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MICHELANGELO AND LEONARDO
THE FRESCOES FOR THE PALAZZO VECCHIO

by

Paula Rae Duncan

B.A. University of Montana. 1993

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

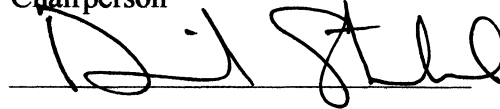
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Dean, Graduate School

6-3-04

Date

Michelangelo and Leonardo – Frescoes for the Palazzo Vecchio

Director: H. Rafael Chacón



Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti were two of the most well known and respected artists of the 15th and 16th centuries. In 1504 they were each commissioned to paint frescoes of scenes from two victorious Florentine army battles to decorate the Great Council Hall where members of the Florentine government met in the Palazzo Vecchio. These two talented artists competed against one another under the auspices of their patron, Piero Soderini, the highest magistrate of the Florentine government.

After drawing sketches and studies for his paintings, Leonardo began painting his fresco. However, due to the failure of an experimental technique in applying the paint to the wall, Leonardo's painting sloughed off the wall onto the floor, destroying most of a small portion of the fresco that he finished. Leonardo abandoned the project and moved to Milan. He never returned to Florence to finish his commission.

Michelangelo completed his preliminary drawings and cartoons for his frescoes. He never painted his frescoes on the wall. Pope Julius II called Michelangelo to Rome to begin a commission for sculpting figures for his tomb. Julius changed his mind about his tomb, and commissioned Michelangelo instead to paint the frescoes for the Sistine Chapel. He also abandoned the Soderini commission.

There is nothing left of what might have been the world's most famous frescoes by two men who had already established their reputations as artistic geniuses except a few drawings and copies made by other artists.

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In the years 1505 and 1506, the people of Florence, Italy were filled with anticipation for the embellishment of the Palazzo della Signoria, or Great Hall of Council, of the Palazzo Vecchio. The room was to be decorated with fresco paintings by one of the most renowned artists of his time, Leonardo da Vinci, and the young, up-and-coming sculptor Michelangelo Buonarroti. The Signori commissioned each artist to paint a battle depicting the victorious Florentine army, one scene from the Battle of Cascina in 1364 and the other from the Battle of Anghiari in 1440. These frescoes were intended for the benefit of the citizens and were, “to be an exaltation of the civic virtues from which the Florentine Republic was to derive its moral strength”.¹

The elder Leonardo was considered a genius at painting. Michelangelo was a neophyte in the art world at the time of this commission, but had already proven himself when he unveiled his sculpture of the *David* in Florence. The Signori chose them to paint the frescoes of the Council Hall as rivals pitted against each other. The competition for the fresco paintings on the walls of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome was a precedent that had been previously set. Between 1481 and 1483, Pietro Perugino, Sandro Botticelli, Cosimo Rosselli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Bernardino Pinturicchio competed against each other in the paintings of the lateral walls of the Sistine Chapel. The idea was that each would provide the best work that he was capable of creating, but one would not be outdone by the other.² Another close example was the contest between Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti

¹ Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo, A Study in Chronology and Style* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 83.

² http://www.groveart.com/shared/components/search_results/hh_article?section=art.018921.3

for the commission to sculpt the Baptistery doors for San Giovanni in front of Florence's Duomo in 1401. "By commissioning...artists to work together on a project, the patron, inviting rivalry, ensures the best effort from each participant".³ Michelangelo and Leonardo were thus engaged in a commission intended to encourage rivalry between them, and all under the approval of the state's highest officer. By painting their own battle scenes, they would be battling against each other.

Each artist was completely different from the other in his use of the medium, aesthetic philosophy, and personality. Leonardo was well known for his gentlemanly demeanor and pleasant social deportment, while Michelangelo already had an unpleasant, melancholic, and at times nasty, disposition. Leonardo was a painter who wrote of the superiority of his craft over that of the sculptor. Michelangelo was a sculptor who appreciated the three-dimensionality of his art over the illusion of the second dimension in painting. He did not consider himself a painter, although he had been trained by Domenico Ghirlandaio to execute frescoes.

Pietro Soderini, Magistrate of Florence, was familiar with Leonardo's reputation when he commissioned the Battle of Anghiari from him. Leonardo was at the pinnacle of his fame as a painter in 1503. A year later Soderini chose Michelangelo. Michelangelo's fame as an artist had been clearly established when he finished the sculpture of the *Pietà* in 1499 in the Vatican, and the *David* of 1504, in Florence's Piazza Vecchio. "Michelangelo crafted *David*, the defiant hero of the Florentine republic and, in so doing, assured his reputation...as an extraordinary

Accessed March 7, 2004.

³ Ibid.

talent”.⁴ That talent led Gonfalonier Soderini to choose Michelangelo for the other fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio, pitting him against Leonardo.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COMMISSION

The political climate in Tuscany in the first decade of the 16th century was unstable as a result of conflicts between rival feudal lords attempting to establish their own power base in the area. Tired of the constant upheaval from the battling aristocrats, Florentines fought for and gained their independence in the 12th century and established a Republican form government made up of twelve representatives from the aristocracy known as the *Commune*.⁵ In addition, a group of citizens, called the *Council of One Hundred*, met to decide important issues when called upon by the *Commune*.⁶

In the 13th century, as the population of Florence grew, its wealth and reputation also increased. It became, “one of the richest cities in the Christian world...[it] was regarded as the biggest city in Western civilization...with a population of almost 100,000 by 1300...Pope Bonifacius VIII believed [it] should be added as a fifth element...water, earth, air, fire and Florence”.⁷ By the end of the 14th century rival aristocratic families began once again to vie for control of the city and the government. A return to feudalism and control by a single leader or family was an irresistible temptation for the wealthy elite who fought the representational form of government that had been established.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rolf C. Wirtz, *The Art and Architecture of Florence* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2000), 9.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

Groups of ideologically polarized civic factions formed from many of the wealthy families and began a violent assault on their enemies. As a result, the elite began to build enormous fortresses with towering defensive turrets that filled the skyline of the city in order to protect themselves against attack from hostile neighbors. Often they would bombard each other with explosive projectiles, launched from tower to tower over the homes of the poorer citizens. One such faction, the bourgeois merchants and bankers called the Guelphs were advocates of the reigning Popes. Meanwhile, the aristocratic Ghibellines, were loyal to the Roman secular leaders of the 12th and 13th centuries. The factions fought fiercely for control of the area for several decades.

By 1293 the Guelphs, whose members had become extremely wealthy and politically influential, had gained control of the wool merchants' guilds. Eventually, they took over the government and renamed their bureaucracy the *primo popolo*, literally the "first people".⁸ They gained exclusive political supremacy and simply ignored all the other smaller guilds not involved in the trading or manufacturing facets of the prosperous textile industry. As a result, the poorer classes who made up the guilds of the artisans and lower-scale merchants combined their organizations and formed an association of Minor Guilds.⁹ The large numbers of guild members produced even further conflicts within the government, demanded that the ruling party also hear their voices, and stipulated that they receive representation in the Council.

⁸ Alessandro Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio* (Florence: Scala, 1989), 15.

⁹ Cecchi, 16.

The constitution of the city was ultimately revised in 1299 and representatives of the Minor Guild were included in administrative decisions. The office of Gonfalonier of Justice, or magistrate, was established to preside over the meetings of the Commune that now included representation of all the guilds. The guilds took over the state, which had become a true people's government, the first representative republican form of government established in Italy.

The Palazzo Vecchio was built to accommodate the increased numbers of new representative guild members in the revised government that now excluded rule by the elite aristocracy. As the seat of a government that would hopefully end the fighting in the city once and for all it became one of the most important buildings erected in Florence, built to serve as a central governmental building in the midst of the many fortresses of the 13th century. Construction of the building began in 1299 in an area close to the church of San Piero Scheraggio near the Arno River.¹⁰ An entire neighborhood of homes was demolished to open an area large enough to build the palace and its huge square. "In the same way as the Cathedral area [the Duomo] [represented] the religious centre of the city...founded on Roman sites, so the Piazza della Signoria [Palazzio Vecchio] [represented] the secular centre".¹¹

In 1313, the supreme Council of the Commune moved into the building to carry out its duties.¹² Unfortunately, their positions in the government were short lived. By 1342, the Duke of Athens, Frenchman Walter de Brienne, began a successful campaign to return the power of the Council to the hands of one man

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Georg Kauffmann, *Florence, Art Treasures and Buildings* (New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1971), 142.

through violent force. However, after only one year his opponents rose up against him, forced him into exile and took over the Palazzo Vecchio. That unsuccessful coup attempt left a weakened Council and no individual powerful enough to assume the head of the government. Florence fell into a period of continuous decline for the next thirty years. In addition, during much of the 14th century the disastrous flooding of the Arno river, recurring episodes of famine, and the devastation and death caused by the Black Plague that killed nearly two-thirds of the Florentine population, also created chaos. As a result, several banks owned by affluent families collapsed, causing economic crisis as well.

In 1378, in a bloody revolt known as the *Ciompi Rebellion*, the wool workers of the city, tired of the corruption in the government and their downtrodden circumstances, tried to overthrow the wealthy merchant class. They attempted to put an end to, “a government which was becoming increasingly authoritarian, [that] gradually abolished all the civilized institutions of the Commune and the Republic.”¹³ Niccolò Machiavelli wrote of these events,

Those serious...enmities which occur between the popular classes and the nobility, arising from the desire of the latter to command, and the disinclination of the former to obey, are the causes of most ...troubles that take place in cities...animosities were brought to a conclusion by the contentions of our citizens... [the laws] of Florence [caused] the death and banishment of many of her best people .¹⁴

The wealthy Medici family returned from exile in 1434 during the Ciompi revolt, and took advantage of the power vacuum caused by the revolt. They stepped forward and once again created an oligarchy. As head of the family, Cosimo de'

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cecchi, 18.

Medici (the Elder) gained almost complete control over the bureaucracy. Although by definition it was a Republican form of government with representatives elected to serve the interests of the Florentine population, in reality, “all effective power became concentrated in [Cosimo’s] hands, for he was entirely responsible for the nominations to the major offices, all of which he carefully placed in the hands of his loyal supporters”.¹⁵

Under Cosimo’s reign there were only a few Council members needed to carry out the necessary duties of government.¹⁶ He appointed representative Priors, who supposedly responded to the interests of the people, while they voted according to the wishes of Cosimo in Council. When he became Gonfalonier in 1446, Cosimo presided over their meetings as the head of the Council, which were now held in the Palazzo Vecchio.¹⁷ The Palazzo Vecchio became the home of the Gonfalonier and Priors and they realized that renovations were needed to make the palace a more comfortable place for Cosimo and his officials to live. A larger room for the Council meetings, or the Council Hall, was also part of the ongoing reconstruction of the building during the time Cosimo ruled.

During the decades of dictatorial rule by the Medici family, Florence was transformed, “into a center of humanistic erudition...and with only a few short interruptions, [the Medici] would continue to influence the history and art of the city for almost three centuries”.¹⁸ Upon the death of Cosimo in 1464, his grandson

¹⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *History of Florence* (New York: The Colonial Press, 1901), 121.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ivor B. Hart, *The World of Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 76.

¹⁷ Cecchi, 18.

¹⁸ Wirtz, 12.

Lorenzo de' Medici, known as *Il Magnifico*, became a generous patron of cultural endeavors in literature, architecture and the arts.

One short interruption in Medici rule came at the end of the 15th century when Lorenzo's son Piero was expelled from Florence by the invading French. A radical monk name Girolamo Savonarola also contributed to his downfall. Savonarola gave sermons to the Florentines that promoted the formation of a theocracy under the guise of a republican form of government. "He prophesized the doom attendant on the city's luxury, license, corruption and general depravity and denounced the Borgia pope, Alexander VI".¹⁹ His zealous near-hysterical ranting eventually discouraged even his most ardent followers when Savonarola told them to give up the simplest pleasures in life. He ordered them to burn their books, jewelry and all luxuries in the "Bonfire of the Vanities". The republican government, in cooperation with the papacy, decided to stop the spread of his radical dogma and end the monk's life. In 1498 he was hanged in the Piazza della Signoria. His ashes were scattered indiscriminately to avoid the formation of a "posthumous cult".²⁰

THE COUNCIL HALL FRESCOES

A new government with a new constitution was formed in December 1494, "and the old Parliament, which in the hands of the Medici had become simply an instrument to perpetuate their autocracy, was dissolved"²¹. The Council Hall built by Cosimo the Elder was no longer large enough for the five hundred new representative members, chosen from the population of over 100,000 Florentines.

¹⁹ Linda Murray, *Michelangelo, His Life, Work and Times* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 35.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cecchi, 20.

Construction and renovations were immediately begun on the Palazzo Vecchio to accommodate them.

In less than a year, the new hall on the second floor of the Palazzo was completed and Piero Soderini, described as, “a man of integrity but of little strength of character,” became Gonfalonier with the aid of the politically astute Niccolò Machiavelli.²² The Great Council Hall, or *Salone dei Cinquecento*, was prepared for the citizen representatives to gather and carry out the civic duties of Florence.

Gonfalonier Soderini wanted to reunite the people after years of chaos and perpetual economic decline caused by the internal fighting between hostile the aristocratic families of Florence, the exile of the Medici and their money, and the theocratic fanaticism of Savonarola. He attempted to champion the glory of Florence and enhance the status of its citizens by revisiting, through fresco paintings, victorious historical battles over the city’s enemies. In addition, by decorating the hall where he presided over the meetings of members of the government, he also attempted to convey and exalt the importance of his own position.

The Gonfalonier wanted two frescoes of battles in which the Florentine army defeated the armies of Pisa in 1364 and Milan in 1440.²³ The images were political statements and propagandistic tools. As author Rona Goffen stated, “Civic pride required public monuments to memorialize the ideals and accomplishments of the state”.²⁴ Just as the statue of *David*, by Michelangelo, had become a civic symbol of the power and might of Florence when placed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio in

²² Hart, 98.

²³ Michael Levy, *Florence, A Portrait* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 82.

²⁴ Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 150.

1504, the battle scenes in the Council Hall would also become secular metaphors for the glory of Florence over her enemies and invaders.

The battle scenes were to occupy the east wall of the Council Hall, a space measuring 202 by 40 feet (See Appendix A). In the center of the east wall stood a large desk from which Soderini presided over the meetings of the council. A window was placed on each side of the desk to allow light into the room. The desk and windows took up one-third of the wall. Soderini commissioned Leonardo to paint a scene from the Battle of Anghiari to the left of the desk. Although the original contract for Leonardo's commission dating from 1503 has not survived, Soderini recorded the revised version in May of 1504. Niccolò Machiavelli witnessed this second document, outlining the pay and the subject matter for the fresco (See Appendix B). The contract had strict guidelines, including a penalty clause for not finishing the work. One Leonardo biographer has written, "That such a revised agreement should have been necessary suggests that Leonardo had characteristically fallen behind schedule".²⁵ The document specified that Leonardo had already received 35 gold florins (about \$660 today) and would be paid 15 gold florins each month (about \$290 today). If he did not finish the contract by February of 1505 he would be 'obliged' to repay all the monies he had been given. In addition, Leonardo would have to give all the battle sketches and cartoons to Soderini.

The subject matter of Leonardo's fresco was the Battle of Anghiari, also known as the Battle for the Standard, which took place on June 29, 1440 between the

²⁵ Martin Kemp, *Leonardo Da Vinci, The Marvelous Works of Nature and Man* (Cambridge: Harvard

Florentine leader, Neri de Gino Capponi and his Papal troops, and Niccolò Piccinino, Duke of Milan.²⁶ Pope Eugene IV had provided an army to assist the Florentines in defeating Piccinino, who had deceived him into thinking he was an ally, but who instead invaded and confiscated the papal territory of Milan. The historical accounts of the battle were based upon the preserved dispatches written by Capponi to the Signori in Florence.

The battle began in the morning of June 29, 1440, St. Peter and St. Paul's Day, when Piccinino learned that the Florentine troops had gone a short distance from the town of Anghiari to feed their horses on nearby fields. Piccinino saw an opportunity for a surprise attack on the enemy camp, but the surprise strategy failed when a cloud of dust from the Milanese cavalry swirled high on the horizon, warning Capponi's troops that the enemy was advancing. He, in turn, sent nearly 500 troops to defend the road and a bridge that spanned the upper Tiber River, about eight miles from Anghiari.

The first encounter between the two armies that June morning lasted over four hours and was violent and bloody, with no decisive victory for either side. At first the Florentines pushed back the Milanese, but later that day Piccinino's troops retook the bridge and moved closer to Capponi's camp. The Florentines did not give up easily, however. With over 600 cavalry, they advanced again toward the bridge. Leonardo described the details of the battle in his *Notebook*, "Niccolò Piccinino pushed forward the remnant of his men...had it not been for the Patriarch [Capponi] setting himself in their midst and sustaining his captains by words and deeds, our

University Press, 1981), 237.

soldiers would have taken to flight...[but] the disorder was so complete that [Piccinino] and his followers took flight”.²⁷

In a fierce battle later that afternoon, Capponi eventually drove the enemy from the bridge. With artillery firing from a hill onto his Milanese soldiers, Piccinino was forced to retreat to the distant town of Borgo San Sepolcro, which they had previously occupied. The Florentine army pursued the fleeing Milanese, and killed all the soldiers except for the few who had first retreated. Although Piccinino was completely defeated, he remained in Borgo. The Florentines nevertheless feared that the Milanese, at a later more advantageous time and with the aid of mercenaries, would exact revenge on Florence for their losses. However, the Milanese leader left Tuscany and never returned, “enhancing the battle’s importance and making it worthy of being immortalized in the Council Chamber of the Palazzo Vecchio even sixty-three years later”.²⁸

A year after he hired Leonardo to paint in the hall, Soderini commissioned Michelangelo to paint the other side of the wall. Michelangelo was to paint a fresco with a scene from the Battle of Cascina in which the Florentine military was victorious over the army of Pisa in 1364. The scene Michelangelo chose for the fresco took place the day before the actual battle. It is known as “Soldiers Bathing”²⁹. Michelangelo may not have actually seen the cartoons that Leonardo had drawn, but he must have heard of them since Leonardo had been working on his

²⁶ Barbara Hochstetler Meyer, “Leonardo’s Battle of Anghiari,” *The Art Bulletin*, September 1984, 374.

²⁷ Irma A. Richter, Editor, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 353.

²⁸ Meyer, 371.

²⁹ Hart, 102.

mural for almost a year. It was a well-known subject of gossip among the citizens of Florence that Leonardo was working on a group of soldiers and horses for the Battle of Anghiari. Michelangelo did not want to repeat the same type of scene and subject matter in his own fresco. Instead he chose to portray nothing but nude figures. As Tansey states, “he based his whole art on his conviction that whatever can be said greatly through sculpture and painting must be said through the human figure”.³⁰ Moreover, by associating his figures with the nude figures of ancient Greek and Roman art, Michelangelo was also elevating Florentine heroism to the status of the ancients.

The Battle of Cascina took place during the conflict between Pisa and Florence in 1364. It began as a result of a visit to Pisa by Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV in 1355. During his stay, this well-known “weaver of politics” purloined large amounts of the Pisan treasury to fill his own pockets.³¹ After Charles left, the Pisans were desperate to regain financial solvency. They devised a way to tax trade items from other cities that flowed in and out of its port. This violated a peace treaty it held with Florence. In retaliation, Florence rerouted goods and merchandise through Siena and avoided having to pay the Pisan taxes. Many other Italian states also boycotted the Porto Pisano. Pisa then resorted to piracy, and began taking foreign ships near its port and forcing them to anchor at Pisa. This aggression outraged the Florentines who attacked Pisa in 1362.

Successes on the battlefield shifted back and forth between the two cities until 1364 when the Florentines, led by Galeotto Malatesta, defeated the Pisans

³⁰ Tansey, 648.

³¹ Mark Kishlansky, Patrick Geary, and Patricia O’Brien, *Civilization in the West*. New York:

decisively at the Battle of Cascina. He drove the enemy within the walls of Pisa after capturing several castles belonging to the Pisan aristocracy. The Pope intervened and forced the signing of a treaty that restored the pre-war trading conditions to Florence. Pisa was ordered to pay “100,000 gold florin in reparations”, adding insult to injury to their financial crisis.³²

The battle was, “an engagement which had been fought against the Pisans in 1364 and won...though not exactly brilliantly”.³³ In the period after the overthrow of the Medici, democratic civic leaders looked to the glory of the 14th century for validation. Humanist Coluccio Salutati, who became Chancellor or Latin Secretary for the Florentine Republic in 1375, wrote of the glory of Florence in 1403,

What city, not merely in Italy, but in all the world...
is more proud in its palazzi, more bedecked with
churches, more beautiful in its architecture, more
imposing in its gates, richer in piazzas, happier in
its wide streets, greater in its people, more glorious
in its citizenry, more inexhaustible in wealth,
more fertile in its fields?.³⁴

Through their frescoes in the Palazzo Vecchio, Leonardo and Michelangelo were expected to preserve the pride of the Florentine people.

Unfortunately neither artwork was completed as a result of unusual circumstances that occurred in both artists' careers and lives during 1506. The compositions are only known from a few remnant drawings and the copies and sketches drawn by contemporaries and recopied by later artists. Peter Paul Rubens,

Harper Collins, 1991), 293.

³² <http://www.Summary%2520of%2520Major-Major%2520Wars%25201250-1494.pdf> Accessed February 10, 2004.

³³ Cecil Gould, *Michelangelo: Battle of Cascina* (Newcastle upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne Press, 1966), 7.

for example, preserved the central group from Leonardo's incomplete fresco in a drawing that is now in the Louvre.³⁵ Rubens based his battle scene on drawings by an unknown artist who had copied Leonardo's sketches around 1550. There is another copy of the Battle for the Standard in oil on panel from around 1550, also by an unknown artist that was previously in the collection of the Prince of Naples, Doria d'Angri, as recorded in a 1766 guidebook of the city of Genoa.³⁶ The Doria painting clearly shows the parts of the composition that Leonardo had actually completed in 1506 [See Appendix C]. There are spaces and blank areas that indicate the unfinished state of the fresco.

As a contemporary artist and friend of Michelangelo, Aristotele da Sangallo copied the preliminary cartoons for the fresco. His composite drawing is now in the collection of the Earl of Leicester in England. Other sketches and drawings for the cartoons from the artist's hand show the figures of men and horses he intended to utilize in the final battle scenes.

LEONARDO

Leonardo, who had set up a studio in the Sala del Papa in the church of Santa Maria Novella, drew several horse and human studies for his fresco. He experimented with proportions and foreshortening, analyzed perspectives, and fully researched the history of the Battle of Anghiari. The battle itself was a difficult subject to portray, particularly choosing the right moment during the fight that could summarize the entire composition. The decision regarding which scene to choose, "added to the technical difficulties that stand in the way of a satisfactory

³⁴ Kishlansky, Geary and O'Brien, 346.

³⁵ This drawing by Rubens was done in watercolor with pen and ink and black chalk.

achievement...rarely has the artist been a witness of the battle he depicts; often he painted years and years after the actual occurrence...the artist's prime interest is in the picturesque".³⁷

The central image of Leonardo's battle scene was similar in form to a scene depicted on an antique cameo in the Medici family collection of antiquities. The dynamic scene of the *Fall of Phaeton* etched on the cameo shows four horses colliding in turbulent combat. A similar configuration of horses and men also appears in the background of Leonardo's unfinished painting of the *Adoration of the Magi* of 1481.³⁸ Leonardo seems to have had a particular passion for horses as they appear on many of the pages of his sketchbooks and notebooks. Vasari described Leonardo's ability to capture the power of this animal, "rage, hatred and revenge are no less visible in the men than in the horses."³⁹ Leonardo captured the fury of the encounter in the grimacing faces of the men and in the teeth-baring aggression of the horses. He originally sketched the proposed scene including drawings of several cavalymen and their horses in separate battle engagements. These figures covered a large plane on either side of the central battle. Arranged as a visual narrative, Leonardo drew figures of the Florentine troops on the right as they approached the central area of the confrontation, while the enemy army of Milan joined the fray from the left.

His fellow artists of the early 16th century and later biographers agreed that Leonardo was uncontested when it came to his depiction of the horse. The horses of

³⁶ Pedretti, 86. This painting is now in a private collection.

³⁷ Alfred Vagts, "Battle Scenes and Picture Politics", *Military Affairs*, Summer, 1941, 90.

³⁸ Kemp, 67.

³⁹ Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 127.

his battle scene were an integral part of the drama. These were “two prancing horses confronting each other, their haunches and bellies and necks, with tossed-back heads...in free and centrifugal movement...unbearably close knit and dense”.⁴⁰

Michelangelo, however, was the victor when it came to depicting the male nude seen in his battle cartoons, and especially after his unveiling of the *David* sculpture to the Florentines, a fact that Leonardo must have also realized. Michelangelo’s career and subsequent artistic endeavors, including the Sistine Chapel ceiling, proved this fact unequivocally.

In the center the fight for the enemy’s flag or standard was the focal point of the composition. Two rearing horses charge in the foreground; three soldiers on horseback raise swords against each other; and two enemy men on the ground collapse in a gesture of defeat. Leonardo sketched the battle for the enemy’s flag or standard dramatizing the violence inherent in war in which, “everyone, every man and horse, is in motion and interrelated to the other in...swirling activity”.⁴¹

Leonardo created a repetitive, spiraling composition that tied all the varying elements into one cohesive design. The horses’ manes and tails, flags, helmet feathers, and the furling scarves and capes of the men effectively convey the turbulence of the scene. One of the enemy horses brutishly bites the neck of the horse in the foreground on the right side. The Milanese soldiers in uncontrolled aggression, their arms flailing, with weapons in hand, contorted facial expressions, and wrenched postures, lend even greater drama to the scene.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 126.

⁴¹ Goffen, 152.

The Florentine soldiers, in contrast, appeared more constrained, owing to a popular notion at the time that they were fully confident in their precise and carefully planned tactics. The confidence of the soldiers through the visual propaganda of the painting would have promoted a sense of security in the citizens of Florence and trust in their cavalry to protect them.

Leonardo began to apply the fresco in the summer of 1505 after inventing moveable scaffolding that enabled him to easily reach the entire surface of such a huge wall. He had never before attempted to paint such an enormous area with so many figures, so much activity, and such a sweeping landscape. The two areas on the east wall of the Council Hall, designated for the two artist's murals, were each approximately 20 feet high and 55 feet long.⁴² This created a problem for Leonardo in postulating a logical perspective for the three narratives that were to take place in his design.

Leonardo had to consider another problem concerning perspective from the viewpoint of the audience. Although the mural was tall and wide, the distance from the entrance doorway on the west wall to the scene on the east wall was only about 70 feet. According to Claire Farago, applying one-point perspective would not have been a successful strategy in this situation since,

The sheer technical difficulty of constructing a unified outdoor setting on a colossal scale...would have created serious distortions in the [Council Hall], with its side lateral expanse and short viewing distance...[since the] recommended viewing distance of three, ten or even twenty times the size of the picture [was needed] to compensate for distortions.⁴³

⁴² Johnathan Wilde, "Michelangelo and Leonardo," *Burlington Magazine*, 1953, 71.

⁴³ Claire J. Farago, "Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari: A Study in the Exchange Between Theory and Practice". *The Art Bulletin*, June 1994, 309.

The other difficulty Leonardo had to overcome was in applying his new technique on the wall. There are several theories and many discussions put forth by art historians about the kind of paint, plaster and finish Leonardo used. He was experimenting with a new technique in fresco painting. Even Leonardo's own contemporaries wrote about the experimental recipes he might have tried, yet there is still no clear understanding of his technique. Some historians believe that Leonardo was experimenting with the ancient technique of encaustic application. In 1505, according to a record of payment Leonardo ordered 89 pounds of a material known as "Greek pitch".⁴⁴ Now known as rosin, it was a mixture of resin and wax. He may have wanted to use the pitch to seal the wall against the absorption of moisture and thus avoid one of the problems he encountered in *Last Supper* in Milan in 1495. There, the paint began to deteriorate soon after it was applied due to the damp conditions that existed in the building and the moisture that seeped up the walls from below.

Another thought regarding his preparation of the wall in the Council room is that Leonardo might have attempted to apply the pitch into the prepared plaster along with his color pigments. The resin would have sealed the surface with a glaze, the color infused within, so that it would not flake off as many traditionally frescoed surfaces have. Leonardo may have used an ancient technique that included a combination of the resin, linseed oil, and gesso to coat the surface of a wall prepared with a plaster made of pulverized brick dust. Ancient writers Pliny and Vitruvius had written that, "Greek painters developed an encaustic technique from a coarse varnish composed of resin and wax...used for waterproofing the hulls of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 312.

ships...colorless and fluid enough to be applied with a brush”⁴⁵ Oil paint could then be applied to the hardened surface, which gave the painting a luminescent quality.

In 1550 the Duke of Florence, Cosimo de' Medici (the Younger) commissioned Giorgio Vasari, to make alterations in the Council Hall. What was left of Leonardo's ruined fresco was either completely removed or plastered over in preparation for Vasari's battle scene frescoes. In any case, there is now nothing left of Leonardo's work to conclusively determine what formula he used. Vasari never described the mixture Leonardo used on the wall. All he wrote in the first edition of his *Lives* was that the failure of the mixture to adhere to the wall was due to the thickness of the resinous material when it was applied. This statement validates speculation among some art historians that Leonardo used a mixture that Vasari also used later. In 1558 he described attempts to use the resin and pitch varnish on his own frescoes, also without success.⁴⁶

The results of Leonardo's experimental wall treatment were disastrous. The varnish or resin he had used began to drip off the wall and took the paint with it. As Leonardo briefly stated in his *Memoranda* from 1505,

On the 6th of June 1505, a Friday, on the stroke of the thirteenth hour, I began to paint in the palace. At the very moment of laying down the brush, the weather broke and the bell started to toll, calling the men to court, and the cartoon came loose, the water spilled, and the vessel which had been used for carrying it broke. An suddenly the weather broke and the rain poured until evening and it was as dark as night.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 313.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Martin Kemp, *Leonardo on Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 264.

Although it was probably Leonardo's most important and prestigious commission he abandoned his painting in the Palazzo Vecchio in 1506 and left for Milan where he proceeded to work as an engineer and painter. Carlo Pedretti wrote that Leonardo, "left the work in a rage, since an early report points to the cause of the failure in the bad quality of the linseed oil assigned to him".⁴⁸ It is reasonable to assume that he stopped the work because of the poor condition of the prepared wall. Soon after Leonardo left Florence Soderini considered hiring Raffaello Sanzio (Raphael) as a replacement to finish the frescoes in the hall. In a letter to his uncle in 1508, the young Raphael asked for a letter of recommendation for Soderini. He stated, "[the recommendation] would be most useful to me, in view of a certain room to decorate, the commission of which has to come from him [Soderini]".⁴⁹

Soderini must have given up any hope of Leonardo returning to Florence to finish the frescoes. Leonardo already had a reputation for taking payments for several commissions but never finishing the work. A similar problem arose while painting the altarpiece for the Chapel of St. Bernard in the Palazzo Vecchio. It was finally completed seven years later by Filippino Lippi. The younger Lippi also finished Leonardo's altarpiece for the monastery of San Donato a Scopeto just outside Florence. Leonardo never completed the equestrian monument for the Sforza family in Milan, the *Adoration of the Magi* painting, or the altarpiece for the church of San Francesco Grande in Milan in 1483, even though he continued to receive payments from his patrons.

⁴⁸ Pedretti, 90.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Perhaps the reason Leonardo was unwilling or unable to complete his artistic obligations was that he never considered painting as important as his scientific and mathematical studies. Martin Kemp wrote that, “Leonardo’s inventory of works already suggests the expansion and proliferation of studies which devoured so much of the time which a more orthodox painter would use for making finished works”.⁵⁰ Isabelle d’Este, one of Leonardo’s patrons, requested a report on the progress of a painting of the Madonna she had commissioned from him. Her intermediary, Fra Pietro, wrote his mistress in 1501 that, “he [Leonardo] has done nothing...he is obsessed with geometry, being most disgruntled with the brush”.⁵¹

Additionally, Leonardo must have preferred Milan to Florence because he most definitely obtained a better financial arrangement there. “Florence was still nominally a republic, and the majority of artists operated on the time-honoured basis of remuneration for goods provided or services rendered”.⁵² This was not the situation under the patronage of the Sforza court in Milan who supported Leonardo’s elegant life-style on the expectation that he might produce artwork, clever military devices, plans for waterworks and canals, or architectural designs. He received a regular income without necessarily having to produce any tangible product in trade. His days of having to earn a living from his labors were over. Also, as a humanist and a genius, Leonardo was an asset to the Sforza court’s intellectual discussions.

Leonardo felt some pressure to maintain his status as the best Italian artist of the early 16th century. The competition with Michelangelo in the Council Hall surely forced him to consider the abilities of the younger contender. Rather than be

⁵⁰ Kemp, 92.

⁵¹ Ibid., 216.

publicly humiliated at the hands of Michelangelo, he retreated using the failed resin mixture as his excuse to quit the project.

Charles d'Amboise, the French governor of Milan, wrote to the Gonfalonier of Florence that Leonardo received a leave of absence from the Council Hall commission for three months but failed to return to finish the fresco.⁵³ Once he realized Leonardo would not complete the commission, Soderini wrote in a letter to the Bishop of Paris, "Leonardo da Vinci...has not comported himself with the Republic as one should, because he has taken a good sum of money and given small beginning to a large work that he was to execute".⁵⁴ Soderini chastised Leonardo and was especially upset after paying him a substantial amount of money in advance of the project. To add a further insult, Soderini publicly declared Michelangelo as the greatest artist in Italy and the entire world.⁵⁵

MICHELANGELO

In 1504, a year after commissioning Leonardo to paint the Council Hall, the Gonfalonier gave his approval for Michelangelo to paint the space to the right of the magistrate's desk on the east wall. "Gonfalonier Soderini..., to stage a competition with Leonardo, assigned Michelangelo that other wall: wherefore Michelangelo, to conquer [Leonardo]...undertook to paint [the other battle scene]".⁵⁶

Michelangelo had just completed his *David* in June, a sculpture made from an abandoned block of Carrara marble owned by the cathedral of Florence. Soderini had offered the marble to Leonardo. The block of marble was originally intended for

⁵² Ibid., 92.

⁵³ Richter, 360.

⁵⁴ Goffen, 155.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

a sculpture to be placed on one of the buttresses of the Florence Cathedral. An artist named Agostino de Duccio carved a large chunk from the base of the block and assumed that he had ruined the marble completely. To the amazement of the public and his patrons, Michelangelo took on the job and succeeded beyond all expectations. “Michelangelo phrased his first titan in terms of a civic guardian...David, standing with self-assured ease, his huge strong frame a pulsing but perfectly controlled bulwark against attack, his handsome face had [the appearance of] a threatening storm of justice against evil-doers...[it was] a symbol of righteousness”.⁵⁷

Michelangelo’s experience in painting frescoes began in the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio. There he also learned the important steps in preparing the plaster for the walls. Before he finished the sculpture of *David*, Michelangelo finished two paintings. His *Saint Anthony* and the *Stigmatization of Saint Francis* were his first two successful paintings.⁵⁸ An unfinished altarpiece for a bishop’s chapel in Rome, *Entombment*, and the *Manchester Madonna* were also paintings attributed to Michelangelo’s early career.

Although well recognized in Florence for his accomplishments in painting and sculpture, Michelangelo’s name first appeared in print in 1504 after he completed the sculpture of *David*. At age twenty nine Michelangelo challenged the well-established Leonardo who was forty-two and whose artwork could be identified

⁵⁶ Ibid., 143.

⁵⁷ Charles H. Morgan, *The Life of Michelangelo* (New York: Reynal & Company, 1960), 62.

⁵⁸ The unfinished *Entombment* is now in the National Gallery in London, England. The *Temptation of St. Anthony*, thought to be the ‘lost’ original of Michelangelo, is in a private collection. “Attempts have been made to identify this picture as Michelangelo’s lost work”. De Tolnay, The *Manchester Madonna* is in the National Gallery in London, England. The *Stigmatization of St. Francis of Assisi* was formerly in the church at San Pietro in

even without his signature. “With the determination of youth to prove itself, Michelangelo must have looked on Leonardo’s manifest success as a challenge that could not be denied”.⁵⁹ When Michelangelo accepted the commission, he most likely strove to be equal to or better than Leonardo, enabling him to gain instant fame in both mediums of painting and sculpture. Another possible motivation may have been monetary. By besting Leonardo, he would have undoubtedly elicited recognition from wealthy patrons.

Michelangelo began working on the enormous cartoons for his mural in October of 1506.⁶⁰ He lived in a room in the Dyer’s Hospital at Sant’ Onofrio at the government’s expense, near the Palazzo Vecchio. There he drew the plans for his enormous composition of soldiers bathing in the Arno River. According to documents from about 1370, the subject matter Michelangelo chose was described as follows:

The Florentine army was encamped by the Arno [river] in sweltering heat, and the men stripped to bathe in the river while their leader lay ill...Manno Donati realized that the army was ill prepared and undefended; he raised a false cry of alarm...revealing the weakness of the Florentine position. As a result the Florentines pulled themselves together, posted a guard, and won the following day with an attack on the Pisan flank.⁶¹

The subject was a scene from the day before the battle which he named “Soldiers Bathing”.⁶² He associated the figures in his fresco with the nude male hero figures from antiquity. “Nude forms and movement-these were the objectives of

Montorio, Rome, Italy and is now lost.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁰ Charles Clement, *Michelangelo* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1896), 24.

⁶¹ Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1974), 80.

⁶² Hart, 102.

Michelangelo's art...the artist could represent nude forms...without violating historical accuracy".⁶³ He flaunted his knowledge of human anatomy while, at the same time, maintaining the integrity of the historic event.

Michelangelo drew several sketches of twisting, contorted bodies interacting with one another in confusion after Donati shouted the false alarm. Aristotele de Sangallo's drawing is the only known image drawn directly from Michelangelo's original cartoon. Male figures in varying poses fill the scene. "This choice enabled him to draw more than a dozen over-life-size nudes in positions of extreme foreshortening, torsion and exertion – his favorite theme".⁶⁴

Unlike Leonardo's painting with its recognizable details of uniforms and insignias of the participants at Anghiari, Michelangelo chose instead to tell the story of his scene through generalized depictions of emotion, gestures and facial expressions. As far as we know, he was not interested in conveying historical facts or trivialities, but rather was interested in portraying the surprise, incredulity, and panic on the faces after the cry of alarm. According to Michael Duffy it was, "an impressive example of the artist's creative ability to subsume natural displays of alarm, haste, hurry, exertion, and eagerness...of the general emotion displayed by soldiers who desired to engage an attacking force".⁶⁵

After several months in seclusion, Michelangelo finished his cartoon. He moved it from his room at Sant' Onofrio to the Sala del Papa in the Palazzo Vecchio,

51 Tansey, 648.

⁶³ Wölfflin, 57.

⁶⁴ Hibbard, 80.

⁶⁵ Michael H. Duffy, "Michelangelo and the Sublime in Romantic Art Criticism", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, April 1995, 228.

where it could be seen side-by-side with Leonardo's cartoon. Vasari wrote that Michelangelo's drawing became,

a school for artists...those who subsequently studied it and made copies of the figures (as was done for many years in Florence by local artists and others) became excellent painters themselves...people who have seen these inspired figures declare that they have never been surpassed by Michelangelo himself or by anyone else, and that no one can ever again reach such sublime heights.⁶⁶

Apprentices studied the cartoon after Michelangelo transferred it to the Medici Palace when the project was abandoned by both artists. Unfortunately, these over-zealous students also cut pieces from it. They revered the drawing to such a degree that they considered each piece almost a sacred relic. Eventually all the pieces and scraps of drawing disappeared until there was nothing left of the original. Only a few of Michelangelo's figural studies remain along with Sangallo's rendition. The printmaker Marcantonio Raimondi did a series of engravings of the three figures, known as the *Climbers*. One soldier climbs up the bank from the water, a second leans forward over the bank reaching down to the water, and a third points off to the left of the composition.⁶⁷

Michelangelo never began the frescoes in the Council Hall. Pope Julius II called him to Rome in March of 1505 to work on the sculptures for his monumental tomb to be located in the new St. Peter's Basilica. Three years later he began to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

THE RIVALRY

⁶⁶ Murray, 24.

⁶⁷ Goffen, 154.

Leonardo was a social creature. In his treatise on *The Life of the Painter*, he explained that solitude was not good for the soul of the artist.⁶⁸ He wrote, “if you say I shall withdraw so far apart that...words will not reach me, and will cause me no disturbance, I for my part would say that you would be held to be mad”.⁶⁹

Michelangelo, in contrast to Leonardo, chose to execute his cartoons in private and refused to allow anyone to see them until he had finished. “Whereas Leonardo characteristically opened his studio to visitors and made works in progress readily available, Michelangelo locked his doors and hid his unfinished works from view”.⁷⁰

Vasari wrote in his biography that Michelangelo, “never wanted others to see [the cartoon]”.⁷¹

Michelangelo, however, was not necessarily anti-social as some historians have written. His handpicked biographer and devotee Ascanio Condivi wrote that Michelangelo, when not involved in an artistic endeavor, also enjoyed the company of others. In a letter to a friend Michelangelo wrote, “[friends] asked that I go to dinner with them; in this I took the greatest pleasure because my melancholy...left me for awhile...even more I enjoyed the discussions that took place”.⁷² He simply preferred to be alone, without interruption, while working on his art. Vasari reaffirmed that Michelangelo, “did not enjoy solitude...it [was] necessary that one who wishes to attend to studies of that [art] flee from company”.⁷³

⁶⁸ Kemp, 205.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Goffen, 120.

⁷¹ Goffen, 147.

⁷² David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 11.

⁷³ Goffen, 147.

Between 1523 and 1527 Bishop Paolo Giovio described Michelangelo as a man of contradictions.⁷⁴ His skill in creating sculptures was unsurpassed by any contemporary artist, and Giovio declared that, “no one since the Ancients had carved marble with more skill”.⁷⁵ Michelangelo’s clothing was often filthy, covered with dirt and marble dust. When he worked on a sculpture, he slept in a corner of his studio on a pile of hay, and rarely changed his clothing. Vasari explained that Michelangelo, later in his life, “constantly wore dog skin leggings on his bare flesh for whole months at a time, which, when he wanted to remove them, often pulled away his own skin”.⁷⁶ Rona Goffen suggests that probably the only time Michelangelo was clean and dressed in finery was when he was placed in his coffin.

Giovio personally favored Leonardo and wrote that he was, “by nature affable, sparkling, generous, with an extraordinarily beautiful face”.⁷⁷ He had a keen wit and was described as, “beguiling in conversation”.⁷⁸ Kenneth Clark wrote that Leonardo was, “elegant, ...calmly aware of his superiority to the average of mankind”.⁷⁹ Michelangelo, on the other hand, had an aggressive, often fiery temper, was prone to violent rages or *terribilità*, and harbored deep animosities toward people he considered his rivals or enemies.

Leonardo was the son of a wealthy nobleman. He had a gentleman’s deportment perfumed himself, dressed in the finest attire, curled his hair, and donned fancy, plumed hats. His manners were impeccable and the tenderness of his heart

⁷⁴ Paolo Giovio was the first biographer to write about the lives of the famous 16th century artists Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael.

⁷⁵ Murray, 7.

⁷⁶ Goffen, 149.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁷⁸ Rachel Annand Taylor, *Leonardo the Florentine* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928), 43.

was demonstrated when he bought caged birds at the markets and set them free. He was described as a handsome man, tall, who was very strong, yet gentle. One historian wrote that Leonardo was, “beautiful in countenance, strong as a Titan, generous, with numerous servants and horses, and fanciful furniture; a perfect musician, poet, sculptor, anatomist, architect, engineer, mechanic, a friend of princes and kings”.⁸⁰

Michelangelo could not have been more different. Although his family was of noble origin, they had lost the bulk of their inheritance. His father’s only source of income was from a small farm he had inherited, so the family often lived on the edges of poverty. Physically, Michelangelo was of average stature, although muscular. He was extremely self-conscious of his looks and considered himself ugly because of his disfigured nose, supposedly broken by fellow apprentice Torrigiano dei Torrigiani, who punched him during an argument.

In many ways these two artists were completely opposite from one another, not just in their personalities, but also in their artistic philosophies and preferred mediums. As one art historian suggests, “[their] professional confrontation [in the Council Hall] was exacerbated by their animosity: Leonardo and Michelangelo were like oil and water”.⁸¹ Their differences were based on deep, individualistic belief systems and philosophies related to the meaning of life, beauty, faith, and art.

Leonardo was analytical and scientific. He believed that knowledge was gained from logical conclusion and deduction or experience. He wrote,

To me it seems that those sciences are vain and full of error

⁷⁹ Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo Da Vinci* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958), 83.

⁸⁰ Herman Grimm, *Life of Michelangelo* (Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1896), 51.

⁸¹ Goffen, 145.

which are not born of experience, mother of all certainty, and that are not tested by Experience; that is to say, that do not at their origin, middle, or end pass through any of the five senses...how much more should we question the many things...such as the existence of God and the soul and the like which there are endless disputes and controversies...All true sciences are the result of Experience that have passed through our senses...Experience does not feed investigators on dreams, but always proceeds from accurately determined first principles, step by step in true sequences to the end...so that the tongues of argument are silenced.⁸²

On the other hand, Michelangelo was a man who appeared to be filled with intense emotion and passionate convictions about all facets of his life, whether it was his religion, relationships with friends and family, politics, his art or poetry. Leonardo's questioning the existence of God must have appeared blasphemous to Michelangelo, who was a devout Catholic. Michelangelo's mind was, "filled with ideas [about] good and evil, suffering, purification, unity with God, peace of mind-which to Leonardo seemed meaningless abstractions-but to Michelangelo were ultimate truths".⁸³ Michelangelo understood Leonardo to be a man with little or no conviction about anything. Leonardo had no political allegiance, no loyalty to anyone, did not practice any religious faith. Michelangelo, therefore, considered him an opportunist. Michelangelo, "hated the enemies of his party and of his faith, hated still more those who had neither party nor faith. Brutally and publicly, on many occasions, Michelangelo made Leonardo feel his aversion for him".⁸⁴

According to the Codex Aonimo Magliabechiano from 1544, on one occasion, as Leonardo was carrying on a discussion with a group of Florentine

⁸² Richter, 5.

⁸³ Ibid.

gentlemen, Michelangelo walked within hearing range of the group. The men called to him to participate in a discussion on the meaning of a particular passage from Dante's writings. Leonardo suggested that Michelangelo explain it. Michelangelo assumed that Leonardo was mocking him, and replied, "You explain it yourself, you who have made the design of a horse to be cast in bronze but who was unable to cast it and abandoned it in shame".⁸⁵ As he was walking away from the group Michelangelo added, "and so they believed you did those capons the Milanese".⁸⁶ Shortly after this incident, perhaps in response to the acidic comment, Leonardo wrote in the *Codice Atlantico*, that one must have patience when, "you meet with great wrongs and they will then be powerless to vex your mind".⁸⁷

Of course, Michelangelo was referring to the bronze horse for the Sforza. Leonardo had promised the prominent Milanese family that he would, "undertake the commission of the bronze horse, which shall endue with immortal glory and eternal honour the auspicious memory of your father and of the illustrious house of Sforza".⁸⁸ He never finished the horse because he wanted to cast the entire sculpture all at once. In addition, Ludovico Sforza, his patron, was suffering financial difficulties and could no longer afford the huge amount of bronze necessary to build the statue. Leonardo only completed a clay model of the monument. The conquering French army destroyed it when they used it for bow and arrow target.

⁸⁴ Romain Rolland, *Michelangelo* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1930), 19.

⁸⁵ Goffen, 148.

⁸⁶ Edward McCurdy, *The Mind of Leonardo Da Vinci* (New York, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), 91.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.

Michelangelo could also have been commenting on Leonardo's failure to keep his promises and complete the other projects he proposed. Leonardo had drawn plans for battle armaments for the Milanese army to use against the invading French. He had also promised to design and complete new irrigation canals and serve as architect for the rebuilding of the city of Milan. None of his ideas went any further than plans on paper. The French ultimately succeeded in taking Milan militarily in 1512 and Leonardo left the city shortly thereafter and returned to Florence.

Their dislike for one another found fertile ground in many other areas as well. Leonardo's artistic theory, often rooted in mathematical and geometrical formulations, was diametrically opposed to Michelangelo's. Michelangelo felt that in the process of artistic composition and imitation of nature, the naked eye replaced all mathematical equations, calculations or measurements. Vasari noted that Michelangelo said, "it was necessary to keep one's compass in one's eyes and not in the hand, for the hands execute, but the eye judges...the judgement of the eye is more reliable than compasses or instruments".⁸⁹ Ironically, according to several biographical accounts, Michelangelo also made proportional studies of the male figure using mathematical formulations (See Appendix D and E).⁹⁰ Condivi wrote that Michelangelo planned to write his own treatise on figurative proportions, but this never came to fruition.

The rivalry between Michelangelo and Leonardo may have begun when the statue of the *David* was finished. A meeting of Florentine artists took place in Michelangelo's studio to decide where to place the statue. Many of the members,

⁸⁹ Robert J. Clements, *Michelangelo's Theory of Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 31.

including Leonardo, thought it would be best to put the marble sculpture inside the Loggia dei Lanzi, a large public hall across from the Palazzo Vecchio used for public celebrations.⁹¹ Beneath the loggia the statue would be protected from the weather. Others thought it would take up too much room in the hall. Some artists suggested the *David* should be placed inside a church, but a few, including Michelangelo, thought it should be placed outside the entrance of Palazzo Vecchio, which was considered the most honored location in the city. Leonardo continued to express his preference in the Loggia to the further consternation of Michelangelo. Finally, another artist declared it was up to the artist to decide where the statue should go and he chose the entrance to the Palazzo. The entire discussion irritated Michelangelo who, “felt that Leonardo’s expression of opinion had amounted to a cold refusal to acknowledge the greatness of his work”.⁹²

Probably the biggest differences between these two artists were their respective opinions about the superiority of painting over sculpture and sculpture over painting. Leonardo wrote in his *Notebooks*,

Painting is more beautiful, more imaginative and richer in resource, while sculpture is more enduring, but excels in nothing else. Sculpture reveals what it is with little effort; painting seems a thing miraculous, making things intangible appear tangible, presenting in relief things which are flat, in distance things are near at hand.⁹³

He also wrote that the art of painting lent itself to a gentlemanly way of life.

Sculpture was a manual labor.

The sculptor in creating his work does so by

⁹⁰ These studies are now exhibited in the Casa Buonarroti in Florence, Italy.

⁹¹ Antonina Valentin, *Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 347.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 349.

⁹³ Richter, 205.

the strength of his arm...accompanied by great sweat which mixes with the marble dust and forms a kind of mud daubed all over his face. The marble dust flours him all over so that he looks like a baker: his back is covered with a snowstorm of chips, and his house is made filthy by the flakes and dust of stone. The exact reverse is true of the painter...[who] sits before his work... well dressed...and moves a very light brush dipped in delicate color; and he adorns himself with whatever clothes he pleases. His house is clean and filled with charming pictures... accompanied by music...they are not mixed with the sound of the hammer or other noises.⁹⁴

The painter could exhibit lights and shadows, add color to the canvas, foreshorten figures and create the illusion of depth and distance. For these artistic techniques the painter needed intelligence. He felt that the sculptor only recreated the shapes of things that already appeared in nature. To do this, the artist needed neither intelligence nor creativity. Sculpture, he said, “is not a science but a mechanical art, for it causes the brow of the artist to sweat and wearies his body.”⁹⁵

Almost three decades after Leonardo’s death, Michelangelo wrote a letter in 1547 to Benedetto Varchi a Florentine historian and his friend. In his letter he had the last word about which medium was the highest artform.

The more painting resembles sculpture, the better I like it, and the more sculpture resembles painting, the worse I like it. Sculpture is the torch by which painting is illuminated and the difference between them is the difference between sun and moon. If he who wrote that painting was more noble than sculpture understood as little about other things of which he writes - my servant girl could have expressed them better.⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

⁹⁴ Hibbard, 75.

⁹⁵ Robert Payne, *Leonardo* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), 159.

⁹⁶ Néret, 23.

Michelangelo stated that the difference between painting and sculpture was like the difference between the sun and moon. So were the personalities and dispositions of these two artists. The contest was definitely a chance for the younger challenger, Michelangelo, to test his mettle against the elder, more established artist Leonardo. Michelangelo had to prove to his patrons and fellow Florentines that he was capable of creating a composition equal to or better than Leonardo's. He pursued the opportunity to excel against his rival with vigor. Michelangelo relished the competition, which he seized as a means to best Leonardo and all other artists. By toppling the ultimate master painter, Michelangelo elevated his status in the art world and thereby attracted wealthy patrons, such as Pope Julius II, to commission his work. However, it was more for recognition as the best artist than for monetary rewards that motivated Michelangelo to compete.

Howard Hibbard wrote that Michelangelo's figurative compositions, with their twisting torsos, "exaggeration of poses and unnatural juxtapositions [these figures] verged on...mannerism".⁹⁷ Michelangelo introduced a new concept of configuration in which the subjects were rendered in the instant of physical movement and psychological agitation, themes, which later became central principles of Mannerist and Baroque art. He continued to paint and sculpt the frenzied figure, creating one masterpiece after another. One might argue that his mannerist architectural achievements were no less dynamic.

Leonardo, however, opposed mannerism in art when he warned artists of the hazards of embellishing the human figure. In clear reference to Michelangelo, he wrote, "O anatomical painter, beware, lest in the attempt to make your nudes display

all their emotions by a too strong indication of bones, sinews, and muscles, you become a wooden painter”.⁹⁸ He also wrote that the artist must avoid, “depictions of exaggeratedly muscular male forms, since they too readily resemble a sack of nuts, or even a bundle of radishes.”⁹⁹

Many of Leonardo’s biographers have noted that after the contest of the battle frescoes, the artist gave up painting for the most part. There are few examples of new artworks by Leonardo after 1508. He finished the *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, a project that he had started years earlier, made studies for and painted *Leda and the Swan*, which only exists in copies by his followers. He did, however, spend more and more time on figurative sketches, perhaps in response to Michelangelo’s exceptional portrayals of the human body. He continued further studies of plants and animals, and completed more detailed anatomical studies and dissections. Leonardo seemed to retreat into his scientific investigations, mathematics, and analysis of the flight of birds.

Artistic patrons sought younger artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo for commissions. They recognized that a new style that embodied more emotion, dynamism, and brilliant color was superior to the more restrained realism in the art of Leonardo, whose paintings came to symbolize of the qualities of naturalism and perfection of the High Renaissance. Based on scientific formulas of composition and form, his artwork was not about freedom or creativity, but rather proof of the scientific theories and mathematical formulas he gleaned from his observations of nature.

⁹⁷ Hibbard, 83.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 84.

Did he realize when he received fewer and fewer commissions that his importance in the art world had diminished, and that it was time to withdraw from painting? Leonardo's theories of art had been, for the most part, discarded by a younger generation of painters who were no longer interested in studying from nature. Eventually Leonardo left Italy altogether and went to France where he lived a life at court for the remainder of his years under the care and benefaction of Francis I, King of France.

The competition between Leonardo and Michelangelo to paint the Council Hall frescoes had a profound impact on art during the remainder of the Italian Renaissance and for the generations of artists that followed. Benvenuto Cellini wrote that young artists copied what many teachers from the art guilds considered Michelangelo's perfect rendition of nude figures in the Cascina cartoon, which they used to learn the skill of figurative drawing. Vasari added that they were, "the school of the world".¹⁰⁰ Students also copied the central theme, or what was left of Leonardo's fresco, but not with the same zeal as with Michelangelo's work.

The loss of Leonardo's fresco was tragic, but the fact that both artists abandoned the project and nothing remains of their finished cartoons, has been described by Cecil Gould as, "one of the most serious losses in the history of European art...most particularly the loss of the opportunity which would have been provided for a direct confrontation of the two greatest artistic geniuses of the Italian Renaissance".¹⁰¹ Amazingly, five hundred years after the artists began the project, and considering that there is little physical evidence left of it, art historians and

⁹⁹ Zöllner, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Gould, 14.

biographers of Leonardo and Michelangelo continue today to be intrigued by ‘what might have been’.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 16.

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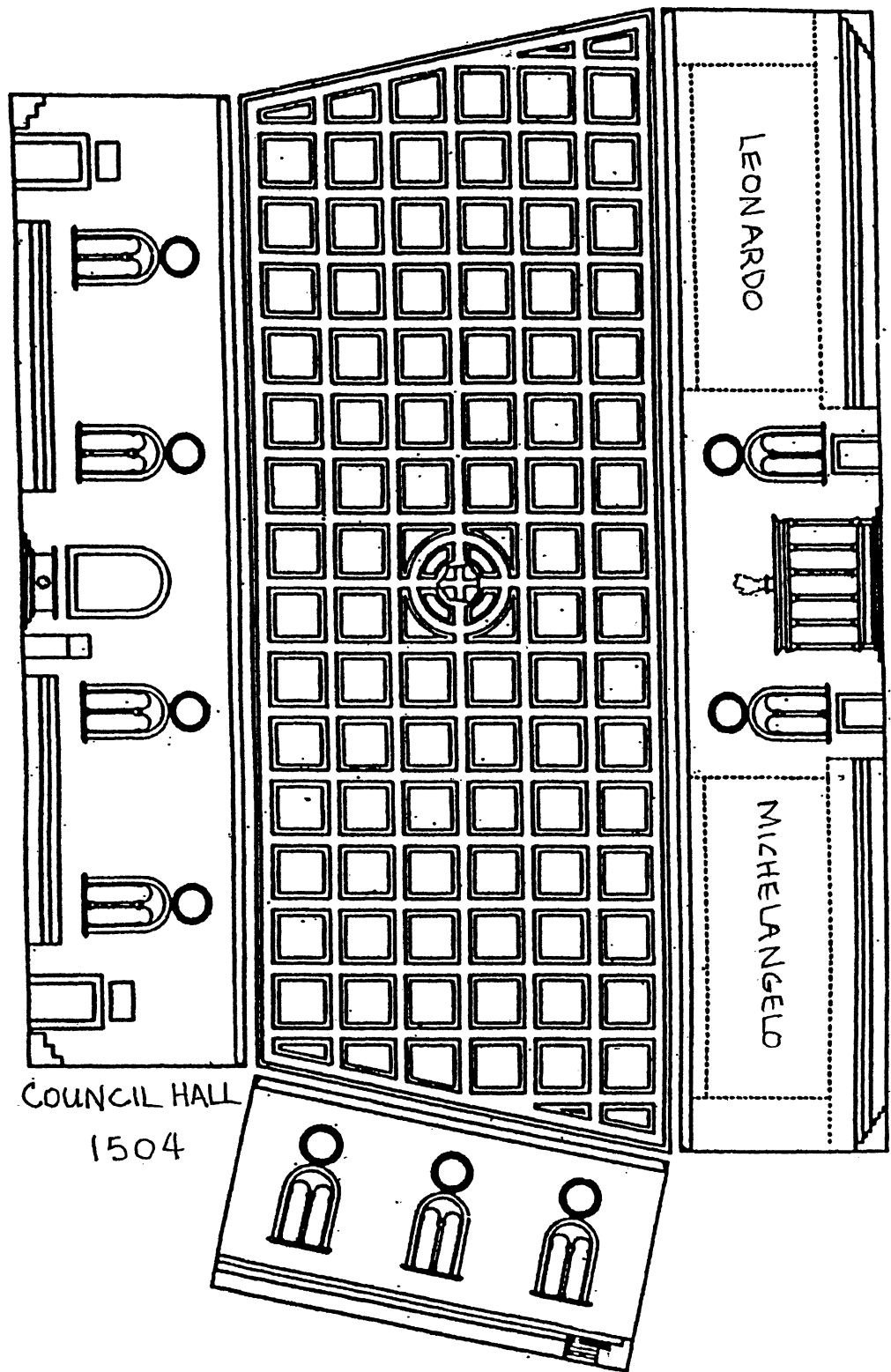
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APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B

CONTRACT FOR THE BATTLE OF ANGHIARI, 1504

May 4th, 1504

...The Magnificent and Sublime Signori, the priors of Liberty and the Standardbearer of Justice of the Florentine people, considering that several months ago Leonardo, son of Ser Piero da Vinci, and a Florentine citizen, undertook to do a painting for the Sala del Consiglio Grande, and seeing that this painting has already been begun as a cartoon by the said Leonardo, he moreover having received on such account 35 *fiorini larghi d'oro* in gold, and desiring that the work be brought as soon as possible to a satisfactory conclusion and that the said Leonardo should be paid a certain sum of money in instalments for that purpose they, the aforesaid Signori have resolved, etc., that the said Leonardo da Vinci is to have completely finished painting the said cartoon and brought it wholly to perfection by the end of February next (1504) without quibble or objection and that the said Leonardo be given in the meanwhile in payment each month 15 *fiorini larghi d'oro* in gold, the first month understood as commencing on 20th April last. And in the event that the said Leonardo shall not, in the stipulated time, have finished the said cartoon, then the aforesaid Magnifici Signori can compel him by whatever means appropriate to repay all the money received in connection with this work up to the said date and the said Leonardo would be obliged to make over to the said Magnifici Signori as much as had been done of the cartoon, and that within the said time the said Leonardo be obliged to have provided the drawing for the said cartoon.

And since it might occur that the said Leonardo will have been able to begin painting on to the wall of the said Sala that part which he had drawn and submitted on the said cartoon, the Magnifici Signori, in that event, would be content to pay him a monthly salary befitting such a painting and as agreed upon with the said Leonardo. And if the said Leonardo thus spends his time painting on the said wall the aforesaid Magnifici Signori will be content to prolong and extend the above mentioned period during which the said Leonardo is obliged to produce the cartoon in that manner and to whatever length of time as will be agreed by the said Magnifici Signori and the said Leonardo. And since it might also occur that Leonardo within the time in which he has undertaken to produce the cartoon may have no opportunity to paint on the wall but seeks to finish the cartoon, according to his obligation as stated above, then the aforesaid Magnifici Signori agree that the painting of that particular cartoon shall not be commissioned from anyone else, nor removed from the said Leonardo without his express consent but that the said Leonardo shall be allowed to provide the painting when he is in a position to do so, and transfer it to

paint on the wall for such recompense each month as they will then agree and as will be appropriate...

Drawn up in the palace of the said Magnifici Signori in the presence of Niccolò, son of Bernardo Machiavelli, Chancellor of the said Signori, Marco Zati and Ser Giovanni di Romena, Florentine citizen, witnesses etc.¹

¹ Martin Kemp, *Leonardo on Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 271.

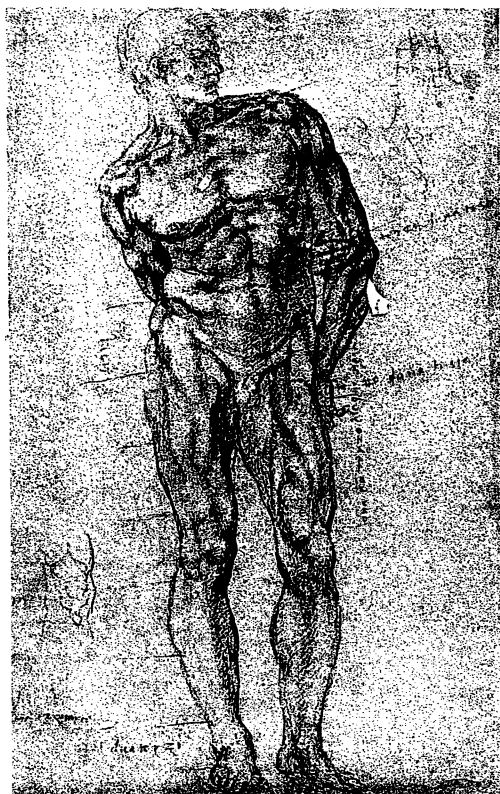
APPENDIX C



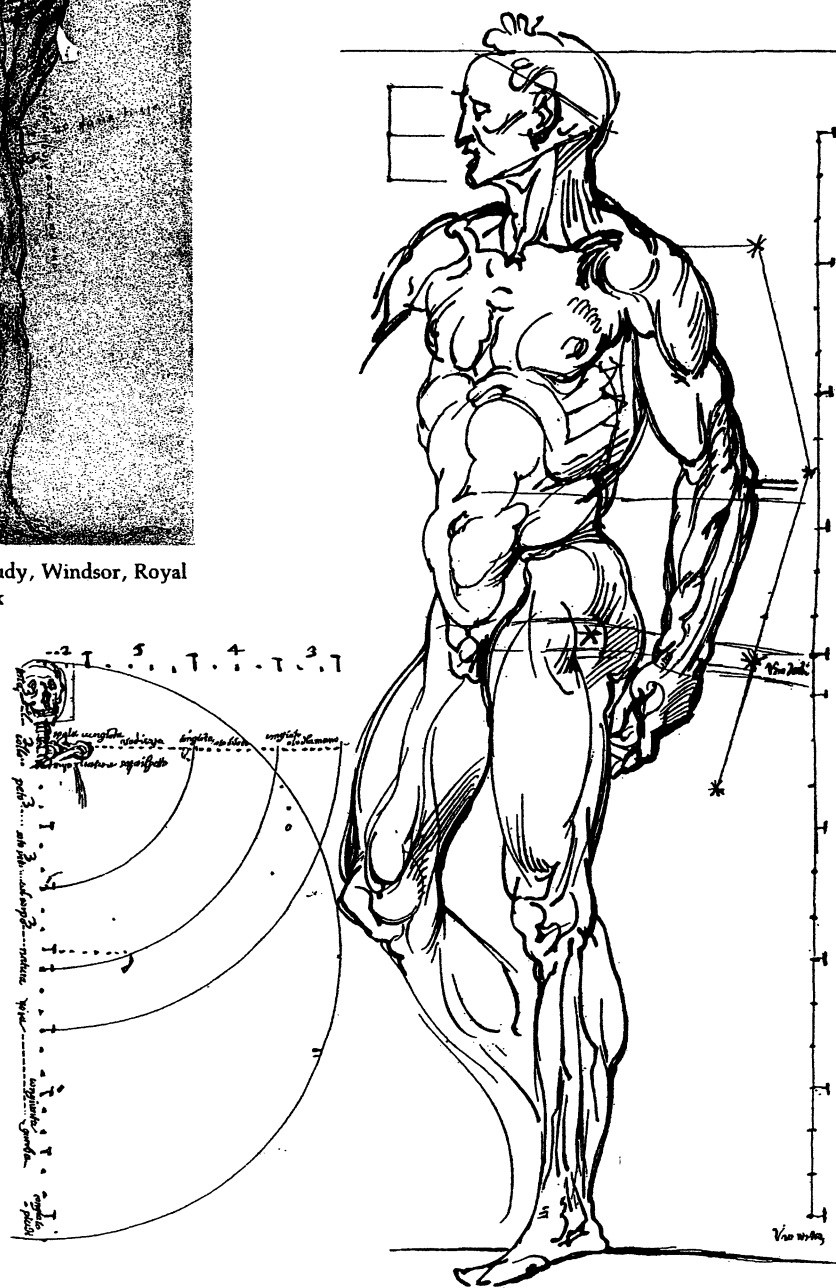
Unknown artist
Battle of Anghiari after Leonardo
(*tavola Doria*), 1503-1506
Oil on wood, 85 x 115 cm
Private collection

This very reliable copy shows the unfinished state of the wall-painting after Leonardo left Florence in 1506.

APPENDIX D AND E



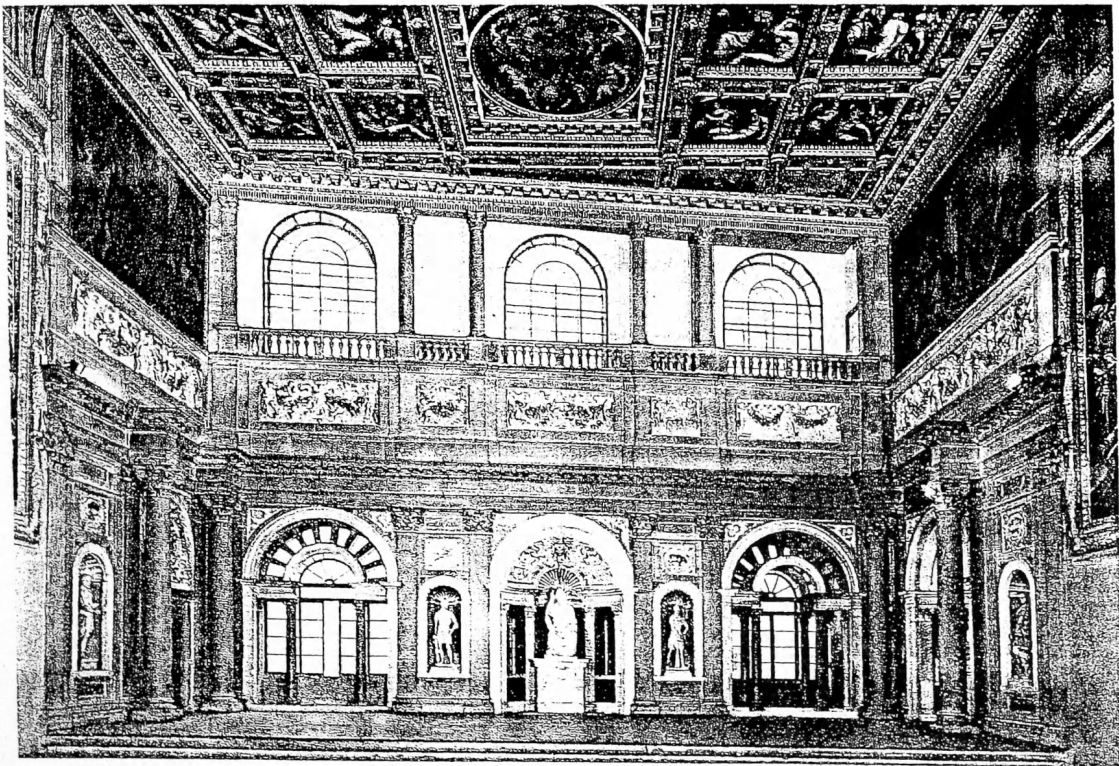
56. Michelangelo, Proportion study, Windsor, Royal Library. 28.9 x 18 cm., red chalk



57 After Giovanni Fabbri after Michelangelo, Proportion studies. From L. Choulant, *Geschichte und Bibliographie der Anatomischen Abbildung*



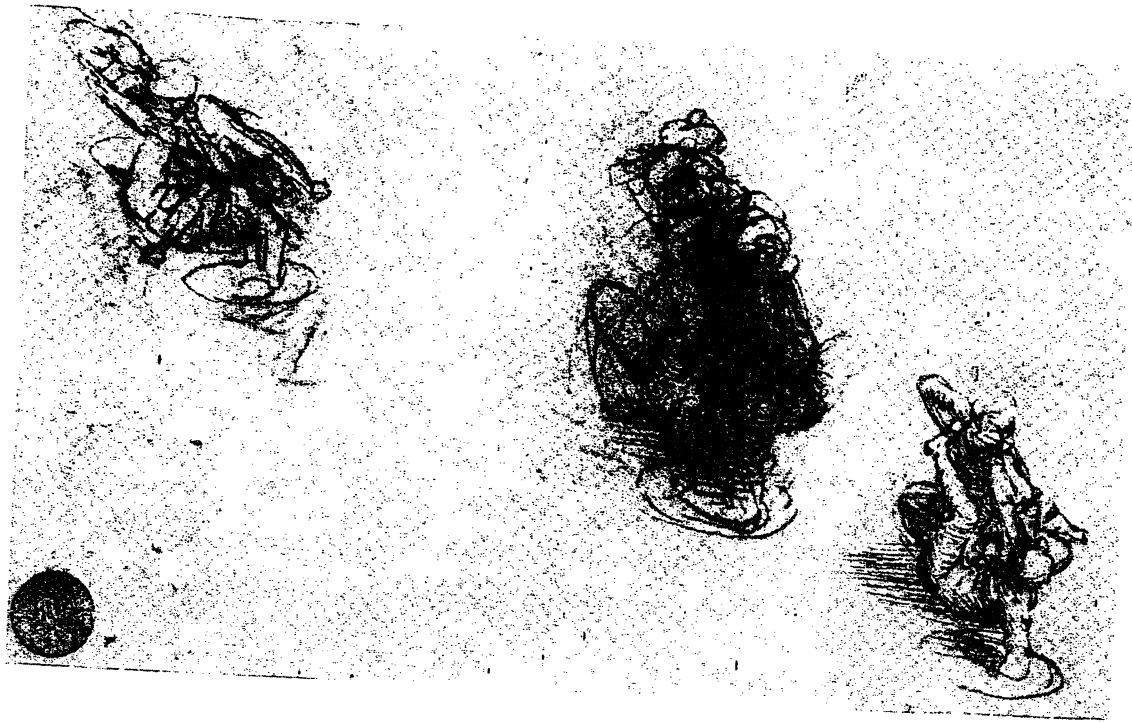
The Salone dei Cinquecento



The "Udienza" in the Salone dei Cinquecento

LEONARDO

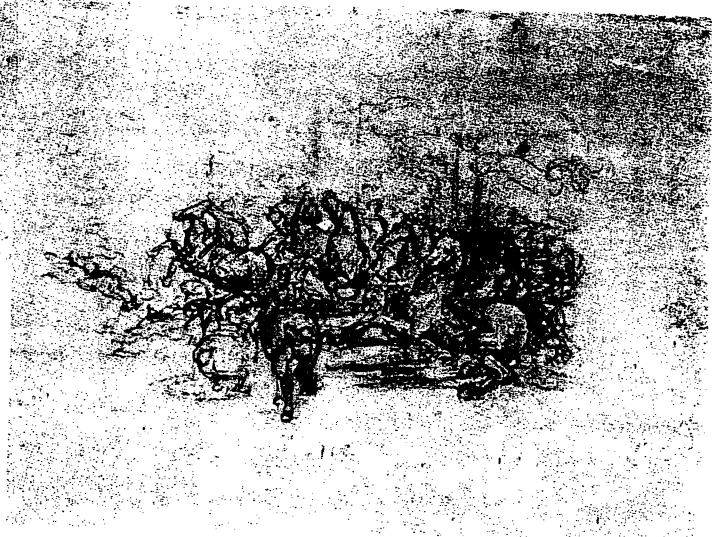
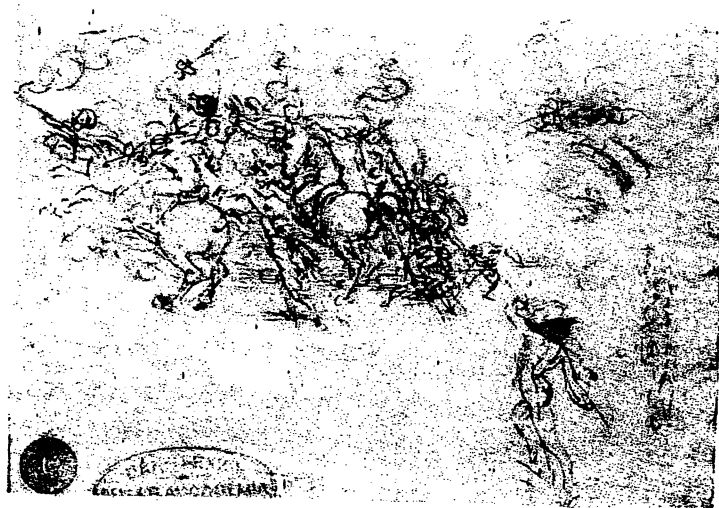






LEONARDO - STUDY FOR BATTLE OF ANGIARI

cat. 35







Pl.65 Peter Paul Rubens, *Copy of Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari* (based on the engraving by Lorenzo Zacchia), Paris, Louvre

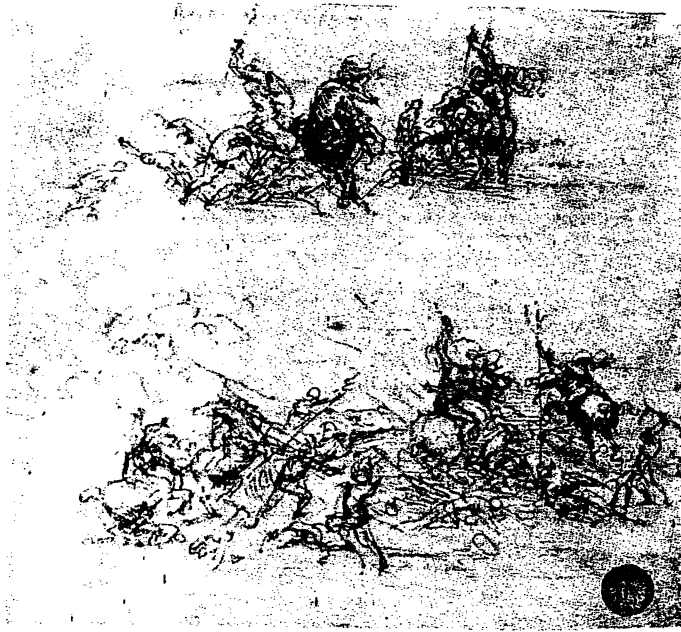
Fig. 9

Peter Paul Rubens, after Leonardo

The fight for the standard, black chalk, pen and
ink, wash, white and grey bodycolour,
452 x 637 mm (17¹/₁₆" x 25¹/₁₆").

Paris, Musée du Louvre





MICHELANGELO



SANGALLO







