

The Tombs of Lorenzo and Giuliano

The two tombs of Lorenzo of Urbino and Giuliano of Nemours, set against the side walls of the sacristy, should have been connected, in Michelangelo's design, with the double one of Lorenzo and Giuliano the Magnificent, located on the entrance wall, by a combination of sculptural and architectural elements so that every part of the complex structure would be linked together in an intense and unitary formal language. Unfortunately, the tomb planned for the two older members of the Medici family was not realized and did not attain its present form until it was built by others around the middle of the century. On the other hand, the two wall tombs for the young dukes were constructed almost entirely by Michelangelo. The parts that were not finished were the top, for which the original project envisaged a different form, the statues for the two lateral niches, which remained empty, and the lower section, where he had intended to place a pair of river gods, of which the models have survived. These tombs profoundly modified the humanistic model of the funeral monument built against a wall. In fact, the structure of white marble that makes up each tomb is not closed at the sides by any architectural element. Instead, they are left so that they open onto the structural pilaster strips of *pietra serena* of the sacristy and make the monument lose its sense of isolation from the rest of the building, almost merging with the wall. The semantic complexity achieved by Michelangelo is also remarkable. The two figures of *Lorenzo* and *Giuliano*, thoughtful and uneasy amidst their symbols of earthly glory and flanked by the four parts of the day, obvious symbols for the passing of time, are gazing toward the *Madonna and Child*, the symbol of supreme spiritual harmony, in both Platonic and Christian terms, which alone is capable of allaying the anxieties of life.