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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

Cortile Belvedere, 00120 Città del Vaticano

Form compiled by Davide Domenici, in collaboration with Sergio Botta

Introduction

The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, one of the richest and most important manuscript libraries in the world, preserves an exceptional body of sources on the history of pre-Columbian and colonial America and on the encounter between Europe and the Indigenous peoples of the New World.

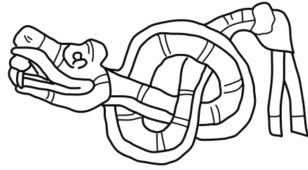
Of particular importance for Mesoamerican studies are the pictorial manuscripts of the so-called Borgia Group preserved in the library. Those that can be attributed, at least in part, to the work of Indigenous artists are three manuscripts: Codex Borgia (Borg. mess. 1) and Codex Vaticanus B (Vat. lat. 3773) are divinatory or mantical screenfolds of the Nahuatl cultural sphere and are among the very few pre-Hispanic manuscripts to have escaped the colonial destruction of Indigenous libraries, making them sources of extraordinary importance for Mesoamerican studies.

A third manuscript (Vat. lat. 3738, known as Codex Vaticanus A) was instead painted and glossed in Nahuatl and Spanish by *tlacuiloque* (painters) and alphabetic scribes (probably Indigenous) active, presumably, in the Dominican convent of Puebla (Mexico), and is one of the most famous colonial sources on the religion, calendar, customs and history of the Indigenous peoples of Central and Western Mexico.

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Cultural Areas

Mesoamerica

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Mesoamerican divinatory manuscripts: Codex Borgia (Borg. mess. 1) and Codex Vaticanus B (Vat. lat. 3773)
<i>Collector</i>	Betanzos, Domingo de (c. 1480–1549) Giustiniani, Benedetto (1554–1621) Borgia, Stefano (1731–1804)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Mesoamerica
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Nahua (Mexico)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	Codex Borgia (Borg. mess. 1) is a long strip of deerskin, folded in accordion form to create 39 leaves and 76 painted pages. The pages are painted on both sides, with the exception of the first two on the recto and on the verso. The manuscript was originally provided with wooden covers, now lost, and is divided into a number of thematic sections, the first of which is an entire 260-day calendrical cycle (<i>tonalpohualli</i> in extenso). The other sections of the manuscript contain complex divinatory tables relating to various ritual and calendrical cycles;

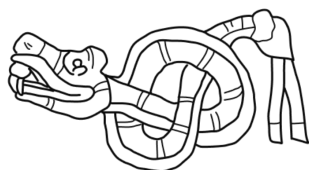
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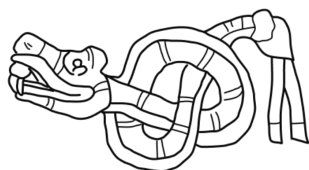
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	particularly notable are the central pages of the codex (29–46). Codex Vaticanus B (Vat. lat. 3773) is likewise made up of a strip of animal skin, about 7.24 metres long and folded in accordion form to produce 49 leaves and 96 painted pages. As in the case of Codex Borgia, most of the pages are painted on both sides. The first and last pages preserve traces of the original wooden covers, one of which still retains turquoise inlays. Like Codex Borgia, Codex Vaticanus B is organised into thematic sequences and begins with a 260-day calendrical cycle (<i>tonalpohualli in extenso</i>). Some pages of the codex are devoted to a historical section. Both manuscripts have been subjected to chemical analyses that have made it possible to identify the pigments used in their production.
<i>History of the collection</i>	Codex Borgia was probably brought to Rome in the sixteenth century. According to tradition it first formed part of the library of the Dominican friar Domingo de Betanzos (c. 1480–1549) and later entered the collection of Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani (1554–1621), in whose inventory, drawn up between 1600 and 1611, it is recorded. In the eighteenth century it was acquired by Cardinal Stefano Borgia (1731–1804), who stated that he had saved it from a group of children who were burning it, and it subsequently entered his museum at Velletri. At the end of the eighteenth century the Jesuit José Lino Fábrega produced the first reading of the manuscript, thereby inaugurating a long tradition of Mesoamericanist scholarship devoted to the codex. After the Cardinal's death Codex Borgia, together with other manuscripts, passed to the Congregation de Propaganda

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	Fide and from there, in the nineteenth century, to the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Codex Vaticanus B, on the other hand, has formed part of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana collections since at least 1596, when it was recorded in the Rainaldi Inventory. It has been identified with one of two Mexican manuscripts mentioned by Michele Mercati in 1589.
Online Database	
Web page	https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg_mess.1
Bibliography	• Anders, F., M. Jansen. 1993. <i>Manual del adivino. Libro explicativo del llamado Códice Vaticano B</i>. Graz-México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario. • Anders, F., M. Jansen, L. Reyes García. 1993. <i>Los templos del cielo y de la oscuridad. Oráculos y liturgia: libro explicativo del llamado Códice Borgia</i>. Graz-México: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario. • Domenici, D. 2016. “Nuovi dati per una storia dei codici messicani della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.” <i>Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae</i> XXI: 341-362. • Domenici, D. 2018. “Códices mesoamericanos en la Italia de la primera edad moderna: historia y recepción.” In <i>Códices y cultura indígena en México. Homenaje a Alfonso Lacadena García-Gallo</i>, ed. J.J.

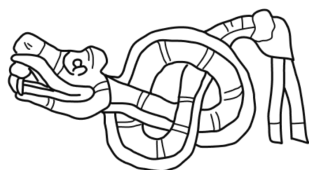
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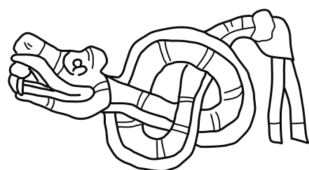
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#02

Name of the collection	Codex Vaticanus A (Vat. lat. 3738)
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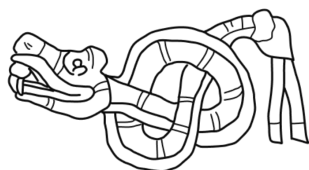
<i>Collector</i>	Córdova, Juan de (1503–1595)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Mesoamerica
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Nahua (Mexico)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	Codex Vaticanus A (Vat. lat. 3738), also known in the literature as Codex Ríos, is a pictorial and alphabetic manuscript. The pictorial part was painted by Nahua <i>tlacuiloque</i> (painters), while the alphabetic part – composed of an Italian-language text that comments on the images – was written by a European author. The codex transmits, in a re-elaborated form, the content of the so-called <i>Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas</i>. Its sections deal with Mesoamerican cosmology, the creation of the world and of humankind, the calendar and religious festivals, and the history and customs of the Indigenous peoples of Central Mexico. Some sections are closely related to Codex Telleriano-Remensis, today in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
<i>History of the collection</i>	It is not known how Codex Vaticanus A reached Italy, but it may have formed part of a group of objects whose arrival is described in the <i>Descrittione dell'India occidentale</i>. The bearer of the gift has tentatively been identified with the Dominican friar Domingo de Betanzos. In any case, shortly after the composition of

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	the Descrittione (c. 1564–1570) the text of the codex (but not the images) was copied in a manuscript now in the Biblioteca Nacional de España (Madrid). As early as 1595 the codex was being copied outside the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, and it is recorded for the first time in the library of the Venetian patrician Giacomo Contarini in that year.
Online Database	
Web page	https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3738
Bibliography	• Anders, F., M. Jansen. 1996. <i>Religión, costumbres e historia de los antiguos mexicanos. Libro explicativo del llamado Códice Vaticano A Codex Vat. Lat. 3738 de la Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana</i>. Graz-México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario. • Botta, S. 2020. “Incorporating Mesoamerican cosmology within a global history of religion. Some considerations on the work of Lorenzo Pignoria.” In <i>Reshaping the world. Debates on Mesoamerican cosmologies</i>, ed. Ana Díaz, 70-99. Louisville: University Press of Colorado. • Botta, S., G. Olivier (eds.). In print. <i>El Códice Vaticano A (Vat. lat. 3738). Historia, recepción y contenido de un manuscrito pictográfico colonial sobre el México antiguo</i>. Mexico City - Roma - Città del Vaticano: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México - Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia,

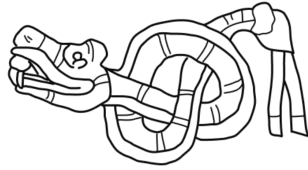
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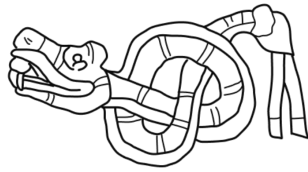
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