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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:  
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS  
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

## Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

Piazza Pio XI 2, 20123 Milano

*Form compiled by* Alberto Rocca (Doctor of the Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana and Director of the Pinacoteca), in collaboration with Davide Domenici

## Introduction

The indigenous American collection of the Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana consists of artefacts of extraordinary value, originating from early collections. Of particular importance is the sixteenth-century Tupinambá feather cloak, an object of absolute international significance, which comes from the seventeenth-century collection of Manfredo Settala, from which two cocos chocolateros also originate. In addition, the collection includes some seventeenth-century black-glazed “buccheri delle Indie” from Tonalá (Mexico), as well as a series of Peruvian ceramics from the nineteenth-century collection of Alessandro Litta Modignani.

## Cultural Areas (tags)

Mesoamerica; Northern Andes; Central and Southern Andes; Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil

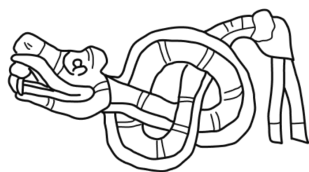
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## Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	<b>American collection of Manfredi Settala</b>
<i>Collector</i>	Landi, Federico (1573–1661) Settala, Manfredi (1600–1680)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Mesoamerica; Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Novohispanic art (Mexico) Tupinambá (Brazil)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	<p>A trapezoidal cloak with a hood (length 155 cm; variable width between 41 and 140 cm) composed of feathers of Ibis rubra, Ara macao, Ara militaris and Psarocolius sp., fixed onto a net of cotton and pineapple fibres. The feathers (some of which have been recoloured by means of tapirage) form a blue and yellow geometric motif on a red background.</p> <p>Two coconut cups with silver foot mounts and two handles. The base shows floral decorations, while the vertical bands connecting it to the handles display chevron motifs. These are seventeenth-century novohispanic cups, mainly used for consuming drinks based on cocoa.</p>

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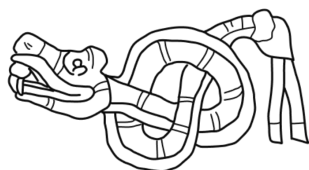
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<i>History of the collection</i>	<p>The Tupinambá cloak was donated – perhaps before 1630 – to the Milanese collector Manfredo Settala (1600–1680) by Prince Federico Landi of Turbigo (1573–1661), a noble closely connected with the Hispanic world (son of Giovanna d’Aragona) and owner of a collection of curiosities kept in the castle of Bardi (Piacenza). Together with the cloak Landi also donated a headdress, a belt, a rattle and a hammock “from Paraguay”, all of which are now lost. The four artefacts were subsequently illustrated in watercolour in one of the volumes of the illustrated inventory of the Settala collection (<i>Disegni originali...</i>, Biblioteca Estense, Modena, Raccolta Campori, gamma.h.01.21, ff. 5, 6, 7, 63, c. 1640–1660). The cloak is also visible in the engraving by Cesare Fiori depicting the Settala Museum, published in 1666 and 1677 in the two Italian editions of the catalogue by Paolo Maria Terzaghi, translated and augmented by Pietro Scarabelli. The two coconut cups with silver mounts were likewise mentioned in the 1666 edition by Scarabelli.</p> <p>The cloak and the cups arrived at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in 1751 together with part of the Settala collection, after a long legal dispute with the heirs.</p>
<i>Online Database</i>	Lombardia Beni Culturali

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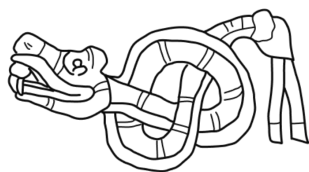
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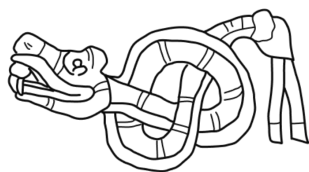
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	<p><i>Modignani – Arti Applicate da donazioni diverse – Numismatica</i>, 53–54. Milano: Electa.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Galbiati, G. 1926. “Antichità sudamericane all’Ambrosiana.” <i>Le vie dell’Italia e dell’America Latina</i> 9: 1027–1030.</li><li>• Gnaccolini, L.P., G. Rossignoli. 2018. “Mantello cerimoniale tupinambá fine del XVI – inizio del XVII secolo.” In <i>Restituzioni 2018. Tesori d’arte restaurati</i>. Accessed June 5, 2025. <a href="http://www.restituzioni.com/wp-content/uploads/2018.cat_.56.pdf">http://www.restituzioni.com/wp-content/uploads/2018.cat_.56.pdf</a>.</li><li>• Pigafetta, A. 1800. <i>Primo viaggio intorno al globo terraqueo</i>. Milano. Nota di Carlo Amoretti, dottore del Collegio Ambrosiano di Milano.</li><li>• Laurencich Minelli, L., S. Ciruzzi. 1981. “Antichi oggetti americani nelle collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Antropologia e Etnologia di Firenze: due mantelli di penne dei Tupinamba.” <i>Archivio per l’Antropologia e la Etnologia</i> CXI: 121–142.</li></ul>
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## #02

<i>Name of the collection</i>	<b>Black-glazed wares from Tonalá (Jalisco, Mexico) and painted gourds (Ecuador-Colombia)</b>
<i>Collector</i>	Unknown

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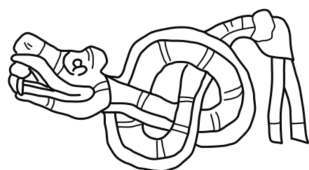
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<i>Cultural areas</i>	Mesoamerica; Northern Andes
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Novohispanic art (Mexico) Regno di Quito (Ecuador-Colombia)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	Seven “buccheri delle Indie” (five cups, a small jar and a bottle) whose typology points to the productions of Tonalá (Jalisco, Mexico). Two half dried gourds, probably from the area of the Regno di Quito, engraved and painted with floral motifs probably executed with Pasto lacquer (mopa-mopa). The two gourds, previously identified as being of Mexican origin, are currently on display at the Museo delle Culture (MUDEC) in Milan.
<i>History of the collection</i>	The ways in which these objects, dated between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reached the Biblioteca Ambrosiana are unknown. The hypothesis that they may have belonged to the Settala collection is not supported by the existing documentation.
<i>Online Database</i>	Lombardia Beni Culturali
<i>Web page</i>	
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domenici, D. 2010. “2242–2247. Coppe e vasetto”, “2248–2249. Recipienti in zucca essiccata con decorazione policroma”, “2250. Bottiglia.” In <i>Pinacoteca Ambrosiana</i>, Tomo VI, <i>Collezioni Settala</i></li> </ul>

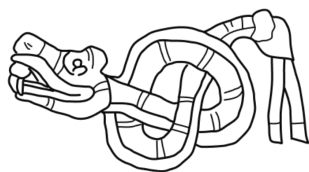
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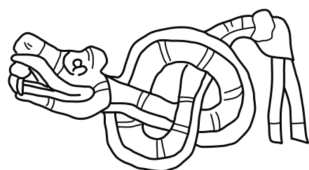
	<i>e Litta Modignani – Arti Applicate da donazioni diverse – Numismatica, 192–193. Milano: Electa.</i>
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## #03

<i>Name of the collection</i>	<b>Litta Modignani collection:</b> Andean artefacts of precolonial, colonial and republican age
<i>Collector</i>	Litta Modignani, Alessandro (1800–1871)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Central and Southern Andes
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Moche (Peru) Wari (Peru) Sicán (Peru) Chimú (Peru) Chancay (Peru) Inka (Peru) Chunchos and other groups from the Ceja de Selva (Peru) Bolivia Chile
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	Four Moche ceramics; two Huari ceramics; one Sicán ceramic; two Chancay ceramics; seventeen Chimú and Chimú-Inka ceramics; fifty-two Inka artefacts in ceramic, stone and bronze; seven pyrographed or painted gourds from Ayacucho; two painted gourds from the Ceja de Selva; two Chunchos bowls; two small

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	columns and one architectural element in alabaster from La Paz; two “buccheri delle Indie” of Chilean origin; one mate with bombilla from La Paz.
<i>History of the collection</i>	Alessandro Litta Modignani gathered the materials of the collection during a journey through various South American countries between 1841 and 1843. Some artefacts were given to him as gifts, while others were presumably purchased on the antiquarian market. Information relating to the provenance and collecting of the artefacts can be inferred from the labels still attached to them and from three handwritten inventories. The Litta Modignani collection came to the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in 1871 through the collector’s will.
<i>Online Database</i>	Lombardia Beni Culturali
<i>Web page</i>	
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Orsini, C., P. Spinato Bruschi. 2010. “La collezione di Alessandro Litta Modignani all’Ambrosiana.” In <i>Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Tomo VI, Collezioni Settala e Litta Modignani – Arti Applicate da donazioni diverse – Numismatica</i>, 135–141, 142–181. Milano: Electa.</li></ul>

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