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ARTICLE

Collecting "Remembrances of these Isles": Tracing the Post-1880 History of a Taíno Cotton *Cemí* in the Dominican Republic and Italy

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Abstract
This article charts the collection history of the only surviving precolumbian cotton reliquary (*cemí*) from the Dominican Republic, establishing its provenance from the mid-nineteenth century through a previously unpublished manuscript written by the collector, Rodolfo Domingo Cambiaso Sosa, and using archival documents in Italy. The *cemí*, found in a cave in the southwest of the country near the town of Petitrou (Enriquillo), was purchased in 1882 by Admiral Giuseppe Giovanni Battista Cambiaso, one of the founders of the Dominican Navy. It emerged in international publications commemorating the quadricentennial of the Spanish–Indigenous encounter in 1892 and shortly thereafter was sent to Genoa, Italy. It entered the collections of Turin's Royal Museum of Antiquities in 1928 before being passed to the newly established Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. It was rediscovered by Dominican scholars in the 1970s and has inspired numerous investigations since, including renewed collaborative links between the Dominican Republic and Italy.

Resumen
Este artículo traza la historia del único relicario precolombino de algodón (*cemí*) que se conserva en la República Dominicana, estableciendo su procedencia desde mediados del siglo XIX a través de un manuscrito inédito escrito por el coleccionista, Rodolfo Domingo Cambiaso Sosa, y de documentos de archivo en Italia. El cemí, hallado en una cueva del suroeste del país, cerca de la localidad de Petitrou (Enriquillo), fue adquirido en 1882 por el almirante Giuseppe Giovanni Battista Cambiaso, uno de los fundadores de la armada dominicana. Surgió en las publicaciones internacionales que conmemoraban el cuarto centenario del encuentro entre españoles e indígenas en 1892, y poco después fue enviado a Génova (Italia). Entró en las colecciones del Museo Real de Antigüedades de Turín en 1928, antes de pasar al recién creado Museo de Antropología y Etnografía. Fue redescubierto por estudiosos dominicanos en la década del 1970, y ha inspirado numerosas investigaciones desde entonces, incluyendo la renovación de los vínculos de colaboración entre la República Dominicana e Italia.

Keywords: cotton *cemí*; artifact biography; Caribbean prehistory/history; museums and cultural patrimony

Palabras clave: *cemí* algodón; biografía de artefactos; prehistoria/historia del Caribe; museos y patrimonio cultural

One of the most remarkable Indigenous artifacts to survive from the ancient Caribbean is a reliquary encasing a cranium and mandible, its fully anatomical body reconstructed in cotton (Figure 1). Such reliquaries supported the remains of important members of Taíno[1] society, making them visible and extending their valued roles as mediators for their communities. These *cemís,* a Taíno term broadly defined as a spirit or ancestor, would be consulted through prescribed rituals, and their presence

Figure 1. Cotton *cemí*, cal AD 1441–1624 (95.4%, 395 ± 27BP, OxA-15359; date reported in Ostapkowicz and Newsom [2012], recalibrated using OxCal v4.4 and IntCal20), with the greatest probability (73.5%) being cal AD 1441–1522. *Gossypium* sp., anterior human skull (including mandible), internal cane framework for arms and legs with central carved wooden support and stone base, resin, shell, gourd, pigments (?) (photo by Joanna Ostapkowicz; courtesy of MAET, University of Turin).

maintained the genealogical histories between the living and their ancestors (for the context of their use, meaning, and construction, see Ostapkowicz and Newsom 2012; Vega 2014; and references therein). Cotton reliquaries were documented in the first Spanish colonial accounts and were among the earliest objects brought to Europe: Columbus returned from his second voyage in 1496 with several, and in the early 1500s, four "idols to whom the islanders pay public worship . . . in the forms of seated figures, out of plaited cotton, tightly stuffed inside" were sent by Peter Martyr D'Anghiera to Cardinal Ludovico D'Aragón (Martyr D'Anghera 1970:167). Around 1520, Pope Leo X received several from Alessandro Geraldini, the first bishop of Santo Domingo, who noted that they "represent men who became saints . . . [and] used to give public oracles to the people, but fell silent all together at our God's arrival in this country"; the bishop suggested that they be displayed in the vestibule of St Peter's Basilica to show the power of the Christian church in silencing Indigenous beliefs (Symcox 2002:133). Other examples circulated in Europe into the mid-seventeenth century, entering royal "curiosity cabinets"; none has survived. Within this context, the reliquary, now in the collections of Turin's Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAET), is the only example of its kind.

Despite the importance of this object, information about its significance, context, and history has had to be pieced together nearly a century after its fortuitous discovery in a cave, at some point before 1882. Its early provenance remains largely obscure, documented solely in secondhand accounts that started circulating in the late nineteenth century. It came to light for American and European audiences as a result of the scramble to find and exhibit prehistoric artifacts for the quadricentennial celebrations of the 1492 Spanish–Indigenous encounter; its discovery caused a sensation in academic circles (Cronau 1892:I:263; Fewkes 1891; Seelye 1892:133). It disappeared, however, from wider public knowledge in the first decade of the twentieth century, apparently "lost to science" (Fewkes 1907:214). It was not until the 1970s that the Dominican scholar Bernardo Vega was able to track it through a convoluted route from London's British Museum to the MAET, where the reliquary has been curated since the late 1920s.

This article charts the lesser-known provenance of this unique example of ancient Caribbean textile arts, including, for the first time, the history as written by the collector Rodolfo D. Cambiaso in an unpublished manuscript recently discovered by the first author in the National Anthropology Archives of the Smithsonian Institution. This document establishes its post-1882 provenance and brings to light contemporary interpretations of its significance and meaning. We also chart its

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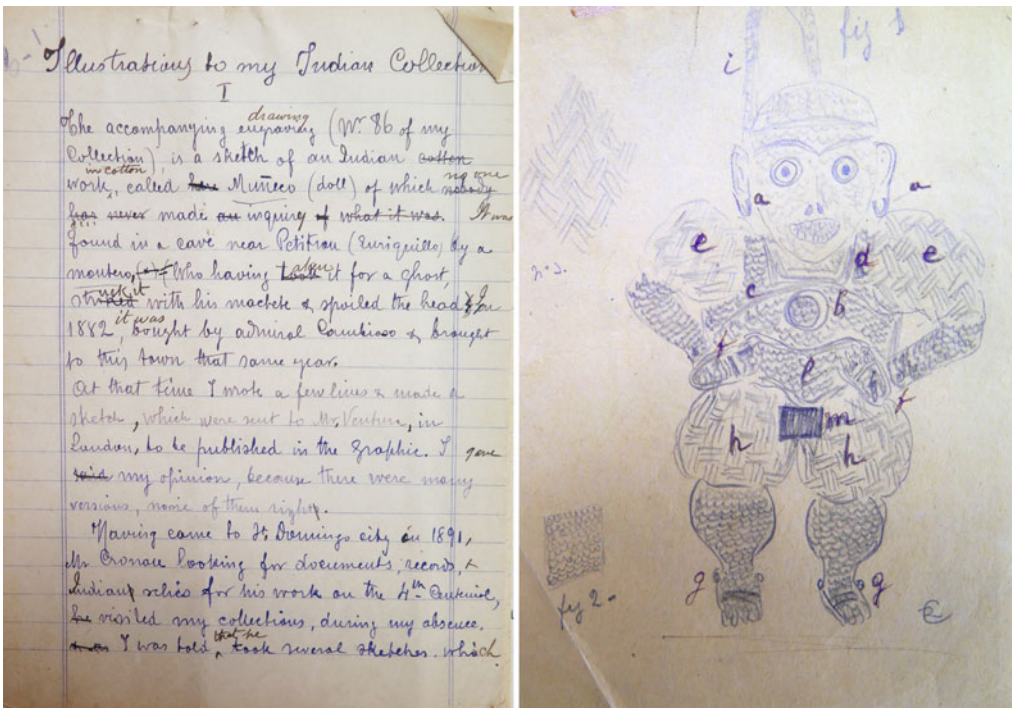
subsequent history from a private collection in Santo Domingo to an Italian academic institution and the increasingly detailed studies that have reinstated it as the exceptional example of Taíno art and belief.

The Cambiaso *Cemí* Manuscript

> The accompanying drawing (no. 86 of my Collection) is a sketch of an Indian work in cotton, called Muñeco (doll) of which no one made inquiry [studies]. It was found in a cave near Petitrou[2] (Enriquillo) by a montero [hunter], who having taken it for a ghost struck it with his machete and spoiled the head. In 1882, it was bought by Admiral Cambiaso and brought to this town [Santo Domingo] that same year [Cambiaso 1906a:1].

In these opening lines of the manuscript handwritten in 1906 by Rodolfo Domingo Cambiaso Sosa (1852–1916; see Figure 2, left), we learn two critical facts that differ from the published accounts of the provenance of the cotton *cemí*: it was found in a cave close to the small town of Petitrou in the Enriquillo province of the Dominican Republic, and it was purchased in 1882 by Rodolfo's father, Admiral Giuseppe Giovanni Battista Cambiaso (1820–1886), considered among the founders of the Dominican Navy (Betances 2018:24). This positions its discovery at least a decade before the first published accounts and provides a different provenance, some 130 km from the oft-cited Maniel region (north of San Cristóbal according to Vega [2014:22]), first suggested by Cronau in his book *Amerika* (1892: I:263). Indeed, Cambiaso noted, "Having come to St. Domingo city in 1891, Mr. Cronau looking for documents, records and Indian relics for his work on the 4th Centennial visited my collections during my absence. I was told that he took several sketches, which he afterwards published in his work . . . calling this muñeco an Indian idol. *At that time I was residing in the Maniel, this is why he says the doll was found in that place, far from Petitrou, and he did not remark what it was in reality*" (Cambiaso 1906a:1–2; emphasis added).


Illustrations to my Indian Collection

I

The accompanying drawing (No. 86 of my Collection) is a sketch of an Indian cotton work, called Muñeco (doll) of which no one made inquiry of what it was. It was found in a cave near Petitrou (Enriquillo) by a montero who having taken it for a ghost struck it with his machete & spoiled the head. In 1882, it was bought by admiral Cambiaso & brought to this town that same year.

At that time I wrote a few lines & made a sketch, which were sent to Mr Ventura, in London, to be published in the Graphic. I gave my opinion, because there were many versions, none of them right.

Having come to St Domingo city in 1891, Mr Cronau looking for documents, records, & Indians relics for his work on the 4th Centennial, visited my collections, during my absence. I was told that he took several sketches, which

fig 2-

Figure 2. *Illustrations of my Indian Collections*, by Rodolfo D. Cambiaso dated 1906. Cambiaso writes that the "sketch was made hastily, but is a faithful likeness" (photo by Joanna Ostapkowicz; NAA, Smithsonian Institution, Herbert W. Krieger papers, Box 19, "Mss" folder).

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The manuscript dedicated to the *cemí*, consisting of eight handwritten pages and the illustration, is among three documents either signed by Cambiaso or attributed to him (on the basis of the contents and matching handwriting) in the collections of the National Anthropology Archives (NAA) of the Smithsonian Institution. Two others also focus on the archaeology of the region: *Prehistoric Study on West Indies* (a preface of 10 pages and a 9-page chapter titled "Kiskeya" [*Quisqueya*]—a Taíno name referring to the island of Hispaniola, today's Haiti and Dominican Republic) and *Tripointed Stones* (four pages, two illustrations). *Prehistoric Study on West Indies* (Cambiaso 1906b) appears to be a part of a book manuscript, and *Tripointed Stones* (Cambiaso 1906c) is a brief overview of two styles of three-sided, often elaborately carved stones known as trigoliths. The *cemí* manuscript is a copy of an article that Cambiaso reportedly submitted to the London *Graphic* in 1882, although it does not appear to have made it into print (Cambiaso 1906a:1–2).[3]

It is clear from these manuscripts and from Cambiaso's publications, including *Quisqueyanismos y elucubraciones sobre el lenguaje indo-antillano* (Cambiaso 1900) and *Pequeño diccionario de palabras indo-antillanas* (Cambiaso 1916), that the author, a prominent journalist and historian, had a keen interest in archaeology (Balcácer 2021:148,153). In the NAA, there is also a photograph of Cambiaso mounted on gray board (Figure 3) and inscribed on the back: "To Prof. Otis T. Mason as a remembrance of respect and admiration . . . R. D. Cambiaso . . . 9/06." Therefore, it is possible that the documents and photo were sent to Mason in the fall of 1906,[4] perhaps in the hopes that they would elicit comment or be published under the auspices of the Smithsonian; notably, the manuscripts are all written in English, rather than Cambiaso's native Spanish, and they appear to have been edited for clarity by a reviewer.[5] It is not clear whether the two had already met, but Cambiaso draws on Mason's (1899) work on Caribbean artifacts in his *Tripointed Stones* manuscript. Mason's response to Cambiaso has not as yet been located, if indeed it exists.

Figure 3. Portrait of Rodolfo D. Cambiaso, presented to Otis T. Mason (photo by Joanna Ostapkowicz; NAA, Smithsonian Institution, Herbert W. Krieger papers, Box 19, "Mss" folder).

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The manuscript clearly reflects the active debate among Cambiaso's colleagues about whether this "*muñeco*" was indeed the work of Indigenous hands:

> Several were [of] the opinion and still many believe it is an [I]ndian idol. Others think it is a work of the Bienobiena (African negro slaves who fled many years ago to the Bahoruco [Baoruco] mountains . . .). . . . Perhaps it may be a Bienbiens skull or [E]uropean, as some say. . . . The opinion of several learned men is that if there is iron in the doll then it is not an Indian work; but they do not think that the doll was finished after conquest, and by Indians of course, because the manufacture show[s] the [I]ndian hand [Cambiaso 1906a:2–4].

Several paragraphs later, after noting that he was able to study the *cemí* at leisure after the "Ayuntamiento (town hall council [?]) returned it to the owner," Cambiaso (1906a:3, 7) notes of the skull: "I am sure [it] is of [the I]ndian Race, the occipitalis is of calabash *(higuero)* . . . [and] European[s did not practice cranial modification] since infancy." He goes further: "As far as I could note the skull . . . [belongs] to a woman, for the largeness of the cheekbone (*os malae*), the small frontal bone (*os frontis*) the depression of temporal bone and the roundness of [the face]" (Cambiaso 1906a: 3–4). He does not, however, engage the contradiction of a female skull in what is clearly a masculine cotton body.

Cambiaso (1906a:3) then describes the construction in some detail: "The doll is woven in cotton and cleverly made. It seems more . . . sailor . . . knot work than an [I]ndian tissue. The inside must be of rough cotton, and have a piece of wood to keep it so hard." He is clearly well versed with the materials incorporated into the construction: "The mouth is open wide, showing the teeth (real ones); the molars are fastened with a little rope made of majagua ([*H*]*ibiscus tibicus*). Some are wanting; canine and incisors are incrusted on the jaw bone. The eyes are (white) of lambio shell [*Aliger gigas*] and (pupil) burgao (*pica*). . . . The work is uniform and very well executed and seems to have exacted great care and time" (Cambiaso 1906a:5). Finally, and perhaps most polemically, Cambiaso (1906a:5) opines that the "doll is no other than a likeness of a Spanish cavalier . . . [after their] . . . arrival at St Domingo (which can give us the sure date)." He continues,

> My opinion is that it was made by the Enriquillo Indians [who] took refuge in the Bahorue [Baoruco] mountains . . . the last shelter of [Quisqueya] liberty. It was made to imitate a Spanish chevalier of that time, or if not . . . made . . . as soon as they landed, to show to the other [caciques] . . . the new comer, as in Mexico, statues and painting showed to Moctezuma the Spanish of Cortes. The doll represents the Spanish dress of 1500. One has only to take a portrait of that time to compare [Cambiaso 1906a:5–6].

To support his claim, he notes features in his sketch of the *cemí* (Figure 2, right) that suggest European dress: "b", for example, is the "medal of the chevalier order"; "ff" is "the gauntlet"; "gg" are the "spurs" (Cambiaso 1906a:6). This suggestion foreshadowed some of the discussions of other Hispaniolan cotton artifacts that incorporate glass beads and mirrors and feature unusual slashed arm ornaments reminiscent of European slashed fabric fashions during the early part of the sixteenth century (Ostapkowicz 2020). Yet, the features of the cotton *cemí* that Cambiaso highlights as European in style are fully in keeping within traditional Indigenous iconography (e.g., "b" is an enlarged belly button, which signified a "living" individual, and "gg" depict ankle bones, frequently seen in other Indigenous sculptures; Ostapkowicz and Newsom 2012). There is nothing sufficiently distinctive to point to this being a depiction of a Spanish "chevalier."

In summary, this document's greatest contribution is fleshing out the earlier history of the *cemí*; specifically, that it was found in a cave near the town of "Petitrou (Enriquillo)" and that it was purchased by Admiral Cambiaso in 1882. Notable also is the fact that it was at one point under the authority of the *ayuntamiento*, or town council. Such a find would cause local and national (and later, international) interest, and perhaps its deposit with the *ayuntamiento* was for the purposes of display or study. Notably, it was officially returned to Giovanni Battista Cambiaso and passed down in the family to Rodolfo after the former's death in 1886. The first of the international researchers

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to visit and document the piece was Cronau in 1891, and his published illustration was used by many subsequent writers (Fewkes 1907:214; Joyce 1916:192). That same year, Bostonian ship captain Nathan Appleton passed a sketch of the *cemí* by Sr. Rodriguez to Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology, who included the illustration and a brief discussion of it in his 1891 article, "On Zemes from Santo Domingo" (Figure 4).

In that article, Fewkes (1891:174) describes the *cemí* as "a curious image" and limits his comments to describing the cotton binding on the legs and arms, cautiously noting that he had not seen the "specimen." He compares it to the wooden *cemí*, also in the MAET's collections, noting the similarity "in the form of the patterns on the hands and the fingers" (Fewkes 1891: 174). This is the first time the two *cemís* appear together in a publication, and if the illustration of the wooden *cemí* is also by Rodriguez, it would suggest that they were both in Cambiaso's possession at the time. Although this is the only etching of the wooden carving to appear in subsequent nineteenth-century publications (Ober 1893:256–257; Seelye 1892:133),[6] it is clear that there were at least two images of the cotton *cemí* in circulation in the early 1890s (by Cronau and Rodriguez)—and potentially a third, if the photograph in the British Museum archive was also taken around this time (Figure 5).[7] This would suggest that Cambiaso was facilitating access to his collections by interested parties. Yet, as his opening note in the 1906 manuscript suggests, although photographs were taken and illustrations made, and there was debate about its origin, in his view, "no one made inquiry"—presumably, undertaking detailed investigations of the *cemí*'s iconography, materials, and meaning (Cambiaso 1906a:1). Except for Cambiaso's own attempts at interpretation, it remained a "curiosity," rather than an object of more detailed study at this time.

Cambiaso's Remaining Collection and His Archaeological Interests

In 1902, in a notebook entry dated December 1, Jesse Walter Fewkes writes that he "saw the collection of 'Cambiaso' and took many (10) Kodak photographs of it" (Jesse Walter Fewkes Papers, ms. 4408:45a, Diary of Archaeological Notes and Drawings, November 15 1902–January 16, 1903. 1 volume, ca. 155 pp., Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, National Anthropology Archives, SmithsonianInstitution; subsequent citation = Fewkes ms. 4408:45a). However, the piece that undoubtedly inspired the visit, and was at the forefront of his mind to study, was not available: "Sr. Cambiaso owns the figure with a skull and cotton false body which however he has sent to Italy. . . . The cousin says that the idol was found in a cave by a man hunting a wild boar and that he was alarmed and struck

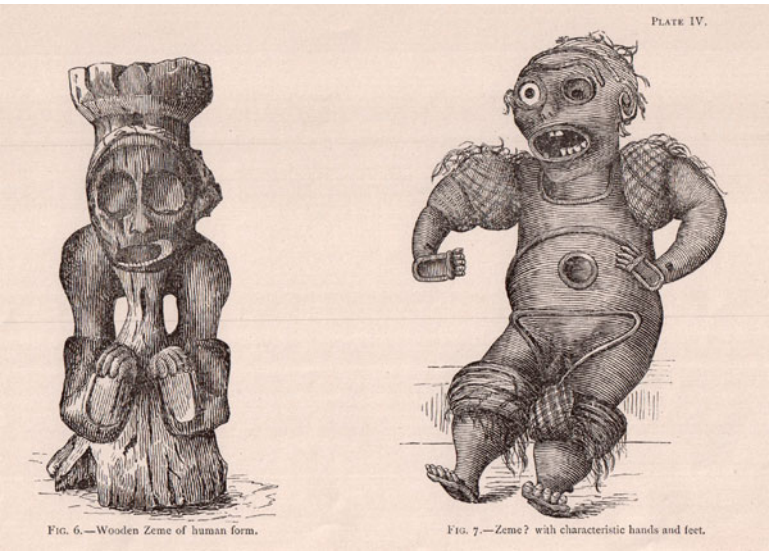

Figure 4. The two *cemís* illustrated in the article by Jesse Walter Fewkes (1891:Plate IV, figures 6–7).

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Figure 5. Photograph of the cotton and wood *cemís* in the British Museum archives. The history of these two pieces appears connected from at least 1891, when they are illustrated in the Fewkes article, and they have remained together to this day in the collections of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Turin (courtesy of the British Museum).

it with his machete. Then he returned with help and carried it away. It became the property of Cambiaso who sent it to Italy. As the owner is not here no one can give me information regarding it" (Fewkes ms. 4408:45a; underscoring in original). No doubt, this was highly disappointing for Fewkes; he mentions the *cemí's* shipment to Europe twice in a matter of a few sentences. This reconnaissance trip, among others, informed his seminal 1907 publication, *The Aborigines of Porto Rico and Neighbouring Islands*, where he had to rely on Cronau's image and the information therein for his discussion of the *cemí*. Fewkes (1907:214) concludes, "It is much to be regretted that our knowledge of this figure, which could shed so much light on the mortuary rites and worship of the prehistoric Antilleans, is so imperfect. The author was told that it is now somewhere in Italy, but whether it is lost to science could not be learned."

Fewkes's attention then turned to the remaining collection, or at least what he was able to view during his visit. He notes that Cambiaso had

> a fine specimen of an old cassava grater of wood which is undoubtedly Indian. The sharp pointed stones on the surface arranged in a figure. There is a partition at the end which is characteristic. This is undoubtedly very old. Among the specimens there is a pipe of clay with a human . . . face worked upon it; a white stone zemi and several pestle-like zemis; also old Indian clubs – all of which I have photographed. . . . There is a spherical piece of pottery in this collection and many heads made of pottery. . . . There is a single rough stone collar. . . . This collar is of rude[?] make and of white stone . . . without marks of ornamentation. One of the best things he has is a clay pipe and the clubs; also the cassava grater [Fewkes ms. 4408:45a].

The list seems rather brief, given the *cemí* was listed under no. 86 in Cambiaso's collection, implying 85 previous entries. Fewkes, normally a prolific illustrator of artifacts during his reconnaissance of Caribbean collections, only made a cursory sketch of a single piece (the grater) from the Cambiaso collection in his notebook; this is in stark contrast to Fewkes's approach to other Dominican collections that he saw on the following days, such as those of Archbishop Meriño and Ramon Imbert, both of which he sketched in meticulous detail. Fewkes was in the Dominican Republic to study collections, as well as to purchase them, where possible, for the Smithsonian, but it would be another decade before part of the Cambiaso collection was sold to a US institution.

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In 1913, the Museum of the American Indian (MAI) of the Heye Foundation in New York (now part of the National Museum of the American Indian [NMAI], Smithsonian Institution) purchased a small group of artifacts from the Cambiaso collection through the direct involvement of the MAI's then-resident Caribbeanist, Theodoor de Booy. De Booy (1916:25) had visited the collection that same year "during a sojourn on the island of Santo Domingo in the interest of the Museum. . . . ([Cambiaso's] collection from Hayti and Santo Domingo is perhaps the best on the island)." The artifacts that entered the MAI's collections range from elaborate ceremonial artifacts such as stone trigoliths, collars, and mauls; body ornaments including stone beads and anthropo-/zoomorphic pendants; to more utilitarian items such as mortars and pestles and ceramic sherds. The grater, pipe, and clubs that Fewkes mentions in 1903 were not among the pieces acquired. De Booy (1916: 26) focuses on a fine anthropomorphic amulet that the MAI accessioned, which Cambiaso had "procured . . . in the Cibao mountain region of the province of Santo Domingo." The use of the word "procure" implies purchase, rather than excavation. The "Cibao mountain" likely refers to the Cordillera Central mountain range, the southern tip of which is just within the Santo Domingo province. This suggests that Cambiaso had a wide reach for his collections, likely acquiring pieces indirectly through colleagues, family, or other collectors (Garcia Hermanos, for example, a Santo Domingo book dealer with a shop on the plaza opposite the cathedral, had a "good collection," including a *duho*; Fewkes ms. 4408:45a, November 30, 1902). The Cambiaso family was affluent and had the resources and sociopolitical connections to acquire important antiquities; although the *cemí* may have been acquired by Giovanni Battista, it is likely that Rodolfo augmented this core collection with his own acquisitions.

Certainly, the book manuscript on file at the NAA documents Cambiaso's interests in the archaeology of Hispaniola, "studies that I have been following for several years"; he notes, "What I am about to write is almost unknown" and that "these studies are in [their] infancy" (Cambiaso 1906b:1, 2). He positions his work within this lacuna of study in the country:

> Writing [on prehistoric archaeology is] very scarce, and the few historians have almost forgotten to enquire [about] the aboriginals, very few have initiated the investigation of the West Indies [I]ndians, specifically in St. Domingo, where nobody has made, even, an attempt to introduce such kinds of study. Not only [are] the records . . . very poor, but also the settlers did not [leave] information . . . which would be of great value to us today; they only took care of collecting gold and did not put any attention to the peoples they were destroying [Cambiaso 1906b:3–4].

He further mentions his "Spanish works" in which he positions intertropical America as the cradle of humanity, so there may well be other articles or manuscripts on the subject available in the Dominican Republic: he was, after all, both a journalist and an historian (Cambiaso 1906b:6). In his chapter on "Kiskeya" (*Quesqueya*; Hispaniola), he introduces the different *cacicazgos* (chiefdoms), naming their caciques (chiefs); explores the sociopolitical system of the inhabitants, their arts, and language; and gives the names for the numerous islands from the Bahamas to Jamaica. His aim was to go "as far as man can go in so dark a night as . . . the *remembrances of these isles*" (Cambiaso 1906b:4; emphasis added).

In his exploration of *Tripointed Stones* (Figure 6), Cambiaso (1906c) compares two examples in his own collections: "no 15 and 16." One, reportedly recovered from the San Pedro de Macorís province, is a large (about 24 cm) trigolith in white stone (Figure 6a). The other is smaller (about 10 cm) in a mottled gray and black stone provenanced to Baní in the Peravia province (Figure 6b). He considers the smaller example to be the true "*cemí*," whereas the larger trigolith he identifies as a *toati* ("stone breast") or possibly an *anaitoa* ("breast that gives health"). These large trigoliths are generally "heavy, big and always with the same shape, though of varied figure or different sculptural ornaments," including human, reptile, bird and "monster" heads. He contextualizes his pieces within the wider corpus of trigolith carvings (as featured in Mason's publications and in other private Dominican collections), clearly showing his understanding of the scope and range of the iconography of this enigmatic artifact form and noting the features that Fewkes (1922) would later classify into distinct trigolith typologies.[8] Cambiaso was among the first to recognize the varied range and distribution

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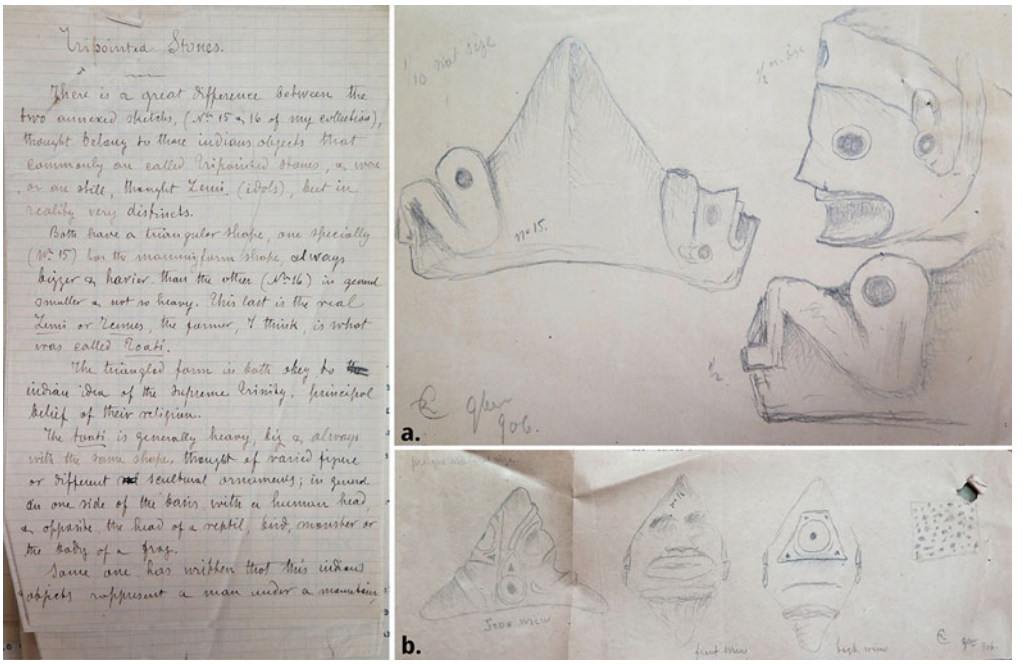

Figure 6. Cambiaso's *Tripointed Stones* manuscript with sketches, dated 1906 (photo by Joanna Ostapkowicz; NAA, Smithsonian Institution, Herbert W. Krieger papers, Box 19, "Mss" folder).

of these artifacts, noting that more appear in the eastern than western regions of Hispaniola (e.g., Breukel 2013:10–11; Veloz Maggiolo 1972:243, 251).

Other Caribbeanists acknowledged Cambiaso's contributions to the field (e.g., Adolfo de Hostos to George Heye, September 19, 1917, National Museum of the American Indian Archives, Box OC-126, folder 3). His work with linguistics is particularly notable: according to Moreno (2009), he is among the "illustrious scholars who elaborated with infinite patience, partial, but very important, compilations of Greater Antillean aboriginal vocabulary." His collection was clearly of international importance. It is a great shame that his thoughts on the other artifacts in his collection are not recorded in the NAA holdings, because undoubtedly they would illuminate emerging investigations into the prehistory of the region by Dominican scholars. However, it seems that Cambiaso's antiquarian interests waned toward the final years of his life, when parts of the collection were dispersed—some, like the cotton *cemí*, initially to family members, and others, such as the pieces now in the NMAI, directly to international institutions.

The Cambiaso Family, the *Cemí*, and Connections between the Dominican Republic and Italy

Although the *cemí* was sent to Italy at some point between Cronau's visit in 1891 and Fewkes's visit in 1902, it remained within the family collections for a time. Fewkes notes that Cambiaso still owned the figure in 1902, which implies that it was still considered part of his, or at least the family's, collection despite its export abroad. Indeed, the Cambiaso family maintained long-standing links to Italy. Rodolfo's father, Giovanni Battista Cambiaso (Figure 7), left Genoa for Santo Domingo between 1830 and 1840, with his father Giacomo, his brother Luigi, and sisters Caterina and Giuditta, while his mother, Rosa Chiossone, remained in that city until the end of her life (Guerra Sanchez 2021:53–55). In Santo Domingo the Cambiasos established a successful business in marine commerce.

Beginning in 1844 Giovanni Battista actively took part in the Haitian–Dominican war, founding the Dominican Navy and leading it in various battles, including, famously, Tortuguero. General Pedro Santana, the first president of the Dominican Republic, later appointed Cambiaso as Divisional General (Balcácer 2021). In 1856 Giovanni Battista became consul of the Sardinian Kingdom (at the time including Genoa) to the Dominican Republic,[9] thus retiring from any official Dominican

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Figure 7. Portrait of Admiral Giovanni Battista Cambiaso curated at the Dominican Academy of Marine Cadets, Dominican Republic (courtesy of Armada República Dominicana).

appointment and dedicating himself to promoting diplomatic activities between the Savoy and Dominican governments. The following decades were extremely challenging both for the Dominican state and for the process of Italian unification and nationalization under the Savoy dynasty, which were achieved in 1861. In his consular capacity, Giovanni Battista—supported by his brother Luigi (appointed vice consul and later consul)—was respected by Dominican authorities, as expressed in Santana's letter to Giovanni Battista of September 2, 1858: in very informal and friendly terms, the president informs Cambiaso of the latest political events, reconfirming his wishes to maintain the best relationships with the Italian government (Historical Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fondo Moscati, Busta 904, Consolato di Sardegna in Santo Domingo [1861–1868]). Until his death on July 22, 1886, Giovanni Battista continued to travel regularly between the two continents, working hard to develop the economic initiatives of the Dominican Republic's Italian community; for this reason he is considered the "great orchestrator of the relations between Italy and the Dominican Republic" (Sang Ben Mu-Kien 2021:163). Awarded "Cavaliere" of the Order of the Crown of Italy, Giovanni Battista is buried in the National Pantheon of the Dominican Republic.

Giovanni Battista had eight children from his marriage with Isabel Sosa, among them Rodolfo Domingo Cambiaso Sosa. Like his father, Rodolfo also traveled to Italy several times on official business between 1863 and 1865 (Balcácer 2021:145, 147, 151). The connections to the homeland, and particularly Genoa—the home of his paternal grandmother and of the extended Cambiaso family—must have remained strong for Rodolfo, who lived in the city for a time (perhaps when he was sent to Italy for his education); he eventually had the *cemí* sent there (Vega 2014:24). The assumption has been that the small wooden *cemí* also curated at the MAET—which since 1891 appeared in some of the same publications and images featuring the cotton figure—was also sent to Genoa at the same time, although no direct mention of it is made in Fewkes's 1902 notes. It remains unclear whether they were found together or were brought together from separate sources as part of the Cambiaso collection. Notably, no mention is made of an associated wooden carving in Cambiaso's discussion of the cotton *cemí*.

Columbus, the Cambiasos, and the 1892 Italian–American Exhibition in Genoa

The names of Giovanni Battista and Luigi Cambiaso are also connected to the controversy over the remains of Christopher Columbus, which animated an international debate in the last decades of

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the nineteenth century (Pistarino 1987). Columbus died in 1506 in Valladolid, and his remains, together with those of his son Diego, were transferred to Santo Domingo around 1540, to be buried in the Santa María la Menor Cathedral as per his last wishes (Cronau 1921:52–53). They were interred near the casket containing the remains of Diego's son (and Columbus's grandson) Louis. Two hundred years later, a set of remains were reportedly transferred to Havana and, in 1898, from there, to Seville. Meanwhile, in May 1877, during restoration work at the Santo Domingo cathedral, a lead case bearing inscriptions referencing Columbus was found in a small vault (Cronau 1921:67). It remained closed until an official opening was organized on September 10 that year before an assembled audience of local authorities and international consuls, including Consul Luigi Cambiaso and his brother Giovanni Battista (Cocchia 1892). A study of the case, which contained numerous bones, was undertaken, and the assembled witnesses concluded that these were the mortal remains of Columbus and that the remains sent to Havana and then Seville were believed to be those of Louis (the controversy over who is buried where remains to this day). The discovery of what many believed to be the true tomb of Columbus was thus announced, and Luigi Cambiaso immediately wrote to the Italian minister of foreign affairs Luigi Melegari announcing the extraordinary find.

In May 1878, Giovanni Battista and Luigi traveled from Santo Domingo to Genoa, as they often did. They took with them a small portion of Columbus's remains, presented to them by Bishop Rocco Cocchia, who in turn had received them from the Dominican authorities in tribute to Italy as the country that gave birth to the explorer (Cocchia 1892:266). On July 24, 1878, the Cambiaso brothers officially presented the remains to Genoa's Town Council, after public speeches were given in front of the assembly of the Società di Storia Patria (Cocchia 1892:354).[10] Five years later, in 1883, the mayor of Genoa, Andrea Podestà, took inspiration from these events to ask the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to sponsor the quadricentennial celebration of Columbus's "discovery" (Cronache 1892), something strongly supported by Pope Leo XIII (Cocchia 1892:266); the celebrations took place in Genoa in 1892.

Rudolf Cronau was also involved in the affair of Columbus's remains. As noted in Rodolfo Cambiaso's manuscript, the German author and painter was in Santo Domingo from December 1890 to January 1891, conducting research for his book *Amerika*. During that time he requested permission from the city authorities to make an investigation of the remains (Cronau 1921:60). While investigating the matter, he met all the foreign consuls who had been present at the 1877 casket opening, probably including Luigi Cambiaso, who remained Italian consul until February 1891. Cronau also went to the Cambiasos' house, where he was able to sketch the cotton *cemí*, later publishing the illustration in his book (Cronau 1892:I:263). After Cronau's visit, could the Cambiaso family, undoubtedly well aware that Genoa's Italian–American exhibition was to be held only a few months later, have sent the *cemís* to be exhibited? This possibility is only a hypothesis at this stage, but the Genoa centennial included an exhibition of American Indigenous objects organized by the Catholic Missions (Figure 8), as well as another exhibition of artifacts from various countries organized by the Italian Geographical

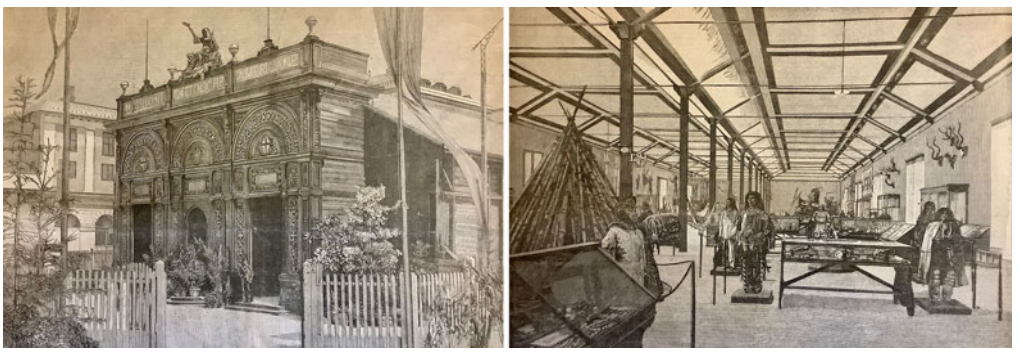

Figure 8. Two views of the "Esposizione Italo-Americana," Genoa 1892, Gallery of the Catholic American Missions, first published in the *Il Secolo illustrato della Domenica* (courtesy of MAET archives, University of Turin).

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Society. As yet, the *cemís* have not been traced through the official exhibition catalogs published to coincide with the event (Dardanoni 1892; Società Geografica Italiana 1892).

The *Cemís* in Turin

We lose sight of the *cemís* after the flurry of Columbus centenary interest died down at the close of the nineteenth century; their provenance over the next few decades is largely obscured. In 1916, Thomas A. Joyce, who worked in the British Museum, illustrated the cotton figure in his book *Central American and West Indian Archaeology*, but the image is clearly labeled "after Cronau," and its details are sufficiently different from the way the *cemí* appears in the British Museum's archival photograph that the latter could not have been the source for the book's illustration, as suggested by Elizabeth Carmichael (Carmichael to Bernardo Vega, November 4, 1970).[11] Nor is the wooden *cemí* featured in Joyce's book, although it is in the archival photograph. One unusual feature of the British Museum photo is the small tag on the cotton *cemí*'s right hand that bears the name "Hamilton Prints, Lot 39[?]2," suggestive of an auction number or an identification number for a commercial image; for example, a postcard. If it were a postcard, however, one would expect there to be more of these images in circulation, which is not the case. The question therefore remains as to why the image of the two *cemís* was sent to the British Museum: Was information about them being circulated for consideration as a future acquisition, as is the case for some of the other photographs on file there, or was it sent with further information to one of Europe's largest institutions with important precolumbian collections and a dedicated Americanist on staff?

It would be more than a decade before information about the *cemís* came to light again, this time in Italy. On December 15, 1927, Ernesto Schiaparelli, director of the Turin Royal Museum of Antiquities (TRMA) since 1894, informed the Ministry of Public Education of the following:

> Lawyer Cesare Buscaglia, resident in Genoa . . . , offered to this Museum two valuable ancient objects representing idols of the Indian populations of S. Domingo Island. The same idols were donated by General Pedro Santana to the Royal Consular agent of Italy in the S. Domingo Republic, Mr. G. B. Cambiaso, in 1848; from him, by inheritance, the objects reached the mentioned lawyer Buscaglia who, willing to secure their conservation, offers them as a gift to this Museum. Being objects of unquestionable authenticity and of particular interest, I beg this Ministry to authorise me to accept the donation and to give to the excellent donor the thanks of the Government [State Archive, Rome, Min PI, DG AABBAA, Div. II, Position 2 (1925–28), code 2615, folder 63, dossier 1367].

This introduces a twist in the tale presented in Rodolfo's manuscript. It suggests that, rather than Giovanni Battista buying the cotton *cemí* outright, it had a longer history; namely, it was initially brought to the attention of Pedro Santana, the military leader and first president of the newly established Dominican Republic in 1844. He was at the height of this powers in the mid- to late 1840s, and he may well have been informed of intriguing new discoveries or collections. This would suggest that four years into his presidency, something enticed him to make an unusual gift to the founder of the Dominican Navy. The curious issue is why such a spectacular find only emerged in the wider literature in the 1890s, and not earlier as one would expect given the suggested 1840s history and its prominent links to the president. On the whole, and unless further archival information comes to light, the Santana connection appears difficult to substantiate, and the details contained in Rodolfo's manuscript are suggestive of a more likely version of events, referring to Admiral Cambiaso's purchase of the *cemí* in 1882.

Minister of Education Pietro Fedele responded to Schiaparelli on February 8, 1928, acknowledging the offer made by Buscaglia (Soprintendenza Piemonte Historical Archive, Turin, correspondence 1881–1960, folder 1 [24–339], doc. 1-6-179). He authorized the Soprintendenza to accept the "*brevi manu*" as a gift, meaning that the objects could be received "in the hand" of the director without any further formality. Schiaparelli, however, died only a few days later, on February 14, 1928; the new superintendent, Pietro Barocelli, wrote to Buscaglia on March 30, informing him that the

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Minister of Education appreciated the gift of two ancient objects from Santo Domingo and asked him to relay his heartfelt thanks (Soprintendenza Piemonte Historical Archive, doc. 1-7-265). The donation was publicized in the 1928 edition of the journal *Historia: Studi Storici per l'Antichità classica*.[12] Thus, by 1928, corroborative documentation indicates that the *cemís* were in the collections of the TRMA. Notably, all references refer to *two* "idols," in accord with the pieces now in the collections of the MAET and further supporting a conjoint history since their appearance in the Fewkes (1891) article and in the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century photograph kept in the British Museum.

By 1936, the two *cemís* were on exhibit at the MAET in Palazzo Carignano. A photo archived in the MAET Historical Archive (IT SMAUT MAET IST/5) shows them featured in a display created for Turin's 1898 Universal Exhibition; this display was dedicated to the Ancient Americas and also originally included a Peruvian mummy and a temple façade. Giovanni Marro (1936:6), the founder and first director of the MAET, wrote the exhibit catalog, which briefly mentions the *cemís*: "Among the singular objects [is] a wonderful reproduction in solid mahogany of an ancient Peruvian temple 3 meters tall; [within which are displayed] two pre-Columbian idols, of an exceptional rarity."

On March 2, 1940, an article published in the town newspaper *Stampa Sera* briefly mentions that Schiaparelli presented the cotton *cemí* as a gift to Marro. Schiaparelli and Marro were longtime colleagues, and numerous ethnographic and archaeological objects now in the collections of the MAET came from Schiaparelli, who had received them as donations to the TRMA.[13] These collections were acquired from various sources, such as state gifts to the Savoy court and donations from the numerous Savoy consuls installed in various locations around the world as part of the international and commercial policy of the Sardinian and then the Italian state. Often these objects were then conveyed to the MAET. Although archival correspondence specific to the transfer of the *cemís* has not, as yet, come to light within the archives of the MAET or TRMA, given this history of exchanges between Schiaparelli and Marro, the transfer of the *cemìs* may have been automatic, with few formalities required.

Marro died on July 21, 1952. His assistant Savina Fumagalli worked on the museum catalog that mentions the two *cemís* (1952–1961). The relevant entry, number 1676, identifies a "singular and precious Peruvian [*sic*] anthropomorphic idol made by interlaced vegetable fibre, encasing a skull. The eyes, one dark and the other light, are frighteningly expanded; he wears a kind of medallion in the ventral region." The wooden *cemí*, identified under the subsequent number 1677, is described as a "Ancient Peruvian [*sic*] monoxile idol," referring to the fact that it is made from a single piece of wood (Fumagalli 1952–1961:40). Number 1675 of the same inventory describes the Peruvian mummy, and 1674 is the catalog number for the temple facade, which probably explains the incorrect attribution of the *cemís* as Peruvian: it may have stemmed from their grouped display in 1936.

There is reference to the cotton *cemí* being exhibited in the museum in 1956 during a UNESCO museum campaign, in which a selection of rooms featuring key displays from the museum's collections were opened to the public for 15 days; it reportedly aroused considerable interest (MAET 2001:7; Masali and Pia 1991:85). The *cemí* was also exhibited in 1961 during the First Congress of Anthropological, Ethnological and Folklore Sciences held in Turin in the framework of "Italia 61," the centennial celebrations of Italian unification (Davide and Masali 1963). In the accompanying text prepared to introduce the exhibition, Fumagalli (1961; see also Masali and Pia 1991:85) includes a reference to the cotton *cemí* as one of MAET's most important holdings. The two *cemís* continued to be shown in the renovated museum exhibition at the San Giovanni Battista Hospital building, as documented by a sketch in the MAET Archive of the Americas showcase containing objects reportedly from Mexico, Haiti, Brazil, and Peru.

Fumagalli died in 1961. In 1963 the Institute of Anthropology officially inventoried the MAET collection; the list of objects included "A zemi coming from Haiti" (University of Turin Historical Archive, Institute of Anthropology, entry voucher 31/10/1963, p. 3). By the 1970s, when Bernardo Vega traced the *cemí* through various diplomatic routes to Turin, he was informed by Brunetto Chiarelli, then director of MAET, that it had become the icon of the Associazione di Antropologia ed Etnologia—Amici del Museo di Torino (Vega 2014:25). With Vega's publication, it would be reinstated as a precolumbian icon within the Dominican Republic. Since the 1970s several researchers have published studies of the cotton *cemí* (Doro Garetto et al. 1993; MAET 2001; Guaraldo and

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Thiemer-Sachse 2013, 2015; Guidi 1975, 1990; Guidi and Appendino 1973; Martina et al. 2010; Masali and Pia 1991; Ostapkowicz and Newsom 2012; Pennacini 2021), and some international exhibitions offered the larger public an opportunity to view this extraordinary piece (Cavalli-Sforza and Pievani 2011; Curto 2017; Eikelmann 2009; Giacobini 2003; Kerchache 1994; Rigoli 1992). In 2014, the Academia de Historia Dominicana, under the editorship of Bernardo Vega (2014), published an anthology presenting a comprehensive overview of the studies on the cotton *cemí*, for which Italian, Dominican, and international authors were brought together in a broad cooperative effort.

A New Collaborative Perspective

This article has charted the recent history of the two *cemís*, spanning a century of connection between the Dominican Republic and Italy: these links both continue and are being expanded in new directions. Within the last two years, Dominican authorities opened a dialogue with the University of Turin about the *cemí*, facilitated by the Dominican Embassy in Rome, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the Italian Inter-ministerial Committee for the Recovery and Return of Cultural Heritage.[14] During this process both Italy and the Dominican Republic strongly expressed their wish to engage in scientific and cultural cooperation for the study and shared promotion of the cotton *cemí* and more generally of the Taíno civilization, thereby offering the international public additional opportunities to learn from this exceptional artifact.

Recent collaborative efforts included the display of the two *cemís* at the Reggia di Venaria's *The World in a Room* (October 9, 2021–April 10, 2022; Figure 9); this exhibition focused on the international museum collections at the University of Turin and was organized by the university and the Consortium of the Sabaudian Residences, in collaboration with the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, which loaned a stone pestle for the occasion. At the same time, Reggia di Venaria hosted a photographic exhibition, *The Italian Legacy in the Dominican Republic*, supported by both the Italian and the Dominican governments, retracing the history of the Italian presence in the Dominican Republic with a focus on the life of Admiral Giovanni Battista Cambiaso (Canepari 2021).

The renewed focus on this shared heritage has facilitated a cross-disciplinary, noninvasive documentation of both *cemís*, capturing details of relevance to future exhibition plans in Italy, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere targeting both academic and public audiences. This collaboration between the MAET, the Universities of Turin and Oxford, and E-RIHS MOLAB (European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Sciences, Mobile Laboratory) has conducted a variety of noninvasive analyses: infrared-reflected (IRR) and UV-induced visible luminescence (UVL) photographic imaging; X-ray tomography combined with surface 3D laser scanning; Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR); ultraviolet, visible, and near infrared (UV-vis-NIR) reflectance and fluorescence; X-ray Fluorescence (XRF); XR flow energy; and Raman spectroscopy. Among the significant outcomes is

Figure 9. *Left*, the cotton *cemí* displayed at the exhibit, *Ill mondo in una stanza*, Reggia di Venaria. *Right*, His Excellency Toni Raful Tejada, Dominican ambassador in Italy (*left*) and Stefano Geuna, rector of the University of Turin (*right*), at the opening of the exhibition, October 7, 2021 (courtesy of Press Office, Consorzio Residenze Sabaude, and Press Office, University of Turin).

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a digital reconstruction of the surface and inner structure of the cotton *cemí*, which will be integrated into an interactive virtual display.

It is anticipated that the Italian-Dominican cooperation will be strengthened through scientific and cultural collaboration at the academic and institutional levels once a scientific cooperation agreement is signed between the University of Turin and the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo. Of course, museums and cultural embassies are but two among many stakeholders. Increasingly the *cemí* has become an icon for diaspora communities linked through a shared connection to the Taíno past, as well as for local and international artists, writers, and cultural commentators. Through these varied perspectives, the cotton *cemí* will continue to tell its story to a broader public as an ambassador of an important Caribbean civilization at the cusp of a truly global world.

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Notes

1. Taíno is an collective term often used to refer to the cultures inhabiting the Caribbean's Greater Antilles from about AD 1000. However, as an umbrella term, it masks the diversity of the cultures that inhabited this region.

2. Petitrou, a small town established in 1801 on the banks of the Sito River, became the town of Enriquillo in 1884 as part of the Enriquillo municipality (http://enciclopediadominicana.org/Municipio_Enriquillo). The Enriquillo region is in the southwest and includes the provinces of Barahona, Bahoruco (Baoruco), Independencia, and Pedernales.

3. A search was made in the weekly *Graphic* between the years 1881 and 1883, but the article does not appear therein. As such, this is the first time that Cambiaso's manuscript is appearing in print.

4. However, they were all found among the Herbert William Krieger Papers in a folder titled "Material concerning West Indies, Mss." The NAA note that Krieger "collected correspondence or other material" from colleagues, including Mason, and it is likely that he was sufficiently intrigued by the Cambiaso correspondence to incorporate the manuscript into his own files.

5. It is the revised version (amended in black script by a different hand from Cambiaso's) that is used in quotes here. Cambiaso (1906b:1–2) writes, "My knowledge on English language oblige me to request the favour of my readers for my way of writing; [as much as I am a] lover . . . of . . . English Literature, [I am] . . . not sufficiently . . . acquainted with its beauties. Man must be able to transfer his thoughts on paper that has to be read . . . [in] English, but I cannot."

6. Ober (1893:256–257) mistakenly identifies the wooden *cemí* as being in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, where he likely acquired the illustration (the same appears in Fewkes 1891). He erroneously links it with the history of two large wooden carvings (one depicting twinned *cemís* seated on a *duho* and the other a free-standing, four-legged anthropo-/zoomorphic figure) purchased by Prof. Gabb in the Dominican Republic for the Smithsonian collections (Ostapkowicz 1998:64–66). Ober's description of the find therefore cannot be taken to refer to the cotton and wooden *cemís* in the collection of the MAET.

7. Comparing the Cronau image to that of the archival photograph in the British Museum collections suggests that they were made at different times. Notably, in the British Museum photo, the back strap covers the damage to the back of the head, which is left exposed in the Cronau image, and the lower-right incisors are missing. This would suggest that the British Museum photograph was taken later than the Cronau image.

8. Fewkes (1922:Plate 108) includes the Cambiaso trigoliths in his publication, listing the larger of the two as his Type I and the smaller as Type II.

9. He received the "Exequatur" on April 29, 1856, and installed the consulate, appointing Giuseppe Fontana his attorney in Genoa (Historical Diplomatic Archive, Rome, Protocols years 1856–1875).

10. Until recently, the relics of Columbus were kept in Palazzo Tursi, home of the Genoa City Council, before being transferred to Genoa's Galata Maritime Museum.

11. Joyce had a long history at the British Museum, spanning more than 30 years: he joined the staff in the museum's subdepartment of ethnography in 1902, was appointed deputy keeper in 1921, and retired in 1938 (http://www.therai.org.uk/archives-and-manuscripts/obituaries/thomas-athol-joyce); if he had been aware of the photograph before 1916, he would have likely

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included the image in his *Central American and West Indian Archaeology*. His correspondence at the British Museum may hold further information, and work is planned to review this in future. For Carmichael's correspondence, see Vega (2014:50–51).

12. Notiziaro archeologico, in *Historia: studi storici per l'antichita' classica* (1928): "The lawyer Cesar Buscaglia of Genoa donated to the Royal Museum of Antiquities of Turin two ancient and valuable idols of the Indian populations of the island of S. Domingo, already donated in 1848 by General Pedro Santana to the Consul G. B. Cambiaso."

13. In the State Archive in Turin, various documents attest to Schiaparelli's transferring select non-Western collections from the Museum of Antiquities to Marro, such as the important Congolese ethnographic and prehistoric collection donated by Pietro Gariazzo or the royal drum of the Rwenzori region given by the Duke of Abruzzi Luigi Amedeo of Savoy (State Archive, Torino, Egyptian Museum, acquisitions, donations, exchanges and loans, VI, 052, 02). These same objects are listed in the first catalog of MAET.

14. Comitato Interministeriale per il Recupero e la Restituzione dei bei culturali (https://cultura.gov.it/comunicato/d-m-504-30-10-2019-ricostituzione-del-comitato-per-il-recupero-e-la-restituzione-dei-beni-culturali). In Italy this debate was recently addressed during the conference, "Restituire" il patrimonio archeologico: Questioni etiche e giuridiche," organized by CNR on April 21–22, 2021 (Arizza 2021).

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