
INEQUALITIES IN THE WORK OF EL GRECO AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

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by *Nicos Hadjinicolaou*

*In memory of Stella Panagopoulos,
whose presence at the lecture gave me great pleasure*

The organization of a series of lectures in honour of a distinguished art critic¹ could bring the invited art historians in the delicate or uncomfortable position of defining the limits proper to art criticism and art history, thus reviving a rather sterile paragon of the 20th century.

If, in the debate about the primacy of sculpture or of painting, Vasari (out of conviction it seems and not for reasons of tactics) declared that the controversy was futile because both arts were equally based on “disegno”, I am afraid that today a similar proposition to remove the object of dissent between art criticism and art history by claiming that both were equally based on “artistic theory” would, unfortunately, be rejected as being totally out of place.

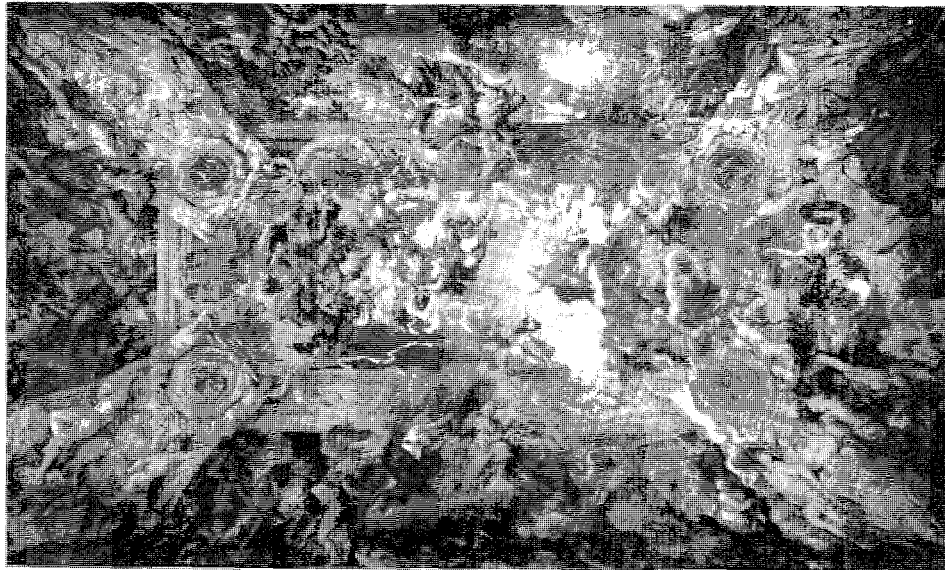
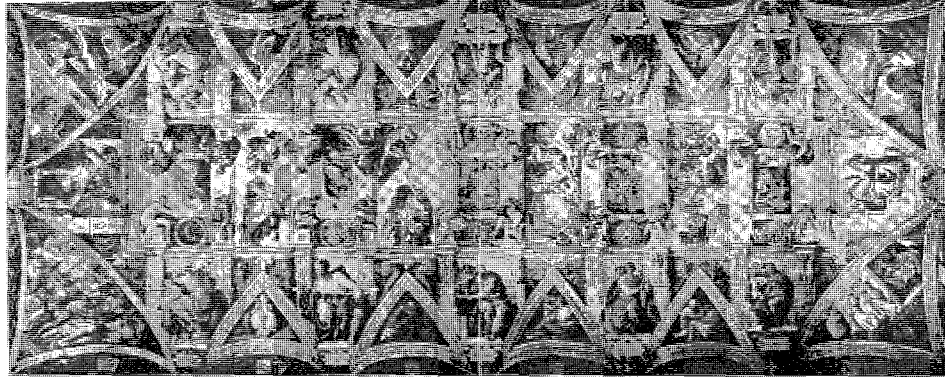
Reconciliation being, at least for the moment, impossible, an art historian might be allowed to stress what in his eyes is one of the advantages of art criticism over art history: that it takes a stand, that it takes risks, that it measures the relevance of a work for the present and for the immediate future.

It goes without saying that an art critic also judges a contemporary work under the burden of his or her knowledge of the art of the past and of the literature written about it. Yet, this does not change the fundamental fact that the appreciation of the work and the value judgements about its assumed “quality” or “validity as a statement” are elements inside a perspective looking towards the future and not towards the past.

¹ Public lecture given at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, in November 1990 in honour of Frank Davis. The notes have been added afterwards while the text has been left practically in its original spoken form, with the exception of the last two pages which have been substantially modified and enlarged.

One of the phenomena which have exercised an enormous fascination upon me, since my first years at the University as an art history student, is that of the changes of artistic forms. It is, indeed, by a miraculous process, that the principles of construction and decoration, that a specific aesthetic ideology which pervades churches, palaces and villas with frescoes, altar-pieces and easel-paintings during the first and second decades of the Cinquecento in Rome², should be replaced one century later

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² Here exemplified with the ceiling frescoes of the Cappella Sistina, painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512.

(and in an equally permeating manner, encompassing the whole of the social life of the ruling classes, from architecture to furniture, from painting to public fountains, or bookbindings) by totally different aesthetic and moral principles³.

For those of us who do not believe in miracles and work as historians, the question is: how can we capture the continuous changes leading from the predominance of one system of aesthetic values to the predominance of another and, more than anything else, how do we *explain* this change, this replacement of one system by another? What are the reasons or the driving forces behind it, which make its fulfilment possible?

If we abandoned this historical perspective and moved from the large scale of “epochal” changes, encompassing many generations of artists, to the small scale of an artist’s life, the problems of formal change remain fundamentally the same. David’s *Equestrian Portrait of Count Potocki*, was painted in 1781, his *Marat* only 12 years later and his *Napoleon* in 1812.

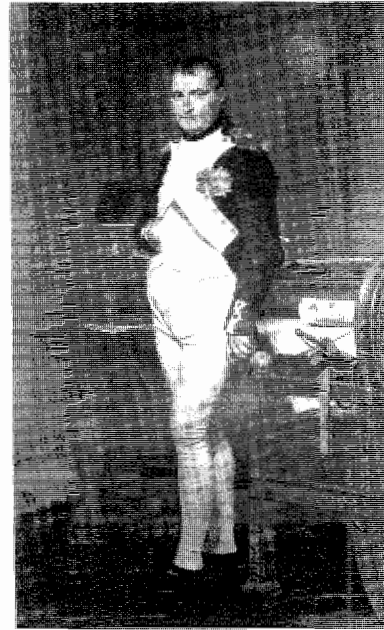


According to historical periods and, in more recent times, to the artist’s inclinations and to the demand of the market we can observe a long duration of stylistic forms, where works of art are produced as if out of a cast, or, on the contrary, short-lived aesthetic ideals, “visual ideologies” succeeding each other rapidly in time.

The difference between the macro-approach and the micro-scale of formal changes, in an individual’s personal production lies in the fact that, whereas one would not

³ As one can see (lower left page) in Pietro da Cortona’s fresco *Il Trionfo della Divina Provvidenza*, in the ceiling of the Salone of Palazzo Barberini, Rome, painted in 1638-1639.

dream of explaining the move from the Sistine ceiling to Pietro da Cortona's *Triumph of Divine Providence* through the personality of individual artists (the chronological distance is too great and too many individuals are involved), many art historians would be tempted to explain the leap from David's Count Potocki to his *Marat* and then to his *Napoleon* by referring exclusively to the artist. The temptation is indeed enormous. What is more obvious than the role of the artist for the accomplishment of formal change? But even if we kept this perspective as a legitimate basis of discussion, how would we move from this microscale of an individual's life to the macroscale of epochal changes without being obliged to consider them as the sum total of *artistic wills and individualities*?



An answer to this dilemma could be to refuse to consider an artist as an indivisible entity, in spite of so many factors which make up the unity of a human being and keep it together, and to view him or her rather as being a permanent part, consciously or unconsciously, of larger social entities and their ideals.

What one could find in each individual artist's oeuvre is less the unifying presence of a personal cachet and more a series of centrifugal forces at work, or, rather, because the word centrifugal is already misleading, the existence of different, sometimes even contradictory, units which are an integral part of different, sometimes opposed, projects or visions of the world. In a book written some twenty years ago I formulated this idea in the following manner: "As one leaf on a tree is never exactly the same as another, so surely no human being is the same as any other. However, to try to apply this platitude to art history would mean, on the one hand, transforming art historians into detectives who would try to discover the personality of each creator from his fingerprints; and on the other hand would lead them to ignore both the determining differences between pictures produced by the same individual, and also the fact that these paintings belong to styles which are certainly different, if not conflicting. (...) The fact that pictures have been produced by the same artist does not link them together, or at least not in any way that is important for the purposes of art history".⁴

The assumption that it is neither productive nor useful to use the artist as a point of departure for the explication of his own products, particularly if one wanted to account for their diversity, will be re-examined today.

Our subject is: inequalities in the work of El Greco and their interpretation. The accent is

⁴ *Art History and Class Struggle*, first published in French in January 1973, English translation by Louise Asmal, Pluto Press, London, 1978, p. 138 and 104.

placed on the term “inequalities” and I assume that from the perspective of a London art critic the term would be fitting for the title of an article if a certain Theotocopoulos from Iraklion, Crete, now living in Spain, were holding an exhibition of his works in one of the galleries in Bond street.

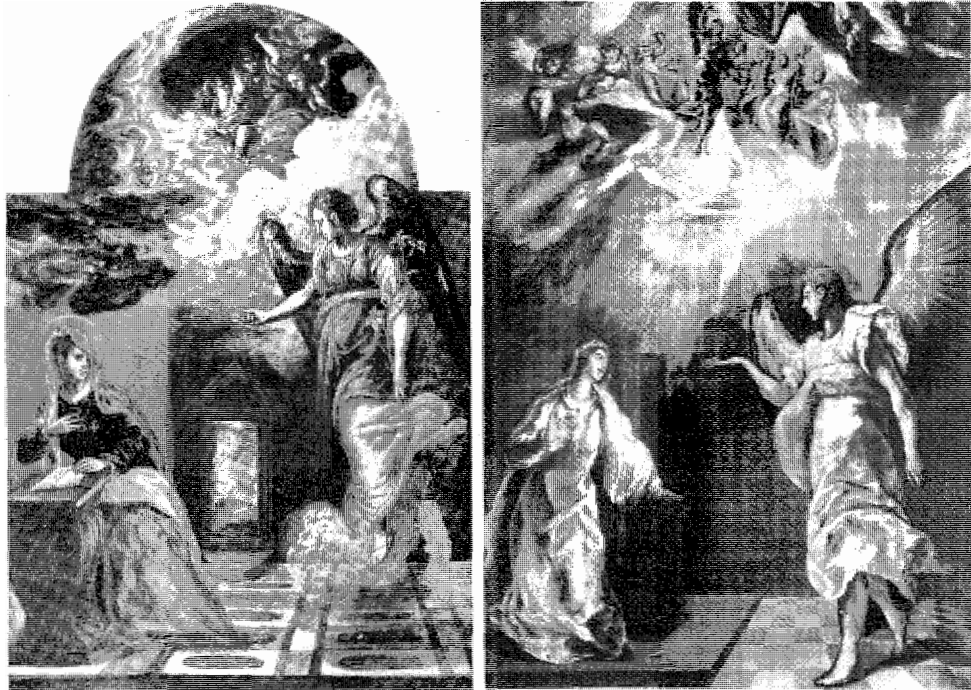
“Unequal”, “disproportionate”, “uneven” these words also inevitably imply, be it by free association, “of unequal quality”. Inequalities, disparities in the work of El Greco : already the *unity* of the work considered in its totality is thus being called in question. And through this bias also the artist in person as a unifying, all embracing force giving meaning and sense to the forms he created, asks for reconsideration. This is the starting point in spite of the fact that we are talking, as far as we can gather from the existing sources, about a forceful, stubborn character, what a psychologist would call “a strong personality”. I would go as far as to speak of a “one-sided” mind, to avoid the much too pejorative term of “monomaniac”. *How is this to be reconciled with the rest?* One-sidedness of character, inequality of the work, continuity and discontinuity: *what is their relationship?* It would be useful to start with the phenomena of *continuity* in El Greco’s oeuvre. First of all from an iconographic point of view.



The analogies between these two “Dormitions”, separated in time by more than 20 years, are indeed impressive. The transformation of the two stooping apostles, Peter and Paul, on the left and on the right of the *Dormition of the Virgin* in Syros⁵ into St. Stephen

and St. Augustine in the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*⁶; the separation into two zones, an earthly and a celestial one; the soul of the Virgin in the form of an infant held in Christ's hands on the left and the transportation of the soul of the deceased into Heaven by an angel in the Orgaz picture; the glorification in Heaven, with the Virgin at the top and the kneeling St. Thomas at her feet in the Syros picture and a triangular construction with Christ, the seated Virgin and the kneeling John the Baptist in the Santo Tomé picture; with the skies filled with apostles and angels in both cases; all these *iconographical* and *compositional* analogies denote a certain continuity of approach.

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⁵ Discovered in 1983 by G. Mastoropoulos the icon is in the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Ermoupolis, Syros. All authors who have written about it consider that it was painted before Theotocopoulos left Crete, at the latest at the very beginning of 1567 (see Γιώργη Στ. Μαστορόπουλου, "Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Θεοτοκόπουλου" in *Τρίτο Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινής και Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης - Πρόγραμμα και Περίληψεις Ανακοινώσεων*, Athens, 1983, p. 53, Μανόλης Χατζηδάκης in *Έκθεση για τα εκατό χρόνια της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (1884-1984)*, Athens, 1985, p. 34, G. Mastoropoulos in *From Byzantium to El Greco - Greek Frescoes and Icons*, London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1987, No 63, p.190-191, Lydie Hadermann-Misguich "Le Byzantinisme du Greco à la lumière de découvertes récentes", in *Académie Royale de Belgique - Bulletin de la Classe des Beaux-Arts*, 5e série, Tome LXIX, 1987, 1-2, pp. 42-64, M. Acheimastou-Potamianou in *El Greco of Crete*, exhibition catalogue, Iraklion, 1990, p. 142-145 and Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou "The Dormition of the Virgin - A work of the Painter's Cretan Period" in *El Greco of Crete - Proceedings of the International Symposium on El Greco, Organised on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of his Birth*, Iraklion, Crete, forthcoming).

⁶ The contract with El Greco is dated 18 March 1586 and the work was finished by 20 June 1588 (see Francisco de Borja de San Román y Fernández *El Greco en Toledo*, Madrid, 1910, Documents 8 and 9).

From a formal point of view, considering both iconography and the principles of composition, the affinities between the *Annunciation* of the Modena Triptych and, say, the *Incarnation* now at the Banco Hispano Americano (a very late work unanimously accepted as being based on an original design by El Greco and completed by his son Jorge Manuel), two works separated by a chronological distance of at least forty years, are striking to the eye.

These manifestations of *continuity*, these traces left by the same Subject on the surface of many pictures can not be dismissed as inexistent. They are anchored in the universe of the individual. But the point is that this universe is not given once and for all: it is formed sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly, in any case often changing and always *related* to other non-individual factors.

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El Greco had obtained, before he left the island of Crete, the title of a “master” and was a renowned practitioner of icon-painting⁷. This element *could* or *could not* re-emerge later on as he became a well known painter in Italy and Spain. It disappeared completely in Italy. To such an extent that if Domenicos Theotocopoulos had died at the end of 1576 we would have been unable to connect the works he painted in Italy to the works painted by him in Crete. But the story did not end like this. Theotocopoulos lived another 38 years and elements from the artistic world of his youth reappeared during the last phase of his work in Spain. The judicious Justi remarked in his short chapter on El Greco included in his monograph on Velasquez of 1888: “old byzantine reminiscences *haunt him...*”. It is significant that Justi chose the verb “haunt” (“byzantinische Erinnerungen *verfolgen ihn*” reads the German text⁸), thus giving a dramatic dimension to this past-present relationship inside the individual. And Francisco Alcantara wrote in 1887: “He carried in his entrails ... the feeling for the highly austere byzantine painting” (“trae en sus entrañas, como pintor, el sentimiento de la austerísima pintura bizantina”⁹).

These “reminiscences” are indeed present in some of the late works painted in Spain: when we look at *Christ the Saviour* (see next page), from his last Apostolado, now in the Casa y Museo del Greco in Toledo, painted at the very end of his life (1608-1614), we can immediately perceive these reminiscences at work if we turn to a Byzantine *Christ Pantocrator* painted during the first half of the sixth century¹⁰.

Or, if one looks at *St. James Major as Pilgrim*, painted between 1587 and 1596 (property of the church of St. Nicolas, on loan to the Museum of Santa Cruz in Toledo)¹¹

⁷ See the document discovered by Maria Constantoudaki in the Venetian Archives, dated 26/27 December 1566 and published in *Thesaurismata*, vol. 12, 1975, p. 296.

⁸ Carl Justi, *Diego Velazquez und sein Jahrhundert*, Bonn, Verlag von Max Cohen und Sohn, Vol. I, 1888, p. 76.

⁹ “El Greco, precursor de Velázquez”, in *La Opinión*, Madrid, 25 October 1887, reprinted in José Alvarez Lopera, *De Ceán a Cossío: la fortuna crítica del Greco en el siglo XIX*, Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, 1987, p. 318.

¹⁰ 84 X 45,5 cm., in the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai.

¹¹ According to Soehner the work is a replica from El Greco’s workshop. There is quite a variety of opinion as to its dating. Pita and Camón date it sensibly earlier (1580-85), Cossío 1584-1594, Wetthey ca. 1590-95, Soehner ca. 1596-1600 and Gudiol 1597-1603.

one can feel the presence of an earlier conception of art and a comparison with the *Enthroned Christ* of the church of the Chora, now Kariye Djami in Istanbul (a mosaic of c. 1315 - 1320) can easily convince us of its existence.

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Finally, in a work like El Greco's *Resurrection of Christ*, now in the Prado (painted around 1600 - 1605), the echo of a byzantine *Transfiguration* can be perceived, as for example in a icon of an Unknown Master, painted during the second half of the 15th century, now at the Benaki Museum in Athens.



Can one draw any conclusions on the basis of these examples? There is no doubt that from the moment we look for these recurring or reappearing elements (and we can look for them so much more easily if we have the benefit of the knowledge of the artist's biography) it is indeed possible in some instances to establish their presence.

The question is : *what do we gain for our knowledge of a specific work from such findings ?*

To go back to the earlier example : since the discovery by G. Mastoropoulos of the Syros *Dormition* in 1983 as a work by El Greco and its inclusion in the artist's oeuvre, we can easily ascertain by comparison what I did above : some iconographic analogies between the two Dormitions (in fact a Dormition and an Entombment) can not be denied. Before



1983 we did not have at our disposal a similar subject painted by El Greco. But we knew enough of El Greco's biography, we knew that he was a Greek from Crete, and so Robert Byron and David Talbot Rice in their book *The Birth of Western Painting* (published by Routledge in 1930) could argue that the subject of the Byzantine *Dormition of the Virgin* was the precedent and the source of inspiration for El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*.¹²

Is it worth noting that Domenicos Theotocopoulos' nationality, although well known from the beginnings of his stay in Italy until his death in Toledo, to the extent that it gave him his nickname, does not seem to have provoked any commentaries during his lifetime and for a century and a half thereafter as to a potential formal relationship between his work and art in Greece, of any period. Such remarks first appear in the 1870's and 1880's, a phenomenon due partly to the gradual re-evaluation of medieval and byzantine art and partly to the influence of historicism. Does it need to be added that the fact that during 300 years no one, apparently, made any remarks on the affinities of some works by El Greco (or of the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* for that matter) with Byzantine and Post-byzantine art in general or with the subject of the Dormition of the Virgin more specifically, does not invalidate the ascertainment of such analogies later, a fortiori after the discovery of an icon painted by Theotocopoulos himself with the subject of the Dormition of the Virgin?

We can say *today* that the recurrence of certain formal or iconographic elements during the long working life of El Greco is a fact, explainable through the artist's biography but also *through the historical and social circumstances* which *permitted*, at various moments of his life, some elements of experience stored in his mind and memory *to be used* and others *not*. If the elements of continuity in El Greco's work mentioned so far are rather the

¹² See pp. 188-189 and Notes to plates 65, 66, 67 and 68.

product of external circumstances, one could add to these what seems to be more directly emerging from his *personality*. El Greco was a man with fixed ideas but we will see afterwards to what extent he was also willing to espouse, with the same fervour, different views in the course of his life. The best example for this is his conception of nature, as exemplified in his landscapes.

It is indeed worth noting that during the half-century of his working life El Greco's "painting relationship to nature" remained constant: nature offers him the starting point for a construct which serves its purposes better than a "naturalistic" representation.

From the very beginning, to the very end, from works like the representation of *Mount Sinai*



(the one now in a private collection in Vienna¹³, painted after an engraving in the early 1570's)¹⁴ to the famous *View of Toledo* (whose changing titles from *View*¹⁵ to *Landscape of Toledo*¹⁶ to *Toledo in a Storm*¹⁷ etc. demonstrate the unwillingness of onlookers to take such a "View" for granted¹⁸), painted at the very end of the 16th century¹⁹, now in the Metropolitan in New York, *what counts is not topographical exactitude*. To quote David Davies: "In both works there is a fusion of topography and creative atmosphere".²⁰ From the other *View of Mount Sinai*, painted a little earlier²¹ and forming the central panel of the reverse side of the *Modena Triptych*, to the artist's *View and Plan of Toledo*, painted in 1610-1614 (now in the Casa y Museo del Greco in Toledo), called in a *Guide to Spain and Portugal*

¹³ Since this lecture was given the work was acquired by the Historical Museum of Iraklion, Crete.

¹⁴ With the exception of Edoardo Arslan ("prodotto debolissimo" in "Cronistoria del Greco 'Madonnero'" published in *Commentari*, XV, July-December 1964, p. 216) and José Gudiol ("Obra del Greco (?)" in *El Greco*, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 1971, p. 339, No 6 of the Catalogue) all other authors, including Wethey who changed his mind between 1962 ("Pseudo El Greco, c.1550" in *El Greco and his School*, Princeton University Press, 1962, NoX-157 of the Catalogue) and 1984 ("The only other item by El Greco that survives from Fulvio Orsini's collection is the small *View of Mount Sinai*, now in a private collection at Vienna, formerly in the Hatvany Collection at Budapest", in "El Greco in Rome and the Portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi" published in *El Greco: Italy and Spain*, Studies in the History of Art, Vol. 13, Washington, 1984, p. 174) consider this as an authentic work and identify it with the "Quadro corniciato di noce con un paese del monte Sinai, di mano d'un Greco scolaro di Titiano" mentioned in Fulvio Orsini's testament dated 31 January 1600 (see Pierre de Nolhac, "Les collections de Fulvio Orsini", in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1884, p. 433).

¹⁵ The title *View of Toledo* is used by the majority of authors, inspite of the fact that, as they themselves recognize in their text, the buildings of the city have been purposely misplaced by the artist.

¹⁶ Cossío (1908) calls the picture "Paisaje de Toledo" (in contradistinction to Ceán, Camón, Pita and others who use the term "Vista") followed by Cassou and others.

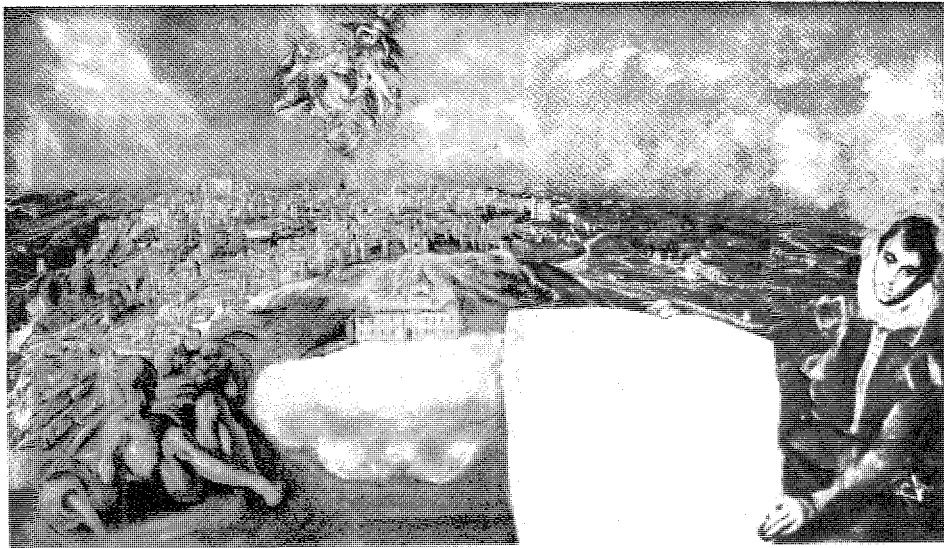
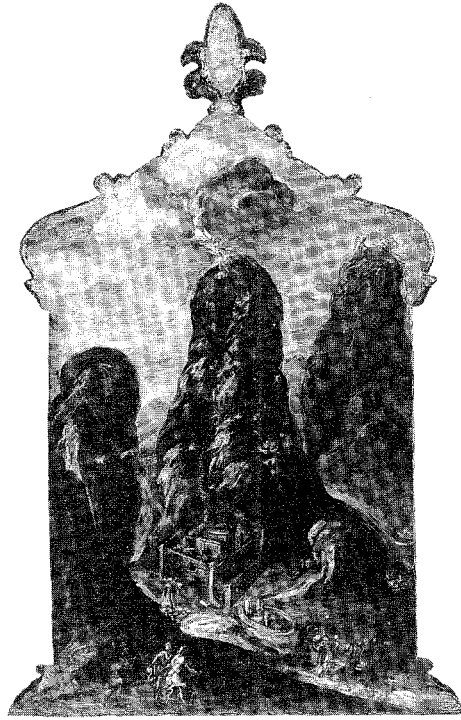
¹⁷ The earlier use of this title seems to be by Kehrler in 1914 (Hugo Kehrler, *Die Kunst des Greco*, Hugo Schmidt, München, p. 83-84 and plate 53) and was taken over by Legendre, Rutter, Ipser, Pfister and others. It is significant that A.L. Mayer gives to the same work the title "Toledo" in 1911, "Toledo im Gewitter" in 1926 and "Toledo in Gewitterstimmung" in 1931!

¹⁸ The most detailed study on the painting and the "unprecedented liberties" the artist took, was published by Jonathan Brown and Richard L. Kagan ("View of Toledo" in *Figures of Thought: El Greco as Interpreter of History, Tradition and Ideas*, Studies in the History of Art, Vol. 11, 1982, pp. 19-30). Already in 1928 Otto Grautoff denied that the picture at the Metropolitan was aiming at verisimilitude: "Auch diese Landschaft ist eine Vision" ("Die Malerei im Barockzeitalter in Frankreich und Spanien", second part of the volume *Barockmalerei in den Romanischen Ländern*, by Pevsner and Grautoff, published in the series *Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft*, Akademische Verlagsanstalt Athenaion, Wildpark-Potsdam, 1928, p. 228.

¹⁹ According to Wethey and Gudiol. Cossío, Soehner, Pita and others place it in the first decade of the 17th century.

²⁰ David Davies, "Introduction" in the exhibition catalogue *El Greco: Mystery and Illumination*, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1989, p. 48

²¹ That the *Mount Sinai* of the *Modena Triptych* has been painted *before* the *Mount Sinai* now in Iraklion has, as far as I know, never been put into question. *How long before* is another matter since according to some authors (including Wethey in 1984), the work could have been painted in Crete.



of 1865 “a very curious plan of Toledo and its montes”²², what we observe is a refusal to represent nature.

In this sense what Hannah Lynch wrote in her book on Toledo, published in 1898, about El Greco in general, seems rather appropriate to describe his attitude to nature: “he worked with his mind concentrated upon the accomplishment of an ideal achievement, not as an idealist, as a materialist rather with an ideal object in view”.²³ There is something specific here that can not be explained by the simple reference to the “spirit of the times” and the beginning vogue for “ideal landscapes”.²⁴ A look at landscape backgrounds in

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²² Henry O'Shea, *Guide to Spain and Portugal*, 3rd edition, Edinburgh, Adam and Charles Black, 1868 [1st edition : 1865], p. 463 (passage reprinted in Alvarez Lopera, *op.cit.*, p. 255).

²³ Alvarez-Lopera, p. 429.

²⁴ A comparative study of El Greco's landscapes with the Venetian tradition (Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, Jacopo Bassano) on the one hand and with landscape painting in Rome in 1590-1600 on the other (Annibale Carracci, Paul Bril, Adam Elsheimer), as well as a juxtaposition with Vermeer's *View of Delft* (painted 44-46 years after El Greco's death) will allow us to define his own conception more precisely.

works by El Greco would even convince us of a *growing and relatively constant tendency towards abstraction*, as we can observe (see previous page) by comparing the background on the left of the *San Sebastian*, in the Cathedral of Palencia, painted around 1577-78, with the background on the left of Saint Peter in *St. Peter in Tears* in Barnard Castle, painted ten years later (around 1585-1590). These overt *simulations of nature* which simply serve the



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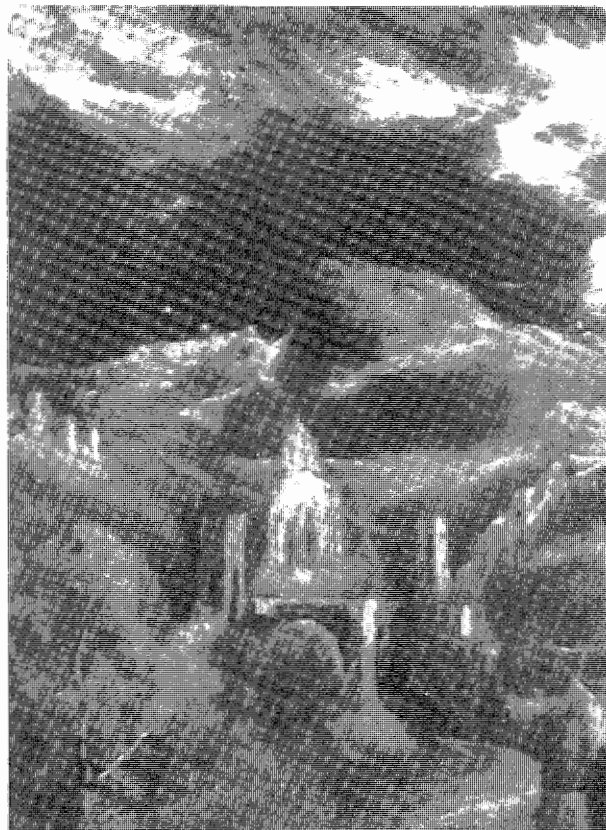
dramatic context of the work, can, eventually, move to the centre of the picture, as in the well known painting of the *Agony in the Garden* where the isolation of Christ and his abandonment by his disciples is *literally represented through a substance* (whose perception can range from a light gauze, to a cloud, to a rock formation) encircling the sleeping disciples (as one can see above, in the variant in Toledo, Ohio, with an enlarged detail next to it).



But other solutions are possible. In the later version of the subject, where El Greco *changed the format* of the picture, *moved the sleeping disciples to the foreground* (as in the Church of Santa Maria in Andújar, unanimously accepted as an original, painted around 1605-1610) *and removed the cocoon* enveloping them, the Garden of Gethemane does not become, for that matter, more “natural”: dominated by the triangular rock whose only *raison d’être* is to form an appropriate background for Christ (both for his figure as far as composition is concerned

and for his red robe as far as the colour-scheme of the whole is concerned), this is really an extremely abstract, “cerebral” representation of the Garden, more conceivable as a backdrop for a theatrical performance than as a landscape painted in the age of Titian or Domenichino.

Artificial nature: be it in the form of glimpses¹ of the background, as, on the left, in *The*



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Agony in the Garden in Toledo, Ohio, or in the form of distant “views” as, on the right, in a detail from the *Immaculate Conception* painted in 1607-1613 for the Capilla Oballe, now in the Museum of Santa Cruz, Toledo (for which Harold Wethey writes: “Here color predominates over all, the figures being no more than disembodied visions of a heavenly realm. The landscape below has no greater sense of reality”²⁵), it is always the same principle at work.

The philosophy of this approach has been explicitly formulated by El Greco in the text written / painted on his *View and Plan of Toledo* (which Wethey perhaps misunderstood and significantly enough called “the amusing inscription”)²⁶ and it has been applied to all of his works.

This is enough evidence to stress the aspect of “continuity” in El Greco’s oeuvre. The time has come to consider the issue of “discontinuity”.

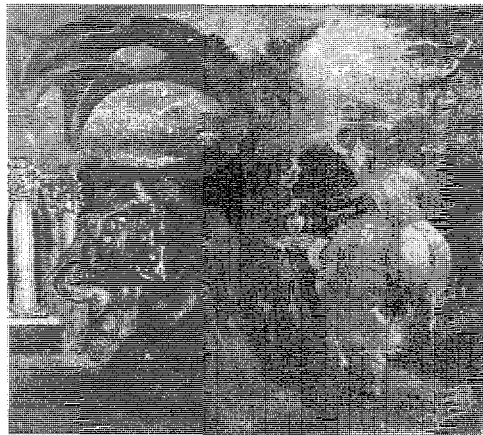
²⁵ Harold Wethey, *El Greco and his School*, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 61.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 84.

In the work of some artists continuity seems indeed to predominate. Rubens's *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma*, now in the Prado, and his *Portrait of Hélène Fourment with a carriage* in the Louvre, are separated by almost forty years! In spite of differences, what a marvellous continuity! If we compare this kind of steadfastness of purpose with what we observed previously in El Greco, we can perceive the difference between *organic continuity in the overall conception of painting on the one hand* (Rubens) and *the re-emergence of certain elements or the constancy of their presence amidst very diverging artistic realisations on the other* (Greco). The similarities or analogies between some very



early works and some late works by El Greco could be interpreted as the sign of such an organic development. *Quite the contrary is the truth.* In his case we observe such radical shifts and changes of perception that, with the exception of the Bolognese eclecticists, we can rarely find a similar instance in the history of art before the second half of the 18th century. Looking at his pictures we observe that the *gradual, quantitative type of development* does not last for more than a decade, fifteen years maximum. For example, this type of *gradual change inside a pattern of continuity* is perceptible if we look at the two Baptisms (see next page), one, on the top left, now in the Prado, painted in 1596-1600 and the other, on the top right, in the Tavera Hospital, begun by El Greco around 1608 and finished by his son Jorge Manuel circa 1622. But how do we accommodate differences of this type, as exemplified by the *Adoration of the Kings* at the Benaki Museum in Athens (assuming, of course, that this is a picture by the artist), painted in the mid 1560's (lower left) and the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (lower right), now in the Buccleuch collection, painted some ten years later?



The mere *existence* of such radical differences forms also part of a problem which has been largely underestimated. In fact, since the beginning of our century, these changes have been reduced, following a classic “evolutionist” approach much too often used in art history, to simple stages of a one-way street leading, as of necessity, to the supposed highest summit of the works painted in Toledo during the last 25 years of the artist’s life (ca. 1590-1614).

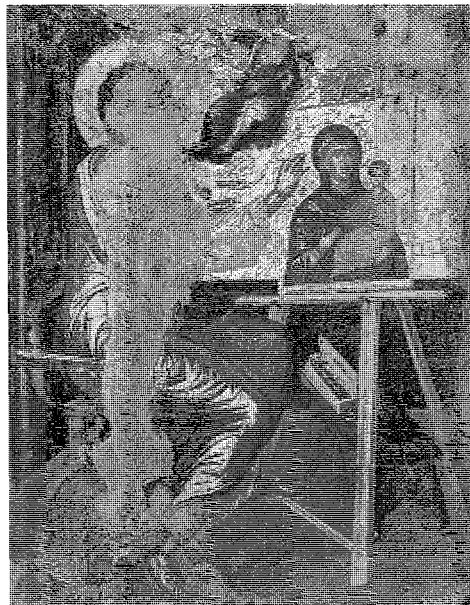
Again, we should be reminded of the differences between art criticism and art history. The critic is facing the work of someone alive. The direction the artist will take in the future is unknown. The historian has the luxury, which is a terrible trap, of knowing the end of the story: the artist is dead and, with some rare exceptions (like Giorgio de Chirico or Picabia who are supposed to have gone off), the way leads in general from one phase to a qualitatively superior one. We write our art histories from the end and we conceive of everything as being a necessary “phase” or “stage” towards this end. That this is being done also by people who profess to believe in the free choice of the individual is another irony of history.

Then, what could more restrict the choices and the risks that an artist makes and takes, than this certainty of a pre-ordained path offered generously from the perspective of a graveyard?

The very existence of these radical changes in El Greco’s art, this uneven succession of visual ideologies observable in his production is already a problem in itself. But far more complicated is the search for the reasons of these changes. Let us start with this last issue. I have mentioned above that the general tendency of El Greco scholarship, the exceptions as always confirm the rule, is a) to minimize the importance of these changes and b) to perceive them, anyway, as inevitable steps, as a series of ante-chambers leading to the royal bed-chamber of the artist’s last style. Be it as it may, if one was obliged to investigate the *reasons* for these changes I suppose that one would impute their existence to two types of factors: what one would call the personal or the psychological factor and what one would call the environmental factor. Assuming that one would have to specify the effects of the individual and of the environmental factors with regard to El Greco’s changes of style I think that one could attribute to the artist’s personality and character some characteristics observable already during the Cretan period.

Looking at *St. Luke painting the portrait of the Virgin and Child*, one would have to say that, even if the phenomenon of eclecticism is rather widespread in post-byzantine art, this young man must have been particularly curious and must have been experimenting in various directions simultaneously, in order to account for such a diversity.

One would have to assume an extraordinary capacity of adaptation, probably combined with a high degree of ambition, if one wanted to account for the existence of the works painted in Venice and Rome. One could also add to these characteristics the above-mentioned onesidedness of mind and



obstinate pursuit of objectives in order to facilitate the explanation of the consistency of the painting of the last years. All these characteristics make out quite a coherent personality although I made different uses of them in order to explain a rather great variety of realisations.

Let us now consider the environmental factor. First of all one would have to mention the fundamental change in the general cultural environment: the move from Crete to the West. How can we explain otherwise the change from the Syros *Dormition* to the *Modena Triptych*? The leap from a post-byzantine icon-painting attracted by western art to western art imbued with elements from the Byzantine tradition?

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Something else could also be attributable to the environment : from his sojourn in Italy Theotocopoulos was to carry forever with him Correggio, Parmigianino, Michelangelo, Bassano, Tintoretto, Schiavone and the Roman mannerists. Yet, again one would have to turn back to the personality factor: no one obliged him to feel a certain affinity of intentions or to “admire” these particular artists. He could have chosen others. Or, he could have remained in the Greek quarter of Venice and painted forever in the manner of the *scuola bizantina migliorata*, as dozens of other Greek artists did.

The environment again: the isolation in Spain and particularly in Toledo is certainly an important intervening factor, a determining element of El Greco's art of the last years. I suppose that these arguments do count if we wanted to explain the reasons for the stylistic changes observed although they all have in common that they are *static*, both the artist's assumed character and individuality and the “environment” are taken as given, monolithic blocks.

Let us look a little more closely at the works in order to see better what I am hinting at: El Greco's capacity to adapt himself to a new environment and pick up the

challenge to excel in the same environment according to *its own* standards, is I think beyond any doubt. The proof lies in the fact that the works he painted immediately after the *Modena Triptych* or the *View of Mount Sinai* cannot be recognized as being his own but through external evidence. Theotocopoulos abandons completely what he has learned until then and starts again from zero.

Imagine what this leap means: from the *Modena Triptych*, on the left, to the *Healing of the Blind* in Parma, on the right or, to the same subject, in Dresden, below.

Can both works be the products of the same hand? In the painting in Parma both the effort and the success of adaptation are blatant to the extent that “the artist” (in reality: the late image of him that took control over the rest) has disappeared.





What we see instead is rather a work by Tintoretto of the 1540's or by Veronese of the 1550's. Tintoretto's *Christ and the woman taken in adultery*, of 1546, now in the Galleria Nazionale in Rome (on top), and his *Christ washing the feet of his disciples*, painted around 1547, now in the Prado, could serve as an example, as well as Veronese's *Annunciation* of 1555, now in the Uffizi. All three works were painted *before El Greco's arrival in Italy*.



The Dresden picture, above, is not “an El Greco”. It is unsigned, it was purchased in Venice in 1741 for the Royal Saxon Collection as a work of Leandro Bassano and it continued to be considered as such for the next 150 years. The work now in Parma, is signed with big capital letters in Greek ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ ΚΡΗΣ ΕΠΟΙΕΙ. This did not prevent the work from being catalogued as a Veronese in the Farnese inventory of 1680. And the third variant of the same subject, now at the Metropolitan, considered a Tintoretto earlier, was bought as a Veronese at a London sale in 1958²⁷.

If we look at El Greco’s *Boy Lighting a Candle*, now in Naples, we are confronted with a similar phenomenon. In an article published in the *Burlington* in May 1968, entitled “Jacopo Bassano’s Later Genre Paintings”, W.R. Rearick mentions that “the motive of a boy blowing on a firebrand had first appeared in Jacopo’s work in the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Rome, Palazzo Barberini) of about 1557. In the early 1570’s it was appropriated by El Greco in a series of paintings of which at least one is signed.” This unsigned little canvas, mentioned in 1662 in the Farnese collection in Parma as having been painted “by the hand of the Greek”, appears in the inventory of 1680 as a work by Giulio Clovio, reappears, after its removal by the Napoleonic troops, as a Honthorst and Adolfo Venturi attributed it in 1929 to Jacopo Bassano²⁸.

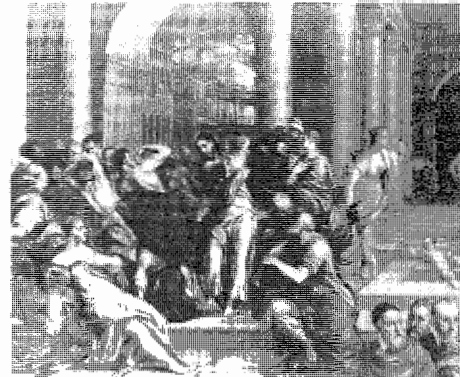


²⁷ On the provenance of these three paintings see Wethey, *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 41-44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 79.

The same remarks are valid for the two *Purifications of the Temple* painted in Italy in the early 1570's, signed in Greek ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ ΚΡΗΣ and ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ ΚΡΗΣ ΕΠΟΙΕΙ.

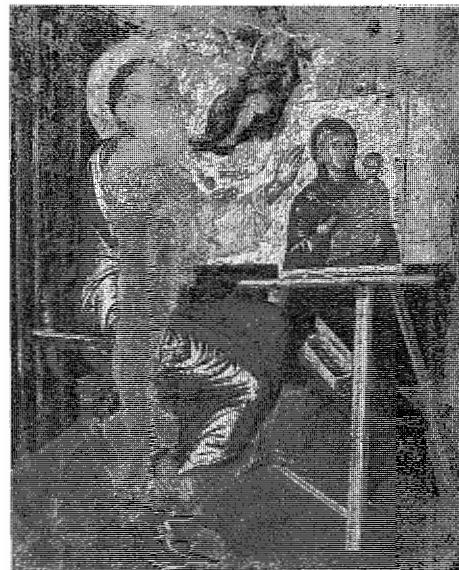
Yet the picture on the right, now in Minneapolis (the one on the left is in Washington) was considered between the middle of the 18th and the end of the 19th century to be a work by Veronese²⁹.



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We are now near enough the problem in order to be able to formulate it. If we stayed at the level of the personality we would say: the young foreigner, eager (but also able) to adapt himself to the new environment renounced completely what he had learned and done before. A defender of El Greco's so-called "byzantinism" could speak of a sort of exorcism of the past. Indeed, the visual evidence speaks in favour of an extreme insistence on precisely the factor more or less absent from Byzantine and Post-Byzantine painting, namely three-dimensional space, the technique for the creation of the feeling of depth, research in perspective, etc.

Remaining at this level for one moment longer we could ask ourselves how sincere such a renunciation could be. Francis Jourdain, in an article published in 1948 in *La Pensée*, called Jacques-Louis David a "chameleon". Shall we attribute to El Greco similar qualities? I think



²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

rather that we should abandon this approach and instead of trying desperately to relate the works to the personality of their producer *we should start asking questions about this type of painting, the interests it represents and the social groups supporting it.*

Questions could also be raised in other terms : is there such a demand for pictures of this kind in the market? Who buys such pictures? At what prices? Where do the pictures go to? What kind of houses or churches? This type of questions would lead to a much more productive perspective than the one we have been engaged in until now. Such an approach would break away from the individual artist and see how profoundly united are works that are produced by different artists. Unfortunately, in the case of El Greco the evidence at our disposal concerning his clients in Italy is minimal. Everything we know about the owners of his religious, genre or allegorical works painted in Venice and Rome (and we are speaking of something like 20 or perhaps even 30 paintings) consists of one version of the *Boy Lighting a Candle*, one version of *Christ Healing the Blind* and the *View of Mount Sinai*, three works that lead us directly to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese or to his immediate entourage via his librarian Fulvio Orsini.³⁰

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But this evidence is not sufficient and it would be misleading to draw any conclusions from it. In the case of the paintings by Tintoretto or Veronese previously mentioned it should also be kept in mind that both the *Woman taken in adultery* and the *Annunciation* have been attributed to other artists as well.³¹ So, we are speaking about *a widespread phenomenon* indeed which deserves to be

³⁰ On Alessandro Farnese as an art collector we now have at our disposal Christina Riebesell's Ph.D. *Die Sammlung des Kardinal Alessandro Farnese*, Acta Humaniora, Weinheim, 1989. On Fulvio Orsini and El Greco there is an excellent study by Clare Robertson "El Greco, Fulvio Orsini and Giulio Clovio", in *El Greco of Crete - Proceedings of the International Symposium on El Greco, Organised on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of his Birth*, Iraklion (forthcoming). I have not yet had the opportunity to consult Clare Robertson's book on *Il Gran Cardinale, Alessandro Farnese as a Patron of the Arts*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992.

³¹ On the oscillations of attribution concerning the *Woman taken in Adultery*, see the article by John Maxon "The Master of the Corsini *Adulteress*" in *The Connoisseur*, 1961, pp. 254-261. Already in 1923 Erich von der Bercken and A.L. Mayer noted that the picture "in seiner flüchtigen Art an Schiavone erinnert" (*Jacopo Tintoretto*, Munich, Piper, 1923, Vol. I, p.201). The *Annunciation* has been attributed to Giovanni Battista Zelotti by Morelli (1897), Berenson (1907) and A. Venturi (1929) (see Remigio Marini in *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Veronese*, Flammarion, Paris, 1970, No 27). Particularly interesting in this context is the article by Jaromir Neumann "Venezianische Meister in der Prager Burg" (*Jahrbuch des kunsthistorischen Institutes der Universität Graz*, 2, 1966/67, p. 53-76) referring to a variant in Prague of the "Christ and the Adulteress" subject. Neumann considers this to be a work by Tintoretto of c. 1545 and adds: "Man darf berechtigt die Vermutung aussprechen, daß Tintoretto sich beim Suchen neuer manieristischer Formen auch auf das heimische, im wesentlichen mittelalterliche byzantinische System der kretisch-venezianischen Malerei stützte. Von einem solchen byzantinischen Schema kann man die Figur des Pharisäers im Turban aus dem Amsterdamer Bild ableiten, ebenso wie die Proportionen und marionettenhaften Bewegungen der übrigen Gestalten aller hier erwähnten Werke unserer Gruppe. Sehr auffallend sind diese Merkmale insbesondere bei dem Prager Bild. Wenn sich Greco in Venedig nach Tintoretto orientierte und sein Stil gerade den Werken dieser Schaffensperiode Tintoretto's verwandt war, können wir das darauf zurückführen, daß er hier einen seinem eigenen kretisch-byzantinischen Ausgangspunkt zutiefst verwandten Geist gefunden hatte und sich in Venedig zunächst im Milieu der kretisch-byzantinischen Malerei bewegte. In diesem Sinne kann man den Stil des Prager Gemäldes und der mit ihm verwandten Werke als Stil Grecos vor Greco - El Greco avant la lettre - bezeichnen" (p.63). I would like to thank Rose Wishnevsky (Zentralinstitut, Munich) for drawing my attention to this publication.

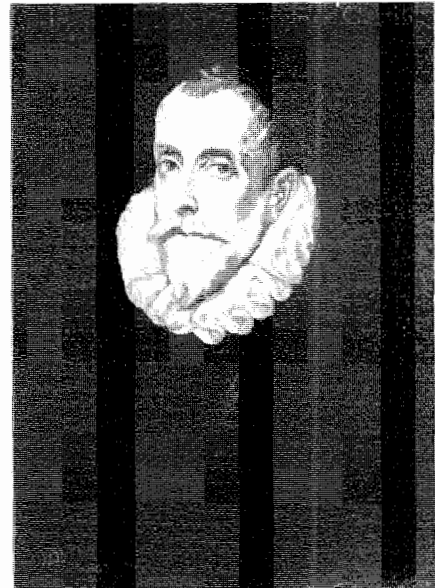
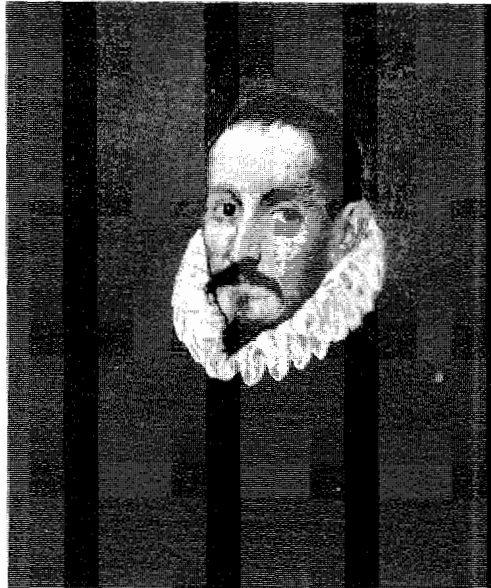
studied in itself if we want to be able to explain the *attraction* exercised by this genre on a twenty six year old painter newly arrived from the dominions.

To sum up this argument: instead of underestimating some major works of El Greco (to this ensemble one should add not only the portraits which will be mentioned later but also a painting such as the Budapest *Magdalen* most probably painted in Italy at the very end of the artist's stay there) simply because *they do not fit* with a certain image of him, and practically dismiss a determining decade of his life (from his 26th to his 36th year), it would be historically more justifiable to see the Italian period *not as a bridge* leading necessarily to Spain but as an entity in itself, with its own, very different, values.

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A second sign of disproportion in El Greco's oeuvre, one could say provocatively a second "anomaly", is represented by his early portraiture in Spain. Contrary to current opinion, according to which El Greco captured, so to say, upon touching Spanish soil, the very essence of the "Spanish soul", I believe that his presence in a society in which he felt a total stranger and the traditionalist values of his new clients had as a result an incredible decline³² in the quality and inventiveness of his work *in portraiture*³³.

The situation is such that many scholars, including one of the foremost *connoisseurs* of El Greco's work, Harold Wethey, hesitate to attribute most of the early portraits painted in Spain to the artist. However, if a parenthesis is allowed, some connoisseurs have been so à côté in their judgments that one should be careful. For example, one can not forget that Wethey himself, a man with such a "good eye", was for



³² Since the triumph of positivism in art historical scholarship the mere use of such a word is not tolerated. If I did not profit this evening from the freedom conceded to art critics, I would not have used it myself.

³³ The difference from the other genres where El Greco presents himself during his first years in Spain as an Italian virtuoso is particularly astonishing.

many years³⁴ *unable to see* what so many others like Pallucchini, Longhi or even Camón Aznar were able to see namely, that the *Modena Triptych* was painted by El Greco.³⁵

But let us return to the problem of portraiture. There is no doubt that if we have an image of an artist and of his work, *which we do not want to alter at any cost*, then we are forced to declare all works which do not fit into the image as “school works” or even attribute them to other, “lesser”, artists. The fact is that in El Greco’s portraits from the late 1570’s to the late 1580’s, we have such a series of very conventional works that the question has to be raised as to the reasons for such a change of approach.

The painting on the left (previous page), is the portrait of an unknown gentleman³⁶ and on the right the portrait of Rodrigo Vasquez, both in the Prado (the latter considered by Wethey to be a 17th century copy after a lost original).

The so-called *Duke of Benavente*, in the Musée Bonnat in Bayonne, is another such example. “Rigid in pose, the figure does not reach El Greco’s highest level of achievement”, writes Wethey. All three works have indeed a rigidity in common. They are exterior representations of a physiognomy and a social status rather than of individuals.

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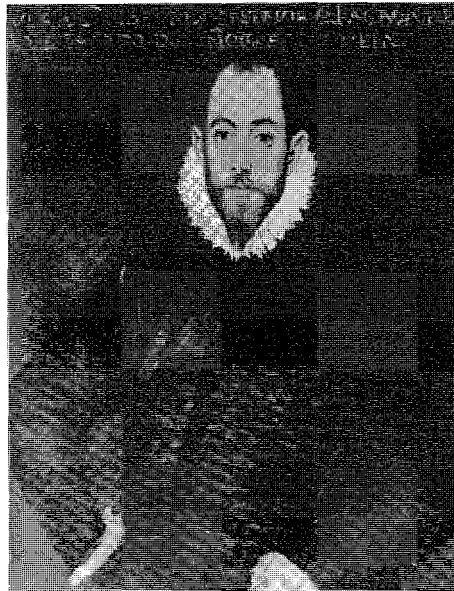
³⁴ In the already mentioned article of 1984 he retracted: “He [Theotocopoulos] probably had painted the little and much disputed triptych in the Galleria Estense at Modena before he left Crete” (p. 171).

³⁵ “Wethey con una gran falta de sentido crítico niega en este poliptico que sea del Greco”, writes Camón in 1970 (José Camón Aznar, *Dominico Greco*, 2nd edition, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1970, Vol. I, p. 60).

³⁶ Wethey: “More mechanical than usual in El Greco’s portraits, yet the picture seems to be his” (Vol. II, p. 91).

Even the portrait assumed to be of a *Gentleman of the House of Leiva* or of *A Knight of the Order of Santiago* as the work has also been called, now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal, although with a well-painted head and a lively movement of the body, is in fact disjointed, with a feeble torso and the head screwed on it.

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Perhaps the most flagrant example of this early production of portraits in Spain is the celebrated *Knight taking an Oath* (*El Caballero de la mano al pecho*), probably the first of the portraits to be painted in Spain, which has become (as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple became the symbol for rural English middle-class elderly ladies), the incarnation of Spanish masculine nobility, if not of "hispanidad" par excellence. Here it is less the accomplishment in painting in the stricter sense and more the overall conception of the portrait which raises questions. A passage about this work from José Gudiol's book on El Greco³⁷ is a significant example of a 20th century tendency to turn some works of art into national emblems: "there are some works of art - and this is one of them - which seem to be destined not so much to satisfy the capacity for enjoyment of the expert as to attract the masses, not only because of their subject-matter but also on account of that subject-matter's generic significance. It is also the mission of art, after all, to create figures, forms and even personages that will remain as witnesses to a way of life, a race, an age. In this portrait generations have seen the personification of the Spanish grandee of the Golden Age, whose hand is a sign of caste and lineage, but whose look denotes resolution and boldness".³⁸

Indeed, because of a series of circumstances totally foreign to the 16th century, we now have before us (as with Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*) a

³⁷ First published in Spanish in 1971 (ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona).

³⁸ English translation published in 1973 by The Viking Press, Inc., Νέα Υόρκη, σελ. 54.

mythical painting. That large portions of a society, from the ruling classes to the lower middle class and the peasantry, identify themselves with such an image is a further symptom in this sense. The *Knight taking on Oath* circulated even as a stamp to help the unemployed, towards the end of the Spanish Civil War. In reality it is the portrait of a closed, rigid society.

What a change compared to the earlier portraits painted by the artist in Italy, for example the portrait of Palladio, now in Copenhagen (considered for many decades to be the portrait of Giovanni Battista Porta).³⁹



How free-standing in three-dimensional space the figure on the left is, and what a difference in the conception of the individual! How unapproachable is the figure on the right and what an insight is provided into the personality of the figure on the left! El Greco's conception of portraiture was never like Titian's, even if he was influenced by him. The Venetian's masterly portraits of absolute rulers, be they Church dignitaries, uniting, in a very rare combination, the praise of secular power with a critical insight into the individual ruler, depicted a different world from that of El Greco's

³⁹ In this picture, attributed to Tintoretto until the end of the 19th century, one used, since 1917, to see a portrait of Giovanni Battista Porta. It is during the last 40 years that some authors believe that it is rather a portrait of Palladio. This last argument seems to appear for the first time in Camón Aznar's *Dominico Greco* (Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1950, p. 75) and was taken over by Rodolfo Pallucchini in *La giovinezza del Tintoretto - La giovinezza del Greco*, dispense a cura di Paola Rossi, Università di Padova, 1974/75, p. 150 and then in the exhibition catalogue *Da Tiziano a El Greco - Per la storia del Manierismo a Venezia*, Electa, Milano, 1981, p. 264).



Italian clients. Above, the portrait of Paul III, painted by Titian in 1543, now in Naples.

For this reason El Greco seems to be *from a social and pictorial point of view* nearer to Tintoretto and Bassano. Venetian procurators and senators or military men, like Sebastiano Venier, here on the lower left, attributed to Tintoretto, at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, painted immediately after Lepanto, are close to El Greco's Italian portraits, like the one of Giulio Clovio, now in Naples.



Although again upon scrutiny there is still a distance separating them.



But, in any case, this is where El Greco comes from. For example, from Tintoretto's *Unknown man with armour*, painted around 1555, also at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.



El Greco's *Portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi* painted in Rome in 1576, now at the Frick Collection in New York, shows again (just like the previous comparison of Giulio Clovio with the portrait of Sebastiano Venier) his dependency upon the Venetian master in spite of the signs of an individual approach. He prefers more vivid colours and he applies them more freely, his figures are less "refined": there is an intensity in his canvases which is absent from both Tintoretto's and Bassano's portraiture.

At this point, let us go back again to the portraits painted in Spain, such as *The Knight taking an Oath*. The change of approach is remarkable.

How do we explain this change? I can see no other factor than the imposition of certain *pictorial and social* values upon the artist who adapts himself as well as he can to his new environment. It will take El Greco a good twenty years to recover in this field. If we consider the *Lady in a Fur Wrap*, in a way, as a *residue* of the Italian period (I say "in a way" because in another the work looks as if it was not painted by El Greco at all, although it is most improbable that it is a Tintoretto as was proposed by Aureliano de Beruete in 1901 and by Lafuente Ferrari in 1969⁴⁰)



⁴⁰ The discussion initiated with Jeannine Baticle's article on the *identity of the sitter* ("A propos de Greco portraitiste: Identification de la *Dame à la fourrure*" in *El Greco: Italy and Spain, op.cit.*, p. 11-20) continued on the same grounds but also by calling in question the traditional attribution of the painting to El Greco first with an article by Carmen Bernis ("La Dama del armiño y la moda - datos para su fechación y su atribución" in *Archivo Español de Arte*, 59, 1986, p. 147-170, who concluded: "El cuadro se pintó en Italia muy poco antes de la muerte de la Duquesa, ocurrida en 1597. Su autor pudiera ser un artista de formación veneciana") and then with the exhibition catalogue *Alonso Sanchez Coello y el retrato en la corte de Felipe II* (Madrid, Museo del Prado, 1990) where the painting was attributed to Sofonisba Anguissola by Stephanie Breuer-Hermann (p. 29 and 146) and Carmen Bernis (p. 94-95, 106-108). Although not convincing in my view, this attribution has the merit of stressing the relationship of the picture to the Italian pictorial tradition in portraiture.

then it will take years until he rediscovers the way he opened with the portraits of Palladio, Giulio Clovio and Anastagi: but *this time it is his isolation in Toledo which gives him his freedom and his force.*

The first signs of the renewal are the well known portraits of notabilities



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and friends in the Orgaz picture or other contemporary portraits like the one in the Prado (below), painted in the late 1580's.



It is, however, during the last fifteen years of his life, when the travelling painter has achieved stability and recognition, when he knows where he is going to die, that he is free to take the ways he wishes. Moreover, we observe a sort of bifurcation of the different genres: in religious painting "c'est le délire", as most authors of the 18th and 19th century remarked.

Here is the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, in the Prado (above), painted between 1612 and 1614, with classicist criteria a horrifying yet an utterly convincing picture. Next to and simultaneously with this kind of pictures of the last years, El Greco produces, calmly,



serenely the most astonishing, severe, critical, penetrating portraits he ever painted. On the left is the portrait of Cardinal Niño de Guevara, now at the Metropolitan, painted around 1600, and beneath it is the portrait of Jerónimo de Cevallos painted circa 1605-1610, now in the Prado.



Dissimilar in this sense even to Picasso who in 1909 gave the structure and coloration of the landscape at Horta de Ebro to the features of his friend Fernand Olivier, El Greco operates a strict dichotomy between the genres. Probably, even if he had wanted to do otherwise (anyway we do not know what he wanted and we should not care: what counts for us as art historians is what he did) he would not have been accepted. The fact is that here we are facing two worlds - in a sense, another "inequality". In the world of portraiture El Greco will carry on in the late 1580's and early 1590's from where he had discontinued when he left Italy. But now he is evidently more experienced, he is, as it is customary to say, "more mature" and so the old man from Crete fulfils in Spanish portraits painted during the last years of his life the highest achievements of Venetian portraiture.

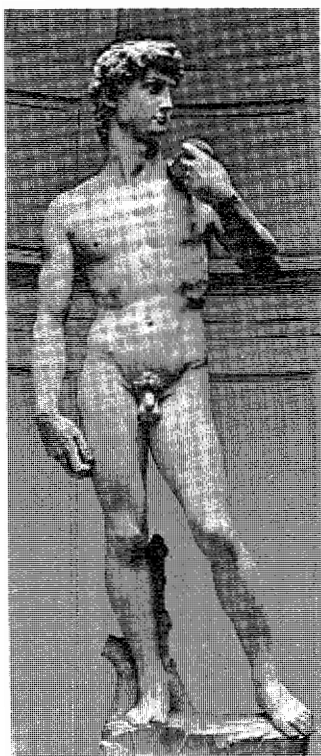


Allow me, in order to start concluding, to come back to El Greco's isolation as a productive factor. He has since the 1580's a strong position in Toledo: one could say a sort of a monopoly of all major projects. We have reliable documents concerning the commissions for the altar-pieces. What he does during the last 25 years is to bring to a paroxysm, because of his isolation, certain inventions which relate him directly to post-byzantine and, even more so, to Italian mannerist painting. Toledo has no choice, and no standards by which to reject such achievements.

El Greco's style has always been a problem for scholarship, mainly because it is something composite, as far as its sources are concerned and also because of the extraordinary diversity of opinions as to the characteristics of Mannerism.

If the concepts of "Renaissance" and "Baroque", the configuration of forms and the "artistic will", to use Riegl's terminology, can be exemplified easily by particular works (here with Michelangelo's and Bernini's *David*) we are still at the initial stage of elaboration of the concept of Mannerism.

El Greco's work embodies at least two different ways of understanding it : in his early work in Toledo one could speak of Mannerism understood as a "stylish style" (to use John Shearman's terminology) and then,



increasingly, of Mannerism as an "expressive" style full of "strain" and "tension".

The Chicago *Assumption of the Virgin*, painted in 1577 for Santo Domingo el Antiguo is in a way a combination of Roman, Emilian and Venetian mannerism in the first sense of the term. In a way the work relies on something like Parmigianino's *Madonna and Child with SS. John the Baptist and Jerome* (painted in Rome c. 1527, which was in the 1570's in the church of S. Agostino in Città di Castello, now in London) and Tintoretto's *Assumption of the Virgin* (c. 1555, Venice, Gesuiti).

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The Prado *Resurrection*, already mentioned, painted during the first decade of the 17th century, is a combination of pictorial ideals observable in Bronzino's *Resurrection* of 1552 (Florence, Santissima Annunziata), Schiavone, Giovanni de' Vecchi⁴¹ and Tintoretto once more (as we can see in his *Assumption* for the Sala Grande of the Scuola di San Rocco,

⁴¹ "Am stärksten ist die römische Parallele zu Greco wohl in manchen Bildern des de' Vecchi ausgeprägt" (Friedrich Antal "Zum Problem des niederländischen Manierismus", in *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, 1928/29, No 3/4, p. 232).

painted in 1579-81) which have been reworked and absorbed in different ways. Stylistically speaking, El Greco's isolation in Toledo allowed him to bring to its conclusion (from an evolutionist point of view, you would have to say "with enormous delay") the expressive possibilities contained in works painted in central Italy during the 1520's, 1530's and 1540's and in Venice and the Veneto in the 1550's and 1560's but this was done sometimes in a conceptual context, that we could call, since Enriquetta Harris's seminal study published in 1938, "Baroque"⁴².

Add to the factor of isolation, the role of artistic production in the social fabric of late 16th and early 17th century Toledo, the problem of socio-religious ideals and their visual realizations, and then perhaps El Greco's late production can also be seen as part of a broader trend.

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In any case we should, I think, first of all, start from the point of accepting the inequalities existing in El Greco's oeuvre as something that will lead us into the realm of co-existing artistic trends and their relationship to the demands of society.

This will probably also help us understand better the extraordinary variations in the appreciation of El Greco's work from the middle of the 17th century until today.

⁴² "The decoration of the Capilla Mayor of the Hospital de la Caridad in Illescas is important not only as a unique example of an entire scheme of decoration by El Greco, but because it provides what could be called the first example of a baroque chapel in Europe, a quarter of a century before Bernini" ("A Decorative Scheme by El Greco", in *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. LXXII, April 1938, p. 154).