

*The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti,
Florentine Painter, Sculptor, and Architect*

[1475–1564]

* While industrious and distinguished spirits, illuminated by the widely renowned Giotto and his followers, were striving to give the world proof of the talent which the benevolence of the stars and the proportionate mixture of their humours had bestowed upon their genius, all toiling anxiously, though in vain, in their eagerness to imitate the grandeur of Nature with the skills of art, in order to come as close as they could to that ultimate knowledge many people call intelligence, the most benevolent Ruler of Heaven mercifully turned His eyes towards earth, and, witnessing the hopeless quantity of such labours, the most fervid but fruitless studies, and the presumptuous opinion of men who were further from the truth than shadows from the light, He decided, in order to rid us of so many errors, to send to earth a spirit who, working alone, was able to demonstrate in every art and every profession the meaning of perfection in the art of design, how to give relief to the details in paintings by means of proper drawing, tracing, shading, and casting light, how to work with good judgement in sculpture, and how to make buildings comfortable and secure, healthy, cheerful, well proportioned, and richly adorned with various decorations in architecture.* Moreover, He wanted to join to this spirit true moral philosophy and the gift of sweet poetry, so that the world would admire and prefer him for the wholly singular example of his life, his work, the holiness of his habits, and all his human undertakings, and so that we would call him something divine rather than mortal. And because He saw that in the practice of these professions and in these most singular crafts—that is, painting, sculpture, and architecture—Tuscan minds were

always among the greatest and most elevated, and because they were more scrupulous in their efforts to study these arts than any other people of Italy, He wanted to bequeath to this spirit, as his native city, Florence, the most worthy among all the other cities, so that the perfection Florence justly achieved with all her talents might finally reach its culmination in one of her own citizens.

Thus, in the year 1474 under a fateful and fortunate star, a son was born in the Casentino district of an honest and noble lady to Lodovico di Lionardo Buonarroti Simoni who, according to what people say, was a descendant of the most noble and ancient family of the Counts of Canossa.* To this Lodovico, who, in that year, was *podestà** of the castle of Chiusi and Caprese, near Sasso della Vernia in the diocese of Arezzo, where Saint Francis received the stigmata, was born a son, let me say, on the sixth day of March on Sunday, around eight o'clock at night, to whom he gave the name of Michelangelo, for without thinking any further about the matter, he was inspired by One from above and wished to make him into something celestial and divine, beyond the usual human scope, as was seen in the horoscope of his birth, which had Mercury ascendant and Venus entering the house of Jupiter in a favourable position, showing that one could expect to see among his accomplishments miraculous and magnificent works created through his hands and his genius. After Lodovico's term as *podestà* ended, he returned to Florence and to his villa in Settignano, three miles from the city, where he owned a farm inherited from his ancestors (a place abundant in stone and everywhere filled with quarries of blue-grey sandstone continuously mined by stone-cutters and sculptors, most of whom are born in this area), and Michelangelo was given by Lodovico to a wet-nurse in the villa who was the wife of one of the stone-cutters. Thus, conversing with Vasari on one occasion, Michelangelo jokingly declared: 'Giorgio, if I have any intelligence at all, it has come from being born in the pure air of your native Arezzo, and also because I took the hammer and chisels with which I carve my figures from my wet-nurse's milk.'

In time the number of Lodovico's children grew, and since

he was not well off and had little income, he placed his children in service with the Wool and Silk Guilds while Michelangelo, who was already grown, was placed with Master Francesco da Urbino in his grammar school, and because Michelangelo's genius attracted him to the pleasures of drawing, he spent all the time he could drawing in secret, for which he was scolded and sometimes beaten by his father and his elders, since they probably thought applying oneself to a craft they did not recognize was a base and unworthy undertaking for their ancient house. During this time Michelangelo struck up a friendship with Francesco Granacci, also a young man, who had been placed with Domenico Ghirlandaio to learn the art of painting, and since Granacci, who was fond of Michelangelo, saw he was skilful in drawing, he assisted him every day by giving him sketches by Ghirlandaio, known at that time not only in Florence but throughout all of Italy as one of the best masters alive.* And so Michelangelo's desire to draw increased day by day, and since Lodovico could not prevent the young man from studying design and saw no remedy for it, he decided, in order to derive some benefit from it and upon the advice of friends, to place him with Domenico Ghirlandaio.

When Michelangelo was apprenticed into the craft with Domenico, he was fourteen years of age, and because the man who wrote his biography after 1550, when I wrote these *Lives* the first time, declares that some people who never associated with Michelangelo have said things which never happened and left out many details worthy of note, I cite in particular the passage where he accuses Domenico of jealousy and of never having offered Michelangelo any kind of assistance; this was obviously false, as can be seen from a document written in the hand of Lodovico, Michelangelo's father, and inscribed in Domenico's record books now in the possession of his heirs, which states as follows:

1488. On this day, the first of April, I record that I, Lodovico di Lionardo di Buonarroto, place my son Michelangelo with Domenico and David di Tommaso di Currado for the next three years to come with these covenants and agreements: that the said Michelangelo must remain with the above-mentioned for the stipulated period to

learn to paint and to practise this trade, and to do whatever the above-mentioned may order him to do, and, during these three years, the aforesaid Domenico and David must give him twenty-four newly minted florins—six in the first year, eight the second, and ten the third, in all, a total of ninety-six lire.

And below this statement is this record or entry written in Lodovico's hand: 'The above-mentioned Michelangelo on this day of 16 April received two florins in gold. I, Lodovico di Lionardo, his father, received twelve lire and twelve *scudi*.' I have copied these entries from this book to demonstrate that everything written earlier and everything that is now to be written is the truth; nor do I know anyone who was more familiar with Michelangelo than I, or anyone who has ever been a better friend or more faithful servant to him, as anyone can testify; nor do I believe that anyone can display a greater number of letters written by Michelangelo himself or letters which contain more affection than he has shown for me. I have made this digression to bear witness to the truth, and this must suffice for the remainder of his *Life*. Now, let us return to the story.*

Michelangelo's skill and character grew in such a way that it amazed Domenico, who saw him executing works beyond a young man's ability, for it seemed to him that Michelangelo not only surpassed his other students (of whom he had a large number) but on many occasions equalled works he himself had completed. It happened that one of the young men studying with Domenico had copied some clothed female figures in ink from Ghirlandaio's works, and Michelangelo took the paper and went over the outlines with a thicker pen in the way it should have been done (that is, perfectly), and it is a marvellous thing to see the difference between the two styles and the excellence and judgement of a young man who was so spirited and bold that he had enough courage to correct the work of his master. Today, I keep this drawing near me as a relic, for I obtained it from Granacci to put in my book of drawings with others I received from Michelangelo; in the year 1550, when he was in Rome, Giorgio [Vasari] showed it to Michelangelo, who recognized it and loved seeing it again,

saying modestly that he knew more of that art as a child than he did now as an old man.

Now while Domenico was working on the main chapel of Santa Maria Novella, it happened one day while he was away that Michelangelo began to sketch the scaffolding with some stools and the implements of the craft, along with some of the young men who were working there. When Domenico returned and saw Michelangelo's sketch, he declared: 'This boy knows more about it than I do.' And he was astonished by the new style and the new kind of imitation that derived from the judgement given by heaven to a youth of such a tender age, for to tell the truth, it was as much as one might expect in the practice of an artisan who had worked for many years. This was because all the knowledge and ability of true grace was, in his nature, enhanced by study and practice, for in Michelangelo it produced more sublime works every day, as he clearly began to demonstrate in the portrait he did from an engraving by Martin the German,* which gained him a fine reputation. Since a scene by this same Martin, which was engraved in copper and showed Saint Anthony being beaten by devils, had reached Florence, Michelangelo drew it with his pen in such a way that it was not recognized as his, and he painted it with colours; in order to copy the strange forms of some of the devils, he went to buy fish that had scales of unusual colours and showed so much talent in this work that he acquired from it both credit and renown. He also copied drawings done by various old masters so closely that they were not recognized as copies, for by staining and ageing them with smoke and various materials, he soiled them so that they seemed old and could not be distinguished from the originals; he did this for no other reason than to have the originals, giving away his copies, because he admired the originals for the excellence of their skill, which he sought to surpass in his copies, thereby acquiring a very great reputation.

In those days Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent kept Bertoldo the sculptor* in his garden near Piazza San Marco, not so much as the custodian or guardian of the many beautiful antiquities he had collected and assembled there at great expense, but rather because he wished above all else to create a

school for excellent painters and sculptors and wanted them to have the above-mentioned Bertoldo, who was a pupil of Donatello, as their teacher and guide. And although he was so old that he could no longer work, he was nevertheless a very experienced and famous master, not only because he had most carefully polished the pulpits cast by his master Donatello, but also because he had cast many other works in bronze of battle scenes as well as some other small objects, and his skill was such that no one in Florence at that time could surpass him. Thus, Lorenzo, who bore a great love for the arts of painting and sculpture, lamenting the fact that in his day no renowned and noble sculptors could be found as compared with painters of the greatest merit and fame, decided, as I said, to found a school, and accordingly he told Domenico Ghirlandaio that if he had any young men in his shop who were inclined to this art, he should send them to his garden, where he wished to train and form them in a way that would honour himself, Domenico, and his city. Thus, Domenico gave him some of his best young men, including among others Michelangelo and Francesco Granacci; and when they went to the garden, they found that Torrigiani, a young man of the Torrigiani family, was there working on some clay figures in the round that Bertoldo had given him to do.*

After Michelangelo saw these figures, he made some himself to rival those of Torrigiani, so that Lorenzo, seeing his high spirit, always had great expectations for him, and, encouraged after only a few days, Michelangelo began copying with a piece of marble the antique head of an old and wrinkled faun with a damaged nose and a laughing mouth, which he found there. Although Michelangelo had never before touched marble or chisels, the imitation turned out so well that Lorenzo was astonished, and when Lorenzo saw that Michelangelo, following his own fantasy rather than the antique head, had carved its mouth open to give it a tongue and to make all its teeth visible, this lord, laughing with pleasure as was his custom, said to him: 'But you should have known that old men never have all their teeth and that some of them are always missing.' In that simplicity of his, it seemed to Michelangelo, who loved and feared this lord, that Lorenzo

was correct; and as soon as Lorenzo left, he immediately broke a tooth on the head and dug out the gum in such a way that it seemed the tooth had fallen out, and anxiously awaited Lorenzo's return, who, after coming back and seeing Michelangelo's simplicity and excellence, laughed about it on more than one occasion, recounting it to his friends as if it were miraculous; and having resolved to assist Michelangelo and to show him favour, he sent for his father Lodovico and asked if he could have the boy, telling him that he wanted to raise him as one of his own sons, and Lodovico most willingly granted his request; and then Lorenzo prepared a room for Michelangelo in his home and had him cared for, so that he always ate at the table with his sons and other worthy and noble people who stayed with Lorenzo and by whom he was treated with honour. This occurred the year following Michelangelo's apprenticeship to Domenico when Michelangelo was either fifteen or sixteen years old, and he remained in that house for four years until the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent in 1492.

During this time, as his salary and in order to assist his father, Michelangelo received five ducats a month from Lorenzo, and to make him happy Lorenzo gave him a purple robe and his father a job in the Customs Department; indeed, all the young men in the garden were being paid a salary, some more and others less, because of the generosity of this most noble and magnificent citizen, and while he lived they were rewarded. Around this time, on the advice of a singular man of letters named Poliziano,* Michelangelo created in a single piece of marble given to him by Lorenzo the Battle of Hercules with the Centaurs, which was so beautiful that those who examine it today sometimes cannot believe it is by the hand of a young man rather than by an esteemed master who has been steeped in the study and practice of this art. Today the work is in Michelangelo's home, kept as an exceptional treasure in his memory by Lionardo, his nephew; it is not many years ago that Lionardo also owned, in memory of his uncle, a bas-relief in marble of Our Lady executed by Michelangelo a little more than an arm'slength high; in this work Michelangelo, as a young man at this same time who wanted to imitate Donatello's style, acquitted himself so well

that it seems to have been done by Donatello himself, except that it contains more grace and a better sense of design.* Lionardo later gave the second work to Duke Cosimo de' Medici, who considers it especially unique, since it is the only sculpture in bas-relief by Michelangelo.

Returning to Lorenzo the Magnificent's garden, it was completely filled with antiquities and lavishly decorated with excellent paintings, all of which had been collected there for their beauty as well as for study and pleasure, and Michelangelo always had the keys to the place, for he was far more eager than the other young men in all his actions and with great boldness always proved himself to be very quick. He sketched the paintings of Masaccio for many months in the Carmine, and he copied those works with such judgement that he amazed the artisans and others in such a way that along with his fame, envy began to grow up against him. It is said that Torrigiani, who struck up a friendship with him, was fooling around when, prompted by envy at seeing Michelangelo more honoured and more talented as an artist, he struck Michelangelo upon the nose with such force that he broke and flattened it, unfortunately marking Michelangelo for life; and this was the reason why he was banished from Florence, as was mentioned elsewhere.*

After the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Michelangelo returned to his father's home with endless sorrow over the death of such a great man, a friend to all with talent, and there he purchased a large block of marble from which he carved a Hercules that was four arm'slengths high, which stood for many years in the Strozzi palace and was considered a marvelous work; afterwards, during the year of the siege, it was sent by Giovambattista della Palla to France to King Francis.* It is said that Piero de' Medici, who was the heir of his father Lorenzo, often used to send for Michelangelo, with whom he had long been friends, when he wanted to purchase ancient cameos and other engraved stones; and one winter when it snowed heavily in Florence, Piero had him make a very beautiful statue out of the snow in his courtyard, and he honoured Michelangelo for his talents in such a fashion that the artist's father, who was beginning to see that his son was

esteemed by important people, dressed Michelangelo much more honourably than he usually did.

For the church of Santo Spirito in Florence, Michelangelo carved a wooden crucifix which was placed above the lunette of the main altar, where it remains, to the satisfaction of the prior who provided him with spacious quarters, where on many occasions Michelangelo dissected dead bodies in order to study the details of anatomy, and began to perfect the great skill in design that he subsequently possessed.* It happened that the Medici were driven out of Florence, and that, a few weeks before, Michelangelo had already left for Bologna and then for Venice, because, having seen the insolent actions and bad government of Piero de' Medici, he feared some sinister accident might befall him as a friend of the family; and finding nothing to keep him in Venice, he returned to Bologna, where he foolishly neglected to take the countersign for leaving the city when he came through the city gates, as had been decreed at that time as a precaution by Messer Giovanni Bentivogli, who ordered foreigners without the countersign to pay a fine of fifty Bolognese lire; and when Michelangelo found himself in this predicament without the means of paying the fine, he was fortunately spotted by Messer Giovanfrancesco Aldovrandi, one of the Sixteen in the government, who, after having Michelangelo recount the story, freed him out of compassion and kept him in his home for more than a year. One day Aldovrandi took him to see the tomb of Saint Dominic carved, as was mentioned, by the older sculptors Giovanni Pisano and, later, Niccolò dell'Arca, but which lacked an angel holding a candlestick and a figure of Saint Petronius about one armslength high, and Aldovrandi asked Michelangelo if he had the courage to complete the tomb; Michelangelo replied that he did. And so he had the marble delivered to Michelangelo, who executed the works, which are the best figures on the tomb, and Messer Francesco Aldovrandi paid him thirty ducats for them.*

Michelangelo remained in Bologna for a little more than a year, and he would have remained longer to repay the kindness of Aldovrandi, who loved him both for his skill in design and also because he liked Michelangelo's Tuscan pro-

nunciation and gladly listened to him read the works of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and other Tuscan poets. But since Michelangelo realized he was wasting time, he willingly returned to Florence and carved a little figure of Saint John in marble for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, and then with another piece of marble he immediately began to carve a life-size figure of a sleeping Cupid. When this was completed, Baldassare del Milanese showed it as a beautiful piece of work to Pierfrancesco, who agreed with Baldassare's judgement and declared to Michelangelo: 'If you buried it, I am convinced it would pass as an ancient work, and if you sent it to Rome treated so that it appeared old, you would earn much more than by selling it here.' It is said that Michelangelo treated it in such a way that it appeared to be ancient, nor is this astonishing, since he had the genius to do this and more. Others maintain that Milanese took it to Rome and buried it in a vineyard he owned and then sold it as an antique statue to Cardinal San Giorgio for two hundred ducats. Still others say that Milanese sold a copy Michelangelo made for him to the cardinal, then wrote to Pierfrancesco, telling him to give Michelangelo thirty *scudi*, declaring he received no more than that from the cupid, thus deceiving the cardinal, Pierfrancesco, and Michelangelo; but later the cardinal heard from someone who had seen the cupid being carved in Florence, and, using every means to discover the truth through one of his messengers, he then forced Milanese's agent to return his money and take back the cupid, which then fell into the hands of Duke Valentino, who gave it to the Marchioness of Mantua, and she took it to her own city where it can still be seen today.* This affair did not come about without damage to Cardinal San Giorgio, who did not recognize the value of the work, which consists in its perfection, for modern works are just as good as ancient ones when they are excellent, and it is greater vanity to pursue things more for their reputation than for what they really are, but these kinds of men can be found in any age, men who pay more attention to appearances than to realities.*

Nevertheless, this affair gave Michelangelo such a reputation that he was immediately brought to Rome and taken in by Cardinal San Giorgio, with whom he stayed almost a year,

and the cardinal, who had little understanding of the arts, did not give Michelangelo anything to do. During that time, the cardinal's barber, a painter who worked with diligence in tempera but lacked all sense of design, befriended Michelangelo, who drew him a cartoon with the figure of Saint Francis receiving the stigmata, which was painted very carefully by the barber on a small panel in colour; this painting today is located in one of the first chapels on the left as you enter the church of San Piero a Montorio.* Afterwards, Messer Jacopo Galli, a Roman gentleman and a man of some intelligence, clearly recognized Michelangelo's talent and had him carve a life-size Cupid in marble and then a Bacchus ten palms high, holding a cup in his right hand and in the left a tiger's skin along with a cluster of grapes, which a little satyr is trying to eat; in this figure it is clear that Michelangelo wanted to attain a marvellous combination of various parts of the body and, most particularly, to give it both the slenderness of the young male figure and the fleshiness and roundness of the female: it was such an astonishing work that it showed Michelangelo to be more skilled than any other modern sculptor who had ever worked up to that time.*

While staying in Rome, Michelangelo acquired so much skill in his study of art that it was incredible to see his lofty concepts and his difficult style, which he put into practice with such great facility that it terrified people unaccustomed to seeing such works as well as those accustomed to good ones, for the works that others were showing seemed nothing in comparison with his. All these things aroused the desire of the Cardinal of Saint-Denis, a Frenchman called Cardinal Rouen, to leave behind some worthy memorial of himself in such a renowned city through the talents of such an unusual artist, and he commissioned Michelangelo to do a marble *Pietà* in the round, which, when completed, was placed in Saint Peter's in the Chapel of the Madonna della Febbre in the temple of Mars.*

No sculptor, not even the most rare artist, could ever reach this level of design and grace, nor could he, even with hard work, ever finish, polish, and cut the marble as skilfully as Michelangelo did here, for in this statue all of the worth and

power of sculpture is revealed. Among the beautiful details it contains, besides its inspired draperies, the figure of the dead Christ stands out, and no one could ever imagine—given the beauty of its limbs and the skill with which the body is carved—seeing a nude so well endowed with muscles, veins, and nerves stretched over the framework of the bones, or the figure of a dead man which more closely resembled a dead body than this one. The expression on the face is so very gentle, and there is such harmony in the joints and the articulations of the arms, torso, and legs, with their finely wrought pulses and veins, that, in truth, it is absolutely astonishing that the hand of an artist could have properly executed something so sublime and admirable in a brief time, and clearly it is a miracle that a stone, formless in the beginning, could ever have been brought to the state of perfection which Nature habitually struggles to create in the flesh. Michelangelo placed so much love and labour in this work that on it (something he did in no other work) he left his name written across a sash which girds Our Lady's breast. This came about because one day when Michelangelo was entering the church where the statue was placed, he found a large number of foreigners from Lombardy who were praising the statue very highly; one of them asked another who had sculpted it, and he replied: 'Our Gobbo from Milan.'* Michelangelo stood there silently, and it seemed somewhat strange to him that his labours were being attributed to someone else; one night he locked himself inside the church with a little light, and, having brought his chisels, he carved his name upon the statue. And it has such qualities that a very fine mind has described it as a true and lifelike figure:

Beauty and goodness,
And grief and pity, alive in dead marble,
Do not, as you do,
Weep so loudly,
Lest too early He should reawaken from death
In spite of Himself,
Our Lord and Thy
Spouse, Son and Father,
Only bride, His Daughter and Mother.*

Because of this statue, Michelangelo gained very great fame. And some people, more stupid than anything else, say that he made Our Lady too young, but have they failed to realize or to discover that spotless virgins keep themselves young and their faces remain well preserved for a long time without any blemish whatsoever, while those who are afflicted, as was Christ, do the opposite? And so this work added more glory and distinction to Michelangelo's talent than all the others he had done before.

Some of Michelangelo's friends wrote from Florence to tell him to return, since it was not beyond the realm of possibility that he might be given the block of spoiled marble in the Works Department, which Piero Soderini, recently elected Gonfaloniere of the city for life* had many times talked about giving to Leonardo da Vinci, and which he was then arranging to give to Master Andrea Contucci dal Monte San Sovino, an excellent sculptor, who was trying to obtain it; although it would be difficult to carve an entire figure out of it without adding additional pieces, no other man except Michelangelo had the courage to complete it without other pieces, and since many years previously he had wanted it, Michelangelo attempted to obtain it when he returned to Florence.

This marble was nine armslengths high, and unfortunately a certain master named Simone da Fiesole* had begun to carve out the figure of a giant, and the stone was so poorly hewn that he had bored a hole between its legs, and had botched and bungled everything; and so the trustees of the Works Department of Santa Maria del Fiore, who were in charge of the project, had abandoned the block without thinking about completing it, and it had already lain there for many years and was lying there still. Michelangelo once again examined it closely and, calculating that one could carve a reasonable figure from the stone by adapting its pose to the rock which had been mutilated by Master Simone, he decided to request the block from the trustees and from Soderini, who gave it to him as something of no use, believing that whatever he made of it would be better than the condition in which it then happened to be, for whether broken up in pieces or left in that poorly hewn state, it was of no use whatsoever to the Works Department.

Thus, Michelangelo did a wax model depicting a young David with a sling in hand, as the symbol of the palace, for just as David had defended his people and governed them with justice, so, too, those who governed this city should courageously defend it and govern it with justice:* he began the statue in the Works Department of Santa Maria del Fiore, where he erected a scaffolding between the wall and the tables surrounding the marble, and, working continuously without letting anyone see it, he brought the statue to perfect completion. The marble had been mutilated and spoiled by Master Simone, and in some places even Michelangelo's will-power did not suffice to achieve what he wished; so he allowed some of Master Simone's original chisel marks to remain on the extremities of the marble, a few of which can still be seen. And Michelangelo certainly performed a miracle in restoring to life a block of marble left for dead.

When the statue was completed, various disputes arose over how, given its size, it should be transported to the Piazza della Signoria. For that reason, Giuliano da San Gallo and his brother Antonio built a very strong wooden frame and suspended the statue from it with ropes so that when it was shaken it would not break or, rather, just come tumbling down, and they pulled it with winches over flat planks laid upon the ground and set it in place. They tied a slip-knot in the rope that held the statue suspended which moved very easily and tightened as the weight increased, a very fine and ingenious device that I have in my book drawn up by Michelangelo himself, a secure and strong knot for holding weights, which is remarkable. Around this time it happened that Piero Soderini saw the statue, and it pleased him greatly, but while Michelangelo was giving it the finishing touches, he told Michelangelo that he thought the nose of the figure was too large. Michelangelo, realizing that the Gonfaloniere was standing under the giant and that his viewpoint did not allow him to see it properly, climbed up the scaffolding to satisfy Soderini (who was behind him nearby), and having quickly grabbed his chisel in his left hand along with a little marble dust that he found on the planks in the scaffolding, Michelangelo began to tap lightly with the chisel, allowing

the dust to fall little by little without retouching the nose from the way it was. Then, looking down at the Gonfaloniere who stood there watching, he ordered:

'Look at it now.'

'I like it better,' replied the Gonfaloniere: 'you've made it come alive.'

Thus Michelangelo climbed down, and, having contented this lord, he laughed to himself, feeling compassion for those who, in order to make it appear that they understand, do not realize what they are saying; and when the statue was finished and set in its foundation, he uncovered it, and to tell the truth, this work eclipsed all other statues, both modern and ancient, whether Greek or Roman; and it can be said that neither the Marforio in Rome, nor the Tiber and the Nile of the Belvedere, nor the colossal statues of Monte Cavallo can be compared to this David, which Michelangelo completed with so much measure and beauty, and so much skill. For the contours of its legs are extremely beautiful, along with the splendid articulations and grace of its flanks; a sweeter and more graceful pose has never been seen that could equal it, nor have feet, hands, and a head ever been produced which so well match all the other parts of the body in skill of workmanship or design. To be sure, anyone who sees this statue need not be concerned with seeing any other piece of sculpture done in our times or in any other period by any other artist.

Michelangelo received four hundred *scudi* in payment from Piero Soderini, and the David was erected in the year 1504; this statue brought great fame to Michelangelo in the art of sculpture, and, as a result, he cast an extremely beautiful David in bronze for the above-mentioned Gonfaloniere which Soderini then sent to France;* at the same time he roughed out but left unfinished two marble tondos, one for Taddeo Taddei, which today hangs in his home, and another, only just begun, for Bartolomeo Pitti, which was given by Fra Miniato Pitti of Monte Oliveto, an unusually knowledgeable expert in cosmography and many areas of study, especially the art of painting, to his close friend Luigi Guicciardini; both works were considered most worthy and admirable.* And at the

same time, he also roughed out a marble statue of Saint Matthew in the Works Department of Santa Maria del Fiore, a statue which even in an unfinished state reveals its perfection and teaches other sculptors how to carve figures from marble without mutilating them, so that they may always be carefully improved by carving away some of the marble while leaving enough for redesigning or altering the piece as is sometimes necessary. He also did a bronze tondo of Our Lady which he cast at the request of some Flemish merchants of the Moscheroni family, extremely noble men in their own country, who paid him one hundred *scudi* and sent the work to Flanders.*

Angelo Doni, a Florentine citizen and friend of Michelangelo, as a man who took great delight in owning beautiful objects by both ancient and modern artists, decided that he wanted something done by Michelangelo; hence, Michelangelo began painting a tondo for him,* containing the figure of Our Lady kneeling down with a young child in Her arms whom She holds out towards Joseph, who receives Him; in the way Christ's mother turns Her head and fixes Her eyes upon the supreme beauty of Her Child, Michelangelo makes us understand Her marvellous sense of contentment and the emotion She feels in sharing it with that most holy old man, who takes the child with equal love, tenderness, and reverence, which can easily be discerned in his face at a glance. Since these details were not enough for Michelangelo to prove that his skill was immense, he painted in the background of this work many nudes, some leaning, others standing or seated, and he completed this painting with such diligence and polish that of all his paintings on panels, although they are few, this one is surely considered the most perfect and the most beautiful painting in existence. After it was completed, he sent it by messenger to Angelo's home, covered, along with a bill asking seventy ducats in payment. Since Angelo was a thrifty person, he thought it strange to pay so much for a painting, even though he knew it to be worth even more, and he told the messenger that forty ducats were enough and gave them to him; at this Michelangelo sent the messenger back again, telling him to say that either one hundred ducats

or the painting should be returned to him. At this, Angelo, who liked the painting, declared: 'I'll give him those seventy.' But Michelangelo was not satisfied, and, indeed, because of Angelo's lack of good faith, he wanted double the payment he had requested the first time; since Angelo wanted the painting, he was forced to send Michelangelo one hundred and forty ducats.

It happened that while that exceptional painter, Leonardo da Vinci, was working in the Grand Hall of the Council, as is recounted in his *Life*, Piero Soderini, the Gonfaloniere of that time, because of the great talent he observed in Michelangelo, commissioned him to do part of the hall, and this was why he came to compete with Leonardo on the other wall, taking as his subject the Pisan war.* For this reason, Michelangelo had access to a room in the Dyers' Hospital at Sant'Onofrio, and there he began an enormous cartoon, which he never wanted anyone else to see. He filled it with nudes bathing during the heat in the river Arno, imagining the moment when the alarm is sounded in the camp at the assault of the enemy, and while the soldiers emerge from the water to dress, the divinely inspired hands of Michelangelo depicted some hurrying to take up their arms to help their comrades, while others buckle on their cuirasses, and many put on other kinds of armour, with countless men fighting on horseback to start the scuffle. Among the other figures is an old man wearing a garland of ivy to shade his head; he has sat himself down to put on his stockings but is unable to do so because his legs are wet from the water, and hearing the tumult of the soldiers and the cries and the rolls of the drums, he hurriedly forces his foot into a stocking; besides the fact that all the muscles and nerves in this figure can be seen, Michelangelo gave him a contorted mouth, using it to show that he was suffering and exerting himself down to the very tips of his toes.

Drummers and naked figures with their clothes wrapped in a bundle are also racing towards the fight, and men in extravagant poses can be seen, some standing upright, others kneeling or bent over or lying down, all in positions drawn with the most difficult foreshortenings. There are also many figures grouped together and sketched out in various ways, some

outlined with charcoal, others drawn in with a few strokes, some shaded and illumined with white lead, since Michelangelo wished to demonstrate how much he knew about this craft. Thus, the artisans remained astonished and amazed when they saw the limits of the art of painting demonstrated to them in this cartoon by Michelangelo. Once they had examined these sublime figures, some of the people who saw them declared that no other genius, neither Michelangelo nor any other artist, could ever produce anything to equal the sublime qualities of this work of art. And this can certainly be believed, for as soon as it was finished and, to the great glory of Michelangelo, carried to the Pope's Chamber with a great clamour among the craftsmen, all those who studied the cartoon and sketched from it, which both foreigners and local artisans continued to do in Florence for many years afterwards, became distinguished individuals in this profession, as we have seen; those who later studied the cartoon included Aristotle da San Gallo, Michelangelo's friend; Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, Raphael Sanzio of Urbino, Francesco Granacci, Baccio Bandinelli, and the Spaniard Alonso Beruguete; following them were Andrea del Sarto, Franciabigio, Jacopo Sansovino, Rosso, Maturino, Lorenzetto, Tribolo as a young boy, Jacopo da Pontormo, and Perin del Vaga, all of whom were excellent Florentine masters; and since the cartoon had become a subject of study for artisans, it was taken to the large upper hall in the Medici's home, and this was the reason why it was placed too freely in the hands of the artists. Thus, during the illness of Duke Giuliano and while no one was looking after such a thing, it was, as we said elsewhere, torn apart and divided into many pieces so that it was scattered around in a number of places, as is substantiated by some pieces that can still be seen in Mantua in the home of Uberto Strozzi, a Mantuan gentleman who conserves them with great reverence.* And certainly anyone who sees them considers them something divine rather than human.

The *Pietà*, the giant of Florence, and the cartoon had made Michelangelo so famous that in the year 1503, when Pope Alexander VI died and Julius II was named pope, at a time when Michelangelo was about twenty-nine years of age, he

was summoned with great courtesy by Julius II to build his tomb, and for his travelling expenses he was paid one hundred *scudi* by the pope's agents.* After he had been brought to Rome, many months passed before he was put to work on anything. Finally the pope decided upon a design that Michelangelo had done for the tomb, which provided admirable proof of his talent and which in beauty, splendour, magnificent decoration, and the richness of its statuary surpassed every ancient and imperial tomb. And as Pope Julius's courage increased, it caused him to decide to begin rebuilding the church of Saint Peter in Rome in order to place the tomb inside it, as was mentioned elsewhere.*

Thus, Michelangelo boldly set to work: to begin the project, he went to Carrara to excavate all of the marble with two of his apprentices, and from Alamanno Salviati in Florence he received a thousand *scudi* on this account; he spent eight months in those mountains without any other salary or provisions, where, challenged by those massive blocks, he conceived many fantastic ideas for carving giant statues in those quarries in order to leave a memorial of himself as the ancients had already done. After having chosen the appropriate pieces of marble, he had them loaded at the dock and then brought to Rome, where they filled half the square of Saint Peter's near Santa Caterina and the space between the church and the corridor that runs towards Castel Sant'Angelo, where Michelangelo had set up a room to work on the figures and the rest of the tomb; and so that he could conveniently come to see Michelangelo work, the pope had a drawbridge built from the corridor to the room, and, because of this, he came to be on very intimate terms with Michelangelo, though in time these favours brought Michelangelo great annoyance and even persecution, and also stirred up a great deal of envy among his fellow artisans.

While Julius was alive and after his death, Michelangelo executed for this project four finished statues and eight others only roughed out, as I shall describe in the proper place, and since the project was conceived with the greatest powers of invention, we shall describe below the plan he followed. In order to give it a greater sense of grandeur, Michelangelo

wanted the tomb to be isolated so that it could be seen from all four sides, each of which measured twenty-four feet in one direction and thirty-six feet in the other, so that the proportions were a square and a half. The outside of the tomb had a series of niches all around it divided by terminal figures clothed from the middle upwards which supported the first cornice with their heads, and to each of these terminal figures was bound a nude prisoner standing on a projection of the base in a strange and unusual pose. These prisoners represented all the provinces subjugated by the pontiff and made obedient to the Apostolic Church; and other different statues, also bound, represented all the Virtues and the Liberal Arts and Sciences to show that they, too, were no less subject to death than the pontiff who so honourably employed them. Four large figures were to go on the corners of the first cornice: the Active and Contemplative Life, Saint Paul, and Moses. Above the cornice the work rose in diminishing steps, with a decorated bronze frieze and other figures, putti, and decorations all around, and at the top, completing the monument, there were two figures, one of which was Heaven, who was smiling and bearing a coffin on her shoulders, and the other Cybele, the goddess of earth, who seemed unhappy to remain in a world deprived of every virtue at the death of such a man, while Heaven seemed to be rejoicing that his soul had passed to celestial glory. The tomb was arranged so that one could enter and leave through the space at the ends of the square panels between the niches, while the inside had the configuration of a temple in an oval form, in the middle of which was the sarcophagus where the dead body of that pontiff was to be placed, and, finally, forty marble statues—not counting the other scenes, putti, decorations, and all the carved cornices and other architectural details—were to adorn the entire work.

To facilitate the work, Michelangelo ordered part of the marble to be brought to Florence, where he planned on occasion to pass the summer to avoid the unhealthy air of Rome, and where he executed one side of the work in several pieces down to the last detail; and in Rome, with his own hand, he completed two of the prisoners in a truly sublime

fashion as well as some other statues that have never been surpassed. Since they were not placed upon the tomb, the two prisoners were given to Signor Roberto Strozzi by Michelangelo, because Michelangelo had been in Strozzi's home during an illness; later they were sent as a gift to King Francis and are today in Écouen in France.* In Rome he also roughed out eight statues, and another five in Florence,* and he completed a Victory standing over the figure of a prisoner which is now in the possession of Duke Cosimo, to whom the work was given by Michelangelo's nephew Lionardo; His Excellency has placed the statue of Victory in the Great Hall of his palace, which was painted by Vasari.*

Michelangelo finished the figure of Moses, a statue in marble five arm-lengths high, which no modern statue could ever rival in beauty (and one could say the same of ancient statues as well), for seated with a most serious expression, Moses rests one arm upon the tablets he is holding in one hand, and with the other he grasps his long and flowing beard, which is executed so well in the marble that the hairs, so difficult to render in sculpture, are delicately carved, downy, and soft, and drawn out in such a way that it seems as if the chisel has become a brush;* and besides the beauty of the face, which wears the expression typical of a true saint and a most formidable prince, it seems that while you gaze at the statue, you feel the desire to ask for a veil to cover his face, so splendid and radiant does it appear to onlookers. And in the marble, Michelangelo has perfectly depicted the divinity God has endowed upon his most holy face, not to mention the fact that his garments are carved and finished with the most beautiful folds in the hems, while the muscles of the arms and the bones and sinews of the hands are brought to the height of beauty and perfection along with the legs and knees, and the feet below are fitted with such well-fashioned sandals, and every aspect of the work is finished so skilfully, that, today more than ever, Moses can call himself the friend of God, since through the hands of Michelangelo He wished to restore and prepare Moses' body for the Resurrection long before that of anyone else. May the Jews continue to go there, as they do in crowds, both men and women, every Saturday, like flocks

of starlings, to visit and adore the statue, for they will be worshipping something that is not human but divine.

Finally, when an agreement was reached for the completion of this work, one of the smaller of the four sides was built in San Pietro in Vincoli. It is said that while Michelangelo was carrying out this work, the rest of the marble for the tomb that had been left in Carrara arrived at Ripa, and was brought to Saint Peter's square along with the rest, and because he had to pay the men who had delivered it, Michelangelo went as usual to see the pope, but since that day His Holiness had to attend to some matters which were of interest to him concerning the Bologna affair,* Michelangelo returned home and paid for the marble himself, assuming he would immediately receive the order of reimbursement from His Holiness. He returned on another day to speak to the pope about it and found it difficult to gain entrance, because a footman told him to be patient and that he had orders not to admit him: when a bishop told the footman 'Perhaps you don't know this man!', the footman declared: 'I know him only too well, but I am here to carry out the orders of my superiors and the pope.'

This attitude displeased Michelangelo, who thought it stood in contrast to the treatment he had received up to then, and he indignantly told the footman to tell the pope that from now on when he looked for Michelangelo he would find that he had gone somewhere else, and having returned to his quarters at two o'clock in the morning, he mounted a post horse, leaving behind him two servants to sell all his household goods to the Jews with orders to follow him to Florence where he was headed. When he reached Poggibonsi, a city in the Florentine territory, he felt safe enough to stop, even though it was not long before five couriers arrived there with written instructions from the pope to bring Michelangelo back, and neither their entreaties nor the letter ordering him to return to Rome on pain of disgrace could make Michelangelo listen to anything, but the prayers of the couriers finally convinced him to write two words in reply to His Holiness, asking his pardon for not returning again to His Presence, after he had been driven away like a poor wretch, and explaining that his