



MONUMENTAL ADVENTURES

at the greek unesco monuments



METEORA



► credits

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Meteora

Ten steps to...



1

Here one can admire frescoes executed by great painters.

The best known was Theophanes from Crete, the painter of the frescoes in the katholikon of the monastery of Saint Nicholas Anapafsas.



2

The area is protected as a Landscape of Special Natural Beauty and is one of the most important habitats in the country¹.





3

It is the largest and most important monastic community in Greece after Mount Athos.



5

The monasteries have the richest monastic collection of manuscripts after Mount Athos. Important workshops for copying manuscripts operated here (scriptoria).



7

The monasteries are built on the tops of giant rocks, in harmony with the natural environment. They look like they are “hanging in mid-air”!

The ancient city of Kalambaka was built on the roots of the rocks³.



9

Until 1930 access was by a net. The ascent mechanism was located in the *tower of vrizoni*, near the entrance of each monastery.



4

The monasteries contributed to the cultivation of letters, among others seeing to the establishment of schools.

The famous Academy of Socrates operated here after the mid-16th c.²



6

From the 18th c., the monasteries also functioned as places of imprisonment, exile, but also care.

The monasteries of Great Meteoron and Varlaam also had a hospital and a nursing home.



8

The complex of the imposing rocks was created millions of years ago.

Nearby is the Cave of Theopetra, which was inhabited about 130,000 years ago⁴.



10

The founder of the monastic state was **Osios Athanasios, the Meteorite.**

He founded the monastery of Metamorphosis on the rock Platys Lithos, and it is said that he was the first to rename it Meteoro.

... Meteora!

Meteora...

*the rocks
of heaven...*



WHAT?

- The monastic community of Meteora.

WHERE?

- Regional Unit of Trikala, Region of Thessaly.

WHEN?

- late 11th–early 12th c.: settlement of the first monks in Meteora.
- mid-14th century: foundation of most of the monasteries.
- 16th century: a period of prosperity for the monasteries.

what do the numbers say:

1,200



MANUSCRIPTS

are kept in the monasteries of Meteora

630 m

HEIGHT

the rock of Agia, the highest in Meteora

242

SCRIBES

are identified in the manuscripts of Meteora

167

STEPS

for the ascent to the Metamorphosis monastery

103.6 m

LENGTH

the longest rope in the ascent net of the Varlaam Monastery in 1897

...in the UNESCO List!

The monument was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List based on the following criteria:



LATE BYZANTINE
POST BYZANTINE
PERIOD

YEAR OF REGISTRATION:

1988

critterion i

The “hanging in midair” monasteries represent the ingenious architectural transformation of an area into a retreat, a place of meditation and prayer.

critterion iv

The monasteries are excellent examples of monastic architecture.

critterion v

Built on inaccessible cliffs, the monasteries reflect the traditional simple and ascetic lifestyle of the monks.

critterion ii

The frescoes of the Cretan Theophanes had a strong influence on post-Byzantine painting.

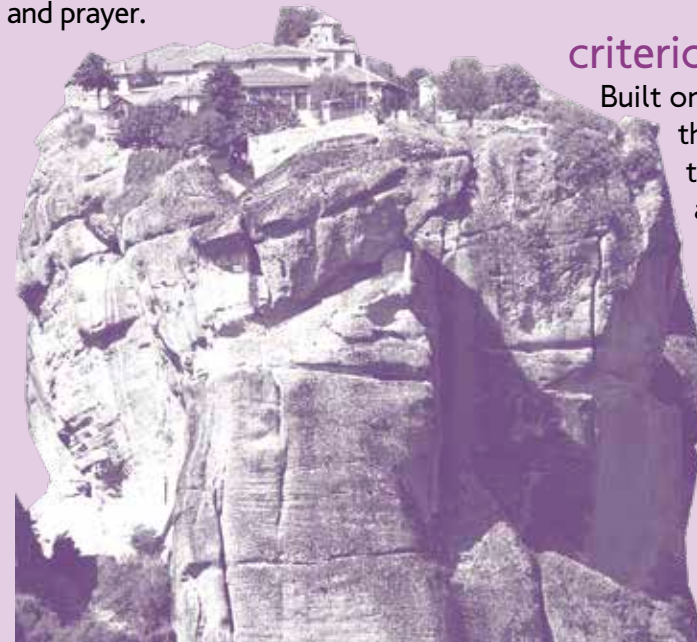
critterion vii

The rocks of Meteora form a rare and uniquely beautiful landscape.

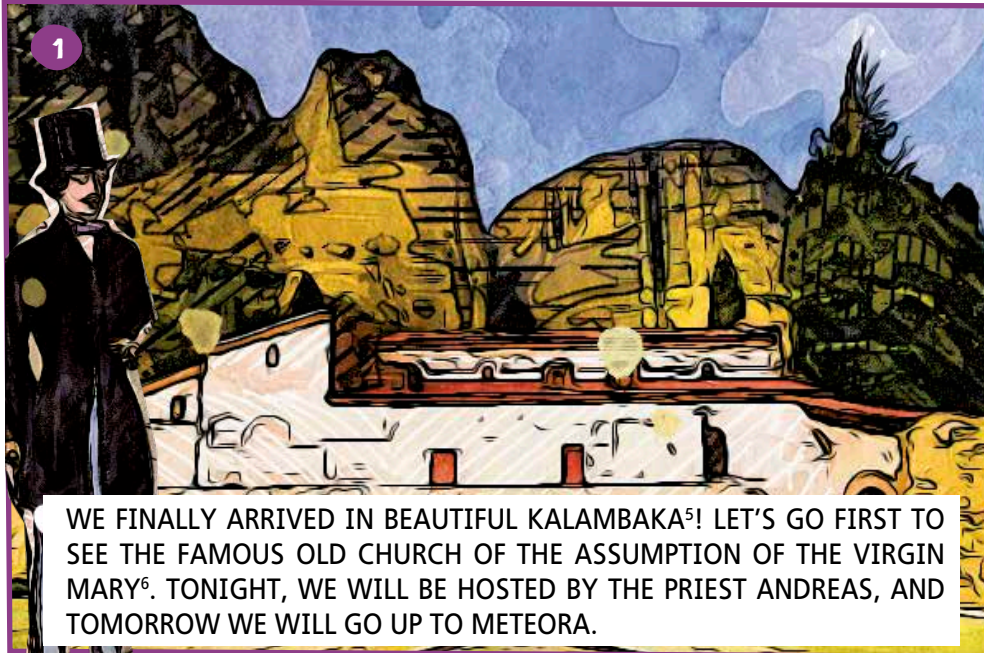


20+
MONASTERIES
operated in the 16th century

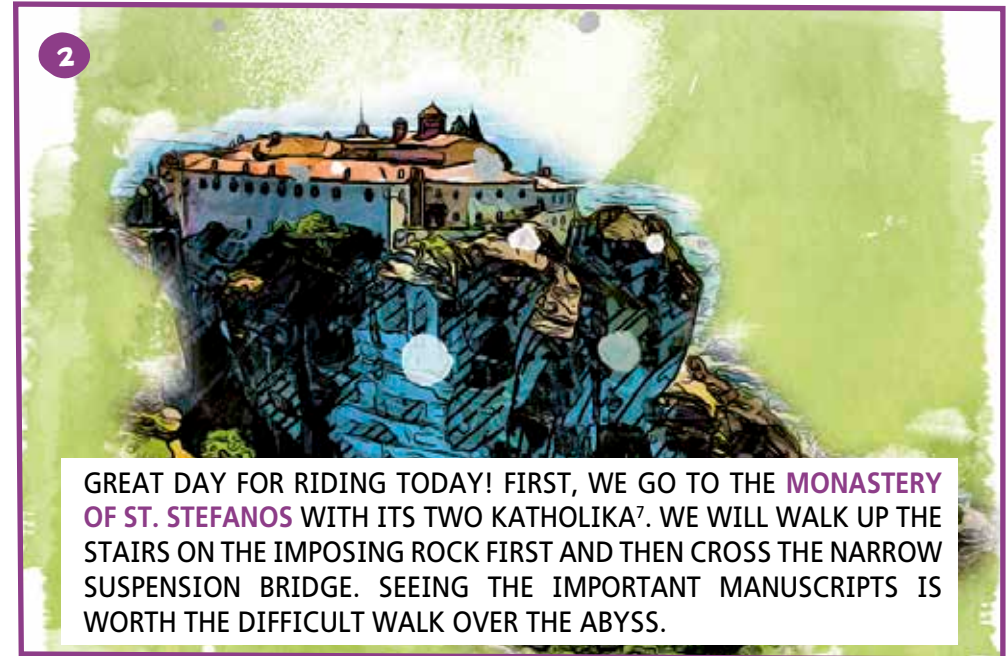
1. The monastery of Agia Triada.



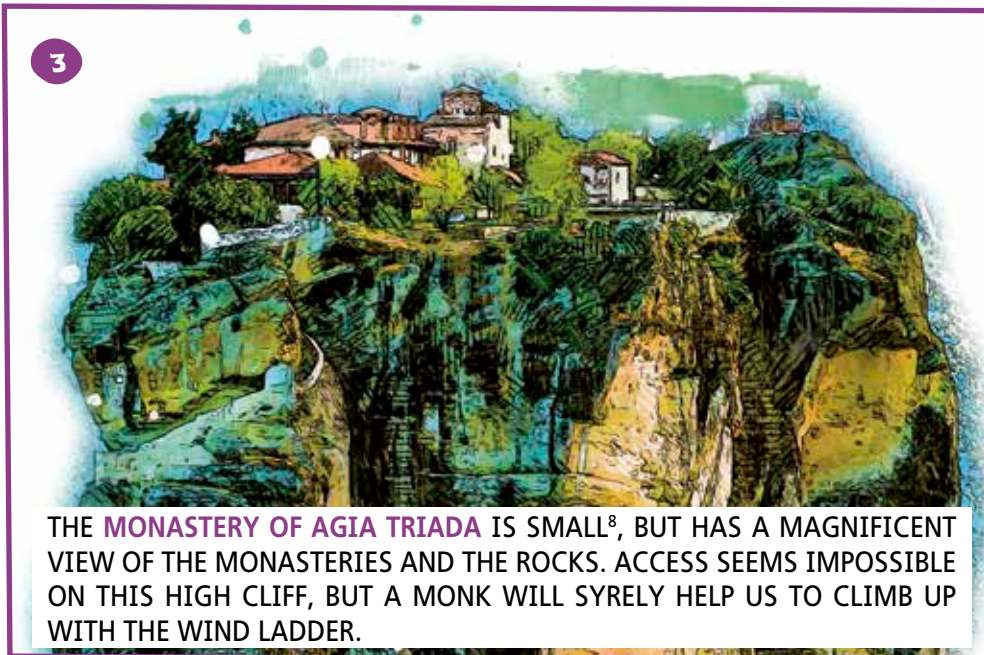
Walking around Meteora...



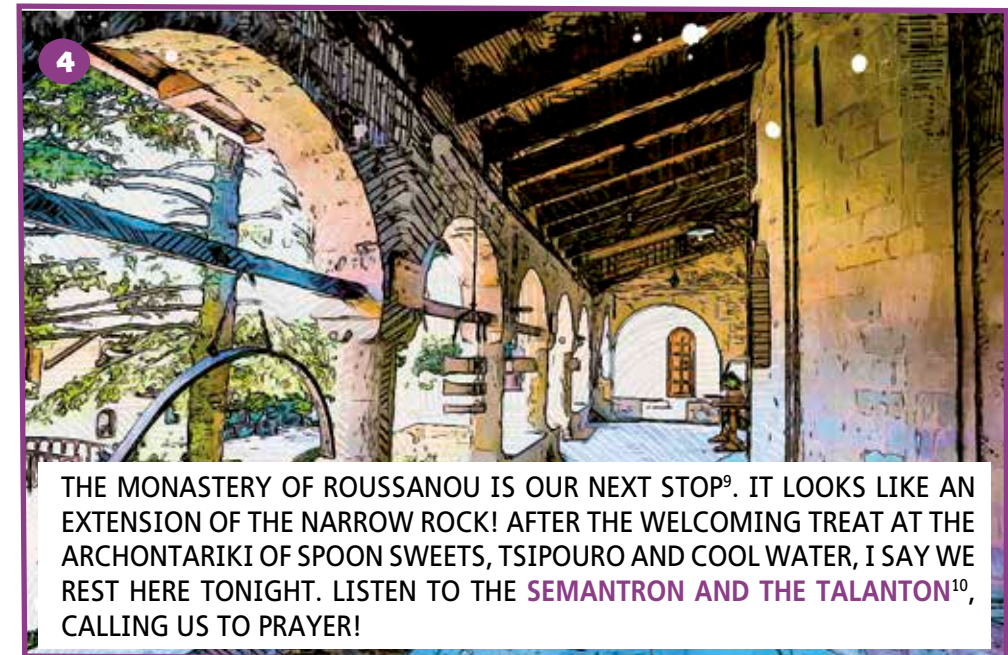
WE FINALLY ARRIVED IN BEAUTIFUL KALAMBAKA⁵! LET'S GO FIRST TO SEE THE FAMOUS OLD CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY⁶. TONIGHT, WE WILL BE HOSTED BY THE PRIEST ANDREAS, AND TOMORROW WE WILL GO UP TO METEORA.



GREAT DAY FOR RIDING TODAY! FIRST, WE GO TO THE **MONASTERY OF ST. STEFANOS** WITH ITS TWO KATHOLIKA⁷. WE WILL WALK UP THE STAIRS ON THE IMPOSING ROCK FIRST AND THEN CROSS THE NARROW SUSPENSION BRIDGE. SEEING THE IMPORTANT MANUSCRIPTS IS WORTH THE DIFFICULT WALK OVER THE ABYSS.



THE **MONASTERY OF AGIA TRIADA** IS SMALL⁸, BUT HAS A MAGNIFICENT VIEW OF THE MONASTERIES AND THE ROCKS. ACCESS SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE ON THIS HIGH CLIFF, BUT A MONK WILL SYRELY HELP US TO CLIMB UP WITH THE WIND LADDER.

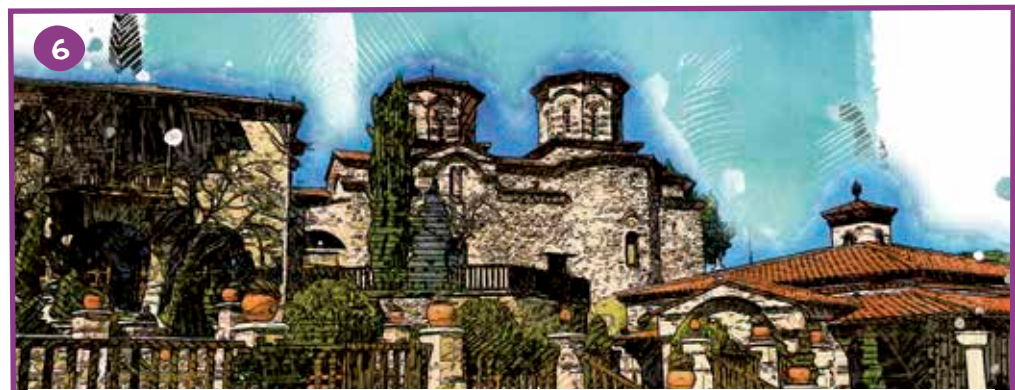


THE MONASTERY OF ROUSSANOU IS OUR NEXT STOP⁹. IT LOOKS LIKE AN EXTENSION OF THE NARROW ROCK! AFTER THE WELCOMING TREAT AT THE ARCHONTARIKI OF SPOON SWEETS, TSIPOURO AND COOL WATER, I SAY WE REST HERE TONIGHT. LISTEN TO THE **SEMANTRON AND THE TALANTON**¹⁰, CALLING US TO PRAYER!

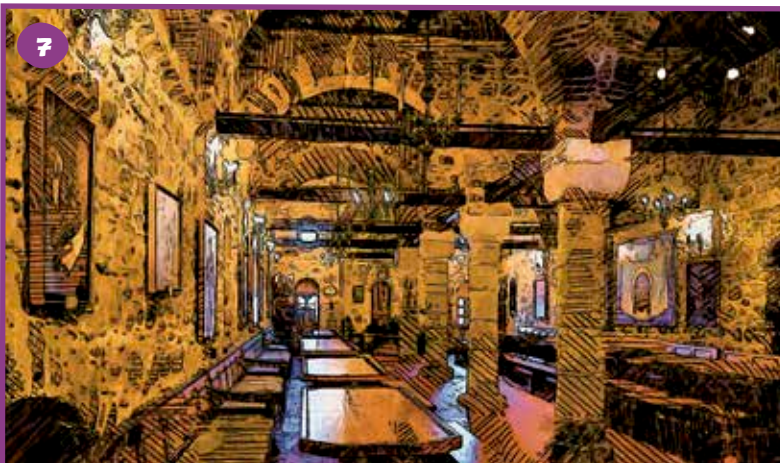
...with the archaeologist Leon!



IN THE MORNING LIGHT, THE ANAPAFSA MONASTERY LOOKS LIKE A MULTI-STOREY BUILDING STUCK IN THE ROCK¹¹. IN THE SMALL **KATHOLIKON**, WE WILL ADMIRE THE FAMOUS FRESCOES OF THEOPHANES OF CRETE. TO GET TO THE OTHER BUILDINGS, WE WILL CLIMB STAIRS AND PASS THROUGH NARROW, DARK CORRIDORS.



AT **VARLAAM MONASTERY**¹² WE MUST CLIMB WITH THE NET! I'LL CLOSE MY EYES AND PRAY! THE WAY THE ROPE SPUN, I GOT VERTIGO! LUCKILY THE MONASTERY HAS ALSO A HOSPITAL! THREE GREAT PAINTERS FROM THEBES HAVE WORKED IN THE KATHOLIKON HERE¹³! IT WAS WORTH THE EFFORT SO THAT WE COULD ADMIRE THE WORKS OF GOD THROUGH THE HANDS OF MEN!



IN GREAT METEORON¹⁴, THE LARGEST MONASTERY OF METEORA, THE CELLAR AND THE WINE CELLAR ARE FULL¹⁵. AT THE LARGE **REFECTORY** THE HOSPITABLE MONKS WILL WELCOME US WITH A RICH DINNER¹⁶! IN THE LIBRARY OF THE MONASTERY I DISCOVERED RARE MANUSCRIPTS!

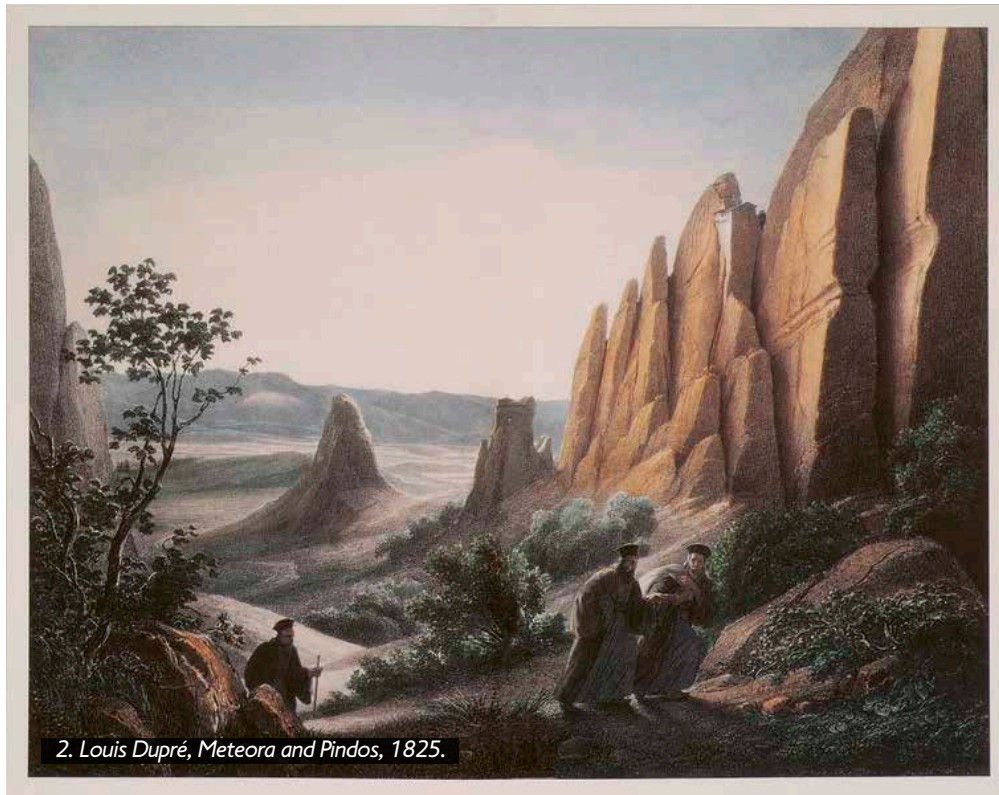


BEFORE WE LEAVE WE SHOULD ALSO VISIT THE **MONASTERY OF YPAPANTI**¹⁷. IT IS BUILT IN A CAVE, 60 M ABOVE THE GROUND, LIKE AN EAGLE'S NEST, AND WE WILL CLIMB UP THE WOODEN HANGING LADDER! NOW I KNOW: PRAYER TAKES AWAY FEAR!

The environment...

The stone forest

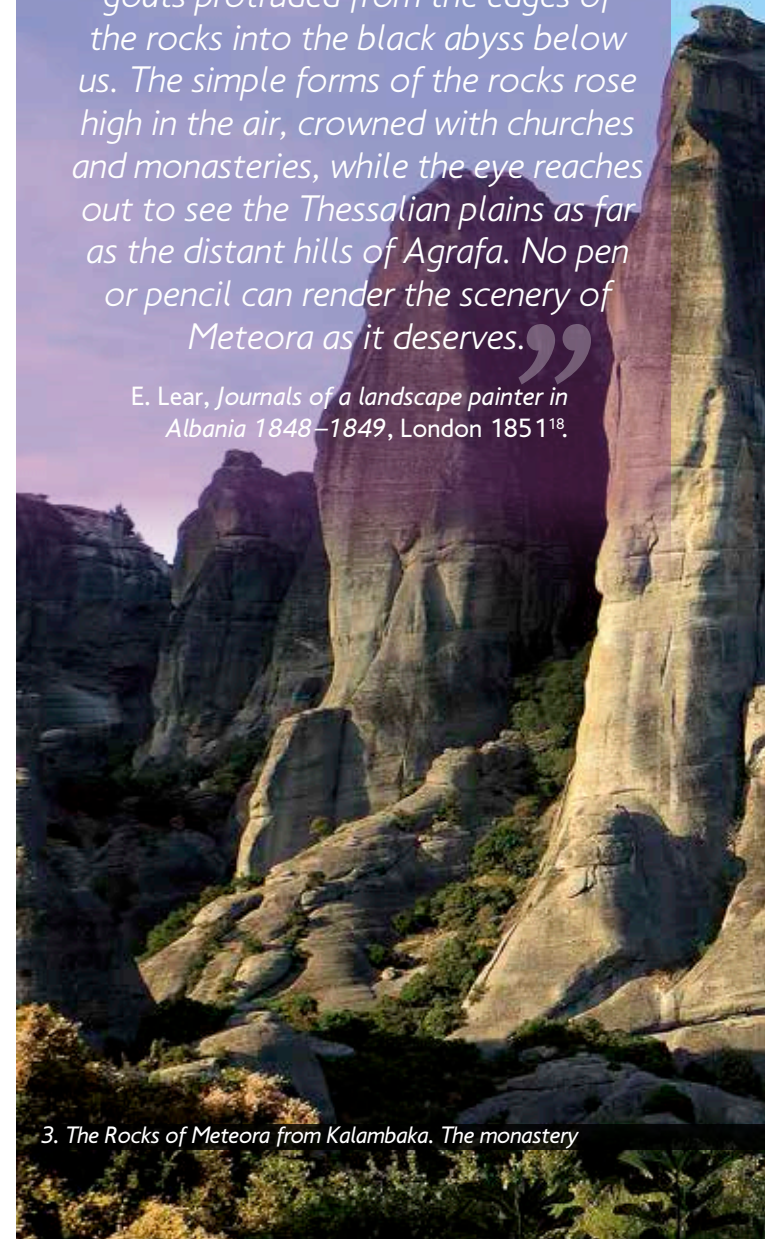
The grey and smooth, giant rocks of Meteora rise at the northwestern edge of the vast Thessalian plain and the beginning of the course of the river Pinios, between Pindos and the Antichasia Mountains. This unique geological phenomenon was created millions of years ago and is one of the rarest natural landscapes in the world. Kalambaka is built in the shadow of the sandstone and cobblestone rocks, while the picturesque village of Kastraki is a short distance away.



2. Louis Dupré, *Meteora and Pindos*, 1825.

“These massive stone pillars, cut off from each other, crowned by the shelters of the monks, rose vertically through a sea of foliage... Silver-white goats protruded from the edges of the rocks into the black abyss below us. The simple forms of the rocks rose high in the air, crowned with churches and monasteries, while the eye reaches out to see the Thessalian plains as far as the distant hills of Agrafa. No pen or pencil can render the scenery of Meteora as it deserves.”

E. Lear, *Journals of a landscape painter in Albania 1848–1849*, London 1851¹⁸.



3. The Rocks of Meteora from Kalambaka. The monastery

...and the landscape

- In the steep and inaccessible rocks of Meteora, which have the form of sharp mountain peaks, the first ascetics lived in search of spiritual peace. The first hermitages were natural or artificial cavities in the rocks and makeshift constructions. The increase in the number of anchorites led to the first communal monastic brotherhoods, which built monasteries of unique architecture on the tops of the cliffs in harmony with the imposing landscape.
- For their subsistence, the monks also developed activities outside the monasteries: cultivation of the land in the fields and vineyards at the foot of the cliffs, flour production in water mills, logging of the surrounding forests, beekeeping, breeding of productive animals, but also of large animals necessary for transport.

Green details

Meteora is a protected habitat of the Natura 2000 network, as it contains many rare species of flora and fauna. A rare and endangered species of migratory vulture, the endangered Egyptian vulture or *Asproparis*, comes here around mid-March to breed. It is one of the cleverest birds, using stones as “tools” to crack eggs!

of St. Stefanos can be seen.

Meteora through time



early 10th c.

The earliest written mention of the bishopric and the city of Stagi (today Kalambaka).



late 11th or 12th c.

First settlement of ascetics on the rocks of Meteora.



2nd half of the 12th or early 13th c.

The first written record of the monastery of Panagia Doupiani at Kastraki, which was the center of the homonymous skete and the first church at Meteora.



1204

After the Fourth Crusade Thessaly came under the Latin kingdom of Thessaloniki.



1222

Thessaly comes under the rule of various rulers.



1332

Restoration of Byzantine rule in Thessaly.



mid-14th c.

First attempts to organize monastic life by great spiritual figures of Meteoric monasticism, such as Hieromonk Neilos and Osios Athanasios the Meteorite. In the 14th century, most of the monasteries of Meteora were founded.



**1348–1356
and 1359–c.1373**

Thessaly under Serbian rule. The Serbian rulers generously support the monasteries of Meteora.



1386/7

First conquest of Thessaly by the Ottomans.



1392/3–1396/7

Second conquest of Thessaly by the Ottomans.



1410–1460

The monasteries of Meteora acquire the status of a stavropegion: they are directly under the Patriarchate of Constantinople.



1414/23–1470

Final conquest of Thessaly by the Ottomans.



16th c.

Monastic life at Meteora flourishes. Many monasteries are renovated and decorated with frescoes.



1546

The Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah I (1522–1544) visited Great Meteoron.



17th–18th c.

The increasing poverty of the monasteries led to a reduction in the number of monks and the desertion of many of them.



1821–1881

During the Greek War of Independence and the subsequent Thessalian uprisings, the monasteries of Meteora were often plundered.



1881

Thessaly is annexed to the Greek state.



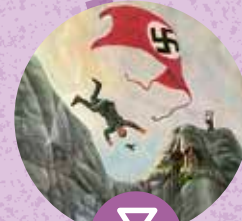
1808/9

The rebellion of the priest Thymios Vlahava provokes Ali Pasha's vengeful fury on the monasteries of Meteora.



1786

The notorious Ali Pasha is appointed Pasha of Trikala and pursues a harsh tax policy and trespasses on the property of the monasteries.



1940–1944

During the World War II, the monasteries of Meteora suffer great destruction.



1959–1970

The monasticism is reorganized, and the monasteries of Meteora are manned.



1988

Inclusion of the monument in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

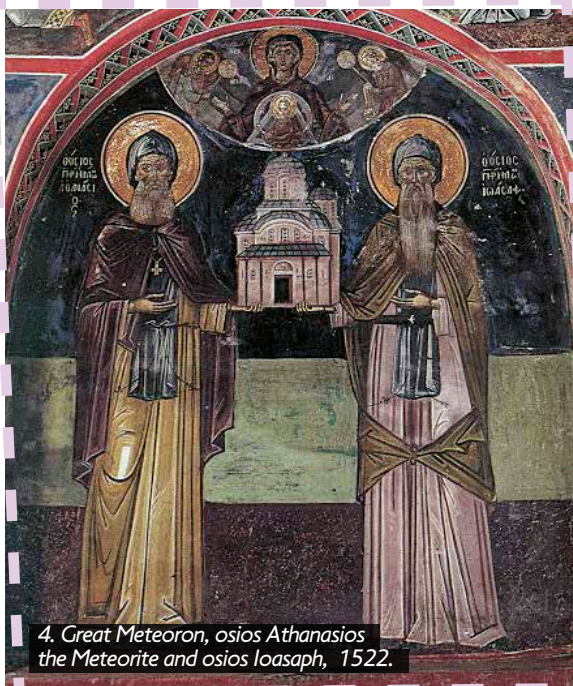
Historical figures through the ages

In Meteora important figures of Orthodox monasticism emerged.

They lived either as ascetics, isolated in inaccessible rocks, or in organized communal monasteries¹⁹, where they founded splendid churches decorated with excellent frescoes.



A' ACTIVE ABBOTS AND MONKS



4. Great Meteoron, osios Athanasios the Meteorite and osios Ioasaph, 1522.

Osios Athanasios the Meteorite from Ypati (c. 1302–1381)

founded around 1340 the monastery of Transfiguration (Great Meteoron), the first systematic monastic community of Meteora, so he is considered the leading figure in the organization of the monastic life of Meteora.

Osios Ioasaph

the last descendant of the Serbian dynasty of the Nemanides, became a monk in the monastery of Great Meteoron²⁰. He is considered the second founder of the monastery, as he contributed decisively to its development into the largest monastery in Meteora.



5. Varlaam Monastery, osios Theophanes Apsaras and osios Nektarios Apsaras, 1548.

The brothers Theophanes and Nektarios Apsarades,

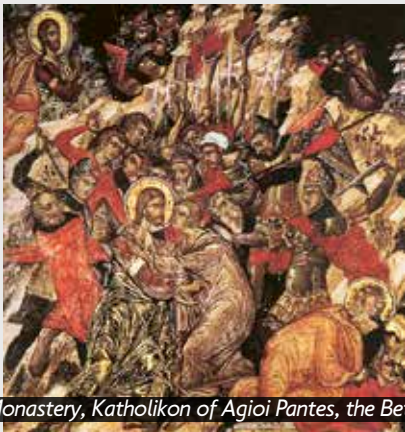
from an old and wealthy family in Ioannina, arrived in Meteora in 1510/11. In 1517/18, they settled on the rock of Varlaam, where they founded a new monastic brotherhood²¹. The two monks devoted themselves to building the monastery, which was to become one of the most important in Meteora.

PROMINENT CREATORS

Great hagiographers, skilled manuscript writers, wood carvers and other creators put their art and inspiration at the service of their faith.

Frangos Katelanos

The leading hagiographer of the 16th c. from Thebes, is believed to have worked in 1548 in the katholikon of the monastery of Varlaam, which is full of exquisite frescoes.



6. Varlaam Monastery, Katholikon of Agioi Pantes, the Betrayal, 1548.

The monk Neilos Stavras

was a notable codicographer²². The writing of the life of Saint Athanasios is attributed to him at the end of the 14th c.

The "taliadoroi" Kostas and Dimitris from Metsovo²³

constructed the exquisite wooden carved altarpiece of the newest katholikon in the monastery of Saint Stephanos in 1814. The construction cost 1000 gurushes (silver ottoman coins).

GREAT BENEFACTORS

Representatives of the secular and ecclesiastical power who offered sponsorships and privileges, enlightened teachers, travelers, historians and fighters against the Ottomans were also associated with Meteora.



Spain, Cuenca Monastery Museum, Maria Paleologina at the feet of the Theotokos, detail of a diptych icon.

Maria Angelina Komneni Dukaina Paleologina Preliubovna

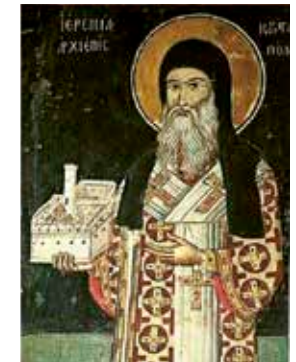
(1350–1394)

the wife of the despot of Epirus Thomas Preliubovich and sister of Saint Ioasaph, was a great benefactress of the monastery of Great Meteoron. Two icons with portraits of the "Byzantine Lady" are kept in the monastery today.

The Patriarch of Constantinople Jeremiah I

(1522–1524, 1525–1546)

issued a series of *sigils* in favor of the monasteries of Meteora, securing their property and independence, following the models of the Athonite monasteries²⁴.



BRAVE PATRIOTS



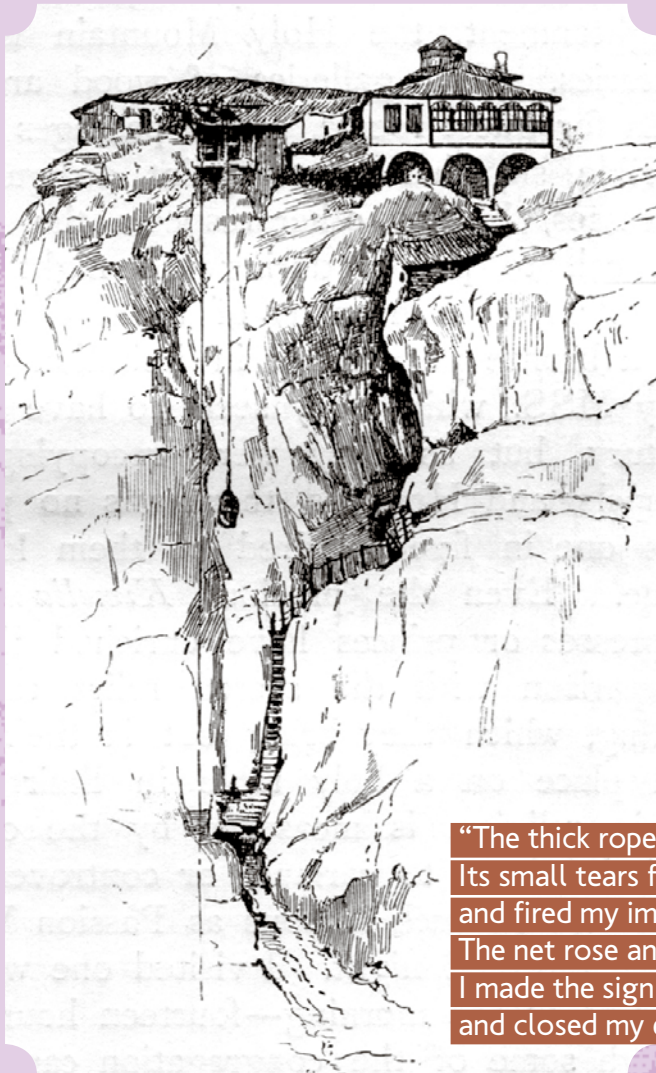
The priest Thimios Vlahavas

(1703–1809)

from Kalambaka became an *armatolos* and in 1808 he organized a mutiny against Ali Pasha of Ioannina, which was brutally crushed, while he himself was killed in a horrible way.

A monument is born

Since the 18th c., Meteora has been visited by adventurous travelers, who, in their accounts and drawings, capture the beauty of the landscape, the monasteries and the life of the monks. At the same time, they provide a wealth of geographical, folklore and ethnological information about the area.



“The thick rope was hanging motionless...
Its small tears filled me with terror
and fired my imagination...
The net rose and tightened me.
I made the sign of the cross
and closed my eyes”²⁵



7. Engraving of the monastery of Transfiguration (Great Meteoron), by the monk Parthenios (1782), which depicts the ascent systems of the 18th c. and the agricultural activities of the monks.

ARDUOUS ASCENT

Most travelers vividly comment on the arduous climb to the monasteries with a wind ladder or in a net with the help of a manual mechanism, the so-called vrizoni.

“There was something terrible
about the climb...
We were completely
suspended in the air,
hanging only by a thin rope”²⁶



The drawings of the monk traveler
Vasily Grigorovich Barsky from Kyiv (1745)
depict the monasteries of Meteora in detail.

PILLAGE

Some visitors looted the treasures of the monasteries. During his tour in Greece (1643–1653), the Cypriot cleric Athanasios the Rhetor “a Papist, disguised as an Orthodox” deceived the monks of Meteora and removed many valuable documents, which he took to Paris²⁷.

In 1882, in order to protect the rare documents, the Greek state transferred selected manuscripts to Athens²⁸.



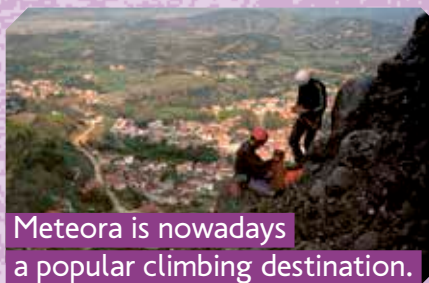
A NEW ERA

The eerie landscape and the beauty of the monasteries attract long ago pilgrims and visitors from all over the world.

At the beginning of the 20th century, monasticism in Meteora gradually begins to experience growth. Similarly, visitors increase significantly as stairs and bridges are built in the 1920s, and the net is gradually removed. In the 1940s, a road for cars was built connecting Kalambaka with Meteora, while the ban on women entering the monasteries (avaton) was abolished.



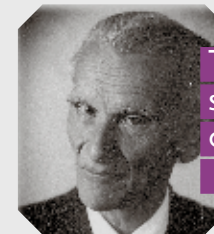
The well-known photographer Robert McCabe in his youth photographed his father, Charles, at Meteora (1961).



Meteora is nowadays a popular climbing destination.

RESEARCH AND PROTECTION

The architecture, the monumental wealth and the rare relics of the monasteries of Meteora attracted leading Greek and foreign Byzantine scholars from early on. At the beginning of the 20th century, the academic and professor Nikos A. Veis was the first to record the manuscripts and archives of the monasteries systematically. The Meteora was also studied by Professor Dimitrios Z. Sofianos, who, among other things, completed the publication of the Meteora manuscripts.



The Byzantine scholar Nikos A. Veis studied and published a multitude of manuscripts and relics, under extremely difficult conditions.

The Greek state as early as 1921 ensured the protection of the meteoritic monasteries by declaring them as prominent Byzantine monuments. Extensive restorations work began in the 1960s and today the monasteries have been almost completely restored, while most of their frescoes have been preserved²⁹. The conservation and promotion of the Meteora is supervised by the competent Ephorate of Antiquities of Trikala.

A unique monument...

Strong hands, sharp minds

The unique combination of wild natural beauty and the works of man determines the special landscape of Meteora. The “floating” monasteries were built with effort and elegance on almost vertical rocks, using every available plateau surface.

In the past, there were more than 20 monasteries and sketes. Today, only six monasteries remain inhabited, as they have all the necessary buildings for a monastic complex: a katholikon, a refectory, a kitchen (maggipeion), cells and other auxiliary buildings.

Most of the katholika of the monasteries in Meteora are built according to the so called athonite (of Mount Athos) architectural type³⁰.

“ Further above this rock was another, which the locals called Platylithos... Athanasios climbed this rock and found that its construction was suitable for an ascetic cemetery; because it was much taller and superior to the surrounding rocks and had a large area in width and length... and in general, it was suitable in every respect for the settlement of ascetics.”

From *The Life of Saint Athanasios the Meteorite*, (Sofianos 1990, p. 108–109).



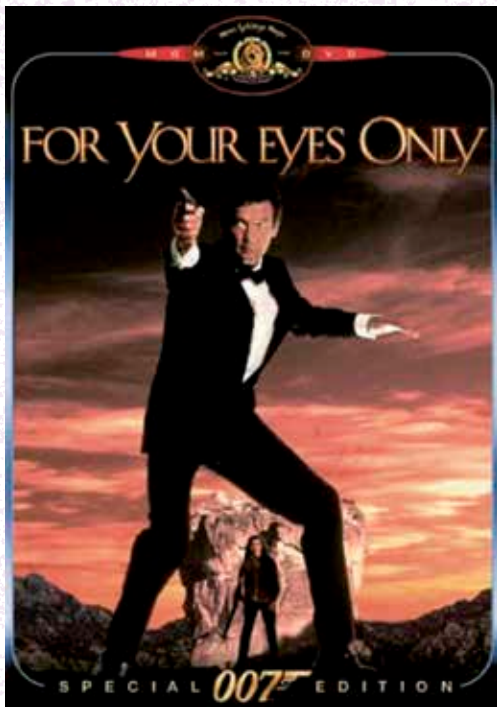
...with timeless radiance

“Forest of gigantic rocks, stacks of stones as obelisks, menacing and leaning towers, or buildings with ruined foundations.”

Léon Heuzey, *Excursion dans la Thessalie turque en 1858, 1858*³¹.

Source of Inspiration

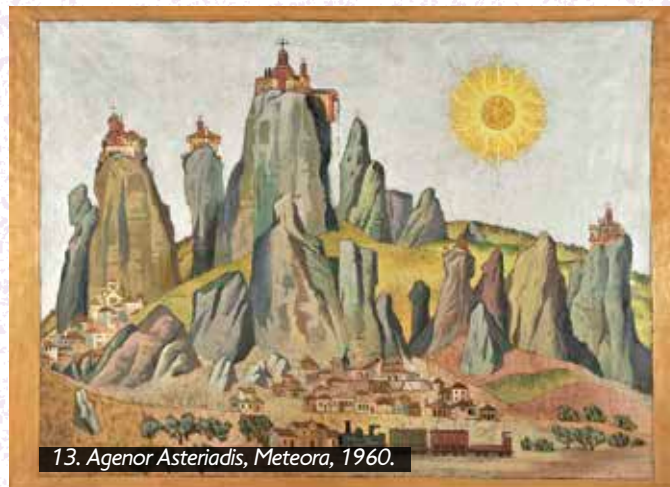
The harmonious juxtaposition of the rocks and the monasteries has been a source of inspiration for many artists.



The huge rocks of Meteora stand out as a natural backdrop setting in many popular films, such as “James Bond, Agent 007: For Your Eyes Only” (1981), “Our Agent in Greece” (1980), “Tintin and the Mystery of the Golden Fleece” (1961), and “The Child and the Dolphin” (1957) with Sophia Loren.



12. George Sikeliotis, *Meteora, Varlaam Monastery*, c. 1961–1970.



13. Agenor Asteriadis, *Meteora*, 1960.



14. Fotis Kontoglou, *Meteora*, 1923.

A unique monument...

“Genius craftsmanship³²”

In the monasteries of Meteora important frescoes are preserved, depicting the evolution of the art of painting from the 13th to the 18th century. The frescoes of the 16th century are particularly noteworthy, having been executed by the most remarkable painters of the period, such as the Cretan painters Theofanes and Tzortzis (or Zorzis) and by the Theban painters Frangos Katelanos and the brothers Georgios and Frangos Kontaris. Their works represent the two different dominant artistic trends of the period, the School of Crete and the School of Northwestern Greece (School of Thebes).

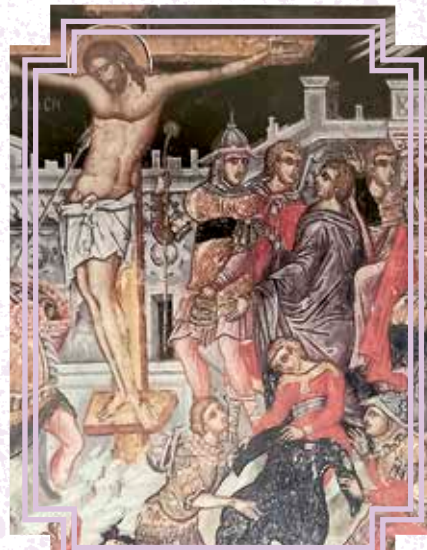
The work of the Greek painters exudes expressive immediacy, narrative momentum and dynamic movement.



Old katholikon of the Great Meteoron Monastery, The Crucifixion, 1483.



New katholikon of the Great Meteoron Monastery, Christ drawn on the cross, 1522, perhaps the work of the painter Tzortzis.



Katholikon of the monastery of Varlaam, Detail of the Crucifixion, of Jesus, 1548, probably the work of Frangos Katelanos.

“Shall I describe the wondrously ‘story-told’ churches of Meteora and Varlaam? How can the pen render on paper a painting? I have only to say that the painters who decorated the churches with frescoes were great artists, endowed with a double faith: faith in the God whom they praised with their art. Faith in their art that praised God. Yes, wondrous achievements of faith are the two great churches of Meteora and Varlaam, decorated by a genius painter. I don’t know, I’m not qualified. But the aesthetic thrill that the anonymous painter of the church of Varlaam gave me was not given to me by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel...”

M. Karagatsis, *Journey to Meteora*, 1957³³



15. Narthex of the katholikon of Varlaam Monastery, St. Sisois in front of the tomb of Alexander the Great, work by Georgios and Frangos Kontaris, 1566. In the inscription, it is written that facing the skeleton of the once glorious king, the monk Sisois laments the futility of the earthly life.

...with timeless radiance ★

A great painter

The painter Theophanes Strelitzas Bathas from Crete is the main representative of the Cretan School, which would dominate from the 16th c. in the Post-Byzantine painting. His career began with the frescoes in the katholikon of the monastery of Saint Nicholas Anapafsas in Meteora (1527), while his brilliant career continued on Mount Athos.

His compositions, which are characterized by orderliness, spirituality, doctrinal propriety and classical calm, combine successfully various elements of western art.

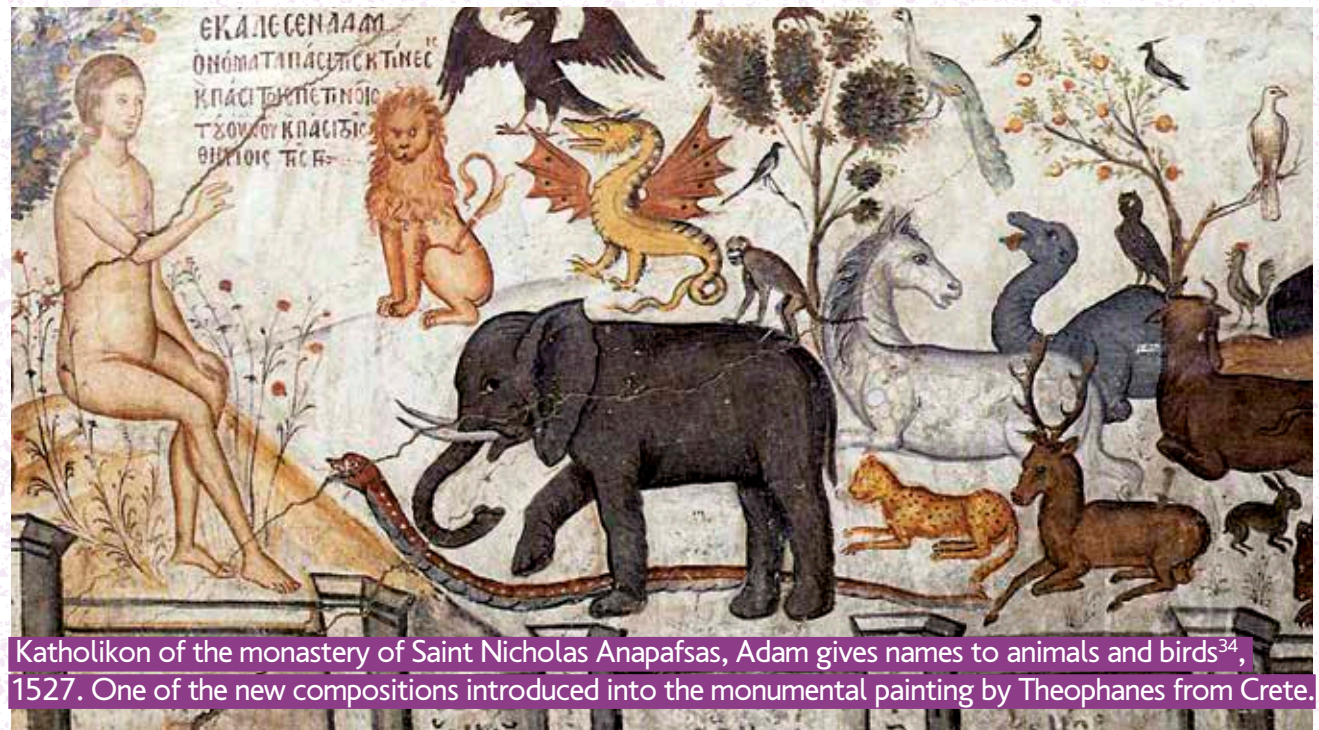
Katholikon
of the monastery
of Saint Nicholas
Anapafsas, Saint Jacob,
the Persian, 1527,
work of Theophanes
from Crete.



In 1932 the great painter Fotis Kontoglou visited Meteora with his pupil at the time, Yannis Tsarouchis to make copies of the frescoes for the Byzantine Museum of Athens.



Fotis Kontoglou and Yannis Tsarouchis,
as novice monks, demonstrate their works.



Katholikon of the monastery of Saint Nicholas Anapafsas, Adam gives names to animals and birds³⁴, 1527. One of the new compositions introduced into the monumental painting by Theophanes from Crete.

A unique monument...

The monastic life

The difficult daily living conditions of the monks on the steep cliffs of Meteora were accompanied by various activities that provided them with the necessities of life, such as the creation of handicrafts (baskets, etc.), beekeeping, viticulture and the cultivation of small gardens.

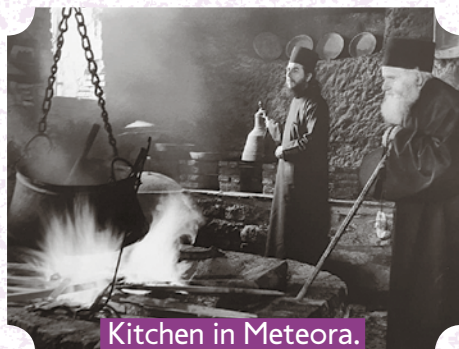
The activities undertaken today by the monks and nuns of Meteora are similar and include goldwork embroidery, candle making, incense making, icon making, etc.

“...while he ordered the strong young men to get adzes and cultivate the land, so as to feed themselves with the fruits of their labors and also to give to those in need”

The life of Saint Athanasius the Meteorite, chapter 27, c. 1390. (Sofianos 1990, p. 112).



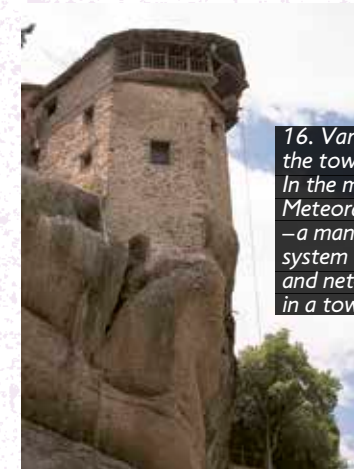
A monk of Meteora sewing.
Photo by the French army, 1917.



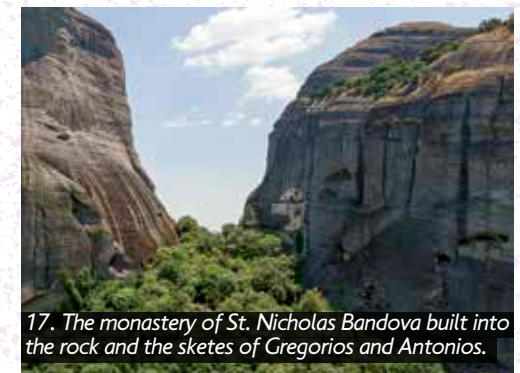
Kitchen in Meteora.



Monastery of Saint Nicholas Anapafsas, The Assumption of Ephraim of Syros, 1527, a work by Theophanes. In this fresco there are depicted various typical scenes of monastic life, such as the prayer, the study and the delivery of food to a stylite monk.



16. Varlaam Monastery, the tower of vrizoni. In the monasteries of Meteora the vrizoni – a manual climbing system with rope and net – was housed in a tower.



17. The monastery of St. Nicholas Bandova built into the rock and the sketes of Gregorios and Antonios.

...with timeless radiance

In front of the sight of these incomparable natural beauties, it was impossible to talk about anything. I felt the need to be silent.

*To enjoy in silence the beauty of nature.
To prolong as long as possible this spiritual exhilaration. The kind of exhilaration one can't get anywhere else in the world.
Only in Meteora...*

Archimandrite Porfyrios Uspensky, mid-19th c.³⁵

To Saint George, the “Mantilas”

Every year on the day of the celebration of Saint George, the custom of the handkerchiefs³⁶ is revived in Kastraki, Kalambaka, in the ruined cavernous hermitage of Saint George Mantilas, at the height of about 20 m from the ground. There, young people carrying hundreds of handkerchiefs –votives of the faithful– climb the rock to hang handkerchiefs and take down last year's handkerchiefs, which they distribute as amulets to the pilgrims watching the dangerous ascent.



Climbing the rock of St George “Mantilas”.

A city in the shadow of Meteora

The area of Meteora has been experiencing great tourist growth in recent years, as the renovated monasteries and their small museum collections receive a large number of visitors. The town of Kalambaka is also experiencing great growth as a stopover. The only wood carving school in Greece has been operating there since 1964, as well as many remarkable museums.

Tourists from all over the world combine visiting the historic monastic complexes with a variety of other activities in the unique environment, such as photography, hiking, climbing, mountaineering, etc.



The sacristy of Varlaam monastery.



Works of the Wood Carving School in Kalambaka.



Old Kitchen at the Great Meteoron Monastery.



Natural History Museum –
Mushroom Museum in Kalambaka.

Monumental dialogues



GREECE

Mount Athos

The largest monastic community in Greece and one of the most brilliant spiritual and artistic centers of Orthodoxy.



TURKEY



Göreme National Park

The Byzantine churches, carved into the soft rock of Cappadocia, preserve excellent frescoes and bear witness to the spread of Christianity in this region.



GREECE

Monastery of Saint Vissarion Dousiko

Located 25 km from Trikala, it was founded by the archbishop of Larisa Vissarion between 1527–1535, a period of prosperity for Meteora. The katholikon is built in the *athonite* type, while its frescoes are the work of the painter Tzortzis.

CHINA



Wulingyuan

The impressive quartzite rock formations reach a height of hundreds of meters.

A message today...

“Peace on Earth”

The terrible consequences of wars include the destruction of monuments on the sides involved. The monasteries of Meteora managed to survive despite frequent looting and destruction. Especially from the end of the 18th century onwards, repeated raids and wars led the Meteoric monasteries to a dire situation, even to desolation³⁷, while the theft of many valuable votive offerings from the sacristy of the monasteries was frequent.

Nevertheless, the monasteries often offered shelter to the persecuted populations of the surrounding areas, with the monks themselves playing an additional leading role in armed conflicts.

Even today, the monks and nuns of the Meteoric monasteries lead a modest life, are the spiritual guardians of the place and pray unceasingly “for the peace of the universal world”³⁸, which remains one of the greatest demands of modern times.



18. The “hanging in mid-air” monasteries on top of the cliffs.

...for a better tomorrow!

Goals 2030 >



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



We promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and participatory institutions at all levels.

1. Meteora was declared a Landscape of Special Natural Beauty (LSNB) in 1967. The area has also been included in the European ecological protection network Natura 2000, which protects important habitats.

2. The “Socrates Academy in Meteora” was founded in the monastery of Great Meteoron (1550–1558) and operated during the Turkish occupation in Thessaly. Later, in 1893, the “Constantius School” was founded by the abbot of the monastery of St Stephanos, Constantius.

3. Kalambaka, a city built on the left bank of the river Pinios, was called in ancient times Aeginio, and in Byzantine times Stagi. The current name has Turkish origins and means “strong fortress”.

4. The Cave of Theopetra is located about 4 km south of Kalambaka, opposite Meteora. In it, important evidence has been found to indicate systematic use by the man from 130,000 before now to 4000 BC. The finds include burials, tools, vases and jewelry, as well as the famous human footprints.

5. Our story is inspired by the eminent French archaeologist Léon Heuzey (1831–1922), who visited Thessaly and Meteora in 1858. In his voluminous work *Excursion dans la Thessalie turque en 1858* he provides valuable information on the life of the Greeks and Turks of this period. At the monasteries of Meteora he found the opportunity to copy some previously unknown important documents. See (in greek) Χρ. Πολέζε, *Ετερότητα και περιγητική γραμματεία. Η περίπτωση της Λάρισας κατά τον 19ο αιώνα μέσα από τα κείμενα ευρωπαϊών περιηγητών* (ιδ. διατρ.), Θεσσαλονίκη 2006, 248–263.

6. Assumption of Theotokos: Three-aisled wooden-roofed basilica ending in three niches on the east. It was founded around 1000 AD and was the seat of the bishop of Stagi. The church’s interior is decorated with frescoes painted in the late 11th–early 12th c. and later, in 1573, when extensive repairs were carried out. The fresco decoration of the narthex dates back to the 18th c.

7. Monks inhabited the rock of the monastery of St Stephanos at the end of the 12th c. The first founder of the monastery, in the year 1191/2, was the holy ascetic Jeremiah. The building of the male monastery, founded in the 14th c. was completed in the 15th and 16th c. The first katholikon was founded in the 15th c. and renovated by the monk Filotheos. The old katholikon was founded in the 15th century and renovated by the monk Philotheos. The new katholikon was built in 1798. Today it functions as a nunnery.

8. According to tradition, the Agia Triada monastery was founded in 1488 by a monk named Dometios. However, sources testify to its existence as early as 1362. Nowadays, the oldest building phase of the monastery is represented by the current katholikon, which was built in 1475/6.

9. The monastery of Rousanou or Arsani was founded in 1545 and was decorated with frescoes in 1560. Originally it was a male monastery, but today it is a nunnery.

10. The *semantron*, a metal plate, and the *talanton*, a wooden stick, are percussion instruments, earlier than the bell, which call the monks to the worship meetings.

11. The male monastery of Saint Nicholas Anapafsas stands out for its design, with successive floors. The monastery’s name is probably due to a donor of the 14th century. Its katholikon was hagiographed by the Cretan painter Theophanes Strelitzas.

12. The monastery of Varlaam is a male monastery on top of a steep cliff. It was founded in the early 16th c., but it was named after the ascetic Varlaam,

who settled on the rock in the 14th c.

13. The katholikon of the monastery of Varlaam was built in 1541/2. Its frescoes are attributed to the famous painters from Thebes Frangos Katelanos (1548), Georgios and Frangos Kontaris (1566).

14. The katholikon of the monastery of the Great Meteoron, the Transfiguration of the Saviour, is one of the grandest churches in Greece. A new katholikon was built in 1544/5, dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Saviour, which incorporated the previous as the Holy Bema. In the 16th century a School of Letters and a codex copying workshop operated here.

15. *Vagenareio* is the cellar where the large wine barrels, the *vagenia* or *vaenia*, were stored. In the monastery of Varlaam, the old *vaeni*, the “grandfather,” as the monks call it, is 2.5 m in diameter, 6 m long and has a capacity of 12,000 liters.

16. The description of a sumptuous meal at the refectory of the monastery of St. Stefanos, with a vegetable soup with plenty of aniseed, chopped meat wrapped in vine leaves, cold roast lamb, salad with wild radishes and soft goat’s cheese is found in the notes of the French socialite Marie-Anne de Bovet, who visited Meteora shortly after the 1896 Olympics.

17. The monastery of Ypapanti, a part of the monastery of the Great Meteoron, is not functioning today. However, in 2000 the building restoration and the conservation of the frescoes were completed. It is one of the oldest monasteries in Meteora, as it was founded in 1366/7 by monk Neilos, a great ascetic of Meteoric monasticism.

18. Edward Lear, an English writer and painter-landscape painter (1812–1888), traveled a lot and wrote down whatever impressed him in travel journals. See (in greek) Π.Γ. Παπαβασιλείου, «Edward Lear: ένας τοπιογράφος στη Θεσσαλία του 1849», *Τρικαλινά*, 20 (2000), σελ. 313–325.

19. Cenobitic is a monastery in which the administration is exercised by the abbot/abbess and the council of abbots. The monks/nuns live together in the community of the monastery, follow a common schedule and participate in the daily work –ministries– of the monastery.

20. Ioannis, around 1370, about two years before he became a monk and took the name Ioasaph, had succeeded as a ruler his father, the Serbian ruler of Thessaly, Simeon Uros Palaiologos (1359–1370).

21. When Theophanes and Nektarios climbed the rock, the remains of the church of the Three Hierarchs and other buildings erected by the monk Varlaam, the first ascetic who had settled there in the mid-14th c., were still preserved.

22. Codicographer: a scribe and copier of manuscripts. In the monastery of Ypsiloteria, which is not preserved now, operated one of the biggest bibliographical workshops in Meteora, which made it known as the Monastery of Calligraphers. There are 11 handwritten codices signed by the monk Neilos Stavras preserved, while 8 more codices are attributed to him based on the style of writing. The manuscripts of the monastery of Ypsiloteria are now kept in the monastery of the Great Meteoron.

23. The first woodcarver Kostas is probably also credited with the carved altarpiece of the katholikon of the Great Meteoron monastery (1791).

24. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the abbots of the monasteries appealed to the Patriarch of Constantinople to have their assets and other privileges ratified by sigil or *sigillum* (sealed document).

25. See (in greek) Archimandrite Τιμ. Σακκάς, «Τα Μετέωρα στα μέσα του ΙΘ’ αιώνας, όπως τα είδε ο Ρώσος περιηγητής αρχιμ. Πορφύριος Ουσπένσκυ», *Πρακτικά Πανελληνίου Μοναστικού Συνεδρίου*, 18–20 Απριλίου 1990, Άγια Μετέωρα 1990, 360–362.

26. H. Holland, *Travels in the Ionian Isles, Albania, Thessaly, Macedonia, during the years 1812 and 1813*, London 1815, p. 236.

27. See Σοφιανός 1988, p. 36. These manuscripts are now in the National Library of Paris.

28. In 1882, immediately after the annexation of Thessaly to the Greek state, the government attempted to transfer the manuscripts of the Meteoric and other Thessalian monasteries to Athens. After much opposition from the monks and residents most of the documents remained in Meteora., except 104 manuscripts that were transferred to the National Library of Greece.

29. The monasteries that function are Great Meteoron, Varlaam, St Nicholas Anapafsas, Agia Triada, Rousanou and Saint Stephanos, of which the last two are nunneries. Also, the ruined monasteries of Saint Nicholas Bandova or Kofinas and Ypapanti have been restored.

30. The monks of Meteora maintained close ties with Mount Athos. The Athonite architectural type of churchbuilding is followed by the katholika of the monasteries of Rousanou, Varlaam, Great Meteoron and Saint Stephanos. They are complex cruciform churches with a dome, the transverse antenna of which ends in niches, the so-called choirs, where the groups of cantors stood.

31. See above, note 5.

32. The phrase refers to the painter Theophanes from Crete. See interview of Prof. of Aristoteleian University of Thessaloniki Dr. Euthimios Tsigaridas <https://www.kathimerini.gr/culture/arts/876093/megalofyoyos-cheiros-ergon-gia-tin-aioniotita/>.

33. M. Καραγάτσος, «Οδοιπορικό στα Μετέωρα», magazine *Εικόνες*, issue 93 (5–11 August 1957), p. 12–17.

34. Genesis 2:20. “And Adam gave names to all the animals, the birds of the air and the wild beasts”.

35. See above, note 25.

36. It is said that back to the time of the Turkish occupation a Turkish soldier fell unconscious under the monastery. The agha’s wife gifted the scarf of her yashmak to the monastery of Saint George to save him and the Turk miraculously rose healthy. Every year since then new headscarves are sent up and hung in the monastery. Source <https://www.infotouristmeteora.gr/ι-μ-α-γιου-γεωργιου-μανδηλά/>

37. Characteristically mentioned is the complete razing to the ground of the monastery of Saint Demetrios by the Turks in 1809. The raids of Ali Pasha’s men (early 19th c.), the military conflicts during the Greek War of Independence of 1821, the rebellions until the final annexation of Thessaly to the Greek state in 1881, and the conflicts during the World War I and II. In the monastery of Great Meteoron, a lot of relevant material is exhibited in the galleries of “Konstantinos Mantzanas” (Historical Museum) and “Nikiforos Kominis” (Historical Lithographs).

38. See the Great Eucharist of the Orthodox Church, Papadimitriou (ed.), Athens 2014.

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