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# MONASTIC GARDENS OF ATHOS

## THE ARCHETYPE OF THE GARDEN IN THE GENESIS OF CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE

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### Abstract

The gardens of Athos are so unique that they lend credibility to the statement that their forms and purpose are a bridge between the Garden of Eden and the City of God. They are both exceedingly beautiful and extremely practical, providing monks and pilgrims with spiritual experiences and food while representing prayer and work in one. They are an answer to the call of 'ora et labora', which is in Latin but was known well before the split of the Church. This paper demonstrates how the diverse composition of the gardens of Athos serves the primary goal of the existence of Athos as a place where Orthodoxy unifies numerous countries of the world, from Romania to Egypt, in prayer and work. The gardens are blended into the landscape and their composition, which takes the form of contemplative fragments, follows the idea of Heavenly Jerusalem. It is not possible to investigate the gardens of Agion Oros solely through reason, just as it is impossible to rationally explore the qualities of Paradise.

*Keywords:* garden, architecture, archetype, monastery, Athos

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### 1. Introduction

The archetype of the garden - the Paradise from which man comes and to which he goes - occurs in many religious traditions. The garden of Paradise in monotheistic religions symbolises the natural environment of perfect happiness, harmony, order, beauty, purity, carefreeness and eternal vitality. Paradise is the primal and eschatological dwelling of God and man. Rooted in the biblical tradition, the ideal of a garden - Eden - finds its analogies in the 'garden of delight' described in the Quran - Janna [M. Ali Tajddin, *Janna*, <http://www.ismaili.net/heritage/node/10500>, accessed on 20.01.2021].

The concept of 'paradise' established in Christianity refers to the Persian term 'paradis' - etymologically related to the Greek 'paradeisos'. What is significant is that the 'paradise' of Christians is not the same as 'Eden'.

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Christianity does not return the eschatological future of its followers to the 'lost paradise' of the Garden of Eden but situates their happy eternal future in the City of God, New Jerusalem [1]. God established a garden in Eden for his creatures, and the first city was built by Cain, a man who defied God. In this dramatic contradiction - the antinomy of 'garden' and 'city' - the essence of the transcendent perspective of Christianity is encoded. The omnipotent Creator, who gave man freedom, accompanies man in his struggle to achieve everlasting happiness. The dramaturgy of these relations - which make up the history of salvation - is poetically summarised by Jose Ortega Y Gasset in the essay *Adam in Paradise*: "Where is Paradise? Is it a northern or southern country? Does not matter; it is the ubiquitous background of the great tragedy of life, in which a person fights or rests gaining strength for further struggle." [2]

Man has an image of 'Paradise lost' in his memory. However, the prospects of his aspirations are not limited by the closed gates of Eden. The reality for which man strives goes beyond the 'remembered miracles of Paradise'. "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Corinthians 2.9). The fulfilment of this promise of eternal happiness is illustrated by the Christian symbols of the 'eternal city': New Jerusalem, the City of God, 'Civitas Dei'.

What do we know about the values - the silhouette, the shape, the climate - of the eschatological Civitas Dei? Our knowledge about it is based on intuition, imaginations and predictions. Its features define the visions of biblical prophets as confirmed by the messianic testimony of Jesus Christ. Still, however, 'we see It vaguely, as if in a mirror'. Attempts to anticipate the pattern of the Civitas Dei represent the concepts of ideal cities.

Regardless of the differences in these concepts, they share a number of analogous universal features. Their formation is determined by human aspirations for safe existence, freedom and happiness. The environment ensuring these values requires 'separation': fencing from the area where the untamed elements of Nature prevail. Attempts to fulfil these aspirations are illustrated by human settlements: cities and agglomerations. Their patterns combine the natural values of the world with perfectly functioning attributes of a safe habitat. They create a living space in which human development is possible in both existential and metaphysical dimensions; in which Nature is transformed into culture. Attempts to implement the vision of the 'ideal city' include the ancient Greek polis, the Roman castrum, medieval charter towns, polycentric Renaissance cities or garden-cities of the industrialisation era, as well as their Modernist reinterpretations.

## **2. Methodological remarks - approaches to understanding the sacred in space**

The monastic gardens on Mount Athos are an integral part of its landscape and bear the spirit of the sacred. In this paper, we used in situ studies as per the

phenomenological method [3] - the primary method used in this study - together with a case study and a review of the literature. The phenomenon of the sacred is based on an interaction of mystical, sensory and metaphysical aspects of a spatial object in its perception. The object of the sacred cannot be rationally understood. Describing and understanding the religious landscape does not involve only the rational concepts that form the basis of insight into the landscape. Rather, use of the term 'achievement' against the background of the ordinary term 'knowledge' allows one to explore a greater share of the sacred than knowledge alone. Non-rational means of cognition combine with other forms of achieving the essence of the world.

By the complexity of their natures, the sacred and architecture are similar to primal creative impulses. The sensing of a work as its image appears before the work itself. This is the message, the good news that reflects a certain state and stage of creation that is shrouded in mystery. The sacred is a birth that lasts forever; it lives and gives life, as does the Spirit that fills and permeates it, and forms the nature of the sacred in its fleetingness and unknowability.

The sacred is a mystery with which one must resonate, since humans have no rational means of cognition for discovering and exploring the mystery of holiness. Here, the words resonate, understanding and achieving, outside of ordinary logic and the entire integrity of the human being, their intuition, emotions, the perception of one's eyes and heart. Resonance, similar to human perception, behaves like a wave that diminishes at the edges of the known and returns to an expressive centre: the source of vibration. This oscillatory motion from the centre to the diminishing edges forms an image in the human mind; it enters it without regard for our will, experience and knowledge. This image manifests itself as an archetype, a symbol or sign, depending on how it permeates our involvement with an object.

The image of the religious landscape of Mount Athos is rational (as a spatial layout), sensory (as art, creation) and mystical (as spirit, sanctity). Human cognition methods can be useful in achieving the sacred: engaging the object of cognition within the process of said cognition; cognition focused on the human being, self-exploration, the identification of the subject and object of cognition; the interpretative character of knowledge; the identification of internal, non-manifested possibilities; a set of approaches to knowledge; description, explanation, an awareness and understanding of facts. The paradigm of this form of cognition represents the most general of methods: phenomenology, logical and categorical analysis, dialectics, system-and-structure analysis, hermeneutics and transcendental analytics.

To understand the sacred, we use the most general methodological trajectory, namely the phenomenology (eidetic analysis) presented in the views of Edmund Husserl [4, 5] and those of his proponents [6]: the utilisation of phenomenological description and the recording of conscious states. Phenomenology is based on the principle of negating the separateness of the

existence of consciousness and reality in favour of a flow of phenomena. These phenomena fill human perception and are expressed in intentions and emotions. The content of the phenomenon of the sacred is contained within itself.

On an endless field of events, facts, texts, literature, relations, imaginations, ideas, tendencies, places, spaces, times, images, objects and subjects, the notion of the sacred is framed by rational and metaphysical paradigms.

The rational paradigm of cognition pursues the discovery of new areas of cognition in transcendence while also moving the object of transcendence beyond the horizon of cognition and reducing it to a minimum at a certain point. By assimilating what is known, humans once again extend their horizons towards the unknown, coming closer to the transcendental and the mysterious. In the metaphysical paradigm, the world is analysed as inseparable and integral with its known and unknown entities, and phenomena as inseparable from the interpenetration of material, functional and spiritual aspects. The metaphysical paradigm studies transcendence in its real-life manifestations.

To combine this array of different approaches, we used a cognitive tool with intermediary properties - the image, which has at once a conceptual, definitive and undefined character. This character is beyond the definitive potential, the visible and invisible structure that can be perceived and achieved and that bears hidden meanings and senses.

The image is thus a complex structure whose semantic completeness is based on comparing, grouping, contextualising, analogising and synthesis: methods that are also typical of scholars of the Bible and other holy texts and that correlate with the most modern multi-criteria, multi-principle academic methods. The interdisciplinarity of the approach, together with the placing of a metaphysical phenomenon under the rational interpretation of landscape elements - the monastic gardens of Mount Athos - essentially enhances and develops the very subject of religious architecture in two subsequent stages and levels.

First, the rationalisation and documentation of a work of architecture can be performed without distorting the complex essence of the sacred (its supernatural character), and allows the formulation of practical recommendations for landscape and architectural design.

Second, the utilisation of depictions combined with figurative and symbolic descriptions - which, by their very nature, are derived from faith and art, do not reduce or simplify the complexity of the phenomena of faith and art, and are immanent to architecture - allows the enhancement of the theoretical and philosophical bases of architecture itself.

The literature on the intellectual explorations of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries confirms the indestructibility of the metaphysical element and the gnostic need for a constant complementarity of the world's completeness in being, thoughts and senses. Metaphysics, in a spatial embodiment via the visible, achievable and measurable, displays what is invisible and unmeasured. The image grasps: it explains the visible and invisible form and refers to the

content and meaning of the world. The image allows us to describe the subject and object of religious architecture in their historical, territorial, spatial, semantic, psychological and spiritual genesis and entirety [7].

### **3. Medieval monasteries - models of an ideal city, anticipations of Civitas Dei**

Medieval Benedictine monastic foundations are the phenomena of European culture. In them, we find a synthesis of the values of ancient ideal cities and, at the same time, a source of inspiration for their modern representations. They were shaped in accordance with the model plan of the monastery of Saint Gallen, which is dated to Carolingian times. This plan is a diagram of the spatial arrangement of the various functions that make up a self-sustaining monastic settlement. Historical research shows that this document is a copy of a more detailed plan that was created in the year 800 at the court of Charlemagne or after 816 in the reformist circle of Saint Benedict of Aniane. At that time, Hatto, Abbot of Reichenau, sent it to Gozbert, Abbot of Saint Gallen [8].

The centre of the Benedictine monasteries was an oblong - shaped temple. It was not an autonomous, free-standing landmark. The monastery church - the House of God, *de facto* replaced the ideological centre - the core of the multifunctional system. In its immediate vicinity were cloistered functions of the monastery, composed around a rectangular garden patio. In the vicinity of this centre, accompanying functions were arranged in a rationally ordered system: a school, a library, guest houses, apartments for travellers, bathhouses, a mill, workshops, granaries, bakeries, breweries, barns, stables, pigsties, sheepfolds, barns, a hospital and a cemetery. Within the border of the monastery, there were places for gardens, orchards, and fields. The spatial order of the Benedictine monastery plan reflected the essence of the monastic rule, summarised by the motto *ora et labora*.

The features of the Saint Gallen plan, which characterise the ideal of Benedictine monasteries, have found their realisation in numerous representations. In these assumptions, urban historians indicate the seeds that are the basis for many medieval settlements - castles, cities. This genesis is demonstrated, for example, by the monastery of Saint-Requier, around which a settlement was established in the 8<sup>th</sup> century; this settlement was inhabited by families of craftsmen. An analysis of the development of the network of Benedictine monasteries proves their importance in the cultural and economic development of Europe, with their influence going far beyond the Middle Ages.

The ideals of mendicant orders - the Franciscans and the Dominicans - emerged from the medieval monastic patterns of shaping religious communities in accordance with the Benedictine Rule. The monastic assumptions of these communities also contain characteristic interpretations of the archetype of the garden, integrated into the space of a religious house. Medieval Franciscans lived on the outskirts of cities, in unprivileged places, but were integrated into the living

space of the local community - at least on its 'margins'. The notion of 'open heaven' can be considered a summary of the ideal of a Franciscan house and church. We find the essence of Christian architecture in such accentuated accounts. The shaping of such architecture in every place and time is a participation in the act of creation, performed in union with its transcendent Source. In this perspective, the works of architecture become integral elements of human living space, which is rooted in the original unity of the 'lost Paradise' and at the same time oriented towards the eschatological unity of 'New Jerusalem'. In search of examples of the temporal anticipation of the ideal of the City of God or 'Civitas Dei', the 'garden cities' on the Athos Peninsula are still a source of fascinating inspiration: a phenomenon that has been shaped by Christian monks for over a thousand years.

#### **4. Are the gardens of Athos ornamental or utilitarian?**

When discussing the gardens of Athos, it should be noted that the vast majority of these gardens are utilitarian. The monks eat primarily vegetarian food. During major festivals, the menu is enhanced by fish and wine, which is produced locally from grapes grown at monastic vineyards full of well-maintained vines. Athos wines are famous, highly sought-after and relatively expensive. Depending on their size (and thus their rank in the hierarchy of the twenty major monasteries), the different monasteries are inhabited by differing numbers of monks and practise relatively intensive horticulture. Due to the visits of a varying number of pilgrims (Athos does not have tourism in the regular sense of the word), the demand for vegetables and fruits is very high. During peak season, the Vatopedi monastery accepts over 100 pilgrims per day, who, together with the 80 monks that live there permanently, present a serious challenge in terms of provisions and daily needs. Tradition holds that the pilgrims are the guests of the monasteries, and the monks are obliged to provide the pilgrims with food and a night's lodging free of charge.

This also means that there are no hotels or large stores. In Karyes, the capital of this monastic republic, there is only a bakery, a pharmacy, a single bar serving warm meals and a scattering of small convenience stores and coffee shops. Upon exiting the port in Ouranopolis, one can stock up on basic products only at the port in Dafni, which is on Athos, and at the few stores in Karyes. Typically, each major monastery has small stores for pilgrims, where they can purchase icons, objects of religious worship, incense and locally produced plant products, monastic wine and ouzo (a type of local Greek liquor). Near the larger monasteries, there are gardens and vineyards that stretch across terraces. Sometimes these are located on very steep slopes. For instance, the gardens of the Simonos Petras monastery, located in a small and narrow valley that leads directly to the port, are not as steep as others; however, ropes have nonetheless been set up there to facilitate transport from their various levels to the monastery's kitchen. The ropes are used for the daily transport of fresh vegetables and fruits using baskets.

The size of these farming terraces differs, and monasteries are constantly striving to extend their areas. This is associated with significant engineering work. All new farming terraces typically feature massive retaining walls; these used to be built out of large stones, but are now made from reinforced concrete, finished with an external stone veneer and equipped with all necessary drainage and irrigation installations as well as with access roads. Historically, during their periods of greatest prosperity, the largest monasteries, such as Saint Panteleimon monastery, had populations of up to as many as 2,500 monks - comparable to the size of a town [9]. Of course, with populations of this size, food had to be imported from outside Athos and supplied primarily by sea. The situation is similar today. Despite horticulture being practised on a near-industrial scale in suitable locations, in greenhouses and under foil tents, without food being supplied from other parts of Greece, it would be very difficult to imagine the functioning of all the monasteries, sketes and keliias (the last two being smaller organisational units that sometimes have monk populations rivalling those of their monasteries).

However, it would be an overstatement to say that the peninsula has no ornamental greenery. Apart from the wildlife itself, whose beauty is truly unique, one can find small enclaves of landscaped greenery. These typically take the form of long treillages that provide shade to the small paths connecting the ports with the monasteries located above them; in addition, there are passages around them that allow pedestrians to walk in the shade. These treillage-covered walkways have multiple uses: they add wonderful variation to the landscape as well as providing shade and wine, since the treillages are typically covered in vines. Ornamental and utilitarian greenery - such as orange or lemon trees - is located in monastery courtyards, along with blooming and fragrant bushes.

These bushes form simple, geometric compositions. While most larger courtyards do have lawns, they are often not used for practical reasons, since the courtyards are typically paved with various types of flat stones. Cypresses or other trees are planted along some roads. The author has not personally visited all the places that could feature such small ornamental gardens, but such fragments of greenery must certainly exist near the Koutloumousiou monastery. This monastery even features an observation point in the form of a gazebo situated above a small water reservoir, affording both monks and pilgrims space for peaceful contemplation.

The tradition of building observation gazebos in selected areas near monasteries, offering beautiful views of the sea and the local forests, is continued today. This is how those monks who reside primarily in enclosed spaces due to the nature of their duties can satisfy their need for contact with open spaces. In addition, these sites are continuously visited by pilgrims, who marvel at the wonderful sunrises and sunsets. Another element that is present in the monastery courtyards are ancient trees. Accounts tell us that they are mostly several-centuries-old, such as the mighty cypresses in the courtyard of Athos' most important monastery, Great Lavra.

Fires present a dire threat to plants. Unfortunately, fires are frequent and are typically caused by electrical discharge during storms or started accidentally. Due to limited access to water, a fire can sometimes mean that the monastery that has suffered it must cease to operate - not to mention the loss of works of religious art stored inside and of neighbouring old trees. In March 2004, an enormous fire consumed the Serbian Chilandariou monastery (established in 1198); its reconstruction continues to this day, despite the receipt of funding not only from all of Serbia but from specialised Serbian and European companies. The monastery features large gardens and fruit orchards that are arranged and used in a highly logical manner, similar to the nearby vineyards. The road that leads from Chilandariou monastery to Esphigmenou monastery, which is around thirty minutes' walk away and is renowned for its fanatical Orthodoxy and coastal location, travels amidst a beautiful cypress forest on one side and extensive orchards on the other.

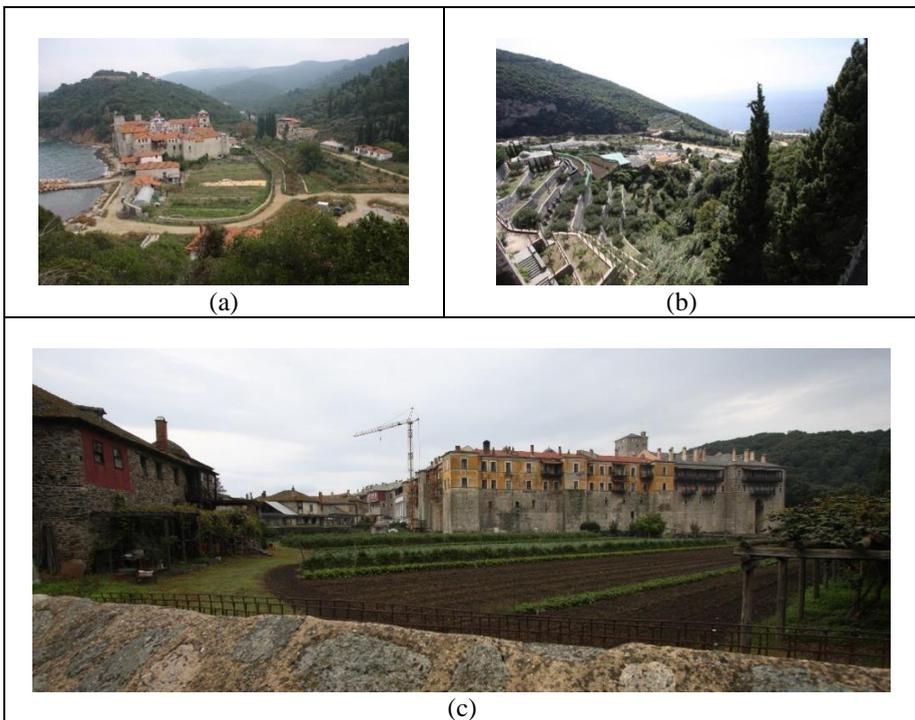
Immense olive orchards - located on slopes and criss-crossed by greened roads and pedestrian paths - stand out among the open, green landscape of Athos due to the silvery colour of the olive leaves. The harmony of form and material is easily observable in the landscape and blends into this mountainous scenery in an extraordinarily picturesque way. It is not without reason that Athos is often called the garden of the Mother of God. The beauty present here is not disturbed by car traffic (no cars other than those belonging to the monasteries are permitted to enter). On the steep, stepped paths with steps adapted to donkeys and mules, and deliberately delineated by tall greenery, one can often find caravans of these animals transporting goods from the ports to the sketes and kelias up on the mountain.

Particularly in Kapsiokalivia, in the south-eastern part of the peninsula, with its immensely steep rocky cliffs and slopes with small kelias and hermitages, there is no other way to transport essential goods. Even a highly trained hiker can find journeys there a significant and often dangerous challenge. Some hermitages can be reached by ladders or by very narrow and dangerous paths secured with chains. Transport using ropes is sometimes the only way to supply the necessary food. However, even in these challenging conditions, it is always possible to find ornamental bushes or miniature vegetable gardens. The monks who live there are extremely poor by choice, but extraordinarily hospitable to the pilgrims who visit them. Living in caves and sleeping in simple bunks, they often give these bunks to the pilgrims to sleep in, while they themselves sleep directly on the rock. One can only imagine the difficult conditions there in winter, and snowfall is not unheard of [Romanian skete Prodromos, <https://asceticexperience.com/portfolio/romanian-skete-prodromos/>]. However, the main reason for which the monks reside there is prayer. All other everyday activities are done so that prayer can continue without pause.

## 5. The proximity to landscape and nature resembles the closeness of Panagia and God

One must approach Athos slowly so as not to miss its greatness in its tiny, earthly dimension, not swimming alongside it like a ship in the fog, not suspecting the existence of the immensity of the spirit nearby. As a soft tuning fork is so important for the purity of sound, so Athos is such a tuning fork for the world. Hear its melody, try to resonate with it, see something... Write your music, attend to tuning your instrument, play for yourself, for others...

While the landscape of the Holy Mountain peninsula is characterised by its numerous monasteries and hermitages, the holy image of Athos shapes the landscape and structure of the monasteries. The appearance, arrangement and surroundings of the monasteries are adapted to the monks' lifestyle and constitute a spatial expression of monastic life.



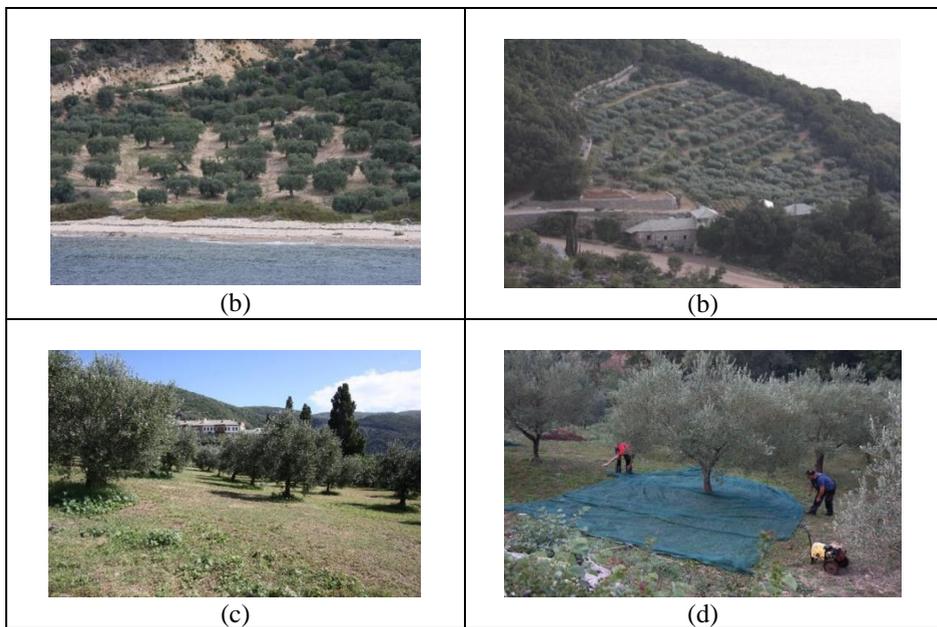
**Figure 1.** Athos monasteries and surrounding gardens: (a) Esphigmenou on the coast, (b) Paulou with its terraces, (c) field layouts next to Iviron.

The structure of monasteries has not changed much from their inception until now. This is evidenced by the drawings of Ukrainian traveller and pilgrim Vasyl Hryhorowych-Barski, which he created in the holy places of the East and

in particular on Mount Athos in the years 1723-1747 [10]. His travels and detailed descriptions of Mount Athos are of great interest to contemporary researchers [V. Della Dora, *A Pilgrim and Enlightener on the Holy Mountain: Vasilij Grigorovich Barskij's Journeys to Mount Athos, 1725-1744*, Friends of Mount Athos Annual Report, 2016, 32-43; 11; 12]. The theme of sacred places is actively explored in the research of A. Lidov and his followers in the study of the hierarchy of sacred places [13-21].

The structure of a monastery consists of a medieval fortress (the vast majority of monasteries were built in the Middle Ages) with a temple - a church (or churches) inside and the structures of cells and utility rooms surrounding it, adjacent to the defensive walls or being part of them.

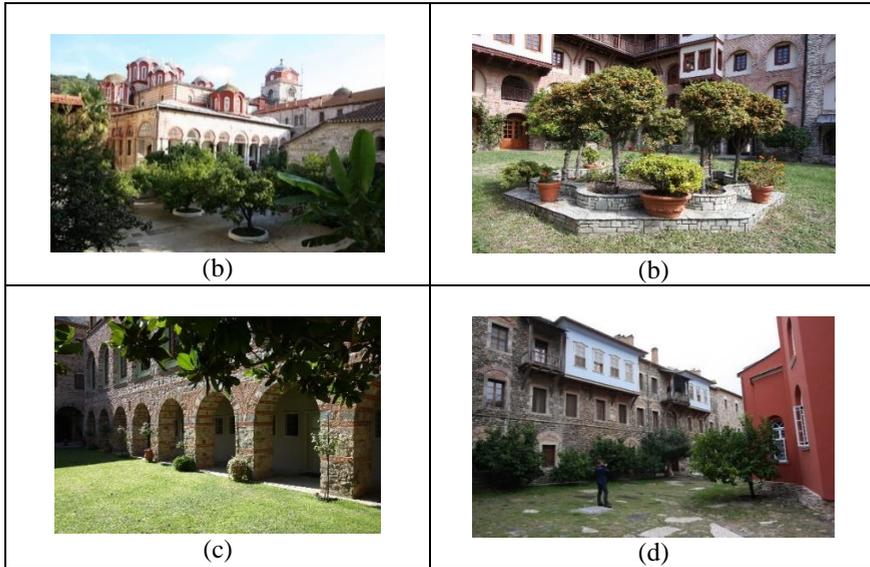
The immediate surroundings of monasteries - olive groves, vegetable gardens, fruit orchards and farm buildings situated on terraces supported by high retaining walls - play an important role. The Athos monastery gardens are diverse and form an integral part of each monastery's spatial structure and its daily life (Figure 1).



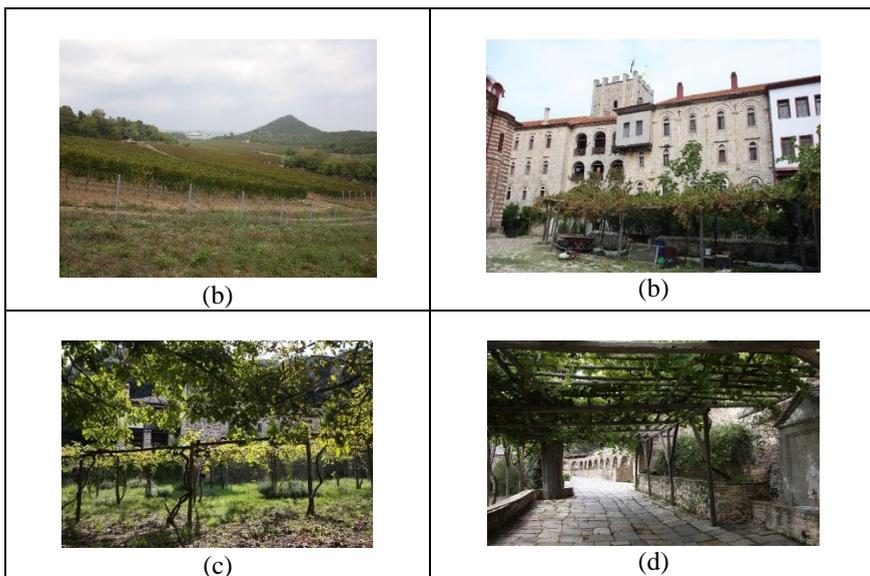
**Figure 2.** Olive groves of monasteries: (a) Paulou, (b) Docheiariou, (c) Xiropotamou, (d) Chilandariou.

The surrounding monasteries are covered with olive groves, some of which are hundreds of years old. To establish them, high stone retaining walls were often built, and fertile soil was brought in. Such structures also served as additional fortifications, making it difficult for enemies to invade. Vast areas of old olive

groves have blended with the surrounding forest landscape over time, and the light green colour of the olive trees on the slopes of the mountains is often the only remaining indicator of old agricultural land (Figure 2).



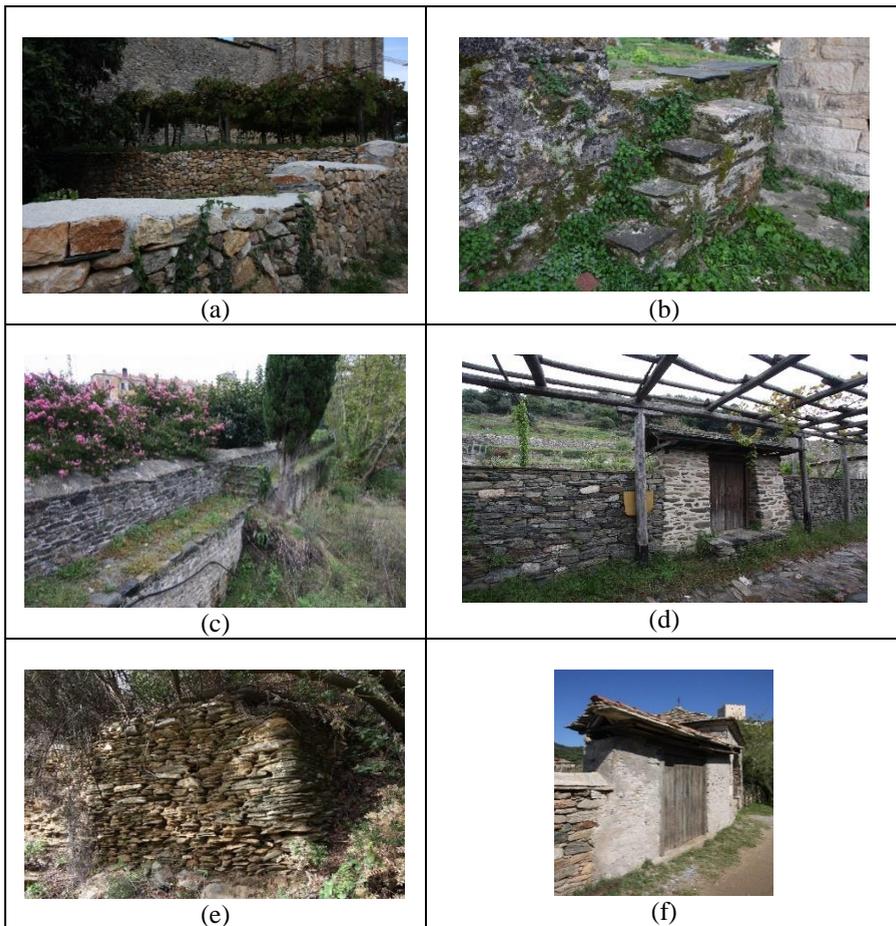
**Figure 3.** Monastic courtyards of Athos: (a) Esphigmenou, (b) Xiropotamou, (c) Filotheou, (d) Iviron.



**Figure 4.** Vineyards of Athos monasteries: (a, b) Esphigmenou, (c) Koutloumousiou, (d) Stavronikita.

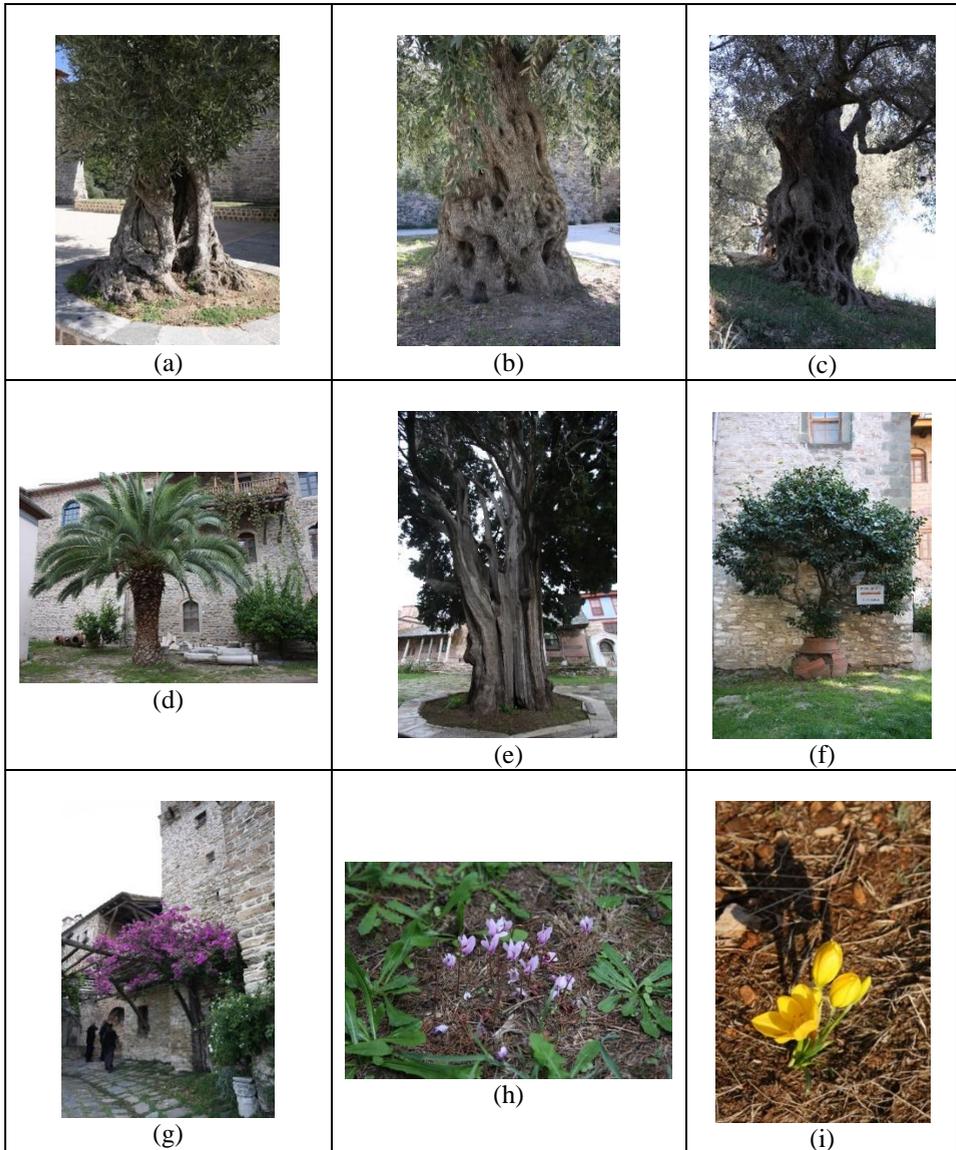
The inner spaces of the monasteries usually consist of a large courtyard (in large monasteries) or narrow passages around a temple (in smaller monasteries). High defensive walls define the internal multi-story structure of the monastery and open onto an internal space with galleries and cell windows. As in medieval castles, the structure of a monastery often includes an impregnable tower that was the last refuge for monks in the difficult times of pirate invasions. In addition to flowers, orange, lemon, pomegranate and fig trees are grown in the monasteries' courtyards (Figure 3).

As in previous centuries, large areas are occupied by vineyards. Grapes also grow inside the monasteries, creating shade that is invaluable in the hot summers. The wine produced on Mount Athos is of very high quality and is exported to Germany, America and Canada (Figure 4).



**Figure 5.** Walls and wickets of the gardens of Athos monasteries: (a, b) Chilandariou, (c, d) Iviron, (e) Stavronikita, (f) Pantocratoros.

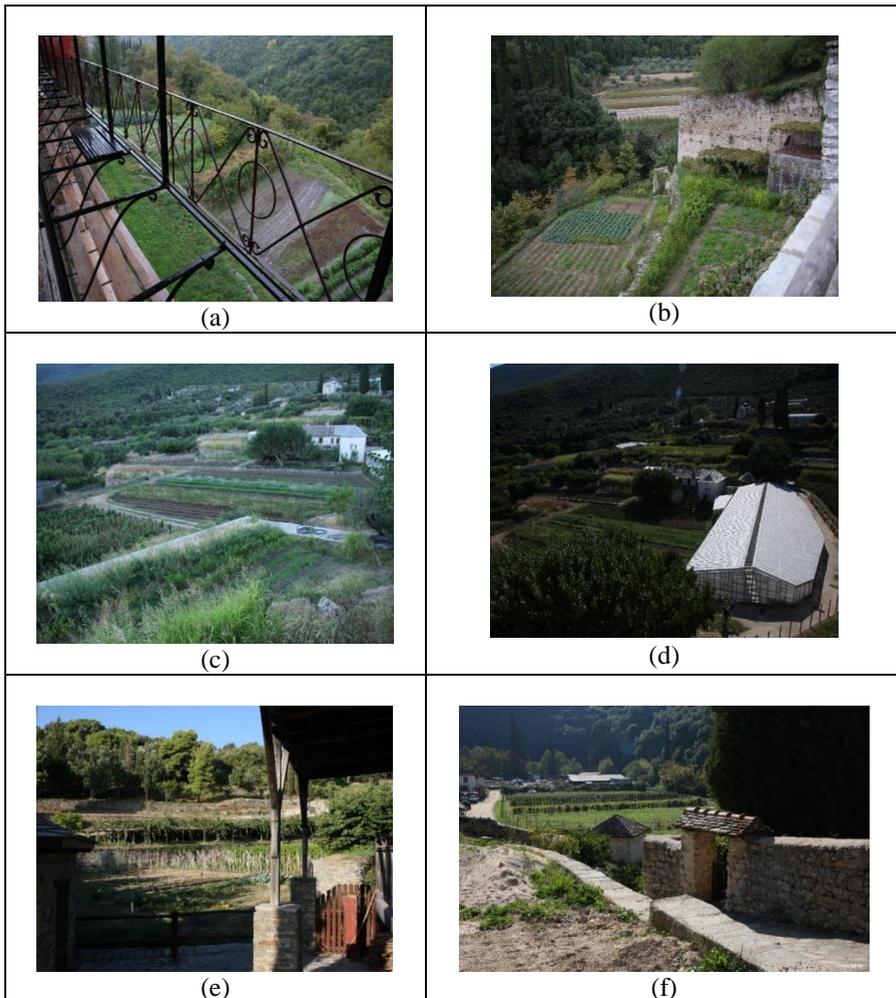
The entrances to the gardens and orchards are framed by gates, chapels, crosses and other sacred signs, and decorated with ornaments made by the monks' own hands. Old walls carry the burden of hundreds of years under the scorching sun, winter winds and rains (Figure 5).



**Figure 6.** Trees and flowers of Athos monasteries: (a, b) Xiropotamou and (c) Chilandariou - olive trees, (d) Iviron - palm trees, (e) Great Lavra - cypress, (f) Philotheou, (g) Stavronikita, (h) Chilandariou, (i) Zografou - flowers.

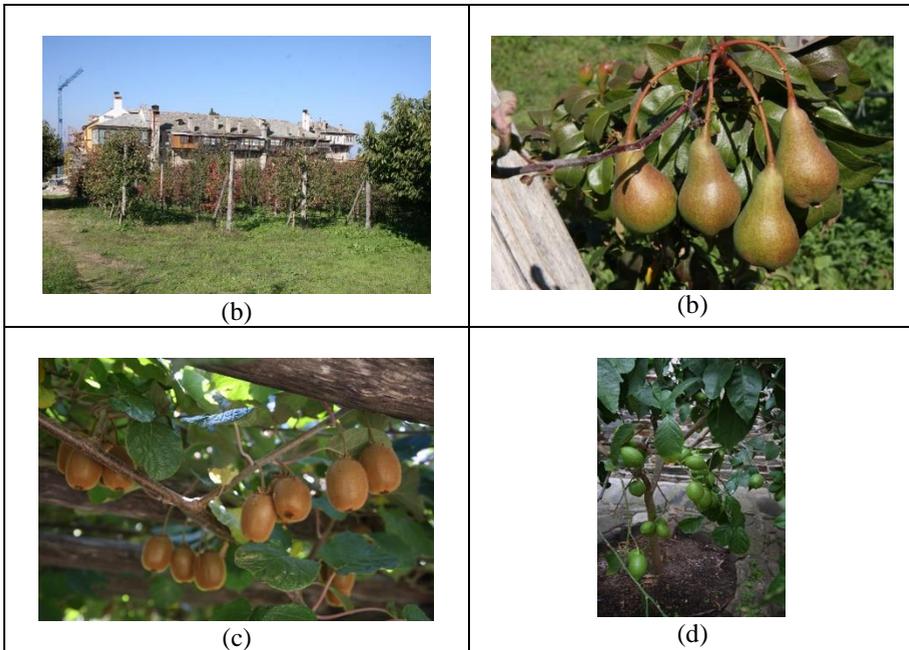
In addition to arable land around and inside the monasteries, horticulture is practised in the form of ornamental plantings, especially shrubs and beautiful flowers. Old olive trees are very well maintained, and palms, cypresses and flowering bushes grow. The tree, like the presence of the living among the stones, is a symbol of eternal life, the Garden of Eden (Figure 6).

Today, vegetables are also grown in the gardens using modern horticulture technologies. In many monasteries, agricultural land is provided with artificial irrigation. On separate vegetable terraces, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots, peppers, beans, asparagus and other vegetables are planted to provide food for monks and refreshment for pilgrims (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Vegetable gardens of Athos monasteries: (a) Konstamonitou, (b) Zografou, (c, d) Great Lavra, (e) Baruseri Skete, (f) Chilandariou.

The presence of vegetation cultivated by monks who have dedicated their lives to God creates a special mental climate of full-fledged, joyful human life in the shadow of the Holy Mother (sometimes described as Queen of the gardens of Athos). Even fruit has a meaning beyond simple consumption or aesthetics. It is difficult to express it in words the incredible silence of the gardens. Orchards have long been planted around the monasteries to grow pears, apples, pomegranates, figs, plums, oranges, lemons, kiwi and other fruits (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Orchards and fruits of the monasteries of: (a, b, c) Philotheou and (d) Iviron.

In order to supply monasteries with water and to power water mills, aqueducts were established: complex arched stone structures along which water was transported from the mountain springs to the monasteries. There were also windmills in the monasteries. In addition, water reservoirs were installed, numerous springs with cool water were maintained, and decorative fish were bred in the pools (Figure 9).

Outbuildings form an integral part of the landscape of the monastery gardens and vegetable gardens [7, p. 6]. These buildings are most often made of raw stone, covered with tiles, although modern outbuildings are now also being built in the large monasteries. Greenhouses for growing vegetables are common. Ascetic monks in cells and hesychastries are engaged in woodcarving, icon painting and rosary making. The brothers and other monks work in the gardens. The act of working on Mount Athos is referred to as obedience. Pilgrims willingly

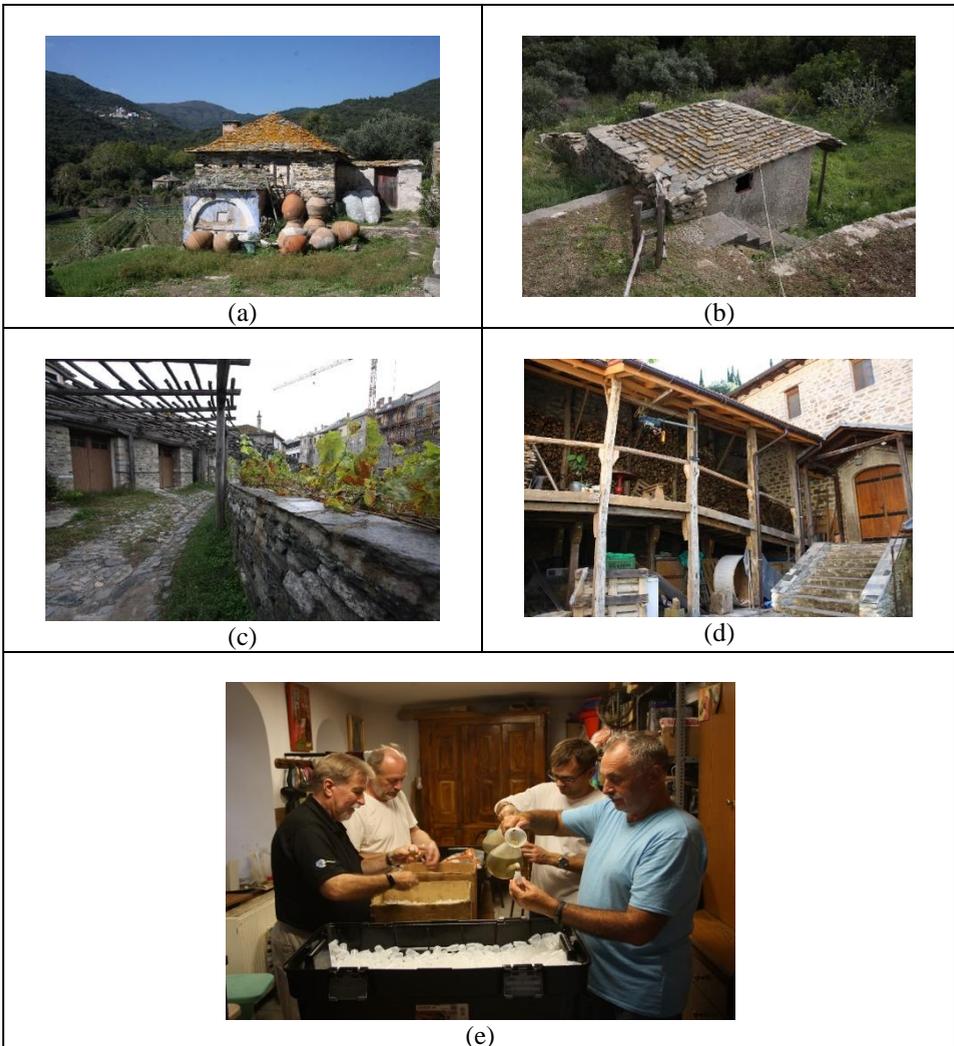
participate in various types of obedience, such as pouring myrrh into tiny cans at Vatopedi monastery (Figure 10).



**Figure 9.** Water and water mechanisms of the Athos monasteries: (a) mills in Xiropotamou and (b) Panteleimonos; (c, d, e) spring, water reservoir for gardening and aqueduct in Iviron; (f) swimming pool with fish in Panteleimonos; (g) water lilies in the pond at Stavronikita.

Athos' cuisine is based on bread, olive oil, wine, olives and vegetables. Consumption of food in the monastery is a sacred rite that extends the Divine Liturgy. The 'Trapezna' (refectory) is located at the entrance opposite to the entrance to the main temple: the door in front of the door. The monks enter the

refectory in procession, and the main obligatory attribute of each meal is prayer; careful listening to special texts spoken by the lector. The ‘Trapezna’ is decorated very much like a church, with frescoes and icons often originating from the Middle Ages. In principle, the value of an icon is not distinguished depending on the age of its writing; rather, what is important is its presence, its supernatural strength. There are nine miraculous icons at the Vatopedi monastery, and the miracles obtained from them have been thoroughly described by numerous witnesses.



**Figure 10.** Outbuildings at the Athos gardens: (a) Pantocratoros, (b) Stavronikita, (c) Iviron, (d) Zografou, (e) pilgrims' obedience at the Vatopedi monastery (spill myrrh).



**Figure 11.** (a) Trapezna (refectory) of the Great Lavra monastery, (b) trapezna (refectory) of the Koutloumousiou monastery - one of the oldest in Athos (the monk is shown serving pilgrims), (c, d) pilgrim's meal in the Vatopedi monastery and (e, f) Koutloumousiou monastery.

As the morning trapeze after the three-hour night liturgy takes place at 6 a.m., the wine greatly enlivens the order of day and night, which is unusual for a pilgrim. The next meal after the service is held at 6 p.m. at another monastery, where the pilgrim is to arrive at during the day. The presence of saints and their stories on frescoes is not merely a visual representation, but a living presence of

holiness necessary for prayer and trapeze, and a meal in which this presence is part of the liturgy. The oldest 'Trapezna' is in the oldest monastery, Great Lavra. Its walls are covered with frescoes; its white marble tables have been in service for hundreds of years (Figure 11a). Another very old 'Trapezna' - one of the oldest on Athos, in the Koutloumousiou monastery - is also beautifully painted with frescoes (Figure 11b). Pilgrims have a trapeze together with monks, but at separate tables. A pilgrim's trapeze consists of pasta with sauce, sliced tomatoes with onions, and a glass of cool pure spring water. On holidays and some days of the week (Thursday), the monks serve very tasty wine. Monks often have a much more modest meal; they are very strict about fasting (Figure 11c-f).

## **6. Conclusions**

In conclusion, it can be said that the gardens on the Athos Peninsula are, in essence, neither utilitarian nor ornamental. The gardens express a certain order, a trace of human activity that differs from the peninsula's environment, its virgin rocks and cliffs, via their geometry, showing a reliability of order formed by human hands. At the same time, these centuries-old gardens - and especially the olive groves, which live on in a natural state as remains of lost sketes - are gradually transitioning to a natural state. The gaping rows indicate the presence of a regularity of planting that was once cultivated by a monk's hand. The retaining walls of these old groves, located on hills, are gradually losing the character of gardens made by human (monk) hands. It is this gradualism of the lives of gardens as human work that is impressive. The same applies to the walls and skylines of monasteries, which demonstrate various stages of nature being transformed: first by mankind, then again by God. It is a path from one set of hands to another: His hands. It is the gardens and groves beyond the temple, beyond the monastery, that bear the spirit of prayer and contemplation, creating the unbreakable fabric of the Spirit, forming a continuation of religious space both in front of a pilgrim's eyes and inside them. In this, we see the main spiritual mission of these traces and images of the work of the faithful.

The composition of the gardens is adapted to topographic conditions. While the gardens do not include redundant, purely aesthetic elements, they do feature garden furniture and religious symbols.

The function of the gardens is mostly utilitarian. They are used to produce various types of plant-based foods, from vegetables to fruits.

There are small gardens with an aesthetic and contemplative function in which water (in the form of a pond or stream) plays a certain compositional role.

The interior courtyards of the monasteries feature tall ornamental greenery; however, this greenery does not form orderly garden layouts. Garden layouts are supplemented by observation points with gazebos (belvederes), which provide excellent views of the sea and the surroundings of the monasteries.

The contemplative character of the gardens is their essential feature; it manifests itself in the presence of religious symbols associated with Byzantine artistic tradition and continued by the Greek Orthodox Church. The two-headed Byzantine eagle is also the coat of arms of Athos, and crosses and vessels follow similar patterns. As perceived by monks, gardens are life-giving, God-giving, established for prayer and work - because work is prayer. The hands are working, and in the head, there is a prayer - between consciousness and subconsciousness - where there are no ordinary human divisions, no cause or effect, no beginning or end. Everything is repeated one after the other: spring, summer, autumn, winter; day, night; prayer after prayer. All the colours of the world exist here as the colours of God. The ideal of a monk is constant prayer - "Kyrie, Iesou Christe, eleison me" - and everything here is subordinated, just like the presence of the pilgrims. Athos Gardens - these are also unspoken words of prayer. This is not a feeling that comes immediately. Only with time...

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