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M I C H E L A N G E L O

Painting and Sculpture

Imre Judge

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SYNOPSIS

Sculptor, painter, architect, and poet, Michelangelo was hailed in his own time as the greatest artist in the world. An innovator, an idealist, a perfectionist, he was throughout his long life a victim of his own genius and of the conditions of patronage of his time. Lesser artists, who kept workshops and sold their services like any other craftsmen, were hardly affected by the conditions of patronage but a great artist had little freedom of choice once his gifts had been recognised and his services were desired by the great. It was certainly not possible to refuse the commands of the Church when the Pope himself was patron. In 1548, Michelangelo wrote, "I have served three Popes but it has been under compulsion".

Apart from having to contend with Popes, the main struggle faced by Michelangelo through his life was with his own ideals. The whole development of his art closely reflects the evolution of his own convictions and character. To the end, he struggled to reconcile the Neoplatonic beliefs of his early years with the spirituality of his Christian faith. To the changing character of his art is owed not only the greatest achievements of the Italian Renaissance but an extension of the expressive language of painting, sculpture, and architecture.

X

1. Early Years 1475-1505

To his contemporaries, who recognised the extraordinary nature and power of his art, Michelangelo was the epitome of a new kind of artist. They saw him as an artist of genius who owed no obligation to a master, who was respected by rather than respecting his patrons, and for whom art was a driving inner calling rather than a means of livelihood.

Comparisons between Michelangelo and his two fellow giants of the High Renaissance, Leonardo and Raphael, serve only to emphasise Michelangelo's uniqueness. Leonardo's vision, that of the multi-minded "universal man" serves to highlight the single-minded determination with which Michelangelo saw painting, sculpture, and architecture as one art involving the same problems. The gifted public performance of Raphael whose talent could be turned, with the assistance of a smoothly run workshop, to meet any commission that might arise, highlights Michelangelo's struggle, constantly more and more introverted, for the realisation of his ideas in the face of demanding patrons, inadequate assistants, and of far greater importance, the standards of his own ideals. While Raphael's art became a copybook standard for many academies, that of Michelangelo was too personal to be successfully shared in any stylistic sense. In the work of followers and copyists, Michelangelo's forms, poses, and gestures appear false, because they lack the authority of his personality. The artists who gained most from his work were those who, such as Rubens and Bernini, could see the greatness beyond his style and mannerisms.

Michelangelo's debt to his own masters, the painter Ghirlandaio and the sculptor Bertoldo, seems, on the evidence of his work, to have lain chiefly in acquiring technical skill. It was while studying in the Medici sculpture school under Bertoldo that Michelangelo's ability and intelligence were noticed by Lorenzo de Medici. He was taken into Lorenzo's household and treated almost as a member of the family. As a member of the household he came in contact with some of the most learned Florentine humanists of the time and their thinking was one important influence on Michelangelo. The programme of the humanists was a search for the understanding of the principles underlying human morality and both spiritual and physical behaviour. They praised intellectual achievement and called into question sensual emotion and impression. The other major influence on Michelangelo's thinking was the ascetic anti-materialistic philosophy of Savonarola who championed rejection of all excesses and indulgences. Both influences encouraged in Michelangelo a disregard of surface appearances and a deep involvement with the spiritual essence underlying reality. This involvement is evident in the brooding Madonna of the Stairs (Plate 1, c. 1491). The main cause of Michelangelo's later mental anguish, visible in the emotionally disturbed character of his late works, was the conflict between the humanist view of life - optimistic pagan rationalism - and that of Savonarola - a pessimistic search for Christian purity.

Michelangelo fled to Rome after the death of Lorenzo de Medici, shortly before the expulsion of the Medici from Florence. He returned to Florence in 1501, a master in his own right because of two works executed in Rome, Bacchus and the St. Peter's Pieta (Plate 2, c. 1499). Bacchus was admired for its great technical accomplishment but it was the Pieta which overwhelmed his contemporaries and accounted for his successful return as a famous

sculptor to Florence. The Pieta is the first sculpture of that brief period of classical perfection, the High Renaissance. The concentration and simplification of the Pieta is typical of that period. The complete range of feeling associated with the passion of Christ is condensed into these two simple figures - the still-young mother nursing the limp body of the crucified Christ, grown to early manhood but seeming, an echo of his infancy, pathetically small. The ability of Michelangelo to express subtle shades of human emotion is at its finest in this, the most unique of his works.

For the four years following his return to Florence all went well. Works undertaken at this time were two circular marble reliefs the Taddei Tondo and the Pitti Madonna, both unfinished ; the Doni Tondo (Plate 6, c. 1504) his earliest known painting ; the Bruges Madonna (Plate 3, c. 1504), St. Matthew (Plate 5, 1505); and, probably the most famous statue in the world, the colossal David (Plate 4, 1501-04).

In the David can be seen the beginning of Michelangelo's lifelong preoccupation with the male nude as a vehicle of artistic expression. In terms of technique it is the second great masterpiece of his early years. In style it is the final statement of his Classical period - the anatomical detail and ease of pose showing his mastery of the Classical idiom. There is, however, a powerful individual style blended with the Classical ideal, the traditional pose being injected with a sense of restlessness and dormant energy. It was this individualism, his natural ability, which above all else made Michelangelo the supreme artist of the High Renaissance. In the marble Tondi we can see Michelangelo's exploration of relief, a form which lay at the heart of his conception of sculpture and which was inherent in his approach to fresco and architecture. Even in the Doni Tondo can be seen his exploration of three-dim-

ensional form through the medium of paint. An interesting aspect of some of these works, particularly of the Taddei Tondo, the Doni Tondo, and the Bruges Madonna, is the evidence they afford of Michelangelo's understanding and love of children, here beautifully observed. In the St. Matthew, where the forms seem to churn within the stone block, can be seen the change from Michelangelo's Classicism, where outward appearance was perfected, to an introverted art where control of form is sacrificed to intense expression of spiritual tensions.

With the completion of David in 1504, and its universal acclaim, came two major public commissions in Florence : one for a painting to decorate a wall of the great Council Hall - to be a companion piece to a painting already commissioned from Leonardo; the second for statues of the Twelve Apostles for the nave of the Cathedral. Michelangelo was then 29 years old and the future seemed assured but he had scarcely begun work on these undertakings when Pope Julius II summoned him to Rome to design his tomb.

2. Rome, Florence 1505 - 1534

Rome was replacing Florence as the most important centre of artistic activity in Italy during the 1500s. Julius II was responsible for large-scale patronage of all the arts and the commission for the tomb of this "Pope-Emperor" was sufficiently challenging for Michelangelo to forego his work in Florence. The tomb, however, proved to be the most bitter frustration of his life. In later life he was to write, "It is borne in upon me that I lost the whole of my youth chained to this tomb". For forty years the work dragged on, constantly interrupted by papal commissions of one kind or another.

At the beginning of 1506, Michelangelo, incensed at the Pope's refusal to advance more money for the tomb or even to discuss the project, returned to Florence. Reconciled with Julius in Bologna in 1506, Michelangelo undertook, reluctantly, a commission from the Pope: to decorate the vault of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The Sistine Chapel, built by Sixtus IV, uncle of Julius II, is slightly more than 130 feet long and 43 feet wide. The ceiling, at its highest point rising to 68 feet, is "in the form of a barrel vault resting on lunettes, six to the length and two to the width of the building". Michelangelo's first commission was to paint the Twelve Apostles in the lunettes but after the work was begun he told the Pope that it seemed to him it would turn out a poor affair. The Pope gave him a new commission to do what he liked, a tremendous prospect.

Michelangelo ~~then~~ attempted to acquire the art of fresco, but to little avail, and decided to proceed on the work without the assistance of Francesco Granacci, Jacopo l'Indaco and other painters whom he had summoned from Florence to help him. Michelangelo's solution to the problem of decorating the vault of the Sistine

Chapel (Plate 9) was essentially a sculptural one - not wholly illusionistic nor wholly decorative. The notion of the niched and sooted figure in an architectural setting, both real and simulated, is fundamental to sculpture. It is possible that Michelangelo was inspired by the bronze door of the Baptistery in Florence. The analogy between the framed reliefs of the door and the four large and five smaller divisions of the vault and also between the alternating Prophets and Sibyls is certainly significant. The Drunkenness of Noah reminds us of Ghiberti's handling of the same subject, and is particularly noteworthy when we remember that it was with the scenes at the entrance that Michelangelo began his decoration.

Inspired by the vault itself, Michelangelo constructed a scheme which echoes and extends the actual structure and shape. The scheme is like a massive relief decreasing in scale and projection through the ignudi to the histories from the Prophets and Sibyls, the highest point of the relief. The nine compartments of the ceiling, emphasised by the painted stone bands which separate them, are all devoted to Old Testament subjects. Beginning above the altar the scenes are :

The Division of Light from Darkness,

The Creation of the Planets (Plate 16)

The Division of Earth and Water,

The Creation of Man (Plate 15),

The Creation of Eve,

The Fall of Man (Plate 14)

The Sacrifice of Noah,

The Flood (Plate 13),

The Drunkenness of Noah.

Apart from the organisation of the design, the most extraordinary

feature of the entire work is the way in which perfect balance is maintained between the unity of the composition, notwithstanding its complexity, and the elaboration of its diverse parts. Michelangelo's intention was not to create a technically perfect illusion but to create a framework which, though related to its context, was governed by its own logic and structural force. Each individual part can be understood but is at the same time only part of a total vision.

Entering the chapel by the main door, the scenes are in reverse order. This was the order in which Michelangelo painted them and in which he intended them to be seen - a progression from the servitude of the body to the uplifting of the soul. In the theme, salvation, we see Michelangelo attempting to reconcile the pagan philosophy of the Neoplatonists with Christian beliefs. We see, too, his growing concern, also visible in the St. Matthew, with the spiritual life underlying physical appearance. In the contrast between the Prophets and the Sibyls, all seekers of truth, can be seen Michelangelo's great powers of observation and his grasp of the innermost differences between the young and the old. The degree of contemplation and enlightenment in each of these figures builds up to a climax in the figure of Jonah above the altar. He alone looks up to the figure of the Almighty overhead, a final moment of revelation. The humble ancestors of Christ exemplify Michelangelo's sympathetic observation of scenes of everyday life. Of all the elements of the fresco the most original and the most typical of Michelangelo is the frieze of the Ignudi. Embodying a variety of mood, from the meditative to the gay, these figures, all living a life of their own, are supreme examples of Michelangelo's use of the male nude.

In fact, the entire fresco was conceived by Michelangelo in

terms of the figure. The bareness of setting in The Creation of Man (Plate 15), for example, is deliberately a foil for the figures and there is none of the rich drapery or intensive study of landscape which were features of Renaissance and fifteenth century art. Critics of the period saw Michelangelo's use of the male nude as a limitation when compared, for example, with Raphael's "mastery in every field". However, it was Michelangelo's intimate knowledge of this limited field which enabled him to achieve an extraordinarily wide range of expression. Our total picture of his art is an accumulation of impressions of the human body in many different states.

In 1511, the first part of the vault, up to and including The Creation of Eve, was finished, and unveiled at the Pope's insistence. This was the first time Michelangelo was able to view the work in its entirety from the ground. Owing partly to this opportunity and partly to the experience he had gained, he now developed a new style. The remainder of the work was conceived more as a whole and painted more quickly. Detail and finish were suppressed in favour of a massive tonal unity and greater freedom, compatible with his enlarged understanding of the art of fresco and a more exalted vision of the theme.

The Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel totally absorbed Michelangelo spiritually and physically for four years and is unique in being his only major project to be completed in his lifetime. In its combination of aspects of sculpture and architecture in painting it is a turning point. Vespers were sung in the Chapel on the eve of All Saints, 1512, to mark the completion of the work. In an entry mentioning this in the diary of Papal Master of Ceremonies, Paris de Grassis, Michelangelo's name is not mentioned!

With the completion of the Sistine ceiling and the death of Julius II (early in 1513), Michelangelo recommenced work on the Tomb, for the heirs of Julius. From the start, the Tomb of Julius II (Plate 17) was a fusion of sculpture and architecture on a grand scale. With each of four revised contracts (1513, 1516, 1532, 1542) it was reduced in scale and ambition and by the 1520s was so altered that Michelangelo had lost interest in the project. By the end of 1516 he had completed the Dying Captive (Plate 18), the Heroic Captive (Plate 19), and the Moses (Plate 20). Work on the tomb was continually interrupted by commissions of one kind or another and it was not finished until 1545 when it was erected in San Pietro in Vincoli - in the end a travesty of the original design. Michelangelo's conception of a vast unified project was never realised. The severe Moses (completed almost 30 years earlier) is uncomfortable in the company of the assistant's sterile work overhead and is incompatible with the visionary quality of Michelangelo's late style in the figures of Rachel and Leah on either side.

In 1520, Michelangelo was commissioned to complete the partially constructed New Sacristy in the Medici church of San Lorenzo and to design tombs for Guilio de Medici and Lorenzo de Medici (his old benefactor) the "Magnifici" and for Guilio, Duke of Nemours, and Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, the "Capitani". It was finally decided to have simple tombs on either side wall for the "Capitani" and a double tomb, opposite the altar, for the "Magnifici". The double tomb was never started and neither of the others, the Tomb of Guilio of Nemours (Plate 21) and the Tomb of Lorenzo of Urbino (Plate 22), was wholly finished.

The exact subject matter to be meditated on in these tombs is

unclear, especially since Michelangelo constantly improvised both in form and subject while working on a project. It seems, however, that he was here once again concerned with the basic significance of man's inner spiritual existence and his outward physical appearance. Guiliano sits alert while Lorenzo is physically inert - an opposition of the active and contemplative. This opposition is reflected in the figures reclining on the sarcophagi. Those below Guiliano are contrasted in both finish and subject, Night, highly polished, is withered and sagging while Day has a massive power. Opposite extremes in subject, they are symbols of physical exhaustion and strength. Evening and Dawn on the opposite sarcophagi are less positive, symbols of spiritual decline and reawakening.

The death of Pope Clement VII in 1534 freed Michelangelo from his commitments to the Medici and left him free, he thought, to complete the Tomb of Julius. But it was not to be. The new Pope, Paul III, had long wished to obtain the services of Michelangelo and appointed him chief architect, sculptor, and painter to the Vatican with an order, much against Michelangelo's will, to paint the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. The subject chosen was The Last Judgement.

3. Last Years

Begun in 1536, the enormous fresco of The Last Judgement (Plate 23) contains 314 brilliantly organised figures. As a subject it is the climax to any theme of the redemption of the soul and the damnation of weakness. The turmoil in the work is tremendous. In the foreground is the unlikely character of Charon from pagan mythology; in the middle air angels sound the trump of doom; on the left the righteous struggle toward heaven while on the right sinners are cast into hell. Christ is a threatening furious figure and the supporting saints, Peter and John, are not interceding but urging Christ to severity. The righteous souls ascend to heaven, not in the traditional serene manner but by a grim struggle for hard-won salvation: they are liable to fall again with any slackening of the struggle. The fall of the damned is occasioned not so much by devils (of which there is a medieval profusion) as by their own despair. There is no glorification of the human body as in the ceiling's supernatural world. Instead the body is heavy, floundering and inadequate. The swarms of figures heave, swim, float or sink against a background of infinite space. In contrast with the ceiling, Michelangelo here abandoned fundamental demands. The integrity of the wall surface, the sense of order traditional to the subject, a coordinated viewpoint, all were ignored.

Though it was not as great an undertaking, The Last Judgement took Michelangelo a year longer to complete than the ceiling. It was unveiled to a mixed reception in 1541 and was immediately followed by another Papal commission, this time the decoration of the Pauline Chapel. The Pauline paintings were his last, laboured on over a period of seven years, during which he twice appeared to be close to death. Of the commission Michelangelo wrote, "I shall paint with discontent and my work

shall arouse discontent". Once begun, however, he spared no pains in its execution. As before, the walls are crowded with figures in a variety of poses. The Conversion of Saul is a violent drama. The Crucifixion of Peter has a strangeness of mood, building to a peak in the figure of Peter staring questioningly, perhaps defiantly, straight out of the picture. Although some of the figures are out of scale and although there are defects of gesture and movement, the frescoes, while lacking Michelangelo's first "fine frenzy", still are examples of his commanding genius.

In 1545, now 75 years of age, Michelangelo completed work in the Pauline Chapel. This year also saw the finalisation of the Tomb of Julius. Instead of being allowed to rest from his labours, his last years saw him burdened, notwithstanding his protestations that he was not an architect, with the appointment as architect to Saint Peters. For the next 17 years he served three Popes in this capacity. The Rondanini Pieta and the Deposition from The Cross, executed during those years, were a return to his prime calling, that of sculptor, and were undertaken mainly to please himself.

Michelangelo died in 1564, esteemed by his patrons, loved by his friends, and acclaimed as the greatest artist in the world.

The Madonna of the Stairs

1

This tiny Madonna, the only work in low relief known to have been carved by Michelangelo, is alone probably the earliest of his sculptures that survives. Michelangelo made the relief during the years when he was living in the Medici Palace and working in the Medici Gardens. He was, therefore, between fourteen and seventeen when he executed the little masterpiece.

The Virgin is seated in absolute profile on a simple cube of stone, her wide-eyed gaze directed straightforward as she draws her mantle gently around her sleeping child whose face is pressed against her uncovered breast (at which he has been apparently taking nourishment). A stairway, consisting of five steps and an unmoulded stair-rail, almost fills the background to the left of the Virgin. Two children appear at the top of the steps, a third leans on the balustrade, and a fourth is behind the Virgin to the right; all are occupied in stretching out an enormous cloth. This is not merely a depiction of ordinary family life. The stair-rail suggests the beams of the Cross; the flattened steps remind us of the ladder; the cloth resembles a shroud. It has been shown that the sleeping Christ Child in Italian representations of the Madonna and Child invariably foretells the death of the adult Christ. The four children here recall the number of the Gospels; the five steps, the mysteries of the Rosary. Detached from the world around her, Mary contemplates, as in a vision, the future sacrifice of her Son.



1

MADONNA OF THE STAIRS. c. 1491
CASA BUONARROTI, FLORENCE

The Rome Pieta

2

Despite its enormous popularity this work has puzzled scholars. It is not "Michelangelesque". It does not seem to fit pre-conceptions of the artist's grandiosity, nor can it be easily inserted in to our notion of his development. It must be dated after the Bacchus, which looks in so many ways more "advanced". On the threshold of the High Renaissance the complexity of elements and the attenuated proportions look Gothic. Luckily, Michelangelo is the last artist to succumb to principles superimposed by posterity. The elaborate of the work which suggests late Gothic art, had already been revived in Florence in the styles of Botticelli and Philippino Lippi.

Michelangelo's Virgin has taken the mantle from her shoulders and spread it over her knees to receive the body of her Son, so that the folds stretch out upon the ground. The toe of her left shoe barely peeps from under the edge of the gigantic mantle. Two fingers of Christ's right hand have converged about one of its folds ; another supports his left. The broad sweep of the outlines of the cloak encloses a host of broken rhythms, still more minute when the eye rises to the loincloth of Christ and the tunic of His Mother. Particularly striking are the concentration of criss-cross folds over the Virgin's bosom and in the tumbled masses of her veil which seem to embody in abstract forms the intensity of emotion restrained in her quiet countenance. These folds are, as if symbolically, held in check by the strap of her mantle which crosses her breast. The facial torpe of the Christ has been compared with His appearance in the engravings of the great German master Martin Schorsganer, one of whose prints the young artist is known to have copied exactly. The little curls of the moustache and beard are alien to Italian representations of Christ, but the long tresses suggest the treatment of hair in some of Botticelli's paintings.

The artist's delight in his tools is everywhere apparent. Not only has he achieved a higher degree of surface polish than in any of his other works, earlier or later, but he has set this taut surface in active conflict with brilliantly incisive line. The wrinkles around the eyelids, the edge of the transparent veil over the Virgin's

forehead, the sharp contours of her lips, above all, the curls of Christ's short moustache and beard, cut into the surrounding flesh, sometimes to a measurable degree. This conflict between surface and line, between mass and contour will be maintained in the artist's work until line is fused with mass in the Moses and the Louvre Slaves (Fig.).



2

PIETA. 1501
SAINT PETER'S, ROME

The Bruges Madonna

As in all of Michelangelo's early Madonnas overtures of the Passion can be sensed in the Bruges Madonna. Mary's expression is pensive as she gazes downward and past her Son. She holds his right hand firmly with her left as, from His unprecedented refuge between her knees, he seems about to try a step forward with one chubby foot, steadying Himself with the other hand against her knee. The book lies idle on the Virgin's lap supported lightly by her right hand.

The Bruges Madonna recalls aspects of the Madonna of the Stairs (Fig.), especially in profile. All the diffuse and complex drapery rhythms, so loosely held within the Virgin's mantle in the Pieta, are now densely massed in one compact group. All forms are fuller, stronger and less slender. The Virgin's gravely beautiful face has none of the pinched quality so visible in the Pieta, and although the head veil is arranged in much the same manner, both this and the features are at once more blocky and less pointed. The conflict between line and form continues but both are strengthened. No longer does the line have the engraving-like character it showed in the Pieta; it is broader, more supple, and more deeply undercut, especially around the eyes, nose, and mouth. The Virgin's lips are fuller, even slightly tremulous. Fifteenth century elegance, even in dress, has given way to the sober classicism of the High Renaissance.

The grave Christ Child is one of the artist's most winning creations. The boy seems aware of the grandeur of His mission, even of its perils, and his tentative step towards the world is accompanied by a certain solemnity. The soft round cheeks are those of a child, but the mouth is full of resolve and the eyes of sadness, echoing the downcast gaze of Mary. Strong muscles move under the skin of the childish limbs. The arm crossing the body with its rich alternation of rounded swellings and sharp, straight repressions, is a motive later to recur in figures in the Sistine Ceiling.



3

MADONNA AND CHILD. c. 1504
NOTRE DAME, BRUGES

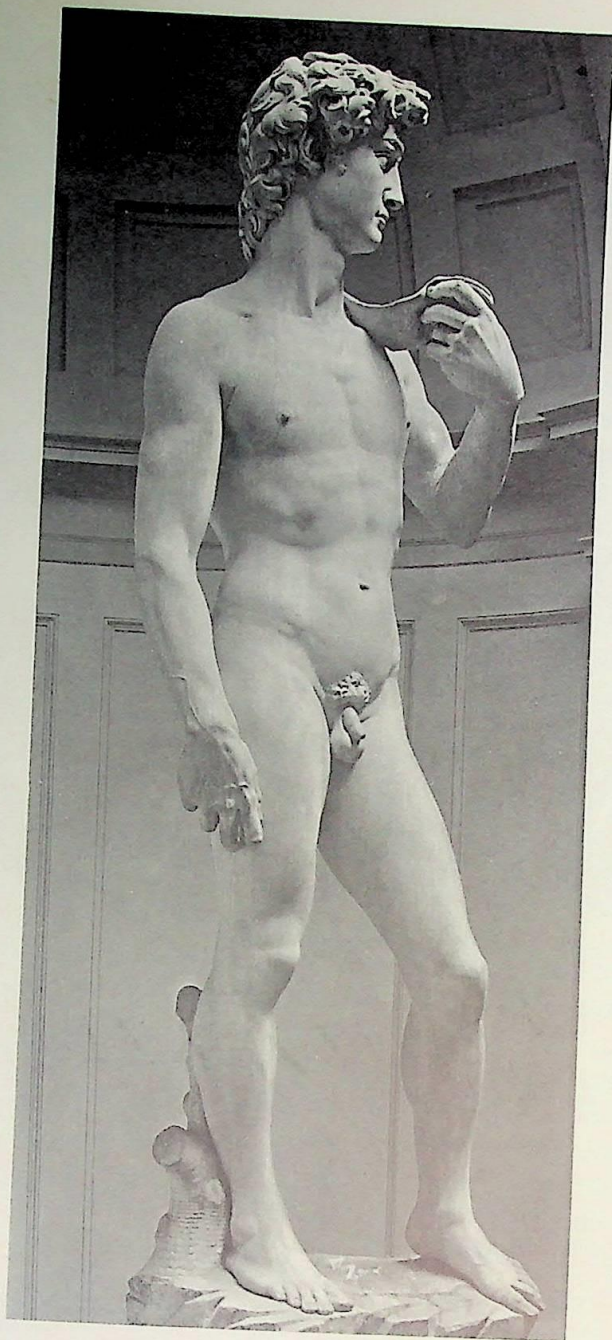
David

Michelangelo's new conception of the David is incommensurable with any of the numerous fifteenth-century treatments of the subject. Instead of showing a slender delicate child, as did Donatello and Verrocchio, Michelangelo portrays an adolescent hero. David is now completely nude, glorying in his physical strength without the slightest reference to the major enemy, Goliath, whose severed head he was usually shown standing over, or even pushing about with his foot. As always, Michelangelo carefully avoided depicting a passing moment and concentrated on the timeless and the universal. To people who stand before him today he seems an ideal for all humanity.

Despite echoes of classical antiquity, it is not the tension and restlessness of the statue that separate it from classical norms; the proportions are those of a youth who has not yet finished growing up to the size of his head, hands and feet. And the powerful muscles without an ounce of surplus tissue denote a boy of the people rather than the soft and pampered child shown by earlier sculptors. Both the pose and expression, with dilated eyes and knitted brows, are a grand fulfillment of the early promise of the little St. Proculus in Bologna (Fig.); but there is no longer any hint of self-portrait. In profile at least, the features seem strongly Hellenized, but in full face they are far from regular. The flaring lips are asymmetrical, the left eye slightly higher than the right, the nose unevenly pinched below the bridge. The hairy eyebrows are full and shaggy, and the forehead, already lined by anxiety, unevenly compressed. Perhaps these very deviations from perfection play a part in rendering the colossal statue accessible to observers of ordinary size.

Throughout the statue, but especially in the head, the conflict between line and form which began in the Rome Pieta is intensified and deepened. The features are more sharply undercut than in any of the earlier works, possibly because of the height from which the statue was originally intended to be seen. A measurable space separates the eyeball from its enclosed lids. The flat flares joining at determined angles, visible for the first time in the Bruges Madonna, underlie all the construction of the David, not only in the squared-off masses of the features, but throughout the knotty, long, sinewy, half-developed and very beautiful torso and legs. For the first time Michelangelo, now nearing thirty,

is able to embody in the quality of a single human body all the passionate drama of man's inner nature. The sinews of the neck seem to tense and relax, the veins of the neck, hands and wrists to fill, the nostrils to pinch, the belly muscles to contract and the chest to lift with the intake of breath. This is still just the beginning for Michelangelo's nude heroes; the full development of the figure in conflict is yet to come.



DAVID. 1501-4
ACCADEMIA, FLORENCE

DAVID. DETAIL

The Taddei Madonna

The Taddei Madonna is usually dated about 1504. Despite the unfinished condition of the Taddei Madonna it is clear that she would have had the same sharp wrinkle under her eye visible in the Virgin of the Pieta - the last time this particular detail appears in any of Michelangelo's Madonnas. The same softness of shape is also evident in her face, soon to be replaced in the David (Fig.) and the Bruges Madonna (Fig.) by the blocky, squared treatment of the facial masses so powerful in the considerably later Pitti Madonna (Fig.). Even the cloak falling diagonally across the bosom and puckered into a host of little jagged shapes, recalls the mantle in which the Virgin of the Pieta holds the body of her dead Son. This motive, too, will not recur in Michelangelo's later work. If the Taddei round had been completed in every elegant detail, it would undoubtedly have resembled the Pieta very strongly. Certainly the almost finished modelling of the Child's body, with all its dimples and hollows, suggests the same concern with minute surface detail to vanish from Michelangelo's art after the Doni Madonna in 1503.

It is impossible to make out from the rough masses of marble surrounding the figures how Michelangelo intended to treat the background. He may have wished to show works like those of the Pieta and the Bruges Madonna. He may have wanted to clean off the raw stone completely and silhouette the figures against a smooth disc. Surely, however, the scene was intended to be set outdoors. Mary's crouching position could hardly be justified for an interior and St. John's travel ouch forms a prominent element in the composition. Most important of all, the drama over the bird must have taken place in the open air.

For the Baptist has captured a bird and is presenting the little creature to the terrified Christ Child, who takes refuge in His mother's lap. The bird may be a goldfinch, which is believed to subsist largely on a diet of thorns, and, therefore, to signify mystically the Passion of Christ and the Crown of Thorns. There are many examples in earlier Italian art of the Christ Child holding a goldfinch, and even some show Him in similar terror before this symbol of His suffering and death.

The Pitti Madonna

The squared forms so evident in the features of the David and throughout the Bruges Madonna apply to the entire figure of the Pitti Madonna. The shoulder, the elbow, the knee, as well as the head, the hand and the drapery masses show the new ideal of mass. This is particularly striking when we compare the features of this Virgin with the more refined and delicate features of her predecessor in Bruges. A fresh phase of Michelangelo's art is well under way, a phase of tremendous vigour and intensity. The artist is impatient with the tondo form. He does not even shape it accurately, and refuses to compose within it. The Virgin's head protrudes from the frame at the top as her blocklike bench and even her garments, break the border at the bottom.

As in the Bruges Madonna the Virgin holds a book upon her lap; as in the Taddei Madonna the infant St. John the Baptist appears. What is new is the wide-eyed gaze of Mary into the distance, her lips parted as if in prayer or chant, while the Christ Child, pressed against her knee and protected by her mantle, contemplates the meaning of the open pages. One of the few remaining concessions to charm is the way the Child props the book open with one chubby arm, but even this is quickly overcome by the passionate intensity of his face under the windblown curls.

The cubic delineation of Mary's features results in strong angles even in the formation of the eyelids and eyebrows, and the same process flattens the masses of her headress.

St. Matthew

This simple statue of shattering emotional and plastic intensity is all that remains of Michelangelo's first cyclical commission on a grand scale - the Twelve Apostles for the Cathedral of Florence.

A great deal of romantic nonsense has been written about the unfinished state of St. Matthew, as well as of other statues by Michelangelo. We have no reasonable evidence that he intended to leave it in any such condition. We must imagine the St. Matthew as brought to the stage of completion represented by such other early works as the David and the Bruges Madonna. The masses of unfinished stone to eyes trained in the tradition of Rodin look wonderfully suggestive and mysterious. At first sight, indeed, the St. Matthew can easily be confused with the Slaves. Surely, however, all the marble would have been cut away, there would have been a space between the lower legs, the right arm would have hung free from the body, and the head would have been seen in a kind of jutting profile later to be brilliantly exploited. Undoubtedly the figure would have had a back as well as a front and was intended from the start to be very nearly freestanding.

The figure is not struggling against any sort of bonds. Rather, St. Matthew seems to be represented, as he should be, in a moment of inspiration, in the tradition of the great evangelists portraits of the Middle Ages, with some of which Michelangelo must have been familiar. St. Matthew's symbol was the angel, although Michelangelo surely had no intention of representing one. Only the book which St. Matthew clutches with his left hand and presses to his heart attests to his evangelical mission - the book and his arresting pose of rapt listening to a voice beyond all worlds. As the soul of the saint is filled with the voice he hears, his eyes look upwards towards the source of his inspiration. In keeping with the lifelong interests of Michelangelo, it is the timeless message, in this case the soul in ecstatic communion with the very source of revelation.

The use of the toothed chisel in broad curves to define the masses of the neck and head may be compared closely to the technique of the unfinished portions of the Pitti Madonna.

SAINT MATTHEW. c. 1505
ACCADÉMIA, FLORENCE





THE DONI TONDO
UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE



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THE PITTI MADONNA. c. 1505
BARGELLO, FLORENCE



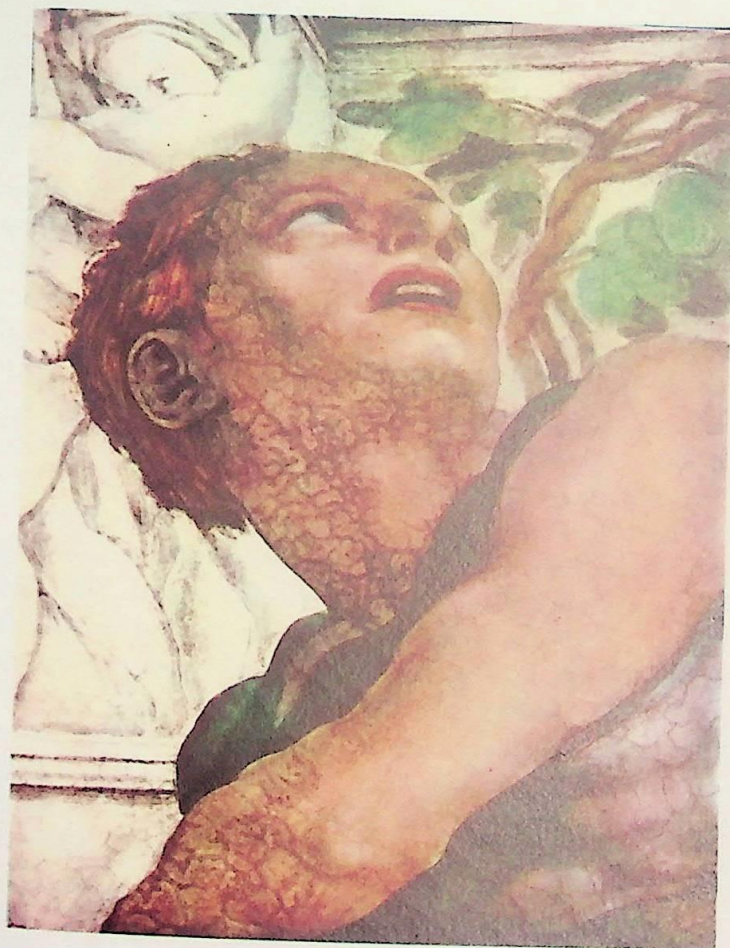
8

IGNUDO
SISTINE CHAPEL



10

HEAD OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL
SISTINE CHAPEL



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HEAD OF THE PROPHET JONAH
SISTINE CHAPEL

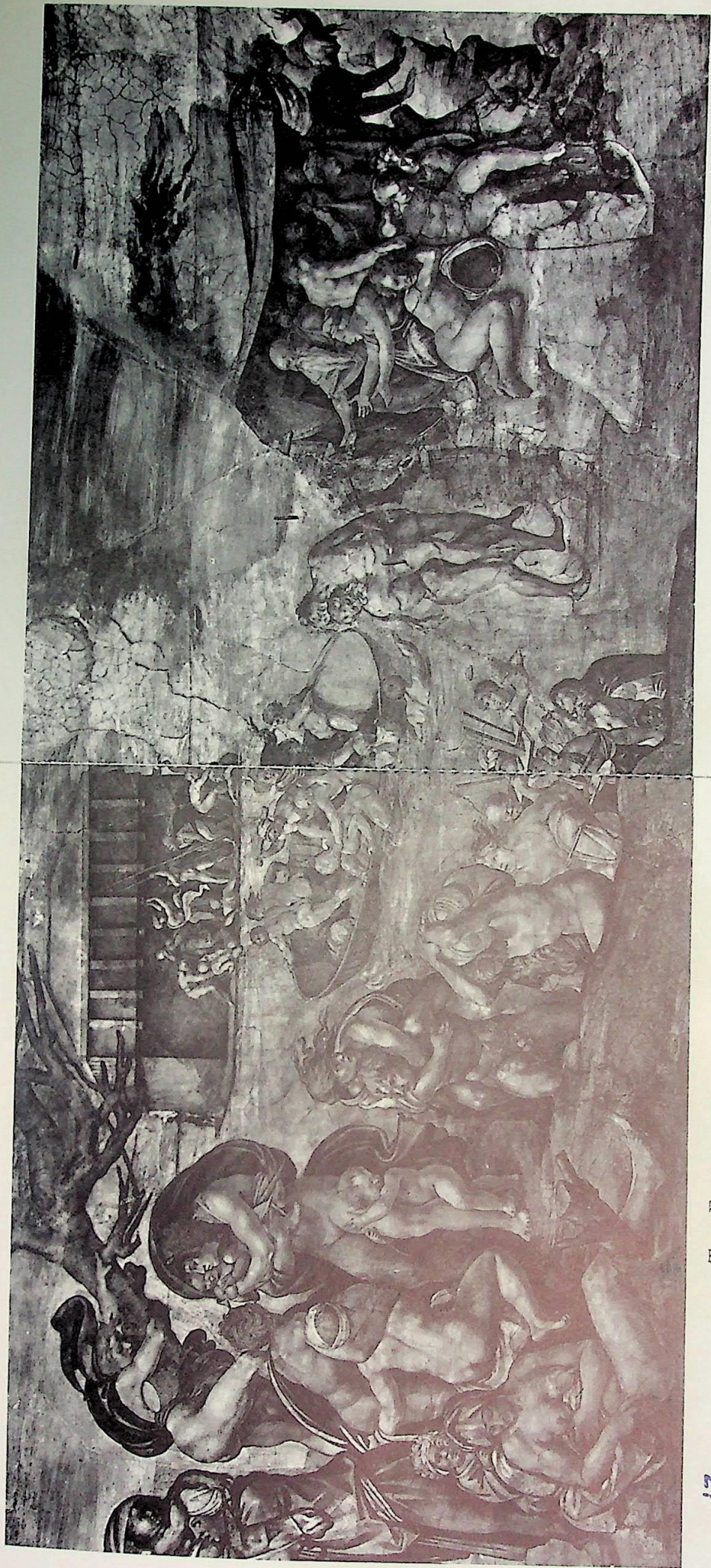


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HEAD OF THE PROPHET DANIEL
SISTINE CHAPEL



and the corners of the five smaller figures as the upper part of the
 and the lower part of the figures, giving them the appearance of



THE FLOOD
 SISTINE CHAPEL

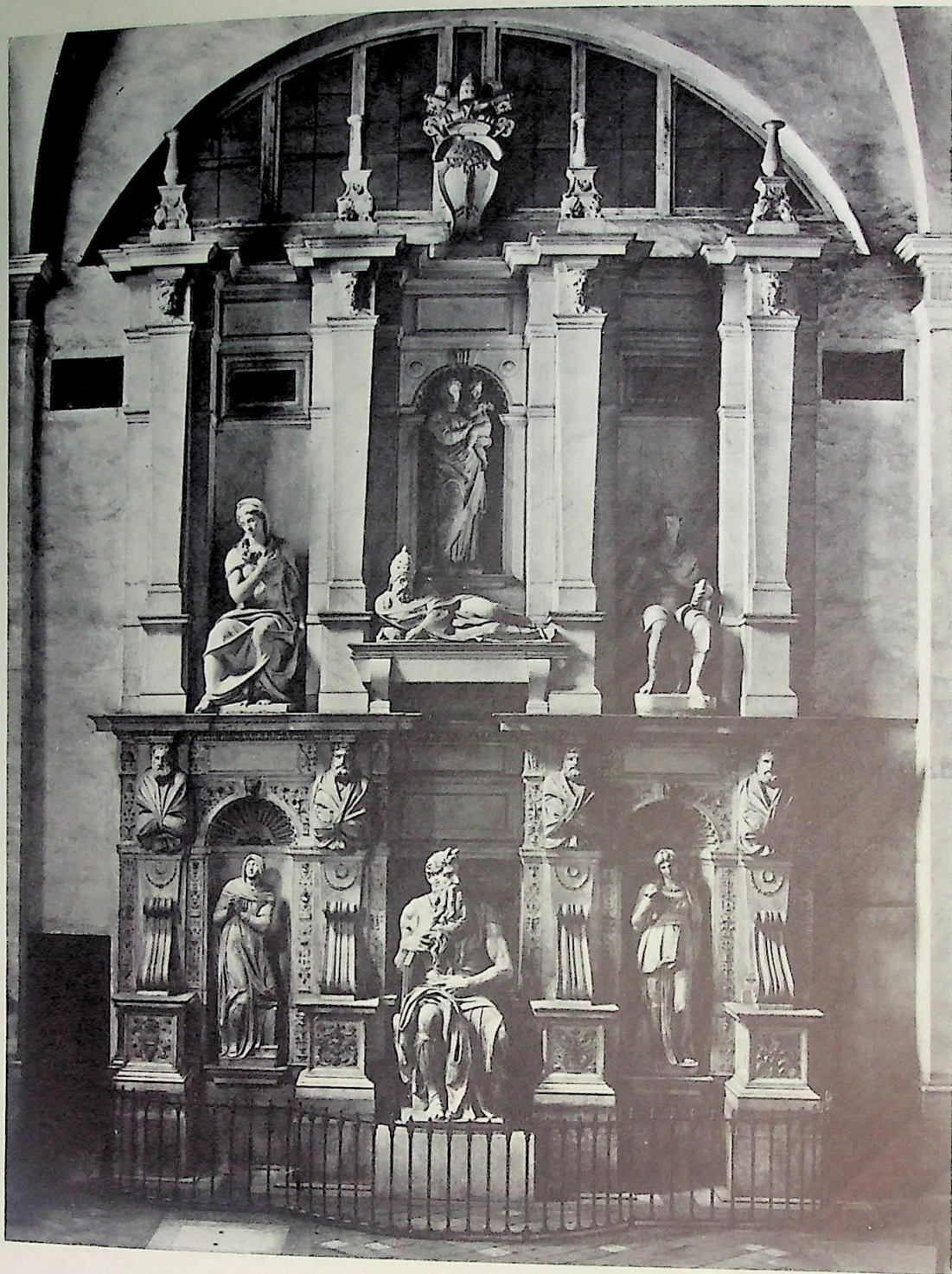


THE FALL OF MAN AND THE EXPULSION FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN
SISTINE CHAPEL



CREATION OF ADAM
SISTINE CHAPEL



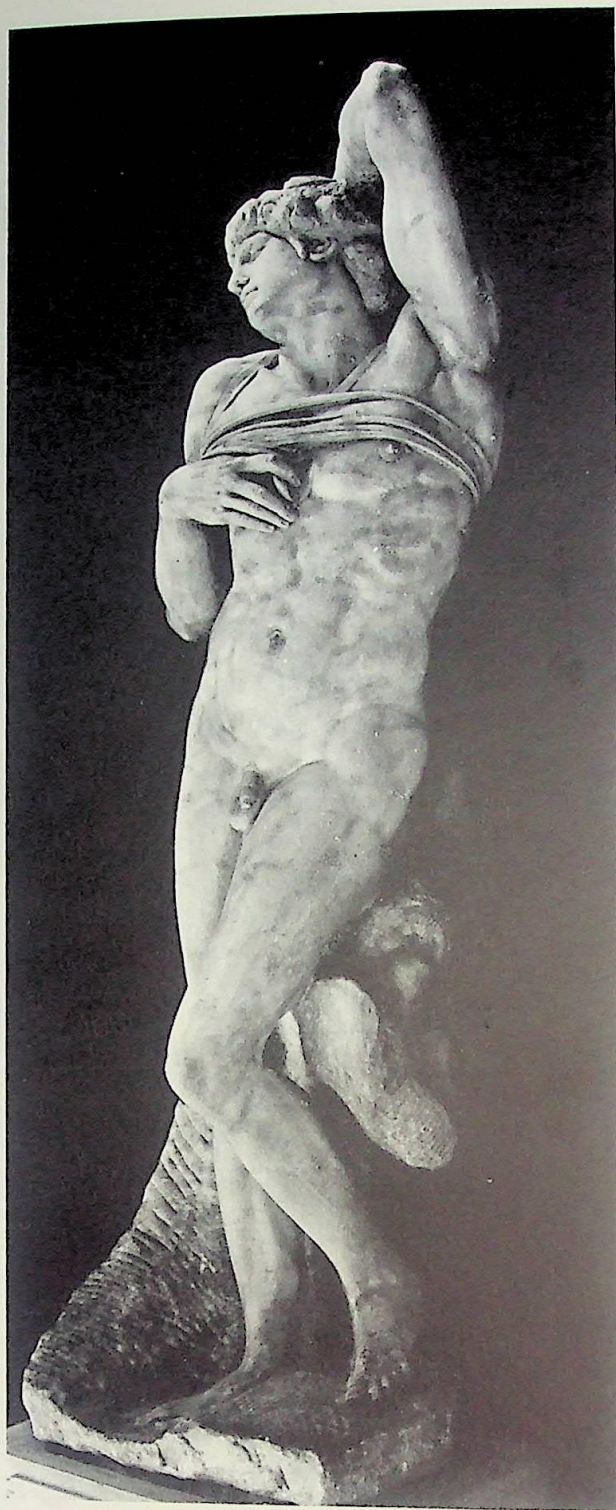


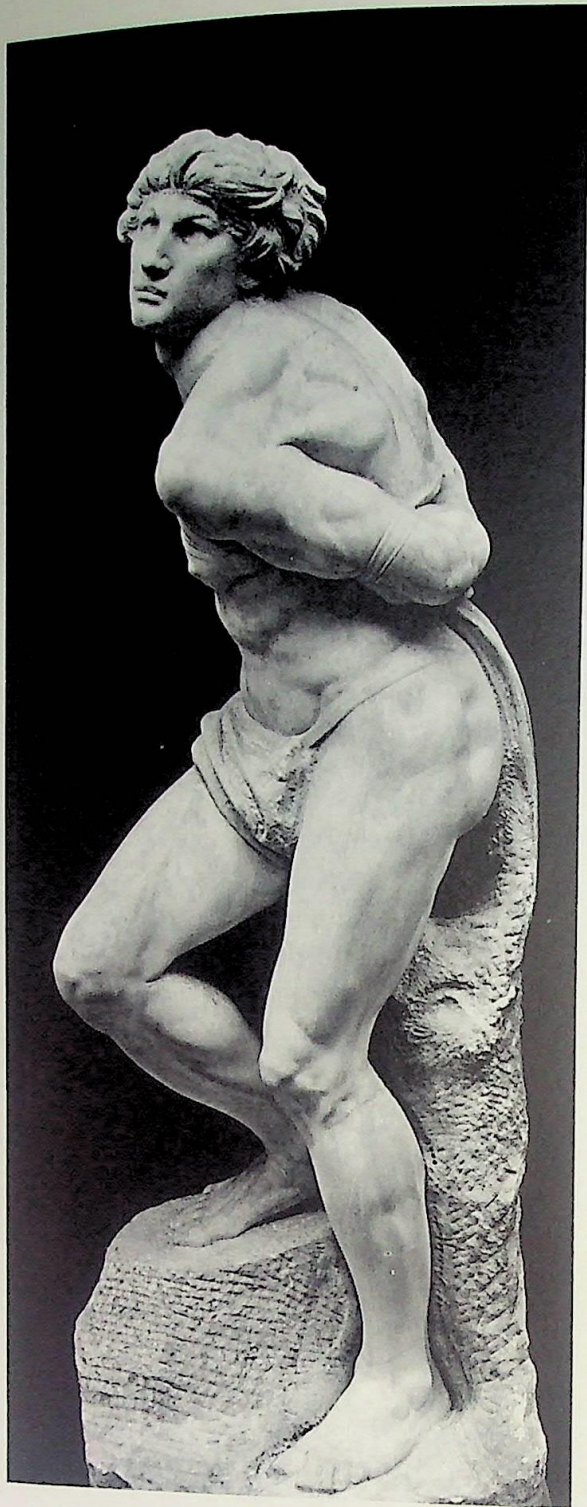
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TOMB OF POPE JULIUS II. 1505-42
SAN PIETRO IN VINCOLI, ROME

18

DYING CAPTIVE. 1513-6
LOUVRE, PARIS





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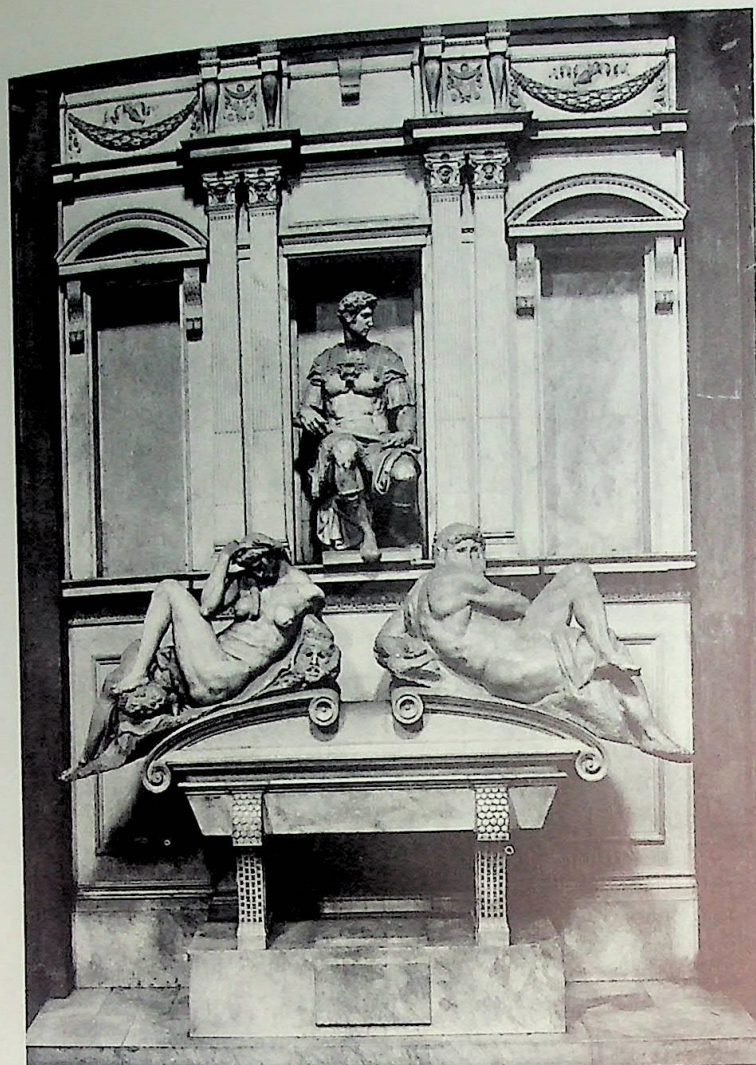
HEROIC CAPTIVE. 1513-6
LOUVRE, PARIS



20

MOSES. 1513-16
SAN PIETRO IN VINCOLI, ROME





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TOMB OF GIULIANO DE' MEDICI. 1524-34
MEDICI CHAPEL, FLORENCE





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THE LAST JUDGEMENT. 1536-41
SISTINE CHAPEL