



EDUCATIONAL PRINTS AT THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT: Collections of the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures include a set of 355 educational images printed on cloth and hand-coloured. They were published by the Working Men’s Educational Union based in London to accompany public lectures for British workers, and purchased by Vojta Náprstek in 1862 during his visit to the World Exposition in London for an industrial museum he had planned. Topics of the prints come from natural sciences (astronomy, anatomy, fauna, flora, physics, geology) as well as humanities (archaeology, ethnology, history, theology). A collection of this size has not been preserved anywhere else in the Czech lands.

KEY WORDS: educational posters – London – Vojta Náprstek – Náprstek Museum

In 1861, Vojta Náprstek, a well-known patriot and sponsor of new ideas, put on a tea party at his library, on which he noted in his diary: *Morning party including an exhibition of teaching aids, collected by me², V. and A. Frič, and Felkl, from 10–1 o’clock³ [...]*⁴ and continued to list eighty participants in total. His report was way too brief, but luckily another participant, the writer Jan Neruda, described the event in his newspaper column titled *At a Tea Party: English colour prints hang on the walls, representing educational, and for the school specially fabricated aids. We find ourselves as if at an English school where*

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² English in original. Emphasized by translator.

³ As above.

⁴ Julius Zeyer, *Kostra deníku*, p. 163. Archives of the Náprstek Museum (hereinafter abbreviated as ANpM), Personal collection Náprstek Vojta, Sig. VN 24/2.

miscellaneous maps and pictures constantly attract pupils' attention and instruct them incessantly. Indeed, even tables hold cupboards atop them, little school museums of natural history and industry, more modest cabinets containing even smaller systematically and precisely arranged collections of mineralogy, two cabinets containing plaster models of chemically decomposed food substances, another cabinet containing substances needed for the production of glass and indicating the whole procedure of the manufacturing thereof, etc. The aim being to get us acquainted with accessories of advanced English schools and the excellence of developed illustrative education (Neruda 1861: unpagged). The party had important consequences. The naturalist Antonín Frič exhibited there the results of his study trip to London, and his lecture led to the decision taken by a whole group of Czech patriots to visit the World Exposition in London the next year, and to continue with purchasing modern educational aids. New discoveries and new findings were changing knowledge long taken for granted which meant school curricula as well as paraphernalia needed an upgrade too. Public education was seen by Czech patriots as a remedy to the underdeveloped society, and promotion of schools was a priority.

On 16 June 1862 Náprstek, representing the Industrial Union, came to London where his task was to negotiate with corresponding London institutions an exchange of publications. On 31 July, members of the Czech mission met at Vojta Náprstek's London flat and agreed on founding a similar industrial museum in Prague as the one they saw in Kensington. They collected funds, and Náprstek as their treasurer was charged to purchase appropriate future museum exhibits. As early as on 1 August, he noted in his diary: *With Krejčí⁵, bought at Working Men Educ. Union in King William Str. diagrams⁶ for our Kensington Mus. in Prague; will be approx. 500 of them for £43; a good start!*⁷ Combined with preserved leaflets, this evidences a purchase of several hundred educational images. On 9 August 1862, Náprstek noted down again having paid £37 to the Working Men's Union. Consequently, most likely they were not 500 pieces, but the exact number is hard to ascertain. To this day, the Náprstek Museum holds over 350 pictures. There is a record from the 16 April 1894 by Náprstek's librarian Stanislav Kodym, stating that in a *survey of diagrams on cloth, 35 pieces have not been found*.⁸ Thus, it could be inferred that Náprstek bought approximately four hundred pictures.

The pictures are printed on cloth, measuring for the most part 70 x 120 cms with metal ring reinforced eyelets in the corners for suspension. Several pieces are twice, exceptionally even three times wider. The black print is coloured by hand. Each picture bears a circular stamp of the publishing society, and a number marking sometimes accompanied by letters M, ML, WM, or EH. The pictures were published by Working Men's Educational Union, 25 King William St. Trafalgar Square, London, and were described on a promotional leaflet in the following way: *The Diagrams of this Society are intended for the use of Lecturers, and are executed in a bold, attractive style. Each is three feet by four feet in area, printed on cloth, adapted for distant inspection, and coloured for gas or candlelight. They are both durable and very portable. Although arranged in Sets, they may generally be obtained singly. Single Diagrams – i.e. having one number attached – are sold at 3s.; Double and Treble Diagrams in proportion. When required, they can be provided with Frame*

⁵ Jan Krejčí (1825–1887), naturalist – geologist and mineralogist, teacher.

⁶ What would be nowadays called educational posters, was termed diagrams in the English original, and Náprstek stuck to this designation.

⁷ *Deník Vojty Náprstka*, 1862. ANpM, Personal collection Náprstek Vojta.

⁸ *Deník knihovny a Náprstkova muzea 1881–1898*, p. 459, Náprstek Museum Library.

and Eyelets for convenient suspension.⁹ The publisher was a philanthropic society founded in 1850, the purpose of which was the support of workers' education. The diagrams they published were intended to visually accompany lectures in various fields of science, literature, arts, history, and geography, conducted by the society itself, and to a lesser extent by the Religious Tract Society.¹⁰ The promotional leaflet *Vojta Náprstek* brought from London, includes 440 diagrams, but Náprstek bought also other ones that are not mentioned in the list. The leaflet had perhaps been outdated, and the society had published prints to accompany other subjects. It is worth mentioning that the leaflet, in addition to a list of individual diagrams, indicates recommended literature for each topic, including the price of individual volumes. The task of the lecturer was thus somewhat facilitated, as he was released from the need to search for other sources of information. The books mentioned were by renowned experts, while in diagrams intended for the use by the Religious Tract Society, the referenced titles were published by the Society itself.¹¹

The first part of the leaflet includes diagrams titled *Scientific Illustrations*, individual sets being dedicated to: Astronomy (three sets), Geology, Volcanoes, The Steam Engine, Optics (two sets), The Mechanical Powers, Progress made in Locomotion, Natural History, Ethnology and Physiology in Relation to Health. Náprstek bought diagrams from each set, rather paradoxically, considering the future orientation of the Museum, the least from the Ethnology set. On the other hand, he purchased every diagram from the set concerning the human body. The second part with the heading *Archaeological, Historical and Allegorical Illustrations* includes sets titled: Ancient Egypt, Nineveh and Assyria [Pl. 1], Pompeii and its Remains, Paganism, Early Christianity, The Catacombs at Rome, The Literary History of the Bible, The Book and its Missions, The Druids, Britain under the Romans, The Reformation in England, Sufferings and Emigration of the Pilgrim Fathers, The Pilgrims' Progress, and Australia and Australian Life [Pl. 2]. From this section, Náprstek acquired nothing, with one exception, of The Reformation in England and sets relating to the Pilgrims. The other sets he purchased complete. The third part, under the heading *Missionary Illustrations, Maps, etc.*, includes sets titled Dr. Livingstone's Missionary Researches, Hindoostan and the Hindoos [Pl. 3], Large Map of India, China and Chinese, Map of Palestine and View of Modern Jerusalem. From these sets Náprstek purchased everything except for the map of Palestine. The last part of the sheet under the heading *Scriptures Illustrations* includes parts dedicated to Eastern Habitations, Fulfilled Prophecy, The Seven Churches of Asia, The Tabernacle of Witness, Palestine, Mountains of the Bible, The Types of Scripture, and Travels of the Apostle Paul. From this part too, Náprstek purchased everything except the next-to-last section. Náprstek's declared atheism considered, it comes as a surprise that he purchased diagrams on Biblical subjects in particular. In addition, he brought diagrams relating to Domestic Arrangements, New Zealand, and Polar Regions [Pl. 4]. It is surprising that the Working Men's Educational Union did not offer any diagrams

⁹ *List of Diagrams and Picture*. London: Working Men's Educational Union – leaflet.

¹⁰ The Religious Tract Society was founded in London in 1799 as an institution oriented exclusively on the publishing of religious literature, at first as small and often paperback prints. Later they started publishing books on non-European regions too (in relation to the subject matter of religion), and by the end of the 19th century began publishing also fiction, periodicals, and children's and women's literature.

¹¹ The publishing house was located at 56, Paternoster Row, London.

concerning the Americas, however, this might have been a response to the War of 1812 between the British and the Americans (1812–1815), in which the British were defeated. Had such diagrams been published, Náprstek would have certainly ordered them, considering among other things his nine years stay in the USA (1848–1857). Examining the list of prints published by the Religious Tract Society, one finds only one item relating to America: Abraham Lincoln's biography published as late as in 1890, and one print dedicated to North-American Indians (Mogridge 1843).

Judging by the surviving diagrams, it is quite sure they were bought for the use in lectures on various subject matters for the general public, with no special plan. They were modern educational aids for the use by the then planned Industrial Museum in Prague. It was supposed, in addition to its expositions, to organize lectures, feature a large library equipped with the most up-to-date literature and technical instruction handbooks, drawings and plans, so that it could serve small manufacturers too. Establishment of a professional school was also part of the plans.

In several cases, the subject of the purchased diagrams is astounding. Náprstek bought them for the widest audience, with whose dispositions and level of education he was well acquainted, so the choice of subjects seems surprising: some relate more to Great Britain and its history (for example *The Literary History of the Bible in England*, *The Book and its Missions*, *The Druids*, *Britain under the Romans*, *The Reformation in England*), some are way too specialized for the Czech Catholic society (*The Tabernacle of Witness*, *Travels of the Apostle Paul*, etc.). Náprstek possibly purchased everything that was available at the moment, and did not consider the relevance of individual topics for Czech society.

Before the diagrams became museum exhibits, some of them were displayed in late 1862 at an industrial exhibition organized by Vojta Náprstek and Antonín Frič on the Střelecký Island in Prague. In surviving photographs, one can recognize diagrams on anatomy, astronomy, fauna, physics, Babylonia, Egypt, etc. Náprstek, together with Antonín Frič, leased exhibition grounds there, and introduced their visitors to their London acquisitions. A year later, Náprstek organized already a second industrial exhibition at the same place, this time larger and supplemented with Czech and American products. The exhibition was accompanied by a printed catalogue, giving evidence of a display of a hundred and thirty pieces of *diagrams (pictures on cloth)* illustrating *Livingstone's travels in South Africa, China, its inhabitants, their occupations, habits and manners, household life of the Orientals, Herculeum and Pompeii, ancient Rome, etc.*¹² The catalogue list shows the exhibited diagrams were different from those at the first exhibition which focused more on the domain of science.

In the following years, after an unfruitful request for an official permission to found at least a society for the creation of an industrial museum, the London diagrams remained in a box in a storage at the U Halánků house where Vojta Náprstek resided. In 1865, Náprstek's library saw the establishment of the first women's educational society called the American Ladies' Club, and some of the diagrams were used in lectures. Namely, they accompanied lectures by František Josef Studnička in astronomy (1865, 1868, 1872, 1885), Antonín Majer on steam engines (1865), and Prof. Jan Evangelista Purkyně in anatomy (1866, 1867). Most probably, images of Pompeii were used in a lecture by Prof. František Jeřábek (1872), to accompany a relation of their experience in

¹² *Katalog druhé výstavy průmyslové a školní na Střeleckém ostrově*. Prague 1863, p. 14.

India by Prof. Otokar Feistmantel (1881), and in polar regions [Pl. 5] by the explorer Josef Kořenský (1882). They might have been used to illustrate other topics too, but we lack any evidence thereof. However, Náprstek was willing to look up required information for every visitor to the library in every source available, be it in printed word, or in pictures. For this reason, his library was very sought-after among dilettantes as well as experts. Contemporaries emphasized the fact that Náprstek's library was the only place in Prague where one could learn about the life in distant lands, and verify the learnings with their own eyes in stereoscopic pictures, photographs, and other visual materials too. Let us now focus on the diagrams with regard to individual countries and ethnic groups.

What do the English educational pictures then speak about?¹³ It is evident that authors of the drawings, who were numerous judging by the distinctive features of their approaches, proceeded from expert sources of the newest literature, and tried to capture the most interesting things of every particular subject matter. In some cases, the draughtsman copied book illustrations with utmost accuracy and in the tiniest detail; this is true especially for the diagrams of ancient Assyria (20 pieces),¹⁴ and African travels of David Livingstone (10 pieces).¹⁵ From Babylonia, scenes documenting the size and beauty of surviving reliefs showing various motifs (feasts, transport of stones from a quarry, and in particular atrocious battle scenes), using human figures only as a gauge of the real size of the finds. On the other hand, diagrams from Livingstone's travels are full of figures, and present scenes mostly from the life of South African inhabitants. One of the more remarkable prints is a depiction of Victoria Falls [Pl. 6], discovered by Livingstone in 1855. It was probably the first picture, apart from book illustrations,¹⁶ Náprstek acquired for his library, and moreover, it was in colour. As well as the Babylonian diagrams, the Egyptian ones (totalling 9 pieces) represent the most famous monuments (The Rosetta Stone, Hieroglyphics from Karnak, Temple of Abou Simbel [Pl. 7], Sitting Statues on the Plain of Thebes, etc.), known at the period mostly only among experts. Human figures in the drawings were used again to demonstrate the size and magnificence of the monuments. For the region of India, there were eighteen diagrams in total on offer, which represented the second largest set dedicated to a single geographical region, however, this is understandable considering the situation of the country in relation to Britain. Individual diagrams depict partly scenes from the local everyday life, its ceremonies and customs, mostly with regard to religion or activities of British missionaries, and partly specific places and monuments (Gumbaz at Srirangapatna, Hindoo School near Madras, Scene on the Ganges). The same applies to diagrams relating to China, only there is just eight of them. Everyday life scenes involving religious activities (Missionary Preaching in a Buddhist Temple, Buddhist Priest at his Devotions), and views of specific places (Canton, Hong Kong). Recommended reading on India and China does not specify specialized books, but a text compiled by the publisher (Baron). It seems evident that the illustrator chose

¹³ Acknowledgements go to my colleagues PhDr. Jana Součková, DrSc., PhDr. Dagmar Pospíšilová, Csc., and PhDr. Pavel Onderka for their guidance in their respective domains of specialization.

¹⁴ The diagrams consist of faithfully redrawn illustrations from books by Charles Henry Layard (1849) and Joseph Benoni (1852).

¹⁵ The diagrams consist of faithfully redrawn illustrations from a book by David Livingstone (1857).

¹⁶ Náprstek probably already had a German translation of Livingstone's book in his library (Leipzig 1859).

attractive and shocking motifs (Self Torture, Opium Smoker's Den [Pl. 8]). Asian customs were portrayed also by diagrams called Domestic Arrangements of the Orientals (10 pieces in total) [Pl. 9], and Eastern Habitations (10 pieces) [Pl. 10], illustrating various types of habitations, furniture [Pl. 1], and Oriental paraphernalia. These diagrams were not accompanied by any recommended reading. Non-European subject matter can be found also in the section called Fulfilled Prophecy (11 pieces), including mainly views of specific places (Petra, Babylon, Tyre, Thebes, Heliopolis in Egypt, Jerusalem).

Diagrams showing Australia (6 pieces) are equally interesting, focusing, apart from specific places, on fauna, and gold mining. Recommended reading is a (non-illustrated) booklet published by the Religious Tract Society¹⁷. The diagram collection includes also twelve canvases dedicated to New Zealand. These are not mentioned in the promotional leaflet, they must have been newly released in 1862, and documented, similarly to the Australian diagrams, predominantly encounters of British colonists and missionaries with the Maori. Two canvases depict the Maori as a harsh and bloodthirsty ethnic group [Pl. 12, Pl. 13].¹⁸

All diagrams have been preserved at the Náprstek Museum in a comparatively good shape, and, with a few exceptions, show few signs of wear. The only visible damage are brownish spots testifying to them having been subjected to water. This is due to a disastrous flood that hit Prague, among other places, in 1890. As Josefa Náprstková mentioned in her memoirs: *On the 4th of September, we were not able to get to either the front or the back gate, water was reaching the wine distillery; early in the morning we wrapped up water taps, carried stones to the back store and put them on the floor, so that in case the water broke into the store it would not raise the flooring. In the midst of all these provisions, my husband remembered the crate which stored diagrams brought from London in 1862, placed in the so-called America in rooms adjoining the back gate, nevertheless, the crate was already standing in water, and the water level kept rising.*¹⁹ The crate was salvaged after all, and in time, as the basement which housed the exposition was flooded up to the ceiling, and people sailed Betlémské square in boats.

As we have suggested, the surviving diagram collection is highly valuable. It is unique in its purpose, the period of its creation, the scope of its topics, and naturally also in its information value. The scope of information presented to British workers who attended lectures after their day jobs to expand their education, is remarkable. The diagrams were a practical teaching aid, more durable than a sheet of paper of such size, and also more mobile. The collection preserved at the Náprstek Museum is unique in its size, and is not matched by any other in the Czech lands.²⁰

¹⁷ Australia, its Scenery, Natural History and Resources. Ed. Religious Tract Society, 56 Paternoster Row.

¹⁸ The National Library of New Zealand possesses fifteen pieces of these educational posters. Interestingly, the colourist used different colours in them, and our pictures are, accordingly, considerably more colourful and conspicuous.

¹⁹ Josefa Náprstková, *Vzpomínky 1890–1894*, ANpM, Personal collection Náprstek Vojta.

²⁰ Individual prints are available for sale on the internet at prices ranging from £200 to £600.

Sources:

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- Archive of the Náprstek Museum (ANpM), Julius Zeyer, *Kostrá deníku*. Personal collection Náprstek Vojta, Sig. VN 24/2;
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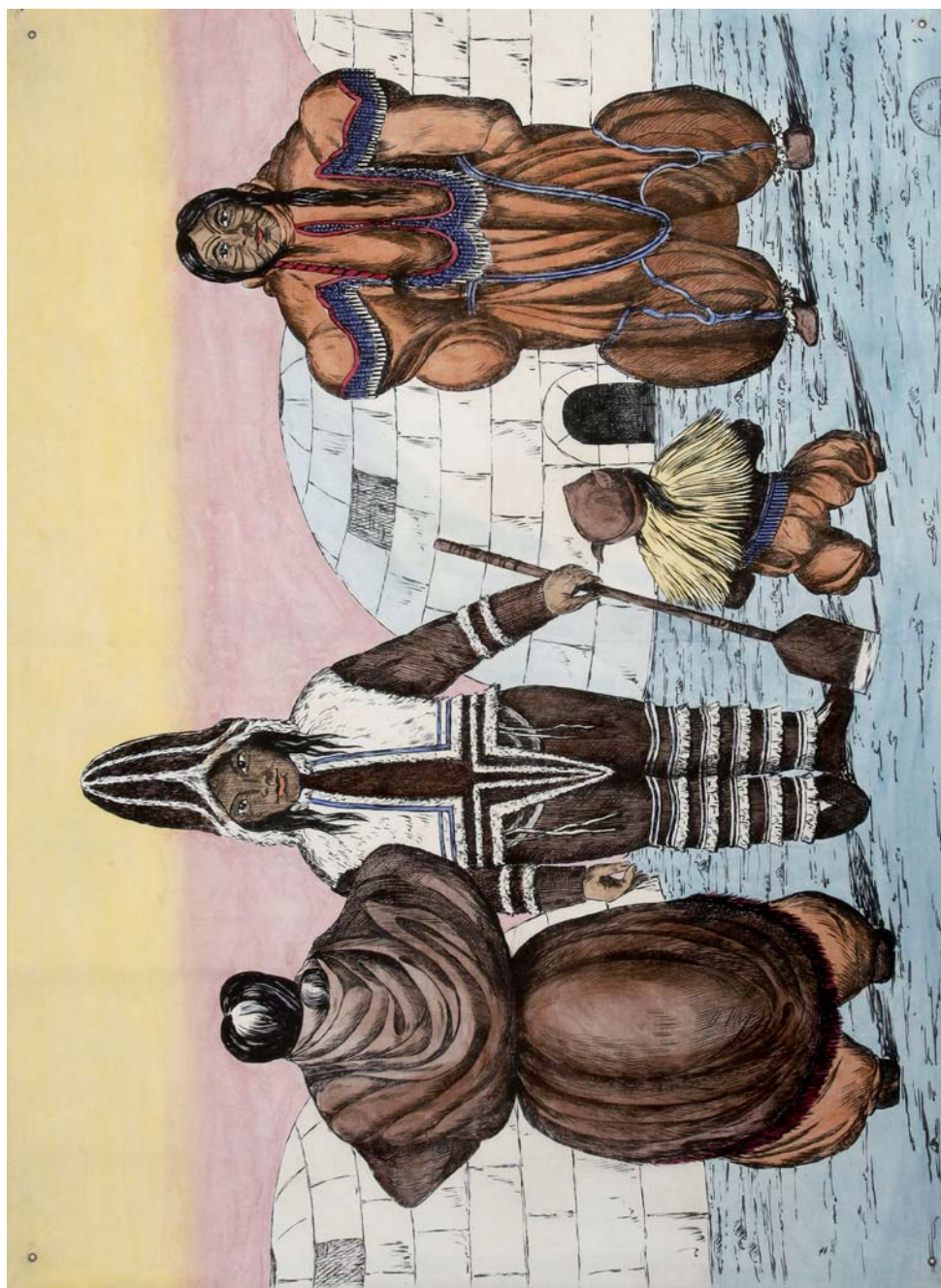
Pl. 1 Niniveh and Assyria – Nimrod – „The Mighty Hunter“ (Inv. No. N 2544).



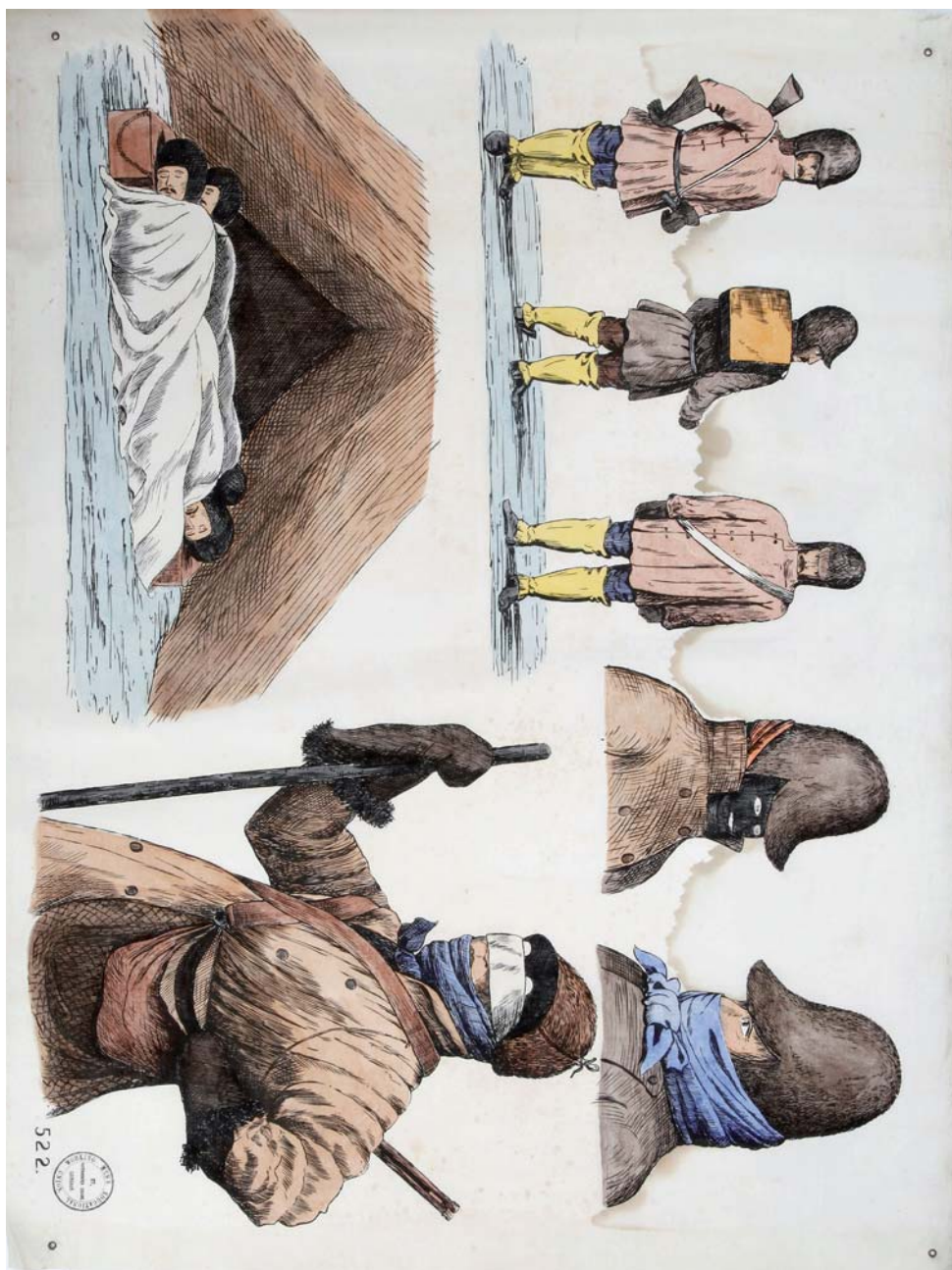
Pl. 2 Australia and Australian Life – Animals (Inv. No. N 2295).



Pl. 3 Hindoostan and the Hindoos – Procession of Jagannath (Inv. No. N 2490).



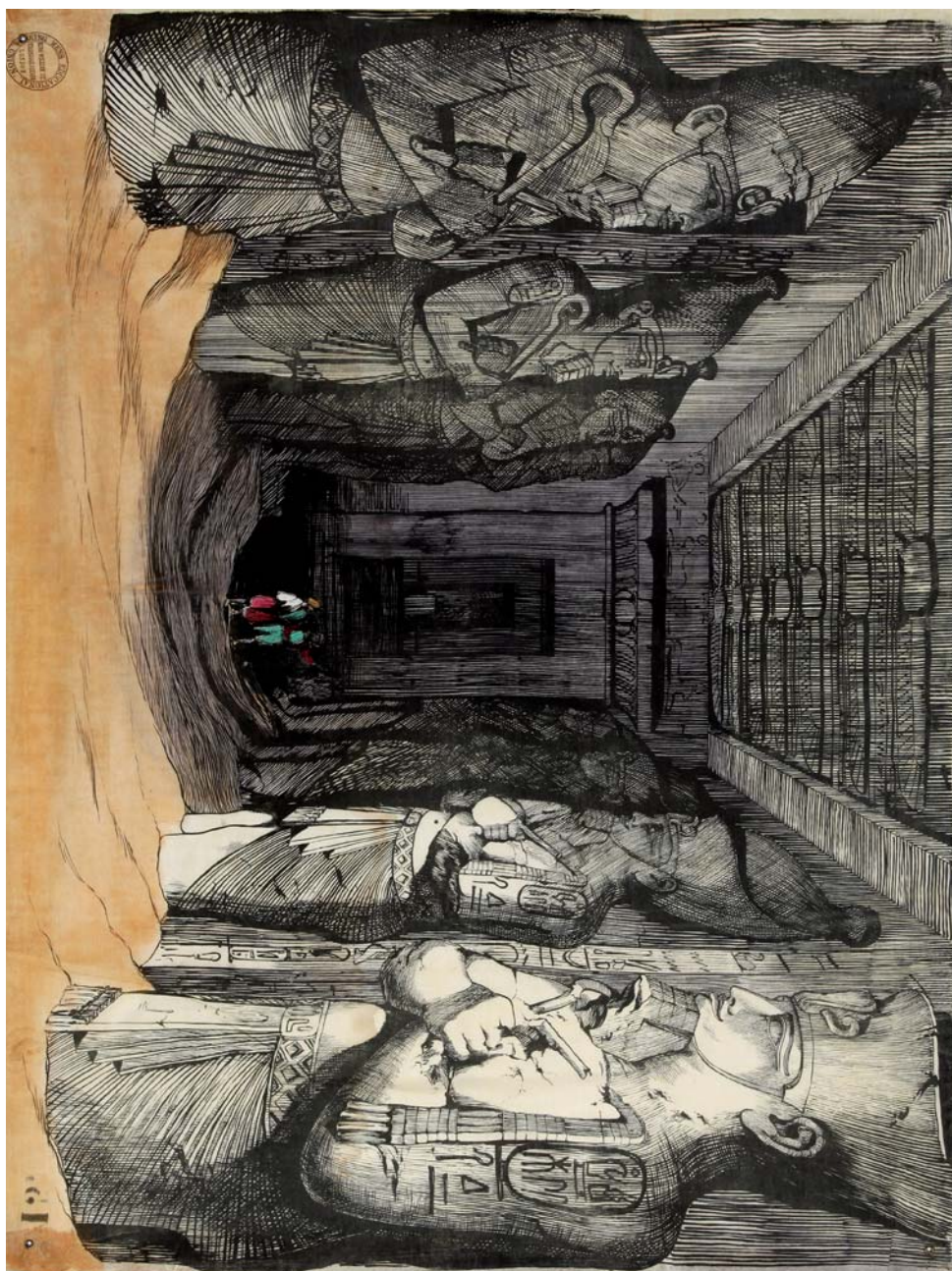
Pl. 4 Polární kraje – Inuitská rodina [Polar Regions – Inuit Family] (Inv. No. N 2510).



Pl. 5 Polární kraje – Oblečení a vybavení prvních polárníků [Polar Regions – Clothes and the Equipment of the First Explorers] (Inv. No. N 2511).



Pl. 6 Dr. Livingstone's Missionary Researches – The Victoria Falls (Inv. No. N 2466).



Pl. 7 Ancient Egypt – Temple of Abou Simbel (Inv. No. N 2347).



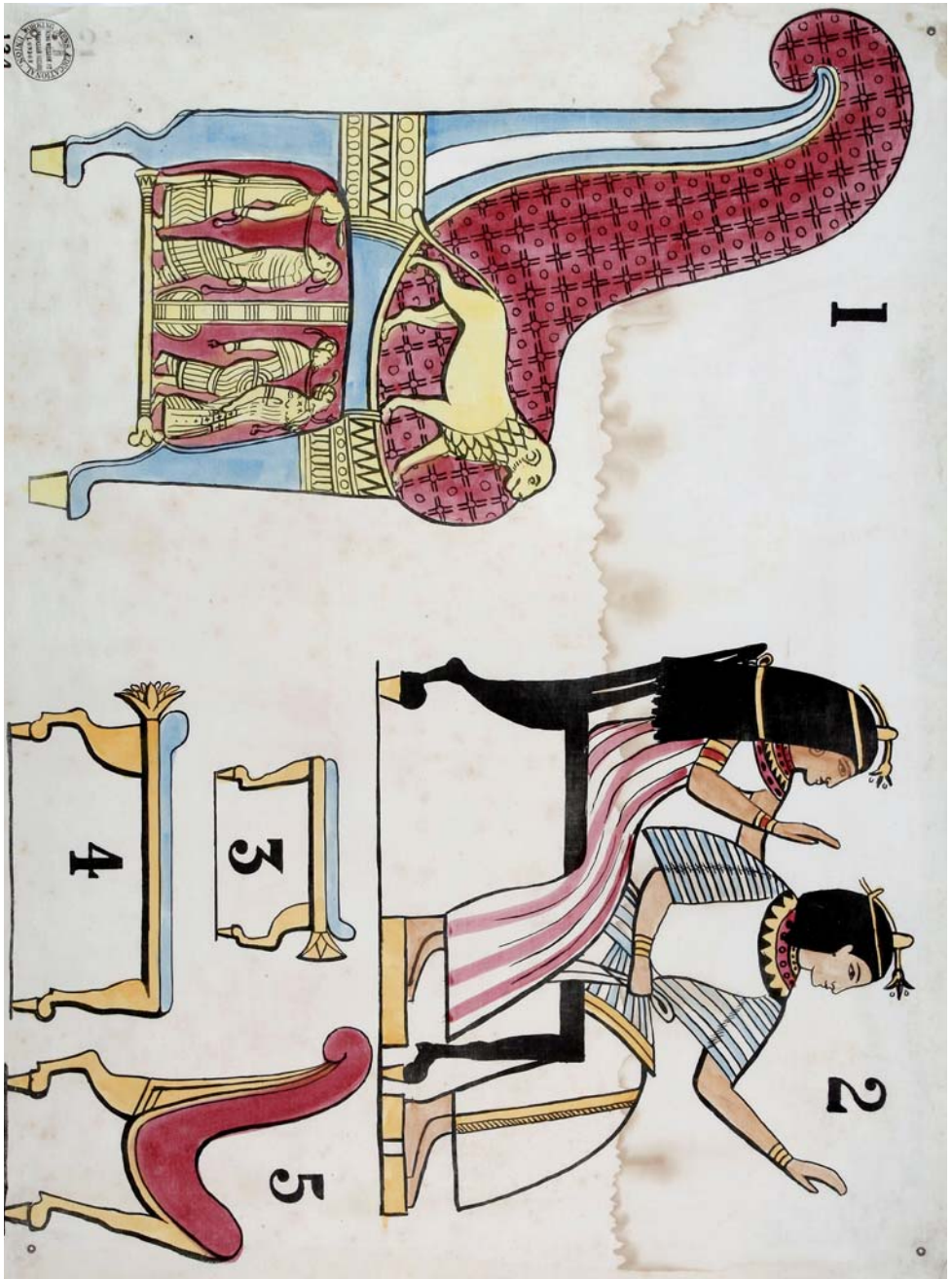
Pl. 8 China and the Chinese – Opium Smoker’s Den (Inv. No. N 2499).



Pl. 9 Domestic Arrangements of the Orientals – Eating (Inv. No. N 2329).



Pl. 10 Eastern Habitations – Tents various (Inv. No. N 2341).



Pl. 11 Domestic Arrangements of the Orientals – Seats and Chairs (Inv. No. N 2326).



Pl. 12 New Zealand – Maorský bojovník [Maori Fighter] (Inv. No. N 2299).



Pl. 13 New Zealand – Maorský náčelník [Maori Chief] (Inv. No. N 2300).