

Botticelli, Savonarola and the Bonfire of the Vanities

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Dr. Catherine Harding, Department
of Art History and Visual Studies

Great Waves of Fires in Florence: 1497-98

- 1) Bonfire of the Vanities I and II, Carnival, Feb. 7, 1497 & Feb. 27, 1498
- 2) Testing the gift of prophecy by fire, April 6, 1498
- 3) Death by hanging, a great bonfire to consume the bodies, May 23, 1498



Francesco Rosselli, *Execution of Savonarola*, after 1498, Florence, Museo di San Marco

Key players in Florentine history: Lorenzo de' Medici and Girolamo Savonarola



L: Verrocchio, bust of Lorenzo de' Medici, late 15th c., Washington, Nat. Gallery; R: Fra Bartolomeo, *Savonarola*, after 1498, Florence, Museo di San Marco

Sandro Botticelli: painter of 'poetic' mythological paintings in the 1480's



L: Self-portrait of Botticelli; R: Botticelli, detail of *Primavera*, c.1478, Florence, Uffizi

Botticelli's visual poetry transformed: from *La Primavera*, c.1478, to a whole new worldview of reform



Key players at this moment of Florentine history: Piero de' Medici (the Unfortunate) and Pope Alexander VI



L: Ghirlandaio, portrait of Piero de' Medici, 1485, Sassetti Chapel, S. Trinita; R: Cristofano dell'Altissima, *Alexander VI*, 16th c., Florence, Uffizi

French King Charles VIII enters Florence: 17 November

1494. L. Francesco Granacci, *Arrival of Charles VII at Palazzo Medici*, 1522-30, Florence, Uffizi; R. *Portrait of Charles VIII*, 16th c., Chantilly, Mus. Condé.



Piero de' Medici surrenders the city to Charles VIII. L.

Agnolo Bronzino, *Piero de' Medici*, Florence, Uffizi; R. *Portrait of Charles VIII*, 16th c., Chantilly, Mus. Condé.



L: Niccoló di Forzore Spinelli, bronze medal of Savonarola, 1494

R: Anonymous Florentine engraver, *Savonarola Preaching*, in Savonarola, *Compendio di Revelatione*, Florence, 1495.



The Bonfires begin...and lead to trial by fire

Below: Ludwig von Langenmantel, *Savonarola Preaching*, 1881, St. Bonaventure University, NY, The Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts.



Johannes Lingelbach, *Carnival Scene in Rome*, 1660,
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum





The vanities: combs, wigs, fancy purses and other finery.



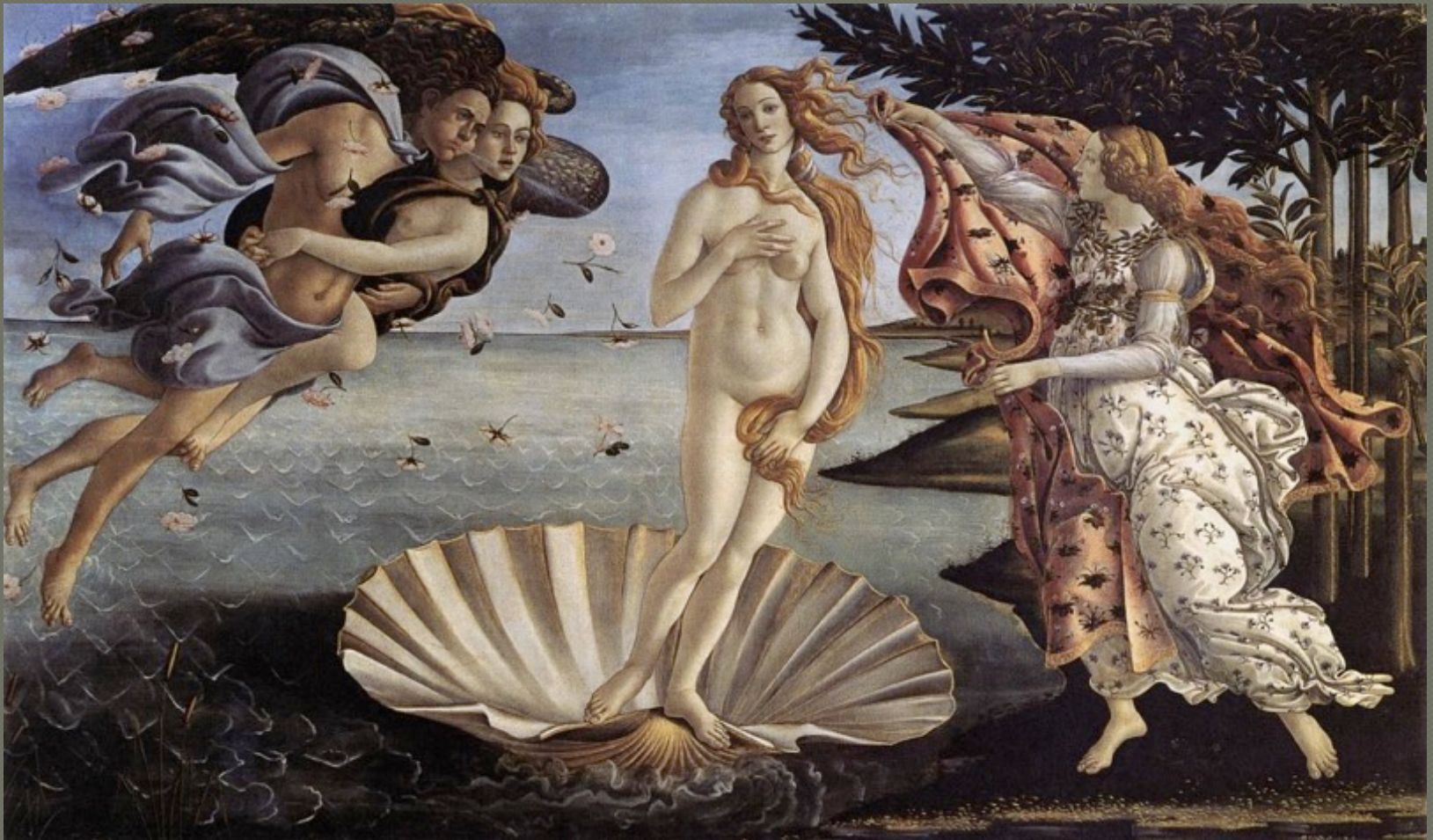
Top: French 14th century comb; L: money-bag, 15th c., Prato, Mus. dell'Tessuto; R: Botticelli, *Simonetta Vespucci*, 1476, Berlin: Gemaldegalerie

The location where the bonfire of the vanities was held:
February 7, 1497, and February 27, 1498



The Moment of Renaissance Humanism, Visual Poetry and
Passion for Antiquities Challenged...

Below: Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, 1484-5, Florence, Uffizi.



The *Birth of Venus*, 1484-5, and the *Primavera*, c.1478, belong to a unique moment in time that is changed forever by Savonarola and the anxieties of the 1490s



Agostino da Duccio, *Bonfire of the Vanities: San Bernardino da Siena Preaching*, Oratorio di San Bernardino, Siena, 1457-61



School of Giotto, *St Francis endures the trial by fire before the Mamluk Sultan al-Kamil in 1219*, painted 1296, fresco, San Francesco, Assisi.



The Alberghetto, prison in the Palazzo Vecchio, where Savonarola was held during his imprisonment. He was tortured using the strappado method to force his confession.



Savonarola's Excommunication (1497), Arrest (April 1498),
Torture, Trial (April-May) and Execution (May 23, 1498)



Botticelli's workshop is forever altered: much debate about the role of art and reform



L: *Savonarola Preaching*, *Compendio di Revelatione*, 1495 ; R: Botticelli, *Mystic Nativity of Christ*, 1500-1, London, Nat. Gallery

Botticelli's orientation transformed: theology triumphant over poetry?



L: Botticelli, *Venus*, 1480 (?) Berlin, Staatliche Museen; R: Botticelli, *Mystic Nativity of Christ*, 1500-1, London, Nat. Gallery