

THE *INRŌ* COLLECTION IN THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT: Small several-compartment cases called *inrō* were a supplement to Japanese men's clothing during the Edo period and were used to store various small items (especially personal stamps). Decorated with various techniques, such as decorating with gold, nacre (mother of pearl), and inlaying with metals, they gradually became a decorative accessory for Japanese clothing. In the 19th century *inrō* became favorite collector's items in Europe. This article deals with *inrō* collection in the Náprstek Museum, its origin, but also with the techniques of *inrō* production.

KEYWORDS: *inrō* – box – stamp case – Japanese lacquer – Edo period – Japan

The second half of the 19th century brought a growing interest in Japan and its culture. This interest, caused by the end of Japan's policy of isolation in 1868 and the opening of the country towards foreigners, aroused in Western society a desire for a deeper knowledge of the country, its culture, and Japanese items. Japanese influences were reflected in art in the form of Japan-inspired art, whether it was painting inspired by Japanese woodblock prints or literature² where popular stories were inspired by the Far East. Although the Czech lands did not directly participate in Oriental trade and their contact with foreign countries was not as widespread as that of the colonial powers, the romanticizing view and interest in Japan also penetrated the Czech society. In 1884, Julius Zeyer published his novel *Gompachi a Komurasaki*,³ which was inspired by the Japanese story of Gompachi's unhappy love for the beautiful courtesan Komurasaki, whose love story is a popular theme in the Japanese kabuki theatre. Zeyer drew his theme for the work partly from translated works, Zeyer himself mentioning Mitford's⁴ (1837–1916) stories.⁵ Other information was drawn from books about Japan available in Prague and Japanese items. It was in especially in Europe that the unusual decor of Japanese objects influenced Zeyer's contemporaries and evoked the idea of Japan as an exotic or nearly even fairy-tale-like country.⁶ Interest increased even more when the first travellers began to travel to Japan and publish their experiences in books or in the

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2 Abou-Jaoude 2016, pp. 57–82.

3 Zeyer 1884.

4 A. B. Mitford was a British aristocrat and diplomat who lived in Japan in the 1860s.

5 Mitford 1871.

6 'Japan, the strange and fantastic, which speaks to us so vividly and colourfully from harpoons, embroidered gauzes and atlases, screens and curtains, from fans, from lacquerware painted with gold, from vases and bowls made of fine enamel...'; Zeyer 1884, p. 8.

form of lectures.⁷ Associated with the Náprstek Museum were, for example, Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860–1932), a Czech traveller who visited Japan in 1896, or Josef Kořenský (1847–1938). One of the first travellers to visit Japan in 1876 was Erwin Dubský (1836–1909), a frigate captain. He then exhibited the items he acquired during his travels to the public at his chateau in Lysice.⁸

Japan, which had practiced strict isolation since 1630s,⁹ was not completely unknown to Europeans. Dutch traders who were allowed to trade with Japan in the port of Nagasaki¹⁰ had been bringing porcelain and lacquered items from Japan to the European market. However, such items were luxury goods typical of wealthy aristocratic families and their decor was often made to suit the requirements of Dutch merchants, and therefore did not reflect Japanese style or taste. The items imported to Europe were primarily jewellery boxes and travel chests.¹¹

It was not until the second half of the 19th century that Japan introduced itself to broad strata of the European population. In addition to art and literature, exhibitions where foreign products were presented also played a role. The objects, often made and decorated with techniques or patterns that were unusual in Europe, were fascinating for Europeans and aroused collectors' interest in these goods. One of the first major presentations of Japanese goods was the World's Fair in London in 1862.¹² Japanese objects were sent to London by Sir Rutherford Alcock (1809–1897), an envoy to Japan at the time who wanted to show the qualities of Japanese crafts in Europe.¹³ He was often commissioned by his friends abroad to buy and send them 'beautiful things from Japan', which he also considered very inexpensive.¹⁴ Exhibitions in Paris (1867) and Vienna (1873) soon followed. It was these exhibitions that re-introduced Japanese lacquerware and stimulated interest in both lacquered products produced in Japan for the foreign market and interest in older Japanese lacquerware.¹⁵

Among the lacquered items imported to Europe were also the *innō* 印籠, multi-compartment cases, which were a common accessory for Japanese clothing and hung from the *obi* 帯 belt¹⁶. After the Meiji restoration (1868),¹⁷ the Japanese began to prefer

7 In 1863, Vojta Náprstek's lecture on the topic of Japan and its art took place on Střelecký Island, supplemented by examples of Japanese items; Hánová 2010, pp. 40–41.

8 Suchomel and Suchomelová 2006, p. 40.

9 The policy of *sakoku* 鎖国 (closed country) was introduced by the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651) in the 1630s, mainly due to fears of the possible influence of Christian missionaries and alliances of Catholic powers with Japanese feudal lords who might resist the Tokugawa shogunate.

10 The Dutch trading company was originally based on the island of Hirado near Nagasaki, but in 1641 it moved to the artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki, originally the seat of Portuguese merchants who were expelled from Japan in 1638. Contacts with foreigners were reserved only for trusted officials, and the number of Dutch ships that were allowed to visit Dejima during the year was limited.

11 Suchomel and Suchomelová 2002, pp. 19–20.

12 Watanabe 1984, pp. 667–684.

13 'Specimens of the lacquer, porcelain, and bronze, many of them very choice and rare, I collected and sent to the Great Exhibition that it might be seen how far they would bear the test of close comparison with the best workmanship of Europe, and I think the result was by no means to the disparagement of the Japanese.'; Alcock 1863, p. 279.

14 Alcock 1863, pp. 278–279.

15 Suchomel and Suchomelová 2002, pp. 26–27.

16 A belt worn with traditional Japanese clothes.

17 The return of authority and reign to the emperor, which led to extensive reforms of society and the transformation of feudal Japan into a modern state.

Western clothing, and the *inrō* lost its meaning. However, it gained popularity among foreigners, for whom *inrō* were an example of Japanese craftsmanship. In the eyes of the foreigners, these small, decorated cases represented an example of precise Japanese work and elegance, and they began to be collected along with other Japanese lacquered products. This trend of interest in lacquered items was also supported by the Japanese government, which specifically selected representatives of craftsmen for World Fairs.¹⁸ *Inrō* were produced for export even at a time when they were no longer worn in the Japanese culture and society. In this way, large private collections belonging to various collectors of Japanese items were created. Later, some of the items also reached European ethnographic museums.

The largest collections of *inrō* are located at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (approximately 800 pieces), which include items from the collections of great collectors such as George Salting (1835–1909), William C. Alexander (1840–1916), or Sir Harry Garner (1891–1977)¹⁹ and in the British Museum (346 *inrō*).²⁰ Other large collections are in the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet (250 *inrō*) or in the Museo d'Arte Orientale di Venezia (160 *inrō*). In Central Europe, the larger collections also include the collection in the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Eastern Asian Arts in Budapest (191 *inrō*), over 140 pieces come directly from the collection of the founder Ferenc Hopp, or the collection in the Muzeum Narodowe Krakowie (70 *inrō*). Another collection of *inrō* in Czech Republic is located in the Národní galerie Praha.

There are 52 *inrō* in the Náprstek Museum, of which 38 items come from the collection of Joe Hloucha and they arrived in the museum in the 1950s. Some of these *inrō* have been exhibited at exhibitions focused on *netsuke* 根付²¹ figures and jewellery,²² or are mentioned in studies dealing with Japanese lacquerware;²³ however, a more detailed elaboration of the collection has not yet been carried out. The aim and purpose of this work is to describe the collection in the Náprstek Museum from a material point of view and to show whether it contains all types of *inrō* described in scholarly literature.

The first catalogues with lacquerware objects, including *inrō*, already appeared at the end of the 19th century. These were often catalogues printed for exhibitions of Japanese art with a brief history of lacquerware or for auctions; they were often supplemented by photographic material.²⁴ An example that we could state is the catalogue associated with the exhibition of Japanese metals in London.²⁵ It was not until the 1960s that *inrō* began to be published in works on Japanese lacquerware²⁶ or *netsuke*.²⁷ One of the first books to focus exclusively on *inrō* is Raymond Bushell's work published in 1979.²⁸ Since the early 1990s, *inrō* collections have been developed and exhibited in European

18 Kress and Kress 2005, p. 99.

19 *Lacquer at the V&A* 2016.

20 *Inro* 2020.

21 *Netsuke* is a miniature sculpture carved mostly from ivory or wood; Forman 1960.

22 Boháčková and Součková 1990.

23 Suchomel and Suchomelová 2002.

24 *Catalogue of important and valuable Japanese work of art including lacquer, inro, netsuke, swords, and sword furniture: being the third portion of Gilbertson collection 1917*.

25 *Catalogue of specimens of Japanese Lacquer and Metal Work exhibited in 1894 1894*.

26 Pekarík 1980.

27 Okada 1982.

28 Bushell 1979.

museums, such as the *inrō* collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum²⁹ or in the Linden Museum in Stuttgart.³⁰

Historical and cultural context

Traditional Japanese clothing lacks pockets;³¹ therefore the items that the Japanese normally needed to carry with them (a handkerchief, fan, or knife) were placed in the bosom (in the space between the kimono's outer garment and the lower robe *nagajuban* 長襦袢³²) or in the sleeve pouch (*tamoto* 袂). Alternatively, they were worn tucked behind the *obi* belt. Items that could not be carried in this way were stored in cases that hung from the belt. These cases hung from the *obi* were called *sagemono* 提げ物, that is 'the hanging things'. Many such cases were manufactured to carry a particular type of item, be it pipe cases (*kiseruzutsu* 煙管筒) or calligraphic brushes and ink (*yatate* 矢立). *Sagemono* also includes *inrō* cases which were used to store and carry various small items.³³

The name *inrō* or *inro*, (印籠) consists of two characters and could literally be translated as a 'stamp basket', where the character 印 means 'a stamp or a seal' and the character 籠 means 'a basket'. It was originally intended to store personal stamps, but today it is better known as a case in which medicines were stored (in English literature, *inrō* is often mistakenly translated as a 'pillbox').

Personal stamps and seals were commonly used in Asia instead of signatures, a custom that still continues to this day. The first documented seal came to Japan from China, and its use was reserved for the emperor or his chosen officials. In the 8th century CE, the use of personal stamps spread among the court aristocracy. During the Kamakura period (1192–1333), personal stamps were already used even among the samurai. During the Edo period (1600–1868), trade began to develop, and a seal became a necessary requirement for traders who used it to sign contracts.³⁴

Inrō cases appear in the Muromachi period (1333–1568). In addition to the need to store stamps and the colours in which the stamps were dipped, their growing popularity among the samurai and the wealthy urban population is often associated with an interest in foreign medicine. First Portuguese and later Dutch merchants brought medicinal drugs to the country. These medications had to be taken regularly; thus, *inrō* was suitable to carry them, since it was possible to carry several medicinal mixtures without their undesired mixing.³⁵

During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the function of *inrō* changed. The cases became more ornate and, rather than a functional accessory for carrying small items, began to serve as an ornament and status symbol – they were intended to show not only the wealth but also the taste of its wearer.

29 Hutt 1997.

30 Werlich 2016.

31 Winkelhöferová 1999. pp. 170–172.

32 *Nagajuban* is a simple kimono-shaped robe worn under the kimono to protect it from stains.

33 Okada 1982, pp. 9–11.

34 Pekarik 1980, pp. 22–24.

35 Pekarik 1980, pp. 23–24.

Description

Most *inrō* have an elongated oval shape. They consist of several compartments that fit together and are connected by a string. The individual pieces (called *dan* 段) have an oval hole inside (*naibu* 内部), which represents a compartment in which medicines and small items were stored. The lowest piece is called *chi* 地, the upper piece *ten* 天. Because the bottom piece has a *naibu* compartment, it counts as a part. The upper piece does not have *naibu* and only serves as a lid. A four-case *inrō* consists of five parts – four *dan* pieces (which includes even the bottom piece *chi*) and then *ten* lid.

All parts of the *inrō* (including the bottom part and the lid) have a small round opening on their sides (*himotōshi* 紐通し). A silk cord was threaded through these holes, which held the individual pieces together and at the same time served to hang the *inrō* on the belt. There was a bead (*ojime* 緒締め) above the upper piece which served as a zipper of the threads. A *netsuke* – a small carved sculpture – was strung on the string. The silk cords stretched under the *obi* and the *netsuke* hooked behind the *obi*, serving as a counterweight to the *inrō* case. The free ends of the silk cord were then tied into a decorative knot under the lower piece.

Although *inrō*, *ojime*, and *netsuke* were made by different craftsmen, all these three parts were intended to form a complex whole together. It was common for *inrō* and *netsuke* to complement each other – the same decorations or materials were used for both or the *netsuke* figure motive complemented the *inrō* design. However, foreign collectors often focused only on the collection of individual parts, especially *netsuke*. Therefore, many *inrō* in European collections are incomplete. In the Náprstek Museum there are only nine *inrō*, which are complete, including *ojime* and *netsuke* (Inv. nos. 11599, 23183, 23184, 30049, 30050, 30051, 32068, 32070, A10936). Two *inrō* have only a *netsuke* figure (Inv. nos. 507, 32092) and one *inrō* has the *ojime* bead (Inv. No. 32089). A less common type are *saya inrō* 鞘印籠, which derive their name from the designation of a sword scabbard *saya* 鞘. These *inrō* consist of *dan* pieces as such and a *saya* case. Instead of the cord passing through each piece or part, it only passes through the case in which the pieces are placed.

Japanese lacquer

Japanese lacquer (*urushi* 漆) was used as a protective and covering material, because under suitable conditions (temperature 20–25°C, humidity 70–80%) it oxidizes, which causes the lacquer to harden; it becomes stable and highly resistant to weather conditions. The raw material for the production of lacquer is the sap of Chinese lacquer tree (*Toxicodendron vernicifluum*, formerly *Rhus verniciflua*), a plant endemic to the East Asian regions (India, China, Myanmar, Thailand, Japan). Sap is collected in the period from June to November.³⁶ The sap, called *arame* or *arami urushi* 荒味漆, is then freed of impurities by filtration through paper and of excess water by heating. After filtering through paper, *ki urushi* (raw *urushi* 生漆) is formed, which contains a larger amount

³⁶ The quality of the sap changes during this time. The best quality is obtained at the end of July and in August (called *sakari-urushi* 盛り漆, 'prime urushi') and is used to produce transparent or coloured lacquer for the final covering. Sap obtained in September (*sue-urushi* 末漆, 'last urushi'), and October (*urame-urushi* 裏目漆, 'reverse urushi') contains less water and is mainly used as an adhesive or as a base layer of lacquer.

of water. *Ki urushi* can be mixed with rice paste or flour to create a quality *mugi urushi* (urushi glue 麦漆). Only after a process called *kurome* クロメ³⁷, when the *ki urushi* is heated and freed of excess water, transparent *urushi* (*suki urushi* 透漆, *kijiro urushi* 木地呂漆) is obtained, which can be applied to items or coloured with pigments. Black lacquer³⁸ was created by adding *ohaguro* お歯黒³⁹ or soot;⁴⁰ red lacquer by adding pigments from vermilion.

The technique of applying lacquer probably came to Japan from mainland China and its use has a long tradition in Japan. The oldest lacquered objects were found in the Tōhoku⁴¹ area and are dated approximately to the middle of the Jōmon (14,000–300 BCE).⁴²

During the Asuka (538–710 CE) and Nara (710–794 CE) periods, interest in lacquered items increased even more, which was related to the arrival of Buddhism in Japan and the development of large temples. Buddhist objects as well as statues were decorated with lacquer. The large Buddhist statues in the Tōdaiji Temple⁴³ were made by the method of dry lacquer (*kanshitsu* 乾漆), which came to Japan from China. The basis of these statues consisted of many layers of canvas dipped in lacquer, on which, after solidification, a mixture of lacquer, sawdust, clay, and other materials were applied, from which the details of the sculpture were modelled.⁴⁴ At this time, lacquer trees began to be grown intentionally, and sap from the trees was often used to pay taxes.⁴⁵

***Innrō* types and their production**

The methods of production and decoration of *innrō* are quite diverse, individual cases can vary in shape, size, material, and number of pieces. The number of pieces that an *innrō* consists of can be variable. The most common are four-case *innrō*; there are 21 pieces of those in the collection of the Náprstek Museum. Less numerous are three-case *innrō* (14), two-case *innrō* (9), and five-case *innrō* (5). There are also *innrō* that have six or seven compartments, but none of those are in the collection. The *innrō* collection also includes three *innrō* cases, which consist only of the bottom piece and the lid; thus, they have only one compartment. These cases (Inv. nos. 512, 32070, 32074) differ from the others in shape, since they are wider; therefore, they maybe served not as cases for a seal or medicine, but as decorative cases for tobacco called *tonkotsu* とんこつ.⁴⁶

Innrō are most often classified according to the material used. Although lacquered *innrō* were produced most often, other materials such as wood or ivory were used as well.

37 From verb *kurome* 黒める, blackening.

38 While the lacquer from the trees in China is naturally dark, the sap from the trees in Japan is milky and becomes transparent during the treatment processes.

39 Japanese designation for a solution with an admixture of ferric acetate, which was commonly used to colour fabrics or blacken teeth (which was common in Japan for married women).

40 Matsuda 2019, pp. 78–79.

41 The north-eastern part of the island of Honshu.

42 Matsuda 2019, pp. 52–55.

43 Buddhist temple in the city of Nara, which was built in the 8th century CE.

44 Mason 1993, pp. 65–66.

45 Matsuda 2019, p. 68.

46 Bushell 1979, pp. 141–148.

The collection of the Krakow Museum includes an *inrō* made of coconut.⁴⁷ Raymond Bushell's *The Inrō Handbook* also mentions porcelain, turtle shell, and snakeskin *inrō*.⁴⁸ However, even these *inrō* were often decorated with lacquer and lacquering techniques.

Most of the *inrō* in the collection are lacquered, although sometimes it is difficult to determine more precisely whether the *inrō* is lacquered or made of wood covered with lacquer. When it comes to other materials, the collection contains only five wooden *inrō* (Inv. nos. 11599, 32074, 32075, 32082, 39092) and four *inrō* made of ivory (Inv. nos. 32068, 32069, 32072, 32095), all from the collection of Joe Hloucha.

Lacquered *inrō* were made of lacquer-covered paper, only the partitions between the individual pieces were made of wood, usually of Japanese cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*), known in Japan as *hinoki* ヒノキ. Individual strips of paper, according to the number of the pieces of the specific *inrō*, were wrapped around a wooden mould, lacquered, and then allowed to dry in a cabinet called *urushi muro* (漆室) or simply *muro*.⁴⁹ To produce one *inrō*, two wooden moulds were needed; one was used for shaping the inner parts of the pieces, the other for shaping the outer shape of the *inrō*. *Himotōshi* (cord hole) were produced separately as well. Several types of Japanese lacquer were used to make *inrō*. After each application of one coat of lacquer on paper wrapped around the wooden mould, it was necessary to store the mould in a *muro* cabinet, allow the lacquer to harden properly, polish it, and only then apply another layer of lacquer.⁵⁰

The individual parts were then glued together using *mugi urushi* (urushi glue) and again lacquered, dried, and polished several times. Only after the production of the *inrō* case as such was finished could the decoration itself take place. The inner parts of *inrō* are often decorated with a *nashiji* 梨子地⁵¹ pattern, while various decorating techniques were used on the outward parts. The artist could design the decor himself or copy the design from *ehon* 絵本 woodblock printed books⁵², which included even *inrō* decoration motifs.⁵³ Many artists did not sign their products. It is therefore impossible to determine exactly who and when produced a specific *inrō*. We find a signature on other *inrō*, but no details about the artists are known that would allow a more accurate dating of these *inrō*.

Origins of the collection in the Náprstek Museum

The oldest *inrō* additions (Inv. nos. 506, 507) in the collections of the Náprstek Museum date back to 1887, when they were donated to the museum by Josefa Náprstková (1838–1907). Josefa, the wife of the museum's founder Vojtěch Náprstek (1826–1894), donated many items from Asia and Africa to the museum. She did not

47 Kress and Kress 2005, p. 108.

48 Bushell 1979, pp. 126–127.

49 A type of cabinet, in which constant humidity and temperature, essential for drying lacquer, is maintained.

50 Bushell 1979, pp. 221–223.

51 A lacquering technique in which gold dust is poured into a moist layer of lacquer and thus creates a pattern similar to the skin of the Japanese *nashi* pear.

52 The illustrated books popular in Japan during Edo period (1600–1868). Some *ehon* books displayed designs for kimono, *netsuke* and *inrō* decorating.

53 Bushell 1979, p. 226.

choose the items herself but rather entrusted her friends and acquaintances with the task of buying them in shops in European capitals.⁵⁴

In 1901, an item was purchased for the museum from Josef Kořenský (1847–1938), one of the first Czech travellers to Japan. The case (Inv. No. 512), made of wood and decorated with inlays of nacre, has only one compartment and is therefore possible that it served as a tobacco box. Josef Kořenský published a travelogue in which he describes Japan, its climate, agriculture and, indirectly, the beauty of lacquered objects: 'Many houses shine in such a way that they seem to be Japanese cabinets, whose great and durable paint is still unrivalled in our country.'⁵⁵ Kořenský's travelogue was simultaneously designed to educate; therefore, during his travels he was also interested in the functioning of Japanese education and the production of various Japanese items. He visited, for example, workshops producing porcelain and tortoiseshell items, but not artists working with lacquer. In his travelogue he also mentions *netsuke* figures, which according to Kořenský belonged among smoking utensils. The question is whether Kořenský only knew tobacco boxes hung at the waist, or whether he also saw *inrō* as tobacco boxes. However, *inrō* were no longer widely used at the time of his visit.

In 1937, objects from the estate of Růžena Trnožková (1868–1937) were donated to the museum. Not much information about Růžena Trnožková has been preserved. A letter⁵⁶ which is located in the Náprstek Museum indicates that she was the wife of a general director of an export company for the East and a Czech patriot. On his travels he collected objects of Chinese and Japanese provenance, especially textiles. It is not known whether his wife travelled abroad with him. The inventory of the estate, which numbered 207 items, includes also four *inrō* (Inv. nos. 30048–30051), all of them beautifully decorated. Three *inrō* from Trnožková's collection are complete, including *netsuke* and *ojime* (Inv. nos. 30049–30051), *inrō* Inv. No. 30048 is richly inlaid with *aogai* 青貝 nacre.⁵⁷ It is one of the two *inrō* in the collection which are decorated with this technique, typical for products from the Ryūkyū Islands.⁵⁸ The other is Inv. No. A18654.

In 1951, the Liberation Memorial (Památník osvobození)⁵⁹ donated 32 items of Japanese provenance to the museum (addition No. 87/51–120/51). These items came from the estate of Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919),⁶⁰ who visited Japan in October

54 Jiroušková and Lukáš 2007.

55 Kořenský 1902, p. 53.

56 This is a letter from the lawyer Richard Aron, who dealt with the estate of Mrs. Trnožková. In Administrative documentation, folder 'Růžena Trnožková'. Letter from Richard Aaron to the director of the Náprstek Museum dated 14 August 1936.

57 A type of very thin nacre of bluish colour.

58 In the Ryūkyū Kingdom men did not wear kimono and *inrō*. Ryūkyūan *inrō* were made as gift for Japanese officials and later in the Meiji period as souvenir for foreigners. For more on the issue of Ryūkyūan *inrō* see Kress and Kress 2002.

59 A scientific institute which was established in 1929 by merging several institutions: Archive of Legions (Archiv legií), Archive of National Liberation (Archiv národního osvobození), Military Archive of the Czechoslovak Republic (Vojenský archiv RČS), and Military Museum of the Czechoslovak Republic (Vojenské muzeum RČS). During the Nazi occupation, the monument was discontinued. After 1945, the Military History Institute (Vojenský historický ústav) became the successor of the Memorial. The coup of 1948 marked a change in its concept, including questioning the importance of legionnaires.

60 Milan Rastislav Štefánik was a Slovak politician, diplomat, and astronomer. After the outbreak of World War I, he joined the French army and was the organizer of the Czechoslovak legions.

1918. During his stay, he attended diplomatic meetings, but also: 'bought many nice Japanese art products, especially antique ones. He chose with great taste.'⁶¹ Thus, two *inrō* became part of the collection. Both *inrō* are complete, with *ojime* and *netsuke*. One is decorated with black and coloured lacquer in rose relief (Inv. No. 23183), the other by golden *maki-e* (Inv. No. 23184).

The largest part of the *inrō* collection comes from the collection of Joe Hloucha. Hloucha's uncle was Josef Kořenský, and it was his travelogue and storytelling that aroused Hloucha's love for Japan when he was still a child. Despite the wishes of his parents, who hoped that he would take over the family business, he started working in the Náprstek Museum and studied foreign cultures.⁶² In 1906 and 1926, Hloucha made trips to Japan, where he even lived for some time. The items he bought on his travels and in European shops served him as inspiration in writing his works; at the same time, however, he considered the possibility of founding a Japanese museum. He collected Japanese woodblocks, metals, porcelain, sword guards, and *netsuke* figurines. Hloucha's collection is also the origin of a whole set of *inrō* (38 pieces; Inv. nos. 11597, 11599, 32068–32092, 32094–32104), most of which were gained by the museum in 1955,⁶³ when Hloucha donated his collections to the Náprstek Museum.⁶⁴ Most of the *inrō* are lacquered with various types of decoration. All *inrō* made of ivory (Inv. nos. 32068, 32069, 32072, 32095) and the only *inrō* decorated with the carved lacquer technique (Inv. No. 32099) in the possession of the Museum also come from Hloucha's collection.

In the second half of the 20th century, the collection gained several more *inrō*, two purchased in 1967 from a private collector (Inv. No. A4230, A4231) and two from a store *Klenoty* (Jewellery)⁶⁵ (Inv. No. A10936, A 12361). In 1988, items from the Moravian Museum in Brno were transferred to the Náprstek Museum. The only *inrō* (Inv. No. A18654) in the transfer came from the collection of Jindřich Blažej Vávra, also known as Heinrich Wawra Ritter von Fernsee (1831–1887), who served as a ship physician and surgeon in the Austro-Hungarian Navy. In the years 1872–1873, during a trip around the world, on which he accompanied the Saxon-Coburg princes, he also visited Japan.

Conclusion

There are 52 *inrō* in the collection of the Náprstek Museum. The oldest acquisition comes from Jindřich Vávra, who had brought his *inrō* from Japan. Much of the collection comes from the collection of Joe Hloucha, a well-known Japanophile and collector of Japanese items, who, however, did not directly focus on the products of the great masters. His collection thus contains mainly objects made in the 19th century which were popular collector's item. The collection contains *inrō* made of usual materials, the most common are lacquer *inrō* (41 pieces). When it comes to other materials, *inrō* made

61 Písecký 1929, p. 104.

62 Kraemerová and Šejbl 2007, p. 10.

63 The gift agreement between Hloucha and National Museum made these objects part of the museum's collection, but the objects physically remained in possession of Hloucha until his death in 1956. In Administrative documentation, folder 'Hloucha'. The gift agreement between Joe Hloucha and National Museum in Prague. 25. IX. 1955, Ref. No. 62.539/1955.

64 Kraemerová and Šejbl 2007, p. 48.

65 *Klenoty* was state-owned enterprise during the Communist regime, that offered luxury goods, antiquities and 'oriental' items.

of wood and ivory also appear in the collection. In comparison with the collections of other museums, the collection in the Náprstek Museum is an example of common collectors' production. Nevertheless, it still provides a helpful map of various techniques of decorating lacquerware.

No. 1

Woodblock

Dimensions: 35.7 × 23.8 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1955

Dating: 1839

Inv. No. 38258⁶⁶

The author of the woodblock is Utagawa Kunisada⁶⁷ (1786–1865). The sheet comes from the series *Azuma hakkei no uchi: Hana sasō Yoshiwara no ya-u* (東八景ノ内: 花誘吉原の夜雨) (*Eight views from the East: Evening rain in Yoshiwara attracting Japanese cherry blossoms*) and depicts Kabuki theatre actor Nakamura Utaemon IV⁶⁸ 中村歌右衛門 (1798–1852) in one of his roles. Kabuki actors often set fashion trends. Nakamura is wearing a black kimono with a brown *obi* belt. On the left side you can see a three-case red *inrō* case.

No. 2

Inrō

Dimensions: 7.5 × 9 × 2.5 cm

Acquisition: Klenoty, 1976

Dating: 19th century

Material: Lacquer, gold, metal

Inv. No. A 12361⁶⁹

The case differs from other *inrō* by its robustness and unusual heart shape. Both the front and the back side are covered with golden *okibirame* 置平目.⁷⁰ In the *shakudo* 赤銅⁷¹ inserts, on the one side there is golden depiction of the ruler of hell, Yama, who is trying to drag away a smoking man; on the other side there is the yawning *rakan* Hattar Sonja⁷² with his tiger. The edges are decorated with Japanese cherry flowers on a golden *nashiji*. It is probably a product from the second half of the 19th century intended for foreigners, as evidenced by both the unusual shape of the case and the considerable weight of the metal inserts, which would make it impossible to wear the *inrō* hung from the *obi*.

66 Published in Honcoopová, 2005, Cat. No. 070.

67 Also known as Utagawa Toyokuni III, one of the masters of woodcarving.

68 Actor in the Japanese kabuki theatre.

69 Published in *Catalogue of Japanese Art in The Náprstek Museum* 1994, Cat. No. 1328.

70 A lacquering technique in which larger grains of gold are poured into a moist thin layer of lacquer.

71 An alloy of gold and copper.

72 *Rakan* (*arhat* in Sanskrit) is a designation for a Buddhist disciple who has attained nirvana. There are several hundred *rakans*, the most famous in Japan being the Sixteen *Rakans*.

No. 3

Inrō

Dimensions: 8.4 × 4.5 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1943

Dating: 19th century

Material: Wood covered with lacquer, golden *maki-e*

Inv. No. 11599⁷³

Inrō with three compartments. It is made of wood covered with a transparent lacquer to make the wood grain stand out. The decor is complemented by five leaves of Ginkgo biloba in golden *maki-e*, complemented by the techniques of *tsukegaki* 付描⁷⁴ and *kirikane* 切金.⁷⁵ The *inrō* is signed 'Morimasa'.

No. 4

Inrō – tonkotsu

Dimensions: 5.9 × 7 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1955

Dating: 19th century

Material: Wood, lacquer

Inv. No. 32074

This two-part case probably served as a tobacco box. It is carved from wood. It is partially covered with black and red lacquer, which creates the impression of a case. In the cartouches made of natural unlacquered wood, there is a motif of two Chinese children on the one side and a mountain pine motif on the other.

No. 5

Inrō

Dimensions: 9.5 × 5.5 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1955

Dating: 19th century

Material: Ivory

Inv. No. 32072⁷⁶

Inrō with three compartments made of ivory. It is decorated with the popular motif of the seven gods of fortune.⁷⁷ On the one side, six of these gods are shown in a relief; on the other side a lowered relief shows the seventh god Bishamonten⁷⁸ with a pagoda in his hand.

73 Published in *Catalogue of Japanese Art in The Náprstek Museum* 1994, Cat. No. 1308, Suchomel and Suchomelová 2005, Cat. No. 191.

74 Narrow lacquer lines sprinkled with gold or silver filings.

75 A decorative technique using thin sheets of cut-out gold or silver foil.

76 Published in *Catalogue of Japanese Art in The Náprstek Museum* 1994, Cat. No. 1324.

77 One of the lucky symbols often depicted on *netsuke* figures.

78 One of the seven gods of fortune and at the same time one of the Buddhist Four Heavenly Kings. He was the protector of the north and the ruler of rain. His symbol is a pagoda.

No. 6*Inrō*

Dimensions: 9 × 5.9 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1957

Dating: 19th century

Material: Ivory

Inv. No. 32069⁷⁹

Three-case ivory *inrō*. The relief carving depicts the gods of fortune Daikokuten and Ebisu⁸⁰ with a rod and fish on the one side and the god Fukurokuju with a staff⁸¹ on the other. The sides of the *inrō* are decorated with lotus leaves and flowers. The *inrō* was created by an unusual technique, since the individual pieces are not integral, but consist of several parts glued together. Signed 'Takachika'.

No. 7*Inrō*

Dimensions: 7 × 3 cm

Acquisition: Růžena Trnožková

Dating: 19th century

Material: Lacquer, paints

Inv. No. 30051

One of the less common *saya*-type *inrō*s. The individual pieces, which were used to store medicines and small items, do not have *himotōshi* openings through which the thread would pass; instead, they are stored in a case with a lid, and this case is then hung along the waist. The *inrō* is two-case, covered with golden *nashiji*, and the *saya* is covered with black lacquer and decorated with colourful horse motifs. The *inrō* also includes an *ojime* covered with lacquer and decorated with golden *takamaki-e* and a wooden *netsuke* in the form of a Buddhist *mokugyo* bell.⁸²

No. 8*Inrō*

Dimensions: 9.5 × 4.9 cm

Acquisition: Klenoty, 1974

Dating: 19th centuryMaterial: Lacquer, golden *maki-e*, metal

Inv. No. A10936

Five-case *inrō* covered with gold lacquer. It is decorated with a popular motif of a river and pine trees.

79 Published in *Catalogue of Japanese Art in The Náprstek Museum* 1994, Cat. No. 1320.

80 Gods of fortune. They are often depicted together. Daikoku was associated with wealth and crops, Ebisu with fishing.

81 A god of fortune associated with wisdom and longevity. His character probably had a type in Chinese legend, so he is depicted as a Chinese sage in a robe and with a cane.

82 Literally 'wooden fish' (木魚). It is a wooden instrument used in Buddhism and played on with a beater. It was often carved in the form of a fish or at least decorated with fish motifs.

No. 9*Inrō*

Dimensions: 8 × 6.5 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1957

Dating: 19th century

Material: Carved Lacquer

Inv. No. 32099

Three-case *inrō* decorated with carved lacquer (*tsuishu* 堆朱). In two cartouches bordered by geometric ornaments (swastika, rhombuses), there is a waterfall with a vessel and a ladle on one side, and a Chinese scholar with an apprentice spreading ink on the other. The technique of carved lacquer had a long tradition in China, where it is documented during the Sung dynasty (960–1279). It consists in the application and subsequent drying of many lacquer layers which were subsequently carved into the desired pattern.

No. 10*Inrō*

Dimensions: 8.2 × 4.2 cm

Acquisition: Joe Hloucha, 1955

Dating: 19th century

Material: Wood

Inv. No. 32075⁸³

Two-case *inrō* in the form of a bridge pillar, with its top covered with black lacquer. A centipede is gnawing through the pillar, which is a reference to a popular folk tale in which the hero Tawara Toda kills a giant man-eating centipede.

No. 11*Inrō*

Dimensions: 8.5 × 4.4 cm

Acquisition: Moravian Museum Brno – collection of Jindřich Vávra

Dating: 19th century

Material: Lacquer, nacre

Inv. No. A18654⁸⁴

Inrō decorated in the style of products from the Ryūkyū Islands. The decoration depicts a pagoda and a pine tree above a water on one side and a *gazebo* with a pine tree on the other. It is formed by inlay with a thin *aogai* nacre.

Acknowledgements

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83 Published in *Catalogue of Japanese Art in The Náprstek Museum* 1994, Cat. No. 1309.

84 Published in *Catalogue of Japanese Art in The Náprstek Museum* 1994, Cat. No. 1323; Kraemerová 2005, p. 214; Suchomel and Suchomelová 2005, Cat. No. 200.

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Pl. 1



No. 1

No. 2



No. 3

No. 4



No. 5

No. 6



No. 7



No. 8



No. 9

No. 10



No. 11