



## THE INDONESIAN COLLECTION OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

*Blanka Remešová*

The Náprstek Museum's Indonesian collection originated still during Vojtěch Náprstek's lifetime, through occasional acquisitions as well as thanks to gifts of complete private collections from explorers and Náprstek's friends. Among them were two Czech physicians, **František Czurda (1844 - 1886)** and **Pavel Durdík (1843 - 1903)**, both of whom worked on the islands of Celebes, Sumatra and Nias in the 1870s and '80s, and combined their professional practice with the gathering of specimens of local products for the nascent Náprstek Museum. Thus the museum acquired, among other items, samples of processes used in the making of the batiked Javanese sarong, as well as men's and women's clothes, including notably trousers and tunics, and an extensive collection documenting the tribal cultures of Nias and Sumatra. Further items in the Indonesian collection come from the collecting pursuits of **Josef Kořenský (1847 - 1938)**, who presented to the museum a set of leather puppets used in the Javan shadow theatre. Explorer **E. Stanko Vráz (1860 - 1932)** supplied the Náprstek Museum with an important collection of Indonesian kris daggers. The collection of textiles was enriched by artist **Růžena Charlotta Urbanová (1888 - 1978)**, who lived in Indonesia between the two world wars and was an exceptionally keen collector of textiles. Thanks to her the museum acquired for example an assortment of the famed ceremonial cloths, decorated with the characteristic motive of a ship, created from cotton yarn woven into canvas fabric. Also coming



from Urbanová's collection are ikets (headscarves), and other articles of Javanese female clothing: kembens and slendangs. This collection was displayed in one of the museum's first exhibitions staged after World War II, in 1948. Further acquisitions are represented by gifts and purchases from individual collectors. One of the most recent major purchases, made in the 1990s, was that of a complete collection documenting the tribal culture of the Dayak of Kalimantan, acquired from explorer and businessman **Miloslav Šulc (b. 1922)**.

A substantial portion of the Indonesian collection is taken up by objects of daily use and decorative items documenting various tribal cultures



Beadornament with stylized anthropomorphic figure of ancestor. Indonesia, Kalimantan, 19<sup>th</sup> c. (?), 35 x 35 cm (NpM A 25 571).





Hardwood bowl decorated with reliefs depicting zoomorphic motifs, with massive handles in the shape of mythical beasts. Indonesia, Kalimantan, 19<sup>th</sup> c. H. 19 cm, l. 78 cm, w. 39 cm (NpM A 25 546).

of the Indonesian archipelago. Thanks to Pavel Durdík the museum acquired a body of objects from the island of Nias, including e.g. wooden statuettes of ancestors called *adu*, headdresses, tools for kindling fire, diverse containers made of natural materials, coats from tree-bark, weapons and warshields. The region's culturally most advanced tribes include the Bataks of central Sumatra, represented in the collection e.g. by magic wands and books (*pustahs*) written in Batak script which is probably of Indian origin. The same culture produced woven textiles likewise documented in the collection, including notably *ikats*, as well as *kris* daggers with wooden or bone hilts decorated with cut stylized zoomorphic or anthropomorphic figures of ancestors. The Dayaks, the head-hunters of Kalimantan, are represented by a rich assortment of weapons, including poison-dart blowpipes, swords with asymmetrical blades and warshields, as well as textiles, bead-embroidered loincloths, carrycots, and musical instruments. Among some exceptional examples of the tribe's craftsmanship are monumental, above-lifesize statues of ancestors, and massive hardwood bowls decorated with reliefs depicting mythical beasts.

Traditional Indonesian crafts represented in the museum's collection include armoury, which is exemplified by a whole range of weapons: daggers, knives, swords and cutters. The most comprehensive section is devoted to the *kris*, the characteristic Indonesian dagger with an asymmetrical straight or curved blade, topped by a hilt made of wood or bone, ivory and horn, depicting a mythic ancestor in anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form. The dagger is protected by a sheath that widens markedly at the upper



end, and is supported by a stand in the form of a polychrome wood-carving depicting figures associated with the cult of ancestors or with local legends. Other traditional crafts include the making of textiles, which was brought in Indonesia to a high degree of sophistication. The museum's collection contains specimens of the famed Indonesian textile techniques:



Wayang klitik, wooden puppets with leather limbs used in the traditional Indonesian theatre. Indonesia, Java. 19<sup>th</sup> c. H. 56, 53. 3 cm (NpM A 11 358, NpM 56 219).





Head of Buddha. Grey slate. Indonesia, Central Java, 8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> c. H. 47 cm (NpM A 25611).



batik and ikats. While batik consists in applying several layers of wax onto the fabric with the use of a tool called canting, ikat is achieved by the dyeing of warp or woof threads still prior to the process of weaving. Of particular elaborateness is the weaving of double ikat, where the design is produced by the dyeing of both the warp and woof threads. The museum's collection also features samples of Indonesian brocades, made with the use of a support woof from coloured or metallic, notably gold, threads. The collection likewise documents an exceptional decorative technique consisting in the fixation of gold foil or gold dust onto the fabric, known as prada.

An inseparable part of the Indonesian collection is formed by leather puppets for the Javan and Balinese shadow theatre, called wayang purwa or wayang kulit. Apart from that, the collection also contains examples of wooden puppets with leather limbs, known as wayang klitik. Actors of the traditional Indonesian theatre wayang topeng use distinct face masks. Three-dimensional rod puppets are usually clad in the traditional Indonesian textiles. Indonesian puppet theatre performances are accompanied by gamelan orchestras comprised of various instruments. In 1990 the Náprstek Museum received a gift of eighteen principal gamelan instruments.

The collection's outstanding specimens of classical sculpture include two heads of Buddha from the central Java (8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> c.).

*Blanka REMEŠOVÁ*

*Student of Ethnology and Indonesian Studies at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, Prague. She has been preparing degree thesis on the art and crafts of the Kalimantan tribes, drawing on the collection of the Náprstek Museum, Prague.*