

Esphigmenou

Friday, 22 December 2006

Last Updated Friday, 29 December 2006

Esphigmenou

monastery

dedicated to the Ascension of

Christ. It is built

next to the sea at the northern part of the Athonite peninsula near the

Hilandar Monastery. Esphigmenou is

the most populous monastery in

Athos. The monastery's name

translates to Greek literally as "tightened". The name is attributed to

the monk that either founded or renovated the monastery.

It recounts that he used to wear a tight rope around his waist therefore the

monastery got the name "of the

tightened".

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The

monastery greatly prospered until

the Ottoman conquest. Many Byzantine emperors, such as John V Palaiologue, contributed to this, as

well as leaders of other orthodox

states such as Stefan Uro

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Prince of Rascia.

This prosperity was however shrouded

by constant disputes over land issues with the neighboring Vatopediou monastery, as well as many pirate raids

and two great fires that damaged the monastery

during the 14th century. Due to the above reasons

the monastery was eventually ruined and practically deserted which

allowed the nearby monasteries of Hilandar and Zograf to

grab various portions of land from it, which lead to further legal disputes. The

rulers of the Danubian

Principalities also made significant contributions to the monastery. During the early 18th century the bishop

Gregory of Melenikon made donations to it and eventually become one of its

monks, undertaking a renovation of the monastery.

Also, the bishop Daniel of Thessaloniki took care of the monastery's finances and, with the consent of the

Athonite community and Patriarch Gerasimus III of Constantinople, made the monastery

a cenobium. A series of competent

abbots (Acacius, Euthymius, Theodoritus and Agathangellus) greatly renovated

and expanded the monastery, to the

point that the current structures date almost exclusively from their time.

Treasures held within the monastery

The

monastery has

a large collection of manuscripts. Its library houses 372 manuscripts, a

collection of roughly 2000 printed books, while 6000 more are also housed in

another part of the monastery, at

the second floor of the northern wing. It also has

the left leg of Maria Magdalene, the Cross of St. Pulcheria.

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Miracle-working icons within the monastery

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Our Lady Eleousa. Theotokos is depicted enthroned and holding Baby Jesus who is blessing with his right hand and in his left hand heâ€™s handing a scroll. Theotokos is surrounded with cherubs. The icon is signed by Ioann Maxim in 1673.

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The icon of Our Lord (Pantokratoras). A mosaic icon is depicting Jesus in his full height. The icon is in a silver ark which contains inscription â€œRemember Your slave Grigorios Smaragda, his parents and childrenâ€•.

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