Fiona Kerlogue and Dagmar Pospíšilová, *Collecting Experience in the 1930s: Indonesian and Pacific collections of Růžena Charlotta Urbanová in the National Museum*. Prague: National Museum Prague [Editio Monographica Musei Nationalis Pragae 24, photographs: Jiří Vaněk, English translation: Valerie Talacko], 2018, 272 pp, ISBN: 9788070365779, price: CZK 420.00 (hardcover).

Telling the story of material culture, tourism, and travelers in the Pacific and the Dutch East Indies in the 1930s, this richly illustrated book takes as its point of departure a collection held by the National Museum in the Prague. It also conveys the intricate ways in which European history unfolded during the lifetime of the woman behind the collection: Růžena Charlotta Urbanová.

Urbanová was born in 1888 in Austria-Hungary, in a small town west of Prague, an area that during the twentieth century would become part of Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic. She died in The Hague in 1978 after an adventurous life as an artist (living many years in Paris), author of two novels, journalist, and world traveler.

The collection at the National Museum in Prague originates from a journey around the world that began in the spring of 1939. At that time, Urbanová was in her early fifties, divorced from her second husband, and led a prosperous and successful life as both a novelist and a painter. The book provides documentation of the collection she gathered during the journey, which lasted longer than expected and only ended after the Second World War. From 1943 Urbanová was interned by the Japanese in Java. One reason why the collection previously lacked documentation is that most of Urbanová's writings and photographs from her travels were confiscated by the Japanese in 1943. The collection was shipped to Europe in 1946 when Urbanová was evacuated from Java, but her papers and photographs were never returned to her.

The book begins with a reconstruction of the journey that generated the collection. In May 1939, traveling by ship from Marseille, Urbanová made it to Tahiti via the Panama Canal. Despite their elusive main character, the authors Fiona Kerlogue and Dagmar Pospíšilová provide a lively image of French Polynesia from the perspective of visitors and wealthy globetrotters in the 1930s.

Tahiti and similar places attracted tourists seeking to fulfil their desire for paradise untouched by modernity (conveyed by artists like Gauguin) and that of exhilarating danger in areas supposedly inhabited by primitive head-hunters. Both these experiential tropes are present in the story of Urbanová who sometimes appeared as a tourist and in other instances as a colonial world citizen (today's "internationals"), who stayed long periods abroad and enjoyed Western company and amenities. This fluctuation between personas, the tourist and the initiated foreigner, is also reflected in the collection Urbanová left behind.

BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE

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Many objects in her collection were produced for tourists, while others would qualify as rare and exclusive ethnographic items.

Similar to other contemporary travelers, Urbanová needed to fulfill the expectations of her home audience. The most revealing example that appears in the book is a photograph of Urbanová shaking hands with a local man in the New Hebrides (p. 36). She wears long trousers, a shirt, and a pith helmet—the ultimate adornment of the White [wo]man in the tropics. He is naked save for a belt around his waist, a small plaited mat(?) covering his genitals and a head decoration. The photograph was published in the Czech magazine *Vlasta* in 1947, in an article about the adventures of Urbanová. It includes a story about how Urbanová had to escape from cannibals, and according to the article ‘... was aided by her artistic talent and the fact that she created a portrait of the chief’ (p. 230). This resonates with well-known stories like that about the murderous Bataks in Sumatra and the German missionary Nommensen (1834–1918), who managed to win both hearts and souls, and escape being killed, by playing his fiddle.

The source material used in the book is patchy. Apart from the collection, it includes letters, some remaining photographs, paintings, receipts, and other paper trails from Urbanová’s travels, Czech archival records, and newspaper articles. Furthermore, the authors have followed in the footsteps of Urbanová to some of the places she visited and added present day photographs.

Together, the sources convey an image of a colorful collector. However, as there is no diary or other record from her travels, Urbanová’s own voice is largely lacking. This is both a blessing and a curse for the book. The silent protagonist gives the authors freedom to make generalizations, and they have been ingenuous in finding other voices among Urbanová’s contemporaries. Well-chosen quotes from Western observers provide lively descriptions of places Urbanová visited. Possibly they paint a fuller picture than a diary note by Urbanová would have done. This said, the main drawback with the book is the lacuna surrounding the collector it portrays.

Among the most interesting secondary sources that the authors draw from are a set of tourist guides used in the 1930s. These are presented in the chapter ‘Traveling in the Dutch East Indies in the 1930s’ (pp. 39–61). Due to gaps in the source material, the itinerary of Urbanová’s travels is tentative, especially for the years in Indonesia. There are many occasions when the authors make statements about what Urbanová ‘may have planned ...’, or that ‘there is evidence to suggest ...’ she went to a certain place. Still, the authors manage to convey a valid reconstruction of the tourist-generic experiences that Urbanová can be expected to have had. Even if the text sometimes gets a bit speculative (though the authors are very careful not to jump to conclusions), it is captivat-

ing to read about the tourist trail, the places you should visit, and what to do in Sumatra, Java, Bali, and Sulawesi. There are many moments of recognition for the present day tourist to Indonesia. It is also fascinating to learn details about the dealers and art shops that catered for Western collectors of ethnographica and antiquities, a subject which is covered in a chapter on collecting in the Dutch East Indies in the 1930s (pp. 62–90).

Another remarkable aspect of the book is the story it presents about the collection after it arrived in Europe. In November 1946 Urbanová was back in her native country and wrote to the National Cultural Commission about her valuable collection from her years in Indonesia and the Pacific. She suggested this important collection should be displayed in a castle where it could be used to promote the Czechoslovakian state. In return the state should provide accommodation for Urbanová for the rest of her lifetime in said castle, including 'a studio and a study, a flat for a secretary and a servant ...' as this was '... essential given her social contacts with distinguished foreigners' (p. 91). Preferably the castle should have greenhouses with exotic flowers and if possible a garage, a stable, and an Indonesian kitchen. The idea was not immediately rejected. Parts of the collection were exhibited at the Náprstek Museum in Prague in the spring of 1948. The following year Urbanová was again on her way to the Pacific, on her own initiative but for the purpose of the museum she hoped her collections would turn into. However, after the communists came into power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, government politics differed greatly from the grandeur Urbanová had envisioned. By the mid-1950s her collection was confiscated by the state and placed at the Náprstek museum. In an exhibition of dance, music, and theatre in non-European countries held in 1952–1954, Urbanová's objects pertaining to dance performances in Bali and Java were put on display as exhibits illustrating the struggle for national liberation in countries fighting against imperialism (p. 96). This interpretation, infused with communist ideology, is of course one way of contextualizing the objects, but it was far from the castle museum that the collector hoped for.

One of the principal qualities of the book is the combined expertise held by the authors, which is invaluable, as they use the diverse objects in the collection as a pretext to elaborate on ethnographic information and the cultural contexts from where the items originate. Both are experienced museum curators; Fiona Kerlogue, who until recently worked at the Horniman Museum in London, is an expert on the material culture of Southeast Asia, especially textiles, and is the author of several books on these subjects. Her knowledge about material culture and textiles makes the book informative and useful far beyond the ordinary catalogue cum collector's biography. Dagmar Pospíšilová works at the National Museum in Prague and has a good hold of the Czech sources and

circumstances. Furthermore, she specializes in Asian collections and has previous experience from writing about collections and collectors.

Together they have contributed an unusually full documentation of an eclectic collection, and a biography which, although it is only a partial representation of her life, conveys the story of a fascinating woman. It is a true pleasure reading about Urbanová's life and the cultural history of the objects she collected.

Emilie Wellfelt

Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

emilie.wellfelt@historia.su.se