

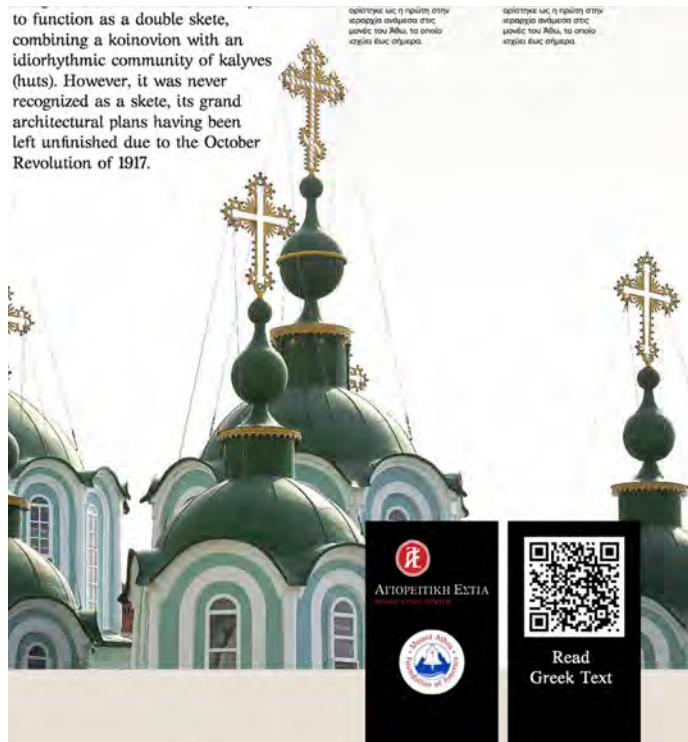


Robert W. Allison, President,
The Mount Athos Foundation of America, Inc.
119 Summit Hills Drive, Spartanburg, SC 29307

NEWSLETTER 7 – FALL, 2023

Much of MAFA’s activity in 2023 has been forward-looking – plans for events and programs for 2024 that we expect will be of great interest to Americans, and about which we are very excited. Keep reading! Preliminary announcements about these upcoming activities are at the end of this newsletter....

MAFA Exhibition: *Mount Athos the Ark of Orthodoxy*



Detail from the exhibit panel for Panteleimon Monastery showing the QR code that opens detailed information for viewers on their cell phones.

MAFA’s first exhibition, ***Mount Athos: The Ark of Orthodoxy***, produced in collaboration with the Mount Athos Center (Agioreitiki Estia) of Thessaloniki, Greece, has enjoyed phenomenal success. Originally intended for a one-month event opening September 13, 2022, it continued to draw so many viewers that it has been kept in place now the whole year. Untold numbers of visitors – including classes from nearby colleges and universities – have viewed it at the Maliotis Cultural Center. MAFA thanks Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts and the Maliotis Center itself for hosting it and welcoming these numerous visitors.

The exhibition offers viewers a virtual pilgrimage of all twenty monasteries of Mount Athos with panels displaying spectacular photographs from the collection of the Mount Athos Center. 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 world-wide Orthodox Christianity.

The exhibit is available for travel to other venues in 2024, and MAFA has a fund enabling us to subsidize some of the cost. Contact our exhibits coordinator for further information.

Landslide at the Little St. Anne’s Kalyva of the Dormition



The church crushed by massive boulders loosened by the landslide

In May 2022 a landslide crushed the dome and damaged the walls of the church of the Kalyva (a small monastic cell) of the Dormition, 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.

MAFA was able to act quickly – in keeping with our mission to be able to respond quickly to emergencies, getting funds to the places where they are needed. Thanks to our quick response, the clean up and site stabilization started immediately.

Over the past three years, MAFA’s service as a facilitator of timely donations from donors to the holy monasteries and smaller foundations of the Holy Mountain in the face of emergencies has emerged as one of our most valued and important functions.

In this case, a generous donor and friend of the Kalyva who had learned of MAFA contributed over \$100,000 in response to MAFA’s appeal, enabling the Kalyva to complete the restoration of damages to the church and to the kalyva itself. More work remains, however, including the rebuilding of the old stone stairways. If you would like to help, please visit our appeal page, (<https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/appeals/>)



Right: the restored church of the Kalyva of the Dormition, Fall, 2023. Photos provided to MAFA by Fr. Eftymios, who has lived his ascetic life at the kalyva for 33 years.

MAFA’s Liaison Officer in Greece: Konstantinos Dolmas

MAFA’s communication with the Holy Mountain has increased to the extent that we now have engaged our **Liaison Officer, Konstantinos Dolmas**, on a permanent basis. The Liaison Officer is now MAFA’s first paid appointment. Konstantinos is in constant contact with our president and the MAFA Liaison Committee. He visits the Holy Mountain on behalf of MAFA, represents MAFA in meetings with the Mount Athos Center in Thessaloniki (Αγιοριτική Εστία) and with the Center for Preservation of Athonite Heritage (ΚεΔΑΚ – Κέντρο Διφυλάξεως Αγιορείτικης Κληρονομιάς). He conducts on-site visits and inspections of projects on Mt. Athos funded by MAFA, and participates in interviews of scholarship and grant applicants. Together with **FoMA member, Cliff Argue**, he keeps MAFA informed of news events and reportage related to the Holy Mountain via monthly reports and attending meetings of the Board of Directors. AND he handles all kinds of logistical support in Greece for MAFA, our scholarship winners and our grant recipients.

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

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 again with all of our readers: *We were somehow overwhelmed by the lack of funds and the extended damages Yet our appeal’s approval*

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

The work at the Axion Estin Cell is ongoing. Renovation of the main building and the residence of the monks lies 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/> (in Greek). You can follow progress on the project itself on FoMA’s website: <https://www.athosfriends.org/appeals/> Please join us in bringing the Axion Estin restoration project to a successful completion by visiting the FoMA website (above) and tell them in the window for “Notes” that MAFA sent you!

Grigoriou Monastery Follow-up

We are pleased to report that the MAFA contributions toward the Monastery of St. Grigoriou Appeal helped the monastery replace some of the equipment damaged in the 2019 fire, restoring life in the monastery to normalcy. However, much remains to complete construction for the long term. As such, **MAFA's Grigoriou Appeal is still open**. Remaining are the purchase of a modern 200 kw wood boiler to replace the last of the damaged equipment, and new construction to provide housing for the new electro-mechanical equipment and living space for engineers and workers employed by the monastery. The new construction projects are a critically important part of the overall project, positioned at a distance from the Monastery to protect it from any future issues and to facilitate quiet at the Monastery itself.



Image: The proposed building complex at Grigoriou (reproduced courtesy of Grigoriou Monastery)

MAFA Special Endowment Funds

MAFA's own financial picture has continued to improve, with new donations and growth of our special endowed funds. You can see the results in the chart below. Thanks to donations from friends like you, who share our ideal of "giving back", our special funds are growing, enabling MAFA to provide important aid to the monasteries, sketes and hermitages of the Holy Mountain when and where it is needed. MAFA would like to honor the family or person who contributes the full amount needed to endow one of the 2 scholarship funds, or 75% or more of what is needed to endow one of the other three funds:

NAMEABLE FUNDS	Cash	Endowment To Date	Endowment Goal
Emergency Aid Fund <i>Ability to pay out \$100,000 every 2 years</i>	\$87,005.00		\$4,000,000
Architectural and Ecological Conservation Fund <i>Ability to pay out \$50,000/yr</i>	\$24,799.40	\$40,000	\$1,000,000
Heritage Conservation Fund <i>Ability to pay out \$25,000/yr</i>			\$500,000
2 Scholarship Funds <i>Ability to pay out \$1,000/yr for each of 2 scholarships</i>	Paid from operating funds		\$30,000 each

With the funds from your donations in 2023, we plan to continue our support for the renovation of the historic Axion Estin Cell on Mount Athos (see above), contributing via our sister organization, **The Friends of Mount Athos (FoMA)**.

Beyond that, thanks to your generous donations we are reaching a point where we can begin to provide some significant support when catastrophe strikes the Holy Mountain – forest fires, the increasingly violent storms, and resulting disasters like the landslide that struck Little St. Anne's Kalyva of the Dormition this year (above). But our support for the Athonite community is not and will not be truly reliable and sustainable until we build up our endowment funds listed above.

If you would like to help MAFA build one of these funds so that we can realize *in full* our mission to support the Holy Mountain when support is needed, here are some options for getting started:

- Visit our Giving page – <https://www.mountathosfoundation.org/donate/> – and click on that “DONATE” button.
- Help us find donors in your area or your parish who themselves would be interested in helping us grow one of these endowed funds.
- Initiate a legacy gift (**Legacy Giving Guide:** www.mountathosfoundation.org/legacy-giving/)
- Go right to the top: contact our president in person (info@mountathosfoundation.org)

MAFA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

In 2023 MAFA issued a \$1,000 travel scholarship to Nikoletta Tzani for her project to examine the romantic, picturesque and oriental images that appeared in illustrated magazines, newspapers, and travelers accounts in the United States, France and Greece in the 20th century. Included are books and other written and photographic accounts, as well as works of art by American, French, and Greek travelers to the Holy Mountain. Her project aims to analyze both the choices of the works and monuments, and the viewpoints of each author or artist.

Prof. Tzani is an art historian by training. She works as a curator for the Municipality of Volos in Greece and as an adjunct professor of art history at the Democritus University on Thrace. Currently, she is in residence at Princeton University where she is conducting a large segment of research for her project. Princeton’s extensive archive of rarely-studied Athonite photographs was featured last year at the opening of MAFA’s exhibit, *Mount Athos the Ark of Orthodoxy* (see above, and more below on the Mount Athos Archive at Princeton University).

Nikoletta is our first female scholarship winner, and we hope, the first of many. Congratulations, Nikoletta! We look forward to seeing the results of this valuable research and are pleased that we were able to support it.

LOOKING AHEAD...

KeDAK.

MAFA has nearly completed working out an agreement with the Center for Preservation of Athonite Heritage (KeDAK) to enhance our ability to provide support for projects that require approval for construction and projects that have ecological impact.

Exhibitions.

MAFA, in collaboration with Princeton University and the Mount Athos Center in Thessaloniki, is launching another exhibition in the United States in 2024. Produced by the Mount Athos Center and based on a recently rediscovered Princeton photographic and film archive of a 1929 expedition to Mt. Athos, the exhibition opened first in Thessaloniki entitled *No Woman’s Land*, (based on a quote from the archival materials at Princeton), and later at Meteora (also featured in the photographic archive). Those who attended the opening of this year’s exhibition at the Maliotis Center were treated to a “sneak preview” of the films. The American tour of this exhibition will open at the Maliotis Cultural Center on the campus of Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School in Brookline, Massachusetts, hopefully followed by showings in New York City and Chicago.

Athonite Pilgrimage to be Led by Archbishop Elpidophoros

On October 5, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America announced that Archbishop Elpidophoros will be leading a pilgrimage to Mount Athos, Ormylia, and Thessaloniki on January 17-29, 2024. At least two members of MAFA will be participating in the pilgrimage and look forward to meeting their fellow pilgrims. See the following link for more information: <https://www.goarch.org/-/archbishop-elpidophoros-pilgrimage-2024> .

Mt. Athos Summer School Program

MAFA itself is beginning plans for a new program to be launched in the summer of 2025 that will combine a pilgrimage to Mount Athos and a 2-week summer school program. Watch for updates in our next MAFA Newsletter....

FoMA Christmas Appeal

While war rages in the Middle East and the Ukraine, the world has forgotten the plight of thousands of Greeks who have lost everything as a result of the September storms and floods in central Greece.

Sister Theoktisti of the Monastery of St John the Forerunner near Larissa – to whose work MAFA has contributed – sent FoMA the enclosed report. It lays bare the magnitude of what has befallen people in the region. We urge our readers to make a generous Christmas donation to the nuns’ efforts on behalf of the flood victims, even though for North Americans it cannot be a tax-deductible donation.