

LESVOS

«A journey back in time»



Historical times



«A journey back in time»



Modern times



REGION OF
NORTH AEGEAN
REGIONAL UNIT
OF LESVOS



European Union
European Regional Development Fund



Co-financed by Greece
and the European Union

Municipality
of Lesvos

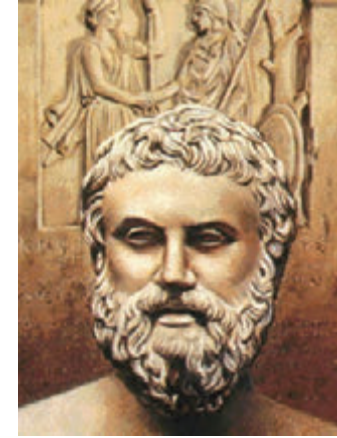


Spanning across an area of 1,624 square kilometers, situated next to Asia Minor, with two mountains of the same height, and two distinctive bays that give it its unique shape, Lesvos has always been a bridge of civilizations, which left uncountable scars on the island.

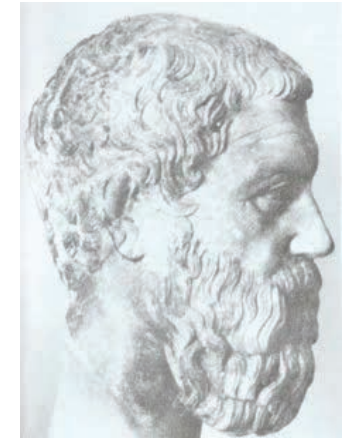
It was justifiably given the name "Island Continent", given that it was divided between Europe and the historical paths of the East. Peoples with different languages, customs and traditions that changed history. Its people's hard work is scattered throughout the world, while the names of personalities that made the island known spring up from the foundations of its cultural heritage.



Sappho



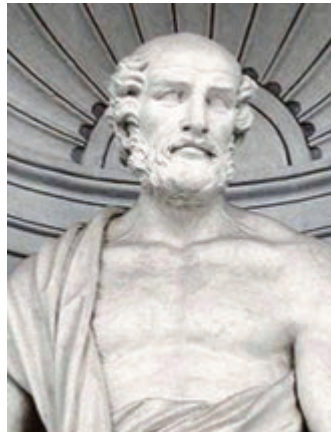
*Pittacus of Mytilene,
one of the 7 wise men*



Alkaios



Arion of Mithymna



*Theophrastus of Eresus,
the father of botany*



*Terpander of Antissa,
the father of music*

Names such as Sappho, Alkaios, Pittacus, Theophrastus, Terpander, Arion, Myrivilis, Venezis, Elytis, and the "madman" Theophilus. Today, the island continues to sail in the Aegean Sea having its permanent residents, approximately 90,000, as its crew.

The Prehistoric Times

Evidence of human existence was only found recently! In 2000, Paleolithic tools were found in Rodafnidia Lisvorio. In 2012, it was established that these first humans (perhaps *Homo erectus*), who probably hunted animals in the closed Kalloni Bay and in the region's rivers, date back to the Lower Paleolithic period (from 120 to 580 thousand years ago). For the thousands of years that go by, we know nothing. There is evidence of the great civilization of the Northeastern Aegean from the late Neolithic period (Cave of Saint Bartholomew, Halakies Polychnitos) that stretches from Asia Minor to Skyros and from Thrace to Samos! The vases are dark-colored, plain-colored, carefully crafted, polished with ascetic plastic or engraved decoration. Stone tools, spindle whorls, jewelry, bronze weapons and tools—among them a unique steel bracelet—, violin-shaped stone or anthropomorphic coarsely crafted clay figurines fill the museums of the islands. They were farmers, fishermen, livestock breeders as well as seamen and merchants. Their centers were considered to be the Aegean's first urban areas, possibly where joint decisions were taken (parliament of Poliochni). Between 1928 and 1935, the archaeologist W. Lamb proceeds with excavations in Kanoni, Thermi, which was the first urban center! In 2005, the Ephorate of Antiquities "resurfaces" the settlement, which is now open to the public. This is a coastal "city", with approximately 1,200 inhabitants at its peak that evolved in five phases, from 3000 BC to 2400 BC. During this period, more coastal cities and numerous small fortified agricultural and stockbreeding settlements appear at higher altitudes on the island (more than 100 such 'villages' have been discovered). It is not known what language they spoke, nor do we have script samples. There is evidence of a permanent settlement in the bay of Gera from 1600-1200 BC. Two more cities reappear in Thermi from 1400 - 1200 BC. These cities were inhabited by the Mycenaean, who also appear in other parts of the island, such as Skala Eresus, Makara, and the lower levels of the subsequent Aeolian cities. Moreover, the city becomes an ally of the Trojans, since Agamemnon, wanting to appease Achilles, offers him women from Lesbos. Achaeans, according to Pausanias, have taken over the island, together with Penthilos, a genus (*Penthilidae*) most probably "found in Mytilene" when the Aeolians arrived. Thus, around 1000 BC, Mycenaean Lesbos is colonized by the new coming Aeolians. Their language—the same spoken by Sappho, Alkaios and used in the inscriptions—is referred to as Mytilena, Mathymna, Antissa, Eresus, Pyrrha and Arisva. The latter was taken over by Mithymna rather early, maybe at the end of the 8th century or the beginning of the 7th century BC. The cities divide the island into territories, i.e. in regions with adequate resources for survival.





Mytilene in historical times



Mytilene was originally built on the islet where the castle was later built and connects to the opposite beach by bridges. Surrounded by fortifications, the island has a port at the north and at the head of the city lays the sacred parkland of Aphrodite, whose hymn was written by Sappho or Psappha, according to the Aeolian dialect, the tenth Muse and the greatest lyric poet of antiquity. We are in the 7th century BC and Sappho declares her right to act and love, contrary to the orations of the gods and heroes. She teaches young women in her school and offers us the uniqueness of her poetic lyrics that glorify life and love. The other poet, Alkaios, is joining her. Both descendants of aristocratic families, perhaps of Achaean Penthilides. They are exiled for criticizing Democracy. Sappho is sent to southern Italy and Alkaios is sent to the political asylum of the great temple of Messes, in the territory of Pyrrha.

The geometric sanctuary of Cybele also belongs to Mytilene. People from Mytilene colonize the coast of Asia Minor and create the "Mytilene Seashore". In the 5th century BC, the city expands to the opposite shore, it is fortified, and it has two ports –the trade port in the southern and the warfare port in the northern, with shipyards that connect by the channel of Euripus. The theater is built during the Roman period, along with the imposing Roman aqueduct, with arches, underground routes and carved slopes for a length of 27 kilometers. This late Hellenistic and Roman Mytilene with the two necropolises (to the north and south) is filled with magnificent houses, whose mosaic flooring now adorns the new Archaeological Museum. There is a sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone, while Apollo Malloeis decorates the city's coins with his lyre. The great temple of Artemis Thermia, during the Hellenistic -Roman era, is surrounded by bath complexes, where sponsored games take place.





The city of Mithymna



Mithymna, the second city which usually has an oligarchic regime, will request assistance from the Spartans on many occasions, when the Mytilenians are part of the Athenian Alliance.

It occupies the location of the current day settlement, with an acropolis, a port – in the same location - and the aqueduct from nearby Lepetymnos. A water tower still stands there. Dionysus Fallin and his wooden figurehead – which was recovered from the sea-, the inimitable guitar player, Arion, who enchanted dolphins with his music, as well as the silver and lead mines near Vafeios and Argenos, from where medieval Molyvos got its name, were also mentioned. Prevailing on the city's coins is the figure of Athena from the ancient temple of Assos, which was the only colony of Mithymna in the Mytilene Seashore. In Klopedi, onto a Mycenaean settlement, there is the first temple with a vaulted sanctuary dating back to the 8th century BC, which is dedicated to a female deity (clay head). Originally, the sanctuary belonged to the territory of Arisvi. The sacred area is then passed on to Mithymna, after Arisvi is violently taken over by Mithymna. There are now two successive sanctuaries! The first was built around the mid - 6th century BC and the second at the end of the same century. In Archaic Lesbos, the unfluted columns, used for the construction of temples, were crowned by the incredible Aeolian Column Capitals. The place of worship – the sanctuary of Klopedi - , according to contemporary archaeological findings, belonged to Apollo; something that the local scholarly tradition attributed to Apollo Napaio. The western part of the island was taken over by the territories of two cities; Antissaia and Mithymnaia. These cities have fortified settlements and acropolises (Pachis Ammos, Xirokastrini, Ai Lias of Hunters), examples of resources management between their territories. The cultivation of wheat, vines (the island's Anthosmias wine is well-known), olives and olive oil (certainly from 300 AD, when it appeared in the registers of Diocletian), acorn, and alum, as well as fishing, beekeeping, and livestock farming were the inhabitants' main resources for survival. Olive mills (trapetum) and grape presses can be found throughout the island. However, the land belonged to the rulers of the time!



Ancient Assos



Mithymna



The City of Antissa



The city of Antissa is situated on the north coast, along the cape (maybe island) which was later occupied by the Castle of Agioi Theodoroi (Ovriokastro) and on the rear hill the walls of the acropolis are salvaged, in a unique coexistence of Lesbian Structure and ashlar masonry. The necropolis, the port to the east, as well as the excavated geometric sanctuary define its archaeological existence. This was home to Terpander, the great musician who founded the music school of Sparta and who allegedly invented varvitos, i.e. the seven-stringed lyre. He lived in the 7th century BC at the same time as Sappho and Alkaios. The city's occupation by the Roman fleet in 167 BC, and its destruction are a significant part of its history. After that, it became an unfortified settlement in the territory of Mithymna.



The City of Eresus



The outer western part of the island belonged to the territory of Eresus. The ancient city occupied the hill on the Seashore of the town. The acropolis, whose position was later occupied by the castle of medieval Eresus, the walls, its port –in the same location as the current port–, as well as its necropolis reveal its archaeological location. The pedestal with reference to Apollo Eresus proves that games took place here, as well as in Thermi and the sanctuary of Messes. This is where Tyrtamos, whom Aristotle calls Theophrastus, was born (372-287 BC). He was a student of Aristotle and the father of botany. The Eresus coins show Hermes wearing a petasus (a type of sun hat in ancient times) on one side, and wheat on the other as a reminder of the grain grown in the area.

Ancient Antissa

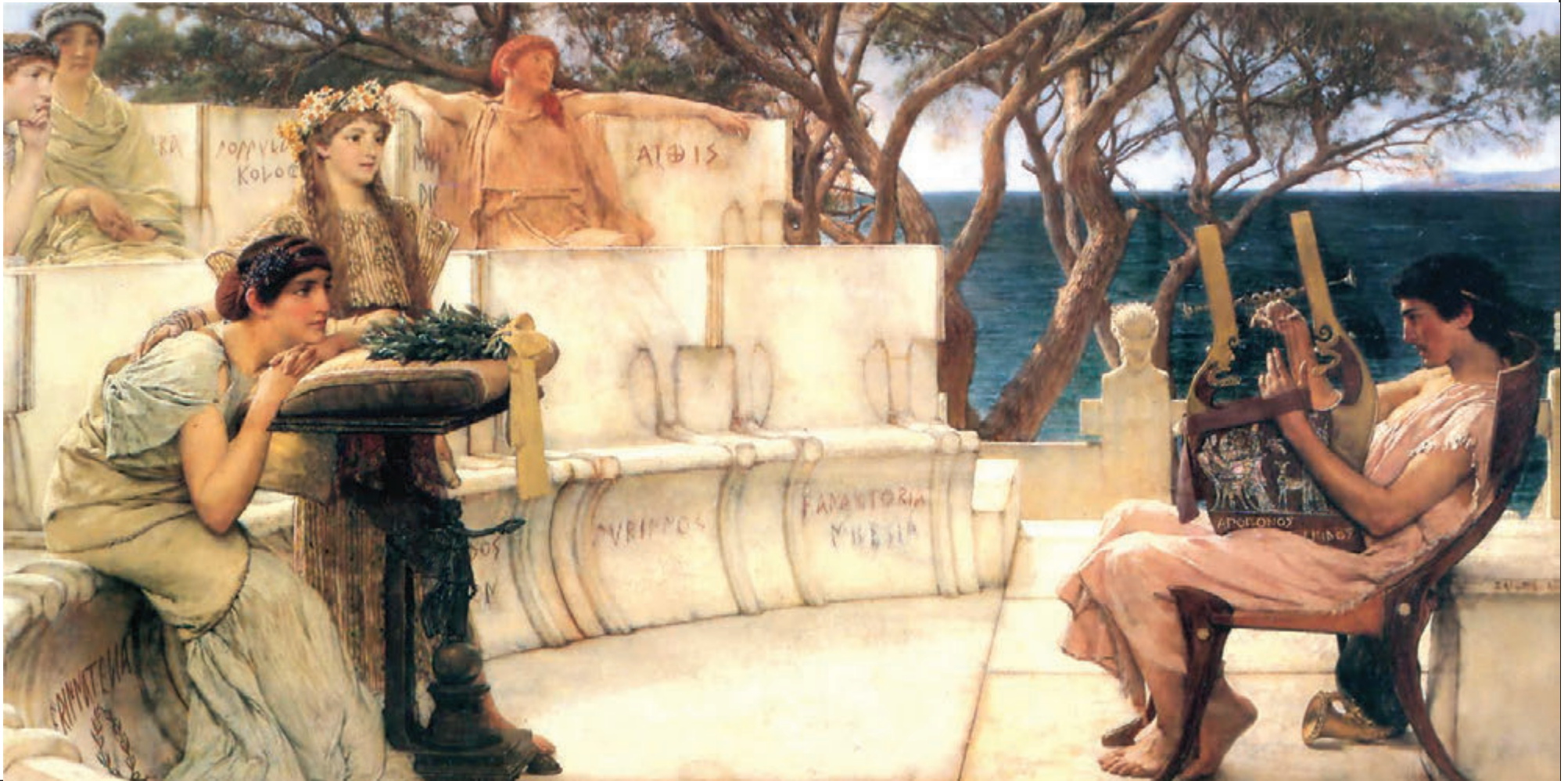
Eresus



🌿 The poet Sappho 🌿

Sappho was born in Eresus. This is supported by her figure on the city's coins and reference to her name.

At her school in Mytilene in the 6th century BC, the greatest lyric poet of ancient times taught young women about life and love. She declares her right to love and act freely, contrary to the oration of gods and heroes in epic poetry. Plato named her the Tenth Muse!



Her contemporaries, being jealous of her fame and reputation, made infamous comments – mainly through the Attica comedy - about her affection towards her students. Athena was also jealous of her pivotal role in the poetry, orchestral and philosophical schools of the city. Her unique poetry was preserved in papyrus fragments and the written heritage of later historians.

Ancient coin with Sappho



Sappho with her students



The City of Pyrrha

The territory of Pyrrha occupies the area of the former Municipality of Polichnitos. It is said that it gave its name to the pine forest (Pyrraia Mountains) and the bay of Kalloni (Pyrraion Euripus). It was built on a rocky peak (Achladeri), with Proasteio occupying its western side, outside the walls, probably along with a small theater. There are remnants of Lesbian Structural walls. The necropolis was situated on the western side, while the port (shipyards were discovered) was situated near the estuary on the eastern side. Based on reference made by Strabo (13.2), it was concluded that the city was destroyed by an earthquake on 231 BC – which is somewhat controversial. It is said that Messa, one of the most important sanctuaries of Lesbos, belongs to the territory of Pyrrha. The land in Messa leading towards Kalloni has been excavated and is now open to the public. According to a poem written by Sappho, the Achaean leaders, Agamemnon and Menelaus, stopped at Lesbos and pleaded the Lesbian Triad – who later showed them the way back to their land. Alkaios continues, the Lesbians, “established a sanctuary so big and visible from afar, with altars dedicated to the Immortals”. According to the researchers (e.g. L. Robert), this large sanctuary

The Sanctuary of Messa



belonged to the Lesbian Triad, i.e. Zeus Antiaon, Hera, and Dionysus. In the mid - 6th century, the League of Lesbians is established as a political synergy for common problems. The League also issues its own coins. A grandiose pseudoperipteral Ionian temple is built on open - air altars and a preexisting archaic sanctuary in the 4th century BC and is preserved until the 3rd-4th century BC. Later on, an early Christian Basilica, which later became a post - Byzantine church dedicated to the Archangel, was built onto the ancient temple.



Hellenistic and Roman Lesvos



During the Hellenistic (death of Alexander the Great 323 BC) and Roman (Mithridatic Wars 88 BC) periods, the island's city-states continue to exist, but as members of larger territories with superficial autonomy, where trade is developed resulting in financial prosperity. Lesvos unites with the territory of Ptolemies, the League of Messa is reconstituted, and an agreement is reached with the League of Aetolians (214-213 BC) for immunity to Lesbian ships against the pirate forces of the former. The alliance of the Mytilenians with Mithridates led to the occupation of the city by the Roman general Lucullus in 84 BC, with casualties amounting to 500 locals, 6,000 slaves and merciless looting. Emperor Pompeius saves Mytilene from this difficult position, declaring it free during his visit (66 BC). During the reign of Diocletian, Lesvos belonged to the "Province of the Islands" and the island's first known cadastre -carved in stone- is preserved until today and includes many names of towns that still exist. The cultivation of olives, vines and grains prevails.

Mytilene's water supply came from the Roman Aqueduct, which was located about 26 kilometers away, several sections of which have been preserved. Its best section is preserved in the location of Moria (with 17 arches of carved marble). The Paspala section and the excavation under the pipeline, are also well preserved.





Byzantine Lesvos



We now follow the history of the Eastern Roman Empire of Emperor Constantine, who builds Istanbul in the location of the ancient Byzantium. Lesvos belongs to the emerging Byzantine Empire, to the historic and cultural Hellenic circle, always under the influence of nearby Asia Minor. For more than 1000 years it falls under the empire's fate, victories, defeats, and constant conspiracies of the throne, hosting many exiled leaders who fight for it. Christianity appears in the early- Byzantine era (from Paul the Apostle in 52 AC), and the two metropolises, Mytilene and Mithymna, emerge. Large paleo-Christian wooden-roof basilicas fill the island. The largest excavated, date back to the 6th century AD and have incredible mosaic floors, as well as baptistry and charitable infirmaries outbuildings. Mytilene is now restricted to an archaic island, and its big castle is constructed. Mithymna, which was renamed Molyvos, also has its own castle in the location of the ancient acropolis. There are about 30 medieval fortresses on the island. Small villages, just like in ancient times, cultivate crops and breed animals, but people's lives depend on the masters of the estates who control everything. Empress Irene of Athens is exiled to the island in 802 and dies in 803. Tradition links certain locations, such as the town of Vasilika, with famous exiles. The Monasteries of Ipsilos, Limonos and Myrsiniotissas were surely established during the Byzantine era, and continued to exist after their acquisition by the Ottoman Empire following the fall of the island. Furthermore, there are few Byzantine churches, such as the Virgin Mary Trouloti in Thermi (probably of the 12th century), Agios Stefanos in Madamado (of the same period) and Taxiarchis in Kato Tritos. During the late-Byzantine era (1071-1355),

the infamous Crusades end up seizing the city in 1204. The Genoese nobleman Domenico Cattaneo occupied Mytilene and part of the island in 1333. The Genoese Gateluzo ruled the island from 1355 until it was captured by the Turks in 1462. There were six rulers in total, that also dominated Limnos, Imbros, Samothrace and Thracian Enos, who further fortified and expanded the island's large castles – mainly those of Mytilene and Molyvos.

Virgin Mary Trouloti





Lesvos under Ottoman rule



In 1462, Mehmed II arrived at the northern port, bombarded the castle with cannons that he had disembarked from the ships and occupying the fortress, the island surrenders to the Turks.

In Lesvos everything belongs to the Ottoman Empire, and the land was distributed to officials and religious institutions. Only the assets of the Orthodox Church were preserved, due to the privileges from the Gate, which is increased in the form of pious foundations. The larger castles of Mytilene and Molyvos were reinforced and expanded, while the small Castle of Sigris was constructed in 1757. All the other fortresses were abandoned and ruined. The precious Ottoman tax registers of 1548 show an almost pure Christian population on the island that is primarily taxed for the cultivation of wheat (the island is self-sufficient in wheat for the first three centuries) and much less for olive oil and vines. The island is administratively divided into kazas. One century later, there is remarkable growth of the Ottoman population, which might have been the result of voluntary islamization (to obtain privileges). According to tax registers of the 17th century, olive oil is now primarily taxed. Mosques were built in almost all villages. In some of them, there is a rather large Turkish population. Kale Mosque was built in the castle of Mytilene, atop the remnants of a catholic church. Many fountains and public baths (hammam) were also built, such as the renovated bath of the Mytilene market. Today's villages slowly attract all the population of scattered settlements and the olive, along with its products, wheat, livestock breeding, acorn for tanneries (mainly at the western part of the island), and the shipyards (e.g. in Plomari) evolved over time, and became the main resources for the population's survival.

Yeni Mosque





The 18th – 19th century



After the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) and mainly after the equality of the citizens of Tanzimat (decree) of 1839 (and its ratification with the 1856 firman), the bourgeois of the island's Christians, which buys land, establishes the first olive processing industry, and takes over transportation and trade. In 1856, the first steam olive press makes its appearance in Mytilene (belonging to Halil Bey) and soon these will be spread across the island, eliminating animal - powered olive presses and approximately 260 watermills. Wealthy Turks live in large houses (konaks), which are scattered throughout the island, and have estates and olive presses; this also applied to the Greek bourgeois. The magnificent tower houses, remnants of the medieval fortified towers, were built followed by then old mansions that displayed the financial affluence of the 18th and the 19th centuries. Oil presses, soap factories, tanneries,

machine shops (manufacturing the mechanical equipment of factories), shipyards, commercial and passenger ships, belong to the bourgeois, while creating a wealthy working class that demands better working conditions. In Mytilene, given that the Turkish and the Christian neighborhoods are separate, the southern port is developed and the northern port is abandoned. Education is supported by the Christian communities with the appointment of teachers and the establishment of all boys' and girls' schools. This is when magnificent buildings, such as the main school building and the girls' school in Mytilene, are established. The Turks have their own schools – their best being the seven - grade Intantie, housed in today's grand court building.



The fire ship Papanikolis

Next to this building there is another neoclassical building that housed the Turkish administrative headquarters. Churches coexist with mosques, and bell towers with minarets. Before 1774 and mainly before 1839, Christian liturgies take place discreetly in small, single-aisle, paved churches, with barely any windows, but with remarkable Byzantine frescoes and portable icons. Some of them have been preserved on the island like valuable monuments. In some villages, such as in Sykamia, Halika Lepetymnou, and Kleiou, these churches are built in spaces with a lower height than that of mosques, usually outside the village. During the 18th and mainly in the 19th century, the Ottoman government started permitting (with firmans) the erection of today's big, usually three-aisle basilicas, few with inner domes and some with an elevated middle aisle. Excellently crafted wooden temples, perforated and some gilded, adorn the basilicas of the island. In some churches, dedicated to the island's patron Tarxiarchis, the frescoes of Tarxiarchis are not demolished, but turned into iconostases in the big basilicas. The supply of water for the community was a special ritual. The sponsor (Ottoman or Christian) -in the memory of a beloved one- undertook to bring water from a spring to the settlement or a certain street and to finance the construction of the fountain. Thankfully, numerous such fountains with their inscriptions and decor, either made of marble or from volcanic rock, have been preserved throughout the island. Events characterized as natural disasters include the "Great Frost of 1850" that completely destroyed the olive grove and the island's production base, as well as the 1867 earthquake that caused the collapse of many houses which resulted in human casualties. Moreover, Lesvos had many casualties due to the 1832 plague, and probably the so-called "Justinian Plague" hundreds of years before that. On May 27, 1821, at the beach of Eresus, a fire ship navigated by D. Papanikolis burns down a Ottoman two-decker frigate. The Turks in Mytilene retaliate by slaughtering about 50 Christians and hanging the imprisoned notables. The famous Mustafa Pasha Kulaksiz was the Governor of Lesvos at the time. The island remained under Ottomans rule for 81 more years, until 1912.



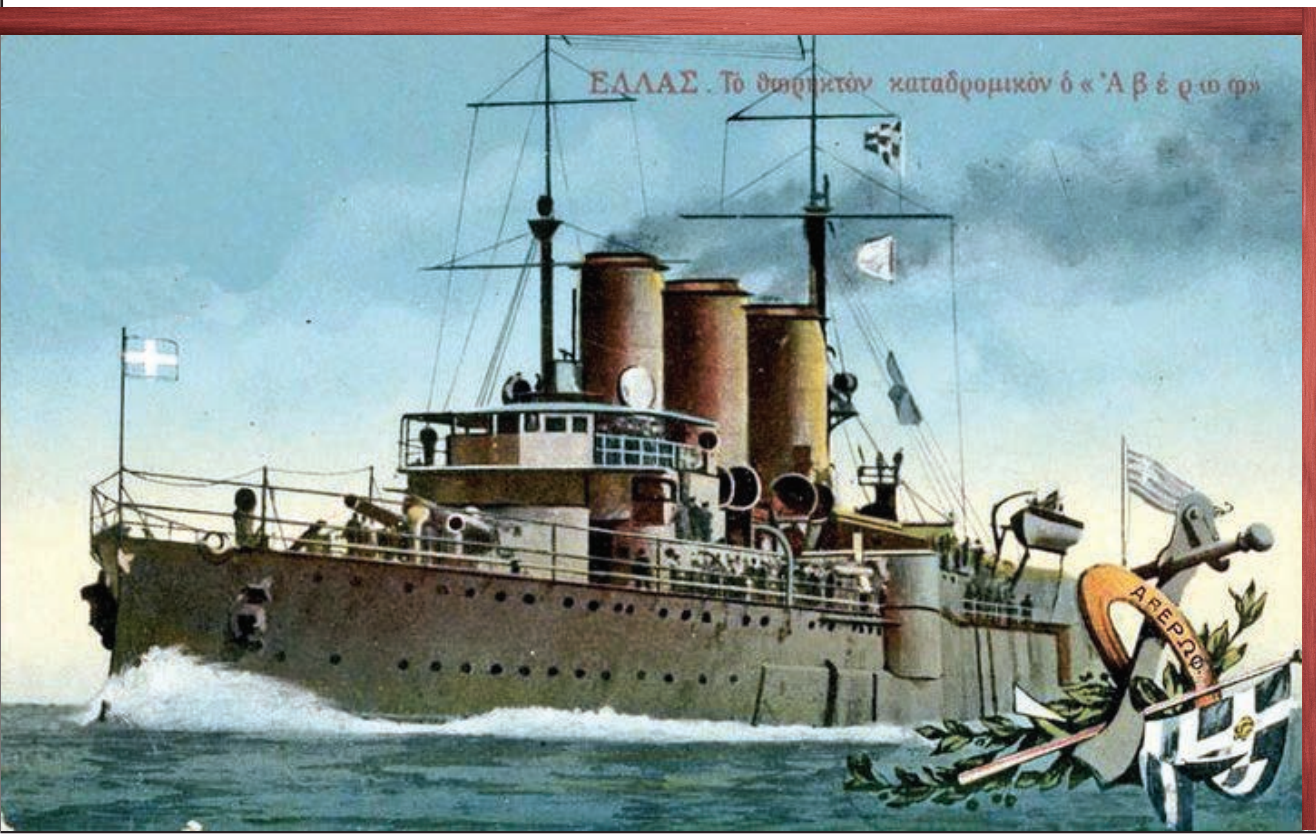


The 20th century



At the beginning of the 20th century, the Great European Powers start attacking the faltering Ottoman Empire. In 1909, when the Nationalist Turkish Komitat was established, Lesvos had a population of 150,000, with only 1/8 Ottomans. The 1st Balkan War against Turkey started in 1912, when Prefect Eram Bey ruled the island. On November 8, the name day of Taxiarchis, the Greek fleet, led by the warship Averoff, moored off the port of Mytilene and requested the surrender of the city. Eventually, the Greek army disembarks after the Turkish garrison abandons the city. Barricaded behind Mount Skoteino, next to the Klapados village, the Turkish army gives its last battles with about 200 fatalities, while the Greeks (together with the volunteers of the Lesbian convoy from the US) had about 20 fatalities and many casualties. The Turkish army surrenders on December 10, 1912. Being cut off from major ports, such as Smyrna and Istanbul, and in a continuous state of war, the prosperity of the island of Lesvos was affected, while the bourgeois and the living standards of the population deteriorated. The island follows Greece's fate in the outbreak of WWI in 1915, and the Great Division between the pro-German King Konstantinos who requests neutrality and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, who supported the engagement with Entente. This division resulted in tragicomic events, such as members of the same family belonging to different

sides or two oil cooperatives existing in the same village (Paleokipos). In 1914, approximately 15,000 refugees arrive from Turkey, as a result of the first persecution. The presence of Venizelos on the island (March 1915) gains him support in the upcoming elections. In 1915, when Georgios Papandreou is the Prefect, the French troops use the bay of Loutra as a mooring and refueling station, for the battles of Macedonia and Gallipoli, against the Turks. The French fort and cemetery in Loutra have been preserved from this period. Despite the military call, the country remains neutral, and its territory is used as a transit center of foreign troops.



Venizelos passes through Mytilene on his way to Thessaloniki in 1916 and this is when the 4th and 5th Archipelago Regiment are being organized and advanced to Thessaloniki and the Division defeats the Germans and the Bulgarians in the famous battle of Skra. This is the movement of the officers of the National Defense, who sided with Venizelos. The Great Division haunts Greece and Lesvos receives the 25,000 refugees from Ayvalık, who from 1914 until 1917, urged by the Germans (General Von Sanders), are persecuted from the opposite coast, a region of Greek inscription dating back to the 8th century BC. The Treaty of Sevres (August 10, 1920), eight years after the liberation, forces Turkey to recognize Greece's sovereignty in Lesvos. This Great Division, which was more like a national decline, led to the withdrawal of Hellenism from age-old places of its existence.

A Greek military division takes over 17,000 square kilometers from Smyrna to Ayvalık. Many things have happened and each side holds its beliefs! The interests of the foreign "supporters" quickly change and the division is a criminal error factor! The campaign to Ankara was a serious and irreversible error! Kemal conducted a national liberation struggle and secures arms from the newly created Soviet state. War atrocities take place on both sides. But the events in Smyrna – which was burned, violated and looted

- originated from the legacy of the Neo-Turkish Komitat of 1908. The barbarism of the "civilized" allies appeared in all its glory as they just stood there watching the people being murdered and drowning from their boats. Lesvos fills once again with refugees. About 130,000 cross over and about 24,000 stay at the refugee settlements on a permanent basis. Five mosques were turned into churches, to cover their housing needs (those of Sigrı, Baltziki, Yalı Mosque at Epáno Skála, Michos, and Perama. Apart from the last one that was demolished, the others are preserved). Just across, the refugees from Lesvos go to Ayvalık, Pergamos, and other towns, and settle in the houses of the rich Greeks.

Museum of Theophilos



In Lesbos, the estates of the Turks are bought by rich Greeks and the refugees acquire small pieces of land, and settle in small houses of newly established settlements, which in many cases manage to repay! From then on, the island follows Greece in all its adventures! During WW2 and the German occupation (when olive oil helps to alleviate famine on the island), the resistance of the island's democratic people holds strong against the conquerors and during the Civil War, after 1944.

Since then the island coexists with Turkey, with the occasional air hostilities over the Aegean Sea, but also with the infinite number of visitors that peacefully spend their holidays on both coasts, that follow the same course of both lands. The people of these lands do not demand anything, but the interests of the few always overshadow good intentions.

Aeolian Capital in Napi



Municipal Gallery of Mithymna

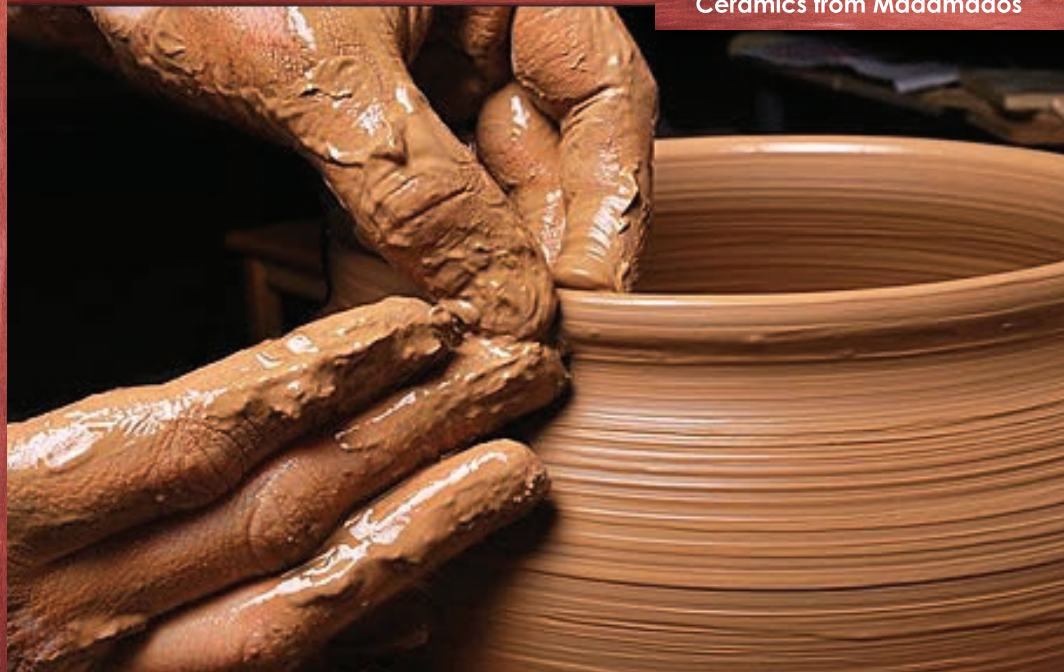


Emerging in the 20th century, prominent personalities of literature and arts appear, such as Argyris Eftaliotis, who rejuvenates Modern Greek Literature, while later on great novelists, such as Stratis Myrivilis and Elias Venezis, introduce antiwar and humanitarian stimuli to global readers. Asimakis Panselinos, Nikos Kampas, S. Paraskevaïdis and M. Kountouras bring their intellectual light to the Lesbian Spring, with Nobel Prize winner Odysseas Elytis, whose poetry – together with that by Sappho - made Lesbos' unique natural beauty known to the world.



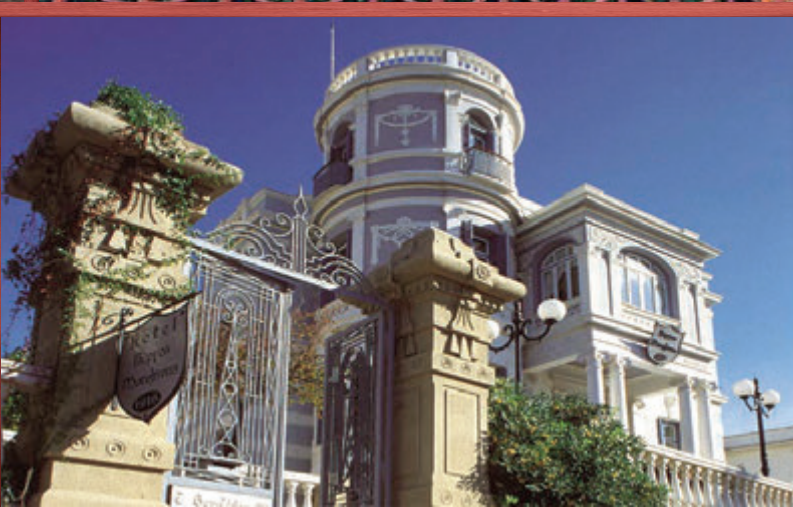
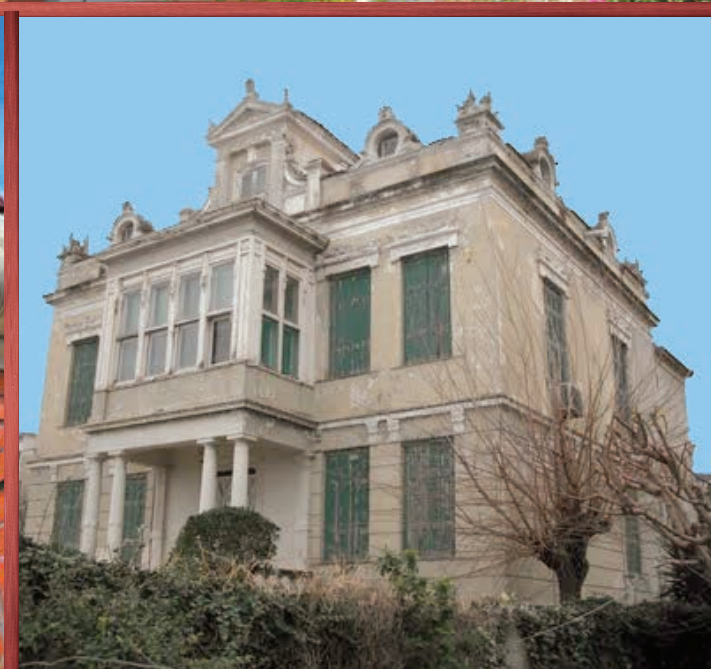
Odysseas Elytis, Nobel Prize in Literature, 1979

Ceramics from Madamados



The Bull Sacrifice





Mytilene buildings