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[El Greco]
[1967, 2008]

EL GRECO

The life and work of the artist illustrated with

80 COLOUR PLATES

LIONELLO PUPPI

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To Isabel
with all my love
Chris
1978

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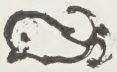

THAMES AND HUDSON

Translated from the Italian by Eva Pirie

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Life

Domenico Theotocopoulos was born at Candia on the island of Crete in 1541. There is ample evidence to substantiate this, and the date is confirmed by the artist himself, who admitted in 1606 to an 'age of sixty-five years'. Moreover, in some of his paintings, he would add to his signature the word 'Chrés' (i.e. Cretan); as for example, in the *Healing of the Blind Man* in the Pinacoteca at Parma, in the *Allegory of the Holy League* in the Escorial (*pls 9-11*); and once, when he appeared as interpreter before the Court of the Inquisition at Toledo, in a case brought against a Greek, he declared himself to be a 'native of the city of Candia'.

Very little is known about his family, which must however have been Catholic (the orthodox name corresponding to Domenico is Ciriaco) and middle-class, being civil servants in the employ of the Venetian Republic, which then ruled Crete. His father Jorghi died before 1556, and his brother Manusso, ten years his senior, worked as a customs officer. We know almost nothing about the years El Greco spent in Crete. We have good reason to believe, however, that he spent some time in the studio of one of the numerous painters at work in the island, and quickly achieved professional recognition. This has been proved by recent research into archives (Mertzios, 1962). In a deed drawn up by the lawyer Michele Morás, in which his name appears as a witness, he signed himself 'maistro Menegos Theotocopoulos sgourafos' (painter).

Shortly after that, still young but no longer obscure, he probably set sail on a ship carrying wine to Venice, where he seems to have been already established in 1567, if we may agree with most other authorities in identifying him as the 'talented young pupil' whom Titian mentions in a letter to Philip II dated 2 December of that year. The fact that El Greco went to Titian's studio as soon as he reached Venice is confirmed by reliable contemporary sources. We may well believe then that his departure from Crete was not a sudden rash decision but a premeditated move, and

that therefore his journey to Venice had been guaranteed by a letter of introduction to Titian obtained for him by Cretan painters working in the capital, such as Marco Bathà or Giorgio Scordilis or, more likely still, by his brother Manusso, who had a prominent position in the civil service, and who must thus have been in touch with influential circles in Venice.

It is a significant fact that El Greco's name never figures in the registers of the Community of San Giorgio, which in the 1550s numbered about four thousand Greeks (the majority, therefore, of those living in Venice), and among whom were many artists working especially for that community. This suggests that whatever his relationship with Titian may have been – whether he was a regular student or, more likely, merely had free access to his studio – he was working on his own account for the Venetian public, both under commission and on the open market. In any case he did not stay long in Venice, for by 1590 he was already in Rome, where he managed to make the acquaintance of the Croatian miniaturist Giulio Clovio, who evidently admired his work, for on 19 November he wrote a letter of recommendation to his protector and patron Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who was then in Viterbo.

This letter must have been favourably received, for El Greco obtained an introduction to the Farnese circle and thus had the opportunity of meeting some of the most outstanding figures in Mannerist circles in Rome. This enabled him to enrich his own cultural experience and also to give expression to his original personality.

In 1619, Mancini, who gave Domenico the nickname 'The Greek' – in Spanish, 'El Greco' – by which he was to be known from his time in Rome for the rest of his life, says of the painter, 'at a time when there were not many men in Rome with as positive or as fresh a manner as his, he became very presumptuous', and this presumption developed to such a degree, because of the success his works were having among those giving him commissions, that he exclaimed, on seeing Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, the 'decency' of which was being very heatedly discussed, that 'if the work were destroyed he would repaint it honestly ...

and make a work as good as the other, and well-painted too.'

It is impossible to say exactly how long El Greco stayed in Rome, but most critics (except Arslan, 1958) would surmise, although there is no documentary proof, that he stayed only two or three years, and then returned to Venice in about 1572. One fact is certain, however, that on 2 July 1577 he was living at Toledo in Spain, his '*patria elegida*', the 'chosen country' where he was to stay until the end of his life. We do not really know why he went to Spain, but we have reason to believe that this was not a matter of chance. On the contrary, it is probable that he went initially, in 1575 or 1576, to work at the court of Philip II, having been recommended by the sculptor Pompeo Leoni, whom he had painted, or by Fulvio Orsini, librarian of the Farnese, or even by his old master, Titian; this would support the theory of a second visit to Venice. Not having any success at court, he was encouraged to go off to a provincial city that was rich in intellectual life, and soon found the life there congenial and, eventually, indispensable to him. Toledo had been political capital of Spain until 1561, but was proud of the title it still retained of *Ciudad imperial y coronada*. It was built on a magnificent site, and had attracted some of the most distinguished Spanish artists and writers, for one reason or another and for varying lengths of time, to live there during the last decades of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth; these included Quevedo and Cervantes, Lope and Tirso, Góngora and Paravicino, and St Teresa. Cervantes, in a famous passage, describes Toledo, *Oh peñascosa pesadumbre, gloria de España y luz de sus ciudades* ('O rocky mass, glory of Spain, and light of her cities'), and Lope too, *Toledo, ciudad famosa, corona y lustre de España* ('Toledo, famous city, crown and lustre of Spain').

It would be difficult to try and discuss the historical substance and the objective reality of the undeniably fascinating '*secret of Toledo*', which fifty years ago appealed to the decadent symbolist Maurice Barrès, leading him to wild and mystifying declarations, (*El Greco, ou le secret de Tolède*) which had their imitators (though in a new form,

such as Jean Cocteau's *Le Demi-Dieu: Le Greco*, 1943). This 'secret' seems to consist of an ability to conciliate, in an extraordinary yet somehow unifying fashion, the apparently most strident contrasts: the economic prosperity resulting from the silk and steel-blade industries, and the crowds of poor people among the Galician, Asturian and Moorish immigrants; the cultural fervour of the University, which was one of the most distinguished in Europe, and of the many artistic and literary academies, and the merciless activity of the Inquisition; the gaiety of the *fiestas* in the Plaza Zocodover, and the terrifying flames of the *autos da fé*; the brilliantly colourful traders from Flanders, Italy and France, and the darkly solemn processions; the frantic building of Renaissance-style houses, and the memorials of the *mudejares*; the sumptuous churches, and the sombre enclosed monasteries; the cheerful façades of gaudy tiles (*azulejos*), and the severe stretches of stonework; and the arid soil of the hill to which the city is anchored, and the slow flow of the Tagus in the valley all around. So we shall have to consider the new surroundings in which El Greco chose to settle as the reflexion or natural product of a structural reality in which he himself participates, rather than as a beautiful or evocative backcloth to a study of El Greco's career.

From 1577, El Greco's life became very full, and he worked as painter, architect and sculptor. All these activities are recorded, both by a small number of contemporary accounts, and by numerous records in archives, which also give a fair amount of detail about his private life. From these we learn that El Greco was becoming quite wealthy, since his work was well-paid, and he tended to put his earnings into property. One of the houses he bought was to be his own house, on a splendid site overlooking the Tagus – but not, however, the house that is now known as El Greco's. He made improvements to it and added to it, and it seems much larger and more comfortable than the houses of many of the artists of his time. It must have been soon after he reached Spain that he had a *liaison* with a mysterious Doña Jerónima de las Cuevas, who was certainly of high social rank but whom El Greco seems not to have

wanted to marry, although she was the mother of his son, Jorge Manuel, who was born in 1578. Jorge Manuel always lived with his father who loved him dearly, and he too followed an artistic career. In later years the house became more cheerful with the arrival of Jorge Manuel's wife, Alfonsa de los Morales, and it was here that El Greco's grandson, Gabriel, was born.

There are few outstanding or even interesting events in El Greco's life: a few disputes with his patrons, above all when it was a question of payment, and with the fiscal authorities. He travelled very little and not very far, perhaps to the Escorial and to Madrid in 1595 or 1596 and in 1600.

During his last years he suffered from an illness which has been the subject of long and often inept discussion. Did it affect his sight, or did it aggravate his paranoid tendencies? At the worst, it clearly reduced his capacity for work, which had before been most impressive. On 31 March 1614 he dictated his will, in which he made a solemn profession of faith in 'Holy Mother Church of Rome', and declared his love for and confidence in his son, Jorge Manuel, who seems to have been the main beneficiary of the will. On 7 April he died, mourned by the intellectuals and artists of Toledo, who paid tribute to him in many ways, among which were sonnets written *in memoriam* by Paravicino and Góngora.

Some passages of the will, two inventories of El Greco's possessions, dated 12 April 1614 and 7 August 1621, and a few other reliable records lead us to think that he must have had simple, and even severe, tastes; that he was a cultured man, both in literature and philosophy; that he loved music – Martinez says that he maintained, at great cost 'salaried musicians for when he dined'; and that he liked to be alone, even though he was a fine and witty conversationalist. There was very little furniture or household goods in his vast house, only a large number of books and his paintings. Among these, according to Pacheco (1649), there were 'miniature versions of all the paintings he had ever done'. Few friends visited him at his home, and these were chosen from among those active in the intellectual

and religious life of the town. He had two servants, and, apart from Jorge Manuel, he had no regular assistant or studio hand.

The most authentic and disquieting portrait of El Greco is one dating from his stay in Rome, and comes from Giulio Clovio, in a letter in Croat, now in the Civic Museum, Split, and published by Kehrer in *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt,* 1922. It reads, 'I went to visit El Greco to ask him out for a walk through the town. It was a splendidly sunny spring day, which made us all gay. The town seemed to be in a festive mood. Imagine my surprise as I went into El Greco's studio and saw the shutters still closed so that one could hardly make out anything in the room. El Greco was sitting on a stool, neither working nor sleeping. He did not want to go out with me, because the daylight disturbed his inner light.'

Works

As I have already pointed out, it is only from very recently discovered manuscripts (Mertzios, 1960) that we know that until June 1566 El Greco was still living in Crete, where he was a professional painter with the title *maistro,* and that he cannot therefore have left for Venice until the autumn of that year. Art historians have, consequently, felt the need to re-examine the problem of the artist's formative period.

This problem was, if not easy to resolve, at least made easier to deal with when it was thought possible to fix El Greco's arrival in Venice at about 1560, when he was little more than an adolescent. This would tally with R. Pallucchini's discovery in 1937 of a work of great stylistic importance, authenticated by El Greco's signature, the small altarpiece in the Galleria Estense at Modena (*pls 1-3*), which is now considered to be the key painting of a significant group of *juvenilia.* This group of paintings, including the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Benaki Museum at Athens and that in the Museo Lazaro Galdiano at Madrid (*pl. 4*), and the *Last Supper* in the Bologna Pinacoteca, are characterized by a decidedly Western and even Venetian style, although there is also a Byzantine flavour about them, and can be dated more or less to 1565-7. They must therefore be the result of extensive contacts with Venetian artistic circles, which would have been in many ways a revelation to a sensitive young painter who was not prepared for it by his experiences in his own country. It was natural, therefore, that we should have thought that he had brought with him from Crete only the rudiments of his trade and an intimate knowledge of an exotic world of images. But now that the period of his stay in Venice has been narrowed down one must admit that, at the time he left Crete, *maistro Menegos* cannot have had so little knowledge, but must at least have had some qualifications to his professional title. This question of El Greco's years in Crete deserves consideration in detail.

The Cretan figurative tradition of the very period derives, in its stylistic mannerisms and its iconography (which are classified in the so-called *Manual of Mt Athos* of Dionysius of Furnà), from late Byzantine tendencies which are themselves a minor and rather late flowering of the Paleologue revival. On existing evidence, it would seen to have made no concessions to Western influence more radical than those which are to be found in the six well-known panels in the metropolitan church of Candia (1574-9) in which the painter Michele Damasceno makes a timid attempt to enrich traditional motifs, and to create a more 'modern' atmosphere under the influence of Bassano and Tintoretto, while preserving the fundamental structure of the local tradition. These conclusions are justified by all the existing examples of Cretan painting that are to be seen *in situ;* but it is not a mere quibble to point out that these are all public works, designed for church use, and that an alternative tradition may have existed.

It is well-known that at this very time, when Cretan painters working in Venice for the Greek community were working on religious commissions, they were no less bound by the tradition of the Paleologue revival. This sort of painting is seen in the decoration of the colony's church, San Giorgio, in the mosaics carried out between 1589 and 1606, which are still there, and the numerous icons painted between the end of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth and now mostly in the Instituto Ellenico. Some of these were painted by artists also active in Crete, including Michele Damasceno himself. Nevertheless, it has been proved that some of these painters practised a sort of pictorial bilingualism. The will of Tommaso Bathà (artist of the cartoon of the *Christ* for the vault in the apse of San Giorgio), drawn up on 11 April 1599, contains a clause leaving all his drawings to his disciple Emanuele Zanfurnari, 'those in the Greek manner as well as those in the Italian manner'. In 1964, the preparation of an exhibition of art in Apulia from late antiquity to the Rococo led to the discovery, in the church of San Benedetto di Conversano, of an altarpiece depicting the *Madonna of the Rosary,* signed by Michele Damasceno, which can be dated *c.* 1575. It was,

therefore, painted in Venice during the very period in which the same artist was painting the six panels for the metropolitan church at Candia; and yet the Conversano picture is described as a 'very ordinary western painting' in which 'one cannot, taking only the style as a basis, ascribe to the same artist who signs in Greek' icons which are characterized by smooth surfaces on which colours are fixed on a static gold background; this is in spite of Michele's significant inclination to dryness and the 'immobility' of his images.

It is obvious, then, that the Cretan painters' bilingualism, their easy manipulation of both a 'Greek manner' and an 'Italian manner', depended on the way they had to handle their commisions. In Venice, moreover, there was no official work in the 'Greek manner' apart from that involving the decoration of San Giorgio, and the Greek colony could offer little employment to the numerous painters who belonged to it. It is obvious then that they must have had to turn to a wider public, adapting themselves to its taste, and, first of all, learning to work in a figurative language that their public would be able to understand.

The situation in Crete must have been rather similar to that in Venice. First of all, there was in the island a Venetian minority which required certain specified things in the works of art it bought (above all, small devotional panels, altarpieces, etc.), and these demands excluded anything in the 'Greek manner'. There was also a substantial native Catholic community, and it is likely that religion was a determining factor in the choice of artistic styles. Furthermore, the archives reveal that between 1538 and 1578 there were several dozen painters at work in Crete, a number out of all proportion to the size of the potential market for works of art on the island, and so one would imagine that Cretan painters worked for foreign markets and supplied them not only with traditional icons (a fact that has been proved), but also with works in the western style. I am convinced that if one were to set out to identify the studios responsible for the countless pictures 'in the Italian manner', found throughout Sicily and Apulia, and above all in Dalmatia, and which have recently come on to

the market as early works of El Greco, one would often be led back to Crete.

While he was still in Candia, El Greco must have worked in one of these studios, and I now believe, contrary to my previous conviction, that he might very well have painted some of his more remarkable early paintings there, such as the *Adoration* in the Benaki museum at Athens, and that in the Museo Lazaro Galdiano in Madrid. In fact, these works are supposed to have come from Dalmatia, in the same way as the Modena altarpiece. They are signed, according to local tradition, only with his Christian name, and without the addition of *chrés* (Cretan), which, obviously unnecessary while he worked in Crete, he used for some time after his arrival in Italy. In the light of these conclusions we can now interpret the explicit statement of Paravicino, in one of the sonnets written in memory of the artist, *Creta le diò la vida y los pincels* ('Crete gave him life and his paintbrushes').

It is possible that El Greco was immediately and exclusively interested in the 'Italian manner'; whereas the complete lack of proof (in spite of far-fetched assertions that he worked for the Monastery of St Catherine on Sinai or for the convents of Mt Athos) of any involvement in a traditional movement could well fit in with his belonging to the Catholic community, not merely passively, but strictly and integrally, as to an army. In any case, Crete was not cut off from the outside world, and information about what was happening in Western, and more specifically Venetian, art reached the artists interested in the 'Italian manner'. They were well informed, thanks to a few paintings which found their way to the island and, more especially, to the wide circulation of original engravings or reproductions of famous pictures, mainly Italian ones. It would be most rewarding to extend to this specific problem, and indeed to many others, Benjamin's analysis of the consequences of the development of techniques for the reproduction of works of art. Furthermore, it has been shown (by Heydenreich, by Bettini and by Chatzidakis) that the masters of the traditional Greek style were by now quite used to adding prints of all kinds and of any origin to the iconographical reper-

toire contained in their medieval pattern books (see, for instance, the sixteenth-century cycle of the *Apocalypse* of Mt Athos, which was inspired by post-Dürer German prints).

El Greco, in effect, in his first works, seems to be 'trying to acquire a formal, western syntax, with which to express the most traditional and intimate part of his sensibility: that is to say, colour' (Pallucchini, 1937). He worked continually on prints – he never copied them slavishly, but always adapted them to his own ideas, selecting above all those in the mannerist style, which were characterized by a tendency to deform figures and by a decidedly anti-naturalistic spirit. They were therefore congenial to a temperament which had been shaped by, and which had worked on, the local culture. In other words, El Greco created a new style, in which the typical structures of the Paleologue revival were either absent or at least unrecognizable, and which makes itself felt in an obvious love of elongated figures, in the related disregard of perspective, in illusionism, and lastly, in a love of an antitonality in colours, where we have the most vivid proof of his artistic background. It must be understood that during this period, when it now seems that he was still in Crete, El Greco was still an artisan – a painter of icons, but in the 'Italian manner' – whose technique bears the stamp of the local studios. The 'continual transcription of mannerist engravings' was destined not only to give him the abstract qualifications of stylistic excellence and dignity, but to deepen the '(artist's) sympathy for the agitation and the resultant deformation which characterize them' (Pallucchini, 1965). Thus he acquired an attitude of incomprehension and diffidence towards the naturalistic currents of the Renaissance, which, as it developed, involved him in the problems of mannerism. When El Greco arrived in Venice, and began to look around, he had no prejudices to hinder him from making contact with the major currents of local painting, which were to offer him elements that he could incorporate into his own style – elements of culture in the widest sense of the word. He did not, as a result, have any violent preferences, even for Titian, to whom he was recommended and whose

studio he must have frequented, although an undeniable interest in Titian is evident in, for example, the *Healing of the Blind Man* in Parma (*pls 5-6*), where he tries to give the figures an effect of weight, and to organize the sources of light, in order to achieve harmony between space, light and atmosphere. However this may be, there is no doubt that in time the young El Greco was genuinely interested in and attracted by Jacopo Bassano, who in the 1570s had completed some of his most remarkable 'nocturnes'. El Greco's various replicas of the *Boy blowing on charcoal* (the very beautiful version at Capodimonte was, however, painted at Rome) are a proof of this interest in Bassano. He was also drawn towards the visionary quality which Tintoretto was beginning to manifest at about this time.

We might enquire at this point whether his interest in Tintoretto was not perhaps more than a mere interest in style, or rather, whether his initial interest in the style was not developed to a point where it encountered the complex temperament which had produced that style. Ch. de Tolnay has shown – and R. Pallucchini has taken up the theme again – that Tintoretto believed the sources of his art to be a fervent awareness of that 'spontaneous movement, deeply alive and positive' in its efforts to recapture the most authentic Christian values (I quote from Cantimori's notes on a well-known essay by Hubert Jedin), which existed side by side with the authoritarian and reactionary official Counter-Reformation, and which has been aptly described as the true 'Catholic Reformation'. This awareness found its expression in anxiety and doubts, which are evident in his choice of style and imagery, just as the moral and intellectual climate of the age were anxious and doubting. And this, after all, was very like the climate in which El Greco had been born, in a Catholic community which existed as an isolated minority, and from which he inherited an intransigence which was later to develop into a deep spiritual yearning.

We cannot say exactly when the artist bought many of the significant books which were later to be found in his library at Toledo, from the *Acts of the Apostles* to various editions

of the Fathers; but signs of an austere 'Catholic Reformation' piety first appear during his stay in Rome. His curt dismissal of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* has already been quoted (p. 4); it implies that he subscribed to the violent and puritanical censure first formulated by Pietro Aretino. Behind his attitude lies a refusal, characteristic of the Catholic Reformation spirit in general, to recognize in Michelangelo's work his own inner *angst*. Michelangelo's influence on El Greco's own style suffices to prove that this outburst was a complex emotional reaction rather than a considered judgment. It is also possible that he was out of sympathy with Michelangelo's 'sculptural' approach to painting; in 1611 he remarked to Pacheco that 'Michelangelo was a good man, but he couldn't paint'.

When he arrived in Rome he was no longer a *madonero*, a painter of icons. Although still young, he was already a confirmed artist, 'an excellent painter', who had access to the best-known artistic circles. He began to frequent the milieux he found most congenial, and Mancini (*c.* 1619) records him in the company of Muziani, Taddeo Zuccari and Sermoneta. He must certainly have studied the works of art that surrounded him, especially those of Pierin del Vaga, of Venusti, and, in spite of all his protestations, those of Michelangelo, whose various *Pietàs* were to inspire El Greco's own version of the theme, a *Deposition* now in the Johnson Collection in Philadelphia, one of the major works of his Roman period and a work of a hallucinatory quality. Mrs du Gué Trapier (1958) has pointed out that for El Greco – now called by this nickname – the Palazzo Farnese must have been a landmark, with its art collections which were rich both in antiques and contemporary works, and a place where he could come into daily contact with men of the quality of the librarian, Fulvio Orsini, and of Giulio Clovio. El Greco's relationship with the latter deserves more study. On the one hand, as regards style, Giulio's work in the field of book-illustration certainly influenced El Greco, as in his work in the *Officiolo* in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, and in the *Codex* in the Soane Museum, London. On the other hand, it would be interesting to know whether the high level of

culture (in the widest sense of the word) which El Greco was to show in Spain (his library, etc.), had its origins in his intimacy with the Croatian humanist and miniaturist, and also to find concrete proof of cultural exchange between the two men.

El Greco was living in Rome at a most interesting moment in history, when the Pope was Pius V, the upstart, the Dominican ascetic who, as we have already said, was hard and intolerent, living in a medieval and biblical atmosphere. He was the true, and perhaps the only, Pope of the 'Catholic Reformation'. Mancini suggests that the reason for El Greco's leaving Rome was the hostility aroused by his irreverent criticism of Michelangelo. This may be the case, although the explanation is perhaps too facile. It would be interesting to know whether El Greco's departure was not perhaps connected with the death of Pius V, whose successor Gregory XIII immediately showed that he had none of his predecessor's burning zeal for reform. His policies were motivated by caution and opportunism. Bishop Filippo Sega, in the *Cod. Ottob. Lat. 2473,* quoted by Carocci, remarked that the true work of reform ended with Pius V.

In any case it is not unlikely that El Greco returned to Venice, and stopped on the way at Siena, where he studied the works of Beccafumi. Once in Venice, he directed all his interest to Tintoretto, whom his experiences in the mannerist world of Rome enabled him to reappraise with a new knowledge, and to understand thoroughly. Pallucchini (1965) writes that from now on, El Greco, 'with the strength of his experiences in Rome behind him, casts off light effects of Byzantine origin, the construction of the painting, based on an undulating line, becomes firmer, tending to a new and unrealistic sense of space, and thus to new experiments with perspective and atmosphere.' Pallucchini goes on to say that El Greco, besides using 'Beccafumi's smoky *chiaroscuro*', is indebted to Tintoretto for 'morphological quotations, elements of typology, contrasting movements, ... intonations that are livid in colour, backgrounds of ghostly crowds.' The result of this in seen in the series of *Annunciations* in the Prado, in the Contini

Bonacossi Collection in Florence, and in the Muñoz Collection in Barcelona, and also in the extraordinary *Deposition* in the Broglie collection in Paris, which foreshadows the poetic invention El Greco was to develop during his stay in Spain. The very different components of El Greco's figurative culture that are present in the *Deposition* are most difficult to disentangle, blended as they are in a style that is at once original and incomparable. It is complete in itself and its structures cannot be penetrated from the outside.

At this point El Greco's career took a new turn which precluded the possibility of acquiring new means of expression; Spain, whether it could supply him with any or not, does not count in the matter. His 'creative determinant' – to adapt the phrase used by Louis Althusser in his exemplary essay on Cremonini – has become, in the most inflexible and rigorous way, the work itself, which is related only to its *own* painter. There ensued a period of furious experimentation during which his inner spiritual crisis came to a head in an extreme state of tension. His 'creative determinant' constantly needed linguistic contributions (in the wide sense); El Greco gathered these from wherever he pleased, and in this way he established a number useful but superficial relationships, through a stimulus of encounters and comparisons.

This leads to another crucial problem: that of 'El Greco the mystic'. The difficulty here lies in establishing and maintaining the distinction between the inner spiritual drama and the structure of the works. Thus, Florisoone (1957) is right in saying that El Greco is not a mystic; but he is not convincing when he justifies his theory by observing that the images used exclude all elements proper to mystical experience, above all, an amorous, tranquil and gentle feeling for nature, and concludes that El Greco just missed being a mystic. El Greco was not a mystic because he was only an artist. When, to use an analogy proposed by Florisoone, St John of the Cross wants to translate his personal experience on to a figurative plane he acts within the limits of a purely automatic action, so that, for example, the well-known drawing of the *Vision of the*

Crucifix in the Convent of the Incarnation in Avila, does not come into the aesthetic sphere, in so far as it is only supposed to be a mere and immediate transcript of mystical experience. Dalí, the surrealist and mystifier, must have been well aware of this, since he had St John's drawing in mind when he painted his well-known *Crucifix* by a most refined intellectual process. In his art, El Greco reflects and affirms the reality of a cultural and ideological sphere in which he lives and suffers; his works constitute a record, on a creative and aesthetic level, of the ferment created by the 'Catholic Reformation'. He reflects this cultural background both in his anxious and highly personal stylistic experimentation and, it seems to me, in his failure in society. Although we have no documents to prove it, it would seem that when El Greco went to Spain he first lived in Madrid, at the court of Philip II, defender of Christianity, probably to work at the Escorial. The king also had some part in commissioning the paintings *Allegory of the Holy League* (*pls 9-11*) and the *Martyrdom of St Maurice* (*pls 15-16*) which were completed about 1580 at Toledo, and these could therefore be considered as consequences of a relationship established during a short stay at the court in Madrid. El Greco was, most likely, not really at ease in that milieu. The king considered art and culture as instruments to be used in the service of his own political designs, which, in their basic aim of cementing the unity of Spain as a nation, of creating a pure Spanish spirit and building a line of defences against every possibility of Europeanization, had found support in those members of the religious hierarchy who were most opposed to any spirit of reform, which they suspected of heresy and Lutheranism.

El Greco's decision to move to Toledo can be explained, as one might expect, by the position of the city, the former capital of the Empire. It was not only a centre of intellectual life but also a stronghold of those who had been the most open and sincere reformers, and of the cultural forces closely allied to the moral climate of reform. Consider, for example, the survival of Erasmian humanism, observed by Marcel Bataillon, which became more lively as the opposition to it became more determined. Since we can give

valid historical reasons for El Greco's choice of Toledo we can discount Americo Castro's explanations which are founded on hypotheses and presuppositions, and which would lead us to suppose that it is the result of feeling that he must express the soul of Castile in her innermost being, and to identify his 'own *Erlebnis*' with the '(perennial) existence' of Spain. This choice can also be seen as his acceptance of a state of arduous and dramatic isolation and solitude, and his decision to work without there being any possibility of a confrontation except with himself. Goethe was to say later that 'to distract one from the world there was nothing surer than art'; and El Greco's well-known intolerance of the desires or criticisms of his patrons is most significant. One cannot but compare him with the other great Toledan exiles, St Teresa and St John of the Cross, in their choice of mysticism and their refuge into prayer. How far this was from the worldly openness of St Ignatius!

The first works painted in Toledo show a tendency, which was, to a certain extent, a legacy of his youthful training as a Byzantine artisan, to reduce his iconographic repertory. Images were being gradually denuded of significance and turned into pretexts for a free pictorial discourse which found its significance within itself, in its internal relationships. Pallucchini (1956) says that his 'expressive fantasy is stimulated, every time anew, by the re-creation of a scheme and of a model'. The figures are arranged in a timeless space, they are drawn out in length and in breadth, and they move, moulded in an incandescent colour-scheme that is at once luminous and phantasmagorical. There is now only a very tenuous relationship to tangible reality; we are not yet in the realm of expressionistic abstraction, but perhaps one might say that the painting is on the plane of metaphor. García Lorca, in his fine essay on Góngora, said, 'Metaphor unites two worlds, with a daring leap of the imagination.'

During the 1580s, from the pictures painted for San Domingo el Antiguo to the *Burial* at least, there does exist a dialogue between the world of the senses and the world of the spirit, and it finds its expression in metaphor. This

is not the place to consider the extent to which El Greco's participation in the movements of reform was influenced by neoplatonism. That he was interested in it would seem to be proved by the presence among his books not only of a work by Francesco Patrizi, but of a copy of the *Hierarchia celestis* (with its theory of light) by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, which might give some 'theoretical' basis to his work on the effects of light. However, it is also interesting to note, with Cassou (1931), the extraordinary affinity of his structures with Góngora's Euphuistic or 'conceited' style. 'The bombast and solemnity of those verses, the rarity of the expressions, the drawing out of the syntax, alternating with sudden abbreviated forms and the suppression of the articles, which give greater weight and intensity to the substantives, his way of blocking the sentence in such a manner as not to let the mind relax or take breath': all this corresponds, in every detail, to the way in which El Greco constructs his masterpieces. He presents the figures, Unamuno adds, 'like visions, like dreams of the natural world, rather than as copies or transcriptions of it'. From the last decade of the sixteenth century and up to his very last paintings, this effort to spiritualize his paintings reaches its most dazzling heights. The connections fall apart, the figures lose all corporeality and become moving tongues of fire, flashing like lightning in a completely ethereal space. There is no doubt left that the world of the spirit is more important than that of reality. Unamuno, again, says that the 'frontiers between waking and sleeping disappear, and the dream is life'. The inner life on which the painter has meditated during his long hours of solitude penetrates the substance of the painting, and itself becomes the painting.

So astonishing is the artist's constant and lucid awareness of his inner life that it is impossible to compare it with anything else; and not only this awareness, but also his ability to transform it into a 'creative disposition', which he then manages to recapture in his work, using, to the point of exhaustion, all the stylistic means at his disposal. 'When one looks closely,' writes Pallucchini (1956), 'at a detail of the *Assumption* in the Museum of San Vicente,

Detail of the Assumption of the Virgin, *in the Museum of San Vicente, Toledo (see text, pp. 20, 22)*

Toledo, or at the *St Ildefonso* once at Illescas and now in the Prado, or at the *Zuloaga Apocalypse* [or the *Laocoön, pl. 73*], one is amazed by the mysterious stuff which makes up the chromatic material of those paintings: it is "shaping without shape" . . . which suggests the appearance of the figures, rising out of the greyish background in an interplay of filmy brushstrokes.' One is reminded of Sartre's words – implying the intuition of a critical instrument at work – that Tintoretto's anguish is turned into colour.

From Crete to Venice, to Rome, Venice again, and lastly Toledo. From his obscure post-Byzantine apprenticeship to his participation in the great Venetian tradition, to the bold and decisive experiments of his mannerist period, there runs through El Greco's career an absolutely unfailing coherence, which leads him to work out an incomparable means of expression, and which we would be rash to try to reduce, even if only for the legitimate purpose of definition, to the usual categories of the art-historian, and which it is certainly wrong to try to explain as the expression of an immutable collective 'soul', whether that of Spain, or, worse still, that of a generic, or mythical, East. This short book, which sets out to discover the various external phases of El Greco's career through the language of the paintings, is meant to show that this coherence was guaranteed by El Greco's ability to become completely absorbed in a strange milieu, historically recognizable and definable, within a unique and contradictory complex of circumstances fraught with other and perhaps contrasting moods. Taken in this sense, El Greco's work constitutes one of his age's supreme moments of self-recognition, and bears witness, perhaps, to an aspiration doomed to failure. His last works do indeed, in the words of Ortega, look alarmingly like 'a little matter set to burn'.

El Greco and the Critics

Until at least the middle of the seventeenth century El Greco's merit was almost unanimously accepted in artistic circles. Even during El Greco's lifetime, Padre José de Sigüenza, in the third part of his *Historia de la Orden de San Jerónimo,* published in 1605, gives a very flattering opinion of the painter, and this is repeated by Francisco Pacheco, the painter and essayist, who visited El Greco's studio in 1611. He gives an account of this visit in his work *Arte de la Pintura* (which did not come out until 1649). The opinion of El Greco's contemporaries is reflected in the sonnets *in memoriam*, mentioned earlier on, by Góngora and Paravicino. The latter, returning to the subject in his *Oraciones Evangélicas* (1640), praises El Greco for his unconditional artistic freedom. He continues to be named among the greatest painters by Cristobal Suárez de la Figueroa: *Plaza universal de todas Ciencias y Artes,* 1615; by Juan de Butron: *Discursos apologéticos . . . del arte de la pintura,* 1626; by Garcia de Salcedo Coronel: in the Madrid edition of Góngora's works, 1648; by Padre Francisco de los Santos: *Descripción de San Lorenzo de El Escorial,* 1657 ed.; etc.

A most interesting account of the painter's stay in Rome was written by Giulio Mancini between 1614 and 1619, but published only in 1914 by Longhi, in *L'Arte,* from Ms. 5571 in the Marciana. On the other hand, an allusion to the '*pittura goffa del Greco . . . sciocco pittor*' ('the clumsy painting of El Greco . . . a stupid painter') by the poet Giambattista Marino in *La Galleria,* 1620, seems rather surprising at first, but, when one looks more closely, is consistent with the Italian poet's love of virtuosity, what Hocke defined as 'the lyric poetry of the *commedia d'Arte*'. In the *Discursos praticables del nobilísimo arte de la pintura,* collected *c.* 1675 but printed only in 1853, Jusepe Martinez is very insistent, for the first time, on El Greco's 'extravagant and capricious manner'. This axiomatic opinion is not contradicted, but is attenuated to some extent, by

the statement that such a style 'was only good for (El Greco)'.

With the establishment of the naturalistic and academic conventions which were followed by purist tendencies and neoclassicism, we come to a complete reversal of opinion on the painter. His extravagance and caprice, which were considered the only significant aspects of his painting, were decried. Already in 1724, Palomino in his *Parnaso español pintoresco y laureado* denounced El Greco's painting as 'contemptible and ridiculous', an opinion that was echoed by Preciado de la Vega in 1765, and Mayáns Siscar in 1776, whose views were printed by Sánchez Cantón in his *Fuentes Literarias*. There was, however, an attempt to redeem El Greco's reputation on the grounds of his technical skill, and it as pronounced exceptional but misdirected (see Antonio Ponz: *Viaje de España*, 1772-94). Little by little El Greco was forgotten and his painting no longer studied. The Abbé de Fontenai in his *Dictionnaire des Artistes*, 1782, and F. Quilliet in his *Dictionnaire des Peintres Espagnols*, 1816, do not even mention him; Ticozzi, in the *Dizionario dei Pittori*, 1818, confounds El Greco with the minor painter Domenico Dalle Greche, whilst Théophile Gautier, in the journal of his travels in Spain in 1840, declares that he is hardly known outside Spain. All the same, Gautier himself finds in some of the Toledan paintings a 'mad energy, a sick power', that he considers truly genial.

But it was not long before El Greco was recognized again, by the artists and poets of the romantic movement. Baudelaire was most interested in him, and he was admired by Manet, Millet, Delacroix, and Fortuny, who owned paintings by him (cf. Xavier de Salas: 'La valoración del Greco por los romanticos españoles y franceses', in *Archivo Español de Arte y Arq.*, 1941). In official circles, critical opinion was, as usual, behind the times. In 1881, Federico de Madrazo, a senior official of the Prado, said of El Greco's paintings that the was sorry 'not to be able to throw such absurd caricatures out of the Museum'. However the *fin de siècle* created a suitable climate for a reinstatement of the painter, and in 1897 an art historian, K. Justi, wrote a

definitive account of El Greco in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst.* This was followed in 1902 by an exhibition of El Greco's work in the Prado, which was accompanied by a critical catalogue written by Viniegra. In 1908 Manuel B. Cossío published his important monograph, and in 1910 Borja de San Roman, in his *El Greco en Toledo,* gave the first valuable account of his research into the archives, which was substantially augmented by a further article published in 1927, 'De la vida del Greco', in *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueologia.* Other works which are significant in this first phase of the rediscovery of El Greco are: Meier-Graefe: *Spanische Reise,* 1910; Maurice Barrès' famous *El Greco, ou le secret de Tolède,* 1910; the first work by Kehrer on the painter: *Die Kunst des Greco,* 1914; and an essay by Unamuno in *Rassegna d'Arte,* 1914. In some cases criticism is vitiated by the positivist assumption that the artist's style was pahologically determined (see: A. Goldschmidt, 'Grecos Augenkrankheit', in *Süddeutsche Monatshefte,* 1911; C. Juarros, 'La Locura del Greco', in *Esculapio,* 1914; E. Tormo: 'Los médicos y el caso del Greco', in *Por el Arte,* 1913; M. Benitens, *Aberaciones del Greco cientificamente consideradas,* 1913, and *El astigmatismo del Greco,* 1914).

In other cases, the value of the criticism is compromised by an unjustified, though interesting and suggestive, attempt to locate El Greco's art in the great tradition of Spanish mysticism (see: K. Steinbach: 'Greco und die spanische Mystik', in *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft,* 1913; J. Lopez Cedillo de Ayala: '*De la religiosidad y del misticismo en las obras del Greco*', 1915). The growing interest in the theories of expressionism in poetry and the beginnings of a critical historical reappraisal of mannerism, encouraged the acceptance of El Greco as one of the great representatives of his time. In 1921 Dvořák gave a famous lecture on El Greco, 'Über Greco und Manierismus' (printed in *Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*) in which he offers a spiritualistic interpretation of his work, which gave further weight to this revaluation. This interpretation is inevitably of the utmost importance in such books as Mayer's *El Greco,* 1926 and 1931, Cassou's *Le Greco,* 1931, and, in

particular, in several passages in a most discerning essay by F. Antal: 'Zum Problem des niederländischen Manierismus', in *Kritische Berichte,* 1928-9.

It soon became increasingly necessary to trace the history of El Greco's activity before he came to Spain, to analyse the elements of Byzantine influence that remained in his art, and the extent to which he was influenced by the Italian artistic tradition. Since the publication of Longhi's note, quoted above, included as an appendix to the transcription of Mancini's text, and Willumsen's pages, which are, to tell the truth, often debatable (see: *La jeunesse du peintre El Greco,* vol. I, 1927), there have been essays by Waterhouse: 'El Greco's Italian period', in *Art Studies,* 1930; by Brizio: 'Il Greco a Venezia', in *L'Arte,* 1932; and by Fiocco: 'El Maestro del Greco', in *Revista española de Arte,* 1934, and the article 'El Greco' in the *Enciclopedia Italiana,* 1933. There are also articles by Byron: 'Greco: the epilogue to Byzantine Culture', in *The Burlington Magazine,* 1929; by Schweinfurth: 'Greco und die italokretische Schule', in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift,* 1930; and by Talbot-Rice: 'El Greco and Byzantium', in *The Burlington Magazine,* 1937.

In 1937, just before the great exhibition of El Greco's works organized by the Gazette des Beaux-Arts, the catalogue of which was by Rubinstein and Busuiceanu, R. Pallucchini found in the repository of the Galleria Estense, Modena, the well-known little triptych which was most important for a correct evaluation of El Greco's formative period.

Following N. Cossío de Jimenez's contribution to the biographical studies in *El Greco: Notes on his Birthplace.* etc., 1948, two big volumes appeared in 1950, by J. Camón Aznar, called *Domenico Greco.* These are characterized by a lack of organization and of selectivity in the presentation of critical material, but they are an inexhaustible mine of information, to which the present author must acknowledge his debt in the writing of this book. In 1950 too, Chatzidakis, writing on 'Theotokopouli and Cretan Culture' (in Greek) in *Kritiká Chronicá*; and in 1952, Bettini: 'Precisazione sull'attività giovanile del Greco', in *Arte Veneta*; and

Procopio: 'El Greco and Cretan painting', in *The Burlington Magazine* (together with a reply by A. G. Xydis), all discovered new critical material for a deeper study of El Greco's artistic apprenticeship. In 1953 a new exhibition was organized in Bordeaux, dedicated to *Le Greco: de la Crète à Tolède par Venise,* with a catalogue by G. Martin-Méry, with a foreword by R. Pallucchini. In the meantime, the discovery of El Greco as a painter of icons had had disturbing repercussions in the antique world, where, in the 1950s, the market was flooded by works bearing the name of El Greco but often of doubtful origin and mediocre quality. This situation is reflected in the grossly inflated catalogue of *Greco's Italian Period,* published by M. S. Soria in *Arte Veneta,* 1954. Soria corrected himself in 1960 in the article 'Algunos madoneros venecianos', in *Goya*; cf. also the article by L. Puppi: 'Il Greco giovane e altri pittori "madonneri" di maniera italiana a Venezia nella seconda metà del Cinquecento', which appeared in *Prospettive*, 1962.

To conclude this brief review of studies on El Greco we must mention also A. Vallentin: *El Greco,* 1955, on the psychoanalytical and mystical aspects of his work, and for a more interesting study of the mystical aspect, H. Hetzfeld: 'Textos teresianos aplicados a la interpretación del Greco', in *Clovileño,* 1950. On El Greco's works in general, see R. P. Bruno: *L'Espagne mystique au XVI siecle,* 1946; P. Guinard: *Greco,* 1956; R. Pallucchini: *Il Greco,* 1956; M. Florisoone: 'La mystique plastique du Greco et les antécédents de son style', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* 1957; E. du Gué Trapier: 'El Greco in the Farnese Palace, Rome', in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* 1958; E. Arslan: the article 'El Greco' in the *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte,* 1958; H. Soehner: articles in *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst,* 1957, 1958-9, 1960; K. Ipser: *El Greco: der Maler des Christlichen Weltbildes,* 1960; P. Kelemen: *El Greco revisited,* 1961; C. D. Mertzios: 'Domenico Theotokopoulos: nouveaux éléments biographiques', in *Arte Veneta,* 1961 (a most important collection of documents); Goldscheider: *El Greco,* 1954 (a new edition of the 1938 monograph); H. Hauser: *Der Manierismus,* 1964.

Lastly we must mention Wethey's two-volume monograph *El Greco and his School,* 1962, which is very useful in so far as it goes into some important problems which up to now have been insufficiently studied, as, for example, El Greco's architectural and sculptural works, but it is invalid as regards other aspects of El Greco's work, especially in the attempt to deny that El Greco ever painted icons or the Modena triptych and the group of paintings related to it. Wethey's theories were supported by Arslan in the article: 'Cronistoria del Greco madonnero', in *Commentari,* 1964, but they were energetically opposed by R. Longhi in the article: 'Una monografia su El Greco e due suoi inediti', in *Paragone 159,* 1963, and by R. Pallucchini in his article 'Il Greco a Venezia', in *Venezia e l'Oriente fra tardo Medioevo e Rinascimento,* 1965. In my opinion, Longhi and Pallucchini have restated the problem in valid and realistic terms.

Notes on the Plates

1-3 Altarpiece. On the outside: left, *Annunciation*; centre, *View of Mount Sinai*: right, *Adam and Eve with their Creator;* on the inside; left, *Adoration of the Shepherds*; centre, *Allegory of the Christian Knight*; right, *Baptism of Christ.* Tempera on panel, 37 × 23.8 cm. (the centre panels) and 24 × 18 cm. (the side panels). Modena, Galleria Estense. Signed: CHEIR DOMENÍKOU. This painting came to Modena from the Obizzi Collection in the Castello del Catajo near Battaglia Terme. It was first recognized by R. Pallucchini (1937), as a key painting of El Greco's early period as a painter of icons; it can be dated *c.* 1567. All scholars have agreed with this attribution, with the exception of Wethey (1962), who seems to have little justification for considering it to be the work of a Domenico, not necessarily El Greco, but perhaps the *madonero* (painter of madonnas in the 'Italian manner') who signed a *Virgin with St Luke* in the Benaki Museum at Athens. Recently Longhi (1960) and Pallucchini again (1965) have made convincing claims for El Greco's authorship of this picture as well as that of a group of other pictures of similar style, and which one must take together with this one. El Greco has tried to give this altarpiece, which was perhaps painted before he left Crete for Venice, a 'Western' structure, and has quite obviously been inspired by engravings, the majority of which can be identified. The *Adoration* is derived from several engravings: from one by the artist who signed himself I. B. and which reproduces the painting in the style of Titian now in the Pitti; one by Bonasone; and one by Parmigianino. The *Annunciation* is inspired by a well-known print by Caraglio, also inspired by Titian; and the *View of Mount Sinai* (a replica of which existed in the Hatvany Collection at Budapest, but is now lost) comes from one of the numerous *Views* which circulated in the Christian communities of the East. Recently V. H. Miesel in an article: 'La tabla central del Tríptico de Modena' in *Archivo español de arte,* 1953, pointed out a passage in the Epistle to Timothy (4,7-8) which may be the iconographic source of the *Allegory.* Meyer (1939), in 'Notes on the Early Greco' in *The Burlington Magazine,* had already called attention to an anonymous woodcut of 1558 which was reproduced in an engraving by Andreani in 1590, together with the verses from Paul's epistle. Lastly, the picture of Hell, represented here as a sea-monster devouring the damned, belongs to Byzantine tradition and appears, for example, in the Mt Athos cycles.

4 Adoration of the Magi. Panel, 45 × 52 cm. Madrid, Museo Lazaro Galdiano. When this painting was still in the Kieslinger collection it was attributed to Marescalchi, but it has since been assigned by Mayer (1939) to El Greco. Camón Aznar (1950) dates it at the beginning of the 1570s, and Pallucchini, in 'Some early

works of El Greco' in *The Burlington Magazine* (1948), and Sotia (1954), have pointed out its similarity to the Modena altarpiece, whilst Wethey strikes it out of the catalogue of El Greco's works – where all the experts, and even Soehner (1958-9) had accepted its place – to attribute it to the painter of the *Virgin with St Luke* in the Benaki museum. El Greco perhaps based this painting, which was probably painted in Crete, *c.* 1565, on a print of the picture in the style of Titian in the Ambrosiana.

5-6 Healing of the Blind Man. Oil on canvas, 50 × 61 cm. Parma, Pinacoteca Nazionale. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS KRÈS ÈPOÍEI. In the 1680 inventory of the Palazzo Farnese del Giardino at Parma it was recorded as a work by Veronese. Waterhouse (1930) dated it 1569-70, and Ipser (1960) and Wethey (1962) among others, agree with this dating. Cossío (1908), however, favours 1571-6, and Mayer (1962) and Pallucchini (1956) favour *c.* 1574. The fact that it comes from a Farnese collection does suggest that it was painted in Rome, and therefore after 1570. In any case it must have been painted very soon after his arrival there, and is in the style he developed during his three years' stay in Venice.

7 Portrait of Giulio Clovio. Oil on canvas, 58 × 86 cm. Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS KRÈS ÈPOÍEI. This painting was also in the Farnese inventory of 1680. All the experts from Cossío (1908) to Wethey (1962) agree in assigning this picture to El Greco's period in Rome, and this has been confirmed by Mrs du Gué Trapier (1958) who has identified the book held by Clovio as the *Officiolo della Madonna,* which Clovio finished in 1546 for Cardinal Farnese and is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. El Greco could only have seen and copied the miniatures on the pages in the Farnese library in Rome. The miniatures are those of the *Creation* and the *Holy Family.*

8 Boy blowing Charcoal. Oil on canvas, 59 × 51 cm. Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. In the 1662 Farnese inventory it was already described correctly as 'a picture on canvas of a young man blowing on a coal to get a light, by the hand of El Greco' (in G. Campori, *Raccolte di cataloghi,* 1870). The subject of this painting comes from the work of Jacopo Bassano, to whom even this picture was once wrongly attributed (A. Venturi). There are many versions of this painting, some of them signed, as for example, the one in the Ch. S. Peyson Collection in Monhasset; they are listed by Camón Aznar (1950). Experts are unanimous in assigning this picture to the Italian period; Waterhouse's dating (1950) of 1572-3 seems the most convincing.

9-11 Allegory of the Holy League. Oil on canvas, 140 × 110 cm. El Escorial: Chapter House of the Monastery of San Lorenzo. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS KRÈS ÈPOÍEI. The subject of this painting has been interpreted in various ways: as the *Dream of Philip II* (Polero y Toledo in the 1857 catalogue of the paintings

in the Escorial) or as the *Adoration of the Name of Jesus* (Philippians II, 10-11; according to Padre de Los Santos, 1657). Blunt gives the correct interpretation in the *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes,* 1938-40; this is an *Allegory of the Alliance of the Papacy and Venice*, the alliance which vanquished the Turks at Lepanto in 1571. In the centre of the composition we see Pius V with Philip II and the Doge Alvise Mocenigo. Wethey (1962) dates the picture *c.* 1579, since, as Blunt does, he identifies the warrior in Roman costume looking up to heaven as Don John of Austria who died in Flanders in 1578 and was brought to the Escorial to be buried the next year. There seem to be a connection between the commissioning of the work and the transfer to Spain of the soldier's body. This would seem to be confirmed by fact that the painting was originally in the Pantheon of the Escorial. For other reasons, other experts such as Mayer, 1926; Kehrer, 1931; Arslan, 1958; Hauser, 1964; and Cossío, 1908, prefer 1600. There may well be some doubt about the 1579 dating since the picture has obvious affinities with El Greco's Italian style, in the way he depicts Hell as a sea-monster, and the fact that the sketch for the painting, now in the National Gallery, London, is very Italian in style. However, it is worth considering the 1576-7 dating of Camón Aznar (1950) and of Soehner (1957); that is to say, immediately after his arrival in Spain, perhaps during his brief stay in the court at Madrid.

12 Christ Despoiled (*El Espolio*). Oil on canvas, 285 × 173 cm. Toledo, Cathedral Sacristy. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTO (...) KRÈS ÈP (...). There is documentary evidence for the dating of this painting: a first payment for it, on 2 July 1577, which is the first record of El Greco's presence in Spain, leads us to think that he had not got very far with the painting. We also know that in 1578 El Greco '*esta haciendo... el quadro*' ('is still doing the painting'), which was to be finished by 15 May 1579. The subject – Christ being stripped of his garments – is extremely rare, and taken from the *Meditationes de Passione Jesu Christi* of St Bonaventure (cf. J. M. de Azcarate's note: 'La iconografia de El Espolio del Greco', in *Archivio español de Arte,* 1955). For the many replicas cf. *pl. 18* and Wethey's list (1962).

13 The Holy Trinity. Oil on panel, 300 × 178 cm. Madrid, Prado. This was originally painted as part of the altarpiece for the high altar of the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo, which was taken apart at the beginning of the nineteenth century and went partly to the Prado and partly to the Art Institute of Chicago (the *Assumption*). For an account of the part played by El Greco, which has been well documented, from 1577-9, at the moment when the Church was built (and also later on after 1608), in supplying designs for the architectural surrounds of the high altar and the two side altars and for the sculptures they embody, see Camón Aznar (1950) and the further details given by Wethey (1962). It is worth noting that the subject is derived from a version of

Dürer's well-known engraving, remodelled under the influence of *Pietàs* like those of Michelangelo. Du Gué Trapier, in *El Greco: Early years in Toledo, 1576-86* (1958), has pointed to resemblances with Correggio's *Deposition* in the Parma Pinacoteca, and with a drawing for a *Pietà* by Palma il Giovane in the Louvre.

14 Portrait of a man with his hand on his breast. Oil on canvas, 66 cm. Madrid, Prado. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. Experts are almost unanimous in dating this very famous portrait between 1578 and the early 1580s. The subject is perhaps Juan de Silva, Marquis of Montemayor. The attitude of the sitter was perhaps suggested by the first of the four '*adiociones*' mentioned in the *Ejercicios espirituales* of St Ignatius Loyola (Cassou, 1931): 'every time we fall into sin... (let us) put our hand to our breast'.

15-16 Martyrdom of St Maurice and the Theban Legion. Oil on canvas, 448 × 331 cm. El Escorial: Chapter House of the Monastery of San Lorenzo. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. We know from a note made by Philip II who commissioned the work that on 25 April 1580 the picture was already being painted; on 2 September 1572 it was finished (Wethey, 1962). We are told by P. Sigüenza (1605) that the picture, not unusually, did not please the king, who had a substitute painted of the same subject by an obscure Italian painter called Romolo Cincinnato. The iconography of this painting, which is on three ideological levels demonstrating the cultural bases of the reform movement, i. e. the holiness which is the requisite for martyrdom; the cruelty of the martyrdom itself; the martyr's glorification by angels (cf. Camón Aznar, 1950), is perhaps derived ultimately from Jacopo da Varagine's *Golden Legend*, through other Italian works such as Pontormo's *Martyrdom of Four Saints* in the Pitti (Antal, 1927-9; cf. also Hauser, 1964). There are however some obscure elements in the painting, such as the card with the artist's signature which is held up by a snake.

17 Christ appearing to the Virgin. Oil on canvas, 131 × 83 cm. Toledo, Museo de Santa Cruz. According to Cossío (1908), Camón Aznar (1950), and Wethey (1962) this is a copy. Soehner, however, attributes it to El Greco himself, although only the upper half. Mayer (1926) and Ipser (1960) are of this opinion too. It can be dated to 1582 or 1583.

18 Christ Despoiled (*El Espolio*). Oil on canvas, 165 × 99 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek. This is the best replica of the famous painting in the Cathedral at Toledo (*pl. 12*). Mayer (1926), supported by Pallucchini (1956), Arslan (1959) etc., gives the most convincing date, between 1583 and 1584. Wethey (1952), surprisingly enough, thinks it may have been painted in El Greco's studio, whilst Camón Aznar (1950) dates it between 1590 and 1595, and Soehner (1957) as late as 1606-8.

19 St Ildefonso receives his mitre. Polychrome wood, 85 × 125 cm. Toledo: Cathedral Sacristy. This relief, which was recognized

as El Greco's by Cossío in 1901 shows El Greco's artistry as a sculptor: in the words of Góngora, '*dió espíritu a leño*' ('he breathed life into wood'). Only Wethey (1962) has attempted a critical appreciation of El Greco as a sculptor, a subject that is worthy of more study. He believes the subject of this sculpture to be a *Miracle of St Ildefonso*. It belonged to the sumptuous frame of the *Espolio*, which was commissioned on 9 June 1585 and finished on 3 February 1587; the original frame was taken to pieces before the beginning of the eighteenth century when the present frame was made.

20-23 Burial of Count Orgaz. Oil on canvas, 480 × 360 cm. Toledo: Church of Santo Tomé. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI 1578. On 4 October 1584 Andrés Nuñez, parish priest of Santo Tomé, obtained the Curia's permission to have this picture painted. On 8 March 1586 a contract was signed giving the commission to El Greco and indicating in great detail the subject of the painting which was to depict the symbolic interment of Don Gonzalo Ruiz de Toledo, Señor de la Villa de Orgaz, by St Augustine and St Stephen. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the Count had rebuilt the church of Santo Tomé. El Greco was paid for the painting on 20 May 1588 (Borja de San Roman, 1910). In his *Flos Sanctorum* (1588), Alonso de Villegas bears witness to the fame of the painting, which contains portraits of many of El Greco's contemporaries. Perhaps these were suggested by the painter's memory of paintings for public places in Venice. Among these portraits, that of the boy on the left (*pl. 22*) is certainly El Greco's son, Jorge Manuel (next to the signature is 1578, the year of his birth: Cossío 1908); the humanist Antonio de Cavarrubias is the second figure to the left of the priest; and to the right of Cavarrubias is Francesco da Pisa. There are innumerable interpretations of the painting and we shall mention only Dvořák's fine essay (1921) and that of Hauser (1946) which point out, preparing the way for a new structural analysis, that this work embodies, in a most surprising manner, the tenets which are the basis of the Spanish theatre, from Lope to the imitators of Calderón, and which have been analysed by A. A. Parker in his important work *Approach to the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age*.

24 Portrait of Julián Romero de las Azañas y San Julián. Oil on canvas, 207 × 127 cm. Madrid, Prado. This painting has, probably correctly, been dated between 1585 and 1590 by Wethey (1962), although this is too late for Cossío. Soehner (1958-9) is the only expert who, quite unexpectedly, would not exclude the possibility of its being the copy of a lost original. For the sitter, see A. Marichalar, *Julián Romero*, 1952.

25 St Louis, King of France. Oil on canvas, 117 × 95 cm. Paris, Louvre. Cossío identified the subject of this painting in 1908. Mayer (1926) dates it between 1585 and 1590, and is supported by Pallucchini (1956). This dating was substantiated by Wethey in 1962

when he recognized the figure of the page as a portrait of Jorge Manuel.

26 Portrait of Don Rodrigo de la Fuente. Oil on canvas, 93 × 84 cm. Madrid, Prado. It cannot be dated later than 1590, the year of the sitter's death; Mayer's dating (1926) of 1585-7 is probably correct.

27 Portrait of Rodrigo Vazquez. Oil on canvas, 59 × 42 cm. Madrid, Prado. Wethey (1962) considers it to be a seventeenth-century copy of an original dating from between 1585 and 1590, but this is an isolated opinion. Soehner (1958-9) thinks it may be a replica. This very beautiful picture was, however, a work of El Greco's own hand, done soon after the *Burial of Count Orgaz* (Arslan, 1958), and was mentioned in the 1666 inventories of the Alcázar in Madrid.

28-29 Holy Family with St Anne. Oil on canvas, 127 × 106 cm. Toledo, hospital of San Juan Baptista. This painting was given to the hospital by Teresa d'Aguilera, widow of Alonso Capoche, and there has been a record of it since 1631. There are many different opinions as to its date; Cossío (1908) and Soehner (1958-9) place it at the end of the century, but Wethey's dating (1962) of between 1590 and 1595 is more acceptable.

30 Portrait of an Unknown Man. Oil on canvas, 44 × 42 cm. Madrid, Prado (no. 806). Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. This very famous painting was recorded in the 1666 inventories of the Alcázar in Madrid, and Soehner (1958-9), among others, dates it between 1590 and 1595.

31 Head of Christ. Oil on canvas, 61 × 46 cm. Prague, Narodní Galerie. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. There are several well-known replicas and derivations of this painting, which Wethey (1962) believes to come from El Greco's studio. However, if we accept Camón Aznar's dating of 1592-6, this would be impossible.

32 St Peter and St Paul. Oil on canvas, 120 × 92 cm. Barcelona, Museo de Arte de Cataluña. Mayer (1926) considers this to be an early work *c.* 1577-9, but Soehner is of the opinion that it is a late studio work, 1601-2. Wethey is probably right in declaring it to be a great work of El Greco's maturity, between 1590 and 1595.

33 Mater Dolorosa. Oil on canvas, 54 × 41 cm. Strasbourg, Musée des Beaux Arts. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. Arslan (1958) and Ipser (1960) date this *c.* 1590, and Mayer 1594-7.

34 St Andrew and St Francis. Oil on canvas, 167 × 113 cm. Madrid, Prado. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. This painting was formerly in the Monastero de la Encarnación in Madrid, and Camón Aznar (1950) assigns it to the period 1595-1600.

35 The Risen Christ. Polychrome wood, 45 cm. high. Toledo, hospital of San Juan Baptista. El Greco made this statue for the

high altar which he himself had designed between 1595 and 1598, in which year, on 16 August, the work was consecrated. For a complete and detailed account see Wethey's monograph (1962).

36 St John the Evangelist. Oil on canvas, 102 × 77 cm. Madrid, Prado. According to Mayer (1926) and Camón Aznar (1950) the painting was done for a series of *Apostles* which experts have tried to reconstruct, but this theory has been discredited by Wethey (1962) whose dating of between 1595 and 1600 is more acceptable.

37 Coronation of the Virgin. Oil on canvas, 120 × 47 cm. Toledo, Cappella San José. This chapel was to have been built in 1569 on a larger scale, under the will of the merchant Martin Ramírez, for St Teresa and her nuns. When they made their home elsewhere, the building of the chapel, on a smaller scale, was postponed until 1594 and it was then dedicated to St Joseph, to whom St Teresa had a great devotion. According to a contract drawn up on 9 November 1597 with Señora Vazquez Parga y Vigon, El Greco was to design the high altar and the two side altars as well as altarpieces for them. For further details see Soehner's important essay: 'Ein Hauptwerk Grecos: Die Kapelle San José in Toledo', in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1957, which has been rewritten as *Una obra maestra del Greco,* 1961. This essay is also useful for its study of El Greco's ideas on architecture, since San José, together with the main chapel of the hospital at Illescas (1603-5), is the most important example of El Greco's work as a decorator on a large scale. Soehner finds in the chapel of San José an embryonic form of the Baroque idea of the church as a 'sacred theatre'. Cf. also E. Harris Frankfort, 'A Decorative Scheme by El Greco', in *The Burlington Magazine,* 1938.

38-9 St Martin and the Beggar. Oil on canvas, 193 × 103 cm. Washington, National Gallery. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. This painting comes from the left-hand side chapel of the Capela San José at Toledo.

40-1 Madonna and Child with St Agnes and St Martina. Oil on canvas, 193 × 103 cm. Washington, National Gallery. Signed with a delta and a theta. From the right-hand side chapel of the Capela San José at Toledo.

42 Baptism of Christ. Oil on canvas, 350 × 144 cm. Madrid, Prado. Signed DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. This painting originally belonged to an altarpiece commissioned in December 1596 by the Colegio de Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación, Madrid, run by the Calced Augustinians, and also called after its foundress Colegio de Doña Maria de Aragón. It was placed there on 12 July 1600. During the Napoleonic war of 1814-5 it was damaged, and the altarpiece – whose frame El Greco probably designed and sculpted, according to Ponz – was divided and dispersed in about 1835. Various theories have been put forward as to the original composition of the whole. See Wethey (1962), who considers it to be a large triptych comprising

this *Baptism*, the *Adoration of the Shepherds* now in the National Museum, Bucharest, and the *Annunciation* now in the Balaguer Museum at Villanueva y Geltrù. This masterpiece marks the beginning of El Greco's extremist period, with its hallucinatory style of painting.

43 St Joseph with the Christ Child. Oil on canvas, 109 × 56 cm. Toledo, Santa Cruz Museum. The usual signature, in Greek script, is now only partly visible. It is generally dated at the turn of the century (e. g. Cossío, 1908; Mayer, 1926; Camón Aznar, 1950; Ipser, 1960; etc.), and is perhaps a sketch for the altarpiece in the Cappella San José, (see notes to *pl. 37*). In this case it should be dated *c.* 1597 (Wethey, 1962). Soehner's opinion that it is a studio work is unacceptable.

44 St Jerome as a Cardinal. Oil on canvas, 59 × 48 cm. London, National Gallery. The signature, which is very faint, was perhaps added later as was an inscription in the Cardinal's book, which was partly removed in the course of restoration carried out in 1952: *L. Cornaro Aet. suae 100. 1566.* This painting is the very best example of a subject that has been frequently painted (see Camón Aznar, 1950, and Wethey, 1962). Pallucchini (1956) and the majority of the experts date it 1600, with the exception of Cossío (1908) who puts it in El Greco's Italian period, 1571-6.

45 St Veronica. Oil on canvas, 103 × 79 cm. Munich, Alte Pinakothek. Cossío (1908) and Wethey (1962) consider both this and the various replicas of it as works of El Greco's studio or of his school, but this painting is clearly a good work from El Greco's own hand, painted *c.* 1600.

46 St Dominic. Oil on canvas, 120 × 88 cm. Toledo, Cathedral Sacristy. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS. El Greco often painted this subject (see Camón Aznar, 1950; etc.) and this version must have been completed between 1603 and 1604.

47 Crucifixion. Oil on canvas, 312 × 169 cm. Madrid, Prado. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓ (...) ÈPOÍEI. The experts are not at all agreed on the origin of this work, and this makes it hard to give the most precise dating. Recently however, Wethey has superseded all previous suggestions in a closely argued case. He believes the painting to have been originally in the Jesuit church of San Ildefonso in Toledo and, in dating it between 1600 and 1605, agrees with Arslan (1958).

48 St Bernardine of Siena. Oil on canvas, 269 × 144 cm. Toledo, El Greco's House. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. This work was painted between February and September 1603 (Borja de San Roman, 1910), for the altar of the main chapel of the Colegio de San Bernardino in Toledo.

49-50 Resurrection. Oil on canvas, 275 × 127 cm. Madrid, Prado, It was seen and admired by Palomino (1724), and by Ponz (1772-94),

who calls it 'a most excellent thing, life-size', in the *camarín* of Nuestra Señora de Atocha in Madrid. This painting is generally dated between 1600 and 1605, although Cossío (1908) and Camón Aznar (1950) consider it to be a work of El Greco's maturity, and Soehner (1957) of his last period. For the dating more generally accepted see Arslan, 1958; Wethey, 1962; Hauser, 1964; etc.

51-52 Adoration of the Shepherds. Oil on canvas, 320 × 180 cm. Madrid, Prado. This work was painted for San Domingo el Antiguo, Toledo, where Luis Tristán, who was an assistant of El Greco from 1603 to 1607, declared, in 1618, that '*se lo bido pintar*' ('he saw it painted') – see Borja de San Roman, *Noticias Nuevas para la biografia del pintor Luis Tristán*, 1924 – and this allows it to be dated with some accuracy. However, on the basis of other data, Soehner (1957, 1958-9) and Wethey (1962) prefer to date it between 1612 and 1614.

53-6 The Saviour, St Andrew, St Matthew and St Luke. Oil on canvas, 100 × 76 cm. (each painting). Toledo, Cathedral Sacristy. These four paintings belong to the complete series of *Apostles* in Toledo Cathedral for which they were probably painted between 1605 and 1610. According to Wethey (1962) the figure of Christ is not by El Greco.

57 Christ bearing His Cross. Oil on canvas, 104 × 78 cm. Madrid, Prado. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓ (...) ÈPOÍEI. Mayer (1926) dates it between 1582 and 1587, but Soehner (1957) and the majority of the experts date it more accurately as between 1604 and 1606.

58-60 The Purification of the Temple. Oil on canvas, 106 × 130 cm. London, National Gallery. El Greco had already painted this subject in Italy (see the signed version now in the Institute of Art, Minneapolis), but this painting is more splendid. With the exception of Cossío (1908) and Camón Aznar (1950), who believe it to date from the last years of the sixteenth century, experts tend to date it 1605-10.

61 St Peter weeping. Oil on canvas, 102 × 84 cm. Toledo, hospital San Juan Baptista. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI. This subject was inspired by the new importance given by the Counter-Reformation to the sacrament of penance, and El Greco painted several versions of it. This one dates from the first decade of the seventeenth century.

62 St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist. Oil on canvas, 110 × 87 cm. Toledo, Jesuit church of San Ildefonso. Soehner (1957 and 1958-9) dates it between 1605 and 1608, and this coincides more or less with that of the majority of the experts, with the exception of Cossío (1908: 1594-1604), Camón Aznar (1950: *c.* 1595); and Ipser (1960: *c.* 1590).

63 St Peter. Oil on canvas, 207 × 105 cm. El Escorial: Monastery of San Lorenzo. This painting was seen *in situ* at the end of the

seventeenth century by Padre de Los Santos, and dates from the end of the first decade of that century (Mayer 1926; almost all the other experts agree within a few years).

64 Portrait of Jerónimo de Cevallos. Oil on canvas, 65 × 55 cm. Madrid, Prado. Mayer's dating (1926) of between 1608 and 1612 seems convincing enough.

65 Portrait of Cardinal Juan de Tavera. Oil on canvas, 103 × 82 cm. Toledo, hospital of San Juan Baptista. The signature, written in the usual script, has disappeared. The subject of the picture died in 1545, so we must assume that it was done from his death-mask. Wethey (1962) dates it *c.* 1608.

66-9 The Saviour with St James the Greater, St Thomas and St Bartholomew. Oil on canvas, 97 × 77 cm. Toledo. Museo El Greco. These form part of a series of *Apostles,* originally in the hospital of Santiago in Toledo and now, in its entirety, in the El Greco museum. They are probably of a slightly later date than those in the Cathedral. See notes to *pl. 53.*

70-1 View and Plan of Toledo. Oil on canvas, 132 × 228 cm. Toledo, Museo El Greco. It is not known for whom El Greco painted this famous picture, but it was probably finished after 1608. Camón Aznar (1950) thinks that the plan and the inscription were painted by Jorge Manuel, which might account for a few topographical errors. Wethey (1962) puts forward the theory that this was an experiment in the tradition of Venetian cartography, but this theory does not hold with the expressive force of the painting.

72 St Simon. (See notes to *pl. 66*).

73 Laocoön. Oil on canvas, 142 × 193 cm. Washington, National Gallery. The three figures on the left and the view of Toledo are incomplete. When the painting was restored between 1955 and 1956, the loin-cloths, which had been added after El Greco's death to cover the figures, were removed. This interpretation of Virgil's story has challenged many art historians, and some have advanced rather irrelevant theories, for example, concerning the interpretation of dreams (cf. Marañon, 1956). For the iconography of the painting see W. S. Cook in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts,* 1946. The *Laocoön* is mentioned in the 1620 inventory of the Alcázar, Madrid, and is generally dated *c.* 1610.

74 Pentecost. Oil on canvas, 275 × 127 cm. Madrid, Prado. Signed: DOMÉNIKOS THEOTOKÓPOULOS ÈPOÍEI (this seems to have been restored). It is not known where this painting originally was, although Camón Aznar (1950) wrongly associates it with the paintings in the Colegio de Doña Maria de Aragón, Madrid (see notes to *pl. 42*). Wethey (1962) is probably right in suggesting that it dates from the period 1610-4 when Jorge Manuel was collaborating with El Greco.

75 St Francis of Assisi. Oil on canvas, 90 × 70 cm. Toledo, hospital of San Juan Baptista. El Greco frequently painted this subject (see Camón Aznar, 1950), and this version was already recorded as being in the Hospital in the inventories of 1628 and 1630, and is unanimously assigned to El Greco's last period. Soehner (1958-9) and Wethey (1962) attribute it to Jorge Manuel.

76 Agony in the Garden. Oil on canvas, 102 × 131 cm. London, National Gallery. This painting comes from the Convento de Las Salesas Nuevas in Madrid and is variously dated. Arslan (1958) puts it a little after 1586; Ipser (1960) *c.* 1600; Wethey (1962) 1590-95 – as a partly studio version of the same subject in the Toledo Museum, Ohio; and McLaren (*Catalogue of the National Gallery: Spanish School,* 1952) as early as the 1580s. Perhaps the most convincing dating is Cossío's (1908) and Pallucchini's (1956) of between 1604 and 1614.

77 Annunciation. Oil on canvas, 109 × 64 cm. Toledo, Museo Santa Cruz. Mayer (1926) considers this a very late work. It resembles the rather better *Annunciation* in the Cathedral at Sigüenza, but Soehner (1958-9) and Wethey (1962) would not assign it to El Greco at all. This judgment seems excessively severe.

78 Crucifix. Oil on canvas, 64 × 37 cm. Toledo, Museo Santa Cruz. Signed with delta and theta. Although Wethey (1962) thinks it is a picture of the school of El Greco, and Soehner (1958-9) discounts it altogether, it has quite justifiably been accepted as El Greco's work by Cossío (1908), Mayer (1926) and Ipser (1960).

79 St Sebastian. Oil on canvas, 114 × 84 cm. Madrid, Prado. This painting, from Cossío (1908) onwards, has been considered as belonging to the very last years of El Greco's career. Wethey's theory (1962) that it is a studio work has been rejected by Longhi (1963).

Assumption of the Virgin (black and white illustration, p. 21). Oil on canvas, 325 × 170 cm. Toledo, Museum of San Vicente. Detail of the upper part of the painting, which dates from *c.* 1608.

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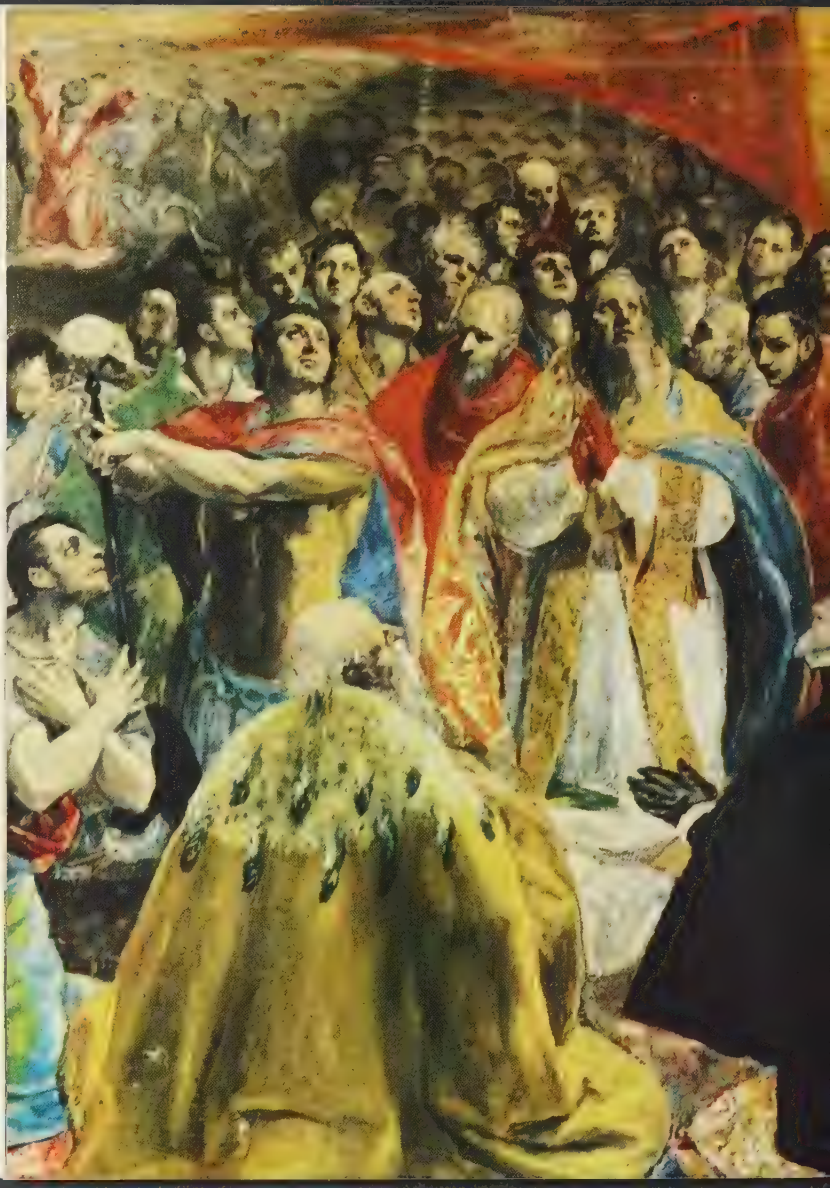

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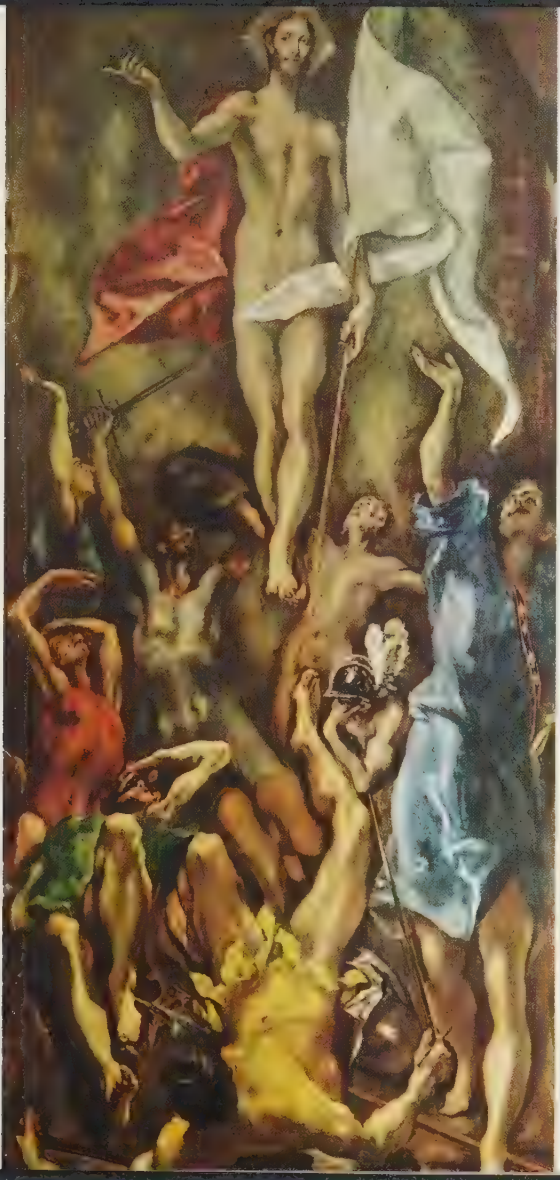

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El Greco Lecture Ottawa 13 February 2008

"And they came with haste:" El Greco and *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in Crete, Italy and Spain

This talk focuses on El Greco, one of the most popular artists in the Western canon - or one of the *most popular* amongst the general public for at least the last century or so - but one who sits uneasily in the art history curriculum of many universities, including my own, largely because his career crosses well-defined geographic and political frontiers, and his art straddles commonly understood stylistic divides. As a consequence, it is quite easy to teach the history of European art of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and leave El Greco out altogether. And if we probe very far into the critical literature on El Greco, we soon realize how peculiar it is, often skewed by nationalistic prejudices, and sometimes by downright lack of open mindedness.

My own interest in El Greco was spurred by a small panel of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, one of several variants of the same composition. All the variants have been considered by serious scholars to be the work of the young El Greco, but many of these paintings have provoked heated discussion, even prolonged controversy. This debate has mostly centered on the attribution and dating of the paintings, but, as it turns out, even the subject of the paintings, the Adoration of the Shepherds, raises fundamental questions, apparently not explored before. This talk will attempt to explore some of those issues - with a particular focus on El Greco's stay in Venice - but inevitably it will extend geographically beyond the shores of the lagoon city, as well as backward and forward in time from the period of the artist's sojourn there.

First, it may prove useful to review, however briefly, the history of El Greco's critical fortune, because in his case it plays a fundamental role in the way he has been understood. In fact, it is hard to think of another major Western artist whose overall career has continued to be defined- and redefined - in such fundamental ways virtually right up until the present.

El Greco is one of those artists– like Vermeer - who was rediscovered in the nineteenth century. El Greco was rehabilitated essentially as a Spanish artist, which is understandable, inasmuch as he spent his mature years in Toledo in Spain – close to four decades, in fact, from 1576 until his death in 1614. But, as his popular nickname (*El Greco*) implies, he was Greek in origin; and since *Greco* is an Italian word, he was also familiar with Italy. Early on, it had been reliably established that that his real name was Doménikos Theotokópoulos, and that he was born in 1541 in Candia (today Iraklion) in Crete, which was then under Venetian jurisdiction.

The Spanish paintings by El Greco restituted during the nineteenth century possessed enormous appeal for the most adventurous collectors of the time, especially those collectors who were also purchasing canvases by such contemporary artists as Cézanne and his fellow Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. The New York sugar magnate Henry Havemeyer and his wife Louisine, the close friend of Mary Cassatt, were perfect examples of this attitude. In 1901 Henry Havemeyer even experienced a kind of aesthetic revelation on standing in front of El Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz* in Toledo for the first time. After a long silence he is reported to have said, "One of the greatest pictures I have ever seen; yes, perhaps the greatest." Back in New York, the Havemeyer's always hung El Greco's *View of Toledo* and Cezanne's *Mont Sainte Victoire* side by side, or above one another. With such interest in America, it is not surprising that, today, El Greco is so splendidly represented in so many public museums in the USA.

Nor is it a surprise that during the early years of interest in El Greco much of the significant literature was by Spanish scholars, such as Manuel B. Cossío, and by Germans who had virtually invented serious art history.

In the early twentieth century, some art historians had also begun to investigate El Greco's sojourn in Italy, though they did not always agree on the length of his stay there, or on his closest contacts. It was generally agreed, however, that El Greco had lived in Venice, though exact details of that sojourn were lacking for most of the twentieth century, and then in 1570 he moved to Rome. The latter date is securely fixed, because on 16 November 1570 the manuscript painter Giulio Clovio in Rome wrote a letter to his patron Cardinal Alessandro Farnese to recommend a young native of Candia and follower of Titian (*un giovane Candiotto, discepolo di Titiano*),

who had recently arrived in the city. The identity of the *giovane Candiotto* is universally agreed to be El Greco, and he did indeed live in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome until 1572. By 18 September of that year he was sufficiently established in Rome to have been accepted into the painters guild of San Luca in Rome. A subsequent shorter sojourn back in Venice is taken for granted by many scholars, but there is no documentation for this.

In the art historical literature of the first third of the twentieth century, the Spanish and Italian paintings said to be by El Greco generally showed a stylistic homogeneity, even if the quality of these pictures ranged considerably, and there remained the need for more precise analysis of what constituted work entirely by the master and what was by his workshop. Then, in 1937, a deviant entered the fold. At that date, Rodolfo Pallucchini, a young Italian curator working at the Galleria Estense, in Modena, Italy, found in a cupboard in the museum a hitherto unknown, small triptych inscribed in capital Greek letters: *CHEIR DOMENIKOU* (hand of Domenikos). Immediately, he published the newly discovered, six-part painting as a signed work by El Greco. Pallucchini claimed that the Modena triptych was from El Greco's earliest years in Italy - that is, from his stay in Venice. For our discussion this evening, the Modena Triptych is of the utmost significance, because it introduces what must be the earliest known depiction of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* by El Greco. With Pallucchini's 1937 publication of the Modena Triptych, an altogether new chapter in El Greco studies began, one with almost immediate ramifications. During the following two decades, innumerable small religious paintings were published, especially in Italian journals, as being by El Greco from his early years, and the art market was flooded with similarly attributed paintings, almost all of which ultimately turned out to be spurious.

However, in the United States, where El Greco remained one of the most popular painters of all time, serious, university-based art history took a completely different tack, and when Harold Wethey published his catalogue raisonné of El Greco in 1962 all of these paintings, including the Modena Triptych, were banished from the artist's oeuvre. Even the signature on the Modena Triptych was dismissed, and was taken to mean only that the work was by the hand of some as-yet-unknown "Master Domenikos."

For Italian scholars, however, the Modena Triptych retained its status as a fundamental early work by El Greco. And the most eminent living Italian art historian of the time, Roberto Longhi savaged Wethey's book in one of the

most brutal reviews I've ever read. Pallucchini, who quickly evolved into the kingpin of Venetian art history, also held his ground. In 1981, when he was able to achieve what he had always said was a lifelong ambition – to organize an exhibition of so-called Mannerist art in Venice – he proudly included the Modena triptych - and defended it, without question, as a work by El Greco. Appropriately for the subject of his exhibition, he also insisted that it was painted in Venice, though he generously acknowledged that his good friend the Byzantinist Sergio Bettini had recently discussed the painting in print as more likely to have been done by El Greco in Crete. On the other hand, and equally characteristically, in a *Burlington Magazine* review of the exhibition, the American scholar, Roger Rearick, called the Modena triptych of "*problematic authorship and date*." One year later, when the United States and Spain joined forces to mount a major exhibition of El Greco's paintings, *not only* was the Modena triptych conspicuously absent, *but* it was *also* specifically condemned in an essay in the accompanying exhibition catalogue by Jonathan Brown, the leading American scholar of Spanish art. He said that it as typical of "the hackwork of the Madonneri" done by "artisans [who] had neither talent nor ambition and were content to grind out their clumsy pictures in wholesale quantities." (p. 77). Ironically, in a paper presented at a symposium held in Washington in conjunction with the exhibition, the aged Harold Wethey recanted, and admitted that El Greco might have done the Modena triptych after all, probably in Crete before he moved to Venice in about 1567.

Whatever the case, the attribution of the Modena triptych remained one of the most contentious issues in understanding the overall career of El Greco – and in particular, of understanding his transition from the Byzantine art of Crete to the Western art of Italy and then Spain. Some *new* evidence, presented later in this talk will, I hope, help to clarify this relationship.

In a schematic way, we could say that during the earlier part of the twentieth century the Spanish paintings by El Greco had come into prominence, and then that those done earlier in Italy had begun to receive due attention. Next it was the turn of the Greeks to claim *their* portion of the life of Domenikos Theotokopoulos, the Greek name of El Greco. As early as 1956, M. Chatzidakis the director of the Benaki Museum in Athens had published an icon of Saint Luke painting the Virgin and Child as a work by El Greco from his early years in Crete. The panel is signed *CHEIR DOMENIKOU* (hand of Domenikos), just like the Modena Triptych. Perhaps predictably, Wethey in his authoritative 1962 catalogue raisonné rejected the claim, and declared

that "this purely Byzantine panel does not appear to be by either El Greco or by the master of the Modena triptych." Then in 1983 an inscription, reading *Demenikos Theotokopoulos realized/the Dormition of the Virgin*, was discovered on an icon of that subject in the cathedral of the island of Syros in the Aegean. In contrast to the past proposals, this inscription unequivocally was to be understood as El Greco's signature. And with this discovery, a firm basis for reconstructing El Greco's early career in Crete was established. As it turned out, these signed icons also reinforced what written documents, discovered during approximately the same years, clearly indicated -- and that is, that El Greco had been thoroughly trained as a icon painter in the late Byzantine tradition that flourished in Crete, especially in his birthplace of Candia (or Iraklion) before he relocated to Italy and eventually to Spain. A Cretan document even attests that one of El Greco's paintings was evaluated at a relatively high price in December 1566. Shortly after this El Greco probably left Crete (then a Venetian possession) and settled in Venice itself, where his father and brother already had connections. There is, however, only one document attesting to El Greco's actual residence in the city - that is, on 18 August 1568, when he consigned a number of topographic drawings to Manolis Dakypris to be taken to the Cretan cartographer Giorgio Sideris.

To complete this survey of the Greek reclamation of El Greco, it is worth noting that in the 1990s a number of major exhibitions of El Greco's paintings took place in Greece, and that, for the first time, the country also began to acquire paintings by their most illustrious sixteenth-century artist, most recently, when, at a London auction in December 2004, the municipality of Iraklion purchased a small arched panel of the *Baptism of Christ.*

The latter painting, previously altogether unknown but discovered in Spain, is of particular interest, because it is closely related in size and subject matter to one of the panels in the Modena Triptych. And so is *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, which had been acquired in 1991 and which I will shortly discuss in greater detail.

But first, a little more about the Modena triptych, particularly about its depiction of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. The subject of the shepherds worshipping the newborn Christ Child is surely straightforward enough, principally because it is amply described in the Bible, albeit in only one of the four Gospels. In the Ontario of my youth, that text, from the Gospel of

Saint Luke (2: 8-16), was probably, along with the 21st Psalm, the best known of all biblical passages; it was so well known, in fact, that we could all repeat it by heart. Today, I'm told, the text is mostly associated with *Charlie Brown's Christmas*, but whatever the case, in the present context, it is worth repeating the text (here in the King James Version) in full.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
12. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
15And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

In Renaissance art of the West, representations of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* were not uncommon, and the biblical text must have been well known, but in Byzantine art the subject itself appears not to have been depicted. The lowly shepherds were not altogether neglected, but they were given much less prominence. In Byzantine art he visual emphasis was placed on *The Nativity*, which was traditionally shown in a cave, with Mary reclining on the ground and near her the Christ Child, tightly bound in swaddling clothes, lying in a rectangular stone manger. Outside the confines of the cave it was common to show a number of related events, including the angel announcing Christ's miraculous birth to the shepherds in the fields (typically shown at the upper right), but the shepherds' subsequent visit to the stable – *their coming with haste* - seems not to have been represented. Even in San Giorgio dei Greci, the Greek community's church in Venice, the old compositional formula persisted, as can be seen in Michele

L 9

Damaskinos's beautiful *Nativity*, which dates from about 1575-80, a full decade after El Greco's documented stay in the city. In fact, El Greco's infatuation with the theme of the adoration of the shepherds seems to have been so unusual for a Byzantine artist as to be all but unique.

In his 1937 publication, Rodolfo Pallucchini had astutely identified the remarkable anthology of visual sources comprising the Modena *Adoration of the Shepherds*. To a degree that was exceptional even at a time when Western artists routinely enhanced their compositions with appropriations from earlier art, El Greco *entirely* composed his *Adoration* with borrowings from other sixteenth-century Italian artists -- all *in fact* from prints of this very subject. It is also worth interjecting that, subsequent to Pallucchini's article, considerable evidence has emerged proving that Italian prints were widely available in Crete, moreover that El Greco had used them as partial inspiration for the two signed icons we just looked at.

L 10

For his overall composition, El Greco relied heavily on Giovanni Britto's woodcut, no doubt dating to the 1530s, after Titian's emphatically rustic *Adoration of the Shepherds*. In particular, El Greco appropriated Titian's architecture, with its rectilinear stable and angular hole in the thatched roof, and its engaged column and rusticated pier at the right, but he also adopted and then adapted Titian's principal figures. Since the woodcut is in reverse to the original painting by Titian, the shepherds approach from the right, and the one in the foreground courteously removes his broad-brimmed hat with his left hand, a gesture both homely and eloquent, and irresistible to subsequent artists.

El Greco generally repeated the arrangement of figures in Britto's woodcut, as well as virtually replicating the meditative Virgin Mary, but he had to accommodate the oblong composition to a vertical format, and in doing so he modified Titian's dignified naturalism. His composition became more concentrated, and the effect more rhetorical, as he added and replaced figures from other prints. For Titian's benevolent Joseph, El Greco

L 11

substituted a heavily cloaked, active figure in profile, theatrically stretching out his left arm. This new Joseph, relocated immediately behind Mary, and replacing the woodcut's boy with a candle, is a precise quotation from Parmigianino's small etching of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* from about 1527. To the right of Mary, El Greco brought the kneeling shepherds closer to the manger and rearranged them. These are details inspired by an

L 12

ambitious etching of *The Adoration* by Giulio Bonasone from c.1561-1565.

El Greco relied on Bonasone's print not only for his depiction of the shepherds – most noticeably for the youthful bare-chested shepherd – but even more fully for the two conversing women (probably the two mid-wives mentioned in early apocryphal accounts) at the right, and the heavenly choir in the sky. Whether it was his goal or not, El Greco thus created a composition that was an effective blend of Venetian naturalism and Central Italian mannerism.

Although El Greco's compositional sources were uniformly Italian, his panel does not look like any sixteenth-century Italian painting. Especially alien are the fiery sky and the abrupt changes of hue and tone among the figures. In sum, while the artist clearly set out to undertake a Western subject and to create an Italianate composition - and succeeded by ransacking monochromatic prints of the appropriate theme - he ended up producing an image that lacked the tonal shading and atmospheric harmony typical of sixteenth-century Italian painting. And so, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Modena triptych was most likely executed in Crete, a deduction that has been made by an increasing number of scholars in recent years.

In the aftermath of Pallucchini's 1937 publication of the Modena triptych, a number of variations on the *Adoration of the Shepherds* came to light, evidently executed in various contexts that are still far from clear. These variants include a large canvas (114 x 104.5 cm.) belonging to the Duke of Buccleuch at Boughton House, Kettering, which Ellis Waterhouse published as a work by El Greco in 1951, and which has since found general acceptance; a small panel (24.5 x 16.5cm.) once in the Carlo Broglio collection, Paris (now untraced), published in 1952 by Pallucchini, and dated by him to the "second Venetian period," i.e., mid-1570s; another (?) panel (32 x 21 cm.) formerly in the Charles Brunner collection, Paris (now untraced), published by Martin Soria in 1954 and dated by him to the "second Venetian period 1572-1576"; and a copper (24.2 x 18.8 cm.) published by Pallucchini in 1986, then with Piero Corsini Inc., New York, and now in the San Diego Museum of Art, and dated by him to about 1574-1575.

The most recent addition to this group of variants - all of which are closely related in design to *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Modena triptych - is the panel in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University in Kingston. Purchased in 1991 at auction in New York, the painting in Kingston is on a wood panel, measuring 23.8 by 19.1 cm., and is amongst

the smallest of the variants. It alone of the variants has an arched top, similar to those of the Modena triptych. The medium is oil paint and probably some tempera.

The Kingston panel shares many features with the other variants, especially with the smaller ones. All of these works retain some aspects of the setting of Titian's *Adoration*, re-used by El Greco in the Modena triptych, as well as some of the figures from the etchings by Parmigianino and Bonasone, but there are differences in specific details. Most conspicuously, El Greco replaced the horizontal band of seated choristers at the top (which had been based directly on Bonasone's print) with three frolicking baby angels who brandish a thin banderole amidst dramatic clouds. At the middle level, Joseph's right hand is now clearly shown, whereas it is entirely covered by his cloak in the Modena triptych, and also in its source, Parmigianino's etching. Similarly, at the extreme right, the standing woman now turns her head to talk to her companion, instead of looking out at the viewer - as in the triptych and the etching by Bonasone. Although still kneeling, Mary is now the one who looks outward. She reverently clasps her hands, and is clad in canonical red and blue, in place of only red in the triptych. The shepherds have also been rearranged: with the eldest and youngest switching places, the naked chest of the middle one quoted from Bonasone's etching being partly covered up, and the lamb being held horizontally rather than upside down. Lastly, the ox and ass have been moved directly behind the Christ Child's manger.

While most of these changes indicate that El Greco had abandoned a strict adherence to Parmigianino's and Bonasone's prints, in contrast, a few details are actually closer to Britto's woodcut after Titian. The bare rafters of the stable's roof thus imitate those in the woodcut more accurately than do those in the Modena *Adoration*, just as in some of the variants the hat with its turned-up brim, held by the foreground shepherd, is more closely repeated. Such details suggest that El Greco had carefully examined Britto's woodcut after Titian's *Adoration* once more – evidence that perhaps adds some further support to the contention that El Greco enjoyed close ties with Titian in Venice. R 9

More significantly, all the variants exploit the use of oil paint (or at least the partial use of it), all the variants present a tonal unity, and all the variants follow the Gospel passage saying that the shepherds were "*keeping watch over their flock by night,*" and thus unequivocally depict the *Adoration* as a

nocturne. Together, these features strongly suggest that the variants were executed at a later date than the Modena triptych, and most likely in Italy, not Crete. If the Modena triptych is indeed to be dated before El Greco's departure from Crete (i.e., before 1567/68), then it is plausible to interpret the innovations of the variants as reflecting his fuller exposure to Western art, first experienced during his years in Venice.

El Greco's endeavours to create a tonal unity, together with his introduction of a dramatic supernatural lighting, must have evolved alongside his decision to depict the *Adoration* at night. Although the prints by Britto (after Titian) and Bonasone both show the subject as a night scene, El Greco completely ignored this aspect of their designs when he painted the Modena *Adoration*. In all the variants, however, it is a distinguishing feature – one that not only complies with the scriptural passage in St. Luke, but also conforms to a fashion then current in Venice. Beginning in the late 1540s both Titian and Tintoretto had started to paint religious subjects as nocturnes -- and such canvases as Titian's *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* in the church of the Crociferi and Tintoretto's *Saint Roch Healing the Plague Stricken* in the church of San Rocco were easily accessible.

Even more compelling for the young El Greco must have been a less accessible painting that was underway in Titian's studio from 1564 - when King Philip II of Spain requested a martyrdom of St. Lawrence for the high altar of the new church of the monastery of the Escorial, through 1566 when the artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari visited Titian and mentions the painting, until 3 December 1567, when the finished canvas was dispatched to Spain. Titian had based the Escorial altarpiece on the composition of his Crociferi *Saint Lawrence*, but he thoroughly reworked almost every detail, reducing the recession into the architectural setting, and forcing the figures into an agitated lateral sweep across the front of the canvas. It is also clear – even to the naked eye – that Titian had started out by copying the composition of his earlier *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*, but then introduced changes as he went along. A good example of this procedure is the soldier at the middle right, who in the first versions stands on the steps of the temple, but in the second version was painted over, only to become visible again with time as the layers of oil paint became more transparent with age. If El Greco had indeed settled in Venice by 1567 and had had access to Titian's studio (as Giulio Clovio's 1570 letter certainly implies), he would surely have known the painting well. And if he were in fact Titian's pupil, perhaps he would have even had a hand in its execution. Whatever

the case, El Greco's own painting – including his various *Adorations of the Shepherds* - stands as sufficient testimony to his deep and abiding interest in what has been called "arguably the supreme masterpiece of Titian's last years and the most exciting night scene of his entire career." In fact, for an artist trained in the Byzantine tradition, where art normally assumed a "timeless" quality, and where naturalistic lighting and meteorological conditions were not conspicuously shown (if depicted at all), dramatic nocturnes, especially this example by Titian, must have come as a startling revelation.

The practice of making copies is also likely to have struck a sympathetic chord with El Greco, given his training in painting icons. For various reasons, Titian often repeated the theme of a painting on a second canvas. And in doing so, Titian frequently reworked the image, so that an altered composition evolved (through many changes) on the canvas itself – rather than in separate studies, undertaken as drawings, as would have been more common in Central Italy. Now, it can now be shown that El Greco also adopted the same procedure. Through infra-red reflectography, it was recently possible to peer below the visible paint surface of the Kingston panel, and a number of surprises were found. For instance, it is clear that the artist first drew the hat held by the foreground shepherd with a flat brim, and then painted over that with the turned-up brim. And so, he moved from the design in the Modena triptych to copying more closely this detail in Britto's woodcut after Titian. Perhaps more revealing, at the top of the panel, El Greco did not originally show the three ecstatic angels, but instead the group of choristers taken ~~directly~~ originally from Bonasone's engraving.

What the underdrawing signifies is that El Greco first designed his Kingston *Adoration of the Shepherds* on the basis of the related panel in the Modena Triptych – perhaps even using a tracing (because the dimensions are almost identical) – and then, as he continued to work on the panel, and as he gained greater knowledge of Italian art, of Venetian art in particular, he began to modify his earlier design. In the case of the angels on high, he obliterated them entirely. As such, this new information indubitably ties the Kingston panel to the Modena Triptych, and in doing so reinforces the attribution of both paintings. It also indicates a chronological sequence, one that happily reinforces what the naked eye had already suggested. And, that is -- that the Modena Triptych must have been painted first, and that the Kingston panel followed at some later time. In addition, it must have been the Kingston panel that acted as the chief transitional work to the various other variants.

To sum up, in the Kingston panel the design of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Modena Triptych was applied, was found wanting, and was then replaced by details that were either closer to Britto's woodcut after Titian, to Titian's contemporary way of painting, or in general to more modern Venetian art. All of this reinforces the document that is the first proof of El Greco being in Rome, when El Greco is described as a young man from Candia and a follower of Titian *(un Giovane candiotto, discepolo di Titiano)*.

When was the Kingston panel likely to have been painted? There is no definitive answer, but it is worth returning to the Iraklion *Baptism,* which has almost the same dimensions as the Kingston panel, and which may well have constituted another part of a hypothetical triptych by El Greco. Indeed, a recent X-ray of the Kingston painting suggests that at one time it did indeed have hinges, and was therefore part of some sort of polyptych. As it happens, the Iraklion *Baptism*, too, has recently yielded revealing evidence. During recent technical analysis in Athens, the Iraklion *Baptism* was found to bear the date 1567 in Roman numerals, also hidden beneath the paint layers at the lower edge of the panel. That date, as we have seen, would fit perfectly with the time when El Greco was in Venice, and would also mesh with the stylistic evidence, not just of the *Baptism* but also of the Kingston *Adoration.*

Or that date would be appropriate for the commencement of the execution of the Kingston panel, but perhaps not for its completion. For I think that the panel may well have been worked on again, some year later. For just as the design of the Kingston *Adoration of the Shepherds* displays debts to El Greco's sojourn in Venice, and through the *Modena Triptych* connections back to Crete, its completion appears to link it with El Greco's future in Spain. As Robert Simon first observed with regard to the painting on copper now in San Diego, the right border unmistakably shows the famous Alcantara bridge in Toledo. And, if you look closely at the Kingston panel, the same configuration is again found in the same location – just as it appears in the famous Havemeyer *View of Toledo*, and as in fact the site looks even today. So, I would now propose that, although the Kingston panel must have been started in Venice about 1567, it was likely taken to Spain and finished (or at least retouched) there.

And it was in Spain that El Greco's association with the subject of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* – even, we might say, his obsession with the

subject – increased enormously and came to a full flowering, especially in the format of large vertical altarpieces.

But before we leave Venice, it behooves us to examine, in somewhat greater detail, El Greco's particular depiction of *light* in his *Adoration of the Shephers*, and also to investigate the local Venetian interest in the subject in general. By doing so, we can somewhat better gauge the degree to which Venetian art provided him with inspiration that may well have stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Not only do all the variants on the Modena *Adoration* possess a new tonal coherence, from the darkest shadow to the highest light, but also the major sources of light are clearly defined as supernatural, these sources being the naked Christ Child and the heavens above. Although El Greco may not have achieved total consistency, it is evident that he was now seeking to relate the light sources, though supernatural, in a rational way to the surrounding three-dimensional solids. The radiance of the Child thus illuminates the underside of Mary's right hand and sleeve, and the right-hand side of her red gown, and (on the other side of the manger) the left edge of the kneeling shepherd's arm and the top of his knee.

Literary texts are almost certainly the ultimate inspiration for this effect. Predictably, there are a number of well-known religious passages that may have prompted El Greco to show this visual relationship, but more surprisingly there may have *also* been a classical secular text.

It is a commonplace to equate Jesus Christ with light. No doubt, the most direct assertion of this metaphor is in the gospel of John, 8:12 – "*Then spake Jesus unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" Indeed, the very first chapter of John's gospel sets the stage with repeated metaphors of light: "*4 In him was life; and the light was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*" And in religious texts much closer to El Greco's time, the metaphor of light continued to play a significant rhetorical role. For instance, in the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, which we know was in El Greco's

library at the time of his death, the Second Session of January 1546 begins with the declaration, "*The holy Council of Trent ...recognizing with the blessed apostle James that every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights . . .*" and soon goes on to say, "*Moreover, since it is the chief care, solicitude and intention of this holy council that the darkness of heresies, which for so many years has covered the earth, being dispelled, the light of Catholic truth, may with the aid of Jesus Christ, who is the true light, shine forth in splendor and purity . . .*"

These are general texts that El Greco would almost certainly have known, but in the specific case of the Nativity there is another source that he seems to have known and to have partly followed, either by direct knowledge of the written text itself or through its depiction in other works of art. And that is the *Revelationes* of St. Bridget of Sweden, written about 1360 to 1370. Her description of the birth of Christ was frequently followed by Renaissance artists, especially by those in Northern Europe during the fifteenth century, and then by those in Italy in the next century. For instance, Hugo van der Goes painted an especially influential example of the type of Nativity largely based on Saint Bridget's vision; his painting is now lost but it is known through copies such as this panel by Gerard David from about 1495 now in Vienna. For our purposes, the significant element is the light, which emanates from the newborn Christ Child, and as the divine radiance (the *splendor divinus*) it totally annihilates the material light (the *splendor materialis*), represented by the candle that Joseph holds at the left. And to make Saint Bridget's vision effective in painting, the event had, almost of necessity, to be shown at night, as here.

R 19

In Venice and its mainland territories, paintings of the *Nativity*, or even more specifically of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, were not altogether unknown but they were not all that common either. Most often, it seems, such paintings were intended for a domestic setting, rather than for an ecclesiastical one. Thus, as early as 1510, Isabella d'Este yearned to acquire for her own collection in Mantua a painting by Giorgione in Venice of una *notte bella et singolare*, which is often interpreted to be a *Nativity* at night, if not actually an *Adoration of the Shepherds*. Unfortunately, today the painting that so obsessed Isabella d"Este is not known for certain.

On the mainland, there may well have been a taste for night scenes of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* that was less constrained by conventions than was the case in Venice itself. Another artist who catered to this taste, and

who was fully conversant with mainland traditions, was Lorenzo Lotto. The artist completed a number of night scenes of the Nativity, but one probably from the late 1520s, again in a domestic setting (this time in Venice itself), is especially relevant for our argument. It was Giorgio Vasari who specifically singled out this "*Natività di Cristo finta in una notte*" by Lotto, in the Venetian house of the Florentine Tommaso da Empoli. Vasari says the painting was, "*bellissimo, massimamente perchè vi si vede che lo splendore di Cristo con bella maniera illumina quella pittura*," and featured a portrait of Marco Loredano, the Venetian patrician, as a full-length figure adoring the baby Jesus. The paintings is now lost, but its grand composition is plausibly known through a seventeenth-century engraving. Across the front of the composition, a kneeling Mary, an ample manger with the radiant Christ Child, and Joseph and the shepherds (one shown as Marco Loredano), are all picked out in strong highlight, while over them the stable towers like a formidable stage set.

Titian also seems to have been among the first in Venice to show the Nativity at night, and with some of the light effects described by Saint Bridget. He also featured the shepherds just as they arrive at the manger. The painting in question, which is now in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence but which is almost never on public display because of its ruinous condition, was commissioned by the Duke of Urbino in 1532 as a gift to his wife who was expecting a child. Titian did not follow Saint Bridget literally, because (unlike Lotto, and El Greco) he does not show the light emanating from the Christ Child in a fully consistent manner, but he does include the *splendor materialis* coming from the candle, which is not held by Joseph but by a young boy leaning over the stable wall at the upper right. Building on the Gospel text and well-established visual traditions, Titian has also beautifully articulated the sudden drama of the humble shepherds, breathless from the fields - as they first catch sight of the newborn saviour "lying in a manger," and as they then fall reverently to their knees. The composition is familiar to us, because it is the source for Britto's woodcut - in reverse - that we saw earlier this evening and that was such a major influence for El Greco's early versions of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. Ironically, since the painting itself was sent to the Duke and Duchess of Urbino who were then living in Pesaro and so was relatively inaccessible, it was not the painting itself but rather Britto's reversed woodcut that disseminated Titian's wonderful combination of noble naturalism and honest piety.

Among the paintings it partly inspired is Jacopo Bassano's magnificent *Adoration of the Shepherds*, in the Royal Collection at Hampton Court, again a work almost certainly intended for a secular setting, and probably for one on the terrafirma. Perhaps, significantly, the artist has included a glimpse of his hometown, Bassano, and of Monte Grappa in the background.

Since El Greco's major depictions of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in Spain would be altarpieces, we might be inclined to think that he arrived there with a mind filled with Venetian images of the *Adoration* as altarpieces. And when we turn to the authoritative study on the subject of Venetian altarpieces, Peter Humfrey's *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice,* p. 68, we are assured that among the "relatively common subjects for altarpieces" is the *Adoration of the Shepherds.* Yet, the truth appears to be exactly the opposite. In fact, during the first two thirds of the sixteenth century, that is, in the years up until the arrival of El Greco in the Serenissima, there appear to have been only two altarpieces in Venice itself that showed even remotely an image of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*.

The earliest of these is Cima da Conegliano's altarpiece of about 1509 to 1511, in the church of the Carmine in Venice. The altarpiece is that kind of hybrid that combines elements of a biblical narrative – in this case, the *Nativity* - and a *sacra conversazione* – where saints are included because of their association with the donor, the church, and so on. Thus, we see in the foreground, in front of a clearly lit landscape, the Holy Family, flanked by Saints Catherine, Helen and Raphael. The kneeling shepherd in the left foreground is almost certainly a portrait of the painting's donor, the cloth merchant, Giovanni Calvo. Obviously, the overall image is far removed from El Greco's interpretation of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, yet the notion that one of the shepherds could bear the facial features of the donor is one that seems to have appealed to him, as we shall see.

The other altarpiece is Giovanni Gerolamo Savoldo's meditative *Nativity/Adoration of the Shepherds* of about 1540 in the church of San Giobbe of the Observant Franciscan order. Although the Christ Child does not truly radiate divine illumination, and the light in general is more twilight than nocturne, the composition still owes something to Saint Bridget's text, as is perhaps best seen through a comparison with the woodcut illustration of a 1492 German edition of Saint Bridget's *Revalationes*. In both woodcut and altarpiece the shepherds do not actually enter the stable but look on from

outside its walls. In this instance, again the shepherd at the left could well be a portrait.

Although both of these altarpieces include shepherds, neither of them is what we would today call a true *Adoration of the Shepherds*. The only depiction of a full-fledged *Adoration of the Shepherds* in a Venetian church before El Greco's time known to me is Andrea Schiavone's long narrow panel from 1552-1553. With its moody dark tonality contrasting with flashes of bright colour and its elegantly elongated figures, the painting would surely have appealed to the young Cretan who could easily have seen it only about fifteen years after its installation. Perhaps El Greco even remembered Schiavone's greyhound at the left, because he included a very similar dog in the same place in both his Kingston and San Diego versions of the *Adoration*. Schiavone's *Adoration* is of course not an altarpiece; instead it was originally affixed to the parapet of the nave choir loft, facing the main entrance of the church of the Carmini, and is today installed elsewhere in the same church – the same church that also houses Cima's altarpiece. It might be noted that all three examples of the Shepherds appear in monastic churches of conservative and mendicant orders, where evidently the subject had particular appeal. Whatever the case, the rarity of Venetian altarpieces featuring the *Adoration of the Shepherds* during the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century is perhaps surprising, and surely merits further investigation. But that clearly takes us beyond our specific focus this evening. What does begin to emerge, however, is a pattern that suggests that earlier in the sixteenth century the subject of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* was more common as a subject for a secular setting that for an ecclesiastical one. And by extension, that El Greco's interest in the subject is of special significance in itself, and in the recognition that he was in the vanguard of what would become a widespread shift in usage. We can also conclude that in Venice itself there was relatively little visual stimulation related specifically to the *Adoration of the Shepherds* as El Greco had already begun to interpret it.

With this conclusion, the potential importance for El Greco of a work such as Titian's *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* comes even into sharper focus. Titian's great altarpiece is *also* of course a drama of light and darkness. And David Rosand is surely correct when he claimed that its major literary source was Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, and the beautiful lines quoted there and said to have come from Lawrence himself: "*Mea nox obscurum non habet . . .My night hath no darkness. All things shine with*

light!" Undoubtedly, El Greco also knew Jacobus de Voragine's useful compendium of stories about the saints, as well as about selected biblical events. Proof of that would appear to exist right in his Kingston *Adoration*. Thus, the *Golden Legend*'s text for December 25 makes a point of saying that the miraculous birth of Christ was revealed to five classes of being: that is, " to every class of creatures, from the stones, which are at the bottom of the scale of creation, to the angels, who are at the summit." "The Nativity was revealed to the creatures which possessed existence and life, such as the plants and trees." "The Nativity was revealed to the creatures possessed of existence, life, and sensation, that is, to the animals. Now the ox and the ass, miraculously recognizing the Lord, knelt before Him and adored Him." "The Nativity was revealed to the creatures possessed of existence, life, sensation, and reason, that is, to men" And then the story of the shepherds is retold. "Finally, the Nativity was revealed to the creatures who possessed existence, life, sensation, reason, and knowledge, namely to the angels."

It may be pushing it too far to suggest that one more literary source might be reflected in El Greco's *Adoration of the Shepherds*. But I introduce it now because, to the best of my knowledge, it has not previously been associated with El Greco's depiction of the subject. The source is classical and Roman, and is from Pliny the Elder. The first-century Latin author thus directs attention to the ancient Greek artist Antiphilus of Alexandria who was praised for his painting of a boy blowing on a fire and for the depiction of the light reflected on his face and on the walls of the room. The Polish art historian, Jan Bialostocki first made the connection between this ancient text and various so-called genre paintings of single figures from the late sixteenth-century and the early seventeenth century, including one by El Greco, probably done in Rome during the early 1570s. Thus this painting is now usually interpreted as El Greco's emulation of the lost Greek painting, prompted by his own Greek roots and perhaps by conversations with Fulvio Orsini, the Farnese's librarian and owner of several copies of Pliny's *Natural History*. We have seen, however, that El Greco was already obsessed with rendering the appearance of light reflected off various surfaces, including faces, and that it was frequently a feature of depictions of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. This association also came immediately to Vincenzo Borghini, the cultivated prior of the Innocenti in Florence, when in 1564 he read the passage in Pliny about Antiphilus and his painting of the boy blowing on a fire. On 14 August 1564 Borghini wrote to his good friend Giorgio Vasari about the Pliny's text, and said that the effect of the ancient Greek painting was just like his nocturne at Camaldoli: "come la vostra notte

di Camaldolj." What Borghini was referring to was an altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, painted by Giorgio Vasari early in his career – in 1538 - , an altarpiece that is moreover largely based Saint Bridget's vision. Could Vasari then have referred to Pliny's passage when he visited Titian two years later, and when he saw Titian working on another night scene, the *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*? And then did Titian relate the matter to El Greco about a year later? We will probably never know the exact answer to these questions, but we can say with assurance that Pliny's passage was associated with more than subjects just showing a boy lighting a candle.

There can be little doubt that when El Greco settled in Rome in 1570, he found himself in the midst of a cultivated milieu. He obviously maintained ties with the miniaturist Giulio Clovio, who had introduced him to the Farnese household. These various links are suggested in El Greco's sympathetic portrait of Clovio, which shows the miniaturist holding the Farnese Hours, the lavish illuminated manuscript completed by Clovio for Cardinal Alessando Farnese in 1546. In the portrait, the book is open at pages that reflect the work of Michelangelo and Raphael. And when El Greco turned the pages to Clovio's miniature of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, he must have felt personally assured, because there again was an image based on Saint Bridget's vision with a Christ Child radiating light in all directions, as well as frolicking angels and youthful shepherds.

When in 1576 El Greco relocated to Toledo in Spain, one of his first commissions there was to paint an altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. The commission was part of a larger ensemble for the Cistercian convent church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, and included an imposing central retable in the chancel featuring the *Assumption of the Virgin* (now in the Art Institute of Chicago), and a side altar at the right with the *Resurrection of Christ*, balancing the *Adoration* on the altar at the left. El Greco had probably not painted the subjects of The *Assumption* and *Resurrection* before, but he must have felt singularly well prepared to do the *Adoration of the Shepherds*. In this, his first altarpiece of the subject, he almost entirely eliminated the architectural setting, and instead let the darkness of deepest night almost entirely fill the space. This of course served to emphasize the dramatic contrast between the enveloping dark and the four specific sources of light he has included. The two most important of these are on the central axis of the composition. In the lower part, the incandescent light of the naked Christ Child radiates outward in all directions, and

highlights isolated fragments of the garments, limbs and faces of the encircling Mary, Joseph and the five shepherds who have clearly just come with haste. Now, more than ever before the principal colours are the three primaries (red, blue and yellow) with a touch of green for the jacket of the figure at the lower left. At the top, there is a heavenly radiance that is so bright that it appears to transfix the spectral angels. In addition, in the foreground there is a candle which is reminiscent of Saint Bridget's *spendor materialis*, but since it is held by Saint Jerome, who seems to have been included in reference to the patron Don Diego De Castilla, its meaning may be somewhat different here. In any case, natural light is also represented at the upper right by the crescent moon, which has sometimes been interpreted as a reference to the Immaculate Conception, but, revealingly, in terms of pure naturalism it is also just where Titian had placed it in his *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*. The two women beneath the moon may well be the two midwives: in any case, they provide a link to El Greco's earlier *Adorations*, where the two women appear in the same place and their poses are generally similar. In Post-Tridentine images the midwives are usually omitted – because they are not mentioned in any of the Gospels – and El Greco never seems to have included any vestiges of them again.

In the ensuing years El Greco had several opportunities to paint the *Adoration of the Shepherds* as large and important altarpieces. But as much as we can imagine that El Greco would have welcomed these opportunities, the choice of the subject for an altarpiece would have been far from his alone. And, although it seems not to have been much investigated, the taste for the subject of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* as an altarpiece did clearly increase during the last third of the sixteenth century. Even in Venice, a notable example is one of Jacopo Bassano's last works, which he showed as a nocturne according to Saint Bridget, and which was installed on a side altar in the newly rebuilt church of San Giorgio Maggiore in the early 1590s.

As culminating proof of El Greco's abiding affection for the *Adoration of the Shepherds* is the fact that the subject appears on the altarpiece over his own tomb. On 26 August 1612 El Greco's son Jorge Manuel, who was also an artist, signed a contract for a family burial vault in the convent church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, and at the same time he and his father took responsibility for the funding and decoration of the accompanying altarpiece. The resulting painting, which is now in the Prado in Madrid, and

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This shepherd has frequently been seen as a portrait of the artist himself, an identification that I find very likely. We have already noted that it was not uncommon, in Venice at least, to show the donor of an altarpiece of the *Adoration* as a humble shepherd. And, when El Greco undertook this *Adoration*, it is just possible that he recalled other aspects of Venice art as well. As we have seen, El Greco was said by Giulio Clovio to have been a follower of Titian, and there is every reason to think that that was correct. El

Greco could well have known, then, that Titian had been preparing an altarpiece for above his own tomb in the church of the Frari in Venice, especially if the Cretan had actually made the putative trip to Venice before leaving for Spain in 1576, the very year of Titian's death. In addition, there is the striking coincidence that just as Titian had originally made his public reputation with a high altar of the *Assumption of the Virgin*, as he did in 1518 in the Venetian church of the Frari, and then many years later planned to be buried in the same church, so too had El Greco made his reputation with a painting of the *Assumption of the Virgin* on the high altar of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, and then arranged many years later to be buried in the same church. (Bray, 2003, p. 216) And in Titian's altarpiece for his burial chapel, the artist had included himself in a location rather similar to that of El Greco's shepherd - in Titian's case in the guise of Saint Jerome. Appropriately for an altarpiece in a burial chapel, Titian's painting shows the artist/donor reverently contemplating the dead Christ of a *Pieta*. It is further revealing that El Greco had in his early days painted several versions of the dead Christ, including one small painting of the *Entombment* that includes a depiction of the aged Titian as one of the mourners. It is even possible that Titian had just died when El Greco painted this panel (August to October 1576).

An image of the dead Christ is highly appropriate for a burial chapel, and it might well be asked why El Greco did not follow this formula in choosing a subject for his own tomb. The exact answer to that question may never be known, but there can be no doubt that El Greco did choose a subject that was dear to his heart. Though he had not neglected the subject of mourners grieving over the dead Saviour, especially in his early years, the accumulative evidence of his long career is that he professed a personal affinity for the shepherds revering the live Saviour. Since El Greco's surname Theotokopoulos carries the meaning of Mother of God (*theotokos*), it has been suggested that the choice of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* may have reflected the desire to include the artist's "name saint" and to feature her as his personal intercessor. (Davies) Such an interpretation may well be correct, but the notion need not be confined to the subject of *The Adoration of the Shepherds,* and in itself it does not fully explain the artist's particular attachment to this subject. Whatever El Greco's motivation may have been, in his late *Adoration* for Santo Domingo el Antiguo he succeeded in creating an altarpiece that was an eloquent means of recording his mortal being and registering his quest for personal redemption. It is a subject he had taken up in his youth – almost certainly in Crete, where *The Adoration of the*

Shepherds had little or (more likely) no currency – then embraced it in Venice – where the theme was only slowly gaining popularity – and brought it to a full flowering in Spain, where he made it something deeply personal and profoundly spiritual.

To conclude, one last piece of evidence may be adduced as proof of El Greco's particular involvement with the subject of *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. When an inventory was made of the paintings in his studio at the time of his death in 1614, no fewer than eight were listed as *The Nativity*. It is a subject that all specialists agree must refer to *The Adoration of the Shepherds* and it is a number that much outweighs that of any other theme. (Wethey, II, p. 25)