

# 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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## *Three Questions on the Modena Triptych*

Almost sixty years after the discovery and publication by Rodolfo Pallucchini of the Modena triptych, in 1937, there are still questions to be answered and issues to be raised.<sup>1</sup> Pallucchini was the one to suggest the attribution of this work to Domenicos Theotocopoulos on the basis of the inscription ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ on the central panel of the reverse of the triptych. This attribution was made possible through the publication two years previously, in 1935, by August Mayer, of the Benaki Museum icon of the *Adoration of the Magi*, in which the inscription ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ was connected with Theotocopoulos.<sup>2</sup> Pallucchini also suggested that the triptych was painted in Venice soon after the painter's arrival there. He examined separately each of the six compositions which decorate the six panels and for some of them he managed to locate their prototypes. These were mainly drawn from engravings copying the work of famous Venetian painters. There can be no question that this monograph by Pallucchini on the Modena triptych, published in 1937, though important and still in use, needs to be updated. More recently, in 1980, Pallucchini dealt with the triptych again when it was shown in the exhibition *Da Tiziano a el Greco. Per la storia del Manierismo a Venezia* in Venice. The entry in the catalogue written by him<sup>3</sup> repeated the author's views already put forward in 1937, the only difference being a slight change in chronology from 1566-67, which he had earlier suggested, to 1567-68, so that it could coincide still with Theotocopoulos' first years in Venice which had been altered to 1567-68 after the documents published by M. Constantoudaki.<sup>4</sup> Mentions of the triptych are very often found in the literature concerning El Greco's early artistic activity, but they are usually brief.<sup>5</sup> More work

1. R. Pallucchini, «Un politico del Greco nella R. Galleria Estense di Modena», *Bollettino d'Arte*, xxx, March 1937, pp. 389-392. Idem, *Il politico del Greco della R. Galleria Estense e la formazione dell'artista*. R. Istituto d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte. Opere d'Arte. fasc. VII, Roma 1937.

2. A. L. Mayer, «De pintura española. I. Una obra juvenil del Greco», *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, 32, May-Aug. 1935, pp. 205-207.

3. *Da Tiziano a El Greco. Per la storia del Manierismo a Venezia. 1540-1590*. Exhibition Catalogue. Venice, Palazzo Ducale Sept.-Dec. 1981, entry no. 95, pp. 246-251.

4. M. Constantoudaki, «Domenicos Théotocopoulos (El Greco) de Candie à Venise. Documents inédits (1566-1568)», *Θησαυρίσματα*, 12, 1975, pp. 292-308.

5. M. Chatzidakis, «'Ο Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος και ή κρητική ζωγραφική», *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, 4.iii, Sept.-Oct. 1950, pp. 401-408. M. S. Soria, «Greco's Italian Period», *Arte Veneta*, viii, 1954, pp. 213-214, 220, nos. 28-30. L. Puppi, «Il Greco giovane e altri pittori 'madonneri' di maniera italiana a Venezia nella seconda metà del cinquecento», *Prospettive*, 26-27, 1963, pp. 28, 1-3. Idem, «Il soggiorno italiano del Greco», *Studies in the History of Art*, 13, 1984, pp. 138-141. E. Arslan, «Cronistoria del Greco 'madonnero'», *Commentari*, xv, 1964, pp. 213-217. S. Bettini, «Maistro Menegos Theotokopoulos sgrufos», *Arte Veneta*, xxxii, 1978, pp. 244-245. L. Hadermann-Misguich, «Forme et esprit de Byzance dans l'oeuvre du Greco», *Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles*, 5, Aug.-Sept. 1964, pp. 448-451. Eadem, «Le byzantinisme du Greco à la lumière de découvertes récentes», *Bulletin de la Classe des Beaux-Arts*, lxi, 1987, pp. 49-53.

has been done on the prototypes of the triptych's compositions.<sup>6</sup> Today when new documents on Theotocopoulos' activity are known, when new data on Cretan painting of the second half of the 16th century have been published and a better knowledge of Theotocopoulos' early work has been achieved, especially after the discovery of the icon of the *Dormition of the Virgin* on the island of Syros,<sup>7</sup> it is time to touch again on the main questions concerning the Modena triptych. I think that for the moment the triptych can be approached by posing and trying to answer three main questions:

- a) the question of the triptych's authenticity
- b) the question of its origin and
- c) the question of its relevance and significance to Theotocopoulos' painting.

These questions cannot be treated separately or independently of one another. They have to be considered as interrelated matters. For example, the question of the triptych's authenticity cannot be judged on the basis of its signature-type (XEIP ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ) alone. It has to be examined with the help of relevant pictorial material, an issue which leads to the third question. At the same time these questions include or presuppose others of equal importance. The problem of dating the triptych is closely connected with that of identifying its origin: Crete or Italy or more precisely Candia or Venice? That in its turn is associated with the problem of identifying the triptych's donor, commissioner or owner. If we were in a position to establish this, the question of the triptych's origin would then stand on firmer ground. However, the question of the triptych's origin cannot be answered, for the moment, on the basis of external factors, that is documents which could throw some light on this matter, since such documents either do not exist or have not yet been discovered. For the time being, iconography and style considered as internal factors are the only data available to us regarding the question of the triptych's origin. Questions two and three, therefore, should be looked at together. The question of the triptych's authenticity will be left aside for the moment and it will be assumed that it is the work of Theotocopoulos.

Before we start dealing with the above issues it is necessary to mention the six scenes of the Triptych (fig. 1) which cover the six panels of it:

Front Side

Left Wing: The Adoration of the Shepherds

Central Panel: Christ crowns a soldier and Scenes from the Life of the Church and the Last Judgement

Right Wing: The Baptism of Christ

Reverse Side

Left Wing: The Annunciation

Central Panel: The View of Mount Sinai

Right Wing: Adam and Eve

For most of these compositions Pallucchini suggested convincing comparisons with engravings copying the work of famous sixteenth-century Venetian painters. In the Adoration of the Shepherds, for example, he showed that Theotocopoulos combined details from three engravings: (a) the wood-

6. A. L. Mayer, «Notes on the Early El Greco», *The Burlington Magazine*, lxxiv, Jan. 1939, pp. 28-33. V. H. Miesel Jr., «La tabla central del triptico de Modena, del Greco», *Archivo español de Arte*, 26, July 1953, pp. 205-214. L. Hadermann-Misguich, «Deux nouvelles sources d'inspiration du polyptyque de Modène», *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, lxxiii, 1964, pp. 355-358.

7. *El Greco of Crete. Exhibition on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of his Birth*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Iraklion 1990, entry no. 1, pp. 142-145.



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1. El Greco, The Modena triptych. Modena, Galleria Estense.

cut by the engraver I.B., today identified as Giovanni Britto which reproduces Titian's composition,<sup>8</sup> (b) the engraving by Giulio Bonasone<sup>9</sup> and (c) the engraving by Parmigianino.<sup>10</sup> For the Annunciation, painted on the reverse left wing, Pallucchini proposed an iconographic relation to the composition by Titian copied around 1537 by Gian Giacomo Caraglio on a copperplate engraving.<sup>11</sup> This relation, though limited to the upper part of the composition, in particular to the clouds with the little angels and the Holy Spirit, is, indeed, very obvious.

Pallucchini did not locate the prototypes for the composition of the central front panel in engravings, but this was done two years later by A. Mayer, who published a woodcut of 1555 from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>12</sup> It is obvious that Theotocopoulos was aware of this woodcut, from which he copied the upper part of his composition with Christ crowning the soldier of Christian faith. As Lydie Hadermann-Misguich has shown Theotocopoulos did not only use the 1555 woodcut. For the upper part of his composition he also copied elements from another woodcut dated to the middle of the 16th century, while for the representation of the sea monster in the lower part, Hadermann-Misguich suggested that a woodcut by Dürer was the source of inspiration.<sup>13</sup> It seems, however, that the *Last Judgement* engraving by Giovanni Battista Fontana which also includes the sea monster element (fig. 2) must have played an important role in the composition by Theotocopoulos.<sup>14</sup> We know that he used this element in exactly the same way in his painting of the *Allegory of the Holy League* of 1578-80 in both the Escorial and National Gallery panels.<sup>15</sup> As will be shown below, this is not the only time that we can deduce from the Modena triptych compositions that the artist was aware of Giovanni Battista Fontana's engravings. This awareness is not only important in our search for the Modena triptych's prototypes but also for a reassessment of its origin and date. It should be mentioned here that the context of the composition has been successfully analysed by V. Miesel as showing a Counter-Reformation orientation, which is also clear in the 1555 woodcut.<sup>16</sup> This Counter-Reformation content should be taken into consideration in the discussion of the triptych's owner.

Interesting points for our discussion are offered by the composition on the central panel of the triptych's reverse side which is the View of Mt. Sinai. An inscription is written in Greek capital letters

8. Pallucchini, *Il polittico*, p. 7, fig. 4. *Titian und sein Kreis: 50 Venezianische Holzschnitte aus dem Berliner Kupferstichkabinett*. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz 1972, no. 17-II, p. 50, fig. Kat. 17-II. *Tiziano e la silografia Veneziana del Cinquecento*, Catalogue ed. by M. Muraro - D. Rosand, Vicenza 1976, no. 55A. *El Greco of Crete*, entry no. 4, p. 160, fig. 3 on p. 162.

9. Pallucchini, *op. cit.*, p. 7, fig. 5. *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 28, ed. by S. Boorsch - J. Spike, N. York 1985, no. 39 (119). *El Greco of Crete*, p. 160, fig. 4 on p. 162.

10. Pallucchini, *op. cit.*, p. 7, fig. 6. *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 32, N. York 1979, no. 3 (7). *El Greco of Crete*, p. 160, fig. 5 on p. 162.

11. Pallucchini, *op. cit.*, p. 6, fig. 3. Muraro-Rosand, *Tiziano*, p. 35. *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 28, no. 3 (67). *El Greco of Crete*, p. 172, fig. 3 on p. 174.

12. Mayer, «Notes», p. 28, pl. 1B.

13. Hadermann-Misguich, «Deux nouvelles sources», pp. 355-357, figs. 3-4.

14. To my knowledge, Allan Braham was the first to draw attention to this work as a possible source of inspiration for El Greco («Two notes on El Greco and Michelangelo», in *Burlington Magazine*, no. 108, June 1966, p. 308 and figs. 42 and 43); G. Dillon also mentioned this relationship in his paper at the El Greco conference published here («El Greco e l'incisione veneta. Precisazioni e novità»).

15. G. Manzini - T. Fratti, *L'opera completa del Greco*, Milano 1969, nos. 37a-b, pls. V-VII. A. Blunt, «El Greco's 'Dream of Philip II': an Allegory of the Holy League», *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 3, 1939-40, pp. 58-69.

16. Miesel, «La tabla central», pp. 205-214.





2. G. B. Fontana, *The Last Judgement*, engraving.

3. El Greco, *View of Mount Sinai*, Iraklion, Historical Museum.

on the upper part of the composition ΤΟ ΑΓΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΟΒΑΔΙΣΤΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ ΤΟ ΣΙΝΕΟΝ (The Holy and God-trodden Mount Sinai).

The iconographic scheme used by Theotocopoulos in the Modena triptych for the portrayal of the view of Sinai is similar in all respects to a panel (fig. 3) of his that was once in the Hatvany collection in Budapest, then in a private collection in Vienna and finally bought through Sotheby's by the Historical Museum in Iraklion, Crete.<sup>17</sup> This painting is known to have been in the Fulvio Orsini collection in 1600 and because of this is held to have been painted during the artist's stay in Rome (c. 1570-1575/76).<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that both compositions used the same iconographic model. This model has already been sought amongst the woodcuts and engravings done by European travellers, mostly German, after the middle of the 16th century. The engravings proposed as nearest, iconographically and chronologically, to Theotocopoulos' composition are those of Christopher Führer ab Heimendorf of 1570 and Walter von Waltersweyl of 1587.<sup>19</sup> But it seems that even closer to the rendering of Sinai

17. D. Talbot Rice, «Five Late Byzantine Panels and Greco's Views of Mount Sinai», *The Burlington Magazine*, lxxxix, April 1947, p. 94, pl. A. *Da Tiziano a El Greco*, entry no. 100, pp. 258-259. *Sotheby's Old Master Paintings*, London 7th Dec. 1988, no. 84, pp. 28-30. *El Greco of Crete*, entry no. 5, pp. 186-191.

18. In the inventory of Fulvio Orsini is recorded: *Quadro corniciato di noce con u. paese del Monte Sinai, di mano di un Greco scolare di Tiziano*. P. de Nolhac, «Une galerie de peinture au XVIIe siècle: les collections de Fulvio Orsini», *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, xxix, 1884, p. 433, no 39.

19. R. Byron - D. Talbot Rice, *The Birth of Western painting. A History of Colour, Form, Iconography Illustrated from the Paintings of Mistra and Mount Athos, of Giotto and Duccio and El Greco*, London 1930, pp. 195-197, pls. 91-92. Chatzidakis, «'Ο Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος», pp. 404-408, fig. 6. G. Kühnel, «Die 'Ikone des Sinai-Klosters' und verwandte Pilgerillustrationen», *Oriens Christianus*, 65, 1981, pp. 171-174, figs. 8, 10. *El Greco of Crete*, p. 178, figs. 2-3, pp. 189-190.

by Theotocopoulos is a copper engraving by Giovanni Battista Fontana printed in Venice in 1569 (fig. 4).<sup>20</sup> In this engraving we find a similar arrangement of the three mountains with the giving of the tablets in the centre and the burial of St. Catherine on the right, as they are in Theotocopoulos' composition. The slanted placing of the square monastic settlement is common to both works. Differences in the rendering of the pilgrims and monks prevent us considering the engraving the immediate or the only model for Theotocopoulos' composition. It is reasonable to suppose that more than one engraving with the view of Sinai was used and that Battista Fontana's was one of these. That Theotocopoulos used what was for the second half of the sixteenth century the well-established representation of Sinai, characterised by the schematised rendering of the three mountain masses, as in the engraving by Battista Fontana is not in doubt. The fact that Battista Fontana's engraving was printed in Venice in 1569 offers a secure *terminus post quem* for the establishment of the topographical view of Mt. Sinai which is found on the Modena triptych and, consequently, for the date of the triptych itself. It might be of some significance that while in Venice Theotocopoulos sent to Crete to the well-known cartographer George Sideros or Kalapodas a series of «disegni».<sup>21</sup> What sort of disegni would a cartographer need to have?

As has already been stressed, the depiction of Mt. Sinai as an independent representation is found in Post-Byzantine painting. Among the surviving representations, of special importance is a triptych with the view of Mt. Sinai on the reverse left wing (fig. 5), today in the Vatican collection, which is a Cretan work and dates from the last decades of the 16th century,<sup>22</sup> as well as a panel (fig. 6), from a series of five compositions, originally consisting of the wings of a triptych, once in the Wilfrid Blunt collection in England, which appeared recently at auction at Sotheby's<sup>23</sup> and was finally acquired by a Greek collector. D. Talbot Rice suggested a date around 1600 for these panels and thought them to have been painted in northern Greece.<sup>24</sup> However, the triptych is iconographically and stylistically connected with Cretan painting of the second half of the 16th century. Moreover, it can be connected to the work of the Cretan painter Michael Damaskinos, who was active during the second half of the 16th century. The view of Mt. Sinai which is depicted on this panel is exactly the same with that on the Cretan triptych in the Vatican, mentioned above, and the Modena triptych. This means that during the second half of the 16th century this composition of the view of Mt. Sinai had become established and was known to Cretan icon-painters of the time. Was Theotocopoulos himself the one who established this iconographic scheme of Mt. Sinai by combining various engravings of it or did they all copy the same prototype? In the first case a relevant question to be asked

20. *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 32, nos. 67 (237). Kühnel, «Die Ikone des Sinai-Klosters», p. 174, fig. 11. D. Papastratou, *Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ὁρθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά 1665-1899*, vol. II, Athens 1986, p. 238, fig. 2. *El Greco of Crete*, p. 178, fig. 4 and p. 189, fig. 1.

21. Constantoudaki, «Dominicos Théotocopoulos», pp. 295, 305-308, doc. no. III.

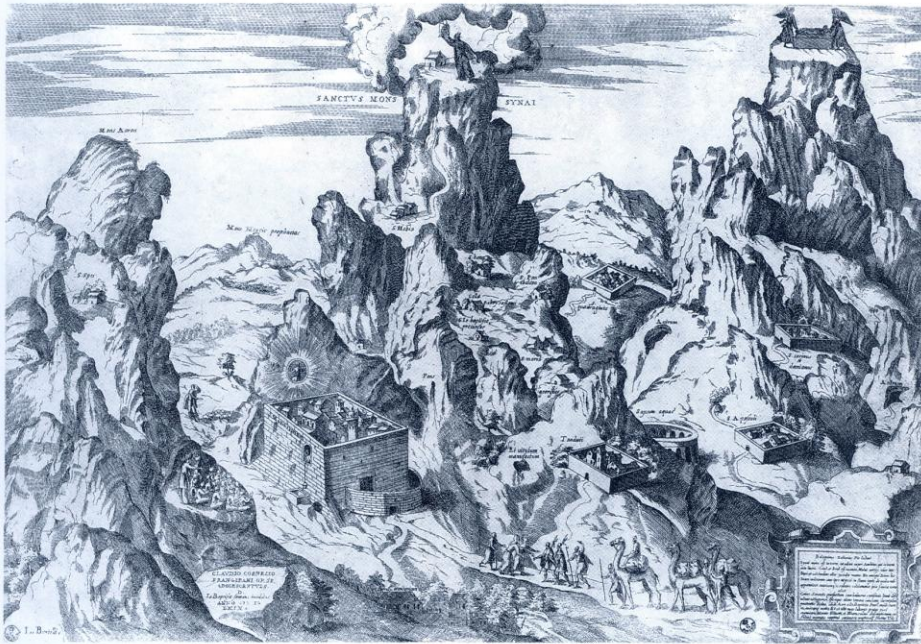
22. A drawing of the triptych, which faithfully copies the compositions of all its panels is given by Seroux d'Agincourt. *Histoire de l'art par les monuments, depuis sa décadence au IVe siècle jusqu'à son renouvellement au XVIe par J.B.L.G. Seroux d'Agincourt*, vol. 5, Paris 1823, pl. XCI. A. Muñoz, *I quadri bizantini della Pinacoteca Vaticana provenienti dalla biblioteca Vaticana*, Rome 1928, pl. VIII. Chatzidakis, «Ὁ Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος», p. 406, pl. ΚΔ'. Idem, «Τὸ τοπίο τοῦ Σινᾶ», in: *Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος Κρήσις. Κείμενα 1940-1990*, Athens 1990, fig. 30. *El Greco of Crete*, pp. 178, 180, fig. 5.

23. *Sotheby's Icons, Russian Pictures and Works of Art*, London 28 November 1991, no. 541, pp. 96-97.

24. Talbot Rice, «Five Late Byzantine Panels», pp. 93-94. Idem, *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase*, New York 1968, p. 191, pl. 166. *El Greco of Crete*, p. 178, fig. 6.



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4. G. B. Fontana, *View of Mount Sinai*, engraving.



5. Unknown artist, *View of Mount Sinai*, wing of a triptych. Rome, Vatican.



6. Unknown artist, *View of Mount Sinai*, wing of a triptych. Formerly London, Blunt Collection.



would be: if the Modena triptych was executed in Venice, how did the Cretan painters of the Vatican and the Blunt triptychs come to know the composition by Theotocopoulos? If the Blunt triptych can with certainty be connected with Michael Damaskinos, who spent some years in Venice (1568-69 and 1574-1583/84), we may easily suppose that he came to know the composition established by Theotocopoulos during the years they were both living in Venice. But what about the Cretan painter of the Vatican triptych? Where did he see the composition of Theotocopoulos? In Venice again? This is rather too much to say. Unless we accept that Theotocopoulos had already executed a similar composition (in the way he also did for the panel with Mt. Sinai which was in the Orsini collection in Rome) while he was still on Crete. In this case, however, we will have to face the difficulty created by the fact that the engraving of Battista Fontana which must surely have been known to him at the time was only printed in 1569.

To the discussion of the depiction of Mt. Sinai as an independent representation in Cretan works of art two more triptychs have to be added. Both bear the signature of Georgios Klontzas, a contemporary to Theotocopoulos. One of these triptychs formerly in the Spada collection in Rome was recently sold to a private collector in America,<sup>25</sup> while the other, which at one time belonged to a private collector in Yorkshire, England, is today in the possession of a Greek collector in Athens.<sup>26</sup> On the central panel of the reverse side of both these triptychs, that is in exactly the same place as on the Modena triptych, is a view of Mt. Sinai (figs. 7, 8). The same subject appears on a panel once in the Geneva Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, which has been associated with Klontzas.<sup>27</sup> In this case it is interesting to underline the existence of a panel whose concept is similar to that of the Theotocopoulos' panel once in Rome with the view of Sinai. Both these panels embody the idea of independent landscape painting which was developed by western European painters during the 16th century.<sup>28</sup>

The relation of the carved wooden frame of the Spada triptych to that of the Modena should also be stressed here. The same carved decoration is found in other triptychs painted by Klontzas, one in the monastery of Patmos, a second in the Vatican and a third in the Municipal Gallery of Ravenna.<sup>29</sup> It seems therefore that all these triptychs were produced by the same Cretan woodcarving workshop operating during the second half of the 16th century. These elements imply a certain connection between Theotocopoulos and Georgios Klontzas. We should also call to mind the indirect connection which, according to recently published archival documents,<sup>30</sup> Georgios Klontzas appears to have had with Theotocopoulos and which could also indicate a direct connection between the two painters during the years Theotocopoulos was still on Crete. The portrayals of Mt. Sinai on the triptychs by Georgios Klontzas are interesting not so much for their iconographic closeness to Theotocopoulos' compositions, which is not very obvious, as for the fact that they show that engravings of Mt. Sinai

25. P. L. Vocotopoulos, «Ένα άγνωστο τρίπτυχο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα», *Πεπραγμένα του Ε' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου* ("Άγιος Νικόλαος 1981), vol. 2, Athens 1985, pp. 64-73. *East Christian Art. Exhibition Catalogue*, London 1987, no. 74, pp. 88-95.

26. Vocotopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 74. *East Christian Art*, no. 75, p. 95.

27. M. Chatzidakis, V. Djurić, M. Lazović, *Les icônes dans les collections suisses*, Bern 1968, no. 17. Chatzidakis, «Τό τοπίο του Σινά», p. 145, fig. 33.

28. M. J. Friedländer, *Landscape, Portrait, Still Life. Their Origin and Development*, Oxford 1949, pp. 46 ff. A. R. Turner, *The Vision of Landscape in Renaissance Italy*, Princeton N.J. 1966, *passim*.

29. M. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos. Questions of Byzantine and Postbyzantine Painting*, Athens 1985, no. 62. Muñoz, *I quadri*, pl. VII. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, «Τρίπτυχο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα (;) άλλοτε οε ξένη ιδιωτική συλλογή», *Πεπραγμένα του Ε' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*, vol. 2, pp. 209-248.

30. Constantoudaki, «Dominicos Théotocopoulos», pp. 295-299, doc. no. I.



7. Unknown artist, *View of Mount Sinai*, wing of the «Yorkshire» triptych.



8. Unknown artist, *View of Mount Sinai*, wing of the «Spada» triptych.

circulated on Crete during the second half of the 16th century and that there existed on Crete a public who appreciated and commissioned works with this subject. In connection with the engravings, which are thought to be the iconographic models for both Theotocopoulos and Klontzas, it is worth noting that the inscription ΤΟ ΑΓΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΟΒΑΔΙΣΤΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ ΤΟ ΣΙΝΕΟΝ is exactly the same on both the Modena and the Yorkshire triptychs. This is perhaps a copy of a well-established type of inscription that could have existed on engravings which, although printed in Europe, were circulated in the Orthodox East.

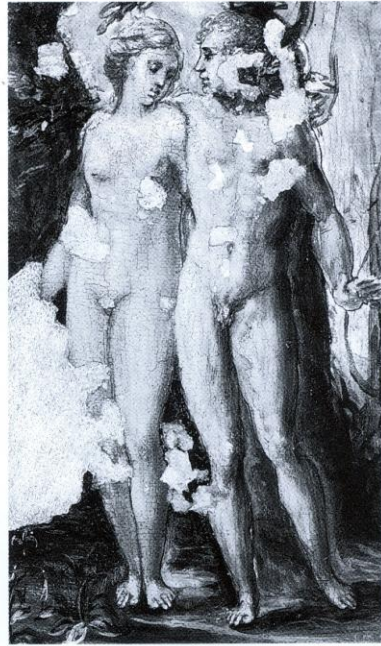
It is reasonable to suppose that the monastery of Sinai itself must have played an important role in the establishment and distribution of such engravings. It must have also played an important role in the production of icons and triptychs with the view of Mt. Sinai. The monastery still possesses today an impressive number of such works which could have been commissioned either by it or by pilgrims to it.<sup>31</sup> We should also bear in mind the possibility that icons and triptychs with Mt. Sinai were

31. M. Chatzidakis, «Μία εικόνα αφιερωμένη στο Σινᾶ», *Ἀφιέρωμα εἰς Κ. Ἰμαντον*, Athens 1940, pp. 351-364. G. Soteriou, «Εἰκὼν ἐθίμων τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ καὶ ἱστορικῶν σκηνῶν τῆς ἐρήμου», *Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας*, series 4th, 2, 1960-61, pp. 1-6. K. Weitzmann, «Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 28, 1974, pp. 54-55. G. Galavaris, «A Bread Stamp from Sinai and its Relatives», *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 27, 1978, pp. 329-342. Kühnel, «Die Ἱκὼνη des Sinai-Klosters», figs. 4-5, 7.





9. Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, woodcut.



10. El Greco, *Adam and Eve*, detail from the Modena triptych.

commissioned by pilgrims to it after they had come back from their journey in order to remind them of their pilgrimage.

The last panel of the triptych, on the reverse right wing, shows Adam and Eve before God in the Garden of Eden. The depiction of Adam and Eve brings us close to compositions of Adam and Eve such as that on a woodcut of 1504 by Dürer (fig. 9).<sup>32</sup> Adam's contraposto in the Modena triptych is a forceful reminder of Eve's stance in the Dürer woodcut. Moreover, as G. Dillon was able to show in his communication at the El Greco conference, published here, «El Greco e l'incisione veneta. Precisioni e novità», it is again an engraving by Fontana which appears to present the closest parallel to Theotocopoulos' composition. He also suggested an engraving of the Baptism of Christ by Fontana as the direct source of Theotocopoulos for the same composition on the front right wing of the triptych. All these engravings were printed in Venice during the years Theotocopoulos was there (1567/68-1570).

If we go back to the three questions we proposed as the main issues through which one should deal with the Modena triptych, that is (a) the question of the triptych's authenticity, (b) the question of its origin and (c) the question of its relevance and significance to Theotocopoulos' paintings we will see that it's easier to try and give an answer now.

Harold Wethey who objected to the attribution of the Modena triptych to Domenicos Theotocopoulos in his 1962 monograph on El Greco based his objections mainly on the epigraphic evidence.<sup>33</sup>

32. *Sammlung Max Kade. Leihgabe der Max Kade-Foundation Inc. New York*, Exhibition Catalogue. Graphische Sammlung Staatsgalerie Stuttgart - Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München 1963/64, no. 37, p. 21.

33. H. Wethey, *El Greco and His School*, Princeton N.J. 1962, vol. II, pp. 198-200.

His views were successfully opposed by Manolis Chatzidakis who compared the type of signature on the Modena triptych with that in the Benaki Museum icon of *St. Luke painting an icon of the Virgin*.<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that Wethey in his 1984 article on «El Greco in Rome and the Portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi» writes that «*Theotocopoulos probably had painted the little and much disputed triptych in the Galleria Estense at Modena before he left Crete*».<sup>35</sup> This means that he has moderated his opinions on the Modena triptych and its relation to Domenicos Theotocopoulos.

Today the discussion on Theotocopoulos' early artistic activity and the assignment of the two Benaki Museum panels (the *Evangelist Luke painting an icon of the Virgin* and the *Adoration of the Magi*)<sup>36</sup> has been made much clearer after the discovery of the Syros icon with the *Dormition of the Virgin*.<sup>37</sup> The signature «ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ Ο ΔΕΙΞΑC», which is written on it, leaves no room for doubt about the authenticity of the ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ type, because the lettering is exactly the same. At the same time the relation of compositions on the Modena triptych to paintings El Greco executed either in Italy or in Spain give the most definite answer to the question of its authenticity. I have already mentioned the sea monster element on the central panel of the Modena triptych which was used in exactly the same way by El Greco in his composition of the *Allegory of the Holy League* in Escorial and the National Gallery in London.<sup>38</sup> I would also like to add some remarks concerning other compositions of the Modena triptych and their association to later paintings by El Greco.<sup>39</sup> The *Adoration of the Shepherds* is close iconographically to paintings which Theotocopoulos painted during the years he stayed in Venice, namely the *Adoration of the Shepherds* once in the Broglio collection and that of the Duke of Buccleuch at Kettering.<sup>40</sup> Echoes from the *Adoration of the Shepherds* on the Modena triptych can easily be noticed in later paintings which El Greco executed in Spain. In the *Adoration of the Shepherds* for the church of San Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo<sup>41</sup> El Greco keeps the basic grouping of the composition on the triptych: the Virgin and Child, the kneeling shepherds, the two conversing women, the two shepherds at the back of the hut and the angels on high. As for the composition of the *Annunciation* on the left wing of the reverse side of the triptych, Theotocopoulos used a scheme, which he will repeat in his Venetian panels. The most telling comparison is with the painting from the Thyssen Bornemisza collection<sup>42</sup> as the pose, movement and gesture of the Virgin and angel, the desk at which Mary sits and has put her book, the floor with its rectangular slabs indicate. But I think that the most convincing connection between the Modena triptych compositions and later paintings by El Greco is to be found in the Adam and Eve scene (fig. 10) on the right wing of the triptych's reverse side. Because El Greco would continue to use and develop these specific types of naked bodies in his later paintings. The way Eve turns her head in the triptych is repeated in the similar stance of the naked female figure, also identified as Eve (fig. 11) in the *Laocoön* painting of

34. M. Chatzidakis, «Παρατηρήσεις στις υπογραφές του Θεοτοκόπουλου», *Ζυγός*, 103-4, 1964, pp. 78-83.

35. H. Wethey, «El Greco in Rome and the portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi», *Studies in the History of Art*, 13, 1984, p. 171.

36. *El Greco of Crete*, nos. 2-3, pp. 146-155.

37. *Ibid.*, no. 1, pp. 142-145.

38. See above n. 15.

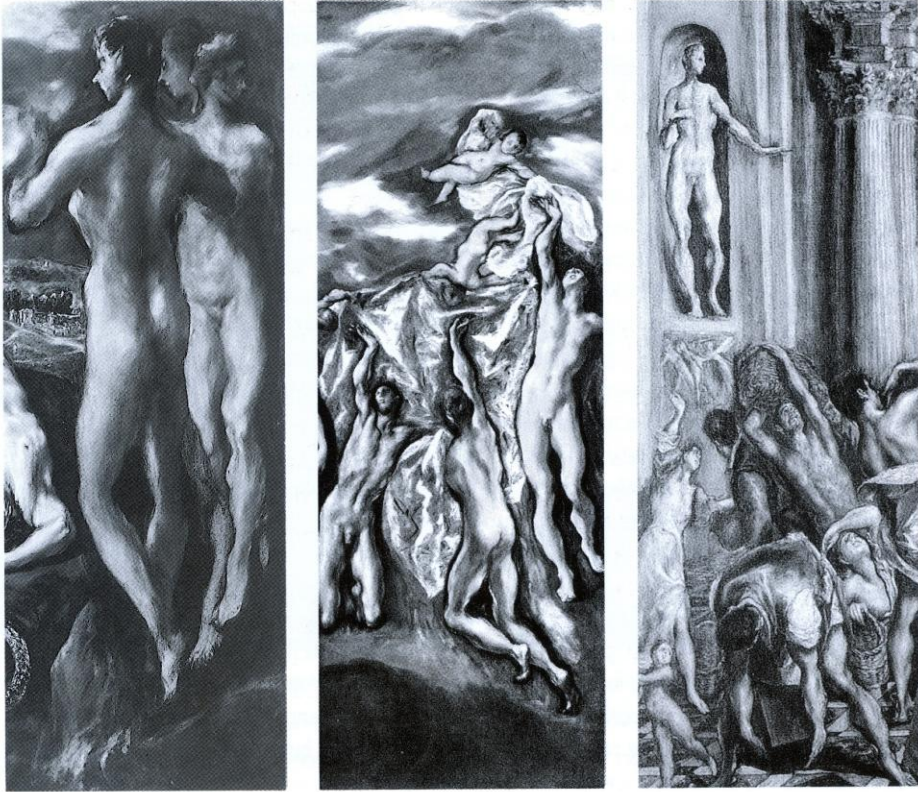
39. These remarks have been discussed in full detail in the catalogue entry for the Modena triptych in *El Greco of Crete*, entry no. 4, pp. 156-185.

40. *Da Tiziano a El Greco*, figs. on pp. 56-57.

41. *L'opera completa*, no. 171a, pl. LVII.

42. *El Greco of Toledo*, Exhibition Catalogue, Museo del Prado · Madrid 1982, National Gallery of Art · Washington 1982, The Toledo Museum of Art · Toledo Ohio 1982, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts · Dallas Texas 1982, no. 6, pl. 32.





11. El Greco, *Laocoön*, detail. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art.

12. El Greco, *The Vision of the Apocalypse* (detail). New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

13. El Greco, *Purification of the Temple* (detail). Madrid, San Ginés.

1610-14 in the National Gallery in Washington.<sup>43</sup> Correspondingly, the iconographic type of Adam seems to be the stable model for the depictions of nude men in El Greco's paintings.<sup>44</sup> Actually, we can recognize an iconographic relationship between Adam and the naked figure (fig. 12) on the right side of the painting with the *Vision from the Apocalypse of St. John*, dated to 1608-14 in the Metropolitan Museum of New York.<sup>45</sup> Also with the statue (fig. 13) in the niche in the wall on the left from the painting of the *Purification of the Temple* from the San Ginés church in Madrid and with one of Laocoön's sons (on the left side) in the painting of *Laocoön*.<sup>46</sup>

These similarities also give the answer to the question of the triptych's relevance and significance to Theotocopoulos' painting. However, the question which has still not been answered is that of the triptych's place of execution: Candia or Venice? Throughout this brief analysis of the triptych's compositions the issues relating to both origins have come out.

43. E. W. Palm, «Zu zwei späten Bildern von El Greco», *Pantheon*, xxviii. 4, Jul.-Aug. 1970, p. 298. *L'opera completa*, pls. XLVIII-IL, LI.

44. Palm, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-299.

45. *L'opera completa*, no. 173c, pl. XXXIX.

46. *Ibid.*, no. 169a, pls. XLVII-XLVIII.

The attribution of a Cretan origin of the triptych might have depended on issues such as:

1) Its carved decoration is identical with that produced on Crete during the second half of the 16th century. Sergio Bettini has shown that this decoration had its origins in traditional Venetian woodcarving and copied a type which by the 16th century had already been given up by Venetian woodcarvers.<sup>47</sup> It continued to be produced, however, by the Cretan workshops as indicated by the triptychs painted by Georgios Klontzas. If Theotocopoulos painted this triptych in Venice did he order its wooden part from Crete?

2) The use of engravings based on the work of Venetian painters which is attested to in most of the triptych's compositions does not necessarily mean that Theotocopoulos had to be in Venice in order to have such engravings at his disposal. The wide circulation of engravings on Crete at that time is evidenced by the work of many sixteenth-century Cretan painters.<sup>48</sup>

3) The depiction of the view of Sinai makes better sense if it was done on the island of Crete. We know that Crete had very close connections with Sinai and that there was a Sinaitic metochion in Candia.<sup>49</sup> We also know a number of Cretan icons and triptychs of Sinaitic iconography. The two triptychs by Georgios Klontzas which include a view of Mt. Sinai belong to this group as probably does the Modena triptych. Furthermore, the view of Sinai on both the Modena and the Yorkshire triptychs has an identical inscription in Greek: ΤΟ ΑΓΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΟΒΑΔΙΣΤΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ ΤΟ ΣΙΝΕΟΝ which may also point in the direction of Crete.

4) The Counter-Reformation content of the central panel of the main side of the triptych with Christ crowning the soldier of Christian faith and scenes from the Life of the Church and the Last Judgement is very indicative of the religious preferences and orientation of its owner. He could be based on Crete because we can deduce that there must have been on the island members of the Counter-Reformation movement. This is indicated, for example, by the two icons painted by the Candiotte Georgios Klontzas, one in Sarajevo and the other in Copenhagen, whose compositions have been interpreted as having a Counter-Reformation context, of which the painter himself was aware.<sup>50</sup>

5) There is stylistic evidence which may also support the Cretan origin of the triptych. Some of the triptych's compositions when compared with paintings of similar subjects which Theotocopoulos executed in Venice, betray the clumsiness and inexperience of their painter while working on the Modena triptych. Thus the Modena triptych shows the state of Theotocopoulos' art just before he left Crete for Venice, where he would be able to develop his artistic potentialities to a better degree.

47. Bettini, «Maistro Menegos Theotokopoulos», pp. 244-245. R. Pallucchini, *La pittura Veneziana del Trecento*, Venice-Rome 1964, figs. 519, 622-623, 651-652, 658, 660, 707. M. Muraro, *Paolo da Venezia*, University Park - London 1970, figs. 113-114, figs. 12-13, 61 (Comparative Illustrations).

48. On the use of engravings by the Cretan painters of the 16th c. Theophanes and Michael Damaskinos and others: M. Chatzidakis, «Marcantonio Raimondi und die postbyzantinisch-kretische Malerei», *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, lix.1-2, 1940, pp. 147-161 reprinted in M. Chatzidakis, *Études sur la peinture postbyzantine*, Variorum Reprints, London 1976, no. III. Idem, «'Η κρητική ζωγραφική και ή ιταλική χαλκογραφία», *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, 1, 1947, pp. 30-35, 38-43. M. Constantoudaki, «Στοιχεία από ιταλικές χαλκογραφίες σε εικόνα του κρητικού ζωγράφου Γεωργίου Σωτήρχου», *Θησαυρίσματα*, 11, 1974, pp. 240-250. Eadem, «'Ο Θεοφάνης, ό Marcantonio Raimondi, θέματα all'antica και grottesche», *Ευφρόσυνον. 'Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, vol. 1, Athens 1991, pp. 271-281. *El Greco of Crete*, entry nos. IV, V, pp. 128-135.

49. K. Amantos, *Σύντομος Ιστορία της 'Ιερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Σινᾶ*, Thessaloniki 1953, pp. 36-42. G. S. Ploumidis, «Οἱ Σινάιτες μοναχοί, ή Κρήτη και τὸ σπήλαιο τῆς Βηθλεέμ», *Μνημόσυνον Σοφίας 'Αντωνιάδη*, Venice 1974, pp. 237-246.

50. O. Gratziou, «'Η εικόνα του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα στο Σεράγεβο και τὰ ἐπάλληλα ἐπίπεδα σημασιῶν της», *Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας*, series 4th, 14, 1987-88, pp. 9-31, esp. 24-25.



6) The strong western character exhibited by some compositions of the triptych, both iconographically and stylistically, does not necessarily support its execution in Venice. The Benaki *Adoration of the Magi*, which is believed to have been painted on Crete, also shows a strong western character and an awareness of contemporary Venetian painting.

7) Finally the type of the signature ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ used in the Modena triptych is the one that Theotocopoulos used in icons he painted on Crete: that is on the *Evangelist Luke painting the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria* and in *the Adoration of the Magi*, both in the Benaki Museum. This signature copies a traditional byzantine type, in which the expression by the hand of, is used. The fact, however, that he used the first suffix of his name only possibly shows the extent of the painter's fame in his hometown. This type of signature also copies the signature already used by the well-known Cretan painter Angelos in the first half of the 15th century.<sup>51</sup> We know, of course, that Theotocopoulos would use this type of signature again on three of his Spanish paintings (*Mary Magdalen in Penitence* in the Worcester Art Museum, *St. Veronica* in the Caturla collection in Madrid and *St. Anthony of Padua* in the Prado).<sup>52</sup>

Could these points offer firm ground for claiming the triptych's execution on Crete? I am afraid not. They just point in that direction, but more supporting evidence would have been needed.

For as long as the question of the triptych's origin has to be answered on the basis of iconographic and stylistic grounds, the eminence of Venice as the place of execution must remain strong. Because most of the triptych's compositions do not only adopt iconographic schemes which were current in Venetian painting, which could have happened with the help of engravings (these being an easily transportable material), but also display a style deeply influenced by Venetian mannerism. Theotocopoulos shows such an awareness of this style that this may presuppose his presence in the city of Venice and his direct contact with mannerist painters and paintings. It is true that he sometimes seems quite clumsy and inexperienced, but we shouldn't forget that in the Modena triptych we are following his first steps into Venetian mannerism. In any event, the engraving with the view of Sinai by Giovanni Battista Fontana, which was printed in Venice in 1569 and seems to have influenced Theotocopoulos' composition, offers a strong evidence for the triptych's execution in Venice (evidence which is also supported by the engraving of the *Last Judgement* by Battista Fontana which Theotocopoulos copied for the sea monster element on the central panel composition as well as by other engravings by Fontana, which Dr. Dillon has shown to have influenced the Modena compositions of the Baptism of Christ and of Adam and Eve). These factors are decisive and leave no doubt that the triptych was executed after the painter's arrival in Venice. That this was the case, the authenticity of the triptych once given, will have been obvious to the reader almost since the outset, and yet there is so much that points the other way. Such was the complexity of relations between Venice and Crete.

51. M. Vassilaki, «A Cretan Icon of Saint George», *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxxi, March 1989, p. 208 n. 2.

52. *L'opera completa*, no. 22a, p. 84 (*St. Veronica*), no. 25 (*St. Anthony of Padua*), no. 20a and *El Greco of Toledo*, no. 9, p. 230, pl. 34 (*Mary Magdalen in Penitence*).