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Gleanings from the Archive of André Chastel around the rediscovery and edition of Leonardo's Madrid Manuscripts

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THE story of how two Leonardo's manuscripts, the *Matritensis* 8936 and 8937, were found in the *Biblioteca Nacional* in Madrid in the 1960s has been told differently by many sources and is still difficult to assess with certainty.¹

Their existence was known from the catalogues of the Spanish National library, but they had been untraceable since 1898. Several attempts had been made to locate them: in the 1950s by André Corbeau² (1898–1971), a distinguished French Leonardo scholar, as well as by Paul Oskar Kristeller (1905–1999), the great scholar of Renaissance Humanism, and in 1964 by Ladislao Reti³ (1901–1973), a History of Technology specialist and associated researcher at the Elmer Belt Library.

Their 'discovery' was announced on the 14th of February 1967 in the *New York Times* article: "700 pages of Leonardo Manuscripts found in Madrid" describing them as 'lost'

¹ For only a few of the accounts on the Madrid mss. see Pedretti, Carlo, "Leonardo's lost notebooks." *Life*, 62, 9, March 1967, p. 24–32 and Id., *Le note di pittura di Leonardo da Vinci nei manoscritti inediti a Madrid* (Lettura vinciana, VIII, 1968), Firenze, Giunti Barbèra, 1969; Reti, Ladislao, "The Two Unpublished Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci in the Biblioteca Nacional of Madrid." *The Burlington Magazine*, 778 (January 1968), pp. 10–22 and 779, (February 1968), pp. 81–89; André Corbeau, *La découverte des manuscrits de Léonard de Vinci à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid*, Amboise: chez l'auteur, 1969.

² A French lawyer and Leonardo scholar who had translated into French and edited – with Nando De Toni – the manuscripts A, B, C and D of the Institut de France. See *André Corbeau: un bibliophile et érudit entre France et Italie au nom de Leonardo da Vinci*, Fabrizio-Costa, Silvia (ed.), *Leia*, 42 (2018).

³ An Istrian-born chemist and engineer who studied in Vienna and Bologna, and who pursued his interests in the early modern history of technology, eventually becoming an associate researcher at the Elmer Belt Library in Vinciana. See "The Leonardo da Vinci Medal awarded to Ladislao Reti." *Technology and Culture*, v. 14, no. 3 (July 1973), pp. 423–428.

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and rediscovered by Jules Piccus, a professor of Romance languages at the University of Massachusetts, who came across the manuscripts by chance while searching for medieval Spanish ballads.⁴ The Spanish Library did not appreciate the way Piccus' exploits had been presented in the American press, and, though they admitted that the library's indexing system was antiquated and that some mistakes had been made in the catalogue numbers, they categorically denied that any rare manuscripts by Leonardo had ever been 'lost' as claimed in the *New York Times*.⁵ It was argued that the manuscripts had in fact been located since 1965 by the chief curator of manuscripts, Ramón Paz y Remolar, and put on display in April-May 1965 in a small exhibition in the context of a national festival of books in the foyer of the library.⁶

In 1967, not long after Piccus' 'discovery', the distinguished scholar Ladislao Reti was called in to expertise the manuscripts, while the University of Massachusetts, where Piccus taught, immediately contacted the Spanish authorities to acquire the rights to publish them. A contract was signed on 7 February 1967 and Reti was appointed as scientific editor. In the following months the *New York Times* reported (22 and 25 February 1967)

of increasing tensions between the National Library and the University of Massachusetts surrounding the controversy, widely publicised in the media, on when and by whom the manuscripts had been discovered. As a result of the disagreements the publishing project risked falling apart.⁷ To promote reconciliation, the Renaissance Society of America set up a commission to find a diplomatic solution. Chaired by Paul Oskar Kristeller and including Theodore S. Beardsley, a Spanish literature scholar, and Carlo Pedretti, at the time professor at the University of California, the commission was tasked to evaluate all the documents regarding the discovery and publish a report.⁸ Despite the controversy, the McGraw Hill Book Company and the Spanish company Taurus, with the authorization of the Spanish authorities, went on with their project to publish the Madrid manuscripts and Reti was to direct their publication.

In 1968 Chastel was invited to be part of the project and put in charge of studying the notes on painting contained in the ms. Matr. 8936. Thus, in the French scholar's archive, there are various boxes of documents marked as "Leonardo's Notes on Painting".⁹ They contain the material and the manuscripts of two essays that Chastel had already

⁴ See the articles of Walter Sullivan, science editor at the *New York Times*, and Tad Szulc, its representative in Madrid (*New York Times*, 1967: February 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 25, March 4, 5).

⁵ "Library denies it 'lost' the Leonardo mss." *New York Times*, 15 February 1967.

⁶ See "Library says the Leonardo mss. were put on display in 1965." *The New York Times*, 18 February 1967.

⁷ "Dr. Ladislao Reti, an expert on the engineering drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, withdrew today from a contract with the University of Massachusetts and the Madrid National Library for the publication of two volumes of the Italian master's manuscripts." *New York Times*, 22 February 1967; "Spain may cancel book on Leonardo. Reported Looking for Legal Way to Drop U.S. Contract." *The New York Times*, 25 February 1967.

⁸ The report was not published until 1971 and was in fact a very dry statement that left some of the questions unanswered. "News and Notes." *Renaissance Quarterly*, 24, 3 (1971), pp. 430-431.

⁹ See Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'art, from now on BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186-187. Some of these documents have been published as appendices in the volume Chastel, André, *Trois études sur Léonard (1952-1987)*, Frommel, Sabine and Renzulli, Eva (eds.), Paris: EPHE, 2022.

written on the Florentine's notes on painting in 1960 and 1964.¹⁰ They also contain notebooks, transcriptions, photos and various letters to André Corbeau, Oskar Kristeller, Annie Cloulas,¹¹ Ernst Gombrich,¹² Ladislao Reti, and to the editors concerning the Madrid mss. These provide interesting first-hand supplements to the accounts about the 'la tenebreuse affaire' of the 'lost' manuscripts, as well as to our knowledge of the scholarly exchanges related to the Madrid manuscripts.

I. ANDRÉ CORBEAU AND THE 'INTELLECTUAL PATERNITY' OF THE DISCOVERY

In the March 1967 issue of the American magazine *Life*, the manuscripts were presented and described on the basis of a report by

Carlo Pedretti and illustrated with photos.¹³ Pedretti had also sent a more detailed report to many of his fellow Leonardo scholars.¹⁴ On the 11th April 1967, Chastel asked the Italian scholar for permission to write an article based on the information contained therein.¹⁵ However, though the discovery was announced very briefly in *Le Monde* on 17 February 1967,¹⁶ Chastel did not write about it until 2nd April 1970 when his chronicle *Réapparition de Léonard* was published.¹⁷ The following day, Chastel received a letter from André Corbeau in which he contested some of the assertions published in the article. He enclosed an *errata corrige*: *Note pour M. le Pr. A. Chastel à la suite de ma lettre du 2 avril 1970 à insérer dans Le Monde sans attendre*.¹⁸ Here he claims 'the intellectual paternity' of the discovery, emphasizing the vital input in

¹⁰ Leonardo da Vinci, *Traité de la peinture*, Chastel, André and Klein, Robert (eds.), Paris: Club des libraires, 1960; Leonardo da Vinci, *La peinture*, Chastel, André and Klein, Robert (eds.), Paris: Hermann, 1964.

¹¹ Annie Cloulas was a Casa Velasquez fellow living in Madrid, and a Ph.D. student of Chastel. He had most likely asked her to consult the Mss for him. In the letter to Chastel of 9 May 1967, she describes the content of the two manuscripts and their watermarks. See Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.9.2

¹² A letter from E.H. Gombrich to Chastel (29 July 1969) in Chastel's general correspondence also refers to the Madrid mss. See Paris, BINHA, Archives 090.346.77.

¹³ Pedretti, Carlo, "Leonardo's lost notebooks." *Life*, 62, 9, March 1967, pp. 24–32. For the chronology of this article, see Pedretti, *Lettura Vinciana VIII*, 1968, p.10, n. 3.

¹⁴ A copy of the report that Pedretti sent to his fellow scholars is present in Chastel's archives, Paris, BINHA, 090.187.12

¹⁵ A letter from Chastel to Pedretti thanking him for the report is dated 11 April 1967 and Pedretti's answer 18 of April have been published in *André Chastel et l'Italie, 1947–1990. Lettres choisies et annotées*, De Fuccia, Laura and Renzulli, Eva (eds.), Rome–Paris: Campisano–Mare et Martin, 2019, p.185.

¹⁶ Chastel, André, "Des manuscrits de Léonard de Vinci découverts à Madrid." *Le Monde*, 17 février 1967.

¹⁷ Chastel, André, "Réapparition de Léonard." *Le Monde*, 2 April 1970.

¹⁸ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.2, Corbeau to Chastel, 2 April 1970: "Si la matérialité de la découverte revient au Dr. R. Paz, Chef de la section des mss. à la BN de Madrid, je n'en suis pas moins l'auteur, au sens fort du mot, pour en avoir été le promoteur, méthodique et persévérant dès 1959, qui n'a cessé de réclamer une recherche, selon les indications précises, mais qui ne furent prises en considération qu'à la suite d'une ultime intervention de ma part le 23 avril 1965. Celle-ci fut la cause immédiate de la découverte, arrivée le 28 avril 1965 et qui me fut annoncée par don Lopez de Toro, suivant lettre du 29 avril 1965. Tout ceci a été, sans ambages formellement reconnu par le Dr. Paz et don L. de Toro, ainsi que l'atteste une lettre du 30 novembre 1968 du Pr. P. O. Kristeller, au cours de son enquête". One small paragraph of the note sent by Corbeau was published by Chastel in *Le Monde* without explicitly endorsing all that Corbeau had written in the note.

prompting the librarians.¹⁹ Corroborating the version given by Madrid, Corbeau writes that he had received the news of the discovery from the chief librarian, not in 1967, but on 29th April 1965, one day after the Spanish librarians claimed to have found the manuscript. He also adds that he had proof of this and that Paul Oskar Kristeller, President of the Commission of the Renaissance Society, could confirm this. In fact, Chastel had already written to Kristeller to inquire about the affair and the latter had replied that

On the basis of the information available to us at this time (our report is not yet finished), we cannot sustain M Corbeau's claim in its entirety. We are inclined to think that his insistence over many years was an important contributing factor in the discovery of Leonardo manuscripts in Madrid, but not more than that.²⁰

The brief report was published in autumn 1971 by the Commission.²¹ It did, diplomat-

ically, endorse the fact that the manuscripts had been located during the winter 1964–1965 by the head of the manuscripts division of the Spanish National Library, Ramon Paz, who had been ‘urged’ by the Vice Director who in turn had been ‘prompted’ by Corbeau. Yet, many questions remained unanswered, first and foremost, why had the news not circulated in 1965, at least in the scholarly circles?²²

II. “IL NOSTRO BENAMATO E SCONCERTANTE LEONARDO”

Letters between André Chastel, Ladislao Reti, Carlo Pedretti and Anna Maria Brizio can be cross-referenced to better understand the various stages of the study and publication of the two manuscripts.²³ Though Reti had been appointed to edit the two manuscripts (*Matritensis* 8936 and 8937)²⁴ in February 1967, for various reasons, the project took a while to get off the ground.²⁵ As he writes to Pedretti in February 1968, initial-

¹⁹ For his research preceding the discovery see Corbeau, André, “Les manuscrits de Léonard de Vinci. Contributions hispaniques à leur histoire.”, *Raccolta Vinciana*, XX, (1964), pp. 299–323.

²⁰ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel 090.188.10, Kristeller to Chastel, 8 April 1970.

²¹ “News and Notes.”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, cit. In his *Lettura Vinciana* Pedretti writes (p. 10, n. 2) that the commission had collected an impressive quantity of documents, that “non potrà essere pubblicata per ovvie ragioni, ma che sarà depositata presso alcuni istituti per gli storici futuri”. Copies of this dossier assembled by Paul O. Kristeller, Theodore Beardsley, Jr., and Carlo Pedretti exists in Kristeller’s archive at the University of Columbia (https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_4079550) BOX 90, at the Fondazione Rossana and Carlo Pedretti in Lamporecchio and in the archives of the National Library of Madrid. Margherita Melani is currently working on them. A first interpretation of the report has been presented in Julián Martín Abad, “La (in)olvidable historia bibliotecaria de los manuscritos vincianos de la Biblioteca Nacional de España”, in *El imaginario de Leonardo : Códices Madrid de la BNE*, Elisa Ruiz García (ed.), Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2012, pp. 270–303.

²² Apart from an article by Nando De Toni, published in 1967, but dated 1966, see De Toni, Nando, “Frammenti Vinciani XXI e Contributo alla conoscenza dei manoscritti 8936 e 8937 della BN di Madrid.”, *Commentari dell’Ateneo di Brescia*, CLXV, 1966, pp. 27–108.

²³ These are held in Chastel’s archives in Paris, but also in Pedretti’s in Lamporecchio and Brizio’s in Milan.

²⁴ Following Pedretti’s *Lettura Vinciana* (1968), which established the chronological precedence of *Matritensis* 8937 over *Matritensis* 8936, they are referred to as Madrid I and Madrid II.

²⁵ At first because of the controversy due to the media. But on a more personal note, thing must have slowed down when Reti’s only son died in a car accident in August 1967.

ly the publisher McGraw and Hill had intended to print a book “senza riguardo ai più elementari principi di scholarship”.²⁶ However, he had managed to persuade them to publish a facsimile edition and, on the side, a more ‘popular’ but still scholarly book that would reveal the novelties contained in the two manuscripts. In the same letter, Reti tells his friend that he was already working very hard on the facsimile project.²⁷ He shares the enthusiasm that he felt as he worked on the project:

Ogni giorno, mentre procede la trascrizione del testo, trovo nuove meravigliose idee nel campo della scienza e della tecnica. Tu certo avrai trovato altre cose. Sono sicuro che anche tu stai meditando sulle misteriose opere progettate, se non eseguite, a Piombino.²⁸

On the other hand he seems concerned about the more ‘popular’ book that he de-

finies a ‘delicate matter’ and expresses the hope that Pedretti would take part in it, so that it would be worthy of Leonardo’s memory and not a “Zibaldone” like the volume published by “Agostini”.²⁹

A meeting of various Vinciani took place in Madrid on the 21st and 22nd of September 1968, to better define the publication programme and select the team of scholars that were to take part in the project.³⁰ As Anna Maria Brizio writes to Chastel, on this occasion it had been suggested that he should study Leonardo’s notes on painting contained in the ms. Matr. 8936 (Madrid II).³¹ He had in fact already published two essays on the Florentine’s *Trattato della Pittura*.³² Reti’s enthusiastic letter, dated 30 November 1968, suggest that the French art historian accepted to take part in the project.³³ Conversely, Pedretti declined Reti’s proposal, as he writes to Chastel, because he was concentrating intensely on the revised edition of Richter’s *Literary*

²⁶ See the letter from Reti to Pedretti, 27 February 1968, held in the archives of the Fondazione Rossana e Carlo Pedretti, Lamporecchio: “Avrai saputo che la McGraw-Hill Book Company acquistò i diritti per la edizione dei codici di Madrid. Al principio volevano lanciarsi in una pubblicazione ‘popolare’, senza riguardo ai più elementari principi di «scholarship». Per fortuna sono riusciti a convincerli di fare una cosa che soddisfi anche gli studiosi. Mi hanno incaricato dell’edizione in facsimile dei codici di Madrid e della preparazione di un’opera di divulgazione (mediante la quale sperano di ottenere un compenso economico)”.

²⁷ L. de Vinci, *I codici di Madrid*, Reti, Ladislao ed., Madrid-Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill & Taurus Ediciones, 1974, 5 vols., with facsimile, semi-diplomatic transcription and English translation. Two more facsimile editions of the two codices have been printed in 2009 and 2023, these are exact reproductions in terms of format and pagination, but do not contain any scholarly commentary. The website of the BNE also offers a digital version of Leonardo da Vinci’s Madrid Codices. An exhibition was organised in 2012 (28 May – 29 July 2012), *El imaginario de Leonardo: Códices Madrid de la BNE* Elisa Ruiz García (ed.), Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2012. A small selection of drawings has been published in *Leonardo da Vinci: los codices Madrid I y II*, Elisa Ruiz García (ed.) Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2022.

²⁸ See the letter from Reti to Pedretti, 27 February 1968, *cit.*

²⁹ The “Zibaldone” to which Reti refers is possibly *Leonardo da Vinci*, published by the editor De Agostini in 1956, and republished in 1964.

³⁰ In addition to Reti and Chastel, the team was made up of Silvio Bedini, Anna Maria Brizio, Maria Vittoria Brignoli, Bern Diebner, Ludwig Heydenreich, Augusto Marinoni, Emanuel Winternitz and Carlo Zammattio.

³¹ See the letter from Brizio to Chastel, 9 November 1968, in *André Chastel et l’Italie*, *cit.*, p. 545.

³² Leonardo da Vinci, *Libro di pittura: Codice Urbinate lat. 1270 nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Pedretti, Carlo (ed.), transcription by Vecce, Carlo, Firenze: Giunti, 1995.

³³ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.9. Reti to Chastel, 30 November 1968.

Works of Leonardo da Vinci and didn't intend to be distracted.³⁴

From the 30th of November 1968 onwards, a series of letters exchanged between Reti and Chastel show how their shared passion for the Florentin polymath became a fruitful collaboration.³⁵ Reti was working on the semi diplomatic transcription and translation into English of both the volumes, Madrid I and Madrid II. Additionally, for *The Unknown Leonardo*, the more 'popular' volume, he was engaged in the study of the Madrid I, the comprehensive treatise on the composition and operation of mechanical devices.³⁶ In this first letter, Reti promises to send the Frenchman the microfilm of the two codices, and redirects Chastel to the editor for practical details, and to Anna Maria Brizio for the exact definition of the limits of the themes that each of them were going to study.³⁷

The French scholar, in order to test his ideas as he elaborated them, chose the *Notes on Painting in the Spanish Manuscripts* as the subject of his graduate seminars at the École pratique des hautes études for the academic year of 1969–1970.³⁸ However, on 29 December 1969, he had still not received the entire transcriptions and all the photocopies he needed and,

quite annoyed, he writes to the European Director of McGraw-Hill, Emil M. Bühner, to reclaim them.³⁹ In February 1970, Reti informs him that he had completed all the transcriptions of the two manuscripts and most of the translation into English and promises to send the transcriptions of all the passages on painting and the microfilm of Madrid I.⁴⁰ At the time, Reti, who had transcribed all the manuscripts, was the scholar with the most accurate overall picture. One month later, in a letter dated 12 March 1970,⁴¹ Reti provides Chastel with additional information that the latter must have asked, on particular pages, then on the different booklets, on the 'sfogliato' and on the dates of the 9 fascicules, stating that the part on the 'Cavallo', – the casting and moulding of the bronze horse for Ludovico il Moro – was to be dated to 1491–1493, and not chronologically coherent with the other parts, which could be dated precisely to 1503, 1504 and 1505, and is to date much earlier. In this same letter, Reti also announces that, he and his wife Chiquita were going to move from Los Angeles to Monza, so understandably there are no letters until the 6 July 1970, when Reti writes:

³⁴ Paris, BINHA, Archives 090.16.69 and carbon copy at Lamporecchio, Archivio Fondazione Rosanna e Carlo Pedretti, Pedretti to Chastel, 18 November 1969: "In the last two years, I have been working on a huge commentary to a new edition of Richter's Literary Works of L. da V. and I am now giving it the last touches. I am quite determined to make this my final contribution to Leonardo studies. In fact, this is the main reason why I could not participate in the edition of the Madrid mss." See Pedretti, Carlo, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci: A Commentary to Jean Paul Richter's Edition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, 2 vols.

³⁵ It has not been possible to locate Ladislao Reti's archives. The sole surviving account of this dialogue are Reti's letters in Chastel's archives.

³⁶ In the *Unknown Leonardo* he published "Elements of Machines." pp. 264–287.

³⁷ See note 22 and Anna Maria Brizio to Chastel, 16 January 1970. Paris, BINHA, 090.09.17 Anna Maria Brizio archive is kept in Milan in the Biblioteca di Storia dell'Arte, (Fondo Anna Maria Brizio), her correspondence with Chastel has been published in *André Chastel et l'Italie*, cit. pp. 539–556.

³⁸ See Chastel, André, "Histoire de la Renaissance." In *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études, 1969–1970*, cit.

³⁹ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.9.1, Chastel to Emil M. Bühner, 29 December 1969.

⁴⁰ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.9.2, Reti to Chastel, 2 February 1970.

⁴¹ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.9.2, Reti to Chastel, 12 March 1970.

sono lieto di riprendere con lei la conversazione sul nostro beneamato, ma ahimé così sconcertante Leonardo. Comprendo anche troppo bene il suo *plaisir et tremblement*.”

It is a very dense letter of three pages in which Reti replied to more questions that his *carissimo amico* had asked him. To ensure that there was no confusion, he restates the identification of the manuscripts as Madrid I (ms. 8937) and Madrid II (ms. 8936), arguing that “Corbeau e De Toni sono contrari a questo arbitrio, ma le date parlano chiaro”. His comments concern a few folios of the Madrid I, but mainly concentrate on the Madrid II. Pedretti, Corbeau and De Toni are the principal sources that Reti quotes, contradicting the latter two’s hypothesis on dates, and slightly readjusting some dates proposed by Pedretti.

Chastel must have devoted his summer holidays to the study of the notes on painting of the Madrid II. Though it had been postponed, the first deadline for the essay had been set for October 1970. In a letter dated 24 August 1970, Reti acknowledges having received Chastel’s letter and answers “senza indugio alle domande specifiche”, mostly practical: about deadlines, about the language to be used for the quotations, the bibliography, the images, about how to refer to the excerpts Chastel wanted to comment, with internal references or mentioning only the folios. Furthermore, he responds to queries pertaining to the book’s content in relation

to Melzi’s compilation, as well as to the dates of Madrid II in relation to those of the ms. L and comments on the absolute novelty of the information of Leonardo’s *sejour* in Piombino. The scholar expresses the hypothesis that it is Machiavelli who had recommended da Vinci to the ‘Signore’ Jacopo Appiano. A hypothesis that Ludwig H. Heidenreich, in his essay in *The Unknown Leonardo*, has no doubt about.⁴² It would be interesting to find the correspondence that Reti had with the other authors of the book to investigate the extent of Reti’s interactions, particularly in terms of the dissemination of ideas and his role as a catalyst in this process.

III. “PER FORTUNA SONO RIUSCITO A CONVINCERLI DI FARE UNA COSA CHE SODDISFI ANCHE GLI STUDIOSI”

Though far from being finished, in October 1970, ‘dummies’ of the volumes was presented at the Frankfurt Book Festival and had a great success: 10,000 copies of the facsimile and 60,000 copies of *The Unknown Leonardo* were commissioned in various languages (English, French, Italian, German, Spanish and Serbo-Croatian).⁴³

In the autumn of 1970, Chastel presented Reti with his study, which they had discussed during the preceding summer.⁴⁴ It appears that at some stage in the process, either the precise expectations were not articulated with sufficient clarity, or there was a discrepancy in the understanding of which of the two publications Chastel’s essay was to be included in.

⁴² Heydenreich, Ludwig H., “The Military architect.” In *The Unknown Leonardo*, cit. pp. 136–165, cit. p. 152.

⁴³ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.353.28, Reti to Chastel, 8 October 1970.

⁴⁴ Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.357.59, Chastel to Emil M. Bühner, 2 February 1972: “J’ai rédigé mon texte et je l’ai montré au Dr. Reti à l’automne 1970. Malheureusement mon étude a paru trop savante et mal adaptée au ton de haute vulgarisation qui doit être celui du livre. Je dois dire que je ne l’avais pas compris ainsi et que je me suis trouvé embarrassé pour savoir exactement ce qu’on attendait.”

The text was an extremely detailed philological analysis of the notes on painting in the Madrid I, which was overly academic for *The Unknown Leonardo* and Reti was obliged to refuse it.⁴⁵ Chastel published the original text in the *Revue de l'art*,⁴⁶ and subsequently produced a more accessible version for Reti's book.⁴⁷ Unfortunately the publication of both the volumes was delayed. In March 1973 Reti suffered a stroke and died the following October. He did not live to see the fruits of his work, which was finally published in 1974 thanks to Marinoni's revision of the text and edition of the glossary and index.⁴⁸ The publication of the facsimile edition of the Spanish manuscripts marked an important date in the history of Leonardo studies. According to Bert Hall, a historian of technology, Reti's facsimile edition was a labour of love and praiseworthy.⁴⁹ At the same time, *The Unknown Leonardo* – which was intended as an attractive and accessible book to offset the cost of the five volumes of the critical edition – had been written by scholars who excelled in each of the fields dealt with in the two Spanish manuscripts, who had previously,

or concurrently, published on the exact same topics in more academic contexts – and who were, mostly, members of the Commissione Vinciana. In fact, as Hall writes, the book was far more insightful than others of its kind, offering a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective on the manuscripts, and, he adds, one should not be “distracted by the graphic treatment and the carnival-like atmosphere” of *The Unknown Leonardo*. Kate Steinitz appears to share Hall's assessment of both the facsimile edition of the Spanish manuscripts, and of the second book, emphasising that the latter united the studies of “ten outstanding Leonardo specialists”.⁵⁰

Ultimately, Reti's unwavering opposition to the editor's idea of publishing a richly illustrated book «senza riguardo ai più elementari principi di «scholarship»»⁵¹ and his subsequent proposal to issue two books proved to be a successful strategy, balancing scholarly integrity with broader accessibility, even though the facsimile edition – because of the diplomatic problems, the haste to publish and Reti's death – did not have the *imprimatur* of the Commissione Vinciana.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ “Les notes de Léonard de Vinci sur la peinture d'après le nouveau manuscrit de Madrid,” *Revue de l'art*, no. 15 (1972), pp. 8–28. He had hoped that Reti and Pedretti would hand in an article to accompany his, see Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.353.28 Chastel to Reti 13 January 1971.

⁴⁷ This essay was submitted to Reti and Emil M. Bührer of McGraw-Hill in June 1972. See Paris, BINHA, Archives Chastel, 090.186.9.1, Emil M. Bührer to Chastel, 6 juillet 1972.

⁴⁸ See the review by Steinitz, Kate T., “Ladislao Reti and the *Unknown Leonardo*,” *Technology and Culture*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Apr. 1976), pp. 264–270.

⁴⁹ Hall, Bert S. “The New Leonardo,” *Isis*, vol. 67, no. 3, 1976, pp. 463–75. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/230689>. Accessed 29 August 2024.

⁵⁰ Steinitz, Kate T., “Ladislao Reti and the *Unknown Leonardo*,” *cit.*

⁵¹ See the letter from Reti to Pedretti, 27 February 1968 *cit.* n. 26.