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From New Guinea 1872-78 to Genova 2004: recovering Luigi Maria D'Albertis' private collection

by

Elisabetta GNECCHI-RUSCONE*

ABSTRACT

This paper illustrates a process of recovering the past concerning one of the earliest ethnographic collections from New Guinea. Made in the 1870s and donated to the municipality of Genova in the 1930s this collection of artefacts from Luigi Maria D'Albertis' expeditions in New Guinea has finally become available to the public in 2004, with the opening of the Museo Castello D'Albertis. The first process of recovery is that of bringing it to public attention. The question – raised more than one hundred years after the collection was made— was how to stage this exhibition, with what representational aims. Its location within the reconstructed museum/home of Luigi Maria's cousin Enrico (also a navigator and explorer) suggested contextualising it within a discourse on 19th Century collectors, rather than displaying the artefacts as material instantiations of New Guinea cultures. The solution was to juxtapose the objects with passages from D'Albertis' memoirs, and with oral history accounts of those 'first encounters' recorded among descendants of some of the 'natives' from whom the objects were taken. In this way we hoped to emphasise to the public that there are more sides to the activity of collection and of the historical, not absolute, meaning of the objects.

KEYWORDS: Collection, Museum, First encounters, New Guinea, D'Albertis

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine un procès de récupération du passé relatif à l'une des premières collections ethnologiques de la Nouvelle-Guinée, rassemblée par Luigi Maria D'Albertis pendant ses expéditions en Nouvelle-Guinée dans les années 1870 et donnée à la Municipalité de Genova Gênes dans les années 1930, pour ne devenir accessible au public qu'en 2004, avec l'inauguration du Museo Castello D'Albertis. La première opération de récupération a donc été celle d'ouvrir la collection au public, plus de cent ans après, et la question était avec quels objectifs représentationnels exposer les objets. La collocation dans la maison/musée du cousin du Luigi Maria, Enrico D'Albertis (navigateur et explorateur) nous a permis d'insérer les objets dans un discours sur les explorations du XIX^e siècle, plutôt que de les utiliser pour représenter les cultures de la Nouvelle-Guinée en juxtaposant les objets aux passages des mémoires Mémoires de l'explorateur, aux témoignages oraux des « premières rencontres » enregistrées parmi les descendants de quelques uns des gens parmi lesquels les objets ont été collectés. Cette démarche permet à chaque visiteur de percevoir qu'il y a plusieurs parties aspects dans l'activité de collectionner et que la valeur des objets dans le musée est historique et non absolue.

MOTS-CLÉS : collection, musée, premiers rencontres, Nouvelle-Guinée, D'Albertis

The people came and found her body lying there, with a circle of trade goods salt, tobacco and soap, and axes around her corpse. They threw all this in the water, except for one of the axes.

This short extract of the oral narrative collected by Chris Ballard from Wikli Kikli of Gusiore

concerning the passage of D'Albertis' expeditions along the Fly River is emblematic of the curatorial choices we made at the Museo Castello D'Albertis in Genova in order to make available to the public the collection resulting from the expeditions, while bringing to the fore the problematic aspects of the very act of collecting.

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This paper reconstructs the history of that part of the ethnographic collection made in New Guinea at the end of the 19th Century by Luigi Maria D'Albertis that is housed since 1902 in the home-museum of his cousin, also a traveller and collector, Captain Enrico D'Albertis. This has recently been restored and opened to the public in 2004 – year in which Genova was the European Capital of Culture.

The unfolding of this history takes us across time and space from Genova in the 1870's when a well-to-do, restless man decided to put his hunting ability and desire for adventure to the service of science; to pre-colonial New Guinea, where he forced his way into the impenetrable interior putting himself, his crew, and several indigenous people in a situation of "first contact", through the recently established colonial society of Australia, and back to Europe where what has remained of his ethnographic collection after he sold most of it to the museums in Florence and Rome, has lain almost forgotten for a century. This reconstruction ends in the first years of the 21st century in Genova, where I became involved as an anthropologist in devising a curatorial strategy for restoring the collection to the public.

One issue raised was that of displaying artefacts from New Guinea in a way that would be meaningful in a city with very little connections with the Pacific area, unlike others represented in the museum. The location of the collection within what was originally conceived as home-museum and a self-aggrandisement project by D'Albertis' cousin, himself another explorer of the era, imposed a further dimension to the problem of going beyond the exhibition of exotic objects as representing putatively archaic cultures. The question was how to present the objects left by such a controversial figure in New Guinea's colonial history as Luigi Maria D'Albertis, while at the same time proposing a reflection on the practices of 19th century scientific collectors in general, and specifically on the complex, often violent relations that were at the origin of the exhibition itself.

These questions were of particular relevance in the cultural context in which issues of representation and agency in museums were under scrutiny and in which, as Clifford said, «Current developments question the very status of museums as historical-cultural theatres of memory.» (Clifford, 1988: 248). These kinds of questions and reflections have led to a radical re-thinking of exhibitions, their relationship with the public, and with the cultures from which the objects originate (Biscione, 2002: 219).

If museums are to escape the suspicion of being synonymous with misappropriation they must scrutinise the very concept of representation by reflecting on the history of collection making. (De Palma, 1998: 299, 308). For

O'Hanlon the renewed interest in ethnographic collections since the 1980's has often resulted in their labelling as "colonial abductees". However, an ethnography of collection might uncover aspects of local native agency that contribute to shaping collections, and museums classificatory procedures that may expunge both indigenous and collectors' intentions. At the same time an ethnography of collecting illuminates features of colonialism by revealing the context in which collections were made and the intellectual agendas of collectors (O'Hanlon, 2000).

The solution to such representational problems that we opted for in the Museum of Castello D'Albertis was to foreground the "first contact" situation, which continues to exercise appeal on the general public. In order to promote reflection on the encounters between explorer and indigenous peoples, an effort was made to include the voices of the other protagonists of ethnographic collection, those from whom the objects were taken, thus undermining the museum as a single, authoritative voice of knowledge and proposing a less Euro-centric view of history.

«The creation of spaces where other voices can be heard creates alternative histories, more inclusive histories.» (Hempenstall, 2000: 60)

The body of this paper, therefore, will be concerned with the history of the making of D'Albertis' ethnographic collection and its institutional destiny to our days.

Luigi Maria D'Albertis as collector

Today Luigi Maria D'Albertis is perhaps better known in Papua New Guinea than he is in his city of origin. His figure stands out in the panorama of Europeans in the Pacific area in the last decades of the nineteenth century for two not unrelated reasons: his motivation and the questionable reputation he left behind him in New Guinea. His achievements in penetrating so far inland along the Fly River and for his outstanding collection of bird, insect and mammal specimens, in addition to his collection of ethnological interest are acknowledged, but D'Albertis has been denounced on human-rights grounds for his cruel and rapacious dealings with the indigenous people he made contact with.

Not a missionary or an emissary of a colonial power with pretensions on the territories of New Guinea, his travels were apparently motivated by a yearning for adventure and the desire to accumulate specimens and to demonstrate his prowess. He was clearly influenced by the general enthusiasm of his times for scientific explorations and the enlightenment conception of the world outside Europe as constituting an open field for

the acquisition of knowledge on the part of men from the more 'advanced' countries. On the other hand the new Italian government, preoccupied with the problems of creating a national cohesion, had as yet no colonial ambitions, particularly in the Pacific. In fact D'Albertis' reassurances that he had no territorial interest vested in the exploration of the Fly, were instrumental in persuading the Government of New South Wales to loan him the steam launch with which he succeeded in ascending the river (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6th March 1876, quoted in Goode, 1977:156-7). These assurances were later questioned by some in the Australian administration.

A patriot, no doubt, D'Albertis «Spontaneously put himself to the service of distant governments, asking for no other reward than the right to fly the Italian flag in those unknown regions» (De Magistris, 1919). «*Spirito bizzarro e avventuroso*» (*ibid.*), as he was defined by his contemporaries, he did not fit in with other figures such as missionaries, administrators and trader-settlers. Unlike them he was a free

agent, unrestricted by the demands of work or institutional roles, a factor that may have contributed to his unpopularity in colonial circles and to the durability of his ill repute. This was not improved by his own published memoirs (D'Albertis, 1880). Although a close reading of the text including the numerous passages in which he communicates his enthusiasm for discovery and describes his geographic, naturalistic and ethnographic findings reveals D'Albertis as a more complex and mutable figure than generally remembered, in them the explorer openly boasted of his frequent use of firearms and gunpowder to impress indigenous people and scare away those who seemed threatening, often with fatal consequences for them. Although the historical context of D'Albertis' explorations was one in which violence was not uncommon, he was uncharacteristically outspoken about his methods, and has come to symbolise brutal colonial force to the extent that when newly independent Papua New Guinea produced a series of stamps depicting scientific pioneers, D'Albertis was ex-

FIGURE 1. – Map of New Guinea and D'Albertis' Expeditions (© Castello d'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo)

cluded on the advice of anzaas (The Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science) (Goode, 1977:1-3).

Born in 1841 D'Albertis was educated in a Catholic school with his cousin Enrico. One of their teachers, the French missionary and naturalist Armand David, instilled in the cousins an interest in natural history and the exploration of distant countries.

In 1860 L. M. D'Albertis participated in Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily (which led to the unity of Italy in 1861). He spent the next ten years travelling throughout Europe on hunting trips. After meeting with his old teacher Armand David, returned from Mongolia, D'Albertis developed a desire to travel in a more productive way. He was introduced by his cousin to Giacomo Doria who had recently founded the Natural History Museum in Genova and collected specimens in Persia and Borneo. Doria, together with the botanist Odoardo Beccari, taught D'Albertis taxidermy and trained him as naturalist. D'Albertis specialised on the fauna of the Pacific; impressed by Wallace's reports on searching for birds of paradise and other rare birds in New Guinea (1862a, 1862b) he joined Beccari on his next voyage, which was to take them to New Guinea. This was to be the first of a series of five expeditions to New Guinea, of which the last three to the Fly River.

D'Albertis' choice of destination can be attributed to the attraction to the absolute exotic. Although specifically trained for making zoological collections, his fascination with the idea of encountering "primitive man" exudes from the first pages of his diary. He was certainly aware of the ethnographic museums that were being established as part of the "scientific-naturalistic" project of 19th century anthropology, in Italy as elsewhere in Europe. Ethnographic collection was therefore one of D'Albertis' concerns from the start. He was influenced by the scientific climate of the time in which evolutionism «allocated a central role to artefacts» (O'Hanlon, 2000: 5). Not only were collections used to produce knowledge about colonial subjects, but, according to Ballard:

«they did so within a broader context supplied by loosely formulated but nevertheless powerful narratives of racial difference.» (Ballard, 2000: 149)

These, in turn, were largely dependent on anthropometric measurements, which explains D'Albertis' enthusiasm for securing skulls and skeletons, and his comparative descriptions of physical types of natives. The following summary of his expeditions, eloquently described in D'Albertis' own published accounts, is intended to highlight his activity as ethnographic collector. An activity which according to O'Hanlon «has been more judged than described» (1993: 56).

In April 1872 D'Albertis and Beccari landed on the small island of Sorong, close to the North-Western tip of New Guinea. They built a house from which they ventured on collecting trips to the mainland, particularly along the Ramoi River where they set up a second camp in a small village. Here D'Albertis recorded bartering tobacco for two carved headrests. Weakened by fevers, and worried by growing unrest among their hosts, D'Albertis and Beccari decided to leave. They travelled Northeast along the coast of New Guinea to Andai, where they were hosted by a Dutch missionary and his wife. From here they ventured into the interior to the villages of Putam and Hatam, on the Arfak Mountains. These pages in D'Albertis' diary recount mainly his feats as hunter; ethnographic collection seems not to excite the writer's imagination as much. However in his detailed descriptions of the houses and villages he visited, and of the people he encountered, D'Albertis reveals both a keen sense of observation and a closeness of rapport suggesting that he did trade with indigenous persons. Illness forced D'Albertis to stay some time in Andai, where he set up a field studio and took some photographs. Despite problems caused by the long time required for exposure, he managed to portray groups of people from Mansinam, Andai and Arfak.

«At the beginning there was no way to persuade them to let me photograph them, then having won their shyness and fear with many gifts, I had a lot to do to make them understand how to stand calm and unmoving.» (1880: 97)

D'Albertis' health deteriorated and the two Italians left for Amboina, where they met the ship *Vettor Pisani*. D'Albertis boarded it and went to Australia, while Beccari continued his expedition alone. The ship called in at various locations along the way, and D'Albertis really seemed to enjoy the thrill of trading for artefacts with natives approaching the ship on their canoes. In Battulei, in the Aru Islands, he reported trading for bracelets and skulls, but it was especially in Orangerie Bay that he did most of his ethnographic collection on this trip. He acquired spears, stone clubs, bamboo combs, cassowary ornaments, and bracelets made out of human mandibles. To the north of Dafure Island D'Albertis reported having nearly succeeded in bartering a piece of iron for a ten-year old boy. The arrival of the boy's mother thwarted his efforts and instead he obtained a grass skirt (1880: 131-132). Leaving the coast of New Guinea D'Albertis is moved to write in his diary:

«A last greeting to these children of Nature, a farewell, perhaps forever. Chance brought us to know them; we approached them, we may say, for a minute, yet this sufficed to breed in us a sympathy for

FIGURE 2. – Photograph of men from Andai, 1872 (© Castello d'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo)

this people who we call barbarous and savage because they live a life so different from ours. If we knew more intimately their customs we may have reason to be persuaded that they are better than is generally thought.» (1880: 136)

For his next expedition D'Albertis chose to explore the south-eastern coast of New Guinea, which he reputed to be virgin and unexplored, and whose people he judged to be more likeable after his experience in Orangerie Bay. In 1875 he set up camp on Yule Island, with a young botanist from Genova, Riccardo Tomasinelli, two Cingalese men, four men from New Britain and twelve people (including seven women) from the New Hebrides. During his eight-month stay D'Albertis often visited villages on the mainland, he collected plants and insects, and made many ethnographic collections. He also described the customs and villages of Yule, Epa, Nicura and Naiabui, as well as Maree ceremonial huts, and a mummified corpse kept by his widow in her hut. Especially in the early stages of his stay D'Albertis seemed to relish in the good relations he established with the natives through his flam-

boyant style; particularly when he obtains what he desires easily, he describes Papuans in a positive manner,

«With little gifts to the women, with some caress to the children, I think I have already captured this people's sympathy.» (1880: 172)

Though it may have been conditional upon their appearing to conform to European standards of civility, he also seemed to develop a genuine liking for some of the indigenous people he met:

«They had in them something noble, and did not lower themselves to asking or showing desire for what I showed them. No, these personages are something more than savages, they are in the European sense two gentlemen.» (1880: 172)

In his memoirs D'Albertis also liked to play with the notion of attraction between him and native women. He repeatedly mentioned that he ingratiated himself with a woman whom he referred to as the “queen” of Yule Island, com-

mented on the beauty of young girls, and reported events such as the following with an amused and self-congratulatory tone:

«To show that I intended being friends with Aira and his people, I hugged and kissed him, in the middle of the village square, then, among general laughter, I went on to kiss all the women: The scene was certainly among the most comical, some shyer women would have refused my embrace, but were incited by the others to let me do. It is true that to be impartial and give my act the true aspect of a ceremony I had to kiss some old and ugly ones, but on the whole there were more young and beautiful ones, and some really were beautiful.» (D'Albertis, 1880: 208)

To establish good relations with the natives of Yule Island the explorer used a mixture of diplomacy, gifts, and demonstrations of power such as lighting a shell filled with pure alcohol:

«For them, I realised, I was a magician; how could I burn water? Who had ever seen in their country water burning like fire? They believed alcohol to be pure and simple water.» (1880: 179)

However, when things did not go his way, D'Albertis did not hesitate to demonstrate his real firepower. After some days spent in another village he returned to his house to find that most of his things had been stolen. He announced to the natives that unless his goods were returned he would shoot anyone approaching his house, then proceeded to blow up a tin loaded with five sticks of dynamite, fire rockets over the village and light Bengal fires over his house. For two weeks, the time it took him to recoup most of the stolen goods, he kept his word by purposefully near-missing anyone coming within shooting range of his house.

«The natives broke the good relations existing between us: Should it cost my life I will not give in to them. I hope, instead, that in the end I will dictate the peace conditions, and I will be strict.» (1880: 242)

Mosko (2009) argues that the use of firepower by D'Albertis and Assistant Resident Magistrate C.A.W. Monckton in the initial encounters with the Roro and Mekeo inhabitants of this area, in particular their representation of the deadly capacity of their weapons as aspects of white man's spiritual or magical power, in addition to the epidemics of introduced diseases, had profound effects on the categories that would be defined as "traditional" chieftainship and sorcery and on the subsequent historical denouements in the relations of indigenous political institutions with the colonial government.

«In these encounters, we can thus discern the outlines of a mythopraxis in Sahlins' sense of the term where Europeans, to be effective in imposing their

wills, consciously revised their identities and actions in ways that happened to coincide with certain pre-existing presuppositions on the part of the village peoples, and accordingly the latter elaborated their views of themselves and their capacities in ways to enhance their effectiveness with the new foreign powers.» (Mosko, 2009: 286)

In July Tomasinelli, ill with fevers and saddened by the news of his brother's death, returned to Genova. In August the *Chevert*, carrying Macleay's expedition stopped at Yule island, exciting D'Albertis jealousy for the comforts they enjoyed, and his disapproval for the high prices they offered natives who helped them in their collection. In November D'Albertis was picked up by the *Ellangowan*, and after a moving farewell from the natives with whom he had reconciled, he returned to Somerset. The length of his stay and the enduring relationships he developed with villagers, allowed D'Albertis to collect a great number and variety of artefacts, described in his summary to the expedition (1888: 287).

While in Somerset, D'Albertis learned of Reverend MacFarlane's plan to navigate the Fly River, and leaped at the opportunity to join the expedition. On the 29th of November 1875, after barely a month's rest, he boarded the *Ellangowan* with the missionary; Chester, the Police Magistrate from Somerset, six black troopers, as well as the boat crew composed of Captain Runcie, a Chinese cook and engineer, and four South Seas sailors. Their first stop was on the island of Tawan, in the Torres Straits, where they picked up two mission teachers to act as interpreters. On the coast of New Guinea they stopped at the village of Moatta, where they persuaded two headmen, Maino from Moatta and Auta from Tureture, to join them as guides. In the village D'Albertis noticed some human skulls hung in bunches in front of the houses, he was told they were skulls of bushmen, but he was unable to purchase any. He also failed to persuade Maino to part with a bunch of arrow points, each of which allegedly represented a man killed in battle.

During this expedition, the *Ellangowan* tried to approach any natives they encountered to exchange gifts as a way of establishing good relations. D'Albertis reported collecting various artefacts in this way, including bracelets, arrows, and earrings, but all these encounters were fleeting. When the boat was approached by natives with seemingly aggressive intentions, the tactic was to keep them at a distance by shooting in the water, if this failed to frighten them the shotguns were aimed at the canoes. In one case, when the *Ellangowan* was surrounded by canoes, D'Albertis resorted to flinging dynamite sticks toward them; on another occasion, when the *Ellangowan* was stuck on a sandbank at low tide, some men from a village on the banks ap-

proached them and offered to trade. Chester followed them ashore with eight men, but things went wrong and the police shot in the air, causing all the villagers to flee. Chester shot two pigs, then entered the house where he picked up some artefacts including fourteen human skulls, transformed into masks and containing seeds which rattled when shaken. This method would thereafter become a standard collecting strategy for D'Albertis.

After following the watercourse for 150 miles (280 km), having reached an island that they named Ellangowan, Chester and MacFarlane decided to return, much to D'Albertis' disappointment. What they saw persuaded D'Albertis that vast plains were to be found between the coast and the mountain range that could be seen from the sea. By December 1875 they had reached Somerset, and D'Albertis, determined to return to the Fly River, went to Sydney.

With the help of his friend Dr. G. Bennett, D'Albertis obtained from the Governor of New South Wales the *Neva*, a steamboat. On the 1st of May he left Somerset with Lawrence Hargrave as engineer, a young botanist called Wilcox, a Chinese cook, a Fijian called Bob, Tom from the Philippines, and two Islanders, John and Johnny. Reaching Moatta on the New Guinea coast D'Albertis persuaded Maino and two other villagers, Dawan and Waruk, to go with them as guides. On the 22nd of May the *Neva* entered the Fly, and by the 31st they passed Ellangowan Island. This time they encountered very few natives, only a few abandoned huts from which D'Albertis collected artefacts, leaving bottles and knives in exchange. The same occurred when they came across the first inhabited house: all the natives fled, D'Albertis entered, examined the stringbags left behind, and helped himself to «some of the more important curiosities» (1880: 350) leaving knives, cloth and beads. On the 17th of June the explorer climbed a hill, saw mountains in the distance, and named them Vittorio Emanuele after the king of Italy. Soon after the expedition started becoming more difficult, food provisions were getting low and the level of water in the river kept decreasing. In one hamlet, hurriedly abandoned by its inhabitants, D'Albertis took small parcels containing human bones, dance rattles, and even two skeletons (male and female) wrapped in bark from a raised platform. Although he left trade goods in exchange for what he took, in his memoirs D'Albertis felt the need to justify his sacrilegious act in the name of «science».

«The aim of this voyage is to know something of this unknown country, and its inhabitants: but these noble savages flee from us, and vanish as if by magic, at the appearance of the «*Neva*», they flee as if faced by a monster, as if it were a Demon. If the living escape us,

if they won't tell us who they are, why not interrogate their dead, who can flee no more?» (1880: 362)

On the 28th of June progress became impossible because the water was too shallow and the opposing currents too strong. D'Albertis estimated that he reached latitude 5° 47' South. between the 141 and 142 meridians East, (800 km from the estuary), and after making Hargrave sign a statement that it was impossible to proceed any further, turned back. Passing by one of the few inhabited houses, D'Albertis reportedly intended to approach the group with gifts, but eventually resorted to frightening them away by shooting in the air. When he entered the house he found the body of an old woman, who had probably been killed by her own people who were unable to take her with them as they fled.

«I can do nothing but curse fate which brought us here today, and this people's barbarity.» (1880: 371)

D'Albertis also noticed that some of the trade goods he had left behind on his previous passage had been used, and expressed dismay for their refusal of his friendly approach. The next day the *Neva* came to Snake Point and the captain decided, much to his crew's disappointment, to ascend an affluent, which he named Alice. They went upstream for 160 km. On the 7th of July the steamer hit rapids and shallow waters and, after obtaining another written and signed declaration by his engineer that proceeding further was impossible, D'Albertis decided to turn back. Some days later, back on the Fly, they stopped near a coconut plantation and found a temporary village. The villagers fled, and the explorers killed some pigs and found numerous arrows, elaborate spears, some skulls painted red and an embalmed head. D'Albertis described the effect of the steamer on those who saw it for the first time:

«And truly a terrible and mysterious monster it must seem to the natives, who certainly could not explain how it could move by itself, nor the column of smoke it left behind it. But what perhaps terrified them mostly, was the machine's whistle. Upon hearing it they seemed to lose what little reason strength and courage they still possessed and having brought their canoes to the riverbanks they abandoned them.» (1880: 388)

Once again D'Albertis and his men found food and artefacts in the canoes. Having reached the village of Auti, on the island of Kiwai, near the river's mouth, D'Albertis went ashore with the three guides who had friends in the village. Here he bullied his way into a ceremonial hut, which he described as a gothic nave and where he noticed a bunch of skulls hanging from the ceiling. With the help of Dawan he persuaded a reluc-

tant man to trade a blanket, knives, axes, mirrors and beads for three of the skulls, but considering himself unsatisfied, he took nine more. Also back in Moatta, D'Albertis continued trading and cajoling natives to obtain food, animal specimens and artefacts; he also persuaded a villager to sell him two of the skulls which he had not succeeded in securing on his previous visit. The *Neva* reached Somerset on the 21st of November.

D'Albertis' last expedition, the third along the Fly River and second on the *Neva*, lasted from the 3rd of May 1877 to the 19th of January 1878. This time the crew included an English engineer Preston, five Chinese crewmen, two south sea islanders, and Bob, the Fijian who had accompanied D'Albertis on the previous mission. This would be an ill-fated expedition. The causes for its disastrous outcome were many, the first perhaps that he had lured the Chinese crewmen into joining him with false promises of finding gold. Most of the villagers on Moatta had left the island when he reached it, and he did not find any of the men who had accompanied him previously. Near Walker Island the steamer was approached by a canoe in which D'Albertis recognised one of the men he had traded with on his first expedition on the Fly. After exchanging a red kerchief for a headband decorated with feathers of bird of paradise and cassowary, D'Albertis was alarmed by the approach of numerous canoes and steamed away for fear of an ambush. Further upstream, near Alligator Island, the men camped on the shore and were attacked during the night. D'Albertis calculated firing 120 shots to scatter the attackers, and estimates having hit at least one man. One of the Chinese men was hit by an arrow. During the night D'Albertis fired fireworks, and the next day his men recovered some bows and arrows left behind by the fleeing warriors. The explorer commented:

«After what happened today, I am led to think that the world progresses, and that all times pass. The time in which the savages believed foreigners to be superior beings, must have certainly passed. Here instead of coming to bring us homage and gifts, they come during the night simply to kill us.» (1880: 466)

This statement proved to be prophetic: at its third passage the *Neva's* progress was met by many more hostile natives than on previous occasions. The «inhabitants along the banks of the Fly had organized themselves in defence against the *Neva*» (Kirksey, 2002: 3). This constant harassment obviously put additional strain on the hungry, ill, and disaffected crew. Soon the Chinese men took to sleeping ashore instead of returning onto the steamer at night. On the 19th of July, several miles up the Fly, D'Albertis who was ill, sent most of his men ashore. Bob the Fijian, who had quarrelled with another member

of the crew, asked to be let off on the opposite shore of the river. He was alone when he was ambushed by a group of men, and shot his way through, killing a warrior.

«Young still he lies where his own abandoned him, where Bob killed him in personal defence. If his friends do not return to retrieve him, he will serve as meal for worms and other animals; if they do return, he will demonstrate to them what our guns are, and maybe they will learn not to desire the head of others. They may one day have mine perhaps, but for now I will preserve in spirit this head, which Bob, perhaps remembering his youthful days, did not hesitate to sever from its bust.» (1880: 488-9)

Throughout August the steamer navigated through seemingly deserted land, the level of the river decreased steadily, and fevers affected everyone on board. Discipline became increasingly problematic until, at the beginning of September, two Chinese men disappeared. Only one of them returned two days later, and on the fifth day D'Albertis gave up hope regarding the other's return and began his homeward journey, leaving behind a marooned man and his plans of penetrating further inland than on his previous expedition. Another Chinese man, referred to as Ah Tong, apparently lost his senses and attacked the captain who caned him on the backside. Later that day Ah Tong died delirious. Some days later the last three Chinese men stole the *Neva's* skiff and disappeared. Almost a month later the boat was found in some reeds downstream, empty. During that month the remaining crew threatened mutiny and also had to face numerous attacks, which they warded off by killing an undetermined number of warriors. In November, now near Mibu Island at the mouth of the Fly, D'Albertis suspected that Jack and Bob were planning a new mutiny. He persuaded them to leave the boat instead and make their own way to Somerset, where he would meet them later to pay them. Upon arriving, after a hazardous crossing of the Torres Strait with only Tom and Preston as crew, he found that Jack and Bob had accused him of killing Ah Tong and generally ill-treating his crew, forcing the others to abandon the steamer. D'Albertis relied on Preston's favourable testimony in the court case, which he obtained despite the fact that the latter was so ill as to seem on the point of death. In February 1878, after being acquitted of the charges and obtaining from the seemingly reluctant Police Magistrate Chester some form of punishment of the two men who had accused him, the explorer returned to Sydney where he spent some time recovering his health.

An overview of D'Albertis' career as a collector in O'Hanlon's terms (2000: 12-25) shows variation over time. If on his first expedition with Bec-

cari, the collection of artefacts seemed to have been of secondary importance to that of animals and birds, after his visit to Orangerie Bay, ethnographic collection assumed greater prominence in D'Albertis' concerns. Also his style of collection varied: it was stationary in Yule Island, in Moatta it resulted from repeated short visits, and it was travelling in the Fly. Significant changes in style of collection, however, can be noticed between the three travelling expeditions along the Fly. There seems to be a progressive disaffection for establishing friendly trading relations with natives, perhaps as a result of increasing cynicism on the part of the explorer, and of the greater aggressiveness on the part of the natives with each subsequent passage of the steamer.

These differences in turn influenced the possibility for native agency to find expression in the contents and documentation of the collection. In some instances the role of intermediaries is explicitly acknowledged. What seems peculiar is that the objects themselves were not, apparently, accompanied by exhaustive explanatory notes. This is not the result of D'Albertis' inability to obtain detailed information on the production and use of the objects – his memoirs are replete with rich descriptive passages which can be mined for such information – it is more a reflection of the 19th Century collectors' inclination to consider objects as self-explanatory, hard evidence in themselves. Kirksey acutely points out that D'Albertis' methods of collecting and preserving human remains, in particular the head of the warrior killed by one of his own crew members during the second Fly expedition,

«bear striking similarities to the methods he used to collect and preserve insect and plant specimens.» (2002: 3)

This belies D'Albertis' conception of Papuans as inherently savage, almost on a par to the wild animal species he had set out to collect as a naturalist, an attitude that is blatantly in contrast with the spirit of the concluding pages of the first volume of the collector's travelogue, an uncharacteristic plea for someone who is remembered for his unethical dealings with Papuans

«They should be treated as friends, not slaves; they should be cherished not destroyed.» (cited in Kirksey, 2002: 3)

After the third expedition along the Fly D'Albertis, weakened by illness, had become disaffected with the whole project of exploration, and decided never to return to New Guinea. His reputation was marred. His bad name in Australia, explains Goode (1977), was partly due to his soured relationship with Hargrave (the engineer who had manoeuvred the *Neva* in its first exploration of the Fly), his conflicts with Chester, and the fact that the Government of New South

Wales realised, somewhat belatedly, that it had in no way benefited from its loan of the *Neva* to the Italian explorer. In fact the Trustees of the Australian Museum declared that D'Albertis had twice refused to sell any of his specimens to them, and then had asked a price that was exorbitant (Goode, 1977: 216). Another factor may have been the singling out of D'Albertis and Loria as plunderers by MacGregor and Haddon; this, according to Quinnell (2000: 86), was related to tensions between collectors and to national stereotyping.

In July 1878 D'Albertis went to London where he delivered lectures at the Royal Geographical Society, the Anthropological Institute and the Royal Colonial Institute and wrote his memoirs. Here too the price that he asked for his collections was deemed to be too high.

Upon his return to Italy D'Albertis sold his naturalist collections to the Natural History Museum in Genova, and the ethnographic collections to the Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology in Florence, and the Pigorini Ethnographical Museum in Rome. He finished writing his book which was to become a best seller, published in Italian and English (1880 and 1880a) and in French (1883), and in 1881 he was awarded the gold medal by the Società Geografica Italiana.

In Italy D'Albertis moved to Rome from where he often went hunting in the nearby Agro Pontino area, where he allegedly built a New-Guinea style house on stilts. Later he moved to Sardinia, where he died in 1901. The only person with whom he appears to have maintained some relationship was his cousin Enrico. The rest of his family did not appreciate his outspoken anticlericalism and were dismayed, even after his death, by his request to be cremated. In fact the city's crematorium was built in the famous Staglieno cemetery with money which he left for that purpose (Repetto, 2002).

According to the current director of the Natural History Museum in Genova, Dr. Poggi, Luigi Maria D'Albertis' relations with the museum and scientific community in Italy were also somewhat soured after his return. While most of the great naturalists of the time, whose expeditions had been financed through the museum, usually donated their collections to the institution, Luigi Maria D'Albertis, who owed his training to Doria and Beccari, insisted on being paid for his marvellous collections, and drove a hard bargain too.

It is uncertain what he did with his personal ethnographic collection while he was living in Rome and Sardinia. What is certain is that after his death in 1901 it was included in his cousin Enrico's collection. Here begins another phase of the story of this collection, and that is its incorporation into the home museum of another eccentric traveller in the Castello di Montegalletto.

The Museum

The Castello di Montegalletto was completed in 1892, on the occasion of the 4th Centenary of the Discovery of America. It was built by Captain Enrico D'Albertis (Luigi Maria's cousin: a seafarer, explorer and scholar of nautical, geographic and natural sciences) as his home, and, explicitly, as a monument to the glories of his city, to Christopher Columbus, and to his own exploits as an interpreter of the superiority of Western culture with its centralising power and ability to know and dominate the world around it through the collection and exhibition of objects and other fetishes of its ventures into unknown world (De Palma 2007, 97). In the castle Captain D'Albertis housed all the collections he made during his many travels in the Mediterranean, the Americas, Africa, South East Asia and Oceania between 1869 and 1915. Among other things it included a room dedicated to nautical sciences, a "Turkish lounge", and numerous panoplies of weapons, as well as a reconstruction of his cutter's cabin, looking out over the city to the sea through a port-hole in the castle's bastion. The Italian flag which Luigi Maria D'Albertis had flown in New Guinea on the *Neva* and the *Ellangowan*, had a prominent place in a panoply which also included some arrows from the Fly, dominating the lobby of the castle.

The castle's architecture, internal structure and conceptualisation «straddles the gothic and the exotic». Its style blends:

«Fanciful medievalism with the exotic fantasies of late romanticism: the era of great discoveries, of scientific and adventure travels, of 'exoticism', of interest for the new-born sciences of ethnology and anthropology and of Genova's commercial expansionism.» (De Palma, 1990: 89)

At the Captain's death in 1932, the castle, with all its contents, was bequeathed to the City of Genova. Subsequently other collections of various proveniences have been added, such as the American Catholic Missions' ethnographic and archaeological collections (brought to Genova for the 4th centenary of the discovery of America in 1892), African weapons and utensils, and an important collection of pre-Columbian pottery and textiles.

During the Second World War the collection was packed away for fear of damages, and the castle was occupied in turn by German troops and then by partisan fighters. After the war the museum was partly opened at times until 1972 when anthropologist Ernesta Cerulli organised an exhibition on the "American material" on the occasion of the XL International Congress of Americanists. The exhibition, which occupied only part of the building, remained open until

1977. Since then the museum has been closed for major structural restorations, which have proceeded rather erratically depending on the availability of funding. In 1991, with the collection once again packed away, work began in earnest in preparation for the opening planned for 1992, on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary celebrations of Columbus. Eventually the inauguration was postponed to the year 2004.

The restoration has the ambitious aim of preserving the Genovese medieval character of the building, re-discovering its more ancient parts (dating from the Fourteenth and Sixteenth century) while reclaiming, by digging into the ramparts, a whole new floor. This reclaimed space has been used to house the more recent acquisitions and all those features considered essential in a modern museum: bathrooms, restaurants, and teaching spaces-while at the same time preserving the look and spirit of Captain D'Albertis' home museum (De Palma, 2003).

The new Castello D'Albertis museum as a whole is conceived as a:

«duplex observatory on the world vision of a collector: a protagonist of Genova at the end of the 19th Century and an emblematic interpreter of the culture of his period, as well as on non-European peoples: not only as seen through the categories and parameters of the 19th Century, but through the instruments of scientific knowledge of today's ethnographic research.» (De Palma, 1990: 90)

It was in the course of discussions with the museum's curator, Maria Camilla De Palma, that the question regarding a meaningful presentation of the L. M. D'Albertis collection from New Guinea took shape. The work of James Clifford and Sally Price, among others, has exposed the paradox that museums speak more of us than of those who we wish to represent. By removing objects from their life contexts and immobilising them in museum show cases, we transform their meaning and identity. Biscione argues that historical collections, which originate from ideological and cultural backgrounds far from those of contemporary curators, constitute the:

«fundamental but cumbersome heritage of old museums, at once the fortune and the burden of contemporary museums.» (Biscione, 2002: 215)

Thus, for De Palma the task of a museum:

«should not be limited to the exposition of objects, but to the declared presentation of the relativity of its own point of view.» (De Palma, 1999: 133)

The ideal course taken by visitors through the restored museum begins from the neo-gothic castle in which the style of Captain Enrico D'Albertis home-museum is reproduced, not

FIGURE 3. – The New Guinea display cases in the original “Otio et Amicis” Room of Captain D’Albertis Home Museum (© *Castello d’Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo*)

merely for the sake of preservation, but to stimulate a historical reflection on our ways of looking at others. Only then, aware of the arbitrary nature of museum representations, are visitors led through the “Turkish lounge”, ultimate representation of 19th Century ideologies of colonialism and exoticism, towards the more contemporary point of view in which indigenous people have a more active and conscious role in the representation of themselves (De Palma, 2003). The next part of the museum brings visitors out of the Captain’s home proper into the newly reclaimed embrasures in the castle’s bastions that have been dug out to form sixteen semicircular spaces. The first seven niches house archaeological material from pre-Columbian America. The next one displays archaeological artefacts from Copán. This is followed by displays of Plains Indian material. The niche containing materials used in Hopi ceremonies has been furnished as a *Kiva* following the visit by representatives of the culture who recognised in its underground position an ideal location for a ceremonial chamber.

The remaining five embrasures, small recesses in the wall, opening onto a spacious central room contain material from Oceania: one houses Australian material, others are dedicated to Maori, Fijian and Polynesian material, the last niche

was originally designated to display Luigi Maria D’Albertis’ New Guinea collection. Soon after the museum’s opening that location was considered to be unsatisfactory, and the collection was moved to the second floor, into the heart of the Captain’s reconstructed home, in a room next to his cousin’s “cabinet of curiosities”.

The Luigi Maria D’Albertis Collection in the context of the museum

The material housed in Genova does not comprise the whole, or even the best part of Luigi Maria D’Albertis’ ethnographic collection. Most of it was purchased by the Ministry for Public Instruction for a sum between 25000 and 30000 Lire, and shared between the *Museo Nazionale di Antropologia e Etnologia* founded in 1869 by Paolo Mantegazza at the University in Florence, and Rome’s *Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico*, founded in 1875 by Luigi Pigorini. It is unclear whether the Genova material was what D’Albertis was particularly attached to himself or simply that which was left after the museums had taken their pick. What is known is that these objects were displayed in Captain

Enrico D'Albertis' home-museum at the time it was left to the municipality of Genova. Some New Guinea weapons, with the flag that he flew on the *Neva* and his shotguns formed part of a panoply celebrating Luigi Maria's exploits as explorer and hunter, while his ethnographic objects were displayed in glass cases housed on the ground-floor of Captain D'Albertis' home, in the space he called "Otio et Amicis", and that he considered as the museum part of his dwelling.

The ethnographic collection in Genova includes 4 bows and 80 arrows, axes, 2 bamboo head-cutters, stringbags, fish hooks and instruments for making nets, various ornaments including cassowary feather belts, nose pieces, shell, seed and fibre necklaces and bracelets, a wig, shell money, a bamboo flute and a coconut shell rattle, a head-rest, and a skull painted with ochre. The material includes objects from all his trips to New Guinea and covers different locations including the Fly River, Moresby Island, Orangerie Bay, and Yule Island. The collection also includes photographs, some which were used as illustrations in his book, of skulls and artefacts, others of posed men and women taken in Andai during the first expedition to New Guinea.

Apart from their intrinsic historical value, I would venture to say that none of the objects would be considered as exceptional works of art in the supposedly universal aesthetic sense currently being represented in museums such as the Quai Branly in Paris, nor could they be said to be a representative series of a specific group's material culture. Further, the documentation for the artefacts amounts to a hand written list of objects as they were arranged in the original display cabinets. Notes on presumed provenience of some items have been added in a different handwriting, making it difficult to attribute an author to such notations, and to determine the accuracy of the information.

Starting from the actual material objects at our disposal, and from the museum director's persuasion that:

«A museum's life revolves around objects, it is contact with them which renders the visit a unique experience for the public. Nevertheless it is not so much the objects' existence in itself to be crucial, as the knowledge about them and the way in which it is transmitted» (De Palma, 2001)

we began reflecting on the possible expositive strategies that were open to us.

A first suggestion came from Gilda Della Ragione's original proposal to use passages from D'Albertis' memoirs as captions for the artefacts. Introducing a narrative dimension would serve as a strategy for de-centering visitors' attention from the exotic-looking objects as icons of "primitive authenticity" in favour of their bi-

ography. This solution would allow us to voice the sense of wonder and excitement at discovery expressed in D'Albertis' writings, while exposing the different methods of collection he adopted in different situations: from trading to looting. Further, significant passages of his memoirs also illustrate the ambivalent attitudes of the 19th century towards Papuans. D'Albertis' prose is revealing in the continuous shifts between idealising natural man and despising the primitive (Biscione, 2002: 209). The 19th century spirit in which exploration and collection were undertaken is also expressed in many passages of the book, including: the call of the exotic, possible colonial interests in the Pacific, evolutionist assumptions, the role of collectors and of armchair anthropologists in the construction of knowledge. In order to give visitors the opportunity to become aware of these different aspects of the explorer's engagement with his activities as collector, excerpts of his memoirs, in particular those which bear some relationship with the objects in the showcases, are also published in the guidebook and other museum publications (De Palma 2008, A. G. D'Albertis 2001).

With the same purpose, and conscious of the limited space available for this section of the museum, it was decided to fit as many of the objects collected by Luigi Maria D'Albertis, with the original hand-written paper labels attached, in the two glass-topped cases available. The resulting, somewhat haphazard juxtaposition of different kinds of artefacts in a purposefully crowded display, does not impress visitors as a systematic classificatory enterprise or as the outcome of scholarly interest in understanding the functions of the items. The display evokes rather the explorer's urge to collect, and to bring back anything he could lay his hands on, from implements to ornaments to body parts, and even live specimens if he had had his way! It was also decided to leave the painted paper eyes that someone has added to the skull in the collection, as a silent testimony to the transference of meanings involved in the passage of such objects from indigenous to alien hands. Between the two cabinets, a marble bust of Luigi Maria serves to identify this space in the Captain's house as being devoted to his cousin's exploits. A reduced version of the panoply of weapons that originally adorned one of the castle's halls also identifies the provenience of this collection. It includes arrows from the Fly River region, the flag that flew on the *Neva* and the guns with which Luigi Maria D'Albertis shot at animals and humans in New Guinea. A panel above one of the cases reproduces a depiction of the *Neva*, briefly describes his expeditions and explains the explorer's infamous reputation in Papua New Guinea.

The aim of introducing a narrative element was to effect a transformation: a collection "of ethno-

FIGURE 4. – Enrico Maria D'Albertis New Guinea Section in the Museum today (© *Castello d'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo*)

graphic interest” that could be read as a display of the artefacts of a historical “first contact” event (or series of events) between a Western adventurer and New Guinea peoples. However, focussing on the explorer’s sense of discovery and collecting urge still only told one side of the story, particularly considering the location of this collection well within the wider celebratory project of his cousin Captain D’Albertis’ home museum.

I felt that a further dimension should be added. This involved a further shift of perspective from focussing on D’Albertis as explorer, collector and writer to introducing indigenous voices into the museum in order to stimulate visitors to think reflexively about the history of collecting practices. Thus I suggested that the objects in the collection should be accompanied by oral history narratives of people whose ancestors were involved in the “first contact” situations he brought about. I was able to track down two such accounts, kindly forwarded by anthropologists Chris Ballard and John Burton. Both these accounts concern D’Albertis’ expeditions on the Fly River; they are printed on the removable

card relating to the display in the case devoted to objects from the Fly expeditions. Visitors may take the cards with them to read as they look at the exhibits.

Oral History accounts from the Fly River

The text printed on the card available for visitors is reproduced below:

«Luigi Maria D’Albertis’ is not the only voice in this story. The objects in this collection have been the protagonists of a momentous encounter between members of different cultures; two anthropologists have met some of the descendants of the natives who saw the Neva sailing on their river. Their oral histories retain some traces of those encounters:

Account by Wikli Kikli of Gusiere Village, near Ungwene

A man from Ipen near Ungwene first saw the ship and alerted the others.

They thought it was a large fish. This was at Lario Bank, in fact, near Wai Island. The people motioned

them not to shoot, but they decided to shoot arrows at the boat. Then the people on the boat fired shots high into the trees. Everyone ran off except the local leader and his wife. Some men from the boat landed to fight the man, who ran off, but they caught his wife and decapitated her. The people came and found her body lying there, with a circle of trade goods salt, tobacco and soap, and axes around her corpse. They threw all this in the water, except for one of the axes, which they then worked out how to use. So they got a blackpalm bow-stave poked around in the river to try and retrieve the other axes, but failed. This axe was held at Gusiore until recently, when it disintegrated entirely.

Story recounted to Chris Ballard by Samuel Kepuk-nae, 3 January 1996, at Tripen Village, during an ANU-sponsored re-walk of the 1926 Fly-Sepik Expedition.

Accounts by Edward Kasinakawe and Melchior Samet of Aimbak from Wangawanga village

A white man and one from Kiwai came up the river in a steamer and some Komaks saw them from the bank, by the hamlet of Aiambak, the men on the boat offered them some cloths, but the men refused them. The white man told them he would travel upriver and then return.

When they returned the Komak were preparing nine pigs for a feast called 'basi gilous', (a traditional feast of the middle Fly area in which men from rival tribes exchanged pigs and wives among "boka" partners in a joking relationship, to mediate peace).

The Komaks had invited their 'Boka' partners and when they saw the boat approaching someone cried: "He's not a spirit, let's kill him!" They thought the foreigners were going to the feast. The boat came up to them, a Kiwai was steering, the white man had a pen and was writing down everything they said. When the Komaks saw that they had not brought their wives, they began to rock the boat to capsize it. The white man shot to the ground but the Komak continued to rock the boat. A warrior chief called Betei raised his bow and, aiming at the foreigner, cried his war cry "Betei ete-Wagi" ("Betei is shooting his arrow") but as he did so the white man shot, killing Kasinakawe instantly, they all ran away leaving the body where it lay. Some time later, when the Komak had determined that the foreigners had gone, they ventured back, to find the place had been ransacked. The foreigners had taken a pig to eat it and all the other pigs and dogs had been killed. Kasinakawe's body had been hacked all over with a bush knife.

The narrator of this story, E. Kasinakauwe, born in 1948, is a descendant of the killed Kasinakauwe and bears his name.

At another point on the Fly, there is a bend, which the Komak call **Gove deve**, the name means "spirit lying there" and refers to an episode that occurred at that spot, probably at the time of D'Albertis' last expedition. After the death of one of his Chinese crewmen, two others fled on a rowboat, and were never found again, but during his return D'Albertis found the boat, caught in the reeds.

Some Komak arrived to Gove dove and found a "white man" (one of the Neva's deserters), on the ground; he was alive but unconscious. So they killed him, wrapped him in black palm bark strips, wearing his trousers and boots, and ate him. As they did not know about boots, and considered hands and feet as the best parts, the cannibals could not understand why his boots were so tough.

These episodes were narrated to John Burton during his fieldwork among the Komak of the Fly river, March 22nd, 1994.»

These stories, in their brevity, bear witness to the bewilderment, curiosity, fear, defensiveness with which men and women living along the banks of the Fly River reacted to the passage of an open steamboat carrying strange men and their weapons. It is remarkable that they parallel the explorer's memoirs in highlighting the sanguinary outcomes of their encounters, but these accounts are also telling of the sense of active participation in the events' denouement. In the words recorded by Chris Ballard and John Burton in the 1990s there is no sense that the narrators' ancestors were powerless victims of this harbinger of colonial power.

Beyond telling the other side of the story and recognising voice and authority to the tellers, these accounts also bring to the public's attention the very notion that natives too have a history. The objects exposed were collected a century ago, but at least in some cases, the people from whom they come have retained a collective memory of the event. This memory, moreover, is significantly focussed around material objects: the boat that is initially mistaken for a large fish, the pen held by one of the white men, the pigs stolen, the boots worn by the corpse in the bush. In New Guinea, as in Genova, artefacts are singled out for description and provide a focus for narratives of engagement with the 'other'. In particular Wikli Kikli's account which concludes by drawing a striking parallel between the conservation of indigenous objects in Western museums and the preservation of the only object that his ancestors deemed worthy of keeping from the encounter with D'Albertis, provides a poignant example of the process by which Europeans and Pacific islanders mutually appropriated and contextualised each other's artefacts (Thomas, 1991). Further, the apposition of this story to the objects in the collection illustrates that indigenous people's history and culture continued to live beyond that moment of contact, and that a trace of the encounter has remained in their contemporary stories as it does in our museums. Thus asserting natives' coevalness with visitors of the museum (Fabian, 1983), a point which still needs to be brought home to a Western public, in particular concerning populations such as those of New Guinea who are so distant from the everyday experience of museum visitors in Genova.

Epeli Hau'ofa has commented on the importance of such awareness:

«As long as we rely mainly on written documents, and as long as Europeans, Americans, and similar others are seen to dominate our pasts as main actors or manipulators of local people to carry out their de-

signs, our histories will remain imperial histories and narratives of passive submissions to transformations, of victimizations and fatal impacts: [...] from a long-time perspective, which is the best kind of historical outlook, what is of more importance is how people, ordinary people, the forgotten people of history, have coped and are coping with their harsh realities, their resistances and struggles to be themselves and hold together.» (Hau'ofa, 2000: 458)

Conclusions

Our aim in deciding upon the best use to be made of the L.M. D'Albertis material in Genova was not to aestheticize the objects as primitive art, or to represent "New Guinea Cultures", nor to attempt to historicise it by juxtaposing elements of contemporary indigenous material culture. Embedded within the home-museum of Captain D'Albertis, this New Guinea collection presented uncritically would run the risk of being taken as was perhaps intended by the two cousins, 19th century travellers and collectors: as mere souvenirs and material evidence of the amazing adventures of one man from the city of Genova, exotic fetishes of "What I did and what I saw" in New Guinea.

«In the moment of public presentation of historical collections it becomes necessary to overcome their nature as collections of objects which, not only were conceived as a sampling of a reality which has disappeared or has become profoundly modified, but which have been collected and found their *raison d'être* in lands distant from us, according to a theory, or better an ideology, which is distant and irreconcilable in its presuppositions, with contemporary thought.» (Biscione, 2002: 219)

Without denying the historical and cultural context in which the collection was made, we sought for a way to make it the starting point for a reflexive reading of the collection itself and of what perhaps is the greatest marvel to be stirred up in visitors: that such objects are on display here.

«Ideally the history of its own collection and display should be a visible aspect of any exhibition.» (Clifford, 1988: 229)

The narratives available in the explorer's memoirs were a starting point. "First Contact" stories are still extremely appealing to Western imagination. Further, as Mosko (2009) has demonstrated, the legacy of such written documents goes beyond what might appear as the narrative of an individual's adventures. These memoirs can be mined for historical and anthropological information on the way their actions and style of interaction with the indigenous people they contacted had important consequences in shaping the encounters that followed, and the history of their assimilation into the colonial history of outside powers.

The objects in this collection however, cried out for the need to evoke the existence of indigenous perspectives to such encounters, highlighting the relations of power which have made it possible for a people's objects of daily use to be selected, valued, collected and exposed by, and for, another portion of humanity. Through the work of recovering what we could find of Papua New Guinean recollections concerning such a momentous historical encounter, we have endeavoured to create a space for indigenous voices to intrude in what otherwise might appear as an uncritical reconstruction of a house-museum; thus adding one more arrow to the panoply of reflections proposed by the D'Albertis Museum on 19th Century collectors, and their role in the history of the Western gaze on "Others".

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