

Brawl of the Centaurs

The relief must have been carved shortly before the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, on April 8th, 1492. This means that it dates from a time shortly after the *Madonna della Scala* and therefore, from the period when the artist was working in the garden of San Marco. It displays the influence of Donatello and especially Bertoldo (*Battle of the Bargello*), of the reliefs on the pulpits by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, and of Pollaiuolo in the marked dynamism of the figures. Apart from these influences it is certain that, in this work, Michelangelo used light for the first time to bring out the forms, and that the scene of a fight was a device to exalt the power and vitality of the muscles. The subject is described differently by Vasari and Condivi: the former calls it the *Battle of Hercules with the Centaurs*, the latter as the *Abduction of Deianeira* and the *Brawl of the Centaurs*. It is more probable that it represents the *Abduction of Hippodameia* by the centaur Eurytion as related in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, an idea given to him by Agnolo Poliziano. According to Condivi, Michelangelo considered this the first complete work in which he was able to express himself freely: «When he looks at it, he recognizes how much wrong he had done to nature in not carrying on promptly with the art of sculpture. This work showing how successful he could have been.».