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THE NIAS COLLECTION OF THE ETHNOLOGY MUSEUM IN VIENNA

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The Viennese Museum of Ethnology holds 798 objects from Nias.

The majority of the Nias objects are labeled 'Este', named after the Austrian archduke and then successor to the throne, Franz Ferdinand von Österreich-Este (1863-1914). In December 1892 he boarded the torpedo-ram-cruiser Empress Elizabeth for a journey around the world. Along the way a collection was put together, consisting of the Archduke's hunting trophies, natural history specimens, and ethnographic objects. From Nias he brought back 492 objects.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand's collection was initially filed by officers of the anthropological-ethnographic section of the Royal Imperial Court Museum. This tremendous increase in objects contributed to the separation of the ethnographic collection from the Natural History Museum, which eventually led to the opening of the Ethnology Museum in 1928.

Only a few researchers and collectors had reached Nias in this era. Among them were the Italian adventurer and explorer Giovanni Battista Cerutti and the Austrian Baron Joachim von Brenner-Felsach.

Cerutti accompanied the Italian researcher Elio Modigliani to Nias in 1886 and Brenner-Felsach in 1887. After his journeys to Nias, he went to the Malay Peninsula, where he spent a total of 15 years, living among an ethnic group called Sakai. Cerutti died in Penang in 1914. In 1933 his remains were transferred to the cemetery of Varazze, his place of birth. Cerutti donated in 1887 and 1895 a total of 490 objects from Nias to the Natural History Museum.

Baron Joachim Brenner-Felsach (1859-1927) visited the island of Nias in 1887. From this expedition the Austrian baron bequeathed various textual and imagery sources, among them a diary and photographs, but also an ethnographic collection. Most of this material went to the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin. Nevertheless, 303 objects went to the Natural History Museum; 104 of those were from Nias.

Another Austrian, Johann Schild, operated as Austrian and German consul in Padang, Sumatra. Schild was born in 1865 in St. Pölten into an old patrician family. In 1888 he went to Sumatra, representing a Dutch world trade firm. In 1908 he assumed office as consul of Germany, and in 1911 also of Austria-Hungary. He stayed in this position until 1918. During visits to Vienna in 1904 and 1914, he donated 147 objects from Nias and Mentawai to

the Natural History Museum. He died in 1932. One of his descendants, Ms. Helga Schnürer, sold under very favorable terms his extremely valuable photography collection (approximately 250 images) to the Museum of Ethnology in 2006.