

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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El Greco's Iconographical Sources

In an unpublished study of mine of 1969-70, I assigned 39 works to the Cretan and Italian production of Theotocopoulos (counting separately the six works of the Modena Triptych). There are now 40 with the Syra *Dormition of the Virgin*, which from an initial examination, should be placed among the painter's earliest works.

I put aside nine (one drawing, three portraits, five of the group *Boy Blowing on an Ember* and the *Proverb*) which will not concern us today.¹ For the remaining 31 works I believe I have identified their iconographical sources accurately enough.²

We have the good fortune to see exhibited here at least 11 of these works, among them the six of the Modena Triptych. This latter work I call seminal because it has given birth to many later compositions of El Greco.

I shall concentrate my attention on the exhibited works and will refer only briefly to my conclusions and discoveries relating to the others, even though they too are important for the later development of Theotocopoulos.

With regard to the Modena Triptych, R. Pallucchini, its discoverer, proposed³ some sources:

For the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig. 1), a woodcut after a work of Titian by the engraver «IB», an original etching by Giulio Bonasone, and an etching by Parmigianino.⁴

For the *Annunciation* (fig. 2), an etching by Gian-Jacopo Caraglio⁵ after a lost work of Titian.

For the crowded and until now unidentified representation of the center of the Triptych, first Mayer,⁶ calling it «Christ Crowning the Christian Fighters», proposes an anonymous woodcut of 1555 (fig. 3), after a work of Battista Franco-Semolei. Later, L. Hadermann-Misguich⁷ adds two woodcuts

1. Drawing from sculpture of Michelangelo (Munich), portraits of Clovio (Naples), Unknown Man (Copenhagen), Anastagi (New York), *Youth blowing on an Ember* (4 versions, *Soplon*, Naples, New York, Florence, Genoa), *Proverb* (Fabula, New York).

2. Of these 19 can be fitted according to their subjects into six groups, while 12 are of isolated subjects. The groups are: Adoration of the Magi and the Shepherds (7 works), Annunciation (3), Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata (3), Healing of the Blind (2), Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple (2), and Mount Sinai (2). The 12 individual subjects are: Saint Luke Painting the Virgin and Child, Christ the Righteous Judge, the Baptism, Adam and Eve, the Last Supper, the Flight into Egypt, Christ in the House of Mary and Martha, the Espolio, Christ on the Cross, the Pietà, the Entombment and the Dormition of the Virgin.

3. R. Pallucchini, «Il Polittico del Greco nella R. Galleria Estense», Rome 1937 = Pallucchini. First publication by Pallucchini, *Bollettino d'Arte*, March 1937, pp. 389-392.

4. See Pallucchini, figs. 4, 5 and 6, respectively.

5. See Pallucchini, fig. 3.

6. A. L. Mayer, «Notes on the Early El Greco», in *Burlington Magazine*, lxxiv, Jan. 1939, no. 430, pp. 28-33.

7. L. Hadermann-Misguich, «Deux Nouvelles Sources d'Inspiration du Polyptyque de Modène», in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, lxxiii, May - June 1964, pp. 355-357.

of the *Last Judgment*, the one by an anonymous Italian (fig. 4), the other by Dürer.

Today I propose:

- a) the Dürer (fig. 5) woodcut⁸ which I had identified independently of Hadermann-Misguich and which is the source of inspiration of the Mouth of Hell in El Greco's central panel of the Modena Triptych (fig. 6).
- b) elements from Byzantine depictions of the «Last Judgment» and especially of «Christ the Arch Priest» offering the Faithful Holy Communion;⁹
- c) a woodcut (fig. 7) by Andrea Andreani¹⁰ also based on a work by B. Franco-Semolei entitled the *Christian Hero*.

Apart from important motifs which had remained unexplained from the other sources, this print supplies the real theme of Theotocopoulos' work, which I call «Christ the Righteous Judge» from the inscription in Latin which frames the scene and which is extracted from Saint Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy.¹¹

I also propose that we recognise:

- a) in the Saint with black hair and beard being crowned by Christ, Saint Paul himself, and
- b) in the wheel with the butcher's hooks behind the Angel of Saint Matthew, a reference to Saint Catherine, also a militant saint. This could be to underline the equality of the contribution of both Martyrs and Evangelists to the struggle to propagate the Faith.

Such references fit in well with the interest Theotocopoulos always showed for Saint Paul and also for Saint Catherine,¹² the patron of the Monastery of Mount Sinai, with which the Triptych is closely connected.

With regard to the rare depiction in art of Mount Sinai, I agree with Chatzidakis¹³ that it is based

8. W. Kurth, *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer*, Dover Publications, New York 1963 = Kurth. Cat. no. 258, «The Last Judgment».

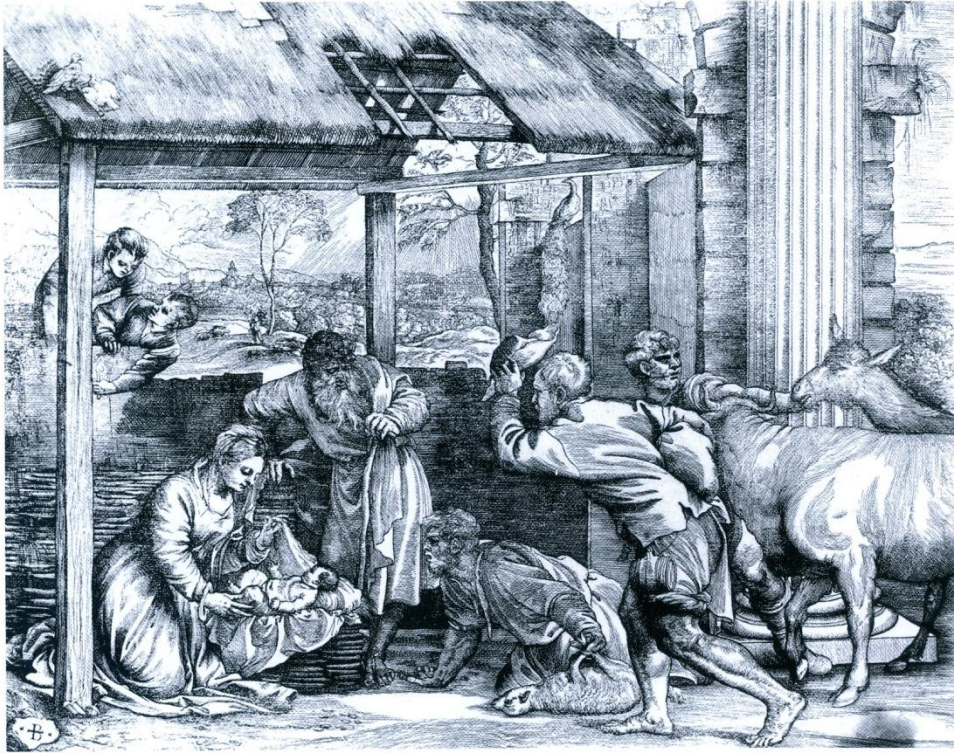
9. The representation of Christ the Arch Priest receiving the Elect at the entrance to Paradise dates at least from the Palaeologan period. According to Chatzidakis (*Icons de St. Georges des Grecs, etc.*, p. xxxv, Venice 1962), the composition underwent some changes around 1600, perhaps on the initiative of some Cretan painter, which brought it closer to Western models. Here Theotocopoulos portrays, as I believe, God dressed as the Arch Priest in a Western manner, that is, wearing a papal mitre, offering Holy Communion to Christ. See also E. Bertaux, «Notes sur le Greco III», in *La Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne*, t. xxxiii, Jan. - June 1913, pp. 32-34. «I Quadri della Pinacoteca Vaticana», Rome 1928, plate VI, p. 10.

10. The fact that Mayer's anonymous woodcut (dated c. 1555) and Andreani's (dated 1610) are different in many places leads one to conjecture that a common original, either an engraving or a drawing by Battista Franco-Semolei, was circulating in Venice and that this was what Theotocopoulos used, taking elements from both its versions in order to produce his own. Moreover, Andreani in his dedication to Lodovico Gonzaga writes expressly, «This noble drawing by Semolei has lain buried in my hands for a long time ... I decided finally to bring it to the light...», and this may be the original of the 1555 woodcut also.

11. Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy 4: 7-8: «I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness...» and which continues in the Epistle «...the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day...».

12. Judging from the paintings of them Theotocopoulos made in Spain, perhaps it is no coincidence that St. Catherine is represented in the central panel of a seventeenth century polyptych together with the soldier Saint Mercurius, trampling and piercing with their lances two infidels beneath Christ blessing them, called «The righteous Judge», and that on another panel of the same polyptych Mount Sinai is pictured in a variant quite closely related to the Modena work. Reproduced in D. Talbot-Rice, «Five late Byzantine Panels, etc.», in *Burlington Magazine*, cxxxix, 1947, pp. 93-94.

13. M. Chatzidakis, «Ο Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος και η κρητική ζωγραφική», in *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, 4, 1950, pp. 405-408.



1. Engraver I.B., *Adoration of the Shepherds*, woodcut.



2. Gian-Jacopo Caraglio, *Annunciation*, engraving.



3. Unknown artist, *Christ Crowning the Christian Fighters*, woodcut.



4. Unknown artist, *Last Judgment*, woodcut.

on a woodcut made from travellers' accounts of the «Mountain trodden by God». Despite my extensive researches I have not been able so far to identify the «common prototype» from the first half of the sixteenth century, sought for also by Chatzidakis, and which Theotocopoulos must have had before him.¹⁴ The same observations hold, of course, for the independent, later *Mount Sinai* also exhibited here.

As for the other two scenes of the Triptych, the *Baptism* follows essentially old Byzantine models,¹⁵ and the *Adam and Eve* seems to be an invention of Theotocopoulos influenced by western examples.¹⁶

In the later Thyssen *Annunciation* (fig. 8), one of Theotocopoulos' most Venetian works, he returns almost identically—with the inevitable stylistic adaptations—to the *Annunciation* of the *Triptych* with its Titianesque roots.

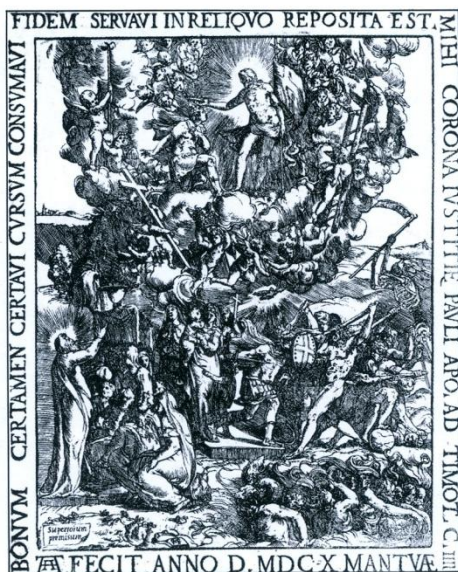
14. Nearer in time to the Modena panel but later, I believe, is the etching by Giovanni Battista Fontana, printed by Luca Bertelli in 1569. It must also follow the same «common prototype».

15. The arrangement of the personages from left to right, their small number, Christ almost entirely naked on the right of John the Baptist, have been customary in Byzantine art almost from its beginnings. In Spain, Greco reversed the arrangement and generally introduced a new iconography which does not appear before the Counter-Reformation.

16. Unprecedented in (post) Byzantine art, which is not accustomed to nudes, the «Protoplastoi = First Created» must be an invention of Theotocopoulos. In western art paintings of nudes are frequent, and the Adam and Eve couple had interested the greatest painters from Dürer (Adam and Eve, etching 1504) to Titian (Adam and Eve, c. 1550, Prado). They all represent it after the «original sin» with the forbidden fruit in their hand and their genital parts decently covered with conveniently growing foliage. In contrast, Theotocopoulos shows them naked from head to foot, i.e. at a time when they have nothing to conceal. They stand with fraternal affection before God (with the face of Christ) who is warning them of the danger of sin. Obviously they have not yet transgressed his commandment, and they stand before him totally innocent and pure like siblings. No serpent is apparent. Theotocopoulos did not follow here either Dürer or Titian.



5. Albrecht Dürer, *Last Judgment*, woodcut.



7. Andrea Andreani, *The Christian Hero*, woodcut.



6. El Greco, *The Modena triptych*, detail of the central panel.

For the Benaki Museum *Adoration of the Magi*, I have proposed since 1964,¹⁷ an etching by Cornelis Cort after a work by Titian (the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, fig. 9), the IB woodcut¹⁸ Theotocopoulos had already used for the *Modena Adoration of the Shepherds*, and —for the ruined building— a third print by some northern engraver such as Martin Schongauer¹⁹ (fig. 10). Mayer²⁰ had

17. See A. G. Xydias, «Η προσκύνησις των Μάγων του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου», in *Ζυγός*, nos. 103-104, October 1964, pp. 68-70.

18. See Pallucchini, fig. 4.

19. For example, the *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Martin Schongauer (*Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, li, February 1958, p. 67, fig. 1) which was widely diffused also outside the Germanic world and in copies engraved by Italians.

20. When he first published the work, «Una Obra juvenil del Greco», in *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, 1935, xi, pp. 205-207.



8. El Greco, *Annunciation*. Madrid, Thyssen Collection.



9. Cornelis Cort, *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, woodcut.

proposed also the *Virgin and Child with Saint George* by Correggio²¹ which Theotocopoulos, he thinks, could have seen when passing through Parma. It is more likely that he would have had in mind an etching of the work, widely diffused at that time.

The Lazaro Collection's *Adoration of the Magi* is an entirely different composition from the Benaki one, and also some years later. The somewhat Raphaelite elements, simplicity of composition, near-classical severity of the building in the background, must come from an etching by M. A. Raimondi after Raphael, as do two other works of Theotocopoulos' same period to which I shall refer later.²²

For the Parma *Healing of the Blind* (fig. 11), I have already shown²³ that it portrays in reality four miracles by Christ: the healing of two Blind Men, the resurrection of the Daughter of Jairus, the healing of the dumb man possessed with a devil, and of the woman with an issue of blood who «touches the hem of His garment». In 1968,²⁴ I had published an impressive source used by Theotocopoulos for this and for the Dresden *Healing of the Blind*, namely, Cort's etching (fig. 12) after Titian's *Triumph of the Holy Trinity*,²⁵ known as the *Gloria*. For the Parma *Healing*, moreover, Trapier²⁶ has proposed as a source for the background architecture, a drawing from the *Third Book of*

21. Especially for the figure of the aide with the helmet on the right.

22. The subject of the «Adoration of the Magi» does not reappear in Greco's work, perhaps because the Counter-Rè-formation did not encourage its representation (E. Mâle, *L'Art Religieux après le Concile de Trente*, Paris 1951, pp. 249 ff.).

23. See A. G. Xydis, «Νέο φως στις πηγές και στις μεθόδους σύνθεσης του Γκρέκο», in *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, xvii, 1964, pp. 27-36.

24. See A. G. Xydis, «El Greco's Healing of the Blind», in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, lxxii, November 1968, pp. 301-306.

25. J.C.J. Bierens de Haan, *L'Oeuvre gravé de Cornelis Cort, graveur Hollandais 1533-1578*, The Hague 1948 = Haan, cat. no. 111, pp. 117-120, fig. 30.

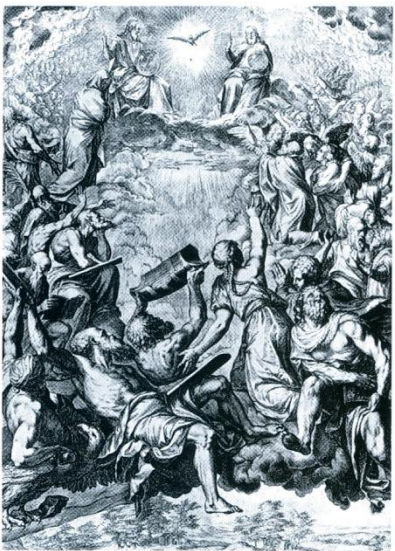
26. See Elisabeth du Gué-Trapier, «El Greco in the Farnese Palace, Rome», in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, li, February 1958, pp. 73-90 = Trapier.



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10. Martin Schongauer, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, engraving.

11. El Greco, *Healing of the Blind*. Parma, Galleria Nazionale.

12. Cornelis Cort, *Triumph of the Holy Trinity (Gloria)*, engraving.

13. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Last Supper*, engraving.

Architecture by Sebastian Serlio which Greco had, in fact, in his library.

So much for the iconographical sources of the works exhibited here.

For the remaining 20 works, I have identified a number of sources for their motifs so closely tied up with those referred to above that they seem to stem from a single organised iconographical «bank» which Greco had probably not collected in any systematic fashion but rather as he studied the composition of each new work. He collected iconographical elements and drew on them again as he required ready motifs, figures, entire scenes, etc.

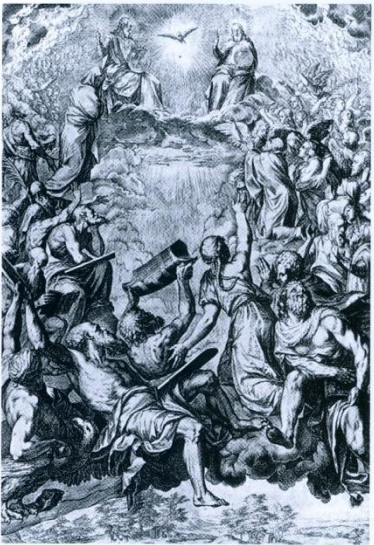
I have already referred to Marcantonio Raimondi, the «official», as it were, engraver of Raphael.



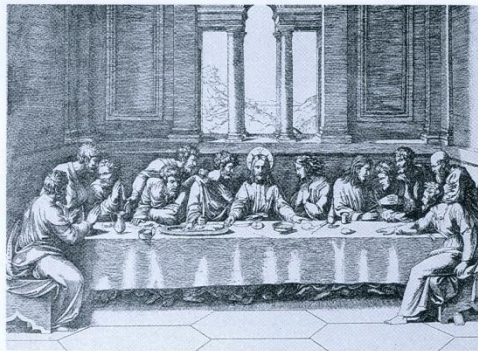
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14. El Greco, *Last Supper*. Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale.

His *Last Supper* (fig. 13), after Raphael's, gave Theotocopoulos the idea for Christ and ten of the apostles (from left in the engraving, numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12) for his own *Last Supper* in Bologna (fig. 14). It also gave him the figure of the Apostle Luke painting the Virgin, which is based on the seated apostle at the left end of the table (no. 1). But the buildings in the Raimondi-Raphael engravings also interested Theotocopoulos. He uses them as stage settings for certain representations especially of interior spaces. Thus, the hall of the *Last Supper* seems drawn from two Raimondi engravings — the *Last Supper* and the *Jesus in the House of Simon* (fig. 15).

For the hall of *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*²⁷ (fig. 16), we note that he uses the device of the hanging curtain which also appears in the *Last Supper* — perhaps to convey the interior space in contrast to the identical colonnade in the Lazaro Galdiano *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 17) which takes place in the open air.²⁸

The engravers who seem to have appealed particularly to Greco are some who engraved on their own after works by Titian, or by commission for the great Venetian and who worked in Venice during the mid-sixteenth century. Among these Giulio Bonasone, apart from his contribution to the Modena

27. Among the very few works of this period of Theotocopoulos which I have not seen.

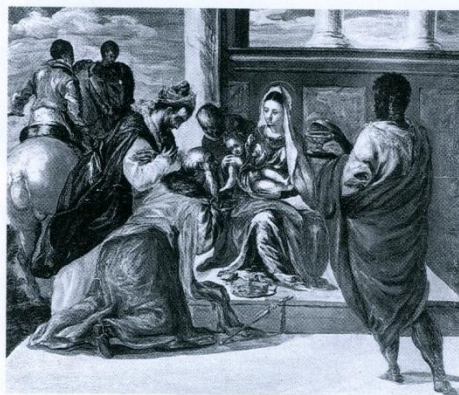
28. M. Chatzidakis since 1940 (and 1947) («Marcantonio Raimondi und die postbyzantinisch-kretische Malerei», in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, lix, 1940, pp. 147-161, and Idem, «Η Κρητική ζωγραφική και η Ιταλική χαλκογραφία», in *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, i, 1947, pp. 27-46), has noted the use of etchings, especially by Raimondi, by Cretan painters, in particular by Damaskinos. He specifically excludes Theotocopoulos from his research «because he had freed himself from any tie to Byzantine painting». Raimondi's etchings (he was the oldest Italian engraver — b. around 1480) must have been circulating in Crete before the middle of the 16th century. Thus, the earlier dating of some of Theotocopoulos' works which I believe were painted in Crete and which make use of elements from Raimondi's engravings, is strengthened.



15. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Jesus in the House of Simon*, engraving.



16. El Greco, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*. Private Collection, U.S.A.



17. El Greco, *Adoration of the Magi*. Madrid, Museo Lazaro Galdiano.

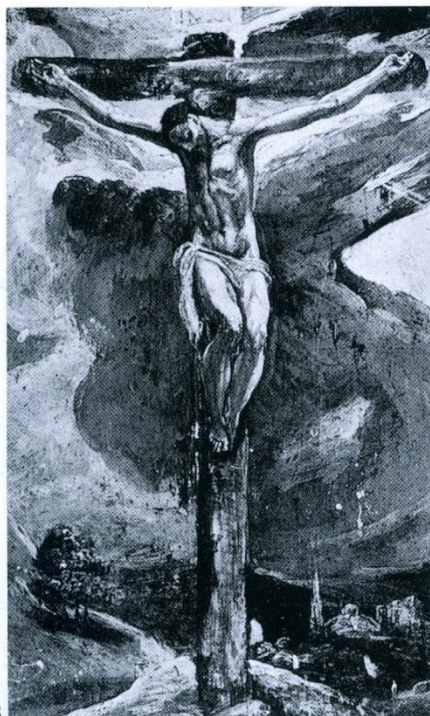
Adoration of the Shepherds, was valuable to Theotocopoulos for two engravings he used for the *Christ on the Cross* (Marañón Collection, fig. 18) after works by Titian (fig. 19) and Michelangelo²⁹ (fig. 20), as well as for the *Entombment of Christ*³⁰ (Ibarra Collection, fig. 21) with another etching (fig. 22) after Titian.

The engraver who signed with the initials IB,³¹ also engraved from works by Titian, the most

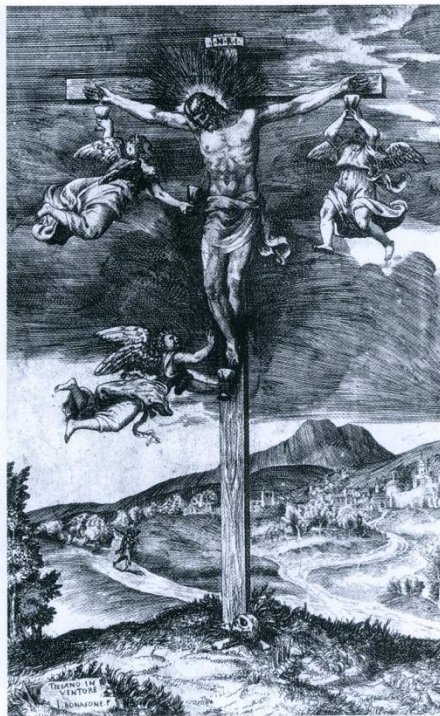
29. After Titian, etching dated c. 1563 (Bartsch XV, no. 42, p. 120). After Michelangelo, etching (Bartsch XV, no. 43, p. 120).

30. After Titian, etching dated 1567 (Bartsch XV, no. 44, p. 120).

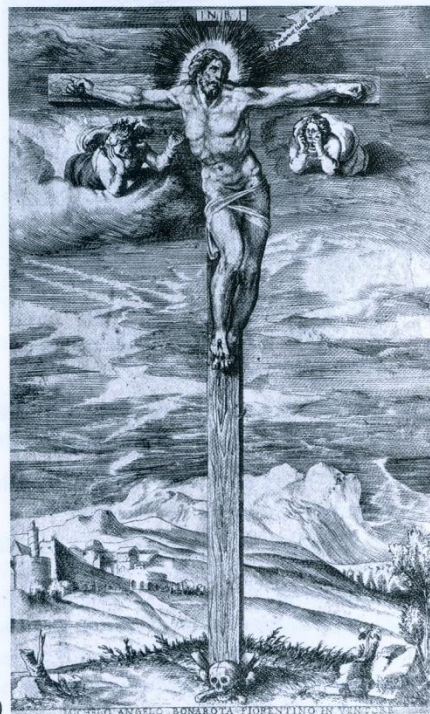
31. Thought to be the German Johan Breit or Giovanni Britto.



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18. El Greco, *Christ on the Cross*. Marañon Collection.

19. Giulio Bonasone, *Christ on the Cross*, engraving, after Titian.

20. Giulio Bonasone, *Christ on the Cross*, engraving, after Michelangelo.

21. El Greco, *Entombment of Christ*. Ibarra Collection.



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22. Giulio Bonasone, *Entombment of Christ*, engraving.



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23. El Greco, *Purification of the Temple*. Washington, National Gallery of Art.



24

24. Niccolò Boldrini, *Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata*, woodcut.

important being the woodcut of the «Adoration of the Shepherds»³² which contributed many figures, motifs and ideas to Theotocopoulos for his own *Adorations*, starting with the Modena Triptych, following with the Benaki *Adoration of the Magi* and ending with the Washington *Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple* (fig. 23).

Another engraver of Titian's circle, Niccolò Boldrini³³ (fig. 24), provided important elements for three versions of the *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* in Bergamo (fig. 25), Naples and the Zuloaga Collection.

Yet another important source is the Dutchman Cornelis Cort, who associated with Titian's circle during the same years as Theotocopoulos, and who engraved works after Titian directly from drawings or paintings of the great Master by special agreement³⁴ with him. Theotocopoulos drew many

32. See Pallucchini, fig. 4, after an «Adoration» by Titian painted in 1532-33, for the Duke of Urbino, where it was for many years before Theotocopoulos came to Venice, and thus he could not have seen it. Many believe the work to be now lost, others recognise it in a very damaged painting in the Pitti Palace.

33. One of his woodcuts after a lost picture or drawing by Titian. See D. Rosand - M. Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, Washington 1976, no. 23.

34. On the occasion of the *Gloria* and other engravings by Cort, who stayed at Titian's house for one year (1565-1566), Titian requested from the Council of Ten a special license (privilegio) and on 4 February 1566, was granted one for 15 years. Thus, he did not have to seek special permission for each new print (Haan, pp. 9, 117).



25. El Greco, *Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata*. Bergamo, Accademia Carrara.

elements from Cort's engravings (and must surely have had some in his possession) for important works — beginning very early with the Benaki *Adoration of the Magi*, and going on to the Willumsen *Adoration of the Shepherds*³⁵ (see Cort's engraving fig. 26) (from an engraving after Taddeo Zuccaro), the Broglio and Buccleuch *Adorations of the Shepherds*, to the two *Healings of the Blind*, the two *Expulsions from the Temple* (engraving after the *Gloria* of Titian), the Marañon *Christ on the Cross*³⁶ (see Cort's engraving fig. 27) and the Ibarra *Entombment*³⁷ (see Cort's engraving fig. 28), both from etchings after drawings of Clovio.

Dürer's woodcuts also provided raw material for Theotocopoulos, especially his 1511 series of the *Small Passion*,³⁸ on some of which Greco based himself, as we have seen, for figures and motifs in the *Righteous Judge*, the *Entombment*³⁹ (fig. 29), the *Espolio*⁴⁰ (figs. 30a, b, c), perhaps even in the *Flight into Egypt*.

35. Haan, cat. no. 33, dated 1567. First noted by Willumsen (J. F. Willumsen, *La Jeunesse du Peintre El Greco*, Paris 1927, vol. II, pp. 337-360).

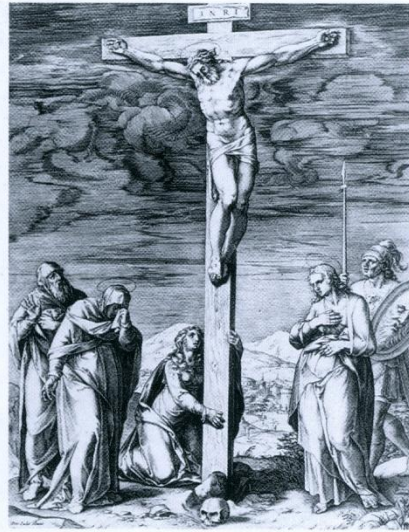
36. Haan, cat. no. 84, dated 1568, pp. 97-98, figs. 24, 25.

37. Haan, cat. no. 92, dated 1568, p. 103.

38. That is, the small format narrative in 36 woodcuts of the Passion of Christ, made in 1511. See Kurth, cat. nos. 222-258.

39. Kurth 249, the «Lamentation for Christ». From this the motif of the basket with ropes and other tools and behind them the crown of thorns from the descent from the Cross, which do not appear in other Italian «Entombments» or «Lamentations» of the sixteenth century. But they do usually appear in Byzantine «Lamentations» — «Nicodemus' basket» — Theotocopoulos would have been reminded of it by Dürer and used it here.

40. For the *Espolio* he used three Dürer woodcuts, two from the «Small Passion» — Kurth 233 «Christ taken Captive» = the «Kiss of Judas», Kurth 245 «Christ being nailed to the Cross», and from the «Great Passion» Kurth 124 «Christ bearing the Cross».



26. Cornelis Cort, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, engraving.

27. Cornelis Cort, *Christ on the Cross*, engraving.

Apart from the engravings, we may speculate —without direct indications of copying— that for certain works Theotocopoulos looked at and took ideas from the great religious compositions which surrounded him in Venice (Tintoretto, Veronese, Titian) and in Rome (Raphael, Michelangelo) for those of his compositions full of people (*Healing of the Blind*, *Expulsion of the Merchants*, etc.).

An important work which he certainly saw and studied in Rome is the Michelangelo *Pietà* (fig. 31), now in the Duomo in Florence. In Greco's time it lay abandoned in a garden (vigna) on the Quirinale belonging to the Cardinal Bandini.⁴¹ The gigantic body of the dead Christ seems to have so impressed Theotocopoulos that he used it in two of his last works, as I believe, before he left for Spain, the Johnson *Pietà* (fig. 32) and the Ibarra *Entombment*.

In the latter, moreover, among the many persons depicted can be distinguished in the background the head of an old man, without doubt Titian.⁴² Pallucchini wonders whether this constitutes a last salute to his teacher who died on 28 August 1576, in the plague which decimated Venice then.⁴³

As we proceed in time we find fewer borrowings from paintings or engravings of fellow artists. The assimilation and working out by himself of all the elements he has borrowed has advanced to the point where he no longer requires the direct assistance of other works. But the repertory of themes,

41. Trapier first made the connection with the Christ of the *Pietà* by Michelangelo from the Cardinal's garden, who had it from a servant of Michelangelo. She comments also on the use of motifs from a Dürer woodcut, Kurth 245 («Christ being nailed to the Cross») in the *Espolio*.

42. Theotocopoulos perhaps remembered Titian's *Entombment* (now in the Prado, Madrid) with his self-portrait as Nicodemus of 1559. Here he uses Titian's self-portrait (now in Berlin) which he must have had to hand in a drawing or engraving which he has also used it earlier for Titian's portrait in the Minneapolis *Expulsion of the Merchants*.

43. R. Pallucchini, «La Vicenda Italiana del Greco», in *Paragone*, September 1953, iv, pp. 24-39.

28. Cornelis Cort, *Entombment*, engraving.29. Albrecht Dürer, *Lamentation*, woodcut.

motifs and forms which he had worked so hard to assemble was not only retained in his mind. Part of it went with him to Spain. Pacheco, when visiting Greco's studio in 1611, recounts that he saw in a cupboard «the originals of all the works Greco had painted in his life, in oil on canvas in very small format to use them for his works», like a sort of archive of his production. I believe that from the works of his Italian period, five at least he took with him to Spain as «modelli». ⁴⁴ The Johnson *Pietà*, the Zuloaga *Saint Francis*, the Prado *Annunciation*, the Marañón *Christ on the Cross*, the Ibarra *Entombment*. They all have approximately the same dimensions (height approximately 28 centimetres, breadth approximately 20 centimetres), and are all painted in tempera on wood, in the 2 or 3 last years of his stay in Italy.

From all of them were drawn in Spain important works in larger format, oil on canvas, enriched by new ideas and figures, by the requisite stylistic adaptations, often genial, called for by his talent.

This summary reconnaissance into the iconographic sources of Theotocopoulos' art is based on a detailed study of all the elements in each work. Time does not now permit me to enlarge upon it.

The almost complete lack of references to Byzantine elements does not mean that I consider them non-existent. On the contrary, I note them wherever they appear in the detailed study of each work. Beyond the frequent use, until the end of his Italian stay, of tempera on dressed canvas on wood in the Byzantine manner, ⁴⁵ beyond even his signature in Greek until the end, it is truly impressive to see his persistent use of iconographic elements from his Byzantine training wherever it helps him to express himself. And this persistence lasts until his death, a half century away from the post-

44. I use the Italian word «modello, modelli» in the sense of a reproduction of a work made by the artist himself, to serve him as a document for his archives, his «liber veritatis» as Claude Lorrain would have said, as well as for models of designs from which he could draw new versions of his initial work.

45. Of the 40 works of the pre-Toledo period, 22 use this technique (and 9 are signed, all in Greek).



30a



30b



30c



31

30a. Albrecht Dürer, *The Arrest of Christ*, woodcut.

30b. Albrecht Dürer, *Christ carrying the Cross*, woodcut.

30c. Albrecht Dürer, *The Crucifixion of Christ*, woodcut.

31. Michelangelo, *Pietà*. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.



32. El Greco, *Pietà*. Philadelphia, Museum of Art, Johnson Collection.

Byzantine world in Crete. It has its roots deep in his temperament as it was first formed in Crete. From then on he distilled the most valuable, because most alive, elements of the Byzantine tradition and the resulting distillate became an essential element of all his later creation. Not, however, the only one.

The other elements which went into the formation of his temperament were those he reaped from the experience of his life and work in Italy during the second half of that century of the High Renaissance which saw the culmination of Giorgione (d. 1511), Raphael (d. 1520), Correggio (d. 1534), and the unfolding of the entire careers of Michelangelo (d. 1564), Titian (d. 1576) and Tintoretto (d. 1594).

These elements for which I use the general term «western», should however be particularised and called Venetian, and more particularly Titianesque. If various students of Greco could, half a century ago, maintain that the artist studied with Bassano or Tintoretto or with ... Marescalchi, I believe that today there can be no doubt that in Venice he was a «discepolo di Titiano» (as he is described by Clovio), or a «scolaro di Titiano», in accordance with old inventories of the Farnese. But even without such written evidence, the all-pervading presence of Titian is there to tell us that it is not even necessary to postulate a long service in the studio of the great Venetian, even if Theotocopoulos is not the «valente giovine mio discepolo» to whom Titian refers when writing to Philip II in 1567. Recalling perhaps his Byzantine training, he preferred engraved reproductions of works by Titian to the works themselves (some of which he could not have seen as they were not in Venice), starting with the *Triptych (Adoration of the Shepherds, Annunciation)* and with the Benaki *Adoration of the Magi*, and proceeding to the 1576 *Entombment*, where indeed he portrays his master.

From an overview of his whole production until 1577, one can come to some conclusions about certain features of Theotocopoulos' method of work as well as about the formation of his style. Apart from his iconographic «bank», to which I have already referred, we note a tendency to look for subjects outside the commonplace iconography of both Byzantine and western art. The *Flight into Egypt* and *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, are described only in one of the Gospels (Matthew and Luke respectively), and in the sixteenth century there are very few pictures of the first and none of the second.

For the *Last Supper*, Theotocopoulos chooses the least usual passage and the only one that mentions all the objects on the table.

There are only two western representations of the *Healing of the Blind*, with one blind man, one post-Byzantine, and certainly none which combine the four miracles. This is an original composition by Theotocopoulos. And for this he has chosen one of the only two Gospel passages which refers to two blind men. The same holds true for the *Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple*, another original composition. For this he chooses the only passage which mentions the objects scattered around the Temple. The Gospel texts are rendered literally — one might think that he had them before him as he worked.

It does not seem that Theotocopoulos was interested in a continuous production of new compositions on commonplace religious subjects. He preferred to test his capacities on original subjects of his own choice. Once he has set up a composition which satisfies him he will use it again with minor variations until the end of his life. From the Modena Triptych come countless later versions of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* and at least two *Annunciations*. The composition of the *Righteous Judge* will return in one of the important works of his first Spanish period, the Dream of Philip II. The composition of the *Dormition of the Virgin* in the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*.⁴⁶ Luke painting the Virgin becomes a later Luke who displays his work.

46. The discovery in 1983, of the *Dormition of the Virgin* in a church of Syros disturbed the sleeping waters of research on Greco. The detailed presentation of the picture will be made by another colleague. I shall limit myself below, therefore, to a few general remarks as this adds another work to the 39 I have included in Theotocopoulos' production before he arrived in Toledo in 1577:

- i) A rather rare subject in the 16th century and in post-Byzantine art. Theotocopoulos follows here one of its two types, the one of the actual «Dormition» rather than of the «Burial of the Virgin», where the episode of the Jew, Jechonias, is often added with the Archangel cutting off his hands.
- ii) I wonder if there is also missing here the other episode sometimes added where the Virgin gives her belt to Thomas who is late, because in the clouds on which they are hastening the Apostles —six on each side— are all present. Could we have in the somewhat personalised figure kneeling to the Virgin not Thomas but the donor of the icon?
- iii) The technique of this work is pure Byzantine as is also the style, but the conception and luscious style go beyond the usual post-Byzantine aridity. In the rendering of the bodies and draperies it is very close to *Luke painting the Virgin*. It should, therefore, be placed among Theotocopoulos' early works together with others between the years 1562 and 1565, painted before Venice. This work was also found in the Cyclades, as were the two early works in the Benaki Museum.
- iv) A careful study will surely show similarities with other works of Theotocopoulos. I think, for example, of the *Last Supper* in Bologna, the Benaki *Adoration of the Magi* in the rendering of the utensils in comparison with the candelabra and the censer of the *Dormition*. I reach as far as the *Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple* (Washington) for architectural and other details.
- v) But the most striking projection is that which leads Greco, through the melting pot of Venetian art, from the religious *Dormition of the Virgin* to a worldly «dormition» ..., the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, as the direct product of a talent which fuses in a masterly fashion his Venetian and his Byzantine culture. All students of Greco have remarked on the iconographical origin of the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* in the compositional pattern of the *Dormition*, especially in the receiving of the soul of the dead as an anthropomorphic phantom being carried to heaven. The *Dormition* of Syros comes spectacularly to shed light on these origins from the painter's own work.
- vi) Very noticeable is the difference in style between the lower part of the icon around the «sleeping» Virgin, done in a pure Byzantine technique, and the upper part around the ascension of the Virgin where western elements are to the fore. Is this due to the double-edged personality of the artist? or to a later reworking of the painting?
- vii) The profile of St. Thomas (or donor, in my view) bears a striking resemblance to the profile of the healed blind man, at the extreme left of the Dresden *Healing of the Blind*.

Theotocopoulos was more a colourist than a «draughtsman». It was Titian who brought this inclination to colour to bloom, colour, the sensual element par excellence of painting which his severe Byzantine background might not have let him savour, with its fixed hieratic patterns, its predetermined colour range, its unnatural gold backgrounds. Perhaps the Washington *Expulsion of the Merchants* and the Thyssen *Annunciation* mark the moment when Theotocopoulos came closest to the sensual, paganistic spirit of Venetian painting, born with Giorgione and carried on to the end of the century by Titian.

From Giorgione also, through Titian, came Theotocopoulos' concern with the working of light spreading from a single source through the darkness, his «luminism» which leads him, toward the end of his Italian period to the extraordinary studies of the *Boy blowing on an Ember* and the *Proverb*. Here we have again a pioneer contribution of Greco (not of Jacopo Bassano) to later painting which passed to Caravaggio and immediately after to the Dutch «luminists» of the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Another side of Greco, the more expressionist and «non-sensual», was stimulated by the discovery of Dürer's engravings. The German with his strong painter's temperament, full of Gothic inhibitions, followed a path toward the Renaissance similar to that of the Byzantine nurtured Theotocopoulos. Both of them came from cultures entirely incompatible with the Renaissance spirit discovered in Renaissance Venice. Theotocopoulos must have been very early aware of his affinity with the earnest and basically ascetic work of Dürer, and it is striking that it continues to be evident in Theotocopoulos' Spanish production. The religious woodcuts of Dürer did not only operate as substitute «patterns» (ἀντίβολα) but also as stimuli for work more profoundly religious than the somewhat worldly outlook he met with in his fellow artists of Venice and especially of Rome.

The synthesis in the personality of a gifted Greek from an out-of-the-way province of Venice, of the dry hieraticism of Byzantine decadence, of the richly sensual colourism of the Venetian zenith, of a vein of ascetic expressionism, of an intellectual agility and a far from usual culture, led in the final analysis by some secret alchemy, to the mutation of Domenicos Theotocopoulos into the last man of the Renaissance, the El Greco of Spain and of the world.

Post scriptum

From the entries in the Exhibition Catalogue and the communications given in Iraklion at the Congress where the above text of mine was also given, there emerged some significant points about Theotocopoulos' iconographical sources which complete, strengthen and confirm findings contained in my text. I, therefore, consider it useful to note them here together with the appropriate reference to their authors. Thus:

1. *Dormition of the Virgin*, Syra: In her paper, Mrs. Kanto Fatourou-Hesychakis demonstrates that the large candelabrum which constitutes a central element of the painting, is taken virtually intact from a Raimondi etching. The three naked Graces —the third must be on the back— which form its base are in reality the three «theological virtues», Hope, Charity and Faith. They are painted with the identical technique as the three figures of the central panel of the Modena Triptych (*Christ the Righteous Judge*), which are half-naked and with the same gestures of the hands for Hope and Faith. Such a striking reference to Raimondi, who was known very early in Crete, as I have noted elsewhere, confirms the dating of the *Dormition* among Theotocopoulos' early work, painted in Crete.

2. *Luke painting the Virgin and Child*: In her entry for this work in the Catalogue (pp. 146-149), Mrs. Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides proposes a flying Victory in an «engraving attributed to G. D.

d'Angely from a drawing by B. Campi» as a source. The Victory is reversed for the Angel who arrives from on high to crown the Evangelist. I agree. Mrs. M. C.-K. concurs with me in the provenance of Luke from the disciple on the far left of Raimondi's «Last Supper».

3. *The Adoration of the Magi*, Benaki Museum: Mrs. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides' impressive finding for the «Aide» with his left leg bent as he climbs a step and offers the gift for the Child to the black King. He is indeed a facsimile of the soldier in the etching of the *Resurrection* after Parmigianino. The missing helmet Greco simply transfers from the next soldier in the etching.

On the other hand, the association of some works by Theotocopoulos with works by Bassano does not seem to me convincing. These works are indeed earlier than Theotocopoulos, but it is difficult to see how he could have known the originals before he arrived in Venice, as they do not seem to have been reproduced in engravings with a wide circulation.