

## EL GRECO

Spanish school, 1541 - 1614.

The real name of this artist was Domenikos Theotokopoulos. In Spain his contemporaries called him Domenico Greco or "el Griego" (the Greek) ; El Greco, the form which is now generally used, apparently came into use only later. He was born in Crete, then a Venetian possession. Nothing is known of his early years, but there are a few surviving paintings which indicate that he worked initially in the Byzantine manner practiced by Cretan icon-painters.<sup>(1)</sup> The date of his move to Italy is equally unknown. It seems probable that he went to Venice first, around 1560. He was almost certainly a pupil of Titian's there, and appears to have assimilated alongside this the art of Tintoretto and Jacopo Bassano. He can be identified with reasonable certainty as the pupil of Titian's, "Giovanni Candiotto", whom Giulio Clovio mentioned in 1570 as having arrived in Rome. There he reacted, in a fundamental way, to the work of Michelangelo. By 1577 he was in Toledo, where he remained for the rest of his life. In 1580 Philip II commissioned him to do a painting for the Escorial, but was displeased with the result. He worked also for numerous churches and convents, both in Toledo and in other parts of Spain. Most of his compositions exist in several versions, and there are further versions which appear to have been done by assistants working under him. He died in Toledo on April 6 or 7, 1614.

Three Saints : Matthew, Simon and Luke

oil on canvas, each  $28\frac{1}{8} \times 21\frac{1}{8}$  ins.

each signed with El Greco's Greek initials

Condition Cleaned and restored after their discovery<sup>(see below)</sup>. The Clowes saints appear to have been <sup>severely</sup> overcleaned.

### Provenance

Church of Almadrones, <sup>N<sup>o</sup></sup> Guadalajara, Spain ;  
Newhouse Galleries, New York. Acquired by Dr Clowes in 1952.

### Literature

E. Lafuente Ferrari, "El Greco. Some Recent Discoveries",  
Burl. Mag., 86-87, 1945, pp.296ff.;\* J. Camon Aznar, Domenico Greco, 2 vols., Madrid, 1950, II, pp.981, 1053, 1072 ; p.1372,  
nos. 289, 291, 293 and figs. 829, 834, 842 ; Museo del Prado,  
Madrid, Catalogo de los Cuadros, 1952 ed., pp.293ff., under nos.  
2889-2892.† Catalogo de la Pinturas, 1963 ed., pp.306ff.;‡ H.E.  
Wethey, El Greco and his School, 2 vols., Princeton, 1962, I,  
fig. 233 (St Matthew) ; II, pp.107f., nos.190, 191, 193.

### Exhibited

Pontormo to Greco, the Age of Mannerism, John Herron Art  
Museum, Indianapolis. Feb.-Mar.1954, nos.65-67, ill. ; Ind.,  
1959, nos.32-34.

### Versions

There are related series of saints by El Greco in the  
Cathedral at Toledo (~~thirteen~~<sup>13</sup> three-quarter length figures,  
average size  $39\frac{3}{8} \times 30$  ins.) and in the Museo del Greco, Toledo  
(also ~~thirteen~~<sup>13</sup> three-quarter length figures, average size  
 $38\frac{1}{4} \times 30\frac{1}{2}$  ins.)<sup>(2)</sup> ; also a further group, probably from the  
artist's studio, in the colln. of the marquis de San Felix,  
Oviedo (half-length, average size  $27\frac{3}{4} \times 21$  ins.), and another  
series, now split up, which was in the Henke colln., Seville, and  
again seems to have been produced by the artists' workshop  
(half-length,  $24\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$  ins.)<sup>(3)</sup>

These three paintings belong to a series of nine,  
depicting eight apostles and the Savior, which were discovered  
high up in the parish church of Almadrones during the Spanish  
Civil War (1936-38). Four of the paintings are in the Prado

(the Savior, <sup>Saints</sup> Sts. James Major, Thomas and Paul)<sup>(4)</sup>. The remainder --comprising the present works, the <sup>Saint</sup> St. Andrew now in the Los Angeles County Museum and the <sup>Saint</sup> St. John the Evangelist in the Kimbell Art Foundation, Fort Worth, Texas --came to the United States as the result of an exchange between the Prado and the Kress Foundation in 1952<sup>(5)</sup>.

The identification of the Clowes saints is based on the depiction of St Matthew with an open book in his left hand and a pen in his right, as though he were writing his gospels ; of St Simon with an open book which he supports with both hands and reads ; and of St Luke as holding a book and his painter's brush in his right hand.<sup>(6)</sup>

The series, which was evidently left unfinished<sup>(7)</sup>, was dated by Lafuente Ferrari<sup>(1945)</sup> around 1600 and by Camon Aznar<sup>(1950)</sup> around 1614. Soehner<sup>(1958)</sup> proposed a date of 1610-1614 and considered the whole group to be a workshop production<sup>(8)</sup>; Wethey (1962) dated the series similarly --after the Toledo Cathedral series and contemporaneously with the one in the Museo del Greco -- and attributed it largely to El Greco's workshop, with the exception of the <sup>Saint</sup> St. Matthew which he considered to be by El Greco himself. There are evident differences of quality within the series, and the <sup>Saint</sup> St. Matthew stands out in this respect ; but it seems unnecessary to posit workshop assistance to that extent, since the looseness of <sup>handling</sup> technique here (accentuated by cleaning) goes with the fact that the paintings were high up in the church.<sup>(9)</sup>

#### Notes.

1. See E.K. Waterhouse "El Greco's Italian Period", Art Studies, 8, 1, 1930, pp. 59ff. For reservations about the number of works which can be attributed to El Greco's early period, see most recently E. Arslan, article on El Greco, Encyclopedia of World Art, VI, 1962, p. 835 and the still stronger view of Wethey, op. cit., I, pp. 30ff.
2. Wethey, nos. 160-172, 173-185
3. Catalogued by Wethey, II, pp. 210ff. end-211f, nos X-207 - X-215, X-219 - X-231

Notes, cont.

4. Prado nos. 2880 (Savior) and 2890-2892. No.2880 is the most finished ; in the others the head and neck in particular are unfinished.

5. See Prado cat., (Under lit.), 1952 ed.

6. See Wethey, op.cit. pp.100ff. For Luke, cf. the Tolêdo Cathedral series, (Wethey no.166 and fig.214), where the book is displayed open with a portrait of the Madonna in it, and the San Feliz series (Wethey no.X-212 and fig.236 ; wrongly inscr. "St Simon") where the saint is shown frontally and the book is closed, as here. The painter's brush appears in the right hand in both cases. For Matthew, cf. both the Tolêdo and the Museo del Greco series (Wethey nos. 167, 180 and figs 215,229) where the arm is extended down to the right, with the pen in it. Wethey states that in the present case, as in the Henke and San Feliz series (his nos. X-213, fig.231 and X-226) the right arm with the pen is eliminated; but the pen is in fact clearly visible here, indicating that St Matthew is in this case actually writing, rather than about to write. For Simon, the iconography is invariable in all of the series mentioned (Wethey nos. 171,fig.217, wrongly labelled St Mark, and 184, fig.230 ; and nos. X-217, fig. 232, wrongly inscr. St Bartholomew, X-230, now at Fogg Art Museum, Harvard Univ. and wrongly called St Philip, as noted by Wethey, in accordance with the identification of the previous owner, Edwin H.Abbott). The Clowes Luke has sometimes been identified alternatively as Bartholomew, and the Simon as Mark.

7. See n.4

8. H.Soehner, "El Greco in Spanien", py. <sup>hi</sup> ~~Ma~~, Münchener Jahrbuch für Bildende Kunst, 9-10, 1958-59, p.221, nos. 200-203 (the Prado group).

9. I am grateful to A.Šánchez-Peréz of the Prado for making this point to me (orally, 1966).