

# 7th Scientific Workshop of Agioritek Estia: Various social dimensions inside and outside the monastic state of Mount Athos

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Pension Maria Kaltsidis



The perception that the monastic state of **Mount Athos** is an isolated, closed society comes to be "disputed", with strong arguments, by a new

study on the monasteries of Mount Athos. The study reveals the diversity of social interactions occurring on the peninsula, as well as the various networks that connect the community and its members to the 'outside world'.

In the context of the **7th Scientific Workshop** organized again this year by the **Agioretiki Estia**, the study of the PhD student at the Department of Anthropology of the University of California in Los Angeles, by the Greek-American Paul Melas, was presented.

He himself was on Mount Athos, but also in other Athonian monasteries in Greece and abroad, where for a period of twelve months in the period 2022-2023, he observed and talked with both monks and pilgrims or workers who are accommodated there temporarily.

"Paul Melas spoke about a research he has done about the anthropology of Mount Athos and it is - if not the first - one of the first times that someone approaches the subject from a more social point of view and not from a spiritual or theological one," he explains in Athenian-Macedonian News Agency the director of the Agioretiki Hestia, Anastasios Douros.

In the past, other anthropologists and sociologists have dealt with the monastic community of Mount Athos, but their researches, however, focused mainly on the daily life of the holy monks, the relationship of the community with the historical (i.e. Byzantine) past, and the role and the functioning of the community in the wider context of modern Greek society.

"Drawing from a large part of these investigations, the present study/doctoral thesis sought to document the creation and maintenance of spiritual relationships of care and support on Mount Athos and the shares outside the Athos peninsula. The study has

specifically addressed the ways in which complex social problems—such as poverty, disease, marginalization, and oppression—are dealt with by people in terms of their spirituality and its relationship to the spirituality of other people. and cosmic and supernatural forces,” the study states.

The work aims, ultimately, at a more general understanding of the functioning of modern orthodox Christian monasticism as a spiritual network which, for those who participate and hope in it, contributes to leading man to better ways of being in this world and the next. Within this context of interpersonal relationships, practices such as worship, prayer, work, and pilgrimage become modes of interpersonal communication with other people.

"In general, the suggestions that have been heard so far are very valuable, they add many new elements to the research around Mount Athos and help the scientists, depending on the specialization that each one has. Through this, very important aspects are highlighted in various areas of Mount Athos, such as history, art, theology, etc.," adds Mr. Douros.

The work of the 7th Scientific Workshop, which already started yesterday, Friday, December 8, is taking place in the Stefanos Dragoumis Amphitheater of the Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki, while it is also broadcast live via live streaming. Tomorrow the Workshop concludes with a special section on the Vatopedi Monastery and the new findings in relation to the Byzantine table and the frescoes of the monastery's catholicon.

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