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Thesis.

MICHAEL ANGELO.

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Michael Angelo

Most of our information concerning Michael Angelo, has come through the biographies of him written by Condivi and Vasari.

The most complete history of Michael Angelo, and his age, is that which was written by Roman Gurini. The material being gathered from Condivi's and Vasari's biographies, Michael Angelo's letters and a very careful and complete study of his works.

Two years previous to Michael Angelo's birth, his father, Ludovico, received an appointment as Governor of the little fortified cities of Chiusi and Caprese - situated on the Tiber, where he and his wife immediately resided. Here on the 6th of March 1475, the child was born who received the name of Michael Agnolo. This being the true orthography instead of the more usual one of Angelo.

Two years later when his term expired Ludovico and his wife returned to Florence - leaving the little Michael Angelo

with the nose on the Buonarrotti estate, three miles outside of Florence. In these surroundings, he began to draw as soon as he could use his hands. His brothers were merchants and this being a more esteemed profession than painting, his uncle and father tried in every way to prevent him from becoming an artist, even resorting to punishment. However, they found it impossible to overcome his love for art so in April, 1488 his father signed a contract, by virtue of which, he was apprenticed to the masters - Domenico, and David Cellandajo for three years. He made rapid progress here and it soon became evident that he had surpassed his masters, in the knowledge of his art. It seemed imperative that he sever his connection with Cellandajo before the expiration of the three years, and this was accomplished by his acquaintance with Lorenzo dei Medici who was at the head of the government at Florence.

Lorenzo was a great lover and promoter of art, and in order to encourage and advance it he had placed in the gardens of San Marco, the finest

sculpture and paintings which he could obtain. In this place Lorenzo gathered together the most promising young talent of the city to be instructed by Bertoldo, a pupil of Donatello.

Under these favorable influences in the gardens of San Marco, Michael Angelo's talent was soon developed. His early training had been in painting, but now he began to do work in sculpture, which was so remarkable that it soon caught the attention of Lorenzo.

Michael Angelo became a favorite of Lorenzo's, living in his house and often sitting at his side at dinner. In this way he was associated with the highest and best culture at home and abroad, receiving much of his training and instruction in an intellectual way, at this time.

Florence, was, during this period, corrupt in every sense of the word, crimes of all sorts being commonly indulged in. Savonarola now appeared in Florence to bring about, as he said, total reform, morally and politically, for the good and freedom of Florence. He succeeded in converting a great number of people, even reaching Lorenzo, at the time of his death which occurred in 1492 when he was forty four

years old. Owing to his short illness and the practices of the times, many people attributed his death to poison.

Michael Angelo, overcome by the loss of his friend and benefactor, soon left the palace, although invited to stay, to set up an atelier for himself in his father's house.

The two years which followed were full of political disturbances and preparations for war. Michael Angelo, who was not yet twenty years old was working at his own expense. He executed at this time a marble Hercules, four feet in height, and also a crucifix in wax.

In 1494 he returned to the palace of the Medici at the request of Piero, the son of Lorenzo and now Governor of Florence.

War was now renewed and the Neapolitans, who were in alliance with the Florentines were defeated. The Florentines were very much frightened as they were not used to fighting, having had peace for many generations.

This fact together with with superstitious signs, in which Michael Angelo and others believed, led him in his departure from the house of the Medici which he believed to be doomed.

He, together with two of his friends, fled to Venice, only reaching Bologna, however

where they stopped. One of the laws of the city was that every one who entered it must present himself before the ruling family, and receive a seal of red wax on his thumb. Michael Angelo and his friends not having conformed to this law, were seized and fined an amount too great for them to pay, and were therefore detained.

By chance, a member of the council and one of the leading families of Bologna saw them and freed them.

Upon finding that Michael Angelo was a sculptor, he invited him to his house.

Since Michael Angelo was the only one of the three who had any money, he gave all he had to his two friends and went to the home of his newly-found friend.

Only a short time elapsed after this when the Medici and their adherents arrived in Bologna on their flight from Florence.

Michael Angelo remained in Bologna about a year and the only work which he did while there was to finish the coffin in the church of San Petronio which contains, to this day, the bones of Saint-Domenico. He was finally driven away by the jealous artists

of the city and returned to Florence.

The Florence to which he returned was not the city he had left just a year before. The palace of the Medici stood empty and the art-treasures were destroyed or sold to the highest bidder.

Many of the followers of Savonarola to whom all this destruction was due, condemned the works which they had before executed. Savonarola, held almost completely away and a great reform movement had set in.

During the troublous times which followed, Michael Angelo set up an atelier for himself and also found a patron for his work who was a Medici.

Cosmo, the grandfather of Piero, had a brother whose descendants lived in Florence.

The two brothers, Lorenzo and Ciiovanni, were exiled by Piero, but returned to Florence from France in the train of King Carlos.

Lorenzo ordered some work of Michael Angelo, who was an adherent of Savonarola, but not to such an extent as that he could execute a Marble Cupid which was sold to a Cardinal in Rome, and which ultimately led him to

leave Florence and take up his abode in Rome, on June Twenty five 1496.

His advent in Rome at the age of twenty one, marks the beginning of a great series of his masterly works. The first noteworthy work done in Rome was his "Drunk in Bacchus" which was criticized as more human than God-like. At the age of twenty four his "Pietà" was completed which is considered by many his masterpiece in sculpture, although it was executed just at the threshold of his great career.

In reply to a criticism on his Madonna in this group, that she is too young for her son, he says, "Do you not know that chaste women remain fresher than those who are not so? How much more so a virgin who has never been led astray by the slightest sinful desire? But yet more of such youthful bloom is thus naturally retained in her, we must believe the divine power came also to her aid, so that the maidenliness and imperishable purity of the Mother of God might appear to all the world. Not as necessary was this in her Son. On the contrary, it was

to be shown how he in truth assumed the human form and was exposed to all that can befall a mortal man, sin alone excepted. Thus it was not necessary here to place his divinity before his humanity, but to represent him at the age which, according to the course of time he had reached. It must not, therefore, appear amazing to you if I have represented the most holy Virgin and Mother of God much younger than her Son, than regard to the ordinary maturing of man might have required, and that I have left the Son at his natural age."

After a reign of several years, Savonarola was killed in 1498 and in 1499 Michael Angelo returned to his native City. His first work after his arrival in Florence was a Madonna in marble and next a painting of the Holy Family.

He now undertook the execution of his statue of David. Many years before a block of marble eighteen feet in height, had been conveyed from Carrara, by the wool-weaver's

guild, to whom belonged the church of Santa Maria del Fiore, from which a Prophet was to be carved for the dome of the church. Nothing was done to it, however, as artist was able to do the work. Even Donatello to whom it was offered, did not consider himself equal to the task and the mass of marble had lain for years in front of the church.

Now in 1501 the order was given to Michael Angelo. The David was completed in 1504 and after much discussion and a meeting of the artists and architects of the city, it was decided that it should be placed at the gate of the palace of the Government, where it has stood now for many centuries. Altho it is becoming much affected by exposure to the weather, the Florentines have a little sentiment attached to its position which prevents its removal to a more sheltered place.

During the time that he worked on the David Michael Angelo had many other orders and a great deal of other work.

In 1504, after the completion of the David he was asked by Soderini, who was leaving the walls in the hall where the Consiglio grande sat painted, to do a painting on the wall opposite that on which Leonardo was at that time working.

He undertook the work, although at the time he had done no painting to amount to any thing. His "cartoon of the Bathing Soldiers", the work of which was interrupted and not finished until some years later, was one of his greatest achievements.

In 1505, upon the urgent request of Pope Julius II Michael Angelo went again to Rome. The Pope wished him to execute for him his mausoleum.

He began at once upon the plans, which when completed, met with the Pope's approval and consisted of a large number of marble figures. The Pope now sent him to Carrara, where the quarries were situated, to pick out his own blocks of marble and to see that they were transported safely. This task occupied him for eight months: when

all preparations had been made he went to work with his chisel, with fervent enthusiasm. Although the Pope and Michael Angelo both had fiery dispositions and independent natures, they were, never-the-less, good friends and the Pope spent much of his time watching Michael Angelo at his work. The latter was always allowed to go to the Pope without being announced, but, one day, owing to some caprice of the Pope, he was not admitted. Michael Angelo became enraged at this and left at once for Florence, leaving word that if the Pope wanted him he would have to send for him. He now resumed work on the Cartoon as well as the statues of the twelve apostles which he had previously undertaken.

The Pope sent for him many times, using first inducements, then threats to get him back. He remained obstinate a long time, but finally met the Pope in Bologna, making him come over half-way, where a reconciliation was effected. He remained in Bologna for some time to make a bronze statue

of the Pope. This proved a difficult task and kept him much longer than he intended it should, but it was finally completed and he returned to Florence.

Michael Angelo, upon his return to Florence found plenty of work awaiting him but he only remained a short time, leaving for Rome in 1508 to resume his work, as he thought, on the mausoleum of Pope Pius II. He found, upon his arrival in Rome, however, that he was not to be allowed to work on the unfinished statues. During his absence,

Bramante, who was very jealous of Michael Angelo, had persuaded the Pope that it was unlucky to have his mausoleum erected while he yet lived. Thus Bramante hoped to ruin the sculptor.

The Pope immediately planned other work and told Michael Angelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michael Angelo objected, having done so little painting, and because he longed to return to his statues, but the Pope insisted. Michael Angelo now began the wonderful work in the dome of the chapel which was completed in just twenty months. He showed his architectural

genius at the start - by erecting a scaffolding on which to work, which the other architects of Rome failed to do successfully.

When the work was once started, he worked day and night, often not sparing time in which to eat.

The Pope kept urging him on with feverish haste, often climbing the scaffolding to inspect the work, to the disgust as well as the annoyance of Michael Angelo.

While he worked the painter had to lie upon his back and for some time after the painting was completed, in order to see an object, he had to drop his head back and hold the object above his eyes.

It is almost impossible to describe this wonderful work. One has to see it for himself to really know of the grandeur, and to understand the great creative imagination with which it is filled.

The artist first produced an architectural effect in which to place his pictures of the Creation.

Around the lower part of the dome, between the twelve windows, are arranged the Prophets and Sibyls, who seem to be

seated in the interior of a great marble temple, looking up at the pictures in the center of the ceiling which appear to be seen through apertures in the ceiling. This being accomplished through perspective illusions. His conception of the figures and the skill with which he produced them by fore-shortening and perspective, were remarkable and altogether new, and had a very great influence, being the beginning of modern painting.

The Sistine frescoes were finished in 1512, the year in which Pope Julius II died. Next came Pope Leo X who was the first Medici to become Pope. His Pontificate lasted nine years and this time is a desert in Michael Angelo's life.

He wished, upon the death of Pope Julius, to begin again his work on the tomb but he was not permitted to do so.

After Leo X came Pope Adrian, who allowed him to work on the tomb.

In 1523 Clement VII became Pope. He was also a Medici and immediately sent Michael Angelo to Florence to erect a monument to the Medici family.

It is perhaps to this man that the

world over Michael Angelo's most wonderful work - The Tomb of the Medici in San Lorenzo, which is decorated with the statue of Lorenzo, and four figures: The Dawn, The Evening, The Twilight, and The Night.

In 1529 Michael Angelo was appointed Commissary General of the fortifications, this being the time that Florence, together with Venice, England and France, were engaged in a battle against the Pope and the Emperor, to prevent Alexander, a Medici, and Margaret, the daughter of the Emperor, from becoming Duke and Duchess of Florence.

Here he not only showed his patriotism but also his great engineering ability, in which he proved himself very ingenious -

Michael Angelo is, perhaps, the exception which proves the rule, that to excel in any thing one must confine his attention to just that one thing, for he excelled in at least three things and was besides, a poet of more than ordinary ability.

The Last Judgement, a painting

in the Sistine Chapel, was executed thirty years after the other works there when Michael Angelo was sixty one years old.

When he was sixty two years old, through their mutual acquaintance with the Pope, he met Vittoria Colonna, who was thenceforth, his dearest friend, and was the only woman who ever came into his life.

Their friendship and companionship only lasted five or six years for in 1547 she died. At her loss he was prostrated with grief and nearly lost his senses.

He said to Condivi, he regretted nothing so much as having only kissed her hand and not her forehead and cheek also when he went to her at her last hour.

Michael Angelo's acquaintance with Vittoria Colonna changed his conception of women. His representation of women had always been large, noble, and pure, but with a certain lack of gentle womanliness which now appeared in them.

For many years there had been an effort put forth by the different Popes to raise St. Peter's, but all had made little progress. Now when

Michael Angelo was eighty one years old and Bramante, San Gallo and Rafael, who had worked on the church, were dead, he was instructed by Pope Caraffa, to undertake the raising of St. Peters.

Altho Caraffa cared less for art than any of his predecessors, he did more for St. Peters than any of them.

Michael Angelo undertook this work - accepting no pay, wishing, as he said, to do the work for the glorification of his God and his own soul. He greatly changed the plans of Bramante, making first a plaster model of the building, which still exists and is kept in the Vatican.

He died of extreme old age, after watching and waiting for death, on February eighteenth, 1564. He had always led a life of stern uprightness, never swerving from a path of duty. He was unpretentious in his personal surroundings, kind but erratic, retiring and often very melancholy. He was ironical

positive and independant, with regard to matters respecting his profession.

He was determined to allow no one to surpass him in any branch of the arts. He taught at all times

That - Beauty is truth and truth is Beauty.

"Few names are synonymous with his in the roll and calendar of great men - Homer, Dante, Sophocles, Milton."

For, "power is more than beauty, - character more than grace."

His body was sent from Rome to Florence, to the sacred precincts of Santa Croce, where it now rests.