

Beltrami's Cradleboard and Other Stories. Beltrami's is the Oldest Preserved Dakota Cradleboard in the World

Sandra Busatta

Independent researcher; e-mail <sandra@bakomagazine.net>

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ABSTRACT

This is an updated version of the article “La culla di Beltrami e altre storie”, published in Italian in 1993. The Beltrami Collection, made up of the objects he brought back from his travels, has been divided for a long time: a part was kept at the Museum of Natural History E. Caffi in Bergamo, Lombardy, and a part was at Luchetti House in Filottrano (Ancona, Marche). Only very recently the two parts have been reunited in Bergamo: it constitutes the earliest group of objects from Minnesota in Europe. I believe that the items divided between the Beltrami collection at the museum “E. Caffi” in Bergamo and the Luchetti collection in Filottrano form a single artifact, that is, a cradle of the type called “cradleboard”, of which only the parts decorated with porcupine quills survive today. The cradleboard was collected in 1823 by G. Costantino Beltrami probably near Fort Snelling (ex Fort Anthony) among the Eastern Sioux, probably the Santee Mdewakanton who had their village in Kaposia, very close to the fort and represents the most ancient specimen of Santee Sioux cradleboard currently preserved.

Introduction

In 1823 an Italian, armed only with a red cloth umbrella and great courage, traveling in the “no man’s land” between the enemy tribes of the Chippewa and the Dakota, discovered the northern sources of the Mississippi River. Giacomo Costantino Beltrami, born in Bergamo in 1779, at a very young age joined Napoleon’s Grand Army in Piedmont. After various military and civil assignments, in 1808 he was appointed judge in Macerata in the Marche region. At the fall of Napoleon, accused of belonging to the Carboneria and Freemasonry, he was exiled. After a brief return to the Marche, saddened by the death of a dear friend, Countess Giulia Spada de’ Medici, he left for a long journey. He reached the United States in 1823 and joined the expedition of Major Taliaferro that departed from Ft. St. Antony, later Ft. Snelling, but disagreements made him leave the group and in almost complete solitude, he went upstream the Mississippi discovering the northern sources of the river in the lake that he called Lake Giulia (Beltrami County, Minnesota). In 1824 Beltrami’s observations on the Indians

appear continuously in his volume written in French, to ensure greater dissemination, “La Découverte des sources du Mississippi et de la Rivière Sanglante” (Nouvelle Orleans, 1824), given to the press after having traveled, the first white man, the entire course of the river from the north to the mouth. This volume was then printed in London in 1828 in English with the title “A Pilgrimage in Europe and America Leading to Discovery of the Sources of the Mississippi River and the Bloody River...” (Luchetti 1997:5-6).

In a subscription list for the purchase of the book, among other things, it is indicated that it contains critical-philosophical observations on the Customs, Religion, Ceremonies, Superstitions,

Customs, Arms, Hunts, War, Peace, Division [into tribes, Ed.], Origin, etc. of numerous Indian Nations. In fact the promises are kept and, even if sometimes the information is contested, a number of distinguished authors have taken advantage of this without ever citing the source. Beltrami has his first contacts with the Indians when he goes up the river by boat from Fort S. Anthony [later Ft. Snelling]; of sturdy size, 1,85 m. tall, he is welcomed by the natives with amazement also because he says he comes from the Moon. He behaves respectfully, dignified and unobtrusive; he is also a good hunter and this is no bad thing” (Luchetti 1997:6).

He spent a year in Mexico among various dangers and adventures. In 1826 he spent a year in Haiti and then returned to London; from here he went to Paris where he lived almost five years. He finally bought a villa in Heidelberg, but tired and disappointed by the lack of recognition of his discovery, he returned to the Marche region where he had a palace and property and where he died a “solitary pilgrim” in 1855. Feest and Kasprzycki write (1997:19-20): “Beltrami thought that the reason for his rejection had been that he was ‘a man who belongs to an unfortunate and denationalized people.’ The expanded English version of his book “did not help his reputation among those who felt that the sources of the most American of rivers should not have discovered by an Italian.” However, they add, Beltrami’s claim “was basically correct” according to the words of a fair-minded American historian (Coues 1895, 1:329 n.28 in Feest and Kasprzycki:ibidem).

The Beltrami Collection

The Beltrami Collection, made up of the objects he brought back from his travels, has been divided for a long time: a part was kept at the Museum of Natural History E. Caffi in Bergamo, Lombardy, and a part was at Luchetti House in Filottrano (Ancona, Marche). Only very recently the two parts have been reunited in Bergamo. The Indian objects Beltrami collected are to be considered among the oldest and best preserved in this area and the travel reports constitute a precious source of knowledge. According to Feest and Kaprinsky (1997:40), “Beltrami’s collection ... constitutes the earliest group of objects from Minnesota in Europe”.

*What remains of Beltrami’s extensive American collection is today on display in two Italian museums. The bulk of the ethnographic objects are in the Museo di Scienze Naturali ‘Enrico Caffi’, in Bergamo Alta, where the traveller was born. There are sixtythree numbered pieces, all well preserved and carefully described in a catalogue by Leonardo Vigorelli [...] One of the most striking of Beltrami objects is a rare deer-hide, round, double-faced Wabéno Midè drum, painted on one side with a powerful anthropomorphic spirit/shaman design, and on the other with the sun. The Beltrami Wabéno drum inspired the logo of the exhibition *The Spirit Sings* held in Calgary for the 1988 Winter Olympics (including its illustrated catalogue), and was one of the most admired pieces at this international display of the artistic traditions of Canada’s First Peoples. [...] Recent national and international attention has in turn had a positive impact on the ethnographic objects themselves. Under the leadership of the museum director, Dr. Marco Valle, the Beltrami collection underwent a thorough cleaning and conservation, and now enjoys a prominent space in the new ethnographic exhibition hall inaugurated at Bergamo’s Museo Caffi in 2001. (Taylor and Marino 2020:54-57)*

Dr. Mario Guerra, the former director of Bergamo’s Caffi Museum from 1979 to 1997, and a subscriber of our magazine HAKO devoted to the Native North American cultures, told me that in 1983, when J. C. Ewers, who was writing his book, *Plains Indian Sculpture* (1986), came to Bergamo to see the Beltrami’s pieces and especially the tepee door, they were still ‘mouldering’ in the attic, since the museum mission was devoted to Natural History. Ewers did not say a word, but dr. Guerra felt so ashamed under the distinguished scholar’s reproachful glance, that started the enhancing of the value of these precious ethnographical objects. He also promoted the monographic issue of the Museum Rivista

(Guerra, Maconi, Vigorelli, Speranza 1987, editor dr. Marco Valle, the current director of the Museum) as well as the exhibition *Mississippi 1823. Gli oggetti indiani raccolti da G. Costantino Beltrami* (4th June -10th July 1987) at Galleria Lorenzelli, Bergamo, and the catalogue by Vigorelli (1987).

Count Glauco Luchetti Gentiloni (1916–2004), moral heir and trustee of the Beltrami heritage in Italy, created the private Beltrami-Luchetti Museum in Filottrano at Beltrami House in the late 1970s, and opened it to the public in 1979. The American Indian pieces are on display in glass cases in Room No. 1 and Room No. 2. On the ceiling of one of the rooms there is a copy of Benjamin West's 1770 painting, *The Death of General Wolfe*, commemorating the 1759 Battle of Quebec, where General James Wolfe died at the moment of victory. But the general's uniform in Filottrano is grey-blue instead of red as in the original, probably from William Woollett's engraving, which was the best-known copy of West's original and became popular around the world. The family's interest in American things witnessed by this painting matches the interest in the American objects brought home by Costantino Beltrami. His heirs, however, while preserved these objects, considered them simply curios, and were not very respectful in their use of them. Count Luchetti told me that a relative of his, his grandfather or great uncle, used the very beautiful "long wooden pipe stem, decorated with porcupine quillwork" (Taylor and Marino 2010:55) as an exotic walking stick, and someone used the "summer buffalo robe, square in outline and painted with a large central 'feather circle' ('sun burst', or 'war bonnet') motif, and [...] stylized eagle feathers are also painted on the four corners of the robe" (Taylor and Marino 2010:55) to cover a hole in the wallpaper or more probably they used the fragment of male summer robe also with the feather circle, with conspicuous damage from parasite infestation, and with leather inserts after the realization of the artifact, which is one of the three pieces donated by Luchetti to the Caffi Museum in 1973 (n. 14, page 77 in Vigorelli's catalogue 1987). He did not know whether it was cut in that occasion to adjust its size to the damaged wallpaper or in some other occasion. Count Luchetti, however, also had a somewhat cavalier attitude: once he phoned to ask my sister Flavia (who holds a degree in chemistry) whether he could use the Super Attack glue to mend the frayed thread of some quillwork. Flavia tried to discourage him, but he laughed and told her it was too late, he had already done it, and only after having second thoughts, he had called.

*Among the objects on exhibition in the Beltrami-Luchetti Palace (but not listed by Vigorelli in his Appendix on the Manufatti conservati a Filottrano: Collezione Luchetti) is a flat, open sheet of birch bark identified on its accompanying label as a 'frammento di corteccia di betulla', simply a 'piece of birch bark'. It was recently (in 2014) identified by Cesare Marino as a rare sketch-map of the course of the Upper Mississippi River with the contour of Upper and Lower Lake as etched into the bark by Beltrami himself in 1823, during his solo explorations through the Minnesota wilderness. Of great interest to North Americanists – Siouan linguists in particular – is also a Dakota/Santee manuscript Sioux vocabulary, also collected by Beltrami in 1823, most likely at Fort St Anthony. Count Glauco Luchetti discovered this manuscript in the 1980s while compiling his inventory of the vast Archivio. [...] Nevertheless, though the Beltrami collection had already been presented to the public in 1929 at the Prima Esposizione Nazionale di Storia delle Scienze in Florence, Italian anthropologists seem to have paid little attention to it. Only in 1973, after the opening of the dedicated exhibit, Costantino Beltrami e le sorgenti del Mississippi, 1823–1973, in Bergamo, did some Italian anthropologists turn their attention to Beltrami and his collection. [...] Since the 1970s, North Americanists in the USA and Europe have studied the Beltrami collection and appreciated its ethnographic and historical value, including John C. Ewers, Tom Vennum, Christian Feest, Sylvia Kasprzycki, Tilly Laskey, Laura Laurencich-Minelli, Sandra Busatta and Flavia Busatta (editors of *Hako*, an Italian magazine devoted to American Indian studies), Sergio Susani, and Alessio Martella. (Taylor and Marino 2020:56)*

According to Vigorelli (1986), the original list of objects donated by Beltrami's nephew and heir,

Giobatta Beltrami, to the Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai of Bergamo around 1856, is not currently known. The artifacts now in the Museum (with the exception of the coat and the model of a Chippewa canoe brought to Bergamo directly by Costantino Beltrami) were given together with passports, manuscripts and autographed letters addressed to him. When the Regio Istituto Tecnico and its Museum were established in the Upper City, they were entrusted with the objects of an ethnographic nature, until 1917, when the material passed to the Museo Civico di Storia Naturale. The Beltrami Collection, thus constituted, was presented at the *First National Exhibition of Natural History* in Florence in 1929. In 1973, Glauco Luchetti donated to the Museum three artifacts from his collection preserved at Beltrami's House in Filottrano, which are listed with the designation "without previous cataloguing number". They are the no. 5. Fragment of painted rawhide (tepee door?), no. 13. Strip of decorated skin, no. 14. Fragment of male summer robe. No list of the objects in the collection prior to that compiled by Enrico Caffi in 1942 is known. Some objects in the Caffi list are not currently present in the Museum (Vigorelli, 1986:22).

Count Luchetti bore a grudge against the Caffi, and was fiercely opposed to uniting the two parts of the collection, even though the City of Filottrano had showed no interest in the Museum. In fact, during the 1980-90's it lacked any security and had an ex-carabiniere as a custodian for the paltry sum of less than 30 thousand liras. It seems, according to Luchetti who was still furious after so many years, that the Caffi Museum had withheld or lost an object after it had been loaned for an exhibition. Yet, while ranting on the sins of the Caffi, he never specified which exhibition and which object. Despite my advice, of my sister and Dr. Marino, Luchetti was adamant in rejecting any suggestion to reunite the collection in Bergamo, more endowed with means and tourist appeal, especially after the construction of the new exhibition hall inaugurated in 2001. Filottrano is a pleasant, although sleepy, small town situated on the hills of the Marche hinterland and it does not even have a hotel in town. To be honest, I should say that, little known in Bergamo, which gave him his birthplace and dedicated a street in the Upper City, Beltrami became an illustrious son of the city only after a number of scholars started trickling from the USA and Germany to Bergamo to see the collection.

Count Luchetti died in 2004; in 2005 the Caffi organized the exhibition *Un Bergamasco tra i Sioux. G. C. Beltrami Alla scoperta delle sorgenti del Mississippi* (A Bergamasque among the Sioux . G. C. Beltrami at the discovery of the sources of the Mississippi) and the objects were gathered and reunited by the heirs' will. The Filottrano collection was requested by Bergamo on loan for ten years to celebrate in the best possible way the adventurous journey of Beltrami, who in 1823 discovered the sources of the Mississippi.

In 2014, already at the end of the Coppari administration, the Luchetti family had manifested to the City Council the desire to donate the Beltrami Museum to Filottrano. In subsequent years, the Administration Giulioni did nothing to formalize the act of donation, and, in 2019, the Luchetti family, still the owner and responsible for the preservation of the precious artifacts that were deteriorating, decided with Marche Superintendent for Cultural Heritage and Activities Marta Mazza the temporary entrustment of the collection to the Caffi Museum of Bergamo, which would have guaranteed the protection of the objects in a suitable environment, waiting for the City of Filottrano to be activated to take charge. On December 19, 2019 the Superintendent communicated to the City of Filottrano the authorization to move the Beltrami collection of Filottrano to the Museum 'E. Caffi' in Bergamo. Hence, the Filottrano mayor tried to block the transfer with the appeal to the Regional Administrative Court of the Marche, which granted the request provisionally. The mayor of Filottrano explained that two conventions have been made, one with the Polytechnic University of Marche, for the preparation of the museum project, which also includes the restoration of the floor that houses the museum; the other with the School of Restoration of Urbino for the restoration and preservation of all objects. The Mayor, however, never provided for the formalization of the donation and showed an interest only in the months preceding the elections, presenting the above

mentioned project, which was less than preliminary. The Caffi Museum appealed against the Regional Administrative Court of the Marche region; in the meantime, the Council of State, while waiting for the final ruling scheduled for February 20th, 2021, confirmed the provisional decision of the Marche Regional Court. In the end, however, the Regional Administrative Court of Marche rejected the appeal by the Municipality of Filottrano aimed at obtaining the permanence of the Beltrami Museum in the town. The administrative judges of Ancona did not accept it, deeming it inadmissible with a ruling on March 12, 2021. In fact, the owners and the competent authorities had already acted to protect the collection, and the decision legitimized the transfer of the collection to Bergamo, where it was already to be restored (C. Marino, 2021, personal communication).

Beltrami in Minnesota

Anyone who visits Minneapolis finds it hard to believe that this city was the last American outpost in the Old Northwest when Giacomo Costantino Beltrami first saw it. “It is the last military fort in the United States, in the northern part of their territory”, wrote the Bergamasque on June 10, 1823 in his *Decouverte des sources du Mississippi et de la Rivière Sanglante*, published in New Orleans in 1824.

Beltrami reached the outpost aboard the steamer *Virginia* together with Major Lawrence Taliaferro (whom Beltrami called Tagliaferro because of the Genoese origin of the officer’s family), the first Indian agent for the Dakota Sioux. The American presence in the area, however, was mostly theoretical after 1819, since the Indians had not been given the gifts and goods promised in payment for the land they had ceded. In any case the Americans began to be present in the area only after the construction in 1818 of Fort Snelling, the ancient Minneapolis, called for a short period Fort Anthony.

In 1823 the fort was still called Fort Anthony, and the Italian traveler had already met the Sioux. The fort was located more or less near the border between the Chippewa territory (the southern Ojibwa, i.e., those tribes living in the United States) and the lands of the Dakota Sioux, collectively called the Santee, and the Yankton, who were being pushed slowly but continually westward.

Beltrami had met Chief Wabishinhowa, the Leaf, of the Mdewakanton Sioux (the main group of the Santee) at his summer camp at Prairie of Wings and a little further upstream at Pepin Lake had visited Tatangamani, Red Eagle, chief of another Mdewakanton village and bought a bow and quiver (Beltrami 1965:56) from him. It is possible that the bow is the one currently in the Beltrami Collection in Filottrano, but I tend to believe that it is rather the one in the Beltrami Collection in Bergamo, given the exceptional beauty of the Filottrano bow, which could instead be the Medicine Bow “that always hangs in the Great House of Manitù ... I own a very beautiful one” (Beltrami 1965: 91). The Red Eagle bow was probably an ordinary hunting bow, while the other, being extensively decorated, is probably a ceremonial bow.

Major Taliaferro had the difficult task of trying to secure the friendship of the Dakotas, even if he was convinced that they would choose the English in case of war. He also had the thankless task of preventing a Sioux-Chippewa conflict, something neither the French nor the British had been able to do. These conflicts, inherited by the Americans, had inflamed the area throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, so the Indian culture of this part of the United States was far from uncontaminated, as it would appear from the words of Prof. Vigorelli in his Preface to the Catalogue of the Beltrami Collection (1987:17) “Few travelers, adventurers, fur trappers, extravagant whites approached the tribes when their way of life was still intact and vital and war was not yet the only possible form of relationship.” The Sioux had been involved in the fur wars since the 17th century and when Beltrami visited them in 1823 they had long established commercial and political relationships with the trappers of the various Canadian and

American fur companies. The various Sioux groups had already concluded the Treaty of Pike in 1805 and the Treaties of Friendship in 1815 and 1816 with the U.S. government, which were intended to wrest them from Anglo-Canadian commercial influence.

In historical accounts of horticultural peoples the Dakotas are the almost classically stylized enemy figure. These people represented one of the most successful examples of the new way of life. Their transition from nomadic hunting on foot to fully developed equestrian patterns was surprisingly rapid. The entire change seems to have taken place in two generations. But it was only the final stage of a long process that had been maturing for over a century. The groups described by Jonathan Carver and Peter Pond after the mid-18th century were not untouched savages; they had been familiar with elements of European culture for at least a century. However, the level of native socioeconomic development never went beyond hunting-gathering. (Holder 1970:105)

The tribes Beltrami had encountered shortly before arriving at Fort Anthony had been the Menomini and Winnebago, who had immigrated from the Great Lakes area around Green Bay, probably to trade their pelts at Prairie du Chien. They had come via the waterways of the Wisconsin and Fox rivers, connected by a portage, a route in which canoes are carried on the shoulders, which “is the main channel for skins,” as Beltrami recalls. It is possible that from them he got the object that is called “Sheath of knife, Ojibway, L. 45.5 cm, H 10 cm.” by Prof. Laurencich Minelli (1991:275-288), and appears in Vigorelli’s catalogue (1987:104, no. o) also as a knife sheath .

The object in question was deeply modified to be made into a knife sheath by someone who was certainly not an Indian. It has been roughly cut, glued and sewn onto a leather backing and adorned with a leather fringe in which leather strips are adorned with porcupine quills and form rings and also has blue glass beads. The ringed strips, sewn and glued over the original decoration, are cut from the horse headpiece at figure 14 in Prof. Minelli, who attributes it without reason to the Cree of the Plains: in fact it may very well be either Santee or Chippewa and collected in the area. Prof. Vigorelli, 1987, at page 99 of the catalogue identifies it as no. d, fragment of a headdress, but this is impossible. This piece was either part of a Midé otter skin bag, and precisely the tail, or was an element of a garter that was fashionable at the end of the eighteenth century, early nineteenth century, of which there are few specimens left, and which can be seen in the portrait of Keokuk, chief of the Sauk nation, in the McKenney-Hall Portrait Gallery of American Indians collection. A similar type of garter appears in the portrait of Mohawk war chief Joseph Brant, painted by William Berczey in 1797. However, the most convincing example, because of the lozenge decoration (widespread in the Great Lakes area), very similar to that of Filottrano, is found in the “Menomini ornaments with decoration of porcupine quills” in the Denver Art Museum, dated the end of the 18th century. These Menomini ornaments in the Denver Art Museum are interpreted as Midé bag ornaments, but they are asymmetrical, whereas all examples of Midé bags have symmetrical decorations, and thus are not part of a Midé bag, but almost certainly parts of garters, which always have asymmetrical decorations. I tend to believe that the original artifact of the Filottrano collection belonged to a garter. Of the three decorated parts of the garter only the ‘tail’ remains “transformed into a knife sheath to be worn hanging from the belt, in the European way, fixed with glue and shoemaker’s thread on coarse commercial leather.”

It is possible that from the Sauk Beltrami took the “leather bag” that Prof. Minelli attributes to the Iroquois with some doubt. The bag, to be worn around the neck, is similar to Sauk and Eastern Sioux examples, such as the one of about 1830 in the Chandler-Pohrt Collection (2842) (Penney 1992. *Catalog of the exhibition The Art of the Great Lakes Indians*. March 25 - July 1, 1973. Flint Institute of Arts, Flint Michigan. The caption records that the piece was collected in 1922 in Tama, Iowa by Mrs. Joseph Tesson, a Sauk and Fox. The curators of the exhibition *Art of the American Indian Frontier. The Chandler-Pohrt Collection*. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Seattle 1992, attributed it to the Eastern

Sioux and refer for attribution precisely to “Beltrami, 1828, table 1, fig. 2.”). An Iroquois attribution is also possible, however, given the great favor of this type of bag in the Northeast. On the other hand, the long bag to be worn on the belt and therefore generally decorated only on the visible external side and very widespread among the Iroquois, is probably Iroquois. Members of the League of Six Nations and ‘French’ Mohawks from Quebec were in the area either as hunters employed by the Northwest Company or as members of the Oneida colony of Wisconsin, on territory purchased from the Winnebago, who may have come to trade via the Wisconsin River route.

During his stay at Fort Anthony/Fort Snelling Beltrami bought many items, including the beautiful Filottrano ceremonial pipe decorated with red painted horsehair, Mallard duck neck skin, and porcupine quill decoration with an hourglass design divided by two parallel stripes, which appears to be the dragonfly, an important shamanic animal.

Beltrami also brought home a rare and precious object that currently exists as a series of separate pieces that have not yet been recognized as parts of a single object: a cradle of the *cradleboard* type of which we have very few Eastern Sioux examples. In fact, the Lakota (also known as the Western Teton Sioux) abandoned this kind of cradle in their westward migration and we possess only examples from the Santee area, collected at or near Fort Snelling.

In the collection of the E. Caffi Museum in Bergamo there are *cradle decorations* (cat. no. 15, page 78), correctly recognized as such, even if with some uncertainty. They would have been purchased from the Yankton Sioux, according to Prof. Vigorelli, but he does not say how he came to this conclusion. At the end of the Catalogue, in the section on *Artifacts preserved in Filottrano, Luchetti Collection*, the pieces are only drawn and the drawing on p. 98, no. a, has the caption: “Belt. Decorations in quillwork on tanned hide. Lower fringing with tin cones. Northern Plains. Santee Sioux.” (Fig. 1). Another drawing, on p. 100, no. e, is described as: “Belt. Quill decoration on tanned hide. Lower fringing with tin cones. Northern Plains.” (Fig. 2). The same drawings are mentioned as objects ‘a’ and ‘e’ in *Beltrami’s Catalogue of Objects* and as n.15 sect. *Rivista del Museo Civico di Scienze Naturali ‘E. Caffi’*, Bergamo 1987, vol. 2. In the same magazine (1987 at page 28 there is the description, page 91 a B/W photo) there is an object that does not appear in the Catalogue of the Exhibition: “e. 12/35 wrap-around belt, L cm 46, H cm 15, Upper Mississippi, Northern Plains” (Fig. 3, Fig. 4),

“decorated with two horizontal bands of embroidery and geometric motifs of dyed red-orange, black and natural white porcupine quills. The upper margin is decorated with coils of orange-red porcupine quills, while the lower margin has a short fringe also decorated with coils of orange-red quills to which a sequence of tin cones is attached, resonating by reciprocal percussion” (Vigorelli 1987:28).

Prof. Laurencich Minelli (1991) describes the strips of Filottrano in the following way:

“There are also in the collection of Filottrano two decorative hide strips: the first, perhaps an ornament for the parasol of a cradle, is incomplete, that is, it is cut at one end and is rather worn: it has been restored with raffia threads. It is decorated with four horizontal lines, two black and two white, alternating with three rectangles in which the black lines are instead dashed: these motifs are also framed by a red line. The ornamentation is obtained with a porcupine quill at a time made to pass over and under two parallel lines of points of tendon thread, that is half triangular interlacing. A fringe of leather and tin cones is inserted on one of the two long sides of the strip.”¹

During the conference proceedings in 1991 Prof. Laurencich Minelli had advanced the hypothesis

1 [The cones appear on the upper long side]

that it could be part of a harness for horses, then after a conversation with this author she seemed to have opted for a part of a cradle, the *parasol*, but the length, cm 1.78 makes the hypothesis impossible. She described the second piece:

“The second strip is complete even if rather worn and restored with raffia threads: (Fig. 13) it is a rectangle of leather with a hole at each corner that perhaps served to apply to the harness. Only the central rectangle is decorated with three cream-colored bands underlined by a red line: the first and second bands show a sequence of pseudo-anthropomorphic black figurines that can be read as the female forces of the earth, while the second shows a series of geometric figures alternately red and black, probably the universe in the indigenous conception. The decoration is worked from a porcupine quill according to the method of triangular half-braiding. A fringe of leather and tin cones is sewn to one of the long sides of the rectangle. Both objects are referable either to the Ojibway or to the Dakota, that is to the area of the Woodlands or to the area of the Prairies”.

The examples of cradles of the Eastern Sioux make me believe that the two pieces in the Caffi Museum, n. 12 and n. 15, and the two “belts” of Filottrano are parts of the same artifact of the *cradleboard* type, which the Santee Sioux still used at the time when Beltrami visited the area, and which the Lakota had abandoned during the separation from their Eastern relatives between 1700 and 1785 (Lessard 1990).

George Catlin (1973:132, fig. 232) bought the cradleboard he drew in his book on Indian customs, a cradle that is now part of the Catlin collection at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (Fig. 5). He bought it at Fort Snelling in 1835, and at that time the Mdewakanton Sioux were living around the fort. Catlin’s cradle has almost the same decoration as the Filottrano so-called “belts”: a series of black birds on a white background, probably Thunder Birds and black and red figures on a white background, framed by red stripes. Thunder Birds, Underwater World Panthers, and deer were common decorations for cradles and other objects in this area. I do not think that the decorations identified as “pseudo anthropomorphic” by Prof. Laurencich Minelli are female earth forces, generally represented by creatures such as Panthers and deer at this religious area.

I also believe that this is one of the parts of the decorated leather strips of the front part of the cradle, the other part of which is the object no. 12 in the Bergamo collection. Together these two parts, of almost equal width (respectively L cm 46 and H cm 15 in Bergamo and L cm 44, H cm 20.5 in Filottrano) constitute the decorated parts of the hide strips that hold the child fixed to the board of the cradle. Probably, as it happened to other objects in the collection, only the decorated parts were cut and kept.

Another Eastern Sioux cradleboard is the one mentioned as Cat. No. E 27,984, which Norman Feder (1982) (Fig. 6) dates about 1830, very similar to Catlin’s cradle and housed at the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. This cradle also shows other interesting details: the decoration of the part holding the baby, again in two pieces with Thunder Birds (bottom) and geometric designs (top), again with the same three-color combination, and the long strip of tanned hide used to carry the cradle. Indian mothers carried the cradle on their backs with the baby strapped to the board via a long strip of decorated hide attached to the forehead, as can be seen from Catlin’s drawing and the image *Ojibwa Woman and Child* published by E. C. Biddle, Philadelphia 1837, C. Collection. J. Hambleton. The mother could also carry her son by letting the strip rest across her chest, as seen in Peter Rindisbacher’s painting *Chippewa Way of Traveling in Spring and Summer*, West Point Museum Collections, painted in the 1820s.

In the Brooklyn Museum, New York City, there is another cradleboard collected at Fort Snelling during the period between 1833 and 1836, when Dr. Nathan Sturges Jarvis worked as the fort’s

physician, and which is now part of the Jarvis collection (Feder 1964:55, Fig. 38 Cat. no. 29).

In the Peabody Museum cradle the tin cones hang from the upper edge of the long strip of hide used to support the board against the mother's back, while in the photographs in the Italian publications they are interpreted as hanging from the underside, since they are believed to be belts or ornamental strips. If the cones were hanging from the underside they would bother the mother when she carries the cradle with her forehead in the way that many Indians still carry weights in Central and South America. The length of the Filottrano strip allows us to assume with some degree of certainty that it is the support strip of the cradle at the board and not a belt or the decoration of the parasol (in this case it would be too long) and certainly not a piece of a horse harness. Bergamo's other so called belts are certainly the decorated parts of the hide strip that held the child secured to the board and are very similar to those of the Peabody and Catlin cradleboards. The decorations that from the parasol were tied to the feet of the cradle are instead represented by the "decorations for cradle" cat. n. 15 of Bergamo (Vigorelli 1987:43,78) (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).

Another set of cradle decorations, with the same family air, were collected by the Swiss Count von Pourtales, who accompanied the American writer Washington Irving on his travels in the West between September and November 1832 and made into an exotic bag, now housed in the Museum of Bern, Switzerland, Cat. no. 195 and dubiously attributed to the Eastern Sioux. (Thompson 1977:184)

These and other cradles can also be found in Feest and Kaprisky's book *Peoples of the Twilight*: at pages 190-191, fig. 35 there is the Dakota wooden cradleboard model, before 1830, Ludwig von Rönne Collection, ex Colonel Thomas L. McKenney collection, from the Völkerkunde Museum, Berlin. At pages 192-193 there is the watercolor of a cradleboard, "probably Dakota" 1941, after a lost color-coded pencil sketch. ca. 1830-1850 by Duke Paul von Wüntenberg, also from the from the Völkerkunde Museum, Berlin. In the Annotated Catalog of the Illustrations Feest and Kasprycki at page 283-284 list the comparative examples of the McKenney-von Rönne Dakota cradleboard model: the Catlin cradleboard in Washington, collected between 1832 and 1839, the Peabody cradle, ca. 1830 in Feder 1965, already mentioned, another cradleboard at the Peabody Museum "Dakota cradle early 19th century, in Monroe et al. 1996:94-97", and the Ojibwa cradleboard ca. 1850 at the same museum, the model Dakota cradleboard, 1856 at the Náprstek Museum in Prague, and the already mentioned fragment of a cradleboard decoration, Dakota, ca. 1830, A.A. de Pourtales collection Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne. Then there are the items in the Caffi and Filottrano collections. They are the "fragment of cradleboard decoration, Dakota, collected in Minnesota in 1823 (Vigorelli 1987:43,78,#15)", and the "fragments of cradleboard decoration. Dakota: collected in Minnesota in 1823 (Laurencich Minnelli 1990:248, 251, figs. 15, 16; the latter identified as a horse harness decorated strip".

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that the objects divided between the Beltrami collection at the museum 'E. Caffi' of Bergamo and the Luchetti collection of Filottrano form a single artifact, that is, a cradle of the type called cradleboard, of which only the parts decorated with porcupine quills survive today. The cradleboard was collected in 1823 by G. Costantino Beltrami probably near Fort Snelling (ex Fort Anthony) among the Eastern Sioux, maybe the Santee Mdewakanton who had their village in Kaposia, very close to the fort and represents the most ancient specimen of Santee Sioux cradleboard currently preserved. When the different parts were divided it cannot be known for certain, but the curators were not, and still are not aware of that, as shows the recent photo of one of the Caffi glass cases shows, that is they have not yet realized that the various pieces form a single object, and that they own the earliest Santee cradleboard preserved in a Western Museum.

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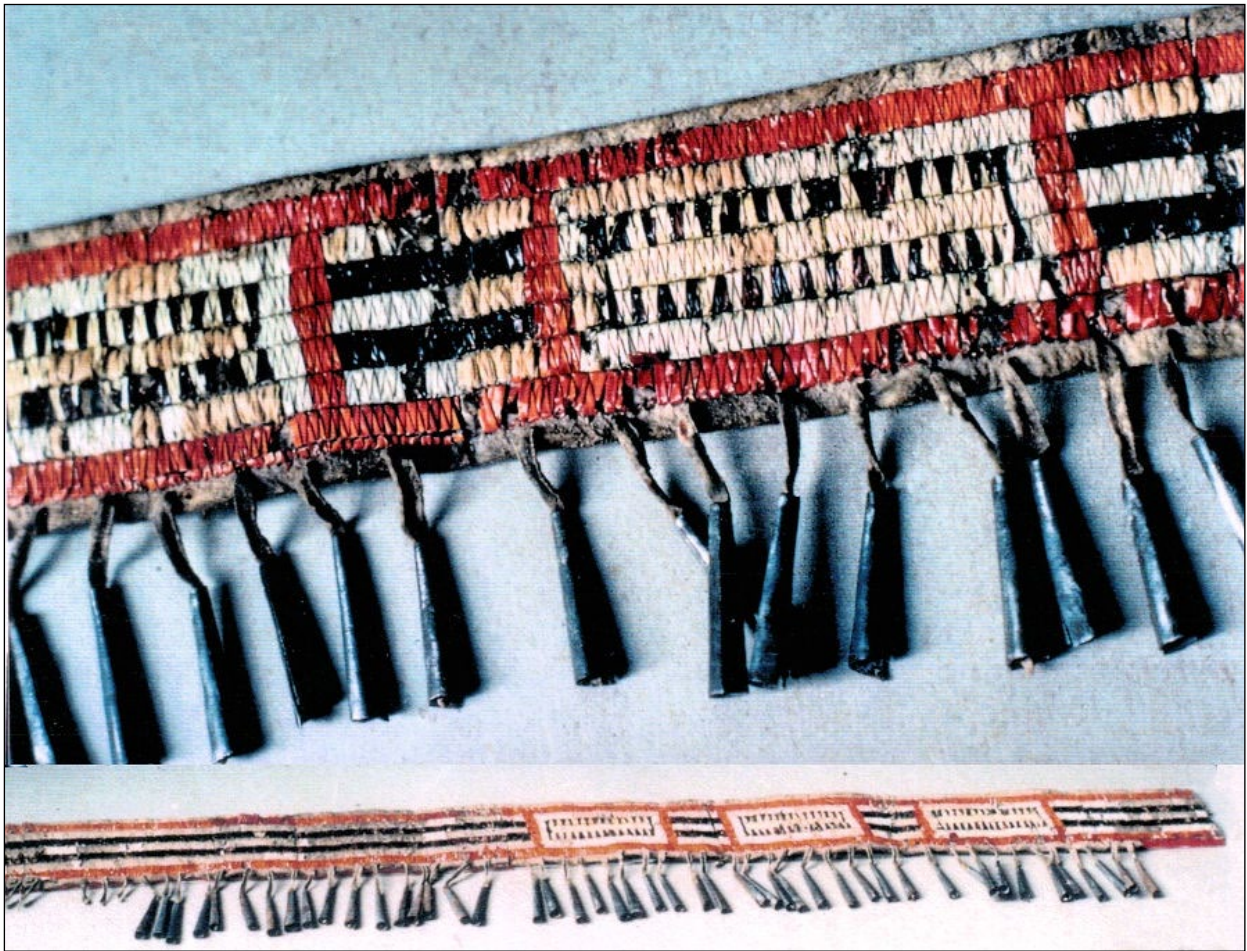
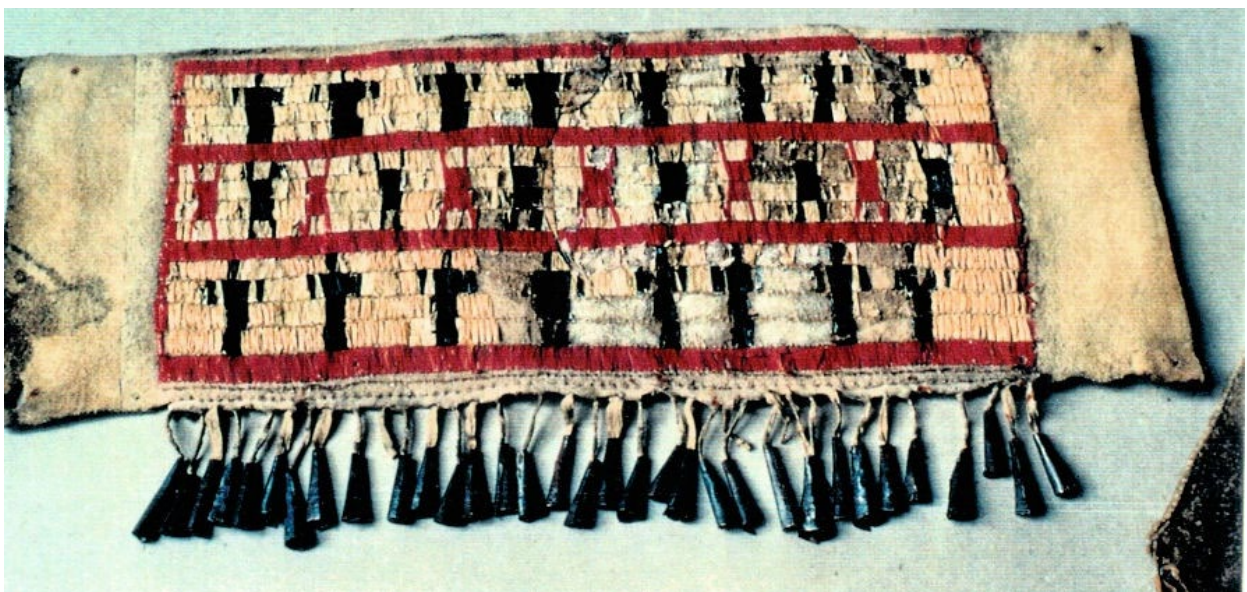


Fig. 1 - The cradleboard strap. (Belt in Vigorelli 1987a:98, a), Filottrano Collection. Photo by S. Busatta.

Fig. 2 - Decorated leather strip with thunderbirds securing the child to the cradleboard (Belt in Vigorelli 1987a:100, e), Filottrano Collection. Photo by S. Busatta



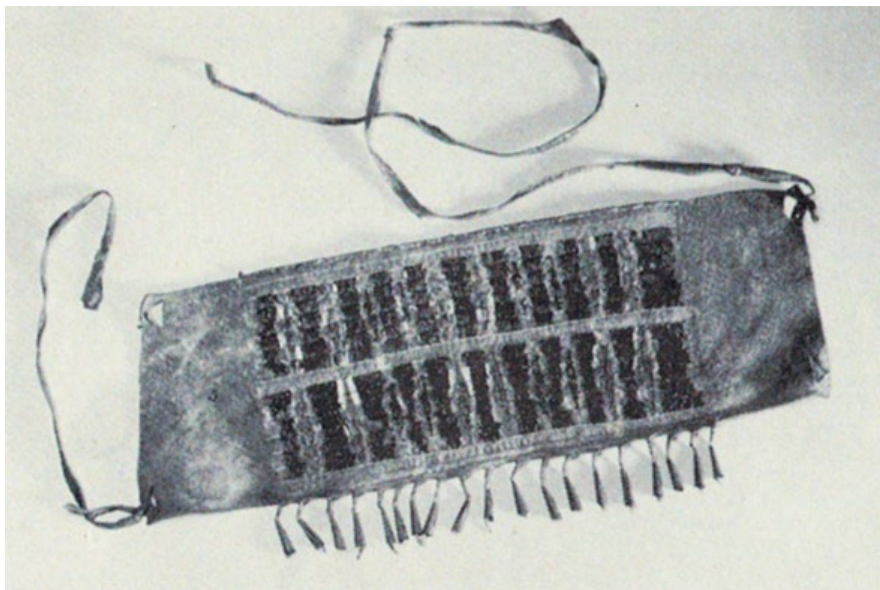


Fig. 3 - Decorated leather strip securing the child to the cradleboard (e. 12/35 wrap-around belt in Vigorelli 1987b:28,91, no. 12). E. Caffi, Bergamo.



Fig. 4 - The same decorated leather strip securing the child to the cradleboard in the glass case (Bergamonews.it Jan. 13, 20). E. Caffi, Bergamo.

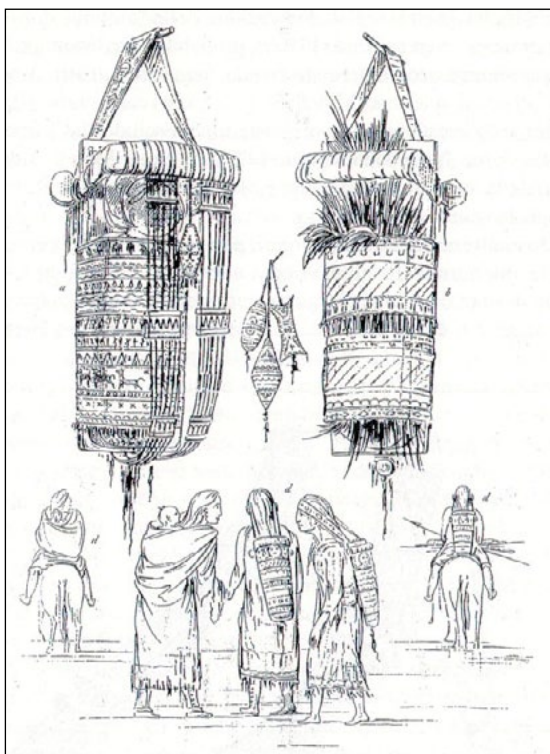


Fig. 5. - (Left) Sioux cradles. George Catlin (1973 vol. 2, p. 132, fig. 232).

Fig. 6. - (Right) Eastern Sioux cradleboard, cat. n°. E 27,984. Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass. (N. Feder 1982).



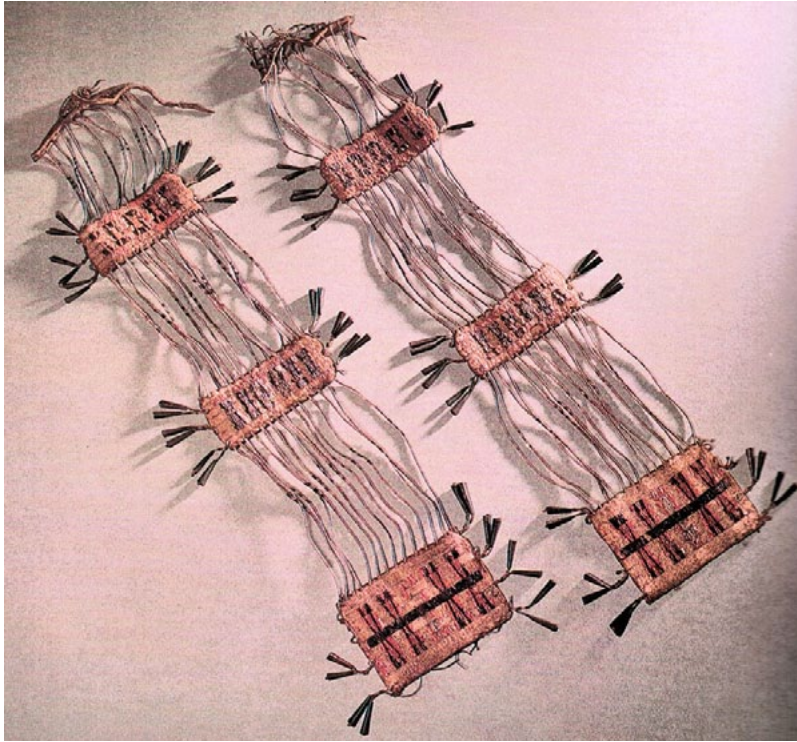


Fig. 7 - Decorations for cradle, at. n. 15 of Bergamo (Vigorelli 1987:78) E. Caffi, Bergamo. Photo by F. Zaina

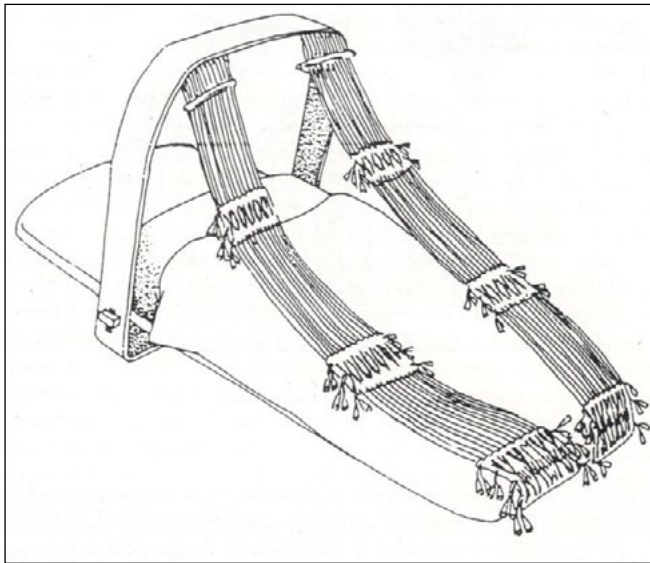


Fig. 8 - Decorations for cradle, cat. n. 15 of Bergamo (Vigorelli 1987:43). Drawing by M. Guerra.