

A contemporary edition of Savonarola discussing divine love.

Savonarola, Girolamo. *Operetta del amore di Iesu*. [Florence : Gian Stefano di Carlo?, 1505?]. 8 1/4 inches x 5 1/16 inches (210 mm x 130 mm), [44] pp.

Clausewitz's famous military axiom, "Secure your base," applies to the religio-political zealot with as much force as to the general. An independent city-state is ideally suited to a reform movement, but the scale must be manageable. A huge metropolis like New York, London, Paris, or Baghdad is an unpromising site for the theocrat's heavenly city, but Calvin found his Geneva, Brigham Young his Salt Lake City, Muqtada Al-Sadr his Al-Najaf—and Savonarola his Florence. He was a Dominican friar who left his native Ferrara to preach in Florence and environs, becoming Prior of the monastery of San Marco in 1491. Intoxicated by the exuberance of his own sermons, Savonarola became increasingly apocalyptic, separating his monastery from the Congregazione Lombarda in 1493 to become the Vicar-general of a new and expanding monastic organization. A year later, after the exile of Piero II de' Medici, Savonarola essentially took over the city of Florence and turned it into a theocracy. The Pope excommunicated him in 1497, but the heretic sailed on, regardless.

Unfortunately, Savonarola had not secured his base: the Pope and the vestigially democratic Florentine authorities combined to arrest him. He was burned at the stake in 1498. Savonarola, himself, was not without experience of burning. By promoting a ceremonial *Falò delle Vanità* ("bonfire of the vanities"), he had extended a certain perverse civility or decorum to the actions of so untamed an element as fire—the Spanish *auto-da-fé* was to have a similar operative effect on the burning of heretics.

It was not only by public harangue that Savonarola promoted his policies. He was the author of dozens of books and pamphlets. It is estimated that 15 percent of Florentine printings in the decade of his ascendancy were by Savonarola. This treatise on divine love, based on his 1483 sermon "On the Lord's Passion," was first published in 1492. Some six or seven further editions appeared in Florence before his death. There are

several illustrations: a large woodcut of the crucifixion on the title-page that has been traced in pen on the reverse a tiny image of “Iesu gia eleuato in aria insu la croce” on **Spread 20**, and a picture of the Trinity as a tail-piece on **Spread 26**. This devotional tract (in Italian prose) on the love of Christ is followed by a pair of *Laude* (devotional poems) on the crucifixion (**Spreads 24–26**) interspersed with a brief prayer (*Oratione brieue & deuota & bella del decto Frate Hieronymo*). These additions are not present in the earliest printings of the book.

As in most Florentine editions of this title, there is no indication here of printer: Roberto Ridolfi in his *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola* (Rome, 1952, vol. 2, p. 108) attributed this edition to Bartolomeo de’ Libri (printer of several other editions), with a tentative date of 1495. Max Sander in *Le Livre à figures italien* (no. 6854) gave no date but recorded the printer as Gerardus de Harlem. Stanford University Library (owner of this copy) assigns it to Gian Stefano di Carlo, with a date of 1505, both tentative suggestions. The title-page appears to contain a monastic inscription.

The front pastedown of this copy (**Spread 2**) bears the bookplate of Giorgio Di Veroli (1890–1952), an Italian banker employed by the Banca Commerciale Italiana. As a Jew, he was forced to leave Italy in 1938 on account of the racial laws. He remained in the United States for the rest of his life, as the bank’s representative in New York, an important position inasmuch as Italian economic recovery after the Second World War was heavily dependent on American financial support for the Banca Commerciale. The general director of the bank, Raffaele Mattioli, one of the great patrons of Italian culture and scholarship, was also a bibliophile, at times entering into friendly competition with his associate in America. This copy of Savonarola’s tract was sold for \$40 at Di Veroli’s sale at Parke-Bernet in 1956. It is bound in boards covered with marbled paper, with a cloth spine.

This volume is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries’ 8.5 million volumes. The Green Library houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes; among the rarities are an

extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.