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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo Civico di Modena

Piazza Sant'Agostino, 337, 41121 Modena (MO)

Form compiled by Maria Elena Righi (curator of ethnological collections).

Introduction

The Museo Civico di Modena was founded in 1871 and found its permanent home in the Palazzo dei Musei in 1886. Its founder and first director, Carlo Boni, created a museum characterised by an apparent heterogeneity which was in fact the result of an organic plan designed to "receive and preserve everything that might be of interest to the whole population".

Arsenio Crespellani and Luigi Alberto Gandini, directors between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, continued this work, significantly expanding the holdings with artistic, archaeological and ethnological collections.

The museum's nineteenth-century origins have been enhanced in its current display, which substantially retains the original nineteenth-century furnishings and preserves a testimony of outstanding importance in the Italian and European panorama.

The creation of the city museum was promoted and supported by an enlightened middle class which, in the years immediately following the unification of Italy, sought to safeguard local identity and prevent the dispersion of the archaeological, historical and artistic heritage of Modena. Through bequests and donations it deposited in the museum the memory of itself and of its own time.

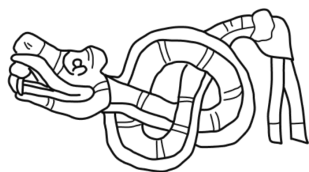
In an age open to the development of science, the arts and industry, and animated by a widespread faith in human progress, the museum took shape as a laboratory of experience for scientists, craftsmen and artists.

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In the wake of the contemporary debate on evolutionism, the museum acquired finds from the Bronze Age terramare settlements, which opened up new perspectives on prehistory and on the earliest human settlements in the Modena area.

In order to provide data useful for understanding past societies, alongside the archaeological collections a section of ethnography was created, bringing together materials originating from travels and experiences in distant lands.

Through its relations with the world of the great international exhibitions and of the emerging European museums of decorative arts, the museum developed its educational vocation, creating repertoires of techniques, forms and models across the most diverse types of materials.

Over time, from the nineteenth century to the present, the museum's holdings have been enriched with new archaeological finds, ethnological collections and works of art. Continuing the work of its founders represents a constant commitment for the museum, in the awareness that civic identity is strengthened also by looking to the past and preserving its memory.

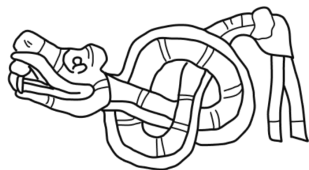
Today the Museo Civico maintains its role as custodian of the city's historical memory and renews it over time in relation to changes in the community and in constant dialogue with it. The museum is committed to safeguarding the archaeological and historical-artistic heritage of the territory and to enhancing the nineteenth-century display created by its founders and subsequent curators. It guarantees access to the collections for both the general public and the scholarly community and promotes their continual rediscovery through research, valorisation and participation. It fosters networks and partnerships and plays an important role of cultural mediation between the scholarly community and the public, presenting the knowledge it constantly broadens and updates in different forms and in languages tailored to its many interlocutors. It responds to the challenges of the contemporary world, adheres in a convinced way to the sustainable development goals of the UN 2030 Agenda and promotes them through its choices and its activities.

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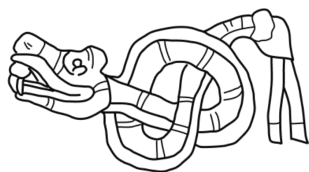
The ethnological collections

The ethnological section, created between 1875 and the early decades of the twentieth century, was conceived with the aim of making immediately perceptible the link between prehistory and ethnography which, at that time, formed an integral part of the evolutionist paradigm applied to the study of human societies. Placing in the museum galleries the artefacts of "living savages" alongside those of populations of the past meant, for the first director Carlo Boni, adhering to a model of investigation that then had numerous applications throughout Europe. This methodological approach, through which one sought to provide evidence for humanity's path from a primitive stage to civilisation, had been pioneered in Denmark at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Italy this perspective was adopted by Luigi Pigorini, the most renowned Italian prehistorian of the nineteenth century, who in 1875 founded the Museo Nazionale Preistorico-Etnografico in Rome. It was on this experience that Boni drew when in the same year he decided to create an ethnographic section in his museum. Subsequently the ethnological section took on the character of a repertory of objects of both living and past populations from all over the world, classified and displayed according to a geographical arrangement. Some collections stand out for their homogeneity and completeness, such as those from New Guinea, Equatorial and Eastern Africa, Amazonia and the pre-Columbian cemeteries of Peru. Over the years these were joined by individual objects or small groups donated by Modenese citizens on their return from journeys and scientific or commercial expeditions which had little or nothing to do with Boni's original comparative ethnographic project. In most cases these are heterogeneous items, souvenirs of travel to exotic lands or testimonies linked to experiences in Italian colonial Africa.

Brief introduction to the history of the American collections

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The South American collections are arranged in a single large display case following an order that takes into account the consequences of the impact of the outside world on the life of these communities. The sequence begins with material culture of groups long since extinct, such as the Botocudos, Camacan and Puris of central-eastern Brazil. Having come into contact with European colonisers as early as the sixteenth century, these groups were decimated by the epidemics and persecutions to which they fell victim. At the opposite end of the case are displayed items from the Guaraní of Mato Grosso do Sul and the Mocoví of the Argentine Chaco, whose artefacts, permeated by European influences, highlight the drastic cultural changes to which many populations have had to adapt in order to survive. In the central part of the display, finally, a rich collection of feather ornaments from the Amazonian area, produced by the Munduruku and by populations from the Upper Rio Negro basin, bears witness to an art once widespread in various regions of South America and today almost completely abandoned. The Munduruku, in fact, although they have not become extinct, have lost the memory both of the techniques of production and of the symbolic value of these ornaments, while among the groups of the Upper Rio Negro only the Tukano have preserved some recollection of the techniques and symbolic meanings.

In 2019, alongside the Amazonian materials, a selection of featherwork from Yanomami communities was added. The collection to which these pieces belong was acquired by the Museo Civico in 2011 and is the result of a corpus assembled by Loretta Emiri, who in 1977 settled in Brazilian Amazonia, where she carried out activities in support and defence of the Yanomami. The remaining part of the collection was acquired by the museum in 2022. The collection consists of objects representative of the daily life of these populations: artefacts in plant fibre, feather ornaments, weapons and hunting tools.

Since this is not an historical collection, the museum is considering moving and re-presenting this nucleus of objects in the new spaces it has recently acquired and which will become available in the coming years. On that occasion the collection would be

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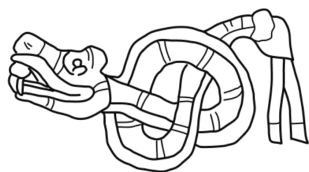
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displayed in the light of a new participatory approach that the museum is developing within the framework of the project "Letterature e patrimoni indigeni, musealizzazione e decolonialità" ("Indigenous literatures and heritages, musealisation and decoloniality"), launched by the Museo Civico and the University of Bologna (Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the University of Bologna, the project Nuova Cartografia Sociale dell'Amazzonia – PNCSA – and the Brazilian universities UEMA, UEA, UFRRJ, UNEMAT, UFPA, IFMA, IFAM, UNIFESPA, UFRB and UFOPA). The aim is to focus on issues relating to rethinking the museum space, to Amazonian literatures and cultures, and to the self-representations promoted by the Centres of Science and Knowledge of Indigenous and quilombola communities. The American collection also includes small groups of artefacts from North America, Mesoamerica and the Caribbean.

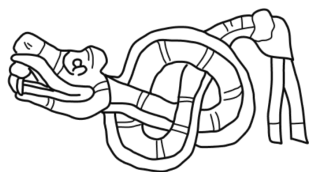
Collection name	Boccolari-Parenti Collection
Collector	Boccolari, Antonio; Parenti, Paolo
Cultural areas	Central and Southern Andes
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Chancay (Ancón, Perù) Inka (Peru)
Description of the collection	The collection comprises 383 archaeological items consisting of 22 ceramic objects and more than 250 pieces, including textiles, spinning and weaving tools and other elements of funerary equipment. In addition

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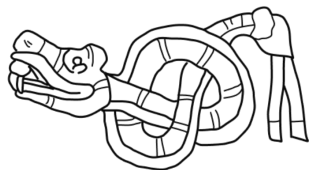
	there are 9 anthropological specimens (eight crania and one mummy). Boccolari and Parenti had in fact collected 23 crania, but they donated most of them to the Museum of Human Anatomy in Modena.
History of the collection	The collection was assembled by two officers from Modena, Antonio Boccolari and Paolo Parenti, during the circumnavigation voyage of the Regia Corvetta "Vettor Pisani" between 1882 and 1885. In 1883, during a stop in Ancón, they visited the local necropolis, where they collected archaeological and anthropological remains. In 1885 the collection was donated to the Museo Civico di Modena by the two Modenese. In 1889 another small nucleus of the collection, including a mummy, was sold to the institution by Paolo Parenti alone.
Online database	Website of the Museo Civico
Web page	https://www.catalogo.museocivicomodena.it/espansioni-digitali/#/collections/3f209e4e-24f2-464a-9af7-de543f1aa780
Bibliography	• Boni, C. 1887. <i>Rapporto biennale del Museo Civico per gli anni 1885 – 1886</i>. Modena, 14. • Desrosiers, S., I. Pulini, eds. 1992. <i>Tessuti precolombiani</i>. Modena.

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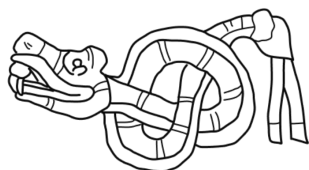
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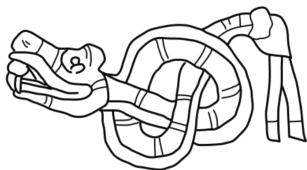
Collection name	Mario Fantin Collection
Collector	Fantin, Mario
Cultural areas	Central and Southern Andes
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Chancay (Peru) Ica-Chincha (Peru)
Description of the collection	The collection consists of 56 objects, including weaving tools, four Chancay dolls and textiles, mainly relating to the central and southern coast of Peru.
History of the collection	The collection was assembled by Mario Fantin during his travels in Peru. It was purchased by the Museo Civico di Modena in 1983.
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Web page	https://www.catalogo.museocivicomodena.it/espansioni-digitali/#/collections/3f209e4e-24f2-464a-9af7-

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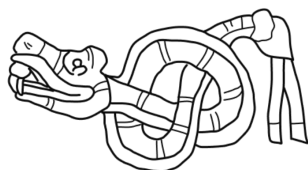
Collection name	Pietro Tacchini Collection
Collector	Tacchini, Pietro
Cultural areas	Eastern Woodlands; Central and Southern Andes
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Ohio (USA) New Jersey (USA) Chancay (Ancón, Perù)
Description of the collection	The nucleus consists of 367 objects (mainly textiles and ceramics) from various localities along the Peruvian coast. There is also a small group of five arrowheads from Ohio and five arrowheads from New Jersey.
History of the collection	Pietro Tacchini obtained the collection from the Museo Preistorico Etnografico in Rome; it formed part of a larger group assembled by the Florentine collector Ernesto Mazzei. The collection was acquired by the Museo Civico di Modena in 1897 following an exchange with the Museo Preistorico Etnografico in Rome.
Online database	Website of the Museo Civico

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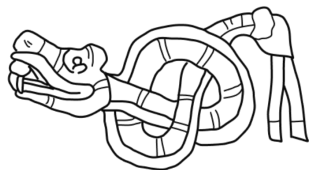
Collection name	Luigi Bompani Collection
Collector	Bompani, Luigi
Cultural areas	Amazon
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Munduruku (Brazil) Paratintin (Brazil) Upper Rio Negro groups (Brazil)
Description of the collection	The collection consists of 24 objects from the Paratintin and Munduruku peoples and from Upper Rio Negro populations.
History of the	The collection was assembled by Luigi Bompani in 1840.

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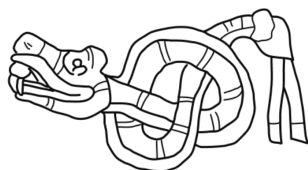
collection	Between 1841 and 1853 it was donated by Bompani to the University of Modena and was later acquired in 1879 by the Museo Civico di Modena through an exchange.
Online database	PatER
Web page	https://www.catalogo.museocivicomodena.it/espansioni-digitali/#/collections/3f209e4e-24f2-464a-9af7-de543f1aa780
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	Giuseppe Casari (1852-?) nei musei modenesi.” <i>Atti della Società dei Naturalisti e Matematici di Modena</i> 147: 351–70.
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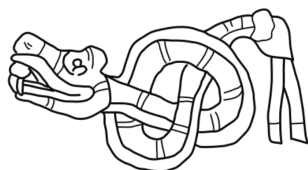
Collection name	Loretta Emiri Collection
Collector	Emiri, Loretta
Cultural areas	Amazon
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Yanomami (Roraima, Brazil)
Description of the collection	Loretta Emiri collected the objects between 1977 and 1988. The collection is divided into two nuclei. The first consists of 176 objects that describe all aspects of the daily life of these populations: baskets, feather ornaments, weapons, hunting tools, objects in plant fibre, etc. The second nucleus is made up of around seventy objects that typologically replicate those of the first batch.
History of the collection	A first part of Loretta Emiri’s collection was acquired in 2001 and a second in 2022. In this way the museum has acquired the whole of Loretta Emiri’s collection prior to her definitive departure for Brazil.

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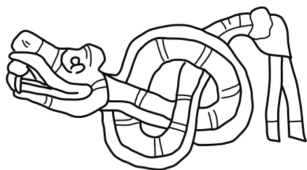
Collection name	Raffaele De Agostini Collection
Collector	De Agostini, Raffaele
Cultural areas	Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Botocudos (Brazil) Guaraní (Brazil)
Description of the collection	56 objects from Botocudo and Guaraní communities.
History of the collection	The collection was purchased by the Museo Civico di Modena in 1875.
Online database	Website of the Museo Civico
Web page	https://www.catalogo.museocivicomodena.it/espansioni-digitali/#/collections/3f209e4e-24f2-464a-9af7-de543f1aa780

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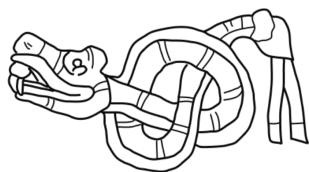
Collection name	Charles Le Beuf Collection
Collector	Le Beuf, Charles
Cultural areas	Eastern Woodlands; Mesoamerica; Caribbean
Ethnic group / community / cultural sphere	Kentucky (USA) Maryland (USA) Nahua (Mexico) Guadeloupe
Description of the collection	Three groups of obsidian from Mexico, a flint arrowhead and a stone axe from Kentucky, a stone axe from Maryland and a diorite axe from Guadeloupe.
History of the collection	The Museo Civico di Modena purchased these objects from the French dealer and antiquarian Charles Le Beuf, with whom the museum's director, Carlo Boni, maintained frequent relations between 1878 and 1891.
Online database	Website of the Museo Civico
Web page	https://www.catalogo.museocivicomodena.it/espansioni-digitali/#/collections/3f209e4e-24f2-464a-9af7-de543f1aa780
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