

MICHELANGELO'S PROPHETS AND SIBYLS

By EDGAR WIND

Read 2 March 1960

THE official *Life of Michelangelo*, written with the artist's approval by his pupil Ascanio Condivi, includes a short and simple statement on Michelangelo's religious readings: 'With deep study and attention, he read the Holy Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments, as well as those who have expounded them, such as the writings of Savonarola, for whom he always had a great affection, keeping always in mind the memory of his living voice.'¹

Charles Holroyd, who was the first to translate Condivi's *Life* into English, supplied this passage with a cautious commentary, warning against the opinion that Michelangelo's general views of the Church were formed—or transformed—by Savonarola: 'No doubt, like all the other citizens, the master listened to the voice of the preacher, but we have no evidence that he was particularly influenced by his teaching, though many of his biographers would have us believe that Savonarola made him Protestant, Lutheran, or what not, according to the sect of the biographer. Michael Angelo loved the sermons of the eloquent Frate as works of art; no doubt, if the prophets of the Sistine could speak, they would preach with the voice of Savonarola.'²

Whether anyone in Florence could have listened to the fulminations of Savonarola as works of art is doubtful. His style was abrupt, and his delivery so direct that it offended the poetic sensibilities of Politian, who preferred the mellifluous, well-balanced sermons of Savonarola's enemy, Fra Mariano da Genazzano.³ But the last sentence in Holroyd's comment is true in a more literal sense than he may have intended: Michelangelo's characterization of the prophets in the Sistine Chapel rests on a theological doctrine of prophecy that can be learned, in

¹ Tr. Charles Holroyd, here quoted from the second edition (1911) of Holroyd's *Michael Angelo Buonarroti*, p. 74, § lxxv.

² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³ Politianus, *Epistolae* iv. vi (*Opera* i, 1519, fol. 36^r); *Miscellanea*, Praefatio (*ibid.*, fols. 125^v f.).

a most handy form, from one of the popular tracts of Savonarola, his *Dialogo della verità profetica*.¹

That this text appears not to have been seriously considered by any of the numerous commentators on Michelangelo's Prophets is easy enough to understand. The paintings of the Sistine Ceiling were begun in 1508, ten years after Savonarola's death, and their style is informed with a Roman grandiloquence for which he would have had little use. Indeed, a glance at the simple woodcut that illustrates the tract (Pl. I) would be sufficient to dispel any thoughts of the Sistine Ceiling.

Savonarola is seen seated under a large tree on the outskirts of Florence, conversing with a group of seven strangers dressed in exotic costume, while the dove of the Holy Ghost floats uneasily above the Friar. The text begins with a lyrical invocation of nature, clearly borrowed from the scene in the *Phaedrus* in which Socrates chooses a grassy slope near a fresh spring, under a lofty spreading plane-tree, as the most auspicious place for discussing divine Beauty. 'Here is the place', writes Savonarola, 'that invites us to sit down near that spring in the fresh grass and under this plane-tree rich with foliage: so that we may converse more quietly and with more pleasure (*con maggiore iocundita*) on divine illuminations.'

In the ensuing dialogue the seven strangers, examined firmly by the Friar, behave very much like pupils of Socrates, surprised by the simplicity of the examiner's questions: ' "I ask you, what is the colour of the lily?"—"It is white."—"Would you think that you could be mistaken in this?"—"No."—"Why not?"—"Because I see it."—"In that case you know for certain that the lily is white?"—"Yes, certainly."—"If all the people of our city were to affirm with one voice that the lily is not white, whom would you rather trust: all the people or your own eyes?"—"Certainly my own eyes."—"But if the sages with many reasons and proofs were to tell you that the lily is black, would you believe them?"—"Not in truth."'

Under the pressure of Savonarola's interrogation, the strangers gradually reveal their identity: they are the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, disguised for Savonarola's benefit as picturesque orientals and bearing mysterious Hebrew names—Uria, Eliphaz, Rechima, Iechima, Thoralméd, Abbacuc, Saphtham—that form the acrostic VERITAS. They discuss with Savonarola his prophetic calling, and after feigning (semi-

¹ Hain, *Repertorium bibliographicum*, no. 14341, originally in Latin (nos. 14339 f.), *De veritate prophetica dialogus*.

Socratic in their turn) to disbelieve the rumour of his divine inspiration, proceed to supply him with splendid credentials attesting the supernatural source of his visions.

Savonarola must have written this little fantasy with the Florentine Platonists in mind. The literary form, the idyllic location, the charade performed by oriental mystagogues, reveal an unexpected taste for the arcane vagaries that flourished in Ficino's Villa di Careggi. While it is known that Savonarola made a strong impression on some members of that circle, in particular on the two Benivienis and on Pico della Mirandola, the fanciful nature of this pamphlet makes one wonder whether there was not some influence also in the reverse direction,¹ although Savonarola never favoured the secretive Pythagorean manner. In his hands the cryptic pomp of the pagan mystics dissolves into popular imagery, Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus giving way to the magi of the miracle plays. The scene in the woodcut seems far removed from awesome rites or secret societies: it merely suggests that an argument on a difficult subject can be enhanced by a pleasant setting.

It would be agreeable to think that it was in this handy form of a vernacular tract, rather than in the recondite jargon of the higher learning, that Michelangelo first encountered the doctrine of prophetic powers, which the Roman theologians later taught him to expand. The Seven Gifts cited by Savonarola—Wisdom and Understanding, Deliberation and Might, Science and Compassion, and Fear of the Lord—are the canonical gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in a famous prophecy of Isaiah (xi. 1-3):

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom (*sapientia*) and understanding (*intellectus*), the spirit of deliberation (*consilium*) and might (*fortitudo*), the spirit of science (*scientia*) and compassion (*pietas*), and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord (*timor Domini*).²

¹ Petrus Crinitus, *De honesta disciplina* III. ii (ed. C. Angeleri, 1955, pp. 104 f.), describes a debate he had witnessed between Savonarola and Pico della Mirandola in the library of San Marco in Florence, where a small academy used to assemble ('in Marciana academia apud Hieronymum Savonarolam'). At the start of the discussion Savonarola objected to the pride caused by too much emulation of pagan philosophers, but when Pico opposed him by reciting the mystical insights of the pagans, Savonarola replied by embracing Pico and praising his speech. However idealizing in retrospect, Crinitus's account was published in 1508, that is, within living memory of Savonarola and Pico.

² The text given here follows that of the Vulgate. In the King James version the gift of *pietas* is not mentioned, so that the canonical seven gifts

In the Sistine Ceiling the Prophets alternate with Sibyls, but although it was customary to group them in pairs, in this instance their numbers do not match: seven prophets are set against five sibyls. In the lunettes below the Prophets and Sibyls Michelangelo painted the Genealogy of Christ according to Matthew, that is, precisely the Tree of Jesse on which, as Isaiah said in the passage quoted, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are supposed to rest. Leaving the sibyls aside for the moment, it can be shown that the seven prophets, beginning at the entrance and ending at the altar, express the Biblical 'gifts of the spirit' in the same order as they appear in Isaiah: *sapientia—intellectus—consilium—fortitudo—scientia—pietas—timor Domini*. A lesser artist might have despaired of visualizing such a set of abstractions. How was he to distinguish, for example, between the spirits of Understanding (*intellectus*), Science (*scientia*) and Wisdom (*sapientia*)? To represent them disguised as mysterious orientals or, according to medieval custom, by a group of white doves perched on a tree,¹ was a delightful way of dodging the problem which only a bolder imagination would attack: could human features, expressions, and gestures be used to characterize the seven gifts of the Spirit as specific moods of prophetic seizure?

In beginning with Zechariah, who represents *sapientia* (Pls. II, III), it is important to suspend judgement on his spiritual temperament until the character is seen as part of the series. Taken by itself, the profile of an elderly sage, reading attentively in his papers while two companionable spirits stand musingly behind him, may or may not be an illustration of Wisdom; but the doubt will diminish, or perhaps even vanish, on seeing how *intellectus*, which follows after *sapientia*, appears in the determined physiognomy of Joel (Pl. IV). With his clean-shaven face and high Ciceronian forehead, framed by flamboyantly receding hair, he embodies the type of a humanist critic, judiciously examining his text with a touch of the vanity and self-esteem that often adhere to the character of an 'intellectual'.² The cool

appear as six. On the history of this version, see A. Gardeil, 'Dons du Saint-Esprit', *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* iv, cols. 1728–81. St. Ambrose's listing of the seven gifts (*De spiritu sancto* I, xvi. 159; *Patr. lat.* xvi, col. 740) corresponds closely to that of Jerome: *spiritus sapientiae et intellectus, spiritus consilii atque virtutis, spiritus cognitionis atque pietatis, spiritus timoris Dei*. See also his *Expositio in Psalmum cxviii*, 38 (*Patr. lat.* xv, col. 1265).

¹ Arthur Watson, *The Early Iconography of the Tree of Jesse* (1934), p. 168, with illustrations (cf. p. 64, n. 1, below).

² Michelangelo had ample opportunity for observing the type, not only in the average run of contentious humanists, but in an outstanding intellectual

eyes and tight lips, the shapely nose dominated by a frowning brow, suggest force of understanding, mental acumen. Behind him the pair of spirits, to illustrate his state of mind, enact a little pantomime of intellectual demonstration (Pl. V): the one putto lectures to the other with a superior air, his authority visibly buttressed by a large volume under his arm.

After *sapientia* and *intellectus*, the mood of deliberation prescribed by *consilium* appears in the attitude of Isaiah (Pl. VI). Reluctantly turning from his half-closed book, the prophet listens to the call of the spirit with an expression of mingled doubt and concern. He hesitates to follow, deliberates, 'takes counsel'. Although appointed to be a 'crier in the wilderness', Isaiah remains a reflective prophet (xl. 6): 'A voice said, Cry! And I said, What shall I cry?' (*Vox dicentis: Clama! Et dixi: Quid clamabo?*). The tension within the prophetic seizure, between an active call and a retarding thought, defines the inspired state of suspense which belongs to the gift of Counsel.

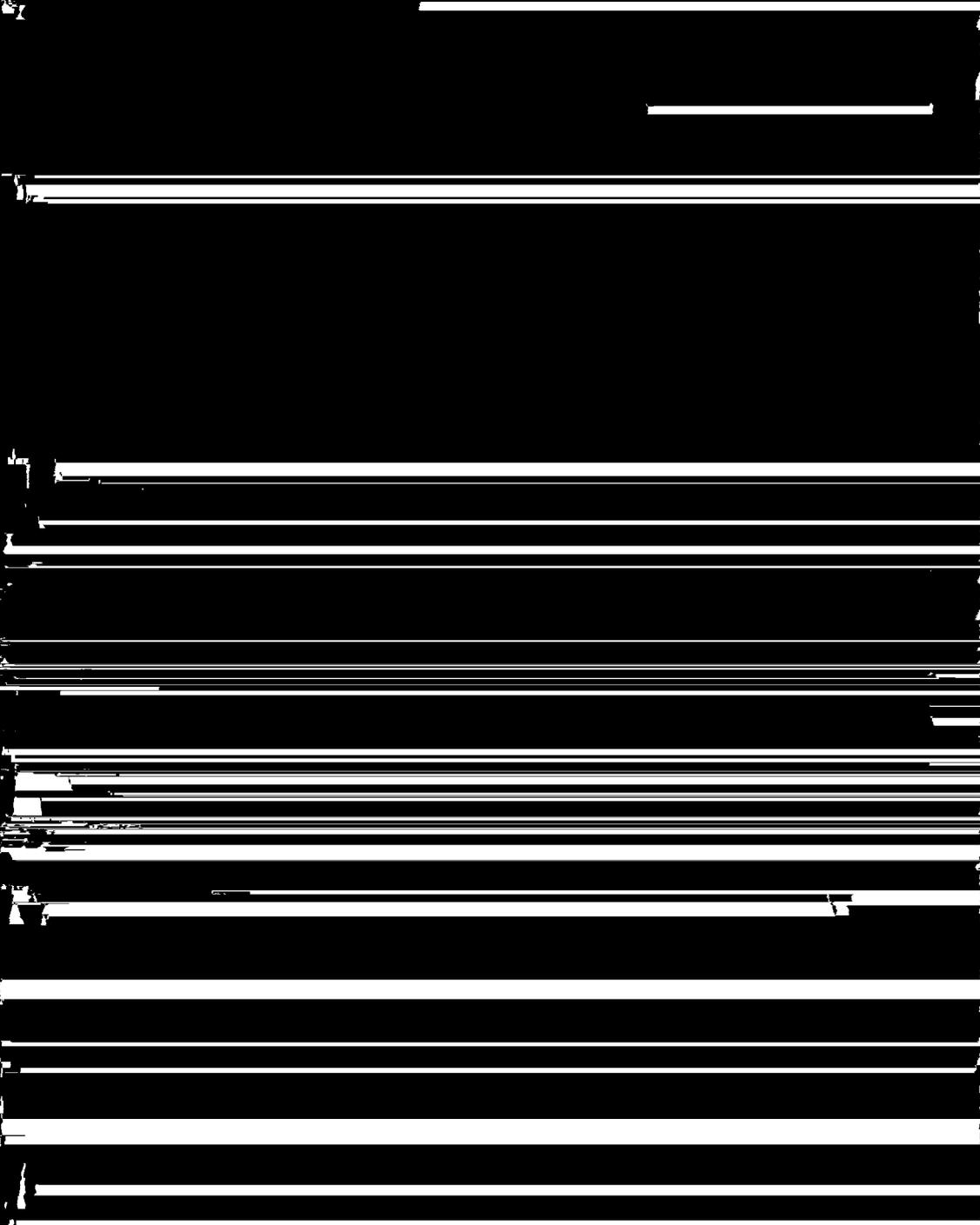
Ezekiel, who follows, is impulsive Might (Pl. VII). The force and rage, concentrated in the bull-like neck, are threateningly expressed by the gesture of the hand, the lips being pressed together in a state of prophetic fury (Pl. VIII). Of the two spirits, one has lodged himself impishly behind the prophet's neck, driving him forward (Pl. IX), while the other, more benign and idealistic looking, guides him upward (Pl. VII). Ezekiel's name is translated 'God gives strength'. In a famous passage he refers to 'the form of a man's hand' (*similitudo manus hominis*) as a threatening apparition (x. 8, resumed x. 21), and St. Gregory quotes the image (*Moralia* VII, xxviii) as meaning an active force under divine guidance. *Quid per manus nisi operationes?* As Durandus succinctly put it: 'the hand signifies the deed.'¹

Science (*scientia*) is represented by Daniel (Pl. X), zealously engaged in transcribing a text: 'I, Daniel, understood by books' (ix. 2). He appears here as the skilled interpreter, explaining the difficult word in the large volume by transferring it to a little book. 'I have heard of thee', Belshazzar said to Daniel, 'that thou canst make interpretations of obscure meanings and untie whom he disliked: the sharp-witted Bramante. As shown on two medals, his features resemble those of Joel (see Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals*, 1930, nos. 657 f.). Even more pertinent are the classical busts of Cicero (Capitoline Museum, Rome, no. 75; Vatican, no. 698; also Apsley House, London).

¹ 'Manus enim opus significat' (*Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, IV, xvii. 2). In Pagnini's *Isagoge ad mysticos sacrae scripturae sensus* (1536) the chapter *Quid manus mystice significet* (x. xlv) begins with St. Gregory's explanation (*Moralia* VII, xxviii) of the image in Ezekiel x. 8: *similitudo manus hominis*.

knots' (*audivi de te quod possis obscura interpretari et ligata dissolvere*, v. 16). In writing his commentary Daniel is assisted by a spirit who illustrates the weight of learning by supporting the large heavy volume, but there is another spirit lurking behind the prophet's shoulder, a ghost-like figure covered by a cloak, suggestive of the visionary dreams that were vouchsafed to Daniel as part of his science. As St. Augustine explained, Daniel was distinguished among the prophets by the fact that

~~he combined inspiration and learning intelligence~~



the Genealogy of Christ, in which Virtues and Vices oppose each other until Christ is born in the human soul¹—the particular Vice or Virtue under each Prophet or Sibyl is like a homely echo of the prophetic mood. In the case of Daniel the connexion is sufficiently simple not to require any long explanation (by moralizing the names in Matthew i) of why the man writes and the woman spins. Suffice it to say that he is an ascetic judge plagued (like Daniel) with an itch to clarify his thoughts with the help of a pen,² while the woman (again like Daniel explicating a text) draws out the spun yarn neatly on a skein-winder. That Michelangelo's contemporaries recognized in these accompanying figures a running commentary on the Prophets and Sibyls is shown by a series of engravings, by Giorgio Ghisi, in which each Prophet and Sibyl is attended by the two adjacent figures from the Genealogy (Pls. XVIII, XXXIX).

Jeremiah (Pl. XIV), the author of the Lamentations, is the prophet of compassionate sorrow (*pietas*): 'For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem, or who shall bemoan thee?' (xv. 5). Withdrawn into the gloom of his meditation, he has let his

¹ On the custom of translating and allegorizing the Hebrew names in Biblical genealogies and itineraries, cf. Pagnini, *Isagoge*, p. 9, with reference to Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* II. xvi: 'nomina Hebraea non est disputandum habere non parvam vim atque adiutorium ad solvenda aenigmata scripturarum.' It was with the intention of assisting the allegorical interpretation of the Bible that Pagnini compiled, on the model of Jerome's *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* (for which see *Onomastica sacra*, ed. Paul de Lagarde, 1870, pp. 1-159), a new and philologically more ambitious *Liber interpretationem Hebraicorum Graecorumque nominum quae arcanis sacrisque in literis inveniuntur* (attached to Pagnini's translation of the Bible, 1528, fols. n ii-x vi); cf. Wind, 'Sante Pagnini and Michelangelo', *Gazette des beaux-arts* xxvi (1944, Focillon Memorial Volume), particularly pp. 218-32: 'The Genealogy of Christ in Renaissance Theology'. To satirize the cult of mystical etymologies, Ben Jonson made a female impostor feign the obsession: 'If you but name a word touching the Hebrew, /she falls into her fit and will discourse /so learnedly of genealogies /as you would run mad, too, to hear her, sir' (*The Alchemist* II. i). As late as 1704 there appeared in Naples a most ponderous specimen of that extravagant literature by a Spanish Franciscan, Isidorus a S. Michaelae, entitled *De temporalis, humana, et mystica D.N. Jesu Christi generatione observatio genealogica, panegyrica, mystica, dogmatica et moralis super primum caput S. Matthaei* (copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale, D. 3156); reviewed in *Acta eruditorum* (1711), Supplementum iv, pp. 342-6, with some astonishment at the survival of this *ingeniosa pietas*—quam 'non ignoramus . . . compluribus Ecclesiae Patribus arrisisse'.

² His name, Josaphat, was translated *ipse judicans*, for which the moralization is: *librum scribat ipse qui iudicat* (Job xxxi. 35; cf. St. Gregory, *Moralia* xxii. xix; also Pagnini, *Isagoge* IX. xxxv).

aged head sink down on his hand, in the traditional posture of melancholy: 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light' (*me minavit, et adduxit in tenebras, et non in lucem*, Lamentations iii, 1 f.). Placed next to the picture of the *Fiat Lux*, in which God divides Light from Darkness (Pl. XL), Jeremiah sits on the side of Darkness, below him two figures from the Genealogy who are doomed by the obscurity that has invaded their minds (Pl. XIX): a superstitious carpenter who looks like a wrathful gnome, cursing the image of his own face that is carved on his stick,¹ and a man lost in a stupor of forgetfulness.² They seem to illustrate the prophet's words: *in tenebris collocavit me quasi mortuos sempiternos* (Lamentations iii. 6).³ In a chapter on *Abdita Dei* and mystical silence, Francesco Giorgio reflected on the oppressive load that the Lord has put 'on the shoulders of those to whom he has confided his secrets', and he referred as an example to the solitary Jeremiah who had written in the Lamentations (iii. 28): *sedebit solitarius et tacebit* ('he sitteth alone and keepeth silence').⁴ Of the two spirits attending Jeremiah, the more remote looks cold and impenetrable like a Fate, while the one closer to the prophet expresses the profoundest pity (Pl. XIV). 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light' (John iii. 19). Between the *Ignudi* above the prophet (Pls. XVI, XVII) the same kind of disparity prevails as between the two spirits behind him: one of them is bent under a heavy burden, the other looks impenetrable and impassive, his expression arrested in a fixed

¹ The name is Boas, but except for the name the figure has nothing in common with the wealthy and generous Boas in the Book of Ruth. 'Boas' was translated *in quo est robur*, and taken to mean 'he in whom there is wood'. For the superstitious carpenter see Wisdom of Solomon xiii. 11-19; Isaiah xliv. 13-18.

² Named Aminadab (= *populus meus*), he appears next to a youthful woman, with a veil on her lap, who combs her hair: 'Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people (*populus meus*) have forgotten me days without number' (Jeremiah ii. 32). In the Vulgate the bride's 'attire' is specified in this passage as a shawl (*fascia pectoralis*).

³ That Jeremiah reflects with gloom on the Day of Judgement, prophetically foreshadowed in the first Day of Creation when God divides Light from Darkness (Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *Patr. lat.* xxxiv, cols. 228-30), is further suggested by the fiery chariot of Elijah in the medallion above Jeremiah: 'Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Malachi iv. 5).

⁴ *Harmonia mundi totius* (1525) III. viii. 20, fols. 134^v ff.: 'De pausa, quiete, et silentio.'

gaze like a mask: the face of one who fathoms the abyss (Pl. XV).

The series ends with the prophet Jonah (Pl. XX), exemplifying Fear of the Lord (*timor Domini*): 'I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land' (i. 9). Indeed, no prophet was more fully possessed of that fear than the obstinate fugitive and mutineer, who first fled from the presence of the Lord unto the sea, then cried to the Lord out of the belly of the great fish, and finally put the fear of the Lord into Nineveh, so forcefully that the city repented: 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown', etc. (iii. 4 ff.). Christ himself, to rebuke the scribes and pharisees who had asked him to produce a sign, gave them 'the sign of the prophet Jonah' by which he foretold the Day of Judgement (Matthew xii. 38-41): 'The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.' The passage would suffice to explain why Michelangelo, some twenty years after he had finished the Sistine Ceiling, painted the Day of Judgement directly below the figure of Jonah, thus bringing the spectator face to face with the terrible event which the prophet of the Fear of the Lord foreshadows.

Attended by the whale from whose belly he was resurrected after three days and three nights (Pl. XX), and by the gourd which came up in a night and perished in a night, Jonah is seen in the dialectical moment (related in the Book of Jonah with laconic astuteness) of arguing with God about Justice and Grace, demanding the destruction of the wicked, while he himself becomes through his conduct an object-lesson of divine mercy. If he seems the most turbulent of the seven prophets—unbalanced in the strict sense of the word—it is because he speaks to God directly and thus experiences the terrible disproportion between the divine will and its human vehicle. His absurd attempts to flee from the Lord, defended by truthful but surly remarks on the unsatisfactory state of his employment, are a convincing demonstration that the character best suited to know and preach the fear of the Lord is the most impertinent of all his prophets. Michelangelo did not shrink from this astounding piece of religious logic: he painted Jonah's disequilibrium, his titanic form thrown back by the overwhelming impact of the divine command, which he obeys with reluctance and in fear. While the hands make the gesture of the dialectical reckoner

(Pl. XX), the face is transfigured by an amazed awareness of the incalculable nature of the final judgement, an entranced admission of *timor Dei* (Pl. XXI), dramatically reflected in the emotion of awe that animates the attending spirits.

No doubt, the iconographic plan provided that Jonah, the last and most agitated of the prophets, should lead back to Zechariah, the most self-contained (Pls. II, III): 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs ix. 10). St. Ambrose quoted that proverb in his classical demonstration that all the other gifts of the spirit originate in the fear of the Lord, that they rise from it as a column rises from its pedestal, and that, again like a column, they transfigure the support on which they rest: the Fear of the Lord, he said, is 'informed by Wisdom, instructed by Intellect, guided by Counsel, made firm by Might, governed by Cognition, enhanced by Pity. Take these away from the fear of the Lord, and it is an unreasonable and insipient fear.'¹ In summarizing these reflections St. Augustine found that in 'these seven operations' the divine forces act from above and below: 'Descending to us, the Holy Spirit begins from Wisdom and moves toward Fear. We however, in ascending, begin with Fear and are perfected in Wisdom.'²

In the Sistine Chapel the ascending order would be the sequence that conforms with the liturgical orientation: in facing the altar one sees Jonah, but it is only on turning round to leave the Chapel that one becomes aware of Zechariah throning peacefully above the principal door: after the upheaval of worship the end is quietude. Moreover, along the middle of the vault the stories from Genesis, and in the lunettes the names from the Genealogy of Christ, progress again from the altar toward the entrance, coming toward the spectator while he faces the altar; and the same orientation governs also the Quattrocento frescoes below: the parallel lives of Moses and Christ, and the apostolic succession of the Popes. A purely linear reading, however, whether in one direction or the other, will not do justice to Michelangelo's plan. In contrast to the narrative procession of the large frescoes below, arranged along the walls

¹ Ambrose, *Expositio in Psalmum cxviii*, 38 (*Patr. lat.* xv, col. 1265).

² Augustine, *Sermones* (*Patr. lat.* xxxviii, cols. 1161 ff.). Durandus (*Rationale divinatorum officiorum* II. i. 52) reads the 'gifts' only in ascending order, *a timore incipiens* and ending with *sapientia*. See also Pagnini, *Isagoge* VI. xiv (pp. 320 f.: *Quid gradus mystice significant*): 'Propheta ergo, quia de coelestibus ad ima loquebatur, coepit magis a sapientia et descendit ad timorem. Sed nos qui a terrenis ad coelestia tendimus, eosdem gradus ascendendo enumeremus, ut a timore ad sapientiam pervenire valeamus.'

like a series of monumental tapestries, Michelangelo's ceiling is composed contrapuntally, and this involves all the actors in dynamic cross-correspondences. Just as Jonah's turbulence calls for its complement in the quietude of Zechariah, who is the prophet furthest removed from him, so each of the other prophets finds his spiritual partner not so much in his immediate neighbour on the canonical list as in the figure that answers him by providing a symmetrical counterforce. Given the length of the chapel (cf. Pl. XLVIII), the eye may stall at conceiving of Zechariah and Jonah as a pair, but once this feat of the imagination is achieved, it ought not to be too difficult to recognize that Isaiah, as the hesitant prophet, is counterbalanced by Daniel, the zealous one, and that the sanguine acumen of Joel contrasts with the apathy of Jeremiah. Despite the vast stretch separating these figures, the weight of Ezekiel's fury binds them together: the extremes are centred in his strength.

However, the tensions and correspondences that connect the prophets are less obvious, and perhaps less important, than those introduced by the presence of the Sibyls. What is their part in the prophetic plan? What kind of 'spirits' do they represent, and how do they enter into converse with the seven gifts assigned to the prophets?

While the prophets were appointed to preach to the Jews, the Sibyls prophesied to the Gentiles. Together, they foreshadow the division of the Church into *Ecclesia Iudaeorum* and *Ecclesia Gentilium*, a distinction suggested by Christ himself when he instructed the disciples, before his death, to teach the new gospel only to the Jews, but urged them later, after his resurrection, to spread the good tidings to all the nations. The contradiction between these two commands (Matthew x. 5 f. as against Mark xvi. 15) is resolved by the mystery of the 'supplantation': as heirs according to the promise the Gentiles displaced the Chosen People, to whom the Word was originally given. In the liturgy of the Sistine Chapel, this particular point of doctrine was of central importance: for, as Durandus explained in the *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, it is peculiar to the mass celebrated by the Roman pontiff that the Apostolic Creed is recited in two stages: first, before the Pope's salutation of peace, by the subdeacons alone who, as Durandus says, represent the Church of the Jews (*Iudaeorum ecclesia*), and afterwards by the choir, which represents the Church of the Nations (*ecclesia Gentium*).¹

¹ Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* iv. xxv. 4: 'Et idcirco, Romano pontifice solemniter celebrante symbolum fidei, non cantores in choro sed

The geographical names assigned to the Sibyls reveal the range of their mission to the nations: Greece is represented by the Delphic Sibyl, Ionia and Asia by the Erythraean and Persian Sibyls, Africa by the Egyptian or Libyan Sibyl, and Rome—in the centre—by the sibyl from Cumae, who had instructed Aeneas about the golden bough and was later to force the Sibylline Books on Tarquin. Although all their Christian prophecies were apocryphal,¹ the fact that these uncouth and often garbled texts had been preserved by the efforts of Lactantius and Augustine² was sufficient to secure for them a religious

subdiaconi ad altare decantant, et generaliter ipsi ad universa respondent, usque dum ipse pontifex dicit: *Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*: quoniam usque post Christi resurrectionem sola Iudaeorum Ecclesia, quae per subdiaconum, qui sursum ad altare consistit, designatur, corde credidit ad iustitiam et ore confessa est ad salutem [cf. Romans x. 10]: sed ex tunc cantores in choro respondent, et universa decantant, quia post resurrectionem Ecclesia Gentium, quam cantores, qui deorsum in choro subsistunt, designant, fidem Christi recipit et laudum praeconia personuit Salvatori.’

In another chapter, describing the entry of the procession (iv. vi. 17: *De accessu sacerdotis ac pontificis ad altare*), Durandus refers to a group of seven subdeacons: they represent the prophets who foretold the incarnation through the ‘septiform gift of the Holy Spirit’. Throughout the ritual the subdeacon enacts, as it were, the Epistle side, that is, *figuram legis et prophetiae* (iv. xv), hence called in England ‘the epistoler’ (*OED*, 1440).

On the history of Durandus and his *Rationale*, written about 1286 and printed in 43 editions before 1500, with 13 further editions in the sixteenth century, see J. Sauer, *Symbolik des Kirchengebäudes* (1902), pp. 28–37.

¹ On the origin and growth of these Hellenistic fabrications, conflated (presumably by a Byzantine compiler) into an epic aggregate of fifteen books, of which twelve survive today comprising more than four thousand hexameters (the first eight books having been published in 1545, the last four in 1828), see the classic edition of C. Alexandre, *Oracula Sibyllina* (1841–56), with a deceptively elegant Latin translation and invaluable commentaries and bibliography. A fair sample, translated into English, was included by Montague R. James in *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924), pp. 521 ff. For the impressive number of fifteenth-century manuscripts see the list in J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (1902).

² Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* i. vi, an account of the ten Sibyls listed by Varro (in the lost *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*), with Christian passages from Sibylline prophecies dispersed throughout the book (e.g. iv. vi, xv–xviii; vii. xvi–xxiv, etc.); Augustine, *Civitas Dei* xviii. xxiii, a discussion of a Christian acrostic ascribed to the Erythraean Sibyl (of which the Greek text is given in Eusebius, *Constantini oratio ad sanctorum coetum* viii), followed by a list of Sibylline prophecies from Lactantius. Isidore of Seville’s chapter on the Sibyls (*Etymologiae* viii. viii) derives, like most of the later statements, from Lactantius and Augustine. For a Renaissance view, see Ficino, *De christiana religione* xxiv f., ‘Auctoritas Sibyllarum’, ‘Testimonia Sibyllarum de Christo’ (*Opera*, 1561, pp. 28 ff.). An illustrated block book of *Oracula Sibyllina*,

authority close to that of sacred script. Few humanists thought of questioning their authenticity,¹ while many were engaged in preserved in a unique copy at St. Gallen (eds. P. Heitz and W. L. Schreiber, 1903, with an important essay on Sibylline iconography), is typical of the sets of Sibylline quotations that were circulated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, before the first comprehensive edition of Books i–viii was published in 1545 (see preceding note). Émile Mâle, with an excusable preference for ‘nos Sibylles françaises’ (*L’art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France*, 1925, pp. 256 ff.), dismisses the block book as of uncertain date (p. 267, note 2) and possibly later than 1480, but in fact it is inscribed by a monk of St. Gallen who is known to have been dead by 1477 (Heitz and Schreiber, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 f.; also Schreiber, *Basels Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Blockbücher*, 1909, p. 45). There is thus no certainty that this branch of the tradition is of French origin, as Mâle surmised. As for Italian engravings of the Sibyls, A. M. Hind has shown (*Early Italian Engraving*, i, 1938, pp. 155 ff.) that the ‘Baccio Baldini’ series antedates by about ten years the publication of Filippo Barbieri’s illustrated tract *Duodecim Sibyllarum vaticinia* (1481), whose historical influence, although very great (cf. Alexandre, *op. cit.* iii, pp. 301 ff.; Heitz and Schreiber, *op. cit.*, pp. 7 ff.), was not quite so decisive as Mâle believed (*op. cit.*, pp. 258–64). The increase from ten Sibyls to twelve, for example, was not an innovation by Barbieri but had appeared, some fifty years earlier, in a Roman cycle of frescoes commissioned by Cardinal Giordano Orsini, since destroyed, but mentioned by Poggio and fully described in three fifteenth-century manuscripts (cf. Lothar Freund, *Studien zur Bildgeschichte der Sibyllen in der neueren Kunst*, 1936, pp. 22 ff.). Perhaps the oddest consequence of Mâle’s belief in Barbieri as a fountain-head is his attempt to explain the presence of Jonah in the Sistine Ceiling by a printer’s error in Barbieri’s book, where a picture of Jonah and the whale appears by mistake over a text concerning Gideon’s fleece: ‘Jonas s’est donc introduit, à la faveur d’une faute d’impression, dans la compagnie des Sibylles. Michel-Ange, qui n’a pas regardé de très près le livre de Filippo Barbieri, a aperçu une gravure représentant Jonas et la baleine, cela lui a suffi’ (p. 264; also p. 260, note 1). Nevertheless, Mâle’s chapter on Sibylline iconography remains fundamental to any study of the subject—its chief rivals being Mâle’s own dissertation *Quomodo Sibyllas recentiores artifices repraesentaverint* (1899), and two considerably older but very substantial studies: Ferdinand Piper, *Mythologie und Symbolik der christlichen Kunst*, i. i (1847), § 43: ‘Von den Sibyllen’, pp. 472–507 and X. Barbier de Montault, ‘Iconographie des Sibylles’, *Revue de l’art chrétien* xiii (1869), 244–57, 321–56, 465–507, 578–82; xiv (1870), pp. 290–317; 326–41, 385–406.

¹ A notable case is L. G. Gyraldus, *De poetarum historia*, Dialogus ii (*Opera* ii, 1696, col. 112). In the midst of an arduous struggle with Sibylline traditions, Gyraldus reveals that he and his interlocutor, Piso, despair of disentangling the literary history of the Sibyls: “So much for the Cumaean Sibyl”.—“And enough”, said Piso, “for I begin to see what you mean: that Virgil spread confusion about the Sibyls.”—“Not only Virgil, Piso,” said I, “but all the other writers as well: for it is evident that they all produced concoctions and failed to report with candour” (*omnes enim miscuisse, nec sincere narrasse videmus*).² This judgement is the more remarkable as Gyraldus was sufficiently touched by the poetic aura of the Sibyls to attempt a Latin

lending a touch of Virgilian grace to those unwieldy lumps of oracular verbiage,¹ excusable enough in untutored visionaries who were presumably 'speaking with tongues', as did the Gentiles in Acts x. 45 f.² The frequency with which some coarse bit of Sibylline fustian appears transfigured in Renaissance books and paintings shows that the Sibyls, particularly among men of elegant erudition, satisfied a profound and genuinely humanist craving: they bore testimony against the prejudice that Christian prophecy had been withheld from the pagans.

That these mantic women had preached the divine word without preparation by Mosaic disciplines seemed only to increase their prophetic stature. As the quality of Mercy is superior to Justice, and Grace stands higher than the Law, so the Sibyls—as prophetesses to the heathen—seemed more miraculous than the Hebrew prophets. A painting by Mantegna that shows a Sibyl conversing with a Prophet leaves no doubt as to which is the superior spirit (Pl. XXII). While the Prophet holds the sacred script, the Sibyl explains it to him with persuasive clairvoyance, *numine afflata*, touching the crucial passage like a divine enchantress, while he listens with awe to her inspired utterances.³

translation of the Erythraean acrostic (op. cit., col. 108) and to climb into the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl, at that time a more hazardous undertaking than it is today: 'ad quae visenda subterranea crypta ego ipse cum studiosis plerisque comitibus aliquando non sine horrore descendi' (col. 112). On the grotto in question, see below, p. 83, n. 2. An elegiac allusion to it in Sannazaro, *Ad ruinas Cumarum, urbis vetustissimae* (*Elegiae* II. ix. 9 f.).

¹ Politian, *Nutricia* 218–25, gives a catalogue of Sibyls (derived from Pausanias x. xii), cleverly versified as a mnemonic aid. In Sannazaro's *De partu Virginis*, the traditional image of the Annunciation, in which the Virgin is found reading as the Angel approaches, is enriched by a significant detail: the Virgin reads the prophecies of the Sibyls (i. 93). Of peculiar interest is a miscellaneous volume of classical texts published by Aldus in 1495: it begins with Theocritus's *Idylls* and ends with Hesiod's *Works and Days*. In the middle of it, following on *Aurea carmina Pythagorae* and *Phocylidae poema admonitorium*, one can read *Carmina Sibyllae Erythraeae de Christo Iesu domino nostro*, that is, the Greek acrostic of the Erythraean Sibyl, taken from Eusebius.

² 'On the Gentiles also was poured the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.'

³ The diadem she wears is a Sibylline attribute derived from Eusebius's description of the Erythraean Sibyl (*Constantini oratio ad sanctorum coetum viii*); see also the diadem of the Cumaean Sibyl in Castagno's fresco in Sant' Apollonia, Florence. The old title of Mantegna's painting, *Sibyl and Prophet*, is certainly preferable to the more recent suggestion that the scene represents the Cumaean Sibyl instructing Tarquin. Neither the man's physiognomy nor his costume suggests a Roman. Besides, the Sibyl taught nothing to Tarquin

Even in the spectacular setting of Titian's *Gloria* (Pl. XXIII), designed for Charles V as a celestial vision of the triumphant Church, a mysterious Sibyl, known as Noah's daughter-in-law,¹ appears near the centre in the part of a jubilant prophetess, directing Noah toward the Holy Trinity above the clouds, with a protective gesture as if she were interceding for him. Yet Noah was an inspired prophet in his own right: with fore-knowledge of the Passion, he had produced a model of divine salvation in his construction of the Ark,—its wood signifying the wood of the Cross while the Ark itself was a figure of the Church floating securely on the waters of tribulation.² In a Florentine engraving of the fifteenth century he appears with the inscription *Noe profeta*, pointing to a small model of the Ark which he holds as his prophetic emblem (Pl. XXVa). It is in the same role that he is seen in Titian's painting, raising the emblem of the Ark ecstatically toward heaven: and yet he seems to need the Sibyl's assistance. Her superiority over the prophet is here as marked as it was in Mantegna's painting.³

—except to buy three books for the exorbitant price that he had refused to pay for nine.

¹ Cf. Gyraldus, *Opera*, ii, col. 106. For the full text see *Oracula Sibyllina* iii, 822 ff. (ed. Alexandre, i, pp. 162 f.). A handy summary was accessible in the *Scholia Platonica* (ed. G. C. Greene, 1938, pp. 79 f., on *Phaedrus* 244B); the same also in Photius, *Amphilochia* 60 (cf. Alexandre, op. cit. iii, p. 427).

² Augustine, *Civitas Dei* xv. xxvi f.; Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noë morali* i. viii; cf. Wind, 'The Ark of Noah: a Study in the Symbolism of Michelangelo', *Measure* i (1950), pp. 411–21.

³ As Noah is supported by the Sibyl, so Moses on his left is assisted by John the Evangelist in holding up the inspired Word (Genesis i. 1 = John i. 1). The devout youth next to the Sibyl is perhaps meant to represent her spouse, Noah's youngest son Japheth, from whom descended the race of the Gentiles. These appear as worshippers on the upper right, among them Charles V and his family, and a more humble group that includes Titian. In the foreground, David, covered by a shroud of royal ermine, plays the psalter. While Titian called this picture simply *The Trinity* (cf. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Titian*, ii, 1881, p. 231), Charles V referred to it as *The Last Judgement* (ibid., p. 236)—'teste David cum Sibylla'. The presence of the Virgin and John the Baptist as intercessors (on the upper left) would seem to confirm that interpretation, even though the scene is confined to the blessed who enjoy the beatific vision. In the Kingdom of Heaven, according to Romans xiv. 17, the souls are moved by three divine forces that emanate from the Trinity: *iustitia et pax et gaudium in spiritu sancto* (cf. Pagnini, *Isagoge*, p. 252). These phases of ecstasy seem illustrated in the three central characters of the painting: Moses holding the tables of the Law (*iustitia*), Noah raising up the Ark, with the dove and the branch of olive (*pax*), and the Sibyl filled with jubilation (*gaudium in spiritu sancto*). Since all three proclaim by their hymnic gestures the *Gloria Deo in*

Michelangelo, too, paid homage to this Sibyl. In the picture of *Noah's Sacrifice*, which appears in the Sistine Ceiling next to the figure of the Erythraean Sibyl, the 'eight souls' that 'were saved by water' (1 Peter iii. 20)—Noah and his wife, and his three sons and their wives—are assembled around the altar (Pl. XXIV). While the sons and two of the daughters-in-law are busy with the paraphernalia of the sacrifice (carrying wood, fanning the fire, and preparing the victims), the third daughter-in-law stands on Noah's right side behind the altar where she officiates like a priestess: she solemnly places a burning faggot on the altar, while shielding her face with an ominous oracular gesture (derived from classical representations of the Death of Meleager in which Althea thus lights the enchanted faggot that causes the death of her son¹). Noah, attended by his wife who listens intently, enacts the part of *Noe profeta*. His gesture of promise, pointing to heaven, unites with the compassionate and mournful, almost protesting gesture of the Sibyl.²

With a fine sense for the future union between the Church of the Gentiles and that of the Jews, this particularly clairvoyant Sibyl had married into an Old Testament family before the Flood. As she explains in her prophecy, she had come from Babylon, although 'the mortals in Hellas will call me by another city, saying that I am from Erythrae'. The world, she says, 'was flooded with water, and only one man remained pious, who drove over the waters in a house of cut wood with the beasts and fowls so that the world would be filled again: of him am I a

excelsis, the traditional title *La Gloria* is not mistaken, although deficient in theological detail. Vasari notes that, 'secondo che gli fu comandato da Cesare', Titian represented the emperor in his shroud: this defines the scene as a funerary pageant, comparable to a Requiem.

¹ Michelangelo almost certainly saw this figure on a Roman sarcophagus formerly in the Palazzo della Valle in Rome, now in the Villa Albani. For a sixteenth-century drawing of it see Codex Coburgensis as reproduced in C. Robert, *Die antiken Sarkophag-Reliefs* (1904), no. 278'; cf. E. H. Gombrich, 'A classical Quotation in Michelangelo's "Sacrifice of Noah"', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, i (1937), p. 69.

² Among the animals that have issued from the Ark, a lowing ox and a braying ass (interpreted as emblems of Jew and Gentile by St. Gregory, *Moralia* vii. iv) stand out as prophetic images, as in Job vi. 5 and Isaiah i. 3. According to St. Gregory, whose argument was adopted by Pagnini, *Isagoge* iv. iii. 218, the braying of the ass and the lowing of the ox express the longing for the incarnation and the eucharist 'by which Jews and Gentiles are equally nourished'. On ox and ass as Jew and Gentile, see also Egidio da Viterbo, *Historia viginti saeculorum*, cod. Angel. 502, fol. 32r: 'Hebraeos bovi, gentes asello comparant.'

daughter-in-law'.¹ How closely the Biblical account of the Flood became associated with this apocryphal legend may be seen from the fact that a Venetian printer, in publishing Savonarola's sermons on the Ark of Noah in the sixteenth century, decorated the title-page with an image of Noah's daughter-in-law, inscribed *Sybilla* (Pl. XXVI), her figure framed by a quotation from John (xv. 5) printed in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, which says that without her spiritual gift the books that surround her would be useless.²

Fortunately, the Bible could be said to have lent some support to these poetic divagations in praise of sibylline intruders. A few verses after his prophecy on the Tree of Jesse and the Gifts of the Spirit, Isaiah had returned to the same theme, repeating the prophecy in a form that included the Gentiles (xi. 10):

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

St. Paul, as apostle to the Gentiles, quoted this passage from Isaiah as part of his evidence when he wrote to the Romans (xv. 12), while in the epistle to the Galatians he traced the promise to the heathen as far back as Abraham:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed (*benedicentur in te omnes gentes*). . . . That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. . . . Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. . . . And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise [iii. 8-29].

If thus by the strength of faith alone the Gentiles could become 'descendants of Abraham', with whose name the Genealogy of

¹ The quotation in Gyraldus (cf. above, p. 61, n. 1) is important because it shows that the passage was known before the full text appeared in print. For the latter see *Oracula Sibyllina* iii. 808-26 (ed. Alexandre, i, pp. 160 ff.); also J. A. Fabricius, *Codex pseudepigraphus Veteris Testamenti*, i (1722), pp. 278 ff.; F. Blass, 'Die Sibyllinischen Orakel' in E. Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, ii (1900), pp. 200 ff.; R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ii (1913), pp. 392 f. In a Dutch *Spiegel der Sibyllen* by J[ohannes] A[itizma] (Amsterdam, 1685), Noah's daughter-in-law, by now known as the Persian Sibyl, is pictured against the background of the biblical Deluge, with Noah's Ark impressively afloat (Pl. XXV b). On Noah's connexion with the Sibylline tradition, see also E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* (1898).

² Published in Venice, 1536, by Pietro de' Nicolini da Sabio; cf. Piero Ginori Conti, *Bibliografia delle opere del Savonarola*, i (1939), p. 109, no. 9.

Christ begins in Matthew i, then 'the spirit of the Lord', described by Isaiah as resting upon the Tree of Jesse (xi. 2), may fill the Sibyls with 'spiritual gifts' as it did the Prophets, and both will belong to the 'Genealogy of Christ'.¹

A list of 'spiritual gifts', specially designed for Gentiles, was drawn up by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians xiv. 26. They are five in number, and sound so abstract that, like the seven gifts in Isaiah, they might seem at first like unpaintable subjects. St. Paul calls them Psalm, Doctrine, Tongue, Revelation, and Interpretation. In his commentary on the Epistles of Paul,² Thomas Aquinas explained the nature of these five gifts, whose part in the prophetic dispensation he defined in the *Summa theologica* as follows: 'It belongs to the perfection in the operation of the Holy Spirit that it not only fills the mind with prophetic light, and the imagination with fantastic visions, as was the case in the Old Testament, but also outwardly informs the tongue how to produce a variety of signs through speech: All of which is done in the New Testament according to 1 Corinthians xiv: Each of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue', etc.³

Since the account given by Aquinas of these new gifts of the spirit is a tough theological demonstration, one must be grateful to Erasmus (who happened to be in Rome as Cardinal Riario's guest when Michelangelo began painting the Sistine Ceiling⁴) that he paraphrased the doctrine with such elegance and lucidity that the five gifts are easy to distinguish. 'Psalmus', he says, is 'a mystic song in praise of God' (*canticum mysticum quo lubet canere*

¹ For rare instances of a Sibyl or a pair of Sibyls associated with a Tree of Jesse in medieval representations, see Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 f.; Heitz and Schreiber, *op. cit.*, p. 14. It should be noted, however, that the corresponding Prophets (Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 54 ff.) attend the Tree of Jesse not as representatives of the 'Gifts of the Spirit', from which they differ in number as well as in character, but simply as prophets of the incarnation, of which the Tree of Jesse is a figure. It would seem to follow that the occasional Sibyl owes her presence near a Tree of Jesse likewise to a prophecy of the incarnation rather than to any particular 'spiritual gift'. Seven doves remain the current symbol for the 'gifts of the Spirit', visibly separated from Prophets or Sibyls even when they appear on the same page (*ibid.*, pl. xv: Lambeth MS. 3, fol. 198^r). Nevertheless, the Renaissance fusion of 'spiritual gifts' with representative prophets or sibyls was prepared by their medieval juxtaposition as separate images.

² *Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura* v. 867 (ed. P. P. Cai, i, 1953, p. 400).

³ *Summa theologica* II, ii, q. 176, art. 2.

⁴ Erasmus stayed in Rome in 1509. In a letter addressed to Riario in 1515 he recalled his sojourn there with more affection than one would expect from him (*Epistolae*, ed. Allen, no. 333).

deum). *Doctrina* he defines as moral instruction, or indoctrination, which relates to the good conduct of life (*ad instituendam vitam, or ad bonos mores pertinet*). *Lingua* is of course 'the gift of tongues', which calls for *Interpretatio* (exposition) to make the strange voices intelligible. *Revelatio*, finally, is the exegetic power to 'detect concealed and remote meanings in sacred script' (*erueret abstrusa reconditaque in sacris literis*) or, as Erasmus put it with deliberately occult intonation, to 'open up an arcanum by the gift of apocalypse' (*aperire arcanum per apocalypsis donum*).¹

Two of these gifts, that of 'mystic song' (*psalmus*) and the 'gift of tongues' (*lingua*) stand out as extremes of prophetic exaltation against the more reflective moods of the other three (*interpretatio, doctrina, revelatio*). The sequence embodied in Michelangelo's Sibyls, if read from the entrance towards the altar, begins with *lingua* and ends with *psalmus*, while the three temperate phases are placed between.

It is fairly obvious from 1 Corinthians xiv that St. Paul was driven to distinguish between these five gifts because of the excessive use that had been made of the 'gift of tongues'. Although an important part of prophecy, and sanctioned as such by Christ himself (Mark xvi. 17), St. Paul wrote that it was of no use in the Church unless it was followed by interpretation: for 'if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. . . . Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret' (*ibid.* 11-13). Erasmus made much of St. Paul's passing remark that he himself spoke with tongues 'more than ye all', but that in the Church he would

¹ Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in omnes epistolas apostolicas* (1539), xiv, pp. 276 f., also p. 272; derived from Thomas Aquinas, *Super epistolas S. Pauli*, loc. cit., where these gifts are explained in the same way; e.g. *Psalmus* = 'canticum ad laudandum nomen Dei'; *Doctrina* = 'praedicatio ad instructionem morum', etc. Although it did not occur to Aquinas to associate the gifts to the Gentiles with Sibylline inspiration, it should be noted that he included the Sibyls with Balaam among the indigenous *prophetae daemonum* who were chosen by God to speak not *ex daemonum revelatione* but *ex inspiratione divina* (*Summa theologica* II. ii, q. 172, art. 6; cf. also II. ii, q. 2, art. 7). The parallel with Balaam makes it clear that he treated the Sibylline evidence as marginal, true enough to be respected ('Sibyllae multa vera praedixerunt de Christo') but not so fascinating as it proved to the Renaissance, when the naming of Balaam together with the Sibyls could not but enhance his reputation. In the spirited procession of Titian's woodcut, *The Triumph of the Cross*, a figure inscribed 'Balaam propheta' brings up the rear of a battalion of Sibyls waving flags. In the vanguard Noah and Moses raise the Ark and the tables of the Law like trophies (compare Pl. XXIII).

rather speak five words with his understanding than ten thousand of the unintelligible kind (18 f.). In Erasmus's paraphrase this short passage was expanded as follows: 'for in the Church and in the concourse of saints I would rather speak very few words in such a way that, by understanding my own language, I would achieve that it was understood also by others, than pronounce ten thousand words in such a manner that none of the others could understand them, and perhaps not even myself (*ac fortasse ne ipse quidem*)'.¹ The last phrase, which is not in St. Paul, adopts the Platonic view that, in the state of prophetic seizure, the person who suffers these fits is demented and does not himself know what they mean.² Erasmus, no doubt, was aware that his reading of St. Paul in this Platonic sense had the support of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. In the 'gift of tongues', they say, the prophetic attack gets caught in the imagination so forcefully that it cannot rise to the mind. The uttering of unintelligible words results from hallucinatory states of vision in which the inspired person sees 'images' and 'similitudes' with too much vivacity to be able to grasp their meaning.³

The eyes and mouth of the Delphic Sibyl appear to be moved by a violent inspiration which struggles in vain to become articulate (Pls. XXVII, XXVIII). The tongue is seen pressing against the teeth, and the phrases that escape from the half-open lips are presumably as unintelligible as the visionary figments at which the eyes are staring. No doubt, the face was modelled on Virgil's verses (*Aeneid* vi. 46 ff., 79 f.) describing the derangement suffered by the Sibyl as the god takes possession of her frame (*fatigat os rabidum, fera corda domans, fingitque premendo*):⁴ but

¹ Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

² *Timaeus* 71D-72B; see also below, p. 74, n. 4.

³ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XII. viii (*Patr. lat.* xxxiv, cols. 460 f.), credits St. Paul with a distinction between *spiritualis visio* and *mens*, the former being confined to 'significationes velut imagines rerum ac similitudines'. He infers that in a figurative sense St. Paul's term *lingua* refers to any subrational projection of signs: 'translato verbo *linguam* appellavit quamlibet signorum prolationem priusquam intelligantur'. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* II. ii, q. 176 (*De gratia linguarum*), art. 2: 'Augustinus, *xii super Genesim ad litteram* (cap. viii), comparat donum linguarum visioni imaginariae.'

⁴ Matteo Palmieri (*Città di vita* i. 20 ff.) tried to translate Virgil's description of the raging Sibyl (*pectus anhelum . . . adflata est numine*) into *terza rima*: 'ma di furor piena incensa ed anhela . . .', 'ne viso el suo terror ne pecto cela . . .', 'comincio cosi grande ombra si svela'. In this visionary theological epic, ambitiously modelled on the *Divine Comedy*, the parts of Virgil and Beatrice are fused in the divinely inspired Sibyl—a pagan guide even to the beatific vision.

equally relevant is a more figurative passage that alludes, through a magnificent metaphor, to the disappointments caused by the Sibyl's madness (iii. 443 ff.): Winds blow through the desolate cave of the Sibyl, catch the loose leaves inscribed with her words and put them into a state of disorder which the distracted prophetess does not amend: whence men go away disillusioned and resentful: *inconsulti abeunt sedemque odere Sibyllae* (452).

The two spirits attending the Delphic Sibyl illustrate that fatuous state of expectation that is aroused by incommunicable words (Pl. XXIX). One putto is engrossed in reading a text while the other waits to hear it, suggesting by his stolid expression that he has been waiting very long. Indeed, the word will not be delivered until Intellect supervenes, as it does—on the opposite side—in the two putti attending Joel (Pl. V). The clarity and sharpness of Joel's reason offsets the raving of the Sibyl, so that the signs of things that were formed in the spirit 'would beam with intelligence in the mind': *ut et signa rerum formarentur in spiritu, et eorum refulgeret intellectus in mente*.¹

Yet Joel's intellectual penetration remains a private exercise of the understanding. *Interpretatio*, as practised by the Erythraean Sibyl (Pl. XXX), is enlightenment addressed to the assembled Church: she speaks (to use Erasmus's words) *in ecclesia coetuque sanctorum*.² Her formal posture in pointing to the text, which is displayed wide open on a lectern that has been ceremoniously covered with linen, suggests the performance of a communal duty; she provides demonstrable authoritative evidence, and thus serves the purpose of illumination, engagingly illustrated by the attending putto who is preoccupied with lighting a lamp: his companion rubs his eyes.

The question whether so rational a process as Interpretation deserves to be called a 'prophetic gift' was raised by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa theologica*, and answered in the affirmative with considerable vigour. The words addressed by Belshazzar to Daniel seemed to him a conclusive proof: 'I have heard of thee that the spirit of the gods is in thee. . . . And I have heard of thee that thou canst make interpretation of obscure meanings and untie knots' (*audivi de te quod possis obscura interpretari et ligata dissolvere*, v. 16). Aquinas inferred from this text that *interpretatio*

¹ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XII. ix (*Patr. lat.* xxxiv, col. 461).

² Erasmus, *Paraphrasis*, p. 274. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, loc. cit., where *interpretatio* is defined as 'utilior ad aedificationem Ecclesiae: ad quam qui loquitur linguis nihil prodest, nisi expositio subsequatur'.

sermonum involves the *donum prophetiae*: 'inasmuch as the mind requires illumination to understand and expound whatever is obscure in speech, whether because of the difficulty of the things signified, or because the words themselves are unfamiliar, or because of the strange use of imagery'.¹

The reference to Daniel in this context is of importance to the Sistine Ceiling, since it was Daniel who represented Interpretation among the Prophets (Pl. XXXI): the very word *Scientia*, which designated his 'spiritual gift', recurs in the Vulgate as a synonym for *Interpretatio* among the 'five gifts' listed by St. Paul (1 Corinthians xiv. 6). Thus Daniel and the Erythraean Sibyl, placed diagonally across from each other (see Pl. XLVIII), are meant to be seen as equivalent forces: if the zeal of Daniel counteracts the suspense of Isaiah, Isaiah's hesitation is equally opposed by the positivism of the Erythraean Sibyl whose assertive gesture appears directly opposite to him.

After the frenzied prophecy of the Delphic Sibyl and the Erythraean's enlightening interpretation, *Doctrina* appears in the Cumaean Sibyl as a solid and homely kind of foresight, concerned with nurture and tutelage *ad instituendam vitam* (Pl. XXXIII). Like a primeval nurse or *alma mater*, this muscular woman of gigantic age is distinguished from all the other Sibyls by being visibly endowed with breasts, an attribute that belongs to her as prophetess of the 'celestial milk' (*lac de coelo missum*) which is the future food of salvation.² What Michelet said mistakenly of the Delphic Sibyl (at which he cannot have looked very closely) applies almost literally to the Cumaean: 'gonflée de ses pleines mamelles'.³ Having nursed the Romans with the Sibylline Books, from which they drew advice in critical hours, she looks, with an expression of maternal care, at a weighty sample of codified doctrine. The children watch her benevolently,

¹ *Summa theologica*, loc. cit.

² The 'Cimmerian' Sibyl, to whom this prophecy was ascribed by Barbieri and others (Mâle, pp. 259, 269 f.), was commonly identified, or 'confused', with the Cumaean, as Gyraldus explained (*Opera* ii, col. 109). See also Alexandre, op. cit. iii, pp. 49-61, Excursus 1, vii: 'De Sibylla Cumana seu Cimmeria, . . . sive quorundam Itala.' Even Virgil's line in the Fourth Eclogue: *iam nova progenies coelo demittitur alto*, although introduced in the original by *ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas*, was ascribed alternatively to the Cimmerian and the Cumaean Sibyl (Mâle, pp. 256, 259). Both were of course known as 'Italic' (see Lactantius 1, vi, after Varro). Because of her prophecy about the milk, the Cimmerian Sibyl often carries a nipple (Mâle, loc. cit.).

³ *Histoire de France* vii: 'La Renaissance' (1855), pp. 315 f., an ebullient description of the Delphic Sibyl, *vierge et féconde, débordant de l'Esprit*.

and with a leisurely touch of condescension: one of them carries a second volume, presumably from the Sibyl's library. She is the weightiest prophetess of the five, and placed in the centre of the series, opposite to the mighty and firm Ezekiel, whose active energy she offsets by a display of monumental quietude.

For a confirmation of her role as prophetic 'nurse' or 'mother', it should be observed that in the lunettes below the Cumaean Sibyl the scenes allegorizing the Genealogy of Christ provide the only instance, in the whole cycle, of two contiguous groups of a nursing mother: they supply a marginal gloss on the Sibyl's character (Pl. XXXII). Furthermore, in the cycle from Genesis the scene adjacent to the Cumaean Sibyl represents the Creation of Eve, the first mother (Pl. XXXIV). Foreshadowing the Birth of the Church (the second Eve), who was to issue from the side of Christ (the second Adam), the picture occupies the centre of the Ceiling for prophetic reasons that are clearly indicated by the dead tree against which the sleeping Adam leans.¹ The sacraments that were born from the side of the dead Christ for the remission of sin are the 'milk sent from heaven' that the benevolent nurse administers in her 'doctrine':² she prophesies

¹ As in Donne's verses on 'Christ's cross and Adam's tree' (*Hymn to God my God, in my sickness*, 21-25), Michelangelo's image of Paradise as a desolate landscape was meant to foreshadow Golgotha. On the sacramental meaning of Adam's sleep, and of the opening in his side, see Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* II. xxiv (*Patr. lat.* xxxiv, col. 215 f.), 'Adam Christus, Eva Ecclesia': '. . . soporatus est dormitione passionis, ut ei conjux Ecclesia formaretur . . . de latere eius . . .'; also Dante, *Paradiso* xvii. 37 ff. For illustrations cf. A. de Laborde, *La Bible Moralisée illustrée* I (1911), pl. 6; V (1927), p. 158; Henrik Cornell, *Biblia pauperum* (1925), pl. 39, with corresponding scene of the Passion and explanatory text: 'Adam dormiens Christum significat, de cuius latere fluxit sanguis et aqua in signum illius ut intelligamus omnia sacramenta de latere Christi effluxisse.' The prophet Ezekiel, seated across from the Cumaean Sibyl on the other side of the Creation of Eve, supports the sacramental interpretation of that scene: 'Et tu dormiens super latus tuum sinistrum . . . assumes iniquitatem eorum' (iv. 4 ff.). See also Ezekiel xvii. 24, on the dry tree as an emblem of redemption, contrasted with the green tree as an emblem of sin: 'I the Lord . . . have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish.' In the background of Michelangelo's painting of the Fall of Man, the dry tree reappears as a meek rod offsetting the rich foliage of the Tree of Knowledge (Pl. XXXV). For a comprehensive bibliography on the dry and the green tree in Paradise see G. B. Ladner, 'Vegetation Symbolism and the Concept of Renaissance', in *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (1961), pp. 302-22, particularly notes 26, 32, 36, 39, 41, 43.

² On the relation between 'celestial milk' and 'sacramental wounds', commonly symbolized by Mary pointing to her breast while Christ points to the wound in his side, see Ernardus, *Liber de laudibus Mariae* (*Patr. lat.* clxxxix,

of the Motherhood of the Church—the most staid and least mantic of subjects, which Michelangelo managed to endow with a monstrous sort of solidity.

The Persian Sibyl (Pl. XXXVI), who exhibits the gift of *Revelatio*, is an old prophetess like the Cumaean, but slender and spinsterly, slightly hunch-backed like a gentle witch, her face foreshortened in a lost profile and covered by a shadow. Straining her short-sighted eyes, she divines some 'concealed and remote meaning' that is 'adumbrated' in her book. The revelatory guess-work, in which she excels, does not prosper in the clear light administered by her Erythraean sister, with whom she is connected by antithetical symmetry. Mysteries belong to the hour of dusk and disclose their presence only to those who retain a sense of the indefinable: *vaticinari videtur sub nubilo*, 'she appears to prophesy under a cloud'.¹ Her attendants act like somnambulists, and the ancestral figures in the lunettes below her seem lost in sleep and dream (Pl. XXXVIII). The Caryatids, too, with veils on their heads, are in the mood of sleep-walkers, but above them one of the *Ignudi* (Pl. XXXVII), seized with a cryptic madness, rages in the posture of a classical figure that Michelangelo had seen on a Bacchic relief.² The reason is not far to seek. In the Renaissance the supreme model of a veiled theological style, shunning the cold use of positive definitions, was admired in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, translated and interpreted by Marsilio Ficino who, seizing on the name Dionysius, had characterized the author as a Bacchic spirit: 'Inebriate with this Dionysiac wine our Dionysius expresses his exaltation. He pours forth enigmas, he sings in dithyrambs. . . . To penetrate the profundity of his meaning, . . . to imitate his quasi-Orphic manner of speech . . . , we too require col. 1726), illustrated in *Speculum humanae salvationis*, eds. J. Lutz and P. Perdrizet (1907), pl. 78. In a predella by Francia (Pinacoteca, Bologna, no. 82) a figure of St. Augustine, placed between the bleeding Crucifix and the Virgin nursing the Child, points to these contrasting images, while the two scrolls above his hands read: HIC AB UBERE LACTOR—HIC A VULNERE PASCOR. On a third scroll the dilemma of the saint, caught between joy and agony, is resolved into prayer: 'Positus in medio, quo me vertar nescio. Dicam ergo: Jesu Maria miserere.'

¹ Heitz and Schreiber, op. cit., s.v. 'Sibilla persica'; also Mâle, op. cit., pp. 267 f.

² Vatican, Galleria delle statue (W. Amelung, *Die Sculpturen des Vaticanischen Museums* II. iii, 1908, pp. 440 ff., no. 261a, pl. 52); cf. A. Hekler, 'Michelangelo und die Antike', *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* vii (1930), p. 213, fig. iii. 2b; A. von Salis, *Antike und Renaissance* (1947), pp. 182 f., 265, with further references and illustrations.

the divine fury.¹ The excited youth above the Persian Sibyl exhibits the prescriptive Dionysian rage that issues in dithyrambic declamation. Pictured in the act of 'pouring forth enigmas' (a very different matter from 'speaking with tongues'), he is counterbalanced not so much by his dazed companion as by the violently jubilant spirit (above Daniel) diagonally across from him (Pl. XI, see also Pl. XLVIII), these two being related to each other as metaphorical darkness is to logical clarity. Prophesying *sub nubilo*, the Persian Sibyl dimly weaves the kind of knot which Daniel is so skilled to untie. Yet Daniel's scientific explanation is not what the Sibyl seeks. Her aim is to reach the 'cloud of unknowing' by the methods of 'negative theology'—to which the Erythraean Sibyl opposes the 'positive theology' of her authorized book. Yet the belief that 'God resides in darkness' could invoke biblical authority in its turn: *Et posuit tenebras latibulum suum* (Psalms xvii. 12).²

In the Libyan Sibyl, prophecy transcends the cloud of adumbration and reaches the state of pure ecstasy—the 'mystic canticle' or 'psalm' (Pl. XLIII). She was famed as conveyor of a joyous message: *Ecce veniet dies et illuminabit condensa tenebrarum* ('Behold there will come the day and illuminate the density of darkness'),³ and she is placed next to the *Fiat Lux*, on the side to which God, as he divides Light from Darkness, pushes the light (Pl. XL), while the side of darkness is given to Jeremiah. Rising from her seat with downcast eyes, like one who has been struck by a blinding light, and feeling her way with her toes, again like one blinded, but moving with the ease of a dancer, she closes her book and turns away from it.⁴ Divine love is above understanding: *amor est supra intellectum*.⁵ That she shuts her eyes

¹ Ficino, *Opera*, p. 1013 (preface to Dionysius Areopagita, *De mystica theologia*).

² Pico della Mirandola, *De ente et uno* v (*Opera*, 1557, p. 248).

³ Heitz and Schreiber, op. cit., s.v. 'Sibilla Libica'; also Mâle, op. cit., pp. 258 (Barbieri), 268.

⁴ As Vasari explained, the Libyan Sibyl is about to rise from her seat while shutting the book: 'in un medesimo tempo mostra volere alzarsi e serrare il libro' (ed. Milanesi, vii, 1881, p. 184). The common belief that she takes the book down, expressed most forcefully by Taine—'emportant l'énorme livre qu'elle a saisi' (*Voyage en Italie*, 1866, p. 284)—is certainly mistaken: the left hand (Pl. XLI) holds the pages, not the cover, which remains resting on its stand (cf. C. de Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling*, 1945, p. 158).

⁵ Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones . . . in doctrinam Platonis*, no. 6 (*Opera*, p. 96); also *De ente et uno* v (ibid., p. 248): 'for we have not reached God so long as we understand and comprehend what we say of God.' Although Ficino was less radical than Pico in his pursuit of a *docta ignorantia* (cf. Wind,

(Pl. XLII) is proof of her mystical exaltation: 'for to close the eyes in initiation', Hermias wrote in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, 'is no longer to receive by sense those divine mysteries, but with the pure soul itself'; and Proclus in the *Platonic Theology* described the supreme mystic surrender as 'giving ourselves up to the divine light, and closing the eyes of the soul, after this manner to become established in the unknown and occult unity of being'.¹ If in her blind ecstasy the Sibyl seems curiously light-footed, stepping with an eerie grace, it is because of a prophetic verse (taken from Habakkuk iii. 19) by which Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary of 1 Corinthians xiv. 26, illustrated the gift of *psalmus*:

Et ponet pedes meos quasi cervorum;
et super excelsa mea deducet me
victor in psalmis canentem.

'And he will set my feet like the feet of hinds, and lead me away captive upon my high places singing psalms.'² In Jerome's gloss on that passage (quoted in full in Pagnini's *Isagoge*, with references to Psalms xvii. 34: *qui perfecit pedes meos tanquam cervorum, et super excelsa ponet me*, and xxviii. 9: *vox Domini perficientis cervos*), the prophetic ecstasy that walks *super excelsa* is infused with the joyful tidings of the new faith: 'And he will set my feet among his other hinds, and lead me to celestial places so that I may sing the glory of the Lord' among the angels, and announce peace on earth to men of good will.'³

The two forms of madness distinguished by Plato, the one below reason, the other above it, appear in the Delphic and Libyan Sibyl as mantic obsession and mystic release, 'demonic' as against 'angelic' ecstasy.⁴ Related to each other like the *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, 1958, pp. 65 ff.), he endorsed the doctrine in his commentaries on Plotinus and on Dionysius the Areopagite (e.g. *Opera*, pp. 1066, 1793) as well as in his excerpts from Proclus (*ibid.*, pp. 1911 f.); cf. also his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* (e.g. *Opera*, pp. 1017 f.).

¹ Hermias, *In Platonis Phaedrum* 250B (ed. P. Couvreur, p. 178); Proclus, *In theologiam Platonis* I. xxv (ed. A. Portus, p. 61). For further sources, see Wind, *op. cit.*, pp. 57 ff.

² *Super epistolas S. Pauli* v. 867: 'exponit Abac. iii. 19: *super excelsa mea deducet me*, etc.'

³ Jerome, *Commentaria in Abacuc* II. iii (*Patr. lat.* xxv, col. 1336); Pagnini, *Isagoge* I. xxxiii (p. 89). The words from Psalms are here given as in Jerome and Pagnini, numbered according to the Vulgate. In the King James version, where the corresponding verses are Psalms xviii. 33 and xxix. 9, the meaning is not the same.

⁴ It is significant that the Libyan Sibyl has removed her gown, which is seen hanging from her seat (Pl. XLIII). The act of putting on, or throwing

opposite extremes of the same passion, the anxiety in the wide-open eyes of the Delphic Sibyl (Pl. XXVIII) is answered by the weirdly quiet joy with which the Libyan Sibyl closes her eyes (Pl. XLII). These 'deranged' states of mind are pagan forms of prophetic excess unknown to the Hebrews: none of their prophets, not even the unbalanced Jonah, surrenders his reasoning powers to that extent. Nevertheless, Jeremiah seems to draw his compassionate silence from the same depths that blind the Libyan Sibyl with joy. In the presence of the ultimate arcanum, both word and vision are transcended. As Pythagorean Platonists and Dionysian mystics taught, the only proper way of meeting the ineffable is by silence and by closing the eyes.¹

In reflecting on the theology of the Sistine Ceiling, it is important to avoid the misapprehension that, on reaching the mystical Sibyl and the silent Prophet, Michelangelo must have felt that the rest no longer counted. Radical Platonists would indeed have taken that view, which Giordano Bruno was to express with characteristic candour: 'wherefore the most

off, a garment or material vesture (χιτῶν) is a Neoplatonic image for the soul's descent into matter or ascent from it (cf. E. R. Dodds's commentary on Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 1964, pp. 307 f., referring to proposition no. 209). If the Libyca appears 'divested' as compared with the other Sibyls, it is because of her departure *super excelsa*. Among the attending spirits the leader has rolled up the scroll, as if there was no more reading to be done, and admonishes the other putto, who wears a cloak (Pl. XLV), to throw it off like the Sibyl. The cloaked putto should be compared with the chief figure attending the Persian Sibyl (Pl. XXXVI): As Ghisi's engraving shows very clearly (Pl. XXXIX), this figure also clutches a cloak, a significant attribute for a spirit attached to a 'veiled' form of initiation, to be abandoned in the final, 'disrobing' ecstasy. The Libyan Sibyl's act of 'transcendence' is illustrated also by the Caryatids engaged in a complicated mock-battle (Pl. XLIV): one of them forces the other, by kicking his thigh from below, to turn around, while the victim raises his arm to his eyes as if to shield them against the light—a remarkable parody of the Platonic ἐπιστροφή. Justi, *Michelangelo* (1900), p. 177 ('Die Grisailen der Kinderpaare') described the action correctly: 'Dann versuchen sie es gar sich im Kreise zu bewegen, was anfangs zwar bei dem engen Raum entsetzliche Schwierigkeiten und Verrenkungen kostet (Libyca).'

¹ Ficino, *In Dionysium Areopagitam* (*Opera*, pp. 1018 f.): 'Quomodo Deus apparet in silentio, et post transitum summitatum, et in caligine'; also Pico, *De ente et uno* v (*Opera*, p. 250): 'Tibi silentium laus'; Celio Calcagnini, 'Descriptio silentii', *Opera aliquot* (1544), p. 494: 'in silentio summum bonum'; Francesco Giorgio, loc. cit.: 'arcana et abdita Dei quae (teste Paulo) non licet homini loqui'; Egidio da Viterbo, *Historia viginti saeculorum*, Cod. Angel. 502, fol. 256^r (*arcanum, silentium*), also fol. 291^r on Pythagorean silence; cf. Iamblichus, *De vita pythagorica* xxxii. 226 f. On 'closing the eyes in initiation', see the sources quoted above, p. 72, n. 1.

profound and divine theologians say that God is better honoured and loved by silence than by words, and better seen by closing the eyes to images than by opening them: and therefore the negative theology of Pythagoras and Dionysius is so celebrated and placed above the demonstrable theology of Aristotle and the Scholastics.¹ In the Sistine Ceiling 'positive' and 'negative' theology are held in balance: the Erythraean Sibyl is as important as the Persian; nor do Joel and Ezekiel yield to Jeremiah. Without the open eyes of the Delphic Sibyl, the closed eyes of the Libyan would lose part of their meaning, and both these Sibyls would appear uprooted without the central weight of the Cumaean.

A word may be added here about the distinction between male and female prophets. To conceive of the Gentile prophecy as essentially feminine accorded with mantic practice among the pagans. Tiresias and other augurs notwithstanding, the unenviable power to commune with the gods was preferably assigned among the ancient Greeks to women,² either simple women susceptible to trance, like the Pythian priestess who uttered oracles that had to be interpreted by men, or women of a perspicacity that was more than masculine, like Socrates's friend Diotima.³ While Plato said in the *Timaeus* that the gods prefer weak vessels for their infusions,⁴ he referred in the

¹ *Eroici furori* II. iv.

² Pausanias's account of ancient diviners (x. xii) is typical in that it places the women ahead of the men: γυναῖκες καὶ ἄνδρες (x. xii. 11). In fact, the whole chapter is devoted to prophetic women while the male prophets are listed summarily in one sentence near the end. See also A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* II (1880), pp. 134 ff., with special reference to the Sibyls.

³ As if to certify her mantic powers, Plato made her a native of Mantinea (*Symposium* 201D). Socrates revered her as 'the Mantineian stranger', ἡ Μαντινικὴ ζένη (211D).

⁴ 71D-72B: 'For the authors of our being . . . placed in the liver the seat of divination. And herein is a proof that God has given the art of divination to the foolishness of man (ἀφροσύνη ἀνθρωπίνη). No man, when in his wits, attains mantic truth and inspiration; but when he receives the inspired word, either his intelligence is enthralled in sleep, or he is demented by some distemper or possession. And he who would understand . . . the apparitions . . . must first recover his wits. But while he continues demented, he cannot judge of the visions. . . . And for this reason it is customary to appoint interpreters. . . . Some persons call them diviners; but they are quite unaware that they are only expositors of dark sayings and visions, and are not to be called diviners at all, but only expounders of divinations (προφήται μαντευομένων).' To judge by the derogatory tone of these remarks, they were probably directed primarily against popular prophets who made business by peddling

Phaedrus with some respect to 'the Sibyl' (Σιβυλλα) as an inspired woman.¹ In Rome the care and consultation of the treasured Sibylline Books was entrusted first to two, later to ten, and ultimately to fifteen men (*quindecimviri sacris faciundis*), whose combined male efforts were directed toward understanding a feminine oracle. Even St. Paul, although he wrote peremptorily to the Corinthians, on finding that there was too much 'speaking with tongues': 'Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak' (1 Corinthians xiv. 34), acknowledged in the Epistle to the Galatians that the distinction between Jew and Greek corresponded to that between male and female which, like the division between free and slave, was to vanish in the apostolic church: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (iii. 28).

oracular books (cf. *Republic* 364B-E). Nevertheless, Plato's distinction between two levels of prophecy applies also to the practice at Delphi, where the prophetess, exposed to the fumes that rise from the tripod, produces dark sayings that the priests interpret and edit. Plato's argument was followed closely by Augustine in his distinction of the same two levels in Biblical prophecy (see above, p. 66), St. Paul having likewise insisted (1 Corinthians xiv) that 'speaking with tongues' must be followed by 'interpretation'. In fact, the Greek word for 'expounder', the easily mistranslated προφήτης, is in St. Paul the same as in Plato, as Erasmus noticed in a gloss that he added to his translation of 1 Corinthians xiv. 1: 'Hoc loco Paulus prophetiam vocat non praedictionem futurorum, sed interpretationem divinae scripturae. Quemadmodum et Plato discernit vates a prophetis. Vates arrepti numine, nec ipsi quid loquantur intelligunt, ea prudentes interpretantur caeteris.' Near the end of the *Praise of Folly* Erasmus describes the 'maggoty and crack-brained' state of frenzy at some length, admitting that 'persons thus affected shall have . . . mantic ecstasies of foretelling things to come, shall in a rapture talk languages they never before learned, and seem in all things actuated by something divine and extraordinary.' In the conclusion he makes much of the grammatical fact that Folly (*moria*) is a woman.

¹ 244B. For Neoplatonic commentaries see Hermias, *In Platonis Phaedrum* (ed. Couvreur), p. 94; Proclus, *In Timaeum* iv. 288E; v. 325E, 326C (cf. Alexandre, op. cit. iii, pp. 15, 116); *Scholia Platonica* as quoted above, p. 61, n. 1; also Photius, *Amphilochia* 60. Perhaps these Neoplatonic and Byzantine texts should be added to the quotations from Varro in Lactantius to account for the marked interest in the Sibylline revival among the Italian followers of Gemistus Pletho: cf. the cycle of the Sibyls in the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. As stated in Platina's Life of Paul II (*Opera*, 1511, fol. x 1^v), Sigismondo Malatesta entertained relations with the academy of Pomponius Laetus, which was equally renowned for its study of Varro (edited by Laetus) and for its part in the Platonic revival: see Platina's panegyric on Bessarion, with its reference to Pletho as *doctissimum et secundum a Platone* (*Opera*, fol. F 5^v; also fol. x 2^r on the Roman Academy's Platonism).

In surveying the Sistine cycle as a whole, it may be noted that along the left wall (which is, ritually speaking, the inferior side) the dominant places are held by prophets: Joel's intellect, Ezekiel's might, and Jeremiah's pity mark the beginning, middle, and end of that sequence while the two sibylline gifts of 'interpretation' and 'revelation' support the prophetic trio as secondary voices. Further weight is given to the Hebrew prophecy by the addition of a separate Prophet at each end of the chapel, raising the Old Testament gifts of the spirit numerically above those of the New. Nevertheless, along the right wall, which is ritually superior to the left, the Sibyls play the dominant parts: the beginning, middle, and end of that section are marked by the Delphic, Cumaean, and Libyan gifts, whereas Isaiah's 'counsel' and Daniel's 'science' seem to support them by holding the intermediary seats. Within a system of compelling symmetries, these inequalities and dominations correspond to the irregular concord between the two churches, which rests on the law of 'supplantation': the greater visible strength belongs to the Prophets because they represent the Chosen People to whom the Word was originally given; but the Sibyls, who enter dispersedly and in lesser force, are the true heirs according to the promise. As was explained above on the evidence of Durandus, the division and concord between the two churches was ritually enacted in the Sistine Chapel by a peculiar way of reciting the Apostolic Creed: first as a solo-chant confined to a group of sub-deacons who signify the beginnings of the Church among the Jews, then by the choir representing the Church of the Nations.

In view of the ritual prominence given in the Sistine Chapel to the recitation of the Apostolic Creed, it is not surprising to learn that the first and comparatively simple programme for the Ceiling, which Michelangelo persuaded the Pope to abandon, provided for a series of the Twelve Apostles in the places now occupied by the Prophets and Sibyls.¹ In such a series it would be the custom to associate each Apostle with one of the twelve articles of the Creed—the one which he was believed to have spontaneously spoken when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost.² The schema of this older programme underlies also

¹ *Lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti*, ed. G. Milanesi (1875), p. 426, no. 383. Written sixteen years after the event and under the threat of a lawsuit by the heirs of Julius II, the letter must be read with some caution, but there is no reason to doubt Michelangelo's statement that there was a change of programme and that the original version provided for a representation of the Twelve Apostles.

² On this legend and the customary distribution of the twelve Articles

the new. In the texts of Michelangelo's Prophets and Sibyls prophetic words corresponding to the twelve articles of the Creed can be found without difficulty, and even in the right order: the third article, for example, on the Virgin Birth, would correspond to a famous prophecy of Isaiah (vii. 14), who is the third prophet in the series; or the seventh article, on the Last Judgement, would fall very properly on Jonah. Daniel, who descended into the lion's den and was resurrected, holds the fifth place: and it is the fifth article that says *Descendit ad inferos* and *resurrexit*. With the resumption of the word *Credo* in the eighth article, the final section of the creed would start with the Delphic Sibyl (*credo in spiritum sanctum*), continue with the Erythraean, who represents the *sancta ecclesia communioque sanctorum* (cf. above, p. 67), and end with the promise of *vita aeterna* (Libyan Sibyl). Being endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Prophets and Sibyls would thus foreshadow the pentecostal inspiration of the Apostles.¹

From an iconographic point of view, the spelling out of the series in that form would neither increase nor diminish the visual eloquence of the figures and might for that reason be dismissed as artistically irrelevant, even though the association of the twelve Articles of the Creed with Prophets and Sibyls was not uncommon in Michelangelo's time.² Perhaps the right method is to recognize the twelve Articles for what they are in this context: theological rubrics, comparable to the tablets that carry the names of the Prophets and Sibyls, and of the same use as titles on poems: without being themselves part of the poetry, they set the poetic reading on the right course. In that sense the very first words of the Apostolic Creed: 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth' (*credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem, creatorem coeli et terrae*),³ not only direct the mind to the cycle of the Creation represented along the middle of the vault, but also invite the imagination to expect that,

among the twelve Apostles, see Durandus, *Rationale divinarum officiorum* iv. xxv. 7; cf. J. Sauer, *Symbolik des Kirchengebäudes* (1902), pp. 67, 298, with further literature; Mâle, op. cit., pp. 246-53.

¹ Durandus, op. cit. iv. xiv. 9, gives an interesting, if strained, example of how the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, by being associated with the seven salutations of mass, might be seen to imply the corresponding articles of the Creed.

² For a parallel instance see Benoît Monténat, *Traité de la conformité, concordance et consonance des prophètes et sibylles aux douze articles de la foi*, dated 1505 (MS. français 949, Bibliothèque Nationale).

³ For the wording, cf. Durandus, op. cit. iv. xxv. 7: 'De symbolo.'

following the sequence of the Creed, the Creation will foreshadow the Redemption.

To reinforce that expectation is precisely the *raison d'être* of Michelangelo's Prophets and Sibyls: they prophesy, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and the theme of their prophecy is the interconnexion between the Creation of the World and the Genealogy of Christ. Occupying a zone between these two cycles, they bear witness to 'a certain analogy between the economy of the incarnation and the first setting in motion of the world' (*ut incarnationis oeconomiam quandam proportionem cum prima mundi molitione habuisse credamus*).¹ Although the argument implies that the whole Sistine Ceiling was designed as a vast prophetic programme,² the system rests on a relatively simple theological thought. According to a doctrine of concordance that goes back to the early Fathers, the beginnings of the Old and New Testaments—the first Book of Moses and the first chapter of Matthew—were prophetically connected by the word *generation*: what Moses had called 'the generation of Heaven and Earth' reappeared in Matthew as 'the generation of Jesus Christ': 'whence it was provided (as Peter Damian put it) that both should inscribe their books with the same heading, saying *Book of Generation*.'³ While St. Paul's and Isaiah's 'gifts of the spirit' continue to rest on the genealogical Tree of Jesse, the enlarged concept of 'generation' links them above to the first Acts of Creation.

In the Sistine Ceiling the connexion between Acts of Creation and Gifts of the Spirit is made visible by the *Ignudi*. Hovering above the Prophets and Sibyls, in whose moods they seem to share, they form a living frame for the primeval images in which God is seen setting the world in motion. What kind of theological creatures are these *Ignudi*? The question may sound a little odd since no one seems to have seriously wondered to what part of the theological world they belong. They have been accepted as figments of Michelangelo's imagination, invented freely to enrich the design and to enliven the spectacle by a display of beautiful youths in athletic postures. For want of a better name it has become customary to call them *Genii*, *Athletes* or *Slaves*. An otherwise sensible and learned critic has even dis-

¹ Hieronymus de Guevara, *Commentaria in Matthaeum* (1640), p. 19. See also Bernardino de Busti, *Mariale* (1496), II. iii, 1: 'pars prima . . . quae dicitur creatonis.'

² I am engaged in writing a book on this subject.

³ *Sermo de Sancto Matthaeo* (*Patr. lat.* cxliv, col. 778).

tinguished in their attitudes different stages of labour:¹ do they not attach festoons of oak leaves to the cornice, burdening themselves also with heavy medallions which they hold with bands?

It is one of the idiosyncrasies of Michelangelo's art that, except for a very early example in which he was commissioned to supply a companion-piece to a given sculpture,² he avoided representing angels as winged. (Like Hogarth, he seems to have recoiled from the idea of disfiguring a human body with the appurtenances of a fowl.) Not only are the angels of the Last Judgement and in the Cappella Paolina wingless, but even in so early a work as the *Madonna della scala* the angels are playing on the celestial staircase without benefit of wings.³ In the Sistine Ceiling itself, the halo of attendants surrounding God as he creates sun and moon, moves over the face of the waters, or infuses life into the body of Adam, consists of a group of wingless children; and because of this well-known peculiarity of Michelangelo's it has been suspected that the little spirits behind the Prophets and Sibyls might qualify as angels.⁴ Strangely enough, this thought has not been extended to the *Ignudi*,⁵ although in this instance two preparatory sketches by Michelangelo's own hand give conclusive evidence of his intention.

¹ Justi, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-6: 'Die Sklaven.' Tolnay's bold attempt to invest them with the functions of the *anima razionale* (*op. cit.*, pp. 63 ff., 159 ff.) rests on a misreading of Pico, *Commento* 1, ii (ed. Garin, p. 463), where the *anima razionale* is placed below, not above, the *natura intellettuale*. The confusion is increased by quoting Pomponazzi among the Neoplatonists (pp. 48, 159).

² The second Angel for the Arca di San Domenico in Bologna.

³ While the number of steps on the heavenly ladder is no less than thirty in Johannes Climacus's *Scala Paradisi* (cf. M. Vloberg, *La Vierge, notre médiatrice*, 1938, pp. 189-96: 'La Vierge à l'échelle'), they are reduced in Michelangelo's staircase to five—the same as in Domenico Benivieni, *Scala della vita spirituale sopra il nome di Maria* (1495), where this number is associated with the letters in the name MARIA. The author of this devotional tract is mentioned in Pico della Mirandola's dedication of *De ente et uno* to Politian as *utriusque nostrum pro sua et doctrina et integritate carissimus*. Since Condivi says that at this period Politian spurred the young Michelangelo by 'always explaining things to him and giving him subjects' (ed. *cit.*, p. 12), it is probable that Politian's friend Domenico Benivieni did likewise.

⁴ C. Heath Wilson, *Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1876), pp. 143, 145; Mâle, *op. cit.*, p. 264, note 3; also Barbier de Montault, *op. cit.* xiii, p. 336.

⁵ J. A. Symonds (*The Renaissance in Italy, The Fine Arts*, chapter viii) seized on an appropriate simile for the *Ignudi* in Psalms civ. 4, but denied a few years later (*Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti* i, 1893, pp. 245 f.) that they signified anything of the kind. The first statement is nevertheless worth quoting: '“He maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire”': this verse rises to our lips when we seek to describe the genii that crowd the cornice of the Sistine Chapel.'

Apparently he did not hesitate, in his short-hand notations, to designate angels by roughly sketched wings, which he then omitted in the execution. The first design for the Sistine Ceiling, in which the roles of Caryatids and *Ignudi* were not yet distinguished, shows the medallions flanked by a pair of terminal figures which are characterized as angels by wings (Pl. XLVI*b*). In a later sketch the flanking figures are no longer herms, but their vestigial wings still define them as angels (Pl. XLVII*b*). The configuration resembles a heraldic type of Renaissance design in which a pair of winged figures hold a medallion that they decorate with a festoon (Pl. XLVI*a*). This is exactly the function of the *Ignudi* (the oak leaves and acorns being the Rovere symbol), and it is not difficult to recognize in some of them a development of the traditional formula for emblem-bearers (Pl. XLVII*a*). As for the scenes in the medallions, they represent the Ten Commandments, exemplified in part by Maccabean Histories and related in all cases to the adjacent prophecies.¹ These sacred Tables of the Law, here cast in bronze, would traditionally have to be held by angels.²

On the role that angels were thought to play in the formation of prophetic thoughts Savonarola made a significant remark in answering some of his detractors who had accused him of arrogance and blasphemy because he had suggested in a sermon that he had been mysteriously transported to Paradise, where all the enchanting amenities of the place were shown to him: 'Had they listened attentively, they would have understood that I did not mean to say that my mortal body had been in Paradise, but only that I had seen it in a mental vision. Assuredly, in Paradise there would be neither trees nor waters, nor stairs, nor doors, nor chairs; therefore, but for their ill-will, these men might have easily understood that all these things were formed in my mind by angelic intervention.'³ He consistently maintained that his visions were formed 'by God through the ministrations of angels' (*a Deo per ministeria angelorum formari*): 'for since the angels are intermediate between God and men, prophetic illuminations coming from God himself are subserved by angelic

¹ Wind, 'Maccabean Histories in the Sistine Ceiling', in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E. F. Jacob (1960), pp. 312-27.

² The biblical prototype is Exodus xxv. 16-21.

³ P. Villari, *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, tr. L. Villari (1897), pp. 320 f. The full text of the sermon—according to R. Ridolfi 'perhaps more than the full text' (cf. Ginori Conti, *op. cit.*, p. 57)—was inserted at the end of Savonarola's *Compendium revelationum* (1495).

spirits who not only inform and arouse the imagination internally towards various apparitions but also address the prophets from within (*sed etiam intrinsecus prophetas alloquuntur*).¹

It was generally agreed that during a prophetic seizure the agitation of angels could make itself felt on several different levels.² Clearly, the *Ignudi* are spirits superior to the little imps behind the Prophets and Sibyls and to the Caryatids that decorate their seats. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suppose that Michelangelo intended them for Seraphs, as distinguished from Cherubs and Thrones.

That angels feel sorrow, anger, pity, and joy (Pls. XIII, XV, XLVIIa) is in keeping with theological tradition; and in states of ecstasy they even rage. As St. Ambrose explained in *De Spiritu Sancto*, the gifts of the Spirit, as they descend into men, become channelled to suit earthly limitations, but in the hierarchy of the angelic spirits the Holy Ghost overflows like an abundant river that soars over the embankments:

But that Sacred Spirit proceeding from the fountain of life, from

¹ *Compendium revelationum*. In conformity with Thomas Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* II. ii. 171–6) Savonarola distinguished between three kinds of prophecy: (1) by direct infusion into the intellect, as when God poured wisdom into Solomon; (2) by the intervention of angels, who fill the imagination with holy figments; (3) by portents visible to the outward eye. His own prophetic calling was of the second kind. He did not presume that God would speak to him intellectually, nor did he base his predictions on comets, floods, or monstrous births (let alone on astrology, which he despised). He relied on his inward visions. In Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* the philosopher is asked whether any prophet ever attained an intellectual vision of God; to which he answers: 'None, except Moses, who was the first of the prophets, because all the others received their vision through an angel, and their imagination shared with their intellect' (tr. F. Friedeberg-Seeley and J. H. Barnes, 1937, pp. 325 f.). Despite the biblical evidence for this view (Numbers xii. 6–8; Deuteronomy xxxiv. 10) Dionysius the Areopagite denied, as Augustine had done before him (*De Trinitate* II. xvi f.; III. xi; *Patr. lat.* xlii, cols. 862 f., 881 ff.), that even Moses could have seen God without the intervention of spirits: 'Now, if anyone should say that God had shown himself without intermediary to certain holy men, let him know beyond doubt, from the most Holy Scriptures, that no man has ever seen, nor shall see, the hidden Being of God; but God has shown himself, according to revelations which are fitting for God, to his faithful servants in holy visions adapted to the nature of the seer' (*De coelesti hierarchia* IV. iii; *Patr. graec.* iii. col. 179).

² Dionysius the Areopagite explained in *De coelesti hierarchia* XI. ii (*Patr. graec.* iii, col. 285) that to ignore distinctions of insight and energy between holy Powers 'would bring confusion into the clear and harmonious order of the angels'. What Savonarola calls 'angelic intervention' is characterized by the presence of dream-like shapes or riddled fancies, and these admit of different degrees of lucidity.

which we are satiated after a short draught, is seen to flow more redundantly in the celestial Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Angels and Archangels as a stream filled with the seven spiritual virtues. For if an overflowing river rises above its banks, how much more will that Spirit which rises above all creatures, in leaving the lower stretches of our minds flooded behind, elate the celestial nature of those angels with an effusive wealth of sanctification.¹

Even Jerome, who disliked the verbosity of Ambrose, grew ecstatic in writing a philological gloss on the word *effusio*: 'That word "effusion", which in Hebrew is called עֲפֹחַח and which all translate in the same way, denotes the plenitude of that donation which descends not only on a few Prophets (as was once the case in the Old Testament), but on all believers in the name of the Saviour as gifts of the Holy Spirit—not only here and there, but on all flesh. For there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female: for we are all one in Christ.'²

There can be no doubt that the Roman theologians who planned the programme of the Sistine Ceiling for Michelangelo, conceived the cycle as a hymn to the spirit that confers divine gifts by effusion. To establish the historical identity of Michelangelo's mentor is too complex a task to be attempted here. Circumstantial evidence points to the religious circle of Sant' Agostino in Rome, which in the early sixteenth century was also the centre of the Roman Academy.³ Julius II's cousin, Raffaele Riario, who had arranged for Michelangelo's first visit to Rome in 1496, was cardinal-protector of the Augustinian order; and at the time when the Sistine Ceiling was painted, their prior general was the neo-classical orator Egidio da Viterbo, Julius II's chosen preacher, a philological explorer of Hebrew and Platonic arcana and a Latin lyricist of considerable polish.

¹ Ambrose, *De spiritu sancto*, I. xvi. 158 (*Patr. lat.* xvi, col. 740).

² Jerome, *Commentaria in Joëlem* ii. 28 ff. (*Patr. lat.* xxv, col. 978).

³ See Jacopo Sadoletto, *Epistolae* v. xviii, a nostalgic letter to Angelo Coloccio on the Roman Academy they had known before the Sack of Rome; Egidio da Viterbo, *Historia viginti saeculorum*, MS. Angel. 502, fols. 197 f., on the poetic ritual of the *Coryciana*, enacted by the Roman Academy in the church of S. Agostino. In the late seventeenth century, well after the dissolution of the academy described by Sadoletto, the academic associations of S. Agostino were renewed by members of the former circle of Christina of Sweden: the famous *Accademia degli Arcadi* (with its enchanting garden on the Gianicolo, the Bosco Parrasio) still holds regular meetings in the Biblioteca Angelica at S. Agostino, the former (now secularized) Augustinian Library, which possesses the bulk of the manuscripts left by Egidio da Viterbo.

Sadoleto referred to him in 1512 as *clarissimum huius seculi tamquam obscurascentis lumen*.¹ The pursuit of a bold and erudite, poetically elegant theology, which drew from some of the Greek and Latin Fathers the authority to revive apocryphal traditions, spread from these adventurous academicians far beyond Rome.²

¹ Letter to Bembo (*Epistolae* xvii. xx; *Opera* ii, 1738, pp. 165 f.). Even as early as 1505, Sadoleto had written about Egidio as 'de homine sanctissimo longeque aetatis nostrae doctissimo' (MS. Angel, 1001, fol. 31; cf. G. Signorelli, *Il cardinale Egidio da Viterbo*, 1929, p. 209, note 43). It has not escaped either contemporary or later critics (see F. X. Martin, *The Problem of Giles of Viterbo, a Historiographical Survey*, 1960, pp. 35 ff., 42) that this eminently civilized and eloquent mystic, of whom Giovio spread the malicious gossip that he inhaled wet straw in order to acquire a saintly pallor (*Elogia virorum literis illustrium*, 1577, p. 103), was the general of the Augustinian Order in 1511—the year in which Luther, staying in Rome at the Augustinian monastery next to S. Maria del Popolo, formed his unflattering opinions of the Roman clergy. Some reflections in Erasmus's *Ciceronianus*, on a Roman sermon delivered before the Pope in a portentous classical diction, may also have been inspired by Egidio: cf. the genial pastiche of an Egidian sermon in Pontano's *Aegidius*, prefaced by Petrus Summontius, who addresses Egidio *Christiane mi Cicero* (Pontanus, *Opera* ii, 1519, p. 154). Sannazaro added his praise in *Elegiae* i. ix. 79 f.: 'Quid loquar, ut sacros Mariani exhauriat amnes/Aegidius, verum dum canit ore deum?' Surprising is the impatience of Gregorovius, who admired Egidio's candour and energy as an ecclesiastical statesman but, glancing at a manuscript of the *Historia viginti saeculorum*, found its erudition monstrous and 'not worth printing' (*Geschichte der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter* xiv. i. 6; iv. 2; vi. 4).

² As Sannazaro said (cf. G. Signorelli, op. cit., p. 107; J. A. Vulpius, *Vita Sannazarii*, in *Sannazarii Opera*, ed. J. Broukhus, 1728, p. 514), the thought of composing a neo-pagan epic on the Incarnation (*De partu Virginis*, written in Naples) had come to his mind on hearing Egidio da Viterbo quote a verse from Virgil in a sermon. Egidio himself, on a visit to Cumae, descended frequently (*saepissime*) into what he believed to be the cave of the Sibyl. In a weird letter dated 'from Lake Avernus' he described the grotto as decorated with shells and mosaics and pervaded by a stifling air that he found conducive to spells of fainting and of hallucination: 'visi nescio quod et plus sapere et vaticinari' (Cod. Angel. 1001, fols. 25 f.; cf. E. Martène and U. Durand, *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum collectio* iii, 1724, col. 1252; also Signorelli, op. cit., p. 130, note 23). The cave in question was probably on the site, near Lake Avernus, that A. Maiuri (*The Phlegraean Fields*, 1937, pp. 136 ff.) calls 'the pseudo-grotto of the Sibyl' because it appears to have been part of a Roman tunnel presumably built by Agrippa. Traces of mosaics in a cavernous chamber below the tunnel (the so-called 'bath of the Sibyl') were still visible in the mid-nineteenth century: see A.-J. du Pays, *Itinéraire descriptif, historique et artistique de l'Italie et de la Sicile* (1855), whose account is quoted in Barbier de Montault, op. cit. xiv, p. 387. According to Maiuri (op. cit., p. 139), a more direct access to that deep part of the cave has been blocked up by a modern wall. It is curious to reflect that while the Renaissance assumed that the deepest and darkest place in the grotto must have been the dreaded

Their theological *Summa* emerged from Lyons in Sante Pagnini's *Isagoge ad mysticos sacrae scripturae sensus*, dedicated to Cardinal Jean du Bellay but presumably compiled for the most part in Lucca and of primary importance for the study of Michelangelo because its author, at one time Prior of San Marco in Florence, was a disciple of Savonarola.¹ Like Egidio da Viterbo, Pagnini favoured a use of religious metaphor in which the prophetic learning of the Hebrews was heightened by the felicities of pagan intuition: 'ab ethnicis siquid bene dictum, in nostrum usum esse convertendum.'²

adyton where the Sibyl raved, the Nineteenth Century was satisfied that this would have been the right place for a bath.

¹ Wind, 'Sante Pagnini and Michelangelo: a Study of the Succession of Savonarola', *op. cit.*, pp. 211-46.

² *Isagoge*, p. 28.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Albertina, Vienna (Pl. XXVa), Alinari (Pl. XLVIa), Anderson (Pls. II-XVII, XXf, XXIV, XXVII-XXX, XXXIII-XXXVII, XL-XLV, XLVIIa), Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Pls. XVIII, XXXIX), British Museum, London (Pl. XLVIb), Cincinnati Art Museum (Pl. XXII), Detroit Institute of Arts (Pl. XLVIIb), Houghton Library, Harvard University (Pls. I, XXVI), Prado, Madrid (Pl. XXIII).

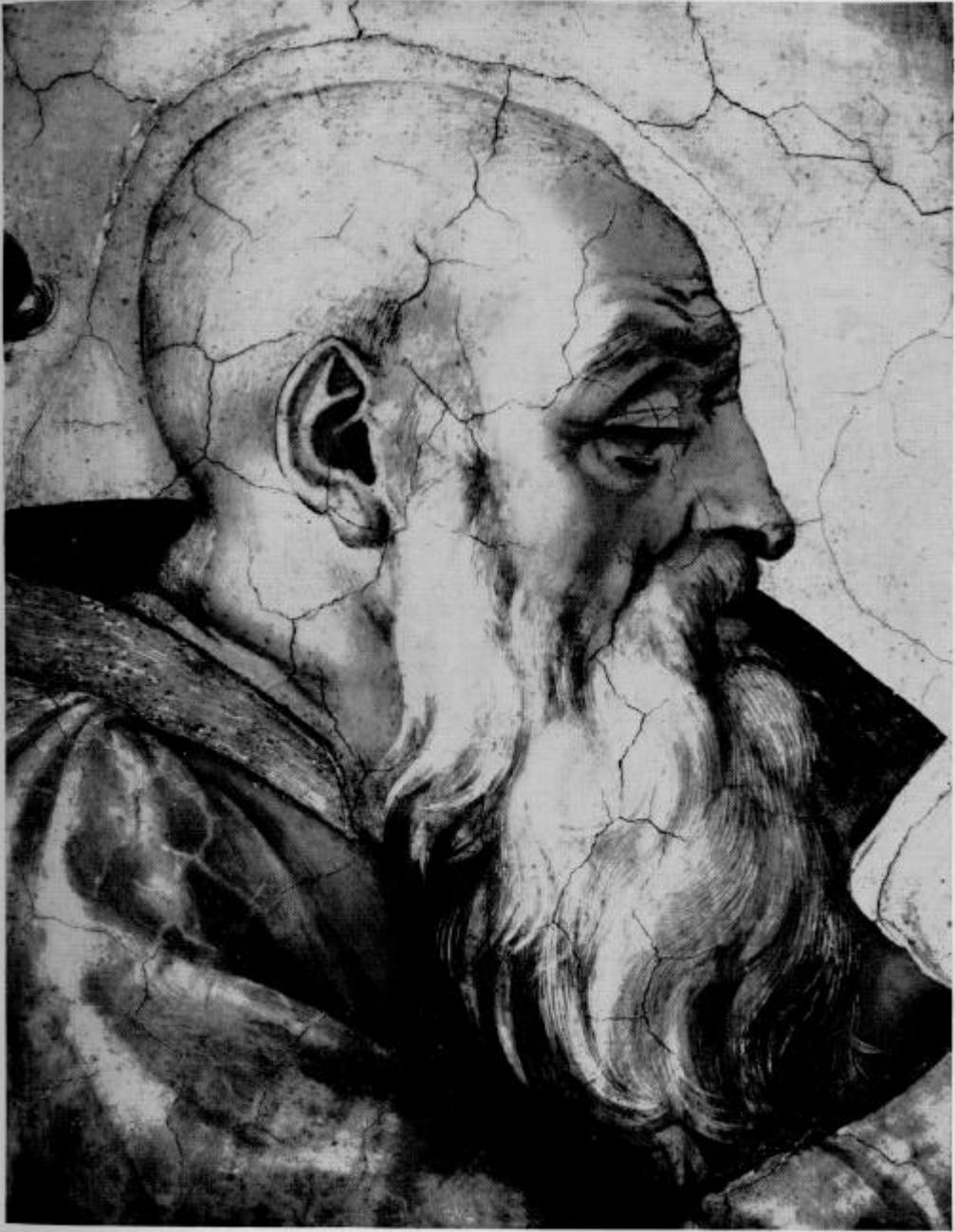
Dyalogo della uerita prophetica.



Frontispiece to Savonarola's *Dialogue on Prophetic Truth*, c. 1496

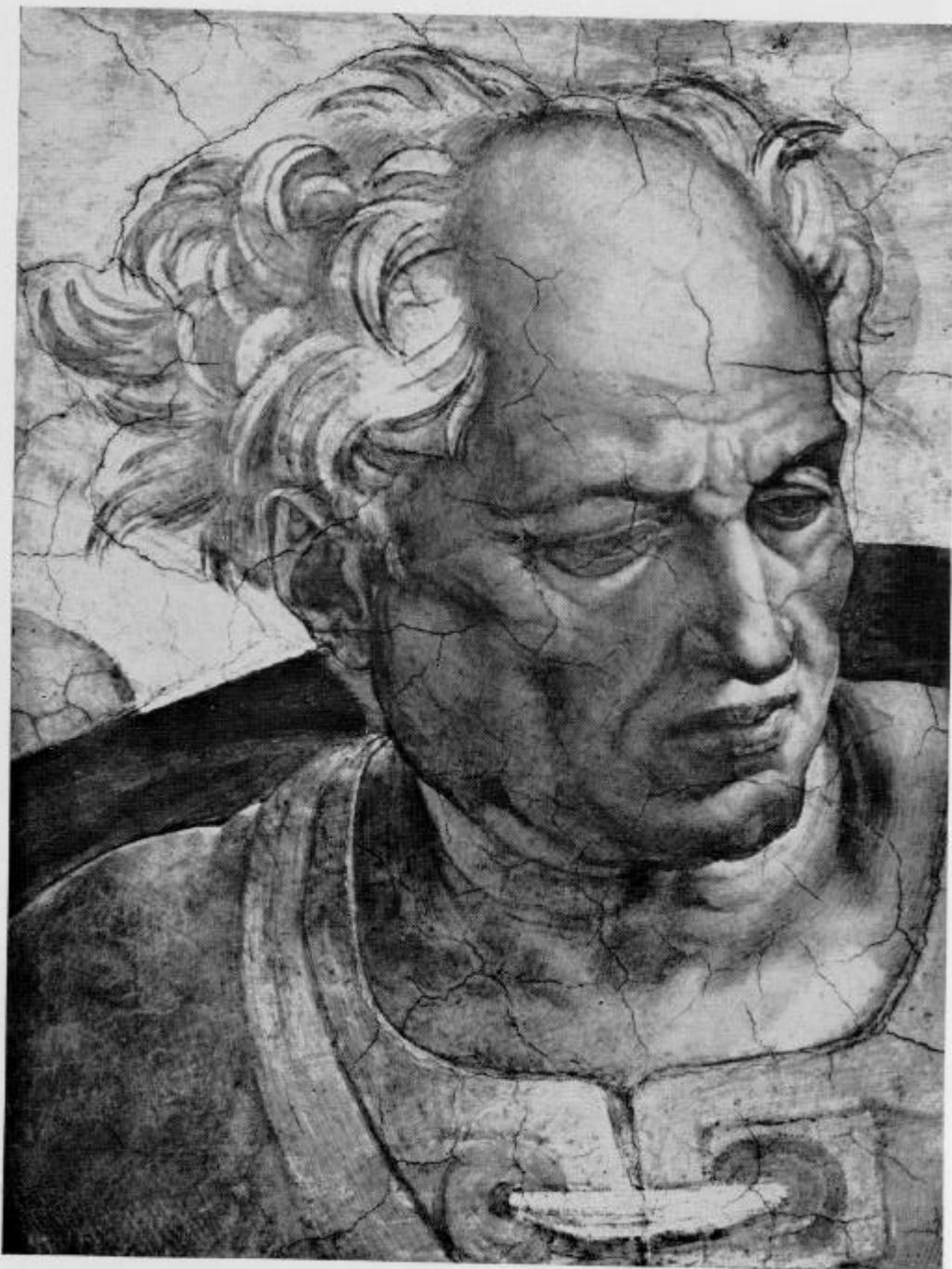


The Prophet Zechariah. Sistine Ceiling



Head of Zechariah, Detail of Pl. II

PLATE IV



Head of Joel. Detail of Pl. V



The Prophet Joel. Sistine Ceiling



The Prophet Isaiah. Sistine Ceiling



The Prophet Ezekiel. Sistine Ceiling

PLATE VIII



Head of Ezckiel. Detail of Pl. VII



Spirit driving Ezekiel. Detail of Pl. VII



The Prophet Daniel. Sistine Ceiling



Ignudo above Daniel, Sistine Ceiling



Caryatids next to Daniel. Detail of Pl. X



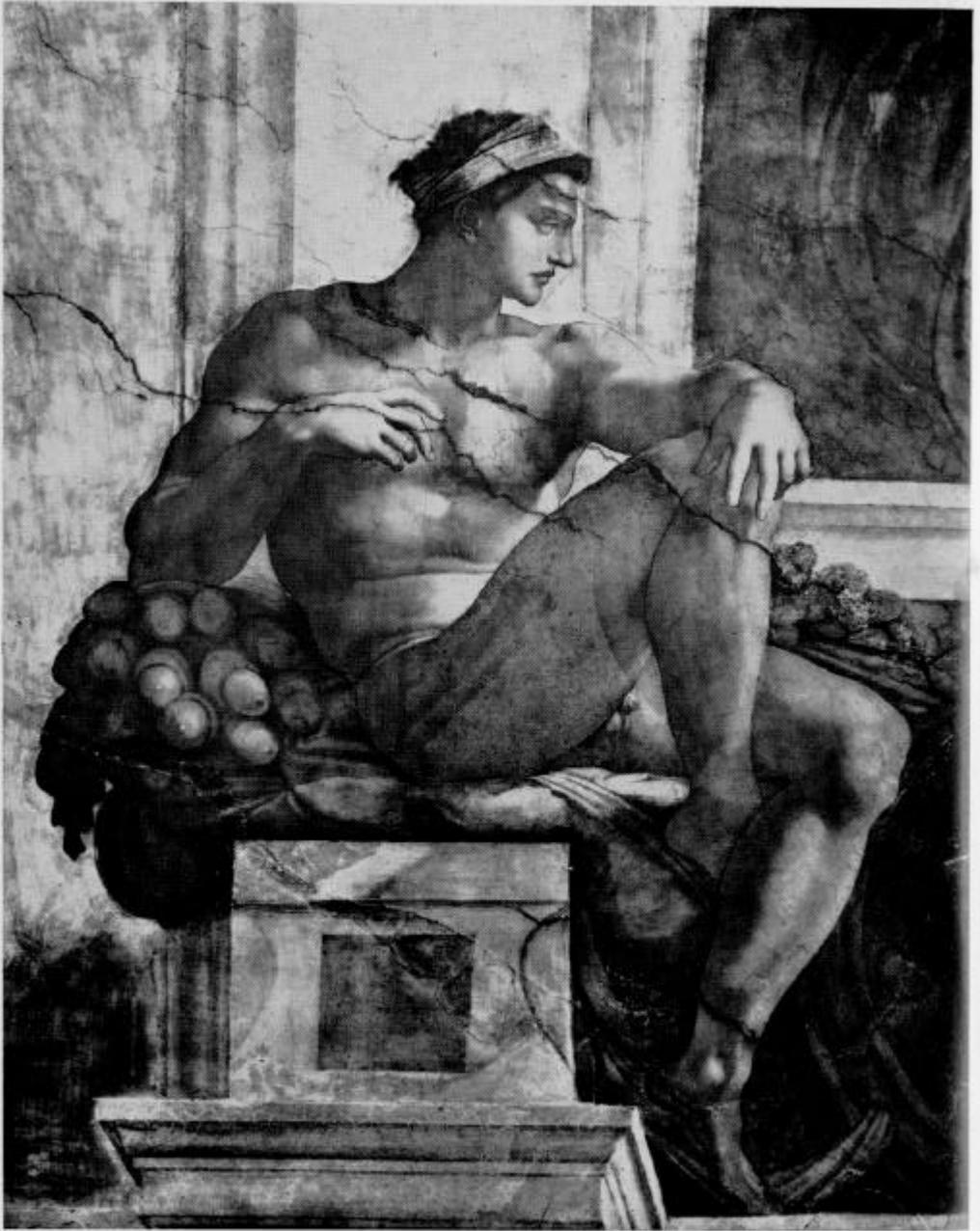
Head of *Ignudo*, Detail of Pl. XI



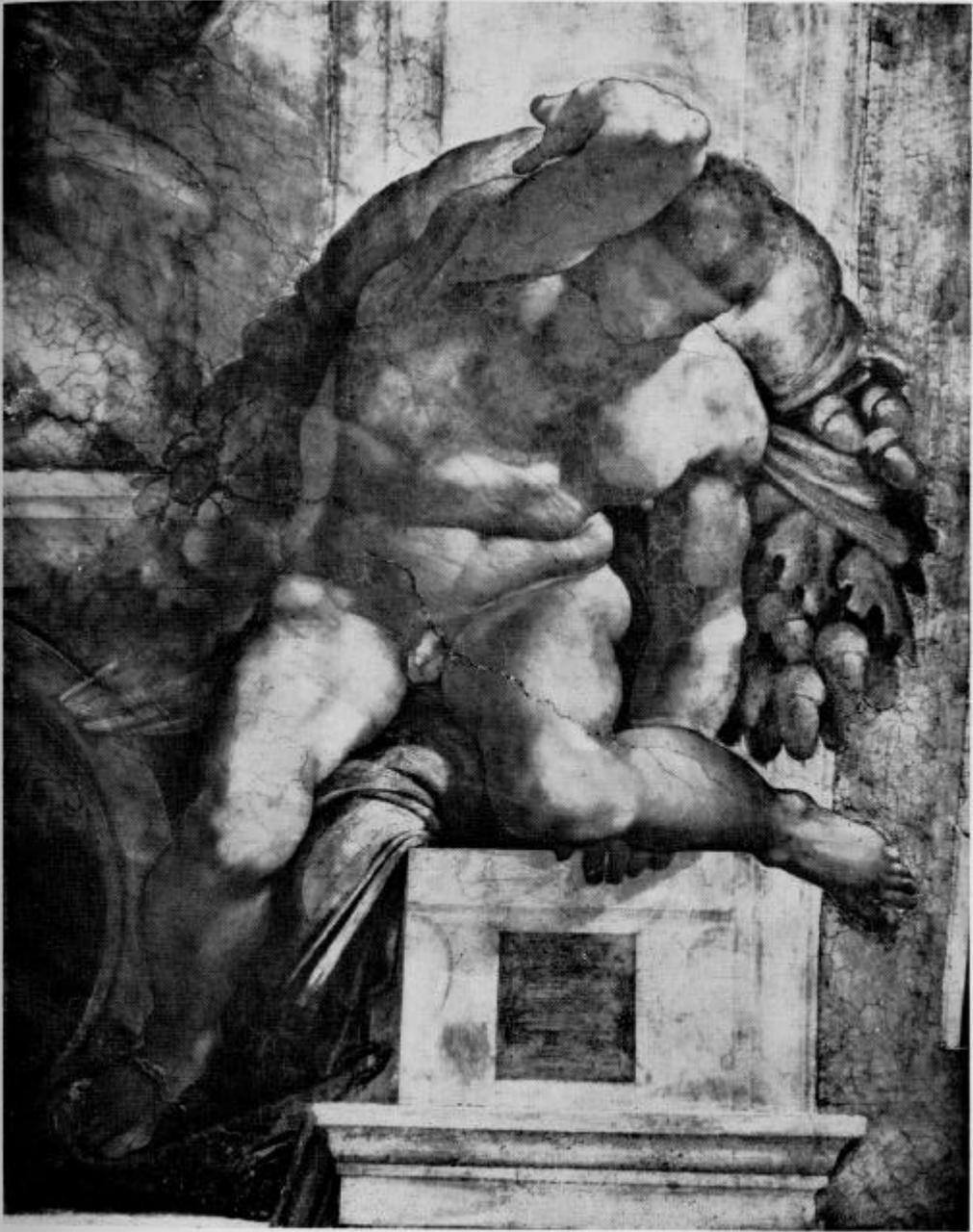
The Prophet Jeremiah. Sistine Ceiling



Head of *Ignudo* above Jeremiah. Detail of Pl. XVI



Ignudo above Jeremiah. Sistine Ceiling



Ignudo above Jeremiah. Sistine Ceiling

PLATE XVIII



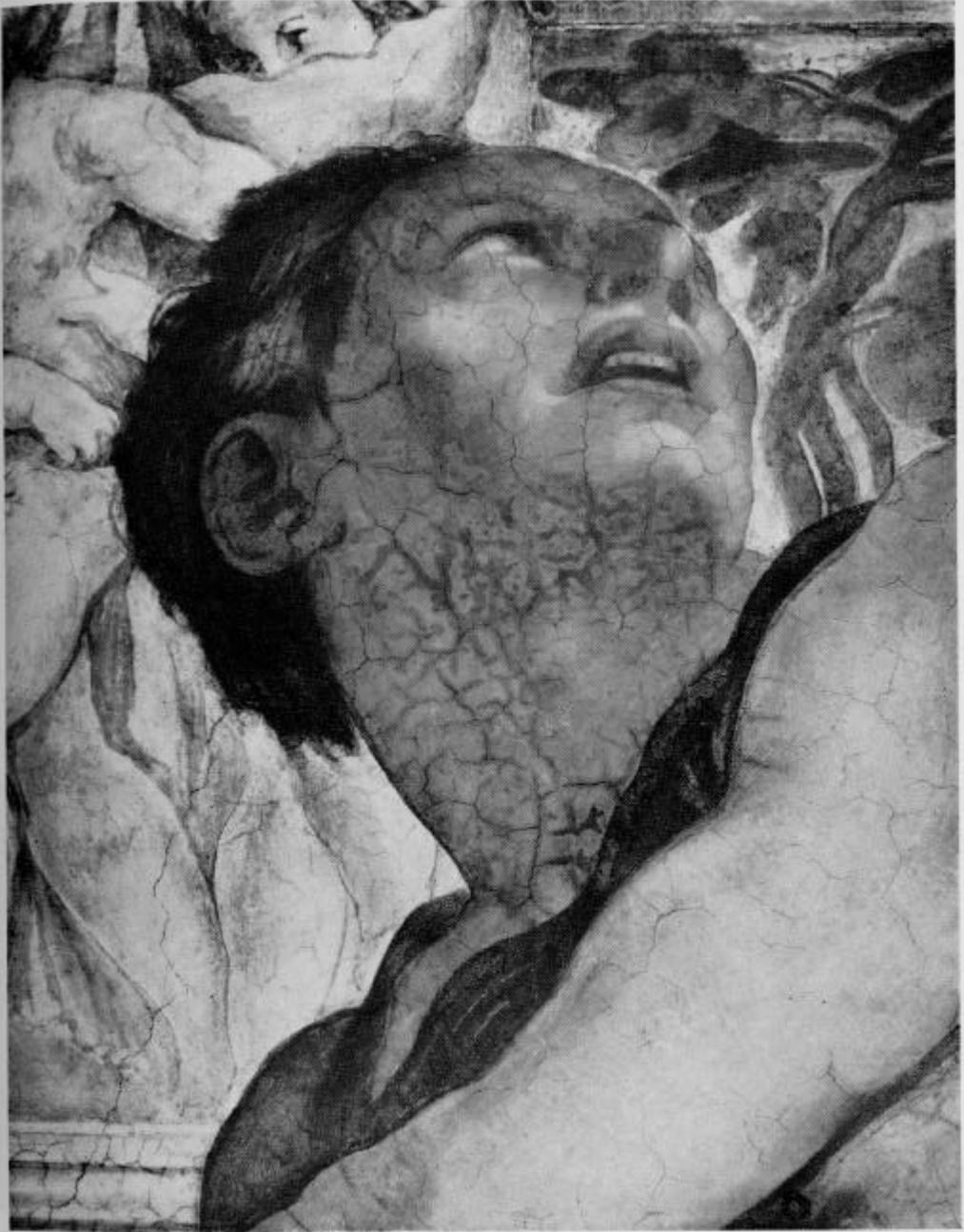
Engraving by Giorgio Ghisi, after the Sistine Ceiling



Jeremiah, with adjacent figures from the Genealogy of Christ. Sistine Ceiling



The Prophet Jonah. Sistine Ceiling



Head of Jonah. Detail of Pl. XX



Mantegna: Sibyl and Prophet.
(Cincinnati Art Museum)



Titian: La Gloria.
(Prado, Madrid)



Michelangelo: Noah's Sacrifice. Sistine Ceiling



b. Sibyl as Noah's Daughter-in-law. Seventeenth-century Dutch Engraving



a. Noah as Prophet. Fifteenth-century Florentine Engraving



'Sybilla': Title-page of Savonarola's *Sermons on the Ark of Noah*, 1536



The Delphic Sibyl. Sistine Ceiling



Head of the Delphic Sibyl. Detail of Pl. XXVII



Putti next to the Delphic Sibyl, Detail of Pl. XXVII



The Erythraean Sibyl. Sistine Ceiling



The Prophet Daniel, with adjacent figures from the Genealogy of Christ.
Sistine Ceiling



The Cumaean Sibyl, with adjacent figures from the Genealogy of Christ.
Sistine Ceiling

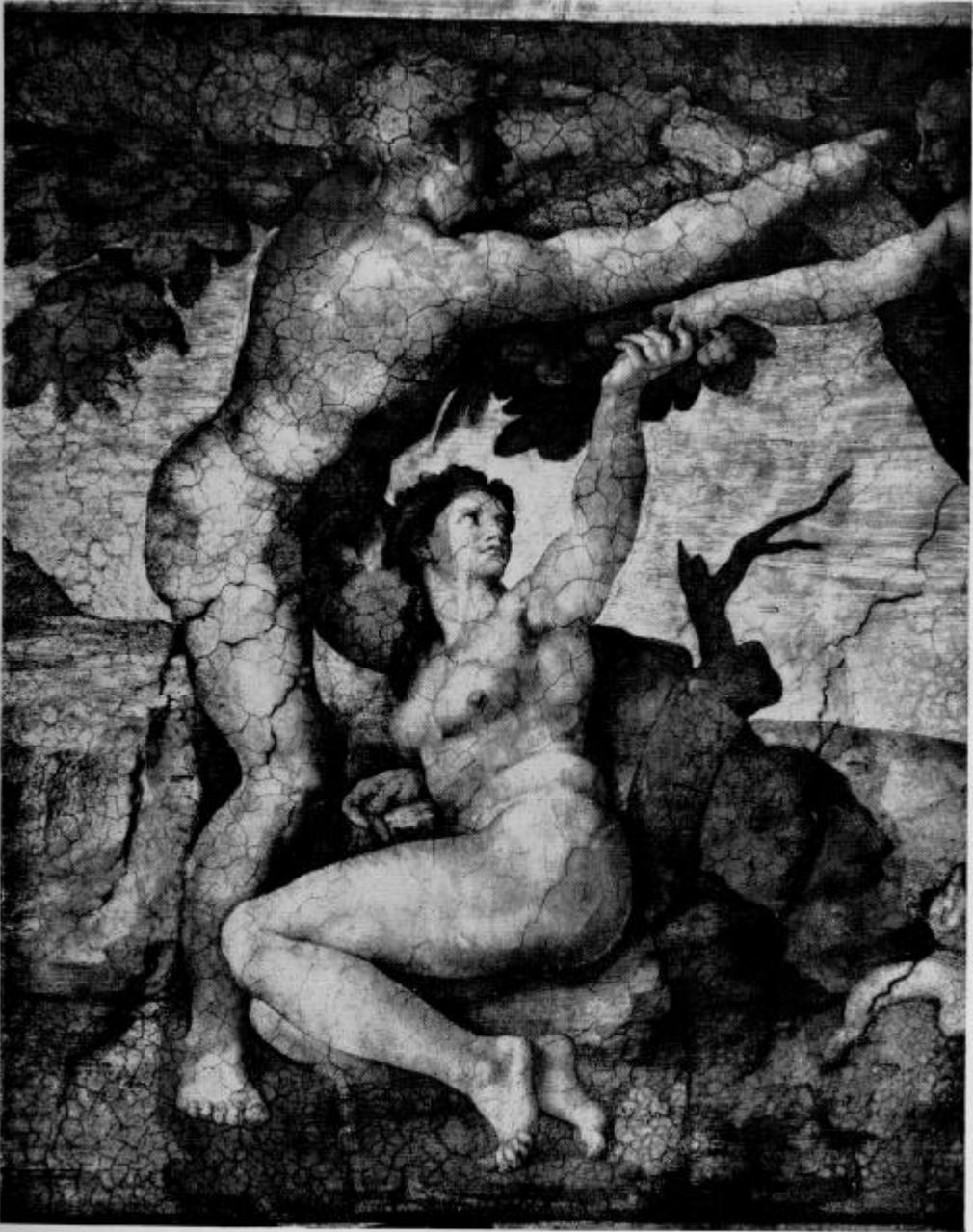


The Cumaean Sibyl. Sistine Ceiling

PLATE XXXIV



Creation of Eve. Sistine Ceiling



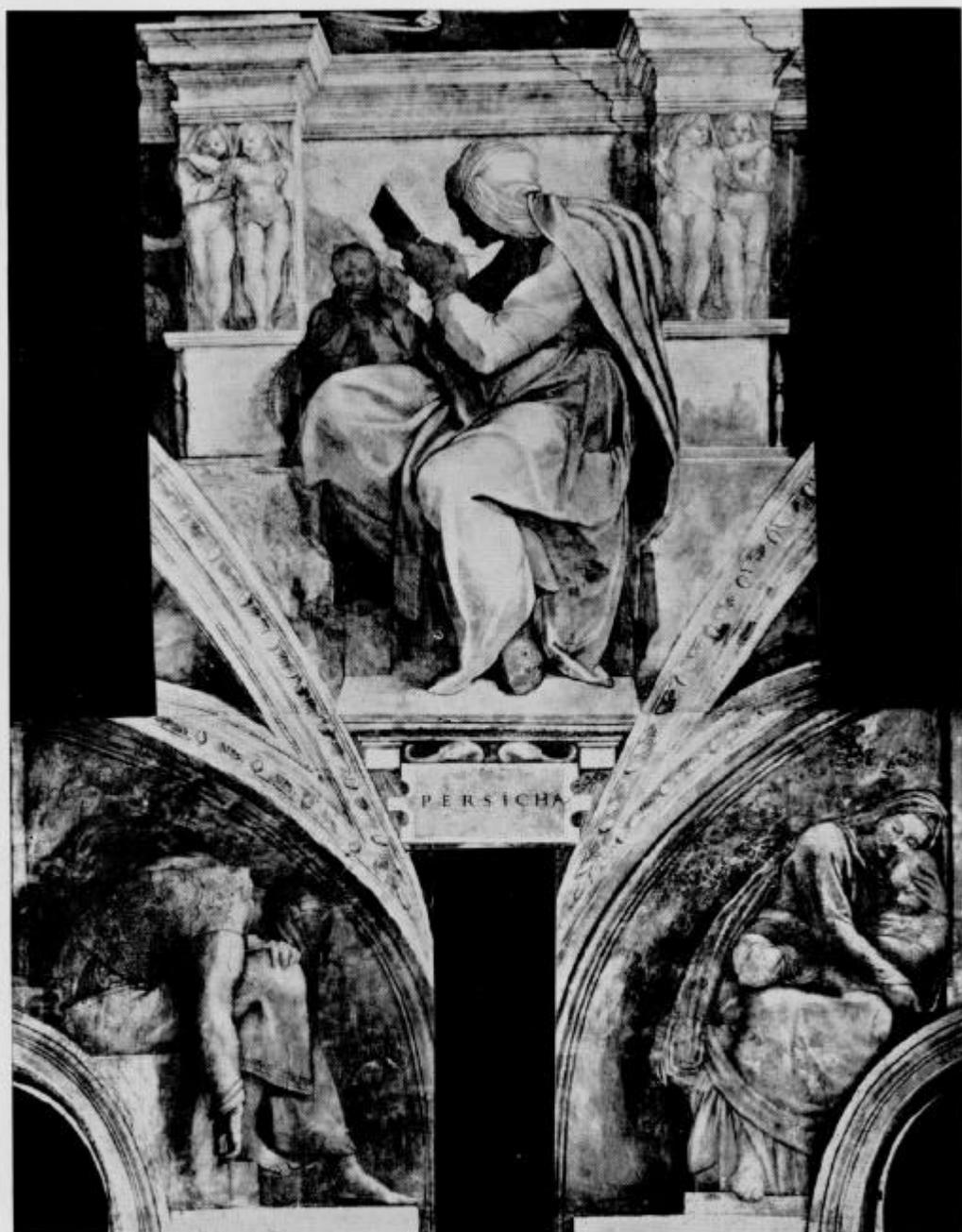
The Fall of Man. Sistine Ceiling



The Persian Sibyl, Sistine Ceiling



Ignudo above the Persian Sibyl, Sistine Ceiling



The Persian Sibyl, with adjacent figures from the Genealogy of Christ.
Sistine Ceiling



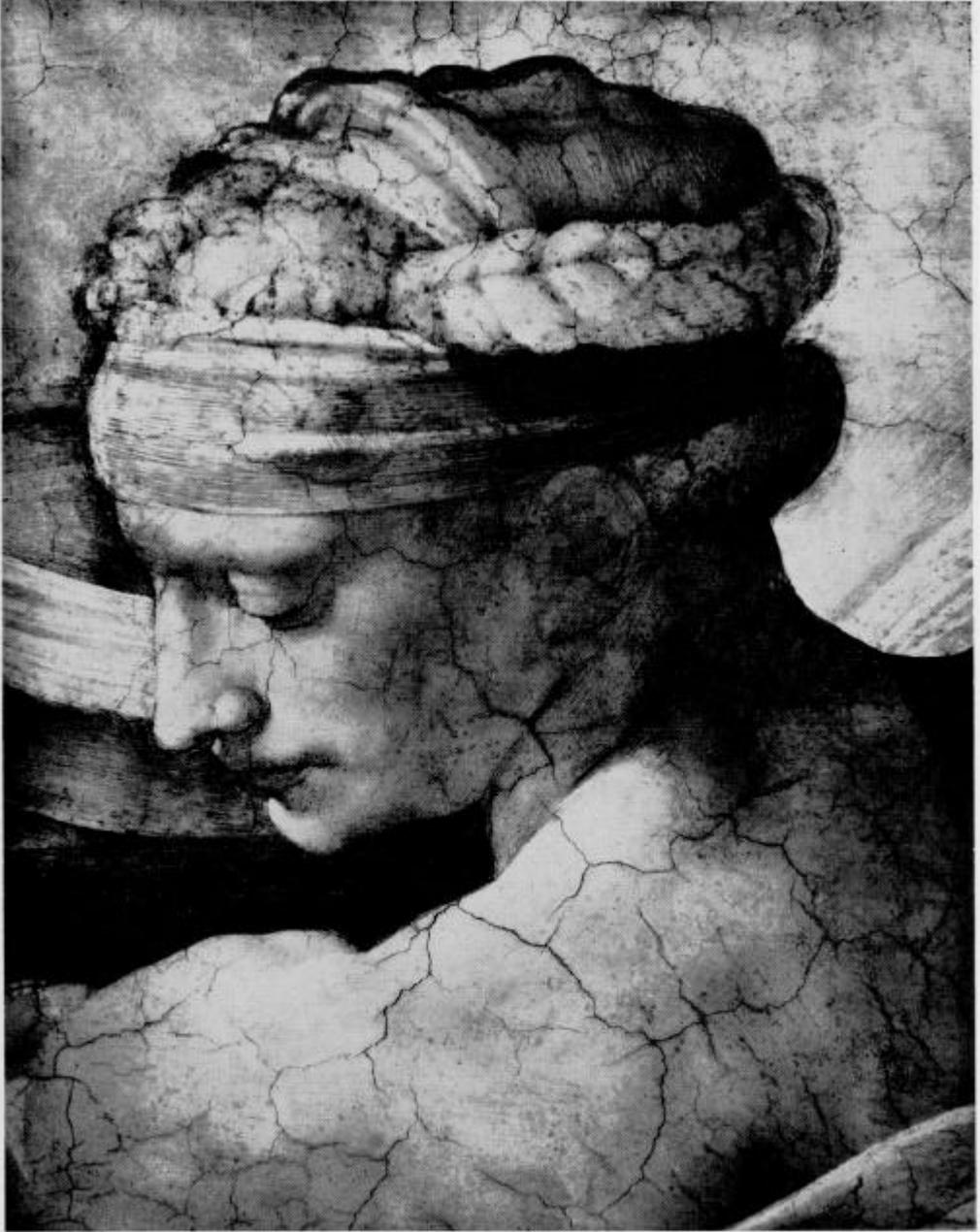
Engraving by Giorgio Ghisi, after the Sistine Ceiling



Division of Light from Darkness, Sistine Ceiling



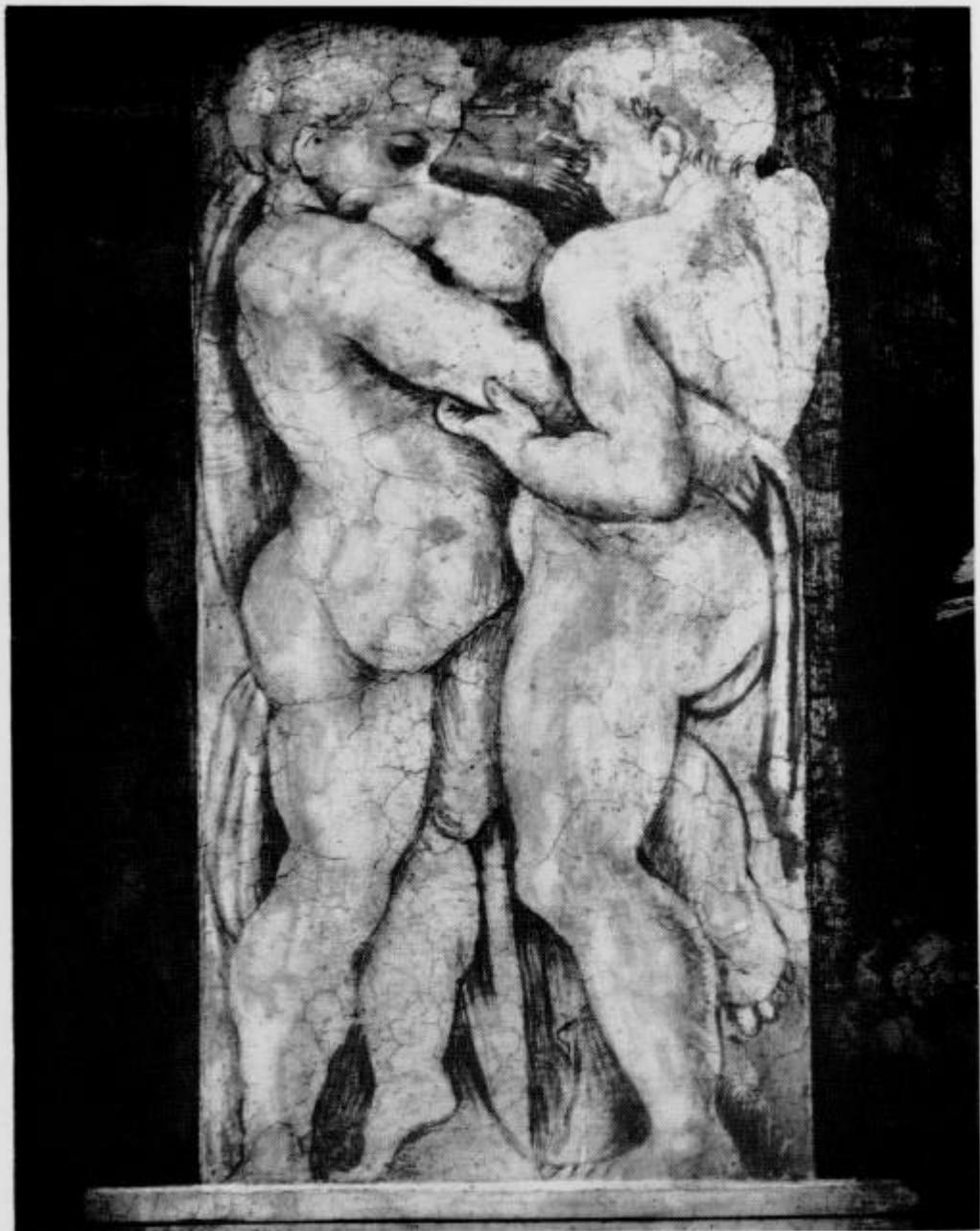
The Libyan Sibyl, Detail of Pl. XLIII



Head of the Libyan Sibyl. Detail of Pl. XLIII



The Libyan Sibyl, Sistine Ceiling



Caryatids next to the Libyan Sibyl: Detail of Pl. XLIII



Putti next to the Libyan Sibyl. Detail of Pl. XLIII



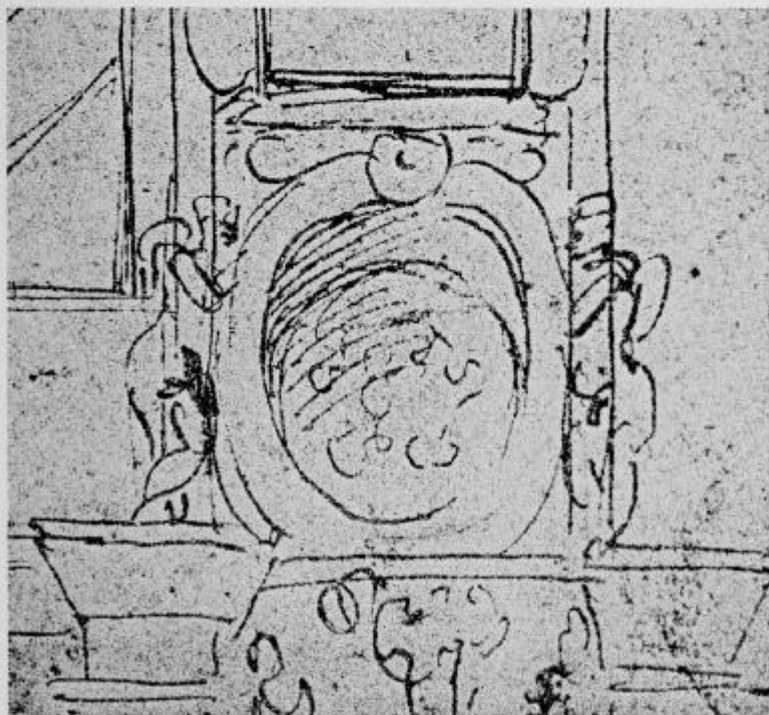
a. Bernardo Rossellino: Detail from the Tomb of Leonardo Bruni.
(*Santa Croce, Florence*)



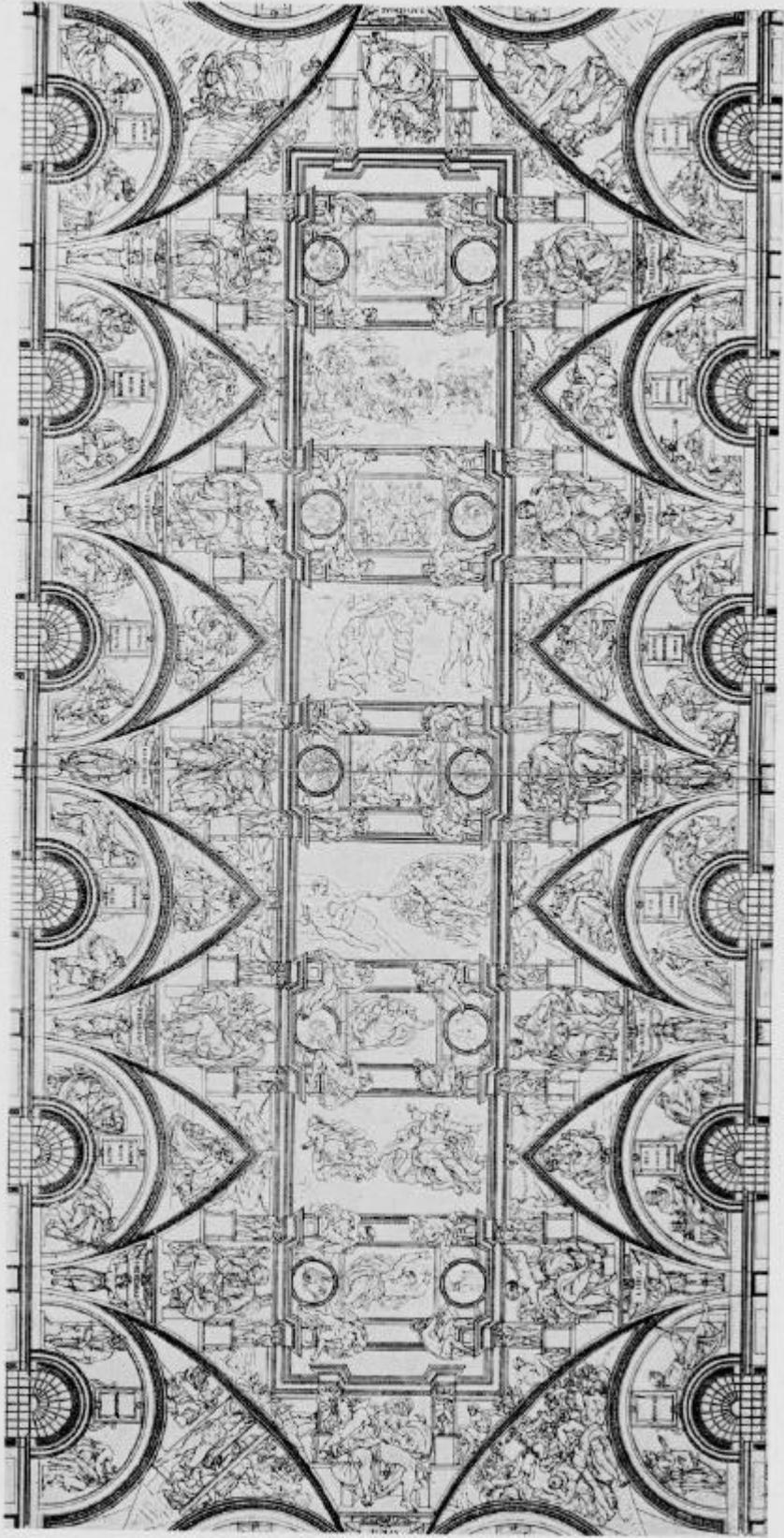
b. Michelangelo: Detail (enlarged) from a Sketch for the Sistine Ceiling.
(*British Museum, London*)



a. Ignudi, above Isaiah. Sistine Ceiling



*b. Michelangelo; Detail (enlarged) from a Sketch for the Sistine Ceiling.
(Institute of Arts, Detroit)*



Schema of the Sistine Ceiling. After an engraving by Domenico Cunego