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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo Civico di Storia Naturale

Largo Florestano Vancini, 2, 44100 Ferrara (FE)

Form compiled by: Stefano Mazzotti (Director)

Introduction

The Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Ferrara was founded in 1872 in the former convent of the Martiri in Via Roversella. Under the direction of Galdino Gardini, and thanks to his careful cultivation of relations with donors and benefactors, the collections grew rapidly, soon comprising more than 70,000 zoological, mineralogical, botanical, palaeontological and ethnographic specimens.

Transfer to the current building in Largo Florestano Vancini took place in 1937, following a closure for inventorying. A further transformation occurred in 1982 during the directorship of Fausto Pesarini, who gave the museum its present appearance through a series of structural and functional renovations.

The American collections preserved at the Museo di Storia Naturale di Ferrara comprise materials from the Ecuadorian Amazon (Shuar people) and the Brazilian Amazon (peoples belonging to the Tupi language family). They consist mainly of featherwork artefacts and other body ornaments, such as breastplates, necklaces, belts and a tsantsa. All of the materials are displayed in a single showcase in the museum, to which they arrived between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Cultural Areas (tags)

Amazon

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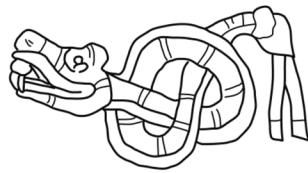
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Collection name	Count Gualtiero Gulinelli Collection
Collector	Gulinelli, Gualtiero
Cultural areas	Amazon
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Shuar (Ecuador)
Description of the collection	<p>The collection consists of a tsantsa (reduced head) prepared by the Shuar.</p> <p>In the museum catalogue it is described as: "ornamental outfit of an Indian tribe of the Amazon".</p> <p>The tsantsa is a human trophy characteristic of the group known as the Jivaros or Jíbaros (a derogatory Castilian term meaning "barbarians, savages"), or Shuar ("people" in their own language), who live in a vast region of the Amazon forest between Ecuador and Peru. Never subjugated either by the Incas or by the Spanish conquistadores of the sixteenth century, they succeeded in maintaining their independence thanks to the harshness of the territory and their fierce character.</p> <p>Known as hunters and "miniaturisers" of heads, the Jivaros, who are deeply knowledgeable about the extraordinary therapeutic and toxic properties of Amazonian vegetation, customarily cut off the heads of their enemies and, using an elaborate technique unique to them, shrink them in order to make ritual trophies.</p>

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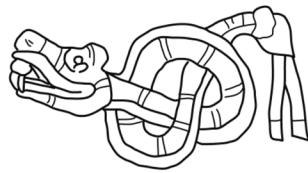
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	<p>This ritual practice is linked to the belief that by appropriating the head and hair of the enemy—where they believe power and strength reside—one takes on the power that belonged to the victim.</p>
History of the collection	<p>The tsantsa was collected by Count Gualtiero Gulinelli in the second half of the nineteenth century and brought to Italy in 1871. In 1947 it was donated to the museum by his heirs.</p>
Online database	<p>PatER</p>
Web page	<p>PatER https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/search.do?type=bdm&page=1&re=load</p>
Bibliography	<p>● Sgarzi, M. 2025. <i>Le collezioni americanistiche Fiorini e Gulinelli del Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Ferrara</i>, Tesi di Laurea in Antropologia, Religioni e Civiltà Orientali, Università di Bologna.</p>

Collection name	Angelo Fiorini Collection
Collector	Fiorini, Angelo
Cultural areas	Amazon
Ethnic group / community / cultural	Shuar (Ecuador) Tupi-Guaraní (Brazil)

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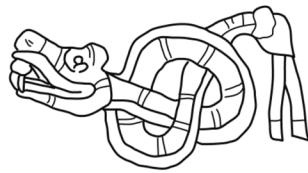
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sphere	
Description of the collection	<p>Body ornaments made of parrot and toucan feathers, monkeys' and carnivores' teeth, small bird bones, shells, beetle elytra and pierced seeds. The museum catalogue records the Shuar people as the provenance and gives a broader attribution to the Tupi-Guaraní.</p> <p>In the museum catalogue we read: "The set of ornaments made with parrot and toucan feathers, monkeys' and carnivores' teeth, small bird bones, shells, beetle elytra and pierced seeds belongs to the Jivaros and the Tupí-Guaraní, another well-known Amazonian people."</p>
History of the collection	<p>The collection was assembled by Angelo Fiorini. It was later donated to the museum in 1876 and in 1910.</p>
Online database	
Web page	
Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sgarzi, M. 2025. <i>Le collezioni americanistiche Fiorini e Gulinelli del Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Ferrara</i>, Tesi di Laurea in Antropologia, Religioni e Civiltà Orientali, Università di Bologna.

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