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Some discoveries of 1492:
Eastern antiquities and Renaissance Europe

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1 ANDREA MANTEGNA
Adoration of the Magi
 Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum

SOME DISCOVERIES OF 1492: EASTERN ANTIQUITIES AND RENAISSANCE EUROPE

Before you is a painting by Andrea Mantegna in an unusual medium, distemper on linen, a technique he used for a few of his smaller devotional paintings (fig. 1). Mantegna mixed ground minerals with animal glue, the kind used to size or seal a canvas, and applied the colors to a piece of fine linen prepared with only a very light coat of gesso. Distemper remains water soluble after drying, which allows the painter greater flexibility in blending new paint into existing paint than is afforded by the egg tempera technique. In lesser hands, such opportunities can produce muddy results, but Mantegna used it to produce passages of extraordinarily fine modeling, for example in the flesh of the Virgin's face and in the turbans of wound cloth worn by her and two of the Magi. Another advantage of the technique is that it produces luminous colors with a matte finish, making forms legible and brilliant, without glare, even in low light. This work's surface was left exposed, dirtying it, and in an effort to heighten the colors early restorers applied varnish—a bad idea, since unlike oil and egg tempera distemper absorbs varnish, leaving the paint stained and darkened.¹ Try to imagine it in its original brilliant colors, subtly modeled throughout and enamel smooth, inviting us to approach close, like the Magi.

I am going to come back to this painting in a number of contexts, but for now I want to concentrate on what it might have to tell us about two terms in the title of my lecture, “antiquities” and “eastern.” What was an antiquity in this period, and how was eastern understood? Tracing these two terms not only refines what “Renaissance” might mean, but also illuminates how the designation “Europe” came into being, that is, how a geographical designation was transfigured into a cultural identity.

Mantegna's painting is set in antiquity. The Vulgate translation of the Gospel of Matthew tells of “magi” who arrived in Bethlehem “ab oriente,” at a time when Palestine was under Roman rule. Yet nothing shown in the painting can be strictly identified as an antiquity. The two standing Magi wear turbans familiar from contemporary Ottoman dress. The Marquis of Mantua Francesco Gonzaga, Mantegna's patron, owned such a turban, given to him by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II.² The black king holds an alabaster vessel containing his myrrh, and the middle-aged king next to him holds a container for frankincense, probably made out of jasper, though



2 *Small bowl with Indian-lotus motif in underglaze blue*, Early Ming
Taipei, National Palace Museum



3 ANDREA MANTEGNA
Adoration of the Magi, (detail fig. 1)
Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum



4 ANDREA MANTEGNA
Adoration of the Magi, (detail fig. 1)
Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum

the paint losses in this area make it hard to say.³ These are materials and types of vessels that would have been known in antiquity, but Mantegna makes no particular effort to identify them as antiquities; for the frankincense container, he extrapolated fairly directly from recent productions from the eastern Mediterranean. The eldest king, finally, proffers a porcelain cup of a type produced in fifteenth-century China (figs. 2 and 3). Porcelain was a relatively recent invention and just beginning to reach western collections, yet here it is in the hands of the biblical Magus.⁴

The Virgin's head is wrapped in a different kind of turban, perhaps marking her geographical and cultural distance from the Magi. On her collar and sleeve we see a fluent non-Latin script (fig. 4). The Virgin was an extremely familiar figure in western Christian art, and yet details such as this, folded into many paintings of the period,

reveal the persistent awareness that she was a personage remote in place and time.⁵ Many Italian artists used pseudo-Arabic script in their paintings of holy figures, but here Mantegna seems to be emulating specifically Syriac scripts comparable to those found in biblical manuscripts, or *Peshitta* (fig. 5).⁶ He offers an extended imitation of such script in a painting of the *Ecce Homo* in Paris of about the same date, also a close-up composition in distemper on linen (fig. 6). In September 1498, right around the time Mantegna produced these paintings, his patron Isabella d'Este wrote to her humanist advisor Paride Ceresara thanking him for having sent her a sampling of "Syrian or Babylonian sacred letters" ("littere sacre o siano syrie o babilonice," by which she meant, probably, "in Syriac or Aramaic").⁷ Joseph, behind the Virgin, is the only one who is not obviously exotic. He wears a type of hat familiar in fifteenth-century Italy, one that we find in Mantegna's own portraits. The infant, wrapped in linens, is unmarked by time.

Thus we have a scene set in antiquity but filled with items from much later centuries, produced in locales stretching from China to the Mediterranean. No artist in Italy at this time was better informed about antiquities than Mantegna, and no patron was more imperiously determined to collect antiquities than his patron Isabella d'Este. Her correspondence fairly bristles with demands to her agents to procure the best antiquities, and with sharp rejections when she is presented with pieces she or her experts deem not to be antique. One of them, an ivory head, was rejected on the advice of her artists Andrea Mantegna and Gian Cristoforo Romano: "Non la iudicano antiqua né bona."⁸ She acquired Michelangelo's *Sleeping Cupid*, which had passed as an antiquity and had been exposed, displaying it as an ingenious forgery in the same room as an ancient Cupid then attributed to Praxiteles.⁹ Yet when it came to certain kinds of items even the rigorous antiquarian standards of the Gonzaga court could be relaxed.¹⁰ For example, Isabella's criteria were notably looser when assessing vases and vessels in marble and hard stone. She was willing to buy several pieces from the collection of Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence, choosing among them on the basis of their quality, not their antiquity.¹¹

Byzantine works were also commonly considered antiquities. For example, a famous manuscript of Homer commissioned in 1477 by Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, whom Mantegna portrayed in the Camera degli Sposi of the Castello di San Giorgio in Mantua, shows the Greek text on the left with a translation in Latin on the facing page. The marginal ornamentation on the Latin side is composed of quotations of Roman antiquities drawn from monuments such as Trajan's Column. The Greek side shows an equally careful citation of "ancient" Greek ornament, but in this case the forms



5 Masoretic Peshitta, Syria (Tikrit), 1204/1205 (in Syriac script)
Lund University Library, Medeltidshandskrift 58, f. 191



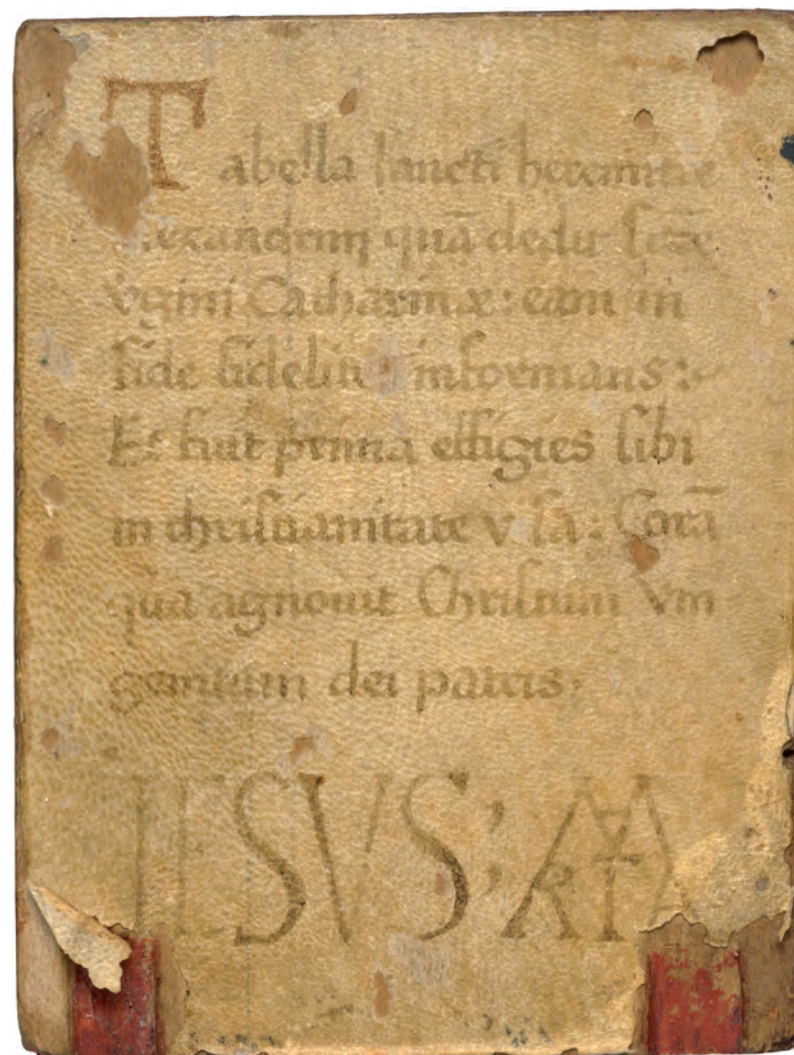
6 ANDREA MANTEGNA

Ecce Homo

Paris, Institut de France, Musée Jacquemart-André

are based in patterns drawn from tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine manuscripts. The Byzantine manuscripts clearly counted as sources of good antique ornament.¹² The same Francesco Gonzaga inherited some of the works once in the collection of Pope Paul II, including some micromosaic icons, Byzantine works of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries described by contemporaries as antiquities.¹³ One such micro-mosaic icon now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, a Palaiologan work of the fourteenth century, is only 11.2 cm tall, smaller than a postcard (fig. 7). It is rare for any work of art from this period to come with a label that tells us what people thought it was, but this one does. A piece of parchment affixed to the back of the panel is inscribed in Latin in a fifteenth-century Italian hand, identifying it as the first image gazed upon by the just converted Saint Catherine of Alexandria, implicitly dating the work to the fourth century at the latest, at least one thousand years earlier than its actual date.¹⁴ Other icons were ascribed to Saint Luke and so dated right back to the time of Christ. A famous Saint Luke icon, in this case a work of the thirteenth century, resides in the church of Santa Giustina in Padua, a church that also proudly held the Evangelist's body and so was a sort of center for the Luke cult (fig. 8).¹⁵ Mantegna knew this work well; in his early years he painted an altarpiece for this very chapel in Santa Giustina, a work in direct dialogue with Saint Luke's body and his icon.¹⁶ Such icons fundamentally shaped Mantegna's approach to close-up framings such as the kind we see in our *Adoration of the Magi*. From them he learned the fundamental principle of a work that is both intimate and deeply formal. The grouping of the Madonna and Child found in such icons, cut off at the waist or thighs, were basic vocabulary for Mantegna. He performed variations on them until the end of his life.

Isabella's letter to her humanist advisor thanking him for sending her examples of Syriac or Aramaic is of some conceptual help in trying to understand how works of recent centuries could count as antiquities. Obviously recent was the transcription of the letters on the sheet sent to Isabella—what we would call the textual vehicle. She understood that, but she also saw the letters as samples of biblical language, "sacred letters." Indeed, she asks her advisor for a clarification: she is not sure whether certain strokes of the pen are "di sustantia," that is, part of the letter form, or "pur solum per adornamento," flourishes only for ornament, and in that case she asks him to resend the letters "schiette et simplici," written out in a simple and unadorned way, "as they would have been written in their time." Perhaps it was also possible to think of objects in that way, making a distinction between content and vehicle, between original form and later, ornamented form. Even recent material productions can speak in a language that was ancient, and eastern. Forms may change while retaining their ancient lan-



7 *Portable Icon with the Virgin Eleousa*, view of front and back, Byzantine
 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

guage. Perhaps the turbans, the vessels, the porcelain, and the textiles in the *Adoration* and other works could be thought of in these terms, as antiquities “di sustantia.”¹⁷

* * *

The word “orient” comes from the present participle “oriens” of the Latin verb “orior,” to rise. It is close to the Greek word “orino,” to rouse or move, which is not far from the Sanskrit “aruh,” to set in motion. Oriens is thus not a place but a direction, and a principle of arising movement. Orior is the root of both orient and origin. When the Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible, in wide use until the Reformation and even after, says that the Magi came “ab oriente,” it designates them not merely as “eastern” but as embodiments of a dynamic principle of generative movement coming from the east.

According to a non-biblical but long and pervasive tradition, at the end of his life Christ hung on the cross facing to the west.¹⁸ A moving expression of the Christian configuration of the cardinal directions is found in John Donne’s poem “Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward,” where he says that his soul’s form naturally bends to the east, which is to say towards Christ on the cross, but the pleasures and business of the world mis-shape his form and urge him in the other direction, propelling him westward, his back turned to Christ on the day of Christ’s death. But perhaps this is as it should be, as this way his back can receive from Christ the scourges that might restore his deformed image. Conversion may then result in a turning:

Burn off my rust, and my deformity;
Restore Thine image, so much, by Thy grace,
That Thou mayst know me, and I’ll turn my face.

In Mantegna’s *Crucifixion* in the Louvre, originally a part of the predella of his altarpiece for the church of San Zeno in Verona, the siting of the event in relation to the viewer’s position motivates and structures the picture (fig. 9). The viewer is placed some way down the western slope of the hill of Golgotha, the place of the skull, outside the walls of Jerusalem. The rising of the hill away from us, and its corresponding slope down the far side, activates the viewer’s relation to the location. In Mantegna’s time, pilgrims to the site of the Crucifixion—then enshrined in the Golgotha chapel, encompassed in the church of the Holy Sepulcher—carefully counted the eighteen steps leading up to the chapel (some, including the floor, counted nineteen). In Mantegna’s reconstruction of the original site, we see the top two steps; mounting figures of two soldiers, each on a different riser, suggest the full flight. Farthest behind, in the background, the tower of David rises on Mount Sion, and a round building representing the Temple occupies



8 *Madonna di Constantinopoli*, Italian(?)
Padua, S. Giustina

the center. Golgotha, which is to say the site of the Holy Sepulcher church, stands to the west of the Temple Mount, which is to say towards us. The lighting confirms and articulates the topographical siting. Shadows are cast by a light source located before the painting and to the right, positioning the sun in the southwest, as it would be in Palestine on an afternoon in Spring. The painting positions Christ with Jerusalem behind him, to the east, with his body facing a viewer understood to be standing far to the west in the church of San Zeno, looking eastward towards the altarpiece and the Holy Land.¹⁹

By contrast, in his infancy Christ received the Magi who had come “ab oriente.” I mentioned earlier that the only figure in Mantegna’s *Adoration* who is not dressed in exotic clothing is Saint Joseph, who stands opposite the Magi—in relational terms on the west side of the painting. He is also the only one whose attention is not fixed on Christ. The Magi look with grave intensity and open-mouthed amazement at the Child, but Joseph looks across at the new arrivals, almost as if he is learning from them what the act of adoration is. The first Gentiles to recognize Christ, the Magi were described by a long tradition of Christian commentary and sermons as the precursors of every Christian worshipper.²⁰ The office of Matins for the feast of Epiphany reads: “Let us then recognize in the Magi the origin of our vocation and faith.” Thus, although they arrived long ago and came from the other side of the world, they are the ur-model for the worshipper, which is to say the viewer of this painting. Cradling our relation to them is Joseph, who stands in his western hat on the western side of the picture and examines the exotic figures who have come from the other side. East, here, is not other but rather the origin of ourselves.

* * *

In the Latin west, for centuries preceding Mantegna’s painting, orient was origin, our origin. Italy’s fascination with its own eastern roots reached a sort of high-water mark in the 1490s. The year 1492 in particular brought a cluster of discoveries of eastern antiquities, apart from the famous discovery of Columbus. An Italian medal from this moment carries an image of Christ, and on the reverse an inscription explaining that the image was taken from an ancient emerald impressed with the likeness of Christ that had been preserved in Constantinople by the Byzantines and then given as a gift to Pope Innocent VIII by the Turkish sultan Bayezid II in thanks for keeping his brother as a hostage in Rome (fig. 10).²¹ It happens that the Sultan’s brother Dzem was indeed kept as a hostage in Rome, and that in 1492 Bayezid had in fact given the Pope a number of gifts in gratitude for keeping his brother, gifts that included the lance tip



9 ANDREA MANTEGNA
The Crucifixion
 Paris, Musée du Louvre



10 Bronze medal with profile of Christ, Italian
London, British Museum

with which Longinus had wounded the side of Christ. This medal is meshing its data with some well-known recent events, “appending” the otherwise unattested emerald to a noted cache of gifts.

Another discovery of 1492 was quite celebrated at the time and made a lasting impact on European scholarship, until it was revealed to be a hoax in the later sixteenth century. This was the unearthing of a trove of artifacts by the Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo. In the form of counterfeited texts attributed to the Chaldean sage Berosus, Annius offered evidence that these monuments documented the presence of the Egyptian god Osiris on Italian soil, long before the Romans. In one of the “antiquities” he presented, known as the *Marmo Osiriano*, the upper left shows a profile head that Annius claimed was the head of Osiris, faced on the other side by his cousin Sais Xantho (fig. 11). Even today, art historians have trouble dating these heads, but most agree they are from the twelfth or thirteenth century. Below is a lunette with a tree that Annius took to be a hieroglyphic text, which he helpfully “deciphered.” The trunk of the oak tree and the branches above forming the image of an eye are symbols particular to Osiris, he explained. The monument declared that Osiris had resided for a time on Italian soil and had helped the Italian people fight a war against their oppressors,

and then had taught them the arts of agriculture. According to Annius’ widely read theory, Italian culture was founded under the tutelage of an Egyptian deity, well before the arrival of the Greeks and Romans. Here we have another example of our familiar pattern: twelfth-thirteenth century artifacts are presented as antiquities, in this case the hoariest of antiquities bearing the imprint of archaic eastern wisdom.²²

In addition to the Christ medal based in a Holy Land emerald and the “Egyptian” tablet of Annius, there was a third widely broadcast archeological discovery of 1492, and it also pointed eastward. At the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome a lead capsule was found that contained a piece of the Titulus Crucis, the inscribed wooden tablet that Pontius Pilate had mounted on the cross (fig. 12). The church bore this odd name, the church of the holy cross in Jerusalem, because by legend it contained not only relics of the Passion brought from Jerusalem by Saint Helena, Emperor Constantine’s mother, but also large quantities of earth from the site of the crucifixion drenched with the blood of Christ. The earth was embedded in the flooring of the room that was to be known as the chapel of Helena, or, popularly, chapel Jerusalem. During this period the church was a base of Spanish power. The titular cardinal of the church, Pedro González de Mendoza, publicized the discovery of the Titulus as a divine coincidence. It occurred on February 1st, the very day that news reached Rome of the Catholic re-conquest of Granada from the last Muslim governors of Spain. The discovery was a huge sensation. Excited reports about it were sent all over Europe.²³

According to John 19:19-20, “Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus the Nazorean, the King of Jews.’ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.” The inscription on the rediscovered Titulus is awkwardly carved. The Hebrew text is almost entirely missing in the fragmentary state of the tablet, and the Greek and Latin lines are incomplete, ending just where the word king (REX, BASILEIOS) begins. The tablet does present a feature that is nowhere indicated in the biblical text and was noted by everyone who reported on the discovery at the time: the Greek and Latin lines are written in mirror script, from right to left. One letter announcing the discovery was sent from Rome to the entourage of Lorenzo de’ Medici in Florence, which included some of the foremost philologists of the age, such as Angelo Poliziano. This letter explains that the reverse writing was a form of homage to a more ancient and holy Hebrew language: “From that one can see the great faith and religion that attaches to this object, for they did not want to contravene the primary way of ordering script that belongs to Hebrew letters.”²⁴



11 *Marmo Osiriano*
Viterbo, Museo Civico



12 *Titulus Crucis*
Rome, S. Croce in Gerusalemme

These two works contain inscriptions in which Greek and Latin appear written backwards. As a result this disorienting feature, the images were printed in reverse in the body of the text. The author is grateful for these added pages, where the two images are reproduced in the correct orientation.



12 *Titulus Crucis*

Rome, S. Croce in Gerusalemme



13 MICHELANGELO BUONAROTTI
Crucifix
Florence, S. Spirito

According to this reading, Greek and Latin conform themselves to the more venerable language by switching direction, performing a sort of pilgrimage back to their origin. It was probably shortly after the arrival of this news that Michelangelo, a teenage pupil of Poliziano and a lodger at Lorenzo de' Medici's palace, carved his crucifix for the church of Santo Spirito, whose titulus bears the telltale feature of the backwards Greek and Latin script (fig. 13). He had clearly been told about the discovery by the well-informed scholars near Lorenzo de' Medici. On this basis the work can be dated to sometime after January 1492.

Aristotle (*De Caelo*, 2.2.284b) says that the universe moves from right to left when facing north, which is to say from east to west, as confirmed (in a non-heliocentric view) by the daily course of the sun and stars. In 1524, prompted by Aristotle's cosmic observation, the English Hebraist Robert Wakefield explained that the Hebrew language follows the example of nature by going from right to left, putting the Hebrews in greater harmony with God's order than the Greeks and Latins, who had got themselves into the bind of writing in such a way that the pen is in the way of the letters one is trying to put down.²⁵ For such reasons, Hebrew was believed to have powers that the other languages did not have.²⁶

To summarize again, these three artifacts, discovered, rediscovered, or made available in 1492, all involve a fascination with eastern antiquities. In the case of the medal, an ancient gem carrying Christ's likeness; in the case of Annius' tablet, the Egyptian founders of Italian civilization; and in the Titulus, a textual artifact from the life of Christ preceding even the text of the Bible revealing a feature not described in the biblical text: Greek and Latin script doubling back in conformity, even in homage, to the Hebrew.

* * *

We can now consider that more famous discovery of 1492. As is well known, when Columbus embarked on his first voyage in August 1492 his intention was to reach Asia by a different route. The first page of his travel log declares that it was the goal of the journey to make contact with the great ruler in the east—the Great Khan, as he called him, using the term that Marco Polo had used two centuries earlier in his description of his Asian travels.²⁷ Columbus and his royal patrons believed the Great Khan to be well disposed to Christian conversion. With this alliance and with monies drawn from commercial contact with those lands, it would be possible to mount a crusade from both east and west to recapture Jerusalem once and for all.²⁸



13 MICHELANGELO BUONAROTTI
Crucifix
Florence, S. Spirito



14 *Hunt-Lenox Globe*, Italian (?)
New York, New York Public Library

Columbus had brought with him a translator, a Jew named Luis de Torres, who had chosen conversion rather than exile under the new rules that applied in Spain beginning in 1492. Torres was valuable, Columbus says, because he knew Hebrew, Aramaic, and some Arabic, and thus presumably could treat with the Asian locals.²⁹ When, on November 2nd, 1492, Columbus reached Cubanacan, another name for present-day Cuba, he thought he was already on the mainland of Asia and sent Torres inland to find a representative of the Great Khan and initiate discussions.³⁰ We must thus imagine the first negotiations with American natives being held in a babel of near eastern languages on one side and Taino on the other.

In the Hunt-Lenox globe now in the New York Public Library in New York, a copper sphere most likely produced in Florence around the year 1503, we see how long persisted the idea that Columbus had discovered lands near the Asian coast (fig. 14). North America does not yet exist, although we do see a continent to the south labeled

MUNDUS NOVUS, TERRA SANCTAE CRUCIS, corresponding to present-day Brazil, which was discovered in 1500. North of that land mass we see Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti), the first island in these parts discovered by Columbus. Slightly north of Hispaniola is Isabel, or present-day Cuba. But not far to the west of that, which is to say to the east, is Zipancrí, that is, Japan. The mainland not far beyond Zipancrí is labeled INDIA SUPERIOR. Thus even the landmass corresponding to Brazil is considered to be a new land in the southern part of Asia.

One of the very first works of art to contain data from the newly discovered territories is an *Adoration of the Magi*, made by the Portuguese artist Vasco Fernandes in 1501 or 1502, that is, very close to the time of Mantegna's painting (fig. 15).³¹ The middle king, whose body is displayed almost whole in the center of the panel, is shown with dark skin and wearing the headdress and foot gear of the Tupinamba people of what we now call Brazil. The panel belongs to an altarpiece made for the cathedral of Viseu in Portugal, which was the ancestral home of the family of Pedro Alvares de Cabral, the first explorer to discover Brazil and make contact with the Tupinamba inhabitants of what is now known as the Bahía Cabralia. Some scholars have wanted to see the features of the discoverer Cabral in the eldest king, despite the fact that Cabral was still in his thirties at the time the painting was made. In any case, there is no doubt that the painting's depiction of the second king incorporates information from the Cabral expedition of the year 1500.

Cabral's discoveries are pinpointed and mentioned, crediting him by name, in a famous early map of 1502 called the Cantino map (fig. 16). This map shows the newly discovered lands at the extreme left, and on the far right is the Asian coast. How the two edges meet is left undecided, since the northwestern land mass is simply cut off by the left edge of the map. Scholars still debate whether that peninsula is a description of Florida, or the Yucatán, or the Asian coast. Nonetheless, on its back the map is inscribed with the words "Navigational chart for the lands lately discovered in the parts of India" (*Carta de navegar per le Isole nouam tr[ovate] in le parte de India: dono Alberto Cantino al S. Duca Hercole*), indicating clearly that the map's maker and first users still considered the new lands to be in Asia.³²

Vasco Fernandes' painting of the Magi is informed by some of the same sources as this exact cartographic contemporary. Read with the Cantino map in mind, it is clear that the magus with the strange headdress was to be understood as an inhabitant of the "parte de India." In the previous centuries the Magi's exotic accoutrements had undergone fairly elaborate iconographic codification. But in this painting, as in



15 ATTRIBUTED TO VASCO FERNANDES
Adoration of the Magi
 Viseu, Museu de Grão Vasco

the Cantino map, the idea and look of what comes “ab oriente” was being radically reshaped under the pressure of the most recent information. In contrast to the familiarized exoticism of the other two kings, the middle king is dressed in half-outlandish, half-familiar gear. He sports a Tupinamba headdress and footwear but he has been given western shirt and breeches to cover his middle parts, which would otherwise be naked. The first account of the natives encountered by Cabral’s expedition, written by an official onboard named Pero Vaz de Caminha, said: “They go naked, with no sort of covering. They attach no more importance to covering up their private parts or leaving them uncovered than they do to showing their faces.”³³ A naked magus would have brought the painting’s iconographic machinery to a grinding halt, so the figure’s absolute otherness at head and feet is compensated for by extreme familiarity around his middle. Caminha indeed explained that as individual natives became domesticated as pages to the officers, they were given shirts to wear.³⁴ The king in the painting has actually added feather decoration to his shirt and breeches, adapting the western items to his native stylings. If the other two kings are foreign in a recognizable mode, this figure is a threading together of the unknown and the domestic.

When this panel was installed in its altarpiece, it was perhaps possible to imagine that this strange new figure could be incorporated into the subject, extending its meaning rather than exploding it. The theme is stretched to the breaking point, literally on the brink of dis-orientation, just as the prevailing geographical schema was being strained to its limits in contemporary maps. Within a few years, when everyone had understood that this part of the world had nothing to do with Asia, that it was culturally and geographically uncharted territory, that a whole other ocean separated America, as it was now known, from Asia, it became harder to see this fragile painting of 1501-2 as anything but an assemblage. Rather than an extremely distended *Adoration of the Magi*, it became a painting of multiple and incompatible purposes, part representation of the Magi, part ethnographic exhibit. Rather than a conjoining of times, it became a mere anachronism, a biblical legend interrupted by a current event.

The Cantino map is named after the Ferrarese agent of Duke Ercole d’Este who commissioned it to smuggle back to Italy for his boss. Ercole’s daughter Isabella was married to Duke Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua, a man with a very developed interest in maps. In the 1490s he had employed his court artist Andrea Mantegna’s son Francesco to decorate his residence at Marmirolo with a map of the world.³⁵

* * *



16 Cantino World Map, Portuguese
Modena, Biblioteca Estense



17 *Textile with phoenix, winged animals and flowers*, Central Asian
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Mantegna's *Adoration of the Magi* comes with no provenance or commission history but was produced by the artist in Mantua, sometime in the late 1490s or early 1500s.³⁶ Mantegna's patron had views of eastern cities and a map of the world painted in his country residence, but in this painting, made for a small room or perhaps a palace chapel, we see no background and no territorial description, only figures against a black background. The viewer is invited to examine the faces, clothing, and gifts of the Magi for clues about their provenance. The youngest king is dark-skinned, indicating an African origin, and appropriately the jar he holds, containing myrrh, is made of Egyptian alabaster. The middle king has a more near eastern appearance. The eldest king, bald and with a white beard, comes from farthest east, perhaps from very far, given the blue and white Ming porcelain in his hand. The provenance of the bowl



18 ZHU ZHANJI (EMPEROR XUANZONG)
Deity of Longevity (Shouxing tu juan)
Beijing, Palace Museum

aligns, more or less, with the figure's silk cloak, which carries a silk brocade pattern that is either non-repeating or repeats at large intervals. Mantegna has been careful to show that the fabric contains metallic thread interwoven with the silk, giving it a particular sheen, a technique found in silks from Central Asia with large or non-repeating patterns similar to the one worn by Mantegna's king (fig. 17).

The cup and the robe combine to give this king a distinctly far eastern provenance, an impression confirmed by his facial features. This is, I believe, Mantegna's best effort at a portrait of a Chinese sage, with eyes narrower than usual, face creased with venerable age, and a long flowing beard in the Chinese style. I show a fifteenth-century image of the figure of Shouxing, the star-god of longevity, because his characteristically protuberant head makes for an irresistible comparison, but I am not suggesting that Mantegna knew this specific iconography (fig. 18).³⁷ He might have produced his visualization by reference to any number of types of elderly sage in Chinese art, or



19 GREGOR REISCH
Margarita Philosophica (Freiburg, 1503)

even on the basis of verbal description of such types. The head of Mantegna's Magus, with its highly developed frontal lobe and protuberant back portion, was primarily shaped by western faculty psychology (fig. 19). The frontal cortex was the seat of the *sensus communis*, where the mind collects new impressions from the world. These observations are processed by the brain to produce, ultimately, firm knowledge in the form of memory, located in the far back of the head. Mantegna's hoary Magus is possessed of deep knowledge and a vast memory, and yet he is also eminently capable of absorbing new information, as he gazes up from his massive brow, his mouth open in awe, to take in this momentous and disorienting new information. He is the ancient mirror image to the discoverers of Mantegna's time.

Reports of the newly discovered territories still believed to be off the coast of Asia spread immediately to all the courts of Europe, including that of the geographically avid Francesco Gonzaga in Mantua.³⁸ As we have seen, his father in law the Duke of Ferrara managed to get an up to date map smuggled out of Portugal in 1502. Mantegna's painting, with its careful sorting of geographies and its emphasis on the deliberate gravity of a Great Khan come from China to pay homage to Christ in the Holy Land, revisits the theme in the flush of the recent discoveries. Although probably made for an intimate setting and a privileged viewership, the painting's composition spread through copies.³⁹

Mantegna's painting gathers the newly expanded post-1492 world into an intensely concentrated figural structure. It is often called a close-up but the sense is rather of a very tight composition, say a Madonna and Child, that has been somewhat strenuously opened, pushing the picture's borders outwards just enough to include the new arrivals. The boundaries retain a tensile force, bending the figures into the picture field and moving them into a configuration of optimal distribution within the picture's limits, an interlocking pattern with minimal overlap. The Christ Child's halo almost touches the contour of the Virgin's cheek and the head of the central Magus, as the Child's foot nearly meets the curling rim of the proffered porcelain bowl. We are at once very close, our heads leaning toward the Child at the moment of the offering, and yet we are sealed off, outside the frame, spectators admiring an extraordinarily realized picture.⁴⁰ Achievements of objective reportage are enveloped, and fulfilled, by the knowledge that this is a work of art.

The picture offers a compressed world of information, and yet it is on linen, a portable picture. It reports to its viewers, wherever they may be. Each viewer who chooses to come closer and look into this mirror is called upon to figure his or her own relation to

its coordination of distances and proximities. Identification with the Magi is proposed for serious consideration, and for the viewer of this picture that means recognizing geographical and historical distances and the means by which they are bridged. Early viewers recognized features, like the porcelain and turbans, that were contemporary but exotic, actual portals into the distant past. Western viewers will notice, even today, that the eldest Magus is the one with the lightest skin and no visible exotic headgear; he is from farthest away (where complexions are again light) and yet he is here, in the foreground, the one who most resembles his western viewer. It is fitting that this picture ended up on the California coast, facing west, which is to say east.

The painting is an analogue to the messianic worldview Columbus took on his explorations, where a strangely unchanging Asia was to undergo a conversion and produce a new Magus “ab oriente.” The painting exemplifies the oriented antiquarian culture still prevailing in Mantegna’s time, which produced modern antiquities and discovered the exotic east in the deepest folds of Italian culture. It develops and fulfills that vision in the flush of the latest discoveries, but it also reveals in its very pictorial structure the extreme tensions placed upon that worldview after 1492, and the massive effort now required to hold it together.

After this point, and especially after about 1510, the New World was increasingly recognized as a separate continent, isolated from the formerly known world by oceans on two sides. The east settles down as “the East,” rather than as the orienting seat of the earthly paradise and the distant origin of Europe. And the Americas, nowhere near paradise, require beating into Christian form through arms and missions. The new macro-geographical structure, with a truly old world to the east and the truly new world to the west, gave a new position to Europe, truly in the middle. Anachronisms and eastern elements fall away from the European picture of its own antiquity, which becomes increasingly focused on the Greco-Roman past. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the basic orientation of European culture steadily falls away.

The age of expansion and exploration ushered in a new era, and we can call it an era of globalism, but the fact is that the geographical and political reordering also produced a contraction, introducing a form of Eurocentrism that had never before existed.

NOTES

1 I thank Anna Majeski for her research assistance on various aspects of Mantegna’s painting, as well as for her editorial work and help with images. For the distemper medium in Mantegna’s work, see Andrea Rothe, “Mantegna’s Painting on Distemper,” in *Andrea Mantegna*, Jane Martineau (ed.), London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1992, pp. 80-88. On this painting’s technique and condition see Dawson Carr, *Andrea Mantegna, The Adoration of the Magi*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997, pp. 2-11.

2 Molly Bourne, “Francesco II Gonzaga and Maps as Palace Decoration in Renaissance Mantua,” *Imago Mundi*, 51, 1999, pp. 51-82, notes that the Marquis tried to learn Turkish and during the early 1490s placed special orders for turbans “in the same style that is used in Turkey,” and owned a turban presented to him by the Sultan himself.

3 The 1540-2 inventory of the collection of Isabella d’Este records twenty-nine objects in jasper. Two are of special interest for the Mantegna example: “uno diaspis rosso con uno vaso da sacrficio, taliato in meggio che butta biancho, fornito d’oro” and “uno vaso de diaspis in foggia de tazza col coperto et piede et ordello forniti de argento adorato et lavorato parte a scaglie de pesce et parte a fogliette.” See Daniela Ferrari, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga, vol. 1: L’inventario dei Beni del 1540-2*, Milan: Silvana, 2000-2006, nos. 7175 and 7213. No confirmed examples of jasper vessels from the collection exist and so unfortunately nothing further is known either of the appearance or provenance of these vessels, or the dates when they entered Isabella’s collection. The exact definition of the stone today known as jasper (given as ‘diaspro’ or ‘diaspis’ in the 1540-2 inventory) was flexible in the sixteenth century, as was the case for many semiprecious stones. However in the 1540-2 inventory of the d’Este collection, objects in jasper are often further qualified as either red or green in hue. These variations in color are consistent with what is today understood as jasper, suggesting the terms ‘diaspro’ or ‘diaspis’ do often refer to an object of jasper. For an overview of production in hard stone see “Hardstones,” *Grove Art Online*, Oxford Art Online, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T036633>; Wolfram Koeppel, “Mysterious and Prized; Hardstones in Human History before the Renaissance,” in *Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 2-11; and Anna Maria Giusti, *Pietre Dure: the Art of Semiprecious Stonework*, trans. Fabio Barry, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006, pp. 9-20.

4 There are four porcelain objects in the 1540-2 inventory of the collection of Isabella d'Este. Among these are three items of possible interest for the object depicted by Mantegna: "due vasetti de porcellana piccoli, in foggia de coppe, forniti d'oro l'oradello e piedi, con dui anellini per uno per manichi," and "uno vasetto de porcellana in foggia de campanella, con piede et oredello d'oro." See Ferrari, *Le Collezioni Gonzaga, Volume 1: L'inventario dei Beni del 1540-2*, nos. 7158 and 7195. It is uncertain when these objects came into Isabella's collection, or indeed whether they are porcelain in the strict sense. On Chinese porcelain in Renaissance collections, see Marco Spallanzani, *Ceramiche orientali a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Firenze: Libreria Chiari, 1997. For Chinese porcelain in early modern western paintings, see A. I. Spriggs, "Oriental Porcelain in Western paintings, 1450-1700," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 36, 1964-66, pp. 73-87.

5 On this problem, see Alexander Nagel, "Twenty-five notes on pseudoscript in Italian art," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59/60, 2011, pp. 229-48, with full references to the previous literature.

6 On Mantegna's relation to Hebrew culture in Mantua, see Giulio Busi, *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento*, Turin: Aragno, 2007, esp. pp. 95-109.

7 Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier, *La cultura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga*, Simone Albonico (ed.), Milan: Bonnard, 2006, p. 97: "Havemo gratissime le littere sacre, o siano syrie o babilonice, come scrivete, quali...ne haveti mandate, et vi ne ringratiamo. Ma per più nostra chiarezza haveremo charo che ce avisati se alcuni fogliami che hanno esse littere sono di sustantia o pur solum per adornamento, il che quando fosse vi pregamo ne mandati un altro exemplo d'esse littere schiette et semplici, come si solevano a li soi tempi notare."

8 Clifford M. Brown, *Per Dare Qualche Splendore A La Gloriosa Cita di Mantua: documents for the antiquarian collection of Isabella d'Este*. Rome: Bulzoni, 2002, p. 181.

9 Brown, *Per Dare Qualche Splendore a la Gloriosa Cita di Mantua: documents for the antiquarian collection of Isabella d'Este*, pp. 79-82, 156-59, 177-80. See also the fine analysis of Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, 91-102.

10 For more on this topic generally, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, "What counted as an Antiquity in the Renaissance?" in *Renaissance Medievalisms*, Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009, pp. 53-74.

11 Brown, *Per Dare Qualche Splendore a la Gloriosa Cita di Mantua: documents for the antiquarian collection of Isabella d'Este*, pp. 196-204. Also, objects with an eastern Mediterranean provenance seemed to have qualified on occasion as antiquities. In 1505, Isabella's agent Gian Cristoforo Romano went to inspect, in Rome, a "tavola di bronzo, tutta lavorata d'argento a la damaschina con figure, antica." (*Ibid.*, p. 213.) The description "a la damaschina," referring to workmanship of Damascus, suggests that it was a piece of brassware of the sort produced in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, popular then among collectors. At the very least the inlay technique used in such ware was considered strongly

enough in the ancient tradition for the term "a la damaschina" to be used to describe an ancient object. On the use of this terminology to describe Mamluk brassware, see Sylvia Auld, *Renaissance Venice, Islam, and Mahmud the Kurd: A Metalworking Enigma*, London: Altajir World Of Islam Trust, 2004, p. 37.

12 As shown by Robert Nelson, "Byzantium and the Rebirth of Art and Learning in Italy and France," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, Helen C. Evans (ed.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 515-523, esp. 520-521.

13 Describing the collection of Pietro Barbo (Pope Paul II, r. 1464-1471), which contained many Roman antiquities, Cardinal Jacopo Ammanati noted "images of saints of ancient workmanship brought from Greece, which they call icons." See Eugène Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le XV^e et le XVI^e siècle. Recueil de documents inédits tirés des archives et des bibliothèques romaines*, 3 vols., Paris: E. Thorin, 1878-1882, Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms, 1983, vol. 2, pp. 131-132, n. 4, here p. 132: "imagines sanctorum operis antiqui ex Graecia allatas, quas illi iconas vacant." See also David Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and His Worldly Goods: the Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-83)*, London: The Warburg Institute, 1992, p. 88.

14 The inscription reads: "Tabella sancti heremitae [A]lexandrini quam dedit sanctae virgini Catharinae: eam in fidelium informans: Et fuit prima effigies sibi in christianitate visa: Coram qua agnovit Christum unigenitum dei patris." See *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, Helen C. Evans (ed.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, cat. 128.

15 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 344, believes it to be a thirteenth-century panel painted in Venice. Michele Bacci, in *Luca Evangelista: parola e immagine tra Oriente e Occidente*, Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2000, cat. 75, dates it to the second half of the thirteenth century and also believes it is Italian. Maria Billanovich, "La moneta falsa rinvenuta nella 'Tomba di San Luca' a Padova," in *Monastica et Humanistica: Scritti in onore di Gregorio Penco O.S.B.*, Francesco G. Trolese (ed.), Cesena: Badia di Santa Maria del Monte, 2003. Badia di Santa Maria del Monte, 2003, pp. 699-715, dates it to the eleventh or twelfth century in light of a recent technical examination that puts the poplar panel between 1020-1170. Could it be that it was an earlier Byzantine work overpainted by a local artist in the thirteenth century? On the subject of Saint Luke as painter generally, see Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista: storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a san Luca*, Pisa: GISEM, Edizioni ETS, 1998. On the phenomenon of backdating icons, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York: Zone Books, 2010, pp. 97-108.

16 See Ronald Lightbown, *Mantegna: with a complete catalogue of the paintings, drawings and prints*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1986, 401-403; and *Mantegna 1431-1506*, Giovanni Agosti and Dominique Thiébaud (eds.), assisted by Arturo Galansino and Jacopo Stoppa, Paris: Hasan, Musée du Louvre, 2008, no. 25, pp. 110-11.

17 Even modern works after antique models, such as the statuettes by the sculptor Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi, called Antico, were described by Isabella d'Este as "antichità." Ann Hersey Allison, "The Bronzes of Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi, called Antico," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 89-90, 1993-1994, p. 92, docs. 74-75. This is not to say that Isabella could not distinguish between a modern work and an antiquity, or that the distinction did not matter to her, but that she was also able to see a powerful substitution function in the modern works.

18 The eastward facing Christ on the cross is taken as a tenet of faith by John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, book 4, chap. 12. In the thirteenth-century account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Ricoldo da Montecroce notes that next to the rock where the cross was embedded there is an image of Jesus Christ, "which is in mosaic; and it turns its face to the west, just as Christ was crucified." He then says that at the foot of the stone where the cross was implanted there is the room of the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Evangelist, "who were next to the crucified Christ at the foot of the cross, and looked towards the Orient at the face of Christ." (*Viaggio in Terra Santa di Fra Ricoldo da Monte Di Croce*, Siena: Mucci, 1864, p. 21) The pilgrimage account of Alessandro di Filippo Rinuicini of 1474 explains that the hole for the cross of the good thief can be seen somewhat to the north of the hole where Christ's cross stood, and that this was why this thief was converted: "il Salvatore nostro fue levato conficto in croce col volto rivolto verso l'occidente et essendo questo ladrone crocifixo dalla parte di tramontana, veniva a essere alla mano dextra d'esso Salvatore et per chagione che l'ora era circha sexta, il sole, che era già levato in alto, veniva a gittare l'ombra del corpo d'esso Salvatore sopra di questo ladrone, onde egli si venne a conpugnere nel chuoire suo et avere pentimento de' suoi pecchati connessi e a rendersene in cholpa." (Alessandro di Filippo Rinuccini, *Santeissimo Peregrinaggio del Sancto Sepolcro* 1474, Andrea Calamai, [ed.], Pisa, Pacini, 1993, p. 173. My thanks to Michele Bacci for this reference.) In the seventeenth century, Thomas Browne declares this tradition credible, whereas the tradition of representing Christ's cross higher than those of the thieves he considers dubious: "That (Christ) was crucified with his face towards the West, we will not contend with tradition and probable account; but we applaud not the hand of the Painter, in exalting his Crosse so high above those on either side; since hereof we find no authentick account in history, and even the crosses found by Helena pretend no such distinction from longitude or dimension." (*Urne-Buriall*, chap. 3; in Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici and Urne-Buriall*, Stephen Greenblatt and Ramie Targoff (eds.), New York: New York Review of Books, 2012, p. 121.

19 On the Crucifixion panel of the San Zeno predella, see *Mantegna* 143-1506, Giovanni Agosti and Dominique Thiébaud (eds.), no. 51, pp. 164-167; *Mantegna e le Arti a Verona*, 1450-1500, Sergio Marinelli and Paola Marini (eds.), Venice: Marsilio, 2006, no. 2, p. 199; Lightbown, *Mantegna*, pp. 73-76.

20 For various sources, see Hugo Kehrer, *Die "Heiligen Drei Könige" in der Legende und in der deutschen bildenden Kunst bis Albrecht Dürer*, Strassburg: Heitz, 1904, vol. 1, p. 33.

21 George F. Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance*, London: British Museum, 1930, pp. 231-32, nos. 898-901 and 903. See also Georg Habich, "Zum Medaillen-Porträt Christi," *Archiv für Medaillen- und Plaketten-Kunde* 2, 1920-21, pp. 69-78; George F. Hill, *Medallie Portraits of Christ*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920; Philine Helas, "Lo 'smeraldo' smarrito, ossia il 'vero profilo' di Cristo," in *Il Volto di Cristo*, Milan: Electa, 2000, Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf (eds.), pp. 215-26; Gerhard Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel: Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance*, Munich: Fink, 2002, pp. 298-302; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, pp. 241, 252-53. It is not certain who created this medal, but consensus is settling on Niccolò Fiorentino, who is most famous for his medal of Girolamo Savonarola. The inscription on the reverse reads: "PRESENTES FIGURE AD SIMILITUDINEM DOMINI IHESUS SALVATORIS NOSTRI ET APOSTOLI PAULI IN AMIRALDO IMPRESSE PER MAGNI THEUCRI PREDECESSORES ANTIA SINGULARITER OBSERVATE MISSE SUNT AB IPSO MAGNO THEUCRO S.D.N. PAPE INNOCENCIO OCTAVO PRO SINGULARI CLENODIO AD HUNC FINEM UT SUUM FRATREM CAPTIVUM RETINERET." Evidence that such a medal was known in northern Italy at the time can be found in the altarpiece of the Madonna and Saints of 1499 by Bartolomeo Montagna (a Mantegna pupil, according to Vasari), originally in the church of San Michele in Vicenza and now in the Brera Museum in Milan, where a numismatic profile of Christ decorates the architectural frieze.

22 On Anniius, see Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science*, 1450-1800, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 76-103; Amanda Collins, "Renaissance Epigraphy and Its Legitimizing Potential: Anniius of Viterbo, Etruscan Inscriptions, and the Origins of Civilization," in *The Afterlife of Inscriptions: Reusing, Rediscovering, Reinventing & Revitalizing Ancient Inscriptions*, A. E. Cooley (ed.), London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2000, pp. 57-76; Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 121-131; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, pp. 247-50. Anniius' logic persisted even decades later in the debates about Italian language that ran through the sixteenth century. Basing himself in Anniius' theories, the noted linguist Pier Francesco Giambullari argued in 1546 that most of the words used in Florence and in the Florentine region derived not from Latin but from Etruscan, and that Etruscan was derived from oriental languages such as Hebrew and Chaldean. Chaldean for him meant Aramaic, which he considered an archaic language preceding even Hebrew. See Claude Gilbert Dubois, "Postérité des langues d'Aram: l'Hypothèse sémitique dans l'origine imaginée de l'Etrusque au XVIe siècle," in *L'Hébreu au Temps de La Renaissance*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 127-153, here, p. 130.

23 The wooden panel has recently been radiocarbon dated to the eleventh or twelfth century. For a fuller discussion and further bibliographical references concerning the Titulus, see Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, pp. 219-40.

24 Letter of February 4th, 1492, from Leonardo Sarzano in Rome to Giacomo Gherardi in Florence is in the Vatican Library, Vat. Lat. 3912, f. 43v: “Titulus Graecus, & Latinus haud facile, etiam a peritissimis earum linguarum, legi poterat. Sunt enim figurati eo ordine scribendi retrogrado, quo et litterae hebraicae conscribuntur. Ex quo et major fides et religio huic rei adhibenda videtur. Primo namque ordini litterarum Hebraicarum inscribendi modo contraire noluerunt.” Gherardi, nuntio of Pope Innocent VIII, was close to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano. For a fuller interpretation, see Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, pp. 234-35.

25 Robert Wakefield, *On the Three Languages*, G. Lloyd Jones (ed. and trans.), Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989, pp. 96-97.

26 In the years just preceding the discovery of the Titulus, Pico della Mirandola had been engaged in an intensive course of Hebrew and Kabbalah study in Florence. On the basis of these texts, then being taught in Florence primarily by the Hebrew scholar Yohanan Alemanno, Pico affirmed that the only names that were effective in magic were Hebrew or derived from Hebrew. On these views of Pico (who is echoing Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.24-25 and 4.45), see Antonella Ansani, “Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola’s Language of Magic,” in *L’Hébreu au Temps de La Renaissance*, pp. 89-104, and Giovanni Busi, *L’enigma dell’ebraico nel Rinascimento*, Turin: Aragno, 2007, pp. 35-46. On Yohanan Alemanno in Florence and the function of Hebrew letters in enlivening the golem, see Moshe Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance. Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (eds.), Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1988, pp. 59-76.

27 *A Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus’s First Voyage* (Repertorium Colombianum, vol. VI), F. Lardicci (ed.), Turnhout: Brepols, 1999, p. 309: “Y luego en aquel presente mes, por la información que yo avía dado a V. Al. de las tierras de Yndia y de un Príncipe que es llamado Gran Can, que quiere dezir en nuestro romance Rey de los Reyes (como muchas vezes él y sus antecessores avían enbiado a Roma a pedir doctores en nuestra sancta fe porque le enseñasen en ella, y que nunca el Sancto Padre le avía proveído y se perdían tantos pueblos, cayendo en idolatrías e rescibiendo en sí sectas de perdición); y V. Al., como cathólicos cristianos y príncipes amadores de la sancta fe cristiana y acrecentadores d’ella y enemigos de la secta de Mahoma y de todas idolatrías y heregías, pensaron de embiarme a mí, Cristóval Colón, a las dichas partidas de Yndia par aver los dichos príncipes y los pueblos y las tierras y la /lv/ disposición d’ellas y de todo, y la manera que se pudiera tener para la conversión d’ellas a nuestra sancta fe.”

28 My understanding of Columbus’s historical geography has been greatly enriched by George E. Nunn, *The Geographical Conceptions of Columbus*, New York: American Geographical Society, 1924, and Alain Milhou, *Colomb et le messianisme hispanique*, Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2007.

29 This was not an entirely absurd idea. Under the Yüan dynasty, most government officials were Muslim. Even under the Ming, Zheng He, the great Chinese navigator who undertook several voyages under the Yongle emperor (r. 1404-1424) to India, Africa, and as far as the Persian Gulf, was a Muslim and on every expedition took officers who knew Arabic. See Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History*, New York: Norton, 2000, pp. 46-47.

30 *A Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus’s First Voyage*, esp. pp. 332-333, 522.

31 On this painting, see, principally, *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, Jay Levinson (ed.), Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991, p. 152, and Joseph Leo Koerner, “The Epiphany of the Black Magus circa 1500,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 3: *From the “Age of Discovery” to the Age of Abolition*, part 1: *Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 7-92, here pp. 7-13.

32 Even up in the northern sea the southern part of Greenland is fairly accurately represented, with a banderole that reads: “*This land which was discovered by order of . . . Dom Manoel, King of Portugal, is believed to be the extremity of Asia.*” By far the most up to date and informative account of this map is on the internet: http://www.cartographic-images.net/Cartographic_Images/306_Cantino.html.

33 “The Letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha,” in E. Bradford Burns (ed.), *A Documentary History of Brazil*, New York: Knopf, 1966, p. 20-29, here 22: “They are of a dark brown, rather reddish colour. They have good well-made faces and noses. They go naked, with no sort of covering. They attach no more importance to covering up their private parts or leaving them uncovered than they to showing their faces. They are very ingenuous in that matter.... One of them had on a kind of wig covered with yellow feathers which ran round from behind the cavity of the skull, from temple to temple, and so to the back of the head; it must have been about a hand’s breadth wide, was very close-set and thick, and covered his occiput and his ears.”

34 “The Letter of Pero Vaz de Caminha,” p. 25.

35 The Sala del Mappamundo, with a map of the world painted by Andrea Mantegna’s son Francesco, was commissioned in 1494. In the same year and for the same residence Francesco also commissioned the Camera Graeca, also painted by Francesco Mantegna, with portraits of Constantinople, Adrianople (now called Edirne), either the Dardanelles or the Bosphorus straits, the Albanian port city of Vlore (Valona in Italian), and the siege of the island of Rhodes. See Bourne, “Francesco II Gonzaga and Maps as Palace Decoration in Renaissance Mantua.”

36 For a history of views about the original location, see Giovanni Agosti, *Su Mantegna I*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005, p. 331.

37 I wish to thank Jonathan Hay for pointing me in this direction and for discussing with me the iconography of sages in China and the methodological issues involved in making any such comparison. I thank Michelle Wang for locating this painting of Shouxing.

38 One direct link from the Spain of Columbus and the Catholic Kings came to Mantua in 1499 in the person of Gonzálo Fernández de Oviedo. While serving as page in the family households of King Ferdinand of Spain, he witnessed in 1492 the surrender of Granada by what remained of the Nasrid kingdom, and was also present in 1493 at Columbus's appearance before the Catholic Kings upon his return from his first voyage to the Indies. Oviedo then passed to the court of Ludovico Sforza in Milan, and when Sforza was ousted by the French King Louis XII in October 1499, he passed to the court of Isabella d'Este in Mantua. He was to travel to the New World several times and was to remember in his later writings his exchanges with "that most excellent painter who was living there then, Andrea Mantegna." This passage is drawn from his *Batallas y Quinquagenas*, J. B. Avallé-Arce (ed.), Salamanca: Editorial Diputación de Salamanca, 1989, p. 81. It was quoted by Lightbown, *Andrea Mantegna*, p. 268, from J. Pérez de Tudela Bueso, "Vida y escritos de Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo," in Fernández de Oviedo, *Historial General y Natural de la Indias*, J. Pérez de Tudela Bueso, (ed.), 5. Vols., Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, vol. 1, p. xxiv. This and other passages from Fernández de Oviedo mentioning Mantegna are discussed by Agosti, *Su Mantegna I*, p. 105.

39 A thorough list of the copies can be found in Agosti, *Su Mantegna I*, pp. 331-32.

40 This effect is confirmed by the construction of space in the picture: though presented as a close-up, the scene is in fact described as if seen from afar. In contrast to some of Mantegna's portraits, which register the visual effects of a figure seen from nearby—the figure looming, the underside of a chin coming into view as a result of a proximate viewpoint—this picture presents its scene as seen from some distance, with spatial intervals compressed into a frieze-like array on one plane. The effect is similar to the compression of space provided by a telephoto lens: a distant scene is brought close and made visible in its details, without losing a sense that its contents are in fact at a significant remove. Mantegna offers the same treatment, distance rendered proximate, in several of his other close-ups, such as the Berlin *Presentation in the Temple*, the Brera *Dead Christ* and the Jacquemart-André *Ecce Homo*. My thanks to Blake Gopnik for clarifying this point.

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