The iconography of St. Francis is of great interest for us, especially because of the painting rediscovered at Kosów Lacki in 1964. It is interesting to analyse and consider this painting against the broad background of this saint’s iconography, and compare it with all other known versions of this theme.

The Franciscan iconography in the work of El Greco was the subject of research of almost all El Greco scholars, since the production of different representations of the Saint from Assisi by the artist and his Toledo workshop was extremely prolific. Today, about two hundred works related to El Greco’s Franciscan invention are known. These are works executed by himself, his son Jorge Manuel and other assistants, as well as those carried out by his followers throughout the 17th century, and even later. It was especially José Camón Aznar and José Gudiol who tried to put this enormous group of paintings in order. They gathered over 130 paintings representing St. Francis, trying to determine which of them were autographed works executed by his assistants and workshop, as well as by later followers, copyists and forgers. And it was Harold Wethey, in his crucial El Greco monograph, who...
more carefully and critically analysed the enormous production of El Grecian St. Francis. However, after many decades, when many newly discovered works by El Greco and his circle came to light, it is worth reconsidering the problem.

It is interesting to examine this specific Franciscan iconography in its historical context. Although born Orthodox, after his stay in Italy, El Greco became strictly Roman Catholic, and it was especially after his arrival in Spain that he dedicated his talent and invention to the glory of the Roman Catholic Church, translating into pictorial narration the decisions and recommendations of the Council of Trent. It was surely El Greco who has contributed in a substantial way to the religious iconography of the Counter-Reformation.

The first group of works considered by scholars as the earliest representations of St. Francis in the oeuvre of El Greco is the Italianate composition of Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata known in three versions: one in the collection Zuloaga in Geneva (ill. 50), another in Naples, Museo di Capodimonte and the third one in the collection of the


6 G. Manzini, T. Frati, L’opera..., op. cit., p. 92, ill. 7a; J. Camón Aznar, Dominico..., op. cit., II, p. 1383, no. 538; Da Tiziano..., op. cit., p. 256, no. 98.
Fundación Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid. The scene of the stigmatization of the Poverello is represented here against a quite realistically painted Titianesque landscape. St. Francis is shown kneeling in the wooded ravine, turned frontally to the viewer, while his companion, Brother Leo, is visible in the background, lying with outstretched hands, his face turned toward the luminous appearance in the sky, from where the divine rays are coming upon St. Francis’s hands.

Similar in its Venetian characteristics is a painting belonging to the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo, attributed to El Greco and still considered by some scholars to be his work. It shows an identical figure of Brother Leo, back-turned to the viewer, with widely outstretched hands. However the position of St. Francis is completely different here. He looks upward to the source of light of the heavenly rays descending on his hands; a position very similar to the figure of St. Francis in Jacopo Tintoretto’s painting from the Robert Lehman collection, currently in New York’s Metropolitan Museum. This position and gesture is already much closer to the representations of St. Francis in ecstasy, or receiving the stigmata, known from El Greco’s later, Spanish period. However, I personally do not think that any one of those compositions from the first group presented here were made by El Greco. The modest compositions of small dimensions (25 × 18 cm, 29 × 20 cm) seem to be copies by some Venetian painters, all of them by different hands, after a lost Titianesque composition known from the woodcut by Niccolò Boldrini based on a lost Titian painting from ca. 1535–1545. The figure of Brother Leo in all four works is identical with the one in the engraving, but reversed. They are probably by some minor Venetian painters commissioned to copy the now-lost painting by Titian.

However, even if I do not believe in El Greco’s authorship, I present this group here for the scholarly correctness’s sake, as those works were considered as painted by El Greco by major Spanish and Italian scholars.

The first group presented here does not show the type of meditative or contemplative, single figure of St. Francis in ecstasy depicted in the cave, between rocks, or in an unspecified location, so characteristic of later representations of the saint in El Greco’s paintings from the Spanish period.

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7 For J. Gudiol a free copy after the Zuloaga painting. See: J. Gudiol, Iconography..., op. cit., p. 196; idem, Domenikos Theotokopoulos..., op. cit., p. 341, no. 36; J. Camón Aznar, Dominico..., op. cit., II, p. 1384, no. 540.
10 Niccolò Boldrini, Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata (after Titian), woodcut on paper, 29, 5 × 43, 3 cm, ca. 1535–1545. See: H. E. Wethey, El Greco and..., op. cit., II, p. 117, no. 208.
Two paintings of *St. Francis in Ecstasy* – one in the Wildenstein\(^{11}\) and two in the Lázaro Galdiano (ill. 51)\(^{12}\) collections – present the Saint in prayer, seen in a half-figure in an undetermined space, probably kneeling in front of a rock, on which a skull is placed. His stigmatized hands are crossed on the chest. Stylistically both compositions are very close to El Greco’s works from his Italian period, and can be dated to the artist’s first years in Spain. Many later copies are known; three of them in the same Fundación Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid, and another one in the Cathedral of Granada.

The next group of paintings to which belongs our Polish painting of St. Francis, today in the Diocesan Museum in Siedlce (ill. 52), represents a very personal invention of El Greco. This is a group commonly known as a “Pidal type”, from the painting formerly in the Pidal, and today in the Abelló collection (ill. 53). This specific type was the subject of the research of Izabella Galicka and Hanna Sygietyńska,\(^{13}\) therefore, I will just mention the paintings in this type of various quality. There are about 15 known versions of this composition. Some of the best of them seem to be the Pidal/Abelló, Siedlce and Detroit versions, where one can surely discern the hand of El Greco. In the Detroit version by his hand with the help probably of his son, Jorge Manuel (ill. 54).\(^{14}\)

There exist some variants of this type. In one of them, clearly representing the *Stigmatisation of St. Francis*, the Saint is depicted as a three-quarter-length figure, turned to the left, looking to heaven, from where the light, breaking through the clouds, sends the rays of stigmata towards him. In some paintings of this group the stigmata are coming from the crucifix, in others from the brightly lit clouds. In some, the rocks to the left are austere and barren, in other versions, some plants, like ivy, the symbol of the immortality of the soul, are shown.

In some variants, mostly from the workshop of El Greco, there are no divine rays of stigmata coming down to the hands of the Saint and the crucifix in the sky is missing, like in the sample from the Museum of Dublin, or in the 17th-century copy from the


\(^{12}\) Other versions were in ex-Marquesa de Bermejillo coll., in ex-Thomas Harris coll. and in Santa Olalla (Toledo), the present whereabouts are unknown. See: G. Manzini, T. Frati, *L’opera…*, op. cit., p. 96, ill. 29b; J. Gudiol, *Iconography…*, op. cit., p. 196.

\(^{13}\) See footnote no. 1.

52. El Greco, *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, circa 1580, Siedlce, Diocesan Museum
Stanley Moss collection. From the iconographic point of view it is rather the Ecstasy than the Stigmatization of the Saint.

A large group of paintings represents works executed in the workshop, perhaps with some contribution of El Greco, as in the paintings from Ottawa and the Escorial. The next group represents the works by the school, 17th-century followers and 17th-century copies, in: Dublin, San Sebastian, Stockholm, London, Riverdale-on-Hudson. ¹⁵

The painting by an imitator of El Greco, today in the Art Gallery in Grand Rapids,¹⁶ represents the stigmatization in an inept way. Bizarrely enough, the Saint is looking not towards the crucifix in the bright halo in the sky but he is turned back to the divine light. The clumsy clouds prove that we are confronted with a work by an imitator, a later follower of the Cretan artist. ¹⁷

¹⁵ There are versions, repetitions and copies in the following collections: Abelló (ex Pidal) coll., Madrid; Private coll., Vienna (formerly Institute of Art, Detroit); Stanley Moss coll., Riverdale-on-Hudson; Diocesan Museum, Siedlce; Escorial, Chapter House; National Gallery, Ottawa; Milicua coll., Barcelona; National Gallery, Dublin; Museo Municipal de San Telmo, San Sebastian; Private coll., London; Ex–Joseph C. Sachs coll., Stockholm; Bachstitz coll., The Hague; Art Gallery, Grand Rapids; Museum of Fine Arts, Bilbao.


¹⁷ Other late copies: Ricardo Blanco Ciceron coll., Santiago de Compostela; formerly Froelich coll., Vienna.
The Torelló (ill. 55)\(^{18}\) variant represents a type close to the Pidal/Abelló composition of the stigmatization. However, here the Saint is shown looking downwards to the skull, meditating over transience of life. The crucifix is placed on the rocks in front of him. Behind the crucifix, in the background of the cloudy sky, a branch of ivy is creeping up the rocks, a symbol of immortality together with the skull, both used so often in the representations of meditation about the earthly death and eternal life in the depiction of various saints: Jerome, Magdalene, Peter, and Francis. The subject of meditation was very popular in the religious art of the Counter-Reformation, after the Council of Trent.

In the 17th-century copies, as for example in the San Diego\(^{19}\) and Valencia\(^{20}\) paintings, the ivy is missing, the expressive clouds appear from behind the rocks. There are still many more 17th-century copies of this type.\(^{21}\)

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54. El Greco, *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, after 1600, formerly in The Detroit Institute of Arts, now in private collection

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\(^{20}\) The variant of the composition in the Marqués de Sardanola collection, Valencia.

The St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata in the Escorial Chapter House,\textsuperscript{22} and the painting in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (ill. 56)\textsuperscript{23} represent the saint as a three-quarter-length figure, turned to the left, with outstretched hands and looking upwards to the crucifix appearing in illuminated clouds. The darkness of the background suggests that the scene takes place at night. The saint is shown with a capucho (i.e. a hood or cowl) over his head. Some examples are considered to be by El Greco’s studio (the Escorial and the Museo Nacional del Prado). A late 17\textsuperscript{th}-century copy is in the Spanish embassy in Rome, and a modern copy in the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid.

As derivatives of this type, there are two paintings considered as not being by El Greco, almost identical with the previous ones, but St. Francis is represented there in left profile but without hood (capucho): New York, ex-Koetser collection, Madrid and Fundación Lázaro Galdiano; both later copies of the Escorial Chapter House painting.

The Montreal,\textsuperscript{24} Seville\textsuperscript{25} and Granada\textsuperscript{26} St. Francis in Ecstasy represent a similar type to the one from Baltimore of the saint in capucho, however the right hand of the saint is placed on his chest in a gesture of humility and acceptance, while he is looking upwards to

\textsuperscript{22} Ibidem, p. 104, ill. 71a.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibidem, p. 104, ill. 71b.
the crucifix in the sky. So it is more correct to call this version *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata* instead of *St. Francis in Ecstasy*.

The examples of the so-called “Soler type” of *St. Francis in Ecstasy* are in the collection of Blanco Soler, and in the Fernández Aráoz collection, both in Madrid. This type is almost identical with the previously discussed versions from Montreal, Seville and Granada, but the crucifix here is placed on the rocks in front of the saint, leaning against the skull. So it is more correct to call this version *St. Francis Meditating* instead of *St. Francis in Ecstasy*.

The best representative of the next type is the painting at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Pau, France (ill. 57). The figure of the Saint, shown in three-quarters, with hands outstretched in prayer, is turned to the left. His ecstatic gaze is directed up heavenwards, the skull is shown on the rock in front of the saint, and the painting gives an impression of deep prayer and meditation. The expressive atmosphere of ecstasy is emphasised by the black clouds behind the saint on the left. The austere-looking, mystic, divine light is coming down through dark clouds.

This type was very popular not only in El Greco’s time, but throughout the entire 17th century. Numerous replicas, workshop copies, as well as late copies of this composition

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29 G. Manzini, T. Frati, *Lópera...*, op. cit., p. 104, ill. 75a; J. Gudiol, *Iconography...*, op. cit., p. 203. Other versions are in Conde de Guendulain y del Vado coll., Toledo; Museo de Santa Cruz, Toledo; ex-William Helis coll., New Orleans; Don Tomás Barrecheguren Yañez coll., Granada; Álvarez Sala coll., Madrid; Alfredo Hirsch coll., Buenos Aires; Museu de Arte, São Paulo; Academia de San Carlos, Mexico City; Museo Iglesia de San Vicente, Toledo; Goudstikker coll., Amsterdam.
are known. Many of them are in different collections, in Toledo and Madrid. Some of them were even signed by later copyists, like the example in Toledo’s Casa del Greco, executed in 1683 and signed by Blas Muñoz.30

One of the most popular of El Greco’s compositions dedicated to the Saint from Assisi was *St. Francis Kneeling in Meditation*. St. Francis in full figure is kneeling in the cave with hands crossed on his chest, in front of a rocky stone looking like a table on which the most popular objects of meditation are placed: a crucifix and skull. On the bright stone a book – a breviary or bible with pages marked with a white piece of paper as if with a bookmark. A branch of ivy is shown on the dark wall of the cave. The blue sky covered with white clouds is visible at the upper right-hand part of the painting, behind the silhouette of the rocks. This composition was repeated by El Greco several times, but also many workshop and late copies are known. The best examples of this type are in the Fine Arts Museum in San Francisco (ill. 58),31 in the Art Institute in Chicago32 and in the Museum of Fine Arts in Bilbao.33 A good and very expressive copy, today in the Hospital of St. John the

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33 Ibidem, p. 108, ill. 102c.
Baptist extra Muros in Toledo, seems to have been painted by the son of the artist, Jorge Manuel. About 20 more workshop works and later copies of this type are recorded in different collections.³⁴

There exist numerous accurate copies, but also less faithful imitations, such as the painting in the Buehler collection in Zurich.³⁵ The mediocre imitator of El Greco added, behind the meditating Saint, the figure of Brother Leo reading a prayer from an open book, the hood covers a half of his head. The locked hands of Brother Leo are clumsily depicted, the fingers awkwardly interwoven. There are more branches of ivy on the cave’s wall than in the El Greco’s original composition. This later imitator apparently tried to compile elements from different El Greco’s inventions: he added Brother Leo to the well known composition, because the representation of the meditation of St. Francis in the company of Brother Leo was one of the most popular, sought-after and coveted compositions in 17th-century Spain, as we can deduce from the existence of so numerous examples of this type: originals by El Greco, copies and derivations, today spread throughout the world.

The biggest number of originals, workshop replicas, copies and imitations exist of the type that is best represented in the collections of the museums: Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid,³⁶ the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa (ill. 59),³⁷ as well as in the monastery of

³⁴ For example: Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille; coll. M. González Aguilar; Medina; University Art Museum, Princeton; coll. Zuloaga, Zumaya; University of California, Los Angeles; Zareh Nubar coll., Paris; José Luis Urquijo Chacón coll., Madrid; Museo Municipal de San Telmo, San Sebastian; Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles; Private coll., Oviedo; Museo Provincial, Zaragoza; Ramón de la Sota coll., Bilbao; W. J. Hole coll., Los Angeles; Clemente de Velasco coll., Madrid.
³⁵ J. Gudiol, Iconography…, op. cit., p. 198.
Monforte de Lemos – St. Francis and Brother Leo Meditating on Death. The Saint is shown kneeling on the rocky protrusion in the cave, frontally to the viewer, holding a human skull in his both hands, looking at it with a meditative gaze. The figure of the Saint takes the very central position in the painting, its symmetry is accentuated by the vertical line of the rope of the sackcloth habit and the fold in his habit coming down from the Saint's head covered with the hood. Below, to the left, we see Brother Leo leaning his body against the rock's ledge, his hands locked and fingers interwoven in prayer, his gaze directed in the same direction as that of St. Francis – to the skull. Brother Leo is wearing a similar brown greyish sackcloth frock, as St. Francis. The dark brown of the cave's rock in the background harmonizes with the habits of both religious companions. Only the blue triangle of the sky up to the left, cut diagonally by the divine light, imparts a more vivid aspect to the composition. More than 60 examples of this type is known, and surely many more are in unknown locations or have disappeared during the stormy Spanish history. This composition became so popular already during El Greco's

60. El Greco, St. Francis’s Vision of the Flaming Torch, 1600–1605, Cádiz, Hospital de Mujeres


39 Among others in the following collections: Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid; coll. Bollag, Zurich; Colegio del Patriarca, Valencia; Colegio de Doncellas Nobles, Toledo; Barnes Foundation, Merion (Penn.); coll. Vales Izaguirre, Bilbao; coll. Drey, New York; Bargas, Toledo; coll. Rodríguez
life that it was also reproduced in engravings. The earliest known example is by Diego de Astor and dated 1606.\textsuperscript{40} The subject was so popular that even very poor copyists continued to produce derivatives of it during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century and later.

The widely spread out group of paintings is a type represented by the works in the Hospital de Mujeres in Cádiz (ill. 60)\textsuperscript{41} and in the Museo Cerralbo in Madrid\textsuperscript{42} – \textit{The Vision of St. Francis}, called also \textit{Stigmatization in the Presence of Brother Leo}.\textsuperscript{43} The Saint is standing in a position very similar to that in the Pidal/Abelló variant. However, here he is turned to the right and standing in full figure with outstretched hands. Wearing his poor, darned sackcloth, with the \textit{capucho} covering his head, he is looking upwards to the heavenly light coming through the dark clouds. The brownish figure of the Saint occupies almost the entire left part of the composition. To the right, the bottom quarter of the painting is occupied by the sitting figure of Brother Leo turned with his back to the viewer. His right hand is outstretched towards the divine light, his left hand placed on the rocky earth supporting his body leaning out to the back, as if he was looking for balance, while surprised by the heavenly vision. The light effects accentuating the contour of the silhouette create space, but also the mystic atmosphere of the vision. Robert Loescher\textsuperscript{44} proposed the identification of the subject not as \textit{Stigmatization}, but as \textit{The St. Francis’s Vision of the Flaming Torch}, as described in the \textit{Little Flowers of St. Francis}. Harold Wethey also disagree with the old identification of the scene as stigmatization, because of the missing crucifix, from which the rays create the Saint’s stigmata. This type was also very popular, and even some modern copies or forgeries of this composition exist.

\textsuperscript{40} J. Gudiol, \textit{Domenikos Theotokopoulos…}, op. cit., p. 322, 326, ill. 346.
\textsuperscript{41} Called also Hospital de Nuestra Señora del Carmen, see: G. Manzini, T. Frati, \textit{Lópera…}, op. cit., p. 115, ill. 128a.
\textsuperscript{43} This “Cádiz type” is represented also in the following collections: Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid; Duques de T’Serclaes, Madrid; Condesa Viuda de Heredia Spínola, Madrid; Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa; Ermita de Nuestra Señora del Castillo, Salinas de Léniz (Guipúzcoa).
\textsuperscript{44} H. E. Wethey, \textit{El Greco and…}, op. cit., II, p. 116.
The last iconographic type of St. Francis in the oeuvre of El Greco represents the saint standing in full length. It appears in two different versions. The first depicts a single figure of the Saint occupying the entire space of the painting, as in the example in the Museo de Santa Cruz in Toledo,\(^45\) or in the copy by El Greco’s son Jorge Manuel in a Boston private collection.\(^46\) In this type of the composition the Saint is standing with the body shown almost frontally, but his head is turned sharply to the left, and seen in profile. He wears his brownish grey sackcloth, tied at the waist with the rope with four big knots on it, falling down to the feet. His right hand is placed on the chest, while the left one is outstretched down with the gesture of acceptance. The Saint is seen slightly dal sotto in sù, placed in the large landscape with a low horizon. The blue sky with white clouds occupies the major part of the background.

The second version of the type of St. Francis in full length show the Saint paired with another saint. In one case with St. Andrew, as in El Greco’s painting in the Museo Nacional del Prado (ill. 61),\(^47\) in other case, with St. John, as in the painting by El Greco and workshop in the same museum.\(^48\) In all these cases the figure of St. Francis is identical, also the landscape with the low horizon and the blue sky behind is similarly painted.

Many Italian paintings may be pointed to as the source of inspiration for El Greco’s later inventions of the various types of saints, which served as the religious arsenal of the Spanish Counter-Reformation: St. Peter, St. Jerome, Magdalene, St. Andrew, St. John, St. Lawrence, St. Bartholomew, St. Dominic and, last but not least, our Poverello of Assisi.

The Cretan artist took over the repertory of gesture particularly from the Venetian artists he met in Venice, like Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto. Let us mention only at the few examples from Titian’s works. His different ways of expression and gestures we can find later in different variants of St. Francis by El Greco. In the Penitent Magdalene by Titian, the gesture of the hand on the chest, the speech of the hands of the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, as well as the gestures of the putti, as seen in the Annunciation in San Salvatore in Venice, the outstretched hands, comparable with those of Christ in the Agony in the Garden and the composition of St. Jerome, both in Madrid. All these works and many others could have been seen by El Greco during his stay in Venice, or later in Madrid. However, beside the possible Italian sources of inspiration, it was El Greco’s own, very personal invention supported by his real religious zeal and profound faith that contributed


\(^{47}\) Ibidem, II, p. 110, no. 197.

61. El Greco, *St. Andrew and St. Francis*, circa 1595, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado
to the creation of so many various types of St. Francis, as convincing artistic realisations in the service of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ikonografia św. Franciszka w twórczości El Greca i jego pracowni: typologia, warianty, pochodne*

Streszczenie


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