

Domingo de Betanzos' Gifts to Pope Clement VII in 1532-1533: Tracking the Early History of Some Mexican Objects and Codices in Italy

Los obsequios de Domingo de Betanzos al papa Clemente VII en 1532-1533: siguiendo la historia de algunos objetos y códices mexicanos en Italia

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ABSTRACT In this article we identify the Dominican Domingo de Betanzos as the anonymous bearer of a rich gift of Mexican objects and codices offered in Bologna to Pope Clement VII (1533), as recorded in the *Historie di Bologna* (1548) of the Bolognese Dominican Leandro Alberti. Joining this information with additional descriptions of another gift that Betanzos had given to the Pope the previous year in Rome, we attempt to track the history of some outstanding ancient Mexican objects and codices that pertained to Italian collections, museums and libraries during 16th and 17th centuries.

KEYWORDS European Collections, Mesoamerican Codices, Domingo de Betanzos

RESUMEN En el presente artículo identificamos al dominico Domingo de Betanzos como el portador anónimo de un rico obsequio de objetos y códices mexicanos entregado en Bolonia al papa Clemente VII (1533), tal como lo registró en su *Historia de Bolonia* (1548) el dominico boloñés Leandro Alberti. Enriqueciendo esta información con descripciones adicionales de otros regalos que Betanzos entregó al papa previamente en Roma, intentamos seguir la historia de algunos excepcionales objetos y códices prehispánicos que pertenecieron a colecciones, museos y bibliotecas italianas durante los siglos XVI y XVII.

PALABRAS CLAVE Coleccionismo europeo, códices mesoamericanos, Domingo de Betanzos

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THE TWO MEXICAN GIFTS TO POPE CLEMENT VII

In a recent paper (Laurencich Minelli 2012), the senior author discussed the importance of a passage wrote by the Bolognese Dominican Leandro Alberti in his historical work *Historie di Bologna* (1548). The text, whose relevance for the early Bolognese history of *Codex Cospi* had been stressed by Massimo Donattini (2008) in an article unnoticed by Mesoamericanist scholars,¹ describes a gift that a Dominican friar named “Domingo” coming from the “New Indies” brought to Clement VII (Giulio de’ Medici) when the Pope went to Bologna to meet the Emperor Charles V in 1532-1533. The passage is so interesting that it is worth repeating in its entirety:

We arrive then to the month of March, on day 3rd [1533], when the Spanish Brother Domingo of the Order of Preachers, who was coming from the New Indies, that is from the New World, as it was called, paid a visit to the Pope and offered him many things brought from

¹ The relevance of Alberti’s text was first noted various years ago by the late Gina Fasoli who pointed it out to Laura Laurencich Minelli, who began working on it but, due to other ongoing research, never published her results. Massimo Donattini worked independently on the same text.

there. Among them there were two coverlets made and weaved out of blue, green, black, yellow parrot-feathers, which looked like velvet. Hence it seems to recognize what is said in the Scriptures about the God's shrine which is recommended to be embellished with feather materials. Afterwards he gave the Pope stoles, maniples and granite textiles for chemises made in a similar way and gracefully worked with the said feathers, as well as other ornaments for priests. He also presented him with some nicely painted books that looked like hieroglyphs by which they understand each other as we do by letters. Afterwards he gave him some very thick masks furnished with turquoises, through which he said the demons were speaking to those peoples. Then a two fingers-wide and two ounces-long knife made of yellow stone with the handle entirely covered by turquoises. Then some stone knives that cut like razors, which they used for shaving. By these knives we knew the kind of those knives of which the Bible speaks when the Lord says: "Make me the stone knives to circumcise". He also presented him with a piece of extremely fine alabaster worked in the likeness of a small hill above which was a half foot-high cross made of one single piece of chalcedony very nicely worked, with many pieces of chalcedony as ornaments on it. Many other similar objects he presented to the Pope which very much pleased him and his retainers. Among these things, I received some books, knives, and the big knife used to kill men to sacrifice them to their idols, which I gave to Mr. Giovanni Achillino to decorate his museum together with a book and a stone knife similar to a razor.²

2 "Entrasi di poi nel mese di marzo alli 3 di cui s' appresentò al pontefice frate Domenico spagnuolo dell' ordine dei predicatori, che venea dalle Nuove indie ovvero dal Mundo Nuovo, come se diceva, et presentogli molte cose d'indi portate. Et tra l'altra due coperte da letto fatte et tessute di pene di papagalli di diversi colori, cioè azuri, verde, negro, giale talmente lavorate che pareano di veluto. Onde parvi di conoscere quel che habbiano nella scrittura descrivendo l' apparato del tabernacolo de Iddio ove comandava che opere plumario se dovesse ornare. Poscia vi diede stolle, manipuli et granite da camice fatte similmente et degnamente lavorate di dette penne, con altri ornamenti da sacerdoti. Anche li presentò alcuni libri molto ben dipinti che pareano figure hieroglifici, per le quali intendevansi fra loro, come noi facciamo per le lettere. Poscia li diede alcune maschere molto grosse fornite di torchine, per le quali diceva parlavano li demoni a quei popoli. Poi un cortelo di pietra giala largo due dita et lungo da due onze, col manico tutto coperto

As discussed in detail by L. Laurencich Minelli (2012), it is clear that Alberti's text is of primary importance to shed light on the early arrival in Italy of some of the outstanding Mexican objects whose history is intertwined with that of Bolognese collectionism. Foremost among these objects are the *Codex Cospi* and the turquoise masks and knives today housed in the Pigorini Museum in Rome. In order to better understand the relevance of the aforementioned passage and to put it in a wider meaningful context, it is first necessary to identify the main character of the story: Who is "the Spanish Brother Domingo of the Order of Preachers, who was coming from the New Indies"?

Despite the fact that Alberti wrote only his first name, an analysis of the historical chronicles of the Dominican order in Mexico allows the identification of the mysterious friar as Domingo de Betanzos (1480-1549), founder of the Dominican Order in New Spain and one of the most renown and controversial characters of 16th century Mexico.³ Sent to Rome in order to obtain the independence of the Mexican friars from the Santa Cruz Province of Hispaniola, Betanzos left Guatemala, where

di torchini. Poi alquanti coltelli di pietra che tagliavano come rasori, per li quali si radevano. Et per tali coltelli, se conobbe di che sorte fussero quelli coltelli deli quali parla la Bibbia quando dice il signore 'Fami li coltelli di pietra da circoncidere'. Altresi presentoli un pezzo di finissimo alabastro lavorato a simiglianza di un piccolo monte sopra lo quale era posto una croce alta circa un mezzo piede di calcidonio d' un pezzo molto bella e ben lavorata, con alquanti pezzi di calcidonio in quella posti per ornamento. Molte altre cose simili vi presentò, che il pontefice n' ebbe molto piacere con li circostanti. Dela quale cose io ne hebbe alcuni libri, coltelli, co' il coltello grande co il quale uccidevano gli huomini facendone sacrificio alli suoi idoli, lo quale io diedi con un libro et con un cor-telo di pietra a simiglianza di ratorio a meser Giovanni Achilino per ornamento del suo studio" (Alberti [1548] 2006: 629-630) (our translation).

³ Arrived in Mexico in 1526 with a group of friars led by Tomás Ortíz, Betanzos soon became the leader of the small group that survived diseases and defections; in the following three years, after the arrival of a new group of friars led by Vicente de Santamaría who was elected *Vicario general*, Domingo de Betanzos and Vicente de Santa María organized the Dominican presence in the area of Mexico City as well as the Order's expansion in the southern part of the Mexico basin, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Guatemala, where Betanzos himself voyaged in 1529. Among the many publications on Betanzos' life and works, besides the Dominican chronicles by authors such as Agustín Dávila Padilla, Antonio de Remesal, Juan Bautista Méndez, Juan José de la Cruz y Moya, and the anonymous writer of the *Isagoge histórica...*, see Bandelier 1913; Carreño 1924, 1962; Trueba 1955; Rodríguez Cabal 1934; Ulloa 1977; Robles Sierra 1990; Fernández Rodríguez 1994; Jay 2002; Tinajero 2009.

he was working as a missionary, at the beginning of the month of December of 1530 and arrived in Mexico on February 24th 1531 (Dávila Padilla 1596: 67; Trueba 1955: 39; Fernández Rodríguez 1994: 142); then, after spending some time in Mexico City, he travelled to Veracruz where, in March of the same year, he sailed to Europe together with Brother Diego Marín.⁴ The two friars arrived in Sanlúcar de Barrameda and then walked to Seville, where they started the long route to Rome. Describing with a clearly apologetic flavour the poor and almost ascetic conditions in which Betanzos travelled, the Dominican chronicler Agustín Dávila Padilla stated that:

La Provincia le dió algunas cosas de la tierra, que se estiman en las apartadas y remotas, para que las presentase al summo Pontífice, en reconocimiento de obediencia: como fueron algunas imágenes de pluma, y algunas piedras medicinales, que se hallaban por despojos temporales, en los ídolos que los Indios adoravan: y aún estas cosas no quiso el santo llevar consigo, sino que las entregó en Sevilla á un mercader que iba á Roma, por llevar él con el mayor descuido de todas las cosas, mayor cuidado de Dios (Dávila Padilla 1596: 69).

After a long detour to Marseille to honour Maria Magdalene's cave, Betanzos and Marín embarked to Naples, in order to meet the General of the Dominican Order, Pablo Butigela. Seriously ill, the General died on October 9th 1531, some time after having met the two friars. Betanzos and Marín then waited some months in various Italian convents until May 19th 1532, when the next *Capitolo Generale* was held at the Minerva Convent, in Rome. The *Capitolo* confirmed what the new General Juan de Fenario had already promised to Betanzos, that is the creation of the new, independent Dominican province of Santiago de México. After the *Capitolo Generale*, Betanzos met Pope Clement VII in Rome. In his description of the meeting, Dávila Padilla recorded Betanzos' words:

⁴ Antonio de Remesal (1988: 74-76) states that Betanzos could not have left on March and that he might have probably embarked at the end of July (see Ulloa 1977: 114-115).

para que Vuestra Santidad vea algunas cosas de las muchas de aquella tierra, envía mi Provincia con su pobreza esta pequeña muestra, para que lo sea mas de obediencia filial, que de valor ni de riqueza. Sacó entonces algunas imagenes de plumas muy bien labradas, que no solamente regalaban con sus visos, pero que admiraban con su composición, pues una a una habían sido assentadas todas aquella pequeñitas plumas, dejando después una obra tan maravillosa y bien compuesta. Lo que mas admiró al Pontifice y a los Cardenales, fue una mitra de pluma maravillosamente obrada, que avia sido de un sacerdote de los idolos, y otra hecha de pedreria, de turquesas y esmeraldas. Sacaron tambien algunos instrumentos con que los idolatras sacrificavan hombres al demonio; y en particular unas navajas de dos filos muy resplandecientes y vistosas, y mucho mas agudas y penetrantes con estraña subtileza. Huvo tambien algunas piezas de plumas del ropaje sacerdotal Indiano, que dezian con la mitra (Dávila Padilla 1596: 73-74).

Dávila Padilla added that, having obtained the confirmation of the decisions of the *Capitolo Generale*, which the Pope later officially confirmed with the bulla *Pastoralis Officii* on July 11th 1532⁵ (Carreño 1962: 165; Larios Ramos 1988: 143; Fernández Rodríguez 1994: 146-147), Betanzos also received one hundred ducats that he used to pay the merchant who brought the gift from Seville to Rome (Dávila Padilla 1596: 75). Interestingly, Dávila Padilla also stated that Betanzos later met the Pope in other instances (“Despidióse del Summo Pontífice aquella vez, aunque le vio otras”, Dávila Padilla 1596: 74), but did not give any detail of these subsequent encounters before describing Betanzos sailing back to Mexico, where he arrived in 1534.⁶

Despite the fact that Dávila Padilla, whose chronicle was first published in 1596, did not describe the following meetings between Betanzos

⁵ Antonio de Remesal wrongly dates the *Pastoralis Officii* as July 2nd 1532 (Remesal 1988: I, 84).

⁶ A more synthetic description of the same events, repeating word by word the second Dávila Padilla’s description of the gift, was given by Juan Bautista Méndez in 1685 (Méndez 1993: 28, 40-43).

and Clement VII, thus not mentioning any meeting in Bologna, interesting clues can be found in later Dominican chronicles. In his chronicle completed in 1619, Antonio de Remesal, although describing very briefly the first meeting in Rome (without any mention of the gift), stated that Betanzos was unsatisfied by the long duration of the prelates' charges as defined in the *Pastoralis Officii* and that he informed the Pope of his doubts, so that the Pope reduced the durations in a *bulia* emitted in Bologna on March 8th, 1533 (Remesal 1988: 84); even if Remesal did not explicitly state that Betanzos went to Bologna, the congruence of the dates with Alberti's narrative –describing the meeting in Bologna on March 3rd– is quite obvious.

More interestingly, Juan Bautista Méndez later explicitly mentioned Betanzos' travel to Bologna in his 1689 chronicle, where he described both meetings with the Pope. The 1532 one, in Rome, is described with the very same words of Dávila Padilla (Méndez 1993: 39-40), while the 1533 one is only briefly but clearly mentioned with the words “llegó su Santidad a la ciudad de Bolonia, donde visitándolo el V. Betanzos alcanzó nuevas gracias para la provincia, que se contienen en la bula siguiente”, then copying the whole text of the March 8th 1533 *bulia* but making no mention of a second gift (Méndez 1993: 45-47). More than half a century later in 1756-1757, Juan José de la Cruz y Moya described in his chronicle the meeting between Betanzos and the Pope in Rome simply paraphrasing Dávila Padilla (Cruz y Moya 1954: t. I, 262), and he also described the meeting in Bologna (Cruz y Moya 1954: t. I, 270-275). The author, as Dávila Padilla before him, made no mention of a gift brought by Betanzos, but interestingly stated that it was in Bologna that Betanzos received the one hundred ducats from the Pope. It is not clear to us from which source Juan José de la Cruz y Moya drew this last information, but it is interesting because it suggests that Dávila Padilla could have synthesized in a single event those that had actually been two different meetings between Betanzos and Clement VII, as clearly stated in later chronicles.

Moreover, the cited Dominican texts imply that Betanzos gave two different gifts of Mexican items to the Pope. We cannot suppose that the items described by Alberti as composing the second gift could have been offered in Rome because Alberti describes in detail the daily events occurred

only in Bologna (and not in Rome); moreover, the comparison of the two presents' content confirms the existence of two different lots of items: as a matter of fact, apart from a possible overlapping between the descriptions of some knives and some minor featherworks, the two authors describe entirely different groups of Mexican items, suggesting that Betanzos had divided the materials brought from Mexico in different lots, offering them in different occasions to the Pope (and, maybe, to other persons he met in Italy).⁷

THE DISSEMINATION OF KNIVES, MASKS, FEATHERWORKS AND PRECIOUS STONES

The two lists of objects described by Dávila Padilla and Leandro Alberti may shed new light on the so far unclear origin of some outstanding Mesoamerican items housed in European museums. In various published works most of them are usually thought to derive from the various shipments of Mexican objects sent by Juan de Grijalva or Hernán Cortés, but a clear identification of the specific items with those listed in the shipments' inventories has always been difficult (Feest 1990; Heikamp 1972: 8). Despite this shortcoming, the objects whose Early European history is related with places somehow linked to the Haabsburg royal house (e.g. Vienna, Stuttgart, Braunschweig, Ambras, Bruges, Madrid) can be reasonably attributed to various shipments from Mexico or to gift exchanges involving the Spanish Court and the Church (Heikamp 1976; Feest 1985, 1990; Carmichael 1970: 35; Yaya 2008; Bujok 2009; Russo 2011).

⁷In order to easily compare the two gifts, we can divide the items into different categories. *Featherworks*: Dávila Padilla mentions feather images, a feather Native mitre and some feather pieces that matched with the mitre; on the other hand, Alberti speaks about two feather coverlets and some feather pieces as "stoles, manipules and granites". *Lithics*: Dávila Padilla mentions a Native mitre composed of emeralds and turquoises as well as some double-edged blades and "some tools used to sacrifice men to the Devil". Alberti, on his part speaks of some thick masks covered by turquoise mosaic, a yellow stone knife with a turquoise-covered handle, and an alabaster and chalcedony sculpture in the form of a mountain topped by a cross. *Codices*: Dávila Padilla did not mention any codex, while Alberti clearly describes various painted books.

On the other hand, the early history of many important objects shows a clear “Italian connection” whose relationship with the shipments to the Spanish court is, at best, elusive. Most of the Mexican objects that arrived in Early Modern Italy were in some way linked with the Medici family of Florence, whose interests in objects coming from the recently discovered Mexico has been the subject of a good deal of scholarly research (e.g. Heikamp 1972, 1976, 1982, 1998; Turpin 2006; Markey 2008; Keating and Markey 2011). Beside the sketchily recorded envoy of “un rico presente de piedras ricas e joyas de oro, y dos indios maestros de jugar el palo con los pies” received in April 1529 by Clement VII (Giulio de Medici) from Cortés’ ambassador Juan de Herrada or Juan de Rada (Díaz del Castillo 1991: 795-797)⁸ and the somewhat dubious early gift of *Codex Vindobonensis* by Manuel I of Portugal recorded in a late note (see below), the reception of Mexican items by the Medici family has usually been hypothetically attributed to later and unrecorded gifts exchanges related with events such as the 1539 marriage between Cosimo I de Medici and the Spanish princess Eleonora de Toledo (Markey 2008; Keating and Markey 2011: 288).⁹ In this context, it is obvious that Betanzos’ gifts to Clement VII in 1532-1533 represent the second earliest, and by far the best

⁸ Pope Clement VII has often been credited of having a specific interest on Mexican arts on the basis of a quote from Gonzalo de Illescas’ *Historia Pontifical y Católica* purportedly stating that the Pope wanted to “escudriñar los secretos de todas las artes Mexicanas” (e.g. Adelhofer 1963: 14; Heikamp 1972: 8-9). Unfortunately, as Aldo Albónico first noted (1997: 16), the quotation is wrong and the original Illescas’ text, actually saying “artes Mecánicas”, had nothing to do with Clement VII otherwise genuine interest in Mexican items, an interest he shared with most of his Medici family.

⁹ The Medici family’s close relationships with the Habsburg family from 1532 onward could also have been the reason for the early arrival of Mexican objects in Florence (Heikamp 1972: 10); nevertheless, it is important to stress that no documentary evidence of such early exchanges is available at present, since the previously known arrivals of objects from New Spain are mainly related with the later part of Cosimo’s dukedom, whose interest in the New World is well known and who – from the late 1560’s – was receiving shipments of American goods in the port of Leghorn (Heikamp 1972; Markey 2008: 67-110). The earliest recorded Mexican objects in Florence are to be probably sought among the 42 feather items appearing in a 1539 inventory of Cosimo’s collection, even if some of them were probably of Brazilian (Tupinamba) origin (Heikamp 1972: 34; Markey 2008: 89-90). A continuing interest in Mexican culture by the Medici family is confirmed by later events, as the acquisition of *Codex Florentinus* during Ferdinando’s dukedom (1587-1609) (cfr. Keating and Markey 2011: 291).

recorded, arrival of Mexican objects to a member of the Medici family; it is also the only one explicitly described as comprising knives, masks, featherworks and codices. In this perspective, it is important to stress that some of the items that Clement VII received from Betanzos could well have ended up not only in Bologna and Rome but also in Florence and, maybe, in other Italian places; we must also consider that some objects, beside those explicitly described as in possession of Leandro Alberti, could well have remained in Bologna if donated by the Pope to other individuals. Actually Bologna, with its important Early Modern collections,¹⁰ it is the city that beside Florence is most often associated with the early history of Mexican objects in Italy.

We will proceed now to an overview of the objects with a known Italian provenance, observing in some instances their possible association (with different degrees of reliability) with Betanzos' gifts. Even if such an attempt could appear a bit "outmoded" when compared with the recent fine-grained textual readings of early Modern inventories and lists of exotica (e.g. Turpin 2006; Markey 2008; Keating and Markey 2011; Russo 2011), we still think it is worth the effort in order to evaluate the impact that Betanzos' gifts could have had on early modern Italian collectionism of Mexican items and on the existing Mexican heritage in European museums. Part of this work, namely the one regarding those objects that were part of Bolognese collections, has already been published elsewhere by the senior author (Laurencich Minelli 2012) and therefore it will be only resumed and reconsidered here in light of some additional data.

Unfortunately, Dávila Padilla, while stating that "La Provincia le dió algunas cosas de la tierra", did not mention where Betanzos' gift was collected, information that would have facilitated the cultural attribution

10 During the second half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century Bologna had at least four well known encyclopaedic museums – each containing important Mesoamerican objects – which were assembled by Giovanni Achillini (1466-1538), Antonio Giganti (1535-1598), Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) and the Marquee Ferdinando Cospi (1609-1686): the four museums reflected the main components of Bolognese society of the time, that is the academic, the clerical, and the senatorial. For details on the history of Bolognese collection of American objects, see Heikamp 1976; Laurencich Minelli 1980, 1982, 1983, 1985, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2012; Laurencich Minelli and Filipetti 1983; Donattini 2008.

—and thus the identification— of the objects. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that, coming back from Guatemala to Mexico City, Betanzos went through Oaxaca and Puebla, following the *Camino Real* that run through Antequera, Izúcar, Huauhtla and Chalco: i.e. walking northward on the same route followed by the Dominicans on their southward expansion from Mexico City (Fernández Rodríguez 1994: 132; Ball and Brockington 1978: 109-111). Then, going from Mexico City to Veracruz, Betanzos should have passed through Puebla, whose Bishop was the Dominican Julián Garcés. Interestingly, the majority of the Mesoamerican objects which in our opinion could be in some way linked to Betanzos' gifts, are of clear Mixtec or Mixteca-Puebla cultural affiliation, a fact that could be a consequence of their origin from the regions where the Dominicans were operating in the years between 1528 and 1531 (Burgoa 1989: 45; Larios Ramos 1988; Pita Moreda 1988).

Leandro Alberti clearly states that he himself received “some books, some knives together with the big knife used to kill men to sacrifice them to their idols”, adding that he gave to Giovanni Achillini¹¹ the big knife, “a book and a stone knife similar to a razor”. It would be suggestive to identify the two Achillini's knives with the two later owned by Antonio Giganti,¹² who described them as “a stone sacrificial knife with a wooden

11 Giovanni Filoteo Achillini (1466-1538), an erudite, poet, and musician, brother of the famous philosopher and physician Alessandro, was Leandro Alberti's close friend, as witnessed by the fact that Alberti's work *Descrittione di tutta l'Italia et isole pertinenti ad essa* (1550) is opened by a poem by Giovanni Achillini himself. In the same work Alberti includes Giovanni and his son Clearco in a list of Bologna's antiques collectors, stating that “He was so fond of antiques [...] that perhaps in few places of Europe there were so many and such excellent antiques objects” (Alberti 1550: 299-300; Donattini 2008: 572-576).

12 Antonio Giganti, born in Fossombrone in 1535, since 1550 was secretary of Mons. Ludovico Beccadelli, following him in Venice and Ragusa (1555-1560), at the Pope court in Rome (1560-1561), at the Trento Council (1562-1563), as well as in his long stay in Florence (1563-1572). After Beccadelli's death, Giganti worked as secretary of the Bolognese Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (since 1580), moving to Rome with him in 1586. In this same year, before leaving for Rome, Giganti wrote the Index of his museum (whose first notices go back to the period of the Florentine stay). After Paleotti's death Giganti retired to Fossombrone where he died in 1598. It is interesting to note that when living in Bologna, Antonio Giganti inhabited a palace close to the one where Ulisse Aldrovandi was residing.

handle, one foot long” and a “stone razor” (Giganti 1984: 211, 233);¹³ their description closely matches Ulisses Aldrovandi’s two knives, a ceremonial one with a handle in the form of a raptorial bird and a smaller one (seemingly with an obsidian prismatic blade, which actually looks like a barber’s razor), depicted in his *Musaeum Metallicum* (Aldrovandi 1648: 156-157). Since Aldrovandi absorbed the Giganti collection between 1588 and 1597 (Aldrovandi 1648: 157, Laurencich Minelli 1982, 1983), it is probable that his two knives were those formerly owned by Giganti; unfortunately, these Giganti-Aldrovandi’s knives are today lost. If the “razor-like” knife matches Alberti’s description, the “big” one poses a length discrepancy¹⁴ that, unless in presence of a measuring error, makes the identification unlikely; moreover, neither Giganti’s description nor Aldrovandi’s engraving clearly show any mosaic on the wooden handle. In this sense, it is useful to remark here that Giganti worked as secretary of outstanding Bolognese individuals such as Monsignore Lodovico Beccadelli from 1550 to 1572 and Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti, from 1580 to 1597: when Beccadelli worked as tutor of Ferdinando I de Medici in Tuscany, between 1563 and 1572, Giganti lived with him and, both before and after Beccadelli’s death, he obtained many objects from his collection. It is unknown if the two Mexican knives were collected in this way but if this is the case, they could well have been obtained by Beccadelli from the Medici family while in Florence. Interestingly, the Medici family also possessed, at least since the 17th century, a knife whose description in an eighteenth-century inventory clearly shows that it was composed by an obsidian prismatic blade with a wooden handle covered in serpent skin (Heikamp 1976: 460, n. 20), that is, another “razor-like” knife.¹⁵

13 “Un coltello di pietra col manico di legno del mondo nuovo con il quale sacrificavano, lungo un piede in tutto” and “un rasoio di pietra” (Giganti 1984: 211, 233).

14 While Alberti described the knife as “two fingers-wide and two ounces-long”, Giganti wrote that his knife was “one foot-long”. A Bolognese ounce corresponded to the twelfth part of a foot (38 cm), that is approximately 3,16 cm. If Alberti’s knife had a visible blade of approximately 6,32 cm and a handle between 12 and 17 cm (approximate lengths of the known similar mosaic handles), its total length would have been between 18 and 24 cm, still too small to match the approx. 38 cm of Giganti’s knife.

15 Two “razor-like” Mexican knives with obsidian prismatic blades were also illustrated by the Neapolitan collector Ferrante Imperato in his *Dell’Historia Naturale* (1599, pag. 590);

Two other mosaic-covered knife handles today held in the Pigorini Museum were once part of the 17th century Bolognese collection of the Marquee Ferdinando Cospi: not being explicitly mentioned by Alberti in his personal lot, they could have been received independently from Alberti (see below). Both knives passed to the Pigorini Museum in Rome in 1878 (Pigorini 1885: 7).

A fourth mosaic-covered knife handle, in the form of an eagle warrior, is today held in the British Museum of London; once part of Henry Christie's collection, it had been purchased in 1859 from Mr. Bram Hertz, who stated that it originally came from a collection in Florence (Carmichael 1970: 34-37; McEwan et al. 2006: 86 n. 25). Given the formal and stylistic similarity with the knives owned by Aldrovandi and Cospi, a common provenance could be feasible.¹⁶

In sum, it is clear that most of the known sacrificial knives with mosaic-covered handles (as well as some "razor-like" ones) passed through Bologna, Florence, or both. In no case a positive firm identification with those described as part of the gifts to Clement VII is possible, nevertheless it is important to stress that Betanzos' Bolognese gift to an extremely important member of the Florentine family appears at least a reasonable explanation of the relationships linking the known knives and the two Italian cities.

Let's consider now the "some" turquoise masks that according to Alberti were given to the Pope in Bologna. For instance, various turquoise masks are known to have been in Italy during the 16th century. Two such masks were held in the Guardaroba Mediceo in Florence: a first one is recorded for the first time in the 1553 inventory, while the arrival of a second one (which had mother-of-pearl inlaid eyes and ivory teeth, said to be "in its black leather container") was recorded on March 9th, 1556. Both

it is not clear if Imperato saw the actual knives, described as "Indian knives made of flint or fossil glass", or copied them from a manuscript, maybe Antonio Recchi's one (Mottana 2010: 8-9).

¹⁶ It is worth remembering here that a fifth knife with mosaic-covered handle, possessed by Jacob Gaffarel in Mennes (France), was illustrated by Fortunio Liceti in his *Pyronarcha sive de fulminum natura* (1643: 123, 126; Pigorini 1885: 4; Heikamp 1976: 474); unfortunately, the knife is today lost and nothing is known about its provenance.

masks were then recorded in various later inventories (1564, 1640) until 1656, when one of the two was given to the Armory, whereas the other mask (the one with the leather container)¹⁷ continued to be recorded in later inventories of 1665, 1744, 1770, 1783 (Heikamp 1972: 34-35; 1982:127; Turpin 2006: 70-71; Yaya 2008, Keating and Markey 2011: 288-292). The absence of both masks in an earlier 1539 inventory suggests that also the first one (recorded as existing in 1553) entered the collection later than 1539; unfortunately, no information on their origin is given, so that we cannot know if their first recording in the collection's inventories coincided with their arrival in Italy or if they could have been previously held in some other Italian or Florentine collection.

The synthetic descriptions of the masks in the Medici inventories' entries have aroused a plethora of hypotheses regarding their identification with actual mosaic masks today held in European museums. On the basis of Luigi Pigorini's article of 1885, one of the masks today in the Pigorini Museum (the one with a human face emerging from animal jaws, with intertwined serpents on the forehead and a stepped fret nose ornament),¹⁸ acquired by the *Opificio delle Pietre Dure* of Florence in 1880 (Pigorini 1885: 5), has usually been identified with the 1556 Medici's mask.¹⁹ Nev-

17 In the most complete description, that is the one in the 1783 inventory, the mask is said to have "mother-of-pearl eyes, ivory teeth, and a small gold ring in the mouth, with six small turquoises and a very small garnet, [being the mask] partially broken, with its black leather container" (Heikamp 1972: 35). The golden ring with turquoises and garnet, only described from 1640 onward, was probably a later Italian addition, since garnet was not used in Pre-Hispanic Mexico; garnets, for example, were also added, probably in an Italian workshop, to the monkey head today in the British Museum (McEwan et al. 2006: 84-85). It is interesting to note that the descriptions of the golden ring (described in the 1640 inventory as a "small golden ring with a turquoise rosette") closely matches the lip plug represented in the Moctezuma's portrait of the Florentine Museo degli Argenti. The lip plug do not correspond to any known Aztec type, so that a relationship with the Florentine mask's rosette should be taken into consideration: Could it have been copied from the actual item in the Medici Guardaroba? This hypothesis is in clear contrast with the assumption that the portrait was painted in New Spain and with its tentative attribution by P. Escalante Gonzalbo (2004) to the Novo-Hispanic artist Antonio Rodríguez (1636-1691). This entangled problem surely deserves further studies.

18 The Mixteca-Puebla origin of this mask is confirmed by the almost identical wooden mask excavated in Santa Ana Teloxtoc cave, Puebla (cfr. Vargas 1989: 186).

19 Tiberini (1989; 146) wrongly mentions 1553 as the oldest inventory's entry concerning the mask; since in his 1885 article Pigorini clearly identified the Roman mask with the

ertheless, later unpublished Pigorini's writings cited by S. Tiberini (Tiberini 1989: 150) show that Pigorini (probably also motivated by legal problems) rehearsed from his previous identification, observing that the Roman mask does not have neither inlaid eyes and teeth nor a hole in the mouth where the golden ring could have been attached; he then suggested that the "warted" or Nanahuatzin mask, then in the Christie Collection and now in the British Museum, could have been a much better candidate, due to its inlaid eyes and teeth and –according to Pigorini– to the presence of a small hole in the mouth;²⁰ actually, the "warted" mask was acquired by Henry Christie from Bram Hertz, who said that it came from the same famous collection in Florence from where the eagle warrior knife also came (Carmichael 1970: 34, 37). W. Lehmann (1906: 321) later proposed that the other British Museum mask with two serpents intertwined on the nose and forehead could be identified with one of the Medici inventories (Carmichael 1970: 36), but the identification appears to be purely speculative; anyway, the mask was purchased in Paris from the Russian Demidoff princes, whose family had been living in Florence since 1824 (Heikamp 1976: 473), however, no direct link with the Medici collection can be established. It is clear that none of these masks –neither those described in the Guardaroba inventories, nor the abovementioned actual masks– can be firmly linked with Betanzos' gifts to Clement VII. The latter, nevertheless, should be considered as possible sources for masks included in the Guardaroba Mediceo only on a later date or dispersed in other Florentine collections.

A long-nosed and mosaic-covered mask was also part of the Bolognese collection of Ulisse Aldrovandi, who depicted it in his *Musaeum Metallicum* (Aldrovandi 1648: 550); in 1878 it passed in the collection of the Pigorini Museum in Rome (Pigorini 1885: 5). It has often been assumed that Aldrovandi obtained the mask from the Medici family,²¹ adding

one with the golden ring in the mouth, its recurrent association with the leather bag in the inventories implies that it was the one that arrived only in 1556.

²⁰ The British Museum mask has mother-of-pearl eyes and Strombus shell teeth, but no perforation in the mouth is mentioned in a recent detailed publication; interestingly, it was once broken on one side, as can be seen in a published photo of its rear side (McEwan et al. 2006).

²¹ According to this view, Aldrovandi could have received the mask in one of the mutual exchanges he had with Francesco and Ferdinando I de' Medici, when Dr. Ulisse's bo-

another element to the entangled problem of associating inventories' entries with actual items; it must be stressed, anyway, that no documentary evidence exists of such an exchange, which remains purely speculative. In light of the new information regarding the arrival of turquoise-covered masks in Bologna in 1533, we should now consider at least as reasonable (and even more "economic") the hypothesis that Aldrovandi's mask never left the city before entering his collection.

The Copenhagen National Museum houses today two other important mosaic-covered wooden objects, a "rain god" head with a tall headdress (Lehmann 1907; Saville 1922: pl. XXXI) and an alligator head with a human face in the jaws (Lehmann 1907; Saville 1922: pl. XXXIIb). According to L. Lèouzon Le Duc (1867, Tome III, p. 157-158; cit. in Saville 1922: 104), "L'une et l'autre ont été achetées à Rome, où l'on suppose qu'elles avaient été apportées de Mexico par un missionnaire". It would be tempting to identify that hypothetic missionary with Domingo de Betanzos, but nevertheless, at least for the moment, we must limit ourselves to note the Roman provenance of the two objects. A Roman origin is also known for the double-headed serpent held at the British Museum, purchased in 1894 from Lord Walsingham who received it from the Duchess Massimo di Rignano (1811-1899), member of what is said to be the most ancient Roman noble house (see below).²² Similarly, a Roman provenance is attested for the wooden bird head covered with mosaic of the Gotha Museum (Oppel 1896; Saville 1922: 81, pl. XXXIVb; Feest 1985: 239). According to the biography of Stefano Borgia written by Father Paolino di San

tanical work was patronized by the Medici Grand Dukes (Heikamp 1972: 14). It has been supposed by Pigorini and F. Soldi that an entry in the 1656 inventory of Guardaroba Mediceo, stating "an Indian tree's bark mask with turquoises given to Anton Francesco Tofani, keeper of the Armory, on August 31st", could record an envoy to the Armory of Bologna (Tiberini 1989: 146); we do not know on which basis Pigorini and Soldi identified the mentioned Armory with Bologna, since Anton Francesco Tofani is known to be a woodworker living in Florence and working for the Medici family in the second half of 16th century.

²² Interestingly, Heikamp (1976: 474-475) noted that in January 1891 Luigi Pigorini wrote to the State Counselor Giacomo Malvano asking him to induce the Duchess Massimo di Rignano to donate a mosaic Aztec "standard to the Roman museum"; such standard is obviously to be identified with the double-headed serpent today in the British Museum. Unfortunately for us Italians, the Duchess obviously decided otherwise.

Bartolomeo in 1805, the “classis mexicana” of his collection once included “many wooden and pottery images of idols, strange in form and appearance, and typical of Mexican people” (San Bartolomeo 1805: 44).²³ No direct links can be obviously established between the Copenhagen, London and Gotha objects, the Borgia collection, and Betanzos’ gifts, but the Roman provenance of such objects is anyway interesting in light of the following discussion concerning Codex Borgia (see below).

Two other mosaic objects at the British Museum are said to be of Italian origin: a small “monkey” head with European additions of shark teeth and precious stones, and a wooden shield. Both were once owned by Mr. Williams Adams, who affirmed that the shield came from Turin and the animal head from an unnamed place in northern Italy, probably Turin as well (Carmichael 1970: 35-36). As far as we know, no other data are available on their provenance, but given that Turin was since 1563 the seat of the house of Savoy, whose strict relationships with the house of Habsburg are well known;²⁴ a provenance through these noble families seems the most reasonable hypothesis.²⁵

Of Bolognese origin is also a gilded *atlatl*, today in the Pigorini Museum, that was donated by Valerio Zani (the same donor of the *Codex Cospi*) to the Aldrovandi Museum between 1665 and 1667, when the Museum was housed in Palazzo Pubblico (Heikamp 1976: 463-464). Two beautiful gilded wooden spearthrowers are also held at the Museum of Anthropology of Florence since 1902 (Laurencich Minelli 1993); they are supposed to have been in Italy for a long time and to proceed from the

23 “Multa lignea et testacea idolorum simulacra, forma et figura singulari, ac genti mexicana propria” (San Bartolomeo 1805: 44). G. Colini (1885: 324-325) identified three wooden objects (two masks and an anthropomorphic idol) in the Museo Borgiano as proceeding from that lot, but his identification was later challenged by H. Bischof, who stated that the three objects were of Colombian provenance (Bischof 1974).

24 The relationships between the two houses began under the Dukedom of Emanuele Filiberto (1553-1580); his son Carlo Emanuele I (Duke 1580-1630), married Catherine Michelle of Austria, daughter of Philip II, King of Spain.

25 It is worth noting that the shield was purchased by the British Museum in December 1866, a date that rules out the possibility that it came from the Zaverio Calpini collection, comprising the beautiful Aztec-Mixtec gold jewelry items today in the Museo Civico di Arte Antica of Turin. Calpini, in fact, moved from Mexico to Turin only in 1867; in 1876 he donated his Mesoamerican objects to the Museum.

Medici collections (Bushnell 1905), but there is no documentary evidence that could allow any serious hypothesis on their arrival in the city. A fourth gilded *atlatl* with its original shell rings (and with a decoration similar to one of the Florentine ones) was purchased by the Pigorini Museum in 1932 in Florence (Heikamp 1976: 473). Since neither Dávila-Padilla nor Alberti described any *atlatl* among the objects brought by Betanzos, no relationship can be proposed with this event, even if the presence of the four *atlatls* in Florence and Bologna (and, at least in this last case, in a quite early date) it is still worth noting.

Regarding the Mexican featherworks, Antonio Giganti (Laurencich Minelli 1984: 118, 120, c. 236r, c. 248r) owned in Bologna a mitre worked as a feather mosaic picture, “a feather out of a coverlet made in the Indie”, and a yellow cap²⁶, materials that then passed to the Aldrovandi collection (Laurencich Minelli 1984). Giganti himself stated that Cardinal Poggi had brought the mitre from Spain,²⁷ while the origin of the other items remains unknown. Similarly unknown is the origin of the shields with featherworks owned in Rome by Tommaso dei Cavalieri in the second half of 16th century and described by Aldrovandi (Heikamp 1976: 461). The provenance of several other featherworks whose history is linked with Italy –among which one formerly in a private collection in Germany– is also source of speculation (Heikamp 1972: pl. 22-23).

As early as 1539, the Guardaroba of Cosimo I de’ Medici also contained Mexican feather garments and artefacts (various kind of vestments, ten shields, two birds’ heads, and four flower bouquets) (Heikamp 1972: 11-12, 34). As summarized by D. Heikamp (1972: 15-18, 36), various featherworks were also in possession of Ferdinando de Medici, when he

26 “Un’ altra cosa simile [to a headdress] di penne gialle piccole fine, non so di qual uccello, messe insieme con altro artificio ma non è intiera” (Giganti 1984: 120, c. 248r).

27 “Una mitra di lavoro di piuma fatta al Mondo Nuovo: la portò il card. Poggio di Spagna. È intignata assai, pur si vede l’ artiicio e la vaghezza de’ colori” (Giganti 1984: 118, c. 248r). Giovanni Poggio acted as papal nuncio in Spain in 1554. Interestingly, it is to this same Giovanni Poggio that the historian Paolo Giovio, owner of a greenstone hearth received from Cortés and of a Mexican codex (see below), wrote in 1542 asking for an “idol from Temistitan” to be exhibited in his own museum (Markey 2008: 101-102); since Paolo Giovio also possessed two “feather coverlets” (Pavoni 1983: 15) it is reasonable to assume that he also received them from Cardinal Poggio.

was still a Cardinal in Rome (some of which he sent to his sister-in-law Bianca Capello in Florence), as well as when he became Grand Duke of Florence. Some of the Colonial featherworks are signed by Michoacán artists (Heikamp 1972: 16), but in most other cases the original provenance is unknown. Due to the lack of further data, the relationship that could link these featherworks with those described by both Dávila Padilla and Alberti in the two Betanzos' gifts remains purely speculative, even if the early presence of featherworks in Florence (1539) is worth to be noted.

A last group of items to be mentioned are few small semi-precious stone sculptures. Antonio Giganti also owned some "stone idols from the New World", later probably passed to Ulisse Aldrovandi who described them as "nine Indian idols" (Aldrovandi 1648: 540). Furthermore, at least three animal heads (one in amethyst and two in agate) were held in the Medici collection, being recorded in the 1553 inventory; the three heads—remarkably similar to analogous items today in Vienna—are still preserved in the Museum of Mineralogy in Florence (Heikamp 1972: 13-14, 35). Other semi-precious stone sculptures—namely, two Mixtec figurines and an Aztec head mounted in a copper frame today in the Museum of Ethnology of Florence (Heikamp 1972: 25-26, pl. 59-61)—were also part of the Medici collections, but their origin is unknown. The only small Mixtec greenstone idol whose history is partially known is the one that was part of Enrico Hillyer Giglioli's collection together with an obsidian mirror today at the Pigorini Museum. According to Bushnell (1906: 245), the other stone sculptures are said to have been part, around 1650, of the collection of Cardinal Guadagni in Florence: the information seems to be problematic, since the only Guadagni Cardinal we can identify is Giovanni Antonio (born 1674; Heikamp 1976: 473), Cardinal between 1731 and 1759, so that we should probably postdate the collection of almost a century; however, it is known that his ancestor Guglielmo Guadagni was a captain who had excellent relationships with Ferdinando de Medici, so that a Medici provenance for the Mexican objects of the collection is plausible. Other "Mexican idols" of clear Florentine origin were exhibited in the Botanic garden of Pisa created by Cosimo de Medici in 1544 (Schupbach 1985: 170; Tongiorgi Tomasi 1979: 24, 1980; Markey 2008: 80). Could some of these Bolognese and Florentine little stone sculptures

correspond to the “medicinal stones which were spoiled from the idols that the Indians used to adore” described by Dávila-Padilla as part of Betanzos’ gift? In absence of any firm evidence it is impossible to say, but the possibility should be at least taken into consideration²⁸.

THE EUROPEAN WANDERING OF THE PAINTED CODICES: SOME HYPOTHESIS

Among the most interesting information provided by Leandro Alberti’s *Historie* there is his mention of “some nicely painted books” given to Clement VII by Betanzos in 1533, “some” of which remained in the hands of the Bolognese Dominican who, in his turn, gave one of them to Giovanni Achillini. This is the first mention of Mexican codices in Bologna, clearly related with a slightly later one: in 1539, the erudite Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi from Pavia published a work where he stated to have seen in Bologna, in the hands of the “canonist Paleotti”,²⁹ a book covered by

28 Guilhem Olivier suggested (personal communication December 2012) that the words “medicinal stones” could rather refer to *bezoars*, or gastrointestinal masses, items that were highly priced among collectionists in XVI century Europe; the hypothesis is interesting in light of the medicinal qualities attributed to bezoars by Europeans. Concerning the Mexican stone sculptures, it can be interesting to remark here that a small mask carved in Mexican greenstone, mounted on a gilded copper frame, entered the Medici collections during Ferdinando II Dukedom (1620-1670) – most probably after his marriage with Vittoria della Rovere in 1634 – and is today held in the Museo degli Argenti (Heikamp 1972: 22, pl. 43; Markey 2008: 7).

29 The “canonist Paleotti” is probably to be identified with Galeazzo Paleotti, member of the Collegio dei Canonici of Bologna’s Cathedral between 1528 and 1549, when his brother Gabriele took his place after his death (Pasquali Alidosi 1616: 35). They were sons of Vincenzo Paleotti (dead 1498), who owned an important library that continued to be enriched in the first decades of 16th century and that finally passed to Gabriele (Prodi 1959: 52). Gabriele Paleotti was born in Bologna on October 4th, 1522; doctor in law in 1546, he was canonist of Bologna cathedral (1549), sat on the Roman tribunal of the Rota (1556), he was then canonist in the Trento council (1561), Cardinal and Bishop of Bologna (1565) and, in 1586, first Archbishop of Bologna; having renounced Bologna, he became bishop of Albano (1589) and then of Sabina for staying in Rome. According to his friend and contemporary Ulisse Aldrovandi (1599: 636), cardinal Paleotti had, in Bologna, a small encyclopaedic collection which dr. Ulisse admired very much for the high quality of the items. He died in Rome on July 23rd, 1597. He was friends with Aldrovandi whom he bestowed some items upon (i.e. the San Girolamo picture in feather mosaic that Paleotti had received from the Cardinal of Burgos, (Aldrovandi 1599: 636). On the life of Gabriele Paleotti, see Prodi 1967.

“*tygridis pelle*” (tiger skin) which was coming from “Indiae”; he added that the book was painted both on the obverse and on the reverse with figures of men, animals and things which were clarified by some sort of captions around them as well as on the edges,³⁰ “*quas ego literas omnino existimavi*” (“which I thought were real letters”); he also regretted that the canonist Paleotti did not allow him to copy the codex³¹ because he was very interested in studying that curious “alphabet” (Donattini 2008; Laurencich Minelli 2012). Even if Albonesi published his work in 1539, he probably saw the codex between 1534 and 1537, when he was preparing most of his work while living in Ferrara.

It is obvious that the presence of a Mexican codex in Bologna in 1539 could be related with Betanzos’ gift of 1533. Unfortunately, as with the objects discussed in the previous section, it is not easy to clearly identify the codices mentioned in historical sources with extant actual specimens. It is not clear if the codex owned by Paleotti was the same that Alberti gave to Achillini or if it could be a different codex brought by Betanzos, maybe one of those that remained in Alberti’s hands.

Codex Cospi is obviously the most likely candidate to have been part of Betanzos’ gift. According to a note written on its parchment cover, it was presented by the Bolognese Count Valerio Zani to Marquee Ferdinando Cospi on December 26th, 1665.³² Three different hypotheses about

30 “vidi ego proximis annis Bononiae in manibus cuiusdam canonici Paleoti, civis bononiensis, librum ex India advectum, tygridis pelle copertum, in quo variae hominum (et si bene Memini) aliarum quoque rerum, ac animalium figurae tantum depictae erant. Et in circuito seu limbo, ac illarum figurarum peripheria, notae quaedam, quas ego literas omnino existimavit, et si vir ille, alioque nobilis, libelli copiam ad horas non negasset, proculdubio Alphabetum exscripsissem [...]” (Albonesi 1539: c 198r-v).

31 Interestingly, Antonio Giganti’s inventory (1586) of his bolognese collection mentions two pages copied from a Mexican codex (“Duo fogli coloriti copiati [...] d’ un libro di quelli del Nuovo Mondo, paiono Hieroglyphici, credo fossero modi de loro sacrificij”) as well as a barkpaper sheet (“Carta del Mondo Nuovo di scorza d’ arbore rozza et polita”) (Giganti 1984: 124, 156; Laurencich Minelli 1984: 207-208).

32 The codex was then incorrectly attributed to China: The note on the cover saying: “Libro della China donato dal Sig. Co. Valerio Zani al Sig. March. Cospi il dì XXVI Dic.re MDCLXV” (Chinese book presented by count Valerio Zani to the Marchese Cospi on December 26th 1665) was later corrected as “Libro del Messico” (Mexican book). The correction was due to Lorenzo Legati’s research on the Codex. Lorenzo Legati (1677:192) described his comparison between Cospi Codex and some hieroglyphs of the Vindobon-

its relationships with the known historical mentions and its arrival in the Zani collection appear reasonable at the moment. The fact that Lorenzo Legati while describing Codex Cospi's "main hieroglyphs" (the main pictographs) and the "minor hieroglyphs" (the calendar signs) written on the margins,³³ gave a description very similar to the one previously given by Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi could suggest, as proposed by M. Donatini (2008: 577-578), that the codex observed by the erudite in the Paleotti's library was *Codex Cospi* itself; if so, we must assume that it had been gifted by Alberti or Achillini to Paleotti and that its jaguar skin cover must have been later removed and changed with the parchment one, maybe to record the name of the donor Valerio Zani on it. A second possibility is that, if the *Codex Cospi* was not the one seen by Teodosio degli Albonesi in the Paleotti library, it could have been anyway the codex given by Alberti to Achillini. After his owner's death, in fact, it should have been inherited together with the museum by his son Clearco and then by his grandchild Claudio Achillini (1574-1640), a famous Baroque poet who, even if not a member of the Gelati Academy³⁴ –as wrongly supposed by Besomi (1969: 104-105)– was a close friend of various Gelati Academics (Colombo 1988: 38). It would not be surprising that, 25 years after Claudio Achillini's death, one of the Gelati Academics presented the codex to Valerio Zani, honorary member of the same academy.³⁵

A third possibility is that *Codex Cospi* do not correspond to the one(s) once in the Achillini and Paleotti collections, but rather that it was just another codex brought by Betanzos in Bologna. In this sense, it is interesting

ensis Codex, then kept in the Vürmian museum and previously reproduced by Olaus Worm (1655: 383-384), which let him conclude that the former was Mexican. Codex Cospi was then moved into the Istituto delle Scienze together with Cospi's museum in the year 1743 and, finally, to the Bologna University library in 1803.

33 Lorenzo Legati (1677:192) says that the minor "letters" are written on the margin "quasi fussero (e forse lo sono) note marginali o commenti de' Geroglifici maggiori" ("as if they were -and maybe they are- marginal captions or comments to the main hieroglyphs").

34 The Gelati Academy was one of the more important Academies of Bologna. It was founded in 1588 by Melchiorre Zoppio and remained active until the beginning of the XIX century, when it then become part of the Academy of Sciences.

35 For instance, Valerio Zani cited twice Claudio Achillini in his *Memorie, imprese, e ritratti de' Signori Accademici Gelati di Bologna* (1672: 277, 372) being a friend of the Academics Giovanni Capponi and Ridolfo Campeggi.

to recall that during his stay in Bologna in 1530, Clement VII had received the well-known painting known as *Madonna della Rosa* as a gift from its author, the famous Italian painter Parmigianino. For unknown reasons, the painting was not brought to Rome and ended up in the palace where Parmigianino was staying in Bologna, that is Palazzo Zani, home of his host Dionigi Zani (Vasari 1568: IV, 541; Sassu 2007: 126). The fact that in 1530 Clement VII left a work of art to the Zani family could suggest that something similar could have happened in 1533, when he could have left to Dionigi Zani the *Codex Cospi*, as well as the abovementioned atlatl and knives.

The entangled and still unclear relationships between the codices possessed by Alberti, Achillini, and Paleotti raise the possibility that some codices different from Cospi could have been collected in Bologna after 1533. If some of them could have been lost in later times, we should consider that some of the today known codices could correspond to those once in Bologna. Among the extant Mexican codices, Codex Laud (which still has its original jaguar skin cover), *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, *Codex Vaticanus B* (3773), and *Codex Borgia* could also fit Teseo Ambrogio's description regarding the "hieroglyphs" on the margins of the pages. While the still scarcely known history of the first two does not show at the moment any link with Italy, codices *Vaticanus B* and *Borgia* deserve a more detailed consideration.

Codex Vaticanus B (3738) is first explicitly mentioned in Rainaldi's 1596-1600 inventory of the Vatican Library (Ehrle 1896: 5-6). By this time, it is assumed to have been held in the Vatican Library in Rome for some years since it is usually identified, together with *Codex Vaticanus A* (3738),³⁶ as one of the two codices briefly described in Michele Mercati's work *Degli obelischi di Roma*, published in 1589 (Mercati 1981: 111; Ehrle 1896: 9-10).³⁷ Ehrle, followed by many authors, then proposed (1896: 13) that

36 *Codex Vaticanus A* –a copy of *Codex telleriano-remensis*, which was probably wrote by Pedro de los Ríos between 1555 and 1563– could not have left Mexico prior to 1562 or 1563 (the later date contained in the codex) and most probably not before 1563-1665, when the Italian glosses were added; in 1565 or 1566 it was already in the Vatican Library, when Cardinal Marco Antonio Amulio had some of its pages copied.

37 Anders and colleagues assume the year 1589 as the *ante quem* date for the presence of the two codices described in Mercati's work on the basis of its publication date. Nevertheless, this date should probably be antedated a few years, since it is known that Mercati wrote

Codex Vaticanus B could have reached the Vatican in 1665 together with *Codex Vaticanus A*. Anyway, the same Ehrle refrained from his own hypothesis four years later, when trying to reconstruct the history of *Codex Vaticanus A* he observed that Mercati explicitly wrote of two European copies of native books,³⁸ a definition that can be hardly attributed to *Codex Vaticanus B* (Ehrle 1900: 10; see also Glass and Robertson 1975: 228). It is worth noting here that Michele Mercati surely read Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre et profane* (1582), where Paleotti also briefly mentioned Mexican pictographs³⁹ (but unfortunately making no mention of the codex in his family library); regarding the relationships linking Mercati and Gabriele Paleotti, G. Cantelli (1978: 168-169) proposed that the two men could have met to discuss their theories on images and hieroglyphs. Could Michele Mercati have known about the Vatican codices by Paleotti, maybe because Paleotti himself donated one of them? We would never know and we have to admit that the Italian arrival of *Codex Vaticanus B* remains unknown; anyway, the possibility that it could have been the one owned by Paleotti or one of the other codices arrived in Bologna in 1533 should be taken into consideration for further studies.

Another codex that could be related with Betanzos' gifts is *Codex Borgia*, whose earlier mention known so far dates to August 30th, 1795, when Antonio de León y Gama wrote a letter to thank Andrés Cavo who, residing in Rome, had promised to send him a copy of the study of a Mexican codex owned by Cardinal Stefano Borgia, who also owned a Bolognese copy of *Codex Cospi* (Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García 1993: 17-18, 33);

his work while he was in Poland, Boemia, and Austria with Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini; usually Mercati is credited to have relied only on his prodigious memory, but he probably took some notes with him (Cantelli 1981: 34). Anyway, he must have heard about the Vatican codices before 1588.

38 "come si può vedere in due libri della libreria vaticana ritratti da gli esemplari stessi venuti dal Messico" (as can be seen in two books in the Vatican library copied from the originals arrived from Mexico) (Mercati 1589: 96).

39 "coloro che hanno potuto vedere da vicino la realtà del nuovo mondo [...] ci riferiscono che essi non conoscono le lettere e la scrittura, e che per comunicare si servono di figure e immagini delle cose" (those who had the opportunity of knowing first-hand the reality of the new world [...] refer that they do not know characters and writing and that in order to communicate they use figures and images of things (our translation) (Paleotti 1582, Chap. XII).

the codex was then mentioned in later letters as well as in an inventory of the Borgia collection. In 1805, while in Rome, Alexander von Humboldt saw the codex and reported that it was previously owned by the Giustiniani family, whose servants let it in the hands of the children who tried to burn it; Cardinal Borgia luckily succeeded in rescuing the partially burnt codex from their hands (Humboldt 1986: 109). This last information has been considered unreliable by some modern commentators who suggested that it could have been invented to support later pretensions of Camillo Borgia on the codex (Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García 1993: 37; but see Ehrle 1898: 10-11; Heikamp 1976: 472). Anyway, as first noted by Franz Ehrle, on page 68 of the codex there is an Italian manuscript gloss (*in queste carte sono li di de la setimana verbi gracia dominica lunea*) with errors that suggest a 16th century Spanish or Mexican writer writing in Italian; the gloss is attached to a hand sign whose style is also typical of the 16th century, suggesting that Codex Borgia was in Italy by such an early date (Ehrle 1898: 4-5; Anders, Jansen, and Reyes 1993: 37-38). In order to understand where the codex could have been preserved before arriving in the Borgia collection we tried to check Humboldt's note about the Giustiniani family. A brief search in the Giustiniani family's inventories (Danesi Squarzina 2003) actually gave an unexpected result: "A tree-bark book with various colour drawings, and Indian works" and "thirty-six pieces of various items for sacrifices of Indian idols"⁴⁰ are mentioned in the 1600-1611 inventory of the Guardaroba of Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani. The same items are repeated, with some intriguing variation in the number of the objects, in various later inventories of the family, at least until 1649;⁴¹ it is interesting to note that in the 1649 inventory, where the

40 Entrata della Guardaroba, 1600-1611: f. 137r: "Un libro in scorza d'Arboro con varij disegni di colori, e lavori indiani, no. 1"; "Trentasei pezzi di varie cose da sacrificij d'Idoli Indiani, n.º 36" (Danesi Squarzina 2003: I, 57-58).

41 *Inventario post mortem del cardinale Benedetto Giustiniani*, 1621, f. 1380r: "Un libro di lettere all'indiana"; "Quranta [sic] pezzi d'idoli e sagrifiij all'indiana" (Danesi Squarzina 2003: I, 158). *Inventario post mortem del marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani*, 1638, f. 829r, "nella stanza grande del Guardaroba": "Ventiquattro pezzi d'idoli dell'Indie"; "Un libro di geroglifici indiani" (Danesi Squarzina 2003: I, 481). *Inventario del cardinale Orazio Giustiniani*, 1649: f. 115r: "Ventuno pezzi d'idoli in varie forme di legno coperti di musaico e lettere geroglifiche. N.º 21" (Danesi Squarzina 2003: I, 13). A search

codex is apparently missing, the objects (then reduced to twenty-one) were described as wooden items covered by mosaic. The relevance of this new information is self-evident, but an obvious problem arises immediately: The codex in the Giustiniani collection is described (albeit only in the first inventory) as a tree-bark book, while *Codex Borgia* is a leather book. If we were to literally believe to the inventory description we should then imagine that the Giustiniani family possessed a today lost codex, maybe a Maya one. However, since Humboldt's mention of the Giustiniani family as the previous owners of *Codex Borgia* can hardly be a coincidence, we suggest that "tree-bark book" was probably quite a formulaic definition for "Indian books" in the 16th century due to the famous description of Mexican codices as "tree-bark books" given by Peter Martyr in 1525 (see Coe 1989). Incidentally, we would note that if the codex was wrongly described in the first inventory as composed of tree-bark it could mean that in 1600 the gypsum layer covering the pages would have been intact, preventing a close observation of the leather support. *Codex Cospi*, for example, was erroneously described by Lorenzo Legati as a "cardboard" book as late as 1677 (Legati 1677: 191-192); the same can be said of *Codex Fejérvary-Mayer*, still described as an agave paper codex in a 1882 catalogue of the Liverpool Free Public Library (Burland 1971: 11). If in 1600 the gypsum layer of *Codex Borgia* was still intact, it could mean that the burning of some pages –that exposed its leather interior– occurred later in time: in this light, Humboldt's story about the Giustiniani children burning the codex seems less unreliable.

But how then the codex (*Borgia*?) reached the Giustiniani collection? The first inventory of Benedetto Giustiniani's collection was written between 1600 and 1611, that is, over a period in which Benedetto resided both in Rome (1600-1606) and in Bologna (1606-1611). Luckily, Silvia Danesi Squarzina and Luisa Capoduro were able to distinguish the handwritings of the different *guardarobieri* who compiled the inventory. Thanks to their kind help, we now know that the codex was recorded by Silvo Silva, who took service in Rome on April 1st 1600, a detail that rules out the possibility that the

for other mentions of the codex in later manuscript inventories, not published by S. Danesi Squarzina, gave no positive result.

codex was collected by Benedetto during his stay in Bologna (Danesi Squarzina, personal communication, April 2nd 2012). We do not know how Benedetto got the codex in Rome prior to 1600, but it is important to remember that from 1558 to 1570 his uncle Vincenzo Giustiniani (1516-1582) had been General of the Dominican order in the Minerva Convent in Rome, that is in the very same place where Domingo de Betanzos and Diego Marín attended the *Capitolo Generale* in 1532; in his role of Dominican General, Vincenzo Giustiniani also took part to a *Capitolo Generale* held in Bologna in 1564. It is thus possible that Vincenzo Giustiniani received the codex either in Bologna or, most probably, in Rome, and that he later passed it to his nephew Benedetto: in any case, an original provenance from the lot brought by Betanzos seems to be a quite reasonable hypothesis.

The data contained in the Giustiniani inventories also provide important information regarding other Mexican objects, including wooden objects covered by mosaic. Strangely, “thirty-six pieces of various items for sacrifices of Indian idols” appear in the 1600-1611 inventory, while in the 1621 one they are described as “Forty pieces of idols and sacrifices in the Indian fashion”, these became “Twenty-four pieces of Indian idols” in 1638 and, finally, “Twenty-one pieces of idols in various forms of wood covered by mosaic and hieroglyphic characters” in 1649. It is not clear if between 1611 and 1621 new objects entered the collection or if some of them could have been broken thus increasing the number of counted pieces. Anyway, it is clear that from 1621 their number started to decrease, maybe because some of them were lost or passed to other Roman collections. This last possibility is obviously interesting in light of the presence of “many wooden and pottery images of idols, strange in form and appearance, and typical of Mexican people” in the Stefano Borgia collection (San Bartolomeo 1805: 44). The dispersal of the Mexican objects of the Giustiniani collection could also be somehow related with the aforementioned Roman provenance of the mosaic-covered objects today held in Copenhagen, Gotha, and London museums. At least in one case, this relationship can be further argued: as previously said, the two-headed serpent now in the British Museum was owned –by the end of 19th century– by the Duchess Massimo di Rignano, and it is well known that the Giustiniani and Massimo families had close kinship ties since the 16th century, when Clarice Giustiniani mar-

ried Carlo Massimo and further exchanges of properties between the two families continued until the 19th century; more interestingly, Cardinal Camillo II Massimo (1620-1677), the main art collector of the family, was raised in the house of its uncle Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564-1637) (Carpagna Falconieri 1997: 18). A Giustiniani collection provenance for the famous two-headed mosaic serpent is therefore extremely reasonable, and further research on this theme is required.

Going back to the codices arrived in Bologna in 1533, from Alberti's words we can assume that Clement VII didn't leave all the codices in Bologna and probably some of them were thus brought to Rome or to Florence, home of the Medici family. Could some other of the extant Mexican codices, apart from the already mentioned members of the Borgia Group, belong to this group?

Interestingly, it is well known that a Latin manuscript note written between 1537 and 1557 by Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter on *Codex Vindobonensis* states that the codex from "South India" had been gifted by Manuel I King of Portugal to Pope Clement VII; being that Manuel I died in December 1521, it has been assumed (Nuttall 1902) that the codex reached Europe in a very early date, probably as part of one of Cortés shipments.⁴² If the anachronism of calling Giulio de Medici as Clement VII when referring to an event that took place *before* his election (1523) could be explained as a simple linguistic habit of the later writer (Heikamp 1972: 9), the problematic character of Widmanstetter's statement, however, has been stressed by E. Thompson (1972). The British mayanist observed that it is quite unlikely that the Spaniards could have obtained codices from the Mixteca Alta region by such an early date.⁴³ Thompson gave a reasonable

42 Zelia Nuttall (1902) proposed that the codex could have been one of the two books (together with Codex Nuttall) included in Cortés' first shipment of 1519 and described both in the official shipment list and in Peter Martyr's work. On the other hand, Maarten Jansen and Pérez (2011: 57-58) observed that the codex could rather have been part of Cortés' second shipment. It is not clear at all how Manuel of Portugal could have obtained the codex in such an early date, but it has been assumed that he maybe received it via his wife Eleonora, Charles V's sister (Toorian 1983, 1984; Markey 2008: 61).

43 Given its provenance from the Tilantongo region, the hypothesis that the codex could have been obtained during a Spanish raid of one of the Mixtec settlements on the Gulf Coast (Heikamp 1972: 9) seems quite unlikely.

explanation for the strange mention of Manuel of Portugal (whose relationships with Giulio de Medici were quite bad indeed): he proposed that Widmanstetter erroneously attributed the gift to Manuel I because of his close relationships with (East) India and because in 1514 he had presented a rich gift of (East) Indian objects to Pope Leone X; Thompson then concluded that Clement VII must have received *Codex Vindobonensis* in some other way; if we accept Thompson's criticism, we should consider the possibility that Clement VII received *Codex Vindobonensis* by the hands of Domingo de Betanzos, prominent member of a religious order that had already concentrated many of its activities in the Mixtec region of Oaxaca.

Finally, an admittedly weak relationship can also be traced with *Codex Nuttall*, whose stylistic and thematic similarity with *Codex Vindobonensis* has been often stressed, suggesting not only a common origin from the Tilantongo area, but also the possibility of a common later history. Unfortunately, nothing is known of *Codex Nuttall* before 1854, when it was held in the Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence (Nuttall 1902). Due to the complete lack of earlier documentary evidence it is impossible to know how the codex reached the monastery, but its presence there suggest that its arrival in Italy could be linked with some Dominican missionary: M. Jansen and G. A. Pérez, for example, proposed that its arrival in San Marco could be related with Antonio de la Serna, a Dominican friar who worked in the Mixteca Alta and who died in 1604 in the Florentine Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella, part of whose library was moved to San Marco in the 18th century (Jansen and Pérez 2011: 70-71). At an even more speculative level, we would anyway note that Dávila Padilla wrote that after Betanzos' stay in Naples, while he was waiting for the *Capítulo General* to be held in Rome (that is, between October 1531 and May 1532), "le fue forzoso al santo, estarse en algunos conventos de Italia, con su religioso compañero" (Dávila Padilla 1596: 72). Could have Betanzos and Marín spent some time in the Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence, leaving *Codex Nuttall* in exchange for the hospitality? We would never know, but the possibility should be kept in mind.

A last, and unfortunately lost, codex is worth to be mentioned here. The famous Italian humanist Paolo Giovio –who also possessed an Aztec greenstone hearth and two feather coverlets (see note 27)– is known to

have possessed a Mexican codex that, according to Giovio himself, he received as a gift from Francisco de Los Cobos,⁴⁴ secretary of the Emperor Charles V. H. Keniston (1960: 174), followed by other scholars (e.g. Zimmermann 1995: 144), supposed that the mentioned gift could have been received by Giovio in 1535, when he met Cobos in Naples; he also supposed that the codex should have proceeded from one of Cortés shipment to the Spanish Court, even if it is not clear at all why Cobos should have brought the codex from Spain to Naples. M.M. Benzoni, on the other hand, more properly proposed that Giovio could have obtained the codex in Bologna in 1530, during Charles V coronation (Benzoni 2004: 35). Since both Cobos and Paolo Giovio were also in Bologna in 1533, when Giovio was a member of the court of Cardinal Ippolito de Medici, nephew of Clement VII and then acting as the main *mecenas* of the Medici family (Zimmermann 1995: 130; Sassu 2007, 2012), we would rather propose that in this occasion Cobos could have received one of Betanzos' codices from Clement VII during the exchanges of gifts and that in the same occasion he could have given it to Paolo Giovio. Giovio's codex was then probably preserved in the rich library he had in his museum in Borgo Vico, whose items were unfortunately lost in later years.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The identification of Domingo de Betanzos as the almost anonymous donor of the Mexican objects to Clement VII in Bologna in 1533 allowed us to combine the information recorded by the Bolognese Dominican Leandro Alberti with those contained in other Dominican chronicles recording a previous encounter in Rome. In this way it has been possible to reconstruct the history of a previously unnoticed multiple gift of outstanding Mexican objects and codices brought in Europe in a quite early date, just twenty-one years after the Conquest of Mexico. Our cross-checking between the scanty descriptions of the historical sources and the actual objects preserved in

44 "Donommi un volume di queste historie fatto di fogli tutti interi, ma piegati indietro, et coperto d'un cuoio indanaiato di tigre, il molto illustre S. Francesco Covos, segretario dell'Imperatore (Giovio 1552: 395).

European collections can appear as a quite disappointing attempt, due to the impossibility to reach unquestionable matches. Nevertheless, it allowed us to sketch a general picture of early modern Italian collectionism of Mexican objects, stressing the recurrence of “Bolognese” and “Dominican” connections in the early history of such objects, often overshadowed by the much studied role played by the Medici family. Previous studies of early modern Bolognese collectionism usually looked at the Bolognese session of the Trento Council (1547-1549) or at the relationships linking Bolognese personalities and the Medici family as possible explanations for the arrival and exchange of American objects in the city. These factors still deserve attention, but it is important to stress that their role in the arrival of American items is mostly conjectural. On the contrary, Betanzos’ arrival in Bologna and his gifts to a Roman-residing member of the Florentine Medici family now stands as a much earlier and well-documented case that could explain both the outstanding role that Bologna had in the early European history of Mesoamerican objects and the presence of such objects in Bologna, Rome, and Florence. Even if no indisputable identification of objects brought by Betanzos has been reached, in cases such as that of *Codex Cospi*, those of the two knife-handles, as well as the long-nosed mask of the Pigorini Museum, a provenance from Betanzos’ gift is by far the most economic and reasonable hypothesis that can be advanced today. A possible similar origin is to be taken in consideration, even if with a lower degree of certainty, for cases such as the codices Borgia, Vindobonensis, Nuttall, and Giovio’s, as well as for various turquoise covered objects –mostly of Mixteca-Puebla cultural affiliation– today held in Copenhagen, Gotha, and London, and whose early history is linked with Bologna, Rome, and Florence.

Beside the specific identifications of actual objects, it is important to emphasize that Betanzos’ gift to Clement VII is an extremely important event for our knowledge about early European collectionism of American pieces and their role in shaping the European perception of the New World. As a matter of fact, it represents one the earliest known arrivals of Mexican objects in Europe, whose detailed record is only matched by the famed and much studied Hernán Cortés’ shipments (Markey 2008: 51-59; Russo 2011). Moreover, before the “rediscovery” of Alberti’s text, it was presumed that the Mexican objects could have entered the collection of Medi-

ci Popes in Rome only via the Habsburg court and that the Medici collectionism of New World objects in Florence had initiated only after Cosimo's marriage with Eleonora de Toledo in 1539 (Markey 2008: I, 58, 71-72): we now know a much different story.

A last aspect that we want to mention here is that the data presented so far also add new important elements useful to reconsider the controversial figure of Domingo de Betanzos. Betanzos' attitude toward the natives' rationality and capacity of receiving the Christian faith was, in fact, the object of a bitter and longstanding debate going back to the 16th century and involving outstanding Dominican personalities such as Bartolomé de Las Casas, Julián Garcés, and Bernardino de Minaya.⁴⁵ Historians divided themselves among those clearly favourable to Betanzos, whose life and missionary commitment is often described with a clearly apologetic flavour (a tendency started with Agustín Dávila Padilla and culminated in the works of Alberto Carreño), and those (Lewis Hanke being the foremost among them) who harshly criticized Betanzos on the basis of his supposed assertion of the irrationality of the Indians. However, the gift that Betanzos brought to Clement VII shows, at the least, that he appreciated the natives' skill in the so-called "mechanical arts". It would be quite ironic that the very hands of a man that considered the Indians as irrational beasts had brought in Europe some of the masterpieces that today stand as indisputable proofs of their intellectual and artistic achievements.

45 During his stay in Spain, in fact, Betanzos would have declared at the *Consejo de Indias* that the natives were incapable of receiving the Christian faith; in the following years Betanzos would have repeated his claims, in a somewhat milder manner in various letters and memoirs. Betanzos' declaration, that we do not know directly, in 1533 caused a series of harsh responses by Ramírez de Fuenleal, president of the Audiencia de México and by some Franciscan friars led by Jacobo de Testera and Luis de Fuensalida. Among his fiercer opponents were the Dominican Juan Garcés and Bernardino de Minaya, who in turn strongly contributed to the emission of the *Sublimis Deus* bulla by Pope Paul III. Betanzos would have retracted his earlier statements just before his death, on September 13th, 1549. For some synthesis of the controversy over Domingo de Betanzos and the natives' rationality, see: Carreño 1924, 1940, 1962; O'Gorman 1941; Gallegos Rocafull 1951; De la Hera 1956; Hanke 1937, 1974; Gómez Cañedo 1966; Trueba 1975; Ulloa 1977; Robles Sierra 1990; Seed 1993; Fernández Rodríguez 1994.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge various colleagues that contributed to the improvement of the present text. Massimo Donattini helped with the discussion of several important points; Silvia Danesi Squarzina and Luisa Capoduro kindly helped with important information regarding the Giustiniani family inventories. Michela Craveri, Nicoletta Maestri, Lia Markey, Guilhem Olivier, and John Pohl gave important suggestions. To them all goes our deepest gratitude. Of course, the responsibility for the article's content—including possible errors—is solely ours.

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