



Mount Athos

Status: Autonomous Theocratic Society within Greece
Area: 130 sq. miles
Population: 1,811 (2011 est.)
Currency: 100 cents = 1 euro (€1 = U.S. \$1.06)



Athos is the easternmost of three peninsulas reaching into the Aegean Sea from the Halkidiki (also Chalkidiki) Province in north central Greece. It is 31 miles long and ranges from 2 to 5 miles wide. The spine of the peninsula rises to a height of 3,000 feet. The 6,670-foot Mount Athos anchors the southern end of the Peninsula.

According to legend, the Virgin Mary was blown off course when traveling to Cyprus from Joppa and landed on the northeastern coast near what is today the Iviron Monastery. Since that time the area has been called the Agion Oros, or Holy Mountain, a sacred place for Orthodox Christians.



A 2009 stamp showing a monk packing a mule, Scott 30.

Hermits lived on Mount Athos at least by the fourth century, and in 885, the Byzantine emperor proclaimed it “the garden of the Virgin” in which only holy men could live. All others were denied entrance. Under four centuries of Ottoman rule the sultan recognized Athos’ special status as “the country in which day and night the name of God is revered.” In 1912, Greece took Mount Athos in the First Balkan War and it became a self-governing polity of Greece.

Today, Mount Athos has 20 monasteries, a number of small isolated religious cells, and even individual hermits living in caves, though the hermit population is dwindling. The territory is administered by the abbots of the monasteries with a rotating leadership. Any visitor to Mount Athos is required to have a permit from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Only 110 permits, valid for a three-day visit, are issued per day, 100 to Orthodox pilgrims and 10 to non-Orthodox. Tourism is discouraged. Ancient law prohibits the presence of females. Even female animals are strictly prohibited except for chickens (for eggs) and cats (to control rodents).



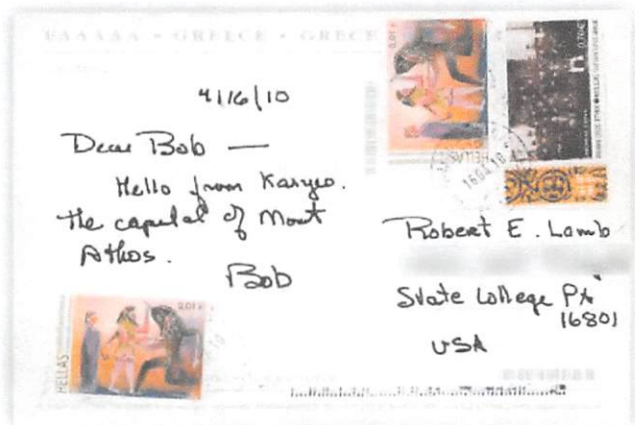
A 2009 commemorative stamp showing the Holy Epistiasia (executive committee) of the Holy Community of Mount Athos, Scott 41.

The Ottomans operated a post office in the administrative center of Karyes until 1912. They overprinted eight local stamps specifically for use in Mount Athos in 1880. At the end of the 19th century, the Russians established one of their offices in the Turkish Empire there to serve the large Russian monastic community.



Columnist Bob Lamb at the post office in Dafni.

In 1909, Russia released special stamps overprinted Mount Athos (Russia, Offices in Turkish Empire, 101–17). In late 1915, the Allies prepared a set of stamps depicting the HMS *Royal Ark* for use in the Holy Community that were not issued, and in 1916, Greece overprinted 33 stamps for use there. They were also not issued. Greek stamps have been in use since 1912.



A postcard with mixed Mount Athos and Greek franking. The stamps are Greece (Scott 2404) and Mount Athos (Scott 42). The postcard was mailed from Karyes.

Today there are two post offices, one in Mount Athos, Karyes and the other in the port of Dafni. They are staffed by Greek postal employees. Mount Athos stamps were first issued on May 16, 2008, and are used primarily, though some Greek stamps also are available. Greek stamps are valid in Mount Athos. Many Greek post offices sell Mount Athos stamps for the philatelic market. Mount Athos stamps are valid for postage in Greece.

Mount Athos

Mount Athos, the Holy Mountain, is a peninsula in northern Greece. It is 11 miles long and ranges from 1 to 2 miles wide. The peninsula is 1,500 feet high and the highest point is the summit of the Protari. The area is 100 square miles (261 sq km). (Currency: 100 cents = 1 euro (€) = U.S. \$1.00)

The peninsula is a unique and isolated place. It is a monastic state, a place where the monks of the 20th century have lived for centuries. The monks of the 20th century have lived in the same way as the monks of the 10th century. They have lived in the same way as the monks of the 10th century. They have lived in the same way as the monks of the 10th century. They have lived in the same way as the monks of the 10th century.



A 1000-year-old monastery (excavated by the Holy Community of Mount Athos, 1900)



Monastery of the Holy Spirit (excavated by the Holy Community of Mount Athos, 1900)

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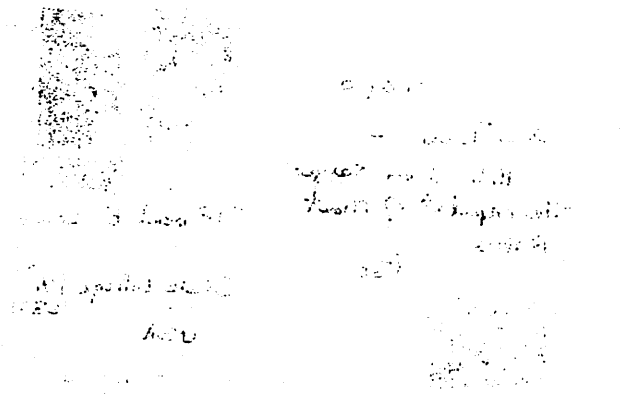
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