Digital Pilgrimage: Online Journeys to Mount Athos

PRESENTED BY

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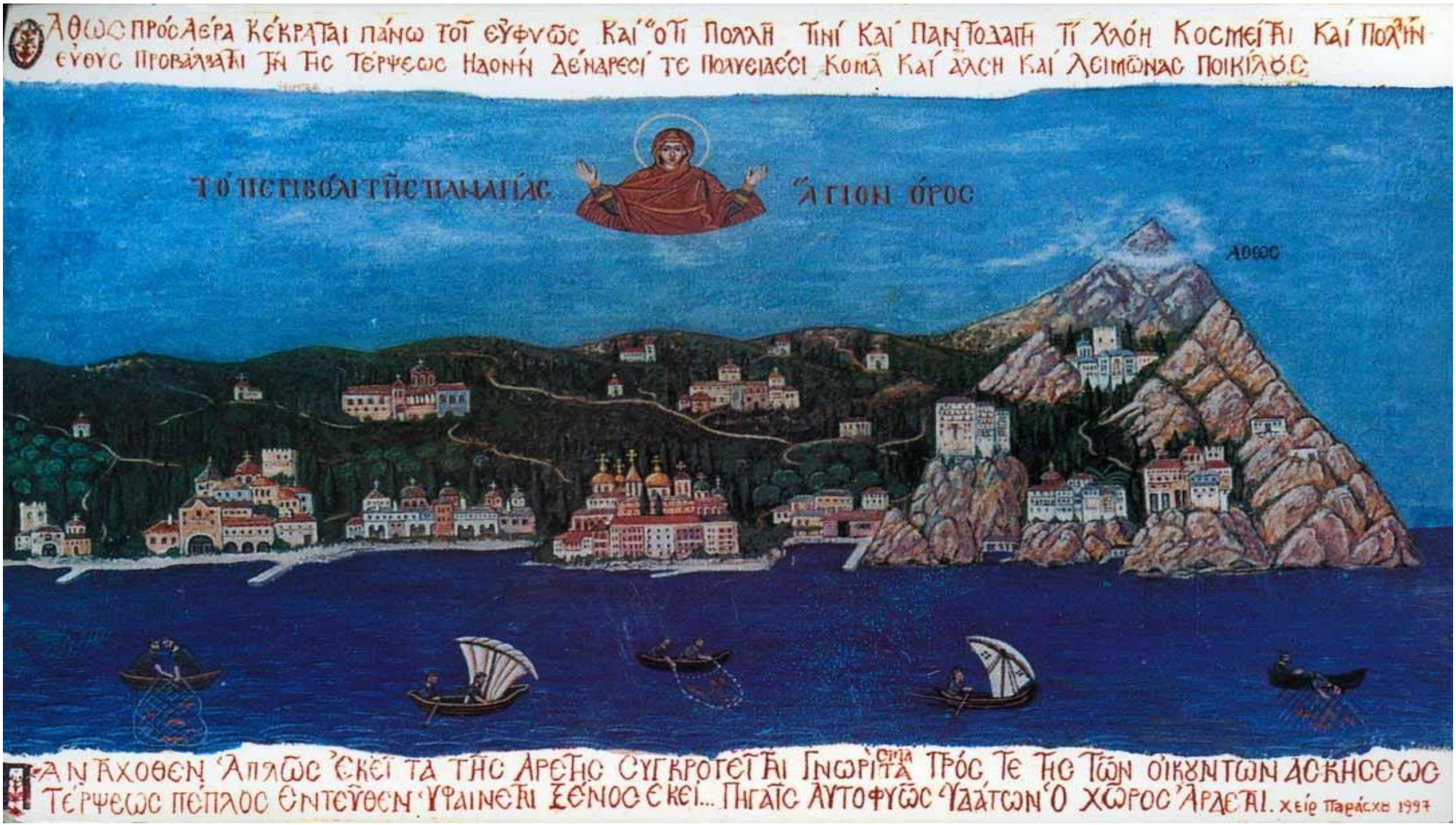
Introduction

- Christopher Helland's axis: 'religion online' / 'online religion'
- **Mount Athos**: Pilgrimage site as a 'landscape' of 'remembrance' (Tim Ingold; and Mesaritou, Coleman, Eade et al.)
- "Athos Digital Heritage" funded project, digitally reproducing the Athonian landscape by introducing innovative pedagogical tools and applications.
- Sightseeing, reinvention of Athonian traditions and introduction of interpersonal online reciprocal relations between monks and visitors.
- Techno-Nostalgia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To perceive the landscape is […] to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.

(Tim Ingold *The Temporality of the Landscape*, 2000, 153)

Objects of *Remembrance*: Reproducing The Holy Girdle of Mary

ЧЕСТНОЙ ПОЯС
ПРЕСВЯТОЙ БОГОРОДИЦЫ

Этот поясок освящен на Святом Поясе Пресвятой Богородицы, который хранится в монастыре Ватопед Святой Горы Афон. В XIV веке византийский император Иоанн Кантакузин подарил эту святыню Обители. Традиция раздавать такие пояски благочестивым паломникам существует издревле. Благодатью Пресвятой Богородицы, Которой посвящен монастырь, совершаются многие чудеса.

Благословением Божией Матери через Ее Честной Пояс многие бездетные супруги, разрешаясь от бесплодия, становятся родителями, исцеляются больные раком и другими неизлечимыми заболеваниями.

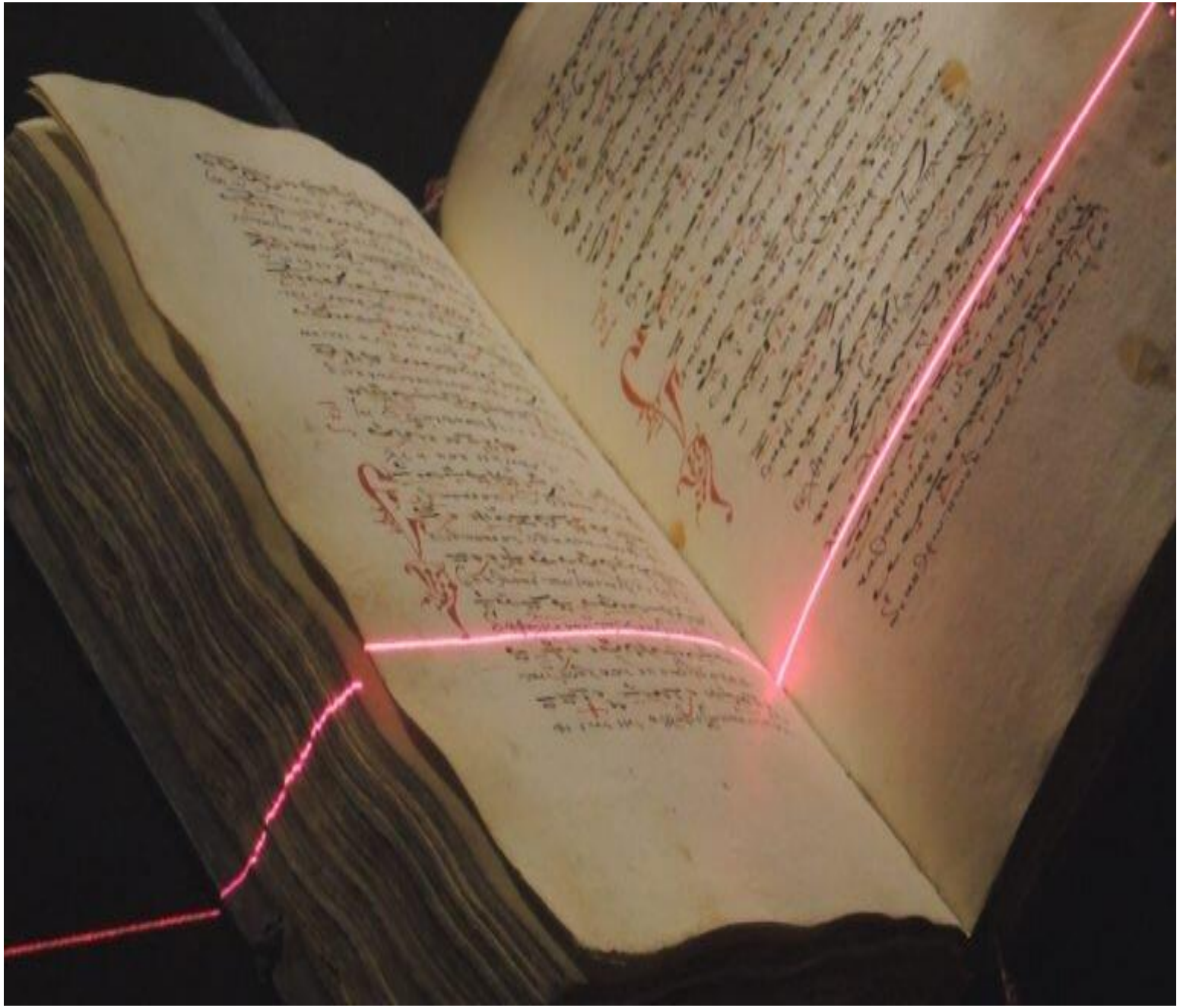
Верующие опоясываются этим пояском на некоторое время, живя покаянием, исповедью, молитвой и причащением Святых Тайн.

Таким же образом поступают и супруги, прибавляя к этому пост и супружеское воздержание – по возможности и по взаимному согласию. При этом необходимо помнить, что искреннее покаяние и участие в Таинствах Церкви должны продолжаться в течение всей нашей жизни, поскольку это является единственным способом общения и единения с Богом как в настоящем, так и в будущем веке.

The term ‘techno-nostalgia’ derives from cinematic appropriations of Walter Benjamin’s concept of the ‘aura’ of an original artwork in his famous 1935 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The term itself refers to the technological processes employed to recover and reproduce the lost ‘aura’ by using emerging technologies, such as colorization and digitization of archives, to bring it back to life in a nostalgic manner as much as it is technologically possible. The ‘aura’ of Mount Athos springs out of its ‘landscape’ associated with the ‘scared tradition of the place and ‘spiritual way of living’.

Athos Digital Heritage

Athos Digital Heritage aims at a twofold objective: to communicate, on the one hand, and disseminate the outcomes of this enormous digitisation and documentation project to meet the needs of the academics and research community in general. To support, contribute to and develop, through digital applications and the dissemination of the digitised content of spiritual value, innovative pedagogical tools and applications.
https://www.mountathos.org/en-US/The-Project.aspx



Digital Pilgrimages

Browse the Digital Pilgrimages of five Monasteries and discover their history through the narratives and audiovisual content.

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PILGRIMAGE ONLINE

- ATHOS DIGITAL HERITAGE PROJECT.
- DIFFERENT VIRTUAL ‘PATHS’ FOLLOWING SITES/OBJECTS OF ‘REMEMBRANCE’ AS A MEANS OF NAVIGATING AND OPENING THE DIGITAL TECHNOSCAPE.
- DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALIZED DIGITAL PATHS AND INNOVATIVE MEANS OF SIGHTSEEING.
- USE OF EMERGING VISUAL TECHNOLOGIES OF REPRESENTATION TO RE-BUILD AND REPRODUCE THE ‘LANDSCAPE’ AS WELL AS MINIMIZE THE LOSS OF ITS PHYSICAL ‘AURA’ AND/OR REPLACE IT WITH A TECHOLONIGICAL AURA.

ONLINE PILGRIMAGE

- Virtually light a candle and pray in a monastery or front of a specific icon and relic for personal reasons. https://athos.guide/en/svechi/vatopedi
- Submit online memorial prayers to be performed by the monks of specific monastic institutions or isolated settlements. Notes on Athos about health or repose.
- Take an e-course into Byzantine arts and crafts to further engage the pilgrimage in the long term.
- Participate in broadcasted Live Q&A ZOOM sessions with Abbots and elders in real-time web channels and social media, hosted by online channels such as The Uncut Mountain YouTube channel, which hosts a series of online weekly talks entitled Digital Archontariki [“Guesthouse”].
- Real time (Live) open online sessions with monks and online visitors.

- Pilgrimage as ‘Communita’: Degree of personal engagement with pilgrimage instantaneous groups on the way to a sacred site, or ‘communitas’ in Victor and Edith Turner’s classic terms [1969, 1974].
- Online pilgrimage/pilgrimage online: Emergence of online ‘communitas’ and digital pathways of ‘remembrances’.
- Kim et al. (2020) argued that “Understandings of religious tourism have evolved beyond pilgrimage and now encompass the meaningfulness of a destination”, including “individual religious affiliations” and a personal and subjective sense of identity and religiosity associated with the history and vibes of the place
- The collective urge for rediscovering a ‘lost’ identity emerges out of the representations of the Athonian ‘landscape’ itself, which, in turn, are materialized and marked by objectified “remembrances”, such as the Girdle of the Mother of God, its chapel in the monastery, and the network of marketing it in the new online market of faith.
- Helland’s axis in terms of offering services (online pilgrimage/ pilgrimage online) is increasingly disappearing because on the one hand, on one’s personalized engagement with technology, and on the other, on the quality and degree of this engagement accommodated by the technologies themselves in their present and future development towards AI real-time applications.
- Techno-Nostalgia is the circular process through which an institution creates and reproduces collective new ‘memories’ in- between immaterial and material worlds.
- Conversely, the media is the journey as pilgrimage becomes an online socio-material matter of representation of landscapes and social relations. By offering access to users to visit online and participate in the virtual life of the monasteries via their online social presence, pilgrimage tourism has reemerged online alongside the reinvented and personalized emerging millenarian markets of faith (Comaroffs 2000).

ATHOS
DIGITAL HERITAGE