

CHAPTER 11

Conclusion

The most important factor that has affected the life of Meteora throughout its recent history is the growth of the tourism industry. The Meteora monastic communities, in the context of their philanthropic-missionary approach to monasticism, have willingly accepted the development of tourism and their role in it. This acceptance has brought considerable power to the monastic communities in the site's operation and management in economic, social, and political terms – and a most significant position of theirs in the tourism and heritage industry. At the same time, however, this acceptance has caused serious problems in the operation and management of the site: the separation between monasticism, heritage protection and tourism operation; an increased emphasis on tourism; and the adjustment of monasticism to the pressure of tourism. These problems have been manifested through changes in the use and arrangement of space: the monastic communities have become increasingly restricted within their space; the space has been clearly divided between the monastic communities on the one hand and the visitors on the other; and the monastic communities have found it difficult to conduct their worship of God in the existing space, and thus have created new spaces.

These problems became evident over the course of the recent history of the site, in phase B and especially in phase C. However, the roots of these problems can be traced back to the first appearance of the philanthropic-missionary approach in the monastic life of Meteora with the re-establishment of the monastic communities on the site in the 1960s. To be more specific, Kouros, a member of the local community at that time, highlighted the clear separation between the monastic function of the site, the heritage protection and the tourism development, and stated that, unlike heritage protection and tourist exploitation, the monastic (in the sense of ascetic) function of the site will be very difficult to maintain in the future, and can be maintained only within the context of heritage protection and especially tourism development. His exact words are as follows:

Meteora as a fabulous, flourishing monastic centre and a significant religious centre undoubtedly does not exist any longer. But it does exist, and will always exist, as an invaluable holy trust/keeper of Orthodox Christianity... The Meteora monasteries are already significant religious museums thanks to their history and thanks to the many treasures that are still kept there... Even if it is not an ascetic centre with the old meaning any

longer, Meteora is at least a trust of holy treasures, religious artworks, written sources and scientific knowledge...

Meteora, as a location and as a historic content is undoubtedly something unique... Within the archaeological cycle of the country, referring to older times and all other types of Greek civilizations, the uniqueness of Meteora in terms of location and in terms of the type of history renders the site a very interesting change for those willing to know Greece... [hence] the tourism potential and the tourism exploitation of the Meteora area [by the government authorities]... Thus if not all the monasteries, at least the five of the monasteries that exist and are active, are protected very effectively, are growing and getting organised, thus presenting ideal conditions for their future maintenance. (Kouros 1965, 43–47)

The analysis of the operation and management of the site over the course of the recent history of the site clearly suggests that Kouros was right.

The objectives of the Meteora monastic communities in the context of their philanthropic-missionary approach seem to have been successfully applied in the case of Meteora. Today Meteora has become a popular tourist destination promoting the Orthodox faith to hundreds of thousands of visitors. It is a well-maintained heritage site reflecting strength and glory. At the same time it is an important monastic site with monastic communities that are flourishing and increasing in size and have a significant contribution to the wider society (Meteora Monasteries 1994a, 37–43; Meteora Monasteries 1995, 10; Anastasiou 1994a, 204–206; Anastasiou 1990, 391–392).

An assessment of the operation and management of the site based on the principles of the Orthodox *Tradition*, however, leads to completely different conclusions. The vast majority of the visitors are unable to participate in the ritual life of the monasteries, and most of the time are not even aware of it. There is an increasing and confusing construction activity, not always in accordance with the principles of the Orthodox monastic *Tradition*, with often irreversible effects on the fabric and the space of the site. Meteora is not a flourishing monastic site either. Monastic life is suppressed, under the influence of the tourism industry, and the monastic communities are increasingly restricted within their monasteries, in oppressing need of new space within and even outside their site. The monastic communities are in some cases increasing in size, yet mostly in an attempt to deal with the increasing pressure of tourism. The monastic communities seem unable to manage their site, given the inactivity of the Assembly.

Therefore, the objectives of ‘philanthropic-missionary’ approach do not conform to the principles of the Orthodox *Tradition*, and have been applied at Meteora at the expense of the site and its monastic communities. Tourism, accepted by the monastic communities as a means to promote the Orthodox monastic life to the outside world, has ended up affecting the reason that ‘brought’ it and made it develop at the site, i.e. monastic life.

From this analysis, it appears that the Meteora monastic communities, with the help of the heritage authorities and the other communities protecting and using the site, should move away from the ‘philanthropic-missionary’ approach to monasticism and concentrate more on the principles of the Orthodox *Tradition*, redefining their everyday monastic life and their attitude towards the visitors and the outside world: the focus will be diverted from developing tourism to worshipping God, and tourism operation and heritage protection will be incorporated within monastic life. This suggestion about an increased emphasis on the Orthodox *Tradition* does not mean fossilisation in the face of a changing world, but an attempt to sustain the ongoing change in terms of seeking a new balance between monasticism, heritage protection and tourism operation, and thus maintain relevant to the contemporary society.