

Tracing Tibetan Objects

The 'Forgotten' Von Siebold Collection and Early
Tibetan Collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden



By Drijver, J.L.

Cover image: Adaptation of Ritual sceptre (vajra)(RV-1-3634), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

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The ‘Forgotten’ Von Siebold Collection and Early Tibetan Collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden

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Table 4.1 Comparative Overview of Early Tibetan Collections at Wereldmuseum Leiden.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Tibetan material culture has been part of the Wereldmuseum Leiden for over 180 years; its earliest collection was among the items on display at the museum's opening in 1837. This collection comprises approximately 100 objects and was part of the larger collection of artefacts gathered by Philipp Franz Von Siebold during his time in Japan.

This thesis examines three early Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden—the Von Siebold, Van Manen, and Series 2845 collections —to trace the origins and influence of the Von Siebold collection within the Tibetan collection at the Wereldmuseum in Leiden. Through comparative analysis, this study reveals how these collections collectively constructed 'Museum Tibet': a religion-centric image of Tibetan culture within the Western museum imagination. Thus, the main research question will be as follows:

1. What types of objects are included in the Von Siebold collection, and what do they reflect about Von Siebold's interest in Tibetan culture?
2. How did the Von Siebold collection influence the formation and typology of later Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden, such as the Van Manen collection and Series 2845?
3. How have these early collections contributed to the construction of 'Museum Tibet', a static, ritual-centric image of Tibetan culture in Western museums?

This research will employ a combination of methodologies. The first is an object-based analysis of the Von Siebold collection, conducted using the Wereldmuseum Leiden's digital catalogues. Objects in the collection will be classified typologically and examined through iconographic analysis. Where possible, comparative examples from collections such as the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art will be reviewed to assess stylistic traits and potential regional origins. The aim is to determine provenance, function and potential misattributions by the museum.

However, this methodological approach is limited by the photographs and descriptions provided by the museum. The images used in this thesis are often taken from a single

angle and at low resolution, and they can conceal details. Additionally, the objects are staged by the museum; consequently, they appear static and may not accurately reveal their original use or purpose. Another limitation is that not all objects can be compared to the catalogues of other museums, either because they were not digitally published or the museum did not acquire similar objects. Finally, an object-based analysis alone is not always sufficient to establish provenance or function.

Second, a literature-based approach is employed to trace acquisition pathways using key secondary sources (Pott, 1951; Effert, 2008) and, where available, archival records. This will contextualise the formation of the early Tibetan collections and establish their provenance.

This approach also has limitations, primarily the lack of available archival records. Furthermore, where records are available, they often lack useful information or omit details such as acquisition methods.

The third method is a comparative analysis examining the Von Siebold, Van Manen, and Series 2845 collections across several dimensions: object typologies, acquisition contexts, and collector motivations. This will reveal patterns in the early Tibetan collections in the Wereldmuseum Leiden. Due to the scope of this thesis, only one of the collections, the Von Siebold collection, was studied in great detail. The other two collections were examined in broader terms. Furthermore, only three of the collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden were compared. A more comprehensive analysis would require comparing a larger group of collections.

Finally, a critical museological analysis will examine how Tibet is represented in the Wereldmuseum's framing of these collections. Together, these methodologies will allow for a comprehensive study of the three early Tibetan collections. The analysis of representation is therefore based on the objects' typologies and the broader Western perception of Tibet, as no records concerning their early display are available.

The outline of this thesis will be as follows. Chapter 2 will give historical context to the birth of the Wereldmuseum Leiden as well as a biographical overview of Von Siebold.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth analysis of the objects in the Von Siebold collection. Furthermore, this chapter examines Von Siebold's motivations, interests, and access to materials. Lastly, this section investigates the provenance of the collection. With this, the first research question will be answered.

The in-depth analysis is important for gaining a deeper understanding of the collection's formation and its role in portraying Tibetan culture within the museum. Furthermore, having this understanding will be important in the second section, as it will allow me to compare Von Siebold with later collections.

Chapter 4 addresses the second question, which will be answered by comparing the Von Siebold Collection with the Van Manen Collection and the Series 2845 Collection.

The Van Manen Collection was the second collection bought by the museum in 1948. During this period, as General Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Johan van Manen collected numerous paintings and ethnographic objects (Pott, 1951, p. 5).

The third collection, Series 2845, is described by Pott (1951, p. 5) as the *pièce de résistance* of the museum. The collection comprises approximately 80 objects collected during the Younghusband expeditions in Tibet. The collection includes objects in fragmentary states.

As both of these collections entered the museum after the Von Siebold, this research seeks to determine whether the Von Siebold influenced the types of objects the museum was interested in. A comparison will be made with two other early Tibetan collections to understand broader collecting patterns, the collector's interests, and whether the Von Siebold collection influenced subsequent Tibetan collections. This will help understand the typologies of the collections as well as the preferred and overlooked narratives of Tibetan culture.

Chapter 5 will discuss the concept of 'Museum Tibet' and how the Tibetan image is shaped in the Wereldmuseum Leiden. It will furthermore discuss issues of displaying

living religion and approaches the museum can take to be more transparent about their collections.

The thesis concludes with a brief overview of the main arguments presented and answers the research question. Additionally, it will state this study's contributions, review its limitations and make suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of The Wereldmuseum Leiden and Von Siebold

The public conception of a museum is often that of a large building housing art, artefacts, or natural history objects, often accompanied by a gift shop and a café. The word "museum" has existed, however, since Ancient Greece. It is derived from *mouseion*, the name of the Temple of the Muses (Holman, 2022, p. 24), later also used to describe the Musaeum in Alexandria (Abt, 2006, p. 161; Holman, 2022, p. 24).

This chapter discusses the origins of the Wereldmuseum in Leiden. Additionally, life and collections of Philipp Franz Von Siebold (1796-1866) will be discussed, as his Tibetan collection will be central in the next chapter.

2.1 History of the Dutch Museum

In the 19th century, European museums served as institutions for nation-building and as sites for promoting national identity through historical narratives. The Netherlands is a slight exception, as it never had a museum of national history or a museum that displays the chronology of Dutch history (Bergvelt, 2024, pp. 65-66). Instead, Dutch rulers in the 19th century CE favoured art over history within museum spaces.

That does not mean there was never the idea to establish a national museum. In 1798, Finance Minister Gogel proposed that measures be made to 'raise the moral standard of the Dutch public' through a Dutch national museum (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 69; Bodenstein, 2011, p. 599). Although this plan was never realised, Gogel opened the first museum two years later in 1800, which was the National Art Gallery. Its collections featured Dutch 17th-century art (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 71; Bodenstein, 2011, p. 599) and 'national relics' (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 72).

Part of the collection was transferred in 1808 during the rule of Louis Napoleon to Amsterdam for the Royal Museum. Louis Napoleon additionally expanded the collection by purchasing mainly paintings from the Dutch Golden Age. However, after his

departure in 1810, the collection was neglected (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 71; Bodenstein, 2011, p. 600) until William I renamed the Royal Museum the *Rijks Museum* in 1815. He expanded the royal collections by establishing a second museum, *Mauritshuis*, for painting that had belonged to his father (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 75; Bodenstein, 2011, p. 600) and, of interest for this study, the *Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden* in 1816 (Bodenstein, 2011, p. 600). This institution focused on rare and exotic objects from across the empire. It served as a precursor to the later ethnographic museum in the Netherlands, which would later house the Tibetan collections.

Later in the century, following the economic boom of the 1870s, another important museum was established, the *Netherlands Museum of History and Art* in The Hague. Additionally, the *Rijks museum* would be relocated to a new *Rijksmuseum* (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 75). Opened in 1885, this new museum would house multiple private collections as well as the *Rijksmuseum van Schilderijen*, the National Print Room and the *Netherlands Museum of History and Art* (Bergvelt, 2024, p. 75).

2.1.1 Wereldmuseum Leiden

The museum central in this thesis, the *Wereldmuseum Leiden*, was officially founded in 1837 and was originally named the *Rijks Japansch Museum Von Siebold* (*Geschiedenis Wereldmuseum Leiden*, n.d.), after the founding collection collected by Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866). As a result, much of the early focus was on artefacts from Japan and on objects collected from the Dutch colonies, especially Indonesia and Suriname (Berger, 2023, p. 3; Bodenstein, 2011, p. 607). This direction aligned with King Willem I's ambition for the Royal Cabinets: to highlight Dutch maritime and colonial expansion (Bodenstein, 2011, p. 607). The museum's 1864 renaming to the *Rijks Ethnographisch Museum* (*Geschiedenis Wereldmuseum Leiden*, n.d.) reshaped the museum as ethnographic, thereby moving on from a predominantly Dutch-colonial perspective.

The 1883 merger between the *Rijks Ethnographisch Museum* in Leiden and the Royal Cabinets consolidated and expanded the range of regions represented in the museum (Berger, 2023, p. 3; *Geschiedenis Wereldmuseum Leiden*, n.d.). The *Wereldmuseum Leiden*, as it is now called (formerly *Museum Volkenkunde*), is one of the longest-standing

ethnographic museums in the world (Berger, 2023, p. 3) and houses collections from around the world. The museum's history, formed from a private collection and linked to colonial expansion, provides the context within which its early collections must be understood.

2.2 Von Siebold and his collections

Philipp Franz Balthasar Von Siebold, depicted in Figure 2.1, was born on the 17th of February 1796 in Würzburg. He was the son of Dr Johnan Georg Christoph Siebold and Maria Appolonia Josepha Lotz. Following his family tradition, he studied medicine at the University of Würzburg, earning his doctorate in 1820. Alongside his medical studies, he had a strong interest in natural history, which led him to join the *Senckenbergischen Naturforschenden Gesellschaft* in 1822 and participate in an expedition to Brazil (Effert, 2008, p. 118). This combination of medical practice and naturalist curiosity would define his later career as a collector.



Fig. 1.1: Philipp Franz Von Siebold. (n.d.).

<https://bsm.snsb.de/about-us/collectors/philipp-franz-von-siebold/>

In July 1822, Von Siebold travelled to the Netherlands to join the Dutch military as a surgeon-major in the Dutch East Indies. After arriving in Batavia in 1823 (Effert, 2008, pp. 118-119), he was soon deployed to Japan, tasked with collecting scientific data and

gathering natural history specimens (Effert, 2008, p. 121). On August 8 1823, Von Siebold arrived at the Dutch trading port on the island of Deshima in Nagasaki (Effert, 2008, p. 122).

2.2.1 His collections

Von Siebold would spend 6 years in Japan. During his time, Von Siebold would, however, visit the mainland on several occasions through his profession as a physician. He would collect household goods, woodblock print, tools and handcrafted artefacts as commissions for his services. He would also collect plants, seeds, and animals (*Japan Museum SieboldHuis*, 2025).

In 1829, Von Siebold was expelled from Japan because of his collection of maps of the country. Which Japanese officials took as an act of treason. Thus, Von Siebold returned to the Netherlands with his collections. In 1859, he visited Japan once more, for the last time (*Japan Museum SieboldHuis*, 2025), where he stayed for three years, amassing another large collection of artefacts (Kuper, 2024, p. 44).

2.2.2 Von Siebold and Wereldmuseum

Upon returning to the Netherlands in 1830, Von Siebold chose to settle in Leiden, in a house located at Rapenburg 19 (Effert, 2008, p. 128; Siebold, 2025). On the 25th of April 1831, the Dutch state approved a part of Von Siebold's Japan collection (Effert, 2008, p. 128). However, it was only in 1837, with the establishment of the Wereldmuseum in Leiden, that the state began to display its collection (Effert, 2008, p. 132). Von Siebold also opened a museum in his own house, which was open to the public from 1831 (Kuper, 2024, p. 41; *Japan Museum SieboldHuis*, 2025).

Chapter 3: Von Siebold's Tibetan collection

As noted earlier, the Von Siebold collection was acquired by the Wereldmuseum in Leiden in 1837 and comprises more than 5,000 objects, including a small collection of Tibetan artefacts. This collection was the first collection of Tibetan artefacts acquired by a museum in the Netherlands. As part of the sale, Von Siebold was requested to make a catalogue of his collections. In this catalogue, however, he noted only general object groups; thus, more information about the acquisition and provenance of the collections is unavailable.

This chapter argues that Von Siebold's 'Tibetan' collection is less a coherent representation of Tibet and more an unintentional assemblage of objects, likely acquired in Japan. It comprises ritual primarily artefacts, several of which have been mislabeled by the museum.

This chapter will examine in detail the Tibetan sub-collection within the Von Siebold collection. It also speculates on the collection's origins and analyses general trends associated with it. To do this, the objects within the collection will be divided into several categories. There are various ways to classify objects, such as by material or use. In this thesis, the objects will be organised into one of the following eight categories:

1. *Thangkas and other paintings*
2. *Vajra and Ghanta*
3. *Ritual Vessels*
4. *Portable prayer objects*
5. *Special ritual objects*
6. *Ritual musical instruments*
7. *Ritual textiles*
8. *Writing and printing blocks*

The eight categories were chosen based on either the type of object (e.g., musical instruments, textiles) or its primary function (e.g., ritual vessels, portable prayer objects). These categories were loosely based on the categories used by Henss (2020).

As many objects could belong to multiple categories, the primary classification was chosen to be the typology of the objects, with their function as a secondary classification criterion. Additionally, the image descriptions are based on classifications made by the Wereldmuseum and may therefore differ from the categories used in the thesis.

3.1 Overview of the Collection

The Von Siebold collection comprises 72 objects. The largest group of objects (30,6%) are categorised as *Thangkas* and other paintings. The majority of these pieces are *thangkas*, totalling 22 items, along with several objects classified as paintings and drawings, and one stone engraving. The second-largest category comprises 13 items: musical instruments. The remaining 51,3% of the collection comprises the six categories; the detailed percentages are shown in Figure 3.1.

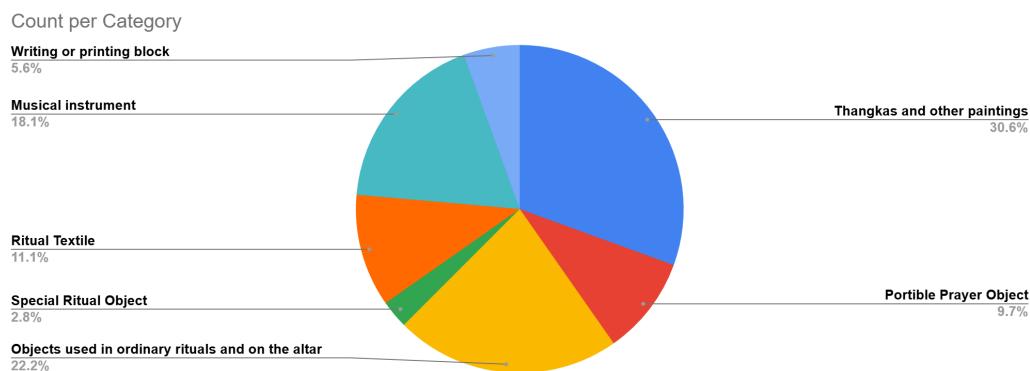


Fig. 3.1: Count per Category – Distribution of object types in the Von Siebold Tibetan collection.

All objects within the collection are credited to the Ph.F.B. Von Siebold Collection and have a purchase date of 1837-01-01. The Von Siebold collections were the first objects acquired by the Wereldmuseum Leiden; therefore, all inventory numbers begin with 'RV-1'. The artefacts classified as Tibetan are sequentially numbered from RV-1-1493, except for the last five, which are numbered RV-1-3633, RV-1-3634, RV-1-4581, RV-1-4582, and RV-1-4681, respectively. These were initially classified under different regions of origin.

Additionally, three numbers are missing from the sequence: RV-1-1491, RV-1-1495, and RV-1-1505. Unfortunately, these objects appear to be lost, as indicated by the Wereldmuseum Leiden database.

3.2.1 *Thangkas* and other paintings

In Tibetan Buddhism, art, painting, and sculpture are considered offerings. Images can be directed to a specific deity depicted in them, and the merit accumulated can likewise be offered to a particular person or to all living beings. The creation of the art is not the only way to accumulate merit, but the commission itself is also meritorious (Fisher, 1997, p. 96). The art piece can serve several purposes: an educational tool for understanding Buddhist liturgy and as a visual centrepiece for ceremonies and meditation (Fisher, 1997, p. 97).

Generally, Tibetan art has several distinct characteristics: the first being that the works of art are almost never signed. It is believed that, in accordance with the Buddhist concept of the absence of self, the artist was a medium, and the artist's personality was not regarded as important. However, the donor's name was often included (Fisher, 1997, p. 98; Pott, 1951, p. 36). The other characteristic is that works of art are difficult to date, and there are no distinct schools within Tibetan art (Pott, 1951, pp. 36-37). However, there is a distinct Tibetan style.

As noted earlier, the largest group of objects in this category is *thangkas*. Although the *thangka* is classified as an art form, it is also considered a ritual object. *Thangkas* are portable paintings that act as a bridge between the divine and mortal worlds. The painting is considered in a ritual, after which the deity depicted inhabits the *thangka*. The images are created according to a formula that represents both the spiritual essence and the timelessness of the deity depicted (Fisher, 1997, p. 107). As noted earlier, this makes it difficult to date the works.

Thangkas were vertical paintings, usually surrounded by textile mounting and a curtain; however, the exceptions are RV-1-1469 and RV-1-1487, which do not possess such mounting and, in several cases, have been framed. The Von Siebold collection comprises 14 *thangkas*. They depict a variety of Buddhas and other deities. Notably,

RV-1-1478 is labelled as a *thangka*; however, the image associated with this object is actually a landscape sketch (fig. 3.2).



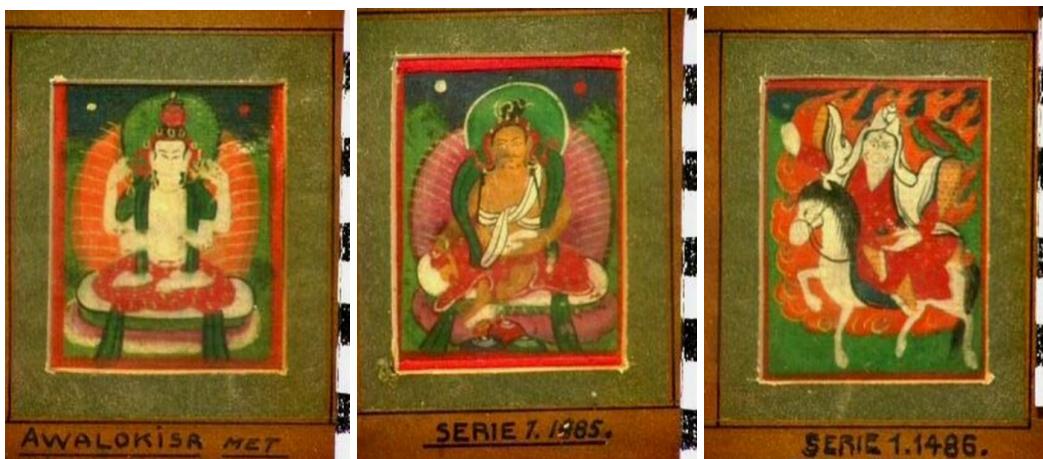
Figure 3.2: [Thangka painting of the Five Kings and Hayagriva] (RV-1-1478), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586733>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

There are five other objects, RV-1-1482, RV-1-1483, RV-1-1484, RV-1-1485 and RV-1-1486, not classified as *thangkas*, but as paintings; The Wereldmuseum Leiden describes them as being of lower quality, 'Very crudely painted on coarse linen. Neither attractive nor important.' These are possible tsakali, which are cards used by Buddhist practitioners to invoke a deity. Tsakli was often used as a set to represent the pantheon of Buddhist deities (Behrendt, 2015). Based on the painting's style, they appear to have been part of two different sets of cards, as shown below.



Left Fig. 3.3: [Painting of Padmasambhava] (RV-1-1482), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586737>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.4: [Painting of Amitayus, the Buddha of long life] (RV-1-1483), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586738>. CC BY-SA 4.0.



Left Fig. 3.5: [Amulet drawing of a four-armed Avalokitesvara] (RV-1-1484), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586739>. CC0 1.0.

Centre Fig. 3.6: [Amulet drawing of Kuvera] (RV-1-1485), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586740>. CC0 1.0.

Right Fig. 3.7: [Amulet drawing of a demonic goddess] (RV-1-1486), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586741>. CC0 1.0.

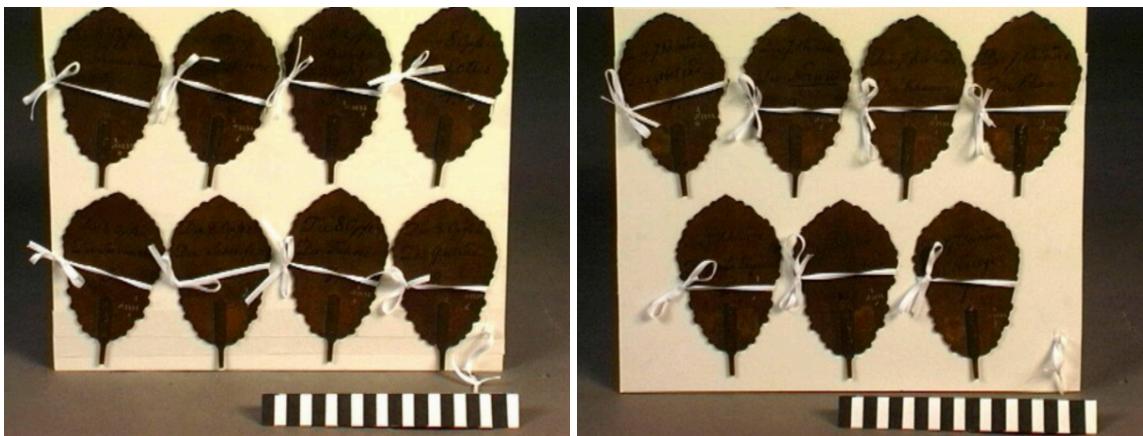
The last two paintings, RV-1-1481 and RV-1-1492, are on paper. The first is a watercolour drawing depicting Bhaisajyagura seated on a lotus that rises from the waters of a lake. The second is a divine ancestor or household god (Khan) sitting on a throne.



Left Fig. 3.8: [Drawing of Bhaisajyagura, the medicine Buddha] (RV-1-1481), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586736>. CC0 1.0.

Right 3.9: [Watercolour drawing of a divine ancestor or house god (Khan)] (RV-1-1492), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586747>. CC0 1.0.

The last three objects are not specifically paintings but feature iconographic images of imperial symbols and the Buddha. The first two objects, RV-1-1493 and RV-1-1494, represent the Eight Auspicious Emblems (fig. 3.10) and the Seven Jewels of Royal Power (fig. 3.11). Unfortunately, all 15 symbols are featured on the other side of the objects and are not visible in the photographs. The symbols are considered more than decoration, but are a ritualistic set of altar furnishings. The Eight Auspicious Emblems are the parasol, the gold fish, the treasure vase, the lotus, the conch, the endless knot, the victory banner and the Dharma wheel (Henss, 2020, pp. 51-55). And the Seven Jewels of Royal Power are the precious wheel, jewel, queen, minister, elephant, horse and general. Together they symbolise how the universal ruler can achieve spiritual enlightenment and worldly power (Henss, 2020, p. 59).



Left Fig. 3.10: [Repoussé relief] (RV-1-1493), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586748>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.11: [Repoussé relief] (RV-1-1494), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586749>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The final object in this category, RV-1-1534, is a rock with a carving of the Medicine Buddha (fig. 3.12). Perhaps this was part of the collection because of Von Siebold's profession as a doctor, or perhaps it was a coincidence.



Fig. 3.12: [Basalt engraving of Buddha in varadamudra] (RV-1-1534), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586789>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The inclusion of *thangkas*, several of which the museum describes as 'crudely painted' and 'unimportant,' suggests they have low aesthetic value within the collection. Furthermore, the lack of labels on several of the objects reveals this. This suggests that the museum prioritises type over quality or specific iconography, rather than the use of the objects.

3.2.2 Vajra and Ghanta

The two objects in this category are the *vajra*, or thunderbolt, and the *ghanta*, or prayer-bell. Both of these items, like many other ritual objects, trace their roots back to Indian religions. For instance, the *vajra* originated as a weapon wielded by Indra (Fisher, 1997, pp. 91-92; Pott, 1951, p. 110; Henss, 2020, p. 35). In Tibetan traditions, the *vajra* and *ghanta* are commonly depicted in the hands of deities, with the *vajra* typically held in the right hand and the *ghanta* in the left (Henss, 2020, p. 29).

These two items complement each other, symbolising the method and the doctrine, respectively. They also embody opposites: the *vajra* stands for the male and power, while the *ghanta* represents the female and knowledge (Henss, 2020, p. 29). Together, they symbolise enlightenment (Fisher, 1997, p. 92). The Von Siebold collection features several examples of both the *vajra* and a single *ghanta*, as shown in Figure 3.10.

The *ghanta* is decorated with floral and lotus motifs. Inside, there is an inscription; however, it is not visible in the museum's image. On the handle of the bell, half of a five-pronged *vajra* is depicted. The other decorations on the handle are not clearly

visible due to the image quality; however, they resemble a *ghanta* in the British Museum's collection (Fig. 3.14). Its handle is decorated with female human faces, and the bell itself represents a female, a feature typical of Tibetan *ghantas*. Furthermore, the example in the British Museum dates to the 19th century. Interestingly, in the description of the Wereldmuseum Leiden (fig. 3.13), they speculate that the bell is not 'probably not original'. However, no further explanation is given.



Left Fig. 3.13: [Ritual bell (ghanta)] (RV-1-1519), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586774>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.14: Bell, *ghanta*. Made of carved bronze. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

The *vajra* consists of three elements: two prongs at either end and a central shaft, with a central sphere. They are classified according to the number of prongs. Within the Von Siebold collection, there are three *vajras* labelled as Tibetan. The first is object number RV-1-1520, seen in Figure 3.15. This example comprises five prongs, representing the five wisdoms and perfections of the Buddha (Henss, 2020, p. 29). The five-pronged *vajra* is used to increase wealth and merit and in pacification rituals (Henss, 2020, p. 31). It (fig. 3.15) is decorated with a row of lotus leaves at each side of the central sphere. The base of the prongs is decorated with makara heads, from which the prong appears.



Fig. 3.15: [Ritual sceptre (vajra)] (RV-1-1520), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586775>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The other two *vajras*, depicted in Figures 3.16 and 3.17, are decorated with two rows of lotus leaves on either side of the central sphere and have no distinct decorations on the prongs. Additionally, object number RV-1-3633 (fig. 3.16) has only three prongs, which is uncommon in Tibetan *vajras*. However, it is more common for Japanese *vajras*.



Right Fig. 3.16: [Ritual sceptre (vajra)] (RV-1-3633), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/589213>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Left Fig. 3.17: [Ritual sceptre (vajra)] (RV-1-3634), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/589214>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Notably, the two objects have object numbers that are out of sequence with the other objects in the Tibetan portion of the Von Siebold collection. They were originally classified as originating in Japan and were later reclassified as originating in Tibet.

Japanese Buddhism generally follows Mahayana traditions; however, a small number of schools follow Vajrayana traditions. One of these schools is the Shingon school.

Importantly, this school also uses *vajras* in their rituals (fig. 3.18). These Japanese *vajras* are more simply decorated compared to Tibetan *vajras*, with two bands of lotus leaves at either side of the central sphere. Two examples of Japanese *vajras* are shown in Figures 3.19 and 3.20 below; they feature the same lotus decorations and protrusions on the prongs as the two *vajras* in the Von Siebold collection. The initial classification of objects RV-1-3633 and RV-1-3634 as Japanese is thus likely correct.



Left Fig. 3.18: *Eight Patriarchs of the Shingon Sect of Buddhism (Kukai Cropped)*, by Unknown Japanese painter, 1392-1573. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Top right Fig. 3.19: *Netsuke of Vajra (Sanko)*, 18th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Gift of Mrs Russell Sage, 1910, 10.211.2310). Public Domain.

Bottom right Fig. 3.20: *Vajra made of brass (standing on tray 6.29.a with bell 6.29.b and 2 vajra 6.29.d, e)*. (1394872001). The British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

3.2.3 Ritual Vessels

The second group of objects in the Von Siebold collection consists of ritual vessels. This collection features several types of vessels, but it is challenging to determine the specific use of each vase beyond its role as an offering vessel. Typically, these vases are filled with consecrated water and other substances, making them important ceremonial tools in Tibetan rituals. They are commonly known as *kalasha* or *kamanḍalu* (Henss, 2020, p. 119).

The first vessel in the collection is RV-1-1498 (fig. 3.21), which is decorated on the base, top and lid with a lotus motif. The spout is decorated with either a makara or a dragon's head. Interestingly, the vessel features a handle shaped like a fish, suggesting that it was likely a teapot rather than a ritual vessel. According to the Wereldmuseum, the vessel was used for pouring holy water.



Fig. 3.21: [Holy water vessel (*bumpa*)] (RV-1-1498), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586753>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The collection also features two other vessels with similar decoration, lotus motifs and makara spout, which can be seen in figures 3.22 and 3.23. These two vessels are likely spouted 'Action Vases' filled with saffron water, used for blessings and purification (Henss, 2020, p. 120). Additionally, there are a pair; however, RV-1-1500 (fig. 3.23) is either missing the vessel's top or may have had a peacock feather in it.



Left Fig. 3.22: [Holy water vessel (*bumpa*) with makara spout] (RV-1-1499), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586754>. CC BY-SA 4.0.
Right Fig. 3.23: [Holy water vessel (*bumpa*)] (RV-1-1500), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586755>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The British Museum has a similar offering vessel (fig. 3.24) that features a lotus motif and a makara spout. This vessel is dated to the 19th century and was acquired from Tibet.



Fig. 3.24: Kamandalu, jar. Made of turquoise inset bronze; also cloth (1109255001). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

The last two vases in the collection (fig. 3.25 and 3.26), also labelled as 'offering vases' and described as sacrificial bottles. The Wereldmuseum Leiden described them as zogaza, a Mongolian term; however, no other source corroborates this designation. Furthermore, no vases of a similar appearance could be found in either Tibetan or Japanese catalogues.

These vases feature half-spherical bases and necks that flare outward at the top, as illustrated below. Each vessel has paper labels, but the inscriptions are not legible in the photographs.



Left Fig. 3.25: [Offering vase (zogaza)] (RV-1-1507), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586762>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.26: [Offering vase (zogaza)] (RV-1-1508), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586763>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The last group of objects is offering bowls. There were six offering bowls in the Von Siebold collection; however, RV-1-1505 was missing by 1994. The remaining five bowls are depicted below. They are made of yellow copper, approximately 7 centimetres in diameter, and undecorated. The museum's records describe them as being sacrificial bowls, similar to the offering vases, also called *zogaza*.



Top left Fig. 3.27: [Offering bowl (zogaza)] (RV-1-1501), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586756>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Top right Fig 3.28: [Offering bowl (zogaza)] (RV-1-1502), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586757>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Bottom left Fig 3.29: [Offering bowl (zogaza)] (RV-1-1503), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586758>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Bottom middle Fig. 3.30: [Offering bowl (zogaza)] (RV-1-1504), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586759>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Bottom right Fig. 3.31: [Offering bowl (zogaza)] (RV-1-1506), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586761>. CC BY-SA 4.0.1

As with previous objects, the British Museum houses similar bowls, one of which is shown in Figure 3.32 and is part of a Gomadan altar. The Gomadan altar is used in the fire ritual, goma, performed by the Shingon sect in Japan. The whole altar, as can be seen in Figure 3.33, consists of a central iron cauldron, several bowls and vases. Additionally, in the centre is a tray with three vajras, a bell, an incense holder, and fire tongs.



Fig. 3.32: Cup (yaku-shu) (1394925001). The British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.



Fig. 3.33: Altar arrangement for the Goma fire ritual of the Shingon sect (479409001). The British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

Several other items that are part of the Gomadan altar are also present in the Von Siebold collection; several can be seen below (fig. 3.34, 3.35, 3.36 and 3.37) but are classified as originating from Japan. None of these is listed as being part of a Gomadan altar.



Top left Fig. 3.34: [Incense burner] (RV-1-3650), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/589238>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Top right Fig. 3.35: [Lidded bowl on foot] (RV-1-3654), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/589248>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Bottom left Fig. 3.36: [Table] (RV-1-3524), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/589090>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Bottom right Fig. 3.37: [Oil lamp bowl on stand (rokki)] (RV-1-3526), collected by P.F.B. von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/589092>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.2.4 Portable Prayer Objects

This category includes four types of objects from the Von Siebold collection: tsatsas, a prayer wheel, a portable mandala, and prayer cords.

The first group of objects are votive tablets, also known as tsatsa. These votive tablets are moulded out of clay and were used by pilgrims and lay worshippers. Tsatsa, in Tibetan, means 'earth-imprint' (Henss, 2020, p. 381), possibly referring to the

production of the tablets. The tablets were made using moulds, often in large quantities, at pilgrimage sites or important monasteries. The mould used for the tablets could be used for decades, even centuries, making the tsatsa 'timeless' (Henss, 2020, p. 382).

The tablets are used to accrue merit. The tablets come in a wide range of shapes, as exemplified by object number RV-1-1489 (fig. 3.37). Additionally, the images may depict any deity from the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon (Henss, 2020, p. 381).

The Von Siebold collection includes six tsatsa, depicted below (fig. 3.37 and 3.38). However, Tibet was not the sole producer of these votive tablets, making it difficult to determine whether these six tablets are of Tibetan origin. What stands out about them is that several are painted.



Left Fig. 3.37: [Five Buddhist votive tablets] (RV-1-1489), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586744>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.38: [Painted plaster votive tablet of a wrathful deity] (RV-1-1490), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586745>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The tsatsa depicted in Figure 3.37, from top left to bottom right, includes images of:

1. Buddha seated on a lotus, flanked by two Bodhisattvas.
2. Buddha with his two principal disciples, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana.
3. A seated Lama, possibly Padmasambhava.
4. A seated Buddha.

5. Either Vajrabhairava or Yamantaka, a Dharmapala (Protector of the Teachings), representing a fearsome manifestation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Lord of Wisdom.

Object RV-1-1490, illustrated in Figure 3.38, depicts Simhavaktra, painted with red and gold.



Fig. 3.39: [Tibetan prayer wheel] (RV-1-1496), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586751>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The second object type in this category is object number RV-1-1496 (fig. 3.39), which represents a prayer wheel made of red copper with yellow copper decorations. On top is a wheel of law, and the sides are adorned with the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum". Above is a band motif of vajras, and below are lotus leaves.

When spinning a prayer wheel, it is equivalent to reciting and generating mantras; thus, turning the wheel is for merit-making. The wheel should be turned clockwise (Henss, 2020, pp. 149-150).



Left Fig. 3.40: [Libation bowl with eight auspicious symbols] (RV-1-1510), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586765>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.41: Antique Mongolian Buddhist hand-embossed copper mandala. WorthPoint. Copyright by WorthPoint. Reprinted for academic purposes under fair use.

<https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/antique-mongolian-buddhist-hand-2108707835>

Depicted above, according to the Wereldmuseum, is (Von Siebold, 1837, object description):

Bronze shallow bowl intended for libation of drink to Burchanen (?). With depiction of the eight auspicious symbols (asta mangala). Fish (matsya), parasol (chatra), conch shell (cangkha), auspicious diagram (criwatsa), banner (dhwaja), vase (kalaca, bumpa), lotus (padma), wheel (sakra).

The term 'Burchanen' yields no relevant results in standard literature on Tibetan ritual. However, several objects with a similar design were identified: a central pyramid encircled by the eight auspicious symbols. These artefacts have been recognised as mandalas originating from Mongolia. At the same time, the item from the Von Siebold collection appears to be a more refined example than Figure 3.41.

That last group of objects within the portable prayer objects category are *malas*. Prayer cords, or *malas*, are used to count mantras and are used by all Buddhist practitioners. The *mala* is held in the left hand and should have more than 100 beads, often 108, as it is a sacred number. Furthermore, it is associated with the 108 forms of Avalokiteśvara (Henss, 2020, p. 152). The *mala* in Figure 3.43 consists of 111 beads, and the *mala* in Figure 3.44 of 102 beads.

The Von Siebold collection holds three examples of *mala*; the museum identifies them as part of a mandarin costume. *Mala* can be made of any material; however, some *mala* have four equally defined colour beads, as can be seen in object RV-1-1535 (fig. 3.42). Objects RV-1-1535 and RV-1-1537 (figs. 3.42 & 3.44) also have additional counting strings.



Left Fig. 3.42: [Official's necklace (mandarin costume part)] (RV-1-1535), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586790>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Centre Fig. 3.43: [Prayer beads (pren-ba)] (RV-1-1536), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586791>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.44: [Official's necklace (mandarin costume part)] (RV-1-1537), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586792>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.2.5 Special Ritual Objects

The objects in this section are categorised as "special ritual objects" to distinguish them from items used for general worship. The mirror (RV-1-1497) and skull cup (RV-1-1509) belong to this classification because they are esoteric implements used in advanced Tantric Buddhist practices. Their function extends beyond standard devotion.

The mirror, or magic mirror, seen in Figure 3.45, in Tibetan Buddhism, can be classified into three types. The one in the Von Siebold Collection, based on the Tibetan characters on one side *Hum*, *Om*, *Hri*, *A*; *Tram*, is an oracle mirror. Mirrors reflect the invisible and ultimate truth; however, unfortunately, little is known about the use of these mirrors (Henss, 2020, p. 230).

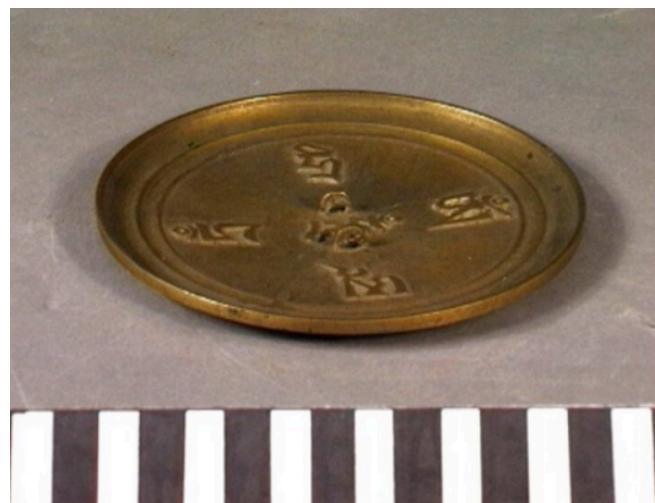


Fig. 3.45: [Ritual mirror with mantras] (RV-1-1497), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586752>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Although difficult to see in the picture below, the description identifies it as a miniature skull bowl. The skull-cup or *kapala* is one of the most important objects in esoteric rituals. They are used in several types of rituals, for example, a libation offering vessel or as an alms or drinking bowl. The bowl is often made from a human cranium that belonged to a lama or saint (Henss, 2020, pp. 248-250). The *kapala*, as seen below (fig 3.46), features a bowl made of dark bronze rather than a skull. The cup is seated upon a triangle base representing fire, with three heads in each corner symbolising desire, hatred and ignorance (Henss, 2020, p. 248).



Fig. 3.46: [Miniature skull cup with lid and stand] (RV-1-1509), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586764>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.2.6 Musical instruments

In Tibet, rather than musical instruments, the objects in this category are considered 'acoustic ritual objects' used in religious ceremonies (Henss, 2020, p. 300). The Von Siebold collection includes various types of instruments, primarily drums, trumpets, and cymbals.



Left Fig. 3.47: [Hand drum (damaru)] (RV-1-1521), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586776>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.48: [Hand drum (damaru)] (RV-1-1522), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586777>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The first two objects within this category are double-sided hand drums or *damaru*. The *damaru*, alongside the *vajra* and the hand bell, form the three principal ritual objects. These drums are used to mark sections in liturgy during rituals (Henss, 2020, p. 300).

The examples from the Von Siebold collection are made of 2 wooden half-spheres, which together form an hourglass shape. However, other drums can be made from two human skull-caps, creating the same hourglass shape (Henss, 2020, p. 300). The drum has two clappers attached by a string to create the sound. Additionally, RV-1-1522 (fig. 3.48) has a velvet band with rosettes of four red beads, a piece of mother-of-pearl attached in the centre, and three silk ribbons with tassels (museum).



Fig. 3.49: [Hand drum (kengerga)] (RV-1-1529), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586784>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Another type of drum in temple drums can be sorted into three categories. RV-1-1529 (fig. 3.49) is a hanging drum; the other two types are hand-held and standing drums. Generally, drums are used as a tool to indicate time and to introduce prayers. The hanging drum or sky drum is generally used in a protector chapel and is also referred to as an offering drum (Henss, 2020, p. 303).

Although RV-1-1529 (fig. 3.49) is decorated with a dragon at the centre of the drum, it resembles a drum that could be found in China and Japan as well as in Tibet. The exact origin of the object is thus unclear based on appearance alone. However, because of the fact that several items in the Tibetan portion of the Von Siebold collection appear to be Japanese and other items, which will be discussed later, are of Chinese origins, it might be unlikely that this drum is Tibetan. This is further supported by the classification of 'kengerga' in the decision of the Wereldmuseum. However, a translation of the term could not be found.

Within the Von Siebold collection, there are several trumpets and shawms. The first four are *gyaling* or Tibetan shawms. These are used in many types of ceremonies, primarily to invite deities or welcome guests. Furthermore, they are always used in pairs (Henss, 2020, p. 297). Within the collection, there are two pairs, one longer bronze pair and a short pair with decorative red-coloured wood. Both pairs can be seen below.



Top Left Fig. 3.50: [Long trumpet (bura)] (RV-1-1523), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586778>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

To Right Fig. 51 [Long trumpet (bura)] (RV-1-1524), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586779>. CC BY-SA 4.0.



Left Fig. 3.52: [Tibetan shepherd's flute] (RV-1-1525), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586780>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.53: [Shawm (bischkurr)] (RV-1-1526), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586781>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The other two, RV-1-1527 and RV-1-1528, are bronze trumpets modelled after a 'bone trumpet'. Compared to the bone trumpets, the metal version would have been used for more general monastic rituals (Henss, 2020, p. 295). The trumpets are decorated with a dragon or sea monster's head and flower and leaf decorations above the shaft. The trumpets are always used in pairs; thus, RV-1-1527 and RV-1-1528 (figs. 3.54 and 3.55) are likely a pair, as they have similar decorations.

In the museum's description, the two instruments are referred to as '*gandung*'; however, this is likely a mistranslation, as there is no instrument called '*gandung*'.



Left Fig. 3.54: [Ritual trumpet (*gandung*)] (RV-1-1527), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586782>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.55: [Ritual trumpet (*gandung*)] (RV-1-1528), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586783>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The last type of instrument within the collection is cymbals. There are three types of cymbals used in Tibetan rituals, all played in pairs (Henss, 2020, p. 295). The Von Siebold collection, curiously, has two cymbals from two different pairs. The first, see in Figure 3.56, has a small central dome with straight edges; the second cymbal has a bigger central dome with rounded sides. From the centre of the dome, a string or strap would have been attached to hold the instrument, which is missing in RV-1-1531. There are no inscriptions or decorations on either object.



Left Fig. 3.56: [Cymbal] (RV-1-1530), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

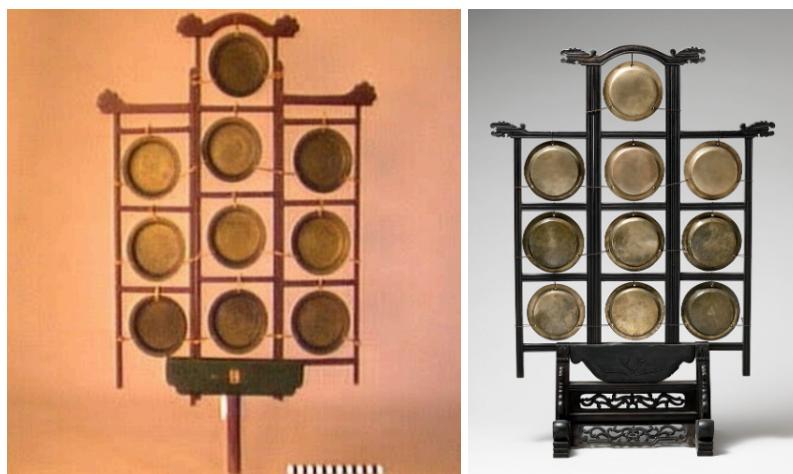
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586785>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.57: [Cymbal] (RV-1-1531), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586786>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Although the Von Siebold collection includes two additional musical instruments, neither is of Tibetan origin. The first instrument is RV-1-1533, illustrated in Fig. 3.58,

which is classified as a gong set comprising ten cymbals. This instrument may be a Korean Ulla or a Chinese Yunluo, commonly known as a cloud gong. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a similar object (see Fig. 3.59), which they classify as a Yunluo. It is described as 'consisting of ten drums of varying thickness, used in court and Confucian ceremonies.' Over time, this instrument also became popular at weddings and funerals (Yunluo (雲鑼) "Cloud Gong" - Chinese - Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) - the Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.).



Left Fig. 3.58: [Set of ten ritual gongs] (RV-1-1533), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586788>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.59: Yunluo (雲鑼) "Cloud Gong", 19th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889, 89.4.15a). Public Domain.

The second is a handheld bell, which is described as a 'small yellow brass cymbal on a wooden handle' and which the Wereldmuseum Leiden classifies as 'ding-sha'. A *ding-sha* is a different instrument, consisting of two little cymbals that are attached by a rope, which Figure 3.60 is not. The British Museum houses a similar bell, classified as a Japanese gong, as shown in Figure 3.61.



Left Fig. 3.60: [Small cymbal (*ding-sha*)] (RV-1-1532), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.

Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586787>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.61: Buddhist gong (1614211770). The British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

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3.2.7 Ritual Textiles

The second-to-last objects within this category are cloth artefacts, namely the temple banner and altar cloth. Of each, there are four examples within the Von Siebold Collection.



Left Fig. 3.62: [Temple banner] (RV-1-1511), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586766>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.63: [Temple banner] (RV-1-1512), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586767>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

There are two types of temple banners. The first pair of banners, depicted in Figures 3.62 and 3.63, are cylindrical victory banners. They appear to be a set comprising four rows of silk brocade. This type of banner is named after the Buddha's victory over Mara, or temptation. However, the banners are now also a symbol of good luck (Henss, 2020, p. 316). Both banners are approximately 82 centimetres long and between 20 and 25 centimetres wide.



Left Fig. 3.64: [Temple banner] (RV-1-1513), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586768>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.65: [Temple banner] (RV-1-1514), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586769>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The other two banners, shown in Figures 3.64 and 3.65, are flat temple banners with the typical three steamers. These types of banners may have been inspired by other hanging textiles along the Silk Road (Henss, 2020, p. 317). Although both banners appear

to be decorated with patterns, the cloth has deteriorated over time, and the image quality makes it difficult to discern the patterns.

Altar cloths were used to decorate altars and thrones of religious dignitaries (Henss, 2020, p. 320). The three altar cloths, as labelled by the Wereldmuseum, in the Von Siebold Collection, are similarly deteriorated. RV-1-1515, RV-1-1516, and RV-1-1517 (figs. 3.66, 3.67, and 3.68) are, however, thangka covers and are decorated with a similar floral pattern.



Left Fig. 3.66: [Altar cloth (samboi-chadak)] (RV-1-1515), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586770>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Middle Fig. 3.67: [Altar cloth (prip-chadak)] (RV-1-1516), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586771>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Right Fig. 3.68: [Altar cloth (prip-chadak)] (RV-1-1517), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586772>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Met museum houses a cloth with a similar pattern, which they identified as a Thangka Curtain. Unfortunately, the image is in black and white, so the colours of the decorations are not discernible. Interestingly, the cloth is dated to the 17th century, as organic materials like silk are highly susceptible to degradation.

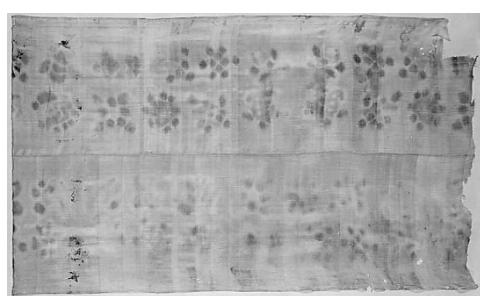


Fig. 3.69: Thangka curtain, 17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Gift of Miss Jean Mailey, 1972, 1972.104). Public Domain.

The final object in this category is RV-1-1518 (fig. 3.70), which may be a ceremonial scarf rather than an altar cloth, which it is currently labelled as by the Wereldmuseum Leiden.



Fig 3.70: [Altar cloth (*sangja-chadak*)] (RV-1-1518), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586773>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.2.8 Writing and printing blocks

The last four objects in the Von Siebold collection are classified as writing and printing blocks. The first object is a printing block of the first page of the Mahavyutpatti. Interestingly, the text is a trilingual work, combining Sanskrit, Tibetan and Mongolian (Pott, 1951, p. 127).



Fig 3.71: [Prayer printing block] (RV-1-1538), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/586793>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The second artefact in this section is a Tibetan manuscript, called Mani Kambum. The manuscript is bound in a colourful border decorated with images of the Buddha and flower motifs. Unfortunately, the work is incomplete, as it is missing several pages.

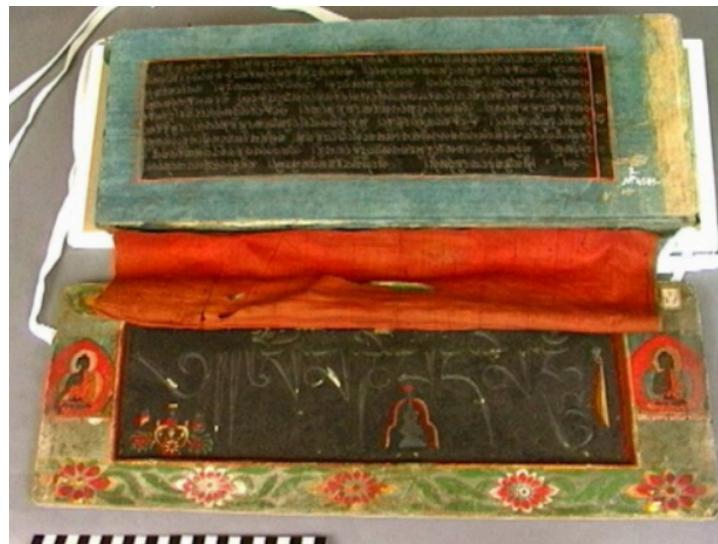


Fig 3.72: [Manuscript: Mani Gambum] (RV-1-4581), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.
Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/591059>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The third object is a list of medicines, the only medical object in this part of the Von Siebold collection. The book is a Chinese translation of the Sman Sna-ts'og-gi Dpe-tchad, accompanied by Tibetan and Mongolian introductions and conclusions. This work is a trilingual edition.

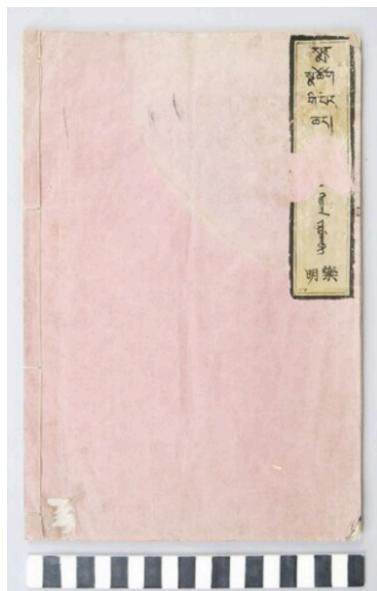


Fig 3.73: [Mongolian-Tibetan list of medicines] (RV-1-4582), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837.
Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/591060>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The final object in the Von Siebold collection is sheets of paper printed with the characters Om-ma-ni-pad-mé-hum 33333 times. These sheets would be put inside a prayer wheel to invoke the mantra.



Fig 3.74: [Scroll with *Om mani padme hum* mantra] (RV-1-4681), collected by P.F.B. Von Siebold, acquired 1837. Wereldmuseum Leiden. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/591175>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

3.2 Origins of the Collection

The definitive origins of the objects in the Von Siebold collection are difficult to trace because Von Siebold did not maintain a detailed catalogue. This could reflect the lack of interest in Von Siebold in this collection or be an extension of the early 19th-century collecting practices. Additionally, there was no annotated catalogue accompanying the collection; only an inventory of the objects (Effert, 2008, p. 133), which does not specify beyond general object types, e.g., a collection of paintings and drawings and a collection of coins.

Von Siebold collected most of the artefacts within his collections as gifts in exchange for his services as a physician, rather than through monetary transactions. Thus, the origins of these items were not documented at the time, nor did Von Siebold record their provenance (Effert, 2008, p. 135).

Curiously, there are no records indicating that Von Siebold ever visited Tibet or China; therefore, the objects in this collection were either gifts to him or acquired through other collections. However, some descriptions of objects labelled as Tibetan suggest that they may be Japanese reproductions; additionally, several objects point to Mongolian and Chinese origins. Chutiwongs (2013, p. 20) mentions that objects from

Tibetan cultures that travel with Tibetan communities to China and by maritime routes have reached Decima, near Nagasaki, Japan. This aligns with the fact that nearly all of Von Siebold's collections were acquired in Japan. Furthermore, this could explain how he obtained Tibetan objects without having travelled to Tibet himself.

At the time, Von Siebold did not explicitly classify them as Tibetan; the objects were included in his Japanese collection, purchased by the Dutch state, and were identified as Tibetan only later. As noted in the collection overview, many of the objects identified as Tibetan may in fact be Japanese. This would be consistent with the fact that Von Siebold has not been to Tibet and that the objects in the collection are likely to have been acquired in Japan.

3.3 Conclusion

In general, the 'Tibetan' collection of Von Siebold housed at the Wereldmuseum in Leiden is not purely Tibetan Buddhist. Meaning that many objects have Japanese origins, for example, two of the *vajras* or the ritual bowls. These mixed origins also reflect Von Siebold's travels, as there is no documentation that he visited Tibet or China.

The objects in the collection are exclusively Buddhist ritual objects and do not include everyday objects, unlike the broader Von Siebold collection. Based on the typology of the objects and the acquisition methods, the collections reflect the availability of artefacts over the personal interest of Von Siebold. This is supported by the fact that the collection was originally not classified as Tibetan, although several objects turned out to be Japanese or Chinese.

Having established the mixed origins, ritual focus, and foundational nature of the Von Siebold collection, the next chapter will examine how this initial assemblage influenced the subsequent formation and character of the Wereldmuseum's broader Tibetan holdings.

Chapter 4: A Comparative Analysis with the Van Manen and Series 2845 Collections

Von Siebold's collection is not the only Tibetan collection held by the Wereldmuseum in Leiden; in total, the museum has classified 2687 objects as originating from Tibet (according to the NMVW-collection website). Of these, 30 are currently on view at the museum, including one from the Von Siebold collection (RV-1-1499, Figure 3.19).

While Chapter 3 discussed the origins of Von Siebold's 'Tibetan' collection, Chapter 4 examines if and how the Von Siebold collection influenced later Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum. For this commemorative framework, the Von Siebold collection will be compared to two other early collections, the Van Manen collections and the Series 2845 collection. These three collections constitute approximately 20% of the Tibetan collection at the Wereldmuseum, with the Van Manen collection being the largest and most elaborate. These collections were selected by the Wereldmuseum for their early acquisition dates and for their varied methods of acquisition.

The comparative analysis is based on an object-based examination of Tibetan items in the three collections, using the Wereldmuseum's online catalogue (accessed in 2025). It also relies on Pott's (1951) publication as a primary source for understanding the acquisition context of the Van Manen and Series 2845 collections.

4.1 The Van Manen Collection

The Van Manen collection was the third major collection acquired by the museum, which was bought by the museum in 1948. The Van Manen collection comprises nearly 1,000 blockprints, over 600 manuscripts, and approximately 450 artworks and objects, housed at the Wereldmuseum in Leiden
(<https://himalayancollections.hcommons.org/frontpage/>).

Johan van Manen, born in 1877 in Nijmegen, was interested in theosophy from an early age and joined the Theosophical Society at age eighteen. As a member of the Society,

he travelled to India, arriving at the International Headquarters in 1909. Here, at the Adyar Library, he worked as a librarian until 1916, after which he moved to Darjeeling to focus on the Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism. In 1918, he became an ordinary Member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and began working as Librarian of the Imperial Library in Calcutta (Rath, 2012, p. 56).

In 1923, he was elected General Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, a position he held for the following sixteen years (Pott, 1951, p. 133; Rath, 2012, p. 57). He would resign in 1939 due to recurring health problems and passed away in 1943 due to a stroke (Rath, 2012, p. 58).

Van Manen's life is documented by both P.H. Pott's *Introduction to the Tibetan collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden*, and Peter Richardus's *description of The life and works of van Manen*; however, neither provides in-depth detail on the acquisition of his collections. Richardus (1989) cites several editions of the *Journal Of The Asiatic Society of Bengal*, in which Van Manen's exhibition of Tibetan artefacts was recorded. Along with the types of objects, a location is specified, which may refer to either the object's origin or the place of acquisition. How Van Manen came to possess these artefacts is unfortunately not written down.

Van Manen created his collection of Tibetan artefacts and manuscripts during his time at the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. He likely worked with local collectors or agents who would seek out the objects in his collection. His primary focus was on collecting manuscripts, as evidenced by the number of blockprints and manuscripts relative to the number of artefacts in his collection.

Similar to Von Siebold's collection, Van Manen's centers around ritual artefacts used in Buddhist contexts. It includes a substantial selection of *thangkas* and ritual objects, which, compared with the Von Siebold collection, are more extensively decorated. Unlike Von Siebold's collection, however, Van Manen's collection includes a broader range of objects, including furniture (fig. 4.1), relic boxes (*gau*), weapons and jewellery.



Fig. 4.1: [Collapsible wooden table] (RV-2739-85), acquired 1948. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/751709>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Van Manen himself, like Von Siebold, never personally visited Tibet; however, he created his collection with the intention of focusing on Tibetan material culture. Due to this more focused collection method, the collection is more extensive and displays a wider range of objects, including manuscripts, texts, and several ethnographic items from Tibet. This reflects a shift from opportunistic collecting with Von Siebold to a more deliberate and systematic interest in Van Manen.

Thus, the Van Manen collection demonstrates a change from Von Siebold's incidental gathering to a more systematic one. Despite this shift, the collection's focus remains predominantly Tibetan Buddhist-centric, with a preference for more luxurious artefacts compared to the Von Siebold collection; examples appear in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.



Fig. 4.2: [Jar for water of life] (RV-2739-11), acquired 1948. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/751630>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Fig. 4.3: [Thangka with Tibetan pantheon] (RV-2740-2), acquired 1948. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/751852>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

4.2 Series 2845

Series 2845 is a small collection purchased by the Wereldmuseum in London in 1950. The collection is not named after its collector; thus, it will be referred to by the catalogue number. In contrast to the Von Siebold and Van Manen collections, Series 2845 was not assembled but looted, marking a transition from collection to colonial appropriation. It is important to note that although Series 2845 was acquired by the museum later than the Van Manen collection, the objects themselves were seized decades earlier, during the 1903-1904 Younghusband Expedition.

The Younghusband Expedition was a British invasion of Tibet from 1903 to 1904, led by Colonel Francis Younghusband, the Indian Political Officer (McKay, 2012, p. 5). The pretext for the mission was the self-imposed isolation of Tibet and its refusal to let foreigners enter its territory. The official justification, however, was the threat of Russian involvement in Tibet (McKay, 2012, pp. 6-8). This threat, however, dissipated during the Younghusband Expedition, following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (McKay, 2012, p. 9).

The Expedition led to Chinese control over Tibet, stemming from the power vacuum it created. However, it did not diminish the image of Tibet 'as a land of mystery and magic' (McKay, 2012, p. 22). The looting during the Expedition may have even reinforced this image, as it provided the British with artefacts through which Tibetan culture was presented in Europe, where it was still largely shrouded in mystery.

During the Expedition, monasteries, forts and other sites were heavily looted, as the British considered this 'fair game' (McKay, 2012, p. 19). Series 2845, comprising eight objects, was among the spoils taken from Gyantse. Most of the items in this small collection are fragmented bronze decorative borders from reliquaries, along with a relic box and a book cover, all made of gilded bronze and decorated with precious stones. Finally, the collections also include a small drum.

Thus, the context surrounding the collection's origin moves from acquisitions to spoliation. This is further exemplified by the fragmentary state of the objects in the collection (see figures 4.4-4.7), which suggests their indiscriminate removal from their original contexts. These are looted artefacts, yet instead, Pott (1951, p. 5), who later served as director of the Wereldmuseum Leiden, refers to them as the '*piece de résistance*' of the museum. This label highlights their value as trophies of victory and, in turn, validates the British colonial conquest of Tibet.

Instead of addressing this colonial past, Pott chooses to focus on the claim that 'We may reasonably assume that they (...) represent the oldest specimens of Tibetan art in the Museum' (1951, p. 5). Ignoring the violence with which these fragments of Tibetan culture were taken, and instead valuing them for their rarity.



Fig. 4.4: [Fragment of a halo] (RV-2845-3), acquired 1950. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/753209>.

Fig. 4.5: [Fragment of a halo] (RV-2845-4), acquired 1950. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/753209>.



Fig. 4.6: [Fragment of a halo with Manjushri] (RV-2845-8), acquired 1950. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/753214>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Fig. 4.7: [Fragment of a halo with Samantabhadra] (RV-2845-7), acquired 1950. Wereldmuseum Leiden.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/753213>. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Series 2845 is not the only collection resulting from the Younghusband Expedition, and the Wereldmuseum Leiden is not the only museum holding these looted artefacts; it is part of a larger network of colonial collecting. This collection does not just reflect an interest in Tibetan religion; it frames Tibet as a conquered territory. Its status as the *piece de résistance* reveals how colonial conquest became a source of prestige for the museum. This collection transforms the museum from a neutral space to a trophy case, embedding colonial violence directly into the museum.

4.3 Patterns in the Three Tibetan Collections

These three collections have highlighted several of the methods used to acquire Tibetan artefacts in Europe. Many early collections arose from collectors' personal interests or from opportunistic collecting and looting. Notably, the Wereldmuseum did not commission any of the early collections but purchased many objects that were already part of collections and already in Europe. Only a small selection of Tibetan objects were purchased in India (sr. 1842 in Darjeeling, sr. 1943 and sr. 1994 in Calcutta).

To answer whether Von Siebold's collection influences later collections, the typologies of the three collections must be compared. Table 4.1 illustrates the comparison of collecting practices across the three Tibetan collections at Wereldmuseum Leiden. The comparative analysis of these three collections reveals three patterns.

Collection	Date of Collection Formation	Acquisition Date by Museum	Number of Objects	Primary Object Types	Acquisition Method
Von Siebold	Between 1823 and 1829	1837	~72	Thangkas, ritual vessels, vajras, musical instruments, textiles, writing blocks	Gifts or exchange (medical services)
Van Manen	Between 1918 and 1943	1948	~450+ artefacts	Blockprints, manuscripts, thangkas, ritual objects, furniture, jewellery, etc.	Collection and purchase
Series 2845	Between 1903 and 1904	1950	~8	Decorative borders of reliquaries, relic box, book cover, small drum	Military confiscation and looting

Table 4.1: Overview of the three collections

The first pattern illustrates the evolution of acquisition methods, moving from personal exchange (Siebold) to military confiscation (Series 2845) to a more systematic scholarly focus (Van Manen). Reflects the European engagement with Tibet in the 19th and early 20th centuries (see Neuhaus, 2012). This implies that the three collections are not a neutral assembly of objects but an exemplary Western engagement with Tibet.

The second pattern concerns the focus on Tibetan Buddhist ritual material culture across the three collections. Although the Van Manen collection features a broader selection of objects than the Von Siebold or Series 2845 collections, its emphasis remains on religious material culture. This focus, whether deliberate or unintentional, creates an image that reinforces Tibet as a mysterious and magical place. Through these collections, the Wereldmuseum Leiden constructed a sacred, idyllic Tibet within the museum space.

The third pattern addresses whether Von Siebold's collection influenced later collections at the Wereldmuseum. It did not directly determine the specific objects subsequently acquired. However, it was foundational in two ways: first, it established "Tibet" as a collecting category for the museum. Second, it focuses on ritual objects that created a template that influenced the perspectives of later collectors, who expanded upon it, reinforcing the ritual-centric pattern, as evidenced by Van Manen's more extensive but still religiously focused collection.

To summarise, the early Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden are the result of different types of European involvement, opportunistic, violent, and scholarly, that have created a specific vision of Tibet. Chapter five will explore the broader implications for how museums construct an image of 'Shangri-La', address contemporary issues in the display of Tibetan religious artefacts, and offer recommendations for the future of these early collections.

Chapter 5: ‘Museum Tibet’, Living Religion and Repatriation

Chapter 5 will argue that the collecting patterns analysed in the previous chapter did not involve object collection but also constructed a Western perception of Tibet. It will, furthermore, examine the contemporary issues, displaying a living religion and reckoning with colonial provenance. Lastly, it will provide recommendations for the future of these collections, both within and beyond the museum.

5.1 ‘Museum Tibet’

The section of the chapter will argue that the Wereldmuseum’s early Tibetan collections did not passively reflect Tibetan culture, but curated an image of Tibet, creating a ‘Museum Tibet’ primarily based on material culture collected. This concept of ‘Museum Tibet’ is rooted in Said’s concept of Orientalism, where the other is exoticised by the West. As sites of education and knowledge production, museums shape public perspectives, yet they are not neutral. Instead, they can reinforce cultural stereotypes, reinforcing the distorted image of Tibet through a material-centric and religion-focused lens, creating a distorted, decontextualised, and fetishised representation.

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, most of Von Siebold’s collection consists of ritual objects. A pattern that persists in the Van Manen and Sieries 2845 collection, as highlighted in chapter 4, together presenting a Tibet of things rather than practices. This material-centric lens produces a static object-based image of Tibet, removing them from their living culture. In preserving the object, the museum often ignores intangible heritage, reflecting a deeper colonial and museological ideology: objects can be owned, displayed, and traded, whereas intangible heritage resists such commodification.

The Wereldmuseum Leiden’s early collections are further shaped by the interest of their collectors and the market. Objects collected through donation, purchase, or loot are already framed as unique and valuable before they enter the museum. This framing,

through the commodification of the objects, makes them more attractive to the museum. The commodification of Buddhist Tibet can be approached through Marx's concept of "commodity fetishism". The objects are further transformed by the museum into commodities of curiosity and wonder in which aesthetic and exotic appeal take precedence over their use and provenance. For instance, the looted fragments of Series 2845, described by Pott (1951) as the '*piece de résistance*', were fetishised as trophies of colonial conquest and their violent acquisition aestheticised.

Additionally, since the early 20th century, museums have struggled to move beyond religious frameworks in their display of Tibet (Martin, 2017, p. 59). As noted in Chapter 4, this preference is also evident in the Von Siebold, Van Manen, and Series 2845 collections: they collected religious artefacts rather than secular, everyday items. Martin (2017, p. 59) further argues that this is due to the preference of the curator to create a shrine, 'a sacred showstopper', which can be compared to the '*piece de résistance*' of Pott (1951).

In contrast to this portrayal of objects in the museum space, Tibetan Buddhist objects can serve multiple roles across the religious, political, and intellectual spheres (Martin, 2017, p. 60). By approaching the religious sphere alone, the object is essentially decontextualised from its original environment and curated as a more sacred artefact, thereby increasing its mysticism and value, as this would attract more visitors.

5.2 Living Religion and Historical Collection

Besides the curated image of Tibet in the museum, a second concern when displaying Tibetan Buddhist artefacts is the tension between preserving historical artefacts and respecting living religious traditions. By focusing on the object's preservation, the use and scarcity of the objects are set aside, thereby 'killing' them. Especially if the objects were consecrated, by prioritising the conservation of the objects, dies, within the museum.

This can be seen as a consequence of the commodification of the objects; the religious tradition associated with them disappears. The sacredness of such objects is thus not

fixed but contested: while museums may treat them as historical artefacts, for Tibetan Buddhist communities, they can hold spiritual significance.

For example, the *thangkas* in the Von Siebold collection were not merely art objects; in Tibetan Buddhist practice, they are ritual implements used in meditation and rituals. Their display as static museum pieces separates them from their use in practice. The idea that objects can be killed in the museum aligns with Alfred Gell's (1998) concept of object agency, wherein artefacts are not merely passive but active agents that influence their environments and social relationships.

Addressing this issue within the museum space and reviving the objects in the Tibetan collection at Wereldmuseum Leiden are tasks the modern museum should strive to undertake. As the objects in the museum are art of a living religion with descendants, the museum should strive to provide an active representation of the culture and to display their heritage respectfully.

The question of whether an object remains sacred is not solely academic; it is ultimately determined by its stakeholders. While this thesis may classify a *kapala* (skull cup, RV-1-1509) as a 'special ritual object' for Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, it may retain sanctity or require specific handling. This highlights the need for community consultation in curation and interpretation.

It should, however, not be a binary between preserving historical integrity and respecting living religious meaning. There should be a balance between the two to create a space in which the public can be educated and learn about the wider world.

5.3 Repatriation, Transparency, and the Future

The question that remains is, when curating these objects, how can a sacred object remain "sacred" in a museum? And who decided what this sacredness looks like? This requires nuance, including ideas of decolonisation and community involvement. For example, the idea that decolonisation should resemble an untouched image of the Orient erases colonial history rather than addressing it. Furthermore, by doing that,

you erased the resilience, adaptation, and growth of the Orient. Additionally, by excluding stakeholders, the museum risks perpetuating false or biased perspectives.

An alternative strategy is to adopt an object-oriented ontology rather than one that involves people. Shifting focus from the collector or the looter, an ontological approach to the object would focus on its agency and ontological status, emphasising its meaning and its relations to other objects, thereby creating collections based on these relations. This approach, used by scholars such as Bjørnar Olsen (2010) or Miguel John Versluys (2021), both archaeologists rather than museum curators, would allow the museum to move away from its religious-centric perspective and allow the objects to speak for themselves rather than being used to construct a false narrative.

Additionally, the museum should recognise the problematic origins of its collections. Instead of obscuring it, they can use that history as the foundation for a more transparent, dialogic, and educational museum space. As provenance research becomes increasingly popular, the Tibetan collection should also be included in the Wereldmuseum Leiden's efforts.

When conducting provenance research and considering repatriation, the distinction between stolen and purchased objects is often blurred. What do we consider a fair transaction? Purchased objects can be regarded as 'stolen' if the exchange of goods was not balanced, even though the transaction might have seemed fair at the time. Instead of focusing on this aspect of the exchange, the museum can decide to highlight the context in which the object was acquired.

To increase this transparency of the collections, the museum can choose to adopt provenance labels, both in the museum and in the online catalogues. The Met museum, for example, has a tag for Nazi-era provenance for 'Objects with changed or unknown ownership in continental Europe between 1933-1945'. Something similar can be done for stolen and looted objects in the Wereldmuseum Leiden. Furthermore, by increasing access to the online catalogues, the museum can digitally repatriate their collections. However, to do so, the museum needs to critically assess the labels and descriptions of its objects, as this study has shown; several descriptions are incomplete or inaccurate.

Lastly, the museum can involve local communities in consultation on displays and interpretation, and participate in lending and co-curation with Tibetan institutions.

These are only a few suggestions on how the museum can actively move away from the image created by 'Museum Tibet'. There are other ways in which the museum space can move away from the image of a mystical Tibet. What matters most is that attempts are made to represent Tibet as a living and diverse space.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that the Wereldmuseum Leiden's early Tibetan collections, Von Siebold, Van Manen, and Series 2845, were not neutral collections but were shaped by their collectors and the museum space. They create a mysterious, ritual-centric image of Tibet in the museum space, the so-called 'Museum Tibet'. However, it has also highlighted several methodologies that can be used to move away from the image. To conclude, this thesis has aimed to answer three research questions:

1. What types of objects are included in the Von Siebold collection, and what do they reflect about Von Siebold's interest in Tibetan culture?
2. How did the Von Siebold collection influence the formation and typology of later Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden, such as the Van Manen collection and Series 2845?
3. How have these early collections contributed to the construction of 'Museum Tibet', and what image of Tibetan culture is portrayed in the Wereldmuseum Leiden?

The first question was addressed in Chapter 3, which highlighted that a significant number of objects in the Von Siebold collections were Japanese, Mongolian, or Chinese origin rather than Tibetan. Furthermore, the objects within the collection had a religion-centric focus. Additionally, the acquisition methods were likely more opportunistic than intended. Although Von Siebold's interest in Tibet was minimal, the ritualistic nature of the collections points to an interest in Buddhism.

The second research question was addressed in Chapter 4, which revealed that the Von Siebold collection neither employs the acquisition methods nor the typologies of the latter two collections. However, the patterns in the collections revealed a region-centred focus across all three. Additionally, the formation timeline of the collections mirrored the European engagement with Tibet.

The last question was discussed in Chapter 5, which outlined that the religious-centric focus of these collections has aided in the construction of 'Museum Tibet.' It further offers solutions to move away from the 'Museum Tibet' by, for example, adopting an object-based ontology or engaging with stakeholders.

There were, however, also limitations in this study, several of which were already highlighted in the introduction. The most significant limitation was the scarcity of historical documents on the acquisition of the collections, as well as on the early display of these artefacts. In addition, the reliance on photographs in Chapter 3 was also a limiting factor.

The conclusions drawn in this study are based on limited data. This study could serve as a starting point for a wider project researching the Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden. Further research could build on this study by conducting a comprehensive survey of the entire Tibetan repository at Wereldmuseum and by conducting comparative analyses with other European museums.

Abstract

This study explores the 'Forgotten' Von Siebold collection housed at the Wereldmuseum Leiden, highlighting three early Tibetan collections that reflect the intersection of culture, religion, and colonial history. This thesis examines the historical context surrounding the collection, acquired by Philipp Franz Von Siebold in the 19th century, and its significance in relation to the Van Manen and Serie 2845 collections. Through a detailed analysis of the Tibetan artefacts, including *thangkas*, ritual vessels, and musical instruments, the research aims to understand the formation of the Von Siebold collection. In addition to a comparative analysis with the two other Tibetan collections, this study seeks to uncover patterns in the acquisition and typology of early Tibetan collections at the Wereldmuseum Leiden.

Furthermore, the discourse on acquisition practices, repatriation, and the evolving narrative of 'Museum Tibet' emphasises the importance of transparency and ethical considerations when displaying Tibetan culture in a European museum. The conclusion seeks to answer the research questions, highlight the study's limitations, and propose future research. This study critically examines the 'Forgotten' Von Siebold collection and the role of Wereldmuseum Leiden in presenting Tibetan culture within a museum context.

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