

A selection of Highlights

NORTH- AND LATIN-AMERICA COLLECTION



Ancient Mexican feathered headdress

Mexico, Aztec, early 16th century

feathers of the resplendent quetzal, cotingas, roseate spoonbill, Squirrel Cuckoo, kingfisher; wood, fibres, paper, cotton, leather, gold, gilt bronze

h. 116, w. 175

Both the armoury and the Kunst- und Wunderkammer assembled by Archduke Ferdinand II, count of the Tyrol, were renowned throughout Europe. In 1596, a year after Ferdinand's death, an inventory of his collections was compiled. Of particular importance for the Weltmuseum Wien are the Indian feather objects from what is now Mexico listed in this inventory that are now in the museum. Most prominent among them is the celebrated ancient Mexican feather headdress featuring hundreds of long quetzal feathers and over a thousand gold plaques. This headdress is unique, it is the only one to have survived, and it is something of an iconic artefact for the Weltmuseum Wien. Between 2010 and 2012 it was studied and analysed as part of a joint Austrian-Mexican research project that focused on its history, as well as carefully cleaning and conserving it.

The North- and Latin-America Collection comprises almost 18,000 artefacts, half of which are archaeological objects. The focus is on Mexico, and in North-America on the Great Lakes and the north-western coast where Captain James Cook (1728–1779) collected important artefacts.

SOUTH AMERICA COLLECTION



Feather Cloak

Munduruku, Rio Tapajos, Brazil, c. 1830

Ara and Mutum, feathers, cotton

w. 110 cm

This rare Munduruku feather cloak is from the collection assembled by Johann Natterer; he was a member of the Austrian expedition to Brazil that criss-crossed the South-American country between 1817 and 1835. His ethnological collection is both the most important and the largest of his time. Today it forms the core of our South-American holdings of ethnological collections from Amazonia. In addition, our holdings comprise archaeological civilizations and folk art with a regional focus on the Andes region.

The South America Collection contains over 18,000 ethnographic and archaeological objects from all countries of the continent: from the northernmost Colombia to the deep south of Argentina and Chile. Also the countries bordering the Caribbean, such as Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and the French overseas department French Guiana are part of the collecting area.

The objects impressively mirror the cultural diversity of the South American continent. They document history and tell stories: of the era before the arrival of the Europeans in the Andes, of Amazonia's mythical primeval period, of the relations between American Indian cultures, and the colonial appropriation of the continent by the Europeans: of continuity and change, growth and loss.

OCEANIA AND AUSTRALIA COLLECTION



Feather Temple (hale waiea)

Hawai'i, Polynesia, 1778/79

Feathers of the Hawaiian Honeycreeper, tortoise shell, aerial roots of the freycinetia arborea, plant fiber threads
h. 59 cm, l. 20 cm, w. 8 cm

This is the only extant example of a Hawaiian ceremonial house in the shape of a feather temple; it was acquired by Captain James Cook (1728-1779) during his third circumnavigation of the globe. The model of a house comprises latticework made of the split aerial roots of a climbing plant embellished with red and yellow feathers. The door is decorated with seven tortoiseshell plaques. In Hawaiian temples priests consulted oracles about plans for and the outcomes of proposed political and military undertakings.

This rare artefact came to Austria in 1806 following the endeavours of Baron Leopold von Fichtel; he had been sent to London by the Imperial family to acquire objects collected by Cook at an auction of the content of the private museum assembled by Sir Ashton Lever. The objects acquired by him were incorporated into the collections of Emperor Francis I of Austria.

The 30,000 objects of the Oceania and Australia Collection document European encounters with the inhabitants of the South Seas between the 18th and the 21st century. The oldest collection was assembled in the course of James Cook's three circumnavigations of the globe. Now museum objects, they originate in Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia and Australia, documenting Pacific creativity, regional traditions and cultural specifications; but they also invite us to reflect on appropriation and heteronomy both in the past and today.

NORTH AFRICA, CENTRAL ASIA AND SIBERIA COLLECTION



Hanging Lamps from a Mosque

Egypt or Syria; Bahri Mamelukes, c. 1360

Glass with enamel decoration and gilding

h. max. 40 cm, diam. max. 28 cm

„From the marble objects decorating the sanctuary (of the mosque of Sultan Hassan in Cairo) (...) the saved 34 hanging lamps made of enamelled glass (...) (form) the most valuable part of the entire collection. Made of impure greenish glass, each with six eyelets for fine metal chains so they can be suspended from the ceiling or the pinnacle of the arcades, they served more as embellishments than as sources of light. They are elaborately decorated in coloured enamel with elegant vines and Koranic inscriptions as well as medallions that feature a dedication, usually „Honour to our master, the victorious Sultan“, or the Emir’s coat of arms” Franz Pascha (Julius), Cairo 1903.

The inscriptions tell us that these two hanging lamps once decorated the madrasa erected by the Mameluke Sultan al-Nasir b. Mohammad in Cairo in 1356-1363. Before entering the Anthropological-Ethnological Department of the k.k. Naturhistorisches Hofmuseum (Imperial Museum of Natural History) as a gift in 1883, they decorated one of the state rooms at Miramar Palace near Trieste; the palace was built by Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian (1832-1867), later Emperor of Mexico. Maximilian probably acquired these hanging lamps in Cairo during one of his Mediterranean journeys.

The Weltmuseum Wien’s Department of North Africa, Central Asia and Siberia comprises c. 25,000 inventory numbers, making it one of the world’s most important collections of objects reflecting every-day life and the material culture of these parts.

SUBSAHARAN AFRICA COLLECTION



Two Court Dwarfs

Kingdom of Benin, Nigeria, 14th/15th century

brass

h. 59 cm; h. 60 cm

These two unique figures are among the oldest extant artworks from the Kingdom of Benin; with their true-to-life naturalism they are among the best and most delicate examples of early court style.

They were probably once placed on an altar of royal ancestors. Court dwarfs are not part of the standard inventory of such shrines so we may assume that these figures depict historical persons who had played an important role during the reign of a 15th century ruler. Dwarfs at the royal court in Benin are recorded from this time onwards. Their local name translates as „trumpet“, a reference to their seminal role as the king’s mouthpiece. Today, a court dwarf clutching a fan - his attribute - initiates palace ceremonies with a formal salutation of the king.

The celebrated Benin Collection is part of the holdings of the Africa south of the Sahara Collection, which comprises nearly 38,000 objects. The collection reflects the cultural wealth and variety of Africa from the Sahel to the continent’s southern tip, from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia and Madagascar in the east.

INSULAR SOUTH-EAST ASIA COLLECTION



Kris with painted sheath

Bali/Java, Indonesia, 16th– early 17th cent.

Steel, damascened nickel, wood, pigment; blade: L. 44 cm, sheath: L. 48 cm, W. 9 cm

Inv. No. 91.919 ab

This kris (keris) is impressive due to its beauty and age. According to an analysis by the two experts in kris swords, Dietrich Drescher and Achim Weihrauch, the type is representative of the late period of the Hindu-Javanese Majapahit kingdom on Java and Bali in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Only a few examples from this period exist in museums worldwide. Particularly unusual is the painting of the scabbard with a typical representation of Javanese cosmology: the world with animals (alas-alasan) and the motif of mountains (gunungan). The hilt displays the image of a male figure with a fighting cockerel, carved in wayang style. This male figure carries a kris on his back, and is therefore to be classified as a warrior (ksatria). The blade is typical for kris swords which arrived in Europe from Java in the seventeenth century. It is a masterpiece of Javanese blacksmithing. The eleven waves (luk) of the blade indicate the desire of the person who commissioned it for high status and financial advancement.

Kris swords not only functioned as weapons, but also as heirlooms (pusaka) of Javanese families. Nearly every son owns a kris from his father. Due to its cultural and spiritual significance, UNESCO placed the kris on the list of masterpieces of human cultural heritage in 2005.

The Insular Southeast Asia Collection comprises c. 20,000 objects from the Nicobar and the Andaman Islands as well as states of Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, Timor Leste, and the Philippines. Today Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. While Malaysia and Brunei have Islam as their official religion, the majority of people in the Philippines and Timor Leste are Catholic. The Nicobar and the Andaman Islands are part of the territory of India, and only accessible to a limited extent.

COLLECTION EAST ASIA: CHINA, KOREA, JAPAN



Bodhisattva Jizō

polychromed wood, gold lacquer, glass, brass

H: 68 cm

early Edo-Period (1600 – 1868), Japan

Jizō (Sanskrit: Ksitigarbha), "Earth Treasury" or "Earth Womb", is one of the eight bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva of mercy and compassion. On a lotus base over stylized mountaintops, seated, a wish-fulfilling jewel in his left and a pilgrim's staff with six rings in his right hand (both attributes missing here). He is the guardian of the dead and of hell. In Japan, Jizō is one of the most loved of all Buddhist divinities. Many temples are dedicated to him and Jizō statues line streets and fields; most of them are embellished with a red bib. The protector of the souls of children, from the Edo-Period (1600-1868) onwards he guides the souls of children aborted or killed as new-borns by parents too poor to raise them out of hell.

In the year 2017, the East Asia Collection with its objects from China, Korea, and Japan comprises ca. 28,500 objects, 15,000 of which are from just one country: Japan. While almost 12,000 artefacts were collected in the cultural region of China, the small collection of ca. 1,500 objects on Korea was primarily assembled in the late 19th century. The focus of the collection is on objects of daily life from these regions. As the greater part of the collection was compiled in the 19th century, it is an important witness of cultural history as well as a fundamental document of economic history.

SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, HIMALAYAS



Dong Son Drum

Northern Vietnam, 2nd/1st century B.C.

copper alloy

h. 53 cm, diam. 70 cm

This gong was found in the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam; it is among the finest examples of its kind in the world. The drums produced by the Dong Son Civilization around the beginning of the Common Era feature decorations – ships of the dead, buildings, animals and people - that tell of the origins of Vietnamese civilization. Only kings and priests were allowed to hit these instruments with a mallet. The sound of the drum was believed to call the dragon that brought the live-giving rain for the rice fields. The exclusive control over these instruments legitimized the king's power in the Dong Son civilization. Today stylized depictions of the metal disk of a bronze drum feature in political propaganda, reminding the Vietnamese people of their origins and cultural identity.

This object is known all over the world, making it a seminal artefact in the South East Asia Collection of the Weltmuseum Wien, which houses a total of 25 Dong Son drums. In 1903, after studying the collection, Franz Heger published a still relevant typology of these instruments that have evolved stylistically over the centuries and were also adopted by ethnic minorities.

The South-, South-East Asia and the Countries of the Himalayas Collection comprises c. 30,000 objects. They offer a comprehensive survey of human activity, from simple every-day tasks to worship of the gods.

LIBRARY



**Ost- und West-Indischer wie auch Sinesischer Lust- und Stats-Garten [...]
(East- and West-Indian as well as Chinese Pleasure- and Formal Gardens)**

by Erasmus Franciscus

Nuremberg 1668

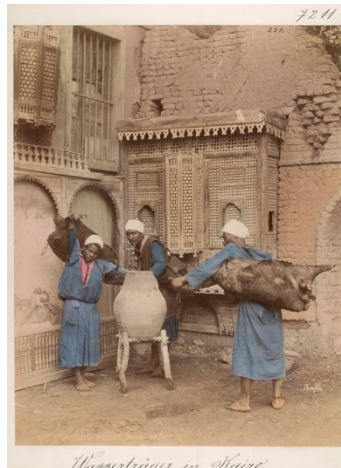
leather, paper

h. 34 cm, w. 24 cm

The first part of this publication describes the flora and fauna of America, Asia and China, including monsters and other mythical creatures. The second part focuses on geography and the riches and resources of these regions, while the third discusses local customs and religions. The work is lavishly illustrated with wonderful pictures of forests, trees, plants, spices, wood people and dragons.

This precious historical volume is one of 148,000 books and magazines in the museum library, which is open to the public. It is the only scholarly library in Austria specialised in non-European material culture and art.

COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS



Waters Carrier in Cairo

Photograph: Bonfils, Felix or Adrien; photograph taken c. 1870
print, coloured by hand
27,7 x 21,5 cm

This image depicts three water carriers in Cairo. At the time water was transported and distributed in animal skins. The large, coarse ceramic vessels stood in the courtyards of houses. The water slowly diffused through the pitchers where it evaporated, keeping the water cool.

The company Bonfils was founded in Beirut in 1867 as „Maison Bonfils“. It was famous for studio photographs, pictures of archaeological sites and every-day scenes, like this one. Between 1867 and 1916 the Bonfils family produced tens of thousands of pictures from all over the Middle East. The exceptional quality of their images – both technical and artistic – and their skilful colouring by hand made these pictures sought-after souvenirs for tourists and travellers. During his circumnavigation of the globe the Uhlan cavalry captain, Josef von Lommer, visited the Middle East in late 1899/early 1900, acquiring a total of 80 images from Bonfils. Following von Lommer's death in 1905, his collection comprising a total of 1043 photographs entered the museum.

The Weltmuseum Wien holds an additional 136 photographs produced by Bonfils. The archive comprises over 140,000 photographs, making it Austria's largest ethnological picture library. Its holdings date from 1860 until today and include images from all over the world, with a focus on documentary photographs taken during research or educational journeys, images of objects in the collection, and collections of works by different photographers.

Further information: www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/curatorial-departments/