

# EL GRECO OF CRETE

Πρακτικά του διεθνούς επιστημονικού συνεδρίου  
που οργανώθηκε με αφορμή τα 450 χρόνια από τη γέννηση του ζωγράφου  
Ηράκλειο 1-5 Σεπτεμβρίου 1990

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*Domenicos Theotocopoulos:  
«The Dormition of the Virgin»,  
a Work of the Painter's Cretan Period*

All are acquainted with the events surrounding the discovery made on the island of Syros in spring, 1983, by the Byzantinist G. Mastoropoulos of the icon of the *Dormition of the Virgin* bearing the signature of Domenicos Theotocopoulos<sup>1</sup> (figs. 1-18). As part of a study on the island of Psara, the then Curator of Byzantine Antiquities of Chios conducted a search on Syros for heirlooms of Psarian refugees from 1824. This search led him to the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in the Psariote community at Ermoupolis, where the marvelous icon of Domenicos Theotocopoulos was found. It would be inappropriate to regard this important discovery as simply the outcome of providence. The locating and deciphering of the painter's almost illegible signature in the work's then state (fig. 1) was greatly assisted by Mr. Mastoropoulos' experience gained over many years in recording icons of the Cyclades for the Archaeological Service.

The icon was at once removed to the Byzantine Museum in Athens for study and conservation which was undertaken by the gifted painter and conservator Stavros Baltoyianis. As can be imagined, Mr. Mastoropoulos' announcement of the important discovery created a sensation at the time.<sup>2</sup> After conservation, the work was displayed at the Byzantine Museum during an exhibition in 1984.<sup>3</sup> In 1986, it was returned to Syros.

Discussion of the state in which the icon was found and the conservation work undertaken thereon (figs. 1-9) will be as brief as possible. The upper part of the icon and the ground below had been repainted in green while a few additions were made to the miniature figures of the apostles in the

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1. On the icon, cf. G. St. Mastoropoulos, «Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Θεοτοκόπουλου», *Τρίτο Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινής και Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης*, Summary of Communications, Athens 1983, p. 53; *Έκθεση για τα 100 χρόνια της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (1884-1984)*, Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, 6 October 1984 - 31 June 1985, Catalogue, p. 10 ff. (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou), p. 34, no. 21 (M. Chatzidakis); *From Byzantium to El Greco, Greek Frescoes and Icons*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 27th March - 21st of June 1987, Catalogue, Athens 1987, p. 190 ff. no. 63 (G. Mastoropoulos); N. M. Panayotakis, *Η Κρητική περίοδος της ζωής του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου*, Athens 1986, pp. 21 and 87; L. Hadermann-Misguich, «Le Byzantinisme du Greco à la lumière de découvertes récentes», *Bulletin de la Classe des Beaux-Arts*, 5e serie - tome lxxix, 1987, pp. 42, 44 ff., 61, and 63. I regret that, for reasons beyond his control, Mr. Mastoropoulos could not present the icon of Domenicos Theotocopoulos at this conference. Having, however, only an indirect relation with the subject, I took the responsibility of presenting this communication in his place. The photographs (nos. 3-4, 10-18 and 20) by Makis Skiadaresis, (nos. 1-2) by G. Balis of the Byzantine Museum of Athens, (nos. 5-9) by Dr. J. Chrysoulakis, Professor of the National Technical University, Athens, (no. 19) from the Byzantine Museum archives, Athens.

2. Mastoropoulos, «Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Θεοτοκόπουλου», *op. cit.*

3. *Έκθεση για τα 100 χρόνια της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (1884-1984)*.



1. Domenico Theotocopoulos, *The Dormition of the Virgin*. Ermoupolis of Syros. Before conservation.



2. Domenico Theotocopoulos, *The Dormition of the Virgin*. During conservation.

clouds, and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The central figures of the Virgin and Christ had been covered by silver worked in repoussé, possibly contemporary to the repainting which may be dated to the nineteenth century. The oxidized later layer of varnish together with the soot had rendered the colours opaque, and parts of the representation were indiscernible. At the bottom left-hand corner, the painting was destroyed showing the wood, part of which is missing at the edge; while a vertical crack extending from the middle of the upper edge reaches the figure of Christ.

The removal of the silver coverings revealed the extent of serious wear occasioned under and around them due to oxidization and to cleaning of the metal (fig. 2). The painting's sensitivity to solvents necessitated an exclusively mechanical cleaning method under a stereo-microscope.<sup>5</sup> The more recent layer of varnish, together with the repainting, was removed to reveal the gold background and the original green colour of the ground surface both of which had undergone wear. The original varnish was in certain places preserved. Part of the repainting was preserved below to facilitate study of this most recent intervention. Furthermore, parts of the repainted figures of the apostles in the clouds were likewise preserved since the condition of the original did not permit the removal of the later layer of paint at all places without danger of damage. Interventions to cover worn areas were limited to essentials. Basically, work was undertaken only on those areas where the prepared surface of the wood had been laid bare, especially at the centre where the white plaster was covered with a

4. These consisted of retouching to the face and hands of the apostles in the clouds, to Christ's garments and the Dormant Virgin, and repainting of the mandorla of the Metastasis.

5. Investigation of the icon involved photography from a stereo-microscope, x-ray, examination and photography with ultraviolet rays, photography with an infra-red reflectograph (figs. 5-9) and examination of small samples under a metalographic microscope (the two last tasks were performed by the Professor of the National Technical University, Mr. J. Chrysoulakis).



3. Domenikos Theotocopoulos, *The Dormition of the Virgin*. After conservation.

watercolour patina to preserve the continuity of the composition (figs. 2, 10). Finally, the icon was covered with a light coat of varnish. The general condition of the work can be said to be fine.

The icon, painted as is usual on wood with a preparation of cloth and a thin layer of gesso, measures 61.4 x 52.2 cm. Candles burn on three fine candlesticks in front of the bier (figs. 3-4). Christ in the centre (figs. 10, 17), flanked by angels in the mandorla behind, bends towards the Virgin holding her soul in His hands. Peter and the hierarch James the Brother of Christ burn incense to the left and right respectively while Paul prays to the right (figs. 11-12). Two groups of onlookers are depicted on either side of Christ's mandorla with restrained expressions of grief and sadness (figs. 11-16): these are the other apostles joined by three bishops, two of them with opened books reciting the service for



4. The painter's signature on the base of the central candlestick.

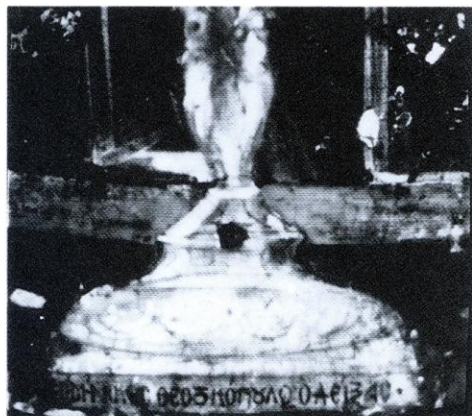
the dead. The assembly is joined by two women at the edge of both sides representing friends of the Virgin. Two corresponding buildings rise behind and are joined by a wall thus constituting the boundary of the scene at the back (fig. 3). The Metastasis is represented in a smaller scale above. The Virgin sits upright on a suggested throne of light issuing from the Holy Spirit who takes the form of a dove in the mandorla below (figs. 3, 17, 18). Throwing her girdle to the left to the late-comer, Thomas, the Virgin is accompanied to heaven by a host of singing angels while the gates open on high. To the right and left, and on an even smaller scale on the gold ground, the apostles «gathered from the ends of the earth» are shown sailing on clouds. The base of the central candlestick with its stem of cast Karyatids (figs. 3-5) bears the painter's signature in black capital letters: ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ Ο ΑΓΙΖΑΝ.

The authenticity of the signature is beyond doubt. The letters, of which the initial Δ of the name Domenicos is covered by the repainting preserved at this point, have undergone the same extent of wear due to the passage of time as has the rest of the painting. Furthermore, during conservation it was ascertained that the signature was covered by the icon's original layer of varnish.

We need not deal extensively here with the undisputed similarity of the graphic nature of the signature with others by Theotocopoulos written in capital letters on his early and later works, a similarity which extends to the identification of the characters and ligatures used by Domenicos in his writing.<sup>6</sup>

The archaic form of the signature with the use of the verb δείκνυμι (ὁ δείξας) with its special meaning, as given by Lucian and Strabo, of «create» in association with a work of art bears witness to

6. M. Chatzidakis, «Παρατηρήσεις στις υπογραφές του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου», in the volume *El Greco: Byzantium and Italy*, Rethymnon 1990, p. 418, figs. 1-6.



5-9. Photographs taken with an infra-red reflectograph, details of the icon.



10. The Virgin on the bier and Christ with her soul.



11. Apostles, hierarchs and women around the bier.

the education of the young Domenicos who kept a copy of Lucian in his library in Spain to the end of his days.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the signature throws light on the artist's self-confidence and his sense of his creation's value, a view justified by the icon itself.

This form of Theotocopoulos' signature constitutes a «hapax» amongst those of many Cretan painters of the period<sup>8</sup> who not infrequently were inspired by trends popular during the Renaissance to adopt an analogous cultivated style when signing their works, eschewing the ordinary expressions that made of the painter a humble executor of divine will and, instead, projecting the personal relationship of the artist with his work,<sup>9</sup> for example, George Klontzas, Michael Damaskinos, Markos Bathas and Thomas (Topios) Bathas. What thought-play, indeed, prodded the lonely Greek in Toledo

7. Cf. Chatzidakis, *op. cit.*, p. 82; *Έκθεση για τα 100 χρόνια*, no. 21; *From Byzantium to El Greco*, p. 191, no. 63; O. Gratzou, *Domenicos Theotocopoulos «ό δείξας». A Commentary on a Rare Signature Type of El Greco*, in the present volume.

8. The only other example of a signature on a portable icon with the use of the same verb is found in an icon of St Spyridon from 1739: «ΔΕΗCIC ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ Θ(Ε)ΙΟΥ / άναστασίου ίερομονάχου / έδειξε ταύτην χείρ / Γαβριήλ ίερομόνα/χου Ναξιάιου / ,αψλθ / ιουνίου» (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, Κέντρο Συντηρήσεως Αρχαιοτήτων, ΑΔ, 31, 1976, *Χρονικά*, p. 15, p. 14c-d).

9. «Γεωργίου χείρ Κλόντζα, τάδ' έγεγράφει ό δ' αὐ λαβών μέμνησο κάμου προφρόνως» (M. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos, Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*, Athens 1985, p. 105, no. 62, pl. 40). «Ποίημα Μιχαήλ Δαμασκηνού» (M. Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την άλωση (1450-1830)*, Athens 1987, p. 241; «Μάρκος Βαθάς έγραψεν», «Μάρκος Βαθάς έγραψεν» (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, «Φορητές εικόνες του ζωγράφου Μάρκου Στριλίτζα Μπαθά ή Μάρκος Βαθά στην Ήπειρο», in *ΔΧΑΕ*, series 4, vol. 8, 1975-76, pp. 117, 134, 135 and 140, pl. 61b, 67 and 68); «Πύμα [ποίημα] Τωμίου Βαθέος» (Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos*, p. 109, no. 63, fig. 112, pl. 47); «Τομίος Μπαθάς έγραψε» (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, «Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Θωμά ή Τομίου Μπαθά στο Βυζαντινό Μουσείο», *ΑΑΑ*, xviii, 1985, *Συμμεικτα*, pp. 145 and 150, figs. 1-2 and colour pl.)



12. Apostles, hierarchs and women around the bier.



in later years to proudly use the same signature on the painting of the similar subject of the *Assumption of the Virgin* in 1577, the first work of his Spanish period, in the Santo Domingo el Antiguo?<sup>10</sup>

The essence of the iconographical composition of the Syros icon, and more still the figures and individual elements, echo in their entirety a well-trying type of 15th century Cretan painting<sup>11</sup> which was extensively used by 16th-century painters as well as more recent artists in the rendition of the Dormition on both icons and wall-paintings.<sup>12</sup> Of the earliest examples, two icons of the Hellenic Institute in Venice<sup>13</sup> and one in the Benaki Museum<sup>14</sup> preserve in their varied treatment of the subject the severe Cretan model which served as a starting point for the inspiration of the painter. Domenicos, however, in contrast to his fellow-painters, maintained only the conventional structure of the iconographical subject, deviating from the minutiae to advance boldly towards the restructuring of the scene by way of rare and innovative elements which create a prototype purveying sublime goals.

The new element introduced by Theotocopoulos in the scene is light (fig. 3). The cool blue or green normally employed in the mandorla —a standard colour in Orthodox art for the heavenly light which surrounds the epiphany of Christ in the Dormition— has been transformed here into the warm, sun-bathed colour of wheat which matches the bright gold of the ground in the upper region and casts a festive glow on garments and faces and to the very extremities of the scene. The Dormition and the Metastasis are here united through light which welds the earth to the heavens. Here we see a more immediate manifestation of the marvel where, instead of the formal frontal figure of Christ, He is shown bending sideways towards His mother with a tender and homely gesture while taking her immaculate soul in hands covered by His himation (fig. 10). Four retainer angels with lighted candles are outlined in the monochrome mandorla (fig. 17), two waiting on Christ behind Him and another

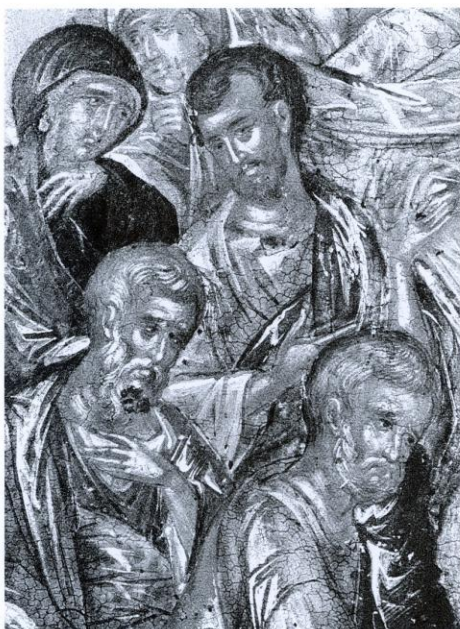
10. To the miniscule signature on this work («δομήνικος θεοτοκόπουλος κρής / ο δείξας, α<sup>ω</sup> φ<sup>ω</sup>. οζ<sup>ω</sup>») he added his place of origin and the date (cf. Chatzidakis, «Παρατηρήσεις στις υπογραφές του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου», *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 419, fig. 7.

11. Cf. M. Chatzidakis, *Icones de Saint-Georges des Grecs et de la Collection de l'Institut, Bibliothèque de l'Institut Hellénique d'Études Byzantines et Post-byzantines de Venise-N. 1*, Neri Pozza-Venice 1962, p. 33 ff., no. 15, pl. 15 and no. 16, pl. 14; Idem, *Εικόνες του Αγίου Γεωργίου των Ελλήνων και της Συλλογής του Ινστιτούτου*, Venice 1975, p. xvii, pl. 15 and 14; G. Babić - E. M. Chatzidakis, «Le Icone della penisola Balcanica e delle isole Greche», in K. Weitzmann et al., *Le Ikone*, Milan 1981, p. 311, fig. p. 321; O. Wulff - M. Alpatoff, *Denkmäler der Ikonenmalerei, in Kunstgeschichtlicher Folge*, Hellerau bei Dresden 1925, p. 146, fig. 60; L. Bouras, «Δωρεά εικόνων Γεωργίου Πατριαρχέα», *Τα Νέα των Φίλων*, ed. The Friends of the Benaki Museum, vol. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1987, p. 36 ff., no. 4, fig. 4. An analogous type can be found in an icon of Andreas Ritzos (Ch. Baltoyianni, «Η Κοίμησις του Ανδρέα Ριτζου του Λονδίνου και η εξάρτησή της από την παλαιολόγεια ζωγραφική του 14ου αιώνα», *Ένατο Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινής και Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης*, Summary of Communications, Athens 1989, p. 56 ff.) Cf. also «Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art», Athens, Old University Building, 26th July 1985 - 6th January 1986, Catalogue, Athens 1986, p. 121, no. 120.

12. W. Felicetti-Liebenfels, *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Ikonenmalerei*, Osten - Lausanne 1956, p. 102 ff., fig. 134a-b; M. Chatzidakis, «Recherches sur le peintre Théophane le Crétois», *DOP*, 23-24, 1969-70, p. 316, fig. 5, p. 325, fig. 82; G. A. Soteiriou, «Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Θεσσαλίας ΙΓ' και ΙΔ' αιώνας, 3. Η Βασιλική της Κοιμήσεως της Θεοτόκου εν Καλαμπάκκ», *ΕΕΒΣ*, 6, 1929, p. 313 ff., fig. 15 (the more recent depiction of the Dormition in the bilateral Kalambaka icon is in all probability a work of the son of Theophanes Neophytos Bathas, who worked on the wall-paintings of the church in 1573). *Έκθεση για τα 100 χρόνια* (note 1) p. 37 ff., no. 25; Chatzidakis, *Icones de Venise*, p. 115, no. 95, pl. 54 and p. 149, no. 130, pl. 70; A. Xynopoulos, *Benaki Museum, Catalogue of the Icons*, Athens 1936, p. 19, no. 10, pl. 9b; Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos*, p. 140, no. 104, pl. 155.

13. Chatzidakis, *Icones de Venise*, *op. cit.* n. 11 above.

14. Bouras, *op. cit.* n. 11 above.



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13-16. Details of figures around the bier.



17. The Holy Spirit in Christ's mandorla.

two conspicuous figures regarding the Virgin above, thus transferring our attention to the heavenly world. Between these latter angels, and where normally we would expect the upper-most cherubim of the mandorla, one sees the sudden manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, unique in Byzantine art, radiating the light which illuminates the entire scene and carves out the way for the Theotokos, «full of grace». She, «more honoured than the cherubim», two of which support her immaterial throne to the left and right below (fig. 18), rises again as a queen with her ethereal crown, «with the sun and the moon at her feet», like the woman in the Apocalypse,<sup>15</sup> while around her the «supermundane» angels receive the «mother of the perpetual light».<sup>16</sup>

The place of Christ next to the Theotokos<sup>17</sup> represents at one and the same time the unity of heaven and earth invoked by the hymn to the Virgin during the feast of the Dormition in a symbolic

15. Revelations, 12:1. The crescent moon is shown below the Virgin's feet.

16. From the hymns sung during the liturgy for the Dormition (Menaion for August, ed. Ecclesiastical Library «Phos», Athens 1970, p. 145). The same verse is read in the unfurled scroll of one of the angels to the right who opens the gates of heaven in an icon of the Dormition on Kos attributed to a contemporary of Theotocopoulos, George Klontzas (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, «Η Κοίμησις της Θεοτόκου σε δύο κρητικές εικόνες της Κω», ΔΧΑΕ, series 4, vol. 13, 1985-86, p. 128, figs. 1 and 7; *From Byzantium to El Greco*, p. 189 ff., no. 62).

17. Already by the 12th century in the wall-paintings of St. Nicholas of Kasnitzi at Kastoria, Christ is represented in a position analogous to that of the Virgin (St. Pelekanidis - M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, edition Melissa, Athens 1984, p. 50, fig. 16). Examples from the 14th and 15th centuries are more common. Cf. *ibid.* p. 93, fig. 14; R. Hamann-Mac Lean and H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien vom 11. bis zum frühen 14. Jahrhundert*, Giessen 1965, figs. 162-63 and 231-32; V. Lazarev, *Storia della Pittura Bizantina*, Torino 1967, p. 368, fig. 498; Cv. Grozdanov, *La peinture murale d'Ochrid au XIVe siècle*, Belgrade 1980, drawings 39 and 47, figs. 115, 119 and 163; G. Subotić, *L'École de peinture d'Ochrid au XVe siècle*, Belgrade 1980, drawing 79.



18. Metastasis of the Theotokos.

reference to the Incarnation: «hail, thou who hast alone bonded earth with heaven through thy parturition»,<sup>18</sup> symbolism not lost upon the Late-Byzantine iconography of the scene.<sup>19</sup> One of the most expressive examples of the Dormition can be found amongst the frescoes of St. Clement (the *Peribleptos*) in Ochrid, a work of 1295 by the painters Michael and Eutybios Astrapas from Thessaloniki where analogous ideas are expressed in a turbulent composition.<sup>20</sup> In this depiction, Christ, in the same pose, receives the winged soul of the Virgin and with its receipt unites earth and heaven with a path crowded with angels.

Christ's pose (fig. 10), which constitutes an exception to the rule, would not have been unknown in Crete during Domenicos' time.<sup>21</sup> It is repeated in a miniature rendition of the Dormition in an unsigned icon, now in Sarajevo, by George Klontzas,<sup>22</sup> the famous painter from Iraklion appointed

18. Menaion for August, *op. cit.*, p. 157. The idea of communion between the invisible and visible church is likewise imparted by the composition of the Kos icon with its traditional principles of geometric harmony (Acheimastou-Potamianou, *op. cit.*, pp. 131 and 143 n. 72).

19. Cf. Hamann-Mac Lean and Hallensleben, *op. cit.*, fig. 163; St. Pelekanidis, *Καστορία, I. Βυζαντινά τοιχογραφία*, Plates, Thessaloniki 1953, pl. 159a; Grozdanov, *op. cit.*, fig. 195; Subotić, *op. cit.*, drawing 79.

20. Hamann-MacLean and Hallensleben, fig. 163. *Η παλαιολόγεια ζωγραφική στη Θεσσαλονίκη*, text M. Kambouri-Vamvoukou and Th. Papazotos, w.p. & w.d., fig. 8.

21. In an icon in the Byzantine Museum (T. 1561), with 16th century scenes from the Virgin Cycle which refer back to older prototypes, but with a more modern inserted icon of the Virgin of Passion in the centre, Christ in the Dormition is in a similar pose (K. Kalokyris, *Η Θεοτόκος εις την εικονογραφίαν Ανατολής και Δύσεως*, Thessaloniki 1972, fig. 104).

22. P. L. Vokotopoulos, «Μια άγνωστη κρητική εικόνα στο Σεράγεβο», *ΔΧΑΕ*, series 4, vol. 12, 1984, p. 386, fig. 4.



19. George Klontzas, *Triptych, The Dormition of the Virgin*, detail. Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos.

assessor for one of Theotocopoulos' works in 1566;<sup>23</sup> only rarely do later painters reproduce it.<sup>24</sup> In Klontzas' signed triptych in the monastery of the Theologian on Patmos (fig. 19) one can also discern similar architectural features to those found in the Syros icon,<sup>25</sup> an unusual combination for a Dormition icon and clearly related to a 15th-century Cretan model depicting the Annunciation.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, mention should be made of the interest shared by both painters in architectural and sculptural works, something clearly expressed in the Syros icon by the classicizing building to the right (fig. 3) as well as in the finely painted cymatium crowning the wall between the buildings, not to mention the choice of an Italian candlestick below<sup>27</sup> (figs. 3-4). The Kos Dormition attributed to Klontzas (fig. 20)

23. M. Constantoudaki, «Dominicos Théotocopoulos (El Greco) de Candia à Venise, Documents inédits (1566-1568)», *Thesaurismata*, 12, 1975, p. 294 ff. (also in *ΔΧΑΕ*, series 4, vol. 8, 1975-76, p. 57 ff).

24. For instance, two icons of Victor (A. Xyngoropoulos, *Benaki Museum: Catalogue of the Icons*, p. 47 ff., no. 32, pl. 24B; P. L. Vokotopoulos, «Οι δεσποτικές εικόνες του Βίκτωρος στην Μονή Φιλοσόφου», *Πρακτικά του Γ' Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Πελοποννησιακών Σπουδών* [Kalamata, 8-15 September 1985], offprint, Athens 1987-88, p. 245 ff., pl. 10. On Victor, cf. Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την άλωση* [op. cit. n. 9 above], p. 192 ff.), and an icon of the same type in the Canellopoulos Museum (inv. no. 349: unpublished).

25. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos*, p. 105 ff., no. 62, pl. 43.

26. Cf. Ch. Baltogiannis, «Παράσταση Ευαγγελισμού κάτω από νεότερη επιζωγράφηση στο βημόθυρο T. 737 του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου», *ΑΑΑ*, xvii, 1984, p. 51 ff., figs. 3-7; *Holy Image, Holy Space, Icons and Frescoes from Greece*, Catalogue, Athens 1988, p. 207 ff., no. 48 and p. 219 ff., no. 63. The linking of similar building types through a low intervening wall was adopted in the second half of the 15th century by Andreas Ritzos in a scene of the Hospitality of Abraham (Holy Trinity) in an icon now in Tokyo (cf. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos*, pl. 201). A schematic rendition of both buildings exists in the Annunciation and the Dormition of icon T. 1561 in the Byzantine Museum (Kalokyris, *Η Θεοτόκος*, [n. 21 above], fig. 104). A detail worthy of note is a certain similarity between the pose of the first angel on the left accompanying the Virgin to her Metastasis in the Syros icon, and the equally unusual stance of the left of the two angels opening the gates of heaven in the Dormition attributed to Klontzas and now in the monastery of Sinai (K. Weitzmann, *Ikonen aus dem Katharinen Kloster auf dem Berge Sinai*, Berlin 1980 [fascicule with loose colour plates], no. 23; Achaimastou-Potamianou, *Η Κοίμησις της Θεοτόκου*, p. 130 ff., fig. 10).

27. Note the striking similarity of the central candlestick with its equivalent, rendered in the baroque fashion, in the Dormition of the Chrysospege monastery in Crete (*Εικόνες του Νομού Χανίων*, text by M. Borboudakis, Athens 1975, p. 89 ff., no. 25).

with its multi-storied buildings —the left one, indeed, adorned with statues— in itself bears witness to this interest which can be more readily discerned in his works as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

Those common elements mentioned above should be supplemented by both artists' proclivity for miniature depictions together with the characteristic manner in which they incorporate Western, Italian elements in their works, thus enriching and modernising them without, however, compromising their Orthodox meaning: the Syros icon is a fine example of this process. By the standards of Venetian-held Crete, all these elements, not to mention the artists' clear interest in letters (the refined Klontzas was a well-known copyist and manuscript-illuminator) go to draw a picture of two versatile personalities in the cultured surroundings of Candia.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, these circumstances may help support the theory that Domenicos Theotocopoulos and George Klontzas enjoyed a closer relationship.<sup>30</sup>

Mr Mastoropoulos' hypothesis that the Dormition icon, a devotional icon of the church on Syros, was brought from Psara after the destruction of that island by the Turks in 1824 during the Greek Revolution<sup>31</sup> has been contested by the Syrote scholar Andreas Drakakis who states that the icon came from Venice in 1843.<sup>32</sup> The private church of the Dormition, built by the Hydriote George Plataniti in 1827-28,<sup>33</sup> was bought in 1832 by the Elders of the newly-formed community of Ermoupolis. The church's Governing Council, which had received the building bereft of icons, appealed to the

28. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Η Κοίμησις της Θεοτόκου*, p. 137 ff., figs. 1, 5, and 6. Cf. also A. D. Paliouras, *Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας (1540c.-1608) και αι μικρογραφίαι του κώδικος αυτού*, Athens 1977, p. 227 ff.

29. On George Klontzas as a painter, copyist and manuscript-illuminator, cf. Chatzidakis, *Icones de Venise*, pp. xxxiv ff., 74 ff.; Paliouras, *Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας*; M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, «Τρίπτυχο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα (;), άλλοτε σε ξένη ιδιωτική συλλογή», *Πεπραγμένα του Ε' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*, 1981, II, p. 235 ff.; Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Η Κοίμησις της Θεοτόκου*, p. 132 ff.; with the signed and attributed works (p. 132 n. 28) to which are added the triptych of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (*Holy Image, Holy Space*, p. 227 ff., no. 70) and an icon of St. George Slaying the Dragon (T. 234) in the Byzantine Museum (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, «Βυζαντινό και Χριστιανικό Μουσείο», in print, *ΑΔ*, 1986, *Χρονικά*).

30. Klontzas' marriage in 1562 and his first known signature as a painter in a document of 1564 led Paliouras (*op. cit.*, p. 37) to place his birth at around 1540, a date which perhaps should remain open to revision. The extant signature of 1564 need not mean, however, that George Klontzas then made his first appearance as a painter, nor does the date of his marriage constitute a standard indication of age. On the contrary, his appointment as assessor for a work of Domenicos Theotocopoulos in 1566 gives the impression that Klontzas must have been quite older, a mature and recognised painter. If this were the case, some relationship between Domenicos who already by 1563, at the age of 22, was a 'Master Painter' (Panayotakis, *Η κρητική περίοδος της ζωής του Θεοτοκόπουλου*, p. 90. Cf. also Chatzidakis, «Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την άλωση», p. 309) and the gifted George Klontzas can not be ruled out. Certainly, the artistic goals and preferences apparent in their output (cf. Paliouras, *Ο ζωγράφος Γεώργιος Κλόντζας*, p. 39) hint at some level of apprenticeship or other terms of cooperation. Taking this into account, it is interesting that the Dormition, to take one example, was one of the themes which Klontzas often painted, showing great imagination in its iconographic variations (Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Η Κοίμησις της Θεοτόκου*, p. 128 ff. and 134). The Modena triptych, moreover (cf. in the volume *Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος, Βυζάντιο και Ιταλία*, Rethymnon 1990: [José Camón Aznar] p. 293, fig. pp. 299-302, [M. Chatzidakis] p. 328 ff., fig. 350. [L. Hadermann-Misguich], p. 404, fig. 1, [L. Puppi] p. 435 ff., figs. 4-11), preserves in its structure and wood-carved decoration that characteristic form of triptych of which Klontzas was a specialist, notable examples being that in the monastery of the Theologian on Patmos (Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos*, no. 62, pls. 40-44 and 117) and the Spada triptych (P. L. Vokotopoulos, «Ένα άγνωστο τρίπτυχο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα», *Πεπραγμένα του Ε' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*, 1981, II, p. 64 ff.; *Holy Image, Holy Space*, p. 224 ff., no. 69).

31. *From Byzantium to El Greco*, no. 63, p. 191.

32. A. Drakakis, «Έρω από το έργο του Ελ Γκρέκο», newspaper *Τα Νέα*, 21.11.1986.

33. On the church, cf. J. Travlos - A. Kokkou, *Ερμούπολη*, Athens 1980, p. 88 ff.



20. George Klontzas (?), *The Dormition of the Virgin*. Church of the Annunciation on Kos.

large Greek colonies abroad for support. A local publication of 1843 indicates that the Greek colony in Venice responded by collecting the sum of 401 gold Austrian 20-franc pieces to buy a bell and many icons for the Ermoupolis church.<sup>34</sup> Mr Drakakis finds it reasonable to suppose that the Theotocopoulos icon was amongst the works sent, especially since the Greeks of Venice would have wished to send an icon of the Dormition of the Virgin to a church dedicated to that feast.

This view, which is quite possibly correct, poses the question: did Theotocopoulos paint the icon while living on Crete or during his stay in Venice, where he probably arrived in 1567?<sup>35</sup> Everything said above concerning the iconographic model and those elements associating the icon with the work of George Klontzas, who as far as is known never left Crete, must, I believe, leave no doubt as to the work's Cretan provenance.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the existence of Western European works on Crete, attested by archival evidence, together with the wide dissemination of Western etchings in this important colony of the Serene Republic,<sup>37</sup> constitutes a satisfactory explanation for the existence of

34. Drakakis, *op. cit.*

35. Constantoudaki, *Dominikos Théotocopoulos (El Greco)*, p. 292 ff.

36. Cf. *Έκθεση για τα 100 χρόνια* (n. 1 above) no. 21 (M. Chatzidakis); *From Byzantium to El Greco*, no. 63 (G. Mastoropoulos); Panayotakis, *Η κρητική περίοδος της ζωής του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου*, p. 87; Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την άλωση*, p. 312.

37. M. Chatzidakis, «Ο Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος και η Κρητική ζωγραφική», *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, 4, 1950, p. 412; Panayotakis, *op. cit.*, p. 99 ff.

Western elements selectively employed by Domenicos in his Dormition, elements which abound in the icons of George Klontzas as well as in those of Michael Damaskinos and other painters of the period.<sup>38</sup>

Amongst the limited western elements adopted by the young Master of interest for the meaning of the scene are the Holy Spirit, the crown of the Virgin in the Metastasis, and the crescent moon between the cherubim at her feet below — a reference to the Immaculate Conception (figs. 3, 17, 18).<sup>39</sup> These elements are directly attributable to Western depictions of the glorification of the Virgin and here take on new dimensions, inserted as they are in a composition of different conception, in which the sublime event of the Dormition and the Metastasis is highlighted with an emphasis similar to that in Klontzas' Dormition compositions in the Venice triptych<sup>40</sup> and the Kos icon<sup>41</sup> (fig. 20).

The crescent moon, which could also be taken as the lower arc of the Virgin's invisible mandorla, together with the crown known from other Byzantine depictions are, in their monochrome state, only just discernible; immaterially outlined by the surrounding light which gives the Metastasis a triumphal air<sup>42</sup> (figs. 17-18). Of special importance, on the other hand, is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (figs. 3, 17), the only such example in Byzantine and, more particularly, Cretan iconography of this scene. Indeed, as far as I am aware, its position here is also unknown in Western iconography of the Dormition and related scenes. The position of the Holy Spirit, the source of light, in Christ's mandorla and beneath the Metastasis, is not immediately associated with the Holy Trinity in the Coronation of the Virgin and related scenes since we have no reference here to God the Father.

The presence of the dove, floating in mid-air and facing downward with rays of light extending towards Christ and the Virgin, is perhaps chiefly associated with the interconnected meanings involved in the dogma of the Incarnation and of the issue of grace from the Holy Spirit, both preconditions for Man's salvation and eternal life given to the «Virgin full of grace» and «verily the Mother of God», through whom the Divine Word «became flesh». In the Fathers of the Church and Dormition hymnology, the concept of the Incarnation is clearly interwoven in a cycle of variations with the Dormition in order to elevate the figure of the Virgin and the event of her Metastasis. In one of the most eloquent *troparia* referring to the Dormition, the hymnographer addressed himself to the Virgin thus: «Without seed she conceived God Who became impeccable flesh, thus clothing the new incorruptibility of the Spirit; you, the Mother of life and of all things Queen, now leave the living, O Virgin, to partake in the immaterial...».<sup>43</sup> This or other such hymns, with their wealth and density of ideas and their specific references may have inspired Theotocopoulos to paint the rendition in the centre of the Syros icon which is indeed quite majestic. The «new incorruptibility of the Spirit» transforms the sweet countenance of the Virgin as she rises up to heaven accompanied by angels in a bath of light

38. Moreover, the ability of the Cretan painters to paint, as Domenicos and his contemporaries did, in the Italian and Greek manner, «a la Greca and a la Latina», is well known (cf. Chatzidakis, *op. cit.*, p. 436 ff.; Idem, «Les débuts de l'école Crétoise et la question de l'école dite Italogrecque», *Memorial tome for Sophia Antoniadis*, Venice 1974, p. 197 ff.

39. Cf. L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art Chrétien*, II, Paris 1957, p. 75 ff.

40. Chatzidakis, *Icônes de Venise*, p. 77 ff., no. 51, pl. 38.

41. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *op. cit.* n. 16 above.

42. Although the illustrative references to the Virgin as Queen in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine art are not associated with the Dormition and the Metastasis, analogies do occur in hymnography: «the Bride of God, Virgin Queen ... rises now to her Son» (Menaion for August, p. 144).

43. Menaion for August, p. 164 and 210.



(fig. 18). Small angels or cherubim seem to hold a fluorescent cloud around her head, reminiscent of the rest of the *troparion*, «verily have you proved a thirst-quenching cloud, the spring of our life».

Those various aspects pertaining to the questions we have touched on by no means exhaust the subject of this beautiful icon from Syros. The work's poetic strength, its spirituality and the manner in which the scene has been interpreted, as well as the quality of the painting all combine to imbue new life to an old iconographic theme and justify the style of the artist's signature thereon, the only work thus honoured amongst the known output of his youth: ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ Ο ΔΕΙΞΑΣ. The value of this signed Dormition need not be stressed in as much as it assists us in making a definitive attribution of the other works from Theotocopoulos' youth bearing the signature ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ;<sup>44</sup> it may also play a role in identifying other works of his which have till now escaped notice. The freedom and the finesse of the composition's design, its chromatic harmony and the classicizing grace and the expressiveness of the figures (figs. 11-18), the organisation of the crowded scene (fig. 3) achieved with effortless style, steadily but delicately expressed in lyrical undulating lines, together with the pulsating movement with its mannerist tendencies distinguish this and other icons as works of Theotocopoulos. This early manifestation of Dominico's artistic genius already bears clear witness that Crete had lost a great painter so that Europe and the world could gain El Greco.

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44. The Evangelist Luke painting the Virgin, Benaki Museum, Athens; Adoration of the Magi, Benaki Museum; the triptych in the Galleria Estense, Modena (Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την άλωση*, p. 312 with previous bibliography). Chatzidakis (*op. cit.*, cf. also *Έκθεση για τα 100 χρόνια*, no. 21) believes that Theotocopoulos painted all three works in Crete, as most likely seems to have been the case. Cf. also *Holy Image, Holy Space*, p. 229 ff., no. 71: Luke painting the Virgin (L. Bouras) and p. 230 ff., no. 72: Adoration of the Magi (L. Bouras). In the latter and the Modena triptych, Bouras (*op. cit.*, p. 231) accepts that these are works of Theotocopoulos' Venetian period.