

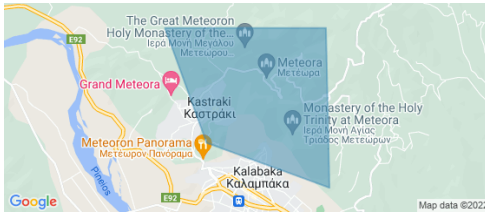
The Orthodox Monasteries of Meteora

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Entry tags: Religious Group, Christian Traditions, Orthodox/Eastern Christian, Orthodox Christianity, Religious Place, Orthodoxy, Greece, Thessaly, Greek Orthodox

Meteora (meaning “suspended in the air” in Greek) in the region of Thessaly (Greece), is a group of monasteries built on the summits of vertical sandstone formations, which average 300 m in height while several of them are reaching 550 m. From the 11th century onwards, hermits established their dwellings in the lesser peaks of the sandstones. They eventually formed a single monastic community, of which remains today the 12th century chapel of the Theotokos at the base of the pillar of Doupiani, after which the monastery was named. In the 14th century the Athonite monk Athanasios founded the first monastery built on a summit, the Great Meteoron. Meteora reached the peak of their prosperity in the 16th century. From the 24 monasteries that were built, only six are still functioning today, while the rest are in ruinous state. 1. The Great Meteoron: the church of the oldest and largest of the monasteries of Meteora built by Athanasios in the 14th century is dedicated to the Virgin, while cells for the monks were added later. The second church (the present katholikon) built in 1387-1388 by monk Ioasaph (the Serbian ruler of Thessaly and Epirus Jovan Uroš Nemanjić or John Ouresis Doukas Palaiologos). In 1544-1545 was built a new katholikon dedicated to the Transfiguration of Christ, to which the old church was integrated. It was decorated with frescoes in 1552. The successors of Athanasios expanded the monastery by adding more cells, a hospital, a chapel and renovated the two churches. 2. Varlaam Monastery: the name of the second largest monastery of Meteora comes from the monk who climbed the cliff and founded the monastery around 1350. Varlaam built in total three churches but after his death, the monastery was abandoned, until the beginning of the 16th century when the priest-monks Theophanes and Nektarios Apsara, members of a Byzantine noble family settled there. In 1518 they renovated the church of the Three Hierarchs. In 1541 they built the present katholikon, dedicated to All Saints. It was decorated with frescoes in 1548. In 1627 the chapel of the Three Hierarchs was rebuilt and was frescoed in 1637. 3. Rousanou Monastery: it is believed to have been established in the 14th century, while the 16th century monastery preserved until today, was built by the brothers Ioasaph and Maximos. The katholikon was frescoed in 1560 following the style of the Cretan school of Byzantine iconography. It received the name “Roussanou” probably from the first monk who settled on the rock on which the monastery was built. The monastery is dedicated to the Transfiguration of Christ, although it is also dedicated to saint Barbara. 4. Holy Trinity Monastery: it is believed that the actual monastery was built between 1475-1476, although there is evidence that the first monk who lived at the site was Dometios, in 1362. The wall paintings of the katholikon were completed in different phases. In 1741 brothers Antonios and Nikolaos completed the inside of the church. The esonarthex built in 1689 was decorated in 1692. In 1682 was built and decorated the chapel of saint John the Baptist. 5. Saint Stephen Monastery: it is believed that monks were living on the site since the end of the 12th century and that the founder of the monastery was a monk named Ieremias. The monastic complex was built in the 14th century by the monk Antonios Kantakouzinou, although the present katholikon dedicated to saint Charalampos is a structure of 1798 with frescoes of the 1980s. The old church was constructed at the time of the monastery’s foundation or shortly thereafter and was rebuilt by monk Philotheos in 1545. Its painted decoration was executed in two phases. The first phase probably dates from the period spanning the second and the third decade of the 17th century. The second phase was completed around the middle of the same century. 6. Saint Nicholas Anapafsas Monastery: it was founded in the late 14th century. It has served as a resting place for pilgrims and so it received the name “Anapafsas”, meaning “the one who rests you” in Greek. The first katholikon of the monastery dedicated to saint Anthony was decorated with frescoes in the 14th century. The monastery was renovated in the first decade of the 16th century, when the present main church dedicated to saint Nicholas was built, and in the 1960s. In 1527 the famous Cretan

painter, founder of the Cretan school of Byzantine iconography, Theophanes Strelitzas Bathas painted the katholikon.



Date Range: 1000 CE - 2022 CE

Region: Kalampaka, Thessaly

Region tags: Europe, Southern Europe, Greece, Greece, Thessaly, Thessaly, Kalampaka

The monasteries of Meteora at Kalampaka, Thessaly

Status of Participants:

- ✓ Elite
- ✓ Religious Specialists
- ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

General Variables

Sources and Excavations

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Bees, N., "Symbole eis ten historian ton monon ton Meteoron", Byzantis 1 (1909), 191-332
- Source 2: Lampros, S., "Symbolai eis ten historian ton monon ton Meteoron", Neos Ellinomnemon 2 (1905), 49-156

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/gh351.jsp?obj_id=2442
- Source 1 Description: The Monasteries of Meteora (in Greek)
- Source 1 URL: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/gh251.jsp?obj_id=5281
- Source 1 Description: Detailed description (in Greek) of each Monastery
- Source 2 URL: <https://www.meteora.net.gr/en/main/>
- Source 2 Description: Meteora project

Has this place been the focus of excavation (pre-modern, illicit, or scientific):

Answer 'Yes' for each period or type of excavation.

- Field doesn't know

Notes: Excavations have been conducted at various areas of the vast area.

Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

- Elevation

↳ Type of elevation

– Other [specify]: Vertical sandstone formations

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

Other features might be ground clearing, terracing, other modifications of the local environment.

– Yes

↳ Type of feature

– Terracing

– Clearing

– Trackway or road-surface

Is the place situated in an urban or significantly urbanized area:

– No

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

– Yes

↳ Are there settlements in close proximity to the place:

– Yes

↳ Are there routes of travel in close proximity to the place:

– Yes

Is the place situated far removed from non-religious places of habitation:

– No

Structures Present

Are there structures or features present:

Instructions: Answer once for each structure/feature or group that can be differentiated.

– Yes

↳ A single structure

– No

↳ One single feature

– Other [specify]: The complex of Meteora is composed of six monasteries and ruins of monasteries that are not functioning anymore.

↳ A group of structures:

– Yes

Notes: Each of the six functioning monasteries of Meteora is composed of a number of structures such as the main church, the refectory, chapels, the cells of the monks, the library etc.

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– No

↳ A group of features:

– Yes

Notes: Each of the six functioning monasteries of Meteora is composed of a number of structures such as the main church, the refectory, chapels, the cells of the monks, the library etc.

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– No

Notes: Meteora covers a large area that contains monasteries and ruins of monasteries.

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Worship

↳ Worship:

– Communal

Notes: The monasteries are the dwellings of Orthodox monks

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

Notes: The monasteries were altered, renovated, restored and rebuilt through the centuries.

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– No

Notes: The monasteries that are still functioning are 6 while there were 24 monasteries in the area.

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– Yes

↳ In modernity

– Post-Renaissance

Notes: The monasteries were restored, rebuilt and renovated many times throughout their long history.

Reasons for Creation/Construction/Consecration

Is the place used for the worship of/communication with non-human supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Dedicated to a supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: The monasteries, main churches and chapels of Meteora were dedicated to different Saints, the Theotokos, the Holy Trinity and to feasts celebrating events from the life of Christ.

↳ Dedicated to more than one supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: The monasteries, main churches and chapels of Meteora were dedicated to different Saints, the Theotokos, the Holy Trinity and to feasts celebrating events from the life of Christ.

Is the place used for the worship of a semi-divine human being:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of non-divine ancestors:

– No

Was the place commissioned/built by an official political entity:

A political entity is a local power structure that leverages a workforce.

– Yes

Notes: The monasteries were founded and built by monks. Some of them were founded and supported by princes and wealthy Orthodox individuals.

↳ Specify

– King or emperor

– Other [specify]: Monks

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Yes

↳ Groups:

– Other [specify]: Orthodox monks

Was the place thought to have originated as the result of divine intervention:

– No

Was the place created to mark or commemorate the birthplace of a supernatural or human being:

– No

Was the place created as the result of an event:

– No

Was the creation of the place sponsored by an external financial/material donation:

– Yes

↳ Is this sponsor of the same religious group/tradition as the main usage of the place:

– Yes

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

– Expression of devotion with no expectation of favor in return

Was the place built specifically for housing scriptures/sacred texts:

– No

Notes: The monasteries of Meteora were not built specifically for housing scriptures or sacred texts. Yet, their libraries contain important manuscripts and early modern books of theological, liturgical, philosophical, scientific content etc.

Design and Material Remains

Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– Yes

↳ Are any of the structures attached to or associated with a landscape feature:

– Yes

Notes: All of the monasteries are built on the summit of the summits of the vertical sandstone formations.

↳ Are any of the structures attached to other structures:

– Yes

Notes: Each monastery is composed of many structures such as the main church, chapels, kitchen, hospital, library, cells, refectory etc.

↳ Is there a hierarchy among the structures:

– Yes

Notes: The main church (katholikon) of each monastery is the most important structure, since the liturgies and services are taking place there.

Is monumental architecture present:

Monumental architecture is defined here as a built structure that surpasses average human proportions and in general is larger and more complex than is necessary to fulfill the structure's utilitarian function(s). Examples of monumental architecture include Mesopotamian Ziggurats, Egyptian Pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Mesoamerican Pyramids, North American and Aegean burial mounds, etc.

– Yes

↳ In the average place, what percentage of area is taken up by built monuments:

– I don't know

↳ Footprint of largest single religious monument, square meters:

Please add dimensions in the comments, if known.

– I don't know

↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:

– I don't know

↳ Size of average monument, square meters:

– I don't know

↳ Height of average monument, meters:

– I don't know

Is the structure/feature made out of natural materials:

Answer [Yes] for each material type

– Yes

↳ Earth

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– I don't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Sand

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– I don't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Clay

– Yes

|

↳ Is this material sourced locally:
– I don't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:
– No

↳ Plaster
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:
– I don't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:
– No

↳ Wood
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:
– I don't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:
– No

↳ Grass
– No

↳ Stone
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:
– I don't know

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:
– No

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: Pigments for the frescoes, gold and silver for the decorations, other metals for the furnishings of the structures.

Is the structure/feature made out of human-made materials

– No

Decoration

Is decoration present:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration part of the building (permanent):

– Yes

↳ On the outside:

– No

↳ On the inside:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration attached to the building, i.e. movable reliefs or tapestries

– Yes

Notes: The main churches of the monasteries and the chapels have an iconostasis on which are hanged the icons depicting Christ, the Virgin, saints and events from the life of Christ and the Virgin.

↳ Is the decoration figural:

A figural representation is defined here as one that contains the depiction of discernible human, anthropomorphic, animal, or zoomorphic forms. In general, it differentiates between animate and inanimate beings, as well as between narrative compositions and still life, landscapes, abstraction, etc. Answer [Yes] for each type of figure depicted

– Yes

↳ Are there gods depicted:

– No

Notes: The Son of God is depicted. Otherwise are depicted the Mother of God and saints.

↳ Are there other supernatural beings depicted:

– Yes

Notes: angels and demons

↳ Are there humans depicted:

– Yes

↳ Are there animals depicted:

– Yes

Notes: The animals are part of the narrative compositions that depict events narrated in the Old and New Testament.

↳ Are there animal-human hybrids depicted:

– No

↳ Is the decoration non-figural:

– No

Notes: The decoration is figural. Yet, non-figural decoration may appear in small areas and in very small portions.

↳ Is the decoration hidden or restricted from view:

– No

↳ Are there statues present:

– No

↳ Are there reliefs present:

A relief as opposed to sculpture carved on the round is a work of sculpture in which the figures project from a background support, generally a flat surface. Reliefs can be carved out of stone, clay, or a similar material.

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing the god(s) worshipped at the place:

– No

↳ Reliefs representing mythological narratives:

– No

↳ Reliefs representing human/historical narratives:

– No

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Reliefs are purely decorative and can be found in different areas, like for instance on the iconostasis of the churches and chapels.

↳ Are there paintings present:

– Yes

↳ Are they panel paintings [movable]:

– Yes

Notes: Icons are placed on the iconostasis of the main churches and chapels of the monasteries, as well as on proskynetaria.

↳ Are they wall paintings:

– Yes

↳ Type

–'True' fresco

–Secco

↳ Paintings representing the gods worshipped at the place:

– Yes

↳ Paintings representing mythological narratives:

– No

↳ Paintings representing human/historical narratives:

– Yes

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Paintings can be also found in handwritten books.

↳ Are there mosaics present:

– No

↳ Are there inscriptions as part of the decoration:

– Yes

↳ Are the inscriptions ornamental:

– No

↳ Are the inscriptions informative/declarative
[e.g. historical narratives, calendars, donor lists etc...]

– Yes

Notes: The inscriptions name the person or the event depicted.

↳ Are the inscription a formal dedication:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, in some cases inscriptions mention the founder and his or her dedication.

↳ Other [Specify]

– Other [specify]: In the monasteries can be found also graffiti by the pilgrims that have visited them.

↳ Other type of decoration:

– No

Iconography

Are there distinct features in the places iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not)

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic)

– Yes

Notes: angels, demons, personifications.

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract)

– No

↳ Portrayals of afterlife

– Yes

Notes: Last Judgment and depictions of Paradise and Hell.

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols)

– Yes

↳ Humans

– Yes

Notes: Saints, Virgin Mary and the Man of God, Christ.

↳ Supernatural narratives

– No

↳ Human narratives

– Yes

Notes: Lives of Christ, Virgin Mary and saints.

↳ Other [Specify]

– Other [specify]: The iconographic programme of each church and chapel of the monasteries of Meteora has its own specificities and characteristics that are either stylistic, iconographic or spatial.

Beliefs and Practices

Funerary Associations

Is this place a tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: The monasteries have, however, cemeteries for the monks or nuns of their communities.

Is this a place for the worship of the dead:

– No

Is this a place for treatment of the corpse:

– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

Co-sacrifices are animal/human sacrifices prompted by the death of the primary occupant of the tomb/burial.

– No

Are grave goods present:

– No

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: There are burials of the monks and nuns that have lived at the monasteries.

↳ As cenotaphs:

– No

↳ In cemetery:

– Yes

↳ Family tomb/crypt:

– No

↳ Domestic context:

Interred beneath floors of house, or in areas of domestic activity

– No

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: Monastic cemeteries

Supernatural Beings

Is a supreme high god is present:

– No

Does the supreme high god communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Notes: The monks and nuns that live in the monasteries pray, participate in the divine liturgies and live a mystic life.

Are previously human spirits present:

– No

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:

– No

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– No

Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Is the supernatural being/high god present in the form of a cult statue(s):

– No

Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– No

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– No

Notes: Visitors come to pray to God, venerate Christ, the Mother of God, Saints and angels.

Ritual and Performance

Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– No

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings mandatory:

– No

↳ Are material offerings composed of valuable objects:

– Yes

Notes: Valuable objects were and are still offered at the monasteries.

↳ Are material offerings composed of daily-life objects:

– Yes

Notes: Daily-life objects as well as products like wine, bread, olive oil are offered by pilgrims to the monasteries.

↳ Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches):

– No

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: The offerings from the monastery can be various and apart from spiritual purposes may have practical function.

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– No

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– Yes

↳ Is it required:

– Yes

Notes: Maintenance is required since the monasteries are centuries-old and therefore their it is obligatory in order to continue to exist.

↳ Is there cleansing (for the maintenance):

– No

↳ Are there periodic repairs/reconstructions:

– Yes

Notes: Each monastery underwent restoration, repairs and reconstructions.

↳ Is the maintenance performed by permanent staff:

– No

Notes: Monks and nuns are working along with specialists to preserve the complexes.

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: The Monasteries of Meteora belong to the Unesco World Heritage List and so their preservation is of high importance for humanity.

Pilgrimage and Festivals

Are pilgrimages present:

– Yes

↳ How strict is pilgrimage:

– optional (common)

↳ Are pilgrimages the main reason for construction/establishment of the place:

– No

↳ Are pilgrimages to this place associated with significant life events:

– No

↳ Does pilgrimage to this place involve following established routes (roads):

– No

Is this place a venue for feasting:

– No

Notes: This is not a place of feasting, However, pilgrims come to the monasteries on their feast day or on important Christian Orthodox feasts.

Are festivals present:

– No

Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– No

Is healing present/practiced at this place:

– No

Notes: The monasteries had in the past hospitals functioning for their communities.

Do rituals occur at this place:

Rituals are visibly enacted behaviors by one or more people for the purposes of religious observance.

– Yes

↳ Do large-scale rituals take place:

– No

↳ Do small-scale rituals take place:

– Yes

Notes: The liturgical services are performed at each monastery every day. On feast days the rituals are different but are always performed within the walls of each monastery.

↳ On average how many participants are present in large-scale rituals:

– specify: The monastic community of each monastery is always present at the liturgies and feasts. Pilgrims can always be present at them.

↳ How often do these rituals take place:

– specify: Liturgies are taking place every day. They are part of the monastic Orthodox typika.

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks:

– Yes

Notes: The services follow a long-established liturgical tradition.

- ↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:
 - Yes
 - Notes: The services follow a long-established liturgical tradition.
- ↳ Are there synchronic practices:
 - No
- ↳ Are there intoxicants used during the ritual:
 - No

Institutions and Scriptures

Religious Specialists

Are religious specialists present/in charge of this place:

Religious specialists are individuals whose primary duties within a population group are not concerned with subsistence or craft production but the maintenance of the religious landscape and culture of the group.

– Yes

- ↳ Present full time
 - Yes
- ↳ Present part time
 - No
- ↳ Are the religious specialists of specific sex/gender:
 - Yes
- ↳ Are the religious specialists of specific ethnicity:
 - No
 - Notes: Two of the six monasteries are female monasteries, while the four of them are male monasteries.
- ↳ Are the religious specialists of specific class/cast:
 - No
- ↳ Are religious specialists dedicated to the place for life:

– Yes

↳ Are the religious specialists stratified in a hierarchical system:

– Yes

Notes: The monastic communities have an abbot or an abbess and they are administered by the monastic council.

↳ Is access within the space segregated by this hierarchy:

– No

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– Yes

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– No

Are there formal institutions for the maintenance of the place:

Institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders

– Yes

Bureaucracy

Is there a formal bureaucracy present at this place:

A bureaucracy consists of a hierarchical system of accounting and rule maintenance primarily concerned with material wealth.

– No

Does this place control economic resources (land, goods, tools):

– Yes

↳ Is this control the primary supporting income of this place:

– Yes

↳ Does this place lease out land:

– I don't know

↳ Does this place lease out tools:

– No

Public Works

Does this place serve as a location for services to the community:

– No

Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– Yes

Notes: The libraries of the monasteries contain manuscripts and books of every category

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– No

Bibliography

General References

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