



## ALOIS RICHARD NYKL AND THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The personal papers of the Bohemian-born American linguist, Arabist, and Romanicist Alois Richard Nykl (1885–1958) are the largest archival collection of the Náprstek Museum. This study analyses the history of the collection and the reasons why it was bequeathed to this institute. The then director of the Museum's library Bohumír Lifka (1900–1987) played a substantial role in this affair. The study also presents a brief outline of the contents of Nykl's papers.

**KEYWORDS:** Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures (Prague) – Alois Richard (A. R.) Nykl – Bohumír Lifka – Czechs in America – Orientalism – Andalusian Literature

*“It seems to me that my wanderings on the Earth have come to an end. I stand on a hillock in Tlaxcala and contemplate the unique view of the two snowclad volcanoes. My life came to an end in the land of the Nahuatl people because I could not return to my native Central Bohemia. “Every soul will taste death,<sup>3</sup> and no soul knows in what land death will overtake it”<sup>4</sup> are the words of the Qur’ān. But if my body dissolves in a foreign land, my soul will forever dwell in Bohemia among the souls of my ancestors, among those who loved me, amidst my native forests whose soothing lullaby will also be my eternal Requiem. Mankind let me perish because I was too gentle-hearted, too much like the prophet of Nazareth. But the course of my life will shine for all Eternity as a proof of God’s immense mercy on a sinful soul, His victory over the diabolical forces of the Universe He created *ex nihilo*.”<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The article was created within the project No. 13-29508P Alois Richard Nykl, český orientalista, cestovatel a krajan [Alois Richard Nykl, Czech Orientalist, Globetrotter and Compatriot], financed by the Czech Science Foundation and carried out at the National Museum.

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<sup>3</sup> Qur’ān, Sūrah 29:57.

<sup>4</sup> Qur’ān, Sūrah 31:34.

<sup>5</sup> Archives of The Náprstek Museum [further cited as ANpM], Nykl, Manuscripts, Horal, Loyza. *From Eternity to Eternity: The adventures of a Bohemian-born linguist*, non-paginated first version of preliminary Epilogue. The Papers have so far not been processed. The inventory numbers and descriptions are preliminary and most likely will change in the future.

An important and nearly forgotten American Czech, or rather Bohemian globetrotter with an American passport, Alois Richard Nykl (1885–1958), is one of the most prominent linguists of the history. His rather phenomenal language skills hardly found their equal during his time. He made his name in the fields of linguistics, history, ethics, journalism, traveling or even motoring. He published his studies in Czech, English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Arabic, Japanese and Portuguese. He wrote his own manuscripts in these languages without the need of a translator. Despite having more than 160 items in his scholarly and popular bibliography, he is quite the unknown persona of both Czech and Czech-American history. In his native Bohemia, he became famous thanks to his translation of the Qurʾān, the first directly from Arabic. In countries abroad, his classical Hispano-Arabic Poetry is his most frequently cited work (Nykl: 1946). Today's descriptions of his life story and his scientific career are, however, full of inaccuracies, misinterpretations or the prejudiced viewpoints of his contemporaries. These inaccurate interpretations can nevertheless now be updated and Nykl's work and his extraordinary life can be better understood. This outcome is thanks to the information provided by his extensive personal papers deposited in the Náprstek Museum in Prague. After many difficult and unfortunate years, their cataloguing process has started. With their help, Nykl's personality and his worldwide impact may now be presented in full to the scholarly community. Some of his never-before-published works may be submitted for well-deserved editions and publications. This study presents the relationship of A. R. Nykl to the Náprstek Museum, the final storage place for his papers and their fate. Their content and potential topics for study that they present will be briefly described as well.

Based on this archival collection, it is finally possible to compose Nykl's conclusive biography. A short obituary written by Edwin J. Webber, the principal contemporary source of Nykl's life, is haunted by many inaccuracies and misleading information (Webber: 1960).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, other researchers have subsequently incorporated them into their works (Marín: 2009).<sup>7</sup> This outcome is all the more depressing as Nykl himself showed apprehension in the letters of his later years that his life's work might be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Another biography written by Vladimír Honsa (Honsa: 1967) is used less frequently and biographies written in Czech are inaccessible to the world's scientific community.<sup>8</sup> Precisely so that future researchers might truly assess his "linguistic genius", Nykl tried to transfer his literary papers, collected all over the world, to the Náprstek Museum.

Nykl's relationship to the Náprstek Museum was, however, the result of a chance occurrence with the Museum and Compatriot Archive's librarian of many years, Bohumír Lifka (1900–1987).<sup>9</sup> The latter first published an essay to the occasion of Nykl's

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<sup>6</sup> Listed errors: Birthplace: Kachní Louže; Before Mexico he worked in Switzerland (1903–1904), Germany 1904, Bohemia 1905, United States of America 1905–1907. He did not stay in China, but stopped there on his way to Japan. In 1916 he returned to U.S.

<sup>7</sup> This led to errors concerning his life as well as the misunderstanding of his work, of which an example is the study of Manuela Marín.

<sup>8</sup> Two of the best, though incomplete – viz.: Padesáté narozeniny A. R. Nykla [A. R. Nykl's Fiftieth Birthday], *Národní listy*, 13. prosince 1935. Šejch Abd-ur Rahmán El-Bohémi: K padesátce velkého českého linguisty, cestovatele a archeologa Dr. A. R. Nykla [To Fifty Years of Great Bohemian Linguist, Traveler and Archeologist Dr. A. R. Nykl]. In: *Amerikán Národní Kalendář LIX*, 1936, pp. 222-223.

<sup>9</sup> KURKA, Ladislav – LIFKA, Michael: 2003.

fiftieth birthday in the magazine *Krajan* [The Compatriot].<sup>10</sup> As sources for the essay he took a daily newspaper *Národní listy* [National Papers] and the *Amerikán Národní Kalendář* [National Calendar of the American]. Nykl happened to encounter the article the same year during one of his stops in Bohemia. The short and error-riddled essay was not much to his liking and he sent a postcard to the editor's office from Karlovy Vary. He requested that a copy of the issue containing his biography be mailed to him and added a brusque comment: "*Year of my birth = 1885 (not 1880). Cordially yours.*"<sup>11</sup>

The oldest direct mention of Nykl by Bohumír Lifka, the librarian of the Náprstek Museum, may be found in 1937. In the U.S. at the time, Nykl was contacted by a prominent historian of American Czechs, Tomáš (Thomas) Čapek. He asked him to provide his biographical

data for his planned encyclopedia of important American compatriots.<sup>12</sup> Nykl sent him the biographical data by letter on 8<sup>th</sup> May from Evanston.<sup>13</sup> The New York historian's reply says:

*"I gladly confirm receipt of your biography. I had the biography half-finished from material from Kalendář Amerikán [The American's Calendar] for 1936 and from what Dr. Lifka wrote about you in Prague's Krajan. By the way, are you and Dr. Lifka acquainted? He was born*



Fig. 1. Alois Richard Nykl (Paris, 1938), National Museum Library, NAOF, Petr, 05731

<sup>10</sup> *Krajan*, V, Issue 3, 1st February 1936.

<sup>11</sup> ANpM, Travelers 3/16. A part of this archive concerning A. R. Nykl will be conjoined with Nykl's collection. The cutout from the issue sent to Nykl is likely part of Nykl's personal file in the collection of the Oriental Institute in the Archives of Academy of Sciences. On the margins, there are corrections of both the year of birth as well as other information that only Nykl himself could have known.

<sup>12</sup> The sources for this never-published encyclopedia are part of Čapek's Collection in the Library of Congress.

<sup>13</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Thomas Čapek, 8th May 1937, carbon copy of Nykl's letter.

in Radomyšl where I went to primary school."<sup>14</sup> On 14<sup>th</sup> May, Nykl replied: "I believe Dr. Lifka has used my biography published in *Nár. Listy* on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1935 – I do not know him personally."<sup>15</sup>

On the first occasion after his return from the U.S. in 1937, he decided to pay a visit to the museum and see this Bohumír Lifka who was writing articles about him. The trip to the Náprstek's librarian took place on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1937. Nykl noted in his diary at the time: "Went to Náprstek Museum – U Halánků – liquor store... there I found Dr Lifka, born 1900, studied literature..., showed me an article about me (he wrote it) for *Ottův slovník naučný* [Otto's Scholarly Dictionary]. A very nice fellow from South Bohemia, Budějovice Grammar School: has a talent for synthesis – mentioned Sfinx as a potential publisher for my autobiography."<sup>16</sup> This first but by far not the last encounter brought about a mutual friendship and respect between the gentlemen. Lifka was whom Nykl deeply respected for his intellectual capacities. "He is a nice chap, but like all the Czechs lacks truly critical spirit."<sup>17</sup> During their initial communication, Nykl was apprehensive that Lifka might just exploit him. His worries were, however, empty and his original judgment proved correct. On 26<sup>th</sup> March, he wrote in his diary: "A letter from Lifka: all my suspicions were totally unfounded; he is, as I taxed him, an honorable man."<sup>18</sup> The Náprstek's librarian adored Nykl for his knowledge and language skills. It was this personal relationship that was critical for preserving Nykl's heritage.

The reason for this, was that Lifka represented the Museum to him. Nykl therefore put equal trust in the Museum as he did in Bohumír Lifka. He considered him to be the man who would first guard his property and later his legacy. It was therefore a personal, or personified, relationship. Nykl had no other ties to the Náprstek Museum, nor did he keep in touch or corresponded with anyone else. When Bohumír Lifka was arrested and incarcerated by State Security for high treason on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1959, the intimate relationship of Nykl and the Museum ended as well. He became merely one of many who bequeathed their property to the Museum. Bohumír Lifka is therefore crucial to the fate of Nykl's papers. If not for him, it is not clear what might have happened in the end. Nykl quickly became his close friend and always stopped by on his way from Prague to Karlovy Vary where he stayed at his aunt Marie Nyklová. He always talked to Lifka or went through the Náprstek Museum collections with his aid. For instance, he noted in February: "Then on to the Náprstek Museum, where I gave Dr. Lifka the corrected proof, and talked with him till 12:30 on various subjects; *Vráz, Nár. sdř.* [National Association], philosophy, the Japanese, Spain, the prospect of finding a publisher for my autobiography."<sup>19</sup> He also went for a visit to the Museum in April 1938 and happened upon the topic of his linguistic interest in the persona of the Museum's Founder, Vojta Náprstek: "Wanted to see Náprstek Museum, so after lunch "U Fejků" walked via Ječná, Karlovo sq. – past Palacky's house to *Nár. třída + Betlémské sq.* Found there that it is open only 9 a.m. to 12 p.m."<sup>20</sup> On the following day, he was able to get into the Museum: "Looked over his (i.e. Náprstek) notes, especially on linguistics. Extremely interesting – but he was not a man of pure science, but a

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<sup>14</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Thomas Čapek, 11th May 1937.

<sup>15</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Thomas Čapek, 14th May 1937, carbon copy.

<sup>16</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 9th October 1937 to 17th December 1937, 16th December.

<sup>17</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 22nd May, 1938 to 4th July 1938, 25th May.

<sup>18</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 23rd February 23 to 7th April 1938, 26th March.

<sup>19</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 18th December 1937 to 22nd February 1938, 1st February.

<sup>20</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 7th April 1938 to 22 May 1938, 10th April.



Fig. 2. Alois Richard Nykl (Madison, 1956), ANpM, Nykl, Photo Collection

practical man of great curiosity + collector's passion. His talent did not go beyond the initial enthusiasm + it was enough to him when people thought he knew things which he knew he did not know."<sup>21</sup> His greatest attention was focused on the Armenian lecture of Vojta Náprstek and his interest in Armenian language,<sup>22</sup> the language examination of the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 11th April.

<sup>22</sup> He still wrote about this in his letters to Lifka almost twenty years later. See below.

polyglot Čeněk Šercl<sup>23</sup> and on Vojta Náprstek's collection of Japanese and Chinese books.<sup>24</sup>

They also started to collaborate on the publication of several works. Lifka, apart from his assistance in seeking the publisher for the autobiography,<sup>25</sup> offered to publish a short piece of it in the *Marginalia* magazine.<sup>26</sup> The essay titled "The Book in my Life" was published in the January/February 1938 issue of this bibliophile's magazine.<sup>27</sup> It reached Nykl's hands on 21<sup>st</sup> February and he noted: "*Lifka sent me "Marginalia" – 3 small typographical errors, which I overlooked – my eyes are getting weak. I am afraid.*"<sup>28</sup> The text which was partially based on the autobiography manuscript became, without Nykl knowing at that time, the only part of the biography to be published. The publisher recommended by Lifka (SFINX-Janda company) rejected the book and Nykl did not seek another publisher.<sup>29</sup> Their collaboration continued with the publishing of the book "Eternal Japan". Lifka had at the time the photographic appendix with him and Nykl mentioned him as a man able to carry out the proofreading in his correspondence with the publisher Václav Petr. We do not know whether the proofreading actually took place. Lifka was also supposed to keep the manuscript of this publication until Nykl's return from abroad.<sup>30</sup>

The mutual trust established between the two men bore fruit in September 1938. Nykl was plagued by undisclosed ailments (he himself called it "nervous stomach") that he decided to have treated. He stayed shortly in Benecko in the Krkonoše Mountains and decided to travel to Merano, Italy, for a course of treatment. After his recovery, he wanted to travel to Paris and continue his scientific work. The historical events of September 1938 proved fatal not just for the Czech borderlands but for Nykl's personal papers as well. Worried what might happen to his books and notes in Karlovy Vary that were to be given to Germany, he decided to send them to Prague under the protection of Bohumír Lifka. They were to stay there until his return to Czech lands. At the same time, he composed his last will and deposited it in a safe in the Živnobanka bank. The will specified that upon his death, the Náprstek Museum was to inherit his literary property and rights. He also made Bohumír Lifka his proxy in handling this deposit.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 7th April 1938 to 22 May 1938, 13th April.

<sup>24</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 7th April 1938 to 22 May 1938, 14th April. For the best book on Vojta Náprstek see SECKÁ, Milena. *Vojta Náprstek: Mecenáš, sběratel a vlastenec*. Praha, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> "Talked to Dr. Lifka about the publishers – he had a letter from Sfinx – arranged to see them tomorrow." ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 7th April 1938 to 22 May 1938, 11th April.

<sup>26</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, B. Lifka to A.R. Nykl 12th January 1938. Manuscript received 25th January 1938. Ibid, A. R. Nykl to B. Lifka 25th January 1938.

<sup>27</sup> Nykl, Alois Richard. *Kniha v mém životě* [The Book in my Life]. In: *Marginalie: Věstník spolku českých bibliofilů v Praze* XII, 1-2, 1938, pp. 1-9.

<sup>28</sup> ANpM, Nykl, diaries, Diary 18th December 1937 to 22nd February 1938, 21st February.

<sup>29</sup> The article in *Marginalia* was supposed to have a promotional effect and should have helped in finding the publisher for the autobiography. However, the publisher A. Neubert refused it straight away. Novina did not reply and SFINX-Janda refused it after receiving a review. ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. Neubert to B. Lifka, 2nd March 1938. ANpM, Nykl, Lifka, B. Lifka to A. R. Nykl, 24 March 1938. A. R. Nykl to Lifka, 26 March 1938, carbon copy. ANpM, Nykl, Institutional Correspondence, Sfinx Janda to A. R. Nykl, 20 May 1938.

<sup>30</sup> National Museum Library, NAOF, Petr, Correspondence, A. R. Nykl to Václav Petr, 12th October 1938 from Merano, 9th November 1938 from Paris, 30th December 1938 from Paris and 21st and 22nd February 1939 from Paris.

<sup>31</sup> The Náprstek Museum Library, Library Register, kn. 120/59 Deposit listing A. R. Nykl on 4th May completed by Vladimír Zahradníček (then director of the museum's library)



Fig. 3. Jaroslav Nykl (1933), ANpM, Nykl, Personal Correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl

Nykl wrote about his adventurous departure from Czechoslovakia nineteen years later for the magazine *Slovakia* published by American Slovak Phillip Hrobak.<sup>32</sup> There he said that on the day of his departure, he stopped by the Museum to check on everything.<sup>33</sup> The Plohn and Caro & Jellinek companies collected the materials in Karlovy Vary in good order<sup>34</sup> and brought them to Prague at 5 p.m. Sixteen trunks and four crates of books were transferred. Nykl also instructed the U.S. Embassy to verify that everything was delivered correctly.<sup>35</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> September, Nykl also handed over his photographic appendix for the book *Eternal Japan* to Lifka – a unique collection of 203 of his own photographs taken between 1911 to 1916, which included titles.<sup>36</sup>

The correspondence from that time shows that neither of the pair suspected that this would be the last time they saw each other. Nykl also had no idea that he would never be able to finish some of the scientific papers that were deposited in the cases. There were other works (e.g. the manuscript of the edition and the translation of *Qiṣṣat Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ*) that he took with him together with two dictionaries and the manuscript of both parts of *Kitāb az-Zahra*. Later on, he managed to publish the manuscript of

<sup>32</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Manuscripts, Nykl, Alois. September 4-25 in Bohemia. Not clear if text was published. I was not able to physically locate the relevant issue of the magazine *Slovakia* so far.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12. "The librarian of the Náprstek Museum was to take care of my books." (23rd September 1938).

<sup>34</sup> The Náprstek Museum Library, Library Register, kn. 120/59 Deposit listing A. R. Nykl.

<sup>35</sup> The Náprstek Museum Library, Library Register, kn. 264/38 Deposit listing A. R. Nykl, Bohumír Lifka to A. R. Nykl on 3rd October 1938 to Merano.

<sup>36</sup> ANpM, Nykl, handover receipt dated 24th September 1938. The materials were indeed handed over to Václav Petr and were returned to the Museum on 29th August 1939.

Bayād and Riyād in the United States (Nykl: 1941).<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, his considerably more solid and larger edition of *Ḍamm al-Hawā* by Ibn al-Jawzī was left behind in a notebook edition in Prague. This turn of events is all the more regrettable considering the enormous effort on the part of Nykl and many others who helped him acquire six manuscripts.<sup>38</sup> The last recorded contacts with the Náprstek Museum are from 1939.<sup>39</sup> He kept touch with the Protectorate even after the outbreak of World War II, when his mail from Portugal was sent to Prague via Italy.<sup>40</sup> Even in the winter of 1938, he wrote to Bohumír Lifka that he intended to return to Prague in the summer of 1939 and hoped a small room could be found for him in the Náprstek Museum where he could continue his work. *“I therefore beg you to kindly watch over my books stored in crates and cases – and keep in mind the possibility that I could make a small cultural workplace in your library, like a poor hermit, for the benefit of the Czech nation. I do not know how the state of affairs goes, but I intend to come to Prague some time in July and speak to you about my humble plan in the quiet atmosphere of Betlemske square No. 1. The crux of the battles has shifted to Ukraine and the Mediterranean – Prague has no more need for gas masks – culture may flourish again slowly.”*<sup>41</sup> However, the Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1939 halted these plans. Nykl stayed in touch with the Protectorate at least in part even after 1939. In 1941 he sent a brief letter written in German from the United States through Lisbon to his brother Jaroslav. Despite the military censorship, it reached its destination.<sup>42</sup> We are, however, not able to determine further details of his contact with the Protectorate due to the loss of materials from that period.<sup>43</sup>

Nykl only resumed his contacts with Prague in 1945. At that time, he was in Cambridge, Mass., at Harvard University and was avidly interested in the fate of his relatives and friends at the close of the war. He enquired about the librarian Lifka from the former editor of *Národní listy*, J. O. Novotný, and the publisher, Václav Petr.<sup>44</sup> Most likely one of them gave Nykl’s address to Lifka, who did not hesitate to restore his and Museum’s relationship with him.

*“We have now learnt of your postwar address and we are in a great hurry to pay our cordial greetings to you after many years of mutual silence, to wish you good health and luck, and to assure you that we have kept your precious deposit unharmed with extraordinary diligence and that we have guarded it throughout the whole occupation with substantial need for*

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<sup>37</sup> A copy of the Vatican manuscript made in 1935 is part of Nykl’s Papers. So is the carbon copy of this book.

<sup>38</sup> The quality of the manuscript of Nykl’s edition is considerably higher than the edition published in 1998. IBN AL-JAWZĪ, Abū al-Faraj. *Ḍamm al-Hawā* (ed. Khālīd ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Shab’). Bayrūt, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> ANpM, travelers, ArK1-77-II/20 from 8th May 1939. Nykl was in Coimbra at that time. He also sent an issue of the newspaper *Correio Da Extremadura* from 29th April 1939 to the Náprstek Museum, where on page 14 there is an account of his deciphering of the Arabic inscription in Santaremo. ArK1-77-II/20.

<sup>40</sup> National Museum Library, NAOF, Petr, A. R. Nykl to Václav Petr, 21st December 1939.

<sup>41</sup> ANpM, Lifka, 1/1-55, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 30th December 1938.

<sup>42</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl 4th September 1941.

<sup>43</sup> Nykl learnt about the death of his mother in 1942, however we do not know how. He only mentioned this in his letter to his brother Jaroslav. ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl, 29th November 1945.

<sup>44</sup> The letter to Václav Petr has been preserved. National Museum Library, NAOF, Petr. A. R. Nykl to Václav Petr, 10th March 1946.



*subterfuge and sheltering from the appointed Leiter and SA-member, in which endeavor we have, thanks be to God, succeeded. The signatory of this letter remembers with particular emotion the thrilling first days before the occupation of the Sudetenland, when you were so burdened with transporting all your study materials from Karlovy Vary and Rybáře, later much damaged by bombing, to Prague, and where you, a Czech patriot, had thundered in the halls of our study hall against the British lords in the House regarding their duty which they should have exacted on their government: "You must protect Czechoslovakia." Your proud attitude of right and justice was later on many times a marvelous example and reassuring memory, when the United States, your new homeland, entered the war.*"<sup>45</sup> The letter reached Nykl's hands on 14<sup>th</sup> August and his reaction at that time was highly positive: *"Indeed, the Náprstek's Library couldn't be entrusted to better hands, and so I trusted in all ending well over the past eight years, though I worried for your safety many times."*<sup>46</sup> Nykl expressed his wish to visit Prague soon to be able to continue in his interrupted work, recalled his last will in Živnobanka that dealt with the fate of his personal papers, and also reiterated his prewar desire to have a small room in the Museum where he could quietly work on his manuscripts.

Just like the political situation from 1938 to 1945 strongly influenced the fate of the personal papers and his relations with the Museum, the story was severely impacted further on by post-war developments and the onset of the Communist era. When his relationship with Prague was resumed in 1946, Nykl was just finishing the publication of his summary work *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* in Princeton.<sup>47</sup> Aside from additional scholarly plans, he wanted to publish *Eternal Japan* in Prague for the second time, and fulfil his dream of having his autobiography published. Until the beginning of the Communist era, his relationship with Bohumír Lifka was therefore concerned primarily with this unfinished study, the question of remuneration for the *Eternal Japan* publication and other plans. Nykl wrote to Lifka about his wish to publish *Eternal Japan* a second time in an improved condition – mostly by including the previously unused photographic appendix.<sup>48</sup> He also tried to encourage the librarian to find someone who would translate his *Universal Ethics* into Czech. He tried to discern through Lifka how some of his former friends from the Oriental Institute were doing – he enquired about the traveller and physician Josef Aul and professor Tauer. He expressed a similar wish concerning the translation in the following letter from 28<sup>th</sup> December 1946.<sup>49</sup> During 1947, there seem to have been no contact between Nykl and the Museum, there are only some preserved letters from Nykl to Vincenc Lesný in which he again enquired about his colleagues.<sup>50</sup> The two principal projects on which Nykl consulted with Lifka and for which he requested assistance were a third edition of the translation of the *Qur'ān* and one of his greatest dreams – the publication of his autobiography.

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<sup>45</sup> Library of Náprstek Museum, Correspondence register, kn.79/46. Bohumír Lifka to Prof. Dr. Alois R. Nykl, a scientist writer, 9th July 1946.

<sup>46</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 14th August 1946.

<sup>47</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, William Thomson, A. R. Nykl to William Thomson, 1st April 1956, carbon copy.

<sup>48</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 18th November 1946.

<sup>49</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 28th December 1946.

<sup>50</sup> Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, Nykl's personal file, 20th February 1947.

Its manuscript was kept in the Museum together with other items since the unsuccessful search for a publisher in 1938. Ten years later, Nykl made another attempt and wrote to Lifka on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1948: *“The political situation is quite adverse to cultural endeavors, but I try to do my best. The publisher Mazáč wrote to me that he wished to start publishing again and he would like to begin with my translation of the Qur’ān. I do not know whether I would be able to travel to Prague to procure proofreads; I believe that should my trip to Prague be impossible, you might undertake this task for the usual fee. I would also like to attempt publishing my biography that you read in part, and that, as a historical document, might avoid meeting resistance. I hear that some sort of decree concerning the registration of the property of foreign persons has been put into action; I believe this concerns real estate and finance, and therefore the books which I had deposited in the Museum under your protection are not included in this decree.”*<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, all these intentions were derailed by political circumstances. It is interesting to track how all the prospects of our Czech compatriot changed through the correspondence over the course of mere weeks. He wrote to Lifka on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1948:

*“Considering the signs, Dr. Beneš will resign in May, and let’s hope that the extremists will not carry out something similar as in Hungary, Poland and Romania, which would impact our scientific program significantly.... The editor Mazáč has written to me that he had not received permission for publishing the Qur’ān yet, but he will attempt to secure that permission in the spring. If he receives it, you might undertake proofreading the manuscripts for 5,000 CSK or more, as customary.... I hope the Qur’ān gets lucky and that my biography will be taken as well before my departure for the realms of eternal peace and bliss.”*<sup>52</sup> All hopes were quashed by the “Victorious February” of 1948. Shortly thereafter, the publisher Mazáč committed suicide after his publishing house was confiscated, and all of Nykl’s plans for new publications and his return to Czechoslovakia fell apart, as he had planned to finance his voyage to Prague using the proceedings from the publication of the Qur’ān. He had also wanted to finish *Ḍamm al-Hawā* during that time. The active contact between the two scholars did not cease, but it shifted more and more to the level of mere correspondence. In 1948, Lifka also sent him the list of contents of his crates, and Nykl replied: *“I trust I shall see it and you as well once more – and should I no longer reside upon this Earth, you shall remain the guardian for the benefits of linguistics, history, philosophy and poetry.”*<sup>53</sup>

After his hopes for a visit or even return to the Old Country, and new editions of the Qur’ān and *Eternal Japan* were extinguished, Nykl’s chief desire switched to publishing his autobiography, which was written in Czech during 1937–38.<sup>54</sup> Lifka had read it at least in part. Nykl returned to this text at the stage when his mostly scientific works were finished. It appears he began meditating over his life’s work. He felt that his autobiography (an entirely apolitical text) might have a chance for publication in the new political climate post-Victorious February: *“I hope I will be able to publish my*

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<sup>51</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 5th January 1948.

<sup>52</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 9th February 1948.

<sup>53</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 15th November 1948.

<sup>54</sup> The final typescript version is located in the Nykl’s papers, including several proofs and the front page. Apart from this, there is also a carbon copy of this typescript which contains some cutout passages and also the original handwritten manuscript.



Fig. 4. Bohumír Lifka (1958), ANpM, Náprstek, 153/162

*biography in Prague – purely a commemorative act for future comparison.*<sup>55</sup> He asked for Lifka's opinion directly, while keeping in mind the contemporary internal political situation. He also used his enduring political position from the Anti-Masaryk/Beneš camp to which he belonged all his life, and which he defended even during the World War I:<sup>56</sup> *"Do you think that the circumstances might be favorable to printing at least a part of my biography, which you saw as a manuscript (in fact typescript) some time ago (August 1938)? I could also include the World War I years in it. Since my opinions on Mas./Ben. coincide with those of minister Nejedlý, I do not see anything objectionable in my work. I could maybe travel to Prague for several months and handle the aforementioned publication, as well as the manuscript*

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<sup>55</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 15th November 1948.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. his article *Československý stát* [The Czechoslovak State].

of Ibn al-Jawzī, *Damm al-Hawā*. Dr. Tauer, Dr. Růžička and Mr. Karel Petráček<sup>57</sup> from the Semite philology seminar are acquainted with this work.... Your opinion shall be a valuable lead to me."<sup>58</sup> By the end of that year, he however became quite sceptical and in the following year, he explicitly wrote to Lifka: "I trust you shall publish my memoirs in case I have no luck doing so before my departure for Nirvana."<sup>59</sup>

He realized by then that he himself would probably not succeed in publishing them, and he asked himself who at all might actually be interested in his memoirs. He tried to find the answer through his English memoirs that he wrote at that time.

*"At times I pause in this recounting of the stream of my years... and ask myself: "Why am I doing this? Those who saw what I saw and who will have the same type of images in their retrospective television are but few; who else would be interested in my story?"*

*My audience can consist only of people born between 1880 and 1900 – all others will be too modern, without any concrete vision of the world before 1914–1919. Those born, say, in 1915 can only remember the beginning of the post-1929 era: the "Crash" of October 29, the so-called depression, NIRA, New Deal, World War II, Fair Deal. Those born in 1930 grew already into the Hiroshima-Nagasaki, Bikini, Eniwetok and Korea "Atomic Age" craze animated by hasty, precipitate actions and dishonesty. Among those I would be considered a "cantankerous old man or duffy". The age of A-bombs and H-bombs, not the age of Christ's Millennium.*

*And so I count only on those over sixty years of age as my readers. Perhaps fifty thousand. And then the students of history who might want to have a true picture of the past as I saw it in the philosophical strain of Mark Twain."<sup>60</sup>*

These English memoirs originated at the same time, certainly after 20<sup>th</sup> July 1950, and judging by the contents of handwritten notes, the later modifications can be dated up to 1953.<sup>61</sup> He may have started writing these as a reaction to the impossibility of publishing the Czech version. He finished the first rough draft in 1951 in Mexico during his stay at the Sudek's family.<sup>62</sup> During the following years, he tried in vain to find a publisher in the United States. He offered them to the Henry Schuman publishing house in 1953,<sup>63</sup> to Houghton Mifflin Company in 1954,<sup>64</sup> to Henry Regenery Company Publishers,<sup>65</sup> and he made his last unsuccessful attempt in 1955 and 1956 with G.P. Putnam's Sons Publishing House.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> He became acquainted with Karel Petráček through organizing the Orientalist Congress in Prague. They corresponded regularly until Nykl's death.

<sup>58</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 6th May 1950.

<sup>59</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 6th January 1951.

<sup>60</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Manuscripts, Horal, Loyza. From Eternity to Eternity: The Adventures of a Bohemian-born Linguist, p. 267

<sup>61</sup> "I shall only amend my biography and let it be – I see there is no one to understand it – vultures and crows would hardly understand the biography of a nightingale." Archive of NpM, Nykl, Numbered Diaries 1.

<sup>62</sup> "Later on, I may finish my English autobiography that I have started writing in Valor, though a much more substantial one had already been written in Czech." ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Sudkovi, A. R. Nykl to Rudolf Sudek, 5th August 1956, carbon copy.

<sup>63</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Institutional correspondence, Henry Schuman, A. R. Nykl to Henry Schuman, 8th July 1954, he received the reply on the 27th.

<sup>64</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Institutional correspondence, Houghton Mifflin Company, 29th July 1954.

<sup>65</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Institutional correspondence, Henry Regenery Company Publishers, 6th August 1954 (carbon copy), 4th August 1954.

<sup>66</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Institutional correspondence, Nykl to G. P. Putnam's Sons Publishing House. 27th December 1955, 13th January 1956, 4th April 1956.

With his attentions turned towards the publication of his Czech or English memoirs, all the collaborative projects with the Náprstek Museum ended. Already on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1951, Nykl sighed: *“Who could be interested in his memoirs these days? And who shall be interested in a hundred years?”*<sup>67</sup> His last mention of them was in several letters to his brother Jaroslav.<sup>68</sup>

Luckily enough, despite Nykl’s apprehensions and doubts, even the manuscript of his English memoirs reached the Náprstek Museum. Until his death, he kept in touch with Lifka and attempted to transfer his other works and parts of his literary heritage to the Museum.<sup>69</sup> Lifka kept writing to Nykl regularly. They talked for example about the small exhibition of Nykl’s books on the Museum’s premises, the popularity of his scholarly works among museum readers<sup>70</sup> or the new location of the Museum in St. Anne’s Monastery, where they planned to have Nykl’s office.<sup>71</sup> The relationship of Lifka to Nykl can best be illustrated by a letter from Christmas of 1954: *“I am so very grateful for the picture you have attached! It is truly another mighty emotional tie to your persona which has become to me an expression of a remarkable life experience; a meeting with a Spirit that has transcended and concentrated the wisdom of three continents, an example of the heroism of its unique kind. I actualize those chapters of your autobiography with which I am familiar, and I actualize them with your last portrait. Such touching emotion can be read in your face, peaceful and militant, proud, conciliatory and charitable, a firm, soft and kind face – dell’nuom finito! Had I the power and influence, I would make you the president of the Academy with the right to direct the scholarly world; but I can merely revere you as the leader in my spiritual Pantheon.”*<sup>72</sup>

Bohumír Lifka truly admired Nykl and respected him deeply, as we can find in many letters. He was one of few who understood how much Nykl desired to be able to return and pass away in his home country. Nykl on the other hand considered Lifka to be the only person able to preserve his legacy and personal papers. Even so, he was worried that it might be destroyed. *“I often worry that all my painstaking work and effort might come to naught. Only a few shiny slivers shall remain. You may preserve as much as possible, but I shall never be destined to compile my materials. I have said so in Eternal Japan, in the preface to the translation of the Qur’ān and now in the epilogue to my World Ethics. After all, all life is a dream and only God knows the true essence of everything.”*<sup>73</sup> By mere chance, some materials

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<sup>67</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 1st August 1951.

<sup>68</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl, 27th June 1954, 5th April 1957.

<sup>69</sup> See e.g. the letter from 31st December 1951: *“I have here eight more cases with similar materials. I would be glad if these cases could be transported to the Museum and added to the rest. Even though I may not be able to fulfill this dream, maybe in the years to come these materials may be of historical value.”* ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 31st December 1951.

<sup>70</sup> National Museum Archive, Náprstek Museum Register, I./4 1950 Krajané [Compatriots], Ref. No. 317/50-kn. Bohumír Lifka to A. R. Nykl, 4th December 1950.

<sup>71</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, Bohumír Lifka to A. R. Nykl, 21st October 1952.

<sup>72</sup> *“How I wish you to have what you desire, except with one change, that you were healthy in the beautiful Czech country and with a printed proof of some Hispano-Arabic work on your knees, in the perspective of your long life and peace upon the world!”* ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, Bohumír Lifka to A. R. Nykl, “Christmas 1954.”

<sup>73</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka 31st March 1956, carbon copy.

from the collection of Bohuslav Dušek, Nykl's best friend from his youth, reached the Museum as well, even though some were burnt by the widow of the great cultural patron for fear of creating "discord in the family." *"During my trips to Prague, I always visited Dušek in the currency exchange office where he worked – and then upstairs in the office where the company proxy Pilát worked. We used to have interesting conversations – in May 1934, I observed from Dušek's office the parade in the Příklad street after the re-election of TGM, and my eyes of a prophet saw ruin in that black wide-brimmed hat and those four white horses. Dušek had a lovely apartment on the riverside, full of precious collections – his lady was a very sweet Moravian. I was their guest and asked him to collect my letters, as they will once be held in higher regard than TGM's letters. The last time I saw him was in a small Pilsener beerhouse in the summer of 1938, where some officers of the Air Force were as well.... I need not remind you of my visits to the library – especially the last one, when my life seemed to me like that of a hunted deer.... I will send you the bibliography and brief biographical data."*<sup>74</sup> *"It was certainly too hasty to burn those 16 letters: what serious content could there be? Maybe the amusing remarks about the gonorrhoea that I contracted stupidly in Japan – as far as I can see, without any serious consequences.... All that I wrote about traveling to Bohemia was only meant to say that I would come if the government or some scholarly institution invited me, for all kinds of political matters are now of no interest whatsoever to me."*<sup>75</sup>

Nykl made the Náprstek Museum heir to his literary output.<sup>76</sup> He hoped that his materials might become useful for researchers,<sup>77</sup> that some of his works might be published after his death and that his personality and linguistic genius might be understood.<sup>78</sup> He started to feel that the end of his life journey was approaching. He wrote a long recapitulation letter to Lifka together with the last excerpts of his studies for the library – *"The extent of these papers that you "deposited in the cabinet to my other primary sources" surprised me, and I am glad that none of them will thus be lost. I once went through some of the bequeathed papers of Vojta Náprstek and I was amazed that no-one had compiled them. If not for the events of 1938, I would have done so myself. I was especially interested that Vojta had been studying Armenian in Vienna and that he wrote a letter from the United States circa 1854 concerning the tension between the proponents of slavery and the abolitionists."*<sup>79</sup> *My brother also has a set of reviews of "Eternal Japan" that V. Petr had given to him when he paid him my 9,000 CSK – now shrunken to 1,200 CSK. These reviews can also form part of my source material and I hope they shall be delivered to you. I was worried that all this historical material would be fragmented and scattered in the same way as were my books and papers that I had left with my parents in the forester's house in Mrzky (now called Nyklovna) before my departure for New York in February 1905 (just 53 years ago) and then before my departure to Trieste and Alexandria in Egypt in August 1909. My father was pensioned in 1920 and was not wise enough to buy a house before that. Jaroslav worked as a teacher in Slovakia at that time and did not help with the moving.... My younger brother Josef who graduated as a forester worked on the land reform – my parents had no clue whatsoever about the value of my*

<sup>74</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 4th July 1957.

<sup>75</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 26th April, 1958.

<sup>76</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl, 24th March 1958, 26th May 1958.

<sup>77</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl, 12th August 1958.

<sup>78</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Jaroslav Nykl, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl, 10th August 1950, *ibid* 20th January 1958 and 20th July 1958.

<sup>79</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka 17th February 1958.

books and mementos FOR ME – and so the books were taken to Žižkov and the papers-drafts etc. probably burned. It was quite embarrassing for me, as I wanted one day to study the course of my own life based on all these memories – to see where I was right and where I may have erred: a psychological study. There is a substantial amount of similar materials in my cases. I had to leave a crate of books in Cairo – with request to transport it to Mrzky – that was in February 1911 – then the war came and all was lost. What I brought to Chicago from Japan, I had to take to Drahovice, hoping that I might use it further. I was only able to publish a second edition of the *Qur'ān* – and write *Eternal Japan* – then it was necessary to take the books helter-skelter to you – otherwise the Mongols would have destroyed it all in 1945, as my aunt wrote to me. Please read the article in “Slovakia” (I have not sent it yet). My life is a constant escape from brutality, envy, cruelty and stupidity. These days, I again have eleven cases of books stored with friends – I live in a small room like a half-blind poor scholar.<sup>80</sup> In July 1958, he first wrote to Lifka in the anticipation of his own death: “I am ailing, some blood poisoning entered my circulation. I do not know if I can recover. My books are scattered across cellars – but I doubt they will ever manage to reach the N. Museum. I had never dreamt that humanity would become so animalistic.... My only solace would be to die quietly in Bohemian woods and dream there my eternal dream of peace and love. You are one of the last in Bohemia who loved me with selfless love. Please keep me in your good memory.”<sup>81</sup>

Nykl wrote and mailed his very last messages to Prague on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1958. They were addressed to his brother Jaroslav and to Bohumír Lifka. “I was extremely pleased by your letter from 28th July – my shipments were delivered in good order and my brother is gradually handing in what was left of my “stuff.” Much has been lost, but the rest may give some idea – at least a crude one – of the extent of my linguistic genius between 1899 and 1905 etc. I have some manuscript material and if it hadn't been for the terrible animalistic raging of humanity, I would have been roughly able to have the basic or crucial materials printed. My stay in the hospital does not seem to solve the cause of my quite mysterious disease. I would probably cheer up soon in a friendly environment. Please keep me in your good memory. My persona has emanated love and good will – all good people of all nations loved me – peace and quiet, beauty and goodness. Only God knows the truth.”<sup>82</sup> He also instructed his brother Jaroslav with regards to the last things. “Therefore please take everything to the Museum... researchers may work with it... I doubt that I will recover from my current malady.... My linguistic extent is too massive and only six of my contemporaries could understand it. Believe me, I am of good will, a friend of peace and fraternity. As I wrote in my idealistic *World Ethics: When humanity becomes humane, they may understand me better. I wrote my biography in Czech and in English – maybe some excerpts will remain.*”<sup>83</sup>

Alois Richard Nykl died on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1958 in Evanston. The professor at Northwestern University, Walter Leopold, notified the Náprstek Museum and the Nykl family of his death.<sup>84</sup> “Durch einen Zufall weiß ich Ihre Adresse. In der letzten Post, die Ihr Bruder noch gesehen hat, befand sich Ihr Brief an ihn vom 21. November. Leider muss ich Ihnen die traurige Mitteilung machen, das Ihr Bruder, Dr. Alois R Nykl, am 5. Dezember im

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 6th July 1958.

<sup>82</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Bohumír Lifka, 12th August 1958.

<sup>83</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Bohumír Lifka, A. R. Nykl to Jaroslav Nykl, 12th August 1958.

<sup>84</sup> “In der letzten Post, die Dr Alois Nykl noch gesehen hat, befand sich eine Ansichtskarte von Ihnen aus Lysice. Ich muss Ihnen leider die Mitteilung machen, das Dr Nykl am 5. Dezember an Nierenkrebs gestorben ist.” ANpM, Nykl, V 2.5.8. Walter F. Leopold to Bohumír Lifka, 10th December 1958. E.g. V 2.5.7 – Message from Jaroslav Nykl left on 18th December 1958 for Bohumír Lifka in the Náprstek Museum.

*Evanstoner Krankenhaus an Nierenkrebs gestorben ist. Morgen früh findet die Trauermesse in der St. Atanasius – Kirche in Evanston + das Begräbnis statt. Meine Frau + ich haben uns seiner in den letzten Monaten während seiner Krankheit etwas angenommen + sind die letzten Besucher gewesen, die ihn noch am Leben geschehen haben, 5 Stunden vor seinen Tode. Der Nachlass befindet sich in den Händen des staatlichen Vermögensverwalters (Public Administration) in Chicago. Gestatten Sie mir, Ihnen zu dem Verlust mein Beileid auszusprechen.”<sup>85</sup>*

Nykl’s friends learnt of his death by chance from Chicago newspapers.<sup>86</sup> His long-time friend Joseph W. Solch managed to pay his respects to his companion from St. Louis on his last voyage. The wife of Nykl’s friend and colleague R. J. Pšenka, Augusta Pšenková, wrote to Jaroslav Nykl: *“Had we known in time, we would have taken care that your brother be buried in the Bohemian National Cemetery where our dearest, our father and mother, brother, nephew and husband lay. We visit their graves, but we do not go to the place where your brother was buried.”<sup>87</sup>*

Nykl was buried on 11<sup>th</sup> December in All Saints Cemetery in the town of Des Plaines, Illinois, in an unmarked grave. A lovely testament of the respect and friendship of the former librarian to his American friend was shown seven years after his death in 1965. Bohumír Lifka fulfilled the wish of A. R. Nykl expressed in his letter from 18<sup>th</sup> January 1955: *“Should there remain several shiny slivers of my work, you may be able to write about it in 1965.”* The same year, 1965, there was indeed a short obituary published in Lidová demokracie [People’s Democracy] on 10<sup>th</sup> December under the initials B. L. – *“Posthumous eightieth birthday of Czech scientist.”<sup>88</sup>* This was the newspaper which had refused to publish Nykl’s obituary in 1958, as he died in the enemy nation, the United States. Nevertheless, shortly after his death, Nykl was almost forgotten in Czechoslovakia, only on occasion being revived by some scholar through his translation of the Qur’ān or a short citation from some of his other scholarly works. Only a few articles were published about him as a person, e.g. in the exile magazine Reportér published in Zürich.<sup>89</sup> Nykl had anticipated being forgotten. For instance, he compared his fate and the fate of his work in his poems to the fate of a forgotten Arabic-Andalusian poet of the XI century: *“Abderramen Nykl, famoso poeta y poliglota del siglo XI; escribió más de cien magníficas obras en siete idiomas, incluyendo el árabe, el checo y el japonés, pero se salvaron sólo estas dos perlas que demuestran la maravillosa perfección de los versificadores populares en romance francés y gallego-mozárabe.”<sup>90</sup>*

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<sup>85</sup> ANpM, Nykl, V 5. 2.1. Walter F. Leopold to Jaroslav Nykl, 10th December 1958. Nykl’s friend Joseph (Josef) W. Solch only wrote to Jaroslav Nykl on 13th December: *“...Your brother Alois, a friend of mine, died on 5th December 1958 in Evanston Hospital where he was hospitalized for 3 weeks. I was informed he died of kidney cancer. I learnt of his death on 10th December from the newspaper. So I went there straight away with two friends of mine. I attended his funeral on the 11th. His funeral was in Athanasius Church in Evanston, Illinois. The funeral was organized by Dean F. Smiley, 830 Lincoln St., Evanston, Illinois for whom Alois worked as a translator in his private office before his death. This gentleman conducts all of his (Alois’) private affairs. Alois’ private belongings are kept by the people with whom he lived.”* ANpM, Nykl, Joseph W. Solch to Jaroslav Nykl, 13th December 1958.

<sup>86</sup> The obituary was published in Chicago Daily Tribune on 10th December 1958, p. B11.

<sup>87</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Augusta Pšenková (Psenka) to Jaroslav Nykl, 23rd February 1959. Augusta Pšenková also attached the text of a short radio news broadcast by U.S. radio. It is archived in the Nykl’s papers.

<sup>88</sup> National Museum Archive, Collections of Bohuslav Dušek, cutout from Lidová demokracie [People’s Democracy], 10th December 1965.

<sup>89</sup> Reportér [Reporter], Vol. 4, 1987, p. 25.

<sup>90</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Nykl’s Poetry, Cancionillas Nyklianias.



In the 1980's, Nykl's Papers were transported in uncatalogued boxes and cases to the repository in Kostomlaty nad Labem. After the Velvet Revolution, the gradual occasional interest in his person started to manifest. In the book *Islam and the Czech Countries*, the genesis of his translation of the Qur'ān was described briefly, and in 1999, his name was entered in the encyclopedia of Czech and Slovak orientalist by Eduard Gombár. This impulse from an eminent Czech historian and Arabist was also the primary impulse for my study of Nykl. In 2008, I enquired about his papers in the Náprstek Museum, and I obtained with much alacrity from the then director of library Milena Secká the basic information on Nykl's collection. I have gradually started to collect the sources to compile a narrative of Nykl's life, and the initial result was the publication of a short study in *Nový Orient* [The New Orient]. By that time, thanks to the assistance of the archivist of the Náprstek Museum, Martin Šámal, and the current director of the institution Eva Dittertová, the personal papers were located in the accessible repository in Liběchov. Here, in the summer of 2011, I first had the chance to see their contents and determine their extent. Even so, another year and a half went by before the Czech Science Foundation approved the project concerning Nykl's person. Thanks to this grant, Nykl's personal papers can finally be described and processed, and work has started on gradual publishing of his forgotten literary legacy. This project is the beginning of a new chapter of Nykl's story.

## The History of Nykl's Personal Papers

*"The books in Arabic and other languages which I had accumulated during my leisure hours in the bazaars, bookstores and cafés where occasional good bargains could be picked up from itinerant vendors, I put in a large wooden box and left it in the office of my friends Simmon and Säuberlich with instructions to hold it until further advice. When in 1914 war clouds began to gather over Europe I wrote them to ship the box to my parents at Mrzky in Bohemia. No answer came and when in 1932 I was again in Cairo I could learn nothing of the fate of my friends and the books I had stored with them. This has happened to me over and over again; my disjecta membra are scattered in Paris, Coimbra, Lisabon, Prague, Cambridge, Newtonville. And my lifelong dream was to have a quiet place with my books round me like Montaigne in his Tower which I saw in 1931 while travelling in the land of the troubadours."*<sup>91</sup>

Nykl's scholarly and literary papers consisted of three major and several minor parts. The first, all materials that he had collected and that were not destroyed from his birth until August 1938, was taken in 1937 from the U.S. to Karlovy Vary. In September and October 1938, it was transported from Karlovy Vary to the Náprstek Museum and stored as a deposit there. At least two parts of those papers were, however, destroyed in the past. None of the items collected in Egypt between 1909 and 1911 were delivered from Egypt to Japan. The majority of the items from Nykl's youth were destroyed during his parents' move in 1921. The second part, which started to be formed in 1938 was most likely deposited in Cambridge, Mass. in the Widener Library of Harvard University. The situation there became intolerable in 1956, when Robert H. Haynes, Assistant Librarian at Harvard College Library turned to Nykl directly:

*"You know that we moved these trunks from Jewett Room to our locked storage area in the basement. I have to tell you that the situation has changed since I last wrote to you. We are*

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<sup>91</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Manuscripts, Loyza Horal, *From Eternity to Eternity*, p. 307. The manuscript of the unpublished English autobiography contains two pages numbered 307. The quote comes from the second one which is a significantly extended version of the first one.

constantly acquiring library material....Therefore I must ask you to make some disposition of your two trunks." Haynes' following words were quite impolite or even harsh: "It may make some difference, however, if I tell you that the situation has changed also in regard to the Jewett Room. There is a great deal more activity here now with the new regime under Sir Hamilton Gibb, and also with a very active Center for Near Eastern Studies in existence here at Harvard. There would not be room for you, and I am sure you would not find it satisfactory from your point of view. Under these circumstances I thought that you would prefer to have the trunks sent to you in Wisconsin."<sup>92</sup> From there, they were taken to Newtonville in 1956, to the house of Nykl's longtime friend Eugène M. Lebert.<sup>93</sup> "*Comme je vous ai dit, on attendra jusqu'au mois prochain avec l'envoi des deux dernières malles. Pour le cas de ma mort soudaine j'ai un testament dans la boîte à la Cambridge Trust. Je ne comprends pas bien l'allusion à "une oeuvre"; j'ai cru que Frogmere resterait dans la famille Avery après le décès de Madame Lebert.*"<sup>94</sup>

We can but guess what this part could contain. When building on the contents of his materials preserved throughout the other periods, we can deduce with some certainty the resources for his books published in the 1940's, the correspondence from those years, some diaries and at least two unpublished manuscripts. When Nykl died, Walter Leopold, who communicated with Jaroslav Nykl and Bohumír Lifka regarding the settlement of the papers, was aware of the existence of these two cases in Newtonville/Cambridge.<sup>95</sup> It is not clear why these, unlike the third part, were not delivered to Czechoslovakia. I have not been able to trace their fate so far. The answer may lie in the archives of Cook County Probate Court.

The third group of documents contains materials that were created from 1951 to 1957. This part was located at the time of Nykl's death at his then residence in Evanston.<sup>96</sup> By uncertain means (but maybe through Jaroslav Nykl), they were transported to Czechoslovakia. Later on, they reached the Náprstek Museum as per Nykl's testament and, together with the previous deposit, formed his personal papers. For reasons unknown, all the material from 1958 is missing.<sup>97</sup> Neither biographical documents (correspondence), nor the last scholarly works that Nykl was composing and preparing for publication as a part-time assistant at Northwestern University Library for the librarian Jens Nyholm, were preserved.<sup>98</sup> At the University, he catalogued the Horatian

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<sup>92</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Robert Haynes, Robert Haynes to A. R. Nykl, 14th March, 1956.

<sup>93</sup> They knew each other through their activity at Grinnell College in 1919 and 1920.

<sup>94</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Eugene M. Lebert, A. R. Nykl to E. M. Lebert, 12th July 1956. On 22nd May 1956, Nykl mailed the Anderson Baggage Transfer Co.: "*Kindly let me know what is your charge for transporting two army trunks with books from Widener Library to 346 Crafts St., Newtonville, Mass. In 1948 I recall you were charging \$1.25 per trunk.*" ANpM, Nykl, Institutional Correspondence A. R. Nykl to Anderson Baggage Transfer Co., carbon copy.

<sup>95</sup> ANpM, Nykl, V.5.2.1. Walter Leopold to Jaroslav Nykl, 25th January 1959, 29th March 1959.

<sup>96</sup> 847 Foster Avenue, Evanston, Illinois, USA.

<sup>97</sup> Aside from the correspondence included by Bohumír Lifka and Jaroslav Nykl.

<sup>98</sup> There is no information on these documents in the archives of Northwestern University either. We only find the following in Nykl's personal file: "*Dr. A. R. Nykl, who is temporarily on the Library staff to assist in the cataloguing of the Horace Collection, representing a great variety of languages.*" Northwestern Library News XI, 24, 22nd March 1957, p. 4. Northwestern University Archives, A. R. Nykl's Personal File. He mentioned the following in his letter to his colleague Francis L. Utley: "*As you see, I left the center of biochemistry and biological warfare and am back here after 35 years – comparing the present with the past for an autobiographical "From Eternity to Eternity" and cataloguing a large collection of Horatina.*" Ohio State University Archives, Francis Lee Utley Papers, Box 7-9, Correspondence NOAH-Translations: NYKL, A. R., 18th October 1956.

Collections in the library, and he composed an article about the Noon Witch that was to be published in unspecified German scientific journal. Throughout my research in the Library's archives and in the personal archive of the then librarian of many years and Nykl's friend Jens Nyholm, I did not succeed in finding any details on this work. I could not locate the aforementioned text on the Noon Witch nor the manuscript.

The fate of the minor parts of Nykl's literary papers mentioned in the above quote from his English autobiography is unknown. Some details may be learnt from his correspondence. For instance, he gave the manuscript of the first part of *Kitāb az-Zahra* that he took with him from Czechoslovakia in September 1938 to William Marçais. It was meant to aid with the tutoring of students in Paris. He gave the second part which he acquired in Torino to Gustave von Grunebaum in the 1950's. He considered this American professor of Austrian origin, with whom he was friends since his activity at the University of Vienna, to be the only Arabists in the U.S. capable of finishing the work and publishing the second part of the edition.<sup>99</sup> He donated most of his books, newspapers and magazines to the Jewett Room of the Harvard Islamic Center and to the Library of the University of Chicago.<sup>100</sup>

It is also necessary to include here two more extensive collections of materials that were added to the archive. At the turn of 1957–1958, Nykl's materials preserved by Bohuslav Dušek reached the Náprstek Museum. Apart from extremely valuable correspondence, these also contained unique manuscripts of some of the early literary works including Nykl's first work. They also contained other materials sent by Nykl to Dušek, e.g. an issue of the magazine *Jidoshā* which is quite hard to locate today. Nykl had at that time instructed his brother Jaroslav to ask Dušek's widow Hermína after Dušek's death whether some of Nykl's things are not kept there. Mrs. Dušek however handed over to Jaroslav Nykl their correspondence by mistake. A. R. Nykl then ordered this to be sent to Bohumír Lifka at the Náprstek Museum. This series of events concerns materials of prime importance to the literary and personal development of A. R. Nykl.

The second group of materials may have reached the Museum some time during 1959 through Jaroslav Nykl.<sup>101</sup> This contained Nykl's correspondence with his family – his grandparents, parents, his brothers Jaroslav and Josef and his aunt Marie at whose place in Karlovy Vary he often stayed. It is biographical material of considerable extent and prime importance (e.g. for the periods of 1945 to 1951 and the year 1958). Jaroslav Nykl also did something else of great importance by adding his letters and correspondence with people in the U.S. after Alois' death. Thanks to these letters, it is possible to reconstruct the fate of the American part of the personal papers and also describe the funerary arrangements of A. R. Nykl.

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<sup>99</sup> NYKL, A. R. Review of *Le virelai et le villancico: Le Problème des origines arabes* (Pierre Legentil). In: *Speculum – A Journal of Medieval Studies* XXXI/3, 1956, p. 527. "I turned over my material on the second half of the *Kitab al-Zahrah* to the second greatest living authority Gustave E. von Grunebaum who I hope will produce sometime in 1965 if the world survives." ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, William Thomson, A. R. Nykl to William Thomson, 13th January 1956, carbon copy. ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, Gustave von Grunebaum, A. R. Nykl to Gustave von Grunebaum 28th February 1957, carbon copy.

<sup>100</sup> ANpM, Nykl, Institutional correspondence, Harvard College Library, A. R. Nykl to Robert H. Haynes, 6th January 1956, carbon copy. ANpM, Nykl, Institutional correspondence, University of Chicago Library, The University of Chicago Library to A. R. Nykl, 28th December 1938. He donated 194 books and pamphlets to the library.

<sup>101</sup> His youngest daughter mentioned in a personal interview that she remembered carrying these materials to the Museum with her father.

The greatest issue is that no master list of all the materials was preserved, even though Bohumír Lifka had composed at least one in 1948 and sent it to Nykl. Nykl himself composed the last catalogue of his items and his library in the early 1920's.<sup>102</sup> Due to the significant linguistic complexity and the de-emphasizing of the compatriot activities by the Museum after Lifka's leaving, the materials were not catalogued. Their official registration was only carried out in the early 1980's. At that time, a register of the books located in the deposit, and a rough list of the collection of slides from Japan that were separated from the papers for reasons unknown, were also composed.

Currently, the collection has been categorized and all literary materials aside from the uncatalogued books and the collection of magazines have been pre-processed.

## **Brief contents of Nykl's Personal Papers**

Nykl's personal materials currently make up the largest archival collection of the Náprstek Museum. It is quite thematically, scientifically and temporally diverse. Although almost all materials from 1938 to 1951 and 1958 have been lost, the remaining years represent a venerable historical legacy of this forgotten Czech scientist and compatriot. It contains a great wealth of biographical materials. Aside from the two aforementioned autobiographies (the Czech version was titled "50 Years of a Linguist and Philosopher's Travels" and the English "From Eternity to Eternity"), it also includes Nykl's complete diaries from 1912 to 1937, and parts of his diaries from 1909, 1911 and 1938 as well as the 1950's. These works represent an astounding historical source as well as expert resource for a number of topics – e.g. Andalusian literature. Another historical autobiographical work is his "Notes to the Czechoslovak Action in Chicago" – a manuscript of memoirs of the anti-Austrian "resistance" in the U.S. and the activities of the Slavic Office for the re-election of President Wilson in 1916. This part is further substantiated by an extensive convolute of U.S. newspaper cut-outs concerning the Czech National Action and others of Nykl's materials on this topic. For instance, his unique lectures promoting the independence of Czech lands given in Japan that he also mentioned in his book *Eternal Japan*.

Among his scholarly works, the papers include for instance the manuscript of the Arabic edition of *Ḍamm al-Hawā* based on six manuscripts. Nykl unfortunately never succeeded in publishing this quite demanding edition. It stayed in Czechoslovakia in 1938 and he never saw it again. From the other Nykl manuscripts listed in his official bibliography,<sup>103</sup> only a part of the translation of *Kitāb qawānīn wa-l-dawānīn* was preserved.<sup>104</sup> The correspondence with William Thomson, the predecessor of H. A. R. Gibb at Harvard University, indicates that the remaining part was sent to Thomson. The English translation of the 8<sup>th</sup> part of *Mirāt al-Zamān* by Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī based on Jewett's facsimile was likewise not preserved. From the correspondence with William Thomson, we can discern that both Thomson and Fritz Jewett saw the whole translation, Fritz Jewett financed it and Nykl expressed a wish in the 1950's to rewrite it based on recently

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<sup>102</sup> Forms part of the Papers.

<sup>103</sup> There exist two separate versions of the complete bibliography of A. R. Nykl. The first one includes his articles in *Národní listy*, the second one includes only his scholarly works. Neither of them is however a conclusive list. The author of the second, more extensive one, is most likely Jaroslav Nykl.

<sup>104</sup> ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, H. A. R. Gibb, A. R. Nykl to H. A. R. Gibb, 21th November 1956, carbon copy.

discovered manuscripts.<sup>105</sup> An equally interesting document is the review of A. J. Arberry's Moorish Poetry of many pages that Arberry received by post and which made him feel quite humiliated. There is also a response to the ungrateful García Gómez called Poesía Hispano-árabe that Nykl, however, never felt any need to publish. The sources, manuscripts and other materials on this topic are one of the most interesting aspect of the papers and allow us to closely examine Nykl's work in this field and his position within the framework of Andalusian literary studies.

Among other manuscripts, the papers contain several typescripts of a book about Mexico written between 1924 and 1926, and the bound History of the Czech Colony in Mexico (Sudek family in Penzacola) with extensive photographic material. The most interesting item from his linguistic works is the manuscript of his book "Linguistic Genius" in which

Nykl explained his linguistic method and his views on linguistic polyglotism. An equally interesting work is his travel book on his voyage through Mussolini's Italy and Rome from 1935.<sup>106</sup> Similar materials from his travels can be found in a number of scrap books with photos – e.g. Europe 1928, Western U.S. 1927, Mexico 1925-26, Summer School in Mexico, Spain and Morocco 1929, Algiers 1929, Tunisia 1930, Malta, Tripolitania and Rome 1930-1931 etc. His essays on philosophy and ethics that gave life to his two editions of Universal Ethics are also numerous.

His photographic collection is extremely valuable. Aside from pictures of Nykl from 1903 till his death, it contains several separate collections. The most extensive

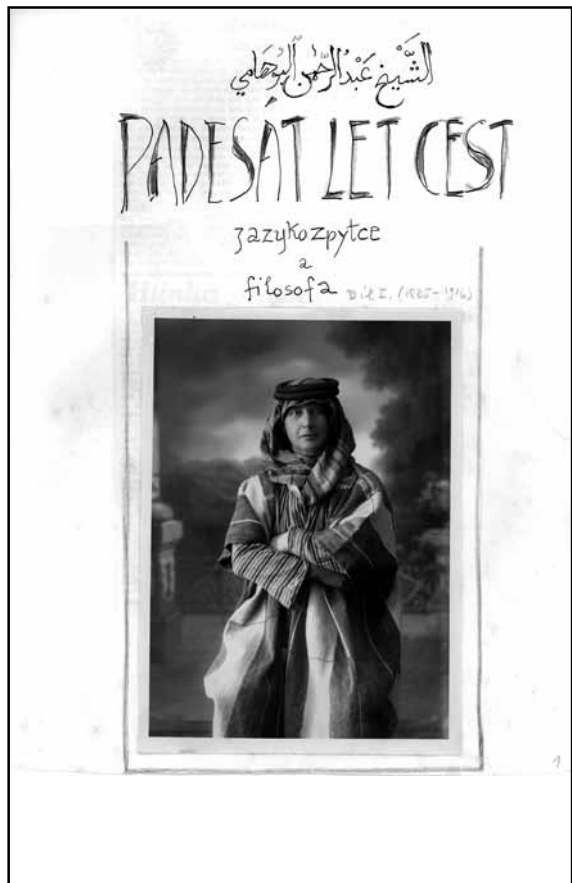


Fig. 5. Title page from Nykl's 50 Years of a Linguist and Philosopher's Travels (1938), ANpM, Nykl, Manuscripts.

<sup>105</sup> "You must have completely forgotten that in 1948 you took to Athol the annotated copy of the Jewett's facsimile and the Carbon copy of my preliminary translation which you wanted to have by Christmas 1948. The original is in the Jewett's Room." ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, William Thomson, A. R. Nykl to William Thomson, 13th January 1956, carbon copy ANpM, Nykl, personal correspondence, H. A. R. Gibb, A. R. Nykl to H. A. R. Gibb, 9th October 1956, carbon copy.

<sup>106</sup> The excerpt was published in Národní listy: Nykl, A. R. Z potulek dnešním Římem [Wandering across today's Rome], In: Národní listy 25th August, annex.

one is concerning Japan from 1911 to 1916 and includes hundreds of unique photos, for instance the installation of the very first traffic signs in Japan. A rare part of this collection is, for example, the photos of the Muslim community in Japan headed by Muhammad Barakatullah from India. This collection is complemented by 1500 slides for his U.S. lectures about Japan that Nykl planned to give during World War I. The second most extensive part are the photos from Mexico from 1925 to 1926 including the photographic documentation of the Czech factory in Penzacola. A number of photos of persons and locations were preserved from his other voyages – for instance from Egypt, Chicago, Granada, Evanston, Paris, and Mexico in 1907 to 1909; among the persons, there is for example the Lebanese publisher in Mexico Aqel Beshelání, Joseph W. Solch, the Lebanese philologist Omar Farrukh, the famous American photographer who settled in Japan Karl Lewis, and many others.

His correspondence is quite extensive as well, and just like the manuscripts and photographs, it encompasses a wide variety of topics. Currently, there are more than 750 individual authors of personal correspondence, and almost 300 authors of institutional correspondence. Also to be included are several large thematic bundles of letters, and several not-yet-catalogued or processed sheets, two bound books with copies of correspondence sent from Japan, and further letters and postcards glued in scrap books. Nykl was an avid writer of letters to colleagues, friends and enemies, and he kept in touch with many over the course of decades. His letters are therefore full of historical and biographical information and enhance some scholarly topics with further context and detail.

Nykl typed a large share of his letters, which helped preserve a great deal of what he sent himself. Another important element for the preservation of this scholarly correspondence was its inclusion by Nykl into studies and books. It is therefore possible to observe extensive scholarly discussions over a variety of topics with a number of experts. For instance, Gerold Hilty's edition of Ali Aben Ragel's book "*El libro conplido en los judizios de las estrellas*" contained an extensive background of information from Gerold Hilty, Arnald Steiger, Omar Farrukh and Victor Oelschläger. The archived correspondence is complemented by many letters preserved in the collections of Nykl's friends and colleagues from his professional and personal life. Their own collections include some other scholarly works not mentioned elsewhere. Such is the case of the letters in the personal papers of Francis L. Utley at Ohio State University. Further examples of Nykl's letters can be found e.g. in the collection of Archer M. Huntington at Syracuse University, the collection of Frederic Starr at the University of Chicago, or within the Epistolario Miguel Asín in Madrid, the collection of Helmuth Ritter, William Marçais, Paul Kahle and others. These are always scientists that Nykl deeply respected and with whom he corresponded for many years. Some of these collections have great importance for the study of the period from 1938 to 1950 where there is missing information in the Nykl papers.

## **Conclusion:**

Thanks to Bohumír Lifka, the Náprstek Museum now owns one of the most extensive compatriot and orientalist collections in the world. The cataloguing of this material opens the door to the study of a wide variety of topics connected to Nykl's life as well as his scholarly work, and finally enables us to understand his role within Czech history

and that of both world and Czech orientalist and linguistic studies. The variety of this information and the detailed background conclusively proves how scant our information is about this scholarly environment. For example, our view on Spanish Arabistics of the 1930's and 1940's acquires a different shape by including Nykl's position within it. Furthermore, the collection has unprecedented importance for the study of Czech compatriot life in the United States, Mexico and Japan. Some of these archives have already been used as resources by experts, for instance to study the history of motoring in Japan; others still await use. The publication of Nykl's autobiography and his Notes on the History of Czech National Movement is planned as well. In this instance, the indubitable importance of the collection can be observed for the activity of the Slavic Office for re-election of President Wilson, of which Nykl was secretary. Alois Richard Nykl, ARNY, Richard Nylsen, Alois Kostelecký, Loyza Horal or Háfiz Abd ur-Rahmán el Bohémi may therefore be finally *evaluated*, either positively or negatively.

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### Appendix:

Outline of Nykl's life – Planned contents of his English autobiography. Only parts I to V were written.

Loyza Horal: From ETERNITY TO ETERNITY: The adventures of a Bohemian-born linguist.

- I. (1885–1899): Radlice, Vojkov, Mukařov, Černý Kostelec
- II. (1899–1903): Karlovy Vary – Praha
- III. (1903–1904): Switzerland – Germany
- IV. (1905–1907): U.S.A. (St. Louis, Chicago, Buffalo, the South)
- V. (1907–1909): Mexico
- VI. (1909–1911): Back to USA, England, Germany, Bohemia, Trieste-Egypt
- VII. (1911–1916): From Suez to the Far East, China, Japan

- VIII. (1916–1918): Back to USA, Chicago, Wilson election, war, stockyards
- IX. (1919–1920): U. of Chicago, A.M. degree, Grinnell College
- X. (1920–1925): U. of Chicago, PhD., Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., trips to Eastern US, throughout Europe, Mexico
- XI. (1925–1926): Mexico revisited (linguistic studies), Tlaxcala
- XII. (1926–1929): Milwaukee (Marquette University), trip through the Southwest, Pacific Coast, Northwest, trip to Europe, Oxford
- XIII. (1929–1932): U.of Chicago-Oriental Institute, travels in the Near East, North Africa, the Balkans, Scandinavia, troubadour studies, printing two books
- XIV. (1933): Spain, France, Italy, the Mediterranean, printing Ibn Quzmān
- XV. (1934–1935): Research in Europe, Prague, Rome, Germany, the Qur’ān
- XVI. (1936): Granada, Madrid, Paris, back to USA, Roosevelt landslide
- XVII. (1937–1938): Research in Europe, Munich, 2nd edition of the Qur’ān
- XVIII. (1939): Research in Switzerland, Paris
- XIX. (1939–1940): Portugal, Spain (Coimbra and Granada), Eternal Japan
- XX. (1941–1944): Back to USA on “Hakozaki Maru”, New York, Boston, Harvard teaching Portuguese and Japanese, books, articles
- XXI. (1945–1953): Hiroshima and what followed; Tlaxcala and loss of the right eye; a brief contemplation. Madison



Fig. 6. Unmarked grave of A. R. Nykl, All Saints Cemetery, Des Plaines, Illinois, U. S. (2013, photo by Josef Ženka)