

# COLLEZIONE STRADA THE EXHIBITION



DIREZIONE  
REGIONALE  
MUSEI  
LOMBARDIA

MUSEO  
ARCHEOLOGICO  
NAZIONALE DELLA  
LOMELLINA



## **A PASSIONATE COLLECTOR**

The life of the nobleman Antonio Strada (1904-1968) and the history of his collection have at their core the Visconti Castle of Scaldasole, which became part of the family's property, along with large arable fields, in the early XIX century. To follow the family farming business, Antonio chose to study agronomics, graduating in Milan in 1928. From his close contact with the surrounding land, which, by the end of the XIX century, had already handed finds back, his passion for archaeology and interest in the study of artifacts began. He had thus the idea of increasing the small archaeological collection present in the castle not only thanks to what was found, but with a more ambitious project: buying artifacts from other collections that had developed in the area in the past, avoiding in this way their dispersion on antiquities market. The peculiar features of his collection, from the beginning, were two: having precise boundaries - the antiquities of Lomellina - and combining the rescue or purchase of artifacts with their study, documented by manuscripts kept in the castle, still precious today to reconstruct the location and origin of the pieces.

## **ACQUIRE FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL**

Note to scholars, especially after the 1964 exhibition held in Milan, the Strada Collection was acknowledged of exceptional interest by the Ministry of Culture in 1999. Law in these cases allows a forced acquisition to the State, agreeing on a just compensation with the heirs, in order to ensure not only an extended use that a private residence cannot guarantee, but also constant effectiveness and vigilant protection. The purchase, concluded in 2022, required the identification of a suitable location. The happy choice of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale della Lomellina is linked to what is exposed, in fact the collection is perfectly inserted in the museum itinerary, completing it and rediscovering a territorial and historical contextualization. The exhibition becomes in this way a chance to give back to the public finds that, thanks to their restoration, have a full legibility, allowing new remarks about their past "life".

## **A COLLECTION OF COLLECTIONS**

A collection of collections with a geographic homogeneity: this is what makes the Strada Collection important.

The first group comes from the Strada's family because at the end of 1800 a dozen of objects, found in the Scaldasole's properties, were preserved in the castle, while the purchase of groups of objects or whole collections of local antiquities date back to the second postwar period onwards. Among these collections, the Steffanini's one stands out, with over 160 objects coming from the area of Mortara. In this way, the Aristeas Cup, the core of the exhibition, has become part of the Strada Collection. The Volpi-Nigra collection follows with about 30 pieces, which includes some objects from Magna Graecia, beside finds from the Brelle of Lomello necropolis, excavated in 1887. The Pezza and the Besotri collections, always from the area of Mortara, are of smaller size. Single pieces complete the set, like the Etruscan chalice of the Pavian collector Brambilla, or objects received as a gift or trade, as collectors used to do. False objects or of doubtful antiquity, as it often happens, are also present. The period covered is very broad, from prehistoric times to the Renaissance. Most of the objects date back to the late Celtic period, 2nd-1st century BC, and the early Roman imperial age, 1st-2nd century AD.

It can be assumed that almost all the artifacts, just because they are often intact, come from burials. Observing them, it can be noticed that materials and shapes - ranging from common use ceramics to the most refined one, from glass to metal, from pottery to utensils to ornamental objects - correspond to those found in the settlements and graveyard sites of Lomellina: all this creates a significant dialogue with what is displayed.

LA CERAMICA: DALLA TRADIZIONE  
LOCALE ALLA ROMANIZZAZIONE

LA CERAMICA: TRE SECOLI DI  
STORIA DEL "SERVIZIO BELLO"

ELEGANZA E TRASPARENZA PER CIBO  
E BELLEZZA

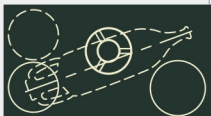
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LE LUCERNE, DALLA LOMELLINA  
ALL'AFRICA, TRA VERO E FALSO

LA CERAMICA COMUNE: LE OLPI

LA CERAMICA GREZZA: COMUNE MA FUNZIONALE

COPPA  
ARISTEAS



DALLA CASA ALLE TOMBE:  
OGGETTI IN METALLO E TERRACOTTA

DALLA PREISTORIA LOMELLINA  
ALLA MAGNA GRECIA

## 10 OBJECTS NOT TO BE MISSED OF THE “COLLECTION OF COLLECTIONS”

Thirty centuries of history in over 260 finds: this is what makes the acquisition of the Strada Collection extraordinary.

Some objects show a particularly refined craftsmanship, while others are meant for daily use; some finds are one of a kind, while others, such as the oil lamps, are present with numerous items, often very similar. The meaning of a collection should not be sought in the quality of the choices of who, over time, has created it, but in its entirety, in its preservation from dispersion.

We could say that each collection is the portrait of the collector, his passion in the mirror. In the exhibition, the displays are equipped with an explanation, which wishes to accompany the visit. At the same time, the curators have selected ten objects “not to be missed” to tell you something special, little-known or useful. It has not been an easy choice, just because each find has its own importance, alone or in relation to others; the selection does not imply a value hierarchy, but springs from the desire to offer some insights linked to ages certainly distant which, nonetheless, in the museum, are present in the public eye.



## **1. Axe, 12th cent. B.C.**

### **FROM PREHISTORIC LOMELLINA TO MAGNA GRAECIA**



Recognizable to anyone who observes it despite thousands of years having passed since its invention, the axe is one of the rare objects of protohistoric age, present in the collection. This tool was introduced during the Neolithic age, when humankind transitioned from a nomadic lifestyle, connected to hunting and harvesting, to a more settled lifestyle: villages were built, the soil was cultivated and cattle were raised bred. The axe allows deforestation, useful to open spaces for agriculture, and tree felling, whose wood was needed to build houses.

The earliest axes are made of stone, but with the inception of the metal age, the blade changes material: first copper, and then bronze. The axe in the Strada Collection, found under unknown circumstances, is a winged bronze axe, with "wings" - as the two parts slightly folded on the sides were called - fastened to a wooden handle that, being a perishable material, is not preserved.

## **2. Spinning top-shaped vase, 2nd half of the 1st cent. B.C.**

### **FINE POTTERY:**

### **THREE CENTURIES OF TABLEWARE HISTORY**



Coming from the Steffanini collection, acquired by Antonio Strada, this object takes the name of "spinning top" flagon for its shape, typical of the late Celtic culture. It is a container for wine - whose production in Lomellina is documented - which could not be missing on the table at that time.

Like many other containers for serving food, which can be seen in the showcase, it is made of smooth, fine pottery. The spinning-top shaped flagon, with its narrow mouth and wide body, persists for a very long time in this area - other vases instances can be seen in the museum - thus documenting the resistance of the Celtic tradition. As the Romanization of the territory progressed, it was replaced by the wine jug, much easier to handle, whose shape is the same as today's jugs.

### **3. Spindle whorls and weight, Roman age FROM HOUSES TO TOMBS: METAL AND TERRACOTTA OBJECTS**



As for many of the finds in the museum's collections, most of the artefacts were found in tombs. Grave goods bring back customs and traditions of the time, because the work tools that had accompanied people in life followed them into the realm of the deceased. This is the case for the disc-shaped spindle whorls and for the loom weights - of which a truncated pyramid shape specimen is present in the collection - often found in feminine funerary sets, since spinning and weaving were exclusively feminine activities. These objects, made of clay, some of which decorated with stamps or engravings, document the continuity of the shape through millennia, because the spinning technique remained unchanged. Placed in the lower part of the spindle, a tool similar to a stick, the spindle whorl would give the rotation needed to spin wool or hemp, in order to then weave it while the weight, tied to the ends of the threads on the frame, held them taut.

### **4. Specchio, I-II secolo d.C.**

#### **DALLE CASE ALLE TOMBE: OGGETTI IN METALLO E TERRACOTTA**



This round bronze mirror, decorated with two concentric circles and round holes along the edge, comes once again from a feminine funerary set. The undecorated surface, thoroughly polished, worked as a mirror reflecting the face. In the afterlife the presence of daily objects had a reassuring value; while the weaving instruments celebrate an industrious time, the grooming ones seem to highlight the body care, not only for women but also for men. Metal finds are always precious; their presence in archaeological contexts is rare because metals were often reused. As previously mentioned in the case of the axe, the handle, which could be made of bone, wood, or even bronze, has been lost.

### **5. Oil Lamp, 2nd cent. A.D. - False Oil Lamp, late 19th - early 20th century A.D.**

#### **THE OIL LAMP: FROM LOMELLINA TO AFRICA, BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE**



Lamps were an essential object in everyday life: they were used to illuminate streets, shops and domestic spaces at night; they also had a religious use as an auspicious object. Their presence is frequent in grave goods because a flame, a symbol of life, would have acted as a guide to the deceased in the realm of the dead. Already widespread in



the 3rd century B.C., they could be made of clay - the most common - or of metal - more expensive and for this reason less common. The first is a lamp with a short, round nozzle: we recognize the reservoir, into which fuel oil was poured through a small opening in the upper disc, the nozzle from which the wick came out, and a small handle, useful to manipulate it. In its apparent simplicity, however, it has an important feature: on the bottom, it bears the name of the maker, Caius Iunius Draco, active in the 3rd century A.D. in Tunisia: therefore, it testifies the intensive trades which, through the Mediterranean, connected Northern Africa and Italy. The second, more elaborate and refined lamp, is not authentic. The disc reproducing a coin, with the emperor's head framed by an inscription, and the decoration of the shoulder (the part surrounding the disc) are elements not found in authentic oil lamps. What was this lamp, then? It is possible that it was a souvenir for travelers or tourists, bought in good faith by Antonio Strada, in the belief that it was an original. Yet, it is valuable nonetheless: it bears witness to the evolution of knowledge, and to the importance of studying - not only preserving and displaying - each find.

## **6. Coppa di Aristeas. Secondo quarto del I secolo d.C. LA COPPA DI ARISTEAS**



The fame of this fine light green two-handled glass cup is due to its extraordinary state of preservation and to the presence of the author's signature on a "tabella ansata" (tablet with dovetail handles). The Greek inscription "APICTEAC EΠOIEI" (Aristeas made) celebrates the skill of the artist, to whom four other signed but not intact cups can be attributed. Who was Aristeas? Of him, it is known that he probably came from Cyprus, because in one cup he signs himself as "Kyprios" (Cypriot). Stating the place of origin seems to suggest that he later moved to the Middle East, from where come other artefacts signed by his contemporary, Ennion, documented in the area of Pavia and in nearby Piedmont, thus testifying the intensive commercial trades in the early imperial age. The cup invites to a slow observation in order to grasp the elements that make it so precious. Made by the technique of blow molding using a four-parts mold - three for the top and one for the bottom - the cup imitates silverware items, popular at the time. Its decoration, on three horizontal bands, has refined vegetal motifs in the center, branching off from the "tabella ansata" with the signature: to the right there are acanthus scrolls, with two birds in the act of pecking; to the left vine shoots are unwinding. Formerly belonging to the Steffanini Collection, although nothing is known about the circumstances of its discovery, the cup was most likely part of the grave goods of a wealthy person, which preserved it in perfect condition.

## **7. Spherical ointment jar (perfume bottle), 1st century A.D.**

### **ELEGANCE AND TRANSPARENCY FOR FOOD AND BEAUTY**



The ointment jar, or perfume bottle, is a container for perfumes, ointments, or cosmetic powders. It was made of clay or glass and could not be missing from the female vanity set. The National Archaeological Museum of Lomellina has a dove as its symbol because this bird, sacred to Venus, lends its shape to numerous perfume bottles, widespread in the area and well documented in the museum rooms. In the Strada Collection, however, there are balsamaria with different shapes: this is one of the most refined. The spherical shape - widespread in the territories of the Empire and present in Lomellina - is made by blowing the glass and subsequently decorating it with a thread of white glass, which wraps in a spiral around the body of the container. The small opening, as can be seen on a closer look, is broken. Some perfume bottles, in fact, had a movable cap, while others, like this one, were similar to today's disposable vials: once filled, they were sealed with molten glass, so the top had to be cracked open and the content was used in a short time. How to keep a spherical shape in balance? Recent finds suggest the existence of small "cages" either of metal or of perishable material, so that they could be hung or supported.

## **8. Pyriform jug, mid-1st century A.D.**

### **ELEGANCE AND TRANSPARENCY FOR FOOD AND BEAUTY**



As well displayed in the exhibition, glass ware is the strong point of the Strada Collection for the value, the rarity of some pieces, and for its quantity. The jug, from the 1st century AD, a period of widespread diffusion of glass, was used to serve drinks at the table, as glass guaranteed the perfect preservation of liquids. The craftsmanship of this jar is elegant: it refers to similar pottery items, and is defined pyriform due to the pear-shaped body; the handle, tripartite, with white glass veinings, was applied later. The intense amber color is accentuated by the contrast with the decoration, created by applying white glass grains to the vitreous mass, subsequently blown; this technique causes the white spots to be irregular.

## 9. Cut amphora

### AMPHORAE IN THE ROMAN WORLD, ONE CONTAINER FOR MANY USES



In ancient times, these containers had a highly functional shape; the body was capacious, the sturdy handles allowed to lift them with ease, the bottom with an elongated peduncle – the foot – facilitated its stowage in ships. Amphorae are perhaps the best-known finds, due to the numerous specimens preserved. Perhaps, however, a cut amphora is not so common to see, or it does not make the eye linger, while it deserves attention. Amphorae were "disposable" containers, so, once empty, they could be reused in various ways: buried to reclaim marshy land, used in the masonry of vaults and domes as material for construction, but also funerary use was not uncommon. This amphora had been cut to contain the ashes of a deceased, probably covered by a tile first and then buried. There is another use of amphoras, also linked to burials: children were buried, not cremated: their little bodies were always placed in amphoras, in this case cut lengthwise, almost like cradles, and then the two halves were rematched.

## 10. Olla (cooking pot) 1st half of the 1st cent. A.D.

### COMMON BUT SPECIAL: POTTERY



From the Steffanini Collection, bought by Antonio Strada, this coarse ware pot takes the name of "olla". It was an object that was present in every home, similar to a modern pot, used to store food, or to cook liquid (soups) or semi-liquid foods, especially puls (wheat polenta). Its use on the fire was allowed by the presence of large inclusions, often quartz, in the clay fabric, necessary to ensure the resistance to the thermal shock and impact. The olla, however, could also be used as a cinerary urn, to collect the ashes and remains of the deceased. The characteristic shape of the rim, slightly curved outwards, may suggest that it could be used to hold a rope, straw or hemp, which held the lid firmly.

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## **LA COLLEZIONE STRADA 10 febbraio – 4 dicembre 2023**

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