



MOUNT ATHOS FOUNDATION of AMERICA  
Annual End of Year Report -- December 31, 2019

Robert W. Allison, President

On December 5 we issued our first official newsletter since MAFA was incorporated by our American membership of the Friends of Mount Athos and successfully obtained its 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service on April 30, 2018. Most of what follows was reported in that newsletter.

Within this short period of time, we have been very active. During the course of the past few months the need for this Foundation has suddenly become very evident as a result of an **emergency appeal from Grigoriou Monastery following a fire at the Monastery on July 9<sup>th</sup>** and receipt of our **first proposal for a grant-funded project** (from the Monastery of Simonopetra). More on these below.

In 2018, with very limited resources, we issued our first **scholarships** for \$1,000 to two promising young scholars to support research on Mount Athos. We also provided over \$2,000 in support of the **Axion Estin Appeal by the Friends of Mount Athos**. That was a small part of the total cost of the restoring of the Axion Estin cell, but a significant first step for us. We also created an impressive website designed by Dionne Katinas of Designs by Dionne, who continues to work with us as our website grows ([www.mountathosfoundation.org](http://www.mountathosfoundation.org)). Now, in 2019, we have issued a second pair of scholarships, and have taken initiatives on behalf of the two monasteries mentioned above. Descriptions of the scholarship projects and the Monastery initiatives are provided in the Addenda at the end of this report, as well as on the MAFA website.

**Expanded Board of Directors.** The amount of work required of our Board of Directors as we began to carry out our mission made it clear that we needed to enlarge the Board to handle it all, and so we did. We also created a **Volunteer Corps**, consisting of people who have volunteered to assist our Board and its committees. A list of our 2019 Board members and our working committees is provided in Addendum 1 at the end of this report.

**MAFA Needs.** (1) Most urgently, we are seeking a **new Board member – a man or woman with fundraising experience and inspired by reverence for the Holy Mountain or for its historical and cultural heritage** – to serve on the Board of Directors as a member of our Development Committee. The capability to successfully raise funds to support needs of the Holy Community and the monasteries on the Mount Athos is central to MAFA's mission, and the urgency of the need is demonstrated by the requests already coming in, including the two identified above. (2) In addition, **we are in need of a CPA** who would be willing to serve MAFA on a *pro bono* basis as a member of our Volunteer Corps (all MAFA positions are voluntary). These needs were sent to all members of FoMA in the Americas in our December Newsletter.

On June 7, we formalized our cooperative relationship with the **Mount Athos Center – Agioreitiki Estia (AE) of Thessaloniki, Greece** (<https://www.agioritikiestia.gr/el/>). Chris Mellen of the MAFA Executive Committee and AE director, Anastasios Ntouros, signed an official memorandum of cooperation between the two organizations that we developed together. MAFA has enjoyed an excellent working relationship with AE for over a year. AE provided superb logistical support for our first scholarship winner, assuring a successful outcome to his project. The Mount Athos Center is distributing our MAFA informational brochure at its store in Thessaloniki and at the Pilgrim's Bureau offices, so that American pilgrims desirous of a way to "give back" can learn about MAFA. We look forward to a long future of cooperation and collaboration. The Center is now listed on our website's "Friends & Links" page, and its future events will be announced on our website.

**Creating & Sponsoring Events for the U.S.** We hope our cooperation with the Mount Athos Center will bring to the U.S. some of the exhibitions and events developed or sponsored by the A.E., to contribute to the cultural enrichment of communities and Orthodox parishes across the U.S. A central mission of MAFA is to "foster study, understanding, and appreciation of the history, religious culture, arts, architecture, natural history, and literature of the monasteries and monastic dependencies of Mount Athos." We look forward to expanding our website in 2020, as mentioned above, to include announcements of A.E. publications and events. We expect those announcements to be of great interest to our followers in the U.S. and everyone who has an interest in the Holy Mountain.

### **Footpaths Planning Study for Simonopetra Monastery**

At our third quarterly 2019 Board meeting on July 11, the Board voted – pending receipt of a formal proposal consistent with MAFA's procedures and mission – to support a proposal by Simonopetra Monastery for a feasibility study entitled, *Study for the Improvement of Road Drivability Between Daphne and the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras and Restoration of the Old Footpaths Along this Route*. The significance of this project for MAFA was preservation and enhancement of the ancient footpaths so important to pilgrims. The project, as defined in this preliminary proposal, was about (a) designing an improved vehicular access road that is safer and easier to drive, and (b) restoring the ancient footpaths used by pilgrims where they have been damaged by the present roadway, and minimizing the impact of vehicular road crossings on the footpaths. In December we received a revised project proposal, separating the footpaths planning project from the vehicular roads project. This revision was, for MAFA, an improvement, in that it included planning for rest stations and information stations along the footpaths as well as restoration and improvement of the paths themselves. As such, it was more clearly in line with our mission and more clearly designed to enhance the pilgrim experience. In December we accepted the revised proposal, pending receipt of a formal, signed application from the monastery. The project, to be conducted in cooperation with the FoMA Footpaths team, and spanning a 12-month period, will probably take place in 2020-2021. The revised proposal for the Simonopetra project is provided as Addendum 3 at the end of this report.

### **Emergency Appeal for Grigoriou Monastery**

Shortly after our July 11 Board meeting, we learned that on July 8/9 a fire broke out in the generator building of Grigoriou Monastery, causing over \$450,000 in damage. You can read

about it in the addendum page about the Grigoriou Emergency Appeal. The text of our appeal is now posted on the MAFA website page for this Emergency Appeal:

<https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/appeals/>.

In our newsletter, we issued a call to all readers to consider a generous donation to support the rebuilding, which is creating a heavy burden on the Monastery of Grigoriou. Additional details are provided in the report of the Mount Athos Liaison Committee for January, 2020.

### **MAFA Name Day**

At our July 11 meeting, the Board voted to adopt as its name day November 21<sup>st</sup>, the Feast Day of the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Orthodox Church. It is especially appropriate to have a name day related to the Theotokos since Mount Athos is dedicated to the Mother of God and traditionally known as the Garden of the Panagia. Also, it has a special significance for monasticism; like the young Mary who turns away from her parents to dedicate herself to the service of God, monks turn away from their families to follow their monastic calling. We envision this date as an occasion for celebration of MAFA's work dedicated to the service of the Holy Mountain. It will also work well as the occasion for our first annual fund drive in 2020, since November 21<sup>st</sup> occurs toward the end of the year, when many people are starting to think about donations, and before the Christmas season. The Board felt, however, that if MAFA should adopt a representative icon, it should be a more generic icon of the Panagia, or perhaps a version of the well known icon of the Panagia of the Holy Mountain.

### **Thank you to the MAFA Board of Directors**

MAFA is blessed with a wonderful Board of Directors. (See the directory in the Addenda.) They have been hard working, imaginative, and creative in bringing this Foundation into existence, and have accomplished more than anyone could have expected in such a short time. Now I am pleased to announce that another of our Board members has issued a matching grant challenge to everyone who reveres the Holy Mountain. The first \$8,000 in contributions to our **Emergency Grigoriou Monastery Appeal** will be matched, doubling the impact of those donations. MAFA's Grigoriou Appeal is provided in the Addenda to this report. At the end of the year, we sent off our first contribution, for \$8,000, to support the rebuilding work at Grigoriou.

Similarly, after the Board voted to contribute \$5,000 from MAFA funds to the **Simonopetra Road and Footpaths Feasibility Study** described above, another Board member donated the remaining funds needed to carry out the project, whose total cost is projected to be 10,000 Euros (\$11,200).

MAFA was created to provide a way to "give back" to the Holy Mountain. FoMA members, pilgrims and many others who have benefitted over the years from the hospitality and spiritual sustenance of the Athonite monasteries have expressed, in their communications with FoMA's membership secretaries, their interest in "giving back." The projects described above are our first emergency appeal and our first project grant.

## **Addenda:**

1. MAFA Board of Directors & Committees
2. Scholarship Projects Descriptions
3. The Simonopetra Project (Road & Footpaths Feasibility Study)
4. The Grigoriou Monastery Emergency Appeal

## **Addendum 1. MAFA Board Members and Committees, 2019**

Robert Allison, President  
James Peters, Vice President  
Roger McHaney, Treasurer  
Chris Mellen, Secretary  
George Babbes, Director  
Chris Deliso, Director  
John Demakis, Director  
Wade Kolb, Director and Registered Agent  
Jonathan Swarts, Director  
Peter Lea, Director and Liaison with the Executive Committee of the Friends of Mount Athos

**Audit Committee:** George Babbes (chair), John Demakis, Jonathan Swarts

**Budget Committee:** Jonathan Swarts (chair), John Demakis, Jim Peters, Roger McHaney

**Development Committee:** Chris Mellen (chair), George Babbes, Jonathan Swarts

**Grants Administration Committee:** Jim Peters (chair), Chris Deliso, John Demakis

**Mount Athos Liaison Committee:** Chris Mellen (chair), Bob Allison

**Nominating Committee:** Jim Peters (chair), Roger McHaney

**Special Website Development & Coordination Committee:** Chris Deliso (chair), Bob Allison

## **Addendum 2. 2019 Mount Athos Travel Scholarships Winners**

The Mount Athos Foundation of America (MAFA) is pleased to announce the winners of our Mount Athos Travel Scholarships for 2019. These scholarships provide up to \$1,000 to support research projects related to Mount Athos. Applicants are required to be conducting research which is related to Mount Athos, which study requires travel either to Mount Athos, or to a dependency of one of the Athonite monasteries, or to one or more institutions such as museums or research institutes essential to the completion of the applicant's Athos-related research project. Winners also receive support from MAFA in establishing effective working relationships with the monasteries on Mount Athos.

**Vladimir Agrigoroaei:** *Conducting an Analysis of a Rare 13th Century Manuscript, which is located at the Iviron Monastery.*

Mr. Agrigoroaei is performing an ongoing codicological analysis of a rare manuscript containing the story of Barlaam and Josaphat in both Greek and Old French. The original manuscript contained only the Greek text accompanied by rich illustrations, painted in gold, but by the beginning of the 13th century, after the Fall of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1204), its margins received an Old French translation of the Greek text. The original manuscript is currently located at the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos. Mr. Agrigoroaei has recently visited Iviron to inspect and study this rare document in person.

A native of Romania, Mr. Agrigoroaei holds two PhDs, as well as three other degrees from institutions in Romania, France and Italy. Currently, he is a “chargé de recherche” – researcher at the Centre for Medieval Studies in Poitiers, France.

**Vladimir Bozinovic:** *Researching the Sculptural Decorations of the Exonarthex of the Hilander Monastery's Katholikon.*

Mr. Bozinovic proposes an on-site study at the Serbian Orthodox Monastery on Mount Athos, known as Hilander Monastery, of sculptural decorations, which are located in the outer narthex (called the exonarthex) of the Monastery's primary church (its Katholikon). His goal is to establish a better understanding of the history and stylistic influences of the Katholikon's architecture and sculptural decorations.

Mr. Bozinovic, a native of Serbia, is currently pursuing a PhD in Art History at the University of Istanbul. He also holds two degrees from the University of Belgrade.

### **Addendum 3. MAFA Grant (application now in process) for the Footpaths Planning Project of Simonopetra Monastery**

The revised proposal submitted by Archimandrite Elissaios, Kathigoumenos of Simonopetra, Dec 5, 2019 / Athos calendar Nov 22, 2019 (translation by Bob Allison)

Thank you for your disposition of an offer and for supporting the efforts of our Holy Monastery and, generally, those of all the monasteries of the Holy Mountain, within the parameters of your society's capabilities and of due legal process, and especially with the adaptation to the special circumstances of the Holy Mountain and with respect for its status.

We would like to inform you that during the preparations for the study of the road and the path it was decided, together with the researcher, because of the amount of the planned interventions, to separate the study and reconfigure it as two separate studies, so that the study of the footpaths will be configured with title, "PRESERVATION - REHABILITATION OF FOOTPATHS IN SURROUNDS OF THE HOLY MONASTERY OF SIMONOPETRA OF MOUNT ATHOS AND CREATION OF REST AND INFORMATION STATIONS WITH MARKING AND INFORMATIONAL SIGNBOARDS FOR THE AREA '.

The cost of the study for the footpaths will come to €9.000.

Within the framework described in your letter dated 8.11.2019, we are submitting a request for funding for this study, together with the bidder's bid, together with the estimated timetable. The researcher is at the disposal of the Representative of the Footpaths Team of the Friends of Mount Athos of England, for determining the mode of cooperation. It should be noted that the study will be written in the Greek language, without, of course, excluding the possibility of any English summary or reference.

Reiterating once again our congratulations and our warmest wishes for the blessing of the all-holy Mother of God for your wonderful actions, we remain with heartfelt wishes.

[signed]

Kathigoumenos of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra

[signed] Αρχιμανδρίτης Ελισσαίος

### **Proposal Summary from the Simonopetra Draft Application Form:**

The Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras desires to preserve and restore the ancient footpaths which have begun to disintegrate from use and from damage effected by the modern vehicular roadways that cross them. This requires first undertaking a technical study in order to develop an appropriate plan. The technical study must include an environmental impact assessment and an ecological study. The desired immediate outcome will be a plan for the footpaths and designs for related infrastructure that are ecologically sound. The longer range outcome will be footpaths that will be sustainable for the foreseeable future, enhanced with resting stations, with provision of water, and with information stations, signposting and marking of points of interest in the area, all of which will enhance the spiritual experience of pilgrims who walk to the monastery as part of their pilgrimage. All of the funds provided by the grant will be spent to carry out the study.

### **Addendum 4. Grigoriou Monastery Emergency Appeal**

The following is the text of the Appeal that now appears on our Appeals web page:

#### **Emergency Appeal following fire at Grigoriou Monastery**

The Mount Athos Foundation of America (MAFA) is issuing an emergency appeal on behalf of Grigoriou Monastery following a fire at the Monastery on July 9, 2019. MAFA was founded by members of the Friends of Mount Athos in the Americas in 2017 to provide support to the Holy Mountain when needed.

The Monastery has informed us that the fire completely destroyed the building housing its electromechanical equipment and all the equipment within.

The total cost of restoring this facility is estimated at €405,000 (\$450,000), including €205,000 (\$225,000) to repair damage to the electromechanical equipment and €200,000 (\$220,000) to construct a new building to house this facility. The estimates were developed by a Thessaloniki-based company ([www.technomat-shop.com](http://www.technomat-shop.com)) that has a good track record of work on Mount Athos, and have been reviewed and accepted by MAFA. Fortunately the destroyed building was located outside the perimeter of the Monastery's historic old buildings, which were undamaged.

The impact of the fire most noticeable to pilgrims visiting the Monastery has probably been the noise and pollution created by the generators. The Monastery continues to welcome pilgrims with the traditional Athonite hospitality in spite of this major setback, but the fathers at Grigoriou are now harder pressed to keep things going.

The Mount Athos Foundation of America call upon all who read this to help. Has your life been enriched by pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain? Have you received the hospitality and spiritual

blessing of that experience? Or are you perhaps looking forward to a future pilgrimage? You can take this occasion to give back by helping in a time of need.

### **Some Unseen Effects of the Fire**

The timing of this setback is creating added financial stress for the Monastery. The Greek economic crisis had already delivered a major blow to the monastery's income. Reduction of funds from governmental sources has added to the financial stress on the monasteries of Mount Athos. Finally, because the damage in this case was not to its historic buildings, the Monastery cannot draw upon European Community funds for restoration. The cost of borrowing to replace the lost electromechanical facility and the building will result in serious cash-flow issues for years to come. This drain on Grigoriou's financial resources will, in turn, impact the Monastery's ability to maintain its historic buildings, precisely at a time when preservation funds from outside sources are becoming scarcer.

### **You Can Help**

A member of the MAFA Board of Directors who has been a pilgrim to Grigoriou has generously pledged to match all donations up to a limit of \$8,000. This is his way of "giving back" to the monastery that has meant much to him. Perhaps you, too, are a grateful pilgrim who has experienced the living spiritual legacy of the Holy Mountain, or perhaps you are someone who views this World Heritage site as a treasure to be maintained and appreciated. You can help, and your donation will be doubled by this member's generous donation.

The cumulative result of many donations, large and small alike, will help us reach our goal of restoring the Monastery's loss. Together, we can help the Monastery weather this storm at a time when its resources are already significantly compromised by world events.

**Please donate to help the Monastery recover from this destructive fire.**