

Ulisse Aldrovandi and Indigenous American Featherwork

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/ Abstract

The article deals with Ulisse Aldrovandi's study of Indigenous American featherwork. Its main section systematically reviews the textual descriptions and visual representations of feather artifacts that Aldrovandi was able to observe, either in his museum or in those of other collectors. The review includes some previously unnoticed texts and images, as well as the transcriptions of previously unpublished manuscript texts. The final part of the article discusses some specific aspects of Aldrovandi's texts, showing how his use of the published sources available at the time led him to tackle some key *tópoi* of early modern European literature on Indigenous American featherwork, to which he added fascinating lexical nuances. Overall, the article reassesses the relevance of the Aldrovandian corpus for Indigenous American studies.

*L'articolo tratta degli studi condotti da Ulisse Aldrovandi sull'arte plumaria indigena americana. La sezione principale passa sistematicamente in rassegna le descrizioni testuali e le rappresentazioni visuali dei manufatti di piume che Aldrovandi ha potuto osservare, sia nel suo museo sia in quelli di altri collezionisti. La rassegna comprende alcuni testi e immagini non precedentemente notati, nonché la trascrizione di testi manoscritti ad oggi inediti. La parte finale dell'articolo discute alcuni aspetti specifici dei testi aldrovandiani, mostrando come l'uso delle fonti edite allora disponibili lo abbia portato ad affrontare alcuni *tópoi* chiave della letteratura europea della prima età moderna relativa all'arte plumaria indigena americana, a cui l'Aldrovandi aggiunse affascinanti sfumature lessicali. Nel complesso, l'articolo contribuisce a riaffermare la rilevanza del corpus aldrovandiano per gli studi sul mondo indigeno americano.*

/ Keywords

Aldrovandi; Featherwork; Tupinamba; Mesoamerica; New Spain.

1. Introduction

Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605) was so fascinated by Indigenous American featherwork that he described a Mexican feather mosaic in his collection as “the most precious object in the whole museum”.¹ This paper systematically explores this fascination by bringing together the various textual and visual representations of Indigenous American featherwork found in the Aldrovandian corpus, with a particular focus on the actual specimens that Aldrovandi owned or was able to observe in other collections.

As is often the case with Aldrovandi’s work, the actual featherwork specimens are placed in dialogue with information from published sources. To explore this interplay between empirical observation and bookish knowledge, I will first comment on each of the featherwork specimens that Aldrovandi saw, touched, described and illustrated in his works. This will include some previously unnoticed textual descriptions and visual representations of a group of 16th century Mexican featherworks. In the final section, I will discuss some of the themes and literary tropes that Aldrovandi addressed when placing artefacts in dialogue with early modern textual sources on Indigenous American featherwork, whose rich corpus has been insightfully explored in modern studies, most notably those of Alessandra Russo.

2. From a protean Florida: The Tupinamba headdresses of the *Homo sylvestris* and of the *Regina insulae Floridae*

The most famous Indigenous American featherwork described and visually reproduced in the Aldrovandi workshop are the feathered garments depicted in the paintings of the *Homo sylvestris* and the *Regina insulae Floridae*, the woodcuts of which were printed both in the *Ornithologiae* (1599) and in the *Monstruorum historia* (1642).² In the *Ornithologiae*, pub-

¹ Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae hoc est De auibus historiae libri 12* (Bologna: Francesco de Franceschi, 1599), 656. Aldrovandi’s interest in American things has been thoroughly explored by previous scholarship. For the relevant references see Davide Domenici, “Rediscovery of a Mesoamerican greenstone sculpture from the collection of Ulisse Aldrovandi”, *Journal of the History of Collections* 34, no. 1 (2022): 1–21, especially n. 12. See also Peter Mason, *Ulisse Aldrovandi: Naturalist and Collector* (New York: Reaktion Books, 2023).

² The two paintings have been often discussed in the literature. See Laura Laurencich Minelli, “Oggetti americani studiati da Ulisse Aldrovandi”, *Archivio per l’Antropologia e l’Etnologia* 113 (1983): 187–206; Ead., “36. Regina Insulae Floridae plumario tecta uelo”, in *Bologna e il Mondo Nuovo*, ed. Laura Laurencich Minelli (Bologna: Grafis, 1992), 138–140; Ead., “Flight of Feathers in Italian Collections from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth century”, in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, ed. Alessandra Russo, Gerard Wolf and Diana Fane (Munich: Hirmer, 2015), 223; Giuseppe Olmi, “‘Things of nature’ from the New World in early modern Bologna”, in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, 233; Lia Markey, “Aldrovandi’s New World natives in Bologna (or how to draw the unseen *al vivo*)”, in *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750*, ed. Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 225–247; Mason, *Ulisse Aldrovandi*, 98–100.

lished during Aldrovandi's lifetime, the two woodcuts were included in Book 11, devoted to parrots (*De psittacis*), after a long passage describing Indigenous American featherwork and whose concluding section focuses precisely on the two headdresses: "Since we are dealing here with the works of the Indies, as an epilogue, let us give here the description of the two hoods, or tunics, that Antonio Giganti [...] preserved in his museum, and let us add their images"³ Following a detailed description of the two artifacts (see below), a single phrase introduces the images: "The first of the following images is the wild man dressed with the feathered cape shown by Antonio Giganti, the other one, which we provide in the second place, is the queen of the island of Florida"⁴

As far as their textual descriptions are concerned, the first published mention of the cape of the *Homo sylvestris* is found in the prologue of the *Ornithologiae* (*Prolegomena in ornithologiam*), where it is stated that "among the many rare things [possessed by Antonio Giganti], the rarest is a headdress very skillfully and dexterously composed with bird feathers, the image of which I have taken care to add to the rest of my images"⁵ Then, in Book 11, immediately after the abovementioned sentence attributing both headdresses to the collection of Antonio Giganti, the description of the first one is given: "The former hood was four dodrantes and one palm long, and about two [dodrantes] wide. The upper part, which covers the wearer's head, was made of softer and narrower feathers, like those seen on the heads of parrots. In the part that covered the neck, the feathers seemed to be those from the back, like those of the tail and wings. All of them were interwoven on a net of brown threads of a kind of cotton; indeed, the quills of the feathers were tied to the underlying net as shown in the picture itself. The color of the whole hood was a very elegant crimson"⁶ As noted by Laura Laurencich Minelli, this description clearly matches one of the entries in the 1586 inventory of the Giganti collection: "A headdress worn by the women in Florida, it hangs down the back, it is made of red Parrot feathers, or some other bird, tied together, which inside resembles a net,

³ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 657: *Nobis enim de Indicis operibus hic agendum erat, quibus tanquam pro epilogo cucullorum duorum, sive capitiorum, quae Antonius Gigas, elegantissimus Poeta, vir vitae probitate conspicuus, rerumque naturalium peritissimus, at immatura iam pridem morte nobis ereptus, in musaeo suo reservabat, descriptionem, necnon icones adiungemus.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 657: *Priorem subsequentium iconum esse hominis sylvestris plumario cucullo induti Antonius Gigas arbitratur, alteram quam secundo loco dabimus, reginae insulae Floridae.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3: *Antonius Gigas, morum probitate, et eruditione praestans vir, inter plurima, quae habet rarissima, capitium quoque asservat scite admodum atque affabre contextum ex Avium pennis; cuius imaginem ego reliquis meis iconibus appingi curavi.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 657: *Prior cucullus quatuor dodrantes, et palmum erat longus; duos ferme latus; Pars supina, qua caput portantis tegitur, ex pennis erat mollioribus, exilioribus, quales in Psittacorum capitibus conspiciuntur; Quibus cervix operitur, pennae, videbantur esse e dorso: quemadmodum quae subsequebantur ex cauda et alis. Erant autem omnes supra rete quoddam ex gossypinis filis castanei coloris intertextae, quibus nimirum pennarum calami inferius reti alligabantur eo modo, quo ipsa pictura demonstrat. Totus cuculli color erat coccineus elegantissimus.*

2.5 feet long”.⁷ As the reader may have noticed, in the Giganti inventory the red headdress that was later depicted on the head of the *Homo sylvestris* is described as a female garment and attributed to “Florida”. Two longer, and almost identical, manuscript descriptions of the same object – i.e., the direct sources of the text later printed in the *Ornithologiae* – are found in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 21, IV, c. 9–10 and ms. 143, IV, c. 263v–264r. The manuscript texts describe in more detail the technological aspects of the garment (also described as female), in particular the way in which the quills of the feathers are tied to the underlying net.⁸ The use of the name “Florida Province; Antarctic Province” (*Provinciae Floridae, Provinciae Antartidae*), as well as the reference to depictions in “French writings” (*in chartis Gallicis depictis*), clearly indicates that Aldrovandi was referring to the work of the French Franciscan friar and royal cosmographer André Thevet. The phrase *Provinciae Floridae, Provinciae Antartidae* (*Florida, seu Francia Antarctica*, “Florida, or Antarctic France” in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 21, IV, c. 9–10) also suggests that Aldrovandi – like Giganti before him – used the name *Florida* loosely, equating it with *Francia Antarctica*, that is, the name that Thevet used for every French colony in the Americas, including Brazil.⁹ As we shall see, it is in this protean “Floridan” space that the two headdresses were conceptually located, with quite different results.

The red headdress that Aldrovandi observed in Giganti’s collection was portrayed on the head of the *Homo sylvestris* in the painting still preserved among the Aldrovandi papers in the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna (Fig. 1).¹⁰ It shows a naked man wearing the long

⁷ Laura Laurencich Minelli, “L’indice del museo di Antonio Giganti: interessi etnografici e ordinamento di un museo cinquecentesco”, *Museologia Scientifica* 1, no. 3–4 (1984), 208, 236, entry [119]: “Un’acconciatura che portano le donne in capo alla Florida, et le pende giù per la schiena, è di penne rosse di Pappagallo, o altro uccello, legate insieme, che di dentro par una rete, lunga, 2 piedi et mezzo”.

⁸ The text from BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 21, IV, c. 9–10 has been noticed and transcribed by Laurencich Minelli, “Oggetti americani”, 198, 204 n. 13. Here we provide the so far unpublished transcription of BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, IV, c. 263v–264r (*Peregrinarum rerum catalogi; India; Florida provincia*), which contains minor differences: *In Museo Mag.ci D. Antonii Giganti vidi tegimen confectum ex pennis Psittacorum purpureorum inter quas pennas quaedam sunt interpositae tamquam maculae colore subviridi, et hoc cappicio longituine est 4 dodrantum cum palmo, latitudine vero unius dodrantis et palmi, quo cappicio in pompis et festis utuntur mulieres Provinciae Floridae Provinciae Antartidae. Pars autem superior qua tegitur caput pennis mellioribus est strata, et ita eleganter, ut proprie videatur emulari caput ipsius Pittaci. Pars vero quae inferius contigua est ipso cappicio, ex pennis alarum vel caudae contexta est densa structura ita tamen ut videatur ipsius avis dorsum aemulari, triplo vero maior est ipsa textura quae tendit ad dorsum inferius quam ipso capicio. Advertendum tamen est quod ipsae pennae contextae coniuncteque sunt imbricatim super rete ex filamentis gossipii, sed colore castaneo. In illis autem filamentis quae instar retis se habent ita coniunguntur pennae suis quidem calamis deorsum retorsis ut firmiter annectantur, presertim cum illa pars cauliculi sit latior in ea parte, qua solet affigi cuti. In capicio vero plagae retis sunt densiores et quadruplo maiores proportionatae pennis melioribus, quae quidem plagae reducuntur prope frontem in foramen rotundum ad instar oculi nostri capicii, quo utimur noctu ad frigiditatem evitandam et humiditatem noctis. In extrema parte est funiculus eiusdem materiae ut firmius contineantur contexta. Principes et magnates utuntur his in festivitibus, et pompis sicut videre est in chartis Gallicis depictis, ipsorumque mulieres huiusmodi tegminibus adornantur.*

⁹ André Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle* (Paris: Pierre l’Huillier, 1575), II, 910r–913r.

¹⁰ BUB, Aldrovandi, *Tavole di Animali*, I, 74.



*Homo sylvestris plumacis Indatus
pelo ad bellum profuscens ex noua orbe*

Fig. 1. *Homo Sylvestris* (BUB, Aldrovandi, *Tavole di Animali*, I, 74). Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.

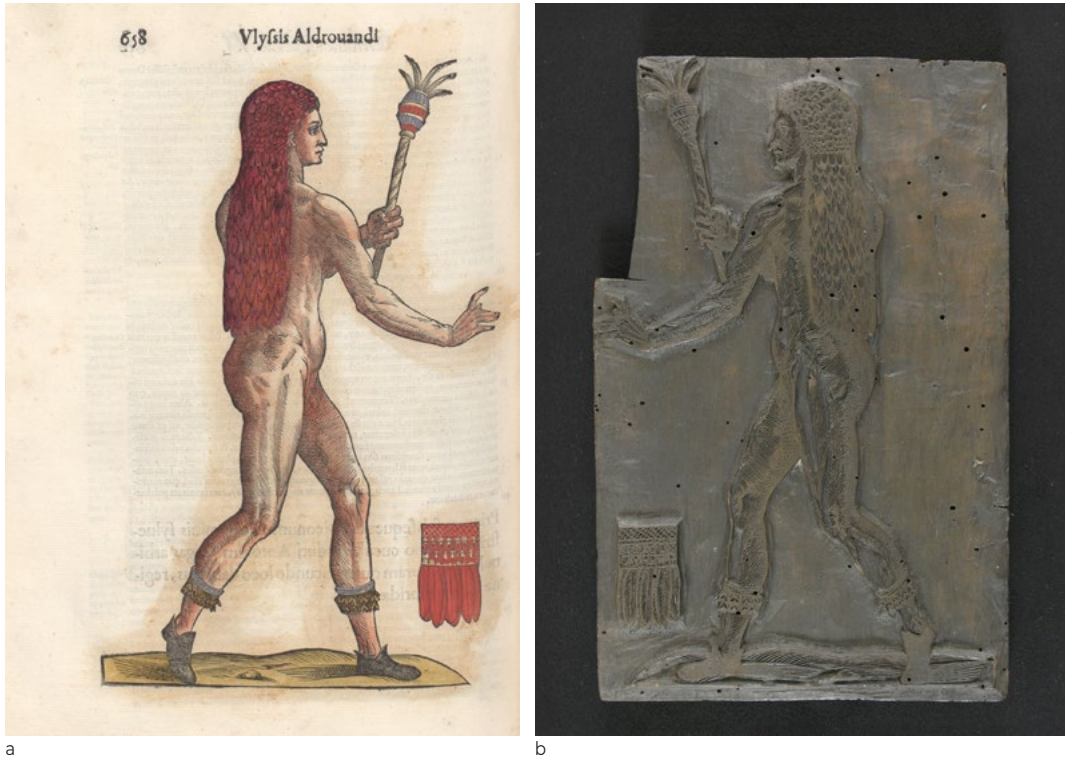


Fig. 2. a) Woodcut of the *Homo Sylvestris* in the *Ornithologiae* (BUB); b) matching wooden matrix (Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – SMA Sistema Museale di Ateneo – Museo di Palazzo Poggi). Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.

crimson feathered cape, calf bands with two rows of hanging rattles made from the endocarps of *Cascabela thevetia* (also known as *Thevetia peruviana*),¹¹ and closed, moccasin-like shoes. In his right hand he holds a diagonally striped cane topped by a red and blue *maraca*, with a feather(?) tuff at the top. The headdress, with a few, interspersed dark spots (typical of the plumage of *Ibis rubra* or *Eudocimus ruber*),¹² is clearly divided into an upper and a lower part, distinguished by the different dimensions of the feathers, thus closely corresponding to the textual descriptions mentioned above. At lower left, an enlarged detail meticulously illustrates the way in which the feather quills are attached to the underlying cotton net, as described in detail in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 21, IV and ms. 143, IV. The short text inscribed on the painting reads “Wild man from the New World wearing a feathered hat going at war”.¹³ In the (mirrored) woodcut derived from this painting, the pearwood tablet of which is still pre-

¹¹ Laurencich Minelli, “Oggetti americani”, 196.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Homo sylvestris plumario Indutus pileo ad bellum profuiscens ex novo orbe*. BUB, Aldrovandi, *Tavole di Animali*, I, 74.

served at the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, a man with a slender body, in keeping with the aesthetic canons of the Late Renaissance, wears a cape in which the difference between the upper and lower parts is even more visible than in the painting (Fig. 2). In the hand-colored copies of the *Ornithologiae* the colors are very similar to those in the painting.¹⁴ The same woodcut was then published (but in reverse order with respect to the *Regina insulae Floridae*) in the *Monstruorum historia* (1642), where it precedes the images of King Quoniambec and the King among the Cannibals.¹⁵

How did this process of putting the headdress in context work? Where did *Homo sylvestris* come from? In a perceptive analysis of the two images, Lia Markey has suggested that a direct or indirect source of the *Homo sylvestris* is the *Sauvage en pompe* from François Desprez' *Recueil de la diversité des habits* (1562), where – despite a marked difference in the shape of the cape – one can observe not only a similar posture but also similar rattle, calf bands, and shoes, even if depicted with a strange, fluffy surface (Fig. 3).¹⁶ The fact that in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 21, IV the term *Pompis* is a later addition, perhaps inspired by the title of Desprez' woodcut, further strengthens Markey's identification.

Exploring the complex meaning of the *al vivo* painting, Markey argued that the *Homo sylvestris* was constructed by combining the observation of the actual headdress with Desprez' image and the textual descriptions of the Brazilian Tupinamba Indians penned by the André Thevet, whose name is explicitly mentioned in the *Monstruorum historia*. To explore this further, it is useful to observe that Aldrovandi had access not only to Thevet's *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (1557) but also to an edition of *La cosmographie universelle* (1575). Indeed, while themes such as the nudity of Indian warriors – as well as the illustrations on which we will comment shortly – also appear in the earlier *Les singularitez* (1557), only the *Cosmographie* contains the images of King Quoniambec and the King among the Cannibals which, as Peter Mason has pointed out, served as sources for the similar (but mismatched) images in the *Monstruorum historia*.¹⁷ Thevet's works also functioned as visual sources to add detail to Desprez' image (Fig. 4), as is the case of the woodcut which depicts the harvesting of the

¹⁴ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 658; https://bcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=209133 (accessed October 30, 2024, as the following links).

¹⁵ Aldrovandi, *Monstruorum historia cum Paralipomenes historiae omnium animalium* (Bologna: Marco Antonio Bernia, 1642), 106–109.

¹⁶ Markey, "Aldrovandi's New World natives", 242–243. I have been unable to find Desprez's work among the books owned by Aldrovandi.

¹⁷ Mason, "Ulisse Aldrovandi", 100. For the reproduced passages and images, see André Thevet, *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (Paris: Maurice de la Porte, 1558), 54r, 57v, 66v, 83r, and compare with Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle*, II, 922r, 927v, 928r. For the images of kings, compare Thevet, *La cosmographie*, 924r, 955v, with Aldrovandi, *Monstruorum historia*, 108–109. The page numbers of the *La cosmographie* are those of volume 2, tome 4 (there is a repetition of page numbers in tomes 3 and 4 of Thevet's original edition). Aldrovandi also owned a copy of a 1561 Italian translation of *Les singularitez*, but with no images, today at the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna: Andrea Tevet, *Historia dell'India America detta altramente Francia Antartica [...]* tra-



Fig. 3. *Sauage en pompe*, from François Desprez, *Recueil de la diversité des habits* (1562). Public Domain.

poisonous fruits of the *ahouai* tree (*Cascabela thevetia*), whose endocarps are used as rattles to be tied to the legs. A dancer holds a *maraca* and wears calf bands with rattles which are obviously the visual models of those worn by the *Homo sylvestris*. Moreover, even if the *Homo sylvestris* feathered cape was copied from the actual artifact in the Giganti collection, the way in which it is worn is derived from another woodcut from Thevet's works, depicting a funeral rite in which a person wears a very similar feathered cape, as well as calf bands with rattles.¹⁸

As for the rattles, they may even have been inspired from a real specimen. In fact, the Aldrovandi collection now in Palazzo Poggi includes a group of four cut *Cascabela thevetia* endocarps, tied together with metal wire. A woodcut of the same object (but including seven endocarps), entitled *Ahouay Brasilianorum Castaneae species*, was published in Aldrovandi's posthumous *Dendrologiae naturalis* (1667), edited by Ovidio Montalbani (Fig. 5); the corresponding xylographic pearwood tablet is still held at the Museo di Palazzo Poggi.¹⁹ In the text of

the volume, the description of the plant ends with the statement that "they serve the Barbarians as bells".²⁰ This information, as well as the name *ahouay*, is clearly derived from Thevet's texts, as also evidenced by two manuscript passages in the *Observationes* and the *Peregrinarum rerum catalogi* that are almost verbatim Latin translations of Thevet's description of the

dotta di francese in lingua italiana da M. Giuseppe Horologi (Venezia: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1561); this is the only Thevet's book listed in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 171, the inventory of Aldrovandi's library.

¹⁸ Thevet, *La cosmographie*, 927v. See Thevet, *Les singularitez*, 83. Additional visual sources could have been various of de Bry's engravings: Théodore de Bry, *Historia Antipodum sive novi orbi* (Frankfurt: De Bry, 1530), 76, 112, 174, 228.

¹⁹ https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/search.do?type=&group=GROUP0&customquery=%3A*+-TYPE%3An+-TYPE%3Acca+-TYPE%3Abib+-TYPE%3Aaut&cvalue%28ANY%29=thetvetia.

²⁰ Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Dendrologiae naturalis scilicet arborum historiae libri duo...* (Bologna: Giovanni Battista Ferroni, 1667), 300: [...] *pro tintinnabulis apud Barbaros illos inserviunt*. A similar specimen was once held in the collection of Manfredo Settala in mid-17th century Milan; now lost, the object was depicted in a beautiful watercolor: Biblioteca Estense Universitaria (Modena), *Ms. Campori*, gamma.h.01.21, c. 63r, described as "Frutti brasiliotti che il loro nome è Ahouai et il frutto è veleno et se ne servono li brasiliani per sonagliera quando fano le loro danze con li sacerdoti loro con le creste di piume di corvo rosse". <https://edl.cultura.gov.it/item/p650gzgrz4>.

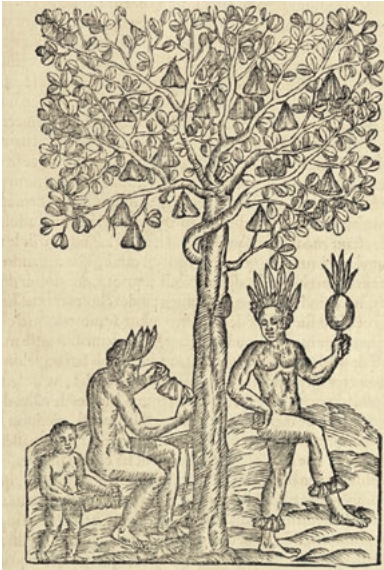


Fig. 4. Woodcuts, from André Thevet, *La cosmographie universelle* (1575), 922r, 927v. Public Domain.

fruit and its uses.²¹ Interestingly, the manuscript passage in the *Observationes* – which is dated April 27, 1580 – describes the artifact that Aldrovandi possessed and states that he received it from a Johannes Dilphius, who in turn received it from Carolus Clusius.²²

As for the headdress of the *Regina insula Floridiae*, it is described in the *Ornithologiae* as a headdress “[...] of a very different shape, and of a different color, and was made entirely of thinner and smaller feathers, worked with greater skill. Here, as the image shows, the individual feathers are so tightly inserted and compressed into each wooden support that they appear to be woven. But such supports are folded so carefully that you could say that they have been cut in two, and in the middle, or section, each of the feathers has been tied with a very thin thread. All the feathers are yellow, somewhat like the feathers on the breast of the Rhamphastos or Pica Bressilica. Moreover, the whole texture was much denser in this one than in the previous one, and looked like the veil that our women use at home. Some purple feathers were mixed with the yellow ones, making the whole textile very beautiful.”²³

²¹ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VII, c. 221 and ms. 143, IV, c. 150–151; compare with Thevet, *Les singularitez*, 66; Id., *Cosmographie*, 921–922.

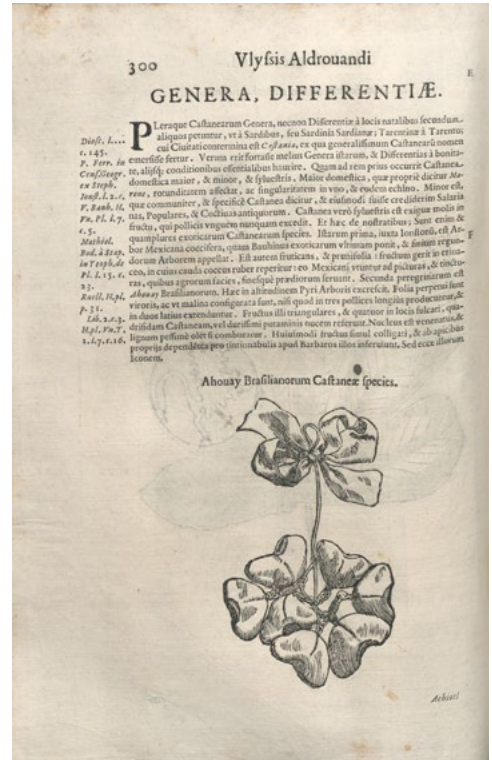
²² BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VII, c. 221r–221v: *Die 27 Aprile 1580. Clusii Sorvo apud me servo ex huius fructus aut huic similis seminibus, quibus exempta est medulla, lora duo filo xylyno contexta. Alia item hinc a fructu quodam anguloso. Constabant vero singula lora duolici aut triplici filorum xylynorum ordine reticuli modo contextorum, a quibus dependent vacui fructus eo quidem exprimi inssimus modo. [...] Abouay Theveti mihi communicavit praeclarus vir D. Joannes Dilphius qui Clusio acceptum referebat.*

²³ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 657: *Alter longe diversae erat figurae, alteriusque coloris, totusque ex tenuioribus, minoribusque plumulis, necnon maiori industria elaboratus. Hic enim singulae plumulae singulis ligneis praesepioliis, uti ex icone apparet, tam constrictae inseruntur, tamque, compresse, ut textae videantur. Talia vero praesepiola tam sedulo complicantur, ut quasi in binas partes secta diceres, et e media veluti sectione singulas plumas tenuissimo filo*



a

Fig. 5. a) Endocarps of *Cascabela thevetia* from the collection of Ulisse Aldrovandi. Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – SMA Sistema Museale di Ateneo – Museo di Palazzo Poggi – Collezione di Ulisse Aldrovandi; photo Marco Ravenna; b) the corresponding woodcut in the *Dendrologiae naturalis* (1667) (BUB). Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.



b

Again, the object appears in the 1586 inventory of Antonio Giganti: “Another similar thing [i.e., a female headdress from Florida] of thin and small yellow feathers, of a bird I do not know, put together with different skill, but not integer”.²⁴ A longer manuscript description of this headdress is found in the *Peregrinarum rerum catalogi (India; Florida provincia)*, where Aldrovandi described the construction technology in detail, expanded the comparison with female garments, explicitly cited Thevet, and also added that the yellow headdress included some purple feathers.²⁵ Perhaps for this reason, when this second headdress was reproduced in

inclusas enasci. Omnes autem plumae luteae, atque quodammodo plumis, quas Rhamphastos seu Pica Bressilica in pectore gerit, similes. Tota insuper textura in hoc, quam in priori, longe densior erat, aemulabaturque velum illud, quo matronae nostrae domi utuntur. Luteis plumis purpureae aliquot immixtae, totam texturam pulcherrimam reddebant. For the comparison with “the veil that our women use at home”, see below.

²⁴ Laurencich Minelli, “L’indice”, 208–211, 236 entry [120]: “Un’altra cosa simile di penne gialle piccole fine, non so di quale uccello, messe insieme con altro artificio, ma non è intiera”.

²⁵ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, IV, c. 264r–265r: *Apud eundem vidi alterum capicium sed alterius figurae formaeque diversae confectum ex pennis mellioribus et minoribus summo atque admirabili artificio contextis siquidem singulae plumae inseruntur in singulis praeseptioli ligneis auctis[?] tamen annexis et in spiram ridutis. Animadversorum est huiusmodi preseptiolum sectum esse in duas partes siquidem in medio sectionis includantur singulae plumae subtilissimo filo spiratum revoluto tamen non sectum sed complicatum est ut diligentis inspicienti manifestus est. Plumulae illae omnes sunt coloris luteo, quae videntur emulari plumas Romphastis seu Picae Brassiliae, et longe den-*



Fig. 6. *Regina insulae Floridae* (BUB, Aldrovandi, *Tavole di Animali*, I, 75). Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.

the painting of the *Regina insulae Floridae* in Aldrovandi's workshop, it was painted (rather confusingly) in a reddish-brown color (Fig. 6).

The woman, described as “Queen of the island of Florida covered with a veil of feathers”²⁶ is depicted in garments that, as Markey points out, were inspired by the images created by Theodore De Bry to illustrate Jacques De Moyne's chronicle and which were ultimately derived from John White's watercolors.²⁷ The corresponding woodcut published in the *Ornithologiae* and the *Monstrorum historia*, whose pearwood tablet is preserved in the Museo di Palazzo Poggi, introduced some slight changes in the woman's posture, in the plant she holds in one hand, and in the rendering of the feathered surface of the “veil”. Significantly, in the hand-colored copies of the *Ornithologiae* the headdress is colored yellow, thus “restoring” the color of the original object (Fig. 7).²⁸ The accompanying text in the *Monstruorum historia* focuses on bodily fashion, repeating Le Moyne's words almost verbatim.²⁹

In summary, as first noted by Laurencich Minelli (and despite some hesitation on this point in previous scholarship),³⁰ Aldrovandi observed both headdresses in the collection of his friend Antonio Giganti, which apparently included several Brazilian objects.³¹ Aldrovandi was particularly interested in their feathers and especially in the manufacturing techniques, which he described in detail in manuscript and printed texts and had visually represented – with outstanding accuracy – in paintings and woodcuts. Unfortunately,

sior est haec textura, quam in alterius capicei proportionatis illis plumis et ut potui conuicere, videtur imitari propriae velum seu peplum qui mulieres ornantur, cum tenum illum anteriores pectus versus tendant, non aut post humeros ut aliud genus capicii superius dicti. Inter illas plumas luteas quadam conspiciuntur plumae purpurei coloris quae maxime pulchram reddunt ipsa texturam et cum ab una parte illius tenue appareat foramen tanquam certum, ut a ligno pactu hemi circuli figuram referat, veri simili est in altera taenia, seu opposita parte particulam ipsius appendicis deesse cum foramen illud rotundum conspiciatur, et tanquam illium deorsum tendunt ad pectus ad instar velorum mulieribum quibus perornantur et hoc capicium nobis descriptum conspicitur hominis illos syluicolas appellatos conficere vestimenta ex plumis variuarum avium quibus vestimentis se tegunt. Et quidam (ut inquit Thevetus) faciunt capicia more suo sicuti refert donatum fuisse huiusmodi capicium Nobilissimo Domino Tres Rius aulico Illustriss. Cardinalis † Sans, et hoc genere capici utuntur tum ob pulchritudinem tum ob ornamentum presentim cum proficiuntur ad bellum ut cum stragem hostium fecerint eosque occiderint. On the reference to “Tres Rius”, see note 35. Thanks to Monica Azzolini for kindly discussing some detail of the transcription.

²⁶ *Regina Insula Florida plumario tecta velo*. BUB, Aldrovandi, *Tavole di Animali*, I, 75.

²⁷ Markey, “Aldrovandi's natives”, 239–241. Jacques Le Moyne, *Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae provincia Gallis acciderunt ... : quae est secunda pars Americae* (Frankfurt: Theodor de Bry, 1591).

²⁸ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 659; Aldrovandi, *Monstruorum historia*, 106; https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=198704.

²⁹ Le Moyne, *Brevis narratio*, XXXVIII.

³⁰ Laurencich Minelli, “Flight of Feathers”, 223 n. 7.

³¹ Among the possible Brazilian objects in Giganti's collection we can mention: “Una borsa Indiana di diversi colori, fatta di scorza di noce d'India”, “Un pezzo di corda fatta dalla scorza della noce d'India”, “Una scure di pietra col manico di legno del Mondo nuovo col manico lungo .2. piedi” (today at the Museo delle Civiltà, Rome), “Un arco di legno d'India con la sua corda lungo cinque piedi et mezzo con diverse frecce del Mondo nuovo, e hanno legno, canna, od osso in cima in cambio di ferro”, as well as a toucan, or “Pica Brassilica”. Laurencich Minelli, “L'indice”, 228–229, 233, 236, 241.



Fig. 7. a) Woodcut of the *Regina insulae Floridae* from the *Ornithologiae* (BUB). Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna; b) matching wooden matrix. Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – SMA Sistema Museale di Ateneo – Museo di Palazzo Poggi.

there is no information on how the two garments and other Brazilian objects reached Antonio Giganti's house in Bologna.

The process of visual contextualization of the headdresses that led to the creation of the *al vivo* paintings of *Homo sylvestris* and *Regina insula Floridae*, involved – as Markey observed – the merging of multiple textual and visual sources through an “autoptic imagination”.³² At the same time, this process also produced shifts in meaning and cultural attribution, largely due to the ambiguity of the protean “Floridan” space in which the artefacts had been conceptually located since their first recording in Giganti's inventory. Influenced by Thevet's text about naked Indigenous warriors going to war with scarlet feathered garments, Aldrovandi (and the artist working for him) put the red headdress on the head of a *Homo sylvestris* (a literal Latin translation of Thevet's French term *sauvage*), described in the *Monstruorum historia* as a warrior going to war with a mace (*baculo*).³³ However, drawing from Desprez

³² Markey, “Aldrovandi's natives”, 246–247.

³³ Aldrovandi, *Monstruorum historia*, 110.



Fig. 8. Tupinamba headdress, now in the collection of the National Museum of Brazil. Courtesy of National Museum of Denmark; photo Roberto Fortuna.

ambiguity of the term “Florida”. Aldrovandi retained Giganti’s identification of the yellow headdress as a female garment from “Florida” and, using Le Moyne’s texts and de Bry’s images, he (and his artist) placed the object (now reddish, now yellow) in a *properly* Flor-

and Thevet as visual sources, the image actually represents a ritual specialist playing musical instruments, with the *baculo* clearly betraying its identity as a *maraca*. Even if Aldrovandi did not indulge in any specific regional attribution, the texts and images he drew from Thevet clearly identify the warrior as a Brazilian Tupinamba. It is thus to this protean “Brazilian Florida” that we must relate Aldrovandi’s praises of the “Floridan” *plumatilis ars*.³⁴ In fact, as first noted by Laura Laurencich Minelli, the cape of the *Homo sylvestris* is obviously a Brazilian Tupinamba ceremonial cape of the kind found in several early modern Italian and European collections and represented today by eleven extant specimens.³⁵ The comparison with the cape once held in the National Museum of Denmark and recently repatriated to the National Museum of Brazil (Fig. 8) shows striking similarities in the general shape, quality, and color of the feathers in the upper and lower sections, and the underlying fiber net.

With regard to the headdress of the *Regina insula Floridae*, the semantic shift – while apparently less pronounced – was in fact even more radical, again due to the

³⁴ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 3: *Plumatilis ars, quam Indi Floridae regionis incolae summa industria exercent, quantum ab alitum genere utilitatis reportet, vel ex hoc constare arbitror; quod non exemplaria solum, sed et insstrumenta, ac materiam ex eo petere cogatur. De cuius artis praestantia, cum suo loco acturus sim, supervacaneum nunc existimo longiori eam sermone prosequi.*

³⁵ Laurencich Minelli, “Oggetti americani”, 196. On the eleven specimens preserved in Copenhagen, Brussels, Paris, Basel, Milan, and Florence, see Amy Buono, “‘Their Treasures Are the Feathers of Birds’: Tupinambá Featherwork and the Image of America”, in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, 178–189. Thevet himself wrote that he had gifted one such cape to a Mr. Troisriex (or Troissereux). Thevet, *Les singularitez*, 47v.



Fig. 9. a) Tupinamba headdress. Courtesy of National Museum of Denmark; photo Roberto Fortuna; b) detail of the feathers' attachment. Courtesy of National Museum of Denmark; photo Roberto Fortuna; c) detail from the painting of the *Regina insulae Floridae*. Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.



idan context, i.e., in the North American Southeast, which also caused some confusion in later scholarship. Indeed, in her earlier publications Laurencich Minelli argued that the headdress could precisely proceed from “proper” Florida, while in a later publication she opted for a possible Mexican origin.³⁶ This was quite paradoxical, since it was Laurencich Minelli herself who spotted the key comparative artifact for a proper identification, a Tupinamba feather headdress at the National Museum of Denmark (Fig. 9). It closely resembles that of the *Regina insula*

³⁶ Laurencich Minelli, “Oggetti americani”, 199–200; Ead., “Museography and ethnographical collections in Bologna during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”, in *The Origin of Museums. The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impney and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 18; Ead., “36. Regina Insulae Floridae”; Ead., “Flight of Feathers in Italian Collections from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, 218–227. Peter Mason, “Ulisse Aldrovandi”, 99 correctly hypothesized a Brazilian provenience.

Floridæ in general shape, (yellow) color, and especially in its technical details, with the feathers set in wooden supports that are strikingly similar to those depicted by Aldrovandi.³⁷ In short, the *Regina insula Floridæ* – dressed as a proper Floridan woman but wearing a Tupinamba headdress – fully embodies the conceptual indeterminacy of Giganti’s and Aldrovandi’s protean “Florida”.

3. The Mesoamerican shields in the collection of Tommaso de’ Cavalieri

In the *Ornithologiae* Aldrovandi briefly mentioned two feathered shields he had seen in the Roman house of Tommaso de’ Cavalieri: “I remember that, when I was in Rome, in the famous museum of the illustrious and noble man Tommaso de’ Cavalieri [...], I saw shields very elegantly elaborated and decorated with such featherwork, with which Indian Princes go to war, as said before”.³⁸ Although previous scholarship refrained from any specific cultural attribution,³⁹ the shields were probably Mesoamerican, a hypothesis further supported by the mention of the two shields in the manuscript lists that record the objects that Ulisse Aldrovandi saw in Cavalieri’s Roman house in 1577.⁴⁰ Not only the Cavalieri collection was rich in Mesoamerican artifacts, but their synthetic description – which confirms Aldrovandi’s attention to craft technologies – includes a telling technical detail: “Shields made of the feathers of various Indian birds, attached on reeds”.⁴¹ This last statement per-

³⁷ Cfr. Laurencich Minelli, “Oggetti americani”, 199, quoting Alfred Mettraux, *La civilization matérielle des tribus Tupi-Guarani* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1928), 131–132.

³⁸ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 656: *Memini me, cum Romae essem, in musaeo percelebri illustris ac patritii ordinis viri D. Thomae Cavallerii, cuius postmodum neptim magnificus D. Iulianus Griffonius Sororis meae filius in uxorem duxit, clypeos vidisse elegantissime eiuscemodi plumario opere elaboratos, condecoratosque, qualibus nempe Principes Indorum ad bellum euntes uti diximus.*

³⁹ Detlef Heikamp, “American objects in Italian collections of the Renaissance and Baroque: a survey”, in *First Images of America: The impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 455–482, 461; Giuseppe Olmi, *L’inventario del mondo. Catalogazione della natura e luoghi del sapere nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 239 n. 64; Mason, *Ulisse Aldrovandi*, 108.

⁴⁰ Various versions of the list are found in the Aldrovandian manuscript corpus (BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VI, ms. 143, III, ms. 34, II). The list in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, III was first noticed by Olmi, *L’inventario del mondo*, 239 n. 64, and commented by Raffaella Stasi, *L’interesse di Ulisse Aldrovandi verso la Mesoamerica: collezioni e fonti*, unpublished MA thesis, Università degli Studi di Bologna, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 1997–1998, 237–238, Appendix, X. For deeper analyses of the lists and of the Cavalieri collection see Davide Domenici “The Collection of Tommaso de’ Cavalieri as Recorded by Ulisse Aldrovandi in 1577 (BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VI), *Storicamente* 19 (2023), https://storicamente.org/domenici_collection_tommaso_de_cavalieri; Id., “Mixtec Social Memory in Late Renaissance Rome. Ulisse Aldrovandi, Tommaso de’ Cavalieri and the ‘Skull of an Indian King’”, *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, in press; Id., “Ulisse Aldrovandi’s engagement with Mesoamerican Material Culture”, in *Global Aldrovandi*, ed. Lia Markey and Davide Domenici (Leiden: Brill, in preparation).

⁴¹ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VI, c. 122r: *Clypei contexti ex plumis variariarum avicularum indicarum intus autem iuncis obiuncti.* BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, XXIII, 144v has *vineis* (“twigs”) instead of *iuncis* (“reeds”).

factly matches the reed structure of the four extant Mesoamerican shields from early modern European collections, now held in Stuttgart, Vienna, and Mexico City.⁴² These four known shields – as well as the many listed in the inventories of Hernán Cortés shipments to Spain – are Nahua (i.e., “Aztec”) objects, so that a similar provenience can be tentatively assumed for the now-lost ones in the Cavalieri collection which, nevertheless, also included several Mixtec artifacts. In fact, Aldrovandi may have been aware of the provenience of the shields, since in the *Ornithologiae* – just before writing about his visit to Tommaso de’ Cavalieri – he specifically mentions the gifts offered by the Aztec king Moctezuma to Hernán Cortés.⁴³

4. The St. Jerome from New Spain

A Mexican feather mosaic depicting St. Jerome in adoration of the crucified Christ was so appreciated by Aldrovandi that he mentioned it twice in the *Ornithologiae*. Already in the prologue, after praising the “Floridan” *plumatilis ars*, he wrote: “I cannot however pass over in silence an exceptional panel, which the Most Illustrious Cardinal Paleotti, a man of incomparable learning and honesty, gave me as a gift and which I still keep hanging in my museum. In it, the image of St. Jerome kneeling and adoring the image of the Crucified Christ, our Savior, is expressed *ad vivum* with the iridescent feathers of Indian birds, in such a way that it seems to have been traced with a brush rather than composed with feathers. After bringing it from Spain, the Most Illustrious Cardinal de Burgos wished to give it to the

⁴² On these four shields, see Zelia Nuttall, “Ancient Mexican feather work at the Columbian historical exposition at Madrid”, in *Report of the Madrid Commission, 1892* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 329–337; Christian Feest, “Vienna’s Mexican treasures: Aztec, Mixtec and Tarascan works from 16th-century American collections”, *Archiv für Völkerkunde* 45 (1990), 14–17; Renée Riedler, “Materials and Technique of the Feather Shield Preserved in Vienna”, in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, 330–341; Melanie Korn, “Zwei Federmosaikschilder im Landesmuseum Württemberg Stuttgart, Eine materialtechnische Untersuchung, Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin, Fachbereich Gestaltung, Konservierung und Restaurierung”, MA thesis (Berlin: Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft, 2016); Laura Filloy Nadal and María Olvido Moreno Guzmán, “Precious Feathers and Fancy Fifteenth-century Feathered Shields”, in *Rethinking the Aztec Economy*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols, Frances F. Berdan, and Michael E. Smith (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017), 156–194; María Olvido Moreno Guzmán, Renée Riedler, Melanie Ruth Korn, and Laura Filloy Nadal, “Chimalli. Escudos mexicas emplumados”, *Arqueología Mexicana* 159 (2019): 54–58; Laura Filloy Nadal and María Olvido Moreno Guzmán, “El *cuexyo chimalli* del Castillo de Chapultepec”, *Arqueología Mexicana* 159 (2019): 61–64; Linda Báez Rubí, “Feathered Shield”, in *New World Objects of Knowledge, A Cabinet of Curiosities*, ed. Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel (London: University of London Press, 2021), 61–65.

⁴³ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 656: [...]*eos populos, quod pariter omnes, quotquot de Indiis scripsere, sepius repetunt, pennas alitum in summis habere delicias: atque idcirco nostratibus eo advectis pro singulari munere varias pennas, atque ipsa opera plumaria obtulisse legimus: Sic Mazuma Rex Ferdinando Cortesio gratificaturus praeter alias innumeras opes, etiam opera quaedam plumaria donavit.*

Most Illustrious Cardinal Paleotti; who later donated it to our Museum”.⁴⁴ Then, in Book 11, the same artwork is mentioned again: “In fact, in my museum is to be seen a picture of St. Jerome kneeling in adoration – donated by the Most Illustrious Cardinal of Burgos to the Most Illustrious Cardinal Paleotti, who then gave it to my museum – which neither Apelles, if he were to be revived, nor any other eminent painter, could express better with the brush. Everyone looks with wonder and amazement at this image, the most precious object in the entire museum, which you could rightly call a microcosm, or the theater of Nature itself, in which, of course, every creation of Nature is represented, as well as almost innumerable other paintings”.⁴⁵

A somewhat more detailed description of the same feather mosaic is found in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 116, where we learn that St. Jerome was depicted while beating his chest with a stone, in a desert landscape where, in addition to the usual lion, other quadrupeds, birds, and trees were also represented.⁴⁶ Thanks to a later inventory we know that, at least in the 18th century, the feather mosaic had a black frame with a small protective curtain.⁴⁷

Aldrovandi’s words are revealing about the provenance of the object, since he made clear that he had received the mosaic from Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti who, in turn, had received it from the Cardinal of Burgos, who brought it from Spain. The Cardinal of Burgos was probably Francisco Pacheco de Toledo (Cardinal since 1561 and Bishop of Burgos since 1567), who met Paleotti on several occasions, including the papal conclaves of 1565–1566 and 1572, in which they both participated as electors.

Feather mosaics with Christian imagery, often made by Indigenous artists from Michoacán,

⁴⁴ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 3: *Unam tamen, eamque eximiam huius generis tabulam silentio involvere non possum, quam Illustrissimus Cardinalis Paleotus incomparabili doctrina & probitate vir mihi dono dedit; quamq̄ ego in Musaeo meo appensam adhuc asservo. In hac D. Hieronymi Christum Salvatorem nostrum cruci affixum genu flexo adorantis imago, ex versicoloribus Avium Indicarum pennis ad vivum ita expressa est; ut non plumis contexta, sed penicillo ducta videatur. Hac ex Hispanijs secum allata, Illustrissimus Cardinalis de Burgos Illustrissimo Cardinali Paleoto gratificari voluit; qui eam postea nostro Musaeo consecravit.*

⁴⁵ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 656: *Equidem in meo musaeo videre est D. Hieronymi Salvatorem nostrum flexo genu adorantis imaginem, ab Ilustriss. Card. de Burgos, Illustriss. Card. Paleoto dono datam, et ab hoc postmodum musaeo meo dedicatam, quam ne Apelles, si reviviscat, vel alius quispiam praestantissimus pictor penicillo melius exprimat. Hanc imaginem, ceu rem pretiosissimam in toto musaeo, quod recte microcosmum, sive Naturae ipsius theatrum dixeris, in quo nimirum quicumque Naturae partus referuantur, atque innumerae pene aliae picturae, suspiciunt omnes, mirantur, obstupescunt.*

⁴⁶ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 116, c. 129 (209). *Pterostraton, .i. est stratum ex pennis diversorum colorum variarum avicularum indiarum ex quibus instar versmiculati [sic] operis depicti est confecta figura sancti Hieronymi poenitentiam agentis in deserto, saxoque pectus suam percutientis; una cum Christo Crucifixo, craneo humani apposito, cum leone, alijs animalibus quadripedibus, aviculi, sylvis et arboribus, ab. Illustrissimo Cardinale Paleoto mihi dono datum.* This manuscript passage, never published before, was first noticed by Olmi 1992, 243. For the correction of *versiculati* into *vermiculati* see below.

⁴⁷ See below, n. 54.

were quite common in early modern European collections.⁴⁸ Three feather mosaics of St. Jerome are known in the extant corpus, while at least two others are mentioned in historical sources.⁴⁹ The one in the Weltmuseum in Vienna, first recorded at Ambras Castle in 1595, shows the saint in the company of the lion while beating his chest with a stone and is perhaps the one that best allows us to imagine the now-lost specimen from the Aldrovandi collection.⁵⁰

In the circle of Aldrovandi's friends, Antonio Giganti owned a "featherwork miter, made in the New World: it was brought by Card. Poggio from Spain, very damaged by moths, but the artistry and the beauty of the colors are still visible", as well as a "small featherwork panel of the New World, Magdalena with Christ and two Angels, better preserved than the miter".⁵¹ Furthermore, accord-

⁴⁸ Thanks to his reading of José de Acosta, Aldrovandi was aware that Michoacán was the main place of production of feather mosaics; see BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, XIII, c. 191. On Mesoamerican feather mosaics and their presence in European collections see the fundamental *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, which also includes an immensely useful census of the extant specimens compiled by Alessandra Russo. On the same topic, see also Diana Magaloni-Kerpel, "Real and Illusory Feathers: Pigments, Painting Techniques, and the Use of Color in Ancient Mesoamerica," *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, (online) *Coloquios* (2006), <https://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/1462>; Corinna Tania Gallori, "Collecting Feathers: A Journey from Mexico into Italian Collections (16th–17th Century)", in *Collecting East and West*, ed. Susan Bracken, Andrea M. Gáldy, and Adriana Turpin (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 61–82; Alessandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image. A Mestizo History of the Arts of New Spain, 1500–1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), especially chapters 4 and 7; Margit Kern, "Cultured Materiality in Early Modern Art: Feather Mosaics in Sixteenth-Century Collections", in *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, ed. Christine Göttler and Mia Mochizuki (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 319–334; Juliana Ramírez Hererra, "Conversion and Conservation: Mexica Featherwork, the Miraculous, and Early Modern European Practices of Collecting", *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 53 (2017), 205–239; Stefan Hanß, "New World Feathers and the Matter of Early Modern Ingenuity: Digital Microscopes, Period Hands, and Period Eyes, in *Ingenuity in the Making: Materials and Technique in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Richard J. Oosterhoff, José Ramón Marcaida, and Alexander Marr (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 189–202. Further specific references are provided below.

⁴⁹ The three mosaics are in Vienna, Loreto, and Madrid. Alessandra Russo, "Inventory of Extant Featherwork from Mesoamerica and New Spain", in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, items 88, 116, 148. A St. Jerome is recorded in a 1610 Prague inventory, while another one (with St. Jerome in the company of the lion) was seen in Naples by Gian Lorenzo d'Anania between 1576 and 1582. Kern, "Cultured Materiality", 335; Gian Lorenzo d'Anania, *L'universale fabbrica del mondo, ovvero Cosmographia* (Venezia: Il Mischio, 1582), 369; Gallori, "Collecting feathers", 76.

⁵⁰ <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/object/?detailID=530486&offset=0&lv=list>; Feest, "Vienna's Mexican Treasures", 21–23; Kern, "Cultured Materiality", 323–330.

⁵¹ Laurencich, "L'indice", 236 entry n. [118] and 238 entry n. [4]: "Una mitra di lavoro di piuma, fatta al Mondo nuovo: la portò il Card. Poggio di Spagna, è intignata assai, pur si vede l'artificio et la vaghezza de colori"; "Un quadretto di lavoro di piuma del Mondo nuovo, la Madalena con un Christo e duo Angeli, più fresco e meglio conservato che la mitra." A few miters of this kind still exist today: in Italy, two specimens are preserved in the Tesoro dei Granduchi in Florence and in the Museo del Duomo di Milano; see Alessandra Russo, "Uncatchable Colors", in *Colors Between Two Worlds. The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, ed. Gerhard Wolf and Joseph Connors in collaboration with Louis A. Waldman (Firenze: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz/Villa I Tatti The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies), 405–410; Corinna Tania Gallori, "From Paper to Feathers: The Holy Names of Jesus and Mary from Europe to Mexico", in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, 311–319; Ellen J. Pearlstein, "Bishop's Miter and Infulae, a Feathered Masterpiece from Museo degli Argenti in Florence", *Latin*

ing to Aldrovandi's own manuscript record, in the Roman collection of Tommaso de' Cavalieri there were "Indian images of various saints, that is, Christ, his Mother the Virgin Mary, Peter and Paul, and other saints made with feathers of various birds, mainly green, which can be called bird mosaic; in fact, the Indians make various images with these feathers [...]"⁵²

After Aldrovandi's death, the St. Jerome feather mosaic followed the fate of his entire collection. It was transferred to Palazzo Pubblico, where it was recorded in a mid-17th century inventory and seen between 1663 and 1666 by the English traveler and writer Philip Skippon, who described it as "A curious picture of *S. Hierome*, made of bird feathers."⁵³ Then, in 1742 it was transferred to the Istituto delle Scienze di Bologna, where it was lost after 1763.⁵⁴ In the same collection of the Istituto, at least since 1763, there was another, later (17th century) feather mosaic on copper and paper depicting Saint Bernard, whose tentative attribution to the Aldrovandi collection must be rejected on chronological grounds. The mosaic is still preserved in the Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna and its ultimate provenance is unfortunately unknown.⁵⁵

American and Latinx Visual Culture 1, no. 2 (2019): 99–106. Several other similar miters existed in 16th century Italy: two of them, for example, were recorded in the inventory of the pontifical *Guardaroba* in 1592; one of them bore the papal coat of arms of Julius III, so that it must have been created between 1550 and 1555; see James W. Nelson Novoa, "L'inventario di Innocenzo IX e Clemente VIII: un'occhiata alla guardaroba pontificia nel 1592", *Studi Medievali e Moderni* XXVIII (2024), 142.

⁵² BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VI, c. 122r: *Figura Indica variorum sanctorum nempe Christi, eius Matris Mariae Verginis, Petri et Pauli et aliorum sanctorum confecta ex plumis variarum avicularum maxime viridium ita ut hornestraton dici possit: nam ex illis plumis varias figuras Indi effingunt [...]*.

⁵³ Archivio di Stato di Bologna, Ass. di Stud., b. 100, n. 6, *Inventario dello studio dell'Aldrovandi* (probably dated between 1649 and 1657): "Un quadro di S. Gieronimo tutto di piume"; see Scappini and Torricelli, *Lo Studio Aldrovandi in Palazzo Pubblico (1617–1742)* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1993), 32, 125. Philip Skippon, "Account of a Journey Made Thro' Part of the Low-Countries, Germany, Italy, and France", in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts*, ed. Awnsham and John Churchill (London: John Walthoe, 1732), VI, 559: "A curious picture of *S. Hierome*, made of bird feathers". Heikamp, "American objects", 477 n. 26.

⁵⁴ The mosaic was recorded in an inventory dated May 25, 1742 (BUB, ms. 595, y, 1) which locates the object in the third room of Aldrovandi's museum in Palazzo Pubblico and which was written just before the transfer to the Istituto: "Venerabile San Girolamo fatto con varie penne d'uccelli con cornice nera e sua tendina sopra il tavolino". See Scappini and Torricelli, *Lo Studio*, 132. The latest mention of the St. Jerome is found – to the best of my knowledge – in a Latin list penned by Giacomo Biancani Tazzi dated March 16, 1763, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Fondo Speciale Filippo Schiassi, b. XXXVIII, fasc. 7, *Promemorie Varie*, where it is recorded as an additional, fifth item, in Italian, by a different hand "5. Pittura rappresentante S. Girolamo fatta con varie penne d'uccelli".

⁵⁵ Laura Laurencich Minelli and Alessandra Filipetti, "Per le collezioni americanistiche del Museo Cospiano e dell'Istituto delle Scienze. Alcuni oggetti ritrovati a Bologna", *Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia*, CXIII (1983), 215, 223; *Bologna e il Mondo Nuovo*, 10, 146–147; Ead., "Flight of Feathers", 218, 222–223. Curiously enough, the earliest mention of this mosaic is found in the same Latin list by Biancani Tazzi mentioned in the previous note: It is listed as the fourth item as *Imago S. Bernardi coram Virgine genuflexi, plumis minutissimis ex perpulchris avicularum, vulgo sunt mexicano Chupa mirtos nuncupatae, depicta, cum argentea theca*. The same mosaic was then recorded in several later inventories when the collection of the Istituto had been

5. The zoomorphic Mesoamerican “idols”

Other Mesoamerican feather mosaics, now lost, were described and illustrated in Aldrovandi’s *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri tres, et De quadrupedibus digitatis ouiparis libri duo*, published posthumously in 1637 and edited by Bartolomeo Ambrosini (Fig. 10). In Book 2 (*Digitatis ouiparis*), when dealing with images of frogs, the text states:

Ferdinando Cortés in the *Historia Mexicana*, dealing with their Gods, reports that the inhabitants worshiped the image of a frog, because they say that the frog is the queen of the fishes, either because it has a voice, while the rest of the fishes have no voice, or because by singing it invites men to catch it. Moreover, how good is the ingenuity of the Indians is most evident in the arts, and especially in the works very

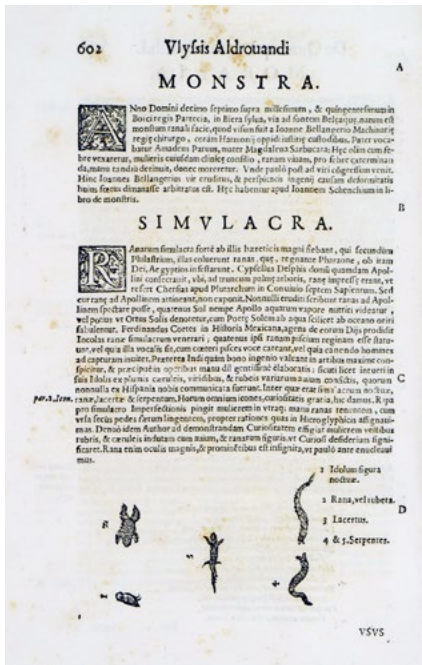


Fig. 10. Feather zoomorphic “idols” from *De quadrupedibus digitatis* (1637) (BUB), and matching wooden matrix (BUB). Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna – Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.

already transferred to the University. In a pre-1814 manuscript list by Filippo Schiassi (BCA, Fondo Speciale Filippo Schiassi, b. XXXVIII, fasc. 8) it is listed as “una pittura di penne d’uccelli rappresentante S. Bernardo”; the very same words were then repeated in Filippo Schiassi, *Guida del Forestiere al Museo delle Antichità della Regia Università di Bologna* (Bologna: Giuseppe Lucchesini, 1814), 144, and in the manuscript *Inventario degli oggetti del Gabinetto Archeologico della Pontificia Università di Bologna diretto dal Professore Filippo Schiassi. Museo dell’università. 14 marzo 1835* (Archivio del Museo Archeologico di Bologna), f. 15. In the manuscript *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Regia Università di Bologna. Inventario delle proprietà mobili dello Stato esistenti al 31 dicembre 1870 nell’archeologia* (Archivio del Museo Archeologico di Bologna) 1870, 71, and in the *Inventario del Museo Archeologico della Regia Università di Bologna* (Archivio del Museo Archeologico di Bologna), 27, it is recorded as “Quadretto formato di penne d’uccelli rappresentante S. Bernardo”.

carefully made by hand; as we may observe in their idols crafted with the blue, green, and red feathers of various birds, some of which were brought to us from Spain. Among them, there was the image of an owl, a frog, a lizard, and snakes. For the sake of curiosity, we offer here the images of all these.⁵⁶

The first part of the text, which reports Aztec beliefs about frogs, is a reference to the 1555 Italian translation of Francisco López de Gómara's work.⁵⁷ In the second part, in addition to a mention of Indigenous ingenuity that we will return to later, the text describes some feather "idols" in the form of animals that Aldrovandi had received from Spain; the incidental presence of a frog among them was the reason for their mention in *De quadrupedibus*, a rather awkward location that has caused this passage to escape scholarly attention until now. The five "idols" are then illustrated in a woodcut – the original pearwood tablet of which is still preserved in the Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna⁵⁸ – in which the feathered surface of the small animals is clearly visible.

A more detailed mention of the same featherwork is also found in the Aldrovandian manuscript text of the *Observationes* probably dated between September 1, 1593, and March 15, 1594:

Of the Idols or Cemi of Indian birds' feathers. How good is the ingenuity of the Indians in the arts is best seen in their works, diligently made by hand, as also in the nautiluses with silver mounts, so beautifully carved, and is also seen in these Cemi made by them from the most beautiful feathers of various birds, Cemi and idols which indeed were given to me by the pious memory of Mr. Roberto Saliceti, administrator of the Most Reverend and Illustrious Archbishop of Rossano, when the latter was in Madrid as nuncio to the Most Serene and Christian Catholic King. Among these idols that were given to me, in the first place it is shown the idol of green feathers which represents an owl. Another represents a frog. The third a lizard, and the fourth and fifth serpents with gaping mouths. Among the feathers there are some green, some red, some blue, with which they are worked with the greatest skill, as we also see among the Italians where all sorts of flowers of silk, satin, and other textiles which are vulgarly called tapheta are made by the women to adorn our brides. In cupboard 6, capsula 52. In the table, see the owl at number 1, the frog at number 2, the lizard at number 3, and the serpents with gaping mouths at numbers 4 and 5.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ulisse Aldrovandi, *De quadrupedibus digitatis viuiparis libri tres, et De quadrupedibus digitatis ouiparis libri duo* (1637), 602: *Ferdinandus Cortes in Historia Mexicana, agens de eorum Dijs prodidit Incolas ranae simulacrum venerari; quatenus ipsi ranam piscium reginam esse statunt, vel quia illa vocalis sit, cum coeteri pisces voce careant, vel quia canendo homines ad capturam invitet. Praeterea Indi quam bono ingenio valeant in artibus maxime conspicitur, et praecipua in operibus manu diligentissime elaborates; sicuti licet intueri in suis Idolis ex plumis caeruleis, viridibus, et rubies variarium avium confictis, quorum nonnulla ex Hispania nobis communicate fuerunt. Inter quae erat simulacrum noctuae, ranae, lacerate et serpentum. Horum omnium icons, curiositatis gratia hic damus.*

⁵⁷ Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia di Mexico et quando si discopere la Nuova Hispana...* (Roma: Valerio & Luigi Dorici, 1555), 223v.

⁵⁸ https://bbcc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=209737.

⁵⁹ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, XXI, c. 189v: *De Idolis seu Cemmi ex plumis avicularum Indicarum. Quam bono ingenio valeant Indi in artibus maxime conspicitur in eorum operibus, manu diligentissime elaboratis sicuti etiam*

Particularly interesting is the information on how the objects arrived from Spain, since Aldrovandi states that they were given to him by a Mr. Roberto Saliceti, administrator of Giambattista Castagna (the future Pope Urban VII) when, as the Archbishop of Rossano, he acted as nuncio at the Spanish court in Madrid (1565–1572). Roberto Saliceti also sent some natural specimens to Aldrovandi.⁶⁰

The small size of the illustrations and the unusual nature of the zoomorphic mosaics hamper a precise cultural attribution. Cortés' mention in the text of *De quadrupedis* suggests a Mesoamerican provenance, which is consistent with the shape of the serpents. In terms of chronology, they could be either pre-Hispanic or colonial productions.

A final aspect worth noting about the woodcut of Mesoamerican “idols” is that it somehow reverses the usual relationship between featherwork and printed images. In fact, several scholars have studied the use of European prints as visual sources for colonial Mesoamerican featherwork, often emphasizing how the creative intervention of indigenous artists – both in terms of materials and content – meant that featherwork could not be considered merely a derivative art genre, but rather the fruit of a process of universalization.⁶¹ In the case of Aldrovandi's idols, on the other hand, the woodcut reproduces an original featherwork, mak-

in nautilus [?] argentinis tam pulcre insculptis apparet, sicuti videre est etiam in his Cemmis ab illis effectis ex plumis pulcherrimis variarum avicularum quiquidem Cemmi et idola mihi communicati fuere a piae memoriae domino Roberto Saliceto economi Reverendissimi ac Illustrissimi nuncis Archiepiscopi Rosani apud Serenissimum et Christianissimum Regem Catholicum cum ageret Madrille. Inter aec vero idola mihi communicata primo loco sese offert Idolum quod referebat noctuam ex plumis viridibus. Aliud vero erat quod referebat ranam. Tertium autem Lacertum quartum et quintum serpentes ore hiantes. Inter plumas autem quaedam sunt virides, quaedam rubrae, quaedam caeruleae ex quibus summa arte sunt constructa sicuti etiam apud Italos videmos ex Holoserico et raso et aliis contestis ex ut raso taphetato vulgo dicta sunt tot genera florum a mulieribus pro sponsis nostris ornandis. In armario caps. 52 numero 6. In tabula videlicet noctua numero 1 Rubera numero 2. Lacertus numero 3 Serpentes ore hiante numero 4 et 5. I thank Daniela Picchi and Cristiana Scappini for pointing me out the manuscript where this passage is found. The handwriting of the text is to be attributed to one of the several copyists working with Aldrovandi.

⁶⁰ Emma Sallent del Colombo, “Natural History Illustration between Bologna and Valencia: The Aldrovandi–Pomar Case”, *Early Science and Medicine* 21 (2016): 189–190; Emma Sallent Del Colombo and José Pardo-Tomás, “Materiali aldrovandiani in Spagna: l'enigmatico caso del *Códice Pomar*”, in *Ulisse Aldrovandi: libri e immagini di storia naturale nella prima età moderna*, ed. Giuseppe Olmi and Fulvio Simoni (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2018), 42–43; Giovanni Battista De Toni, “Spigolature aldrovandiane: XI. Intorno alle relazioni del botanico Melchiorre Guilandino con Ulisse Aldrovandi”, *Atti della I.R. Accademia di scienze, lettere ed arti degli Agiati in Rovereto*, s. 3, 17, no. 2 (1911): 170.

⁶¹ Alessandra Russo, “El Renacimiento vegetal. Arboles de Jes. entre el Viejo Mundo y el Nuevo”, *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 20 (1998): 4–39; Ead., *The Untranslatable Image*, 104–108; Ead., “Lights on the Antipodes. Francisco de Holanda and an Art History of the Universal”, *The Art Bulletin* 102, no. 4 (2020): 61–62; Corinna T. Gallori, “Ink and Feathers: Prints, Printed Books, and Mexican Featherwork”, in *Prints as Agents of Global Exchange, 1500–1800*, ed. Heather Madar (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 283–315; Brendan C. McMahon, “Contingent Images: Looking Obliquely at Colonial Mexican Featherwork in Early Modern Europe”, *The Art Bulletin* 103, no. 2 (2021): 24–49; Alessandra Russo, *A New Antiquity. Art and Humanity as Universal. 1400–1600* (University Park, PA: Penn State University, 2024), 180–181.

ing it potentially accessible to a large European audience. In fact, this possibility remained unexploited, mainly due to the location of the woodcut in the *De quadrupedis* volume: to the best of my knowledge, there has never been a single scholar's comment on it in over three centuries. Furthermore, and unfortunately, the fact that the original plumage is unknown and does not correspond to any known genre makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the woodcarver was able to reproduce the featherwork accurately.

6. Aldrovandi's work in the context of early modern literature on Indigenous American featherwork

Having so far enumerated the specific feather artifacts discussed and illustrated by Aldrovandi, let us now explore some of the discursive contexts in which they were situated by establishing a close dialogue between the actual objects and information drawn from published sources. It is in Book 11 (*De psittacis*) of the *Ornithologiae* (1599), in a section entitled *Usus in externis*, that Aldrovandi summarizes most ethnographic information on the use of parrot feathers by Indians in both the East and West Indies, where parrots are abundant, to make a variety of things, such as images of butterflies, flowers, and herbs, hats, loincloths, shields, costumes for wooden "idols", clothes, curtains, and tapestries.⁶² Stressing that the Mexicans were the most prolific producers of featherwork, he describes the hummingbird (stating that they "do not exceed the size of the bees") and the chromatic variety of their feathers.⁶³ Borrowing information from Amerigo Vespucci and André Thevet, he then stresses the preciousness of the feathers and the ways in which they were sold in Tenochtitlan at special weekly markets.⁶⁴ After a long detour into the ingenuity

⁶² Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 655: *Indi autem tam Eoi, quam Occidentales, quibus Psittacorum frequentissimus numerus est, et quibus vel invitis undique, sese ingerunt, ut et aliarum avium omne genus discolor, aliam cum e Psittacis, tum ex eiuscemodi discoloribus avibus aliis fructum norunt. Non enim eos solum magni aestimant, quod ipsis ceu cupediis quibusdam vescantur, sed vel ideo potissimum, quod bis terve quotannis eos plumis exuant, ut ex illis imagines varias, papiliones, flores, herbasque, necnon pileos, et perizomata sibi conficiant, clypeos suos et entes, quos ligneos habent, exornent, vestes, aulaea atque tapetes contextant, aliaque quamplurima utensilia conficiant, quae ex his summa industria, et miro artificio ad omnium stuporem concinnare norunt. Sed posteaquam in eiuscemodi plumariorum, sive plumatiliu operum mentionem incidimus, no ab re fore arbitramur, paullo susius de ijs, hoc loco agere, quamvis ea alioqui ex alijs quoque versicolorum avium pennis conficiantur: quas inter tanquam caeteris nobiliores existunt patrio nomine Tominei dictae.* In addition to those cited before, several other manuscript notes that – recording information from published books – served as bases for the texts on Indigenous American featherwork in the *Ornithologiae* can be found in the *Peregrinarum rerum catalogi*; see for example BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, II, c. 235r–236r and ms. 143, IV, c. 299v, 341r–342r, 344v.

⁶³ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, IV, c. 289r–290v, devoted to New Spain, contains the manuscript source of the passages on hummingbirds published in the *Ornithologiae*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 655: *Has namque Messicani maximi faciunt. Qui de India nova suas navigationes scriptis publicaverunt, aviculas ibi reperiri tradunt tantae exiguitatis, ut ne apes magnitudine superet, tam diversorum vero colorum pennis vestiri, ut vel hae sole operibus plumariis sufficiant: adduntque eiuscemodi aviculas rore solo, quem apum more ex floribus colligant, vivere, totaque hyeme glirium instar obdormire. Habent praeterea multa alia avium diversicolorum genera Indi quinimo Americus Vesputius eorum divitias solum ex avium pennis dimittitur, no quod aliis rebus non*

of Indigenous artisans and the similarity between featherwork and painting – on which we will comment in a moment –, as well as on his own St. Jerome, Aldrovandi returns to the creation of feathered military items,⁶⁵ to the aforementioned gifts offered by Moctezuma, and (after mentioning Tommaso de' Cavalieri's shields), to additional ethnographic information on Aztec religious practices and their appreciation of feathers. Based on the Jesuit José de Acosta, he offers a translation of the name of the Mexica patron Huitzilopochtli as “Left of the shining feathers” (*senestram resplendentis pennae; sinistra de plumas resplendentes* in Acosta's Spanish text, which is a quite awkward translation of the Nahuatl name that actually means “Left-handed/Southern Hummingbird”) and mentions the feather ornaments of the sacrificial victims offered to Tezcatlipoca and those worn by Topiltzin (Quetzalcoatl).⁶⁶

Intermingled within this synthesis of ethnographic data, somehow cherry-picked to select feathers-related information, Aldrovandi tackled some other issues which deserve to be commented in detail.

Artistic excellence and Indigenous ingenuity

A first aspect I would like to comment on is Aldrovandi's appreciation for the technical and artistic quality of featherwork. In the *Ornithologiae* he praised the great industry (*summa industria*) of “Floridan” feather workers and the “excellence of their art” (*artis praestantia*),

abundent pretiosioribus, verum quia, si his carerent, ex solis plumis, quaecumque ad victum necessaria requiruntur, sibi comparare queant: quare etiam multis in locis publicas de eis nundinas instituunt. Themistbetani referente Teveto, qui et vestimenta, tapetes, atque id genus utensilia alia e pennis contexunt, sex septemve dierum intervallo in quodam loco, tali mercaturae destinato nihil praeter eiuscemodi pennas mercatur. In nundinis Messicanorum omne volucrum genus veditur, cum ad victum, tum ad opera plumaria, inter quae illud omnium mercatorum oculos in se convertit, cui aurum intertextum conspicitur, aspectu iucundissimum vel cuius potissimum causa multa eo confluent nationes. For a manuscript source of this passage, see BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, IV, c. 299v.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 656: *Caeterum eiuscemodi imagines teste, quae paulo antea nominavimus, Acosta apud Messicanos, et Passarinos optime siunt, et quae reliquis praeferuntur. Iam vero praeter imagines varia praeterea alia ex pennis Indi, ut diximus conficiunt, maxime Regum, et principum ornamenta, item templorum et idolorum. Nam et ipsis eiuscemodi opera in summo honorum gradu habentur. His nimrum sese exornant, maxime Principes, et hi potissimum, cum ad bellum proficiscuntur ut in apponendis iconibus apparebit; quinimo gladios suos, clypeos, atque alia iis arma sua condecorant. Americanos tradit Tevetus, quando victores e praelio domum revertuntur, pennis variis sese cohonestare, sed nunquid etiam plumatilibus vestibus sese induant, non addit.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: *Ad quos ut regrediatu oratio nostra, certo adhuc certius est nihil illis pretiosius, delectabilius, gratiusque, atque in maiori aestimatione existisse, quam eiusmodi plumaria opera, quibus denique, non se duntaxat, suosque Sacerdotes in praecipuis idolorum suorum festivitatis, celebrationibusque, verum ipsa etiam idola instruebant, tanquam ornamento, quod omnibus aliis praecelleret, Vitzilipuztli, quod praecipuum ac honoratissimum Messicanorum idolum est, teste Iosepho Acosta a plumis nomen meruit: significat enim Indis id nomen senestram resplendentis pennae. Erat siquidem pennis praecipue adornatum. Cui sacrificaturae etiam virgines brachia sua Psittacorum pennis decorabant, Tezcatlipuca (est alterius Messicanorum idoli nomen) armillas habebat ex avium pennis mirifice fabricatos. In huius quoque Daemonis rogationibus, puelli puellaeque coronati incedebant, pedibus, brachiisque plumario opere cohonestatis. Postremo ipse sacerdos Topiltzin illis vocatus, qui nimirum vivos homines illi daemioni mactabat, plumea corona erat coronatus: adeo ut plumas avium, operaque inde confecta in summo honoris apice Indis semper fuisse iam satis constare arbitremur.*

which was “worthy of admiration” (*miro artificio*).⁶⁷ The shields in the Cavalieri collection were said to be “very elegantly” (*elegantissime*) worked,⁶⁸ while the feather zoomorphic idols were defined as “very diligently” (*diligentissime*) crafted.⁶⁹ Particularly striking was the resemblance to painted images, so that the St. Jerome seemed “to have been traced with a brush rather than composed with feathers”.⁷⁰ Quoting a famous passage from Virgil, Aldrovandi wrote

As for the artistry of this kind of featherwork, it seems indeed to be great, ingenious, and capable of imitating the most difficult reality, since nothing is difficult for the willing, as the poet says: *Labor omnia vicit improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas*. In fact, the Indians also excel in another way as well. For patience is the only master of this art, a thing in which the natives may surpass any other nation, for not even hunger, which they endure even for two days, can divert them from their work, where, if one examines it carefully, there is little, or almost no other artifice. [...] José de Acosta, who recently published a history of these peoples, states that what they see painted with a brush, they also imitate with feathers, with such excellence that they surpass the painting itself. Indeed, in my museum is to be seen a picture of Saint Jerome [...] which neither Apelles, if he should revive, nor any other eminent painter, could express better with the brush.⁷¹

The definition of feather art as “ingenious” at the beginning of this text recalls a similar statement about the featherwork “idols”, which were said to be proofs of “how good is the ingenuity of the Indians in the arts” (*quam bono ingenio valeant Indi in artibus*).⁷² The resemblance between feather mosaics and paintings, so strong as to induce incredulity in the viewers – a veritable *topos* in European literature on featherwork – is further stressed by borrowing from Acosta two episodes that were going to become proverbial:

It is said that Pope Sixtus V when someone brought him a board with such a feather mosaic, with the *ad vivum* image of St. Francis, saying that it was composed of the feathers of different birds, was not only astonished at the great skill of the work, but he also verified the reality by drawing his hand

⁶⁷ Ibid., 655.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 656.

⁶⁹ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, XXI, c. 189v.

⁷⁰ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 3: *Non plumis contexta, sed penicillo ducta videatur*.

⁷¹ Ibid., 655–656: *Quod modo ad eiusmodi operum plumariorum artificium attinet, id quidem magnum esse videtur, ingeniosum, ac imitatu perquam arduum verum quemadmodum nihil volenti difficile est atque ut ait Poeta: Labor omnia vicit improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas. Ita pariter praeter Indos alius quoque praestare queat; Sola enim patientia huiusce artis magistra existit, qua fortassis quascumque nationes Indi superant, quos ne fames, quam vel toto biduo tolerant, ab opere suo avellat: in quo alioqui, si quis intimius rimetur, exiguum, aut pene nullum existit artificium [...]. Iosephus Acosta, qui de his populis nuperrime historiam edidit, quosdam auctor est ibi reperiri, qui quicquid penicillo expressum viderint, etiam plumario opere imitentur, et tanta id expriment excellentia, ut ipsammet superent picturam. Equidem in meo musaeo videre est D. Hieronymi Salvatorem nostrum [...], quam ne Apelles, si reviviscat, vel alius quispiam praestantissimus pictor penicillo melius exprimat.*

⁷² Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 655; BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, XXI, c.189v.

through the feathers. For he could not believe that the feathers of birds could be joined in such a way as to express so vividly the image of that Saint. It is said that Philip, the Prince of Spain, received from his preceptor some feather works made with such skill that when the Prince showed them to his father, that is, the Catholic King, he was astonished and declared that he had never seen other images so small in which such an excellence of work could be seen.⁷³

The excellence of the art of featherwork, its resemblance to painting, the fact that featherworkers endured long periods of fasting, and the fact that featherwork was the best tangible proof of Indigenous ingenuity are all themes that ultimately derive from the *Apologetica historia sumaria* of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a work that remained unpublished until the 20th century but that in the second half of the 16th century circulated in manuscript form. In this work, the Dominican friar devoted a long and famous passage to featherworks, which directly or indirectly inspired a multitude of similar statements:

But what certainly seems to exceed all human ingenuity [*ingenio*] and which will be more new than rare to all the nations of the world, and all the more worthy of admiration and esteem, is the trade and art that those Mexican people know how to ply so well and perfectly, of making with natural colors everything that they and all other excellent and first-rate painters are capable of painting with brushes. [...] [T]hey well demonstrated the subtlety of their talents [*sutileza de sus ingenios*] and how great and unusual was their skill [*habilidad*]. [After the arrival of the Spaniards] they had a long and very effective occasion to show the liveliness of their mind [*entendimientos*], the neatness and deliberateness of their faculties or inner and outer consciousness and their great ability [*capacidad*]; thus, it is common for a tradesman working on these to go without eating and drinking for a whole day [...].⁷⁴

⁷³ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 656: *Sixtum V ferunt Pont. Opt. Max. cum aliquando eiusmodi opere plumario confecta tabula, in qua D. Francisci imago ad vivum erat expressa, ei allata foret, diceretque qui eam adferret, ex diversis avium plumis constare, non obstupuisse duntaxat tanta operis arte, verum etiam manu per aversas plumas ducta veritatem exploravisse. Nequibat enim adduci, ut crederet avium pennas ita simul coniungi posse, ut tam luculenter Divi illius imaginem ad vivum exprimerent. Philippo Hispaniarum Principi aiunt praeceptorem suum plumariorum operum quorundam typos donavisse tanta industria factorum, ut dum Princeps ille patri suo nempe Regi Catholico illos ostendisset, hic admirabundus pronuntiaverit, nunquam sibi alias tantae exiguitatis visas fuisse imagines, in quibus tanta operis excellentia conspiceretur.* Aldrovandi's manuscript synthesis of Acosta's text is in BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 143, XIII, c.164v. See Acosta, *Historia naturale e morale*, Book IV, Chap. XXXVII. See Russo, "Uncatchable Colors", 403–405. On the topos of the resemblance between featherwork and painting, and for a comment on the episode involving Sixtus V (already noticing Aldrovandi's texts), see Alessandra Russo, "Image-plume, temps reliquaire? Tangibilité d'une histoire esthétique (Nouvelle-Espagne, XVI^e–XVII^e siècles)", *Images Re-vues*, Hors-série 1 (2008): 5–6; Ead., "A Contemporary Art from New Spain", in *Images Take Flight: Feather art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, 42–45; Ead., *The Untranslatable Image*, 187–188; Gallori, "Collecting feathers", 76. On the other hand, Ramírez Herrera, "Conversion and Conservation", 217–224, misunderstands Acosta's words. A similar comparison is to be found, for example, in d'Anania, *L'universale fabbrica*, 369.

⁷⁴ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologetica Historia Sumaria*, in *Obras Completas*, vol. 7 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992), 592. The English translation I am using is by Eric Bye, published in Russo, *The Untranslatable Image*, 85–87 n. 9.

Las Casas' words were intended to demonstrate that Indigenous people were endowed with *ingenio*, an intellectual quality that testified to their humanity and, therefore, their convertibility. It was precisely as part of this missionary discourse that many Mesoamerican objects – including some that ended up in the Aldrovandi collection – were brought to Italy by Dominican missionaries in the 16th century.⁷⁵

Lexical debates and neologisms

When writing about featherwork in the *Ornithologiae*, Aldrovandi uses the formulae *plumatilis ars* and *opus plumarium*.⁷⁶ The latter is particularly interesting because it led Aldrovandi into a lively exegetical discussion of a passage from Exodus in the Vulgate, where God commanded His tabernacle to be decorated (*opere plumario*). As discussed by Alessandra Russo,⁷⁷ the precise meaning of this phrase puzzled early modern scholars, who were divided between those who interpreted it as a reference to featherwork (a hypothesis that might have provided clues to a possible Jewish origin of the American natives, as argued by Gregorio García and Diego Muñoz Camargo) and those who understood it as an allusion to an embroidered textile. Among the former, is the early testimony of the Dominican Leandro Alberti who, describing the Mexican feather works brought to Bologna by Domingo de Betanzos in 1533, wrote of “two coverlets made and weaved out of blue, green, black, yellow parrot-feathers, which looked like velvet. Hence it seems to recognize what is said in the Scriptures about the God’s shrine which is recommended to be embellished with featherwork”.⁷⁸ Aldrovandi, on the oth-

⁷⁵ Davide Domenici, “Missionary Gift Records of Mexican Objects in Early Modern Italy”, in *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750*, 86–102. Id., “The Dominicans as Conveyors of Mesoamerican Objects to Italy and Europe”, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.967>; Id., “Ulisse Aldrovandi’s engagement”. On artworks as proofs of ingenuity and humanity and on the early modern category of *ingenium*, see also Alessandra Russo, “An Artistic Humanity: New Positions on Art and Freedom in the Context of Iberian Expansion, 1500–1600”, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 65/66 (2014/2015): 352–363; Patricia Falguières, “Les inventeurs des choses. Enquêtes sur les arts et naissance d’une science de l’homme dans les cabinets du XVI^e siècle”, *Histoire de l’art et anthropologie* (Paris: INHA/Musée du quai Branly, 2009) <http://actesbranly.revues.org/94>. In more recent and important works, Alessandra Russo has explored in detail the topic of artistic excellence: Russo, “Lights on the Antipodes”; Ead., *A New Antiquity*.

⁷⁶ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 1, 655–656. On early modern terminology, see Russo, “Image-plume, temps reliquaire?”, 2 n. 1.

⁷⁷ Russo, “Image-plume, temps reliquaire?”, 8–10; Ead., *The Untranslatable Image*, 93–95; Ead., “A Contemporary Art”, 36–42.

⁷⁸ Leandro Alberti, *Historie di Bologna, 1479–1543* (Bologna: Costa, 2006), 629: “Due coperte da letto fatte et tessute di pene di papagalli di diversi colori, cio. azuri, verdo, negro, giale talmente lavorate che pareano di veluto. Onde parvi di conoscere quel che habbiano nella scrittura descrivendo l’apparato del tabernacolo de Iddio ove comandava che opere plumario se dovesse ornare”. See Davide Domenici and Laura Laurencich Minelli, “Domingo de Betanzos’ Gifts to Pope Clement VII in 1532–1533: Tracking the Early History of Some Mexican Objects and Codices in Italy”, *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 47 (2014), 169–209; Russo, “A Contemporary Art”, 37.

er hand, in his erudite commentary on the subject – based on the works of Thomas Cajetan and Alfonso Tostado – sided with the defenders of the opposite view.⁷⁹ Among them, Bartolomé de las Casas himself had explained the lexical ambiguity by noting that in the Egyptian language the words for feather and needle were identical.

In addition to entering this exegetical and lexical debate, Aldrovandi also indulged in coining new terms based on the Greek *lithostroton* (Latin *lithostrotum*), literally “covered with stones”, whose use by Pliny to call the mosaic deserved a lengthy comment by Aldrovandi in the *Musaeum metallicum*, where the woodcut of a Mesoamerican mosaic mask was even offered as an example of a similar technique used in the Americas.⁸⁰ In the manuscript list where he described the objects seen in 1577 in the house of Tommaso de’ Cavalieri, recording the above-mentioned Christian feather mosaics, Aldrovandi added “so that they can be called *hornestraton* (*ita ut hornestraton dici possit*), a neologism that literally means, “bird layer”.⁸¹ On the other hand, in the manuscript description of the St. Jerome he coined the term *pterostraton*, *id est, stratum ex pennis* (“*pterostraton*, that is, layer of feathers”).⁸² These two neologisms, which did not find their way into subsequent literature, are just two more examples of Aldrovandi’s interest in creating a precise terminology to describe the objects he studied.

⁷⁹ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 656–657: *At quid si quis eiuscemodi dicat idolorum, templorumque (nam et haec plumario opere apparabant) ornamenta a Sacro Hebraeorum ritu promanasse, et postmodum ab Indis, quem Deo vero honorem tribuere debebant, ad nefaria illa sua idola transtulisse? Deum namque Patrem sacra testatur historia, cortinas tabernaculi, quod sibi exaedificari praecepit, plumario opere variatas fieri voluisse. Sed hunc locum divi interpretes, longe aliter atque quidem optime intelligunt. Veruntamen solus doctissimus alias Caietanus, D. Hieronymi versionem carpens, et clarius dictum fuisse credens, si opere polymitario transtulisset, non parum hallucinatur siquidem polymitarium opus ab opere plumario sacra pagina disertissimis verbis distinguit; quemadmodum hoc loco: Fecit et velum de hyacintho et purpura, vermiculo et bisso retorta, opere polymitario varium, atque distinctum. Et paullo post: Fecit et tentorium in introitu tabernaculi ex hyacintho, purpura, vermiculo, bissoque retorta, opere plumarii; Sed et antecedenti capite eiuscemodi operarios distinguens Moses, ait: Ambos erudit sapientia, ut faciant opera abietarii, polymitarii, ac plumarii de hyacintho, ac purpura, coccoque bis tincto et bysso, et textent omnia. At hic operae pretium est indicare, quid D. Hieronymo plumarium opus, ac polymitarium sit, ut a pio lectore eiuscemodi confuso evitetur, nam ea sacra pagina, uti diximus, clare distinguit. Opus nempe polymitarium pictorum est, non item plumarium, at textorum, qui operantur interferendo diversa filo. Pluma enim Hebraeis idem sonat, ac Latinis acus. De qua re, quia huc non pertinet, lectorem ad Alphonsi Tostati commentaria, qui abunde de distinctione horum agit, amandamus. Hoc interim obiter adiungentes ex eiuscemodi etiam plumario opere, hoc est, acu intersuto subsellium Iustiniani Imperatoris fuisse exornatum, de quo ita Corippus Africanus canebat: Auratum scandens solium, sedemque paternam, Constrictum plumis, pulcrisque tapetibus altam. See also Thomas de Vio, *Caietanus in Pentateuchum* (Roma: Antonio Blado, 1531), 123v–124r; Alphonsus Tostado [Alfonso Tostado], *Commentaria in Secundam Partem Exodi* (Venezia: Fratelli Sessa, 1596), 38v–39v.*

⁸⁰ Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Musaeum metallicum* (Bologna: Marco Antonio Bernia, 1568), 550–551; Domenici, “Rediscovery”.

⁸¹ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VI, c. 122r.

⁸² BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 116, c. 129r (209r).

Telling color and iridescence

The chromatic variety of feathers is so rich that it is not surprising that Aldrovandi emphasized the colorfulness of the feathers of American birds, especially those of the hummingbird, a specimen of which he may have seen in the collection of Antonio Giganti.⁸³ His interest in hummingbirds is also attested by a letter he received from Girolamo Mercuriale, from Pisa, dated June 16, 1599, in which Mercuriale wrote that Ferdinand I would send to Aldrovandi the drawings of two hummingbirds he had received as gifts from Rodrigo da Fonseca. In the letter, Mercuriale defined the hummingbirds' colors as "varied and very beautiful" (*vari et vaghissimi*), clarified that they were not as small as bees (as Aldrovandi had stated), and briefly commented on the meaning of *opere plumario*.⁸⁴

Even more than by chromatic variety, bird feathers (especially those of quetzals and hummingbirds) are characterized by chromatic instability, that is, iridescence or shimmer. Together with brilliance, these visual qualities were key Mesoamerican Indigenous aesthetic values, conceived as manifestations of *tonalli*, a life-force associated with the heat and irradiation of the Sun.⁸⁵ The textual description of iridescence is a linguistic challenge that was faced by both Indigenous and European authors: among the latter, the passages by Toribio de Benavente de Motolinía, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Baltasar Dorantes de Carranza are particularly rich, describing in detail how the colors of feathers change depending on the incidence of light.⁸⁶ In his texts, Aldrovandi also faced the same linguistic challenge. Describing the Christian mosaics in the house of Tommaso de' Cavalieri, he wrote that "when exposed to the light, they showed very bright and shiny colors, as in the neck of the peacock,"⁸⁷ a phrase that closely resembles the words used by Gasparo Contarini, Venetian ambassador to Spain, in 1525:

⁸³ Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 655: *Qui de India nova suas navigatione scriptis publicarunt, aviculas ibi reperi tradunt tantae exiguitatis, ut ne apes magnitudine superet, tam diversorum vero colorum pennis vestiri, ut vel hae sole operibus plumariis sufficiant*. Laurencich Minelli, "L'indice", 240: "[30] Il ritratto dell'uccellino di che cavano la piuma verde et purpurina per far quei lavori al Mondo Nuovo. Ho veduto l'uccello intiero secco ma io non ne ho se non il capo, e'l collo dove si vedono i detti due bei colori".

⁸⁴ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, XXVIII, c. 124r–124v, transcribed in Alessandro Tosi, *Ulisse Aldrovandi e la Toscana. Carteggio e testimonianze documentarie* (Firenze: Olschki, 1989), 428–429. On European interest in hummingbirds, see McMahon, "Contingent Images".

⁸⁵ Alessandra Russo, "Plumes of Sacrifice: Transformations in Sixteenth-Century Mexican Feather Art", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 42 (Autumn 2002), 226–250; Ead., "Uncatchable Colors"; Ead., "Untranslatable Images", 177; Gallori, "Collecting feathers", 76; Allison Caplan, "The Living Feather: *Tonalli* in Nahuatl Featherwork Production", *Ethnohistory* 67, no. 3 (2020): 383–406; Ead., "The Cotinga and the Hummingbird: Material Mobilities in the Early Colonial Featherwork of New Spain", in *The Routledge Companion to the Global Renaissance*, ed. Stephen J. Campbell and Stephanie Porras (London: Routledge, 2024), 482–499; McMahon, "Contingent Images".

⁸⁶ Russo, "Uncatchable Colors"; McMahon, "Contingent Images".

⁸⁷ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, VI, c. 122r: [...] *et si luci exponatur more colli pavonis lucidissimos et splendidissimos demonstrabant colores*.

They make work of feathers of miraculous birds. I have certainly not seen any embroidery or any other work as refined as certain feather creations, which possess another *vaghezza*, because their colors change according to the light, as we see in the neck of a pigeon.⁸⁸

In addition to mentioning birds familiar to the European public, early modern European texts often made comparisons to shimmering fabrics like velvet, silk, and shot cloth (*tornasol* in Spanish). As Alessandra Russo has noted, Aldrovandi added the Latin term *versicolor* to this lexical field.⁸⁹ Again, a text presented here for the first time offers an even more fascinating variation on this theme: as mentioned above, in describing the feather “idols” received from Spain, Aldrovandi wrote: “Among the feathers there are some green, some red, some blue, with which they are worked with the greatest skill, as we also see among the Italians where all kinds of flowers of silk (*Holoserico*), satin (*raso*), and other textiles which are vulgarly called tapheta (*raso taphetato*) are made by women to adorn our brides.”⁹⁰ This passage deserves two different comments. On the one hand, the usage of the term “tapheta” (*raso taphetato*) resonates with the intermedial dialog witnessed by a 1613 Spanish inventory of the collection of the Italian sculptor Pompeo Leoni, in which a Mexican featherwork triptych is said to be covered with *tafetán tornasolado*.⁹¹ On the other hand, the mention of Italian women’s garments – as well as the aforementioned comparison between the headdress of the *Regina insulae Floridae* and “the veil that our women use at home” – are references to Cesare Vecellio’s costume books, where women’s garments are often classified as being worn “at home” or “out of home”. The lexical similarity to Vecellio’s Latin texts in *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (1598) is obvious, as shown by the description of the floral dresses of Paduan brides (Fig. 11) as “embroidered garments of silk, or silk satin” (*vestes attalicae ex holoserico, vel e serico raso*).⁹² It is not surprising, then, that in Vecellio’s work such garments are referred to as *versicolores*, (“iridescent”, the same adjective that Aldrovandi used when writing about feathers: *vestes*

⁸⁸ “Lavorano lavori di penne d’uccelli miracolosi. Certamente non ho veduto in queste parti alcun ricamo né altro lavoro tanto sottile, come sono alcuni di quelli di penna, li quali hanno un’altra vaghezza perché paiono di diversi colori secondo ch’anno il lume, come che vediamo fatti nel collo d’un colombo”. “Relazione di Gasparo Contarini letta in Senato il 16 novembre 1525”, in *Fonti per la storia della scoperta del Nuovo Mondo*, ed. Guglielmo Berchet (Roma: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1892), III.I, 129. Contarini’s phrase has been commented by Russo, “Plumes of sacrifice”, 236–237; Ead., “Uncatchable Colors”, 394–397; Ead., *The Untranslatable Image*, 179, and by McMahon, “Contingent Images”, 44. The English translation used here is Russo’s one.

⁸⁹ Russo, “Uncatchable colors”, 396; Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae*, 3, 655. BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 116, c. 129r (209r) has *vermiculati* corrected into *versiculati*, apparently a failed attempt to make sense of a copying error, likely from an original *versicoloris*.

⁹⁰ BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 136, XXI, c. 189v. For the full Latin text see note 59.

⁹¹ Russo, “Uncatchable Colors”, 396–397; McMahon, “Contingent Images”, 34.

⁹² Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo; di nuovo accresciuti di molte figure* (Venezia: Gio. Bernardo Sessa, 1598), 158. That Aldrovandi was in possession of a copy of Vecellio’s work is attested to by the alphabetical index of his library, BUB, Aldrovandi, ms. 171, c. 111v. I thank Giuseppina Muzzarelli for suggesting me to look at Vecellio’s works.



Fig. 11. Paduan bride, from Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (1598), 158. Public Domain.

his own museum or in those of other collectors – also provided an opportunity to clarify some cultural attributions, to offer the transcription of previously unpublished manuscripts, and to present some texts and images that had so far escaped the attention of scholars.

The discussion of some specific issues in the second part of the article showed how Aldrovandi – also through his use of widely read sources such as Thevet, Acosta, and Vecellio – participated in the then current discourses on the qualities of featherwork such as resemblance to painting, craftsmanship/ingenuity, and iridescence. If Aldrovandi's texts on these subjects are not particularly original, they do display a fascinating lexical richness.

⁹³ Ibid., 151.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Elizabeth Hill Boone, “Who they are and what they wear. Aztec costumes for European eyes,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 67/68 (2016/2017), 316–334; Ead., “Seeking Indianness: Christoph Weiditz, the Aztecs, and feathered Amerindians,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 26, no. 1 (2017): 39–61.

holosericae, vel bombacinae, vel attalicae, versicolores (“garments of silk, or cotton, or embroidered, iridescent”).⁹³ Aldrovandi's use of Vecellio's work to describe Indigenous American products is intriguing because costume books have been studied extensively as works in which – as in the case of Desprez's volume mentioned above – Indigenous garments were made familiar to European audiences through their visual representations.⁹⁴ Aldrovandi's use of Vecellio somehow “turns the table” by using costume books' visual and lexical descriptions of European garments to convey the sense of the *versicolor* shimmer of an Indigenous feather mosaic.

7. Conclusions

This review of Aldrovandi's engagement with Indigenous American featherwork has been primarily aimed to systematically bring together the textual and visual information found in the Aldrovandian corpus. The first part of the article – discussing artifacts that Aldrovandi was able to directly observe in

Truly unique, however, are the visual reproductions that Aldrovandi commissioned from his artistic collaborators. The paintings of the two Tupinamba headdresses are among the earliest European color images representing actual Tupinamba feather artifacts, their quality rivaled only by the famous 1599 watercolor series *The Queen of America* (or *Procession of Stuttgart*) and by the mid-17th century watercolors of specimens in the Milanese collection of Manfredo Settala.⁹⁵ None of these other paintings, however, contain such detailed depictions of manufacturing techniques as those found in the Aldrovandian images (and described in the accompanying texts), whose remarkable accuracy is attested by the comparison with extant specimens. As in the case of Mesoamerican stone artifacts, Aldrovandi's approach as a natural historian led him to produce unparalleled textual and visual descriptions of the material and technological aspects of Indigenous American productions.⁹⁶

Similarly, the newly recognized woodcut from the *De quadrupedibus digitatis* (1637) is the earliest known image of Mesoamerican featherwork published in a printed volume, and it would have been even more so if the volume had been published during Aldrovandi's lifetime, when the wooden tablet was engraved. The importance of the image is further enhanced by the fact that it is the only surviving visual testimony of a kind Mesoamerican zoomorphic feather mosaics. Moreover, the detailed provenance information provided by its manuscript description enriches our knowledge of the circulation patterns of featherwork in early modern Europe, while the comparison made between these feather mosaics and the dresses of Italian brides provided a fascinating insight into Aldrovandi's use of Cesare Vecellio's costume book as a lexical source.

In sum, the corpus of images and texts collected here is yet another testament to the richness of the Aldrovandian archive and its relevance to Indigenous American studies.

⁹⁵ Buono, "Their Treasures"; Anna Bottesi, "Objects of Stereotype: the role of material culture in the construction of the 16th century imaginary of Brazilian indigenous people", *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos, Pictures, memories and sounds*, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/94711>. Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Ms. Campori, gamma.h.01.21, c. 5r, 6r, 7r. <https://edl.cultura.gov.it/item/p650gzgrz4>. Black and white images such as those by André Thevet, François Desprez, or Theodore De Bry, to be sure, were produced since earlier times. For other beautiful examples, see Hans Weigel, *Habitus Praecipuorum Populorum, Tam Virorum Quam foeminarum Singularem arte depicti* (Nürnberg: Bey Hans Weigel Formschneider, 1577), pl. 181–182. I thank Mariana C. Françoso for calling my attention on this edition.

⁹⁶ Domenici, "Rediscovery".