

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° 455

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Meteora

Location : Thessaly

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 and V.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Rising starkly above the Peneas valley and the small town of Kalambaka, the Meteora are enormous residual masses of sandstone and conglomerate which appeared through fluvial erosion during the Tertiary period. Seismic activity increased the number of fault lines and fissures and hewed the shapeless masses into individual sheer rock columns.

Hermits and ascetics began settling in this extraordinary area probably in the 11th century. In the late 12th century a small church called the Panaghia Doupiani or "Skete" was built at the foot of one of these "heavenly columns", where monks had already taken up residence. During the fearsome time of political instability in 14th-century Thessaly, monasteries were systematically built on top of the inaccessible peaks and, towards the end of the 15th century, there were 24 of them. They continued to flourish until the 17th century. Today, only four monasteries -the Aghios Stephanos, the Aghia Trias, Varlaam and the Meteoron -still house religious communities.

ICOMOS recommends that the Meteora be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, IV and V.

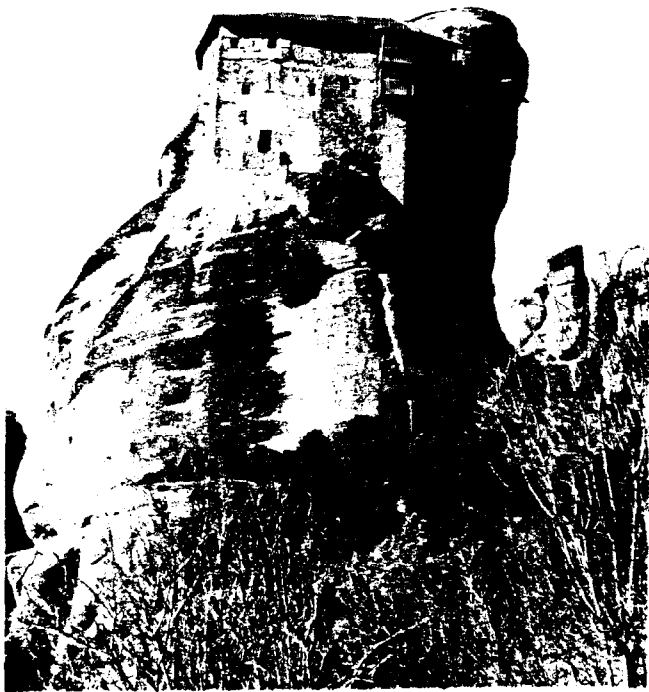
- Criterion I. "Suspended in the air" (the meaning of Meteora in Greek), these monasteries represent a unique artistic achievement and are one of the most forceful examples of the architectural transformation of a site into a place of retreat, meditation and prayer.

- Criterion II. The frescoes executed in 1527 by Theophanes the Cretan became the basic reference of the fundamental iconographic and stylistic features of post-Byzantine painting, which exerted widespread, long-lasting influence.

- Criterion IV. The Meteora provide an outstanding example of the types of monastic construction which illustrate a significant stage in history, that of the 14th and 15th centuries when the hermitic ideals of early Christianity were restored to a place of honor by monastic communities, both in the western world (in Tuscany, for example) and in the Orthodox church.

- Criterion V. Built under impossible conditions, with no practicable roads, permanent though precarious human habitations subsist to this day in the Meteora, but have become vulnerable under the impact of time. The net in which intrepid pilgrims were hoisted up vertically alongside the 373-meter cliff where the Varlaam monastery dominates the valley symbolizes the fragility of a traditional way of life that is threatened with extinction.

ICOMOS, July 1988



Phot.7: The monastery of Saint
Nikolas Anapafsas



Phot.12: The monastery of Roussanou



Phot.5: The monastery of Varlaam