

Presentation of the Volume “Mount Athos and the Orthodox Ecumene” in Thessaloniki



The first official presentation of the volume “Mount Athos and the Orthodox Ecumene: The Influence of the Monastic State during the Years of Ottoman Rule (1423/24–1912)”, a publishing initiative of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy in collaboration with the Society for Macedonian Studies and the Athonite Centre, took place in the hall of the Society for Macedonian Studies in Thessaloniki.

The volume seeks to illuminate the role of Mount Athos as a spiritual and cultural centre during the period of Ottoman rule and to highlight its contribution to the shaping of the Orthodox ecumene.

The Secretary General of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy and Member of Parliament, Maximos Charakopoulos, highlighted in his address the initiative undertaken by the Assembly for the publication of the volume, as well as the historical and spiritual role of the Athonite State.

“We are especially pleased,” Mr Charakopoulos stated, “that here in Thessaloniki, the Byzantine co-capital which for ten centuries has lived under the spiritual protection of Mount Athos, we had the opportunity to hold the first presentation of this major new publishing undertaking of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy.”

He emphasised the contribution of Mount Athos to the preservation of national identity and Christian consciousness, while also underlining its supranational character.

“It is indeed remarkable,” he noted, “that Mount Athos, remaining absolutely faithful throughout all these centuries to the lofty principles of Ecumenical Orthodoxy, which sees the human person beyond ethnic origin and social classification, simultaneously contributed to the formation of the national identities of Orthodox peoples. Yet, thanks to the prudence of the Athonite Community and the wisdom of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, this process did not lead within Mount

Athos to the deviation of ethnophyletism.”

Mr Charakopoulos also referred to the relevance of the publication in the contemporary era, saying: “At the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, we firmly believe that the Orthodox dimension today can offer its own substantial contribution to the anxious search for the identity orientation of a united Europe. It can strengthen the European vision in a changing world and redirect it towards its humanistic and Christian foundations, overcoming an exclusively economic understanding. Mount Athos is a beacon of Orthodoxy, radiating the light of universality, and we need it now more than ever in the troubled times in which we live.”

He further referred to the enduring mission of the Assembly, noting that since 1993 it has worked towards highlighting the common cultural heritage rooted in the Orthodox tradition.

The blessings and Patriarchal benediction of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew were conveyed by His Eminence Metropolitan Nikiforos of Amorion, who stressed: “Mount Athos, the monastic state of prayer and asceticism, constituted not only a place of personal sanctification, but also an ark safeguarding the Orthodox faith, Greek education, and the spiritual cohesion of Orthodox peoples. Its influence transcended the geographical boundaries of Athos, extending throughout the Orthodox ecumene.”

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The Abbot of the Simonopetra Monastery, Archimandrite Elisaïos, reflected on the timeless universality of the Athonite State. “Mount Athos was universal almost from its foundation,” he noted. “During the period of the Byzantine Commonwealth this was something natural, but even during the years of Ottoman rule, the relations of the fathers of Mount Athos with the Orthodox lands of the East and the Balkans enabled them to transmit the message of Mount Athos to all these regions.”

He added: “It preserved its status, its independence, its monastic life, and its contribution to the Nation. There existed there the Athoniada School, which functioned during the years of Ottoman rule and produced teachers of the Nation who contributed to the revival of Greek morale.”

The scientific editor of the publication, Kriton Chrysochoidis, Emeritus Research Director of the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research

Foundation, highlighted the central axis of the work.

“The essential point the volume seeks to present is the universality of the message of Athonite monasticism. This is not a matter of recent centuries. It begins with the foundation of Mount Athos and constitutes the spirit of Saint Athanasios the Athonite,” he stated.

“The miracle of Athonite monasticism was that, amid the hardships of Ottoman domination, it succeeded in preserving its universal spirit intact.”

The adviser to the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, Kostas Mygdalis, presented the history of the publication and the purpose of the initiative.

“It was an effort originally intended to be presented during the bicentenary of the liberation of the Nation, but because of the pandemic and other difficulties it is being presented today. These are texts concerning the universality of Mount Athos during the period of Ottoman rule.”

He added: “In this way we honour the contribution of the Holy Mountain to the universal dimension of Orthodoxy, as well as the cultural treasures it possesses, presenting them to the entire Christian world.”

Greetings were also offered by the President of the Society for Macedonian Studies, Vasileios Pappas, who described Mount Athos as “a beacon radiating the light of faith and Christianity.”

“With its living tradition spanning more than a thousand years, Athos has continued throughout the centuries its luminous course and mission. It is an ark of Orthodoxy and a beacon spreading the light of faith and Christianity to humanity.”

For his part, Nikolaos Makrantonakis, member of the Board of the Athonite Centre, underlined: “The publication offers a multidimensional approach, combining history, theology, and culture, highlighting the contribution of Mount Athos to the preservation of Orthodox identity and its connection with the wider Orthodox ecumene.”

He added: “This is a volume of great value, addressed both to the specialised scholar and to the reader who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of this unique spiritual centre of Orthodoxy.”

Among those present at the event were His Eminence Metropolitan Nikiforos of Amorion, Fr Gregory representing His Eminence Metropolitan Philotheos of Thessaloniki, Member of Parliament Dimitris Kouvelas, former Deputy Minister

Christos Pachtas, the Coordinator of the Prime Minister's Office in Thessaloniki
Giannis Papageorgiou, the Director of the Athonite Centre Anastasios Ntouros, and
representatives of various institutions and the academic community. A greeting
message was also sent by His Eminence Metropolitan Irinej of Bačka, of Serbia.

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