

Friends of Mount Athos

Annual Report

2018

FRIENDS OF MOUNT ATHOS

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THE SOCIETY'S YEAR: 2018

My dear Friends,

We live in a troubled world, the details of which need no rehearsal here, and as such our need of the Holy Mountain and its prayer is greater than ever. Politics impacts on religion in unexpected ways and even within the ancient monolith of the Orthodox Church apparently irreconcilable divisions occur. One of the greatest strengths of the Holy Mountain has always been its pan-Orthodoxy. Athos transcends all such divisions: it is not just international but supranational; it rides over national boundaries and nationalist movements; and so it has done from its very beginning. St Athanasios the Athonite, founder of the Great Lavra, the first great cenobitic monastery which still ranks first in the hierarchy, was determined that the Mountain should welcome monks from all parts of the known world. During his time as abbot of the Lavra (c.963–1001) monasteries were founded on Athos for monks from as far away as Georgia in the east and Amalfi in the west. ‘Even if monasteries were established beyond Cadiz’, he wrote, ‘and some monks from those places visited here and then chose to be enlisted among our brothers, we would not call them foreigners. For I am reluctant to designate a monastery as foreign, since that word suggests to me a separation from God.’

Russians, or rather monks from Kievan Rus’ whom we should now properly call Ukrainians, have had a presence on the Mountain for more than a thousand years, hence our decision to celebrate that millennium at our last Madingley conference in March 2017. The proceedings of that conference, entitled *Mount Athos and Russia: 1016–2016* and edited by Nicholas Fennell and myself, have recently been published and are available (at a favourable price) from the Treasurer (admin@thejennings.org.uk). Dr Fennell concludes his Introduction to the volume on an optimistic note, remarking that, despite events in the outside world that may conspire to divert them, ‘Orthodox ascetics and wonder-workers are no respecters of ethnic boundaries... Thanks to the advances in communication and the ease of international travel, the Russians have been directing their attention towards Greece. They have been avidly reading about the Greek saints. In the high season, some 100 Russian pilgrims visit the Holy Mountain every day... Clearly, pan-Orthodoxy and peaceful coexistence on Mount Athos are not in danger.’ Amen to that.

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The society's year began as usual with a Vasilopitta party at the Oxford & Cambridge Club in Pall Mall and once again we were honoured to have Archbishop Gregorios with us to bless the pitta and wish us all a happy new year. Numbers attending increased slightly this year which has encouraged us to retain the event in its current format. We do not aim to make a profit on the evening, but nor can we justify making a loss on an event which is a purely social occasion, albeit a particularly enjoyable and heart-warming one. Please try to join us in future years if you can.

Events organized in relation to the Axion Estin Cell Appeal of course do aim to be profitable and it is pleasing to note that three such events took place in the course of the year. In February a lunch was held at al-Shami's Lebanese restaurant in Oxford which has a private room that lends itself well to such occasions with its Oriental decor and flexible seating plan. About twenty-five members and guests attended and listened to a brief presentation by Chris Solomon who reminisced about his recent visit to the cell. In September another such event took place at the same venue, this time attracting some thirty-five attendees, and on this occasion I gave an illustrated presentation on the life of the cell and the current state of its buildings. Less than two weeks later, in early October, another lunch was held in aid of the appeal, this time at the Cardiff and County Club in Cardiff. We are grateful to David Leron and Alun Davies on whose initiative the event was staged, to the former for the hospitality of his club, and to Sir Michael Llewellyn Smith who gave an entertaining after-lunch talk about Paddy Leigh Fermor. A brief description of the event by Fr Nicholas Price is printed below (p. 00). We warmly encourage other members of the Friends to follow the example of our Welsh colleagues and organize fundraising events in their area in consultation with the Executive Committee. It is also worth noting that this year's Christmas card, which featured a particularly atmospheric photograph of the Axion Estin cell, was sold in aid of the appeal and proved popular with our members.

In May a team of thirty-two volunteers was dispatched to the Holy Mountain for two weeks to check, clear, and signpost footpaths. I have written such a sentence in every one of the last eighteen Annual Reports, since John Arnell led the very first team to Athos in May 2001. Since then John has handed over leadership of the project

to Andrew Buchanan, the author of this year's report, printed below (p. 00-0). Now he too is handing over the reins, secure in the knowledge that the effort will continue, and this is a good moment to take stock and reflect on the remarkable achievements of this project. Since that first team went out, all the major routes on the Mountain have been cleared, and not only cleared but regularly maintained. Groups of path-clearers have been accommodated at practically every monastery and a good many sketes. Detailed descriptions of all the paths have been written, are kept up to date, and appear on the website in both English and Greek. A brand new map, infinitely more accurate than any of its predecessors, has been produced by members of the project using GPS technology. FoMA signposts are now to be seen the length and breadth of the Mountain from Hilandar in the north to Kerasia in the south (and very reassuring they are if you happen to be walking alone in a remote area). And most rewarding and satisfying of all the results, the paths are once again being put to regular use as more and more monks and pilgrims walk them; and the more they are walked, the easier the task of maintaining them becomes, though there will always be a need for the project to continue its work. We are immensely grateful to John and Andrew for their co-ordination of the project over so many years. We are sorry to see them retire, but they have earned a rest and they will be succeeded by younger volunteers who will build on their work and ensure that the project continues. Long may it flourish!

* * * * *

The summer conference took place on Saturday 16 June at St Anne's College, Oxford. The venue and the format of the meeting were unchanged but there was one significant innovation: for the first time, all three of the main speakers were women. This is good for our image with the Charity Commissioners who sometimes appear concerned that we are not doing enough to benefit that half of the public. As it happens, all three were also graduates of the University of Oxford, which is good for Oxford's image too.

The first presentation was given by Professor Dame Averil Cameron, sometime Warden of Keble College, Oxford. Averil has succeeded Anthony Bryer as both President of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies and doyenne of Byzantine studies in this country. She is also a long-standing member of FoMA and gave a memorable paper at our Madingley conference in 2009. Her most recent

publication, *Byzantine Christianity: A Very Brief History* (SPCK, 2017), provided the context for her talk, entitled ‘Writing about Byzantine Christianity’, a version of which is printed below (pp. 00-00).

Our second speaker was Sister Theoktisti from the women’s monastery of St John the Baptist near Larissa in central Greece which was once an Athonite dependency. Already well known to many members of FoMA through having accompanied the pilgrimages to Egypt and Cappadocia and also having spoken at our Madingley conference in 2013, Sister Theoktisti spoke about the life and work of her monastery in Greece and also about the recent successful restoration of its sixteenth-century church and its important programme of frescos. This inspiring talk was built around a splendid sequence of illustrations which sadly cannot be reproduced here and without which the text would only frustrate the reader.

Our last speaker for the day was Frances Jennings who gave us her reminiscences of the recent pilgrimage to northern Serbia. This too was a highly illustrated presentation, which brought back many happy memories for those who had participated in the tour and will have made those who did not wish that they had. We are grateful to all three speakers for producing a series of such fascinating and varied talks and for demonstrating that FoMA does not cater exclusively for men.

A subsidiary item on the programme for the day was to have been a book launch for my most recent publication, *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth: The Spiritual and Cultural Diaspora of Mount Athos* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and Bishop Kallistos was kind enough to say a few words about the book (which he had in fact read in full at an early stage). But since the publishers failed to deliver any copies of the book, this was something of a non-event and I would prefer to refer those interested to the review by Dr Vladeta Jankovic which is printed below (pp. 00-0). This book also is available from the Treasurer at a very decent discount.

After lunch the formal business of the society’s AGM was briskly transacted. In my Chairman’s report I paid tribute to the work of three much-valued members of the Executive Committee who were retiring: John Arnell, Michael Naldrett, and Frances Jennings. I also spoke about the Axion Estin Appeal and encouraged members to support the fundraising events that were being organized in connection with it. The Secretary then presented his report and gave a summary of the events of the past year. There were currently 801 paid-up members, of whom 253 were life members. We had donated a further €10,000 to the Axion Estin cell through our

American branch and the lunch in February had raised a further £3,000. We had also donated £1,300 towards the publication of a book about St Gregory Palamas and €2,000 to Simonopetra monastery to support an English translation of the statutes of Mount Athos. He concluded by thanking all those who had contributed to the running of the society in the past year, especially Dr Maria Harff who had taken over as our administrator in December. After a brief report on the path-clearing pilgrimage delivered by Leslie Currie and Peter Desmond, the Treasurer presented the accounts for the year to 31 December 2017 which had been independently examined by Peter Stevenson. The accounts were adopted by the meeting. Elections then followed in which Metropolitan Kallistos, Dimitri Conomos, Simon Jennings, and Peter Lea were re-elected and Fr Douglas Dales and Dr Nicholas Fennell, who had both been co-opted on to the committee in the course of the year, were now formally elected. There being no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 2.45 pm.

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The annual pilgrimage to the monastery of St John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights took place on Saturday 30 June. This year's overseas pilgrimage, in which thirty-six pilgrims participated, was to the monasteries and churches of western Crete. There is a report on this below by John Jones (pp. 00-0).

The final event of the year was the autumn meeting in London which took place on Thursday 15 November. As usual, there was a service of Orthodox vespers at the Romanian church of St Dunstan in the West in Fleet Street followed by a reception and lecture at the St Bride Foundation. This year's speaker was Dr Vladeta Jankovic, a patron of FoMA and sometime ambassador of Serbia to the UK. His topic was 'The Renewal of Hilandar: Causes and Consequences of Conflagration' in which he brought us up to date with progress on rebuilding that monastery after the disastrous fire of 2004 and reflected on some of the blessings that have come about in its wake. The text of his talk is printed below (pp. 00-0).

* * * * *

I regret to report the deaths of the following members: Lillian Amis, Sherban Cantacuzino, Peter Dixon, Philip Hermes, Irina Lansley, Michael McCall, Jill Storer, Hugh Syngé. May their memory be eternal!

We welcome the following new members who have joined during 2018:

Slavko Andrejevic	Rick Lane
Fred Bahnson	Joshua Lewis
Fr Bruce Batstone	Grigorios Loukas
Ankaer Britbo	Matthew McDaniel
Malcolm Caborn	Rosemary Martin
Robert Carr-Archer	Mother Mary (St Sunniva Hermitage)
Kristina Castren	Michael Mavroudis
Joseph Cigliano	Mihail Mitrea
Francesca Crichton-Earl	Luc Moerman
Jacques Darcy	Fr James Muggleton
Roland Dib	Ezio Gianni Murzi
Fr Paul Elliott	Evangelos Pappas
Christian Elwell	Fr William Paulish
Daniel Eriksen	Svetlana Pavlova
Helmut Fiedler	Georges Pilloy
Martin Findlay	Kyle Rambo
George Fotiades	Alex Rodriguez Suarez
Angiolini Francesco	Yves Roulier
Albert Freeburger	David Sargent
Christos Gianopoulos	Brendan Schettig
Margaret Griggs	Glen Summers
Mary Jane Griggs	John Tassoulas
Naoki Hamada	Charlie Thermos
Maria Harff	Alessandro Tonchia
Ari Helgason	Carroll Travis
Paul Jefferis	Bishop Graham Usher
Nikolaos Koronaios	James Varian
Andrey Kuznetsov	Stefan Wauters
Kerry Kyriacos Kyraicou	Demetrios Xiourouppas

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Americans make up more than one third of the membership of FoMA and for some time they have felt frustrated at not being able to make tax-efficient donations to the Athonite monasteries. This situation has now been rectified with the recognition by the Internal Revenue Service of the Mount Athos Foundation of America (MAFA) as a non-profit tax-exempt organization. We congratulate Bob Allison and his team on achieving this long-awaited goal. A short article about the new foundation, its aims, and achievements is printed below (pp. 00-0).

Congratulations are also due to our President, Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, who in October was awarded an honorary doctorate by the New Georgian University of Poti. His Eminence also received yet another Festschrift, this one published a little prematurely in honour of his eighty-fifth birthday, edited by Elena Ene D-Vasilescu and entitled *A Journey along the Christian Way: Festschrift for the Right Rev. Kallistos Ware* (Scholars' Press, 2018). Contributors to this volume include Archbishop Rowan Williams, Fr Andrew Louth, Sebastian Brock, Elizabeth Theokritoff, and myself.

Speaking of birthdays, our Royal Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, celebrated his seventieth in November. A garden party was held in May in the grounds of Buckingham Palace for his charities and military affiliations to mark the anniversary. FoMA was honoured to be represented at this event by five members of its Executive Committee.

In last year's Annual Report we mentioned the award of a FoMA travel bursary to our member Peter Desmond who is carrying out postgraduate research into the renewal of iconography on Mount Athos. It is a pleasure this year to include an article by him on the progress that he is making with this most exciting project (p. 00-0). One of our members who has contributed to that renewal is the distinguished iconographer Aidan Hart who presented a series of programmes on Radio 4 in December entitled 'The Creation of an Icon' in which he described the processes, both spiritual and physical, that the iconographer must go through in order to produce an icon, in this instance of the Annunciation.

Finally, in October, we were honoured to be invited by the Macedonian Society of Great Britain to participate in 'an evening dedicated to Mount Athos' at the

Hellenic Centre in Marylebone. Three members of the Executive Committee made presentations to a panel discussion: Metropolitan Kallistos spoke about the monastic life and its purpose, Fr Douglas Dales drew on his experiences as an Anglican pilgrim, and I spoke about the pan-Orthodox history of the Mountain. About 150 people attended this event, and we were grateful to the society's president, Mrs Natasha Svetzouri, for the invitation to participate.

* * * * *

Another death that should not pass unnoticed is that of Archimandrite Placide Deseille (1926–2018). Fr Placide, a convert from Roman Catholicism, was tonsured a monk in 1978 by Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra. Returning to his native France, he went on to found Orthodox monasteries there for both men and women which continue to flourish as overseas *metochia* of Simonopetra. Fr Placide gave a talk about them at our 1999 summer conference, of which an abbreviated version appeared in the Annual Report for that year (pp. 20–3), and our very first FoMA pilgrimage visited them in 2002. At the women's monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God at Solan the abbess, Mother Hypanthia, took us to see the elder, who at the time was recovering from an illness. As Photini Riches wrote in the Annual Report for that year (p. 65), '[his] joyous smile and twinkling eyes remain vivid in me six months later.' The story of his journey into Orthodoxy is told at the end of my *History of the Athonite Commonwealth* (pp. 263-9). In words of his that I quoted there, and that resonate with what Nicholas Fennell wrote in the Introduction to *Mount Athos and Russia*, Fr Placide has summarized the situation of his monasteries and the opportunity that it offers: 'Our position as Athonite monks in France has the advantage of placing us outside certain jurisdictional antagonisms. For centuries Athos has had a "pan-Orthodox" vocation: monks from very different nationalities mingle together there and share a common experience of belonging to the "Garden of the Mother of God". We would like our presence in France to be such a unifying factor, a cause of spiritual convergence among Orthodox of differing origins.' He died on 7 January, aged ninety-one. May his memory be eternal!

GRAHAM SPEAKE
Chairman

THE MOUNT ATHOS FOUNDATION OF AMERICA

On 30 April 2018 a long-awaited vision of the American membership of FoMA became a reality. On that date the American Internal Revenue Service (IRS) issued its official approval of our application for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status for our new Mount Athos Foundation of America. The board of directors of the foundation worked hard through the preceding year to realize this goal. We are especially grateful to board member Wade Kolb, a life member of FoMA, and his colleagues at the law firm of Wyche PA, for their persistence and thoughtful guidance in seeing our application through to a successful conclusion.

MAFA's mission is to advance its charitable purposes, as stated in its articles of incorporation, namely to advance an understanding of, and provide benefit to, the monastic community of Mount Athos in a variety of ways:

- providing assistance in the restoration and preservation of historic buildings, monuments, and artefacts;
- fostering knowledge and study that will increase understanding of the monastic communities;
- supporting the operations of the twenty monasteries and their dependencies in times of need.

As a non-profit tax-exempt organization, MAFA provides Americans with an opportunity to make donations to advance these charitable purposes for the benefit of Mount Athos and also to benefit from tax deductions, which will encourage donations and bequests.

MAFA's organization is quite different from FoMA's. It is a charitable, public-benefit corporation consisting of a board of directors responsible for carrying out the mission for which it was created. FoMA, by contrast, is an international charitable society – i.e. a membership organization – which is registered in England and has an international membership of over 800, but works towards the same goals.

The members or 'directors' comprising MAFA's board, initially numbering eight, form several committees whose work is to carry out its mission. Board members are members of FoMA, and we have established the practice of including on

the board one voting member of the FoMA Executive Committee, reciprocated by FoMA's including on its Executive Committee one member from the board of MAFA. MAFA's board members include:

Robert W. Allison, president	Chris Mellen, director
James Peters, vice-president	Wade Kolb, member, registered agent
Roger McHaney, treasurer	Simon Jennings, member
Nicholas Lamb, secretary	<i>(2 positions currently open)</i>

Two original members, Robert Rible, our first treasurer, and Laurie Carver Estes, who played a large role in the early stages of our effort to form the corporation, have retired for health reasons.

Accomplishments since our incorporation, aside from establishment of the corporation, approval of IRS charitable status, and implementation of a website, are already impressive:

- MAFA raised \$18,582, \$10,000 of it the generous contribution of one of our board members to provide start-up funding;
- it issued its first two annual \$1,000 scholarships and announced scholarships for the coming year;
- it voted to support FoMA's Axion Estin Appeal by issuing a grant to FoMA of \$2,000;
- it formed a strategic alliance with the Agioritiki Estia in Thessaloniki which will provide logistical and other support to our scholars. Collaboration between the two organizations will advance MAFA's educational objectives through co-operation in bringing AE exhibitions and events to the United States which may at the same time provide fundraising and awareness opportunities for MAFA.

The Website Development Committee, chaired this year by Nicholas Lamb, worked with our web designer, Dionne Katinas, and developer, Tinatrix, Inc., to produce the beautiful and well-organized website that is now online:

www.mountathosfoundation.org. There you will see represented the several major areas of MAFA's activity – our explanation of our mission, our scholarship and grants programmes, our fundraising efforts and our call to 'get involved', and the beginnings

of our efforts to build a network of partnerships that will help us carry out our mission.

The Grants Administration Committee, chaired by MAFA Vice-President James Peters, also a life member of FoMA, got us off to a great start at very short notice, announcing our first annual scholarships. The committee developed a unique programme which supports our scholars to ensure their acceptance on the Holy Mountain through our alliance with the Agioritiki Estia. We invite you to read about them and their projects on our website.

Mount Athos Liaison Committee chairman Chris Mellen made a trip to Mount Athos, meeting with elders at several monasteries, to introduce MAFA and establish working relationships with those monasteries.

The Development Committee, under the leadership of chair Chris Mellen, and working with website designer Dionne Katinas, developed and produced a promotional MAFA brochure which we are circulating to the FoMA membership, to the Athonite monasteries to be made available to American pilgrims at the point of registration, and to events conducted by the Agioritiki Estia.

ROBERT W. ALLISON

President

Mount Athos Foundation of America

REPORT FROM THE MOUNTAIN: 2018

January 2018

7 January: Fr Placide Deseille from France passed away. He became a monk of the Cistercian monastery of Bellefontaine in 1942 at the age of sixteen. With fellow monks he founded in 1966 a Uniate monastery at Aubazine in Corrèze. In 1977 the monks decided to become Orthodox. They were received into the Orthodox Church in June 1977, and in February 1978 they were tonsured as monks of the monastery of Simonopetra. They were subsequently sent back to France by Archimandrite Aimilianos to establish a monastery there. The fathers Placide and Serafim founded the monastery of St Antony the Great on 14 September 1978 in a deserted house at St Laurent-en-Royans in a green valley of Vercors. Later, the women's monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God was founded, which would later be known as the monastery of Solan.

Fr Placide taught patristic theology at the Institut St-Serge in Paris. He was one of the editors of the series entitled 'Sources Chrétiennes', for which he planned to produce a series of Eastern monastic texts, and he was the author of many books about the history of monasticism and of Orthodox spirituality. May his memory live for ever!

19 January: Elder Arsenios of the monastery of St Panteleimon, the oldest Russian monk on Athos, passed away at the age of ninety. He was born in 1928 in southern Moldova. He was tonsured a monk in 1966 in Odessa and a year later arrived on Mount Athos. In August 1976 he joined the St Panteleimon monastery and for thirty years he was one of the top chanters.

19 January: In all the twenty monasteries, twelve sketes, and in the hundreds of cells and hermitages the feast of the Theophany and the Blessing of the Waters is celebrated. Among the believers who leapt into the icy sea to catch the cross in the harbour of Vatopedi was Steve, an English pilgrim with mobility problems. Amazing faith!

20 January: A meeting was held with the Orthodox communities in Strasbourg where Mr Anastasios Douros, director of the Mount Athos Center, presented the activities of

the Center and Fr Theophilos from Pantokrator monastery spoke on the Spirituality of Mount Athos.

22 January: The Mount Athos Center opened its cultural activities for the year 2018 with Tomasz Moscicki's exhibition of photographs of Mount Athos in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France.

22 January: An event was organized on Mount Athos with contributions from His Eminence, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, on 'The Message of Mount Athos today', from Fr Theophilos on 'The Law of Mount Athos: One Aspect of European Law', and from Mr Douros on 'The Holy Mountain and its Thousand Years of History'.

February 2018

16 February: The exhibition 'Agion Oros' opened at the Chalkos Gallery in Thessaloniki: a painting exhibition as a spiritual exercise. Konstantinos Kerestzis in the exhibition catalogue invited us to get to know the 'powerful, gentle, unique light from Mount Athos', as Fr Philemon describes it. His work is a monumental record of a world so far but so close to us. The exhibition was held in the framework of the voluntary work of 'All Together We Can' and 5 per cent of the proceeds from the event was given to the aid of vulnerable groups.

March 2018

15 March: The Russian geographical magazine *Vokrug Sveta*, in an issue circulated to 7.5 million readers, reports the experiences of the journalist Kiril Sidorov during his brief stay in Xenophontos monastery. There he discreetly followed the monastic life, but also participated in the services, dined with the monks, and helped in their day-to-day work. At the same time, he had the opportunity to discuss intellectual as well as everyday issues that were of interest to him. He categorized his unforgettable experiences into nine valuable lessons, which the journalist describes in corresponding chapters in his tribute. Although written in a simple way, in a travel-guide style, the article displays the author's respect for the monastic life and focuses on the spiritual fervour with which the visitor departs from Mount Athos, ending with these words: 'he took some important lessons of life and gained faith ... in people.'

21 March: The President of Moldova, Mr Igor Dodon, visited Mount Athos. He has a special love for the Holy Garden of the Virgin Mary, which he regularly visits for spiritual support.

23 March: The Greek Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr John Amanatidis, participated in the session on ‘Special Issues of the Athonite Peninsula’, as part of the Eleventh Regional Conference on Production and Reconstruction in Central Macedonia, and addressed the delegates as follows:

‘... For more than a thousand years Mount Athos has been one of the arks of Orthodoxy and its contribution to the modern world and the international cultural community has been enormous. As a monument of global interest, Mount Athos was registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site because: “In Mount Athos the monastic consciousness has maintained unchanged a way of life and a managed environment in which the concept of sustainability finds real meaning.”

‘On Mount Athos there is a unique combination of natural beauty and architectural mastery. Mount Athos, with its broad impact on the Orthodox world, is a spiritual centre that for many centuries has influenced an immense area, not only from the Balkans to Russia, but across the five continents.

‘The organized cohabitation of people from the tenth century onwards created buildings such as the churches and courtyards, the refectories, the cells, the hospitals, the libraries, chapels, defence towers, harbours, sketes, hermitages, etc., which are models of Orthodox monastic foundations.

‘The state recognizes the strategic importance of protecting and promoting its cultural heritage. Thus, in collaboration with the relevant bodies and the Holy Community, the work of the “Athonite Digital Ark”, a project of national importance aiming at the utilization of modern information and communication technologies through the digitization, documentation, and promotion of the Athonite cultural resource, is being realized on Mount Athos. Upon completion of the project, it will contain 2 million digital downloads (200,000 documents, 3,000 manuscripts, 1,500 old books, and 18,000 smaller items, portable icons, and heirlooms) at 70 per cent of its output.’

April 2018

9 April: The famous Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava visited the holy monastery of Xenophontos during Holy Week. He came to Mount Athos for the Easter celebrations because he has undertaken the architectural design and construction of the church of St Nicholas in Manhattan, New York. The decoration (frescos and icons) of the church will be painted by the iconographers of the monastery of Xenophontos.

May 2018

14 May: A communication was issued by the Holy Community of Mount Athos on the passage of the law, 'Measures to Promote the Institutions of Adoption'. As it is stated, it is now obvious that by the recent adoption of laws such as the institutionalization of the 'pact of cohabitation', the 'legal recognition of gender identity' even of minors, and recently the possibility of placing children with 'same-sex couples', the family, defined as God's gift, is embattled. The sacred institution of the family, as we experience it close to Christ and the Church, is not an 'anachronism' or 'conservatism' but progress and hope. Keeping our traditions is the way that all statutes and laws remain inactive and invalid, the communication points out elsewhere.

15 May: A marvellous welcome is given to the Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, Theodoros II, by the members of the Holy Community of Mount Athos under the Elder Christophoros.

June 2018

11 June: A special baptism took place in the Garden of the Holy Mother of God! One of the African kings from Côte d'Ivoire (tribal King Tchiffi Zae Jean Gervais from Chieftains Krou) joined the Orthodox Church with the name David. The king was baptized at the monastery of Koutloumousiou.

King Tchiffi Zie Jean Gervais serves as General Secretary of the Forum of Kings, Princes and Traditional African Leagues, founded in August 2008 in Benghazi, and based in Sirte in Libya. He is also the head of the United Kingdom of Africa, a 'non-political platform for social development that supports the presidency and the national government, institutions and peoples to support national development plans'.

21 June: Elder Epiphanius of Mylopotamos presented the cooking of Mount Athos in Albania. Among other things, he mentioned that in the monasteries of Mount Athos the feeding of the monks is strictly governed. They do not eat meat. The monastery cuisine is of high nutritional value, says the monk Epiphanius and explains: ‘We cook fish and seafood, such as octopus, cuttlefish, squid, shrimps. Also vegetables, legumes ... We would say it is a kind of Mediterranean diet. But the monastery cuisine, the kitchen of Mount Athos, is more than Mediterranean, because it follows the rules of fasting, which require that for many days food should be eaten without oil. And it has this harmony: there is a cycle of nutrition in the annual cycle of feasts.’

27 June: Public works in the harbour of Ouranoupolis in Chalkidiki are planned for next season in order to improve the infrastructure that serves Mount Athos and receives an ever-increasing tourist traffic.

July 2018

4 July: At the monastery of Vatopedi celebrations commemorated the 500th anniversary of the departure of St Maximus of Vatopedi to Russia.

4 July: A copy of the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary Tricherousa from the holy monastery of Hilandar will be sent to the sanctuary of Kaluga cathedral (Russia). In addition to the holy icon, the cross of the Hilandar monastery with the blood of Christ will be sent, as well as a reliquary containing holy relics of the saints. The sacred heirlooms will remain for the people to venerate until Sunday 5 August.

8 July: Former footballer Mihai Nesu, who was paralysed after an accident, visited Mount Athos. He was seriously injured on 10 May 2011 in a training session in Utrecht, Netherlands, and suffered a vertebral fracture. Nesu remained paralysed from the neck down. At first he could only move his eyelids. Then he began to talk and slowly began to move his right hand. With it he can handle his stroller. From February 2012 he has been able also to move his left hand. Mihai Nesu took a life-changing decision three years ago that he had kept hidden until a few days ago: he was baptized Orthodox. ‘In the two and a half years since my accident I decided to be

baptized an Orthodox. I do not know why this happened to me, but it helped me to discover my true self', said the former defender.

Nesu, who was a Pentecostal, confessed to understanding his accident as something positive: 'Maybe before I did some good things, and then the accident, even if at first sight the world sees it as a tragedy, one curse can turn into a blessing.'

August 2018

12 August: The President of Moldova, Mr Igor Dodon, made a three-day pilgrimage to Mount Athos from 12 to 14 August. He visited the Holy Community, the holy monasteries of Vatopedi, Iviron, St Paul, and Hilandar, as well as cells and hermitages in Provata and St Anne's skete. On the morning of 13 August, accompanied by a group of Moldovan pilgrims, he started climbing to the summit of Mount Athos (2,033 metres). He is the first head of state to have attempted this feat.

13 August: In the presence of members of the Holy Community, monks, and officials, in an atmosphere of Byzantine majesty and devotion, the ceremony of the appointment of a new civil governor of the monastic state, Konstantinos Dimtsas, took place in Karyes. The new governor is a journalist and director of the humanitarian organization 'Mission' of the holy archdiocese of Athens.

28 August: Hollywood star Jonathan Jackson, in a symbolic gesture, consecrated to the Virgin Mary the 5th Emmy 2012 award (a golden statuette, like an Oscar) that he had received for his talent in acting. Mr Jackson was in the holy monastery of Vatopedi for the feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. During the festive vigil, in the Synodikon, where the fathers offered the traditional treat, the popular artist revealed the surprise!

September 2018

21 September: Jan Paul ten Bruggencate, a Dutch friend who visited Mount Athos for the first time in August 1967, passed away at the age of eighty-seven. For half a century he has made many pilgrimage visits, in recent years particularly to the holy monastery of Karakalou and the kellion of Maroudas. Many of his photographs, especially those taken during his early visits to Mount Athos, have an important

historical value. Most of them have been given to the Voogd brothers, administrators of the athosweblog.com page.

30 September: The Hall of Cultural Events of the Consulate General of Greece in Manhattan was filled with works of Byzantine hagiography by graduates of the Athonias, the Ecclesiastical Academy of Mount Athos. The holy monastery of St Irene of Chrysovalantou took the initiative, in collaboration with the Athonias Academy and the support of the Consulate General, to bring from Karyes forty-four icons entitled 'Theotokos: the Hope of the World'. The exhibition lasted until 4 October.

October 2018

1 October: His Beatitude Patriarch Irinej of Serbia was received in Karyes. The Patriarch was received by the Holy Community of Mount Athos together with the Civil Governor, Costas Dimtsas, the students of the Athonian Academy, and several pilgrims.

23 October: The abbot of the holy monastery of Dochiariou, Archimandrite Grigorios, passed away at the age of seventy-six. In the last few years, Fr Grigorios had suffered particularly bad health. With unparalleled self-sacrifice and diligence for four decades he restored and repopulated his monastery.

December 2018

23 December: Two young abbots are elected and established in the holy monasteries: Archimandrite Charalambos at Konstamonitou and Archimandrite Amphilochios at Dochiariou. They were enthroned with the participation of a delegation of the Holy Community, representatives of the holy monasteries, and many pilgrims.

WRITING ABOUT BYZANTINE CHRISTIANITY

I was asked recently if I would write a volume for SPCK in a new series to be called Very Brief Histories. These seem to be a current fashion, but this was a new initiative for SPCK. They were to be very short and to consist of two-thirds 'History' and one part 'Legacy'. My subject was 'Byzantine Christianity' – meant for people who were not experts, and no doubt not Orthodox or perhaps even Christian, but who wanted to find out something in an accessible and short format. Rashly, I accepted, and the resulting little book has now been published.¹

How on earth does one approach such a task? I am painfully aware of what is not there, and what I had to omit – and sadly Mount Athos has only the shortest of mentions. Finding space for the section entitled 'Legacy' (the hardest to write) meant that there was even less room for the historical section, which I interpreted as meaning taking a chronological approach.

Yet I think that the need for accessible information about Christianity in Byzantium is greater than ever, at this moment when so many countries are claiming the heritage of Byzantium as their own, and using Orthodoxy as a political as well as a religious badge for national identity.

Meanwhile historical awareness of Byzantium among the general public remains pretty low, and the Western European religious narrative still prevails. It traces a notional direct line from classical antiquity through the western Middle Ages to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment to modernity. This remains for most of us the standard historical and political fare. President Trump's speech in Warsaw in 2017 praised Pope John Paul II and included a 'shared faith' among the bonds between

¹ Averil Cameron, *Byzantine Christianity: A Very Brief History* (London: SPCK, 2017).

America and Europe. I do not think he was referring to Orthodoxy. Byzantium is still omitted. And it now falls more than ever between two massive historical blocks – Western Europe on the one hand and the Islamic world on the other – and belongs to neither. Of course the Friends of Mount Athos know differently. But the rise of Russia, recent developments in Eastern Europe, the events in Ukraine, and the situation of Christians in the Middle East all demand so much more.

There were some simple points I wanted to get across for those not attuned to the way of looking that readers of this Annual Report take for granted. I should also state firmly that, unlike Metropolitan Kallistos's classic on the subject, my book is emphatically not an introduction to Orthodoxy. It is specifically about 'Byzantine' Christianity, and it is a history, not a general introduction, which might have been rather different.

How on earth to compress the history of Byzantine Christianity into so short a compass, when so much explanation is needed for the assumed readership? I could, for example, have tried to convey the sights and sounds of Byzantine churches and monasteries, or the complexities of popular beliefs, and the varieties of monastic life; these are of course both crucial and central, and there are some excellent recent books on the subjects. Or I could have spent more time on the practices of Orthodox worship and how different it is from what most Christians in this country are used to.

The need for such explanation was borne in on me some years ago when I was lecturing on a Swan Hellenic cruise and we made a stop at Tinos. The sight of pilgrims making the steep climb up to the church on their knees, and pushing through the tourists when they reached the entrance, came as a surprise to many of the Swan passengers. They did not know why one kissed the icon on entering the church, or why the church was hung with tokens, especially miniature ships, or why someone

was sleeping outside in the courtyard. When we got back to the ship I put on an extra talk to explain the importance of Tinos, the story of the Panagia and her miraculous icon, revealed in the very first days of the modern Greek state, and the essentials of Orthodox worship; and elementary as it was, some of those who were there thanked me because they simply had not known or understood before.

I am sure many of you will remember Swan Hellenic very well. You may be amused to know that I once did the commentary as the ship sailed round Mount Athos (something that one may well deplore, though at least *Minerva* was quite a small boat, and Swan Hellenic very respectful) – ironic, because of course I had not been there and had to do the commentary from maps and charts. Needless to say, I felt relieved when the captain kindly said that I knew more than he did himself.

The first point I wanted to make in my book is that Byzantine Christianity is not something exotic. It is part of the very history of Christianity: Byzantine Christianity developed where Christianity first spread, and in the language of the New Testament and the early Christians. Byzantium is often treated as something weird and different, so general readers must be made aware that the history of Christianity in Byzantium starts with and is part of the history of early Christianity itself. For all its claims to be Roman, Constantinople, the city that Constantine founded, was in the Greek-speaking eastern part of the Roman empire, where the majority of Christians then were, and the language of education and culture was always Greek. Even in Rome itself St Paul's Letter to the Romans tells us that the first Christians belonged to Greek-speaking communities. Later, the first Ecumenical Councils, at which the fundamentals of orthodox Christian doctrine were established, had far more Greek-speaking bishops from the eastern empire than the west.

The Emperor Constantine was himself a Latin-speaker, and was indeed proclaimed in Britain. But when he issued his extraordinary *Oration* arguing for the superiority of Christianity, his Greek-speaking court needed to have it in Greek. His biographer, Eusebius of Caesarea, wrote in Greek and admired the fact that Constantine made an effort to speak Greek too. And Constantine founded Constantinople on the site of a Greek city and made it his home for the last part of his reign. Divergence between Christians in east and west came only very much later, and when it did, it was gradual and very slow; meanwhile the line was unbroken. The mainstream Roman Catholic and Protestant tradition of Western Europe does not represent the whole history of Christianity. Byzantine Christianity was not something foreign and different: it shared the very same roots.

The next question is when Byzantine Christianity began. This might seem obvious: it surely began with the Emperor Constantine and the founding of Constantinople in May, AD 330; except that quite a few scholars now argue that the Byzantine empire in its full sense only really began in the seventh century, and that what went before was still late Roman. I think it is best to take the obvious view and start from Constantine. Remember though, there was not yet an Orthodox identity; indeed, even the scriptural canon was still somewhat fluid. Much was yet to come.

I have also argued in the book that a history of Byzantine Christianity is not the same as a history of Orthodoxy in the Byzantine period. For one thing, 'Byzantium' and the Byzantine empire included at different times many Christians who were not Chalcedonian Orthodox and who did not accept the seven Ecumenical Councils. Again, the separation of the eastern Churches after the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century took place only gradually. Many high-profile meetings in the sixth century, and the Ecumenical Council of 553 called by the Emperor

Justinian, all aimed at bridging the differences, and in the early seventh century the Emperor Heraclius was still making such efforts even while in the final stages of war with Persia. The Arab conquests cut off Jerusalem and the eastern Mediterranean, but Byzantium did not give up; eastern patriarchs continued to be appointed, even if they could not take up their sees, and eventually Byzantium recovered territory in the east. Its borders changed drastically over the centuries to incorporate at times large numbers of these non-Chalcedonian Christians, not to mention Muslim populations too.

A large part of my story certainly concerns the definition of Orthodoxy, and this continued to be argued over throughout the Byzantine period, from Constantine's day until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Each of the Ecumenical Councils left its own legacy of disagreement and the arguments did not end with the end of iconoclasm. Arguments in favour of icons had to be restated in the twelfth century; key scriptural texts continued to be debated, and differences with the Latins and the question of union were discussed and fought over for centuries.

There were many casualties in the process: individuals were sanctioned, exiled, or condemned, but as time went on, more and more arguments were produced and repeated. The divisions over hesychasm in the fourteenth century, for example, took several major councils to settle. Orthodoxy also had to be enforced strenuously throughout the period – it did not stand alone without a great deal of effort – and this enforcement took different forms, including exile, deposition, anathema, and indeed the burning of books.

So what of the famous *symphonia*, or ‘harmony’ between Church and state, claimed in Byzantium?²

The Byzantines were very good at putting over a high view of themselves. I do not mean this disparagingly; but it is as much of a mistake to take many of their claims at face value as it would be in politics today, and the reality could be very different. The Byzantine throne was also famously unstable, and dynasties that lasted more than a generation or two were the exception; emperors were often replaced by usurpers, often very violently. An emphasis on ‘order’ was understandable, but it only rarely corresponded with reality.

In the same way emperors and patriarchs of Constantinople quarrelled and deposed each other: the great Photius provides one example in the ninth century; but it happened on numerous other occasions, including in the final centuries of Byzantium, exactly the time when patriarchs made the highest claims to their authority. Emperors sometimes got their way by manipulating or overruling the standing synod of Constantinople, which was convoked to decide high-level disputes, or tried to impose their authority by decree. In the twelfth century the Emperor Manuel I famously pushed one such decree through and had it carved in red letters in Hagia Sophia. But emperors also fell foul of the Church, for instance for their marriage choices, like the Emperor Heraclius, or Leo VI, or later for blinding the lawful heir and supporting union with the Latins, like Michael VIII Palaiologos.

² For a recent discussion of ‘political orthodoxy’ in the key period of the fourteenth century, see James C. Skedros, “‘You Cannot Have a Church Without an Empire’: Political Orthodoxy in Byzantium’, in George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, eds., *Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine* (New York: Fordham, 2017), pp. 219-31, but see also the caveats expressed here.

Michael is perhaps an extreme case, but two patriarchs opposed him and were exiled or deposed, and John Bekkos, who also opposed him, changed sides and became patriarch; he too was to die in prison.

So although its outlines persisted for so many centuries, at the highest levels Byzantium was not a stable society. I would argue that this was part of its inheritance from the first emperor, Augustus, and the early Roman empire. Augustus was a political genius, but he deliberately left the legitimacy of the emperor in some doubt: the empire was not legally dynastic, and the means of succession were left unclear. This met the political needs of the time, but it was a prescription for usurpation and conflict. Similarly, the deference that Constantine adopted towards bishops while at the same time trying to control church matters, left an unstable relation between Church and state that no amount of political theology could disguise. There was continuity in Byzantium, but also inbuilt tension, and the insistence on ‘harmony’ served to obscure actual struggle.

My little book was written with an eye not only to readers who were curious about Byzantium but also to people who did not know much about Christianity or its varieties. Or they may, like the Swan Hellenic passengers, be people who have been to Greece or Turkey or Eastern Europe and want to find out more. The readership is English-speaking in the first instance too, and it might have been different otherwise. I did not have room for much on icons (and in so tiny a volume there are no illustrations, even on the subject of Byzantine Christianity), although I am very aware that icons are what draw many people to Orthodoxy and Byzantium. Again, I realized the real need for explanation a few years ago when I took a group of Oxford alumni round the Byzantium exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. The captions provided were extremely laconic, following Academy conventions at the time, along

the lines of ‘church vestment’ or even ‘liturgical object’. There were also one or two Greeks in the party, who were astonished to be told (correctly) that some of the objects from the Treasury of San Marco in Venice that had been looted from Constantinople in 1204 had been adapted for Roman Catholic use. My niece (and obviously highly educated) Oxford alumni were frankly bemused, and needed a lot of explanation.

None of the readers of this Report needs to be reminded of the Byzantine legacy on Mount Athos. After all, the great monasteries were founded during the Byzantine empire, and their worship and spirituality derive directly from Byzantium. The great *Philokalia*, put together in the eighteenth century and the bedrock of Athonite spirituality, preserves the writings and wisdom of Byzantine ascetics from the earliest period to the end of Byzantium. The monks of Mount Athos are reminded of Byzantium every single day. But I believe there is still an urgent need to explain to the general public what Byzantium was and why it matters.

Even so, the gradual evolution of orthodox – or shall we rather say official – Christianity in Byzantium is not the same as Orthodoxy with a capital O, in the sense in which it exists and is practised today in its various Churches. A great deal of scholarly work in recent decades has taught us just how hard the establishment of orthodoxy in Byzantium actually was, and how intense the struggles were in which churchmen, lay persons, and emperors actually engaged. Even the Fathers sometimes contradicted each other, though it was a cardinal principle in Byzantine theology that they never did. Everything had to be argued and restated time and time again.

My book therefore spends a lot of time on the events and processes by which the Byzantines sought to settle the question of what was orthodox doctrine. That means councils in particular, especially the first seven Ecumenical Councils,

culminating in the rejection of iconoclasm in 787. In a later period the Comnenian emperors famously tried to lay down the law in ecclesiastical matters; the great compilations of anti-heretical argument date from that time, as do high-profile discussions with Latins over papal primacy and the *Filioque*. An enormous amount of effort also was made in Byzantium to destroy the records and the reputation of the iconoclasts. It is also easy to forget that the iconophile Seventh Council of AD 787 was not the last word on icons. A further iconoclastic council in fact followed soon after, as well as depositions of patriarchs, and we know from contemporary evidence that in practice individual bishops changed their positions.

I freely admit that monks and monasticism do not get enough space in the book. But the monasteries of Mount Athos did indeed grow out of a history that went back to the early centuries, and indeed legend has it that the origins of monastic life on Mount Athos go back to the earliest days, when it was miraculously visited by the Theotokos. There were other holy mountains in Byzantium, and ancient monasteries that survived for many centuries. St Catherine's on Sinai was founded in the sixth century in a region already thickly populated with Christian ascetics, and both St Catherine's and the monastery of St Saba near Bethlehem still function today. As for Mount Athos, the *Life of St Euthymios* (included in the fine new set of translations of Lives of Athonite saints published by Dumbarton Oaks)³ tells us about the lives of holy men on Mount Athos before the foundation of the Great Lavra in the tenth century, and in the same way there were certainly hermits and ascetics living on Sinai much earlier, even if the monasteries of Athos themselves belong to the later period of

³ Richard P. H. Greenfield and Alice-Mary Talbot, eds., *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Byzantium, and to a time when Byzantium's neighbours were developing their own Christian identities.

As the editors of the Dumbarton Oaks volume comment, the Lives of St Maximos the Hutburner and St Niphon in the fourteenth century do not tell us much directly about the turbulent political events of the day, but as we read in the Life of St Maximos composed by Theophanes, the abbot of Vatopedi (a subject on which Metropolitan Kallistos has written), the saint was visited by two emperors, the pro-hesychast patriarch of Constantinople Kallistos I, and the archbishop of Thessaloniki; he is said to have predicted the future for all of them, including civil war and invasion, and the Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos's future tonsure. The great hesychast St Gregory of Sinai also arrived from Jerusalem and asked to meet Maximos for a discussion in which he asked him about the issue of inner prayer; he urged him to cease his wandering and settle in a cell, which the saint made himself out of grass and brushwood.

There is a strong emphasis in these Lives on *hesychia* in the sense of stillness, or what the translators call tranquillity. Nevertheless, Athos in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was much visited. The tension in Maximos's life between frequent visitors and evident fame, and the need for retreat, was already a feature of ascetic life in the late fourth and fifth centuries among the desert monks of Egypt, whose ascetic lives attracted famous aristocratic visitors and caused the saints to retreat still further to escape them. But monks might also travel, like Gregory of Sinai. The earlier life of Maximos the Hutburner had taken him to Thrace, Constantinople, and Thessaloniki; he led the life of a wandering holy fool and, after receiving a vision of the Theotokos, continued his wanderings on Mount Athos until he eventually settled in his makeshift cell. In the ninth century St Euthymios had moved to Athos

from Mt Olympos in Bithynia, and centuries later the threat of Turkish raids also made life unsettled on Athos and caused some monks to move away, including the great St Gregory Palamas, who left Athos for Thessaloniki. Palamas indeed has left a very interesting account of the time he spent as a hostage of the Ottomans who had captured him when his ship got into difficulties off Gallipoli.

However exceptional it may now seem, Mount Athos is part of the long history of Byzantine monasticism. A massive transfer of resources into monastic foundations had started by the fifth and sixth centuries and continued throughout the Byzantine period, and the number of monasteries across the empire before 1204 was enormous. With resources and patronage went influence. Mount Athos also benefited from this trend, with an inward flow of patronage and individuals; it formed its own monastic centre, especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Latins in 1204, when it exercised a powerful magnetism and took its place among several other centres in the Byzantine world in addition to Constantinople.

Constantinople regained its emotional and symbolic appeal when the Byzantines returned from Nicaea in 1261, but its secular power was weakened and its patriarchs understandably claimed the highest possible doctrine of the Church. Its population and its territory were tiny, and in contrast Athos gained in wealth and prestige even in this difficult and insecure period. Thessaloniki was a closer Byzantine city than Constantinople, and a serious rival until it fell to the Ottomans, and the rising Christian states beyond Byzantium competed with each other to pour resources into Mount Athos.

Like the great new foundations of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Constantinople and northern Greece, the Athonite houses in late Byzantium were the descendants of the hundreds of earlier foundations in Constantinople and across the

empire. Byzantine monasteries varied greatly in kind and in their legal and economic status; many were private property, others were endowed, and still others could be bestowed with their revenues on individuals for fixed periods. This made their place in Byzantine society and their legal and financial relation to individual members a highly complex one. Athonite monasteries were not immune from this; as Rosemary Morris has shown, they too could also be given, bequeathed, or handed over as property. Pantokrator, for example, was founded by two notables with lands in northern Greece, and their ownership of a *kellion* was confirmed by the Patriarch Kallistos I so long as it stayed under the Athonite government; not much later however the documents show one of the two founders together with his wife exercising founder's rights at Pantokrator as an endowed monastery, and bequeathing lands on Thasos to it under his will.

At the same time the wealth and landholdings of the great monasteries enabled them to benefit from the new trading possibilities of this more plural world. One of Maximos the Hutburner's visitors was a monk about to sail to Constantinople for unspecified business on a Thessalonian ship; Maximos predicted disaster, and the ship sank; but this was no doubt an exception. The monasteries themselves owned villages with tied peasants to work the land, and even ships, and their connections with individual members of the late Byzantine aristocracy were complex – not only spiritual but also economic. Their extensive archives, largely edited by French scholars, reveal a world of trading connections, landed wealth, and *metochia*, monastic outposts; in the almost complete loss of other Byzantine archives, they are one of the best and most detailed sources for Byzantine landholding and economic life as well as for information on Byzantine taxation and the legal system.

Given its ‘internationalism’, and the wealth and economic role played by some of the monasteries, Mount Athos was also in a position to play a central part in the diffusion of Byzantine influence made famous by Dimitri Obolensky as the ‘Byzantine Commonwealth’, and more recently by Jonathan Shepard as a form of Byzantine ‘soft power’. Graham Speake has borrowed the term ‘commonwealth’ for his book about the Athonite diaspora, and it was a relationship that worked in both directions, both push and pull.

Some of the pull exerted by Mount Athos was about politics. Jonathan Shepard rightly cites the example of the Serbian rulers, for whom the magnetism of Athos and the prestige of Byzantium did perhaps go together; Sava, son of Stefan Nemanja and brother of Stefan the First-Crowned, had become a monk on Athos and his father joined him and died there. A century or more later, Stefan Dushan also linked the idea of Athos with that of the Byzantine emperor, and the prince of Moscow that of the Byzantine emperor with the Church of God.⁴ The association lingered in people’s minds, and it is being given a vigorous new life today.

Back briefly to my book and the section on ‘Legacy’, which I took to mean legacy today. As I explained, I was writing for an English-speaking audience, and perhaps it would have looked different had I been writing, for instance, for a French public, not to mention an Orthodox one. In France interest in Byzantium has a longer history, from the reign of Louis XIV, and before Gibbon set the response that is still standard for many of us here. Whereas the study of Byzantium began in France in the early seventeenth century with Louis’s father’s wish to educate his son in monarchy,

⁴ Jonathan Shepard, ‘Superpower to Soft Power, within Overlapping Circles: Byzantium and its Place in Twenty-First-Century International History’, in B. Haider-Wilson, William D. Godsey, and Wolfgang Mueller, eds., *International History in Theory and Practice* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften), pp. 81-122, at 110-11.

which was followed by the pioneering editing and publication of Byzantine texts, Edward Gibbon was exceptional, and well acquainted with French scholarship, but we still feel the impact of his dislike of Byzantium.

So on 'Legacy', where does one begin? My experience with Swan passengers on Tinos is proof of the level of misunderstanding even among people well equipped and genuinely curious to learn. I start with the obvious: the range and extent of Orthodox Churches throughout the world, and the fact that the Byzantine reach is not limited to Greek or Russian Orthodoxy today. The large numbers of Uniates, or Greek Catholics, who observe Orthodox practice but accept the primacy of Rome, are also a large part of the story that needs to be explained, not least in view of the current situation in the Ukraine and the Middle East. And the complexity of Christian communities in the Middle East can be bewildering indeed. Nothing to do with Mount Athos, it might seem, except that I think it is important to place Athos in this wider context.

Many who have heard of Mount Athos or are concerned about the situation of Christians in the Middle East and are curious about Orthodoxy know little about Byzantium. I felt it was important to convey even if briefly the diversity of Orthodoxy today, the variety among Orthodox Churches, and the complications of their relationships. In his book *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (2nd edition 2014) Graham Speake wrote about the various issues and pressures affecting the monasteries of Mount Athos in the twentieth century, including the impact of the Greek state and its membership of the European Union. The end of the Soviet Union and the changes in Eastern Europe in the last decade of the twentieth century also had a major effect, greatly increasing the numbers of monks in certain monasteries, and representing a drastic change since Soviet days.

Now Athos and the Orthodox world in general must cope with the resurgence of the Moscow patriarchate, whose influence is highly active in the Orthodox diaspora as well as within Russia itself. An appeal to the heritage of Byzantium has become a rallying cry for nationalist revival, not only in Russia, where it is actively supported and encouraged by Putin, but in other post-communist countries too. The importance of Russia's annexation of Crimea should not escape us either, given the location of the baptism of Putin's namesake Vladimir in AD 988. In this jostling for position inter-Church rivalries have inevitably increased and show no sign of abating.

I also wrote in this section about the inherent conservatism of Orthodoxy, which stems from what is also one of the most striking features of Athonite spirituality, liturgy, and monastic life, the sense that it derives directly from the traditions laid down by the Fathers in the patristic age. This is surely one of the aspects of life on Mount Athos that outsiders find most attractive. We know of the many ways in which modernity has come to Mount Athos – with computers, vehicles, modernization of buildings, and so on, and with far more contact with the outside world. Exhibitions and the publication of beautiful illustrated volumes have made accessible monastic treasures that were completely unknown when the young Robert Byron and the future Byzantine art historian David Talbot Rice visited Mount Athos in the 1920s and became enthusiasts for Byzantium and Byzantine art as a result. But the sense of longevity and of reaching back to the foundational period of Byzantine Christianity has persisted through so many vicissitudes and difficult times that this in itself exercises a powerful attraction. Differences in the calendar only serve to enhance the sense of apartness, while the various attempts made over the centuries to reach out to other Churches all failed; opposition to ecumenism was indeed one of the difficult issues in relation to the pan-Orthodox council held on Crete in 2016.

This leads directly to something that many non-Orthodox people find difficult to understand, namely the seeming lack of a central authority within Orthodoxy. The 2016 council was the first such pan-Orthodox council for a very long time, and faced immediate issues of inclusion and exclusion in its agenda, its location, and its attendance. Some major Churches including Russia did not attend. There were also dissenters within the Churches legitimately present, leading to an intervention addressed to the Church of Greece by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

These internal divisions, and the rising tide of nationalism, especially in Eastern Europe, lead directly to the Orthodox spectre of ethnic nationalism. Like the previous council of 1872, the 2016 council condemned nationalism, and with it the implied rise of local Churches not recognized as autocephalous. Yet nationalism is exactly what we are seeing across Eastern Europe and elsewhere, and with it the issue of national Churches.

A final word. It might seem that there is a huge gulf between the doctrinal history that is my main subject and the spiritual and liturgical life of the monks on Mount Athos. But I think this may be deceptive. Together with the writings and teachings of the early Fathers in the *Philokalia*, the doctrinal definitions developed in the councils and synods of the Byzantine period provide the fundamental underpinning of the spiritual life of the monasteries, reinforced by their constant cycle of readings, feasts, and prayers. The two are inherently intertwined. A very important part of the essence of Byzantine Christianity did indeed consist in theological debate, dialectic, and doctrinal argument, and even in the use of Aristotelian logic – more than enough indeed to fill the space allotted in a Very Brief History.

AVERIL CAMERON

THE RENEWAL OF HILANDAR

Causes and Consequences of Conflagration

I would like, first of all, to thank the Friends of Mount Athos for inviting me to make this address. I feel greatly honoured. I have been accorded similar privileges on three occasions in the past – first, in Bridgewater House at the beginning of May 2004, when I reported on the great fire that struck Hilandar; then in May 2008 at the same venue, when reporting on the course of the reconstruction work being undertaken at the monastery; and finally at Madingley Hall in February 2009, where I gave a paper on the Serbian tradition on Mount Athos. At the conference in Cambridge, I went more extensively into the history of Hilandar, its role, and significance for Mount Athos and beyond. Knowing that I am facing a well-informed audience, and in order to avoid repetition, tonight I shall ask for your patience to bring to your attention some more factual aspects of the Hilandar fire and its consequences, and of the progress of the work on the monastery's reconstruction which is now entering its fifteenth year. One would also like to use this opportunity to be more specific in regard to the generous contributions made for Hilandar's renewal by the Friends of Mount Athos, whose guest I am tonight.

As is well known, Hilandar was founded in 1198 as a Serbian monastery on Mount Athos, and since the fourteenth century it has occupied fourth place in the Athonite hierarchy – behind Great Lavra, Vatopedi, and Iviron. It is the only non-Greek monastery which, as the head of one of the five *tetrad*es (or groups of four monasteries), appoints the Protos every five years. As one writer on church matters once put it, in a somewhat exalted tone, Hilandar has always been and remains 'the mirror of the Serbian soul, its pride, its consolation, and its path to the Lord'. On a more sober note, one could point out the fact (for British probably not particularly impressive) that Hilandar is the only national, spiritual, or cultural institution of the Serbian people which has, without interruption, existed and served its purpose for more than 800 years.

Throughout Athonite history, fires have been an ever-present and constant danger, ravaging forests and monastic settlements, which, with their open hearths and time-worn chimneys, naturally present a permanent source of peril. As we all know, a year seldom passes without a minor, but more often serious, forest fire. In fact, during the entire thousand-year-long history of the monastic presence, only two monasteries have never suffered a

conflagration – Great Lavra and Dochiariou. As for Hilandar, two great fires have been documented in its history, one in 1722, and another in 1775, when the entire southern and south-western part of the complex perished. Less than three centuries later, originating on almost the same spot, a new disaster struck when, on 4 March 2004, the monastery suffered another great fire.

It should be noted here that the eastern part of the Hilandar complex is almost entirely erected on solid rock, whereas the foundations of the west wing rest on much weaker soil, formed in part from the debris of the first eighteenth-century fire, after which seventy years elapsed before restoration work was initiated. During that period the ruins were left to erode, creating a thick layer of ash and rubble, soaked by decades of precipitation. As a result, over time, the new structures built upon it began to settle slowly and almost imperceptibly, eventually causing cracks in the walls and the chimney ducts.

It was through one of these crannies created in the chimney that a spark from the stove in the *kellion* of an old arthritic monk landed on the beams of the centuries-old roof structure on the cold night between 3 and 4 March 2004, at about 1 o'clock. At first it seemed that only the cell in which the furnace was located had caught fire, and it appeared to the monks that it had been successfully extinguished. But just as they had sat down with a sigh of relief, commenting on what had just befallen them, to their horror they saw the flames surging from beneath the roof. Carried by a strong wind, the fire continued to spread to the west, turning northward towards the entrance to the monastery, and further towards the east wing, only to be stopped by the massive walls of St Sava's tower. According to the account of one of those present, the fire was moving 'almost at the speed of a man running'.

All that the monks felt they could do was to serve a short prayer in front of the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God Tricherousa, to move to safety the most precious icons and relics from the treasury, and to make sure that the *katholikon* was kept from harm. They were helplessly watching roofs, beams, and walls collapsing in clouds of sparks, the equipment they had at their disposal being utterly inadequate for tackling a fire of such proportions. Firefighting teams arrived just before morning and stayed for a few days, making sure that the fire did not break out from beneath the still smouldering debris. First photographs taken the next day show the monastery covered by ash and firefighting foam, as if in the middle of some macabre snow idyll.

First impressions and initial assessments were disheartening. Out of a total of 10,500 square metres of built-up monastery area, 5,671 square metres or approximately 54.87 per cent were destroyed by the fire. The buildings of the so-called Abbot's Lodge and the Dochia

(storage area) from the eighteenth century, the Great Lodge from 1821, the sixteenth-century area of the main entrance, and the White Lodge from 1598 were completely destroyed. Damaged in part were the refectory and the chapel of Holy Archangels adjacent to the tower of St Sava. Out of the total of Hilandar's thirteen chapels, four were burned down, with only one, the one above the monastery gate, preserved enough to be restored.

Here I will allow myself a personal recollection. When I visited Hilandar for the first time after the fire, several weeks later, the works on clearing the rubble were well under way, and a large crane had been set up in the middle of it all. I was given the opportunity to be elevated in the crane gondola above the scene of the fire, and the sight still haunts me: chimneys and walls eroded by fire appeared like broken teeth; mounds of rubble and various metal objects filled up the basements; and on the walls of the monks' cells one could still see, spared by a whim of fate, remains of clothes, books, and even a half-empty teacup resting on the edge of a sink.

Initial estimates of duration of the reconstruction and the costs involved, according to which the work was to take seven years and costs to amount to 10 million euros, proved to be far too optimistic. Now, fifteen years later, not more than about 75 per cent of the works have been completed, while the costs so far amount to no less than 18 million euros.

In order to understand this, one must bear in mind that the work on reconstruction of a historical monument of such antiquity and value is not like any other construction work. This aspect of the project I touched upon more extensively in the Bridgewater House report presented in 2008. Now I will only remind you that, first of all, each intervention must be authorized by the Greek Ministry of Culture as well as by the Centre for the Preservation of Athonite Heritage (KEDAK), a time-consuming feat, not always easy to achieve. Also, the work force comes exclusively from Serbia, a non-EU country, which involves a great deal of red tape and limits the number of specialized workers. Next, one must consider that the number of religious and secular holidays, as well as occasionally adverse weather conditions, limit the number of working days to no more than 190 a year. All this considered, it is clear why reconstruction works are advancing at a much slower pace than was originally envisaged. Another oversight occurred in the cost estimate as, among other things, it turned out that absolutely all construction material and machinery had to be brought in by boat as there is no other access to the monastery. If experts are to be trusted, these circumstances alone increase the cost of the works by almost 30 per cent.

When I spoke to you ten years ago, I pointed out that, before even starting the reconstruction work proper, the walls which were prone to collapse had first to be brought

down, and those that could be preserved stabilized, so that the debris could be cleared. In addition, outside the perimeter of the monastery, some necessary facilities had to be put in place for the accommodation of the brotherhood, the workers, and the pilgrims. Another of the tasks was the inevitably slow and sensitive work of literally sieving tons of ash and rubble, in search of valuable items. All of this took nearly two years.

The first part to be reconstructed was the entrance, which consists of three sets of gates connected by a passage, after the fire completely cluttered up by debris. Immediately next to it, there was a fortification, originally dating from the fourteenth century, housing a chapel of St Nicholas, of which only the walls remained after the fire. These very complicated works lasted for several years and were finalized, one may safely say, in an exemplary way. Next to be tackled was the so-called Great Lodge, covering more than 2,000 square metres, which had been adapted several times during its history, being given its final form in 1821. Reconstruction of this part was completed in full only in 2014, but in such a way that this spacious structure does not deviate, even in the smallest detail, from its original state. The next big undertaking was the renovation of the White Lodge – a building on the eastern side of the complex completed in 1598: it had been one of only two of such structures surviving on Mount Athos. The edifice was completely swallowed by the fire except for seven elegant masonry arches at ground level. This summer saw the completion of reconstruction works, so that by mid-September 2018 the monks were able to start moving in. Within the building, the burned chapel of the Forty Martyrs has been rebuilt in its original place on the top floor.

This means in practice that only two buildings remain to be restored – the so-called Abbot's Lodge and the Dochia. They are situated along the western side of the complex, which is where the fire started in the first place. This apparent reversal in the order of reconstruction is to be explained by the fact that it was necessary first to stabilize the foundations to a depth of 10 metres below the surface, all the way to the external supporting wall, which originates partly from the tenth century. This included cleaning layers of debris remaining after the eighteenth-century fire, thus stabilizing the terrain in order to avoid a new sinking of the foundations. In addition, it was realized that damage to the refectory, a building dating originally from the thirteenth and, in its present form, from the seventeenth century, was more severe than had initially appeared as the roof was at risk of collapsing. For this reason, the work is now being done to replace the entire roof structure over the dining room, even though, strictly speaking, this building does not belong to the parts of the monastery which directly suffered from the fire.

Here I must point out that the effects of the fire and the work on the reconstruction have syphoned off practically all of the monastery's energy as well as its financial means and contributions received from various parties. Consequently, while works on the restoration of the damaged parts continued, regular maintenance elsewhere was relatively neglected. A good example is the case of the bell-tower, located in the south-eastern part of the complex. Apart from the bells in the belfry, it houses a clock dating from the eighteenth century. The ancient wooden structure supporting the heavy bells was badly eaten by rot, and the situation, without exaggeration, could have become critical, were it not for the prompt and generous help of your society. Through FoMA's Hilandar Appeal, the badly needed 40,000 euros were collected. From this money the entire roof frame was restored and the covering stone slates replaced so that, supported by new beams, the bells can now continue to celebrate the Lord.

The funds for the reconstruction of Hilandar originate from several sources. Between 2004 and 2010, the Serbian government financed the reconstruction with 1 million euros per year. However, after the outbreak of the major economic crisis, this amount was reduced to almost half, finally settling at 750,000 since last year. The Greek government had been contributing 400,000 euros per year until the onset of the economic crisis, and as from 2010 this contribution has completely dried up. The Serbian Orthodox Church collected another 2 million, and ever since the fire contributions from institutions and individuals, especially from the diaspora, have been coming in, sometimes in the form of gifts of construction materials or free professional help. Significant contributions have been provided by some Russian institutions (e.g. the Russian Railways) and numerous pious individuals. As far as I know, the European Union so far has not offered its resources towards speeding up the reconstruction process. (Hilandar thus remains one of the few Athonite monasteries which have never received any financial help from EU funds.)

At this point, I would specifically like to focus on the contribution to the Hilandar restoration provided by the British society of Friends of Mount Athos (FoMA). During my time as the ambassador of my country in Britain, I remember being contacted, a day or two after the fire, by the then Secretary of the society, Dr Graham Speake, inquiring about the details of the disaster. Already in May 2004 a meeting was held at Bridgewater House, inaugurating Phase One of FoMA's Hilandar Appeal. The funds raised enabled the Hilandar brotherhood to build a new bakery (as someone nicely put it, 'a source of both spiritual and material nourishment'). In 2008, Phase Two, dedicated to the refurbishment of the library, was inaugurated, while the funds collected in the Third Phase went to the acquiring of equipment for the conservation of icons and manuscripts – specifically a Velox (R) system

for eliminating parasites from icons, manuscripts, and wooden objects. (Put simply, this technology involves injecting a mixture consisting of gases – nitrogen, oxygen, argon, etc. – that purge precious objects of all parasitic organisms.) The recently completed Phase Four of the Hilandar Appeal concerned the endangered bell-tower, where the roof cover and structure were reconstructed, while the timber frame supporting the bells was completely replaced. I am in a position to confirm beyond any doubt how much the help of FoMA meant to Hilandar. Moreover, Abbot Methodios had the opportunity to personally thank HRH The Prince of Wales, patron of both the society and the appeal, on the occasion of a reception held in 2011 by His Royal Highness at his Highgrove summer residence. Tonight it is my pleasant duty to convey to you the expressions of warm gratitude on behalf of the Hilandar brotherhood and its *hegoumenos*. In this case, Christian solidarity has been demonstrated in the best possible way and a warm welcome to Hilandar as well as an ever-open door is assured to all our British friends.

A comprehensive view of the reconstruction works in Hilandar today would show that the following parts of the monastery have been completely renovated and returned to use: the Great Lodge of 1821, where premises for distinguished guests are located along with monastery administration and the infirmary, the entrance section (comprising the gates, chapel of St Nicholas, and the *synodikon*), and the White Lodge of 1598, extending to the tower of St Sava. In addition, two old buildings outside the walls have been reconstructed to accommodate pilgrims. Also, on the slope opposite the entrance, there stands an entirely new little ‘village’ housing workers, a studio for architects, as well as workshops for electricians, carpenters, locksmiths, and other trades who are involved in the restoration. Apart from these newly acquired premises that did not suffer in the fire, but are now an essential part of the life of the monastery, according to objective estimates, over the past fifteen years about 75 per cent of the reconstruction works have been completed.

As was pointed out earlier, two buildings still need to be rebuilt – the Abbot’s Lodge and the Dochia. Before that, however, it is absolutely necessary to stabilize and restore the monastery’s refectory which is decorated with a cycle of precious seventeenth-century frescos, while in the attic section there is an exceptional wall-painting from the best period of the fourteenth century. This will also provide an opportunity to reinstall the medieval stone tables to the dining room. A dozen of the seventeen original tables are still intact, and the missing ones will be replaced by copies. Currently, works are under way to stabilize the foundations to a depth of more than 10 metres. The works were stalled during this spring, because Greek archaeologists had to examine the remains of some Early Byzantine structure

found on the site, dating probably from the seventh century. Incidentally, while the works on the dining room are in progress, the needs of the brotherhood and the pilgrims are being accommodated in a prefabricated temporary building erected in the courtyard. The sight is not particularly aesthetically pleasing but the purpose is served.

The two remaining buildings to be rebuilt will keep their original look on the outside, and two destroyed chapels inside the Abbot's Lodge will be faithfully restored .

Speaking of deadlines, the Belgrade government promised better financing in order for the work to be completed by 2021. The reason behind this is very likely political: 2021 will be election year and the present Serbian authorities would dearly love to use the reopening of a restored Hilandar for their propaganda purposes.

On a final note, I am especially keen to emphasize the change noticeable in the atmosphere within the Hilandar brotherhood and the monastery in general. The monks seem to have realized that, in the tragic circumstances they had to deal with, there were new opportunities opening the way towards putting the monastery's economy on a more sound and stable financial basis, especially bearing in mind that Hilandar has vast domains both within and beyond Mount Athos. This is, in any case, in line with the contemporary understanding of sustainability in the restoration of cultural goods, according to which the real goal is not only to preserve, but also to enable these institutions to function autonomously and to become self-sufficient, so that they can fulfil the mission for which they were originally intended. This is particularly important in the case of Hilandar, whose role as an outpost of Serbian cultural identity will always depend on the soundness of its economy and its ability to sustain itself without depending on the goodwill of others.

That is the reason why, for example, since the fire and thanks to the efforts of the best experts from the country and abroad, as well as to dedicated work of the brotherhood, the once modest Hilandar vineyard now extends to over 5 hectares with 50,000 grape vines delivered from the best French nurseries. In the old harbour building, a winery is now housed. Thus, after the first ten years, the monastery has been able not only to cover its own needs, but actually to begin entering the market with several varieties of cabernet, merlot, and alicante.

In the same spirit, vegetable gardens, which today cover an area of about 60 hectares, have been significantly expanded. Instead of the former small kitchen garden beneath the monastery walls, we have now, conforming to the highest ecological standards, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, peas, parsley, celery, zucchini, beetroot, potatoes, onions, and garlic, all being cultivated on an open stretch of land not far from the coast. Several greenhouses were

erected for the cultivation of winter vegetables. All this is not only to satisfy the needs of the brotherhood, but also those of the pilgrims, whose numbers have grown to as many as 20,000 a year. The orchard, planted in 2006, grows apples, pears, cherries, and, as of late, the homeland specialty – plums.

Hilandar also owns about 3,000 olive trees, aged between 400 and ten years, which yield about 50,000 litres of excellent organic virgin oil. And finally, we should not forget the apiaries, which provide a pleasing amount of the finest honey, for which Halkidiki has been known since ancient times.

With all this in view, one can safely say that the end of the works on Hilandar's restoration is in sight. There can no longer be any doubt that our generation of monks, believers, and friends of the tradition will complete this great task together.

In a certain way, the catastrophic fire gave the monastery an impulse to reinvent and reinvigorate itself. The brotherhood has almost doubled, thanks to the arrival of mostly young, educated, and capable monks. Today the Hilandar brotherhood numbers forty-two monks and eight novices, some of whom are located in Hilandar's cells and hermitages in other parts of Athos. Novices are constantly arriving, the authority of the abbot is unquestionable and perfectly natural, the monastery's economy, as we have seen, has advanced significantly, experts and workers on the reconstruction make a competent, harmonious, and efficient team, while the influx of pilgrims has never been greater throughout the entire 800-year history of Hilandar.

Besides feeling obliged to the Holy Mother of God Tricherousa, to the founders and protectors of Hilandar, St Simeon and St Sava, one feels immense gratitude for the efforts of the Hilandar monks as well as for the magnanimous benevolence of real friends, to which you, who have granted me your kind attention this evening, certainly belong.

VLADETA JANKOVIC

Belgrade

THE PILGRIMAGE TO CRETE

In late October, three dozen of us gathered at a smart new hotel in the narrow streets of old Heraklion. Dense green trees in the square sheltered hundreds of chattering sparrows. Students gathered at pavement cafés that spill out in amicable chaos. Metropolitan Kallistos was leading an eclectic mix of pilgrims – English, Welsh, Greek American, Spanish, Estonian, Finnish; Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican – to explore the monasteries of Crete.

The island's history is complicated. So we started at the beginning with Divine Liturgy at St Titus's church, a pristine cube of white marble dedicated to the man who brought Christianity to Crete. His skull lies in a jewelled orb, resting in a carved stone *mihrab*. This building, established in the Middle Byzantine era (961–1204), was a mosque for 200 years. Today it filled up with all Heraklion, including three teenage boys in football shirts who lit candles as the choir chanted the ancient Orthodox liturgy.

Two museum visits gave valuable background for the week. At the Museum of Christian Art we learned that the Cretan painters lived on the borderline of two worlds, the Byzantine and the Western, the latter with its Venetian and Renaissance influences. The sixteenth century was a boom time with 150 icon-painters working in Heraklion. El Greco learned his craft here. In 1499 two Italian merchants ordered 700 icons of the Virgin Mary to be delivered within forty-five days. There are luminous depictions of the Last Supper and the Resurrection, but also local miracles, such as St Phanourios calming a storm that threatened Cretan priests in a sailing boat.

The Heraklion Archaeological Museum displays the extraordinary finds dug up at nearby Knossos, one of the world's greatest archaeological sites. It was discovered by Sir Arthur Evans, an Oxford scholar who unearthed a whole new civilization: the Minoans. Here they ruled in some splendour 4,000 years ago in a city of many thousands. How thrilling to learn that one of our party, Dr Holley Martlew, has established the Minoans made perfume – from irises, a most precious scent to this day.

Our studies were punctuated for lunch, hosted by the head of the Orthodox Church in Crete, the beaming, joyful Archbishop Irineos. Day one and already it seems we had met the happiest man in Crete!

On Monday we headed across the volcanic Lasithi plain to the monastery of Sellinari. Travellers on the busy road still stop to venerate the miraculous icon of St George. It lies in a tiny thirteenth-century chapel no bigger than an upturned ark and covered in colourful Cretan

wall-paintings. In the main church the hubbub was stilled as Anna Conomos sang a haunting *troparion*, a brief hymn, in Greek.

A few miles on, the monastery of Kremasta clings to the mountainside. It was established in 1593 and taken over by nuns just twenty-five years ago. The ancient gilt iconostasis in the chapel depicts the serpent that tormented St George and frames many fine Cretan School paintings. Pungent mint and oregano grow in the courtyards that give the seven nuns shelter from the heat.

We headed towards the sea where white-painted settlements cling to the coast. Once Cretans were threatened by pirates and fled into the mountains. Now tourists are the invaders. ‘The mountains saved our souls’, said Christos, our guide. ‘Once we were a nation of fighters, lovers, poets. Now we don’t know what we are.’

Christos wisely let us travel in peace, illuminating dates and detail when it helped. The Venetians ruled Crete from 1205 to 1669 when Ottoman Muslims defeated Christian forces. They occupied Crete until 1898, despite three uprisings in the nineteenth century. Christos’s heartfelt comments made him more companion than guide. He found us real Cretan cooking by the shore: boiled Cretan weeds (delicious, thick spinach), platefuls of plump snails, vegetable mezes, and splendid fish stew.

That afternoon we sailed across blue waters to an island with a rather dark story. Spinalonga was one of the last leper colonies in Europe until 1953. The houses lie ruined, but candles still burn in the church.

Next day we travelled south to Crete’s largest male monastery. Bishop Kallistos stilled the chatter on the bus every morning with prayers. They set a framework of calm purpose: every tour bus should have a bishop.

St George Apanosifis dates from the Venetian era, and houses the relics of twenty-one saints. It is an idiorrhythmic monastery, where the twenty-two monks – aged from eighteen to seventy-eight – live independently, coming together for services and feast days. ‘We love life. We don’t need luxury’, said the abbot. Happily, they love cats too and we were greeted by scampering kittens.

Some pilgrims went on to explore Knossos, whilst the rest spiralled over a mountain pass to a taverna deep in the interior. The suckling pig was roasting on the spit as we tumbled out for another garrulous lunch. Chaucer would have felt quite at home here.

Our destination was Chalepa, a monastery on the next mountain with commanding views. No wonder it was a centre of resistance against the Ottomans and latterly the Germans. After the war it fell into ruin until 2008. Thanks to an inspiring Palestinian, Fr

Porphyrios of Gaza, it is a working monastery again. With just three monks, buildings are sparse, but there is a new bell-tower, and candles light up the eighteenth-century iconostasis in the small chapel. Fr Porphyrios radiated faith, optimism, and boundless conviction. 'Now people have the need for the Church to run to them, not them to us. ... It's not so much an economic crisis as a spiritual and social crisis', he said.

Surely it was extraordinary men like him who gathered a following and founded the early Church? Suddenly the ancient and modern worlds are colliding in our minds on this Cretan mountainside.

Light was fading as we drove down to Timios Stavros. Vespers had begun in the green gloom of the chapel, and suddenly they had a congregation of thirty. Someone thrust a service book into the bishop's hand and he joined in the service.

We were back in the crowded world on Wednesday at Arkadi, a major intellectual centre since the sixteenth century. It is a grand Renaissance church with romanesque and baroque decoration. Arkadi became a landmark in Cretan history when it was besieged by Ottoman forces in 1866. Some 700 women and children and 260 fighters trapped here refused to surrender. They fled into the gunpowder store and blew themselves up. UNESCO has designated it a European Freedom Monument.

More crowds too in Rethymnon, a picturesque Venetian port. There is a fine fortress on the headland, another good museum, and some noble Venetian doorways in the narrow streets, now overlaid with handicrafts, pottery, and sunhats.

Our new base, west of Chania, is one of the umpteen tourist colonies along the coast, albeit comfortable and quiet in the off-season. The loungers lay empty around the shallow pool. What will some Arthur Evans 4,000 years hence make of the Beach People of the twenty-first century?

We fled for a day that began on a mountaintop and ended by the seashore. Bishop Kallistos was welcomed at Gouverneto, dedicated to St John Xenos (St John the Hermit), by a prolonged clanging of bells. The fortress wall is rectangular with square towers at each corner. In the centre lies the cupola-covered church with beautiful Venetian sculptures and two small chapels. The abbot brings out many jewel-like boxes of relics. Hard to believe this monastery was down to one monk until it was revitalized by men from Mount Athos. There are twelve here now, living in the cenobitic tradition. 'More are coming soon', says the abbot, reflecting the resurgence of monastic life on the Holy Mountain. There is a real sense of purpose here.

By now we were joined by two remarkable Russian monks, Frs Kyrillos and Methodios. Devout, amusing, and learned; but also men of action who have founded a monastery and an orphanage. They were too busy to stay long.

Our skilful driver, Stavros, steered the bus down the mountain track to the grand monastery of Agia Triada (Holy Trinity), standing like an Oxford college on the plain below. It is one of the most beautiful buildings of the Cretan Renaissance, an imposing cruciform church with three domes. Grand Doric and Corinthian columns flank the church entrance.

Quite different in scale was the small, white-painted monastery of Gonia, built almost upon the shore. Its walls resisted attack by Saracen pirates and it houses some precious icons dating from the fifteenth century in a new museum.

At the nearby Orthodox Academy, a large new conference centre, Anna, a professional story-teller, hooked us with a vivid presentation on the Battle of Crete in World War II. In a *coup de théâtre*, she introduced a resistance fighter who was a basis for the tale.

On St Demetrios's day some – including our unflappable organizer Dimitri Conomos – rose early for celebrations at the Chrysopigi monastery, an important centre of learning in Chania since the sixteenth century. It was commandeered as a German HQ in the war; the monks were expelled and the buildings seriously damaged. But Chrysopigi was saved in 1976 by a community of nuns. They restored the monastery from its foundations, and pursued the work of spiritual renewal. There is a young congregation here now.

Chrysopigi is the main church of three monasteries housing more than fifty nuns – a spiritual powerhouse in modern Crete. The abbess was away in Jerusalem, but we were captivated by our guide, Sister Theomnisti – youthful and wise, clever and humble. She told of the return of an icon of the Dormition. A casualty of war, bought at auction by a Dutchman who, troubled by cries of pain, researched the icon's history and eventually returned it to Crete.

On the hillside lies the nuns' main base and Crete's newest monastery, inaugurated in 2012 and built at the command of St Porphyrios, an Athonite monk who died in 1991 and ranks among the world's most recent saints.

The nuns have a teaching centre on the environment. 'A place of reconciliation between God and creation', the sister said. There is a large icon-writing studio too. Sister Petra Clare, an English Carmelite convert, revealed the theological dimension to icon-painting. The work starts with dark background colours, gradually working upwards into light.

We trekked down a precipitous hillside covered in Cretan oaks to another dependency, the monastery of Agia Kyriaki. A ruin in 1992, this is now one of the most scenic monasteries of Crete.

Later, we visited the synagogue in the former Jewish quarter of Chania. Anna related the dark story of the Jews of Thessaloniki, all transported by the Nazis. Was the rabbi complicit in their fate? It sounds like it. The Jews of Chania too were wiped out, when the ship transporting them across the Aegean to concentration camps was torpedoed. The one man who survived, because his family had fled to Athens, stood up and stoutly told the tale.

Across town stands a building with a syncretic history: a former Dominican friary with a bell-tower at one end and a minaret at the other. In the square outside stands a tree where Ottoman Janissaries reputedly hanged many Christians. Old men peacefully drink coffee at café tables there now.

On our way back to Heraklion, Crete revealed one more treasure: Panagia Antiphonetria, a small jewel of a Romanesque church at Myriokephala. The stonework and extensive wall-paintings from the eleventh century are beautifully restored. Tiny medallion portraits on an archway show two donors peering up at the Resurrection. The monastery had dwindled into disuse, but in 1960 a young priest revived its fortunes. And fifty-eight years on, Fr Ioannis is still there, vigorously ministering to his flock. 'I hope I'm good for a few years yet', he said. And he looked it.

Well, quite a week. Crete showed us two belief systems: sunworshippers who come to roast on narrow strips of sand; and a deeper philosophy which has guided Christian Europe for 2,000 years. It has produced legendary saints, noble monuments, and fine art. The monastic tradition is durable here, still inspiring remarkable people today.

JOHN EIFION JONES

Wimbledon

AN EVENT IN CARDIFF IN AID OF THE AXION ESTIN APPEAL

Over 1,000 years ago, the Archangel Gabriel appeared at a humble Athonite cell and revealed the hymn Axion Estin, which is now part of daily Orthodox prayer. The cell took the name Axion Estin. During the twentieth century the buildings of the cell had fallen into disrepair. A new brotherhood moved into the cell in 2014 and the Friends of Mount Athos are currently supporting its restoration.

A long way away, in South Wales, two of the Friends, David Leron and Alun Davies, set out to do their bit for the cause. It took quite some time to arrange a major event in the Celtic hinterland but they were quite determined and this finally took place in Cardiff on 5 October 2018.

A group of Friends could not gather in Cardiff without visiting St Nicholas's Greek Orthodox church. The Greek Orthodox parish of Cardiff is one of the oldest in the UK, having its origins as the Greek Seamen's Mission founded by Fr Timothy Hatherley in 1873. The church, built in 1906, is one of the few purpose-built Orthodox churches in the country.

Fr Nicholas Price, the assistant priest at the church and himself a member of the Friends, welcomed the visitors and gave a guided tour of the church. The company was also warmly greeted by the Ladies' Auxiliary Association of the parish.

Following the visit to the church, the band of Friends walked to the Cardiff and County Club for a luncheon hosted by David Leron. It was a very jolly affair with long-standing members of FoMA and guests experiencing our society for the first time.

After lunch came the highlight of the day – a talk by Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith, one of the patrons of FoMA. The subject of his talk was the gallant and colourful traveller and soldier, Paddy Leigh Fermor. Sir Michael gave a personal insight into the life of this very complicated character. Leigh Fermor was perhaps the last of the line of Great British travellers and, as we all know, the Holy Mountain was one of his destinations.

The twenty-eight of us who gathered that day all greatly enjoyed the event. We met old friends and made new ones. We raised the sum of £521 for the Axion Estin Appeal. We are very grateful to David Leron and Alun Davies who made this event possible.

Fr NICHOLAS PRICE
Merthyr Tydfil

THE 2018 PATH-CLEARING PILGRIMAGE

The May 2018 trip to the Holy Mountain saw a total of thirty-two pilgrims participating, fifteen for the first time, with FoMA members from the US, Greece, New Zealand, Belgium, Zimbabwe, Ireland, Italy, and the UK taking part.

We were an assorted mix of faiths, with many Orthodox, a number of Anglicans, plus a Catholic, a Quaker, and a Pentecostalist. Occupations varied from software engineer and agronomist through doctor, surgeon, nurse, student, civil servant, cake maker, and military officer, to architectural historian and ice-cream machinery export manager. As in previous years, the differences in faith and background melted away as we laboured and lived together, working for the common good in the garden of the All-Holy Theotokos. All the path-clearers deserve great thanks for willingly working long hours in hot weather, and for their clear and constant support of each other from start to finish of the trip.

Fourteen monastic houses generously hosted us: the monasteries of Great Lavra, Iviron, Vatopedi, Dochiariou, Konstamonitou, Koutloumousiou, Hilandar, Zographou, Pantokrator, Dionysiou, Grigoriou, and Stavronikita, and the sketes of the Prophet Elijah and Bogoroditsa. We are most grateful to the elders and brotherhoods at all of these for their welcome and their hospitality. Significant thanks are also due to the Holy Epistasia for their continued support of our work, and to the SETE Group for once again providing the team with transport and accommodation outside the Holy Mountain.

I am pleased to report that the great majority of paths are in good condition, the path descriptions and GPS tracks are accurate, and we are continuing to see a slow increase in the number of monks and pilgrims using them. On many occasions teams out on the paths received thanks and blessings for their work, another sign that what we do is appreciated. It is particularly satisfying to know that the 19-kilometre-long path along the ridge from Karyes to Hilandar and Esphigmenou is now clear for its entire length. This path, known as the Way of the Bey, forms the spine of a network of important paths between monasteries to the north of Karyes, and needed the combined efforts of the Vatopedi, Koutloumousiou, and Hilandar teams to check and clear it.

Peter Howorth and Roland Baetens continued their work on mapping the Holy Mountain. They have now assembled a huge database of information which is being made available to the Holy Epistasia, monasteries, police, and fire brigade. The Philathonites map

of the Holy Mountain continues to sell well to pilgrims around the world; interestingly, only a small percentage of the purchasers are FoMA members.

Organizing and running the pilgrimage is a team effort, so I was fortunate to be supported by many people. John Arnell, David Bayne, and David Stothard provided invaluable input and advice, while Dimitris Bakalis worked constantly to communicate with the various monasteries and, as always, was a tower of strength. Leslie Currie, Bryce Cross, Peter Desmond, and Chris Thomas helped with paperwork and tools. On the Holy Mountain John McCormack, Mark Pearson, Michael Johnson, Lampros Anadiotis, Chris Thomas, and Dimitris Bakalis all led monastery teams. Constant changes in schedule, missing tools, complex transport arrangements, and participants dropping out at short notice made the leaders' job more complex, and they should all be thanked, not only for taking on the responsibility, but also for ensuring their teams' safe working and return. We were also fortunate to have Kyle Rambo and Ron Epstein, two American pilgrims unconnected with the Footpaths Project, join us for a few days on the paths. Both clearly recognized the value of our work and were keen to support it.

It is with a mix of pleasure and sadness that I finish this report on the 2018 path-clearing pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain. The pleasure is from the completion of another successful visit to the Mountain during which the largest group of path-clearers so far stayed in more monasteries and sketes and checked and cleared more paths than we have ever managed in previous years. The sadness comes from my decision to stand down as co-ordinator of the Footpaths Project – a decision taken in the light of my personal circumstances at home and the importance of handing over to a new group of people. I will miss greatly the companionship of my fellow path-clearers but know that the close friendships we forge on the Holy Mountain will continue for many years to come.

The project's gradual increase in size and complexity means it is now far too big a task for one person to take on. Fortunately a number of members have come forward and agreed to take on the administration and organization. This team is now planning the 2019 pilgrimage, which will take place from 11 to 26 May.

I believe that the Footpaths Project is now stronger than ever and I look forward to supporting its continued growth and success. I am sure the next generation of organizers and leaders will gain spiritually, physically, and emotionally from their involvement. I certainly have over the past decade, and shall be eternally grateful to the Holy Mountain, the monasteries, and all the path-clearers for enriching my life.

ANDREW BUCHANAN

Westbury-sub-Mendip

A LOPPER'S DIARY

Thirty-two people cleared footpaths this year, aged between nineteen and seventy-eight. We had many different experiences, many different days. This one is from the geriatric end of the range.

3 am. Talanton, talanton, talan-talan-talanton. The call for matins hammered out on a plank. On days when we are not working, for example when we leave or change monasteries, I get up. We are working today, so I roll over and go back to sleep.

6 am. Ease protesting limbs out of bed. Wash and dress. Long-sleeve shirt, hiking trousers, boots, elastic socks and knee bandages supplemented by Ibuprofen and trekking poles, the rambler's Zimmer frame. Drink two litres of water for all-day hydration and put another three in the pack. Sun-hat. Trail mix. Goggles. Work gloves. Loppers. I've also bagged the new shears, Britneys we call them, after Ms Spears, the pop singer. I have a Red Cross certificate that qualifies me to carry the first-aid kit.

7 am. The three of us breakfast at the workers' table. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday are fasting, so we start the day with a sugar high on nutty halva and dark chestnut honey with yesterday's bread. Other days we get fried eggs or an omelette. A friendly monk gives us a plastic bag with a generous picnic. The monks' breakfast is about 9.30, too late for us as we start early to get back in time for vespers.

Illustrations in a Book of Hours, we plod through massive nail-studded gates with shouldered loppers to muffled chanting from the katholikon. A glorious morning, porcelain-blue sky, and the crystal light of Greece. Today we are making a 300-metre descent from Karyes to seaside Ivion. Other days we go uphill, a morning slog but easier to stagger home.

The first stretch is past fields of shimmering polytunnels. We are in the Garden of the Virgin – *to Perivoli tis Panagias*. There are two Greek words for garden: *kipo* is the land round the house with lawns and flowers and shady places for a barbie; *perivoli* is a more utilitarian plot, away from the house, for growing fruit and vegetables, like an allotment.

8 am. We follow the FoMA sign with its striding pilgrim logo on to a *kaldერი* path of massive stone slabs. I'm the designated fool to proof the FoMA path descriptions that can be

downloaded from our website in English and Greek. We also note changes for the cartographers responsible for the Filathonites map, a coveted resource for pilgrims, police, fire service, monastery administrators, and the governing council.

The path is overgrown by rock rose, tree heather, strawberry tree, Spanish broom, brambles, various thorns, and the persistent smilax creeper that knits the rest into impenetrable tangles and climbs trees 10 metres tall. The first man puts his pack down 20 metres on and works backwards. The second puts his down another 20 metres ahead. And so on. We should keep in sight of each other, in case someone gets injured or lost.

9 am. We've done 200 metres. Mostly back-breaking, ground-level work. We stop for a water break before a stunning view of the forested valley, cells and sketes among the green, and the sea beyond.

10 am. Work is now at eye level under a luscious canopy of trees. We attack with our saws a dead specimen toppled across the path by the winter snow. As we heave the final bit of trunk into the undergrowth, we break into Monty Python's lumberjack song.

11 am. We stop at the *kelli* of the famous Elder, now Saint, Paisios. After *loukoumi* and a draught of spring water, the resident monk shows us the moving little chapel where Paisios spent most of his nights. And the long string from his balcony to the front gate on which he let down the key to visitors.

A wide *kalderimi* under a tall tunnel of trees with little to do but trudge on. I loiter behind the others, enjoying solitude in the soundscape of birdsong and distant machinery. The rhythm of the Jesus Prayer sets the pace.

12.00. Lunch. In the shade with a stunning view of the coast, a monastery beside the cobalt sea and the white marble peak of the Holy Mountain, for once without its tonsure of cloud. We delve into the bag and bring out what we had for breakfast with the addition of a tomato salad. Our conversation ranges from the theological (the uncertain meaning of 'daily' in the Lord's Prayer) to the secular (Liverpool's chances in the Champions League final).

1 pm. Traffic noise gets louder. The path crosses a main road. Careful not to get run over, we put up signs to help pilgrims navigate 100 metres of dispiriting concrete. It is not the Athos we come for, but one we must get used to. Our team leader takes GPS readings.

2 pm. We are back on a beautiful woodland path, lopping and hacking. We are encouraged by passing walkers, speaking mainly Russian or Greek interspersed with other Balkan languages. A cheerful Serbian monk says he walks the paths in a struggle with his waistline. He slaps the offending part and we exchange commiserations on the subject. I suggest he takes over my Britneys for the exercise, but he thinks I am joking and stomps off with a laugh.

3 pm. Many find path-clearing a spiritual exercise. Chopping a rock rose is a chore or a prayer, depending on your outlook. *Ora et labora*, pray and work, as Benedictines say – not so inappropriate, since one of the first monasteries on Athos was Italian Benedictine. It lasted 300 years and its ruined tower is nearby. Right now I am too tired and hot to meditate on anything but a cold shower and a beer.

I limp into Ivion behind the others. They can walk back up the mountain if they like, I'm calling a cab. Several monks run taxis and I ask the guest master if he has any of their numbers. He says there is a bus back to Karyes in fifteen minutes. We just have time to venerate the wonderworking icon of Our Lady the Gatekeeper, not forgetting a word of thanks for laying on transport, before scuttling to the stop. It takes twenty minutes to whizz back to where we started that morning. Isn't the concrete road wonderful?

4 pm. The shower has two temperatures: agonizingly cold in the morning and deliciously cold in the afternoon. The quiet hour before vespers is the time to make a cup of tea and relax with an improving book. Or in my case collapse on the bed in a stupor.

5 pm. Vespers. The katholikon and the narthex are packed with monks and pilgrims. Four members of a motorcycle gang make their presence felt, big men in every direction with shaven heads and scars, their affiliation advertised on bulging T-shirts. One has to be turfed out of the abbot's seat. They cannot spoil the numinous mix of chanting, the glorious Psalm 103, incense, jingling censer, icons, and frescos alive in the light and shadow of late afternoon.

6 pm. We troop into the *trapeza*. At first the non-Orthodox were seated in a side room. The kindly abbot noticed this on the third day and invited us into the refectory. After grace and the first bell we scoff quickly in silence, listening to the reading and gazing at the spectacular

frescos. At the second bell we may drink, but no wine on a fast day, alas. On the third bell we stand for grace and file out between the abbot's blessing and the cooks bent double in apology. We go back into church for compline and veneration of the relics.

7 pm. Monks and pilgrims mill around in the courtyard. I chat with a genial Cypriot monk about this and that, the Apocalypse mainly, until one of the team comes over in search of a sharpening stone. They go to the workshop, discussing the merits of Chinese tools.

8 pm. I join other pilgrims in the kiosk outside, taking pictures of the Holy Mountain, phoning home, and catching up with the BBC news, the more fatuous the longer one stays here.

9 pm. Nightfall. Time to break out the *tsipouro*. The noisy bikers on the floor below keep themselves to themselves and their vodka. We sit on the balcony, gossiping with the guest-master, an elderly Greek, and a trio of Cypriots. They ply us with a *meze* of feta and tomatoes, which we reciprocate with crisps. The existence of footpaths is a surprise to the Greek. He thought we were here to keep the roadside verges tidy. One day perhaps we shall be tasked with this.

10 pm. Bedtime. Drift off to the sound of nightingales, jackals, and bikers. Tomorrow will be another beautiful day on the allotment.

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TOWARDS AN ICONOGRAPHIC RENEWAL ON MOUNT ATHOS

The icon is part of an act of worship; its context is invocation and doxology. The art of the icon is a liturgical art. In the tradition of the Orthodox Church, the icon is not merely a piece of decoration or a visual aid. We do more than just look at icons or talk about them; we *pray* with them.⁵

On 1 February 2018 I completed a 20,000-word dissertation and submitted it for assessment at the University of Winchester. It was the culmination of a Master of Theology programme that had covered six modules on Orthodoxy including, *inter alia*, Iconography, Canon Law, Pilgrimage, and Monasticism. A central question that lay behind the dissertation concerned a number of challenges that the Orthodox Church faces today in respect of its liturgical art. The revival of traditional iconography only really began in the early part of the twentieth century, after a period when icons had become naturalistic, realistic, or pietistic. In Russia, during the early nineteenth century, the Slavophile movement championed a move away from the pro-Enlightenment reforms of Peter the Great towards a more authentic Slavic identity, including in the sphere of religion and its art. Prince Eugene Trubetskoi, writing around the time of the Great War and before the Russian Revolution, observed that ‘the discovery of the icon is one of the major and most paradoxical events in the history of Russian culture.’⁶ The use of the word ‘discovery’ was not accidental. Since the late sixteenth century older Russian icons had been covered with a silver or gold metallic revetment or *riza*. For Trubetskoi it was also ‘paradoxical’ because it was only at the turn of the twentieth century, through a process of restoration, that ‘the icon’s beauty is revealed to the eye... Once we decipher the language of these symbolic images, not understood until now and still obscure, we shall have to rewrite not only the history of Russian art but also the history of old Russian culture.’⁷

While this astonished sense of discovery was true of Russia, it was equally

⁵ K. Ware, Foreword to R. Williams, *Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002), p. ix.

⁶ E. N. Trubetskoi, *Icons: Theology in Colour* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), p. 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

true of Greece. It came about principally through the iconographer and author Photios Kontoglou who, as part of the ‘Generation of the 1930s’, sought new and authentic expressions of art, literature, and music that offered a modern Greek identity. Kontoglou made his ‘discovery’ of iconography during his first visit to Mount Athos in 1923. Not unlike Trubetskoi, the revelation of what the icon could and should be changed his life. Kontoglou was never a copyist. Over a period of time, his work became infused with the eastern influences of his Anatolian heritage, together with an exposure to rapidly changing concepts of western art in Paris and Munich that had been forged in response to the horrors of the Great War. Kontoglou’s prodigious work ethic, combined with a deep faith in the Orthodox Church – as he expressed it during his early and middle years – inspired a return to the ‘Byzantine style’.

The rediscovery of the icon is still in its relative infancy and may take years to evolve more fully. Many contemporary attempts to imitate ‘authentic’ Byzantine models fail on account of a lack of subtlety in execution or indeed superficiality. A key question being considered as a backdrop to this research concerned the challenges facing contemporary iconographers. How to identify timeless iconographic principles and yet have the boldness, skill, and vision to express them in a way that is authentic, without simply copying or reproducing old models? An answer to this question could form the basis of a valid response to accusations of a reductionist ‘painting by numbers’ levelled by those who may misunderstand the liturgical essence of the icon.

The context of the rediscovery of the icon led to researching the wider context of Greek identity already mentioned. It formed the basis of an investigation into the generation of modern Greek iconographers who were inspired by Kontoglou to produce a form of iconography that also reflects something of their own artistic mien: George Kordis, Stamatis Skliris, and Michael Vassilakis. There is also a parallel road between the near contemporaries Kontoglou and Leonid Ouspensky that has been shown to reveal similarities between the Greek and Russian traditions: one looking to Byzantium and the other to the older Russian schools of Novgorod, Moscow, and Tver. Yet there appeared to be a pressing need to look again towards Mount Athos, given its unquestionable influence on Kontoglou’s rediscovery of what might constitute iconographic authenticity, and to include this as a chapter within the dissertation. A wonderful ‘chance encounter’ with the Master Iconographer at

Vatopedi monastery at the end of the 2017 path-clearing pilgrimage laid the foundations to take these ideas beyond the sphere of books and libraries and into the realm of primary research.

So in October 2017, with the welcome assistance of a FoMA Travel Bursary, I set out on a ten-day solo pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain, to find out what was happening there in terms of its iconography. In particular, the question of whether the very evident spiritual and monastic renewal on Mount Athos had led to a corresponding development in its iconography seemed important. Were older models from the past simply being copied, or had wider contemporary influences and ideas been brought to bear to offer something new? And what freedoms or constraints do monastic iconographers on Mount Athos experience when seeking to balance a new aesthetic authenticity on the one hand with the Holy Mountain's widely perceived role as the pre-eminent conservator of Tradition on the other?

I was aware that the icon studios were highly regarded both within and outside the Holy Mountain, and accepted a kind invitation to return to Vatopedi. In total there are six relatively young monks whose primary obedience is to iconography under the guidance of Fr Haralambos, who trained in Fine Art, including Iconography, at university in Bucharest. During my time at the monastery, I could speak freely and watch the monks paint and learn how the whole process worked. Importantly, I was also able to attend the many liturgical services, experiencing the images *in situ*, and to live as a pilgrim, walking and checking some of the ancient footpaths that lead to and from the monastery.

The timeframe from commissioning an icon to its eventual completion and dispatch can take up to five years. This is largely due to the sheer demand, the time and research needed to undertake the work, and the fact that commissions come from all over the world. Some believe that a hand-painted, handmade icon from Vatopedi brings with it a certain cachet on account of its being crafted by monks in this unique monastic environment with over a thousand years of tradition. As a result, they are not inexpensive items and consequently many people appear happy to wait. Vatopedi receives many commissions for its miracle-working icons (it has eight, more than any

other monastery), to which pilgrims and monks alike attach great reverence.⁸ The icon studios are on the top floor and have access to good light and retain a quiet sense of endeavour and artistry. In the ground-floor workshops some commissions are mounted with silver or gold revetments, as mentioned earlier by Trubetskoi, and encased in highly polished glass, which is hand-cut locally. Likewise the packaging for such larger items consists of locally hand-built wooden boxes, which are affixed to rollers to ensure that the icon will reach its destination in as perfect a condition as when it left the monastery. A wide nexus of transport and shipping logistics, together with sophisticated tracking arrangements, helps to minimize the risk of such valuable items going astray. It is also an impressive alliance of ancient artistic technique with newer technology that ensures the finished icon is of the best possible quality.

Yet behind this impressive organization the iconographers are also aware of a particular aesthetic and theological balance that they strive to achieve in their painting. One question in particular reflects both dimensions: how can the image of a contemporary saint that is known to many be represented in an iconic form that is at once faithful to that memory, whilst at the same time conforming to the traditional theological principles that underpin icon painting? In other words, ensuring that such a depiction is neither reduced to the painting of a photographic likeness, nor, at the opposite extreme, appears so generic in its iconic typology that it could be any saint from any period. This is a good example of where dedicated artistic skill combines with a monastic environment and a life infused with the gospel, to create conditions where the iconographer can stay true to the path of the ‘Royal Road’. In this environment he neither inhibits the development of Tradition inspired by the Holy Spirit, nor is he so radical as to veer away from the middle course of the ‘Royal Road’ of the gospel.

The resultant icon succeeds theologically, in the way that a painting of a photograph – while achieving verisimilitude – would simply not capture the transfigured spiritual reality of the saint depicted. Instead, by introducing a small measure of ‘iconic realism’, the monk allows the saint’s spiritual essence to be conveyed and encountered, while not being so generic as to be unrecognizable to the faithful. Vatopedi achieves this modest realism by setting it within a certain preferred

⁸ http://www.pravoslavieto.com/manastiri/aton/vatoped/guide_vatopedi.htm

aesthetic or 'house style'. It is influenced primarily by the late fourteenth-century Palaiologan School, as found in the highly stylized and dramatic icons of the Annunciation or the Doubting of Thomas from the church of St Mary Peribleptos in Ohrid or, more locally, the fresco of the Lamentation at the Tomb in Vatopedi itself. When a modest element of realism is introduced, it has the effect of producing something that is both daring and yet traditional. Many commissions along these lines have been completed, including several of holy men and women that have not as yet been declared saints by the Church but whose lives have inspired popular devotion around the world: Fr Gheorghe Calciu (d.2006), Fr Sophrony Sakharov (d.1993), and Virgin-Martyr Sara-Fatima Al-Muitairi (d.2008).

After returning to the UK and discussions with my university supervisor, I decided to write up all of the material that I had from my pilgrimage to Mount Athos and to intersperse it with ideas about the rediscovery of the icon from earlier research. The result was that, instead of writing a single chapter on the iconography of Mount Athos, it became the dominant overall theme. Shortly after it was submitted for examination, I learned that the professor who marked it –whom I had never met – had been very kind about it. I had 'put down my pen' in February and vowed not to write another word for some time! Yet not long afterwards it was suggested that I might consider submitting a research proposal for the doctoral programme. This would be based on some of my conclusions for the need to investigate contemporary iconography across the Holy Mountain more widely. Following a formal interview with faculty staff in June, the proposal was accepted and I was offered a place. So I will start work on the PhD in October 2018. I am hopeful that more pilgrimages to Mount Athos will take place to conduct the primary research, not least because there appears to be very little written on this specific subject. This new direction is unlikely to have happened without my October 2017 pilgrimage, as suggested by Andrew Buchanan, the FoMA Footpath Team Co-ordinator, and supported generously by the FoMA Executive Committee and the wise counsel of my academic supervisor, Dr Andreas Andreopoulos. And of course, my wife... and two daughters!

In a final twist, I was again posted to Vatopedi during the path-clearing pilgrimage in May 2018. I was now able to get the first-hand thoughts and reaction to my dissertation from the Master Iconographer and especially his assistant, Fr

Ermaios, who is of Greek family origin and hails from South Carolina, USA. I had sent them a bound (and later an electronic) copy of the research, which, unbeknown to me, a good number of the monks appear to have read or knew of its existence. The two fathers appeared to like what I had written, while helpfully pointing out a number of errors or omissions on my part. I was also gently reminded that no one had previously been given quite such unprecedented access to the iconographers or the studios before, which was a cause of both surprise and much gratitude on my part. So, rather pushing my luck, I asked whether our band of path-clearers might be permitted a small guided visit and perhaps a talk (I had the impression that this had not been done too frequently either). To my great delight, Fr Ermaios later received a blessing to do this and our team of about ten, supplemented by FoMA Chairman Dr Graham Speake – who happened to be on pilgrimage to Vatopedi at the same time – all agreed to come. It was a great blessing and a privilege to have so many of our FoMA team able to visit the studios and to hear the clarity of Fr Ermaios's erudite descriptions of their work and the patience and good grace with which he answered our many questions. Inevitably, we stayed rather later than anyone had anticipated, but it seemed to work quite well. To my own great surprise, I now find myself in a position somewhat unexpected on 1 February 2018: namely of looking ahead to future pilgrimages to the Holy Mountain to carry out more research and writing perhaps a little more about this exciting and fascinating subject over the next several years.

PETER DESMOND
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RESTORATION OF THE DIONYSIOU TOWER CLOCK

Dionysiou is considered to be one of the smaller monasteries on Mount Athos and ranks fifth in the monastic hierarchy. It dates back to the second half of the fourteenth century when it was founded by St Dionysios of Korseos. Time-keeping has always been an important part of maintaining the smooth running of its affairs.

Work was started on the restoration of the Dionysiou tower clock in January 2017. It was a period when Mount Athos witnessed an unprecedented snowfall and at least a metre of snow had to be cleared before access could be gained to the workshop and the clock.

Archaeological evidence supporting the horological history of the monastery has been excavated, not from the ground, but from mounds of rusting iron artefacts that Fr Simon of Dionysiou has collected over many years and has subjected to a process of conservation. There are many fathers like him on the Holy Mountain who collect anything and everything that is old and store it for posterity. At the beginning of 2017 I was engaged by the monastery to restore its tower clock that had been silent for at least half a century. During my stay at Dionysiou many items of rusted iron that might remotely resemble a mechanical gear wheel were given to me to examine and comment upon. On one occasion I received a small gear wheel that had so much corrosion that it was difficult to assess. Electrolysis was used to remove the rust, and when the fog of time was blown away, it revealed what appeared to be sixteenth-century iron clock gear that was characteristic of early iron clocks originating from Germany. The gear was identified as the pin wheel of the strike mechanism that functions by lifting the clock hammer which strikes a bell.

Two other gears found were identified as being part of a winding barrels system. One was the great wheel pin gear which has the same function as the above-mentioned gear, and the other was the great wheel of a going train. The teeth on each of the gears were of different designs, suggesting that they may have originated from two different clocks not related to the tower clock under restoration. They were significantly smaller in diameter, which suggests that these were the remnants of an earlier tower clock or clocks at the monastery. These finds give a glimpse into the horological history of Dionysiou monastery and a clue as to how the artefacts relate to each other.

The Dionysiou clock was dismantled and the individual components that had substantial rust were cleaned using electrolysis. This is a method that was used extensively on other restoration projects and has proved to be the most successful procedure for removing rust, since it is non-invasive to the artefacts being cleaned and to humans. The electrolysis

process converts the rust to black iron oxide powder that can easily be removed with a wire brush, revealing a clean iron surface that is treated with a proprietary rust preventative and patination crystalline wax (Athonite black wax), developed by the author on Mount Athos. Some repairs, reconstruction, and rebushing were done, but generally the clock was in good condition.

Description of the clock

The style of the frame of the Dionysiou tower clock is typically known as a ‘side-by-side birdcage’ construction, where ‘side-by-side’ refers to the orientation of the winding barrels and ‘birdcage’ to the likeness of the frame to a birdcage. The clock was originally mounted on a wooden base frame in the clock room that was over the bell room.

The clock had two gear mechanisms. The first, referred to as the ‘going train’, drives the single hand on the major dial that shows the hours. The other gear mechanism is the ‘striking train’ that sounds the hours and half-hours on a large single bell.

Each mechanism was driven by a heavy weight suspended on a rope wound around a wooden barrel and descending three floors to ground level before requiring rewinding. The original weights had been lost, so a new set of weights were designed and constructed in the form of thick iron plates that were saddled on to a shaft and added to until the correct operation of the clock was achieved.

The approximate dimensions of the clock are: length 0.6m × depth 0.3m × height 0.7m.

There is evidence to suggest that the design of the dial on the façade of the clock tower has been in constant flux over the years, changing with every major renovation of the clock or tower, as was the case with this recent restoration project. The dial, before the current restoration (2016 –17), had four dials painted on a plastered wall on the façade of the clock tower. The major dial had highly stylized arabic numerals, that are sometimes referred to as Turkish numerals and are generally found on clocks made for the Ottoman market. The numerals were painted black on a white background.

Within the circumference of the major dial were three smaller dials, faded and barely visible. The small dial near the 10 o’clock position was divided into twelve hours with numerals in the style of the main dial. Whilst it is usual for the main dial to indicate Athos time, the small dial may have been used possibly to indicate cosmic time or UTC (Coordinated Universal Time). The other two small dials are illegible but possibly showed the days of the week and quarter divisions of the day.

The Dionysiou clock dial is unique on Mount Athos in that it is currently the only tower clock dial that shows the hours in stylized arabic numerals, although this was not always the case. A photograph of the dial taken in 1961 shows what appears to be conventional arabic numbers, of the sort that we are familiar with, that have been overwritten with stylized arabic numerals. The appearance of the dial in a photograph of 1935 shows that conventional arabic numbers were used on the dial and the surrounding area was extensively decorated. The arch is draped with foliage and a winged cherub sits above the dial. Two figures armed with spears appear to be guarding the clock as they are symmetrically positioned either side of the dial. The two figures seem to be European soldiers wearing pith helmets and not the traditional Arab figures that one would expect.

An early photograph taken in 1928 by Fred Boissonnas shows the Dionysiou tower clock dial with stylized arabic numerals. Some artwork within the confines of the dial chapter ring, which includes a small subsidiary dial, indicates ‘minutes’ marked at quarter intervals. At the centre of the dial is an anthropomorphic crescent moon. Above this is an anthropomorphic image of the sun and a star on either side. A cherub is positioned at the top of the clock as in the previous depictions.

The latest restoration of the clock tower dial was carried out during the period 2016 – 17. The repainted clock dial was not merely a reproduction of the previous design but a montage of the dial’s history. The layout of the dial and its content was carefully thought out, taking into consideration features of past artwork, design, and tradition.

The main clock dial shows a division of twelve hours in stylized arabic numerals. Within this dial are three smaller subsidiary dials, one of which has a chapter ring of twelve divisions inscribed in roman numerals. The other two dials have an anthropomorphic depiction of a crescent moon and the sun with stars scattered in the background. These have symbolic meaning in Christianity, the sun symbolizing Christ as in the prophecy of Malachi 4: 2. The sun and moon are used as attributes of the Virgin Mary who is referred to as ‘a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet’ (Revelation 12: 1), and the sun and moon are often portrayed in scenes of the Crucifixion to represent the sorrow of creation at the death of Christ.

The two guardians of the clock that were used in previous decoration of the façade have been replaced by two Arab figures that are more in keeping with the traditional ‘tower clock and Arab figure’ found on other tower clocks on Mount Athos. These two black figures are symmetrically positioned on either side of the clock dial. They are lavishly dressed and each holds a gong mallet in readiness to strike a bell to sound the hours on cue. The clock has

a single hand as is usually found on early clocks where insufficient accuracy would make a minute hand irrelevant. At the rear end of the hand is a bird balanced on a swivel so that, as the hand rotates, the bird is always upright. It appears to be a white dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit and of peace. On the outer circumference of the dial the ancient Greek letters of the alphabet are inscribed to indicate the hours. The ancient Greek alphabet was also used as a numbering system with letters: 'A' representing 1, 'B' 2, and so on.

Dating the clock

The style of the tower clock mechanism is generally known as a 'side-by-side birdcage' that came into use in around 1670 after the introduction of the pendulum. 'Birdcage' is the name given to describe the frame construction which is generally made of wrought iron. The frame is held together by wedges, rivets, or nuts and bolts. This was used until cast iron superseded wrought iron at the end of the eighteenth century. The clock can therefore be dated to after the introduction of the pendulum in 1657 and before 1800. The extensive use of screw threads suggests a date possibly around 1750.

The year 1952 was written on the clock room wall and on the wooden stand that supported the clock. A newspaper fragment found near the clock bears the date Thursday 8 April 1952. This evidence suggests significant activity in the clock room as a result of renovation, major repairs, or alterations to the clock at this period

Alterations to the clock

From evidence discovered in the clock room and on the clock, it would appear that the clock mechanism has undergone extensive alterations during its history. Most of these alterations were made on the going-train gear system where every gear wheel and pinion was replaced by a mixture of brass and iron wheels. The iron wheels were very crudely made and are easily identifiable as later additions.

Normally all the gear and pinion wheels on this clock would have been constructed using wrought iron, but a mixture of iron and brass gear wheels was used that is generally uncommon. The gear system on the striking train appears to be original apart from the count wheel that is an obvious replacement. Again it is roughly constructed using iron and wood material.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF ITEMS AND INSCRIPTIONS RELATING TO THE

DIONYSIOU TOWER CLOCK

DATE	ITEM	INSCRIPTION	LOCATION
15th c.	Chamber clock gear wheel	None	Store room
1744	Drawing of Dionysiou monastery showing the bell-tower		Drawing by Vasily Barsky
1754	Copper print plate	Date: '1754'	Dionysiou museum
1841	Star or sun made from brass, its purpose being part of the pendulum bob decoration	Date: '1841' written on brass in black ink	Tower clock pendulum bob
1930	Wooden clock stand. Translation: 'Vriola Year – 1930'	'ΒΡΙΩΛΑ ΕΤΟΣ – 1930' painted on a red iron oxide background with black paint	Clock room
?	Iron cross bar on clock frame	Initials: Π. Σ. Μ. painted on a red iron oxide background with black paint	Clock, top horizontal iron cross bar
1952	Internal clock room wall	Date: '1952' painted on a white wall with black paint	In the clock room, on the wall behind the main clock dial
1952	Wooden clock stand	Date: '1952' painted on a pale green background with black paint	Clock room

1952	Newspaper fragment	Date: TETAPTH 8-4-1952	Found in a box on the floor of the clock room

Conclusions

The earliest evidence found with reference to the Dionysiou tower clock is a copper engraving dated 1754 that illustrates a twelve-hour clock dial on the bell-tower. A pen-and-ink drawing of Dionysiou monastery dated 1744 by Vasily Barsky, a monk from Kiev, shows the bell-tower with no clock dial, and in his travel accounts he gives a description of the Dionysiou bell-tower but makes no reference to a clock. From this it could be construed that the clock dial was added to the tower sometime between 1744 and 1754, although this is not certain as these drawings are sometimes stylized representations where the artist may add or omit details of the subject-matter.

Another possibility is that an earlier clock was present in the tower but without a dial, giving only an audible time signal.

The discovery of two barrel gear wheels that are smaller than those on the current tower clock suggests the existence of at least one other tower clock at the monastery which predates the current clock, judging by the shape of the gear teeth.

A date 1841 inscribed on the pendulum bob decoration is another indicator of work carried out on the clock.

The name and date ΒΡΙΟΛΑ ΕΤΟΣ – 1930 (translates to ‘Vriola Year – 1930’) painted on the wooden clock frame implies that work was carried out on the clock in 1930 by Vriola. It also tells us that the clock was working during this period. In addition to this work, soon after 1930 the dial face was restored with significant deviations from the original design that included the addition of the two soldiers, one on either side.

The next landmark date was 1952 which was found painted on the clock frame, on the clock room wall, and printed on a fragment of newspaper that was in a box containing some clock parts and tools. The Greek initials Π. Σ. Μ. were also painted on the clock frame but it is not certain that they are related to this period of activity on the clock. Again it would seem that major work was done on the clock at this time. The dial face was altered yet again between 1935 and 1961, losing the soldiers and re-establishing the stylized arabic numerals.

Between 1961 and 2000 we find that the clock dial was altered again: this time three subsidiary dials were added to the face with indicators that were mechanically connected to the clock. This was a challenging undertaking that required a good understanding of horology, mathematics, and mechanics.

In 2016/17 the design of the clock dial has come full circle with the reinvention of the two figures and some artist elements inspired from earlier designs.

The restored Dionysiou tower clock was conserved by taking it out of service and keeping it safe in the monastery museum as a fully working exhibit. A metal stand was constructed to accommodate the clock with a perspex dial, on which a semi-transparent copy of the image on the clock tower was reproduced. A small bell was installed over the clock, connected to the mechanism, so that the hours could be struck. The clock was raised sufficiently above ground level so that the two driving weights had enough fall to allow it to run for several hours for demonstration purposes. A modern electric clock replaced the original mechanical movement in the tower and made superfluous the laborious task of winding the clock every few days.

The iconic façade of the clock tower that is instantly recognizable as belonging to the monastery of Dionysiou has been restored in a way that encompasses many of the former artistic design features that have faded over time. Whilst conserving the old, the practical functionality of the clock tower has been retained.

SPIRIDION AZZOPARDI

Rhondda Cynon Taff

REMINISCENCES OF OLIVER RACKHAM IN GREECE

This is a modified and enlarged version of an article that I wrote for Dr Jennifer Moody's newsletter for friends of the late Professor Oliver Rackham, published on 15 June 2018. Professor Peter Grubb wrote of him in *The Guardian* of 20 February 2015: 'He was one of those few people who combine originality with encyclopedic knowledge. ... Oliver was a quietly devoted Anglican and an eccentric dresser, wearing sandals and red socks with a dinner jacket.' Dr Chris Preston wrote in *Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland Yearbook* for 2016: 'In his lifetime he had produced a series of books which were outstanding for their combination of scholarship and readability, and which changed the way in which we interpret landscapes in Britain, Mediterranean Europe and elsewhere.' Oliver was a member of the Friends of Mount Athos, some of whom will remember his perceptive article, 'Our Lady's Garden: The Historical Ecology of the Holy Mountain', published in the Friends' *Annual Report* for 2004. I was fortunate to be a friend of this remarkable man and to enjoy four visits to Greece with him; but, before I write about them, I shall explain how I came to visit Mount Athos four times before I introduced Oliver to this captivating holy place.

During September 1990, not long before I retired from the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), I received a telephone call from Dr Duncan Poore, previously my boss (as Director), asking me to take over an assignment that he could not fulfil – to assess for the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) the ecological consequences of a major forest fire on Mount Athos. In December I visited Simonopetra, whose land was most affected by the fire and whose monks even had to fight several small fires in the monastery itself, and reported that, while clearly precautions needed to be taken to avoid so fierce and extensive a conflagration in future, fortunately Mediterranean vegetation is adapted to recover from forest fires and often little or no human intervention is necessary. So began for me a series of eight memorable visits to the Holy Mountain over the period from 1990 to 2011 as well as participation during the 1990s in programmes of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture (ICOREC; later called the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, ARC), specifically concerning holy mountains of the Orthodox Churches and of Chinese Taoists.

When Prince Philip became International President of WWF he was surprised to discover that, while science and recreation were recognized as basic 'props' for conservation, nobody had given any thought to religion, the 'third leg'; so he sought out Martin Palmer, Director of ICOREC, and appointed him as his personal adviser in this field. During 1991, 1992, and 1993 Martin, Dr Dimitri Conomos, and I visited seventeen of the twenty ruling monasteries

of Mount Athos and discussed with their abbots or their nominated representatives the environmental and conservation issues of greatest concern to them and/or to us in the light of our own observations. We presented our report to WWF and, on 9 November 1993, in person to the Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, while he was in London on a private visit to meet Prince Philip.

In 1991 I was asked by Martin if I could recommend a leader for an excursion during the Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection planned to be held in Crete that November. My response was that I could do so, provided that I could attend the conference myself too! Naturally my choice was Oliver Rackham, who planned and executed the event with characteristic enthusiasm and thoroughness. The excursion from Kolymbari, across the plain of Chania, up to Lakkoi and across the Omalos plain to the top of the Samaria gorge is vividly described on pages 104–10 of the conference proceedings, *So That God's Creation Might Live: The Orthodox Church Responds to the Ecological Crisis* (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 1992). On another day I sat next to Oliver on the coach and was treated to an astonishing flow of information and statistics about the landscape and settlements. Oliver delighted in the whole conference, including a sticky moment when Prince Philip suggested that a revered Orthodox cleric surely could not accept the literal truth of Isaiah's prophesy (in chapter 65, verse 25) that 'the lion will eat straw like the ox'. I also remember how he relished being offered canapés by a metropolitan! Our return flight to Athens was memorable too; the weather was perfect, the plane flew quite low, and Oliver named all the islands and peninsulas that we could see below us.

From that time I began to try to persuade Oliver to come with me to Mount Athos, because I realized that he would have insights that would never occur to me. He was positive about the idea but always busy with other projects. Then, after nine years, he suggested a visit with the Revd Canon Edward Bailey, an undergraduate contemporary of his at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who was standing in for the Dean of Chapel during a sabbatical and was also a member of the Friends. So I made all the arrangements for a visit in May 2001 by the three of us. We travelled first to Vatopedi monastery, where Oliver was excited by the 'laurisylvan' forest like that of the Tertiary Age. He later described this 'evergreen forest of giant holm-oaks and towering laurels, mantled in woody climbers, with curious evergreen undershrubs such as *Ruscus hypoglossum*', though, characteristically, he found proof, in the form of the ruins of an aqueduct and a water-mill, that this was not 'virgin forest' (as has often been claimed for Mount Athos). Next we travelled to the tip of the peninsula, staying in the oldest monastery, the Great Lavra, and then walking back to Simonopetra over several

days through the wildest part of the peninsula (Eremos or 'the Desert'), with nightingales singing day and night and Oliver reading to us from the works of earlier travellers. Near Grigoriou he pointed out traces of an earlier, forgotten fire close to the area that burnt in 1990.

Oliver was now so enthralled by the Holy Mountain that he demanded a further visit in June 2002, when the two of us planned to climb to the summit of Mount Athos (2,030 metres or 6,660 feet, rising straight out of the sea). We therefore disembarked at a point in Eremos where the crags look almost perpendicular and climbed for several hours in the afternoon heat, in my case in considerable pain as a result of an injured leg. We had been unable to book any overnight accommodation, but it seemed that God was merciful because we found an apparently unmanned cell at Kerasia including a guestroom with beds made up. (Admittedly there was a notice on the gate saying in Greek that pilgrims could not be admitted, but we decided that we didn't read Greek!) We ate some of our stock of food in the courtyard and were about to settle for the night when a monk emerged from the chapel; by this time it was dusk and he had no alternative to allowing us to stay the night. We had decided by now that I would be unable to climb the peak, but Oliver very daringly asked if he could leave his rucksack at the cell next morning while he did so, and the monk directed him to an unlocked shed.

Early next morning Oliver set off to ascend the peak while I limped along the path roughly eastwards towards Krya Nera ('Cold Waters', with a welcome spring) and our destination for the night, the Romanian skete, Prodromou. Being alone, I was rewarded by the sight of an Asiatic jackal watching me from the forest above the track about 50 metres away. (This species has migrated into Greece and become common on the Holy Mountain.) It was almost dusk by the time I staggered into the Romanian skete, where I received a warm welcome, but by the time it was dark there was still no sign of Oliver.

Next morning I emerged from the Liturgy to find Oliver sitting on a low wall, looking exceedingly scruffy but quite composed. He explained that at nightfall he had decided not to risk a fall and had settled down 'in a hollow way', but that, when he heard the skete's bell, he had realized too late that he could have reached Prodromou. Jackals howl when they hear bells, so I asked him whether he had heard a jackal as well. 'Ah,' said Oliver, 'so that's what it was that I heard!' I said, 'But you've often heard them howling, Oliver.' He replied, 'I didn't mean howling; I meant sniffing!' The prior appeared at this moment and firmly berated Oliver, telling him that it was only as a result of all our prayers for him to the All-Holy Virgin that he had not been devoured in the night. Oliver had left the track to botanize

among the rough rocks near the summit, photographing – among other endemic plants – a subspecies of woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) which, improbably, is confined to this mountain. He later declared the peak ‘a three-toenail mountain’ from the number of toenails he had lost despite his strong boots!

Later in 2002 I met Duncan Poore at an NCC reunion and thanked him for introducing me to Mount Athos. I then discovered that he had never been there but would very much like to do so. Thus it was that at the end of April 2003 he joined Oliver and me on our third visit to the Holy Mountain. Like Oliver, Duncan was a woodland ecologist but, though they knew each other’s academic work, they had barely met. In 2002, during our separate journeys to Prodromou, Oliver and I had both unexpectedly discovered and crossed the site of a substantial avalanche of the previous winter above the gorge of St Nilos, so he was determined to return to the site to study it more thoroughly and especially to record the herbaceous species that had sprung up as a wholly natural equivalent of ‘coppice plants’. So we found places in a vehicle to take us to the Great Lavra and from there walked to stay at Prodromou, from which we walked to the avalanche site and back. It proved highly instructive for me to listen to Oliver’s and Duncan’s expert opinions about the ancient deciduous oaks and chestnuts that we passed by – trees sometimes pollarded and often showing unambiguous signs of having originally grown in open wood-pasture at a time when even some remote parts of the peninsula were quite intensively managed for timber, firewood, and grazing – once again certainly not ‘virgin forest’! Later we visited Iviron, where Oliver drew attention to the numerous chimneys, pointing out that a great deal of wood would have been required to fuel the monastery’s fires in past times. Here we were entertained by a remarkable monk who kept a tame slow-worm up his sleeve which kissed him on his nose when he said ‘μύτη, μύτη’ (‘nose, nose’), who could charm wild snakes and lizards, and who recited to us all the scientific names of the herpetofauna of the Holy Mountain. From there we walked to Koutloumousiou – following what is reputedly Prince Charles’s favourite walk on Mount Athos – again seeing fine examples of ancient trees.

Of the four pilgrims who travelled to the Holy Mountain in 2001–2003 I am now the only one living. I still mourn my three companions: Oliver (who died on 12 February 2015, aged 75), Edward (who died on 22 April 2015, aged 79), and Duncan (who died on 22 March 2016, aged 90).

PHILIP H. OSWALD
Cambridge

BOOK REVIEWS

A History of the Athonite Commonwealth: The Spiritual and Cultural Diaspora of Mount Athos.
By Graham Speake. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 294. £75.00
hardback. ISBN 978-1-108-42586-5. £27.99 paperback. ISBN 978-1-108-44432-3. 41 colour
plates, 5 maps.

Graham Speake's new book strikes one as the natural sequel to his previous, well-received, and deservedly acclaimed work on Mount Athos, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (2nd edition, 2014). At the same time, as the title suggests, it stands in a sort of organic relationship with the classic work by Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500–1453* (1971), which is devoted to the history and influence of Byzantium between the early Middle Ages and the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Obolensky demonstrated how the peoples of the Balkans and Central Europe, even when perceiving Byzantium as an occupying force, readily accepted the values and accomplishments of Byzantine civilization as expressed through its laws and legal system, its literary and artistic practices, educational system, and organization of society in general. Parallel to this, Mount Athos, as the spiritual centre of the Byzantine world, radiated Christian values and experiences in organization of the religious life, which was an equally important element of the social fabric as well as of the state apparatus. This latter form of influence greatly outgrew the limits of Obolensky's 'commonwealth', covering all the territory from the Peloponnese to the North Sea and from Siberia to the river Drina.

Following the direction indicated by Obolensky, Speake has arrived at impressive results. Essentially, *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth* rests upon one sentence from Obolensky's book, which reads: 'The analogy ... between the alternating current of men and ideas flowing to and from the Mediterranean and the pulsations of a living heart finds a further illustration in the role of Mount Athos, drawing to itself men from all over Eastern Europe who sought training in the monastic life, and then sending back ... the results of their labours and learning to their native lands.' In this sense, Speake's new book not only testifies to the seminal character of Obolensky's work, but presents a good example of how a scholar can build upon and creatively develop ideas vaguely outlined by his predecessor.

Starting from a sound thesis that the essence of Orthodox teaching is contained in the concept and methods of the hesychast movement, Speake notes that the influence of Mount Athos on the formation of the Church and the development of monastic life in the entire area of the ‘commonwealth’ is directly related to the victory of Palamism in Byzantium. Tracing the spread of Athonite values throughout the Orthodox world, he dwells on the achievements of certain individuals who were their exponents, primarily as translators and interpreters of patristic literature, but also as missionaries, preachers, and founders of monasteries. Some of them (such as St Maximos the Greek or St Kosmas the Aetolian) were Greeks, but a majority belonged to other nations. They all spent years on Mount Athos and then, returning to their countries of origin or in some cases moving elsewhere, either alone or with a group of disciples, they devoted themselves to spreading the ideas of hesychasm, introducing Athonite patterns of worship and monastic life, and often decisively contributing to the founding and organizing of national Churches. Thus the author makes us familiar with the lives and activities of men such as St John the Iberian in Georgia, St Sava in Serbia, St Antony and St Theodosius of Kiev in present-day Ukraine, St Sergius of Radonezh and St Nil Sorsky in Russia, St Theodosius of Trnovo in Bulgaria, St Nikodimos of Tismana in Wallachia, and St Kosmas the Aetolian in Albania. Separate chapters are dedicated to the contributions of St Athanasios the Athonite, St Gregory of Sinai, St Gregory Palamas, St Paisy Velichkovsky, and, of course, the St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and his achievements as editor of the *Philokalia*.

Among the author’s many original and accurate observations, one concerning the direction of the spread of Athonite spiritual influence perhaps deserves special mention. Speake notices that this influence during the Byzantine era and following centuries extended into Eastern Europe and Russia, only to be rerouted westwards once the world wars and spread of communism in the twentieth century closed the northern and eastern routes. This development accounts for the remarkable presence in our time of Athonite values and, by extension, of Orthodoxy in general throughout hitherto impenetrable Roman Catholic and Protestant regions, in France, England, and North America.

In the author’s own words, his previous book was more of an ‘internal history’ of Athos, whereas this second one certainly represents its ‘external history’. Before us is a well-conceived, methodologically consistent, and highly readable work which irrevocably ranks its author among the leading authorities on Mount Athos in the West today.

VLADETA JANKOVIĆ

Belgrade

The Eternal Today: Journeying with the Church, in the Light of the Feasts. By Archimandrite Zacharias. Tolleshunt Knights: Stavropegic Monastery of St John the Baptist, 2018. Pp. 208. £15.00 hardback. ISBN 978-1-090649-15-6.

This is a beautifully produced and illustrated companion to the Orthodox liturgical year from the first of the three Sundays before Lent up to and including the feast of Pentecost. Each significant day is introduced by fragments from the liturgy, accompanied by short meditations and teaching by Fr Zacharias, who has a remarkable ministry in this country and abroad as a spiritual father. The book is adorned by wonderful illustrations, drawn from the frescos and other art created at this monastery founded by Fr Sophrony. Thus the rich iconographic tradition of Orthodoxy is made readily and memorably available, interpreted by and illuminating the written word.

This book will be of real value to anyone on retreat, or wishing to prepare themselves for Lent, Holy Week, and Eastertide, and in any part of the Christian Church. It would also serve well as a gift on the occasion of baptism, confirmation, or marriage. It will be most useful to place into the hands of the young as a companion to worship and belief or as a gift to those seeking to find out about the Christian faith and especially its Orthodox expression. Further companion volumes are being prepared.

Fr DOUGLAS DALES

Oxford

Mount Athos Wine: The History of Winemaking in the Holy Mountain. By Eleni Kefalopoulou, trans. James Lillie. Athens, 2018. Pp. 189. €35.00 hardback. ISBN 978-618-00-0186-0.

Numerous colour illustrations. Available from www.winewitheleni.com

‘If there’s one place on earth where wine is self-evidently woven into the culture, the spirit and the soul, then it’s the Holy Mountain’, says Konstantinos Lazarakis, Master of Wine, in the Prologue to this attractive overview of the history and current state of wine-making on Mount Athos, and Eleni Kefalopoulou provides ample support for that assertion.

The book is the result of a collaboration between the author, a wine journalist who also runs wine tours and holidays in Greece, and her husband, Aris Fotiadis, a documentary filmmaker. The latter – his wife for obvious reasons being forbidden to visit Mount Athos – is responsible for the excellent photographs and the interviews with the monks which provide some memorable insights into their own views of their obedience as wine-makers.

As is to be expected from a modern Greek, the author adopts a methodical approach to her subject, beginning by treating the place of wine in Christianity and more particularly in the life of the Holy Mountain. She goes on to survey the history of wine-making on Athos from ancient times to the modern day, illustrating it with photographs of surviving equipment and buildings, and discussing the production and use of those pilgrim favourites, raki and tsipouro. It is instructive to be reminded of just how widespread the medicinal use of wine and its byproducts has been in the history of the Holy Mountain – a view of wine now largely lost in the West, except perhaps to the more discerning modern antiquarians, such as M. R. James’s readers.

The second half of the book deals with the wines of each monastery and affords an insight into the lives and views of the wine-makers themselves. Elder Epiphanius of Mylopotamos, himself the author of an Athonite cookbook, contrasts the former wine-making styles which favoured tannin so strong ‘that it turned your tongue back to front, like a frog’s’. His own approach to wine-making sounds rather more palatable: ‘Wine needs coddling. You have to listen to it, let it talk to you, provide what it needs... We’re continuing the wine-making tradition of the Holy Mountain with modern methods.’

Elder Maximos of Iviron highlights the importance of the vineyards in times of crisis: ‘Even in the German Occupation, a lot of lay people survived thanks to being able to work in the vineyards. Lots of people were saved thanks to the wine.’ Not all witnesses are so positive,

however: the author recounts the measures taken to curb the consumption of alcohol in all its various Hagioritic forms following several bouts of drunkenness at the Prophet Elijah skete in the early years of the twentieth century. The singers were forbidden raki during their preparation, and the offending monks, temporarily at least, were banned from the skete. As the author says, ‘Punishments for over-indulgence were always harsh, but human nature has its weaknesses.’

Where relevant, what might be termed the gazetteer section of the book lists by name the various vineyards of each monastery, skete, or dependency, their sizes, the grape varieties grown, and provides information on the notable wines produced, sometimes with pictures of the bottled product. There is a general impression that the serious wine-producing establishments have increased their use of the more familiar modern varietals – this because of the higher-quality wines they produce and their resistance to disease. Any romantic yearning for a lost realm of Eastern wine-making is rapidly dispelled by Papa-Savvas of Monoxyllitis: ‘Wine in those days was both medicine and nutrition and was so dry, it made your teeth fall out.’ Papa-Savvas concludes on a thoroughly practical note: ‘Vines are difficult and expensive to look after. This is why, in the old days, they used to say: “Plant a vineyard for your nobility and walnuts for your children.”’

Other monks stress a more obviously spiritual dimension. At Karakalou Fr Leontios reflects the time-honoured character of his monastery when he says: ‘Wine demands hard labour, devotion and love. I expect love in return, nothing material. This is the meaning of our lives. We work out of love from dusk till dawn. So love is what we expect as payment.’

This book is to be welcomed as a serious and unusual survey of the Holy Mountain and its life, of interest to wine-bibbers and teetotalers alike. On this evidence, Eleni Kefalopoulou is an engaging and insightful writer who would make an excellent guide to the varieties of Greek wine explored on her tours.

ALASDAIR CROSS

Guernsey

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Allison is Emeritus Professor of Classical and Medieval Studies and of Religion at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine, USA. FoMA Membership Secretary for the Americas for over twenty-five years, he is director of the Philotheou Greek Manuscripts Catalog project, on which he is now working with FoMA member, Konstantinos Dolmas.

Spiridion Azzopardi was born on Corfu and has lived in the UK since the age of five. Since retirement in 2007, he divides his time between sailing in the Mediterranean during the summer and conservation and research work on early tower and chamber clocks on Mount Athos in the winter.

Andrew Buchanan worked in theatre, feature films, and TV drama before he moved into producing wildlife documentaries. He spends his free time managing a small nature reserve, scuba diving, cider making, and trying to become a better archaeologist.

Averil Cameron was Warden of Keble College, Oxford, and is Chair of the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research and President of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies. Her most recent book is *Byzantine Christianity: A Very Brief History* (2017).

Alasdair Cross is the managing director of a professional services company in Guernsey. His most recent pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain included a memorable visit to the winery of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra.

Douglas Dales is an Anglican priest working in the diocese of Oxford with close links to the Holy Mountain. He is the author of studies in theology and early English church history.

Peter Desmond is a postgraduate research student and doctoral candidate at the University of Winchester. His research is primarily in the field of Orthodox theology and to a lesser extent art history, with specific reference to contemporary iconography where it is practised today, in the monasteries, sketes, and cells of Mount Athos. He is also a team member of the FoMA Footpaths Project.

Vladeta Jankovic is a retired Professor of Classical Literature at the University of Belgrade. He served as the Ambassador of his country in Great Britain and at the Holy See. He is co-founder (1990) of the Serbian Association of the Friends of Athos.

John Eifion Jones is on the editorial staff of the *Daily Telegraph*. He was previously a United Press International correspondent in London and Brussels.

John Mole writes about his and other people's travels in the eastern Mediterranean. He lives on Euboea, Greece, and in London.

Philip Oswald comes from a family of Anglican clergy and read Classics and Theology at King's College, Cambridge. He taught for six years, three of them in Cyprus, and then worked for the Nature Conservancy for thirty years. He has visited Mount Athos eight times, most recently in February 2011 with his forty-nine-year-old son and thirteen-year-old grandson.

Fr Nicholas Price has attended all but one of FoMA's pilgrimages since joining the Friends in 2008. He is assistant priest at St Nicholas's Greek Orthodox Church, Cardiff.

Graham Speake, founder and Chairman of FoMA, is a writer and publisher. He is author of *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (2nd edn. 2014), which won the 2002 Criticos Prize, and of *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth: The Spiritual and Cultural Diaspora of Mount Athos* (2018).