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MAFA NEWSLETTER 3 – DECEMBER, 2020

2020 was hardly the year that any of us anticipated at this time a year ago. But in spite of the pandemic and its ensuing upheaval in our personal lives and around the world, MAFA has succeeded in carrying out its mission of support for the Holy Mountain with great success.

Mount Athos Health Center & Coronavirus Preparations



*The Mount Athos Health Center.
Photo courtesy of the Health center.*

When the Covid-19 crisis hit, MAFA was able to respond quickly thanks to the many donations we received this year. We immediately contacted Dr. Michael Christakis, founder of SAMM (Supporters of Athonite and Monastic Medicine) to find out how we could help. When Dr. Christakis informed us that the new Mount Athos Health Center in Karyes was in need of diagnostic equipment and supplies, including hospital-quality pulse oximeters and supplies needed for Covid testing, MAFA immediately provided funds to purchase what was needed to prepare the Health Center for the imminent pandemic.

On December 9, the *Orthodox Times* reported that, according to Mount Athos civil governor Athanasios Martinos, seven monks were being treated in hospital following diagnosis, one monk had passed away, and a number of others were being monitored with pulse oximeters (provided by MAFA) at the Health Center in Karyes. One other monk was being monitored at his monastery, also by pulse oximeters provided by MAFA and distributed to the Monasteries where they were needed by the Health Center.

This is exactly the kind of quick emergency response that we envisaged when we established MAFA, and a perfect example of why, in our first fundraising campaign this year, we included among options for giving, contributions toward creation of an endowed fund to address emergency needs. (More on our Fundraising Campaign below!)

Simonopetra Footpaths Preservation and Rehabilitation Planning Project

MAFA had already begun working to provide the Holy Monastery of [Simonopetra \[1\]](#) with a grant of \$10,125 toward its footpaths rehabilitation project when a disastrous storm struck the Holy Mountain. The storm, widely reported in the press, caused major washouts along the main vehicular road between Daphni and Karyes, leaving it impassable. At the same time, it caused serious damage to the individual vehicular roads and associated footpath crossings of many of the monasteries, including Simonopetra, whose access was already dangerously steep and difficult. The monastery is now already at work, with planning and design for the repairs and improvements being provided by the Homeotech Environmental Management Company of Thessaloniki, funded [in part \[2\]](#) by our MAFA Grant.

The storm illustrates again the importance of MAFA's mission. Normally maintenance of the roads on Mount Athos is the responsibility of the monasteries and the Holy Community. The scale of the damage was so great in this case that a state of emergency was declared for the whole of Mount Athos, empowering the Greek government to repair both the main Daphni-Karyes road and the monasterial roads. Most of the monasterial roads have now been repaired, and the state of emergency has recently been extended to enable rebuilding of the main road, which requires the laying of a new roadbed.

The increasing frequency in recent years of heavy storms on Mt. Athos alternating with forest fire threats – whose scale will not always justify extreme measures by the Greek government – demonstrates the need for emergency aid that sometimes only a non-governmental organization like MAFA can provide in a timely fashion.

Photograph of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra by Graham Speake, The Friends of Mount Athos. All rights reserved.



Grigoriou Monastery Fire Recovery

As reported in our first 2020 Newsletter, work is also continuing at the Holy Monastery of Grigoriou, partly funded by a MAFA emergency aid grant, on repairs and rebuilding following the fire that destroyed their electromechanical facility a year ago.

Holy Cell of Axion Estin Renovation Project



Photograph of the newly renovated Workers' Building at the Holy Axion Estin Cell.

Thanks to the many generous contributions from our supporters, MAFA also was able in 2020 to make a modest contribution to the Friends of Mount Athos for funding the reconstruction of the historic Holy Axion Estin Cell.

In December, the fathers of Axion Estin wrote the following letter to FoMA, which I would like to share here with all our readers, since it was their generous support that made this contribution possible:

Dear Friends of Mt. Athos,

In these very festive days, we would like to thank all of you for making them even more brilliant and beautiful!

The workers house, finally, will be completely ready this Christmas. And what better Christmas present than this? We are all excited about moving there at first, but most of all because an almost impossible project to our eyes is nearing completion.

It was something beyond imagination at first, but with the Grace of God and your invaluable contribution and help we are finally reaching the end.

Wholeheartedly we wish you all a blessed Nativity. May the new year 2021, grant to you, our friends and to the whole world "the Perfect love of God" which "drives out fear".

With Love in Christ,

The Fathers of Axion Estin

The work at the Axion Estin Cell is ongoing. Renovation of the Workers' House (pictured above) was the first step, but the start of renovations to the main building (the residence of the monks) remains for the year ahead. MAFA is hopeful that we will be able to make ongoing contributions to this important and historic project. We invite you to view the website of the Axion Estin Cell to learn more about its history and the famous hymn for which it is named

<https://www.keliexionestin.com/eng/>

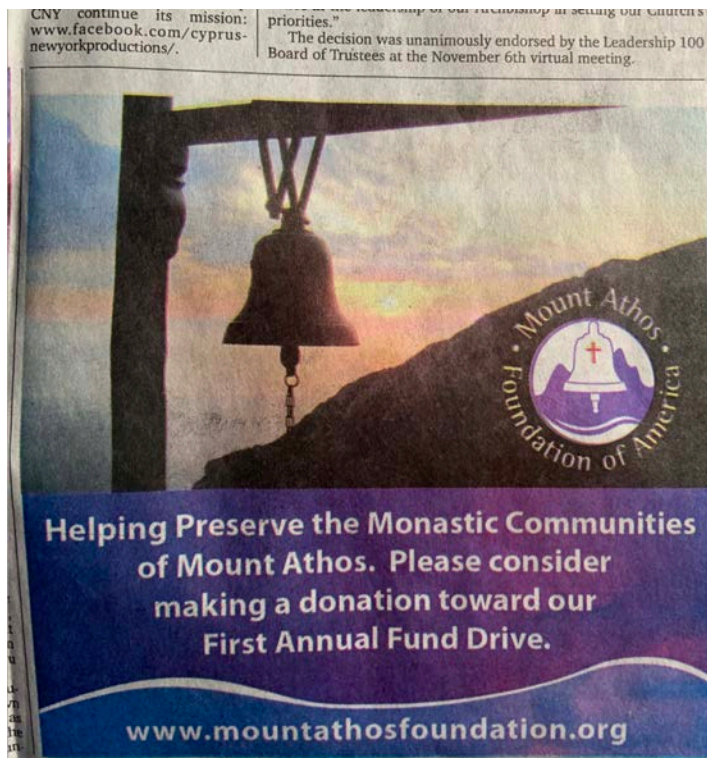
You can see the progress of the project itself on the website of the Friends of Mount Athos:

<https://athosfriends.org/appeals/axion-estin/>

The Axion Estin Cell was also featured in the film by Peter Bardehle and Andreas Martin, *Athos – Mount Athos Monk's Republic Documentary* available on YouTube, where you can see Fr Loukianos making stop-gap roof and window repairs and discussing the brotherhood's dream of renovating the hermitage:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5pwfLRI-R8&feature=youtu.be>

MAFA in the News



I want to take this occasion to express MAFA's profound thanks to **The National Herald** for the support it has provided for our work this year. On September 23, for MAFA's first fundraising campaign, it ran an extensive article featuring MAFA and its mission of support for the Holy Mountain:

https://www.thenationalherald.com/community_church_greece/arthro/new_foundation_organizes_fund_drive_to_support_mount_athos-895095/

To help us further with our first-ever fundraising campaign, it provided three free advertisements for MAFA!! One of those ads was running even as I began to write this newsletter.

This kind of support is priceless, and on behalf of the Mount Athos Foundation of America, the entire MAFA Board [3] is pleased to thank *The National Herald* for helping us launch our fundraising efforts so brilliantly!

MAFA also issued three Press Releases this year, one for each of our major projects. Please take a look at them to learn more about our work this year on behalf of the Holy Mountain:

the Grigoriou fire restorations project

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

the Simonopetra Paths Restoration and Rehabilitation project

https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/news/simonopetra_monastery_footpaths/),

and our donation for Covid-19 readiness to the Mount Athos Health Center in Karyes:

<https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/news/mafa-donation-for-covid19-readiness/>.



MAFA SCHOLARSHIPS

In 2020 MAFA issued \$1,000 scholarships to two scholars working on very interesting projects. We are especially appreciative of our partnership with **The Mount Athos Center in Thessaloniki**, which provides invaluable support for our scholars, assuring the best chance for success of their projects.

Xavier Agati is conducting an on-site study of manuscripts of the 18th-century historian and theologian, **Caesarius Dapontes**, who was a monk at Xeropotamou Monastery. Caesarius Dapontes' works constitute one of our major sources for the history of the Balkans for the 1730s – 1760s. The manuscripts to be studied were Dapontes' research materials and autograph manuscripts for his chronicle, *The Book of Reigns*. The autograph manuscripts, as it turns out, differed extensively from each other, raising questions about what caused him to make such changes, and what impact these changes may have on our understanding of Balkan history in that era.

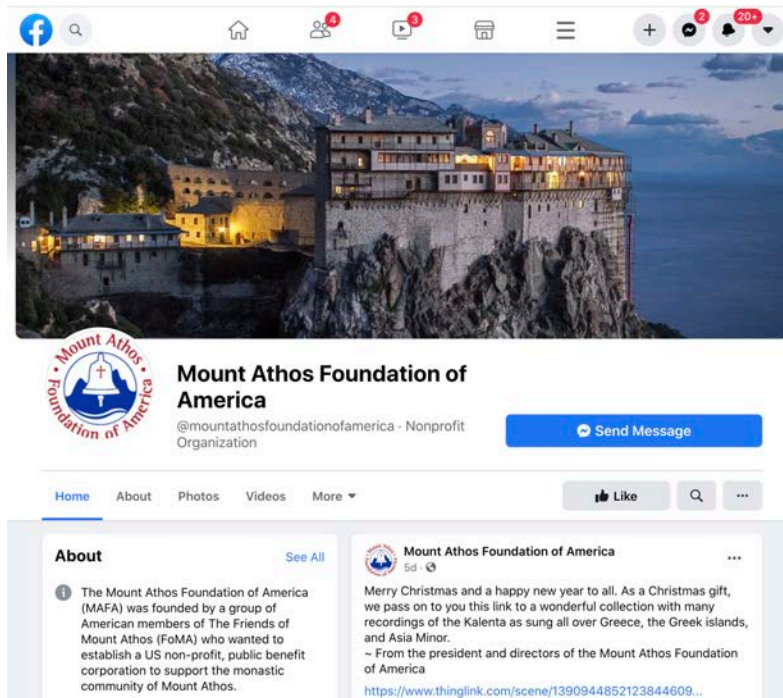
Caesarius Dapontes was a very important figure in the annals of 18th-century Athonite history as well. He was the classic example of a taxidiotis (ταξιδιώτης), that is, a person who travelled about gathering funds and material support for his monastery. The monastery entrusted him with the largest relic of the True Cross, the relics of the Forty Martyrs, and the monastery's foundation charter, for that purpose. Dapontes' mission was phenomenally successful, raising enough funds to rebuild the monastery's Catholicon (its central church). He later played a major role in planning the wall-painting program of the church.

Xavier Agati is a scholar from Grenoble, France now completing his Ph.D. dissertation at the Center of Byzantine and Neo-Hellenic Studies of the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Studies in Paris.

MAFA's second 2020 scholarship was issued to **Ugo Mondini**, for a study of the canons written by the 11th-century poet and hymnographer, **John Mauropous**: *The Transmission of John Mauropous' Canons in Mount Athos. Manuscripts and Cultural Reception*. John Mauropous' name, John the Monk (Ιωάννης Μοναχός), occurs throughout the Orthodox liturgical books as the composer of numerous hymns that are still sung today in the monasteries. Only a small group of the 160 canons that he wrote have been published. Ugo Mondini is particularly interested in questions related to the reception of his hymns, that is, how and why they replaced earlier hymns in the services, and what role the monasteries of Mount Athos played in preserving and promoting his hymns. The monasteries of Mount Athos are one of the most valuable repositories for manuscripts of his hymns, especially the Megisti Lavra, and direct study of the physical manuscripts is critical to understanding which of John's canons were adopted for use within the Athonite monastic services and in what liturgical contexts they were sung.

Ugo Mondini is a Ph.D. student in Byzantine Philology in the Department of Literary, Philological and Linguistic Studies at the Università Degli Studi di Milano

MAFA on FaceBook

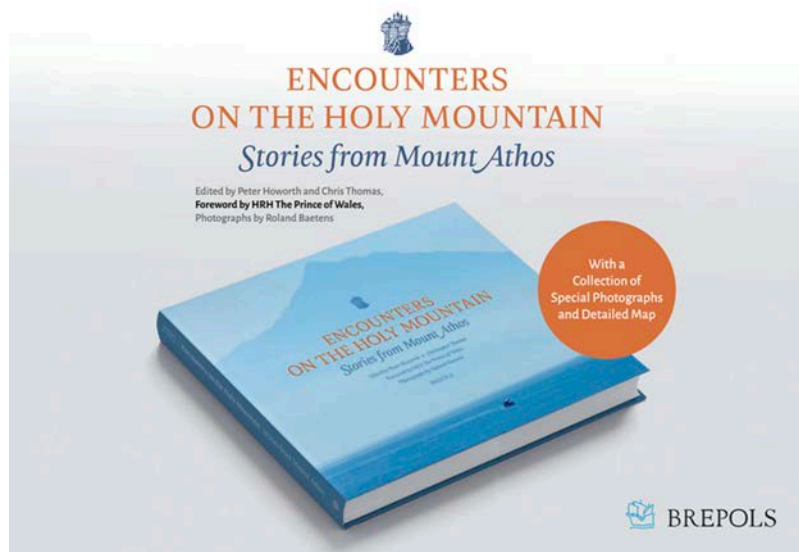


Dionne Katinas, our website designer (designsbydionne.com) has performed superb service for us in getting the **MAFA Facebook Page** up and running in time for our 2020 fundraising campaign. During the campaign we have been promoting the 2020 FoMA publication, *Encounters on the Holy Mountain* edited by Peter Howorth and Christopher Thomas (see below), both on our website and on Facebook. Twice a week we have posted “squibs” (that’s British and/or New Zealandese for blurbs, snippets, or teasers!) from the various stories included in this magnificent volume. Dionne also posted all of MAFA’s press releases there for us, as well as on the MAFA website.

In fact, you can find just about everything mentioned in this Newsletter on our Facebook page. What does this have to do with our fundraising campaign? These postings are bringing new followers to MAFA every week. In the short time that we have been posting on Facebook, we have received 451 “likes” and gained 462 new “followers” on Facebook. That following, which we hope will grow into thousands, translates into an enhanced audience for our fundraising campaigns and added support for MAFA’s mission when we undertake new projects on the Holy Mountain. **If you haven’t seen our Facebook page and “liked” or “followed” us yet, please do so!** Then our postings will be passed on to your friends, helping MAFA achieve wider awareness in 2021 of the Holy Mountain – also part of our mission. Thank you, Dionne!

Encounters on the Holy Mountain

MAFA is promoting *Encounters on the Holy Mountain*, as mentioned above, not only because it is a spectacular book and a publication by members of our sister organization, The Friends of Mount Athos, but also because it advances our mission of cultivating *increased awareness and appreciation for the Holy Mountain in the Americas*. In it you will find all kinds of short stories by a great many members of the Friends of Mount Athos, including my own story about how a bumblebee saved my life, introduced me to the presence of the



Panagia in her special place, and helped me win acceptance on the Holy Mountain very early in my career. Also represented in *Encounters* are MAFA's own Chris Deliso, chairperson of our Website Management Committee (*Twenty Years of Gratitude: Life since Athos*) and Dominic Solly of MAFA's Volunteer Corps (*The First Lopper?*). You can order your copy of *Encounters on the Holy Mountain* from www.mountathosfoundation.org, where a few of the initial discounted copies are still available! Or send an email to books@mountathosfoundation.org.

Fundraising

This year we welcomed to our Board of Directors Peter Allen, to work with existing board member, George Babbes, in planning and carrying out our first-ever fundraising campaign. You can learn more about Peter in our Summer Newsletter (Newsletter 2) available on the [News Page](#) of the MAFA website. Our plans to conduct a series of fundraising events across the country and a celebration on our patronal day, the Presentation of the Virgin, November 21, were all scuttled by Coronavirus. As a result, our first fundraising campaign was conducted mostly through word of mouth and our postings on Facebook.

With only this rather limited fundraising effort, then, I am pleased to announce that between our kickoff date (September 1) and the time at which I began writing this newsletter, we received \$5,965 in donations, bringing the total donations for the year to \$48,325, and additional donations have come in even as I was writing. Many of these contributions have come from FoMA members, but many from people completely new to us, who have discovered MAFA via our website and Facebook pages. To all who contributed, we express our sincere appreciation. In the preceding sections of this newsletter and in our Summer Newsletter, you can find additional details about how put these funds to work carrying out our mission to support and promote understanding of the Holy Mountain.

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If you are interested in becoming a member of the MAFA Volunteer Corps and willing to contribute time and effort to help us carry out our mission of support for the Holy Mountain, please contact us at info@mountathosfoundation.org or visit us via Facebook or our website, www.mountathosfoundation.org to let us know of your interest. We would love to hear from you.

If you are thinking about your taxes and end-of-year donations, please consider a donation to support our mission of giving something back to the Holy Mountain that sustains us all in so many ways, or go direct to our donation page using the donation button below.

MAFA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charity, and your donation to MAFA will be tax deductible. You can donate directly from the MAFA website at <https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/donate/>.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I extend to all who read this my heartfelt wishes for a new year rich in the blessings of health, spiritual fulfillment, and renewed productivity that reaches beyond ourselves to make this world a better place.

Robert W. Allison, President,
The Mount Athos Foundation of America

