

## Four Prisoners

Left in the artist's studio on via Mozza, the four *Prisoners* were donated to Grand Duke Cosimo I, along with the *Victory* by his nephew Lionardo. Cosimo had them set up at the four corners of the Grotta del Buontalenti in the Boboli Garden. They remained there until 1908, when they were moved to their present location. The date of these sculptures is much disputed, but the hypothesis that is now most widely accepted is that Michelangelo carved them for the fifth version of the tomb of Julius II around 1530-4, although it is likely that work on the four statues was begun and resumed at different times. Consequently, while the *Bearded Slave* is fairly well-defined stylistically, the *Young Slave* is only roughly modeled and the *Atlas* and the *Awakening Slave* are only beginning to emerge from the block of marble. It is clear that the artist intended these *Prisoners*, some twenty or thirty centimeters shorter than the ones in Paris, for a different position and role in the tomb. From their gestures, which suggest an instinctive shrinking from something heavy above them and an effort to hold it up, it is likely that they would have been set at the corners as supports for the robust molding between the two levels of the grandiose monument. The legs of the *Bearded Slave* and the *Young Slave* show signs of intervention by an assistant.