

455: METEORA GROUP OF MONASTERIES

Summary prepared by IUCN (April 1988) based on the original nomination and summary submitted by the Government of Greece. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the committee.

1. LOCATION:

Situated in the district of Thessaly, prefecture of Trikala, province of Kalambaka, to the east of the Pindos mountains. The monasteries lie on the south-facing slopes of the Andikhasia mountains, just north of the E87 between Ioannina and Larisain, in the upper valley of the Pinios river, 1-2 kms north of Kalabaka and c. 25 kms north-north-west of Trikkala. The site is some 2-3 kms south-east to north-west and 1.5 kms at its widest point (including the village of Kastraki) giving an approximate area of 375 ha. The Important Bird Area (as defined in EEC legislation) and centred on the site covers some 14,000ha. 39° 45'N, 21° 37'E.

2. JURIDICIAL DATA:

The area is apparently protected by legislative provisions including protective status for the village of Kastraki, although exact details are not provided. Meteora is part of a larger site, called Antikhassia Ori and Meteora, which is identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) as defined by EEC legislation.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

The monasteries are built on rock pinnacles, called 'Meteora', of deltaic origin and comprised of brown sandstone which rise over 400m above the Thessalian plain. Chemical analysis and geological evidence suggests that the pinnacles were created some 60 million years ago in the Tertiary period, emerging from the cone of a river and further transformed by earthquakes.

The IBA site includes the surrounding forested hills and river valley with riverine forests of Platanus orientalis and such species as the endemic Centaurea lactifolia (found near Koniskos village) and Centaurea kalambakensis. The nearest protected area is Trikala Aesthetic Forest (28ha), created in 1979, which has planted Pinus halepensis and Cupressus sempervivens. The potential vegetation cover is described as supra-mediterranean, with climax cover of Quercus and Ostrya and forests of Fagus sylvatica above 700m.

Mammals recorded in the IBA include wolf Canis lupus and otter Lutra lutra. The site has been famed since the 1970s for its raptor population including, in 1987, Egyptian vulture Neophron peranopterus (with 50 pairs the largest population in Greece, but declining), four eagle species; short-toed Circus gallicus (5 pairs), booted Hieraeetus pennatus (3-5 pairs), Bonelli's Hieraeetus fasciatus (one pair), and lesser-spotted Aquila pomarina (one pair), as well as breeding lanner falcons Falco biarmicus, honey buzzard Pernis apivorus, black kite Milvus migrans (ten pairs), Levant sparrowhawk Accipiter brevipes, and peregrine falcon Falco peregrinus. In addition, black stork Ciconia nigra breed (two pairs) and roller Coracias garrulus (ten pairs).

The Meteora group consists of seven separate monasteries:

- the Monastery of the Ascension of Jesus Christ
- the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour
- the Monastery of Varlaam
- the Monastery of Saint Nikolas Anapafsas
- the Monastery of Roussanou
- the Monastery of the Holy Trinity
- the Monastery of Saint Stephan

They are built directly on the rock's surface without foundations as such. Religious life, starting in the form of hermits dwellings, can be traced to around the year 1,000, with the first monastic community emerging in the 14th century, reaching its height in the 15th and 16th centuries. By the 17th century, the monastic population had dwindled to one-third of its original size. During World War II the site was bombed, and many art treasures stolen.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION

Since 1972 the monasteries have been restored and conservation work is carried out annually by specialists, including archaeologists, restorers, craftsmen and labourers. A variety of methods are used in the conservation work, including chemical analysis of colours and concrete injection. The monasteries lie in an area within which different types of building work is prohibited or limited.

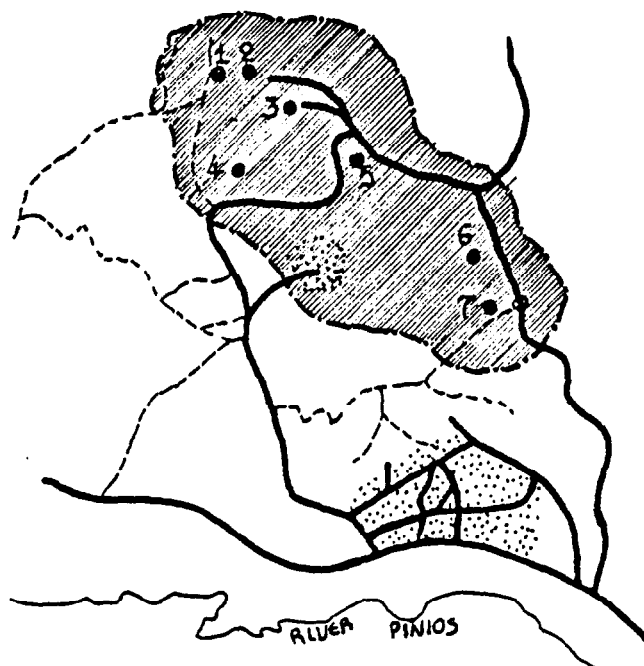
The major threats to the sites are both natural and man-made. The former includes the possibility of earthquake damage; earthquakes occurring frequently but not of a high intensity. The latter include disturbance by low-flying aircraft, the uncontrolled felling of the Platanus forests in the valleys. As a result of excessive disturbance and changes in agricultural practices the vulture species require access to safe, artificial feeding sites.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The nomination, as presented by the Government of Greece, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

- b) Natural property
 - ii) Man's interaction with his natural environment. The monasteries represent an unique example of monastic life against the backdrop of superlative natural phenomena since the 14th century.
 - iv) Rare and threatened species. Contains (admittedly in the wider area) a concentration of raptors.

- Kalambaka (town)
- Kastraki (Village)
- ▨ Zone including the Meteora Monasteries
This zone is protected



- ① The monastery of the Ascension of Jesus Christ
- ② The monastery of the Transfiguration of the Savior
- ③ The monastery of Varlaam
- ④ The monastery of Saint Nikolas Anapafsas
- ⑤ The monastery of Roussanou
- ⑥ The monastery of the Holy Trinity
- ⑦ The monastery of Saint Stephan

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

455 METEORA GROUP OF MONASTERIES (GREECE)

1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) IUCN Data Sheet
- ii) Literature consulted: Meteora - The Rocky Forest of Greece

2 COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

The natural features of this site are the large and picturesque pillars of sandstone which form the citadels on which seven monasteries were built, some hundreds of years ago. Similar sandstone pillar features can be seen in many other places in the world (most notably in several of the national parks in the American state of Utah), but the Meteora Group is distinctive in the use of these rocks as the foundation of religious structures. There are some similarities with the Goreme World Heritage site in Turkey, but here the structures are conical in shape and comprised of volcanic lavas and tuff.

3. INTEGRITY

Threats to the area are few and include disturbance by low-flying aircraft and felling of the Platanus forests which are used by the 4 vulture species that reside in the area. Other natural values occur outside the immediate 400 ha area of the nomination. These include important bird habitat and riverine forests.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The main features of the nomination site are its cultural values albeit with a strong natural backdrop. These would be strong justification in moving consideration of the site entirely to the cultural side.

5. EVALUATION

The sandstone pillars which form the foundation for the monasteries provide a striking setting which man has used to advantage. The natural values on their own are not of universal significance and the site is best evaluated on its cultural attributes.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The Meteora Group of Monasteries should not be added to the World Heritage List on the basis of its natural values.