



REPUTATION AND OBLIVION: THE HISTORY OF VÁCLAV STEJSKAL'S EASTERN ASIA COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT: Václav Stejskal (1851–1934), a traveller and collector, is an important donor to the Náprstek Museum. His collection from the Far East and the Southeast Asia contains almost seven hundred items. Václav Stejskal joined the Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal War Navy, and travelled to Asia in 1886–1888. After his return he belonged to a circle around Vojta Náprstek (1826–1894), the founder of the Náprstek Museum. During the 1920s he became a public figure, displaying his collectibles in his villa and inviting there numerous visitors including the president of the republic. The choice of furniture pieces, porcelain vases, Japanese swords, Chinese and Japanese textiles and scroll paintings represented Václav Stejskal as a middle-class member who had achieved wealth, public esteem, and a sophistication spiced with a flare of adventure. Before his death he presented his collection to the newly established National Museum. However, the collection remained poorly documented in museum depositories, and with political changes after the World War II, his name as a collector and traveller was almost forgotten to the wider public.

KEY WORDS: China – Japan – Southeast Asia – Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal War Navy – Náprstek Museum, National Museum – late 19th century collectors – late 19th century travellers

In 1957, a committee of experts from the Náprstek Museum visited a villa outside Prague, where the widow of Václav Stejskal had preserved the collection that her husband assembled during his travel to Asia. Their aim was to investigate whether the villa could serve as an appropriate place for a separate permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum, the result of which inquiry was the uncompromising verdict: the villa was a “double-edged gift” to the museum and found unsuitable for a modern exhibition.¹ Intriguingly, a few years earlier, in 1950, when a large exhibition about China opened in Prague, Václav Stejskal’s widow

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¹ Protocol No. 133/57. 1957. AD.

appealed to the Ministry of Education, Science and Arts and demanded the inclusion of items from her husband's collection. The correspondence between the elderly lady, the ministry and the museum show a polite but firm reply: Stejskal's collection was in the museum depository waiting for proper documentation, and could not be displayed.²

During his lifetime, Václav Stejskal (1851–1934) earned a reputation as *maecenas* of the Náprstek Museum. Moreover, he was definitely a public figure in the twenties, his photograph appeared in a representative publication featuring biographies of leading figures of the Czechoslovak Republic³, and he exchanged several friendly letters with the first president of the republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937).

Not much later, his collection of several hundred items remained poorly documented in museum depositories, the villa where his collection had been kept as a private museum was found unsuitable for modern exhibition, and even his name as a collector and traveller was almost forgotten to the wider public.

Archival documents make it clear how much his collection was appreciated by his contemporaries. However, what caused his achievements to vanish so soon after his death? What was the reason that he was forgotten? Once an important collector, traveller and donor, his name is today unknown even to the educated public.

Other important donors to the Náprstek Museum were active either during the formative years of the museum as a private institution in the late 19th century, or in the early decades of the 20th century when the museum became a national institution. Václav Stejskal lived not only during the era of Vojta Náprstek (1826–1894), the founder of the Náprstek Museum, but also in the twenties and thirties of the 20th century. The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and World War I marked a drastic shift in the last years of his life, yet during both periods he enjoyed a degree of fame and wealth. Nevertheless, despite his reputation during his late years he was entirely a man of the 19th century, and so were his friends and associates. His lifestyle, career, and pursuits were strongly marked by the prevailing middle-class ideal of an honest, hardworking man, steadily and successfully climbing the social ladder. Although he personally benefited from his professional achievements in his late years, the material legacy – his collection – met an unfavourable fate. The death of the Náprsteks, the transfer of the museum to state ownership in the twenties as well as the change of political situation after the Communist coup in 1948 were the stages that brought his collection and his deeds to public oblivion.

The Sources

The sources concerning Václav Stejskal's professional and private life are abundant yet in some respect highly limited. While the archival material contains a large quantity of personal notices, drafts, notes and letters, several periods of his life and important events are documented only by a few sheets of paper. Many letters show him as a devoted and loyal friend, yet there is only little evidence about his wife and family life. His hobbies and

² Letter from Mrs. Stejskalová to the Ministry of Education, Science and Arts, 7. 4. 1950. AD.
Letter from the Ministry of Education, Science and Arts to NPM, 10. 5. 1950. AD.
Letter from NPM to NM, 16. 5. 1950. AD.

³ *Album reprezentantů všech oborů veřejného života československého* (The Album of Representatives of All Fields of Public Life in the Czechoslovakia). The book featuring 5000 pictures and 200 biographies included important figures of politics, business and art of the time. Inv. No. V/5-1 Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

leisure activities are well documented⁴, whereas almost two decades of his professional life in Vienna go almost without notice.

The Archive of the National Museum contains the majority of the written sources and photographic material. During the research, I focused mainly on three types of materials: his private documents, letters, personal accounts and photographs that shed light on Stejskal's personality, his friends and family. The second kind of materials, especially the valuable diary, covered his journey to Asia. The third type treats his collection and his donation to the Náprstek and the National Museum, documents which were found in both institutions: e.g. letters to the museum authorities, lists of items of his collection, his last will, as well as articles about his collection from the journals and newspapers of the time.

The "Files Vojta Náprstek" in the Náprstek Museum preserves several personal letters from Václav Stejskal to the wife of Vojta Náprstek, the founder of the Náprstek Museum⁵. Several letters and lists of items dealing with the history of the collection in the fifties are still found among the administrative documentation of the Náprstek Museum and are not regarded as archival material. For the history of his collection, museum inventory books represent the fundamental source.

The Kriegsarchiv in the Austrian State Archives, Vienna, provides sources dealing with Václav Stejskal's personal file as a member of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, and his journey aboard the vessel *Aurora* to the Far East.

Secondary sources are provided by Marcela and Filip Suchomel. An article dealing generally with Václav Stejskal was published by Marcela Suchomelová in 2002, and two other articles regarding Stejskal's journey to Asia aboard the *Aurora* were published by both authors (Suchomel and Suchomelová 2002–2003, Suchomelová 2009). Their articles provided useful insights into the evaluation of archival documents, and were the initial point for my further research.

The Background

Václav Stejskal was born September 28, 1851 in a village called Liberk in Czech and Rehberk in German, approximately six kilometres from the town Rychnov near the mountains of northeast Bohemia. The son of a miller, Václav had at least three siblings, a sister and possibly two brothers. As his family relocated several times within the region, he was probably used to changes in schools and friends, and even to endurance of some hardships. At the age of fifteen, he supported his studies at a secondary school by offering lessons in German.⁶

⁴ Personal documents, Inv. No. I/a-8, Correspondence, Inv. No. II/c-5. Files V. Stejskal. ANM. Among his personal documents there are numerous membership-cards of various institutions, ranging from regional reading clubs to major learned societies such as botanical, zoological and mycological institutions in Vienna and Prague.

⁵ Mrs. Náprstková (1838–1907) played an important role in the circle around Vojta Náprstek and his associates, collaborators and friends. The letters exchanged between Václav Stejskal and Mrs. Náprstková included social gossip about life in Prague and Vienna (Stejskal asked Mrs. Náprstková to find him a bride), as well as brief but significant information about Stejskal's collection.

⁶ Biographical draft, Inv. No. 17-I/b-4. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

With his friends from the “gymnasium”⁷ he talked about the right choice of profession, arriving at the conclusion that the possibilities of doctor, lawyer or teacher were not the right choice for him.⁸ He decided to apply to serve in the Austro-Hungarian *Kaiserliche und Königliche Kriegsmarine* (Imperial and Royal War Navy), and entered the navy in 1871.⁹ In summer of that year he was sent as a “Marine-Kommissär” to Pola (today’s Pula in Croatia), a large Adriatic harbour and the home port of the Austro-Hungarian Navy.¹⁰

Marine Adventure

Václav Stejskal was a young man when he joined the navy. Instead of choosing the officers’ ranks he became the “Marine-Kommissär”, a post making him responsible for administration, monetary transactions, supplies and cargos on the ship.¹¹

During the following years he advanced in rank and, in 1881, was chosen to serve aboard the imperial yacht *Miramare*, which journeyed across the Eastern Mediterranean during the four spring months, with the Archduke Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia (1858–1889) aboard. Stejskal received an extraordinary recognition for his service¹². The following years were spent in navy offices in Pola and the *Marine-Section des Reichskriegs Ministerium* (Marine section of the War Office) in Vienna. In 1886 he applied for a post aboard the corvette *Aurora*, a modern, light sailing vessel with auxiliary steam engine, heading to the Far East.¹³

Aurora was a newly build warship, modern and beautiful, elegantly painted white for the tropics.¹⁴ The journey to the East Asia was her second mission.¹⁵ Austro-Hungary was a large central and south European empire with maritime access on the Adriatic, but it had only a few small colonial territories worldwide. In contrast to many colonial countries in Europe, Austro-Hungarian society had almost no colonial experience: no young men heading for adventure in foreign countries, no middle-aged retired officials, soldiers, merchants and clerks returning home after years abroad, no women establishing new households far away, no children born and growing up among people of different cultures and habits. However, despite the absence of the social strata generated by European colonialism, there were adventurous travellers, medicinal doctors, scientists, and army officials who spent months or years abroad bringing back their memories as well as material remains of their explorations. Václav Stejskal was one of them.

Although the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not possess colonial territories, it could boast a successful, strong and modern naval forces. In the second half of the 19th

⁷ “Gymnasium”, a secondary school in the Austro-Hungarian empire state education system.

⁸ Biographical draft, Inv. No. 17-1/b-4. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Entry protocol, 1871, Inv. No. 6-1/a-6. Files V. Stejskal. ANM, “Wenzel Stejskal. Qualifikations-Grundbuchsheft”. KASA.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ This position can be compared to that of the “purser” on modern merchant ships. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purser>. Cit. online 26. 8. 2009.

¹² “Wenzel Stejskal. Qualifikations-Grundbuchsheft”. KASA.

¹³ Biographical draft, Inv. No. 17-1/b-4. Files V. Stejskal. ANM, “Wenzel Stejskal. Qualifikations-Grundbuchsheft”. KASA.

¹⁴ See the photograph of the *Aurora*, Inv. No. 250-V/a-3. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

¹⁵ The *Aurora* sailed for the South America twice in 1884–1885 and in 1891–1892, in 1889–1891 for Africa and India, and in 1895–1896 she was back to the East Asia. For technical specification of the ship, see Jiří Novák’s Preface in Heroldová 2007: 3–22.

century after the Battle of Lissa (1866) in the Adriatic Sea, the Austro-Hungarian Navy was consolidated. The ships of the *Kaiserliche und Königliche Kriegsmarine* (established 1867) journeyed around the world carrying out scientific research, exploring new lands or engaging in armed conflicts of allied states. One Austrian warship, the frigate *Novara* circumnavigated the globe (1857–1859) during a large-scale scientific expedition; a major expedition to the Arctic was attempted in 1872–1874. Austro-Hungarian warships were also sent to the north coast of China to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China (1899–1901), or made regular appearances in large ports of foreign countries in Asia, Africa and South America in order to represent the strength and power of the distant continental empire.

The journey of the *Aurora* numbered among those travels: like other imperial warships, she visited large ports in Asia and anchored alongside warships and merchant vessels of important colonial powers.

The *Aurora*'s sea voyage to the Far East led along the established maritime routes: from Pola through the newly opened Suez Canal to Aden, across the Indian ocean to today's Sri Lanka and the Nicobar Islands, around the northern coast of Sumatra to the Malacca Strait and Singapore, to the islands of today's Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. The ensuing ports of call included Hong Kong (the island became the British Crown colony in 1842), and the ancient Portuguese colonial territory Macao. Then, the *Aurora* made a stop in today's Taiwan, the island that was invaded by the Japanese a decade earlier, in 1874, before heading for Japan, where she spent several months. On her way to Japan and back, *Aurora* visited Chinese ports, and although the visits here were much shorter than in Japan, the Chinese coastal cities and ports gave Václav Stejskal an opportunity to collect the local items and write several pages in his diary about China.¹⁶

China

Václav Stejskal kept his diary during the entire journey aboard *Aurora*. His diary is a valuable source not only for the journey of the ship but also as his personal account. Weather reports, sea condition, and progress of the ship along the route are meticulously described, along with much detail concerning Stejskal's life aboard the ship, foreign ports, numerous social gatherings including visits to local and international authorities, trips to the nearby mainland, as well as comical anecdotes about his friends and sombre personal dramas (one petty officer committed suicide, being bossed by his superior¹⁷). Not a few records also include very intimate moments such as depictions of drinking parties, visits to port brothels and notes about local women.

The diary contains his thoughts and opinions, although scarce and often simplistic. Stejskal made notes about Japan and China from various books, and he added his own remarks. He briefly mentioned the Chinese writing system, Confucianism, Taoist philosophy as well as Buddhist faith and local gods. As well as religious sites, he also

¹⁶ In this article I focus mainly on Stejskal's stay in China and the Chinese section of his collection. However, Stejskal's collection includes items from Southeast Asia and Japan as well. If we compare the sections, the Chinese one, containing more than one hundred items, is less numerous than the Japanese and Southeast Asian sections that contain approximately three hundred items each. The description of the Japanese section written by the curator of Japanese collection will follow in the next issue of the *Annals of the Náprstek Museum*.

¹⁷ The entry dated 16. 12. 1887. Diary, Inv. No. 14-I/b-1. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

described – with a certain enthusiasm – execution grounds and local cemeteries. His comments show clearly that Stejskal was neither a bookish scholar nor a romantic dreamer: he was a realistic man, and so was his diary. His observations are down-to-earth, unsophisticated, but often humorous, showing his interest in foreign countries. However, he was able to capture and describe the basic elements of Chinese culture and society, and his amused tone indicated his effort to understand.

As opposed to Japan, which Stejskal clearly found to his liking, China¹⁸ and Chinese people were not his favourites. He often complained of dirty streets, bad smells in local markets, and especially what he viewed as the servile and dishonest behaviour of Chinese men.

Notes about his purchases also appeared in the diary. Although he mentioned only a limited number of his purchases, he often noted the price or added a short description, frequently complaining that the items were too expensive to buy. Purchases are noted of vases, tin boxes, carved fruit pits, silks, gongs, paintings. For example, in the coastal cities of Fujian province in the southeast of China, famous for its high-quality tea and lacquer ware, he bought “the best kind of tea”, “silk brocade, one yard for 68 cents, several pieces”, and was looking for “lacquer goods”, but the merchandise was over-priced. In the cosmopolitan port Shanghai he bought a chair for \$10 and ordered a cupboard for \$34. In the southern city of Canton he made a large purchase of paintings, fans, panther fur for \$3.50, cushions, ivory figures, jewellery made of kingfisher feathers, and especially a “mandarin gown”, the semi-official dress of a Chinese bureaucrat, for \$12.¹⁹

The Return Home

The Aurora returned to Pola at the end of April 1888. The following year, Václav Stejskal was promoted in rank, but in 1891 he left the navy at his own request and entered the imperial law court in Vienna as a director of the counting office.²⁰

His life in Vienna is documented only sporadically in the archive of the National Museum. Nonetheless, it is known that he organised groups of fellow Czech speakers, and entered into a longstanding friendship with Josef Svatopluk Machar (1864–1942), then a clerk in Vienna but now famed for his ironic, critical poetry, and two significant explorers and writers, Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860–1932) and Josef Kořenský (1847–1938).²¹ In Vienna he met the future president of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who later, as the president, visited Stejskal’s home and received gifts from his collection²².

Judging from his own notes as well as to letters from his friends, Václav Stejskal was a friendly man, agreeable and trustworthy. He was a good singer, played musical instruments well, and liked speaking in public. His naval file characterised him as a healthy man and a good sailor who performed his duties well²³. He was economical in his spending, but he

¹⁸ The Aurora stopped in Macao in April 21. 1887. The route led through the ports: Swatow (Shantou) on the river Han (May 9.), Amoy – present day Xiamen (May 12.), Taipei – present day capital of Taiwan (May 26.). After several months in Japan, Aurora returned back to China on September, and October 1st arrived at today’s Yantai on the Shandong peninsula in the northern China. Shanghai (October 21), then upward the river Yangzijiang, Ningpo (November 11.), Fuzhou (November 18.), Hong Kong (November 30.), Canton (December 21.).

¹⁹ Diary, Inv. No. 14-1/b-1. Files V. Stejskal. ANM. About the mandarin gown, see Heroldová 2009: 253–262.

did not restrain himself from worldly pleasures. He was a pragmatic, realistic man who planned his life well.²⁴

He married at the age of sixty. His wife, Carolina Maria Teresia Kopp came from Vienna, and was twenty two years old (*9. 8. 1889).²⁵ In the year of their marriage (1911) Stejskal left his official post and decided to spend his future days in his villa deep in the forests (but near to the capital city of Bohemia, Prague) and pursue his new hobby – mycology.²⁶ In his new home, in the village Hostomice in the Brdy Mountains, he lived until his death on July 12, 1934.²⁷

Treasure in the Brdy Mountains

In the diary written during his journey to the Far East aboard the *Aurora*, Václav Stejskal made notes about his collectibles. Although these notes are scarce, they provide us at least with basic information about the items, their prices and the places where he bought them. However, Stejskal certainly was not an art *connoisseur*, let alone an educated and knowledgeable collector of foreign arts and crafts. Nevertheless, the items reflected his interest in unusual, exotic things that he could bring back to his home for display, and as witnesses of his adventure in faraway lands. He was not able to build his collection systematically, but a certain fondness can be traced for some types of objects. He was a good singer and musician; hence we can assume a reason for his buying several musical instruments. Other items reminded him of his stay in China, such as Chinese ship flags, traditional Chinese compasses or opium pipes, and scroll paintings of beautiful ladies, dreamy landscapes and eye-catching calligraphies: generally speaking, typical souvenir goods sold to foreigners by skilful local craftsmen in large maritime ports. Most of the larger items, such as porcelain vases and lavish furniture, were bought to embellish his future home back in Vienna or Prague²⁸. As we can see from photographs of the interior of his villa, these items clearly demonstrated the adventurous spirit and wealth of Václav Stejskal as a recognized man in a respected social position.²⁹

After his return to Europe, Václav Stejskal donated twenty seven items from China or of Chinese origin to the museum established by Vojta Náprstek. His gift included several musical instruments such as Chinese violins, a Chinese lute (*pipa*), and a flute, a few items

²⁰ Biographical draft, Inv. No. 17-I/b-4. Files V. Stejskal. ANM, Superannuation protocol, 30. 10. 1891, Inv. No. 7-I/a-7. Files V. Stejskal. ANM, "Wenzel Stejskal. Qualifikations-Grundbuchsheft". KASA.

²¹ For correspondence with Machar, see Inv. No. II/b-57, Kořenský, Inv. No. II/b-48, Vráz, Inv. No. II/b-115, (Files V. Stejskal. ANM).

²² Correspondence, Masaryk, 18. 11. 1920 and 23. 11. 1920, Inv. Nos. 80-II/b-50, 90-II/b-61 (Files V. Stejskal. ANM).

²³ "Wenzel Stejskal. Qualifikations-Grundbuchsheft". KASA,

²⁴ According to the various personal notes and drafts. See Inv. No. I/b-1, 2, 3, 6, 7. Files V. Stejskal. ANM, Graphological analysis, Inv. No. 21-I/b-8. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

²⁵ 20. 9. 1911. Marriage certificate, Inv. No. 2-I/a-2. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

²⁶ Various letters are dedicated to mycology, his hobby. He exchanged letters with mycologist from universities and institutes in foreign countries, and he regularly ordered books from abroad, during the 1920s making use of consular offices and the office of the Czechoslovak President. See Inv. No. II/c-4. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

²⁷ Death certificate, Inv. No. 3-I/a-3. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

²⁸ In a letter to Mrs. Náprstková, dated 23. 1. 1892, he described his "oriental drawing room" with carpets, tapestries, tables and vases, "all of them very beautiful". Files Vojta Náprstek. LNPM.

²⁹ Photographs, Inv. No. V/a-4. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

of kingfisher feathers and cloisonné jewellery, two opium pipes, a Chinese compass, a block of tea for export to Russia, and a medicinal liquid against headache. According to the description in museum inventory books, the items came mainly from Shanghai, Canton and Swatow (present-day Shantou on the southeast coast of China).³⁰

In the late 1880s, when Stejskal presented his Far East collectibles, the museum established by Vojta Náprstek – was undergoing substantial transformation, shifting its main focus from modern technologies to general ethnography, with the national, European, Asian, African and American cultural arts and crafts items prevailing. Since the 1870s, the unfavourable political situation of the previous decade had begun to improve, and along with it, Náprstek's financial and personal situation. In 1873, after the death of his mother, a well-to-do businesswoman, Náprstek collected enough funds to build a new museum edifice near his original house, a former brewery and shop in the centre of Prague's Old Town. Despite the shift in emphasis of his museum to ethnography, Náprstek's main aim of spreading liberal political and social ideas remained: Vojta Náprstek and his wife opened a public library in their home, organized debates, lectures and courses, as well as maintaining contact by mail with friends in foreign countries.

Collecting items from foreign cultures was a not an unusual pastime among the members of the élite middle class; a large part of the Náprstek Museum collection arose from these private activities³¹. After Stejskal established himself in the Hostomice villa, he adapted the residence to display his collectibles. Private rooms were located on the second floor, whereas the downstairs space was for visitors, in particular Stejskal's study, the dining room and the large drawing room on the ground floor, which included a Japanese wind screen, a gramophone, Chinese tables, the statue of Buddha, the panther skin from China, a chaise-longue bought in the Philippines, and Japanese porcelain vases. The collection was kept in a large wooden cabinet with glass windows and on one long and several small tables; a heavy carved wooden cupboard from China overflowed with porcelain vases and figures, while the walls were full of scroll paintings and Chinese and Japanese fans³². The abundance of exotic curiosities and their display in the drawing room of a well-to-do family represented the taste of the owner and his social environment. A self-made man who had achieved wealth, public esteem, and a sophistication spiced with a flare of adventure, he nonetheless exhibited his collection in the quiet and safe

³⁰ Inventory books, year 1888, pp. 325-329, 346, NPM. See also letters from Václav Stejskal to Mrs. Náprstková, dated 28. 8. 1888, and 16. 1. 1892. Files Vojta Náprstek. LNPM.

³¹ Not only the Prague bourgeoisie was fond of collecting; Martin Boštik in his *Spasitel všednosti Quido Šimek (1857-1933): život a dílo neobyčejného litomyšlského kupce* (Saviour of Everyday Life: Quido Šimek (1857-1933): Life and Work of an Exceptional Merchant of Litomyšl) documents the life of a provincial tradesman and his collection of local as well as foreign collectibles (including a few items of Chinese origin). Among the collectors of Chinese collectibles who contributed to the Náprstek Museum, I mention Rudolf Dvořák (1860-1920), translator, linguist and founder of Chinese studies in Bohemia, Antonín Römer (personal data not known, active in the 1880s), clerk of the postal service in Shanghai, Eufrosína Drahorádová-Lvová (1897-1976), author of sentimental novels set in Japan and China, and Růžena Trnožková (died 1936), the wife of a high-ranking public official. The lives and activities of some of the collectors are well documented in the museum archives, whereas in other cases only the collected items remained until today.

³² „Soupis mého nábytku a náradí, v mém domku č. 370 v Hostomicích p. Brdy se nacházejícího“ (List of My Furniture and Equipment in My House no. 370 in Hostomice p. Brdy). After 1920, Inv. No. 12-1/a-14. Files V. Stejskal. ANM. Photographs, Inv. No. V/a-4. Files V. Stejskal.

surroundings of a little village, much as the adventurous experience of his young days was domesticated and adjusted to middle-class expectations.

Václav Stejskal acted as the true master of his collection: inviting visitors and attending them personally, treating them as his guests, while he explained the history of his collectibles. Among those making the journey to Hostomice were journalists, respected guests as well as anonymous schoolchildren and young students. Even the president of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic paid a visit and received gifts from his collection³³.

Meanwhile, Stejskal developed the intention of presenting his collection to the National Museum in Prague. Stejskal was on good terms with the Náprsteks; however, after the widow of Vojta Náprstek died in 1907, his museum was administered by members of the museum's foundation, known as the "curatorium". In 1918, after World War I. and the creation of the independent Czechoslovak Republic, a decade-long process of the museum's transformation began, ending, in 1928, with the museum transferred to the administration of the "Czech lands" and, in 1934, joined with the National Museum. The transformation of a private establishment into a national institution was complete. It was during these unsettled times that Václav Stejskal decided to present his collection to the museum. Probably as early as 1913, he started exchanging letters with the museum's "curatorium"³⁴. Later, after the war years, in the early 1920s the correspondence with the museum authorities revived and acquired an almost personal tone. In 1926 Stejskal prepared his will and designated his villa and possessions to the museum.³⁵ In 1934, on July 12, Václav Stejskal died, and his collection was transferred from Hostomice to the National Museum in Prague. However, the final transport to the building of the former Náprstek Museum occurred six years later, during the early years of World War II, October 23, 1940. Eventually, Stejskal's collection was recorded in the museum inventory books³⁶, finally bringing his will to fulfilment.

³³ Correspondence, T. G. Masaryk, I. 11., 18. 11. 1920 and 23. 11. 1920, Inv. Nos. 80-II/b-50, 90-II/b-61. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

³⁴ Letter from V. Stejskal to J. K. Kottner, 23. 6. 1913, Inv. No. 101/114, Files Vojta Náprstek. LNPM.

³⁵ For correspondence dealing with Stejskal's donation see Inv. Nos. II/c-3 and II/b-83, Files V. Stejskal. ANM. The will, dated 1926, Inv. No. 10-I/a-12. Files V. Stejskal. ANM. The process of the donation to the National Museum lasted for years and Stejskal eventually became annoyed by the slow progress. He even planned to send his collection to a museum in the USA in 1931, see the letter from Mr. Saturník, 27. 8. 1931, Inv. No. 113-II/b-83. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

³⁶ Inventory books, year 1940, pp. 48-54. The collection was accompanied by an original list written by Václav Stejskal, dated 11. 11. 1925, with notes added by Mrs. Stejskalová in 22. 10. 1936 when the collection was transported to Prague. Inv. Nos. I/a-14 and I/a-13. Files V. Stejskal. ANM.

See also "Zpráva o převzetí sbírky etnografických předmětů z Japonska, Číny a Oceánie, z pozůstalosti p. Václava Stejskala" (The Report of Acquisition of the Ethnographical Material from Japan, China and Oceania, the Collection of Mr. Václav Stejskal), 28. 11. 1940. AD. and "Soupis etnografických a uměleckých předmětů z mých cest" (List of Ethnographical and Art Collectibles from My Travels). 22. 10. 1926. AD.

The Inventory book (1940) lists 848 items of Stejskal's collection. The collection can be roughly divided into three parts: two thirds of items come from Japan and Southeast Asia. The minority, approximately one hundred twenty items, is from China. Approximately ten percent of the items have been badly damaged, or are lost now.

The Path to Oblivion

In October 1950 a major exhibition entitled „*Nová Čína*“ (The New China) opened in the *Dům výtvarného umění* (House of Visual Arts) in Prague,³⁷ aiming to show the development and progress of the newly established People's Republic of China (1949). Similarly to the People's Republic of China, post-war Czechoslovakia had also undergone a Communist coup d'état in 1948. Though the exhibition catalogue praised the revolutionary spirit of Chinese peasants and workers, it did not omit examples of traditional arts and crafts.³⁸ Mrs. Stejskalová complained to the *Ministerstvo školství, věd a umění* (Ministry of Education, Science and Arts) that no items from her husband's collection were included. She especially mentioned that the fundamental condition of her husband's will was, as a result, not fulfilled, and the "rare and unique" collection, valued at two and half million Czech crowns in 1934, was hidden in museum depositories³⁹. An exchange of letters between the National Museum and the Náprstek Museum followed. The reply from the Náprstek Museum was polite yet vague: the items for the exhibition were selected from the "entire Chinese collection" of the museum.⁴⁰ As the exhibition was primarily for ideological purposes, presenting the friendship between two newly established Communist nations, there was no interest in highlighting the items from a private collection. However, the Náprstek Museum authorities still treated Stejskal's collection in a particular way. The villa in Hostomice became a depot-cum-museum where the items were kept: Mrs. Stejskalová became its keeper and later was employed by the National Museum as a paid custodian.⁴¹

In 1957, a committee from the Náprstek Museum was sent to the villa in order to inquire about the possibilities of establishing a long-term exhibition in the site. Although Mrs. Stejskalová kept the museum-like exhibition in good order and cared for the objects well, the results of the inquiry were unfavourable towards the idea. Hostomice was too far for Prague, no public transport routes led directly to the villa, nor was the house protected and insured against burglary. The building was unsuitable for a modern museum exhibition, and Stejskal's collection itself described as common, trivial, and not worthy of public display.⁴²

³⁷ 22. 9.–21. 10. 1950.

³⁸ "Nová Čína" (The New China). Catalogue. Files Výstava 1/33. LNPM, p. 30.

³⁹ However, the will does not mention the public display.

⁴⁰ Letter from Mrs. Stejskalová to the Ministry of Education, Science and Arts, 7. 4. 1950. AD.

Letter from the Ministry of Education, Science and Arts to NPM, 10. 5. 1950. AD.

Letter from NPM to NM, 16. 5. 1950. AD.

⁴¹ Various reports, official letters and documents from the 1950s (kept among AD) demonstrate the effort of the Náprstek Museum to keep the Hostomice villa as the property of the National Museum.

Small size items (paintings, dress accessories) from the Náprstek Museum were transported to Hostomice in order to enrich the exhibition. See "Potvrzení" (Delivery receipt). 29. 6. 1954. AD. "Zpráva o šetření možnosti převozu" (Transportation report). 2. 4. 1954. AD.

Mrs. Stejskalová was employed by the National Museum still in 1965 (Report, 16. 4. 1965, Inv. No. 283-VI/a-12. Files V. Stejskal. ANM).

⁴² Protocol No. 133/57, 1957. AD.

The Legacy

With the death of Václav Stejskal, and with the deaths of his friends and associates, the memory of him and his life passed away. Although his widow struggled to preserve his legacy and his collection, the times had changed. Václav Stejskal belonged to the era of Vojta Náprstek and his enthusiastic and daring collaborators: few dared to travel abroad to far countries, and even fewer were able to present their adventures to a wide audience, whether in books, lectures, or items collected.

Stejskal's collection represented his adventurous life. The significance of his collection ultimately rested on its reflection of his deeds. His collection was a witness of his journey, the items represented the places he had visited, and the adventures he had experienced. In later years the collectibles were displayed in his house as "souvenirs" of his travels, and visitors regarded the collection as a testimony to the owner's personal and professional success.

However, World War I brought an end to the society and social relationship of the late 19th century. East Asia was no longer a land of enigmatic mystery, and travelling there was accessible even to students. Universities opened courses of Oriental languages, books were published and public exhibitions were held.

Even if Stejskal had been admired by his contemporaries in his last years, his life as well as his collection were remains of a bygone world of the 19th century. His world no longer existed, and his collection – the witness of his life – slowly sunk into oblivion.

Abbreviations

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|------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| ANM | The Archive of the National Museum, Prague |
| LNPM | The Library of the Náprstek Museum, Prague |
| AD | Administrative Documentation, The Náprstek Museum |
| KASA | The Kriegsarchiv, The Austrian State Archives, Vienna |
| NM | The National Museum |
| NPM | The Náprstek Museum |

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Interieurs in Václav Stejskal's villa (Inv. No. 251-V/a-4, ANM)



Interieurs in Václav Stejskal's villa (Inv. No. 251-V/a-4, ANM)

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