

Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Scaffolding

In the past, it was believed that the scaffolding designed by Michelangelo and described in minute detail by Condivi stood directly on the floor of the Sistine Chapel. Yet, this is unlikely, as a structure of this kind would have been a serious obstacle to the ceremonial functions that had to be held in the chapel. It has recently been demonstrated that Michelangelo invented a scaffold, as a replacement for one set up by Bramante, that rested on the side walls, at the base of the lunettes.

Michelangelo had the holes for the fifteenth century scaffolding enlarged so that they could house thicker wooden props (which Vasari calls *sorgozzoni* or «punches to the neck») capable of supporting the suspended scaffold that he had designed. This solution is recorded in a sketch drawn on a study for *The Creation of Adam*, now in the Uffizi. The drawing must have been intended to provide general indications for the carpenter entrusted with the construction: in fact its proportions must have been designed to ensure that the stepped structure did not come too close to the wall, allowing the artist to fresco the huge ceiling without experiencing too much discomfort. The ingenious solution devised by Michelangelo was purely technical but had important consequences for architectural practice.