

KNOT

KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze

Piazza della SS. Annunziata, 9b, 50122 Firenze

Form compiled by Mario Iozzo (director), in collaboration with Davide Domenici

Introduction

The Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze preserves an Indigenous American artefact of notable importance: a small jadeite sculpture representing the Aztec deity Tezcatlipoca. The sculpture has rubies set into the eyes, a gilded metal mount and a wooden base covered with red velvet, all clearly of European origin.

Cultural Areas

Mesoamerica

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Jadeite face of Tezcatlipoca
<i>Collector</i>	Mario Piccolomini (1651–post-1725) Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (1667–1743)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Mesoamerica

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<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Nahua
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	Human face in green stone (inv. 15892: 4 × 3.2 cm) representing a bearded man, with eight perforations, one of them below the lower lip. On the forehead it shows three incisions representing, from left to right, a smoking mirror (<i>tezcatlipoca</i> in Nahuatl), a heron-feather diadem called <i>aztaxelli</i> (“white heron feathers”), and a feather tuft (<i>iwitl</i>), a sacrificial symbol. The three signs identify the figure as Tezcatlipoca (“Smoking Mirror”), one of the main Nahua deities. The eyes have ruby inlays. The face is set in a gilded metal mount and placed on a wooden base covered with red velvet. Both the rubies and the mount and base are clearly of European origin.
<i>History of the collection</i>	The small mask formed part of the Roman collection of Mario Piccolomini, who sold it, already before 1731, to Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, as a result of which it entered the Uffizi Cabinet of Gems. It later passed to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (inv. no. 15892) around 1895, when the Coin Cabinet and the glyptic collection were transferred from the Uffizi Galleries to the newly created Regio Museo Archeologico, after Italian unification and the Savoy kingdom (inventory no. 15892). In 1929, once it had been recognised as a work of Mesoamerican art, it was placed on temporary deposit at the Museo di Antropologia ed Etnologia in Florence, from

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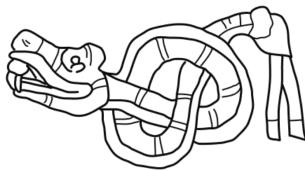
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	which it subsequently returned (after the Second World War) to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale.
<i>Online Database</i>	
<i>Web page</i>	https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg.mess.1
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gennaioli, R. (in stampa). Catalogo della collezione glittica mediceo-lorenese (Corridoio di Maria Maddalena) nel Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, vetrina 33, n. 9.• Heikamp, D. 1972. Mexico and the Medici. Firenze: Editrice Edam.• Heikamp, D. 1982. "Mexico und die Medici-Herzöge." In Mythen der Neuen Welt, ed. K.H. Kohl, 126-146. Berlino.• Laurencich Minelli, L. 1980. "309. Maschera di giada." In Palazzo Vecchio: committenza e collezionismo medicei, 167-168. Firenze: Edizioni Medicee.• Laurencich Minelli, L. 1992. "1078. Maschera di giada." In "Due mondi a confronto. I segni della storia", ed. Aurelio Rigoli, 559. Genova: Edizioni Colombo.• Markey, L. 2008. The New World in Renaissance Italy: A Vicarious Conquest of Art and Nature at the Medici Court. PhD Thesis, The University of Chicago.

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