

# A Pilgrim's Guide to Mount Athos

Friends of Mount Athos

2019

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## Introduction

### *What is Mount Athos?*

In physical terms Mount Athos is a peninsula, 56 kilometres long and not more than 8 kilometres wide, jutting out into the Aegean from Halkidiki, the most easterly of its three splayed claws. Its northern border roughly follows the 100-metre contour across the isthmus. South of it the land rises steeply to wooded peaks of 500 and 600 metres. South of the claw's knuckle the woods give way to scrub and ultimately to bare rock as the contours rise, peaking finally at 2,033 metres before a sudden drop down to the sea. From the summit, snow-capped for much of the year, Robert Byron claimed he could see the plains of Troy; but even he admitted that the flat dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople 'rose only in the mind'. For in spiritual terms Athos is not of this world at all: it is, at least for those who live there, a station in sacred space, a foretaste of paradise. Not for nothing is it known as the Holy Mountain.

For more than a thousand years Athos has existed as the principal centre of monasticism for the Orthodox Church – or rather for all the Orthodox Churches. Ever since Byzantine times it has been a pan-Orthodox, supra-national centre. There were once monasteries for Albanians, Bulgarians, Georgians, Italians, Moldavians, Russians, Serbs, and Wallachians as well as Greeks. Today there are still houses for Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, Russians, and Serbs. Furthermore Athos is unique for being a portion of contemporary continental Europe entirely devoted to the monastic life and to nothing else.

Today the Mountain has a total population of some 2,200 monks, a figure that is at present more or less static. Most follow the cenobitic tradition which brings monks into communities for living, working, and worshipping together. Others follow the eremitical tradition and live as hermits, either in small groups or as solitaries. Between them they inhabit a variety of different establishments.

First and foremost are the so-called ruling monasteries. Their number is fixed by charter at twenty (though there were once more); and they follow a rigid hierarchy of precedence, beginning with the oldest, the Great Lavra, Vatopedi, and Iviron, and ending with Konstamonitou. Each is a self-governing coenobium, owing allegiance to no ecclesiastical authority. Even the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch is restricted to matters of spirituality that affect the monks. Of the twenty, seventeen are Greek, one Serbian, one Russian, and one Bulgarian. Between them they rule the Mountain.

In addition to the ruling monasteries there are many other smaller settlements, though each must function as a dependency of one of the principal houses. First in importance come the sketes. These tend to be smaller, poorer, and more ascetic than their parent house; but apart from being ruled by a prior rather than an abbot, their organization is very similar to that of the monasteries. Some, such as the Romanian skete of Prodromos and the Greek (formerly Russian) sketes of St Andrew and the Prophet Elijah, even look like monasteries, having a number of cells grouped around a courtyard with a church in the middle. But the majority are more loosely structured, being little more than a collection of cottages clustered round a central church.

After the sketes come the *kellia* or cells. Looking very much like an isolated farmhouse, each *kellion* is completely independent of its neighbours and answers only

to its parent monastery. It has its own chapel and usually houses three or four monks. Then come the *kalyves* and *kathismata* which are like the *kellia* but smaller. Finally there are the *hesychasteria*, the true hermitages, simple huts or more often just caves in the cliff, to which monks resort in search of complete isolation and rigorous asceticism. Many of these cluster around the southern tip of the peninsula in what is called the desert of Athos. Here men spend their lives in prayer and are rarely seen.

### *Be a pilgrim*

All visitors to Mount Athos are by definition pilgrims. Whatever reason you have for visiting *them*, the monks will welcome *you* as a pilgrim. It may be helpful to bear this in mind when planning, making, and recalling your visit. It will help you to decide such things as what clothes to wear, what books to read, what subjects to discuss with the monks, what to do and where to go on the Holy Mountain, how to approach fellow visitors, how to describe your experience when you return.

Pilgrimage means different things to different people. In English the word means a journey undertaken for religious purposes and implies a degree of hardship or discomfort. But the Greek word for pilgrimage, *proskynesis*, means prostration or veneration: in other words it lays stress on what you do when you arrive rather than on how you got there. Pilgrims therefore hold quite different views on how to travel between monasteries, and the recent proliferation of roads and vehicles means that often there is a choice.

One belief that is shared by the vast majority of pilgrims and certainly by all the inhabitants of Mount Athos is that the Mountain is actually holy ground. The tradition that Athos was visited by the Virgin Mary is very much alive and accounts for the dedication of the Mountain to the glory of the Mother of God and for the exclusion from it of all other women.

The Mountain is unique for many other reasons too: for its history, its architecture, its art, its place in the history of scholarship, its music, its ecology, its flora, its fauna, its incomparable natural beauty, its seclusion, its silence, its worship. For all these reasons – and it is accepted that any one of them is a perfectly valid motive for visiting Athos – the Mountain expects and merits our respect.

## Planning Your Visit

### *The Climate of Athos*

Compared with southern Greece, winter on Athos is long, wet, and often cold. Snow is by no means a rare occurrence, even at low levels, and stormy seas often confine boats to harbour. As a result there are few visitors at this time. For those who are not bothered by climatic uncertainty and who want to have the Mountain to themselves, winter can be a good time to go. Several monasteries have now installed central heating and others use wood-burning stoves.

High summer by contrast (mid-June to mid-September) can be very hot and is also the time that attracts the greatest numbers of visitors. This means that long-distance walking can be uncomfortable and guest facilities at many monasteries are overstretched. Of those who can choose, many will prefer to plan their visit either in spring (mid-April to mid-June), when the temperature is more congenial for walking and the wild flowers are at their best, or in autumn (mid-September to late October), when the selection of fruit and vegetables on offer may be more appealing.

### *Bureaucracy*

Mount Athos needs to protect its seclusion, without which it would lose its *raison d'être*. For this reason it has to impose strict entry regulations. The bureaucracy may at first glance appear formidable, and so it is. The regulations are also subject to change, often at short notice, which is why, rather than describing them here in detail, we have chosen to refer the reader to the relevant section of the society's website (<http://athosfriends.org/PilgrimsGuide/planning/>). The information on the website is detailed, accurate so far as we are currently aware, and regularly updated. It is essential reading for first-timers, but even veterans are recommended to visit the page in case there have been changes since the last time they were on the Mountain. Pilgrims who encounter any discrepancies from what is described there are encouraged to report them to one of the membership secretaries.

The page gives details not only of the procedure for obtaining an entry permit (*diamonitirion*) to Mount Athos but also of the buses to and from Thessaloniki, the boats from both Ouranoupolis and Ierissos (which should be booked in advance), hotels at both ports, the best way to reserve accommodation in advance at the monasteries (essential at all monasteries nowadays), and the particular requirements for pilgrims who are in holy orders. It also includes a suggested outline for a 'standard travel plan'. This may be helpful for first-time pilgrims who are unsure about how to plan their first moves on the Mountain and how long each step might take or how much it might cost. Returning pilgrims will no doubt prefer to plan their own itinerary.

Athonite pilgrimage is recommended for many purposes, not least as one of the best ways to relieve stress. The better informed the pilgrim is, the less stressful his pilgrimage will be, and the more chance he has to achieve spiritual refreshment.

### *What to take*

The best advice, especially if you intend to walk, is to take as little as possible. At each monastery you will be provided with food and drink, a bed with adequate bedding, and (usually) a towel, so it is not necessary to carry these things with you. On the other hand, packed lunches are not normally provided (though the monks in the refectory, if asked, will usually give you a selection of whatever they have), and if you are walking long distances during the day you are well advised to take some basic supplies (e.g. nuts and dried fruit) and, most essential, a proper (sports or hiking) water bottle.

The most important item for walkers is a good map. A number of tourist maps are available locally but these are not recommended. The Austrian map produced by

Reinhold Zwerger used to be regarded as the most reliable for the use of pilgrims and it is still available, but its most recent edition (2001) is seriously out of date. It has now been superseded by the bilingual (English/Greek) Mount Athos Pilgrim Map, entitled *Mount Athos: The Holy Mountain*, compiled by Roland Baetens, Dimitris Bakalis, and Peter Howorth (© Peter Howorth 2015). This map owes its origins to the FoMA footpath-clearing project and is based on data from the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission as well as other sources and GPS data collected by the footpaths team. Information about the map is available on the society's website (<http://athosfriends.org/PilgrimsGuide/PilgrimMap>) and the map may be ordered direct from the publisher (<http://www.filathonites.org>). To supplement the map and help in planning your route, you may wish to take copies of FoMA's footpath descriptions or even download our GPS tracks, available on the society's website. Guidebooks in several languages are available in Ouranoupolis, Daphni, and Karyes.

Other things worth taking include a torch (some monasteries do not have electricity; those that do, often turn it off at night); matches (to light candles and oil-lamps); stout walking shoes or boots; casual clothing (clothing need not be formal but should be conservative and practical, i.e. short sleeves should be avoided in church; short trousers should not be worn at any time; excessively colourful or promotional clothing should be avoided; clergy of non-Orthodox denominations are recommended not to wear clerical garb); a first-aid kit; insect repellent and sun block; a water bottle; any medication you may need; a hat. There are a few shops in Karyes and Daphni and also in some of the monasteries for souvenirs, books, CDs, and basic provisions, but these should not be relied on for more sophisticated items such as pharmaceuticals or hiking gear.

A word about mobile phones. Unlike some other electronic devices, they are not forbidden on the Mountain and some monks use them a lot, even though reception is at best patchy. They may indeed be helpful for accessing digital maps and GPS tracks on the footpaths, but they should always be turned off when inside a monastery. The best way to communicate with the outside world is by text messaging. The latest information on cell phone providers may be found on the society's website (<http://athosfriends.org/PilgrimsGuide/planning/>).

## Making Your Visit

### *Daphni and Karyes*

Most visitors to Athos will pass through the port of Daphni, either on their way in or on their way out, though, as explained above, this is not strictly necessary. It has a post office, a police station, a public lavatory, a few shops, and a restaurant. Telephones are available at the shops, and a card telephone has recently been installed (but cards for this telephone are sold in only a few places such as on the Daphni–Karyes bus). Daphni is animated for about one hour each day either side of midday when the boat arrives. (The boat leaves again for Ouranoupolis around 12.15. Departing pilgrims are subjected to a customs inspection.) A bus meets the boat and takes people up to Karyes (about 45 minutes). Otherwise Daphni has all the

characteristics of a tiny Greek fishing port of about fifty years ago except that it has no women.

Karyes is more of a town. (Officially it is a capital city!) Holy Ghost Street, which leads from the bus stop to the church of the Protaton, is lined with shops, though most operate more as social centres than places of business. There is a post office, a bank, a medical centre, a couple of inns, and a police station. The headquarters of the Holy Community is the grand building opposite the Protaton. Karyes is the seat of the civil governor. It is also the public transport hub for the Holy Mountain.

### *Travelling on the Holy Mountain*

There is a good deal of choice available to the Athonite pilgrim these days. Traditionally he would walk between monasteries, and walking is strongly recommended as *by far the best way* to enjoy the environment and to internalize the benefits of a pilgrimage. There is a network of mule-tracks and footpaths connecting all parts of the peninsula, many of them of great antiquity and carefully constructed with a stone base. The FoMA path-clearing project plays a major part in keeping these paths open and erecting signposts for the guidance of pilgrims. The paths are accurately indicated on the Mount Athos Pilgrim Map. Detailed and freely downloadable footpath descriptions (in English and Greek) are available on the society's website ([http://www.athosfriends.org/footpaths/footpaths\\_chart/](http://www.athosfriends.org/footpaths/footpaths_chart/)) from which GPS tracks may also be downloaded. Great efforts are made to ensure that the information provided is up to date and accurate, and pilgrims are strongly advised to make use of them. Walking alone, especially in the more remote parts of the peninsula (such as on the ascent of the peak), is not officially advisable, and solitary walkers should be careful to carry essential supplies such as first aid and water; it can, however, be a deeply uplifting experience and it would be disingenuous of us to warn against it.

Those who prefer or are not able to walk have a variety of alternative means of getting about on the Mountain. The traditional alternative was a mule, but mules are in short supply nowadays, being mostly used for the transportation of timber and other goods, though some are still available for hire in the so-called desert at the tip of the peninsula where there are no roads. There are regular boat services on both coasts, details of which are given on the planning page of the website. In addition to the normal bus service that runs between Daphni and Karyes a fleet of minibuses offers transport to most of the monasteries and major centres on the peninsula. Departures to these destinations follow the arrival of the bus in Karyes; and guest masters will be able to advise where and when to pick up the minibus when leaving a monastery in the morning. Otherwise the minibuses tend to operate on the principle that they leave when they are full, or full enough to make the journey worthwhile. They are not particularly cheap, but they provide an invaluable service for those who are pressed for time or who feel that they are no longer fit for the rigours of a traditional pilgrimage.

### *Hospitality in the monasteries*

It is assumed that, unless they have business in Daphni or Karyes, pilgrims will stay at the monasteries. Sleeping outside monasteries is forbidden and dangerous. Gates close at sunset, and during the winter, if you intend to stay the night, you should not arrive later than 4 pm. The majority of monasteries have now announced that they will not accept pilgrims to stay overnight if they have not made reservations in advance by telephone or e-mail. This is no doubt a practice that is here to stay and the only safe advice must be that you are now recommended to make reservations at every monastery at which you wish to stay overnight.

On arrival at a monastery, whether or not you intend to stay the night, you should go straight to the guest house (*archontariki*) where you will be received by the guest master (*archontaris*) and offered refreshment (usually raki, loukoumi, Greek coffee, and cold water). Members of the Friends should identify themselves as early as possible. If you intend to stay the night, you will be given a bed (usually in a dormitory with a number of other guests). The guest master will also tell you the times of services and meals, he may mention the rules of the house, and he may offer a tour of the monastery (always worth taking). Otherwise you will be left to your own devices.

Hospitality in the monasteries is free and to attempt to pay for it may cause offence. On the other hand it is usually expected that guests will stay only one night. If you wish to stay longer, you should ask if this is possible, and usually permission is given. Then it may be appropriate to make a small offering 'for the church'. Even this may be refused, but usually donations are gratefully accepted.

Meals on Athos are generally simple but wholesome. Monks and pilgrims usually eat together in the refectory (*trapeza*), sometimes at separate tables, though in certain monasteries the non-Orthodox are asked to wait until the fathers have finished. Meat is not eaten, but fish is regular fare for feasts, and sometimes on other days too. Otherwise the diet is largely made up of bread, olives, vegetables, rice, pasta, soya dishes, salad, cheese, and fruit. A glass of wine is usually available, but on fast days (Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and longer periods before major feasts) monks abstain from wine, oil, and dairy products. Most communities eat twice a day (morning and evening), except on fast days when some will eat only in the middle of the day. Meals are eaten in silence (and often at great speed) except that one of the monks will usually read a passage from patristic literature. The entrance to the refectory is nearly always immediately opposite the entrance to the church and this proximity symbolizes the way in which eating together is seen as an integral part of the liturgical life of the monastery.

### *Liturgical rhythm and the measurement of time*

The liturgical routine is the foundation of the religious life and, in general, visitors are encouraged to participate in it. But non-Orthodox may not receive communion, and different monasteries have different customs about the attendance of non-Orthodox at services (this is true also of formal meals in the refectory). Restrictions are often imposed for the purely practical reason that there is not enough room for all in the body of the church; they are certainly never meant to cause offence. Athos has never been at the forefront of ecumenical dialogue. On the other hand many monks enjoy the opportunity to discuss questions of belief and practice with members of other

churches. Pilgrims should take advice from the *archontaris* about what is possible. He will also be happy to arrange for Orthodox pilgrims to receive confession.

The liturgical day formally begins with vespers (*esperinos*), which is usually served towards the end of the afternoon. It is followed by the evening meal, after which there is compline (*apodeipnon*) and then often a period of relaxation; this is the time when visitors are encouraged to engage monks in conversation. At sunset the gates are shut, no further visitors are admitted, and monks retire to their cells. The hours of darkness are regarded as a time for silence and prayer and visitors are asked to behave accordingly. The morning office (*orthros*) begins before sunrise and is announced by a rousing call to prayer on the wooden *talanton* or metal *simantron*. This culminates in a celebration of the Divine Liturgy, which is followed (sometimes after a pause) by the morning meal. The rest of the day is devoted to work, though many communities take some rest in the early afternoon.

Most monasteries run according to 'Byzantine time' which starts the clock for each new day at sunset. Depending on the season, therefore, clocks will be between three and six hours ahead of local Greek time. Guest masters however realize that this may be confusing and will generally translate the timetable into 'cosmic' or worldly time for the benefit of visitors. The whole Mountain still follows the Julian calendar and is therefore thirteen days behind the outside world.

### *Libraries and treasuries*

All the monasteries are literally treasure-houses brimming with priceless relics of their Byzantine past. Many of them were displayed for the first time in the exhibition of 'Treasures of Mount Athos' staged in Thessaloniki in 1997-8. Treasures of particular religious significance, such as relics of the saints and miracle-working icons, are often kept in the church and may be displayed at certain times for veneration by Orthodox pilgrims. Other items are likely to be kept in a strongroom to which supervised access can sometimes be arranged.

Most monasteries also house important collections of manuscripts. The vast majority of these are liturgical, many date from the Byzantine period, and some are beautifully illuminated. A small proportion (5 per cent) are of classical texts. Permission to read manuscripts can usually be obtained if the request is supported by a letter of recommendation. Printed books are often kept in another library to which access is less restricted. Books in various languages may also be available in the guest house.

### *Photography*

Athos is deliciously photogenic. Most monasteries permit photography within their walls, but not inside the church, especially during services. Monks do not normally permit themselves to be photographed; a request to do so may have to go to the abbot, but it is often granted. The same procedure may be necessary for photography of icons, frescos, and other treasures. The best advice is: if in doubt, ask. Failure to do so may cause serious offence. It is worth knowing that on Athos the word used for permission is *evlogia* (literally 'blessing').

Video cameras and camcorders are prohibited everywhere on the Mountain.

### *Bathing*

Monks are not much given to bathing, though the sea is sometimes used for baptism. Visitors who wish to bathe should do so out of sight of monasteries. Officially both bathing and fishing are forbidden.

Some guest houses are now equipped with showers, but hot water remains a rarity. Visitors should always be properly clothed in public areas within the guest house.

### *Extending your visit*

A *diamonitirion* normally expires after three nights spent on the Mountain. If you wish to prolong your stay, you should apply to the Holy Community in Karyes where, if a good reason is given, permission will generally not be withheld. Occasionally members of the Friends are asked to show their membership card in support of their application, so it is worth carrying this with you. Sometimes an extension can be arranged through one of the monasteries.

### *Languages*

The common language in the Greek monasteries is Greek, in St Panteleimonos Russian, in Hilandar Serbian, in Zographou Bulgarian, and in the sketes of Prodromos and Lakkou Romanian. Some communities are more cosmopolitan than others, and many now include monks from overseas. An aspect of the recent renewal is that many of the Greek monks are better educated and better travelled than in the past. As a result of all these factors, English is now quite widely spoken on the Mountain. To have no Greek remains a disadvantage, but not nearly so much as it was a few years ago.

### *Foundation and dedication of the monasteries*

In this table the monasteries are listed in order of their foundation together with their dedication and the date of its celebration according to the Julian calendar (after Hasluck, pp. 19-20):

963	Great Lavra	St Athanasios the Athonite (5 July)
976	Iviron	Dormition (15 August)
after 972	Vatopedi	Annunciation (25 March)
before 992	Philotheou	Annunciation (25 March)
c.1030	Xeropotamou	Forty Martyrs (9 March)
early 11th c.	Esphigmenou	Ascension
before 1046	Dochiarion	Archangels Michael and Gabriel (8 Nov)
c.1050	St Paul's	Meeting of our Lord (2 February)
c.1070	Karakalou	Sts Peter and Paul (29 June)

c.1070	Xenophontos	St George (23 April)
c.1086	Konstamonitou	St Stephen (27 December)
1081-1118	Koutlounousiou	Transfiguration (6 August)
before 1169	St Panteleimonos	St Panteleimon (27 July)
1197	Hilandar	Entry of the Mother of God (21 Nov)
c.1270	Zographou	St George (23 April)
before 1363	Pantokratoros	Transfiguration (6 August)
1363	Simonopetra	Nativity (25 December)
1375	Dionysiou	St John Baptist (24 June)
1341-91	Grigoriou	St Nicolas (6 December)
1541	Stavronikita	St Nicolas (6 December)

## Contacting Mount Athos

### *E-mail*

The monasteries have been cautious in adopting e-mail as a regular means of communication with the outside world. In response to our encouragement, a few have permitted us to publish their e-mail addresses which may now be used solely for the purpose of reserving accommodation. It is likely that this list will grow and for the latest advice intending pilgrims should consult the website.

Great Lavra	<a href="mailto:iera.moni.megistis.layras@gmail.com">iera.moni.megistis.layras@gmail.com</a>
Vatopedi	<a href="mailto:filoxenia@vatopedi.gr">filoxenia@vatopedi.gr</a>
Iviron	<a href="mailto:imiviron@gmail.com">imiviron@gmail.com</a>
Hilandar	<a href="mailto:pilgrims@hilandar.org">pilgrims@hilandar.org</a>
Pantokrator	<a href="mailto:filoxenia@pantokrator.gr">filoxenia@pantokrator.gr</a>
Zographou	<a href="mailto:zografergo@gmail.com">zografergo@gmail.com</a>
Philotheou	<a href="mailto:philotheou.filoxenia@gmail.com">philotheou.filoxenia@gmail.com</a>
Simonopetra	<a href="mailto:hospitality@simonopetra.gr">hospitality@simonopetra.gr</a>
Xenophontos	<a href="mailto:arhontariki@imxonophontos.gr">arhontariki@imxonophontos.gr</a>
St Panteleimonos	<a href="mailto:rpm.palomnik@gmail.com">rpm.palomnik@gmail.com</a>

### *Post*

The postal address for any monastery on Athos is

IM [name of monastery]  
63086 Karyes  
Agion Oros  
Greece

## Telephone

The area code for Athos is +30 2377. The best time to call is usually between the hours of 10.00 am and 1.00 pm (Greek time).

Karyes	telephone
Holy Community and Holy Epistasia	023221
Civil governor	023230
Doctor	023217
Police	023212
Post office	023214
Daphni	
Harbour	023300
Police	023222
Post office	023297
Monasteries (in order of precedence)	
Great Lavra	023754
Vatopedi	041488
Iviron	023643
Chilandari	023797
Dionysiou	023687
Koutloumousiou	023226
Pantokratoros	023880
Xeropotamou	023251
Zographou	023247
Dochiariou	023245
Karakalou	023225
Philotheou	023256
Simonopetra	023254
St Paul's	023741
Stavronikita	023255
Xenophontos	023633
Grigoriou	023668
Esphigmenou	023229
St Panteleimonos	023252
Konstamonitou	023228
Sketes and principal cells	
of Great Lavra	
Kafsokalyvia	023319
Karoulia	023342
Katounakia	023368
Kerasia	023318
Little St Anne	023321
Morphonou	023904
Mylopotamos	023774
Prodromos (Romanian)	023294

Provata	023216
St Anne's	023320
St Basil's	023317
Vigla	023923
Skete of Vatopedi (St Andrew's)	023810
Skete of Iviron (Prodromos)	023296
Bourazeri (Hilandar)	023202
Skete of Koutloumousiou (St Panteleimonos)	023259
Skete of Pantokrator (Prophet Elijah)	023304
Axion Estin (Pantokrator)	041371
New Skete (St Paul's)	023656
Lakkou Skete (Romanian) (St Paul's)	023636
Skete of Xenophontos (Evangelismos)	023301

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## The Friends of Mount Athos

(Registered Charity No. 1047287)

The society, which owes its origin to the correspondence columns of *The Times*, was formed in 1990 among those who share a common interest in the well-being of the monasteries of Mount Athos.

### *Membership*

Membership is open to all over the age of eighteen. The society welcomes all those – men and women of all faiths and none – who have an interest in the past, present, and future of the Athonite monasteries and their dependent houses. Details of membership may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, F. W. Peter Lea, The Stables, Manor Road, Woodstock OX20 1XJ, UK, or the Membership Secretary for the Americas, Professor Robert W. Allison, 45 N. Saunders Road, Greene, ME 04236, USA.

### *Objects of the Friends*

The objects of the society are officially described as:

1. the advancement of education through the study and promulgation of knowledge of the history, culture, arts, architecture, natural history, and literature of Mount Athos and its Orthodox monasteries;

2. the advancement of religion through the support and promotion of the religious and other charitable work of the Holy Community, the monasteries, and dependencies of Mount Athos;

3. the advancement of religion through the encouragement and support of the charitable works of religious communities outside Mount Athos, but which are connected thereto by religious affiliation, dependency, or tradition.

To that end the society produces publications, arranges lectures, and organizes conferences, exhibitions, and pilgrimages related to Athonite themes. It also makes grants for the restoration or conservation of buildings or works of art or books of educational or religious significance on Mount Athos.

### *Concerns of the Friends*

The society also acts as a group of concerned friends and supporters of Mount Athos, who will provide assistance wherever practicable, in consultation with the monastic authorities. The society has no specifically political aspirations. Nor is it primarily a fund-raising body. The assistance to be provided is more likely to take the form of liaison, expertise, or equipment for which the monks have expressed a need. It aims above all to be a society of *friends*, who will be both friends with one another and friends with the monks, and who will share with each other their experiences of this ‘station of a faith where all the years have stopped’, but which remains very much alive today.

### *Website*

For the latest information about the activities of the society and developments on Mount Athos readers are encouraged to visit the society’s website at <http://www.athosfriends.org>