Friends of Mount Athos

Annual Report
2005
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My dear friends,

Last year I wrote about disasters, both Athonite and worldly, and this year I could have done the same. There has, after all, been the usual tally, both on the Holy Mountain and in the world. But this piece is supposed to be about our society and for once I shall confine myself to that theme. Our fifteenth birthday occurred in 2005 and it seems to me that we have much to celebrate, or perhaps I should say much to be thankful for. Let us rather lay aside worldly cares and reflect for a moment on what we have achieved in the past year, or indeed in the past fifteen years.

A glance at the table of contents of this Annual Report is quite revealing. The first four articles after this one are in a sense commissioned pieces. Gabriel Pentzikis, who took over from the late and much-lamented John Leatham two years ago, faithfully keeps us up to date with what is happening on the Holy Mountain by means of his meticulously compiled report without which we would run the risk of losing sight of our main focus of attention. It contains the front-page stories which are the inspiration for all our other activities. Bishop Kallistos's paper on 'The Orthodox Vision of Creation' is the text of a lecture delivered to the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Iasi University on 24 October 2005 in the course of the pilgrimage to Moldavia that is referred to below. The next two articles comprise the text of talks that were delivered at meetings of the society, the first at the AGM in June and the second at the London meeting in November. As it happens, both of them were given by academics, professors respectively of Geography and of Byzantine and Modern Greek, but they could not be more different from each other in subject-matter; and neither conforms to the Athonite stereotype of hagiography or spiritual instruction. How fortunate we are to have such distinguished and enlightened scholars among our membership!

The next three articles demonstrate the vitality and the versatility of our society. In the course of this past year we have convened an international residential conference (our second) which was attended by seventy-nine delegates (in addition to six speakers) from eight different countries; we have dispatched a party of seventeen volunteers to the
Holy Mountain to spend two weeks labouring in the sun to rescue the footpaths and mule tracks that other pilgrims take for granted on their travels around the Mountain; and we have organized a nine-day pilgrimage for thirty-four people to the churches and monasteries of Moldavia. These major undertakings, described respectively, objectively, and endearingly by Robin Price, John Arnell and his team, and Richard Marks, are in addition to our usual programme of meetings, parties, and publications.

The remaining items in our table of contents are a miscellany of unsolicited contributions (apart from Dimitri Conomos’s regular and no less welcome report on the SYNDENOSMOS Spiritual Ecology Camp, held this year at Constamonitou). Imagine my excitement when Professor Richard Clogg wrote to me asking if we might be interested in an article about the liberation of Athos in 1945, a piece of history first published sixty years ago in the wonderfully named Frontier Force Regimental Magazine but totally unknown at least to me. Sixty years on, the liberator has just joined our society and plans to revisit the Mountain (for the first time since 1945) in 2006.

Nicholas Fennell is a schoolmaster at Winchester and a long-standing member of the Friends, perhaps best known for his acclaimed study of The Russians on Athos, published by Peter Lang in 2001. Readers may recall the fascinating piece that he wrote in our Annual Report for 1998 on The New Athos’ (or Novy Afon), the dependency of the St Panteleimon monastery in the Caucasus. Sadly its glory was snuffed out soon after 1912 and that was the end of the account until new evidence came to light in 2005 on the strength of which Dr Fennell has been able to complete his unfinished story.

Steve Grady grew up in France and served with the French Resistance before joining the British Army in 1944. He holds British, French, and American decorations and has lived in Greece for forty years. He built his own house in a remote part of Chalkidiki from where he can easily (when his livestock permit) visit Athos. This is his account of a recent pilgrimage in celebration of his eightieth birthday. I wonder how many of his readers knew that there were still so many functioning Russian sketes on the Holy Mountain.

Douglas Porteous is another professor of Geography. His poem, he tells me, was written long ago and refers to an incident (in 1984) at St Anne’s, a monastic funeral for a solitary found dead after several days. (The curve of the ‘po po po po po’ is intended to represent the trajectory of the spit down the cliff.) Was he perhaps reminded of it by our account and illustration of the funeral of Elder Dionysios in last year’s Annual Report?

The book reviews also deserve mention. The first two are of illustrated books, though both are far more than mere picture books. The first is by a photographer, whose text is every bit as illuminating and thoughtful as his photographs; the second concerns a painter whose paintings of the Holy Mountain reveal his desire (in the words of our reviewer) ‘to get under the skin of the landscape, to show its numinous quality, to give an impression of divine presence’. But it is the third book in which I think that not only Dimitri Conomos and I (as its editors) but all members of the Friends may justly take some pride. It contains the proceedings of our first residential conference, held at Madingley Hall, Cambridge, in February 2003, and so it represents the society’s first public venture into print. Members may purchase copies at a discount by writing to the Treasurer, Simon Jennings, at Rawlinson & Hunter, Eagle House, 110 Jermyn Street, London SW1Y 6RH. The cost including delivery to a UK address is £23.00 per copy, to Europe £24.50, and to the rest of the world £26.00 (or $47.00). Cheques should be made payable to The Friends of Mount Athos.

So much for the contents of this Annual Report. Members may be interested to know that the print run has now risen to 900 copies, more than double that for the average academic book, which means that anyone writing in our journal is likely to reach a considerably wider readership than he or she would normally when publishing with an academic press. A free copy is sent to every monastery on the Holy Mountain, to Ormylia, and several of the sketes, as well as to the publishers of books reviewed and a few other institutions and individuals. It is quite clear from the feedback that we receive, not all of it entirely laudatory, that it is read with close attention: the editor is on his mettle. I should also add before leaving the subject of the Annual Report that it is your Annual Report and all it can do is chronicle your activities and publish your contributions. If you enjoy reading it (as we hope you do), please reflect that it is only as interesting as you make it, and so please consider contributing yourself. You don’t have to be a university professor to do so!

* * * * *
We began 2005 as usual with a Vasilopitta party, but this time, at the
invitation of Archbishop Gregorios, we were honoured to hold it in the
crypt of the Greek Cathedral in Moscow Road. We are grateful to His
Eminence for providing us with a change of scene and more spacious
surroundings. But there is something special about the atmosphere of
the Andipa Gallery and we are delighted to accept an invitation from
Mrs Maria Andipa to return there for our 2006 party.

On the first weekend of March we held our second residential
conference at Madingley Hall, Cambridge, this time on the theme
"Beauty Will Save the World": Art, Music, Architecture, and Athonite
Monasticism. Seven papers were presented: by Bishop Kallistos on
'The Principles of Divine Beauty', Abbot Vasileios of Iviron on 'Beauty
Will Save the World', Dr Dimitri Conomos on 'Elder Aimonianos on
the Psalter and the Revival of Melodious Psalmody at Simonopetra',
Dr John Nandris on 'The Master of the Full Moon: Reflections on
Panselinos', Aidan Hart on 'The Sacred in Art and Architecture: Time­
less Principles and Contemporary Challenges', Dr Sophia Sotiriopoulou
on 'Ormylia's Art Diagnosis Centre: Interdisciplinary Research for
Documenting and Preserving Works of Byzantine Art', and Professor
Ioli Kalavrezou on 'The Virgin Mary and Devotional Imagery in the
Wall Paintings of Mount Athos'. In addition some seventy-nine dele­
gates attended the conference, from as many as eight different coun­
tries. There was a framework of Orthodox services held in the beautiful
(but chilly) parish church and once again we are grateful to Fr John
Mullet for making this available to us. We are also grateful to Fr Ephrem
Lash for the trouble he takes in preparing the services and to Demetrios
Skrekas for his melodious chanting. Once again we worked in associa­
tion with the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies at Cambridge
and we are indebted to them (as well as to Esther Hookway and Jeremy
Black) for their part in organizing the event. But most of all we are
grateful to our sponsors, the Prince's Trust, the Michael Marks Trust,
the A.G. Leventis Foundation, the Gerald Palmer Eling Trust, and the
Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, who between them enable us to
cover the speakers' travelling expenses and who make such a generous
contribution towards the costs of the conference as a whole.

The conference seems to have become an established (bi-annual)
event in our calendar. The fact that it has been sold out each time that
we have held it encourages us to believe that there is a demand for it
among our members, and to judge from the evaluation forms that we
encourage delegates to complete, most people seem to enjoy it a lot
(though the points of detail that are mentioned on the forms will not be
ignored). Madingley seems to be the ideal venue in that it is a dedi­
cated conference centre with about the right amount of accommoda­
tion, comfortable en-suite rooms, excellent food, and a welcoming
atmosphere. If communications are not perfect (Cambridge railway
station is about 4 miles away), we may be able to assist more del­
geates in future by offering them lifts in cars. In conclusion I am pleased to
give advance notice that we have made a booking for the weekend of
9-11 February 2007 when we plan a conference on the theme 'Mount
Athos: The Last Fifty Years and the Next'. Application forms will be
circulated in due course, so please don't apply now, but if you are inter­
ested, keep a note of the date.

In May a team of seventeen volunteers went out to continue the
important work of clearing footpaths and mule tracks on the Mountain.
This project, another well-established item in our programme, serves
at least two valuable functions. In the first instance it helps to preserve
the ancient network of communications that makes pedestrian pilgrim­
age on Mount Athos both possible and pleasurable. But secondly, and
perhaps just as significantly, it introduces Athonite monasticism to a
group of individuals who might not otherwise have ever been touched
by it. This year's expedition served also incidentally to highlight the
quality of the medical and dental services now available on the Holy
Mountain (see John Amell's report, below). As always we are indebted
to HRH The Prince of Wales for his active support of the project (which
was originally his idea) and to the Latsis Foundation for covering the
team's travelling expenses.

The society's fourteenth Annual General Meeting took place at St
Anne's College, Oxford, on Saturday 4 June 2005 and was attended by
about seventy members and guests. The day followed the usual pattern
of a talk in the morning, followed by a buffet lunch, then the formal
business of the AGM, followed by a second talk, and then tea. In the
morning Bishop Kallistos spoke about 'The Spiritual Father in Early
Monasticism and on the Holy Mountain' and in the afternoon Professor
Malcolm Wagstaff, Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University
of Southampton, gave an illustrated presentation entitled 'A British Spy
on Mount Athos: The Visit of Colonel Leake, 22 October-3 November
written a good deal. Those wishing to read further are referred to the chapter with that title in his book *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY, 2000), pp. 127–51. A version of Professor Wagstaff's talk is printed below.

At the formal business meeting in my capacity as Secretary I reported on the society's activities over the previous year. I began by saying that the membership had risen to 751, I read aloud the names of those who had joined since the printing of the last Directory, and I reported the deaths of Guy Evans, Ian Lennox Smith, and Charles Stewart. At the AGM on 9 June 2004 we had listened to two talks. Fr John Chryssavgis spoke about 'Discerning the Roots of Athonite Silence: Subtle Insights from the Spiritual Letters of Barsanuphius and John' and I gave an illustrated presentation entitled 'The Way of a Pilgrim on Mount Athos'. There was also a showing of the video based on the first Sherrard Lecture given by Bishop Kallistos on the life and work of the late Philip Sherrard. On 18 November we had met in London for a service of Orthodox Vespers at the Romanian church of St Dunstan in the West followed by a talk by Dr Oliver Rackham entitled 'Our Lady's Garden: The Historical Ecology of the Holy Mountain'. The remainder of my report covered the Vasilopitta party, the Madingley conference, and the path-clearing expedition that have already been mentioned above. I concluded by thanking all those who had contributed to the smooth operation of the society over the past year.

In his capacity as Treasurer Simon Jennings presented the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2004. He remarked that the society's reserves had been reduced by about £10,000 by charitable gifts and donations, and a total of £20,000 had been sent to Hilandar in the course of the year as a contribution towards the reconstruction of that monastery. The Runciman Account had been taken into the general reserves except for £5000 which had been kept back for the Derek Hill memorial (which in the event had cost only 2500 euros). The recent conference had made a small profit thanks to sponsorship and the pilgrimage to Mount Pelion had been self-supporting. Stuart Alderman proposed that the accounts be adopted, a motion that was seconded by Fr Peter Palmer and carried unanimously.

After the reports there were elections. Bishop Kallistos announced that Bishop Basil, David Cadman, Anthony Hazledine, and Graham Speake had all reached the end of their term of office and were offering themselves for re-election. There being no other candidates, he proposed that all four should be treated en bloc and they were duly re-elected nemine contradicente.

Under other business, John Winnington-Ingram said that some pilgrims were experiencing difficulties in gaining access to monasteries and museums and wondered if a membership card might be produced to indicate the bona fides of members. It was agreed that the Executive Committee should consider the suggestion and I am pleased to report that such a card is now available on request from the Secretary. Stuart Alderman asked if a rare atlas in the Koutloumousiou library might be reproduced in facsimile and sold in aid of the Hilandar Appeal but the Treasurer cautioned that this would represent an unjustifiable financial risk. Mr Alderman also proposed a vote of thanks to the Executive Committee for its work and, there being no other business, Bishop Kallistos closed the meeting at 2.55 pm.

As I write about it, it occurs to me that the AGM may sound a rather austere affair with a turgid business meeting sandwiched between two rather heavyweight lectures. If that is the picture that comes across, I should try to correct it. The talks themselves are anything but heavy-weight and are pitched at a level that does not assume specialist knowledge or an audience of academic theologians. Rather they aim to be entertaining as well as enlightening and of interest to anyone who has the objects of our society at heart. During the coffee, lunch, and tea breaks there is always a good deal of 'down time' when members are encouraged to meet each other, to exchange views, and to browse among the items for sale (usually a selection of books, maps, icons, pictures, and CDs of Athonite or Orthodox interest). In short, the AGM aims to be a stimulating and enjoyable day. A good deal of effort goes into organizing it and we would like to see a higher proportion of members attending it in future.

In October a group of thirty-four pilgrims spent nine days touring the monasteries and churches of Moldavia. A description of this pilgrimage written by Professor Richard Marks is printed below, so I will confine my remarks here to a few words of thanks — first to our guide, Fr Dan Sandu, who did a fantastic job in looking after us from the moment we landed in Bucharest to the moment of our departure; secondly to Metropolitan Daniel for providing us with transport (and a
At the autumn meeting on 22 November Bishop Kallistos mentioned
superb feast at his residence in Iasi); thirdly to Bishop Kallistos for
accompanying us and providing spiritual guidance (as well as Liturgies
and lectures) wherever we went; and fourthly to Dimitri Conomos for
once again achieving a real triumph of organization. This was a truly
memorable excursion, greatly enjoyed by all those who participated.
The pilgrimage also seems to have become a regular fixture in our
calendar. Members will already have received a preliminary notice about
the 2006 trip to Finland and northern Russia. Further details will be
circulated in due course.

The autumn meeting took place on 22 November and followed the
usual pattern. We met for Orthodox Vespers at the Romanian church
of St Dunstan in the West after which we walked the short distance to
St Bride's Institute in Bride Lane for a glass of wine. On this occasion
our speaker was Elizabeth Jeffreys, Professor of Byzantine and Modern
Greek at Oxford and a Fellow of Exeter College. She is also a
Patron of the Friends of Mount Athos and she chose as her theme 'Mount Athos and its Libraries: Tales of the Past, Hopes for the Future'.

About seventy members and guests attended the meeting and warmly
appreciated this absorbing talk, a version of which is printed below.
Professor Jeffreys ended with a passionate plea for the introduction of
modern methods of conservation of the books and the libraries them­selves, for the publication of new catalogues both in print and on line,
and for greater ease of access for scholars to the treasures that the
libraries contain. I mentioned earlier that this Annual Report is read
with close attention in certain quarters. I sincerely hope that this plea,
from one of the foremost scholars of our day in the study of Byzantine
and early modern Greek literature, who cannot herself visit the libraries
in person, will not fall on deaf ears.

At the autumn meeting on 22 November Bishop Kallistos mentioned
that we as a society from time to time receive appeals for financial aid
from associated groups or individuals to which we are prevented from
responding by the terms of our charitable status (which limits our giving
to institutions with clear Athonite connections). But as he said, this
does not prevent us from drawing them to the attention of our members,
some of whom may wish to make donations to these worthy causes to
which we can only give moral support. Under this heading there are
three recent appeals that I should like to mention.

The St Edward Brotherhood at Brookwood has long been a corporate
member of our society and several of the fathers there (notably Fr Alexis and Fr Niphon) are regular attenders of our meetings. As
their community has grown and their work (by means of which they
support themselves) and other activities have expanded, they find
that their existing accommodation is inadequate for their needs. They
are therefore appealing for funds to support the building of a new
monastic house (for which full planning permission has been obtained)
as well as repairs to their church. Those who would like further
information on the appeal and how to give should write to St Edward
Brotherhood, St Cyprian's Avenue, Brookwood, Surrey GU24 0BL
(e-mail theshepherd@mac.com).

Secondly, the Russian Cathedral, Ennismore Gardens, is launching
an appeal to help finance the complete restoration of the interior of the
building (listed Grade II*) which will cost around £450,000. The core
of the restoration is the cleaning of large areas of high-quality sgraffito
frescoes dating from the nineteenth century that are now covered with
grime and more or less invisible. When cleaned, Bishop Basil writes,
they will be spectacular. Those who would like to support this appeal
should write to Bishop Basil of Sergievo at 94a Banbury Road, Oxford
OX2 6JT (e-mail sergievo@ntlworld.com).

Finally, Fr Silouan, Abbot of the Monastery of Sts Antony and
Cuthbert in Shropshire, having recently lost a major benefactor, finds
himself in financial difficulties and is appealing for regular donations,
however small, for general subsistence. Readers of this Report will
no doubt recall the striking addresses that Fr Silouan gave both at
our 2003 AGM and at the seminar convened by HRH The Prince of
Wales at Highgrove in June 2002. Anyone wishing to contribute to
this appeal should write to the Treasurer of the Stiperstones Trust,
Nicholas Chapman, at 95 Ravens Lane, Bignall End, Staffs ST7 8PY
(e-mail ngrchapman@btinternet.com).

An appeal to which we were able to respond recently came from the
fathers of the Romanian Skete of Lakkou on Mount Athos to whom we
gave 7500 euros for the purchase of furniture for the kyrionak, and
specifically for the icon stand for the Theotokos, as was mentioned in
last year's Annual Report. We have received a letter of thanks from the
prior, Fr Stephanos, enclosing a photograph of the icon set up on its new stand, which we are pleased to reproduce here (plate 1). He writes, 'If you could help us again we would be very glad. We are still praying for you.' Lakkou is one of the most beautiful, if most inaccessible, spots on Mount Athos, and anyone who makes it up the the path from Morphonou is guaranteed a warm welcome from this very friendly brotherhood. We should remember them too in our prayers.

In response to a further appeal from the monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God, Solan, one of the dependencies of Simonopetra in France, we contributed a further £3000 to their fund for the construction of a new guest house. In a letter of thanks addressed to Bishop Kallistos, Mother Hypandia wrote, 'The amount of money required to all these preliminary studies is enormous – and we have yet to begin the actual building! What Father Sophrony said to Pere Placide some twenty years ago often comes to mind: “the existence of a monastery in the West is a permanent miracle!”

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Members will be anxious for news of Hilandar since the catastrophic fire there in March 2004, details of which may be found on our website (www.athosfriends.org). My informant is Vladeta Jankovic, formerly Ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro at the Court of St James, who delivered a memorable address (‘Hilandar before and after the Fire’) at Bridgewater House on 6 May 2004 which was printed in last year’s Annual Report. Dr Jankovic has visited Hilandar twice in the course of 2005 and sent me reports after each visit. His first report, in the summer, was rather depressing because it suggested that Hilandar would not be immune from the frustrating delays and disputes that have dogged so many projects of restoration on Athos in recent times. ‘The work of restoration itself’, he wrote, has hardly begun. The clearing of the rubble on the western side of the complex is still in progress but should be completed by the end of August. The unstable walls have been secured and frescos which were left in the open are now under covers… It is all not unlike putting up the scaffolding before the real building work begins and will serve a good purpose. The real reason why the reconstruction has not properly begun is the conflict between KEDAK [the Greek archaeological organization responsible for construction works on Mount Athos] and the fraternity (supported by an impressive number of both Greek and Serbian experts), who are in favour of using reinforced concrete structure, which would be invisible under the perfectly reconstructed outside look. They claim it would be safer in case of another fire … but also cheaper and faster to raise… The whole situation is very complicated and, considering the stubbornness of all participants, I cannot predict the outcome.

In the autumn Dr Jankovic accompanied Prime Minister Kostunica on a visit to Greece. At a meeting with Prime Minister Karamanlis they were able to raise the issue of Hilandar, to ask for more flexibility from KEDAK, and to request forty labour permits for Serbian construction workers to be employed during the reconstruction. Mr Karamanlis responded positively to both requests and within days the labour permits had been issued and KEDAK gave permission for limited use of concrete on the north-west wing. The next day they visited the monastery and were able to see that:

- the huge operation of the rubble clearing is now completed;
- all suspect parts of the remaining walls have been either brought down or properly strengthened;
- all frescos left in the open are well protected;
- four (?) workshops – electrical, plumbing, carpentry – on the slope opposite the main entrance have been built and completely equipped to be used when reconstruction work starts in earnest;
- a new guest house outside the complex has been built in the exact style of the previous eighteenth-century structure;
- everything is ready for reconstruction of the 1821 structure on the north-west side, where the main sleeping quarters used to be; and of course
- the first real reconstruction work has now begun.

This time Dr Jankovic writes that he had a very good feeling about the atmosphere within the brotherhood, 'imbued with optimism and energy'. In general things are at last moving in the right direction and, even though the progress is not particularly visible from the approach to the monastery, time-consuming and complicated clearing and preparatory works are now completed. 'If everything goes as predicted, and the money from the EU, Serbian state, and individual donors continues to arrive regularly, we should see the reconstruction completed by 2012. GOD WILLING, of course.'
Meanwhile, to ensure that the work continues on schedule, substantial sums are still required. Our appeal account remains open. Anyone wishing to donate should send a cheque, payable to the Hilandar Appeal, to the Treasurer, Simon Jennings, Rawlinson & Hunter, Eagle House, 110 Jermyn Street, London SW1Y 6RH.

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News reached us in August of the foundation in Helsinki of the Finnish Society of Friends of the Holy Mountain of Athos and the election of Professor René Gothóni as its first President. Professor Gothóni is a long-standing member of our society and members will no doubt recall his talk, ‘Understanding Pilgrimage to Mount Athos’, at our 2002 AGM. We have been pleased to appoint him a Patron of our society and we have sent him greetings and good wishes for the future to the new Finnish society.

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On the home front it is a pleasure to congratulate Fr John Stroyan on his translation to the bishopric of Warwick in the Anglican Diocese of Coventry, and Professor Averil Cameron, Warden of Keble College, Oxford, on being appointed DBE in the New Year honours list.

I regret to report the deaths of James Rennie and Robert Rowett. Robert, who only joined the society at the start of last year, had a bad fall in September from which he never really recovered. James on the other hand had been a member for more than ten years and was particularly helpful in giving us the benefit of his professional expertise when we were attempting to get the Friends registered as a charity. Despite suffering a serious stroke some years ago, he continued regularly to attend our meetings and conferences and will be much missed. We extend our deepest sympathy to the widows of both. May their memory be eternal!

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As I said at the start of this report, I wanted to reflect on what we had achieved as a society in the past year, or rather the past fifteen years since Derek Hill and I first founded the Friends. Whenever we undertake a new initiative, such as our first residential conference or our first pilgrimage, or when we see our first book published, I always say to myself ‘I wish Derek had been here’ or ‘I wish Derek could see this.’ Derek himself never actually did very much for the Friends. I always recall with a smile his (not entirely jocular) exclamation, ‘I’m only an artist: I can’t do anything!’ But he was a man of vision, he loved Athos, and he had great aspirations for this society. He richly deserves the memorial to him, with its elegant bilingual inscription designed by Mark Hoare, that has recently been completed at Vatopedi. I hope he would like it, and I hope he would approve of what we have been doing.

GRAHAM SPEAKE
Hon. Secretary
Mount Athos, it is often said, is a place where no one is born and all is reborn. This adage inevitably comes to mind when one begins to discuss Athonite art. In architecture there is a distinctive 'Athonite type church', essentially a cross-in-square church to which lateral apses have been added on the north and south sides to accommodate large numbers of cantors. The earliest example of such a church is the katholikon at Great Lavra, built by St Athanasios the Athonite at the turn of the second millennium, which has subsequently served as the model for every katholikon on Athos and for many katholikons outside the Holy Mountain. The parish church currently known as Prophet Elijah in Thessaloniki, an exquisite example of the Athonite type church, was the katholikon of an unidentified monastery which has not survived.

It has been calculated that the area covered by monumental paintings on Athos amounts to 12 hectares (29.6 acres). Is there any distinctive feature in these wall-paintings, or in the countless portable icons produced on Athos over the centuries, which distinguishes them as specifically Athonite? Can one speak of an Athonite painting style in the way one speaks of an Athonite type church?

Monumental painting on Athos can be broadly divided into three phases. The earliest phase (end of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century) is associated with the Macedonian School. The most important example of this phase is the Protaton frescos (c.1290) by Manuel Panselinos of Thessaloniki, a legendary figure whose style has come to be regarded as the quintessence of this school, which favours narrative compositions, monumental proportions, flowing draperies, light colours, and supple volumes. Near-contemporary frescos at Vatopedi and Hilandar monasteries also belong to this school and have been attributed to such Thessalonian artists as the brothers Michael and Eutychios Astrapas, whose frescos decorate churches in Ohrid and Gracanica. It is not known whether any of these artists were monks, but it is clear that they were commissioned artists coming from outside Athos.

The next phase comes in sixteenth century and is associated with the Cretan School, which favoured sharp draperies and figures in contained postures and gestures set against a black background. Remarkable are the frescos by Theophanes the Cretan, chief exponent of this school, at the katholikons of Great Lavra (1535) and Stavronikita (1546) monasteries. Theophanes worked with his son and both were tonsured monks. He was however already an established and accomplished artist by the time he arrived on Athos: in 1527 he had painted the katholikon frescos at St Nicholas Anapafsas monastery at Meteora. Theophanes's influence is noticeable in the frescos of the Molyvokklesia hermitage near Karyes and in the work of Tzortzis, who painted the frescos of the katholikons at Dionysiou (1547) and Dochiariou monasteries. In 1560 Frangos Catelanos, the chief exponent of the Thebes workshop, painted the frescos in the chapel of St Nicholas at Great Lavra; his work adheres less to the Cretan School, and western influence, notably in the vivid colours and the intense facial expressions, is more prominent. Seventeenth-century frescos include the Revelation cycle at Dionysiou monastery which has close affinities with engravings by Dürrer, Cranach, and Holbein.

The next major phase of monumental painting comes in the second half of eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and follows major restoration and renovation projects carried out in many monasteries and sketes. It is heralded by the Painter's Manual (1730–4) by Dionysios of Phournas, which is at the same time a handbook providing instruction on, for instance, 'How to work like the Muscovites' and an artistic manifesto proclaiming a return to the style of Panselinos. Dionysios is quite sincere in his respect and reverence for Panselinos, yet one cannot help feeling that something of Panselinos's doctrinal fullness, displayed in representations such as the Reclined Christ, where every single detail has solid doctrinal connotations, is somehow missing in Dionysios. In the Painter's Manual, for instance, instructions on how to paint the Harrowing of Hell (the traditional Orthodox way of representing the Resurrection) are followed by instructions on how to paint 'Christ Rising from the Tomb' (western-style depiction of the Resurrection); the representation of the Nativity of Christ should show 'a cave, with inside it on the right the Mother of God kneeling and laying the infant Christ, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in the crib and on the left Joseph kneeling with his hands crossed on his breast'; in other words, Dionysios tacitly introduces into eastern iconography the western motif of the Nativity as the 'Holy Family'. The influence and conceptual dichotomy of Dionysios are evident in the work of artists such as Constantine and Athanasius from Korče, who painted the frescos at the kyriakon churches of St Anne's skete (1757) and the skete of Xenophontos (1766),
and at the katholikons of Philotheou (1765) and Xeropotamou (1783) monasteries. It is also evident in the works of monks Nikephoros from Karpenisi and Makarios from Galatista. This third phase could be called truly 'Athonite', in the sense that, instead of commissioning artists from outside, Mount Athos now became the chief producer of religious art. Monk Makarios of Karakalou monastery set up a painter's workshop at Karyes, brought his younger brothers from his native village, and established an icon-painting brotherhood, known as the Galatsianoi, which turned into something of a dynasty spanning almost a century. When Porfiry Uspeisky visited Athos in 1859, he met and interviewed the younger Makarios, who had come to Athos at the age of nine. The Galatsianoi were prolific in their output; their monumental compositions adorn katholikons (Vatopedi, Hilandar, Esigmenou, Zographou), kyriakons (skete of St Demetrios), chapels (Iviron, Pantokrator, Vatopedi), refectories (Vatopedi), entrance pavilions (Dochiariou, Iviron, Xenophontos), phiales (Hilandari); they also produced innumerable portable icons. One could almost say that mutatis mutandis the Galatsianoi were the equivalent of medieval court painters. They inhabited the hermitage of the Presentation of the Virgin, opposite the north-west corner of the Protaton, where two of them served as typikaris (responsible for proper adherence to the typikon). The central location of their hermitage and the fact that it was the Galatsianoi who provided the Holy Community with a huge loan when the latter was in dire financial straits because of vicissitudes caused by the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, demonstrate the rising fortunes of the brotherhood. It could be safely said that it was the Galatsianoi who institutionalized icon-painting on Mount Athos and acted as forerunners of such renowned icon-painting brotherhoods as the Ioasaphaioi (established 1859), the Kyrillaioi, and the Danieliaioi.

It is interesting to note that throughout history artists, on Mount Athos and elsewhere, were referred to as zographoi (painters); only in the late nineteenth century do we find references to bagiographoi (icon-painters). The semantic difference, which implies a clear separation of secular and religious art, is said to have been a reaction to what was perceived as extreme secularization in the Russian and Nazarene Schools.

The Galatsianoi were clearly zographoi. Their monumental compositions frequently included purely decorative secular landscapes and allusions to dominant western styles such as baroque and rococo. There is an apparent contradiction in the fact that 'native' Athonite art is a far cry from the Byzantine models one normally associates with Mount Athos. Yet there is something charming in the way the Galatsianoi incorporated these allusions; there is a certain carefree joy, strongly reminiscent of Byzantine art and culture, with decorative landscapes functioning like an ekphrasis in medieval verse romances. Their frescos could be seen as visual equivalents of the poetry of Kaisarios Dapontes, to whom we owe the name 'Garden of the Virgin' (To Perivoli tis Panaghias) for Mount Athos; they represent a holistic approach where monastic vocation is guarantee enough for doctrinal discipline.

The icon-painting brotherhoods that followed in the wake of the Galatsianoi established themselves in sketes, away from the Athonite capital, although the Ioasaphaioi eventually moved from Kafsokalivia to Karyes. New Skete, home of the Kyrillaioi brotherhood, is often referred to as the 'Painters' Skete', and some of the best-known contemporary Athonite icon-painters, such as Fr Nikon, Fr Prodromos, Fr Gregory, and Fr Gabriel, live there. Icon-painting is still essentially a hermitage handicraft but, interestingly enough, Xenophontos monastery has set up an icon-painting workshop under the able guidance of Fr Lukas, who is also responsible for the state-of-the-art museum display of relics and artefacts inaugurated by the Ecumenical Patriarch on the occasion of the millennial celebrations of the monastery. Fr Lukas has painted the frescos of the new katholikon at Xenophontos and also the dome frescos in the Protaton treasury. It is also worth noting that certain monumental compositions have recently been commissioned from lay icon-painters. The chapel of St Andrew's hermitage in Provata, the largest hermitage chapel on Athos, was decorated by a lay icon-painter from Thessaloniki some years ago; this year saw the completion of the nave frescos in the chapel of Marouda hermitage, near Karyes. They are the work of Demos Avramidis (b. 1965), who abandoned the prospect of a legal career to study fine arts and train as a restorer and who has been painting portable icons for a number of years. The wall-paintings at Marouda hermitage chapel were his first monumental commission; he started painting the Pantokrator on the dome in 1998. Although the chapel is fairly small, Avramidis chose to depict saints life-sized, and consequently one comes to feel their presence almost palpably. His representation of the Nativity of the Virgin displays a sobriety and playfulness which betray an unusual degree of interaction
between artist and patron. The hermitage Elder's guidance was, 'Paint something that will be restful to our eyes', and one feels that through this interaction the artist was somehow reborn; and on the question whether there is a specifically Athonite style in painting and whether art is born or reborn on Athos, one could say that an artist reborn is worth just as much, if not more, than a born artist.

The artistic output of the Galatsianoi School was the subject of an exhibition organized in the framework of the Dimitria Festivities in Thessaloniki in November. The mention of a 'School' is a reference to the output of artistic workshops set up by disciples of the Galatsianoi in many villages in Chalkidiki. The portable icons in the exhibition underwent extensive restoration, cleaning, and scientific study at the Ormylia Art Diagnosis Centre, well documented in the exhibition catalogue (I Eikonograpbia tis Scholos ton Galatsianon, Thessaloniki Municipal Gallery, ISBN 960-6602-19-2). The exhibition was jointly set up by the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the holy convent of the Annunciation with Fr Vasileios, abbot of Iviron monastery, was among the speakers, and contributed an Athonite point of view on beauty. His talk pole-vaulted over artistic beauty to discuss 'the light-bearing beauty of Him who has embellished mankind', the state of beauty attained through ascesis and illumination, when toil becomes repose, with particular reference to the life of Elder Porphyrios (d. 1991).

Archimandrite Vasileios is a prominent, if not emblematic, figure of renewal on Mount Athos. Born in 1936 to a large, pious family from Iraklion, Crete, he studied theology at Athens and later at St Sergius' Orthodox Theological Seminary in Paris. In the early 1960s, when monasticism was on the whole frowned upon, he was tonsured a monk and went to live in a hermitage belonging to the skete of Iviron together with Fr Païssios. In 1968 Stavronikita monastery was peopled by four very old monks and was in serious danger of becoming derelict; it was then that the Holy Community asked Fr Vasileios to become the abbot of the monastery, and he accepted on condition that Stavronikita would revert to cenobitic rule. The rest is history. Stavronikita, the youngest monastery on Athos and the only one which is not an 'imperial monastery' (basilike mone), since it was reconstructed by Patriarch Jeremiah in the mid-sixteenth century, the 'Cinderella' of monasteries - so small that its katholikon lacks the distinctive Athonite lateral apses - became the pioneer of renewal on Athos. Monks grew in numbers round Abbot Vasileios, the monastery was consolidated (literally so, as it had suffered latent damage in the 1932 Ierissos earthquake), lay people became acquainted with the artistic achievements of Theophanes through elegant and scholarly volumes and, more important, listened for the first time to a theological discourse free from stagnant pietist platitudes, which guided the faithful directly to the Church Fathers. In 1990 Fr Vasileios was offered the abbotship of Iviron, which he accepted out of love for his metanoia (the monastery where he first dwelt as monk).

In October this year Fr Vasileios retired from office and the brotherhood at Iviron elected hieromonk Nathanael (b. 1966) as abbot. The
consecration of the new abbot took place on the feast day of St Dimitrios (26 October/8 November), in the presence of eleven Athonite abbots and representatives from all the monasteries. As dictated by Athonite tradition, the new abbot received his staff from the hands of the representative of Great Lavra. Later, in the refectory, Fr Vasileios, visibly moved, said that if he had not known that the Iviron brotherhood was united and spiritually mature he would have stayed on as abbot until his deathbed. In the Synaxarion one often reads of abbots retiring from office so as to return to solitude; in recent Athonite history Abbot Ephrem moved, said that ‘these relations should be harmonious and based on common trust and common spiritual ideals.’ He then made an unscheduled visit to Iviron monastery where he venerated the icon of the Virgin Portaitissa and met the abbot and the brethren. Fr Vasileios pointed out that the strength of the Russian people lies in their Orthodox faith, so eloquently described by Dostoevsky. He also referred to the Iviron metochion of St Nicholas, confiscated and destroyed under Soviet persecution, and said that handing it back to Iviron monastery would be a concrete step in consolidating relations between Athos and Russia. Abbot Vasileios presented the Russian President with an icon of the Mother of God, with the inscription ‘Most Holy Mother of God, intercede for thy servant Vladimir.’ Mr Putin thanked him and said that the revival of faith was the foundation of the current rebirth of Russia. The President then visited the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon, where he was met by Abbot Jeremiah and the brethren. He venerated the relics in the katholikon and thanked the monks for the prayers they offer for Russia and all Orthodox peoples, and presented Abbot Jeremiah with the Order of Friendship.

On 3 October the Ecumenical Patriarchate nominated Elder Chrysostomos Katsoulieris abbott of Esphigmenou. Elder Chrysostomos and his brotherhood inhabited the Annunciation hermitage, a Simonopetra dependency, in the valley of Kapsala, near Karyes. They moved into what was then a derelict hermitage in 1987 and embarked on extensive repair and restoration work, which literally turned to ashes in the great fire of 1990. None of the damage sustained then is visible today as the brotherhood has very diligently and efficiently managed to turn the smoky ruins into what is now referred to as the ‘Jewel of Kapsala’. The nomination was recognized by the Holy Community and the Katsoulieris brotherhood now constitutes the de jure Esphigmenou monastery. However, when the brotherhood attempted to take over the konaki (representative’s house) of Esphigmenou at Karyes in late November, monks of the rebel Esphigmenou brotherhood resisted and the police had to intervene to maintain order.

The Esphigmenou question has turned into a major thorn in the relations between the Holy Community and the Greek government. Athonites feel the government treats the issue as an internal dispute between the Holy Community and the break-away monastery and fails to understand the institutional dimension of the problem, despite the fact that the Council of State, Greece’s supreme court, clearly and irrevocably upheld the decision of the Holy Community on Esphigmenou monastery. Relations with the present government have deteriorated further on account of a number of issues, such as the intention of government ministers to abolish exemption from military service for novices who have not yet been tonsured, and their insistence that Athonite monasteries should submit a declaration of real estate property, and that this property should then be subjected to VAT. Athonites point out that such intentions infringe the special status of Mount Athos and all Orthodox peoples, and presented Abbot Jeremiah with the Order of Friendship.
Athonites. The leader of the opposition was quick to make political capital out of Athonite discontent; he visited Mount Athos in early December and pledged his party's support. Matters are extremely sensitive, particularly in view of the imminent revision of the Constitution, with opposition parties explicitly asking for a separation of Church and State. Numerous articles on Church matters have appeared recently in the Greek press. One of them convincingly pointed out that wanton violence exercised by dictatorial regimes in the 1920s greatly exacerbated the problem of the 'Old Calendarists', who refused to conform to the Gregorian calendar introduced in 1923.

Graham Speake's book Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise came out in Greek this year, inaugurating the 'Athonika' series of Indiktos Editions. Renewal on Athos is clearly seen in the extensive construction, reconstruction, and refurbishment of buildings. Construction projects are in progress in most monasteries. On the whole they seem to be have made slow progress this year, probably because funds are restricted as a result of government austerity policies and most available resources have been earmarked for the restoration of the Protaton. In Pantokrator monastery the restoration of the katholikon exterior is now complete. The conversion of the docheio (olive-oil store) at Vatopedi monastery into the recently inaugurated treasury/museum was made possible by generous funding from the Catalan Generalitat, a token reparation for the destruction and pillage caused by the Catalan Company in the early fourteenth century. A newspaper account reported that the initiative for the Generalitat funding came from a young Catalan songwriter who realized that Athonite monks had neither forgotten nor forgiven the destruction caused by his fellow countrymen, when he was refused entry in a monastery because of his nationality. It would be wrong, however, exclusively to equate renewal with construction projects and the preservation of the architectural heritage. There are ongoing projects aiming at the preservation of the spiritual and cultural heritage as well. Vatopedi, Simonopetra, and Pantokrator monasteries are implementing projects for digital processing of their archives, funded by the Information Society Program of the Third Community Support Framework. Pantokrator monastery, where last July a Libyan Muslim was baptized into the Orthodox faith, expects to complete the cataloguing and digital processing of 200 manuscript codices (a total of 80,000 photographs) and the documentation and digital photographing of more than 1,000 items in the folklore collection of the Prophet Elijah skete by March 2006. At the Second International Symposium on Athos held in Thessaloniki (11-13 November), under the auspices of the Society for Macedonian Studies, monk Patapios of St Akakios hermitage at Kafos-kalyvia skete presented his research into the work of an icon-painter hitherto known as 'Parthenios from Agraphe'. He convincingly identified him with Parthenios Skourtis from Phourn, a disciple of Dionysios, who lived in St George's hermitage (Skourtai) near Karyes and was spiritual father of St Makarios Notaras and a pioneer of the Kollyvades movement. St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain lived in the same hermitage in later years. This aspect of renewal, marked by a dynamic strengthening of patristic spirituality and monastic life, is evident in numerous Athonite publications in the last thirty years which have had an overwhelming impact on lay theology and on congregations outside Athos. A book by Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra on the ascetic teaching of Abba Isaiah is being reprinted hardly a month after its first edition. A translation into English of Elder Aimilianos's book Peri Theou appeared this autumn (The Church at Prayer: The Mystical Liturgy of the Heart, Indiktos Editions, ISBN 960-518-251-3); non-Greek readers thus have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the profound theological discourse of the spiritual leader of Simonopetra.

Among Athonite publications this year one should note Porphyriou Uspenski Agioretikon Epopteia (K. Papoulides, ed.), published by the 'Agioreitiki Bibliothike' (ISBN 960-86970-2-6), a handy guide for scholars. Bishop Porfiry Uspensky was one of the first to write scholarly Athonite history. The 'Agioreitiki Estia' has reprinted a classic monograph by deacon Kosmas Vlachos, I Chersonissos tou Agiou Orous Atho, originally published in 1903. It has also produced in collaboration with the Museum of Photography and the Hellenic Culture Organization a beautiful album of photographs by Fred Boissonas, the Museum of Photography and the Hellenic Culture Organization a beautiful album of photographs by Fred Boissonas, the Pilgrim's Guide (S. Paschalidis, Iera Moni Pantokratoros: Prosymematikos Odigos, Mount Athos 2005, ISBN 960-86258-3-1). It is the third such guide produced by the monastery in twenty years: the 1996 guide was written by Archimandrite Efthymios, abbot of what was then an idiorrhythmic monastery; the 1996 guide and the present one were both written by lay scholars. Symeon
Paschalidis is an assistant professor at Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, and the cover of the guide features a 1726 drawing of the monastery kept at the Bodleian Library. Some years ago Pantokrator monastery also produced a fine guide on video, and last year it produced an elegant edition of the Book of Psalms, a typikon for the hermitage vigil service. Transfiguration hermitage of Pantokrator monastery has produced this year’s Athonite calendar-cum-telephone directory, which unlike previous editions includes a long list of hermitage telephone numbers, often noting handicrafts (icons, incense, woodcarvings) produced there. Transfiguration hermitage is listed as 'builders'; this is a significant occupational change since monks of the hermitage were formerly known as moutafs, i.e. manufacturers of Athonite woven shoulder bags. Telephone numbers are arranged according to hermitage, and, as there is a list of all hermitage dependencies of ruling monasteries, both inhabited and uninhabited, with or without telephone, the telephone directory provides a splendid overview of contemporary Athonite human geography (tel. 00 30 23770 23880, fax 00 30 23770 23685, to order). By far the most important publication this year, however, is the critical edition with introduction and translation into Modern Greek of the Alphabetical Chapters of St Symeon the New Theologian, produced by monks of Stavronikita monastery (Alphabetika Kephalaia, ISBN 960-86507-2-0). It is a seminal work of spiritual guidance by the greatest mystic poet of eastern Christendom and its publication shows that Athonite monks are always close to patristic spirituality and participate in it with the world outside.

P.S. On 20 January 2006, while this report was being written, monk Theoklitos of Dionysiou fell asleep in the Lord. One of the outstanding learned monks of Athos in the twentieth century, monk Theoklitos was the author of Between Heaven and Earth (1956), on Athonite monasticism, and Athonite Dialogues (1975), on the theology of the Jesus prayer. He also proved to be a bold defender of Athonite sovereignty when the military dictatorship (1967–74) attempted to manipulate the status of monasteries on Athos.

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THE ORTHODOX VISION
OF CREATION

Beginning the new day
Let me start with two questions. First, in the Orthodox understanding of time, when does the new day begin? That, you will doubtless reply, is easily answered. According to the ancient Hebrew understanding of time, which is still preserved in the Orthodox Church, the new day begins, not at midnight, not at dawn, but at sunset. So, in the Genesis account of the creation of the world, it is said: 'There was evening and there was morning, the first day’ (Genesis 1: 5). The evening, we notice, comes before the morning. According to this concept of time, then, in the Church’s worship the liturgical cycle of daily prayer commences, not with the Midnight Office (Mesonyktikon), not with Matins (Orthros), but with Vespers. The service of Vespers is not a kind of epilogue, bringing the old day to an end. On the contrary, Vespers is not an end, but a beginning: it marks the inauguration of the new day, it celebrates a fresh start.

This brings me to my second question: how does Vespers begin? What happens liturgically at the start of this, the first service of the new day? It is surely significant that throughout the year Vespers begins always in the same way. Except during Bright Week, the week immediately following Pascha, we invariably commence Vespers by reading or singing Psalm 103 (104):

Bless the Lord, 0 my soul. 0 Lord my God, Thou art exceeding great: Thou hast clothed thyself with praise and honour.
Thou coverest Thyself with light as with a garment: and spreadest out the heavens like a curtain...
How marvellous are Thy works, 0 Lord! In wisdom hast Thou made them all...
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live: I will praise my God while I have my being.

Such is the beginning of Vespers; such is the manner in which we commence each new day. We begin with a hymn of praise to God the Creator. We begin with joy and gratitude, blessing the Maker of the world for all the beauty, the variety, and the manifold wonders of the universe. We begin, as Fr Alexander Schmemann expresses it, 'with the "rediscovery", in adoration and thanksgiving, of the world as God’s
creation. The Church takes us, as it were, to that first evening on which man, called by God to life, opened his eyes and saw what God in His love was giving to him, saw all the beauty, all the glory of the temple in which he was standing, and rendered thanks to God. And in this thanksgiving he became himself. 1

Our first act, then, at the start of the opening service of the day, is to offer the world back to God in thanksgiving. In this way we exercise our priesthood, the royal priesthood that is bestowed upon all the baptized (1 Peter 2: 4). There are many different ways of thinking of the human person, created in God's image and likeness. We may regard man as an animal that weeps and laughs; or with the Stoics, as a logical or rational animal (logikon zoion); 2 or with Aristotle, as a political animal (politikon zoion). 3 But we come closer to the heart of the matter if we think of man as a eucharistic or priestly animal, an animal capable of oblation and sacrifice, an animal endowed with the vocation of offering the world back to God - and of offering himself, together with the world - in a continuing act of joyful doxology. Such should be our primary model of what it is to be human: not man the thinker, or man the craftsman, but man the offerer. It is through offering, through giving thanks that (in Fr Alexander's phrase) we 'become ourselves'.

This initial act of Vespers, when we recite the Psalm of Introduction, shows how close and intimate is the link that unites us as human beings to the created order. We live in the world, and the world lives in us. We and the animals are partners in a single cosmic covenant that unites us together in the same earth community (see Genesis 9: 12-13).

In this context, then, let us reflect together on the Orthodox vision of creation.

Why did God create the world?

At the outset, let us go back to the first principles. Why did God choose to create the world? That is an unanswerable question, and yet we cannot avoid asking it. Speaking as I am at a Faculty of Theology dedicated to the memory of Archpriest Dumitru Staniloae, I find it appropriate to seek an answer in a Greek Father who particularly influenced Fr Dumitru; that is to say, in St Maximos the Confessor. He comes as close to a convincing reply as anyone has ever done, when in the Centuries on Love he talks in terms of mutual joy:

God, full beyond all fullness, brought creatures into being, not because He had need of anything, but so that they might participate in Him in proportion to their capacity, and that He Himself might rejoice in His works through seeing them joyful. 4

What St Maximos affirms here in terms of mutual joy can equally be spelt out in terms of mutual love. 'God is love', says St John (1 John 4: 8). But this divine love is not just self-love but mutual or shared love. God is not just the monad, self-contained, isolated, loving Himself alone. God is the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, loving each other, united one to the other in an unceasing movement of reciprocal coherience or perichoresis. God is not just personal but inter-personal, not just a unit but a union. One of the characteristic words that the Cappadocian Fathers use to describe the Trinity is precisely the term 'communion' or koinonia. 5

Now, if God the Trinity is in this way a mystery of shared love, then it is altogether appropriate and in conformity with His nature that He should have chosen to create the world, so that others besides Himself might share in the movement of Trinitarian love. In using these words 'appropriate and in conformity with His nature', I do not mean that God was in any way compelled to create the world. On the contrary, nothing within or outside God constrained Him to bring the world into existence; He acted in total freedom. God is necessary to the world, but the world is not necessary to God. In the words of Fr Georges Florovsky:

The world exists. But it began to exist. And that means: the world could have not existed. There is no necessity whatsoever for the existence of the world... The sole foundation of the world consists in God's freedom, in the freedom of Love. 6

3 Politics, 1.1.9 (1253a).
4 Centuries on Love, 3: 46.
Yet, although God creates in perfect freedom, and although the created world is therefore an expression of His free will, at the same time, in creating, God is manifesting His true nature as love. In the words of St Dionysios the Areopagite, 'Divine eros is ecstatic.' The Areopagite has here in view the literal sense of ekstasis, meaning 'standing outside oneself'. God created the world because His love is outgoing and self-diffusive; and without this overflowing love the world would not exist. Rather than speaking of creation ex nihilo, 'out of nothing', would it not be better to speak of creation ex amore, 'out of love'?

If creation is envisaged in this manner, as the expression of mutual joy and mutual love, then clearly we cannot rest satisfied with a 'deist' doctrine of creation that regards the universe as an artefact, with the divine Creator shaping it from the outside as an architect or engineer. We cannot regard it as a clock that the cosmic Clockmaker winds up at the beginning and then leaves to go on ticking by itself. No, that is surely wrong. According to the approach affirmed by St Maximos and St Dionysios, creation is not something upon which God acts from the exterior, but something through which He expresses Himself from within. God is not just outside everything, but equally inside everything. Our primary images, when we describe God's relation to the world, should not be of shaping, manipulating, or organizing; we should think rather of God's indwelling and omnipresence. When we say that God is creator of the universe, what we mean is that He is 'everywhere present and fills all things', to use a phrase applied in our Orthodox worship both to Christ and to the Holy Spirit.

Closely related to this is a further point. Creation is to be interpreted, not as a once-for-all event in the past, but as a continuing relationship in the present. The world exists because God loves it, not because He loved it a long time ago, at the beginning, but because He loves it here and now, at this moment as at every moment. We are to think and speak not in the aorist but in the present tense. We are to say, not 'God made the world, once upon a time, in far-off ages', but 'God is making the world, and you and me in it, at this instant and always.' If the Divine Maker did not exert His demiurgic will at each split second of time, the universe would immediately lapse into the void of not-being. In the words of St Philaret of Moscow, 'All creatures are balanced upon the creative word of God, as upon a bridge of diamond. Above them is the abyss of the divine infinitude, below them that of their own nothingness.' This creative word of God that constitutes St Philaret's 'bridge of diamond' is a word spoken not just once but continually: a word spoken yesterday, today and for ever, until the consummation of the age' (Matt. 28: 20).

As God's creation, the world is intrinsically good: 'God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good' (Gen. 1: 31). It is, however, at the same time a fallen world, shattered and broken, marred and distorted by sin, by original or 'ancestral' sin, and by the personal sins of each one of us. As St Paul says, the whole universe is in bond-age to decay and 'groans aloud', longing to be set free' (Romans 8: 20-2). Yet the fall is not total. The created order is still, even in its fallen state, a sacrament of the divine presence. Even though its beauty is flawed, the cosmos still remains beautiful. We can still say, as indeed we do every day at Vespers, 'How marvellous are Thy works, O Lord!'

This intrinsic goodness and beauty of the world are vividly emphasized by the anonymous author of the Russian nineteenth-century classic The Way of a Pilgrim. As he journeyed through the boundless forest reciting the Jesus Prayer, the Pilgrim found that his heart was filled with an all-embracing love for all mankind, and not only that, but also for all created things: 'When... I prayed with all my heart, everything around me seemed delightful and marvellous. The trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, the light seemed to be telling me that... all things prayed to God and sang His praise. Thus it was that I came to understand what The Philokalia calls the knowledge of the speech of all creatures'. His experience at that moment was not an illusion, but a genuine insight into the true nature of the created world.

Ecological crisis

In the light of this Orthodox vision of the creation — in the light, more particularly, of what has been affirmed about our human mission to offer the world back to God with thanksgiving — what are we to say about the present crisis in the environment, about the ecological

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disaster that threatens us in almost every part of the globe? As the American poet Robert Frost has remarked, 'It doesn't take long to destroy a continent' – or, we may add, a whole planet.

The first thing to be said is that the present crisis is not really a crisis in the environment, but a crisis within ourselves. The fundamental difficulty lies not outside but inside, not in the ecosystem but in the human heart. The basic problem is not technological or economic but spiritual. If the atmosphere is growing more and more polluted, if the lakes and rivers are becoming poisonous, and if the forests are dying and the green plains are becoming a desert, this is because we human beings have become alienated from God and from our true selves, and as a result we have forgotten our proper relationship with the world around us. A solution cannot come simply through the development of greater technical skills. It will come only through repentance on our part, through cosmic metanoia – understanding the Greek word in its literal sense, which is 'change of mind'. We need to change our whole way of thinking about God, the world and ourselves.

Closely related to this first point is a second. Our misuse of the environment is a sin. This was asserted with great emphasis at the First International Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment, convened in September 1995 by His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, which concluded its work on the island of Patmos. To say that misuse of the environment is not just a miscalculation but a sin may seem to many of you an obvious point. But it is in fact a point that has been widely overlooked by Christians in the past. All too often we have tended to assume that sin involves only what we do to other human persons. Yet we are tragically short-sighted if we think in this way. Our maltreatment of earth and air, of the animals and the plants, springs out directly from our sinful greed and our sinful lust for power. We need then to repent of this ecological sinfulness. Let us listen to the cry of the earth (and here I quote from the 'Service when in danger of earthquake', to be found in the Euchologion): 'The earth, although without words, yet cries aloud: Why, all peoples, do you inflict such evils upon me?'

Yes, indeed, in our sinfulness we have been inflicting, and we continue to inflict, great 'evils' upon the long-suffering earth that God in His generosity has granted for our use; dire and wicked 'evils' upon the atmosphere and the water-springs, upon the trees and the animals; and for these many 'evils' we need to ask forgiveness. God be merciful to us sinners!

King, steward, priest
To describe the relationship of human beings to the creation, three words are commonly used in the Christian tradition: king, steward, and priest. The first of these, king, has good scriptural authority, most notably in the account of creation in Genesis 1, where it is stated: 'Then God said, Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds in the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth' (Gen. 1: 26). Today, however, this biblical language of kingship has become widely unpopular among Christians in Western Europe and North America. It is considered by many to imply an arbitrary and arrogant attitude towards the creation – precisely the attitude that has brought about the present ecological crisis.

Yet in fact this criticism rests upon a misunderstanding. In reality, the vocation of cosmic kingship, as presented in Genesis, is the diametrical opposite of cruel and self-centred tyranny. For in the Genesis account our dominion over the creation is the consequence precisely of the fact that we are created in the divine image. Our exercise of dominion, then, so far from being selfish and oppressive, is to reflect the attributes of God our Archetype. We are to display towards creation nothing less than the gentle and tender-hearted compassion that is characteristic of God Himself.

Because of the difficulties raised by the notion of kingship, Christian ecologists in the West often prefer to speak of our stewardship of creation. This has the advantage of making clear that our authority over the created world is not absolute but delegated. We are not the owners or proprietors of creation, for the world belongs to God and not to us. God merely gives it to us in trust. The language of stewardship, however, also has disadvantages. To speak in this way suggests a utilitarian, managerial approach to nature, as if it were an 'asset' to be developed and exploited. We must not allow ourselves to objectify and depersonalize the world around us. Let us treat nature as a 'thou', not an 'it'.

In view of these possible misunderstandings of the terms 'king' and 'steward', we shall do well to employ a third word – one that we have
already used when we were speaking earlier about the Psalm of Introduction at Vespers: it is our human vocation to be priest of the creation. The essence of priesthood, as we have already suggested, is to offer, to give thanks, and to bless. The priest – and here I am speaking not of the ministerial priesthood but of the ontological priesthood inherent in our human personhood – is the one who takes the world in his or her hands and then offers it back to God, thereby bringing down God's blessing upon that which he or she offers. Through this act of priestly offering, creation is brought into communion with God Himself. Such is the essence of priesthood; such is our God-given vocation as human beings; and it is a vocation that only human beings can perform.

By acting in this manner as priests of the creation, we human beings transform the world into a 'eucharistic offering'. In the words of Dimitrios I, predecessor of the present Ecumenical Patriarch:

Let us consider ourselves, each one according to his or her position, to be personally responsible for the world, entrusted into our hands by God. Whatever the Son of God has assumed and made His body through His Incarnation should not be allowed to perish. But it should become an eucharistic offering to the Creator, a life-giving bread, partaken in justice and love with others, a hymn of praise for all the creatures of God.10

To appreciate at its true value this conception of cosmic priesthood, two things require to be added. First, there can be no genuine act of offering without sacrifice, without what Patriarch Dimitios terms an 'ascetic spirit'.11 Clearly he understands asceticism here in its broadest and most fundamental sense: it means, not just fasting, vigils, and prostrations, but every form of voluntary self-restraint, a greater simplicity at each and every level of our daily life. The ecological crisis can only be resolved – if, indeed, a resolution is still possible – through our willingness to practise self-limitation in our consumption not only of food but of all natural resources. It can be resolved only if we make a distinction between what we want and what we need, between our selfish desires and our natural requirements. Only through self-denial, through the decision to forgo and sometimes to say 'no' to ourselves, shall we rediscover our proper place in the universe.

As the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew emphasized at the closing ceremony of the Fourth International Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment (Venice, 10 June 2002), this element of 'sacrifice' constitutes precisely the 'missing dimension' in our ecological programme. 'Without sacrifice', he said, 'there can be no blessing and no cosmic transfiguration.'12 Indeed, the world was created for joy. But, in our fallen and sinful condition, there is only one path whereby we can enter into the great joy of the Resurrection, and that is through cross-bearing. As we affirm each Sunday at Matins (Orthros): 'Behold, through the Cross joy has come to all the world.' Through the Cross: there can be no other way.

Second, and yet more important, there can be no genuine act of priestly offering without love. It is love that lies at the heart of the divine mystery of the Holy Trinity; it is love that lies at the heart of the human mystery, love that expresses the image of God within us, love that enables each of us to act as a priest of the creation, offering the world back to the Creator with thanksgiving. At the outset of the modern era, René Descartes took as his starting-point the axiom Cogito, ergo sum, 'I think, therefore I am'. But thinking, the ability to develop arguments and draw conclusions through the use of our reasoning brain, is not our only or, indeed, our highest function as human beings. How much wiser he would have been to say Amo, ergo sum, 'I love, therefore I am!' Or else, better still, he might have used the passive voice, Amor, ergo sum, 'I am loved, therefore I am.' As Fr Dumitru Stanioloa has said, 'In so far as I am not loved by the others, I am unintelligible to myself.'13 Without love – the love of others for myself, my responsive love for them – there can be no joy and no meaning.

If this is true of inter-human relations, it is no less true of our relationship to the material creation. The ecological crisis, we have said, cannot be resolved without sacrifice. We may add: it cannot be resolved without love. I recall how, in the 1960s when I was a deacon at the monastery of St John the Theologian on Patmos, our geronta Fr Amphilochios used to say to us: 'Do you know that God gave us one

11 Ibid.
more commandment, which is not recorded in the Scripture? It is the commandment *Love the trees.* Whoever does not love trees, so he believed, does not love Christ. 'When you plant a tree,' he told us, 'you plant hope, you plant peace, you plant love, and you will receive God's blessing.' An ecologist long before ecology had become fashionable, when hearing the confessions of the local farmers he used to assign to them, as an *epitimion* or penance, the task of planting a tree. Nor was this all. He would himself go round the island to see how they were carrying out their penance, whether they were keeping their tree-*epitimion* properly watered, whether they were making sure that the *epitimion* was not being eaten by goats. His example and influence have transformed the island: where, eighty years ago, there were bare and barren slopes, today there are flourishing groves of pine and eucalyptus.14

'Love the trees', Fr Amphilochios insisted. Was he not right? We cannot save what we do not love.

The cosmic Christ
Before I end my reflections upon the Orthodox vision of creation – upon the bonds that unite us with the animals in a single 'earth community' – I ask you to recall with me how every part of the created order played a part in the story of Christ's life and death:

- a star appeared at His birth (Matt. 2: 9–10);
- an ox and an ass stood beside His crib as He lay in swaddling clothes (cf. Isa. 1: 3);
- during the forty days of His temptation in the wilderness He was 'with the wild beasts' (Mark 1: 13);
- repeatedly He spoke of Himself as shepherd, and of His disciples as sheep (Luke 15: 3–7; Matt. 18: 10–14; John 10: 1–16);
- He likened His love for Jerusalem to the maternal love of a hen for her chickens (Matt. 23: 37);
- He taught that every sparrow is precious in the sight of God the Father (Matt. 10: 29);


- He illustrated His parables with references to the *lilies* (Matt. 6: 28–30), to the *mustard bush* full of nesting birds (Mark. 4: 32), to a *domestic animal* that has fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day (Matt. 12: 11);
- He urged us to show reptilian subtlety and avian guilelessness: 'Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Matt. 10: 16);
- as Lord of creation, He stilled the storm (Mark 4: 35–41) and walked upon the water (Mark 6: 45–51).

Most notably of all, the created order in its entirety participated in the Saviour's Passion: the earth shook, the rocks were split, the whole cosmos shuddered (Matt. 27: 51). In the words of St Ephrem the Syrian, 'humans were silent, so the stones cried out.'15 As the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* expresses it, 'All creation wept.'16 This all-embracing participation in the death of God incarnate is memorably expressed in the *Praises* or *Enkomia* sung on the evening of Good Friday or early in the morning on Holy Saturday: 'Come, and with the whole creation let us offer a funeral hymn to the Creator.'

'The whole earth quaked with fear, O Lord, and the Daystar hid its rays, when Thy great light was hidden in the earth.'

'The sun and moon grew dark together, O Saviour, like faithful servants clothed in black robes of mourning.'

'O hills and valleys', exclaims the Holy Virgin, 'the multitude of mankind and all creation, weep and lament with me, the Mother of God.'

Most remarkably of all, in what is truly an amazing statement, it is affirmed: 'The whole creation was altered by Thy Passion: for all things suffered with Thee, knowing, O Lord, that Thou holdest all in unity.'17

Do we reflect sufficiently, I wonder, upon the environmental implications of our Lord's Incarnation, upon the way in which Jesus is ecologically inclusive, embedded in the soil like us, containing within His


humanity what has been termed ‘the whole evolving earth story’. Do we allow properly for the fact that our Saviour came to redeem, not only the human race, but the fullness of creation? Do we keep constantly in mind that we are not saved from but with the world?

Such, then, is our Orthodox vision of creation; such is our vocation as priests of the created order; such is our Christian response to the ecological crisis. Such is the deeper meaning implicit in the words that we say daily at the beginning of Vespers: ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul.’

BISHOP KALLISTOS OF DIOKLEIA
President

A BRITISH SPY ON MOUNT ATHOS

The Visit of Colonel Leake, 22 October–3 November 1806

I will start by sketching the historical context of Leake’s visit to Mount Athos in the autumn of 1806. Then I will indicate where he went on the Holy Mountain. After that I will summarize his comments on the monks. Finally I will offer some explanations for his visit.

Background

Let us start with some background history. The year is 1806 and the month October. Britain has been at war with France for thirteen years, apart from a fourteen-month peace (25 March 1802–18 May 1803). In 1805 she put together a Third Coalition against her enemy and financed its war efforts. The other partners were Russia (11 April 1805), Austria (11 August 1805), Sweden (October 1805), and Prussia (3 November 1805). The naval battle off Cape Trafalgar in Spain on 21 October 1805 destroyed a combined French and Spanish fleet. Although there were no more major fleet actions, the war at sea was far from over. At home William Pitt the Younger died on 23 January 1806 and his administration was followed by the Ministry of ‘All the Talents’ headed by Lord Grenville as First Lord of the Treasury and Charles James Fox as Foreign Secretary. Fox attempted to negotiate a peace with France (March–June 1806) but without success.

In October 1806 France is ruled by General Napoleon Buonaparte who has enjoyed the style of Emperor since May 1804, though not officially recognized as such in Britain. His victories at Ulm (7 October 1805) and then Austerlitz (2 December 1805) began the destruction of the Third Coalition. Austria made peace (26 December 1805). The Treaty of Pressburg allowed Napoleon to complete the reorganization of Germany begun in 1803 and create the Confederation of the Rhine (17 July 1806), abolish the Holy Roman Empire (6 August 1806), and facilitate the expansion of his then allies, Denmark and Saxony (now a monarchy), as well as the transformation of the Republic of Batavia into the Kingdom of Holland. A fourth anti-French coalition was formed (Britain, Prussia, Russia, and Saxony), but it was smashed at the battles of Auerstadt and Jena fought on 14 October 1806.

18 Echlin, Earth Spirituality, p. 70.
As well as facilitating the reorganization of Germany, the Treaty of Pressburg also allowed the reordering of Italy. The Bourbon rulers of Naples were forced to flee to Sicily and the French occupied the mainland part of the kingdom. A small British army was already in Sicily and this scored the only significant British land victory against the French before the Peninsular War, at Maida in Calabria (4 July 1806). France also acquired territory in northern Italy and on the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic Sea which had been allocated to Austria nine years before at Campo Formio (17 October 1797). Campo Formio, however, had granted the Ionian Islands to France. These had belonged to Venice until the Serene Republic was abolished by General Buonaparte in May 1797 and had been occupied by French forces from June of that year. This was a year before Buonaparte took an army to Egypt (arrived off Alexandria 1 July 1798), where it was stranded following the naval action in Aboukir Bay (1 August 1798). Subsequently, a Russo-Ottoman fleet captured the Ionian Islands, most of them in October–November 1798, though Corfu did not surrender until 3 March 1799. While Russian garrisons were introduced, the islands were technically autonomous with their own constitution as the Republic of the Seven Islands, or the Septinsular Republic, under joint Russian and Ottoman protection. They enjoyed their unique status until the Treaty of Tilsit (1807) took Russia out of the war and French troops returned.

The French used their position in Italy and Dalmatia to destabilize the Ottoman Empire, already troubled by an uprising in Serbia. As French agents encouraged dissident elites in Albania and Greece, including Ali Pasha of Ioannina, to throw off the Ottoman yoke, the French army in Dalmatia began to move menacingly down the coast. As counter-measures, Russian forces occupied the Bocche di Cattaro (Kotor) and besieged French-held Ragusa (Dubrovnik), while Russian agents fanned out across the Balkans. At the same time, the newly arrived French ambassador, Colonel Horace Sebastiani (arrived 9 August 1806), a close associate of Buonaparte, skillfully exerted diplomatic pressure on the Porte to break with Britain and Russia.

The date is 22 October 1806, the time late afternoon. A sakoleva (a type of sailing vessel) is beating its way northward towards Mount Athos. At sunset it is off the south-west corner of the Holy Mountain, identified as a cape 'antiently [sic] called Nymphaeum'. On board is a twenty-nine-year-old British officer of artillery, doubtless in mufti and possibly local dress, rather than his dark blue uniform with red facings, which would have been conspicuous. He is Captain William Martin Leake. As Colonel Leake he was to achieve fame later for his work on the historical geography of ancient Greece, as a Philhellene, and as one of the founders of the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Society of Literature. His father, John Martin Leake, had been in the Treasury but in 1806 was one of the comptrollers of army accounts; his grandfather, Stephen Martin Leake, was Garter King of Arms, and his great-grandfather was the distinguished naval officer, Captain Stephen Martin. Martin added the name of Leake to his own in 1721 after inheriting the property of his brother-in-law, Admiral Sir John Leake. In 1806 Captain Leake had been in the army for twelve years and in Greece since November 1804. He had travelled in Greece, Egypt, and the Levant before this while a member of the British Military Mission to Turkey. Leake’s journals are the source for his excursion on Mount Athos. The relevant section is in Volume 3 of his Travels in Northern Greece, published by Rodwell in 1835 (pp. 115-42). This is a much-amplified version of the original daily journal kept by Leake in a small notebook. The manuscript is the source of the quotations which I use here.

### Leake’s Travels on Mount Athos

Leake had hired the sakoleva in Mykonos. He had come into the archipelago from Corfu, where he had been based for some time following a long trip through central Greece and the Morea (Peloponnese). While in Corfu he had made a brief reconnaissance of the Russian position at Bocche de Cattaro. Now he was looking forward to landing on Mount Athos.

As the sun set on 22 October 1806, Leake and his companions saw ‘A[gh]ia Anna in a beautiful hollow of the rocks at some distance above the shore and surrounded with small houses which they call hermitages’. As they coasted north, they passed the monasteries, which he called St Paul, St Dionysius, and St Gregory, ‘on the edge of the sea, under the range which advances from Athos to the Isthmus’. At 10 pm the vessel anchored at Xeropotamou, ‘the only good anchorage on the west coast side of the peninsula’. It is not clear whether the party stayed

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on the ship for the night or not. The whole of the next day, 23 October, was certainly spent at Aghii Saranda, otherwise known as Xeropotamou. 'The monastery', Leake noted, is built chiefly with Roman tiles in a quadrangle and, as usual, around the church, having towers with peaked roofs, leaded on the top, showing the style of building work of the Emperors. In many parts there are wooden kiosks and projections added afterwards. The form of the quadrangle is very irregular. The sit[uation] of the house is extremely beautiful, overlooking the Sinitic Gulf.

The next day, 24 October, Leake rode in one and a half hours to Caries (Karyes),

the road over the ridge, having the peak of Athos 5 miles in short line on the right. The ridge is not high, rising gradually from the Isthmus to a peak, which stands above the convent of St. Paul on one side and of Iviron on the other. The peak is connected by a [ridge] of this range with others which towards the top is rocky and bare, thus increasing the beauty of the spectacle by contrast with the unbroken verdure of the lower ridge. In addition to the grandeur of the general scenery of the m[oun]tain, the road passing through continued groves of oaks and chestnuts, [shews] such an enchanting variety of more confined prospects, and a grand diversity of ground in such a small space. In the thickest parts of the forests are seen verdant lawns covered with cattle, or slopes cultivated with vineyards, where is an askiti or solitary habitation belonging to some of the convents. In the highest part of the ridge, the wood is all of chestnuts. The prospect of Caries, as we descend towards it, is extremely beautiful, covering a huge space of ground on the woody slopes of the mountain amidst gardens and vineyards.

Karyes, Leake noted, was the residence of the Ottoman governor of the Holy Mountain and his Albanian guard. They were responsible for 'the general police of the mountain, and for its protection against thieves and pirates'.

In the village are shops of all the trades and manufactures necessary for the holy community, particularly many blacksmiths, locksmiths, etc. There are also the Proesti and archontes of the town who carry on the traffick [sic]. These have good houses, but all wear [the] bonnets of monks.

After dinner, Leake rode for two hours down to Iviron, situated by the seaside in a small bend of the coast half way between Lavra and Vatopedhi. The road descends the hills obliquely by a rugged path through vineyards and amidst a variety of hilly ground covered with wood. The monastery is Iviron or of the Georgians, as having been founded by some Georgian brothers, is a large irregular quadrangle, including in the court a church which next to that of the Great Lavra is the largest upon the Mountain. The convent contains about 300 monks, a third of whom are either absent on eleemosynary missions or work [on] the lands and metochies of the convent. The library is kept in tolerable order by the old didaskolos, but contains scarcely anything but ekklesiatika kai paterika. Some Latin books are not touched because the monks cannot read. It is of little importance to the monks who scarcely ever read and are the most ignorant [illegible word] in existence. The convent has the reputation of being the best ordered of any upon the Mountain.

Note here that several items included in Leake's published account of Iviron were not noted in the manuscript journal at this point: a hospital for the sick and presses for wine and oil, though there are oblique references to a second church and the Portaitissa icon. During the afternoon of 25 October, Leake proceeded to Philotheou, 'in my way to St Lavra', as he noted in his journal.

The road along the slope of the mountain through thick forest of chestnuts, oaks, elms and mixed with arbutus now covered with ripe fruit, and an infinite variety of other shrubs. The oaks are small and none fit for shipbuilding. The chestnuts are many of them fine trees.

A violent northerly gale detained Leake at Philotheou on the next day. The loss of time seems to have prevented him from going on to the Great Lavra, and we hear nothing more about it in the manuscript journal. He passed his time looking over the books of the monastery, then 'allowed to rot in a corner above the church'. He found only paterika, though he noted that most of the manuscripts were written on parchment. The state of the weather made it unlikely that he would be able to ascend Mount Athos itself, so in the afternoon he decided to walk back to Iviron.

5 *Manuscript Journal*, p. 6.
8 *Manuscript Journal*, p. 9.
Since the 'boisterous weather' continued, he stayed on there. 'Walking on the Mountain', he observed, 'in a very high situation, the monks building a boat at one of the asketes belonging to Iviron'.\(^{12}\) He was probably using his telescope, for the manuscript journal gives no suggestion that Leake actually walked up to the boat-building site, which is the impression - I think - left by the published account.\(^{13}\) He noted later that he was told that boats were built 'in situations much higher than where I saw them this afternoon'.\(^{14}\)

On 28 October Leake rode for one and a half hours to Pantokrator, 'over a branch of the Mountain forming a cape on the sea'. From there he went over another ridge, 'consistently through woods, to Vatopedhi, at the bottom of a small bay, where is a little level ground at the embouchement of a torrent coming from some lofty woody heights, surrounding the bay on all sides'.\(^{15}\) Leake stayed in the fortress-like monastery for four days (28 October–2 November 1806), but then rode over to Chilandari in two and three-quarter hours.

We rode over the hills not far above the sea by a very stony road and winding. Half an hour short of Chilandari is the convent of Simen\[Esphigmenou\], situated close to the sea, at the mouth of a torrent in a little valley. About a mile east of Simen\[Esphigmenou\] is a little notch of the coast where boats anchor in safety with any kind of wind but N[orth]W[est]. On the hill separating the vale of Simen\[Esphigmenou\] from that of Chilandari is a tower on the edge of a cliff above the sea .... The convent [of Chilandari] is delightfully situated in a vall\[Esphigmenou\] surrounded with pine-clad hills, having a good garden in the valley, and below it the torrent is shaded with trees to the sea. The monks are almost all from Servia and Bulgaria, and the Illyric is the only language used in the convent or read at the church.\(^{16}\)

Early on the following morning Leake left Chilandari and in four and three-quarter hours arrived at the metochi of Vatopedi on the isthmus. He had been on the Holy Mountain for just eleven days and visited only five of the monasteries. Why did he go?

Explanation
Leake does not tell us why he went to Mount Athos, either in the two versions of his journal, published and unpublished, or in his letters to the Foreign Office. There are various possible answers to the question. These include his interest in locating ancient sites, the possibility of finding 'lost' ancient manuscripts, curiosity about Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and intelligence gathering. The first three, however, will not stand up to examination.

Wherever he travelled in Greece, Leake was interested in locating places mentioned by the ancient historians and geographers, as well as visiting ancient remains. If his primary reason for going to Mount Athos was to locate the sites of the settlements reported to exist there in antiquity, then he was largely disappointed. He certainly found some ancient walls near the coast when he spent the day at Xeropotamou and noticed two ancient bas-reliefs 'in one part of the interior walls of the convent'. Someone told him that the tower between Esphigmenou and Chilandari was 'partly Ellenic', but he could see no evidence for that. Nor could he find the 'Ellenic' foundations or the remains of an ancient mole mentioned by the monks as being at the arsanas of Chilandari.

Leake looked at the libraries at Iviron, Philotheou, and Chilandari, but it was more of a casual activity - for amusement - rather than a serious search for ancient manuscripts and early printed books. He knew that the monastic libraries had already been thoroughly searched at the time of the military mission to Turkey by Elgin's chaplain, Philip Hunt, and the Revd Joseph Dacre Carlyle, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, and he acknowledged this when he came to write up his Athos visit for publication in his Travels in Northern Greece.\(^{17}\)

Leake never showed much interest in the Eastern Orthodox Church, let alone monasticism. His journals contain about twenty descriptions of monasteries in different parts of Greece, for they were convenient places to stay, and experience taught that they were often built from ancient materials and were located on or near ancient sites. But he made very few comments about the monks. His remarks on the monastic community of Mount Athos, though, are comparatively extensive.

Leake's informants reckoned there were 3,000 monks on the Holy Mountain, though it is not clear whether that total included those who were working at the metochia or wandering through the Orthodox world.

\(^{12}\) Manuscript Journal, p. 11.

\(^{13}\) Travels in Northern Greece, 3, p. 130.

\(^{14}\) Manuscript Journal, p. 12.


\(^{16}\) Manuscript Journal, pp. 17–18.

\(^{17}\) Travels in Northern Greece, 3, p. 127, n. 1.
collecting alms and donations. The proportion was reckoned to be about a third at Iviron. The monks came

of course, from all parts of Turkey and consist chiefly of old men who [retire hither] either from motives of piety or to enjoy the remainder of their days in quiet, or of fugitives who come here to hide themselves, or of youths who come for work. There are only two or three persons in each convent who have anything beyond the liturgies, etc. All the rest are equally brutal, stupid and ignorant, being men of low birth generally and no education. 18

Leake reported how one monk at Philotheou asked whether England (he meant London) was as large as Constantinople, while another, 'who was thought an oracle, informed his companions that India was near England, at 15 or 20 miles distant'. 19 Some of the monks, Leake learnt, lived to a great age and generally enjoyed good health. 'Cutaneous disorders and ruptures', though, were 'very common'. 20 If they came to the Holy Mountain as old men, then they had to bring a sum of money with them. If young, they were admitted for nothing, being allowed to obtain their livelihood by working.

Leake discovered that the monasteries had properties (metochia) away from Mount Athos, and that these supplied the corn and at least some of the oil which the monks consumed. They made their own wine, but their diet was 'vegetables, salt fish, eggs and fresh fish, when they have it'. They were 'very strict' at Vatopedi 'concerning what fish are allowed', but the monks were 'too lazy and stupid to catch many'. There was no meat, even though Leake claimed that meat was killed once a week at Karyes and that young bullocks and oxen bred on the metochia were brought to the Mountain and fattened on the abundant pasture. It was therefore difficult, Leake found, for the traveller 'to make a dinner, unless he is lucky enough find an old cock about the monastery or to shoot some of the wild pigeons which flock about the monastery for food'. 21 Leake was told that the Athos community paid about 150 purses in taxes to the Porte and 130 to the Pasha of Thessaloniki for its metochia and properties in Macedonia, 22 but new exactions were imposed every year. All the monasteries were in debt, partly because of the tax burden, but partly also because of expensive law cases, like that between Iviron and the Great Lavra and the one between Vatopedi and Zographou.

Leake tells us almost nothing about the spiritual life of the Holy Mountain. He noted that 'so many hundred' prostrations was the common punishment for breaking the rules on fasting and mentioned askites in his manuscript journal and together with kelleia in the published version, but only in an economic and demographic context. Most of the information which Leake published in his Travels in Northern Greece about the history of the different monasteries and the relics which they possessed is not in the original journal. There is little about the governance of the Mountain or, with the exception of Vatopedi, about that of individual monasteries. Vatopedi, with its 300 monks (many absent) and 'a great number of laymen (kosmikoi) who are the solitary slaves of the monks', was reported to be under the direction of about twelve igoumeni. The chief dignitaries were the Skevophylakas 'or sacristan', 'who is the head of the convent', the Epitropos 'or inspector', the Dikaios 'who has care of the stores, mules [and] lodgings', and the Secretary. The only source which Leake acknowledges for the additional material incorporated in his Travels in Northern Greece is the Proskynitarion tou Aghiou Orous, originally published by John Komnenos at Jassy in 1701 and reprinted at Venice in 1745. 23 He probably drew on other sources, including Paul Ricaut's Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches (1679) and Dr John Covel's Some Account of the Present Greek Church (1722). My conclusion, then, is that Leake did not go to Mount Athos to deepen his knowledge of Orthodox monasticism or Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Leake's interests in antiquity, in early books, and - such as it was - in Eastern Orthodoxy were incidental to his main activities in Greece. His instructions issued by Lord Harrowby, then Foreign Secretary, on 28 August 1804 are clear. 24 He was (to summarize)

- to make himself acquainted with places on the west coast of Albania and the Morea where an enemy might land coming from Italy;

- to survey and map these places;

23 Travels in Northern Greece, 3, p. 115, n.2
24 Herefordshire County Record Office, Acc.599.85492; National Archives (Public Record Office) FO78/57.
to check the state of repair of the coastal fortifications and advise on their improvement.

Having done all this, Leake was ordered to proceed into the interior to acquire that general knowledge of the country which would be necessary if resistance were to be organized against an invader, taking particular note of the passes towards Constantinople, on the one hand, and the Morea, on the other. These observations were to be reduced to a form of permanent utility by survey. He was also required, 'in the course of his journeys', to 'observe and report the political and military dispositions of the inhabitants'. In the event of an enemy landing, Leake was to assist the commander of the Russian forces in the Ionian Islands and to use his influence with local leaders to 'pay attention to their depots, supplies and resources of every kind'. In short, Leake was in Greece principally to gather intelligence – to spy.

A French attack on Albania and the Morea seemed imminent when these instructions were drawn up in 1804. In fact, when the French fleet came out of Toulon on 17 January 1805 and again on 30 March, at the start of what we now know as the Trafalgar campaign, the British agents in the Levant, when they heard the news three weeks later, thought the French destination was the Morea. Their response is another story. By October 1806 the wider geo-political situation had changed and was configured as I indicated at the beginning. To the threat of a French invasion of Ottoman territory had been added diplomatic efforts to detach the Porte from its alliance with Britain and Russia, as well as the prospect of popular uprisings and guerrilla warfare against the Ottoman authorities.

Leake carried on with his efforts to assemble detailed observations for a topographical map of Greece and to collect information about the political and military disposition of the inhabitants'. Thus, one reason for going to Mount Athos was his survey work. Throughout his travels he had used vantage points to take compass bearings to prominent topographical features and, where possible, measure the angles with a sextant and theodolite. As he rode along, he took careful note of his travel times so that he could calculate distances. On Mount Athos he commented on what he could see westwards from the vantage point of Xeropotamou and was disappointed that bad weather prevented him from climbing to the top of Mount Athos. He hoped that the view would have allowed him to tie in the principal summits of Macedonia, Thrace and east central Greece, and possibly also Bithynian Olympus in Asia Minor by taking angles with a sextant. Nevertheless, the delay caused by the gales on 26 and 27 October seems to have allowed time to produce a sketch map of the Holy Mountain.

Wherever he went, Leake met local leaders. These included Muslims as well as Christians, and ranged from important Ottoman governors, such as Ali Pasha of Ioannina, and substantial landowners to merchants engaged in international trade, physicians, scholars, and leaders of local militias. He was dependent upon them, of course, for safe conduct, military escorts, guides, and accommodation. But it is significant that many of the men with whom he had contact were not only powerful leaders at the time, but also important players on both sides in the Greek War of Independence which broke out fifteen years later. Consider just two examples from Leake’s time in northern Greece.

After leaving Athos, Leake made his way to Serres. This was not only the town where the Via Egnatia emerged eastward from the wide, marshy valley of the Strymon river – a possible line of defence against an invading force moving towards Constantinople. It was also the base of Ismail Bey, one of the richest and most powerful men in the Balkans at the time. Although 'deficient in the extraordinary talents of Aly Pasha', Leake noted, 'he is said to be free from his cruelty, perfidy and insatiable rapacity'. At Thessaloniki, after dark on 17 November (it was Ramadan), Leake renewed his acquaintance with Musa Pasha whom he had met nine months earlier as governor of Epakto/Naupactus. Musa Pasha was now governor of Thessaloniki vilayet, but in May 1807 he was to become one of the leaders of the conservative revolt against the pro-French Sultan, Selim III, and briefly one of the most powerful men in the Ottoman capital. On the other side, while in Thessaloniki, Leake also met some leaders of the opposition to Ali Pasha.

Whilst he was on Mount Athos, Leake noted that he spoke to the lgoumenos of Xeropotamou, who told him about the tax liability of

25 Travels in Northern Greece, 3, p. 128.
26 Manuscript Journal, p. 10.
30 Travels in Northern Greece, 3, p. 286.
the Mountain. He probably talked with the Abbot of Iviron, who was perhaps the source of his information about food and diet, and he reports conversations with monks at Philotheou and Chilandari. One or more monks at Vatopedi gave him information about the governance and economy of that monastery during his four-day stay. What was Leake hoping to find out in these conversations?

He was always interested in the local economy and taxation, but not simply out of curiosity and a willingness to conform to the expected model of a travel account, when he came to write up his journal. He was looking for indicators of what supplies and wealth would be available in the event of a military campaign. Similarly, his note of the export of deal planks, as well as oak and chestnut scantlings from Mount Athos, was not just a casual observation, but a record of the availability of timber potentially useful to the Royal Navy, desperate for such material in its repair yards at Gibraltar and Malta. Above all, though, I think Leake was interested in finding out the disposition of the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain. This was important for two reasons. First, the monasteries occupy a potentially strategic position on the flank of the land and sea routes towards Constantinople. They and the whole Athonite peninsula could be used to protect or threaten those routes. Second, through their wide recruitment base, their mainland metochia, and their activities in collecting alms the Athonite monasteries were well placed to know the attitudes of the Christian populations in European Turkey towards a possible French invasion – whether they would support it tacitly or rise against the Ottoman Empire, whether they would be indifferent or even support the existing authorities.

Leake was arrested later that month when the deteriorating relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire finally broke down. The British ambassador had not been able to get word to him in time for him to escape. Leake spent the next eight months in Thessaloniki, most of it under house arrest. Somehow, he managed to hide those papers, which the French would so dearly have liked to seize. His escape and secret interview with Ali Pasha on the beach near the site of ancient Nicopolis are – alas – a tale for another time and place.

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31 Manuscript Journal, p. 8.

32 I doubt if Leake was aware of the fundamentalist Kolivyades movement or the activities of the itinerant preachers inspired by St Kosmas the Aetolian (1714–79).


THE LIBRARIES OF MOUNT ATHOS

Among the many glories for which the monasteries of Athos are renowned are the libraries. D.C. Hogarth, in his introduction to the 1916 edition of Curzon's Visits to Monasteries in the Levant, commented that the contents of the libraries had been famous and well explored since the fifteenth century. He was probably referring to the journeys of Cristoforo Buondelmonte around 1442, which took him largely to the islands. Certainly in the sixteenth century the Frenchman Pierre Belon drew attention to the scholarly potential of the Athos libraries with his Observations de plusieurs singularités en Grèce, Asie, Iudé, Egypte, Arabie et autres pays, the result of travels in 1547, published in 1553 and something of a best seller. As a result, expeditions such as those sponsored by Seguier and Mazarin in 1649 enriched the royal library in Paris, chiefly through the present Fonds Coislin in what has now become the Bibliothèque Nationale: some 200 Coislin manuscripts have their provenance from Athos. The Vatican and libraries in Moscow also benefited at this time from the collecting activities of the monk Arsenios. In the seventeenth century the number of travellers and visitors and published accounts remains slight; we have, for example, the account of Joseph Georgirenes, bishop of Samos, translated as A Description of the Present State of Samos, Nicaria, Patmos and Mount Athos, and printed in London in 1678. More significant perhaps is John Covel (1638-1722), ultimately Master of Christ's College, Cambridge, but who at an earlier stage in his career served as chaplain to the British Embassy in Constantinople. His extensive travels, recorded in his only partially published diary (now in the British Library), took him to Athos in the late 1670s; he comments: 'I myself have seen vast heaps of manuscripts (for I never found them on shelves or in good order) in the monasteries at Mount Athos and elsewhere, all covered over with dust and dirt, and many of them mutilated and spoiled.' In the eighteenth century the pace quickens: Paul Lucas whose journeyings in the Levant took place in 1705 and later were widely printed; Braconier and his Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Mont Athos (1706); Richard Pococke's Description of the East (1737 and thereafter); or Ansse de Villoison who visited Athos in 1785 in the hope of finding another manuscript to rival the Codex Venetus of Homer. Perhaps one of the fullest accounts is that by Johannes Komnenos, a doctor from Bucharest, whose narrative (Descrip­tion Montis Atbo), written in 1701, was included in Montfaucon's renowned Palaeographia Graeca, published in Paris some seven years later in 1708. Komnenos comments: 'There you will see innumerable ancient books, for the most part still unpublished and all written by hand, full of every kind of wisdom and learning, and lofty concepts.' And he lists some of the sorts of things one might find - marvellous chrysobulls, patriarchal letters, all expressed in the most beautiful Greek. But in his brief pen-portraits of the monasteries he is in fact much more interested in the relics they hold than in the contents of the libraries.

The motivations for exploring Athos were various - partly scholarly, partly diplomatic; for some it was an element in the Enlighten­ment's version of the gap year, known as the Grand Tour. But while considerable numbers of young aristocrats - the English in particular - ventured beyond Italy to the Levant, it was only the most hardy who made it to Athos.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century there is a different flavour to the visitors to Athos. Fuelled by scholarly zeal, aware that many of the Greek manuscript books found in the bazaars of Constan­tineople came from monastic sources, they are after the hidden - and neglected, they claimed - treasures of the libraries. One such was Joseph Carlyle (1758-1804), who though primarily an Arabist - he was profes­ sor of Arabic in Cambridge - got himself appointed chaplain to Byron's mission to Constantinople in 1799 and toured extensively in Palestine and Greece in search of Greek and Syriac manuscripts to support a new edition of the New Testament. The diary of his journey to Mount Athos and his catalogue of the manuscripts he examined there are in the British Library (BL, Add. MSS 27604, 27234).

Shortly after came E.D. Clarke (1769-1822), an antiquary and mineralogist, who in October 1800 toured extensively in Greece acquiring coins, and a very large statue of Ceres. In 1802 he found himself shipping from Constantinople seventy-six cases of antiquities and mineralo­gical specimens; the antiquities eventually went to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and formed the core of its collection of classi­cal statuary. Incidentally, it is intriguing to note the wide interests of some of these investigators of the libraries of the Levant - Arabic (Carlyle), science (Clarke): they did not confine themselves to phil­ology. Although Clarke corresponded with the renowned classical...
Lectures on Mineralogy

R. C. Clarke was a scholar and was elected Librarian of Cambridge University in 1817; his heart was in the sciences, as witnessed by his Lectures on Mineralogy (1818). In 1808 the Greek manuscripts he had so enthusiastically collected only a few years before were sold to Oxford University (for £1000); these included what is now the Clarke Plato, the earliest surviving manuscript of that author, written for the scholarly Bishop Arethas of Caesarea in 896, but acquired in Patmos, so not really relevant to this discussion. Clarke’s account of his Constantinopolitan activities can be found in Volume 2 of his Travels (published 1814), accompanied by a discussion of the Athonite libraries by the Revd. R. Walpole, his editor. ‘There is no doubt’, comments Walpole, ‘that Constantinople and Athos have contributed the greatest number of the manuscripts we possess in different parts of Europe. There were monasteries full of learned men at Byzantium, to a late period; and every monastery had its library.’ Clarke, like Carlyle, seems not to have been unduly scrupulous about the means by which he persuaded guardians of monastic libraries to part with their possessions, and was responsible for some of the guarders, not to say hostile reactions with which some later visitors were met.

But the visitor and book-collector who did most to bring Athos and its library treasures to the attention of the reading public rather than the scholarly world was Robert Curzon, 14th Baron Zouche (1810–73), with his Visits to Monasteries in the Levant, first published in 1849, going through three editions that year and reprinted repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century and with reprints in the 1950s and 1980s. Curzon, a young man of modest affluence, intelligent, and generally cultured rather than deeply scholarly, was quite clear why he had gone to Athos. He was interested in the history of writing, he was seeking specimens of the oldest form of written communication, and this included written copies of classical Greek authors. He was also quite convinced that specimens of these were hidden in the Athos libraries. He was after two things: ancient manuscripts, and lost authors. But his constant hope of uncovering a lost work by some giant of the classical past was never realized. However, he also kept his eyes open for ‘old’ books, by which he seems to have meant books in uncial, but he did allow his attention to be caught as well by what were obviously later works if they had copious illuminations or an unusual format. He had quite a good eye for quality.

Curzon was one of those visitors who were greeted with suspicion. In 1833 he thought there had been no visitors since Dr Clarke some twenty years earlier and that Clarke’s behaviour did not help his own reception. Curzon on several occasions was scrupulous to point out that he had not pressed to make a purchase from a reluctant begoumenos. Nevertheless he came away with some twenty-two manuscripts which he had acquired from the monasteries of Karakalou (15), Xenophonis (2), St Paul (2), Docheiariou (1), and Simonopetra (1) plus one which was from an unidentified community. All except one were ecclesiastical books of some kind, and the exception was not of the sort that Curzon had been so eager to find. It may have been a hitherto unknown copy of a classical author, but it was in fact a fifteenth-century copy of Demosthenes, not particularly rare or exciting; in fact rather a grubby little book with some fairly elementary interlinear glosses in the first few speeches – in other words, a late Byzantine teaching tool and as such of a certain interest but not the spectacular find that Curzon was after.

However, some of the other manuscripts are eloquent testimony to Curzon’s eye for a handsome book, and to the willingness on the part of certain abbots to hand over their possessions. One of the books he acquired, from Xenophonis, to which it had apparently been moved during the War of Independence from Pantokrator, is a lectionary with a cruciform layout to the pages (Plate 2: BL, Add. MS 39603, cruciform lectionary). Only four other books set out in this manner are known. This manuscript was copied in the twelfth century, with text written first in red, then with gold added; the accents merge regular textual accentuation with ekphnetic notation to help with chanting the text. A sixteenth-century bishop considered that it was in the imperial hand of Alexios and Manuel Komnenos; while no one would agree with this today, the manuscript could well have been an imperial commission.

Just as magnificent, though in different ways, is a Bulgarian gospel manuscript copied from a Greek original by the monk Simeon for the tsar John Alexander in 1335 (a manuscript now in Paris provides a parallel set of images), which Curzon acquired from the monastery of St Paul (Plate 3: BL, Add. MS 39627). Curzon also acquired two other Bulgarian manuscripts with Serbian connections, both copiously illustrated gospels: one from Karakalou (now BL, Add. MS 39625), dated c. 1346–56 and also associated with Tsar John Alexander; and the other
from St Paul's (now BL, Add. MS 39626), copied in honour of Jakov of Serres in 1354–5.

In the case of Curzon and his manuscript acquisitions we are fortunate in having a very clear trail in his published account of the three weeks he spent travelling around Athos in August 1837. He gives a detailed and lively narrative of his encounters with monks, their begoumenoi, and the libraries, like his session with the enthusiastic and benevolent begoumenos of Lavra, who insisted on preparing a particularly pungent dish of garlic, oil, and cheese for his visitor before allowing him to see the books.

Curzon’s regular narrative pattern is to begin by commenting on the state of the library. His description of the ruinous condition of Pantokrator and the state of its books is particularly vivid:

By the dim light which streamed through the opening of an iron door in the wall of the ruined tower, I saw above a hundred ancient manuscripts lying among the rubbish which had fallen from the upper floor, which was ruinous and had in great part fallen away. Some of these manuscripts seemed quite entire – fine large folios; but the monks said they were unapproachable for that floor also on which they lay was unsafe, the beams being rotten from the wet and rain which came in through the roof. (Visits [1916 ed.], p. 374)

To cut the story short, Curzon’s attempts to fish books out with a stick produced two or three but they turned out to be so waterlogged that they were illegible and fell apart in his hands. However, this was an exceptionally disastrous situation: he is usually much more sanguine about the state in which the books were kept.

Curzon regularly gives an estimate of the number of manuscripts and books held in each library. For example, for Lavra he comments (p. 359) that there were about 5,000 volumes, of which about 4,000 were printed books, including a number of fine Aldines. He was excited in this case because the collection included ‘two curious and rather early manuscripts on botany, full of rudely drawn figures of herbs’. A twelfth-century illustrated copy of Dioscorides’ Materia Medica is still in Lavra to this day, and is presumably the manuscript he had come across.

It is not at all clear how Curzon arrived at his totals for the book collections. Presumably he made on the spot calculations, based on numbers of shelves and averages per shelf. Or was he using earlier statements, or library records of some sort (which are never mentioned)?

He did indeed write up his Visits some years after the event (and confused episodes) and he could have made further investigations, but it is not apparent from what else is known of his life and activities that he did so. So his firm statements about numbers of manuscripts remain a little puzzling – though it is plain that wherever possible he did take books off the shelves and leaf through them.

Curzon’s justification for his attempts to carry off manuscripts was that he was saving them: quite avowedly he was being the Elgin of manuscripts. And to do be fair to him, he did take good care of his treasures. They were kept in his family house, Parham in Sussex, where these and what now seems an odd assortment of writing implements, inscriptions on a variety of surfaces, ink-wells, and so forth were intended to be the basis for a history of writing. He published a catalogue of his collection in 1849, Catalogue of Materials for Writing, of which the manuscript section had been drawn up in 1837 by the eccentric, ill-tempered, but learned Thomas Phillipps, he of the massive Phillipps collection of some 60,000 manuscripts, the dispersal of which continued for nearly a century after his death in 1872. The Catalogue included engravings of some of the more striking manuscripts, and information on their provenance. On Curzon’s death in 1873 the manuscripts came to the British Museum, now the British Library, to which they were definitively presented in 1917 on the death of his daughter and heir, together with the other important Greek and Syriac manuscripts Curzon had acquired in Palestine and Egypt: eighty-nine manuscripts in all. The Zouche bequest is now catalogued among the Additional MSS of the British Library. Curzon had kept his side of the bargain.

But how reasonable was his assumption that the manuscripts were in dire peril on Athos? Curzon uses what has become the classic ‘jam-pot’ justification: that the monks were so indifferent to these books that they were used to cover jars of preserves (Visits, p. 366). And indeed he describes with horror how the begoumenos of Karakalou, on having it suggested to him that this was an appropriate use, ripped out portions from a ‘thick quarto manuscript of the Acts and the Epistles’ and presented them to Curzon. This is duly noted in the British Library catalogues: the Apocalypse in Add. MS 39601 is catalogued separately from Add. MS 39599, containing the Epistles of Paul, with a note that these pages had been removed by the begoumenos of Karakalou, and a reference to Curzon’s Visits.
But how far was Curzon's gloomy attitude justified? Let us pause for a moment and consider why there were libraries in the monasteries, and for how long they had been in existence. A religious community acquires and collects books for strictly utilitarian purposes: to enable the services to be held in seemly and informed fashion, to train and educate the members of the community, to further the community's mission. All this was, and is, as true for Athonite monasteries as for any other monastic order and community. So it should be no surprise that the vast majority of the books now on Athos are broadly speaking 'religious' - service books of one sort or another, gospel lectionaries, copies of the Psalms, menaia, menologia, homilies, biblical texts with commentaries, free-standing commentaries. The laments of classical scholars from the Renaissance onwards - up to the present day - that the ignorant monks had no classical authors in their libraries have rather missed the point. The surprise should be that there are any secular texts there at all. Figures given for the number of manuscripts on Athos remain slightly fluid - about 16,000 is the usual total. If 5 per cent of these (i.e. around 800) are secular in content, which means, in scholarly parlance, that they contain texts of classical authors, then I think that is quite a generous estimate. One should always be inclined to look for a reason why a copy of Thucydides or Demosthenes is in an Athonite library, rather than lament that it is not.

So it is not unreasonable to assume that a monastery would be endowed with a library of sorts from the moment of foundation. But further than that it is rather hard to go. Efthymios Litsas, who has been closely involved with cataloguing and investigating the holdings on Athos for many years, in a recent important paper stated succinctly that The history of the monastic libraries of Mount Athos is interesting but largely unknown, since very little information has survived. Our chief source of information consists of the manuscripts themselves' (Hellenika, 50 (2000), 217–30). He has, in the case of the Lavra, attempted to construct an outline history, basing himself on evidence accumulated from the thirty librarians' notes that he encountered as he catalogued the first 300 codices in the Lavra collection. He concludes that the library was indeed almost certainly set up in the mid-tenth century, on the monastery's foundation in 963. That in the last decade of that century the well-known copyist Ioannis, responsible for several copies of patristic and liturgical texts, was active there, but that then there is no traceable activity until the late twelfth and early thirteenth century when there appear a number of notes indicating where books were stored. Litsas has calculated from these notes that up to 960 books were in the library at that time. There is a general feeling that this is rather a high number, and perhaps the shelf-marks (which is what they add up to) can be interpreted differently, though perhaps in view of the size of the library today one should not be too surprised. The subsequent history of the library Litsas has not ventured to sketch out, and I cannot do so here, except to say that it must have had some periods of organized and relative affluence and some of disaster, echoing the rise and fall of the peninsula's economic and spiritual life. But books survived: today, as I have said, the manuscripts in the Athonite monasteries are reckoned to total around 16,000.

Where would books have been stored? It is usually argued that the regular space where books were kept in a monastery was in what is called the katecboumena, that is, in the upper section of the narthex of the katholikon. The Lavra in the thirteenth century, from Litsas's evidence, was no exception; the librarians' notes also indicate that books were housed in the tower (pyrgos), and in the armalion, the cupboard in the nave where books needed for services were stored. Litsas is impressed by a strong sense of continuity in library practices in the Lavra - there is still an armalion in the nave, and the shelf-marks currently used, which were imposed by Lambros in 1897 when he initiated the catalogue later published by Evstratiades in 1925, and which were based on the system of the late nineteenth-century librarian Alexandros, in Litsas's view very probably reflect the late medieval system of classification, that is, a letter of the Greek alphabet followed by a number. What would the medieval library have looked like? This is hard to say. One thing that is reasonably certain is that the books would have been lying flat on the shelves, as the 'Greek' binding technology produced a large protrusion at the top and bottom of the spine, which made for flexible opening but tricky storage.

But Curzon and others were wrong to think that the books were inevitably treated as of no value. There would be various reasons for neglect - inappropriate subject matter (especially applicable to any secular books that strayed in), or physical incomprehensibility, by which I mean a book that could not be read, a point I take from Litsas, who was struck by the very low percentage of uncial manuscripts in any of the
Athos libraries. Uncial is the formal book hand that was still in use for liturgical books in the tenth century at the time of the first monasteries’ foundations but which soon came to be replaced by the more economical minuscule. But while this low percentage can be explained in part by the ‘jam-pot’ principle as uncial became unreadable when the cursive minuscule hand came into regular use and manuscripts were cut up, exceptions can be found. One of the most prized objects in the Great Lavra is the Gospels of Phokas (or the Phokas Evangelisterion), said to have been given by the emperor Nikephoros Phokas to his friend and spiritual counsellor Athanasios on the monastery’s foundation in the mid-tenth century. It is kept on the altar of the katholikon, and is barely allowed an entry in the monastery’s library catalogue. But art historians are clear that the book’s illustrations date it to the eleventh century. Litsas has been able to examine this manuscript closely and has observed that its binding sits very loosely on to the main fabric of the book – a rebinding process has gone on; furthermore, the figure of Christ in relief on the cover is in a style that has many similarities with the Christ in the frontispiece of Lavra A 86, a sumptuously illustrated tenth-century uncial manuscript. This makes a neat case: Lavra A 86 and the binding of what is now known as the Phokas Evangelisterion make up a genuine mid-tenth-century manuscript and there is no reason to disbelieve the monastery’s tradition that this book was presented by the emperor to his friend Athanasios; at some point a decision was taken to dis-bind the manuscript when it ceased to be easily legible and to replace the text with something equally spectacular, possibly also with an imperial provenance, but easier to comprehend; but the fabric of the uncial book itself was carefully preserved separately. An exception proving a rule.

Thus far my comments have been about the past, about how the libraries came into being, and for what purposes. What of the present? How does one find out now, for example, about the contents of the libraries? There are three ways of setting about this.

The first is to investigate the catalogues. The currently available printed catalogues are still essentially those produced by Spyridon Lambros and a small team of his students; these appeared in print in 1897. This monumental survey work was done in a short period of time, with a very small team. It remains an amazing achievement. Given the smallness of the team and the time factor, Lambros must have been building on earlier catalogues already made in the libraries by the librarian monks. Lambros’s multi-volume work has its shortcomings: the entries are brief with little detail, and have a totally inadequate categorization of the vernacular material. And it is not complete. It has been estimated that of the 16,000 manuscripts on Athos only 12,000 have been catalogued, and systematic investigation still throws up surprises – like the new manuscript of Thucydides found in the mid-1990s, the Procopius that has recently been investigated, or the completely unknown fourteenth-century Cretan poet Leonardo DellaPorta whom Manousakas found himself reading, to his astonishment, in 1981, in the uncatalogued second part of a Pantokrator manuscript which he had turned to for a completely different purpose. So Curzon had not been unreasonable to hope for lost authors – and it is not totally unreasonable to think that more might yet appear.

But the fact is that Lambros’s catalogues are not satisfactory and replacements, researched and presented by modern criteria, are needed. Indeed work has begun, in some instances has made considerable advances, and in one instance has progressed into print. The printed example is the catalogue by Sotiroudis of 100 manuscripts from Iviron (Katalogos Ellinikon Theiropoion, Agion Oros, 1998). Elsewhere Efthymios Litsas has in advanced readiness a catalogue of 300 manuscripts from the Lavra, Erich Lamperz hopes that his catalogue of Vatopedi 1-102 will appear next year, Bob Allison’s material on Philotheou is mostly done. Teams from the Byzantine Institute and the National Institute for Research in Athens, under Kriton Chryssochoidis, involving Agamemnon Tsellikas and Costas Contatinides to name but two, make regular brief forays for cataloguing purposes. I understand there is some debate still continuing about the detail and format of the information to be recorded. However, actual results that can be used by the wider public are not yet available – in print, there is only Sotiroudis’s volume for Iviron. This is not necessarily a cause for surprise: a cataloguing campaign on this scale is a massive undertaking with many people involved and laborious and time-consuming preparation at every stage. Yet today reference works such as catalogues are not best consulted in a paper format. Libraries are moving, and indeed have moved, into the electronic age. We are now accustomed to using electronic catalogues, easily searchable in a variety of modes. Today’s students look aghast at tales of trudging round and round the circular
central catalogue area of the old British Library. What the Athos libraries need are electronic catalogues, available on line, over the Internet.

The second way of consulting the Athos library holdings is to use reproductions. One source of reproductions for many years has been the microfilms made by and for the Library of Congress in 1952/3, of which there is one set in Washington and another in the Patriarchal Institute in Thessaloniki. Copies can be ordered. But both these and the originals are of varying quality, and are beginning to show their age— and the originals need serious conservation if they are to retain any scholarly usefulness. A future source could come from digitized images. Here matters are delicate. At one point it seemed that there was to be an extremely fruitful collaboration between the Patriarchal Institute in Thessaloniki and the Ancient Biblical Manuscripts Center in Claremont, California, which would produce on-line digitized material. But recently this seems to have met a series of problems and has been abandoned. I can only hope passionately that these problems are only temporary and that this extremely enlightened venture will resume.

The third way is to go and inspect the manuscripts on the spot, which my male colleagues and students tell me is not necessarily quite as easy as it sounds, and is out of the question for me.

So, in conclusion, I have come to this brief and superficial account of the libraries of Athos as a medievalist interested in texts and their transmission from antiquity to the present, and in the literary culture of Byzantium. As such, Athos is a fascinating store house, whose libraries in many ways represent a time-capsule of material, attitudes, and processes. Furthermore, while my focus has been on manuscripts and not printed books, we should not forget that Athos has a rich collection of incunabula and early printings in Greek, as witnessed by Thomas Papa­dopoulos’s recent admirable charting of books relating to the Greek printing heritage (Bibliothikes Agiou Orous, Palaia Ellinika Entypa, Athens, 2000), though I have a few problems with his definition of what constitutes Greek. Nor should we forget that the Athonite monasteries house an unrivalled collection of medieval charters, which has been steadily and efficiently published over the last half-century by scholars from Paris.

In the view of the scholarly world it is vital that work continues steadily in, and on, the treasure houses that are the libraries of Mount Athos. From my position on the outside, it appears that this is also the

Plate 1. The icon of the Mother of God in the kyriakon at the skete of Lakkou. Its carved wooden stand was the gift of the Friends of Mount Athos (p. 14).
Plate 2. One of the manuscripts acquired by Robert Curzon from Xenophontos: 
a twelfth-century Greek lectionary with the pages in the shape of a cross. 
British Library, Add. MS. 39603 (p. 57).

Plate 3. Another of Curzon's acquisitions, this one from St Paul's monastery: 
a Bulgarian gospel copied from a Greek original in 1335. 
British Library, Add. MS. 39627 (p. 57).
Plate 4. Fr George (centre) was delighted to entertain the path-clearers when they had opened up the route to his hermitage and he presented them all with walking sticks (p.69).

Plate 5. Lunchbreak for the members of the path-clearing expedition above Simonopetra (p. 69).
Plate 6. Bishop Kallistos celebrates the Divine Liturgy in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Iasi (p. 77).

Plate 7. A group of pilgrims inside the monastery church at Putna following the Divine Liturgy for the feast of St Dimitrios (p. 79).
wish of the majority of the monastic communities and their librarians. This means introducing modern methods of conservation of the books and the fabric of the libraries. This means producing new catalogues that conform to current best practice. This means making the holdings of the libraries available in a way that both allows the monastic communities to continue their lives and vocations unhindered but also allows the scholarly public access to the treasures of which the monasteries have been guardians for so long. This means today that catalogues should be available electronically, on line as well as in print, and that a generous amount of the library contents should be digitized and also available on line. In the world outside Athos, libraries are enthusiastic for digitization as a means of preserving the fabric of their most treasured items while at the same time allowing wider access. In the case of Athos, access is the major issue: even if I were not debarred by my gender, I know it would not be easy – for many reasons – to obtain on the spot the unfettered time that detailed manuscript work demands. In the past this has been achieved by means of microfilm. Modern electronic methods are far superior, far more flexible. Let us hope that some way will be found.

ELIZABETH JEFFREYS

Oxford
The heavens declare the glory of God. Indeed they do, but everywhere the subtle glory of the night sky is obscured by the temporal works of man, not least by the coarse and mundane light of modern utility. This is a trope of our twenty-first-century culture, itself at the dead end of the Enlightenment, the once useful search for the physical betterment of mankind, now so domineering an idol of the mind that it obscures what it is to be truly human. A new cultural paradigm is due, since the present paradigm has ceased to fit needs, experience, or aspiration. We are fortunate that the Christian Churches, especially the Orthodox Church which has never denied its mystical inheritance, retain the sense of wonder and glory, that connection with the Divine Essence which is both unknowable and gloriously revealed.

The Friends’ colloquium, its title based on Dostoevsky’s ‘Beauty will save the world’, revealed to us the sacred path of Athonite tradition, by way of art, music, and architecture, and necessarily by way of abnegation of self, towards the glory of the Divine Wisdom, the Sophia invoked in the Liturgy. Beauty is thus material; it is also wisdom. Beauty is mediation between earth and heaven.

All this sounds exceedingly portentous. In fact, in human speech such perceptions can only be gently indicated. Our President Bishop Kallistos, in his opening speech which outlined the principles of divine beauty, reminded us of diaphanic beauty and theophanic beauty, beauty which is perceived through created things, and God shining through those created things. ‘The beyond is in our midst.’ He reminded us too of the beauty of the Divine Liturgy in time, space, and sound, which passes from the temporal to the eternal. As also of the reverse, the seductive and corrupt nature of the fatal gift of beauty. Loving the secondary for its own sake is a siren song, infinitely better rejected. Real beauty in a fallen world is sacrificial and cannot be truly attained without suffering.

These were the keynotes of the rest of the meeting. Abbot Vasileios of Iviron focused on the understanding of sacred space in Athonite worship and architecture. In the monastic life the role of suffering elicits divine beauty and the radiance of Calvary. The true Athonite asks nothing for himself and knows the need to die daily. Sanctity lies in what you lose, and not in what you acquire.

Dr Dimitri Conomos, well known to us all, and one of the two Dimitris who chanted the offices and Liturgy so well for us, spoke on the Elder Aimilianos on the Psalter and on the revival of melodious psalmody at Simonopetra, moving from the early history of psalmody and its possible descent from the early Christians by way of urban communities to our own day, and to the new melodies of the Elder Aimilianos. This well-informed and well-illustrated talk demonstrated melody by recordings accompanied by notated music. As the new psalmody finds a place in the liturgy without the Liturgy, so we discover that the beauty that saves is a matter of creativity, not of custom. Music too may be diaphany.

Speaking of the frescos of the Protaton, Dr John Nandris reminded us that in any human sense ‘God does not exist’, and of the wisdom lost in knowledge. Passing by way of the Kabbalah, he suggested that the world will be saved by the grace of God, that space in ourselves to admit the eternal message, the everlasting Annunciation.

We are left with the pointers towards that Way. Aidan Hart, former rasophore of Iviron, indicated that as an icon painter it is his task to join the material and the divine, to reveal the inner essence of things. Through the many attributes of the traditional icon a window is opened on heaven. ‘Beauty is the fragrance left behind by God when he walks.’

Of heaven they are, but icons too participate in a fallen world. They decay, and they need the material salvation of scientific diagnosis and preservation in order to communicate to us for a few more hundred years. This, as Dr Sophia Sotiropoulou demonstrated, is ably pursued by the formidably well-equipped Art Diagnosis Centre at the vast and successful convent at Ormylia, just without the Holy Mountain and a daughter house of Simonopetra. An unusual and absorbing aspect of our theme.

Focusing again on iconography, Professor Ioli Kalavrezou developed the theme of the Theotokos from the fourth century until her early appearance in iconic form on Mount Athos in the Portaitissa (now
known to be of the early eleventh century) and thence to the sophisticated fourteenth-century murals at Vatopedi and Chilandar. Of unusual interest are the human images of the Virgin within her household illustrated at Chilandar, where she is depicted as both God-bearer and mother of the child of all humanity within time and place.

So we end with the question of Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'To what serves mortal Beauty?' Our answer, and the answer of the meeting, was much the same as his. That answer lies for us, as it must be, in the Liturgy so amply fulfilled in its celebration on the Sunday morning, as also in the offices celebrated throughout the meeting, especially perhaps in Saturday's Vespers. God is there: we do not always perceive him. 'Restore us to thy likeness, my Ancient Beauty.'

Let Francis Thompson, who knew of these things, have the last word:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The angels keep their ancient places;} \\
\text{Turn but a stone, and start a wing!} \\
\text{Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,} \\
\text{That miss the many-splendoured thing.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is that glory of the heavens that the meeting so movingly revealed.

Of matters more banausic but so necessary in our mortal state, there was not one of us who did not acknowledge gratefully the excellence (and simple beauty) of our accommodation, arrangements, and food, and the cheerful efficiency with which all was carried out. Congratulations and thanks to the organizers for all their hard work, and to the Madingley Hall staff for their quality and efficiency of service. As it is so rare, so much the more is it appreciated.

ROBIN PRICE
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**PATHS FOR PILGRIMS: 9–21 May 2005**

We were able to make further progress on the Holy Mountain, clearing and restoring footpaths, and a team of seventeen set off for two weeks in May. On this occasion, a number of the group were taken ill, with a bug that has been variously described but which I am sure we took with us. This year we were able to base a small team at Simonopetra with other groups at Koutloumousiou, Pantokrator, and Vatopedi. Several members of the party very kindly sent me their journals of the trip and I have reproduced as many of these as I could fit in. I think they give a good flavour of the project and of the humour mustered in adversity.

*This journal from Clive Strutt covers the first week.*

**Monday 9 May:** Our first working day at Koutloumousiou. After the evening meal we were shown the katholikon by Fr Chrysostomos. He is studying for a doctorate at Thessaloniki University in the field of Celtic and early English Christianity. This is the first time that I have been aware of any Orthodox monk having an interest in the pre-schism Christianity of the British Isles. There is a serendipity here that will become apparent later in the journal.

**Tuesday 10 May:** Our four-man team divided in two today: Ken and Malcolm continued yesterday’s clearing of the path down to the port, whilst John and I set off to walk the path to Philotheou, with the aim of ascertaining what that monastery’s requirement might be for a path team for the second week. The path had been cleared last year by a team that included myself and it was most interesting to see what it looked like after one year. It was mostly walkable with ease, as one would expect, but the surprise was just how many trees by the path side had snapped off about halfway up the trunk and had fallen across the path, necessitating in one case a short diversion of the path around it. The diversion did serve to show that the path was being well used.

We were aiming to contact the two monks at Philotheou who I knew could speak English, and surprisingly we found them almost immediately without any need for enquiry. Fr Palladios was extremely surprised to hear his name called out in English from halfway up a staircase by the refectory.
The footpath walk took three hours each way, much of it on forest roads rather than traditional tracks. The most spectacular part is near the end where a ravine is crossed by a rustic wooden bridge, with great waterfalls, a rushing torrent, and massive rocks in the riverbed.

It was during the evening that I started to feel unwell, with various symptoms of feverishness.

Wednesday 11 May: Although unwell, I managed to work on the port path, but during the night my condition did not improve, and I decided to act on the advice of Fr Jacob, a nurse, who suggested a visit to the Karyes medical centre.

Thursday 12 May: Koutloumousiou monastery is definitely the best of the twenty to become ill in, as it is only a five-minute walk to Karyes, the capital town, with its 24/7 medical centre. As Fr Jacob put it when I showed a hint of reluctance to visit it: 'You might just as well go as there are four doctors there without very much to do.' The other three team members accompanied me for support, or was it simply out of curiosity? I was seen by two doctors: first a blood pressure reading was taken, then temperature (risen to 38°C); a blood sample was taken and immediately analysed by a computer, which showed a higher than normal white corpuscle count, and chest listened to. I was given an injection in the backside of paracetamol, and prescribed eight-hourly antibiotic and paracetamol tablets. Feeling dizzy after all this, I was given a second blood pressure test, which showed a reduced pressure, consistent with having had an injection (according to the other doctor), and was then told to lie down for a while. I was asked to return the following day for a further check-up. The second doctor spoke excellent English, but it was the first doctor, with very limited English, who delivered the final ingredient in the procedure - a theological homily no less. It was along the lines that Greek people are spiritual, whereas Protestants are materialistic. The most remarkable thing of all is to find all these facilities in Mount Athos, which is described in the blurb of a recent book which one of the team was reading as 'a place untouched by modernity!' There was nothing to pay, and I did not even have to produce my E111 NHS reciprocal-treatment document. The doctor had diagnosed my illness as a 'cold on the chest: not a big cold, but a little cold'. I know it does not sound much, but the symptoms were quite nasty, and very varied. I spent the rest of the day in bed.

Friday 13 May: I should have stayed in bed this day as well, but felt better and decided to work. As things turned out, I wish that I had followed the doctor's orders. Another team member has gone down with the cold.

Saturday 14 May: After accompanying our other unwell team member to the medical centre I returned to bed, feeling much worse, and stayed there until the next day.

Sunday 15 May: Changeover day, but not until the afternoon. Feeling much recovered from the cold symptoms, apart from a residual chest cough.

In the monastery's lovely reception room we had our official departing treat - chocolate cake, coffee, ouzo, water - and after it we were called to the office to receive presents. The gift was an illustrated diary on the theme of Mount Athos and nature. I had a small gift to present to the monastery, and this is where the serendipity comes in. The previous year I had mentioned in a discussion with Fr Gregorios that there was a theory that the St George who is regarded in England as its patron saint was not the same St George who is recognized in the east by the Orthodox Church. The gift-book was *St George at Glastonbury* by 'The Recorder of Avalon' (no other identity is mentioned), published early in the twentieth century, and giving a life history of the 'English' St George. The serendipity was that the very monk giving us the diaries was Fr Chrysostomos, earlier mentioned as having an academic interest in early English and Celtic Christianity, and hence the book might be of interest to him. He was scheduled to visit the British Library early in 2006 for research, and would most probably be looking into the various legends surrounding the visit of Joseph of Arimathea with the child Jesus to Glastonbury, to Cornwall, or to Priddy in the Mendip Hills.

Thus ended the first week of the 2005 project.

The following journal from John Andrews covers the second week.

Sunday 15 May: Clive and I say our farewells to Ken and Malcolm outside the entrance to Koutloumousiou, as we join Kurt and John for the ride down to Pantokrator. It seems sad to break up our little group, as it has been a good week working together. As the Landrover heads
down the hill and the monastery swings into view, it appears little changed since my last trip here many years ago. We are shown to our room by the guest master (after a coffee and ouzo, wonderfully refreshing as always); six beds which we share with two other pilgrims. Brilliant view down to the sea against the rocks, and out to the island of Thasos. We attend afternoon church service. The singing, particularly by one monk, is very unusual and excellent, and the wonderful large frescos of the Virgin and Baptist which flank the entrance to the sanctuary, and which were being restored on my last visit here, are now completed. Dinner. Smaller amounts than what we received at Koutloumousoiou (where we were quite spoiled in this respect), but very tasty nonetheless. Clive is still ill, and after a short walk along the beach, he retires for the night. The rumours of a telephone under the stairway in the courtyard prove to be true; I call home before going to bed. The sound of the sea against the rocks just below our window puts me to sleep very quickly.

Monday 16 May: After morning service and breakfast, we are moved to our own room with four beds (the same one I stayed in all those years ago). Kurt proposes we work on the Prophet Elijah footpath halfway to the skete, then slowly walk up the rest of the way for a coffee, and continue working on the trail as we head home. This proves to be a delight, as the skete (which is actually larger than some of the monasteries and once housed 400 monks) is quite wonderful. The monks here are very friendly, and we are treated to coffee, their wonderful well water, and a special cherry brandy (apparently the family recipe of the guest master). Clive and I befriend the two cats and four kittens that live here and are cared for by the monks. A nap, church, and dinner upon our return to Pantokrator. Fr Varsinios greets us afterwards and takes us for a walking history around the grounds recounting the stories of the miraculous icon of the Virgin housed here. This is quite a treat, and the evening is beautiful with a slight breeze. I am gently scolded (and rightly so) for my somewhat rusty Greek. I take a very cold shower and then to bed.

Tuesday 17 May: Clive and I set out to continue work on the Prophet Elijah trail. We are joined by the Arnells, father and son, and work is begun on the footpath to Bogoroditsa, a small and fairly remote skete. Fr Varsinios arranges for a tour of the treasury housed in the monastery tower; this is quite fascinating. We spend the evening talking in the guest master’s reception room, which doubles as a kind of lounge for pilgrims.

Wednesday 18 May: We bid farewell to both Arnells after breakfast who continue their tour on to Koutloumousoiou, and we begin work on the trail to Stavronikita. We find it is in remarkably good shape and requires little work. We continue on to Karyes, a hard and hot trek, but varied in its lovely scenery, and visit the nearby skete of St Andrew. Like Prophet Elijah, it is more massive than many monasteries, but in this case barely populated, and fairly ruinous in some sections.

Thursday 19 May: After breakfast, an early walk and we begin final clearing of the path up to Prophet Elijah. We clearly mark the entrance to the Bogoroditsa path, then proceed down the hill to the start of the path up to the little derelict chapel atop a hill behind Pantokrator. We will clear this as a favour to the Abbot, as this is one of his favourite spots. This proves somewhat difficult due to steepness, heat, and humidity, but we complete the work and the view from the top is breathtaking.

Friday 20 May: After church and breakfast, we start our final day of work, on the footpath to Vatopedi. The first third of the way is in fairly good shape but then it becomes terribly overgrown. There are beautiful views down to the sea all around. We manage to clear about three-quarters of the way to the monastery before we start back. It seems very strange to be completely done with the work. Fr Varsinios spends the evening in conversation with us in the lounge, where over mountain tea he answers our many questions. He also recounts the events leading up to his becoming a monk, which is totally absorbing. The evening is capped by a massive thunderstorm, very atmospheric when viewed from the courtyard. Fr Vasinios secures a taxi for us for the morning, and promises we can watch him ring the festive bells in the tower then (one of his many jobs at the monastery), as it will be a feast day.

Saturday 21 May: Fr Varsinios keeps his promise and fetches us from the church at the appointed time. He leads us up to the top of the bell tower where we watch him perform. The bells are loud and beautiful, with an amazing array of hammers and pulleys, apparently designed and built by the father of one of the monks. They obviously require
great skill to operate. The taxi arrives and we bid farewell to Fr Varsinios. He gives us all a blessing. I promise I will improve my Greek by my next visit. We settle into the boat and begin the journey back to Ouranoupolis. The same melancholy feeling in the pit of my stomach that always hits me when I leave this beautiful place. But I know I will return again soon.

The following journal from Malcolm Wagstaff might touch a nerve!

A Pain on Mount Athos
A different aspect of Mount Athos was shown to some members of the Friends' footpath working party this year. Previous years have taught us just how generous the monks are with their time and how accommodating they are to us. This time, their genuine love and care were to the fore.

Four members of the team went down with some sort of 'flu bug and were out of action for various lengths of time, cared for and supported by their hosts. I was one of them. I was based at Koutloumousiou for the first part of the season. Four days into my stay I developed a hacking cough, a temperature, and bunged-up nose, symptoms similar to those shown by Clive, who had become ill a day or two earlier and had taken to his bed. The monks showed great solicitude, but it was our companions, John and Ken, who insisted that first Clive and then I should go to the medical centre at Karyes, normally only a few minutes' walk from the monastery but a bit of an uphill struggle when you are ill. The medical centre is in a rather undistinguished building, close to the Karyes end of the footpath from Koutloumousiou and the bakery. It always looked closed. As we tentatively opened the door for the first time, the inside looked a bit basic. Two or three white-coated medical people lolled in their chairs. At least one of them looked rather shifty in his unshaven state (what had we come to?), but the staff could not have been more helpful. At least one of them had a good command of English. Clive and I were treated on separate days, but the procedure was much the same. The duty doctor carried out a pretty thorough examination, and took temperature and blood tests. Afterwards, he insisted on giving each of us a massive injection of paracetamol in the butt to bring our temperatures down quickly — painful but effective — and then loaded us with assorted pills. We were ordered to report in a couple of days. Both of us went back to bed and gradually recovered and were signed off. I took a full six days to get well again. While Clive managed to sleep quite a lot, I did a huge amount of reading. Neither of us did much work before being transferred to other monasteries.

I was still unwell when I went to Vatopedi on the second Sunday and could not help out on what should have been my first working day there. One of the other invalids, Anthony, was already there and Matt joined us. At supper on that first evening, I became a 'pain' in a different way. I recall that part way through supper I said to the rest of our table, in a rather surprised tone, 'I think I have cracked a tooth!' I had bitten rather too vigorously on a hard piece of bread and part of the tooth seemed to be hanging off. There was a little pain — just a rather odd sensation. Someone advised me to tell Fr Matthew, our cicerone at Vatopedi. Without batting an eyelid he said he would arrange for me to see the monastery's medical officer who happened to have some dental experience. How lucky can you be? It seemed quite a long wait — there was Compline, a meeting for the monks, and then other patients to see. Eventually, Fr Matthew conducted me into the depths of the monastery, east of the katholikon, up stairs and down corridors. Here I was ushered into the dental surgery. I did not know what to expect, but the room was spanking white, brightly lit, and equipped with an incredible array of modern gadgets, including a computer. I was introduced to Fr Lukas, an amazingly gentle and patient man, with a habit of bending forward slightly and shrugging his shoulders while he explained what he was going to do. His English was not extensive but Fr Matthew stopped to translate. Fr Lukas looked at the tooth, took some X-ray pictures which, with considerable delight, he was able to show me immediately on his computer, but deferred treatment until the morning. It was late.

At our next consultation, Fr Lukas decided to remove the broken piece of tooth. The inevitable happened: a large filling dropped out. That complicated things. The remaining filling had to be removed and the root canals cleaned out from what turned out to be a largely dead tooth. This took another two sessions, each of them fairly long, but with Fr Lukas's graceful approach, delicate touch, and gentle humour the time passed quickly and without much pain to me. I was reprimanded, though, both on the state of my teeth and the quality of the dental care which I had been receiving. 'Malcolm,' said Fr Lukas in his distinctive, quiet voice, 'it is bad — very bad.' Unlike Fr Lukas, he did not say much while he was working. I could see only a pair of eyes. Unmasked, Polydoros turned out to be a smiley and funny
man. I left the monastery with a huge feeling of gratitude, a temporary filling, a technicolour CD of my X-rays, and an appointment with a dentist in Volos, a friend of Vatopedi, for the following week.

Why Volos? My wife and I were going to meet up in Thessaloniki and spend a few days in Pelion. A quick telephone call from Afissos confirmed the appointment. The dental surgery was in a side street, not very far from the waterfront. An almost hidden and anonymous door and a flight of stairs led to a waiting room furnished not only with chairs but also highly coloured and rather folksy sculptures. The dentist was a man of many talents and a full Athonite beard, but he had little English. My Greek was not up to explaining what had happened at Vatopedi but I need not have worried. He had been thoroughly briefed by Fr Lukas over the telephone and got straight to work. In a quarter of an hour or so I emerged from his equally pristine, state-of-the-art surgery with a permanent filling, duly drilled for the crown, which would have to be fitted in due course. The Volos dentist turned out to be Vasili Kapodistrias, a descendant of Joannis Kapodistrias, the first President of independent Greece. Being treated by him was the icing on the Holy Mountain. The final work was done when I got back to Britain and involved two widely spaced dental appointments.

I am sure I must have been a ‘pain’, or at least an additional concern, to my companions and the monks of two monasteries. But none of them was fazed. They took the flu in their stride, while the dental problem was treated with professional skill by Fr Lukas and Polydoros, as well as becoming an item of curiosity and conversation. I am grateful to them all.

My gratitude to Clive, John, and Malcolm and to the others who submitted their journals and comments but which the available space does not allow me to include.

Plans are already afoot for a further expedition in 2006 and I would be very pleased to hear from anyone interested in joining us for future expeditions.

JOHN ARNELL
Bishop’s Stortford

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PILGRIMAGE TO THE MOLDAVIAN MONASTERIES: 22–30 October 2005

On 22 October the third foreign pilgrimage undertaken by the Friends assembled at Heathrow Airport, that contemporary equivalent of the Tabard Inn at Southwark. The principal destination was Moldavia with its famous painted monastic churches, in north-east Romania. The party, which once again was led by Bishop Kallistos, was the largest to date, comprising thirty-five members and others with an interest in the Orthodox faith and its art. An international flavour was imparted by the presence of participants from the United States, Belgium, and Greece.

Within twenty minutes of boarding the coach at Bucharest airport for Iasi, we were introduced to a traditional rural way of life which was to become commonplace for the rest of the visit, a culture which, still largely reliant on the horse, has now almost vanished from the rest of Europe, even in Russia. Apparently many of the large numbers of unemployed people are reversing Ceausescu’s policy of enforced deruralization by leaving Bucharest and other cities and returning to their villages, where they can at least live off the land. Our informant on this and so much else was Fr Dan Sandu, our cheerful and solicitous guide for the entire pilgrimage.

Thanks to a diversion caused by flooding at Buzau, the party did not arrive in Iasi until the early hours of Sunday morning, when we were comfortably housed for our three nights here in the St Nicholas Ecumenical Institute. Next morning the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Kallistos in the imposing neo-classical metropolitan cathedral. This must have been the first occasion on which the Liturgy had been celebrated in Iasi by an English Orthodox hierarch and Bishop Kallistos did so with great reverence, moving effortlessly between Greek and English and even Romanian. The packed congregation listened attentively to his homily which dexterously and sensitively linked Christ’s healing of the Gaderene tormented by demons with the writings of St Macarius and communal precepts for society today. The occasion also provided evidence of the strength of devotion to St Paraskevi, whose relics are preserved in the cathedral. After luncheon, at which the party was introduced to the powers of tuica, the national drink, the historic
Orthodox church of St Sava and the Golia monastery, founded in the sixteenth century and restored as a monastery in 1992, were visited. Both were engaged in social programmes and at Golia, which had ancient links with Vatopedi monastery, we inspected the printing press and the only dedicated Orthodox radio station in the country. Dinner was held in the imposing Cetatuia monastery, which stands on a hill just outside the city, and whose walls, towers, and church were silhouetted dramatically against the twilight sky. This, like many historic monastic foundations, was undergoing extensive restoration. The church, erected through royal patronage in 1669–72, introduced the distinctive features of Romanian monastic architecture which we were to encounter throughout the visit. Set in usual Orthodox fashion in the middle of walled enclosures, the churches are distinguished by their imposing size (perhaps only exceeded by Russian monastic churches), giving the appearance of great liners at anchor. In detail they are a patchwork of various elements: a triconch east end plan to suit monastic services and presumably derived from Athonite models, tracery and mouldings of windows and doors borrowed from German late Gothic, elaborate fresco programmes of Byzantine origin, and the shingled roofs and spires representing the indigenous talent for joinery and wood-carving.

Monday began with a talk by Bishop Kallistos on the theme of 'The Orthodox Vision of Creation' which was very well received by the large audience comprising staff and students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Iasi University, the Friends, and many others. In the afternoon visits were made to the historic Three Holy Hierarchs monastery and the royal church of St Nicholas, both rebuilt and frescoed sympathetically at the end of the nineteenth century by a French architect clearly inspired by Viollet-le-Duc and representing the nationalist ideology of the time. In 1642 an important council was convened in the refectory of the Three Holy Hierarchs monastery to formulate an Orthodox doctrinal counter to the advance of Catholicism and Protestantism in the Balkans and the Ukraine. Afterwards the party moved on to another hilltop foundation, the monastery of Galata, founded in the sixteenth century and restored as a nunnery in 1996, where the nuns showed us examples of their embroidery skills. The day ended with a reception and dinner hosted by the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, the charismatic Daniel, who impressed the party with his erudition and command of languages.

The following day we travelled north to Bucovina and its famous painted churches. Four of the finest examples (Humor, Voronet, Moldovita, and Sucevita) were seen, although such were the distances, not to mention the enthusiasm and hospitality of the nuns who ensure that these establishments are not just historic monuments, that the last was only reached as dusk fell. The churches of this region are justly renowned for their lavish fresco programmes covering exterior as well as interior walls and preserved by overhanging eaves. Scholars may debate as to whether the external imagery is unique in the Orthodox world (compare the Byzantine churches of Kastoria and traces in Cyprus and Istanbul), but nowhere else can it be experienced on this scale and in this state of preservation. These churches and their enclosures exemplify that distinctive trait of Orthodox artistic tradition, symphonia: seamless harmony between the world of art and the world of nature. In all of the programmes, time past, time present, and time eternal are pictured in an unbroken pictorial narrative, but any impression of uniformity was dispelled as the erudite nuns explained their theological complexity and individuality, ranging from Voronet’s elaborate Tree of Jesse to the moral precepts of the Ladder of Virtue and the presence of the Pokrov story (a reminder of the proximity of Rus) at Sucevita, from the blue grounds characteristic of Humor, Voronet, and Moldovita to the predominant green of Sucevita, executed half a century after the others.

The beauties of the churches are matched by the wondrous tranquillity of their natural settings, which are also dotted with picturesque villages in which traditional rural life and craftsmanship continue and the internal combustion engine still cedes first place to the horse. The idyllic drive between Moldovita and Sucevita, with the glowing copper, yellow, brown, and green autumnal hues of the well-wooded rolling Alpine landscape and the steep pastures grazed by horses and cattle, was a high point of the entire visit.

Putna was reached in darkness, the guesthouse of which afforded the most agreeable accommodation of the entire trip. Wednesday fittingly began and ended with the sound of the semantron and bells. After the exertions of the previous day, the beauty of this historic monastery and its rural location near the Ukrainian border could be explored in a spirit of relaxed and quiet contemplation. It was the feast-day of St Dimitrios of Thessaloniki, a major festival in the Orthodox calendar, and most of the party attended the Liturgy together with the commu-
vided of the monastery museum, which houses magnificent embroideries and other works of art donated by the founder, Stephen the Great, and other rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia. The image of Maria of Mangop, and other works of art donated by the founder, Stephen the Great, and the village of Putna exhibits the characteristic features of Moldavian rural life. The predominant construction material is wood, used for the single- or two-storey houses, placed end-on to the road, and the barns and other agricultural buildings enclosing the farmyards. The better-preserved examples, including the ubiquitous wells, are colourfully painted and sport eaves fashioned with such skill and imagination that it is not difficult to imagine from where Brancusi drew his inspiration. Each complex is surrounded by orchards and/or small fields with traditional hayricks and maize crops. In these unmechanized small holdings micro-agriculture has survived collectivization, the rusting abandoned hulks of which were evident throughout the trip. How will this kind of small-scale and ecological husbandry survive Romania's entry into the EU? Putna also has what is reputedly the oldest (fourteenth-century) surviving wooden church in the country, near to which the service of commemoration of the dead (which is held on St Dimitrios's day) was taking place in the graveyard, with banners, bread, and drink.

A further opportunity to observe rural life was offered on the afternoon journey to Neamt when a stop to purchase pottery and genuine rural crafts was made at Marginea. The elderly lady presiding over the shop may only have spoken Romanian, yet in the calculation of exchange rates she displayed the expertise of a City currency dealer. En route too, a visit was made to the remarkable monastery at Varatec which, together with its associated house at Agapia, houses no fewer than 500 nuns. They follow the idiorrhythmic life, now vanished from Athonite monasteries, in white-painted wooden houses with pretty gardens. The next halt was Sihastria, another flourishing monastery with a newly built church and refectory and over 100 monks following a very austere regime. In the dark we were taken to see the grave of the Blessed Cleopas (1912–98) by a monk who observed that the cemetery was full of anonymous saints. Over dinner in the guesthouse at Neamt Bishop Kallistos prepared the party for the next day by a talk on St Paisyy (1722–94), who after a sojourn on Mount Athos became abbot here. His translation of the *Philokalia* into Slavonic was of fundamental importance in the revival of Hesychast teaching and indeed monasticism throughout the Orthodox world, especially in Russia and the Balkans.

Thursday morning was spent on a tour of Neamt, a large monastery with two storeys of cells lining the precinct walls. Highlights were the evocative reconstruction of St Paisyy's cell, the late fifteenth-century frescos in the church (possibly the prototypes for the Bucovina monastic programmes), and the double-sided miracle-working icon of the Hodegetria with St George, a Byzantine masterpiece presented to Neamt by the emperor John VIII Palaeologos. Before departing for the long drive to Sinaia Bishop Kallistos was prevailed upon to address the students of the Orthodox Academy at Neamt.

After a brief stop at Bistrita monastery, with another miracle-working icon (of St Anne) presented by a Byzantine Palaeologan emperor (Manuel II), the drive south-west traversed the spectacular Carpathian mountain range via the Bicaz gorges, so narrow in places that the coach could barely pass. Here too traditional Romania rubbed shoulders with modern life as horse-drawn haycarts mingled with cars and large lorries. As the foothills were reached, an architecture of Baroque forms, pastel colours, tiled and hipped roofs, and Catholic and Protestant as well as Orthodox churches introduced the former Hapsburg imperial culture of Transylvania, ceded to Romania in 1920 by the Treaty of Trianon. Unfortunately the late running of the schedule ruled out the planned visit to the famous Black Church at Brasov, a fine example of the great Gothic churches erected by settlers from Saxony from the thirteenth century. Sinaia, our destination, was reached in the dark, which at least prevented a full appreciation of the Hostel Eldorado, which has lost something of whatever lustre it once may have had. Undeterred and fortified by a good breakfast, the intrepid pilgrims set out on Friday morning to experience this mountain resort, which was seen to advantage in the most glorious sunshine of the entire visit. The principal tourist attraction is Peles Castle, the extraordinary summer residence of King Carol I, a bizarre *mitteleuropäischen* confection built in 1875–83: there is a rewarding study to be made of the edifices erected throughout Europe by the various branches of the Hohenzollerns who occupied or married into the royal families of so many new nations in the late nineteenth century. Is Peles any less alien than the great Stalinist
monoliths erected by Ceausescu in Bucharest? More appealing perhaps is the monastery here, with an attractive small late seventeenth-century church and its much larger companion erected in 1842-6 by Carol (then prince), who associated it with St Catherine's monastery, Mount Sinai.

After luncheon the drive to Bucharest was broken by an unscheduled visit to the beautiful isolated monastery of Caldarusani (thirty monks), where a parliament of long-eared owls contemplated the pilgrims from a tree with solemnity and, one suspects, puzzlement. The monastic church is notable for its frescos, executed in 1911 by the artist responsible for the murals of the Three Holy Hierarchs and St Nicholas churches in Iasi; in the nineteenth century this monastery was famed for its schools of music and art.

The hotel in Bucharest, where the last two nights were spent, was a very different kind of establishment from our other resting places in both scale and facilities. Formerly a monastery, it looked as if it had been refurbished in the 1970s to cater for Western visitors. The next morning the group was privileged to be granted an audience with His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who impressed everyone with his vigorous defence of the Church's much-criticized record under Communism with the aid of recently accessible archives. The visit included a tour of the patriarchal palace and cathedral and afterwards members of the party pursued their various interests in Bucharest. Charming is not an epithet that I think many would apply to Romania's capital city. Thanks to Ceausescu's megalomania and bad taste, only a few traces remain of the elegant pre-war metropolis familiar to Olivia Manning, and it retains the shabby feel of a Soviet-bloc city whilst embracing Western consumerism with its brash advertising and clogged traffic. But Bucharest is not without its attractions.

A few souls braved the allegedly complicated metro system (in fact both simpler and more modern than London's) to explore the fascinating Village Museum and the Museum of the Romanian Peasant and others sampled the musical offerings of the capital.

The visit ended as it had begun with a stop on the way to the airport to attend the Sunday Liturgy, this time in the monastery of Cernica, like Caldarusani, in a lovely lakeside setting. An invitation to dine with the monks in their frescoed refectory provided a fitting conclusion to the pilgrimage.

All members of the party will have their own particular highlights of the visit, but for everyone it was an enriching and enlightening experience blessed by remarkably clement weather which showed the pastoral beauty of the north Romanian landscape in its full autumnal glory. In all the monasteries we were welcomed warmly and given generous hospitality as well as provided with erudite accounts of the history and art and architecture of each foundation. Everywhere too the party was invited to participate in communal liturgical life, to which troparia were contributed by the vocal skills of the two Dimitris (Conomos and Skrekas). Romanian Orthodox monastic life clearly is expanding by attracting numerous young recruits, both male and female; it was impossible to gauge whether in the process there has been some dilution of vocations and educational standards, as a recent BBC radio programme suggested. It was however apparent that prayer and the Liturgy are performed without detriment to the preservation of the historic fabric of so many of the monasteries. Those privileged to have participated are indebted to the monks and nuns of these communities for making the pilgrimage so rewarding as well as to Fr Dan Sandu for his impeccable shepherding of the flock. Thanks of course are also due to Bishop Kallistos, for his spiritual and learned leadership, and to Dimitri Conomos for organizing the trip and, in his self-effacing way, smoothing over the inevitable minor hiccups and adjustments to the programme with tact and discretion. On the coach journeys John Nandris shared his encyclopaedic knowledge of Romanian archaeology, history, and culture, supplemented by the contributions of Philip Oswald on the country's natural history. Latterly an epidemic of limerick composition spread almost as swiftly as the food-poisoning that afflicted most members of the party at some time or another and revealed unsuspected poetic talents. That of Bishop Kallistos, no less, is reproduced as an appendix with his permission. It was inspired by the owls of Caldarusani monastery.

In two trees 'midst monastical cloaks
Dwelt a cohort of stripy brown owls.
These remarkable birds
Sang liturgical words
In eight tones with articulate vowels.
THE LIBERATION OF MOUNT ATHOS

My daughter, Viveca, who was doing research for me in the National Archive at Kew, came across this article which I had written as a very young officer. She photocopied it, and when I first read it I was only convinced that it was mine by the idiosyncratic way I have always spelt ‘shrew’. Memories came flooding back. My battalion was stationed in Khalkidiki when a message came down from Headquarters that we were to send a platoon to the Holy Mountain. A new civilian Governor was to be installed, he was to accompany us, and, if necessary, order to be restored. The Germans had only just withdrawn and the Communists had been giving trouble to the Holy Fathers. Aged twenty-two, I was the Battalion Intelligence Officer. A platoon of Pathans was selected. The visit took place as described. The Muslim Pathans were enchanted and grateful for the reception they received. On my return I reported to Divisional HQ in writing. The General called for me and suggested I publish the account of the visit. Very shortly afterwards I was sent back to England to hospital and then on leave. I never returned; nor had I realized that the piece had been submitted to the regimental magazine by Colonel McDonald, commanding our battalion, the 3/12 Royal Frontier Force Regiment.

This Division has had many stories to tell, some of which have been recorded officially, and some have become legendary by constant telling and re-telling, in bars and canteens, messes and langars, but we have a strange tale which is both bizarre and unique: the story of how Pathans from the North-West Frontier of India visited another world, and saw a land that is the finest example of Byzantine civilisation and culture; and the story we will tell is the 'Liberation of Mount Athos'.

To most Europeans, especially those who have read the French Romantic poets, Mount Athos (the Holy Mountain) has a significance all of its own, for it is unique amongst the religious communities of the world. On Mt. Athos there live in 20 large monasteries and many smaller ones about 3,000 monks. The Holy fathers come from MANY countries, Russia, France, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, to spend their lives secluded and in peaceful meditation. The monasteries in which they live and the traditions that they inherit date back many hundreds of years, and have a colourful history.

In late March 1945 information started coming in to our detachments in South Khalkidiki that the Holy Brethren on Mt. Athos were living in a state of anarchy thanks to the breakdown of their social system, under the Germans, and later during the period of political upheaval. During this later stage armed bandits had taken advantage of the chaotic state of things on Mt. Athos, and as a result were living well on the extortions that they wrung from the peaceful monks.

It was decided therefore that an expedition be sent to Mount Athos to give a display of force, to encourage the monks, and to ascertain what the true internal situation on Mt. Athos really was. A platoon of Pathans of the 3rd Royal Sikhs were chosen for this mission and on April 3rd, 1945, a caique left Ierissos for the Holy Mountain. The jawans had been told that they were going to see something different, and unique, and an atmosphere of excitement prevailed. This was a little damped when on passing Stilliara and turning South for Moni Vatopedhiou a heavy swell was encountered and several of the Pathans found that too much chapatti before a sea voyage is disastrous. This inconvenience was soon forgotten when after 3 hours Moni Vatopedhiou came in sight. Moni Vatopedhiou one of the largest and richest of the monasteries lies at the foot of high cliffs in a secluded bay; as the caique turned the corner of the bay a gasp of astonishment went up from the jawans ‘Sha-bash’. The scene was indeed wonderful, the monastery itself a huge square building, stands forbidding and grim like a medieval castle. It even has the archway and portcullis door effect of a Norman stronghold. Rising straight up from the water's edge, cream coloured stone and red turrets set against a background of green jungle vegetation, and below a deep blue sea, one could not help but be astonished at the beauty and grandeur of Vatopediou. The jawans could be heard talking excitedly amongst themselves as they speculated on the sort of people who inhabited such a splendid building.

The answer to all their queries was not long in coming. As our boat drew nearer the shore black figures could be seen running hither and thither, some down to the jetty, some up towards the monastery itself. Suddenly a peal of bells rang out, and the bells, played in harmony,
echoed and re-echoed round the bay. As we came to within 200 yards of the jetty, the monks, jostling each other in their eagerness to greet us, came pouring through the great stone archways.

Then the Greek flag was hoisted from the top of the building, and to a fresh peal of bells the white Ensign was broken from a neighbouring roof.

We could now see the distinguishing tall black hats of the Fathers and their flowing white beards. All at once the monks began to clap their hands and cheer, moving to and fro shouting themselves hoarse. Our jawans replied answering their cheers, and for 10 minutes there was an uproar.

The boat touched the jetty and we began to disembark. It was an amazing sight, priest and Pathans shaking each other by the hand, slapping each other on the back, the Fathers saying ‘yasu’ (Good health) and ‘Kala’, the Pathans ‘Stare mash ye’ and an answering ‘Kala’. Many of the Holy Fathers were overcome and wept openly, and several blinded by tears shook each other’s hands in mistake for those of our men.

At length the leader of the monastery came down to greet us and invite us up to the monastery. We went up a winding cobbled path towards the inner building and monks walked before us strewing leaves and flowers in our path. The delight of the monks knew no bounds; they felt and looked free men again and were determined to shew us exactly what freedom meant to them.

We spent two hours at Vatopedhiou wandering through the gardens, looking at the murals, and the ikons, and though the men would only drink water, the officers received some first class ‘Oyzo’.

We literally had to drag ourselves away, after many a flowery speech, and we could hear the cheers and bells of Vatopedhiou long after we had turned the bluff and were sailing towards Moni Iviron.

The caique arrived at Moni Iviron at 18.00 hrs. and this time both parties knew what to expect. The monks at Vatopedhiou had been telephoning frantically to every monastery, which although it lost us any surprise we might have achieved against bandits, yet boosted the morale of the Holy community to enormous heights.

The Union Jack was flying as we sailed into Iviron, and a committee was waiting to welcome us. They took the jawans’ kit, and refused to let them carry it. Then the whole party went up to the large guest room where we were made to sit on luxurious chairs and eat sweetmeats, and jam, and a kind of marshmellon.

There followed next the inevitable speeches of welcome bountifully loaded with compliments, but the biggest surprise came when each jawan was taken to a separate room by a monk, and given sheets and a bed to sleep in. As one jawan named Waziristan remarked ‘Bahut first class bandobast Sahib’. This gave opportunity for much ‘gup’ and the wits of the platoon had a field day; Naik Gul Rakhman who rather fancies himself as a Greek scholar got into conversation with one of the Fathers. He asked how long the Fathers had been in the monastery, whether women were allowed on Athos, how the monks were ‘recruited’ (sic) and whether they could go on leave. The conversation was carried on with great solemnity on both sides over a glass of fruit juice, and Gul Rakhman claims that he understood every word.

Next morning early we moved to the capital town of the Holy Community, named Karies. To get from Iviron to Karies one goes by mule through wild and most beautiful country. It is an hour and a half’s ride along a cobbled track cut in the side of the hills, rambling through streams and water meadows, woods and copses, the track often sunken, its banks piled high with wild mountain flowers.

We arrived at Karies at about 10 o’clock the bells ringing and the monks cheering and strewing our path with flowers and laurel leaves as we moved into the town. The first thing that struck the sepoys was that there were so many churches in the town. ‘Every house is a church’ said Sepoy Adalat Khan. 500 years ago the monks told our men, the Turks invaded Athos and then they were asked not to destroy a particularly precious ikon. The Turkish Commander, however, denied that ikon had any value, and said ‘if this is a Holy picture, then when I strike it with my sword it will bleed.’ He drew his sword and struck the picture, whereupon blood flowed from the wound. We were shewn the ikon and the stab mark.

At Karies the jawans had a big ‘tea party’ for the brethren when they had a small opportunity to repay in a small way the amazing hospitality of the monks. Jemadar Nauroz Khan, M.C., ordered special chapatties and dhall to be prepared and cups of chae. The monks intrigued at this novel way of eating, and wishing to try this strange food fell to with relish, and it was amusing to see black-habited monks sitting in a circle trying to scoop dhall in one hand with a chapatti and holding their clothes
and beards with the other to prevent any of the food from spilling. Chopatti and chae proved a great success on Athos.

We also treated the monks by switching on the news with our sets, and when the voice of a woman announcer came through, one monk told us he had not seen a woman for 30 years.

The final place that was visited was Moni Lavra, situated on the South-East tip of the Akti peninsula, and this was the most interesting of all. For Moni Lavra is the most pro-British of all the monasteries and their welcome was so effusive that it beggars description. Here again the jawans gave the monks a 'bara Khana' and in return were feted wherever they went. Here it was that we met a monk who in 1914 had been a doctor, and had treated Indian troops, and could still speak some Hindustani. Here it was that we were shewn the signatures of the Germans who came searching for the English soldiers hidden in Lavra. Here also we saw the names of the English that the monks would not betray. Here too we captured a German sailor who had deserted the German Navy and the monks had taken him in and looked after him. This was one of the main features that impressed the sepoys, that every man whoever he might be was looked after if he came for help.

Of bandits we saw nothing and the monks were far less afraid as soon as we told them that we were going to send a Greek detachment of troops shortly.

Finally on the 7th April 1945 we sailed back to Ierissos and as we passed every monastery along the coast line they rang the bells and hoisted the Union Jack, and to this day if you ask any of the 20 men who went on that expedition, what it is like on Mount Athos, you will see his face change, and he will speak softly and affectionately of the people and the life that he encountered during 'THE LIBERATION OF MOUNT ATHOS.'

ANTHONY ABRAHAMS
Sible Hedingham

THE NEW ATHOS: PART II

In the 1998 Annual Report I wrote an article entitled 'The New Athos'. It described the establishment in the Abkhazian Caucasus, at the behest of the Russian Athonite monastery of St Panteleimon (Old Athos), of the vast New Athonite monastery of St Simon the Canaanite. My account ended when, soon after 1912, 'the light of New Russian Athos, Old Russian Athos, and of Old Russia itself was snuffed out.' I had no information about the fate of the new monastery from the October Revolution to the present day and the editor appended the following appeal at the foot of the opening page: 'We understand that renewal is now taking place at Novy Afon. If any reader knows about this and would care to write about it, it would be interesting to have a follow-up article next year.' Hardly surprisingly, nobody was able to oblige, for especially recently the Abkhazian Caucasus has been a hotspot of conflict.

Luckily, however, I met Abbot Pyotr when I visited Moscow in October 2005. A one-time member of the St Panteleimon brotherhood, he was appointed acting abbot of the New Athonite monastery when it reopened in 1995 for the first time since 1924. He now lives in the Vysokopertorovsky monastery in Moscow, where he is writing, teaching, and publishing. One of his major publications is the ecclesiastical journal K Svetu. Its 16th number, which came out in 1997, is entirely de-

2 Ibid., p.38.
3 At the beginning of 1991 he joined the brotherhood of St Panteleimon along with nine other monks from Russia. At the end of the same year he was sent with the blessing of the St Panteleimon Council of Elders to Moscow as the Athonite representative at the Moscow Patriarchate. His job was to arrange for the opening of the Moscow Athonite Dependency (Moscovskoe Afonskoe Podvor'ye), and he became its prior in 1992. In 1993 he was sent as the St Panteleimon representative to Abkhazia to report back on the situation there, and when the New Athos monastery opened in 1995 he became its acting abbot. He was unable to stay there more than two years because war broke out again and life in Abkhazia became dangerous.
4 Since 1999 he has been head of book publishing in the Moscow Patriarchate publishing department; since 2002 he has been in charge of the publishing sector in the Department of Catechism and Religious Education of the Russian Orthodox Church, and Pro-Rector of the St John the Theologian Russian Orthodox University, in which he is also Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy.
voted to the New Athos. It had a print run, relatively small for Russia, of 5,000 copies, which were rapidly distributed and sold. I was fortunate enough to be given one of just two copies in Fr Pyotr's possession, so I am now in the position to complete my unfinished story.

The New Athonite monastery of St Simon the Canaanite was founded in 1875 in the Abkhazian foothills overlooking the Black Sea coast near Pitsunda, on the banks of the river Psyrtskha. Its first abbot was Priest-Monk Arseny Minin, the well-known author of numerous St Panteleimon publications for pilgrims and a tireless alms-gatherer on behalf of Russian Athos. He was sent to the Caucasus by the St Panteleimon spiritual father (Dukhovnik), Priest-Schema-Monk Ieronim, and by Archimandrite Makary, its first Russian abbot. Frs Ieronim and Makary conceived the idea of founding the new monastery in 1874 when relations between the Greeks and the Russians in St Panteleimon were very acrimonious. The former were threatening to expel the Russians from Mount Athos. Fr Ieronim, who bore the brunt of the dispute, at one time expressed the wish to die in the Caucasian monastery or have his bones transported there.5

The monastery of St Simon was also intended as a refuge for the St Panteleimon brotherhood in case war broke out between Russia and Turkey and life on the Holy Mountain became perilous. This turned out to be an astute precaution, for not only were the Russians subjected to pressure from both the Greeks and Turks on Athos, but war did break out, in 1877. Hostilities were short-lived and nobody had to be evacuated from St Panteleimon. However, the Turks invaded the Caucasus from the Black Sea and joined Muslim insurgents in Abkhazia. Russia was victorious and peace was signed in 1878. When Fr Arseny's successor, Priest-Monk Ieron, arrived from St Panteleimon in May of that year he found that the monastery had been reduced to smouldering ruins. An unusually gifted, self-taught engineer and architect, he set about rebuilding with characteristic energy and urgency. In just a decade a magnificent complex of some twenty buildings had been completed, including a school for fifty Abkhazian orphans. The new monastery was a marvel of ecology, economy, and agriculture. A railway was built to transport timber from the mountain forests to the various monastery workshops. With no specialist help and at minimum cost, Fr Ieron con-

5 To my knowledge, his bones are in St Panteleimon monastery.
read it is welcome to do so, but we shall not be buying it. Something untoward will happen because of it. 8

What really caused a stir in the monastery of St Simon the Canaanite was the frequent occurrence of various heavenly signs and wonders, especially from the Mother of God, St Panteleimon, and St Simon. One of the most revered treasures of the monastery was the miraculous icon of the Mother of God Izbavel'niitsa (the Deliverer), a gift from Archimandrite Makary. It cured countless infirmities, most notably on 19-20 May 1891 when three invalid pilgrims in a row were made whole while venerating the icon in front of a large congregation during an all-night vigil in the monastery's Pokrov church. When the monastery was closed down, but before it was ransacked by the Bolsheviks, the icon was discovered to be missing. It is hoped that the Izbavel'niitsa will one day somehow return, like Iviron's Portaitissa icon perhaps, which arrived miraculously, born on the waves of the sea, also at a time of strife.

The monastery of St Simon was the most important centre for the propagation of Orthodox Christianity in this southern outpost of the Russian empire. The New Athonite monks had the task of spreading the Gospel like missionaries, especially from 1879, for during the Turkish occupation of 1877-9 a number of Abkhazians converted to Islam. The monastery's school for orphaned Abkhazians played a key role in the mission and many of its graduates became priests. When in 1924 the Chairman of the Soviet of the Abkhazian People's Commissars, Nestor Lakoba, came to shut down the monastery, he paid tribute to the school. In terms uncharacteristically gentle for a representative of the Stalinist authorities, he announced to the assembled brethren:

Dear fathers, I was told in Moscow in no uncertain terms to close your monastery. I strongly protest, for you know that the monastery is as dear to me as it is to you: I was educated at the monastery school, which our beloved father, Abbot Ieron of blessed memory, founded in bygone days for the education of...

Abkhazian boys. I too was educated there entirely at the monastery's expense...

Forgive me fathers, but it is not in my power to delay the decision, even for a short time, for this decision has been taken by Stalin himself.

Alas, the treatment that the monastery received at the hands of other state officials was contrastingly brutal. In May of 1917 a group of Sukhumi soldiers' deputies searched the monastery, but the only incriminating finds were portraits of the imperial family and church calendars. These they tore down, ripped to shreds, and stamped on. From 1918 most of the monastery lands were seized by the local state farm, on which the able-bodied monks were forced to work for eight hours a day. In 1924 only the old and infirm, numbering some 250 monks, stayed on in the monastery. The rest made their way either to Sukhumi and Tbilisi or high into the mountains above the monastery. Abbot Ilarion and Archdeacon Pitirim were arrested and taken under military escort to Sukhumi. The abbot was released and allowed to spend the rest of his days in the Mayak settlement outside the city. Deacon Pitirim was deported to Moscow where he died a martyr's death.

The brethren who fled to the mountains crossed the ridge of the Caucasus and settled in the remote Pskhu valley. It was sparsely populated and inaccessible for four to five months of the year. They lived an untroubled life in this remote spot until 1930. First they built themselves living quarters and a simple wooden church. Next they set about growing their own food. Soon a mill was built, a vineyard was planted, and an apiary was set up. By 1926 the new monastic settlement was the centre of a thriving Christian community with twelve priests serving in eight churches. But the Soviet authorities, suspecting that a cell of dangerous counter-revolutionaries was operating somewhere in the mountains, sent a spy to find out what was going on. A mysterious wandering holy man appeared in the settlement. Nicknamed Shuba on account of his sheepskin coat, he went from house to house and taught children the catechism, reading, and writing. Then he disappeared, only to turn up in the uniform of a people's commissar with heavily armed soldiers. In April 1930 thirty-three monks who were visiting the Pskhu settlement from Mount Athos were shot. A month later some 150 brethren were taken under armed escort down to Sukhumi but shot on the way. One of the victims was the revered Elder Dorofey who many of the brethren had hoped would succeed Abbot Ieron in 1912. Another
group of 113 monks managed to reach Sukhumi, having witnessed the killing of the elderly Fr Matfey, who was too weak to keep up with the convoy and received a bullet in the back of the head. His body was thrown into a ravine. When the party arrived at the Black Sea port, fifty-six were dispatched to Tbilisi and fifty-seven boarded a prison ship bound for Novorossiysk. There were rumours of another group that was loaded into a boat; some of the passengers were shot, others had stone weights attached around their necks so that they drowned when the boat was sunk.

Monk Merkury was one of the fifty-seven bound for Novorossiysk and his account of events is an astonishing part of the journal K Svetu. On arrival, his group were herded into a death camp where executions happened each night between midnight and 4 am. When his turn came he was so frightened that, forgetting his monastic dignity, he failed to take proper leave or ask forgiveness of his brethren and had to be dragged in handcuffs, almost bereft of his senses, to the execution chamber. Against one wall of the brightly lit room was a heap of shot bodies. Fr Merkury was told to face the opposite wall, which was swathed in blood. As his death sentence in the name of the people of the USSR was read out to him, his fear suddenly left him and he became alert. The executioner took out his revolver but Fr Merkury pointed out that the sentence was incorrect: although his name, patronymic, and surname were correctly cited, his date and place of birth were wrong. There was a delay during which embarrassed officers hurriedly read through piles of documents, then the prisoner was returned to his cell. He and a novice were eventually sent to a labour camp. The rest were shot.

Fr Merkury’s abiding memory of the death camp was of Fr Parfeny. Unlike the other prisoners, who had been reduced to the state of zombies through fear, he was calm, slept peacefully, and spent his waking hours in prayer. When his time came he left with the guards, barefoot because he wanted to give away his leather boots. He refused to be handcuffed, saying: ‘don’t put cuffs on me because I shall calmly go where you have to take me. I have long awaited this blessed hour.’ He then made a prostration to the ground in front of his brethren, asking for their prayers and forgiveness. Fr Merkury felt humbled and shamed by his brother’s dignity and presence of mind. He later heard from an execution chamber orderly that Fr Parfeny refused to face the wall.

‘Shoot me in the face’, he said; ‘Jesus Christ did not turn away when he was beaten.’ The executioner lodged a bullet between his eyes.

Fr Merkury’s account is followed in the journal by the portrait photographs of twenty-four Novy Afon monks, each with his prisoner’s number. Twelve of them were shot, and the other twelve were deported for ten years’ hard labour and disappeared without trace. All were officially rehabilitated by the state in 1990. The compiler of the journal adds:

The names of the killed monks have been entered into the monastery’s books for the commemoration of the dead and prayers are said daily for the repose of their souls. The brethren of the monastery of St Simon the Canaanite trust that they now stand in front of our Lord Jesus Christ in the host of the holy martyrs and that they are interceding with their prayers on behalf of our holy house.

A few monks escaped arrest altogether in 1930. They made their way to an even more remote part of the mountains where they hid in impene- trable caves, living like the early catacomb Christians. In subsequent years they were occasionally sighted.

What of the latest history of the monastery of St Simon? On 23 July 1991 Abbot Ieremiya of St Panteleimon wrote to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian S.S.R. requesting that ‘we receive help to get back our illegally confiscated dependency,9 the New Athonite monastery of St Simon the Canaanite’. During the war between Georgia and Abkhazia, until 1994, the New Athonite monastery was used as a military hospital, but when hostilities ceased the government of the Republic of Abkhazia decided to restore it and return all its confiscated property. On 7 April 1994 (Old Style 25 March) the liturgy of the Annunciation was celebrated in the church of St Simon the Canaanite. This was the first service in any of the monastery churches since closure in Stalinist times. On 23 May 1995, on the festival of St Simon, the monastery’s 120th jubilee was celebrated. A festive meal was served in the refectory for the clergy, guests, and members of the Abkhazian government. Owing to the recent war, the Abkhazians were gripped with patriotic and religious fervour, and the restoration of the monastery was an event of national importance. The feast of St Simon

9 The Russian word for dependency here is filial. This is not the same as a podvorye or metochion, because the New Athos monastery is a monastery in its own right rather than a dependent house.
War has recently again broken out between the Georgians and Abkhazians, but despite Abbot Pyotr's departure the monastery has remained open. Visitors continue to arrive and services are celebrated in its churches. There are now seven monks, in the main Abkhazians, and the new abbot, Priest-Monk Andrey, is also Abkhazian. The school has become a seminary; its rector is the Abkhazian Priest-Monk Dorofey. Since Abkhazia has been annexed by Georgia, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church is neither autocephalous nor under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarch. Owing perhaps to this crisis in ecclesiastical identity and affiliation, the brethren are prey to nationalist feelings. They are attempting to break with tradition by cutting ties with the Old Athos. The monastery is no longer called the New Athonite monastery of St Simon the Canaanite, a title conferred on it by imperial decree in 1879. It is now simply known as the monastery of the Apostle Simon the Canaanite. There would be no place there today for the remains of Elder Ieronim.

NICHOLAS FENNELL
Winchester

A BIRTHDAY BLESSING

Having spent my seventieth birthday at the Russian holy monastery of St Panteleimon, I had vowed to return on my eightieth. After making the necessary arrangements, I travelled in the company of an old friend, Dimitri Misaltis, Postmaster of Kassandria. We travelled to Ouranoupolis where we met another old friend, Fr Vitaly, who had journeyed from Cheboksary on the banks of the Volga. The three of us embarked, landing in Daphne where we were met by Nikolai, a burly Russian who drove us to the Russian skete of Aghios Modestos, near the holy monastery of Simonos Petras. We were given very comfortable quarters and, throughout our three-day visit, enjoyed the best food I have ever tasted on Athos. The skete of Aghios Modestos is of recent construction with massive timber beams and stone in the traditional style. The buildings are superb and the workmanship of the highest quality. In the evening we attended the religious service and confession.

On Sunday 29 May, after attending morning service and taking communion, we set off with driver Nikolai and made our first call at the Russian skete of Xylourgou. The skete is situated in the wooded hills above Vatopedi. From there one can see the former Russian skete of Profitis Ilias and, in the distance, the monastery of Pantokrator. We were greeted by Fr Nicholas and attended to by Martignan, the cook. The skete unfortunately suffered a severe fire some five years ago which destroyed half the buildings including the bell tower. Five monks live there now. They cultivate a large vegetable garden and mostly fend for themselves with some assistance from the main Russian monastery of St Panteleimon. After paying respect to icons in the two churches we were taken over by Fr Martignan who produced a substantial snack of bread, cucumbers, cheese, wine, and tea. On our way out we spotted a pair of young boar crossing the path as we approached.

We travelled over the mountain range to the old Russian monastery and the skete of Aghios Dimitri where Fr Iona greeted us and took us to visit the lake nearby. We went on to the great holy monastery of St Panteleimon where we were greeted by Fr Nikitas, also from Cheboksary. We were taken to the main church where we paid respect to the holy icons and where I accomplished the vow I had taken ten years previously.

We then set off in the late afternoon to visit Fr Efthymios who lives alone at the age of eighty-three in a small house, part of the skete complex of the Xenophonoton monastery. Fr Efthymios had worked many years as cook at St Panteleimon. Born and brought up on the island of Ammouliani off
Ouranoupolis, he has spent all his life on Athos. Awakened from his siesta, Fr Efthymios appeared in the doorway, decorated with a huge centipede crawling up his rason. When this was pointed out to him, he went into a wild dance which caused the centipede to fall to the ground from where, with some admonitions, Efthymios swept him off the terrace and back into the garden.

After this unexpected theatrical adventure Efthymios recovered his senses, took us to visit his church, and produced home-made raki of explosive strength followed by home-made wine and coffee. He talked of his many years in St Panteleimon and of the difficult days there during and after the last war. He would not let us leave, but we eventually managed to tear ourselves away to regain our comfortable quarters at Aghios Modestos.

On Monday 30 May we set off for Karyes and on to the holy monastery of Iviron. There we paid respect to the miraculous icon of Panaghia Portaitissa, a sublime moment on my eightieth birthday. We were greeted by the Archontaris and offered the traditional glass of raki followed by a snack of bread, cheese, and cucumber. The courtyard at Iviron was a blaze of colour with majestic magnolia in full bloom and the whole area perfumed by a huge tilia (lime).

We set off to visit a lake some 850 metres of altitude above the Simonos Petra monastery. Not far from there in beautiful forest lies another skete of St Dimitri. It was founded by an archimandrite refugee from Smyrna in 1923. It is inhabited by a young Greek monk who cultivates a huge garden and orchard and is largely self-sufficient.

We left St Dimitri to arrive at the holy monastery of Simonos Petras in time to attend Esperinos and to be shown the holy relics which include a hand from Mary Magdalen, a piece of the original Cross, and a relic of St Panteleimon. After trapeza we returned to our quarters at Aghios Modestos and on the way we were escorted by a flight of red-legged partridges.

On Tuesday 31 May we left by boat from Daphne, but before ending our pilgrimage visited the Russian skete at Chromitsa where Fr Paisios entertained us and where we paid our respects to the beautiful icons there.

Thus ended yet another delightful visit. Rendez-vous in ten years' time.

STEPHEN GRADY
Kassandra

BURIAL ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

God gleams in the dark black only
mysteries the shade of pain.
Smell the man they're burying in the cliff!
yellow wellies, sweet rot,
umber sackcloth, no rat
could resist.

do
po
po
po

I spit like a Greek
down among the dolphins where
quay, arsenal, rock wall harbour
dark cells, no feel
for space there, all unknown
where ends eternity.

God gleams in the dark black only.
His high domed eye surveys
yellow wellies, black gown
rotten hermit,
God's clown.

DOUGLAS PORTEOUS
Victoria, BC, Canada
SYNDESMOS AND MOUNT ATHOS
The Twelfth Spiritual Ecology Camp
Constamonitou Monastery: 25 July–5 August 2006

The abbot and monks of the holy monastery of Constamonitou kindly
hosted this year’s SYNDENOMOS Spiritual Ecology Camp on the Holy
Mountain. SYNDENOMOS, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth,
was founded in 1953; it is the sole international Orthodox youth asso­
ciation and the largest Christian youth federation in the world.1 At the
1991 Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection held in
Crete it was recommended that SYNDENOMOS serve as a co-ordinating
body for the development of youth projects around the world. The an­
nual Spiritual Ecology Camp on the Holy Mountain is one of several
such programmes that seek to provide an Orthodox awareness of envi­
enmental issues to the participating youth who offer their service
(diakonima) to the host community.

On the Holy Mountain the mem­
bers of the group are ecology and religious pilgrims who experience
and, for a short time, become a part of the ascetic and devotional life of
the monks. They offer an ecological contribution to the ‘Garden of the
Most Holy Mother of God, the Panagia’, and through worship, work,
and fellowship receive spiritual reward. Over the past eleven summers
hard and positive work by SYNDENOMOS teams has been done at the
following monasteries: 1994 Vatopedi; 1995 Xeropotamou; 1996 Iviron;
1997 Pantokrator; 1998 Philotheou I; 1999 Koutloumousiou; 2000 St
Andrew’s Skete; 2001 Hilendar; 2002 Xenophontos; 2003 Dionysiou;
2004 Philotheou II.2 The eighteen young men attending the camp this
year once again represented a varied selection of Orthodox ethnic back­
grounds – Canadian, Ugandan, Egyptian, Polish, Romanian, Russian,
Serbian, Ukrainian, British, and American. Team leader was Dimitri
Conomos.

On the morning of 25 July everyone gathered at Ouranoupolis where
diamonitiria were collected and the ferry, Axion Estin, was boarded. In

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1 Information on SYNDENOMOS can be found on its website: www.syndemos.org
2 For notices on the previous eleven camps, refer to the relevant pages in the Annual
Stephen the first martyr) on the ruins of its predecessor, and restored other buildings.

In 1979 the first members of the present coenobium – a mere handful – migrated from Philotheou monastery. Monk Agathon was made abbot. Today there are over thirty fathers and four novices. Constamonitou occupies the twentieth place in the hierarchy of the Athonite monasteries.

The monastery has five chapels within its precincts and four outside. Among its treasures are a miraculous icon of St Stephen, two wonderworking icons of the Virgin (the Hodegetria and the Antiponetria), medieval vestments and liturgical vessels, 110 manuscripts, and around 5000 printed books. Its elegant buildings, standing in one of the most picturesque spots on the Holy Mountain, are surrounded by mountains and hidden by rich vegetation.

Upon arriving at the guest house, we were greeted by the archoniaris, Fr Barnabas, with the first of many loukoumia, grainy coffees, tsipoura, and glasses of refreshing water. We were then shown our rooms and the facilities (about which see below), and given a meal before taking time to familiarize ourselves with the surroundings and to rest.

Unlike most Athonite houses, which have long ago updated their lodgings, bathrooms, and refectory kitchens, Constamonitou has firmly eschewed modernity and refuses to apply for the available EU grants that would make modernity a reality. Should anyone wish to experience Athonite pilgrim conditions of the 1950s and 60s, this is the place to visit: no electricity, no mirrors, no hot water, no bathing facilities (washing was carried out in the lavatory cubicles using makeshift ‘showers’ of cut lengths of elastic hose), and no central heating in the winter. Also exceptional was the fact that Constamonitou has no kiosk or shop for souvenirs or gifts; it does not sell books, CDs, icons, printed brochures, postcards, produce, or coffee-table illustrated albums. Nor does it have a museum or library for public viewing.

For the night services our path to the katholikon was lit by kerosene lamps and candles (some battery torches were occasionally made available) and in the bedrooms there were regular dusk-to-dawn raids by barbarian hordes of mosquitoes that entered our rooms through welcoming apertures in the window screens. But no one complained about this austerity; everything was accepted by the SYNDENOS team with enormous gratitude and respect. It could not have been any other way: we received abundant hospitality and courtesy from the fathers; our every need (whether expressed or not) was catered to.

On the first evening, following Vespers, the SYNDENOS group enjoyed a simple but hearty meal in the refectory, after which we venerated the holy relics, including a fragment of the True Cross, the bones of St Stephen the first martyr, St John Chrysostom, St Artemios, St Constantine, and St Panteleimon.

At 4.30 am we rose for the liturgical sequence of midnight office, matins, hours, and the Divine Liturgy which took us to around 8.00 am when a meal was served in the refectory. The daily services at Constamonitou, while decidedly unfussy, somewhat casual (or rustic), and rather unmelodious, moved along at a brisk pace. The time sped by unnoticed. After the meal there was a three-hour rest period during which some of the party took off with their cameras to the nearby woods and hills or down to the sea. Constamonitou is surrounded by a rich, dense chestnut forest that rises sharply to levels that afford magnificent views of Athos’s southern coastline.

The forest was one of two areas where the SYNDENOS work force was dispatched for the following days’ labours. The other was the garden. Diakonimata began at 11.30 am and finished shortly before vespers, some five hours later. The larger team that worked in the forest, led by Fr Stephanos (uncle of a member of the Friends, currently completing his doctorate at Oxford, Demetrios Skrekas), cut and transported logs for the monastery’s winter fuel and for the ovens in the kitchen. This was arduous work, day after day under the midday sun, but was well rewarded with delicious treats during break time: watermelon, cheese, sweets, fresh bread, enormous tomatoes, succulent peaches, etc. Fr Stephanos, several decades older than his young assistants, astonished everyone by his indefatigable vigour, strength, and speed. The others simply could not keep up with him. One afternoon he surprised us with the announcement that Greek pilgrims to the monastery usually bring gifts of coffee, sugar, black socks, and handkerchiefs. At the moment there was an overabundance of socks and handkerchiefs: could we do the monastery a favour by relieving them of the surplus? Thereupon Fr Stephanos produced a box with around

3 A blessing was given to those who needed to recharge their mobile telephones or laptops to use the electric plug in the kitchen. This provided power during the day when the monastery’s generator was in operation.
fifty pairs of black socks and as many handkerchiefs: they were all snapped up.

In the gardens Fr David, an English speaker, was in charge of a smaller party that gathered tomatoes, weeded, and trimmed the vines. He was an excellent raconteur who in a lively and humorous fashion narrated stories about the monks. He also provided fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as cheese and ice-cold water, for the workers. Upon returning to their rooms at the end of the day, everyone collapsed in a heap and struggled to get to vespers on time.

It was not long before we noticed the high degree of importance that is laid at this monastery on saying the Jesus Prayer and using the prayer rope when doing so. Novices would go about their everyday tasks saying the words of the prayer aloud, and in his evening talks to us (which took place in the peaceful cemetery garden) Fr Haralambos (the monastery's secretary) insisted that everyone get into the habit of using the prayer as often as possible. Fr Haralambos also answered questions from the group on the monastic life and about coping as a Christian in a secular and increasingly violent world.

Sundays and feast days were given over to exploring and visiting other areas of the peninsula. The company split up into groups of three to five and wandered over to other monastic settlements both near and far: Vatopedi, Philotheou, Zographou, Simonopetra, Lakkou, St Andrew's, Karakalou, Iviron, etc.

The camp officially ended on 5 August but many decided to stay on for a few more days before returning to their distant homes. The SYNDHSMOS contingent was warmly thanked for the work undertaken and especially for the lively spirit that it had brought to the monastery, which was felt by the fathers. In turn, the participants expressed their gratitude to the fathers for their openness, generosity, and love.

DIMITRI CONOMOS
Oxford

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SYNDHSMOS is extremely grateful to the Friends of Mount Athos for a grant in support of this year's Spiritual Ecology Camp.

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BOOK REVIEWS


This book is an unqualified delight. The author is a photographer by profession; but in fact he is far more than that. He has a degree in Byzantine art and is a professor of the aesthetics of photography at the Stendhal University of Grenoble. He is the author of a number of other books in which his pictures are often accompanied by texts by his wife. But he now supplements his genius with the camera with impressive literary skills of his own and he evinces a deep love of the Holy Mountain that can only result from intimate knowledge of its institutions and their inhabitants. He is also Orthodox.

The photographs, all of them refreshingly in black and white, are stunning. We are bombarded by images in colour nowadays, and often our eye is so taken with the prettiness of the ensemble that the intended focal point of the picture is missed. Not so in black and white which, at its best, is infinitely more successful in focusing the attention of the viewer on the main subject. In this book a few of the photographs, really very few, illustrate the landscape, the architecture, and the holy places of Athos. But the vast majority illustrate the Athonites themselves: monks at prayer, monks on the move, monks at work in the kitchen or garden, monks at a festival or a funeral, monks in church or refectory, monks just being monks, informal conversation pieces, and astonishing portraits. My favourites are the desert fathers, whose ageless, saintly faces remind me of the priest's words in the Divine Liturgy offered on behalf of 'martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and every righteous spirit made perfect in faith'. This photographer is more than an artist; he is surely an ascetic himself.

He is as much an artist with words as with pictures. As Père Placide writes at the end of his Préface,

Les grands monastères et les ermitages donnent aujourd'hui le spectacle d'une vie intense, les communautés étonnent par leur jeunesse. Les textes et les illustrations si évocatrices du présent ouvrage permettront au lecteur d'entrevoir quelque chose de ce renouveau spirituel qui féconde aujourd'hui l'Eglise orthodoxe.

As with the photographs, the most evocative of the texts, to my mind, are those that concentrate on the desert fathers and ascetics. The heart of the
book comprises three long sections entitled 'Grandes figures', 'Portraits de moines par un père de Simonos Petra', and 'Histores athonites'.

The 'Grandes figures' are St Silouan (1866–1938), Fr Sophrony (1896–1993), Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1898–1959), Fr Ephrem of Katounakia (1912–1988), Fr Porphyrios (1906–1991), Fr Paisios (1924–1994), and Elder Aimilianos (1934–). In most cases the author cannot have known the subject, but the life of each elder is described and illuminated by the evidence of other monks. Extended spiritual biographies of many of these elders have been published in recent years and they are well worth reading. But da Costa's brief lives are the most readable and most arresting of any summaries that have come my way. A few textbites will perhaps convey something of the flavour. Fr Charalambos on Elder Joseph the Hesychast: 'Les événements miraculeux, les hauts faits ascétiques que l'on raconte sont des choses admirables et extraordinaires pour les gens du monde. Mais pour nous qui vivons au mont Athos, elles ont un goût...'

On Fr Ephrem of Katounakia, 'lorsque père Ephrem célébrait, les anges descendaient du ciel pour célébrer avec lui.' On Fr Porphyrios, 'J'ai parlé avec les pierres: elles m'ont raconté tous les secrets de Kapsokalyvia.' Remarkable stories are told of Fr Paisios, but the most graphic description of all is reserved for Elder Aimilianos. Here da Costa wisely relies on the testimony of Elder Elisaisios, Aimilianos's successor as abbot of Simonopetra. The result, in just a few pages, is the most fascinating tribute to the charismatic architect of Simonopetra's renewal that I have ever read.

da Costa's allegiance is of course to Simonopetra and in the next chapter, 'Portraits de moines par un père de Simonos Petra', we read about the lives of some of the less grand figures, humble monks renowned for nothing in particular and with no sense of ambition or mission, who simply bear witness to the glory of God and who collectively make up the vast majority of the population of the Holy Mountain. There are wonderful stories about Fr Gelasios, for example, who was fond of saying, 'We are all pilgrims on Mount Athos, because no one is ever born here.' The photograph of this frail old man striking the talanto to summon his brothers so that he could bid them farewell minutes before his death is one of the most poignant in the book. This chapter concludes with these words:

Voilà le genre d'hommes spirituels qui vivaient sur l'Athos, même si d'une manière générale, à cette époque, les grands monastères étaient en déclin. On dit que sur la Sainte Montaigne, chacun trouve ce que son cœur cherche. Et ceux qui cherchent des hommes spirituels trouvent des hommes spirituels.

The chapter entitled 'Histores athonites' concentrates more on miraculous stories and spiritual happenings than on individuals, and the monks who feature in them are for the most part anonymous. An exception is Fr Jacobos of Pantokrator who died in 1973. When asked what was the secret of his spiritual life after forty-three years in the same monastery, he replied simply 'Humility and obedience'. The unnamed monk of Pantokrator goes on, 'Each monk who remains faithful to the monastic life is a miracle. For to come here, to lay aside the pleasures of the world, to give up human vanities, is truly a miracle... Here we live another miracle, that of confession. Their faces are transformed, they are radiant, joyful, liberated.'

The book is prefaced by brief sections on the history of the Mountain, the garden of the Mother of God, and the contemporary renewal, and rounded off by thumbnail sketches of each of the twenty monasteries. These are somewhat perfunctory but provide the background that is necessary for the reader who is being introduced to Athos for the first time. Nor are they without error: the Persian fleet was wrecked off Athos in 492 BC (not 419 BC); the Holy Community is made up of elected representatives from each of the twenty monasteries (not abbots); the military coup that brought the Colonels to power occurred in 1967 (not 1969); and Iviron ceased to be idiorrhythmic in 1990 (not 1981). But these are blemishes that can easily be corrected in a reprint, of which one hopes there will be many. I commend this book without reservation to all friends (and Friends) of Mount Athos.

GRAHAM SPEAKE
Oxford


What makes Spyros Papaloukas (1892–1957) so interesting as a Greek painter is that he straddles the art of Western Europe (he studied in Paris from 1916 to 1921) and the traditional art of the Orthodox Church. Unlike his ultra-conservative friend Photis Kontoglou he did not react against the influences...
Years after his sojourn on Athos, Papaloukas was to apply this belief in shared Skete.

Judging by the written accounts, the originals are more translucent and radiate the Fauves and Cezanne to help express this essentially spiritual concern. He was particularly influenced.

Some of the more recent movements—especially perhaps the Nabis by whom he was exposed to in western art, but saw a certain parallelism with icons in the spirituality of the Holy Mountain—but especially from the quality of the contributions. The volume brings together a number of papers from the conference of the same name held by the Friends of Mount Athos in association with the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies at Madingley Hall, near Cambridge, in 2003. These are supplemented by two closely related papers given to AGMs of the Friends in 2001 and 2002. Taken as a whole, the book has the great value of reflecting the sheer variety of Athonite spirituality, albeit with understandable emphasis on the specifically Hesychast tradition. The reader will be struck by the way in which Athonite spirituality is consistently set within its broader theological, intellectual, and historical contexts. It is also in large part a scholarly work, with many of the essays being accompanied by substantial academic apparatus and representing major contributions to the field. Even at its most scholarly, however, it is never dry—thinking and feeling, head and heart, being kept united in the best tradition of Orthodox theology. Conversely, its less obviously academic contributions are always chock full of food for serious thought and material for emulation. The balance is well held.

The opening paper, by Metropolitan Nikolaos (Hatzinikolaou), paints a vivid and accessible picture of the distinctive features of Athonite life enlivened by many memorable anecdotes from his own experience. Fr Andrew Louth's paper that follows is somewhat more explicitly theological in character. Beginning with the Athonite connections of St Gregory Palamas—an area shrouded in historical obscurity—Professor Louth proceeds via the intriguing figure of Theoleptos of Philadelphia to a wide-ranging consideration of the theological dynamics of the Hesychast controversy. He is particularly illuminating (no pun intended) on the East-West dimension, showing, for example, how the use made by certain Hesychast writers of Aristotle or the unipersonal Trinitarian models of St Augustine rules out any black-and-white perception of the controversy in terms of East versus West. He also makes some very penetrating observations as to the possible roots of the Palamite distinction between the essence and energy (or operation) of God in Dionysius the Areopagite's conception of distinctions that unite—
in other words as a way of simultaneously upholding both God’s utter transcendent and the reality of the experience of God himself vouchsafed to the saints. For all its theological complexity, however, Fr Andrew’s paper remains oriented upon the fundamental dictum of St Gregory Palamas (which it cites), namely that ‘It is not safe for those who do not know how to speak to God to speak about God.’ The experience of God in prayer must lie at the heart of any theology worthy of the name.

We are next treated to a masterly treatment of St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and the Philokalia. In this paper Bishop Kallistos (Ware) presents a rounded and insightful survey of the life and work of St Nikodemos, setting him skilfully within his historical and theological context (including some intriguing remarks concerning Nikodemos’s ‘recycling’ of a number of Catholic spiritual texts for an Orthodox audience). Bishop Kallistos probes deeply into the origins and nature of the Philokalia, demonstrating with inimitable precision and clarity its immense significance as a marker and (eventually) maker of a profound renaissance of Orthodox spirituality. In this sense the Philokalia can be seen as a kind of Orthodox response to the secular ‘Enlightenment’ and, sub specie aetemitatis, of far greater import than the French Revolution with which it was almost contemporaneous.

There follow two pieces by members of the monastery of St John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights, Essex – itself a sign of the ‘outreach’ of the Holy Mountain into the western world. Sister Magdalen furnishes an account of the life and teaching of St Silouan the Athonite that is palpably the fruit of long acquaintance with the saint. Fr Nicholas Sakharov goes on to explore the legacy of St Silouan in the thought of Fr Sophrony, the founder of the said monastery. Most interesting, perhaps, are the discussions of Fr Sophrony’s understanding of personhood and community, and of the implications of St Silouan’s injunction to ‘Keep thy mind in hell and despair not.’ Fr Nicholas also makes some very fertile suggestions as to the place of the theology of experience within the modern academy and demonstrates the close (but not uncritical) connections between Fr Sophrony and figures such as Nikolai Berdyaev and Fr Sergei Bulgakov.

The book closes with three treatments centred on two of the most influential elders of twentieth-century Athos: Elder Joseph the Hesychast and Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra. Archimandrite Ephraim of Vatopedi takes Elder Joseph as a ‘universal image of holiness’, one whose prayer rose from humility and obscurity to become one of the driving forces behind the recent revival of Athonite monasticism. Archimandrite Eliaisaio fleshes out this story of revival with an account of the spiritual tradition of Simonopetra focused on the teaching of Elder Aimilianos. Elder Aimilianos’s life and teaching are further explored by Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin in the last paper of this volume, in which the author roots his own encounter with this grace-filled elder not only in the spiritual tradition of the Christian East (with Dionysius the Areopagite again looming large) but also in Old Testament and later Jewish conceptions of the self-revelation or ‘place’ of God in the world.

Of course one might bemoan the lack of any substantial treatment of figures such as Elders Gabriel, Paissios, or Porphyrios; but a book like this can clearly never be entirely comprehensive. One might also draw attention to the lack of any sustained critical voice: Athos has its detractors and Friends must surely be prepared not only to praise but also to point out frankly problems and deficiencies where appropriate. Again, in homage to the traditional craftsmanship still surviving on Athos, can one not hope that a book on such a subject would be produced in a more beautiful physical form, for example with stitching rather than simply glue holding the pages together and a more substantial cover (mine is already furled on first reading, but perhaps my reading has been too avid)? That said, the book is very well edited and laid out, with very few typographical errors. Minor gripes aside, this is a volume that offers a remarkable series of multi-layered perspectives on to the rich alter orbis that is Athonite spirituality. Indeed it is in itself a kind of bridge between Athos and the wider world – and one could hardly hope for more than that.

MARCUS PLESTED
Cambridge