



THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM'S COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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The history of the collection of photographs of the Ethnographic Department of the Náprstek Museum in Prague is comparatively short. Its beginnings date back to 1951, when the museum set up its auxiliary material book of acquisitions. The photographs, which reached the museum by various ways and means, were initially not listed under the individual collections, but separately, as "auxiliary material". After some time, however, photographs concerning Africa were singled out and listed as such. The same method was subsequently also applied to photographic material related to the other areas.

The collection of photographs contains negatives, slides and prints divided into the following sections: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia and Oceania. All photographic material of European provenance deposited in the collection invariably reflects, in one way or another, non-European context.

The most plentifully represented subject is architecture in all its forms. Other photographs capture various types of landscape, species of fauna and flora and the concomitant variety of farming activities. Indeed, a considerable portion of the photographs is devoted to human activity, ranging from agriculture, through miscellaneous ways and means of obtaining raw materials, a wide scale of crafts, trades and household chores, to sale and exchange of goods, as well as documenting entertainment and spiritual activities (dance, song, music, games, rituals, healing).

Another extensive thematic group is focused on the human face and all the essential accessories needed and used by humans: clothes, footwear, ornaments and jewels, weapons, tools and instruments, vessels and containers, hairstyles and body decoration. Photographic materials in the collection vary in terms of age and provenance. The key assets have come most notably from bequests and posthumous estates of this country's prominent explorers. One of the largest bodies of photographs is part of the estate of **Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860-1932)**. However, the Ethnographic Department of the Náprstek Museum currently controls only a small fraction of that huge source of data: namely, Vráz's oldest negatives on glass plates, dating from 1883-1904. Vráz took his first photographs in the Gold Coast (today Ghana) in 1883. The photos are unique, as regards both their age and the exclusiveness of the situations they depict. The same applies to pictures from some of Vráz's other expeditions: those to South America (1889-1893), Borneo (1896), and above all, New Guinea (1896). In 1901 Vráz set out on a voyage to China, where he recorded the situation in the aftermath of the Boxer Rising. Vráz's last journey, covering South American capitals, took place between 1903 and 1904.

Another large group of photographs comes from the estate of **Alberto Vojtěch Frič (1882-1944)**. Unfortunately, most of the negatives are not accompanied by documentation and therefore difficult to identify. Frič started to photograph during his second expedition to South America, in 1903. Later on he made photos of Indians from the regions around the Orinoco and Amazon rivers, including several extremely rare pictures, as Frič was the first to have photographically documented members of those tribes.

A very extensive and completely documented corpus of negatives and slides comes from the posthumous estate of **Bedřich Machulka (1875-1954)**. Machulka spent almost all of his life in Africa, as a professional big game hunter, collector of natural science specimens and organizer of safaris. Throughout his stay in Africa he photographed - non just for pleasure, but also for commercial purposes (even Vráz's collection of photos, for instance, includes a series of negatives bought by Vráz from Machulka). The earliest of his photographs date from the period between 1898 and 1902, when Machulka stayed in Tripoli, Libya. Subsequently Machulka set out on travels, which took him through Egypt to Somalia, Kenya and Madagascar. There, he photographed both the local Malagasy population and soldiers of the French occupation army. Finally he left for Sudan, settling in Khartoum. In Sudan he once again organized and guided hun-

ting safaris. Machulka became intimately acquainted with the entire region, and took a huge number of photographs there. He showed particular interest in landscape, human types, dwellings, hairstyles, ornaments, clothes, weapons, tools, and local customs. His photos include scenes from safaris, pictures of campsites and hunting trophies. He spent the final period of his life (until 1935) in Kenya, Uganda and the former Belgian Congo, in the region of Ituri tropical rain forest. The corpus of Machulka's African photographs is priceless, owing not only to its impressive extent (over 3,000 items), but also to its documentary value. Besides showing long vanished things, its photographs, made continuously over a period of more than three decades, capture numerous events in the process of evolution and change.

An interesting and valuable body is represented by the collection of photographs from the expeditions of **Josef Kořenský (1847-1938)** and **Karel Řezníček (1845-1914)**. The former undertook a journey around the world between 1893 and 1894. Later on, in 1900-1901, Kořenský went on another expedition, this time on his own, covering Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands. Kořenský himself did not photograph, but he bought large amounts of pictures from professional photographers who had their studios in every major tourist centre. Thematically, these photographs are enormously varied. They depict nature, architecture, artistic scenes, as well as products of nature and museum exhibits. Kořenský's photographs are coupled in this collection with those supplied by **Karel Řezníček**, which largely concentrate on Japan and China.

A significant part of the collection of photographs documents the results of research carried out by the museum's scholarly staff and collaborators. There, the most important asset is represented by the corpus provided by **Václav Šolc (1919-1995)**, ethnographer, Americanist and director of the Náprstek Museum (1970-1979). In the period between 1963 and 1975 Šolc launched seven expeditions to various countries of South America and to Mexico. Nearly three thousand negatives and slides document his ethnographic field studies. Apart from that, over one thousand negatives sum up Šolc's stay in China, in 1957. Another member of the Náprstek Museum's scholarly staff, **Milan Stuchlík (1932-1982)** conducted a month-long research in Morocco, in 1961, from where he brought a photographic documentation consisting of around 300 negatives. In 1971 Stuchlík accompanied V. Šolc on one of the latter's expeditions to South America. The resulting photographic documentation amounts to over 200 negatives. In 1965 Náprstek Museum's ethnographer **Alice Holá** spent six months

doing research among the Berti and Fur tribesmen in Sudan. The project's documentary outcome includes a body of more than 300 negatives.

Věra Šťovíčková, a prominent journalist and one-time staff member of the Náprstek Museum, presented to the museum a gift in 1994, containing photographic documentation from her travels in Africa, the Near East and Cuba.

The collection of photographs of the Ethnographic Department of the Náprstek Museum continues to grow. At the current stage the most frequent new contributions are represented by both small- and large-scale gifts. In 1996, for instance, a niece of explorer **J. L. Erben (1888-1958)** handed over to the museum his extensive bequest of photographs which is now ready for documentation.

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