

# Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Rose*

## *The revelation of the earth*

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*Dedicated to the memory of my teacher Marjorie Reeves*

### Twisting gourds

A featherwork mosaic shield now in Stuttgart was one of the first Mexica objects to arrive in Europe after Hernán Cortés's battle for Tenochtitlan (fig. 1). Specialists now identify the stepped and turning central motif as *xicalcolihqui*, "twisted gourd," which was associated through a large swathe of Mesoamerican culture with lightning, serpent deities, rain, waves, and cyclical movement.<sup>1</sup> Without knowledge of Nahuatl culture, the Europeans who first saw this shield in the 1520s would have relied on their own sense of these forms, a stepped spiral formation at top and a target-like design of concentric circles at bottom. From Columbus's first arrival on Haiti, European viewers speculated about whether works made by the newly encountered indigenous communities were made as beautiful ornamentation or as symbolic imagery related in some way to a ritual function.<sup>2</sup> The objects arriving in Europe as a result of Cortés's military activities in Mexico evoked riches and great civilizations coming under the aegis of Christian empire, still unintelligible messages now becoming available to Christian knowledge,

speaking of a divine plan hidden until now and revealing itself in these times.

The shield's pattern—a pale spiral formation against a red ground, with a sphere at bottom—is not very far from that of the *Madonna of the Rose* by the Italian artist Parmigianino (fig. 2). The two works turn out to be not that far from each other in symbolism as well. Complicating such comparisons, scholars have noted that while the twisted gourd motif on the Stuttgart shield is traditional, the combination with the motif of concentric circles is not.<sup>3</sup> Alessandra Russo has encouraged us to see this shield and other Cortesian objects not as pristine relics of precontact Mesoamerican culture but as early expressions of the contact itself, since the earliest known objects from the New World are almost immediately entangled with European forms and techniques.<sup>4</sup> Russo's insight makes it possible to pose the question: Is the addition of the concentric circle motif at the bottom of the shield an unusual conjunction of Mexica shield designs or an early processing by Nahuatl artisans of the image of a concentric cosmos often seen in European books and images (fig. 3)? In either case, the concentric circles would have struck Europeans as a highly familiar cosmic motif, possibly a sign that this new and still unknown world shared deep origins with the European Christian world.

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This article forms one part of a larger study coauthored with Elizabeth Horodowich entitled *Amerasia*, forthcoming from Zone Books.

1. M. Orozpe Enríquez, *El código oculto de la greca escalonada: Tloque Nahuaque* (Mexico City, 2010)

2. F. Lardicci, ed., *A Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus's First Voyage* (Turnhout, 1999), 517: "Hallaron diz que muchas estatuas en figura de mugeres y muchas cabeças muy bien labradas de palo; no supo si lo tenían por arreo y hermosura de casa o lo adoravan." The English translation on page 61 of this edition is faulty; I offer the following: "They [the Christians] found many statues in the shape of women and many heads well worked in wood. He [Columbus] did not know whether they had them for the adornment and beauty of their houses or if they worshipped them."

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3. Diana Fane describes it as "an unusual variant of the type" of the *xicalcolihqui chimalli* or twisted gourd shield; D. Fane, "Feathers, Jade, Turquoise, and Gold," in *Images Take Flight: Feather Art in Mexico and Europe, 1400–1700*, ed. A. Russo, G. Wolf, and D. Fane (Munich, 2016), 107. A concentric circle motif is used as the main element in another Mexica shield type, known as the golden disc shield or *teocuitlaxapo chimalli*. See P. R. Anawalt and F. Berdan, *The Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley, 1992), 3:141 (fol. 67r), and for its appearance in other sources, "Appendix G, Shields: The Codex Mendoza and other Aztec Pictorials," *ibid.*, 1:242–43. Thus, the novelty of this shield might consist in combining the two shield types.

4. A. Russo, "Cortés's Objects and the Idea of New Spain: Inventories as Spatial Narratives," *Journal of the History of Collections* 23 (2011): 229–52. See also A. Russo, "A Contemporary Art from New Spain," in Russo, Wolf, and Fane, *Images Take Flight*, 23–63.



Figure 1. Feather shield, possibly made for Cortés, with *xicalcolihqui chimalli* (twisted gourd) motif and concentric circles, ca. 1520. Wood, cane, fleece, feathers, and rawhide, 71 x 75.5 cm. Stuttgart, Landesmuseum Württemberg. Photo: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Federschild-Sonneretuschiert.jpg> (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Like the ceremonial feather shield, Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Rose* is a design shaped to a format. The Virgin's head reaches to the top of the painting, her form spreading downward across the composition's lower boundary, as the Christ child's body extends from one edge to the other. Christ's hand threads knowingly under the Virgin's left arm to offer her a rose, while her right hand passes across his to receive it, a crossing of limbs that draws attention to the picture's center, exactly marked by the Virgin's left nipple. The Christ child looks out of the picture with a sharp gaze as he rests his hand on a globe, a feature that defined the picture for its early commentators, who consistently noted that this was a Madonna that included a terrestrial globe, a *mappamondo*.<sup>5</sup> We see the

5. Now called the *Madonna of the Rose*, for the century or so after it was made commentators tended to identify the picture by the earthly orb, describing it as a Madonna with child leaning on a globe of the earth; the globe defined the painting for its early viewers. G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini (Florence, 1966), 4:540, wrote in the 1550 edition: "E poco dopo fece un quadro di Nostra Donna in casa messer Dionigi de' Gianni, con un Cristo che tiene una palla del mappamondo"; and in the 1568 edition: "dopo fece un quadro di Nostra Donna con un Cristo che tiene una palla di mappamondo."

Iberian Peninsula at the orb's left edge, with Africa below it and Asia extending across to the right. Parmigianino certainly consulted a recent globe in rendering his sphere, yet no globe design known from the period exactly matches this one.

A pattern of repetition and resonance runs through the various forms. Christ's arm resting on the globe rhymes with the upward swell of the curtain above. The parting of the curtains at the top right, suggesting an opening canopy, finds an echo in the parting of the Virgin's veil on either side of her head, and in the general downward spread of the Virgin's form. Striations and folds course through the painting with dizzying consistency and variety. The swirling draperies and the poised figures embody a paradox of movement in stillness. There is no consistent wind moving the drapes around, yet they spiral. The limbs of the Virgin and Christ can be understood to be in movement—the child offering the rose and the Virgin perhaps lifting one hand to receive the flower while putting out a protecting arm in front of the child—yet there is something still about these limbs.<sup>6</sup> The globe, too, combines movement and stillness. Its landmasses are clearly described—it is a cartographic exhibit—and yet it has a swirling quality; one feels the energy that animates it as a cosmic body. It seems to rotate on the axis delicately but unambiguously marked by the landing of Christ's pinky on the North Pole.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis on pattern and rhythm and the paradox of stillness in movement come together in the rose, a layered and repeated unfurling of forms composing an image of cosmic order, the full view of which is being offered not to us but to the Virgin. This is probably a damask rose (*Rosa x damascena*), a hybridization of

Pietro Lama, in his ca. 1560 description of works of art in Bologna, noted the presence of the painting in the palace of Bartolomeo Zani (Dionigi's son) on Via Santo Stefano: "e fra le altre ha quel rarissimo quadro del Parmigianino, dov'è quella Madonna, che ha quel Puttino coricato in braccio col gomito sopra un Mappamondo." P. Lama, *Graticola di Bologna: Ossia descrizione delle pitture, sculture e architetture di detta città, fatta l'anno 1560* (Bologna, 1844), 12.

6. See also A. Gnann, *Parmigianino: Die Zeichnungen* (Petersburg, 2007), 1:236. One early preparatory drawing in Chatsworth (Gnann, cat. no. 710) shows the Virgin rolling up the sleeve of the downward-pointing arm (presumably in preparation for giving the child a bath), a motif that then lost its purpose in the succeeding drawings and in the final painting. A. E. Popham, *The Drawings of Parmigianino* (New York, 1953), 33: "the curious and apparently motiveless action of the Virgin's right arm in the picture is explained as a survival of the mother's perfectly natural action in the drawing."

7. A detail observed by Robert Smithson in "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman, or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam (Berkeley, 1996), 352.

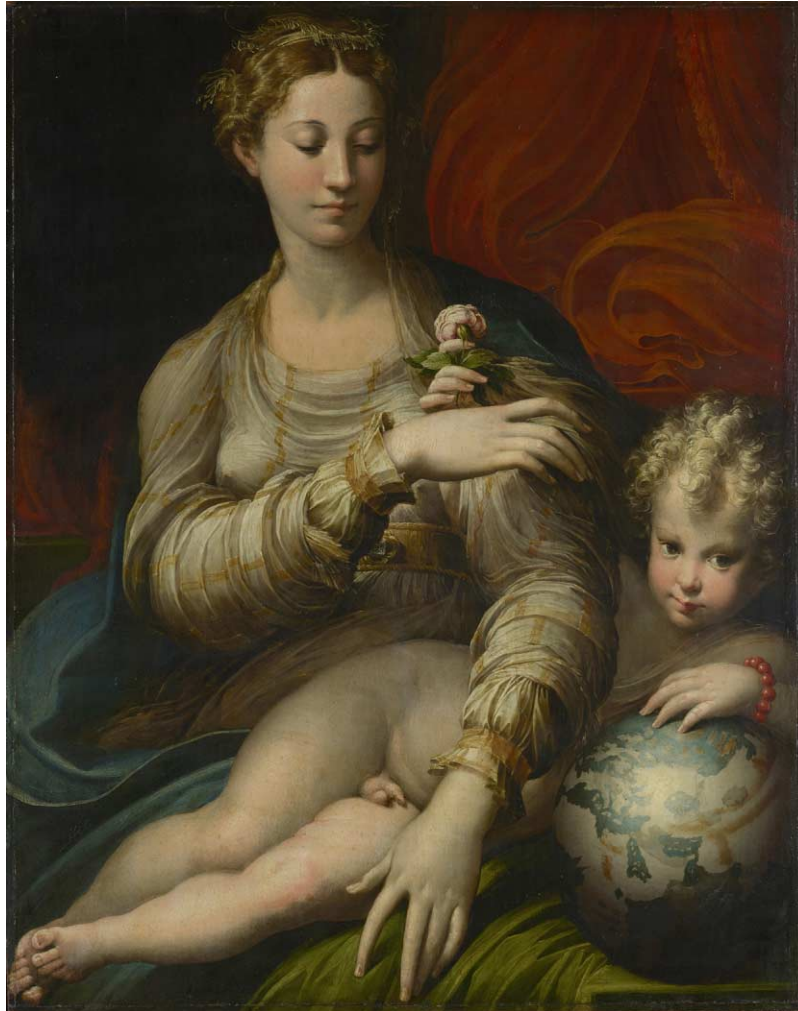


Figure 2. Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Rose*, 1529–30. Oil on poplar wood, 109 x 88.5 cm. Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister. Photo: bpk Bildagentur / Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister / Hans-Peter Klut / Art Resource, NY.

*Rosa gallica* and *Rosa phœnicia* produced in Asia Minor and distributed throughout the Near East and Middle East, then brought to Europe by crusaders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and christened with the Damascus provenance.<sup>8</sup> The Virgin gazes down at the flower and through the flower toward Christ, who is turned toward us. His hand resting on the globe emerges from a bracelet composed of miniature red coral globes

8. B. Dickerson, *Old Rose History and Synopsis*, <https://web.csulb.edu/~odinthor/oldrose.html#Damask%20Roses>. Thanks to Rosie Cullinane for sharing her thoughts on the identification of the rose, and this reference. See also M. Mahboubi, "Rosa damascena as Holy Ancient Herb with Novel Applications," *Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine* 6 (2016): 10–16.

polished to a shine, following one another around his wrist and disappearing from view. Like the rose, the bracelet is a sequence of forms repeated into circular infinity. The ambidextrous child presents the unfurling rose to her and the swirling earth to us.

In his brief description of the painting, Vasari took note of the *modi straordinari* of the Virgin's clothing, with its "sleeves of yellowish veils and as it were striped with gold."<sup>9</sup> The patterning and striations that make up the layered forms constantly curl and turn, suggesting that all ornament is other-sided, that by following the course of any surface the opposite side of it will be

9. Vasari, *Vite*, 4:540. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

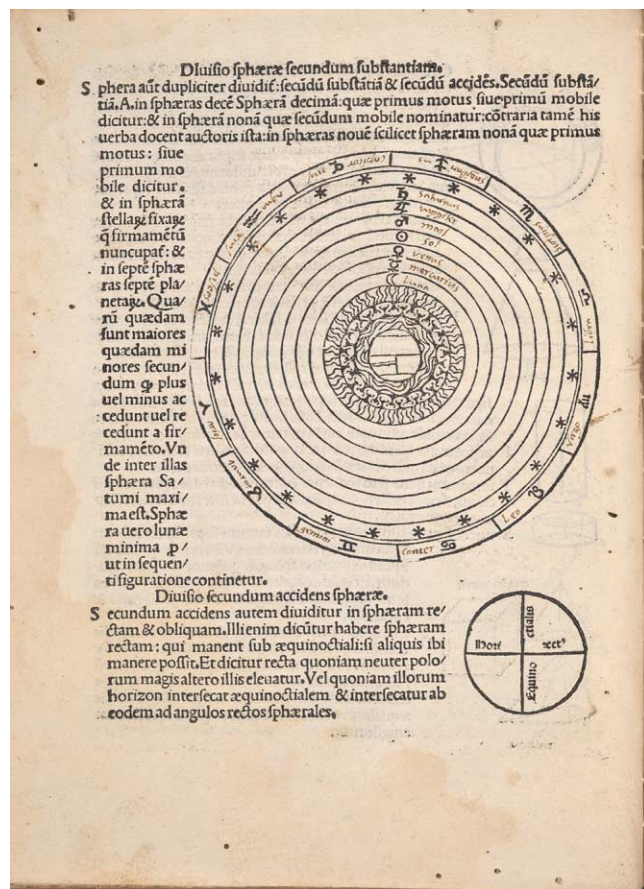


Figure 3. Johannes de Sacrobosco, *Sphaera mundi* (Venice: Bonetus Locatellus for Octavianus Scotus, 1490), n.p. Photo: Courtesy of Brown University Library.

revealed. The emphasis on pattern and rhythm and the paradox of movement in stillness are enhanced by the painting's emphatic enclosure and the resulting impression of allover ornamentation. The figures reach to the edge of the picture field, turning gyrating draperies into a sort of ground for pearlescent bodies. There is a partial view to what appear to be bedclothes at the left, but they are of the same color as the draperies, so we are offered not so much a view into space as an undulating red field fading into shadow toward the top left corner. The resulting impression is that this is not an excerpt from our world, not even a scene in the earthly life of Mary and Jesus.

The Virgin's golden sash carries at its center a large crystal, receiving light from all sides, an embedding that is repeated fractally throughout the painting. The scintillating, turning form of the Virgin—a sort of twisted gourd—shimmers against the backing of wine-red

draperies and in turn becomes the setting for the body of the child. The ornamental emphasis is a clear “no” to the last one hundred years of space-describing paintings, and arguably a call to an earlier mode of Christian *ars sacra* based in the cosmic principle that all aspects of a work of religious art, both ornament and figuration, participate in its sacred meaning, just as all elements of creation participate in God's design.

Whereas in conventional painting figures and objects are placed in a rendition of worldly space, what is called a setting, here we have a different relation of figure and ground, with the multicolored earth set against the picture's layered forms like a precious stone against a foil—a setting not in the pictorial but in the jeweler's sense. The earth is nestled against the white body of the child, which is in turn set against the striated gold of the Virgin-matrix-foil, in its turn placed against the dark and sumptuous red-bole-like field of draperies. The earth here is a gem of creation, or perhaps it is a cosmic toy, under the playful and delicate hand of a child god who seems to know exactly what he is going to do with it.

If the figures are not set into the world but rather form an ornamental pattern, scale is radically open to question. This Virgin and child could be sitting in a room, or they could be set out of time and earthly space altogether. The globe under the child's hand could be a mere model of the earth, like a desktop globe a scholar might keep in his study, or it could be a vision of the planet earth presented to those who live on earth. Parmigiano's painting dislodges us from human-scaled reality, but without setting the earth into the traditional cosmological armature of planets and stars, as we see in the image from Johannes de Sacrobosco's astronomy treatise (fig. 3). Instead, the earth is a living organism under the hand of Christ, as the Virgin, his throne and support, looks on in decorous subordination. This is a cosmogonic image, an insight into creation, or rather a final unfolding of the destiny of creation now being offered to us by its creator. The painting captures the sense of a gathering excitement that is now coming to a head. Everything is in transformation. For natural philosophers at the time, coral hovered between the categories of mineral, vegetal, and animal, and so the coral beads on Christ's wrist are a succession of potential worlds, shown in proximity to the realized earth of creation, the dwelling eventually populated by God's fallen humans.<sup>10</sup>

10. S. Kelley, “The King's Coral Body: A Natural History of Coral and the Post-tragic Ecology of *The Tempest*,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14 (2014): 116–18.



Figure 4. Sebastiano del Piombo shows Emperor and Pope debating over a globe in 1530. Black and white chalk on gray prepared paper, 30.9 x 46.3 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

### Multisided earth

In his *Lives of the Artists* of 1550, Vasari tells us that Parmigianino's painting was offered to Pope Clement VII when he resided in the city of Bologna in late 1529 and early 1530 to meet with and crown Emperor Charles V. Then, in his second edition of 1568, Vasari says that the artist originally intended the painting to be for the writer Pietro Aretino and only in a second moment gave it to the pope. We will probably never know the true story, but the preparatory drawings for the painting do suggest that an important change occurred at an advanced stage in the process, indicating a change in purpose. In none of the several preparatory drawings do we see the rose or the globe. Introduced into the picture in a subsequent phase not documented by any drawing, the globe and the rose are mutually interdependent symbols of cosmic order that suit a newly elevated papal reception for the painting. Either way, Parmigianino probably finished the picture in late 1529.

The artist Sebastiano Veneziano (later Sebastiano del Piombo), who traveled to Bologna in the pope's retinue, produced a drawing of his meeting with Charles V in early 1530, possibly for a never-executed painting (fig. 4). The summit is here cast as a debate focused around a

terrestrial globe, which is being presented and explained with some excitement by a cosmographer. Behind them under a canopy is a monstrance with the host consecrated in the papal mass, the pope's tiara on the left (Evangelist) side of the monstrance and the newly bestowed imperial crown on the right (Epistle) side. On the table before the two potentates, all attention is drawn to the spherical *mappamundi* charting the earth's landmasses and seas. Instruments of the cartographer's art strewn on the table insist on the ingenuity and labor that went into the making of the globe that is now at the center of discussion. The pope points to the globe even as the emperor, hand on chest, is shown in mid-speech. Apart from the impending Turkish threat, principal matters of geopolitical discussion at this meeting included the Christian empire's global expansion over the previous decades, marked by a succession of world-historical events: Columbus and Vespucci sailing west and landing in hitherto unknown reaches of the earth's inhabited lands; the Portuguese king's wildly successful expeditions around Africa and to the farthest known islands of Asia; Cortés's conquest of Mexico in 1519–20; and then, making it possible that it could all be tied together, the complete circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan's crew in 1519–22. During the coronation

ceremony, the pope bestowed on the emperor various insignia of his rule: a ring, a sword, a golden crown of empire, a scepter, and, finally, “a globe representing the image of the entire world” (*globum totius mundi imaginem repraesentans*).<sup>11</sup> This gifted globe may have represented the world, but only abstractly, symbolizing the emperor’s power by an unfigured gold orb topped by a cross.<sup>12</sup> That was fine for the ceremony and procession, but at the actual summit, world domination was under discussion as a political reality, and that meant the abstract imperial orb needed to be supplemented by the accurate mapping of the world, incorporating the latest geographical information obtained from the recent spectacular expeditions to new lands to the east and west.

Europe was abuzz with reports on these events. On September 24, 1522, the Venetian ambassador Gasparo Contarini (who was a prominent participant in the negotiations at Bologna in 1529–30) wrote to the Venetian doge Andrea Grimani from Valladolid in Spain with a description of Cortés’s conquest in Mexico and the gifts sent by Cortés to Emperor Charles V, which may have included the feather shield shown above. Contarini reports that Cortés had found “various and diverse cities and castles, inhabited by men more civilized than those that had been discovered until now.” Their dwellings, he reports, are well adorned, even with cotton textiles, and “they have a great deal of gold, but they do not use it for money, instead appreciating it and using it in various ornaments . . .; they do not use letters, but write necessary things with figures of animals or other things, in the way that the Egyptians did in antiquity.” Combining the news of the Mexican conquest with that of Magellan’s passage through the American strait that would thereafter bear his name and around the earth,

11. As described in a papal bull promulgated on the occasion. See G. Giordani, *Della venuta e dimora in Bologna del sommo pontefice Clemente VII per la coronazione di Carlo V. imperatore celebrata l’anno MDXXX* (Bologna, 1842), 73 (appendix XLVIII): “Hos vero Missam prosequentes, Evangelio latino, graecaque lingua nondum enunciato, eadem quae nudius tertius Regia, Imperialiaque insignia Imperatori contulimus, annulum in primis eius digito annulari imponentes, deinde Ensem adversus fidei hostes, ut brandum, ad ejus femur accingi fecimus, deinde vero aurea corona ejus caput coronavimus, ac postmodum sceptrum peculiare Regibus insigne, ac globum totius mundi imaginem repraesentans, in ejus manu tradidimus, et ad pacis osculum, qua Christus nascens, praedicans, moriens, resurgens ac regnans Ecclesiam suam docuit, admissimus.”

12. As is clear from the engravings by Nicolas Hogenberg commemorating the imperial procession at Bologna (The Hague: Hendrik Hondius II, 1530), in one of which (plate 25) we see the Duke of Bavaria on a rearing horse “with the golden globe” (*CVM AVREO POMO*).

Contarini’s letter strongly suggests that Spanish exploration westward had opened a western passage to Asia.<sup>13</sup> The same hope of access to Asia animated Cortés and his followers in their various westward and northward ventures of the 1520s, 1530s, and 1540s.

Contarini’s excitement chimes with verses of the poet Ludovico Ariosto, who in the 1532 edition of his *Orlando Furioso* (that is, after his d’Este patrons had shifted allegiance from the French to the imperial side after the emperor’s coronation in Bologna in 1530) inserted a prophecy of future world discovery into his epic set in the Middle Ages:

Veggio Hernando Cortese, il quale ha messo  
nuove città sotto i cesarei editti,  
e regni in Oriente sí remoti,  
ch’ a noi, che siamo in India, non son noti.

[I see Hernan Cortés, who put  
new cities under imperial edicts,  
as well as kingdoms in the East so remote,  
that we, who are in India, do not know of them.]<sup>14</sup>

For Ariosto after 1530, Mexico opens a misty vision of kingdoms so far to the east that even those in India don’t know them.<sup>15</sup>

The questions surrounding the newly discovered territories in Asia and America—their riches, their extent, the nature of the people who inhabited them, the problem of their governance—were hotly discussed in this period generally and in Bologna in particular. How did these places relate to the known world? What was the nature of the peoples who lived there? Were they capable of being converted? Among these questions was the basic and unresolved question of how and where east met west on the other side of the globe and how the world should be divided: Were the Spanish territories across the Atlantic part of a continuum with Asia, thus putting eastern Asia under Spanish rule, or were the Asian territories separate and under Portuguese dominion? In negotiations at Badajoz in 1524 and at Zaragoza in 1529, the Spanish and Portuguese vied over which kingdom had claim to the Moluccas, the Spice

13. Letter of Gasparo Contarini to Doge Andrea Grimani from Valladolid, September 24, 1522, trans. in *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, ed. L. Formisano and G. Symcox (Turnhout, 2002), 136–38. On Contarini’s diplomatic career in the 1520s, see E. G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform* (Berkeley, 1993), 29–62.

14. L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (Ferrara, 1532), canto 15, verse 27.

15. See E. MacPhail, “Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment,” *MLN* 116 (2001): 30–53.



Figure 5. Parmigianino, *Charles V and the World*, 1530. Oil on canvas, 172.7 x 119.4 cm. Private collection. Photo: courtesy of Sotheby's.

Islands celebrated since antiquity for their coveted aromatic produce.<sup>16</sup>

16. See A. Rumeu de Armas, *El Tratado de Tordesillas* (Madrid, 1992); J. Brotton, *Trading Territories: Mapping the Early Modern World* (London, 1997), 119–50; A. Sandman, “Mirroring the World: Sea Charts, Navigation, and Territorial Claims in Sixteenth-Century Spain,” in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. P. H. Smith and P. Findlen (New York, 2002), 83–108. See also S. R. Kimmel, “Interpreting Inaccuracy: The Fiction of Longitude in Early Modern Spain,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40 (2010): 299–323.

The question of the extent of Christian dominion on earth motivated another painting made by Parmigianino at the time of the Bologna summit (fig. 5). If the *Madonna of the Rose* was for the pope, this one was made for Charles V, showing the emperor with one hand on his sword and the other holding a staff or lance. Like the *Madonna of the Rose*, this second “summit painting” by Parmigianino also prominently features a cartographic globe, presented to the emperor by a young Hercules, with the winged figure of Glory or Fame above holding a laurel branch in one hand and the palm

of victory in the other. In what has been described as the first allegorical ruler portrait made in Europe, Charles is shown as master of the earth's geographic totality.<sup>17</sup> As in the *Madonna of the Rose*, we see only the most familiar part of the earth: the Iberian Peninsula on the left separated by a rather too large Gibraltar Strait from the northern coast of Africa, and a vast Asia extending eastward, its limits nowhere in sight.

What about the rest of the globe? What about the recent discoveries beyond the previously known world? A closer look at the picture reveals that they are very much in play. Charles's left hand grasps a sword whose scabbard is embellished with two columns, a reference to the columns of Hercules, placed by the mythical hero at the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar to mark the westernmost limit of the known world, a geographical frontier here shown at the left edge of what we can see of the globe. Those reaches beyond the Strait of Gibraltar had long been a subject of speculation and myth. In the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato told the legend of the lost realm of Atlantis, which lay beyond the columns of Hercules until it was submerged by the waters to the west of Africa and Europe. As early as Pindar and in the writings of several medieval authorities, the columns were interpreted as a warning to the prudent not to navigate beyond this limit. In the *Inferno* (26, 104–8), for example, Dante says that with the columns, Hercules had placed a warning "that man should not go farther beyond" (*dov'Ercole segnò li suoi riguardi / acciochè l'uom più oltre non si metta*).

Charles V proudly proclaimed that this limit *should* be surpassed, and had been, on his own initiative. On his imperial insignia, the device of the columns was often accompanied by the motto *PLVS VLTRA*—"farther" or "beyond"—in open defiance of the ancient and medieval warning, a call often associated in period sources with the Spanish/imperial explorations and conquests in the New World.<sup>18</sup> In Parmigianino's portrait of the emperor the New World is not visible to us, but it is fully available to the figure of Glory, who looks down onto the globe from the other side as she offers the victorious laurel, her hand hovering just above Charles's

right arm, which is shown passing around the far, unseen side of the globe as if to stake a claim there. The words *PLVS VLTRA* are inscribed nowhere in the picture, but they don't need to be: the portrait as a whole is the motto's emblem. Confirming and mirroring the emperor's world-embracing reach, Hercules's right hand extends eastward past Arabia while his left hand, undepicted but clearly implied, can only be reaching westward beyond the picture's edge (*PLVS VLTRA*) toward the New World on the globe's far side.

The far side of the globe was very much on the emperor's mind in the years around 1530. Probably just before the Bologna summit, the Flemish cartographer and globe-maker Franciscus Monachus published his *De orbis situ ac descriptione* (The position and description of the world) under an imperial privilege, a mostly symbolic form of copyright protection significant mostly as a sign of imperial approbation. The pamphlet publishes a letter from the cartographer to Jean Carondelet, the archbishop of Palermo and one of the most important advisors to Charles V during the debates with Portugal over the division of the world into two dominions. Its frontispiece presents a woodcut world map divided into hemispheres, one of which (belonging to the king of Portugal) corresponds to the known world extending from the Iberian Peninsula to Asia, and the other (belonging to the Spanish king) marking out many newly discovered territories, including America (fig. 6). These woodcut hemispheres are an abbreviated projection of a three-dimensional terrestrial globe reportedly produced by Monachus, now lost.<sup>19</sup> Carondelet and Charles found in his small treatise a geographical vision that placed farthest Asia, from the Spice Islands eastward, in the Spanish hemisphere, a view promoted by the Spanish in various forms throughout the sixteenth century.

For Franciscus, America was an appendage of Asia, and the travelers to distant Asia of previous centuries could now be understood to have reached America. "According to Hernán [Cortés]," he asserts, "in Culua or the province of Culuacana [Mexico] lies the residence of the eastern emperor, called Cathay in other travel accounts."<sup>20</sup> Cosmographers working in the orbit of

17. S. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500–1600* (Harmondsworth, 1975), 701n2; and W. Eisler, "The Impact of the Emperor Charles V upon the Italian Visual Culture 1529–1533," *Arte Lombarda* 65 (1983): 93–110.

18. E. Rosenthal, "Plus Ultra, Non plus Ultra, and the Columnar Device of Emperor Charles V," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971): 204–28, and "The Invention of the Columnar Device of Emperor Charles V at the Court of Burgundy in Flanders in 1516," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973): 198–230.

19. See J. Hewitt, "A World Map on an Oval Projection Attributed to Franciscus Monachus, ca. 1526," *The Globe* 73 (2013): 17–27; and R. J. King, "Franciscus Monachus and the c. 1529 Paris Gilt Globe," *The Globe* 86 (2019): 19–42.

20. Franciscus Monachus, *De orbis situ ac descriptione* (Antwerp, n.d. [1529?]), n.p.: "Apud Ferdinandum Culua, sive Culuacana provincia est in qua iacet regia Imperatoris orientalis, in itinerarijs alias Cataya, vel Catay nuncupatur. Themistetam neotericis est, seu





Figure 6. Franciscus Monachus, *De orbis situ ac descriptione*, frontispiece, possibly 1529.  
 Photo: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monachus\\_1527\\_globe\\_map\\_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monachus_1527_globe_map_03.jpg).

Charles V around 1530 were actively bringing into view the far side of the globe, with its Amerasian territories.<sup>21</sup>

Tenostica ante Quinsam, ab Oderico Themisan vocata, isque propius veritatem attingit, concordi & consentiente traditione autorum, de regionis eiusdem opibus & positura. / Ad septentriones a Culuacana terra. Thamachum protenditur, olim Tangut dicta, Teuis superiora saecula nuncuparunt Tebet, vel Cibet, Messigo provincia temporibus avorum Mansi vocabulo innotuit." The "Amerasian" implications of this treatise and many other related period texts and maps are the subject of a book-length study by Elizabeth Horodowich and Alexander Nagel, forthcoming from Zone Books. For now, see E. Horodowich and A. Nagel, "Amerasia: European Reflections of an Emergent World, 1492–ca. 1700," *Journal of Early Modern History* 23 (2019): 257–95.

21. Another publication made under the aegis of Charles V, just after the summit of 1530, was Gemma Frisius's *De principiis astronomiae et cosmographiae, deque usu globi . . . De orbis divisione, et insulis, rebusque nuper inventis* (On the principles of astronomy and cosmography, as well as the use of the globe . . . On the division of the world and the islands and things newly discovered) (Antwerp, 1530), with illustrations by the cartographer Johannes Schöner. The globe on the frontispiece shows us something similar to what we see in Parmigianino's summit paintings—the world from the Iberian Peninsula across to Asia, whose ultimate limits are lost to view as its vast landmass curves around the globe. However, the book's interior makes good on the title's promise, providing a description of the full extent of the world, including the newly discovered lands and America, which

A Franciscan friar, Franciscus saw the rounding of the globe in his times as nothing short of a divine revelation accorded to Christians:

In our time God marks out truly extraordinary and marvelous things, such as have never appeared in any historical chronicles or memorials. Has one ever heard since the creation of the world that a fleet has circled the whole orb? Yet this has been granted by the superior powers under the auspices of the Emperor Charles. The Antarctic pole, unknown lands, seas, people beyond the Equator, the very existence of whom was not long ago a matter for continual debate, all of this has come into view [*videre contigit*, literally, visually reached]. And so by the explorations of our Caesar a huge part of the world has uncovered, bared, and revealed itself.<sup>22</sup>

are presented as an extension off the coast of Asia, as in the account of Franciscus Monachus.

22. Franciscus Monachus, *De Orbis Situ*, n.p.: "Eximia sane atque mirabilia, quae nostro aëvo designat deus, qualia nullis annalium historiarumvè monumentis prodita sunt. An unquam fando a condito mundo prius auditum, classem universum orbis ambitum circuisse? at hoc Caroli Caesaris auspiciis dedere Superi. Cardinem antarcticum, ignotas terras, maria, populos trans mundi medium limitem videre contigit, quae essent nec ne, vix satis olim constans erat opinio. At Caesaris nostri exploratoribus multo ingens orbis pars sese aperuit, nudavit, retexit."

It is this fully revealed view of the world that was on the table at Bologna, as is made clear by the multisided discussion around a globe depicted in the drawing by Sebastiano (see fig. 4).

In Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Rose*, the earth is taken up into a larger configuration that is at once animated and jewel-like, where bodies don't resolve into space and movement yields no action. The marbled world pivots under the little finger of its creator, unsettling scale without resetting it. In Bologna in 1529–30, the basic project of painting as a description of the world is upended even as the shape of the world itself—its continents, its peopling, and its history—was newly and radically opened to question. The recently discovered lands with their hitherto unknown first peoples remained unsettled in the minds of Europeans, their definition and boundaries still in flux. This as yet barely known hemisphere is nestled against the child's body, a kind of arcane knowledge. His unnerving gaze suggests that disclosure is imminent, and that this will be no mere addition to existing knowledge but the opening of a seal, upending what humans thought they knew.

To imply that a meaning hidden since the beginning of the world is now being revealed—apocalypse means, literally, uncovering—is to deal in prophecy and its fulfillment, a common enough mode of European response to the New World discoveries in the early sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In Amerigo Vespucci's so-called *Mundus novus* letter, a widely read text, the large number of inhabitants found in the newly encountered lands was presented in apocalyptic terms: "We found in those regions such a multitude of people as nobody could number (as we read in the Apocalypse), a people I say gentle and amenable."<sup>24</sup> (The reference is to Revelation 7:9: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.") Egidio da Viterbo, a prominent theologian in early sixteenth-century Rome, proposed that in the tenth and final age, in which the world now finds itself, "all secrets will be revealed, those of the divine and eternal world through the cabbala and those of the created world by voyages of discovery. Mankind will be brought into an

intellectual and religious unity under the Papacy."<sup>25</sup> In his last work, *Scechina*, dedicated to Emperor Charles V and written in 1530—thus exactly contemporary with Parmigianino's painting—Egidio noted that whereas the apostles had conquered only the smallest part of the world, through Charles V Christians were now preparing to conquer it in its entirety.<sup>26</sup> The Spanish cardinal Bernardino López de Carvajal, a highly influential ecclesiastic and a primary candidate for the papal throne in the early sixteenth century, gave a sermon in 1508 before Maximilian I (grandfather of Charles V and his precursor as Holy Roman Emperor) where he presented the recent victories of the Portuguese and the Spanish as a sign that the ultimate fulfillment of history in Christian victory was at hand.<sup>27</sup> Carvajal himself commissioned an elaborate mosaic in one of the principal churches of Rome, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, presenting an apocalyptic vision with imagery from the New World.<sup>28</sup> In the wake of Magellan, the idea of end-times was specifically bound up with the complete rounding of the globe.<sup>29</sup>

25. Quoted in M. E. Reeves, "Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo: A Prophetic Interpretation of History," in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. M. Reeves (Oxford, 1992), 102. See also J. W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden, 1968), 8.

26. Egidio da Viterbo, *Scechina e Libellus de litteris hebraicis*, ed. François Secret (Rome, 1959), 161. See Reeves, "Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo," 104.

27. See N. H. Minnich, "The Role of Prophecy in the Career of the Enigmatic Bernardino López de Carvajal," in Reeves, *Prophetic Rome*, 115–16.

28. The New World elements in the Helena Chapel were observed by Cynthia Anne Payne, who understood them in connection with the Spanish patronage of the chapel. C. A. Payne, "In the Fullness of Time: The Vault Mosaic in the Cappella Sant'Elena, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2003), 134–35.

29. See M. Donattini, "Three Bolognese Franciscan Missionaries in the New World in the Early Sixteenth Century," in *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750*, ed. E. Horodowich and L. Markey (Cambridge, 2017), 63–85; and M. Bataillon, "Novo mundo e fim do mundo," *Revista de Historia* 8 (1954): 343–51. Beyond biblical interpretation, there was also a cosmological counterpart to the idea of a progressive revelation westward through history. An ancient idea stemming from Aristotle and developed throughout the Middle Ages coordinated the movement of the stars and the sun from east to west with the course of history. History begins in the east, in paradise, and over time progresses westward. An idea found in many places and many forms, it was applied freely in the early sixteenth century to the latest explorations, which were now seen as a furthering of the progressive westward movement of human history. For example, in an account of Jacques Cartier's second voyage up the Saint Lawrence River in 1535, the author writes that God "in his divine goodness" had allowed these discoveries in fulfillment of the movement of Christianity from east to west, following the course of the sun; the Christian religion had originated in the Holy Land, "in Asia to the east of our

23. A. Proserpi, "America e apocalisse: Note sulla 'conquista spirituale' del Nuovo Mondo," in Proserpi, *America e apocalisse e altri saggi* (Pisa, 1999), 15–63.

24. *Epistola Albericii de novo mundo* (Rostock, 1502), ii: "Primum igitur ad gentes. Tantam in illis regionibus gentis multitudinem inuenimus quantam nemo dinumerare poterat (ut legitur in apocalipsi) gentem dico mitem atque tractabilem."

We don't have to go very far afield for such a reading of Parmigianino's painting. An engraving of the 1560s by the Bolognese Domenico Tibaldi glosses the painting in prophetic terms by adding a biblical inscription from Isaiah 11:1–2 (fig. 7). Here are the two verses in their entirety, with the parts not quoted in the print in brackets: “[And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse,] and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: [the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness].” Christian interpreters had long read these verses as a prophecy of the advent of Christ, but here the text is excerpted in specific reference to the flower that Christ offers the Virgin in the painting. The excerpt then cues up the rest of Isaiah 11, which applies well to other aspects of the painting, in particular the earthly globe. A few verses down (Isaiah 11:11–12) we find a prophecy of a new era of the Lord's dominion over the whole earth: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand the second time to possess the remnant of his people, which shall be left from the Assyrians, and from Egypt, and from Phetros, and from Ethiopia, and from Elam, and from Sennaar, and from Emath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up a standard unto the nations, and shall assemble the fugitives of Israel, and shall gather together the dispersed of Juda from the four quarters of the earth.” Tibaldi's print glosses Christ as the new shoot, with one hand bringing forth the flower of wisdom and the other ready “to possess the remnant of his people . . . from the four quarters of the earth.” The implication is that Isaiah's prophecy is coming to pass now, as the fullness of the earth and Christ's dominion over it is finally being revealed.

In 1657, the Bolognese writer Francesco Scannelli located Parmigianino's painting in the house of Count Valerio Zani, a scholar and compiler of travel accounts from around the globe.<sup>30</sup> Zani was also the owner of curiosities from faraway parts of the earth, including one famous Mixtec calendrical manuscript in the form of a screenfold, now known as the *Codex Cospi*, that had

Europe,” and had moved westward ever since. See K. O. Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 13.

30. Zani's compilation of travel accounts from all over the world was published under an anagram of his name: Aurelio degli Anzi, *Il genio vagante* (Parma, 1691–93). See P. Spiechowicz, “Il Genio vagante: Valerio Zani nell'ambito dell'Accademia dei Gelati,” in *Crocevia e capitale della migrazione artistica: Forestieri a Bologna e bolognesi nel mondo (secolo XVII)*, ed. S. Frommel (Bologna, 2012), 21–32.



Figure 7. Domenico Tibaldi, copy of Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Rose*, 1560s. Engraving, 47.5 x 33.8 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.136.855, Bequest of Phyllis Massar, 2011. Photo: www.metmuseum.org.

arrived in Bologna in 1533 or possibly earlier (figs. 8–9). Like Parmigianino's painting, the screenfold had been presented to Pope Clement VII, and like Parmigianino's painting it remained in Bologna and ended up in the Zani palace, where Count Valerio named it a *Libro della China*, a title later changed to *Libro del Messico*.<sup>31</sup> Zani believed it to be a Chinese book either because he was

31. The screenfold carries a European parchment cover with the inscription “Libro del Messico donato dal Sig[no]r Co[n]te Valerio Zani al Sig[nor] March[ese] Cospi il di xxvi Dic[emb]re MDCLXV.” Looking closely, one can see that originally the inscription read *Libro della China*. For more on the reception of this and related Mesoamerican codices, which were often given Asian provenances, see L. Laurencich-Minelli, “From the New World to Bologna, 1533: A Gift for Pope Clement VII and Bolognese Collections of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 24 (2012): 145–58; and D. Domenici and L. Laurencich-Minelli, “Domingo de Betanzos' Gifts to Pope Clement VII in 1532–1533: Tracking the Early



Figure 8. The cover of the so-called Codex Cospi, ca. 1500. Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms. 4093. Photo: author.

mistaken regarding its provenance or because the earlier idea that Mexico was a province of China, expounded by the cosmographer Franciscus Monachus and several others in the sixteenth century, had somehow persisted into Zani's time, perhaps with some adaptations. In 1667, shortly after it was given to Ferdinando Cospi, it was called "a book come from China with various hieroglyphics" (probably Zani's understanding of it).<sup>32</sup> Then, a decade later, it was described as a book with "hieroglyphics from Mexico," suggesting that even if this scholarly culture saw China and Mexico as separate, they still imagined a cultural commonality between

them based in a shared culture of hieroglyphic writing believed to exist in China, Japan, and Mexico.<sup>33</sup>

Both Parmigianino's painting and the Codex Cospi were works of religious art intended for the use of priests: in the case of Parmigianino the pope, high priest of the Catholic Church, and in the case of the manuscript a diviner and celebrant equipped to use it as a ritual handbook, opening and manipulating the screenfold to use in divinatory and propitiatory ceremonies.<sup>34</sup> (Even if no European at this time understood how the manuscript worked, they ascribed

History of Some Mexican Objects and Codices in Italy," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 47 (2014): 169–209.

32. *Breve descrizione del Museo . . . Ferdinando Cospi* (Bologna, 1667), 38: "libro venuto dalla China con varij geroglifici."

33. L. Legati, *Museo Cospiano annesso a quello del famoso Ulisse Aldrovandi e donato alla sua patria dall'illustrissimo signor Ferdinando Cospi* (Bologna, 1677), 191: "Contiene questo libro non altro che GEROGLIFICI DEL MESSICO." See also Horodowich and Nagel, "Amerasia," 188.

34. For an extended explanation of the manuscript's function and iconography, see F. Anders, M. Jansen, and P. van der Loo, *Calendario de pronósticos y ofrendas: Libro explicativo del llamado Códice Cospi* (Mexico City, 1994).



Figure 9. Venus as Morningstar wreaking havoc on rulers, resources, and religious institutions. Codex Cospi, ca. 1500. Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms. 4093. Photo: author.

it a high religious function in identifying it as a collection not merely of pictures but of hieroglyphs—literally, sacred inscriptions—an archaic form of priestly writing known primarily from Egyptian monuments and held in the highest regard by European scholars.) Yet both works were dislodged from their original functions and audiences, set on unexpected itineraries, and finally landed together in the palace of a prominent Bolognese family. Valerio Zani held in his family's collection two signal works of art inherited from the previous century, a vibrantly colored hieroglyphic manuscript from a newly

discovered part of the world and a jewel-like painting by Parmigianino of the Virgin with a Christ child manipulating an earthly globe. Each work in its own way set the earth and earthly time into the movements of a cosmos driven by not always gentle divine forces. However he interpreted them, the connoisseur and armchair traveler Zani was in a position to appreciate them together, possibly in the same room. Gazing at Parmigianino's painting, Zani knew that his *Libro della China* came from that part of the world that the Christ child is keeping close to his chest.