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Georgios Alexopoulos

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Management of Living Religious Heritage: Who Sets the Agenda? The Case of the Monastic Community of Mount Athos

GEORGIOS ALEXOPOULOS

Initiative for Heritage Conservancy, Greece

This paper explores the decision-making process for heritage management at the monastic community of Mount Athos, a World Heritage Site in Northern Greece, in relation to the concept of living religious heritage and the pursuit to balance the heritage values of both the experts (heritage professionals) and the non-experts. The function and impact of a specific heritage agency — KEDAK (Centre for the Preservation of Athonite Heritage) — designed to establish the decision-making power of the Athonite monasteries will be critically discussed. A range of interesting compromising solutions and some challenges and problems raised by the function of this agency will serve as the background for examining the extent to which different perceptions on heritage management can coexist, particularly when heritage professionals find themselves on the bottom of a top-down decision-making process.

KEYWORDS living religious heritage, intangible heritage, Mount Athos, monastic communities, Orthodox heritage, Greece

Introduction

This paper analyses some critical issues relevant to the management of living religious heritage, and examines the advantages and disadvantages of a specific decision-making mechanism for enhancing the active participation of an Orthodox monastic community in the management of its heritage. A discussion of the international discourse on the management of living heritage and the relevant discourse in Greece is followed by the examination of the monasteries of Mount Athos as a case study. The heritage-related activity that has taken place in the monastic community of Mount Athos has raised a wide range of issues that merit consideration when discussing the appropriate balance between contemporary heritage management and living

religious heritage values. Drawing from my doctoral research (Alexopoulos, 2010), this paper will focus on an initiative for the creation of a heritage agency, KEDAK (Centre for the Preservation of Athonite Heritage), introduced in the 1980s in order to tackle the decision-making process for getting across the local/Athonite views on heritage management, and will examine a set of interesting solutions, along with some problems arising from their application. The framework existing on Mount Athos provides interesting insights on how living religious communities can have an active role in the management of their heritage and suggests that it is possible to achieve the coexistence of effective heritage management with approaches that foster respect towards intangible monastic values. At the same time, however, the challenges and problems raised by the function of KEDAK also demonstrate that sharing decision-making power may sometimes require heritage professionals to accept significant compromises. This is particularly evident in the example of Mount Athos, as the experts are seemingly at the bottom of a top-down decision-making process.

In this paper the term ‘living religious heritage’ is used in order to denote any aspect of tangible or intangible heritage that pertains to active religious communities worldwide following the terminology adopted by a relevant ICCROM workshop held in 2003 (Stovel et al., 2005). The emphasis on living religious heritage does not suggest that the classification of heritage sites or monuments into living/dynamic/animated or dead/static (Jokilehto, 1999: 250; Miura, 2005: 6) is supported. On the contrary, it is believed that the values, associations, and meanings attributed by people to any form of heritage can potentially render the latter as living.

The concept of living religious heritage within the international and Greek heritage management discourse

Following the post-war emergence of an international discourse related to various aspects of cultural heritage preservation and conservation which developed into the discipline of heritage management in many parts of the world (Cleere, 1989; McManamon and Hatton, 2000), the tendency to recognize the importance of living religious heritage is only evident in the last few decades (Stovel et al., 2005).

Wider debates and discussions have centred around the concepts of living and dynamic sites or monuments (Jokilehto, 1999: 250), the controversy surrounding authenticity in architectural restorations (Larsen, 1995), the recognition of indigenous heritage with a special emphasis placed on the active participation of descendant communities in heritage management (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 2008), and the broadening of the cultural heritage concept to include intangible values (Smith and Akagawa, 2009). A growing discourse has also recently emerged with regard to the archaeology of living traditions (Layton, 1989), the management of sacred sites (Carmichael et al., 1994; Serageldin et al., 2001; Shackley, 2001), and the display of religious heritage in museums (Paine, 2000; Sullivan and Edwards, 2004). Heritage practitioners and scholars worldwide have also been increasingly concerned by the uses and abuses of cultural heritage in the context of competing requirements of coexisting faiths (Layton et al., 2001; Guinn, 2006) and increasingly aware of the necessity to respect and demonstrate sensitivity towards cultural diversity and ‘minority and folk cultures’ (Inaba, 2005: 46).

A very significant turning point indicating the direction that international committees and organizations are currently taking towards intangible manifestations of heritage was UNESCO's 'Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage' (UNESCO, 2003). The emergence of this convention is telling of the current tendency to move away from a 'material fossilisation of heritage' (Jones, 2006: 121), despite the debate surrounding the impossibility of separating or distinguishing the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: 60; Wijesuriya, 2007: 122). Overall, approaches to the management of living religious heritage, taking into consideration both material/physical and intangible/spiritual elements, need to address several fundamental issues that relate to ownership, active participation in decision-making, and balancing contemporary use with worship, right to access, and definitions of sacredness. The confrontation of different value-systems is often generated by the fact that custodians of living religious heritage places widely view themselves predominantly as facilitators of worship (Shackley, 2001: xv–xvi) and protectors of a living tradition rather than heritage managers adhering to the ethics of the contemporary secular world. Naturally, this debate is very prominent also in the context of the collaboration among heritage professionals and monastic communities of various religious denominations (Alexopoulos, 2010; Miura, 2005; Poullos, 2011; Wijesuriya, 2000).

Within the Greek heritage management mechanism and the relevant national heritage discourse, the concept of living religious heritage has featured predominantly in relation to monuments of the Byzantine (AD *c.* fourth century–1453) and Post-Byzantine periods (AD 1453–1830) and the Greek Orthodox Christian heritage in general. For example, non-Orthodox religious heritage such as formerly active Ottoman period mosques (Astrinidou, 2010: 210–11) or other monuments valued in areas with Islamic populations (Demetriou, 2010: 224–29) have rarely been considered with regard to the associations and meanings they may have for adherents of the relevant faith. To some extent, political reasons have clearly underpinned such tendencies, such as the 'Greek chauvinism' towards Islamic art and cultural heritage in the past (Konstantios, 2003: 172–74, 192–95), the negative connotations of the Ottoman Turkish occupation (Herzfeld, 1991: 57), or the fact that the majority of the country's population identifies itself as Greek Orthodox. However, the emphasis on Greek Orthodox heritage is perhaps more significantly generated by the special role of Orthodoxy and Byzantine cultural heritage in contemporary Greek society (Dubisch, 1990: 113; Makrides and Molokotos-Liederman, 2004; Chronis, 2005; Hamilakis, 2007: 112–19).

Moreover, while Hamilakis and Yalouri (1999) have eloquently discussed the religious undertones vested upon archaeological monuments in the context of Hellenic national imagination, there are certain groups of people who actually imbue living religious heritage to certain elements of the classical Greek heritage and have recently been more vocal through various media. These are the followers of the ancient Greek religion who claim their right for using archaeological sites of the Classical antiquity for religious purposes. In particular, the so-called *Supreme Council of Ethnikoi Hellenes* (YSEE, 2012) and the *Church of Hellenes* (2012) have actively campaigned for acquiring the permission to use ancient Greek sanctuaries or temples as places of worship and have stood against decisions made by the Central Archaeological Council with regard to what they view as their religious heritage.¹ The

values of such religious groups are not widely accepted or recognized by the state authorities who have control over the management of cultural heritage in the country. This example touches upon a matter that is disputed in Greece and certainly provides food for thought over the potential limits of defining what is an active or ‘non-active’, in religious terms, archaeological site. Nevertheless, it is a matter of international relevance, as highlighted by similar examples from other countries such as the conflicts in the UK over the use of ancient monuments and sites by neo-druids, neo-pagans, and new age worshippers which have challenged heritage practitioners and scholars (Chippindale et al., 1990; Blain and Wallis, 2007).

Managing the Byzantine and Orthodox Greek heritage: dealing with monastic communities

The Greek legislation caters for the protection of all Byzantine and Post-Byzantine monuments (Archaeological Law, 2002). Interestingly, apart from the Greek state, the only entity that can have ownership of Byzantine period religious monuments (churches and monasteries), which are considered and treated as antiquities, is the Orthodox Church of Greece (Apostolakis, 2002: 41–42), with the territory of Mount Athos being the only exception to this rule. Indeed, the numerous Orthodox monasteries that are scattered around the country with their active communities of monks and nuns are at the centre of Orthodox spiritual activity and are also linked to a booming religious tourism which is focused on pilgrimage. These communities, however, cannot be expected to share the same values as heritage professionals when it comes to managing their natural and built environment and their collections (Alexopoulos, 2010; Chatzigogas, 2005; Petherbridge, 1993; Shackley, 1998).

The responsible central and regional agencies of the Greek Archaeological service arguably do not operate according to clearly articulated or formally established principles regarding the concept of living religious heritage, although the contemporary use of Byzantine monuments for religious purposes is deemed essential (Zias, 2002: 43). In fact, this concept, even under a different terminology, is not sufficiently elaborated on the principal legislative text, the Archaeological Law (2002). Some heritage professionals have acknowledged that stakeholders, such as the Greek Church, must have active participation in decision-making for the management of Christian monuments, but have underlined the role of the Greek state by stressing what they view as the temporality of the interest and continuous presence of the traditional custodians (Konstantios, 2003: 196–99). The restrictions imposed by the state archaeological agencies on the use of Orthodox monasteries or buildings with Orthodox heritage values in Greece have occasionally caused conflicts that highlight the complexity of identifying and establishing the limits of acceptable use of religious monuments (Stewart, 2001; Apostolakis, 2002: 67–87; Lyratzaki, 2007).

The reality of how cultural heritage is managed in Greece demonstrates that both the state-controlled agencies and heritage scholars should more actively engage in collaborative efforts to address and identify the challenges and opportunities posed by living religious heritage values. The application of bottom-up approaches to the conservation and management of cultural and spiritual values of protected areas have been suggested for active Orthodox monastic communities, including Mount Athos

(Papayiannis, 2007; 2008). However, within such endeavours greater attention should be placed on processes that foster active participation of all relevant stakeholders and sufficient empowerment of the monastic communities in decision-making, while leaving space for both heritage experts and non-experts to negotiate their different and often conflicting aspirations.

Mount Athos: background to the case study

Mount Athos is a self-governed Orthodox monastic community, under the sovereignty of the Greek state, located in the easternmost peninsula of the prefecture of Halkidiki in the region of Macedonia, Northern Greece (Figure 1). The whole area is divided into territories among the twenty ruling monasteries, with the oldest of these establishments, the Great Lavra monastery, having been founded in AD 963. Among the privileges retained by the community is also the ban of access to females from the peninsula (widely known as the *Avaton*). Today the area is host to a thriving Pan-Orthodox monastic community with an estimated population of around 2000 monks, and it is still regarded as ‘the cradle of Orthodoxy’ and ‘the bastion of Eastern Christianity’ (Kadas, 1986: 10; Speake, 2002: 2).²

The worldwide significance of the Athonite heritage was reflected in the inclusion of Mount Athos to UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites in 1988. Apart from the importance of the natural environment, the monasteries have preserved several movable and immovable elements representative of the cultural heritage of Greece, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe for over a millennium. It is estimated that approximately 3000 structures exist on the peninsula (Charkiolakis, 1999: 106; Figure 2).



FIGURE 1 The peninsula of Mount Athos.
Map courtesy of András Berezsnay



FIGURE 2 The Holy monastery of Dohiariou viewed from the sea.
Photograph by Georgios Alexopoulos

Most of the surviving — and still in use — churches, chapels, and refectories are decorated with mural paintings covering an estimated total surface of about 100,000 square meters (Vocotopoulos, 1997: 33). Moreover, the collections kept by the monasteries are considered to manifest almost every aspect of the art and heritage of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine periods in Greece and the Balkans (Kadas, 1986: 143; Papadopoulos, 1992: 26).³

The Athonite community falls under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Istanbul) only in spiritual matters, while the Greek state is represented by a Governor (appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). With regard to the management of cultural heritage, each monastery is responsible for its own territory, while several issues are supervised by and subject to the decisions of the Athonite collective administrative bodies situated in the capital, Karyes. The heritage-related Athonite legislation as well as the relevant heritage management ethos stem mainly from century-old traditions, internal regulations, customary usage, and the so-called ‘Constitutional Charter for the Holy Mountain of Athos’ (henceforth MAC).⁴ However, the Greek state is directly involved in heritage-related interventions and projects through the 10th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities (EBA), a regional agency of the former Hellenic Ministry of Culture.⁵ In addition, from the early 1980s certain responsibilities are shared with KEDAK (*KEAAK* = Centre for the Preservation of Athonite Heritage), an agency consisting of Athonite representatives and heritage

professionals (mainly archaeologists and architects) working in both academia and the Greek state services.⁶

The living religious heritage of Mount Athos

On Mount Athos, the built environment and material culture are imbued with living heritage value and meanings linked with the monastic spiritual, ecclesiastical, and everyday life activity. These values reveal the primary function of the monastic community as a retreat for contemplation, worship, and prayer, and as a pilgrimage destination that offers confession and spiritual healing to its pilgrims. Recent research by Andriotis (2009; 2011) suggests that visitors to Mount Athos, whether constituting pilgrims or tourists, gain an authentic religious heritage experience that combines, among others, spiritual, cultural (heritage-related), and environmental elements.

Among other things, the Athonite monasteries have preserved almost extinct traditional human habitations, century-old agricultural traditions, and arts and crafts (e.g. woodcarving and Orthodox painting). In addition, a variety of artefacts (such as church vestments, sacred vessels, crosses, manuscript books) which are deemed vulnerable and highly valuable by heritage experts are used in various manifestations of the Athonite life and feature in church services, sanctifications, sacraments, feasts, processions, and so on. These artefacts symbolize a living spiritual embodiment of religious import (Karydis and Thomas, 2006: 3) and are also treasured for their message rather than their form (Petherbridge, 1993: 128–29). There are also several artefacts that are believed to hold miracle-working and healing properties. This living religious heritage is commonly referred to as *keimelia* (κειμήλια = heirlooms). Similarly, the architectural heritage and built environment of the Athonite monasteries are rarely valued by the community itself as a precious remnant of the past but rather as the spaces where the activities of their monastic life take place. In this sense, debates over the appropriate levels of intervention and how the monastic infrastructure should be developed, maintained, and used have emerged (Alexopoulos, 2010: ch. 6; Charkiolakis, 1999; Chatzigogas, 2005). Continuity of use, for example, in a tenth-century church with vulnerable and significant mural frescoes cannot be compromised over the need to conserve and preserve for present and future generations by restricting access and use (Figure 3). Overall, the monks themselves do not view the area itself as a visitor/tourist attraction and have traditionally feared any changes imposed to their way of life from the outside secular world (Alexopoulos, 2007). The perceived threat of museumification and touristification of Mount Athos (Alexopoulos, forthcoming) together with the sensitivity of the living religious heritage and the adherence to century-old traditions, have underscored many of the recent or still-existing conflicts that relate to the management of Athonite heritage (Alexopoulos, 2010: ch. 7).

Collaborating with the heritage professionals

The monasteries of Mount Athos are self-administered sovereign territories and the sole proprietors of their land and built environment. Therefore, as long as the Athonite legislation (relevant to the whole community collectively) is not breached, the elected officials of each monastery are responsible for cultural heritage management and can make decisions according to their internal rules without the interference of other



FIGURE 3 The Protaton church at Karyes, the capital of Mount Athos, undergoing conservation, 12 August 2005.

Photograph by Georgios Alexopoulos

authorities (Papastathis, 1993: 64). Indeed, the applicability of the Archaeological Law (2002), which defines the principles and activity of the Greek state archaeologists, has been very much disputed by the Athonite officials (Charkiolakis, 1999: 147; Papastathis, 2004: 513–15).

Nevertheless, the role of the Greek state heritage professionals in conducting various projects and interventions in the peninsula (particularly from the 1970s with the creation of the 10th EBA) has been crucial, and the latter have consistently provided their expertise and human resources. Particularly from the 1980s, when Greece became part of the European Union (formerly European Economic Community) and significant funds were allocated for the development of the Athonite infrastructure (Speake, 2002: 183), the necessity to collaborate with experienced architects, archaeologists, conservators, engineers, historians, museologists, and so on was inevitable. The know-how of the heritage professionals had to be integrated in decisions that concerned the quality of life and the needs of the monastic community.

Heritage professionals with long experience of working in the monasteries acknowledge that heritage management interventions not considering the intangible sacred practices and traditions and religious substance of Mount Athos are destined to fail (Mylonas, 1975: 184; Charkiolakis, 1982: 126). Nevertheless, despite several incidents of conflict, very interesting collaborations have been achieved demonstrating the potential brought by mutual understanding and negotiation. At the core of

every successful project and every positive cooperation between heritage professionals and Athonite monasteries — arguably also of every problem or conflict that has occurred — lies the effectiveness of the decision-making process. The power held by the Athonite community in decision-making has ensured a truly participatory process in terms of the influence of the non-experts. At the same time, in cases where heritage experts have been willing to adjust their aspirations and principles in order to accommodate the traditionally dissonant values, concerted efforts and joint approaches have emerged.

An Athonite model for participatory planning: the active role of the monastic community in KEDAK

As mentioned above, the Athonite monasteries have a very influential role in heritage management decision-making through their active participation in the Centre for the Preservation of Athonite Heritage (henceforth KEDAK). The latter was established in September 1981 as a legal entity of public law (KEDAK, 2012). KEDAK has exclusive competence for the implementation of projects involving documentation, safeguarding and promotion of Athonite heritage, including monuments, *keimelia*, and the natural environment (KEDAK, 1999; 2012). Its aim is to support and assist the Holy Community and the Athonite monasteries, and therefore KEDAK both oversees its own projects and authorizes and supervises the projects undertaken by private engineers.

It is worth noting that KEDAK exercises on Athonite peninsula competences pertaining to ministries that deal with public works, environmental planning, and agriculture (Pantos, 2001: 138–41). What is more, it has also acquired responsibilities that overlap with those of the (former) Ministry of Culture and its relevant representative, the 10th EBA. In practical terms, KEDAK has been more focused on the protection and restoration of the Athonite architectural heritage and the management of the natural environment, while the 10th EBA has been somewhat restricted to the conservation of movable artefacts and to the conduction of limited archaeological excavations (Charkiolakis, 1999: 172; Papastathis, 2004: 516). From the 1980s and onwards KEDAK has been the main body responsible of handling funds derived from the Public Investment Programme of the Ministry of National Economy and from financial contributions of the European Union (KEDAK, 2012).

The interesting aspect of the decision-making process advocated by KEDAK is the composition of its administrative council which consists of eleven regular members and their relevant substitutes that are appointed for a period of three years by, until recently, the Minister of Macedonia and Thrace (KEDAK, 2012). Within this scheme, the opinions of both the monastic community and of the heritage experts are formally brought together along with the views of members of the academia. Indeed, the members of the council include three archaeologists (two from the Archaeological Service and one academic), three experts with training in polytechnics (usually architects, civil or mechanical engineers), two government officials, two monks, and an academic theologian. It is important to stress that KEDAK cannot pursue to undertake or implement any project study without the expressed consent of the relevant Athonite authorities, the individual monasteries, or the Holy Community (Law

1198/1981, Articles 6.6, 9; Pantos, 2001: 138–41). Consequently, an Athonite monastery can collectively be represented by the relevant Athonite members but can also individually exercise the right to veto any decision (Charkiolakis, 1999: 172). As KEDAK does not have the human or the financial resources to undertake projects for all monastic establishments, it has been granted (by Law 1198/1981, Article 9, Section 9b) the right to detach employees from other public services according to its needs.

One could argue that the existence of an administrative council following the aforementioned composition renders the possibility for KEDAK to combine participatory approaches (particularly the inclusion of non-expert voices) with projects that retain adequately professional standards. In principle, the active participation of the Athonite monasteries and of heritage professionals that represent not only the disciplines of archaeology and architecture is an advantage. Furthermore, KEDAK as an agency is perhaps the first (if not the only) state agency for heritage management in Greece that explicitly advocates for the concept of respect and protection of the living heritage (KEDAK, 2012). Various heritage professionals have praised the quality of the projects implemented (Petherbridge, 1993: 130; Dikas 2006b) to the extent that KEDAK has been regarded as the first ‘Greek experiment’ of integrated conservation in the spirit of international conventions and standards (Charkiolakis, 1999: 152).

Challenges and problems

Without doubt, the introduction of KEDAK to the Athonite heritage management scene has been a significant improvement and even a fundamentally progressive approach for Greek standards. Nevertheless, certain problems and challenges have emerged from the activities undertaken in the last decades, and in most cases the root of the problem lies in the competition over who sets the agenda in heritage management, who controls the funding, and whose principles and values will prevail.

To start with, the Athonite legislation does not specify the exact terms of collaboration between the monastic authorities and the responsible Greek state agencies (10th EBA and KEDAK) and particularly the extent to which the principles of the Greek state heritage professionals should apply to Mount Athos. This important drawback is caused by the fact that the legislation itself stems from a period when heritage management was both nationally and internationally embryonic, to say the least. To this end, ICOMOS Greece has recently strived to develop in cooperation with the Athonite authorities a framework supported by a relevant charter for the establishment of principles that would blend long-term heritage management with the living religious element of the monastic community (Chatzigogas, 2005: 73). It is yet to be seen whether these efforts will materialize. It is, however, important to stress that a relevant charter, with input from both the Athonite monks and heritage professionals, should entail principles that establish binding responsibilities to all parties involved in order to have any chance of filling any legislative gaps for heritage management.

Another contested aspect of KEDAK’s activity has been the extent of control over the architectural restorations authorized and supervised by the administrative council as well as the quality of the interventions per se. Criticism has focused on projects that have overlooked the preservation of historical elements and the concept of authenticity (Petherbridge, 1993: 129–30; Koufopoulos, 2003: 26; Dikas, 2006a: 306–07) and on interventions that have extensively used reinforced concrete (Eleftherotopia,

1997; Papaspyrou, 2004) something that has attracted also international concern and attention (WHC, 2005: 43; Joint Mission Report, 2006).

The underlying issue in this conflict has centred on the tendency of the monasteries to pursue the replacement of damaged or destroyed architectural elements by demolition and reconstruction, using modern materials and up-to-date technical methods (Lavas, 1995: 178; Chatzigogas, 2005: 69). This has been referred to as an ideological antinomy between the opinions of the monks and the architectural restorers (Lavas, 1995: 178). It has been claimed that KEDAK itself has intervened to stop and alter interventions it has not authorized (Lavas, 1995: 178), while in certain cases the interventions sought by self-supervised projects have not always been authorized and monitored by KEDAK in the first place (TCG, 2002a and 2002b). The fact that members of KEDAK have also complained about the quality and methodology of restorations as well as some interventions on the landscape and the development of infrastructure (Dikas, 2006a: 304–05) indicates that these controversial projects have actually been initiated and controlled by individual Athonite monasteries rather than KEDAK itself.

Indeed, members of KEDAK have argued that the rationale behind some of these restoration projects has reflected the standards and priorities determined by individual monasteries and the teams of engineers employed by them (Dikas, 2006a: 306–08). According to the approach adopted in some of these self-supervised projects, the preservation of authentic architectural elements has been considered too time-consuming, costly, and with limited potential for long-term maintenance, and therefore imitations of ‘traditional’ forms and techniques have been preferred (*ibid.*: 308). These tendencies have been attributed to a wider attempt to exclude KEDAK from the management of the funds provided by the European Union. Members of the Technical Chamber of Greece (TCG) — a public legal entity and advisor to the Greek state, representing architects and engineers (of all disciplines) — which has a member at KEDAK’s administrative council, have strongly criticized the lack of transparency in planning and funding processes that have marginalized KEDAK’s jurisdiction in the supervision of restoration projects (TCG, 2002a and 2002b). Members of KEDAK have also raised their voices on this matter (Papaspyrou, 2004; Dikas, 2006a: 307; 2006b).

Within the debates and power struggle for decision-making, the archaeologists of the (former) Ministry of Culture, another important stakeholder, have also expressed discontent about their amount of influence they are allowed to have on issues pertaining to the management of Athonite heritage. The perceived marginalization of the 10th EBA (representing the Archaeological Service) from the decision-making process has also been strongly expressed, with various practitioners and academics suggesting that the opinions of archaeologists, architectural restorers, and conservators of the Archaeological Service have often been ignored (Theocharides, 1996: 206; Papaspyrou, 2004; Alexopoulos, 2010: ch. 8.3). The state archaeologists, as we have seen previously, hold the right to vote on decisions made by KEDAK, but control only a fraction (2/11) of its administrative council. Nevertheless, they have often seized the opportunity to raise their voices against the principles followed in certain architectural restorations. In fact, several conflicts of opinion with other members of KEDAK led to the withdrawal, for around four years (1986–90), of the three archaeologists (including the academic archaeologist) belonging to its administrative council

(Charkiolakis, 1999: 172). Although things have moved on from the aforementioned situation, the tension between state archaeologists and certain members of the monastic community have been maintained on certain issues (Alexopoulos, 2010: ch. 8.3).

The impact of KEDAK: top-down or bottom-up approach?

In a way, the decision-making process on Mount Athos sustains a top-down approach with the monastic community being dominant. This is very much contrary to the usual situation in Greece, and elsewhere in the world, where the archaeologists, architects, or conservators of the state services have the upper hand on the power balance/scale of the stakeholders (Fouseki, 2009). The Authorised Heritage Discourse, to borrow the term established by Laurajane Smith (2006: 29–34), is much weaker in this particular case. At times, particularly for practitioners with long experience in working on Mount Athos, getting across the values of the heritage experts is a continuous struggle that requires significant compromises (Alexopoulos, 2010: ch. 8). Archaeologists and other heritage professionals who undertake projects on behalf of the monasteries or who are called upon to represent a state agency in the management of Athonite heritage certainly require negotiation skills and the ability to discuss, listen, and deal with different and sometimes opposing values and principles. Whether the idea of creating a heritage agency that goes too far into shifting the decision-making power to the non-experts is essential or even ethically correct can be debated. Perhaps the most important thing to remember in this situation is that not all monasteries share the same views and aspirations with regard to the treatment of their heritage and the role of ‘outsiders’, and that people and communities can change over time. Indeed, the decision-making problems surrounding the role of KEDAK have also revealed tensions and conflicts between heritage professionals and agencies as well. Regardless of what share of the decision-making power heritage experts enjoy in the administrative council of KEDAK, or any relevant agency for that matter, their opinion, support, and advice on a range of issues can still be very useful and constructive.

Conclusions

This paper has reflected on the issues raised by the management of living religious heritage and has particularly examined some challenges encountered in the Greek context with a special reference to Orthodox monastic communities. Within this context, the case study of Mount Athos, a site of national as well as universal significance, has served to illustrate the problems that are often generated by the emphasis on tangible heritage values placed by heritage professionals and the intangible values imbued to heritage by living religious communities. It has been argued that as, all too often, conflicts arise from the constant power struggle over decision-making and who sets the agenda for heritage management it is important for all involved parties to develop mechanisms that provide the opportunity for all voices (both of experts and non-experts) to be heard and taken into consideration. Considering the powerful influence exercised by national and international heritage organizations on how heritage is managed — often to the detriment of alternative voices, indigenous communities or, as we have seen in this paper, living religious communities — the experts usually have the upper hand in a top-down approach (Stovel, 2004). However, as an

example of a self-governed Orthodox monastic community, the Athonite monasteries seem to enjoy a status quo that reverses the power balance. The creation of a heritage agency, in this case KEDAK, that supervises and authorizes heritage-related projects and interventions embracing a range of specialists (state-controlled and academics) and representatives of the Athonite monastic authorities is an interesting example of a decision-making mechanism that merits attention in the pursuit for participatory management. There are rarely any clear-cut solutions as to how the principles of contemporary heritage management can efficiently be balanced with the values of living religious communities, and the problems and challenges raised by the function of KEDAK are no exception to this rule. However, as the example of Mount Athos has demonstrated, dealing with the management of living religious heritage and collaborating with the respective communities requires a great deal of sensitivity, but also acknowledgement of the demand to truly share power in decision-making.

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Notes

- ¹ According to the website of the Supreme Council of Hellenes Ethnikoi, more than 2500 people gathered in March 2011 at the archaeological site of the Ancient Agora in Athens to protest against the reburial of an altar dedicated to the twelve Olympian gods which was unearthed during works on the Athens Piraeus Electric Railways (YSEE, 2012).
- ² Concise general information on Mount Athos can be found in a variety of publications in Greek and English (Kadas, 1986; Karakatsanis, 1997; Speake, 2002; Pentzikis, 2003) and various online resources (e.g. <<http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Athos/>>; <<http://www.athosfriends.org/>>).
- ³ This enormous repository of artefacts includes, among many other things: the largest collection of Orthodox portable icons in the world, numbering approximately 20,000 (Tsigaridas, 1997: 47); around 15,000 manuscripts, including the largest collection of Greek manuscripts worldwide (Atsalos, 1997: 511); more than 200,000 printed books; extensive collections of historically significant archival

documents; textiles, works of minor arts, artefacts of gold- and silversmithery, etc. (Karakatsanis, 1997).

- ⁴ The MAC is recognized by Article 105 of the Constitution of Greece as a law of superior formal force in comparison to the other laws of the Hellenic Republic (Papastathis, 2004: 509). However, it is worth noting that the most comprehensive and heritage-specific guidelines (albeit focused namely on movable heritage) are advocated in documents such as the Normative Provision 13/05/1947 (Alexopoulos, 2010: ch. 5).
- ⁵ The former Ministry of Culture has recently become a sub-Ministry and has been merged into the newly formed Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports.
- ⁶ The former Ministry for Macedonia and Thrace, to which KEDAK has belonged, has recently been turned into the General Secretariat for Macedonia and Thrace and is placed under the administration of the Ministry of the Interior.

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Notes on contributor

Georgios Alexopoulos is a Research Associate at the Initiative for Heritage Conservancy, Greece. He holds a BA in archaeology and art history and an MA in cultural heritage studies from the University of Athens and the University College London respectively. His PhD thesis at the UCL Institute of Archaeology dealt with the management of cultural heritage in the monastic community of Mount Athos. He has been employed as a Research Associate for the University of York (Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past) and as Visiting Research Fellow for the Initiative for Heritage Conservancy.

Correspondence to: Georgios Alexopoulos. Email: alexopoulosgeorgios@yahoo.gr