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Film on life of St Nektarios tops Greek and Cyprus box office



The film “Man of God”, starring Greek actor Aris Servetalis as St Nektarios of Aegina, has enjoyed the best opening of a movie in Greece and Cyprus since March last year, when the COVID pandemic began.

In the first four days after its release on 26 August, the film that was shown in 117 cinemas and sold 62,305 tickets. Featuring a host of Greek actors, American Mickey Rourke and Russian star Alexander Petrov, the film, which is in English, recorded 175,000 admissions in the first 11 days of its release with many sold-out screenings.

The next best performers on the Greek and Cyprus cinema circuit where the Disney production “Luca’ sold 118,000 tickets during its run, followed by “Tenet” (100,000), “Black Widow” and “Fast and Furious 9” (both 60,000).

The film’s writer and director Yelena Popovic, 42, an Serbian-American actress, director, producer said in an online essay about the making of the film (on the Honey and Hemlock website), that she returned to Orthodoxy in the United States, eight years after she left Serbia at the age of 17.

She said that on reading about the life of the saint in 2012, she found the story resonated with her and felt that she had to share that experience.
“I thought that his story would make a good film, especially in the times we live in,”

Ms Popovic wrote in her essay. She twice visited the saint's monastery in Aegina and received the blessing of Abbot Paisios and Elder Ephraim of St Anthony's Monastery in Arizona before she to set to work on the film in 2016.

Her production company Simeon Entertainment was one of the film's producers along with View Master Films in association with the Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi, St. Maxim The Greek Institute, The Holy Metropolis of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki and Eurogroup,

The film was to have been released on last year to coincide with the centenary of the saint's death but the pandemic delayed its release until the European summer this year. A Greek film on the life of the saint, entitled "Saint Nektarios – The Protector of the Poor" starring Christos Politis and directed by Grigoris Grigoriou, was made in 1969, eight years after the canonisation of the saint.

St Nektarios was born Anastasios Kephalas to a poor family in Selymbria, near modern-day Istanbul, on 1 October, 1846. He moved to Chios to work as a teacher in 1866 and 10 years later he became a monk in the Monastery of Nea Moni.

He was ordained a deacon and went to study at the University of Athens where he wrote numerous books, pamphlets and Bible commentaries. After graduating, he went to Egypt was ordained and served as priest at St Nicholas in Cairo. In 1889 he was consecrated as the Metropolitan Bishop of Pentapolis, formerly the diocese of Cyrenaica in present-day Libya. He served as bishop in Cairo for one year but was suspended without explanation.

In 1891, St Nektarios returned to Greece and preached for the next three years before serving as the director of the Rizarios Ecclesiastical School until 1904.

He then went to Aegina where he established the Holy Trinity Convent. He was to ordained two women as deaconesses in 1911. He had resigned from his role as school director, in 1908 and continued to live and work as a monk.

He died on 8 November, 1920 and was buried at the Holy Trinity Convent. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa restored "all due credits and honours" to St Nektarios in 1998.

"Man of God" is set for release in Russia on 14 October – the film won the Audience Award at Moscow's International Film Festival. Its distribution has been secured for Australia and New Zealand, France, Italy, countries of the former Yugoslavia, and Latin America The release dates are yet to be announced.