The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Art and Architecture

THE ARTIST AND THE FRIAR:

BOTTICELLI, SAVONAROLA, AND THE BUISNESS OF ART

A Thesis in

Art History

by

Timothy A. Betz

©Timothy A. Betz

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2013

This thesis of Timothy A. Betz was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Brian A. Curran
Professor of Art History
Thesis Advisor

Robin Thomas
Assistant Professor of Art History

Amara Solari
Assistant Professor of Art History and Anthropology

Craig Zabel
Associate Professor of Art History
Head of the Department of Art History

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

Throughout art historical scholarship, Sandro Botticelli's art during the last two decades of his life is often described as retrograde. This is often considered the result of the artist becoming a follower of the radical Dominican reformer Girolamo Savonarola, a millennial friar who strove to direct Florence from its decadent past under the Medici to God through the use of fiery sermons and bonfires of superfluous vanities. As a result of this supposed allegiance, Botticelli produced several paintings which contain iconography derived from the sermons of Savonarola. In this thesis, I seek to overthrow this classic paradigm of Botticelli as a follower of the friar. Though many of the Botticelli's later paintings contain Savonarolan iconography, they are not a direct indicator that he himself was a follower of friar. Instead, I present Botticelli as both an economically savvy and adaptable artist who produced artwork containing a variety of themes at the request of a multitude of patrons. This group of patrons consisted of both Savonarolan followers who requested artwork of Savonarolan themes and those who were either ambivalent to the friar or against his movement completely. Therefore, regardless of his personal feelings, it seems that Botticelli was willing to access a new Florentine demographic willing to commission artwork—the followers of Savonarola. I first analyze Botticelli's interaction with his patrons in order to discuss their role in the decision of the iconography of the paintings they commissioned. I also discuss modes of artistic production such as the use of pigments, gold leaf, and the influence of Roman relief sculpture. In this, I illustrate that, rather than experiencing an artistic and intellectual decline as a result of a conservative religious movement, Botticelli continued to actively display artistic agency in the art production at the end of his life, the same as he had in Florence before Savonarola.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures v
Acknowledgments vii

Introduction: The Artist and the Friar 1

Chapter 1. Historiography 11

Chapter 2. The Savonarolan Paintings 27

Chapter 3. Botticelli in the Savonarolan Era 44

Chapter 4. The Use of Materials and Ancient Sources in the Savonarolan Paintings. 50

Bibliography 83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1**:** Sandro Botticelli, *Mystic Crucifixion,* c. 1500. Fogg Museum of Art Cambridge, Mass 40

Figure 2: Sandro Botticelli, *Mystic Nativity,* 1500. National Gallery, London 41

Figure 3: Sandro Botticelli, *the Agony in the Garden,* c. 1500. Capella Real, Granda 42

Figure 4: Sandro Botticelli, *the Last Communion of Saint Jerome,* c. 1495. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.....43

Figure 5: Fra Angelico, *the Annunciation,* 1438-45. San Marco, Florence.....66

Figure 6: Sandro Botticelli, *the Punishment of Korah,* 1482. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City .67

Figure 7: Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna of the Magnificat,* 1481. Galleria degli Uffizi Florence.....68

Figure 8: Sandro Botticelli, *the Calumny of Apelles,* 1494. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.....69

Figure 9: Sandro Botticelli, *Baptism of Saint Zenobius and His Appointment as Bishop,* c. 1500-5. National Gallery, London.
Sandro Botticelli, *Three Miracles of Saint Zenobius,* c. 1500-5. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Sandro Botticelli, *Three Miracles of Saint Zenobius,* c. 1500-5. National Gallery, London.
Sandro Botticelli, *The Last Miracle and Death of Saint Zenobius,* c. 1500-5. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden 70

Figure 10: Sandro Botticelli, *Lucretia,* c. 1500. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston 71

Figure 11: Sandro Botticelli, *Virginia,* c. 1500. Accademia Carrara, Bergamo 71

Figure 12: Sandro Botticelli, *Lamentation,* 1495, Alte Pinakothek, Munich 72

Figure 13: Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin,* 1431, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence...73

Figure 14: Fra Bartolomeo and Mariatto Albertinelli, "Detail of Christ in Majesty," *The Last Judgment,* c. 1501. Monastery of San Marco, Florence 74

Figure 15: Sandro Botticelli, *Coronation of the Virgin (San Marco Altarpiece),* 1490-92. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. 75

Figure 16: Sandro Botticelli, *the Birth of Venus*, 1485. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. 76

Figure 17: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, c.1482. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. 76

Figure 18: Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1475. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.77

Figure 19: "Camp Building with Turf," detail from Trajan's Column, 113 AD, Forum, Rome.....78

Figure 20: "Sack of Jerusalem," Arch of Titus, c. 82 AD, Forum, Rome. 79

Figure 21: *Tazza Farnese*, 2nd Century. Naples National Archeological Museum, Naples ..80

Figure 22: Benozzo Gozzoli, *Journey of the Magi (Retinue of Youngest Knight)*, c. 1459. . Medici Chapel, Palazzo Medici, Florence 81

Figure 23: Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1441-1447, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.....82

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The thanks for this thesis is divided among several people who have helped me along throughout the process of its writing.

First, thanks are due to the kind people at the Fogg Museum of Art, for their help and for allowing me access to the *Mystic Crucifixion* even though the museum was closed for renovation.

To Brian Curran, for helping me push Savonarola and Botticelli farther than I thought possible, and to Robin Thomas and Amara Solari for their encouragement and helpful eyes. Additionally, I would like to thank Sarah Rich, whose helpful guidance in her Seminar on Color and Art resulted in my thesis's final chapter.

I would also like to thank the Kutztown Art History professors, who got me started on this crazy journey, particularly Laurent Odde, Christine Atiyeh, Lisa Norris, and Dan Haxall.

More personally, I would like to thank my family and Chelsea, for putting up with my constant talk of the friar of Florence and the artist who was not a follower of him.

Introduction

The Friar and the Painter

This is an investigation of the supposed relationship between two prominent figures in the history of the Florentine Renaissance: Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445-1510), a native-born painter of some renown, and the Ferrarese Dominican friar and preacher Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), who, from 1490 until his public execution in 1498, held the city of Florence spellbound by his words and, eventually, his actions as one of the prime governing forces in the city following the expulsion of the Medici in 1494. Ironically, though their names have been entwined in Renaissance historiography for many years, there is no evidence that they ever actually never met.

During the period of Savonarola's ministry in Florence, however, Botticelli produced several paintings that appear to echo some of the religious and prophetic themes associated with the friar. This, for some art historians, has been enough to mark him as a follower of Savonarola, whose influence is believed to have prompted a radical shift in his work during these years. In this thesis, I endeavor to present an alternate interpretation of this later period in Botticelli's art. Rather than marking a dramatic shift in artistic intentions, I argue, that Botticelli's later work may be understood in more complex terms as a logical extension of his earlier product of his earlier production, which is only intermittently impacted by Savonarolan ideas.

But before proceeding, let us begin with a little background. We will start with a brief portrait of Savonarola, who was born in the North Italian city of Ferrara on September 21, 1452, to prominent parents-his father was a scholarly physician while his mother claimed descent from a distinguished family from Mantua. Through his studies at

the University of Ferrara, he became well acquainted with the classics and the ideas of humanists like Petrarch. Eventually, however, he abandoned his study of medicine to purse a religious vocation, entering the convent of San Domenico in Bologna. In 1482, he began a residence the observant Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence, before moving on to Ferrara, San Gimignano, and other localities. He returned to Florence in 1490 at the request of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-1492) to become prior of San Marco. Lorenzo had become interested in Savonarola's ideas some time before this, and he undoubtedly admired the friar's erudition as a scholar and theologian.[1] Not long after his arrival, however, Savonarola began preaching radical sermons that would, in time, have a great impact on Florentine political and religious institutions. At first, he promised the Florentines that the city's tyrants— a thinly veiled reference to Lorenzo, who held the reigns of the city's economic and political systems, would be brought down to earth and God would raise the poor up in their absence.[2]

In its most fully developed form after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, Savonarolan preaching may be broken down into three main theses. First, he declared that the Church, which he saw as corrupt and full of vice, needed reform to make it worthy to meet Christ at His Second Coming. Second, he argued that the city of Florence itself had gone astray from the path of God, become awash with 'pagan' embellishment, and the mere performance of Christianity had replaced actual belief in the Gospel. Therefore, both the Church and Florence must undergo cleansing in order to be made worthy of the return of Christ. Last, but perhaps most important, he proclaimed that the

---

[1] See: Lorenzo Polizzotto. *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545.*, Ronald M. Steinberg. *Fra Girolamo Savonarola: Florentine Art and Renaissance Historiography*.,Donald Weinstein. *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*.

[2] Donald Weinstein, "Savonarola, Florence, and the Millenarian Tradition." *Church History* 27(1958): 291-305. 294.

coming of the half-millennium in 1500 would mark the beginning of a Florentine empire with Christ as its physical king, an end which could only come as a result of the purification of the city. As a result of this teaching, the citizens of Florence scrambled for saving purification from God's wrath as the fifteenth century ominously turned over into the sixteenth.

The years leading up to the 1500 also saw two other momentous events that were separate, but linked in many ways, to Savonarola. Lorenzo de' Medici died on April 8, 1492, and was succeeded by his "unfortunate" son Piero (1472-1503), who lacked his father's gravitas and intellectualism, essentially ending the period of Lorenzo's "Golden Age." This came to a head two years later, when the threat of French invasion led to the expulsion of the Medici from Florence. Eventually, the city was overrun by the forces of the French King Charles VIII, who prepared to occupy the city on the way to his final goal of the Kingdom of Naples. But this perilous situation quickly dissolved, without much incident, thanks in no small part to Savonarola's skillful diplomacy. These events proved to be particularly pivotal in the friar's life in Florence. He moderated the tone of his preaching, declaring that the city had clearly been chosen for divine favor. As a result, he soon became the *de facto* spiritual and political leader of the Florentine people.[3]

The friar called for a free, republican regime that would help bring about the coming of Christ through political and spiritual means.[4] He declared that Florence would become God's chosen city at Christ's return, prophetically and ideologically linking it to Jerusalem. As he put it in a sermon in 1495:

> First, glorious in the sight of God as well as of men: and you, oh Florence, will begin and spread all

[3] Ibid., p.296
[4] Ibid., p.299

> over, because this is the umbilicus of Italy. Your councils will reform all by the light and grace that God will give you. Second, oh Florence, you will have innumerable riches, and God will multiply all things for you. Third, you will spread your empire, and thus you will have power temporal and spiritual.[5]

With his promises that his adopted city would become the seat of a spiritual empire, the friar assured the Florentines that their city would continue to gain prestige, making it worthy of this position as the New Jerusalem.[6]

But this situation soon began to unravel. In the spring of 1497, Pope Alexander VI (the infamous Borgia pope and target of much of Savonarola's displeasure) issued a papal bull that accused the friar of preaching a false doctrine, and excommunicated him from the Church.[7] The friar rejected the charges leveled against him and continued to preach. Countering the pope, he stated his excommunication was brought about by sinful men who were acting against the will of God who had ordained him as his voice on earth.[8] However, things quickly escalated. Savonarola was arrested, condemned by the Florentine state, tried for heresy and treason, and tortured. He put pen to paper, signing a confession stating that he was a false prophet who had brought Florence under his ungodly spell. On May 23, 1498, he was lead from his prison cell in the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria and hanged in the main square, along with his assistants, Fra

---

[5] Ibid., p.298

[6] See Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1970). Particularly, Chapter 4 "Florence the New Jerusalem," 138-158.

[7] Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 88. Among the charges listed against Savonarola in the papal bull are: the friar's disobedience to go to Rome after being summoned by the Pope, the refusal of the friar and the other friars of San Marco to become a part of the Tuscan-Roman congregation and false teachings.

[8] Ibid., p. 90. Savonarola explained his rationale for challenging the Papal Bull in a letter to Giovanfranceso Pico, a supporter of his cause, in which he wrote: "First, because it has been obtained by the entreaties of evil men, second, because it is full of false instigations; third, because it has been obtained in order to do evil, and therefore, having a bad beginning, and a bad middle, and a bad end, Your Lordship can imagine what it is worth."

Domenico and Fra Silvestro Maruffi. A fire was lit under the gallows, and to prevent any relics being collected by the friar's devotees, the ashes were tossed into the river Arno.

This (brutal) effort to eradicate any trace of the man makes sense when we consider the fact that, during his time in Florence, Savonarola attracted a large group of followers, who were called (mockingly, by their detractors) the *Piagnoni*, or the Weepers. Whatever the original intent, however, the name stuck and was quickly adopted by the friar's devotees as a badge of honor. After Savonarola's 1498 execution, the members of the sect did not shrink away into the nooks and crannies of Florentine society, but rather used his death as a rallying cry to seek the renewed Church that he had prophesized. In this way, the Savonarola movement continued as a prominent political and cultural faction in Florence well into the sixteenth century.[9] More importantly, many *Piagnoni* had once been members of the circle of Lorenzo de' Medici. Among their number were some highly trained humanists, who continued to discuss theological matters and assert the need for religious reform. This is a factor to keep in mind, especially as it relates to the issue of artistic patronage, since patrons with Savonarolan ideas almost certainly continued to commission works of art from the likes of Botticelli and his contemporaries, a circumstance that seems to have been overlooked in previous scholarship.[10]

Though Savonarola's preaching on art is often cited as a driving force in the artistic careers of many Florentine artists, his stance on art is tenuous at best. Primarily, he advised his followers to cast aside immoral images and objects, replacing them with

[9] Ibid., 4.
[10] Ibid., 19.

simple objects of devotion.[11] Savonarola criticized the rich for their love of self-glorification through the commissioning of lavish artworks, specifically paintings with superfluous detail and the commissioning of elaborate church tombs. His views on these subjects are very concrete: altarpieces should be stripped of irrelevant details to keep the focus on prayer, and the only people worthy of public memorials are the saints, not Florentine merchants.[12]

In addition to this preaching on art, the friar was responsible for two separate bonfires of the vanities, occurring on Fat Tuesday of 1497 and 1498. These were held in place of the Florentine carnival and provided an opportunity for the friar to publicly proclaim (and denounce) the luxuries that had to be cast aside to cleanse his prophesized New Jerusalem. In addition to this obvious didactic purpose, these conflagrations permitted the friar to make a show of force, in the form of the bands of young men who would round up the "vanities" (and in some cases compel their owners' "donations") and prepare them for destruction.[13] The contemporary Florentine historian, Jacopo Nardi, provides us with a list of objects that were thrown into the bonfire:

> A marvelous multitude of shameful sculptures and paintings, as well as dead hair and ornamental headdresses for women, Middle Eastern articles, cosmetics, orange blossom water, musk, perfumes of various kinds and similar vanities, and nearby little tables and chessboards, beautiful and expensive, playing cards and dice, harps, lutes, zithers, and similar musical instruments, the works of Boccaccio and the *Morganti*, as well as an extraordinary

[11] See Marcia Hall. "Savonarola's Preaching and the Patronage of Art," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*. Timothy Vernon and John Henerson, eds. Syracuse: Syrcause University Press, 1990. P.493-522.
[12] Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy: From 1400 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 87.
[13] Ludovica Sebrogondi, "Money and Beauty, the Economy and Art in Praise of Opposites," in Ludovica Sebregondi and Tim Parks, eds. *Money and Beauty: Bankers, Botticelli, and the Bonfire of the Vanities*, exh. cat., Palazzo Strozzi. (Florence and Milan: Giunti, 2011), 24.

> number of books of enchantments, magic, and superstitions.[14]

To this list we must also add works of art, including objects that showed nudity, mythological subject matter, or other themes which were considered to be amoral.[15]

In addition to decrying the lavishness of the materiality of art, Savonarola was even more critical of their patrons. We may be sure that the group that considered themselves followers of Savonarola would have been aware of their spiritual leader's feelings in regard to objects of luxury. Some of them must have been present at either or both of the bonfires of the vanities, and if so, would have witnessed the destruction of the objects like the ones on Nardi's list.

It is fascinating to ponder, therefore, the reaction of patrons who had, only a few years earlier, actively participated in, and contributed to, the production of the very works of art that were condemned as sinful by the new de facto ruler of their city. And what of the artists? How did an established, flourishing painter like Alessandro Filipepi, known to his contemporaries by the moniker Botticelli (the little barrel), who had produced some of the exemplary images of Lorenzo the Magnificent's Florence, how might he have responded to this sudden shift in the cultural weather? By the time of the expulsion of Piero de' Medici, he was entering his 50s, with a distinguished career behind him.

The fact is that we know very little about this now most celebrated of Florentine painters. Only a few scant details of his earlier life are recorded. He had been trained early as a goldsmith. However, around 1461 he became an assistant tone of the leading

---

[14] Stefano Dall'Aglio, "Girolamo Savonarola and His Dream of Reform: Art, Money, and the Bonfire of the Vanities," in Ludovica Sebregondi and Tim Parks, eds. *Money and Beauty: Bankers, Botticelli, and the Bonfire of the Vanities*, 96.

[15] Ludovica Sebrogondi, "Money and Beauty, the Economy and Art in Praise of Opposites," in Ludovica Sebregondi and Tim Parks, eds. *Money and Beauty: Bankers, Botticelli, and the Bonfire of the Vanities*:, 24.

painters in Florence, the Carmelite Fra Filippo Lippi.[16] After about ten years in the shop of Fra Filippo, Sandro opened his own workshop and began painting for his own clients. He produced such paintings as the 1476 *Adoration of the Magi* at the Uffizi, which is often described as containing portraits of members of the Medici family, and perhaps a candid self-portrait by the artist then in his early thirties.[17] In the 1480s, he was summoned to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV, and was commissioned to fresco three panels in the newly constructed Sistine Chapel. The pontiff hired a who's who of Botticelli's contemporaries to paint the other panels, including Pietro Perugino, Cosimo Rosseli and Domenico Ghirlandaio. Botticelli's contribution consists of three scenes: *The Trials of Moses*, the *Punishment of Korah*, and the *Temptation of Christ*. These Sistine panels are indicative of the artist's earlier artistic production, showing a strong emphasis on pictorial narrative as well as the citation of classical visual sources. These interests would continue into his later artistic production, including his supposedly Savonarolan paintings.

Upon his return to Florence, Botticelli became one of the prominent painters for the circle of Lorenzo de' Medici. He produced many important works, large and small, during these years. Many of them are saturated with Medicean themes, including some of his most famous secular works, which contain allusions to the love poetry of Lorenzo and his circle, as well as ancient texts like Ovid's *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*. In short, the work that Botticelli produced during this time was a complex palimpsest of meanings, with several levels of interpretation, which could be read on many levels by a variety of

[16] Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, vol 1. (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 17.
[17] Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, and New York: Prestel, 2005), 41.

readers. It functioned at face value as a narrative of a mythological story, but at the same time reinforced important conceptualizations and political ideologies.[18]

The period from the mid-1470s and to the mid-90s marks the apex of a career that made Botticelli a notable artistic force on the landscape of Early Modern Italy. He was accepting commissions from notables as members of the Medici family, Pope Sixtus IV, and other prominent Florentines. It is only in the last two decades of his life that controversy clouds the discussion. Following the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492 and the expulsion of his son in 1495, the old patterns of patronage began to shift. The Medici were gone, and in their place at the head of state stood the forbidding Savonarola, who turned the fanaticism of his movement against the pagan and luxurious aspects of Medici culture that had figured so prominently in the Botticelli's work. Many scholars have argued, as we shall see, that faced with this changing climate, Botticelli renounced his Medicean past in favor of the austerity of Savonarolism. Others have suggested that he simply drifted along with the current, influenced by the moment but not necessarily an actor in it—a leaf in the swirling pond of late 15th-century Florence.

What follows in this study is a reevaluation of these final problematic decades of the artist's life and work. It is impossible, of course, to reconstruct the feelings of a long deceased artist through a scant collection of paintings and documentation. While it is my belief that Botticelli continued his earlier modes of production into these decades (and it seems that the material evidence supports this), there is no way to know with certainty, and I make no claim to speak for the artist himself. Therefore, it is necessary to approach

[18] For more on the complex overtones in the *Primavera*, see Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and the Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

the case from a variety of angles of inquiry. We may catch a glance of the painter in the mirror, but his image is refracted and never really clear.

I have arranged this thesis into four sections. In the first, I assess the historiography to date in regards to the supposed Savonarolan influence on the painter and his art. In the second, I discuss the paintings that have been held to contain Savonarolan themes through both visual analysis and comparison to their original Savonarolan sources. In the third, I analyze the potential dynamic of Botticelli and his patrons around the turn of the fifteenth century, in order to develop an understanding of his later artistic production in relation to then-current system of patron and artist. In the final section, I analyze the artist's use of materials and sources in the Savonarolan paintings, in order to evaluate them against the broader corpus of the artist's work.

1.

Historiography

Throughout modern scholarship, a number of Sandro Botticelli's paintings produced between 1495 and 1510 have been described as products of his active adherence to the Savonarolan movement. This notion has its origins in Giorgio Vasari's sixteenth century account of the artist's life, and has persisted through the years to become something of an axiom in modern art history. It is my intention in this chapter to present a critical survey of the relevant historiography, to identify some of its recurring, and as we shall see, problematic paradigms.

Any discussion of Botticelli's postulated relationship to Savonarola must begin with Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Famous Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, first published in 1550, and then in a much-expanded second edition in 1568. Vasari, who is known for his use of entertaining but often factually inaccurate anecdotes, depicts the artist in the last decades of his life as a washed-up artistic has-been, driven to this sorry state by his own Savonarolan fanaticism. As he puts it:

> He [Botticelli] was apparently a follower of Savonarola's faction, which led him to abandon painting; unable to make enough to live on, he fell into the direst of straights. Nevertheless, he remained an ardent *piagnone* (as they were called in those days), which kept him away from his work. [19]

But Vasari does not stop here. He goes on to report that it was only through the largesse of Botticelli's friends and supporters in the Medici circle that the painter was spared the indignity of starving (however piously) to death..

[19]Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 228

There are several lines of evidence which seem to refute Vasari's statements about Botticelli's decline at the end of his life, chief among them the fact that both Botticelli and his workshop continued to churn out artwork right up to the artist's death in 1510. He did not die a poor man, but lived rather comfortably through his income from art making as well as the rental of a small farm with his brother, Simone. Most importantly, Vasari never knew Botticelli. The biographer was born a year after the artist died. By the time the first edition of his collection of biographies was published, Botticelli had been dead for forty years. As with many of his biographies throughout his *Vite*, Vasari constructed Botticelli's life out of a tapestry of hearsay, legends, gossip, and fact. His goals were not exclusivity directed to accuracy, as much as they were to telling a engaging and morally edifying tale. In the case of Botticelli, it is possible that he wanted to warn future painters of the disastrous results of renouncing one's career in favor of an ill-chosen ideal.[20]

Most contemporary scholars agree that Botticelli produced around forty paintings between the year 1490 and his death in 1510, an output that corresponds with his earlier production.[21] From this, it is clear that the artist was both willing to produce artwork in the wake of the Savonarolan episode and was also willing to work in a variety of artistic modes for different patrons to support himself.

In addition to the evidence of the artist's paintings, there are some contemporary documents that also contradict his account of Botticelli's retirement from painting. In September of 1502, Isabella d'Este received a letter from her agent in Florence regarding

---

[20] On Vasari as a commemorative and moralizing author, see Patricia Rubin, "'What men saw': Vasari's Life of Leonardo da Vinci and the Image of the Renaissance Artist," *Art History* 13 (1990): 33-45.
[21] Ronald M. Steinberg, *Fra. Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art, and Renaissance Historiography* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 22-23.

a commission the *Marchesa* was seeking there. In the letter we learn that though Perugino and Filippino Lippi were unable to accept her commission due to previous commitments, Botticelli, whom the agent identifies as an artist of great renown, was willing to accept the job. [22] This correspondence reveals that Botticelli is not only willing to work, but is still considered worthy of consideration alongside his most notable contemporaries. Additionally, rather than refusing to work, as per Vasari's account, Botticelli is described as willing to accept commissions from a patron who had no connection whatsoever to the Savonarolan movement. Thus, the letter to the *Marchesa* provides a very strong counter-argument to Vasari's assertion that Botticelli's output and reputation declined under the influence of Savonarola.

But we have yet another document, from much closer to home, that appears to contradict the Vasarian account. In a diary entry date November 2, 1499-about a year after Savonarola's death—Botticelli's brother, Simone, noted in a diary entry that his brother Sandro had had a conversation in his workshop with Doffo Spini, the leader of the anti-Savonarolan movement. Spini was a friend of Sandro's, and often spent time at his studio with other members of the anti-Savonarola circle. Simone tells us:

> About the third hour after sunset, my brother Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi, one of the good painters our city has had in these times, in my presence, being in the house by the fire, told me how that same day in his shop he had been in conversation with Doffo Spini about the fall of Fra Girolamo. And, in sum, because he knew that the said Doffo had been one of the leaders of those who had always put the question to him, Sandro asked him to tell him the simple truth, what sins had they found in Fra Girolamo, to make him deserve such a vile death, whereupon Doffo answered him, " Sandro, I tell you the truth, we never found any venial sin in him, let alone mortal." Then Sandro said to him, "Then why did you

[22] Charles Burroughs, "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's Mannerism and the Reform of Sacred Art," *Artibus et Historie*,18, no. 36 (1997): 9-40. p. 17

> make him die so vilely?" He answered, it wasn't me, but Benozzo Federighi who was the cause, and if he hadn't had that prophet and his companions killed, but had sent them back to San Marco, the people would have taken us and cut us to pieces, the matter had gone so far that we decided they must die to save us." The other things were said between them, which need not be repeated.[23]

Spini had been a member of the youthful *Compagnacci,* an opposition party to the *frate's* movement, an association that prompted his arrest and subsequent trial for sodomy in 1499.[24] From the dialogue as reported, it would be possible to interpret Botticelli's an expression of general interest in the case, although the phrasing of his question and the deferral of responsibility from Spini suggests a measure of sympathy with the friar and disgust as the method of his execution. For this reason, the story has been cited as evidence of Botticelli's Savonarolan sympathies. One wonders, however, that if this was the case, why the artist would have been on such intimate and friendly terms with one of the friar's most vocal opponents?[25] As a second-hand account of a conversation where the writer was not present, it is not clear how much we can take this bit of evidence for granted. At the very least, however, it suggests that Botticelli's associations in the period immediately following Savonarola's death were not limited to the friar's followers, but quite possibly included major figures in the opposition.

Despite this evidence for a more complicated and nuanced picture of the painter's relationship to the movement, Vasari's description has cast a heavy shadow on virtually all subsequent accounts of the painter's life.

---

[23] Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art 1400-1500: Sources and* Documents (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), 219. I use Gilbert's translation of this selection from the Chronicle of Simone Filipepi, as it seems to be one of the better versions. The document originally appeared in Horne's 1908 biography of Botticelli, see: Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 362.
[24] Lorenzo Polizotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545,* 212.
[25] Ibid., p.20

In his 1901 biography of the artist, Ernst Steinmann reported that Botticelli was a "zealous adherent" of Savonarola, but acknowledged that Vasari had been misinformed about the artist's supposed abandonment of his craft, since he clearly continued to produce work, as evidenced by several surviving paintings firmly dated to those years.[26] Steinmann did, however, propose that, in his later work, continued, Botticelli apparently "forgot the ideals of his youth and returned by preference to entirely religious painting under the influence of Savonarola's sermons."[27] According to Steinmann, the painter cast aside the "pagan" trappings of Lorenzo de' Medici's Florence, and replaced them with the religious fervor of the Savonarolan movement - humanist intellectualism dashed aside by a fear of the divine wrath promised by the friar. Steinmann also compared the 'Savonarolan' works of Botticelli to the supposedly Savonarola-inspired works of Michelangelo, surmising that Botticelli, "whose temperament [was] so easily roused, was still more strongly attracted to the great to the great personality of the Dominican [than Michelangelo], could not shut his ears to such ardent admonitions." In this way, Steinmann posited a comparison of two distinct kinds of artistic religiosity, contrasting the quiet stillness of the Madonna of Michelangelo's Vatican *Pieta* and of the furious spirituality of Botticelli's more 'easily roused' manner throughout his later life.[28]

Two years later, Julia Cartwright Ady argued that Botticelli, like his brother, appeared to have been an ardent follower of Savonarola. She supported this by pointing out the brothers' close proximity and amicability throughout the end of the artist's life. In addition to this, Ady invoked the evidence of a letter to the artist from Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (1463-1503), a cousin of the late Lorenzo the Magnificent who

[26] Ernst Steinmann, *Botticelli* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen and Klafking, 1897), 26
[27] Ibid., 27
[28] Ibid., 96.

had stayed on after Piero de'Medici's exile in 1495. In the letter, Lorenzo greeted the painter with the *Piagnoni* salutation of "Christus!" Ady argued that this salutation had been reserved only for followers of the friar, and marked the artist as an adherent of the Savonarolan movement.[29] However, this letter is found, to the best of my knowledge, nowhere else in scholarship about Botticelli, making Ady's discussion of it an exception instead of the rule.[30]

During the same year, another Botticelli biographer, A. Streeter, weighed in on the matter: "Vasari's assertion that under Savonarola's influence Botticelli abandoned painting seems in the main to be correct," as demonstrated by the fact that the artist's later years (between 1500 and 1510) appeared to have been artistically and financially "unproductive."[31] As such, Streeter's characterization seems to adhere to Vasarian precedent — overcome with religious fervor, Botticelli fell under the spell of the *frate's* fiery religious reform, and gave up the art through which he had gained such fame. He replaced it with austere spirituality that caused him to fall into artistic oblivion.

In his 1908 monograph on the artist, Herbert P. Horne followed the same paradigm, noting that while there is an absence of material evidence tying Botticelli directly to the Savonarolan movement, "all the last works of Sandro bear ample proof" that the artist was a follower of the *frate*.[32] Horne also suggested that Botticelli could have participated in the destruction of his own artwork during the bonfires of the vanities, and that the disappearance of some of his earlier works from his output around the end of

---

[29] Julia Cartwright Ady, *Sandro Botticelli* (London: Duckworth and Company, 1903), 70.
[30] Ady's Piagnoni letter is tantalizing, but its absence from all subsequent historiography on Botticelli's Savonarolanism raises serious questions about its validity and existence.
[31] A. Streeter, *Botticelli* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1903), 18-19.
[32] Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli: Painter of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 272.

the fifteenth century pointed to their use as kindling for Savonarola's fire.[33] (I would suggest that, while the absence of some works makes it at least a possibility that they could have been destroyed in this way, this would not necessarily mean that Botticelli himself cast them into the fire.) Horne also pointed out that Sandro's name is not found on the 1497 petition by followers of the *frate* to Pope Alexander VI, which pleaded for Savonarola's excommunication to be rescinded. Since this list has become a virtual who's who of *Piagnoni* in Florence at the time, Botticelli's absence from the list would indeed appear to be telling. In addition, Horne suggested that the artist's friendliness with Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, a prominent critic of the Savonarolan movement, suggests that he had not become a follower of Savonarola (at least openly) until after his execution.[34] Horne notes, however, that after 1497, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco fled Florence, at which time there seems to have been a rupture between them. He attributed to Sandro's "avowed attachment" to the Savonarolan cause, a stance which would have gone entirely against everything that Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco had fought for in regards to the friar. As a result of all this, Botticelli, Horne concluded, was apparently "deeply impressed" with Savonarola and, as a result, joined his movement around this time.[35]

In 1925, Yukio Yashiro described Botticelli as an artist inclined to follow a more mystical path. He argued that in his final years, the artist was overcome with an infusion of Catholic mysticism rooted in Savonarola's ideas. As he put it: "The age was of Savonarola, who saw visions and put ultimate confidence in their spiritual reality. Why could not Botticelli, who, after the friar's martyrdom in 1498, fall completely under his

[33] Ibid., 274.
[34] Ibid., 276.
[35] Ibid, 277.

prophetic spell?"[36] Therefore, for Yashiro, Botticelli became a Christian mystic who prophesizes through his artwork, making the Savonarolan paintings material records of the painter's newfound mysticism.

That same year, Wilhelm von Bode argued that: "the sermons of the friar moved Botticelli deeply, and even exercised a profound influence on his art." He develops this notion by stating that the artist "condemned those of his pictures which represented 'pagan' subjects, and with his own hands consigned [them] to the flames." Botticelli, according to Bode, became an ardent champion of the Savonarolan cause, as seen in his destruction of his own artwork and the creation of paintings saturated with Savonarolan iconography.[37]

Likewise, in 1937, Lionel Ventura wrote, "anyone can find a thousand reasons in support of the tradition handed down by Vasari that Botticelli became a follower of Savonarola."[38] Ventura sustained this argument throughout his analysis of the artist's later works, up until his death in poverty, fallen into despair at the death of Savonarola. "In 1510, Botticelli died in seclusion and silence, according to Vasari," Venturi reported. "But Vasari failed to understand that isolation was necessary to the artist's spiritual life. He was able to find, even on earth, the salvation of his soul, the last touch to make his mortal figure appear to us as perfect as the image of his art."[39] According to Venturi, Botticelli was freed from the sins of his 'pagan' past and sought to save his soul through the reform of his own artwork through his allegiance to the Savonarolan movement. From this standpoint, Savonarolan paintings are indicators of the artist's personal attachment to

[36] Yukio Yashiro, *Sandro Botticelli*, vol 2. (Boston and London: The Medici Society, 1925), 220.
[37] Wilhelm von Bode, *Sandro Botticelli* (Berlin: Propaläen-Verland, 1921), 118
[38] Lionello Venturi, *Botticelli* (New York and Vienna: Phaidon and Oxford University Press, 1937), 23.
[39] Ibid., 24

the Savonarolan cause and proof that he had completely renounced his 'pagan' Medici past. In order to save himself from damnation, the artist cast all trappings of his past aside, replacing his luxurious life under the Medici with the austerity of a hermit.

Guilio Carlo Argan inserted a note of dissension into the discourse in his 1957 biography of the artist, when he observed, "there is in fact no historical evidence to support the claim that Botticelli was a follower of the friar and his movement."[40] Expanding on this point, Argan proposed that the artist may have been indifferent to the friar and his teachings, and that the change in style at the end of his life was the result of "a acute mental crisis for which we have historical proof, Botticelli's religious outlook took on new poetic and moral depths…a frank reversion to the religious tradition of medieval painting,[41] rather than the artist's association with the Savonarolan movement. There is, however, seemingly no proof of this mental collapse to be found in contemporary documentation or subsequent scholarship.

In 1977, L.D. and Helen Ettlinger argued that while the artist had close contact with Savonarolan followers through his brother, Simone, his own feelings towards the friar could only be surmised. Thus, they suggested that the "religious fervor of his late paintings should therefore not be interpreted as the direct response of Savonarolan influence but rather as an anxious response to the uncertainty of the time," the morality of the works was a product of "general causes" of the context in which the artist worked, and not his own Savonarolan support.[42]

The same year, Ronald M. Steinberg, in his important study of *Fra Girolamo Savonarola: Florentine Art and Renaissance Historiography,* espoused a similar thesis

[40] Giulio Carlo Argan, *Botticelli: Bibliographical and Critical* Study (New York: Skira, 1957), 8.
[41] Ibid., 14.
[42] Leopold Ettlinger, *Botticelli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 92.

regarding Botticelli's later work. Steinberg acknowledged that Botticelli's personal feelings towards the friar are impossible to ascertain with certainty, but accepted the notion that a Savonarolan flavor and related iconography could be identified in some of his later paintings.[43] He also acknowledged the notable stylistic shift that appears in the artist's later works, which is often defined as a "spiritual style." However, Steinberg asserted that this "new manner" is only applicable to a handful of paintings that the artist produced between 1490 and 1510, and points out that the artist worked in a variety of distinct styles throughout this period, which Steinberg attributed to the influence of his patrons. For Steinberg, then, it would be an overreach to interpret the paintings that contain Savonarolan iconography as proof of the allegiance of the artist himself. "The fault is clearly in attempting *a priori* to classify these paintings done by Botticelli after Savonarola's advent in Florence as being under the *frate's* influence," Steinberg concludes.[44] In my opinion, Steinberg was very much on the mark with this analysis. Rather than simply placing these paintings into a body of works that were the product of Botticelli's Savonarolan allegiance each should be taken independently as the product of some sort of social trend however that might relate to the faith or personal associations of the artist who produced them.

In his 1978 monograph on Botticelli, Ronald Lightbown also discussed the role of Savonarola in the artist's life. He focused especially on the conversation that Simone Filipepe recorded in his diary of the meeting of Doffo Spini and the artist at his studio regarding the fate of the *frate,* arguing, "these conversations must have influenced

[43] Ronald M. Steinberg, *Fra Girolamo Savonarola: Florentine Art and Renaissance Historiography*, 71.
[44] Ibid., 61.

Sandro."[45] However, Lightbown expressed skepticism regarding Vasari's account of Botticelli as a *piagnone*, acknowledging, "some modern scholars reject the story [of the artist's neglect of his art], arguing that Vasari confused Sandro with his brother Simone, who without doubt was an obstinate *piagnone*."[46]

In a 1995 article entitled "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium," Rab Hatfield discussed the influence of the friar's preaching on Botticelli's later artistic production, specifically the London *Mystic Nativity* of 1500. He explored some iconographic connections between the work and Savonarola's sermons to link the artist to the Savonarolan movement, particularly the friar's Christmas sermon of 1493 (and another from December of 1494), which relate to allegories of the heavenly virtues, Florence, Christ and millennial notions. Hatfield concluded that Botticelli was in fact influenced by the Savonarolan movement, and had to veil the references to the friar in the work because the Savonarolan movement had gone underground. Thus, the painting could be interpreted as a coded representation of Savonarolan piety and membership to the *Piagnoni* sect by the artist.[47]

Also in 1995, Richard Stapleford argued that Vasari's claim of the decline of Botticelli's art at the end of his life was simply untrue. "In his [Vasari's] organic view of the evolution of art, the erosion of Botticelli's naturalistic style could only be identified by the intrusion of an alien presence –Savonarola—to lead the painter astray," writes Stapleford. "Today, corroborating evidence of a vital connection between Savonarola and Botticelli is slim at best and is more than offset by arguments to the contrary within the

[45] Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, vol. 1, 134
[46] Ibid, 130
[47] Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola, and the Millennium." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 88-114. p. 103.

paintings themselves." Stapleford emphasized the near-total absence of proof that Botticelli had become an convert to Savonarolan ideas, and noted that, rather than exhibiting a decline in his art attributable to this influence, he continued to produce work at the same caliber and containing the same humanistic values throughout the course of his life.[48]

In a 1997 article, Charles Burroughs also tackled the issue of Botticelli's artistic output at the end of his life. He acknowledged that there seems to be some sort of crisis of the image which occurs in these works, which he attributed to several factors: the Savonarolan movement, the death of Lorenzo de' Medici and the Medici expulsion, and the French invasion of 1494. According to Burroughs, a sense of catastrophe had become prevalent in Florence. He observed that while Botticelli had often been considered to be the exemplar Savonarolan artist, Vasari's report of this is most likely a fabrication and, therefore, the whole notion of him as a *Piagnoni* artist is inherently incorrect. Burroughs also points out that Botticelli continued to work, joined a painting guild in 1502 (proof of his continued artistic activity), and did not suffer any sort of repercussions after the fall of the Savonarolan movement. Additionally, he had also been friendly with anti-Savonarolans, such as Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Doffo Spini, a fact that further supports the likelihood that he was not a follower of Savonarola, adding that "even on the assumption that the imagery of these paintings expressed the artist's own convictions, it is quite likely that he was caught up in the great groundswell of *Piagnoni* enthusiasm that followed the friar's death and, merging with republican patriotism,

[48] Richard Stapleford, "Vasari and Botticelli." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorichen Institutes in Florenz* 18 (1974): 319-408. p .401.

played a crucial role in Florentine public opinion and political history until the fall of the last republic in 1530."[49]

Also in 1997, Hillard T. Goldfarb argued that Vasari's account of Botticelli's Savonarolism seems to have been fabricated. However, he asserts that the influence of the friar on the later work of the artist is undeniable.[50] Goldfarb pointed out that several individuals in the artist's social sphere, such as his brother, the della Robbia, Cronaca the architect, Lorenzo di Credi, and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, had all been supporters of the movement, which makes it possible that Sandro had been one of them as well. Goldfarb also noted that some of the artist's later work, notably the *Mystic Nativity* and *Mystic Crucifixion*, reveals a deepening spirituality that reflects the impact of friar's teaching. Goldfarb concludes that "together with the directness of expression and gesture and the passionate tone of these pictures, there is an abjuration of sumptuous attire in these paintings that is consistent with Savonarola's attitude toward decorum."[51]

In the 2003 exhibition catalogue for *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola* at the Musée du Luxembourg, several scholars discussed the influence of Savonarola on Botticelli's art production. Daniel Arrasse argued that the austerity evident in some of Botticelli's later works may have been connected the upheavals of the Savonarolan era, but had already been a factor in some of his earlier work, including the *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*.[52] In addition, Arrasse argued that the paintings associated with Savonarolan ideas may be identified as such "on the grounds of their inspiration or

---

[49] Charles Burroughs, "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's 'Mannerism' and the Reform of Sacred Art." *Artibus et Historiae* 18, no. 36 (1997): 9-40. p. 17.
[50] Hillard T. Goldfarb, "Sandro Botticelli As Artist and Witness: An Overview," in Laurence Kanter, Hillard T Goldfarb, and James Hankins, *Botticelli's Witness: Changing Style in a Changing Florence,* ech. Cat. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Lowell, MA: LaVigne Press, 1997), *7*.
[51] Ibid, 12.
[52] Daniel Arasse, "Botticelli's Manner," in Musée du Luxembourg, *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola,* exh. cat., text by Daniel Arasse and others (Milan: Skira, 2003), 15.

the personality of the client." In short, for Arrasse, Botticelli's Savonarolan works show no major shift in style from his earlier works, and likely owe their idiosyncrasies to outside forces acting on the artist. [53] Later in the catalogue, Antonio Paolucci dramatically proclaims that Botticelli's earlier Medici world would "vanish like snow in sunshine" with the arrival of Savonarola, and that the friar's words "troubled all Florentines," but affected "Sandro Botticelli more than others and in a special way."[54] Paolucci presents an image of Botticelli as a man who was greatly affected by the Savonarolan movement. The result of this was the Savonarolan paintings, which he explains as the result of a rupture from the artist's past as a Medici artist to his present as a follower of Savonarola. In another section, Claudio Strunati proposes that "the story of his [Botticelli's] relationship with Savonarola…has much to tell us in this sense, as on one hand it is transparent, and on the other impenetrable." [55] It seems, then, that even in the pages of a single exhibition catalogue, there is room for uncertainty and disagreement about Botticelli's relationship to the *Piagnoni* movement.

As the preceding survey clearly demonstrates, Botticelli is most often discussed as either a follower of or a sympathizer to the Savonarolan movement, on the one hand; or as being not directly involved, but influenced in some way as a result of the general situation, on the other. We can, therefore, identify two major schools of thought. The first of these adheres, to the most part, to Vasari's precedent: Botticelli had been a great humanist painter of the Golden Age of Lorenzo de' Medici's Florence, but with the rise of Savonarola fell, into decline and oblivion. He turned away from his interest in

---

[53] Ibid., 16.
[54] Antonio Paolucci, "Botticelli and the Medici: A Privileged Relationship," in Musée du Luxembourg, *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, 76.
[55] Claudio Strjnati, "The Real Botticelli," in Musée du Luxembourg, *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, 80.

depicting sensuous nudes, scenes of classical mythology, and richly textured religious work. Instead, Botticelli had become enraptured with the depiction of religious scenes inspired by the words of Savonarola. The focus of these later works centered solely on the artist's interest in showing unobstructed religious narrative, boiled down to the main essentials, with all extraneous embellishment abandoned.

The second school asserts that the artist was influenced by events which were out of his control, perhaps shifting his allegiances over time, and putting matters of professional survival over such risky matters as "taking sides." A variety of sometimes-conflicting sub-arguments tend to emergence from this general school. For example, while Argan asserts that the artist experienced some sort of mental breakdown at the end of his life (reflected in the seemingly drastic shift in the artist's style); the Ettlingers argue that the Savonarolan paintings were a product of living in 'anxious' times, and that the artist's own feelings towards Savonarola can only be inferred through his social and professional interactions. Lightbown and Stapleford follow pretty much the same thread.

In the next section of this thesis, I shall attempt to address and challenge both of these paradigms, and will propose an alternate possibility for what was occurring in the concluding phases of Botticelli's artistic life. I believe that, rather than being a committed supporter of the Savonarolan movement, the artist was a shrewd businessman who seized the opportunity to tap in to a new Florentine demographic. I will also attempt to show that, contrary to the image of an artist flailing helplessly against a tide of social and spiritual crises, Botticelli might have operated with a lot more artistic and professional agency in these final years than has been previously acknowledged by scholarship. Like Ronald Steinberg, I have concluded that there is no point in attempting to ascertain

Botticelli's personal convictions one way or the other in relation to Savonarola and his movement. The paintings may be another matter, however. I hope to make clear in the following section; many of the so-called "Savonarolan" works quite clearly contain iconography connected to the friar's teachings. How this might be explained will be the focus of the next chapter.

2.

The Savonarolan Paintings[56]

Regardless of his personal affiliations, there is no doubt that Botticelli produced paintings during his later years that contain iconography related to Savonarola's teachings. These works include *Mystic Crucifixion*, *Mystic Nativity*, *Agony in the Garden,* and *the Last Communion of Saint Jerome*, all from after 1500. What follows is a visual, iconographic, and contextual discussion of these works, which have been discussed at length in the historiography of Botticelli's art.

Botticelli's *Mystic Crucifixion* (fig.1) of 1500, now in the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard University, is perhaps Botticelli's clearest and most elegant expression of Savonarolan ideals. The composition is dominated by a large cross, upon which hangs the crucified Christ. Christ's body is elongated and sinewy, idealized and mostly unblemished. Beneath his outstretched arms are the figures of Mary Magdalene and an angel. The angel[57] stands on the right side of the composition and is holding an animal that, given its leonine appearance, can be identified as the Florentine *marzocco*, This holy figure is poised on the brink of dispatching the lion with a cudgel, thereby perhaps administering God's justice. The angel is dressed in a robe that is clearly inspired by classical Greek dress, and is reminiscent of the artist's earlier works such as *The Birth of*

[56] Though it seems that the paintings in question were the result of patron-artist interaction and not necessarily the personal feelings of Botticelli himself, I have opted to refer to these works as 'the Savonarolan paintings' throughout this thesis. This is in keeping with references to them throughout scholarship and the fact that they contain obvious allusions to Savonarola's preaching.

[57] Like other examples of angels throughout both the art of Botticelli and his Florentine contemporaries, the gender of the angel is unclear. This androgynous figure is most likely male; however, it could be argued that angels are not of this world and are therefore beyond such base discussions of gender.

Venus and the *Primavera*. This cloak is blue and is covered by a red cape, much of which has been obscured as a result of the generally poor state of preservation of the work. On the left side of the composition is the Magdalene, who has sunk to the ground while clutching the cross of Christ. The Magdalene does not look up at the face of Christ, who is turned down toward her, but instead gazes the angel as if imploring the forgiveness of the divine messenger for transgressions of the animal (which, given its connection to the *marzocco*, should be considered a personification Florence itself). Another creature emerges from under the cloak of the Magdalene and slinks out of the composition on the left side. Perhaps this motif could be interpreted as a statement that the Magdalene, a former prostitute, could, through the Grace of God, be elevated out of the depths of sin as an animal of vice flees from her cloak to avoid the angel's wrath.

Though the background has suffered more from deterioration and botched restoration than the foreground, it also presents a strong message of Savonarolan ideology. The figures at the foot of the cross are arranged across the green carpet of a field, which rolls back into the distance until it reaches a city on the horizon. This city is not the Jerusalem of the Biblical event, but is clearly Florence itself. The skyline is dominated with such Florentine landmarks as the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, Giotto's Campanile, the Palazzo Vecchio, and the Baptistery. Through this placement, the city on the Arno becomes equated with Jerusalem, becoming the chosen city of Christ's return, just as in Savonarola's millennial teaching.

To add another layer of meaning, above the city and to the right of Christ, a dark thunderhead of smoke rises above the city from the ground. Within this smoke, angels battle with demons and hurl them into the maw of hell, a fiery chasm to the right of the

angel. This is tranquilly overseen by God the Father, who appears in a golden mandorla on the left side of the composition.

I believe we should take our interpretive cues from the figure of Christ, whose head has slumped down, facing both the figure of the weeping Magdalene and the skyline of Florence, which in Savonarolan terms, has been transformed into the New Jerusalem, Savonarola's promised city of God. According to the friar's teachings, Florence would have to be punished for its transgressions--as evidenced by the angel preparing the dispatch of emblematic animal of the Florentine state—before it would be worthy of this transformation. However, this was only to be a moment of torment and tribulation on the way to greater glory. The figure of Christ would have assured the viewer that these ominous events were only a temporary (but necessary) cleansing in preparation for paradise. Christ looks down at both the Magdalene and Florence, two separate entities that were purged of their respective transgressions in order to make them worthy of being called Christ's own.

The most widely accepted interpretation of the *Mystic Crucifixion* is that it is a direct reference to Savonarola's January 13, 1495, sermon describing the impending wrath of God over Rome (which he equates to Babylon). In this sermon, the friar noted that the sky above Rome would become dark, and that it would bring forth a rain of all sorts of misfortune, including knives, stones and darkness at the time of God's final judgment. Over the city would appear a black cross with the inscription "the Anger of God." Savonarola said he witnessed a cross over Jerusalem that reached from the earth to the sky and was inscribed with "the Mercy of God." This cross was of gold and above it; the sky was clear and blue. Thus, Florence becomes the New Jerusalem, poised to receive

the blessings of God as the evils of Alexander VI's Rome are revealed.[58] Additionally, Donald Weinstein has connected the image of the Magdalene to the concept of Florence as the *bella donna*, a figure that pervaded contemporary poetry, painting and prophecy. Weinstein argues that the repentance of this beautiful lady was the first, necessary condition for the return of Christ. He also asserts that the image as a whole is a depiction of three temporal moments: in the first, Florence undergoes the purifying scourge of God; in the second, she is repentant at the cross as the Magdalene, and finally; she is shown in glory under the watchful eye of the Father in heaven. Seen in this way, the painting presents a neatly packed parcel of Savonarolan ideology.[59]

A second, more celebrated (and considerably more enigmatic) work by the artist, the *Mystic Nativity* (fig.2), from around 1500 and now at the National Gallery, London, presents a more opaque assertion of Savonarolan ideology. The composition is divided into three registers. On the top are an inscription and a ring of angels who rise into the golden dome of heaven. In the center register is the Nativity itself, with the Christ child, the Virgin, Joseph, ox and ass, and a group of adoring angels and shepherds. In the lowest register are three groups of figures, each an angel and a man embracing before the nativity scene. Around the men and angels, small demons shrink back into the depths, struggling to escape the event that would mark their doom.

Let us return to that center register, in which a group of men crowd around the central grouping of figures. The Christ child, the Madonna, and Joseph are ensconced under a roof built across the opening of a cave. This cave is not deep, since we can see

[58] "Mystical Crucifixion," in Laurence Kanter, Hillard T. Goldfarb, and James Hankins, *Botticelli's Witness*: *Changing Style in a Changing Florence*, 52.
[59] Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, 337.

light falling between tree trunks on the other side. The Christ child has been placed on the ground and looks up at his Virgin mother, who is praying above him. Joseph kneels down piously, his head turned from the viewer's gaze. On the left side of the composition, an angel holding an olive branch gestures towards the scene and leads in a group of men with olive wreath crowns. This group kneels before the Holy Family. On the right, a similar angel guides two shepherds. They too are also crowned with olive wreaths, though they are dressed in the ragged clothing of their humble profession. One of the men's leggings has ripped at the ankle, exposing his bare foot.

Above this main scene, three angels sit on the roof of the manger. The central one holds an open book, while the two on either side hold olive branches. These branches have often been connected to the olive branches that were carried in Savonarola's children's processions of 1496,[60] and therefore could have provoked a particularly charged memory of events associated with the Savonarolan movement. Above these figures, twelve more angels dance around the golden vault of heaven. They hold olive branches in their hands, and are dressed in cloaks reminiscent of ancient costume. These angels also hold banners, upon which are written various praises to God for the coming of Christ.

Above this, there is a Greek inscription that reads:

> This picture, at the end of the year 1500, in the great troubles of Italy, I Alessandro, painting in the half time after the time; at the time of the fulfillment of the eleventh of St. John, in the Second Woe of the Apocalypse; in the loosening of the devil for three and a half years; then shall he be chained according

[60] Hillard T. Goldfarb, "Sandro Botticelli As Artist and Witness: An Overview," in Laurence Kanter, Hillard T Goldfarb, and James Hankins, *Botticelli's Witness: Changing Style in a Changing Florence*, 11.

> to the twelfth, and we shall see him as in this picture.[61]

Before proceeding further, let us consider this extraordinary inscription, which is unique, not only in Botticelli's work, but in the work of his contemporaries. On the one hand, its inclusion may be explained as both a signature and as an explanation of the painting's meaning, set in this case into the context of recent events in Italy. On the other hand, it is written in a language that only the most educated of humanist scholars could be expected to read. There is no reason to believe that Botticelli cold read Greek, or could have composed it himself, although the use of Greek and other ancient languages and script connects to a tradition of artists including such conceits in their signatures or as inscriptions within their works.[62]

The peculiarity of this inscription aside, the text is a reference to the apocalyptic Revelation of Saint John, the eleventh chapter of which details the appearance of two men. They are described as having the ability to breathe fire and perform miracles and are appointed by God to preach in his Holy City. These two holy men are subsequently murdered and their bodies viewed by multitudes of people, only to be taken up to heaven on a cloud.[63] Ronald Lightbown has observed that the story of the eleventh chapter of Revelation bears a strong parallel to the eventual execution of Savonarola and his two compatriots in 1498, when the radical reformers were burned in front of a large crowd and their bodies ascended to heaven in a cloud of smoke.[64]

---

[61] Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium*,"* 98. I have elected to use Hatfield's translation of this inscription, as it seems to be one of the best.
[62] For more on this see Patricia Rubin, "Signposts of Invention: Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art," *Art History* 24. 4 (Sept 2006): 563-599. This includes several examples from throughout the history of Renaissance art, including Michelangelo's famous FACIABAT on the sash of the Virgin of the Vatican *Pieta*.
[63] Rev. 11:1-14.
[64] Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium," 282

The inscription also refers to the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation, in which a woman, after being menaced by a dragon, gives birth to a male child. The child is whisked away from the dragon, though a multitude of stars are swept from the sky as a result of his fiery wrath. Angels capture the dragon and chain it to earth for a thousand years.[65] In his sermons, Savonarola frequently identified the dragon of this passage as the Antichrist, whose arrival in the city was imminent and would bring misfortune to the Florentine people, a clear allusion to one of the central points of his ministry.[66]

The inscription also states that while the artist was working on the painting, Italy was experiencing the Second Woe of the Apocalypse. The date of 1500 helps to identify the second woe as a likely reference to the invasion of the Italian peninsula by the French king, Charles VIII, who Savonarola believed would act as the scourge of God.[67] Thus, the prophecies of Savonarola had become reality, and Botticelli's *Nativity* can be interpreted as a reference to the second coming of Christ and the renovation of the Church, a time when the earth would be a renewed place where men and angels embrace in joy at the return of Christ.[68] This inscription has often been cited throughout the scholarship as proof of the artist's personal association with the Savonarolan movement. However, it seems that it could only have been an elaborate way for the artist to sign and date his

---

[65] Rev. 12:1-9. (NAB), the text of which reads: "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days. Then war broke out in heaven; Michael [and] his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it."

[66] Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium," 97

[67] Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, vol. 1, 137

[68] Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, vol. 1, 138

work in a manner that would have been considered appropriate to a Savonarolan audience or patrons, in keeping with contemporary traditions of the practice of clever signatures.

In addition to these associations, the painting may be directly connected to a sermon delivered by Savonarola on Christmas Eve 1493, in which he proclaimed:

> Behold, the sky opened, and right away I see descending from the bosom of the Eternal Father a venerable woman with an olive branch in hand, and she came singing, *Misericordia Domini plena est terra*. That is, the earth of the Holy Virgin was filled with the mercy of the Lord. She urged and begged the Child to come forth, and thus, *Vertias de terra orta est.* Suddenly from this 'earth' was born Truth. The Holy Child came forth. Then he set himself on the bare ground in front of the Hold Virgin. Now as soon as this Truth had come forth, Mercy met with her, and the two embraced each other and said, *Universe vie Domini misericordia et veritas*: All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth. And while these things were being done on earth, *Iustitita de cello prospexit:* Righteousness looked from the sky. And seeing this marriage of the Son of God with human nature, and wishing to come to that banquet, she took leave of God and descended forthwith to earth, shouting and singing, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. And lo, from the other part of heaven came a woman in a simple, white, and pure dress who was the most beautiful and graceful, and with great haste she ran towards Righteousness, and they kissed each other; and thus, *Iustitia et pax obsculate sunt*. And forthwith one of them, who was Lady Peace, said *Et in terra pax hominibus bone voluntatis*. And so all four met together and united forever, so that anyone who might have one of them should have all of them.[69]

In his important study of the painting, Rab Hatfield argues that this allegory has two main points. The first is that Mercy, Truth, Righteousness and Peace represent names given to Christ by David, which were united in his incarnation. Second, to find the manger and its

[69] *Prediche…'Quam bonus' (as in n. 4 Hatfield). Fol. 116,* quoted from Hatfield's translation in, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium." Hatfield believes that the heavenly virtues described here are interchangeable with the angels of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2: 13-14. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

blessings, a person must have all these qualities so they are worthy.[70] This source was first proposed by John Pope-Hennessey, in his 1945 essay on *Sandro Botticelli, the Nativity at the National Gallery, London.*[71] However, Hatfield argues that these similarities are not precise. This seems to be supported by the fact that accompanying the angels throughout the painting are scrolls reading *Gloria in excelsis Deo* and *et in terra pax hominibus voluntatis*,[72] which, though they are quotes from the angels discourse to the Virgin at the Annunciation, were also quoted by Savonarola in full in his Christmas Eve sermon.

Instead, Hatfield suggests that Botticelli was influenced by another sermon in December of 1494, in which the friar said:

> I have told you several times in the past, Florence, that even though God has everywhere prepared a great scourge, nevertheless on the other hand he loves you and is fond of you. And so it can be said that in you has been realized the saying, 'Mercy and truth are met together,' that is, Mercy and Righteousness have come together in the city of Florence. From the one side came the scourge, and Mercy came towards it from the other side, and, 'righteousness and peace have kissed each other' and have embraced together, and God has wished to show you justice and on the other hand be merciful to you.[73]

Hatfield points out that this passage seems to relate both to the *Mystic Nativity* and to the *Mystic Crucifixion*, which seems very likely given the close proximity of the ideology of both works. Clearly, the iconography of Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* (and by the same token, of the *Mystic Crucifixion)* is strongly linked to Savonarolan sermons which would have been in publication after the friar's death.

---

[70] Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium," 90.
[71] John Pope-Hennessy, *Sandro Botticelli: The Nativity* (London: Percy Lund Humphries and Company: London, 1946), 8.
[72] "Glory to God in the Highest," and "and on earth peace to people of good will," respectively.
[73] Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium," 93.

In a rare case regarding the supposedly Savonarolan works of Botticelli's later years, scholars seem to agree on who commissioned the *Mystic Nativity*. It is usually connected to the family of a nun, Arcangela Aldobrandini of the Florentine convent of Santa Lucia. According to contemporary reports and tradition, Arcangela was cured of a disease by having contact with a relic of Savonarola. In addition to this miracle, the Aldobrandini family had long been associated with the *Piagnoni* faction. For example, Cardinal Ippolito Aldobrandini wrote a letter in defense of Savonarola shortly after his excommunication and most of the family had signed the 1497 petition to Alexander VI to rescind the *frate's* excommunication.[74] Therefore, the *Mystic Nativity* seems to have been conceived by agreement between the artist and his patron as a work reflecting the latter's adherence to Savonarolan ideals.

Before concluding our initial discussion of this work, let us remind the reader once again of its curious style, including a division into three distinct, stacked registers, and the striking lack of any display of pictorial depth, which results in a composition that is reminiscent of classical relief sculpture and medieval manuscript illumination, an tendency which is evident in other works by the artist, including some notable productions from before the Savonarolan period. We shall return to this issue again below.

Botticelli's *Agony in the Garden* of 1505 (fig.3), now at the Capela Real in Granada, Spain, is a strongly vertical composition divided into two registers, similar in layout to the *Mystic Nativity*. In the lower register, the apostles (Peter, James, and John) sleep on the ground among rocks and olive branches. Above them, the jagged verticals of a spindly wooden fence pierce the upper register. On the upper section, Christ kneels in

[74] Ronald M. Steinberg, *Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art and Renaissance Historiography*, 77.

prayer on top of an almost impossible rocky hill, which is punctuated by a cave in which is placed a stone sarcophagus. Christ accepts the cup of his suffering from an angel, who swoops down from the top of the composition. Both Christ and the angel are depicted in very stark profile, neither an assertion of foreshortening or clarification that the figures are corporeal bodies occupying space.

The setting is punctuated by olive plants, which, like the olive sprigs in the *Mystic Nativity*, can be associated with Savonarola's olive-bearing bands of children. However, their inclusion here can be seen as a visual connection to the Biblical name of the setting of the event — Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives through accurate botanical representation.

While Botticelli's contemporaries such as Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini had portrayed the Agony in the Garden, it seems the subject matter was relatively unpopular to a Florentine audience. In fact, the motif is rare throughout Quattrocento, and it could be argued that its depiction here is the result of the altered religious climate that was caused by Savonarola. Clifford has interpreted this as part of a new trend of meditating on Christ's sufferings, as necessary to Salvation, which in and of itself is common in Savonarolism.[75] In addition, the painting has also been connected to contemporary woodcuts, particularly those produced for printed Savonarolan texts. One woodcut often connected to the work was printed for the *Tractato o vero sermone della Oratione di Savonarola*, which Ronald Lightbown goes so far as to say was originally designed by Botticelli himself.[76] Likewise, Lisa Pon suggests that the painting is iconographically similar to an engraving that was printed under the title of the *Expositione del Pater noster*

[75] Timothy Clifford, "Catalogue Entry for *The Agony in the Garden*," in Musée du Luxembourg, *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, 158.
[76] Ronald Lightbown, *Botticelli*, 75.

that was composed to honor Savonarola. In both cases, the motif is a personal reflection on Christ's sufferings, a form of empathetic meditation that the *frate* espoused throughout his public ministry.

Another painting that has identifiable connections to Savonarola is the *Last Communion of Saint Jerome,* (fig.4) which the artist painted sometime in the 1490s, and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The painting's composition is simple: the saint kneels on the floor, humbly receiving his last communion in his hermit's hut near Bethlehem. He is supported by two of his fellow monks and receives the sacrament from a third. On the wall behind this grouping, there are two palm branches, a crucifix and a cardinal's hat. According to Horne, the subject is taken from a questionable letter from the Blessed Eusebius of Caesarea addressed to Pope Damasus in 420 that described Jerome's death. "And as soon as the priest who held the Eucharist came near to him, the glorious man, with our aid, raised himself on his knees, and lifted his head, and with many tears and sighs, beating his breast many times, he said: 'Thou art my God and my Lord, who suffered Death and Passion for me, and none other!' [and he] received the most holy body of Christ, and cast himself again upon the ground, with his hands crossed upon his breast, singing the canticle of Simeon, the prophet, 'Nunc dimittis servum tuum.'"[77]

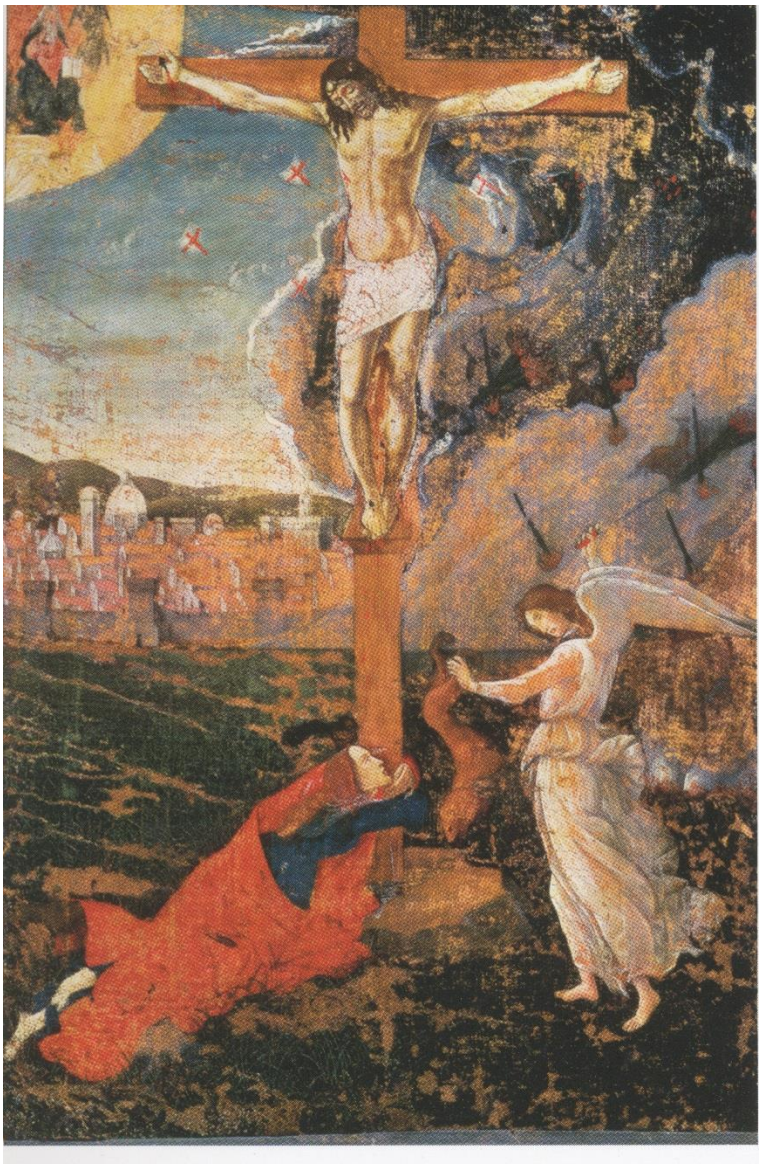
The painting is generally believed to have been commissioned by Francesco di Filippo del Puglise, who was a committed *piagnone* activist both during Savonarola's lifetime and after his death. During the 1490s, Puglise was a close confidant of the *frate*, and often asserted his belief that the movement should have a major role in the Florentine

[77] Herbert P. Horne, *Sandro Botticelli*, 174-7.

government.[78] Such was his closeness to Savonarola that he also received a crucifix from the friar's estate after his execution. In addition to his Savonarolan affiliation, Puglise was a well-known art connoisseur. He commissioned a series of secular panels from Piero de Cosimo (of which the National Gallery in London's *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs* is probably part), in addition to a fresco of Saint George for the staircase of his palace from Fra Bartolomeo (1472-1517), who was a strong follower of Savonarola.[79]

[78] Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, 263.
[79] Martin Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist*, trans. Alison Luchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 277.

Fig. 1.



Sandro Botticelli, *Mystic Crucifixion*. c. 1500. Fogg Museum of Art. Cambridge, Mass. (Source: Frank Zöllner. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich, Berlin, London, and New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 2.

Sandro Botticelli, *Mystic Nativity*, 1500. National Gallery, London. (Source: Frank Zöllner. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich, Berlin, London, and New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 3.

Sandro Botticelli, *The Agony on the Garden*, c. 1500. Capela Real, Granda, Spain. (Source: Musée du Luxembourg. *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola* exh. cat., text by Daniel Arasse and others. Milan: Skira, 2003.)

Fig. 4.

Sandro Botticelli, *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome*, c. 1495. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Source: Frank Zöllner. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich, Berlin, London, and New York: Prestel, 2005).

3.

Botticelli in the Savonarolan Era

As we have seen above, a selection of the paintings that Botticelli produced in the final decades of his life clearly contain iconography associated with the friar, though these only mark about ten percent of his total artistic output throughout his life. However, the unfortunate reality of being separated from their creation by five hundred years makes the knot of circumstances surrounding their commissioning and creation difficult to unravel. We do know that at least two — *the Mystic Nativity* and the *Last Communion of Saint Jerome* — were commissioned by staunch followers of Savonarola. It is not too much of a leap to entertain the possibility that the others were also commissioned by Savonarolan patrons. It is my intention to discuss the process of commissioning of artwork as would have occurred for both Botticelli and his contemporaries in order to contextualize the Savonarolan paintings in the broad scope of both Florentine art production and the life of the artist himself.

Peter Burke, in his *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy*, points out that the Italian Renaissance patron-artist system operated in two major forms. Either a wealthy patron would bring an artist into his home to support him in a long-term artistic relationship (a model more relevant to the northern court-states in our period, and which was truly established under the Medici dukes in the sixteenth century), or, more typically in Florence, the patron was responsible for individual commissions for altarpieces, frescoes for a chapel or a palace, domestic works, etc., which were made to the patron's specifications on a case-by-case basis.[80] In these cases, there was almost always,

[80] Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540* (New York: Scribner, 1972), 75.

especially in the case of major works, a legally binding contract drawn up between the two parties.[81] These agreements were usually a clear and binding stipulation of subject matter accompanied by other conditions placed on the artist at the start of his work. As Michael Baxandall put it in his *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, "the one general point to be insisted on is that in the fifteenth century painting was still too important to be left to the painters. The picture trade was a quite different thing from that in our own late romantic condition, in which painters paint what they think best and then look around for a buyer."[82] Therefore, art making was usually tied to the will (and purse) of the commissioning patron through the skills of the artist.

One must also consider the social status of the artist at the time Botticelli was working. Burke reminds us that the 15th-century Italian artist had a somewhat ambiguous position in the social and cultural hierarchy of the time. On the one hand, he (and they were virtually all men during this period) was in many ways a merchant, a craftsman, a specialist in producing finely-crafted objects. On the other hand, and to an increasing extent as time went on, artists were valued for their imaginative and intellectual powers, and the crafts they trained were described, by some, as equal to the liberal or intellectual arts.[83] This ambiguity may be illustrated by two examples. Leonardo da Vinci, who has become in modern times the virtual embodiment of the so-called "Renaissance man," wrote in his copious notebooks that "You have set painting among the mechanical arts!...If you call it mechanical because it is by manual work that the hands represent what the imagination creates, your writers are setting down to pen by manual work what

---

[81] See Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).
[82] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.
[83] Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540*, 63.

originates in the mind." [84] For Leonardo, painting was a highly cultivated intellectual pursuit, much like poetry or rhetoric. His argument typifies the desire of painters and sculptors to be equated with poets and rhetoricians, one of the continuing struggles of the fifteenth century artist.[85] On the other hand, it was argued by some of Leonardo's contemporaries that artists belonged to a retail class, as they kept workshops and produced work for sale like cobblers and bakers. They were skilled craftsmen and nothing more.[86] It seems, however, that the actual place of the artist rested somewhere in between these two extremes. The iconography of an artwork was not created by the artist in isolation from the patron, but was the product of his interaction with his paying clients, who provided him with payment for a service, that being the production of a work of art. At the same time, the artist was a highly trained individual who was skilled at raveling and unraveling concepts from a multitude of disciplines, including poetry, rhetoric and theology.

In order to place the Savonarolan paintings into the broader scope of Botticelli's artistic output and Florentine culture in general, we must consider the role that his patrons played in the conception of the artworks themselves. Though we are only semi-certain of the patronage of two of these paintings, it is reasonable to conclude that the others in the series were also produced to their patron's specifications.[87] We know that Botticelli was willing to work for Savonarola-leaning patrons during the period between the friar's execution and the artist's own death in 1510. At the same time, the survival of other

---

[84] Leonardo da Vinci, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, trans. Edward MacCurdy (George Baziller: New York, 1954), 853.
[85] Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy: 1450-1660* (New York: Scribner, 1972), 51.
[86] Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540*, 68.
[87] I think it is important to note here that, even though Botticelli was receiving commissions for artwork that was Savonarolan in character, he himself did not necessarily have to be a follower of Savonarola to produce these works.

works that are in no way connected to Savonarolan iconography indicates he also worked for patrons who had no affiliation with the movement.[88] Thus, it is clear than in his final years, Botticelli produced work for a variety of patrons, and that his ability to conceive of paintings with Savonarolan themes does not necessarily reflect his own opinion of the movement.

But there is one further issue we should address before arriving at this conclusion. As we have suggested above, one of the defining characteristics of Botticelli's later output is his so-called "austere style," a stripped-down manner that is often connected to notions of Savonarola's rejection of luxury and sensuality in the arts. In response to this general claim, Ronald M. Steinberg has pointed out that this so-called austere or spiritual style has only been identified in a few of the artist's later paintings. Indeed, Steinberg argues, if we take a look at the larger output from the period, we shall see that it includes works in a variety of styles, perhaps indicating the tastes of their various patrons.

Steinberg also points out the "odd" fact "that the same 'spiritual' style occurs in Botticelli's paintings of non-Christian subjects commissioned by advisories of Savonarola."[89] Perhaps, as Daniel Arrasse reminds us, "we must at least recognize that Botticelli's fundamental decisions were made long before the arrival in Florence of the Dominican friar of Ferrara. It is now generally agreed that his manner began to shift towards a greater austerity around the middle of the 1480s."[90] When these observations are taken together as a whole, the very notion Botticelli's 'Savonarolan style' seems to

---

[88]This fact is supported by the vast amount of paintings from the artist's later life that are in no way connected to known Savonarolan iconographic ideas. This includes a handful of portraits and several religious scenes.

[89] Ronald M. Steinberg, *Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art and Renaissance* Historiography, 61.

[90] Daniel Arasse, Botticelli's Manner," in Musée du Luxembourg, *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola* 16.

evaporate into the mist. Indeed, it could be argued that Savonarola and his movement were of little or no import for the style he used during those years. It should be noted, however, that these very qualities might have made him an attractive choice for Savonarolan partisans who desired stylistic elements (such as a focus on clear, relief-like narrative) that Botticelli was already producing.

Still, we must consider the question of how (and why) Botticelli received commissions from *Piagnoni* if he himself was not a at least a sympathetic observer of their movement. Wouldn't these Savonarola followers preferred artists of the same persuasion, such as Fra Bartolomeo, a known sympathizer? I think the solution to this question lies in the person of the artist's brother, Simone Filipepe, Despite Simone's politics, Sandro and his brother remained on good terms through the beginning of the sixteenth century, as the artist purchased a villa with his brother in 1494.[91] Likewise, it seems that Simone spent a considerable amount of time with his brother, as is revealed by the secondhand account of his brother's encounter with Doffo Spini.[92] This means that, at least in proximity, Botticelli was close to the inner workings of the *Piagnoni* movement through his continued amicable relationship with Simone. It seems only plausible that Simone may have directed his fellow partisans to his brother in the commissioning of work with Savonarolan iconography. If this is true, the Savonarolan paintings and the circumstances surrounding commissioning reveals a very different Botticelli than the man presented by Vasari. It would appear, then, that rather than sinking into obscurity, the artist shrewdly made the best of the situation by utilizing his connection to his brother to

[91] Martin Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist*, 346. The villa is probably the Villa le Cave in the Florentine countryside.
[92] See Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art 1400-1500*, 219.

gain access to a demographic that was willing to commission artwork in the cultural vacuum which was caused by the expulsion of the Medici.

It is also important to consider Lorenzo Polizzotto's analysis of the 1497 petition to Alexander VI to rescind the friar's excommunication. After examining the signatures attached to this petition, Polizzotto concluded that many of the *Piagnoni* came from the same, broadly humanist circle that had surrounded Lorenzo de' Medici. Many of these men, like Lorenzo himself, had been interested in the issues of spirituality and of religious reform that came to be associated with the friar's movement.[93] Many of them, like Francesco de Puglise, would have been knowledgeable connoisseurs of art. It seems likely that they would have been interested in commissioning artwork from one of the most popular artists of pre-Savonarolan Florence, even if he was not a member of their movement per se.

Given all this, it seems more than likely that Botticelli was functioning very differently in the later decades of his life than sources like Vasari, Steinmann and Paolucci would have us believe.[94] Rather than shrinking into the background, he clearly was still an artistic force in Florence. In addition, it also becomes apparent that the artist's stylistic shift was not the result of Savonarola. This occurred before the friar ever set foot in Florence, making him a non-issue. Rather, it seems that production continued uniformly throughout the artist's life.

---

[93] Lorenzo Polizotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, 19.
[94] Vasari, Steinmann, and Paolucci are among that first school of thought in relation to Botticelli's earlier life which I detailed among the historiography. Namely, it is their belief that Botticelli became an ardent follower of Savonarola and his later paintings mark a strong stylistic shift as a result of this.

4.

The Use of Materials and Ancient Sources in the Savonarolan Paintings

Sandro Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* of 1500 is not a typical representation of the birth of Christ (fig.2). The Christ child lies on a cloth surrounded by his Virgin Mother and foster father. On either side of the Holy Family, men on bended knee with laurel crowns on their heads kneel at the behest of angels. The composition changes from a typical Nativity in the top and bottom portions of the composition. Below the Nativity, a group of men and angels embrace each other. Above them, and above the brilliant blue sky, a group of twelve angels dance in a circle around the golden vault of heaven, each holding a palm branch and a golden crown. In addition to this, it seems that Botticelli was actively rejecting the conventions of pictorial depth by staking registers of the image on top of each other across the pictorial surface rather than having them recede back into space. I would like to focus on the visual quirks of this and the other Savonarolan paintings: the use (or lack of use) of expensive materials such as gold and ultramarine, and the supposed lack of perspectival depth that occurs in Botticelli's work. I believe these elements are key to any discussion of Botticelli's artistic output in the last decades of his life, and help to support the notion that the years were actually business as usual for the artist.

Let us begin by considering Botticelli's use of color in these paintings. In his *Della semplicita della vita Christiana* of the 1490s, Savonarola details the denial of materiality which should be a part of the life of a Christian who wishes to become close

to God. In addition to decrying luxury and sexual immorality, the friar also targeted Florence's chief cultural export — art - and called for its simplicity. "In as much as the works are simple, they proceed, as we have already said, in a form infused by God. And though they are simple, they are the works of God," he writes.[95]. With this emphasis on *semplici*, Savonarola makes a clear statement about what art should be. Rather than covered with excessive flourishes, art should be contemplative, an emulation of God's creation in nature, and elevate man to a higher position with God. I believe this can be best illustrated by an example that would have been close to the friar—the frescoes of Fra Angelico in San Marco, including the famous *Annunciation* (fig.5). These are not paintings in which expense was spared. However, at the same time, they seem to not be blatant about their lusciousness. In comparison to both other artworks produced by Fra Angelico and his contemporaries, the San Marco frescoes are a thoughtful contemplation on the divine mysteries. It is likely that patrons who were followers of Savonarola would have been familiar with these edicts regarding art from their spiritual leader, and would have considered this stance as they commissioned artwork of themes associated with the friar, a fact that will be discussed in great depth later.

Let us now reexamine the Savonarolan works. It should be noted that the works themselves contain many moments that seem to be against the notion of the "simple" being of God, including the use of gold and ultramarine. In fact, in many instances, they seem totally contrary to Savonarola's teaching regarding *semplici.* This paradox, however, is important to the understanding of these works within the context of

---

[95] Girolamo Savonarola, *Della Semplicita della vita Christiana, nella quale insegna come vivere debbe il vero Christiano* (Venetia, 1547), 31."*Imperoche le opera semplici, procedono come gia habbiamo detto dalla inclination d'una forma infusa da Dio. Et pero le opere semplici, sono opera di Dio."* This translation is my own.

Botticelli's career and infuses the works with several layers of meaning. In these paintings, a discussion may be introduced regarding the price of materials and the presumed desire of Piagnoni patrons to use less sumptuous materials, as per the edicts of Savonarola on the subject of materiality in addition to the role of the artist and patron in the contractual process. This can be most readily seen in the use of ultramarine and *azurro di magna*, both prominent blue pigments, and the application of gold.

In Botticelli's earlier art production, there is a noticeable quantity of blue pigment, be that ultramarine or *azurro di magna*, as can be seen in the *Punishment of Korah*, fig.6) and the *Madonna of the Magnificat* (fig.7). In these works, the artist usually used brilliant blue pigment to mark the solid plane of the sky, the traditionally blue cloak of the Virgin, as well as the clothing of other saints, and some miscellaneous decorations. In the particularly dazzling example of the Sistine Chapel *Punishment of Korah* of 1481, the majority of the composition becomes awash in lush blue tones, from the vault of the sky to the cloak of Moses. This use of blue continues into the Savonarolan period until the artist's death in 1510, in such works as the *Calumny of Apelles* (fig.8) the Zenobius panels (fig.9), the panels of the lives of *Lucretia* (fig.10), and *Virginia* (fig.11), all works that are clearly identified through scholarship as having little or no connection with the Savonarolan period.

In the Savonarolan paintings, however, there is a noticeable drop in the proportion of blue pigments that are employed by the artist.[96] The *Mystic Nativity* (fig.2) is punctuated by a small horizontal bar of pale blue sky between the trees behind the manger and the angels ascending into heaven. In the *Mystic Crucifixion* (fig.1) the blue of

[96] I make this observation both through visual analysis of pictorial surface (in the case of the *Last Communion of Saint Jerome* and *the Mystic Crucifixion* this was done first hand) and consultation of curatorial records.

the sky marks only a quarter of the entire composition, the right side of which is dominated by the violent storm clouds of divine wrath that appear over the city of Florence, and the cross, a simple statement of Savonarola's prophecies that torment would befall Florence before it could become the chosen city of God[97]. It is also curious to note that even the blue sky on the left side of the *Crucifixion* is noticeably grayer than a typical Botticellean sky, and is striated with white clouds and broken apart by the golden mandorla containing the watchful figure of God the Father in the upper left corner.[98] In another Savonarolan painting, the *Agony in the Garden* (fig.3) from around 1500, the sky above Christ is very similar to the one that the artist painted in the *Crucifixion*. It is not the usual elegant gradient of blue near the top of the composition that blends into white near the horizon line that is typical of a Botticelli's other skies throughout the corpus of his work, but is rather a blotchy, relatively hazy white sky. In addition, the sky marks a very small portion of the work itself, which is dominated by the greens of the grass and trees in the garden.

In another Savonarolan work, The *Last Communion of Saint Jerome* of 1501 (fig.4), there is a marked lack of blue pigment, which only appears in the small bars of cerulean that peek through the windows on either side of the saint's house and above the eaves of the construction at each corner of the composition. I believe the blue here

---

[97] Alison Brown, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, trans. and ed. Anne Borelli and Maria Pastore Passaro (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006): xv-xvi.

[98] I admit, however, that this shift in color could also be explained by the relatively poor condition of the work as well as the aging of five-hundred years of history. In addition to this, the work had undergone several botched restorations before its acquisition by the Fogg Museum in 1924. However, I believe there is enough of Botticelli's original work present to make, at least somewhat, an observation about his use of pigments. For more on this, see Francesca G. Bewer, *A Laboratory for Art: Harvard's Fogg Museum and the Emergence of Conservation in America, 1900-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

accounts for a very small amount of ultramarine pigment; the majority of the sky is a blend of blue pigment and white or simply a wash of pure white paint.

Throughout the Renaissance in Italy, ultramarine and *azurro di magnia* were the most commonly used blue pigments. Ultramarine was the more costly of these pigments, being the yield of ground lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan via Baghdad and Constantinople. Therefore, it a very costly material throughout the Renaissance.[99] Ultramarine was produced in different grades, the price of which varied. *Azurro di magna* was the cheaper alternative, being ground azurite. It produced a greener blue than ultramarine, but was much easier to produce in quantity than its more pricey competitor. In some cases, both of these blues were used, with Ultramarine in areas of greater prominence or iconographical import, which seems to be the case with Botticelli's artistic output. In other situations, patrons and artists chose one or the other. [100]

These blues differed greatly in price. Ultramarine could be purchased by the artist at the sum of 3 florins an ounce, while its cheaper alternative, *Azurro di magna,* could be procured for a payment of 3 florins per pound.[101] Throughout the Renaissance in Florence, these prices naturally adjusted, with *azurro di magna* being available for

---

[99] Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy*, 66.

[100] This is best explored by Michael Baxandall in his *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, 14: "As the century progressed contracts became less eloquent than before about gold and ultramarine. They are still commonly mentioned and the grade of ultramarine may even be specified in terms of florins to the ounce—nobody could want the blue to flake off their picture—but they are less and less the centre of attention and the gold is increasingly intended for the frame. Strarnina's undertaking of 1408 about different grades of blue for different parts of the picture is very much of the moment: there is nothing quite like it in the second half of the century. This lessening preoccupation with the precious pigments is quite consistent with the paintings as we see them now. It seems the clients were becoming less anxious to flaunt sheer opulence of material before the public than they had previously been."

[101] Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy,* 68.

anywhere between one and two florins. However, ultramarine was always the more expensive alternative.[102]

This choice of pigment was often stipulated in the contractual agreement between the artist and his patron. Frequently, patrons would request that the artist use 'good' colors in their work, and would provide an advance for the artist to purchase expensive materials such as gold and lapis lazuli.[103] It seems, then, that the use of precious materials in the Savonarolan paintings would have been stipulated in the artist's original working contract with his patron. As such, the irregularities with the rest of Botticelli's work and these Savonarolan paintings should be seen as a result of the patronage process.

With all this in mind, it seems highly probable that Botticelli's Savonarola-leaning patrons would have been concerned with the pigments that the artist was using. Given Savonarola's stance on displays of wealth and frivolity, it is entirely possible that his followers would have wanted to avoid lavishness in the commissioning of artwork and would have opted for less money to be spent on excessive quantities of expensive pigments in order to keep the message of the artwork solely on the spiritual rather than an expression of worldly prestige. Savonarola was also opposed to the use and importation of products from Islamic countries, as shown by the inclusion of Islamic articles to the Florentine historian Iacopo Nardi's account of "luxuries" cast into the bonfires of the vanities.[104] It is possible that the less extensive use of these exotic pigments could be interpreted as an expression of a Savonarolan patron's concern about this issue.

---

[102] Ibid., 74.
[103] Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540*, 88.
[104] Stefano Dall'Aglio, "Girolamo Savonarola and his Dream of Reform: Art, Money, and the Bonfire of Vanities," in Ludovica Sebregondi and Tim Parks, eds. *Money and Beauty: Bankers, Botticelli, and the Bonfire of the Vanities* (Florence and Milan: Giunti, 2011): 96. I admit this could perhaps be a stretch in the conceptualization of Early Modern trade and ultramarine pigment, given that the artist and his patrons still chose the use of ultramarine in the Savonarolan paintings. It is likely that the inclusion of Islamic articles in

This considered, Botticelli's use of expensive blue pigment in his Savonarolan paintings appears to be minimal at best. In fact, it seems that the total amount of its use would count for a relatively small amount of ground blue pigment — ultramarine or *azurro di magna* -- and would have accounted for very little expenditure on the part of the patron. Instead, it seems that money was spent on the use of more earthy pigment colors - the subtle earth tones, the greens, and reds which are prominent throughout these paintings, pigments which were traditionally considered much less luxurious than ultramarine, and perhaps would better conform to Savonarolan philosophy. Of course, one will notice a paradox here. Though Savonarola seems to have been against the use and purchase of objects made out of expensive materials such as gold, it seems his patrons were more than willing to commission artwork from Botticelli and his contemporaries containing expensive materials. I will address this further below.

Blue pigments are not the only material richness that seems to be dropped from Botticelli's Savonarolan works. As we shall now see, these works are also lacking in gilded ornamentation that Botticelli included in his other works throughout his career. The use of gold paintings was common practice among Early Modern Italian artists and appears frequently in many examples among Botticelli's contemporaries. Giorgio Vasari, in his discussion of painting materials, reports that the traditional substructure for gilding in panel painting was wood covered in a gesso made out of sizing and chalk. Onto this gesso, a mixture of egg yolk and Armenian bole was added to provide a red base upon

---

the bonfire of the vanities is an expression of their disconnectedness from the 'true faith,' and of an Early Modern desire to stop the spread of Islam into Western Europe. The connection to the pigments' origin and Savonarola's stance on Islam, however, should be considered further at a later date.

which the gold leaf would be applied. This gold was applied in small areas with a brush and more sizing.[105]

Gold leaf was produced by melting down blocks of gold, which were then cut into small squares and sold to artists in packages of several hundred leaves. This is known because contracts of the period usually stipulate the price paid per several hundred leaves of gold. The price of gold leaf was relatively stable throughout the fifteenth century hovering around one hundred leaves per florin. As such, expenditures on gold leaf took a relatively large chunk of the expenses paid per commission. Michelle O'Malley, in her book *The Business of Art*, provides a very concise breakdown of the percent of money that was allocated for the purchase of gold for the gilding of paintings. She notes that Botticelli, in his commission for the *Birth of Venus* in 1485, spent 38% of a commission totaling 98 florins on gold leaf. Among his contemporaries, Domenico Ghirlandaio spent 41% of a commission of 224 ducats on gold in 1485, while Filippino Lippi spent 41% of a commission of 590 florins in 1503 on gilding.[106] Thus we see that, typically, the price of gilding could use up roughly 40% of total funds.

Turning from the general to the specific, our discussion now returns to the materiality of the gold of Botticelli's Savonarolan paintings. Rather than being used for decoration, or highlights, as we see in the hair of Venus and the cloak of Moses, the gold in the *Mystic Nativity* is employed to represent a spiritual realm, which, could only be accessed through a pious discarding of material goods. This glory of heaven is literally

---

[105] Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari on Technique: Bring the Introduction to Three Arts of Design; Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting*. Trans., Louisa S. Madelhose. (London: J.M. Dent and Company, 1907): 249.
[106] Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy*, 54-55. It is key to note again that both of these artists were in close proximity with Botticelli, as Lippi was his former master, and Ghirlandaio had some contact with him, particularly during the frescoing of the walls of the Sistine Chapel

depicted as a shining realm that would have been impossible, and perhaps improper, to depict with normal pigments brought forth from the earth and instead was represented with one of the most costly materials available on the Florentine market.

For the most part, the Savonarolan paintings are virtually devoid of any of this "superfluous" golden adornment. Instead, they become indicative of the *semplici* that Savonarola laid forth in his *Della semplicita della vita Christiana*. However, one sees an exception to this is the *Mystic Nativity*. Above the manger where the newborn Christ, the Virgin, and Joseph are ensconced in the *Nativity*, a circle of angels dances in a circle around the dome of heaven, which Botticelli represented as a flat application of gold leaf, which gives way to gold, pink, and purple clouds around its perimeter. This gilded heaven provides a striking comparison to the rest of the painted picture surface, which is represented in mostly earth tones. Additionally, throughout the later part of his life gilding was still used by the artist in a manner which is more similar to his earlier production in such examples as the golden decorations that encrust much of the surface of the *Calumny of Apelles*, the *Lucretia* and *Virginia* panels, and the four panels of the *Life of Saint Zenobius*. The artist also used gold leaf in the *Lamentation* of 1495 (fig.12) to denote halos around the holy figures that have gathered around the body of Christ. I believe that the use of gold in these contemporaneous works is for vastly different reasons.[107]

It is my belief that the lack of costly materials such as ultramarine and gilding in Botticelli's Savonarolan paintings is an assertion of the client's wishes being placed upon

[107] This earlier mode of the use of gold leaf visually seems to connect to the artist's earlier training as a goldsmith and, perhaps, the influence of tapestries.

the artist.[108] Savonarola, as previously stated, believed that the decadence of Lorenzo de' Medici's Florence had gone astray from the true teachings of Christ. He believed that the gap between the true asceticism of the Gospels and the superficial religious display of Early Modern Italy was growing wider by the day, and that this gap needed to be closed by any means necessary.[109] This renewed Florence would be born out of fire, out of the destruction of the trappings of Old Florence to prepare for the glory of the New, by Christian simplicity replacing pagan encrustation.

It is telling that the Savonarolan paintings exhibit a visible shift in the use of pigments from Botticelli's other works. Certainly, the artist was willing to amend his artistic production for a client who, of course, would have stipulated the use of gold in the works themselves, but this marks no great shift from what he was known to do in his earlier career.

In the select cases expensive imported blue pigments were used, it was a matter of direct necessity, connected to requirements of naturalism, preexisting religious iconography, or to make a spiritual statement. In the case of expensive ultramarine pigments, Botticelli relied on the use of the pigment only when necessary. He tinged his skies with blue because the established methods of naturalism dictated it. The sky must

---

[108] This sort of exertion of the patron's wishes regarding materiality is not an isolated incident for Botticelli. Rather, an excellent example of it can be seen in the life of a notable Dominican artist, Fra Angelico himself. Angelico produced paintings for San Marco of an entirely different visual mode than for outside commissions. This can be seen in the contrasting of the lack of adornment and gold in his 1450 *Annunciation* for San Marco against the Cortona Altarpiece of sometime between 1433-34 for the Church of San Domenico at Cortona. Though both of these compositions are almost identical, the Cortona Altarpiece is embroided by golden decoration whereas the *Annunciation* of San Marco is strictly about religious narrative. I believe this marks an important precedent for Botticelli in this, as Fra Angelico seems not to have changed his personal convictions during the production of either painting. Rather, he was tailoring his composition to better fit the needs and wishes of his patron, as it seems Botticelli was as well.

[109] John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Oxford, Malden, Victoria Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 392.

be blue. Likewise, he painted the cloak of the Virgin blue in the *Mystic Nativity* because iconography dictated that the outer cloak of the Virgin be portrayed in blue.

In the case of his use of gilding, the golden decoration of the artist's earlier works falls away. Gone in the Savonarolan paintings are the hairs of gold that appear in the famous golden tresses of the Venus, the *Primavera* and numerous Madonnas from throughout his career, to be replaced with Savonarolan austerity. The only broad swatch of gold in all of these works marks the unworldly vault of heaven and the halos of holy figures, unattainable without atonement and unrepresentable by ordinary materials made out of the base dirt of the earth. The use of gilding in these Savonarolan paintings is very different than that of the other paintings produced at the same time. It should be viewed as a practical (and deeply philosophical) representation of a spiritual ideal. In the other works — including *Virginia, Lucretia, The Life of Saint Zenobius,* and the *Calumny of Apelles*— Botticelli's use of gold is more indicative of his earlier precedents as the material becomes a decorative accent to the completed work. Clearly, its use was very a lavish statement of material wealth, both of the culture and of a Florentine patron living in that culture. The fact that these works were both produced at the same time, with expressly different functions in the use of gilding, can be seen to break down the intentions of Botticelli as the artist.

Let us consider Botticelli's use of gold in the *Mystic Nativity*. Botticelli's heaven is pure gold leaf on the picture plane in the *Nativity*. This should be viewed through the lens of Pliny's Xeuxis, who painted grapes so realistically he fooled the birds into thinking they were real.[110] Perhaps Botticelli was interested in more than just a depiction

[110] Pliny, *Natural History Books 33-35,* trans. by H. Rackham. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 309.

of this heavenly material. Instead, a leap is made. The materiality of the gold itself is called into question, as the flat expanse of gilding becomes the intangible vault of the glory of heaven.[111] This functions on two different levels. It is an assertion of a Savonarolan desire to rid one's life of material gold, as can be seen in the lack of unnecessarily lavish material in the Savonarolan paintings, and to focus on the golden crown of the kingdom of heaven and Christian simplicity. On another more complex level, perhaps Botticelli was making a statement about his role as artist. Clearly, the artist would have been personally aware of his place in the equation of patronage which brought these works into being, the artist through which a Savonarolan patron would be granted artwork of a Savonarolan nature.

This, however, is not a question of the exceptionality of Botticelli during the Savonarolan period, as other artists had been operating in this same sort of visual mode. This includes the earlier example of Fra Angelico, whose artwork decorated Savonarola's monastery of San Marco and was deeply motivated by religiosity; therefore, it would have been an artistic example for the Savonarolan movement. A similar use of gold can be seen in Beato Angelico's *The Coronation of the Virgin* of 1431, now at the Uffizi (fig.13). One must also consider the heavily Savonarolan Fra Bartolomeo's *Last Judgment Fresco* of around 1501 at San Marco (fig.14). In addition to this, Botticelli himself used gold as an indicator of heaven before the supposed period of Savonarolan influence, in such paintings as the *San Marco Altarpiece (Coronation of the Virgin with Saint John the Evangelist, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, and Saint Eligius),* of 1492 (fig.15) and the golden corona of heaven in his tondo of the *Virgin and Child with Six*

[111] This is by no means a situation that is new to Botticelli himself. It appears again and again throughout the history of art, going back to Early Christian and Byzantine times at the very least.

Angels or Madonna of the Magnificat of 1487 (fig.7), which itself is very similar to the heaven of the *Mystic Nativity*. This use of gold, then, is both in dialogue with artistic precedent, both of Botticelli himself and his contemporaries, and perhaps has little to do with the Savonarolan period.

With this in mind, I shall now consider the representation of pictorial depth in Botticelli's later work. This shallow, linear quality is often cited in scholarship as evidence of the decline of Botticelli's art as a result of his infatuation with Savonarola. Timothy Clifford, in his 2003 analysis of Botticelli's *Agony in the Garden* for the exhibition catalogue *From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, commented: "The deliberately archaic character of the work (negation of the laws of perspective, flattening and simplification of the figures, marked symbolic connotation), is typical of Botticelli's late production, pervaded by the influence of Savonarola and reflected by his profound religious upheaval."[112] Like Clifford, Paul Joannides connected this archaism to a retrograde style, which resulted in "paintings where figural presence is intended to be paramount, the picture is treated as a graphic surface to be dominated by the figure design."[113] Likewise, Charles Burroughs argued that Botticelli's rejection of pictorial depth was the result of both aesthetic choices and the artist's engagement with the Savonarolan movement. "A more profound concern was the issue of the appropriate vehicle for the representation of sacred narrative, rejecting the pictorial sign that through illusionism dissembles its own status as a sign, Botticelli developed a mode of painting that closes off the effect of distance, i.e. of spatial illusionism, but heightens the drama of the narrative by projecting it forward, as if into the beholder's space, though the fictivity

[112] Timothy Clifford, "Catalogue Entry for *The Agony in the Garden,*" in Musée du Luxembourg, *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola*, 158.
[113] Paul Joannides, "Late Botticelli: Archaism and Ideology," *Arte Christiana* 83 (1995): 165-178. p.165.

of the image is not in question."[114] Burroughs connects this lack of receding depth to classical relief sculpture and sarcophagi, which would have had an influence on Botticelli's art, arguing that the artist's later style is not so much anti-classical as anti-illusionist.

I believe that we might take Burroughs' notion regarding a "rejection of pictorial depth" in the artist's later work to another level. Burroughs observed that the artist's interest in ancient reliefs could be seen in the fictive architecture of the *Calumny* (fig.8).[115] This is undoubtedly correct, and is underlined by the fact that the architecture of King Midas' palace is covered with classically inspired relief scenes. But it should also be noted that Botticelli's shift in style to incorporate pictorial registers is thought to have occurred before the Savonarolan period, usually ascribed to sometime during the 1480s. Indeed, it is clear that Botticelli had a long record of doing this, as can be seen in the Sistine frescoes (particularly the *Punishment of Korah* and *The Temptation of Moses*), as well as the *Birth of Venus* (fig.16), and *Primavera* (fig.17), all from the period of the 1480s. There is also a flattening of figures in earlier works, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* (fig.18). Likewise, this was not an atypical instance in the scope of art produced in contemporary Florence. One can see a similar use of registers in the work of Benozzo Gozzoli and Filippino Lippi. Clearly, this cannot be attributed to Savonarolan influence, the Savonarolan movement or the Florentine political and spiritual 'crisis' of the 1490s. In fact, it is was typical of Botticelli's visual production (and that of his contemporaries) from throughout his life.

[114] Charles Burroughs, "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's 'Mannerism' and the Reform of Sacred Art," 14-16.
[115] Ibid. 21.

Following Burroughs, I believe this visual mode was prompted by the artist's interaction and dialogue with ancient relief sculpture. Botticelli would have had access to the sculpture collections of Lorenzo de' Medici, which contained many examples of ancient reliefs. This collection had apparently been assembled, at least in art, to provide models for contemporary artists.[116] Likewise, it is important to note that this compositional stacking occurs in Botticelli's work not at the rise of Savonarola but was roughly contemporaneous to the artist's travel to Rome for his work in the Sistine Chapel, at the beginning of the 1480s. While in Rome, Botticelli would have encountered such examples of ancient relief as those on Trajan's Column (fig.19), on various sarcophagi throughout the city, as well as the sculptures on the Arch of Titus at the Forum, particularly the *Sack of Jerusalem* (fig.20), in addition to countless other examples in private collections and throughout the city. Perhaps most notably, the artist was most likely influenced by ancient objects from the collection of Lorenzo de' Medici, including the now so-called *Tazza Farnese* (fig.21), with its compressed representation of a figural depth. In addition to this influence, the layering of registers is not unheard of for Florentine art of the Quattrocento, as there are several examples of this mode of representation by other artists from the city. Among these is the cycle of frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli of the *Journey of the Magi* of 1459 for the Medici Palace Chapel (fig.22), which Loren Patridge describes as "colorful tapestries" where "the main figures [are] parading close to the picture plane on a shallow rocky foreground surface," which

[116] See Caroline Elam, "Lorenzo de Medici's Sculpture Garden," *Milleilungen des Kunsthistorichen Institutes in Florenz* 36 (1992): 41-84.

he connects to the artist's training as a goldsmith.[117] In addition to Gozzoli, one must also consider Filippo Lippi's stacking of depth in his Sant'Ambrogio *Coronation of the Virgin* of 1447 (fig. 23, now in the Uffizi), which strongly resembles relief sculpture or contemporary tapestries.

Clearly, then, this new visual phenomenon in Botticelli's art was not the result of some retrograde in his style that was the result of Savonarolan teaching. These paintings display a strong assertion of knowledge of the ancient world and an example of the artistic *paragone* of the quotation of three-dimensional modes of representation in a two-dimensional medium. In addition to this interaction with ancient examples, the existence of such prominent examples as Gozzoli's *Journey of the Magi* indicate that Botticelli also was in dialogue with his contemporaries in this use of the layering of pictorial registers. The Savonarolan paintings must be considered as part of a dialogue, both with the past and with contemporaries. Although this dialogue may contain Savonarolan themes on the surface, is entirely independent of the ideals promoted by the friar.

However, while I believe Botticelli operated in these modes during the Savonarolan period, this is far from a call for his exceptionalism, as it appears that Botticelli was operating in the same basic way that he did during his earlier career. He was producing artwork that is very similar in its overall character to his earlier production, as he continued to engage with ancient and contemporary modes of representation. It is clear, then, that the so-called "Savonarolan years" of Botticelli's artistic production should not be viewed, at least not in such stark, ideological terms, as an exception to his earlier career.

---

[117] Loren Patridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence 1400-1600* (Berkley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2009), 83-84. Given Botticelli's own training as a goldsmith, perhaps, too Patridge's model for this in Benozzo Gozzoli is also applicable to him.

Fig. 5

Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, 1438-45. Monastery of San Marco, Florence (Source: Paolo Morachiello. *Fra Angelico: The San Marco Frescoes*. Translated by Eleanor Daunt. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

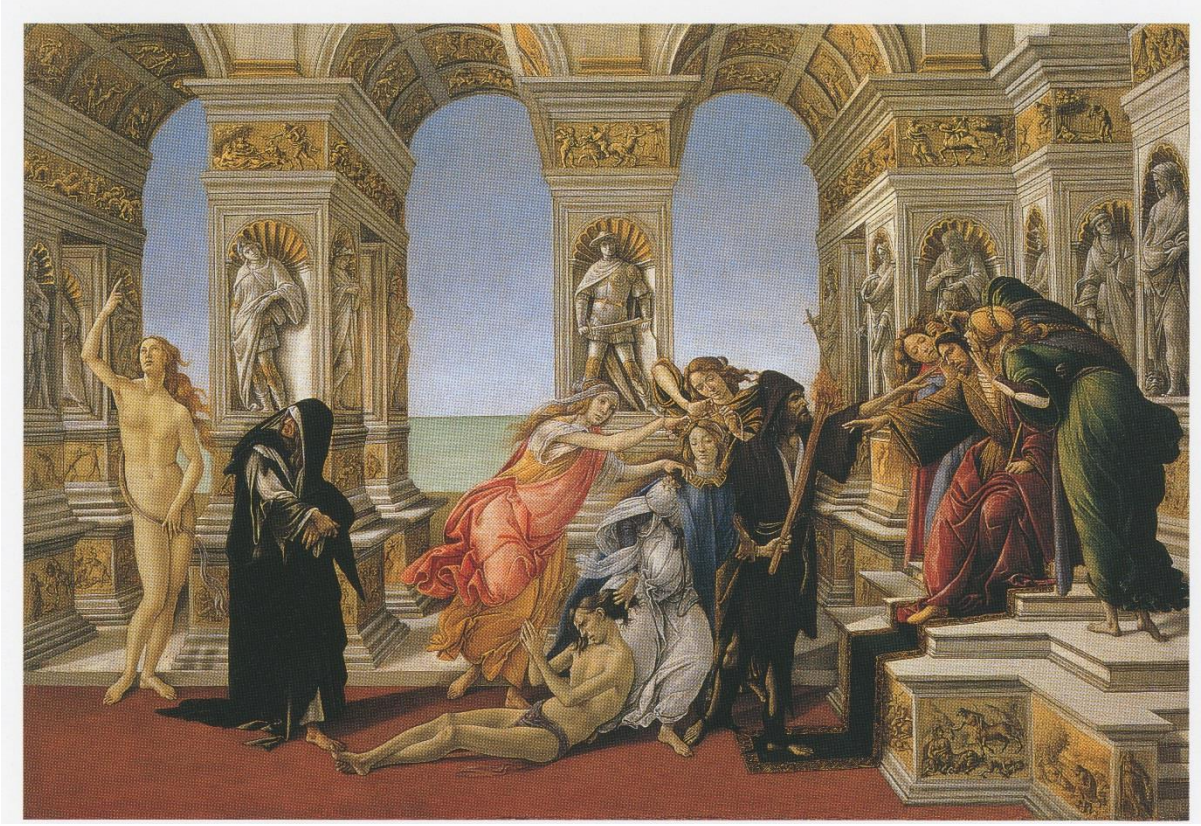
Fig. 6.

Sandro Botticelli, *The Punishment of Korah*, 1482. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City. (Source: Frank Zöllner. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich, Berlin, London, and New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 7.

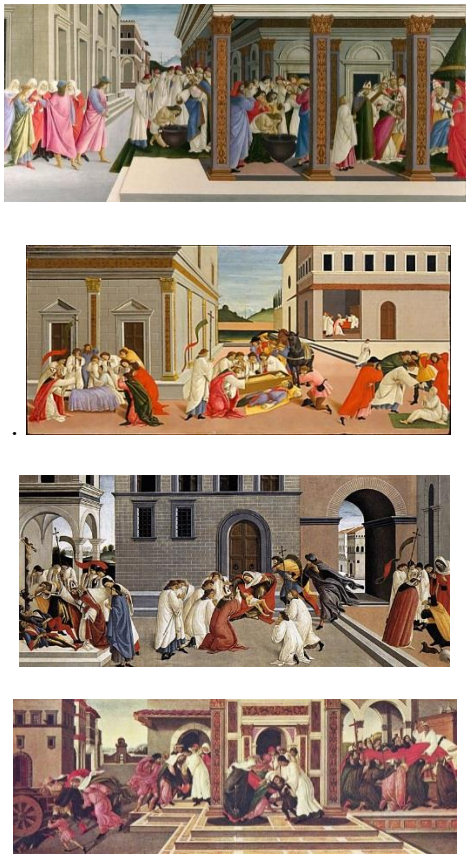
Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna of the Magnificat*, 1481. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Source: Frank Zöllner. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich, Berlin, London, and New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 8.



Sandro Botticelli, *The Calumny of Apelles*, 1494, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Source: Palazzo Strozzi. *Botticelli and Filippino: Passion and Grace in Fifteenth Century Florentine Painting* exh. cat., text by Daniel Arasse and others. Milan: Skira, 2004)

Fig. 9.



From top: Sandro Botticelli, *Baptism of Saint Zenovius and His Appointment as Bishop*, c. 1500. National Gallery, London.
Sandro Botticelli, *Three Miracles of Saint Zenobius*, c. 1500-5. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Sandro Botticelli, *Three Miracles of Saint Zenobius*, c. 1500-5. National Gallery, London.
Sandro Botticelli, *The Last Miracle and Death of Saint Zenobius*, c. 1500-5. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.
(Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 10.

Sandro Botticelli, *Lucretia*, c. 1500. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 11.

Sandro Botticelli, *Virginia*, c. 1500, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

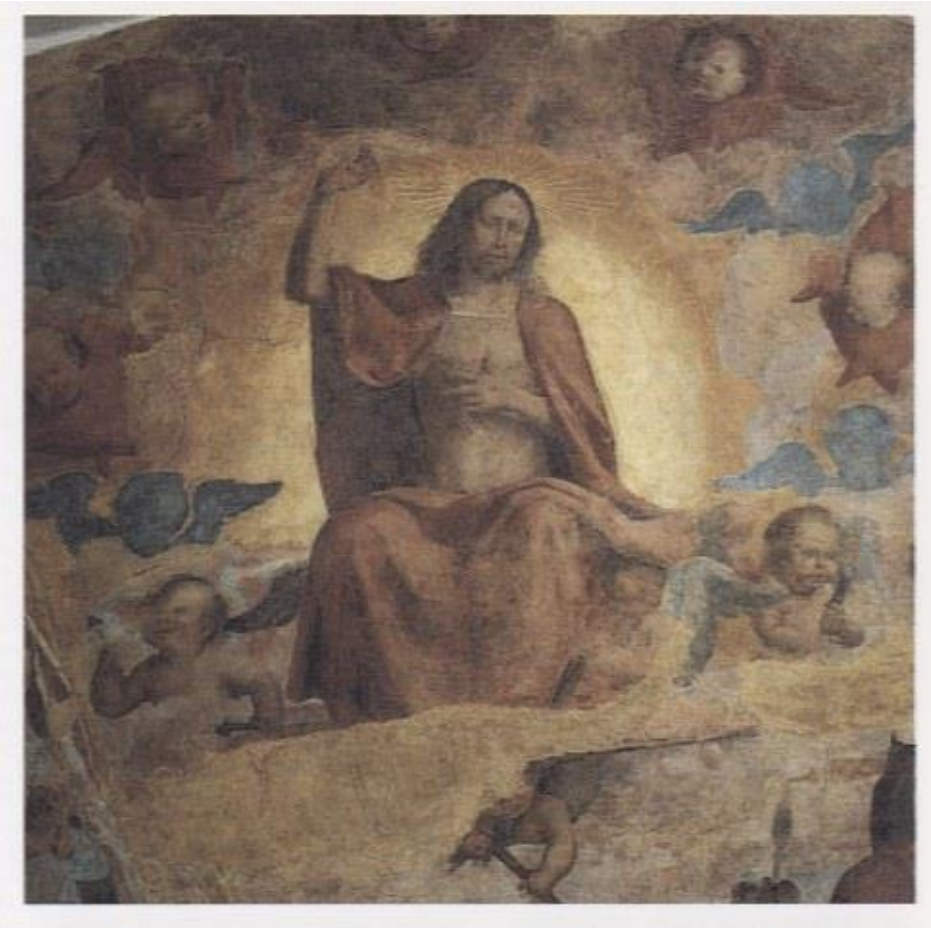
Fig. 12.

Sandro Botticelli, *Lamentation*¸1495, Alte Pinakothek, Munich. (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 13.

Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1431-2, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Source: Diane Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*. London: Phaidon, 2008).

Fig. 14.

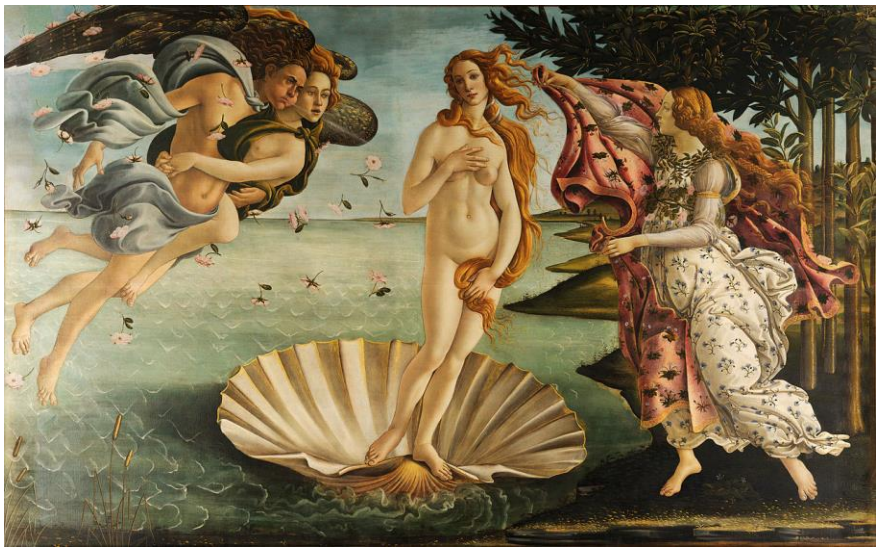


Fra Bartolomeo and Mariatto Albertinelli, *Detail of Christ in Majesty from the Last Judgment*, c.1501. Monastery of San Marco, Florence. (Source: Serena Padovani, ed. *La' Eta di Savonarola: Fra Bartolomeo e la Scuola di San Marco*. Venice: Marsilio, 1996).

Fig. 15

Sandro Botticelli, *Coronation of the Virgin (San Marco Altarpiece)*, 1490-92, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 16



Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1485, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 17.

Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 18.

Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Source: Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005).

Fig. 19.

Camp Building with Turf, detail from Trajan's Column, 113 CE, Roman Forum, Rome. (Source: Ian Richmond, *Trajan's Army on Trajan's Column*. London: The British School at Rome, London, 1982).

Fig. 20.

Sack of Jerusalem, from the Arch of Titus, c. 82 CE, Roman Forum, Rome (Source: Robin Haydon Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome*, Bruxelles: Latomus Revue d'Etudes Latines, 1996).

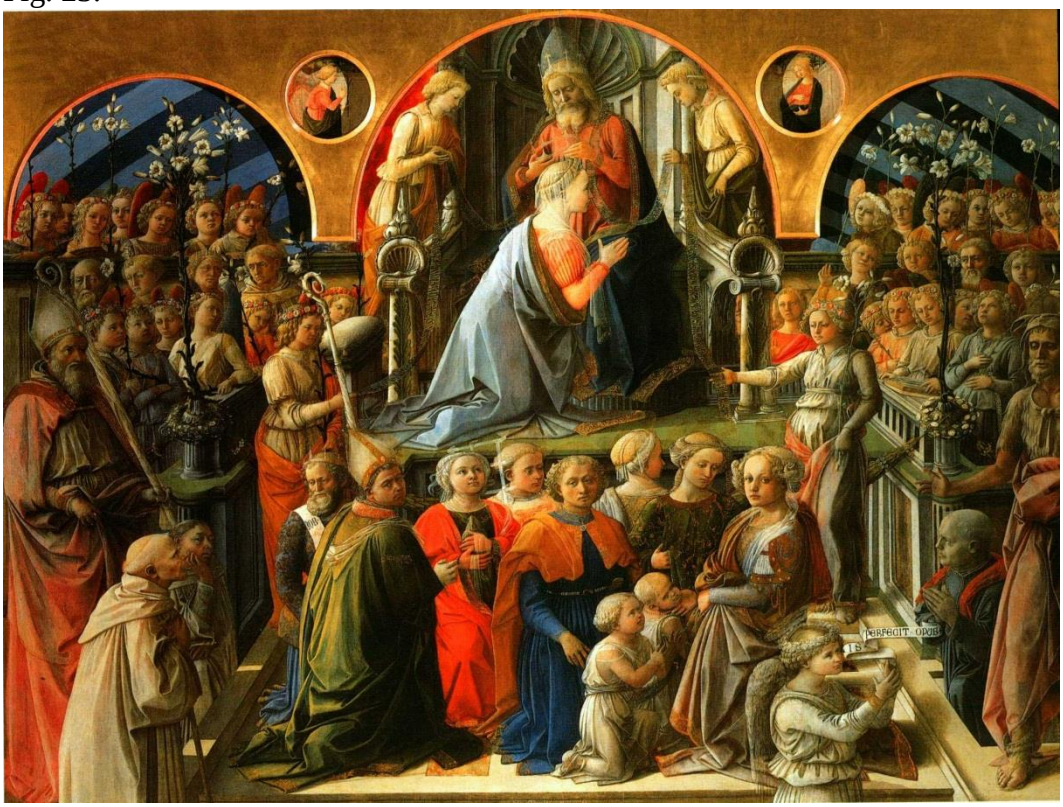
Fig. 21

Tazza Farnese (Farnese Cup), (front), 2nd century, Naples National Archeological Museum, Naples. (Source: Ludovica Sebregondi and Tim Parks. *Money and Beauty: Bankers, Botticelli, and the Bonfire of the Vanities* exh. cat., Palazzo Strozzi. Florence and Milan: Giunti, 2011).

Fig. 22.

Benozzo Gozzoli, *Journey of the Magi (Retinue of the Youngest King)*, c.1459, Medici Chapel, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence. (Source: Christina Acidini Lucinat, ed. *The Chapel of the Magi: Benozzo Gozzoli's Frescoes in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994).

Fig. 23.



Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1441-7, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Source: Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi, the Carmelite Painter*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

Bibliography

Ady, Julia Cartwright. *Sandro Botticelli*. London: Duckworth and Company: 1903.

Ahl, Diane Cole. *Fra Angelico*. London; Phaidon, 2008.

Argan, Giulio Carlo. *Botticelli*: *Biographical and Critical Study*. New York: Skira: 1957.

Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Bewer, Francesca G. *A Laboratory for Art: Harvard's Fogg Museum and the Emergence of Conservation in America, 1900-1950*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010.

Blume, Andrew C. "Botticelli's Family and Finances in the 1490's: Santa Maria Nuova and the San Marco Altarpiece." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 38 (1994): 154-164.

Blunt, Anthony. *Artistic Theory in Italy: 1450-1600*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Bober, Phyllis Pray and Ruth Rubinstein. *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*. London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2010.

Bode, Wilhelm von. *Sandro Botticelli*. Berlin: Propyaläen-Verlang, 1921.

Brundin, Abigail and Matthew Treherine, eds. *Forms of Faith in Sixteenth Century Italy.* Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate. 2009.

Burke, Peter. *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540*. New York: Scribner, 1972.

---. *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication*. Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbrone, Syndney: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Burroughs, Charles. "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's 'Mannerism' and the Reform of Sacred Art,"*Artibus et Historiae* 18, no. 36 (1997): 9-40.

Callmann, Ellen. "Botticelli's Life of Saint Zenobius." *The Art Bulletin*, 66 no.3 (1984): 492-496.

Crum, Roger J. and John T. Paoletti, eds. *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*. Cambridge, New York, Melborne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paolo: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Darwall-Smith, Robin Haydon. *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome*. Bruxelles: Latomus Revue d'Etudes Latomus, 1996.

Dempsey, Charles. *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Elam, Caroline. "Lorenzo de' Medici's Sculpture Garden." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 36 (1992): 41-84.

Elkins, James. *The Poetics of Perspective*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Ettlinger, Leopold. *Botticelli*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Fletcher, Stella and Christine Shaw, eds. *The World of Savonarola: Italian Elites and Perceptions of Crisis*. Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate, 2000.

Gilbert, Creighton E. *Italian Art 1400-1500: Sources and Documents*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980

--. "What Did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1998): 392-450.

Hatfield, Rab. "Botticelli's Mystic Nativity, Savonarola, and the Millennium." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 88-114.

Hollingsworth, Mary. *Patronage in Renaissance Italy: From 1400 to the Early Sixteenth Century*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Holmes, Megan. *Fra Filippo Lippi, the Carmelite Painter*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

Horne, Herbert P. *Botticelli: Painter of Florence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

--. "Botticelli's Last Communion of S. Jerome." *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 28, no. 152 (1915): 44-46.

Joannides, Paul. "Late Botticelli: Archaism and Ideology," *Arte Christiana* 83 (1995): 165-178.

Kanter, Laurence, Hillard T. Goldfarb, and James Hankins. *Botticelli's Witness: Changing Style in a Changing Florence*, exh. cat. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Lowell, MA: LaVigne Press, 1997.

Leonardo da Vinci. *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*. Translated and edited by Edward MacCurdy. New York: George Baziller, 1954.

Lightbown, Ronald. *Sandro Botticelli*, 2 vols. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978.

McGrath, Thomas. "Color and the Exchange of Ideas between Patron and Artist in Renaissance Italy," *The Art Bulletin* 82, vol. 2 (2000): 298-308.

McLean, Paul D. *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence*. Durnham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.

Morachiello, Paolo. *Fra Angelico: The San Marco Frescoes*. Translated by Eleanor Daunt. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

Musée du Luxembourg. *Botticelli: From Lorenzo the Magnificent to Savonarola* exh. cat. Text by Daniel Arasse and others. Milan: Skira, 2003.

Nagel, Alexander and Christopher S. Wood. *Anachronic Renaissance*. New York: Zone Books, 2010.

Najemy, John M. *A History of Florence 1200-1575*. Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell, 2006.

Najemy, John M, ed. *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300-1550.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Neher, Gabriele and Rupert Shepherd, eds. *Revaluing Renaissance Art.* Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000.

O'Malley, Michelle. *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005.

Padovani, Serena. *L'Eta di Savonarola: Fra Bartolomeo e la Scuola di San Marco.* Venice: Marisilo, 1996.

Palazzo Strozzi. *Botticelli and Filippino: Passion and Grace in Fifteenth Century Florentine Painting* exh. cat., text by Daniel Arasse and others. Milan: Skira, 2004.

Patridge, Loren. *Art of Renaissance Florence 1400-1600*. Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009.

Pliny. *Natural History, Books 33-35*. Translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Pogány-Balás, Edit. *The Influence of Rome's Antique Monumental Sculptures on the Great Masters of the Renaissance*. Translated by Árpád Debreczeni. Akadémiai Kiadó: Budapest, 1980.

Polizzotto, Lorenzo. *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Pope-Hennessy, John. *Sandro Botticelli: The Nativity*. London: Percy Lund Humphries and Company: London, 1946.

Richardson, Carol M., Kim W. Woods, and Michael W. Franklin, eds. *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. Malden, Oxford, and Victoria: Blackwell, 2007.

Rubin, Patricia. "Signposts of Invention: Artists' Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art." *Art History* 29, vol. 4 (2006): 563-599.

Rujemann, H. "Technical Analysis of an Early Painting by Botticelli." *Studies in Conversation,* vol.2 (1955): 17-40.

Savonarola, Girolamo. *Della Semplicita della vita Christiana, nella quale insegna come vivere debbe il vero Christiano*. Venetia, 1547.

Savonarola, Girolamo. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490- 1498.* Translated by Anne Borelli and Maria Pastore Passaro, eds. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.

Sebregondi, Ludovica and Tim Parks. *Money and Beauty: Bankers, Botticelli, and the Bonfire of the Vanities* exh. cat., Palazzo Strozzi. Florence and Milan: Giunti, 2011.

Stapleford, Richard. "Vasari and Botticelli," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorichen Institutes in Florenz* 39 (1995): 397-408.

Steinberg, Ronald M. "Fra Bartolomeo, Savonarola and a Divine Image." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 18 (1974): 319-328.

--. *Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art and Renaissance Historiography.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977.

Steinmann, Ernst. *Botticelli*. Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen and Klafing, 1897.

Streeter, A. *Botticelli*. London: George Bell and Sons: 1903.

Torelli, Mario. *Typology and Structure of Roman Historical Reliefs*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982.

Turner, A. Richard. *Renaissance Florence: The Invention of a New Art*. New York: Abrams, 1997.

Wackernagel, Martin. *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist*. Translated by Alison Luchs. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Weinstein, Donald. "Savonarola, Florence, and the Millenarian Tradition." *Church History* 27 (1958): 291-305.

--. *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

---. *Vasari on Technique: Being the Introduction to the Three Arts of Design, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting*. Translated by Louisa S. Madelhose. London: J.M. Dent and Company, 1907.

Venturi, Lionello. *Botticelli*. New York and Vienna: Phaidon and Oxford University Press, 1937.

Verdon, Timothy and John Henderson, eds. *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*. Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, 1990.

Yashiro, Yukio. *Sandro Botticelli,* 3 vols. Boston and London: The Medici Society, 1925.

Zöllner, Frank. *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2005