

Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet. Donald Weinstein.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. xii + 380 pp. \$45.

In 1970 *Savonarola and Florence* cemented Donald Weinstein's reputation as an authority on Renaissance Italy. Thereafter, scholarly interest in the Dominican preacher and prophet snowballed, though it took more than four decades for Weinstein himself to return to the subject in a book-length study, more concise than his original work but benefiting from half a lifetime's reflection. Weinstein died in 2015, which adds to the sense of *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* as the culmination of the author's career, even if it was not his final publication. It is a labor of love, a story well told, and a potential source of inspiration for teachers and students alike.

The Ferrarese-born preacher's intellectual and religious formation is dealt with in the opening chapters, which Weinstein enriches with references to the clerical personalities and religious disputes of earlier generations. There follows a more detailed account of Savonarola's Florentine ministry between 1490, when he returned to S. Marco at the instigation of its patron Lorenzo de' Medici and the learned refugee Giovanni Pico, and 1498, when rival Franciscan and Dominican friars failed to undertake the trial by fire that was somehow intended to refute or confirm the truth of Savonarola's prophecies, a failure that caused a disillusioned mob to attack S. Marco, leading to the arrest, torture, and execution for heresy of Savonarola and two of his closest associates. Weinstein is particularly strong when summarizing and interpreting Savonarola's sermons, a case in point being the friar's apparent intercession with the Virgin Mary on behalf of Florence, pre-announced on the vigil of the Annunciation in 1495 and then relayed in detail the following day. Around this central core of sermons Weinstein sustains a number of subplots, including Savonarola's relations with the wider Dominican family. The order's cardinal protector Oliviero Carafa and master general Gioacchino Torriani appear where appropriate, but arguably the most striking story comes from Savonarola's relationship with Torriani's eventual successor Vincenzo Bandelli, who can be glimpsed behind the frustration of Savonarola's academic career and later opposed his creation of a breakaway Tuscan congregation based on S. Marco.

Other recurring features are comparisons between Savonarola's preaching and that of his Florentine contemporaries, among whom Dominicans shared his taste for apocalyptic messages and attracted sizeable audiences, while Franciscans chose to avoid such fare and were consequently heard by few. Weinstein also ensures that his reader never loses sight of Florentine domestic politics, relating the frate's sermons to the

precise composition of the ruling nine-man signoria at strategic points, and keeps admirable control of the complex relations between allied and warring states. Only in the final chapters does he become more reliant on the work of others, including those who have published since 1970. Thus Franco Cordero and Paolo Viti are called upon to interpret Savonarola's rather baffling, torture-induced confessions, and the impact of Lorenzo Polizzotto's *The Elect Nation* (1994) means that the account would be incomplete without coverage of the friar's posthumous cult.

Details of which students should be wary are relatively few and far between. Some of them are extra-Florentine in nature: Carafa is misleadingly presented as a creature of the Neapolitan king (99), and the largest organ of Venetian government appears as the "Grand Council" (122) before settling down as the more familiar "Great Council." With regard to dates, Sixtus IV was the pope who died in 1484, not Innocent VIII (137), and the feast of Corpus Christi falls in May or June, rather than August (154). More significantly, now that we enjoy electronic access to the date of Easter in any given year, perhaps we can stop repeating the statement that the Pazzi Conspiracy occurred on Easter Sunday (55). In 1478 that most significant of feasts fell on 22 March, making 26 April the sixth Sunday of the Easter season.

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