Readings for Unit 1:

The Italian Renaissance

Selection A: Castiglione on “Cool”

**Study Questions:**

Where do you see examples of ‘sprezzatura’ in life today? How is sprezzatura – and the attitude it describes – regarded in our society? Whatis the relationship between sprezzatura and the concept of ‘cool’ (or whatever term we use today)?

*Baldassare Castiglione coins the concept “sprezzatura” in* The Book of the Courtier *I.26. The speaker is Count Lodovico da Canossa. The names here are irritatingly anglicized.*

Although some say (in the manner of a proverb) that Grace is not to be learned, I hold that whoever sets out to be gracious or to have a good grace in the exercises of his body, (presupposing first that he be not by nature inept) ought to begin young and to learn his principles from clever men.  Philip, king of Macedonia, thought so, and he instructed through his will  that so famous a philosopher as Aristotle, perhaps the greatest in the world, should be the one to instruct Alexander, his son, in the first principles of letters.  And of men today, the same is true.   Mark how well and with what a good grace Sir Galiazzo Sanseverino M. of the horse guards has taught the French king, who does all exercises of the body, and, with the natural disposition of person that is in him, and applies all his study to the learning of clever men.  He continually has excellent men about him, and chooses everyone from the best of that skill they possess.

For as in wrestling and vaulting, and in learning to handle various kind of weapons, the king has taken for his guide our M. Peter Mount, who (as you know) is the true and only master of all artificial force and sleight.  Likewise, in riding, in jousting, and in every other feat, the king has always had before his eyes the most perfect person that has been known to be in those professions.  He who would be a good scholar, beside the practicing of good things, must always set all his diligence to be like his master, and (if it were possible) change himself into him.  And when he has had some entry, it profits him much to behold various men of that profession and governing himself with that good judgment that must always be his guide, go about to pick out, sometime of one and sometime of an other, various guides.  Just as the bee in the green meadows flies about the grass choosing out flowers, so shall our Courtier steal this grace from those who appear to have it, and from each one purchase what shall be most worthy praise.  And he shall not do, as a friend of ours (whom you all know) did: he thought he looked like King Ferdinand the younger of Aragon, but attempted not to resemble him in any other point but in often lifting up his head so and arranging his mouth so, expressions which the king had actually gotten by infirmity.  And there are many who think they resemble great men, and actually may somewhat, but who often take the aspect in the great man that worst becomes him.

I often wonder myself about where such grace comes from (leaving out those blessed with it from above), and I find one rule that is most general and occurs above all in everything belonging to a man of grace. And that is to avoid, as much as a man may, the sharp and dangerous rock of affectation or studiousness of manner, and (to invent a new word) do everything with a certain carefree ease [in Italian: *sprezzatura*]--that is to appear to do difficult things simply and without effort, and (as it were) as if you do not mind doing it.  I do believe this is where grace comes from, for everyone knows the difficulties of accomplishing difficult matters, so that an easy ability to do them creates a great impression.

By contrast, to use force and (as they say) to make a big deal of your own effort is a great disgrace and causes everything great to be little valued.  Therefore grace is the art that appears not to be any art at all.  Neither ought a man appear to put more effort into anything than it takes to do it...   I recall having read that there were some excellent speakers who tried to to make people believe that they could not read, a trick trick that  made their learning seem even more impressive, but which was an undignified trick...  You can see that to reveal the effort and study that go into doings something takes away the grace of doing it.  Who among you doesn't laugh when our M. Peterpaul dances after his own  fashion with such fine skips and on tiptoe without moving his head, as though he were all of wood, so carefully that you can see him counting his paces?  What eye is so blind that cannot see the disgrace of too much interest in how one appears.  Grace in men and women is lightly-regarded agility or ease of motion, a way with words, and an unselfconscious or unstudied smile or gesture that conveys a sense that nothing is amiss and that nothing possibly could be amiss.

Here M. Bernard Bibiena could wait any longer, and he said: You may see yet that our M. Robert has found one to praise in dancing, though the rest of you set little by it. For if grace does consist in carefree boldness [sprezzatura], and in appearing not  to mind any other thing,  then M. Robert is graceful and has no equal in the world.  For we perceive that he appears to think nothing of his manner, the way his garments fall from his back, and his slippers from his feet.  He dances on without picking them up.

Then the Count answered, I will say something so of our vices.  Can you not see that what you call in M. Robert a carefree and easy manner is actually a studied effort?   For it is well known that he works very hard to make a show of not minding how he appears. To work at not minding is to mind too much.  And because he does this, his carefree attitude is not attractive.  It is a thing that does just the opposite of what he sets out to do, (i.e., to obscure the difficulty of acting so). Therefore I judge it a vice to take an interest in one's carefree attitude (which in itself is praiseworthy).   Putting effort into the precise way your clothes drape themselves while dancing, carrying yourself just so for fear of ruffling your hair, or keeping a looking glass in your cap and a comb in your sleeve, and to have always at your heels a servant to sponge and a brush you is not to be carefree and reckless.  Such precise effort is always a vice and contrary to that pure and amiable simplicity which is so acceptable to men's minds.  Mark what an ill grace a soldier has when he forces himself to sit bolt upright and settled in saddle (as we use to say after the Venetian phrase) in comparison to one who appears not to mind it and sits on horseback so nimbly and close as though he were on foot.  How much more pleasing is a gentleman who is a modest soldier of few words, and no bragger, than one who always brags about himself and blasphemes with a bravery that seems to threaten the world.  And this is nothing else but an effort to seem to be what he is not.  The same thing happens in many areas of life; yes, in everything in the world that a man can do or speak.

Selection B: Leonardo’s Notebooks

**Selections from the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci --** On Naval Warfare and watery things.

*The tricky part of reading this is that these texts appear next to countless illustrations and sketches, sometimes crossed out and refined, sometimes repeated several times. Take a look at the online edition of these notebooks to getr a sense of what they look like – the British Library has made a cool, online edition you can browse through at the following website:*

<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=arundel_ms_263_f001r>

*For an explanation and highlights, see the accompanying website:*

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/features/leonardo/leonardo.html>

*A translation of some of the most interesting bits of Leonardo’s notebooks can be found at wikisource:*

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\_Notebooks\_of\_Leonardo\_Da\_Vinci

**Methods of staying and moving in water**

1114.

How an army ought to cross rivers by swimming with air-bags ... How fishes swim [Footnote 2: Compare No. 821.]; of the way in which they jump out of the water, as may be seen with dolphins; and it seems a wonderful thing to make a leap from a thing which does not resist but slips away. Of the swimming of animals of a long form, such as eels and the like. Of the mode of swimming against currents and in the rapid falls of rivers. Of the mode of swimming of fishes of a round form. How it is that animals which have not long hind quartres cannot swim. How it is that all other animals which have feet with toes, know by nature how to swim, excepting man. In what way man ought to learn to swim. Of the way in which man may rest on the water. How man may protect himself against whirlpools or eddies in the water, which drag him down. How a man dragged to the bottom must seek the reflux which will throw him up from the depths. How he ought to move his arms. How to swim on his back. How he can and how he cannot stay under water unless he can hold his breath [13]. How by means of a certain machine many people may stay some time under water. How and why I do not describe my method of remaining under water, or how long I can stay without eating; and I do not publish nor divulge these by reason of the evil nature of men who would use them as means of destruction at the bottom of the sea, by sending ships to the bottom, and sinking them together with the men in them. And although I will impart others, there is no danger in them; because the mouth of the tube, by which you breathe, is above the water supported on bags or corks [19].

1115.

Supposing in a battle between ships and galleys that the ships are victorious by reason of the high of heir tops, you must haul the yard up almost to the top of the mast, and at the extremity of the yard, that is the end which is turned towards the enemy, have a small cage fastened, wrapped up below and all round in a great mattress full of cotton so that it may not be injured by the bombs; then, with the capstan, haul down the opposite end of this yard and the top on the opposite side will go up so high, that it will be far above the round-top of the ship, and you will easily drive out the men that are in it. But it is necessary that the men who are in the galley should go to the opposite side of it so as to afford a counterpoise to the weight of the men placed inside the cage on the yard.

1116.

If you want to build an armada for the sea employ these ships to ram in the enemy's ships. That is, make ships 100 feet long and 8 feet wide, but arranged so that the left hand rowers may have their oars to the right side of the ship, and the right hand ones to the left side, as is shown at M, so that the leverage of the oars may be longer. And the said ship may be one foot and a half thick, that is made with cross beams within and without, with planks in contrary directions. And this ship must have attached to it, a foot below the water, an iron-shod spike of about the weight and size of an anvil; and this, by force of oars may, after it has given the first blow, be drawn back, and driven forward again with fury give a second blow, and then a third, and so many as to destroy the other ship.

The use of swimming belts.

1117.

A METHOD OF ESCAPING IN A TEMPEST AND SHIPWRECK AT SEA.

Have a coat made of leather, which must be double across the breast, that is having a hem on each side of about a finger breadth. Thus it will be double from the waist to the knee; and the leather must be quite air-tight. When you want to leap into the sea, blow out the skirt of your coat through the double hems of the breast; and jump into the sea, and allow yourself to be carried by the waves; when you see no shore near, give your attention to the sea you are in, and always keep in your mouth the air-tube which leads down into the coat; and if now and again you require to take a breath of fresh air, and the foam prevents you, you may draw a breath of the air within the coat.

On the gravity of water.

1118.

If the weight of the sea bears on its bottom, a man, lying on that bottom and having l000 braccia of water on his back, would have enough to crush him.

Diving apparatus and Skating (1119-1121).

1119.

Of walking under water. Method of walking on water.

1120.

Just as on a frozen river a man may run without moving his feet, so a car might be made that would slide by itself.

[Footnote: The drawings of carts by the side of this text have no direct connection with the problem as stated in words.--Compare No. 1448, l. 17.]

1121.

A definition as to why a man who slides on ice does not fall. [Footnote: An indistinct sketch accompanies the passage, in the original.]

On Flying machines (1122-1126).

1122.

Man when flying must stand free from the waist upwards so as to be able to balance himself as he does in a boat so that the centre of gravity in himself and in the machine may counterbalance each other, and be shifted as necessity demands for the changes of its centre of resistance.

1123.

Remember that your flying machine must imitate no other than the bat, because the web is what by its union gives the armour, or strength to the wings.

If you imitate the wings of feathered birds, you will find a much stronger structure, because they are pervious; that is, their feathers are separate and the air passes through them. But the bat is aided by the web that connects the whole and is not pervious.

1124.

TO ESCAPE THE PERIL OF DESTRUCTION.

Destruction to such a machine may occur in two ways; of which the first is the breaking of the machine. The second would be when the machine should turn on its edge or nearly on its edge, because it ought always to descend in a highly oblique direction, and almost exactly balanced on its centre. As regards the first--the breaking of the machine--, that may be prevented by making it as strong as possible; and in whichever direction it may tend to turn over, one centre must be very far from the other; that is, in a machine 30 braccia long the centres must be 4 braccia one from the other.

1125.

Bags by which a man falling from a height of 6 braccia may avoid hurting himself, by a fall whether into water or on the ground; and these bags, strung together like a rosary, are to be fixed on one's back.

1126.

An object offers as much resistance to the air as the air does to the object. You may see that the beating of its wings against the air supports a heavy eagle in the highest and rarest atmosphere, close to the sphere of elemental fire. Again you may see the air in motion over the sea, fill the swelling sails and drive heavily laden ships. From these instances, and the reasons given, a man with wings large enough and duly connected might learn to overcome the resistance of the air, and by conquering it, succeed in subjugating it and rising above it. [Footnote: A parachute is here sketched, with an explanatory remark. It is reproduced on Tav. XVI in the Saggio, and in: \_Leonardo da Vinci als Ingenieur etc., Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Technik und der induktiven Wissenschaften, von Dr. Hermann Grothe, Berlin\_ 1874, p. 50.]

Of mining.

1127.

If you want to know where a mine runs, place a drum over all the places where you suspect that it is being made, and upon this drum put a couple of dice, and when you are over the spot where they are mining, the dice will jump a little on the drum at every blow which is given underground in the mining.

There are persons who, having the convenience of a river or a lake in their lands, have made, close to the place where they suspect that a mine is being made, a great reservoir of water, and have countermined the enemy, and having found them, have turned the water upon them and destroyed a great number in the mine.

Of Greek fire.

1128.

GREEK FIRE.

Take charcoal of willow, and saltpetre, and sulphuric acid, and sulphur, and pitch, with frankincense and camphor, and Ethiopian wool, and boil them all together. This fire is so ready to burn that it clings to the timbers even under water. And add to this composition liquid varnish, and bituminous oil, and turpentine and strong vinegar, and mix all together and dry it in the sun, or in an oven when the bread is taken out; and then stick it round hempen or other tow, moulding it into a round form, and studding it all over with very sharp nails. You must leave in this ball an opening to serve as a fusee, and cover it with rosin and sulphur.

Again, this fire, stuck at the top of a long plank which has one braccio length of the end pointed with iron that it may not be burnt by the said fire, is good for avoiding and keeping off the ships, so as not to be overwhelmed by their onset.

Again throw vessels of glass full of pitch on to the enemy's ships when the men in them are intent on the battle; and then by throwing similar burning balls upon them you have it in your power to burn all their ships.

Of Music (1129. 1130).

1129.

A drum with cogs working by wheels with springs [2].

[Footnote: This chapter consists of explanations of the sketches shown on Pl. CXXI. Lines 1 and 2 of the text are to be seen at the top at the left hand side of the first sketch of a drum. Lines 3-5 refer to the sketch immediately below this. Line 6 is written as the side of the seventh sketch, and lines 7 and 8 at the side of the eighth. Lines 9-16 are at the bottom in the middle. The remainder of the text is at the side of the drawing at the bottom.]

A square drum of which the parchment may be drawn tight or slackened by the lever \_a b\_ [5].

A drum for harmony [6].

[7] A clapper for harmony; that is, three clappers together.

[9] Just as one and the same drum makes a deep or acute sound according as the parchments are more or less tightened, so these parchments variously tightened on one and the same drum will make various sounds [16].

Keys narrow and close together; (bicchi) far apart; these will be right for the trumpet shown above.

\_a\_ must enter in the place of the ordinary keys which have the ... in the openings of a flute.

1130.

Tymbals to be played like the monochord, or the soft flute.

[6] Here there is to be a cylinder of cane after the manner of clappers with a musical round called a Canon, which is sung in four parts; each singer singing the whole round. Therefore I here make a wheel with 4 teeth so that each tooth takes by itself the part of a singer.

[Footnote: In the original there are some more sketches, to which the text, from line 6, refers. They are studies for a contrivance exactly like the cylinder in our musical boxes.]

1131.

Of decorations.

White and sky-blue cloths, woven in checks to make a decoration.

Cloths with the threads drawn at \_a b c d e f g h i k\_, to go round the decoration.

Selection C: Poems by Michelangelo

*In this poem Michelangelo wrestles with the neoplatonic argument that the human eyes only see human or bodily beauty, but cannot perceive the higher or “spiritual” beauty. For Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna’s beauty – like all genuine beauty – is the purest means for perceiving spiritual truth and beauty.*

My eyes can easily see your beautiful face

Wherever it appears, near or far away;

But my feet, lady, are prevented from bearing

My arms or either hand to that same place.

The soul, the intellect complete and sound,

More free and unfettered, can rise through the eyes

Up to your lofty beauty; but great ardor

Gives no such privilege to the human body,

Which, weighed down and mortal, and still lacking wings,

Can hardly follow the flight of a little angel;

So sight alone can take pride and pleasure in doing so.

If you have as much power in heaven as here among us,

Make my whole body nothing but an eye:

Let there be no part of me that can’t enjoy you.

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*The following two poems further express Michelangelo’s ideas about beauty.*

After trying many years, and then  
near death, the able man may know  
an image living in the alpine stone.  
If at all, the high and new come slowly,  
and, for us, they do not last so long.  
Oh my beloved! nature's like that too,  
who tried for beauty times untold  
until she triumphed, and made you.  
Yet by that token she is old  
and almost at the end of her career.  
So terror, which is always near  
to beauty, feeds desire strange food.  
My mind falls silent and no longer says  
if joy or pain be more: the sight  
of you calls forth the End of Days,  
yet gives me great delight.

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Too much good luck no less than misery

May kill a man condemned to mortal pain,

If, lost to hope and chilled in every vein,

A sudden pardon comes to set him free.

Thus thy unwonted kindness shown to me

Amid the gloom where only sad thoughts reign,

With too much rapture bringing light again,

Threatens my life more than that agony.

Good news and bad may bear the self-same knife;

And death may follow both upon their flight;

For hearts that shrink or swell, alike will break.

Let then thy beauty, to preserve my life,

Temper the source of this supreme delight,

Lest joy so poignant slay a soul so weak.

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*The following two poems represent the…”earthy” Michelangelo. In this poem, Michelangelo complains about the stresses put upon his body while painting the Sistine Chapel. Remember, he had to paint these huge, complex works looking up or lying on his back, many feet above the ground, for several years.*

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| A goiter it seems I got from this backward craning like the cats get there in Lombardy, or wherever —bad water, they say, from lapping their fetid river. My belly, tugged under my chin, 's all out of whack.      Beard points like a finger at heaven. Near the back of my neck, skull scrapes where a hunchback's lump would be. I'm pigeon-breasted, a harpy! Face dribbled—see?— like a Byzantine floor, mosaic. From all this straining      my guts and my hambones tangle, pretty near. Thank God I can swivel my butt about for ballast. Feet are out of sight; they just scuffle around, erratic.      Up front my hide's tight elastic; in the rear it's slack and droopy, except where crimps have callused. I'm bent like a bow, half-round, type Asiatic.      Not odd that what's on my mind, when expressed, comes out weird, jumbled. Don't berate; no gun with its barrel screwy can shoot straight.      Giovanni, come agitate for my pride, my poor dead art! I don't belong! Who's a painter? Me? No way! They've got me wrong. |

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*In this poem Michelangelo complains about his kidney problems, which make digestion and its consequences difficult and painful.*

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| --- |
| I'm packaged in here like the pulp in fruit compacted by its peel. In lonely gloom, a genii in a jar. Dumped destitute.      No room for flying high. I'm in a tomb where mad Arachne and her creepy crew keep jittering up and down, a spooky loom.      My entryway's a jakes for giants, who gorge on gut-loosening grapes or suffer flux. No other comfort station seems to do.      Urine! How well I know it—drippy duct compelling me awake too early, when dawn plays at peekaboo, then yonder—yuck!—      dead cats, cesspool and privy slosh, pigpen guck—gifts for me, flung hit-or-miss? Can't trudge to a proper dunghill, gentlemen?      Soul gets some help from body though in this: if guts, unclogged, could ventilate their smell no bread and cheese would keep it in duress,      while round it now catarrh and mucus jell. Congestion blocks the postern down in back. With all the phlegm, top exit's blocked as well.      Gut-sprung and graveled, spavined, out of whack, done in by drudgery's what I am. I pay innkeeper Death for a fleabag, grub and sack.      My pleasure: gloomy moping. Old and gray, discomfort's my repose. Who'd choose it so, God keep him in the dumps day after day.      The bogeyman, that's me, at a twelfth-night show. The setting's right, a stable. Disrepair's conspicuous near fine mansions in a row.      No flames of love within my heart, a bare cold hearthstone deep in ash. Chill drafts prevail. Clipped are the wings that rode celestial air.      Skull hums like a hornet in a wooden pail; gunnysack skin totes bones and jute around; bladder's a pouch of gravel, edged like shale.      My eyes: mauve pigment pestled till it's ground; teeth: oboe-keys that, when I puff out air, whistle it through or else begrudge the sound.      My face says, "Boo!" It's scary. Rags I wear rout-without bow and arrow-flocks of crows from fresh-sown furrows even when weather's fair.      One ear's all spider fuzz. I've tremolos in the one an all-night vocal cricket chooses. Can't sleep for my raucous snuffling, mouth and nose.      Amor, flower-quilted grottos, all the Muses, for these I scribbled reams—now scraps to tot up tabs, wrap fish, scrub toilets, or worse uses.      The puppets once I postured, cocky lot, size up my here and now: I'm like the one who, having swum wide ocean, drowned in snot.      My cherished art, my season in the sun, name, fame, acclaim—that cant I made a run for, left me in servitude, poor, old, alone.      O death, relieve me soon. Or soon I'm done for. |

Selection D: Vasari on Michangelo

During the 1550’s, Giorgio Vasari started writing a series of descriptions of the lives and works of the greatest artists of the Italian Renaissance, entitled accurately enough ***Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Times*.** The books are often considered the first works of art history ever written. To me, Vasari’s work is a testament to the self-consciousness of the era – Vasari *knew* that these artists were doing something remarkable and new, and he knew that other people were curious about them. There has always been art, but in the Renaissance, we see artists seeing not only their worlds and their art anew, but seeing themselves anew, as well.

The following selection is Vasari’s account of Michelangelo’s painting of the Sistine Chapel. Here, he calls Michelangelo ‘Michelagnolo’ and Raphael ‘Raffaello.’

**Questions**:

What sorts of things does Vasari focus on here? Elsewhere in the selection he carefully walks us through and describes the paintings on the Sistine chapel, but what sorts of things does he concern himself with here? Why? What impressions do we get of the major characters here, Michelangelo himself and the Pope?

Compete Vasari can be found online at

http://members.efn.org/~acd/vite/VasariLives.html

**MICHELAGNOLO BUONARROTI (1475-1564)  
PAINTER, SCULPTOR, AND ARCHITECT OF FLORENCE   
Part 5: The Sistine Chapel Ceiling**

**Vasari's Lives of the Artists**

WHEN THE POPE had returned to Rome and Michelagnolo was at work on the statue, Bramante, the friend and relative of Raffaello da Urbino, and for that reason little the friend of Michelagnolo, perceiving that the Pope held in great favor and estimation the works that he executed in sculpture, was constantly planning with Raffaello in Michelagnolo's absence to remove from the mind of his Holiness the idea of causing Michelagnolo, after his return, to devote himself to finishing his tomb; saying that for a man to prepare himself a tomb during his own lifetime was an evil augury and a hurrying on of his death. And they persuaded his Holiness that on the return of Michelagnolo, he should cause him to paint in memory of his uncle Sixtus the vaulting of the chapel that he had built in the Palace. In this manner it seemed possible to Bramante and other rivals of Michelagnolo to draw him away from sculpture, in which they saw him to be perfect, and to plunge him into despair, they thinking that if they compelled him to paint, he would do work less worthy of praise, since he had no experience of colors in fresco, and that he would prove inferior to Raffaello, and, even if he did succeed in the work, in any case it would make him angry against the Pope; so that in either event they would achieve their object of getting rid of him. And so, when Michelagnolo returned to Rome, the Pope was not disposed at that time to finish his tomb, and requested him to paint the vaulting of the chapel. Michelagnolo, who desired to finish the tomb, believing the vaulting of that chapel to be a great and difficult labor, and considering his own want of practice in colors, sought by every means to shake such a burden from his shoulders, and proposed Raffaello for the work.

But the more he refused, the greater grew the desire of the Pope, who was headstrong in his undertakings, and, in addition, was being spurred on anew by the rivals of Michelagnolo, and especially by Bramante; so that his Holiness, who was quick-tempered, was on the point of becoming enraged with Michelagnolo. Whereupon Michelagnolo, perceiving that his Holiness was determined in the matter, resolved to do it; and the Pope commanded Bramante to erect the scaffolding from which the vaulting might be painted. Bramante made it all supported by ropes, piercing the vaulting; which having perceived, Michelagnolo inquired of Bramante how he was to proceed to fill up the holes when he had finished painting it, and he replied that he would think of that afterwards, and that it could not be done otherwise. Michelagnolo recognized that Bramante was either not very competent for such a work or else little his friend, and he went to the Pope and said to him that the scaffolding was not satisfactory, and that Bramante had not known how to make it; and the Pope answered, in the presence of Bramante, that he should make it after his own fashion. And so he commanded that it should be erected upon props so as not to touch the walls, a method of making scaffoldings for vaults that he taught afterwards to Bramante and others, whereby many fine works have been executed. Thus he enabled a poor creature of a carpenter, who rebuilt the scaffolding, to dispense with so many of the ropes, that, after selling them (for Michelagnolo gave them to him), he made up a dowry for his daughter.

He then set his hand to making the cartoons for that vaulting; and the Pope decided, also, that the walls which the masters before him in the time of Sixtus had painted should be scraped clean, and decreed that he should have fifteen thousand ducats for the whole cost of the work; which price was fixed through Giuliano da San Gallo. Thereupon, forced by the magnitude of the undertaking to resign himself to obtaining assistance, Michelagnolo sent for men to Florence; and he determined to demonstrate in such a work that those who had painted there before him were destined to be vanquished by his labors, and also resolved to show to the modern craftsmen how to draw and paint. Having begun the cartoons, he finished them; and the circumstances of the work spurred him to soar to great heights, both for his own fame and for the welfare of art. And then, desiring to paint it in fresco-colours, and not having any experience of them, there came from Florence to Rome certain of his friends who were painters, to the end that they might give him assistance in such a work, and also that he might learn from them the method of working in fresco, in which some of them were well-practised; and among these were Granaccio, Giuliano Bugiardini, Jacopo di Sandro, the elder Indaco, Agnolo di Donnino, and Aristotile. Having made a commencement with the work, he caused them to begin some things as specimens; but, perceiving that their efforts were very far from what he desired, and not being satisfied with them, he resolved one morning to throw to the ground everything that they had done. Then, shutting himself up in the chapel, he would never open to them, nor even allowed himself to be seen by them when he was at home. And so, when the jest appeared to them to be going too far, they resigned themselves to it and returned in shame to Florence. Thereupon Michelagnolo, having made arrangements to paint the whole work by himself, carried it well on the way to completion with the utmost solicitude, labor, and study; nor would he ever let himself be seen, lest he should give any occasion to compel him to show it, so that the desire in the minds of everyone to see it grew greater every day.

Pope Julius was always very desirous to see any undertakings that he was having carried out, and therefore became more eager than ever to see this one, which was hidden from him. And so one day he resolved to go to see it, but was not admitted, for Michelagnolo would never have consented to show it to him; out of which affair arose the quarrel that has been described, when he had to depart from Rome because he would not show his work to the Pope. Now, when a third of the work was finished (as I ascertained from him in order to clear up all doubts), it began to throw out certain spots of mould, one winter that the north wind was blowing. The reason of this was that the Roman lime, which is made of travertine and white in colour, does not dry very readily, and, when mixed with pozzolana, which is of a tawny colour, makes a dark mixture which, when soft, is very watery; and when the wall has been well soaked, it often breaks out into an efflorescence in the drying; and thus this salt efflorescence of moisture came out in many places, but in time the air consumed it. Michelagnolo was in despair over this, and was unwilling to continue the work, asking the Pope to excuse him, since he was not succeeding; but his Holiness sent Giuliano da San Gallo to see him, and he, having told him whence the defect arose and taught him how to remove the spots of mould, encouraged him to persevere.

Now, when he had finished half of it, the Pope, who had subsequently gone to see it several times (mounting certain ladders with the assistance of Michelagnolo), insisted that it should be thrown open, for he was hasty and impatient by nature, and could not wait for it to be completely finished and to receive, as the saying is, the final touch. No sooner was it thrown open than all Rome was drawn to see it, and the Pope was the first, not having the patience to wait until the dust caused by the dismantling of the scaffolding had settled. Thereupon Raffaello da Urbino, who was very excellent in imitation, after seeing it straightway changed his manner, and without losing any time, in order to display his ability, painted the Prophets and Sibyls in the work of the Pace; and at the same time Bramante sought to have the other half of the chapel entrusted by the Pope to Raffaello. Which hearing, Michelagnolo complained of Bramante, and revealed to the Pope without any reserve many faults both in his life and in his architectural works; of which last, in the building of S. Pietro, as was seen afterwards, Michelagnolo became the corrector. But the Pope, recognizing more clearly every day the ability of Michel- agnolo, desired that he should continue the work, judging, after he had seen it uncovered, that he could make the second half considerably better; and so in twenty months he carried that work to perfect completion by himself alone, without the assistance even of anyone to grind his colours. Michelagnolo complained at times that on account of the haste that the Pope imposed on him he was not able to finish it in his own fashion, as he would have liked; for his Holiness was always asking him importunately when he would finish it. On one occasion, among others, he replied, "It will be finished when I shall have satisfied myself in the matter of art." "But it is our pleasure," answered the Pope, "that you should satisfy us in our desire to have it done quickly;" and he added, finally, that if Michelagnolo did not finish the work quickly he would have him thrown down from the scaffolding. Whereupon Michelagnolo, who feared and had good reason to fear the anger of the Pope, straightway finished all that was wanting, without losing any time, and, after taking down the rest of the scaffolding, threw it open to view on the morning of All Saints' Day, when the Pope went into the chapel to sing Mass, to the great satisfaction of the whole city. Michelagnolo desired to retouch some parts "a secco," as the old masters had done on the scenes below, painting backgrounds, draperies, and skies in ultramarine, and ornaments in gold in certain places, to the end that this might produce greater richness and a more striking effect; and the Pope, having learned that this ornamentation was wanting, and hearing the work praised so much by all who had seen it, wished him to finish it; but, since it would have been too long a labor for Michelagnolo to rebuild the scaffolding, it was left as it was. His Holiness, often seeing Michelagnolo, would say to him that the chapel should be enriched with colors and gold, since it looked poor. And Michelagnolo would answer familiarly, "Holy Father, in those times men did not bedeck themselves with gold, and those that are painted there were never very rich, but rather holy men, on which account they despised riches."

For this work Michelagnolo was paid by the Pope three thousand crowns on several occasions, of which he had to spend twenty-five on colors. The work was executed with very great discomfort to himself, from his having to labor with his face upwards, which so impaired his sight that for a time, which was not less than several months, he was not able to read letters or look at drawings save with his head backwards. And to this I can bear witness, having painted five vaulted chambers in the great apartments in the Palace of Duke Cosimo, when, if I had not made a chair on which I could rest my head and lie down at my work, I would never have finished it; even so, it has so ruined my sight and injured my head, that I still feel the effects, and I am astonished that Michelagnolo endured all that discomfort so well. But in truth, becoming more and more kindled every day by his fervour in the work, and encouraged by the proficience and improvement that he made, he felt no fatigue and cared nothing for discomfort.

[ *I’ve cut a long section out here in which Vasari describes, at great length, what you see when you look up at the Sistine Chapel*]

It would take too long to describe all the beautiful fantasies in the different actions in the part where there is all the Genealogy of the Fathers, beginning with the sons of Noah, to demonstrate the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, in which figures is a variety of things that it is not possible to enumerate, such as draperies, expressions of heads, and an infinite number of novel and extraordinary fancies, all most beautifully considered. Nothing there but is carried into execution with genius: all the figures there are masterly and most beautifully foreshortened, and everything that you look at is divine and beyond praise. And who will not be struck dumb with admiration at the sight of the sublime force of Jonas, the last figure in the chapel, wherein by the power of art the vaulting, which in fact springs forward in accord with the curve of the masonry, yet, being in appearance pushed back by that figure, which bends inwards, seems as if straight, and, vanquished by the art of design with its lights and shades, even appears in truth to recede inwards? Oh, truly happy age of ours, and truly blessed craftsmen! Well may you be called so, seeing that in our time you have been able to illumine anew in such a fount of light the darkened sight of your eyes, and to see all that was difficult made smooth by a master so marvellous and so unrivalled! Certainly the glory of his labors makes you known and honored, in that he has stripped from you that veil which you had over the eyes of your minds, which were so full of darkness, and has delivered the truth from the falsehood that overshadowed your intellects. Thank Heaven, therefore, for this, and strive to imitate Michelagnolo in everything.

When the work was thrown open, the whole world could be heard running up to see it, and, indeed, it was such as to make everyone astonished and dumb. Wherefore the Pope, having been magnified by such a result and encouraged in his heart to undertake even greater enterprises, rewarded Michelagnolo liberally with money and rich gifts: and Michelagnolo would say at times of the extraordinary favors that the Pope conferred upon him, that they showed that he fully recognized his worth, and that, if by way of proving his friendliness he sometimes played him strange tricks, he would heal the wound with signal gifts and favors. As when, Michelagnolo once demanding from him leave to go to Florence for the festival of S. John, and asking money for that purpose, the Pope said, "Well, but when will you have this chapel finished?" "As soon as I can, Holy Father." The Pope, who had a staff in his hand, struck Michelagnolo, saying, "As soon as I can! As soon as I can! I will soon make you finish it!" Whereupon Michelagnolo went back to his house to get ready to go to Florence; but the Pope straightway sent Cursio, his Chamberlain, to Michelagnolo with five hundred crowns to pacify him, fearing lest he might commit one of his caprices, and Cursio made excuse for the Pope, saying that such things were favors and marks of affection. And Michelagnolo, who knew the Pope's nature and, after all, loved him, laughed over it all, for he saw that in the end everything turned to his profit and advantage, and that the Pontiff would do anything to keep a man such as himself as his friend.