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## Photographs of Mongolian *tsam*-related artefacts taken by Czechoslovak researchers in the 1950s and 1960s: re-opening an old file

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* This paper deals with two sets of colour photographs of Mongolian *tsam* masks taken by Czechoslovak archaeologist Lumír Jisl (1921–1969) and art photographer Werner Forman (1921–2010) in Mongolia during the period of 1956–1963. Werner Forman's photographs appeared in *Lamaistische Tanzmasken*. This unpretentious, slim volume, with a text composed by B. Rinchen (with the apparent assistance of a former *tsam* ceremony master, giving it unequivocal authenticity) holds a unique position: it was published 32 years after the last eye-witness description of the Mongolian *tsam* given by Shastina in 1935 (including black-and-white photographs), and some two decades before the series of *tsam* mask photographs featured in Tsultem's *Mongolian Sculpture and Iskusstvo Mongolii* 'Mongolian Art'. In contrast, Lumír Jisl's photographs, apart from the few that were published during his lifetime, were preserved in a family archive for more than fifty years. The *goal* of this paper is to describe the circumstances under which these colour photographs came into being. A brief account is given of the visits to Mongolia undertaken by Lumír Jisl and Werner Forman. The general background of Czechoslovak-Mongolian cooperation in its first decade after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries is also sketched out. At that time, *tsam* masks were stored in the Choijin Lama Temple, one of the very few monastic complexes to survive the antireligious campaign of the late 1930s; the temple became shelter to many religious artefacts. In addition to photographing this temple complex, Lumír Jisl photographed the *tsam* masks during research trips to at least three regional museums. This paper also describes the different goals and visions of both Lumír Jisl and Werner Forman when photographing the *tsam* masks, resulting in differing modes of execution. In *conclusion*, I examine the changes in perspective of the Buddhist monks following the general atmosphere of mistrust and fear engendered by the antireligion campaigns and repressions of the late 1930s, as well as the subsequent partial easing of these repressions. Not only were Forman and Jisl both invited to take photographs of religious artefacts, but they also received assistance in doing so. The Mongolian monks who helped Forman and Jisl had to accept, however,

the drastically changed status of these artefacts: once sacred items used in religious ritual dance, they were now objects of Mongolian artistic heritage.

**Keywords:** Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, *tsam*, mask, photography, Lumír Jisl, Werner Forman

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## Фотографии артефактов монгольского цама, сделанные чехословацкими исследователями в 1950-х и 1960-х гг.: новый взгляд на старые документы

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**Аннотация. Введение.** В данной статье рассматриваются два набора цветных фотографий монгольских масок цама, сделанных чехословацким археологом Лумиром Йислом (1921–1969) и художником-фотографом Вернером Форманом (1921–2010) в Монголии в период 1956–1963 гг. Фотографии В. Формана были опубликованы в книге «Ламаистские танцевальные маски» в 1967 г. Эта книга с текстом, составленным Б. Ринченем (с очевидной помощью бывшего мастера церемонии цам, что придает ему недвусмысленную аутентичность), уникальна: она была опубликована через 32 года после последнего описания очевидца монгольского цама, данного Н. П. Шастиной в 1935 г. (включавшего черно-белые фотографии), и примерно за два десятилетия до серии фотографий с масками цама, представленных в альбоме монгольской скульптуры Н. Цултэма и альбоме «Искусство Монголии». Фотографии Л. Йисла, за исключением нескольких опубликованных при его жизни, хранились в семейном архиве более пятидесяти лет. **Цель** данной статьи — описать обстоятельства, при которых появились эти цветные фотографии монгольского цама. **Результаты.** Даны краткие сведения о поездках в Монголию Л. Йисла и В. Формана. Обрисована общая история чехословацко-монгольского сотрудничества в первое десятилетие после установления дипломатических отношений между двумя странами. В то время маски цама хранились в храме Чойджин-ламы, одном из немногих монастырских комплексов, переживших антирелигиозную кампанию конца 1930-х гг. — храм стал убежищем для многих религиозных артефактов. Помимо фотографий храмового комплекса, Л. Йисл сделал фотографии масок цама во время исследовательских поездок как минимум в три региональных музея. В статье также описываются различные цели и видения Л. Йисла и В. Формана при фотографировании масок цама, которые приводили к различным способам исполнения. Анализируются изменения во взглядах буддийских монахов после общей

атмосферы недоверия и страха, порожденной антирелигиозными кампаниями и репрессиями конца 1930-х гг., а также последующее частичное ослабление этих репрессий. В. Форман и Л. Йисл не только были приглашены фотографировать религиозные артефакты, но и получили в этом важном деле содействие с монгольской стороны. Однако монгольским монахам, которые помогали В. Форману и Л. Йислу, пришлось смириться с резко изменившимся статусом этих артефактов: когда-то священные предметы, использовавшиеся в религиозных ритуальных танцах, теперь стали объектами монгольского художественного наследия.

**Ключевые слова:** Монголия, Чехословакия, цам, маска, фотография, Лумир Йисл, Вернер Форман

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**Introduction.** Mongolian *tsam* is a specific ritual dance of Tibetan and initially of Indian origin, performed by the masked characters of the Buddhist pantheon and local spirits with the aim of suppressing antireligious and anti-human evil powers and pleasing the “Buddhas of the ten directions.” It is certainly one of the most spectacular tantric Buddhist ritual performances and as such it enjoyed tremendous popularity among the Mongols, as well as historically drawing the attention of foreign travellers, scholars and residents, once allowed to enter Mongolian territory. This vivid performance of masked deities in richly decorated garments is mentioned or thoroughly described in numerous travelogues and scholarly treatises [Pozdneev 1887: 392–403; etc.]. Moreover, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as photographic cameras became available to researchers and travellers to Mongolia, black-and-white photographs of *tsam* and masked deities became invaluable components of their accounts [Haslund-Christensen 1934; Forbáth 1934; Shastina 1935; etc.].

The *tsam* dance, as well as its related rituals, has been described in detail in Shastina

[Shastina 1935], Majer [Majer 2008], Majer – Teleki [Majer, Teleki 2014], Kimura [Kimura 1997], and others. Tsendina [Tsendina 2018] relates in detail the history of *tsam* and its introduction to Mongolia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from Tsültem’s volume on Mongolian art history [Tsültem 1986: 86–89], not much space has been given to the description of the masks themselves, the garments, accessories, or their comparative analysis.

Despite the limited data, it can be assumed that the masks were most likely produced in the artisan shops established at the larger monasteries. Sometime around 1910, a group of masters from all over Mongolia under the leadership of the famous artist and *tsam* ceremony master (*chambon*) Puntsog-Osor (or Puntsogosor) was entrusted with the creation of new masks, robes and attributes for more than one hundred *tsam* figures [Tsültem 1986: 88; Damdinsüren 1995: 54–55; Gangaa 2003: 42–43]. Both the old and new masks were in use until the antireligious campaign and subsequent repressions which eventually resulted in a total ban on religious life in Mongolia in 1938.

**Czechoslovak researchers in Mongolia.**

At the end of April 1950, slightly more than a decade had passed since the antireligious campaign and repressions of the late 1930s. At this time, Mongolia established diplomatic relations with the six European countries of the so-called Eastern bloc,<sup>1</sup> Czechoslovakia being among them. This provided an official basis for mutual cooperation between the two countries in various fields. Priority was given to industry, trade and geology with the goal of contributing to Mongolia's economic development. Czechoslovak experts in various fields and researchers were dispatched to Mongolia as part of this project. Cultural cooperation (including education) began with the exchange of cultural delegations. The first recorded and official visit of poet, writer and literary historian Ts. Damdinsüren and philologist S. Luvsanvandan took place in 1953.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the visit of a group of Czechoslovak writers and poets to Mongolia in the autumn of 1953; subsequent individual visits were made by other writers.<sup>3</sup> At first, cultural, educational, and scientific cooperation was set up in a mutually agreed annual plan. This enabled Pavel Poucha (1905–1986), a scholar of Asian languages and founder of Czechoslovak Mongolian studies, to spend four months in Mongolia in 1955 travelling, conducting research and consulting with his Mongolian colleagues. The result of this visit was the first travelogue, published in 1957, solely focused on Mongolia and full of insight into its culture, history, language and literature. Poucha's colleague, the eminent Mongolian scholar Byambyn Rinchen (1905–1977), during his short visit to Prague as a representative of the Scientific institute (*Shinjlekh ukhaany khüreele*)<sup>4</sup> in 1956, suggested initiating joint research in Mongolia, with a particular empha-

sis on archaeology. The plan was submitted by both Poucha and Rinchen to the directorship of the Czechoslovak Academy of sciences (ČSAV), and the agreement between the scientific institutions of both countries was signed. This was also included in the Cultural Relation Plan for both 1957 and 1958 with a focus on joint archaeological expeditions<sup>5</sup>. Lumír Jisl (1921–1969), an archaeologist specializing in the Orkhon Turks, an outstanding ethnographer following in the tradition of Hans Leder<sup>6</sup>, and a candidate nominated by the ČSAV (Institute of Archeology), could not be a better choice for director of the expedition.

It was also important to acquire and generate materials for the mutual promotion of the both countries, as well as for their promotion in the wider (non-socialist) world. There was a regular exchange of photographic materials intended for exhibitions held on occasions such as the anniversaries of significant political or historical events, or the presentation of economic progress. Radio recordings and films were also exchanged. In addition, the state-owned Artia Publishing house<sup>7</sup> sent art photographers to Mongolia, as they intended to publish a series of books illustrating the most important artistic artefacts and monuments of the so-called people's democracies, i.e. China, Mongolia, Korea and Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> The broth-

<sup>5</sup> For details, see [Bělka 2014: 9–13].

<sup>6</sup> Hans Leder (1843–1921) was a Czech-born Austrian traveller to Central Asia, as well as a collector of Buddhist artefacts. For more details, see [Lang 2013: 9–24].

<sup>7</sup> Artia Publishing house (1953–1990) was a part of the Artia foreign trade enterprise, focused on trade and the promotion of cultural assets to foreign countries. Artia Publishing house provided high-quality books in foreign languages for export ([Slovník české literatury]. On: <http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=1821>).

<sup>8</sup> According to archival sources, this trip was originally planned as joint trip to China and Mongolia in 1955, but permission was not granted by the Czechoslovak authorities for technical reasons. The trip to China took place in 1956 at the request of the Chinese authorities [Dossier; Letter from] (Dossier “China 8 — trip of 2 art photographers”, typed documents, dossier dated June 21, 1955. National Archives of the Czech Republic, Box 341, Nr. 560; Letter from Artia to the Ministry of Culture dated May 21, 1956. Typed document. National Archives of the Czech Republic, Box 327, Nr. 548).

<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Bloc generally refers to the satellite states of the Soviet Union during the Cold War (app. 1947–1991).

<sup>2</sup> Archive of MFA of the Czech Republic, Folder 157/368, typed doc. dated November 16, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> For details and analysis of such reports, see [Slobodník 2018: 39–59].

<sup>4</sup> The predecessor of the Academy of Sciences functioned under this name from 1930 to 1957 [The Mongolian Academy of Sciences 2011: 45–70]. In Russian it was referred to as *Uchkom* (abbr. of *Uchonyy komitet*) or *NIK* (abbr. of *Nauchno-issledovatel'skiy komitet*).



ers Werner (1921–2010) and Bedřich Forman (1919–1985) were appointed to this mission in 1959 as well-known photographers who had also developed their own innovative technique of capturing artistic objects.

**Lumír Jisl: photo-documentation of *tsam* masks.** Lumír Jisl conducted three extensive expeditions in Mongolia, each with a different goal [Bělka 2014: 10–11]. The first one took place in 1957 as part of a study trip to the USSR, Mongolia and China. In Mongolia, Jisl's task was to evaluate overall conditions and select sites appropriate for the Czechoslovak-Mongolian joint archaeological expedition, as well as to propagate Czechoslovak archaeological methods, more advanced at the time. A second expedition took place in 1958; based in Khöshöö Tsaidam, a truly outstanding discovery — the stone head of the Turkic prince Kül Tegin [Bělka 2014: 11], now exhibited in the National Museum of Mongolia — had been made. During his third expedition in 1963, Jisl spent almost a month with his Mongolian colleague Namsrain Ser-Odjav (1923–1990) conducting field research mainly in northern Mongolia [Bělka 2018]. For Jisl, photography was an important method of documenting his trips and research. Jisl always carried two cameras — a twin lens reflex Flexaret and a folding medium-range format Iconta with a Zeiss lens [Kapišovská 2014: 15]. Given Jisl's personal interest and background in religious studies, ceremonies, monasteries, temples, home altars, objects of Buddhist art, and monks were his most frequently photographed topics.<sup>9</sup>

Only couple of days after Jisl had arrived in Ulaanbaatar for the first time, he visited Gandantegchenlin Monastery where he was granted an audience with the abbot; he met with other monks as well. In Choijin Lama Temple, he was guided through the temples by the caretaker Luvsanbaldan [LJ: Lobsan Baldan] who lived in the yurt in the temple yard. Jisl impressed him with his knowledge of Buddhist deities and their names. Luvsanbaldan invited Jisl into his yurt, where they continued their discussion about Jisl's research. Luvsanbaldan showed Jisl his drawing of a *tsam*-masked monk in full garments with banners and details

in gold; he told Jisl he could take pictures of the artefacts in the temple, as well as the temple buildings [Jisl 1957–1958: 19]. The *tsam* masks displayed in Choijin Lama Temple immediately caught Jisl's attention, and he was to document them extensively. In his photographic archive there are a total of 28 colour photographs of *tsam* masks, in addition to one black-and-white photograph, dating from 1963,<sup>10</sup> showing the black mask of the protector *Gombo/Mahākāla* from Erdene-Zuu monastery; there are also two other colour photographs documenting a bone apron (Mon. *rüüjin*) [108 Images of Mongolia, 2014: 23 (pict. 8)] with silken boots and bone ornaments, photographed in 1957 in the Arvaikheer museum and in Choijin Lama Temple respectively. Masks were photographed at different times during Jisl's visits to Mongolia, and in different locations, although the vast majority are from the Choijin Lama Temple. In addition to the latter, there is a photograph of the masks of the benefactor *Khashin khaan* (< Chin. *he shang* 'Buddhist monk', Tib. *shyin bdag*) and three of his children taken in the Zuunmod museum (Central aimag) in 1963, a photograph of the mask of the Indian teacher Azar (Tib. *a tsarya/a tsa ra*, Skt. *ācārya*) [Jisl 1960: pict. 91] taken in 1957 in the Arvaikheer museum (Uvurkhangai aimag) at the same time as the above-mentioned bone apron, and a mask of the guardian of Sor (Tib. *zor*), which is a triangular wooden construction decorated with flames for absorbing evil forces, photographed in the Undurkhaan museum (Khentii aimag) in 1963 (See Photo 3).<sup>11</sup>

Jisl's approach to the objects he photographed was primarily a documentary one; his techniques were the same as those used by archaeologists or ethnographers. Apart from a few masks (for example, the bodhisattva *Ochirvaani* (Skt. *Vajrapāṇi*), the red aspect of the Lord of Death or the Underworld *Erleg Nomun Khan* or *Chojjoo*<sup>12</sup> (see Photo 1) and his messenger the Deer deity (Mon. *buga, shiva*, Tib. *shi ba*) installed inside the temple museum, most artefacts were photographed outside

<sup>9</sup> For a classification of his photographs by topic, see [Kapišovská 2014]; for the identification of monks in Lumír Jisl's photographs, see [Byambaa 2018: 27–64].

<sup>10</sup> Mon. *gombo*, Tib. *mgon po*. This is possibly the same mask that is mentioned in Kotwicz's description of *tsam* in Erdene Zuu in 1912 [Kotwicz 2012: 164, 177].

<sup>11</sup> For details, see Majer [Majer 2008: 109, 112, 93].

<sup>12</sup> *Nandub Chojjoo/Chojjil*, Tib. *chos rgyal*, Skt. *Yama*.

in order to ensure enough light. They were either displayed on the table in the 16-column pavilion at the entrance to the Main Temple, in the temple yard, or outside the museum building. His acquaintance with M. Gombojav (1904–?), the official photographer of the Scientific Institute, gave Jisl the opportunity to obtain around forty historical photographs of *tsam* dating from the early 1930s in exchange for several roles of Agfacolor film — a hard-to-obtain item in socialist countries at that time [Jisl 1957–1958: 39, 65]. A photo lab had been set up in the Scientific Institute as early as in 1924 [The Mongolian Academy of Sciences 2011: 22], and according to the annual reports of the Institute,<sup>13</sup> its members often took photographs of *tsam*, the Maitreya circumambulation and other religious ceremonies mostly in Ulaanbaatar and its surroundings. Many of these photographs are indicated as having been taken by M. Gombojav [Teleki 2015: 251–296], as were those given to Jisl, all bearing the date 1934. Some were published in Shastina's work on *tsam* in the Züün khüree Monastery [Shastina 1935: ill.].

Jisl's collection of research materials was very thorough. He occasionally included pictures of *tsam* masks in his works on Mongolian Buddhist art (see, for instance, [Jisl 1960; Jisl 1961] etc.). In 1964, however, in his letter to the Artia Publishing House [Letter 1964],<sup>14</sup> he proposed a monograph devoted to Mongolian *tsam* and *tsam* masks. The monograph was to include more than 30 colour photographs of *tsam* masks and accessories, in addition to 10 black-and-white historical photographs and 30 photographs (both colour and black-and-white) of *tsam*-figures in the collection of Hans Leder.<sup>15</sup> The textual part would describe the masks and their attributes as well as that of the ritual dances. Jisl's offer was unfortunately rejected. Presumably, the publisher was aware

that a volume with Werner Forman's photographs on the same topic was already being prepared: foreign-language publishing, as well as communications with foreign presses was thoroughly centralized those days, limited as it was to a few state-owned companies.

**Werner Forman: masked deities in dance.** Unlike Jisl, the Forman brothers<sup>16</sup> visited Mongolia only once, spending a month there from October 11<sup>th</sup> to November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1959 [Teluch, Nemazal 1960: 1]. For the most part, they worked in Ulaanbaatar. Although they were supposed to spend time in the countryside photographing trees and game animals to promote Mongolian tourism, the trip was officially cancelled due to poor weather.

According to the official report submitted by the embassy, the Forman brothers were the first to photograph numerous artefacts in the State Museum, as well as in the museum and library of the Scientific Institute. This included the priceless sutra of 120 volumes written in gold with richly decorated silver plate-covers (possibly the Mongolian version of the Ganjuur, Tib. *Kangyur* 'The Translation of the Word') [Ibid.]. Moreover, photographic documentation of all the paleontographical exhibits in the museum was undertaken at the request of the department of paleontology. From this collection, a photograph of a girl sitting on a table, in front of a giant skull of *Tarbosaurus*, became very popular.<sup>17</sup>

The Forman brothers spent several days working in Gandan Monastery and the Antireligious Museum (i.e. Chojin Lama

<sup>13</sup> Yearly report of the activities of the photography department, list of photographs (1931) National Archives of Mongolia, fund 23, file 1, unit 280.

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 7 above.

<sup>15</sup> The collections of *tsam*-figures ordered by Leder in Urga (a former name of the capital Ulaanbaatar) in 1902. Today, these figures are located in several European museums. Jisl photographed some of them during his research trip to Vienna in 1964. For more about Leder's collections of *tsam*-figures, see Teleki [Teleki 2013: 76–83].

<sup>16</sup> The Prague-born art photographer Werner (1921–2010) and his brother Bedřich (1919–1985), a graphic designer, worked as a team. Their work was very popular thanks to a series of photographs of Asian art artefacts in the magazine *Nový Orient* (*New Orient*) and in exhibitions for Prague Náprstek museum. A special volume on Chinese art in the Czechoslovak collections, published in 1954 with accompanying text by the Asian art historian Lubor Hájek was a great success; a visit to China followed in 1956 (see footnote 8). Throughout their career, the Forman brothers documented not only Asian art artefacts (Indian, Chinese, Japanese etc.), but also those of ancient Greece and Egypt [Survey 1955: 1–2]. For more details about Werner Forman, see Werner Forman Obituary [Werner Forman Obituary 2010: 84].

<sup>17</sup> Nr. 328LA0035B in Werner Forman Archive (WFA) collection [Werner Forman Archive].





*Photo 1.* Nandub Chojjoo, the red aspect of Lord of Death or Underworld Erleg Nomun Khan/Chojjoo/Chojil (tib. chos rgyal, Skt. Yama). Photographed by Lumír Jisl in Chojin Lama Temple, 1957



*Photo 2.* The Indian teacher Azar (tib. a tsarya/a tsa ra, Skt. ācārya). Photographed by Lumír Jisl in Chojin Lama Temple, 1957



Photo 3. The Guardian of Sor, which is a triangular wooden construction for absorbing evil forces for absorbing evil powers. This mask was created by the former monk Gombojantsan († 1961) from Ömnödelger somon in Khentii aimag. Photographed by Lumír Jisl in Undurkhaan museum (Khentii aimag), 1963

Temple). According to Barbara Heller, the curator of the Werner Forman Collection, it was a former *chambon* (Tib. *'cham dpon*, *tsam* ceremony master) who suggested they photograph the *tsam* masks [Jackson 2014]. The masks were stored in the same place where Lumír Jisl had found them, in the Main Temple of the Choijin Lama Temple complex. The temple complex, located to the south of the city centre of present-day Ulaanbaatar, was built between 1904 and 1908 for Luvsankhaidav (Tib. *blo bzang mkhas grub*, 1872–1918), the state oracle and a younger brother of the 8<sup>th</sup> Jebtsundamba khutuktu (1869–1924).<sup>18</sup> The *tsam* had been performed in the Choijin Lama Temple since 1916 [Dashdulam, Naranchimeg 2011: 164]. Religious services “for the sake of state and religion” continued in the temple complex until 1936; in 1938, it was closed as a result of the nationwide antireligious purges [Dashdulam, Naranchimeg 2011: 212]. And yet the Choijin

Lama Temple was not destroyed as were most other monasteries and temples in Mongolia. Thanks to the intervention of a group of scholars from the Scientific Institute, the temple complex was made a branch of the National Museum under the auspices of the Scientific Institute, while certain artefacts were registered as having been transferred to the Library [Protocol 1938; List 1938]. From 1942 to 1962, it served as a museum, closed to the public but accessible to “special” (i.e. foreign) guests.

Werner Forman had the idea of capturing the masks as if in motion, with full garments to create the illusion of a genuine *tsam* performance. The photographs were taken on sunlit days outside the temple, but with the temple buildings in the background. Thus, posed in this sacred architectural setting, there is the wrathful deity Namsrai (Tib. *rnam (thos) sras*, Skt. *Vaiśravaṇa/Kubera/Kuvera*) as seen through a doorway, the Deer deity (Mon. *buga*, *shiva*, Tib. *shi ba*) dancing with the Bull deity (Mon. *bukh*, *makhe*, Tib. *ma he*), the deity Chadraabal (Tib. *zhing skyong*, Skt. *Kṣetrapāla*), the companion spirit of the

<sup>18</sup> For a brief description of the complex, see Teleki [Teleki 2015: 23], a detailed historical account is given in Dashdulam and Naranchimeg [Dashdulam, Naranchimeg 2011].



wrathful deity *Gombo/Mahākāla*, dancing with a hooked-knife in his hand in the sixteen-column pavilion in front of the Main Temple entrance [Forman, Rinchen 1967: 53, 80–81, 107], and the two lords of the cemetery, i.e. skeletons *Khokhimoi* (Tib. *dur khrod (kyi) bdag po*, Skt. *Citipati*) standing as if in conversation. Many other masks are captured resting against the wall or hanging on the wooden columns. The companions of the coral-hued *Jamsran*, i.e. *Dogshin ulaan sakhius*, the ‘Red Wrathful Protector’ (Tib. *lcam sring*, Skt. *beg tse*), the two red-faced Ditogjads (Tib. *sde brgyad*) and one Jamshid are arranged below him in a group, indicating that these characters belong to Jamsran’s retinue [Forman, Rinchen 1967: 99]. Werner Forman also paid careful attention to the mask details, as well as to the deities’ accessories, robes, bone aprons and richly embroidered silken boots.

Several days of intensive photographic work in the Chojjin Lama Temple and Gandantegchenlin Monastery provided Forman with ample material “that would easily make a separate book” [Teluch, Nemazal 1960: 1]. Yet it took a few more years until the book was actually produced. Sometime in 1963, through the auspices of the Czechoslovak state-owned publishing agency, Werner Forman approached the German publishers Koehler & Amelang, based in Leipzig, with the idea of creating a book about *tsam* masks. He planned on including 38 colour pictures of the masks, in addition to about ten other pictures, most of them portraits of monks who had been photographed in Ulaanbaatar in 1959.<sup>19</sup> A letter written by Dr. Faensen, the head of the publishing house, to Byambyn Rinchen reveals that Werner Forman had arranged for the text to be assigned to Rinchen [Letter 1963], who himself was urged to enlist the assistance of the *chambon* of Gandantegchenlin Monastery. In this manner, the authenticity of the book ultimately published under the title “Lamaistische Tanzmasken” in 1967 was assured [Forman, Rinchen 1967].

**Conclusion: From votive objects to Buddhist art.** Both Lumír Jisl’s and Werner Forman’s photographs of Mongolian *tsam* masks were pioneering in many respects: they were the first colour photographs of the

*tsam* masks ever made and, to my knowledge, the first such photographs taken after the repressions of the late 1930s. As such, they document the conditions of the masks and the way they were handled and stored. But there is much more that can be seen behind them.

These photographs capture the *tsam* masks during a crucial moment, as they were being transformed from their role as integral components of the *tsam* dance into artistic artefacts of Buddhism. In addition, the reports of both photographers of how the monks not only permitted, but in fact called upon them to take these pictures tells us that the attitudes of Mongolian monks had changed since the anti-religious campaign and repressions of the late 1930s. Before the anti-religious purges, it would be difficult to imagine laymen being allowed to touch such sacred objects as *tsam* masks: a consecration ceremony had to be performed [Majer 2008: 98] before they could even be used in the *tsam* dance. In earlier decades, however, with the establishment of the Scientific Institute in 1921 — initially named the Institute of Sutras and Texts, *Sudar bičgiin khüreele*n — certain monks were engaged in academic work and as translators from Tibetan. They were also librarians of Tibetan books and xylographs, as well as serving as consultants for religion-related issues. Later on, after the harshest wave of the anti-religious campaign had abated, they were persuaded by prominent scholars such as B. Rinchen or Ts. Damdinsüren to adapt to the new situation: this meant placing Buddhism firmly in the context of national cultural and art heritage, and promoting it as such.<sup>20</sup> Hence, Lumír Jisl and Werner Forman were eagerly assisted in the arrangement of the masks for photography, and the latter even had the *tsam* characters revived in dance in front of his camera lens.

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<sup>20</sup> Ragchaa Byambaa, a Buddhist monk. Personal communication, November 2020.

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