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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

MUNISS - Museo Scientifico Università di Sassari Collezione Anatomica «Luigi Rolando»

Anatomia umana normale
Dipartimento di Scienze Biomediche
Viale San Pietro
43c, 07100 Sassari (SS)

Form compiled by Pasquale Bandiera, Elena Bandiera

Introduction

The museum preserves two Chancay mummies, an adult male individual of about 25–30 years of age and a subadult of about six months. Since there is no documentation in the university archives concerning how the mummies arrived in Sassari, various hypotheses have been put forward regarding the history of the collection:

- a donation to the university by a member of the House of Savoy;
- a gift made by a Peruvian explorer in gratitude for the hospitality received;
- a donation by an officer from Sassari on his return from a journey to Peru;
- or, most plausibly, their arrival through the same channel that brought to Italy most of the Peruvian and Chancay mummies now in the country, namely Paolo Mantegazza and Ernesto Mazzei, physicians and explorers who, on their return from travels in South America, brought back to Italy artefacts of every kind, from bronze and stone axes and painted spindles to mummies.

The lack of historical documentation may therefore be attributed either to the loss of records relating to the two mummies during the various relocations of the former

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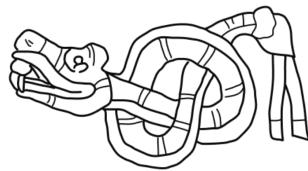
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Institute of Human Anatomy and later of the Department of Biomedical Sciences, or to the fact that during the trade associated with nineteenth-century explorations the artefacts were not accompanied by documentation specifying their precise geographic origin, dating and cultural affiliation.

Cultural Areas

Central and Southern Andes

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Anatomical Collection of the Museo Anatomico “Luigi Rolando”
<i>Collector</i>	Alessio Pirino; Stefania Bagella
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Central and Southern Andes
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Chancay (Peru)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	<p>The collection consists of two natural mummies.</p> <p>1. Naturally mummified complete body of an adult male individual of about 25–30 years of age, associated with a cotton belt. A sponge has been inserted into the mouth of the mummy. Epithelial tissue is preserved over almost the entire body except for the left lower limb, the left upper limb, the fingers of the right hand and the</p>

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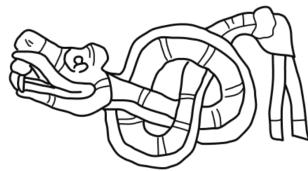
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abdomen. The abdominal organs are largely absent (possible evisceration?); it has not yet been determined whether the thoracic organs, eyes and brain are present. There are signs of osteophytosis in the lumbar region, which has led to a collapse of the body at the level of the fourth lumbar vertebra. The lower limbs are fractured at the level of the patellae (with loss of the probable original flexed position), a damage that probably occurred during the move to the new premises of the Department of Biomedical Sciences.

The belt is made up of three pieces of cloth sewn together and decorated with embroidered serpents in shades of brown and white; in some areas traces of ochre-coloured details are still visible, following the zigzagging body of the serpents, as well as pink thread used to emphasise the animals' eyes. Two samples were taken from the belt for scanning electron microscopy, which revealed the typical structure of cotton fibres.

2. Naturally mummified complete body of a subadult individual of about six months of age. The body is wrapped in different layers and types of textile from the neck to the feet. Thanks to the images obtained by computed tomography and the 3D reconstructions, it has been possible to determine some aspects of the individual's biological profile.

The long bones are in an early phase of growth; only the two lower central incisors are partially erupted, while the buds of the other deciduous teeth are still visible

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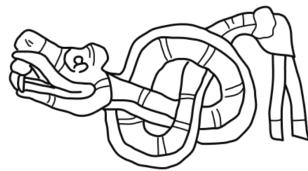
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inside the mandible and maxilla. The vertebral column shows a slight curvature, probably determined post mortem; inside the skull the brain is visible as a small mass in the occipital region; there are remains of organs in the abdominal cavity; some vertebrae are disarticulated and are located among the ribs; the tibiae, fibulae and feet are detached from the rest of the body and wrapped separately in cotton threads. There is a rounded object positioned between the fifth and sixth thoracic vertebrae of uncertain nature (it may be a metal or stone object placed as a charm or votive offering). The skull is elongated in a tubular shape towards the top with an antero-posterior narrowing at parietal-occipital level, possibly as an effect of the practice of cranial deformation using boards placed on the frontal and occipital bones and held in place by bandages, or alternatively as a consequence of post-depositional events linked to the incomplete fusion of the cranial sutures. Several different textiles wrap the body, beginning with a larger cloth that envelops the shoulders and displays a chequered pattern formed by red lines. There is a belt at abdominal level with geometric zigzag decorations and what may be interpreted as serpents; the figures are executed on an ochre-coloured ground with red threads echoing the colour of the belt border, while some are filled with a white dye and detailed in black. The bands around the pelvis show zigzag motifs in brown, yellow

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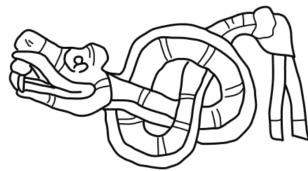
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	<p>and red, and there were also elements in blue, today almost completely faded. The thighs are wrapped in a gauze-like fabric, and the hands and lower limbs are wrapped in cotton threads twisted around themselves. Five samples were taken from the various textiles and analysed by scanning electron microscopy: all the textiles are made of cotton fibres, and it was not possible to detect differences between the samples taken from coloured and uncoloured areas because of a patina covering all the fibres, attributable to dust. The weave varies according to the type of textile analysed, but the fibres are generally woven in a regular manner, with the exception of the fabric that wraps the hands and lower limbs.</p>
<i>History of the collection</i>	No information is available on the history of the collection, which may derive from the collections assembled by Paolo Mantegazza and Ernesto Mazzei.
<i>Online Database</i>	Present in the MUST catalogue record.
<i>Web page</i>	
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bandiera, E. 2019. Il Museo anatomico «Luigi Rolando». Il catalogo della collezione anatomica e le sue mummie chancay. Persone o oggetti da collezione. Tesi di laurea triennale in «Arte e cultura dell'America indigena», Università di Bologna.

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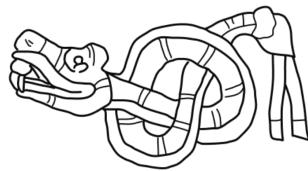
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