

Caroline Fernandes Caromano, Mariana  
Françoço

## One *Cara Grande* for Each Museum in the World: Borys Malkin and the Formation of Lowland South American Indigenous Collections (1960-1970)

### ABSTRACT

Borys Malkin (1917-2009) is arguably one of the most important yet least known twentieth-century collectors of Indigenous material culture from South America, with especially numerous collecting expeditions to the Amazon region. In fact, his contact with museums worldwide and the systematic way in which he collected and sold his materials can be characterized as a form of *wholesale collecting* that rested upon the creation of chains of supply and demand typical of a market economy. In this article, we explore the ways in which Malkin engaged

with Indigenous peoples, intermediaries, and museums in South America, North America and in Europe in order to create this network of “producers” or “suppliers”, on the one hand, and potential buyers on the other. We do so by presenting information about the scope and breadth of his Indigenous collections, and then investigating his *modus operandi*. We conclude that the successful spreading of his collections in various museums and the constant presence in exhibitions of objects from collections formed by Malkin shaped, in a significant way, the face of Lowland South America in ethnographic museums of the Global North.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Borys Malkin (1917-2009) is arguably one of the most important yet least known twentieth-century collectors of Indigenous material culture from South America, with especially numerous collecting expeditions to the Amazon region. While the names of researchers such as Curt Nimuendaju and Claude Lévi-Strauss have become an integral part of the anthropological canon and are often remembered as major contributors to the collections of ethnographic museums as we know them at present, Malkin rests undiscovered in their shadow despite having amassed, documented, sold, and shipped thousands of Indigenous South American objects to museums in North America and in Europe in the short span of a few decades. Although Malkin collected ethnographic material in South America from the 1950s until the 1990s, totaling almost forty years of travel, the largest volume of objects sold to European and North American museums was mainly collected between the 1960s and 1970s.

Malkin never wrote substantial analyses of the materials he collected, nor did he contribute in writing to anthropological and archaeological theory and debate on the ways of life, languages, and cultures of the Indigenous peoples he met and worked with. Nevertheless, as this article will argue, his work surpasses – in variety of collections, amounts of objects and broadness of their dispersion – those of any other collector of his time. Borys Malkin can, in fact, be regarded as the main contributor to the profile of Amazonian collections in Europe at present. It is by no means an exaggeration to state that at least ten different museums could host, at the same point in time, precisely the same exhibition with the same objects, all collected by Malkin in Amazonia in the 1960s. In fact, most museums that presently showcase Ka'apor objects, or Cara-Grande masks of the Tapirapé (among others) will be doing so through Malkin's objects.

Fortunately, in recent years the work and life of Malkin have started to receive due attention from scholars intrigued by his *oeuvre* and *modus operandi*. Buliński and Kairski have argued that Malkin's fieldwork practices shaped the first generation of Polish Amazonist scholars.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Magdalena Nierzwicka of the District Museum in Toruń, Poland, has done extensive work on the collections and correspondence by Malkin, and has recently

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1 Research for this article was supported by the NWO Veni project "Seeds in Amazonian body ornaments: encapsulated Indigenous histories, aesthetic and environmental knowledge" (VI.Veni.201C.030) awarded to Dr. Caroline F. Caromano; and by the ERC project BRASILIAE. Indigenous Knowledge in the Making of Science, directed by Dr. Mariana Françaço at Leiden University and funded by the European Research Council Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Agreement No. 715423). We are deeply indebted to the curators of the many museums cited in this paper for allowing us to work with their object, photographic, and archival collections, and for their interest in hearing more about the Malkin collections in other museums. We are particularly thankful to Magdalena Nierzwicka of the District Museum in Toruń, Poland for sharing with us information and insights from her research on Malkin. We thank the anonymous reviewer of this article whose comments greatly helped us improve the manuscript. Any remaining mistakes are of course our own.

2 Tarzycjusz Buliński and Mariusz Kairski, A brief history of Amazonian research in Polish anthropology, in *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia*, 6/6 (2020), 205-216.

reflected particularly about his role in collecting numerous objects from, among others, the Noanamá people in Colombia, and about how his letters to his wife serve as a precious source of information about his travels and contacts with Indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, his contact with museums worldwide and the systematic way in which he collected and sold his materials can be characterized as a form of *wholesale collecting* that rested upon the creation of chains of supply and demand typical of a market economy. In this article, we explore the ways in which Malkin engaged with Indigenous peoples, intermediaries, and museums in South America and in Europe in order to create this network of “producers” or “suppliers”, on the one hand, and potential buyers on the other. We do so by first presenting information about the scope and breadth of his Indigenous collections, and then investigating his *modus operandi*. We conclude with a reflection about what Malkin’s activities may have meant for Indigenous peoples themselves, and how we can re-read his wholesale approach to anthropological collecting, trading, and selling from the perspective of Indigenous agency.

## Biography and material legacy

Born in Byelorussia (former USSR) and raised in Poland, Malkin moved to the United States shortly before World War II. After military service with the US Airforce in the Pacific during the war, he studied biology and anthropology at the London School of Economics and at the University of Washington, Seattle. His academic career would not last long: he worked as a researcher at the University of Minnesota; however, he soon found his calling elsewhere. In a letter to his wife, Helena Przystalska, he says: “I decided that teaching at schools and universities would be for nothing for me. I prefer to do travel on my own and ethnographic photography so far. And this kind of life suits me better”.<sup>4</sup>

Starting in 1952, he undertook various field trips to Latin America, including to Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Paraguay, and Suriname (fig. 1). In his own words, “Staying with the Indians I always combined natural history and ethnographic interests very often adding to this herpetological. My main ethnographic interest was in the technological processes, both in collecting ethnography objects and recording such work with cameras both in color and in black and white.”<sup>5</sup>

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3 Magdalena Nierzwicka, Borys Malkin’s letters from the field (South America, 1959–1994), presentation at the Zürcher Museen, Switzerland, 15 December 2022. See: <https://zuercher-museen.ch/museen/voelkerkundemuseum/archiv/221215-borys-malkin-s-letters-from-the-field-south-america-1959-1994> (accessed 29-09-2023).

4 Letter from Borys Malkin to Helena Przystalska, 28 May 1961. Correspondence Archives (I/3704/MNP), Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie, Poland (henceforth MEK). Translated by the authors.

5 Borys Malkin’s biographical CV written by himself, Correspondence Archive, ca. 1964 (?). National Museum of Ethnology Leiden, The Netherlands (henceforth NME).

As a result of these field trips, Malkin amassed a large number of collections which he subsequently sold to museums in Europe and North America. Our research has so far

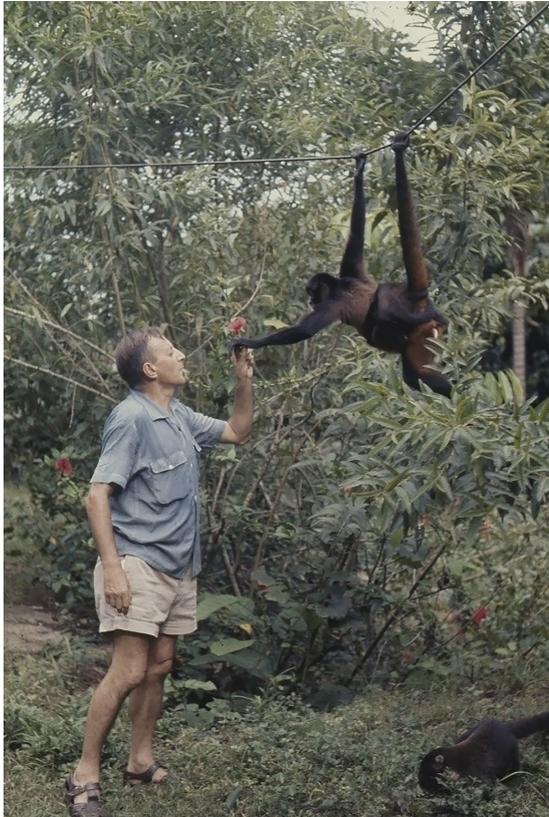


Fig. 1: Borys Malkin feeding a spider monkey. MEK I/5638, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie.

identified sixteen large ethnographic collections in museums in Europe (with at least 500 objects), such as Basel (which keeps the second largest ethnographic collection by Malkin), Berlin, Geneva, Vienna, Zurich, and several museums in the United States and Canada (where the largest collection by Malkin is housed at the Glenbow Museum, in Alberta). Malkin also sold or donated smaller ethnographic collections to many museums, such as those in Bern, Freiburg, Oslo, Belém, and Leiden. Although we will not explore these at length, he is also responsible for creating collections of archaeological material from Colombia and Ecuador presently kept in Europe and in Canada. All in all, his Lowland South American collections comprise at least 8000 items. Other collectors, such as the Brazilian-German ethnologist Harald Schultz (1909-1966), also collected vast amounts of (Brazilian) Indigenous materials – in his case, about six thousand objects for the Museu Paulista in São Paulo between the

1940s-1960s. Yet, while some of his collections can also be found in museums abroad, Schultz was working as an official employee and had the expansion of the museum's ethnographic collections as one of his main tasks.<sup>6</sup> Malkin, on the other hand, was operating *solo* and managed to move his materials through a wide network of museums and contacts internationally.

How did Borys Malkin go about collecting so many objects? As the next section shows, the origins of his Indigenous collections can actually be found in his activities as a zoologist.

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6 For an overview of Schultz's and other anthropologists' Brazilian Indigenous collections created until 1955, see Sonia Dorta, "Coleções Etnográficas: 1650-1955" in *História dos Índios no Brasil*, organized by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, 501-528 (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992). For collections at the Museu Paulista and their later relocation to the Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia – USP, see Antônio Sergio Azevedo Damy and Thekla Hartmann, *As coleções etnográficas do Museu Paulista: composição e história*, in *Revista do Museu Paulista*, XXXI (1986), 220-273. For Schultz, see: Herbert Baldus, Harald Schultz 1909-1966, in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 68/5 (1966), 1233-1235.

## Eyes everywhere: Malkin as collector of zoological specimens

In his youth, Malkin had already been a passionate collector of insects. When he immigrated to the United States, he developed a relationship with the American Museum of Natural History due to his interest in entomology.<sup>7</sup> In a letter to Dr C.A. Schmitz, curator in Basel, Malkin describes himself as such: “Although I am trained mainly as an anthropologist (American sense) I am by inclination primarily a naturalist. Hence there is a heavy stress of habitat, plant and animal life as well as plain ethnography.”<sup>8</sup>

The outcomes of his activities as a collector of insects, arachnids, fishes, reptiles, mammals, amphibians, and mollusks reach impressive numbers: hundreds of thousands of specimens collected in at least sixty-one countries, whose total sum is difficult to confirm since not all specimens were digitized and made available in public databases by the institutions where they are housed. The majority of his zoological collections are kept in the United States, with the overwhelming number of at least 128,396 specimens at the California Academy of Sciences attributed to collections made by Borys Malkin.<sup>9</sup>

Next to selling and donating zoological specimens from and to all over the world, Malkin also kept a continuous relationship to the professional field in his home country. For instance, he regularly donated specimens to the Zoological Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (now Museum and Institute of Zoology of the Polish Academy of Sciences). The last donation was made in 2010 by his widow, Helena Przystalska-Malkin, containing over 16,000 specimens, mostly beetles and molluscs collected in the USA, Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Greece, Spain, and Switzerland.<sup>10</sup> More evidence that Malkin donated specimens to Polish scholars is the presence of specimens from the United States (from places like Bronx, Coney Island, and Manhattan) in the collection of Szymon Tenenbaum, Malkin’s former teacher from the Gymnasium *Humanistycznego Męskiego Towarzystwa*.<sup>11</sup>

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- 7 Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives, Borys Malkin slides, negatives and other materials ca. 1960-62, Biographical/Historical Note. <https://sova.si.edu/record/NMAI.AC.040> [accessed on 17 February 2023].
- 8 Museum der Kulturen Basel, Switzerland (henceforth MdK), Correspondence Archives, letter from Borys Malkin to Carl A. Schmitz, 19 January 1963.
- 9 Christopher C. Grinter, Collection Manager of Entomology, California Academy of Sciences, Personal communication via email on 23 January 2023.
- 10 Dariusz Iwan, Dominika Mierzwa-Szymkowiak, and Wioletta Wawer, Zbiory przyrodnicze Muzeum i Instytutu Zoologii PAN - Świadectwo Polskiego wkładu w rozwój światowych badań bioróżnorodności prowadzonych od początku XIX wieku. *Kosmos. Seria A, Biologia / Polskie Towarzystwo Przyrodników im. Kopernika*, 70/2 (2021), 246.
- 11 The collection was donated by Szymon Tenenbaum’s wife to the State Zoological Museum (Państwowemu Muzeum Zoologicznemu - PMZ). Tenenbaum was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941, but his collection was hidden and survived the Second World War. Dariusz Iwan and Piotr Daszkiewicz, Szymon Tenen-

The labels associated to the zoological material reveal that several specimens were collected during his visits to Indigenous villages. For instance, the associated labels of Damselflies specimens collected by Malkin and housed in the Naturalis Biodiversity Center, the Netherlands, mentions Ka'apor (Yavaruhu) and Tapirapé villages (fig. 2). Moreover, the documents associated to the zoological specimens suggest that Malkin relied on the collaboration with local people who would collect specimens for him. For example, José Celis Pinheiro<sup>12</sup>, a riverine man hired by Malkin as field assistant, is named as collector in one of the labels of the specimen *Phyllocycla malkini* Belle (fig. 2).<sup>13</sup>

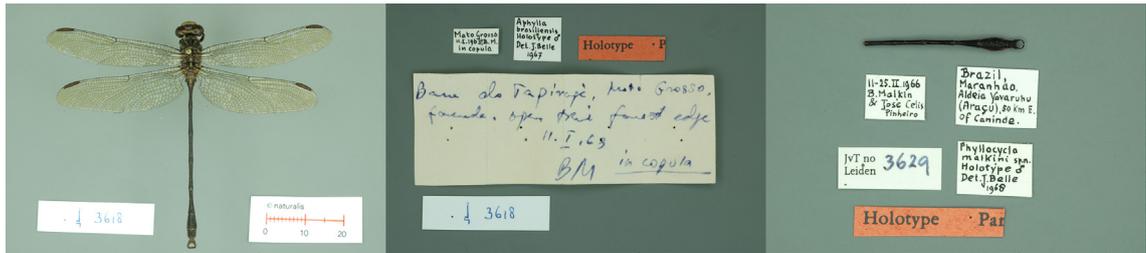


Fig. 2: Damselflies specimens collected by Borys Malkin and housed at the Naturalis Biodiversity Center: Left and center: *Aphylla brasiliensis* Belle, registration number RMNH.INS.JVT.3618, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, collected in 1963, at Barra do Tapirapé; Right: *Phyllocycla malkini* Belle, registration number RMNH.INS.JVT.3629, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, collected in 1966, at the Ka'apor village of Yavaruhu.

In this sense, Malkin's field diaries, kept at the Museum of Ethnology in Kraków, are much more explicit than the specimens' museum labels about the importance of the knowledge of Indigenous and riverine peoples in the collection of animals, containing a detailed record of the people he contacted and counted on while in the field (fig. 3). These diaries do not contain much ethnographic descriptions, but seem to have been used for the practical organization of his commercial work as a dealer. Descriptions of his travels, the people he met, Indigenous ways of life, and other "dense descriptions" can be found in the very many letters he wrote throughout his life, especially to his wife.<sup>14</sup>

baum (1892-1941) – Życiorys spisany na entomologicznej etykiecie, in *Kosmos. Seria A, Biologia / Polskie Towarzystwo Przyrodników im. Kopernika*, 70/2 (2021), 147-155.

12 José Celis Pinheiro's family had been living in the Barra do Tapirapé region since the 1920s, close to the Tapirapé Indigenous village. Borys Malkin, *Odchodzący świat. Tropem kultur indiańskich i świata przyrody Ameryki Południowej* (Warszawa: Akot, 2007).

13 Riverine peoples (ribeirinhos) are members of a traditional social group in the Amazon that lives in the margins of the rivers. This aquatic environment is "a dynamic space that articulates sociability and cultural relations within the particularities of that space, where the mark of this configuration can be seen in the behaviors, way of living, food, beliefs, religiosity, etc., specific to that space". See Francisco Rente Neto and Lourdes Gonçalves Furtado, Ribeiridade amazônica: algumas reflexões, in *Cadernos de Campo*, 24 (2015), 160.

14 Magdalena Nierzwicka, Borys Malkin's letters from the field (South America, 1959–1994), presentation at the Zürcher Museen, Switzerland, 15 December 2022. See also footnote 3.

A large part of the zoological collections made by Borys Malkin in South America were collected alongside his collections of Indigenous material culture. In an interview, Malkin explained that “When I came for the first time to a village, I never told them that I want to collect ethnographic material. In fact, I went about my business collecting insects, and reptiles and amphibians.”<sup>15</sup> Only after having gotten acquainted with people from the village would Malkin start collecting ethnographic objects, trading them for goods wanted by the Indigenous people (such as knives, machetes, fabrics and sewing aids), or, sometimes, paying them in cash.<sup>16</sup>

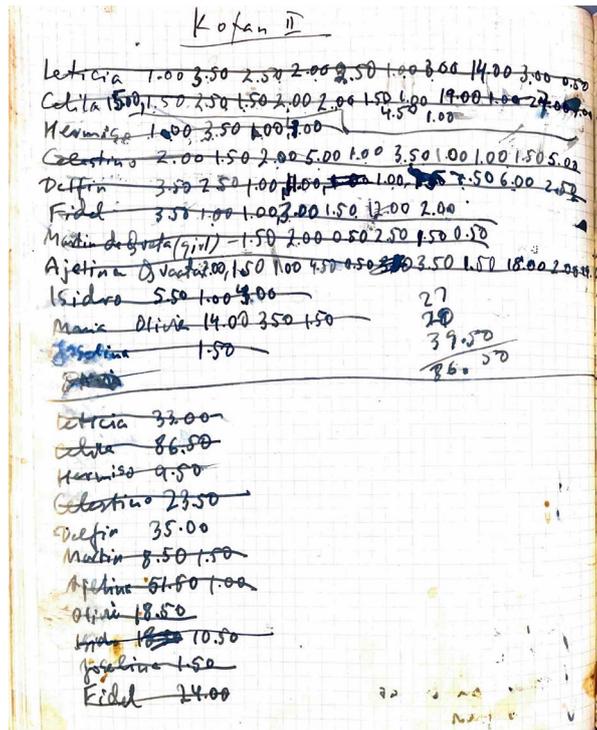


Fig. 3: Example of one of the payment lists in Malkin’s notebooks listing the names of Indigenous collectors, in this case, from a Cofan village. MEK III/1055, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie.

The fact that Malkin collected animals in the vicinities of the Indigenous villages has important implications. Recent research on the Amazonian biome has revealed the fundamental role of Indigenous peoples in managing and preserving the environments in which they live, both in the present and in the past.<sup>17</sup> Indigenous territories harbour high numbers of threatened and data-deficient species.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, research has shown that Brazilian Indigenous territories generally have higher vertebrate species richness than the country’s officially protected environmental areas.<sup>19</sup> In these settings, attracting animals to domesticated landscapes may indirectly contribute to form and maintain multi-species patches of useful plants from ancient home-

15 Interview with Borys Malkin by Ewa (last name not registered; we believe it could be either Ewa Smithwick or Ewa Prądyńska), no date, ms., MEK Archives, Poland.  
 16 *Idem*.  
 17 William Balée, Indigenous transformation of Amazonian forests: an example from Maranhão, Brazil, in *L’Homme*, 33 (1983), 231–254; Carolina Levis, Bernardo M. Flores, Priscila A. Moreira, Bruno G. Luiz, Rubana P. Alves, Juliano Franco-Moraes, Juliana Lins, Evelien Konings, Marielos Peña-Claros, Frans Bongers, Flavia R. C. Costa, Charles R. Clemen, How People Domesticated Amazonian Forests, in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, 5/171 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2017.00171>.  
 18 Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, Adrià López-Baucells, Paül M. Velazco, Arun Gyawali, Ricardo Rocha, Julien Terraube, and Mar Cabeza, The importance of Indigenous Territories for conserving bat diversity across the Amazon biome, in *Perspectives in Ecology and Conservation*, 19/1 (2021), 10-20.  
 19 R. Schuster, R.R. Germain, J.R. Bennett, N.J. Reo, P. Arcese. Vertebrate biodiversity on Indigenous-managed lands in Australia, Brazil and Canada equals that in protected areas, in *Environ. Sci. Policy*, 101 (2019), 1-6.

gardens and swiddens.<sup>20</sup> Malkin's collections of animals from Indigenous landscapes thus originate in an environment historically transformed by Indigenous agents. These records, currently housed in natural history collections, serve as the basis for Western scientific studies that are, therefore, doubly affected by Indigenous presence - both in a practical sense, with Indigenous and riverine individuals acting as Malkin's assistants in the collections, and in a broader historical sense, given that the animal specimens are important components of an environment managed by Indigenous peoples.

Animal specimens collected by Malkin remain important in zoology to this day, containing several primary types.<sup>21</sup> He collected holotypes of new species which were identified many years after his collection and were named in his honor, as in the case of the frog *Eleutherodactylus malkini* (whose current name is *Pristimantis malkini*) described in 1980 by John Lynch and the spider *Paradysderina malkini*, collected by Malkin in Cuzco, Peru, in 1964.<sup>22</sup>

## Made for sale: Malkin's ethnographic and photographic collections

According to the records of the Board of Inspection of Artistic and Scientific Expeditions in Brazil, Malkin organized three trips with the intention to document and collect amongst Indigenous peoples of the greater Amazon region. In 1957, he asked for permission to visit the Karajá; in 1960, to travel to various states in order to make a photographic documentary; and finally in 1962, he requested permission to travel to the Northern states of Brazil in order to make ethnographic, zoological, and photographic collections.<sup>23</sup> The aim of these expeditions was, respectively, to collect Karajá material for the Anthropology Museum at the University of Michigan, for the Academia of Sciences of California, for the Chicago Natural History Museum, and the Museum of the American Indian in New York. The documentation about Malkin's expeditions and collecting and shipping activities as regulated by the Council end in 1963; perhaps because of the military coup in Brazil in 1964 and the ensuing dictatorship that ruled the country for two decades,

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20 William Balée, *Cultural Forests of the Amazon: a Historical Ecology of People and their Landscapes* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013).

21 A primary type or type specimen is particularly important to biologists since it is the individual specimen that is used to name a taxon.

22 John D. Lynch, A Taxonomic and distributional synopsis of the Amazonian Frogs of the Genus *Eleutherodactylus*, in *American Museum Novitates*, 2696 (1980), 9; Norman I.; Platnick and Nadine Dupérré, The Andean Goblin Spiders of the New Genera *Paradysderina* and *Semidysderina* (Araneae, Oonopidae), in *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, 364 (2011), 23. A holotype is a single physical example of an organism used when the species was formally described. It is either the single such physical example or one of several examples, but explicitly designated as the holotype.

23 MAST – Museu de Astronomia, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, CFE\_T\_2\_345, Documentos sobre os pedidos de licença do antropólogo Borys Malkin (Estados Unidos) para realizar expedição etnográfica e fotográfica nos estados do Pará, Maranhão, Mato Grosso e Goiás, referentes aos anos de 1957, 1960 e 1962. Rio de Janeiro, Belém, de 16 jul. 1957 a 7 fev. 1963.

Malkin's activities had to be organized through different official and unofficial channels. In any case, when contrasting these official government documents from 1957 to 1963 with the letters sent by Malkin to the museums all over continental Europe in the 1960s, it is clear that his commercial practices went much further than he initially had requested permission for.

Additionally, and in opposition to the national regulations regarding the export of cultural goods from Brazil to foreign countries, Malkin's collections in Brazil represent only a fraction of those in Europe and North America, demonstrating that Malkin did not always leave duplicates of most of the material he collected. This was a clear stipulation of the aforementioned Board of Inspection of Artistic and Scientific Expeditions in Brazil, a governmental institution (active 1933-1968) that oversaw, regulated, and controlled all Brazilian and foreign scientific expeditions in the country, as well as the donation or export of objects to museums in Brazil and abroad.<sup>24</sup> While a major Brazilian museum such as the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Belém do Pará does have collections amassed by Malkin in its holdings, the sheer amount of Brazilian collections outside the country reveal the extent to which he was not complying with federal regulations.

When asked to comment on the amount and scope of the collections amassed by Borys Malkin, his colleague René Fuerst quickly replied: "He had them tailor-made", that is, he placed orders for certain types of objects so as to be able to sell them to museums.<sup>25</sup> As an example, Fuerst cites the Tapirapé Cara-Grande mask, an otherwise ritual object, made only every so many years, of which for Malkin a couple of dozen were made using an electric chainsaw. Indeed, the direct analysis of some of the objects from Malkin's collections at National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden and Museum der Kulturen Basel reveals a large number of objects which do not present trace marks of use.<sup>26</sup> This is the case for some fire-drills and hearths. The same can be seen in the photograph made by Malkin in the Tapirapé village, in which an Indigenous man demonstrates the use of the fire drill – the lack of combustion marks on the hearth supported by his feet is clearly noticeable (fig. 4).

Indigenous peoples in Brazil and elsewhere have been producing specific items of their material culture repertoire to sell to non-Indigenous people for very long. In the nineteenth century, although boarding schools had not yet been established in the Rio Negro region of the Amazon, the actions of missionaries already mediated the subordination of Indigenous peoples into a logic of production for the market.<sup>27</sup> Concerning the same time

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24 Luíz Donizete Benzi Grupioni, *Coleções e expedições vigiadas: os etnólogos no Conselho de Fiscalização das Expedições Artísticas e Científicas no Brasil* (São Paulo: Hucitec/Anpocs, 1998).

25 Mariana Françaço, O colecionismo etnográfico no Brasil (1955-1975): entrevista com René Fuerst, in *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 12/3 (2017), 795.

26 Caroline F. Caromano, Some Ugly Things That Nobody Studies: Provocations About Fire as a Museum Object, in *Indiana*, 37/2 (2020), 147-169.

27 Valéria Weigel and José Ramos, O processo educativo dos internatos para os índios do Alto Rio Negro-Amazonas, in *Linguística indígena e educação na América Latina*, edited by Lucy Seki, 285-305.

period and location, Cascon and Caromano studied the production of decorated hammocks and concluded that Indigenous people manufactured artifacts that articulated Indigenous and non-Indigenous techniques and aesthetics “...which circulated widely throughout the country and abroad (...) dealing with alternating systems of control of the region by missionaries, government, and merchants.”<sup>28</sup> Such circulation went as far as

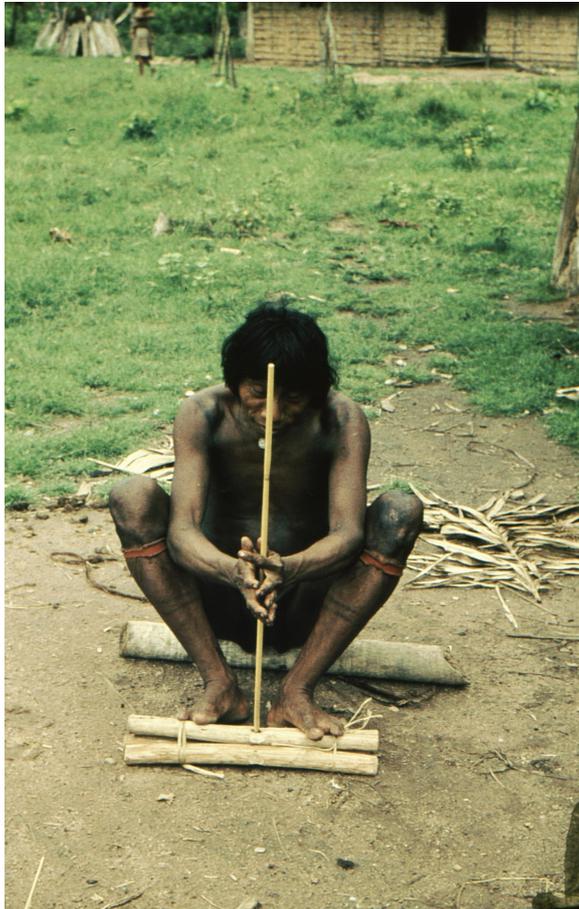


Fig. 4: Tapirapé man demonstrates the use of fire drill and hearth. Borys Malkin. MEK I/250, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie.

reaching Dom Pedro II, then Emperor of Brazil, who received a pallium made of the cock-of-the-rock as a gift which had been ordered by a merchant to a group of Tiriyo Indigenous people.<sup>29</sup> An example closer in time, and perhaps scope, to that of Borys Malkin is the production of dolls known as *ritxoko* by the Iny-Karajá people for sale, which has served as a source of income for families since at least the mid- twentieth century – and increasingly so after their registration as Brazilian intangible heritage.<sup>30</sup>

In that sense, even if these objects collected by Malkin were visually similar to those used by Indigenous peoples in their daily lives, the collections made for sale can be considered, following Nicholas Thomas’ suggestion, “products of the cross-cultural encounter”: not so much an appropriation of Indigenous material culture but rather a space of redefinition and invention.<sup>31</sup> Even though they were making objects because Malkin marketed them, still it was up for the Indigenous artists to work with the materials and make (even if limited)

choices regarding objects’ style, color, etc. While the power imbalance in these commercial relationships is undeniable, so is the agency of Indigenous peoples in choosing the

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Campinas: Editora da Unicamp.

- 28 Leandro M. Cascon and Caroline F. Caromano, Swaying on Feather-Roses and Imperial Crests: Brazilian Feather-Decorated Hammocks, Nation-Building, and Indigenous Agency, in *Indiana* 37/2 (2020), 71-95
- 29 Lilia M. Schwarcz, *As barbas do imperador: D. Pedro II: um monarca nos trópicos*, 87-88 (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998).
- 30 Rita Moraes de Andrade e Manuelina Maria Duarte Cândido, Iny Karajá Presence: Material and Visual Culture of Ritxoko Dolls in Museums, in *Curator*, 65 (2022): 747-772.
- 31 Nicholas Thomas, *The Return of Curiosity: What Museums are Good For in the 21st Century* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016.)

techniques, tools, and materials to be used when assembling these orders. In that sense, Indigenous peoples can be seen as active participants in the making of museum collections.

Malkin's photographic collection reflects his multiple gazes and interests during his many field visits. On the one hand, we see a researcher interested in animals, their morphology and habitat; on the other, we see a collector and dealer looking at how to attractively portray the items he wanted to sell. Often both gazes can be present in the same picture. There are portraits of people using adornments, of object manufacturing processes, everyday scenes, landscapes around villages, but also photos of plants and animals. The portraits are always in context, that is, of people wearing adornments typical of their culture – almost as if creating a visual catalog of how the objects they sold were used. These photos, mostly in color, were also sold by Malkin as a complement to his collections. The photographs of *chaînes opératoires*, on the other hand, were generally taken in black-and-white to lower the cost of producing the images, but also accompanied the materials he sold as part of their documentation (fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Example of a *chaîne opératoire* photographic register of the manufacture of a teeth necklace by the Ka'apor chief Karo. Borys Malkin, MEK II/12845 and MEK II/12844, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie.

Malkin's photographic production followed a combination of scientific interest and market orientation. The color photographs of animals (fig. 6) were made to be featured in popularization magazines and in order to assist in the description and identification of species for the purposes of advertising and selling the collections – which then would be used for proper taxonomic research in the scientific institutions that bought them. Color photographs of landscapes and richly adorned individuals were very important as illustrations in the Polish magazine *Poznaj Świat* - even if we only consider them quantitatively. In a chronicle written by Kairski and Jaskulski,<sup>32</sup> the authors list a total of seventy-five articles published by Malkin, including scientific journals and magazines for the general public. In the magazine *Poznaj Świat* alone, Malkin published fifty articles that included several color photographs illustrating Indigenous groups and places he visited.

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32 Mariusz Kairski and Janusz Jaskulski, Borys Malkin - etnograf - przyrodnik - kolekcjoner, in *LUD*, 83 (1999), 247-250.

Black-and-white portraits and scenes of festivities and rituals were also demanded by museums for their aesthetic appeal in exhibitions<sup>33</sup> and as didactic materials (fig. 7).



Fig. 6: Lizard and beetle photographed at Barra do Tapirapé, Mato Grosso, Brazil. Borys Malkin, MEK I/3441 and MEK I/3412, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie.

Oftentimes, the museums themselves requested photographs. For instance, on the occasion of the purchase of a collection of 93 Karajá objects, the director of the Chicago Museum of Natural History wrote to Malkin: “We shall be happy to take advantage of your offer to include duplicate negatives from your collection that will serve to illustrate the manufacture or use of the objects in the collection. A few negatives showing people and houses would also be very useful to us.”<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 7: Cara-Grande mask being finalized by the Tapirapé chief, Marco and later, inside the men’s house accompanied by other ceremonial masks. Borys Malkin, MEK II/12879 and MEK II/12915, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie. Both photographs have pen marks showing a crop selection for the printing and exhibition at the museum.

33 The photographs sold by Malkin to museums are still featured in recent exhibitions, as in the case of the temporary exhibition *Rytualne zdobienie ciała: Archiwalna Fotografia etnograficzna* (Ritual body decoration: Archival ethnographic photography), which was on display at the Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie, between April 14 and May 30, 2005. Malkin’s photographs selected for the exhibition record body paintings from the Galibi (Suriname), Tapirapé (Brazil), Colorado (Ecuador), Wayana (French Guiana), and Cofán (Colombia), and are yet another record of the great diversity of Indigenous peoples with whom Malkin established commercial relations and the extensive area in which he operated in South America.

34 Field Museum, Chicago, Field Museum Archives, letter from Clifford Gregg to Borys Malkin, 21 April 1958.

## A negotiator by vocation: Malkin's *modus operandi*

The photos taken by Malkin were thus an essential part of his collecting and selling strategy. So were the thousands of letters he wrote to European and North American museums throughout his lifetime. In effect, their insistent commercial tone suggests that selling collections soon became his main source of income. A talented promoter of his own work, Malkin sold the idea of *completeness* of his collections, creating a strong reputation for himself and for the materials he advertised.

One of the most compelling examples of such are the letters and associated documents kept at the Museum der Kulturen Basel, which comprise a total of 867 pages covering a period of almost twenty years. In these, we see a great effort by Malkin in offering collections to the museum and in communicating frequently, even though he was constantly travelling through different places. In the archive, considering only correspondence for the year of 1963, we see a sequence of approximately eighty pages of letters and documents which were exchanged by Malkin and the museum. During these twelve months, Malkin negotiated six of his collections, and intermediated the sale of two collections made by Father Protásio Frickel, a German missionary of the Franciscan Order who had settled in the Amazon in the late 1930s and became one of the most important researchers of the anthropology and archaeology of Indigenous Amazonia.<sup>35</sup> Frickel's collections handled by Malkin were namely a Xikrin-Kayapó and a Tiriyó collection.<sup>36</sup> At the end of that negotiation year, Malkin's six collections reached Basel, for which he received a total amount of 3,950 USD.<sup>37</sup>

As for the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, Malkin sold collections to the museum twice, in 1964 and in 1966, with a total of 370 objects – in both cases, those were collections made by the Ka'apor and the Tapirapé peoples. The negotiations had started in September 1963, when Ger van Wengen wrote to Malkin expressing interest in buying the Ka'apor and Tapirapé materials that Malkin had offered them earlier. Malkin reacted by writing directly to Tom Zuidema, curator of Middle- and South America at the museum between 1960-65, in an affirmative tone: "There is no question that the Urubu

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35 For more on Frickel and his collecting activities, see Vítor Nazareno da Mata Martins, *Para Além do Tumucumaque: Protásio Frikel, Arqueologia e História Intelectual na Amazônia*. Unpublished MA thesis in History, Federal University of Pará, 2013.

36 Malkin initially wrote to Carl Schmitz, curator at the Basel museum, in July 1963 offering the Xikrin-Kayapó and Tiriyó collections on behalf of Father Frickel, who was preoccupied with other matters at the time. In September that same year, he insisted: "Since my last writing I have fallen an heir to Frikel's Tirio collection which he wants me to dispose of. He wants \$1.200 for it. It contains some 200 or perhaps slightly more pieces and represents result of some 10 years work. His definitive ethnography of the Tirio will start coming out soon in four separate volumes so the collection would be the very basis of discussion of the material culture in it. I have no list of items with me. However it is very fine material." Whether this price had indeed been stipulated by Frickel, or if Malkin himself had a say about it, is unfortunately not known. The offer was eventually accepted for both collections. MdK, Correspondence Archives, letter from Borys Malkin to Carl A Schmitz, 16 September 1963.

37 Equivalent to roughly USD 40,000.00 today.

[Ka'apor] material represents the very finest featherwork in extant South American aboriginal culture and ranks among the very best ever produced on this continent. Its main attraction is the finesse, inventiveness and delicacy of design and color combination. Only one other collection of their stuff exists today in Europe and that was also one I made".<sup>38</sup> At the time, Dr. Pieter Pott, an Indologist, was director of the museum, and the institution – like many others around the world – lacked a formal acquisition policy. Nevertheless, as Martin Berger shows, Pott was deeply interested in acquiring new collections for the museum, ones that would help expand the holdings of an institution whose mission was, in his perspective, to provide to Dutch visitors and researchers a comprehensive view of how peoples in foreign parts of the world lived their lives.<sup>39</sup> In that sense, Malkin's offer of ordinary-life items, alongside some particularly beautiful ones, fit Pott's vision perfectly well. He seems to have quickly agreed to the purchase, as in November that same year he asked the Board of Curators (the external administration of the museum) for extra funding to buy Tapirape and Ka'apor collections, qualified as not expensive, as well as a Mexican fresco, considered expensive but rare, and which must be bought before the Mexican government would no longer allow it.<sup>40</sup> The Counsel eventually consented to the request and both purchases were made.

In the following years, Malkin continued to offer collections from diverse South American Indigenous groups (Mataco; Chiriguano; Bororo; Tapirapé) to the museum. In 1965, he wrote directly to director Pott, who replied that he preferred to talk personally when Malkin visited the museum in the fall, and that he did not want to commit to any purchase or stimulate field collecting as he could not promise the museum would be able to purchase materials.<sup>41</sup> Still, Malkin continued to insist on making collections and urged Pott to place orders as he was about to leave for the field – specifically, he wanted to sell a large ceramic pot used by the Ka'apor to make *cauim*, a cashew-based beverage. Malkin's tone in writing is always one of insistence and pressure, while Pott – and, after 1965, Ted Leyenaar, the then newly-appointed curator of Middle- and South American and a specialist in Mesoamerica – remain cautious and, by the second half of the 1960s, continuously refer to lack of funds.

The last contact registered between Malkin and the NME is a letter dated 23 July 1968, in which Ted Leyenaar answered Malkin's offer of collections from the Tucuna, Cofan, Tucano, Cubeo, Quiba, Mataco, and Pacaá Nova Indigenous peoples. These collections would still have to be amassed, and for his work Malkin would charge a total of USD1,500. Leyenaar was categorical in his rejection: "We got a very interesting but ditto

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38 NME, Correspondence Archives, 1963, Letter 1814, Paramaribo 12 October 1963. Presumably, the other collection is the one in Geneva.

39 Martin Berger, Between policy and practice – The impact of global decolonization on the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, 1960-1970, in *Museums, Collections and Societies Yearbook*, 1 (2021), 86. For Pott's engagement with Malkin, see p. 91.

40 NME, Correspondence Archives, 1963 Letter 1953, 8 November 1963; see also O'Neill and Miller, this volume, for illicit export of Teotihuacan frescoes by commercial market actors.

41 NME, Correspondence Archives, 1965 Letter 720, 7 May 1965.

expensive crocodile from the Basel Museum for the New Guinea Department and we have to bleed for that. Another thing is that for 1500,- I can almost go myself, collecting the material and experiences. What do you think yourself?”<sup>42</sup>

Exporting such impressive quantities of Indigenous collections, with objects ranging from small and delicate to large and heavy pieces, cannot have been a simple task. How did Malkin move these objects from the villages to their final buyers? And where were they stored during this process? Nierzwicka points out that Malkin put a huge amount of effort in the process of transporting his enormous collections from the villages to the nearest cities, and subsequently in the city he needed time and much work to properly sort, document, package, and ship his collections.<sup>43</sup> In his letters, he indicates that correspondence should be sent to museums where he was temporarily staying, which suggests he made use of these as storage spaces until he could ship the collections or before moving them on to a different museum or a field location. For instance, the Protásio Friel Xikrin-Kayapó collection was kept at the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Belém before being sold to Basel; the Tiriyó one was kept “in our mutual friends house”.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Malkin stored material with the Indigenous peoples themselves, as was the case with a Tapirapé collection and some Karajá materials left in a Tapirapé village.<sup>45</sup>

Export processes were particularly difficult in Brazil, which can be gathered from Malkin’s correspondence with Carl Schmitz from Basel:

Would it be possible to arrange the shipment of the Brazilian material through the Swiss embassy? In Suriname or Peru such matters are no problem but in Brazil they are an awful headache even when one follows the requirements to the letter (such as deposition of duplicate material in Brasil etc) as I do. When I made collections for one of the Swedish museums, they asked me to do just that and it worked fine.<sup>46</sup>

The museum curator answered swiftly, stating that the Swiss embassy was

perhaps not the best of places to handle this kind of problem. But we succeeded to find the right man for you and us. Please contact Dr. Daris Tuor, from Sandoz Brasil (a Swiss pharmaceutical company), in Sao Paulo. He is the chief-manager of Sandoz in Brasil, and he has agreed to take care of the collection. Please write to him and ask him whether to send the cases to Sao Paulo or Recife. If necessary or preferable Dr. Tuor could eventually arrange to pick up the collection in Belen. Concerning the

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42 NME, Correspondence Archives, 1968, Letter 1293, 27 June 1968 and Letter 1294, 23 July 1968.

43 Magdalena Nierzwicka, personal communication via email, 9 January 2023.

44 MdK, Correspondence Archives, letter from Borys Malkin to Carl A Schmitz, 6 December 1963.

45 MdK, Correspondence Archives, letter from Borys Malkin to Carl A Schmitz, 4 January 1964.

46 MdK, Correspondence Archives, letter from Borys Malkin to Carl A Schmitz, 19 January 1963.

legal formalities I propose that you turn over the necessary papers and documents to him. And he shall see the whole collection through customs.<sup>47</sup>

Malkin's letters document that museum directors helped to transport the material, but in other situations, as in the aforementioned case, shipments carried out by companies or embassies were an alternative way to facilitate the transfer of ethnographic material. Evidently, the difficulties in shipping materials were not exclusive to South America. When preparing to go on a field trip to the Southwest Pacific, Malkin received a request from the Chicago Museum of Natural History to collect Melanesian ethnographic objects for them while doing his own research. As part of the agreement, Malkin asked the director for an official document explaining that he was sending the museum scientific specimens on a non-commercial basis, adding that "This sort of document will undoubtedly come useful at the time of shipment of the collections and will aid me in getting past the customs without too much red tape."<sup>48</sup> Such practical arrangements were often discussed in the correspondence with potential buyers, which suggests Malkin was walking a fine line between the roles of (zoology) researcher, collector and dealer of Indigenous materials.

Indeed, during the height of his activities, Malkin was known to museum staff as someone operating with keen commercial intentions, much to the aversion of some anthropologists. In 1965, he wrote the following to James Garner of the Glenbow Museum in Canada about the problems encountered with shipping collections from Brazil:

I might have done with the collection long ago but I had to interrupt packing due to illness. (...). Finally last week together with Rene Fuerst we got cracking and yesterday finished everything except the films. All was ready, delivered to the Lufthansa for shipment and I thought it would go off Friday but new problems occurred. The authorization for export which Galvao in Brasilia gave me was done so ineptly that Banco do Brasil authorities decided that it was meaningless and asked for an export licence. (...). I will have to see tomorrow Baldus of the Museu Paulista for the paper although he mainly hates my guts (and Fuerst's) because we are both as he says: '*museumercenaries*'.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

The analysis of archives revealed that Malkin, in most cases, collected objects not by order from museums, but instead that collections were sold to museums through his

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47 MdK, Correspondence Archives, letter from Carl A Schmitz to Borys Malkin, 11 February 1963.

48 Field Museum, Chicago, Field Museum Archives, letter from Borys Malkin to Clifford Gregg, 23 May 1958.

49 Letter from Borys Malkin to James Garner, Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Canada, 10 February 1965 (emphasis ours). This document was kindly shared with us by Dr. Magdalena Nierzwicka, to whom we are grateful. She is currently conducting research on Malkin, and particularly his letters to his wife Helena Przystalska-Malkin in Poland (see footnote 3).

insistent offering. By becoming one of the main suppliers of Lowland South America ethnographic objects to leading museums between the 1960s and 1970s, he influenced the standardization of objects distributed in different museums. As a result, the constant presence in exhibitions of objects from collections formed by Malkin shaped, in a significant way, the face of South America, and specially of the Amazon region in ethnographic museums of the Global North.

Malkin established relationships with local communities, including ensuring enough space to store materials that would later be sent to museums. The relationship included ordering objects for artisans, but Malkin also relied on the knowledge of Indigenous collectors to capture animals to be sent to natural history museums around the world. The following image (fig. 8) seems to adequately summarize how continuing the investigation about Malkin as a collector can lead to a better understanding not simply of the Indigenous peoples with whom he related but, more importantly, it will advance knowledge about the Indigenous points of view and agency that are present in collections kept in museums worldwide.



Fig. 8: Celila Lusitante, a Cofan woman, using a dragonfly wing as a nose ornament, Colombia. Borys Malkin, MEK I/2736, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie.

In this photo, Celila Lusitante, an Indigenous Cofan woman, wears a dragonfly wing as a nose ornament. As Malkin's colleague, D.C. Geijskes<sup>50</sup> pointed out, the fact that Celila adopted and adapted the dragonfly as a body ornament might be the result of her experience as an insect collector for Malkin.<sup>51</sup> With this action, this woman resigified the

entomological collection, appropriating a system of Western scientific collecting in order to create a new ornament. Through Indigenous hands, Malkin's two worlds of collecting, ethnographic and zoological, become one.

*Caroline Fernandes Caromano is a post-doctoral researcher at the Naturalis Biodiversity Center in Leiden. Mariana Françaço is Associate Professor of Museum Studies at Leiden University.*

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50 Geijskes was a Dutch zoologist and the first director of the Surinaams Museum. See Dirk Geijskes, The dragonfly wing used as a nose plug adornment, in *Odonatologica*, 4/1(1975), 29–30.

51 Celila's name listed as collector can be seen on figure 3.