

Rhodes island

The island of Rhodes is located at the crossroads of two major sea routes of the Mediterranean between the Aegean Sea and the coast of the Middle East, as well as Cyprus and Egypt. The meeting point of three continents, it has known many civilizations.

Throughout its long history the different people who settled on Rhodes left their mark in all aspects of the island's culture: art, language, architecture. Its strategic position brought to the island great wealth and made the city of Rhodes one of the leading cities of the ancient Greek world.

Rhodes is the largest island in the Dodecanese. Its capital city, located at its northern tip, is the capital of the Prefecture with the Medieval Town in its centre. In 1988 the Medieval Town was designated as a World Heritage City. The Medieval Town of Rhodes is the result of different architectures belonging to various historic eras, predominantly those of the Knights of St. John.



Rhodes today



Rhodes is the fourth largest of the Greek islands. It has an area of 1,398 sq. km, belongs to the Dodecanese group of islands and , has a permanent population of 100,000. Its shape is elliptical, and it has a maximum length of 77 km., while its greatest breadth is 37 km

The island's terrain is mountainous. Its rocks, which are of limestone and schist, form a mountain backbone in the centre of the island: Mt Atavyros is in the middle and its highest point is 1,215m, Rhodes has a Mediterranean climate, with an average temperature of 18 - 20", mild winters, and cool summers. It has a high number of hours of sunshine (some 300 days a year) and high humidity. There are no proper rivers or lakes, but there is plentiful run-off of water from the hills to irrigate the crops. The island's principal products are olive oil, wine, vegetables and citrus fruit.



Typical of its flora are conifers, plane trees, oaks, thyme, capers, cyclamens and many other kinds of wild flowers. Of its fauna, a kind of deer, the platoni, which lived in the woods from prehistoric times, is particularly associated with the island.

The economy of Rhodes, before the tourist boom, was based on farming and stockbreeding). The population, which up to the 1950's was very largely engaged in farming and stockbreeding, then realized that tourism could be more profitable. At the same time, getting to know and looking after visitors from distant lands suits the restless, sociable and hospitable character of the Rhodians. Thus the present population entertain more than 1.000.000 visitors a year - visitors who come to enjoy, with them, the natural beauty of the island and to learn something of its long history



Short history of Rhodes

In the Dodecanese, history starts in the neolithic period. In c. 1700-1600 B.C. the Telchines arrived in the islands of Rhodes.

Then, in c. 1500 B.C., the first Mycenaeans from the Greek mainland arrived.

The role of Rhodes in the history of the eastern Mediterranean begins with the establishment there of settlers from Minoan Crete. Later, around 1400 BC, the island was colonised by Achaeans, who founded the city of Achaea on what was later to become the site of Ialysos.



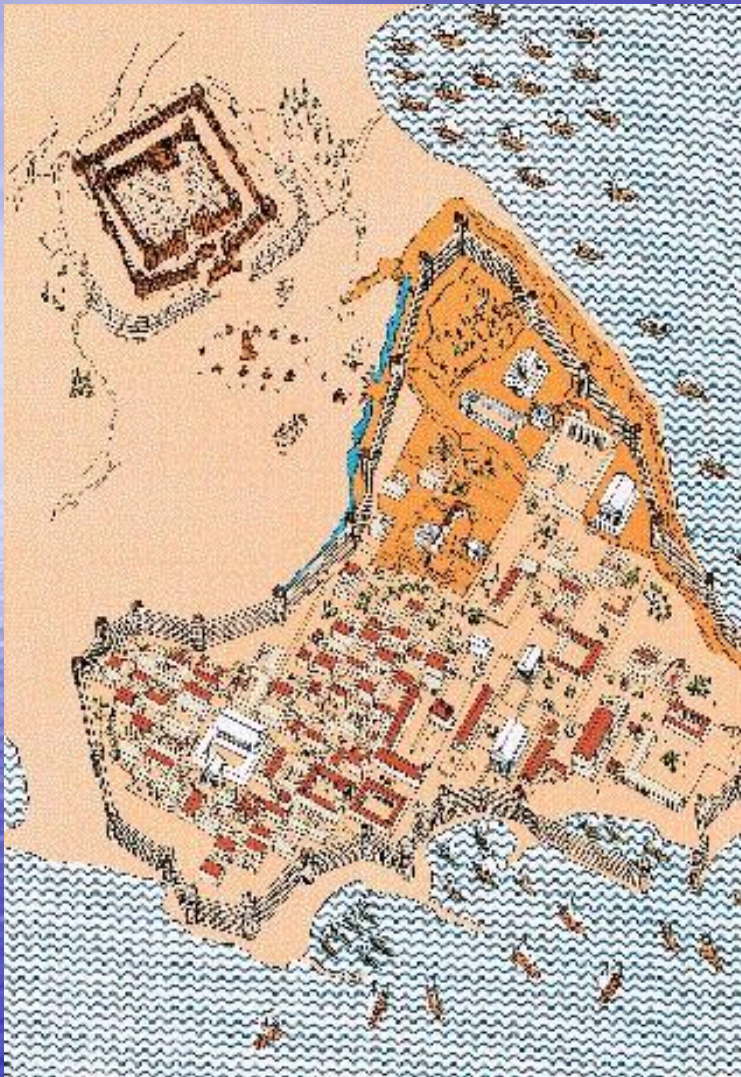
A Minoan warrior, armed with a light shield, a helmet made from the teeth of wild boar, a lance and short sword

In about 1100 BC the Dorians migrated to Rhodes under their leader Tlepolemos, who - according to tradition - shared out the island between the three cities of Ialysos, Lindos and Kamiros. In 408 BC, Ialysos, Lindos and Kamiros founded Rhodes city.

This was the beginning of a golden age, with Rhodes strategically situated on the axis of the East-West trade route. The island farmers and peasants of the past had now become sailors and traders.



The prow of a trireme, or ancient Greek warship. There are three rows of oarsmen below, and the hoplites stood on the deck above. The projecting hull below the surface of the water served as a ramming device for sinking enemy ships. The eye painted on the side of the hull was to keep away evil.



In 305-304 B.C., when the fearful Demetrios Poliorketes (the 'Besieger'), son of Antigonos I requested Rhodes' support in his war against Ptolemy of Egypt, he was given a firm refusal. Demetrios then focused his attention on Rhodes, besieging it with 400 ships, a cavalry force of some 40,000 horsemen, and a vast infantry equipped with siege engines never before seen. The siege lasted a whole year, but the city held out.

***A plan depicting the siege of Rhodes.
Shown are the strong walls of the city, the
fortified encampment of Demetrios, the battle
formation of his siege engines and the size of
his fleet..***



By 42 BC Rhodes had entered a period of decline, and it was easily captured by the Roman general Cassius, who carried off many of its statues and other art treasures.

In the centuries, which succeeded, invader followed invader and all left their traces: Persians, Saracens, and Genoese

The Winged Victory of Samothrace (today in the Louvre Museum, Paris), was the creation of three Rhodian sculptors: Agesandros, Polydoros and Athenodoro. It was dedicated to the Great Gods (the so-called Kabeiroi) and their sanctuary in Samothrace in 190 B.C



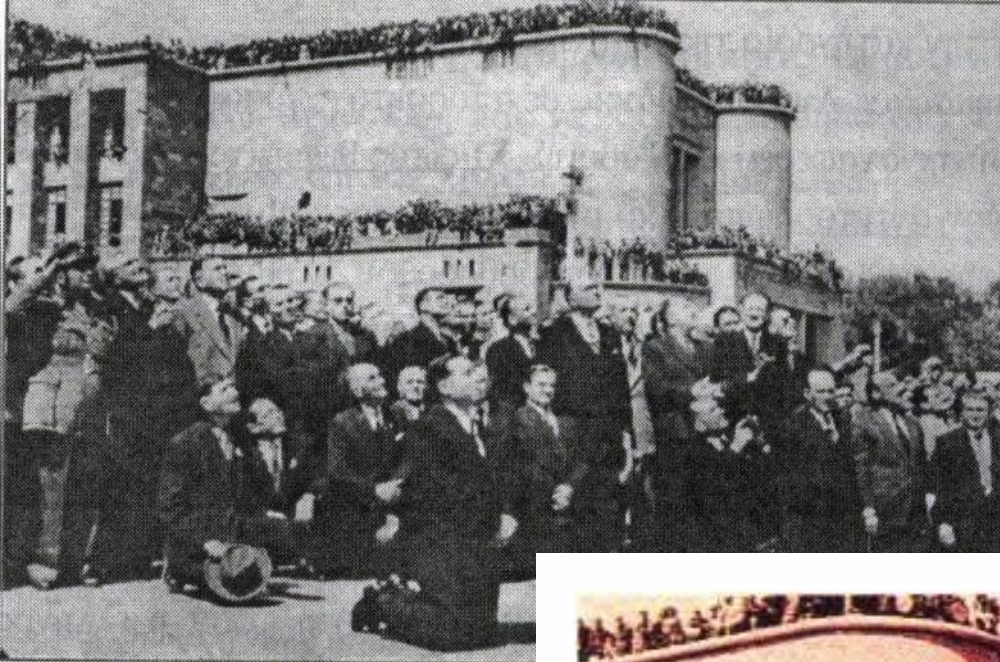
The Knights of St John of Jerusalem (14th century.)



In 1309 a Genoese adventurer, to whom the Byzantine emperor had given Rhodes as a feudal property, or fief, sold the island to the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, who then quickly spread their control across the islands of the Dodecanese.

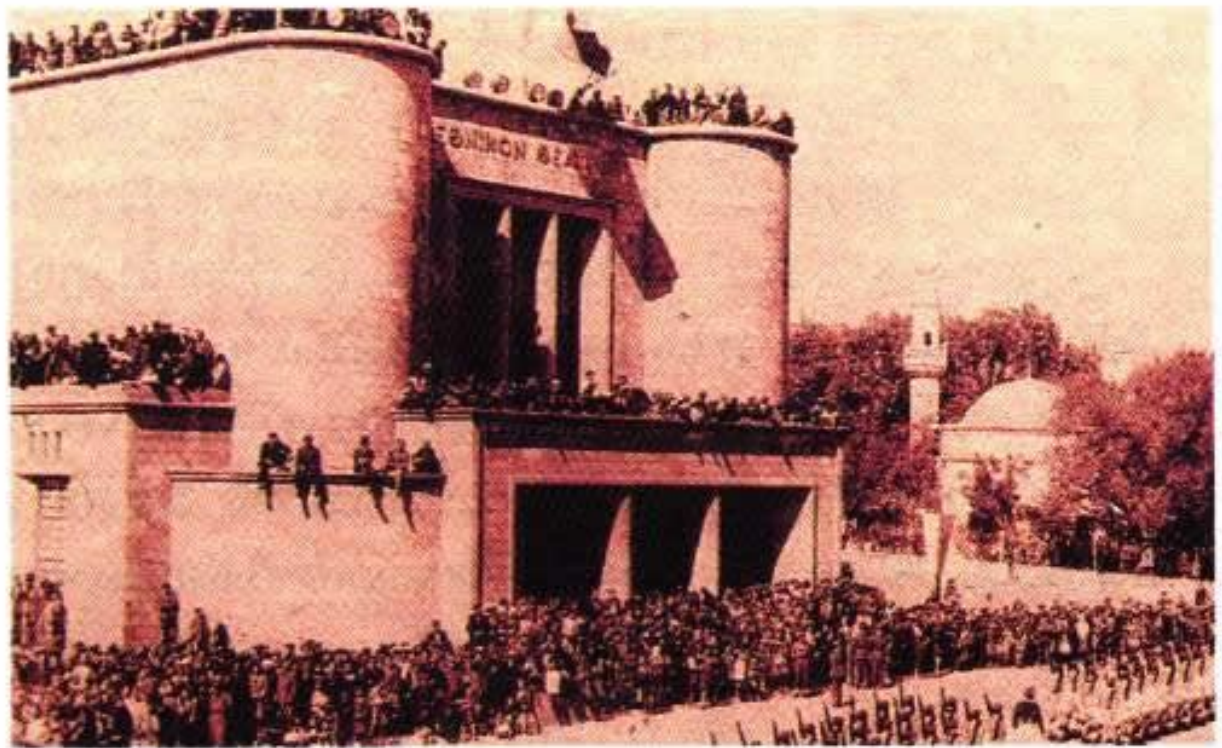
The knights stayed in Rhodes for almost two centuries, leaving marked traces and giving the particular medieval atmosphere, which we can discern even today, with its strong walls, gates, churches, hospices, inns, and magnificent palaces.

In 1453 the city of Constantinople fell to Mehmet the Conqueror. Rhodes now braced itself for the onslaught of the Ottoman Turks



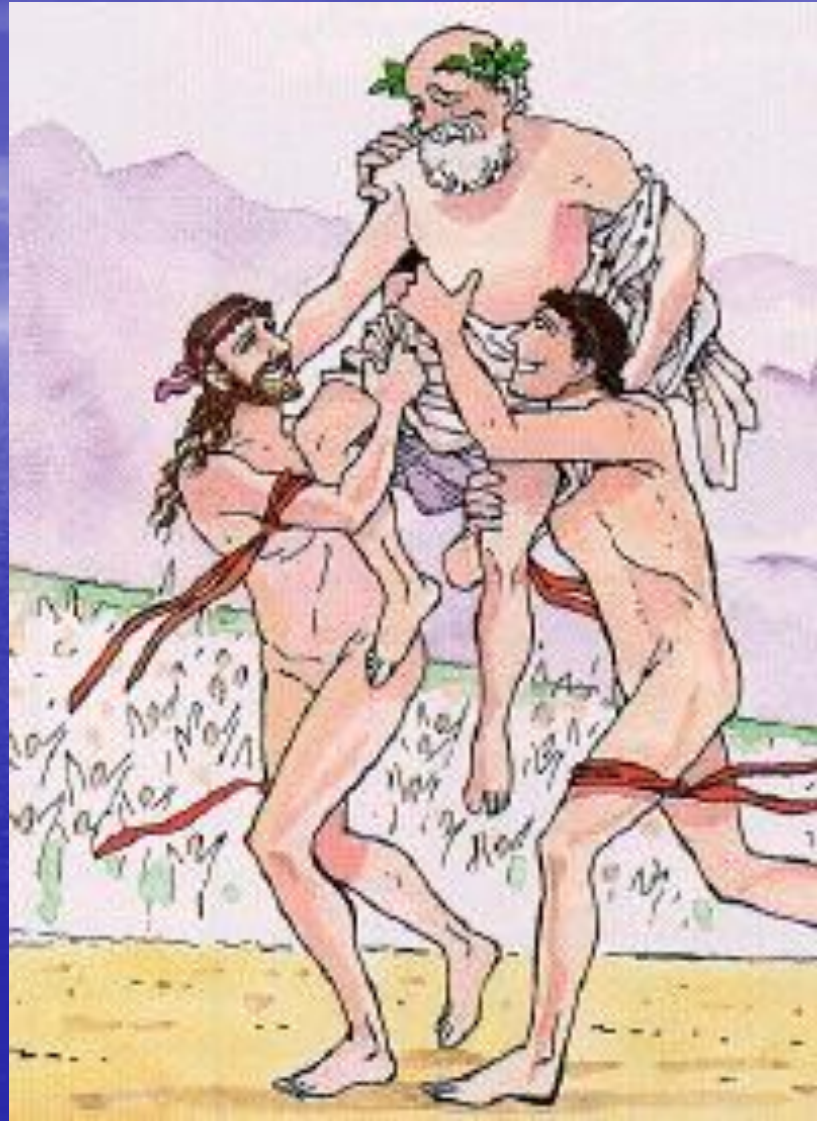
The Turks occupied Rhodes until 1912. The islands then passed to Italy, which acted like a liberator at first but eventually proved to be a harsh oppressor. It was not until 1945, after a hard struggle, that the islands were liberated, and after two years under British administration they were officially united with Greece on 7 March 1948

***Celebrations for the
union of the
Dodecanese with
Greece in 1948***

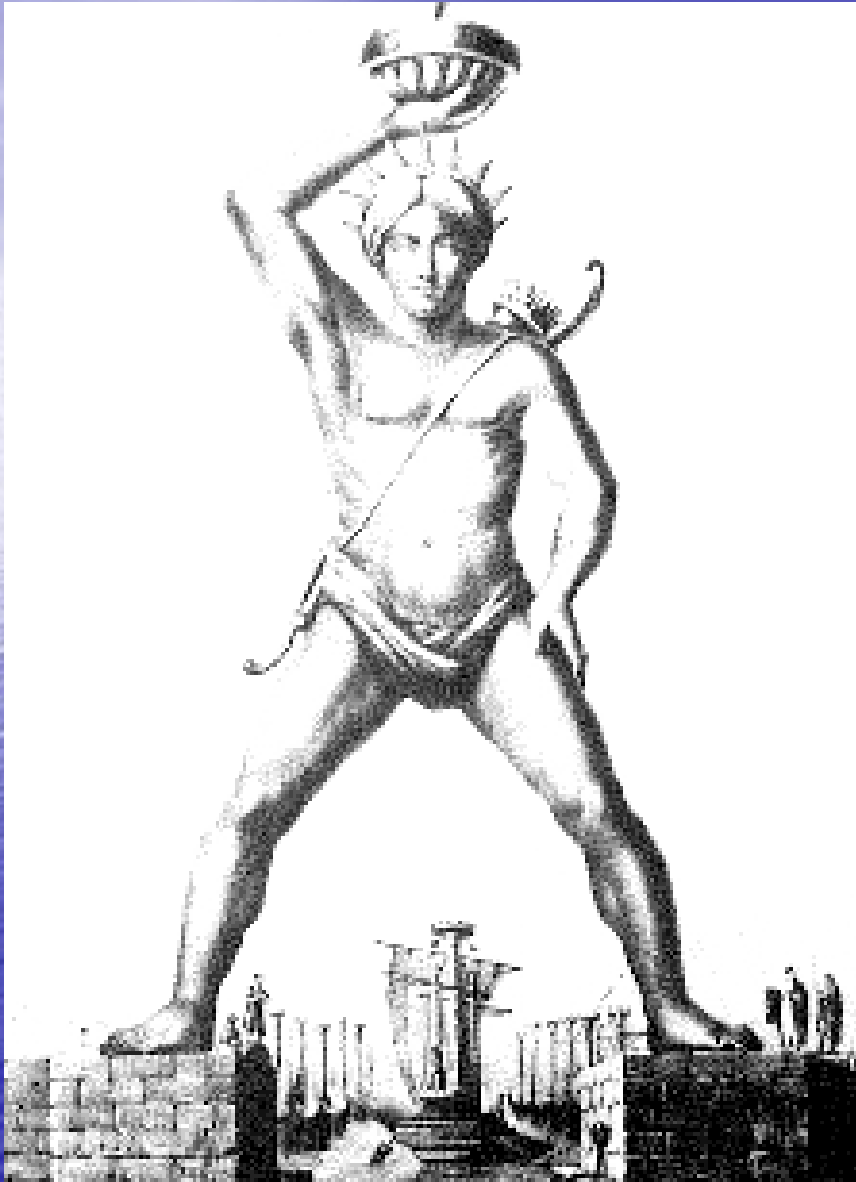


Diagoras of Rhodes

Diagoras of Rhodes was one of the most fortunate of citizens. He won a trophy in the Olympic Games in 464 B.C., and lived to see his sons, Damagetos and Akousialos, likewise become Olympic champions in 448 B.C. Indeed, when the two sons lifted him onto their shoulders (in order to show that they owed their victory to their father) and carried him around the stadium at Olympia, it is recorded that a Spartan shouted out to him, "You should die now, diagoras, while you are so happy and fotunate! For you will never be able to live with the gods on Olympos!"



Colossus of Rhodes



The Colossus of Rhodes is usually depicted in this way. For structural reasons, however, it is very unlikely that a statue 31-32 metres high, with its feet astride the entrance of the harbour could have remained standing without further support. And yet its dimensions were so awe-inspiring that popular imagination and legend made it even larger.

The Colossus of Rhodes eventually collapsed in an earthquake 66 years later, and thereafter it remained a ruin for a further nine centuries. It was dubbed one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

In 654 A.D., according to historians, the Arabs occupied the island for a short spell and removed the fallen pieces of the Colossus: they loaded them onto 900 camels and sold them for their bronze and iron in the East.