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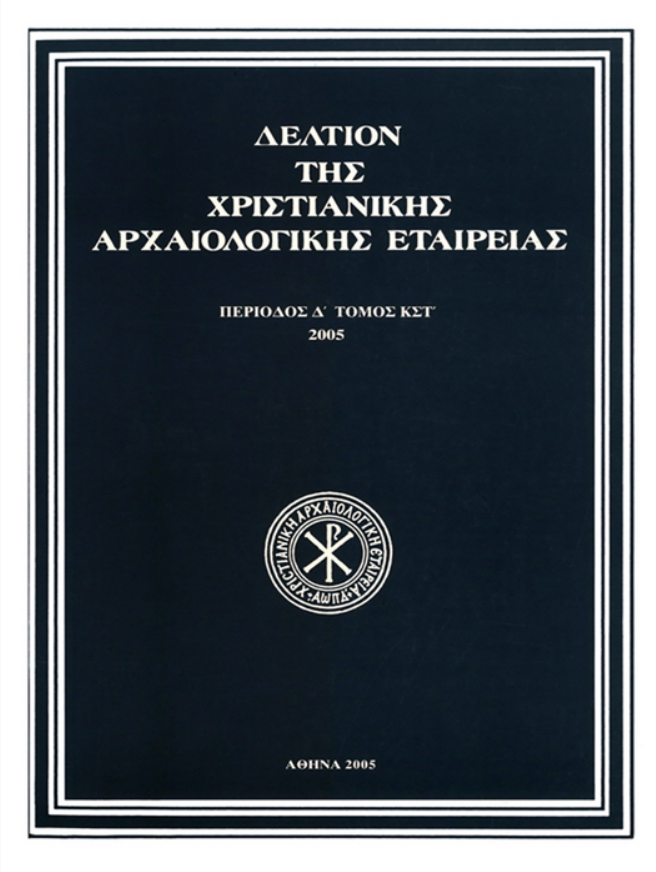

Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου: η βάπτιση του Χριστού. Το πρόσφατο απόκτημα του δήμου Ηρακλείου

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ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism of Christ. A Recent Acquisition of the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete

Maria VASSILAKES-MAVRAKAKES, Maria VASSILAKI, Robin CORMACK

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Maria Vassilaki - Robin Cormack

DOMENIKOS THEOTOKOPOULOS, THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST. A RECENT ACQUISITION OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF HERAKLION, CRETE*

A previously unknown painting (Fig. 1) by Domenikos Theotokopoulos (El Greco), which appeared at auction at Christie's, London in early December 2004 and was acquired by the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete, has afforded us a welcome opportunity of contributing to this volume dedicated to the memory of George Galavaris. In doing so, it has also given us a chance to honour the memory of a colleague and friend, who greatly admired El Greco and dedicated a very important study to him[1]. The invitation by the Municipality of Heraklion to authenticate this painting allowed us to spend long hours holding it, looking at it and studying it. What follows here is our first effort to put on paper some of our thoughts concerning this panel. It is therefore a preliminary study of a painting to which, after it has been cleaned by the Conservation Department of the Benaki Museum, Athens, we intend to return. The technical investigation and pigment analysis which will be conducted during the process of cleaning will allow us to understand more clearly and penetrate more deeply into this very important work of art.

The discovery of an unknown painting by El Greco is an international event. In the case of the Baptism of Christ it is also one of those totally unexpected events which make the world of art so exciting. According to the Christie's Press release of 20 October 2004 the painting, found in an envelope during a routine valuation in Spain, had been in the ownership of a Spanish family since the mid-nineteenth century. The importance of the painting was instantly recognized[2].

The scene depicted on the panel is the Baptism of Christ. St John the Baptist is standing beneath a tree on the left bank of the river Jordan. He is wearing a red robe with white highlights. The upper part of his body and his right leg are left uncovered. St John, at the moment of baptising him, is pouring water over Christ's head from a shell in his left hand and holding a staff with a cross at the top in his right. Christ, turned to the left, is standing in the waters of the river and is extending both his arms towards the Baptist. He is wearing a light blue loincloth with golden floral decorations and fringes. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a white dove, is descending from the sky above towards the head of Christ. On the right-hand bank of the river three winged angels, in the guise of young girls, are standing behind Christ. The angel to the right is holding a red towel, with which to dry Christ's body, and is turned away from the viewer. The middle angel

* We would like to express our deepest thanks to the Municipality of Heraklion and to its Mayor Mr Yannis Kourakis, who entrusted us with the authentication and publication of the panel. We would also like to thank Prof Nano Chatzidaki, of the University of Ioannina, and Dr Xavier Bray, assistant curator at the National Gallery, London, for discussing with us some of the issues raised in this text. We very much enjoyed exchanging our views with Mr John Craxton, painter and academician at Royal Academy, London. Mr Jack Wakefield of Christie's London was very helpful during the authentication of the panel. He also provided us with the Press release and the condition's report of the panel.

[1] G. Galavaris, El Greco's Image of St. Francis of Assisi, in N. Hadjinicolaou (ed.), *El Greco of Crete, Proceedings of the International Symposium Held on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of the Artist's Birth (Iraklion, Crete, 1-5 September 1990)*, Municipality of Iraklion 1995, 383-96.

[2] We are citing from the Press release: "Paul Raison, Director and Head of Old Master Pictures at Christie's London, and Pablo Melendo, Director of Fine Art at Christie's Spain, discovered the piece while carrying out a routine valuation in Spain. To discover a painting of such beauty and importance came as a complete surprise; we simply hadn't expected such a find. This is a wonderful, vibrant work that has an impact that goes well beyond its modest dimensions. This painting originates from a particularly exciting moment in El Greco's career, when the artist was still developing what became his distinctive style." Part of this information was also included in the auction catalogue, *Old Master Pictures,* Christie's, London, Wednesday 8 December 2004, lot 91, 162, 164.

Fig. 1. Municipality of Heraklion, Crete. Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism of Christ.

is looking towards the angel on the right. The left angel is looking towards Christ's back and is isolated from the other two. On the more distant left bank of the river we can see a group of figures and a city. The trees on each side of the composition have thick foliage, both originally truncated at the top, which is now repainted where the panel has been extended.

The panel is currently rectangular in format, measuring 23.60 cm in height and 18.00 cm in width. However this was not apparently its original form, since it has been embedded into a wooden panel which is 0.07 cm thick. The wooden support on which the painting was executed is 0.02 cm thick, but most likely this has been sliced vertically, and is therefore thinner than when it was first painted and has, consequently, lost its original back. It appears, therefore, that the panel may have been thicker and may have had another painting on the other side. It is not possible at present to see this side of the panel as it is covered by the secondary rectangular panel.

The painting has been executed in a mixed medium (egg-tempera and oil) on wood. Its condition is good, but at present some colours are muted by dirt and varnish, and the surface is chipped in a few places. There are some cracks in the wood, and slight damage has been caused by a hook which must once have been inserted at the top of the panel in the centre, no doubt after its alteration into a rectangular panel. There must have been some over-painting on the right side along the two vertical cracks caused when the wood was sliced vertically[3].

Although the painting is now rectangular in shape, it is clear that an alteration has been made in the upper part and that the composition was once arched at the top. At a later date the panel was embedded in the rectangular base and the painting on each side of the arch belongs also to a later date, one presumably contemporary with the alteration. The importance of recognising this alteration and of understanding that the painting was originally arch-shaped is that we may deduce from this that originally the panel formed part of a triptych. Something which is confirmed by the marks left by two hinges, themselves no longer extant, on the left side of the panel. The reasonable conclusion is that this scene was the right wing of a triptych (Fig. 4). An example of this format is offered by the well-known triptych, which bears the signature ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ (Hand of Domenikos) and belonging to the Galleria Estense of Modena in Italy (Fig. 2)[4], which is believed to have been painted by Domenikos

[3] Ms Sarah Walden, conservator of paintings, has conducted a condition's report for Christie's, London. We want to thank her for having allowed us to use the information included in it. Here follows what it is stated in it : "This very thin panel, with a domed top and integrated side wings, has presumably been thinned and now has an equally thin backing panel, probably a century or more old. There is some extinct worm damage in this backing but no reason to think that this has affected the original wood. Various very old cracks appear to have been completely stabilized long ago by the addition of this backing. Very old minor flaking can be seen in some places, now long inactive. There is no structural problem with the paint layers, neither with the panel and support.

The old cracks stem from the base, with one vertical crack from the base up to the spandrel on the right, one slightly diagonal a little more towards the centre from the right base up through the central angel into the tree behind. Another is close to the left edge rising above two inches. The central top of the domed curve has been knocked and lost flakes with some small cracks, and there is an equivalent knock at the centre of the base edge, with other minor knocks along the centre of that edge and some retouching. The side edges are knocked and there is some retouching down the left edge.

The old cracks have been retouched rather broadly and roughly: down the right crack, on the horizon and in the angel's skirt, on the more diagonal crack, quite narrowly but with rather wider touches on the drapery. The base edge has some retouching in the centre and rather older to centre left. In the sky the blue at the top has been heavily strengthened, wit the underlying slightly darker, browner sky still visible in spaces. The same generation of over-paint can be seen on the streaks of blue in the middle of the sky and just below the dove, where lighter sky has been reinforced with the blue. The original bluish light behind the heads of the angels appears to have partially flaked long ago and the ground is visible also in the redder cloud above.

There are some iconoclastic (sic!) scratches across the central juncture of the two figures, with some damage to the far side of the face of Christ. There are various minor scrapes elsewhere, with little nicks in the paint and minute flakes here and there in the figures and throughout. There are drifts of old discoloured varnish. However the essential brushwork is undisturbed even in the minutiae of the distance and the modeling of the heads and drapery. The heads of the angels, in particular the reworked head of the angel closest to Christ, are beautifully intact, despite the vertical crack through the central angel. The delicate area around the feet of Christ in the water for example is perfectly preserved and despite the occasional accidental damage or flaking over time this painting has escaped rubbing and wear from radical restoration. Even the vegetation near the base and towards the left edge and in the trees is remarkably well preserved, under the surface distractions of decomposing varnish and old retouching at the left edge and base. The richness of the crimson drapery and the flowing brushwork in the sky and throughout are remarkably intact, as is the fine detail of the figure."

[4] The extensive bibliography on the Modena triptych can be found in the relevant entry compiled for the exhibition catalogue N. Hadjinicolaou (ed.), *El Greco of Crete*, exh. cat., Municipality of Iraklion 1990, no. 4, 156-85 (M. Vassilaki-Mavrakaki) (hereafter: *El Greco of Crete*). See also M. Vassilaki, Three Questions on the Modena Triptych, N.

Fig. 2. Modena, Galleria Estense. The Modena triptych.

Theotokopoulos (El Greco). This has an image of the Baptism on the right side and so offers a close parallel to the form that we have reconstructed (Fig. 4). It is also very close in size (24,5×17,9 cm).

At this point we want to introduce another painting which has not yet received the attention it deserves. This is a panel of the Adoration of the Shepherds (Fig. 3) which was sold at auction at Christie's, New York, in May 1991[5]. As becomes clear from the photograph this too is the wing of an unknown triptych. It can be attributed to El Greco and compared with the painting of the Adoration of the Shepherds in the collection of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry at Kettering, England, which has also been attributed to Greco[6]. The wing was sold at Christie's, New York in 1991 and is now in the possession of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (inv. 34-011) of the Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario in Canada[7]. The dimensions of the Adoration of the Shepherds are 23.80 cm in height by 19.10 cm in width and thus it makes a convincing candidate for the left wing of the very same triptych to which the Baptism belonged. Were such a reconstruction of the triptych (Fig. 4) correct, with the Adoration, that is, of the Shepherds on the inner left wing and the Baptism of Christ on the inner right, it would suggest that the now missing triptych had closely followed the form of the Modena triptych, at least as far as its inner left and right wings are concerned.

It is common knowledge that it was a feature of El Greco's working practice throughout his life that he often produced multiple versions of the same subject. Each of these versions, individually worked out, was effectively a new production. To take just one such example, this is the case with the Adoration of the Name of Jesus in the National Gallery, London[8] and El Escorial[9]. Some of the iconographic features of these two compositions were already apparent on the inner central panel of the Modena triptych with the Coronation of the Christian Knight[10].

The question that arises at this point is whether El Greco had produced an exact copy of the Modena triptych and if he did, at what stage of his career he did so. For, as long as we have to rely on two of its compositions (the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Baptism of Christ) alone, out of the six that originally decorated this triptych, anything we say must remain highly hypothetical. It is possible that El Greco could have produced a second triptych identical to the Modena one. If we were able to offer a convincing answer to the question of who we think might have commissioned the Modena triptych, we might then be able to answer the question of whether El Greco could have produced a copy identical to it on the occasion of another commission. Most of the compositions chosen for the Modena triptych make absolute sense for a piece destined for private ownership and devotion. It is the central panel of the Modena triptych, with the Coronation of the Christian Knight on its inner side and the View of Mount Sinai on its outer, which, more than anything, gives to the triptych its unique character. The Coronation of the Christian Knight has already been interpreted as an allegory for the triumph of the Christian Faith, and, as a scene containing Counter-Reformation connotations[11], it would need

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Hadjinicolaou (ed.), *El Greco of Crete, Proceedings* (n. 1), 119-32. The bibliography which appeared after 1995 is included in the entry on the Modena triptych published in the exhibition catalogue, José Álvarez Lopera, *El Greco. Identity and Transformation. Crete, Italy, Spain*, Madrid, Rome and Athens 1999-2000, no. 6, 351-6 (M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides). References to the Modena triptych have also been included in the exhibition catalogue, D. Davies (ed.), *El Greco*, exh. cat., National Gallery, London 2003, 45, 46, 100, 106, 112, figs 11, 29, 30 (hereafter: *El Greco*).

[5] Christie's New York, *Important Old Master Paintings*, Friday May 31 1991, lot 58, 93.

[6] This painting, believed to have been painted in the early 1570s, was first attributed to Greco in 1951 by E.K. Waterhouse in the *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Spanish Paintings from El Greco to Goya*, Edinburgh 19/8-8/9/1951, no. 16, 18: "Hitherto unrecorded as Greco. It dates from his Italian period, probably from the early 1570's". This attribution was immediately accepted by Enriqueta Harris in her review of the Edinburgh exhibition. E. Harris, Spanish Painting from Morales to Goya in the National Gallery of Scotland, *BurlMag* XCIII.583 (1951), 313. The vast bibliography on this panel is given in *El Greco. Identity and Transformation* (n. 4), no. 18, 369-70 (J. Álvarez Lopera) and *El Greco*, no. 13, 106-7 (G. Finaldi).

[7] Valuable information was offered to us by the Director of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Dr Janet M. Brooke, and the Bader Curator of European Art, Dr David A. de Witt, both of whom we would like to thank warmly.

[8] This is dated in the late 1570's and is believed to be a sketch on panel that Greco brought with him to Spain as a demonstration piece. *El Greco*, no. 23, 128-9 (G. Finaldi).

[9] He was commissioned to execute this painting for the Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial between 1577 and 1579. *El Greco*, no. 22, 126-7 (G. Finaldi).

[10] Such as, for example, the sea monster, *El Greco of Crete, Proceedings* (n. 1), 342 and Vassilaki, Three Questions, op.cit. (n. 4), 122.

[11] V.H. Miesel Jr, La tabla central del tríptico del Modena del Greco, *Archivo Español de Arte* XXVI (1953), 205-14. See also D. Davies, El Greco's Religious Art: the Illumination and Quickening of the Spirit, in *El Greco*, 45-71, esp. 62-6.

Fig. 3. Kingston (Canada). Queen's University, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, gift of Drs Alfred and Isabel Bader, 1991. The Adoration of the Shepherds.

to be investigated further before one could say whether it might have been selected by an individual to accord with his own preoccupations and beliefs. It might also be held to reflect the historical and religious conditions of its time as well as the general climate and atmosphere of the period. Of course, we are unable for the moment to take these questions any further. We can only make a few suggestions.

If we compare the scene of the Heraklion Baptism (Fig. 1) with that of the Modena triptych (Fig. 2) we find that they resemble each other closely. The position and gesture of Christ, the detailed rendering of his face and hair; the shell held by the Baptist; the white dove coming down from the sky and the trees on each side of the scene – all these features are common to both compositions. However, there are many differences of detail which show that this is not simply a copy of the Modena triptych but is rather a more refined version of it. It is in several respects a much more powerful work of art. Thus, the figure of St John the Baptist has about it a greater sense of movement, the Baptist and Christ are set at the same level, so that the relationship of the two figures has a different and more direct impact and becomes more human than in the Modena triptych. The angel on the right is similarly a far more powerful image than the related figure in the Modena triptych, whose posture and gesture appear to be quite 'clumsy'.

In general, it could be said that the Baptism on the Modena

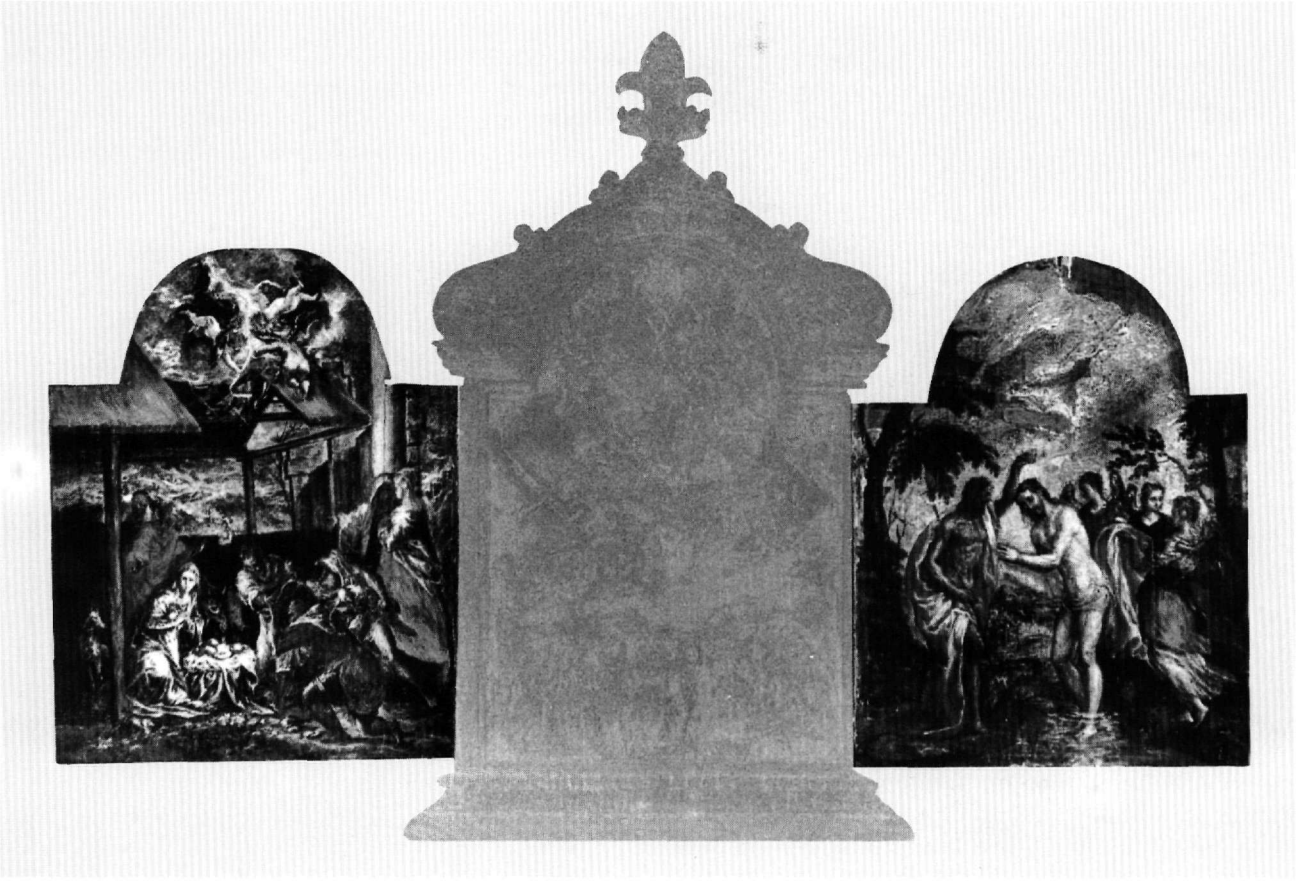

Fig. 4. Proposed reconstruction of the triptych with the Baptism of Christ and the Adoration of the Shepherds.

triptych relies far deeper on the Byzantine – in fact, the 'Post-Byzantine', the Cretan – background and training of El Greco[12] than the Heraklion Baptism, which has a much stronger Venetian character. It might also be said that, where the Modena Baptism is the outcome of the artist's acquaintance with Venetian mannerism mainly through prints[13], the Heraklion Baptism issues rather from his direct acquaintance with the paintings of late Venetian mannerism, which he could have seen in large numbers on his arrival in Venice[14]. This does not exclude the possibility that El Greco also derived, as was his common practice, some of the iconographic features in this panel from prints. According to G. Dillon, the composition of the Modena Baptism follows that of an engraving (Fig. 5) by Giovanni Battista d'An-

[12] For example, the placing of the Baptist higher than Christ finds many parallels in sixteenth-century Cretan representations of the scene, such as the fresco at the Stavronikita monastery on Mt Athos, painted by the Cretan Theophanes in 1546. M. Chatzidakis, *The Cretan Painter Theophanes. The Final Phase of his Art in the Wall-Paintings of the Holy Monastery of Stavronikita,* Mount Athos 1986, 57, fig. 7. The range of colours is rather limited compared to those used in the Heraklion Baptism and also stem from the painter's Byzantine background.

[13] G. Dillon, El Greco e l'incisione veneta. Precisazioni e novità, in Hadjinicolaou, *El Greco of Crete, Proceedings* (n. 1), 229-49, esp. 234-5, fig. 4 (an engraving by Giovanni Battista d'Angeli (del Moro), repeated in *El Greco. Identity and Transformation*, no. 6.3, 353-4 (M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides).

[14] It is true that works by Titian, Tintoretto, Jacopo Palma and Giovanni Bellini are documented to have existed in Candia (modern Heraklion), but it is also true that their number should have been very small compared with that of paintings existing in Venice herself. N. Panagiotakis, *Τά νεανικά χρόνια τοῦ Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου*, Crete University Press, Heraklion 1999, 140-51.

Fig. 5. Giovanni Battista d'Angeli, The Baptism of Christ, engraving.

geli (del Moro)[15]. It is interesting to note that El Greco made further use of the same engraving for the Heraklion Baptism. In fact he borrowed from it the feature of the group of figures and the city in the more distant left bank of the river. It appears that for the composition of the Baptism on the panel he also made use of an engraving by Giulio Bonasone[16] (Fig. 6), from which he borrowed the feature of the angel to the right (Fig. 7), who is turned away from the viewer. This engraving copies the print of Circe and the Companion of Ulysses by Parmigianino[17].

The infra-red photograph of the panel (Fig. 8) reveals the painter's drawing technique and his concern for creating an effective composition as some *pentimenti* notably in the figure and head of the Baptist indicate[18]. Greco had long made it his practice to make careful drawings for his compositions before he started painting them[19]. The under-drawing of the Baptism also corresponds with other works and drawings attributed to El Greco, such as those of St John the Baptist (Fig. 9) and St John the Evangelist in a private collection exhibited in the El Greco show at the National Gallery, London[20].

The discovery of the Heraklion Baptism allows us to challenge the date and place of origin of the Modena triptych once again. Since its first publication by Pallucchini[21] it has been widely accepted that the Modena triptych was executed after the painter's arrival in Venice in 1567/68[22] though the opposite view that it was painted before Greco left Crete also has its supporters[23]. It is in our judgement certain that

[15] H. Zerner (ed.), *The Illustrated Bartsch. Italian Artists of the Sixteenth-Century School of Fontainenblau*, 32 (16.1), New York 1979, no. 4 (179).

[16] S. Boorsch and J. Spike (eds), *The Illustrated Bartsch. Italian Masters of the Sixteenth Century*, 28 (15), New York 1985, no. 86 (135). M.B. Cirillo, *Giulio Bonasone and Sixteenth-Century Italian Printmaking*, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison 1978, 235. St. Massari, *Giulio Bonasone*, Rome 1983, no. 14, 41-3. The engraving by Bonasone was executed in the 1530s.

[17] The print executed between 1524 and 1530 is kept in the Cabinetto Disegni e Stampe of the Uffizi Gallery. L. Fornari Schianchi and S. Ferino-Pagden, *Parmigianino e il manierismo europeo*, exh. cat., Parma, Galleria Nazionale, 8/2-15/5/2003 and Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 4/6-14/9/2003, 89-91, fig. 13.

[18] Alterations (*pentimenti*) are also visible in the head of the left-hand angel.

[19] See, for example, the drawing that has been revealed during restoration underneath the painted surface of the panel of the Evangelist Luke painting the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (1560-1567) and of that of the Adoration of the Magi (*ca.* 1565-1567), both at the Benaki Museum, Athens. S. Stassinopoulos, Το σχέδιο στα έργα του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη, *Τα νέα των φίλων του Μουσείου Μπενάκη* 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1988), 13-7.

[20] They are both dated in 1577 and are thought to have "formed part of a much larger composition depicting the altarpiece commissioned by Diego de Castilla from El Greco for Santo Domingo el Antiguo". *El Greco*, nos 18-19, 118-9 (X. Bray), with previous bibliography.

[21] R. Pallucchini, *Il polittico del Greco della R. Galleria Estense e la formazione dell'artista*, Rome 1937.

[22] For a review of the existing bibliography up to 1990, see the entry by M. Vassilaki in the catalogue *El Greco of Crete*, no. 4, 156-91, esp. 156-9 and eadem, Three Questions, op.cit. (n. 4), 119-32. See most recently the entry for the Modena triptych by M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides in *El Greco. Identity and Transformation*, no. 6, 351-6 and the views expressed in the *El Greco* catalogue by D. Davies in his essay, El Greco's Religious Art (n. 11), 45-71, esp. 45, 46 and by G. Finaldi in his entry for the panel with the View of Mount Sinai, today in the Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, no. 10, 100 and elsewhere in the same catalogue, 106, 112.

[23] S. Bettini, Maistro Menegos Theotokopoulos sgurafos, *ArtVen* 32 (1978), 238-49, esp. 244. H. Wethey who had initially dismissed the authenticity of the triptych (H.E. Wethey, *El Greco and his School*, Princeton 1962, II, 198-200) later suggested that El Greco "painted the little and much disputed triptych in the Galleria Estense at Modena before he left Crete". Idem, El Greco in Rome and the

Fig. 6. Giulio Bonasone, Circe and the Companion of Ulysses, engraving, detail.

Fig. 7. Detail of Fig. 1.

the Modena triptych was painted before the one to which both the Baptism of Christ and the Adoration of the Shepherds belonged. The comparison also offers further clues that the components of Venetian mannerism in the Modena triptych could arise from the use of prints, which El Greco had at his disposal rather than through first hand knowledge of paintings in Venice[24]. The iconography and range of colours used for the Modena triptych are still very close to

Portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi, in J. Brown and J.M. Pita Andrade, *El Greco: Italy and Spain, Studies in the History of Art* 13 (1984), 171-8, esp. 171. Vassilaki, Three Questions, op.cit. (n. 4), 119-32 tried to provide some clues as to the triptych's origin in Crete but finally concluded that more conclusive evidence is needed to overturn the current view that it was produced in Venice. L. Puppi, El Greco's Two Sojourns in Venice, in N. Hadjinicolaou, *El Greco in Italy and Italian Art*, exh. cat., National Gallery-Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens 1995, 393-6, esp. 393-4 (hereafter: *El Greco in Italy*), also believes that the Modena triptych was painted in Crete.

[24] He made a wide use of prints for the compositions of the icons of the Evangelist Luke painting the Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, today

'Post-Byzantine', Cretan, representations of the theme both in monumental art and icon-painting. On the other hand, the compositions of the Heraklion Baptism and the Canada Adoration of the Shepherds rely on much more refined versions of their iconographic themes and the range of colours used in these is different and much wider than those used for the Modena triptych. The Modena triptych consequently fits better into El Greco's experience of art while he was still living in Crete.

The fact that the engraving by Giovanni Battista Fontana of the View of Mt Sinai (Fig. 10), which El Greco used for his Modena composition (Fig. 2), was printed in Venice in 1569[25] has been taken to be decisive evidence for dating the triptych's to a time after the painter's arrival in Venice in 1567/68. We do not think, however, that we are on firm ground when we date the Modena triptych on the evidence of a single engraving alone. This would require one to assume that every single print that was ever produced of Mt Sinai has either survived or at least been located[26]. It is not clear where Battista Fontana found his prototype for the View of Mt Sinai. It seems entirely possible that both Battista Fontana and Theotokopoulos made use of the same source for portraying Mt Sinai, which being the case the engraving by Fontana cannot be taken as offering a secure *terminus post quem* in dating the Modena triptych. A small number of Cretan triptychs of the second half of the sixteenth century with the View of Mt Sinai[27] have adopted the same portrayal of Sinai and this at least shows that the iconographic scheme used by Fontana and Theotokopoulos was circulating on Crete at the time. Surviving examples also indicate that the View of Mt Sinai had become a popular theme among Cretan painters of the second half of the sixteenth century, such as Georgios Klontzas[28], who was a contemporary of Theotokopoulos[29]. There is a further connection between the Modena and the Klontzas triptychs[30]. Their carved wooden frame is identical and they all seem to have been produced by the same Cretan woodcarving workshop operating in Candia during the second half of the sixteenth century. Sergio Bettini has shown that this carved decoration had its origins in traditional Venetian woodcarving[31] and copied a type which by the sixteenth century had already been given up by Venetian woodcarvers. It continu-

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at the Benaki Museum, Athens and of the Dormition of the Virgin, today on the island of Syros. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, Italian Influences on El Greco's Early Work. Some New Observations, in Hadjinicolaou, *El Greco of Crete*, *Proceedings* (n. 1), 97-118. Eadem, Saint-Luc par Théotocopoulos au Musée Bénaki. Nouvelles remarques, *Topics in Post-Byzantine Painting in Memory of Manolis Chatzidakis*, Athens 2002, 271-86. For the prints used in the Dormition of the Virgin see also K. Fatourou-Hesychakis, Philosophical and Cultural Interests of Domenicos Theotokopoulos in Crete, *El Greco of Crete*, *Proceedings* (n. 1), 45-68.

[25] Dillon, El Greco e l'incisione veneta, op.cit. (n. 13), 236-7, 240-1, fig. 7. On Giovanni Battista Fontana, see also idem, Stampi e libri a Verona negli anni di Palladio, in P. Marini (ed.), *Palladio e Verona*, exh. cat., Verona 1980, 257-8 and nos XI.53-XI.65, 282-8.

[26] The article by G. Kühnel, Die 'Ikone des Sinai Klosters' und verwandte Pilgerillustrationen, *OC* 65 (1981), 163-218 has provided us with an impressive number of engravings and prints of Mt Sinai. See also, Ch. Gardner von Teuffel, El Greco's View of Mount Sinai as Independent Landscape, *El Greco of Crete*, *Proceedings* (n. 1), 161-72.

[27] A triptych in the Vatican and a panel from a series of five compositions which originally formed a triptych, once in the Wilfrid Blunt collection in England and now in a collection in Athens, are both of Cretan origin and may date from the last decades of the sixteenth century. Vassilaki, Three Questions, op.cit. (n. 4), 122-8, figs 5-6.

[28] Two triptychs that bear the signature of Georgios Klontzas have survived. The first, formerly in the Spada collection in Rome was sold to a private collector in the States. P.L. Vocotopoulos, Ἕνα ἄγνωστο τρίπτυχο τοῦ Γεωργίου Κλόντζα, *Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of Cretan Studies*, vol. 2, Athens 1985, 64-73. *Holy Image, Holy Space. Icons and Frescoes from Greece*, exh. cat., The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore MD 1988, no. 69, 224-7 (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou). The second belonged to a collector in Yorkshire, England and is today in a private collection in Athens. Vocotopoulos, op.cit., 75. The same subject appears on a panel once in the Geneva Musée d'Art et d'Histoire that has been associated with G. Klontzas. M. Chatzidakis, V. Djurić, M. Lazović, *Les icônes dans les collections suisses*, Bern 1968, no. 17. M. Chatzidakis, Το τοπίο του Σινά, in *Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος Κρης. Κείμενα 1940-1990*, Athens 1990, 145, fig. 33.

[29] G. Klontzas was not only a contemporary to Theotokopoulos but appears to have been connected with him as he was asked on 27 December 1566 to valuate a painting of the Passion of Christ that Theotokopoulos wanted to sell in a lottery in Candia. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, Dominicos Théotokopoulos (El Greco) de Candie à Venise. Documents inédits (1566-1568), *Θησαυρίσματα* 12 (1975), 292-308. A painting now in the Vellimezis collection in Athens, which once had the signature of Domenikos Theotokopoulos, has been identified by Nano Chatzidaki as the actual Passion of Christ described in the document of December 1566. N. Chatzidaki, *Icons of the Vellimezis Collection. Catalogue raisonné*, Athens 1997, no. 17, 184-227.

[30] Vassilaki, Three Questions, op.cit. (n. 4), 126. One is the Spada triptych, mentioned above, a second is preserved in the monastery of Patmos (M. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos. Questions of Byzantine and Postbyzantine Painting*, Athens 1985, no. 62), a third in the Vatican (A. Muñoz, *I quadri bizantini della Pinacoteca Vaticana provenienti dalla biblioteca Vaticana*, Rome 1928, pl. VIII) and a fourth in the Municipal Gallery of Ravenna (M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, Τρίπτυχο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα (;) άλλοτε σε ξένη ιδιωτική συλλογή, *Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of Cretan Studies* (n. 28), 209-48).

[31] Bettini, Maistro Menegos Theotokopoulos, op.cit. (n. 23), 244-5. An impressive number of examples is offered by R. Pallucchini, *La pit-*

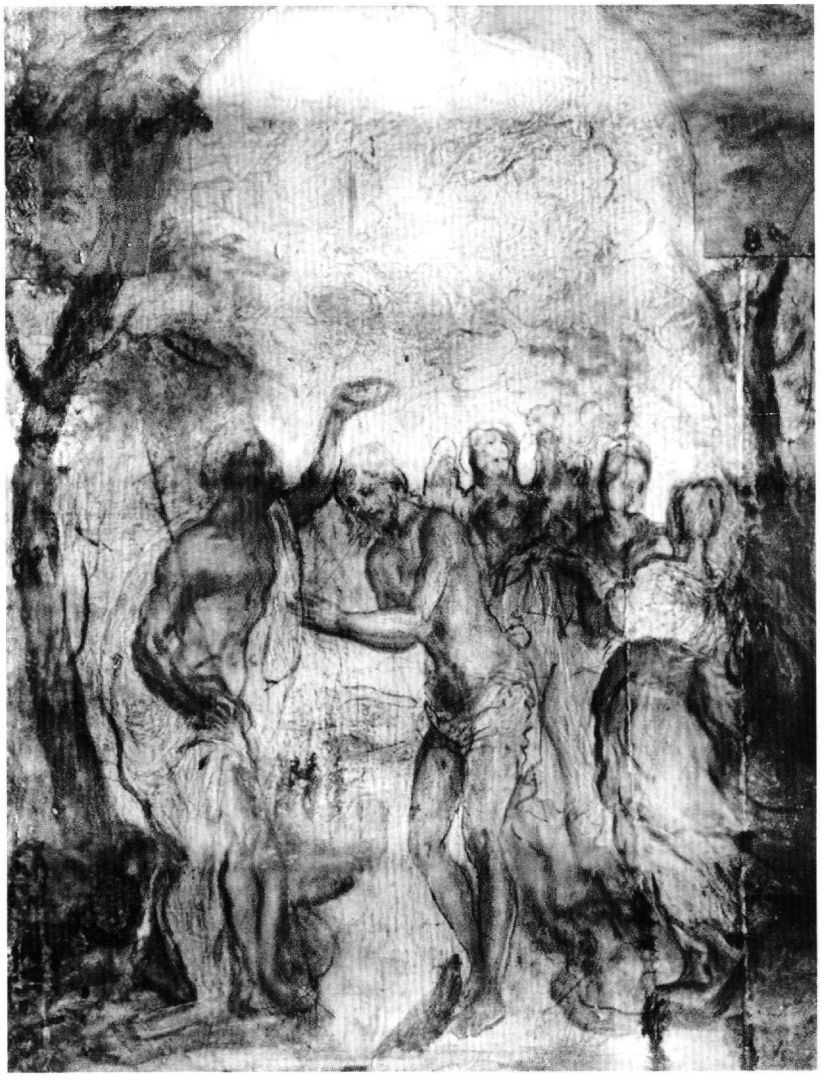

Fig. 8. Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The Baptism of Christ, infra-red photograph.

Fig. 9. Private collection. Domenikos Theotokopoulos, St John the Baptist, drawing.

ed, however, to be produced by the Cretan workshops of the second half of the sixteenth century. It seems reasonable to suggest that the wooden carved frame of the Modena triptych indicates that it was commissioned by Theotokopoulos while he was still in Crete. Otherwise we would have to accept that though he painted it in Venice, he ordered its wooden support and frame from Crete. Following what we have stated above, we find it more reasonable to accept that Theotokopoulos painted the Modena triptych before 1567, while he was still living in Crete and that he probably took it with him on his journey to Venice. This fits exactly with the function of a triptych as a portable object.

The engraving of Mt Sinai that El Greco used for the Modena triptych was to be used again by the painter when he executed the panel with the View of Mt Sinai (Fig. 11), once in the Hatvany collection in Budapest, then in a private collection in Vienna and finally in the Historical Museum of He-

tura veneziana del Trecento, Venice-Rome 1964, figs 519, 622-623, 651-652, 658, 660, 707. See also, M. Muraro, *Paolo da Venezia*, University Park and London 1970, figs 12-13, 61, 113-114.

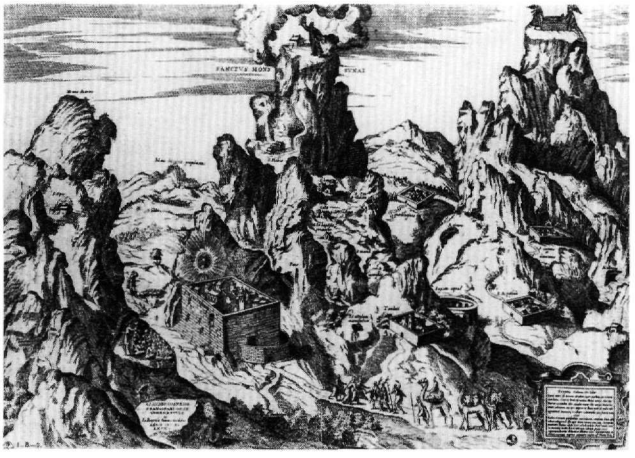

Fig. 10. Giovanni Battista Fontana, The View of Mt Sinai, engraving.

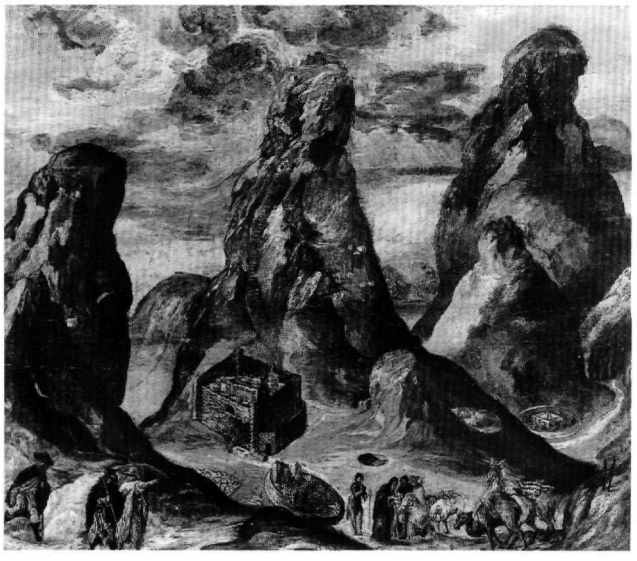

Fig. 11. Heraklion, Historical Museum of Crete. Domenikos Theotokopoulos, The View of Mt Sinai.

raklion, Crete[32]. This painting is recorded in the inventory of the Fulvio Orsini collection in Rome compiled in 1600[33] and this is taken as evidence of its execution during the artist's stay in Rome (*ca.* 1570-1575/76). It is interesting to note that the Heraklion Baptism shares with the Historical Museum View of Mt Sinai the common iconographic feature of a group of figures on the more distant left bank of the river Jordan that are rendered in miniature scale.

There are many iconographic and stylistic devices adopted by the Heraklion Baptism that bring it closer to works that El Greco executed while in Venice. The use of orange and of a light transparent blue for the right angel's vestments is known to us from paintings such as the Flight into Egypt, formerly in the Hirsch collection, Basel and now in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid[34] and the Entombment of Christ[35] formerly in the Stanley Moss collection, New York and now in the National Gallery of Greece, Athens, which are both to be placed in the Venetian period (1567/68-1570) of El Greco. The dark brown skin of the Baptist is reminiscent of the two dark-skinned barefooted men who bear Christ's body in the Entombment of Christ. The emotional effect created by the thick clouds on the sky is also reminiscent of similar renderings of a clouded sky in the Flight into Egypt and in two paintings of St Francis receiving the Stigmata, one from the Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa, Naples and the other from a private collection, both dated in the early 1570s[36]. The latter also shares with the Baptism the common device of rendering the trees with thick foliage.

The rich red garment of the Baptist that rests heavily on the ground is another feature which El Greco will develop in paintings that he will execute in Venice and Rome. This will later become one of his most characteristic features in works of his Spanish period[37]. As mentioned above, the painterly qualities of the Heraklion Baptism of Christ betray El Greco's acquaintance with Venetian mannerism not through prints alone but mainly through his direct contact with paint-

[32] *El Greco*, no. 10, 100-1 (G. Finaldi), with all the previous bibliography.

[33] "Quadro corniciato di noce con un paese del Monte Sinai, di mano di un Greco scolare di Titiano". P. de Nolhac, Une galerie de peinture au XVIe siècle: les collections de Fulvio Orsini, *GBA* 29 (1884), 433, no. 39.

[34] *Da Tiziano a Greco*, no. 105. F. Marías, *Greco. Biographie d'un peintre extravagant*, Paris 1977, 73, fig. 40. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, La 'Huida a Egipto' y la producción juvenil de El Greco, in *El Greco. Circulo de Lectores* (series of lectures given at the Prado), Amigos del Prado, Madrid 2003, I, 21-36.

[35] *El Greco*, no. 3, 78-9 (G. Finaldi), with the previous bibliography.

[36] *El Greco in Italy*, no. 43, 334-41 (N. Hadjinicolaou) and *El Greco*, no. 11, 102-3 (X. Bray).

[37] Among numerous examples, we only cite here a few: the Virgin's robe and mantle in the scene of the Annunciation in the Prado, dated 1596-1600 and the same scene in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid. *El Greco*, fig. 19 and no. 40, 170-71. See also the right angel's robe in the scene of the Baptism of Christ (1608-1628) in the Tavera Hospital, Toledo. *El Greco*, fig. 20.

ings, which he could have seen on his arrival in Venice. His alleged apprenticeship at Titian's workshop would have been one way in which he might have studied such paintings. He also appears to have seen paintings by Tintoretto, such as Christ Carried to the Tomb of *ca.* 1564/65, the Last Supper in San Trovaso, *ca.* 1556/58 and in San Marcuola of 1547[38]. The period in which El Greco was present in Venice was the same as that in which Tintoretto was working for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco[39]. Iconographic and stylistic features that El Greco employed for the Baptism of Christ, such as the use of orange and blue for the vestments of the figures and the trees with high trunks and thick foliage seem to have their origin in paintings by Tintoretto, like the Way to Calvary, of 1566/67 painted for the Sala dell'Albergo of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco[40].

We would like to conclude by saying that the Baptism of Christ that the Municipality of Heraklion acquired from at auction at Christie's in December 2004 can rightly take its place in El Greco's Venetian production. It is a work of immense quality and craftsmanship that shows how much more confident the painter had begun to feel in the years that followed his arrival in Venice. The Modena triptych, thanks to the Heraklion Baptism and the Canada Adoration of the Shepherds, can now be more confidently dated in El Greco's Cretan period. His enthusiasm for the new adventures of his artistic life can be clearly traced in the spontaneity of his brushstrokes of the Heraklion Baptism and can speak for themselves in this work by an exceptionally gifted painter.

Μαρία Βασιλάκη - Robin Cormack

ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ: Η ΒΑΠΤΙΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ. ΤΟ ΠΡΟΣΦΑΤΟ ΑΠΟΚΤΗΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΔΗΜΟΥ ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟΥ

Στις 8 Δεκεμβρίου 2004, σε πλειστηριασμό του οίκου Christie's του Λονδίνου, ο Δήμος Ηρακλείου απέκτησε τον πίνακα του Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου «Η Βάπτιση του Χριστού» (Εικ. 1). Το έργο είχε πρόσφατα εμφανιστεί στην αγορά συνοδευόμενο από την πληροφορία ότι είχε εντοπισθεί στην Ισπανία από υπεύθυνους του οίκου Christie's και ότι βρισκόταν στην κατοχή ισπανικής οικογένειας από τα μέσα του 19ου αιώνα.

Το έργο έχει σήμερα ορθογώνιο σχήμα και διαστάσεις 23,6 εκ. (ύψος) και 18 εκ. (πλάτος). Όμως αυτό δεν ήταν το αρχικό του σχήμα, αλλά έφερε τοξωτή απόληξη. Σε μεταγενέστερη εποχή ο πίνακας ενσωματώθηκε σε ορθογώνια επιφάνεια ξύλου. Η τοξωτή απόληξη του έργου υποδηλώνει ότι αποτελούσε φύλλο τριπτύχου και επομένως έφερε παράσταση και στην άλλη πλευρά, η οποία διαχωρίστηκε από εκείνη με τη Βάπτιση. Η ύπαρξη οπών, που υποδηλώνουν την ύπαρξη στροφίγγων στην αριστερή κατακόρυφη πλευρά του έργου, οδηγούν στη διαπίστωση ότι ο συγκεκριμένος πίνακας αποτελούσε την εσωτερική πλευρά δεξιού φύλλου τριπτύχου (Εικ. 4). Αυτό επιτρέπει να το συνδέσουμε με το τρίπτυχο που σήμερα φυλάσσεται στην Galleria Estense

[38] T. Nichols, *Tintoretto. Tradition and Identity*, London 1999, illus. 20 (San Marcuola), 59 (San Trovaso), 110 (Christ Carried to the Tomb) today in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

[39] G. Romanelli, *Tintoretto. La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, Milan 1994. Nichols, *Tintoretto*, 149-73 (for the period 1564-67). A. Zenkert, *Tintoretto in der Scuola di San Rocco. Ensemble und Wirkung*, Tübinger Studien zur Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte, Band 19, Tübingen and Berlin 2003.

[40] Nichols, *Tintoretto*, illus. 127. Romanelli, *Tintoretto*, pl. 18 and details on 61-81.

της Μόδενας (Εικ. 2), φέρει την υπογραφή *ΧΕΙΡ ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ* στην πίσω πλευρά του κεντρικού του φύλλου και θεωρείται ότι ζωγραφήθηκε από τον Δομήνικο Θεοτοκόπουλο μετά την άφιξή του στη Βενετία (1567/68). Και στο τρίπτυχο της Μόδενα η παράσταση της Βάπτισης κοσμεί το δεξιό εσωτερικό φύλλο και οι διαστάσεις του (24,5×17,9 εκ.) είναι παρόμοιες με εκείνες του φύλλου του Ηρακλείου.

Το τρίπτυχο, του οποίου το δεξιό εσωτερικό φύλλο κοσμούσε η παράσταση της Βάπτισης, φαίνεται πως είχε παρόμοια εικονογραφία με εκείνη του τρίπτυχου της Μόδενα. Φύλλο τριπτύχου με την Προσκύνηση των Ποιμένων (Εικ. 3), που σήμερα ανήκει στο The Agnes Etherington Arts Centre του Πανεπιστημίου Kingston του Καναδά, είναι πολύ πιθανό να αποτελούσε το αριστερό φύλλο του τριπτύχου (Εικ. 4). Οι διαστάσεις του, 23,8×19,1 εκ., είναι παρόμοιες με εκείνες του φύλλου με τη Βάπτιση. Τα δύο φύλλα παρουσιάζουν μεν πολλές εικονογραφικές και τεχνοτροπικές ομοιότητες με τις αντίστοιχες παραστάσεις στο τρίπτυχο της Μόδενα, αποτελούν όμως περισσότερο επεξεργασμένες και εκλεπτυσμένες παραλλαγές των παραστάσεων αυτών. Στη σύνθεση της Βάπτισης η στάση και η χειρονομία του Προδρόμου έχουν αποδοθεί πολύ πιο επιτυχημένα. Το γεγονός επίσης ότι οι μορφές του Χριστού και του Προδρόμου βρίσκονται τώρα στο ίδιο επίπεδο και όχι σε διαφορετικό, όπως στο τρίπτυχο της Μόδενα, δημιουργεί μια πιο άμεση, πιο ανθρώπινη, σχέση ανάμεσα στους δύο πρωταγωνιστές της σκηνής.

Η φωτογράφηση του έργου με υπέρυθρη ακτινοβολία (Εικ. 8) επιτρέπει να διαπιστώσουμε την απίστευτη δεξιοτεχνία με την οποία σχεδιάστηκαν οι μορφές και την εμμονή του ζωγράφου στο να δημιουργήσει μια όσο το δυνατόν πιο επιτυχημένη σύνθεση, κάνοντας συνεχείς αλλαγές (pentimenti) στο σχέδιό του. Αυτές είναι εμφανείς στο πρόσωπο και το σώμα του Προδρόμου καθώς και στο κεφάλι του αριστερού αγγέλου. Το σχέδιο της Βάπτισης μπορεί να συγκριθεί με σχέδια του Προδρόμου (Εικ. 9) και του ευαγγελιστή Ιωάννη, σήμερα σε ιδιωτική συλλογή του εξωτερικού, που αποδίδονται στον Γκρέκο και τοποθετούνται στην ισπανική του περίοδο (περ. 1577).

Ο Θεοτοκόπουλος ακολούθησε και σε αυτή τη σύνθεση τη συνηθισμένη πρακτική του, να υιοθετεί εικονογραφικά στοιχεία από χαρακτικά της εποχής. Το τοπίο της πόλης και οι μικρογραφικές μορφές στο βάθος της αριστερής όχθης προέρχονται από χαρακτικό της Βάπτισης (Εικ. 5) του Giovanni Battista d'Angeli (del Moro). Ο δεξιός άγγελος (Εικ. 7), που στρέφει την πλάτη του προς το θεατή, προέρχεται από χαρακτικό του Giulio Bonasone (Εικ. 6), που αντιγράφει σχέδιο του Parmigianino.

Υπάρχουν πολλά εικονογραφικά και τεχνοτροπικά στοιχεία στη σύνθεση της Βάπτισης που επιτρέπουν να τη συγκρίνουμε με έργα που ο Θεοτοκόπουλος ζωγράφισε κατά την περίοδο της διαμονής του στη Βενετία (1567/68-1570). Το πορτοκαλί και το διάφανο μπλε χρώμα που χρησιμοποίησε για την ενδυμασία του δεξιού αγγέλου παραπέμπει στη Φυγή στην Αίγυπτο, που ανήκε στη συλλογή Hirsch της Βασιλείας και σήμερα βρίσκεται σε ιδιωτική συλλογή του Λονδίνου, και στην Ταφή του Χριστού, σήμερα στην Εθνική Πινακοθήκη της Αθήνας. Το έντονα σύννεφα στον ουρανό, που προσδίδουν ένα δραματικό τόνο στη σύνθεση, θυμίζουν εκείνα που ο ζωγράφος χρησιμοποίησε για τη Φυγή στην Αίγυπτο αλλά και για δύο πίνακες με τον άγιο Φραγκίσκο να Δέχεται τα Στίγματα, που χρονολογούνται στο 1570 και βρίσκονται ο ένας στο Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa της Νάπολης και ο άλλος σε ιδιωτική συλλογή του εξωτερικού. Τέλος, οι μορφές στο βάθος της σύνθεσης, που έχουν αποδοθεί μικρογραφικά, θυμίζουν ανάλογες μορφές στη σύνθεση του Τοπίου του Όρους Σινά που βρίσκεται στο Ιστορικό Μουσείο Ηρακλείου (Εικ. 11).

Όλα τα παραπάνω δεν αφήνουν καμιά αμφιβολία πως η Βάπτιση του Χριστού αποτελεί ανυπόγραφο έργο του ζωγράφου Δομήνικου Θεοτοκόπουλου και ανήκει στη βενετική περίοδο (1567/68-1570) της καλλιτεχνικής παραγωγής του. Ο επικείμενος καθαρισμός του έργου στα εργαστήρια συντήρησης του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, καθώς και η ανάλυση της τεχνικής και των χρωστικών του, θα επιτρέψουν να μελετήσουμε πιο διεισδυτικά αυτό το έργο του κορυφαίου κρητικού ζωγράφου.