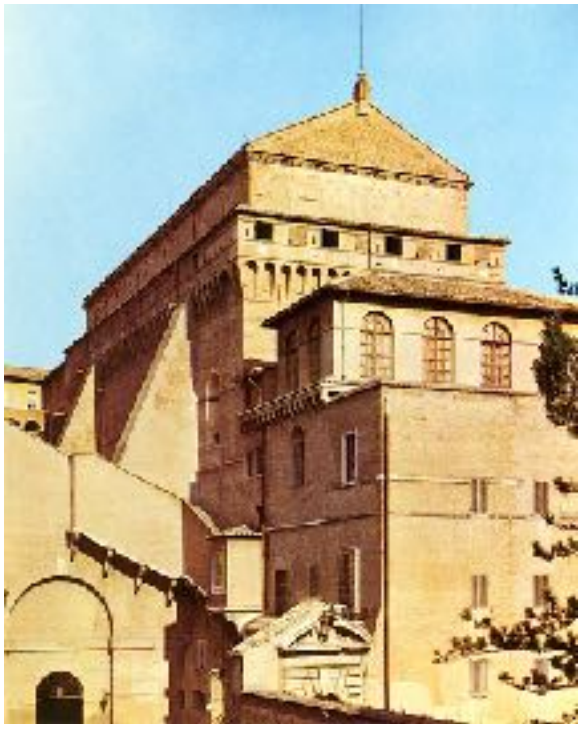
Cappella Sistina in Vaticano



Sistine Chapel (Italian: *Cappella Sistina*) is the best-known chapel in the Apostolic Palace, the official residence of the Pope in Vatican City. It is famous for its architecture, evocative of Solomon's Temple of the Old Testament, and its decoration which has been frescoed throughout by the greatest Renaissance artists including Michelangelo, Raphael, and Sandro Botticelli. Under the patronage of Pope Julius II, Michelangelo painted 12,000 square feet (1,100 m^2) of the chapel ceiling between 1508 and 1512. He resented the commission, and believed his work only served the Pope's need for grandeur. However, today the ceiling, and especially *The Last Judgement*, is widely believed to be Michelangelo's crowning achievements in painting.

The Sistine Chapel takes its name from Pope Sixtus IV, who restored the old Cappella Magna between 1477 and 1480. During this period a team of painters from Florence that included Pietro Perugino, Sandro Botticelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio created a series of frescoed panels depicting the life of Moses and the life of Christ, offset by papal portraits above and trompe l'oeil drapery below. These paintings were completed in 1482, and on August 15, 1483.

Since the time of Sixtus IV, the chapel has served as a place of both religious and functionary papal activity. Today it is the site of the Papal conclave.

History

The Sistine Chapel is best known for being the location of Papal conclaves; it is, however, the physical chapel of the Papal Chapel. At the time of Pope Sixtus IV in the late 15th century, this corporate body comprised about 200 people, including clerics, officials of the Vatican and distinguished laity. There were 50 occasions during the year on which it was prescribed by the Papal Calendar that the whole Papal Chapel should meet. Of these 50 occasions, 35 were masses, of which 8 were held in Basilicas, in general St. Peters, and were attended by large congregations. These included the Christmas Day and Easter masses, at which the Pope himself was the celebrant. The other 27 masses could be held in a smaller, less public space, for which the *Cappella Maggiore* was used before it was rebuilt on the same site as the Sistine Chapel.

The *Cappella Maggiore* derived its name, the Greater Chapel, from the fact that there was another chapel also in use by the Pope and his retinue for daily worship. At the time of Pope Sixtus IV, this was the Chapel of Pope Nicholas V, which had been decorated by Fra Angelico. The *Cappella Maggiore* is recorded as existing in 1368. According to a communication from Andreas of Trebizond to Pope Sixtus IV, by the time of its demolition to make way for the present chapel, the *Cappella Maggiore* was in a ruinous state with its walls leaning.

The present chapel, on the site of the *Cappella Maggiore*, was designed by Baccio Pontelli for Pope Sixtus IV, for whom it is named, and built under the supervision of Giovannino de Dolci between 1473 and 1481. The proportions of the present chapel appear to closely follow those of the original. After its completion, the chapel was decorated with frescoes by a number of the most famous artists of the High Renaissance, including Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Perugino, and Michelangelo.

The first Mass in the Sistine Chapel was celebrated on August 9, 1483, the Feast of the Assumption, at which ceremony the chapel was consecrated and dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The Sistine Chapel has maintained its function to the present day, and continues to host the important services of the Papal Calendar, unless the Pope is travelling. There is a permanent choir, the Sistine Chapel Choir, for whom much original music has been written, the most famous piece being Allegri's *Miserere*.

Exterior

The Chapel is a high rectangular brick building, its exterior unadorned by architectural or decorative details, as common in many Medieval and Renaissance churches in Italy. It has no exterior facade or exterior processional doorways, as the ingress has always been from internal rooms within the Papal Palace, and the exterior can be seen only from nearby windows and light-wells in the palace. The internal spaces are divided into three stories of which the lowest is huge, with a robustly vaulted basement with several utilitarian windows and a doorway giving onto the exterior court.

Above is the main space, the Chapel, the internal measurements of which are 40.9 meters (134 ft) long by 13.4 meters (44 ft) wide—the dimensions of the Temple of Solomon, as given in the Old Testament. The vaulted ceiling rises to 20.7 meters (68 ft). The building had six tall arched windows down each side and two at either end. Several of these have been blocked, but the chapel is still accessible. Above the vault rises a third story with wardrooms for guards. At this level, an open projecting gangway was constructed, which encircled the building supported on an arcade springing from the walls. The gangway has been roofed as it was a continual source of water leaking in to the vault of the Chapel.

Subsidence and cracking of masonry such as must also have affected the Cappella Maggiore has necessitated the building of very large buttresses to brace the exterior walls. The accretion of other buildings has further altered the exterior appearance of the Chapel.

Interior

As with most buildings measured internally, absolute measurement is hard to ascertain. However, the general proportions of the chapel are clear to within a few centimeters. The length is the measurement and has been divided by three to get the width and by two to get the height. Maintaining the ratio, there were six windows down each side and two at either end. The screen that divides the chapel was originally placed halfway from the altar wall, but this has changed. Clearly-defined proportions were a feature of Renaissance architecture and reflected the growing interest in the Classical heritage of Rome.

The ceiling of the chapel is a flattened barrel vault springing from a course that encircles the walls at the level of the springing of the window arches. This barrel vault is cut transversely by smaller vaults over each window, which divides the barrel vault at its lowest level into a series of large pendentives

rising from shallow pilasters between each window. The barrel vault was originally painted brilliant-blue and dotted with gold stars, to the design of Piermatteo Lauro de' Manfredi da Amelia. The pavement is in opus alexandrinum, a decorative style using marble and colored stone in a pattern that reflects the earlier proportion in the division of the interior and also marks the processional way from the main door, used by the Pope on important occasions such as Palm Sunday.

The screen or *transenna* in marble by Mino da Fiesole, Andrea Bregno, and Giovanni Dalmata divides the chapel into two parts. Originally these made equal space for the members of the Papal Chapel within the sanctuary near the altar and the pilgrims and townsfolk without. However, with growth in the number of those attending the Pope, the screen was moved giving a reduced area for the faithful laity. The *transenna* is surmounted by a row of ornate candlesticks, once gilt, and has a wooden door, where once there was an ornate door of gilded wrought iron. The sculptors of the *transenna* also provided the *cantoria* or projecting choir gallery.

Decoration

The walls are divided into three main tiers. The lower is decorated with frescoed wall hangings in silver and gold. The central tier of the walls has two cycles of paintings, which complement each other, *The Life of Moses* and *The Life of Christ*. They were commissioned in 1480 by Pope Sixtus IV and executed by Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, Perugino, and Cosimo Roselli and their workshops. These were the best fresco artists from Florence. The upper tier is divided into two zones. At the lower level of the windows is a *Gallery of Popes* painted at the same time as the *Lives*. Around the arched tops of the windows are areas known as the *lunettes* which contain the *Ancestors of Christ*, painted by Michelangelo as part of the scheme for the ceiling.

The ceiling was commissioned by Pope Julius II and painted by Michelangelo between 1508 to 1512. (See below)

Raphael's tapestries

In 1515, Raphael was commissioned by Pope Leo X to design a series of ten tapestries to hang around the lower tier of the walls. Leo intended the works to hang beneath a series of 15th century frescos that had been commissioned by Sixtus IV. Raphael was at the time twenty-five and an established artist in Florence, with a number of wealthy patrons, yet he was ambitious, and keen to make an entry into the patronage of the papacy. Raphael was attracted by the ambition and energy of Rome.

Raphael saw the commission as an opportunity to be compared with Michelangelo, while Leo saw hangings as his answer to the ceiling of Julius. The subjects he chose were based on the text of the Acts of the Apostles. Work began in mid-1515. Due to their large size, manufacture of the hangings was carried out in Brussels, and took four years under the hands of the weavers in the shop of Pieter van Aelst.

The tapestries were looted a few years later in the 1527 Sack of Rome and either burnt for their precious metal content or scattered around Europe. The tapestries depict events from the *Life of St. Peter* and the *Life of St. Paul* as described in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. In the late 20th century, a set was reassembled (several further sets had been made) and displayed again in the Sistine Chapel in 1983. The full-size preparatory cartoons for seven of the ten tapestries are known as the Raphael Cartoons and are in London.

Frescos

The wall paintings were executed by the most respected painters of the 15th century: Pietro Perugino, Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, Luca Signorelli and their respective workshops, which included Pinturicchio, Piero di Cosimo and Bartolomeo della Gatta. The subjects were historical religious themes, selected and divided according to the medieval concept of the partition of world history into three epochs: before the Ten Commandments were

given to Moses, between Moses and Christ's birth, and the Christian era thereafter. They underline the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, or the transition from the Mosaic law to the Christian religion.

The walls were painted over a relatively short period of time, barely eleven months between July 1481 and May 1482. The painters were each required first to execute a sample fresco; these were to be officially examined and evaluated in January, 1482. However, it was so evident at such an early stage that the frescoes would be satisfactory that by October 1481, the artists were given the commission to execute the remaining ten stories.

The pictorial program for the chapel was composed of a cycle each from the Old and New Testament of scenes from the lives of Moses and Christ. The narratives began at the altar wall - the frescoes painted there yielding to Michelangelo's Last Judgment a mere thirty years later - continued along the long walls of the chapel, and ended at the entrance wall. A gallery of papal portraits was painted above these depictions, and the latter were completed underneath by representations of painted curtains. The individual scenes from the two cycles contain typological references to one another. The Old and New Testaments are understood as constituting a whole, with Moses appearing as the prefiguration of Christ.

The typological positioning of the Moses and Christ cycles has a political dimension going beyond a mere illustrating of the correspondences between Old and New Testament. Sixtus IV was employing a precisely conceived program to illustrate through the entire cycle the legitimacy of papal authority, running from Moses, via Christ, to Peter, whose ultimate authority, conferred by Christ, ultimately to the Pope of present. The portraits of the latter above the narrative depictions served emphatically to illustrate the ancestral lineage of their God-given authority.

The two most important scenes from the fresco cycle, Perugino's *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter* and Botticelli's *The Punishment of Korah*, both contain in the background the triumphal arch of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who gave the Pope temporal power over the Roman western world. The triumphal arch makes reference to the imperial grant of papal power of the Pope. Sixtus IV was, thereby, not only illustrating his position in a line of succession starting in the Old Testament and continuing through the New Testament up to contemporary times but simultaneously restating the view of the papacy as the legitimate successor to the Roman Empire.

Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter

Among Perugino's frescoes in the Chapel, the *Christ Giving the Keys to St. Peter* is stylistically the most instructive. This scene is a reference to Matthew 16 in which the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" are given to St. Peter. These keys represent the power to forgive and to share the word of God thereby giving them the power to allow others into heaven. The main figures are organized in a frieze in two tightly compressed rows close to the surface of the picture and well below the horizon. The principal group, showing Christ handing the silver and gold keys to the kneeling St. Peter, is surrounded by the other Apostles, including Judas (fifth figure to the left of Christ), all with halos, together with portraits of contemporaries, including one said to be a self-portrait (fifth from the right edge). The flat, open square is divided by colored stones into large foreshortened rectangles, although they are not used in defining the spatial organization. Nor is the relationship between the figures and the felicitous invention of the porticoed Temple of Solomon that dominates the picture effectively resolved. The triumphal arches at the extremities appear as superfluous antiquarian references, suitable for a Roman audience. Scattered in the middle distance are two secondary scenes from the life of Christ, including the *Tribute Money* on the left and the *Stoning of Christ* on the right.

This fresco is located in the fifth compartment in the northern wall.

The style of the figures is inspired by Andrea del Verrocchio. The active drapery, with its massive complexity, and the figures, particularly several apostles, including St. John the Evangelist, with beautiful features, long flowing hair, elegant demeanor, and refinement recall St Thomas from Verrocchio's bronze group in Orsanmichele (a church in Florence). The poses of the actors fall into a small number of basic attitudes that are consistently repeated, usually in reverse from one side to the other, signifying the use of the same cartoon. They are graceful and elegant figures who tend to stand firmly on the earth. Their heads are smallish in proportion to the rest of their bodies, and their features are delicately distilled with considerable attention to minor detail.

The octagonal temple of Jerusalem and its porches that dominates the central axis must have had behind it a project created by an architect, but Perugino's treatment is like the rendering of a wooden model, painted with exactitude. The building with its arches serves as a backdrop in front of which the action unfolds. Perugino has made a significant contribution in rendering the landscape. The sense of an infinite world that stretches across the horizon is stronger than in almost any other work of his contemporaries, and the feathery trees against the cloud-filled sky with the bluish-gray hills in the distance represent a solution that later painters would find instructive, especially Raphael.

The fresco was believed to be a good omen in papal conclaves: superstition held that the cardinal who (as selected by lot) was housed in the cell beneath the fresco was likely to be elected. Contemporary records indicate at least three popes were housed beneath the fresco during the conclaves that elected them: Pope Clement VII, Pope Julius II, and Pope Paul III.

Scenes of the Life of Moses

Scenes from the Life of Moses
by Sandro Botticelli

Botticelli painted three scenes within the short period of eleven months: *Scenes from the Life of Moses*, *The Temptation of Christ* and *The Punishment of Korah*. He also painted, with much help from his workshop, in the niches above the biblical scenes, some portraits of popes, which have been considerably painted over. In all these works his painting appears relatively weak.

The *Scenes of the Life of Moses* fresco is opposite *The Temptation of Christ* also painted by Botticelli. The two pictures are typologically related in that both deal with the theme of temptation. Botticelli integrated seven episodes from the life of the young Moses into the landscape with considerable skill, by opening up the surface of the picture with four diagonal rows of figures.

The Punishment of Korah

The Punishment of Korah
by Sandro Botticelli

The message of this painting provides the key to an understanding of the Sistine Chapel as a whole before Michelangelo's work. The fresco reproduces three episodes, each of which depicts a rebellion by the Hebrews against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron, along with the ensuing divine punishment of the agitators. On the right-hand side, the revolt of the Jews against Moses is related, the latter portrayed as an old man with a long white beard, clothed in a yellow robe and an olive-green cloak. Irritated by the various trials through which their emigration from Egypt was putting them, the Jews demanded that Moses be dismissed. They wanted a new leader, one who would take them back to Egypt, and they threatened to stone Moses; however, Joshua placed himself protectively between them and their would-be victim, as depicted in Botticelli's painting.

The centre of the fresco shows the rebellion, under the leadership of Korah, of the sons of Aaron and some Levites, who, setting themselves up in defiance of Aaron's authority as high priest, also offered up incense. In the background we see Aaron in a blue robe, swinging his incense censer with an upright posture and filled with solemn dignity, while his rivals stagger and fall to the ground with their censers at God's behest. Their punishment ensues on the left-hand side of the picture, as the rebels are swallowed up by the earth, which is breaking open under them. The two innocent sons of Korah, the ringleader of the rebels, appear floating on a cloud, exempted from the divine punishment.

The principal message of these scenes is made manifest by the inscription in the central field of the triumphal arch: "Let no man take the honor to himself except he that is called by God, as Aaron was." The fresco thus holds a warning that God's punishment will fall upon those who oppose God's appointed leaders. This warning also contained a contemporary political reference through the portrayal of Aaron in the fresco, depicted wearing the triple-ringed tiara of the Pope and thus characterized as the papal predecessor. It was a warning to those questioning the ultimate authority of the Pope over the Church. The papal claims to leadership were God-given, their origin lay in Christ giving Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven and thereby granting him primacy over the young Church. Perugino painted this crucial element of the doctrine of papal supremacy immediately opposite Botticelli's fresco.

The Temptation of Christ

The Temptation of Christ
by Sandro Botticelli

The fresco which Botticelli began in July 1481 is the third scene within the Christ cycle and depicts the *Temptation of Christ*. Christ's threefold temptation by the Devil, as described in the Gospel

according to Matthew, can be seen in the background of the picture, with the devil disguised as a hermit. At top left, up on the mountain, he is challenging Christ to turn stones into bread; in the centre, we see the two standing on a temple, with the Devil attempting to persuade Christ to cast himself down; on the right-hand side, he is showing the Son of God the splendor of the world's riches, over which he is offering to make Him master. However, Christ drives away the Devil, who ultimately reveals his true devilish form.

On the right in the background, three angels have prepared a table for the celebration of the Eucharist, a scene that becomes comprehensible only when seen in conjunction with the event in the foreground of the fresco. The unity of these two events from the point of view of content is clarified by the reappearance of Christ with three angels in the middle ground on the left of the picture, where he is, it is apparent, explaining the incident occurring in the foreground to the heavenly messengers. We are concerned here with the celebration of a Jewish sacrifice, conducted daily before the Temple in accordance with ancient custom. The high priest is receiving the blood-filled sacrificial bowl, while several people are bringing animals and wood as offerings.

At first sight, the inclusion of this Jewish sacrificial scene in the Christ cycle would appear extremely puzzling; however, its explanation may be found in the typological interpretation. The Jewish sacrifice portrayed here refers to the crucifixion of Christ, who through His death offered of His flesh and blood for the redemption of mankind. Christ's sacrifice is reconstructed in the celebration of the Eucharist, alluded to here by the gift table prepared by the angels.

Michelangelo

Michelangelo Buonarroti was commissioned by Pope Julius II in 1508 to repaint the vault, or ceiling, of the Chapel. It was originally painted as golden stars on a blue sky. The work was completed between 1508 and 2 November 1512. He painted the Last Judgment over the altar, between 1535 and 1541, on commission from Pope Paul III Farnese.

Michelangelo was intimidated by the scale of the commission, and made it known from the outset of Julius II's approach that he would prefer to decline. He felt he was more of a sculptor than a painter, and was suspicious that such a large-scale project was being offered to him by enemies as a set-up for an inevitable fall. For Michelangelo, the project was a distraction from the major marble sculpture that had preoccupied him for the previous few years.

The sources of Michelangelo's inspiration are not easily determined; both Joachite and Augustinian theologians were within the sphere of Julius influence. Nor is known the extent to which his own hand physically contributed to the actual physical painting of any of particular images attributed to him.

Although Michelangelo's complex design for the ceiling was not quite what his patron, Pope Julius II, had in mind when he commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Twelve Apostles, the scheme displayed a consistent iconographical pattern. However, this was disrupted by a further commission to Michelangelo to decorate the wall above the altar with *The Last Judgement*, 1537-1541. The painting of this scene necessitated the obliteration of two episodes from the *Lives*, several of the *Popes* and two sets of *Ancestors*. Two of the windows were blocked and two of Raphael's tapestries became redundant.

Sistine Chapel ceiling

The **Sistine Chapel ceiling**, painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512, at the commission of Pope Julius II, is one of the most renowned artworks of the High Renaissance. The ceiling's various painted elements comprise part of a larger scheme of decoration within the Sistine Chapel which includes the large fresco of The Last Judgment on the sanctuary wall, also by Michelangelo, wall paintings by a team of the most highly regarded painters of the late 15th century including Botticelli and Perugino, and a set of large tapestries by Raphael, the whole illustrating much of the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Central to the ceiling decoration are nine scenes from the Book of Genesis of which the Creation of Adam is the best known, having an iconic standing equaled only by Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, the hands of God and Adam being reproduced in countless imitations.

Pope Julius II was a "warrior pope" who in his papacy undertook an aggressive campaign for political control, to unite and empower Italy under the leadership of the Church. He invested in symbolism to display his temporal power such as his procession, in the Classical manner, through a triumphal arch in a chariot after one of his many military victories. It was Julius who began the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in 1506, as the most potent symbol of the source of papal power.

In the same year, 1506, Julius II conceived a program to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. A draft by Matteo d'Amelia indicates that the ceiling was painted blue like that of the Arena Chapel and decorated with gold stars, possibly representing the zodiacal constellations. It is probable that because the chapel was the site of regular meetings and Masses of an elite body of officials known as the Papal Chapel who would observe the decorations and interpret their theological and temporal significance, it was Pope Julius' intention and expectation that the iconography of the ceiling was to read with many layers of meaning.

Michelangelo, who was not primarily a painter but a sculptor, was reluctant to take on the work. Also, he was occupied with a very large sculptural commission for the Pope's own tomb. The Pope was adamant, leaving Michelangelo no choice but to accept. But a war with the French broke out, diverting the attention of the Pope, and Michelangelo fled from Rome to continue sculpting. The tomb sculptures, however, were never to be finished because in 1508 the Pope returned to Rome

victorious and summoned Michelangelo to begin work on the ceiling. The contract was signed on 10 May 1508.

The scheme proposed by the pope was for twelve large figures of the Apostles to occupy the pendentives. However Michelangelo negotiated for a grander, much more complex scheme and was finally permitted, in his own words, "to do as I liked". His scheme for the ceiling eventually comprised some three hundred figures and took four years to execute, being completed in 1512. It is unknown and is the subject of much speculation among art historians as to whether Michelangelo was really able to "do as he liked". It has been suggested that Egidio da Viterbo was a consultant for the Theology. Many writers consider that Michelangelo had the intellect, the Biblical knowledge and the powers of invention to have devised the scheme himself. This is supported by Condivi's statement that Michelangelo read and reread the Old Testament while he was painting the ceiling, drawing his inspiration from the words of the scripture, rather than from the established traditions of sacral art.

Method

In order to reach the chapel's ceiling, Michelangelo designed his own scaffold, a flat wooden platform on brackets built out from holes in the wall near the top of the windows, rather than being built up from the floor which would have involved a massive structure and would have meant that the chapel was unavailable for services. According to Michelangelo's pupil and biographer Ascanio Condivi, the brackets and frame which supported the steps and flooring were all put in place at the beginning of the work and a lightweight screen, possibly cloth, was suspended beneath them to catch plaster drips, dust and splashes of paint. Only half the building was scaffolded at a time and the platform was moved as the painting was done in stages. The areas of the wall covered by the scaffolding still appear as unpainted areas across the bottom of the lunettes. The holes were re-used to hold scaffolding in the latest restoration.

Contrary to popular belief, he painted in a standing position, not lying on his back. According to Vasari, "The work was carried out in extremely uncomfortable conditions, from his having to work with his head tilted upwards". Michelangelo described his physical discomfort in a humorous sonnet accompanied by a little sketch.

The painting technique employed was fresco, in which the paint is applied to damp plaster. Michelangelo had been apprenticed in the workshop of Ghirlandaio, one of the most competent and prolific of Florentine fresco painters, at the time that the latter was employed on a fresco cycle at Santa Maria Novella and whose work was represented on the walls of the Sistine Chapel. At the outset, the plaster, *intonaco*, began to grow mold because it was too wet. Michelangelo had to remove it and start again. He then tried a new formula created by one of his assistants, Jacopo l'Indaco, which resisted mold, and entered the Italian building tradition.

Because he was painting *fresco*, the plaster was laid in a new section every day, called a *giornata*. At the beginning of each session, the edges would be scraped away and a new area laid down. The edges between *giornate* remain slightly visible, thus they give a good idea of how the work progressed. It was customary for fresco painters to use a full-sized detailed drawing, a *cartoon*, to transfer a design onto a plaster surface – many frescoes show little holes made with a stiletto, outlining the figures. Here Michelangelo broke with convention; once confident the *intonaco* had been well applied, he drew directly onto the ceiling. His energetic sweeping outlines can be seen scraped into some of the surfaces, while on others a grid is evident, indicating that he enlarged directly onto the ceiling from a small drawing.

Michelangelo painted onto the damp plaster using a *wash* technique to apply broad areas of color, then as the surface became drier; he revisited these areas with a more linear approach, adding shade and detail with a variety of brushes. For some textured surfaces, such as facial hair and wood grain, he used a broad brush with bristles as sparse as a comb. Altogether, Michelangelo's techniques show the skill that one would expect of Ghirlandaio's greatest pupil. He employed all the finest workshop

methods and best innovations, combining them with a diversity of brushwork and breadth of skill far exceeding that of the meticulous Ghirlandaio.

The work commenced at the end of the building furthest from the altar, with the latest of the narrative scenes, and progressed towards the altar with the scenes of the Creation. The first three scenes, from the story of Noah, contain a much larger number of small figures than the later panels. This is partly because of the subject matter, which deals with the fate of Humanity, but also because all the figures at that end of the ceiling, including the prophets and *Ignudi*, are smaller than in the central section. As the scale got larger, Michelangelo's style became broader; the final narrative scene of God in the act of Creation was painted in a single day.

The bright colors and broad, cleanly defined outlines make each subject easily visible from the floor. Despite the height of the ceiling the proportions of the *Creation of Adam* are such that when standing beneath it, "it appears as if the viewer could simply raise a finger and meet those of God and Adam". Vasari tells us that the ceiling is "unfinished", that its unveiling occurred before it could be reworked with gold leaf and vivid blue lapis lazuli as was customary with frescoes and in order to better link the ceiling with the walls below it which were highlighted with a great deal of gold. But this never took place, in part because Michelangelo was reluctant to set up the scaffolding again, and probably also because the gold and particularly the intense blue would have distracted from his painterly conception.

Some areas were, in fact, decorated with gold: the shields between the *Ignudi* and the columns between the Prophets and Sibyls. It seems very likely that the gilding of the shields was part of Michelangelo's original scheme since they are painted to resemble a certain type of parade shield, a number of which still exist and which are decorated in a similar style with gold.

Content

The main components of the design are nine scenes from the Book of Genesis, of which five smaller ones are each framed and supported by four naked youths or *Ignudi*. At either end, and beneath the scenes are the figures of twelve men and women who prophesied the birth of Jesus. On the crescent-shaped areas, or lunettes, above each of the chapel's windows are tablets listing the Ancestors of Christ and accompanying figures. Above them, in the triangular spandrels, a further eight groups of figures are shown, but these have not been identified with specific Biblical characters. The scheme is completed by four large corner *pendentives*, each illustrating a dramatic Biblical story.

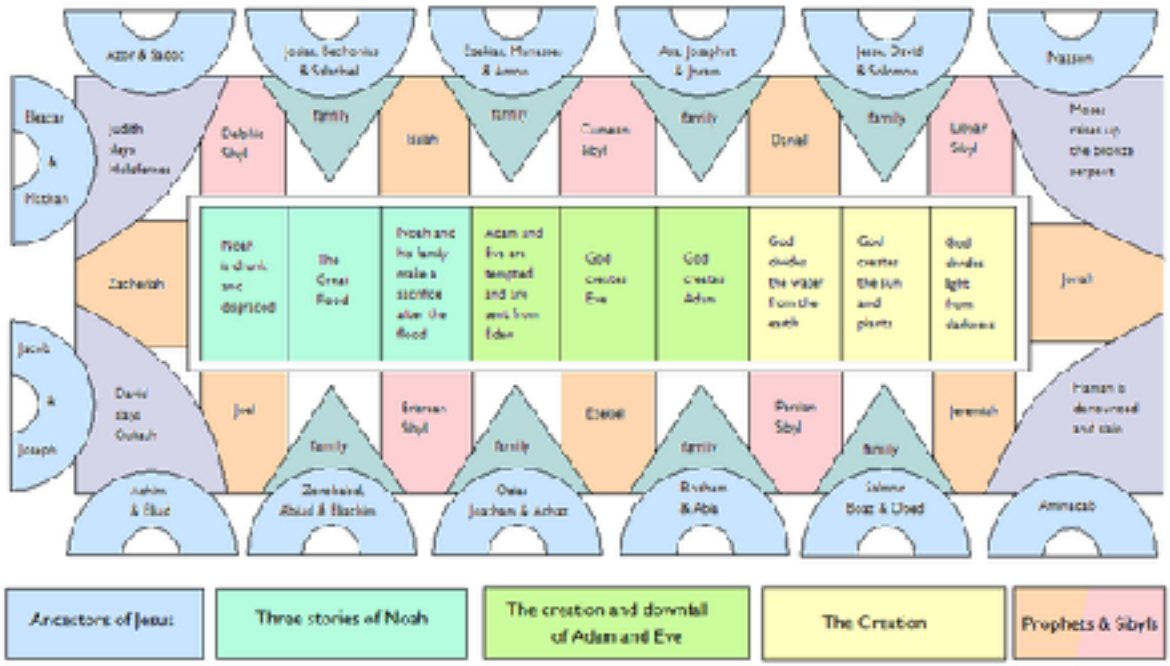
The narrative elements of the ceiling illustrate that God made the World as a perfect creation and put humanity into it, that humanity fell into disgrace and was punished by death and by separation from God. Humanity then sank further into sin and disgrace, and was punished by the Great Flood. Through a lineage of Ancestors – from Abraham to Joseph – God sent the savior of humanity, Christ Jesus. The coming of the Savior was prophesied by Prophets of Israel and Sibyls of the Classical world. The various components of the ceiling are linked to this Christian doctrine. Traditionally, the Old Testament was perceived as a prefiguring of the New Testament. Many incidents and characters of the Old Testament were commonly understood as having a direct symbolic link to some particular aspect of the life of Jesus or to an important element of Christian doctrine or to a sacrament such as Baptism or the Eucharist. Jonah, for example was readily recognizable by his attribute of the large fish, and was commonly seen to symbolized Jesus' death and resurrection.

While much of the symbolism of the ceiling dates from the early church, the ceiling also has elements that express the specifically Renaissance thinking which sought to reconcile Christian theology with the philosophy of Humanism. During the 15th century in Italy, and in Florence in particular, there was a strong interest in Classical literature and the philosophies of Plato, Socrates and other Classical writers. Michelangelo, as a young man, had spent time at the Humanist academy established by the Medici family in Florence. He was familiar with early Humanist-inspired sculptural

works such as Donatello's bronze David, and had himself responded by carving the enormous nude marble David which was placed in the piazza near the Palazzo Vecchio, the home of Florence's council. The Humanist vision of humanity was one in which people responded to other people, to social responsibility and to God in a direct way, not through intermediaries, such as the Church. This conflicted with the Church's emphasis. While the Church emphasized humanity as essentially sinful and flawed, Humanism emphasized humanity as potentially noble and beautiful. These two views were not necessarily irreconcilable to the Church, but only through recognition that the unique way to achieve this "elevation of spirit, mind and body" was through the Church as the agent of God. To be outside the Church was to be beyond *Salvation*. In the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo presented both Catholic and Humanist elements in a way that does not appear visually conflicting. The inclusion of "non-biblical" figures such as the Sibyls or *Ignudi* is consistent with the rationalizing of Humanist and Christian thought of the Renaissance. This rationalization was to become a target of the Counter Reformation.

The iconography of the ceiling has had various interpretations in the past, some elements of which have been contradicted by modern scholarship and others – such as the identity of the figures in the lunettes and spandrels – continue to defy interpretation. Modern scholars have sought, as yet unsuccessfully, to determine a written source of the theological program of the ceiling, and have questioned whether or not it was entirely devised by the artist himself, who was both an avid reader of the Bible and a genius. Also of interest to some modern scholars is the question of how Michelangelo's own spiritual and psychological state is reflected in the iconography and the artistic expression of the ceiling.

Pictorial scheme



Plan

of the pictorial elements of the ceiling showing the division of the narrative scenes into three parts themes

Nine scenes from the Book of Genesis

Along the central section of the ceiling, Michelangelo depicted nine scenes from the Book of Genesis. The pictures fall into three groups of three alternating large and small panels.

The first group shows God creating the Heavens and the Earth. The second group shows God creating the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and their disobedience of God and consequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden where they have lived and where they walked with God. The third group of three pictures shows the plight of Humanity and in particular the family of Noah.

The pictures are not in strictly chronological order. If they are perceived as three groups, then the pictures in each of the three units inform upon each other. The three sections of Creation, Downfall and Fate of Humanity appear in reverse order, when read from the entrance of the chapel. However, each individual scene is painted to be viewed when looking towards the altar. This is not easily apparent when viewing a reproduced image of the ceiling, but becomes clear when the viewer looks upward at the vault.

The scenes, from the altar towards the main door, are ordered as follows:

1. The Separation of Light and Darkness
2. The Creation of the Sun, Moon and Earth
3. The Separation of Land and Water
4. The Creation of Adam
5. The Creation of Eve
6. The Temptation and Expulsion
7. The Sacrifice of Noah

8. The Great Flood
9. The Drunkenness of Noah

Creation

These three scenes, completed in the third stage of painting, are the most broadly conceived, the most broadly painted and the most dynamic of all the pictures. Of the first scene Vasari says "...Michelangelo depicted God dividing Light from Darkness, showing him in all his majesty as he rests self-sustained with arms outstretched, in a revelation of love and creative power."

Adam and Eve

For the central section of the ceiling, Michelangelo has taken four episodes from the story of Adam and Eve as told in the first, second and third chapters of Genesis. In this sequence of three, two of the panels are large and one small.

In the first of the pictures, and one of the most widely recognized images in the history of painting, Michelangelo shows God reaching out to touch Adam, who, in the words of Vasari, is "a figure whose beauty, pose and contours are such that it seems to have been fashioned that very moment by the first and supreme creator rather than by the drawing and brush of a mortal man." From beneath the sheltering arm of God, Eve looks out, a little apprehensively.

The central scene, of God creating Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam has been taken in its composition directly from another Creation sequence, the relief panels that surround the door of the Basilica of San Petronio, Bologna by Jacopo della Quercia whose work Michelangelo had studied in his youth.

In the final panel of this sequence Michelangelo combines two contrasting scenes into one panel, that of Adam and Eve taking fruit from the forbidden tree, Eve trustingly taking it from the hand of the Serpent and Adam eagerly picking it for himself; and their banishment from the Garden of Eden, where they have lived in the company of God, to the world outside where they have to fend for themselves and experience death.

Story of Noah

As with the first sequence of pictures, the three panels concerning Noah, taken from the sixth to ninth chapters of Genesis are thematic rather than chronological. In the first scene is shown the sacrifice of a sheep. Vasari, in writing about this scene mistakes it for the sacrifices by Cain and Abel, in which Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God and Cain's was not. What this image almost certainly depicts is the sacrifice made by the family of Noah, after their safe deliverance from the Great Flood which destroyed the rest of Humankind.

The central, larger, scene shows the Great Flood. The Ark in which Noah's family escaped floats at the rear of the picture while the rest of humanity tries frantically to scramble to some point of safety. This picture, the first completed by Michelangelo on the ceiling, which has a large number of figures, conforms the most closely to the format of the paintings that had been done around the walls. This one scene took Michelangelo a month to complete.

The final scene is the story of Noah's drunkenness. After the Flood, Noah tills the soil and grows vines. He is shown doing so, in the background of the picture. He becomes drunk and inadvertently exposes himself. His youngest son, Ham, brings his two brothers Shem and Japheth to see the sight but they discreetly cover their father with a cloak. Ham is later cursed by Noah and told that the descendants of Ham's son Canaan will serve Shem and Japheth's descendants forever. Taken together, these three pictures serve to show that Humankind had moved a long way from God's perfect creation. However, it is through Shem and his descendants, the Israelites, that Salvation will come to the world.

Shields

Adjacent to the smaller Biblical scenes and supported by the *Ignudi* are ten circular parade shields, sometimes described as being painted to resemble bronze. Known examples are actually of lacquered and gilt wood. Each is decorated with a picture drawn from the Old Testament or the Book of Maccabees from the Apocrypha.

The subjects are the more gruesome or shameful of Biblical episodes, the only exception seeming to be that of Elijah being swept up to Heaven in a Chariot of Fire, leaving his mantel to fall on Elisha. However, Elijah's role as a prophet was one marked by accusation and warnings to repent, and the purpose of his translation into Heaven was traditionally seen as so that he might stand before God to condemn Israel for its sins. In four of the five most highly finished "medallions" the space is crowded with figures in violent action, similar to Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina*.

The application of gold on the shields, in contrast to its absence on the rest of the ceiling, serves to link the ceiling to some extent with the frescoes around the walls. In the latter, gold leaf has been applied lavishly to many details and in some of the frescoes, notably those by Perugino, has been most expertly used not just to detail the robes but to highlight the folds by subtle graduation in the density of golden flecks. It is this technique that Michelangelo has picked up on and carried a step further, inspired also perhaps by the medallions that appear on a Roman triumphal arch in Botticelli's episode from the Life of Moses, showing the punishment of the *Sons of Corah*.

The medallions represent:

- Abraham about to sacrifice his son Isaac
- The Destruction of the Statue of Baal
- The worshippers of Baal being brutally slaughtered.
- Uriah being beaten to death.
- Nathan the priest condemning King David for murder and corruption.
- King David's traitorous son Absalom caught by his hair in a tree while trying to escape and beheaded by David's troops.
- Abner sneaking up on Joab to murder him
- Joram being hurled from a chariot onto his head.
- Elijah being carried up to Heaven
- On one medallion the subject is either obliterated or incomplete.

Twelve prophetic figures

On the five pendentives along each side and the two at either end, Michelangelo painted the largest figures on the ceiling: twelve people who prophesied or represented some aspect of the Coming of Christ. Of those twelve, seven were Prophets of Israel and were male. The remaining five were prophets of the Classical World, called *Sibyls* and were female. The prophet Jonah is placed above the altar and Zechariah at the further end. The other male and female figures alternate down each side, each being identified by an inscription on a painted marble panel supported by a putto.

- Jonah (IONAS) – above the altar
- Jeremiah (HIEREMIAS)
- Persian Sibyl (PERSICHA)
- Ezekiel (EZECHIEL)
- Erythraean Sibyl. (ERITHRAEA)
- Joel (IOEL)
- Zechariah (ZACHERIAS) – above the main door of the chapel

- Delphic Sibyl. (DELPHICA)
- Isaiah (ESAIAS)
- Cumaean Sibyl. (CVMAEA)
- Daniel (DANIEL)
- Libyan Sibyl (LIBICA)

Prophets

The seven prophets of Israel chosen for depiction on the ceiling include the four so-called Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Of the remaining twelve possibilities among the Minor Prophets, the three represented are Joel, Zechariah and Jonah. Although the prophets Joel and Zechariah are considered "minor" because of the comparatively small number of pages that their prophecy occupies in the Bible, each one produced prophesies of profound significance.

They are often quoted, Joel for his "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your elderly shall dream dreams and your youth shall see visions". These words are significant for Michelangelo's decorative scheme, where women take their place among men and the youthful Daniel sits across from the brooding Jeremiah with his long white beard.

Zechariah prophesied "Behold! Your King comes to you, humble and riding on a donkey". His place in the chapel is directly above the door through which the Pope is carried in procession on Palm Sunday, the day on which Jesus fulfilled the prophecy by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and being proclaimed King.

Jonah's main prophesy concerned the downfall of the city of Nineveh. This alone does not seem to warrant him a place above the High Altar. But there is another factor involved. It is the person of Jonah himself that is of symbolic and prophetic significance, a significance which was commonly perceived and had been represented in countless works of art including manuscripts and stained glass windows. Jonah, through his reluctance to obey God, was swallowed by a "mighty fish". He spent three days in its belly and was eventually spewed up on dry land where he went about God's business. Because of this, Jonah was seen as a forerunner of Jesus, who having died by crucifixion, spent a time which spanned part of three days in a tomb, and was resurrected on the third day. So, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Jonah, with the "great fish" beside him and his eyes turned towards God the Creator, represents a "portent" of the Resurrection of Christ.

In Vasari's description of the Prophets and Sibyls he is particularly high in his praise of the portrayal of Isaiah: "Anyone who studies this figure, copied so faithfully from nature, the true mother of the art of painting, will find a beautifully composed work capable of teaching in full measure all the precepts to be followed by a good painter."

Sibyls

The Sibyls were prophetic women who were resident at shrines or temples throughout the Classical World. The five depicted here are each said to have prophesied the birth of Christ. The Cumaean Sibyl, for example, is quoted by Virgil as declaring that "a new progeny of Heaven" would bring about a return of the "Golden Age". This was interpreted as referring to Jesus.

It is not known why Michelangelo selected the five particular Sibyls that were depicted, given that, as with the Minor Prophets, there were ten or twelve possibilities. It is suggested by John O'Malley that the choice was made for a wide geographic coverage, with the Sibyls coming from Africa, Asia, Greece and Ionia.

Vasari says of the Erythraean Sibyl "Many aspects of this figure are of exceptional loveliness: the expression of her face, her headdress and the arrangement of her draperies: and her arms, which are bared, are as beautiful as the rest."

Pendentives

In each corner of the chapel is a triangular pendentive filling the space between the walls and the arch of the vault and forming the spandrel above the windows nearest the corners. On these curving shapes Michelangelo has painted four scenes from Biblical stories that are associated with the salvation of Israel by four great male and female heroes of the Jews, Moses, Esther, David and Judith.

- The Brazen Serpent
- The Punishment of Haman
- David and Goliath
- Judith and Holofernes

The first two stories were both seen in Medieval and Renaissance theology as prefiguring the Crucifixion of Jesus. In the story of the *Brazen Serpent*, the people of Israel become dissatisfied and grumble at God. As punishment they receive a plague of poisonous snakes. God offers the people relief by instructing Moses to make a snake of brass, set up on a pole, the sight of which gives miraculous healing. Michelangelo chooses a crowded composition, depicting a dramatic mass of suffering men, women and writhing snakes, separated from redeemed worshipers by the snake before an epiphanic light.

In the book of Esther it is related that Haman, a public servant, plots to get Esther's husband, the King of Persia, to slay all the Jewish people in his land. The King, who is going over his books during a sleepless night, realizes something is amiss. Esther, discovering the plot, denounces Haman and her husband orders his execution on a scaffold he has built. The King's eunuchs promptly carry this out. Michelangelo shows Haman crucified with Esther looking at him from a doorway, the King giving orders in the background.

The other two stories, those of David and Judith, were often linked in Renaissance art, particularly by Florentine artists as they demonstrated the overthrow of tyrants, a popular subject in the Republic. In this image, the shepherd boy, David, has brought down the towering Goliath with his sling, but the giant is alive and is trying to rise as David forces his head down to chop it off.

The depiction of Judith and Holofernes has an equally gruesome detail. As Judith loads the enemy's head onto a basket carried by her maid and covers it with a cloth, she looks towards the tent, apparently distracted by the limbs of the decapitated corpse threshing about.

There are obvious connections in the design of the *Slaying of Holofernes* and the *Slaying of Haman* at the opposite end of the chapel. Although in the Holofernes picture the figures are smaller and the space less filled, both have the triangular space divided into two zones by a vertical wall, allowing us to see what is happening on both sides of it. There are actually three scenes in the Haman picture because as well as seeing Haman punished, we see him at the table with Esther and the King and get a view of the King on his bed. Mordechai sits on the steps, making a link between the scenes.

While the *Slaying of Goliath* is a relatively simple composition with the two protagonists centrally placed, the only other figures being dimly seen observers, the *Brazen Serpent* picture is crowded with figures and separate incidents as the various individuals who have been attacked by snakes struggle and die or turn towards the icon that will save them. This is the most Mannerist of Michelangelo's earlier compositions at the Sistine Chapel, picking up the theme of human distress begun in the *Great Flood* scene and carrying it forward into the torment of lost souls in the *Last Judgement* which was later to be painted below.

Ancestors of Christ

Subject

Between the large pendentives that support the vault are windows, six on each side of the chapel. There were two more windows in each end of the chapel, now closed, and those above the High Altar covered by the Last Judgement. Above each window is an arched shape, referred to as a lunette

and above eight of the lunettes at the sides of the chapel are triangular *spandrels* filling the spaces between the side pendentives and the vault, the other eight lunettes each being below one of the corner pendentives.

Michelangelo was commissioned to paint these areas, as part of the work on the ceiling. The structures form visual bridges between the walls and the ceiling, and the figures that are painted on them are midway in size (approximately 2 meters high) between the very large prophets and the much smaller figures of Popes which had been painted to either side of each window in the 15th century. Michelangelo chose the Ancestors of Christ as the subject of these images, thus portraying Jesus' physical lineage, while the papal portraits are his spiritual successors according to Church doctrine.

Centrally placed above each window is a *faux* marble tablet with a decorative frame. On each is painted the names of the male line by which Jesus, through his Earthly father, Joseph, is descended from Abraham, according to the Gospel of Matthew. However the genealogy is now incomplete, since the two lunettes of the windows in the Altar wall were destroyed by Michelangelo when he returned to the Sistine Chapel in 1537 to paint The Last Judgment. Only engravings, based on a drawing that has since been lost, remain of them. The sequence of tablets seems a little erratic as one plaque has four names, most have three or two, and two plaques have only one. Moreover, the progression moves from one side of the building to the other, but not consistently, and the figures the lunettes contain do not coincide closely with the listed names. These figures vaguely suggest various family relationships; most lunettes contain one or more infants and many depict a man and a woman, often sitting on opposing sides of the painted plaque that separates them.

There is also an indeterminate relationship between the figures in the spandrels, and the lunettes beneath them. Because of the constraints of the triangular shape, in each spandrel the figures are seated on the ground. In six of the eight spandrels the compositions resemble traditional depictions of the Flight into Egypt. Of the two remaining, one shows a woman with shears trimming the neck of a garment she is making while her toddler looks on. The Biblical woman who is recorded as making a new garment for her child is Hannah, the mother of Samuel, whose child went to live in the temple, and indeed, the male figure in the background is wearing a distinctive hat that might suggest that of a priest. The other figure who differs from the rest is a young woman who sits staring out of the picture with prophetic intensity. Curiously, her open eyes have been closed in the restoration.

Treatment

Michelangelo's depiction of the Genealogy of Jesus departs from an artistic tradition for this topic that was common in medieval times, especially in stained-glass windows. This so-called Jesse Tree shows Jesse lying prone and a tree growing from his side with the ancestors on each branch, in a visual treatment of a biblical verse.

The figures in the lunettes appear to be families, but in every case they are families that are divided. The figures in them are physically divided by the name tablet but they are also divided by a range of human emotions that turn them outward or in on themselves and sometimes towards their partner with jealousy, suspicion, rage or simply boredom. In them Michelangelo has portrayed the anger and unhappiness of the human condition, painting "the daily round of merely domestic life as if it were a curse". In their constraining niches, the ancestors "sit, squat and wait". Of the fourteen lunettes, the two that were probably painted first, the families of Eleazar and Mathan and of Jacob and Joseph are the most detailed. They become progressively broader towards the altar end, one of the last being painted in only two days.

The Eleazar and Mathan picture contains two figures with a wealth of costume detail that is not present in any other lunette. The female to the left has had as much care taken with her clothing as any of the Sibyls. Her skirt is turned back showing her linen petticoat and the garter that holds up her mauve stockings and cuts into the flesh. She has a reticule and her dress is laced up under the

arms. On the other side of the tablet sits the only male figure among those on the lunettes who is intrinsically beautiful. This blonde young man, elegantly dressed in white shirt and pale green hose, with no jerkin but a red cloak, postures with an insipid and vain gesture, in contrast to the *Ignudi* which he closely resembles.

Prior to restoration, of all the paintings in the Sistine Chapel, the lunettes and spandrels were the dirtiest. Added to this, there has always been a problem of poor daytime visibility of the panels nearest the windows because of halination. Consequently, they were the least well known of all Michelangelo's publicly accessible works. The recent restoration has made these masterly studies of human nature and inventive depiction of the human form known once more.

Ignudi

The *Ignudi* are the 20 athletic, nude males that Michelangelo painted as supporting figures at the each corner of the five smaller narrative scenes that run along the centre of the ceiling. The figures hold or are draped with or lean on a variety of items which include pink ribbons, green bolsters and enormous garlands of acorns.

The *Ignudi*, although all seated, are less physically constrained than the Ancestors of Christ. While the pairs of the monochrome male and female figures above the spandrels are mirrors of each other, these *Ignudi* are all different. In the earliest paintings, they are paired, their poses being similar but with variation. These variations become greater with each pair until the postures of the final four bear no relation to each other whatsoever.

The meaning of these figures has never been clear. They are certainly in keeping with the Humanist acceptance of the classical Greek view that "the man is the measure of all things". But Michelangelo knew the Bible well. He would have been well aware of the fact that although seraphim and cherubim are described as being winged creatures, angels are not. They are described as looking like men. When Michelangelo later painted the altar wall of the chapel, he included a great number of angels, particularly in the lunettes which are decorated with scenes of angels carrying the symbols of the Passion. Other angels are employed sounding the trumpets which call forth the dead, displaying books in which the names of the saved and the damned are written and casting sinners down to Hell. In all, the Last Judgment contains more than forty angels, all closely resembling the *Ignudi*. It is reasonable to conclude that the *Ignudi* represent angels. If the *Ignudi* are indeed angels, they are the ever-present attendants and messengers of God, impassively watching and waiting on the fate of Humankind.

Their painting demonstrates, more than any other figures on the ceiling, Michelangelo's mastery of anatomy and foreshortening and his enormous powers of invention. In their reflection of classical antiquity they resonate with Pope Julius' aspirations to lead Italy towards a new 'age of gold'; at the same time, they staked Michelangelo's claim to greatness. However, a number of critics were angered by their presence and nudity: Pope Adrian VI described the ceiling as "a stew of naked bodies" and wanted it stripped.

Stylistic analysis and artistic legacy

Michelangelo was the artistic heir to the great 15th century sculptors and painters of Florence. He learned his trade first under the direction of a masterly fresco painter, Domenico Ghirlandaio, known for two great fresco cycles in the Sassetti Chapel and Tornabuoni Chapel, and for his contribution to the cycle of paintings on the walls of the Sistine Chapel. As a student Michelangelo studied and drew from the works of the two most renowned Florentine fresco painters of the early Renaissance, Giotto and Masaccio. Masaccio's figures of Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden had a profound effect on the depiction of the nude in general and in particular on the use of the nude figure to convey human emotion. Helen Gardner says that in the hands of Michelangelo "the body is simply the manifestation of the soul or of a state of mind and character".

Michelangelo was also almost certainly influenced by the paintings of Luca Signorelli whose paintings, particularly the *Death and Resurrection Cycle* in Orvieto Cathedral contain a great number of nudes and inventive figurative compositions. In Bologna, Michelangelo saw the relief sculptures of Jacopo della Quercia around the doors of the cathedral. In Michelangelo's depiction of the *Creation of Eve* the whole composition, the form of the figures and the relatively conservative concept of the relationship between Eve and her Creator adheres closely to Jacopo's design. Other panels on the ceiling, most particularly the iconic *Creation of Adam,* show "unprecedented invention".

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was to have a profound effect upon other artists, even before it was completed. Vasari, in his Life of Raphael, tells us that Bramante, who had the keys to the chapel, let Raphael in to examine the paintings in Michelangelo's absence. On seeing Michelangelo's prophets, Raphael went back to the picture of the Prophet Isaiah that he was painting on a column in the Church of Sant'Agostino and, according to Vasari, although it was finished, he scraped it off the wall and repainted it in a much more powerful manner, in imitation of Michelangelo. John O'Malley points out that even earlier than the Isaiah is Raphael's inclusion of the figure of Heraclitus in the *School of Athens*, a brooding figure similar to Michelangelo's Jeremiah, but with the countenance of Michelangelo himself, and leaning on a block of marble.

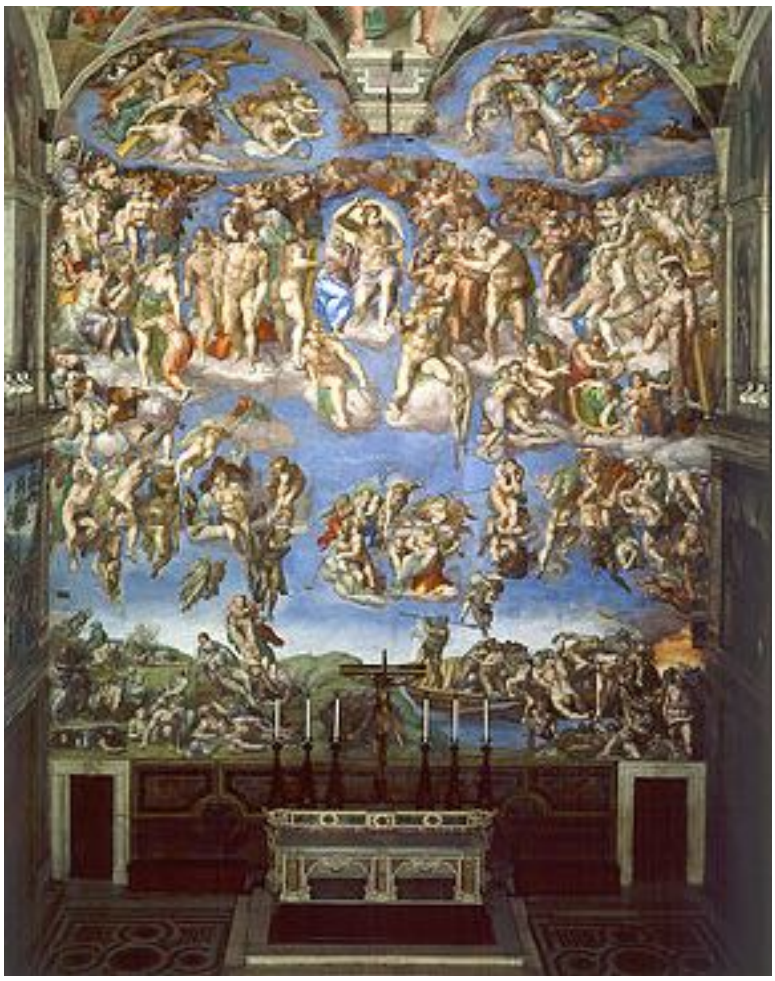
There was hardly a design element on the ceiling that was not subsequently imitated: the fictive architecture, the muscular anatomy, the foreshortening, the dynamic motion, the luminous coloration, the haunting expressions of the figures in the lunettes, the abundance of putti.

Within Michelangelo's own work, the chapel ceiling led to the later and more Mannerist painting of the Last Judgment in which the crowded compositions gave full rein to his inventiveness in painting contorted and foreshortened figures expressing despair or jubilation. Among the artists in whose work can be seen the direct influence of Michelangelo are Pontormo, Andrea del Sarto, Correggio, Tintoretto, Annibale Carracci, Paolo Veronese and El Greco.

In January 2007, it was claimed that as many as 10,000 visitors passed through the Vatican Museums in a day and that the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is the biggest attraction. The Vatican, anxious at the possibility that the newly restored frescoes will suffer damage, announced plans to reduce visiting hours and raise the price in an attempt to discourage visitors.

Five hundred years earlier Vasari had said "The whole world came running when the vault was revealed, and the sight of it was enough to reduce them to stunned silence."

Last Judgment



The *Last Judgment* is a fresco by Michelangelo on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, commissioned by Pope Clement VII. It took four years to complete. Michelangelo began working on it three decades after finishing the ceiling of the chapel, at the age of 62.

The work is massive and spans the entire wall behind the altar of the Sistine Chapel. It was executed from 1536 to 1541, after the Sack of Rome of 1527 by mercenary forces from the Holy Roman Empire, which effectively ended the Roman Renaissance, just before the Council of Trent. The Last Judgment is a depiction of the second coming of Christ and the apocalypse. The souls of humans rise and descend to their fates, as judged by Christ surrounded by his saints.

The Last Judgment was an object of a heavy dispute between Cardinal Carafa and Michelangelo: the artist was accused of immorality and intolerable obscenity, having depicted naked figures, with genitals in evidence, inside the most important church of Christianity, so a censorship campaign (known as the "Fig-Leaf Campaign") was organized by Carafa and Monsignor Sernini (Mantua's ambassador) to remove the frescoes. When the Pope's own Master of Ceremonies, Biagio da Cesena, said "it was mostly disgraceful that in so sacred a place there should have been depicted all those nude figures, exposing themselves so shamefully," and that it was no work for a papal chapel but rather "for the public baths and taverns," Michelangelo worked the Cesena's semblance into the scene as Minos, judge of the underworld (far bottom-right corner of the painting) with Donkey ears {i.e.foolishness} while his nudity is covered by a coiled snake. It is said that when Cesena

complained to the Pope, the pontiff responded that his jurisdiction did not extend to hell, so the portrait would have to remain.

The genitalia in the fresco were later covered by the artist Daniele da Volterra, whom history remembers by the derogatory nickname "Il Braghettone" ("the breeches-painter"). In the painting, Michelangelo does a self portrait depicting himself as St. Bartholomew after he had been flayed (skinned alive). This is reflective of the feelings of contempt Michelangelo had for being commissioned to paint "The Last Judgment". The figure of St. Bartholomew depicts the satirist and erotic writer Pietro Aretino who had tried to extort a valuable drawing from Michelangelo. He holds the painter's flayed skin as a symbol of attempted victimization.

Solar Symbolism

Apart from its technical mastery, the painting is noted for its radical departures from traditional depictions of the Last Judgment. In particular, firstly, the overall structure seems to swirl around Christ at the centre, replacing the traditional pattern of horizontal layers depicting heaven, earth and hell; and secondly, the figure of Christ himself, beardless and muscular, surrounded by light, which has often been compared to the Greek sun-god Apollo. One week before commissioning the work, Pope Clement VII is known to have been studying the new heliocentric cosmology of Copernicus. There seems a real possibility that the painting is in part as an allegory of the new cosmology, with Christ as the sun in the centre of the universe.

Restoration

The frescoes of the Sistine Chapel were restored between June 1980 and December 1999, with preliminary tests taking place in 1979.

The first stage of restoration, the work upon Michelangelo's lunettes, was achieved in October 1984. The work then proceeded on the ceiling, completed December 1989 and from there to the Last Judgment. The restoration was unveiled by Pope John Paul II on 8 April, 1994. The final stage was the restoration of the wall frescoes by Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Perugino and others. This was unveiled on 11 December, 1999.

The colors, which now appear so fresh and spring-like with pale pink, apple green, vivid yellow and sky blue against a background of warm pearly grey, were so discolored by candle smoke as to make the pictures seem almost monochrome. The restoration has removed the filter of grime to reveal the colors again. However, the restoration was met with both praise and criticism. Critics assert that much original work by Michelangelo – in particular pentimenti, highlights and shadows, and other detailing painted *a secco* – was lost in the removal of various accretions.

Artists and Architects:

Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi aka Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445-1510), Italian painter of the Early Renaissance
Andrea Bregno (1418–1506), Italian sculptor and architect of the Early Renaissance
Baccio Pontelli (c.1450-1492), Italian architect
Bartolomeo della Gatta (1448-1502), Italian Renaissance painter
Bernardino di Betto aka Pinturicchio (1454-1513), Italian painter of the Renaissance period
Cosimo Roselli (1439-1507), Italian painter of the Quattrocento
Daniele da Volterra (1509-1566), Italian Mannerist painter and sculptor
Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Italian Renaissance painter
Giovanni Dalmata (1440-1514), Dalmatian sculptor
Giovannino de Dolci (1435-1485), Italian architect
Luca Signorelli (c.1445-1523), Italian Renaissance painter
Michelangelo Buonarroiti (1475-1564), Italian Mannerist sculptor, painter, architect
Mino da Fiesole (c.1429-1484), Italian sculptor of the early Renaissance period
Piero di Cosimo (1462-1521), Italian Renaissance painter
Pieter van Aelst (16th cent), Flemish tapestry weaver
Pietro Perugino (c. 1450-1523), Italian Renaissance painter
Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino aka Raphael, (1483-1520), Italian architect and painter of the High Renaissance

Location:

Coordinates: 41° 54′ 11″ N, 12° 27′ 16″ E

Links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistine_Chapel

http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Cappella_Sistina

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistine_Chapel_ceiling

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Judgment_%28Michelangelo%29

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration_of_the_Sistine_Chapel_frescoes

Frescoes in the Sistine Chapel from Web Gallery of Art

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