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The Southwestern Collections of E. St. Vráz (1900) in the Náprstek Museum

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ABSTRACT: This text is dedicated to a rare collection of artefacts and photographs deposited in the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures (henceforth the Náprstek Museum). The collection was acquired in 1900 by the Czech traveller E. St. Vráz in Arizona. The purpose of the article is, first, to summarise the known facts regarding Vráz's journey, provenance of the objects, and the circumstances under which the photographs were taken, to take into account the broader contexts of the 'discovery' of the American Southwest, but also of the Czech nationalism and colonial fantasies of the 19th and early 20th century. Finally, the text is intended as a starting point for discussions about curating the collections that arose of these contexts, as a first step towards dismantling the deep-embedded discourses of Czech 'colonial innocence'.

KEYWORDS: E. St. Vráz – Náprstek Museum – Central Europe – American Southwest – photography – ceramics – colonial fantasies

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This text is dedicated to a rare collection of artefacts and photographs deposited in the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures (henceforth the Náprstek Museum). The collection was acquired in 1900 by the Czech traveller Vráz in Arizona. Its larger part was donated to the museum by Vráz himself immediately after the journey. Several more pieces and all the photographs later, in the 1960s, and a few more items were donated in 1992 by his daughter Vlasta Vrázová. Almost no documentation on Vráz's journey to the Southwest survives; all there is to go on are scattered references in Vráz's correspondence and in newspaper articles covering his travels and lectures. The collection was catalogued roughly in 1950 and in 1981–1984 by curators of the Náprstek Museum. Several pieces from it were included in a permanent exhibition on the native cultures of North America that was on display in 1986–2013; these and other items from the Vráz collection were also presented at some temporary exhibitions.² Nevertheless, the objects have yet to be scientifically studied and the same applies to the photographs, which capture the Hopi communities in Arizona at a critical moment in their history.³

The purpose of the article is not only to summarise the known facts regarding Vráz's journey (which, given the lack of sources, are few), provenance of the objects, and the circumstances under which the photographs were taken. The author also wishes to challenge the existing interpretation of the collection and the photographs, which owes much to the long-held image of Vráz as a 'scientist' and his travels as a scientific endeavour. This is the line followed by Vráz's biographer Jiřina Todorovová, as evidenced by her following assessment:

He documented [the Hopi] during everyday activities as well as religious celebrations. Because he lived directly in the village and befriended its inhabitants, his friends had shown him also those parts of rituals which were not open to the public. He, for instance, captured a priest in his mask, getting ready for the ceremonial dance. [...] These unique photographs of Hopi dancers could only be taken because of the friendship between the Indians and the traveller and thanks to the fact Vráz was able to gain the Hopis' trust.⁴

Conceived in this way, Vráz's trip to the Southwest and the items he brought back seem unique. His behaviour during the trip is presented as not only ethically unproblematic but as laudable, in line with the ethos of scientific endeavour, and

2 See the catalogue of the permanent exhibition, Kandertová and Klápšřová 1983, p. 14, for reproduction of one of the *katsina tihó* from Vráz's collection (Inv. No. A2415) or the catalogue to the temporary exhibition 'Between the wilderness and the crazy metropolis' in the Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen in 2025, where a painted clay jar from Vráz's collection was put on display (Inv. No. 45.850), Machalířová and Petrasová 2025, p. 65.

3 The only available text is in Czech, Todorovová and Klápšřová 2003.

4 Todorovová 2012, p. 9.

confirming the moral superiority of the European traveller who made an impression upon his ‘Indian friends’.

The author’s aim here is to question this image, and not only because many of the claims which Todorovová took at face value (such as ‘being a friend’ to the Hopi) came only from Vráz himself and cannot be verified. There are other important aspects to be considered. Vráz viewed his travels, collecting, and photographing not only as a scientific enterprise but also through the prism of the Czech struggle for national recognition – and this logic applied also to his efforts to collect items for Czech museums. Nevertheless, one should also see Vráz’s activities within a wider context of ‘discovery’ and scientific and artistic appropriation of the American Southwest in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From such perspective, a better understanding can be gained of the reason Vráz collected and documented the objects, persons, and landscapes he did, and how he probably interpreted their meaning. This view could also tell us what Vráz was likely to miss or misunderstand about the culture and worldview of the people he documented. Ultimately, such an approach can help explain why some items in Vráz’s ethnographic and especially photographic collection are both valuable and problematic, requiring a particularly careful curatorial approach.

This article is based on sources preserved in the Náprstek Museum and some supplementary documents found in other archives, mostly in Prague. It was written intentionally as the first reflection on Vráz’s ‘problematic heritage’⁵ preserved in this museum. It departs from the vantage point of Czech academia, which has only recently started to explore the long-term colonial complicity of the Czech society. The aim is to point to the untenability of the alleged ‘colonial innocence’⁶ and explore not only the global entanglements but also ethical implications of both interpreting historical events and caring for and curating material testimonies of these events in museums. This contribution is intended as a starting point for discussions about curating these collections, as a first step towards dismantling the deep-embedded heroic narratives of Czech travellers and ‘pioneers of science’. Yet as to the decisions concerning collections from the American Southwest and contacting the indigenous communities involved, given the author’s position outside the Náprstek Museum, the author cannot be the person to implement such initiatives. This text was therefore written without consulting directly with the indigenous communities of the Southwest; however, it is hoped to be able to do so in the future, developing the author’s research further.

5 On the concept of ‘problematic heritage’, see Larsen and Křížová 2025. Whilst the starting point was the concept of ‘difficult heritage’, coined by Macdonald 2009 as part of her research into the legacy of German National Socialism in present-day German urban spaces, there is an important difference between the two notions. While ‘difficult heritage’ focuses on what is already perceived as problematic, contentious, and awkward, the concept of ‘problematic heritage’ explores areas that often remain uncontested, normal, and yet, from another perspective, turn out to be problematic and ought to be challenged.

6 Herza 2020.

The journey to the Southwest

A man known under the pseudonym E. St. Vráz (approx. 1860–1932) was in the late 19th and early 20th century a well-known figure in Czech society. His real identity, however, remains unknown and historians so far have not been able to definitively establish his place of birth or nationality. He even signed letters to his close friends only with the initials E. St. and openly admitted that Vráz was not his actual name.⁷ But ever since he made his first appearance in Prague in 1894 (allegedly after spending eight years in Africa, six years in equatorial America, and just before departing for further travels to Asia), he assumed Czech identity and was accepted as ‘Czech’ by his contemporaries. He wrote and lectured only in Czech, which was fully in line with his repeatedly stated allegiance to the Czech national cause. But that is also why his texts so far have not attracted much interest from the international academic community. Jiřina Todorovová wrote a monograph in the Czech language in which she summarised her thorough archival research and put together basic facts about Vráz, including speculations about his origin.⁸ There are several articles available in English. Most deal with particular collections or areas that Vráz visited,⁹ but some also outline how Vráz presented non-European otherness to the Czechs.¹⁰

Vráz helped introduce the non-European world to the Czech public during a crucial phase of the Czech national revival and contributed to increasing the prestige of the Czech nation by furnishing the Museum of the Kingdom of Bohemia (now the National Museum) and the Czech Industrial Museum (now the Náprstek Museum) with rare exhibits. Moreover, he shared his experiences not only through articles in popular journals and illustrated books, but also through a then new form of knowledge production and transmission which became immensely popular in the Czech Lands in the late 19th century: through lectures accompanied by projections of pictures on glass slides.

For many years, Vráz’s home was in Chicago (1897–1920), although his stay there was interrupted by numerous and lengthy travels. But he did not travel much around North America, except when invited for lectures by Czech-American communities in the Midwest or on the East Coast. One exception to this pattern was his visit to Arizona in 1900. Vráz decided to travel there instead of departing for an originally planned more extensive trip to Africa, which had to be postponed

7 In official forms, such as visa applications or the marriage certificate, the first names he gave varied, although they mostly followed the initials he used: Emrajeve Stanislav, Emil Stanislav, or Emanuel Stanislav. Finally, for his travel books, the author opted for a quasi-Spanish version Enrique Stanko. This last version often appears at present in library catalogues and the posthumous editions of his works (or on the Wikipedia), but in fact does not correspond to reality.

8 Todorovová 2006.

9 Heroldová and Todorovová 2018; Melicharová 2023; Nakládalová 2021; Nakládalová 2024.

10 Křížová 2025.

due to a lack of finances. It seems that – in line with the contemporary image of the Southwest within the American society (on which there is more below) – Vráz viewed this part of North America as still a ‘wilderness’ that could and should be scientifically ‘explored’.

Science played an important role in the Czech national revival and competition with Germans in the Czech Lands was taking place also in this field. Successful development of various scientific disciplines, establishment of a Czech scientific terminology, and the creation of museums presenting valuable collections of various kinds served as evidence of a high civilisational status of the Czech nation. Even more appealing to the Czech public was the figure of a Czech explorer beating the path through unknown lands, meeting peoples untouched by ‘civilisation’, and bringing home unique natural historical and ethnographical specimen.

Vráz announced, in a letter to the famous Czech patriot and patron of sciences and arts, Josef Hlávka, who financially supported some of his travels:

I am getting ready for a shorter journey [...] to the territory of Indians¹¹ who even today live their original life, partly pre-Columbian. I am also preparing a longer trip, necessary for rounding off my knowledge of the entire world, but for that what is decisive is not my willingness but whether and how much will be my savings from the travel diary I am about to publish.¹²

Vráz announced the same purpose – namely, to ‘conduct scientific research’ – also in his correspondence with the Indian Agent for Arizona, Charles Burton. His request was granted and Burton gave him freedom of movement in the Hopi reservation and a promise of any further service the Indian Office could render.¹³

Initially, Vráz wanted to spend a month in Arizona and then return to Chicago. His wife’s letter dated 21 May 1900 states it explicitly: ‘Tomorrow, it will be two weeks since you went away, and soon I will be able to say that already half of the time of your absence from home had passed, as you promised to return in five weeks.’¹⁴ But having learned – probably from correspondence he maintained with the Underwood & Underwood Co., to which he was to deliver photographs¹⁵ – about the Boxer Rebellion in China, that is, about the uprising aimed against

11 When quoting from primary sources written in Czech, the original use of the word ‘Indian’ is followed, commonly used during the period under study, even though the author is fully aware of its problematic nature.

12 Vráz’s letter to Hlávka, Chicago, 18 December 1899, Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature, collection 1251 (Josef Hlávka), file Korespondence vlastní (přijátá) – Vráz.

13 Burton’s letter to Vráz, 19 May 1900, Archive of the Náprstek Museum (hereafter ANpM), fund Ar. Vráz, box 4/2, file 14. All in all, there are 70 boxes of archival documents in the Náprstek Museum. They consist of correspondence, travel notes, manuscripts of published as well as unpublished texts, etc.

14 Vlasta Vrázová’s letter to Vráz, Chicago, 21 May 1900, ANpM, fund Ar. Vráz, box 1, file 5, item no. 11.

15 See letter sent by the Underwood & Underwood Co. to Vráz, New York, 28 April 1900, ANpM, fund Ar. Vráz box 4, file 2, item no. 24, which mentions Vráz’s plans to go to China to acquire more photographs.



↑ Fig. 1. An advertisement of Vráz's lecture 'Tracing the vanished glory of the Indians: From the United States of North America, through Arizona, and Mexico to Central America', which took place on 6 May 1923 in the town of Litomyšl. The advertisement uses the most common stereotype of 'Indians', namely a picture of inhabitant of the Plains in a traditional dress, as well as the trope of 'vanishing' native cultures. Archive of the Náprstek Museum, fund Ar. Vráz, box 15, file 1.

graphs from the Southwest.

The photographs are unique in the local context, as there are no similar collections from the Southwestern region anywhere else in the Czech Republic, or other parts of Central Europe. The artefacts are remarkable especially because of the

Western encroachments which started in early June 1900, Vráz set off via San Francisco to Beijing. From there, he travelled to Korea and Russia, and via Europe back to Chicago. All in all, he spent nearly two years travelling.

Impressions from this Asian journey, especially the dramatic events Vráz witnessed in Beijing, pushed into the background his memories of the Southwest, and he never published any articles, book chapters, or books about this region. His experiences from there appeared only in his public lectures. [Fig. 1] But Vráz always gave his public presentations from memory, which is why we can access their contents only indirectly, via reports published in newspapers.¹⁶ Before departing for China, Vráz dispatched the objects he collected in the American Southwest to Prague (and possibly another batch of items to his family in Chicago), but added no detailed information about their provenance. In the 1960s, Vráz's photographic estate (photographs, negatives, and hand-coloured glass slides) was deposited by his daughter in the Náprstek Museum, and it is still kept there, including some 300 photo-

16 This is known from surviving contracts, newspaper ads, and reports including BB [= Bohumil Bauše], 'Vráz o Arizoně' [Vráz about Arizona], *Národní listy*, 7 October 1902, p. 1; or advertisement for Vráz's lecture in Jindřichův Hradec, 12 April 1903, on '1. Korea, 2. Across Siberia; 3. Arizona (the Hopi Indians and the Great Canyon)' in *Štítný*, 4 April 1903, p. 1. Vráz included the American Southwest amongst the subjects he lectured on in the 1920s for Radiojournal, a company that operated radio broadcasting in Czechoslovakia. (A contract confirming that Vráz held a lecture on 3 September 1928 for Radiojournal on the subject of 'being a guest at an Indian wedding of the Hopi tribe in Arizona, in Walpi' is preserved in ANpM, fund Ar. Vráz, box 4, file 6) Moreover, conversion of some of his photographs into slides lends further support to the notion that Vráz included his experiences from Arizona in his lectures.

time they were acquired, being the oldest preserved in Czech museums. But there are other collections of this type, and the objects themselves, as will be explained below, are not so unique. Náprstek Museum has overall more than 500 inventoried items from the Southwest, so those brought by Vráz represent just a fraction of them.¹⁷ But the value of Vráz's collection rests not just in the combination of the material and pictorial documentation, but in the specific context in which it was amassed and brought to Bohemia.

Vráz always insisted he was not a tourist but an explorer facing innumerable dangers and discomforts.¹⁸ In his lectures, he repeatedly described his travels in the Southwest as difficult and challenging because of the rugged terrain, great distances, and the need to carry 'supplies of food and water for several days'.¹⁹ When speaking about his journey to the Southwest in the years that followed, Vráz portrayed it as a real exploration.

Vráz will present to us, in word and in pictures, those lands of the Far West of North America where nature, majestic, magnificent, and terrible, created wonders unequalled anywhere in the world, and where remnants of the original Indians inhabit rock dwellings and ancient ruins.²⁰

In fact, Vráz took a train from Chicago to Santa Fe or Albuquerque and then another train to Arizona. Only after leaving the train in Arizona – probably in Flagstaff because, although it is not direct evidence, his collection includes a picture of the New Bank Hotel in Flagstaff²¹ – he travelled on horseback to the Hopi and back, stopping *en route* to see the Grand Canyon. There are some photographs that show people sleeping in tents and cooking on open fire (e.g., photograph Inv. No. Am I 6291). [Fig. 2] This route was followed (and purchases made that are similar to those that appear in Vráz's collection in the Náprstek Museum) at that time by many other visitors to the area, that is, by people whom Vráz described condescendingly as mere tourists. There is no information as to how he found accommodation in the Hopi settlements, but again, by 1900 the area had basic tourist infrastructure.

17 There is, especially, the collection by František Pospíšil, who travelled to the Southwest in the 1930s. (Pospíšil 1932–1933). The Náprstek Museum acquired the collection in 1988. For all collections from the Southwest in that museum, see Vrtalová 2024, 48–50.

18 One of the celebratory articles stated: 'Twenty years of travelling on difficult trails through unknown lands, full of dangers, without the conveniences of civilisation. [...] Twenty years of travel through the world but never as a tourist who comfortably watches the world from a train.', [anon.], E. St. Vráz, *Lidové noviny*, 16 April 1910, p. 2.

19 [anon.], Původní dopis z Čech: Přednáška slavného cestovatele E. St. Vráze [Original letter from Bohemia: Lecture by the famous traveller E. St. Vráz], *Amerikán*, 10 November 1902, p. 12.

20 BB [= Bohumil Bauše], Vráz o Arizoně [Vráz about Arizona], *Národní listy*, 7 October 1902, p. 2.

21 See photograph Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 2902.



↑ Fig. 2. Vráz on his way to the Hopi. Hand-coloured glass diapositive; Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 3985.

In the last decades of the 19th century, the American Southwest held a specific place in the self-understanding of the American society and in the minds of European scholars and visitors. It played a key role in the image of the ‘American West’, in the beginning of mass tourism, and in ethnography, i.e., the study of cultural varieties of the peoples of the world. The region was attached to the USA only after the Mexican–American war in 1848. Until 1912, it had the status of a ‘territory’, meaning it was not integrated into the political body of the United States. It was a place rich with history, which

included complex contacts between the native peoples and the Spanish- and English-speaking settlers and missionaries. Reservations for native Americans were established in the 1870s and 1880s. The process took a different course in different places. While the Navajo and Apache actively opposed the encroachment, most of the agricultural groups (commonly known as Pueblos) did not mount armed resistance.²²

For several decades after the USA established their dominance in the region, the Southwest attracted little interest of settlers and visitors. But in 1880, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad (ATSF) reached Santa Fe and connected the Southwest with the eastern part of the USA and a little later also with California. To increase the sales of passenger tickets, the ATSF hired ethnographers, artists, photographers, and writers to spread awareness of attractions of the region, including its natural beauty and the native peoples, their everyday life, arts and crafts, religion, and archaeological sites. This led to a growth in demand for objects made by the indigenous people of the Southwest; such items were sought after both by private collectors and by museums and other scientific institutions, because the region also drew the interest of the newly formalised disciplines of archaeology and ethnography.²³ This is the context within which we should interpret Vráz’s trip and the origin of his collection.

Vráz focused on one specific native group in the Southwest, the Hopi (who were then known as Moqui or Moki, whereby the term ‘Moqui’ first appeared after the expedition of Juan de Oñate in 1598 and was used until the end of the 19th

22 Spicer 1962.

23 Dilworth 1996.

century).²⁴ Totalling several thousand, the Hopi formed a number of communities in north-eastern Arizona. In 1882, a Hopi reservation was created by a presidential executive order. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Hopi descended from peoples whose cultures have been present in the south-western United States for at least two thousand years.²⁵ In the iconography of the Southwestern tourist and anthropological industry of late 19th century, the Hopi were portrayed – and sometimes idealised – as ‘ancient Indians’, representatives of earlier stages of civilisational development.

The remoteness of Hopi villages had indeed somewhat protected them from the Spanish colonisation and encroachments of the first English-speaking settlers, and their culture and rituals were undoubtedly fascinating to European eyes. Because of this, the Hopi remain one of the most intensely studied native peoples of the USA. The image of an indigenous nation ‘frozen in time’ was of course misleading, but it served its purpose in promoting the region.²⁶ At the same time, there also appeared traces of what one could call ‘Orientalism’ in the image of the Southwest. As used by Edward Said (1978), the term refers to the peculiarities of the European image of Asia and northern Africa which may seem out of place for North America, but popular photographs of young Pueblo women carrying potter pitchers explicitly evoked the biblical Orient, while their religious rituals seemed reminiscent of bacchanalia of the East [Fig. 3].²⁷ There were even some explicit allusions, for instance in a book of travel sketches by Charles Lummis, who called the Southwestern landscape ‘American Sahara’,²⁸ or in George Wharton James’s article in the popular *Overland Monthly*, where the journalist described the native women from that region as ‘Copper Cleopatras’.²⁹

This imagery depicted Southwestern natives as exotic others, both fascinating and repulsive, as wild but also as the heirs of a vanished civilisation



↑ Fig. 3. Olla maidens, that is, Hopi women carrying water jars on their heads. Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 2932.

24 Bernardini and Kuwanwisiwma 2023, p. 85.

25 Bernardini et al. 2023.

26 See e.g., Bourke 1884, which inspired much interest in the Hopi culture; cf. also Fewkes 1894.

27 Heneman 2023.

28 Lummis 1891, p. 28.

29 James 1900, p. 195.

who are themselves on the verge of extinction. In all this, however, they were not perceived as historic actors but rather as passive objects to be observed, studied, and dominated. This was also the reasoning behind the practice of collecting: it was assumed that the natives could not appropriately appreciate their cultural heritage. And, finally, this perception of the Southwest facilitated drawing a parallel between the European empires on the one hand and American dreams of dominance on the other. As Europe had colonised the Orient, the United States wanted to dominate the Southwest – and this aspect was significant in relation to Vráz. Although the Czechs had never pursued colonial ambitions, the author will explain in the following how scientific travel and collecting contributed to the development of colonial and imperial fantasies. Collecting and subsequent ‘consumption’ of the collected items in museums and in the tourist market³⁰ functioned as important components of a strategy of representation and self-presentation. The very existence of the Czech Industrial Museum (the future Náprstek Museum) in Prague was, much like the Czech national revival itself, closely connected to colonial ambitions and fantasies.³¹ The possession of original artefacts symbolically increased the prestige of the Czech nation and signalled its global outreach.

The museum founded by Náprstek also served other functions. It mediated to the Czechs access to the wide, fascinating, and colourful world and promoted interest in peoples and landscapes beyond Czechs’ immediate horizons. Native American cultures were popular in Europe since the 16th century and were often viewed as a paradigmatic embodiment of the ‘exotic’. This doubtlessly contributed to the public’s avid interest in items brought by Czech travellers from the Americas.

Vráz’s collection of artefacts

We will probably never know when exactly Vráz’s collection arrived in Prague. New acquisitions to the Náprstek Museum were often registered with a delay and, moreover, the oldest inventories are far from complete. For 1902, there appear under the heading ‘brought by Mr. E. St. Vráz’ ten entries for objects which correspond to those kept in the museum to this day (save for one that has not been identified amongst the current collections) [Tab. 1].³² The inventory entries clearly copied information received from Vráz, stating that all the items were made by the ‘Hopi Indians of Arizona’. Updated catalogues from the 1960s and 1980s also started from the assumption that Vráz visited the Hopi in Arizona, but the curators realised

30 Dilworth 1996, p. 7, uses the word ‘consumption’ for museum displays, pictorial representations, or private use of the native artefacts.

31 Křížová, *in press*.

32 Národní muzeum – Náprstkovo muzeum, Historický inventář III., f. 574, nos. 3123 to 3131, f. 587, no. 3255, 1902.

Tab. 1. Objects from the Southwest, brought by Vráz, in the collections of the Náprstek Museum.

No. in the historical inventory (1902)	Present - day inventory number	Description of the object in the historical inventory	Description in modern inventory	Additional information
3123b	44.644	Kachina, protection spirit of the Hopi tribe. The Hopi Indians (wrongly called Moqui) now give these idols to their children as toys.	Kachina – children's toy, Cross Crowned, Hopi, Southwestern USA	The specific katsina remains unidentified.
3124b	44.643	<i>dtto</i>	Kachina figure, Shalako Man Hopi, Southwestern USA.	Rather than Shalako Man, this is Hahai-i Wu-uti - katsina mother, a usual gift to Hopi babies
3125b	45.851	Clay vessel made by the Hopi Indians from Arizona, the territory of the United States of America.	Ceramic jar, Pueblo, Southwestern USA.	Hopi polychrome jar, probably by Nampeyo.
3126b	56.718	Clay vessel for medicine made by Hopi Indians.	Ceramic vessel, Hopi, Arizona.	Polychrome small jar, probably Isleta.
3127b	A8343	<i>dtto</i>	Ceramic cup, Hopi, Arizona.	Footed coffee cup, probably Isleta.
3128b		Clay children's toy from the Arizona Hopi Indians.		Unidentified.
3129b	45.891	Clay bowl	Clay bowl with flower design, Hopi, Arizona.	
3130b	44.036	Gourd rattle, magical instruments of the Hopi Indians from Arizona.	Gourd rattle, pear shaped, Hopi, Arizona	
3131b	44.037	<i>dtto</i>	Gourd rattle, flat, Hopi, Arizona	
3255b	45.850	Clay vessel, made by the Hopi Indians in Arizona (territory of the United States of America).	Vase shaped clay vessel, Pueblo, Southwestern USA, modern ceramics.	Polychrome jar with double-twisted handles, probably Zia or Laguna.
	45.853		Plaque coiled from natural fibers (grass), Hopi, Southwestern USA.	
	A1723		Clay figure America.	Clay figurine in textile dress, Mojave or Quechan.
	A1730		Lamp, Hopi, America.	Candlestick.
	A2415		Kachina – a male figure bearing a fantastic figure on his shoulders. Hopi, Arizona.	Probably Tühavi paralysed katsina.
	62.599		Small pottery jar with a polished meander ornament, New Mexico.	Black-on-black jar with cloud design, Santa Clara or San Ildefonso.

that at least some of the objects were not made by the Hopi. In fact, the collection is varied and some of the items originated in New Mexico, which Vráz apparently only passed through. Still, he must have obtained them at a trading post, either in Flagstaff or at Keams Canyon (there is one photograph from this locality in the Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 4007; but, as is mentioned below, Vráz also included in his collection some pictures not taken by himself). The collection also includes two pieces from Isleta Pueblo, a place south of Albuquerque; Vráz may have obtained them there but there is no photograph in the collection to confirm his visit of that pueblo.

It is interesting to note that the composition of objects collected by Vráz resembles the collection of the German art historian Aby Warburg, acquired roughly at the same time and under similar conditions, that is, from dealers in the tourist centres of the Southwest.³³ Warburg's collection is characterised by the same stress on acquisition of a representative range of objects, which was at the time viewed as desirable by museums of anthropology and emphasised by contemporary tourist guides. We thus find objects made from various materials and by different crafts (pottery, basketry), a mix of ritual objects and objects of daily use, and musical instruments; all of this made by people from various native groups. It is known that Southwestern dealers advertised such ready-made collections for purchase and shipment.³⁴

The possibility that the items Vráz bought were, in fact, produced for tourists is further supported by the fact that most are smaller than equivalent objects made for actual everyday use. Although the old inventory tried to gloss over this fact by labelling some of the pottery as 'jars for medicines', it is much more likely that these vessels were made small so that tourists could easily fit them in their luggage and put them on display in their homes. One of the 'jars for medicines' (Inv. No. A8343) is most likely a coffee cup, that is, an explicitly tourist piece (and, moreover, not made by the Hopi but in the Isleta Pueblo in New Mexico) [Fig. 4]. Another piece (Inv. No. A1730) is a candle holder, also from Isleta Pueblo – again not an object the Pueblos would have had use for at that time. Even the two most spectacular pottery jars (Inv. Nos. 45.850, 45.851) are too small to be used to carry water or store food. This does not detract from the value of the collection. On the contrary, it documents the handicraft production of the Pueblo peoples at a point in their history, attesting to how local indigenous people responded to the pressures of the market and to the gradual integration of their region into the United States. On top of that, it reflects popular tastes of the times, ideas that shaped the image of

33 The Warburg collection, deposited in Hamburg (Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt), includes some pieces almost identical to those in the Vráz collection, such as a polychrome jar with the design of birds or a gourd rattle with the design of turkey feathers (a circle from which extend black triangles); see Chávez and Fleckner 2022.

34 Batkin 2008.

the Southwest both within and outside the United States.

There is one object in the Vráz collection that does not seem to come from the Pueblo area, namely item Inv. No. A1723, a fragment of a human figurine [Fig. 5]. It might have been made by the Mojave or Quechan (Yuma) people, whose territory stretched across the borders of Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada. The current inventory of Náprstek Museum lists it as one of the objects from Vráz's legacy which were given to the museum in 1963. It is possible that it was not acquired during his trip to Arizona in 1900 or, if it was, it may have been amongst the merchandise offered at the trading post. It should be borne in mind that since the 1870s, the Mojave and Quejan peoples reportedly sold clay figurines 'dressed' in textiles to Euro-American travellers passing through their territory³⁵ and whilst such figurines might have initially had some basis in rituals, perhaps in mourning ceremonies, by the late 19th century, they were most certainly adapted for commercial use.³⁶ And the same applies to other objects in Vráz's collection, which in turn implies that displaying them is considerably less ethically problematic.

Of course, even the trade in curiosa and ethnographica in the Southwest, just as elsewhere in the USA in the nineteenth and 20th centuries, was affected by power and economic imbalance, racial prejudice, and a general situation that put the native producers at a disadvantage. On the other hand, the dominance of the traders and entrepreneurs catering for tourists and anthropologists was far from overwhelming and the Pueblos could, through a revival of handicraft production and from the tourist industry, acquire income that was beneficial to them both as individuals and as communities. All this needs to be considered when curating the objects for the public view.³⁷ Moreover, it should be noted that Vráz's collection does not indicate any acquisition through the looting of graves or sanctuaries, eventually other forms of unethical behaviour associated with the origin of so many museum collections from that period.

Several objects deserve special consideration. First of all, there is an ellipsoid polychrome jar (Inv. No. 45.851) that might have been made the famous Hopi-Tewa potter Nampeyo (approx. 1859–1942), who at this time lived in Walpi (even though



↑ Fig. 4 Footed coffee cup, probably from Isleta, labelled in the old inventory list as 'clay vessel for medicines made by the Hopi Indians'. Náprstek Museum, Inv. No. A8343.

35 Trippel 1984 [1889].

36 Furst 2001, pp. 80–81; see illustrations in that book for comparison with the object in the Náprstek Museum.

37 Dilworth 1996, pp. 125–140.



↑ Fig. 6. A polychrome jar, probably made by Nampeyo. Náprstek Museum, Inv. No. 45.851.



↑ Fig. 7. The potter Nampeyo in front of her house in Walpi with her daughter and an unidentified man in the background. Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 2885.

there is no direct evidence of this).³⁸

It is a low, wide-shouldered jar similar to Nampeyo's production at this time [Fig.6].³⁹ Nampeyo was inspired by finds from archaeological excavations conducted in the Hopi territory, but she developed and transformed the old styles in her own original way. Her work, which had attractive designs and was of high quality, was marketed through the Keams Canyon trading post and other trade networks throughout the United States.⁴⁰ The supposition that she is the author of the jar in Vráz's collection is further supported by the fact that she appears, with a child (possibly her daughter), in

38 The Tewa was another Pueblo group, of distinct language and culture, who in the late 17th and early 18th century, after the Pueblo Revolt (1680–1692), moved to the Hopi regions, mostly to the First Mesa. They sometimes intermarried (as was the case of Nampeyo), but for the most part Tewa remained linguistically and culturally distinct even when living in close proximity to the Hopi, Kramer 1996, p. xi.

39 Blair and Blair 1999, pp. 45–46.

40 Elmore 2015.

front of her dwelling in one of Vráz's photographs (Inv. No. Am II 2885) [Fig. 7].⁴¹

As a rule, Vráz did not record the names of the native people who made the objects he collected for the Náprstek Museum, nor of those who assisted him in acquiring natural specimen. This was, of course, fully in line with customs of the times. Whilst museums and private collectors required that the objects be authentic, the explicit contrasting of non-European 'crafts' with European 'art' suppressed the notion of individual authorship. It seems that Vráz's portrait of Nampeyo was just one of his 'genre' photographs: it showed a woman against the background of a picturesque pueblo, Walpi, not an important artist, although Nampeyo was a central figure in the transformation of Hopi art that took place after 1890. The fact that this information escaped Vráz further confirms that his visit to the Hopis was touristic rather than research-driven, focused on 'exploration'.

Another item that deserves closer attention is a pottery jar with double-twisted handles and polychrome design of birds and flowers (Inv. No. 45.850), in the old inventory erroneously identified as Hopi, although it was actually made by the Zia nation of New Mexico. It is a beautiful example of a long tradition of pottery making adjusted to the demands of late 19th-century trade [Fig. 8].⁴²

Vráz's collection in the Náprstek Museum also includes three *katsina tihó* figurines, the oldest such artefacts in the Czech Republic. *Katsina* – spelt also *kachina*, *katchina*, etc. – have very complex meaning in the Pueblo culture. They have been viewed as manifestations of spirits and forces of nature who visited Pueblo homes and participated in ritual dancing. Masked dancers embodied katsina, which helped them mediate the prayers of their communities to the supernatural forces. To spread a general awareness of the traditional conception of the world and



↑ Fig. 8. Zia polychrome jar with double-twisted handles. Náprstek Museum, Inv. No. 45.850.

41 Identification of the woman in the photograph as Nampeyo and the polychrome jar 45.851 as Nampeyo's work came from Lea McChesney (Maxwell Museum, Albuquerque). For Nampeyo's biography and work, see Blair and Blair 1999; Kramer 1996. Kramer 1996, p. 69, quoted from the federal census on the Hopi taken in 1900, which recorded Nampeyo as living with her mother White Corn, her husband Lesso, their two young children (Nellie, born about 1896, and infant son Wesley, born in 1899), and her married daughter Annie and her husband Willie Healing. Not recorded in the census was Nampeyo's last child, Fannie, born towards the end of 1900.

42 Harlow and Lanmon 2003.



↑ Fig. 9. Katsina from Vráz's collection, probably Ha-hai-i Wu-uti, that is, a maternal katsina, often given to babies. Náprstek Museum, Inv. No. 44.643.

the powers that operate it, participants in the dances made painted wooden figurines with attributes of the katsinas. These figurines, called *katsina tihó*, would then be hung above the beds of women and children. They helped to teach Pueblo children about their religion and brought females closer to the otherwise male-dominated cult. The dolls were not toys. But children could, and often did, play with them.⁴³

While the katsina masks and dancers' costumes, as well as knowledge linked to the rituals, were treated as sacred and never reproduced or sold, *katsina tihó* were not perceived as sacred in the European sense of the word.⁴⁴ In fact, they were soon marketed to the Euro-American visitors who were fascinated by Pueblo rituals and the possible hidden meanings of the figurines. By the end of the 19th century, *katsina tihó* became a generic type souvenir from the Southwest, which naturally brought about some stylistic and manufacturing changes.⁴⁵ There may be some

specimen in museum collections whose meaning, or the context of their production and eventual acquisition, could prevent their public display.⁴⁶ But, in general, *katsina tihó* that were marketed for sale do not place ethical obligations on the museums that possess and curate them.

The three *katsina tihó* figurines in Vráz's collection document the transformation of these objects in the late nineteenth and the early 20th centuries. Figurine Inv. No. 44.643 seems to be an 'authentic' doll that would have been made for babies and is thus very simple (so as to not pose danger to a small child). It

43 Pearlstone and Babcock 2001.

44 Kisielewski 2018, p. 109.

45 Brody 2000; Dockstader 1985; Erickson 1977; Schaafsma 2000.

46 Maxson 2010, p. 7.

probably depicts Hahai-i Wu-uti, the ‘mother of all katsinas’ [Fig. 9].⁴⁷ It was documented around the time of Vráz’s visit that Pueblo adolescents would exchange their dolls at the trading posts for sweets or cash; such exchange also informally marked the end of childhood.⁴⁸ Figurine Inv. No. 44.644, identified by Kateřina Klápšřová as a ‘cross-crowned katsina’ or ‘corn dancer’,⁴⁹ still has a string around its neck by which it would have hung on the wall, so it seems it had actually resided in a Hopi household before passing into Vráz’s possession. In contrast, the third figurine (Inv. No. A2415), ‘Tühavi paralysed katsina’, which consists of two figurines, one carried by another, has a circular base, which may indicate that it was meant to be sold and put on display. On the other hand, the base might have been added later [Fig. 10].⁵⁰



↑ Fig. 10. Katsina Tühavi, the paralysed katsina. Náprstek Museum, Inv. No. A2415.

Photographs and their hidden meanings

Vráz’s photographs from the Southwest do not form a separate set; they are integrated in two photographic collections in the Náprstek Museum. The majority of Vráz’s photographs is part of the Ethnographic Photo-Collection, the rest is in the Collection of Historical Photographs. The photographs are in a variety of formats: positives (prints), negatives, and glass slides. Some of the slides are hand-coloured. There are both single slides and stereoscopic images, i.e., two shots of the same scene taken with a two-lense camera, which, when viewed through a special device, give the illusion of three-dimensional picture. In the late 19th century, stereosco-

47 Sellers 1959, no. 44. The curator Kateřina Klápšřová in 1981 in the inventory card of this object speculated that the figurine depicts a ‘Shalako Man’, a female figure important in the ceremonies closing the old and celebrating the new year.

48 Brody 2000, pp. 149–150.

49 Klápšřová quoted in the inventory card Wright 1975, p. 19.

50 Sellers 1959, no. 144, mentioned that in the story of the Tühavi paralyzed katsina, he has a blind companion, but it seems the latter was never impersonated during rituals; see also Fewkes 1903, p. 70.



↑ Fig. 11. The landscape of the American Southwest. Hand - coloured glass diapositive for 'stereoscopic' viewing; Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo - Collection, Inv. No. Am II 3988 a.

pic images were viewed as cheaper equivalents of panoramas or dioramas and they were highly popular both with private collectors and as public attractions for paying audiences.⁵¹ Some of the photographs exist in several variants, so that whilst the Náprstek Museum has about 300 photographs by Vráz from the Southwest, this corresponds to about 200 original images [Fig. 11].⁵² They are not chronologically ordered and, in most cases, the place where they were taken is not identified, making their exact localisation rather difficult. Some pictures were taken from books or picture postcards, probably so that Vráz could then use them for his lectures.⁵³ In short, Vráz's collection of photographs needs to be approached with the utmost care.

Vráz viewed taking photographs as a central activity during his travels ever since his stay in Africa in the 1880s. He was one of the early pioneers of photographic documentation of non-European regions. He photographed both landscapes and the inhabitants, and many of the pictures he took are unique, first ever made in regions such as Western Africa or New Guinea.⁵⁴ Photographs assisted him in several ways. As supposedly 'objective' images of reality, they were perceived as

51 Wittlich 2012, p. 31.

52 The collections can be accessed online (with the possibility of full - text search) through the website of the National Museum, its ethnographic collections; available at: <https://vademecum.nm.cz/nm/>.

53 e.g., Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo - Collection, Inv. No. Am II 2916 is a hand - coloured version of the popular photograph of a 'Yuma musician', by Isaiah West Taber, taken in his studio in San Francisco in 1885; see Payne 1985, p. 18, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, lot 12926, available at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005677474/> [Accessed 9 Aug. 2025]. This photograph was erroneously identified by Todorovová and Klápšřová 2003, p. 356, as 'priest from the Antelope Society playing a flute'. Similarly, photographs Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo - Collection, Inv. Nos. Am I 5054, Am I 5075 show the snake dance, which Vráz certainly did not witness because he left Walpi before it would have taken place in August 1900.

54 Todorovová 2002.

more tangibly 'true' than any written or spoken word. As such, they functioned as crucial support for Vráz's claims that he had visited certain regions and described them truthfully. They complemented the emphasis on personal experience as a criterion of truth, which we find, repeatedly, in Vráz's accounts of his travels. In fact, one commentator remarked upon it at the time, noting that '[the] world can be adjusted to the individual opinion of the traveller, but pictures cannot. Everyone can judge for himself whether the lecturer speaks the truth'.⁵⁵ Photographs also facilitated the transmission of the travel experience to audiences via lectures and books. On top of that, they could be represented as scientific material that enabled anthropologists and art historians to study the inhabitants of 'exotic' regions: photography was how the native groups, on the verge of vanishing, could be 'saved' for science.

But Vráz also monetised his pictures. There is an important document in the archives of the Náprstek Museum which sheds light on Vráz's objectives in the Southwest, at least in terms of photographs. It is an agreement with Underwood & Underwood Co. of New York, dated to 26 April 1900, that is, immediately before Vráz departed to Arizona. Vráz committed himself to 'photograph the ranch, cow boy and indian [*sic!*] typical scenes as well as the natural features' of Arizona and New Mexico and to deliver to the company the relevant stereoscopic images.⁵⁶ In other words, he promised to capture on glass slides and negatives images conforming to the existing stereotypes of the 'West' and 'Southwest' of the USA, thus reinforcing them further.

These diverse, and at times conflicting, purposes to which he put his photographs indicate that Vráz's photographs did not just objectively capture the reality of landscapes and peoples he had seen. He carefully selected what to photograph and which pictures should be kept and published. There were, of course, some technical limitations. The long exposure time required careful preparation and patient posing of the subjects. In case of hand-coloured diapositives, there is no guarantee that the colours correspond to what Vráz saw, that is, that the colouring corresponds to reality. But it certainly increased the attractiveness of the depictions. There is a series of landscape vistas, including views of the Grand Canyon and its surroundings, which conforms to the ideal of the breathtaking nature of the 'American Sahara'.⁵⁷ Along similar lines, it can also be found in the collection photographs that illustrate the 'inaccessible wilderness', that is, the deserts and

55 [anon.], Přednáška E. St. Vráze [Lecture by E. St. Vráz], Štítný, April 4, 1903, p. 1. On the problematic nature of the claim made by early photographers that their pictures directly reflect the observed reality, see Edwards 2008; Scherer 1992.

56 Document in ANpM, fund Ar. Vráz, box 4/2, no. 13.

57 e.g., photographs Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. Nos. Am II 513, Am II 514 (the same picture appears also as Am II 3987, Am II 4021, and Am I 6297), Am II 2849 (the same picture appears also as Am II 2912 and Am II 3986), Am II 2859 (Am II 2858, Am II 2904, Am III 467), etc.

stony plains to be crossed before reaching the goal of the travel, the mountaintop village Walpi.⁵⁸

Newspaper coverage indicates that such pictures appealed to the audiences of Vráz's lectures. According to an anonymous report – which hinted at the fact that the slides projected were hand-coloured – in 1902 in Prague the visitors could admire

[...] the monumental images of gorgeous Arizona, the lands of the far West. [...] Probably nowhere else had nature worked with contrasts such as those found here. Here we see a beautiful valley with pines and oaks, over there a terrifying desert and sky-high mountains, abysses that seem to lead right down to hell, and there again endless flatlands. Something incredibly mournful breathes from the blood-red rocks that seem to belong to the shores of long-vanished seas. From the terrible wastelands with no sign of man or animal, not even the tiniest spring of water, we come to the world of myths: where in the fantasy of the greedy Spaniards there were the seven fabled cities, rich in gold, there are strange Indian villages atop rocky outcrops. Interesting remnants of the original Indians, who, as if exiled from the world, live in their rock cities that resemble ruins of old castles. If the photographs of Vráz did not so truthfully confirm his words, it would appear that he is just making things up. A mysterious river, running one thousand feet below through a gaping chasm amongst huge rocks, reminds us of Verne's fantasies. Yet all this is real. [...] Through these terrible images, Vráz [...] led us smoothly to ancient dwellings, introduced the characteristic types of Indians from the Moqui tribe and the civilised Indian maiden whom we already knew from the posters.⁵⁹

Walpi, with its inhabitants, indeed repeatedly appears in the photographs in the Náprstek Museum. It features many portraits of men, women, and children, with one or several people posing in each photo. Even when the photographs ostensibly depict scenes from everyday life (e.g., in Inv. No. Am II 4037, where several women are engaged in household chores while a child climbs on the pueblo roof), a closer look reveals the composition to be staged. One of the women is posing at the corn-grinding stones but there are no corn grains [Fig. 12]. All in all, I would disagree with characterising these photographs as 'coarse documentaries'.⁶⁰ What we see are examples of what the tourists and anthropologists viewed as 'scenes from daily life' and 'ethnographic portraits', which were very popular in late nineteenth and early

58 Such as Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. Nos. Am II 2882, Am II 2892 (the same picture also appears as Am II 3982), etc.

59 [anon.], Vrázovy přednáškové toučky Arizonou [Vráz's lecturing tours through Arizona], *Národní listy*, 17 October 1902, p. 3.

60 Todorovová and Klápšřová 2003, p. 353.



↑ Fig.12. Women posing with stones for grinding corn. Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 517.



↑ Fig.13. Two female potters. Hand-coloured slide; Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 4044 a.

20th century. Vráz's photograph of the 'olla maidens', reproduced above (Inv. No. Am II 2932) [Fig.3], is a good example: portraits of women carrying pottery jars (*ollas*) on their heads was a favourite theme in promotional images of the Southwest.⁶¹

Aside from this general observation, it should be noted that the persons portrayed by Vráz were dressed in festive clothes and the adults wore heavy silver jewellery, so they clearly were not in their everyday clothes. Such attire manifested the wealth of the owner when dealing with the outside world, but it also reflected the stereotypical image of Southwestern natives, such as the two women who are making pottery vessels in photograph Inv. No. Am II 4044a [Fig. 13].⁶² Such pictures also responded to the demand for photographs of 'exotic types', especially females, in both the European and North American markets. Even so, we can see in this image (Inv. No. Am II 4044a) that the clay for pottery making is stored in a metal bowl that was probably obtained from a trader, which realistically documents that changes in the Hopi material culture were taking place. Moreover, whilst the younger woman in the picture wears a traditional dress, the older one is dressed in printed cotton which, too, must have been obtained by trade. We can only guess which of the women in the photographs was the 'civilised maiden' mentioned in the Vráz's report, and what was her role during his stay in Walpi. Perhaps it was the young woman shown in Inv. No. Am II 527 but also in several

61 For overt sexualisation of Southwestern women in 'documentary' photography, see James 1900.

62 Also photographs Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. Nos. Am II 516 (appears also as Am II 528 and Am II 2926), Am II 522 (appears also as Am I 6309), Am II 2870 (Am II 3994), Am II 2888 (Am II 4049ab, Am I 6313), etc.



↑ Fig.14. A married woman and a young girl (on a horse) from Walpi, with characteristic hair styles. Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 527.



↑ Fig.15. A view of Walpi. Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 515.

other pictures, who always wears a traditional Hopi hairstyle reserved for unmarried girls. But Vráz never noted her name or recorded any other information about her [Fig. 14].

Ethnographic photography has always been ambiguous, often objectifying the non-Europeans depicted in it through a voyeuristic and supremacist gaze.⁶³ But whilst Vráz's photographs, too, are stereotypical, orientalising, and depicting the Hopi from the perspective of the supposed superiority of the Euro-American culture, they are for the most part not overtly problematic. They can certainly be used to study the Hopi culture at a specific point in history when they were taken, to investigate changes in the pueblo structures, household equipment, and the like [Fig. 15].

Nevertheless, one part of the corpus of photographs made by Vráz in Walpi does present some ethical problems, namely the pictures related to Hopi rituals and masked dances. For obvious reasons – as the author remains convinced that these photographs are problematic and challenging – they will not be reproduced here. Ceremonial dances, that is, 'exotic' performances, were both perfect tourist attractions and they held an appeal for the scientific travellers. From 1880 until 1920, the Hopi Snake and Antelope ceremony, popularly known as 'the Snake Dance', was by far the most widely depicted Southwest Native American ritual. Performed in August to ensure abundant rainfall for the corn crops, it was a ritual in the annual cycle of ceremonies enacted by the Hopi. It involved the handling of live

63 Vizenor 1998.

snakes, and it was a ceremony most frequently described by non-Indian observers. After thousands of people, including many celebrities, started to descend each year for that day on the Hopi villages, the representatives of the Hopi community started to restrict, shortly after 1900, firstly the documentation and then access of non-tribal members to the ceremony.⁶⁴ Vráz did not attend this dance but there were apparently other ceremonies taking place during his stay in Walpi and it was during these ceremonies that the masked dancers impersonated the katsinas who were expected to appear and attend the dances.

Whilst, as was explained, *katsina tihó*, i.e., the dolls representing the intermediaries between the gods and people, were not sacred in the European sense of the word, the dance ceremonies held many aspects that could not be revealed to casual visitors. The most guarded secret, one that had most provoked the European observers, was that the masked dancers were in fact male members of the community. Whilst the real katsinas were expected to visit human settlements on some occasions, any Hopi man who donned a katsina mask with the appropriate costume effectively became the katsina. He lost his personal identity and a spirit of the katsina he was impersonating entered him.⁶⁵ The men thus put on, and then took off, the masks in seclusion, outside the settlement. To reveal that there is an ordinary human dressed in the dance costume was considered an ultimate transgression that could bring misfortune and punishment to the entire village. But that was what the anthropologists and missionaries did in late nineteenth and early 20th century, to reveal the 'absurd' nature of native 'superstitions'. Aby Warburg, who visited Walpi in 1895 and witnessed the Snake Dance, not only took pictures of partly unmasked dancers but put the katsina mask on his head while keeping his face visible. He thus ridiculed and trivialised the Hopi mysteries, stripping them of their secrets and reducing them to colourful *exotica*.⁶⁶

We do not know if Vráz was familiar with Warburg's visit. Probably not, because the German scholar publicly reflected on his journey to the Southwest many years after visiting it, in 1923.⁶⁷ It is more likely that both Vráz and Warburg conformed to what was common amongst tourists at the time. We thus find photographs of masked and partly unmasked dancers in Vráz's collection, which resemble those made by Warburg five years earlier.⁶⁸ There is also a photograph of Vráz himself with the dancers without face coverings (Inv. No. Am II 4047). On another of the glass slides (Inv. No. Am II 518), Vráz wrote the following note: 'A priest of the

64 Dilworth 1996, pp. 21–22; Lyon 1988.

65 Wright 1979, p. 99.

66 Freedberg 2005, p. 14.

67 Warburg and Mainland 1939.

68 Such as Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. Nos. Am I 6310 (Am II 2886, Am II 4004), Am II 521 (Am II 4003, Am II 4046, Am I 6307ab), Am II 3999 (Am II 4045), etc. The publication of Warburg's photographs by Cestelli Guidi and Mann 1996 provoked protests from representatives of the Hopi who demanded the publication to be halted, and distribution of the images stopped, see Schaber 2019.



↑ Fig. 16. Pupils and teachers at the government school in Keams Canyon. Náprstek Museum, Ethnographic Photo-Collection, Inv. No. Am II 4007.

Antelope clan in a mask for a religious dance; it was difficult to photograph him, since the others were not to know about it.' This shows that Vráz knew he was violating the rules of the Hopi but still thought he had the right, and even duty, to 'expose' their taboos in the interest of science. He legitimised this transgression by pointing to consent given by the individual (who himself acted contrary to the common wish of the community). This is an important aspect of the situation: the masks and other paraphernalia, and especially the knowledge of the ritual and its mythological background were and are to

this day property of the community, clan, or another social unit. A large part of this knowledge is privileged, highly sensitive, and should never be discussed publicly.⁶⁹

The abovementioned photographs taken by Vráz and Warburg, and their stories, show that by the late 19th century, inner coherence of Hopi communities started to crumble under the pressure of the encroachment of Anglo-American settlers and visitors to Hopi territory, which brought with it an imposition of what the sociologist Dean MacCannell calls the 'staged authenticity' of a tourist space.⁷⁰ The process of community disintegration culminated in 1906 in the famous 'split' of another Hopi settlement, Oraibi.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the fact that a social and cultural transformation was underway in the Southwest already during Vráz's visit is clear from another of his photographs, which shows the pupils of a boarding school which the American government established in the Hopi Reservation in Keam's Canyon [Fig. 16]. Vráz was supportive of schools, education, and missionary work, which may initially seem paradoxical given his effort to find and record 'authentic' cultures in the Southwest and elsewhere. But the presentation of indigenous cultures as 'vanishing' would increase the attractiveness of items associated with them; the trope of the 'vanishing Indian' thus increased the symbolic as well as commercial value of Vráz's collections and added to the popularity of his lectures on the Hopi.

69 Whiteley 1988, p. 15.

70 MacCannell 1973.

71 Whiteley 1988.

Conclusion

A deeper look into Vráz's collection of Southwestern artefacts and photographs in the Náprstek Museum reveals many aspects that run counter the predominant image of Vráz as an explorer, scholar, and an impartial acute observer. Upon closer inspection, he is found to be rather a tourist who visited places where staged stereotypical 'exotic' experiences and equally 'exotic' goods were waiting for him to be recorded and taken away. Such assessment of Vráz's travels naturally does not diminish the documentary value of these collections – it helps to place them in a broader context. Nevertheless, it also opens some wider issues regarding the moral and ethical dimension of conducting research amongst and on indigenous peoples. Whilst these questions cannot be resolved within this article, there are some final considerations that ought to be mentioned. There is, for example, the issue of an interplay between a 'museum object' and a human being 'creating' it as an artefact, imbuing it with meaning – be it through producing it, curating, studying, displaying, or observing it.

The practice of scientific travel and the documentation of nineteenth and 20th century was based on the idea that scientific knowledge should be maximally complete and publicly shared. This clashed with the customs of many of the native communities involved (the Hopi were certainly not the only ones). There is no doubt that their religious symbols, rituals, and culture in general have been expropriated and commercialised, and the present-day representatives of the native communities present objections against a continuation of such practices. The situation is aggravated by increasing digitisation, sharing, and open access publication of the documents and objects which are in possession of Euro-American museums. Digitisation of archival materials seemed to promise more diplomatic access to the world's cultural heritage, giving digital heritage the status of a universal common good. In fact, it can even inspire efforts to 'repatriate' objects and knowledge appropriated in the past.⁷²

On the other hand, the case of Hopi ritual knowledge highlights the complexity of the politics of custodianship, control, access, and meaning. Different stakeholders have different needs and make different demands: on the one hand, there are the communities in which objects and knowledge originated, on the other hand, there are the Euro-American institutions. European museums have been historically linked to nationalism and collective national ownership of 'precious objects' kept in memory institutions (which also have the expertise for their presentation and interpretation) remains crucial in the process of building collective identity. Not surprisingly, this makes any efforts aimed at adjustment of curation and exhibition practices in response to the requests of native groups extremely

72 Clark 2024, p. 167.

difficult. A balance needs to be found, and the beauty, individual histories, and complex meanings of specific artefacts, especially the meanings they acquired after the removal from their original context, should be communicated to museum visitors, the international academic community, and to the native communities. To find strategies that would facilitate such a novel approach to museum collections, a look back into their histories needs to be taken. The short trip of E. St. Vráz to the Hopi in Arizona in 1900 is a case through which one may be able to glimpse at the complexity of decolonising even collections which were not created by outright colonial plunder.

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