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From Ciriaco to Sandro

Ancient Greek Cultural and Figurative Models from Pizzecolli's Travels to Botticelli's Paintings

This paper aims to analyze the cultural and figurative sources which stay beyond a large part of the most famous Botticelli's production, before and after his trip to Rome around 1481. From the iconographic point of view it seems more evident that the painter's choices were nearer to the "Greek Antiquity" and not to the general antiquarian taste, as often said. The connection among Cristoforo Landino, Sandro Botticelli and his most important patron Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, enable the search into the contemporary humanistic world to find a direct relation to ancient Greek models. The great traveler and proto-archaeologist Ciriaco de' Pizzecolli, called Cyriac of Ancona, plays here a key-role: he was in fact very close to Carlo Marsuppini, Landino's teacher, and he was also the author of the *Itinerarium*, a description of his trips to Greece illustrated by copious drawings of buildings, sculptures and inscriptions. He was the first man during the Renaissance who visited and brought back descriptions of the Parthenon, *Hagia Sophia* and the Pergamon altar, with its gigantic sculptures in Hellenistic style. His manuscripts, in circulation between 1452 (Cyriac's death) and the end of the 15th century, were destroyed in the fire together with the whole Sforza's library in Pesaro in 1514. May it be possible for Sandro Botticelli to had seen – and got inspired – by some drawings or sculptures brought back from Greece by Cyriac (even if today we think that those Greek works were rediscovered only in the 19th century)? What is the role played by the drawings copied by the architect Giuliano da Sangallo and for sure known to Botticelli in Rome? The consistent amount of clues ask for some critical approach and hypothesis on the figurative models which allowed the genesis of some of the most known masterpieces of the Renaissance.