

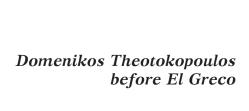
BYZANTINE & CHRISTIAN MUSEUM Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports

Theotokopoulos before El Greco

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Domenikos Theotokopoulos before El Greco

Byzantine & Christian Museum
December 3, 2014 - March 31, 2015



This is the first exhibition which attempts to interpret Domenikos Theotokopoulos in terms of the social and cultural environment which impacted on his artistic choices.

The exhibition is in three parts.

The first part focuses on Crete's importance to Venice in the 16th century and maps the island's social, ideological and economic structure in terms of the relationship between its urban and rural contexts.

The second part examines the arts within the island's cosmopolitan urban environment, stressing the ways in which Cretan artists strove to combine the Byzantine and Western traditions

The final section constructs an interpretation of Theotokopoulos' Crete through a stylistic examination of his work and its comparison with the oeuvres of other Cretan painters. What was it that convinced Theotokopoulos to leave Crete for Venice in the autumn of 1567 or the spring of 1568?

Crete, 16th century

Venetian Crete

The Duchy of Crete / Regno di Candia

Venice's primary goal in the 16th century was full control of the south-eastern Mediterranean. As a result, Crete's geographically strategic position made it the Serenissima's most important colony. A strict bureaucracy regulated the public, economic and social life of the island's inhabitants, while its high-ranking officials were appointed directly from Venice.

Trade routes

Venice's economic supremacy and maritime dominance depended on a network of ports and trading stations. Its colonies were also the main markets for its craft products. Chandax (Candia) was Venice's main export and transit centre in the area. Its most

sought-after export product were its Malvazia wine, olive oil, cheese and wheat.

Battle of Lepanto: 7 October 1571

The naval battle marked the culmination of a drawn-out struggle for control of the Mediterranean. It was fought between the Ottoman empire and the Sacra Lega Antiturca, an alliance of Spain, Venice and the Pope. Although it ended with victory for the Christian forces, it did not leave the Ottoman Empire drastically weakened.

Military Power

The Venetian fleet was largely made up of galleys, which were flexible, adaptable craft. Turkish pirate attacks on Cretan coastal areas and the island's active involvement in the Ottoman-Venetian wars required military strength and good organization on the island. Crete's military forces, which were entirely under Venetian control, relied both on paid professionals and on an army of

local conscripts. The army was divided into infantry, cavalry and artillery.

The countryside

Cultivators of the earth

Two thirds of Crete's population worked the land. Serfs (dependent peasants / paroikoi) were bound to their lord's estate, while freemen were either smallholders or cultivated the land of others; all, however, were burdened with onerous obligations to their feudal lords and to the Cretan administration. The gradual dismantling of the feudal system during the 16th century led to an increase in the number of freemen.

Villages and rural churches

The Cretan countryside was full of small villages, most of which were the property of feudal lords. Rural churches were found

both within and outside these settlements. They were usually built with funds provided by Venetian nobles and feudal lords, though some came into being thanks to private individuals with small or middling incomes. Many of these churches served the needs of both Catholic and Orthodox congregations (dual churches) and were in receipt of an income.

Nobles and feudal lords

The nobility was divided into subcategories and drew its power from land-ownership and its control of production. The nobles held positions and ranks within the island's political system; a number grew rich through trade. In the 16th century, the nobility had to live with the threat of Ottoman invasion and were under pressure both from the Venetian government and the disobedience of the rural population, which was rebelling against the merciless exploitation to which they were subject.

Rural monasteries

The monasteries in the Cretan hinterland were centres of Byzantine Orthodoxy. As such, they were kept under close observation by the local feudal lords throughout the period of Venetian rule. Over time, as the doctrinal differences between the Orthodox and Catholic churches became less intense, some Cretan monasteries acquired dual churches which served the needs of both congregations. This doctrinal blending is reflected in the churches' architecture and sculpted decoration.

The city

City fortifications

Crete's cities were fortified at public expense. The introduction of gunpowder and the development of new weapons of war (cannons) necessitated a change in the way cities were fortified, leading to the establishment of fortresses with bulwarks. Starting in the 16th century, Venice gradually updated the fortifications of its Cretan cityports under the supervision of celebrated Italian architects and engineers.

The urban landscape

Chania's fortress, the open city of Rethymnon and the Great Castle, Chandax's (Candia's) city-port, each present a different aspect of Crete's urban landscape. These were cities in which life bore some resemblances to life in Italy, and whose residents were very much aware of their urban identities. In these cities, the arrangement of public space —new fortifications, port facilities, shipyards, public buildings, founts and fountains, barracks and churches— was prescribed by the Venetian authorities.

The Chronicle of Georgios Klontzas: prophesy and history

This unique manuscript interweaves the history of Man from the banishing of Adam and Eve from Eden to the Second Coming, and includes the capture of Christian territory by the Ottoman Turks, prophesies about their ultimate defeat and the history of Crete. The illustrations drive the narrative, which consists of original texts and modified excerpts from Byzantine and Italian sources.

Guilds, brotherhoods and public ceremonies

The professional guilds were simply associations of craftsmen, while the religious brotherhoods were divided between secular and monastic confraternities. There were Catholic and Orthodox brotherhoods. Each collective drew up its own rules to regulate its operation and administration, and had

its own patron saint and church. They operated under the supervision of the island's political and ecclesiastical authorities. The associations organized Crete's citizens socially and economically, played a charitable, educational and political role on the island, and were under an obligation to participate in various festivals/processions of a secular and religious nature.

Monastic orders

The monastic orders on Crete sought to promulgate the Catholic faith, but were subject to restrictions imposed on them by the Venetian authorities. Sharing common religious goals including the combating of heresy and the desire to convert the local populace, they were intensely engaged in social and philanthropic activities. They also helped support the local economy through their building projects—the churches and imposing monastic complexes they built were emblematic of the mediaeval urban landscape.

Religion

The Catholic Church failed to impose the terms of the Union of Churches on Crete. The Orthodox faith remained predominant (95%) numerically, but the Catholic Church retained the political power. The two churches began to converge doctrinally when the Orthodox people and the Venetian authorities joined forces against the Catholic Church. However, doctrinal difference also often became a means of expressing political differences resulting from the different social conditions of the Orthodox and Catholic populations.

The Counter-Reformation

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), in the face of the Protestant threat, the Catholic church defined its doctrine and reorganized its institutions, forms of worship, teaching and the mechanisms in place for ensuring doctrinal orthodoxy (the Inquisition). Special

emphasis was placed on the sermon and the choice of iconographic subjects in religious art. On Crete, although there were Protestants in Chandax (Candia) in the 1540s, they were driven out by the Inquisition.

The Urban phenomenon

The organization of Chandax's (Candia's) craftsmen into guilds in the early 16th century was a powerful indication of the emergence of a middle class, in the historic sense of the term. This was accompanied by increased activity in the arts. However, the further development of the new middle class was undermined by Venetian policies, resulting in a lack of liquidity and industrial production.

The poor

"The poor [...] usually ate bread and cheese or salted fish [...] both to save money and to stimulate a thirst for those strong wines that increased their desire and ability to sing as

they worked. Come the evening, they would stumble their way homewards [...] to the Maroulas neighbourhood [...] to those caverns made tout of the hollow rock using partitions [...] with food up their sleeves for the family supper". *L' Occio*, by Zuanne Papadopoli.

Money

Lack of liquidity troubled the economy of Crete in the latter half of the 16th century. The lack of coinage in the public coffers would impact on the entire economy, first and foremost through difficulties faced in the payment of salaries, taxes and debts. The lack of liquidity also caused problems for public works and other investments. There was more money in circulation in Chandax (Candia) than in rural areas.

Barter

The lack of money in circulation meant that many exchanges were made in the form of barter. The phenomenon was so widespread, especially in rural areas, that Crete's could barely be described as a money economy.

Minting emergency coinage

In times of war, rough emergency coinage would be hurriedly minted. Such coins were of low intrinsic value, usually copper, and had a disproportionately high face value.

Craft & Industry

On Crete, everyday essentials like clothes continued to be produced by cottage industries. The island's crafts never achieved large-scale production, with the exception, perhaps, of core agricultural goods, painting and wood carving.

Domenikos Theotokopoulos; The artistic background

Intelligentsia

The cosmopolitan urban environment which began to emerge on Crete in the early 16th century was closed linked to the Italian Renaissance. Given that Crete had no printing press of its own, it relied on —primarily Western— Europe for books in Greek and other languages. The imported works provided for the needs of the Church, but also included literary and historical works which circulated among the upper echelons of the Veneto-Cretan administration as well as the island's merchants, scholars and noblemen, some of whom, including the Kallergis family and Francesco Barozzi, maintained fine libraries.

The commissioners

The production of portable icons on Crete increased in the 16th century as the icon ceased to be solely an object of worship and became a collectible and saleable work of art. The number of commissions encouraged the establishment of numerous well-staffed painters' workshops. According to the archive sources, their clientele was not limited to the Greek Orthodox and included Catholics of various social classes and occupations, some of them resident on Crete, others not.

The demand for Cretan icons

Starting in the late 15th century, the reputation of Crete's artists began to spread beyond the island to Mount Athos, the Balkans, the Dalmatian coast, Italy, Flanders, Spain and Sinai. Cretan artists adorned churches built by flourishing Greek communities abroad, but also received commissions from private individuals. Some maintained their own studios, while others

apprenticed themselves to well-respected Italian artists as they sought to break free of the narrow confines of Crete.

Two painterly traditions

Cretan artists' constant interaction with contemporary Italian art-works and with Italian artists who worked on Venetian-ruled Crete, coupled with their visits to Italy, where they came into contact with the newest trends in Western art, served to familiarize them with Italian iconography, whose subjects they added to their own repertoires. In this way, two distinct techniques developed in their religious art: the Byzantine (maniera greca) and the Western (maniera latina).

Painting before Theotokopoulos

Cretan artists began attempting to combine the *maniera greca* with the *maniera*

Domenikos Thotokopoulos; The artistic background

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latina in the 15th century in works that sought to promote the policy of Church Union. They added naturalistic details to traditional elements along with a form of geometric perspective. The way in which the heterogeneous elements were combined varies according to both the artist and the era. The first half of the 16th century was a critical period in the formation of a unified style.

Engravings as models

That Western engravings portraying both religious and secular subject-matter had had a considerable influence on Cretan icons was first noted in the early 16th century. Such engravings were very common on the island, having been brought to Crete by travellers, intellectuals and pious individuals or in a more organized fashion by traders. The extent to which an individual artist adopted elements from these works depended on their education and their personal style.

Painting from life

Cretan artists were very much concerned with two core Renaissance principles: a naturalistic rendering and pictorial and technical originality. They included landscapes in some of their works and selectively applied geometric perspective. However, the end result would not usually depart from the fundamental principles of Byzantine painting. Only in very few cases did the finished work resemble a painting from life.

The particularity of Georgios Klontzas' painting

Georgios Klontzas, a contemporary of Theotokopoulos and a scholar, created an inventive and dramatic personal style. His highly original miniatures feature multiple figures and separate scenes which

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combine to form larger narratives. Many of his works deal with problems of the time, including doctrinal disputes and the Ottoman threat. Klontzas' works often provide anguished support for the Union of the Churches and convey his conviction that Divine Providence alone can save Mankind.

Domenikos Theotokopoulos

Domenikos Theotokopoulos

Domenikos Theotokopoulos was born in 1540 or 1541. When his father, the tax collector Georgios Theotokopoulos died in 1556, Domenikos came under the protection of his older brother, the customs official Manousos Theotokopoulos, who was ten years his senior. Domenikos's family background places him among the *cittadini*, the urban middle class who were employed in the Venetian civil service or the free professions. He left for Venice in the autumn of 1567 or the spring of 1568, and died in Toledo on 7 April 1614.

The singularity of Theotokopoulos' style

To date, three works have been attributed with certainty to Theotokopoulos' Cretan period: Luke the Evangelist, the Adoration of the Magi and the Dormition of the Virgin. All reveal Domenikos's unique painting style

which, though rooted in the maniera latina technique, is nonetheless very different from that of other Cretan artists of his generation. Theotokopoulos strove to marry the mutually incompatible elements of the Byzantine and Western styles by creating a unified space. He did so through his treatment of light and colour, which he used to achieve atmospheric perspective; given the incompatibility of geometric perspective with the transcendental nature of his subjects, he makes only sparing use of it in his work. Colour plays a decisive role in delineating the figures in all three works as well as clearly differentiating the texture of the painted surface in each case. The intense chromatic contrasts are softened by the use of mostly earthy, warm shades. The tonalities are delicately gradated, and an invisible light source illuminates the space more realistically and dramatically than is customary in Byzantine works. Through these innovations, Theotokopoulos takes the maniera latina to its logical conclusion.

Luke the Evangelist painting the Virgin

Theotokopoulos has clearly taken pains to combine the Byzantine tradition and Western painting in a common space. The realistic elements—the stool and the box of paints, the seat, the Evangelist's hair and, above all, the position of his body—are all tightly bound up with the transcendental qualities of the Byzantine tradition, as are the icon depicting the Virgin which the Evangelist is painting and the gold background. The shading and the use of geometric perspective, which compete with one another in their contribution to the creation of space, attest to a work predating both the Adoration of the Magi and the Dormition of the Virgin.

The Adoration of the Magi

Although Theotokopoulos most probably experimented in various directions at once

depending on the commissions he was working on, this work makes it clear that he was apprenticed also to an Italian master. The use of evocative light and chromatic unity allows the artist to paint a space which, though naturalistic, remains transcendental. The use of both geometric and atmospheric perspective accentuates the intensity of the work, as it does in Luke the Evangelist. Although the work is ultimately unified by means of colour, there is a degree of disequilibrium in the rendering of space: the Virgin seems to be suspended, while the two groups in the foreground are not connected and the landscape in the background seems to exist independently of the foreground. These details would indicate that this work was painted before the *Dormition*.

Dormition of the Virgin

This icon from Syros is the most artistically complete work to have survived from Theotokopoulos' Cretan period. Various

Western elements (Metastasis of the Mother of God, the Holy Ghost, candlesticks) have been introduced into the Byzantine iconographic type. The figures are naturally rendered and modelled and move easily in space, while the colour and lighting serve to unite the earthly and the heavenly. The scene is transcendental and realistic in equal measures. The work was probably the last of the three surviving works from the artist's Cretan period to have been painted. This hypothesis is reinforced by the artist's signature which reads "Displayed by Domenikos Theotokopoulos" instead of the earlier "By the hand of Domenikos": the new signature reveals the artist's scholarship and is expressive of a mature artistic personality.

The Last Supper: a related style
The high quality of the work can no longer

be fully appreciated due to damage to the painted surface. However, it is clear that the artist shared Theotokopoulos' views and choices in respect of the marrying of Byzantine and Western elements: he has created a unitary space in terms of geometry and lighting, and the end result balances realism with the transcendental. The icon reveals an artist with a strong personality whose style is closer to Domeniko's than any other.

The departure

Why would a well-respected artist leave Crete, never to return? Why have so few works survived from his Cretan period? Apart from any personal reasons and ambitions he may have had, it would have been impossible for Theotokopoulos to pursue the intellectual and artistic quests revealed by his works' unique style and by his evolution as a painter any further on Crete. The narrow circle of clients who could commission works could have been another reason for

leaving, as might his religious convictions. Whatever the case, however, as we have seen, Theotokopoulos had to a very real extent already severed his links with the Cretan painting tradition before his departure.

Ephorates of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities 1st, 6th, 23rd, 25th Ephorates of Byzantine Antiquities 4th, 8th, 10th, 13th, 18th, 20th, 21st, 28th

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Maritime Museum of Crete The National Gallery - Alexandros Soutzos Museum The Paul and Alexandra Canellopoulos Museum Benaki Museum Benaki Museum-Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika Gallery

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Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia, Italy
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National Library of Greece
Hellenic Library - The Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit

Holy Archbishoprics - Metropoleis - Monasteries

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Holy Metropolis of Arta / Church of Hagios Demetrios of Arta

Holy Metropolis of Gordys and Arkadia / Apezanon Monastery, Herakleion Holy Metropolis of Kos and Nisyros
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Domenikos Theotokopoulos before El Greco

A. CRETE, 16th C. VENETIAN CRETE THE COUNTRYSIDE / THE CITY Temporary Exhibitions' hall

B. DOMENIKOS THEOTOKOPOULOS: THE ARTISTIC BACKGROUND

Duchess of Plaisance Mansion, 1st floor

C. DOMENIKOS THEOTOKOPOULOS

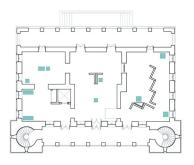
Duchess of Plaisance Mansion, 1st floor

Exhibition Floor Plans

A. TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS' HALL (P)



B-C. DUCHESS OF PLAISANCE MANSION TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS' HALL - 1st FLOOR (D1)



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