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# El Greco's Portrait of Giulio Clovio as Creator: an Artistic Affinity and Assertion of Creative Identity

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EL GRECO'S PORTRAIT OF GIULIO CLOVIO AS CREATOR:  
AN ARTISTIC AFFINITY AND ASSERTION OF CREATIVE  
IDENTITY

by

Jordan M. Severson

A Thesis Submitted in  
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August 2015

ABSTRACT

EL GRECO'S PORTRAIT OF GIULIO CLOVIO AS CREATOR:  
AN ARTISTIC AFFINITY AND ASSERTION OF CREATIVE  
IDENTITY

by

Jordan M. Severson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Professor Tanya Tiffany

In 1571, Domenikos Theotokopoulos of Crete, today remembered as El Greco, painted a spectacular portrait of the manuscript illuminator Giorgio Giulio Clovio while in Rome. In this portrait, El Greco commemorated Clovio and his work by depicting him with his most praised creation, *The Farnese Hours*. Despite the portrait's renown, scholars have generally only mentioned it in larger studies of portraiture or in comparison to El Greco's other works. It has been examined primarily for its value as a likeness with little attention to its deeper implications or context. However, the image is rich with content more complex than any typical portrait. The image bears unexplored connections to a time of El Greco's burgeoning intellectual and theoretical understanding while containing references to the status of the artist and the very act of creation. This study analyzes Clovio's portrait in conjunction with key primary sources, such as Pacheco's treatise on painting and El Greco's own annotations, along with recent scholarship on El Greco to elucidate the manner in which the image deviates from typical portraiture of the time. This examination brings much needed focus and contextualization to the portrait

and considers its stylistic details along with the relationship between Giulio Clovio and El Greco. Furthermore, this analysis presents the intellectual, nuanced details of the portrait in context to show how El Greco manipulated artistic conventions to suit his own unique purposes. This study considers the Clovio portrait within Richard Brilliant's theoretical framework for portraiture, in regards to the portrait's qualities beyond the normal expectations of portraits in Renaissance Italy. The implications of this perspective reveal much about the development of El Greco's artistic thought and practice while he lived in Rome.

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To my mother, sister, brothers,  
nephews, nieces,  
Luke, Dave, Kevin,  
and  
Aubrey

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\*All images obtained from [http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/g/greco\\_el/index.html](http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/g/greco_el/index.html) unless otherwise noted.

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# Introduction

## Background

In 1571, Domenikos Theotokopoulos of Crete, today remembered as El Greco, painted a spectacular portrait of the manuscript illuminator Giorgio Giulio Clovio (Figure 1, Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte). In this portrait, El Greco commemorated Clovio and his work by depicting him with his most praised creation, the *Farnese Hours*,<sup>1</sup> which Clovio painted for the powerful Roman Cardinal and artistic patron, Alessandro Farnese. Clovio appears well dressed, sitting near a window that opens onto a landscape, which is articulated in typically Venetian brushstrokes. He looks outward at the viewer, while the window recalls Alberti's influential concept of a canvas as a window to another plane.<sup>2</sup> As scholars have long noted, El Greco showed great care in painting Clovio, who was proud of his profession and status as a court painter. In this portrait, however, El Greco not only commemorated his friend, but also himself as an artist. By portraying and glorifying Clovio, El Greco highlighted his own skill as well as his relationship with both Clovio and the intellectual and artistic milieu of the Farnese household. Clovio occupied an ideal position in the employ of a powerful patron and provided a model for El Greco's own ambitions of becoming a court painter.

Giorgio Giulio Clovio (1498-1578) was a Renaissance miniaturist who achieved significant fame during his lifetime. Like El Greco (who was born on Crete), Clovio

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<sup>1</sup> J. Pierpont Morgan Library Ms. M. 069. A Book of Hours is the most common extant manuscript from the middle ages; it is a private devotional prayer book for laypersons often personalized for wealthy individuals. See discussion in Christopher De Hamel's *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* for more information on illuminated manuscripts and books of hours.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Casper, *Art and the Religious Images in El Greco's Italy*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2014), 127-131.

hailed originally from the outer reaches of the Venetian Empire. Croatian by birth, he spent most of his career in Rome working as an illuminator of manuscripts. El Greco developed a friendship with Clovio during the years he resided in Rome (approximately 1570-1572). I argue this bond was strengthened by their shared interests in everything from Michelangelo's high Renaissance works to Baroque images and beyond. They drew inspiration from similar source materials (for example, they shared references that must have included Clovio's personal collection of drawings and prints from artists like Parmigianino and Jacopo Caraglio).

In fact, Clovio wrote on behalf of El Greco to secure him lodgings within the Farnese palace during his time in Rome.<sup>3</sup> El Greco's portrait of Clovio was one of several works the artist created in the atmosphere of the Farnese court. These works stand out from the rest of El Greco's oeuvre for their varied subject matter. They span many religious and secular themes, and they are executed in a wide range of styles, and techniques. The portrait of Clovio is also significant because it belonged to Farnese's librarian, a humanist scholar named Fulvio Orsini. Documents show the Clovio portrait in Orsini's possession until it moved into the Farnese collection after Orsini's death along with several other El Greco paintings.<sup>4</sup>

Orsini, the recipient of the Clovio portrait, was not just a librarian, but an art advisor, a notable antiquarian, and leader of other noted intellectuals in the court; this circle of influence was instrumental in fueling the diversity of El Greco's output in the 1570s. Orsini had a reputation for his extensive intellectual circle and diverse interests in

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Wethey, *El Greco and His School*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 124-7.

topics of antiquity. In reference to cerebral subjects familiar to Orsini, El Greco's portrait depicts Clovio seated proudly with his famous *Farnese Hours* (Figure 2) while incorporating religious and self-referential themes. Both the painting's style and presentation of Clovio in the Farnese palace referring to its intellectual culture must have been appealing by court standards—and to Orsini in particular.

### **State of the Question**

In the 1980s, Jonathan Brown and other influential art historians stressed the difficulties of correcting misconceptions about El Greco that had become entrenched in perceptions of the artist. Scholars saw him as a strange painter concerned with mysticism, and as a quintessentially Spanish artist who absorbed his peculiar style and talents from his adoptive city of Toledo. These scholars also pointed to a lack of knowledge of the early part of his career, especially his time in Italy.<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Richard Kagan have since promoted a historical approach to El Greco's works. Kagan moved beyond consideration of chronological periods as discrete portions of El Greco's oeuvre. This enabled him to identify both general patterns in his portraiture—such as imbuing members of the middle class or individuals of problematic social status with the trappings and posture of social superiors to elevate their status—and changes over time— in his acceptance of more portrait commissions to supplement his workshop income. Kagan's approach suggests how El Greco adapted to use the commission of portraits to best suit his purposes over the course of his career.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Brown and José Manuel Pita Andrade, *El Greco: Italy and Spain*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1984), 31-32.

In this thesis, I will interpret the characteristics of the portrait of Clovio in regards to a new understanding of El Greco's own artistic theory along with the rigorously historical approach advocated by scholars like Kagan.<sup>6</sup> El Greco's time in Rome remains more shrouded than other phases of his career,<sup>7</sup> though this period held many formative experiences that influenced the rest of his career. Clovio's portrait shows themes and techniques seen throughout El Greco's career that were previously thought to be uniquely "Spanish" sensibilities developed late in his career, rather than traits that he first established and experimented with in Rome and during his years in Venice. Based on Kagan's approach regarding the genesis of El Greco's portraiture in Spain, I will argue that El Greco built this earlier portrait in a complex way.

My thesis will demonstrate that El Greco was already challenging the traditional idea of the portrait while in Rome to communicate a unique message of philosophical interests and artistic theory to match the climate in the Farnese palace. Kagan demonstrates that El Greco painted portraits in somewhat unconventional commissions from patrons of varied social standings to substantiate their importance and establish a unique client base.<sup>8</sup> I will show how the Clovio portrait similarly illustrates a unique relationship between sitter and artist as El Greco addresses the social standing of the sitter. This suited El Greco's purposes and enabled him to create complex references to artistic production.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard L. Kagan, "El Greco's Portraits Reconsidered," in *Art in Spain and the Hispanic World: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Brown*, (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, in association with Center for Spain in America, 2010), 59-67.

<sup>7</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 1-7.

<sup>8</sup> Kagan, "El Greco's Portraits," 59-67.

Today, scholars continue to make great strides in revising the understanding of El Greco as they continue to reconsider the Italian phase of his career. Most recently, Andrew Casper's publication, *Art and the Religious Image in El Greco's Italy*, specifically explores this period.<sup>9</sup> The Clovio portrait, according to Casper, is El Greco's finest extant portrait from the time he spent in Rome, and it represents a manifestation of many complex themes. Yet the portrait of Clovio is a prime example from the artist's early work for which a wider scope has not yet emerged. Casper points to evidence that El Greco attempted to secure many types of commissions in Italy with apparently little success; yet some of those experiences must have informed this and the other paintings he completed during the time in his investigation of Italian taste and ideas.<sup>10</sup> Scholars have only incorporated a few concepts from El Greco's Roman phase into the current understanding of the Clovio portrait, even though much of the knowledge gained about this time can greatly inform our understanding of it. This is surprising since even early research demonstrates that El Greco interacted with many Italian ideas and theories. Thus, there is room to expand the understanding of the work in its context now that scholars recognize this period to hold significant implications for the wider scope of El Greco studies.<sup>11</sup>

Scholarship on El Greco is currently reaching a period of many new insights with the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death (commemorated in 2014) prompting numerous studies of his works and their original contexts. Although new descriptions of El Greco, his paintings, and life are now emerging, they have remained discrete elements in the larger

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<sup>9</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 1-174.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-131.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-7.



search to identify the cumulative effects of his varied experiences in Crete, Venice, and Rome on the rest of his career. Scholars continue to present different perspectives of his stylistic accomplishments and explanations of distinct threads in his subjects, rather than assembling the best-supported perspectives into a cohesive and logical interpretation of the artist. Since Brown and others' initial attempts to shed the myth of El Greco as a spontaneous artist influenced by mysticism, while promoting a more historically nuanced understanding of his life and work, many have followed in attempts to better comprehend El Greco's presence in Italy and its impact on his life. In this thesis, I will apply this knowledge to the portrait of Clovio to reveal its messages as representative of his ideas while in Rome. The ideas formed in this period and represented in the Clovio portrait inform the complete understanding of El Greco.

I bring that much needed focus and contextualization to this work, and consider specific details of the portrait's composition in addition to the relationship between Clovio and El Greco. My analysis puts the intellectual, nuanced details of the portrait in perspective to show how El Greco manipulated conventions for his purposes. I suggest the portrait reflects El Greco's complex intentions by interpreting its correlations with contemporary opinions of art and theory, its consistency with the current understanding of his artistic experiences in Rome, and its complex social constructions in El Greco's attempts to elevate the sitter in his portraiture.

I analyze Clovio's portrait in conjunction with key primary sources. El Greco's ideas are found in annotations discovered in the margins of texts from his personal library. The annotated texts include those written by the renowned ancient Roman author Vitruvius in his *De Architectura*, and Giorgio Vasari (Figures 3, 4), prominent Italian

artist and biographer, in his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Fernando Marías, an eminent El Greco scholar, draws attention to the agreement between El Greco's ideas and accounts of individuals with firsthand knowledge of him or his work like the Spanish author and painter, Francisco Pacheco (1599-1660).<sup>12</sup> In keeping with that connection, I will compare El Greco's notes with descriptions in Pacheco's influential treatise on painting, *Arte de la Pintura* (1649), which was an informative theoretical text on painting practice and account of artists from his day. After considering El Greco's contemporary influences, I incorporate more recent scholarship on El Greco to elucidate his social contacts, artistic thought, and execution of portraiture through trends in his art.

Marías asserts that the discovery of El Greco's own writing on art has opened up new perspectives since the notes demonstrate his artistic thoughts on painting and theory. Marías, along with Agustín Bustamante, interpreted and analyzed the newly discovered annotations of El Greco for publication in 1981.<sup>13</sup> Scholars at that time were already attempting to ground the more fantastic perceptions of El Greco's career; they immediately adopted this evidence to reinterpret his life and works in conjunction with analyses of the lesser understood details of El Greco's experiences. Some of these concepts are precursors to various new studies of El Greco, including everything from his early artistic practice to his many parallels with Modernism. Subsequent publications have used his annotations to interpret his images within the framework of his own artistic

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<sup>12</sup> Marías, "El Greco's Artistic Thought," in *El Greco: Identity and Transformation: Crete, Italy, Spain*, (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 1999), 167-8.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando Marías and Agustín Bustamante García, *Las ideas artísticas de El Greco: (comentarios a un texto inédito)*, (Madrid: Cátedra, 1981), 17-219.

theory while dismissing claims of El Greco as a mystic who lacked formal knowledge of artistic theory.

## **Chapter Divisions**

The first chapter considers El Greco's painting of Giulio Clovio within the genre of portraiture. For this purpose, I will draw from Richard Brilliant's thorough analysis of El Greco's portraits within Western art. I will also shed light on the relationship between Giulio Clovio and El Greco through their professional roles, social connections, and mutual friendship. Their relationship provides context for El Greco's time in Rome and approach to portraits, but it also suggests why El Greco chose to paint his friend and represent him in the particular way he did. Lastly, this study will present some of the consistent tendencies in El Greco's portraiture as uncovered by scholars like Kagan. That lens of social analysis applied to portrait execution illustrates the specifics of El Greco's practice as it departs from other portraits and standards in painting of the time. The tendencies identified in that study reveal El Greco's gravitation toward expanding portraits in their social function outside of traditional practice. This chapter offers a way to see a similar predilection at work in El Greco's commemoration of his friend, Giulio Clovio.

In my second chapter, I will delve into some of the particular features of this portrait, placing those features within the context of El Greco's annotations and other primary sources. This argument will build upon my assertion, in chapter one, that El Greco designed the portrait of Clovio to function outside the purpose of most traditional

portraits. I will also expand my consideration of the painting's function by demonstrating that the painting is a visual manifestation of El Greco's intellectual and theoretical beliefs. In my examination of the portrait's composition and its implications, El Greco's intellectual and theoretical interests come to the fore. This analysis of the Clovio portrait suggests many of the themes and artistic concepts present in the painting that demonstrate El Greco's artistic theory and philosophical concerns.

## Chapter One-El Greco's Models and Portrait Execution

When studying a portrait in depth, it is necessary to move the beyond basic definitions and assumptions of artworks to understand their deeper functions. Art historian and archaeologist Richard Brilliant tells a great deal about the nature of portraits. His book, *Portraiture*, analyzes how portraits function as a carefully developed artistic practice, and the characteristics that distinguish them from other works of art. Brilliant introduces a theoretical framework for portraiture based on its role in defining individual identity, and he offers insight into viewer expectations of portraits.<sup>14</sup> In my study, I also look at relationships between the artist and his work, the sitter and the work, and viewers' perceptions of portraits. Analysis of these relationships explicates complexities of the Giulio Clovio portrait in regards to its context. Portraits have a public aspect as well, seen in this image through presentation of Clovio and its relationship to widespread artistic theory. The set of relationships visible in the Clovio portrait are similar to other portraits El Greco painted, yet distinct from images by other artists. This becomes apparent when viewing this image in the wider scope of portraiture.

### **Portrait Theory**

As Brilliant argues, the portrait has an exclusive characteristic in its ability to gain an authority that causes it to cease appearing as artistic construction—instead it becomes a surrogate for the individual it represents.<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon occurs because the

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, Cambridge, (Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 7-22.

<sup>15</sup> Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 23-26.

portrait represents more about a person than mere physical appearance. The ability of an image to stand in for its exemplar is a quality displayed in El Greco's portrait of Giulio Clovio; the image portrays Clovio in his post as an illuminator in the Farnese palace, welcoming viewers in a gesture toward his masterpiece. Prominent Renaissance biographer and artist, Giorgio Vasari, states that *The Farnese Hours* were available to distinguished visitors of the palace—just as they are in El Greco's portrait. In fact, Clovio often presented the book, as in the portrait, by laying them out for the viewer himself.<sup>16</sup>

Brilliant's analysis reveals that some implications of individual mannerisms or motion are necessary to creating successful personal links to portraits. In El Greco's portrait of Clovio, the sitter's posture, gesture, and expression of confidence all communicate personal characteristics and motion to the viewer. Brilliant has shown that the mannerisms and body language in a portrait can be essential to its success, along with such physical traits. These are key to conveying the essence of an individual to viewers. Viewers want the most possible links to their perception of a person to recognize their individuality naturally. Accurate artistic rendering of physical appearance alone is insufficient to create the personal association viewers desire since their image of an individual includes their own personal experiences.<sup>17</sup> El Greco's intimate friendship with Clovio no doubt helped him display Clovio's demeanor, habits, and presence.

In an argument with significant implications for El Greco's depiction of Clovio, Brilliant demonstrates that portraits are predicated on a combination of roles enacted by the sitter and artist. Both the sitter's performance of his or her role and the artist's

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<sup>16</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, Volume V. Trans. Mrs. Jonathan Foster. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1876), 443.

<sup>17</sup> Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 23-26.

interpretation of the sitter's character affect the final work. The mixture forms the intended social outcome of the image in public viewing, which exhibits the importance of El Greco's choices and personal knowledge of Clovio.<sup>18</sup> In a study focused on portraits completed in Spain, Kagan demonstrates that El Greco raised perception of public statuses for sitters of lower standing (Figures 5, 6, 7);<sup>19</sup> Kagan's observations also apply to the Roman phase of El Greco's career. In fact, these trends appear in the portrait of Clovio and others from his time in Italy. During that time, he also represented his sitters in a professional context while using portraiture to ennoble them through constructed appearances. The image of Giulio Clovio is an example of these predilections that El Greco improved over the course of his career.

El Greco specifically created images of artists and other individuals vying for a respectable or wealthy status, and these paintings display characteristics similar to other forms of portraiture; the images also use a system of coded artistic conventions. El Greco depicted individuals through visual cues commonly understood by the public as indications of favorable standing. Clovio's distinguished appearance in black attire with ruffled collar, his confident demeanor, and his intellectual reference to the manuscript are examples of such illustrative tropes in the portrait. Many of El Greco's portraits exhibit qualities of elite imagery since he frequently used techniques and conventions employed in high profile commissions to grant dignity and respect to sitters, as he did for Giulio Clovio.<sup>20</sup> El Greco also lent his own name, reputation, and influence to those in his

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<sup>18</sup> Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 1-11.

<sup>19</sup> Richard L. Kagan, "El Greco's Portraits Reconsidered," in *Art in Spain and the Hispanic World: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Brown*, (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, in association with Center for Spain in America, 2010), 59-67.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Kagan's analysis of El Greco's portraiture makes this point readily apparent, especially in his essay, "El Greco's Portraits Reconsidered."

portraits to further their self-fashioning as noteworthy individuals.<sup>21</sup> In that way, he formed a reciprocal relationship, whereby sitters gained acceptance through an esteemed artist's noble depiction, and he raised his own reputation as a painter of affluent individuals.

## **El Greco's Portraits**

El Greco used his portraits in these ways to identify and aggrandize his sitters for mutual gains, and he implemented innovative approaches to sustain his workshop, even though he spent a large part of his career as a foreigner in Italy and Spain.<sup>22</sup> Kagan elucidates general patterns in El Greco's portraiture to show his ability to secure financial support and affect social hierarchy.<sup>23</sup> In addition to economic and social gains, El Greco used portraits, like the Clovio portrait, to affect his personal relationships and to illustrate his own beliefs. The Clovio portrait presents El Greco's ideas while it documents his close relationship with Clovio and suggests another link with its original owner, Orsini. Ultimately, El Greco continually adapted the role of portraiture to suit his purposes over his whole career.

Of El Greco's subsequent career in Spain as a *retratador*, or portrait painter, Kagan concludes that, "El Greco's success as a portraitist... helped popularize throughout Spain an artistic genre previously confined to the somewhat narrow circles of the royal court. In this respect, El Greco was extraordinarily influential, as he was an

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<sup>21</sup> Kagan, "El Greco's Portraits Reconsidered," 65-67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-67.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



artist who not only helped to elevate the social status of the *retratador*, but he also infused new dignity into the art of portraiture.”<sup>24</sup> As Kagan points out, trends in El Greco’s portraiture reveal his interest in social elevation of both sitter and portraitist, which also instigated changes in the genre of portraiture. These concepts are consistent with the complex messages in the Clovio portrait. As in Kagan’s survey of portraits, this image illustrates a unique relationship between sitter and artist roles. Clovio seemingly did not commission the image since there is no record of any commission, any payment from Clovio to El Greco, and no evidence that Clovio ever possessed the portrait since Orsini appears to have been the first owner of the image and it appears in Farnese court inventories. Instead, the painting suited El Greco’s purposes to reference artistic production and impact social standing. This image of Clovio prominently reflects Clovio’s profession, social position, and relationship to El Greco.

El Greco painted another portrait of Giulio Clovio in one version of his *Purification of the Temple* (1571-6, probably completed in Rome). In the image, El Greco used small portrait busts to demonstrate his respect for leading practitioners of the most prominent artistic styles. It features portraits of Michelangelo of Florentine origin, Titian of the Venetian school, a figure usually identified as Raphael, and Clovio for an artist active in Rome, which demonstrates his own respect for figures central to artistic practice (Figures 8, 9). Also unusual in composition, these portraits appear in the form of a small grouping of busts in the lower right hand corner of the image. This group is unnecessary to the religious subject, and his other depictions of Purification themes across his career include no such portraits. He also painted an earlier *Purification of the Temple* (ca. 1570)

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<sup>24</sup> Kagan, “El Greco's Portraits Reconsidered,” 59-67.

that is almost identical, and a similar composition on a smaller canvas later in his career (ca. 1600); neither includes artist portraits. In his *Purification of the Temple*, the portraits seem almost a subtext or footnote to the larger image where these Renaissance masters emerge from a crowd of figures present at the event.

Most scholars characterize those portraits in the *Purification of the Temple* as El Greco's homage to Michelangelo, Titian, Raphael, and Clovio as the foremost masters of his day, or at least a sign of gratitude to his major stylistic influences. While the appearance of Clovio in that image places him in the context of the other masters, it also demonstrates the importance of Clovio to El Greco. El Greco specifically painted Clovio in at least two images to commemorate and show respect for his friend. By placing the artists amongst a biblical scene, El Greco indicates their importance through this relationship to the scene at the temple. While their fitting presence as observers might be a clever placement of contemporaries in a biblical narrative (which other artists often did in the Renaissance), it probably had additional connotations for El Greco. Since contemporaries regarded these artists as leaders in their field, I suggest that their connection to the subject, for El Greco, probably relates to a theoretical purity or cleansing of artistic style and vision. The reference might even relate to artistic thoughts that El Greco shared with Clovio since he was the artist El Greco knew best.

### **The Case of Clovio**

El Greco's friendship with Clovio marks an opportunity to explore connections between the two artists. Details of their relationship establish or support current

understanding of their bond as like-minded individuals in the same profession. It is necessary to understand some of Clovio's life and profession in order to ascertain how El Greco related to him and how that relationship surfaces in this portrait. If Clovio did not provide an example, encouragement, or impetus for El Greco's desire to seek a position with a wealthy patron, Clovio's career at least provided validation for El Greco's preexisting aspirations. Clovio was an influence on El Greco as an artist with varied stylistic and intellectual interests.

Giulio Clovio was born in 1498 in the region of Grizane, Croatia; at eighteen, he went to Rome for study and work. There, he served his long time patrons, the Grimani family.<sup>25</sup> He was in their service from about 1516, learning to draw and paint for Cardinal Domenico Grimani, and later Cardinal Marino Grimani (made cardinal in 1526). In 1527, events during the Sack of Rome led to Clovio's capture, and he pledged to take holy orders should he survive the ordeal. Eventually, he escaped to Mantua and kept his word. In 1528, he entered a monastery at the Church of Saint Ruffino.<sup>26</sup> Having already adapted his name from a native Croatian form to Giorgio Clovio in his Italian environment, he took up the title Don Giulio, probably in honor of Giulio Romano, after taking religious vows and he continued to practice illumination.<sup>27</sup> When Clovio suffered an injury in 1531, Cardinal Marino Grimani arranged for his release from the monastery to the Grimani household. He probably remained there until about 1535, and his most

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<sup>25</sup> John Bradley, *Giorgio Giulio Clovio: Miniaturist, 1498-1578, His Life and Works*, (Amsterdam: 1971), xi-xxviii

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 20-22; Clovio probably took orders with the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine in Mantua although not all scholars agree on this fact.

<sup>27</sup> Scholars have proposed many possible variants for Clovio's birth name, but the dispute is unresolved; his name was most likely some form of Juraj Julije Klović.

famous work at of that time was *The Grimani Hours*, (1530-35).<sup>28</sup> It was through his work there that he obtained recognition, and his first commissions for Alessandro Farnese, probably as early as 1537.

In Italy, he became acquainted with many prominent figures like Michelangelo and Francisco de Hollanda, and he became a friend and student of Giulio Romano. Romano's master was Raphael, and he became one of the greatest miniaturists of the day.<sup>29</sup> Most believe Romano first suggested Clovio pursue a career as a miniaturist. In the 1530s, and again in 1551, Clovio spent time in Florence completing commissions for Cosimo de Medici. By the 1540s, he settled in the Farnese Palace, where he completed *The Farnese Hours* in 1546. That was the same year Vasari finished a series of frescos for Farnese (this was probably when Vasari came to know Clovio personally although there is no clear relationship between these artworks).<sup>30</sup> *The Farnese Hours* encapsulates the grandeur of large-scale fresco works on a miniature scale for examination with a magnifying glass. Clovio completed other works for Farnese, like *The Towneley Lectionary* ca. 1560, but his eyesight began to fail in his old age. Clovio died later in Rome, aged eighty, in 1578.<sup>31</sup>

Vasari declared the following about his friend Giorgio Giulio Clovio: “There never has been, and for many ages there probably never will be, a more admirable and more extraordinary miniaturist, I mean a painter of minute objects, than Don Giulio Clovio, who has far surpassed all that have hitherto distinguished themselves in that

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 23-25.

<sup>29</sup> Bradley, *Giorgio Giulio Clovio*, xi-xxviii.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 24-26.

<sup>31</sup> Bradley, *Giorgio Giulio Clovio*, xi-xxviii; Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 20-31.

manner.”<sup>32</sup> Vasari wrote extensively about Clovio and his chapter praised the artist along with detailed descriptions of his works, especially his most famous work, the “Hours for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.” Though Vasari is most strongly associated with his contributions in chronicling the history of Italian art and artists, he also perpetuated biases in his biographies. For him, Michelangelo Buonarroti was the epitome of artists, so Clovio's frequent borrowing and style strongly reminiscent of Michelangelo was more reason for Vasari's praise.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with Vasari's rhetoric of praise, some of his descriptions of Clovio are exaggerated, but his appreciation generally reflects the high opinion of Clovio and his work held by contemporaries.

### **State of the Question on Clovio**

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prominent critics like John Ruskin felt that the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries were the culmination of miniature painting and that the art was well in decline by Clovio's time. These same critics labeled Clovio a mere copyist.<sup>34</sup> Ruskin seems to have led the charge, or at least made the strongest attempts to reduce Clovio's reputation. Such significant changes in favor help explain why Clovio's name is less common today than are other artists who were held in similar esteem during their own lifetimes.

According to Webster Smith, a scholar of Clovio in the 1970s, many influential art critics continued Ruskin's negative sentiments and declared Clovio was a “slavish

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<sup>32</sup> Vasari, *Lives*, 443.

<sup>33</sup> While Vasari must be read with relative skepticism, it seems that most of his remarks concerning Clovio's life are accurate. While he exaggerates in description and borders on excess in his account of Clovio's images, other evidence typically supports the details that he puts forth. Many other contemporary views share his opinion of Clovio as an illuminator of the highest quality and the notion is not at all exclusive to Vasari.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 11.

imitator” of both altarpiece and fresco while others subsequently found Clovio's work “mawkish sentiment of disgust and florid taste.”<sup>35</sup> Smith points out these shifts in general opinion on Clovio in his own less-biased account. Smith summarized the fame of Clovio's prized work in 1976, in the first partial facsimile of the Hours when he said, “*The Farnese Hours* was once the most famous of all illuminated manuscripts. Completed in Rome for Alessandro Cardinal Farnese in 1546, this book of Private devotions is chronologically one of the last great examples of the art of illumination.”<sup>36</sup> His remarks illustrate the importance of the book as Clovio's most celebrated manuscript and the height for Renaissance manuscript illumination, with added awareness that interest in Clovio and manuscripts had begun to wane. Smith’s work marks a change in the 1950s, when art historians were beginning to reevaluate Clovio and recognize him for his artistic contributions.

Maria Cionini-Visani, co-author of the 1980 publication titled *Giorgio Giulio Clovio: Miniaturist of the Renaissance* declares, “In fact it is only possible to reacquire a taste for Clovio in the light of new historical perspective on mannerism. It is certain that Clovio studied Michelangelo, Raphael, and many others, but never academically. He mixed their languages according to the demands of a fiery imagination.”<sup>37</sup> This statement supports a modified view with the benefit of history to contextualize Clovio's efforts (as I will argue, this notion of mixing languages according to imagination also applies to El Greco). Yet, Grgo Gamulin states elsewhere in that same publication that Clovio's relative isolation in the Farnese household probably meant he was ignorant of

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> Maria Cionini-Visani and Grgo Gamulin, *Giorgio Giulio Clovio: Miniaturist of the Renaissance*, (New York: The Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1980), 26-7.

contemporary debates like those concerning the merits of mannerism.<sup>38</sup> This notion reflects a long held belief that Clovio was skilled in his ability to reproduce Renaissance works on a small scale, but his efforts had little to do with contemporary taste.

Recent scholarship has shown that Clovio worked according to the stylistic trends of the time and used his specific knowledge for the benefit of his patrons. In truth, El Greco and Giulio Clovio had extensive knowledge of the artistic world around them, which they put to use in their own works. Such knowledge is apparent in *The Farnese Hours* consistently as Clovio blends his grotesques and antique architectural designs into the margins around his grand compositions of biblical narrative. Besides those connections between Rome's ancient past and biblical narrative, Clovio designed parallels specifically for his patron's pleasure. For example, the antique helmet and costume adorning the cardinal's image in the right hand margin of folio 33. As Smith points out, this is a flattering, original depiction to suggest a parallel between Alessandro Farnese and Alexander the Great.<sup>39</sup>

Voelkle and Golub, the editors and commentators of a facsimile of *The Farnese Hours* published in 2003, located the manuscript within the context of its initial sixteenth-century reception. They speak to the early popular opinion of *The Farnese Hours* when they remark, "Clovio's first biographer, his contemporary and friend Giorgio Vasari, carefully described each miniature in this book, a landmark in the history of miniature painting. Just as Clovio has been called the Michelangelo of miniature painting, this book

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<sup>38</sup> Cionini-Visani and Gamulin, *Miniaturist*, 9. It is also worth noting that Cionini-Visani and Gamulin treat Clovio with both positive and negative remarks in their account and some of those opinions detract from Clovio even though they provide evidence contrary to some of those claims independent of their own views. They brought many new concepts to the consideration of Clovio, but more evidence has changed the view of both Clovio and El Greco since the time of this book.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 23-24.

could justly be called a pocketbook-sized Sistine Chapel.”<sup>40</sup> These words reflect the high opinion that often accompanies Clovio in later scholarship, which reevaluated Clovio according to the perceptions of his contemporaries. Vasari paid him respect as one of only two miniaturists in his biographies, as he was highly regarded by many artists of his time.

### **Artists Alike**

By painting Clovio’s portrait, El Greco allied himself with a prominent, greatly respected contemporary artist. Clovio’s prominence outweighed that of El Greco, and El Greco had more to gain from their association than Clovio. In his discussion of El Greco’s painting of masters in the *Purification of the Temple*, Andrew Casper points out that Clovio would have been just as recognizable as a choice for representing a leading Renaissance painter as Raphael or Michelangelo.<sup>41</sup> Elena Calvillo, in her dissertation on Clovio, explains that Clovio had a reputation as a great master in his day for his ability to imitate, modify, and draw from other artists with great ease.<sup>42</sup>

El Greco was clearly able to profit from his friendship with Clovio. His introduction to the atmosphere at the Farnese court brought him many new opportunities. Clovio served as a gateway and an example for El Greco to expand his stylistic and theoretical knowledge. This surely accelerated El Greco’s training to focus on the

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<sup>40</sup> William Voelkle and Ivan Golub, *The Farnese Hours*, commentary (Austria: Kroiss and Bichler, 2003), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Elena Calvillo, “Imitation and Invention in the Service of Rome: Giulio Clovio’s Works for Cardinals Marino Grimani and Alessandro Farnese” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2003), 20-21.



antique, proper religious decorum, and innovation in his art. Casper summarizes El Greco's experiences at the Farnese court by declaring the following:

Though El Greco's tenure at the Farnese court proved to be short-lived, his relationship with such erudite individuals would have required him to tailor his religious images to the expectations of learned intellectuals. This role of the artist as an intellectual capable of constructing sophisticated religious metaphors is central to the unique formal characteristics visible in Clovio's [*Farnese Hours*]. The book is such a prominent part of El Greco's portrait that it effectively embodies the kinds of objects an artist in his position would have been expected to fashion for the cardinal and his circle.<sup>43</sup>

As Casper suggests, El Greco followed Clovio in intellectual content and religious doctrine while he was in Rome through basic expectations while attempting to gain the favor of Alessandro Farnese. This also opened his possibilities to the construction of complex messages within an image like those embodied in Clovio's manuscripts. El Greco acknowledges these connections in his portrait of Clovio by including *The Farnese Hours* to represent Clovio's work in the Farnese court. He represented Clovio's work and relationship to his post at the Farnese court in addition to documenting the friendship between the two artists.

The relationship between El Greco and Clovio, while long acknowledged, warrants further scrutiny. There is little information concerning specific interactions between the two, and extant documents from the Farnese household have yet to receive examination exclusively for clues about their relationship. As Gamulin and Cionini-Visani have argued:

In spite of the attentive and sensitive exegeses of contemporary criticism, the problem of Clovio's teaching in the formation of the young El Greco has not been faced yet. He was certainly a teacher as well as friend, during his stay in Rome.

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<sup>43</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 131.

The Orsini inventory lists small-sized works by El Greco from this period, and the *Portrait of a Man* of the Hispanic Society of America, New York, bears witness to his activity as a miniaturist.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the lack of documentation for El Greco at this time further complicates our knowledge, especially since the circumstances of his departure from the Farnese court remain unknown. Only the few documents exist to inform us of the dates for El Greco's time in Rome: the letter from Clovio, court records and inventories, his registration in the painter's guild, personal correspondence, and later evidence of commissions from the beginning of his time in Spain. As Casper suggests, "[El Greco's] career might have ended up differently had his stay there not come to an abrupt end. A letter El Greco wrote to the cardinal on July 6, 1572, expresses remorse for a hasty dismissal from the court only a little more than a year and a half after his introduction."<sup>45</sup> There is no evidence that El Greco trained with Clovio in a formal capacity, although Clovio had several other students and known assistants for most of his life.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, El Greco certainly did study with Clovio in many senses. While in Italy, he adopted local working habits, like his study of prints and drawings as stylistic reference for religious paintings.<sup>47</sup> Clovio engaged in this practice through his personal collection and the works in Farnese's possession. It seems that El Greco followed suit, and he developed interest in miniature painting during this time. As Casper theorizes, "El Greco's loss of a potential patron in Alessandro Farnese may have expedited the artist's decision to join the painters' guild in Rome."<sup>48</sup> El Greco might very

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<sup>44</sup> Cionini-Visani and Gamulin, *Miniaturist*, 59. Currently, there is no consensus on the identity of the man in this portrait.

<sup>45</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 29-30.

<sup>47</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 5; 70-71; 76.

<sup>48</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 6.

well have tried to become a miniaturist as a new approach to adapt to the environment in Rome.

El Greco's practice of miniature painting seems limited to his stay in Rome, evidenced by the few miniatures listed in Orsini's inventory, such as his extant image called *Portrait of a Man* (Figure 10).<sup>49</sup> When El Greco registered in the painters' guild in Rome, he seemingly registered as a painter of small items (specifically "*pittore a carte*"), which is slightly unusual. That documentation comes from an extant seventeenth-century index of his membership by which time documentation practices had changed slightly. However, officials still usually registered guild members under a single specific category, such as either *pittore* or *miniature* (meaning painter or illuminator).<sup>50</sup> Instead, El Greco's record indicates that he is a painter of small things instead of distinctly a painter or a miniaturist.

Additionally, as Smith writes, "Precisely in Clovio's own time, and perhaps mainly because of the influence of his own works, the word *miniaturist* begins to have more than one significance: it can still mean manuscript-illuminator, as it does ordinarily in Vasari; it can also mean a painter of portrait miniatures and of other tiny pictures."<sup>51</sup> The problem of changing meaning and terminology in history creates some uncertainty as to the nature of El Greco's place in the guild in Rome, and in painting small works. Scholars must ask both what kind of painter the guild considered him, and why officials listed him in these particular terms.

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<sup>49</sup> Cionini-Visani and Gamulin, *Miniaturist*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 6-7.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 19. Smith also explains that in the *Farnese Hours*, Clovio is listed, probably due to the scribe Francesco Monerchi's input, in a singular occurrence as the maker of the book's "monuments" connecting the illuminations with a literary sense of a great work or memorial to something.

Casper shares further confusion over his registration with the painters' guild since documents list him after he left the Farnese court.<sup>52</sup> The lack of records for El Greco's whereabouts between departing from the Farnese household in 1572 and his first activities noted in Spain around 1576 further complicates scholars' understanding of this period.<sup>53</sup> El Greco might never have intended to stay in the Farnese court for an extended period, as is implied by Clovio's letter to secure him lodging. However, he seems to have continued receiving guidance from his friend after leaving the court. The record of El Greco's registration, if not in error, might indicate that El Greco continued his guidance under Clovio after leaving the court, and had significant intent to remain in Rome.<sup>54</sup> Since El Greco joined after his time with Clovio, he registered as a miniaturist, and it was the same guild as Clovio, it was likely at his suggestion that El Greco joined.

Whatever the best interpretation of for their relationship, El Greco felt the need to complete at least two images of Clovio during his time in Rome. These images demonstrate reverence and admiration for Clovio, and it is easy to conclude El Greco thought of him as an artistic mentor. El Greco must have seen Clovio as a model for style, theory, and connection to Italian painting as other scholars have remarked.<sup>55</sup>

For El Greco, one of the benefits of Clovio's post in the Farnese court was a vast collection of art from which to learn.<sup>56</sup> The inventories of the palace reveal the presence

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<sup>52</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> The reason for his eventual relocation to Spain is also unclear and the subject of much scholarly debate. It will be mentioned in the next chapter, but it probably relates to his desire for consistent employment.

<sup>54</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 6-7.

<sup>55</sup> This will be discussed further in the next chapter concerning one version of El Greco's *Purification of the Temple* now in Minneapolis.

<sup>56</sup> Alessandro Farnese's will and his eulogy documented that he also intended for the art collection and resources were available to a wide range of individuals even outside his employ for education and improvement. This is similar to the public education intended by Cardinal Domenico Grimani in his collection, as well. Smith, *Farnese*, 11-13; Calvillo, "Imitation and Invention," 51.

of many influential works of consequence to both artists. The inventory of Clovio's collection confirms works by many artists that inspired them both.<sup>57</sup> He started accruing this collection and working from other collections of diverse artistic objects at least as early as when he worked for Cardinal Grimani (ca. 1516-1535).<sup>58</sup> It seems probable that Clovio, as El Greco's initial connection to the Farnese court, must have given him instruction in how to access the artistic examples and other resources there.

El Greco and Clovio used the Farnese collection in accord with Alessandro Farnese's wishes; he encouraged others to engage with the collection for artistic edification.<sup>59</sup> Both El Greco and Clovio consulted the works for various projects, or made copies of images for court purposes.<sup>60</sup> Michelangelo, Titian, and Raphael were major influences on both El Greco and Clovio, both of whom also took significant inspiration from artists like Parmigianino, Correggio, and one of Clovio's teachers, Giulio Romano. The Farnese collection, Fulvio Orsini's collection, and Clovio's own collection of works offered examples of images by these artists. Likely, Clovio shared his favorite works from the Farnese collection and his own with El Greco. In their own works, both El Greco and Clovio displayed mannerist tendencies in their fondness for drawing from a variety of source material, stylization of figures, and inventiveness in combining themes for their own purposes.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 76.

<sup>58</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 76; Calvillo, "Imitation and Invention," 56.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 11-13

<sup>60</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Both artists are frequently labelled as mannerists for their working tendencies to exaggerate and combine images while using skilled brushstrokes in the creation of compositions that match their needs. While mannerism, or *maniera*, is a difficult term to pin down and is fraught with contention, I use it here to refer to scholars' associations with their respective styles and often unusual or spontaneous blending of subject matter. It is fair to say, at the least, that both artists displayed mannerist tendencies and were consciously

## Capturing Likeness

El Greco's portrait of Clovio is thus representative of a friendship between fellow artists with many similarities, but it is also evidence of more. It also demonstrates El Greco's intellectual understanding of painting—a deliberate process that has been touched upon in recent scholarship. All these connections make it a distinct example of portraiture, but El Greco united the many themes in the portrait through his capable rendering of Clovio.

El Greco's Clovio portrait is a convincing likeness, and it closely resembles Clovio's extant self-portrait (Figure 11). El Greco's rendering of Clovio in the portrait is consistent with the facial features that Clovio's own image depicts, which is consistent with Clovio's declaration that El Greco was a skilled portrait painter.<sup>62</sup> *The Farnese Hours* appears in the image with great attention to detail as well, even though it is rendered in fairly gestural, loose brushstrokes. El Greco's paint application in his depiction of *The Farnese Hours* on the Clovio portrait matches the colors of the pages in the manuscript itself. El Greco shows Clovio with a proud expression and a naturalistic, benevolent face. Contemporaries held Clovio in high regard for his artistic abilities, and it is fitting that El Greco's painted image acknowledges Clovio and his accomplishments so clearly.

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borrowing from the vocabulary of artists like Parmigianino who remains among the foremost examples of mannerist artists.

<sup>62</sup> Fernando Marías, Paul Edson, and Sander Berg, *El Greco, Life and Work, a New History*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 80-81.

El Greco's image of Clovio corresponds to several of Brilliant's observations. It demonstrates the ability to satisfy viewers' strong desires to relate to the identity of the individual, which creates strong connections to audience of the image. Viewers look for the most possible parallels between a specific individual and their portrait—by definition an object designed as a visual representation of a person. However, the viewer interprets that representation and envisions an identity through more than just the physical characteristics of the sitter. Brilliant points out that an individual's presentation of himself or herself unites with the artist's representational goals in a single image, but those motives can produce uneasy results.<sup>63</sup> The sitter and artist must coordinate their projections of identity to be successful. El Greco's ability to align multiple purposes in an image is clear in the portrait of Clovio. In it, he balances issues of identity in the composition without disrupting connections between Clovio and his own artistic choices.

In the Clovio portrait, as in his other portraits, El Greco employs an iconography of status commonly practiced to emphasize the sitter's status, intellect, wealth, family ties, or power. However, El Greco does not attempt to represent Clovio's foreignness, or his status as a monastic outside of the monastery. Instead, he merely presents Clovio as well dressed, with a formal posture in the Farnese court. He does not emphasize other aspects of Clovio's identity or unique circumstances, but rather he presents Clovio as a gentleman with typical dress for his status. The book of hours, with its associations of antique and spiritual content, connect to his role as an artist of refined taste, religious themes, and intellectual pursuits. El Greco draws these associations to Clovio to

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<sup>63</sup> Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 45-47.

emphasize the sitter's profession as a skilled artist, and a sophisticated intellectual member of the Farnese court.

This image's success as a portrait lies in El Greco's understanding of Clovio's identity. Clovio's eyes and expression in the portrait conjure an assured and charismatic presence. El Greco effectively captured those qualities to communicate a believable sense of pride as Clovio knowingly gestures toward his creation. As Elena Calvillo observes, many scholars have looked to the portrait as indication of Clovio's pride in his work.<sup>64</sup> The painting communicates the display of pride so convincingly that that one can easily imagine visiting and seeing the manuscript. El Greco does this so capably and intimately that viewers centuries removed from Clovio can easily relate to the anecdote of him sharing his work. El Greco's portrayal is so believable that viewers can see the work, and become convinced of its resemblance to Clovio despite never having met him.

## **A Model for Success**

*The Farnese Hours* encapsulates the blend of intellectual and religious content upon which Clovio built his reputation. The book, as represented in El Greco's painting, also emphasizes Clovio's ability as a painter of religious subjects and the great effort he expended in service of his patrons. Cionini-Visani and Gamulin discuss Clovio's relationship to his *Farnese Hours* and the manuscript's inclusion in El Greco's painting stating, "For his new employer Clovio painted his masterpiece [*The Farnese Hours*] (Morgan Library, New York). The enthusiastic Vasari writes it cost the proud illustrator

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<sup>64</sup> Calvillo, "Imitation and Invention," 21.



nine years of work (nearly thirty years later he was portrayed by El Greco in the portrait of Capodimonte, holding the little codex open in his right hand) and was completed in 1546.”<sup>65</sup>

Portraying this manuscript of such lasting labor also establishes Clovio’s devotion to its religious contents and to the cardinal. The open manuscript clearly displays two pages that emphasize, as is typical of *The Farnese Hours*, a comparison between Biblical subjects. Here, he pairs *God Creating the Sun and Moon* with an image of the *Holy Family*. Webster Smith asserts that this pairing of miniatures highlights the idea of the Immaculate Conception, from the surrounding texts and later made official dogma of the Christian Church, by connecting an image of the *Holy Family* with God’s Creation (including an insertion of Mary next to the Creator).<sup>66</sup> The concept of pairing New Testament Scenes with themes from the Old Testament is not unique to Clovio’s depiction, but his combination of imagery and composition adjustment (like this inclusion of Mary to add meaning) adapts the themes distinctively to his purposes. Vasari and many scholars since have regarded these particular combinations of miniature pairs as ideas largely of Clovio’s design.<sup>67</sup>

However, others understand the content of *The Farnese Hours* as simple illustrations of theological programs. As Gamulin and Cionini-Visani observe of the time, “The ecclesiastic patrons of this period were less liberal than their predecessors. They often dictated the dogmas and prejudices found in both the style and content of many paintings; these are often so complex as to make one suspect the control of theological

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<sup>65</sup> Cionini-Visani and Gamulin, *Miniaturist*, 53-54.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 59v-60.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 59v-60.

authorities at the artist's side."<sup>68</sup> While this point is valid, it is difficult to make generalizations for works without much knowledge of production specifics or any commission stipulations. However, since Clovio had a monastic background, it is conceivable that part of his motivation for keeping Clovio in the court was his compatible theological knowledge and artistic skill. The skills and knowledge required to work in such a demanding environment in Rome are exactly the type of trade experiences that Clovio likely shared with a friend like El Greco.

Farnese clearly valued Clovio and gave him important commissions. To please a wealthy cardinal with sophisticated taste and a vast art collection, Clovio must have exhibited an aptitude for satisfactory execution of religious themes with appropriate decorum. As a work for an influential cardinal, the religious themes of *The Farnese Hours* would have also communicated to viewers that Clovio was skilled not only in a mastery of artistic languages of the day, but at combining those styles for artistic applications of utmost spiritual importance. Gamulin and Cionini-Visani discuss this in their description of Clovio's activities. They comment that Clovio balances his work with Michelangesque and Raphaellesque elements while wavering between unusual motifs and art of the Counter Reformation.<sup>69</sup> This balance of varied elements appears in the open pages of the book in El Greco's composition. While scholars frequently remark on the incorporation of compositions or styles from both Michelangelo and Raphael, Webster Smith describes the pairing as follows:

The figure of the Creator, which resembles Michelangelo's *God Creating the Sun and Moon*, is one of Clovio's more obvious near-quotations from other works of

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<sup>68</sup> Cionini-Visani and Gamulin, *Miniaturist*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-72.

art. The figures of Mary and Jesus are quite similar to those by Perino del Vaga in a *Holy Family* now in the Musée Condé, Chantilly. The frames, compared with those elsewhere in the manuscript, look very simple, as though to suggest that even the most elaborate ornaments would seem paltry around pictures representing such a mystery as that of the Immaculate Conception. Perhaps the simplicity of the frames and the small number of figures made El Greco want to have these two pages, rather than a more elaborate pair, show in his portrait of Clovio holding the open book.<sup>70</sup>

Smith's explanation describes the theological scheme and its probable models in a plausible manner. He also provides motivation for Clovio's use of the *Creation Scene* and the *Holy Family* while expressing that lack of border decoration and complexity made them ideal for inclusion in El Greco's rendering of Clovio. Art historians seldom mention El Greco's reason for featuring those particular pages in the Clovio portrait. However, I argue that the depiction of those pages was a very deliberate choice. Indeed, El Greco's choice in depicting Clovio's compositions with such precision while maintaining their legibility as religious themes and significant quotations shows remarkable effort. El Greco also conveyed the details of the book with surprisingly loose brushwork, considering that Clovio painted the original compositions with minute detail and tight brushstrokes. It seems much more likely that El Greco included this pair of images because of the specific content on those pages. This is consistent with the many deliberate choices apparent in the rest of the portrait.<sup>71</sup>

Clovio's ability to balance between leading artistic styles and various types of subject matter gives particular insight into the artistic bond that took place between El Greco and Giulio Clovio. El Greco had long engaged in painting religious themes, as

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<sup>70</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 59v-60.

<sup>71</sup> The next chapter will expand on this other content along with reference to additional implications of Clovio's manuscript in the picture plane.

evidenced by extant icons and other subjects attributed to his hand prior to his departure for Italy. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the two artists conversed about the pursuit of balancing quality art and spiritually appropriate themes. El Greco made an effort to represent the religious significance of Clovio's work in this use of the pages of *The Farnese Hours*, and this probably indicates he had specific meaning in mind for the appearance of the book in the image. Religious content was also an essential part of both artists' careers, and Clovio must have been an example for El Greco's approach to artistic rendering of Christian themes for Roman commissions. He is the most likely model for El Greco's developing artistic habits, and he obviously aided El Greco in adjusting to Roman artistic demands.

Clovio was a positive model for the type of painter El Greco became. As we have seen, Clovio was not only a respected court painter, but also a mentor and an artist of mannerist tendencies; he expertly used his knowledge of other art, and his unique genius to blend those styles for religious purposes befitting his high profile commissions. Those skills were likely crucial to the experiences he imparted on El Greco. Gamulin and Cionini-Visani mention the Clovio portrait in their discussion of Clovio's famed *Farnese Hours*. In relation to El Greco's image, they also underscore Clovio's inventive traits in the book depicted in the portrait:

The Morgan codex is a compendium of Clovio's intelligent interpretation of the Roman, and Tuscan styles, a splendid summary of preceding trails as well as a display of a, by then, thirty-year culture. It is a confluence of memories suggestions, and stimuli. Every accusation of "servile cop[y]ing" falls before such an inexhaustible capacity for "manipulation" in the sense of inventive

imagination. The raw materials are the Sistine frescoes, the Raphael Stanzas, and the Vatican Loggias, three generators of endless acrobatic experiments.<sup>72</sup>

Similar statements have been made of El Greco. Although their stylistic and compositional approaches vary, their tendencies to engage in and be successful at blending stylistic traditions with standard religious imagery are very comparable. In fact, this capacity marks a principle connection between the two artists and probably indicates a key benefit of El Greco learning from Clovio. Throughout the rest of his career, El Greco continued to explore the tension between various artistic styles and religious decorum. If El Greco learned the skill of blending artistic techniques according to religious purpose from Giulio Clovio, that mentorship seems just as much commemorated in the portrait of Clovio as any relationship. In that sense, Clovio served as a model both for El Greco's portrait, and for artistic training that was essential to his developing career.

## **The Personal Portrait**

By creating a portrait, an artist participates in the process of navigating social identities through the qualities he or she chooses to present as defining of the individual portrayed.<sup>73</sup> This involves both the role of sitter, and the artist's choices. For instance, a sitter could dress or pose with the specific characteristics that they wished to endure, just as the artist could highlight, downplay, or idealize any of the qualities before him. The roles of both parties influence the portrait's function in both public and private contexts.

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<sup>72</sup> Cionini-Visani and Gamulin, *Miniaturist*, 53-54.

<sup>73</sup> Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 89-90.

El Greco was not only capable of grasping those multiple aspects of a portrait, but he excelled at combining goals in the presentation of an individual. Like his other portraits, the Clovio portrait creates private significance for sitter and patron, personal and professional relationships, and social standing with references to the accomplishments of Clovio in a single image.

El Greco painted Clovio as a dignified gentleman proud of his profession and emphasized status as a painter in the employ of the powerful Alessandro Farnese. He produced the painting as a personal portrait of a friend and fellow artist. By portraying and glorifying his friend, El Greco also highlighted himself through the parallel between them; this elevated his own status through the profession and his association with such an important painter. Clovio had a stable profession as an artist under the employ of a powerful patron; in this sense, he embodied El Greco's own goals and ambitions. Most scholars agree that he moved to Spain with similar aspirations of becoming a court painter. There was a rich kinship between these artists in their passion for art, ambitions, and intentions. This image exemplifies their intimate friendship. Clovio acted on El Greco's behalf to allow him, another foreigner, and determined artist, to stay in the Farnese palace. He appears to have been an interlocutor for his kindred spirit. El Greco seems a like-minded individual who grew close to Clovio out of the similarity in both their circumstances and aspirations. Incidentally, many have misinterpreted both artists over time, probably in part due to their connection with mannerism and the types of commissions they executed for their patrons. They both borrowed from many sources and had an appetite not only for the digestion of various source materials, but an aptitude for drawing from that knowledge to repurpose artistic models at the whim of their patrons.

## Chapter Two-The Theoretical Divine Beyond Likeness

In light of the progress made in studies of El Greco in recent years, it has become much easier to discuss the intellectual side of his paintings. His annotations to Vitruvius and Vasari remind us of new perspectives on theoretical and philosophical content in his imagery, as well as his cerebral engagement with a variety of stylistic debates. The goal of this chapter is to tie the complex content in his portrait of Giulio Clovio to these intellectual concepts, which dominated El Greco's thought and practice during his time in Rome. This chapter will explore interpretations of the intellectual content in the Clovio portrait, such as references to artistic practice, prominent theoretical concepts, and parallels between God and artists.

In this chapter, I argue that the status of El Greco's image of Clovio as a portrait – as an image that achieves a convincing likeness—has impeded scholars' understanding of its intellectual design. In El Greco's day, viewers likely found the intellectual content of the *Portrait of Giulio Clovio* much more familiar, especially the well-read individuals that El Greco interacted with in the Farnese palace. However, while they could interpret the image's intellectual content easily, they were unaccustomed to observing complex references in a portrait since viewers of the time perceived portraits as images with little intellectual content. Instead, the public viewed portraiture as a simpler form of representation that was profitable, yet held in lower regard than other subject matter. I will now consider the image as a singularly intellectual work. The intellectual implications within the work shed light on the wider scope of El Greco's oeuvre.

Furthermore, applying ideas in El Greco's theory to the portrait's interpretation enables better understanding of El Greco's intentions. Consideration of his interaction with theory and intellectual concepts will elucidate understanding of the portrait in the context of El Greco's time in Rome and the development of his artistic practice.

### **The Portrait Beyond Likeness**

In his portrait of Giulio Clovio, El Greco provides various intellectual messages. El Greco's portrait of Clovio demonstrates his developing artistic thoughts in Rome, consistent with contemporary theory and confirmed by his own writing. In the portrait of Clovio, El Greco not only created a likeness of his sitter, but also infused dignity into the image through Clovio's confident posture and relation to his post as a miniaturist in the intellectual milieu of the Farnese court. This relationship fulfills the traditional roles of a portrait, yet El Greco injected additional content into his composition. El Greco added self-reference to the role of the artist in the image and open edits interpretation to additional messages.

El Greco's execution of portraits expanded the traditional view of the functions that portraits serve. At the time (and in most scholarship of this portrait thus far), verisimilitude was a primary concern in its evaluation. Portraits were important in adherence to the patron's commission and as a source of steady income for many artists. Portraits were not usually associated with the intellectual content or theoretical messages that were more common to other subjects. El Greco's portrait of Clovio, however, does not fit those generalizations. This portrait exceeds those expectations of the portrait functionality. It uses the language of portraiture to depict Clovio, while emphasizing his



role as an artist; the portrait accomplishes this even though artists were traditionally the producers—not subjects of the image. Artists were craftsmen paid for their ability to capture likeness and vision on a canvas, rather than the ones glorified. Furthermore, El Greco put as much thought and effort into his depiction of Clovio as was fitting for another genre. El Greco distilled contemporary artistic theory and new academic thoughts into a single canvas.

### **Intellectual Content in El Greco's Images**

The recurrent myth of El Greco, his association with themes of Modernism, and a lack of his own conceptual framework for interpretation of his works have long masked the cerebral nature of his art. El Greco's own notes support these concepts with incontrovertible proof of the theory behind his artistic choices. Art historians associate some of his more mysterious works with antiquarian themes. During his time in Rome, El Greco painted two versions of an ancient theme described by Pliny the Elder. Most refer to them as *Boy Blowing an Ember* (Figure 12), and art historians hypothesize that they are an instance of *ekphrasis*, or an attempt to reanimate an ancient theme. El Greco likely chose to paint this image for the pleasure of the intellectuals at the Farnese court, whose humanist and antiquarian concerns matched the ancient subject with both secular and religious connotations.<sup>74</sup> Those in Fulvio Orsini's circle would have been familiar with the description given in Pliny that El Greco reanimated.

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<sup>74</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 126-7.

Many art historians, like Katharine Baetjer, have placed El Greco in the context of the Farnese palace by showing his study of works by other artists. El Greco and court artists like Clovio produced both portraits and copies of other masterworks housed in the Farnese collection. Their studies gave them intimate knowledge of other works and familiarity with the fine array of antique objects in the Farnese collection.<sup>75</sup> This practice of copying seems to be both an exercise in mastery of artistic styles and an acquisition of a sort of language of antiquity. Careful study of those antique objects enabled artists like Clovio and El Greco to employ the ideas and aesthetics of ancient Rome as appropriate for their commissions. A majority of the work in the Farnese palace was collected for its humanist values and both intellectuals and artists alike could study those objects for their edification.

A large portion of El Greco's oeuvre included altarpieces and various religious subjects that were just as important to his success as his portraits and other secular works. This is true throughout his career—including his time in Rome even though evidence of his own faith appears contradictory. Consequently, scholars like Nikolaos Panagiōtakēs, and Roderick Beaton still debate his own religious practice and preference.<sup>76</sup> Yet as Casper and others have argued, El Greco was clearly invested in the proper depiction of Christian themes, whatever personal beliefs he held. While this matter may never be settled, it remains apparent that El Greco painted religious subject matter in accordance with the needs of his clients.

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<sup>75</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 127; Katharine Baetjer, "El Greco," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, (39, no. 1, 1981): 1-48.

<sup>76</sup> For instance, this debate is frequently mentioned in scholarship that covers his early life in Crete to shed light on his family and early biography, as well as in regards to his later career in Toledo where religious works were part of the regular income in his studio; see Nikolaos Panagiōtakēs, and Roderick Beaton, *El Greco: the Cretan years*, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate), 2009.

El Greco imbued his paintings with complex, intelligent, and didactic content. His works reveal many Christian themes that required him to be familiar with complex theological content and Church doctrine. Like many artists focused on academic concerns, El Greco developed his art to fit the spirit of the Counter-Reformation and convey messages in accord with demands of the Council of Trent.<sup>77</sup> Regardless of his personal beliefs, El Greco subscribed to Church doctrine when it came to depicting religious themes with proper decorum and instructional cues for the viewer. El Greco demonstrates the instructional tendency clearly visible in his religious themes through all of his art.

El Greco's success was, in many ways, the result of his own stylistic synthesis and the didactic quality of his compositions. El Greco's works bear instructive cues and syntheses of ideas even apart from those works requiring new Christian standards. In the Clovio portrait, El Greco illustrates connections between Clovio's acts of creation and God's while maintaining the appearance of an ordinary portrait. Casper stresses El Greco's tendency to synthesize his style through his theoretical beliefs. That synthesis is central to El Greco's stylistic tendencies and results from a culmination of theoretical ideas that he developed in the various locations of his artistic training.

El Greco's portrait of Clovio demonstrates not only intimate knowledge of many different concepts and themes in painting, but also creative and playful combinations of themes: self-reference, allusions to divinity, and emphasis on the artist's profession. Perhaps, El Greco always had a desire to make instructive images since the tendency appears in his religious images and other genres alike. Images like the Clovio portrait

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<sup>77</sup> Baetjer, *El Greco*, 18-20.

reflect the desire to inform viewers on several intellectual themes through their content. El Greco's tendencies in creating didactic images also reveal a desire to master the profession and demonstrate personal understanding of various topics through his works. This notion is relevant to the diverse messages in the portrait of Clovio, which reflect El Greco's own artistic progression and theoretical mindset. This mindset is even more apparent when considering El Greco's development in the company of the Farnese court.

### **Intellectual Foundations at the Farnese Court**

El Greco's artwork reveals a preference for intellectual content that relates directly to the company he kept while in Rome. Clovio excelled at his post for his ability to replicate styles and themes in the appropriate blend of current taste and decorum. Court positions for patrons like Alessandro Farnese depended on flexibility and an ability to create original works, especially for an artist of long-term employment like Clovio. His "imitation" or adoption of stylistic and compositional motifs was greatly valued, and a skill practiced by many contemporary artists to match the tastes and commission demands—especially in service of religious themes—in atmospheres like the Farnese court.<sup>78</sup>

The Clovio portrait exhibits a variety of stylistic traits and theoretical concepts befitting both Giulio Clovio and the atmosphere at the Farnese court. El Greco's works from the Italian phase of his oeuvre display similar tendencies to sophisticated court artists like Clovio. These practices include fluid blending from a variety of sources in his

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<sup>78</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 20.

assimilation and recombination of ideas. For example, El Greco studied architectural monuments to create recognizable settings for religious narratives, but he would alter details and scale of his renderings freely to meet the needs of the composition and recall events of the past. He makes a similar quotation in the Clovio portrait by including the open pages of the manuscript to enrich the presence of Clovio. Casper makes the connection between Clovio's work and its influence on El Greco while describing El Greco's use of Clovio and *The Farnese Hours* in the composition. He declares, "It is in this guise as a maker of religious images that we see a celebration of artistic agency and the intellectual status of the artist. Giulio Clovio thus represents an inspirational model of a figure responsible for creating works that appealed to a learned and culturally literate Roman audience."<sup>79</sup> By extension, El Greco is aware of this fact and he exhibits his own ability to cater to that elite audience through the Clovio portrait.

El Greco carefully selected the various elements of style and composition in his paintings to achieve his artistic goals. As with Clovio, early scholars of El Greco described the artist with a combination of positive and negative remarks to evaluate their mannered compositions. Those assessments usually centered on the amalgamation of styles and varied source material and critics negatively labelled their works as acts of imitation or eclecticism. Both artists had extremely varied tastes that surfaced in their own works. Art historian Ellis Waterhouse, for one, labelled El Greco an "eclectic borrower," which communicates his artistic skill while also suggesting that his abilities relied completely on those who came before him.<sup>80</sup> Casper makes a point to emphasize how El Greco intentionally selected what elements he incorporated into his work. El

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<sup>79</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 130.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

Greco developed a distinctive style of synthesis in his approach to painting technique, and his beliefs and theory appear in his notes as conscious adoption of the stylistic tendencies he found in the best painters of the Renaissance. Misunderstanding of this artistic choice often leads to a problematic description of El Greco. Casper corrects earlier scholarship like that of Waterhouse when he elucidates, “this characterization risks denying the intentionality of El Greco’s procedural choices and the care with which he studied the art of sixteenth-century masters. The painter’s decision to draw upon a variety of artistic sources when forging his own unique style is symptomatic of his endorsement of stylistic synthesis in both practice and theory.”<sup>81</sup> It is important to point out this distinction: El Greco apparently formulated a synthesis of theoretical views that dictated the stylistic execution of his works, rather than painting purely from trained method or intuition for critics attribute styles and explain through theory later.<sup>82</sup>

### **Synthesis as Artistic Ideal**

El Greco’s theoretical focus on a methodical amalgamation of style complicates the Clovio portrait’s themes and its style of execution. For example, his brushwork is loose and painterly in Venetian technique on most of the canvas, while shifting from bright colors in the manuscript and the window to the darker areas of the canvas, defined by the modelling of Clovio’s figure against a dim background. The idea of synthesis, or at least of combining the desirable parts of several objects for a greater whole, is a

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<sup>81</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 75; El Greco objected to Michelangelo primarily on religious decorum, but also painting technique and he incorporated other aspects from his work.

<sup>82</sup> This concept is discussed more fully under the next heading, *Synthesis as Artistic Ideal*.

common trope in the artistic thought of the Italian Renaissance. El Greco sought to combine aspects both of Michelangelo's central Italian *disegno* and Titian's Venetian *colorito* into a synthesis of his own making.<sup>83</sup> The specific combination of strengths in technical approaches like those of Michelangelo and Titian exist much earlier in theoretical concepts.<sup>84</sup> Artist Gian Paolo Lomazzo wrote in his *Idea del Tempio della Pittura* in 1590 that an ultimate image would include figures with sensibilities of Michelangelo, Titian, Raphael, and Correggio with each artist being responsible for specific components of design and coloration for each figure in the composition. For Lomazzo and others in the sixteenth century, this expressed Neo-Platonic ideals through painting, so a greater whole resulted from the combined stylistic components.<sup>85</sup> For that theoretical framework, the specific balance of those two properties of in a body of work was what defined the style of a given artist.

For El Greco, the process that enabled artists to combine these artistic characteristics differed through his intent and the theoretical basis for his practice. As Casper explains, "the difference is that El Greco emerges as one of the first to have his practice guided by theory directly instead of having [later] theorists ascribe a method to his practice."<sup>86</sup> For El Greco, the intellectual concept was present in the theoretical beliefs that dictated the style of his practice, rather than the assignment of thought to his practice. Many prominent Renaissance artists and theoreticians began to view artistic practice in terms of component styles and compositional exemplars, which probably comes from specific classical notions. Both Vasari's and Alberti's influential writings

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<sup>83</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 91.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-98.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

refer to piecemeal inspirational models that relate to the famed Greek painter Zeuxis. He supposedly created the most beautiful portrait by combining natural traits from the most attractive models in a composite image of Helen of Troy.<sup>87</sup>

The Venetian Paolo Pino, in his *Dialogo di Pittura* of 1548, also echoes this concept of employing the best examples from nature. In that treatise, he advocates for the study of the best masters to combine their stylistic strengths, rather than mere quotation of compositional pieces.<sup>88</sup> Pino and the later Venetian theorist, Ludovico Dolce both afforded the concepts of *disegno* and *colorito* great importance and often considered them as equal in value to the art of painting. Pino must have had a great effect on El Greco's own thought and his development of the amalgamated style he demonstrated in works like the Clovio portrait. Promoting the idea later championed by Lomazzo, Pino described a composite stylistic approach whereby an artist could successfully marry Titian's superb color with Michelangelo's plastic compositions to become a veritable "God of Painting."<sup>89</sup> With this promise of divinity in the arts and correlations with El Greco's style, it is tempting to wonder whether El Greco's practices resulted from a conscious realization of Pino's recipe for the mastery of painting. The synthetic style of the Clovio portrait is then possibly part of El Greco's identification of himself in the image, as well as association with this "divine" ideal of artistic practice introduced through theoretical advances of authors like Paolo Pino.

Theories regarding divine inspiration and artists' connections to God began to spread through discussions of art while El Greco was in Rome. Casper and Marías have

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<sup>87</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 89.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.



both shown that Pirro Ligorio, another intellectual in the employ of Cardinal Farnese, played an influential role in El Greco's Roman career.<sup>90</sup> Ligorio argued that artists should be inspired by God as creator to emulate from nature in their work, and El Greco's views align with other concepts attributed to Ligorio as well.<sup>91</sup> Casper also cites examples of artistic allegories relating to divine inspiration that trace back to artists and theoreticians like Lomazzo and Federico Zuccaro. El Greco was likely familiar with Lomazzo's theory, and he had contact with Zuccaro in the 1570s. These individuals held notions of *disegno* as the "sign of God," art as a spiritual act, art as a "spark of the divine," and occurrences of divine gifts being manifested through art as humans mimic God's act of creation. Casper also links those concepts of divinity to Francisco de Hollanda and his writing.<sup>92</sup> Francisco de Hollanda's dialogues on art from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century present ideas about several artists, including Giulio Clovio, where Clovio appears as an artist who appreciated speaking about art as much as he loved making it.<sup>93</sup> Since the Clovio portrait exemplifies that idea of the artist as creator, it is likely that individuals like Ligorio and those concepts about divine inspiration had direct influence on El Greco's synthesis-based artistic process and his consideration of the artist's profession as a whole. In the portrait, El Greco makes one of several overt references to the artist's occupation by presenting Clovio as a gentleman who sits, pointing to his work as a court artist. By asserting the importance of the occupation and of his close friend and mentor, El Greco draws himself into the meaning of the work as well.

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<sup>90</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 126; Marías, *El Greco, Life and Work*, 80.

<sup>91</sup> Marías, *El Greco, Life and Work*, 88-90.

<sup>92</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 26-8.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 18.

## **Influence of Clovio and Other Artists**

We have already seen that El Greco expressed interest in a variety of artists and theories throughout his time in Italy. In his notes on Vasari, El Greco repeatedly highlights appreciation for and knowledge of other artists including Tintoretto, Raphael, Correggio, Parmigianino, Michelangelo, and Titian to name a few.<sup>94</sup> In fact, Casper asserts that El Greco was experiencing artistic influences that would shape his artistic proclivities even before this time in Rome. Casper hypothesizes that many of the key developments in El Greco's art were burgeoning in Venice just before he journeyed to Rome. According to Casper, "El Greco's Italian paintings reveal a more accomplished study after the styles and techniques of Italian masters than what we see in other Cretan painters. His short stay in Venice in the late 1560s exposed him to artists who helped shape his early development."<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the intellectual and antiquarian concerns at the Farnese court enhanced his early development once he reached that place of vast learning opportunities. His studies with Clovio through the collections at the Farnese palace gave him many models while developing his theoretical beliefs. Thus, it is logical that concepts central to his developing theory appear in the representation of his mentor, Clovio, in the Farnese palace.

In various paintings completed in Rome, El Greco followed Clovio's example by depicting intellectual themes through references to the antique past. Casper discusses the antiquarian character of several of El Greco's works from his time in Rome, paintings

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<sup>94</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 75.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

that represent, “most strongly the impact of the Farnesian and Roman influence on the impressionable young El Greco at a time when he was eager to appease his closest and most exalted observers. Scholars have consistently undervalued the impact of Rome’s pre-Christian past on El Greco’s compositional repertoire.”<sup>96</sup> Casper refutes notions from earlier scholars, like Harold Wethey, who suggested that El Greco focused only on Venetian ideas—unaware of the antiquarian sensibilities around him in Rome. Casper replies, “On the contrary, El Greco was keenly aware of Rome’s ancient heritage, and so it ought not [sic] be surprising that we see in this painting a number of clear references to identifiable ancient works of sculpture and architecture.”<sup>97</sup> Casper describes that those images all attest to the impact of the Farnese court on El Greco’s artistic development.<sup>98</sup>

The same concern for antiquity and religious themes is abundant in Giulio Clovio’s aesthetic and are seen at work in his *Farnese Hours*, made for the cardinal’s satisfaction. As Casper describes, “The classicizing character of this illuminated prayer book was so strong that... [i]t was kept in Cardinal Farnese’s *studiolo* in the company of a range of curiosities that included ancient coins, medallions, and other small artifacts honoring the glory of Rome’s ancient imperial history.”<sup>99</sup> The Farnese family deliberately fostered conditions that resulted in research and a general knowledge of ancient objects amongst members of the court. The antique history of Rome fascinated Alessandro Farnese and he sought to contribute to knowledge of ancient Rome through intellectual gatherings and archaeological endeavors.<sup>100</sup> Farnese created an expectation of intellectual

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<sup>96</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 132.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 130. Casper also mentions here that Vasari describes *The Farnese Hours* as one of Rome’s most important objects along with other ancient artifacts for their classical value. Farnese also singled it out in his will, attempting to ensure it remained in the city indefinitely.

<sup>100</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 131.

concerns for those who resided in the palace through his various interests, collections, and commissions. As Casper concludes, “Farnese’s circle surely required artists, much like the cardinal himself, to be capable of giving visual expression to the authority of the church in a way that also honored its direct lineage from ancient Rome.”<sup>101</sup> El Greco, while limited in his stay there, was no exception to the culture of the Farnese court. El Greco’s portraits and other images required that he be “immersed in the unique environment offered by the Farnese court.”<sup>102</sup> Other artists and writers’ comments on El Greco reinforce the presence of intellectual tendencies in El Greco’s artworks.

### **Early Modern Perspectives on El Greco**

Primary sources emphasize El Greco’s indebtedness to Venetian painting while noting his staunch opposition to other artistic practices. Figures like Pacheco commented on ideas in El Greco’s theory. Pacheco met El Greco in 1611 and remarked directly about the painter in his treatise, in which he recounted El Greco’s opinion that practice of *colorire* took more skill than *disegno* and that Michelangelo was not much of a painter.<sup>103</sup> Giulio Mancini, an art collector and author, famously described El Greco as a student of Titian.<sup>104</sup> Mancini also stated that El Greco did not last long in Rome, where he supposedly caused a scandal by offering to repaint Michelangelo’s nudes in the *Last*

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<sup>101</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 132.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la Pintura: Edición del Manuscrito Original, Acabado el 24 de Enero de 1638*, (Madrid: Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, 1956), 370; For more on the dichotomy between *colorire* and *disegno* in Italian art, see Michael Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 139-140.

<sup>104</sup> Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla Pittura*, (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), 230-1.

*Judgment* at the Vatican.<sup>105</sup> Casper objects to this reason frequently cited for El Greco's leaving Rome— though in keeping with El Greco's opinions, the anecdote seems to be an exaggeration since the frescoes later received retouching anyway. El Greco's relocation in Spain was most likely due to the lure of lucrative opportunities, which probably obtained through connections in Orsini's intellectual circle.<sup>106</sup>

Clovio's initial letter to Cardinal Farnese, as Marías points out, promotes El Greco as a "disciple of Titian," and as a painter capable of excellent portraits that exhibit his skill through Venetian techniques.<sup>107</sup> That connection to Titian also links El Greco to contemporary debates in art with the concepts of *colorire* and *disegno* central to Italian dialogues on art. Along with prominent Venetian thought, these ideas appear in Ludovico Dolce's *Dialogue on Painting* and his *Letters to Titian*.<sup>108</sup> The letter from Clovio to Farnese regarding El Greco signaled El Greco's entrance into the milieu of the Farnese court. Of Clovio's 1570 letter, Marías remarks, "The letter gave Domenico access to the circle of intellectuals, scholars, and men of letters...that surrounded the prelate, led by his chief art advisor, the humanist Fulvio Orsini."<sup>109</sup> This observation provides context for El Greco's social and intellectual interactions while in Rome, which corroborate El Greco's theoretical engagements at the time. That intellectual circle also explains the motivation and origin of El Greco's process in expanding academic thinking through the discourse of

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. Although no real evidence supports this anecdote and most scholars find it to be likely fabricated by Mancini or repeated by him for another purpose, this story suggests that El Greco ultimately fled Rome for safety after offering to repaint Michelangelo's nudes.

<sup>106</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 6-7.

<sup>107</sup> Fernando Marías, Paul Edson, and Sander Berg, *El Greco, Life and Work, a New History*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), 80-81.

<sup>108</sup> Dolce, *L'aretino ovvero dialogo della pittura*, 1-69; 6-12.

<sup>109</sup> Marías, *El Greco, Life and Work*, 88-90.

artistic and religious content of his day. All of these social and theoretical connections are links to Orsini.

El Greco's relationship to individuals in Orsini's circle also explains the context of his interactions with a variety of erudite figures. Those intellectual ties informed El Greco's consideration of theoretical content such as the concepts in the portrait of Clovio. While there is no evidence that Orsini commissioned the work from El Greco, I suggest that El Greco most likely made the portrait independently concerning issues that he discussed with Orsini, or generally catered to the librarian's tastes in hopes that he would purchase it. This scenario would be consistent with El Greco's attempt to find work and financial support in Rome, and the connection of both men to Clovio. Orsini's intellectual interests make him an obvious candidate for both the inspiration and reception of the painting. That is evident from the existence of multiple themes in the portrait, connections to artistic theory, and references to the status of the artist that would have held obvious appeal for Orsini. All of those factors relate directly to the content of El Greco's own writing.

## **El Greco's Notes and Theory**

El Greco's notes in the margins of influential texts by both Vitruvius and Vasari indicate he was deeply concerned with various contemporary debates on artistic theory. El Greco's notes in Vitruvius on theoretical principals of design begin with his thoughts on architecture, yet even those meditations on order and physical structures ultimately privilege beauty and proportion over all other systems of logic. He expresses that painting is the only art capable of full reproduction of nature through consideration of all

characteristics and the use of color. He believed in the practice of imitating nature and quality examples of fundamental techniques to learn artistic endeavors.<sup>110</sup> El Greco's notes also favor a characteristically humanist contemplative and philosophical approach to the process of making art, even though some of his painterly tendencies suggest more spontaneity in his process. El Greco repeatedly emphasizes the primacy of painting and its complete incorporation of form, color, and light from nature. He also emphasizes the act of imitating from nature in the artistic process, though he believes the artist must to use his own judgment to improve on nature in its representation.<sup>111</sup> Only meticulous study and methodical practice enables an artist like El Greco to formulate such complex artistic ideas while articulating his views of art with such specificity.

El Greco also showed a desire to formulate his own views in a way that resolved prominent disputes about artistic execution. While strongly opposing Vasari in some respects like the supremacy of Michelangelo, he also agreed on other occasions as in the case of Vasari's advocating "subjective judgment" of the artist.<sup>112</sup> El Greco similarly embraces elements of opposing views, such as Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought, which Marías rightly suggests appears in his style as an attempt to find balance between many polemic views of his day.<sup>113</sup> El Greco's investment in these contemporary debates relates to discussion of the foremost Italian artists discussed by authors like Vasari or the prominent Venetian theorist, Ludovico Dolce.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Marías, "Greco's Artistic Thought," 168-72.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-1. Marías mentions El Greco's support and interest in a concept called *giudizio dell'occhio* that Vasari praises in Michelangelo's art.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Ludovico Dolce, *L'Aretino ovvero dialogo della pittura di Lodovico Dolce con l'aggiunta delle lettere del Tiziano a vari e dell'Aretino a lui*, (Milano: Daelli, 1863), 55-61.

El Greco's attention to these discussions is visible in the portraits at the bottom of the *Purification of the Temple*. While he often opposed Vasari's views, and he disparaged Michelangelo's painting,<sup>115</sup> images like this one reveal that he also saw importance in acknowledging such fundamental artists and their creative contributions. In the Clovio portrait, El Greco also displayed his debt to prominent artistic practice besides the connection to Clovio and his prized work. The portrait displays carefully delineated posture through Clovio's body as would those images favoring *disegno* like Michelangelo's work, but it also favors painterly color application and articulation of light in depiction of a window landscape, as was common to Venetian practices in painting from nature.

### **The Clovio Portrait and the Impact of Michelangelo**

Whatever ways El Greco disagreed with Michelangelo, he still studied Michelangelo's art and regarded him as an important influence. Art historian Webster Smith described the painting of Giulio Clovio in a facsimile of *The Farnese Hours* wherein he connects the inclusion of that book in the Clovio portrait to its overt reference to Michelangelo's work. He states, "In the El Greco portrait Clovio holds the Hours opened to fols. 59v.-60 and points at the figure of God the Creator, which obviously resembles Michelangelo's colossal representation of the Almighty in the act of making the sun and the moon."<sup>116</sup> As Webster indicates, El Greco's depiction of Clovio holding

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<sup>115</sup> Marías and Bustamante, *Las ideas Artísticas de El Greco*, 41-45; 79.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, *Farnese Hours*, 28.



his work is essential to the composition, but also to El Greco's theoretical message and reference to Michelangelo's art.

Elena Calvillo explains El Greco's use of these manuscript pages in the Clovio portrait through Clovio's references to Michelangelo. The pages shown are modified compositions from the Creation scene of the *Sistine Ceiling* with additional debt to Giulio Romano, and from Raphael's *Holy Family* depiction. She asserts that, "Holding the Book of Hours open to the pages on which he painted the Immaculate Virgin presented by a figure of God the Creator deriving from the *Sistine Chapel Ceiling*; Clovio appears to emphasize his link to Michelangelo. The knowledgeable viewer, however, would know that the miniaturist had made characteristic adjustments to Michelangelo's model."<sup>117</sup> Calvillo's point is key since El Greco chooses these specific scenes, which are easily recognizable both in relation to Michelangelo and in their adaptation to a new purpose in Clovio's work. Calvillo later continues in saying, "the facing page, more difficult to distinguish than its mate, bears a Holy Family fully representative of Clovio's debt to Raphael and his old friend Giulio Romano. *The Farnese Hours*, emblematic of Clovio's oeuvre, was not a monument dedicated to the elevation of Michelangelo's style but one composed of the entire Italian canon."<sup>118</sup> She sees *The Farnese Hours* as a mastery of miniature painting and his seminal achievement—representative of his career by incorporating elements inclusive of the whole catalogue of Italian artistic technique. This more comprehensive notion enhances our view of El Greco's choices in the portrait. El Greco represented the mastery of artistic styles in Clovio's art while he emphasized own mastery by incorporating that content into a similar work encapsulating many disparate

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<sup>117</sup> Elena Calvillo, "Imitation and Invention," 21.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

themes. In this way, El Greco and his work are in dialogue with a similar undertaking in Clovio's art. El Greco attempted to capture not just Clovio's image, but his artistic practice as well.

### **The Window Metaphor in the Clovio Portrait**

El Greco used the appearance of Clovio and details like the window in the composition to encapsulate other important ideas from Renaissance artistic thought. The window is part of another Renaissance *topos* that El Greco references specifically. Casper offers the most succinct and cogent words on this matter. He posits the following:

While this representation of Giulio Clovio offers a statement on the intellectual role of the artist, then the juxtaposition of the open window above the open pages of Clovio's illuminated prayer book evinces El Greco's understanding of the hierarchical relationship between reality and artifice. The metaphor of the window as a paradigm for artistic representation had been commonplace since Leon Battista Alberti had codified the artistic goal of pictorial naturalism by urging painters to treat the picture plane as a transparent frame through which to gaze at a distant view.<sup>119</sup>

This inclusion of the window serves as a similar reference to that intellectual metaphor. Casper sees further significance in the inclusion of Clovio's famous manuscript and his gestures when he elaborates, "But in El Greco's portrait, Clovio casts his glance away from the window as he confidently points to the work in front of him, drawing our attention to it as well. This suggests that it is the domain of the artist's created work that provides the proper stimulus to devotion, not the outside world that painters are

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<sup>119</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 130.

ostensibly required to imitate.”<sup>120</sup> This notion demonstrates how El Greco’s window is both a reference to Renaissance thought and a declaration of artistic importance.

The tempestuous weather outside the window behind Clovio is another revealing artistic reference in this image. This torrential and windblown landscape immediately evokes associations with Venetian painting. The landscape features steep hills with a vivid blue sky and stormy clouds dabbed with brilliant yellow light reflecting on the willowy trees within the frame. Even before Titian’s dominance as an artistic representative of Venetian practice, this sort of landscape—one with great attention to bright, contrasting hues and attentive rendering of natural forces—was recognizably characteristic of Venetian painting. In the painting, this emphasis on Venetian landscape painting is nonetheless in keeping with El Greco’s conscious display of various painting schools. It is not surprising that El Greco conjured this elaborate landscape since he had just come from studying in Venice. The “turbulent landscape” out the window and the painterly brushstrokes refer to compositional elements popular to sixteenth-century Venetian painters, which all confirm that El Greco was presenting himself as an artist of Venetian skills.<sup>121</sup>

El Greco also produced similar atmospheric effects of tumultuous weather conditions in other paintings of this time. For example, his painting of *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, also completed in Rome, (Figure 13) betrays a similar attention to Venetian effects of wind and clouds rendered in bright hues. That image bears a great resemblance to the Clovio portrait—enough to suspect he painted a familiar location from nature as Venetian practice emphasized—as if El Greco consistently used weather

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<sup>120</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 130.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

patterns in his paintings for such dramatic and metaphorical effect. El Greco's duplication of effects might be related to Casper's discussion of El Greco's practices of invention and repetition; those practices, as noted by Francisco Pacheco, included El Greco keeping miniature versions of his compositions to facilitate reproduction of imagery from his original artistic visions. In Casper's estimation, this method of repetition was a deliberate choice to retain methods of Greek religious icon production, as well as, an adoption of a model practiced in the workshops of Titian and Giovanni Bellini, and ideas from Pirro Ligorio's unpublished treatise of that time.<sup>122</sup> This duplication practice suggests that El Greco could refer back to all his works and make connections or develop themes in his oeuvre including weather patterns. The window scene in the Clovio portrait also conveys similar weather effects to those seen in his other paintings of religious concerns like his *Mount Sinai* (Figure 14); these intense natural phenomena were probably El Greco's means to signify a palpable sense of divine intervention or divine inspiration in an image. In fact, the weather in these images dwarfs and surrounds the figures, as if to represent the power and manifestation of God enveloping the holy persons pictured. Since that is most likely the didactic intent in his religious images, I suspect El Greco extended a similar metaphor of nature's awe-inspiring forces representing the presence of God both cases. This would be in keeping with contemporary parallels between God and artist present in the Clovio portrait.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 56-58; Baetjer also points to a greater significance in his reproduction of religious themes: Baetjer, 18-20.

<sup>123</sup> These parallels concerning God and artistic practice reappear in the sections below. A comparative analysis of El Greco's depiction of nature and weather elements is beyond the scope of this paper and I do not know of any such study to date.

Since El Greco likely intended to refer to his artistic influences in the Clovio portrait, as he had in the *Purification of the Temple*, the bold references to Venetian painting are fitting; like his allusion to Italian painting as a whole, these references would have been easily recognizable for the learned audience in the Farnese palace. It is also worth noting that the window scene, while a small portion of the canvas, received great care appearing in vibrant hues favored only on the rightmost third of the canvas. This coloration creates even greater visual contrast in a composition that is otherwise extraordinarily dark—except for the other explicit references to painting style and divine creation in Clovio’s manuscript pages on that same side of the painting. However, his artistic style also has many characteristics unique to his own perspectives of artistic theory and execution.

### **Self-Reference and Underlying Concepts**

Beyond the portrait’s general attention to his profession, Clovio points to the area of intended emphasis in the image. Many Italian authors—for example, in Alberti’s treatise, *On Painting*—refer to the important role of pointing figures for such an instructive visual cue, especially within religious subjects.<sup>124</sup>In El Greco’s painting, Clovio points toward his own *Farnese Hours*, displaying both the *Creation of the Sun and Moon*, and the *Holy Family* (Figure 2, folios 59v and 60r). By depicting Clovio gesturing to his own creation, El Greco equates Giulio Clovio’s illumination to these biblical concepts directly; that gesture exposes a cyclical effect in the image.

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<sup>124</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, Trans. By Cecil Grayson, (London: Phaidon, 1972), 76-78; See also the discussion of hand gestures in Renaissance images, and expansion on Alberti’s concept of pointing figures: Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 60-65; 71-75.

El Greco uses his image of Clovio to convey a complex set of analogies about creation within the painting. Clovio draws attention to the book in the portrait, itself an artistic creation, which draws attention in turn to an instance where Clovio created the image of God in the act of creating celestial bodies. This deeper analysis of the relationships in the painting exposes a clever mental exercise laid out for viewers. El Greco's elaborate visual exercise highlights his own role as a creator of images since he consciously marks these parallels in an image of his own creation. As the painter of this image, El Greco is a creator of another creator (Clovio), who shows his own creation depicting the Divine Creator in the first acts of creation. This cyclical act of creation demonstrates a very overt connection to Ligorio's argument along with the *Holy Family* image relating Clovio to divine beings; that connection with divine beings completes the notion that artists, through their act of creation, are akin to those original acts of God. This complex visual construction leaves little doubt in El Greco's meaning, even if the rest of the composition was not enough to suggest a parallel with the artist likened to God's creation.

As Casper illustrates in his discussion of the religious content in the image, El Greco focuses on the artist's role in making imagery appropriate to each context—while concluding that El Greco painted the image within the confines of the Farnese household.<sup>125</sup> The Farnese court is an important feature in the portrait since it linked El Greco to Clovio and all of the academic thoughts he acquired in that learned environment. While that place represents El Greco's sense of pride for his station there, it

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<sup>125</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 128; El Greco has depicted the scene meticulously with accuracy to the original with the original binding of the work depicted in the painting, and Cardinal Farnese so prized the work that he did not let it leave the palace, which suggests El Greco executed the portrait there.

is also crucial to the image in the opportunities it afforded El Greco. When El Greco constructed this layered reference to the act of creation, he granted divine implications to the artist's profession that apply to Clovio—and El Greco as well. Through his friendship and shared profession, El Greco extends these notions of a heightened social status for the artist to himself. This attention to social status and the profession of the artist frequently recurred in El Greco's images.

### **The Artist in El Greco's Portraits**

Casper also identifies a pattern between the Clovio portrait and two others from the 1570s, attributed to El Greco and depicting artists: *Portrait of an Architect*, and *Portrait of a Sculptor* (Figures 15, 16). For Casper, the self-referential choice of subject marks an attempt to discuss the profession of the artist. He also extends this notion back to one of the earliest paintings associated with El Greco, an icon of *St. Luke Painting the Virgin and Child*.<sup>126</sup> This early icon represents painters, in general, through depiction of their patron saint—who is also in an act of divine creation—to further extend notions that imbue painting with sacred value (Figure 17).

Casper suggests that the portrait of Clovio resembles the one of Luke through the artists' mirroring poses since Clovio, "Embodies the authority of the maker of artful icons by miming the pose of his profession's founding father."<sup>127</sup> El Greco's signature on the work supports the interpretation of raising artistic status as well. As Casper affirms, "El Greco expresses his affiliation with Clovio's elevated position by signing his portrait... in

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<sup>126</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 129-131.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

a relatively high place immediately behind the sitter. This signature serves to overlay El Greco's accomplishment in making the picture onto the status of the subject, as if only an equally capable artist could capture the refined identity of a court painter such as Clovio."<sup>128</sup> Therefore, for Casper too, this image draws parallels between the artistic, creative, and ritual acts of each artist. That repetition of depicting artists in his compositions and connecting their status to religious acts also applies to the famous artists seen in El Greco's *Purification of the Temple*.

## Conclusion

This portrait of Clovio reveals ties to specific artistic theory, El Greco's repeated tendencies of representing the artist in act of creation, and his use of portraiture to ennoble the sitters through manipulation of social conventions. His portraits capture the social identity of an individual, they commemorate the sitter, and they document personal relationships like El Greco's bond with Clovio, while they offer theoretical and philosophical statements. He was not only capable of recognizing the potential of portraits to represent social standing and intellectual content, but he excelled synthesizing those social and intellectual elements in his images.

In this thesis, I have argued that El Greco's portrait of Giulio Clovio is an intersection of various elements of his artistic thought. His powerful representation of artistic thought (including the rendering of a portrait, nature's forces, leading Renaissance styles, didactic religious content, and the artist as creator ) in one image makes it nearly a visual artistic treatise. The image encapsulates all the social connections and theoretical

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<sup>128</sup> Casper, *Art and the Religious*, 130.



concepts he learned in Italy, which he employed for the rest of his career. This portrait is a singular vision that provides a snapshot of El Greco's time in Rome and the artistic beliefs he perfected there.

El Greco not only immortalized his friend while displaying social connections in the Farnese court, but he created a parallel between the artist and the figure of God in the act of creation. He succeeded in uniquely constructing the portrait not only to ingratiate Clovio socially, but also visually to elevate the status of the artist's profession.

Ultimately, El Greco extends the elevated status of Clovio to the whole profession. Thus, El Greco raises his own status indirectly while he points to himself more overtly through the details of the content in this image and the social context it represents. El Greco's portrait of Giulio Clovio, in this way, fits into trends in his entire oeuvre. It raises the status of artists while taking a subtle approach to the fashioning and elevation of El Greco's own identity.

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