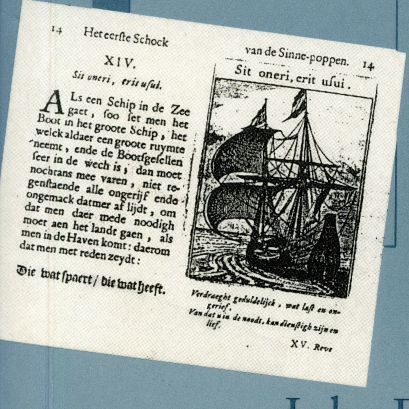
THE CULTURES OF COLLECTING



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Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World

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Opinion is divided over the extent to which the medieval world-view was replaced by new sets of attitudes and interpretative frameworks during the Renaissance. Hodgen, Keen and Laurencich-Minelli clearly identify medieval attitudes and modes of thought persisting through the Renaissance; Le Goff even suggests that the 'Middle Ages' be extended to cover the phase of European history that stretches from the 3rd century AD to the mid-nineteenth century.[1] Change, of course, is never a uniform process simultaneously affecting all of a society's institutions, and the gradual shift from a medieval to a Renaissance world-view saw attempts both to reconcile contending views and tolerate their mutually exclusive coexistence. Neither the European attitude to collecting nor interpretations of the significance of the New World were uniform, but certain categories and rhetorical devices stand out as more commonly employed than others, and it is these that are my subject here. Nowhere do these various world-views appear in more striking relief than when Europeans attempted to explain and so come to terms with the existence of a fourth continent – the New World – and decide on the significance of its inhabitants, flora, fauna and artificial curiosities. Cosmological uncertainty shadows the different motivations behind, and organization of, Renaissance collections that attempted to incorporate representations of the fourth continent. To understand the commerce in, and significance of, natural and artificial curiosities from the New World it is necessary first to describe the broad set of philosophical speculations and attitudes inherited from the Middle Ages that lay behind the culture of collecting between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

THE MEDIEVAL INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF RENAISSANCE COLLECTIONS

In *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924), the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga argued that the Medievals subsumed aesthetics under the sense of wonderment, which, as Eco has been quick to remind us, was tightly integrated within scholastic philosophy to provide a means of achieving communion with God.[2] Eco cites the example of Abbot Suger of St Denis, who was responsible for many of the artistic and architectural projects undertaken by the ecclesiastic authorities in the Ile de France. Taking his cue from King Solomon, Suger believed that churches should be the repositories of all beautiful objects: he described the Treasury of St Denis as including 'a big golden chalice of 140 ounces of gold adorned with precious gems, viz., hyacinths and topazes, as a substitute for another one which had been lost as a pawn in the time of our predecessor . . . [and] a porphyry vase, made admirable by the hand of the sculptor and polisher, after it had lain idly in a chest for many years, converting it from a flagon into the shape of an eagle'.[3] Other offerings protected in churches included altars, chalices, ciboria, chasubles, candelabras and tapestries, not to mention funerary monuments, stained-glass windows and *jubés*.[4] Some medieval churches also contained relics – remnants of the Apostles and martyrs – or objects that were said to have been in contact with them.[5] These were protected in bejewelled reliquaries made of precious metals. The possession of relics had political implications. The bodily remains of sacred persons were believed to retain some of the individual's qualities and authority, and were of sufficient value to sanctify a place and encourage the foundation of new ecclesiastical establishments.[6] Important relics inspired large pilgrimages and increased the importance and prosperity of settlements. Consequently, throughout the Renaissance, cities competed to possess the bones of the Church Fathers as well as the remains of classical thinkers and the founders of eminent institutions.[7] During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, therefore, artefacts were valued for their marvellous or miraculous qualities – their magical reputations – manifested through the use of precious materials and the quality of craftsmanship.

In the Middle Ages the arts were subordinate to a didactic function, much of which was intended to serve the Church. Honorius of Autun justified the art of painting by its three objectives: to beautify the house of God, to recall to mind the lives of the saints, and to provide 'the literature of the laity'.[8] This view was reiterated in the Synod of Arras:

'Unlettered people, who cannot appreciate this through reading Scripture, can grasp it in the contemplation of pictures.'[9] This didactic function was meant to transport admirers from contemplation of material phenomena to a higher spiritual plane, a plane that permitted communion with the Divine. For the medieval mind, the beauty to be found in the material world was only a reflection of a transcendent ideal beauty whose source was God.

Medieval aesthetics consisted of a theory of ideal proportion,[10] together with an appreciation of light (*lux*, *lumen* and *splendor*) and colour. Theirs was a world of intense visual culture, and they were able to synthesize and represent phenomena by a highly developed language of symbol and allegory: 'The Medievals inhabited a world filled with references, reminders and overtones of Divinity, manifestations of God in things. Nature spoke to them heraldically: lions or nut-trees were more than they seemed; griffins were just as real as lions because, like them, they were signs of higher truth.'[11] Beauty and virtue were conflated, which led to art being above all a tracing of a higher order decreed by God. According to Eco:

> At best, art could produce beautiful images, arrangements of material that were superficial only. But it had to preserve a kind of ontological humility before the primacy of nature. The objects produced by art did not introduce a new order, but remained within the limits of their substance. They were simply 'reductions to images by means of measurement'. They existed by means of the material which sustained them, whereas natural objects existed by virtue of divine participation.[12]

Le Goff[13] has drawn attention to the close connection that exists between visual images and the idea of the marvellous, for *mir*, the root of *mirabilis* (marvellous, wonderful) and *mirari* (to wonder at), is from where our word 'mirror' derives. Acknowledging Pierre Mabille's *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (1965), Le Goff agrees that 'the men of the Middle Ages drew a parallel between mirari, mirabilia (marvel) and mirror . . . thus linking the marvel to the complex of images and ideology associated with the mirror'.[14]

These earlier notions concerning art, nature and Divinity, and their relationship with the marvellous and miraculous, hold two important implications for the understanding of collections. First, they explain the medieval origin of the rationalization that lay behind the reduction in the Renaissance of the relations between natural and artificial phenomena to the terms and juxtapositions of objects arranged in a collection. The collection came to provide the mirror of nature as it was formulated by

Divine agency. Symbol and allegory permitted the miniature representation of the universe, while a theory of the innate meaning of objects determined their relationship.

The second implication concerns the meaning the Medievals attributed to the sense of the marvellous. At a general level, the marvellous could be interpreted as a painting or a valuable piece of the lapidary's or metalworker's art, work that invited communion with the Divine. In this sense, assemblages of objects, when they conformed to the ideal relations between phenomena, might be said to have pointed to the divinely sanctioned ideal order of the world. But the medieval world also saw the marvellous as including contingent and altogether exceptional events. This view found its most eloquent exponent in William of Ockham, who denied the existence of any cosmic order or chain of being that linked phenomena or events. According to Ockham, objects had only a nominal existence, and were unregulated by the mind of God. Collections could, therefore, be arranged without any apparent order between their constituent items. For collectors of a nominalist persuasion, what was important were curiosities, rare or near-unique phenomena that were thought to have resulted from some exceptional condition or circumstance. It is curious that other than the judgmental criteria affecting taste, such ideas do not appear to have influenced the accumulation of collections or the classification of objects during much of the medieval period. It was left to Renaissance collectors to define their objectives, and to justify their activities and the presentation of the components of their collections using the intellectual views of the previous age.

COLLECTIONS OF CURIOSITIES

Collections of curiosities, succinctly described by Pomian as hoardings of 'rare, exceptional, extraordinary, exotic and monstruous things',[15] had their heyday after the end of the Middle Ages: collections of this kind flourished from *c.* 1550, began to wane during the seventeenth century, and by 1750 were very rare indeed.[16] Pomian notes that between 1556 and 1560 the Netherlandish collector Hubert Goltzius listed 968 collections that were to be found in the Low Countries, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Italy.[17] Another collector, Pierre Borel (1620–71), personally knew of 63 collections in France, while the Venetian Republic could boast at least 70.[18] Not all these collections were motivated by identical desires, nor did they follow the same model of organization. Pomian judiciously reminds us that differences in the wealth, education and social rank of individuals, as well as the various

degrees of receptivity to new ideas to be found in the cities, all helped determine different types of collections.[19]

Encyclopaedic collectors in France were known as *curieux* because of their passion for, and commitment to, seeking deeper knowledge of the workings and nature of the universe, and a fuller, perhaps grander, picture of the totality of creation. Pomian defines curiosity in terms of desire and passion – 'a desire to see, learn or possess rare, new, secret or remarkable things, in other words those things which have a special relationship with totality and consequently provide a means for attaining it'.[20] A large part of the justification for collections in the Renaissance was borrowed from medieval scholasticism, its ideas concerning the innate meaning of things and the nature of revelation, and its vision of the relationship between the microcosm and macrocosm. Following the advice contained in Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatri amplissimi* (1565), some cabinets were provided with annexes to house a library, laboratory or forge, which were put to use for experiments whose ambiguous significance lay somewhere between medieval magic and enlightened scientific demonstration.[21] Some Churchmen expressed their unease, even opposition, concerning 'curiosity'. Both St Augustine, writing in Late Antiquity, and St Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages were afraid that curiosity might transgress the approved boundaries set for knowledge and the methods for its attainment, and had sought to circumscribe enquiry in order to block the road that led to mortal danger. Nevertheless, the numbers of *curieux* expanded considerably, and attracted a diverse following. Goltzius himself, an engraver by profession, testified to the diverse types of people who accumulated collections in his day: they included the Pope, cardinals, emperors, kings, princes, theologians, lawyers, doctors, scholars, poets, priests, monks, officers and artists.[22] And like the great medieval churches that were filled with sacred remains, Renaissance collections contributed to the fame and reputation of Europe's towns and cities; there were, however, strong personal motivations underlying the enthusiasms of their creators.

Pomian has provided five relatively detailed profiles of collectors obsessed with the encyclopaedic ideal: Pierre Borel, who lived in Paris, and Andrea Vendramin (1554–1629), Federigo Contarini (1538–?1613), Girolamo Gualdo (1496–1566) and Ludovico Moscardo (?1611–81) in Venice.[23] Vendramin's own catalogue listed the contents of his collection under a variety of headings, which included the following:

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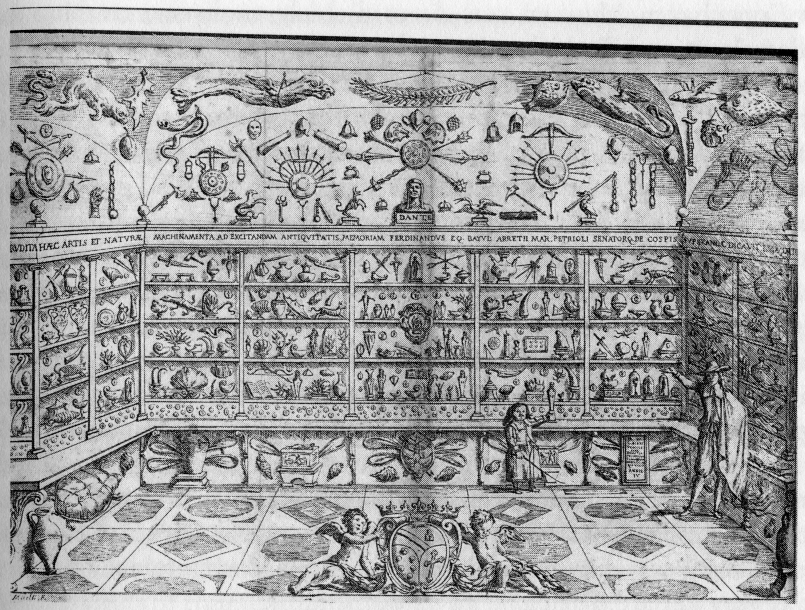
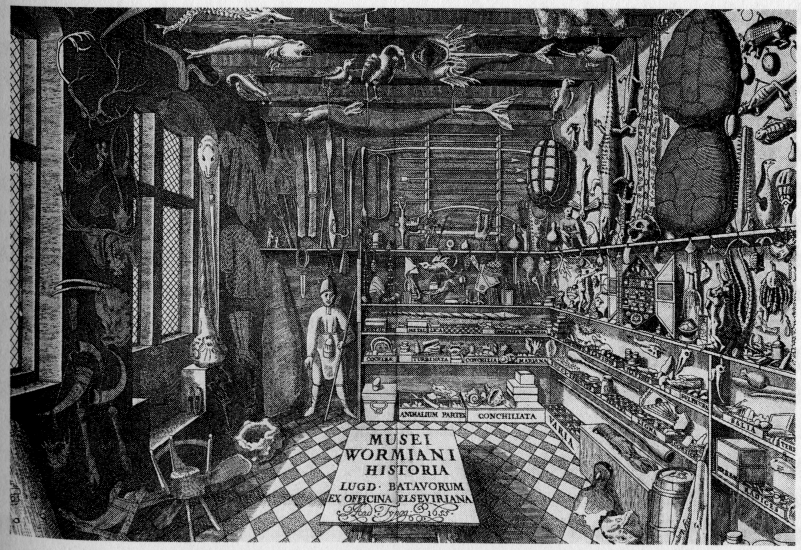
Pictures; sculptures of divinities, oracles and ancient idols; costumes of different lands; ancient instruments of sacrifice including urns and lamps; medals of ancient Romans and famous Venetians; Egyptian rings and seals decorated with scarabs, emblems and other signs engraved in stones and gems; pure, mixed and composite natural substances; whelks, shells and conches from various parts of the world, both east and west; illustrated books on chronology, prints, animals, fish and birds; plants and flowers.[24]

The inventory of the Contarini collection, drawn up after its owner's death, contained a similar miscellany of objects: corals, crystals, petrifications, minerals, oysters with two pearls, horns, teeth and claws, statues, medals, cameos, antiquities and paintings.[25] After it was inherited by Carlo Ruzzini (1554–1644) and subsequently enlarged, the collection became one of the most important cabinets in Venice. A Veronese collector of the time, Mapheus Cusanus, appears to have had a particular predilection for 'Egyptian Idols taken out of the Mummies, divers sorts of petrified shells, petrified cheese, cinnamon, spunge, and Mushromes'.[26] Clearly, although written guides and disquisitions on classifications had been in circulation since antiquity, there still remained plenty of room for personal preferences and idiosyncratic expressions. Ludovico Moscardo divided his collections according to the three broad groupings that had been taken from Pliny the Elder's *Historia naturalis*: antiquities; stones, minerals and earths; and corals, shells, animals, fruits, etc. This meant that 'giants' bones' were considered to be antiquities, while mummies, musical instruments, paintings, clocks and Indian shoes qualified as minerals or earths.[27] In Bologna, the Marchese Ferdinando Cospi (1619–86) assembled another notable collection of the bizarre and extraordinary, with the original intention, so he claimed, of providing 'a youthful pastime', although he later used it to more pragmatic effect.[28]

The earlier cabinets, including the renowned collections of Ulisse Aldrovandi (1527–1605), Antonio Giganti (1535–1598) and the University of Leiden, did not even distinguish between objects found in nature (natural curiosities) and those made by exceptional craftsmen (artificial curiosities),[29] though by the mid-sixteenth century, such a division was often used as a minimum classificatory principle. Pierre Borel, Ferdinando Cospi, Ole Worm (1588–1654) and the collections in the Copenhagen Museum and Bodleian Library were divided into natural and artificial curiosities.[30] In the Worm collection, artificial curiosities were subdivided according to the materials from which they were made (clay, amber, gold, silver, bronze, iron, glass and wood).[31] One room of



The Museum of Ferdinando Cospi, Bologna, from L. Legati, *Museo Cospiano* (Bologna, 1677).



The Museum of Ole Worm, Copenhagen, from Worm's *Museum Wormianum seu Historia Rerum Rariorum* (Amsterdam, 1655).

the Copenhagen Museum was devoted solely to diverse clothing and Indian, Inuit and Turkish arms and utensils.[32] Some cabinets, such as those belonging to Cospi and the Milanese nobleman Manfreda Settala, juxtaposed objects to exemplify similarities believed to exist between different cultures.[33] One of the leading exponents of this method was Lorenzo Pignoria, whose appendix to Vincenzo Cartari's *Le vere e nove imagini degli dei delli antichi*, first published in 1615 and regularly reissued, encouraged a comparative approach to Mexican, Japanese and Chinese mythology in order to illustrate the many different permutations of paganism. Heikamp and Ryan concur that Pre-Columbian items were few, and included chiefly for comparison with classical or Christian religion.[34] The cultural origins of these items seem to have been of less importance than their broad geographical provenances. Frequently, the civilizations of the New World – Aztec, Toltec, Mixtec, Maya – were conflated, and the inhabitants of distinct city states and regions were subsumed under general rubrics. Paganism provided a primary category, and material examples and cultural practices had importance only in so far as they imparted evidence of its distribution.

The Renaissance initially accepted the significance of collections as expressed through medieval thought, but later the theological reasoning of the Middle Ages was slowly transformed into secular rationalization. The two central, undisputed axioms that underlay the Renaissance collection and classification of artefacts were the belief that by using the devices of symbolism and allegory inherited from the Middle Ages, creation could be replicated in miniature and represented by the careful and deliberate assemblage of signifying objects, and that the juxtaposition of the constituent items and parts of the collection could no more be fortuitous than the universe it was said to mirror. According to the influential seventeenth-century museographer Emanuele Tesauro, all natural objects contained their own particular allusion to specific ideas. Meaning was innate to nature, thereby permitting Tesauro to argue that 'if nature speaks through such metaphors, then the encyclopaedic collection, which is the sum of all possible metaphors, logically becomes the great metaphor of the world'.[35] Nevertheless, the order of nature was not envisaged as repetitive, or shackled to coherent sets of laws, but was subject to unlimited variability and novelty. The Renaissance still believed in a world in which God could intervene to perform the miraculous. Writers like Pierre Boaistuau and Conrad Wolffhart kept alive ideas about monsters and unnatural occurrences by concurring with the medieval belief that God possessed the power to alter the course of

nature and create grotesque deformations and monstrosities that served as ill augurs.[36] What the collector sought, therefore, were not common or typical items, but rare, exotic and extraordinary testaments to a world subject to Divine caprice.

Among clerics, such as Stefano Borgia (1731–1804), Athanasius Kircher (1601–1680) or Antonio Giganti, the encyclopaedic ideal was pursued in order to illustrate the authority of God, whose design gave reason to all creation. Church collections benefited greatly from the ecclesiastical humanism heralded by the Council of Trent (1545–63), which encouraged missionary work abroad that often led to the exchange of exotic gifts among Churchmen. Borgia's position, first as secretary and then as prefect of the Congregation of the Sacred Propagation of the Faith, brought him into close contact with missionaries all over the world, and allowed him considerably to enlarge his collections of exotica.[37] Giganti was secretary to the cleric Lodovico Beccadelli, whose collection Giganti eventually inherited, and later to the Bishop of Bologna, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti.[38] These positions provided Giganti with the kinds of contacts that allowed him to enlarge his collections, just as the Medici used their close ties with the Habsburgs to pursue similar objectives. Giganti's universal metaphor juxtaposed like with unlike items, which meant that groups of objects were arranged together in his collections in accordance with particular themes. The symmetry by which he arranged and grouped objects was conceived as inherent in nature: it mirrored the harmonious unity of the world.[39]

Ulisse Aldrovandi had a very different background and reason for assembling his cabinet. By profession an academic at the University of Bologna, he used his collection for teaching and research. The purpose behind the assemblage was not to celebrate the symmetry and harmony of the divine order, but to help verify Hippocratese opinion that environment, because of its influence on production and the availability and use of raw materials, conditioned different customs. Aldrovandi examined the material technologies of exotic and ancient peoples in order to ascertain what practical help they might be able to give to Europe, and thereby pioneered the scientific uses of collections that were to supplant medieval encyclopaedism after 1750.

Cabinets of curiosities became the allegorical mirror reflecting a perfect and completed picture of the world. As Susan Stewart has commented, 'the collection presents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have both the minimum and the complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world – a world which

is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority'.[40]

If the image of the reflected world was originally drawn from Christian cosmology, in the later Renaissance, under the patronage of the aristocracy, merchants and statesmen, it assumed a secular turn. Cultivating gardens, gathering antiquity's remnants, and completing the full metaphorical extension of the collection was, among these influential groups, undertaken to demonstrate personal worth and to legitimate their social positions.[41] While collections may formerly have been assembled in ways that allowed for some caprice on the part of their instigators, after wider access was allowed, or once they became public property, a tendency to catalogue and perfect the encyclopaedic image gradually increased. The published catalogue became synonymous with the high point of achievement: it announced that the collector had reached his objective – completion; it was an attempt to ensure the collection would be preserved from depredations; and it was a means by which the identity of the collector was fused with the collection.[42] After Cospi donated his collection to the city of Bologna in 1667, he arranged for it to be catalogued by Lorenzo Legati. Settala catalogued his own collection in five illustrated codexes with accompanying manuscript notes.[43] Clerics, on the other hand, who had fewer political exigencies, waited much longer for their catalogues to appear. Aldrovandi's catalogue – the *Musæum metallicum* (1648) – of the collection he donated to the Senate of Bologna in 1603, remained unpublished until 43 years after his death.[44] Athanasius Kircher wrote a description – the 'Kircheriana domus naturae artisque theatrum' – of his Amsterdam collection in 1678, which was followed by a published catalogue by Filippo Bonanni only in 1709 – 29 years after Kircher's death.

The perfection of the secularized model of the encyclopaedic ideal was achieved by the Medici when Francesco I became Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1574. Francesco dissolved his studio, which had been constructed in the 1570s, and put his collections on public display in the newly built Uffizi Palace in Florence. The ideals that had motivated his endeavours, however, no longer envisaged a model of the universe with God at its centre, but instead a representation of creation that allowed each princely ruler symbolically to claim his dominion over the world as a means of glorifying and celebrating a family's influence, and legitimating its titles and position. In sixteenth-century Milan, all but two of the sixteen leading galleries of pictures belonged to members of the Milanese government.[45] This transfer to the public gallery of sumptuous private

The Kircher Museum in Rome, from Athanasius Kircher, *Romani Colegii Societati Jesu Musæum Celeberimmum* (Amsterdam, 1678).

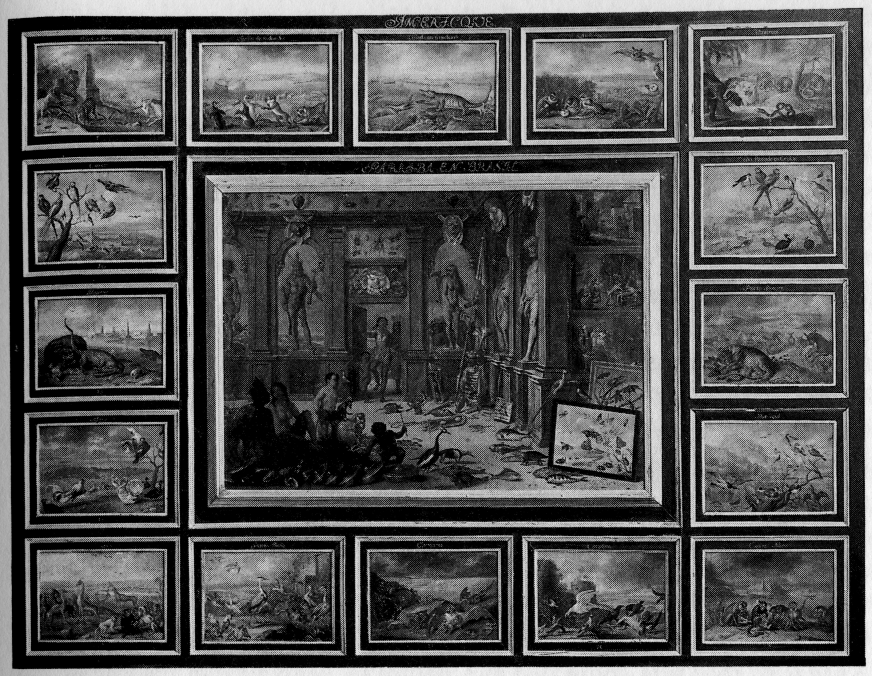
property, paralleling a change in its perception from souvenirs to the 'great world' metaphor, consecrated collecting as an expression of the worthiness of an individual life. Private biography was thereby magnified and projected through public exhibition.

Objects of curiosity were widely exchanged within the nobility. Gifts made between such families were a means of reinforcing the sense of self-worth they enjoyed as a class, just as the degree of comprehensiveness of a collection could be reflected in the degree of esteem a collector enjoyed among his peers. Conversely, the limited availability of certain types of exotic items encouraged competition between collectors. The quality of

even the best collections could by turns be enhanced or tarnished, depending on whether the community of *curieux* chose to assist or frustrate a collector.

Natural history collections, allegorical gardens, antiquities and libraries all had scientific implications that went beyond their immediate inspirations. Ferdinando I de' Medici, for example, reorganized the botanical gardens at Pisa and constructed a museum of natural history which became a centre for teaching and research. His father, Cosimo I, founded the Accademia del Cimento,[46] encouraged the cultivation of Mexican plants and their uses in medicine, and imported rare animals from Africa and America for his menageries.[47]

Every collector is faced with the dilemma of the eventual completion and closure of his or her collection. But nowhere was this problem more pronounced than in the grand project collectors of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries set themselves. The use of collections to evoke publicly the worthiness of their owners led to the patronage of scholars who exerted themselves to expand and complete the encyclopaedic metaphor. Painting and illustration offered another partial aid by providing substitute representations of rare, unobtainable, non-preservable or intangible subjects. Aldrovandi included in his collection ten illustrated volumes of accurately drawn and coloured plants and six of 'birds, beasts and fishes',[48] while written compilations of ethnographic, geographical, zoological or botanical knowledge became very popular in the period. More ambitious still were the picture series intended to represent the totality of a subject. Etienne Delaune (1519–95), Jost Amman (1539–91) and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, to mention but three artists, contributed to the exhaustive attempt at allegorical representation of the Four Continents that included their native people, characteristic flora and fauna, minerals and artefacts. The most outstanding example of this genre is probably Jan van Kessel's *Amerika* (1664–6), painted in oil on copper, now in Munich's Alte Pinakothek. The central panel shows two groups of Brazilian Indians in a Baroque-style room surrounded by examples of America's characteristic animals, while smaller, adjacent panels contain paintings of landscapes inhabited by mammals, reptiles and birds.[49] Other examples, worth mentioning because they treat America and adorn the building of that arch-pragmatist and perfecter of the universalist ideal, Ferdinando I de' Medici, are the Armoury frescos. The ceiling in the Uffizi's Armoury was painted by the Florentine Mannerist Ludovico Buti in 1588. The central scene shows an Indian nobleman seated on a litter carried by various



Jan van Kessel, *Amerika*, 1664–6. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

bearers. The party is surrounded by an idealized landscape full of exuberant tropical and semi-tropical vegetation and exotic birds, while smaller frescos illustrate scenes from the conquest of Mexico and battles between pagans and Christians. The Armoury originally served to house the Medici's collections of exotic costumes, weapons and items of natural history, including art and artefacts from the New World; and frescos provided an appropriate encapsulating context.[50] Artistic and scientific types of patronage were greatly expanded by the encyclopaedic passions of those among the *curieux* who attempted to complete the world metaphor, not only through collecting, but through demonstrations of natural processes and even topographical depictions and schemes of the heavens.

EUROPEAN RECEPTIVITY TO NEW WORLD TREASURES

As Greenblatt has argued, the category of the marvellous provided an important means of incorporating knowledge of the new phenomena found in America.[51] In the beginning, far from creating any crisis of

interpretation by threatening firmly-held cosmographic principles, Europeans treated the discovery of the new continent and its people as a marvel, and responded to the accounts with tolerant curiosity. The European reaction to the inhabitants of America has been thoroughly treated by a number of writers,[52] while its impact on certain medieval categories – geography, botany and zoology – has also been discussed elsewhere.[53] What I wish to concentrate on here is the European attitude towards the New World's *material* culture, and its selective availability to European collectors.

The European understanding of the New World was mediated through medieval categories that included the marvellous, paganism, ideas about divine revelation, and the discourse of origins.[54] Exploration itself offered more than just pleasure, or amusement, escape, terror or even the simple satisfaction of curiosity. Journeys could themselves partake of the marvellous, and were expected to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the world.[55] The circumstances of Hernando Cortéz's early sixteenth-century explorations and campaigns caused Bernal Díaz, one of Cortéz's fellow conquistadors and, subsequently, a chronicler of Cortéz's conquest of Mexico, to 'marvel' on seeing the treasure of Axayacatl that was concealed in a palace in Tenochtitlan, just as he did when confronted by Aztec gardens, while the sight of Tenochtitlan more than amazed him, for he was actually unable to decide whether what he was seeing was real or illusory.[56]

The New World's material products that most attracted the Spaniards were items that closely corresponded with the canons of taste they had inherited from medieval thought; indigenous concepts of worth, often based on materials or artefacts not valued in Europe, were of limited interest. Consequently, the cargoes of Aztec treasure dispatched to Europe to exemplify Amerindian products and wares, and win political favour for the explorers, were adjudicated by European criteria of rarity, and hence value, and by the ability of New World's craftsmen realistically to copy natural phenomena. This emphasis is clearly to be seen in Díaz's descriptions of the perfection of Aztec gold and silverwork and the best of their painters, which he favourably compared with those of Greece, Italy and Spain:

> There are three Indians now living in the city of Mexico, named Marcos de Aquino, Juan de la Cruz and El Crespillo, who are such magnificent painters and carvers that, had they lived in the age of the famous Apelles of old, or of Michelangelo or Berruguete in our own day, they would be counted in the same rank.[57]

Aztec material culture and technology also made a great impression on the religious chroniclers and defenders of the native population. Diego Durán and Bernardino de Sahagún included detailed descriptions of indigenous arts and crafts, while Las Casas, in his *Apologetica historia*, described the technical knowledge and creative abilities of the native inhabitants as a way of indicating their intellectual attainments. Like other observers, Las Casas was also struck by the ability of the featherworkers:

> The activity in which they seem to excel over all other intellects and which makes them appear unique among the nations of the earth is the craft they have perfected of representing with real feathers, in all their natural colours, all the things that they and other excellent painters can paint with brushes. They used to make many things of feathers, including animals, birds, men, cloaks or mantles, apparel for the priests, crowns or mitres, shields and flyswatters, and a thousand other things. . . . Before the coming of the Spaniards they used this art and craft to make marvellously perfect things . . . all so natural or lifelike that if they represented a living thing the work seemed alive, and if they represented an inanimate thing the copy seemed natural. . . . One of the greatest beauties of their featherwork, especially in an object of large size, is the placing of the feathers in such a way that, viewed from one direction, the object looks golden though there is no gold in it; viewed from another direction it is iridescent, though green is not its principal colour, and so on, all with marvellous luster and grace.[58]

Las Casas judged these works by the fundamental categories inherited from medieval aesthetics – light, colour and the correct positioning of each element of the composition – which are evaluated by their fidelity to the 'real'. It is not surprising that pre-Hispanic examples of featherwork were included in the shipments of treasure Cortéz sent to the court of the Spanish monarch, or that missionaries and priests had Indian craftsmen create religious images, regalia and retablos from this material. An undated tribute list, believed to refer to the period 1523–8, notes that 117 items of featherwork, including 68 shields, capes, garments, headdresses, fans and figures, were given to various churches, convents and individuals in Spain.[59] Like the medieval justification for painting, the featherworkers' art provided a means for communion with God, and involved the Church doing no more than redirecting the subject and changing the patronage and organization of its exponents. Examples of featherwork were one of the most sought-after commodities from the Americas. In 1539 it was reported that Cosimo de' Medici owned a rich collection of feather costumes and other objects, while his son Ferdinando owned two feather pictures that he later passed on to his brother's

second wife, Bianca Capello. According to a document dated 1571, Ferdinando also possessed fans made of parrot feathers and two bishop's mitres. In 1587, when Ferdinando succeeded his brother Francesco I as Grand Duke, both mitres were sent to Florence; within ten years one of them had been lost, although the other survives today in the city's Museo degli Argenti. Another six mitres have also been preserved. One is now in the Escorial, to where it was transferred in 1576 by Philip II, while another, in the treasury of the Cathedral of Milan, is by tradition thought to have been given to Pius IV by converted Mexican Indians in 1559 when he was crowned pontiff. The third, in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, originally came from Ferdinando's *Kunstkammer* at Ambras Castle. Like the majority of surviving Pre-Columbian pieces that were brought to Europe at an early date, the other mitres – at the Musée Historique des Tissus in Lyon, the Cathedral of Toledo and one formerly belonging to a private collection in Hohentwiel in Germany (and which now belongs to the Hispanic Society of America, New York) – have uncertain provenances, although the subject-matter of the first is similar to those in Florence and the Escorial. Feather pictures were included in a number of early collections. Aldrovandi had a picture representing St Jerome, but, like the two presented by Ferdinando to Bianca Capello, neither can be firmly identified with contemporary surviving examples. Four feather pictures, representing St Jerome, St Ambrose, St Augustine and St Gregory, are still preserved in the Santa Casa of Loreto, a gift from the Augustinian monk Pietro Lanfranconi in 1668. Another, representing the Madonna, and reportedly given to the same institution, has since been lost. The Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna contains pictures representing both St Jerome and the Madonna, while further examples of the featherworkers' art can still be found in the Armeriá Real and the Museo de las Americas in Madrid.[60] Other examples of featherwork in Vienna, including the feather crown reputed to have belonged to Motecuhzoma II and a decorated shield, are said to have been part of the original treasure sent by Cortéz to Charles V.[61] Brazilian featherwork was also much sought after, and even though never used to produce Christian religious images and cult objects it was classified alongside Mexican works. The Tupinamba cloak now in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, first appears in an inventory of material in the royal arsenal in 1781, while two earlier ones recorded from the *kunstkammer* of the Danish Royal household, now in Copenhagen's Nationalmuseet, can be traced back to 1689. The example in Brussels is telling because it was formerly identified as belonging to

Motecuhzoma II, and provides a good illustration of how specific cultural attributions were ignored by a discourse that subsumed difference under the general categories of the pagan and the marvellous.

Sumptuous objects, chosen because of colour, natural fidelity or craftsmanship, were dispatched to the Spanish court by Cortéz to furnish exotic evidence of his accomplishments. The first shipment, made in 1519, consisted of the treasures that Motecuhzoma II had sent Cortéz in the hope of halting his advance from the coast. According to Bernardino de Sahagún, the first gifts given by Motecuhzoma II to Cortéz consisted of mosaic masks and precious regalia of the gods Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca and Tlaloc.[62] These were all gods associated with Aztec royal succession and kingship, and the regalia may have been intended to symbolize Motecuhzoma's acquiescence to foreign authority. Díaz's documentation of the conquest provides information on at least thirteen occasions when Cortéz received gifts from the ambassadors of Motecuhzoma or from representatives of local communities. In Tabasco, for example, Cortéz received a 'present of gold, consisting of four diadems and some gold lizards, and two (ornaments) like little dogs, and ear-rings and five ducks, and two masks with Indian faces and two gold soles for sandals, and some other things of little value'.[63] Later, at San Juan de Ulua, one of Motecuhzoma's subordinate governors, Pitalpitoque, brought the Spaniards gold jewellery.[64] The following day another governor, Tendile, arrived with more valuables: 'he took out of a petaca, which is a sort of chest, many articles of gold beautifully and richly worked and ordered ten loads of white cloth made of cotton and feathers to be brought, wonderful things to see, besides quantities of food'.[65] At the next meeting Tendile was accompanied by another governor, Quintalbor, who brought further presents. According to Díaz:

> The first article presented was a wheel like a sun, as big as a cartwheel, with many sorts of pictures on it, the whole of fine gold, and a wonderful thing to behold, which those who afterwards weighed it said was worth more than ten thousand dollars. Then another wheel was presented of greater size made of silver of great brilliancy in imitation of the moon with other figures shown on it, and this was of great value as it was very heavy – and the chief brought back the helmet full of fine grains of gold, just as they are got out of the mines, and this was worth three thousand dollars. . . . Then were brought twenty golden ducks, beautifully worked and very natural looking, and some (ornaments) like dogs, and many articles of gold worked in the shape of tigers and lions and monkeys, and ten collars beautifully worked and other necklaces; and twelve arrows and a bow with its string, and two rods like staffs of justice, five palms long, all in beautiful hollow work of fine gold. Then there were presented crests of gold and plumes of

rich green feathers, and others of silver, and fans of the same materials, and deer copied in hollow gold and many other things that I cannot remember for it all happened so many years ago. And then over thirty loads of beautiful cotton cloth were brought worked with many patterns and decorated with many coloured feathers, and so many other things were there that it is useless my trying to describe them for I know not how to do it.[66]

After Tendile returned from Tenochtitlan with news that Motecuhzoma had refused to meet Cortéz, Tendile offered the Spaniards a new consignment of gifts:

Ten loads of fine rich feather cloth, and four chalchihuites, which are green stones of very great value, and held in the greatest esteem among the Indians, more than emeralds are by us, and certain other gold articles. Not counting the chalchihuites, the gold alone was said to be worth three thousand dollars.[67]

Another large consignment of gold and precious cloth was sent by Motecuhzoma shortly after Cortéz had persuaded the Totonac to refuse further tribute to the Aztec emperor.[68] And on their first meeting, Motecuhzoma presented Cortéz with a 'very rich necklace of golden crabs'.[69] Cortéz was not himself blind to the quality of Aztec craftsmanship, which prompted him to ask:

What greater grandeur can there be than that a barbarian monarch such as Motecuhzoma should have imitations in gold, silver, stones, and featherwork of all the things existing in his dominion? The gold and silver things are so like to nature that there is not a silversmith in all the world who could do better; and as for the stones, there is no imagination which can divine the instruments with which they were so perfectly executed.[70]

In addition to these formal presentations of precious materials, Díaz also recounts the bartering that occurred between Cortéz's men and the Indians so that the former might obtain gold and food. The gold from Motecuhzoma's treasury was melted down and some of it used to make long heavy chains that the conquistadors conspicuously wore. According to Díaz, 'some of our soldiers had their hands so full, that many ingots of gold, marked and unmarked, and jewels of a great diversity of patterns were openly in circulation. Heavy gaming was always going on with some playing cards . . .'.[71] Early in 1520 part of the consignments of treasure accumulated by Cortéz arrived in Spain and was placed on public display in Toledo. That spring they were taken to Valladolid, then late in the summer they arrived in Flanders, where they were seen and admired by Albrecht Dürer. A second shipment was sent in 1522, and another in September 1526. The third shipment of treasure Cortéz

dispatched to Spain included Christian images, crucifixes and medallions that had been copied by the Aztec metalworkers at his request.[72]

The arrival in Europe of Aztec valuables astounded those who beheld them, and wealthy collectors were smitten by desires to renew their efforts to complete 'comprehensive' collections. Peter Martyr could not hide his amazement:

I am at a loss to describe the aigrettes, the plumes and the feather fans. If ever artists of this kind have touched genius, then surely these natives are they. It is not so much the gold or the precious stones that I admire, as the cleverness of the artist and the workmanship, which must exceed the value of the material and excite my amazement. I have examined a thousand figures which it is impossible to describe. In my opinion, I have never seen anything which for beauty could more delight the human eye.[73]

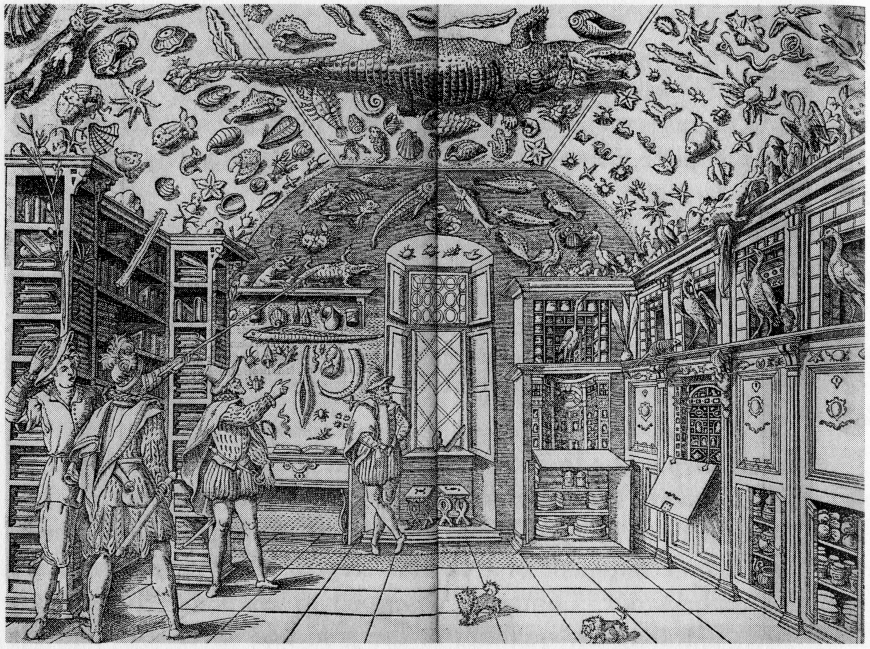
Similar statements of admiration and marvel at the workmanship were voiced by renowned European craftsmen, among them Benvenuto Cellini and Dürer. In 1522 Martyr invited members of the diplomatic corps to view the second shipment of treasures sent to Charles V, which the Venetian ambassador, Contarini, described to his Senate three years later. After extolling the qualities of the gold and silverwork and the obsidian mirrors, he reserved his greatest praise for the featherwork, which he thought 'miraculous' – 'Never have I seen embroidery so lovely and delicate as some examples of this work'.[74]

Apart from the vast quantities of booty taken by the Spaniards, gold, silver and 'chalchihuites' (jade, and related stones of a green-blue colour) were also discovered under the foundations of temples, and in at least one case were the subject of a lawsuit between a settler and the Crown.[75]

Although inventories might not even begin to give an accurate idea of the amount of material sent back from the New World, they do clearly reveal the tastes and interests of the Spaniards at the time of the conquest. It would be surprising if other members of the expedition had not also brought back, or sent home, various objects, and Heikamp confidently believes 'numerous shiploads of treasures reached Europe'.[76]

In addition to the treasures from Mexico, the conquest of Peru in 1533 yielded further quantities of Indian booty. The objects obtained by Pizarro from the ransom of Atahualpa alone were said to be sufficient to fill a room 25 feet long and 15 feet wide even when piled higher than the upraised arms of a tall man.[77] Francisco de Xeres, writing of some of the articles sent to Spain, recounted the following:

The ship brought, for his Majesty, thirty-eight vases of gold and forty-eight of silver, among which there was an eagle of silver. In its body were fitted two water



The Museum of Ferrante Imperato, Naples, from Imperato's *Historia naturale* (Naples, 1599).

jars and (or?) two large pots, one of gold and the other of silver, each of which was capable of containing a cow cut in pieces. There were also two sacks of gold, each capable of holding two fanegas of wheat, an idol of gold the size of a child four years old, and two small drums. The other vases were of gold and silver, each one capable of holding two arrobas and more. In the same ship passengers brought home forty-four vases of silver and four of gold.[78]

The tribute destined for the King reached Seville on 25 April 1538.[79] According to the Peruvian historian Medina:

> There were recorded with it three golden sheep, of 118 or 119 marcs; 20 statues of women with their tapaderas [fine clothing], whose weight ranged from 124 to 95 marcs; a male dwarf with an artificial bonnet and crown. The workmanship of these feminine figures must have been very faultless, since on the inventory it appears one of them lacked a finger.
>
> As for the objects of silver, it appears they were more artistic, if one may say so, since they included three sheep and a shepherd; twelve statues of women, large and small, which, like the former, had 'tapaderas' to fit them, according to the phrasing of the inventory; and finally, 29 jars, all with two handles, a dog's head and two pick-axes.[80]

What, then, was the fate of all these unique objects once they reached Europe's shores? Unlike the Mexican artefacts that had arrived, none of

the Peruvian antiquities from this period are thought to have survived.[81] Much of the state treasure formerly belonging to Axayacatl was melted down and cast into ingots, while the jewellery was 'undone and taken to pieces'. Axayacatl's was probably the largest hoard taken by Cortéz, and is repeatedly referred to by Díaz:

> I say there was so much, that after it was taken to pieces there were three heaps of gold, and they weighed more than six hundred thousand pesos . . . without the silver and other rich things, and not counting in this the ingots and slabs of gold, and the gold in grains from the mines.[82]

Little, apparently, of this treasure remained intact, although some additional fine chalchihuites and 'three blowguns with their pellet moulds, and their coverings of jewels and pearls, and pictures in feathers of little birds covered with pearlshells and other birds' may have reached Spain.[83] One document mentioning a personal treasure of precious jewellery given to Cortéz by the Indian population before his return to Spain in 1532 recorded a similar fate before it left Mexico:[84] much of the gold was melted down in Mexico and part of it was then used to pay for supplies for the military campaigns, or circulated in order to bribe various Spanish factions, thus sealing alliances. Such practical constraints and considerations clearly overrode any views that collectors might have expressed, and had the effect of rationing what was available to them. Another large quantity of treasure, accumulated by Cortéz in 1519–20, was lost in Lake Texcoco during the Spanish retreat from Tenochtitlan, while during the same campaigns Cortéz's Tlaxcalan allies carried off more from plundered Aztec cities. Part of the bundles of precious cloth were also used as payment to his Indian allies, and thus may never have left Mexico's shores. Chalchihuites was similarly used by the Spaniards to bribe Indians for information. After the Spanish rout at Tenochtitlan, precious materials, including chalchihuites, vastly deflated in the hands of the desperate and hungry Spaniards, were even exchanged for food.

Even many of the gold ornaments and ritual objects that Cortéz and others sent to Europe on account of their fine craftsmanship were probably eventually melted down and thereby converted into monetary worth. As for the jewels, some exceptionally exotic items were reworked and converted into more appealing and usable adornment. European craftsmen inlaid Pre-Columbian gold animals with precious stones and converted them into pendants. Even jewellery was not sacrosanct, and could either be reworked again in accordance with fashion or else

be melted down to provide finance when needed.[85] Mexican mosaic works were also taken apart and their precious and semi-precious stones reused for European decorations.

There is no doubt that the material from the New World was not thought, in the formal sense, to constitute a collection, and much of it, in one form or another, was re-distributed. The Spanish Crown had no formal policy towards the collection and preservation of antiquities until 1716,[86] and what had survived in the royal palace had probably done so because it had been regarded as furnishings and decorative art. Many more items were probably given to members of the aristocracy, and thus have been added to collections. It is not uncommon to find Pre-Columbian objects listed in the inventories of private individuals. Moran y Checa mentions Diego Hurtado de Mendoza and the Count of Guimera, for example, as collectors who possessed numerous gold 'idols' and antiquities from the New World.[87] Nevertheless, the fate of most New World artefacts ended in the foundries, jewellers' workshops and banks, or fell victim to the general carnage of everyday life. European collectors were left with a severely limited choice of objects, further restricted by Spain's indifference to the fate of New World artefacts and its quick willingness to convert the cultural spoils of conquest into financial gain.

NOVELTY, GENEALOGY AND DOMESTICATION

Having reviewed the ontological and aesthetic categories that provided the criteria by which New World objects were evaluated, and described the kind of objects that filtered into Europe, it yet remains to be seen how such categories and classifications facilitated the incorporation of potentially transgressive objects into the existing European order.

It is difficult to correlate the greater part of the inventories I have mentioned with existing artefacts in museums or private collections. Part of the treasure sent to Charles V, which included gold butterflies, a snail's head, an eagle with pendants, a 'monster' and various animals made from low-value gold, were inherited by his son Philip II.[88] The Peruvian viceroy, Francisco de Toledo, suggested in 1572 that Philip create a museum of the Americas in the royal palace. This seems to have born fruit, for in 1667 an attaché at the French embassy in Madrid reported that in the Palacio del Buen Retiro he had seen,

> a treasure house of all that was most precious ever produced in the Indies. I mean the hangings of cloth made from the bark of trees, the costumes of Motecuhzoma and of the Incas of Peru, the strangely-wrought cases, the stone mirrors, the bed curtains made of feathers . . . one would have to spend a whole day there to be able to claim to have seen it all closely.[89]

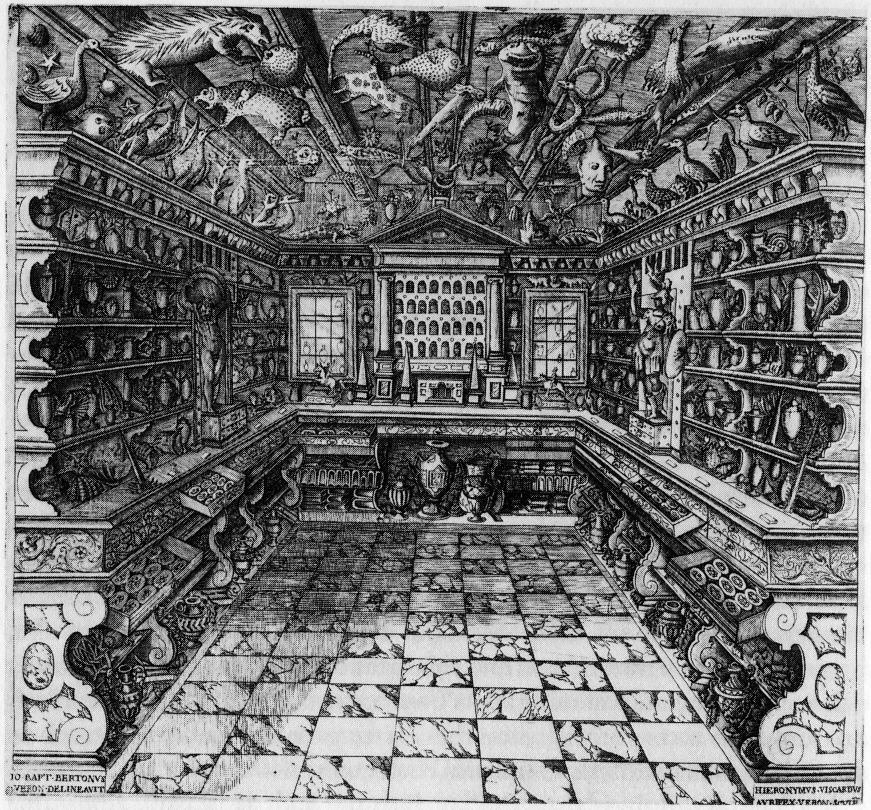
Sadly, after surviving so many upheavals, most of these items appear to have been destroyed in fires that gutted different parts of the Buen Retiro in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[90] It was not, however, until 1716, when Philip V established the Royal Library (which included a cabinet of curiosities containing mathematical instruments, medallions and other antiquities), that the Crown adopted any firm policy towards the preservation and collection of antiquities.[91]

After the late sixteenth century, far fewer articles reached Spain from the New World. As a result of the Royal Cedula of 1577, the clergy were forbidden to make further compilations of Indian customs, and the export of material culture was officially discouraged.[92] Nevertheless, items continued to arrive in Europe via a clandestine trade through the Italian ports, and found ready homes among the great Italian collectors. Studies of the inventories of the collections of Cospi, Giganti, Aldrovandi and the Medici have disclosed part of their former Pre-Columbian holdings.[93] Equally important are the descriptions and drawings of Pre-Columbian objects contained in the catalogues and inventories of collections. In many cases, the preoccupation with valuable materials – based on rarity, chromatic qualities and fidelity to natural forms – is strongly reflected in the objects collected. A familiarity and appreciation of monetary value, however, was far from absent, and appears to have increased later in the period. Even Suger in the twelfth century was conscious of the worth of Church collections, but Cortéz and his men were interminably engaged in translating indigenous symbolic values of artefacts into their European mercantile worth. The ability of such collections to dazzle, amaze and provide a conspicuous badge of wealth, status, taste and learning was never lost. Having said this, the Mexican heads and figurines illustrated in Aldrovandi's *Musæum metallicum* cannot be considered exceptional when judged by contemporary knowledge of pre-Hispanic art. Similarly, many of the small heads and figurines identified by Heikamp as formerly belonging to the Medici are not outstanding.[94] More revealing still is that a substantial number of these and other Mexican artefacts formerly belonging to these collections are not Aztec at all. This raises the possibility that they were shipped by subsequent looters, who robbed graves to satisfy the European market, or that they had been for some time in the care of the former Aztec collectors, who we know revered antique works and reused them in rituals.[95]

Other objects, however, were by all accounts spectacular, and would wholly have satisfied the period's taste for the unique and marvellous. I have already mentioned featherwork. But in addition, the Medici family, for example, possessed manuscripts, including codexes, such as the Vindobonensis, Magliabecchiano, and Sahagún's *Historia general de los cosas de Nueva España*, two Teotihuacan-style stone masks and various turquoise mosaic masks, only two of which survive.[96] Another mosaic mask, together with a sacrificial knife formerly belonged to Aldrovandi. Two other inlaid handles belonging to sacrificial knives are illustrated in Legati's catalogue of the Cospi collection.[97] These were given to the city of Bologna in 1667, where they were both preserved in the University's archaeological museum until one was transferred to the Pigorini Museum in Rome in 1878. Giganti had succeeded in acquiring two feather headdresses from Florida, a sacrificial knife, a stone axe, bows and arrows, an obsidian razor, nine stone idols, two parts of a Mexican codex and a Pre-Columbian map, as well as a Tarascan feather-mosaic picture, a mitre and other objects of indigenous manufacture.[98] The Cospi and Borgia collections also included Mexican codexes. By far the largest surviving collection of turquoise mosaics is preserved in the British Museum,[99] although the Pigorini Museum, the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde,[100] and the Dallas Museum of Fine Art also possess important examples. In the case of the pieces in the British Museum, as with much other Pre-Columbian art that reached Europe early, it is difficult to date their arrival or trace their subsequent history prior to their acquisition in the nineteenth century. Most of the pieces are believed to come from former Italian collections.[101] A cedar mask covered with turquoise mosaic thought to represent the sun god Tonatiuh, or Quetzalcoatl, and a knife with a mosaic handle are thought to have been part of the same collection that had remained in Florence until 1830. Another mosaic mask, probably representing the rain god Tlaloc, purchased at the Demidoff sale in Paris in 1870, was then believed by Lehmann to have formerly belonged to the Medici, and two other mosaic items – a circular shield and an animal head acquired in 1866 and 1868 respectively – were purchased from the dealer William Adams, who claimed to have obtained them from northern Italy. The extraordinary double-headed serpent pendant acquired for the British Museum by A. W. Franks in 1894 also had an Italian provenance. The remaining mosaic works in the British Museum have a still more uncertain history.[102] A mosaic-encrusted skull has only been traced as far back as 1847, when it was in Bruges; a helmet to 1854 when it belonged to a certain W. Chaffers in Paris; and a small seated figure of a jaguar to 1877, the year it was acquired by the Museum. Another turquoise mosaic mask, which I have identified with Xiuhtecuhtli, now in the Pigorini Museum, apparently has a more detailed history, which can be traced back to Cosimo de' Medici. It remained in the Medici collections until 1783, when it was transferred to Florence's Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale. The piece was rediscovered by Luigi Pigorini in 1823 in a workshop, the 'Opificio delle Pietre Dure'. It has been claimed that a number of these surviving examples of mosaic work, including the mask at the Pigorini Museum and various of the pieces in the British Museum, were part of the 1519 shipment of treasures that Cortéz sent to Charles V, but the evidence for this is far from conclusive; such claims must be considered to be part of the mythology of these objects of 'marvellous origin'.

There is what at first appears to be a paradox in the motivation and organization of cabinets of curiosity. As we have seen, cabinets alluded to the marvellous and represented the examples of random novelty. American artefacts were easily incorporated into such collections and assimilated in accordance with the same terms, that is to say, as yet further marvels. The sum of novelties and extraordinary occurrences did, however, have its own reason and significance in terms of its allusion to a divine plan. The marvellous had its own order. America could, therefore, not only be incorporated into the existing world-view, but used to demonstrate that order's value and correctness.

Michael Ryan has argued that Europe had an easily adjustable category – the 'pagan' – within which to categorize the inhabitants of new worlds.[103] 'Paganism' both allowed the admittance of cultural diversity and provided it with a biblical pedigree. It incorporated the people and customs of the fourth continent into the same class as the inhabitants and religions of the classical world and barbarian Europe. The standard compendiums of mythology of the period, by Lilio Giraldi, Natale Conti and Vincenzo Cartari, all classified classical, Asian and American customs under the rubric 'pagan',[104] which, as we have seen, also provided the basis for a comparative classification of the material culture from these regions. Paganism had a common origin with Christianity: a kind of parallel development, perceived as a history of error and folly perpetrated by Satan. The virtues and values of the Christian world are almost confirmed through their juxtaposition with their opposites found in pagan countries. They are almost inverted mirror images. Time after time, whether in defence or in condemnation of the Indies, the missionary chroniclers of Mexico (Oviedo, Las Casas, Durán,



The Museum of Francesco Calzolari, Verona, from B. Ceruti & A. Chiocco, *Museum Calceolarium* (Verona, 1622).

Sahagún, Acosta, Torquemada) drew comparisons between indigenous and classical customs, not simply to make them intelligible, but to consciously substitute the terms of the indigenous discourse to those commensurate with sixteenth-century Europe, and thereby affect the colonization of the American imagination. The subordination of accurate cultural data to the vastly more important need to demonstrate the inclusiveness of paganism created an apparent homogeneity between the different high civilizations of the Americas, as well as blurring their distinctions from other 'pagan' cultures. This is only subtly suggested in the classification of collections, where inaccurate attributes and provenances – far from suggesting important and conscious errors in Renaissance and post-Renaissance knowledge – indicate a relative lack of concern with exact provenance. What was important was an object's

testimonial quality as a pagan attribute. When the turquoise-encrusted cedar mask that is now in the British Museum was earlier identified as Egyptian,[105] or the Mixtec-Puebla stone head originally in the Sloane collection and now also in the British Museum was described as an 'Egyptian head of the Sun',[106] it should be recalled that such objects functioned not within an ethnographic discourse but in a theological discourse that had as its objective the establishment and legitimation of paganism as a category.

The date and circumstances of the divergence of the pagan races from the Christian world in the remote past greatly occupied the minds of the chroniclers who endlessly hypothesised on the origins of the Aztec and Inca, who they usually related to an obscure offspring of Noah or a lost tribe of Israel. Cortéz even sent what he took to be a huge human leg-bone to Charles V, in order to confirm that the indigenous population had indeed descended from the giants whom their histories claimed had inhabited the pre-diluvial world.[107] Small wonder, then, that racial genealogies and conjectural histories partly informed written compendiums of customs and arrangements of material culture.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the heyday of the cabinet of curiosity, examples and testaments to the marvellous, the bizarre and the uniqueness of the universe were collected, but collections were usually far from being random or capricious. Cabinets of curiosity, initially informed by medieval concepts of aesthetics and allegory, were later sometimes challenged by particularly pragmatic and politically expedient motivations that led to their public display and the substitution of a mercantile over a metaphysical value. Whether they mirrored the God-centred universe inherited by the Renaissance, or the emergent man-centred, pragmatic world manipulated by merchant princes and aristocrats, cabinets expressed a visual image of the inclusiveness of the European view of the world and its facile ability to incorporate and domesticate potentially transgressive worlds and customs. The truly marvellous and extraordinary accomplishment of medieval thought was that it made marvellousness itself a category of the mundane.

38 See Soane, 1835, pp. 34–5; Summerson, 1991, p. 40; Thornton and Dorey, op. cit., p. 66.
39 On the value of these models as excavation records for the modern archaeologist, see M. Mazzei, 'L'ipogeo Monterisi Rossignoli di Canosa', *Archeologia e Storia Antica*, XII (1990), pp. 123–67, esp. p. 130 and figs. 42.1 and 42.4.
40 Soane, 1835, pp. 34–5.
41 See the discussion in B. Lukacher, 'John Soane and his Draughtsman Joseph Michael Gandy', *Daidalos*, XXV (15 September 1987), pp. 51–64, esp. pp. 54–7.
42 Here I disagree with Lukacher, op. cit., p. 56, who suggests that the figure must represent Gandy. I think the dividers and plan tell in favour of the architect, but the ambivalence as to whether the models in the drawing are Soane's buildings or Gandy's (the architect's or the draughtsman's) must remain in play.
43 Cf. Stewart, op. cit., p. 61, on the implications of the doll's house.
44 Here the models partake of what Pomian, op. cit., calls the collector's 'desire to miniaturize the constituent parts of the world in such a way as to allow the eye to take them all in at the same time, without losing any of their most intimate features' (p. 49).
45 Soane, 1830, and 1832, p. 25.

9 *Anthony Alan Shelton: Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World*

1 M. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964); B. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick, 1971); L. Laurencich-Minelli, 'Museography and Ethnographical Collections in Bologna during the 16th and 17th Centuries', in O. R. Impey and A. G. MacGregor, eds, *The Origins of Museums* (Oxford, 1985); J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago, 1988), p. 10.
2 J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. F. Hopman (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 254–5; U. Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (London, 1986), p. 12.
3 Cited in Eco, p. 13.
4 K. Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 17.
5 J. Burckhardt, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York, 1958), I, pp. 154–5. See also P. Geary, 'Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Commodities', in *The Social Life of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), p. 169.
6 Pomian, op. cit., p. 17.
7 Burckhardt, op. cit., I, p. 155.
8 Eco, op. cit., p. 16.
9 Ibid., p. 98.
10 According to Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln in the first half of the thirteenth century: 'beauty is a concordance and fittingness of a thing to itself and of all its individual parts to themselves and to each other and to the whole, and of that whole to all things' (cited in Eco, op. cit.).
11 Eco, op. cit., p. 53.
12 Ibid., p. 95.
13 Le Goff, op. cit., p. 27.
14 Ibid., pp. 27–8.
15 Pomian, op. cit., p. 271.
16 Ibid., p. 48.
17 Ibid., p. 35.
18 Ibid., p. 47, and p. 78.

19 Ibid., p. 48.
20 Ibid., pp. 58–9.
21 A. Lugli, 'Inquiry As Collection: The Athanasius Museum in Rome', *RES*, XII (1986), p. 114.
22 Pomian, op. cit., p. 35.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 69.
25 Ibid., p. 70.
26 Hodgen, op. cit., p. 119.
27 Pomian, op. cit., p. 76.
28 Laurencich-Minelli, op. cit., p. 22.
29 G. Olmi, 'Science – Honour – Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the 16th and 17th Centuries', in Impey and MacGregor, op. cit., p. 5.
30 Hodgen, op. cit., p. 123.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 A. Aimi, V. Michele and A. Morandotti, 'Towards a History of Collecting in Milan', in Impey and MacGregor, op. cit., p. 27.
34 D. 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. F. Chiappelli (London, 1976), pp. 455–6; and M. Ryan, 'Assimilating New Worlds in the 16th and 17th Centuries', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXIII (1981), pp. 526–9.
35 Olmi, op. cit., p. 13.
36 Hodgen, op. cit., p. 127.
37 Heikamp, op. cit., p. 471.
38 Laurencich-Minelli, op. cit., p. 18.
39 Ibid., p. 19.
40 S. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London, 1984), p. 152.
41 Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 161.
42 Cf. Lugli, op. cit., p. 112.
43 Aimi, et al., op. cit., p. 27.
44 Heikamp, op. cit., p. 458.
45 Aimi, et al., op. cit., p. 24.
46 Olmi, op. cit., p. 11.
47 D. Heikamp, *Mexico and the Medici* (Florence, 1972), p. 11.
48 Hodgen, op. cit., p. 119.
49 See *Mythen der Neuen Welt: Zur Entdeckungsgeschichte Lateinamerikas*, exhibition catalogue by K.-H. Kohl; Berliner Festspiele (Berlin, 1982), p. 45.
50 D. Robertson, 'Mexican Indian Art and the Atlantic Filter: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. F. Chiappelli (London, 1976), p. 489.
51 S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991), p. 14.
52 See Keen, op. cit., Hodgen, op. cit.; H. Konning, *Columbus: His Enterprise* (New York, 1976); J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (Cambridge, 1970); L. Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the New World* (London, 1959); and A. Padgen, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1986), and *European Encounters with the New World, from Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993).

53 See T. Todorov, *The Conquest of the New World: The Question of the Other* (New York, 1984); and Greenblatt, op. cit.
54 This last-mentioned sought to situate the phenomena of the world by reconstructing its evolution from the biblical creation story.
55 Le Goff, op. cit., p. 40.
56 Bernal Díaz, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, ed. G. García, trans. A. P. Maudslay, intro. I. A. Leonard (New York, 1979), see pp. 226, 214 and 192.
57 Keen, op. cit., p. 60.
58 Ibid., pp. 95–6.
59 See P. Cabello Caro, *Coleccionismo americana indigena en la España del siglo XVIII* (Madrid, 1989), p. 25.
60 Pal Kelemen in *Art of the Americas, Ancient and Hispanic* (1969), p. 182, recounts an amusing incident when, in 1935, while working in the British Museum, he was shown a feather mosaic picture of the Christ at the Column. Since the Museum could not itself afford to purchase the picture, the 'curator' asked Kelemen whether he would be interested in acquiring it! Another picture, representing St Antony and the Christ Child, was offered the Museum in 1988, but this too was refused.
61 This is not intended as an exhaustive list of surviving examples of featherwork. For a more detailed description of these works, readers are directed to 'Tesoros de Mexico, Arte plumario y de mosaico', *Artes de Mexico*, no. 137 año 17 (1970), Z. Nutall, *Ancient Mexican Featherwork at the Columbian Historical Exhibition in Madrid*, Washington D. C.(1895), and the works of Heikamp listed in the bibliography.
62 A. P. Maudslay, 'Montezuma's Gifts to Cortez', in Díaz, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, p. 165.
63 Díaz, op. cit., p. 62.
64 Ibid., p. 70.
65 Ibid., p. 71.
66 Ibid., pp. 74–5.
67 Ibid., p. 76.
68 Ibid., pp. 95–6.
69 Cortéz, cited in Keen, op. cit., p. 59.
70 Ibid., p. 196.
71 Ibid., p. 250.
72 P. Muller, 'The Old World and Gold from the New', in *The Art of Pre-Columbian Gold: The Jan Mitchell Collection*, ed. J. Jones (London, 1985), p. 18.
73 Keen, op. cit., p. 64.
74 Ibid., p. 65.
75 Díaz, op. cit., p. 222.
76 Heikamp, 1972, p. 8.
77 S.K. Lothrop, *Inca Treasures as Depicted by Spanish Historians* (Los Angeles, 1938), p. 48.
78 Ibid., p. 50.
79 An inventory of the articles received by Charles V, summarized by Medina and quoted in Lothrop, op. cit., p. 50, lists the following items: 'Thirty-four jars of gold, of varying standards and weights. . . . Three of them were provided with covers also of gold. Two bags, small, as they weighed between them two pounds and ten ounces. A stalk of maize, of gold, with three leaves and two ears. Two kettle drums (atabales) or drums (tambores), of four pounds, four ounces. A panel of gold and silver, which enclosed the figures of an Indian man and woman, both of medium size. Two platters, which weighed seventeen pounds, and five ounces. A sack, of thirty-three pounds and fifteen ounces. An idol with the figure of a man, of eleven pounds, eleven ounces. A vase like a pitcher of twenty-seven pounds weight. Of silver objects 100 jars were enumerated, the largest weighing 161 pounds and 12 ounces; and the smallest of 45 pounds and 4 ounces.'
80 Medina, cited in Lothrop, op. cit., p. 61.
81 Ibid., p. 46.
82 Díaz, op. cit., p. 248.
83 Díaz, op. cit., p. 249.
84 Cabello, op. cit., p. 25.
85 Surviving examples include the winged lizard pendant in the Wernher Collection, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, an 8th-to-12th-century frog pendant with shell inlay at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a sixteenth-century frog pendant at the Baltimore Museum of Art. An eighteenth-century niche figure, now in the Schatzkammer der Residenz, Munich, has a head made from an Aztec mask remodelled from a pre-Columbian sculpture.
86 Cabello, op. cit., p. 27.
87 Cited in Cabello, op. cit., p. 26.
88 Muller, op. cit., p. 16.
89 In I. Bernal, *A History of Mexican Archaeology: The Vanished Civilizations of Middle America* (London, 1980), p. 131.
90 As a consequence of these disasters, most of the existing American collections are no earlier than the 18th and early 19th centuries when the Bourbons commissioned expeditions to Palenque and other archaeological sites.
91 Cabello, op. cit., p. 27.
92 Robertson, op. cit., p. 491; and Heikamp, 1976, p. 456.
93 For Aldrovandi, see Heikamp, 1976, and Laurencich-Minelli, op. cit.; for the Medici, see Heikamp, 1972.
94 Heikamp, 1972.
95 E. Umberger, 'Antiques, Revivals, and References to the Past in Aztec Art', in *RES*, XIII (1987); and C. Gonzalez and B. Olmedo Vera, *Esculpturas Mezcala en el Templo Mayor* (Mexico, 1990).
96 Heikamp, 1972, pp. 34–5.
97 Heikamp, 1976.
98 Laurencich-Minelli, op. cit., p. 18.
99 Important collections in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, and the Museum of the American Indian, New York, were recovered from caves in the Mixteca-Puebla area of Mexico, and are late arrivals to Western museums (see Shelton, note 101, below).
100 All but one were destroyed in World War II.
101 Maudslay, in Díaz, op. cit.; E. Carmichael, *Turquoise Mosaics from Mexico* (London, 1970); and A. Shelton, 'In the Realm of the Fire Serpent', *British Museum Society Bulletin*, LV (1988), pp. 20–25.
102 It is regrettable that the results of subsequent research on the history of this collection advertised in Carmichael, op. cit., p. 9, have never been made public.
103 Ryan, op. cit.
104 Ibid., pp. 527–8.
105 Letter from Bram Hertz to Henry Christy dated 5 February 1858 (in Carmichael, op. cit.).
106 In H. J. Braunholtz, *Sir Hans Sloane and Ethnography* (London, 1970), p. 31.
107 Díaz, op. cit., p. 158.

10 *Susan Stewart: Death and Life, in that Order, in the Works of Charles Willson Peale*

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