

MOVING BEYOND BEAUTY:
UNCOVERING SANDRO
BOTTICELLI'S
ISIS

by

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ABSTRACT

Sandro Botticelli created at least five bust-length images of idealized young women that are traditionally identified as Simonetta Vespucci (1453-1476), a Florentine beauty and the platonic love of Giuliano de' Medici. In this thesis I analyze one of those images, the *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1480), which is today in the Friedrich Kisters collection in Switzerland. I argue that, while the painting may have begun life as an idealized image of a Florentine beauty, the Kisters Botticelli should be most accurately read as a depiction of the Egyptian goddess Isis. My identification of the subject matter is grounded in references to recent technical analyses of the work, a critical re-assessment of the iconography, and consideration of the social and historical context in which the painting was produced.

A 2009 technical analysis of the Kisters painting revealed significant modifications to the image that took place in Botticelli's workshop. The changes included the incorporation of an elaborate background, the inclusion of a scarf around the neck of the figure, and the exposure of a single, lactating breast. These, I suggest, were completed to shift the identity of the woman from an unknown, idealized woman, or perhaps even Simonetta Vespucci, to the Egyptian goddess Isis. I argue that the iconographic alterations in Botticelli's painting align the image with ancient texts discussing Isis, such as Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* (120 C.E.), Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (c. 160-170 C.E.), and the dialogues of Hermes Trismegistus. Finally, I reconstruct possible contexts for the imagery in reference to Renaissance collecting of Egyptian antiquities, Florentine Neoplatonic interest in connections between Isis and the Virgin Mary, and

the literary genre of illustrious women. Recognition of the figure as Isis identifies this as one of the earliest known representations of the goddess in the Italian Renaissance and may broaden our understanding of Botticelli's interest in mythology as well as stimulate new research in field of unidentified, idealized beauties; the Italian Renaissance interest in Egypt; and Botticelli's workshop.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends who guided me through the trials of completing this project. In particular, my wonderful husband, Joey, whose eternal confidence, patience, and love made this manuscript possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Within the realm of fifteenth-century Florentine painting exists a category of images of unidentified, beautiful women. These paintings have, at times, been identified as poetic muses, but their exact meaning and function remains elusive.¹ Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi, 1445 -1510) is credited with creating a number of such bust-length images of idealized women.² In this thesis, I analyze one of such painting, the so-called *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1480) [Figure 1]. The tempera on canvas painting features a bust-length depiction of pale young woman with dark honey blonde hair. She is clad in a dark green dress, draped loosely around her torso, and accessorized with an ornate blue, gold, and red-stripped scarf dotted with cream-colored pearls. The scarf is shifted to the side, exposing her left breast, from which she gently presses milk. Her hair, partially up, cascades wildly down her back and a single black feather with a pearl is placed at the crown of her high forehead. The woman is situated in front of a landscape that includes, at the lower left-hand side, a body of water before a brown, rocky land mass. To the right of the figure are patches of green forested land and beyond a city with large buildings and towering cliffs.

In this thesis, I assess the history of the work, its subject, and the significance of this image in *quattrocento* Florence. I argue that, while the painting may have begun as an idealized image of a Florentine beauty, it was transformed into a depiction of the Egyptian goddess Isis in Botticelli's workshop. Recognition of the figure as Isis identifies this as one of the earliest

known representations of the goddess in the Italian Renaissance and may broaden our understanding of Botticelli's interest in mythology, offer new insights into the Renaissance interest in Egypt, as well as stimulate new research in field of unidentified, idealized beauties.

Statement of Literature and History of the Object

Since the painting in question first appeared at the 1886 Royal Academy Winter Exhibition in Manchester, England, it has remained in private hands. It is currently in the collection of Friedrich Kisters of Kreuzlingen, Switzerland.³ Perhaps because the artwork resided in private collections and has been exhibited rarely, it has been the subject of relatively little scholarly attention. Existing literature dedicated to the painting focuses on issues of attribution, dating, and identification of the subject. While the commission for the work is undocumented, the work was first assigned to Sandro Botticelli by Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle and Joseph A. Crowe (1870) based upon style.⁴ That attribution has generally been accepted by later scholars.⁵ In the twentieth century, this designation evolved to state that the image was a painting from Botticelli's workshop.⁶ I believe the shift in attribution was due to the perceived crudeness of some of the alterations and the amount of images of unidentified, idealized women credited to Botticelli. There is still some debate as to how much Botticelli was actually involved with the production of this work.⁷ Dates assigned the painting range from 1475 to 1490.⁸ Recent exhibition catalogues from the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main (2009), the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (2015) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London (2016) date the work to the 1480s.⁹ This is based upon the image's relation to the death of Simonetta Vespucci (1476), the Florentine woman long identified with the Kisters image and the dates of other paintings associated with her.

Of particular interest to the present study is a technical analysis of the Kisters Botticelli conducted by conservators at the Städel Museum in 2009. Infrared-reflectography revealed that the composition was significantly altered, likely in Botticelli's workshop.¹⁰ According to the published results, the painting originally featured a woman in profile view with a garment covering her torso in front of a blue background [Figures 2 and 3]. Technical analysis revealed that, in a second phase, major elements of the painting were modified: the face was turned to a slight three-quarter view; the feather and pearl, and the scarf were added; the garment was shifted and an exposed breast inserted; and the landscape was added including the brown rocky land, water, forested areas, and the buildings and cliffs in the background. The *craquelure*, or paint cracking, supports the identification of a two-phase production process that was completed in relatively quick succession.¹¹

The Kisters canvas was also cut down on all four sides at an unknown date.¹² While this is not discussed in the technical report, I believe that the image was cut down more significantly on the left side than on the others. Looking closely at the background, one sees that half of a building is visible on the left edge of the canvas, suggesting that there was more to the landscape at one time [Figure 4]. Comparison with other fifteenth-century paintings suggests that the gray frame, visible now only in the top and right side of the Kisters image, would have originally been visible on at least three sides. As such, it may have resembled the framing device in the *Madonna and Child with Angels* by Fra Filippo Lippi (1465) [Figure 5], Botticelli's teacher.¹³ I do not, however, believe that the original Kisters canvas was drastically larger than it is now. The female figure has most likely always been at half-length. This assertion is based on comparison with the numerous half-length images of women by Sandro Botticelli and the use of the profile view in the original composition [Figures 2 and 3]. The profile view was the dominant

pose in portraits of women into the late *quattrocento* and these were very often half-length as well.¹⁴

Another element essential to consider of the history and function of the Kisters painting is the use of canvas as a support material. During the 1480s, canvas, a cloth-based medium, was primarily utilized for specific types of art objects, mainly ephemeral decorations, such as festival banners, and large wall paintings in private homes.¹⁵ For example, the banners carried by Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici during their respective jousts in 1469 and 1475 were painted on canvas. It was also often used in instances where the artwork was being transported long distances.¹⁶ Canvas could simply be rolled up, whereas wooden panels could not. Botticelli did utilize canvas on occasion, as in *The Birth of Venus* (1482-85) [Figure 10] and *Pallas and the Centaur* (c.1482), two of his most famous mythological images. But for portraits, Florentine artists, including Botticelli, most commonly utilized panel as support. This was the case, for example, in Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady known as Smeralda Bandinelli* (1470-5) and Leonardo da Vinci's *Ginevra de' Benci* (1474-78) [Figure 12]. In fifteenth-century Italy, the main city in which canvas as a support was Venice, where the damp environment quickly warped wood.¹⁷

Two theories dominate discussions of the identity of the female figure in the Kisters Botticelli. Since the nineteenth-century, the subject has been identified as Simonetta Vespucci (1453-1476), a *quattrocento* Florentine woman who was immortalized in poetry as the platonic mistress of Giuliano de' Medici. The Städel Museum catalogue states that the image may be Simonetta in the role of poetic muse, with the black feather and dark cloud above her head alluding to her death in 1476.¹⁸ Following Hermann Ulmann's (1893) monograph, the figure has also sometimes been identified as an allegory of Abundance.¹⁹ The most recent publication

dedicated to the painting, a catalogue entry by Mark Evans in *Botticelli Reimagined* (2016) at the V&A, relates both of these identifications.²⁰

Statement of Need and Outline of Chapters

These existing iconographic analyses of the of the Kisters painting are problematic. The identification of the female figure as Abundance, for example, cannot be sustained. The personification's typical attribute was a cornucopia and, while the figure was sometimes depicted in the presence of children, images of the figure lactating were, to my knowledge, unprecedented.²¹ His *Allegory of Abundance* cartoon (1480-85) [Figure 13] demonstrates that Botticelli was well aware of the traditional attributes associated with Abundance. Even though the Kisters Botticelli has been cut down, I do not believe the composition ever included a child. If there had been another figure in the painting, in front of and to the left of the female figure, the original canvas would have been, of necessity, quite large. Likewise, none of the paintings traditionally identified as depictions of Simonetta Vespucci expose her breasts or include a landscape [Figures 6-9].²²

This unusual iconography combines with the information revealed via the technical analyses to suggest new avenues of inquiry into the meaning and function. These include an assessment of the alterations made to the composition, an expanded consideration of the iconography, and an in-depth evaluation of the identity of the female figure. The two-stage completion process revealed by the infrared reflectography suggests that, in a very real way, the Kisters canvas features two separate paintings contained within one. With all of the modifications made to the painting, it should be questioned whether, indeed, the painting should be connected to Simonetta Vespucci at all. The purpose of the original image and the reason for the drastic modifications made to the composition also bear consideration.

Here I argue that, while the Kisters Botticelli may have begun life as an idealized image of a Florentine beauty, the altered painting is most accurately read as a depiction of the Egyptian goddess Isis. My identification of the subject is grounded in the recent technical analysis, a critical re-assessment of the iconography, and consideration of the social and historical context in which the painting was produced. In Chapter Two, I review and discuss the life and legacy of Simonetta Vespucci, the genre of idealized images of women, and the alterations to the Kisters Botticelli. By understanding the historical identification of Simonetta Vespucci with this painting, I aim to show that the alterations to the canvas shifted the identification away from a representation of her or any other Florentine beauty. Chapter Three is dedicated to an iconographic assessment of the altered work, with a focus on four main elements: the headpiece, the scarf, the breast, and the landscape. I utilize ancient, medieval, and Renaissance texts and imagery to support an argument that the Kisters painting is in fact an image of Isis. The fourth chapter considers the cultural and ideological context surrounding the creation of an image of Isis in fifteenth-century Florence. I examine the collection of Egyptian artifacts in late *quattrocento* Italy, Neoplatonism and the connection between Isis and the Virgin Mary, as well as the literary genre of famous women. In the conclusion, I unpack the implications of re-identifying this female figure as Isis and propose avenues for further research, including new investigations into the genre of unidentified beautiful women, Botticelli's mythological subject matter, the Renaissance interest with Egypt, and the possibility of female viewership.

¹ Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 175-190; Patricia Simons, "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1995), 263-311; and Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, The Eye, and The Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop* 25 (1988): 4-30.

² The primary source for Botticelli's life is Giorgio Vasari, "Sandro Botticelli (1447-1510)," *Lives of the Artists*, trans. Gaston C. DeVere (1915), Accessed May 8, 2016, <http://members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariBott.html>. Subsequently, see Herbert P. Horne, *Botticelli, Painter of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 86-87; and Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli*, trans. Ishbel Flett (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 10. For a complete *catalogue raisonné*, see Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Complete Catalogue*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). On Botticelli's mythological imagery in general, see Frank Zöllner, *Botticelli: Images of Love and Spring*, trans. Fiona Elliot (Munich: Prestel, 1998). On Botticelli's relationship with the Medici family, see Charles Dempsey, "Courtly Lyric II, Sandro Botticelli and Poliziano: Humanist Learning and the Vernacular," in *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 67-115; and Adrian W. B. Randolph, "Spectacular Allegory: Botticelli's *Pallas Medicea* and the Joust of 1475," in *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 193-241.

³ Monika Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal," *Rutgers Art Review* 15 (1995): 3.

⁴ Joseph A. Crowe, and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Geschichte der italienischen Malerei*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1870), 177. Also see Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2:154.

⁵ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2:154.

⁶ In the *catalogue raisonné*, the Kisters painting is listed as workshop production, see Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2:154. It has been identified as a workshop image by multiple scholars; see Wilhelm von Bode, *Sandro Botticelli* (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1921), 78-9; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: A List of the Principal Artists and Their Works, with an Index of Places* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932), 105; Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, vol. 12 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1931), 70; and Jacques Mesnil, *Botticelli* (Paris: Michel, 1938), 220, 223.

⁷ The Städel Museum acknowledges that Botticelli's workshop had a hand in the creation of this painting, especially the second phase alterations, but are uncertain if Botticelli himself was involved; see Andreas Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 163. For the image as a Botticelli, see Mark Evans and Stefan

Weppelmann, eds., *Botticelli Reimagined* (London: V&A Publishing), 312. For author's and reader's ease, I will refer to the painting as a Botticelli work.

⁸ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2:154-155. The painting was dated to c. 1478, Wilhelm von Bode, *Botticelli: des Meisters Werke* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1926), 143. For a c. 1490 date, see Lionello Venturi, *Botticelli* (Vienna: Phaidon Press, 1937), Plate 21. Lightbown does not offer an opinion as to his version of the dating.

⁹ Evans and Weppelmann, eds., *Botticelli Reimagined*, 312; Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 163; and "The Botticelli Renaissance, Gemäldegalerie, Kulturforum, 24. Sep 2015- 24. Jan 2016," http://www.botticelli-renaissance.de/werke?brepo_w=702.

¹⁰ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 160.

¹¹ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 160-63.

¹² Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 160-63.

¹³ Vasari, "Sandro Botticelli (1447-1510)," <http://members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariBott.html>

¹⁴ Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of the Lady, 1430-1520," in *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 69.

¹⁵ Jill Dunkerton, Susan Foister, Dillian Gordon, and Nicholas Penny, eds., *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 161; and Jane C. Long, "Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* as Wedding Painting," *Aurora* 9 (2008), 21.

¹⁶ Dunkerton, et al., *Giotto to Dürer*, 161.

¹⁷ Dunkerton, et al., *Giotto to Dürer*, 161.

¹⁸ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 163.

¹⁹ Hermann Ulmann, *Sandro Botticelli* (Munich: Verlagsanstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1893), 89. More recently, Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 160; Evans and Weppelmann, eds., *Botticelli Reimagined*, 312; and Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2:154.

²⁰ Evans and Weppelmann, eds., *Botticelli Reimagined*, 312.

²¹ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Rev. ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 3.

²² Monica Schmitter discusses a group of five paintings by Sandro Botticelli that are traditionally linked to Simonetta Vespucci. See Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 1-2.

CHAPTER 2

THE ETERNAL SIMONETTA VESPUCCI

As was noted in the Introduction, the Kisters painting has been identified as a portrait of Simonetta Vespucci since its appearance at the 1886 Royal Academy Winter Exhibition in Manchester, England.¹ In this chapter, I examine the art-historical relationship between Signora Vespucci and Botticelli, including a series of Botticelli paintings believed to represent Simonetta. I then consider the “first phase” of the canvas, which was recently uncovered by the conservators at the Städel Museum, and the relationship of the imagery to fifteenth-century Florentine images of unidentified, beautiful women. Finally, I investigate the significant modifications to the Kisters image made in Botticelli’s workshop that, I argue, changed the identity of its subject. My objective is to demonstrate that the Kisters painting was likely never intended as a “portrait” of Simonetta and that the first phase of the work should be considered an image of an unidentified, idealized woman.

Simonetta Vespucci and Sandro Botticelli

In addition to the Kisters painting, four Botticelli “portraits”, generally dated to the 1480s, are traditionally associated with Simonetta Vespucci. These include works at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main [Figure 6], the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin [Figure 7], the Marubeni Collection in Tokyo [Figure 8], and the National Gallery in London [Figure 9]. There are, however, multiple problems when attempting to historically connect Signora Vespucci and the famed Florentine artist. The first major issue is that we have no documentary evidence to show

that Simonetta and Botticelli ever met or that she sat for a portrait.² Consideration of the historical circumstances surrounding Vespucci's life and her subsequent identification with Botticelli's *oeuvre* offers additional insights into the problematic nature of aligning the "first state" of the Kisters canvas with Simonetta.

Born in 1453 in Genoa, Simonetta Cattaneo married Marco Vespucci of Florence in 1469.³ On January 29, 1475, the Medici family hosted a jousting tournament to celebrate the Florentine alliance with Venice and Milan against the Papacy.⁴ Simonetta Vespucci was declared the "queen of beauty" for the tournament and Giuliano de' Medici's platonic mistress.⁵ According to Hans Körner, their relationship was strictly nonphysical and was confined to the framework of chivalric courtship.⁶ Körner has argued that these magnificent events and chivalric courtships, such as the one between Giuliano and Simonetta, were meant to distract from the Medici's increasing power over the Republic.⁷

To coincide with the tournament festivities, Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494) composed the *Stanze per la giostra del Magnifico Giuliano di Piero de' Medici* (1475-79), which featured Giuliano and Simonetta.⁸ In the poem, Julio (Giuliano) is in the woods hunting when he comes across the beautiful nymph named Simonetta and is struck by Cupid's arrow.⁹ However, the nymph refuses his advances. The night before Julio is to compete in a jousting tournament, Simonetta appears to him in the guise of Minerva. Simonetta encourages Julio to emulate Fame instead of Love and gives him weapons in order to succeed in the tournament.¹⁰

A year after the celebration, on April 26, 1476, Simonetta died of tuberculosis.¹¹ At the announcement of her death, her celebrity status soared in Florence. There was a large funeral procession and her body lay in state, uncovered for all of Florence to see at the Ognissanti church.¹² Lorenzo de' Medici was not in town at the time of her passing, but he claimed that to

see a new star in the heavens that night and to know it was her.¹³ Poems by Lorenzo and others immortalized her as “la bella Simonetta.” In *Comento de’ miei sonetti* (c. 1480), Lorenzo exalted her as the pure embodiment of feminine beauty. Sforza Bettini, Lorenzo de’ Medici’s physician who was sent to attend Simonetta in her time of illness, celebrated her as a triumph of beauty even in death. Bettini was one of the first to connect Signora Vespucci to Laura, the poetic beloved of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), Tuscan poet and scholar.¹⁴ Simonetta served as a literary muse in Florence and was seen as symbolizing the city’s creativity.¹⁵ In an elegy, Bernardo Pulci (1438-1488), a member of the Medici circle, begged the Olympian gods to return the sweet nymph that death had stolen.¹⁶ According to a now lost letter, Giuliano de Medici also grieved for the loss of his platonic love. He allegedly visited the Vespucci family and, to help soothe his sorrow, they gave him all of Simonetta’s clothing and her portrait.¹⁷ The mythology surrounding Simonetta grew stronger following Giuliano’s assassination on April 26, 1478, in the Pazzi conspiracy.¹⁸ Their correlating death dates were seen as a sign of their true love.¹⁹

Giorgio Vasari’s *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori da Cimabue insino a’ tempi nostril* (*Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times*) (1550, first edition) served as the basis for claims that Simonetta was painted by Botticelli. In his account of the artist’s life, Vasari mentions that a portrait of Giuliano de’ Medici’s “beloved,” painted by Botticelli, was located in the wardrobe of Duke Cosimo I.²⁰ In the nineteenth-century, this unnamed love was identified as Simonetta. There has been some debate as to which artistic group connected the painter with Signora Vespucci, the Pre-Raphaelites or members of the Aesthetic Movement. But by the early 1870s the claim of their connection was published in John Ruskin’s *Ariadne Florentina: Six Lectures on Wood and Metal Engraving* (1873).²¹ In a letter written to Ruskin, the Victorian art critic, Mr. John Tyrwhitt

stated that he believed that Simonetta was a model for Botticelli and was depicted in his *Primavera* (c. 1482) [Figure 11], *The Birth of Venus* (1482-85) [Figure 10], and the *Calumny of Apelles* (1497). Tyrwhitt also stated that Joseph Archer Crowe, Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, and Walter Pater, three well-known art historians, agreed with his conclusion.²²

The other major art historian to promote Simonetta's legendary role as Botticelli's model was Aby Warburg. In "Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring*: An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance" (1893), Warburg argued that Flora in the *Primavera* (*Spring*) was a portrait of Simonetta.²³ He based that assertion on the description of the nymph bearing her name in Poliziano's *Stanze*.²⁴ In the poem, Simonetta is described as "fair-skinned, unblemished white, and white is her garment, though ornamented with roses, flowers, and grass; the ringlets of her golden hair descend on a forehead humbly proud" (Book 1, 43).²⁵ Warburg also claims that Botticelli and Simonetta were acquainted with one another as it was her portrait in Duke Cosimo's collection. Finally, he discusses two idealized portraits believed to be her, one in Berlin [Figure 7] and the other in Frankfurt am Main [Figure 6].²⁶

In the early twentieth-century, scholars including Herbert Horne (1908) and Ernst Gombrich (1945), argued there was no historical evidence to support the claim that Simonetta's likeness graced Botticelli's *oeuvre*.²⁷ To date, there are no positively identified portraits of Simonetta from her lifetime. All of those now associated with her, if they were meant to represent her at all, appear to have been created posthumously. Gombrich urged academics to cease romanticizing Botticelli's historical association with Simonetta in the absence of any concrete evidence.²⁸

In recent decades, however, Charles Dempsey has revived the argument for Simonetta's presence in Botticelli's imagery, utilizing contemporary Florentine literature as his

justification.²⁹ Dempsey's reasoning is largely based upon Warburg's argument in the 1893 essay. Since the release of Dempsey's *The Portrayal of Love* (1992), scholars have continued to grapple with Simonetta's presence in Botticelli's *oeuvre* and worked to create a more historically contextualized vision of "*la bella Simonetta*".³⁰ In his essay (2009), "Simonetta Vespucci: The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of a Myth," Hans Körner contends that "the presence of the bella Simonetta in *oeuvres* of Sandro Botticelli. . . has once again become overly exaggerated and it would seem that a certain degree of caution or restraint in the identification of the respective female figures is now necessary."³¹ Others, including Frank Zöllner (2005) and Judith Allen (2014), have acknowledged that the platonic mistress of Giuliano was a historical woman who did become a mythical figure in Florence, but have also recognized that she did not necessarily model for Botticelli.³²

The First Phase: An Idealized Beauty

Infrared-reflectography has revealed that Botticelli, or his assistants, modified nearly the entire composition of the Kisters canvas to produce the painting we have today. The "first state" of the painting, now obscured but revealed by the infrared-reflectography, featured a woman in profile view in front of a blue background, with a gray frame surrounding [Figures 2 and 3].³³ The green garment would have completely covered her torso, perhaps as a mantle. The original image on the Kisters canvas was, indeed, similar to the other Botticelli "portraits" subsequently identified as representations of Simonetta.

The Frankfurt panel [Figure 6] is the most often directly associated with Simonetta and Poliziano's poem.³⁴ In *Stanze per la giostra*, the nymph Simonetta is described as appearing in a white dress; when she is in the guise of Minerva she wears armor. Barely visible between the breasts of Botticelli's figure is a metallic surface that has been interpreted as armor. The

extravagant hairstyle and feather accent are described by Warburg as features of classical nymphs and elements of *quattrocento* festival attire. In a 1466 joust in Siena, women were dressed in white gowns with golden feathers on their heads.³⁵ The Berlin [Figure 7] image has a similar *coiffure* to the Frankfurt figure, but the woman wears a red dress, and is framed by a window. The Tokyo [Figure 8] and the London [Figure 9] panels are nearly exact copies of each other. The figures' clothing matches, with the exception of color; their hair is in the same style, and their heads are framed within a window. Tokyo and London paintings also appear in *all'antica* with the draped cloth across the body and over the shoulder, reminiscent of a toga.

While each of these paintings by Botticelli, including the Kisters painting, has long been allied with Simonetta Vespucci, a claim that, as we have seen, is based largely on nineteenth-century literature, there is little evidence to support this as a definitive conclusion. Rather, the images are likely best understood as belonging to a category of Renaissance art dedicated to unidentified, idealized women. In other words, if Botticelli's paintings were inspired by Simonetta Vespucci, an unavailable exemplar, she was sensualized and transformed on his canvases and panels into an unattainable ideal.

Portraiture emerged as an independent genre in Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century.³⁶ Initially, these paintings were primarily dedicated to princes, ladies, or other wealthy individuals seeking to create visual genealogies, for example Fra Filippo Lippi's *Woman with a Man at a Window* (Lorenzo di Ranieri Scolari and Angiola di Bernadro Sapiti) (c. 1438) [Figure 14].³⁷ But in the second half of the *quattrocento*, painters began creating idealized images of women who were apparently portrayed for only their beauty and rather than for their individual or familial identity.³⁸ A multitude of extant paintings apparently depicting unidentified beauties suggest the popularity of the type in Renaissance Italy. Ronald Lightbown (1980) stated that

Botticelli's workshop produced many such *ninfe* (fair ladies) images, particularly in the 1480s.³⁹ Outside of Florence, an inventory of the Venetian artist Palma Vecchio's house and shop at the time of his death in 1528 shows a group of "bella" images, suggesting that by that date in Venice, such paintings were not necessarily commissioned, but sold off-the-peg.⁴⁰ Titian was also known for creating paintings of idealized beauties for the market, for example the *Venus of Urbino* (1538) or *Flora* (1515-17) [Figure 15].⁴¹ The variable meanings assigned subsequently to the images of unidentified women may have been due to the fact that they were ready-mades.⁴² The more open the interpretation of the painting, the more likely the customer could connect with the work.⁴³

Elizabeth Cropper (1986), Patricia Simons (1988, 1995), and Joanna Woods-Marsden (2001) have all considered images of unidentified beauties and their possible functions in the Italian Renaissance.⁴⁴ Each suggests that paintings of unidentified, idealized women embodied an inherent ambiguity about the female subject that lies between purity and seduction, true likeness and idealization.⁴⁵ We can never be certain about the function of these artworks, because images of idealized beauties likely conveyed multiple messages to the viewer(s).⁴⁶ Some of the popular theories as to their use revolve around lyrical poetry, marriage, and Neoplatonic philosophy.

Cropper has argued that the images of idealized women arose in part, as an expression of the rivalry between poetry and painting, the *paragone*. The *paragone* was a challenge described by Lucian, the Roman satirist, in his *Imagines* (*Essays in Portraiture*, 100 AD–200 AD). Lucian claimed the painter could not capture every aspect of the woman, beauty as well as virtue, and the poet's literary depiction would be more complete and enduring.⁴⁷ Francesco Petrararch, the humanist scholar and poet from Arezzo, a town in Tuscany, echoed Lucian's argument when he

discussed Simone Martini's painting of his poetic love, Laura. Petrarch noted that the painting did not contain all of her beauty and it only listened and did not respond; the poet argued that poetry could record her voice as well as her virtues.⁴⁸ The lyrical poetry of Florentine Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) has also been cited as a source for images of idealized women.⁴⁹ Chivalric poems of both Dante and Petrarch attempted to capture both the physical and internal loveliness of their chosen beloveds, Beatrice and Laura, respectively. Men elevated these two literary women to an angelic status of beauty and love that was beyond obtainable.

During the late middle ages and the Renaissance, there was a set of ideal elements of beauty. The literature of Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) codified the standards of beauty: youth, high forehead, pale skin, rosy cheeks and lips, artfully coiffured blond hair, and breasts like apples.⁵⁰ During the Renaissance, virtue and outer allure were directly linked and it was understood that beauty was a sign of integrity and good moral character.⁵¹ Because beauty was such an important aspect of Renaissance femininity and virtue, these expectations applied to both fictional and real women. Often images of unidentified, beautiful women bore a classical or even fantastical appearance, for example Piero di Cosimo *Portrait of a Woman* (c. 1490) [Figure 16]. Here a bare-breasted woman wears an elaborate *coiffure* punctuated with pearls and gems. The snake necklace has led to suggestions that the female figure is Cleopatra.⁵² It would be hard to argue that a respectable Florentine matron modeled bare-breasted with the objective of it being a portrait for her household. Another example is Giorgione's *Laura* (1506) [Figure 17] wears a red, fur-lined cloak, opened to reveal a single breast, with laurel branches surrounding her. Mystery has long circulated about her identity, her profession, and the decision to expose her breast.⁵³ Her identification as Petrarch's beloved Laura is conjecture based upon the laurel branches.⁵⁴ Simons suggests that such paintings, beyond possible mythological or Petrarchan

significance, could very well have served as a fetish or a pin-up in the eye of the voyeuristic male gaze.⁵⁵

It has also been widely suggested that idealized images of beautiful women may have related to marriage rituals. Luke Syson (2008) argues that objects, including paintings and maiolica, that feature representations of beautiful women could have been exchanged during courtship with the objective of inspiration and love.⁵⁶ He makes this connection because of the inclusion of marriage-related objects, such as fur, rings, loose hair, and nudity in the works of art.⁵⁷ Nudity in art calls forth different connotations for each gender. With the Renaissance revival of classicism, a nude male could be, once again, seen as heroic, while a nude, or at least bare-breasted, female was viewed as poetic.⁵⁸ The bare breasts, particularly if accompanied by loose clothing, were also means of erotic idealization. But in the case of fifteenth-century idealized women, such figures were likely understood as unavailable, representations of a fictional beloved, or a classical goddess, or nymph.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Syson suggests that the exposure of the bare breasts may have evoked unembellished beauty of the woman's soul and her chastity.⁶⁰

The Florentine appreciation of Neoplatonism has been also linked to the popularity of imagery of unidentified, beautiful women in the fifteenth-century due to its emphasis on Beauty and Platonic Love.⁶¹ I will discuss the history and philosophy of Neoplatonism more fully in Chapter Four. Here we need only recognize that Neoplatonic philosophy was not solely based on the Greek thinker Plato, and it centered around contemplation, the Immortality of the Soul, and Platonic Love. Neoplatonic thought is credited with the idea of beauty as a sign of inner goodness.⁶² But it also involved the principle of contemplation in the hope of the Soul finding God.⁶³ For man's soul to ascend to God, he needed to faithfully love one perfect object. Lorenzo

de' Medici (1449-1492) defined this as a woman who possessed natural beauty and inner qualities such as intelligence, honesty, elegance, love, and fidelity. The feminine ideal was objectified as a means of drawing man closer to God.⁶⁴ Neoplatonic tradition dictated that the scholar's beloved be both beautiful and virtuous, and her physical attractiveness arousing his senses and leading him to not appreciate her corporeal beauty, but the beauty of her soul and the love of God.⁶⁵ According to Patricia Simons, this mentality may well have provided an intellectual rationale for owning a painting of an attractive, partially clothed woman.⁶⁶

The use of canvas for the Kisters Botticelli calls into question its current designation as a portrait and allows us to speculate on the original function of the painting. As was discussed in Chapter One, the fact that the painting was completed on canvas was unusual. In fact, the Kisters painting is the only one of the Simonetta group to be on canvas. The other four are painted on wooden panel. Botticelli and his shop did utilize canvas for festival and wedding banners; most famously in *The Birth of Venus* (1482-85). *The Birth of Venus*'s origins are a mystery as it is not recorded in an inventory until the mid-sixteenth century by Giorgio Vasari.⁶⁷ Jane C. Long has suggested, however, that the painting may have been created for the 1487 marriage of Annibale Bentivoglio of Bologna and Lucrezia d'Este of Ferrara.⁶⁸ Venus, the goddess of love, would certainly have been appropriate at a wedding celebration.⁶⁹ Long argues that a canvas at this size, 185.5 x 285.5 cm (73.03 x 112.40 in), would have been hung on the walls at a banquet. Also canvas would have made transportation to Bologna relatively stress-free.

Banners were utilized at civic and religious festivals and during marriage processions.⁷⁰ The traditional uses of canvas for weddings and festival banners, suggest that it is possible the Kisters Botticelli originally served as an ephemeral banner. An image of an idealized beauty in profile with a dark green garment might have been appropriate for any number of celebrations,

serving a variety of meanings. Importantly, Botticelli created a banner carried by Giuliano de' Medici at his 1475 joust: that particular canvas banner, now lost, reportedly bore the likeness of Simonetta Vespucci in the guise of Minerva.⁷¹ The banner was described in a poem sent to Bernardo Bembo by Giovanni Aurelio Augurelli as bearing a bounded Cupid with "the frightful Pallas, the more dreadful for her sallet and the savage Gorgon shield, raises her lance over the terrified boy....this is the most beautiful of the painted images."⁷² While the precise origins of the Kisters Botticelli will most likely never be known, the use of canvas calls into question its prior description as a portrait and raises further questions about elements of the painting.

The Second Phase: A New Identity

If the origins of the Kisters painting reside within the popular genre of unidentified, idealized women, the current state of Botticelli's so-called *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* contains unusual iconography that suggests the second phase of execution transformed the canvas significantly. The alterations to the painting introduced elements that transformed the iconography and hence the meaning of the work. These include the insertion of a landscape, a pearl-studded scarf, as well as a bared lactating breast. While bare breasts may have a role, as we have seen in images of idealized Florentine and Venetian beauties, lactating breasts are not featured in such paintings. Lactation was not part of the ideals of poetic beauty and was not deemed desirable by the upper classes, as breastfeeding was believed to prevent or taint future conceptions.⁷³ In addition, Simonetta, an upper class married woman, would have never posed nude for an artist.

The thin finish utilized in some of the alterations suggest that the modifications may have been completed fairly quickly. Was what began as a festival banner, perhaps discarded or fresh off-the-peg, trimmed and quickly repainted per the unknown client's wishes? To be sure, a

canvas painting would also have been ideal acquisition for someone who was traveling and did not have the space to transport a panel. On the other hand, the addition of the elaborate iconography that characterizes the “second phase” of the painting would have taken time to plan and execute. The modifications to the Kisters canvas suggest a reconsideration of how closely this work is connected with Simonetta and images of unidentified, idealized women. While some scholars have noted the variations between the Kisters Botticelli and the other “Simonetta” paintings, no alternative identifications of the figure have been offered.⁷⁴ Recourse to the identification of female figures with Simonetta has long been the simple answer to questions about the identification of Botticelli’s women. We should recognize that, whatever the original circumstances of the Kisters painting’s production, if Botticelli’s unknown client had wanted an image of idealized beautiful woman, the drastic alterations made to the painting would have been necessary. Rather, the changes introduced in the second phase appear to have shifted its meaning and I suggest gave a new identity to the woman in the Kisters painting: the Egyptian goddess Isis.

¹ Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2:154.

² Horne, *Botticelli*, 53; and E. H. Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8 (1945): 9-10.

³ Hans Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci: The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of a Myth," in *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, ed. Andreas Schumacher (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 57.

⁴ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 34.

⁵ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 34; and Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci," 59.

⁶ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 59.

⁷ Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci," 59.

⁸ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 35.

⁹ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 224.

¹⁰ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 224. The poem ends before the tournament takes place and is considered by scholars to be unfinished.

¹¹ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 57.

¹² Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 10.

¹³ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 57.

¹⁴ For comment about triumph in death, see Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci," 57. For comparison to Laura, see Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 117.

¹⁵ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 35.

¹⁶ Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 14; Aby Warburg, "Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring*: An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance (1893)," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, eds. Julia Bloomfield, Kurt W. Forster, Harry F. Mallgrave, Michael S. Roth, Salvatore Settis (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the

Humanities, 1999), 137; and n.a., "Pulci, Bernardo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Accessed August 18, 2016, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bernardo-pulci/>.

¹⁷ The letter where this event is described is reportedly badly damaged and is a Spanish copy of an original Italian that is now lost. I know of only two sources that mention the letter and its contents; See Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 9; and Jacqueline Marie Muscaccio, "Wives, Lovers, and Art in Italian Renaissance Courts," in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 31.

¹⁸ For information on the Pazzi Conspiracy, see Lauro Martines, *April Blood* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 11.

²⁰ Vasari, "Sandro Botticelli (1447-1510)," <http://members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariBott.html>

²¹ Dempsey, *Portrayal of Love*, 122-23; Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci," 60; and Michael Levey, "Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 3/4 (Jul. - Dec., 1960): 291-306.

²² John Ruskin published this letter in the collection of his lectures; see *Ariadne Florentina: Six Lectures on Wood and Metal Engraving* (1873, New York: National Library Association, 2008), The Gutenberg Project ebook, <http://www.gutenberg.org/libdata.lib.ua.edu/ebooks/27268>, 152. The specific object of my research was attributed to Botticelli by Cavalcaselle and Crowe in 1870 as well as identified as Simonetta Vespucci; see Crowe, and Cavalcaselle, *Geschichte der italienischen Malerei*, 3:177.

²³ For scholarship on *Primavera*, see John Dee, "Eclipsed: An Overshadowed Goddess and the Discarded Image of Botticelli's *Primavera*," *Renaissance Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 4-33; Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *Botticelli's Primavera: A Botanical Interpretation Including Astrology, Alchemy and the Medici* (Florence: Olschki, 1983); Max C. Marmor, "From Purgatory to the 'Primavera': Some Observations on Botticelli and Dante," *Artibus et Historiae* 24, no. 48 (2003): 199-212; Joanne Snow-Smith, *The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli: A Neoplatonic Interpretation*, vol. 5, *New Connections: Studies in Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1993); and Lilian Zirpolo, "Botticelli's *Primavera*: A Lesson for the Bride," *Woman's Art Journal* 12, no. 2 (Autumn, 1991-Winter, 1992): 24-28.

²⁴ Warburg, "Sandro Botticelli's," 134.

²⁵ Angelo Poliziano, *The Stanze of Angelo Poliziano*, trans. David Quint (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 43.

²⁶ Warburg, "Sandro Botticelli's," 133-134, 136.

²⁷ Horne, *Botticelli*, 53; and Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies," 9-10.

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- ²⁸ Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies," 10.
- ²⁹ Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love*, 123.
- ³⁰ Judith Allan, "Lorenzo's Star and Savonarola's Serpent: Changing Representations of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci," *Italian Studies* 69, no. 1 (March 2014): 4–23; Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 1-23; and Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli*, 63.
- ³¹ Körner, "Simonetta Vespucci," 64.
- ³² Allan, "Lorenzo's Star and Savonarola's Serpent," 5; Randolph, "Spectacular Allegory," 218, 240; and Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli*, 58, 63.
- ³³ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 160.
- ³⁴ Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 152-155; Muscacchio, "Wives, Lovers, and Art," 31; and David Alan Brown, "Young Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?) in Mythological Guise," in *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra De' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 182.
- ³⁵ Warburg, "Sandro Botticelli's," 136.
- ³⁶ Simons, "Women in Frames," 4.
- ³⁷ Lorne Campbell, "Portrait Types," in *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 41-43.
- ³⁸ Cropper, "Beauty of Woman," 178-179.
- ³⁹ Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1989), 313.
- ⁴⁰ Syson, "Belle," 247.
- ⁴¹ Syson, "Belle," 274.
- ⁴² Syson, "Belle," 247-48.
- ⁴³ There is a famous letter from Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, asking Titian for the "portrait of that lady in the blue dress." The duke is far more interested in her physical features than her name, presuming she had one at all. See, Cropper, "Beauty of Woman," 179.
- ⁴⁴ Cropper, "Beauty of Woman," 175-190; Victoria Kirkham, "Poetic Ideals of Love and Beauty," in *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra De' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, ed. David Alan Brown (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 51-60; Simons,

“Portraiture,” 263-311; idem., “Women in Frames,” 4-30; and Woods-Marsden, “Portrait of the Lady,” 62-87.

⁴⁵ Simons, “Portraiture,” 310.

⁴⁶ Luke Syson, “Belle: Picturing Beautiful Women,” in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 246.

⁴⁷ Cropper, “Beauty of Woman,” 175.

⁴⁸ Cropper, “Beauty of Woman,” 182.

⁴⁹ Kirkham, “Poetic Ideals,” 51-52; and Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 85.

⁵⁰ Kirkham, “Poetic Ideals,” 53; Sara F. Matthews Grieco, “The Body, Appearance, and Sexuality,” in *Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes*, vol. 3, *A History of Women in the West*, eds. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 58; and Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art*, 85-86.

⁵¹ Matthews Grieco, “The Body,” 57-58.

⁵² Giorgio Vasari, “Piero di Cosimo (c.1462-c.1521), Painter of Florence,” *Lives of the Artists*, Accessed June 8, 2016, <http://members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariPierodiCosimo.html>

⁵³ Andrea Bayer, “Portrait of a Woman (Laura),” in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 315-16; and Anne Christine Junkerman, “The Lady and the Laurel: Gender and Meaning in Giorgione's ‘Laura’,” *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1993): 49-58.

⁵⁴ Bayer, “Portrait of a Woman (Laura),” 316.

⁵⁵ Simons, “Portraiture,” 290, 305.

⁵⁶ Syson, “Belle,” 249.

⁵⁷ Syson, “Belle,” 253.

⁵⁸ Simons, “Portraiture,” 302.

⁵⁹ Simons, “Portraiture,” 301-302.

⁶⁰ Syson, “Belle,” 250-251.

⁶¹ Kirkham, “Poetic Ideals,” 59; and Muscacchio, “Wives, Lovers, and Art,” 30.

⁶² Matthews Grieco, "The Body," 57.

⁶³ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Platonic Academy of Florence," in *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 94-95.

⁶⁴ Kirkham, "Poetic Ideals," 59.

⁶⁵ Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 80.

⁶⁶ Simons, "Portraiture," 290.

⁶⁷ Long, "Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*," 26; and Vasari, "Sandro Botticelli (1447-1510)," <http://members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariBott.html>

⁶⁸ Long, "Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*," 23, 25.

⁶⁹ Long, "Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*," 25.

⁷⁰ Long, "Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*," 22. The only caveat to this premise is that Lorenzo de' Medici limited grand civic ceremonies after the Pazzi Conspiracy. Understandably, he would have been a little cautious after his near assassination and his brother's, Giuliano, death. However, this does not mean that wedding processions, complete with banners, ceased to occur in Florence.

⁷¹ Dempsey, *Portrayal of Love*, 131; and Randolph, "Spectacular Allegory," 193. Randolph, "Spectacular Allegory," 193,195; and Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 218-221.

⁷² Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 162-63.

⁷³ For discussion about upper class mentality regarding breastfeeding, see Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 14.

⁷⁴ Schmitter, "Botticelli's Images," 17; and Schumacher, ed., *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, 160-63.

CHAPTER 3

ISIS

In the prior chapter, I argued that identification of the female figure in the first phase of the Kisters Botticelli should be most accurately understood as an unidentified, idealized woman and not a portrait of Simonetta Vespucci. In this chapter, I consider four specific elements altered or added to the Kisters painting in a second phase of execution within Botticelli's workshop, arguing that these features identify the female figure as Isis. These are the headpiece, the scarf, the lactating breast, and the addition of the buildings, cliffs, and boats in the background. To support this argument, I reference a series of ancient and Renaissance texts dedicated to Isis, along with contemporary visual sources.

Multiple texts ancient and medieval discussing Isis circulated in late fifteenth-century Italy and Florence in particular. In these works, Isis comes in various forms. This is based in part, on the fact that, Isis was part of the mythology of three different ancient cultures: Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. She began as the wife and sister of Osiris, Lord of the Egyptian Underworld, but soon the Greeks and Romans connected her with Io, a victim of Jupiter's lust. For the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE -17 CE), the story of Isis began with Io, raped by Jupiter, transformed into a cow, and chased by Juno to Egypt where she found refuge (*Metamorphoses* 1:784-1037).¹ Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 CE) was first printed in Latin in 1471. A copy of the text was in the Medici Library at San Marco in Florence.² In his *De Iside et Osiride* (c. 120 CE), the Roman author Plutarch (40 CE- after 120 CE) describes an Egyptian queen, sister and wife of Osiris, and

the couple's taming of the human race.³ Plutarch's text circulated in Latin from the beginning of the fifteenth century as part of the *Moralia*.⁴ In the Roman poet Apuleius's (c.124 –170 AD) *Metamorphoses*, or *The Golden Ass* (c. 160-170 CE), printed in Latin in 1469, Isis is described as the true queen of heaven.⁵

As part of the Medici circle, as well as a likely acquaintance of Neoplatonists Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano, Botticelli would likely have had access to these texts, as well as the Florentine scholars who studied them.⁶ Botticelli's presumed association with Ficino and his followers is due largely to his large-scale mythological images. Some scholars, including Jean Gillies and E. H. Gombrich, argued that the *Primavera*'s program was constructed as a message or lesson for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici by Ficino.⁷ The majority of Botticelli's mythological paintings, such as the *Primavera*, *The Birth of Venus*, *Calumny of Apelles*, and *Pallas and the Centaur*, have been tied to Neoplatonism and the Medici family.⁸

The Diadem

A black feather and a dark pearl rests at the crest of the Kisters figure's forehead as crown or portion of a diadem. Here I argue that the feather, which was a second phase addition, was an interpretation of Isis's crown, traditionally one of her main identifying attributes. While literary descriptions of Isis were fairly similar from antiquity through the fifteenth century, the goddess's visual iconography and attributes ranged widely. Ancient literary accounts of Isis's headdress revolve around two main features: crescent horn (or moons) and a flat moon disk. In Book Nine of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Isis appears to Telethus wearing crescent horns on her brow, a garland of wheat, and a queenly diadem (*Metamorphoses*, 9:988-996).⁹ In *De Iside et Osiride* (*On Isis and Osiris*) (Chapter 52, 203), Plutarch states that statues of the goddess often bear crescent moons.¹⁰ In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, Isis appears with "an intricate crown into

which were woven all kinds flowers. . . above her forehead, a flat round disc like a mirror-or rather a symbol for the moon. . . to right and left the crown was bounded by coils of rearing snakes, and adorned above with outstretched ears of wheat” (*Metamorphoses*, 11.3).¹¹ His account also describes her hair as “thick, long, and lightly curled, flowed slowly down, loosely spread over her divine neck and shoulders” (*Metamorphoses*, 11.3).¹² Ancient images of the goddess, such as a panel at the Getty Museum (100 CE) [Figure 18] and an Isis sculpture at the Capitoline Museum (2nd century CE) [Figure 19] include these elements or at least variations upon them.

While these literary descriptions were available to fifteenth-century scholars and artists, accessible visual sources presented widely differing representations of the goddess. Roman coins were perhaps the most visible evidence of antiquity in the Renaissance, found throughout Italy during the *quattrocento*.¹³ Isis was featured on Roman coinage with various headdresses. A coin minted under Hadrian (117-138 CE) [Figure 20] depicts Isis on the reverse with the traditional disk and horns. On another, she greets Caracalla (c. 215 CE) [Figure 21] wearing no discernable crown. Some coins, mainly those in minted Egypt and Greece, portray Isis symbolically via a diadem composed of a moon disk, horns, sheaths of wheat, and a possible feather [Figure 22]. These examples suggest that Isis’s crown varied in numismatic imagery over time.

Medieval and Renaissance images of Isis increased the diversity of depictions of the goddess. Portrayals of Isis in texts, such as Giovanni Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris* (*On Famous Women*, 1360–74) and *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (*On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles*, begun c. 1350) and the Second Vatican Mythographer’s entry in the manuscript Vatican Reg. lat. 1401, do not discuss a crown at all.¹⁴ A cow is mentioned in regards to the boat that carried her to Egypt, being on a flag or the bow in miniature, but the medieval authors do not

state she wore cow horns on her head. An illumination from a copy of Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (MS. Fr. 599, f. 10v, BNF) [Figure 223 depicts Isis with a diadem composed of golden leaves with a blueish-purple gem at the center. Other illustrations from this same text show her with a medieval crown. A classical Roman statue of Isis modified by, the Lombard artist, Andrea Bregno after 1475 [Figure 24] features a tuft of wavy hair representing a crown. This bust actually began as a full statue of Isis from the second century CE, but Bregno cut it to resemble sculptural busts of the *quattrocento*.¹⁵ The *Tazza Farnese* (3rd century BCE) [Figure 25], a Ptolemaic sardonyx cameo cup, which was in the Medici collection at the time the Kisters painting was completed, features Osiris (or the personification of the Nile) on the throne with Isis below and Horus standing above her. Here Isis wears only a thin headband in her coiffure [Figure 26] and displays none of the traditional headdresses. It is entirely possible that Botticelli was familiar with the *Tazza* and some scholars have argued that the artist studied it and appropriated motifs for multiple compositions, including *The Birth of Venus* (1482-85).¹⁶

These variations in contemporary visual depictions of Isis's crown suggest that it is not unreasonable to see the black feather and pearl worn by the figure in the Kisters painting as an interpretation of the motif. This is especially true if it is meant to follow in the tradition of the Bregno bust, which was modified just a decade earlier than the Botticelli painting. The lack of consistent and legible ancient visual sources and the shift in the Middle Ages away from Isis's diadem of cow horns and moon disk could have prompted Botticelli and his unknown client to make assumptions and invent a new method of depicting Isis's crown. Another possibility is that the feather is a reference Isis's life in ancient Egypt and her presence at the weighing of the heart ceremony. After death, a person's fate was determined by weighing their heart against the feather of Ma'at, the emblem of the goddess of truth. Isis did not necessarily play a large role in the trial,

but she was evoked in burials as a protectress of the dead.¹⁷ The black plume on the female figure's head in the Kisters Botticelli could have been intended to evoke Ma'at and this ancient Egyptian ceremony. It is unclear if *quattrocento* scholars and artists were aware this particular mythology, but the visual evidence may suggest that they were.

The dark gray cloud immediately behind the head of the figure in the Kisters painting may offer a further allusion to Isis. The gray puff was definitely added in the second phase of execution as it overlaps a portion of the woman's braid. Andreas Schumacher at the Städel Museum suggested that the cloud was reference to Simonetta's early death. Rather, I suggest it alluded to the legend of Io and Jupiter. Ovid stated that Jupiter attacked Io, daughter of Inachus, in the form of a dark cloud or mist (*Metamorphoses*, 1:814-832).¹⁸ The unfortunate Io, transformed into a cow by Jupiter to hide his transgression from his jealous wife Juno (*Metamorphoses*, 1:846-864), eventually arrived in Egypt where she resumed human form as Isis and was worshiped as a goddess (*Metamorphoses*, 1:1020-1037).¹⁹ Io and Isis are two halves of the same being within Greco-Roman mythology. The shadowy cloud that protrudes from the back of the woman's head in the Botticelli image may well have served as a reference to Jupiter's form as he raped Io. The darkness of the feather and pearl could also be suggestive of this story from the *Metamorphoses*.

The Scarf

The scarf adorning the woman in the Kisters Botticelli was a second phase alteration and is one of the most fully rendered of the changes. Its placement, color, and decoration all link the woman to depictions, both visual and literary, of the Egyptian goddess Isis. The knotted shawl or mantle was one of Isis's main identifying attributes and may well have been known within the growing intellectual ambient of Florence. To be sure, the scarf the figure wears is not an

uncommon feature in Botticelli's work. A version appears in the *Madonna del Magifncat* (c. 1480-81) [Figure 27] and is worn by Saint Catherine of Alexandria on the *San Barnaba Altarpiece* (c. 1487) [Figure 28]. It is of note that the women who wear this particular brightly patterned scarf in Botticelli's work are all from the "East." Mary from Palestine and Catherine and Isis from Egypt. Fabrics from the Middle East and beyond were often revered for their rich color and patterns.²⁰ Botticelli could have used this specific stole as a method of signifying "Eastern" origin. However, the scarf was never depicted in such an elaborate and vibrant fashion or draped so that it falls down between the breasts prior to the Kisters canvas.

The stole, a knotted piece of fabric draped between the goddess's breasts, was a defining feature of Greek and Roman Isis sculptures and is traditionally now referred to as the Isis knot.²¹ Multiple Roman statues and busts of Isis include this element; for example, the Capitoline Isis (2nd century CE), the Isis bust at Palazzo San Marco in Rome (2nd-3rd century CE) [Figure 29] and the *Tazza Farnese* (3rd century BCE) all feature this knotted scarf or cloak. The scarf and knot position in the Kisters painting connects the figure most closely with two examples of Isis imagery known in the fifteenth-century, the Palazzo San Marco Isis and the *Tazza Farnese*.

The brilliant coloring of the scarf further connects Botticelli's figure with the Egyptian deity. Both Plutarch and Apuleius describe Isis as wearing polychrome garments. Plutarch states that Isis's clothing was "variegated in color," suggesting stripes of different shades (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 77, 241).²² Apuleius describes the goddess wearing a robe "of many colors...there yellow with saffron bloom, there flaming with rosy redness..." (*Metamorphoses*, 11:3). He also mentions that her cloak is wrapped diagonally across her chest and knotted (*Metamorphoses*, 11:3).²³ The pearl adornments Botticelli added to the scarf also bear consideration in the light of Apuleius's description of the heavenly queen. He writes "Along the

embroidered border and over the surface of the cloak glittering stars were scattered...”

(*Metamorphoses*, 11:4).²⁴ Botticelli’s cream-colored embellishments may well have been meant to represent glittering stars. In the fifteenth-century, pearls were symbols of virginity and perfect female beauty.²⁵ I have not yet uncovered a direct correlation between stars and pearls, but the amount and appearance of the tiny gleaming beads in the painting could be interpreted as the stars on Isis’s cloak in the *Metamorphoses*.

The Exposed Breast

As was discussed in the Introduction, perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the Kisters painting has always been the emphasis upon a lactating breast without the presence of a child. This was unusual, if not unprecedented, in Italian Renaissance imagery. Indeed, I have been unable to locate visual precedents. In medieval and Renaissance art, the main female figure shown lactating was the Virgin Mary, as the *Madonna lactans*.²⁶ But, the woman in the Kisters painting does not bear the same attributes as the Madonna, such as a pink gown and blue mantle and the presence of the Christ child. In *Madonna lactans* imagery, the breast position was often anti-naturalistic, as in Sandro Botticelli’s *Madonna of the Pavilion*, completed c. 1493 [Figure 30]. The same might be argued for the woman in the Kisters Botticelli painting. The breast is quite small compared to the rest of her body and is not in an anatomically correct location.

Here I suggest the introduction of the bared breast in phase two of the Kisters canvas execution was intended to evoke Isis’s nature as a nursing goddess. Aside from being consort to Osiris, Isis was the mother of Horus, the god of the pharaohs (of kingship).²⁷ From antiquity, images of *Isis lactans* depicted Isis nursing her son, or other pharaohs [Figure 31]. Every pharaoh was Horus incarnate, making Isis the mother of the rulers of Egypt.²⁸ In ancient Egyptian culture, it was she who confers divine right and immortality onto the pharaohs.²⁹ Isis’s

role as a maternal figure went beyond Egypt. The Romans and Greeks saw her as “the Nurse;” a title that Plutarch states in *De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 53, Plato assigned her in his *Timaeus* (360 BCE) (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 53, 203).³⁰ The *Isis lactans* motif was featured on Roman coins. One particular example [Figure 32], minted under Antoninus Pius, also features the knotted scarf and a similar hairstyle to the figure in the Kisters painting. Images of her available in the fifteenth-century did not normally include Horus, but the positioning of the knot placed emphasis on her bosom. This was the case in both the Palazzo San Marco Isis and the *Tazza Farnese*. In the *Tazza*, Isis reclines bare breasted with only a small strip of fabric knotted on her chest. The positioning of the Isis knot in the Botticelli painting draws the viewer’s eye to her chest illuminating her role as a nursing goddess and the powers of her milk.

Isis’s lactation played a role in the rites of her cult throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In the Isaic procession described by Apuleius, a devotee carried “a small golden vessel rounded like a breast, from which he poured libations with milk” (*Metamorphoses*, 11.10).³¹ His character, Lucius, also pronounced her a “savior of mankind” and a mother to all (*Metamorphoses*, 11.25).³² In his article about the Isis cult in Pompeii, David L. Balch notes that one of the sacred implements in her following was a *situla* filled with Isis’ milk for Horus.³³ The Capitoline Isis carries such a *situla* in her right hand. Her milk held powers of life, divinity, and immortality.³⁴

Isis’s nurturing manner went beyond caring for her son. According to Plutarch, “Isis is the female principle in nature and that which receives all procreation” (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 53, 203).³⁵ The Roman author writes that the Egyptians held the earth along the Nile to be the body of Isis (*De Iside et Osiride*, 38, 177) and it was she and her husband who taught them farming and animal husbandry (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 13, 137).³⁶ Isis was also allied

with Demeter, Greek goddess of harvest, by Herodotus in *The Persian Wars* (2.156).³⁷ Isis's identity as a nurse who brings life to nature may explain why the milk issuing from her breast lands on the rocky mass below. Once she has given nutrients, the milk, to the uncultivated ground at her side it is transformed into the lush green landscape behind.

The Background

The current background in the Kisters painting was entirely a second phase addition that differentiated the canvas from the panels identified with Simonetta Vespucci. In fact, this is the only one to feature a landscape, and more importantly a landscape containing geographic features not found in *quattrocento* Tuscany. It seems that Isis's function as a nature deity extends beyond the exposed breast and into the landscape behind. It is unclear whether the water depicted is a sea or a river, but with the vibrant green land running alongside it could be interpreted as the Nile [Figure 4]. According to Plutarch, the goddess was the fertile earth that followed the edge of the Nile river and with her rattle she called forth the annual flooding of the waterway.³⁸ As she restored life to Osiris, she brought new life to the earth with the rising of the river.³⁹ Aside from fertility allusions, the water may offer a further reference to Isis in her role as protectress of harbors. Isis was also a deity of weather and seafaring.⁴⁰ In that role, her names were Isis Pharia, the protector of harbor of Alexandria, Isis Pelagia (Hellenistic) and Isis-Sothis (Roman).⁴¹ There was also a Roman festival in March called the *Navigium Isidis*, in which sea navigation was renewed after the winter.⁴²

Identifying Botticelli's figure as Isis offers additional insights into the background, which includes a city with three loosely defined structures. They are painted in a gray-blue color; hints of gold suggest sunlight. It is quite possible that the building closest to the water in the Botticelli painting, the largest of the three, was meant to represent of the Lighthouse of Alexandria. The

lighthouse was constructed on Pharos island in the port of Alexandria and Isis was known as a protector of the harbor. A temple to Isis Pharia stood on the island.⁴³ In Roman coins from the High and Late Empire, feature Isis next to the lighthouse [Figure 33] or standing on the bow of a ship with a sail [Figure 34]. This motif of Isis striding forward with a sail is so common that Susan Handler has proposed that a statue of her in this pose may have existed at her temple on Pharos.⁴⁴

The buildings in the Kisters painting have little detail, but the structure farthest to the left is certainly three-tiered and stands at the water's edge, where it might guide the boats safely into the harbor. The lighthouse at Alexandria was also recorded as being three-tiered and some describe the sections as being rectangular, octagonal, and round, respectively.⁴⁵ We do know that the structure was damaged and restored at different times, which could have affected its overall appearance.⁴⁶ By 1479, the Lighthouse of Alexandria was completely demolished to make way for the Fort of Qaitbay, which still stands there today.⁴⁷ Depictions of the ancient wonder often featured the tripartite design, including the mosaic at San Marco in Venice (13th century) [Figure 35] and sixteenth-century prints of the harbor by Maarten van Heemskerck (c. 1572) [Figure 36].

The boats depicted also have significance in regards to medieval imagery and literary descriptions of Isis. The Second Vatican Mythographer (twelfth century) states that Isis/Io crossed the sea on ship with a likeness of a cow head on it and after her arrival in Egypt the boat was deemed sacred.⁴⁸ The Vatican Mythographers, three now unknown authors who recorded myths, whose works were found together in a single medieval manuscript in the Vatican Archives, Vatican Reg. lat. 1401.⁴⁹ Their description recalls Egyptian Isiac rituals, as there was a festival involving the boat of Isis and ceremoniously crossing the Nile.⁵⁰ In Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, the entry on Isis also mentions a ship with a flag bearing the image of a cow

(*De mulieribus claris*, 8:3) and the text was often accompanied by miniatures depicting Isis on a boat with a representation of cow's head [Figure 23].⁵¹

The cliffs just to the right of three buildings in the Kisters canvas landscape are unusual, having a rounded and sheer appearance. The introduction of rather extraordinary structures, both natural and man-made, appears designed to suggest an exotic land. The frescoed vaults in the *Sala dei Santi* (1492-95), part of the Vatican papal apartments commissioned by Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, 1431-1503), from the Perugian painter, Pinturicchio (1454-1513) feature images of Isis amid similar, fantastical cliffs [Figure 37]. The vaults depict the story of Isis and Osiris, including their marriage, the couple teaching the Egyptians law and agriculture, and the death and funeral of Osiris. In the round arch separating the two quadripartite vaults, five octagonal panels that tell Io's journey to Egypt and transformation into Isis. One of these octagons, the *Meeting of Isis and Osiris* [Figure 38], displays a fantastical rocky cliff, signifying Egypt, in the shallow background. A similar rock structure can be found in Perugino's *Moses's Journey into Egypt* on the walls of the Sistine Chapel (1481-82) [Figure 39]. Pinturicchio was one of Perugino's assistants during the Sistine Chapel project and is believed to have worked on this particular fresco.⁵² It is also worth noting that Botticelli was one of the other artists commissioned to complete scenes from the life of Moses and Christ in the chapel, including *The Trials of Moses* (1481-82) [Figure 40], *The Punishment of Korah*, and *The Temptation of Christ*.⁵³

For whatever reason, Botticelli, as well as Pinturicchio, chose not to utilize stereotypical Egyptian architecture and landscapes in their works. Renaissance scholars and artists were aware of the Great Pyramids in Giza as well as the obelisks as Egyptian forms of architecture.⁵⁴ A pyramid was featured in Lorenzo Ghiberti's *The Story of Noah* from the Gates of Paradise on the

Baptistry in Florence (1425-52) [Figure 41]. The suggestion of a foreign or exotic location was subtler in the Botticelli canvas, with the inclusion of unrealistic rocky cliffs and mountains. The rounded precipices in the Kisters painting were not drawn from Botticelli's, or his assistants', surrounding environment, but their imagination. It insinuates to the viewer that this landscape is not Tuscany, or even Italy, but an exotic place where mountains of unusual shapes and sizes can be found, which just might be Egypt.

To conclude this iconographic analysis of the Kisters painting, we might consider the possibility that the canvas provided inspiration for Pinturicchio's depictions of Isis in the *Sala dei Santi*. In *Meeting of Isis and Osiris*, Isis/IO is greeted by a man clothed in blue garment and red cloak with a white bull behind him, presumably Osiris. The woman wears a yellow dress, a circularly draped polychrome, striped scarf, as well as a thin, double-strand, black necklace, not dissimilar from the Kisters canvas. The scarfs are not wrapped in the same manner, but the pattern and coloration are analogous. Isis/IO's golden hair is also composed in a half-up, half-down manner. The Botticelli image was painted prior to Pinturicchio's work for Pope Alexander VI and the artists were acquainted with one another; both in Rome in the early 1480s, working on the wall decoration in the Sistine Chapel. It is not improbable that Pinturicchio and Botticelli discussed Egyptian mythology and Isis, as there was a bust of her display not too far away at the Palazzo San Marco from the collection of Pietro Barbo (Pope Paul II, r. 1464-71). While I cannot prove that Pinturicchio ever saw Botticelli's image, the visual similarities between their two depictions of Isis suggest he may have.

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. Charles Martin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 1:784-1037.

² Brian A. Curran, “Ancient Egypt and Egyptian Antiquities in Italian Renaissance Art and Culture,” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1997), 225. For the inventory of 1500, see B. L. Ullman and Philip A. Stadter, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici and the Library of San Marco* (Padua: Antenore, 1972), 125-267. For Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, idem, 235, #936. This specific manuscript was from Niccolò Niccoli’s library and it entered the San Marco library around 1437, at his death.

³ Plutarch, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, ed., trans., and comm. J. Gwyn Griffiths (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970), Chap. 12, 137.

⁴ Brian A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 89. The *Moralia* was in the Library at San Marco, however it is unclear when it entered the collection; see Ullman and Stadter, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence*, 278, M 117.

⁵ Curran, “Ancient Egypt,” 225. This text was at the Library of San Marco, see Ullman and Stadter, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence*, 217, #798. This manuscript entered the San Marco library around 1437. The 1469 publication was done in Rome by Arnold Pannartz and Konrad Sweynheim; see *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record of British and Foreign Literature* 67 (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1897), 662.

⁶ Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli's Mythological Paintings* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); Jean Gillies, *Botticelli's Primavera: The Young Lorenzo's Transformation* (New York: iUniverse, Inc, 2010); Gombrich, “Botticelli's Mythologies,”; Andreas Schumacher, “The Painter Sandro Botticelli: An Introduction to his Oeuvre,” in *Botticelli: Likeness, Myth, Devotion*, ed. Andreas Schumacher (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 15-55; and Joanne Snow-Smith, *The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli: A Neoplatonic Interpretation*, Vol. 5 of *New Connections: Studies in Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1993).

⁷ Gillies, *Botticelli's Primavera*, 57-59; and Gombrich, “Botticelli's Mythologies,” 16-17.

⁸ Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism*, 85-92; and Schumacher, “The Painter Sandro Botticelli,” 30-36.

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9:988-996.

¹⁰ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 52, 203.

¹¹ Lucius Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. J. Arthur Hanson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 11.3.

¹² Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11.3.

¹³ John Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious: The Numismatic Presence in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

¹⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8:1-7; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, trans. Jon Solomon (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 9:46; and, "On Io," in *The Vatican Mythographers*, ed. Ronald E. Pepin (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 144; and idem, "On Isis," 144-145.

¹⁵ Claudio Crescentini and Claudio Strinati, eds., *La forma del Rinascimento: Donatello, Andrea Bregno, Michelangelo e la scultura a Roma nel Quattrocento* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2010), 298.

¹⁶ T. E. S. Yuen, "The 'Tazza Farnese' as a Source for Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' and Piero di Cosimo's 'Myth of Prometheus,'" *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 84 (1969): 175-177.

¹⁷ John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 66.

¹⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1:814-832.

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1:1020-1037.

²⁰ Jennifer M. Scarce, *Women's Costume of the Near and Middle East* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 26.

²¹ Thomas F. Mathews and Norman Muller, "Isis and Mary in early icons," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate), 6.

²² Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 77, 241.

²³ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11:3.

²⁴ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11:4.

²⁵ Linda Wolk-Simon, "Portrait of a Nude Woman (The Fornarina), Copy after Raphael," in *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrea Bayer (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 186.

²⁶ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 40, 42.

²⁷ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 11.

²⁸ Gail Paterson Corrington, "The Milk of Salvation: Redemption by the Mother in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 4 (1989), 399.

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- ²⁹ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 11; Corrington, “The Milk of Salvation,” 398.
- ³⁰ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 53, 203. I have searched Plato’s *Timaeus*, but there is no direct discussion of Isis. Plato does discuss a nurse in relation to the Earth and the Universe, but not Isis, see *Timaeus*, 49 A, 51 A. I am left to assume that perhaps Plutarch’s statement is his own personal commentary on the text or he had additional information.
- ³¹ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11.10.
- ³² Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11.25.
- ³³ David L. Balch, “The Suffering of Isis/Isis and Paul’s Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal. 3:1): Frescoes in Pompeian and Roman Houses and in the Temple of Isis in Pompeii,” *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 1 (Jan., 2003): 41.
- ³⁴ Corrington, “The Milk of Salvation,” 398.
- ³⁵ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 53, 203.
- ³⁶ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 13, 137.
- ³⁷ Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, ed. and trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2.156. Herodotus’s *Histories* was in the San Marco Library; see Ullman and Stadter, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence*, 261, #1181. This connection with agriculture was reiterated by the Italian-born author, Christine de Pizan, see *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffery Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), I.36.1.
- ³⁸ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 37, 177. For the connection between the rattle and the Nile, see The Second Vatican Mythographer, in *The Vatican Mythographers*, ed. Ronald Pepin (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), Chap. 112, 144-145.
- ³⁹ R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 14-15.
- ⁴⁰ Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*, 101.
- ⁴¹ Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*, 19; and J. Gwyn Griffiths, in *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride*, 43.
- ⁴² J. Gwyn Griffiths, in *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride*, 50.
- ⁴³ Susan Handler, “Architecture on the Roman Coins of Alexandria,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 75, no. 1 (Jan., 1971), 59.
- ⁴⁴ Handler, “Architecture on the Roman Coins,” 60.

⁴⁵ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “The Islamic History of the Lighthouse of Alexandria,” *Muqarnas* 23 (2006), 3.

⁴⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, “The Islamic History,” 8-9.

⁴⁷ Behrens-Abouseif, “The Islamic History,” 8.

⁴⁸ The Second Vatican Mythographer, “On Io,” 144.

⁴⁹ Pepin, *The Vatican Mythographers*, 5.

⁵⁰ Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*, 165.

⁵¹ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 8: 3.

⁵² Luigi Grassi, “Bernardino di Betto, detto il Pinturicchio,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 9, Accessed November 10, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bernardino-di-betto-detto-il-pinturicchio_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bernardino-di-betto-detto-il-pinturicchio_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

⁵³ Horne, *Botticelli*, 86-101; and Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, 90-113.

⁵⁴ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 66-67, 89.

CHAPTER 4

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF ISIS

While the precise circumstances surrounding the alterations to the Kisters Botticelli are unknown, examining the social and cultural context of fifteenth-century Florence offers insights into the frameworks that may have informed the creation of an image of Isis. The Italian Renaissance is known as the revival of Greco-Roman antiquity, but the period featured an interest in Egypt as well. Brian Curran states that in the first half of the *quattrocento*, there was a recognition of the Egyptian origins of the obelisks in Rome and studies of hieroglyphics.¹ Exemplifying this was the relocation of obelisks in Rome during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The obelisks at the Campidoglio and the Piazza di San Macuto actually originated in the Iseum Campense, the ancient Roman complex dedicated to Isis, and were transported to their current locations in the late medieval period and the fifteenth-century, respectively.² Also two granite lions, covered in hieroglyphics, were removed from the Iseum in the twelfth-century and installed in the Piazza della Rotunda in front of the Pantheon.³ While the connection between these monuments and Isis may not have been specifically known to contemporary Romans, it presents an interesting backdrop when considering the possible circumstances for the creation of the Kisters canvas. Also important to this discussion, is the consideration of Botticelli's patronage during the 1480s, which mainly consisted of the Medici circle and Neoplatonic thinkers, including Ficino, Poliziano, and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.⁴ In this chapter, I investigate the *quattrocento* fascination with Egypt as a background to understanding a rising

interest in ancient deities and collecting, and Florentine Neoplatonism. In the same vein, I also explore late medieval and contemporary secular culture in Italy, considering Isis's place within the literary genre of illustrious women.

Collecting Egyptian Art and Artifacts

In the 1400s, there was growing interest in collecting Roman and Greek antiquities.⁵ As was noted in Chapter Two, ancient Roman coins could be found throughout Renaissance Italy and provided a wealth of visual sources for artists and scholars.⁶ Ancient coins were sources for classical motifs and formed the basis of many collections. For example, Pietro Barbo (Pope Paul II, r. 1464-71) had an enormous collection consisting of numerous coins, medals, bronze statues, and cameos.⁷ Contemporary humanists discussed the objects' prevalence and passed them as gifts between friends.⁸ As we have seen ancient coins featured Isis in various modes. One such Hadrianic coin is documented by Ferrarese scholar Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (1479-1552) in the Roman collection of a Cardinal Salviati.⁹ Giraldi does not specify which Cardinal Salviati or even when he saw the coin; however, I believe it may be Cardinal Giovanni Salviati (1490-1553), nephew of Pope Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici, 1475-1521) and a well-known collector of antiquities.¹⁰

In the late fifteenth-century, the *Tazza Farnese* [Figure 25], the interior of which features a group of Egyptian deities, appeared in the Medici collections. The object was purchased by Lorenzo de' Medici in 1471 from Pietro Barbo and remained in the Medici collection until after Lorenzo's death in 1492.¹¹ The partial Isis statue outside the Palazzo San Marco in Rome [Figure 28] also belonged to Barbo.¹² These two ancient artifacts offer explicit connections to the Botticelli painting. As was noted in the previous chapter, Botticelli reportedly studied and borrowed from the *Tazza*.¹³ Further, Botticelli's time in Rome during the 1480s may well have

allowed him to encounter Barbo's Isis statue [Figure 29]. Finally, Botticelli's acquaintances with Neoplatonic scholars such as Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano could have allowed Botticelli to have some knowledge of Egyptian philosophy and its deities. So it is possible that when our mystery client approached and asked for an image of Isis, Botticelli knew exactly who he was talking about and had, at least, a passing familiarity with her iconography.

Neoplatonism

Developed in the mid-1400s by Florentine Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Neoplatonism was one of the leading philosophies of the Italian Renaissance. Neoplatonism was not a philosophy based solely on the Greek philosopher Plato, but a mix of works from ancient thinkers and patristic writers, including Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, and St. Augustine.¹⁴ Fifteenth-century interest in Egypt was fueled, in part, by Neoplatonism and the continual translation and publication of texts, such as the *Corpus Hermeticum* of Hermes Trismegistus, the then-famous Egyptian philosopher, completed by Florentine Marsilio Ficino. By the seventeenth-century, it was determined that the *Hermeticum* was not an ancient Egyptian text, but written in the third century CE by multiple authors.¹⁵ Hermes Trismegistus, now realized as a fictional character, was among the most praised of the ancient philosophers during the Renaissance and was believed to have instructed Moses and Plato.¹⁶ Ficino's interest with pagan writers and thinkers was certainly not a secret to contemporaries, the historian James Hankins asserts that Ficino never intended to depart from Christianity.¹⁷ Christianity was always central to Ficino's philosophy and it has been argued that Ficino developed Neoplatonism so that citizens of Florence, and beyond, could study ancient pagan philosophy without the fear that it was compromising their Christian faith.¹⁸

Ficino, like Botticelli, spent most of his life under Medici patronage.¹⁹ In the early 1460s, Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) gave Ficino the annual profits of a farm in Careggi and

the charge to complete translations of Plato and other philosophical works from Greek into Latin.²⁰ In April of 1463 Ficino presented Cosimo the translation of Trismegitus's *Corpus Hermeticum*, then known as the *Pimander*.²¹ Less than six months later, in September 1463, the *Hermeticum* was available in the vernacular; both versions were quite popular.²² In true Neoplatonic fashion, Ficino claimed that Trismegitus was the founder of pagan theology and he had foretold the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Trinity.²³ Such a view made the Egyptians forerunners of Christianity, proto-Christian in the eyes of Renaissance scholars.²⁴ Isis is mentioned in Hermetic texts, including the "*Kore Kosmou*," ("The Virgin of the World"), wherein she identifies herself as a disciple of Trismegistus.²⁵

The Virgin Mary and Isis

The "Egyptian Revival" in Rome came to its climax with the fresco program in the Borgia papal apartments in the 1490s. As discussed in the Chapter Three, Pinturicchio depicted the story of Isis and Osiris in the vaults of the *Sala dei Santi* (1492-95). The northern vault [Figure 42] shows the marriage of Isis and Osiris, and the couple as "cultivators of peace," a description found in Plutarch's text.²⁶ The southern vault [Figure 43] displays the murder of Osiris, Isis gathering his limbs, and his burial. In between these two vaulted spaces is an arch that contains five octagonal panels that feature Argus, Mercury, Io/Isis, Osiris, and possibly Jupiter. There are also six lunette scenes along the walls featuring the Virgin Mary and Saints Elizabeth, Sebastian, Catherine of Alexandria, Susanna, Barbara, and Anthony the Abbot. Part of the rationale for the program of the chamber lies in a text from Giovanni Nanni (known as Annius of Viterbo), the personal secretary of Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia), that prescribed Osiris a central role in human history-crediting him with civilizing the world.²⁷ This idea of Osiris as a "deliverer of mankind" can be seen in the northern vault.²⁸ N. Randolph Parks suggests that the Egyptian king is a symbol of a triumphant papacy that would create an empire of peace.²⁹ Nanni

also stated that Apis was the mythological ancestor of the Borgia bull, which is featured on the family's crest [Figure 44]. This ancestral link between the two animals in turn made Rodrigo Borgia and his family descendants of Osiris.³⁰ The Borgia interest in Osiris and Isis went beyond this particular room. The Isis bust by Andrea Bregno [Figure 23], discussed earlier in Chapter Three, is believed to have been a gift or commission for Rodrigo Borgia, due to the bulls on the base of the sculpture.³¹

Aside from Pope Alexander VI's personal lineage, the Christian significance assigned to Isis and Osiris likely made the subject matter appealing. Parks understands the importance of the Egyptian couple within the frame of Plutarch's spiritual triangle from *De Iside et Osiride*, which was certainly a source for the design of the frescoes. Plutarch wrote that Osiris is the "Word", Typhon, his brother, is the agent who destroys the "Word", and Isis who collects the "Word" and delivers it to the world (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 2,121).³² However, the theme is modified for a Christian context. According to Parks, Osiris is the "Word" or the Church; Typhon is the anti-Christian forces, and Isis is the Virgin Mary.³³ Plutarch refers to Osiris as the "Word" but the "Word" in Christianity does not necessarily refer to the Church—it refers to Christ. The first verses of the Gospel of John describe Jesus Christ as the "Word" (John 1:1-4).³⁴ The familial connections between these two sets of figures (Christ and Mary; Isis and Osiris) and the resurrections of both Christ and Osiris provide strong evidence that Osiris was understood as an allegory of Christ not the Church. The Church is the people to whom Isis gave the "Word," just as Mary gave Christ to the world. These personifications may explain why the Pope commissioned a large mythological cycle in the Vatican palace.

The *Sala dei Santi* was not the first connection were made between Mary and Isis. In the *Epistre Othea à Hector* (1399-1400), Christine de Pizan discussed Isis, the goddess of plants and

cultivation, as an allegorical representation of the Virgin's conception of Christ by the Holy Spirit.³⁵ Christine de Pizan was an Italian-born author who spent the majority of her life in the French courts of King Charles V (1338-1380) and Charles VI (1366-1422).³⁶ I cannot demonstrate the presence of this text in Italy; however, I am strictly using this text as a wider fifteenth-century example of the association between Mary and Isis. In *Othea*, de Pizan claims that Isis is a personification of the Holy Spirit, part of the Trinity. This does not detract from the connection between Isis and Mary, but places the Egyptian queen in a deeper theological realm of Christianity. It was not by accident that Isis was recognized as a proto-Christian version of the Madonna. Isis conceived her own son, Horus, through mystical means. Plutarch states that Isis became pregnant by Osiris after his resurrection and the loss of his phallus (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 19, 147-49).³⁷ They also bore similar traits and titles, such as Queen Mother, Queen of Heaven, and Great Virgin.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, Isis's milk was sacred and carried in a *situla* during Isaic rituals. In the Middle Ages, Mary's breast milk was considered the holiest liquid next to the blood of Christ.³⁸ Not only were there innumerable reliquaries containing the miraculous fluid, there were poems and songs that centered around the Madonna's milk.³⁹ One such relic resided in the Tuscan town of Montevarchi.⁴⁰ In images of the *Madonna lactans*, Mary is often shown with a single, exposed breast. The singular bare breast of the Virgin was a reference to its sacred nature—it provided life to the Son of God and was not meant to be seen as erotic.⁴¹ I would argue that this also applies to the Kisters painting. Isis was a maternal deity who offered life and even divinity through her milk. While Isis is not nursing her son in the Botticelli image, her milk nurtures the land and signifies her larger role as a nature goddess. Isis and Mary brought life not only to their offspring, but also to the world.

One of the core objectives of Neoplatonism was to link Christian and pagan figures. A Neoplatonic scholar identifying the woman in the Kisters painting as Isis would have understood her additional significance as an allegory of the Virgin Mary. Isis would lead the mind to Mary, who would in turn bring the intellectual's thoughts to God. Contemplation and the ascent of the immortal soul to God were two of the main tenets in Florentine Neoplatonism.⁴² We might imagine that Botticelli's altered canvas could have served the function of a Neoplatonic meditation object that exercised the eyes, the mind, and the soul.

The Goddess of the Hieroglyphs

There is one more element of Isis's mythos that needs to be discussed—the claim that she invented written language. In *The City of God*, St. Augustine of Hippo states that it was Isis who taught the Egyptians the alphabet and because of this she was worshipped as a goddess after her death (*The City of God*, 18:39).⁴³ The alphabet, to which he references was, of course Egyptian hieroglyphics. This accomplishment was also lauded by Boccaccio in *De mulieribus claris* (8:4) and *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* (9:46:3) and Christine de Pizan *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (*The Book of the City of Women*, c. 1405) (I.36.1).⁴⁴ Creating a written language required logic and reasoning skills that were traditionally associated with men. Because of her invention, Isis was also portrayed as a goddess closely associated with wisdom, reason, and understanding. Plutarch also wrote that, according to Plato, Isis had a myriad of names because she had been transformed by reason and can be all corporeal and spiritual forms (*De Iside et Osiride*, Chapter 53, 203).⁴⁵

There was, in fact, a great interest in hieroglyphs in the fifteenth-century. Florentine scholars, including Niccolò Niccoli, Poggio Bracciolini, and Leon Battista Alberti, all examined and discussed Egyptian hieroglyphs.⁴⁶ Alberti believed that they might contain a universal

language could that transcended speech.⁴⁷ Ficino also described hieroglyphics as a mystical system for encoding sacred doctrines.⁴⁸ In 1484, Lorenzo *il Magnifico* brought Fra Urbano Bolzanio (1442-1524), a member of the Franciscan order and who had traveled to Greece, Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt, to Florence to tutor his second son, Giovanni.⁴⁹ The friar was seen as an expert in hieroglyphs, even though he admitted he was never able to translate them.⁵⁰ He, along with Ficino and Poliziano, tutored the young Giovanni and apparently instilled a fascination with hieroglyphs and Egypt. Giovanni de' Medici (1475-1521), the future Pope Leo X, eventually owned a statue of Isis and used it as a model for a sculpture in the 1520 Carnival procession.⁵¹ While no hieroglyphs, or written languages of any kind, is present in the Kisters image, referencing this association offers additional insights into what may have inspired the modifications to the canvas. Egyptian hieroglyphs recorded the great wisdom of the ancient civilization and taught celebrated prophets like Moses, so it may be possible that a scholar obsessed with decoding these symbols sought out a painting of the goddess who created them.⁵²

To conclude this discussion of Neoplatonism and Isis, we should reference one last octagonal panel from the *Sala dei Santi*. The inset [Figure 45] shows Isis enthroned with two figures seated on either side, identified as Moses (on the left) and Hermes Trismegistus (on the right).⁵³ This composition makes Isis's identification with the Virgin Mary explicit. This depiction is understood as Isis teaching the Egyptians law and writing.⁵⁴ But I think that this painting could be understood as a representation of her place within intellectual culture. On one hand, she was a part of humanist scholarship and Neoplatonism, represented in the figure of Trismegistus. Isis was certainly not the most popular pagan deity from antiquity, but she was still present within *quattrocento* culture through texts, ancient coins, and statues. On the other side, Moses references her proto-Christian significance. Through the means of Neoplatonism and

authors, like de Pizan, Isis became an allegory for the Madonna, as well as the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵

Despite her lack of wide-spread fame in the Renaissance, Isis was linked with powerful figures and credited with invention and civilizing a nation, making it plausible that an educated man or woman could have requested an image of her for their collection.

The Literary Genre of Famous Women

Finally, reference to the tradition of recording, both textually and visually, famous ancient women in the late middle ages and early Renaissance may offer a secular context for the creation of an image of the goddess in fifteenth-century Florence. In the late middle ages, an ancient Roman tradition was revived by Francesco Petrararch (1304-1374): the cataloging of famous men and women. Following the example set out by Plutarch's *Bíoi Παράλληλοι* (*Parallel Lives*, or *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, 2nd century CE) and *Mulierum virtutes* (*Bravery of Women*, or *Concerning Virtuous Women*, 115- 125 CE), Petrararch wrote *De viris illustribus* (*On Illustrious Men*, begun c. 1337).⁵⁶ Broken into two volumes, *De viris illustribus* contained biographies of famous ancient men from Rome, Greece, and the Bible. Aside from this text, Petrararch recorded the achievements of ancient female figures in a letter to Empress Anna of the Holy Roman Empire in May of 1358.⁵⁷ In the epistle, Petrararch congratulates the Empress on the birth of her first child, a daughter named Elizabeth, and consoles her with the accomplishments of women from antiquity.⁵⁸ His list begins with Minerva, whose intellect surpasses all men, and then Isis, daughter of Inachus, who gave Egypt its alphabet.⁵⁹ It is believed that Giovanni Boccaccio was aware of this letter and used it as a basis for his *De mulieribus claris* (1360–74). While Boccaccio's text was not in the Medici library at San Marco, it was apparently popular as it influenced Bartolomeo Goggio (1430-1493), a member of the Ferrarese court under Ercole I d'Este (1431-1505) and Eleanora d' Aragona.⁶⁰ Boccaccio's entry on Isis, "Queen and Goddess

of Egypt,” identifies her as a famous ruler in Egypt, who was previously known as Io (*De mulieribus claris*, 8:1). He states that she transformed the people of Egypt from savages into a noble civilization, teaching them agriculture, law, and giving them an alphabet. Because of these feats, the Egyptians declared her a god after her death (*De mulieribus claris*, 8:4-7).⁶¹

Another example is *De laudibus mulierum* (*In Praise of Women*, c. 1487) by Ferrarese author Bartolomeo Goggio. Not much is known about the life of Goggio, but he did serve in the court of Duke Ercole I d’Este (1431-1505) and his wife Duchess Eleanora d’ Aragona, princess of Naples.⁶² Around 1487, Goggio presented *De laudibus mulierum* to Eleanora as a gift.⁶³ It was written in the Ferrarese vernacular, despite its Latin title.⁶⁴ Isis is included in Book Two of the text where she is again credited with the invention of written language, agriculture, and is described as a source of civilization.⁶⁵ What sets Goggio’s text from all the others is his overarching theme: the superiority of women to men.⁶⁶ This book was a gift to one of the most powerful and politically active women in *quattrocento* Italy. Eleanora d’ Aragona served as ruler whenever her husband was away and helped govern the city while under siege from Venice in 1482-84.⁶⁷ Goggio featured women who held power in their own right and accomplished great feats. He even found a way to redeem Eve for the Fall of Man.⁶⁸ The text was written within the same decade as the Kisters painting and Florence did have a relationship with Ferrara, which became particularly close under Lorenzo de’ Medici. Ferrarese bishops were known for employing Florentine artists, including Donatello, to complete ecclesiastical commissions.⁶⁹ After the Pazzi Conspiracy in 1478, Ercole I was awarded the baton of command of the Florentine alliance and received a palace once belonging to the banished Pazzi family.⁷⁰ One of the few foreign wedding celebrations that Lorenzo attended in person was the 1487 marriage of

Annibale Bentivoglio, future leader of Bologna, and Lucrezia d'Este, daughter of Ercole I and Eleanora.⁷¹

Inspired by Goggio's text, Eleanora commissioned three painted panels, *The Death of Lucretia, Wife of Hasdrubal and Her Children*, and *Portia and Brutus* (1490-93).⁷² These paintings, while tied to Goggio's text, had a precedent in Giotto's series of renowned men and women in Naples (1328-1333).⁷³ Sadly Giotto's cycle was destroyed sometime in the mid-1400s.⁷⁴ Other such series of *uomini famosi* were commissioned in Italy, including a cycle of eight *spalliera* panels in Siena in 1494-95 by Francesco di Giorgio.⁷⁵ While Isis was not included in any of these known painted series of famous women, she was part of the literary tradition that inspired their production. This specific genre of literature and painting suggests another context for the production of an image of Isis. The Kisters Botticelli could have been part of an individual's private collection of illustrious men and women. Isis's accomplishments of language, agriculture, and the Egyptian civilization allot her a certain level of honor within intellectual circles. In addition, with both men and women praising the Egyptian queen, the unknown client could have easily been a female seeking an image of a famous woman who personified intellect and nature.

Based on the influence of Neoplatonism, the presence of Egyptian artifacts in Florence, and the availability of literature discussing Isis in the San Marco Library, it seems plausible that the unknown client for the second phase of execution was a member of the Medici circle. Isis was never as popular as Venus or Minerva amongst the erudite classes, but she was still acknowledged as an ancient woman of great accomplishment by the likes of Petrarch, Boccaccio, de Pizan, and Ficino. The more obscure myths a scholar knew, such as the tales of Isis and Osiris, the more intelligent they would appear to their colleagues.⁷⁶ Having an image of a

beautiful woman, whose identity is not apparent at first glance, would have sparked a conversation that would permit the owner to demonstrate his or her wealth of knowledge. The contexts discussed above are the most likely scenarios that allow for the existence of the Kisters Botticelli, but they are by no means the only ones.

¹ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 89.

² Brian A. Curran, “The Sphinx in the City: Egyptian Memories and Urban Spaces in Renaissance Rome (and Viterbo),” in *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City*, eds. Stephen J. Campbell, and Stephen J. Milner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 295-96.

³ Curran, “The Sphinx in the City,” 297.

⁴ Gillies, *Botticelli's Primavera*, 57-59; and Gombrich, “Botticelli's Mythologies,” 16-17.

⁵ Kathleen Wren Christian, “The Virtues of the Papal Collector: Paul II and Sixtus IV,” *Empire Without End* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 91-92; and Kathleen Wren Christian, “Raphael's 'Philemon' and the Collecting of Antiquities in Rome,” *The Burlington Magazine* 146, no. 1220, Raphael (Nov., 2004), 762-63.

⁶ Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious*, 3-4.

⁷ Wren Christian, “Virtues of the Papal Collector,” 91-92.

⁸ Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious*, 4.

⁹ John Cunnally, “Ancient Coins as Gifts and Tokens of Friendship during the Renaissance,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 6, no. 2 (1994): 135. The article does not specify which Cardinal Salviati. Based on the life dates of Giraldi and the publication of his text in 1548, I presume it to be Cardinal Giovanni Salviati, 1490-1553.

¹⁰ Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *De deis gentium: Basel, 1548* (New York: Garland, 1976), 528, 549.

¹¹ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 190.

¹² Wren Christian, “Virtues of the Papal Collector,” 96-97.

¹³ Yuen, “The ‘Tazza Farnese,’” 175-177.

¹⁴ James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 2:463; and Kristeller, “The Platonic Academy,” 98.

¹⁵ Snow-Smith, *The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli*, 16.

¹⁶ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 91. The *Tazza Farnese* is listed in folio 18 recto of the 1492 Medici Inventory as “A bowl of sardonyx, chalcedony, and agate, within which are several figures and on the outside a head of Medusa, weighing 2 lib., 6 ounces” and it was the most expensive item in Medici collection, valued at 10,000 florins. See Richard Stapleford, *Lorenzo de' Medici at Home: The Inventory of the Palazzo Medici in 1492* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 96.

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- ¹⁷ Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2:454-455.
- ¹⁸ Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 7; and Nesca A. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1935), 62-63.
- ¹⁹ Kristeller, "The Platonic Academy," 92.
- ²⁰ Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, 3; and James Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), 2:187.
- ²¹ Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, 16.
- ²² Fields, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy*, 17.
- ²³ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 91-93. Marsilio Ficino makes these statements in *Argumentum, Opera omnia*.
- ²⁴ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 107.
- ²⁵ Snow-Smith, *The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli*, 136-37.
- ²⁶ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 13, 137; Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 110; N. Randolph Parks, "On the Meaning of Pinturicchio's *Sala Dei Santi*," *Art History* 2, no. 3 (September, 1979), 300.
- ²⁷ Parks, "On the Meaning," 297.
- ²⁸ Parks, "On the Meaning," 298.
- ²⁹ Parks, "On the Meaning," 298.
- ³⁰ Parks, "On the Meaning," 298.
- ³¹ Crescentini and Strinati, eds., *La forma del Rinascimento*, 298.
- ³² Parks, "On the Meaning," 300.
- ³³ Parks, "On the Meaning," 300-301.
- ³⁴ John 1:1-4 (Holman Christian Standard Bible).
- ³⁵ Christine de Pizan, *Christine De Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector*, ed. Jane Chance (Newburyport, MA: The Focus Library of Medieval Women, 1990), 141.

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- ³⁶ Earl Jeffery Richards, introduction to *The Book of the City of Ladies*, by Christine de Pizan (New York: Persea Books, 1982), xix-xxi.
- ³⁷ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 19, 147-49.
- ³⁸ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 44.
- ³⁹ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 44-45.
- ⁴⁰ Megan Holmes, “Disrobing the Virgin: The Madonna lactans in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Art,” in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, eds. Sara F. Matthews Grieco and Geraldine A. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192.
- ⁴¹ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 48.
- ⁴² Kristeller, “The Platonic Academy,” 93-96. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance*, 69, 73.
- ⁴³ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 876.
- ⁴⁴ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 8:4; Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, 9:46:3; and Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffery Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), I.36.1.
- ⁴⁵ Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, Chap. 53, 203.
- ⁴⁶ Curran, “The Sphinx in the City,” 298.
- ⁴⁷ Curran, “The Sphinx in the City,” 300.
- ⁴⁸ Curran, “The Sphinx in the City,” 302.
- ⁴⁹ Lucia Gualdo Rosa, “Dalle Fosse, Urbano,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 32, Accessed August 24, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/urbano-dalle-fosse_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/urbano-dalle-fosse_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
- ⁵⁰ For his status as an expert in hieroglyphs, see Curran, “The Sphinx in the City,” 307; for the lack of translation, see Rosa, “Dalle Fosse, Urbano,” [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/urbano-dalle-fosse_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/urbano-dalle-fosse_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
- ⁵¹ Curran, “The Sphinx in the City,” 307.
- ⁵² Augustine, *The City of God*, 876.

⁵³ Parks, "On the Meaning," 310, n.37; Curran, "Ancient Egypt," 252, n. 93.

⁵⁴ Curran, "Ancient Egypt," 252.

⁵⁵ Jane Chance, "Re-memembering Herself: Christine De Pizan's Refiguration of Isis as Io," *Modern Philology* 111, no. 2 (November 2013), 141; and Chance, ed., *Letter of Othea to Hector*, 128.

⁵⁶ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: W. Heinemann, 1914); *Mulierum virtutes* is part of the collection known as the *Moralia*, see Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, vol. 3 (London: Heinemann, 1931), 475-581; and Francesco Petrarca, *De viris illustribus*, trans. Guido Martellotti (Florence: Sansoni, 1964).

⁵⁷ Stephen Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women: Studies in Boccaccio's De Mulieribus Claris* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 42; and Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum familiarium libri XVII-XXIV*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 3:175-79.

⁵⁸ Kolsky, *The Genealogy of Women*, 42-47. I am not able to confirm that this particular letter was at the library at San Marco, but the library did possess a number of works by Petrarch including some of his letters.

⁵⁹ Petrarca, *Rerum familiarium libri XVII-XXIV*, 3:176. Inachus was Io's father according to Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1:806-810.

⁶⁰ The first vernacular copy of Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* was printed in 1506. Prior versions were produced outside Italy, most likely in Paris. For information about the publication and extant copies of Boccaccio's text, see Stephen Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio: Writings on Famous Women in Renaissance Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 1-5. It also influenced Christine de Pizan's own work and she actually refers to Boccaccio by name, see de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, I.37.1.

⁶¹ Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 8:4-7. About thirty years after Boccaccio's death, Christine de Pizan relates nearly the same story about Isis, see de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, I.36; and also see de Pizan, *Letter of Othea to Hector*, Chap. 25, 60.

⁶² Anna Laura Saso, "Goggio, Bartolomeo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 57, Accessed June 14, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-goggio_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-goggio_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

⁶³ Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio*, 176.

⁶⁴ Werner L. Gundersheimer, "Bartolommeo Goggio: A Feminist in Renaissance Ferrara," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1980), 180.

⁶⁵ Gundersheimer, “Bartolommeo Goggio,” 189-190. I have not seen this text as the only copy exist in manuscript form at the British Library and is not available for view: British Library, Additional MS 17, 415: *Ad divan Eleanoram de Aragona Inclitam ducissam ferrarie de laudibus mulierum Bartholomei Gogii*.

⁶⁶ Gundersheimer, “Bartolommeo Goggio,” 185; and Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio*, 5, 176.

⁶⁷ Gundersheimer, “Bartolommeo Goggio,” 183.

⁶⁸ Gundersheimer, “Bartolommeo Goggio,” 196.

⁶⁹ Stephen J. Campbell, “‘Our eagles always held fast to your lilies’: The Este, the Medici, and the Negotiation of Cultural Identity,” in *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City*, eds. Stephen J. Campbell, and Stephen J. Milner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139.

⁷⁰ Campbell, “‘Our eagles,’” 148.

⁷¹ Long, “Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*,” 23.

⁷² Joseph Manca, “‘Constantia et Forteza’: Eleonora D’aragona’s Famous Matrons,” *Notes in the History of Art* 19, no. 2 (Winter 2000), 13.

⁷³ Ruth Wilkins Sullivan, “Three Ferrarese Panels on the Theme of ‘Death Rather than Dishonour’ and the Neapolitan Connection,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 57, no. 4 (1994), 618.

⁷⁴ Marian H. Wooten, “A Series of Famous Women for Eleonora D’Aragona Neapolitan Princess and Ferrarese Duchess,” (Master’s thesis, The Florida State University, 2002), 37-38.

⁷⁵ Wooten, “A Series of Famous Women,” 28.

⁷⁶ Luba Freedman, *Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Sandro Botticelli's *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* has undergone quite a number of changes throughout its existence. The Kisters canvas most likely began its life as an image of an idealized beauty wearing a green cloak in profile view, perhaps painted for a festival or wedding. It may have even been intended to evoke Simonetta Vespucci. There was a large amount of poetry dedicated to Signora Vespucci, so it is possible that a painted image of her was utilized during a Florentine civic procession. However, I have argued that an unknown client subsequently purchased the canvas and requested significant modifications from Botticelli's workshop to the image. At that point the female figure was given a new identity, as the headdress, scarf, bare breast, and landscape were fashioned to distinguish the woman as Isis. The exposed, lactating breast and the use of a fertile landscape symbolized Isis's disposition as a mother and nature goddess. The city and blue mountains were added to imply the foreign home of the goddess, Egypt, specifically Alexandria. While the identity of the client and his or her reasons for purchasing a painting of Isis will likely never be known, references to the Medici ambient in fifteenth-century Florence and the taste for Egyptian imagery in fifteenth-century Rome provide viable contemporary contexts for the creation of the Kisters Botticelli. To conclude this thesis, I discuss the broader implications of my argument and possible further avenues of research for the Kisters painting.

The re-identification of the woman in Botticelli's *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* as Isis allows us to consider the canvas in a new light: a mythological one. Studying this painting as a mythological image shifts its genre and background from references to portraiture and idealized beauties to discussions of classical mythology. This examination does have bearing on the genre of unidentified, idealized women. My identification of the Kisters idealized beauty is not based in chivalric poetry or the sexualization of women and may prompt new research that goes beyond the traditional approaches.

The genre change will also prompt new discussions of Egypt and its deities within the *quattrocento*. Study of fifteenth-century Italian interest in Egypt has generally focused on Rome, the home of many obelisks and excavations of ancient statuary.¹ But identification of the Kisters painting as an image of Isis expands our understanding of early visual interest in Egypt beyond the Eternal City. The Kisters canvas is generally dated nearly a decade earlier than Pinturicchio's frescoes of Isis and Osiris in the Borgia apartments, marking it as quite possibly be the earliest painting of an Egyptian goddess in the Italian Renaissance. This assessment, of course, bares further research and evaluation. Ficino was translating Trismegistus's writings just outside Florence in the 1460s, but this painting may well represent counterpart to such literary efforts. The Isis bust by Bregno that I discussed in Chapters Three and Four is older than the Botticelli painting; however, it was a modified ancient Roman statue of Isis. The Kisters canvas was an original creation that offers a new vision of Isis, one that was gleaned from multiple ancient and medieval sources. In Florence during the 1480s, Sandro Botticelli reached a milestone when he revealed the first large-scale mythological paintings and first female nude since antiquity. The *Birth of Venus* (1482-85) [Figure 10] and *Primavera* (c. 1482) [Figure 11] centered around the Greco-Roman goddess Venus.² The Kisters painting might be best seen as a continuation, or

perhaps even a beginning, depending on the dating, of Botticelli's interest in ancient mythology. Botticelli most likely had reputation for his mythological imagery in Florence and maybe that is why an unknown client sought him out to transform a pre-existing painting into a vision of the goddess Isis.

The two-stage painting process of the Kisters canvas suggests further consideration of the artist's workshop practices. The original idealized beauty might, as we have seen, have been ready-made image produced by the artist or his students as a festival banner. This painting may be considered an example of how art objects evolved and take on different looks and functions within their lifetimes. Understanding this painting as a workshop product could expand our limited knowledge of Botticelli's shop and the types of demands placed on his assistants. These men were not only responsible for manufacturing, but also completing specific client requests.

Perhaps the most intriguing area of further research is the reception of Isis by the *quattrocento* viewer. I have offered contexts that support the desire for an image of Isis, however I believe it is worth pursuing the possibility of female viewership. With the writings of Christine de Pizan and the growing power of some women like Eleanora d'Aragona, it is possible that the unknown client was female or it was a gift intended for a woman. Isis was a virtuous queen, wife, and mother who possessed *invenzione* and did not have an overly scandalous mythos. She could have been a classical heroine for the educated fifteenth-century woman. A heroine who could in turn be connected with the greatest woman and mother of the late medieval and Renaissance period: the Virgin Mary. These two women present an interesting dynamic that is deserving of deeper evaluation. Persistent study of the Kisters painting and Isis within the context of fifteenth-century Italy may yield further information about the Renaissance

fascination with Egyptian mythology and how the viewer might have responded to images of the goddess Isis.

¹ Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, 65-87.

² Zöllner, *Botticelli: Images of Love and Spring*, 7-10.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Sandro Botticelli, *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1480, tempera on canvas, 58.5 x 40.5 cm, Private Collection

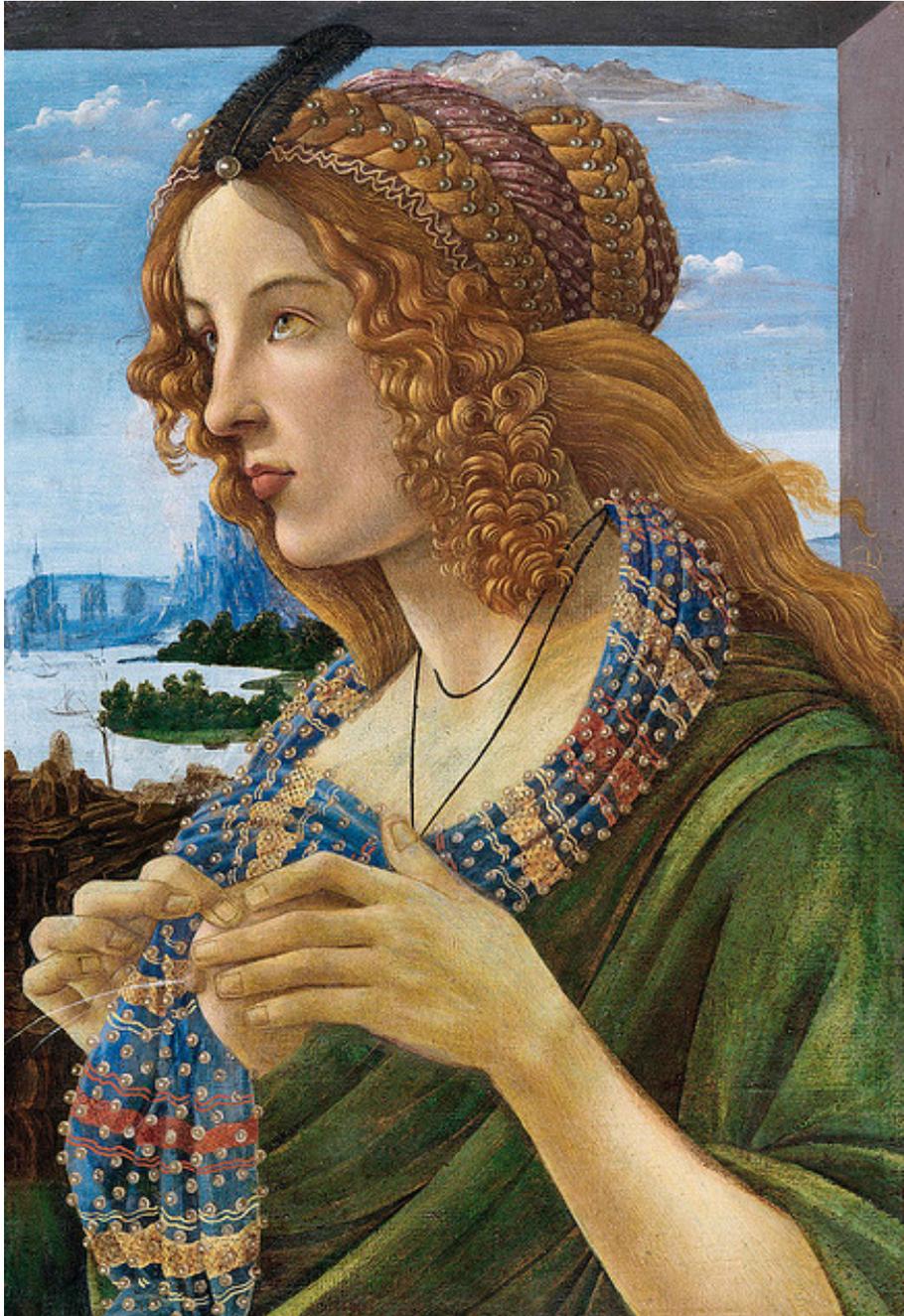


Figure 2: Sandro Botticelli, Infrared photograph of *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1480, tempera on canvas, 58.5 x 40.5 cm, Private Collection

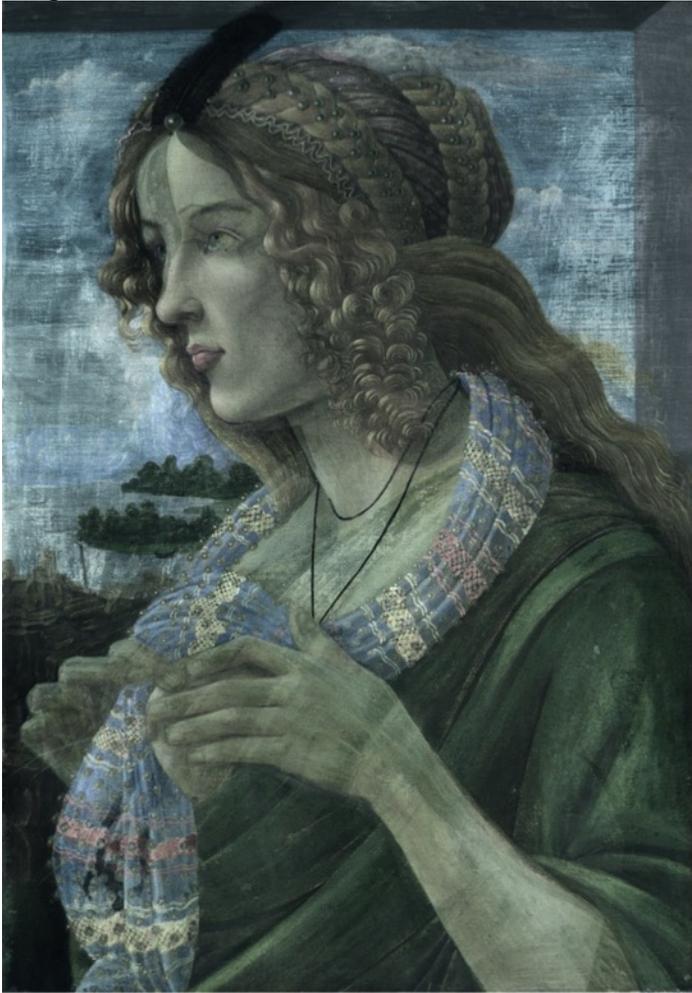


Figure 3: Sandro Botticelli, Infrared photograph of *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1480, tempera on canvas, 58.5 x 40.5 cm, Private Collection



Figure 4: Sandro Botticelli, Detail of *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1480, tempera on canvas, 58.5 x 40.5 cm, Private Collection



Figure 5: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and Child with Angels*, c. 1465, tempera on panel, 92 x 63.5 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



Figure 6: Sandro Botticelli, *Idealized Female Portrait (Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci as a Nymph)*, c. 1483-1486, tempera on panel, 81.8 x 54 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main



Figure 7: Sandro Botticelli, *Ideal Portrait of a Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?)*, c.1475-80, tempera on panel, 47.5 x 35 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museum, Berlin



Figure 8: Sandro Botticelli, *Ideal Portrait of a Young Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?)*, c. 1480-85, tempera on panel, 63.5 x 44.5 cm, Marubeni Corporation, Tokyo



Figure 9: Sandro Botticelli, *Ideal Portrait of a Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?)*, c. 1490, tempera on panel, 59 x 40 cm, The National Gallery, London



Figure 10: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1482-85, tempera on canvas, 185.5 x 285.5 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

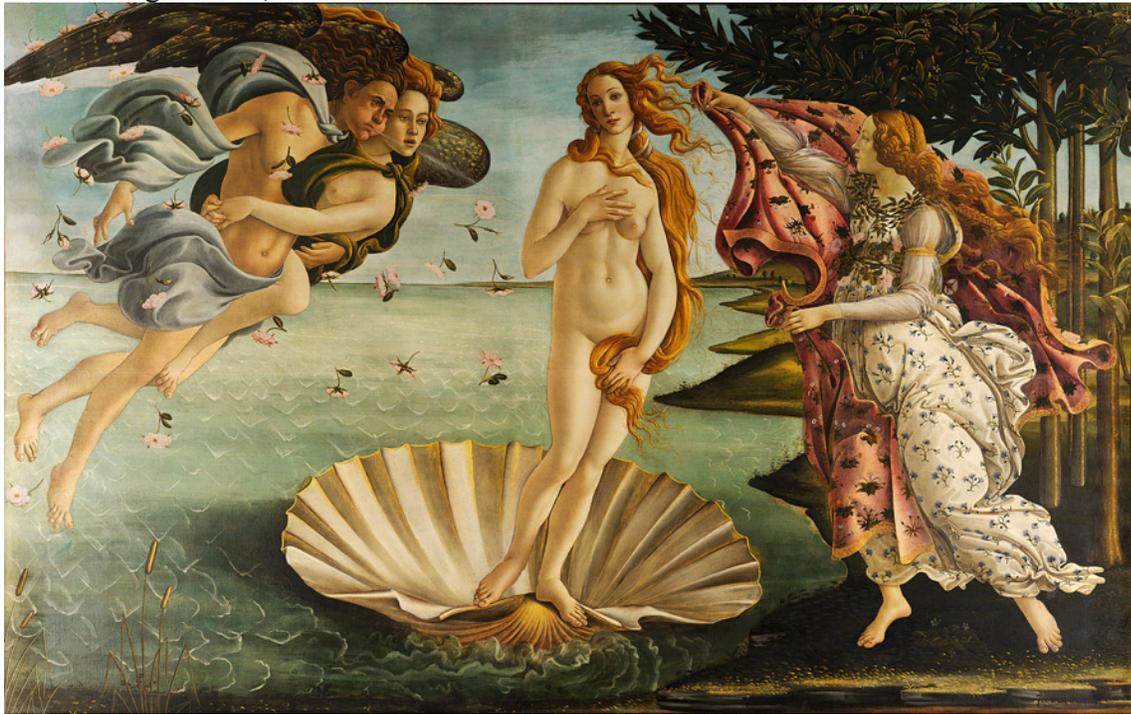


Figure 11: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, c. 1482, tempera on panel, 203 x 314 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



Figure 12: Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci* (obverse), 1474-78, oil on panel, 38.1 x 37 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Figure 13: Sandro Botticelli, *Allegory of Abundance*, c. 1480-85, drawing, 317 x 252 mm, The British Museum, London

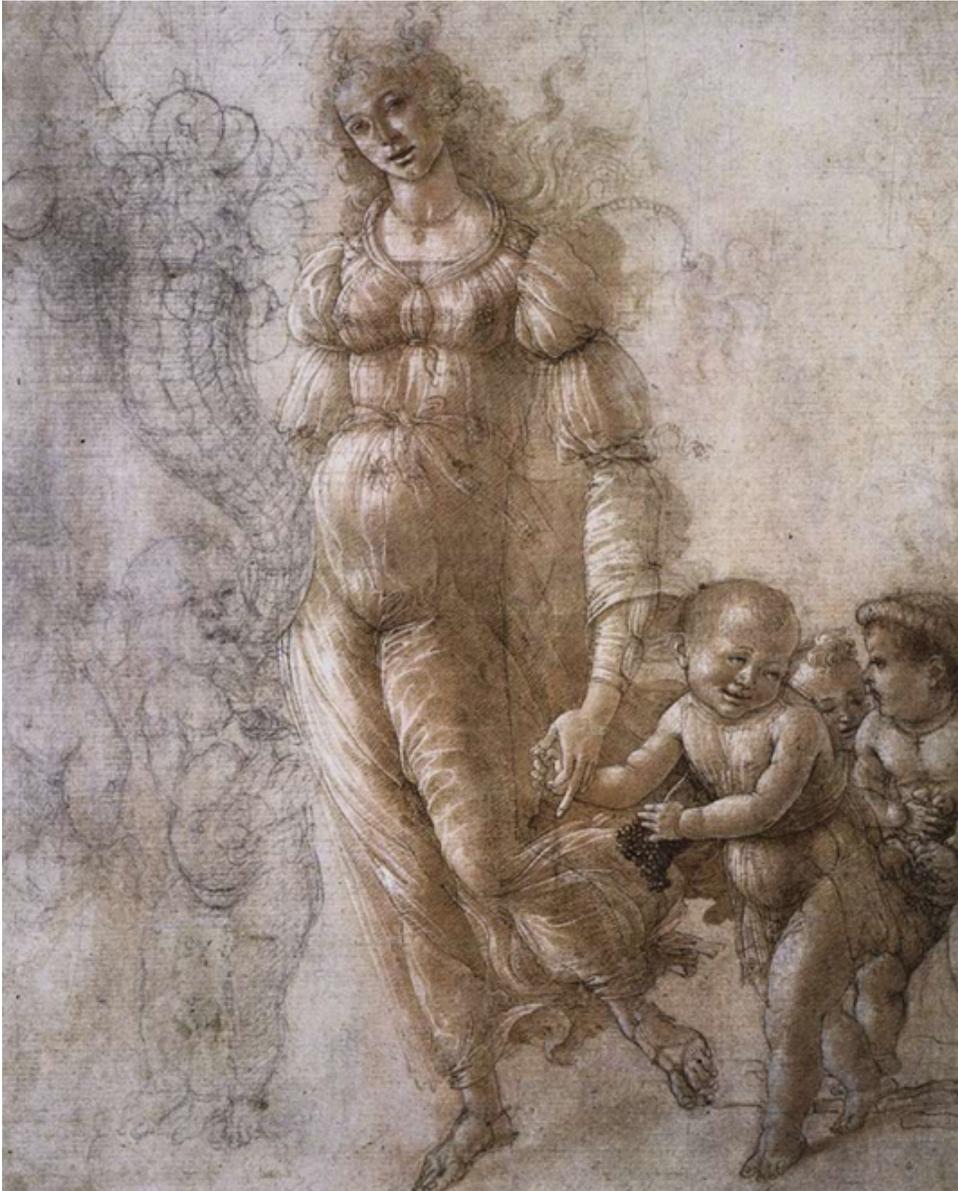


Figure 14: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Woman with a Man at a Window* (Lorenzo di Ranieri Scolari and Angiola di Bernardo Sapiti), c. 1438, Tempera on panel, 64.1 x 41.9 cm, at Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Figure 15: Tiziano Vecellio, *Flora*, 1515-17, oil on canvas, 79.7 × 63.5 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



Figure 16: Piero di Cosimo, *Portrait of a Woman*, c. 1490, distemper on wood, 57 x 42 cm, Musée Condé, Chantilly



Figure 17: Giorgione, *Laura*, 1506, oil on canvas applied to panel, 41 x 33.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



Figure 18: Unknown Artist, *Panel with Painted Image of Isis*, 100 CE, tempera on wood, 40 × 19 × 1.3 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Figure 19: Unknown artist, *The Goddess Isis*, early 2nd century CE, marble, 179.5 cm in height, Musei Capitolini, Rome



Figure 20: Tetrachm of Hadrian, Obverse: Bust of Hadrian, Reverse: Bust of Isis, 121-122 CE, billion, 13.69 mg, American Numismatic Society



Figure 21: Sestertius of Caracalla, Obverse: Bust of Caracalla, Reverse: Caracalla, with right foot on a crocodile, with Isis, holding wheat and sistrum, c. 215 CE, Copper alloy, 25.72 gm, The British Museum, London



Figure 22: Coin of Juba II, Obverse: Bust of Juba II; Reverse: Symbol of Isis with two ears of wheat within crescent moon, 25 BCE-23 CE, silver, 3.74 gm, The British Museum, London



Figure 23: Unknown artist, Arrivée d'Isis en Égypte (Arrival of Isis in Egypt), *De mulieribus claris*, Cognac, France, 15th century, MS. Français 599, folio 10 verso, illuminated manuscript, BNF collection



Figure 24: Attributed to Andrea Bregno, *Isis Bust*, after 1475, constructed with 2nd century Roman statue CE, marble, 50 cm in height, Galleria Borghese, Rome



Figure 25: Unknown artist, *Tazza Farnese*, 3rd century BCE, Ptolemaic dynasty, sardonyx agate, 200 mm in diameter, National Archaeological Museum of Naples



Figure 26: Unknown artist, Detail of Isis in the *Tazza Farnese*, 3rd century BCE, Ptolemaic dynasty, sardonyx agate, 200 mm in diameter, National Archaeological Museum of Naples



Figure 27: Sandro Botticelli, Detail of *Madonna del Magnificat*, c. 1483, tempera on panel, 118 cm in diameter, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



Figure 28: Sandro Botticelli, Detail of Saint Catherine from *San Barnaba Altarpiece*, c. 1487-1488, tempera on panel, 268 x 280 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



Figure 29: Unknown artist, Ancient Statue of Isis (*Madama Lucrezia*), 2nd-3rd century CE, marble, Palazzo San Marco, Rome



Figure 30: Sandro Botticelli, *Virgin and Child with Three Angels (Madonna of the Pavilion)*, c. 1493, tempera on panel, 65 cm in diameter, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan



Figure 31: Unknown artist, *Enthroned Goddess Isis with the young Horus (Isis Lactans)*, 664–525 BCE, 26th Dynasty, Egypt, faience, 9.7 x 3.2 x 6.1 cm, Staatliche Museum, Berlin



Figure 32: Drachm of Antoninus Pius, Obverse: Bust of Antoninus Pius, Reverse: Isis holding Harpocrates, 141-142 CE, bronze, 35 mm, American Numismatic Society



Figure 33: Drachm of Hadrian, Obverse: Bust of Hadrian, Reverse: Isis Pharia holding sail and sistrum with lighthouse of Pharos, 136-137 CE, bronze, 33 mm, American Numismatic Society



Figure 34: Coin of Constantine the Great, Obverse: Bust of Constantine the Great, Reverse: Isis standing on a ship and holding a sail, 306-337 CE, bronze, 1.31 gm, The British Museum, London



Figure 35: Unknown artist, St. Mark passing the Lighthouse of Alexandria, bringing the gospel to Egypt, 13th century, mosaic in San Marco Basilica, Venice



Figure 36: Maerten van Heemskerck and Philips Galle, *The Lighthouse at Alexandria*, c. 1572, engraving, 211 x 268 mm, The Illustrated Bartsch Collection in Amsterdam



Figure 37: Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, ceiling of the *Sala dei Santi*, 1492-95, fresco, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Palace, Vatican City



Figure 38: Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, *Meeting of Osiris and Isis/Io*, octagon panel in arch of *Sala dei Santi*, 1492-95, fresco, Borgia Apartments, Vatican Palace, Vatican City



Figure 39: Perugino and assistants, *Moses's Journey into Egypt*, 1481-82, fresco, 350 × 572 cm, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City



Figure 40: Sandro Botticelli and assistants, *The Trials of Moses*, 1481-82, fresco, 348.5 x 558 cm, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City



Figure 41: Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Story of Noah, Gates of Paradise*, 1425-52, gilded bronze, 80.01 x 80.01 cm, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence



Figure 42: Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, North Vault of the *Sala dei Santi*, 1492-95, fresco, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Palace, Vatican City



Figure 43: Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, South Vault of the *Sala dei Santi*, 1492-95, fresco, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Palace, Vatican City



Figure 44: Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, Borgia Papal Crest, detail of ceiling of the *Sala dei Santi*, 1492-95, fresco, Borgia Apartment, Vatican Palace, Vatican City

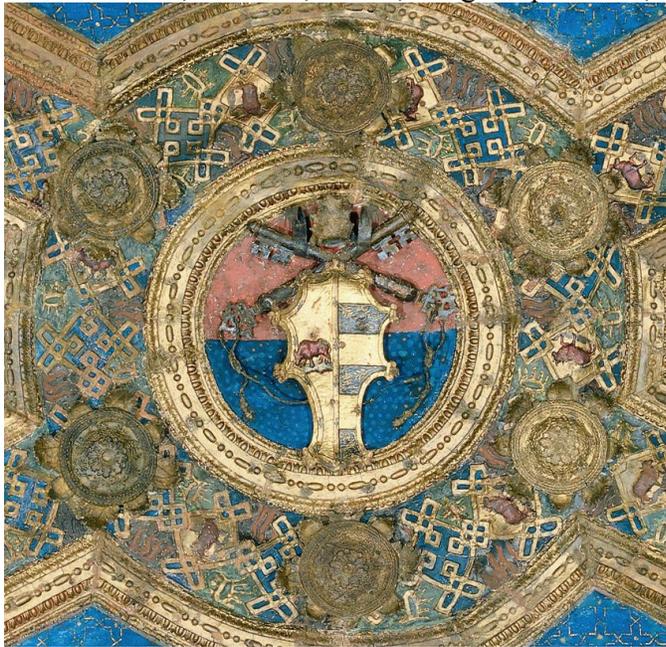


Figure 45: Bernardino Pinturicchio and workshop, *Isis Sovereign of Egypt*, octagon panel in arch of *Sala dei Santi*, 1492-95, fresco, Borgia Apartments, Vatican Palace, Vatican City

