

Thangkas dedicated to the Vajradhātumaṇḍala: questions of stylistic connections

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Most of the *thangkas* known today with representations of Jinas as part of a series dedicated to the Vajradhātumaṇḍala found their way into collections of art outside Tibet as individual items. Only rarely can individual works from different collections be identified as belonging to a group.

The datings and attributions given in publications are almost exclusively arrived at on the basis of intuition alone. In most cases an insecurely dated work is taken as a benchmark for yet another insecure dating. By contrast, a dating arrived at on the basis of iconographic development would seem to provide a much more secure point of reference.

While in West Tibet the formative period is solidly documented by a securely dated building and its entire decoration (Tabo), this is not the case for the formative period of Central Tibet. *Thangkas* that can be dated on the basis of inscriptions – mostly portraits of lamas – permit stylistic classification from around 1200; however, it also becomes apparent that there was certainly more than a single line of development, as parallel schools existed.

This presentation explores the question of whether an at least relative chronology can be posited for the extant material and whether schools of painting can be distinguished from one another.