



**Pospíšilová Dagmar and Klimtová Zdenka**  
***Otokar Feistmantel (1848–1891) and the Indian Collection***  
***of the Náprstek Museum, Prague.***  
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Reviewed by Anamika Pathak

India has attracted people from across the world for various reasons, from the commercial to the spiritual. People of all walks of life have come to India at different times, and often they have developed an interest in Indian art. Quite often they start collecting Indian art and have it sent to their country. That is how a lot of Indian art is preserved, studied and displayed outside the political boundaries of India, and it has spread interest in and love for Indian art over a much wider spectrum. Many museums in the United Kingdom and United States of America are known for their spectacular Indian art collections, and now the National Museum – Náprstek Museum in Prague, Czech Republic, also stands out for that part of its Indian collection which was gathered during his stay in India by the geologist and palaeontologist Otokar Feistmantel. His collection was presented at the first exhibition of Indian art and artifacts in 1884 in Prague. The recent publication by the museum of a catalogue on Feistmantel's Indian collection throws light on several interesting aspects of the Indian collection in the museum, provides information about the collector and his sponsors and so on. This collection of Indian art is significant in that it is the contribution of a single person, Otokar Feistmantel, who collected perhaps one of the largest collections of Indian art in this part of the world. Feistmantel spent just eight years (1875 to 1883) in India as a part of his job with the Geological Survey of India. During this time he put together a wonderful collection of Indian artifacts, which is now housed in the Náprstek Museum in Prague. The monograph under review, entitled *Otokar Feistmantel (1848–1891) and the Indian Collection of the Náprstek Museum, Prague*, is a well-researched, fully illustrated and nicely printed publication. This incredible collection has been studied and catalogued by the dedicated scholars Dagmar Pospíšilová and Zdenka Klimtová.

The monograph has been divided into three main sections. The first part deals with the Náprstek Museum collections and their history, the organisation of the collection, the cataloguing and processing of the oldest collections, the identification of items from Feistmantel's collection, its development and the gradual acquisition of the objects by the museum.

The second part of the monograph is dedicated to Dr. Feistmantel's personal life, his family, his work, his time in Kolkata and his travels around India, and his interest in and passion for Indian decorative art.

The third part of the monograph consists of a catalogue of some of the beautiful artifacts which Dr. Feistmantel purchased with great effort. In addition to the artifacts themselves, several types of information related to them such as a large quantity of notes, diaries, drawings and listings are very important, as they help to identify the artifacts.

The monograph looks at the bright young Czech officer and scholar, who was posted to India by the British government to serve the Geographical Survey of India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He was a trained geologist who had contributed to the field with important research papers, and he was duly rewarded. During his official field duties he developed an interest in Indian artifacts, and started collecting different types of artifacts, systematically documenting them, packing and sending the hundreds of items of everyday art to his home country. His passion for collecting artifacts, together with minute and relevant details regarding them, helps us to understand the artistic scenario of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Feistmantel wrote careful diaries about his various tours to the eastern and northern part of India. He meticulously prepared his notes, providing local names and minute details together with good line drawings, photographs and maps. All these make the entire collection more valuable.

This was the time of the Industrial Revolution, with many changes happening all over the world. It also affected everyday artifacts, from utilitarian objects to personal adornments made of different types of material; textile, metal, ivory, wood, leather, stone, grass etc. These artifacts were hand crafted with great care and passion. The detailed catalogue of hundred and fifty three carefully-selected artifacts of various materials shows the diverse nature of the collection. Some of the utilitarian artifacts are metalware from Punjab, Kashmir, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa. There are different types of arms from Northern India and Eastern India and Lahore in Pakistan and a variety of jewellery items from Eastern India - Orissa, and the Rajmahal Hills area in particular, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Multan in Pakistan. Similarly beautiful specimens of wood carving (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bangladesh, West Bengal, Punjab, Kashmir, Pakistan), papier-mâché (Kashmir) ivory and tortoiseshell (West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Western India) lacquerware and toys (Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Punjab, Kashmir), shoes, leather and basketry (West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) make the collection attractive. There are also a few examples of textiles (Kashmir, Multan, West Bengal, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh), pottery (Multan, Peshawar in Pakistan, Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh), musical instruments (West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh) marble inlay work (Uttar Pradesh), Kalighat paintings on paper, company paintings on mica and ivory, painted *ganjifa* cards painted on paper (Maharashtra, Delhi?), which show the variety and diversity of the collection.

Apart from the interesting narration of Dr. Feistmantel's journey and his collection, the monograph also provides brief information about the history of the Náprstek Museum, its collection and the origin of the collections, and writes with openness about the problems faced by the authors when cataloguing. Another significant aspect concerns the permanent exhibition of Asian culture in the Náprstek Museum at the end of the nineteenth century.

# Otokar Feistmantel (1848–1891)

and the Indian Collection of the Náprstek Museum, Prague

Dagmar Pospíšilová  
Zdenka Klímová



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A further important aspect of this monograph is the challenging task of collecting information from all the sources and matching it to the artifacts in a systematic manner. The work has been carried out with full commitment and dedication by the authors. The need for careful checking with the notes, diaries and correspondence of Feistmantel written in German, English and partly in Czech, archival records, administrative records and old inventories made the authors' work particularly challenging, and they have carried it out very successfully. The high-quality pictures make this illustrated monograph very beautiful, and the printing and layout make it even more attractive.

The monograph is accompanied by a CD-ROM, which presents the collection in its entirety, plus further archive materials such as photographs, drawings and also some of Feistmantel's correspondence with the Náprsteks (unfortunately only in Czech). The CD-ROM also contains a transcript of two diaries written in English, which show researchers what Feistmantel's original notes looked like. Congratulations to the authors for carrying out such an important task in such a systematic manner, making it very enjoyable to read this monograph.

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