



## **“FATHER AND MOTHER”: TANTRIC COUPLES IN THE COLLECTION OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM AND THE HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION DESCRIPTION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The first part of the study is devoted to the history of scholarly description of the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection in the Náprstek Museum, namely to the work of Lumír Jisl (1921–1969). The second part focuses on the iconography of Tantric couples on small votive Buddhist paintings from Mongolia.

**KEY WORDS:** Tibetan Buddhism – Mongolia – Tantric couples – iconography – Lumír Jisl

The present article follows the previous studies devoted to the history of the acquisition of the Tibetan and Mongolian collection in the Náprstek Museum in Prague, namely to the small votive Buddhist paintings from Mongolia. The first study in the series dealt with the Czechoslovak COMECON experts in Mongolia and the Green Tara votive paintings (Heroldová 2014). Two articles followed in 2015: one focused on paintings of female deities, and the other on chemical analyses of pigments (Heroldová 2015a, Heroldová 2015b, respectively). As in the first study, the present article deals with the history of the collection as well as with the iconography of the deities. The double focus stems from the need to study in depth the acquisition history of the collection, and to identify and describe its items correctly.

### **I. History of the Description of the Collection and Lumír Jisl**

The previous article on Green Tara (Heroldová 2014) discussed the history of the collection since the 1960s in more detail, but its acquisition history and the role of Czechoslovak experts in Mongolia should nevertheless be summarized. In the early

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1960s an international COMECON<sup>2</sup> organisation was established in order to promote mutual cooperation between communist countries around the world. Czechoslovak geologists, engineers, medical staff members and structural workers stayed in Mongolia from a few weeks to several months. In addition, hundreds of artists, athletes and university and college students visited Mongolia for short term visits. The experts spent enough time in Mongolia to accumulate ethnographic collections containing tens or hundreds of items that now form a major part of the Náprstek museum's Tibetan and Mongolian Collection. However, despite the fact that the names of the collectors are known from the museum acquisition books and some acquisitions were accompanied by collectors' statements about the places and dates of their sojourn in Mongolia, only very little can be traced about the origin of particular items. The artifacts may have originated in any part of the vast region of Mongolia and north China, and the period of their production could be from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the time of the purchases by the foreign visitors.<sup>3</sup>

A much smaller part of the collection, approximately one hundred items, came to the museum in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much earlier than those acquired by the COMECON experts. They were mostly bought in antiquities markets in Europe, and as a result, their place of origin is difficult to identify. Seventeen paintings, including one votive painting presented in this article, belonged to Joe Hloucha (1881–1957), a fashionable writer of sentimental stories set in Japan and a notable collector.

From the establishment of the museum in the mid-nineteenth century, the newly arrived items were described in the museum acquisition books. The museum acquisition books now represent a most valuable source for the study of history of the museum collection, its curators' scholarly and personal interests, as well as for the study of research during the last and half century, and for the development of new fields of study, such as the study of Tibetan and Mongolian cultures.

Until the early 1930s, only the museum acquisition books were used. Later, in addition to the acquisition books, the curators begun to keep their own records on sheets of papers, and when the new rules for the collection's administration were established in the 1960s, the curators were obliged to write down descriptions of the objects on pre-printed forms.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, the description of objects in the museum acquisition books and on pre-printed forms from the period under scrutiny vary from short notes consisting only of two or three words to long and detailed depictions, sometimes with pencil drawings.

The objects that came originally from the Himalayan countries, Tibet, Mongolia and a part of China became a part of the large regional collection labelled "China" after their acquisition, probably due to their regional origin. The curators at that time were mainly interested in Chinese items, and as the result, the Tibetan and Mongolian objects

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<sup>2</sup> COMECON, Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, 1949–1991, an economic organisation of communist states under the guidance of the Soviet Union.

<sup>3</sup> A similar situation is described by Czaja in his charter "Tsakli, Thangkas, Prints, Amulets and Manuscripts" in Lang and Bauers: 38–52. Czaja described the Mongolian Collection of Hans Leder (1843–1921), now scattered in museums around Europe. Leder's travel to Mongolia was well documented, the artifacts he bought there may have even been produced in central Tibet and northern China (Czaja in Lang – Bauer 2013:38).

<sup>4</sup> Oral information provided by the Head Curator of the Náprstek Museum, 5–6 August 2015.

remained understudied.<sup>5</sup> The neglect of the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection also reflected the history of Tibetan and Mongolian studies compared to Chinese studies, which in Bohemia had a long history starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The few Czech Tibetanists either studied Tibetan during their Chinese language courses in the People's Republic of China, or self-studied, until the first course at the Charles University was opened in 2009.

The curators of the Chinese Collection, including the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection, graduated mostly in Chinese studies, and Chinese culture was their main personal and professional interest. However, there were curators who succeeded in focusing on the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection. Lumír Jisl (1921–1969), the archaeologist and scholar of Mongolian art and history, devoted his research to the Tibetan and Mongolian objects in the Náprstek during the 1960s, especially during the early years of the COMECON in Mongolia. Lumír Jisl studied archaeology, art history and ethnography at the Charles University. In 1947 he moved to Opava, the Silesian border town with a strong pre-war German-speaking community. He became an archaeologist, and later the director to the museum, known today as Slezské zemské museum v Opavě (Silesian Museum in Opava). Here he became interested in the collection of the local German-speaking traveller and collector Hans Leder (1841–1921), who is today almost forgotten. Leder travelled to Mongolia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and gathered a large collection of objects there. However, in need of money, he later sold his collection in pieces to various museums around Europe.<sup>6</sup> Some of his items appeared in the Opava museum, where they were discovered, described and published by Lumír Jisl.<sup>7</sup> In 1956 Jisl moved to Prague. As a member of the Archaeological Institute in Prague he organized archaeological expeditions to Mongolia in 1957–1958 and 1963.<sup>8</sup> Soon he also began to write scholarly studies and popular books on Mongolia.<sup>9</sup>

In the Náprstek Museum, Jisl described many objects in the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection. His descriptions are detailed and precise, with names of the deities and special terms given in Tibetan language, and meet a high standard of collection

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<sup>5</sup> The Chinese Collection comprises approximately 10,000 items from the early dynasties to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including porcelain and paintings which aroused much attention among the researchers and museum curators. The Tibetan and Mongolian Collection contains approximately 3,000 items.

<sup>6</sup> See Lang 2010.

<sup>7</sup> "Sbírka tibetského umění Slezského musea v Opavě (Collection of Tibetan Art in Silesian Museum in Opava)", *Časopis Slezského muzea* 3 (1953): 25–31, 48–57, 57–59; "Hans Leder, ein vergessener Reisender." *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde, Dresden, Band 22*, Berlin 1963: 25–52.

<sup>8</sup> "Předběžná zpráva o výsledcích prvé čs.-mongolské archeologické expedice 1958 (Preliminary Report about the Result of the First Czechoslovak-Mongolian Archaeological Expedition in 1958)." *Referáty 1958*, Liblice 1959: 153–162; "Československo-mongolská archeologická expedice (Czechoslovak-Mongolian Archaeological Expedition).", *Věstník ČSAV* 68 (1959), 1: 162–168; "Výzkum Külteginova památníku v Mongolské lidové republice (Kül-Tegin's Monument in The Mongolian People's Republic)." *Archeologické rozhledy* 12 (1960): 86–115; "Archeologické památky v Mongolské lidové republice (Archaeological Sites in The Mongolian People's Republic)." *Archeologické rozhledy* 13 (1961): 49–56, 63–69, 73–83; "Récents découvertes de gravures et peintures rupestres, d'habitats, nécropoles et monuments turcs en la République populaire de Mongolie." *Archeologické rozhledy* 18 (1966): 21–53.

<sup>9</sup> *Mongolei. Kunst und Tradition*, Praha: Artia 1960; *Mongolian Journey*, Praha: Artia 1960; *Umění starého Mongolska* (Art in Ancient Mongolia), Praha: SNKLU, 1961; "Ein Beitrag zur ikonographischen Deutung der tibetischen Ritualdolches." *Annals of the Náprstek Museum* 1 (1962): 77–83.

description that largely remained unchallenged after his premature death in 1969. His work represents a most valuable source for study of the Mongolian Buddhist ethnography and iconography of deities.

## **II. Museum Artifacts as a Primary Source**

Museum artifacts can be studied from different standpoints. For museum visitors they usually represent material objects of contemporary or historical cultures. However, no museum collection can present any culture in its entirety. Museum collections hold only segments that were deliberately or unconsciously selected by collectors and museum curators. The collector's and curator's motivations to collect and to select, his or her knowledge, financial means and the social and political context influence the resulting nature of the collection that preserves the cultural heritage for further generations.

For the most part the original context of the items is studied, and various methods including archaeology, art history and anthropology are used. However, once the artifacts leave their original social and cultural context, they begin new lives in private collectors' and museum collections. They turn into subjects of new research, and through it they become part of a cultural heritage different from their previous one.

The large paintings and small votive pictures in the Náprstek Museum came from a large area under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism. As mentioned earlier, the exact place and date of their production is difficult to trace, even in the cases of COMECON experts' collections. Aside from this fact, the paintings, together with museum acquisition books, administration and curatorial written sources, and oral information about the collection, serve as a primary source for the study of reception of Tibetan and Mongolian culture in Czech cultural, social and political context. For the purpose of the study of the history of the collection, research into the iconography, painting materials and the original context is necessary, as well as comparison with similar collections in other museums.

## **III. Iconography as a Field of Research**

Images of deities cast in metal, painted on paintings and frescoes, printed on paper and textile were and still are used for a variety of religious and non-religious purposes. The traditional iconography of the deities based upon religious texts was established centuries ago, and it is used until today (see Jackson 2006). The early collectors collected the images because they were visually engaging and displayed strange figures and scenes distinctive from other known cultures.<sup>10</sup> However, they were not able to "read" the complex iconography and understand its cultural meaning. Fortunately the visually catching images attracted not only collectors but also researchers, and the intricate realm of Tibetan and Mongolian iconography inspired the research since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study of iconography connects different fields of study and various methods of research, from the art history to ethnography and anthropology. Although the substantial bibliography about Tibetan and Mongolian iconography is available nowadays, the research in the field is still ongoing, and new revised descriptions and analyses are published.

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<sup>10</sup> This assumption is based on examples of collectors and their collections. However, the collectors' motivations are difficult to unravel, even if written sources such as diaries, letters, lists of items are available.

The current research of the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection in the Náprstek Museum represents the revision and the new description of the Collection. The revision is important especially due to the lack of information about the objects, especially about their place of origin and datation. Moreover, the collectors who were namely interested in the aesthetic qualities of the objects did not pay attention to their original cultural context. Because the detailed information about the provenance, datation and cultural context of the items is incomplete or missing, the current research focuses on the descriptive and comparative methods. Especially the comparison with published objects<sup>11</sup> shed more light on the changes in iconography during the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the traditional iconographical rules were distorted and simplified (Heroldová 2015a).

#### IV. Iconography of Tantric Couples

The present study focuses on Tantric couples. The images of couples represent “sexual union of divine beings with their consort” (Young 2004: 133), and thus express the oneness of the female principle of Wisdom (Sanskrit *prajñā*, Tibetan *shes rab*) and male principle of Skillful Means (Sanskrit *upāya*, Tibetan *thabs*). Protective deities, in particular, have Tantric consorts (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975: 21).

Tantra originally developed as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, mainly in northern India, from various traditions including Vedic sacrifice, yoga and tribal practices.<sup>12</sup> Tantric Buddhism was a branch of Mahāyāna, but it arose outside monastic environment.<sup>13</sup> Tantrics believed that enlightenment is attainable in a single lifetime, and because enlightenment can be found in all activities, they practised “amidst family life, the tumult town and marketplace, the awesome spectacles of a cremation ground, and the dangers of isolated wilderness areas” (Shaw 1994: 21). Tantrics used the human body as the means of enlightenment, including sexual practices between a practitioner and his real or imaginary female consort. There is a rich terminology for depicting the female and male consorts, but the common terms are *yab* and *yum*, the honorific terms for father and mother in Tibetan language.

Tantric Buddhism introduced new types of deities, such as female Buddhas, male and female wrathful deities, and Tantric couples (Shaw 1994: 27, 28, 31).<sup>14</sup> Tantric couples are always depicted standing or seated on paintings (Young 2004: 133). The images usually show the male deity *en face* while his female consort embraces him, her face in profile turned towards him. The hands of the male deity hold ritual implements. The arms of his consort either hold ritual objects as well, or they are hidden behind the male deity. The female deity encircles the male deity with both legs, or only with one leg, usually when they are standing. As pointed by Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt, iconographically, the male deity is clearly recognized as a main deity, while the female

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note the differences in iconography in various regions of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the Collection was acquired mainly in Mongolia, the comparison is found mainly in works by Meinert 2011, Badmažapov 2003 and Lang – Bauer 2013.

<sup>12</sup> For the development of Tantric traditions in India, see Padoux 2002.

<sup>13</sup> In Mongolian cultural and social environment, Tantra developed into a “technique to get support in everyday nomadic life”, as pointed out by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz in her study about the economic and political aspects of transformation of Tantra and indigenous religious concepts in Keul 2002: 239–261.

<sup>14</sup> Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt distinguishes three forms in which Tantric deities appear: male deities alone, female deities alone and *yab yum* couples. Single deities are depicted without consorts, see Herrmann-Pfandt 1997: 17.

deity is depicted as “being a part or an attribute of her partner” (Herrmann-Pfandt 1997: 19).<sup>15</sup> Tibetan Buddhists adopted more ancient Indian practices of worship where the female deities of various names accompanied the male deity (Snellgrove 1987: 158), and as the result, in various traditions, the female partners of male deities were often known under different names and their iconography was interchangeable.

The set of paintings of *yab yum* couples under scrutiny were purchased from the collections of private collectors who participated in the COMECON projects in Mongolia. They are therefore relatively contemporary works, that can be dated to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1960s. As in previous studies, their precise iconography with references is presented, followed by a description of the particular paintings from the Náprstek Museum collection. Lumír Jisl’s descriptions are given where available.

## 1. Atiguhya Hayagrīva and Padmanarteśvarī

Atiguhya Hayagrīva (Tibetan *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa*, Mongolian *Xayanxirvaa*, “Very Secret Horse-neck”) represents the personal meditational deity (Sanskrit *iṣṭadevatā*, Tibetan *yi dam*). He is common both in the Nyingma and Sarma schools. As a horse-headed deity representing an incarnation of Viṣṇu he is known from a variety of sacred texts since the Mahābhārata<sup>16</sup> (Des Jardins 2009: 189–190).

Hayagrīva is red in colour, wrathful in appearance. He has three faces – the one looking forward is red, the face on its right is green, and the other one is white. All the faces have three bulging eyes, and a large, open mouth with fangs.

On his heads sits a crown with dry white skulls. In his upswept flowing hair there is a green horse’s head. The horse’s head is a reminder of his subjugation of the demon Rudra by entering his anus in the likeness of a horse (Meinert 2011: 494).

Adorned with golden bodhisattva jewellery, he is dressed in a tiger loincloth, with a garland of freshly severed human heads. He wears a slayed elephant skin on his back.

In his six arms he holds a pink and white lotus blossom, a skull-cup (Sanskrit *kapāla*, Tibetan *ka pa la*), a hook (Sanskrit *aṅkuśa*, Tibetan *lcags kyu*), a sandalwood wand tipped with a blue jewel<sup>17</sup>, a lasso (Sanskrit *pāśa*, Tibetan *zhags pa*) and a sword of wisdom (Sanskrit *khadga*, Tibetan *ral gri*). His upper arms are covered with the wings of a mythical bird-like creature (Sanskrit *garuḍa*).<sup>18</sup>

Two of his hands embrace his consort *Padmanarteśvarī* (“The Lady of the Lotus Dance”), in blue. Her hair is falling down her back. She wears a leopard skin and charnel ground ornaments with a crown of dry white skulls.

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<sup>15</sup> If the female deity disappears from the image of the *yab yum* couple, the male deity remains iconographically the same as the image of a single deity. However, the female deity changes iconographically according to her depiction either in a couple or as a single deity, see Herrmann-Pfandt: 19. According to her, the *yab yum* iconography repeats the male and female hierarchy in Buddhist society. The images of *yab yum* couples with the female as the “main” deity also exist, but only marginally, see Herrmann-Pfandt 1997: 19, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Des Jardins 2009.

<sup>17</sup> For various types of wands and Beer 1999: 288-291.

<sup>18</sup> The mythical bird-like creature is known both in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. There are many legends about him throughout South and Southeast Asia. Iconography depicts him in various forms ranging from bird to half bird-half human. He is strongly associated with Hayagrīva, as he removes obstacles and illnesses. See Beer 1999: 65-68.

His four legs and her one leg stamp down the figures probably of Kālī and Rudra (Meinert 2011: 494) on a moon disc on a lotus flower. The flames of pristine awareness surround them.<sup>19</sup>

No. 1

Inv. No. A 5807<sup>20</sup>

Pigments on canvas, 8 x 7 cm

Purchased in 1967 from a private owner

Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

The figures are drawn with thick black lines on a simple background. Hayagrīva's attributes are depicted in simple lines and dots of black colour. His consort wears a charnel ground ornament depicted as black dots around her waist. The bodies of Kālī and Rudra under their feet appear as a few lines of black colour. The drawing and painting are simple, and the attributes are simply depicted, but the deity's main attribute, the green horse's head, stands out against the brown hair on his head.

No. 2

Inv. No. A 5808<sup>21</sup>

Pigments on canvas, 8 x 6.5 cm

Purchased in 1967 from a private owner

Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

The figures are finely drawn. There is much use of shading (clouds, flames), which adds plasticity to the bodies. The attributes of Hayagrīva and his consort are simply depicted as lines and dots of gold colour. The bodies of Kālī and Rudra under their feet are depicted as lines of gold colour.

## 2. Vajrabhairava and Vajravetālī

Vajrabhairava (Tib. *gShin rje gshe gshed*, *rDo rje 'jigs byed*, Mong. *Erlig-jin Jarghagchi*, Vajra Terror) is a wrathful manifestation of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, a meditational deity. His cult is common in the Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug schools. Together with the deities Yamāri and Yamāntaka he was seen as conqueror of the god of death (Davidson 2005: 43).<sup>22</sup>

His body is dark blue, with twenty, thirty-two, or thirty-four arms. In his hands he holds a variety of objects: an elephant hide, a skull-cup, a damaru drum (Skt. *damaru*, Tib. *da ma ru*), Brahma's head, a foot, entrails, a hand, a shroud, a brazier, a fan, as well as weapons: a chopper (Skt. *kartrkā*, Tib. *gri gug*), a knife, a dart, a wooden pestle,

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<sup>19</sup> Visual references, see Meinert 2011: 484, 490 (Guhyasādhana Hayagrīva), Meinert 2011: 494, 495 (Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 498 (brown colour, Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century). Badmažapov 2003: 278 (Buryatia, 19<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>20</sup> Lumír Jisl's description on a pre-printed form, dated 4 May 1969 (held by the Náprstek Museum): Hayagrīva with Shakti, brown (the correct colour should be red), three heads, six arms, green horse's head in his hair, bird's wings, Shakti blue. Distemper on canvas.

<sup>21</sup> Lumír Jisl's description on a pre-printed form, dated 4 May 1969 (held of the Náprstek Museum): Hayagrīva with Shakti, red, three heads, six arms, green horse's head in his hair, bird's wings, Shakti blue. Distemper on canvas.

<sup>22</sup> For the study and translations of Vajrabhairava tantra see Siklós 1996.

a harpoon, an axe (Skt. *paraśu*, Tib. *dgra sta*), a spear, an arrow (Skt. *sara*, Tib. *mda*), a hook (Skt. *paśa*, Tib. *zhags pa*), a noose, a club, a *khaṭvāṅga* staff, a wheel, a vajra, a vajra hammer, a sword, a shield, a bow (Skt. *dhanus*, Tib. *gzhu*), a bell (Skt. *ghaṅṭa*, Tib. *dril bu*), a threatening forefinger, and a triple bandarole.

He has sixteen legs, of which the ones on the right are bent and the ones on the left straightened (Skt. *pratyāliḍha*). With his feet he tramples either gods and human figures or birds and beasts. His right feet crush a human being, a buffalo, an ox, an ass, a camel, a dog, a sheep and a fox, while with his left feet he stamps on a vulture, an owl, a raven, a parrot, a hawk, a *garuḍa*, a fowl and a swan. The gods he stands on are Brahmā, Indra, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, and Candra.

He has nine faces.<sup>23</sup> The central, buffalo-like face is dark blue. To the right there are red, blue, and yellow faces, to the left a brown, white and an ashen face. His central face bears long horns with shooting flames. Each face has three eyes, a protruding nose, and an open mouth. Above his central face there is red and a yellow face. The yellow face represents Mañjuśrī with a crown of five flaming jewels. Vajrabhairava's hair is yellow or brown, and is upswept like flames. His appearance is extremely wrathful, with large white teeth and fangs in his open mouth.

He is adorned with charnel ground ornaments of a garland of fifty dry skulls and a garland of fifty freshly severed heads. A black snake as a sacred thread encircles his huge body. There are flames of wisdom around his body.

His consort *Vajravetālī* (Tib. *rDo rje ro lang ma*, "Lady Vajra Corpse") embraces Vajrabhairava. She has a blue body, and long yellow hair falling down her back. In her two hands she holds a vajra knife and a skull-cup. She is adorned with bone ornaments.<sup>24</sup>

No. 3

Inv. No. A 8936<sup>25</sup>

Pigments on canvas, 7.9 x 6.9 cm

Purchased in 1972 from a private owner

Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

Despite the small measurements of the painting, the detailed picture shows the image of extremely wrathful deities surrounded with flames, mutilated bodies and severed heads. Two figures on clouds in the upper right and left corners depict Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) and Buddha. There are three wrathful deities in the bottom part of the picture.

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<sup>23</sup> The faces are arranged either in "circular" (*zhal kor*) or in "stacked" (*zhal rtseg*) positions, see <http://www.himalayanart.org/pages/vajrabhairavafaces/index.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Visual references, see Meinert 2011: 448, 449, single form (Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 457, 458, 459, 462, 463 (Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century, 20<sup>th</sup> century), 450, 451, lineage of Amoghavajra (Buryatia, 19<sup>th</sup> century). Badmažapov 2003: 92 (Buryatia, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 93, 94 (Tibet, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 95 (Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century)

<sup>25</sup> Described as Yamāntaka, dated 2 June 1972. Pre-printed form, hold of the Náprstek Museum.



No. 4

Inv. No. A 8963<sup>26</sup>

Pigments on canvas, 5.6 × 5.6 cm

Purchased in 1971 from a private owner

Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

This picture is not much smaller than the previous No. 3, and although it depicts the same deities, it gives a different visual feeling. The bodies of Vajrabhairava and his consort cover almost the whole space of the painting; however, the attributes are drawn with simple black lines. The heads of Vajrabhairava (his main attribute) and his upswept hair are large and attract the attention of the viewer.

### 3. Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī

Cakrasaṃvara (Tib. *'Khor lo bde mchog*, “Wheel of Bliss”<sup>27</sup>), the manifestation of *Heruka*, is the central deity of the Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala (Meinert: 408).<sup>28</sup> He appears in many various forms from peaceful to wrathful, according to his body colour and number of arms and faces. In his wrathful form his body is dark blue, with twelve arms.<sup>29</sup> He holds various implements, such as a vajra, a bell, a damaru drum, an axe, a trident, a chopper, a *khaṭvāṅga* staff, a lasso, a skull-cup and the head of Brahma. A white elephant hide covers his back, and he sports a tiger skin loincloth.

He has four faces in yellow, blue, green and red. His hair is tied in a knot with a wish-fulfilling jewel on top. His large round eyes and open mouth with curling tongue and fangs show his wrathful nature.

His consort *Vajravārāhī* (Tib. *Rdo rje phag mo*, “The Diamond Sow”), also known as *Vajrayoginī* or *Vajradākinī* (Meinert 2011: 412) with red body and long hair embraces him with both legs.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Described as Bodhisattva with his Shakti, dated 29 June 1972. Pre-printed form. Hold of the Náprstek Museum.

<sup>27</sup> Cakrasaṃvara is a compound name meaning “Union of all the elements” in Sanskrit. Names *Samvara* or *Śanbara* also appear. The name in Tibetan *Bde mchog* means “Supreme Bliss”, see Snellgrove 1987: 153. The Cakrasaṃvara system, together with the Guhyasamāja and Hevajra, were among the most important Tantric systems during the Buddhist renaissance from ca. 950 in Tibet that followed the period of social unrest. All three had numerous texts and lineages that originated in India and were accepted in Tibet. All of them are associated with generating maṇḍalas and psychosexual yoga, see Davidson 2005: 36. The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra represents a vast textual and visual tradition spread across the Himalayan region to China and Mongolia. On the visual aspects of the Cakrasaṃvara tradition, see John. C. Huntington and Dina Bangdel. David B. Gray is author of several studies about Cakrasaṃvara as well as translations of the tantras.

<sup>28</sup> According to the myth about Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala the Buddha Vajradhara emanated Heruka in order to destroy Śiva and his Bhairavas. Heruka (Cakrasaṃvara) then assumed the top of the central Mount Sumeru, see Davidson 2005: 40–41.

<sup>29</sup> David Snellgrove describes him as having dark blue, green, red and yellow faces each with three eyes, blue body and twelve arms. The colour of the faces symbolizes the four material elements, the blue body indicates that the deity does not diverge from the Dharma-sphere, and the three eyes see past, present and future worlds. The flayed elephant hide symbolises the world of illusion, see Snellgrove 1987: 154.

<sup>30</sup> Visual references, see Meinert 2011: 408, 410, 409, 411 (Mongolia/Amdo?, 19<sup>th</sup> century). Rhie – Thurman 2000: 216, 217, 220, 221 (Central Tibet, late 14<sup>th</sup>, early 15<sup>th</sup> century and late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century). Badmažapov 2003: 101, 104 (Tibet, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 102 (Buryatia, 20<sup>th</sup> century), 103 (Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century).

No. 5

Inv. No. A 16405<sup>31</sup>

Pigments on canvas, 8.3 x 7 cm

Purchased in 1985 from a Klenoty, National Corporation

Geographical origin not known, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

The male deity is painted in the most common *Luīpā*<sup>32</sup> tradition with yellow, blue, green and red faces, standing upon the red body of Kālarātrī and blue body of Bhairava (Meinert 2011: 410).

No. 6

Inv. No. 32929<sup>33</sup>

Pigments on canvas, 9.5 x 8 cm

Joe Hloucha Collection, acquired in 1955

Origin not known (Mongolia/China), 19<sup>th</sup> century (?)–20<sup>th</sup> century

The painting was probably newly painted when it was acquired. Its surface and colours are clean, without the dirt usually found on used paintings.

#### 4. Vajrasattva and Vajrasāttvikā

Vajrasattva (Tib. *Rdo rje sems dpa'*, Mong. *Dorjembé*, “Adamantine Being”) represents the highest state of all Buddha-emanations (Snellgrove 1987: 131). He appears in a single form, or with his consort, whose name may vary according to the Tantric practice system. He is a personal meditation deity, and Vajrasattva’s figure was used in major Tantric practice systems for empowerment, and for the purification of sins.

Vajrasattva has many forms, neither peaceful nor wrathful, and usually he is depicted with fierce expression on his face. His body can be white, blue or green, with one or three faces, two or six arms. He wears golden jewellery and beautiful silks. In his hands he holds a vajra and an upturned bell with a vajra handle.<sup>34</sup> His consort holds a skull-cup and a chopper.<sup>35</sup>

Because Vajrasattva appears in many forms, he is often confused with other deities with similar iconography such as *Vajradhara* and *Vajrapāṇi*. Náprstek Museum holds seven small votive paintings depicting Tantric couples that can be identified either as Vajrasattva and his consort or other deities. Only two examples are presented here.

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<sup>31</sup> Described as Yamāntaka with his Shakti (with a question mark). 23. 12. 1985. Pre-printed form. Hold of the Náprstek Museum.

<sup>32</sup> There are three traditions with different iconography. Beside the *Luīpā*, there are *Kṛṣṇācārya* and *Ghaṅṭāpāda* traditions, see Meinert 2011: 409-410.

<sup>33</sup> Described as a Wrathful deity with his Shakti in 7 November 2006. Pre-printed form. Hold of the Náprstek Museum.

<sup>34</sup> He is associated with *vajra*, the weapon of Vedic god Indra. In Tibetan, the term *rdo rje* means “Lord of stones”. Vajra and the bell are essential ritual implements in Tibetan Buddhism. *Vajra* represents the active, mostly male Snellgrove 1987: 131–132.

<sup>35</sup> Visual references, see Meinert 2011: 308, 309 (Mongolia, 19/20<sup>th</sup> century). Badmažapov 2003: 112, 113 (semi-wrathful, Buryatia, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 114 (with three eyes, China, 19<sup>th</sup> century), 115 (Tibet, 18<sup>th</sup> century).

No. 7  
Inv. No. A 17231<sup>36</sup>  
Pigments on canvas, 8 x 7.2 cm  
Purchased from a private owner in 1982  
Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

Vajrasattva with a white body sits in a lotus posture on a lotus throne with his consort. Both wear jewellery and beautiful silks in red, green and orange.<sup>37</sup>

No. 8  
Inv. No. A 17225<sup>38</sup>  
Pigments on canvas, 8 x 7.2 cm  
Gift of a private owner, 1983  
Mongolia, 19<sup>th</sup> century–20<sup>th</sup> century

## Conclusion

The Tibetan and Mongolian Collection of the Náprstek Museum represents a unique opportunity to study relatively contemporary Mongolian Tibetan Buddhist votive paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the history of the collection provides meaningful insights into the reception of Tibetan and Mongolian art and crafts in our cultural, social and political context. As for the political and social context of the collection, it is important to note that a large part of the collection was acquired by the Czechoslovak experts who visited Mongolia as part of the international COMECON projects. Czechoslovak participation in the projects led professionals to work in Mongolia for prolonged periods of time. Many of them became genuinely interested in Mongolian history, and spent their free time searching for interesting artifacts. Fortunately for the assessment of the collection, Czech archaeologist and connoisseur of Mongolian art and history Lumír Jisl conducted his research in Mongolia in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and in the 1960s focused his interest upon the Náprstek Museum collection. His approach remained for decades the standard one for museological assessment and evaluation. He identified the deities on the paintings and described them appropriately, including their names in Mongolian and Tibetan. Unfortunately, his premature death in 1969 left his work unfinished.

The small votive paintings of Tantric couples represent only a tiny part of the Tibetan and Mongolian Collection in the Náprstek Museum. There are less than ten of them out of several hundred of paintings. As in the examples of the paintings of Green Tara and female deities, the paintings under scrutiny show a variety of painting styles, use of colour, level of artisanship and aesthetic appeal that range from simple to elaborate and detailed drawing and painting. Although small votive paintings could not cover complex visual scenes as the large paintings do, the simplification of the iconography is probably not only the result of the folk environment and souvenir production but also of development in iconography. The correct iconographical colours and exaggerated

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<sup>36</sup> Originally described as Bodhisattva with his Shakti. 1983. Pre-printed form. Held by the Náprstek Museum.

<sup>37</sup> For analyses of the pigments, see Heroldová 2016b: 51, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Originally described as: Bodhisattva with his Shakti. 1988. Pre-printed form. Held by the Náprstek Museum.

main attributes display the deity immediately and at first glance, and the overall simplification may stem from the feeling that there was no need to execute an elaborate painting.

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No. 1



No. 2



No. 3



No. 4



No. 5



No. 6



No. 7



No. 8