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Author(s): Charles Robertson

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BRAMANTE, MICHELANGELO AND THE SISTINE CEILING*

Charles Robertson

MICHELANGELO was neither a generous nor a particularly truthful man. When confronted with the account of his life in Vasari's *Vite* in 1550,¹ he was stimulated to present his own version, in the biography written by his pupil Condivi and published in 1553.² Apart from a desire to add information, Michelangelo had another and overriding concern, namely to show how little he had been influenced by masters or contemporaries. He may have been projecting back onto his origins and earlier career an isolation which obtained for his maturity and old age, and have been expressing attitudes which that isolation had engendered; but the result inevitably involved distortion. Vasari, who had hinted at it even in the first edition, largely accepted Condivi's view of Michelangelo in 1568, and, with some qualifications, this picture has generally been taken as authoritative.³ Particularly persuasive is the image of the solitary artist single-handedly tackling the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Certainly the ceiling marked a turning point in his career, for by executing it virtually unaided Michelangelo proved to himself and to others that he could achieve what had seemed impossible. But execution is not preparation, and this study attempts to show how, in the conception of the ceiling, Michelangelo, who had little practice either in architectural design or in illusionistic paintings, drew on the experience and example of a fellow artist skilled in both.

The setting of Bramante's *Argus* (Pl. 23b) over the entrance to the Treasury in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan is very like the tabernacles that surround the Prophets and Sibyls on the Sistine Ceiling (Pls 22, 23a). The elements and the composition of the

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¹ For both versions of the *Life* of Michelangelo the edition used here is that of P. Barocchi: *Giorgio Vasari, La Vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, 1, Testo, Milan and Naples 1962, hereafter Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita*. For the *Lives* other than that of Michelangelo the edition used (from the 1568 version) is that of G. Milanese: G. Vasari, *Le Vite de più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, 9 vols, Florence 1878–85, hereafter Vasari-Milanese, *Vite*.

² *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti raccolta per Ascanio Condivi de la Ripa Transone*, Rome 1553. The edition used here is A. Condivi, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti* (Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli), ed. E. Spina Barelli, Milan 1964, hereafter Condivi, *Vita*.

³ Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita*, 1, pp. 35–36. Attempts have been made to criticise Condivi's and Vasari's revised account of the relationship between Bramante and Michelangelo. There is a copy of Condivi's life anno-

tated by someone who apparently knew Michelangelo which repeats Michelangelo's denials of some of Condivi's assertions (U. Procacci, 'Postille contemporanee in un esemplare della Vita di Michelangelo del Condivi', in *Atti del Convegno di studi michelangioloeschi, Firenze-Roma 1964*, Rome 1966, pp. 277–94. Cf. below, nn. 16 and 17. I am indebted to Caroline Elam for this reference.) Carl Justi (*Michelangelo*, Leipzig 1900, p. 11) casts doubt on the stories of Bramante's machinations, suggesting that the figure of major importance who helped Michelangelo was Giuliano da Sangallo. Martin Spahn ('Michelangelo und Bramante im Frühjahr 1506', *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung*, III, no. 190, Munich, 18 August 1906, pp. 321–24; *Michelangelo und die Sixtinische Kapelle*, Berlin 1907, pp. 1–16, 141–57) and independently Giuseppe Rossi (*La rinascenza dell'arte nel Picino. Raffaello e Bramante*, Macerata 1825, pp. 81–202) have questioned the generally accepted version of events, suggesting a more positive role for Bramante. Their arguments are based upon inconsistencies in the literary and historical evidence, but their review of this is not complete, and they were not concerned with the design. E. Steinmann and R. Wittkower (*Michelangelo Bibliographie 1510–1926*, Leipzig 1927, p. 326, no. 1684) found their view unconvincing.

architecture are strikingly similar. In both there are two large pedestals capped by a broad linking moulding which runs around their edges and across the space between them. In both, pedestals are surmounted by blocks which, in the *Argus*, stand before pilasters supporting the entablature and, on the ceiling, form the bases of the bands that serve as the cross-ribs of the vault. In both, the area between the pedestals, blocks and pilasters or bands contains a figure and a large gilt bronze medal. The only difference is that in the *Argus*, the medal is in the lower register and the figure in the upper, whereas on the ceiling the arrangement is reversed. Although the *Argus* was painted well before the ceiling, probably some time in the early 1490s, Michelangelo could not have seen it, since he was never in Lombardy.⁴ Nevertheless, the similarities can hardly be accidental.

If we were to judge from Vasari it would appear that the architecture and illusionism of the ceiling were relatively unimportant. As he put it quite explicitly in the second edition of his *Lives*:

In the disposition he has not used the rules of perspective that foreshorten, nor is there a fixed viewpoint, but he applied himself to accommodating the disposition more to the figures than the figures to the disposition, contenting himself with bringing the nude and the clothed figures to the perfection of design.⁵

But Vasari was here reacting against Condivi, whose strong emphasis on fictive architecture and illusion in the ceiling probably better reflects what seemed important to Michelangelo himself. Condivi writes:

The form of the vault is what is commonly called a barrel vault; it is arranged with six lunettes along and two lunettes across . . . starting at the imposts on which the arches of the lunettes rest there is an effect of a flat wall continuing up almost to a third of the vault. Going up to this level are several piers with plinths in imitation marble, which project forward, in front of a little flat area in the form of a balcony, with its own brackets below and little pilasters above, where sit the Prophets and Sibyls. The first pilasters spring from the arches of the lunettes, with the imposts in between leaving, however, the greater part of the arch of the lunettes which is that part which is not contained within them. Above the aforesaid plinths are depicted little naked boys in various attitudes who support a cornice, which binds the whole work around, leaving the middle of the vault from top to bottom like an open roof. This opening is divided into nine spaces. Far from the cornice above the piers spring several arches with mouldings which traverse the highest part of the vault to join the cornice on the opposite side, leaving between the arches nine openings, alternately large and small. In the small ones are two fillets of imitation marble, that run across the openings, in such a way that in the middle two parts are left and one [at the sides], where the medallions are placed . . . and he did this to avoid the tedium that is born of sameness.⁶

⁴ The *Argus* is one of Bramante's few surviving paintings. See G. Mulazzani, *Bramantino e Bramante pittore*, Milan 1978, pp. 87–88, no. 4, with further bibliography. Mulazzani suggests a collaboration between Bramante and Bramantino, but doubts as to Bramante's authorship seem unreasonable. The architecture is very close to Bramante, particularly to the Sacristy of Santa Maria presso San Satiro (cf. Pl. 24c), the figures in the medal resemble those in the Prevedari engraving (A.M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, New York 1938–48, vi, pl. 633) and its technique, if finer, is quite similar to that of the *Armed Men* in the Brera (Mulazzani, pls III–X). F. Malguzzi Valeri (*La corte di Lodovico il Moro*, II, Milan 1915, p. 22) suggests a

date for the *Argus* prior to the winter of 1493, in connection with the celebration of Beatrice d'Este's giving birth to Massimiliano Sforza; the room in which the fresco is displayed is mentioned.

⁵ 'Nel partimento non ha usato ordine di prospettive che scortino, né v'è veduta ferma, mà e ito accomodando più il partimento alle figure che le figure al partimento, bastando condurre gli ignudi e vestiti con perfezione di disegno.' See Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita*, I (1568), p. 41.

⁶ 'È la forma della volta, secondoché comunemente si chiama, a botte; e ne' posamenti suoi a lunette, che sono per la lunghezza sei, per la larghezza due. . . . Cominciando dai peducci, dove le corna delle lunette si posano, fin quasi a un terzo dell'arco della volta finge come un

Condivi is concerned with the main part of the ceiling — the plane of the cove of the vault which extends down the outer face of the pendentives — and it is this area which is most significantly related to Bramante.

We have noted how the continuous binding cornice mentioned by Condivi is similar to the *Argus* (Pl. 23b). An even closer analogy exists with Bramante's work in Rome, in particular the choir of Santa Maria del Popolo which was being completed as the ceiling was painted⁷ (Pl. 24b). The cornice of the choir which runs around at the level of the springing of the vaults breaks forward over the pilasters much as in the ceiling's tabernacles. So too the pilasters provide bases for the bands across the vault, and the form of the cross band is strikingly similar. This cross band, while not unique to him, is a favourite motif of Bramante. It is found in Santa Maria presso San Satiro⁸ (Pl. 24c). Here nave and transepts are covered by a barrel vault, and a continuous cornice runs below it breaking forward over pilasters which support the bands across the ceiling. Here indeed the bands rise from little square blocks like those which serve as seats for the 'Ignudi'. The way in which cornice and frieze project and recede together, as around the Prophets and Sibyls, is characteristic of Bramante's Roman as well as his Milanese architecture. It is found in the porch of Abbiategrosso (Pl. 24d) as well as in Santa Maria presso San Satiro, and appears in the upper and lower courts of the Belvedere⁹ (Pl. 25b).

Condivi seems to read the part of the ceiling he describes as a vault, indicated by the cross arches and supported by a wide frieze for the Prophets and Sibyls. This form of frieze or entablature had become increasingly popular in fifteenth-century architecture, but Bramante is its major exponent. Unlike his contemporaries, Bramante does not characterize as a separate order the projected elements that rest on a pier or pilaster and support the arches or bands above; he ornaments them only by breaking the moulding forward over them.¹⁰ This can be observed clearly in Santa Maria delle Grazie (Pl. 24a) and most

parete piano, tirando su a quel termine alcuni pilastri e zoccoli finti di marmo, che sporgono in fuori sopra un piano a guisa di poggiuolo, colle sue mensole sotto e con altri pilastrelli sopra il medesimo piano, dove stanno a sedere Profeti e Sibille; i quali primi pilastri, movendosi dagli archi delle lunette, mettono in mezzo i peducci; lasciando però dell'arco delle lunette maggior parte, che non è quello spazio che dentro a loro si contiene. Sopra detti zoccoli son finti alcuni fanciulletti ignudi, in vari gesti, i quali a guisa de' termini reggono una cornice, che intorno cinge tutta l'opera, lasciando nel mezzo della volta da capo a piè come uno aperto cielo. Questa apertura è distinta in nove liste, perciocché dalla cornice sopra i pilastri si muovono alcuni archi corniciati, i quali passano per l'ultima altezza della volta e vanno a trovare la cornice dell'opposita parte, lasciando tra arco ed arco nove vani, un grande ed un piccolo. Nel piccol son due listerelle finte di marmo, che traversano il vano, fatte talmente, che nel mezzo restan le due parti ed una delle bande dove sono collocati i medaglioni . . . ; e questo ha fatto per fuggir la sazietà, che nasce dalla similitudine.' See Condivi, *Vita*, p. 47.

⁷ The choir of Santa Maria del Popolo was probably begun c. 1505 and was being completed in the first half of 1509. See A. Bruschi, *Bramante architetto*, Bari 1969, pp. 911–12.

⁸ Bramante's work there is documented from 1482–97, but may have begun earlier. See Bruschi, op. cit., pp. 751–55.

⁹ The porch of S. Maria Nascente at Abbiategrosso bears the date 1497. While much was built later, in particular the back façade, this seems to follow the original design. See Bruschi, op. cit. n. 7 above, pp. 819–20. The Belvedere project seems to have been begun in 1504 and work thereafter to have continued fairly rapidly. See J. S. Ackerman, *The Cortile del Belvedere*, Vatican City 1954, pp. 41–44. It is difficult to estimate how much had been built by 1508, but a description written in 1509 — Francesco Albertini, *Opusculum de mirabilibus novae et veteris Urbis Romae*, Rome 1510 (Ackerman, pp. 142–43) — shows an awareness of most of the major elements of the project, even if they had not yet been built.

¹⁰ The examples by other artists, such as in the church of San Pietro in Montorio or in the work of Biagio Rossetti, all use small pilasters with Corinthian capitals in the entablature. See L. H. Heydenreich and W. Lotz, *Architecture in Italy 1400 to 1600*, Harmondsworth etc. 1974, pls 54, 116. Bramante's solution gives the effect of the pier being surmounted by a plinth. Bernardo Rossellino had pioneered this arrangement in the Cathedral at Pienza (c. 1460) (Heydenreich and Lotz,

spectacularly in the double entablature around the octagonal crossing in the model for the Duomo of Pavia¹¹ (Pl. 25c). This form of decoration, which depends on the articulation of mouldings, and is so successfully exploited in the ceiling, has a unique importance in Bramante's architecture, as can be seen in the crypt of the Duomo at Pavia (Pl. 25a) or in the choir at Santa Maria del Popolo. On the Sistine ceiling, as in the courtyard of the Belvedere (Pl. 25b), this cornice articulation follows a pattern of shorter projecting elements alternating with longer recessed ones. Indeed, the notional rectangular space created by the ceiling perhaps even resembles the enclosed courts of the Belvedere. The most obvious analogies, however, in terms of both illusion and the conception of the fictive architecture, are with his painting, and especially the fresco of *Argus* (Pls 22, 23b). There are even at the feet of Argus little towers and battlements and a band of blue sky; and, as in the ceiling, a strip of sky can be glimpsed at either end.¹²

Since the documentary evidence is otherwise so meagre, any consideration of Bramante's relationship to Michelangelo and to the Sistine ceiling must rely on the early secondary sources, and the inaccurate and often contradictory accounts given by Vasari and Condivi. To start with Vasari's *Life* of 1550, here Bramante emerges as an authoritative figure who has considerable influence with Julius II. It is even suggested that he might have been responsible for the choice of artist, for surprise is expressed that Raphael, who Vasari says was related to Bramante, was not chosen.¹³ One anecdote actually presents Bramante as a friend. Michelangelo wished no-one to see his work in progress, not even the Pope. When Julius entered the chapel surreptitiously, the artist started hurling planks down from the scaffolding:

Because of which thing the Pope, having seen him and knowing his (Michelangelo's) nature fled, with no less anger than fear, threatening him much. Michelangelo left through a window of the chapel, and having found Bramante of Urbino, left the key of the work with him and post-haste returned to Florence thinking that Bramante would pacify the Pope again, whom he really thought that he had hurt. Then having arrived at Florence and having heard the Pope complain in such a way, he had formed the intention never to return to Rome; but through the intercession of Bramante and other friends, the Pope's anger passed . . .¹⁴

As told by Condivi in more detail in 1553, Bramante plays an even more important role in the story, but now as an enemy. Along with others envious of the artist he persuades Julius II that Michelangelo would achieve wonders in painting the ceiling. But this was a

pp. 43–44 and pl. 36). The concept could be developed to form a frieze or entablature below the springing of the vaults, as Bramante demonstrated. He seems to have been influenced by Pienza, since the crypt of the Duomo of Pavia echoes the vault at Pienza, as well as the façade (Heydenreich and Lotz, pls 35–36, 106), which, with its double row of pillars also resembles Abbiategrasso (Pl. 24a).

¹¹ The model was made in the 1490s. Bramante's involvement in this project is unclear, and the attribution is entirely based on visual assessments. For a discussion of the problem see R. Schofield, *Bramante Studies*, Ph.D. thesis, University of London (Courtauld Institute), 1979, pp. 68–69.

¹² Bramante's earliest known painting, the façade of the Palazzo del Podesta at Bergamo executed in 1477 (Mulazzani, op. cit. n. 4 above, p. 73, no. 1), provides another parallel. Here the figures are set in embrasures

divided by projecting piers, and a continuous moulding runs along the top. The arrangement differs from Michelangelo's ceiling in that behind some of the figures there is not a continuous wall, but a vista of columns.

¹³ Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita* (1550), I, pp. 35–36.

¹⁴ 'Per il che il Papa, vedutolo e sapendo la natura sua, con non meno collera che paura si mise in fuga, minacciandolo molto. Michele Agnolo per una finestra della cappella si partì; e trovato Bramante da Urbino, gli lasciò la chiave dell'opera et in poste se ne tornò a Fiorenza: pensando che Bramante rappacificasse il Papa, parendogli invero aver fatto male. Arrivato dunque a Fiorenza, et avendo sentito mormorare il Papa in quella maniera, aveva fatto disegno di non tornare più a Roma; ma per gli preghi di Bramante e d'altri amici, passato la collera al Papa . . .' Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita* (1550), I, pp. 39–40.

ploy to dissuade the Pope, who no longer intended to build his tomb, from commissioning sculpture, Michelangelo's true profession. The idea was that the artist would either refuse the ceiling and annoy the Pope, or, if he accepted, would succeed less well than Raphael — whom they supported out of spite. Michelangelo, realizing the difficulties involved in the commission and not considering himself a painter, proposed Raphael, but the Pope was obdurate.¹⁵

Bramante again appears in an unattractive light when he is made the bearer of Raphael's request for a commission to paint the second half of the ceiling. On this occasion Michelangelo retaliates by revealing to the Pope (unspecified) persecution suffered at the hands of Bramante and pointing to his malpractices, in particular his destruction of the pillars of Old St Peter's.¹⁶ Accusations against Bramante of incompetence recur in Condivi's summary of Michelangelo's artistic qualities. To illustrate how expert the latter was in perspective and architecture, including its technicalities, Condivi invokes the enormous superiority of his scaffolding for the Sistine ceiling over the design which Bramante had initially provided, and which, as Michelangelo demonstrated to the Pope, was ridiculous.¹⁷

In 1568 Vasari, now accepting the main points of Condivi's history, begins by repeating the reasons he gives for the cancellation of the tomb project, and includes the story that Bramante persuaded the Pope it was unlucky to build his tomb in his lifetime.¹⁸ He emphasizes the unpleasant behaviour of Bramante, no friend of Michelangelo because of his alliance with Raphael. In recounting Bramante's role and motivation in having the ceiling allotted to Michelangelo he goes further than Condivi, suggesting that the Pope's determination to overcome Michelangelo's unwillingness was reinforced by Bramante and other rivals. To underline the difficulties between the two, Condivi's version of the scaffolding story is introduced immediately after the receipt of the commission. And when he comes to Raphael's bid for the second half of the ceiling he makes Bramante the instigator rather than simply the channel of his request. Michelangelo's retaliation and accusation of Bramante is this time, however, connected not with the demolition of the old Basilica but rather with the construction of the new one.¹⁹

In Vasari's modified text of 1568 the incident of the Pope's surreptitious visit to the chapel was dropped since Condivi connects what is the outcome of Vasari's original story — Michelangelo's flight — with his disappearance to Florence in 1506, which is confirmed by a papal brief.²⁰ Vasari therefore also removed the now inconsistent story of

¹⁵ Condivi, *Vita*, p. 46.

¹⁶ Condivi, *Vita*, p. 51. The anonymous annotator of Condivi (Procacci, op. cit. n. 3 above, p. 290) claims Michelangelo told him that he had never said this about Bramante.

¹⁷ Condivi, *Vita*, pp. 77–78. The anonymous commentator (Procacci, op. cit., p. 292) repeats Michelangelo's words: 'Alla prospetiva non che mi pareva perderci troppo tempo'.

¹⁸ Condivi, *Vita*, pp. 38–40.

¹⁹ Vasari's version is taken from Condivi's account of Bramante's part in the abandonment of the tomb. According to Condivi, it was his fear that Michelangelo might reveal errors in the construction of the new St Peter's to the Pope, as well as envy, that stimulated Bramante to sabotage the tomb project, in order to get Michelangelo out of the Pope's service and out of Rome (Condivi, *Vita*, pp. 39–40). Vasari might have thought

that his version was more probable, since the Basilica would have been further advanced. Perhaps the destruction of the pillars seemed to him insufficiently dramatic, but it could well be true (Condivi, *Vita*, p. 51). Confirmation can perhaps be found in Vasari's *Life of Michelozzo* (Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, II, p. 435) in which Vasari cites Michelangelo as the source for an account of how Michelozzo replaced a column by shoring up a building in Venice. While the procedure described is not identical, it indicates Michelangelo's interest in technical details. Michelangelo's friend Giuliano da Sangallo designed a machine to lower and raise columns. See C. Huelsen, *Il Libro di Giuliano da Sangallo*, Leipzig 1910 (facsimile), fol. 71^r.

²⁰ G. Bottari and S. Ticozzi, *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*, III, Milan 1822, pp. 472–73, no. cxcv.

Bramante's friendship and good offices. Thus the throwing down of the planks, which seems so circumstantial and typical of Michelangelo's character, disappears too, even though it is partly confirmed by the story in Vasari's *Life* of Raphael that Bramante admitted Raphael to see the uncompleted ceiling when he had the key to the chapel during Michelangelo's absence.²¹

That the spirit which informs both Condivi and Vasari's second edition reflects that of Michelangelo himself is evident from the draft of a letter which he wrote to an unknown monsignore in 1542, justifying his conduct in relation to Julius's tomb, and rejecting the accusations of the Pope's heirs. It concludes:

All the disagreements which arose between me and the Pope Julius were due to the envy of Bramante and Raphael of Urbino; and this was the cause of his not carrying on his tomb in his lifetime, in order to ruin me. And Raphael had good reason, for what artistic quality he had, he had from me.²²

Clearly by this date Michelangelo was consumed with dislike of Raphael (and Bramante) and regret at the failure of the tomb. It is not obvious, however, whether this attitude was relevant to the ceiling.

As regards Raphael's role, it is generally recognized that Vasari and Condivi are in many respects wrong. Although also from Urbino, there is no evidence that Raphael was related to Bramante. In any case, Raphael could hardly have been considered for the commission of the ceiling. Not only did he arrive in Rome after Michelangelo had begun working on it,²³ but the project was first discussed long before, in 1506. Nevertheless

²¹ This story would not necessarily imply a long absence on the part of Michelangelo — so it need not be connected with the flight to Florence. Vasari's text is virtually identical in both versions of his *Life* of Raphael. The 1568 edition reads: 'Avenne adunque in questo tempo che Michelangnolo fece al Papa nella cappella quel romore e paura di che parleremo nella Vita sua, onde fu sforzato fuggirsi a Fiorenza: per il che avendo Bramante la chiave della capella, a Raffaello, come amico, la fece vedere, acciò che i modi di Michele Agnolo comprendere potesse.' ('It happened at the time that Michelangelo disturbed and frightened the Pope in the chapel as we will recount in his *Life*, because of which he was forced to flee to Florence. Consequently Bramante had the key to the chapel, and let Raphael as a friend see it, so that he might understand Michelangelo's style.') The versions can be compared most conveniently in Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite . . . nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. R. Bettarini, Florence 1976, iv, pp. 175–76. This account is clearly inconsistent with the passage in the 1568 *Life* of Michelangelo, where, following Condivi, Vasari says that Raphael became aware of Michelangelo's style when the scaffolding of the first half of the chapel was taken down. See Vasari-Barrochi, *Vita* (1568), I, p. 39.

²² 'Tutte le discordie che naquono tra papa Iulio e me fu la invidia di Bramante e di Raffaello da Urbino; et questa fu causa che non e' seguitò la sua sepultura in vita sua, per rovinarmi. Et avevane bene cagione Raffaello, ché ciò che haveva dell'arte, l'aveva da me.' See *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, eds G. Pozzi, P. Barocchi, R. Ristori, 4 vols, Florence 1965–80, iv, p. 155, no. MI.

²³ Michelangelo was at work at least by 17 April 1508, which is the latest possible date for a letter to him from Francesco Granacci concerning assistants for the ceiling (*Carteggio* [op. cit.], I, pp. 64–65, no. XLVI). Raphael was still in Florence on 21 April 1508 when he wrote to his uncle (V. Golzio, *Raffaello nei documenti*, Vatican City 1936, pp. 18–19). He seems to have been in Rome by 3 September 1508, when he wrote to Francia (Golzio, pp. 19–20). The authenticity of the last letter has been reaffirmed by Charles Dempsey, in a paper presented at the Raphael Conference, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1983. He may, however, have made visits to Rome before this date. See J. Shearman, 'Raphael, Rome and the Codex Escorialensis', *Master Drawings*, xv, 1977, pp. 107–40. Shearman suggests that a story in Vasari's *Life* of Jacopo Sansovino (Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, vii, p. 480), which relates that Raphael had helped Bramante judge wax copies after the Laocoon, should be placed in 1506 or 1507. But there is no other evidence for contact between Bramante and Raphael at this period. It is significant in this connexion that Raphael, according to the letter to Francia, was not working for the Pope when he first arrived in Rome in 1508, which might have been expected if he was really close to Bramante at this date; instead he worked for others including Cardinal Riario. This also casts doubt on Vasari's statement in his *Life* of Raphael (Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, iv, pp. 328–29), that Bramante was responsible for bringing Raphael to Rome and into the Pope's service.

something — possibly the incident described in Vasari's *Life* of Raphael alluded to above — seems to have associated Bramante and Raphael suspiciously in Michelangelo's mind, and to have fuelled his subsequent resentment over Raphael's real or imagined attempt to gain the second half of the commission. However, neither event can have predated the approval of the design and the inception of the ceiling.

The relevance of the Julius tomb is more difficult to explain. The 1505 project was cancelled, or, more probably, suspended, in 1506, when the ceiling was first proposed. Vasari and Condivi obscure this by implying that the ceiling was envisaged only after Michelangelo's period in Bologna, which he left in 1508. However, neither in 1506 nor in 1508 does it seem that Bramante, let alone Raphael, can be blamed for the abandonment of the tomb project. In a letter of 2 May 1506 to Giuliano da Sangallo, Michelangelo himself explained his reasons for leaving Rome: he feared that the Pope was no longer interested in the project, 'but there was another thing, about which I don't want to write, enough that it made me think that had I stayed in Rome, my tomb would have been made before the Pope's'.²⁴ As the ceiling is first mentioned eight days later as already under discussion before Michelangelo's departure, it could well be the cryptic 'altra cosa'.²⁵ In the remainder of the letter, which Michelangelo asked Sangallo to read to the Pope, he offers to go on with the tomb in Florence, obviously calculating that in absenting himself from Rome he would force the Pope to continue with the tomb rather than start the ceiling, which required his presence. There is no mention of Bramante as having contributed to his problems over the tomb, even though Sangallo, already a rival to the latter, would no doubt have been sympathetic.²⁶ Instead, as is most probable, the Pope is held fully responsible. In 1508, when the ceiling was started, the tomb project was in fact still active.²⁷ It was clearly envisaged by both Michelangelo and the Pope, who made provision for a very large team so as to paint the ceiling quickly.²⁸ That things transpired otherwise was largely because of Michelangelo's inability to work with others. That he did not therefore return to the Julius tomb for years, with the result that very little had been done before the Pope died, was no-one's fault but his own.

The only contemporary document about the ceiling which mentions Bramante is a letter of 10 May 1506 to Michelangelo from Pietro Rosselli, a mason and minor architect. This has generally been taken to confirm the attitude to Bramante indicated by Condivi and by Vasari in 1568. While it clearly reveals the difficulties between the two artists it also

²⁴ 'Ma questo solo non fu cagione interamente della mia partita, ma fu pure altra cosa, la quale non voglio scrivere; basta ch'ella mi fe' pensare, s'i' stavo a Roma, che fussi facta prima la sepultura mia che quella del Papa.' See *Carteggio* (op. cit. n. 22 above), I, p. 13, no. VIII.

²⁵ Michelangelo's reasons for not mentioning the ceiling directly can be best explained by his thinking that it would be better to remain as silent as possible about a project he had no intention of carrying out. It seems clear to me that the statement that his tomb would be completed before the Pope's refers not to a threat of murder (cf. J. A. Symonds, *Life of Michelangelo*, London 1893, I, pp. 155–59), but to his belief that he would be taken from working on the papal tomb to paint the ceiling.

²⁶ See below, n. 48.

²⁷ Cristoph Frommel ('"Capella Julia": die Grabkapelle Papst Julius II in Neu-St Peter', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, XL, 1977, pp. 26–62) convincingly shows (pp. 26–28) that the tomb was postponed, not cancelled. He cites evidence of continuing work on the project even though Michelangelo was otherwise employed. Further, he suggests that such a postponement, even until after Julius's death, could follow the example of the posthumous Sixtus IV tomb, and this tends to discredit Bramante's part or malice in suggesting it would be unlucky to carry out Julius's tomb in his lifetime.

²⁸ Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita* (1568), I, p. 37, lists six masters who were to help Michelangelo. Michelangelo then sacked them because he was unsatisfied with their work. It should be noted that, while they were to work under Michelangelo's direction, they were not *garzoni*, for whom a separate provision had been made.

points to the deeply creative influence of Bramante on Michelangelo. Rosselli writes that:

. . . on Saturday evening (when) the Pope (was) dining Bramante and I showed him certain drawings to review. When the Pope had dined (and) I had showed them to him, he sent for Bramante and said to him 'Sangallo goes to Florence tomorrow and he will bring back Michelangelo with him'. Bramante replied to the Pope and said 'Holy Father, nothing will come of it, because I have talked of it much to Michelangelo and he has said to me many times that he does not wish to attend to the chapel'. And [Bramante added] that you (Michelangelo) wished to give him (Bramante) this burden, and therefore you did not wish to attend to anything but the tomb and not to painting. And he (Bramante) said, 'Holy Father I believe he does not have enough courage for it, because he has not done too many figures and above all the figures are high and in foreshortening and it is another thing than painting at ground level'. Then the Pope replied and said, 'If he does not come, he does one wrong, therefore I think he will come back in any case'. Then I broke in and said something very rude to him (Bramante) in the presence of the Pope and told him (Bramante) what I think you would have said for me, and inasmuch as he did not know what to reply, and it seemed to him (Bramante) that he (Bramante) had spoken unwisely. And I said further, 'Holy Father he has never spoken to Michelangelo; and if anything he has just told you is true, I would like you to cut my head off; that he never spoke of it to Michelangelo, and I believe he will return in any case when your Holiness wishes'. And here things ended. I have nothing more to tell you. God guard you from harm. If I can do anything tell me, I will do it willingly. Remember me to Simone del Pollaiuolo.²⁹

It is worth considering Rosselli's motives in writing as he did. Rosselli was probably fairly close to Michelangelo since he was the brother-in-law of Cronaca, the Simone del Pollaiuolo he asks to be remembered to, and Cronaca had worked with Michelangelo on a

²⁹ 'A nome di Dio. A dì 10 di Maggio 1506. Charisimo in luogo di frateo, dopo le salute e raccomandazione avisoti chome sabato sera, cianando e' Papa, mostra'li cierti disegni avemo a cimentarli Bramante e io. Cenato che ebe e' Papa, io li avevo mostri; lui mandò per Bramante e disili: 'E' Sangalo va domatina a Firenze e rimenerà in sue Michelagnolo' Rispose Bramante a' Papa e dise: 'Santo Padre, e'no' sarà nula, perchè io òne pratico Michelagnolo asai e àmi deto piue e piue vote none volere atendere a la capela', e che voi li volevi dare cotesto caricho; e che per tanto voi no' volevi atendere se none a la sipultura e none a la pitura. E dise: 'Padre Santo, io credo che lui no' li basti el animo, perchè lui non à fatto tropo di figure, e masimo le figure sono alte e in iscorcio ed ène atra cosa che a dipignere in tera,' Allora rispose e' Papa e dise: 'Se lui no' viene, e' mi fa torto; per che io credo tornerà a ogni modo.' Alota io mi iscopersi e disili una vilania grandissima, presente de' Papa, e disili quello credo aresti deto voi per me; e per tanto non sepe quello si rispondero e parveli avere mal deto. E disì piue oltre: 'Santo Padre, lui non parlò mai a Michelagnolo, e di quello v'ane deto da ora, se li è vero volio mi moziare e' capo: ché lui no'li parlò mai a Michelagnolo; e credo che lui tornerà a ogni modo, quando la vostra Santità vorà. 'E qui fini le cose. Altro no' v'ò a dire. Idio di male vi guardi. Se io posso fare nula, datemi aviso, lo farò volentieri. Racomandatemi a Simone de' Polaiuolo. Per lo vostro Piero Rosselli in Roma. Domino Michelagnolo Bonaroti iscultore in Firenze.' See *Carteggio* (op. cit. n. 22 above), I, p. 16, no. x (the MS is reproduced in Steinmann and Wittkower, op. cit. n. 3 above, pl. 1). My reading and

repunctuation of the passage differs crucially from previous interpretations. The original is unpunctuated, and the editors of the *Carteggio* have mistakenly added inverted commas to enclose the crucial passage (E che . . . caricho; e che . . . a la pitura). This passage is here understood as addressed in the first person to Michelangelo by Rosselli, who is reporting Bramante's words in between two verbatim quotations from Bramante. The switch to the imperfect tense is consistent with reported speech. Rosselli starts the letter addressing Michelangelo as 'tu' but changes to 'voi'; however he retains the second singular form of the verb ('volevi', 'aresti') although in the conventional final phrases he uses the second plural. Rosselli uses the second plural to the Pope as in 'moziate', but phrases addressed to the Pope are usually prefaced by 'Santo Padre'. (I am grateful to Howard Burns and to Giles Robertson for advice on these points.) Ernst Steinmann (*Die Sixtinische Kapelle*, Munich 1905, II, p. 695) states that 'voi' in 'e che . . . caricho', is the Pope, and that 'voi' in 'e che . . . a la pitura' is Michelangelo. This interpretation is accepted by the editor of the *Carteggio*, Renzo Ristori, as he has kindly informed me. Certainly 'e che . . . a la pitura' can only be addressed to Michelangelo, but 'e che . . . caricho' has the same form of verb and pronoun, and, if it were addressed to the Pope, as is generally assumed, it would have been repetitive, since Bramante has already told the Pope that Michelangelo does not wish to paint the chapel. For misleading English translations of these key phrases see also Symonds, op. cit. n. 25 above, I, p. 177 and C. Seymour, *Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel*, London 1972, p. 102.

number of occasions in the first years of the century.³⁰ Such a link with the Florentine architectural establishment may partly explain an antipathy to Bramante. He may also have had a personal aim, for when the project actually started in 1508 he was paid to prepare the plaster of the ceiling for painting; perhaps he already had hopes of employment on it.³¹ Besides, his denial of what Bramante reportedly said might be more convincing had it not been voiced only after the Pope's own emphatic contradiction.

Rosselli's letter takes it for granted that Bramante was an expert whose advice was regularly sought, thus underlining the impression given by Vasari and Condivi. Condivi's assertion that Bramante was responsible for the award of the commission to Michelangelo is confirmed by an apparently independent source, who adds that the ceiling was originally meant for Bramante. In his *Trattato del Oreficeria* (written before 1568) Cellini records that 'this Bramante, having seen how much good Pope Julius delighted in fine talents, and because the said pope wished him to paint that great vault of the great papal chapel, this Bramante presented to the said Pope Julius, Michelangelo Buonarroti, who was in Rome with no reputation and his great talents unknown'.³² Cellini's account can be taken as authoritative. He had come to Rome and worked there before the Sack; he also appears to have known Caradosso Foppa, the medallist, who was an associate of Bramante. Neither Vasari nor Condivi could have had contact with anyone — with the exception of Michelangelo himself — who knew Bramante at this period. While his suggestion that Michelangelo was then without reputation is quite inaccurate, Cellini's admiration for Michelangelo was enormous and frequently expressed, so that he cannot be accused of any bias against him.³³

In fact while the tone of the Rosselli letter is unfavourable to Bramante, and he is called a liar, none of his reported statements is demonstrably untrue. His analysis of the problems faced by Michelangelo in undertaking the ceiling is very much to the point and his observations about Michelangelo's limited experience as a painter, although unflattering, may even reflect what Michelangelo had said of himself. The training in Ghirlandaio's shop, while assuring him great competence in the technique of fresco, would not have prepared him well for the kind of illusionism that was evidently expected. It is quite probable that he wanted Bramante to take on the ceiling instead.³⁴ Bramante, aptly described by Sabba da Castiglione as 'gran prospettivo',³⁵ was ideally qualified for the task. He came from a different background, with a strong tradition of decoration combining elaborate fictive architectural scenes with figures. One need only cite Foppa's Portinari Chapel,³⁶ or Bergognone's work in the transepts of the Certosa di Pavia.³⁷ In

³⁰ Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, III, p. 192, provides a family tree of the Rosselli family showing that Pietro's sister, Tita, was married to Cronaca. The 'Prospetto cronologico della vita e delle opere del Cronaca' (Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, IV, pp. 457-59) lists a number of occasions on which Cronaca was associated with Michelangelo.

³¹ *Michelangelo. I Ricordi*, eds L. Bardeschi and P. Barocchi, Florence 1977, p. 2, no. III.

³² 'Questo Bramante, veduto quanto il buon papa Giulio si diletta delle buone virtù e perché gli aveva volontà il detto Papa di fare dipignere quella gran volta della gran cappella papale, questo Bramante messe innanzi al detto papa Giulio Michelagnolo Buonarroti, il quale era a Roma senza un credito al mondo e non

conosciuto le sue gran virtù.' See B. Cellini, 'Trattato dell' Oreficeria', in *Opere*, ed. G. G. Ferrero, Turin 1971, p. 675.

³³ See, for example, *Opere* (ed. cit.), 'Vita', p. 132; 'Trattato dell' Oreficeria', pp. 674-75.

³⁴ This may even be the foundation of Condivi's assertion that he tried to get Raphael to do it.

³⁵ See his characterization as 'discipolo del Mantegna, e gran prospettivo, come creato di Piero del Borgo'. (Sabba da Castiglione, *Ricordi ovvero ammaestramenti*, Venice 1549, cxi, p. 139; cited by W. Suida, *Bramante pittore e il Bramantino*, Milan 1953, p. 10.)

³⁶ For this work see F. Mazzini, *Affreschi Lombardi del Quattrocento*, Milan 1965, pls 159-64.

³⁷ See Mazzini, op. cit., pls 300-01.

Florence, with the important exception of Filippino Lippi, this had not been a major artistic current in the generation before Michelangelo. Bramante had practised as a painter as late as 1500, when, on his arrival at Rome, he had painted the papal coat of arms supported by angels above the doorway of St John Lateran for the Jubilee celebrations.³⁸ That he would not have wished to paint the ceiling himself is easy to understand. In 1506 he was probably over sixty, and it appears from Vasari's *Life* of Sangallo that, at least later, stiffness in his hand made drawing difficult.³⁹ Quite apart from this, his enormous architectural practice must have kept him fully occupied.

It seems probable that Bramante proposed Michelangelo for the ceiling, and that Vasari's account in the first edition is on this point accurate. During the years 1506–1508 Bramante exerted a great influence over the Pope's artistic patronage, since he must have been partly responsible for persuading Julius to accept such costly and revolutionary projects as the Belvedere and the new St Peter's. Clearly too the Pope also enjoyed his company.⁴⁰

Once the commission had fallen to Michelangelo it was natural that he should turn to Bramante for help. The two must frequently have come in contact between 1504 and 1506 (when Michelangelo was in Rome for longish periods), and they could have met in 1507 in Bologna, when Bramante accompanied the Pope there. They may also have shared a patron: Raffaele Riario, Cardinal of San Giorgio, Julius's cousin.⁴¹ There is good reason to think that Michelangelo would have been impressed by Bramante personally. He was a celebrated commentator on the works of Dante, one of Michelangelo's deepest interests.⁴² He was also a poet, and it is around this period that Michelangelo begins to compose poetry frequently. In addition, Bramante seems to have been a charming and fascinating man.⁴³ In later life Michelangelo disapproved of his cheerful and convivial disposition, to judge from Condivi's censorious characterization of him as 'come ognun sa, dato ad ogni sorte di piacere e largo spenditore'.⁴⁴ But in his youth, though neither libertine nor extravagant, Michelangelo had not been altogether averse to merrymaking.⁴⁵

Despite his later bitterness, Michelangelo evidently retained a great respect for Bramante's abilities as an architect. In a letter of 1546–47, in which he criticizes the

³⁸ Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, iv, pp. 152–54. A drawing of this painting by Borromini (Vienna, Albertina) is reproduced in Suida, op. cit. n. 35 above, pl. 29.

³⁹ Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, v, p. 449. I am grateful to Howard Burns for drawing this to my attention.

⁴⁰ Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, iv, pp. 158–59, recounts a comic incident over Bramante's proposed hieroglyphic inscription, and in the same place explains how the Pope's admiration led him to give Bramante the office of 'Piombo'. There is also an account of Bramante reading and commenting on Dante to the Pope during the siege of Mirandola in 1510, in a dispatch by Stazio Gadio. See A. Luzio, 'Isabella d'Este di fronte a Giulio II', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, ser. iv, xvii, 1912, pp. 278–79.

⁴¹ Michelangelo is known to have worked for him, and according to Vasari, so did Bramante. Michael Hirst ('Michelangelo in Rome: An Altarpiece and the Bacchus', *Burlington Magazine*, cxxiii, 1981, Appendix, pp. 590–93) has shown that Michelangelo began the Bacchus for Cardinal Riario. Vasari (Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, iv, p. 155) says that Bramante worked on the palace

(the Cancelleria) and church of San Lorenzo in Damaso for Riario. Cardinal Raffaele Riario was Julius's first cousin once removed and a prominent patron, and seems to have patronised many of those whom Julius later employed, including Raphael.

⁴² On Michelangelo's admiration for Dante, see Condivi, *Vita*, p. 81. Of Bramante, the Milanese poet Gaspare Visconti wrote that he was 'sviscerato partigiano di Dante' (cited by L. Beltrami, *Bramante poeta colla raccolta dei sonetti*, Milan 1884, p. 8).

⁴³ See, for example, Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, iv, pp. 163–64; G. B. Caporali, *Architettura con il suo commento et figure. Vetrurio in volgar lingua*, Perugia 1536, iv, cap. vii, fol. 102^r.

⁴⁴ 'Bramante as everyone knows, was given to every sort of pleasure and was very extravagant': Condivi, *Vita*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Vasari's *Life* of Jacopo L'Indaco contains one of the most interesting accounts of the young Michelangelo's character (Vasari-Milanesi, *Vite*, iii, p. 681).

Sangallo plan for St Peter's, he asserts 'it cannot be denied that Bramante was as talented in architecture as anyone since the ancients',⁴⁶ and he goes on to praise the order and luminosity of Bramante's plan. His admiration was expressed in more than verbal terms when he took Bramante's plan as the basis for his design for St Peter's, and his architecture, particularly for his stairways, reflects Bramante's influence.⁴⁷

Michelangelo's relationship with Bramante must, however, have been problematic from the outset, and the final rupture was virtually inevitable, given his Florentine associates, his own personality and the advent of Raphael. At this period Michelangelo's working environment was strongly Florentine, his sympathies characteristically 'patriotic'. It is not surprising if he asked Florentines to help him — whether on the statue at Bologna or with painting the ceiling. In particular he was a close associate of Giuliano da Sangallo, who may have introduced him to the Pope and procured for him the commission of the tomb. Sangallo had been the principal architect of Giuliano della Rovere when he was cardinal, a position he lost to Bramante after Giuliano became Pope.⁴⁸ In this competitive atmosphere the common Urbinate origins of Raphael and Bramante probably seemed to Michelangelo immediately suspicious. If Bramante indeed admitted Raphael to the Sistine Chapel, whatever his motives, this would have been construed as a betrayal. And if, as seems also quite probable, the ambitious Raphael hoped to paint the second half of the ceiling, Bramante would have been his obvious advocate with the Pope.

Michelangelo's resentment expressed itself from an early stage. Condivi's story about the scaffolding — of course put in the worst light by association with the subsequent argument over the destruction of the pillars of St Peter's which could have been saved⁴⁹ — illustrates how at this period Michelangelo increasingly saw himself as an expert on building techniques. When he fled to Florence in 1506 he even thought of going to construct a bridge across the Bosphorus.⁵⁰ In criticizing his technical competence Michelangelo was asserting himself in the area of Bramante's particular expertise. Though the episode is introduced to discredit Bramante, it may also, paradoxically, point

⁴⁶ *Carteggio* (op. cit. n. 20 above), iv, MLXXI, p. 251: Michelangelo to Bartolommeo [Ferrantino]: 'non si puo negare che Bramante non fussi valente nella architettura quanto ogni altro che sia stato dagli antichi in qua'.

⁴⁷ See Charles Robertson, *The Origins and Developments in the Design of External Stairways in Italy c. 1500–c. 1550*, M.A. Report, University of London (Courtauld Institute) 1978, pp. 21–36.

⁴⁸ Giuliano da Sangallo was a close friend in whom Michelangelo confided after his flight to Florence in 1506. He is mentioned repeatedly in Michelangelo's letters before his return to Rome in 1508. It also appears from Rosselli's letter cited above that the Pope made contact with Michelangelo via Sangallo. In his *Life* of Sangallo, Vasari says that Sangallo encouraged the Pope to build the tomb, to employ Michelangelo to make the statue at Bologna and to paint the ceiling. This is not confirmed by Condivi or Vasari in either edition of the *Life* of Michelangelo. However, Vasari says that Sangallo fixed the price (Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita*, [1568], I, p. 37). Condivi (*Vita*, p. 51), followed by Vasari (Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita* [1568], I, p. 39), states that he

helped Michelangelo with the technical problems of mould on the surface of the fresco. Both these instances of Sangallo's activity are consistent with the role he appears to have in Michelangelo's and Rosselli's letters, but they do not support the role Vasari ascribes to him in the *Sangallo Life*. The story of the technical help is the only evidence of contact between Michelangelo and Sangallo after the ceiling had been begun.

⁴⁹ See above, n. 19.

⁵⁰ No doubt his experience in quarrying marble at Carrara for the Julius tomb had strengthened his confidence. See Condivi, *Vita*, p. 44 on the bridge project, confirmed by a letter of 1 April 1519 from Tommaso di Tolfo in Adrianople recalling the occasion (*Carteggio* [op. cit. n. 22 above], II, pp. 176–77, no. CDXXIV), and by the anonymous annotator of Condivi (Procacci, op. cit. n. 3 above, p. 277). Michelangelo was also considered a possible architectural designer by others. Giuseppe Marchini ('Il ballatoio della Cupola di Santa Maria del Fiore', *Antichità Viva*, xvi, 1977, p. 47) has published a letter from the Operai to Michelangelo in Bologna (31 July 1507), requesting a design for the *ballatoio* of the Duomo. I thank Michael Hirst for this reference.

to Michelangelo's previous emulation of him, further hinted at in the phrase with which Condivi begins the whole account: 'Si dette alla prospettiva ed all'architettura . . .'.⁵¹

Of Bramante's feelings one can say much less, only that this reputedly cheerful man shared common interests with Michelangelo, and surely must have admired his abilities. In the Rosselli letter he is reported unsympathetically, but his irritation, given the circumstances, is understandable. His feelings cannot have improved after the argument over the scaffolding, and were probable soured completely after Michelangelo's outburst over St Peter's.

In 1506, then, Michelangelo and Bramante had already discussed the ceiling, but it is doubtful whether any preparatory work had been done on the project. Presumably the most significant period for Michelangelo's absorption of Bramante's ideas was after his return to Rome, towards the end of March 1508, and before the incident of the scaffolding — the very time when he was drawing up his designs. Moreover, Giuliano da Sangallo returned to Florence in 1507 (and probably spent much time there during this period), thus removing from Michelangelo an influence both personally and artistically antipathetic to Bramante.⁵²

Besides having discussions with Bramante it is quite plausible that Michelangelo saw some of his drawings relating to decorations, perhaps even a sketch for the *Argus*.⁵³ In the light of Bramante's reported insinuation that Michelangelo felt inadequate in his handling of foreshortening, it is interesting to note that the foreshortening in the frescoes of the Sistine Ceiling is not present in the preliminary studies. This is particularly evident in those for the 'ignudi'.⁵⁴ Equally, Michelangelo must have increasingly appreciated the qualities of Bramante's architecture evident in the building projects which had advanced during the two years of his absence, for the deceptive simplicity of the ceiling's fictive architecture directly reflects Bramante's Roman work.

The decision that the ceiling's design should be strongly architectural was probably Michelangelo's, and may have been related to the choice of subject matter. In 1523 the artist claimed that he was given a free hand with this after persuading the Pope that the initial project for twelve apostles would look feeble.⁵⁵ For the selection of scenes from Genesis, whether or not he consulted the opinion of others, Michelangelo probably looked at vernacular Bibles; certainly he used the famous Malermi Bible, published at Venice in 1490. This book not only has full-page illustrations with scenes from Genesis, but sets these scenes into the architectural framework without an elaborate border and also in most cases links them together by the use of backgrounds of water or land and sky not dissimilar from those in the Sistine ceiling⁵⁶ (Pl. 25d). The lunette at the top of the

⁵¹ Condivi, *Vita*, p. 77; cf. above, n. 17.

⁵² See above, n. 48.

⁵³ No major Bramante drawings survive, but one can imagine something of his range as a draughtsman. The Prevedari engravings show his strength of composition. See Hind, loc. cit. n. 4 above, pl. 633. The broad handling of the medal below the *Argus*, by its close relationship to an existing drawing by his associate Bramantino, would indicate that he produced highly original brush drawings. Cf. the Bramantino drawing of the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (Mulazzani, op. cit. n. 4 above, p. 102, no. D2, and pl. 64).

⁵⁴ See J. Wilde, *Michelangelo and his Studio. Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British*

Museum, London 1953, pp. 20 ff., no. 8 verso, and C. de Tolnay, *Corpus dei Disegni di Michelangelo*, Novara 1975, I, no. 139 verso.

⁵⁵ *Carteggio* (op. cit. n. 22 above), III, Florence 1973, p. 8, no. DXCIV (letter to Giovan Francesco Fattuci, December 1523).

⁵⁶ See Prince d'Essling, *Les Livres à figures vénitiens*, Florence and Paris 1907, I, no. 133, p. 124; III p. 125. Edgar Wind ('Maccabean Histories in the Sistine Ceiling. A Note on Michelangelo's Use of the Malermi Bible', in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob, London 1960, pp. 312–27) has demonstrated that Michelangelo took this *volgare* translation of the Bible as a source for some of the medallions on the ceiling.

woodcut, with the dove that represents the spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters, even recalls the strip at either end of the ceiling which creates the illusion of the whole scheme being set against the sky.

Michelangelo's development of the final scheme can be seen in drawings in London and Detroit (Pl. 26a, b). These are generally associated with the first project,⁵⁷ but neither drawing particularly fits the artist's description of a design with twelve apostles and the remainder 'un certo partimento ripieno d'adornamenti, chome s'usa' ('a certain arrangement full of ornament as is usual').⁵⁸ It need not be assumed that these drawings show a project intended to cover only the central part of the ceiling, which is all that is shown, since the one surviving sketch for the final project also shows only the central field.⁵⁹ Both drawings foreshadow the actual arrangement since they show alternating large and small fields down the centre which, as in the completed ceiling, were presumably intended for narratives.⁶⁰ Both drawings also appear to imply a background of sky, appearing through the roundels on either side of the throne in the London drawing and through the oculus in the Detroit sketch.⁶¹ The scheme of the earlier (London) drawing may bear some superficial relation to the work of Pinturicchio in the Borgia apartments, though the illusionism suggested by the heavily hatched shadow is more reminiscent of the paintings of Melozzo da Forlì or of Bramante. Specifically, the throne in the London drawing resembles, for example, those for Justus of Ghent's *Liberal Arts*⁶² (Pl. 26c), particularly in the intricacy of its moulding. In the Detroit drawing, however, the arms of the throne have expanded into plinths which approach nearer to those in the *Argus*. A number of other elements in this scene may be associated with Bramante, the most striking being the placing of the oculus above the recessed centre of the broad entablature, a configuration which occurs at the junction of the top cornice and the vault in Bramante's sacristy of Santa Maria presso San Satiro (Pl. 27b). But the perspective oculus and the little paired scrolls of the London drawing are also present in the model of the Duomo of Pavia⁶³ (Pl. 25c). The progress of Michelangelo's scheme from the London and Detroit drawings to the ceiling is consistent with the growth of a profound, and increasingly architectural, understanding of Bramante's work.

Of course Michelangelo's interest in architecture predates his contact with Bramante and can be traced back to his contact with Giuliano da Sangallo and to his work on the Julius tomb. The decorative character of the London and Detroit drawings, with their shell niches and complicated framing elements, may also reflect this experience. It is interesting that the term figures on the tomb particularly recall the sculpture represented in Filippino Lippi's *St. Philip Driving the Dragon from the Temple* in the Strozzi chapel,⁶⁴ and

⁵⁷ For the study in the British Museum (Pl. 26a) see Tolnay, op. cit. n. 53 above, I, no. 119 recto. For the study in Detroit Institute of Fine Arts (Pl. 26b) see Tolnay, no. 120 recto. Following M. Wölfflin ('Ein Entwurf Michelangelo's zur sixtinischen Decke', *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, XIII, 1892, pp. 178–82) and K. Frey (*Die Handzeichnungen Michelangelos*, Berlin 1909–11, II, pp. 118–19) these drawings have generally been considered as for the first project.

⁵⁸ *Carteggio*, loc. cit. n. 55 above.

⁵⁹ See Tolnay, op. cit. n. 54 above, no. 154 verso; Wilde, op. cit. n. 54 above, no. 10 verso.

⁶⁰ Joseph Gantner ('Zum Schema der Sixtinischen Decke Michelangelos', *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft*,

XII, 1919, pp. 4–7) suggests that the Detroit drawing is for the final scheme, and that the octagonal field is for a narrative.

⁶¹ Erwin Panofsky ('Die Michelangelo-Literatur seit 1914', (*Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, I, 1922, p. 38) recognized the oculus in this drawing.

⁶² See M. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Leiden and Brussels 1968, III, pp. 54 ff., pls 118–21.

⁶³ The little scrolls occur under the sills of the windows both in the model and in the building. C. Baroni, *Bramante*, Bergamo 1944, pls 56, 60.

⁶⁴ See A. Scharf, *Filippino Lippi*, Vienna 1935, pl. 122.

that this same source seems to be behind the tiered structure of the piers on either side of the tabernacles on the ceiling. The Strozzi chapel illustrates too how Filippino appreciated the pictorial qualities of ancient Roman architecture, particularly triumphal arches,⁶⁵ and these — and especially the Arch of Constantine — have often been seen as relevant to the ceiling, with its medallions, the projection and recession of its frieze with Prophets and Sibyls, and its blocks below the 'ignudi'.⁶⁶

But such elements are in Bramante's *Argus*, which is similarly, and significantly, unlike the Arch of Constantine. It is, as it were, in Bramante's translation that these motifs reappear on Michelangelo's ceiling. Bramante had taken over the cornice and attic of the ancient triumphal arch and made it entirely his own. The development of this process of adaptation can be traced from the sacristy of Santa Maria presso San Satiro (which provides the model for the *Argus*) (Pls 23b, 27b) to Santa Maria delle Grazie (Pl. 24a), where the ancient elements are reduced to a wide entablature, and to the Duomo of Pavia (Pl. 25a), where the upper pilaster has become a band crossing the vault. It is in this final form that Michelangelo adopted it as a basis for his ceiling.

Unlike the *Argus*, the ceiling does not of course have a perspectival scheme consistent with a single viewpoint (Pls 22, 23b). It has multiple viewpoints, one for each tabernacle, with vanishing points at the level of the Prophets' and Sibyls' seats. The length and relative shallowness of the ceiling's central field ruled out the possibility of an effect such as that used by Melozzo in the dome of the sacristy at Loreto (Pl. 26d). But in some ways this precedent is interesting since, like Melozzo's segments of vault, each pendentive of Michelangelo's ceiling is treated so as to be viewed from its centre, and has its own consistent vanishing point. And while there is naturally nothing of Melozzo's extravagant 'di sotto in su' there is nevertheless considerable foreshortening in the 'ignudi', consistent with the viewpoint of each unit. Michelangelo's work is not a rejection of earlier methods of illusion but a series of necessary compromises. The *Argus* motif is, as it were, the module of a repeating architectural system on the ceiling, a system which in its shorter projected and longer recessed elements is both flexible and clear, and could be extended to the decoration of the whole vault. A further degree of unity is preserved with the blue sky hinted at in most of the main scenes and made explicit in the strip at each end of the ceiling, a device already noticed in the early drawings. Sky of course has no vanishing point.

Michelangelo's tripartite division of the ceiling into planes with a varied pictorial treatment is certainly without precedent and is an ingenious exploitation of the circumstances. The lunettes with ancestors of Christ in a sense follow the scheme of the painted Popes below, being in the same plane. The triangles with ancestors of Christ, and the double corner fields with the prefigurations, are separate fields. As such they break the continuity of the wall and so permit the illusion which we have considered in the main part of the vault. This central field, while representing and evoking a frieze supporting a vault, or the ribs of the vault, is thus not any literal extension of the scheme on the walls of the chapel.

Within the constraints of the chapel Michelangelo in fact achieved an extraordinary degree of illusion. The painted cornice around the central field echoes the real cornice, above the Quattrocento narrative frescoes; this, before the painting of the *Last Judgement*, ran all the way around the chapel. The painted cornice encloses a space which is smaller than but in proportion to the enclosures of the real cornice below. In this way

⁶⁵ Scharf, *op. cit.*, pl. 118.

⁶⁶ See C. de Tolnay, *Michelangelo. II: The Sistine Ceiling*, Princeton 1955, p. 17; S. Sandström, *Levels of Unreality*.

Studies in Structure and Construction in Italian Mural Paintings during the Renaissance, Uppsala 1963, pp. 177 ff.

Michelangelo created a measure of vertical diminution from the actual space of the chapel to the painted space, and this makes a strong perspectival illusion.

Vasari's judgement that the arrangement was suited to the figures rather than vice versa, and his remarks on spatial inconsistency, have had a considerable influence on subsequent perceptions of the significance of Michelangelo's illusionistic architecture. But Vasari was reflecting later sixteenth-century artistic attitudes and interests. To underplay the element of illusion and architecture in the Sistine Ceiling is to fail to understand this work in relation to the illusionistic achievements of fifteenth-century Italy, to the markedly architectural tastes of Julius II, and to Michelangelo's own development.

Michelangelo's assimilation and exploitation of Bramante's architecture was of more than temporary importance, and the ceiling represents his first truly independent expression of architectural design. Its importance is underlined by a comparison of the design of the Julius tomb with his major architectural projects after the ceiling: the façade of San Lorenzo and the Medici tombs. While 'Julian' in the originality and in the scale of its conception, the earlier tomb design is old-fashioned in its architectural treatment, going little beyond the fussy decorativeness of Andrea Sansovino. In the façade of San Lorenzo, and, more significantly, in the smaller Medici tombs, Michelangelo evolved a quite different approach which depended for its effect on the manipulation and articulation of specifically architectural form.

Bramante's crucial influence on the ceiling and therefore on this whole development has, I believe, remained unrecognized partly because it is a phenomenon difficult to characterize. Michelangelo and Bramante were neither working associates nor compatriots, and the early secondary sources, while indicating an important role for Bramante, highlight the unease and confusion their authors seem to have felt in articulating the nature of the relationship which fell outside conventional patterns of artistic partnerships and connexions.

Michelangelo himself preferred to denigrate Bramante and remain silent about what he owed him. He did, however, acknowledge his debt on the ceiling itself by making the figure of Joel a portrait of Bramante (Pl. 27c). Joel was one of the earlier Prophets to be painted in the first half of the ceiling, before therefore any of Michelangelo's arguments with Bramante and Raphael. The identification of Joel as Bramante is based on the striking similarity to the corresponding likeness included in Vasari's *Lives*⁶⁷ (Pl. 27a). The suggestion is not new but hitherto it has generally been rejected as inconsistent with received notions of the bad relationship between Bramante and Michelangelo. In the light of what is argued here, this view may now be revised. The choice of prophet too is surely not casual. Joel 1.5 reads 'Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth'. Nothing could be more appropriate to the man whose taste for good living has already been noted, and who is shown carousing in Bramantino's tapestry representing August⁶⁸ (Pl. 27d). The point is underlined by the juxtaposition to the *Drunkenness of Noah*.⁶⁹ The head of Joel pays tribute to one of the most remarkable artists Michelangelo had known, and one who had affected him profoundly. The joke is entirely characteristic of Michelangelo's bitter wit.

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⁶⁷ See H. von Geymüller, *Il Buonarroti*, III, 1868, p. 142.

⁶⁸ See C. Marinelli, 'Renaissance Tapestries from the Vigevano Workshop in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan', *Connoisseur*, CLX, 1965, p. 30, no. 9, where the man seated

at the table with his back to the allegorical figure of August is identified as Bramante.

⁶⁹ I am indebted to Paul Smith for this observation.

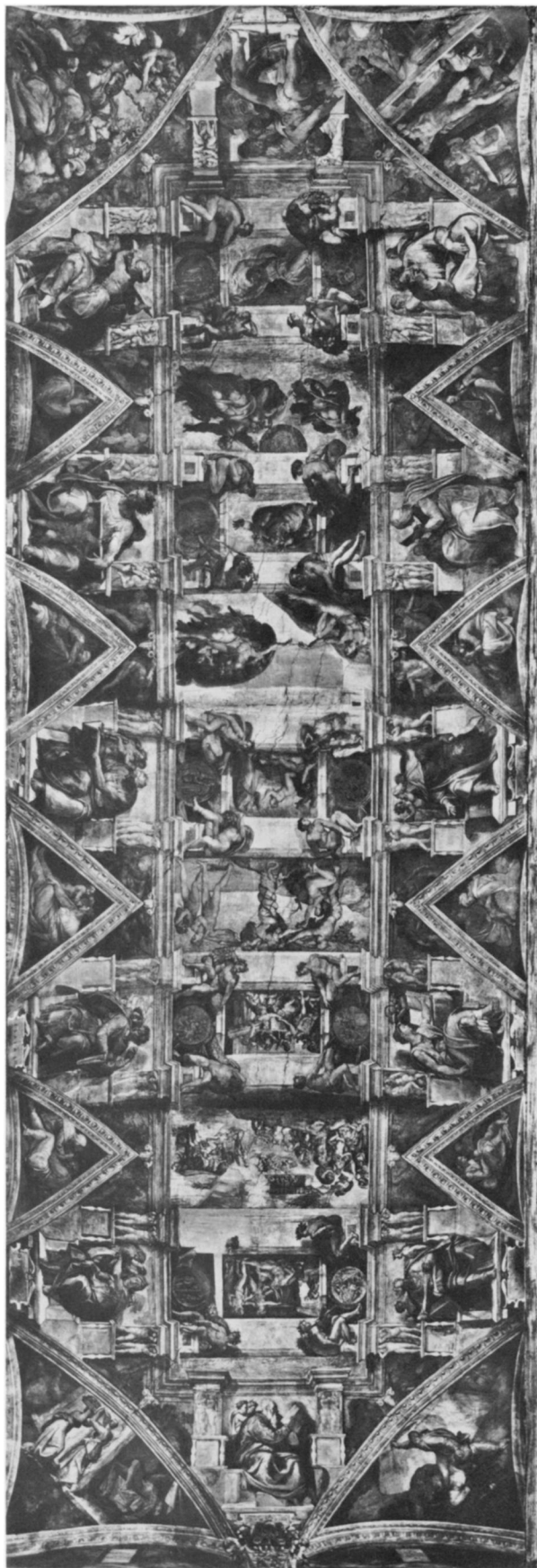
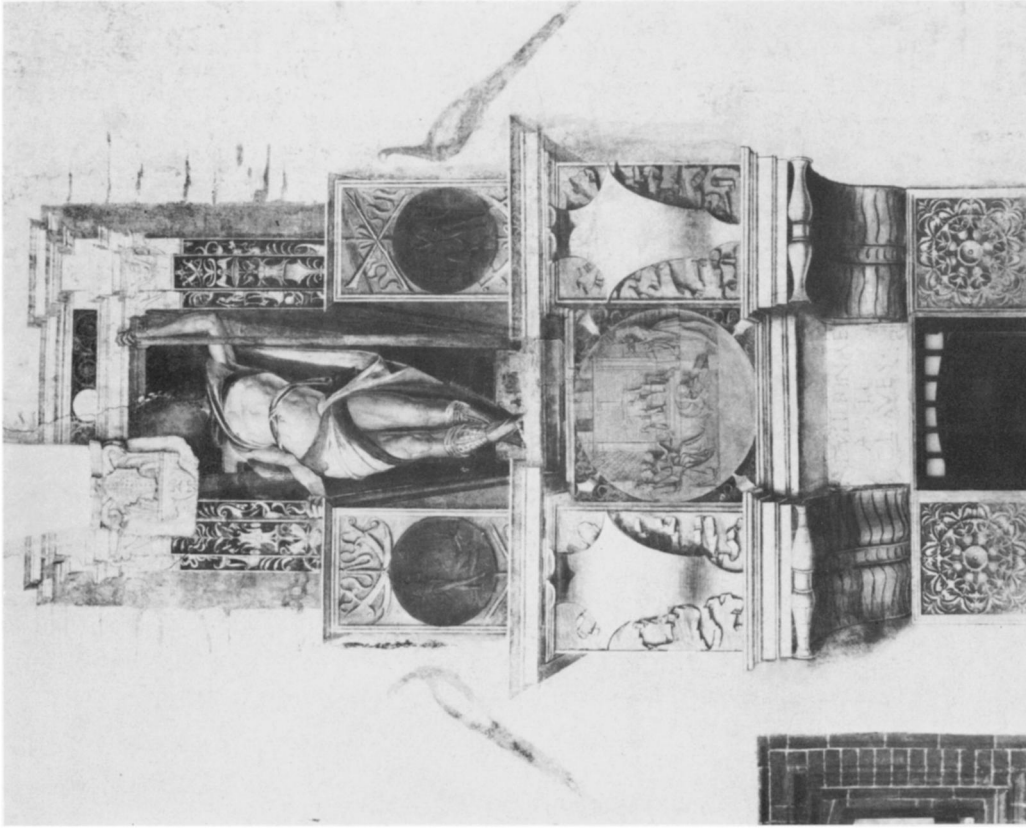


Photo Anderson

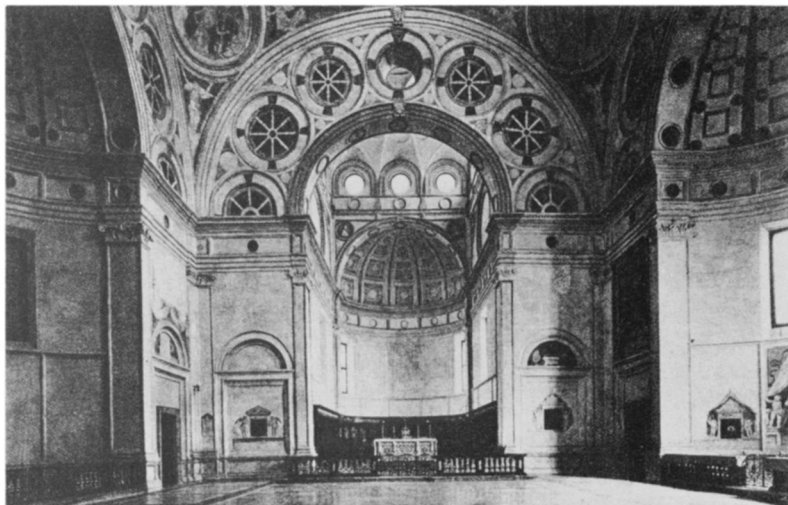
Michelangelo, General View of the Sistine Chapel Ceiling, Vatican City (pp. 91, 94)



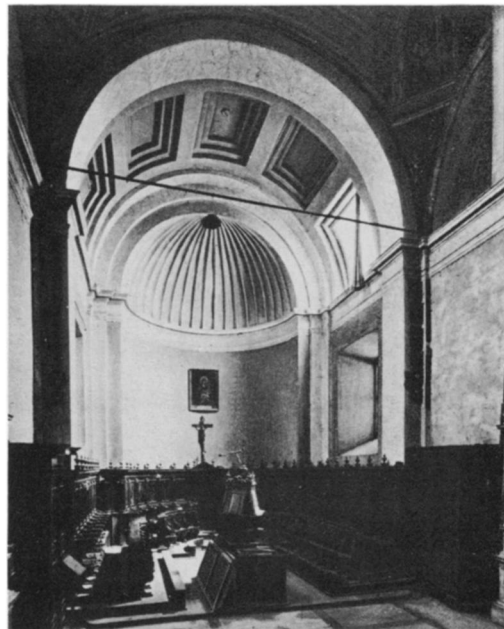
b—Bramante, *Argus*. Milan, Castello Sforzesco, Sala di Tesoro (pp. 91, 93f, 104)



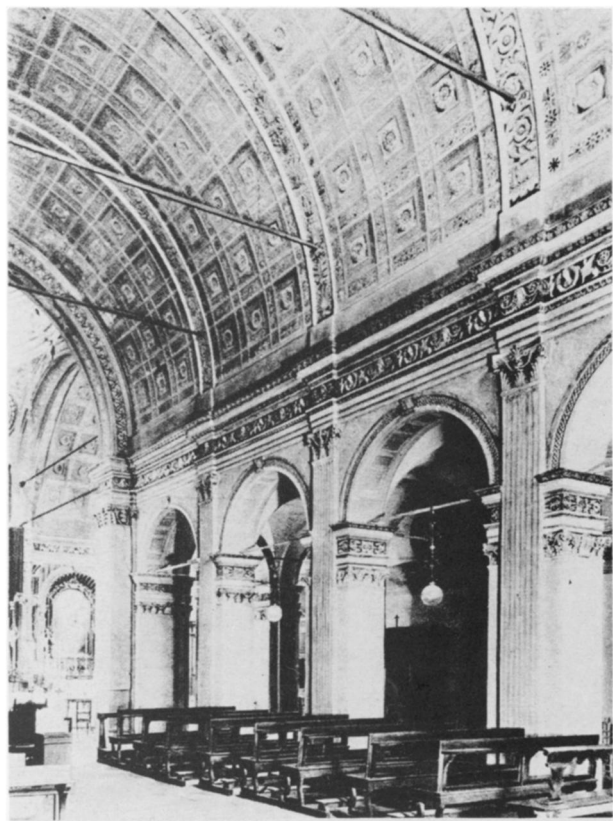
a—Michelangelo, *Joel*. Rome, Sistine Ceiling (detail of Pl. 22) (p. 91)



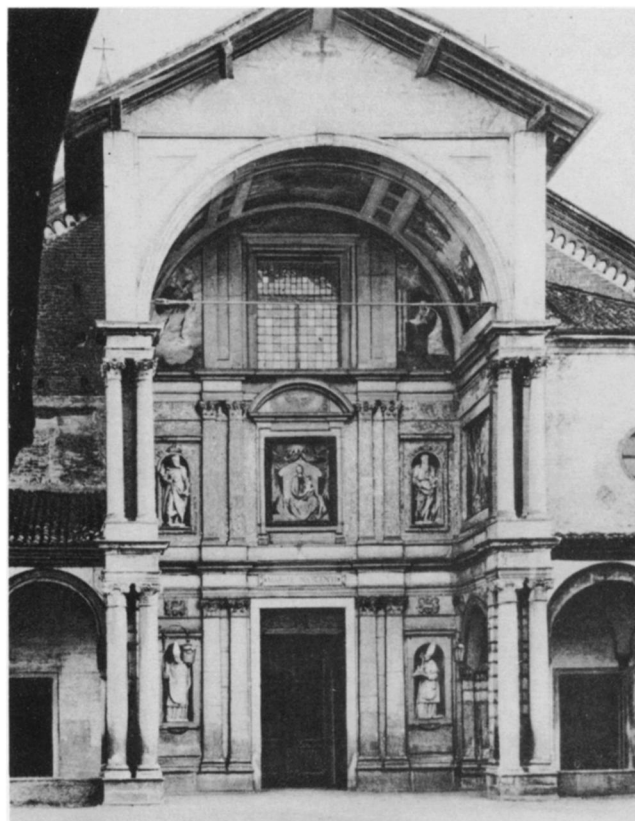
a—Bramante, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan (*p.* 93)



b—Bramante, Choir of Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome (*p.* 93)



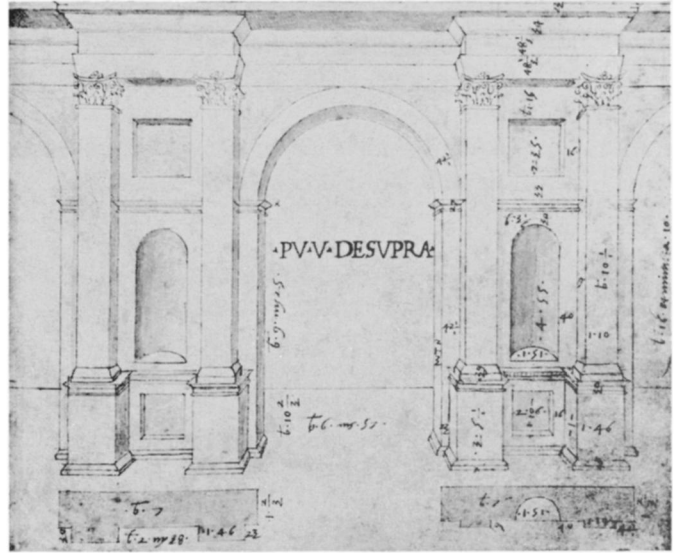
c—Bramante, Nave of Santa Maria presso San Satiro, Milan (*p.* 93)



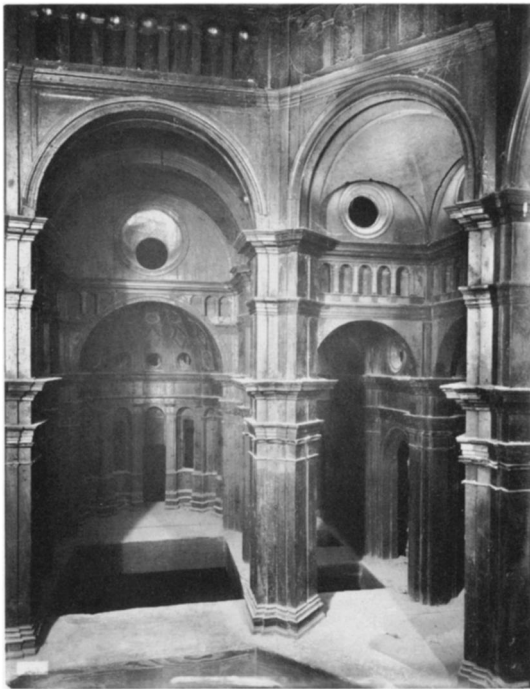
d—Bramante, Porch, Santa Maria Nascente, Abbiategrasso (*p.* 93)



a—Bramante, Crypt of the Duomo, Pavia (*p.* 104)



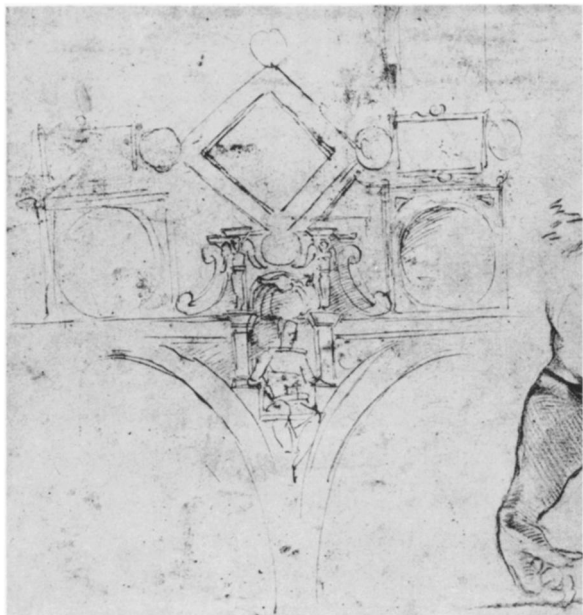
b—Anon., View of Bramante's Upper Court of the Belvedere. Codex Coner, fol. 44. London, Soane Museum (*pp.* 93f)



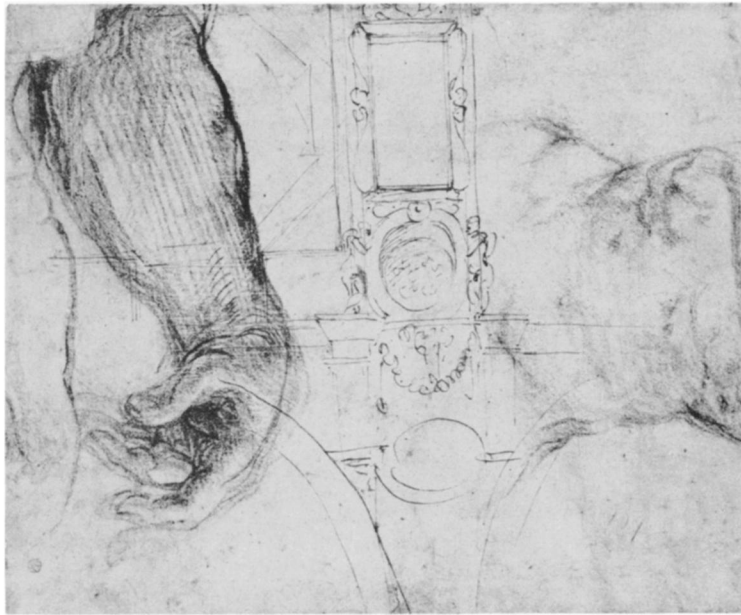
c—Cristoforo Rochi, Interior of the Model of the Duomo at Pavia. Pavia, Museo civico (*pp.* 94, 103)



d—The Creation. Malermi Bible, Venice 1490 (*p.* 102)



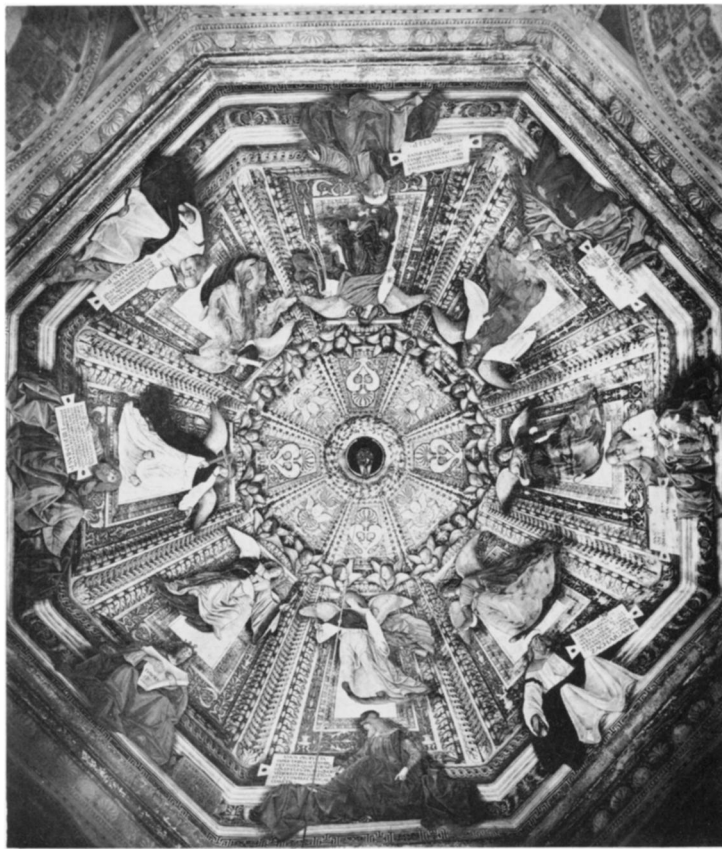
a—Michelangelo, Study for the Sistine Ceiling. London, British Museum (p. 103)



b—Michelangelo, Study for the Sistine Ceiling. Detroit, Institute of Arts (p. 103)

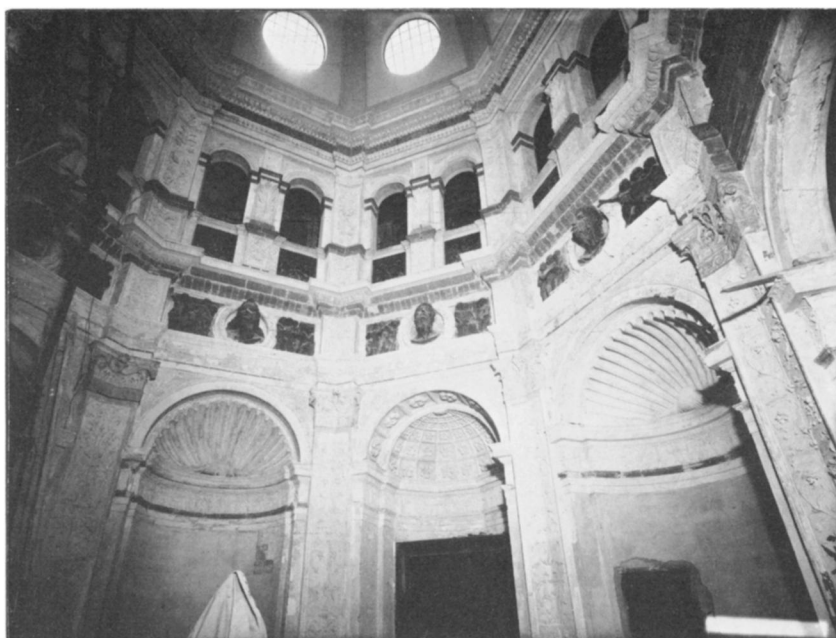


c—Justus of Ghent, *Rhetoric*. London, National Gallery (p. 103)



d—Melozzo da Forlì, Basilica of Cupola of the Sacristy, Loreto (p. 104)

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b—Bramante, Sacristy of Santa Maria presso San Satiro, Milan (pp. 103f)

a—Vasari, *Portrait of Bramante. Vite*, 1568 (p. 105)



c—Michelangelo, *Joel* (detail of Pl. 23a) (p. 105)



d—Bramantino, *August*, detail from *Occupations of the Months*. Tapestry, Milan, Castello Sforzesco (p. 105)

a