

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 454

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Mount Athos

Location : Chalcidice, Macedonia Region

State Party : Greece

Date : January 15, 1987

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, IV, V and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The northernmost of the three peninsulas jutting into the Aegean Sea from Chalcidice is a narrow rocky strip approximately 50 kms long and 10 kms wide and rising to 2033 meters. Its astonishing natural beauty has always beguiled man. In ancient Greek mythology the peninsula was said to be the stone thrown at Poseidon by the giant Athos. For Christians it was the "Garden of the Virgin", the priceless gift Christ gave his mother.

The precise date of the first Christian establishments on Mount Athos is unknown. However, the monastic movement began to intensify in 963 A.D. when the future St. Athanasius the Athonite, having left the theme of Bithynia, founded Great Lavra on the tip of the peninsula.

In 972 the first Typikon was concluded at Karyes between the emperor Jean Tsimitzes and the monks of Mount Athos. It provided the basis of the exceptional status still enjoyed by the "Holy Mount" today. In 1926, the Greek government ratified a charter based on the long tradition of the Typika. In 1977, when Greece became a member of the Common Market, the signatory States recognized the specificity of the self-governing region of Athos and its special status.

The 360 km² of Athos are exclusively inhabited by men, the majority of them monks living in cenobitic or idiorrhythmic establishments, anchorites or gyrovagues.

The Typikon, granted by the emperor Constantine IX Monomachus in 1046 and signed by more than one hundred hegumens, banned women and more generally all "smooth faced persons" from entering the mountain region. Power in this monastic republic is strictly divided between three assemblies : the Synaxe, or the Holy Assembly, which meets twice a year, holds the legislative power; the Holy Community holds the administrative power and the Holy Epistastie, the executive power. At Karyes, a civil governor of Athos, under the Greek Foreign Affairs ministry, ensures that the Charter of 1926 is respected.

Today Athos includes 20 monasteries, 12 skites and about 700 houses, cells or hermitages. Close to 1400 monks live there in communities or alone, as well as in the "desert" of Karoulia where cells cling to the cliff face rising steeply above the sea.

The absence of Mount Athos on the World Heritage List has been a periodic subject of concern for the Committee since 1978. ICOMOS is thoroughly pleased that the nomination concerning this landmark has been submitted. Mount Athos satisfies criteria I, II, IV, V and VI of the "Guidelines".

- **Criterion I.** As was the case with Machupicchu (inscribed in 1983) and Taishan (inscribed in 1987), the transformation of a mountain into a sacred place made Mount Athos a unique artistic creation combining the natural beauty of the site with the expanded forms of architectural creation. Moreover, the monasteries of Athos are a veritable conservatory of masterpieces ranging from wall paintings by Frangos Castellanos at the Great Lavra to portable icons, gold objects, embroideries or illuminated manuscripts which each monastery jealously preserves.

- **Criterion II.** Mount Athos exerted lasting influence in the orthodox world, of which it is the spiritual centre, on the development of religious architecture and monumental painting. The typical layout of Athonite monasteries (mentioned below to illustrate criterion IV) was used as far away as Russia. Iconographic themes, codified by the school of painting at Mount Athos and laid down in minute detail in the Guide to Painting (discovered and published by Didron in 1845), were used and elaborated on from Crete to the Balkans beginning in the 16th century.

- **Criterion IV.** The monasteries of Athos present the typical layout of orthodox monastic establishments : a square, rectangular or trapezoidal wall flanked by towers, which constitutes the periobolus of a consecrated place, in the centre of which the community's church, or the catholicon, stands alone. Strictly organized according to principles dating from the 10th century are the areas reserved for communal activities

(refectory, cells, hospital, library), those reserved solely for liturgical purposes (chapels, fountains), and the defense structures (arsenal, fortified tower). The organization of agricultural lands in the idiorrhythmic skites, the kellia and kathismata (farms operated by monks) is also very characteristic of the medieval period.

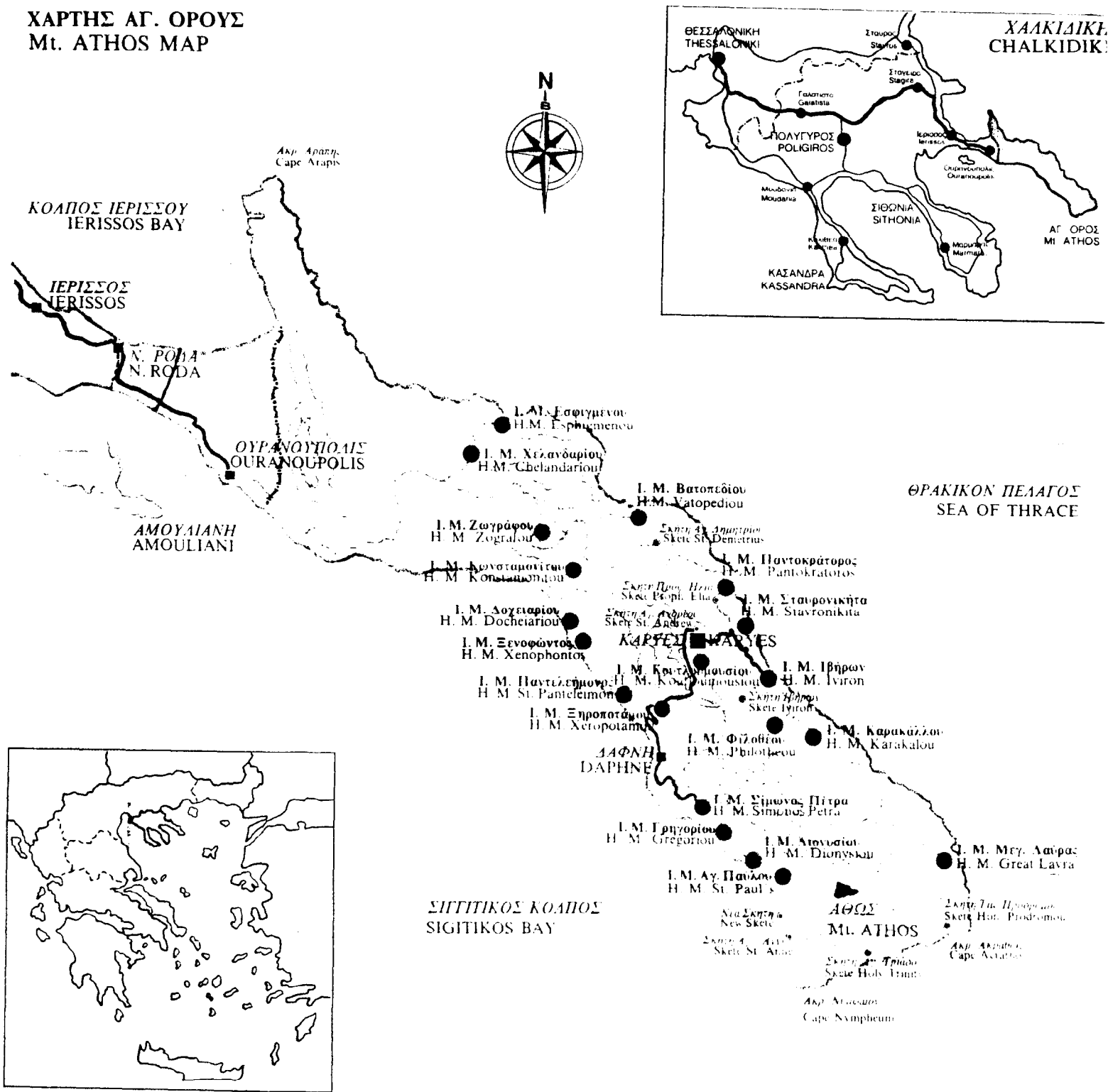
- **Criterion V.** The monastic ideal has, at Mount Athos, preserved traditional human habitations, which are representative of the agrarian cultures of the Mediterranean world and have become vulnerable through the impact of change within contemporary society. Mount Athos is also a conservatory of vernacular architecture and agricultural and craft traditions.

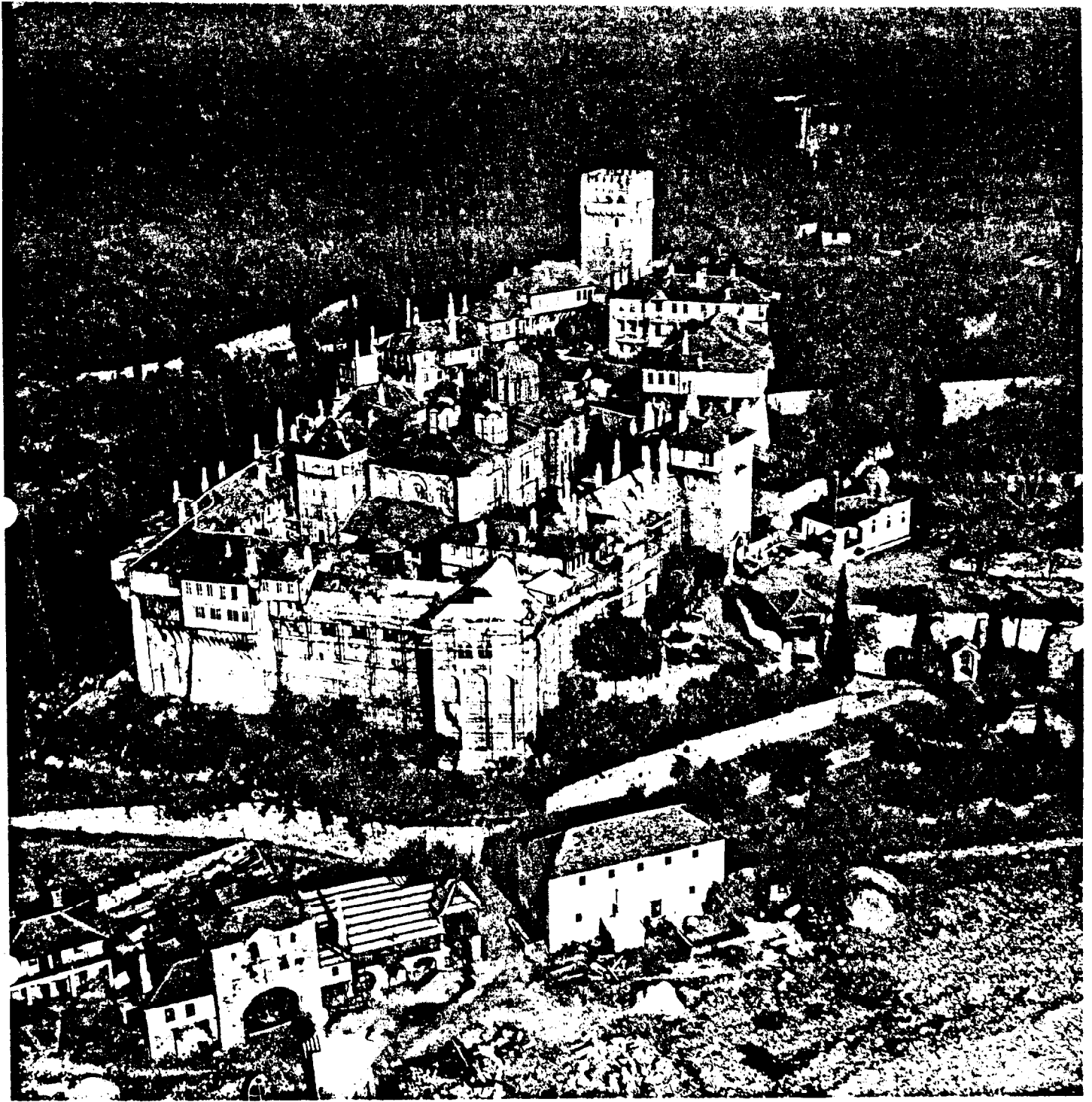
- **Criterion VI.** In 1054, the sacred mountain of Athos, a holy place in the Christian world, became the principal spiritual home of the Orthodox church. It retained this prominent role even after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the establishment of the autocephalous patriarchy of Moscow in 1589.

Mount Athos is directly and tangibly associated with the history of Orthodox Christianity which, in varying degrees, is present in more than 20 nations in the 20th century. It is no exaggeration to say that this thousand-year old site, where the weight of history is palpable in the countryside, the monuments and the precious collections collected slowly over time, has retained even today its universal and exceptional significance.

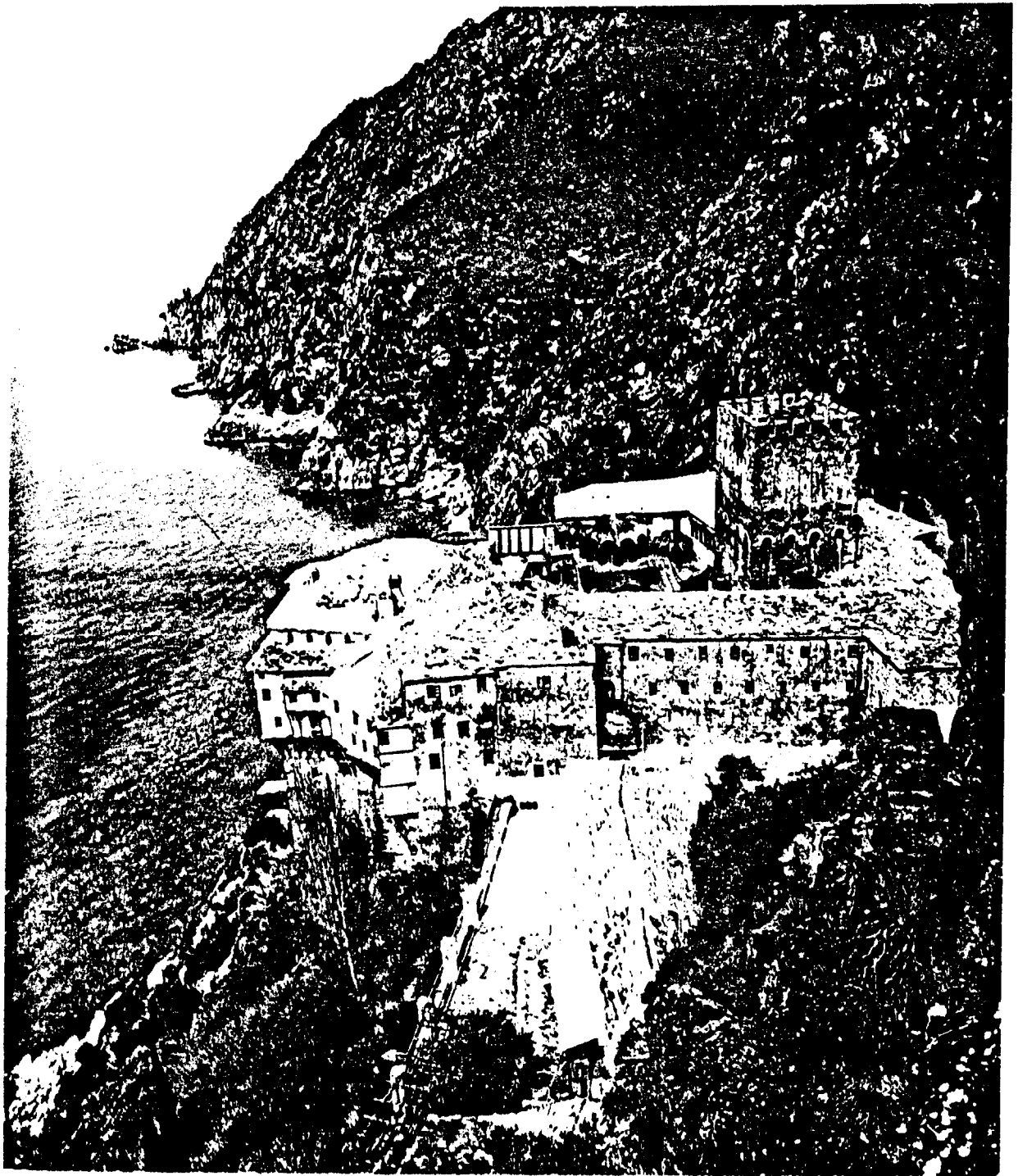
ICOMOS, September 1988

ΧΑΡΤΗΣ ΑΓ. ΟΡΟΥΣ
Mt. ATHOS MAP





The Holy Monastery of Docheiariou with the
arsenal in the foreground



View of the monastery of Dionysiou seen from above.