



**JULIUS NESTLER AND THE “NESTLER COLLECTION”
IN THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM: NATIONALISM, OCCULTISM
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MAKING OF AMERICANIST
ARCHAEOLOGY IN CENTRAL EUROPE¹**

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ABSTRACT: The text aims to present the broader context and biography of Julius Nestler, an amateur archaeologist from Prague, who at the beginning of the twentieth century pursued excavations in the ruins of Tiahuanaco/Tiwanaku and brought to Prague a unique collection of about 3,600 pieces, now deposited in the Náprstek Museum in Prague. A biographical study of Nestler has revealed his wide interests. During the period of Czech-German competition in Bohemia he promoted “German science”. He cooperated with entrepreneurial groups in Germany that were trying to penetrate Latin America economically, as a Freemason actively capitalised on a transnational community of associates; and at the same time was an adherent to and propagator of occultism. All these facets of his personality shaped his activities in the recently-established field of Americanist archaeology.

KEY WORDS: Julius Nestler – Nestler collection – Náprstek Museum – American archaeology – Tiahuanaco/Tiwanaku

The depository of the Náprstek Museum shelters a unique collection: more than 3,600 pieces of archaeological and ethnographical artefacts from Bolivia assembled at the beginning of the twentieth century by the amateur archaeologist Julius Nestler. Documentation of the collection is mostly lacking, but investigation of the activities and publications of Nestler reveals an unexpectedly complicated story that puof his private endeavors into a broader context. In the period of Czech-German competition in Bohemia Nestler promoted “German science”; cooperated with entrepreneurial groups in Germany that were trying to penetrate Latin America economically; as a Freemason, actively capitalised on a transnational community of associates; and at the same time was an adherent to and propagator of occultism. All these facets of his personality

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shaped his activities in the recently established field of Americanist archaeology. Nestler's case seems to confirm clearly an often asserted opinion of historians of science: that scientific knowledge cannot be separated from the social context in which it is produced, and that scientific assertions are as much created as based upon the objective facts.

Early life and commencement of intellectual career

Julius Nestler was born in Prague on 19 June 1877,² the eldest son of Franz Nestler, a professor at a gymnasium (high school), and his wife Katharina, daughter of the writer and journalist Julius Anton Gundling. He thus came from a family of wide intellectual interests – Katharina Gundling was the first female in Austria-Hungary to obtain a university diploma – and also of markedly German national allegiances.³ In 1887 he entered the German gymnasium (high school) in Prague in the street Stephansgasse/Štěpánská, of which his father was a director, and studied there as an “outstanding pupil”.⁴ As Franz Nestler was transferred to Leitmaritz/Litoměřice five years later, Julius finished gymnasium in this city and in October 1895 registered at the German university of Prague.⁵ He studied Classical Philology and German language and literature, passing the state exam in 1899 and two years later qualifying as a high school teacher.⁶ During his studies he was a member of nationalist associations of German students, for example the “Reading and Oration Hall of German Students in Prague” (Lese- und Redehalle der deutschen Studenten in Prag).⁷ Afterwards, he launched himself into the teaching profession, first as an assistant teacher (*Supplent*), then as a regular professor of Greek, Latin and German at high schools in Karlsbad/Karlovy Vary, Böhmisches Leipa/Česká Lípa, and from 1906 in his old high school in

² See his biography in the Archive of Charles University (Archiv Univerzity Karlovy, hereafter AUK, sign. NZKG, k. 82); and the digitalized registration forms of the Prague police directorate in the National Archive of the Czech Republic, Národní archive (hereafter NA), fund Policejní ředitelství I, konškrípce, cart. 419; <http://digi.nacr.cz/prihlasky2/?session=a3d96d35d308ff7dfc3cb75262eafd1d340eaced74b80c432f328c18a357f&action=image&record=3>). This registration also gives the numbers and years of birth of his siblings, Lucian (1878), Magdalena (1880), Franz (1882) and Eugen (1887).

³ For the studies of Nestler's mother, see Gundling 1871; for Franz Nestler, see [anon.] 1916.

⁴ See *Neunter Jahresbericht des K. K. Staats-Obergymnasiums in Prag-Neustadt (Stephansgasse)*, 1889/90, p. 69; also the fund of the same gymnasium in the Archiv hlavního města Prahy [Archive of the Capital of Prague], the fund Německé státní gymnázium Praha II. - Nové Město, Štěpánská 20, no. NAD: 932, catalogues 1887/88-1891/9; for his subsequent studies see the documents of the gymnasium in Litoměřice, Státní oblastní archiv Litoměřice, pobočka Lovosice [State Regional Archive Litoměřice, branch Lovosice], the funds Něm.gymn.Ltm. Reifeprüfungsprotokolle 1897-1888, K. 779; Hauptprotokoll der Maturitäts-Prüfung im Schuljahre 1894/5, p. 13.

⁵ From 1882, as a result of increased Czech-German competition, the Charles-Ferdinand University was divided into two separate institutions, Czech and German. (Kavka 1962: 57-59).

⁶ AUK, sign. NZKG, k. 82.

⁷ Nestler mentioned his membership of the organization in his petition to the Society for Support of German Science, Art and Literature in Bohemia (Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Litteratur in Böhmen) of the year 1908. (The document preserved in the Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, hereafter AAV, fund Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Böhmen, box 35, file Nestler J; for this particular organization, see Čermák 2006.)

Prague in Stephansgasse.⁸ During all these years he pursued literary and historical studies. The list of his published texts clearly documents the rapid development of his interests, from linguistic and literary analyses to the study of mystics, first in Classical times, then in the modern period.⁹

The popularity of mysticism and occultism all over Europe throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century stemmed from efforts to reconcile recent scientific findings with religious views¹⁰ and to present a holistic view of the world that would confer on humans a sense of participation in a total, meaningful order. There were, however, also local specifics. In Germany and Austro-Hungary, occultism combined with German nationalism and Aryan racial theories, partly borrowed from the Theosophy of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, in order to justify the idea of German world rule in the context of the rapid urban and industrial changes in society brought by modernisation, as well as the conflicts of Slavic and German interests in a multi-national Austro-Hungarian state. Therefore, German occultism was characterized by notions of elitism and purity, by a sense of mission and by millenarian visions of a felicitous (national) future. The ideas and symbols of ancient theocracies, secret societies and the mystical gnosis of Rosicrucianism, Cabbalism, and Freemasonry were all woven into an ideology celebrating the Aryan/German race. In some respects, the German and Austrian occultists shared their visions and projects, but in others they diverged, due to the complicated political situation in the new German Empire and the reconstituted Austria-Hungary (Goodrick-Clarke 2006).

Nestler responded to all these impulses, mixing in his texts pronounced German nationalism with an interest in various branches of occult disciplines. As was characteristic of his life-long career, in this early phase he was already able to find powerful patrons. He participated in the founding of the Austrian Astrological Society, established under the patronage of Imperial Councillor Count Alfred von Sauer-Csaky; the members of the society were prominent Austrian advocates, industrialists and artists. He delivered its first two public lectures, on the topic of “Lost Atlantis in the light of modern science” and on the “History of astrology”, in October 1908 in Vienna. ([anon.] 1908/9: 476) Two years later he translated into German – and, in fact, substantially reworked – an influential text by the French physician, Theosoph and propagator of Hermetism, Gerard Encausse/Papus, on Kabbalah (Papus 1910).

The American Atlantis

Maybe it was through the topic of the lost Atlantis that Nestler became interested in American archaeology. After becoming a member of the Viennese Geographical Society in 1907, the next year he joined the French Société des Américanistes, a prominent

⁸ See the yearly overviews of these institutions for the relevant years: *Jahresbericht des K. K. Staats-Obergymnasiums in Böhm. Leipa*; *Jahres-Bericht über das K. K. Staats-Gymnasium mit deutscher Unterrichtssprache in Prag, Neustadt, Stephansgasse*.

⁹ Among others, Nestler 1905a, Nestler 1905b, Nestler 1907/8, Nestler 1908/9, Nestler 1908 (a handbook of chiromanthly, that is, analysing the character of a person and predicting the future by “reading” palms). Last but not least, he translated into German the autobiography of the French writer Nicolas Rétif de la Bretonne (1905) and a book on military strategy by Frederic Natusch Maude (1907).

¹⁰ As one of the articles in the German *Zentralblatt für Occultism* stated, “the research of Radium had rehabilitated the old Alchymists.” ([anon.] 1908/9: 476)

association of scientists interested in archaeology, history and anthropology. As was the case of his participation in occultist associations, so in the field of Americanistics the young teacher from Prague could rely on patrons and advocates. He was recommended for membership in the French Americanist Society by Ernest Théodore Hamy, then president of the society, and Henry Vignaud, who replaced Hamy in the same function.¹¹ It is not clear how he gained access to them; probably via letters of recommendation from influential public personalities in Bohemia and Austria. Interestingly enough, he kept his two areas of activity strictly separate, never mentioning his membership of occultist associations when communicating with scientists, and vice versa (Nestler 1911).

In September 1908 Nestler took part in the proceedings of the 16th World Congress of Americanists in Vienna. Of his two presentations, the first dealt with the discovery of a “prehistoric idol” in Nicaragua, on the basis of written and pictorial information sent to Nestler by the Austrian consul in Nicaragua, another proof of his wide-reaching contacts (Nestler 1910a). The second summarised information on the famous archaeological locality Tiahuanaco¹² in Bolivia, published in previous years by the English traveler Clements Markham and especially by the prominent German archaeologist active in South America, Max Uhle. There was nothing original in this lecture, but what was important was that Nestler explicitly announced his decision to follow in the footsteps of his famous predecessors and himself pursue research into Tiahuanaco, as a faithful “pupil of director Uhle” (Nestler 1910b: 403).

From 1896 Max Uhle had conducted fieldwork in the Andes, first under the auspices of the Royal Ethnographic Museum of Berlin, then the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California, and finally as director of the National Archaeological and Historical Museum in Lima, of which he became the first director in 1906, effectively laying the framework for the archaeology of the Andean region.¹³ The monumental two-volume work by Uhle on Tiahuanaco – published even before his departure for America on the basis of the study of artefacts in Berlin, but in spite of this enjoying enormous popularity in Germany (Uhle; Stübel 1893) – might have provoked Nestler’s interest in American archaeology. As for the locality itself, the picturesque ruins of Tiahuanaco near the shore of Lake Titicaca had become well known to Europeans, thanks to colonial chronicles and later reports of travelers and amateur archaeologists.¹⁴ Various speculations concerning the origins of American Indian cultures and humanity in general were also attached to it (besides the intellectual competition between the Peruvian and the Bolivian archaeologists as to the pertinence of the site to the scheme of historical development of their respective nation states). This was probably another motivation for Nestler to focus his interest in this direction.

¹¹ See the list of members in *Mitteilungen des k. k. geographischen Gesellschaft*, 1908; the application of Nestler for membership in Société des Américanistes in “Actes de la société”, *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 5 (1908), pp. 104, 106.

¹² Even though the present-day official spelling of the name of the site is Tiwanaku (“Tiahuanaco” being used for the neighboring village, after which the site was named, because the name by which the ancient city was known to its inhabitants is unknown today), I decided for the present text to keep to the older version, the one which appears in the sources I have been using.

¹³ For the life story and bibliography of Uhle, as well as a later evaluation of his work, see Kaulicke 1998; Rowe 1954.

¹⁴ For the site and the history of its explorations, see Ponce Sanginés 1977, Ponce Sanginés 1995.

While preparing for the journey to Bolivia, Nestler established written contact with Uhle. From the sole preserved letter of 1908 it is clear that there has been some previous correspondence. In this particular letter, Nestler thanked Uhle for publications he had sent him, mentioned his diligence in studying Spanish and announced his departure for America, promising to endeavour to “become your successor at Tiahuanaco, the more so, in that I can hope that the Bolivian government will make it possible for me to establish a museum in Tiahuanaco, an image of your museum in Lima.” Nestler also asked Uhle for letters of recommendation to the authorities in La Paz and to the “universities of North America”, stressing that he was already able to gather considerable funds for the expedition, altogether 20,000 German Marks.¹⁵

This reference provides a clue to understanding Nestler’s method of procedure. He applied to various institutions for financial support. In a letter of 1908 to the Hamburg Ethnological Museum he promised to deliver artefacts to the museum in exchange for financial assistance for the journey to Bolivia and bolstered his petition with names of prominent scholars – besides Uhle, also the already mentioned German linguist and specialist in Mexican prehistory Eduard Seler and an ethnologist resident in Buenos Aires, Robert Lehmann-Nitsche,¹⁶ as well as Carl Stumpf, a psychologist employed at the University of Berlin. In this case at least, Nestler’s request was denied; we do not know if he applied to other European museums.¹⁷ He also asked the Austrian Ministry for Religion and Education for a stipend, but again the results cannot be currently ascertained. It is, however, interesting that in his presentation in Vienna Nestler explicitly linked this request for funding with his alleged endeavour to “found a permanent Austrian institute for Americanist research and, if I can use such a word, specifically South Americanist research in Bolivia” (Nestler 1910b: 403).

¹⁵ Letter from Julius Nestler to Max Uhle, Prague, 22-VI-1908, preserved in the holdings of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Berlin (hereafter IAI), as part of the great fund of Uhle’s inheritance (fund Nachlass Uhle, no. N-0035, b252). The fact that there were other letters exchanged, with Uhle and with other prominent Americanists of this time, is proved by the petition of Nestler to the Czech Academy for Sciences (which will be mentioned below). To bolster his request for funding, Nestler quoted verbatim from the letters he allegedly received from Uhle (dated 11-XII-1907), from German archaeologist and linguist Eduard Seler (23-VII-1907), Franz Heger, the director of the director of the anthropological department of the Museum of Vienna (26-II-1908), and the Joseph Florimont Herzog von Loubat, president of honour of the Société des Américanistes of Paris (8-V-1908), all of them speaking highly of his project. (The request is preserved in AAV, fund ČAVU, box 69, no. 116)

¹⁶ There is also a letter by Nestler to Lehmann-Nitsche preserved in the legacy of the latter in the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (IAI N.0070 b1297). The contents of the letter are not of much interest, Nestler thanks Lehmann-Nitsche for the sending of publications. It is merely another proof of the extensive correspondence network Nestler maintained. Another is the list of letters commenting positively on his research project in Bolivia which he attached to his petitions to the Society for Support of German Science, Art and Literature in Bohemia and the Czech Academy for Sciences, Literature and Arts. Apart from extracts from the letters by Franz Heger, Max Uhle and Eduard Seler, Nestler also referred in this petition to his alleged correspondence with Joseph Florimont Herzog von Loubat, president of honour of the French Americanist Society. (AAV, fund Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Böhmen, box 35, file Nestler J)

¹⁷ This letter of 10 April 1908 with a copy of the negative reply of the museum curator, dated 28 April 1908, is preserved in the archive of the Hamburg Ethnological Museum; a copy was sent by an employee of this museum, Wolfgang Haberland, at the request of the curator of the Náprstek Museum, Josef Kandert, in 1989, and is deposited in the documentation to the Nestler Collection. (Živá registratura NpM [Living Registry of the Náprstek Museum, hereafter NpM], fund Spisy dárců NpM, sl. Nestler, ff. 26-28, together with the correspondence between Kandert and Haberland, f. 45).

At the same time there was a stipend from the “Society of German Researchers” (Bund Deutscher Forscher), to whom Nestler made a promise to defend German – that is, not Austrian – interests in America;¹⁸ and an unsuccessful petition to the Society for Support of German Science, Art and Literature in Bohemia (Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Böhmen). Simultaneously, Nestler applied also to the Czech Academy for Sciences, Literature and Arts (Česká akademie pro vědy, literaturu a umění), a markedly nationalistic Czech institution. Here, of course, he simply accentuated the necessity of exploring “the world famous ruins” of Tiahuanaco, without hinting to the nationalist question. (But as for the corpus of the petitions, the two are almost identical.)¹⁹

In short, Nestler was capable of manoeuvring within the various nationalist and intellectual discourses of the times and making use of them for his personal activities. He never asked the Náprstek Museum for subsidy, or at least there is no documentation of such a request in the museum archive. But he was able to gain funding from some rich entrepreneurs from Bohemia and elsewhere, as is confirmed by the list of benefactors included in his article about Tiahuanaco, published in 1913, which will be analysed later; and, last but not least, from German occultists striving to prove their theories.²⁰

In October 1910 Nestler obtained a positive response to his request to the Austrian Ministry of Education for a “holiday for scientific purposes”.²¹ But as early as June of this year he was residing in La Paz, and accompanied around Tiahuanaco by Austrian and German delegates of the 17th Congress of Americanists who, after the termination of sessions taking place in Buenos Aires, set out for an excursion to Bolivia and Peru. Among them were Eduard Seler and Franz Heger, director of the anthropological department of the Museum of Vienna. ([Heger] 1910: 62-63; Seler 1912; Nestler had, according to his own assertion, maintained written contact with both of them in previous years and shared with them his project for excavations in Tiahuanaco.) According to the Argentinian ethnologist Debenedetti, the visit was of a very official character, and the scholars and diplomats were escorted to the site by the Bolivian minister of foreign affairs. Still, the experience was disquieting, as the locality had been greatly damaged by uncontrolled excavations and the plundering of stones for the construction of roads and buildings, even though as early as 1906 the National Congress had passed a law that named the Bolivian nation as the rightful owner of the ruins of

¹⁸ At least, an article by a German journalist, who praised the work of Nestler in Tiahuanaco, mentioned that a financial aide was rendered to Nestler, motivated by patriotic sentiments and the fact that scientific research was believed to open the way for economic and political dominance of Germany. (Mandel 1910: 25)

¹⁹ It is paradoxical that both documents ended up in the same archive, namely, the Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The request to the Czech Academy was refused because of the amount asked for, and the fact that the Academy had recently helped to finance the voyage of Alois Musil to Africa. (AAV, fund ČAVU, box 69, no. 116, and fund Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Böhmen, box 35, file Nestler J. On the personality of Alois Musil, explorer and theologian, see for example the special issue of the journal *Archiv orientální. Quarterly Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 1995, 63:4)

²⁰ Nestler's departure for Bolivia, in explicit connection with the search for Atlantis, was mentioned in the German *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus* in an article published only under the initials, which asked “all friends of German scientific work” to support Nestler's endeavor; it confirmed that the Dresden branch of German Theosophical Society had already contributed to the project ([O.Ms.] 1911/12: 611)

²¹ *Jahres-Bericht über das K.K. Staats-Gymnasium mit deutscher Unterrichtssprache in Prag, Neustadt, Stephengasse, für das Schuljahr 1910-1911*, p. 30.

Tiahuanaco, prohibiting the export of objects from this as well as other sites. (Debenedetti 1912: 641, Yates 2011: 293)

Such prohibitions, however, did not hinder Nestler, who stayed in Bolivia after the official visit was finished and pursued extensive excavations around Tiahuanaco. Their traces remained until the present day and, according to prominent Bolivian scholar Carlos Ponce Saginés, prove that Nestler was pursuing his “research” in the most primitive way, removing buried objects with no effort to map their stratigraphic context (Sagines 1995, 123-124). Nestler was also buying artefacts from the Aymara villagers in the vicinity, both archaeological and ethnographical. Precisely because of this, there is a possibility that not all the artefacts in the collection are authentic. In his report from the excursion in 1910 Salvadore Debenedetti remarked sarcastically (without mentioning any names): “Unemployed boys were selling to travelers painted shards, collected from the immense pile of broken vases and jars that covers the place. [...] One little rascal was offering for sale a piece of broken candlestick from the church, [...] and another from a telegraph pole. [...] One excursionist amassed this material carefully and in a short while greatly increased his collections of archaeological material from Tiahuanaco.” (Debenedetti 1912: 645) That in the Andean region the tradition of forgery of artifacts was old and widespread documented also one of the early German scientific travelers, Johann-Jakob Tschudi, who was convinced that „not one in ten“ Andean pottery vessels deposited in the German collections was authentic (Tschudi 1884: 42).

Networks of patrons and sympathizers

How was Nestler able to export such a voluminous collection from the country in spite of the legal obstacles remains undocumented; but, undoubtedly, he used some of his political connections. It is strange that in some of the texts that comment on his activities he is persistently addressed as “Austrian consul”, even though he never actually occupied such position (Among others Loukotka 1958: 333; Ponce Sanginés 1995: 124).²² Sometime in 1912 he returned to Prague, assuming his duties at the gymnasium in September of the same year. But as early as January 1913 he was on another long-term leave, with the purpose of “working out the collections acquired during the study stay in South America”. He returned to teaching only in 1916/17, for 10 hours per week, that is, about half of the regular workload of a gymnasium teacher, and from the next year disappeared from the yearly report of the school,²³ devoting his time exclusively to his studies. He unsuccessfully requested financial subsidy from the Society for Support of German Science, Art and Literature in Bohemia to publish a book about Tiahuanaco,²⁴ but summarized the results of his stay in Bolivia in an article published in the journal of the Viennese Geographical Society, his best-known and until

²² In his petition to the Czech Academy of Sciences, Nestler not only advertised his intimate friendship with certain Max von Vacano, director of military academy in Bolivian capital La Paz, but also his “agreement” with Bolivian government that he would become a director of the newly built museum at the site of Tiahuanaco. (AAV, fund ČAVU, box 69, no. 116)

²³ The registry of all state employees of Austro-Hungary (*Hof- und Staats- Handbuch*) noted by his name “on leave” (*beurlaubt*). (*Jahres-Bericht über das K.K. Staats-Gymnasium mit deutscher Unterrichtssprache in Prag, Neustadt, Stephengasse, für das Schuljahr 1912-13*, p. 12, see also the reports for next years.)

²⁴ AAV, fund Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Böhmen, box 35, file Nestler J. Interesting is that Nestler in this request already mentioned concrete publishing houses, „Hiersemann in Leipzig or Hartleben in Vienna“.

today cited text. Most of it repeated opinions on Tiahuanaco given by other authors. But Nestler also voiced his theory, already contained in a presentation in Vienna in 1908 – that is, even before visiting the site – about the existence of a subterranean city, “another Tiahuanaco”. The renowned scholars of the time, Max Uhle among them, refuted such idea straightforwardly.²⁵ Still, it has been defended by numerous advocates who eagerly referred to Nestler’s excavations.²⁶ Besides, Nestler deduced – from the finding of a stone plate with a fragment of relief “resembling the relief on the famous Gate of the Sun” – that there was a second gate, symmetrically located on the other side of Tiahuanaco,²⁷ and he speculated on the antiquity of Tiahuanaco, “one of the oldest cultures on the globe”, surpassing even Troy or other cities of the Classical world.

It is interesting that the article opened with an enumeration of Nestler’s patrons and sponsors, among them Gustav Schreiner, a politician representing the interests of Germans in Bohemia and a great opponent of the Czech patriots;²⁸ Count Johann von Liechtenstein, again a politician with a markedly “Austrian” allegiance, and Johann Huemer, a high official at the Ministry of Education. Besides the politicians, Nestler alluded to Leo Reinisch, an Egyptologist and Africanist at Vienna University; David Heinrich Müller, Orientalist and Hebraist; Swiss philologist Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke; but also Baron von Rothschild and the industrial magnate Eduard Jakob Weinmann from northern Bohemia, renowned for his philanthropic activities (Weinmann’s son Edmund attended the high school in Litoměřice at the same time as Julius Nestler, so this acquaintance probably gave rise not only to financial aid, but also the first link in the

²⁵ The source was the manuscript that a certain Bartolomé Cervantes, a canon of Chuquisaca, allegedly gave to a Jesuit priest by the name of Oliva sometime in the 19th century, referring to a “ruined city”, of which no judgement could be made as to the size, “because nearly all was built underground”. (Dick 1915: 6) For example, Georges Courty (1910), another advocate of the same theory, mentioned the negative opinion of Max Uhle on the topic, summarized in Uhle’s article for *El comercio de Lima*, 27-II-1910. Courty came to Tiahuanaco as a member of the scientific expedition of Georges de Créqui-Montfort and Sénéchal de la Grange in 1903, but remained even after their departure – however, he had to leave after a conflict with Bolivian government with respect to the collection of artefacts he planned to take out of the country. (Sanginés 1995: 109-110.) Debenedetti mentioned in his already quoted report of the official visit in Tiahuanaco that the theory of the subterranean city was discussed during the excursion, but most of those present agreed that in other parts of America such subterranean structures were proved to be just warehouses. (Debenedetti 1912: 642)

²⁶ Manuel González de la Rosa, director of the National Library in Lima, presented his opinions on the topic in Vienna in 1908, even though he never personally visited Tiahuanaco (González de la Rosa 1910). Markham 1912: 24-25, Beuchat 1918: xiii-xiv and Dick 1915b: 6 expressly quoted Nestler, as did Hörbiger and Fauth [1913]: 344, authors of the rather influential “World Ice Theory” of the origin of the cosmos, popular even after World War II.

²⁷ Nestler 1913: 228, also plate X.1. This opinion was commented on favorably by various reviewers of the article: for example Martin 1913; Bates 1913; Wickware 1914: 698.

²⁸ The journal *Národní listy* wrote after his death (16-VI-1922, p. 2) that there “hasn’t been a more fervent Germaniser” among Austrian politicians. There must have been at least some communication between Schreiner and Nestler, as Nestler tried to bolster his request for by the financial support by the Society for Support of German Science, Art and Literature in Bohemia, for publication of a book about Tiahuanaco, in 1913, by attaching to his petition a letter of recommendation by Schreiner. (AAV, fund Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur in Böhmen, box 35, file Nestler J.)

chain of influential contacts).²⁹ The support from Jewish entrepreneurs is interesting, in the view of the efforts in the 1860s and 1870s of the Jewish population in Austro-Hungary to share in public life. Middle- and upper-class Jews during this period mostly entered the German associations and defended the German national cause (Cohen 2006: 58), hence their common interest with Nestler. There were many Jews in the “German Casino”, the social club of German entrepreneurs and intellectuals of Prague in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, of which Nestler was also a member. Bizarre as it may seem, archaeological research in Bolivia did play some role in the nationalist clashes within Austro-Hungary. The nationality and international renown of the scholars were used in the verbal clashes on the home front and helped in gaining prestige over opponents.³⁰ The interest in American prehistory also conformed to the contemporaneous ideology of the German bourgeoisie, which based its self-esteem just as much on economic prosperity and political power as on its humanist education, an inherent part of which was the general history of mankind.³¹ Besides, as testifies one of the articles in *Der Forscher* of 1911, published in order to motivate the would-be donators to Nestler, he promised to bring back to them, as a token of his gratitude, the pre-Colombian “souvenirs”.³²

But there were also other supporters. In 1906 Nestler published an article about Argentina, “land for immigration”, praising its potential for absorbing German outmigration (Nestler 1906). It seems that he made acquaintance with protagonists of colonizing activities of Germany and Austria in South America. At this period, the scientific expeditions were generally believed to be useful tools to break the ground for further penetration. An article in the German magazine *Der Forscher*, which in 1910 commented on Nestler’s endeavors in Bolivia, alluded to “the common knowledge” that the United States and Great Britain gained an important footing by aiding their archaeologists; and that, “when one day the German Capitalists come ahead of the [North Americans] in Bolivia, [...] they can build upon the already existing friendly relations [with local government] established by Professor Nestler”.³³ The archaeological work of Nestler was described in one short paragraph at the beginning of the article.

²⁹ Nestler also thanked the Austrian envoys in Argentina, Peru and Bolivia, the German Scientific Union of Buenos Aires, and the Freemasonry lodges “Harmonie” and “Amicitia” of Prague, even though without specifying that these two “associations” were Freemason. (Nestler 1913: 226-227) For Weinmann see Kaiser 2000.

³⁰ For example, an article by Karl Mandel in *Zentralblatt of Deutscher Forschung* of 1910 presented Max Uhle as *Deutschböhme*, that is, “German Bohemian” (he was born in Dresden, but there is no proof that the family of this archaeologist came from Bohemia [Mandel 1910: 24]). Nestler was often alluded to as “a German from Prague”.

³¹ The German middle classes were fascinated in this period by exotic and distant civilizations, not only in Classical Antiquity, but also the more “primitive” civilizations. Ethnological museums were established in most big cities of Germany. At the same time, this approach made it possible for the German intellectuals and their bourgeois supporters to maintain a sense of their own superiority, caused by technological advancement and developments in the field of sciences, as revealed by the paternalistic tone of the travelogues and excavation reports. See Manchard 1996; Penny – Bunzl 2003; Gängner 2006.

³² *Der Forscher: Illustriertes Zentralblatt für Deutsche Forschung*, 2, no. 8, 1911, p. 123.

³³ The alleged letter of Nestler alluded to his “intimate friendship” with both the president of Bolivia Ismael Montes (his first term of office was between 1904–1909, second 1913–17) and “those who seek to replace him in the office”, and promised to possible investors an intervention that would assure the granting of all necessary concessions. (Mandel 1910: 26)

But, quoting from Nestler's letter "to the publisher of this journal", the article evaluated the economic potential of the region, the possible benefits from the construction of a railroad,³⁴ and the transcontinental connection of Atlantic and Pacific oceans through the Amazonas river, from the exploitation of "mines rich in ore", rubber forests and fields of sugarcane, cocoa and tobacco, making use of the cheap workforce of local Indians. On subsequent pages the costs for the enterprise were calculated and great potential gains enumerated, concluding with the repeated instigation to all "true Germans" to follow up, adding "another link to the growing chain" of German enterprises all over the world. "For this goal: Germans, go on!" (Mandel 1910: 25-26).

The Nestler Collection

Nestler himself assumed the same nationalistic tone in his efforts to sell his collections after returning from Bolivia. He sent another letter to the Ethnological Museum in Hamburg, offering all of the artefacts for 150,000 German Marks or the most valuable ones separately, such as stone sculptures (among them the already mentioned fragment of the alleged second gate of Tiahuanaco), or gold pieces. He also suggested that, if the museum itself did not dispose of such sums, the "rich Senators and Burghers of Hamburg" could support the case, for the greater good of assisting the further intellectual growth of the German nation. Nevertheless, the offer was rejected by the directorship of the Museum.³⁵

At the same time (in December 1913), Nestler offered his collection to the Ethnological Museum in Vienna. In this case, the Museum agreed to buy some artefacts, and an amount of 300 crowns was transferred to Nestler – surprisingly, to London, even though there were no previous contacts of Nestler with England – via the secretariat of Baron Rothschild, named among the sponsors of Nestler also in his article for the journal of the Geographical Society. But it seems the artefacts were never delivered to the museum in Vienna and there is no reference to Nestler in its inventories; all the other objects which are labelled under Tiahuanaco are clearly related to other collectors.³⁶ We do not know if Nestler tried with some other institutions or private collectors, nor how many objects he was able to sell.³⁷ a detailed reconnaissance in various European museums would be needed. Certainly the bulk remained in his hands. After the end of World War I, Nestler resumed his efforts to sell it. This time, however, he aimed at the government of the newly founded Czechoslovak Republic.

There is an interesting mention in the text by Čestmír Loukotka, who after World War II presented Nestler's story to the Americanist Congress in Copenhagen, that the

³⁴ It is rather an irony that for the recently complemented railroad that connected Huaqui, on the shore of Lake Titicaca, with the Bolivian capital La Paz, the stone monuments from Tiahuanaco were used, causing considerable and irreparable destruction of the ruins. (Ballivián 1910, viii)

³⁵ Letter of Nestler, 22-VII-1912, and response dated 4-VII-1913, copies in NpM, fund Spisy dárců NpM, sl. Nestler, ff. 34-37.

³⁶ I would like to thank Dr. Claudia Augustat, the curator of the South American Collection of the Museum, for rendering me the information and the copies of documents.

³⁷ For example, the letter to the Museum in Hamburg mentions five stone heads, probably from the walls of the „Sunken Courtyard“ in Tiahuanaco, but the Náprstek Museum only holds two of them. Interestingly enough, Nestler did not offer his collections to the ethnographic museum of Berlin, in spite of the fact that he repeatedly referred to scientist from Berlin who allegedly admired his work. (The inexistence of whatsoever document by Nestler in the archive of the museum, or donation/sale of any artifact by him to the institution, was confirmed by Dr. Anja Zenner.)

efforts to sell artefacts were motivated by “disagreement in family”, without further specification (Loukotka 1958: 333).) Whether for this or any other reason, in December 1920 Nestler exhibited his collection in the Museum of Decorative Arts (Uměleckoprůmyslové museum) in Prague. The event was widely promoted, being inaugurated by a lecture by Vojtěch Suk, a prominent Czech physician and anthropologist known for his travels in Africa at the turn of the century. The report of the curators of the Museum for the year 1920 stated that it was “not only the first exhibition of this kind on the territory of Czechoslovakia, but [...] in Europe,”³⁸ and the review in *Národní listy* noted that for the first time Czechoslovaks interested in American art did not need to resort to “foreign museums”.³⁹ The collection was thus advertised to the public and the authorities notified of its value. Karel Herain, a specialist in applied art and future director of the Museum of Decorative Arts, stated very clearly in his comment: “It would be of great scientific and cultural benefit if this collection could be salvaged for the republic through purchase by the state.” (Herain 1921) In fact, the evaluations were not exaggerated. Given the poor accessibility of Tiahuanaco and the early attempts of the Bolivian government to prevent the export of archaeological artefacts, there was and is hardly a similar collection in European museums.

And Nestler achieved his goal. As early as July of the next year, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education and National Awareness bought the whole collection, supplemented with Nestler’s books on the old civilizations and ethnography of South America, for the considerable sum of 100,000 crowns in yearly installments of 4040 crowns.⁴⁰ It was taken over by the State Archaeological Institute and then deposited in the Náprstek Museum which, however, lacked the personnel for its proper treatment. Only in 1935 could the director of Náprstek Museum, Jiří Müller, instigate its inventarisation. After World War II, the linguist and curator at the museum Čestmír Loukotka pursued a further study of the collection, presenting the results at the 32nd Congress of Americanists in Copenhagen in 1956.⁴¹ But his work was complicated by the fact that there were no notes as to the location and context of the findings. In 1962, apparently on the an impulse from the Bolivian side, the then Czechoslovak ministry of education and culture made inquiry as to the contents and importance of the collection.⁴² But the Bolivian government never made any effort to reclaim it. In 1981 another of the curators at Náprstek Museum, Václav Šolc, announced his intention to publish an “extensive sample” of the Nestler collection, but apparently the plan was never realized (Šolc 1981, 227).

We have no precise information concerning Nestler’s last years, but as far as can be judged from the fragmentary evidence, after successfully selling his collection, he abandoned the topic of American archaeology and dedicated himself fully to occultism,

³⁸ Excerpts of the reports in NpM, fund Spisy dárců NpM, sl. Nestler, s.f.

³⁹ *Národní listy* [National Newspaper], 16-XII-1920, 5.

⁴⁰ Copy of a letter from the Ministry of Education to Nestler, 21-VII-1921, in NpM, fund Spisy dárců NpM, sl. Nestler, f. 16; copies of other documents to the transaction dispersed in the same fund. Nestler’s library was to be handed over to the ethnographer Karel Chotek, who, however, was at this time employed at the University of Bratislava. We have been unable to ascertain what happened to the books.

⁴¹ Loukotka 1958; see also Ballestreros Gaibrois 1948 – this is only an abstract, as the texts of the papers presented at the Congress were lost during the Spanish Civil War.

⁴² Živá registratura NpM [Living Registry of the Náprstek Museum, hereafter NpM], fund Spisy dárců NpM, sl. Nestler, II.1.2., f. 7, response of the museum curator ff. 8–9.

which experienced great expansion in the interwar period. Interestingly enough, in this field too he abandoned his previous German nationalism and associated instead with Czech occultists, apparently without any disagreements, while his publishing in German periodicals ceased altogether. He belonged to the circle of Hermetists who in 1927 founded the society *Universalia* and even partly translated Pappus' treatise on Cabbalah into Czech.⁴³ We do not know the precise date of Nestler's death. He died in Prague sometime in the 1930s, most probably in 1936.⁴⁴

From this brief summary of Nestler's life and activities it is clear that the voyage to Tiahuanaco was no more than an episode, subordinate to his principal interests in the field of occult sciences. There was also an undoubtable amount of greed in his efforts, of using the pretext of scientific research for raising funds from institutional and private sponsors and then converting its results into more money. The Bolivian archaeologist Carlos Ponce Sanginés repeatedly accused Nestler of committing "cultural piracy".⁴⁵ Certainly his methods and ways of interpreting archaeological material would not stand up to the standards of the present day, not to mention the strong nationalist colouring of his endeavours. But in spite of all this, Nestler made his contribution in the period when first-hand contact with the American continent was extremely rare for the inhabitants of Central Europe, with all the fallacies pushing forward the development of the discipline of non-European archaeology in the region and propagating it among the general public.

⁴³ In the 1990s fragment of the manuscript of the translation was found in the attic of a Prague villa, probably deposited there by Nestler's inheritors (Nakonečný 2009: 73). However, at present it was not possible to locate the manuscript.

⁴⁴ The year 1936 as date of Nestler's death was given, without further commentary, in Eliáš 1938: 76. The registers of deaths of Prague parishes for this period are still not accessible to public. But Nestler was certainly dead in 1937, when the Náprstek Museum bought from his inheritors the manuscript of the presentation "Die Bedeutung der Ruinen von Tiahuanaco" for the Viennese Congress of Americanists. (Manuscript deposited in the library of the Náprstek Museum, sign. LXXXLA17)

⁴⁵ Ponce Sanginés 1995, 123-124; Ponce Sanginés 1971: 148. See also Sagárnaga Meneses 1985: 4.

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AUK Archiv Univerzity Karlovy (Archive of Charles University, Prague)
IAI Ibero-Americanisches Institut (Berlin)
NA Národní archiv (National Archive of the Czech Republic, Prague)
NpM Náprstkovo museum (Náprstek Museum, Prague)

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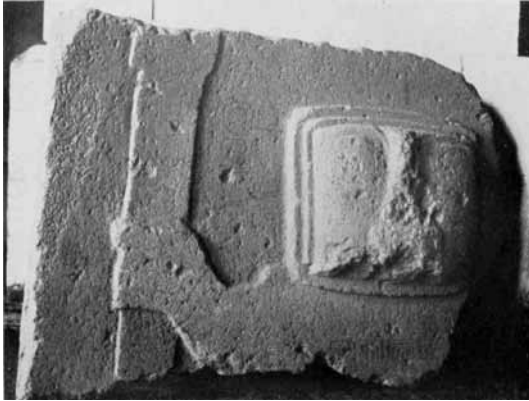


Fig. 1: Fragment of stone relief, found by Nestler in Tiahuanaco and allegedly being part of the second gate, mirroring the famous Gate of the Sun.

The photograph accompanied Nestler's article in the journal of Geographical Society of Vienna (1913).



Fig. 2: Stone artifact found by Nestler in Tiahuanaco, photograph attached to his petition to the Society for Support of German Science, Art and Literature in Bohemia to publish a book about Tiahuanaco in 1913. Both artifacts are currently in the possession of the Náprstek Museum.