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NEWSLETTER 6 – DECEMBER, 2022

2022 was a landmark year for the MAFA. We were able to take significant action both to address emergencies on the Holy Mountain and to advance our existing appeals in support of several Athonite monasteries, as reported below. In our collaboration with the Mount Athos Center in Thessaloniki, we launched our traveling exhibits program with our first-ever exhibit: *Mount Athos, the Ark of Orthodoxy*. The exhibit opened with a hugely successful celebratory event that made headlines from coast to coast. Recognition of the MAFA bell advanced greatly both in the United States and on the Holy Mountain in 2022. These successes are a credit to all who supported MAFA this year, and indeed, they demonstrate MAFA's growing outreach and recognition in the U.S. and Canada. You can read about all these accomplishments in the following paragraphs....

Landslide at the Little St. Anne's Kalyvva of the Dormition



On May 2 we learned that a landslide had crushed the dome and damaged the walls of the church of the Kalyva (a small monastic cell) of the Dormition. This Kalyva is a dependency of the Skete of Little St. Anne on Mount Athos, which itself belongs to the Great Lavra monastery. Named the Church of the Cave of the Holy Fathers Dionysios the Rhetorician and Mitrophanes, it was dedicated to the first ascetics in this part of the Holy Mountain that later became the Skete of Little St. Anne. An important pilgrimage site, it has been maintained by the Kalyva since the 16th century.

Mitophanes was one of the many 16th-

century Athonite priests who left the Holy Mountain as missionaries in a kind of grassroots resistance movement under the Ottoman occupation to preserve Christianity and the Hellenic Orthodox cultural heritage on the Greek mainland. MAFA worked with a very generous American donor to get funds quickly to the Kalyva, and we ran our own appeal to obtain additional funds. Greek government funds are not available for sketes, cells and other Athonite dependencies; funds for these smaller monastic units require special applications to the Greek government, and the cumbersome and lengthy application process can take over two years. MAFA, however, is able to act quickly in emergencies to get funds to the places where they are needed. In this case, a generous donor and friend of the Kalyva who had learned of MAFA contributed \$100,000 toward the immediate clean-up and stabilization of the church, but more is needed to complete the restoration. If you would like to help, please visit our appeal page, (<https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/appeals/>)

MAFA Emergency Aid Fund

On the eve of our first exhibition, we received a completely unexpected donation of \$100,000 from a Canadian citizen who had learned about MAFA. This was the first major donation given directly to MAFA not in response to any appeal, one that hopefully will inspire many others to do the same. While MAFA can act quickly in emergencies, our endowed **Emergency Aid Fund** was, until this donation, only a dream for the future. From this donation we put \$40,000 into the endowment. Our goal is an endowed fund of \$1,000,000, which will give us the ability to spend up to \$100,000 every two years on emergency needs like the disastrous landslide at Little St. Anne's Kalyva of the Dormition. We are grateful to the generous Canadian donor who enabled us to take the first step toward realizing this dream.

With this donation, two of our long-range endowment funds have been initiated. The other is the **Architectural and Ecological Conservation Fund**, which received its first major donation in 2021 from John Campbell, announced in our last Newsletter.

If you would like to help MAFA in building its **Emergency Aid Fund** or its **Architectural and Ecological Conservation Fund**, please visit our Giving page – (<https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/donate/>) – and click on that “DONATE” button, or help us find donors who themselves would be interested in contributing to one of these endowed funds. If you would like to see our **Legacy Giving Guide**, please visit <https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/legacy-giving/>.

Holy Cell of Axion Estin Renovation Project



The Axion Estin Cell, a dependency of Pantokrator Monastery, is located not far from Karyes. Photograph of the completed phase 1, courtesy of Graham Speake, The Friends of Mount Athos

from your Wonderful society has filled our hearts with joy and more optimism for the future progress of our restoration work.

The Axion Estin Cell renovation project is entering phase 2, which includes building new cells for the monks (the old ones are collapsing), a new kitchen and a guest house for pilgrims. MAFA was able to kick off the fundraising for this phase with a contribution of \$20,000 made possible by our generous Canadian donor plus additional funds from our year-long appeal shared with the Friends of Mount Athos.

The Cell, site of the famous miracle that marked the origin of the *Axion Estin* hymn, is over 1,000 years old. Some of its buildings look every bit their age, and are in dangerous condition.

Fr Philoumenos of Axion Estin wrote the following which we share here with all of our readers:

We were somehow overwhelmed by the lack of funds the extended damages.... Yet our appeal's approval

The work at the Axion Estin Cell is ongoing, with renovation of the main building and residence of the monks ahead. MAFA is hopeful that we will be able to make ongoing contributions to this important and historic project. The fathers of the Axion Estin Cell invite you to view their website to learn more about its history and the famous hymn for which it is named: <https://www.keliaxionestin.com/eng/> You can follow the progress of the project itself on FoMA's website: <https://athosfriends.org/appeals/axion-estin/> Please join us in bringing the Axion Estin restoration project to a successful completion by visiting our website: <https://athosfriends.org/appeals/axion-estin/> and clicking on the "donate" button.

MAFA Exhibition: *Mount Athos the Ark of Orthodoxy*



Archbishop Elpidophoros opening the inaugural symposium in the exhibition hall at the Maliotis Cultural Center.

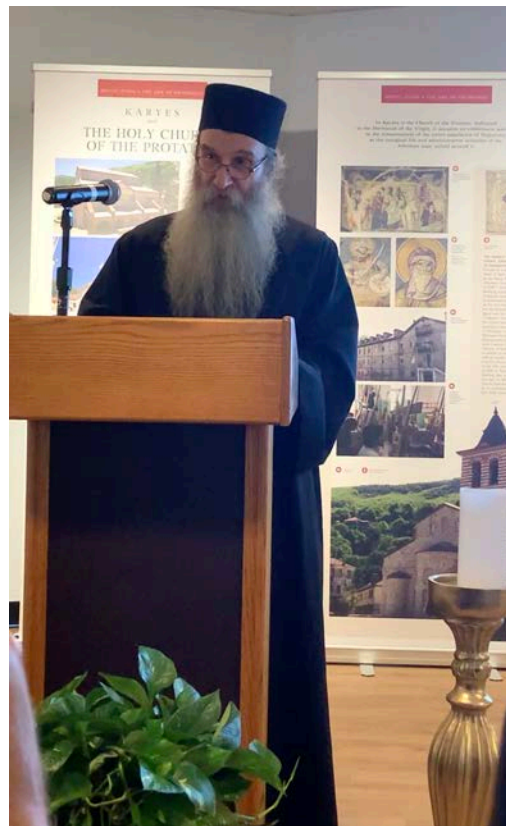
In September we launched our exhibition program with the exhibition, *Mount Athos. The Ark of Orthodoxy*, produced in collaboration with the Mount Athos Center (Agioreitiki Estia) of Thessaloniki, Greece, and hosted by the Maliotis Cultural Center on the campus of Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

The exhibition offers viewers a virtual pilgrimage of all twenty monasteries of Mount Athos as well as the monastic capital with its ancient basilica church, the Protaton. Exhibit panels with spectacular photographs from the collection of the Mount Athos Center transport the viewer to the Athonite Peninsula, informing the viewer about the layout of each monastery, its history, its famous icons, relics and other treasures. Special panels on the spiritual life of Athonite monasticism, on Athonite art and architecture, the flora and fauna of Mount Athos, present a wider view of the significance and beauty of this World Heritage Site and center for all branches of worldwide Orthodox Christianity.

The inaugural symposium for the exhibition was held on September 13, 2022 opening with a prayer of invocation and welcome from Archbishop Elpidophoros, and greetings from the Holy Community of Mount Athos delivered by Fr. Loukas of Xenophontos Monastery.

MAFA president, Robert Allison, emeritus professor of religion and classics at Bates College, served as moderator for the afternoon sessions. In his brief opening remarks, he introduced the audience to MAFA and its two-part mission – being a steady and reliable source of aid to the Holy Mountain when it is needed and promoting awareness, understanding and appreciation of Mount Athos in the Americas.

Fr. Loukas, known to Americans for his work painting the St. Nicholas Shrine at Ground Zero in New York City, delivered an inspiring account of his own experience as a young artist arriving on the Holy Mountain. Anna Merkel, the mother of an Athonite monk, shared her own experience and feelings as a mother whose son went to the Holy Mountain to become a monk. Lee Morest, a student at Holy Cross – recipient of a 2022 MAFA scholarship to study the integration of the daily monastic activity and spiritual life of priest monks on Mount Athos – spoke of the transformative nature of his own pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain. In keeping with the theme of the celebration, *Reflections on a Day on Mount Athos*, the Symposium recessed at 4:00 at the sounding of the semantron for Vespers. During “trapeza” (a banquet lavishly hosted by the staff of the Maliotis Center) diners watched in silence as a recently discovered silent film of an expedition to the Holy Mountain in 1929 was played. The dinner was followed by a discussion of this pictorial record of life and architecture of the ancient Athonite monasteries facilitated by Alice Sullivan, professor at Tufts University, with presentations by Julia Gearhard and Maria Alessia Rossi, both of Princeton University, who recounted the story of their discovery and restoration of a 1929 remarkable film.



Right: Fr Loukas of Xenophontos Monastery, Mount Athos, delivers greetings from the Holy Community.

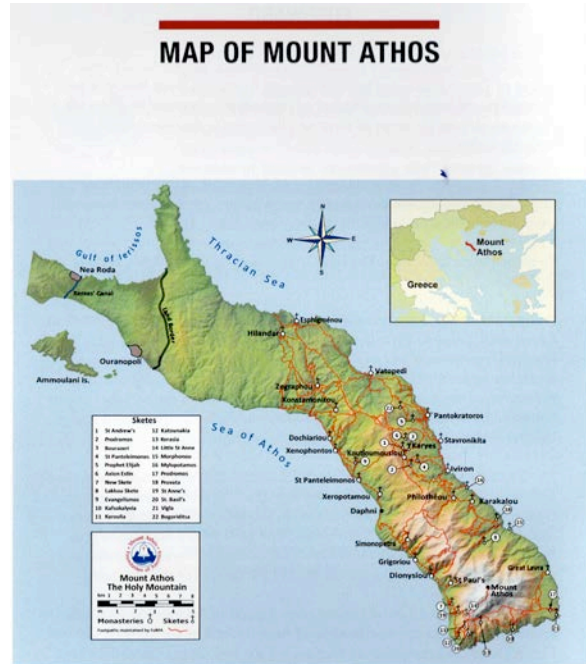
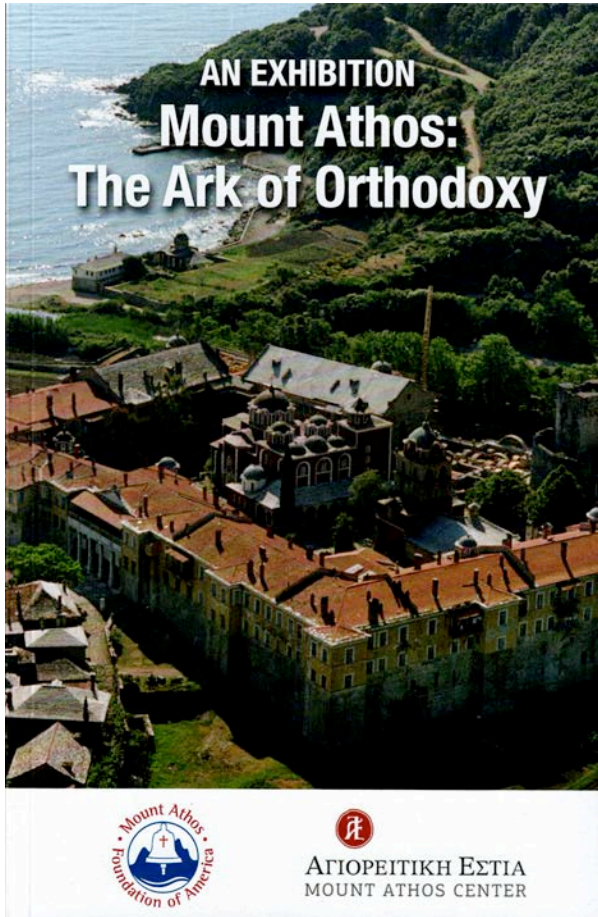


Above: Domes and Crosses: Panteleimonos Monastery (Rossikon). An example of the spectacular photography on display in the exhibition, Mount Athos: The Ark of Orthodoxy.

This exhibition remained on display at the Maliotis Center for almost three months. It will begin its itinerary as a traveling exhibition in January, when it will be available for display at venues across the United States.

Readers interested in bringing the exhibition to their own local venues are invited to contact MAFA via its website at <https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/exhibition/> (click on the button, “Host an Exhibition”).

To complement the exhibition, MAFA and the Mount Athos Center (Agioreitiki Estia) collaborated in publishing a richly illustrated exhibition catalog, in which all the panel texts are printed together with the spectacular photographs produced by the Mount Athos Center. The catalog is designed to serve as a pilgrim’s guide, measuring 8 ½ x 5 ½ inches for easy carrying by persons during pilgrimages to the Holy Mountain. A map produced especially for this catalog by the well-known cartographer and FoMA member, Peter Howorth, and a glossary of monastic terms occurring in the catalog – terms that pilgrims to the hagiorte monasteries are likely to hear and will want to understand – complement the main contents of the catalog. The catalog will be a valuable and valued complement to the *Pilgrim’s Guide* published by the Friends of Mount Athos. (See the images from the catalog reproduced on the following page of this Newsletter.)



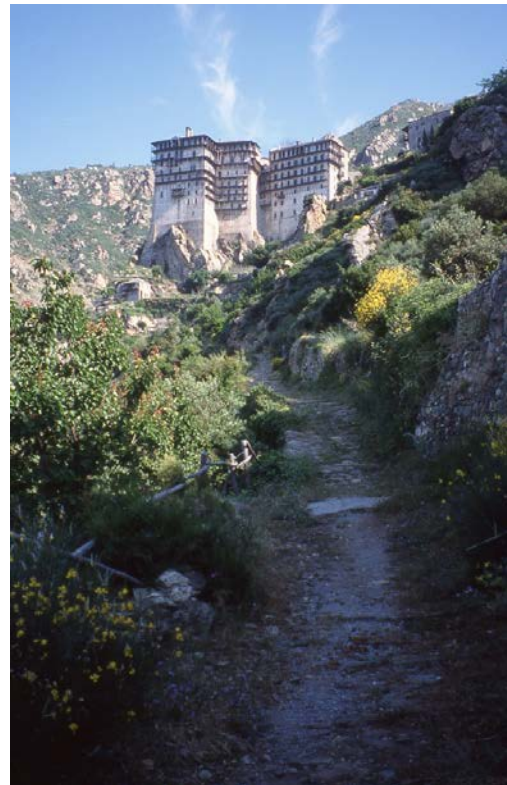
Left: The exhibition catalog, front cover.

Above: Map of Mount Athos (p. iii), especially commissioned from New Zealand cartographer, Peter Howorth, for this exhibition catalog.

Simonopetra Monastery's Footpaths Preservation and Rehabilitation Planning Project

Mafa is pleased to announce that the feasibility project funded in part by MAFA has been completed, and the groundwork is ready for moving ahead with this project. The project included planning for rest stations and information stations along the footpaths as well as restoration and ecological improvement of the paths themselves. MAFA is happy to have been able to support this project that is so clearly aligned with our mission and designed to enhance the pilgrim experience.

Right: the present access route for pilgrims to Simonopetra Monastery. Photo by Graham Speake, The Friends of Mount Athos. All rights reserved.

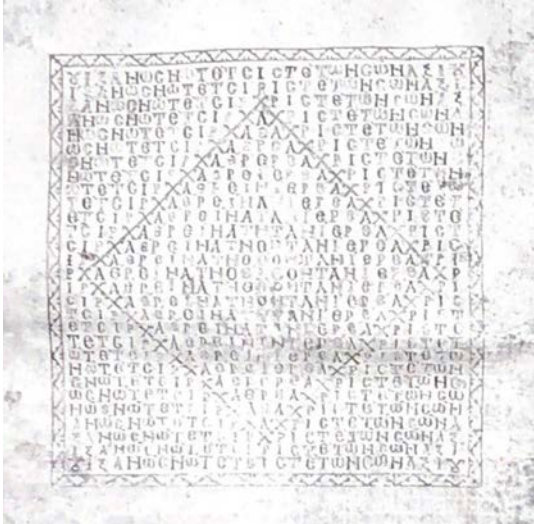


MAFA SCHOLARSHIPS

In 2022 MAFA issued \$1,000 scholarships to two scholars working on very interesting projects.

Lee Morest, a student at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, MA, undertook a project to understand the nature of priesthood on Mt. Athos, from ordination through to the expectations of priests serving in the monasteries there, including the specific practices and traditions of the individual monasteries. The second half of the project involved the potential value of insights from these practices for priesthood and parish life in the world. MAFA and the audience at the exhibition opening witnessed at first-hand from Mr. Morest's presentation how transformative his experience on Mount Athos was.

The second MAFA scholarship was awarded to James Wilson, for a study at Hilandar Monastery of the wonderworking icon, the three-handed Mother of God (an icon featured in the MAFA exhibition panel for Hilandar), and a project at Hilandar and Koutloumoussi Monasteries on the subject of word-labyrinths in in codices preserved in those monasteries (Hilandar codex 13 and Koutloumoussi codex 61).



Left: the word labyrinth from Koutloumoussi cod. 61, folio 201v. Mr. Wilson explains that the labyrinth, written by the priest Leo of Antioch, consists of “letters that, moving from any direction at a right angle from the center, read ΛΕΟΝΤΑ ΙΕΡΕΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΕ ΤΩΝ ΣΩΝ ΑΞΙΟΥ (O Christ, make the priest Leo worthy of thine...)”

We look forward to learning about the results of his work in the coming year!