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*Mongolische Ethnographica in Wien: Die Sammlung Hans Leder
im Museum für Völkerkunde Wien.*

**Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften,
2010. Pp. 69. ISBN 978-3-7001-6760-0.**

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Hans Leder (1843–1921), a traveler and collector, is almost forgotten today, although during his active years he ranked among those intrepid explorers of the late 19th and early 20th century whose works opened the path towards the establishment of Oriental studies. Leder travelled several times to Mongolia, amassed a large collection of ethnographic items, lectured after his return, and published several articles and books, namely *Ueber alte Grabstätten Sibirien und der Mongolei* (Mittheilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien, 1895), and *Das geheimnisvolle Tibet* (Grieben's Verlag, Leipzig 1909). Without doubt, he can be placed among those early researchers whose work could have made a major contribution to the development of Mongolian studies if only the results of his research had been more widely known. However, the story of his life is little known today even among scholars, his vast collection remains scattered around the museums of central Europe, and the value of his articles and lectures is forgotten.

Unfortunately there are only few archival documents left that can provide us with information about his achievements. Adding still further difficulties to the research is the fact that Leder, though a prolific collector who gathered several thousands items during his travels, had to resort to selling his collections in order to finance his travel. His originally large collection became dispersed into museums in various Central European regions, where the items now remain. As a result, great difficulties lies in front of the researcher who wants to reconstruct Leder's original collection.

Maria-Katharina Lang from the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften conducted a two-year research project with the aim to describe Leder's collection in European museums and to evaluate his collection in the context of early 20th century Mongolian culture (see the project description, <http://www.formuse.at/>). Her study is the result of extensive research not only involving visits to the museums where Leder's collection is kept, but equally journeying to Mongolia along the route of Leder's exploration as described in his articles.

The results of Lang's research have been presented in the form of a monograph. Divided into three parts, the study begins with a treatment of Leder's collection in the *Museum für Völkerkunde Wien*, followed by a description of the items kept in other museums. The third part evaluates the collection in context of Mongolian culture.

In the opening chapter, the "Einleitung" (pp. 8–13), the author points out that Leder's collection represents the vestiges of a vanishing culture. During his visit, the culture was still living, but the decades of Communist rule in Mongolia during the 20th century caused the breakage of the tradition. This important aspect of the collection and the preservation of the tradition is further elaborated in the later chapter "Mongolei: Spiegelungen der Objekte im Kontext der Gegenwart" (pp. 58–61) and in the outline of a virtual exhibition "Ausblick: Ausstellungskonzept" (pp. 62–66).

"Der Sammler Hans Leder" (pp. 14–16) summarizes main points of Leder's life. Hans Leder was born in the city of Opava (Troppau in German) in Silesia (Schlesien), now in northern Moravia in the Czech Republic. After finishing secondary school, he set out to travel. In order to pursue his research in entomology, he headed for southern Siberia in 1891, and continued to Lake Baikal and to Mongolia. During the next years he visited Mongolia several times, in 1899–1900, 1902 and 1904–1905. His early travels are depicted in his articles "Eine Sommerreise in der nördlichen Mongolei im Jahre 1892" (*Mitteilungen der k.k. Geographischen Gesellschaft Wien* 38, 1895, pp. 26–57, 85–118), "Reise von Irkuts nach Urga in der Mongolei" (*Globus* 64, Wien, 1893, pp. 319–326, 34–349), "Reise an den oberen Orchon und zu den Ruinen von Karakorum" (*Mitteilungen der k.k. Geographischen Gesellschaft Wien* 38, 1894, pp. 407–436), and "Besuch von Urga in der Mongolei" (*Globus* 66, Wien, 1894, pp. 49–53, 68–72). Leder claimed to have collected approximately 20 000 items during his travels. However, the real number is roughly about 5 000 objects. His ethnographical collection is now to be found in museums in Central Europe, namely the *Museum für Völkerkunde Wien*, *Linden-Museum* (Stuttgart), *Völkerkundemuseum des J. und E. von Portheim-Stiftung* (Heidelberg), *Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde* (Leipzig), *Völkerkundemuseum* (Hamburg), *Néprajzi Múzeum* (Budapest) and the *Náprstek Museum* (Prague).

"Die Sammlung im MVK Wien" (pp. 17–24) introduces the collection in the *Museum für Völkerkunde Wien*, where there are 811 objects. The types of objects are further depicted in the main part of the monograph ("Die Objekte", pp. 25–51). Mainly, Leder collected items of small dimensions that were easy to carry during his travels. Nonetheless, his choice was no less influenced by his financial situation (p. 26). Leder had no sufficient financial resources to buy large and expensive items. However, he collected the objects systematically and with scientific approach. During collecting he looked for advice of the local Mongols, himself speaking Mongolian (p. 26). For every collected object he provided a description on sheets of paper entitled "Objektliste" stating the measures and material used.

His collection of material items thoroughly documents the everyday religious life of the Mongols of the time (p. 26). The collection includes *tsha tshas*, the votive stamped-clay images of deities, small ritual paintings *tsakli* as well as large scroll paintings *thangkas*, amulets, small wooden family altars, tiny votive figures, *tormas* – painted dough sculptures in cone shapes used as food offerings, and items of everyday use made of clay, papier-mâché, metal and textile as well as jewelry and snuff bottles. There is also a set of small wooden figures of masked and costumed 'cham dancers, made to his request (p. 43) after he had seen this religious dance performance near Erdene Zuu Monastery in central Mongolia in 1892.

The *Museum für Völkerkunde Wien* purchased only a part of his collection. In 1905 and 1906, Leder tried to sell his collection for a higher price than the museum authorities were able to pay. However, his collection was sold in portions to other museums and institutions. The chapter “Hans Leders Sammlungen in europäischen Museen” (pp. 52–57) traces the history of the purchases. The *Linden-Museum Stuttgart* bought 1 500 items in 1902, the *Néprajzi Múzeum* got 900 items in 1904, the *Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde* in Leipzig received approximately 1 200 objects in 1907, and the *Porthelm-Stiftung Heidelberg* purchased around 800 items in 1919.

The Náprstek Museum in Prague also hosts some items of Leder’s collection. However, their acquisition history is rather complicated, and was not entirely known to the author of this review during Lang’s research.

Though born in the historic Czech lands, Hans Leder did not belong among the members of the Czech-speaking and nationalist-minded circle of friends around Vojta Náprstek (1826–1894), the founder of the museum bearing today his name. Besides his long residence in Vienna, Leder spent a large part of his life in the German-speaking and German-influenced cultural environment of Habsburg-era Opava. However, he decided to sell a part of his collection to an institution in the town of his birth, the former *Kaiser Franz Josef-Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*, now called the *Slezské museum Opava (Silesia Museum Opava)*. In the 1950s, Leder’s collection aroused the interest of the then director of the museum, Lumír Jisl (1921–1969). Jisl was educated in archeology, but shifted his attention to ancient Mongolia, allegedly through his encounter with Leder’s collection. Between 1958 and 1963 he led three archaeological expeditions to Mongolia, and he became the author of several studies about Mongolian ancient history and art. In 1963 he published a twenty-seven-page study about Hans Leder entitled “Hans Leder: ein vergessener Reisender” (*Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde*, Dresden, Band 22, Berlin 1963: 25–52). In 1953, Jisl published an article about the so-called “Tibetan collection” in Opava (“Sbírka tibetského umění Slezského musea v Opavě”, *Collection of Tibetan Art in Silesia Museum in Opava*) in two issues of the *Acta Musei Silesiae* III, 1953, 1, pp. 25–30, and *Acta Musei Silesiae* III, 1953, 2, pp. 48–59. The first part depicted the scroll paintings and the second one the *tsha tsha*. In the article, he traced the history of Leder’s collection. According to an oral account described in Jisl’s article, the museum’s previous director, Dr. E. W. Braun, said that Leder had given the objects to the museum in 1903 as a gift from his “second Tibetan journey” (Jisl, p. 25), even though it is most likely that Leder never actually visited the area of today’s Tibet (Jisl, p. 50). Nevertheless, Jisl provides us with most important information about the history of the collection. The city of Opava served as one of the three German administrative centers during the Nazi occupation and World War II, and during the final months of the war in 1945 the city was subjected to fierce fighting. Much of the town centre was destroyed, including a severe fire in the museum, and the majority of Leder’s collection did not survive (Jisl p. 25), with the exception of only three paintings and fifteen clay figures (*tsha tsha*). In the late 1950s, these items were transferred to the Náprstek Museum in Prague. During the implementation of the new cultural policies of the Communist regime, the Náprstek Museum became the only museum in Czechoslovakia dealing with non-European ethnography and, in consequence, received hundreds of objects that were formerly kept in regional museums and collections. However, despite the meticulous transfer documentation, much

information about the previous owners was lost. Fortunately, with the help of Jisl's article with photo documentation, three small paintings (approximately 20 x 30 cm, one depicting a Tuṣita Heaven, and two with Avalokiteśvara) and eleven *tsha tsha* were identified as part of Leder's collection.

Hans Leder belongs to the generation of the late 19th and early 20th century travelers who expanded our knowledge of Mongolia. However, despite the articles he wrote and lectures he gave, he was neither a prolific author nor a well-known public figure. His collection represented an important depiction of religious and everyday life in Mongolia of the period, yet this valuable source was dispersed piecemeal. Hans Leder gradually fell into oblivion, despite his adventurous travels and scientific achievements.

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