

History of Kalymnos

Kalymnos, an island close to the Carian coast, between Kos and Leros, is one of the so-called southern Sporades. In the Homeric epics it is encountered with the name Kalydnai islands, in Herodotus as Kalymnos and in Diodorus Siculus and Stephanos Byzantios as Kalydna. In the Attic tribute lists of the fifth century B.C. it is referred to as Kalydne. From the fourth century B.C., the name Kalymna appears in literary and epigraphic sources, as well as on coins.

So scant are the textual sources that it is difficult to form a clear and detailed picture of the island's history in Antiquity. Tradition has it that Carians were its most ancient inhabitants. According to Diodorus, Kalymnos was subsequently settled by Aeolians from Thessaly or by Dorians descended from the mythical Herakles. In the list of ships that participated in the Trojan War, given in the Iliad, the Kalymnians appear under the authority of the King of Kos, who was also descended from the lineage of the Herakleids. Herodotus records a testimony that in later times Kalymnos, like Kos, was colonized by Dorians, and specifically Epidaurians. The three main Dorian tribes – Hylleis, Dymanes and Pamphyloi- are attested in the island's inscriptions. From the second half of the sixth to the first half of the fifth century B.C., Kalymnos minted its own coinage.

Consequence of Kalymnos's proximity to the wealthier and more powerful island of Kos was the continuous sovereignty of the latter already from the time of the Trojan War. In the Persian Wars, Kalymnos, as vassal of Caria, fought on the Persian side in the naval battle of Salamis, in 480 B.C., under the leadership of Artemisia. However, from the mid- fifth century B.C. it was a member of the Athenian League. From the tribute lists, from 452/1 to 433/2 B.C., it seems that it paid the League one talent and three thousand drachmas, while after that, until 415/4 B.C., the exact sum is not known. By 425/4 B.C. it had been exempted from paying tribute.

During the Peace of Antalkidas, in 387/6 B.C., Kalymnos became autonomous. For the greater part of the fourth century B.C. it was subject once more to the Carians, along with Chios, Kos and Rhodes, under the Hekatomnid dynasty. In 333 B.C. the island came into the Antigonids' sphere of influence, remaining so until the death of Demetrios Poliorketes in 283 B.C. and enjoying relative autonomy. Shortly before Demetrios' death, in 286 B.C., according to epigraphic testimonies, the sphere of political influence changed and Ptolemy II appears to have been involved in the islands internal affairs. Kalymnos returned to Macedonians way from around 260 until 242B.C., then passed again to the Ptolemies during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes.

It is considered certain that for most of the third century B.C. Kalymnos was politically independent and had a democratic regime. Between 215 and 205 B.C. Kalymnos was incorporated in the deme of Kos, constituting a separate deme. This took place possibly on the political initiative of Ptolemy V (according to others Ptolemy IV Philopater), in order to create a strong insular front against the Cretan pirates, who in alliance with Philip V were the scourge of the Aegean. The period of political incorporation is known as the homopoliteia. In the sea battle of Lade, in the summer of 201 B.C., and after the victory of Philip V, Kalymnos is believed to have extricated itself from the control of Kos and either became autonomous or passed under the control of the Macedonian king. This situation was short-lived and Kalymnos was once again incorporated to the deme of Kos, which event was characterized politically- according to relevant inscription- as restoration of the homopoliteia, and both islands renewed their alliance with the Ptolemies.

After the Second Macedonian War, the political power of the Ptolemies in the Aegean was weakened and Rhodes assumed a leading role in the region. It is possible that in the first half of the second century B.C., Kalymnos continued to be subject of Kos. During the First Mithridatan War (89-85 BC) the two islands remained neutral and maintained peaceful relations with all parties involved. After the naval battle of Actium (31 BC), Kalymnos, following the fate of all the islands in the region, lost its autonomy and became part of the large Roman province of Asia. There is evidence of severe catastrophic earthquakes in the Roman period, particularly in the second century A.D., a very powerful earthquake destroyed the cities of Lykia and Caria, Rhodes, Kos and Kalymnos. In the year 297 A.D. the Roman emperor Diocletianus (284-305 A.D.), reformed the administrative system in the Roman Provinces and separated Asia Minor in two administrative entities, that of Asia and of Pontos. The Administration of Asia included ten Provinces. Among them was the Province of Islands where Kalymnos belonged, with Rhodes as its capital.

The Early Christian Period (4th-7th c .A.D.) was an era of prosperity and development for Kalymnos. Settlements were established next to the sea, which facilitated trade and travels. Important settlements of that era are found at Vathys, Emporios, Kantuni and Telendos. During this time a great number of sizeable Christian churches was erected, following the basilica architectural type and many of them are decorated with mosaic pavements. In 554 A.D. a powerful earthquake destroyed the settlements of Kalymnos (the intermediary region between Telendos and Kalymnos subsided and sank). The sea raids of Arabs in the 7th century A.D. led to the abandonment of the coastal settlements (residents moved to the hinterland, in mountainous regions, where they created new fortified settlements –Ayios Konstantinos on Telendos, Galatiani at Arginonta etc. -) until the 10th century when the residents of Telendos and Kalymnos inhabited the coastal regions again. After the fall of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, the control of Rhodes and the neighbouring islands was passed on under the sovereignty of Leo and John Gavalas, under the administration of the Byzantine Empire of Nice until 1249. In 1306 the Byzantine

emperor Andronikos II Palaeologos granted Kalymnos, Leros and part of Rhodes to the Genoveze Vingolo dei Vingoli.

During the early part of the 14th century the Knights of the Order of Saint John the Baptist occupied the islands of the Dodecanese. Only Kassos, Karpathos and Astypalea remained outside the limits of knightly sovereignty. The administration of the Order was practiced by the Grand Magister and the General Session. Kalymnos, Kos, Leros and Nissyros constituted a particular administrative unit with a Knight Governor, to whom these islands were ceded to against rent. The administration of each island was practiced by a Knight, who held the title of Castellan. During the administration of the Knight Fantino Quirini (1433-1453), the Castle of Hrysoheria was built (mid-15th century). In 1492 a powerful earthquake destroyed the walls of the Castle of Chora, it was repaired and extended by the Knights and became the center of Kalymnos. The Kalymnians during that time had the privilege of electing representatives, who presented island affairs at the central authority.

In the beginning of 1523 Kalymnos, as well as the other islands of the Dodecanese, surrendered to the Turks. This helped the island to maintain a state of near autonomy during the Ottoman Occupation, paying annual tax to the Ottoman Empire. The permanent settlements of Kalymnians were mainly in the Castle of Chora. The restriction of piracy in the Aegean was the main reason for the creation of settlement of Chora in the beginning of the 18th century at the foot of the hill. This move inaugurated a period of economic growth and progress for the island. One of the most important instances of the Greek Revolution in this geographic region of the Aegean was the naval battle at cape Geronta in 1824, when the Greek fleet under Miauli's and Sahturi's command defeated the Turkish – Egyptian fleet and that victory was celebrated on Kalymnos. After the end of the conflicts between Greek and Turks social peace prevailed in the Aegean, which helped the economic and intellectual growth of Kalymnos. Thus fishery, sponge-fishing and trade were developed, activities that brought on wealth to the island. Because of the increasing involvement with marine activities at the time, from 1840 onwards the city-harbor of Pothia, later to become the new capital of Kalymnos. The growth of the island during the 18th and 19th century is reflected in the imposing churches of Panayia Haritomeni in Chora, Saint Nikolas, Metamorphosis of savior and Ypapanti in Pothia, as well as in the impressive neoclassic houses of Kalymnos. In the trade of sponges the Kalymnian Nikolaos Vouvalis (1859- 1918) made his mark as the most prosperous tradesman of sponges in the Dodecanese, as well as benefactor of Kalymnos. During the Ottoman Occupation the Kalymnians had the right to elect representatives, who presented island affairs to the central administration. This institution evolved in the 19th century to Demogerontia (Council of Elders). Those representatives of the population administered all of the Kalymnian affairs.

On the 29th of April 1912 Italian military forces landed on Kalymnos, releasing Kalymnians from the Turks. Essentially, however, this was not liberation, but simply

alternation of occupation forces. During the occupation, Italy tried systematically to alter the Greek character of Kalymnos. The Kalymnians reacted vigorously against that effort of italianation, which in turn provoked the violent reaction of the Italian military forces, with beatings, imprisonment and exile. Even murders took place, as in the case of M. Kazonis, in the duration of Stonewar in 1935. Many Kalymnians also participated in the Battalion of the Dodecanesean Volunteers during the Greek- Italian War in 1940 that fought at the Albanian Front. Among the most important fighters for the release of the Dodecanese was the Kalymnian academic doctor Skevos Zervos (1875- 1966). Following the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, Kalymnos was used as a German base for the occupation of Leros, a fact that caused bombardments from air and sea by the Allied Forces, enemies of Germans. Bombardments, poverty and hunger led a great number of Kalymnians to escape to the Middle East. After the end of the 2nd World War the Dodecanese was surrendered to the Allies in 8/05/1945. After that, the period of British Military Administration followed, lasting for one year, and then that of Greek Military Administration until 7 March 1948, when the Dodecanese was incorporated into the Greek State. After the 2nd World War Kalymnos remained the only Greek sponge-fishing force, with exports to foreign countries. Today the economic activity of the island is supplemented by fishery, shipping, agriculture and livestock.

