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The Armeria in the Uffizi

Mesoamerican objects between the 16th and 18th
centuries

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Abstract

Nel 1972, Heikamp pubblicò la sua ricerca sugli oggetti provenienti dalle Americhe e presenti nella raccolta de' Medici inducendo, negli anni seguenti, diversi altri studiosi ad analizzare le opere d'arte del Nuovo Mondo. Questa tesi si propone di cogliere la valenza acquisita e donata agli oggetti mesoamericani inclusi nell' Armeria degli Uffizi tra i secoli XVI e XVIII. Lo scopo del lavoro è superare l'idea di "esotico" che informa la ricerca di Heikamp indagando le diverse forme di valore attribuite agli oggetti presenti nella raccolta.

Key-Words: I Medici, Collezionismo, arte mesoamericana, arte piumaria, Armeria degli Uffizi.

In 1972, Heikamp published his research on objects from the Americas present in the Medici collection, thus inducing, in the following years, several other scholars to analyze the works of art of the New World. This thesis proposes to understand the value given and acquired by the Mesoamerican objects included in the Uffizi's Armory between the 16th and 18th centuries. The aim of the work is to overcome the idea of "exotic" that informs Heikamp's research by virtue of investigating the different forms of value attributed to the objects present in the collection.

Key-Words: *The Medici, collecting, Mesoamerican art, feather work, Armeria degli Uffizi.*

INDEX

Introduction	6
CHAPTER 1: State of the Art: The Circulation of Objects in Art-Historical Research on the 17th Century.....	10
1.1.: «Politics of Value» and the Study of History of Collections	14
1.2.: The Maritime American Expansion of Portugal and Spain: the Circulation of «Exotic» Objects	19
1.3.: Gifts and Purchases of Objects from the New World: What it Means to Have Them in a XVII-Century Collection	25
1.4.: A Critic to the Concept of «Exotic».	27
CHAPTER 2: The Armeria in the Medici Inventories.....	34
2.1. Introduction to the Medici's Armeria Collection: A Brief History	47
2.2. Book Guides Descriptions: Mesoamerican Objects in the Armeria	52
2.3. The Armeria Dismantled	59
CHAPTER 3: Non-European Objects and the Medici	62
3.1: Case Study: the Social Life of Tupinambà Objects	62
Conclusion.....	78
Annexes.....	82
1.Mantle	82
2.Hunting Bows.....	85
Image Index.....	88
Abbreviations	90
Bibliografia	92

Introduction

Mesoamerican objects in the Armeria rooms at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence during the 16th and 17th century have been under scrutiny by researchers for decades, especially since the publication of Heikamp's *Mexico and the Medici* essay in 1972. The importance that such items played in the Medici collection was not missed by many (Heikamp 1972, Barocchi 1983, Ciruzzi 1983, Feest 1985, Galdy 2009, Turpin 2013, Bigoni-Roselli 2014, Bleichmar 2015, Markey 2016, Françoso 2016, Buckley 2021) and there is a large corpus of academics that explores the impact that Europeans exerted on American art production during the 16th century.

Through the study of the history of collections, we can explore how non-European objects came to be part of these rooms. Nevertheless, it was the development of decolonization studies that brought to light the relevance of Non-European cultures to Europe itself, and how social connections were built upon the exchange of information on both sides.

History and anthropology, initially did not seem to have anything in common despite using the same words often with different meanings, causing what Nancy

Fariss called a «sort of cultural shock»¹. However, this study brings them together in proposing to analyze the cultural value of Mesoamerican objects' presence in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany during the 16th all through the 18th centuries. Farriss also states that, «as with other forms of culture shock, the discovery of difference is the first step to Enlightenment», meaning both the time period between the 17th and 18th centuries and the expansion of knowledge. The difference in the words' meanings according to the subject they belong to do not signify a «failure in communication»: in fact, it accentuates the need to dialogue and go beyond «disciplinary boundaries» in order to better understand our object of interest. In other words, «exchange is the source of value²», in more ways than we can imagine. More than that, the main aim of this study is to discuss the value of owning Mesoamerican items in Florence in the 17th and 18th century, whether social, political, epistemological, or all of them together.

Methodologically, it was fundamental to analyze the existing bibliography (Lery 1578, Bracken et al. 2013, Schmidt 2015, Gerritsen-Riello 2015, Kaufmann 2017, Hodorowich 2017) on the Maritime Expansion of Spain and Portugal, on the collection of Non-European artefacts and the belongings of the brothers and Grand Dukes Francesco I and Ferdinando I, as well as study the inventories of the Medicean Guardaroba in order to be able to understand the developments which occurred in their organization. Giuseppe Bianchi's *Raguaglio*, his *Catalogo dimonstrativo* and the published inventories were my guides in establishing the historiography of the Uffizi Gallery since 1573, when the gallery display was created. Archival research was also eye-opening, and frequent visits to the Archivio di Stato di Firenze were made, as well as to the Archivio Storico delle

¹ Appadurai 1986, p.3.

² *Ibid*, p.18.

Gallerie Firentine where dott. Simona Pasquinucci was of great help in finding the right documents. The article by Kathleen Buckley(2021) was guide for sourcing the materials in the archives, and I could produce tables which I called Tupinambá Objects Through The Years, summarize the inventory records concerning the Tupinambà Mantle and the Hunting Bows analyzed in this study from the early 17th to the late 18th centuries.

I also visited the rooms in the Uffizi Galleries to have a first contact with the ceilings of one of the Armeria rooms, which depicts the New World, and the Tupinambà mantle that is still held at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Florence (I thank dr. Maria Gloria Roselli for her availability in answering my questions about the location of the objects).

The study is divided in three main parts:

The first addresses the Iberian maritime expansion and the relevance of owning objects from across the globe, as well as a critic to the word «exotic» and what it means through the ages.

The second part focuses on how the Armeria rooms in the Uffizi Galleries also held objects also from Mesoamerica, how this rooms were created and developed over the years, and how they came to be dismantled in the late 18th century.

Finally, the third part explores the Medici grand duchy and the Uffizi collection's history, making a point to include case studies of the previously mentioned objects that have been well recorded in the inventories.

With the exploration of these subjects, the intent is to bring awareness on how the exchange of objects throughout the years change their forms of value.

CHAPTER 1: State of the Art: The Circulation of Objects in Art-Historical Research on the 17th Century

This chapter will analyze previous research on the theme of Iberian maritime expansion – that is, which «belongs to a geographical and political space that is both American and European³», what it meant to exchange gifts in the Royal Courts during the XVI and XVII century, as well as the importance of what was “exotic” in a princely collection at that time. Its goal is to present the reader with enough information to understand chapters Two and Three, by giving a general overview of history, and introduce the methodology used. In order to complement the theme of collecting curious materials, I have used the research by Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai(1986) who talks about objects having social lives, consisting of the many meanings and functions artefacts can acquire during its’ lifetime and the places where they are found.

During the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Spain and Portugal started their maritime expansion across the Atlantic. The Iberian power dominated all trade in what was then baptized as the West Indies (known today as the Central and South American continents), controlling products that would come and go from the

³ Russo 2014, p. 2.

colonized territories. To take on the state of research about Mesoamerican items in Europe during the 17th century, I analyzed the issue of global movement and colonization, as well as the Iberian political power and the many intricacies within the social setting of the period.

In *Mexico and the Medici* (1972), Heikamp had as a scope to examine the Mexican objects in the Medici collections «in the light of their interest as documents of exotic art» due to the perspective that the discovery of the New World «was a breathtaking miracle» and «no collection could fail to include» items from this far-away place⁴. He mentions that Mexican objects were indispensable even in the most modest of *Kunstkammern*, according to European scholars of the XVI century, as «several pieces from collections of princes and private citizens have been recorded in book illustrations»⁵.

Claire Farago, in the introduction to *Reframing the Renaissance*⁶ says that in studying «if» and «how» global trade affected art in Sixteenth-century Italy, she found that accounts of the period did not believe that non-European societies had had an influence on art theory before the nineteenth century. This revelation led Farago to question the completeness of our understanding of historical knowledge. Furthermore, Alessandra Russo, in her book *The Untranslatable Image* (2014), explores the entwining of art history and visual traditions where she strives to put together the «imaginary, real and symbolic» aspects of a society's points of reference⁷ by creating a «novohispano triptych»⁸ where she

⁴ Heikamp 1972, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁶ Farago 1995, p. 3.

⁷ Russo 2014, p. XIV.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. XIV.

analyzed those aspects individually and then brought them together to better understand the many layers of Iberian art.

Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, in their book *The Global Lives of Things* (2015), make the connection between the value of the objects reproduced in paintings and the study of art history across borders, presenting to the reader the “global” perspective which «generally implied a challenge to national approaches to history» within the anthropology and historical field of research:

«Since the global turn, cross-border connections and interactions take precedence over the boundaries and narratives that seek to suggest the importance of separate nations. We ask different questions, and our eyes have been opened to the interactions of people, ideas, and things across cultural and geographical zones»⁹.

This means then, that items represented in paintings, drawing, watercolours etc, are not just «things» with a «social life»; they also have trajectories that relay the path they undertook until their destination – for this study in particular, it is the Medici collection.

In *Reflections on Global Art History*, essay by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann(2017), he breaches the idea of a Geography of art history: a model which «deals with the locational parameters of historical study. (...) A sensitivity to local considerations, namely how to relate various cultures and their locations, may be necessary for considerations of world art history»¹⁰.

Global art history as proposed by DaCosta Kaufmann was the methodology chosen to confront this subject: the interaction and circulation of artefacts seen through a lens «which to consider early modern visual and material culture than

⁹ Gerritsen Riello 2015, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰ Kaufmann 2017, p. 34.

national categories», given that the Maritime Expansion was more than an era of accelerated global interconnection, preceding «the modern emergence of nation-states»¹¹. The circulation of objects is the base of this research where, by exploring the acts of exchange between the Medici Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Habsburg Empire during the Sixteenth to Eighteenth centuries, through the study of diplomacy, forms of values, and material culture of the time, we aim to understand the value of having Mesoamerican objects as part of the Medici collection. On a more specific note, this study focus on objects present in the armoury (from now on: *Armeria*) rooms at the Galleria degli Uffizi in the above mentioned period which contained a selection of weapons from many cultures and countries marking the connections established by the Medici through gift giving and acquisition, as well as how and what it meant when these rooms were dismantled. Separating the aspects of aesthetics and political value of such goods would not bring a comprehensive understanding of the importance they brought to the Medici and, most importantly, to the *Armeria* at the Uffizi.

It was necessary, after a consideration of the many movements that the objects underwent across the ocean and Europe, to consider their “social life”, as it is what gives it meaning. Each object has a trajectory, a value, and «they each circulated in ‘specific cultural and historical milieus’ in which ‘desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power interact to create economic value in specific social situations’»¹², and so the many interpretations that can be embedded in one single object depending on the time, the place and its observer.

¹¹ Bleichmar, Martin 2015, p. 612.

¹² Gerritsen, Riello 2015, p. 2.

1.1.: «Politics of Value» and the Study of History of Collections

Goods from the New World started to make part of Duke Cosimo's collection in the late 1530's; past scholars have demonstrated that «European drive to acquire and collect wonders from the New World derived from medieval collecting interests in novelty, *naturalia*, and precious objects»¹³. It is important to note that in the Italian *studioli*, the antique pieces are a major theme verified by the intense cultural ardor which accompanies the new discovery and the re-read of antiquity's literature. We use both for antiquities and for *curious* and faraway objects the concept of «wonder». The antique pieces, emanating from a distant past of which we ignore the precise specifics, arise an admiration full of curiosity¹⁴.

Understanding where the goods come from must also be accompanied by «economic and commodities theories» to facilitate the explanation of «the distribution and circulation of objects, especially ones of intense and multiple interest, and especially luxury items»¹⁵, taking us to the study of material, economic and cultural exchange through the research by Appadurai (1986).

One of the aims in the essay by Appadurai, *commodities and the politics of value*¹⁶, was to «propose a new perspective on the circulation of commodities in social life», as he understood that «value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged»¹⁷. Broadly speaking, he proposes that once the focus is on the commodity that is exchanged, rather than on the act itself, one can «argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is politics», that is: the meaning of the object itself and then what the subjects exchanging it are saying with it.

¹³ Markey 2016, p. 29.

¹⁴ Lugli 1996, p. 93.

¹⁵ Kaufmann 2017, p. 1.

¹⁶ Appadurai 1986, p. 3

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 3.

«Such argument justify the concept that commodities, like persons, have social lives»¹⁸.

So what are commodities according to this perspective? Appadurai explains that Commodities are «objects of economic value», as in «economic value» being «a judgment made about the object by the subjects» - it is not an inherent characteristic of the object, but an acquired one based on the subjectivity of the judge-observer and their desires to obtain it¹⁹; therefore, «the economy as a particular social form exists and is consisted of ‘not only exchanging values but in the exchange of values’» and would mean a sort of exchange of sacrifices²⁰.

The previous statement, «[...] value is politics», mean that politics is the mediator between «exchange» and «value», and that there is a «relationship between knowledge and commodities» which demonstrates that, to a certain point, «politics of value is, in many contexts, politics of knowledge»²¹. Appadurai reinforces the argument by explaining how gift exchanges and the circulations of commodities are connected to the value of objects, which directly influence their social lives due to the timing of their acquisition²².

In the present study, to know the extension of a commodity's value and what were the politics involved with it were necessary to understand how these artefacts came to be part of the Medici collection, and what owning it meant in a social and political perspective. As argued by Suzanne Butters in 2007,

«In the world shared by these Sixteenth-century protagonists, the success of negotiations, alliances, affiliations, friendships and personal salvation depended a good

¹⁸ Appadurai 1986, p. 3.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 3.

²⁰ Appadurai 1986, p. 4.

²¹ Appadurai 1986, p. 6.

²² Appadurai 1986, p.12. The author explains that the social life of a Christmas gift is different from the one for a wedding or a birthday celebration.

deal on the effective deployment and reciprocation of gifts. Commonly these took the form of material goods, cash or income (including tips), properties, jobs, hospitality, favours, a willingness to serve or to benefit (favours-in waiting, one might say), and continuing loyalty; their nature was limited only by power, connections, wealth, social conventions, wisdom and imagination»²³.

Suzanne Butter's statement is, to a certain extent, still valid for Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. In the same essay, she mentions gifts from King Phillip II of Spain through his Ambassador given to Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici (1549-1609), which are relevant for this research: the gifts from King Phillip II had «'Indian' provenance alluding to the power and extent of the Spanish empire: a cane writing-cabinet inlaid with gold and silver; bezoar stones, 'Indian' vessels and a *featherwork* Madonna»²⁴. Therefore, here we can see the value of the commodity and of the action: King Phillip II is not only showing his power as a ruler that has riches overseas, he is also clearly stating to Duke Ferdinando I their continuous political connection - which is quite limited in regards with the exploration of the New World, as we will see further along in this chapter.

The Medici Grand Dukes collected American objects such as featherwork and Mixtec masks, and their interest in the New World culminated in artists regularly representing the New World in drawings, frescoes, and *studiolo* paintings. The interaction the city of Florence had with the New World was largely material and visual, whereas in other cities, like Venice, where the interaction was characterized by the gigantic «output of its print culture», it was more about

²³ Butters 2007, pp. 243-354.

²⁴ Appadurai 1986, pp. 222-225.

dissemination of knowledge²⁵.

Russo (2014) defines the «untranslatable» as something that «never stops translating»²⁶, instead of what cannot be translated. Therefore, the objects in the Medici collection are untranslatable due to their constant change in meaning. Objects in the early modern era had dynamic lives, with their materiality and interpretation changing every time they were transported across time, territories and cultures. In the case of the object losing part of ideological and cultural meanings which were taken on previous settings, as a result of travel, the same objects adopted new references as they entered new «networks of power and exchange» where they were used to «tell different stories» until today²⁷. This sort of ever-changing interpretation and cultural assimilation can be qualified as a translation of the social lives the object has led.

The fact that an object's movement can change the even the «original identity, purpose, or cultural meaning» until they are no longer evident, rendering the original idea «questionable, if not altogether meaningless», puts into perspective the two meanings the word «translation» has today: «to render from one language into another» and «to transport from one place to another»²⁸. In this study, where I intend to use translation as being the many faces an object can have when being reinterpreted after moving and leaving its original place of existence and function²⁹ – , the objects I want to focus in the Case Studies have multiple versions of what they mean through different lenses: of the prince, the scholar, the people who created it, the conqueror.

²⁵ Hodorowich 2017, p. 28; for further reading see Laurencich-Minelli 2017, Olmi 1992.

²⁶ Russo 2014, p. 6.

²⁷ Bleichmar, Martin 2015, pp. 614, 618.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 614.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 614.

«That the Medici court was one of the most active centers of the peninsula in the field of naturalistic research and, therefore, also in the collection of materials and news on the Novo Mondo, is well testified. (...) Ferdinando de 'Medici, while he was still a cardinal in Rome, before succeeding his brother Francesco I, used to collect and send to Tuscany, in addition to Mexican artifacts, also naturalistic finds»³⁰.

Such testimony proves that Rome too had an important role as a «place for the collection and redistribution on the peninsula of information material» about the American continent. Frequently such materials were transmitted through the «channels of papal diplomacy», particularly through the diplomatic missions of Spain and Portugal³¹.

According to Olmi, a major source of difficulty in constructing a complete picture of the nature and evolution of collections of natural objects, is the great diversity in both form and function which characterizes the numerous important collections formed during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries³². He reminds us that most collections of Italian princes were «were largely characterized by an absence of specialization and by the juxtaposition of natural and artificial objects» and that their «marvelous appearance» with an encyclopaedic order constituted an area of competition between nature and art; it represented an ambitious response of Mannerism «to the crisis of value resulting from the breakdown of the Renaissance certainty»³³.

³⁰ Olmi 1992, p. 229.

³¹ Olmi 1992, p. 229.

³² Olmi 2017, p. 5.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 5.

1.2.: The Maritime American Expansion of Portugal and Spain: the Circulation of «Exotic» Objects

«Nei giorni scorsi ti ho ampiamente scritto del mio ritorno da quei nuovi paesi che, con le navi a spese e per incarico del Serenissimo Re del Portogallo abbiamo cercato e trovato, ai quali sembra lecito dare il nome di Nuovo Mondo. Dal momento che i nostri padri non ebbero di essi cognizione alcuna e l'evento supera l'intendimento di tutti³⁴»,

says the author, that it is hypothesized to be Amerigo Vespucci. With these words, he announces in an extraordinary way, with a significative title: *Mundus Novus*, «at the beginning of the sixteenth century to an audience already full of expectations and eager for news» about what is happening in the distant oceans, «the unexpected appearance on the horizon of the story of an alien universe destined to profoundly upset the traditional equilibrium»³⁵. The centuries of medieval fantasies and legends, the legacy of the Classical world rediscovered in the Fifteenth century, come together under a new sky and new lands to discover. The journey produces a mental body in which «between a mirage and reality, Europe materializes a dream of the 'other'»³⁶.

During the course of the Sixteenth century, Spain and Portugal started what Serge Gruzinski calls a «planetary process» of «Iberian Worldwide Diffusion»³⁷. Through the actions of sailors, soldiers during conquests, and missionaries from those countries, the maritime expansion created «ties [which] were rapidly formed

³⁴ Peloso 1987, p. 28.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 28.

³⁶ Peloso 1987, p. 28.

³⁷ Gruzinski 2017, p. 47.

between the four corners of the globe»³⁸.



Figura 1 - Theodor De Bry, *Americae Magis Cognita*, etching in copperplate, map representing Central and South America, in *Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae*, De Bry 1592, p . 10.

In the volume *Circulations in the Global history of art* (2017) the authors present the hypothesis that «the project of global art history calls for a balanced materialist treatment of artefacts and unified approach that emphasizes questions of transcultural encounters and exchanges as circulations» because they believe that such an approach can create fertile ground for a debate on the considerations of a global art history for a globalized world³⁹. They defend the study of «material conditions» as DaCosta Kaufmann puts himself because they «mean [by that] not only the materiality of the object and the image, but also the diverse modes of

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 47.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

circulation and the various contexts in which they occur»⁴⁰ and the attention to these conditions is «a prerequisite for describing and understanding artistic circulations»⁴¹.

Such circulation process is well studied by Gruzinski⁴², where he analyzed and criticized the maritime expansion in the XVI century. Colonial kingdoms, in its expansion, «annexed or sought to capture» territories outside of Europe. «This led to an unprecedented compression of distances, and an equally unheard-of acceleration of movements»⁴³, «as Europeans traveled farther and with greater frequency⁴⁴». These were never in just one direction as there was an active exchange between people: «European books took ship in Seville for Veracruz or the port of Callao at the foot of the Andes, while the first Chinese books and Mexican codices disembarked in the ports of the Iberian Peninsula»⁴⁵.

Understanding such exchanges is important because as the European conception of the world expanded, the need to keep control of their reality arose, creating the act of collecting objects in order to gain a certain degree of knowledge⁴⁶. The period analyzed is inserted between what's known as the «age of discovery» and the creation of modern nation-states, therefore the early modern period «opened new horizons of movement and possibility, while simultaneously prompting the desire to establish boundaries, to demarcate and dominate»⁴⁷. Therefore, collecting became an activity «among the social and educated elite» filling the leisure hours and even becoming, for some, their main life activity. The

⁴⁰ Gruzinski 2017, p. 52.

⁴¹ Gruzinski 2017, p. 30; Markey 2016, p. 11.

⁴² Gruzinski 2017, p. 50.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ Findlen 1994, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Gruzinski 2017, p. 50.

⁴⁶ Findlen 1994, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Bleichmar, Martin 2015, p. 618.

creation of a museum, during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth century, was «an attempt to manage the empirical explosion of materials that wider dissemination of ancient texts, increased travel, voyages of discovery, and more systematic forms of communication and exchange had produced»⁴⁸.

«The Italian contribution to the discovery, understanding, and ‘creation’ of America began well before Columbus’ voyage. Italian missionaries and merchants regularly traded across» vast territories of the world «during the late Middle Ages, traveling to China, around the Mediterranean, and along the west coast of Africa, helping to create a European desire for exotic, foreign wares and commodities, as well as the potential routes by which to get them»⁴⁹.

Furthermore, in art history with the exception of Heikamp, «Traditional accounts of the 16th century turn to the Atlantic have no space for the reality of Tuscan ports and ships engaged in long-distance trade» according to Brian Brege⁵⁰. In this well-known narrative, the Italian states that dominated the medieval Mediterranean were supposed to have been left behind. In reality, Tuscans were fascinated by the prospects of the Americas⁵¹, and especially of Brazil, but encountered persistent obstacles which were neither technical nor financial, but political ones⁵².

In reality, «Italian merchant capital, and specially that of Genoese, Florentine, and Venetian merchants, bakers, and investors, therefore played a crucial role in the Iberian exploration of the Atlantic, often funding expedition originating in other states» like the travels of Christopher Columbus, John Cabot, Giovanni da

⁴⁸ Findlen 1994, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Horodowich 2017, p. 20.

⁵⁰ Brege 2017, p. 205.

⁵¹ to read more on the subject of individual Tuscan’s endeavours and how they helped Portugal colonize Brazil, refer to the whole article by Brege.

⁵² Brege 2017, p. 206.

Verrazzano, Antonio Pigafetta and others, whom all worked for Monarchies such as Spanish, English and French⁵³. Elizabeth Horodowich (2017), following Charles Verlinden, argues that «many features of Iberian colonialism in the New World», such as convoy navigation or the development of sugarcane farming (including the use of [enslaved Africans in] sugar production in both sides of the Atlantic), had Italian precedents. «Italian colonialism directly influenced Iberian colonialism, and Italian capital and experience in the colonial economy on the islands off the coast of West Africa in particular served as prototype for colonialism in the Americas».⁵⁴



Figura 2 - Theodor De Bry, etching in copperplate, visual representation of the port, in *Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae*, De Bry 1592, p. 18.

Since the Italian peninsula was «dominated by the Habsburgs and consisted of a variety of hybrid states that were culturally and politically both Italian and

⁵³Horodowich 2017, p. 19.

⁵⁴Horodowich 2017, p. 21.

Spanish», a great deal of «transcultural interactions» have often occurred between «individual Italian states and other cultures», as is the example of Florence with the Americas⁵⁵.

«Tuscany's close alliance with the Spanish Habsburgs», despite having received help in the return of the Medici to Florence in the 1530s after their exile, was not enough to allow the participation of extra-Iberian power in «making any outright break» for South-America⁵⁶, as Philip II of Spain had been watching the Florentine Duchy «with suspicion since the Sienese war in 1553-54» with continuous opposing of further expansion after Siena became part of the Duchy of Florence in 1557⁵⁷. Grand Duke Ferdinando I had interest to plant a Tuscan colony on Brazilian shores, but was unsuccessful. The flourishing individual Florentines in early colonial Brazil and the ultimate failure of Medici projects there reveal the possibilities and limitations of Tuscan engagement with the Iberian colonies⁵⁸.

According to Brege, the relationship between the grand duchy of Tuscany and the Spanish Habsburgs was fraught, making «ultimately» the Florentines «neither trusted enough to secure open commerce nor powerful enough to challenge Iberian restrictions»⁵⁹. Still it allowed for single individuals, like the Giraldi family of bankers, to move to Portugal and, through the investment of capital – that is, helping financially with the colonization and development of the *sesmarias*, land captaincies “donated” to dignitaries by the Portuguese kingdom to ensure colonization – to access Brazilian land. Over the years, the family became part of the Portuguese nobility without losing ties with Florence, thus opening the

⁵⁵ Horodowich 2017, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Brege 2017, p. 208.

⁵⁷ Galdy 2009, p. 39.

⁵⁸ Brege 2017, p. 206.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 208.

opportunity, in 1586, for Duke Ferdinando I to request that, should any *curiosity* happen to pass by the hands of Francesco Giraldi in Brazil, to be sent to Florence.

A letter from the Medici ambassador in Madrid, Vincenzo di Andrea Alamanni, in



Figura 3 - Cortés receives on shipboard the envoys of Montezuma, whom offers him gifts, in Florence, Medicea Laurenziana Library; Florentine Codex, book XII, ca.1570. Russo 2014, p.25.

1588, reports that Giraldi sent a case to the Duke, which was on the way⁶⁰.

1.3.: Gifts and Purchases of Objects From the New World: What it Means to Have Them in a 17th Century Collection.

The exchange of gifts among royalty, aristocrats and subjects was an important part of the monarchical social life, and such «acts of giving and accepting gifts were [...] shaped by disparities of power, wealth and persona»⁶¹. It was through gift-giving⁶² that relationships were built and cemented, thus a wrong gift could be a potential source of trouble for such connections.

Maurice Godelier, in his *l'Enigme du don* (1996), brings forward the hypothesis that to donate something has a double meaning: what makes one give a gift is, precisely, that giving obliges one person to the other. To which it means:

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 210, note 15.

⁶¹ Butters 2008, p. 244.

⁶² See Arjun Appadurai (1986) and Maurice Godelier (1996) for a more in-depth reading on the significance of gift exchange between people and societies.

gift giving, to donate, is «a voluntary transfer of something that belongs to one person to somebody, that one thinks cannot be refused»⁶³.

The such is still valid for gifts from a ruler from the New World. Alessandra Russo describes, in her «*The Untranslatable Image*, how Cortés reaped benefits from feather and golden gifts given to him by the Aztec king Montezuma in his first trip to Mexico in 1517»⁶⁴.

In her research, Russo has found out that Montezuma gifted feather dresses and other things to show Cortés «a collection that demonstrates the power of his dominion»⁶⁵, denoting that the ruler's power was so great that he could choose to give these objects away to the newcomers.

Gifts to the Conquistador could not, then be reduced to a gesture of submission from the Mesoamerican tribes. Instead, these donations allow us to envisage another logic of contact, which, according to Russo, was very different from the surrender of the indigenous world to the Western world⁶⁶ - It was a political move, just like the ones between European courts, of which we'll talk later on.

«The gifts to Cortés certainly played a role in the reelaboration of the conquest. Cortés was repeating the same type of gift to his king. Whether they were military *accountrements* or sacred headdresses, these very first objects marked the shift from pre- to postconquest»⁶⁷.

In her *The Uses and Abuses of Gifts*, Butters states that one could «deduce a good deal about [...] donors and recipients» through the «layered meaning» of

⁶³ Godelier 1996, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Russo 2014, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Russo 2014, p. 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 26.

gifts, as it was a way to «gauge the relative position of each in whatever context seemed most appropriate» in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries⁶⁸.

Choosing an object and gifting it was «invariably» attached to risks of acceptance, refusal and reciprocation, «and no advice from revered texts or from experienced officials with good inside knowledge could entirely remove them»⁶⁹. Among the characteristics of gifts given and reciprocated in early modern princely circles, luxury and rarity are frequent, «and some items were phenomenally expensive, or believed to be so»⁷⁰.

When researching the Grand Duke Ferdinando I's inventories, Butters noticed that «the pervasiveness, variety, and sporadic traceability» of these kinds of gifts, and even more of their reciprocation, «make their precise scale and cost impossible to calculate. And yet an awareness of the larger framework of donations which encompassed the kinds of objects administered by princely wardrobes, and indeed by those of most prosperous households, can help one to assess their value as gifts by providing a range of alternatives against which their costs and materials, forms and uses, novelty, social overtones and cultural connotations can be measured»⁷¹.

1.4.: A Critic to the Concept of «Exotic».

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines *exotic* as an adjective that means «unusual and exciting because of coming from a country that is far away»⁷².

⁶⁸ Butters 2008, p. 249.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 250.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 252.

⁷¹ Butters 2008, p.251.

⁷² «Exotic», in Cambridge English Dictionary,

<<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/exotic>> visited on 23.05.2022

Benjamin Schmidt, historian and author of *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (2015)⁷³ explained further this definition by introducing its' chronology:

«The use of the word itself—exotic—and its meaning also expanded over [the 1700s]. Along with its traditional and customary deployment in natural history to designate non-native species, and its technical use in certain other fields of inquiry to describe things foreign or extrinsic to (“outside of”) a defined indigenoussness, the word exotic came to indicate by the mid-eighteenth century things that had not only foreign but also delightful attributes—things that possessed alien and perhaps curious qualities, yet also things that had wondrous and pleasurable features».

Therefore we can say that objects coming from the other side of the European world – across the ocean - which contained uncommon qualities for what was known in the European style, and caused delight in their observer, were considered exotic. Items defined as *all'indiana, delle Indie* («Indian style» or «from the Indies») have been thoroughly analyzed⁷⁴ by contemporary scholars and is a characteristic to look for when reading early modern *Kunstammern* inventories, as generalization from who wrote the entries in the Fifteenth through Eighteenth century is predominant; examples of which will be analyzes further on chapter two.

According to Arthur McGregor in *Collecting East and West*, in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries the wars between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires are reflected in the vast collection of armor present in European collections, objects which were taken as booty. This characterizes and shines a

⁷³ Schmidt 2015, p. 325.

⁷⁴Keating, Markey 2011, p. 284.

light in the «belligerent nature of a great deal of contact in this period, with arms and armor predominating»⁷⁵. Therefore, I tend to believe that such collecting behaviour was also what characterized the presence of shields, axes, knives, spears and other pieces of armor from the New World, since gathering booties of war was commonplace.

But what made artefacts from the Americas to be considered *exotica*? Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, in their essay '*Indian' Objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories* (2011), emphasize «the novel and marvelous aspects of the plants, animals, and objects living among or produced by these foreign cultures»⁷⁶. The term "exotica" was known in the 18th century France to refer to an «epithet qualifying unfamiliar flora or rare objects from foreign places»⁷⁷.

Based on that, we have the term "exoticism", which was «first coined in the 19th century, and was used, not to refer to objects, but to the sense of nostalgia which they produced in the mind of the beholder»⁷⁸. Peter Mason, then, presents the argument that «the stimulation of the senses which led to the feeling of exoticism was above all prompted by the discovery of the New World in the Western hemisphere; while the Orient stimulated the taste of the collector, it was America which stimulated the thirst for adventure»⁷⁹. Therefore, the idea of the exotic is the desire to explore what we not yet know, and be able to compare it to our own experiences.

On the other hand, Edward Said, in his study of Orientalism, demonstrated that «to talk about Orientalism is to talk about power», and it is necessary to reflect

⁷⁵ Mcgregor 2013, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Keating, Markey 2011, p. 285.

⁷⁷ Mason 1991, p. 167.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 167.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

upon the historical semantics of terms like "barbarism," "exoticism," and "Orientalism" since it is indispensable for the serious study of these concepts in isolation⁸⁰. Mason too proceeds to affirm that «it becomes hard to see how any study of the exotic or of exoticism could ever be merely descriptive, for the exotic and exoticism are themselves discursive effects, produced and reproduced in a constant process of signification»⁸¹.

We can conclude from these reflections that the term 'exotic' could also refer to the unknown, to «what cannot be reduced to the familiar», and is an object that «resists full assimilation» from an external gaze⁸².

«For some time now, numerous studies have extensively documented the very attitude with which European man initially came into contact with American reality and faced it at the roots of the rise and spread of these fantastic beliefs [for Europeans]; an attitude that, to a large extent, will not fail to be shared by nature scholars and to visibly mark its research. The phenomenon, now widely known, is the typical one that regularly recurs whenever there is an impact with the new, when a different reality must be described. Therefore, to remain solely in the field of geographical explorations, it did not manifest itself only on the occasion of the discovery of America; previously, for example, it had been responsible for forming in Europe, on the basis of travelers' reports, a certain and very long-lasting image of the East»⁸³.

Those who landed on American soil were not culturally virgins; there are a series of "mental schemes, ingrained conditioning and habits, cultural sedimentations that ensure every activity is seen - and then reported - through a more or less distorting filter of the old, of the 'already known'"; therefore the

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid*, pp. 167-168.

⁸² Mason 1991, p. 170.

⁸³ Olmi 1992, p. 218, (the translation is mine).

explorers of the continent «lived this experience without being able to disregard the secular coordinates provided to them by the elaboration of the Christian and Classical tradition»⁸⁴.

The nature of the New World was generally described as «entirely new and extraordinarily exuberant» because it arose out of nowhere, it was an unknown «natural reality»⁸⁵. Which and this exuberance was what caused the phenomenon described by Olmi (1992):

«(...)Whether it is the geography of America, its flora and fauna, or the nature of its inhabitants, a constant pattern seems to recur in European reactions. From a certain point onward, it is as if the shutters were lowering; as if, with so much to see and assimilate and understand, the effort suddenly became too great, and Europeans retreated into the twilight of the intellectual world of their tradition'. This difficulty in accepting, after an initial moment of enthusiasm, the news coming from the west, adapting one's own mental schemes to them, giving up to root convictions, was generally widespread, but certainly the sector of naturalistic research, or rather, of naturalistic publications, was one of those in which it manifested itself more clearly»⁸⁶.

He underlies how the bigger difference the new represents to the old paradigm, the less the society of seventeenth century was interested in exploring it. The overwhelming amount of information to be sorted and published, shared, which defied what was already known was so pressing that researchers and amateurs did the only thing they could to cope: closed themselves to it. Never the less, in some cases the thirst for information persisted, and the curiosity about

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 218.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 231.

⁸⁶ Olmi 1992, p. 232.

materials was not curbed by the onslaught of new coming from across the Oceans, culminating in some precious collections of items from all over the world.

Because such concepts of Exoticism were elaborated in the 18th and 19th centuries, it is impossible to talk about it before the Age of Enlightenment⁸⁷. Yet, because many authors that are used as reference for this study use terms like «The New World» and «exotic», to include this interlude was a necessity as well as a way to make communication clearer, and propose the substitution by the words «Non-European» and «from faraway», as well as «Mesoamerican» and variations of «from the Americas».

⁸⁷ Mason 1991, p. 168.

CHAPTER 2: The Armeria in the Medici Inventories.

The *Guardaroba Medicea*, that is, the administration of movable goods belonging to the Medici, documented their furniture, vessels, paintings, sculpture, weapons, clothing and linen, jewels and musical instruments. Through the analysis of this archival material, it is possible to trace the recording of acquisition of not only artworks, but also goods and other collectibles, and the movement of the collection's items between the many Medici residences. At the same time, this examination allows for gathering information about the «consequences of historical events on Medici collecting practices and the individual tastes of Medici rulers»⁸⁸.

The Medici collection of *rare* items started well before the XVII century. For Cosimo I and Francesco I, art and nature went hand in hand. In fact, the *Guardaroba Nuova*, on the third floor of *Palazzo Vecchio*, was the place where Cosimo I held his «most precious goods from around the world» and where he could insert his knowledge about the New World along with all else he knew,⁸⁹ as inside the room were stored artistic commissions, diplomatic gifts and purchased

⁸⁸ Vaccari 1997, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁹ Markey 2016, p. 37.

objects that were before in Palazzo Medici⁹⁰. This study focuses on objects that came from far-away lands, since the Medici collected them long before it became a practice between aristocrats and men of knowledge.

It was by the will of Ferdinand I, who had just become Grand Duke, that arms and weapons of prestige, also including non-European ones, were taken from his personal *Guardaroba*, items which could constitute a «sequence of singular vestige» to be displayed as an ideal continuation of the jewels and rare objects contained in the Tribuna created by Buontalenti⁹¹.

Through the inventories of the *Guardaroba* from 1560 through 1747, one can partially follow the development of the Armeria rooms, a particular part of the Medici collection where, in 1656, are recorded ninethousand-fivehundred pieces with different provenance and use⁹². Although not many objects from the collection of the Armeria have reached our times, it is possible to trace the inventory entries for two kinds of artefacts that have remained in the Medici Collection through the Eighteenth Century until our days: tables 1 and 2 (pp. 80-84) document the Tupinambà mantles (table 1) and the Tupinambà hunting bows (table 2), are listed by year, inventory number and placement through the years.

From 1631 to 1641, we can see the diversity of non-European items (some possibly Mesoamerican, others Japanese), in the Armeria inventories.

1631⁹³, «Inventories of weapons and other»

c. 15v

«Quattro archi Indiani di legno che dua neri, e dua rossi senza corde n° 4»

Four wooden Indian bows, two of which are black, and two of which are red without cords n° 4

«Dieci frecce lunghe per detti archi n° 10»

⁹⁰ Rosen 2009, p. 285.

⁹¹ Conforti, Funis 2011, p. 43.

⁹² Vaccari 1997, pp. 11-12.

⁹³ ASF, GM 710, ins. 8.

Ten long arrows for said bows n° 10

14 October 1631-1636⁹⁴

Armeria's Inventory

c. 25v

«Una armadura di legnio Indiano cioè petto estiena listrato doro aonde, con Girello fatto ascarsille simile e maniche di tela nera con più penne, e un cappello di legnio e una maschera etcetera tutto fa un fancioccio n° 1»

An armour made of Indian wood that is a chest and back plate with wavy golden grooves, with Girello made of similar tasset and sleeves of black cloth with many feathers, and a wooden hat and a mask etc. that makes a puppet n° 1

«Tre zimare di penne rosse alla Indiana e altri colori e per cimiero penne di struzzolo non assette e sotto a una di dette zimare vie una camiciola di panno grosso colorato n° 3»

Three coats of red Indian feathers and other colours, and for the crest, untrimmed ostrich's feathers and under one of said coats is a blouse of coloured, coarse cloth n° 3

c. 33v

«Un cappello a foggia di campana alla Indiana n° 1»

An Indian style bell-shaped hat n° 1

«Un cappello di penne alla Indiana con una coda da cavalli etcetera serve per insegna alla loro usanza n° 1»

An Indian style feathered hat with a horse tail etc. that is used as distinctive mark according to their customs n° 1

11 May 1639 - 22 March 1641⁹⁵

Armeria's Inventory

c. 5r

In the First Room

«Undici archi all'Indiana, di più sorte e grandezze n° 11»

Eleven Indian bows of many sorts and sizes n° 11 In the Second Room

c. 6v

In the Second Room

⁹⁴ ASF, GM 513.

⁹⁵ ASF, GM 539.

«Tre veste all'Indiana di penne rosse di Pappagallo, con penne in capo di penne di struzzolo, e bretta di paglia, coperta di penne di pappagallo come la vesta n° 3»

Three Indian style robes of red parrot feathers with ostrich feathers at the head, and a straw hat covered with parrot feathers like the robe n° 3

«Una camiciolina all'Indiana vergata di più colori, sotto a una di dette veste n° 1»

A small Indian style shirt with a bar-like pattern of many colours under one of the aforementioned robes n° 1

«Un' Armadura d'osso di pesce, all'Indiana vernicata, petto schiena, e spallacci, scarsella e cosciali vernicata di verde, e altri colori, et il petto e stiena listrato d'oro a onde, come li spallacci, tocchi d'oro, e maniche di tela nera, con penne, e un' cappello d'osso similmente con una maschera che tutto fa un fantoccio n° 1»

An armour of fish bone, varnished in the Indian way, consisting of chest, back, shoulder straps, tassets and thighs varnished green and other colors, and the chest is lined with wavy golden grooves, like the shoulder straps, and gilt, and black canvas sleeves, with feathers, and a bone hat similarly with a mask that together makes a puppet n° 1

c. 7r

«Un berrettone all'Indiana di panno rosso increspato, con un frontone d'argento dorato, con un cristallo grosso e altre pietre rosse, e turchese la maggior parte false n° 1»

A large Indian hat made of rippled red cloth, with a gilt silver pediment, adorned with a large crystal and other red stones, and turquoise, mostly fake n° 1

85 c. 7v

«Uno scudo all'Indiana, di giunchi, coperti di rosso e altri colori con una borchia in mezzo, di ferro lustro n° 1»

An Indian style shield, made of reeds, covered in red and other colors with a stud in the middle, of lustrous iron n° 1

«Dua tondi di guoio commesso di più colori, all'Indiana n° 2»

Two rounds of leather of several colors, made in the Indian way n° 2

c. 8r

«Dua remi di legno Indiano n° 2»

Two oars made of Indian wood n° 2

«Dua regoli all'Indiana lavorati e intagliati in cima lunghi n° 2»

Two long Indian style rulers carved and incised on the ends n° 2

c. 9r

«Du' Arme all'Indiana di legno Indiano, che una con nappe di roba Indiana n° 2»

Two Indian style weapons of Indian wood, one of which has tassels of Indian cloth n° 2

«Quattro frecce all'Indiana lunghe n° 4»

Four long Indian arrows n° 4

From this list, we can see that in ten years the inventories span, that weapons, armour and other items were displayed together, in a way to show the same theme among them: otherness. It is, of course, with a grain of salt that we consider objects made of «Indian wood» to be Indian, as well as those classified as «Indian style», which could indicate imitations, although there is good reason to believe that their importance was due to the distance traveled and that they constituted a testimony of faraway costumes like the warrior armour made of fishbone.

It is also perceptible a clear affinity with Mediterranean luxury objects: the person who made the inventories was able to apply the lexicon for 1500 and 1600's armour, as well as underline the details which they would have underlined for local objects (gilded parts, gemstones, other quality materials and high quality techniques). It is not by chance that we can find European arms and armours in these rooms, like the «suits of armour from Charles V to Alessandro de Medici, Persian armour for horses and knights, [...] protective body armour for the horsemen, [...] and armour belonging to Cosimo I and his sons Francesco and Ferdinando»⁹⁶.

There is a possibility of interpreting the Non-European objects in an alternative way: as *rarietà* or *artificio*, depending on how the objects were made. They could be held in the collection because they were considered unique pieces,

⁹⁶ Galdy 2009, p. 51.

difficult to obtain, «rare» in all accounts. Or, the same items could be considered by the Grand Dukes a testimony of *artificium*, that is to say, the highest technical quality in the production of the item, wheter it was a compliment to the genius of the artisan, or the ingenuity of a population.

Luciano Berti (1922-2010), one of the first modern historians to study the *studiolo* of Francesco I and former director of the Galleria degli Uffizi, suggested that the objects displayed in the Armeria, «antique and modern weapons from every country» connected to the decoration of «artisans at work on objects including swords, cannon, and barrels; details including *putti* lounging with piles of armour and elaborate vases emphasize objects made of metals»⁹⁷ on the ceilings of the Armeria rooms, alluding to their function.

In his *Saggio istorico della Real galleria di Firenze* (1779), Pelli Bencivenni recalls how the ceilings of the Armeria rooms in the Uffizi were decorated, talking first about the creation of the Galleria degli Uffizi and the Tribuna by Francesco I in 1581, and then goes on:

«I say that not long after [the creation of the Tribuna] were painted the rooms where a variety of arms were collected. These are very vague paintings, elegant, and curious, but with regret I could not discover precisely when they were made. At least three of these decorations are ancient, while another which is small and now the Drawing Cabinet has a very different style and is less beautiful, must surely be the most modern because among the many stories this one is surrounded by six events, one of which belonging to the Grand Duke Ferdinando II».

To say, the ceilings of the four rooms were decorated at the time of their

⁹⁷ Berti 1993, p. 9; Alberts 2018, p. 208.

creation, «three of these decorations are ancient»⁹⁸, while the last room has a modern wall painting, being dated at least from the government of Ferdinando II from 1621 until 1670.

In what today is room 21 of the Uffizi Galleries, we can see one of those «ancient» ceiling paintings. The frescoes by Ludovico Buti still show the original decoration of the Uffizi armory, created by Ferdinando de Medici in 1588. These rooms completed, together with the Cabinet for mathematical instruments, the frescoed decoration of the east corridor and the tribune begun by Francesco I. According to Valentina Conticelli and Francesca De Luca (2018), Ferdinando I would have liked to leave an «evident sign like that of his brother in the place where he would certainly have taken the foreign ambassadors» on the occasion of his marriage to Christina of Lorraine in 1589⁹⁹.

The ceiling of room 21 is the best known of those in the armory, due to the presence of representative images of the New World – including birds and native costumes – inspired by the Mexican Codex (called the Florentine Codex) present in the Laurentian library in Florence from the end of the 17th century, written by the Franciscan friar Bernardino di Sahagùn in two languages: *Nahuatl* and Spanish.

In the center of the ceiling is a *tondo*, dedicated to a procession of natives dressed in feather headdresses carrying their heads on a litter. At the four corners of the central rectangle, the four continents are represented: clockwise starting from the lower left side, Asia, Europe, America and Africa. Among these, four battle scenes are painted, with «fights between peoples from all over the

⁹⁸ Pelli-Bencivenni 1779, https://www.memofonte.it/home/files/pdf/SAGGIO_ISTORICO_1779.pdf, pp. 17-18 del pdf.

⁹⁹ Conticelli, De Luca 2018, p. 381.

world»¹⁰⁰. A battle is depicted between Asia and Africa «at a bridge with the Medici troops assaulting the Turkish ones» which is identified as the Rotta dei Turchi in Piombino. Under this combat you can see an oval with two elephants¹⁰¹.

The next scene, between Asia and Europe, is more problematic to identify: it probably represents a fight between European and Eastern peoples, possibly Portuguese and Ottomans. Above the central *tondo* we see a battle of peoples of the New World against the Spanish, below this, we can see an oval with a warrior and a rhinoceros. The last scene, located between Africa and America, represents a battle between two non-European populations. We distinguish African warriors who perhaps fight against the Turks¹⁰².



Figura 4 – Ludovico Buti, *Battle between Conquistadors and Native warriors*, detail, fresco, 1588, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Armeria room 21, on the ceiling.

Along the diagonals of the ceiling, there are tree branches inhabited by tropical and rare birds as well as representations of Turkish and American animals and warriors. At the ends of the ceiling there were probably two other battle

¹⁰⁰ Conticelli, De Luca 2018, p. 381.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 382.

scenes, one of them now lost and replaced with a view of Florence after the bombing of 1944, while the other surviving depicts a leader in armour, perhaps from the 15th century, and at the bottom a large battlefield near a city. You can see that the clothing of some warriors in the foreground characterize Ottoman troops.

According to Markey (2016), it is unlikely that the European representations of the Americas come from any other source than the Florentine Codex¹⁰³. This statement is confirmed when we compare a specific figure of the codex with an indigenous warrior painted by Buti on the ceiling among the grotesques.



Figura 5 - Warrior, detail, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Codice Laurenziana Mediceo Palatino 220 (Florentine Codex), ca. 1560. From Markey, p.100

¹⁰³ Heikamp 1972, p. 20-21.



Figura 6 - Ludovico Buti, Amerindian warrior, detail, fresco, 1588, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Armeria room 21, on the ceiling.

Markey continues to say that the Italian artist copied not only the costume and headdress but also the stance and weapons, with a little tweak in the angle of the spear and some of the clothing details, proving that he had access to the Florentine Codex already in 1588. Other figurations, on the other hand, suggest that he based himself in many resources circulating throughout Europe in single sheets or books¹⁰⁴.

Since the Armeria's ceiling represents battles around the world, ones that did not even include the Medici, with the costumes, weapons and skin colour acting as ethnographic markers of places, the presence of them in the iconology of the room is quite interesting. Markey suggests that the images of New World battles among this display in a room at the court were useful at creating a narrative

¹⁰⁴ Markey 2016, p. 100.

political parallel between Medici battles against the Turks and Spain's conquest of the Americas¹⁰⁵.

Markey argues that Grottesque decorations were «an ideal and familiar pictorial mode» for the ceilings in the Armeria rooms, since they were a common decorative motif in Italy by the late 1580's and the other hallways in the Uffizi had been decorated like that by order of Francesco I. She proceeds to remark that Grottesques were part of representation of an «encyclopedic aesthetic» which evokes «both the past and the novel discoveries of the present in a fantastic form». Such a statement is proved by the models Buti used to paint the decorations: Ligozzi's drawings of unknown tropical plants and birds as his source, as well as borrowing from European and American imagery, mixing them to create what Gruzinski called «a *mestizo* process» of ethnography with fantasy¹⁰⁶.



Figura 7 – Ludovico Buti, *two unknown armies in battle* and the American birds painted with the grotesques decoration, fresco, 1588, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Armeria room 21, on the ceiling.

Buti was inspired by different media when creating the frescoes. One of them was print; most prominently, the ones by Jan Sadeler's from 1581 portraying the four continents. So much so, that both images of Europe and Africa are a copy of

¹⁰⁵*Ibid*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid*, p. 105.

Sadeler's prints, while Asia and America are reproduced in reverse. The rhinoceros and warrior oval under the battle between Spanish troops and American warriors could also be a direct reproduction from Durer's Rhino print image, as, according to Markey, «the rhino's skin resembles armour»¹⁰⁷. In addition to that, images of battles which happened in the New World were widespread in European courts, especially of natives in battle. It is documented in books by André Thevet *Les singularitez de la France antartique* (1558) and Jean de Léry's 1578 *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil*, both including prints and woodcuts of Tupinambà people fighting. The feather clothing used by the natives was documented by François Deserps (1562) in France and by Joost Amman (1577) in Germany¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁷ Markey 2016, p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 109.



Figura 8 – Ludovico Buti, *Conquistadores and Native American warriors*, detail: *African warrior with rhinoceros*, fresco, Florence, Uffizi Galleries , ceiling in room 21.

The images of the New World in the Armeria connects the Medici to the Americas, especially when analyzing the parallel between the battle scenes of Spanish and Mesoamerican warriors with the directly opposite battle of the Medici against the Turks. With this positioning, Buti creates «a symbolic spatial link» between both battles and puts the Medici warriors on the same level as the Spanish invasion to the New World, celebrating the ties between the Medici and the Spain and the Holy Roman Empire¹⁰⁹.

The iconographic analysis underlines the power of showing off war objects from faraway lands as a means of demonstrating political connections available to

¹⁰⁹ Markey 2016, p. 115.

the owner of the collection, manifest through the acquisition and display of weapons from (among others) the Americas and Northern Africa. According to Galdy (2009) the display was usually arranged in a way to emulate the presentation of figurative sculptures. In this regard, she argues convincingly that this kind of material was appropriate for the Grand Dukes, who by assembling the objects from far and wide drew on their connotation as «foreign and alarming pieces» from the New World¹¹⁰.

The Medici were in a powerful place when we analyze the display of Mesoamerican objects. They had the fortune and the connections – through family and politics – to gather an impressive number of artefacts.

2.1. Introduction to the Medici's Armeria Collection: A Brief History

«After some serious setbacks, [the] ambitions [to be like the “princely houses of Europe”] had come to fruition with the election of Cosimo I de' Medici as Duke of Florence in 1537 and with his marriage to the Spanish princess Eleonora of Toledo in 1539». Years later, Cosimo was also granted the Grand Duchy of Tuscany by pope Pius V in 1569¹¹¹.

Cosimo I and his sons Francesco and Ferdinando understood the importance of «cultural sponsorships, the messages displayed through architecture and artistic commissions and the «judicious exchange of diplomatic gifts and favours with Europe's powerful families and with the Papacy».¹¹² All these negotiations connected them further with their «politics to the *modus operandi* of the main branch of the family during the previous century»¹¹³. The Medici became so

¹¹⁰ Galdy 2009, p. 43-44.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 38.

¹¹² *Ibid*.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 39.

famous due to their collecting and sponsorship of the arts from «the 15th century onwards, that their cultural politics were sometimes regarded as one of the main tools used to fulfil the family's dynastic and political ambitions»¹¹⁴.

Andrea Galdy presents this phase in such terms: to maintain the *Pax Medicea*, that is, the «central premise of Medici propaganda» that only the Medici family could preserve peace in Florence, the Medici strove to unify Florence and Tuscany under a shared heritage and common language, as well as by the cultural politics promoted by the Dukes. «Great warriors or not, the Medici certainly attempted to imitate other European leading families' collections and lifestyle. Although collecting antiquities was a good way in which to emulate their peers, collections of arms and armour were no less important. A prince was supposed to be a man of arms and letters, and the princely pastimes of hunting and jousting were an essential part of aristocratic life». Beyond being a passionate hunter, the Duke Cosimo I «took good care to have himself painted in armour in his official portraits sent out many a time to his peers in Europe»¹¹⁵.

In the *Guardaroba Nuova* of *Palazzo Vecchio*, «a trapezoidal room containing a late-Sixteenth-century cycle of fifty-three geographical maps of the earth affixed in two tiers to the front of a series of wooden cabinets»¹¹⁶ was the place inspired by the late medieval *studioli*: «small, womb-like spaces» which valued contemplation as well as collecting through a complex, humanistic decoration. According to Rosen, the aim of this space was for it to be a «public theatre for the court's cosmography and its power to collect and sort the duchy's finest objects»¹¹⁷, that is, to manage the treasures that came to belong to the Dukes.

¹¹⁴ Galdy 2009, p. 39.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹⁶ Rosen 2009, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

It was in the cabinets (or *armadi*) and chests that the objects were «kept either inside of those or hung on walls, or were «tidied away under the cupboards in an attempt to keep order»¹¹⁸, Cosimo (like his predecessors) kept a large number of arms and weapons, having them in «close vicinity to portraits and other paintings, antiquities in diverse materials, clothing, and wall hangings». Such possessions could be seen by visitors to the palace and clearly testified to the wealth of power, as well as connections to the family's past. The *Guardaroba* was so eclectic that it could readily seem unorganized or senseless. The organization of the space certainly was less arranged than a museum display. Many of the objects made a reference to the owner's princely rank, arms and suits of armour being the most prominent, some of which had been worn in battles or tournaments, some others had been booty from military conflicts where the side of the owner was victorious, and many of which had arrived as diplomatic gifts. Together, they had the scope refer to «the collector's might and power»¹¹⁹.

When Cosimo I, also known as Cosimo the Great, decided to expand the office building which housed the various departments and councils of the Florentine Duchy¹²⁰ - the very reason why today the premises are called *Gli Uffizi* - the project was taken by Giorgio Vasari in the 1560s. The following Medici Grand Duke, Francesco I, amplified and developed the Gallery's display project¹²¹.

It was only at the beginning of the 1581 until 1584 that Francesco I, Cosimo's successor and eldest son, commissioned his architect Buontalenti to create the decoration and the display of the Tribuna by changing one section in «the top floor corridor that forms a horseshoe around the inner courtyard into what was

¹¹⁸ Galdy 2009, p. 42.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹²¹ Turpin 2013, p. 86.

then called a 'galleria', [the space originally designed by Vasari]. A gallery was the most up-to-date form of display for statues; a long hallway of loggia - the origins of which can be traced to France. In the spacious corridor, airy and well-lit, the artworks and the visitors were protected from the elements, while antiquities in large scale or *all'antica* inspired statues were shown alongside portraits of famous men and women¹²².

The *Guardaroba Nuova* a *Palazzo Vecchio* and the Tribuna at the Uffizi were part of the initial project, but only the genius of Francesco I with regard to what to display in the Tribuna¹²³ and later, Ferdinando I's completion and development of the Armeria, were fundamental for the establishment of the artifacts collection at the Uffizi.

«The creation of the Tribuna marks an important stage in the development of the grand dukes' concept of collecting and display»¹²⁴. By the end of the 16th century and beyond, the exhibition in the main corridor and the Tribuna of the Uffizi consisted of statues of all sizes, ancient Roman and Etruscan or Tuscan, and *all'antica*, and many paintings.

In 1588 Ferdinando I added the Armeria to the Gallery. The display of arms at the Armeria rooms was composed of arms, weapons, armoury and «exotic objects from the eastern and western parts of the world»¹²⁵. There, in three rooms adjacent to the Tribuna on the Oriental corridor, the Grand Duke decided to insert his arms and armours collection – where it stayed for another two centuries until the 1770's, when it was dismantled and the objects were almost completely

¹²² Galdy 2009, p. 47.

¹²³ Turpin 2013, p. 84.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 84.

¹²⁵ Galdy 2009, p. 48.

lost¹²⁶.

«Where available the exhibition of exotic objects such as weapons “alla damaschina” and of Aztec feather coats created a counterpoint to the display of European weapons, documented the wide range of interests of the owner, and visualized a sphere of influence that was by no means limited by the borders of Europe or to those parts of the world formerly belonging to the Roman Empire».¹²⁷

As Galdy (2009) argues, princely families like the Habsburgs in Schloss Ambras and the Della Rovere a Urbino would have a collection of arms and weapons from different periods of time, as well as weapons taken from enemy nations (like the Ottomans).

«Certainly, in both cases, antiquities and weapons, the number and quality of the pieces spoke in favour of the Medici discernment, power of acquisition, and aspirations. (...) the Armeria also contained a number of rare objects of exotic provenance whose value was enhanced by the geographical distance, in a similar way that antiquities were regarded as precious for their chronological distance».¹²⁸

That is to say, the value given to the objects from Mesoamerica came from their origin in historical episodes, belonging to famous people, or being traditional clothing from other cultures (of which the 1500 and 1600 are very sensitive during masked festivities, as we will see further along) they were regarded as precious due to the long distance and the difficulty of obtaining them,

¹²⁶ Vaccari 1997, pp. 335-337.

¹²⁷ Galdy 2009, pp. 42-43.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 49.

which reinforced the power of the Grand Dukes in showing their economic and political influences and connections.

Apart from the inventories, we also have a description of the Armeria rooms written by Cinelli in 1677-1681, reproduced by Heikamp in its entirety. The «descrizione della galleria del Serenissimo Granduca»¹²⁹ contains a detailed description of how the Uffizi was organized and displayed in the last quarter of the 17th Century.

The Armeria held more than just a miscellany of arms and armour from Europe and Asia, alongside war trophies and bejeweled weapons. It was the importance given to the Mesoamerican items and their display right in the entrance of the first room that set the collection apart.

2.2. Book Guides Descriptions: Mesoamerican Objects in the Armeria

Francesco Bocchi wrote in 1591 *Bellezze di Firenze*, a small guide which contained a description of the *Galleria degli Uffizi*, where a contribution of Filippo Pigafetta mentions the Armeria in his long list of «singular and marvelous things» of Florence¹³⁰:

«In here the rooms open/& the arms' rooms where are gathered antiques of offense/ & diffense of each nation /& the most exquisite modern ones, even from the New World/ & of India/ & the light-est of Persian steel /& knights».

¹²⁹ Barocchi, Ragionieri 1983, pp. 491-518.

¹³⁰ Bocchi 1591, pp.41-42: "Quivi presso le stanze s'aprono, & le sale dell'armi, dove sono raccolte l'antiche da offensione, & difesa d'ogni natione, & le moderne più esquisite, fin anco del nuovo mondo, & dall'India, & le finissime persiane d'acciaio da pedone, & cavaliere; & di sotto stanno botteghe diverse da lavorarvi archibugi, & altre arme".

The objects were distributed in the three rooms following the Tribuna and a small cupboard in 1598, all under the responsibility of Anton Maria Bianchi, not to be confused with Giuseppe Bianchi, the writer of the 1768 catalogue of the Uffizi.¹³¹ This description attests that the items from Mesoamerica were front and center in the Armeria for only a selected number of visitors whom the Dukes gracefully allowed entrance.

The mention «from each nation» makes reference to the fact that the Dukes collected arms and armours from the known world: from Europe (German pieces of armour), Asia (Japanese pieces of armour and arms) and African (North-African weapons), as well as the newly discovered Americas.

In 1656, was built a new room of weapons» which he believes was the one that, at his time, was the third room containing some weapons and war instruments which were curious or precious¹³² after the Drawing Cabinet, and the one of Gems in the second room in the Oriental corridor¹³³.

Cinelli's expansion and commentary of Bocchi's *Bellezze di Firenze* in 1677 marked an important moment in the documentation of the Uffizi, as it provides an overview of how the display of the objects in the Gallery was organized. Heikamp comments on the book as «not being different from the travel literature of the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries» as well as being a substitute for written guides of the gallery¹³⁴.

¹³¹ Pelli-Bencivenni 1779, <https://www.memofonte.it/home/files/pdf/SAGGIO_ISTORICO_1779.pdf>, p. 32 note 242 del pdf.

¹³² Pelli Bencivenni 1779, p. 82, note XLVI: «L'impresa di Ferdinando II a cui appello è il Rosaio, col motto Gratia obvia, ultio quesita, e si vede nelle monete, e nelle medaglie di questo sovrano. Trovo poi fra i ricordi dell'archivio della Galleria, che nel 1656 fu montata una nuova stanza di armi, e credo sicuramente che abbia da intendersi di questa. Quivi ora è stato fissato il Gabinetto dei disegni, siccome nella seconda stanza quello delle terre, e nella terza quello delle armi, e istrumenti di guerra più curiosi, o ricchi, che sono restati alla Galleria.»

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Heikamp 1983, p. 470.

«The Gallery is [...] full of statues, mostly ancient Greek, transported there from Rome and other parts, of very noble paintings, and of very precious tools, of the most sovereign beauty, today it is truly a notable marvel in the world. In this are found the most exquisite artifices, and the most illustrious ornaments, and the most ingenious devices that can be made from human industry, devised by Bernardo Buontalenti, architect of the Great Duke Francesco, and also of Ferdinando. Hence, wandering the eye in so many beauties so different, so rare, so sublime in the supreme delight, it remains with the soul almost lost, like human industry beyond the course of earthly forces with an unaccustomed way, and admirable advances»¹³⁵.

Later, an illustrated inventory of the *Guardaroba* was made by Giuseppe Bianchi (1768), custodian of the Gallery, where he documents:

«Dalla parte verso l'Arno voltando pe'l corridor verso la mano manca c'è l'Armeria, ove molt'armi bizzarre, e cospicue, di menzione degna, si veggiono. Consiste questa in quattro stanze tutte d'ornamenti militari, per lo più antichi, addobbate: sono nella prima di queste, alle pareti, ventiquattro intere armature delle Amazzoni appese, ch'essendo quasi tutte scanalate hanno il petto assai gonfio acciocché l'armadura le mammelle non offendesse; sono vi ancora le schiene, braccioali, cosce, ed elmetti, tutte ben conservate co'loro scudi, cosa veramente degna e da stimarsi, essendo per tante centinaia d'anni conservate e mantenute»¹³⁶.

Bianchi describes the location of the Armeria rooms: towards the Arno River to the left, where many «bizarre» weapons which merit mention can be seen. In the four rooms (marked 20-23) one can see old, decorated «military ornaments».

¹³⁵ Bocchi-Cinelli 1677, p. 100.

¹³⁶ Barocchi, Ragionieri 1983, p. 504.

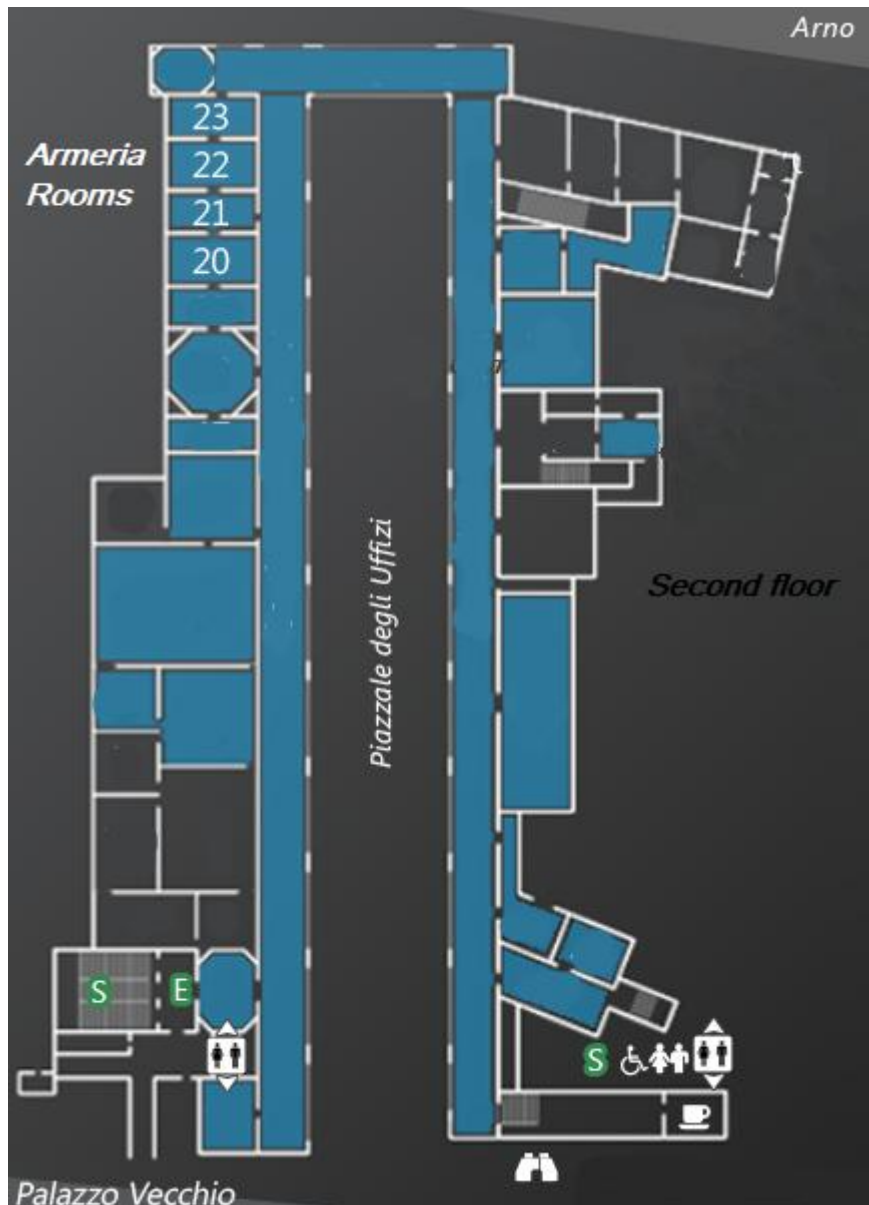


Figura 9 - Gallerie degli Uffizi, second floor, today. With the Armeria rooms numbered 20-23 according to the current museum organization.

In the first room (number 21), he mentions «twenty-four complete armours» from the Amazons, hung on the wall, between chest covers, arm bands, thigh coverings, elms, and shields, all conserved and held in the collection for «hundreds of years»¹³⁷.

¹³⁷ Barocchi, Bertelà 1986, p. 1169.

Bianchi goes on: inside of the rooms, one can find many weapons of war from the 1400s until the 1700s. He highlighted Turkish weapons and horses' harnesses, with jewelry-like decorations in argent and gold, as well as spoils from the Tuscan ships that, once in a while, arrived at the African shores «in between ruins and terror»¹³⁸.

Bianchi then cites a cinnamon stick of eight *braccia* in length (4,66 m) «which is rare and still maintains its smell», and the skin of Cristina di Lorena horse's with its tail. At last, the rest is «things more from a fortress than a Gallery»¹³⁹. He also points out the ceilings with grotesque decorations of five rooms in which the Armeria is contained, the first being attributed to Raffaello da Montelupo and the others by Giovanni da Udine, which are all described as well conserved¹⁴⁰.

With drawings by his own hand, Giuseppe Bianchi details the “visual history” of the Uffizi as a gallery and repository for the Medici collection, and it is considered the most accurate description of the building and the collection at that time, to be integrated with the another two books written by him: the 1759 volume, *Ragguaglio delle antichità e rarità che si conservano nella Galleria Mediceo Imperiale di Firenze* and the accompanying piece to the 1768 catalogue *Trattato della Reale Galleria in forma di dialogo con notizie interessante ed erudite*¹⁴¹.

Bianchi wrote a description of the Gallery from the Eastern wing, which was structured with the main staircase from the loggia on the pavement level to the second floor where the Royal Gallery is located. There is a small room after which the connection with *Palazzo Vecchio* is and then the room following the gallery for paintings and portraits can be found, where the *Ciborio of Pietre Dure* from S.

¹³⁸ Barocchi, Bertelà 1986, p. 1169.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1124.

Lorenzo Church was located at the time. The next rooms are the Cabinet of Northern Paintings and the Hermaphrodite room, then a room containing many lockers (*stipi*) and the Cabinet of Miniatures, where the Hermaphrodite used to be. The succession of rooms leads up to the Tribuna, with the Venus Medicea, an Ancient Greek masterpiece. Following these are the cabinets which were part of the Armeria in the 1588: the Drawing Cabinet, the *terracotta* Ancient Vases Cabinet and the Cabinet with Curious Weapons in the end, to say, a room with of what was left of the Armeria, which had been severely reduced in size. The next rooms were the Madama Cabinet, where paintings were exhibited, and, on the other corridor, the Medals Cabinet where gems were displayed. We finish the tour of the *Galleria degli Uffizi* with the final rooms: the staircase which connects to the Vasarian Corridor and to *Palazzo Pitti*, the rooms containing the portraits of painters, a vestibule with inscriptions that leads to a staircase connecting to the second floor, where another paintings room, the *Nuovo Salone*, a gallery with gold plaster wall decoration is located; last follow the Book Cabinet and the Modern Bronze Cabinet¹⁴².

¹⁴² Barocchi, Bertelà 1986, p. 1124.

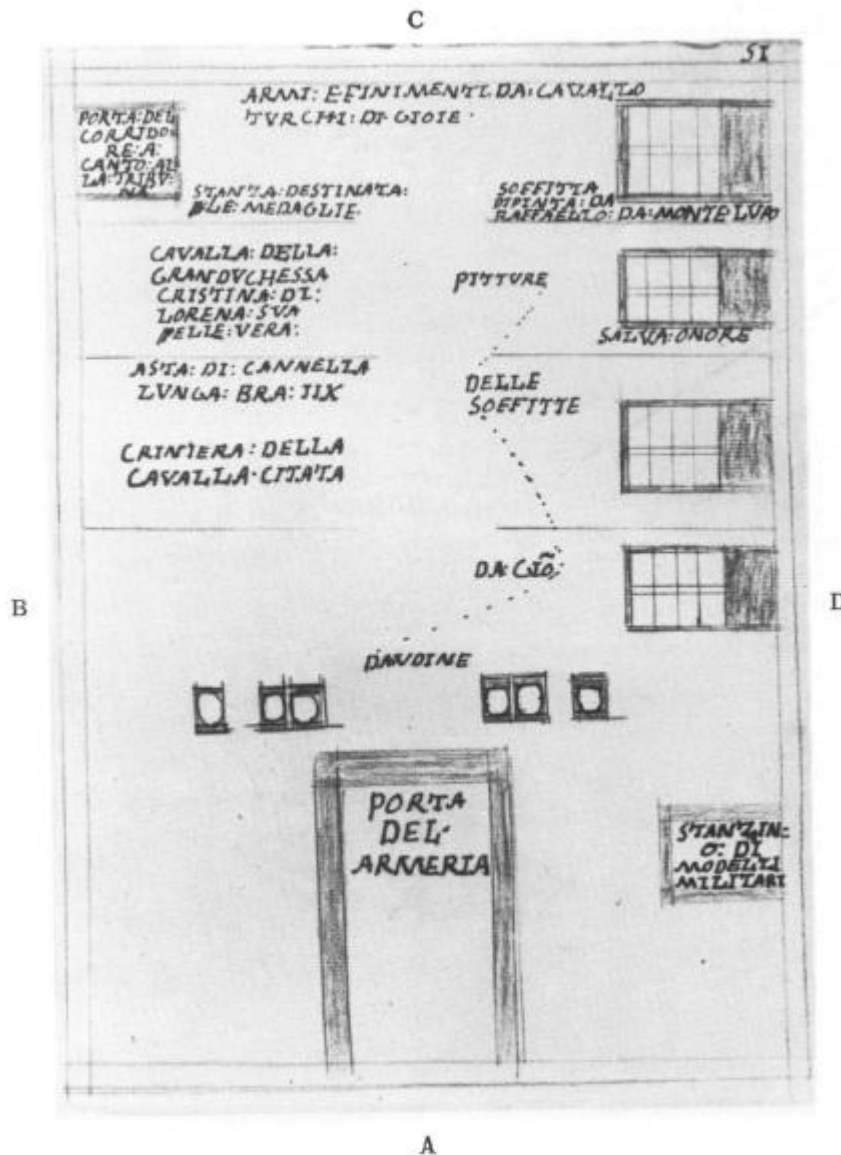


Figura 10 – Giuseppe Bianchi, Map of the first room of the Armeria at the Uffizi Gallery, in Bianchi 1768, p. 1168.

As highlighted further up, the Armeria was distributed under a new display order of which Bianchi wrote that the «weapons of war» from the 15th Century until the second half of the 18th Century was not under the responsibility of the custodian of the Gallery¹⁴³. The author, however, does not mention any of the Mesoamerican items in the room, but only remarks that «the things that remain»

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 1169.

beyond a few Turkish weapons, made of silver and gold and acquired during wars in which Tuscany participated, the Great Duchess' horse hair and skin, as well as some African items, «are more fitting to a fort than to the Gallery»¹⁴⁴. The description testifies that the Armeria's four rooms had been dismantled and rearranged, with only very particular weapons remaining on display in the Gallery.

2.3. *The Armeria Dismantled.*

The multifaceted world displayed at the Uffizi was exhibited as a triumph of the collection until the Leopoldian re-organization finalized in the last quarter of the 17th century. The new antiquary paradigm, the new hierarchies and the class organization required a new ordering¹⁴⁵.

This is because until the re-organization during the Habsburg-Lorraine (1765-1801) period, the Uffizi was, above all, the princes' private collection. To tourists, academics and artists, visiting the Gallery was only allowed as a «gracious» permission of the Grand Duke; however, under the reign of Cosimo III (1670-1723), there was already a pressing tendency for the opening of the collection to a larger public¹⁴⁶.

After Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni was nominated director of the Gallery of the Uffizi in the 17th of April 1775, a campaign of intervention and radical changes reached its climax in the Cabinets, which also influenced not only the distribution of the collection, but also the museum's approach¹⁴⁷.

In the 1776 dispersion inventory of the Armeria, *Nota dei Capi dell'Armeria*

¹⁴⁴ Barocchi, Bertelà 1986, p. 1169.

¹⁴⁵ Barocchi 1983, I, pp. 49-150 ; Gregori 1983, 1, pp. 367-393.

¹⁴⁶ Barocchi, Ragioneri 1983, p. 472.

¹⁴⁷ Spalletti 2010, p.15.

consegnati all R. Gabinetto di Fisica, it is recorded that «one *Indian* bow made of nut» (inv. 210), «one thick *Indian* bat» (inv.963) and «four *Indian style* bows, three with velvet handles» (inv.693) were transferred to the *Reale Gabinetto di Fisica*¹⁴⁸.

In October 1778, Pelli-Bencivenni had requested to the Guardaroba Maggiore to start the works in the two Armeria rooms that were closest to the Tribuna, since they were already clear of weapons, to display drawings, prints and terracotta items, which was granted. During the first months of 1779, the restructuring works were concentrated in these rooms¹⁴⁹.

By July 1779, the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo visited the Gallery and was seen to be satisfied with how the works were going, telling Pelli to continue with vigour. The later then notes in this *Efemeridi*, on the 26 of July:

«today I received at the Gallery His Royal Highness to see some new things, and he seemed content. He would like to have it more “clean”, and gave me support to do it, which I hope, if I am still alive, to leave this place in a better state than which I found it»¹⁵⁰.

The Grand Duke meant “to clean” as in make space for the paintings, as per Pelli’s diary in the 2nd of August of the same year. On the 6th of August 1779 Pelli wrote to be very satisfied with the way the works were coming along, and that he would keep working on the rooms, specially the Cabinet of Drawings, which was one of the Armeria rooms¹⁵¹. The works continued in these four rooms and, in October, red cabinets (*armadi*) which were in the third and forth rooms were disassembled, signaling the use of these two rooms for the Dutch and «other

¹⁴⁸ ASGF, filza 10, 1776, fasc. 55 – Vendita dell’Armeria.

¹⁴⁹ Spalletti 2010, p. 19

¹⁵⁰ Spalletti 2010, p. 21.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

[Northern European] Schools»¹⁵², which responded to a direct request from the Grand Duke. Then, in December, Leopoldo decides that it is best to use the Drawing Cabinet for the Etruscan terracotta, and vice-versa, which Pelli agrees to do¹⁵³.

This paradigm shift made the possession of weapons and armor less interesting to the public because the display was more focused in ancient objects such as Etruscan vases and paintings; therefore, in the re-organization of the gallery, most objects from the Armeria three rooms were placed in the armoury at the Fortezza Da Basso, the fortress of Florence, or simply disposed of. In fact, in 1776, Pelli Bencivenni wrote that he had freed himself from the embarrassment of having weapons and armor, acquiring «place for other genres» of collectibles after dismembering the armoury collection. His statement shows that «by [the Eighteenth century] arms and weapons, like the scientific instruments, were no longer regarded as artworks worthy of display and could therefore easily be dismissed»¹⁵⁴. The Armeria was then reduced to only one room at the end of the Eastern corridor, while the other rooms hosted paintings and terracotta items part of the Medici-Lorraine collection.

So with these testimonials we can attest that the focus of the new arrangement was more on showcasing the items in the collection that were in accordance with the scholarly interests and collector's taste of the 1770s. The items which have remained in the Armeria last room were more to impress the public than to display the breadth of interests of the Prince, and as such, the Gallery gained a public, more focused to the arts and antiquities than keen to appreciate *artificium*.

¹⁵² Spalletti 2010, p. 21; Barocchi 1983, p. 1458, note 205.

¹⁵³ Spalletti 2010, p. 21

¹⁵⁴ Galdy 2009, p. 56.

CHAPTER 3: Non-European Objects and the Medici.

3.1: Case Study: the Social Life of Tupinambà Objects

The Medici started to collect American artefacts during the reign of Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574) in the 16th century. The interest was sparked by his own maritime explorations and the relations with the royal courts of Munich and Spain, with whom he exchanged various objects, which allowed him to enrich his collection – a process continued all through the 18th century by Cosimo III (1642-1723)¹⁵⁵. With variations according to individual interests and what was considered admissible for each time-period, the grand dukes assembled a formidable collection, and their relationships with the Americas can be explored through the examination of the inventories and the collection of New World artefacts¹⁵⁶.

«The pieces in the Uffizi Armeria were displayed in a context of exotic objects such as feather coats and masks from the New Spain. Francesco and Ferdinando were half-Spanish through their mother, Eleonora of Toledo; (...) the brothers may well have felt a strong emotional pull towards Spain; the Spanish possessions in the New World would

¹⁵⁵ Heikamp 1972, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ Buckley 2021, p. 62.

have been regarded as an extension of Philip II's kingdom not as a different national entity»¹⁵⁷.

Unfortunately, much of what was collected was destroyed, dispersed or lost, as well as not even accounted for. Thus, in most cases it is only the Archival entries in the inventories from the 17th and 18th centuries that remain¹⁵⁸, with a few exceptions like the feather mantle and the hunting bows we will analyze later on. There is furthermore the issue of ambiguous descriptions, in which "of the Indies" could refer to materials from both the New World (also known as the West Indies) and the East Indies (today all South Asia). We find the same dilemma of a lack of reference with the identifiers «Indian-style» and «Indian», which are often found in the *Guardaroba* inventories to describe objects and which «became general terms for [referring to] any exotic [thing]» because they are found in inventories of other contemporary European collections¹⁵⁹.

For this section, I chose two items that have been listed in the inventories of the Armeria from the 16th to the 18th centuries, in order to illustrate the kind of materials that were present in the collection and the interconnections among them. On these grounds it shall be examined what kind of path they made until our days. The focus will be on a mantle made of feathers, and two hunting bows from the Tupinambà People, from what is today the coast of Brazil.

Tupinambà's feather cloaks have first been catalogued in the inventory of the Guardaroba of Cosimo I in 1539 as «tre vesticiuole di penne d'India», that is: three cloaks of Indian feathers¹⁶⁰. The first time we can identify one of the

¹⁵⁷ Galdy 2009, p. 49.

¹⁵⁸ Buckley 2021, p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Heikamp 1972, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Buckley 2021, p. 78; ASF, GM 7, c. 29r; Table 1.

surviving items of the 3 parts of the collection is only in the 1631 inventory record, locating the red feathered cloak in the Armeria¹⁶¹.

While Heikamp (1972) states that we cannot know for sure how the mantles came to be part of the Medici collection so soon, even with a blood and political relationship to the Habsburgs since 1532¹⁶², Markey (2016) proposes that the feather cloak could be one of those given as a gift at the wedding of Cosimo I and Eleonora di Toledo, passed by Charles V to Ferdinand Alvarez of Toledo, a male relative of the lady, or it could be among the collection of American objects of Clement VII, passed to his successors¹⁶³. Today, two of the three cloaks are located at the Anthropology and Ethnography Museum of Florence.

The featherwork from South American lowlands cannot be found in archeological records due to the climate conditions that do not allow for the conservation of the materials, unlike the highlands in the Peruvian coast, where there can still be found well preserved feathered objects. Nevertheless, according to Mariana Françoso (2016), other archeological finds like ceramic pots, stone pendants, wooden sculptures and axes, contain «aviary decoration» which «highlight the importance of birds and feathers to Pre-Columbian Caribbean and Amazonian societies»¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*; ASF, 1631, GM 513, c. 25v; Table 1, p. 78.

¹⁶² Heikamp 1972, p. 10.

¹⁶³ Markey 2016, p.32.

¹⁶⁴ Françoso 2016, p. 109.

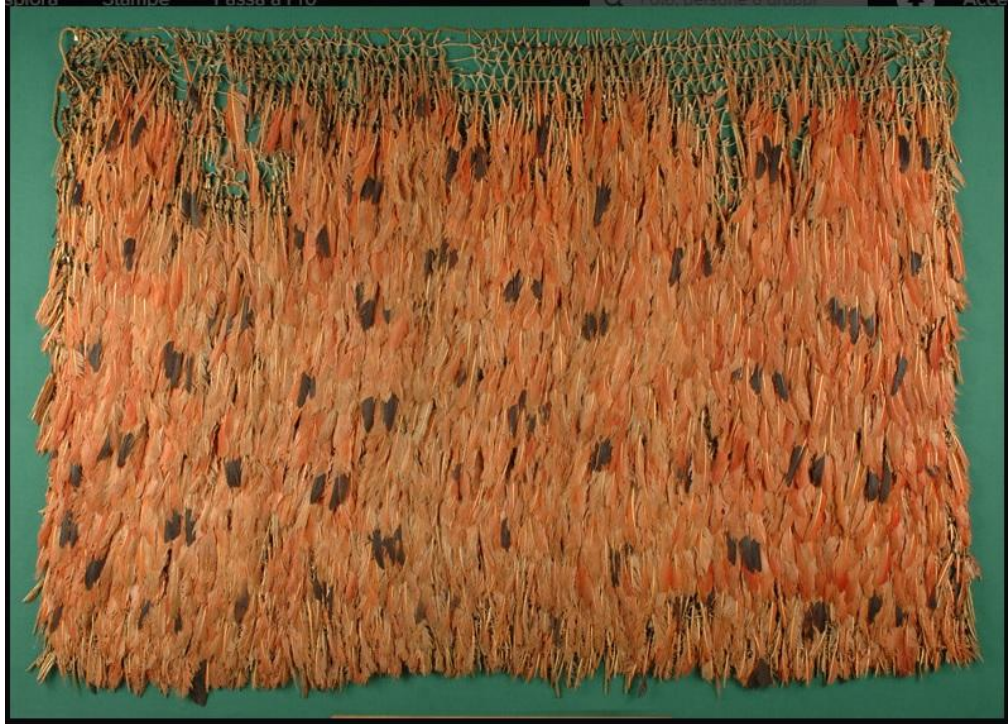


Figure 11 – Tupinambá Scarlet Ibis Mantle from Brazil, feather arranged on a fishing net structure, XVII century, Florence, Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, Inv. 281. From 1618 in the Medici Collection, Florence.

Françoso relates that many European chronicles about 16th Century Latin America suggest that the production of featherwork existed before the arrival of the Europeans and lasted long after in the 16th Century. It would be the case for featherwork produced by indigenous peoples in Amazonia and the coast of Brazil, with evidence provided by European sources like the Franciscan André Thevet (1516-1590) and the French missionary Jean de Léry (1536-1613)¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶⁵ Thevet, 1557, p. 90; Léry 1990 [1594], p. 88.



Figura 12 - Tupinambá Scarlet Ibis Mantle from Brazil, detail, XVII century, Florence, Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, Inv. 281. From 1618 in the Medici Collection, Florence. The photo is mine.

The Medici's red and black feather mantle can probably be related to other rectangular cloaks used by the Caraibi Natives during their warrior ceremony, which happened every three years. De Léry described what the scene looked like:

«Five or six hundred warriors, divided into three different ranks «formed an immense circle without changing site, gradually recounting their deeds in a serious and measured song [...] painted in black and red, they all keep a serious and collected attitude, close to each other, without holding hands; each has the right hand resting on the hip and the other

hanging. Through an oscillating motion that is communicated to each dancer, the body bows and rises to each other; the right leg and foot shake as the *maracá* move. All of a sudden, a harmonious choir rises from the multitude: they are the voices that celebrate the glory of the ancestors and that invite the warriors to new battles. Then three Caraibi natives, dressed in their cloaks of feathers, lay down the sacred instrument, and armed with a kind of pipe, they flood each warrior with the inebriating vapors of petun [tobacco], inviting him to receive the spirit of strength to defeat the enemies».¹⁶⁶

This warrior ritual was also eternalized by De Bry in one of his many etchings, and we can find the aforementioned ceremony with Tupinambà natives dancing in a circle with feather cloaks in the illustrations of the book *Americae tertia pars memorabile(m) provinciae Brasiliae historiam contine(n)s* from 1592¹⁶⁷.

In the Sixteenth century, the word «Tupinambà» was indiscriminately attributed to all the indigenous populations who spoke one of the languages of the Tupí-Guaraní branch, distributed along the entire coast of Brazil in the territories between the mouth of the Amazon River and the state of São Paulo. These populations, united by the language, occupied very distant areas and were divided into numerous local groups, often at war with each other¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁶ Léry 1592, p.229. See also: Gnaccolini, Rossignoli 2018, pp. 533-534.

¹⁶⁷ De Bry 1592.

¹⁶⁸ Camperio Ciani et al. 2015, p.15.



Figure 13 – Theodor De Bry, *Warrior Ritual*, etching in copperplate, in *Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae*, De Bry 1592, p. 228.

It is interesting, however, that in a contribution of 2014 by Francesca Bigoni and Maria Gloria Roselli, the mantle is connected to the rituals of cult to the Sun god. They mention a myth by the Sipaia tribe, who are culturally close to the Tupinambá, where the Sun's crown, the «most venerated divinity by those tribes in the Sixteenth century» was made of *Scarlet Ibis* feathers¹⁶⁹.

The red and black mantles are identifiable as those described in the Armeria inventory of Ferdinando II, made in 1631, as «zimarre di penne rosse alla indiana e altri colori»¹⁷⁰.

In *The Untranslatable Image* (2014), Russo argues that feathers were «a

¹⁶⁹ Bigoni, Roselli 2014, p.157.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 157; ASF, GM 513, c. 25v ; Table 1.

constitutive element of the Mesoamerican military wardrobe» and cites a testimonial from Bernal Díaz de Castillo, who participated in the Cortés expedition at Yucatán during February 1517, describing a native Indian «squadron (...) armed with feather shields, bows, arrows, and helmets» as well as an encounter with Maya warriors which displayed «feather crests which they are accustomed to wear»¹⁷¹ in his *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (1568 ca). Such custom became a common identifier for Europeans of the Amerindian people from North to South, and «a distinctive sign of America itself», as the continent was from then on associated with feather art.



Figura 14 - Straight bow, wood and red velvet, cm 177 x 1,7. Inv. 534. . Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, before in the Medici Collection, XVII century. Florence.



Figura 15 - Straight bow, wood and green silk, cm 202 x 1,5. XVII century. Inv. 533. Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, before in the Medici Collection, XVII century. Florence.

In the Armeria inventories, there are entries of many bows and arrows, and the two chosen to be analyzed can be found in the *Guardaroba Medicea* inventory of 1639¹⁷².

Both are straight bows with a D-section, slightly concave on the back side with

¹⁷¹ Russo 2014, p. 25.

¹⁷² ASF, GM 539, c. 6v; Table 2.

the knuckles carved directly into the wood. The handles are obtained with a beech insert covered with red and green velvet. The red one is nowadays very degraded. At the ends of the handle of the red one, the imprints left by a ligature can be seen. The bows are slightly curved towards the belly, probably due to use.

There are others similar to these two preserved in the Anthropological museum in Florence, all belonging to the Tupinambá people, a population that inhabited the western coasts of Brazil. The additions of velvet and silk on the handles are modifications carried out after the arrival of the bows in Europe, probably in the Medici Court, when it was decided to use it to shoot the target.

The bows could be part of a group of five that came to the Uffizi's Armeria through the Urbino Armeria in 1631, at the time of Ferdinando II¹⁷³; however, those do not seem to have etched handles, even in later inventories. On the other hand, the bows analyzed here could be the ones from the 1769 *Guardaroba* inventory: «forty-three arrow bows, which two straight with fourteen shells full of arrows», and the ASGF's 1776 inventory that lists «four Indian bows of which three with velvet handles»¹⁷⁴. Mario Scalini (1997) argues that the two weapons could have been among «the first finds obtained by the Grand Dukes» in the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, which is supported by the type of textile of the handle. The Grand Dukes had no intention of preserving the object as it was, allowing for changes in its' appearance to confirm the usage of such items for other ends other than just display, even after so many years as part of the collection:

«Since most of the Tupinambà artifacts appear to have arrived during the seventeenth century, first of all the feather cloaks, which already appear in the inventory of Cosimo II

¹⁷³ Ciruzzi 1983, pp. 158-159.

¹⁷⁴ ASGF 1776, filza 10, 55, c.29r: "*quattro archi all'indiana, che tre con impugnatura di velluto*".

in 1618, it is not unlikely that [the two arrows] (...), also given the shape and type of textile that makes up the handle, are to be placed among the first finds obtained by the Grand Dukes, who evidently did not have excessive scruple to modify them for their own playful use, a sign of a still unborn documentary respect for the artifact»¹⁷⁵.

In the green silk bow, the handle is obtained with a wooden insert covered with green silk-satin fabric. At the ends of the handle, vegetable fiber bindings painted in green are preserved, and the lower part has a fracture affecting the ventral region. Almost identical, except for the size, to the red-handle one, it is a clear adaptation of an anthropological artifact to the sporting use. The artifact was originally created by the same population known for the splendid mantles in multicolored bird feathers which remain in the Anthropological museum of Florence and which were exhibited for a long time in the armory of the Uffizi¹⁷⁶.

Another occurrence in the collection was the usage of items by pageants and carnivals in order to showcase the objects to a wider audience. It was not unusual for the mantles, headdresses, bows and arrows, to be present in court festivities by people wearing costumes to represent America. Masquerades were, in fact, an extension of the presence and influence of the Grand Duke's power to the public¹⁷⁷.

Such usage can be seen specially in the celebrations of Cosimo II's wedding to Maria Maddalena of Austria, daughter of Archduke Karl II, in 1608. This marriage was arranged to secure ties with the Holy Roman Empire in a time when Florence was feeling vulnerable to the Spanish, who were in the process of building a fortress close to Livorno's coast.

¹⁷⁵ Scalini 1997, p. 113.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Françaoso 2016, p. 116; Markey 2016, p. 32.

The wedding celebrations consisted of a two-month long event, comprising of a procession through Florence, a banquet at the Salone del Cinquecento in Palazzo Vecchio, a *calcio* match in Piazza Santa Croce, two operas – one of them featuring Amerigo Vespucci and the Americas – a tug of war game with people in costumes and an equestrian ballet.

It was in one of the most public events of the celebration, called Gioco del Ponte, which consisted in a tug-of-war game between Pisan noblemen and «pseudo-warriors from around the world», that is, Florentine men *in maschera*. This was the first time that Native Indians appear in a public festivity. The illustration of the day, done by Matthias Greuter on the text by Camillo Rinuccini¹⁷⁸, shows «people of the world» like Indians, ancient Romans, Moors, Greeks, Turks and even Cyclops on the lower left of the scene, like the illustration of costume books, with the Florentine men on the team «dressed as Indians with feathers».

¹⁷⁸ Rinucci 1608, in Markey 2016, p. 152.



Figura 16 - Matthias Greuter, *Gioco del Ponte*, from Camillo Rinuccini, *Descrizione della festa fatte nelle reali nozze de' serenissimi principi di Toscana d. Cosimo de' Medici e Maria Maddalena, archiduchessa d'Austria*, 1608. Gabineto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi.

The images resemble Stradano's depictions of feathered Indians in his hunt prints, and as pointed out by Lia Markey (2016), in particular a sketch of an Indian in the upper left corner of a composite sheet. According to Markey, the Indian players also recall the ceiling fresco paintings by Buti; she even suggests that the spears carried during the game were borrowed or modeled after the spears in the Armeria's collection¹⁷⁹.

¹⁷⁹ Markey 2016, p. 151.



Figura 17 - Giovanni Stradano, composite sheet with studies of oyster, a native, and an elephant hunt, ca. 1570-80. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Museum purchase through gift of various donors, 1901-39-150.

Another Medici festival in 1616 shows the costumes used by dressed up Florentines; this indicates that the drawings and prints by Stradano were a popular representation of Indians in the first decades of the Seventeenth century.

Markey proceeds to tell us how not only Stradano's prints but also other images of Native Indians were part of the European court festivities which incorporated New World's natives, inspiring the portrayal of those natives in the 1608 celebrations. But representing Mesoamerican natives was not new in European festivals or court events. As early as 1551, in Rouen, Brazilians were

employed in an «artificial battle in honour of the royal entry of Henry II»¹⁸⁰.



Figura 18 - Giulio Parigi, design for a costume of a native of the New World, 1616. Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana, in Markey 2016, p. 153.

Nevertheless, the «Tuscan noblemen costumed as generic feathered Indians» in the game of tug-of-war were shown off with other less known and different cultures, emphasizing their difference through the coding of costumes in the parade. The term used by Markey to describe the behaviour of these noblemen is the performance of «a noble savage» in which it describes the Indian portrayed by these noblemen as Medici courtiers playing against the Pisans, «Florence's true

¹⁸⁰ Markey 2016, p. 153.

‘other’»¹⁸¹. It is possible that exhibiting such different cultures in front of a great public might have had the effect of boosting the Medici’s connection to the Americas, as well as their knowledge of these people, much like the objects displayed in the Armeria¹⁸². But there is also the possibility that these Mesoamerican objects, exactly because of being so diverse, are part of an alternative costume code, which was documented by objects and iconography, and wearable in place of other costumes on occasions where the ego’s otherness in dressing and behaving constitutes a part of the celebration.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 154.

¹⁸² *Ibid*.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the intent of this thesis was to bring awareness on how the exchange of objects throughout the years change their values, focusing on the cultural aspect. If accounts of Sixteenth century Italy did not believe that non-European societies had influenced art history, as Claire Farago found out, I believe is from a lack of perspective towards looking at themselves. It is obvious from the drawing of Stradano and ceiling paintings by Buti that acknowledgement of other cultures was very much present in Italian art. The cultural weight is significative and does not coincide with formal stylistic references, but with the accumulation of information and spoils of war, reuse and display. Today we are aware of how the exchange of information and references like images, books and objects can influence a culture, and art history, for that matter, since we have been capable to look at ourselves and the others from different perspectives specially from the Nineteenth century onwards.

Therefore, by using the framework proposed by Alessandra Russo, where she analyzed the imaginary, symbolic and real aspects of a society's point of reference, thus creating a tryptich of references, I want to highlight those same aspects of Mesoamerican objects present in the Armeria rooms at the Uffizi. First,

the imaginary aspect: what the Europeans expected from the Americas. The acquisition of far away, *exotic*, items that fed the Armeria collections, the long and difficult journey that soldiers, sailors and missionaries had to endure to finally have the opportunity to have the objects in their hands. Second, the symbolic: gift giving was not just a kindness, but a demonstration of power.

From Montezuma to Cortés, Cortés to Phillip II, Phillip to the Medici, the many connections describe powerful political moves of subjects and rulers to gain or maintain alliances, as gifting Mesoamerican headdresses, mantles and weapons was a way to demonstrate a ruler's economical richness and power domination; for instance, from Montezuma to Cortés, the gifts were to show how abundant and rich was the Aztec ruler and the soil and subjects under him, while similar objects being gifted from Phillip II to Cosimo I and Eleonora di Toledo for their marriage, could have been a sign of support and alliance from the Spanish King. These examples demonstrate the hypothesis by Arjun Appadurai that what gives value to the object is not an economical evaluation but the relations behind it, what were the intentions behind them and the difficulty of obtaining the prize, most of all, what presenting someone with an object meant to the relationship between the giver and the receiver, like the gifts given by Montezuma to Cortés and then to Phillip II, as well as the marriage gifts from the Habsburgs to Cosimo and Eleonora de' Medici.

The third, the real aspects: each object present in the America rooms had a function and a meaning in their original setting, which was lost when they were transferred to Florence, gaining another connotation due to the new usage given to them through display or wear as costumes to masque balls.

The Armeria rooms in the East corridor of the Galleria degli Uffizi were a place where Mesoamerican objects have taken many lives. The artifacts chosen for the case study made a trip from Brazil to Spain, to Italy, from West to East, and once were sacred objects to become secular ones: the Tupinambà mantles and bows and arrows had a ritual and warrior relevance in the native tribe where it originated, then it was acquired by Europeans and, after arriving in Italy a being brought to the Medici court, they became something to be admired and to marvel at.

During the Sixteenth century, the objects were symbols of creativity and manual dexterity of the person/people who made the object, connected to the difficulty and the novelty of making it, which is why they were considered artifices or better yet, rarities. The role of such items in the Armeria collection was to promote the power of the Dukes to their political connections through the Seventeenth century, where they were used as costumes to carnivals and balls. The function of items like the Tupinambà mantle and hunting bows was to showcase the wealth and connections that Florence had with Spain and the Hapsburgs, as well as the discovery of the Americas. For Francesco I and Ferdinando I, it was also a connection to the past: the display of weapons and armour from their ancestors, together with those from far-away places and European rulers was a way to celebrate wars won and enemies that had been left behind. It was great as an intimidation tactics and as a way to prove their political and financial power. In the Eighteenth century, the display of Mesoamerican objects were mostly an exhibition of knowledge, of the range of interests and dominion of information held by the Duke Cosimo II. The Grand Dukes had no intention of preserving these artefacts as they were, sparing no thought to changes made during handling, for instance: when the bows were loaned to other

noblemen, despite their long-lasting life in the collection. Opening the Armeria rooms to the public was also a display of power, but mostly, a sign of the changing times due to the requests of *studiosi* whom wanted to see the display.

ANNEXES

TUPINAMBÁ OBJECTS THROUGH THE YEARS

1. MANTLE

Quantity	Location	Date	Description	Archive	Current Location
3	Guardaroba of Cosimo I	1539	Tre vesticiuole di penne d'India	ASF, GM 7, c. 29r	Two are in the Anthropology and Ethnography Museum, Florence Cat. 284b; 281 2
2	Unknown	1618	Due abiti composti di penne di più colori d'uccelli dell'Indie, fatte a forme di mantello lunghissimo a meza gamba, con due ghirlande di penne in capo	ASF, GM 373, c. 56r	<i>Ibid</i>

3	Armeria	1631- 1636	Tre zimarre di penne rosse alla Indiana e altri colori [...]	ASF, GM 513, c. 25v	Two are in the Anthropology and Ethnography Museum, Florence
3	Armeria, 2nd room	1639- 1641	Tre veste all'Indiana di penne rosse di Pappagallo [...]	ASF, GM 539, c. 6v	<i>Ibid</i>
3	Armeria, 2nd room	1651- 1657	Tre veste all'Indiana di penne di pappagallo rosse [...]	ASF, GM 633, c. 6v	<i>Ibid</i>
3	Armeria	1695	Tre veste all'Indiana di penne di pappagallo rosse [...]	ASF, GM 710, ins. 4, c. 47r/v	<i>Ibid</i>
3	Armeria, 3rd room	1696	Tre abiti Indiani di penne di pappagallo tessute, rosse, e d'altri colori [...]	ASF, GM 1091, c. 71v	<i>Ibid</i>

3	Armeria	1715	Tre abiti Indiani di penne di pappagalli tessute rosse, et altri colori [...]	ASF, GM 1231bis, c. 116v	<i>Ibid</i>
3	Armeria	1719- 1736	Tre abiti Indiani di penne di pappagalli tessute rosse, e d'altri colori [...]	ASF, GM 1275, c. 155v	<i>Ibid</i>
3	From Armeria to Gabinetto di Fisica	1775	Tre vesti all'Indiana, tessute di penne di pappagallo [...]	ASGF 1776, c. 94v	<i>Ibid</i>
3	From Armeria to Gabinetto di Fisica	1775	Tre vesti all'Indiana, tessute di penne di pappagallo [...]	ASGF 1776, c. 94v	<i>Ibid</i>

2. HUNTING BOWS

Quantity	Location	Date	Description	Archive	Current Location
11	Inventario dell'Armeria, 1st room	1639 - 1641	Undici archi all'Indiana, di più sorte e grandezze n° 11	ASF, GM 539	
8	Inventario dell'Armeria, 1st room	1715	Otto archi da freccie all'Indiana verniciati di più colori, che uno più grosso, e tre con fasciatura in mezzo, che due di velluto, e l'altre di panno rosso segue 148 n° 8	ASF, GM 1231bis	
8	Inventario del 1715		Otto archi da freccie all'Indiana verniciati di più colori che uno più grosso, e tre con fasciatura in mezzo, che due di velluto, e l'altra di panno rosso	ASF, GM 1231bis	

		inventario a 15/1484, n ° 8	
Inventario del 1736 - 1747		Nove archi all'Indiana che tre con impugnatura d'arazzo e dua corde a 537 n°9	ASF, GM 1450
Inventario dell'Armeria	1768	Sedici archi all'Indiana di noce d'India, che due con impugnatura di velluto	BU, ms. 97

IMAGE INDEX

Figura 1 - Theodor De Bry, <i>Americae Magis Cognita</i> , etching in copperplate, map representing Central and South America, in <i>Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae</i> , De Bry 1592, p . 10.	20
Figura 2 - Theodor De Bry, etching in copperplate, visual representation of the port, in <i>Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae</i> , De Bry 1592, p. 18.	23
Figura 3 - <i>Cortés receives on shipboard the envoys of Montezuma, whom offers him gifts</i> , in Florence, Medicea Laurenziana Library; Florentine Codex, book XII, ca.1570. Russo 2014, p.25.	25
Figura 4 – Ludovico Buti, <i>Battle between Conquistadors and Native warriors</i> , detail, fresco, 1588, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Armeria room 21, on the ceiling.	41
Figura 5 - <i>Warrior</i> , detail, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Codice Laurenziana Mediceo Palatino 220 (Florentine Codex), ca. 1560. From Markey, p.100	42
Figura 6 - Ludovico Buti, Amerindian warrior, detail, fresco, 1588, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Armeria room 21, on the ceiling.	43
Figura 7 – Ludovico Buti, <i>two unknown armies in battle</i> and the American birds painted with the grotesques decoration, fresco, 1588, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Armeria room 21, on the ceiling.	44
Figura 8 – Ludovico Buti, <i>Conquistadores and Native American warriors</i> , detail: <i>African warrior with rhinoceros</i> , fresco, Florence, Uffizi Galleries , ceiling in room 21.	46
Figura 9 - Gallerie degli Uffizi, second floor, today. With the Armeria rooms numbered 20-23 according to the current museum organization.	55
Figura 10 – Giuseppe Bianchi, Map of the first room of the Armeria at the Uffizi Gallery, in Bianchi 1768, p. 1168.	58
Figure 11 – Tupinambá <i>Scarlet Ibis Mantle from Brazil</i> , feather arranged on a fishing net structure, XVII century, Florence, Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, Inv. 281. From 1618 in the Medici Collection, Florence.	65

- Figura 12 - Tupinambá *Scarlet Ibis Mantle from Brazil*, detail, XVII century, Florence, Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, Inv. 281. From 1618 in the Medici Collection, Florence. The photo is mine..... 66
- Figure 13 – Theodor De Bry, *Warrior Ritual*, etching in copperplate, in *Americae tertia pars memorabile provinciae Brasiliae*, De Bry 1592, p. 228. 68
- Figura 14 - *Straight bow*, wood and red velvet, cm 177 x 1,7. Inv. 534. . Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, before in the Medici Collection, XVII century. Florence. 69
- Figura 15 - *Straight bow*, wood and green silk, cm 202 x 1,5. XVII century. Inv. 533. Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, before in the Medici Collection, XVII century. Florence. 69
- Figura 16 - Matthias Greuter, *Gioco del Ponte*, from Camillo Rinuccini, *Descrizione della festa fatte nelle reali nozze de' serenissimi principi di Toscana d. Cosimo de' Medici e Maria Maddalena, archiduchessa d'Austria*, 1608. Gabineto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi. 73
- Figura 17 - Giovanni Stradano, *composite sheet with studies of oyster, a native, and an elephant hunt*, ca. 1570-80. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Museum purchase through gift of various donors, 1901-39-150... 74
- Figura 18 - Giulio Parigi, design for a costume of a native of the New World, 1616. Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana, in Markkey 2016, p. 153. 75

Abbreviations

ASF - Archivio di Stato di Firenze

GM - Guardaroba Medicea

ASGF - Archivio Storico delle Gallerie Fiorentine

BU – Biblioteca degli Uffizi

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