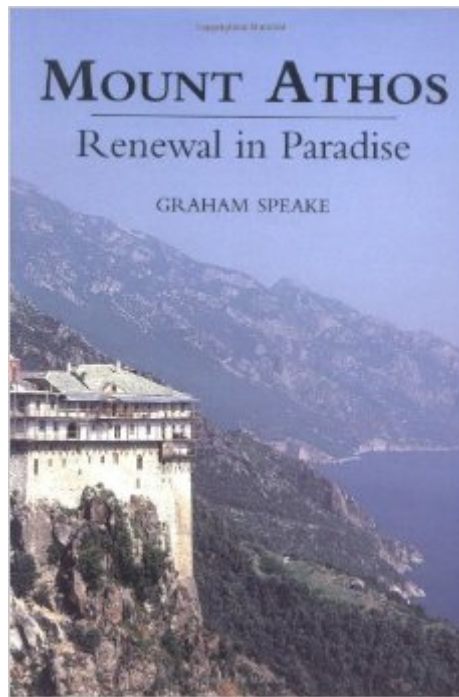


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Mount Athos: Renewal In Paradise



Synopsis

Mount Athos, a spectacularly beautiful rocky peninsula jutting out from the coast of northeastern Greece, has been a monastic preserve since the ninth century. Known as the Holy Mountain, it serves as the centre of monasticism for all the Eastern Orthodox churches and remains fundamentally unchanged despite the storms of political and religious conflict that have raged over the centuries. This is an illustrated history of Mount Athos. It encompasses the entire story of Athos from the first anchorite monks who lived in caves and simple huts to the establishment of the first monasteries in the tenth century to the monastic renewal that is taking place there today. Illustrated with historical and contemporary images, the text considers the influence of outside political events on the men (for only men are allowed) of the Holy Mountain and, more importantly, the impact of spiritual movements and religious controversy. What emerges is an account of the centuries-old Athosite way of life as well as a portrait of thriving monastic communities at the beginning of the 21st century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

MOUNT ATHOS: Renewal in Paradise is a history of this land of monasteries written by Graham Speake, a frequent visitor to the Holy Mountain and ultimately a convert to Orthodox Christianity. The first thing you will notice about the book is that it is lavishly illustrated, containing dozens of full-colour pictures that vividly portray the Athos' beauty. I certainly found myself enthralled by these pictures, and read the book with pleasure. Before recounting the traditional founding of the

monastery in the 10th century, Speake gives the various legends for early monastic settlement on the peninsula, doubtful though some may be. The political workings that regulated the monastery in its early days are clearly spelt out, Byzantine though they may be. The influence of non-Greek peoples on Athos, such as the Vlachs, Kyivan Rusians, and Serbs gets a large amount of space, and Speake dispassionately reports the ethnic conflicts that have led to Slavs and Romanians sometimes finding it difficult to visit the mountain today. Finally, as the subtitle of the book indicates, Speake gives readers an idea of how miraculous the Athos' contemporary flourishing is in comparison to the moribund state of monasticism there for much of the 20th century. Beyond the history, though, Speake's guide is also a vivid portrayal of the timeless way of life on the Holy Mountain: the existing monasteries and their ways of functioning, the relation to the church calendar, initiation procedures, the preparation of meals, and so forth. Speake even describes the baptism of his godson, an adult convert, who profited from the Holy Mountain's remarkably rigorous and spiritually constructive catechesis.

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