



THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST IN THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM COLLECTION

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General interest in the ancient Near East began to spread in Bohemia as early as the advent of Christianity. Speaking of scholarly interest, of course, one has to move quite a bit forward in time, to the late 19th century, and the names of grammar-school teacher J.V. Prášek and university professor R. Dvořák. However, the first material evidence documenting those ancient times reached this country only in the present century. Between 1924 and 1925 **Bedřich Hrozný**, founder of the chair of History of Ancient Near East at Prague's Charles University, conducted the first Czech excavations in the Near East, in the localities of Shekh Sa'ad and Tell Erfad, in Syria. The sculptures, terracotta articles, and commemorative stela of Ramesse II, which were then unearthed by Hrozný, currently rank among the oldest acquisitions of the National Museums in Damascus and in Aleppo. In 1924 and 1925 Hrozný turned his attention to Turkey, to unearth underneath Kültepe the ancient city of Kanesh as well as an Assyrian trading colony with vast



Necklace pendant in the shape of human face. Glass paste, h. 2,6 cm, b. 1,6 cm. Cyprus, probably Phoenician workmanship, 4. - 3. cent. BC.



Jar decorated in black paint on shoulder, h. 30 cm.
Tepe Giyan IV.

archives of cuneiform tablets. His finds, which met with worldwide response, enriched the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. Hrozný brought to Prague a small but representative collection of items from his Syrian excavations. As for Turkey, he had to satisfy himself with objects bought at local street markets. Hrozný's collection was long stored at the Department of the Ancient Near East of the Faculty of Arts of Prague's Charles University. After World War II it was divided between the Department, which has continued to care for the body of so called Cappadocian tablets (i.e. tablets written by As-

syrian merchants); and the National Gallery, which has kept the rest of the objects; while for its part, the Náprstek Museum has taken into custody Hrozný's personal documentation: his correspondence, photographs, slides, and diaries with excavation records. In view of the dispersal of Hrozný's finds in a large number of mutually distant venues, this archive provides a unique and indeed the most comprehensive insight into the so far sole Czech excavations in the Near East. It is supplemented by a small assortment of tablets from the bequest of **J. Petraš**, who accompanied the scholar on his travels.

The Náprstek Museum's collection was later enriched by products of the collecting pursuits of **J. Petrbo**k in Palestine; a body of tools and pottery from the bequest of **Ladislav Krušina-Černý**; a corpus of jewellery from northern Iran; an extensive and representative body of stone

industries from western Iraq; and an assortment of items from the estate of **Bedřich Forman**. Miscellaneous other artifacts, including cylinder seals and stamps, amulets, sculptures, funeral stelae, ornaments, cosmetic aids, and ceramic vessels, have been mostly contributed to the collection on an individual basis, as gifts or purchases made by the museum over the past few decades.

Hrozný's finds were publicly displayed to mark the centenary of his birth (an UNESCO anniversary) in 1979, in a major exhibition entitled „Bedřich Hrozný: Life and Work.“ The collection's various thematic sections were exhibited in smaller-scale shows, „Writing in Babylonia“ (1973); and „Seals: Ancient Attributes of Power“ (1993). An array of jewellery formed part of an exhibition of „Jewels and Decorations of the Non-European World“ (1990).



A finial. Bronze, h. 20,7 cm, b. 6,7 cm.
Luristan, 9. - 7. cent. BC.



Funeral stela of Achita with a baby in arms. Limestone, 52 × 36 cm. Palmyra, columbarium, 2. cent. AD.