



# MONUMENTAL ADVENTURES

at the greek unesco monuments



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF MYSTRAS



10

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# Archaeological Site of Mystras

# Ten steps to...



1

**Built in a prime strategic position at the foot of the imposing Mount Taygetos, the highest mountain in the Peloponnese.**



2

**It was founded in 1249 by the Franks, who conquered the largest part of the Peloponnese after the Fourth Crusade (1204). However, in 1262 it passed into the Byzantines.**



3

It was a great cultural centre, especially in the 14th and 15th century. Art and literature flourished and great scholars lived there, with most prominent the scholar Georgios Gemistos Plethon.



5

Many rulers married princesses from the West. “Diplomatic marriages” were a common way of consolidating their power.

Although they lived far from their homeland, the “divine queens” were often renowned for their virtue and dynamic personality.



7

According to tradition, the last emperor of the Byzantine Empire, the legendary Konstantinos XI Palaeologos, was crowned here (January 6, 1449).

If this is true, it was the first time an emperor was crowned outside Constantinople!



9

Its name sounds like the name of a cheese!

The name Mystras is, according to a theory, a variation of Myzithra, a local cheese<sup>1</sup>.



4

It was the seat of the *Despotate of Morea* and is known as the last bastion of “Byzantine Hellenism”.

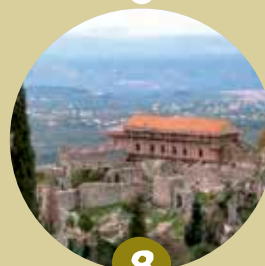
In 1349 Manouel Kantakouzenos, son of the emperor Ioannis VI Kantakouzenos, was appointed despot. The despotate maintained close relations with Constantinople, and the emperor usually appointed his second son as a despot.



6

For many years its rulers came from the **Palaeologos family**.

Theodoros I Palaeologos was the first despot of the dynasty, which ruled the despotate until the Ottoman conquest.



8

It is located just 6 km northwest of the city of Sparta.

Every year the municipality of Sparta organises the “Palaeologeia,” a cultural event in memory of Konstantinos Palaeologos, with various activities, conferences and sporting events.



10

It is a well-preserved Byzantine castle city with walls, splendid buildings and churches. It has been described as the “Greek Pompeii”.

The modern visitor can admire the Byzantine churches and their frescos, study the fortifications and some of the houses that still stand in good condition.

# ... Mystras!

# Mystras...

“I will tell a tale to thee rehearse, a tale of import mighty...”<sup>2</sup>



## WHAT?

- The castle city of Mystras, capital of the Byzantine *Despotate of Morea*.

## WHERE?

- Regional Unit of Laconia, Region of the Peloponnese.

## WHEN?

- 1249: The castle was founded by the Franks.
- 1262: Mystras goes under the Byzantine rule and flourishes.
- 1460: under Ottoman rule.

what do the numbers say:

**40,000**  
VISITORS

at the fair of Mystras  
in 1688<sup>3</sup>

  
**1,199**  
FAMILIES

live in Mystras during  
the years 1553–1558

**99 acres**  
THE AREA  
of Mystras

  
**380 sqm**  
THE AREA  
of the throne room  
in the palace of Mystras!

**25**  
SCENES  
from the life of the Virgin  
Mary are depicted in the  
monastery of Perivleptos

# ... in the UNESCO List!

The monument was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List based on the following criteria:



BYZANTINE PERIOD

YEAR OF REGISTRATION:

1989

## criteria ii

The architecture and the frescoes of its monuments influenced the art of the period. Here lived distinguished scholars who spread Greek culture to the West, contributing to the development of the European Renaissance.

## criteria iii

It is a unique example of a late Byzantine urban centre.

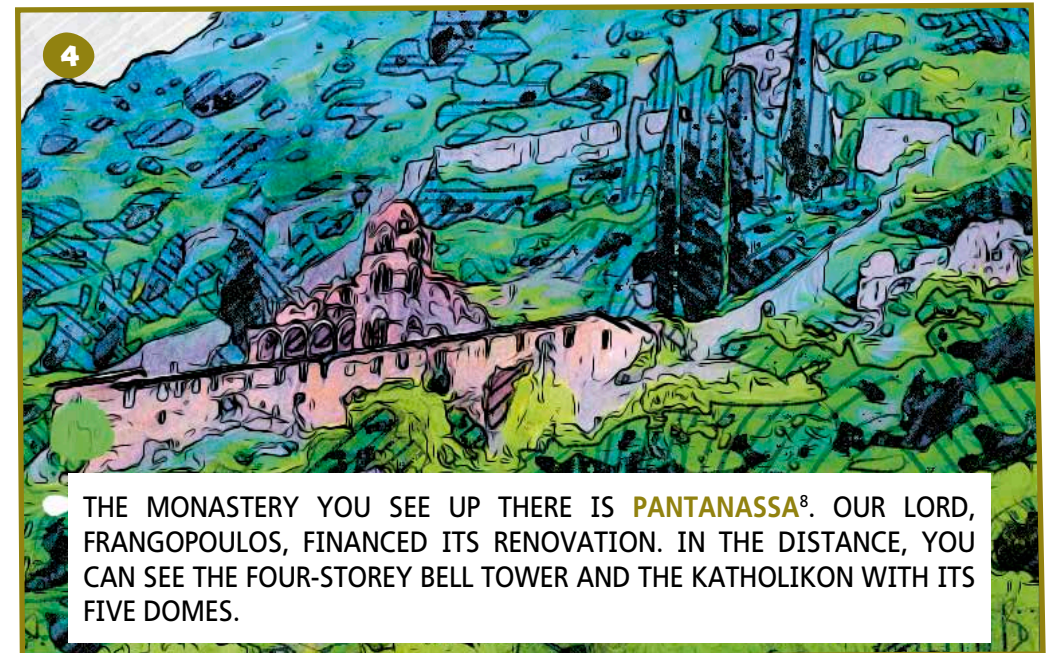
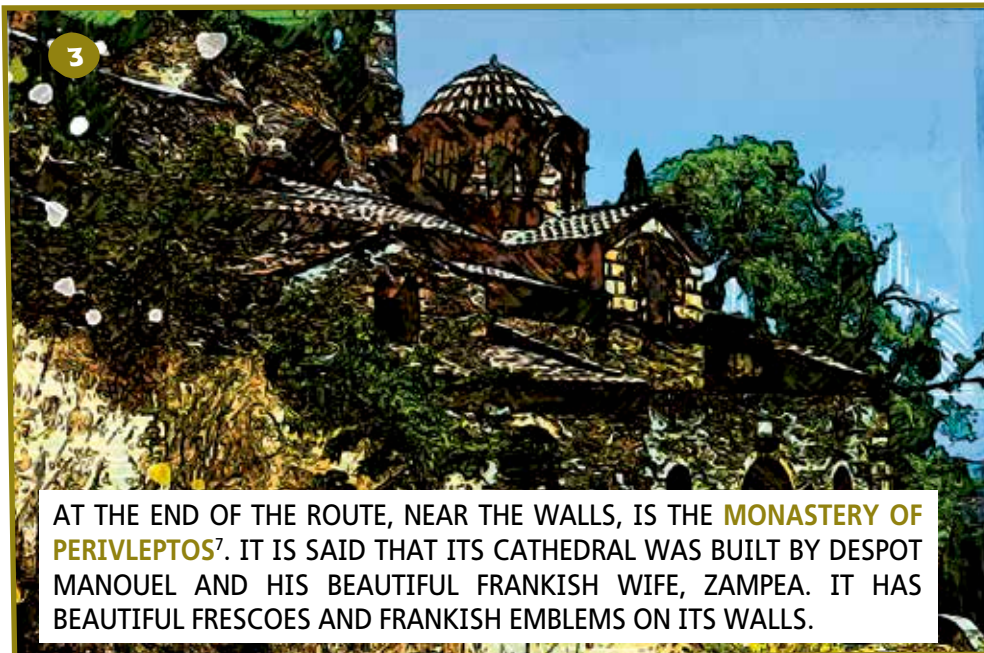
## criteria iv

It is one of the best-preserved castle cities, with fortifications, urban design and outstanding secular and ecclesiastical buildings.

**4** MONASTERIES  
within the urban  
fabric of Mystras

1. The archaeological site of Mystras from above.

# Walking around Mystras...

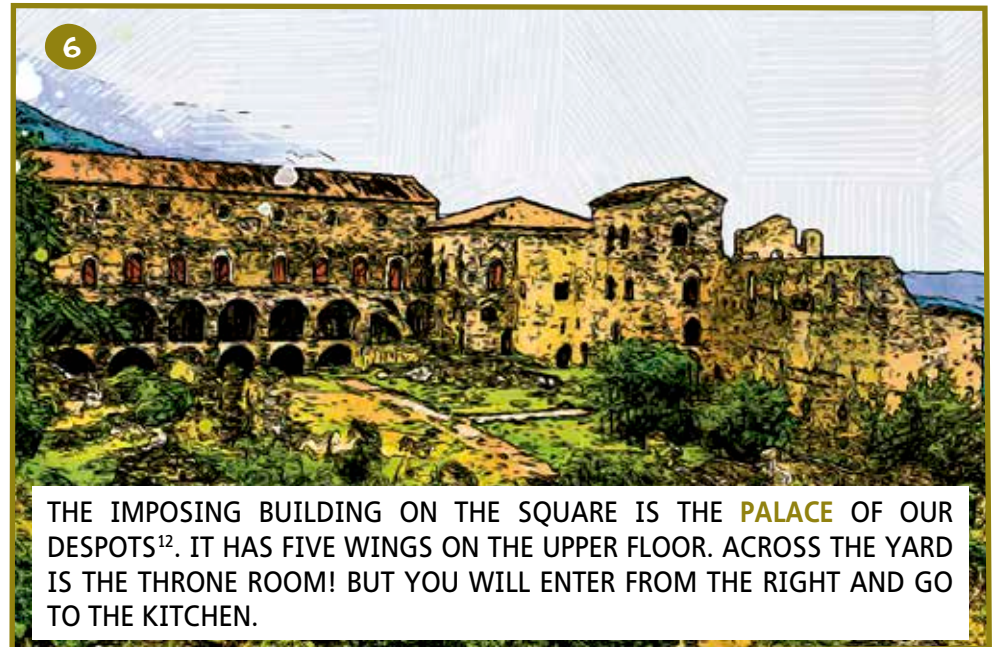


# ... with the cook Irene!



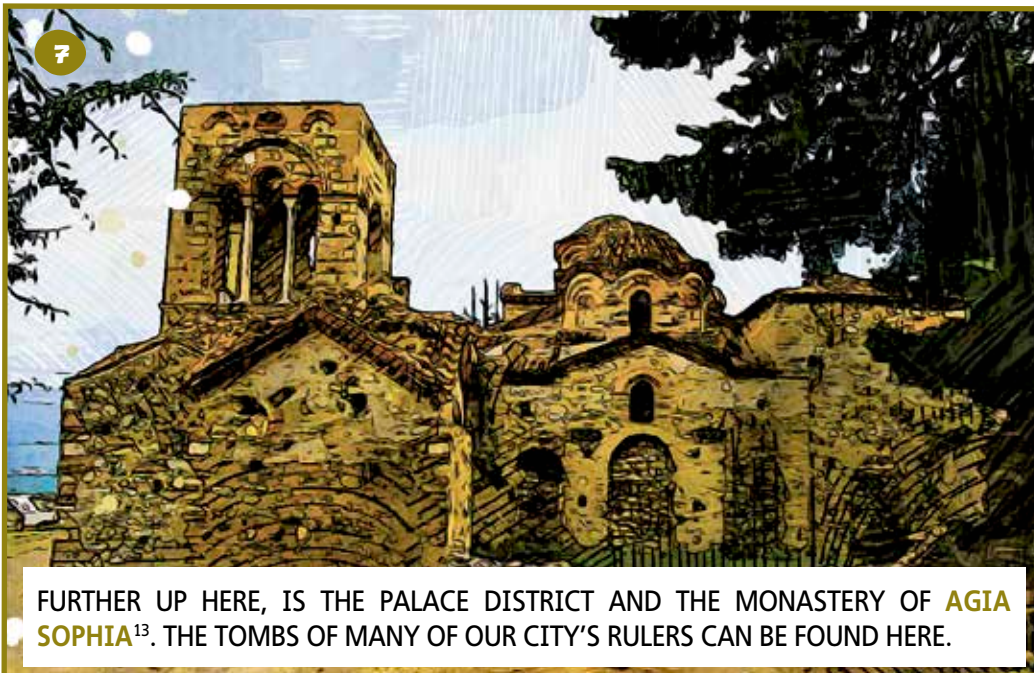
5

WILL YOU UNLOAD SUPPLIES IN THE PALACES AS WELL? DON'T WORRY, WE'LL GO UP THE MAIN ROAD TO THE BIG SQUARE OF THE UPPER CITY!  
THE DONKEYS WITH THEIR GOODS PASS WITHOUT PROBLEM UNDER THE **COVERED PASSAGEWAYS** AND THE BEVELLED EDGES OF THE WALLS<sup>10</sup>. ONCE THROUGH THE GATE, YOU CAN PRAY AT THE CATHEDRAL OF ST DEMETRIOS<sup>11</sup>!



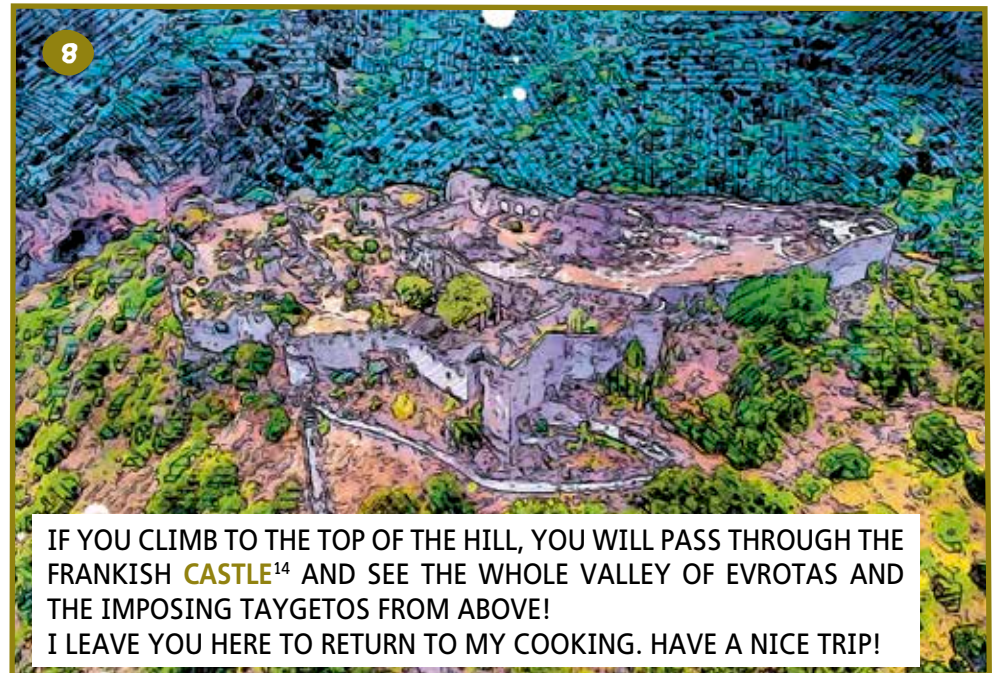
6

THE IMPOSING BUILDING ON THE SQUARE IS THE **PALACE** OF OUR DESPOTS<sup>12</sup>. IT HAS FIVE WINGS ON THE UPPER FLOOR. ACROSS THE YARD IS THE THRONE ROOM! BUT YOU WILL ENTER FROM THE RIGHT AND GO TO THE KITCHEN.



7

FURTHER UP HERE, IS THE PALACE DISTRICT AND THE MONASTERY OF **AGIA SOPHIA**<sup>13</sup>. THE TOMBS OF MANY OF OUR CITY'S RULERS CAN BE FOUND HERE.



8

IF YOU CLIMB TO THE TOP OF THE HILL, YOU WILL PASS THROUGH THE FRANKISH **CASTLE**<sup>14</sup> AND SEE THE WHOLE VALLEY OF EVROTAS AND THE IMPOSING TAYGETOS FROM ABOVE!  
I LEAVE YOU HERE TO RETURN TO MY COOKING. HAVE A NICE TRIP!

# The environment...

“And when he had sought in all those places,  
he found a strange hill, cut off from the ridge,  
approximately a mile above Lacedaemonia  
And because he truly wished to build a stronghold,  
he ordered that a castle be built out on the hill,  
naming it Myzithras because that was  
what the place was called; they made it  
a splendid castle and a mighty stronghold”

Anonumus, *Chronicle of Morea*, l. 2985–2991, 14th c.

The hill of Mystras in northwestern Laconia, at an altitude of 621 m, has a characteristic conical shape, which seems to have been cut off abruptly from the eastern slopes of the imposing Taygetos. Overgrown with shrubs, cypresses and many endemic plants, the hill rises to 300 m, in a perfect strategic position, with access only from the north and east sides, and offers an unobstructed view of the entire Evrotas valley and the ridge of the neighbouring Parnon mountain range.



2. W.H. Bartlet–R. Sands, *Mystras near Sparta*, coloured engraving, 1840–1850.

“ Joust-fighting Sun,  
omnipotent ruler of the wilderness.  
We have thirsted among  
the stones and the years,  
we have thirsted as we thirsted  
before the knowledge  
of thirst on stony lips  
two handfuls of water water.

Wild fig trees dwarfing  
the ancient ruins, domes of silence  
with red tiles, thorns between  
the clenched teeth of stone.  
The marble two-headed (eagle)  
in the narthex worn by  
the treads of years and years,  
barely opening its eyes  
to the last Byzantine twilight.

We were thirsty.  
And the tributaries of the Evrotas'  
white bare gravel, bare white bones,  
and the bitter laurels dusty gazing  
at the all-powerful sun,  
the tyrant, the unrelenting.”

Yiannis Ritsos, *Thirst in Mystras*, 1954.

3. View of the castle city.

# ... and the landscape

- Mystras towers over the verdant valley of the river Evrotas, amidst the lush vegetation of olive and orange trees.
- During the late Byzantine period, the agricultural products of the surrounding area, such as olive oil, honey and wheat, were stored here.
- It quickly became an important economic and commercial centre of the Peloponnese, where merchants from various cities, such as Venice and Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik, Croatia), arrived to buy various products and mainly silk, for which Mystras remained a major production centre even during the Turkish occupation.

## Green details

In Mystras, water was supplied through local water supply networks: the water from the springs was collected in the large aqueduct, and from there, it reached the houses and public fountains through clay underground pipes. In order to secure the precious liquid, rainwater was also collected in underground reservoirs, the *cisterns*. These were public and large, as in the monastery of Agia Sophia or private, small ones, in the basements of houses.

*We can see the monastery of Pantanassa, the castle and ruins of houses.*

# Mystras through time



1204

Fall of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade. The Byzantine Empire was fragmented, and the Peloponnese was ceded to the Franks, who established the Principality of Achaia with its capital at Andravida in present-day Ilia.



1249

The Frankish prince of Achaia, William II Villehardouin, builds the castle of Mystras.



1261

The Byzantines take back Constantinople.



1262

William II Villehardouin, a prisoner of the Byzantines after his defeat at the battle of Pelagonia (1259), cedes the castles of *Monemvasia*, *Maina*, and *Myzithras* to be released.



1270–1280

The headquarters of the governor of the Peloponnese, appointed by Constantinople, the so called *head*, is transferred from *Monemvasia* to *Mystras*.



1349

The Byzantine emperor Ioannis VI Kantakouzenos establishes the semi-autonomous *despotate of Morea*, with *Mystras* as its capital. He entrusts its governance to his son, the despot Manuel Kantakouzenos (1349–1380).



1382

The despotate of *Mystras* passes to the House of Palaeologos. The despot Theodoros I, son of Emperor Ioannis V Palaeologos, takes over its governance.



1443

Konstantinos XI Palaeologos becomes Despot of *Mystras*.



**1448**

Konstantinos XI Palaeologos is proclaimed emperor and departs for Constantinople. His brother Demetrios is appointed as the despot of Mystras.



**1460–1540**

Demetrios Palaeologos surrenders Mystras to the Turks. During the Turkish occupation, Mystras is the capital of *Sanjak* (region) of the Peloponnese.



**1687**

The Venetians, under the command of Francesco Morosini, occupy the Peloponnese and the city of Mystras.



**1715**

The Ottomans reconquer the Peloponnese.



**1770**

The Turk-Albanians plunder Mystras, which declines since then.



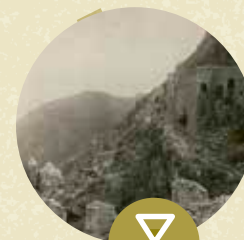
**1825**

During the Greek War of Independence, Mystras is torched by the governor of Egypt Ibrahim Pasha and is largely destroyed.



**1834**

King Otto founds the modern city of Sparta. Mystras and the surrounding villages are gradually abandoned.



**1953**

The archaeological site of Mystras is expropriated, and the last inhabitants move out.



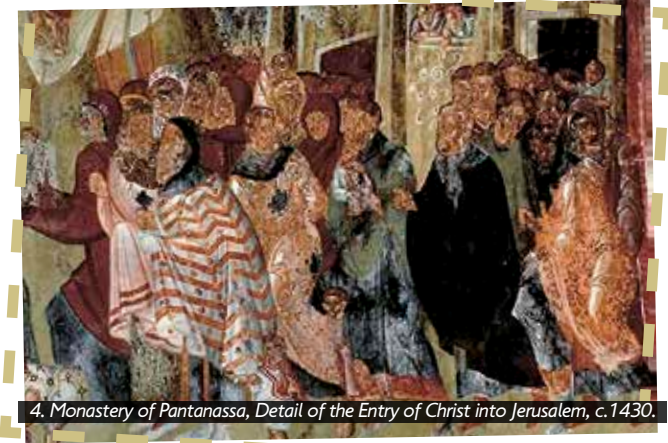
**1989**

Inclusion of the monument in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

# Historical figures through the ages

Mystras, a populous castle city, is the seat of the *Despotate of Morea*.

It is home to despots, lords and officials, eminent scholars, and also ordinary, everyday people such as merchants, craftsmen, builders and farmers. Over time it was inhabited by Byzantines, Franks, Jews and Turks.



4. Monastery of Pantanassa, Detail of the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, c.1430.

## POWERFUL RULERS



### Guillaume II de Villehardouin, (1211–1278)

The Frank prince of Achaia founded the castle of Mystras in 1249, putting under his rule the entire valley of Evrotas.



### Manouel Kantakouzenos

The son of Emperor Ioannis VI Kantakouzenos is the first despot of Mystras (1349–1380). He was a great sponsor and contributed significantly to the flourishing of the castle city.



### Konstantinos XI Palaeologos

The legendary last emperor of Byzantium (1449–1453), as the despot of Mystras (1443–1449) devoted himself assiduously to strengthening the despotate's defence against the Turkish threat.

## GENEROUS LORDS



Frangopoulos is connected to the renovation of the Monastery of Pantanassa.

The court of the despot includes powerful officials, of aristocratic origin and classical education, who were often associated with patronage of churches and monasteries, such as the *protostrator* and *katholikos mesazon* (chief minister) **Ioannis Frangopoulos** and the adjutant **Kaniotis**.

## ACTIVE LADIES



### Isabelle de Luzignan

The wife of despot Manuel Kantakouzenos had a dynamic personality. Her presence in Mystras has been associated with the foundation of the Perivleptos monastery and with many other important sponsorships<sup>15</sup>.



### Cleopa Malatesta

The princess of Italian origin was married to the despot Theodoros II Palaeologos (1407–1443). Even though she was young, she was highly appreciated for her mental qualities and intellectual culture. When she died important scholars of the time composed epitaphs in her memory.

## INTELLECTUALS

### Nikiforos Moschopoulos (1288/9–before 1315)

The Bishop of Lacedaemonia renovated the cathedral of St Demetrios and recorded on its marble columns the property of the Metropolis of Lacedaemonia, accompanied by curses for anyone who dares to usurp it<sup>16</sup>.



### Georgios Gemistos known as Plethon<sup>17</sup>

The philosopher from Constantinople settled in Mystras, where he was entrusted with administrative duties. During his five-year stay there, he became a leading scholar and important intellectual of the time.



### Bessarion from Trapezounta (1403–1472)

The student of Plethon participated in the Council of Ferrara-Florence<sup>18</sup>, where he advocated the union of the two Churches. Shortly afterwards he settled in Italy, where he became a cardinal and spread the Greek literature.

## DARING INVADERS



### Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (1417–1468)

The military leader and lord of Rimini in Italy stole in 1464 the remains of Plethon Gemistos and transferred them to the Cathedral of St Francis in Rimini.



### Francesco Morosini

The commander of the Venetian fleet conquered in 1687 the Peloponnese, which, under the name Venetian Kingdom of Morea, became another conquest of the Republic of Venice (1687–1715).



### Ibrahim Pasha

The Ottoman regent of Egypt led in 1825, during the Greek War of Independence, a large army of 35,000 warriors to the Peloponnese. He burned everything in his path and destroyed Mystras.

# A monument is born

The castle city of Mystras did not change much during the Turkish occupation, while it continued to prosper until the end of the 18th century, mainly due to trade and silk production.

## VISITORS FROM THE PAST

Most of the tourists who visited Mystras did not realise the historical value and singularity of its monuments. They came to Mystras in search of ancient Sparta, while many mistakenly identified it with the city of the Lacedaemonians. From the 17th century onwards, it became a popular destination for European travellers.



5. Bernard Randolph, Mystras, 1687.

Cyriacus of Ancona in Italy, was one of the first visitors to Mystras. Believing it to be ancient Sparta he bitterly notes that the glorious city of Lycurgus, the Dioscuri and Leonidas has become the wretched “Myzithra”!

The numerous travellers who visit the area in the 2nd half of the 17th century describe a city bustling with life. The

local Christian population coexists with the Turks and Jews who are settled outside the walls, in the Outer City, controlling a significant part of the city's trade. English merchant Bernard Randolph notes that Mystras is the second largest city in the Peloponnese after Patras.

At the end of the 17th century, the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi speaks

admiringly of the ‘three-storeyed full and solid fortress’, the vineyards, gardens, lemon trees and the abundant water irrigating the garden plots, but also of the cultured inhabitants of “Misestre”, who are “Romioi speaking elegant Greek”.

The philhellene Viscount Chateaubriand who visited Mystras in 1806 notes: “The Gothic fortress, which crowns these ruins, is also a ruin... Everything is deserted and abandoned. But the view you enjoy from the top of this tower rewards you for your effort to climb it”.

According to him, on Mystras there was also an inn called “The English Inn”, which offered foreign guests roast beef and port wine!



6. Vincenzo Coronelli, Mystras, 1708.

## RENOVATION- RESTORATION AND RESEARCH

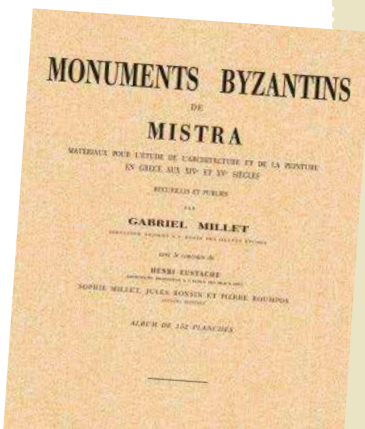
At the end of the 19th century, Mystras was a ruin.

The French Scientific Mission of the Morea made the first impressions of the monuments in 1829. Extensive repair and conservation work began at the end of the 19th century, while the years 1933-1955 restoration work was carried out on important monuments by the archaeologist and architect Anastasios Orlandos.

With the establishment in 1984 of the *Committee for the Restoration of the Monuments of Mystras* and in cooperation with the competent Ephorate of Antiquities, restoration work proceeded vigorously.

Especially important is considered the restoration of the palace complex.

The first studies on Mystras were published at the end of the 19th century. The work of the French researcher Gabriel Millet (1867-1953) is considered particularly important.



## STATE AID

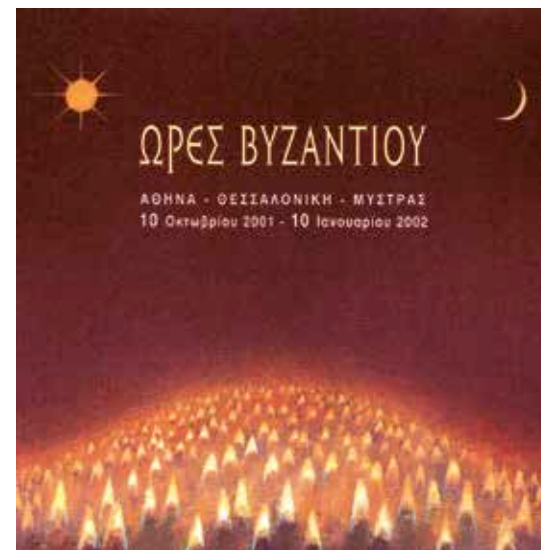
In 1921 the state, by royal decree, declared Mystras as an “significant Byzantine monument”.

In 1953 the site was expropriated, and the last inhabitants moved to the neighbouring villages.

The nunnery of Pantanassa is today the only functioning monastery in the archaeological site of Mystras.

## HIGHLIGHTING

Gabriel Millet was the first to establish a museum for architectural sculptures in 1895. In 1952 the museum in the St Demetrios cathedral complex opened officially.

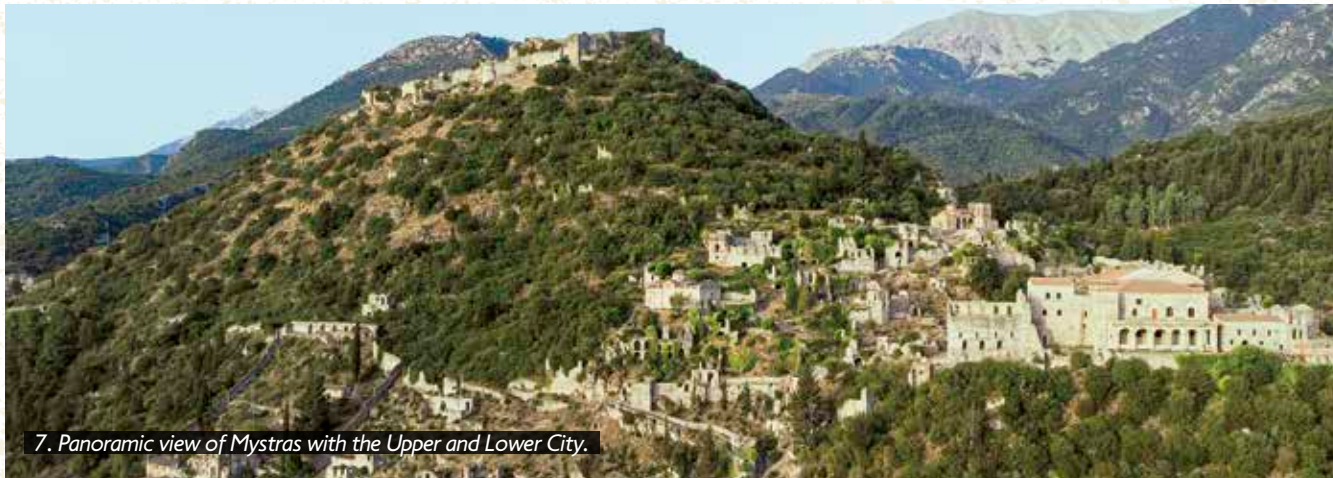


In 2001 the museum was reorganised on the occasion of the participation of Mystras in the great exhibition “Byzantine Hours”, which was organized by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

# A unique monument...

## “A dragon-founded and dragon-built castle”

Mystras was an important administrative, military and urban centre of Lacedaemonia for two centuries, with great intellectual and artistic activity. It played an important role in the revival of Byzantium and the fight against the Franks in the Peloponnese. Here were built strong walls, magnificent palaces, rich and humble residences, four monasteries and churches, a public aqueduct, fountains and cisterns, all unique examples of a great Byzantine city-castle.



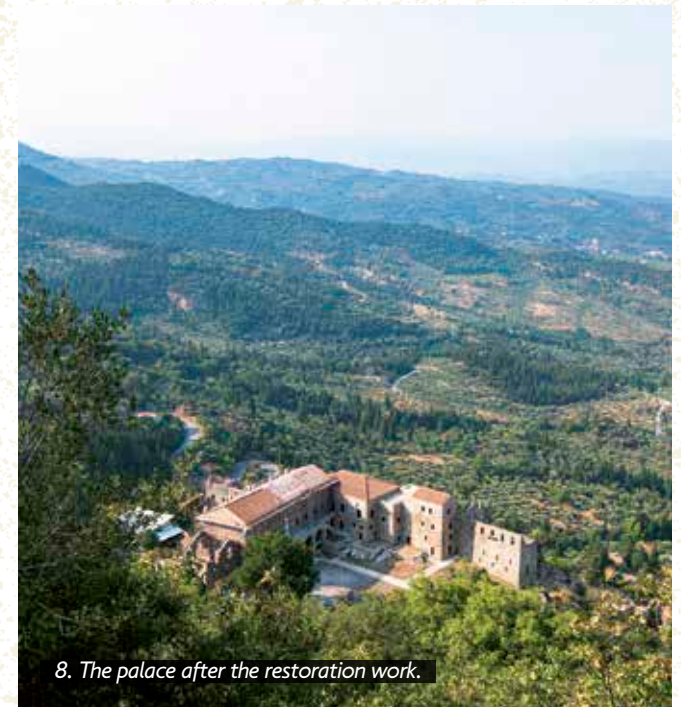
7. Panoramic view of Mystras with the Upper and Lower City.

## At the throne room

On a plateau in the middle of the hill of Mystras rises the palace complex, the seat of the despots. It is the most important secular building of the castle city and the only example of a Byzantine palace in Greece. The complex of buildings was remodelled from time to time to accommodate a variety of functions, such as the throne room, dormitories, dining rooms and storerooms. Similarly, the seat of the ecclesiastical administration, the Bishop of Lacedaemonia, is located in Lower City, in the imposing church of St Demetrios and the other buildings of the cathedral complex.

“Where is Sparta? I don't know it.  
I know Mystras. And the world-  
famous Poli (Constantinople),  
is now Turkish too.  
But through these deaths  
and through all this slavery,  
quietly softly and little by little,  
other lives and other escapes  
are sown and made and spread  
from the peaks to the shores.”

K. Palamas, *Twelve Lays of the Gypsy*, 1907.



8. The palace after the restoration work.

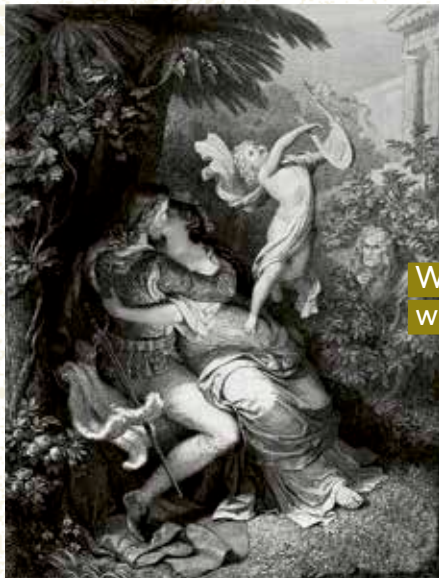
# ... with timeless radiance ★1

“Like a hagiography, Mystras was shining in the morning light, full of black cypresses, sunbaked churches, and invisible blue presences. Amid the plane trees, mulberries and willows of Evrotas, the eyes are affixed to it and no longer wish to go away. This holy hill, where Modern Greece was born, has all the manifest and occult charms to entice the most difficult and indomitable soul.”

N. Kazantzakis, *Journey to the Morea*, Athens, 1969 (first edition 1939), 276.

## An organised state

Mystras is developed in three residential zones. A strongly fortified enclosure with dense towers defines each zone. At the top rises the acropolis, the castle built by the Franks. Next is the Upper City (Ano Chora) enclosure with the complex of the palace and the luxurious mansions. The third enclosure, lower down, protects the Lower City (Kato Chora), with residences and the metropolis. Outside the walls, at the foot of the hill, lies the Outer City (Exo Chora), of which very few buildings remain today. The main road, the Mesi Odos, ran through the Upper City, from the Gate of Monemvasia to the Gate of Nafplio, while dense and narrow cobbled streets ran through the entire city.



Wilhelm von Kaulbach depicts Faust and Helen with their son Euphorion, in a card postal of the 19th c.



9. The monastery of Perivleptos.



10. The Gate of Monemvasia.

“Over there, a bold race... built an impregnable castle...”<sup>19</sup>

Mystras even inspired the great romantic German poet Goethe, although he never visited it! In the second part of *Faust*<sup>20</sup>, the homonymous hero and the beautiful Helen of Troy meet at Mystras, and the Byzantine castle city takes on symbolic significance, as the place where the classical beauty of antiquity merges with the chivalrous romantic spirit of the West.

# A unique monument...

## The “revered monasteries located in Myzithras”

Four monastic complexes are integrated into the urban fabric of Mystras, which together with the Cathedral, became important intellectual and artistic centres of the despotate, partly because they were favoured by despots and officials of Mystras<sup>21</sup>. In them worked great craftsmen, sculptors, painters and manuscript copyists, some coming from Constantinople, the great artistic centre of the time.



11. Hodegetria (Afentikon): The first church of the “Mystras type” (early 14th c.).



12. Interior of the church of Hodegetria (Afentikon).

## A new architectural style

The churches of Mystras combine elements of old Greek and Constantinopolitan architecture, often with elements of western art. Prominent is the so-called “mixed type” or “Mystras type”<sup>22</sup>, which combines the architectural types of the basilica on the ground floor and the cross-in-square-church on the first floor, with the roof formed by five domes.

“A silent painting on the wall can say more and be more beneficial”

St Gregory,  
Bishop of Nyssa, 4th c.



13. Church of St Demetrios, The throne preparation, 1273 –1283.

## The art of painting in Mystras

The brilliant frescoes, which “unfold” in the interior of the churches “like the pages of a precious book”, had a great influence on the development of Byzantine painting. The art in Mystras often shows the influence of ancient art.

# ... with timeless radiance ★

“We are therefore those to whom you are leader and reign, Greeks of the race, as the language and education of our fathers testify<sup>23</sup>”

Georgios Gemistos Plethon addressing the Emperor Manouel II

## Centre for Philosophy, Arts and Literature

Arts and Literature flourished in Mystras during the 14th and 15th centuries. The presence in the palace of members of the Byzantine imperial family, enlightened representatives of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, artists, scholars and scientists transformed Mystras into the cradle of the last cultural Renaissance of Byzantium, the so called *Palaeologean Renaissance*. The court of the despots of Mystras, which invited and sustained a circle of scholars, is compared to the ruling courts of Italy of the same period, such as the Medici of Florence. who played a decisive role in stimulating the arts and literature, laying the foundations for the Renaissance. The spiritual movement in Mystras peaked when the great philosopher Georgios Gemistos Plethon moved there and established his school at the beginning of the 15th century.



14. Manuscript codex. Museum of Mystras.

The famous codicographer Manouel Tzykandylis from Constantinople lived in Mystras in the years 1362–1372 and copied essays of Ioannis Kantakouzenos as well as of ancient historians.



The donation by Cardinal Bessarion of his enriched library to the Republic of Venice formed the core of the famous Marcian Library.



15. Monastery of Pantanassa: Gothic arches, palmettes (floral motifs), garlands and other elements show the influence of Western art on Mystras.

## “Written in Myzithras”

In Mystras flourished the field of manuscript copying (codicography). Manuscripts from Mystras are also preserved today in historical libraries in the West.

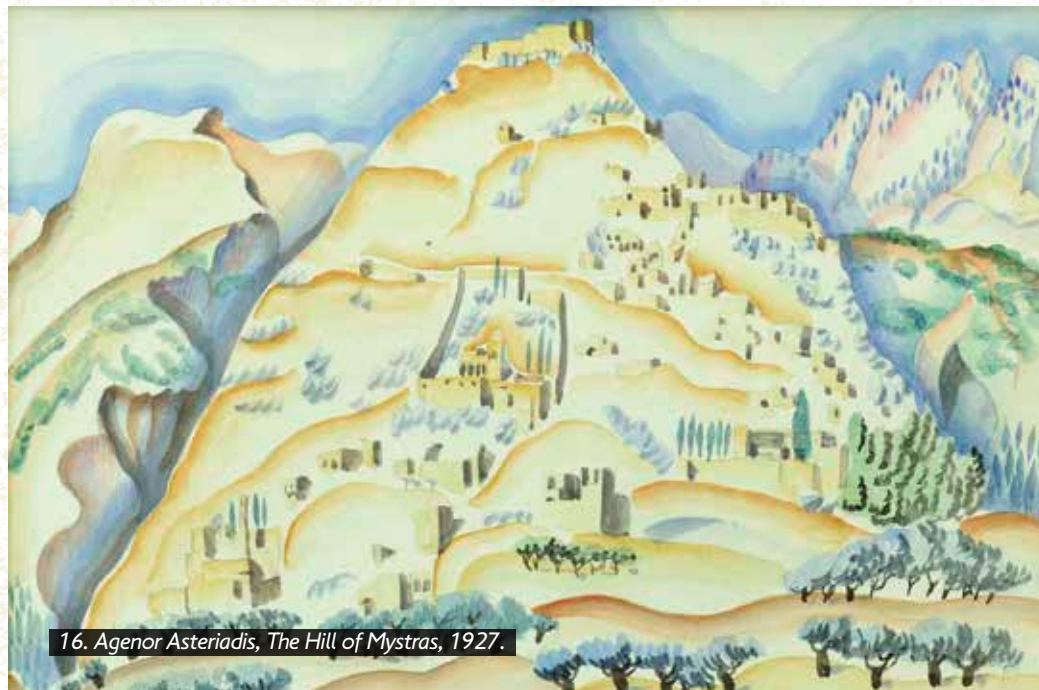
## Mystras and the Italian Renaissance

Many of Plethon’s students carried Greek manuscripts to the West or translated them into Latin and brought Greek and Western thought into contact, thus making a decisive contribution to the emergence and development of the Renaissance and Humanism<sup>24</sup>.

# A unique monument...

## The “Greek Pompeii”

Climbing the steep hillside of Mystras today, strolling through the cobbled alleys, and passing through imposing gates and humble passageways, one can contemplate the grandeur and beauty of the once densely populated castle city.



16. Agenor Asteriadis, *The Hill of Mystras*, 1927.

The despots' palace, the rich mansions, the imposing churches, the great monasteries and a number of other buildings, many of them restored today, stand intact among the ruins, testifying that Mystras “still lives, in the perpetual flow, a life always the same...”<sup>25</sup>.

“For yes, it (the city) is desolate and ruined, but it stands with all its houses, streets, arches, monuments, walls, same as when they were alive. And every nation that has passed through, has left its own footprints, and for this reason Byzantine, Frankish and Turkish are mixed up with each other”<sup>26</sup>.

“ They called Mystras  
Greek Pompeii. What nonsense!  
In Pompeii, everything is ashen,  
with molten lava and merciless death.  
In Mystras everything is continuation.  
A vibration of eternity that you can  
feel lurking, a drugged life.  
The waves lull it to sleep,  
the sun, the blue beauty  
of the Taugetos lulls it to sleep  
descending from above ”

Elias Venezis, “Mystras”, *Anemoi*,  
Athens 1958 (second revised edition).



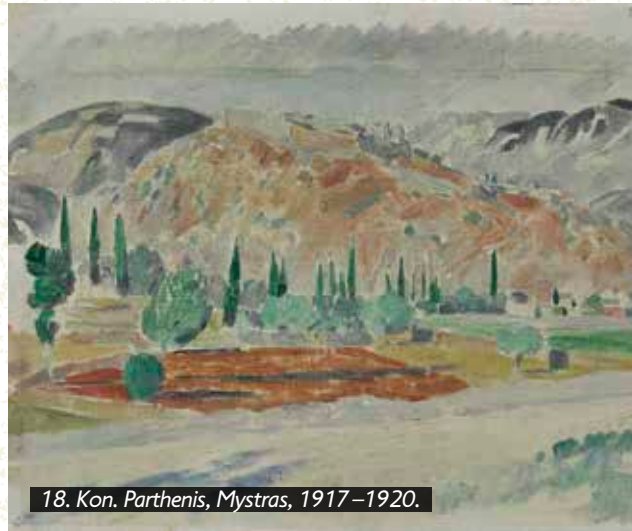
17. Nikos Hatzikyriakos-Gikas, *Mystras*, 1973.

# ... with timeless radiance ★ 3

“Our wanderings on the hill brought us to Despotiko... At one time, this palace would have been magnificent. Today, however, it is such a wreck, that we cannot even imagine what it was like when it was inhabited by the proud Katakouzenos and Palaeologos, who had brought to Mystras the luxuries and etiquette of the Byzantine court, their ladies with their precious silk gowns and lavishly ostentatious jewels, their courtiers and their bodyguards”

Kostas Ouranis, “Mystras”,  
Travels–Greece, Athens 1949.

The castle city of Mystras inspires  
Greek and foreign creators throughout time.



18. Kon. Parthenis, Mystras, 1917–1920.



19. Lykourgos Kojevinas, Landscape (Mystras), 1922–1927.



Filming of the “Dead City” (1951),  
written and directed by Frixos Eliades, music  
by Manos Hatzidakis and starring Irini Pappa.  
The film was screened at the Cannes Film Festival.



20. Snapshot from the fair, 1967.

## The centuries-old fair of Mystras

On August 29, in celebration of Saint John the Baptist, a great fair is organised with roots that probably go back to the 14th century.

In the 18th century, this was the largest trade fair in the Peloponnese, lasting a week and hosting the main trade in silk and felted textiles.

In the early 1950s, it was revived including also a variety of attractions, such as amusement parks, fakirs, acrobats, etc.

# Monumental dialogues



GREECE

## Tiryns



The Mycenaean acropolis of the 13th c. BC is divided into two walled sections, the Upper Acropolis with the palace of the ruler (anaktas), and the Lower Acropolis, with the residences and workshops.



ITALY

## Florence



The city of the House of Medici was a great intellectual and artistic centre during the 15th and 16th centuries, and is considered the cradle of the Italian Renaissance.



GREECE

## Geraki Castle

The “little Mystras”, as it has been called, was founded by the Franks on Mount Paronias. It includes a strong castle and a settlement outside the walls.

ETHIOPIA



## Fasil Ghebbi



The castle city of the 16th and 17th-century in the Gondar region was the residence of the Ethiopian emperor. The fortified complex includes palaces, monasteries, churches and buildings with Indo-Arabic and Western influences.

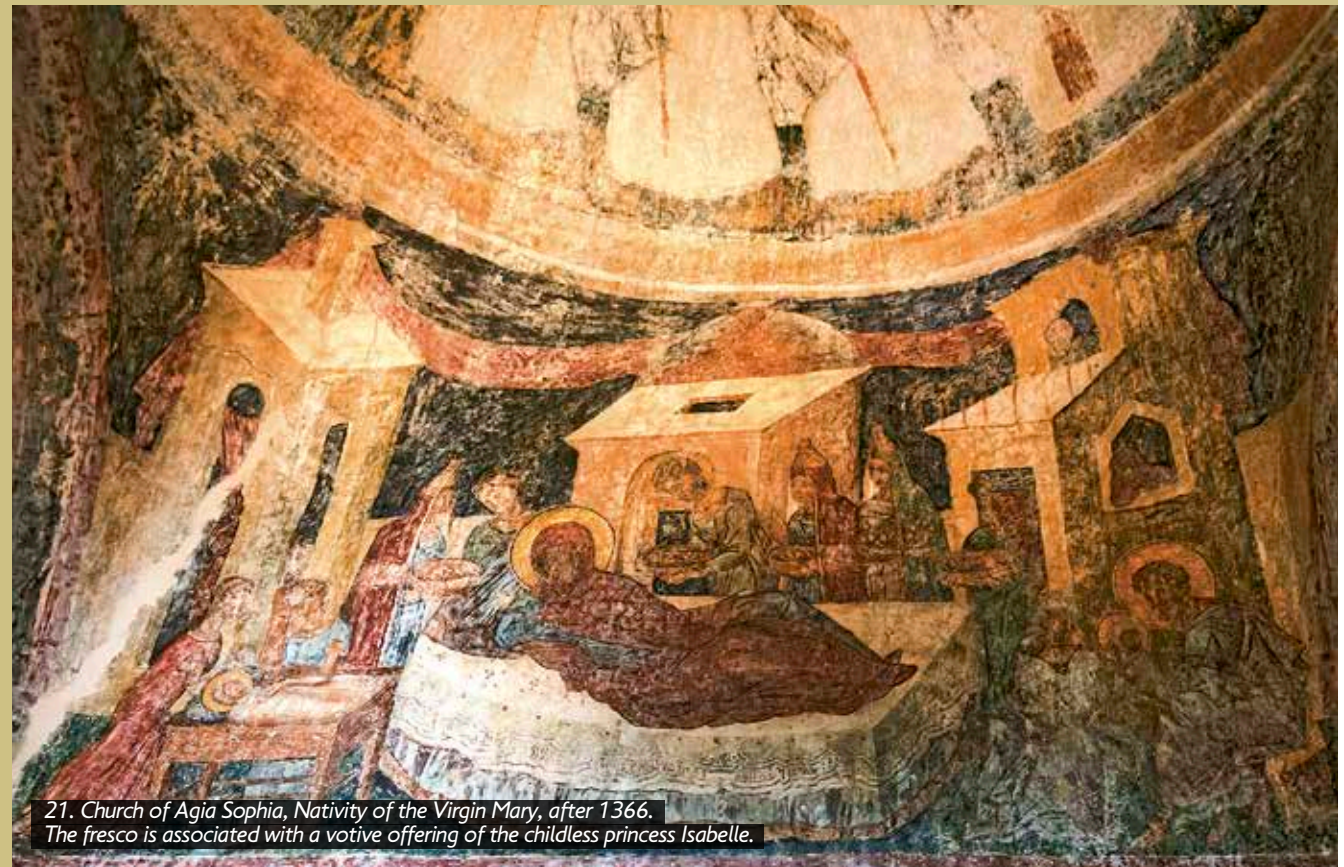
# A message today...

“virtuous and kind...”

In the Byzantine period, the position of women was limited to the family circle: their destination was marriage and motherhood. However, with the rise of the aristocracy from the 11th c. onwards, women often obtain a high level of education and develop a significant economic and political activity.

Typical examples in Mystras are the three princesses of western origin Isabelle de Luzignan, Bartolomé Acciaiuoli<sup>27</sup> and Cleopa Malatesta, who possessed great wealth and whose dynamic personalities were highly influential in shaping the despotate's policies.

In the portraits or funerary portraits in the churches of Mystras, women of the ruling class are depicted together with their husbands or other members of their families. Precious fabrics and jewellery, that have been brought to light from excavations in Mystras, reveal their elegance and are both an indication and a display of wealth and luxury.



21. Church of Agia Sophia, Nativity of the Virgin Mary, after 1366.  
The fresco is associated with a votive offering of the childless princess Isabelle.

## ... for a better tomorrow!

Goals 2030 >



**5** GENDER  
EQUALITY



Achieve gender equality and empower all girls and women.

1. According to a theory, this was the name of the site before the castle was built, perhaps because of the owner of some land there, who was either called Myzithras, or worked as a cheese maker-seller. According to another interpretation, it got its name because the shape of the hill resembles the well-known cheese.

2. *The chronicle of the Morea*, l.1. The long text (Greek text in verse), the work of an anonymous 14th-c. chronicle writer, narrates the conquest of the Peloponnese by the Franks. It is considered the most important source for the feudal organisation and history of the principality of Achaia in the Peloponnese.

3. According to the traveller Evliya Çelebi. The excessive number shows how important the fair was for the Peloponnese.

4. Our story is inspired by the rich banquets of the Palaeologean rulers, that were an opportunity for impressing and showing off, as they included a variety of meats and exotic dishes presented strikingly. Evidence is drawn from Byzantine depictions (frescos) of secular or religious banquets.

5. The name of Nafplion in Byzantine times. From 1388 or 1389, Nafplion becomes a Venetian possession with an important commercial role, where a variety of products were traded, including spices imported by the Venetians from Egypt.

6. In the southernmost part of the Lower City, a mansion of impressive dimensions is preserved, which is connected to the aristocratic family of Frangopoulos (second half of the 14th c.–first half of the 15th c.). It was built on three levels. On the third level is the *triklinos*, i.e. the main living quarters for the residents, with a large *iliakon*, i.e. balcony.

7. The monastery was built by the despot Manouel Kantakouzenos and his wife Isabelle de Luzignan, also known as Zampea. The frescoes here belong to the best examples of Constantinopolitan painting art of the second half of the 14th century.

8. Ioannis Frangopoulos, *protostrator* (military official) and *katholikos mesazon* (chief minister), restored the monastery, according to a written inscription in the centre of the dome of the western gallery and the four relief monograms on the epigraph of the southwestern column's capitals, as well as the six monograms on the upper part of the western side of the church. The *katholikon* of the monastery, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is built according to the mixed type and impresses with its proportions and particular morphological and constructional characteristics. The excellent frescoes stand out for their bold colour combinations.

9. For the urban organization of Mystras see p. 19.

10. The settlement's main road was the so called "Despotic" or "Middle Road", which started from the Gate of Monemvasia, led to the Upper City's central square and ended at the Gate of Nafplion. Traffic in the rest of the city was carried by uphill cobbled streets (alleys). The steep slopes and narrow cobbled alleys made it difficult for the inhabitants to move around, especially when transporting large loads. Free passage through private spaces is ensured by *diavatika*, vaulted passageways on the ground floor of houses. Movement

is also facilitated by the *bevelled edges*, cut corners in the lower parts of the houses, which widen the street in places.

11. The central church in the Cathedral complex is dedicated to Saint Demetrios, the patron saint of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos. It was built as a three-aisled basilica (1262–1272) and was converted into a "mixed type" church (first half of 15th c.). Some researchers believe that the conversion was made for the coronation of Emperor Constantine XI Palaeologos (1449) to take place there, in accordance with the imperial etiquette of Constantinople.

12. The palace is a cluster of buildings built in various phases from the 13th c. to the 15th c. It is the settlement's architectural centre and the despot's seat. The wider district around it was home to political and military officials, scholars and noblemen.

13. The Monastery of Agia Sophia is fortified and has an underground water tank (cistern). It was also founded by the first despot of Mystras, Manouel Kantakouzenos, and was converted into a small male monastery known as Zoodotes Christos in 1365. The church reconstruction with the NE chapel dates between 1348–1354. The *katholikon* (main church) has sculptural decoration and frescoes from the second half of the 14th century.

14. The strong castle on the top of the hill protects the highest plateau and has two enclosures, one inside and one outside. On the northwestern part of the plateau is the residence of the castle's governor.

15. Isabelle de Lousignan was the daughter of the Frankish ruler of Cyprus Guy de Lousignan and the Byzantine princess Theodora Syrgianina. She was born and raised in Thessaloniki and was closely related to the homonymous royal family of Cyprus. In texts of the period appears also under the names Maria or Margarita. After her husband's death, she left Mystras to claim her possessions in Cyprus.

16. The practice of inscribing official documents on the walls or columns of churches is common in Palaeologean times. In Mystras, apart from the church of St Demetrios, there are inscribed on the walls of the SW chapel of the church of Hodegetria (Afentikon) the 4 gold-sealed speeches of the emperors Andronikos II and Michael IX granting privileges to the Brontochion monastery.

17. Plethon gave himself this moniker to remind him of the ancient philosopher Plato, whom he considered his direct spiritual teacher. See also p. 21 and note 23.

18. The Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1439) was another diplomatic move by Emperor Ioannis VIII Palaeologos to obtain the help of the West against the Ottoman threat, through the union of the two Churches. Even though an agreement was reached between the two sides, it ultimately did not yield political benefits for the Byzantines, exacerbating the division within the Byzantine Empire. Through the moves to unite the two churches and the visits of the Byzantine emperors to Western Europe, Western scholars' interest in studying the Greek classics was intensified, since they were taught in Italian universities. They sought out or copied

Greek manuscripts, translated them into Latin and devoted themselves to their study. At the same time, the conflict between the followers of Aristotelian scholasticism and the free-thinking Platonists intensified. During the Council of Ferrara-Florence, Plethon's lessons on Platonism laid the foundations for its prevalence at the expense of Aristotelianism. The influx of Byzantine scholars to the West was particularly intense in the 15th c., coinciding with the emergence and development of the Renaissance movement.

19. Γιόχαν Βόλφγκανγκ φον Γκάιτε, *Ελένη, κλασικορομαντική φαντασμαγορία* (transl. Θρασύβουλος Σταύρου), Athens 1979. Original title: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Helena: klassisch–romantische Phantasmagorie* (1827).

20. *Faust*, the important tragic play by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (published 1832), especially the second part, is largely set in Greece. Searching for "beauty", Faust goes first to Thessaly and then to the Peloponnese. He establishes his kingdom in Arcadia, marries the beautiful Helen, and they have a son, Euphorion. With this union, the educated German's desire to identify with the "true, beautiful, good", the classical ideal, is fulfilled.

21. The monastery of Brontochion, the monastery of Zoodotes Christos (today's church of Agia Sophia), the monastery of Perivleptos and the monastery of Pantanassa. Only the monastery of Pantanassa is active today.

22. The "Mystras type" appears for the first time in the church of Panagia Hodegetria or Afentiko (early 14th c.). It has been argued that the first floor (the galleries) in the churches of the mixed type was intended for members of the ruling class of Mystras.

23. Plethon's phrase translated into modern Greek, «Λοιπὸν εἶμαστε βέβαια Ἕλληνες στην καταγωγή εμεῖς, τοὺς οποίους κυβερνάτε και εἰσθε βασιλεῖς, ὅπως μαρτυρεῖ η γλώσσα και η πατροπαράδοτη Παιδεία». The great scholar found in Mystras the right conditions to establish a philosophical school and to express his ideas, based on those of Plato. His contribution to the emergence of ancient Greek thought, and the Greek character of the Byzantine Empire is considered so important, that he was described as "the last of the Byzantines and the first of the modern Greeks".

24. Many of Plethon's students, such as Bessarion, Manouel Chrysoloras, Charitonimos Hermonimos, Laonicus Chalkokondylis, etc. after the Ottoman conquest of Mystras in 1460, fled to the West, mainly to Italy, where they gave new impetus to the cultivation and study of Greek letters.

25. Kostas Ouranis, "The fairytale atmosphere of Mystras", *Travels–Greece*, Athens 1949, 115–120

26. Fotis Kontoglou, *Mystras, Travels*, Athens 1992, 105–119.

27. Bartolomea Acciaiuoli was considered the fairest of them all. She was married to Theodoros I Palaeologos. For Isabelle and Cleopa, see also p. 15.

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