

continuous contour on his painted group, and further reinforces its effect by reference to the containing shape of the round frame. Then, in a way that seems more consciously aggressive than in a work of actual sculpture, he defines the plastic existence of the painted group and its parts by intensest modelling and deep excavation; he then joins these parts into a connected sequence as if they were interdependent pieces of a single mass of stone. In this sculptural language he creates an absolutely compact, deeply differentiated unity, of a force of impact far beyond that of Leonardo's model. Also exploiting a precedent in that cartoon with his sculptor's sense, Michelangelo has developed the former's mode of moving form in space into an assertive spatial contrapposto, which will reappear constantly in his succeeding works.

The structure of the Doni Tondo reveals a development, on a basis afforded by Leonardo but exceeding it, of a principle of classical style: it is a progress in the exposition of controlled energy internally articulating a unity of form. The classicism of the picture is, however, almost confined to this character of structure: it was not created with a pervasive classicism of state of mind. It is a statement only relatively meant that the expression of the subject matter, unlike that of the Roman *Pietà* or the *Bruges Madonna*, verges on the conventional. In this, the tondo seems almost to recall Michelangelo's first master, Ghirlandaio; also recollective of that first training is a hard clarity of technique and a tendency to precise description of detail. Colour, too, is based on Ghirlandaisque precedent, but with stresses of clarity and intensity that in places make it as assertive as the plastic form to which it adheres. The ideal realized in the design of the tondo is not matched, then, either in the spiritual content of the actors or in their more specific elements of form. But these disparities cannot impede the sheer force, of idea and form, that Michel-

angelo has found for his design: its content, a concentrated unity of vital power, holds more and higher expressive meaning than the persons in it.¹¹

The relation of Michelangelo to Leonardo, of dependence and rivalry at once, that is implicit in the Doni Tondo became overt late in 1504 and in 1505. Just as Leonardo was completing his cartoon for the *Battle of Anghiari*, Michelangelo received the commission, in August 1504, for a companion piece to decorate the great Salone of the Palazzo Vecchio: its subject, the surprise attack in 1364 of Pisans on Florentine troops bathing in the Arno near the town of Cascina, which the Florentines turned into a victory.¹² The direct confrontation with Leonardo compelled Michelangelo to study what the former had done and perhaps to make some kind of accommodation to it. The formative influence of Leonardo's battle piece on Michelangelo's is unmistakable, but the distinction between them emerges still more strongly. Michelangelo's scene betrays a persistent link with Quattrocento modes of thought, and on this account with Quattrocentesque elements of style (as in Signorelli). Unlike Leonardo, for Michelangelo the subject 'battle' held no ideal or essential sense; what he found in it was a pretext for an exercise in dealing with anatomy in action. Painting or not, he confronted this narrative with a sculptor's mind and in sculptor's terms. His conception of the *Cascina* in this most anthropocentric sense implies a kind of ideality, but one narrower than Leonardo's and also less synthetic. Instead of a meeting, as in the *Anghiari*, between artist and subject there has been a constraint of the subject to the artist's interests and will. Michelangelo confronts us with a set of virtuoso demonstrations of a sculptor's supreme formal knowledge, and it is his pride that is the most pervasive and convincing content of the picture. We feel the assertiveness of Michelangelo's genius, which wills not only to com-



6. Michelangelo:
Doni Holy Family.
Florence, Uffizi

painting, for the terms of sculpture. The cartoon of 1501 affords the basis of design of the Doni painting: in particular Leonardo's device is re-used here of including one main form not only in the silhouette but within the spatial embrace of the form behind. Michelangelo had already probably adapted it from Leonardo, but in more rudimentary fashion, for the design of his sculptured *Bruges Madonna*. As in Leonardo's model, Michelangelo imposes a

had by now conceived, even when he might be

pete with Leonardo but to demonstrate its superiority over every analogue in the past, including those in Michelangelo's own art. For the brief while it survived, the cartoon displaced the Brancacci Chapel as the Florentine academy of art. Its matter, in effect, consists of what we call 'academies', in which Michelangelo's preoccupation, as in the immediately precedent Doni Tondo, is primarily with problems of form. No force of gesticulation or any urgency of facial expression the lost original may have held could have been more eloquent than the artifices of posture in the cartoon, or equalled them in interest. The alarm of the arriving enemy is pretext more than true motivation for the actions of the naked or half-clothed soldiery; they are moved by the artist, not by their situation. In spite of a development of classicizing structure in the figures, there is a disparity between the bodily forms and their humanly expressive content which, by Leonardo's paradigm, is not wholly classical. Indeed, in his emphasis on formalism and virtuosity in the *Cascina* cartoon Michelangelo anticipates the mentality of post-classical art.

Michelangelo's *Cascina* project went even less far than Leonardo's *Battle*. Michelangelo's work on the cartoon was interrupted in the spring of 1505 by his summons to Rome to undertake the design of the tomb Julius II thought to erect for himself in St Peter's. When that Roman project was set aside, Michelangelo returned to Florence in the spring and summer of 1506 and then completed the central section, the *Bathers*, of the cartoon, but he may never have begun its transfer to the wall. The cartoon had of necessity been involved in some ways, even with the extreme sculptor's bias it displays, with painter's problems. We have sparse evidence of the design Michelangelo conceived for the tomb in 1505/6 (the first in a sequence that was to extend over more than thirty years), but enough to tell us that it marked his entire rededication to the sculptor's

that Michelangelo expresses his most cogent will towards unity.

These elements of an explicitly sculptural variant of classical aesthetic carry over into Michelangelo's invention, in 1508, of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; however, the relation to the ceiling of the tomb design is still more exact. That design was not abandoned with the suspended project for the tomb; it became the basis from which Michelangelo evolved his design for his vast fresco,¹³ transposing the major elements from one to the other, as if the scheme intended for the tomb should be unfolded flat upon the ceiling space. On that space, Michelangelo has made the semblance of a closed monumental structure richly populated by sculptured-seeming forms, as the tomb was meant to be. An architecture projected in paint (in a perspective internally 'correct' but not illusionistic to the spectator) holds Prophets, Sibyls, and nude male forms (the *Ignudi*) placed in it as if they should be set up on an architectural base. In the topmost, central, panels of the ceiling nine scenes illustrating Genesis are painted flat upon the ceiling plane, envisioned, and also framed, as reliefs might be on the surface of an actual monument. Even the colouring that Michelangelo employs grows out of his initial sculptural conception. The dominant tone is that of the fictive stone of the framework of architecture and of the nude figures that inhabit it, whose flesh is muted towards ancient marble. Where the figures are clothed, as are the Seers, their colours — though they become, as painting proceeds, increasingly fluid and harmonious — seem often like the varied patinas of old bronze: the draperies evoke the memory of metal.¹⁴

The whole scheme retains the sculptor's mode of thinking in terms of single figure units, and the manner of relating them is exactly that which Michelangelo had evolved for the tomb. As there, unity depends first on the formal

interdependence of the figures with the architecture, then on the progressive interlocking of units of architectural form, and finally — here more visibly than in what we can deduce of the first tomb design — on repeated balancing concordances among all the forms. With this sculptor's aesthetic Michelangelo achieves a unity as compelling as any in the art of his contemporaries, and more extensive.

The commission for the Sistine Ceiling was given Michelangelo most likely in March 1508, and the work of its design began probably in May. The conception he first entertained for it,¹⁵ based on subject matter that would have been suggested by the Pope, was nothing like so elaborate as the one put into execution. The first scheme consisted of twelve figured span-drels with Apostles in them, and only abstract patterning elsewhere on the vault. Michelangelo much later explained, in a letter of 1523,¹⁶ that he found this insufficient — too 'poor' — apparently in both theme and form — and was then given permission to 'make what I wanted, whatever would please me'. What pleased him, we observed, was to create a painted substitute for the abandoned tomb. However, we do not know to what degree the new subject matter, with its necessary effect upon his ideas of design, was Michelangelo's own invention, and how much the result of consultation with authorities available in person or in print.

It has long since been pointed out that the theme of the ceiling is, in general, a complete to the pre-existent decoration of the walls below, and that it illustrates the history of man *ante legem*, in prelude to the history *sub lege* and *sub gratia* that Pope Sixtus's artists had depicted almost thirty years before. In its middle range of panels the ceiling tells a summary history of Genesis: the creation of the world and man; man's first sin and fall and its echo in a second fall. The core of meaning of this story is in the central panels, where man is

made who then makes sin, and so requires redemption by the Christ. Around this history, in the prophetic thrones, are those who foretell man's redemption by the Son of Man, alternating Prophets of the Old Testament and Sibyls of classical antiquity; the Sibyls appear in a Christian context and are taken in the sense of their meaning for Christian dogma. Below these Seers are the Ancestors of Christ, in whose line is the long generation of his coming, and in the four pendentives there are Old Testament narratives which refer prophetically to Christ's mission of salvation and to his sacrifice of Crucifixion. The main elements of subject matter in the ceiling, with their intrinsic literary content of tragedy and prophecy, are deeply moving in their common theme, in which they make a perfectly apparent general sense. With surpassing power to convince, the Sistine Ceiling basically means what it instantly and evidently says.¹⁷

However, in a more specific dogmatic or theological sense, it is not always quite clear what the various thematic motifs mean, or how they relate precisely to each other. The Prophets and Sibyls are certainly connected with the scenes of Genesis they adjoin by literary allusions, sometimes overt but more often abstruse or, to us, evasive. It may be more important that the literary justifications that exist for the Seers have been absorbed in and in some cases obscured by the expressive and aesthetic meaning. Michelangelo has conceived for them. For the secondary figures who attend the Seers — the caryatid putti on their thrones, the bronze-coloured men in the spaces between them, and the great Ignudi above — precise literary explanation seems still less accessible. Yet they appear to hold a general sense that is decipherable, which enriches the overt meaning of the central theme and makes it dogmatically more profound. Their presence adds to the history of man *ante legem* and the prophecy of his redemption by Christianity a

commentary on the moral situation of man in that pre-Christian time. There is a spiritual hierarchy in these figures and the Seers whom they accompany. The bronze-coloured nudes,¹⁸ dark and darkly imprisoned in the spandrels next to the Prophets' thrones, are the antithesis of the Seers. They suggest the idea of barbarian peoples of pre-Christian times, inaccessible to the prophecy of Christ's coming; captives of an ancient ignorance, they have no sense of the history that surrounds them. The Ignudi [9] suggest another place in the scale of awareness, between the absolute illumination of the Seers and the dark of the figures in the spandrels: they would be the creatures of the ancient pagan world, who are half-conscious of the meaning of the history they attend and the prophecy they oversee. The bronze-coloured nudes are almost animal in nature, some cat-like supine, others moving in contortions like those of caged beasts; oppositely the attitudes and expressions of the Seers are precise and purposeful, dictated by an ultimate explicitness of state of spirit and of mind. Between the two, the Ignudi are possessed by moods and express themselves in posturings that are neither wholly rational and inspired nor merely physical and animal. They are beings in whom the mind and soul have not yet assumed, as in the Christian habit of belief, a separable identity from the flesh. As for the caryatid putti: if we continue to assume that things basically mean, in the ceiling, what they evidently say, it may be that they stand in fact for *Innocenti*. They would represent a state of man that precedes knowledge, and they may allude as well to the children whom Herod sacrificed as later he would be an instrument of the sacrifice of Christ, which the ceiling as a whole foretells.

The role I discern in the Ignudi would explain the conjunction in them of pagan beauty and Christian disquiet of personality, and would justify the presence of these figures, so much more precisely recollective of the ancient

classic world than the Sibyls, in the Christian context. The history of pre-Christian man becomes, by their presence and that of the bronze-coloured nudes, enriched by a symbolic and anonymous population of antiquity. The nudes are not participants or spectators but concurrent presences in the pre-Christian history, either blind to its meaning or half-knowing of it; but at the same time its meaning is resonant through and differentiated in them. The conception — not only in the nudes but in the Seers — of a division of humanity into strata that are different in their proportion of spiritual to physical content, and in their articulation of a distinguishable and rational soul within the body, is the profoundest demonstration (and the first one formulated in terms of visible ideas) of the nature of man as classicism within Christianity conceived it.

The sources of this thinking are of course generally neo-Platonic, but there is no definition we know in neo-Platonic writing of a position quite like this. In the figures of the ceiling it is demonstrated that the human physical being untouched by Grace is animal in nature and behaviour; it is in proportion as the creature has knowledge — here foreknowledge — of Christ that the soul is a distinguishable essence and no longer confounded with the tissues of the body. In beings like the Seers who know Christ, or in Adam who is made by God directly, the soul is inspired and distinguishable from the mortal flesh; but that flesh is infused by the soul, directed by it, and expressive of its force and splendour. It is this last conception that the classical style within Christianity intended as its ideal. In the ceiling this conception is exactly articulated for the first time, in the context of a history, and in the guise of a process that history reveals.

The iconography and the general design of the ceiling were worked out by the end of 1508, and by January of the new year Michelangelo began the labour of execution. Almost four

years later, in early October 1512, the vast enterprise was done. Evidence exists for the painting's intervening history which, though much of it is in Michelangelo's own words, has never altogether satisfactorily been sorted out. The best deduction we can make (taking account of the longer interruptions of work that we are sure about) is that after some initial difficulties with the new technique, the execution proceeded at the rate of about three months per ceiling bay (including the lunettes on the adjacent walls, executed more or less contemporaneously with the bays above). Painting began at the eastern end of the chapel, in this case towards the entrance rather than the altar, and seems to have been carried towards the altar in a sequence that approximately, but by no means inflexibly, follows in the order of the bays. At the end of August 1510 Michelangelo finished a major section of the work and uncovered it: by our reckoning it is most likely to have been somewhat more than half the ceiling's extent, up to its fifth bay. A second section of the finished work was uncovered before 14 August 1511, presumably (since there had been an interruption in the work) no more than two or three bays farther on. From midsummer 1512 Michelangelo refers to an imminent completion, which he announced finally early in October.¹⁹

When at the beginning of 1509 Michelangelo turned to the execution²⁰ of what he had conceived for the decoration of the ceiling, his first effort was in the large panel of the second bay from the entrance end of the chapel, with the depiction of the *Flood*: the evidence of style confirms the statement the biographer Condivi made to this effect. Confronted with a large field and a dramatic narrative that required many actors, Michelangelo turned for inspiration to his own precedent in the *Casina* cartoon and tried, as he had there, to deal with his theme at least partly in painter's terms, with somewhat more success. The design is spread



7. Michelangelo: Drunkenness of Noah. Sistine Ceiling, 1508-12, Vatican

across the picture field and into space, and there is a visible concern to bind its parts by continuities of rhythm. Yet the sculptor's will is not diminishable by much: the primitive, nude actors are projected in paint as similes of sculptured forms, intensely tactile. Despite the measure of pictorial intention in it, the *Flood* is in a limbo between a painter's and a sculptor's aesthetic. In the second history to be painted, the *Sacrifice of Noah* (in the third bay from the entrance, in one of the smaller fields reduced by the presence around it of Ignudi), Michelangelo is still preoccupied with the painter's problems that have been forced on him, but in a narrower and less alien range. He has carefully 'composed' his figures, making them into a rhyth-

more fluency than in the *Sacrifice*, but now not at all into depth but only in a lateral sequence. In a wholly overt way the conception is an analogue of classical relief. Michelangelo is no longer concerned with the making of an image as a painter would, but in the *Drunkenness of Noah* he has, finally, found entire confidence and ease in the use of a fresco painter's technique.

It was with this quota of experience that Michelangelo began the first Ignudi and the first Seers of the ceiling. In them there was not at any time a conflict between sculptural and pictorial aesthetic: they were initially conceived, as we observed, as if they might be sculpture, as solid figure elements upon an architectural support. The order of evolution of these figures is yet more apparent than that of the histories. Having done the *Drunkenness of Noah*, Michelangelo must have continued in the first bay, painting (in obvious descending sequence on the vault) its Ignudi and its pendant Seers, the Delphic Sibyl and the Prophet Joel; the *Zachariah* of the spandrel preceding the first bay seems also to have been done within this time. All these figures are contained in form and movement, disposed more or less rigidly in an axial and frontal or in a profile scheme. The effect of an analogy with sculpture is most marked in the *Delfica* and *Joel*, even as the former in particular recalls the formal logic of the Florentine tondo. Joel is informed by a higher energy of spirit than the *Delfica*, expressing a contrast of principle that will persist throughout the ceiling between the male force of the Prophets and a lesser spiritual vigour in the Sibyls. More not only than the *Delfica* but than his companion *Zachariah*, Joel makes the spectator know that Michelangelo will henceforth speak about a new dimension of humanity. Joel's controlled energy and scale of form convey that they are the reciprocal of a state of mind: he makes the impression of a being magnified in body and spirit far above the normal status of humanity.

Above Joel, a first pair of Ignudi are in quiet, literally corresponding poses in plane against the wall; above *Delfica* the matching pair² move only gently forward from it. All four seem possessed by a veiled melancholy, as if their function might have been like that of a chorus, of commentary on the scene they frame. But in the second set of Ignudi, around the *Sacrifice* in the third bay, this idea has been set aside. These nudes are not bound to the theme and mood of the history that they adjoin but only to the idea the Ignudi collectively express. Each pair echoes the postures of his pair of predecessors on the same side of the earlier bay, but with a major difference in degree of liberty and energy, especially of movement of the figure in its space. Their feeling, quite unrelated to the scene above, is similarly much more varied and assertive. Below them on one side is the Sibyl *Eriethrea*, freer and more elaborate in movement than the Seers of the first bay and grander in dimension than the male *Joel*, but not so inspired. Opposite her, *Isaiah*, equally on grander scale, embodies Michelangelo's new idea of a stature of humanity, and does so with a subtlety that complements the Prophet Joel's controlled force. *Isaiah* shows a spiritual power not instantly expressed but in the process of unfolding, between meditation and inspiration. To say this, Michelangelo finds a new reach of articulateness, more exactly commanding painterly and draughtsman's skills than in any previous episode on the ceiling. He makes *Isaiah's* body echo and reinforce in every part the state of spirit revealed on his face, so that the whole person tells us of his slow-awakening might. If we contrast *Isaiah* and *Eriethrea* with their surmounting Ignudi, it becomes clear that these two classes of being belong to distinct orders of emotion and idea. The feelings of the Ignudi are those of a category of humanity lower than that of the illumined Seers: what the Nudes express is tinged with the animal or the irrational, and their

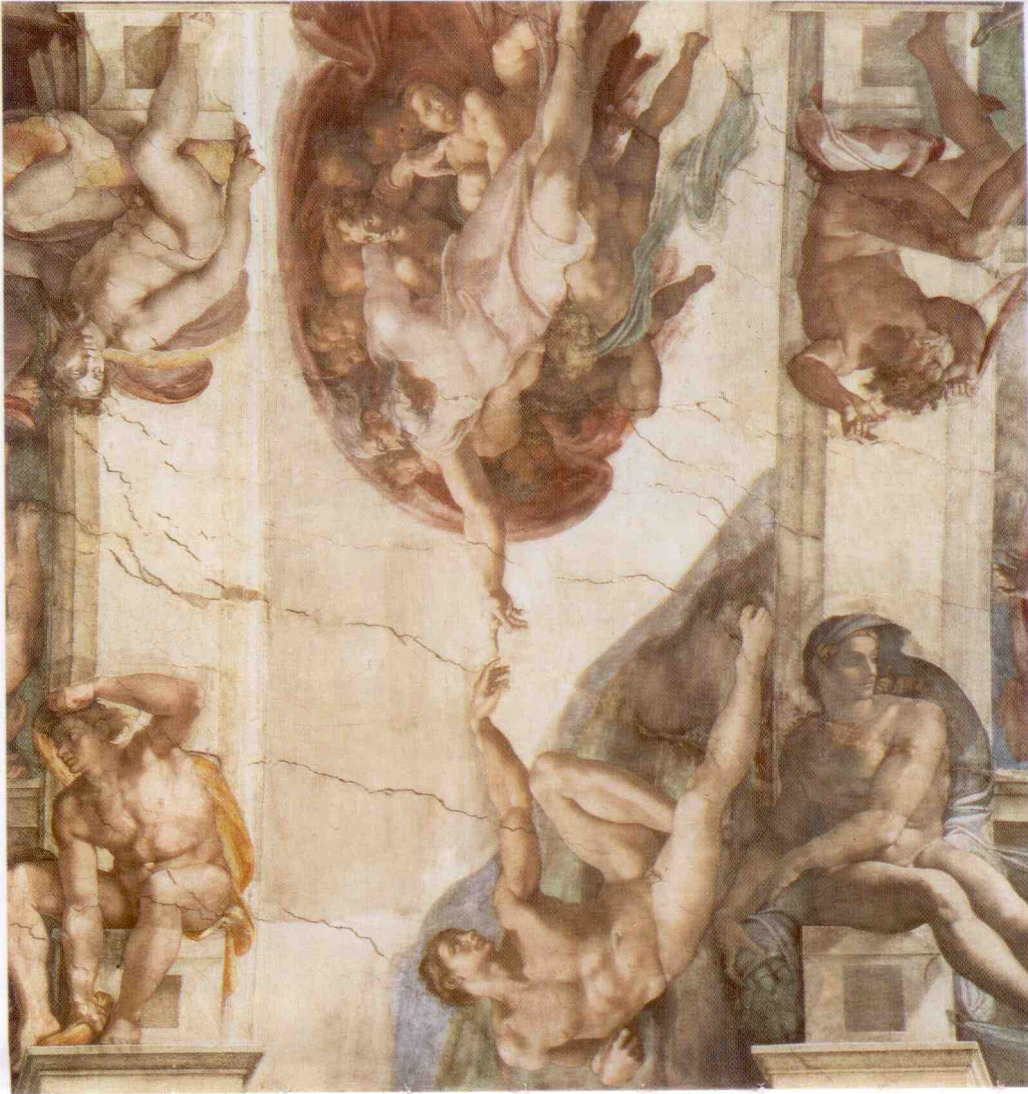
energies are in some way finally bound, slave-like, by the duty they perform of holding up the great bronze-coloured medallions swung between them.

The increase of energy, freedom, and variety that is visible in each successive step that we can trace in the painting of the first three bays is accelerated in the two that follow. The fifth bay, a long one, exactly in the middle of the ceiling, seems to have been decorated earlier than the fourth. Its narrative panel, the *Creation of Eve*, is more painterly in technique and at the same time structurally even less pictorial than the latest preceding narrative, the *Drunkenness of Noah*: here the ordering of form is absolutely in a mode of classical relief. The figures are expanded to the largest scale within the frame the subject will permit; massively modelled and set out laterally on the foremost plane, they wholly prevail over any sense of space. To the interpretation of the subject Michelangelo has brought not only the new reach of power he had found for the *Isaiah* but the subtlety of articulation he had devised there. The result is a re-creation of the biblical event so poignant psychologically and so physically explicit that the spectator is compelled to experience it almost empathically. The Ignudi near this scene are no less articulate, conceived in a new range of freedom and diversity of posture and on a larger scale than the Nudes before. The Seers of the fifth bay, Ezekiel and Cumea, share, though less evidently, in this increase of expressive energy and scale. It is in the larger picture area in the preceding bay, with the *Temptation and Expulsion*, that we are made decisively to feel the effects of a change in scale: it is in this scene that the splendour of physique, the power of movement, and the resonance of feeling in the actors take on the character of the heroic. The figures have not merely grown in size: their expression comes from the accretion in them of both force and

depth of meaning. The magnifying of the human form is in response to the growth in dimension of Michelangelo's ideas of its content.

In the *Temptation and Expulsion* the figures act in a setting as summary as that in the *Creation of Eve*. That panel had referred back to the precedent of Jacopo della Quercia, and the *Expulsion* of this bay recalls Masaccio: Michelangelo's description of environment is not much less abstract than either. However, in the fourth bay Michelangelo arrives at an important difference in his exposition of the idea of relief-like design. Now that his command of the painter's techniques is absolute, and he has come to understand their value and resources fully, he arrives at a definitive solution to the problem that the narrative panels of the ceiling posed of conflict between the painter's and the sculptor's language. He creates a painter's atmosphere around his figures, and describes their modelling with painterly *chiaroscuro*, but as Michelangelo applies them to his forms these painter's means increase their effect of plasticity. The figures become more visually credible and more tactile-seeming substances until they convey, as much as their accompanying Ignudi and the Seers, the sense of presences in the full round. Sculpturally plastic form, set within a summary pictorial ambience, has been described with the fullest powers of a painter's hand.

The *Creation of Adam*, in the sixth bay [8], affirms this solution still more explicitly, emphasizing through the expert painter's means that it is still more essentially sculpturally conceived. Two great plastic units make up the design, of a simplicity exactly proper to Michelangelo's idea of the theme: the confrontation in a high bare world of the first man and his Maker. For the moment Michelangelo's and God's roles merge: God acts the classical sculptor. He has just shaped the first image of



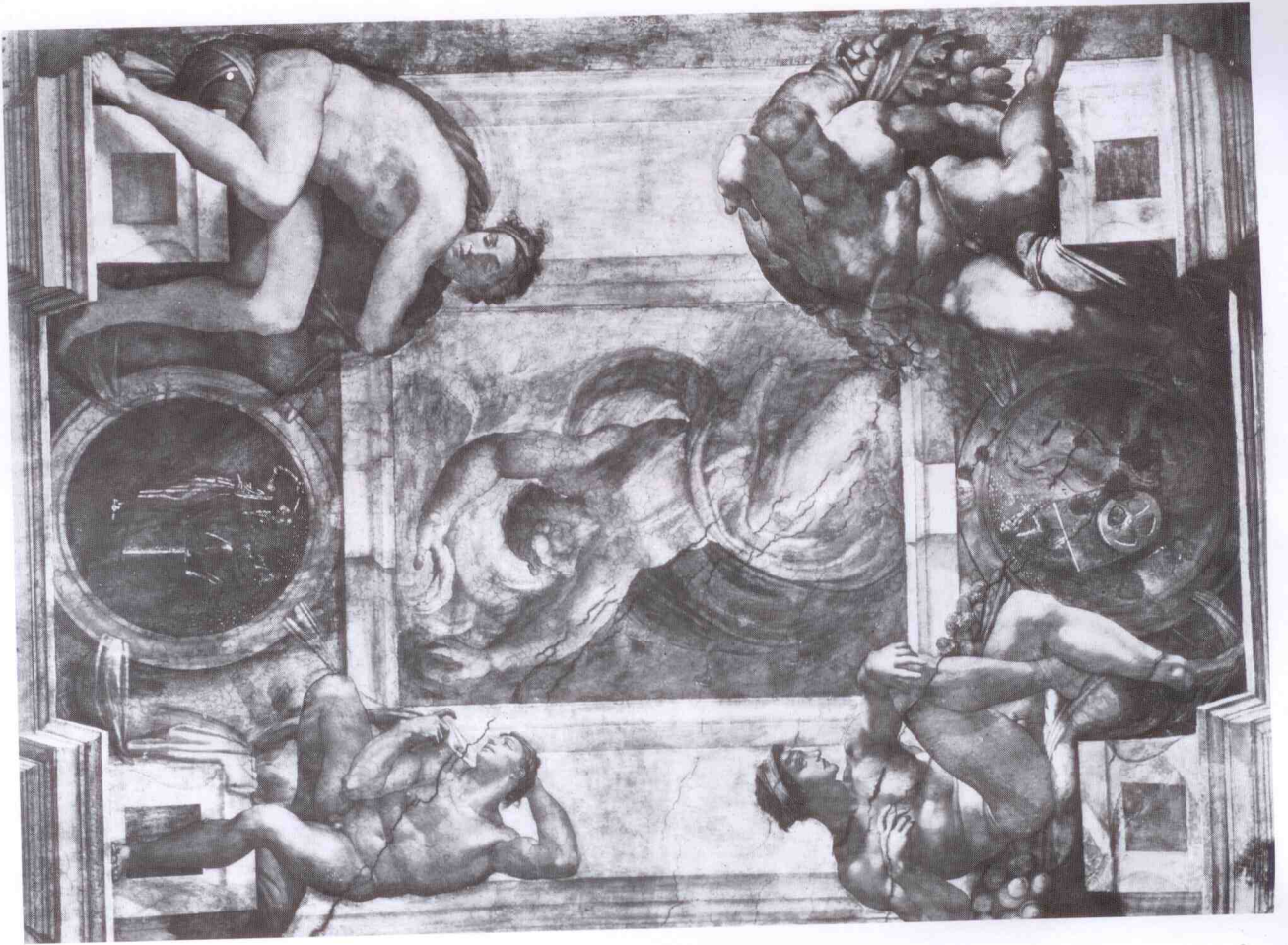
8. Michelangelo: Creation of Adam. Sistine Ceiling

a man, giving him such beauty of physical being as should belong to the ideal ancestor from whom we imperfectly descend. He hovers above His creature in the act of endowing it with its content of life and soul. The vital spark flows from the outstretched hand of God into the matter He has shaped, and in response this matter begins to live, to move physically and to feel. The body of Adam shows precisely how and to what degree it is, at this instant, infused by vitality: each part of the anatomy articulates how much it contains of energy and how much is still inert flesh. The Adam illustrates the essence of the classical idea of interpenetration of the physical and spiritual being, but he also illustrates the non-classical origin of this re-creative synthesis: the flesh and spirit are conceived of as initially separate elements, and it is the spirit, divine in source, which controls and moves the flesh. At the same time the splendour of the flesh and its worth of beauty are as much the work of God as its inner radiance of soul: the beauty of divine creation is in the archetypal substance of the first man as well as in his spirit. What Michelangelo thought God meant by the idea of man and what, thus, humanity was meant to be was this Adam before the deformation of experience: by God's will and grace, a hero, the mortal counterpart of God.

The *Creation of Adam* inaugurates a new stage in the execution of the ceiling, begun probably in February 1511 after a hiatus of some four or five months. Its idea and form are by a measurable stage of still grander effect than the *Temptation and Expulsion*, and its figure scale conforms, roughly, to that in the succeeding scenes. But the other figures in the decoration of the last few bays are on a grander scale still, in a marked acceleration of the process – till now relatively gradual – of growth in their external and internal stature. The Ignudi and, even more, the Seers expand in scope and power of idea. In the large panel of the *Cre-*

tion of the Sun and Moon (in the eighth bay, probably next after the *Adam* in time of execution) God is depicted as creating with a terrible dynamic energy, hurtling through the heavens like a celestial body. In the smaller panel that precedes this one, most often referred to as the *Separation of the Earth and the Waters*, God's movement is altogether contrasting, a slow-gliding majesty. His image takes a shape, extremely simplified and generalized, which even more suggests the merging of God's human form with that of a celestial sphere. As Michelangelo ponders the first episodes of Genesis, his conception of God's nature and action becomes higher and more remote, apart from incident, narration, and materiality. In the last panel of the ceiling [9] the first act of Genesis is represented in an image that reduces meaning to an essence, reaching as if above and through the first bald sentence of the Bible to a vision of a hardly apprehensible God, seemingly newly self-formed from the surrounding chaos. He turns in chaos – a cosmic simile suggests itself, unknown to Michelangelo, of a solar body in its process of formation – seeking to shape the dark reaches where there is as yet no form and no direction. The idea of this image, so exalted and so nearly abstract, is given us in a corresponding language, so general as to border on abstraction.

The last two sets of Ignudi also seem, by comparison with their predecessors, to have been generated in a higher range of Michelangelo's invention – still applied, however, to the theme they are required to illustrate. Their emotions are more intense but no less irrational than before; the Nudes are still enslaved by their bodily existence. Proceeding from the idea of physical splendour devised for the created Adam, their bodies elaborate that con-



9. Michelangelo:
Separation of Light and Darkness, and Ignudi.
Sistine Ceiling

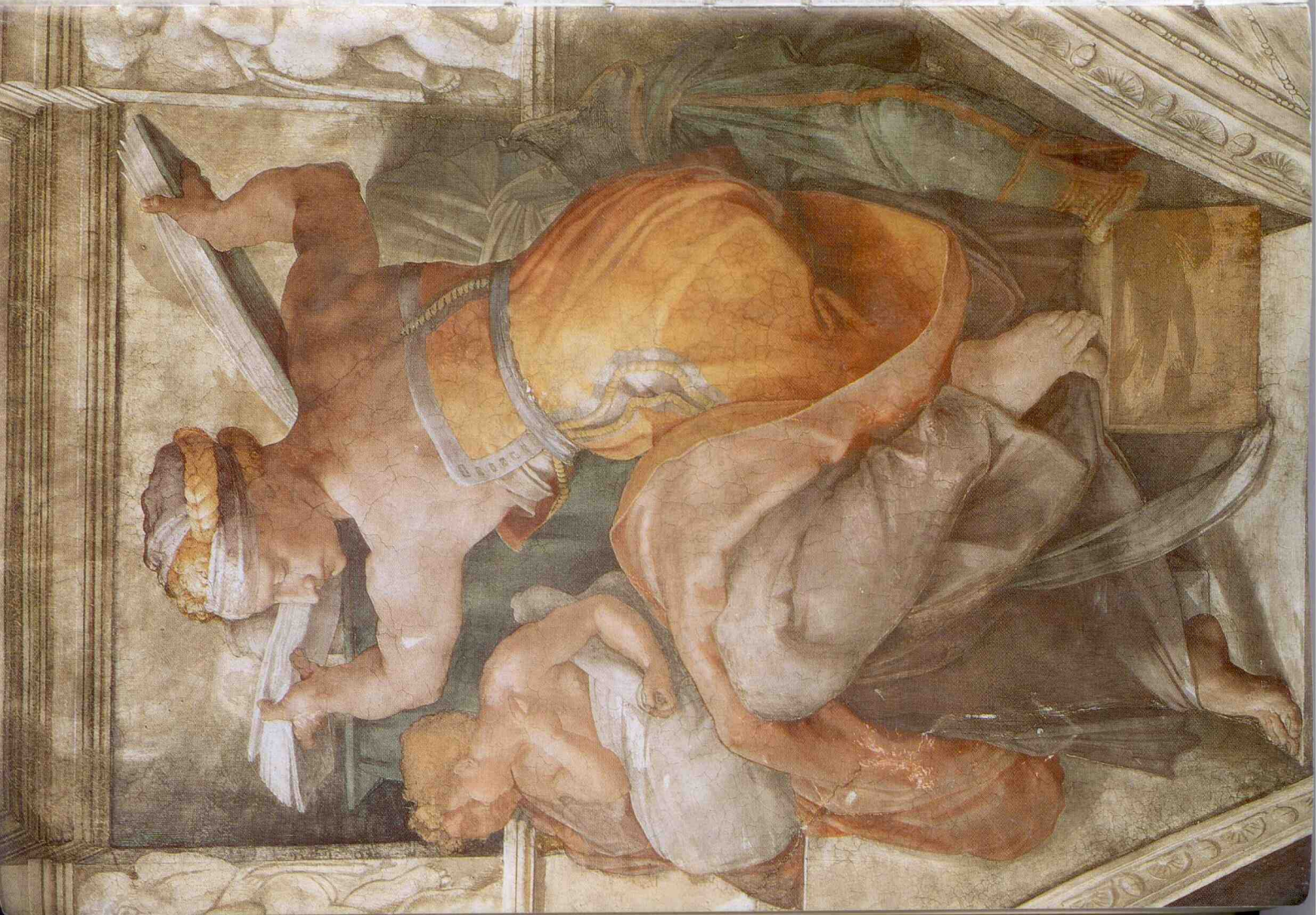
ception or surpass it. The last Ignudi have forms more powerful than Adam's, or both more powerful and fine, and in them Michelangelo has at last won his long private war with the *Lacoon* (which he had known since it was unearthed in 1506) and surpassed the envied model of the Belvedere Torso. But we are impressed in most of the last Ignudi by the sense that in their archetypal beauty or their archetypal strength they no longer seem possible or credible images of human being. In some way they share the extreme ideality with which Michelangelo has conceived the image of God above their heads. The proportion of ideal invention and of plausible description in them has been decisively weighted towards the former. This shift, by which the image is removed yet farther than before from natural appearances towards an idea invented in the artist's mind, marks a clear change from the conception of a classical ideality that Michelangelo had demonstrated in the ceiling's middle range, there a kind of median.

The change may be more marked among the later Seers. In them new energies and depths of thought are released in forms of consonant, and overwhelming, scale. In the *Daniel* of the seventh bay an impassioned intelligence works like an electricity, inspiring swift and subtle action in his gigantic shape. On the same scale, his counterpart, the ancient *Persica*, contrasts a slow-moving, heavy power to his. The Seers around the last bay may be touched with a still higher ideality: each approaches closer still to the effect of archetype. Each, within its higher ideality, conveys an idea differentiated from the others in its kind. The *Libica* [10], superbly poised, seems above all else a demonstration of the idea of a formal beauty, as if this idea should have assumed a sense that could be separately

identified within the larger idealizing process of classical style. In the concern in the *Libica* for formal beauty as a primary ambition and in her complex elegance she is an art-historical as well as a religious prophetess, foretelling the aesthetic of the post-classical Maniera. *Jonah*, at the western end of the vault, differently seems to foretell a baroque. The most terribly inspired figure on the ceiling, he moves with a vehemence that strains the concept of classical constraint. To his left, *Jeremiah*, Prophet of Lamentations, is as grandiose, but opposite in his expression [11]. The power of feeling in this Prophet, as great as the expansive passion of the *Jonah*, is turned in on itself: Jeremiah's great, compact, gathered form expresses the dimension of his thought and its concentration. Every other Seer has been given some pretext of action or of illustrative incident, but Jeremiah has no 'motive' beyond that of his thought. This slow-breathing, meditating monolith embodies, more than any allegory, the concept of thought itself, in that dimension of it Michelangelo himself has now attained: Jeremiah is the image of Michelangelo's Idea. In ways that are different in their form and in intent of content, these last three prophetic figures express aspects of the same conception that dictates the image of God in the final bay. Like Him, all three Seers are no longer idealized representations but, instead, representations of ideas; and Michelangelo's evolution in the ceiling may be summarized in this inversion of a phrase. In the process of this inversion he has moved towards an ideality so high that it now stands at the limits of a classical style.

In the pendentives at the western end of the ceiling Michelangelo finally trespassed those limits. What had occurred between the first and last bays of the vault was all encompassable within a definition of classicism, but what has happened between the first and last pendentives shows, beyond their development, a

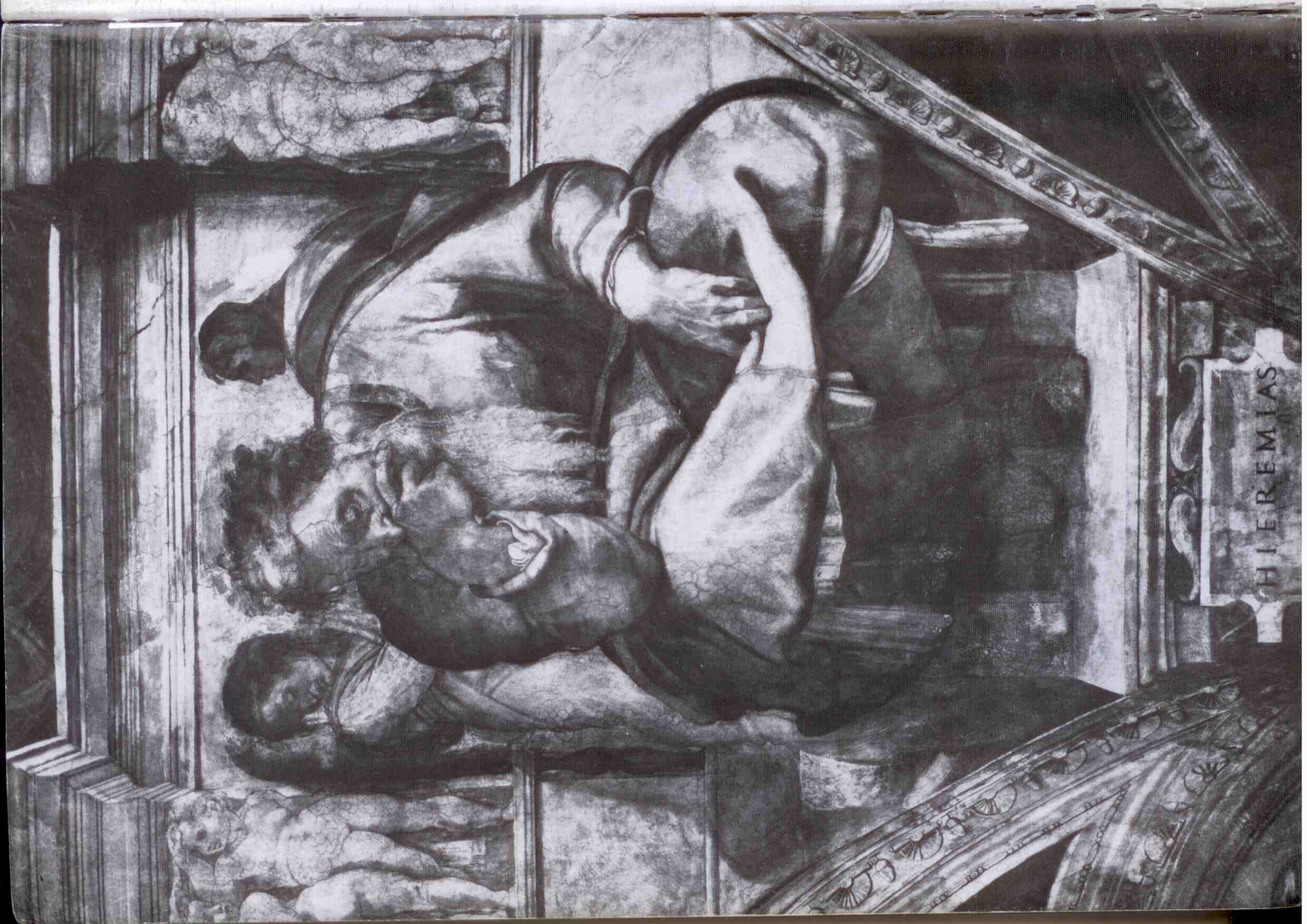
10. Michelangelo: Libyan Sibyl.
Sistine Ceiling



11 (opposite). Michelangelo: Prophet Jeremiah.
Sistine Ceiling

12 (below). Michelangelo: Brazen Serpent.
Sistine Ceiling

cleavage in conception of artistic style. In the *Hanging of Haman* the single forms of which it is composed are still classical, but the manner of composing them is not. There are, in the *Haman*, a violation of the rationale of space, a blunt yet restless order of design, and a dark violence of mood that can no longer be called structurally or expressively classical. Even more than the *Haman*, the pendentive of the *Brazen Serpent* [12] is conceived with a vio-



lence of emotion and an abstractness and illogicality of form that remove it from recognizable classical principles of style. In both pendentives, moved perhaps in part by the drama of their subject, but more by a climactic surge of his own expressive intensity, Michelangelo's force and ideality acquire, for the moment only, an apocalyptic nature. In this momentary breach of the confines of classicism the pendentives take on, prematurely, the character of post-classical phenomena of style. Mannering in the *Haman*, and in the *Brazen Serpent* simultaneously Mannering and Baroque. No development in any other artist is comparable to this one of Michelangelo in the Ceiling. In four years he accomplished an evolution that embraced, in summary and essential terms, the possibilities of the High Renaissance classical style from a relatively elementary to an apparently final stage, and also tested its possibilities. The ceiling may be not only the highest but the swiftest flight of spirit ever undertaken by an artist.

Until he was summoned, more than twenty years later, to confront the problem of design of the *Last Judgement* on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo did no major work in painting. He returned to the profession he considered properly his, sculpture, and continued to give major example to his contemporaries in this field, first in Rome till 1516, then in Florence until 1534, when he returned for good to Rome. But the ceiling still remained the most extensive and in some ways the most overwhelmingly impressive of his accomplishments, and it worked with inevitable and increasing effect, as time went on, upon the progress of contemporary painting.

RAPHAEL

Born in 1483, Raphael was eight years younger than Michelangelo, and his difference in age

suggested in the evidence that tells what the first documented altarpiece, painted in 1501, looked like (*Crowning of S. Nicola di Tolentino*; fragments in the Naples and Brescia Museums); it is clearer in the *Crucifixion* altarpiece (London, National Gallery, 1503) and entirely explicit in the *Marriage of the Virgin* (Milan, Brera, 1504).²³ They increasingly show a harmony that pertains to a cohesive whole — not, as in the Peruginese style, a harmony of added parts. It is still a harmony of quiet, but with the sense of a movement in it as its forms relate to one another in cadenced continuity. A gentle pressure mollifies the shapes that the design contains, smoothing and rounding off the accidents of nature, making ideal images. The result is akin in principle, though hardly in precise effects, to Leonardo's and Michelangelo's propositions of a Cinquecento classical style. Raphael's invention seems more easily achieved than theirs, almost as if it might have been a natural effect of an evolutionary process by which classicism might move from an early phase into a maturity.

In the autumn of 1504, when Raphael transferred his residence to Florence, he thus possessed the bases of the modern style in which Leonardo and Michelangelo already worked, but by comparison what he had formulated seemed provincially simple and naive. With the profound and intelligent receptivity he would exhibit in later years as well, Raphael set himself to learn from them, but from Leonardo mainly, more willing than Michelangelo to admit Leonardo's leadership in the new style. Raphael's four years of residence in Florence may be considered, with not much exaggeration, as a time devoted chiefly to acquiring what Leonardo had to teach. But to this process, which so easily could have become corrosive, Raphael brought a quality that was the positive residue in him of his provincial education — a corollary to his simplicity: clarity

of intelligence and feeling. His work in Florence is based upon a simplification and reduction of Leonardo's style, but this process is also a clarifying of it; he does not follow Leonardo into his torturing complexity of ambitions. Raphael's development in these years thus was a restating of the principles of Cinquecento classical style in terms of greater clarity than those of Leonardo and of easier intellectual and emotional accessibility. This restatement, unlike Leonardo's style (and in this degree unlike Michelangelo's also), carried nothing over from the Quattrocento except its heritage of classicism: Raphael's Florentine style is uncomplicated by the older artists' reminiscences. It assumes the historical significance not only of a redefinition but of the first definition of High Renaissance classical style in terms that are unequivocally of the Cinquecento.

The succession of Raphael's pictures through his Florentine years illustrates his absorption and, at the same time, creative exploitation of Leonardo's art. A series of Madonna paintings in particular, among the most popular of Raphael's works, has become a classroom paradigm for Raphael's developing command of classical style.²⁴ The *Madonna del Prato* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, dated 1505) depends on Leonardo's *St. Anne* theme, but over-simplifies its logic; the *Madonna del Cardellino* (Florence, Uffizi, late 1505-1506), which succeeds it, shows a fuller understanding of Leonardo's — and, in this case, perhaps also Michelangelo's — models of classical style; the so-called *Belle Jardinière* (Paris, Louvre, dated 1507) [13] must rely on Leonardo's third painted version of the *St. Anne*, and like it fulfils a preceding evolution. In the *Belle Jardinière* Raphael has translated the intensity of temper and extremely involved artifice of the Louvre *St. Anne* into a lighter ornamental grace, delicate and just in measure. But the knowledge and control of the formal means of

13. Raphael:
La Belle Jardinière,
1507.
Paris, Louvre



classical style that he now displays are comparable to those in the Leonardo models from which Raphael has learned. Having won this much, Raphael for a while followed Leonardo farther, into his corrosive emotional preserve, as if he should have found it vital to explore beyond the kinds of feeling native to him from his Umbrian character and at need surpass them. A few works of 1507 (e.g. the *Bridge-water House Madonna*, Edinburgh, National Gallery, Ellesmere Loan; *Holy Family of the Casa Canigiani*, Munich, Pinakothek), highly animated, shadowed and complex, are nearly imitative conjunctions between Raphael and Leonardo's mature style. A similar will to expression of increased intensity, but also on a grander scale, turned Raphael to the dramatic model of the *Anghiari*, and even more towards Michelangelo's companion *Cascina* cartoon: the latter especially was guide to Raphael in his sole large-scale essay in Florence in dramatic narrative, the *Entombment* for Atalanta Baglioni (Rome, Borghese, 1507). Raphael grasped Michelangelo's example adequately, but exaggerated its defects: the *Entombment* has still more of the character of an academy in it than the cartoon. The aspiration to new force of feeling and new power of effect in form are more important than his actual result. The *Entombment* marks the opening of an avenue of development that Raphael was later most effectively to explore. His last work on a major scale in Florence, in a more accustomed vein, an altar for the Dei Family, now called the *Madonna del Baldacchino* (Florence, Pitti, 1508), also prepares what he would later do in grander form in Rome. He has conceived a relation in this altar between figure composition and the setting of architecture that makes a resonance between them and confers upon the figures the architectural effect of an aggrandizement of scale.²⁵

Later in 1508 Raphael went on to Rome, already recognized, at twenty-five, as a painter

of sufficient eminence to be called on to direct the major enterprise of decoration, other than the Sistine Ceiling, that Pope Julius had undertaken in the Vatican: the frescoing of the suite of state rooms, the so-called Stanze. The scale and character of the opportunity presented to Raphael, the impact of antique Rome, and the stimulus of the contemporary Julian environment acted upon Raphael in a way for which his own just-previous invention in the *Baldacchino* altar is a metaphor. What he would come to create in the Stanza della Segnatura, his first Roman enterprise, is more than a logical development from what he had achieved in Florence: it is the result of a dramatic magnification, in the new setting, of Raphael's personality.

The programme given to Raphael to illustrate in the Stanza della Segnatura was itself of a kind to stimulate a classicizing character of artistic thought in him. It is certain – as it is not for Michelangelo, working in the Sistine Chapel near by at the same time – that Raphael did not command a literary culture sufficient to enable him to invent his programme. Its author or authors are not known; however, their idea is almost as remarkable a landmark in the history of classicism within Christianity as the form Raphael conceived to describe it. The programme grew out of the functions this Stanza had: its regular one that of a library; its more formal one that of a meeting place for the Papal tribunal of the Segnatura (seal), usually presided over by the Pope in his capacity of chief officer of the canon and the civil law.²⁶ The theme of law could be taken in the context of this room as a province of its normal function of a library, for it was the habit of the time to arrange libraries by 'faculties' like those in the contemporary university. For the walls of the Segnatura, then, four 'faculties' were selected for illustration as having most pertinence to the thinking of the Papal court and the most generalizable significance. Obviously, in this

room, these included Law and, no less obviously, Theology, but also the two faculties that displayed the 'humanist' aspects of contemporary Roman thought, Philosophy and the Poetic Arts. To illustrate Theology, the programme gave Raphael the theme of an imaginary council of the great defenders of the dogmas of the Roman Church, supervised by a heavenly senate of saints and prophets and presided over by the Trinity [14]. The fresco is traditionally titled *Disputa*, and its disputation (not dispute) concerns the doctrine of transubstantiation, a matter of great general importance for Catholic theology which was at the same time highly topical, as well as a particular concern of Pope Julius. The opposite wall, given to the illustration of Philosophy (the *School of Athens*), is an ideal assembly of the great philosophers of the ancient world, led jointly by Plato and Aristotle [15]. In the juxtaposition of Christianity with pre-Christianity, one seeking revelation and the other possessed of it, there is an analogue - but in humanistic terms that are more respectful of the illumination of the Ancients - to the scheme of the Sistine Chapel. The wall to the right of the *School of Athens* personifies the arts in a gathering of classical authors and modern humanists and poets, presided over by Apollo and his Muses.²⁷ Finally, on the wall across the room the Law is represented. On the lower portion of this wall, to either side of a separating window, are the historical foundations of civil and canon law, in the latter of which Pope Julius acts the part of the giver of the Decretals, Gregory IX; and on the upper portion of the wall is the representation of the three Virtues Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude, which complement the Virtue of Justice.

Each illustration is an ideal generalization in the situation invented for it and in the east-of-characters who act it out, but it is a still higher generalization at which the programme aims. It intends to describe not only the dignity of

each 'faculty' but their ideal community. Theology and Philosophy lie across from one another, contrasted not as irreconcilable opposites, but as complementary avenues to truth, one them, as complementary avenues to truth, one by faith and spiritual revelation, the other by reason and observation. Poetry and Art, which men create by inspiration, contrast with but also complement the Law, which man administers by deliberation and by precedent. The different disciplines and seemingly opposite ways in which men work within them are matched and balanced to form together a unity of intellectual endeavour. Reason and faith, discipline and inspiration, become four walls of one temple of the human mind. On the ceiling, personifications of each 'faculty', accompanied by smaller illustrative episodes, are interlocked in theme in a way that demonstrates still more closely that a unity is meant.

Raphael apparently began painting on the ceiling late in the winter of 1508, displacing the Sienese, Il Sodoma, who had been engaged earlier for the painting of this room and had started it, setting the ceiling's system-of-compartimentation.²⁸ The painting of the ceiling occupied Raphael until some time in 1509. In the course of working on it Raphael acquired, from the stimulus of his first extensive contact with antique art, the capacity to make the human form actively, entirely articulate, as had rarely been required of him before. No less important, this time was an interval in which Rome, Julian as well as ancient, could work its aggrandizing effect on Raphael, so that when he began painting on the walls he was prepared to feel and to conceive on an appropriately Roman scale.

The disputation pictured in the first of the wall frescoes is about the Eucharist, which Raphael has set out on an altar in the centre of the vast arched picture field as its true protagonist, and as if the scene should half symbolize, half represent, an enactment of a Mass



14. Raphael: *Disputa*, c. 1509. Vatican, *Stanza della Segnatura*

[14]. The whole design focuses on the Eucharist, and depends in form and sense on relations to it. Echoing the shape of the wall, the disputants and their holy witnesses have been disposed in simple, grandly sweeping semicircles that enclose the altar. Their close-packed forms create the semblance of an architecture which, in an inspired interaction between form and meaning, is the apse of a church. This shape has a clarity, harmony, and spaciousness, as well as a sense of scale, like that of an actual architecture, but it also has the flexibility of the living forms out of which it has been made. As in a real architecture, the solids of the composition not only shape but give aesthetic personality to the space that they enclose. There is no longer, in this pictorial structure, the contrast

usual in earlier Renaissance painting between solids and a measured void; instead there is a unity in which space acts as complement to and in concert with the solid forms. This was the first time such a pictorial idea had been expressed on large scale; it is a middle term in the evolution of a classical mode of relation between substances and space in which Leonardo's *Adoration* stands at one end and, as we shall see, Raphael's Tapestry Cartoons at the other.

The figures that populate this structure have grown beyond Raphael's former scale, magnified along with the structure and the grandeur of the idea they and it express. Full forms, recollecting the antique, convey a decorum - even more, a stately grace - that may reflect

but more likely ennobles the ideal of behaviour of the classicizing Roman court. The figures act as if in complement to one another, making differentiated consonance; yet each figure seems to have been welded into an association with its group: the group makes a formal and expressive chord of which the resonance is much more than the result of an addition of its parts. Each group is then distinguished from yet ineluctably related to the next to make a richly charged, finally inclusive harmony of whole design. This manipulation of a harmony exceeds in both extent and quality what Raphael or any of his predecessors in the High Renaissance style had done before.

The fresco celebrating the arts, *Parnassus*, was most probably executed within 1510. Its theme combines with the effect of longer residence in Rome to stimulate Raphael to a more evident relationship with ancient classicism. The scene evokes into visible life an antique world a neo-Latin poet might have conceived, lyrically warm and populated by beings who, as Raphael has shaped them, are less reconstructions after antique art than regenerations of the ancient classic figure style. They are arranged in a design of which the armature is a rhythmic continuity of particular melodiousness, exactly consonant with the sense of the given theme. The movement of design has a variety – an alternation of rich arabesque and yielding pause – more developed than in the *Disputa*. The next fresco, the *School of Athens* [15], executed probably from late 1510 to mid 1511, also summons up an antique world, but in a different mood from the *Parnassus*, not sensuously warm but crystalline, in an atmosphere of high clear thought. A Bramantesque architecture, lucid, grand, and simple, makes a stage and sets the tenor of the action on it. Contrasting in form and idea with the fictive church architecture of the *Disputa* opposite, this man-made architecture symbolizes the structure of intellect and reason the philoso-

phers have built. Within this structure, on the various levels of its deep foreground space, Raphael distributes his figures in an order that absorbs the experience of both the *Parnassus* and the *Disputa*: this design has more variety than one and yet more grandiose stability than the other. The harmony of the image has been immeasurably enriched. Its figures are in part not different in scale or in expressive value from the classicizing actors of the *Parnassus*, but the more prominent of them have again been magnified in both of these dimensions, answering in size and breadth of action to a grander and more vital state of mind. They move in and occupy space with powerful assertiveness, and as they do they charge it – far more evidently than had been the case in the *Disputa* – with the emanation of their energies. As groups of figures and, finally, the whole figure design enclose space, shaping it, acting in and on it, and filling the air that it contains with energies, space altogether ceases to be conceivable as void and becomes nearly palpable, a kind of plastically responsive aether. Interacting thus, space and substance become parts of an experiential unity. The *School of Athens* also employs a traditional perspective space, and its working and that of the space formed by the figures have been fused, but it is the latter that represents the classical development.²⁹

The thought that is so essentially concerned with the relation between substances and space – or, less abstractly put, between the human figure and its environment – is a painter's mode of thought, different in profound ways from the aesthetic contemporaneously projected on the Sistine Ceiling by Michelangelo. Yet the *School of Athens* contains the first certainly identifiable indices of the action of the Sistine Ceiling upon Raphael, obviously in terms of figure style – not just in motifs or effects of form, but in an ambition to a comparable spiritual scale; as the comparison provoked by Raphael's own imitation reveals, the ambition



15. Raphael: The School of Athens, c. 1510-11. Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura

was not realized. But what Raphael's images of men may lack in force or stature by contrast with Michelangelo's they compensate for by their diversity. Like Leonardo before him, the mature Raphael continues to believe in the function of art as comment on the multiform experience of the world. Where Michelangelo's art is the expression of a lonely psyche and his creatures in the Sistine Chapel are images of man in an essential isolation, the *School of Athens* – and the frescoes of the Segnatura room in general – speak of the community of men: they are representations of the greatness man may attain and promote in social course. More overtly than in Michelangelo, Raphael's tableaux convey an ethic along with their aesthetic sense, implying identity between beauty and human good.

On the last wall of this Stanza to be executed (late 1511), Raphael maintains a Michelangesque dimension to depict the three allegorical figures who represent the Virtues of Law; however, below them in the two histories of the giving of the canon and the civil law he purposely descends from this high level towards naturalism. Both these scenes intend an effect close to illusionism, enough asserted in the one still clearly legible, the *Canon Law*, so that the reference in it to a past historical event is almost submerged in its look of actuality, made with perspective, lighting, and actors who are portraits of real members of the Papal court.³⁰

From the moment of his arrival in Rome Raphael's main function was that of a decorator, and during the three years of his work on

the Stanza della Segnatura he was more nearly exclusively so occupied than he would permit himself to be at any later time in his career. He had not as yet evolved the shop system which soon after was to enable him to diversify his efforts in proportion as, by means of assistants, he multiplied his hands. The few easel works contemporary with the Stanza della Segnatura were wholly his own doing: they include the *Madonna di Casa Alba* (Washington, National Gallery, c. 1509) and the large-scale altarpiece called the *Madonna di Foligno* (Rome, Vatican Museum), probably executed during 1511.

Later in 1511 or early in 1512 Raphael proceeded to the decoration of the Stanza adjoining the Segnatura on the east, since called, after the main fresco he painted there, the Stanza d'Eliodoro; this decoration was complete by mid 1514. The programme given Raphael was in a significant respect unlike that for the Segnatura, where his subject matter was not actions or events but situations symbolizing an idea — a kind of theme that was intrinsically suited to the mentality and forms of an idealizing classical style. In the Stanza d'Eliodoro he was asked instead to illustrate historical narratives, all of which conveyed how in various times and circumstances divine intervention had secured the safety of a threatened Church. When the decoration was conceived in the second half of 1511, the Papacy was in politically uncomfortable straits, and the programme appears simultaneously to intend prayer, affirmation, and prophecy.³¹ It is characteristic for the state of mind that Julius could inspire that, in the actual frescoes, it is the sense of affirmation that Raphael has caused to emerge most strongly — a temper surely reinforced as the situation of the Papacy very rapidly improved. Raphael has far exceeded the nominal requirement that he paint efficient narratives: he has taken the given subject as occasion for a content of dramatic triumph. The potential for this had of course to be in the programme, but to

exploit it was a matter purely of artistic choice. The dramatic animation that pervades the Stanza d'Eliodoro is a meeting of potential in the subject matter with Raphael's inclination and potential of development. The inclination may have been stimulated by Raphael's deepening awareness of the dramatic value of Michelangelo's contemporary painting, even though that was expressed in such concentrated, sculptural terms. In the Stanza d'Eliodoro, on the wide dimensions of his picture-maker's stage, Raphael proceeded to create his counterpart of Michelangelo's grand pathos, but in terms of history made near and present to us rather than, as in Michelangelo, heroically remote.

The four frescoes in the Stanza d'Eliodoro (the *Mass of Bolsena*, early 1512; the *Expulsion of Heliodorus*, second half of 1512; the *Repulse of Attila*, in progress in 1513; and the *Liberation of Peter*, of 1513 or early 1514) in general explore a region of classical style different from that attained in the Segnatura and which, in intensification of expressive content and elaboration of form, must be considered a development beyond it. The level of dramatic life Raphael seeks here requires that, before it, he should have found the sparkling and pervasive animation he instilled in the *School of Athens*. But there, and in the other tableaux of the Segnatura, this animation was infused into an ideal content, and a form consonant with it, that were basically stable; in the dramatic scenes of the new room it is the idea of activity that comes first, while the concept of stability and the mechanisms that insure it follow. The will to achieve a final and embracing harmony is no different than in the Segnatura, but to achieve it in these circumstances needs more complex means. In the Eliodoro frescoes the devices used to control and counterbalance action tend in themselves to be conceived of active elements, even in the architecture; in each of these scenes, harmony is achieved by

the manipulation of substances and forces more highly charged than in the Segnatura. The temper of harmony so made is, of necessity, not the same as that of the frescoes of the earlier Stanza. It is rich with energies and resilient that the Segnatura does not know: it is of a more complex, and also of a more distinct articulateness, and it is instilled with higher power.

Almost as much as in the Segnatura room there is, among the frescoes of the Stanza d'Eliodoro, a development from one to the other of the articulateness and diversity with which Raphael explores their shared proposition of a dramatic style. This is despite the fact of the contemporaneous invention, probably still within 1511, of the elementary ideas of

design for all four frescoes. As the time for the actual painting of each wall approached, the initial design for it was recast to suit the new resource that intervening experience in the fresco just before had brought to Raphael. This is not different, though it is less obvious in degree, from what we have observed occurring in the Stanza della Segnatura, where the elementary designs of the whole were also probably set down at inception. In the new room each fresco is conceived with a different power and kind of dramatic urgency, and in each Raphael invents new devices to express this urgency and, at the same time, discipline it into harmony.

The first fresco to be executed, the *Mass of Bolsena* [16],³² is still visibly related to the mode

16. Raphael: Mass of Bolsena, early 1512.
Vatican, Stanza d'Eliodoro

