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Leonardo's and Botticelli's allegories between allegorical layering and satire

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510) represent two distinct and separate examples of Italian painters of the early Renaissance. Both were well read—Leonardo possibly more so than Botticelli—not only because of his substantial private library, one of the largest owned by an artist of his time, but also because of the range of literature he clearly consulted. Although the kinds of literature they were both interested in overlap in some areas, the focus each applied in painting has a very distinct character. This matches the categories of allegories they both depicted, which is the subject of this article.[1] Comparing the different approaches to allegory in these two painters sheds light on the genre of allegory itself, as well as on their shared level of knowledge and understanding. It also reveals much about their characters and their self-representation, as they fashioned themselves as intellectual painters, as learned artisans. It is through the medium of allegory that this becomes most explicit.

For both painters, allegories were not their main concern. They earned their living primarily through religious paintings, such as devotional Madonna panels and altarpieces, where allegory had less significance than religious symbolism. When the two painters did engage with allegories, they incorporated them in different ways—Botticelli mainly in paintings, Leonardo in drawings. Some of their most demanding allegories are constructed with multi-layered readings, combining symbolism with moral allegories and, ultimately, historical or political allusions.

In order to explain the nature of allegory in Botticelli and Leonardo, several well-discussed works need to be briefly summarized with their interpretations, followed by two extended and new readings: Botticelli's *Calumny* and Leonardo's *Wolf and the Eagle*. Finally, the discussion focuses on allegorical layering as a mode of interpretation borrowed from literary exegesis (the Senses of Scripture), imported into artistic hermeneutic, and on satire as one of its particular artistic expressions.

What shapes an allegory?

Let us first briefly consider what constitutes an allegory.[2] I will quickly summarize what I have published elsewhere: bridging the first step between symbolism and simple allegory, we often find examples in the moral and religious repertoire of human personifications (e.g. personifications and their symbols) or in animal symbolism. Allegories themselves usually fall into two categories: they are either built on top of symbolism or mythology, and sometimes also on satire. The second, more complex variation is similar to a literary commentary and can also be described as *visual commentary*, comparable to the Senses of Scripture.[3]

In the late Middle Ages, poetic interpretations could be understood as the unraveling of a hidden myth, an idea that would later inspire many Renaissance painters. Boccaccio, for example, suggested that poetic obscurity could stimulate the search for truth, as poets and philosophers were doing (*Genealogia deorum*, 14.12).[4] Boccaccio may have been re-

ferring to Phaedrus, the ancient Roman fabulist who turned Aesop's *Fables* into Latin: "It was by design that antiquity wrapped up truth in symbols, that the wise might understand, the ignorant go astray."[5] Boccaccio was relying in part on Dante's definition of allegory, who, following medieval exegetical tradition, distinguished four senses of scripture: the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. The literal sense referred to the text as it stands, while the allegorical sense pointed to hidden meaning ("una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna"). The moral sense applied the text to human behavior, and the anagogical sense pointed to ultimate, eschatological truths. Dante thus formulated the essence of allegory that would become its point of reference for centuries to come: allegory as hidden truth, and allegory as a multi-layered process. [6]

From the late Middle Ages onward, many topics and interpretations for complex allegories of symbols and personifications were transmitted through allegorical keys found in simple didactic literature. This was also the range of literature from which painters could choose their allegorical content. A painter could use, for example, an ancient primary source as the subject of a painting, or an elaborate medieval or Renaissance commentary. Botticelli is a telling example of this procedure. Leonardo, by contrast, disliked written commentaries, as he explicitly states in his *Treatise on Painting*. He rejected the idea of literary commentary, arguing that many commentators did not understand the author's ideas.[7] In fact, unlike Botticelli, who sometimes used literary commentaries alongside textual sources as an aid in composing his allegories, Leonardo did not. He relied instead on moralistic coding and symbolism, and at times on satire. While Botticelli also drew on satirical literature, the way he incorporated it remained substantially different.

Botticelli's painted allegories

Botticelli produced fewer than ten primarily allegorical paintings. Nevertheless, he was highly regarded for his allegories. Setting aside his drawings for the *Divine Comedy*, there are only a few allegorical drawings by Botticelli, most of them probably preparatory sketches for paintings with subjects involving personifications or mythological figures, such as *Minerva* and *Pallas Athene* (both in the Uffizi).[8] His very first painted allegory was a classical religious subject: a personification of *Fortitude* (1470, Uffizi), part of a cycle of the theological virtues painted by different artists for the Mercanzia and its rooms of jurisdiction. [9] This type of religious allegory—female figures enthroned and carrying attributes—was popular but not especially demanding for an artist.[10]

Five of his painted allegories became famous in their category and were among the most admired Florentine allegories of the early Renaissance: the *Primavera*, the *Birth of Venus*, *Minerva (or Camilla) and the Centaur*, *Mars and Venus*, and the *Calumny*. Some of them date to around 1482, the year after Cristoforo Landino's commentary on Dante was published, and the year Leonardo moved from Florence to Milan. The literary sources, much discussed in scholarship, have generally been traced either to classical authors such as Ovid, Vergil, and Lucian, or to contemporary humanist writers such as Ficino, Poliziano, and Landino. In either case, Botticelli's choice of allegories derived mostly from classical mythology, interpreted through a humanist lens, reflecting the taste of Florentine society—especially when the works were commissioned for weddings, to which most can be linked. These five painted allegories must be briefly summarized in terms of their destination and literary background.[11]

The allegory known as *Minerva (or Camilla) and the Centaur* has been identified under different names in the past (fig. 1).[12] The occasion of the painting's commission remains disputed: either as a wedding gift alluding to virtues and vices, or as a political allegory. If intended as a wedding gift, it may have been commissioned around 1482[13] by Lorenzo de' Medici for his cousin Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and his bride Semiramide Appiani, as argued by Lightbown, Zirpolo, Acidini, Deimling, and others. [14] Scholars have searched for literary sources suitable for a wedding allegory, interpreting the scene as a play of virtues and vices between the centaur and Minerva (an allegory of reason and wisdom). More specifically, and in the context of virtue and vice, Gombrich pointed to Ficino's letters,[15] while others have referred to Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (book 37)

Fig. 1: Botticelli, *Minerva (or Camilla) and the Centaur*, ca. 1482, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (Wikimedia).

or Vergil's *Aeneid* (VII and XI), with regard to Camilla as a virgin devoted to Minerva and an example of a virtuous and brave woman (Shearman, Lightbown, De Girolami Cheney).[16] Several scholars, including La Malfa, Deimling, Sbaraglia, and Compton, have connected the painting to Landino's Dante commentary. [17] The idea of a political allegory has also been pursued: either in praise of Lorenzo de' Medici as political leader (Berenson, Chastel, Wittkower, Lightbown, Bredekamp, Sbaraglia, Acidini, Compton),[18] or, more specifically, as a reference to the Pazzi Conspiracy against the Medici, with the centaur read through Landino's commentary (Roßner, Roth).[19] Whether as a wedding piece or a political allegory, Landino's Dante commentary is likely Botticelli's main source here—a text the painter knew well and used repeatedly.[20] Landino mentions centaurs in several contexts, both as symbols of bestial behavior to be tamed and as figures in political allegories. The dating of the

painting to 1482—one year after the commentary's publication—further supports this link, as does its relation to Botticelli's other works inspired by the commentary, the *Calumny* and the *Primavera*.

The *Primavera* (ca. 1482, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi) was among the allegories in Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici's private rooms in the Medici palace on the Via Larga (now Via Cavour), where it was hanging at least in 1498, above the daybed (*lettuccio*). In 1481, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco promised to marry Semiramide Appiani, and the painting has generally been understood in this wedding context, which was realized the following year.[21] Many attempts have been made to decode the composition of the *Primavera*, drawing on ancient literature such as Lucretius, Ovid, or Martianus Capella, or on Ficino's Neoplatonic writings.[22] In addition, Bredekamp and Acidini proposed a political reading, seeing the work as a political allegory of a triumphal spring, celebrating the diplomatic success of Lorenzo de' Medici. [23] In a separate article, I have argued for the importance of certain commentaries as mediators for ancient content: most notably Landino's commentaries on Dante and on Horace, Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium* (*Libro dell'amore*), and Paolo Marsi's commentary on Ovid. Among these, Landino's Dante commentary was the most important. Its vernacular form had the invaluable advantage of interpreting the work of Florence's greatest poet while also linking Dante's themes to both ancient and contemporary authors. [24] The *Primavera* and *Minerva and the Centaur* hung in the same room of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco's palace, his personal room on the ground floor next to the *scrittoio*.[25] Both paintings can therefore be understood as wedding commissions, possibly with political overtones as well.

Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (ca. 1484, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi)[26] differs in some important respects from his other allegories. It must still be mentioned here for its subject and destination. The painting was either intended for the Medici Villa di Castello, owned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (as Vasari noted its presence there in 1550),[27] or conceived as a wedding gift from Lorenzo de' Medici for a Bentivoglio wedding in Bologna in 1487 (Annibale Bentivoglio and Lucrezia d'Este).[28] Researchers

Fig. 2: Botticelli, *Mars and Venus*, ca. 1482-1485, London, National Gallery (© National Gallery, London, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

have proposed numerous destinations and sources, of which I can only mention the most important. Gombrich pointed to Neoplatonic influences in Ficino and in Poliziano's *Stanze*,[29] while others (Dempsey, Acidini Luchinat, Körner, and others) emphasized Poliziano's role, since the *Stanze per la Giostra* drew partly on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, one of the most frequently used sources for mythological allegories.[30] Compared with Botticelli's other allegories, the *Birth of Venus* seems less complex in its allegorical levels, and may contain only two: the myth of Venus itself and its adaptation into a wedding context.

Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* (ca. 1482–1485, London, National Gallery)[31] is an early example of what would become a popular Renaissance subject (fig. 2). Here we encounter an uncommon iconography: Venus clothed, Mars unclothed, both accompanied by playful satyrs. Research indicates that the painting was intended as a *spalliera* and commissioned for a wedding, possibly celebrating or commemorating Giuliano de' Medici and Simonetta Vespucci, both of whom died already in 1476–1477. [32] The theme derives most directly from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but was repeated in later sources. Campbell and others suggested that the composition may also reflect Lucretius or Empedocles, because of the juxtaposition of the gods in an erotic context,[33]

while David Clark proposed Synesius' *On Dreams* (translated into Latin by Ficino) as an influence.[34] The majority of scholars, however—Gombrich, Lightbown, Zöllner, Bellingham, Acidini, and others—have emphasized Lucian as the source. In his *Herodotus or Aëtion* (7.2–7.3, LCL 430:146–47), Lucian describes a painting by the ancient artist Aëtion of the wedding of Roxana and Alexander on Olympus.[35] In this ekphrasis, Mars and Venus appear as a parody, with Erotes playing with the armor—here reimagined by Botticelli as satyrs accompanying Giuliano and Simonetta.[36] Lucian therefore seems a likely source, and Botticelli turned to the ancient satirist again in the *Calumny*, where he found a ready-made version in Landino's commentary.

Botticelli's *Calumny*

Botticelli's *Calumny* (ca. 1495, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi), considered one of his last secular works,[37] ultimately derives from the satirist Lucian (fig. 3). Most researchers have claimed that Alberti's treatise *Della pittura* served as the transmitting source for Lucian's narration of Apelles' story of Calumny.[38] However, I have shown elsewhere that Botticelli did not follow Alberti, but Cristoforo Landino's version of Lucian, which matches the details of the main scene exactly.[39]

Fig. 3: Botticelli, *Calumny*, ca. 1495, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (Wikimedia).

Since Botticelli had no commission for his *Calumny*—a painting he created for himself—the work has often been interpreted as a reflection on envy among painters, a *paragone* between literature and painting, and a demonstration of artistic skill comparable with that of the ancient painter Apelles. A political dimension has also been proposed, though less frequently. Many scholars have linked Botticelli's *Calumny* to Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), noting the impact of the friar's fiery sermons, his demands for abstinence and repentance, and his predictions of the imminent end of the world. Savonarola sought to establish God's republic in Florence, banning luxury, which created a kind of creative depression for many humanists and artists. This view was held by Pater, Müntz, Horne, von Bode, Lötzstam, Feuillet, and others, who relied on Vasari's testimony that Botticelli was a follower of Savonarola, a *piagnone*.[40] Yet the notion of Botticelli as a Savonarolan has been widely questioned over the last two decades. Polizzotto, for exam-

ple, reexamined the context of the *bonfire of the vanities*.[41]

The political background of the painting deserves closer attention. The religious climate changed considerably after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492, three years before the *Calumny* was executed. Savonarola's growing role as both spiritual and political leader left a deep mark on Florence's humanist culture. Patrons, wary of being seen in the wrong light, increasingly commissioned only "politically correct" religious paintings, while humanists, initially sympathetic to Savonarola's call for austerity, turned against him as his radicalism became clearer. Ficino and his circle, as Garin and Polizzotto note, first welcomed his message of purity, then rejected it when it clashed with the Neoplatonic ideal.[42] Florentine families themselves often split into pro- and anti-Savonarola factions, which Polizzotto interprets as a calculated political strategy.[43]

Scholars remain divided about Botticelli's inclination toward Savonarola. Some have described him as a devotee in the 1490s, citing his prolific production of religious works, especially Madonnas. But this argument overlooks the broader market context: there was little demand for mythological paintings, only for religious subjects, as patrons feared to be seen in the wrong light.[44] Whether Savonarola exerted direct influence on Botticelli's late oeuvre is highly doubtful, and several scholars (Cecchi, Dombrowski, Debenedetti, Pons, Berti, Mariani Zini) have questioned it. Mariani Zini, for example, interprets the *Calumny* as a reflection on good government against the backdrop of Savonarola's era, while Dombrowski and Debenedetti see Botticelli's stylistic changes as pragmatic adjustments rather than religious statements.[45]

As noted, Botticelli painted the *Calumny of Apelles* without a patron—one of the few works he created solely for himself, as Vasari confirms. He later gave it to his close friend Antonio Segni (ca. 1460–1512), who admired it greatly and composed a poem[46] that was attached to the work: "This little painting is a warning to the rulers of the earth to avoid false judgments. Apelles gave one like it to the king of Egypt; that king was worthy of the gift, and it of him."[47] The "false ruler" implicitly accused of unjust judgment was obvious to contemporary viewers. In Botticelli's version, Penitentia—described in literary sources as an old woman in black garments—appears uniquely in a Dominican habit.[48] She gazes in fear and shame at the provocatively nude Veritas, who demands divine judgment. Thus the painting directly alludes to Savonarola, following Landino's interpretation, for Landino had framed Apelles' story in a theological context, identifying Calumny with the devil. Florentine history itself suggested that the black-clad devil who dominated the city—embodied here in Penitentia—was guilty of false accusations. In Botticelli's composition, the man leading Calumny is identified by Lucian (and Landino) as Envy, and in Landino's reading as the devil himself. Landino equated the foremost envious and proud being with Lucifer, who blinded those who followed him.[49] Other sources describe this figure only vaguely, as pale and sickly. Botticelli, however, gives him tattered brown garments and strange black boots reminiscent of a devil, making him a central protagonist. He confronts the ruler directly, pointing at the judge's eyes as if to blind him. Landino explained that *superbia* (pride) dwelt in Christians who had forfeited divine grace; deprived of sight, they had also lost reason and could no longer choose the good.[50] A contemporary viewer would immediately have understood the Dominican habit, the devil figure, and the nude Veritas.

Two years after Savonarola's execution (1498), Botticelli painted another work for himself, the *Mystical Nativity* (ca. 1500, London, National Gallery). Here he included a Greek inscription describing himself as a witness to the end of the devil's oppression after three and a half years, when the apocalypse would be fulfilled.[51] The "three and a half years" correspond exactly to the period of Savonarola's active spiritual and political leadership. Botticelli thus used the *Calumny* to present his own version of truth and justice—much as Apelles had once done. Yet here humanist interpretation dominates, supported by ancient literature, theological reflection, and the assertion of intellectual independence. Behind Botticelli's vision stands Dante, mediated through Landino, as the first Italian humanist, offering the foundations of spiritual purification and justice. Dante's ideals of illumination, judgment, and justice, Botticelli suggests, could restore to Florence the path it had lost.

In the background scenes of the *Calumny*, Botticelli emphasized historical and biblical figures who had heroically defended their country. This iconography follows Landino, who at the beginning of his commentary established a link between moral exempla and civic virtue. Botticelli focused on politically motivated virtues and their defenders, creating an iconography directed against corrupt leaders and false judgment, implicitly casting Savonarola as a false ideological guide. In this way, Botticelli inverted Savonarola's message. As Körner and Dombrowski have noted, Savonarola demanded that art imitate nature in order to produce *opera simplicia*—simple, natural, honest works—and condemned artists who took literature as their model, for they produced only *opera artificialia*, works divorced from reality.[52] Botticelli, however, proved him wrong.

A painting of such iconographical and political complexity could only be kept private, not offered for sale. It reveals Botticelli's political thought with unusual clarity. Some contemporaries accused him of sodomy, a common charge used to discredit Savonarola's opponents, generally implying immoral living.[53] The broader context was dramatic: with Lorenzo de' Medici's death in 1492, Florence lost its chief patron of humanism and free intellectual inquiry. Botticelli painted the *Calumny* about three years later, at a time when Lorenzo's circle was in turmoil. Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola, once Lorenzo's protégés, entered Savonarola's convent of San Marco and both died shortly thereafter under mysterious circumstances. Only humanists and artists willing to retreat from public life—such as Ficino and Botticelli—could safeguard their intellectual work in private.[54]

The *Calumny* thus had a double edge. Botticelli accused a tyrant who himself felt accused. The year 1495, when the work was likely painted, was politically turbulent. The Franciscans accused Savonarola of meddling in government, prompting him to double down on his reforms. Pope Alexander VI banned him twice from preaching, but he ignored both orders. The Pope then issued a bull listing charges collected from Franciscans and Florentines, which Savonarola's followers at San Marco answered with a defensive *apologia*, denouncing slander and fraud.[55] Though this document bore little relation to Lucian's tale, its language of calumny and falsehood may have inspired Botticelli. In the mid-1490s, he rendered the story in his own terms, as a meditation on slander and fraud. In this way Botticelli's *Calumny* can be seen as both intellectual and ironic, responding to an atmosphere that was uninspiring, hostile to art, and anti-humanist. Read in this light, the painting aligns with Leonardo's satirical sketches of the mid-1490s, which also used allegories of virtue and vice in double-edged critiques of envy and corruption (e.g. the allegories on Envy).

Summming up Botticelli's allegories

Summing up Botticelli's major allegories, four of the five can be seen in connection with weddings, while the fifth (*Calumny*) was painted without commission, as an artistic and personal challenge. Four of the five works—whether wedding commissions or independent—can additionally or alternatively be read as political allegories, either in relation to a tyrannical or a successful local leader. Nevertheless, scholarship has generally favored the wedding context. For at least three of these paintings, Landino's Dante commentary was the major source, providing explanations of ancient mythology. Two paintings were inspired by satire, drawing on the standard ancient satirist Lucian, either directly or through Landino's mediation.[56] This leads to a preliminary conclusion: when commissioned, Botticelli turned to complex allegories based on ancient mythology for wedding paintings, responding to the circumstances of his most demanding patrons. Landino's Dante commentary offered him the most accessible source for topics involving complex allegories, and almost all of these paintings date to, or shortly after, the commentary's publication. Satirical allegory, especially when based on Lucian's account of Apelles, represents perhaps the most ambitious level Botticelli could achieve.

This summary approach to much-discussed works looks for feasible, accessible, and consistent sources Botticelli might have considered. Whether he did this entirely on his own, or with the help of Cristoforo Landino or Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, is not a point of discussion here.[57] His sources always rely on ancient mythology, sometimes recast in new humanistic contexts. Botticelli made no fundamental distinction between approaching mythological or satirical texts. In either case, he expected his viewers to possess a general knowledge of the characters and stories he depicted—even if his visual narrative introduced variations that led to new contexts. Precise familiarity with specific literary texts does not appear to have been necessary, so long as the audience had a general humanist education. This shared knowledge base supplied the framework for interpretive discussion.

All of these points differ substantially from Leonardo's approach, which was more varied and requires closer examination.

Fig. 4: Leonardo da Vinci, *Aristotle and Phyllis*, ca. 1480, Hamburg, Kunsthalle (bpk Bildagentur / Hamburger Kunsthalle / Elke Walford / Art Resource, NY).

Leonardo's allegorical drawings

Leonardo belonged to the rare group of artists fortunate enough to possess a substantial private library. Among the texts he owned were some of the same sources Botticelli had used, including two of the most important sources for artistic allegories in early Renaissance Italy: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (probably the Bonsignori edition?), the *Epistles* of pseudo-Ovid, as well as historians like Titus Livius and Lucan.[58] Nevertheless, these do not appear directly in his art. As with Botticelli, allegories were not Leonardo's main concern, but they served a different purpose for him: no complex allegories appear in his paintings, while they figure almost exclusively in his drawings. Moreover, almost none of these derive from classical mythology, with the usual background in Ovid or Vergil. Two of his drawings closest to mythological

subjects should in fact be placed in other categories: *Aristotle and Phyllis* (ca. 1480, Hamburg Kunsthalle, fig. 4) and *Neptune with Four Sea Horses* (ca. 1502–1504, Windsor Castle), the latter a presentation drawing.[59] He also produced a *Leda with the Swan*, now lost. Apart from *Neptune* and *Leda*, there is no mythological subject in Leonardo's oeuvre comparable to those of other Florentine painters. This is striking, given that such themes were fashionable in Florence between the 1470s and the early 16th century, and also popular at the northern Italian courts, and that Leonardo owned the relevant literary sources. Despite his high reputation, he was either never regarded as a painter suited for such mythological commissions, or he declined them himself.

The sketch of *Aristotle and Phyllis* is unusual in Italy. The story likely originated in didactic wisdom literature with oriental influences, transmitted in 12th–13th-century Spain or France, and spread north of the

Alps with the crusades. It never became a widespread literary theme but circulated visually—in sculpture, tapestry, and stained glass—between the 13th and early 15th centuries, especially in northern Europe. It gained broader popularity in painting only later (ca. 1490–1520), again with a northern focus, though not entirely excluding Italy.[60] The tale belongs to the category of medieval/early modern popular entertainment, comparable to Ovid's *Ars amatoria* or Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and was common in decorative arts such as majolica.[61] The theme may have reached Leonardo through northern artists or imported art objects. Its witty satire on philosophy—Phyllis seducing and humiliating the wise teacher Aristotle—likely attracted Leonardo. In his version, he even set the scene in a studious environment. Whereas Phyllis usually rides on Aristotle's back, here she beats him, sharpening the erotic and moral implications. In moral terms, this drawing is almost the exact opposite of Botticelli's nearly contemporary *Minerva (or Camilla) and the Centaur* (ca. 1482).

The majority of Leonardo's allegorical drawings derive either from elementary moral or Christian literature used in schooling, or from more advanced works of satire for educated entertainment. Leonardo owned such basic texts as the *Fior di virtù*, Aesop's *Fables*, and the *Epistles* of Ovid, along with intermediary school texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Although he also possessed major historical works (Livy, Lucan), he never used them as subjects for paintings —unlike other painters, for whom these were standard sources for history painting. Instead, he repeatedly turned to elementary texts, which, along with accessible religious compendia,[62] supplied the shared cultural knowledge needed to interpret religious symbolism and basic allegory. This knowledge base was widely available to educated people, including both painters and patrons.

One example illustrates this expectation of shared knowledge particularly well. When Leonardo returned to Florence in 1500–1501, he exhibited a drawing for two days at SS. Annunziata, which Vasari describes as a *Madonna with Child, Saint Anne, and the lamb* (now lost, fig. 5).[63] Leonardo later painted several variations on this theme, most notably the version in the Louvre (ca. 1510). Alexander Nagel,

Fig. 5: Edmond Douet, after Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin with St Elisabeth and the young St John the Baptist who holds a lamb*, ca. 1550, London, British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence).

Joost Keizer, and Carmen Bambach have studied this allegory in detail, together with its contemporary description by the Carmelite Pietro da Novellara, who explained the figures allegorically in a letter to Isabella d'Este. While it remains uncertain whether the exhibited drawing was the version described by Novellara, his account is important because he distinguished two levels of allegorical meaning.

The first level was straightforward: Mary symbolizing the Church, the lamb symbolizing the Passion. Such readings could be supported by introductory compendia or school texts such as the *Fior di virtù* or the *Physiologus*, both of which transmitted widely known religious and moral interpretations. The second level was more complex: Mary (the Church) attempting to separate Christ from the lamb (the Passion), while Saint Anne restrains her, ensuring destiny is fulfilled. This interpretive step

demanded greater intellectual engagement from the spectator, as it could not be derived directly from standard texts but required an active process of reflection. The viewer had to assemble the allegorical components and synthesize them into meaning. By exhibiting the drawing publicly for two days, Leonardo seems to have been testing his audience: would they admire merely the composition and gentle expressions, perceive the obvious Christian symbolism, or penetrate to the deeper allegory? The layering of meanings here is a hallmark of Leonardo's allegorical work, on which he had already been working for some years.

Animal symbolism and allegory occupied Leonardo throughout his life. While he usually relied on the *Fior di virtù* and occasionally on Pliny, around 1494 he drew more systematically on the *Libro della natura degli animali* (LdN) and Cecco d'Ascoli's *Acerba*, in addition to the *Fior di virtù*, to compose his own *Bestiary*. These three texts—all of which Leonardo owned in duplicate—formed the foundation of his allegorical animal studies.[64] Leonardo's *Bestiary* follows established traditions: animals as symbols, as allegories of virtues and vices, as natural beings, and as figures in vernacular repertories. Yet his version was original, weaving together different textual traditions to create a distinctive synthesis.

The allegories examined here show different stages of reflection on the *Fior di virtù* and on Leonardo's own *Bestiary*. As I have shown elsewhere, several drawings from 1475–1483 draw on bestiary material for allegorical purposes—for instance, the unicorn drawings (London, British Museum; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum) and the *Dragon Fight* (London, British Museum). On the first level, animals and virtues/vices are presented as coded symbols. The bestiary serves as the initial interpretive key, assigning each animal a moral meaning (e.g. *Gratitudine*—the bird Upica; *Ingratitudine*—pigeons) and illustrating it with a short story. This symbolic code parallels Leonardo's development of a visual symbolic language, seen in works such as the *Allegory of the Ermine* (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum), *Allegory of the Lizard* (New York, MET), *Calandrino*, *Allegory on Correction*, and the *Four Elements* (formerly *Allegory of Man's Labors*, Windsor Castle). On a second alle-

gorical layer, Leonardo often combined entities in pairs, generating new allegorical meanings from their interaction. He was particularly drawn to opposites—one of the distinctive features of the *Fior di virtù*. Higher levels of allegory introduced moral, biblical, or political dimensions, paralleling the layered structures of the *Fior di virtù historiato* and the *Libro della natura degli animali*. Leonardo's *Allegories on Envy* (Oxford, Christ Church, Nos. 34 and 37) and the *Allegory with Solar Mirror* (Paris, Louvre) exemplify this approach, reflecting on allegory at a meta-level and creating multi-layered interpretive structures.[65]

Leonardo's more complex allegorical drawings are best understood through this lens. They are not illustrations of specific bestiary entries but combinations of symbolic meanings drawn from them, resulting in syncretic readings of virtues and vices. Developing such interpretive "keys" was an exercise Leonardo pursued repeatedly. The *Allegory with Solar Mirror* (also called *Allegory with Animals Fighting and a Man Holding a Burning Glass*, Paris, Louvre, ca. 1494, fig. 6) has long puzzled scholars. It shows a man seated among ruins, holding a shield or mirror that reflects sunlight onto five fighting animals.[66] To clarify its layered meaning, I will briefly summarize what I have published elsewhere.[67]

Using the allegorical reading key from Leonardo's *Bestiary*, the animals can be identified as follows: At the center, the winged snake-like basilisk (or aspide) represents Cruelty, whose role is to catch and kill animals in the grass (*Fior di virtù* 1491, no. 14; *Bestiary* nos. 10, 50, 75). He is attacked from behind by a bear, symbolizing Anger (*Fior di virtù* 1491, no. 12; *Bestiary* no. 6), which intensifies the cruelty of the scene. From the side, a unicorn—symbol of Intemperance (*Fior di virtù* 1491, no. 34; *Bestiary* no. 28)—lunges its horn into the basilisk, joining the fight. In the foreground, another animal crouches with bent forelegs, ready to leap into the fray: Leonardo identifies it as a panther, an animal that "never ceases fighting, even when half-dead" (*Bestiary* no. 92).

Through this reading key, Carmen Bambach's interpretation of the drawing as a *Mirror of Virtue* can be confirmed: the scene becomes a battle of virtues and vices, expressed through the allegorical

Fig. 6: Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory with Solar Mirror/Mirror of Virtue*, ca. 1494, Paris, Louvre (© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY).

animals. The sun illuminates the struggle, while the man moderates the situation. The animals act as carriers of allegorical meaning, whereas the man represents mankind more generally. The bear, unicorn, and panther intensify the conflict, while two additional animals appear as natural enemies of the cruel basilisk. The basilisk itself is shown attacking a weasel (*donnola/bellola*), the only animal capable of killing it (*Bestiary* no. 76). To the left lurks a wild boar, which could also be an ichneumon. The *Physiologus* describes the ichneumon as pig-like, and Leonardo includes it in his *Bestiary* (no. 81), though without a physical description. He defines it instead as the basilisk's worst enemy, able to kill it by coating itself in Nile mud, drying in the sun, and then attacking fatally.[68] In the drawing, the ichneumon benefits from the reflected sunlight of the mirror, which prepares it to strike the central vice. The man holding the mirror directs the sunlight toward the weasel and ichneumon, not toward the other animals, thereby assisting them in their attack on the basilisk. By aiding these creatures, he also protects himself from the vices. The drawing thus offers a syncretic reading of Leonardo's *Bestiary*. Significantly, it dates to the same year as the compilation of the *Bestiary* itself. On top of this moral reading, a political layer may be added, though some scholars have questioned it. Bambach has proposed two possible interpretations: as a moral-political allegory addressed to

Fig. 7: Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory of Envy*, ca. 1494, Oxford, Christ Church, no. 37, JBS 18 (© "By permission of the Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford").

Lodovico Sforza, or as a representation of the underworld, where Veritas, holding the sun-mirror, illuminates the darkness while animals battle.[69] This drawing—probably conceived as a presentation piece —demonstrates how the application of the *Bestiary*'s reading key clarifies the allegorical layers and their meaning. Adding another, politically charged layer further increases the complexity of the multi-tiered allegory. Similar to the *Fior di virtù* and other didactic texts of the later Middle Ages, the subject unfolds across shifting registers—moral, historical, or otherwise. Leonardo pursued the strategy, where perspective deliberately alternates among genres. This kind of strategy derived from early didactic literature, as well as from authors dealing with the allegorical sense of scripture.

Leonardo's four *Allegories of Envy* follow the same principles of complex, multi-layered composition. Each is grounded in an allegorical reading key derived from the *Fior di virtù* and Leonardo's *Bestiary*, with additional moral and political layers. One example will suffice to illustrate the nature of this structure.[70] On the recto of the sheet at Christ Church (No. 37, JBS 18, fig. 7), two women sit side by side, their lower bodies almost merging into one. On the left, the woman with a mirror and sword is readily identifiable as Prudence and Justice, here depicted with their traditional attributes. Both personifications are listed in the *Fior di virtù* and in Leonardo's *Bestiary* as virtues (*Fior di virtù* 1483, nos. 18, 21; 1491, nos. 19, 21; *Bestiary* nos. 14, 16). In Leonardo's *Bestiary*, several entries describe snakes that fight with birds (*Bestiary* no. 64), which are capable of killing them. In this drawing, the snakes are clearly directed toward the falcon flying in from the

right. The falcon symbolizes Pride (Superbia) (*Fior di virtù* 1491, no. 36; *Bestiary* no. 30) and incites a pack of foxes, representing Falsity (*Fior di virtù* 1491, no. 24; *Bestiary* no. 19), who charge toward the seated women. The snakes then engage the foxes in combat. The Devil appears only in the traditional versions of the *Fior di virtù* (*Fior di virtù* 1483, no. 21; 1491, no. 22) and is not included by Leonardo. In the *Fior di virtù*, the devil represents Injustice, the opposite of Justice. In the drawing, this implies that the devil targets the reclining woman, who struggles to defend herself with her deadly snakes against the foxes sent by the devil. The allegory therefore combines the sources of the *Fior di virtù* and the *Bestiary*. To summarize: Prudence is necessary to discern justice or injustice in a person. Once recognized with the help of the mirror, Justice must unleash her deadly snakes against Falsity and Pride, the instruments of Injustice. Reading the allegory could therefore reveal an inner moral struggle.

Several scholars have interpreted all four *Allegories of Envy* as political allegories. Following Nova, the scene—set in the context of Ludovico Sforza's Milan—shows "Ludovico's virtues on the left (Justice, Prudence, Vigilance, Truth), which protect the Milanese grass serpents in the cage", all attacked from above by the kite (*nibbio*).[71] Kemp, Versiero, Salsi, and Bambach have followed this political reading, with Bambach proposing the title *Allegory on the Political State of Milan*.[72] In keeping with Leonardo's other allegories, and consistent with the multi-layered interpretive method of the *Fior di virtù* and other didactic texts, a political meaning can indeed be superimposed on the moralized reading. Here the snakes become a powerful weapon against falsity and injustice in a specific political context. All four sketches of the *Allegories of Envy* demonstrate not only the layering of moral and political interpretation but also a satirical edge, a characteristic feature of Leonardo visible in many of his drawings—comparable, for example, to *Aristotle and Phyllis*. By contrast, the presentation drawing of the *Mirror of Virtue*, though similarly structured on multiple layers, lacks this satirical dimension.

The same is true of the following presentation drawing.

Leonardo's Allegory of *The Wolf and the Eagle*

Contrary to Leonardo's other allegorical drawings analyzed so far, the *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle* (Windsor Castle, Royal Library, RL 12496r, ca. 1494–95, fig. 8)[73] is closely elaborated from literary sources. Two directly connected texts form its immediate origin: the ancient satirist Horace and the humanist Cristoforo Landino, who used Horace in his commentary on Dante.

Leonardo's unusual presentation drawing requires closer examination. Since Anny Popp's 1928 study, research has generally interpreted it as a political allegory, in particular as a *navis ecclesiae* (the ship of the Church). Popp (following St Ambrose) suggested the allegory symbolized the papacy, and most subsequent scholars adopted this reading.[74] Kemp, while supporting the *navis ecclesiae* interpretation, acknowledged difficulties: the wolf is not an obvious papal symbol, being more commonly associated with Romulus and Remus, and often carrying negative connotations. Nevertheless, he and others retained the wolf as symbol of the pope. Kemp read the sail as filled with "the breath of the Holy Spirit" and the tree as the "tree of life," while Pedretti saw the tree as *fortuna verde*.[75] Given his late dating of the sheet (1515–1516), Kemp identified the animals as Pope Leo X and Francis I of France. Most researchers have followed Kemp's interpretation, though some suggested variations within the *navis ecclesiae* framework. Jungić, by contrast, placed the drawing in the context of Savonarolan prophecy, interpreting it as a critique of the first Medici pope. She noted that the wolf's iconography was generally negative and pointed instead to a witty 1513 poem by Girolamo Benivieni for Leo X, which employed the *navis ecclesiae* metaphor but used a lion, not a wolf, as papal symbol. She therefore proposed reading the wolf as corrupt clergy and as an allusion to tensions with the Roman curia.[76]

Clayton, dating the drawing earlier (1494–95), interpreted the allegory as referring to Pope Alexander VI and King Charles VIII of France. Leonardo, he suggested, made the drawing for Ludovico Sforza, who was closely involved with both figures. Clayton argued that "in early 1495 an allegory mocking the lupine

Fig. 8: Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle*, ca. 1494-1495, Windsor Castle, Royal Library, RL 12496r (© Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2025 | Royal Collection Trust).

Pope, cringing before the aquiline magnificence of Charles VIII, would have pandered to what must have been an openly pro-French atmosphere at the Sforza court."[77] The debate over the sheet's date continues, oscillating between 1494–95 and 1513–16. Yet strong stylistic and technical evidence supports the earlier date, as argued by Clayton and Marani, who connect it to Leonardo's Manuscript H—a notebook linked to his *Bestiary* and other allegorical sketches. [78]

While most scholars have agreed on the *navis ecclesiae* interpretation, they have rarely identified precise textual sources. I propose instead two distinct but connected literary origins: first, Horace's *Odes*, interpreted with the addition of Leonardo's bestiary reading key, and second, Landino's commentary on Dante's *Commedia*, where Horace is reinterpreted.

The first source yields the allegory of the "ship of state"; the second draws on Dante's *navicella*, which Landino turned into an ambivalent figure oscillating between *navis ecclesiae* and *ship of state*. Both texts were well known in the Renaissance, and both passages especially so, making them ideal references for a sophisticated allegory. At first glance, the coexistence of two perfectly fitting readings may seem puzzling. Yet in the multi-layered framework of Renaissance allegory, such overlapping interpretations were likely intentional.

Turning to the first reading through Horace, this interpretation alone would fall short on the remarkable complex allegorical setting, and must be read through the reading key of Leonardo's bestiary. On the first interpretive layer, using Leonardo's bestiary, the wolf symbolizes Correction, including self-correction and moderation (*Bestiary* no. 12), while the eagle sym-

bolizes Liberality (*Bestiary* no. 11)—a caring leader who provides for his kind but expects loyalty in return. In this light, the eagle represents a careful ruler navigating with moderation and correction, a plausible political allegory. Horace sharpens this further.[79] In his *Odes*, the eagle and wolf appear repeatedly in opposition: the eagle symbolizes order and kingship, the wolf chaos and threat (*Odes* 3.6; 4.4). Elsewhere, the wolf explicitly stands for Rome as the nurturing *lupa* of Romulus and Remus, while the eagle represents the Roman legions or divine protection over Rome (*Odes* 3.6; 4.4). Most significant is the famous metaphor of the "ship of state" (*O navis, referent in mare te novi fluctus*, *Odes* 1.14), one of the best-known political allegories in Latin poetry.[80] Writing in the Augustan age, Horace described Rome as a storm-tossed ship, damaged and in peril, urging it to seek calm waters instead of venturing again into dangerous seas. The battered ship, with mast and sail broken, is rescued by a Pontic spruce tree, an image of support and stability.

Placed in the context of 1494–1495, when Leonardo was composing his *Bestiary*, the allegory could reflect Pope Alexander VI as leader of the Papal States, with Charles VIII as his challenger. Clayton already highlighted Ludovico Sforza's ties to both figures.[81] The drawing can thus be read as an allegory of the papacy, but also more broadly as a *ship of state* allegory. The wolf may be interpreted as the populace, while the eagle becomes the pope—ruler both of the earthly Church and of Christianity as a whole. Alexander VI, an earthly-minded pope, might have found the image of the ruling eagle appropriate. To express the holiness of this imperial-like "eagle", Leonardo gave him with a radiant wreath.

Combining Horace's "ship of state" with the bestiary's moral reading, the allegory competes with ancient lyric poetry, celebrating the ruler who dominates chaos and threat while embodying moderation and correction. The navigating system that his caring ruler is adjusting, brings moderation and correction to chaos and threat, a threat which either could have taken place, or was about to take place through the behavior of the French king. Therefore, the caring ruler is navigating the ship of the state through turbulent waters, albeit in his direction.[82] The older *navis ecclesiae* reading made the wolf Pope or Peter; the "ship of

state" reading turns the wolf into the populace and the eagle into the pope, ruler of both earth and Church. One might ask why no explicitly Christian symbols appear in the drawing. As I have argued elsewhere,[83] their absence reflects a defining feature of Leonardo's allegorical method: the missing religious symbolism belongs to the essence of Leonardo's reading key in his bestiary.

However, since this allegory of Leonardo is particularly complex, another line of interpretation appears equally convincing. We must again ask whether a parallel reading was intended as a challenge for the spectator. It is possible to read the *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle* entirely through the lens of Landino's Dante commentary. Dante himself already provides many points of comparison, which Landino develops further by condensing scattered passages into a more unified narrative.

In Dante's *Commedia*, the wolf and the eagle both serve as animal allegories. The wolf stands for papal avarice and the corruption of the Church (*Inferno* I.49–51), while the eagle symbolizes imperial justice (*Paradiso* VI.1–9). Dante links these allegories to contemporary figures—Pope Boniface VIII (d. 1303) and Emperor Henry VII (d. 1313)—and elsewhere denounces papal corruption and the Church's enslavement to avarice (*Inferno* XIX). While Dante himself does not explicitly connect the wolf with the ship allegory, later commentators such as Landino did so, most notably in his treatment of *Purgatorio* XXXII–XXXIII. In this famous passage, Dante presents the "navicella della Chiesa," the ship of the Church.[84] The ship, with its mast interpreted as the Cross, becomes the guiding vehicle of the Church. Landino expands Dante's allegory in a different direction. He introduces the tree of knowledge (*albero della scientia*) as the driving force of the ship (*Purgatorio* XXXII.1–9). [85] This tree (the mast), described as reaching from the "boschi d'India," is extraordinarily high because it symbolizes obedience reaching toward the knowledge of God (*Purgatorio* XXXII.28–42). As the steering device of the ecclesiastical vehicle (*carro*), the tree of obedience directs the ship (*Purgatorio* XXXII.43–51). For Landino, the Church as vehicle can only be guided by virtue (*Purgatorio* XXXII.10–27).

Landino's commentary thus provides all the necessary elements found in Leonardo's drawing. Alongside the ship and tree, Landino also elaborates on the wolf and the eagle. The wolf, drawn from *Inferno* I (vv. 49–60, 88–111), is interpreted as an allegory of the Roman Curia and its avarice—so destructive it almost sinks the ship of the Church.[86] The eagle, drawn from *Purgatorio* XXXII and *Paradiso* VI (Paradiso VI.1-9), represents the Roman Empire and divine justice. Landino adds that the eagle comes from the higher and prosperous regions of the world, and may also symbolize *superbia* and austerity. As Rome was the head of the earthly empire, the eagle further stood for the emperors, and even for Jupiter (*Purgatorio* XXXII.94–123). In the allegory of the vehicle, however, Landino identifies false Christians—heretics—occupying the Church's ship, though ultimately the Church triumphs over them (*Purgatorio* XXXI.109–123). He contrasts Peter, who rightly steered the Church with his virtues (*Purgatorio* XXXII.124–141), with Pope Boniface VIII, who corrupted the apostolic vehicle by aligning too closely with the French king. Boniface, like the wolf of the *selva oscura*, led the ship astray into the woods (*Purgatorio* XXXII.142–160).[87]

Landino's interpretation is crucial for Leonardo's drawing because it explicitly connects the ship and its mast with the tree of divine law and knowledge—whereas in Dante, the mast is identified with the Cross. Likewise, Landino redefines the wolf not only as avarice in general but as the Roman Curia in particular, while strengthening the eagle as an allegory of the Empire, ordained by God. Applied to Leonardo's drawing, this reading yields a more negative interpretation than the Horatian one. The wolf, allegory of papal greed and curial corruption, threatens to destroy the Church. Its survival depends entirely on its mast, reimagined here as the tree of divine law and knowledge. The eagle, crowned with a radiant wreath, stands for God's Empire, the true destination of the ship still tossed on turbulent waters. Landino, as a humanist commentator on Horace[88] as well as on Dante, already fused the *navis ecclesiae* with Horace's "ship of state." The clearest sign of this layering is the tree on the ship, which functions both as mast and as moral guide. While Dante opened the possibility of applying these allegories to contemporary ecclesiastical

and political leaders, Leonardo underscored the contemporary political message even more directly.

Thus the drawing may be read convincingly through either Horace or Landino. Leonardo was familiar with both texts, making it impossible to decide definitively on a single source. Both Christian-moral and political-moral readings are plausible. Yet the deliberate overlapping of meanings was likely intentional: an allegory designed to support its message from multiple angles. As in the *Allegories of Envy* and the *Mirror of Virtue*, Leonardo employed multi-layered interpretation as an expressive strategy—here reaching its climax in the *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle*.

Addressing the senses of scripture through allegorical layering

Two interesting yet distinct insights emerge from comparing Botticelli's and Leonardo's allegories: the layering of different structures of meaning, modeled on the Senses of Scripture, and the inclusion of satire.

Botticelli's major painted allegories were mostly created as wedding commissions, serving Florentine humanism by referencing well-known authors of classical mythology. His immediate sources were usually literary—most often Landino's Dante commentary, itself a compendium of knowledge drawn from classical authors such as Ovid, Vergil, Horace and sometimes contemporaries like Ficino. The subjects he depicted were familiar to educated viewers, though the exact textual source was not always obvious, especially in complex works like the *Primavera*.

Leonardo's case is different. He built his allegories on a more accessible foundation, drawing from elementary texts such as the *Fior di virtù*, fables, bestiaries, and the *Physiologus*. These provided a widely shared knowledge base. Yet when Leonardo added a secondary allegorical level, interpretation became more demanding. He combined this basic school literature with elements of higher humanist culture and satirical traditions, though usually without quoting precise passages. The one major exception is the *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle*, which can be tied directly to Horace and Landino. Botticelli, by

contrast, rarely employed animal symbolism and never drew on elementary educational texts. For him, such sources may have seemed beneath the status of an established painter celebrated as a new Apelles. Leonardo, though similarly honored with that title, did not disdain basic literature. On the contrary, he used it as a starting point, layering more complex allegorical inventions on top—intellectual *capricci* or *invenzioni* designed to challenge his spectators.

A striking similarity between the two artists is that their allegories often allow both poetic and political readings. This ambivalence was not unusual in literary practice, where a theme could be deliberately approached from multiple angles. Such interpretive plurality derived from the *modus* of the four Senses of Scripture. Since the 12th century, biblical exegesis had employed the *quatuor sensus scripturae*—literal (historical), allegorical (dogmatic), moral (tropological), and anagogical (eschatological).[89] By the 14th century, this framework was applied not only to scripture but also to secular texts. An important precedent is Hugh of Saint Victor, who emphasized historical, allegorical, and moral interpretation. Late medieval didactic texts such as the *Theodolus historiatus* or the *Fior di virtù historiato* adopted similar methods, presenting diverse examples—biblical, historical, scientific—for allegorical reading. At least from the 14th century onwards, the modi of scripture were an established part in lower and higher education. The 14th-century vernacular translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, printed in 1497 by Giovanni Bonsignori, included Giovanni del Virgilio's allegorical commentary (c. 1319), which distinguished between *istoria* (history), *legenda* (Christian exempla), *favola* (poetic fable), and *novella* (narrative invention). Painters, in turn, translated such layered methods into visual form, experimenting with "visual poetry" and "visual commentary."[90]

The Bolognese professor Giovanni del Virgilio corresponded with Dante in Florence, who himself defined the fourfold method (*quadriga*) in the *Convivio* (1304–1307, *Convivio*, book II.1) and again in his letter to Cangrande della Scala (c. 1319).[91] The interesting point of this contact is the use of the allegorical fourfold approach (for example in letter 13). As Took analyses for this letter, Dante uses a variety of meanings (*polysemousness*), where he combines "the literal meaning of the text, the narrative pure and simple"

with various alternatives, like the allegorical meaning, the moral meaning, and the anagogical meaning. And this is applied not only to scripture, but even taking Dante's own *Commedia* as its basis.[92] Dante articulated the fourfold method, giving examples for each step in the *Convivio* (2.1):

> "E a ciò dare a intendere, si vuol sapere che le scritture si possono intendere e deonsi esponere massimamente per quattro sensi. L'uno si chiama litterale (e questo è quello che non va oltre a ciò che suona la parola fittizia, si come ne le favole dei poeti. L'altro si chiama allegorico) e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna: sì come quando dice Ovidio che Orfeo facea con la cetera mansuete le fiere, e li arbori e le pietre a sé muovere; che vuol dire c(ome) lo savio uomo con lo strumento de la sua voce faccia mansuescere e umilare li crudeli cuori, e faccia muovere a la sua volontade coloro che non hanno vita di scienza e d'arte, e coloro che non hanno vita ragionevole alcuna sono quasi come pietre. … Lo terzo senso si chiama morale, e questo è quello che li lettori deono intentamente andare appostando per le scritture, ad utilitade di loro e di loro diesce(n)ti; sì come appostare si può ne lo Evangelio, quando Cristo salio lo monte per transfigurarsi … in che moralmente si può intendere che a le secretissime cose noi dovemo avere poca compagnia. Lo quarto senso si chiama anagogico, cioè sovrasenso; e questo è quando spiritualmente si spone una scrittura, la quale, ancora (sia vera) eziandio nel senso litterale, per le cose significate significa de le superne cose de l'etternal gloria, sì come vedere si può in quello canto del Profeta… ." (Convivio 2.1)[93]

Dante outlined the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical levels, with the anagogical (*sovrasenso*) pointing to eternal glory. He insisted on the priority of the literal sense, but nonetheless applied the full range even to his own *Commedia*.[94] For example, Boniface VIII is accused of simony (*literal*), warned against corruption (*moral*), shown as enslaving the Church to avarice (*allegorical*), and linked to the Church's eschatological crisis before purification (*anagogical*, *Inferno* XIX). Henry VII, by contrast, appears as a historical ruler (*literal*), divinely ordained (*allegorical*), model of just kingship (*moral*), and providential restorer of the empire (*anagogical*, *Paradiso* XXX). Dante's animal allegories

—wolf for papal avarice (*Inferno* I.49–51), eagle for imperial justice (*Paradiso* VI.1–9)—were taken up by later commentators and humanists such as Landino.

By the late 15th century, this layered method had become a standard hermeneutic practice. Landino, a professor for grammar and literature, in his proem XII to the Dante commentary, explicitly affirms the *quatuor sensus scripturae*. Otherwise, humanists like Landino sometimes reduced the scheme to three: literal/historical (the narrative), moral/civic (lesson), and allegorical/philosophical (often Neoplatonic or Christian). Landino explains that beyond the natural sense, one may find allegorical, tropological, and anagogical senses, all closely related (proem XII).[95] After having elaborated on the origin of poesy and acknowledged the recognition of *historia* and that things can be illustrated skillfully with words and sentences, even better so if with divine help, he explains the essence of the interpreter (proem XII). There would be the natural sense, but likewise the allegorical, tropological and anagogical. All these three later senses were close to each other and used allegorical.[96] Later on, he gives an example for Virgilio and his task in the narrative, being a compagnon in the Inferno and Purgatorio, but not in the Paradiso, and that this would be explained in "senso allegorico" under different guises and interpretations.[97] This approach as exemplified in his prologue is then elaborated under different topics throughout his commentary, with different topics, enriched with a variation of different interpretive *modi*. Throughout his commentary, he applies this method to Dante's narrative, enriching each topic with varied interpretive modes. For instance, in *Inferno* I, he interprets the wolf on four levels: literal (the beast obstructing Dante), moral (avarice), historical (the Roman Curia), and anagogical (the corruption threatening the Church's mission).[98]

This tradition of layered interpretation is precisely what Botticelli and Leonardo adapted. Botticelli usually began with literary sources, while Leonardo started with fables, satire, or elementary texts. Both, however, added a historical or political note drawn from contemporary society—often targeting flawed leaders. At times, satire sharpened the message. Their practice parallels the exegetical and humanist commentaries of their day, often shaped

by university pedagogies (but also adopted to lower educative texts). As friends of humanists and professors such as Landino and Vespucci, both painters were familiar with these structures. When composing allegories, they were not only seeking literary sources but also literary structures for building complex compositions—structures that allowed them to stake their claim as true heirs of Apelles.

This interpretation of layered meaning does not justify combining arbitrary readings, but rather demonstrates how focused, multi-faceted allegorical layering was directly inspired by literary practice. Ultimately, this approach adds a new key to the question of the *paragone* between painting and literature: both artists and *literati* sought equally demanding ways to express profound ideas, whether through words or through images in hermeneutical steps.

Addressing layers of satire

One of the most interesting layers is the reference to the genre of satire, used as a subtle and complex literary allusion. Satire functions very differently in Botticelli and Leonardo. When Botticelli incorporated satire, he did so by deliberately choosing a specific literary source. His two later allegories, *Mars and Venus* and the *Calumny*, refer to Lucian, the ancient comic satirist much admired in Renaissance humanism. While the source of the *Calumny* is evident to humanistically inclined Florentine patrons, in *Mars and Venus* he added little satyrs to signal the literary reference to viewers. That satyrs had little to do with ancient satirical literature was not widely known in Renaissance Florence. Following excavations in Rome, grotesques and satyrs were often thought to be part of satirical stories, although "grotesque" and "satire" had different meanings in antiquity.[99] Not as a misinterpretation but as a reflection of literary interests, satirical literature became a new source for Botticelli. On top of stories derived from satire, Botticelli layered his own satirical touches: the frivolously recumbent Mars teased by the satyrs in *Mars and Venus*, and, in the *Calumny*, an allusion to Savonarola as a false leader. The first is a witty, literature-inspired joke suitable for a wedding, sliding between parody and satire; the second is a

Fig. 9: Leonardo da Vinci, *Grotesque caricature heads of five men and two women*, London, British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence).

pointed political accusation of moral and social misconduct—the essence of satire, especially Menippean satire. Lucian, one of the most important representatives of Menippean satire,[100] informs both Botticelli and Leonardo.

Leonardo, by contrast, only rarely started from direct satirical sources and generally avoided depicting specific satirical texts. His broad knowledge of satire is evident in numerous drawings, yet his most incisive satirical wit appears only in those drawings. These sheets were likely intended for private entertainment at court and elsewhere during his Milanese years. Leonardo did not use satirical approaches in his allegorical presentation drawings (such as the *Madonna with Child, Saint Anne and the Lamb*, the *Mirror of Virtue*, and the *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle*), but he did deploy them in witty,

sarcastic, or moral sketches of human behavior and expression.

One vehicle for this taste for satire and parody were his so-called grotesque heads—Leonardo called them "visi mostruosi" or "teste bizzarre"—which he sketched with particular intensity in Milan between the late 1480s and mid-1490s, though his interest was lifelong (fig. 9).[101] Martin Kemp notes that the countless grotesque heads in Leonardo's oeuvre explore the extremes of physiognomy and the character of the soul (e.g., Windsor Castle, RL 12495, ca. 1493; RL 12490).[102] Although the *teste bizzarre* begin as studies of nature—including states of mind and age—the depictions exceed nature's limits and tip into parody. As in his more bizarre allegories, Leonardo here satirizes everyday states and events. This culminates in grotesque couples and parodies of old women and old brides. Pedretti already identified one such couple as an old bride and her *paranymph*, waiting for the groom (Windsor RL 12449, ca. 1495).[103] The old woman's facial features—hardly those of a bride—and her attire, reminiscent of Florentine dress for young women, display Leonardo's ingenuity and appetite for sarcastic parody. His several sketches for the *Allegory on Envy*, while tinged with parody, deliver ethical critique of human violence, pride, and hypocrisy in an ironic, reflective manner—hallmarks of ancient satire.

Leonardo's wit and satire stand close to authors and texts such as Lucian, Horace's and Juvenal's *Satires*, Petronius' *Satyrica*, and Martial's *Epigrams*, even if he does not copy them directly. His direction—satirical wit and *persiflage* grounded in common moral character studies—aligns especially with Horace, who writes: "Furthermore, not to skim over the subject with a laugh like a writer of witticisms—and yet what is to prevent one from telling truth as he laughs, …".[104] Horace's stories treat envy and fraud, laughter, and old and ugly women in various modes—exactly the terrain of Leonardo's little tales and character heads, both seeking to transmit truth and moral insight through entertaining narration.[105] Horace – an author well-known to Leonardo – as well as Lucian and Apuleius, fuses satire with grotesque hybrid figures and plays with metamorphosis—very much as Leonardo does visually.[106]

Compared with Botticelli and most Renaissance painters, Leonardo explores a wider range of literary expressions and weaves them into his texts and images. Though best known as artist and scientist, his notebooks and sketches contain observations, riddles, fables, and jokes that blend satire's moral bite with the wit of *facezie*. He mixes satire, parody, and *facezia* in a subtle, often indirect, embedded way. Leonardo was clearly influenced by the tradition of *facezie* (e.g., Poggio Bracciolini, whose works he owned), especially in short anecdotes and jokes—his own *facetiae*—and in humorous sketches. Satire, parody, and *facezia* are distinct yet overlapping literary forms in the Italian Renaissance. In his writings, Leonardo fused satire, parody, and *facezia*, joining scientific observation, moral critique, and witty narrative in short forms; in his sketches, the three sometimes overlap, at other times remain more distinct. In general, satire criticizes or mocks vices—from folly to corruption—through bitter or ironic notes (as in Horace, Juvenal, Lucian), addressing an educated audience attuned to morals or politics. Parody mimics or mocks with humor for broader or narrower audiences. *Facezie* are late medieval and Renaissance anecdotes for wider entertainment, marked by wit and humor (as in Boccaccio and Poggio Bracciolini). In allegory, satire is usually better suited for embedding meaning in metaphor, with parody occasionally serving symbolic critique. Botticelli deals mainly with satire in this narrower sense; Leonardo shows a feel for all three. With his grotesque heads and monstrous bodies he alludes to a blend of ancient grotesque literature and medieval *facezie*, while his allegories on envy point more directly to classical satire.

One specific vein of satire from which both Botticelli and Leonardo seem to draw is Menippean satire—an intellectually pointed mode practiced by an elite, characterized by mixing genres through the combination of prose and verse.[107] Blanchard observes: "Menippean satire is a scholar's literature, replete with the sort of inside jokes that can only be understood within a community of shared knowledge—one needs to know Homer and its style to appreciate a Lucianic parody of his work—and yet it also serves to criticize self-reflectively the very community it presupposes."[108] While Botticelli's sharpest satirical expres-

sion appears only occasionally (e.g., the *Primavera*), Menippean traits become central to Leonardo's mocking allegorical sketches. Whether for his own pleasure or, more likely, for courtly entertainment, they suit Menippean satire translated into visual allegory. Blanchard further characterizes its purpose: "… it was to the Menippean satire that the humanist scholars turned for both respite and reflection upon the immense program that humanism represents. Menippean satire is a genre both for and about scholars; it is an immensely learned form that is at the same time paradoxically anti-intellectual. If its master of ceremonies is the humanist as wise fool, its audience is a learned community whose members need to be reminded … of the limits of human understanding."[109] The essence of Menippean satire also fits Leonardo's grotesque heads and monstrous bodies, where satire and the grotesque meet and overlap. Though rooted in learned culture, its expression is often deliberately anti-intellectual, socially pointed, or monstrously witty—precisely the hybrid the Renaissance embraced in overlapping forms.[110] Menippean strategies ultimately inspired early Renaissance *facezie* and invectives; for example, Lucianic irony found its way into Poggio Bracciolini's *Invectives*.[111] This helps explain why Menippean satire mattered to the Renaissance and why figures like Leonardo found it an apt vehicle for manifold, intersecting modes of mockery and irony.

Leonardo may also have been inspired by Renaissance adaptations of Menippean satire, in which humanists produced texts aligned with the ancient tradition and carried its spirit into other literary categories. Two figures in Milan and Bologna are exemplary. Pier Candido Decembrio (ca. 1399–1477), secretary and chancellor to the Visconti and Sforza, translated classical texts and wrote biographies—e.g., of Francesco Sforza—peppered with subtle satirical critique (Ciceronian satire). Decembrio may have been the model for Leonardo how to craft witty, pointed stories with a sharp eye on political leaders—precisely what Leonardo attempted in the *Allegories of Envy*. The Milanese court humanist—at times imprisoned, at times acclaimed—composed the lives of Filippo Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza with detail, wit, rivalry, and ambiguity. While a literal link cannot be proved, these engaging snapshots of princely behavior—politi-

cally and personally barbed—could have caught Leonardo's interest upon his arrival in Milan.[112] A similar case is Antonio Urceo (Codro) (1446–1500), professor of grammar and rhetoric in Bologna, who delighted in teaching and entertaining a broad public. He wrote comic Latin plays and dialogues in a mock-scholarly or parodic style, boasting of his ability to amuse both the illustrious and the semi-literate with fables of human vicissitudes.[113] For Urceo, the great ancient poets, historians, and figures were material for fables.[114] Decembrio and Urceo exemplify humanists who bridged university, court, and public, embracing high and low and a variety of genres to entertain intellectual enthusiasts at all levels. Both fit Menippean satire and help explain the nature of satire and entertainment at the end of the 15th century, when satire began to thrive more broadly. It may not be mere coincidence that Urceo lectured in Bologna in 1494 on Lucian and Apuleius, on metamorphosis and satire, explaining that satire could be called *fabula*.[115] This timing overlaps with many of Leonardo's more pointedly satirical sketches and with Botticelli's *Calumny*. Satire—Menippean forms included—circulated throughout the 15th century; Leon Battista Alberti's *Momus* and *Intercenales* (both 1440s) are telling examples.[116] As noted above, satirical literature, combined with knowledge of excavated ancient visual examples, boosted interest in the genre explicitly at the end of the 15th century..

Conclusion

Both Leonardo and Botticelli were highly literary-inspired artists, shaped by civic and courtly humanism in flourishing centers such as Florence and Milan.[117] With different temperaments and approaches, they engaged the tension between literature and art from different angles, though often responding to similar cues. Developing stories into complex narratives and interpretations was the task of both literary commentators and visual commentators, and for both, allegory was the preferred medium. Interpreters on either side used the technique of layering content and interpretive strands. Allegory thus became a mode of unfolding meaning. As Grendler observes: "The poet penetrated divine mysteries. Medieval scholars used allegory, the

basis of most of their poetical interpretation, to unlock poetry's wisdom."[118]

Artists like Leonardo and Botticelli addressed the *paragone* debate through the Senses of Scripture and through satire. Both artists demonstrated that their means were no less complex than those of the *literati*. In this sense, their work contributed directly to the broader debate on the *paragone* of the arts.[119] This debate should not be understood as a mere controversy, since both Botticelli and Leonardo were closely connected with *literati*, especially the Florentine teachers Cristoforo Landino and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci.[120] The artists' subtle and pointed approaches added to what were at times friendly, at times challenging confrontations between art and letters. Their turn to satire in the later 1480s further indicates a lively exchange between *literati* and artists, a development that has received little attention in scholarship. Leonardo, in particular, was well aware of different strands of satirical and parodic expression, finding the Menippean form most useful because it blended high and low registers, and combined satire, grotesque, and *facezie*. Unlike many Florentines who conflated grotesques with satire after Roman excavations, Leonardo understood satire in its ancient sense and exploited that tradition.

Leonardo's presentation drawings instead—the *Madonna with Child, Saint Anne and the Lamb*, the *Mirror of Virtue*, and the *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle*—are especially rich in allegorical layering. If the scholarly label "presentation drawing" is taken seriously, these sheets were designed to test whether viewers could perceive the multiple layers, functioning as intellectual games and touchstones. Their structures work very much as Dante and Landino described them.

For Dante, allegory was one of the leading topics he wished to transmit, offering examples useful for both literary and artistic interpreters. Allegory required first a literal foundation, followed by allegorical, moral, and anagogical layers. This was the hermeneutic method late medieval commentators used to unravel meaning in both literature and science. Botticelli's *Calumny* illustrates this structure. The literal sense is given by Lucian's narrative (later retold by Landino): each figure has its place in the story. The allegorical

sense reveals the judge with donkey ears like Midas making the wrong decision, while Ignorance and Suspicion support Calumny. The moral sense is represented by Penitence, a double figure that simultaneously embodies virtue and Botticelli's allusion to Savonarola, demanding unjustified penance. Venus on the left signals the anagogical sense, invoking divine guidance. This scheme can also be reduced to Landino's threefold model: the Lucianic story being the literal/historical background, the virtues and vices as the moral aspect, the Platonic and Christian connotations as an allegorical/philosophical layer, with the Venus *pudica* as a call for God's counsel. Botticelli's wedding pieces operate less elaborately, often on a threefold scheme: mythological figures (allegorical/philosophical), the couple (literal/historical), and contemporary political leaders (civic/moral). The categories could overlap, but usually three interpretive levels suffice. As mentioned above, there was no fix canon for the allegorical senses, and painters sometimes had to adapt to their stories.[121]

Leonardo's *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle* can likewise be read through a layered structure. The literal sense comes from Horace's "Ship of the State" or Landino's adaptation of Dante's *navicella*. The allegorical meaning is either the *navis ecclesiae* or the Roman state, while the moral sense depends on whether the leaders are identified as Boniface VIII, Alexander VI, Henry VII, or Charles VIII. The allegorical/philosophical dimension is expressed through the wolf and eagle, while a historical-political allegory may serve as an additional literal or even an anagogical "hidden truth." Similarly, in the *Mirror of Virtue*, the literal sense is provided by the animals identified through Leonardo's bestiary key; the moral sense is tied to their actions; the allegorical/philosophical sense emerges in the narrative of virtues and vices, and in a possible addition of a political reading addressing Ludovico Sforza. The *Allegories of Envy* can also be read in this layered way.

Allegorical layers arise whenever allegory becomes part of a narrative, however small—such narratives were often called *fabulae*. Dante and Urceo were important for understanding *fabula*, a form derived from ancient poetry and history, elaborated with alle-

gorical or satirical meaning. This was the basis of most narrative allegories. Layering allegory and satire became one of the most challenging touchstones in comparing artists and *literati*. While Urceo's importance for *fabula* and satire may not have extended far beyond Bologna, three texts remained fundamental for Renaissance artists: Dante's *Convivio*, Bonsignori's commentary on Ovid, and Landino's Dante commentary, which provided the essence of allegorical practice. [122] Satire, as another form of "hidden truth," became one of the most compelling modes of expression.

Endnotes

1. This article has been presented in parts at three conferences: "Allegories in Botticelli and Leonardo and their literary background", Annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, San Juan/Puerto Rico, March 10, 2023; "Leonardo da Vinci and the Fior di Virtù", Annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, Chicago, March 22, 2024; "Leonardo's Bestiary as a Reading Key for Moral Allegories", Annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, Boston, March 21, 2025.
2. Symbols and allegories are distinct, yet slightly overlapping categories. See on the definition of symbols and allegories: Lemma "Symbol": "Term used to describe certain types of signs that are designed to extend the realm of representation, particularly so as to incorporate abstract ideas. Though overlapping in function, they are broadly less sophisticated in operation and meaning than allegories, of which they might form elements." (Jean Wirth, *Symbol*, in: *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. by Jane Turner, London 1996, vol. 30, p. 163). Lemma "Allegory": "Term used to describe a method of expressing complex abstract ideas or a work of art composed according to this. An allegory is principally constructed from personifications and symbols, and, though overlapping in function, it is thus more sophisticated in both meaning and operation than either of these." (Willem F. Lash, *Allegory*, in: *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. by Jane Turner, London 1996, vol. 1, p. 651).
3. See on visual commenting: Angela Dressen, *Botticelli's Primavera and contemporary commentaries*, in: *Neoplatonism and Art in the Renaissance: Perspectives and Contexts of a Controversial Alliance*, ed. by Berthold Hub/Sergius Kodera, Toronto 2021, pp. 137-159.
4. See on this: Angela Dressen, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist*, New York

2021, p. 137. See on the poetic form of interpretation in relation to the philosophical-theological discourse and the unravelling of truth: Thomas Leinkauf, *Philosophie des Humanismus und der Renaissance (1350-1600)*, Hamburg 2017, vol. 1, pp. 436-443.

5. Babrius and Phaedrus, *Fables*, translated by Ben Edwin Perry, Cambridge MA 1965, Perotti's appendix nr. 7, p. 381.
6. Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Giorgio Inglese, Milan 1999, pp. 83-86, citation on p. 84.
7. Leonardo, *Trattato della pittura*, ed. by Ettore Camesasca, Vicenza 2000, p. 17 (cap. 18); Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education*, p. 145.
8. Other drawings are of uncertain origin, produced by Botticelli or the workshop: *Minerva*, ca. 1490, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto (preparatory drawing for the re magi 1500-1505); *Pallas Athena*, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe; *Allegory of Abundance*, Sandro Botticelli, 1480–1485, London, British Museum.
9. On the painting see, for example, Alessandro Cecchi, *Botticelli*, Milan 2005, pp. 96-100; Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli*, Munich 2015, pp. 30-32.
10. The two frescoed allegories he produced for a villa of the Tornabuoni, *Venus offering gifts to a young woman accompanied by Three Graces*, and *Lorenzo Tornabuoni with the Seven Liberal Arts* are categories of their own, probably following precise requests from the patron (Louvre, ca. 1480 or 1486).
11. I can only sum up some major interpretive strands. The bibliography is intended as an invitation for further reading.
12. *Camilla and the Centaur* was mentioned in the inventory 1498/99, and *Minerva and the Centaur* in the inventory of 1516, then *Pallas and the Centaur*. See: Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, New York 1989, pp. 146-152; Cristina Acidini Luchinat, *Botticelli mitologie*, Milan 2001, pp. 167-168 (Pallas/Minerva); Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, p. 202 (Pallade che doma il centauro); Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Botticelli's Minerva and the Centaur: Artistic and Metaphysical Conceits*, in: *Cultural and Religious Studies*, April 2020, 8 (4), pp. 187-216. Some authors have pointed out that centaurs and satyrs could be seen as interchangeable in the early Renaissance (Barbara Deimling, *Who tames the Centaur? The identification of Botticelli's Heroine*, in: *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, ed. by Rab Hatfield, Florence 2009, pp. 63-103; Stefano Minarelli, *Il ritorno dell'età dell'oro: Pallade e il Centauro di Botticelli*, Rome 2015, p. 27).
13. The date has been much disputed, but the early 1480s seems plausible: Acidini Luchinat 2001,

Botticelli mitologie, p. 167 (ca. 1485); Hans Körner, *Botticelli*, Köln 2006, p. 283 (late 1480s); Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, p. 140 (1480-1482); Wolfram Roßner and Tobias Roth, *Szenen einer Verschwörung. Sandro Botticellis Minerva und der Kentaur im Kontext der Congiura dei Pazzi*, in: *Wolfenbüttler Renaissance-Mitteilungen*, 38 (2), 2017, pp. 115-143, see p. 143 (early 1480s).
14. Ronald Lightbown 1989, *Sandro Botticelli*, pp.146-152; Lilian Zirpolo, *Botticelli's Primavera. A lesson for the bride*, in: *The expanding discourse*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, Boulder 1992, pp. 100-109; Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli mitologie*, pp. 167-169; Deimling 2009, *Who tames the Centaur?* , p. 72; Rebekah Compton, Catalogue Nr. 1: Pallas and the Centaur, in: *Botticelli and Renaissance Florence. Masterworks from the Uffizi*, ed. by Cecilia Frosinini and Rachel McGarry, Minneapolis 2022, pp. 70-72.
15. Ernst Gombrich, *Botticelli's Mythologies. A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of his circle*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 8, 1945, pp. 7-60, see pp. 50-53. The moral interpretation is following Ficino's letter (beast-senses, man-ratio).
16. John Shearman, *The collections of the younger branch of the Medici*, in: *The Burlington Magazine*, 117, 1975, pp. 12-27; Lightbown 1989, *Botticelli: Life and Work*, pp. 146-152; Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, p. 202; Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli mitologie*, p. 168 (Acidini points to Vergil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno*, and the *Stanze per la giostra* from 1475); Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, pp. 287-289 (moral interpretation along Poliziano's *Stanze per la Giostra*, a poem by Lorenzo de' Medici); De Girolami Cheney 2020, *Botticelli's Minerva and the Centaur*, vol. 8 (4), pp. 187-216 (Minerva interpreted as *Minerva pacifica* and *Minerva pudica*: peace and beauty against warfare, but also as chastity and love, beauty and wisdom).
17. Claudia La Malfa was the first to propose Landino's Dante commentary as a source for the centaur (Claudia La Malfa, *La conoscenza delle cose divine nei commenti di Landino e Botticelli alla Divina Commedia di Dante*, in: *Il sacro nel Rinascimento*. Atti del XII Convegno internazionale, ed. by Luisa Secchi Tarugi, Chianciano-Pienza 2000, pp. 225-240, see p. 229) and Deimling picked up on this proposal, adding also Landino's commentaries on Vergil and on Dante, where Camilla is interpreted as an ancient heroine, a virtuous woman, with both myrtle as a symbol for love, and Minerva-like armor for her military power, that enables her to tame the bestial centaur (Deimling 2009, *Who tames the Centaur?*, pp. 63-103; see also Daniela Alejandra Sbaraglia, "*Sobto divino velame acose". Cristoforo Landino e la "Pallade e il cen-*

tauro" di Sandro Botticelli, in: *Schifanoia*, 42/43, 2012, pp. 295-310; Compton 2022, *Pallas and the Centaur*, pp. 70-72 (Camilla after Landino).

18. André Chastel, *Art et humanisme a Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris 1961, pp. 263-164; Gombrich 1945, *Botticelli's Mythologies*, pp. 50-51 (but arguing against a political allegory); Bernard Berenson, *Italian pictures of the Renaissance, Central Italian and North Italian schools. A list of the principal artists and their works with an index of places*, New York 1968, p. 34; Lightbown 1989, *Botticelli. Life and Work*, pp. 146-152; Horst Bredekamp, *Botticelli, Primavera. Florenz als Garten der Venus*, Frankfurt 1988, p. 84; Sbaraglia 2012, "*Sobto divino velame acose*", pp. 295-310; Acidini Luchinat 2022, *Botticelli*, p. 147 ("allegoria di una pace medicea"); Compton 2022, *Pallas and the Centaur*, pp. 70-72 (Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco as ambassador and his relationship to France, while Chirone conntected with the intellect, deals with moral purposes).

19. Roßner and Roth want to see the painting in connection with the *congiura dei Pazzi* and the fight between the Medici and Pazzi. They refer to the interpretation of the centaurs in Landino's Dante commentary, especially Cacus and the stories of tyranny and public political battles. This political interpretation would be on top of the usual allegorical reading of the painting, concerning the battle of virtue and vices, thus pointing to a political allegory (Roßner/Roth 2017, *Szenen einer Verschwörung,* pp. 115-143, see pp. 132, 138).

20. See Dressen 2017, *From Dante to Landino. Botticelli's Calumny of Apelles and its sources*, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 2017, 59, pp. 324-339; Dressen 2021, *Botticelli's Primavera and contemporary commentaries*, pp. 137-159.

21. On the painting as a wedding gift, see for example: Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, London 1978, vol. 1, pp. 80-81; Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli. Allegorie mitologiche*, pp. 29-38; Cristina Acidini Luchinat, *Botticelli,* Pisa-Ospedaletto 2022, pp. 140-143; Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, p. 148 (1498 in Pal. Medici, but painted for Villa di Castello); Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, pp. 205-220; Ulrich Rehm, "*La Primavera*" von Sandro Botticelli. Annäherungen an ein Bildkonzept im historischen Kontext, in: *Kanon Kunstgeschichte. Einführung in Werke, Methoden und Epochen*, ed. by. Kristin Marek /Martin Schulz, vol. II Neuzeit, Paderborn 2015, pp. 149-169, see p. 163; See on the painting, the summary of research in my article Dressen 2021, *Botticelli's Primavera and contemporary commentaries*, pp. 137-159.

22. See for Ficino and Neoplatonic sources: Gombrich 1945, *Botticelli's Mythologies*, pp. 7–60; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London 1958; Joanne Snow-Smith, *The "Primavera" of Sandro Botticelli: A Neoplatonic Interpretation*, New York 1993; Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli. Allegorie mitologiche*, pp. 29-38; Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 148-161 (Ficino, Poliziano); Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, pp. 205-220 (Seneca, Ficino); Marieke van den Doel, *Ficino en het voorstellingsvermogen, "phantasia" en "imaginatio" in kunst en theorie van de Renaissance*, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 154–176 (Ficino, Apulieus, Plotinus); Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli's Mythological Paintings*, Lanham, MD 1985 (Ficino and Plato); Eugene Lane-Spollen, *Under the Guise of Spring: The Message Hidden in Botticelli's Primavera*, London 2014 (Ficino and Ovid); Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *Botticelli's Primavera. A botanical interpretation*, introduction by Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, Florence 2022, pp. 3-19 (Ficino, Ovid, Poliziano). Martianus Capella: Claudia Villa, *Per una lettura della Primavera, Mercurio retrogrado e la rhetorica nella bottega di Botticelli*, in: *Strumenti critici*, 13, 1998, pp. 1–28. Landino and Ficino: Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli. Allegorie mitologiche*, pp. 29-38; Max Marmor, *From Purgatory to the Primavera. Some observations on Botticelli and Dante*, in: *Artibus et historiae*, 24, 2003, pp. 199–212; Christophe Poncet, *The Judgement of Lorenzo*, in: *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 14 (2), 2008, pp. 535–553; John Dee, *Eclipsed. An overshadowed goddess and the discarded image of Botticelli's Primavera*, in: *Renaissance Studies*, 27 (1), 2013, pp. 4–33. Lucretius: Horst Bredekamp, *Götterdämmerung des Neuplatonismus*, in: *Kritische Berichte*, 14, 1986, pp. 39–48. Late medieval naturalistic tendencies, with influences from Lucretius, Petrach, and Poliziano: Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificient*, Princeton 1992, pp. 50-78.

23. Horst Bredekamp, *Botticelli. La Primavera*, Modena 1996, pp. 33-37; Horst Bredekamp, *Sandro Botticelli. Primavera. Florenz als Garten der Venus*, Berlin 2009, pp. 37-41; Acidini Luchinat 2022, *Botticelli*, pp. 139-143.

24. Dressen 2021, *Botticelli's Primavera and contemporary commentaries*, pp. 137-159.

25. Shearman 1975, *The collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici*, pp. 12-27. Its location was in the Palazzo Medici on Via Larga/Via Cavour at least since 1495, when it appears in the inventories. See Lightbown 1989, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, pp. 120-145; Rehm 2015, "*La Primavera*" von Sandro Botticelli, pp. 161-162; Acidini Luchinat 2022, *Botticelli*, pp. 139-143.

26. Regarding the date, see for example: Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli. Allegorie mitologiche*, pp. 109-114 (1484-85, close to Villa Lemmi frescoes); Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, p. 140 (ca. 1490).

27. For example, Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 219-222 (1484 for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Villa di Castello).

28. For example, Jane C. Long, *Botticelli's Birth of Venus as Wedding Painting*, in: *Aurora*, IX, 2008, pp. 1-26; Acidini Luchinat 2022, *Botticelli*, p. 151.

29. Gombrich 1945, *Botticelli's Mythologies*, pp. 54-56.

30. Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, Chapel Hill/London 2001, pp. 136, 146; Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli. Allegorie mitologiche*, pp. 109-114; Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 219-222; Long 2008, *Botticelli's Birth of Venus as Wedding Painting*, pp. 1-26; Stéphane Toussaint, *Botticelli, Politien et Boccace*, in: *Accademia: Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 2021, XXI (2019), pp. 7-29, see pp. 7-11; Acidini Luchinat 2022, *Botticelli*, pp. 154-155. Another reading prefers Poliziano's *Kupris Anadyomene*, a Greek epigram, which could be read as an *ekphrasis* of the Aphrodite Anadyomene by the ancient painter Apelles, while "instead of reporting what eyes could see, the epigram presents a fantasy in the mind's eye". As Clark points out, the epigram was included in Poliziano's *Opera omnia* printed in 1498 (David L. Clark, *Poliziano's 'Kupris Anadyomene' and Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus'*, in: *Word and image*, 22(4,) 2006, pp. 390-397, see p. 390). Körner refers to Pliny's description of Aphrodite emerging from the see, and Homer's *Hymns* (Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, pp. 250-262).

31. See for the date: Acidini Luchinat 2001, *Botticelli. Allegorie mitologiche*, p. 203 (1482-1483); Dempsey 2001, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, pp. 117-119 (1483); Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 222-226 (1483-1484); Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, pp. 269-270, 273 (ca. 1483); Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, p. 140 (ca. 1487-1488); Marco Paoli, *Botticelli. Venere e Marte. Parodia di un adulterio nella Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Pisa 2017, p. 63 (ca. 1483-1485).

32. Wilhelm Arnold von Bode, *Botticelli*, Berlin 1926, p. 22; Gombrich 1945, B*otticelli's Mythologies*, pp. 48-49. See also David Bellingham, *Aphrodite Deconstructed: Botticelli's Venus and Mars in the National Gallery, London*, in: *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite*, ed. by Amy C. Smith/Sadie Pickup, Leiden 2010, pp. 347-374.

33. Gordon Campbell, *Botticelli's Venus and Mars, Lucretius and Empedocles*, in: *Material world. The intersection of Art, Science, and Nature in Ancient Literature and its Renaissance Reception*, ed. by Guy Hedreen, Leiden 2021, pp. 226-250; Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, pp. 125-129 (Lucretius, *De natura rerum*, Lucian, Herodutus, *Alexander and Roxane*); Cristina Acidini Luchinat, *Botticelli*, Pisa-Ospedaletto 2022, p. 161.

34. David L. Clark, *Botticelli's Venus and Mars and other apotropaic art for Tuscan Bedrooms*, in: *Aurora*, 7, 2007, p. 1, pp. 1-18 (literary source: Synesius, *On Dreams*, translated by Marsilio Ficino from Greek to Latin. Pan blowing the conch, Mars in between using his armor or letting putti playing with his armor in a sexually charged game.). Venus and Love interpreted by Cheney and Bellingham as following Ficino's three types of love, divine, human and bestial (Cheney 1985, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism*, p. 23; David Bellingham, *Aphrodite Deconstructed: Botticelli's Venus and Mars in the National Gallery, London*, in: *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite*, ed. by Amy C. Smith and Sadie Pickup, Leiden 2010, pp. 347-374, see p. 367.

35. Lucian. *How to Write History. The Dipsads. Saturnalia. Herodotus or Aetion. Zeuxis or Antiochus. A Slip of the Tongue in Greeting. Apology for the "Salaried Posts in Great Houses." Harmonides. A Conversation with Hesiod. The Scythian or The Consul. Hermotimus or Concerning the Sects. To One Who Said "You're a Prometheus in Words." The Ship or The* Wishes, translated by K. Kilburn. Loeb Classical Library 430, Cambridge, MA 1959, vol. VI, pp. 146-147, see Lucian, *Herodotus or Aëtion* 7.2–7.3, LCL 430:146-147.

36. Gombrich 1945, *Botticelli's Mythologies*, pp. 48-49; Lightbown 1989, *Botticelli: Life and Work*, pp. 164-170; Dempsey 2001, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, pp. 119-221, 140 (through Poliziano, also Lucretius); Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 222-226 (1483-84, for Vespucci.); Bellingham 2010, *Aphrodite Deconstructed*, pp. 347-374; Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, pp. 125-129; Giacomo Montanari, *The Hero of Two Worlds. Politics, Archeology and Passion for the Antique in the 'Cultural Mediation' of Cyriac of Ancona Between East and West, With a Note on the Birth of Venus by Botticelli*, in: *Cultures and Practices of Coexistence from the Thirteenth through the Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. by Marco Folin/Antonio Musarra, New York 2020, pp. 165-186, see p. 169; Acidini Luchinat 2022, *Botticelli*, p. 160. Following Toussaint, the source is a passage taken from Boccaccio's *Decamerone* (25, canzonetta del nicchio), a source he had also taken for the *Nastagio degli Onesti* painting (Stéphane Toussaint, *Botticelli, Politien et Boccace*, in: *Accademia: Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin*, 2021, XXI (2019), pp. 7-29, see pp. 22-26). Stéphane Toussaint also sees a satirical source, rather after the *Satires* of Juvenal, and refers to a painted manuscript that would pre-date Botticelli's painting. The intention of the

painting was striving into a satirical burlesque and entertaining work (Stéphane Toussaint, *Le songe de Botticelli*, Paris 2022, p. 15).

37. In my article on Botticelli's *Calumny* I had given the date 1482 to search a proximity to Landino's publication on Dante's *Comedy* (Dressen 2017, *From Dante to Landino*, pp. 324-339). Admittedly, the classicizing architecture with the large arch would suggest a later date, which I am following here. Postponing the date of execution does not put in question the literary sources, which I had elaborated in my article. I adhere to the more recently discussed postponed dating of the panel to the mid-1490s: Herbert Horne, *Sandro Botticelli*, London 1908 (1494); Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, p. 346 (1497); Michel Feuillet, *Botticelli et Savonarole. L'humanisme à l'épreuve du feu*, Paris 2010, p. 98 (1497); Bertrand Prévost, *Botticelli: Le manège allégorique*, 2011, p. 33 (1497); Harald Mielsch, *Die Verleumdung des Apelles. Ein frühhellenistisches Gemälde?*, Paderborn 2012, p. 5 (around 1495); Fosca Mariani Zini, *La calomnie. Un philosophème humaniste*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2015, p. 85 (after 1492); Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, Nr. 67 (ca. 1491-1495). For a summary of the discussion regarding the date see for example Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, p. 250.

38. See for literature in favor of Alberti: Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli, Painter of Florence*, Princeton 1980 (London 1908), pp. 257–259; Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York 1972, p. 158; Dominique Thiebaut, *Botticelli*, Cologne 1992, p. 136; Fosca Mariani Zini, *La calunnia della tradizione: a proposito di un quadro di Botticelli*, in: *La polifonia estetica: specificità e raccordi*, conference proceedings Salerno 1995, ed. by Massimo Venturi Ferriolo, Milan 1996, pp. 71–87; Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 302–306; Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, p. 346; Michel Feuillet, *Botticelli et Savonarole: l'humanisme à l'épreuve du feu*, Paris 2010, p. 98; Bertrand Prévost, *Botticelli: le manège allégorique*, Paris 2011, pp. 33–40; Mariani Zini 2015, *La calomnie*, p. 79.

39. Dressen 2017, *From Dante to Landino*, pp. 324-339. My interpretation has been considered, for example, by: Sara Agnoletto, Monica Centanni, *La Calunnia di Botticelli: politica, vizi e virtù civili a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Rome 2023, p. 15.

40. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors & architects*, ed. Gaston Du C. de Vere, London 1912-1914, vol. 3, p. 251. The following authors recognize a pietistic influence by Savonarola on Botticelli and see the painting influenced by the friar: Eugène Müntz, *Histoire de l'art pendant la renaissance*, Paris 1889-1895, vol. 2, 1891, pp. 26ff; Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism: a series of lectures*, London/New York 1893; Herbert Percy Horne, *Botticelli: painter of Florence*, Princeton 1980; Gunnar Lötstam, *Die Verleumdung des Apelles von Sandro Botticelli*, in: *Kunstgeschichtliche Studien zur Florentiner Renaissance*, 1, 1980, pp. 374-393; Michel Feuillet, *Botticelli et Savonarole. L'humanisme à l'épreuve du feu*, Paris 2010, p. 97. Körner instead notices that it is impossible to say if the painting was produced for or against Savonarola (Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, p. 348).

41. "Although it is widely reported that the Florentine artist Sandro Botticelli burned several of his paintings based on classical mythology in the great Florentine bonfire of 1497, the historical record on this is not clear. According to the art historian Giorgio Vasari, Botticelli was a partisan of Savonarola […]. Writing several centuries later, Orestes Brownson, an apologist for Savonarola, mentions artwork only by Fra Bartolomeo, Lorenzo di Credi, and "many other painters", along with "several antique statues". (Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The elect nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, Oxford 1994, p. 95). See also: Orestes Brownson, *Savonarola: his Contest with Paganism*, in: *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, April, 1851; Agnoletto/Centanni 2023, *La Calunnia di Botticelli*, p. 72.

42. Eugenio Garin, *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, Milan 1952, pp. 37-39; Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The elect nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*, Oxford 1994, p. 95. See also Dall'Aglio: "Moreover, the Florentine intellectuals of Ficino's circle who had orbited around Lorenzo did not hesitate to line up beside Savonarola. Personalities such as Ugolino Verino, Giovanni Nesi, Domenico and Girolamo Benivieni, Bartolomeo Della Fonte, not to mention Marsilio Ficino himself, can all be traced back to Lorenzo's vibrant cultural milieu. All of them were initially supporters of Savonarola until a series of controversial changes in Florence convinced some of them to distance themselves from the friar. The sympathies of the "Laurentians" for Savonarola grew out of the close connection between the friar's model of anti-tyrannical liberty and the tradition of vita civile (civic life) that Ficino and his circle had borrowed them the humanists of the early fifteenth century." (Stefano Dall'Aglio, *Savonarola and Savonarolism*, Toronto 2010, p. 23).

43. Polizzotto 1994, *The elect nation*, pp. 20, 27-28.

44. On the artistic market during this period see Damian Dombrowski, *Savonarola und die heiligen Bilder. Ein Problem der Botticelli-Forschung*, in: *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 36, 2009, pp. 77-115.

45. Chastel, Dombrowski and Debenedetti argue in proposing a change of style on political grounds and not as a religious manifestation, as the neoplatonic concept of beauty was more difficult to sell in Savonarolan times (see Chastel 1961, *Art et humanisme a Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, pp. 393-400; Dombrowski 2009, *Savonarola und die heiligen Bilder*, pp. 77-115; Ana Debenedetti, *Botticelli: between Neoplatonism and Savonarola*, in: *Botticelli reimagined*, ed. by Marc Evans/Stefan Weppelmann, London 2016, pp. 30-33). Dombrowski sees in Botticelli's oeuvre from 1494 onwards an influence of a rather general religious attitude, than one directly driven by Savonarola's maxims. Although Dombrowski notices that Savonarola had few opinions about the visual arts, he tries to gather those few sentences, where an attitude might become clear. On the whole one can say that Savonarola did not have a high estimate of art and artists, as long as they did not follow his ideas in their art didactic and pietistic purposes. However he was also concerned with the neoplatonic theory of beauty, although he did not build on Ficino in this directly. Savonarola's main points were in any case art-critical, esthetical, and theological. On this see Dombrowski 2009, *Savonarola und die heiligen Bilder*, pp. 77-115. On Savonarola's theory of art see also Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, p. 375. Mariani Zini sees Botticelli's *Calumny* as a defense of poetry and art against Savonarola, a different cultural and educative model. She also points to the Calumny topic as a humanist choice to reflect on the good government (Mariani Zini 1998, *Le judgement suspend*, pp. 234-236, 247-248; Mariani Zini 2015, *La calomnie*, p. 105). Also Meltzoff see Botticelli's painting as being directed against Savonarola's government (see Stanley Meltzoff, *Botticelli, Signorelli and Savonarola. 'Theologia Poetica' and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziano*, Florence 1987, pp. 223-225). Nicoletta Pons believes this to be a manifestation of slander against Savonarola (Nicoletta Pons, scheda n. 8.8, in: *Denaro e Bellezza. I banchieri, Botticelli e il rogo delle vanità*, ed. by L. Sebregondi/T. Parks, Florence 2011, p. 246). Luciano Berti sees the *Calumny* as the exact opposite of a "rogo della vanità" (Luciano Berti, *Botticelli. Approccio nel nuovo milenio*, ed. by Federica Chezzi, Florence 2015, pp. 51-52). Cecchi notes that, whereas Botticelli's brother Simone was known to be a follower of Savonarola in 1494, Botticelli himself did not have taken part in any activities in favor of the friar, which were reported through his brother, who would have certainly mentioned him when he mentioned others. Cecchi believes further that Botticelli at a later date, after the death of the friar might have changed ideas, of which be testimony the two paintings *Natività mistica* and *Crocifissione mistica* (Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 291-296). On Botticelli's brother Simone's engagement, see further Ida Giovanni Rao, Paolo Viti, Raffaella Maria Zaccaria, *Savonarola. I processi di Girolamo Savonarola (1498)*, Florence 2001, pp. L, LIV, LXXIX, LXXXII-LXXXIII; Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 340-341.

46. On this see Richard Förster, *Die Verleumdung des Apelles in der Renaissance*, in: *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, VIII, 1887, pp. 29–56, 89–113, see p. 38; Lightbown 1989, *Sandro Botticelli*, pp. 235-237; Horne 1980, *Botticelli, Painter of Florence*, p. 256; David Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles: a study in the humanist tradition*, New Haven 1981, p. 29; Vasari 1912, *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors & architects*, vol. 1, 3:254 (for Segni); Zöllner 2015, *Sandro Botticelli*, p. 250.

47. (Own translation). The king of Egypt Ptolemeus had followed the wrong advice, as Lucian noticed. See on the sheet: Cast 1981, *The Calumny of Apelles*, pp. 48-54. Around 1525 the painter Lorenzo Leonbruno also attached a phrase to his version of Calumny, pointing likewise to Fortune's misgive leading to abuse of power (See Lisa Regan, *If So In Adversity. Mastering Fortune in Lorenzo Leonbruno's Calumny of Apelles*, in: *California Italian Studies* 4/2, 2013, (http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4sm6f944, accessed May 22, 2016), p. 4. Following Cecchi the victim of calumny could also have been Antonio Segni himself (see Cecchi 2005, *Botticelli*, pp. 300).

48. Also Keim reads this person as a Dominican friar (see Frank Keim, *Sandro Botticelli. Die astronomischen Werke*, Hamburg 2015, pp. 44-47). Research has shifted between several possibilities: the painting as a reflection of Piero de' Medicis misrule, an attack by Botticelli as a painter on the situation in Florence under Savonarola. For some tentative explanations see: Rudolph Altrocchi, *The Calumny of Apelles in the Literature of the Quattrocento*, in: *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 36 (3), 1921, pp. 454-491, see p. 491 (against Piero de' Medici); Chastel 1961, *Art et humanisme a Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, p. 35; Ronald W. Lightbown, *Mantegna: With a Complete Catalogue of the Paintings, Drawings and Prints*, Berkeley 1986, pp. 230-237; Cast 1981, *The Calumny of Apelles*, p. 32; Stanley Meltzoff, *Botticelli, Signorelli and Savonarola: 'Theologia Poetica' and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziano*, Florence 1987, p. 114 (against Lorenzo the Magnificent or his son Piero).

49. Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. by Paolo Procaccioli, 4 vol., Rome 2001, see p. 987 (*Inferno* 32), p. 1267 (*Purgatorio* 14); see also p. 377 (*Inferno* 3), p. 416 (*Inferno* 4), p. 783 (*Inferno* 20).

50. Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, pp. 1209, 1212 (*Purgatorio* 10).

51. Körner had suggested Botticelli being his own patron here for this picture as well, as he was talking about himself in the inscription (Körner 2006, Botticelli, p. 376). Dombrowski argued against a Savonarolean influence in this painting, as it would not fullfil Savonarola's requirement for simplicity of access (Dombrowski 2009, *Savonarola und die heiligen Bilder*, p. 99).

52. Dombrowski 2009, *Savonarola und die heiligen Bilder*, pp. 96-98; see also Körner 2006, *Botticelli*, p. 375.

53. Those accuses are documented for the year 1502. See on this: Jacques Mesnil, *Botticelli*, Paris, 1938, p. 298, n.121. In favor of the thesis for sodomy is: Chastel 1961, *Art et humanisme a Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, pp. 383-386.

54. On Ficino's anti-Savonarolean literary production see Thomas Leinkauf, *Ratio translationis – Good reasons why to translate and comment on the Corpus Dionysiacum. Ficino's interpretation of Dionysios the Areopagite*, in: *The Badia Fiesolana. Augustinian and Academic locus amoenus in the Florentine Hills*, ed. by Angela Dressen/Klaus Pietschmann, Berlin 2016, pp. 195-213.

55. See for the historical background and on the apology: Armando Verde/Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola: la vita, le opera*, Venice 1998, pp. 18-20, 67-68.

56. Only the *Birth of Venus* is not quite fitting into this scheme, despite its nature as a wedding piece.

57. See on this: Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist*, pp. 103-104, 281-282.

58. Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist*, pp. 330-337.

59. See on these, for example: Carmen C. Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci rediscovered*, New Haven 2019, vol. 2, pp. 422-429. On the presentation drawing for Antonio Segni (also mentioned by Vasari). "Vasari's Vita of Leonardo also states that Antonio Segni's son, Fabio, gave the Neptune presentation drawing with a rhymed epigram in Latin to Monsignor Giovanni Gaddi (1493-1542)" (p.429) (Frank Zöllner/Johannes Nathan, *Leonardo da Vinci 1452 – 1519*, vol. 2: *The Graphic Work*, Köln 2011, pp. 492-495).

60. See on the topic and its artistic distribution: Paul Boesch, *Aristoteles und Phyllis auf Glasgemälden*, in: *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 9, 1947, pp. 21-30; Raimond van Marle, *Iconographie de l'art profane au Moyen age et à la Renaissance*, Den Haag 1971, pp. 479-496; Marija Javor Briski, *Eine Warnung vor dominanten Frauen oder Bejahung der Sinnenlust? Zur Ambivalenz des 'Aristoteles-und-Phyllis-Motivs' als Tragezeichen im Spiegel deutscher Dichtungen des späten Mittelalters*, in: *Erotik, aus dem Dreck gezogen*, ed. by Johan H. Winkelman/Gerhard Wolf, Amsterdamer Beitäge zur älteren Germanistik, vol. 59, Amsterdam/New York 2004, pp. 37-66, see pp. 37-39; Luisa Crusvar, *Il sapiente vinto da Amore: Fillide cavalca Aristotele: fortuna e suggestioni di un tema iconografico dal Tardo Medioevo all'Epoca Signorile*, in: *Atti e memorie della Società Istriana di Archeologia e Storia Patria*, N.S. 54, 2006, pp. 73-102; Jerzy Miziołek, Virgil in the basket and mounted Aristotle: two "lettuccio" paintings by Giovanni di Buonconsiglio from the Lanckoroński Collection, in: *Iconographica*, vol. 7, 2008, pp. 90-102; Bambach 2019, *Leonardo da Vinci rediscovered*, vol. 1, pp. 123-125.

61. Boesch 1947, *Aristoteles und Phyllis auf Glasgemälden*, pp. 21-30; Giuseppe Liverani, *Un "istoriato" nella maiolica arcaica faentina ed una tarda eco*, in: *Faenza*, 62(1), 1976, pp. 51-56; Cornelia Herrmann, *Der "Gerittene Aristoteles": das Bildmotiv des "Gerittenen Aristoteles" und seine Bedeutung für die Aufrechterhaltung der gesellschaftlichen Ordnung vom Beginn des 13. Jahrhunderts bis um 1500*, Pfaffenweiler 1991.

62. For example, Domenico Cavalca's *Vite dei Santi Padri* and *Lo specchio della Croce*, *Distica Catonis*, *Legenda aurea*. Leonardo owned a *Passione di Christo*, some lives of the saints, and two volumes of the Bible.

63. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini, Florence 1966, vol. 4, p. 29. See also: Edoardo Villata (ed.), *Leonardo da Vinci: I documenti e le testimonianze contemporanee*, Milan 1999, pp. 134-135; Carmen Bambach, *Introduction to Leonardo and his drawings*, in: *Leonardo da Vinci. Master Craftsman*, ed. by Carmen Bambach, New York 2003, pp. 3-30, see p. 19; Joost Keizer, *Leonardo and Allegory*, in: *Oxford Art Journal*, 2012, pp. 433-455; Alexander Nagel, *Allegories of Art-making in Leonardo and Michelangelo*, in: *Die Oberfläche der Zeichen. Zur Hermeneutik visueller Strukturen in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Ulrike Tarnow, Paderborn 2014, pp. 117-127; Carmen Bambach, *Leonardo's S Anne types and the dating of the National Gallery Cartoon*, in: *Leonardo in Britain. Collections and historical reception*, ed. by Juliana Barone/Susanna Avery-Quash, Florence 2019, pp. 59-71.

64. There is one copy each of Pliny, Cecco d'Ascoli and the *Fior di virtù* in both the Codex Atlanticus

and the Codex Madrid (Carlo Vecce, *La biblioteca perduta. I libri di Leonardo*, Rome 2017, pp. 198-200). There is however another important source for a comparison with Leonardo's bestiary that has generally been overlooked. The late 13th century *Libro della natura degli animali* (LdN, also called *Bestiario toscano*) has a rich tradition in a medieval manuscript form of mostly Tuscan origins. Although the textual compilation is not an exact source for Leonardo, it lends itself for multi-layered comparisons. See Angela Dr*essen, Leonardo's bestiary as a reading key for moral all*egorie*s, in:* L' idea, 1 (1), 2024, pp. 7-33.

65. On the topic of visual commenting in Renaissance painting, see: Dressen 2017, *From Dante to Landino*, pp. 336-338; Dressen 2021, *Botticelli's "Primavera" and contemporary commentaries*, pp. 149-150. See on Leonardo's allegorical levels also Filomena Calabrese, *Leonardo's Literary Writings: History, Genre, Philosophy*, PhD thesis, University of Toronto 2011, pp. 66-67. See for a theory on four layers of allegorical reading, which are literal or historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical: Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of beasts: the second-family bestiary, commentary, art, text and translation*, Woodbridge 2006, p. 23;

66. Bambach and Keizer read the sun as a symbol of Truth (Carmen Bambach, cat 67: Allegory with Solar Mirror, in: Carmen Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci: master draftsman*. New Haven 2003, pp. 443-446; Keizer 2012, *Leonardo and Allegory*, p. 444). Zöllner and Nathan have entitled the drawing *Allegory with Animals Fighting and a Man with a Burning-glass* (Zöllner/Nathan 2011, *Leonardo da Vinci*, vol. 2, p. 495).

67. Dressen 2024, *Leonardo's bestiary as a reading key for moral allegories*, pp. 7-33.

68. In the *Physiologus*, the pork-like Ichneumon killing a dragon is compared to Christ killing the devil (*Physiologus*, ed. by Otto Schönberger, Stuttgart 2001, pp. 43-45).

69. Carmen C. Bambach, *Les allegories*, in *Léonard de Vinci. Dessins et manuscrits*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 2003, ed. by Francoise Viatte, Paris 2003, pp. 149-162. Bambach proposed two different readings: as a moral and political allegory addressing Lodovico Sforza, or as a representation of the underworld with an animal fight, aided by *Veritas* holding the sun-mirror to brighten up the darkness. See also Giuseppina Fumagalli, *Leonardo prosatore. Scelta di scritti vinciani, preceduta da un medaglione leonardesco e da una avvertenza alla presente raccolta e corredata di note, glossarietto, appendice sulle allegorie vinciane*, Milan 1915, pp. 360-361, and Claudio Salsi, *Leonardo, il Moro e le allegorie*, in: *Leonardo da Vinci. All'ombra del Moro*, ed. by

Claudio Salsi/Alessia Alberti, Milan 2019, pp. 200-209, see pp. 212-213; Bambach 2003, *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman*, pp. 443-446, no. 67.

70. See for a detailed analysis: Dressen 2024, *Leonardo's Bestiary as a Reading Key for Moral Allegories*, pp. 7-31.

71. Alessandro Nova, *The Kite, Envy & a Memory of Leonardo da Vinci's Childhood*, in: *Coming About … A Festschrift for John Shearman*, ed. by Lars R. Jones/Louisa C. Matthew, Cambridge MA 2001, pp. 381-386.

72. The big bird is interpreted as a "gallaccio", which can be seen as a homonym for Gian Galleazzo Sforza, and also as a heraldic emblem of Bona di Savoia. The two women on the left (Justice and Prudence), would help to defend the "gallaccio" against both the wolves and the satire (Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, Oxford 2006, pp. 151-152; Marco Versiero, *La "scopetta", gli "occhiali" e la "cadrega" di fuoco: immagini sforzesche della Prudenza nelle allegorie politiche di Leonardo*, in: *Iconographica*, 9, 2010, pp. 107-114, see pp. 107-108). For the Milanese political interpretation, see also Claudio Salsi, *Leonardo, il Moro e le allegorie*, in: *Leonardo da Vinci. All'ombra del Moro*, ed. by Claudio Salsi/Alessia Alberti, Milan 2019, pp. 200-209, see pp. 201-202 (Il Moro/Ludovico would be the defender of his nephew (gallo/Galleazzo); Bambach 2019, *Leonardo da Vinci rediscovered*, vol. 1, p. 485.

73. Regarding the date, there are two lines of thought, proposing either 1494-1495 or 1515-1516: Martin Kemp, *Navis Ecclesiae: An Ambrosian metaphor in Leonardo's allegory of the nautical wolf and the imperious eagle*, in: *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 43 (3), 1981, pp. 257-268 (1515-1516); Carlo Pedretti, *The Drawings and Misc Papers of Leonardo da Vinci in the Collection of HM The Queen at Windsor Castle*, vol. I: Landscapes, Plants and Water Studies, London 1982, pp. 120-122 (1515-1516); Johannes Nathan, *Allegories, emblems and pictographs,* in: *Leonardo da Vinci: 1452-1519: the complete paintings and drawings*, ed. by Frank Zöllner, Köln 2019, p. 478; Joost Keizer, *Leonardo's Paradox: word and image in the making of Renaissance culture*, London 2019, pp. 181-183 (ca. 1515). Clayton and Marani proposed an earlier date, and see on stylistically and technical grounds a connection with Leonardo's manuscript H, wherefore they suggest the years 1494-1495 (Martin Clayton, *Leonardo's Gypsies, and the Wolf and the Eagle*, in: *Apollo*, 2002, pp. 27-33; Pietro C. Marani, *Leonardo e I principi invisibili: Allegorie figurate e fortezze come allegorie politiche per Ludovico il Moro e Cesare Borgia*, in:

Il principe inVisibile, ed. by Lucia Bertolini et al., Turnhout 2015, pp. 271-288, see p. 276).

74. Anny Popp, *Leonardo da Vinci, Zeichnungen*, Munich 1928, p. 55, note 82; A. E. Popham, *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*, New York, 1952, p. 120, note 125; Ladislao Reti, '*Non si svolta chi a stella è fisso'. Le 'Imprese' di Leonardo da Vinci*, in: *Bibliothèque d'humanism et Renaissance*, vol. xxi, 1959, pp. 45-54; Martin Kemp, ‚*Navis Ecclesiae'. An Ambrosian Metaphor in Leonardo's Allegory of the Nautical Wolf and the Imperious Eagle*, in: *Bibliothèque d'humanism et Renaissance*, lxiii, 1981, pp. 257-268; Josephine Jungic, *Savonarolan Prophecy in Leonardo's Allegory with Wolf and Eagle*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 60, 1997, pp. 253-260; Marani 2015, *Leonardo e I principi invisibili*, p. 277; Nathan 2019, *Allegories, emblems and pictographs*, p. 478. Bambach confirms the ship's reading as *navis ecclesiae*, but sees the recipient in Georges de la Trémonuille, whose heraldic emblem was an eagle with a crown (Bambach 2019, *Leonardo da Vinci rediscovered*, vol. 2, p. 238).

75. Kemp 1981, *Navis Ecclesiae*, pp. 262-266; Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo: a study in chronology and style*, London 1973, p. 20; Joost Keizer, *Leonardo's Paradox: word and image in the making of Renaissance culture*, London 2019, pp. 181-183.

76. Jungic 1997, *Savonarolan Prophecy,* pp. 253-259.

77. Clayton 2002, *Leonardo's Gypsies,* p. 32.

78. Clayton 2002, *Leonardo's Gypsies*, pp. 27-33; Marani 2015, *Leonardo e I principi invisibili*, p. 276.

79. Leonardo possessed likely the Latin edition of Horace's *Odes* (and not the vernacular), given the title *Carmina* (*Odes*).

80. Although Kemp briefly mentioned a reading of a "ship of the state", he concentrated on the term *navis ecclesiae* (Kemp 1981, *Navis Ecclesiae'*, p. 260).

81. He writes: "While he [Ludovico] had been pursuing friendly relations with Charles VIII since the late 1480s, Ludovico had also been forging close links with Alexander VI since his election as a Pope in 1492. Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, Ludovico's brother, had been instrumental in the election of the Pope, and was now Alexander's Vice-Chancellor, and their cousin Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, had married the Pope's daughter Lucrezia Borgia in 1491." (Clayton 2002, *Leonardo's Gypsies, and the Wolf and the Eagle*, p. 32.)

82. This reading would be opposite to Savonarola's preaching and apocalyptic views, as expressed in his contemporary *Compendium revelationum* from 1495. Here he points to the French invasion under Charles VIII as God's punishment, towards Rome under Alexander VI, as a Babylon doomed to destruction, urging for a reform of the church (right after Charles VIII entered Florence), Savonarola compares the city to a storm-tossed ship that would need to navigate through the tempest of the French invasion. On other occasions of apocalyptic sermons (esp. 1496 on Amos and Zechariah), Savonarola attacks Rome under Alexander VI as the pilot who has let Peter's ship run aground (see: Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. by Paolo Ghiglieri, 3 vols., Rome 1971-1972, see sermons XL and XLIV; Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola. Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, translated and edited by Anne Borelli/Maria Pastore Passaro, New Haven 2006, pp. 139-175, 222-230). As mentioned above, Jungic had already pointed to a Savonarolean direction, while not preferring him as a direct source, but a poem written on them. While the Savonarolean reading is tempting, it is not to be regarded as the source for Leonardo.

83. Dressen 2024, *Leonardo's bestiary as a reading key for moral allegories*, pp. 7-33.

84. Dante talks first about a vehicle (*carro*), which he later explains as being a ship (*navicella*) (Purg. XXII).

85. Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 3, pp. 1525-1555.

86. "… et per la lupa intende l'avarizia. … chosí l'avarizia tanto cresce nell'huomo, quanto crescono e suoi thesori." (Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 1, pp. 306-307). Thereafter Landino refers to Horace's *Odes*, and the passage where he claims that first the cause of the disease has to be eliminated, before the thirst for something may dissapear. And later: "Venivagli incontro la bestia senza pace, cioè l'avarizia, nella quale non è mai riposo, ma è affanno nel guadagnare, et affanno nel conservare el guadagnato." (Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 1, p. 308). Explanations of the wolf and the allegory of avarice are to be found all over canto 1 of the Inferno.

87. Later on, Landino digs deeper into the personalities of the pope and the king: "Può intendere di Bonifatio, el quale per divina iustitia per rabbiosa morte perdé el pontificato. Può anchora di Philippo re di Francia, el quale con Clemente papa fece ignominiose convegne contro allo honore della chiesa; … Per l'aquila s'appartiene a dirizzare et correggiere gl'errori della chiesa; agiunge che l'aquila non sarà sempre senza reda, cioè sanza imperadore. Imperoché ognuno che è facto imperadore diventa herede dell'aquila." (Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 3, p. 1545, Purg. XXXIII.31-45).

88. *Christophori Landini Florentini in Quinti Horatii Flacci libros omnes*, Venice 1483.

89. See on the four Senes of Scripture: Ernst von Dobschütz, *Vom vierfachen Schriftsinn. Die Geschichte einer Theorie*, in: *Harnack-Ehrung. Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte ihrem Lehrer Adolf von Harnack zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag (7. Mai 1921)*, Leipzig 1921, pp. 1–13; Friedrich Ohly, *Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter*, Darmstadt 1966, pp. 1-23, see pp. 10-11, 18; Meinolf Schumacher, *Einführung in die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters*, Darmstadt 2010, pp. 35–39. See on the coexisting fourfold and threefold manner of understanding (tropological, allegorical and anagogical senses) at the time of Bonaventura, their explanation and the related, more popular „moralizato" or „historiato" versions: A. J. Minnis, *Quadruplex senses, multiplex modus: scriptural sense and mode in medieval scholastic exegesis*, in: *Interpretation and Allegory. Antiquity to the modern period*, ed. by Jon Whitman, Leiden 2000, pp. 231-256. See also Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist*, pp. 136-137.

90. Dressen 2021, *Botticelli's Primavera and contemporary commentaries*, pp. 147-150; Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist,* pp. 328-337.

91. See on the contact between the two humanists, and also on the authenticity of the letter, John F. Took, *Dante*, Princeton 2020, pp. 257-258.

92. Took 2020, *Dante*, pp. 529-530. See on one of the contexts, how Dante is using this approach: "Thus, literally it is all about the state of souls after death pure and simple while allegorically it is all about man here and now as meriting by virtue of his status as a creature of free moral determination reward or punishment hereafter" (Took 2020, *Dante*, p. 530).

93. Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Giorgio Inglese, Milan 1999, pp. 83-85.

94. Dante Alighieri 1999, *Convivio*, pp. 83-86.

95. See on Landino's interpretation of the allegorical senses Lentzen. He states that Landino summarizes under the label „allegory" all three directions (allegorical, tropological, anagogical) (Manfred Lentzen, *Studien zur Dante-Exegese Cristoforo Landinos*, Köln 1971, pp. 59-60, 161, 165-166).

96. "… et useremo in quanto basteranno le nostre forze l'uficio di fedele interprete. Né solamente aprirremo el senso naturale, ma anchora l'allegorico, tropologico et anagocico; e quali tre sensi, perché hanno tra loro molta convenientia, chiamereno tutti allegorici." (Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 1, p. 268).

97. "… pone che Virgilio lo guida solamente pell'inferno et pel purgatorio, perché pel paradiso, come vedremo nel suo luogho, gli sia mestiero di più docta guida. Ma accioché nel processo del poema questo nome non c'induca in alchuno errore o difficultà d'intendere el senso allegorico, già in questo principio ci sia not oche non univoce ma equivoce sarà posto Virgilio, et alchuna la ragione humana semplicemente, et Danthe sarà la sensualità. Altra volta experimerremo per quello la ragione superiore, et allora Danthe significherà non la sensualità sola, ma anchora la ragione inferiore." (Landino 2001, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 1, p. 310).

98. The same goes for the eagle, as explained in Paradiso VI: in the literal sense, the eagle stands as a symbol for Rome, in the moral sense, for justice and good governance, in the historical sense for divine providence in the Roman Empire, and in the anagogical sense, he is pointing to the unity of humankind under God.

99. "The Roman term "satire" probably derived from the word *satura* (a medley or potpourri of foods) and merely indicated that satire was more loosely organized than other forms and more colloquial and various in its diction. And they also confused the Roman term with the Greek figure of the satyr, a misunderstanding that led to especially interesting discussions of satire's putative roots in ancient dramatic buffoonery." (W. Scott Blanchard, *Scholars' Bedlam. Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*, London/Toronto 1995, p. 18, see also pp. 30-31). See also Anne Lake Prescott, *Humour and Satire in the Renaissance*, in: *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3: *The Renaissance*, ed. by Glyn P. Norton, Cambridge 1999, pp. 284-291.

100. On Menippean Satire see: Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, pp. 16-17, see also p. 22. Following Blanchard, Lucian was by far more important as a satirist in the Renaissance, than Apuleius. "Lucian's …. satire, generally in dialogue form, seeks to deflate epic dignity through a technique of juxtaposing the everyday world to the distanced, heroic grandeur of the past upon which more elevated genres such as tragedy and epic depend. Among his satirical targets were the vanities of philosophers, the sophistry of rhetoricians, and even the pedantic and anachronistic imitation of Homeric vocabulary." (Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, p. 17).

101. Carmen Bambach, *Introduction to Leonardo and his drawings*, in: *Leonardo da Vinci. Master Craftsman*, ed. Carmen Bambach, New York 2003, pp. 3-30, p. 16; Michael W. Kwakkelstein, *Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of busts of old men and women with monstrous faces. Satire as moral criticism*, in: *Lénard de Vinci, pionnier de l'anatomie, anatomie compare, biomécanique, biunique, physiognomie*, ed. by Henry de Lumley/Pierre-Marie Liedo 2021, pp. 209-224, see

pp. 212-218; Michael W. Kwakkelstein, *Leonardo da Vinci's sense of humour as reflected in his drawings*, in: *Groniek*, 2024, 238 (7), pp. 147-162.

102.   "Le teste grottesche che Leonardo disegna in gran numero lungo l'arco della sua carriera rappresentano i estremi fisiognomici e caratteriali dell'anima come entità che informa il corpo in senso aristotelico." (Martin Kemp, Il *tutto nelle parti e le parti nel tutto: Leonardo e l'unità della coscienza*, in: *Leonardo da Vinci. Il disegno del mondo*, ed. by Pietro C. Mariani/Maria Teresa Fiorio, Milan 2015, pp. 353-359, see p. 359. See also John T. Spike, *Leonardo da Vinci and the Idea of Beauty*, Florence 2015, pp. 25, 92; Carlo Pedretti/Sara Taglialagamba, *Leonardo. L'arte del disegno*, Florence 2014, nr. 66, p. 120).

103.   Pedretti/Taglialagamba 2014, *Leonardo. L'arte del disegno*, pp. 121-123.

104.   Horace, *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, transl. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge MA 1926, p. 7 (Satire 1.1.23).

105.   For example: Horaz, Sermonen. Satiren, ed. by Karl Büchner, Stuttgart 1972, pp. 15, 21, 71, 81.

106.   Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, pp. 26, 31.

107.   See on Menippean Satire: Joel C. Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, Baltimore 1993; Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*; Carter Kaplan, *Critical Synoptics. Menippean Satire and the Analysis of Intellectual Mythology*, London 2000, pp. 44-47.

108.   Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, p. 43.

109.   Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, p. 14.

110.   "The more complicated nature of the Menippean form, as well as its more anti-intellectual cast, makes it possible in my mind for the categories of the satiric and the grotesque to overlap." (Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, pp. 25, 76). See also Blanchard: "The Menippean satire can be considered as a form of grotesquerie by virtue both of its generic anomalousness and also its reliance on satirical techniques that imagine human beings with abnormal, asocial, or bestial characteristics. As a form in which central characters undergo chameleonic transformation (…), it should probably be considered more exemplary of the Renaissance's anthropology than it has hitherto been…. It is little wonder that the Menippean form was so dominant in the period and that it could mimic so well the un-ironic forms of literature privileged by classical aesthetics, becoming chameleonic parodies of them." (Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, p. 26, see also p. 76).

111.   See Blanchard on the influence on Bracciolini, and the difference between satire and invective (Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, for example p. 47.

112.   Published in: Pier Candido Decembrio, *Lives of the Milanese tyrants*, translated and introduced by Gary Ianziti, Cambridge 2019.

113.   "Accogliete con piacere, uomini illustri, il mio discorso, se solo può essere mio ciò che è stato assemblato con parole di uomini dottissimi. Io, interprete di favole greche, parlerò in esso di favole ora seriamente ora per scherzo e raccoglierò ed esaminerò tutte le parti della vita umana, tutte le attività, tutte le discipline e vi offrirò una merenda, o piuttosto un po' di dolce e salutare vino silato, che placherà forse le ansie eccessive e procurerà una certa allegria. Parlerò perciò in maniera colloquiale e quanto più concisamente potrò, senza alcun belletto, senza alcun ornamento, in modo tale che un ragazzo anche semianalfabeta potrà capire facilmente le mie parole senza annoiarsi." (Antonio Urceo Codro, *Sermones*, ed. by Loredana Chines/Andrea Severi, Rome 2013, p. 61 (Sermones 1)).

114.   Codro 2013, *Sermones*, pp. 69, 223-233.

115.   See on the lecture: Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, pp. 30-31, 60-65.

116.   See on Alberti: Blanchard 1995, *Scholars' Bedlam*, pp. 67-68.

117.   See on the rivalry between the two artists, especially their encounters in Florence in the 1470s and 1480s, and the criticism expressed by Leonardo towards Botticelli's depictions of landscape and nature: Jonathan Nelson, *Leonardo contro Botticelli. Nuovi spunti su un'antica rivalità*, in: *Leonardo & Firenze. Folti scelti dal Codice Atantico*, ed. by Cristina Acidini, Florence 2019, pp. 125-133.

118.   Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*, Baltimore 1989, p. 235.

119.   While Kwakkelstein points to the *paragone* debate and Leonardo's notes on the rivalry between poetry and painting since ca. 1490-92, he regards the *teste bizzarre* mainly as a factor of making fun of poets themselves, while he also points to the publication project of engravings about those (Michael W. Kwakkelstein, *Leonardo da Vinci's sense of humour as reflected in his drawings*, in: *Groniek*, 2024-07, nr. 238, pp. 147-162, see pp. 150-154).

120.   Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist*, pp. 103-104, 281-282.

121.   On the manifold approaches of layers see Lentzen, who mentioned that Piero di Dante, a Dante commentator, for example, used even a seven-part approach (Lentzen 1971, *Studien zur Dante-Exegese Cristoforo Landinos*, p. 166).

122.   See on the importance of these three text my detailed study: Dressen 2021, *The Intellectual Education of the Italian Renaissance Artist*.

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Figures

Fig. 1: Botticelli, *Minerva (or Camilla) and the Centaur*, ca. 1482, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (Wikimedia).

Fig. 2: Botticelli, *Mars and Venus*, ca. 1482-1485, London, National Gallery (© National Gallery, London, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Fig. 3: Botticelli, *Calumny*, ca. 1495, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (Wikimedia).

Fig. 4: Leonardo da Vinci, *Aristotle and Phyllis*, ca. 1480, Hamburg, Kunsthalle (bpk Bildagentur / Hamburger Kunsthalle / Elke Walford / Art Resource, NY).

Fig. 5: Edmond Douet, after Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin with St Elisabeth and the young St John the Baptist who holds a lamb*, ca. 1550, London, British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence).

Fig. 6: Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory with Solar Mirror/Mirror of Virtue*, ca. 1494, Paris, Louvre (© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY).

Fig. 7: Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory of Envy*, ca. 1494, Oxford, Christ Church, no. 37, JBS 18 (© "By permission of the Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford").

Fig. 8: Leonardo da Vinci, *Allegory of the Wolf and the Eagle*, ca. 1494-1495, Windsor Castle, Royal Library, RL 12496r (© Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2025 | Royal Collection Trust).

Fig. 9: Leonardo da Vinci, *Grotesque caricature heads of five men and two women*, London, British Museum (© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence).

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Abstract

This article compares the allegorical strategies of Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci within the intellectual framework of late medieval and Renaissance humanism. Botticelli's major allegories, often produced as wedding commissions, draw primarily on classical mythology, sometimes filtered through Landino's commentary on Dante, with additional layers of satire derived from Lucian or political content. Leonardo, by contrast, built his allegories on elementary texts such as the *Fior di virtù*, bestiaries, and fables, which he developed into multi-layered visual commentaries enriched by satire, parody, and *facezie*. Both painters adapted the exegetical tradition of layered readings through the Senses of Scripture (literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical), familiar from Dante and Landino, applying it to the hermeneutics of visual narratives. Their differing uses of satire, Botticelli's selective allusions and Leonardo's grotesque inventions, further highlight their distinct approaches. Their use of satire, especially in the vein of Menippean satire, reveals an intellectual playfulness that bridged art and literature, underscoring their place in the broader *paragone* between painters and poets as interpreters of hidden truths.

Title