



THE SOUTH AMERICAN COLLECTIONS OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

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The South American collections deposited at the Náprstek Museum can be formally divided into two groups: ethnographic and archaeological. The museum's earliest acquisitions from that area were ethnographic. Probably the oldest of them was a set of items from Brazil presented to the museum in the 1880s by Czech opera singer **Klementina Kalašová (1851 – 1889)**, featuring most prominently a dress of the chief of the now extinct Tupinamba tribe, splendidly decorated with multicoloured bird feathers.

Several valuable specimens of handicraft production, likewise of Brazilian provenance, dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, were relocated to the Náprstek Museum in the early 20th century from the then Museum of the Kingdom of Bohemia (today's National Museum). These include three feather caps and a plumed hat which originally belonged to the defunct Jesuit Museum of Mathematics in Prague.

The explorer **Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860 - 1932)** donated to the museum a collection gathered during his expedition across equatorial America in 1893 - 94. He navigated upstream the Orinoko and Amazon rivers, and traversed the Andes on foot before reaching the Pacific coast. Accordingly, the ethnographic items presented by him come from the tropical rain forest regions of Venezuela and its border with Columbia, as well as from Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. Vráz's bequest constitutes still today a substantial part of the museum's Amazonian collections which were sub-

sequently supplemented by gifts or purchases from various private collectors. Vráz would not concentrate on collecting attractive rarities, but showed due interest in objects of everyday use as well. In the process, he paid close attention to the ways in which they were used and made. Therefore, his selection is highly illustrative of the day-by-day livelihood of the various tribes whose subsistence depended on hunting and gathering or on primitive farming - Venezuela's Guahibo, Baniva and Maquiritare, Colombia's Uiquina etc.



Vessel in the shape of stylized fish with an anthropomorphic figure sitting on its back, baked clay. Culture Moche, north coast of Peru, 200 – 600 AD (NpM 59 209).

For another major ethnographic asset to its South American collections, the Náprstek Museum is indebted to Czech explorer **Alberto Vojtěch Frič (1882 - 1944)**, who conducted four long-term expeditions to Brazil and Paraguay in the early 20th century. At first driven predominantly by an interest in the natural science aspect of his project, he was soon captivated by the life of the native inhabitants, especially in the region of Gran Chaco, straddling the borders of Paraguay, Argentina and

Bolivia, and focused his study on that field. Of Frič's collections, which are now scattered in museums around Europe and America, the Náprstek Museum acquired most notably that part which related to his second expedition, of 1903 - 1904. Apart from that, several dozen items were purchased in the late 1940s from Frič's posthumous estate. The collection comes from members of the Toba, Pilagá, Sanapaná, Angaité, Lengua and Chamacoco tribes and a remarkable contribution is represented by objects acquired during Frič's expedition to the Bororo tribe in the tropical area of southern Brazil. Frič's collections are all the more valuable as the tribes indigenous to Gran Chaco and its adjacent regions have since his time virtually ceased to exist as a result of brutal extermination, or have been assimilated into Western-style civilization.

The Náprstek Museum's first archaeological collection from South America was purchased in 1921 from **Julius Nestler**, a secondary-school teacher of Romance languages who spent two years in Bolivia (1910 - 1911). There, he engaged among other activities in archaeological excavations around Tiahuanaco site, near Titicaca Lake, where a settlement had existed as early as the second century A.D. Nestler's collection contains several thousand items which document a comparatively wide time-span, reaching back to the colonial era (17th - 18th Centuries).

The Náprstek Museum has since then added to the above-listed collections valuable archaeological finds from other localities, including notably vessels and baked-clay figure sculpture from pre-Columbian Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and the mountainous parts of Venezuela. Its present-day collection of ceramics documenting the Peruvian coastal cultures of Nazca (100 B.C. - A.D. 700), Moche (100 B.C. - A.D. 700), Chimú (A.D. 1100 - 1400), Chancay (1100 - 1450) and Inca (1400 - 1553), Ecuadorian cultures Bahía (500 B.C. - A.D. 500), Tolita (500 B.C. - A.D. 500) and Manteño (A.D. 1000 - 1500) and Colombian Tumaco (500 B.C. - A.D. 500) is the result of purchases from private collectors and antiquaries; several Peruvian items were acquired by way of barter from Vienna's Museum für Völkerkunde.

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed an expansion of the Náprstek Museum's ethnographic and archaeological collections, thanks to the efforts of a member of the institution's scholarly staff and later director, **Václav Šolc (1919 - 1995)**. His first American expedition led to Bolivia, subsequently to be followed by several others, to Chile, and to Peru. From Bolivia he brought a collection of ceramics, both contemporary and pre-Columbian (Tiahuanaco, Mollo culture, A.D. 1300 - mid-15th century), as

well as musical instruments (various types of flutes), and hand-woven woollen textiles, parts of the native dress. In Chile he took part in the archaeological research of a burial site near the city of Arica (dating from A.D. 1100 - 1450). Another body of archaeological finds - a burial from the fishing community of Patillos (A.D. 1250 - 1500) was acquired by Václav Šolc by way of barter with the University of Chile in Santiago. The ethnographic collection brought by Šolc from Chile documents the culture of the Aymara, from the Chilean-Peruvian borderland, and the Mapuche of central Chile. The Mapuche collection was further enlarged in the mid-1970s thanks to field research carried out by Czech ethnographer **Milan Stuchlík (1932 - 1982)**, who contributed a number of objects of daily use.

A specific part of the museum's South American collections is represented by specimens made in colonial workshops from metal, wood and ceramics, which attest to interaction between the European and Indian cultures. Certainly the most representative items in that section are Bolivian silver cups and vessels decorated with engraved and beaten veg-



Face-mask of stamped bark coloured by resin and earth. Colombia, 20th Cent. (MpM45 841).



Portrait pottery. Culture Moche, north coast of Peru, 200 - 600 AD. H. 30 cm (MpM 61 755).

etable motives, which were purchased in the late 1960s from a private collection.

Members of the museum's current scholarly staff carry on with systematic endeavours to enlarge its collections; naturally, gifts from the outside are appreciated, as are long-term loans.

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