Arctic Studies Center Newsletter

Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History

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NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

By William W. Fitzhugh

Another covid year has come and gone leaving us a bit surprised and bewildered. Breaks in the COVID-19 waves in 2021 had us launching field plans, experimenting with office returns, and getting 'boosted'. The jabs promised a return to normalcy, or at least a new normal, fortified by zooming technology and hybrid conferencing. Now we're able to talk and listen instantaneously around the world with few or no conference fees. The sky was clearing, and the future looked bright—that is, until Omicron appeared, and we were hauled back into lock-down.

The ASC survived a second covid year, and thanks to the miraculous appearance of vaccines and diligent isolation, none of us fell ill. You might say we thrived in our capsules. We've grown closer to our immediate and distant families and had fewer distractions. Meetings are shorter and more productive, and commuting has been replaced by a couple of clicks, leaving those of us with empty nests more time to read and write. In this respect, our 'mature' ASC crowd may have advantages not available to colleagues with youngsters.

Knud Rasmussen visiting Washington DC with Arnarulunnguaq ("Little Girl") and Qaavigarsuaq ("Eider Duck") after completing the Alaskan leg of the Fifth Thule Expedition. Smithsonian Archives photo

This year our major activity surrounded the hundred-year anniversary of the Danish Fifth Thule Expedition (FTE) of 1921–24, a research enterprise that laid an extraordinary foundation for all subsequent anthropological research in Arctic North America. For the past several years, **Igor Krupnik**, assisted by **Aron Crowell**, laid the groundwork for an FTE retrospective, beginning with a 2019 centennial symposium in Nome, Alaska, bringing together colleagues from Denmark, Canada, Alaska, and the Lower 48, including Inuit whose ancestors hosted the expedition. Crowell and Krupnik edited the Nome proceedings for a special double issue of *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* (19:1-2) released in September.

To initiate the first year of the FTE centennial, we invited Dr. **Mari Kleist**, a Greenland Inuk assistant professor at Ilisimatusarfik/University of Greenland, Nuuk, to give our annual Tiger Burch Memorial Lecture. Delivered on 15 December, her talk, "The Expedition Would Not Have Succeeded Without Them", demonstrated the crucial role played by the Inuit/Inughuit participants in the expedition. Heretofore, credit for this mammoth undertaking has been attributed to its scholarly leaders, especially **Knud Rasmussen**. Kleist's talk and the papers of the AJA volume document in detail, for the first time, the contributions of Inuit participants as translators, knowledge providers, and full expedition partners.

In his third year as anthropology department chair, and in addition to his FTE activities, Igor finished editorial work on Volume 1 (Introduction) of the *Handbook of North American Indians* series, and *Arctic Crashes: People and Animals in the Changing North* (2020) received the museum's book award for 2021. In addition to scholarly activity and supervising staff and operations, Igor led the Department of Anthropology's response to changes in our relationships with constituents, particularly with Indigenous communities. In addition, this year, responding to the national dialogue concerning racism, equity, and endemic issues of disrespect, our physical anthropologists conducted a

Okinawan Horse bit "Muge" from the book Ryukyu Fuzoku Ezu

the University of Washington. The first bone is an ulna, indicated by the trochlear notch (the C-shape depression) near one end. The second two bones are either humeri or femurs because of the structure of the epicondyles (the dual protrusions near the large holes).

This difference presents more questions: Why not carve both bridles from the same type of bone? How could the open end on the ulna bone hold a rope without having it slip out when the horse moves? And there are other unanswered questions, too. How old are the bones? Do the dot motifs mean anything? Why choose bone when wood would have sufficed? I suspect I will spend the next year or so (maybe longer) trying to answer these questions.

I am grateful for all the individuals—academics, curators, and collectors alike—who welcomed my questions, and, if unable to answer them, pointed me in the right direction. Without their willingness to help, I would not have made much progress. I found both objects in mainland Japan, but it's possible—maybe even likely—that they originated elsewhere, given the amount of trade that occurred. The Okinawa drawing and Landor's diagrams are good pieces of evidence, but not enough to declare the bridles' origins with conviction. Bitless bridles appear in a variety of cultures, and I'll need to do more research before I can say for certain where these came from. For now, I am happy to have answered the question I started with.

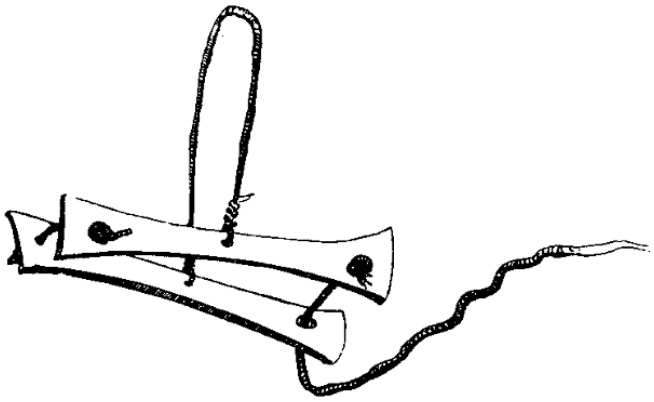


Illustration from A.H. Savage Landor's 1893 book

THE ARTIC VIEWED FROM FLORENCE, ITALY

By Elisa Palomino and John Cloud

We had an opportunity in 2021 to explore the world's first museum of anthropology, which was founded in 1869 by **Paolo Mantegazza** (1831–1910), in Florence, in the context of many centuries of previous ethnographic and philosophical work that converged there. That same year Mantegazza also established the world's first university professorship of anthropology. His museum, now lodged in the wonderfully named Palazzo Nonfinito, in the center of Florence, appears at first glance to be a relic of a now distant past, marooned in the 21st century—but it is not. The story of how this happened illuminates much about the history of anthropology.

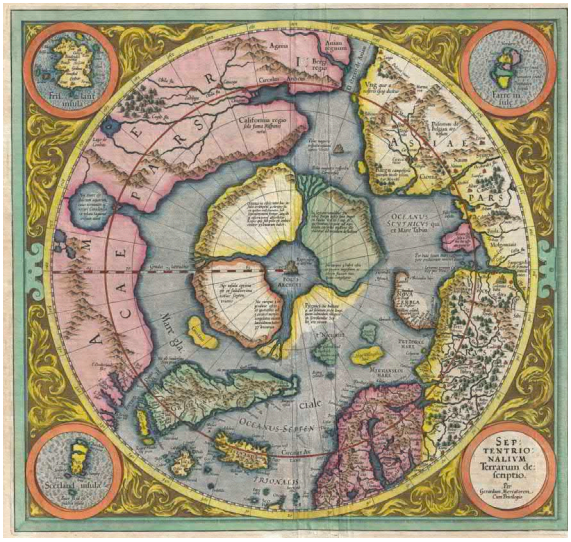
Museums of anthropology are based on collections of materials, and in the case of Florence, the era of collections began in the time of the great Crusades (1095–1291) which were attempts to free "the Holy Land" from the Islamic kingdoms that controlled the ancient territories described in the Bible. The many campaigns never succeeded, but every Crusade offered many opportunities for pillaging and looting on route. The resultant hordes of relics, and bones of supposed saints, as well as whole forests of Middle Eastern trees cut down to provide wooden fragments of "The True Cross" that Jesus was crucified upon, were the foundational collections of what we now call museums.

In the centuries after the Crusades, changes in technology and social structures vastly expanded the collections. Europeans developed ocean-crossing cargo ships, coupled to the structures of modern banking, so that goods and money could move and circulate in ways never before possible. This brings up the history of the Medici family, integral to the history of Florence and much else. The **Medici** were smart and assertive commoners, from the region of Mugello, north of Florence. They started as wool merchants and ended as rich and powerful nobility. The family coat of arms proudly displays their origins: a shield with six three-dimensional balls of woolen yarn, protruding from the shield, a symbol still visible everywhere in Florence.

Bering Sea Kayak from the Cook expedition

Over centuries, the disparate collections that the Medici had gathered in their home, the Palazzo di Medici, were eventually assembled in a chamber in the Palazzo Vecchio, the great medieval fortress in the city center, which is still the seat of government of the city-state, Il Comune di Firenze. In 1563 Duke **Cosimo I de Medici**, newly proclaimed to royalty (by himself) commissioned the artist, art historian and architect **Giorgio Vasari** (1511–1574) to create a study chamber or 'cabinet of curiosities. Up long flights of stairs is the Guardaroba, a secure chamber where cloaks and coats and swords were stored. The Guardaroba became the first public site for display of the vast Medici collections. Duke Cosimo referred to "the cosmography in the Guardaroba", reinforced by a set of beautiful painted maps hung on the doors of dozens of cabinets and rooms around the Guardaroba. Behind each door was collections of diverse treasures from the area mapped.

Guardaroba globe surrounded by artifact cabinets



1606 North Pole Mercator and Hondius map

Starting about 1564, teams of mathematicians, geographers, and wonderfully skilled artists created the major series of maps, which presented the cosmography of the known world (i.e., as known in Florence). As the maps were fitted to the doors of the cabinets of the collections, organized by region, the maps were essentially the finding aids to the collection. There are nine maps of the Americas and one map of Greenland. These maps are foundational to the history of Arctic Studies.

There were also a unique set of four maps, done separately, and apparently somewhat later, of "Polar Lands". These maps were clearly derived from the work of the celebrated cartographer/mathematician **Gerardus Mercator**. In 1569, he published his world map, the first presentation of his Mercator projection. The distortions of the projection mean the north and south poles cannot be represented. Mercator made a separate, azimuthal projection of the region of the north pole in the corner of the map. He repeated this polar map in his first atlas, from 1596. His partner and successor **Hondius** published a revised and refined version of the polar map in 1606, a foundational map of the history of the Arctic.

In the Mercator/Hondius map, the Arctic Ocean is open, and surrounded by four large lands. This concept evolved centuries before Mercator. The later introduction and distribution of magnetic compasses, from China, required some explanatory mechanism for how the compasses worked. Mercator proposed a giant black rock of magnetic iron, the Rupes Nigra, at the North Pole. When the British scientist **John Dee** wrote Mercator about the sources of the map, Mercator wrote back: "In the midst of the four countries is a whirl-pool, into which there empty these four indrawing seas which divide the North. And the water rushes round and descends into the Earth just as if one were pouring it through a filter funnel. It is four degrees wide on every side of the Pole, that is to say eight degrees altogether. Except that right under the Pole there lies a bare Rock in the midst of the Sea. Its circumference is almost 33 French miles, and it is all of magnetic stone".

If we now examine the four maps of the Polar Lands, it is clear they map the four "indrawing seas", with the Rupes Nigra presented at the top of each map. Details of the four lands that frame them are suitably vague (given that they didn't exist) but the maps' text notes the lands were north of very real places: above Greenland; above Hudson Bay; above the Bering Strait; and above Siberia. If ships could navigate to the indrawing Seas, but could avoid the polar whirl-pool, then they could navigate out on the other side: the fabled Northwest (or Northeast) Passage.

The maps are embellished with a myriad of gilded inscriptions, providing a most revealing body of text annotating the history of places and regions and the characteristics of the inhabitants, listing the natural resources and agricultural and livestock farming, mining,

Lands above Arctic regions

craft-industrial and artistic products. The scroll of the polar lands imagined above Greenland reads: “This channel has three accesses, every year it remains frozen for about three months" and "Here are the pygmy who are four feet tall, as those that in Greenland are called Screlirgi”. The lands above Hudson Bay state: “This channel has five accesses and due to its narrowness and the rapidity of its flow it never freezes” and “The Northern parts are so far from us that few are those who wrote about them. They say the King of Norway having heard about it, sent people there to live”. For lands above the Bering Strait: “In the northern parts there are the islands of Bargu that **Marco Polo** states are looking north so much that the pole star is seen to go down towards the south”. For the lands above Siberia, “The Ocean, entering these islands with 19 accesses, creates four channels flowing north without interruption and here it gets absorbed by the bowels of the earth.”

The Medici never wanted a terrestrial empire—they were content financing others’ empires and collecting compound interest on their loans. The Medici collections of artworks, rarities, and anthropological artifacts outgrew the Guardaroba. They were later transferred to the Uffizi Gallery, the Palazzo Pitti, etc. The idea of gathering together in one place the “natural productions” present in the Guardaroba dates back to 1763, when the Florentine naturalist and scientist **Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti**, on behalf of the Grand Ducal government, drew up the first catalogue of all the naturalistic exhibits in the Gallery. In 1765, with the arrival in Florence of the young Grand Duke **Pietro Leopoldo** of Lorraine (who was also a Medici), the museum project came to life, leading to the construction of the 'Palazzo della Scienza', at the noble Palazzo Torrigiani where 'La Specola' Museum is still housed today. Substantial new collections were added, particularly artifacts secured from the three global voyages of Capt. **James Cook** in the late 18th century, which introduced many salient Arctic artifacts to modern Europe.

Meanwhile, Florence continued to endure episodic wars, plagues, and revolutions. In the midst of all this, the structures and disciplines of the modern sciences were developed, in Florence and elsewhere. The rise of disciplinary specialists in botany, geology, ethnology, etc. led eventually to the fission of the Medici mega-collections, into more focused thematic assemblages. These collections were moved to different Florentine palaces. In the 1860s, Italy as a nation-state was invented, with Florence as the first national capitol, while at the same time new major specialized museums in Florence were invented, including **Mantegazza**’s museum, the first in the world to call its domain “anthropology”.

Mantegazza perceived the fundamental unity of human societies, and his collections are organized by geographical regions, without reference to conceptions of a spectrum between “primitive” to “advanced”. He was ahead of his times in various ways, particularly as to the psychology and science of sex. His position became ever more marginal with the rise of fascism. After his death in 1910, in 1925 his collections were moved to the Palazzo Nonfinito, where they remain displayed in wood and glass cases which have changed little in a century. The displays are dense, yet elegant, still marvels of the varieties of human cultures and their arts.

The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology was “founded in poverty”, with a contribution of only 1,000 Italian lire provided by the Italian Ministry of Public Education, a tiny and symbolic sum when compared with the costs of Italy’s cultural patrimony. In the current ordering and funding of the arts and sciences in Italy, the Museum, along with the other major Florentine science museums, is funded through the Sistema Museale di Aterneo, the Museum System of the University of Florence. The University prioritizes the education of its students, and rightly so, which limits resources available to the museums. Nevertheless, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology persists, with a current emphasis on revealing the sub-structures of historical anthropology as it evolved, particularly the myriad ways that disparate humans were quantified and measured, and then partitioned.

These events in a city built on the banks of the River Arno, over half a millennium, are directly relevant to the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian system of thematically defined museums, in large stately buildings, with an organizational structure of staff in departments and institutes, was not invented by the Smithsonian, but rather adopted. And thus, much about “the Arctic” can be experienced and learned from a place known for olive oil and wine, gelato and art, in Florence, which is “the city of flowers” on many levels.

We would like to thank Prof. **Monica Zavattaro** and Prof. **Gloria Roselli** from the Museum of Natural History: Anthropological and Ethnological Collections in Florence for our warm welcome to the museum.

Smithsonian Institution

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