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Moving Artefacts: Mongolian Tsam Figures

OBJECT TRANSFERS: VIENNA

During research on the Mongolian Collections of the Austrian traveller-researcher Hans Leder (1843–1921)¹ one group of artefacts caught my special attention. In this contribution I will analyse these objects and their embeddedness in a network of relations and transfers more closely. I started my research in the Museum für Völkerkunde Wien (renamed as the Weltmuseum Wien in 2013). Here within the Mongolian Collections 12 small wooden figures² depicting characters of the Tsam dance ceremony (Tib. *cham*) are housed in the depository (Fig. 1). The figures are between 20 and 37 cm high; they are carved in wood and painted in various colours. Their surfaces are varnished. In many cases—due to their fragility—some of their attributes are missing or broken. The information on these museum objects was rather scarce but there were some:

The Tsam-group figures came into the museum collections in 1905/1906, at that time still part of the anthropological-ethnographical department at the Royal Imperial Natural History Museum, acquired from Leder after his last visit to Mongolia in 1904/1905. The original handwritten inventory by Leder gives following information on the objects: “Wood carving; Tsam figure. Newly made

¹ Current project “Nomadic Artefacts” (funded by WWTF/Vienna Science and Technology Fund; 2013–2017) and previous project “Mongolian Ethnographica of the Austrian Collector Hans Leder in European Museums” (2010–2012; Research programme *forMUSE* of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research/www.moncol.net); for detailed information on the biography and the collections of Hans Leder see Lang 2010a, 2010b, 2013a.

² Inv. nos. 74711–74722.

to order. Painted or gilded.” In the column “remarks” he added the following:

Tsam is the name of a religious festival celebrated outdoors in front of temples with dances and performances [...] and of comical characters and nearly all deities, especially the Draggshed.³ The lamas appear in masks and mostly very rich costumes at these dance festivals, which are attended by the population of the whole nearby and more distant vicinity. They take place during the good season of the year, but at each temple at a different date, to ensure the believers are present several times a year. Naturally they are accompanied by rather noisy music.⁴

Leder, who had travelled to Mongolia at least four times between 1892 and 1905, had apparently acquired the figures in the Mongolian capital Urga, as it was called by Western foreigners in those days, and which is the basis of present-day Ulaanbaatar, or during his travels to the countryside. He had spent the winter month of 1904/1905

³ Wrathful protector deities (Tib. *drag gshed*).

⁴ English translation of a note by Hans Leder in his list of objects from 1906 (Archive Weltmuseum Wien). Original text: “Zamm ist der Name für ein religiöses Fest, welches im Freien vor den Tempeln mit Tänzen u. Vorführungen [...] und komischer Figuren u. fast aller Götter, besonders der Draggshed gefeiert wird. Die Lamen erscheinen in Masken u. meist sehr reichen Kostümen zu diesen Tanzfesten, denen die Bevölkerung der ganzen näheren u. fernerer Umgebung beiwohnt. Sie finden in der guten Jahreszeit, aber bei jedem einzelnen Tempel an einem anderen Termine statt, um zu ermöglichen, dass die Gläubigen ihnen mehrere male im Jahre beiwohnen können. Selbstverständlich finden sie in Begleitung recht geräuschvoller Musik statt.”

in Urga and during that time among others witnessed the arrival of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama from Tibet for exile in Urga and later was able to meet with him during an official audience. One of Leder's main aims during this stay was to enlarge his collections and study the specifics of Buddhism in Mongolia. From Urga his collections were packed into crates and sent to Europe. Back in Europe Leder tried to sell his collections to ethnographic museums. As an independent researcher, not supported by an institution, Leder's financial situation was difficult and the negotiations with the museums often tedious (cf. Lang 2010a, 2013a). As a result he had to divide his collections and coherent groups of objects sometimes unintentionally. The Viennese collection of 811 identified artefacts, mostly objects of Buddhist ritual, is therefore just one part of a far larger collection of more than 4,500 items divided up to several ethnographic museums in central Europe.⁵

In the archives of the Weltmuseum Wien there are some further traces of the history of the figures in the museum itself. Dated 1926, photographs of each Tsam figure in the set of 12 can be found (Fig. 2); they have a short description and the attribution "Mongolei" (Mongolia). Probably these were taken before their transfer from the anthropological-ethnographical department of the Royal Imperial Natural History Museum to the newly opened Museum für Völkerkunde in the so-called "Corps de Logis" of the Neue Hofburg in 1928. Within the photo archive in the section "Tibet" there are photographs on glass plate showing vitrines (cabinets) of the first exhibition halls of the Museum für Völkerkunde from 1928. The twelve Tsam dance figurines may be identified in the display in one of the cabinets, in the "Kühnscherf vitrines", named after the company producing the showcases (Fig. 3). They are "dancing" in an ensemble amidst various monastic instruments and two Tsam masks (Franz Ferdinand von Este collection; Inv. no. 103334 and 103335) and three thangkas. Beside the Tsam figurines, the thangkas mounted below them (depicting Vajrasattva (Inv. no. 74955) on the left, a mandala of Vajrabhairava (Inv. no. 74986) in the centre and Sitāpatatrā (Inv. no. 74968) on the right and two double drums (Skt. *ḍamaru*; Inv. no. 64855, Inv. no. 75184) derive from the Leder collections from Mongolia. The ensemble seems to have been created according to aesthetic principles regarding size, colour and form rather than to their iconographic attribution.⁶ The

⁵ Cf. www.moncol.net; Lang and Bauer 2013.

⁶ The person responsible for the presentation of the "Tibet" section may have been Robert Bleichsteiner, who had been working in the anthropological-ethnographical department since 1925 and became director of the Museum für Völkerkunde after Fritz Röck in 1945 until 1953. Bleichsteiner's scientific main field in the museum was "Asia"; he published a book on "mysteries" in Buddhist monasteries of India, Tibet, Mongolia and China where several photographs of

cabinets were part of the Tibet hall.⁷ The attribution "Tibet" for artefacts from Mongolia was recurrent usage in various ethnography museums at that time. From around 1940 only one photograph of the statue depicting the protector deity Hayagrīva is archived.⁸ Between 1939 and 1943 the permanent exhibitions were reorganised due to war induced evacuations. One of the temporary exhibitions in this period of time was the "Maskenschau" in the year 1940—a mask show of carved masks from various cultures. It is possible that this artefact was photographed in relation to this exhibition. In 1955 the museum staged a special exhibition on masks and here at least some of the figurines were displayed.⁹ Then later, in 1966, the museum photographer Edeltraut Mandl again documented the Tsam figures in black and white (Fig. 4). In 2006/2007 the group of Tsam figures were moved and exhibited after a long period as stored items in the museum depository in the exhibitions on Genghis Khan in Schloß Schallaburg/Lower Austria¹⁰ and in the Sabancı Museum in Istanbul; in 2013/2014 they were exhibited in the Weltmuseum Wien as part of the exhibition "Danced Creation: Asia's Mythical Past and Living Present" (cf. Lang 2013c).

It seems that after the transfer from their place of origin these figures underwent several transfers within the museum world and during their lives as museum objects the artefacts were used or instrumentalised for different exhibition or curatorial needs. By that time they not only had they been moved but they had also lost some of their attributes. The evidences, especially the photographs, kept in the archive of the Weltmuseum Wien express also the prevailing mood and aesthetics of the time and the possible socio-political influences on the "roles" and location of the artefacts in exhibitions.

TRANSLATIONS: MONGOLIA—EUROPE—RUSSIA

The Hans Leder Collection in Vienna is just one part of Leder's ethnographic collections, which are spread over at least five museums.

objects from the collections of Hans Leder including some of the Tsam figurines are presented (Bleichsteiner 1937).

⁷ At the opening of the museum, under directorship of Friedrich Röck, seven exhibition halls dedicated to different cultures were presented to the public on the ground floor. Photographs of the "China", "Japan", "Turkmenistan" halls can be found in the archive but none of the "Tibet" hall in general view.

⁸ Photo archive Weltmuseum Wien (VF_19676).

⁹ "Masken und Schauspiel bei fremden Völkern", Führer durch die Sonderausstellung, Wien 1955.

¹⁰ "Dschingis Khan und seine Erben" (2006).

As a whole they were first documented within a previous project.¹¹ In the course of the project in total 66 figures of Tsam dancers in various museum collections were documented and reunited by use of a database and in publications.¹²

They are spread over five museums. In addition to the twelve figures in Vienna, 22 figures are in the Néprajzi Múzeum Budapest, 15 figures in the Museum for Ethnology Heidelberg,¹³ 12 figures in the Museum for Ethnology in Leipzig¹⁴ and four figures in the Museum for Ethnology in Hamburg—the latter were not accessible in course of my research. The figures are between 20 and 37 cm high; they all are carved in wood and painted in various colours. Apart from some of the items in Budapest, their surfaces are varnished. Their wooden bases often differ in size, form and painting; some were covered with cloth in the museum. Looking closely at the figures one may differentiate between the styles in which they are made. The groups in Vienna, Leipzig and Heidelberg appear to have originated from one set, created by the same artist. The figures in these museums complement each other, with no character being found twice except Yama. What are the origins, means and histories related to these figures?

The Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig acquired its first collection from Leder, including the Tsam figures, in 1907. Compared to the archival data in Vienna, the museum inventory of 1907 gives very similar information on its group of figures: "Tsam figure (wood carving). Newly made to order by a lama-autodidact. Painted or gilded." The ethnography museums in Heidelberg and Hamburg acquired their figures through the J.F.G. Umlauff trading company¹⁵ and the figures entered the Museum in Hamburg in 1909. The original inventories for the collection in Heidelberg disappeared during or after World War II. The object lists written by Leder kept in the museums in Vienna and Leipzig include information on denomination, size, material, condition and local names of the artefacts. Leder collaborated with local monks, who accompanied him on his travels to the countryside and also translated for him during his stays. The terms are Leder's transcriptions of names as given to him. The evidence shows that

Leder ordered the sets of Tsam figures to be made most probably for sale to the European museum collections. The figures were created by monk-artisans, their names were not found mentioned in the sources available. Comparing the sets of Tsam figures in the various museums, it is difficult to tell absolutely if they were made by just one artist-monk and at the same workshop at one monastery.

Hans Leder had already witnessed a Tsam dance performance during his first journey in 1892 in the eminent monastery Erdene zuu. According to Leder the performance took place on 21 August (cf. Leder 1895). His book *Das geheimnisvolle Tibet* from 1909 includes further descriptions of a Tsam dance ritual performed on the occasion of the New Lunar Year in 1904/05 and a photograph of a cast of Tsam dancers from Buryatia. Apparently the original image was taken by the photographer Alexei K. Kuznetsov from Nerchinsk in 1891 at Azagat Monastery in Buryatia. Kuznetsov's services were engaged by Prince Esper E. Ukhtomskij,¹⁶ who accompanied Crown Prince Nicolai Romanov on his tour in Transbaikalia and compiled an important collection of Buddhist art. A Tsam dance was performed in 1891 out of season just in honour of the visit of the future tsar.

Analysing the archival material connected to the Leder collections in Europe, I found evidence concerning the origin of the Tsam figurines in a letter written by Leder in 1902 addressed to Karl Graf von Linden, director of the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart. Recently returned from his third journey to Mongolia, Leder reported the following, concerning his new acquisitions:

A special ornament is a collection of very beautiful carved, painted and gilded figures in wood that feature the Tsam masks. I ordered them to be made by a lama living in a monastery some miles away from Urga, who as I knew, had carried out a similar commission for the Imperial Academy in Petersburg.¹⁷

As is known, most of the temples and monasteries in Mongolia were closed, abandoned or destroyed in the late 1930s. So were the

¹¹ Research project "Mongolian Ethnographica of the Austrian Collector Hans Leder in European Museums" (2010–2012; Research programme *forMuse* (Research at Museums) of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research).

¹² www.moncol.net; cf. Lang 2013b.

¹³ Inv. nos. 33460–33464, 33496–33505.

¹⁴ Inv. nos. 3882–3892.

¹⁵ The J.F.G. Umlauff trading company was one of the leading trading companies for *ethnographica* and *naturalia* at the turn of the 20th century and influenced collecting activities in many German museums and beyond.

¹⁶ Prince Esper E. Ukhtomskij (1861–1921); his collection is part of the Buddhist art collections in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. Leder's collections were compared with those of Ukhtomskij as unique collection of "Lamaist" art by some of his contemporaries.

¹⁷ Original text in German: "Eine besondere Zierde bildet eine Sammlung von sehr schönen holzgeschnitzten, gemalten u. vergoldeten Figuren, welche die Zam-Masken darstellen. Ich ließ sie auf Bestellung von einem einige Meilen von Urga in einem Kloster lebenden Lama anfertigen, von dem ich wusste, dass er vor Jahren einen ähnlichen Auftrag für die kaiserl. Akademie in Peterburg ausgeführt hatte." Letter from Hans Leder, 3 December 1902, Katharein (near Troppau), Archive Linden-Museum Stuttgart.

monasteries “some miles away from Urga” and it has not been possible to identify the monastery of origin where the figurines were made until today. At the time of Leder’s visits three monasteries that might come into question were located 8–15 km north of Urga. Dambadarjaalin, Dashchoinkhorlin and Shaddüwlin monastery (cf. Teleki 2013: 81).

RUSSIA

We find these Tsam figures, more than 72 items (Figs. 5–7), in the collections of the *Kunstkamera* in Saint Petersburg. With an average height of 18–20 cm they are smaller than the ones ordered by Leder; in the style of making they could be made of the same artist’s hands as the group in Budapest. According to the museum’s inventory these figures were acquired by the Russian merchant G. M. Osokin from Kyakhta in Urga at the end of the nineteenth century in request of the Russian ethnographer Dmitrii A. Klements,¹⁸ who again sent them to Vasily V. Radlov.¹⁹ They entered the collections in 1897. There is no specific information given on their artistic origin or where they were made.²⁰

Another rare and important source on the Tsam ritual in Mongolia is also kept in the *Kunstkamera*: a coloured drawing by an anonymous Mongolian artist (Fig. 8). It shows in detail the participants of a Tsam ceremony in Urga. Except for a few historic photographs this drawing given to the *Kunstkamera* in 1903 by N. N. Shulnygin is the earliest known two-dimensional documentation of the Tsam ritual in Mongolia (cf. Fontein 1999: 46). On this depiction the Tsam is performed in front of the monastic palace of the Eighth Jebtsundamba Bogdo Gegeen. Everything seems to be prepared for his arrival—as his seat is empty. Up to 108 actors took part, an orchestra of monastic instruments is seated aside and accompanies the ceremony and special guests are seated around the dance circles. This drawing may have served as a model and inspiration for a later depiction of the ceremony, which had been suppressed since the late 1930s, a painting by Dolamjur Damdinsüren from 1966 (cf. Fontein 1999: 47), exhibited at present in the Fine Arts Museum of Zanabazar in Ulaanbaatar (Figs. 9–10).

¹⁸ Dmitrii Klements (1848–1914) was an expert in archaeology and ethnography of Siberia and led expeditions to northern Mongolia in 1891–1897.

¹⁹ Vasily V. Radlov, or in German Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff, (1837–1918) was the founder of turcology and the first to publish the Orkhon inscriptions. From 1894–1918 he was the director of the *Kunstkamera* of Peter the Great in Saint Petersburg.

²⁰ I am grateful to curator Dr. Dimitrii Ivanov for giving me insight to the collections and providing me with this information during my visit in June 2013.

In October 2013 I was able to visit the Mongolian collection in the Russian Ethnographic Museum in Saint Petersburg. Here another ensemble of wooden Tsam figures is housed in the depository (Figs. 11–13). These were received in 1909 among other objects as a gift from the Russian General Consul in Urga, Yakov P. Shishmarev.²¹ This is probably the most complete set, including up to 108 figures. They are of about same size as the ones in the *Kunstkamera*, but the figure’s heads are executed in a more refined style. It seems that all actors of the Tsam plus the sacrifice, as depicted on the coloured drawing in the *Kunstkamera*, are represented in this collection.

All the sets of Tsam figurines were transferred from Urga to Europe and Russia by the involvement of Western collectors or researchers who were connected or informed about each other’s activities in one way or another. The Russian orientalists were interacting with colleagues in Europe (although maybe collecting with different trajectories and aims) and they most probably knew the same people in Mongolia. Certainly they were all supported by General Consul Shishmarev—a key figure in Russian/European-Mongolian relations. It may have been Shishmarev who provided the research travellers with the contact of artist monks who created the Tsam figures or it might have been the other way round. Buryat scholars and intellectuals, especially Tsyben (Tseveen) Jamsarano (Zhamtsarano; Jamsrano),²² were not only literally language translators but also influential translators and mediators of Mongolian culture in Russia and Russian (Soviet) culture in Mongolia. They played a major role in the transfer of knowledge in both directions. (cf. Tolz 2013 [2011]).

MONGOLIA

It is notable that, as far as I know, no wooden statues of Tsam figures like these can be found in Mongolia itself.²³ There are artificial, high-grade woodcarving works of similar size in the collections of monasteries such as Erdene zuu and the museums in Mongolia. These indeed show mainly Mongolian-Buddhist deities and they were wor-

²¹ Yakov P. Shishmarev (1833–1915) headed the Russian Consulate in Urga/Ikh Khüree since its foundation in 1861 until 1905 and assisted researchers, collectors and travellers from Russia and other countries in Mongolia. Hans Leder could also count on his advice and support during his travels in Mongolia.

²² Tsyben (Tseveen) Z. Jamsarano (Zhamtsarano; Jamsrano) (1880–1942).

²³ In summer 2015 I noted few small carved Tsam figures exhibited in a wooden altar box without description in one of the temples of Erdene zuu Museum Complex. They are very expressive but differ in style and I suppose they are later creations than Leder’s collectibles. Further investigations on these figurines are planned.

shipped as ritual objects within the altar ensemble, thus having a religious function. The same cannot be said of the Tsam-dancing figurines. Such figurines are not found in Mongolia and would not have had a function there.

So in fact, these artefacts are commissioned work—objects intentionally created on demand of a collector—in the case of Hans Leder following the example of specific items in the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg. Collectors, scientists, officials and travellers of that time were well informed about museum collections, demands and policies through established networks and relations on which they had to (and could) rely on.

In 1899/1900 and 1904/1905 Leder spent the winter months mainly in the Mongolian capital, Urga, and assembled ethnographic collections which he later sold to ethnographic museums in Europe. Some of the time he housed in the compound of the Russian consulate. It is a feature of Leder's collections that they mostly do not include large artefacts such as Tsam masks or dance costumes but rather large groups of small or easily transportable items. On his four documented travels in Mongolia Leder experienced different seasons with corresponding festivities and rituals such as the Tsam.

THE TSAM DANCE IN MONGOLIA

The Tsam dance, originating in Tibet, was one of the major and most spectacular Buddhist ritual ceremonies in Mongolia. The first evidence for a Tsam performance is in 1787 in Erdene zuu Monastery. Only later, in 1811, was the Tsam introduced in Urga (Ikh Khüree). The costumes and up to 108 masks for the Tsam of Urga were created by Mongolian monk artists following the records of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The manufacture of the papier-mâché masks by the monks developed into its own specific form of art in Mongolia. Tibetan Tsam already manifested syncretic features, incorporating pre-Buddhist elements into the ritual. By cultural contact, other regions influenced by Buddhism developed their variations of the Tsam. Over time the repertoire of figures was widened and changed and conferred its own specific character on the Mongolian Tsam.

During the dance, negative energies and obstacles on the path to enlightenment are drawn into an effigy, the sor (Tib. *zor*), which is ritually burned at the conclusion of the festival. Up to 108 characters took part in this dance, which was performed once a year in the summer months. The performers were almost exclusively monks, who appeared after initiation and month-long preparations accompanied by rituals. The main figure of the Khüree Tsam was Chojoo

(Mong.) or Erleg Khan (Skt. Yama), the God of Death and King of the Law. Apart from the Dokshit, the ten wrathful protector gods of Mongolian Buddhism, in Khüree Tsam other figures appeared, such as two skeletons, animal figures (bull, deer, raven), Garuḍa, mountain gods and two heroes. Each figure follows its own predetermined choreography, which may include specific forms of traditional Mongolian dances as long-drawn-out steps and the emphasis on arm and hand movements. A rectangular field served as the dance floor, where seven circles were marked in white chalk. In the middle was an elaborately decorated figure of dough, the torma (Tib. *gtor ma*). The effigy, *linga* (Tib.), made of dough, was placed at the centre of the dance field.

THE DANCE OF THE TSAM FIGURES

From the characters portrayed, the figures in Leder's collections represent this special kind of Tsam dance in Mongolia, the Urga or Khüree Tsam, which is named after the capital. The project database and homepage of the *forMuse* project "Mongolian Ethnographica" provides a virtual collection of all the scattered Tsam figures. In the following, a selection of 39 artefacts, very probably deriving from one set, is presented together, seeking to reconstruct the sequence of their appearance in the performance following various historic descriptions. The most accurate descriptions close to the time when Hans Leder witnessed the Tsam performances and ordered the artefacts to be made are those of Alexei M. Podzneevev,²⁴ the Russian Mongolist who travelled in Mongolia from 1876–1878/1892–1893 and Władysław Kotwicz²⁵ who led an expedition to Mongolia in 1912. Both scholars witnessed Tsam performances in Erdene zuu Monastery in the summer months (Podzneevev during his first journey), as did Leder in 1892. There is a series of rare photographs from the Kotwicz expedition, with participation of Jamtsarano, documenting the Tsam performance in the summer of 1912 (cf. Bareja-Starzynska 2012). An essay by the Mongolian scholar Byambyn Rinchen²⁶ is a main source for the specific form of the Khüree Tsam mentioned

²⁴ Aleksei Matveevich Pozdneevev (1851–1920) was a specialist in Mongol studies; he graduated from the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Saint Petersburg in 1876. He travelled in Mongolia from 1876 to 1878 and in 1892 and 1893.

²⁵ Władysław Kotwicz (Kotvich, Vladislav Liudvigovich) (1872–1944) was a Russian-Polish Orientalist who had graduated from the University of Saint Petersburg in 1895.

²⁶ Byambyn Y. Rinchen (1905–1977), well-known Mongolian scholar and linguist.

above (cf. Forman and Rintschen 1967). These descriptions and depictions helped to identify the figures collected and designated by Leder. Some of the characters represented are still not clear. In the following the Tsam performance is sketched through the artefacts:

The masks of the pair of Skeleton dancers, Khokhimoi (Mong.), the Lords of the Cemetery (Fig. 14A–B), enter the dance field at the beginning of the ceremony, transforming the pavilion with the effigies with their dance into a mystic charnel ground. They appear as skeletons, wearing masks depicting death's heads and white linen garments on which the bones are outlined with red lines. Their role in the ceremony is also to protect the effigy placed at the centre of the dance field from being touched by the Raven (Fig. 14E), who comes into the field with them. During the performance the Raven tries to touch and desecrate the offering (*sor*), which is placed in the innermost circle of the dance field. Flapping its wings, it circles around the *sor*. It is prevented from coming too close to the *sor* by the Lords of the Cemetery and the two Heroes (Fig. 14C–D), who continuously chase it away. Another task of the Raven together with the Lords of the Cemetery was to keep the crowd of spectators at a suitable distance. It was believed that a blow from the sticks of the Lords of the Cemetery or the wings of the Raven meant misfortune. The two Heroes who stood as guards at the edge of the innermost circle of the dance field did not take part at the dance (Rintschen 1967: 75). They wear armour, as shields, arms, helmets and Mongolian-style boots. Leder gives the denomination Ulan Battar (Mong. red hero, like the capital Ulaanbaatar) for the figure of the Hero from the Vienna collection. The second figure possibly depicts Shijir baatar, one of the two Heroes (see above). The mask is a dark colour (usually Shijir baatar's mask appears white).

A figure with a mask in the shape of an Elephant head (Fig. 15D) in all likelihood represents one of the 15 Guardians of Directions. They do not take part in the dance but protect the field as guardians at the edges of the dance field.

During the Tsam ceremony Khashin Khan (Mong.; Chin. Heshang Moheyan; in Tibetan sources Hva shang Mahāyāna) (Fig. 15B) appears together with six or eight children, who sit at the edge of the dance field during the performance playing various monastic instruments. Khashin Khan performs in a yellow mask with a friendly, smiling expression, wearing a yellow (monk's) robe with blue cuffs, an incense burner in his right hand and a long rosary around his neck—or with a white khadag (ceremonial scarf), invites the gods and welcomes them when they arrive on the dance field. His role is to come out with his children to meet every mask that appears—by holding a huge khadag as a welcoming present in his hands. After Khashin

Khan has come out, the dancing deities appear on the dance field. There are different interpretations for the origin of this figure; for instance, for the Mongolians it is supposed to represent the Manchu ruler Kangxi, who patronised the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia in the 17th century.

Following Leder's denomination, one figure represents Luba (Tib. bSlu ba) (Fig. 15C), also described by Rinchen (see Forman and Rintschen 1967: 76–77). According to the latter, two Luba dance to attract the enemies in order to later destroy them. The mask with a deer head (Fig. 15A) is red and appears in the dance together with a bull-head mask called Maki (Mong., Tib. Ma he—a character not present among the group of Tsam figures in the Leder collections). Both characters usually carry a sword in their right hand and a skull cup (Skt. *kapāla*) in their left. In the Tsam performance the deer- and the bull-headed figures are the messengers and servants of Yama (Erleg Khan or Chojjoo), the Lord of Death. In contrast to other characters, who dance in slow solemn movements, these two dance a wild dance, kicking their legs to frighten away malevolent spirits and negative energy. At the end of the ceremony it was the deer's task to chop up the *linga* effigy.

Vaiśravaṇa (Fig. 16A) is one of the four World Guards (Skt. *lokapāla*) or the four Grand Kings. He is considered to be the Guardian of the North. Like the other World Guards, he wears an armoured coat of mail, boots and a golden mask with a crown decorated with five (lucky) jewels. In his right hand he holds a victory standard, in the left a jewel-spewing mongoose. The latter symbolises wealth and abundance. He is worshipped principally as a god of wealth. In the choreography of the Tsam he appears together with Gongor (Mong., Skt. Sitamahākāla) (Fig. 16B). Both are regarded as peaceful deities whose role is to increase good fortune and riches. According to Pozdneev, Vajrapāṇi (Fig. 17A) appeared after the dance of the deer and the bull. He is holding his attribute, a vajra (Mong. *ochir*), in his right hand and a lasso made of string in his left hand. Vajrapāṇi is supposed to use this to catch the enemies of the faith. He dances in the first and second circle in front of the effigy. In the Khüree Tsam, Vajrapāṇi is accompanied by his female consort (*prajñā*), the lion-headed (Siṃhavaktrā) (Fig. 17B). The latter appears with her retinue, two female deities: the tiger-headed (Fig. 17D) and the bear-headed. In his dance Vajrapāṇi symbolically subjugates evil powers.

Siṃhavaktrā, the lion-headed *ḍākinī*, represents one of the Ten Protectors in the Mongolian pantheon. In standard iconography Siṃhavaktrā and Makaravaktrā (Fig. 17D), the Makara-headed *ḍākinī* accompany Lhamo (Śrīdevī) (Fig. 19C). According to Pozdneev's (1978: 502–520) observations of the Tsam, Makaravaktrā appears together

with *Siṃhavaktrā* as a main companion of the goddess *Śrīdevī* after her dance. *Siṃhavaktrā* has two escorts: the bear-headed and the tiger-headed *ḍākinī* (Tib. *srin mo stag gdong*). Another figure may depict the goddess *Rigbii Ikhamo* (Tib. *Rig pa'i lha mo*) (Fig. 18A), the goddess of wisdom.

The red guardian spirit *Laikhan Sorogdag* (Fig. 18C) with a spear and lasso is one of the two attendants of the red protector god *Begtse (Jamsran)* (Fig. 18B). Together with *Rigbii Ikhamo*, he clears and prepares the way for *Begtse*. The war god *Begtse* is one of the *dharmapāla* and a chief protector of Mongolia. He appears on the dance field after his eight associates. This mask is one of the most impressive and terrifying. *Kṣetrapāla* (Fig. 19A) is one of the four companions of the protector god *Mahākāla* (Fig. 19B). *Mahākāla* is of special importance for Mongolia. *Khubilai Khan* chose *Mahākāla* as his personal protective deity after his conversion to Buddhism. Later he was especially honoured as one of the Great Protectors of the Law (*dharmapāla*) and was incorporated into the cast of the Mongolian Tsam. There are more than seventy forms of *Mahākāla*, and this figure probably shows the Black *Mahākāla*.

Śrīdevī or *IHa mo* (Fig. 19C) comes to the dance field after *Vajrapāṇi*. She is the only female of the high-ranking protective deities, *dharmapāla*, (such as *Begtse*, *Mahākāla*, *Vaiśravaṇa* and *Yama*) taking part in the performance. In standard iconography *Śrīdevī* sits sideways on her mule (Fig. 19D). *IHa mo's* mount is not mentioned in the descriptions of the historic Mongolian Tsam nor is it part of the revived Tsam ceremonies.

According to the collector, one figure represents a monkey (Fig. 19E). There is little evidence of the figure of the monkey in Mongolian Tsam. According to narrations, in some areas the monkey entered the dance field after the performance of several protector deities and the two skeletons. Animal figures are attendants and assistants of the deities (cf. Pegg 2001: 159).

Garuḍa (Fig. 20A), the king of birds, appears in the *Khüree Tsam* as one of the four masks which are held for the incorporations of famous shaman spirits of the past. He is identified with the mountain spirit of the holy mountain *Bogd Uul* in the south of *Ulaanbaatar* (or *Urga*), and after the incorporation into the Buddhist religious system was recognised as the protector spirit of this site. Whereas in the *Chojin-Lama Temple Museum* in *Ulaanbaatar* there is a yellow mask with which a yellow garment was worn, both the mask and the costume of the figure in the *Weltmuseum Wien* are blue. As *Garuḍa* the *Blue Old Man* (Fig. 20C) is one of the *Lords of the Four Mountains*, a group of figures who originated in Mongolian shamanism. He is the *Lord of Songino Mountain*, situated west of *Ulaanbaatar*. The rope

with a hook in his hands served to catch souls. According to the people's belief he had once been a mighty shaman, buried near *Songino Mountain*, which until then was his dwelling place that he protected. People were afraid of losing their local protector during the conversion to Buddhism—so this local spirit was converted to Buddhism and hence was made a protector deity of the Buddhist faith. The pig-headed (Fig. 20D) or sow-headed is also one of the *Lords of the Four Mountains*, a group of figures who originated in Mongolian shamanism. The sow-headed is the protector of *Chingeltei Mountain*, situated north of *Ulaanbaatar*. The dog-headed (Fig. 20B) is the *Lord of Bayanjürkh Mountain*, situated east of *Ulaanbaatar* and belongs to the group of the *Lords of the Four Mountains*, former pre-Buddhist, shamanic local spirits.

Two masks represent the *Azar* (Figs. 21A, 21D), religious scholars of India. According to old photographs there may be two or four *Azar*. Often they carry a red stick, which is missing in these figures. Being touched by the stick of an *Azar* was meant to be auspicious for the spectators. During their dance the drums are played. Like the figure of the *White Old Man* they were regarded as friendly and comic characters within the spectacle, contributing to the amusement of the audience. According to legend these characters were integrated to the Mongolian Tsam cast by *Zanabazar* (1635–1723).

The *White Old Man* (Mong. *Tsagaan Ebügen/Cagān Öwgön; Tserendug*) (Fig. 21B), originally a pre-Buddhist shamanistic figure, was very popular among the Mongols and is an important character in the cast of the Tsam. Although his role is a comic one, his gestures have a deeper meaning, symbolising age and revitalisation. His mask, long beard and costume are all white (a sacred colour in Mongolia). The figure holds the typical attributes: a rosary in his right hand and a curved staff with a dragon head in his left. In the performances since the 1990s he again plays an important amusing role.

Four lions (Fig. 21C)—two white and two green ones—participated in the *Khüree Tsam*. They did not directly take part in the dance but enlivened the performance with their appearances. Two actors were needed for each lion figure. Twenty-two *Black Hat dancers* (Fig. 22A) took part in the Tsam performance. The *Black Hat dancers* perform without masks but wear elaborate costumes and ritual daggers.

Hayagrīva (Fig. 22B) is one of the *Great Protectors of Buddhism (dharmapāla)* and is ranked among the group of the *yidam* (personal meditation and protection deities), too. He takes an active role in destroying the obstacles that stand in the way of enlightenment. *Hayagrīva* is also the *Guardian Lord of Horses*, and quite revered in Mongolia. He is not mentioned in all descriptions of the Tsam but

the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum in Ulaanbaatar preserves a mask representing Hayagrīva.

One figure probably concerns the worldly protector deity Pehar (Fig. 22D), one of the Five Kings. Pehar has five forms representing body, speech, mind, quality and activity—each with a different appearance. The most commonly depicted is the Activity Pehar with three faces, white and riding a lion. King Pehar has a non-Tibetan, pre-Buddhist origin, and according to the legend was converted in the 9th century by Guru Rinpoche and made one of the most important protectors of Tibetan Buddhism. In some Tsam dances the Five Kings appear without masks (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976: 79). Pehar is not a character in the Khüree Tsam.

Naro *ḍākinī* (Fig. 23A) is an emanation of Vajrayoginī and revealed herself in this form to the Indian adept Nāropā. In Mongolia Naro *ḍākinī* is worshipped in the monasteries of the Gelugpa and Nyingma schools. She was especially worshipped in Urga, as she was the tutelary deity of the Fifth Bogd Gegen (1815–1841). According to legend, he saw a ray of red light above Bogd Khan Mountain and the River Tuul when he was meditating on this tantric female deity.²⁷ This figure depicts Naro *ḍākinī*, following the usual iconography in her typical posture, her face turned up, drinking the nectar of bliss that perpetually flows from her skull cup (*kapāla*) and looking towards the pure realm of Khecara, her Buddha paradise. In her right she holds her attribute, a hooked knife (Mong. *digüg*, Tib. *gri gug*) and in her left the skull cup. A *khaṭvāṅga* staff rests on her left shoulder. Around her neck she wears a garland of freshly severed human heads, she wears earrings and her body is decorated with bone ornaments. There is no evidence of the figure of Naro *ḍākinī* within the Khüree Tsam but interestingly there is another similar figure representing this character in the Leder Collection in the Néprajzi Múzeum Budapest (Inv. no. 55906).

Another figure in the set is a dark blue *ḍākinī* (Fig. 23B). She is three-eyed and her head is crowned with a five-skull diadem and a (larger) skull on the top of her head. Her blue body is decorated with bone ornaments with the Wheel of Dharma as the central piece, and as a necklace she wears a garland of severed heads and skulls. She holds a rather large double-drum—possibly a *chomdar* drum used in Chöd (Tib. *gcod*) practice—decorated with silk scarves in her right hand and a bell in her left hand. These are for example the attributes of Machig Labdrön (1055–1149), great Tibetan yogini and founder

of Chöd practices—which were widespread in Mongolia. This *ḍākinī* might therefore represent one of the four dancing Vajra *Ḍākinīs*. Machig is usually depicted in the form of the White Yogini—the *ḍākinī* figure in the Leder Collection in Hamburg is white. The classification of this *ḍākinī* in the Tsam is not clear, usually Yama appears in the Tsam together with his consort Jamundi (Skt. *Cāmuṇḍī*). The attributes of the black or red Jamundi can be a double-drum (*ḍamaru*), a trident (*triṣūla*), sword, a snake, skull-staff (*khaṭvāṅga*), thunderbolt or a severed head and a skull-cup (*kapāla*) filled with blood.

The protector deity Yama (Fig. 23C), the “Lord of Death”, the main figure of the dance appears as the last mask with an enormous blue bull’s head. He is accompanied by his consort Jamundi. He finishes his dance in the middle of the circle and starts to dance around the *linga* together with Begtse and their companions. At the end they destroy the *linga*, cutting it into pieces—symbolically killing the enemy of faith. The figure of this collection is depicted in a dancing pose, lifting his right leg. The expressive mask in shape of a bull’s head is dark blue, with two eyes, and horns ending in tongues of flame. A skull decorated with a half vajra adorns the top of his head. As this figure shows, Yama brandishes his attributes, a skeleton stick in his right and a lasso in his left hand.

TRANSFORMATION: REPRESSION, PRESERVATION AND REVITALISATION OF THE MONGOLIAN TSAM

The performances and practice of Tsam in Mongolia underwent a seven-decade-long forceful break during the communist regime. The last official Khüree Tsam was performed in 1937 in the Mongolian capital. Apart from reports from travellers and researchers, only a few original documents about Mongolian Tsam still exist. Some photographs and brief films of Tsam are retained in the film archives in Ulaanbaatar. In Pudovkin’s famous silent film “Storm over Asia” from the year 1928 there is a sequence in which a Tsam performance takes place in front of a large monastery, probably the Azagat monastery in Buryatia. Here, however, it is presented as a negative example for the sake of Soviet propaganda. At the beginning of the 1930s, Khüree Tsam was danced for a second time (out of season) and preserved on black-and-white film. In Forman and Rinchen’s publication from 1967, the famous Tsam masks from the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum in Ulaanbaatar were photographed and explained, in part also in connection with their use in dance, according to instructions and recollections of monks who were still alive.

Between 1965 and 1975 the Mongolian painter Urjingiin Yadam-suren (1905–1987) produced an album entitled “Ritual Tsam Dances

²⁷ Information by Krisztina Teleki who I am grateful to for having provided first descriptions of most of the Tsam figurines in the Leder collections within the *forMuse* project (2010–2012).

in Ikh Khüree of Theocratic Mongolia”, in which he reproduced in exact detail the entire repertoire of Tsam figures in water-colours. After completing the album, Yadamsuren tried in vain to publish his work during his lifetime. Shortly before the transition to democracy (1990), a film was made to document the practice of Mongolian Tsam. Lama Sereeter, a high-ranking monk of the Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, learned the dance movements and took on the main clerical role as Master of the Tsam (Mong. *chambon*, Tib. *’cham dpon*). Lamas who had still witnessed or performed Tsam in the 1930s assumed other roles. The masks were the Tsam masks from the Choijin Lama Temple Monastery Museum.

Since the 1990s, the practice of Mongolian Tsam is being reconstructed by using written sources and recollections of contemporary witnesses but the organisation of performances is fraught with difficulties. Up to now, Tsam has been reintroduced in three monasteries in Mongolia (cf. Majer 2008). Organising a performance with at least twenty to thirty initiated performers is practically impossible. Most monasteries have far fewer monks. Old monks have passed on their memories of performative practice and the complex tantric rituals and preparations on which they are based to a new generation of monks.

Joining the now scattered Tsam dance figures can possibly contribute to the reconstruction of a repressed history. Since the transition to democracy, elements of Tsam also appear in folkloristic and often touristic performances. Here, the religious context is missing. Actors and dancers take over the function of the monks, wearing copies that imitate the original masks and costumes. In summer 2014 the permanent exhibition of the Theatre Museum in Ulaanbaatar included a section on the Mongolian Tsam Performance. Here recently created Tsam figures in miniature, about the same size as the Leder collectables, were presented to document various characters of the dance. They were created by a Mongolian artist to order when the museum was established in 1991.²⁸ Thus, actually similar newly made figurines can be found in Mongolia. Maybe the historic artefacts from Hans Leder’s collections or the collections in Russian museums served as source for inspiration or as a role model (Fig. 24)?

CONCLUSION

The Tsam dance figures in Saint Petersburg and the Leder collections are most probably not emic Mongolian art products but rather

²⁸ I would like to thank Director Khosbaatar for this information. No exact information on the artist is available in the museum register.

commissioned works for European researchers and travellers or museum collections. On one hand these small objects were easier and less costly to transport than huge heavy masks and their appropriate costumes. On the other hand it must have been difficult or nearly impossible to acquire such artefacts made exclusively for ritual use. The masks, consecrated through specific rites, were regarded as sacred items. These peculiar groups of artefacts most likely had no ritual function and are hence a product of the interest of collectors.

Research on the movement and transfers of a specific group of artefacts reveals the intertwined relations of scholars, collections and geopolitics. They illuminate the broader global connections and influences on the at first sight seemingly “small” museum world. They also narrate the changing history and practice of the Tsam ritual in Mongolia and are themselves the result of encounters and transfers of culture and knowledge between Asia and Europe.

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Fig. 1: 12 Tsem figures (Inv. nos. 74711–74722),
Collection Hans Leder, Weltmuseum Wien, early
20th century (© Weltmuseum Wien).

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Inv. Nr 74711. Tsam-Garūḍafigur.
Garūḍa aus Holz geschnitten, mit
langen Hörnern, Ohren u. Zwiesschnabel,
in stehender Stellung.
Hans Leder. Mongolien

Fig. 2: Garuḍa (Inv. no. 74711), Collection Hans Leder, Photoarchive Weltmuseum Wien, 1926 (VF 16162).



Fig. 3: Showcase "Tibet" hall, Museum für Völkerkunde 1928, Photoarchive Weltmuseum Wien (VF 58844).



Fig. 4: Garuḍa (Inv. no. 74711), Photoarchive
Weltmuseum Wien (photo: E. Mandl, 1966; VF 38668).



Fig. 5: Tsam figures in storage, Kunstkamera, Saint Petersburg (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2013).



Fig. 6: Tsam figure Raven, Kunstkamera, Saint Petersburg (photo: D. Ivanov).



Fig. 7: Tsam figures Two Heroes, Kunstkamera, Saint Petersburg (photo: D. Ivanov).



Fig. 8: Drawing of a Tsam performance in Ikh Khüree, Kunstkamera, Saint Petersburg (after Fontein 1999: 46).

Fig. 9: Detail of a drawing of a Tsam performance in Ikh Khüree by Dolamjur Damdinsüren, 1966, Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum, Ulaanbaatar (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2014).



Fig. 10: Detail of a drawing of a Tsam Performance in Ikh Khüree by Dolamjur Damdinsüren, 1966, Zanabazar Fine Arts Museum, Ulaanbaatar (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2014).





Fig. 11: Tsam figures in storage, Russian Ethnographic Museum, Saint Petersburg (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2014).

Fig. 12: Tsam figures in storage "Two Heroes", Russian Ethnographic Museum, Saint Petersburg (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2014).



Fig. 13: Tsam figures in storage "Snow Lions", Russian Ethnographic Museum, Saint Petersburg (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2014).



Fig. 14A–B: Skeleton dancers
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 14C–E: Two Heroes, Raven
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 15A-B: Deer, Khashin Khan
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 15C–D: Luba, Elephant
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 16A–B: Vaiśravaṇa and Gongor
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 17A–D: Vajrapāṇi, Simhvaktrā, Makaravaktrā, Tiger-headed (photo: J. Seifert, 2010).



Fig. 18A–C: Rigbii Ikhamo, Begtse, Laikhan Sorogdag
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 19A–D: Kṣetrapāla, Mahākāla, Śrīdevī, Mule
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).

Fig. 19E: Monkey
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).





Fig. 20A: Garuda
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 20B–D: Dog-headed, Blue Old Man, Pig-headed (photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 21A–B: Azar
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 21C-D: Snow Lion, White Old Man
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 22A: Black Hat dancer
(photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 22B–D: Hayagrīva, unidentified figure, Pehar (photos: J. Seifert, 2010; Weltmuseum Wien, 2010).



Fig. 23A–B : Naro *ḍākini*, Dark Blue *ḍākini*
(photo: J. Seifert, 2010).



Fig. 23C: Yama (photo: J. Seifert, 2010).



Fig. 24: Newly made Tsam figures in the office of the Chojin Lama Temple Museum Ulaanbaatar (photo: M.-K. Lang, 2014).

