

Battle of Cascina

The iconographic theme that was to be illustrated appears to have been taken from Giovanni Villani's *Cronica*: on July 29th, 1364, Galeotto Malatesta, commander of the Florentine forces in the campaign to conquer Pisa, set up camp six miles from the city, in the village of Cascina. The heat induced many of the soldiers to take off their armor and bathe in the Arno River. While the commander was resting in his own tent, Mario Donati saw the Pisans preparing to launch an attack and quickly gave the alarm. The battle went in the Florentine's favor. The episode gave Buonarroti a pretext to try his hand at the virtuoso representation of naked figures caught in extremely lively and dynamic attitudes.

No contract for the work exists, but it appears from records of accounts that in the second half of 1504, Gonfalonier Soderini commissioned Michelangelo to paint a monumental fresco of this epic battle in the Sala Grande del Consiglio of Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Soderini had already commissioned a painting of the *Battle of Anghiari* in the same room from Leonardo, provoking rivalry between the two artists. The cartoon was made in a room of the Ospedale dei Tintori in Sant'Onofrio and completed in 1505. In 1508, it was transferred to the room where the painting was to be located, but work on the latter never started. Subsequently the cartoon, already in a poor condition, was stored in Santa Maria Novella, and then moved to Palazzo Medici around 1515. By 1550, it appears to have been split into a large number of fragments with different owners. The pieces, studied and examined by a flock of Florentine and foreign artists, were destroyed at unknown times. A few partial copies have survived, of which the best known is the one by Aristotele da Sangallo.