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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo di Palazzo Poggi – Sistema Museale di Ateneo Università di Bologna

Via Zamboni, 33, 40126 Bologna (BO)

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Introduction

The Museo di Palazzo Poggi houses the historic collections of the Università di Bologna, including those originally assembled by the Istituto delle Scienze di Bologna, which in turn incorporated such renowned collections as those of Ulisse Aldrovandi and Ferdinando Cospì. In addition to numerous objects of Americanist interest, such as the Aldrovandi woodblocks depicting Indigenous artefacts, the museum preserves what remains of a Tupinambá leg rattle from Brazil and what appears to be a rosary made of seeds, both of which belonged to Ulisse Aldrovandi.

Cultural Areas (tags)

Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil

Collection name	Aldrovandi Collection
Collector	Aldrovandi, Ulisse (1522-1605) Dilphius, Johannes Clusius, Carolus (Charles de l'Écluse) (1526-1609)
Cultural areas	Eastern Highlands

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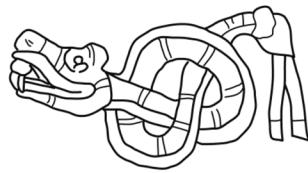
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Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Tupinambá (Brazil)
Description of the collection	<p>Group of four cut endocarps of <i>Cascabela thevetia</i>, held together by a metal wire. The four fruits formed part of a sixteenth-century Tupinambá leg rattle, originally composed of seven endocarps.</p> <p>The collection also contains what appears to be a rosary or necklace, consisting of 59 seeds and a carnivore canine strung and/or tied on cords of different types and supported by a rigid copper wire (it is not clear whether the latter is part of the original assemblage). Most of the seeds belong to <i>Musa</i> sp., with a couple possibly of <i>Cascabela thevetia</i> and one probably of <i>Dioclea</i> sp. (Alessandro Ceregato, personal communication, December 2025). The provenance of the object, probably of Indigenous manufacture, is unknown, but it may come from Brazil or, more generally, from South America.</p>
History of the collection	Ulisse Aldrovandi published an image of the rattle in the posthumous <i>Dendrologiae naturalis</i> (1667), where it is stated that the rattle had been given to him by a certain Johannes Dilphius, who in turn had received it from the famous Dutch botanist Carolus Clusius. The rattle followed all the movements of Aldrovandi's collection,

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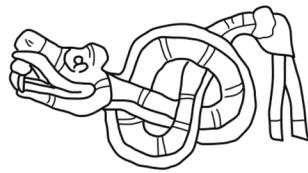
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	<p>from Aldrovandi's own house to the Palazzo Pubblico (1605–1742) and then to the Istituto delle Scienze (from 1742), whose seat is the same building that today houses the Museo di Palazzo Poggi.</p> <p>We do not know how Aldrovandi acquired the seed rosary (or necklace). Oreste Mattiolo (1898) reports that what he calls “the crown” was kept in the zoological collections in Via Zamboni until Carlo Emery decided to transfer it to the Aldrovandi collections, which were then housed at the Orto Botanico.</p>
Online database	
Web page	<p>Woodcut plate and printed image of the original rattle: https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/search.do?type=&group=GROUP0&customquery=%3A%20-%20TYPE%3An%20-%20TYPE%3Aaut%20-%20TYPE%3Abib%20-%20TYPE%3Aeca%20&value%28ANY%29=Thevetia</p> <p>Rosary/seed necklace: https://catalogo.sma.unibo.it/it/29/ricerca/detailicc/9350/</p>
Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Domenici, D. 2024. “Ulisse Aldrovandi and Indigenous American Featherwork.” <i>Aldrovandiana</i> 3/2: 7-39. https://aldrovandiana.it/article/view/251/245● Mattiolo, O. 1898. “La nuova Sala Aldrovandi nell’Istituto della R. Università di Bologna.”

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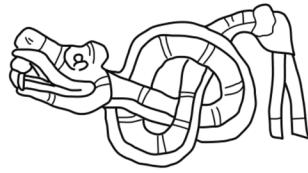
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Malpighia, XII: 140-154.

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