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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo di Anatomia Umana “Filippo Civinini”

Via Roma, 55, 56126, Pisa

Form compiled by Gianfranco Natale (director)

Introduction

The Museo di Anatomia Umana possesses anthropological and archaeological materials found in South America by Carlo Regnoli. Particularly important is a collection of 121 pre-Columbian vessels dating from between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. These vessels were found in various sites along the Peruvian coast and, on the basis of their styles, can be attributed to several pre-Inca cultures: Supe, Chimú-Lambayeque, Chimú and Chimú-Inca in the northern area; Chancay and Huancho in the central area; Chincha in the central-southern area.

The most numerous vessels belong to the Chimú and Chancay cultures. Part of this pottery consists of bowls and amphorae for domestic use with very simple shapes; other vessels, however, had a clearly ceremonial use as parts of funerary assemblages and display more elaborate artistic forms, with anthropomorphic representations (heads of priests), zoomorphic figures (monkeys, snakes, cats, parrots) and phytomorphic elements (pepino fruits, maize cobs).

In the early 1980s many vessels that were encrusted, fragmentary or badly reassembled in the past were restored. Under the direction of Renzo Galluzzi, the pottery was cleaned using brushes, scalpels or washing in water or alcohol; the fragments were reassembled using reversible adhesives (K 60) or others, depending on the type of ceramic; for the missing parts, once appropriate casts had been taken from the existing

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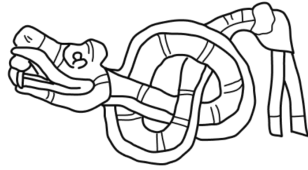
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areas, reintegration was carried out using a mixture composed of plaster and Darwi modelling paste, thus ensuring greater aesthetic legibility and stability.

In addition to the vessels, the pre-Columbian collection also comprises other interesting objects: a basket made of plant fibre, whose walls are decorated with stylised animals and geometric motifs; a copper bowl; two stone mace heads; an antara, a terracotta musical instrument consisting of a series of nine small tubes tied together transversely with plant fibre; a cuchimilco, a terracotta figurine in a praying position, a typical votive object of the Chancay culture that was placed beside the deceased or among the funerary wrappings; and a nineteenth-century forgery of a cuchimilco, made with little care.

Further pre-Columbian materials are kept in thirty-six elegant glass flasks: fragments of vessels, shells and, above all, plant remains. Inside some of these flasks there is also a small slip of paper indicating the place and date of discovery and sometimes a brief description of the contents. The finds date from between 5 and 29 July 1869 and come mainly from excavations carried out in caves and burial sites in the province of Cajamarca in Peru.

Five wooden cases preserve other pre-Columbian materials, including skulls, funerary assemblages (tools, bowls, textiles, other plant remains) and several fardos, which are of great medical-scientific interest. The Spanish term fardo denotes a bundle consisting of many layers of cloth alternating with leaves or tufts of cotton, wrapping the deceased laid in a crouched position. Two complete mummies (spontaneously mummified thanks to the hot, arid climate of the Peruvian coast) discovered when some fardos were opened are well preserved and display a typical foetal position, a clear symbol of the profound and still very strong belief in the sacred maternity of the Earth and in the role of the spirits of the ancestors in controlling the fertility of the soil and the fecundity of their descendants; one of the mummies also has an artificially deformed skull. More striking still is a collection of embalmed heads from a Peruvian family

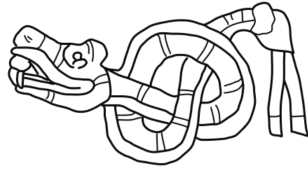
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whose members were decapitated; particularly notable are two heads of infants just a few months old. Numerous heads of hair belonging to the mummies are also preserved.

It is not entirely clear how all this precious pre-Columbian material came to the Museo di Anatomia Umana. Part of the collection certainly derives from Peruvian excavations carried out between 1860 and 1870 by Carlo Regnoli, a scholar at the University of Pisa, in the climate of enthusiasm of the time, when studies in anthropology and ethnology, under the spell of the positivist theories of Darwin and Mantegazza, fascinated scholars and aroused the curiosity of the general public. In fact, many of the descriptive slips accompanying the skulls and the remains kept in the glass flasks bear the note “Collezione Regnoli-Castelli”. Alceste Castelli, Regnoli’s brother-in-law, accompanied him on his journeys in South America.

A further piece of firm evidence is provided by the following letter, written by Duranti to the Rector on 17 August 1873, in which the desire to acquire the anthropological material found by Regnoli is clearly expressed: *«Le trascrivo un brano di lettera, che il Sig. Ippo Garrou [?] scrive il 29 Giugno da Lima al Sig. Dott. Carlo Regnoli e che esso Sig. Regnoli mi comunica in questo momento. “... provveda a che pei transiti necessarii il Ministero degli Affari Esteri dia le opportune disposizioni indispensabili a fare della spedizione un fatto ufficiale, nella prevenzione che quando infino allora non vi sarà stata occasione di bastimento nazionale a vela per far la rimessa al Museo converrà spedire per vapore, e perciò ad altro porto che Italiano, pagando anticipatamente le spese”. Il Dott. Regnoli lasciò in America perchè fossero spedite quà alcune casse piene di oggetti di Storia Naturale destinati ai Nostri Musei. È a queste casse che fa allusione la lettera del Sig. Garrou [?] e per le quali esso dice si facciano premure per mezzo del Ministero degli Esteri. Essendo non poco interessata in questa faccenda la nostra Collezione Antropologica, mi rivolga a V.E. perchè voglia avere la bontà di dirigersi sollecitamente al Ministero predetto, pregandolo a fare presso gli Incaricati Consolari di America le premure preaccennate».*

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An undated note by Duranti records that “altri vasi Americani ed utensili e stoffe” (“other American vessels and utensils and textiles”) were a recent gift from Dr Bertonelli.

Other documents attest that in 1894 Baroness Elisa de Boileau, on behalf of Baron Carlo de Boileau, donated to the then Museo Civico three chests containing Peruvian mummies and other pre-Columbian materials. Baron Carlo de Boileau may well have possessed materials from Peruvian excavations, having been French consul in Lima during the Second Empire. After the fall of the Empire he settled in Pisa in 1877, in the palace that still bears his name and today houses the Faculty of Languages. This pre-Columbian material probably merged with the already existing Regnoli collection of the Museo di Anatomia Umana.

Cultural Areas

Central and Southern Andes

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Pre-Columbian collection
<i>Collector</i>	Carlo Regnoli

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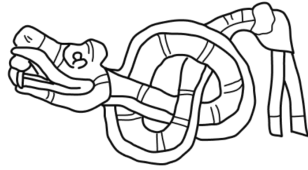
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<i>Cultural areas</i>	Central and Southern Andes
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Chimú, Chancay (Peru)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	Around 200 objects, including arrows, bows, reed artefacts, oars, weaving tools, ropes, terracotta and gourd bowls, wool belts with geometric motifs, wool bags decorated with geometric patterns, dried maize cobs and other plant materials, further textiles decorated with various motifs, dolls made of straw and cotton, various nets, hanks and balls of cotton, a bronze pin, wicker baskets and human remains (infant bones, the scalp of a mummy, skulls, various bones, mummified heads and complete mummies).
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled between 1869 and 1870 and was acquired at the end of the nineteenth century.
<i>Online Database</i>	SIGECweb
<i>Web page</i>	
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barile, P., et al. 2015. “El extraño caso de las cabezas decapitadas.” Revista DMMD 9 (26): 9-12. • La collezione di vasi precolombiani dell’Istituto di Anatomia Umana Normale. 1983. In occasione della mostra tenuta dal 30 novembre al 6

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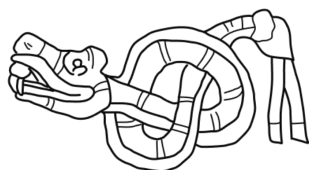
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