

The Early Collections from South and South-East Asia in the National Museum of Finland

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While working nearly 25 years as a curator of the Foreign Ethnographical Collections in the National Museum of Finland, I was fortunate to have the constant support of Harry Halén, particularly when struggling with problems concerning Northern Buddhism and Central Asia. Harry Halén knows the Central Asian collections of the museum like the back of his hand, so I will refrain from commenting them. Instead, I have chosen the South and South-East Asian collections as the subject of my contribution.

The background of the collections. Although Finland has never been an empire, a considerable number of objects from distant places has ended up in Finnish private as well as museum collections. This is to some extent due to the fact that, in succession, Finland has been part of its two neighbouring countries, Sweden and Russia, both of which have had influence in the wider world.

The first public museum in Finland was created at the Academy of Turku (Åbo) as early as the middle of the 18th century. Its collections included also ethnographic material. Unfortunately, the city of Turku was destroyed in a fire in 1827, and so were most of the collections. The activities of the Academy were continued by the University of Helsinki in 1828, then called the Imperial Alexander's University, which also started to receive various objects as donations. In 1893, the university collections, along with the collections of the Student Nations, the Archaeological Society of Finland, the Archaeological Commission, and the Antell Collection, were combined to form the State Historical Museum. It has been called the National Museum of Finland since 1917, the year following the opening of exhibitions in the present building to the public. At that time the collections included more than 2,000 foreign ethnographic items. (Cf. e.g. Varjola 1981: 52-56.)

The foreign items were kept in the third floor of the National Museum, in a store room not open to the general public, but used for instructing university students in ethnography (cf. Varjola 1981: 57). This activity went on, with varying intensity, until the beginning of the 1980s, as I can remember taking groups of students around in the room crowded with beautiful historical vitrines and countless wooden and cardboard boxes.

When the artefacts were moved to the newly-built central godown in Orimattila in 1987, the wonderful opportunity of popping in to check on some object or detail in the storeroom, so comfortably close to the offices of the foreign collections, was lost. Instead, a chance to put up exhibitions in this former storeroom was won. Finally, the activities of the foreign ethnographic unit, together with those of the Finno-Ugrian collections, were moved to the new Museum of Cultures at the «Tennis Palace» in Helsinki. By that time the number of items in the foreign collection had gone up to about 25,000.

In this article I will follow the growth of the collections up to the time when I joined the staff in 1974. The reason for this is that approximately at that time the unit got its first full-time keepers, and its operations got more active. I for one started watching for opportunities to develop particularly the South Asian collection in a more systematic way. While previously the collections had depended predominantly on the activity of outsiders, they may tell more spontaneously about the spirit of different ages. What kind of objects were collected, what kind of people collected them, and how did they comment on them, did the Finns go to the places of origin of the artefacts, and if so, what did they report? These are questions that I will tackle.

Sailors, soldiers, gentlemen. The first number in the museum catalogue (CFEC; the VK numbers refer to this catalogue) belonging to an object from British India is an item acquired in the middle of turbulent events. It is a statuette of the Buddha Śākyamuni (VK 33), made of resin and covered with sheet silver. It was seized as booty when the British made an assault on the great pagoda in the city of Arakan in Lower Burma. The statuette was donated by a Swedish naval officer, **O. Castegren** by name.

More items from Burma, arriving one by one, were catalogued at an early date. A necklace (VK 663) from Moulmein was donated by **A. N. Littson**, a student, in 1861. Of two Śākyamuni statuettes made of alabaster, one (VK 883) was donated in 1869 by Captain **A. Enqvist**, who had personally acquired it in Moulmein; the acquisition details of the other statuette (VK 1040) are unknown. Religious art has remained popular through all times.

A donation including several East Indian objects (VK 733-746) was made in 1866 by **Frans Viktor Heikel**, a student of mathematics and sciences. After practising studies for some time, he had interrupted them on account of poor health and become a sailor. Physical exercise must have proved the right solution to Heikel's problems, as it is known that he later became the father of the gymnastics system of Finnish gentlemen and schools (*Tietosanakirja* 1911, s.v. Heikel; *Otavan iso tietosanakirja* 1932, s.v.). More details about Heikel's voyage are included in the

documents accompanying a cudgel (VK 5097: 4) donated from Viktor and **Hanna Heikel**'s estate in 1929. It is stated that Viktor had purchased the cudgel while sailing on the bark «India» in 1864-65.

Heikel's early donation includes a fan of bamboo and paper (VK 733), a cigar (VK 735), a wooden comb (VK 736), dolls made of fabric and paper (VK 737-738), sandals with buff soles (VK 742), shells probably used as change (VK 743), an almanac for the year 1865 in the Karen language, printed in Rangoon (VK 740), a Christian religious tract in Burmese by L. Ingalls, printed in Rangoon 1863 (VK 741), and a copy-book (VK 746).

There is one item in Heikel's donation that makes a modern museum curator pay attention to changing ethics. It is a partly gilded strip of teak wood (VK 739), said to have been taken from the great Shwe Dagôn pagoda, the greatest in Rangoon, an ancient place of pilgrimage. Plundering ancient monuments was obviously not considered such a crime as it is nowadays, as even missionaries and scholars quite often did bring home pieces cut out of them, and museums, without disapproving the deed, happily accepted them. In this case, of course, the loot is insignificant.

Heikel himself, on the other hand, has indicated disapproval of something, namely of the ancient custom of betel chewing. This is revealed by the comments, undoubtedly written on Heikel's advice, that accompany the catalogue details of some betel chewing ingredients and implements kept in a lacquer box (VK 734), which are included in the donation. After mentioning the nuts, the leaves and the lime, the text goes on to say:

«[...] hvilka tre giftiga ämnen äro nödvändiga ingredienser i en beteltugga (Buyo) och hvilkas narkotiska, mildt bedöfvande verkan torde vara orsaken till den vämjeliga beteltuggningens almäna bruk. [...] En sådan beteldosa träffas i hvarje hus, äfven i den uslaste koja, der man ej kan upptäcka andra husgeråd eller möbler än en säfmatta till bädd och någon lerkopp till att koka och förvara den nästan enda, dagliga födan.»

Thus, according to Heikel, the ingredients are «poisonous» and «narcotic», and the custom is «disgusting» and practised even in the most miserable huts with hardly any household utensils, furniture or food. We can hear a Eurocentric and patronizing voice, but also the voice of a health enthusiast.

Weapons is another group of artefacts that has been popular as collectables through times. The only items representing Nepal up to the 1950s are daggers (*kukri*; VK 4830: 62; VK 5175; VK 5222; VK 5506). One of them (VK 5222) came in 1936 from **Teodor August Heikel**, who was a delegate to the parliament, a former member of the secret society «Kagalen» founded to act against Russian oppressive measures in

Finland, and Governor of Vaasa (Vasa) County. The dagger, however, does not tell that its donator travelled to distant countries as well, as it was simply purchased in London by Heikel's son.

The first catalogued objects to have come from the Malay Archipelago are poisoned arrows acquired from Java (VK 3). They were purchased in 1830 for five rix-dollars from **A. H. Westerberg**, widow of a skipper. Daggers and swords (VK 481-485, VK 826, VK 4340: 401) followed soon after. The trend continued to the 20th century, the donators and sellers, if not sea-captains or traders, often being university-educated people.

Among the various ritual and everyday objects representing Indonesia and the Philippines, and purchased from the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, in 1912 (VK 4888), there are again more than 30 weapons. An exchange collection (VK 5301) from the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, which arrived just before the war in 1939, is not dissimilar in its contents from this, but represents in addition to the island cultures also those of mainland South-East Asia.

From the department of history to the unit of foreign ethnographical collections were moved in 1934 oriental weapons and similar objects originally donated to the collections by various persons. An Indian elephant goad (*ankuśa*; VK 5190: 34) and a ritual axe (VK 5190: 33) from the 18th century, having inlay decoration, probably originate from the collection of **Gustaf Adolf Ramsay**, Governor of Kuopio County. On the back of the ritual axe, on both sides, there is a mirror-image text in *devanāgarī* characters. The largest brass inlay depicts Kṛṣṇa with two gopīs. An Indian dagger (*kaṭār* or *yamdhār*; VK 5190: 31) from the 18th century, having arrived at the museum in 1885, has belonged to **J. J. Mæxmontan**, an estate owner. The heirs to the Generals **K. O. G. Melan** and **C. Enckell** donated an inscribed Afghani rifle from the early 19th century (VK 5190: 12).

Marguerite Gripenberg, widow of Baron **Michaël Gripenberg**, donated in 1949 ten oriental weapons, among them an Indian *yamdhār* (VK 5454: 10). Baron Gripenberg, the former owner since 1915 of Königstedt Estate, is known to have accompanied **Edvard Westermarck** to Morocco. (Nikander & Jutikkala 1939: 425; CFEC under VK 5454.)

The first Indian artefacts were actually entered in the catalogue prior to the weapons referred to above. They are instruments for writing on palm leaf, packed in a leather sheath (VK 626). They include a knife to smooth the palm leaves, a stylus to inscribe the characters on the leaf, and a three-pointed tool to pierce the leaves to make holes through which a string is passed to hold the leaves together. The steel instruments are inlaid with silver wire (*koftgarī* work). They have been acquired in Alleppey on the Malabar coast and presented in 1859 by Captain **Möller** through **Konstantin Hildén**, the Mayor of Raahe (Brahestad). Palm-leaf

manuscripts (VK 937, VK 938), donated by **K. J. Kyntzell**, a student, to the Archaeological Society of Finland in 1875, include the Tamil alphabet and a kind of dictionary.

A brocade letter bag with an inscribed sealing (VK 726a) was donated by Mrs. **Schultz** in 1864. The text is written in *devanāgarī* script, but is difficult to decipher. A Bhuj-style silver object (VK 5303: 57) has been catalogued as a miniature water pipe (*huqqā*), but it rather belongs to a woman's toilet. It has probably been used as a container and applicator of black eye ointment. The artefact has belonged to **Enoch Hjalmar Furuhjelm**, a mining engineer working for the Russian-American Trade Company on the coast of the Pacific Ocean in 1853-62, but this does not explain how he got hold of this small Indian item.

In 1865 a textile consisting of several pieces of white fine hand-woven muslin (Department of History catalogue number 589), embroidered in chain stitch with yellow tussore silk, was sent to the Museum of the University of Helsinki. The cloth had been used as an altarfront in a Lutheran church in northern Finland, and it is probable that the motives had been felt to be queer for the purpose. This type of embroidery work was commissioned by the Portuguese between 1570 and 1650. At that time Bengal experienced a great Vaiṣṇava renaissance movement which underlined human equality in defiance of orthodox Brahmanism. Popular idiom also found expression in art, including brick-built temples, which had walls covered with richly illustrated terracotta plaques and wood-carvings. These decorations have parallel features in the imagery and style of the embroidered textiles in question. (Cf. Irwin 1952.)

From the City Museum of Helsinki 93 artefacts were transferred to the National Museum in 1925, and among them some objects were thought to be Oriental. Among them are, for instance, two painted marble reliefs of Hanuman and Durgā (VK 5054: 60-61) made in Jaipur. A pair of Indian ear ornaments (VK 5054: 68) has been catalogued as «a decorative silver-coloured object consisting of two brooch-like domes with fringes made of little bells and with a bar connecting the two domes, now broken». The misunderstanding can be explained by the lack of experience with South Asian ear ornaments, the wearing of which often requires very large holes in the ear lobes.

A further example of a Eurocentric attitude towards other cultures is revealed in the cataloguing of a fine Indian silver necklace (VK 5054: 67), the units of which represent flower buds:

«Necklace, made of silver-coloured metal, consisting of pointed units imitating animals' teeth or seeds. Considering the quality of the work one can presume that the necklace is industrially made and perhaps meant to be offered for sale to the savage people.»

The person who catalogued the object could not even imagine that

the «savages» were actually able to make this silver ornament so precisely and skilfully by hand that it looked like a factory-made product to a European in whose country high-quality handicrafts had become rare.

Individual persons from the staff of other museums are sometimes mentioned as donators. Such a person is **Alfred Bühler**, Director of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Basel, a University Professor as well. (Schmitz & Wildhaber 1965: 23.) He donated in 1962 a double *ikat* cotton *geringsing* (VK 5570) from the island of Bali. Bühler can be considered a true expert on such textiles as he largely collected for his own museum and published on resist-dyed textiles.

The same year, 1962, the daughters of **Axel Olai Heikel** presented to the museum objects from their father's home collection. Among these is an anklet (VK 5595: 19), which can be identified as belonging to the Oraon tribe of Chota Nagpur (cf. Pinney 1990: 299-300). Heikel has indicated to have received it at «the museum of Copenhagen from Steinhauer». Later, I was asked to catalogue three «museum finds» (VK 5830: 1-3), that is, items that had been lying around uncatalogued and without identification. They were metal trays, two of which are decorated by the *siyāh qalam* technique of Moradabad. Numbers made in pink at their bottom gave a hint that they too might have belonged to Heikel's home collection. And quite right, they could be identified on the basis of his catalogue. They had been marked to come from the Copenhagen exhibition in 1888. What is meant must be the Copenhagen World Exhibition which was held there in 1888; it must have had show rooms with objects for sale. Steinhauer may thus have purchased the anklet from there instead of picking it from the museum collections.

Major collectors. As we have seen, quite a number of private households had at least small collections of weapons and curios. Now we shall consider private collections of a larger scale. The above-mentioned Antell Collection not only includes some Indonesian (VK 4891: 182-183) and Indian swords (*talvār*; VK 4891: 184-186) and a dagger (VK 4891: 196), but also such objects as a fine ewer of cast copper (see Untracht & al. 1993: 30) from North India or Eastern Iran from the 16th to the 18th century. **Herman Fritiof Antell**, a medical doctor by education, probably collected part of his treasures while travelling abroad, which does not mean that he acquired them at their places of origin.

Antell died in 1893, and his legacy finally made the founding of the National Museum of Finland possible. It included a million gold marks as well as his own large collections bequeathed to the state of Finland. The objects were distributed between various museums.

Eric Idestam, Licentiate in Laws, as a collector particularly favoured Asian antiques, such as religious statuettes. Idestam purchased items from foreign auctions and even from China, but he often also used

sea captain **Lennart Trey**, another collector himself, as his agent. Out of the legacy that the National Museum of Finland received in 1961, more than 500 items came to the foreign ethnographic collection along with literature on Asian art.

It is not possible in this short article to go into all the details of the Idestam collection. Suffice it to say about the South-East Asian part of it that it includes several Buddhist statuettes in metal, wood and a combination of the two, alabaster, and resin, covered with silver, often depicting the Buddha Śākyamuni. A Shan-type bronze drum (VK 5561: 295) can also be mentioned, as well as a lacquered Burmese table (VK 5561: 433) of the folding type, decorated with pictures of court life with inserted short explanatory texts in Burmese script. Gilded silver objects with *niello* decoration (VK 5561: 283-284) are typical of Thailand.

From Nepal there is a bell metal figure (VK 5561: 82) of good workmanship depicting the Hindu god Sūrya with his team of horses, originally meant perhaps to decorate a lamp. There are also Tibetan objects from Ladakh, such as crudely made ritual vessels (VK 5561: 350-351), a manuscript box (VK 5561: 432) decorated with semi-precious stones, and a metal bottle (VK 5561: 267) for holy water. Sri Lanka is represented by a wooden Nāga-Kanyā mask (VK 5561: 185).

A Jaina tīrthānkara Pārśvanātha figure (VK 5561:52) can be dated to AD 1433 by a Sanskrit inscription at its back. Several metal figures depicting various Hindu gods belong to the Idestam collection, such as a crude folk bronze of Śiva (VK 5561: 81), and a high-quality Bengali figure from the beginning of the 19th century possibly also depicting Śiva (VK 5561: 103). To the mythology of Śiva belong Vīrabhadra (VK 5561: 83) and Gaṇeśa (VK 5561:108). These and other symbolic figures are also represented in tiny group icons (VK 5561: 112-113). There are also figurines of the female member of the family in her different forms: the food-giving Annapūrṇā in metal (VK 5561: 75, VK 5561: 111), and the ivory figurine of Gaṅgā (VK 5561:153), standing on a crocodile.

A tiny Viṣṇu figurine (VK 5561:110) and a sumptuous, gold plated Rukmiṇī (VK 5561: 107), one of Kṛṣṇa's two spouses (cf. Horstmann 1993: 110), represent the group of the other great Hindu god. The goddess holds a lotus bud in each hand. There is also a much bigger metal female figure (VK 5561: 106; Lakṣmī?) in Gujarati style, holding a lotus bud in her right hand, the emblem in the left hand missing. A rather bulky painted Viṣṇu figure (VK 5561: 102) is made of schist.

Apart from the figurines, there are other Hindu cult objects in the collection. There is a set of cast brass stamps (VK 5561: 289-291) for making Vaiṣṇavite sectarian marks on the skin and clothes of devotees. According to Captain Trey, a ritual anklet (VK 5561: 300) was acquired from Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu. About the ritual importance of swings

in India tell a pair of heavy swing chains (VK 5561: 329-330) from Gujarat. They consist of cast parts, many of which are in the shape of human and animal figures.

It has been suggested that a small figure made of silver plate (VK 5561: 195) might represent the unicorn. That is not surprising, as in stories this fabulous beast is usually placed in India (cf. Riddel 1945). This particular object, however, more probably depicts a horse in festive attire, because the unicorn usually consists of parts of not only a horse but other animals as well. Luxury items are a floor type *huqqā* base (5561: 494) with silver inlay decoration (*bidrī*) from Deccan, dating from the first half of the 18th century (cf. Stronge 1985: 46-47; Untracht & al. 1993: 16, 60), and miniature paintings on ivory depicting Shah Jahan (VK 5561: 487) and three Mughal ladies (VK 5561: 484-486). This kind of paintings were very popular between 1840-1880, but they are still made in Delhi. They are based on earlier models. (Cf. Archer 1992: 215-216). A steel dagger with jade hilt (VK 5561: 499) goes well together with these Mughal-inspired items.

More artefacts have been acquired to the foreign ethnographic collections with the income of the interest of both Antell's and Idestam's will.

Missionaries and head hunters. Compared to the flow of artefacts discussed above, the acquisition of objects now in question differ in the way they were collected. They were picked up at the place of origin or the place where they were in use by persons who spent a long time in the field and learnt quite a lot about the culture they belonged to. In addition to religious art and weapons, curios and collectables, a wider range of objects telling more about everyday life and the way that people live in general started to be accepted in the collections. A tendency towards getting together sets of objects and integrated wholes is discernible. Scholars, of course, belong to the group of people who may stay in the field for months or years, and some of them have also enriched the museum collections. However, the field-work of such Finnish scholars more or less started in South and South-East Asia only after the period which is discussed in this article. Missionaries have worked in India / Tibet and Indonesia early in the 20th century.

Hilja Heiskanen, who worked for the Free Church of Finland in India near the borders of Sikkim and Bhutan, brought two lots of artefacts, in 1908 and 1911. The first lot was probably not commissioned by anyone, but for the second lot she was funded by the Antell delegation. (Paakkanen-Haili 1978: 23.)

The collection is traditionally called the Tibetan collection, as it is for a great part acquired from Tibetans who were hard up and had wandered to the Indian side of the border (Paakkanen-Haili 1978: 17-18).

Most of the 186 artefacts represent Northern Buddhism, but, for instance, samples of food and household utensils tell more about the life of laymen, and many objects may have been used in Bhutan, Sikkim or India. There are from Bhutan dress items including jewellery that make a complete garb for a woman. Newari metal casters Ratna Kaji Shakya, Purna K. Shakya and Lok Chitrakar came to see the Nepalese items at the National Museum in October 1990, and one of them could identify an Amitāyus figure (VK 4883: 25) as having been made by his grandfather. A temple bell (VK 4883: 54) he called just a cheap copy. From India there are also dress items and jewellery, metal household utensils and ritual objects such as an offering tray supported by the Nandī bull (VK 4883: 33). In addition to several small Hindu metal idols purchased in Agra (VK 4883: 26-31, 35) there is a small Jaina tīrthaṅkara figure (VK 4883: 32). All the same, this collection does not nearly form a coherent whole. Much more so does the following.

When the storeroom was still in the National Museum building, I had the pleasure of digging out from the various large boxes a great number of interesting artefacts all catalogued carefully and expertly under the numbers VK 5002 and VK 5114. According to the catalogue, the objects had been collected by a certain Mr. **Edvard Rosenlund**, of whom nobody seemed to know anything. I happened to come across a press cutting revealing that Edvard Rosenlund had worked for the Salvation Army, and that led me to the Headquarters of the Finnish branch in Helsinki. After going through countless Salvation Army publications I found out much about Rosenlund's work in the 1920s and 1930s.

Edvard Rosenlund, born in the small town of Ekenäs (Tammisaari), left on his 19th birthday for mission work in the Dutch East Indies, where he spent almost 25 years, 11 of them in Celebes. The collection under his name arrived in two lots, in 1922 and 1930, and includes more than 500 numbers. With the first lot, the museum also got 32 photographs (VKK 119). In 1979 I succeeded in tracing more photographs and negatives (VKK 400) as well as 25 reels of movie film. This material not only tells about the activities of the Salvation Army but is also of ethnographic interest, particularly the records from the inner parts of Central Celebes. (Films 2555-2579 in the Finnish Film Archives; Parpola, M. 1978; 1979: 3, 5-7, 51-60.)

Rosenlund did not have a good education, but he was quick to learn foreign languages. He is called the Agricola of Celebes on the ground that he, using Dutch spelling, gave a written form to two languages of Central Celebes, Idja and Ledo. He also collected local folk tales which were published, along with descriptions of local customs, in the Salvation Army publications. (Parpola, M. 1979b.) **Heikki Juutilainen**, who worked for the Salvation Army in Indonesia from 1933 to 1947, donated Rosenlund's translation (VK 5786: 2) to Ledo language of the Gospel

according to Saint Luke, together with his own translation of the same to Moma language (VK 5786: 1). According to Juutilainen, Rosenlund had first been very distrustful of his follower's ability to do translation work.

Living for a long time among the natives and a good knowledge of local languages gave Rosenlund a possibility to get acquainted with the cultures that the collection represents. Rosenlund met scholars who had come to work in Celebes, and probably followed their methods as he was capable of collecting a versatile material on the local cultures. (Parpola, M. 1978: 17-20.) A large part of Rosenlund's collection is from Central Celebes, which was still comparatively isolated at the time. It includes a great number of dress items made of brightly decorated bark cloth and cotton, a hand loom, musical instruments, amulets, and paraphernalia needed in betel chewing. The rarer items include weapons and equipment of the head hunters, certain kinds of drums, the shamans' outfit and some ornaments worn at dances.

An interesting family valuable used in rituals (VK 5114: 189), a hand-printed cotton cloth with fast colours, has proved to come from Gujarat, India. The cloth had belonged to the prince of Sigi, and its price had once been seven slaves and seven buffaloes. Bark cloth is the indigenous material of Celebes, whereas woven cloth has been introduced by trade. (CFEC; Parpola, M. 1979: 20-24; 1982: 258-261; Kotilainen 1992: 85.)

Rosenlund condemned some customs as cruel, and he surely believed in the importance of his missionary work. But the enthusiastic way that he collected and commented on artefacts and folklore also tell about losing one's heart to the local cultures. It also tells about ambition.

The collections and the catalogues thus tell about the collectors and the cataloguers just as much as they tell about the people who made the objects collected and catalogued.

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