



Συγγραφή : Τσόνος Κωνσταντίνος , Γεώργια Φραγκούλα , Γεώργια Φραγκούλα , Κέκου Εύα , Φιλίππα Παρασκευή , Τσόνος Κωνσταντίνος
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Για παραπομπή : Τσόνος Κωνσταντίνος , Γεώργια Φραγκούλα , Γεώργια

Περίληψη :

Γενικές Πληροφορίες

Area: 79,194 km²

Coastline length: 67 km

Population: 10.402

Island capital and its population: Fira (2.113)

Administrative structure: Region of South Aegean, Prefecture of the Cyclades, Province of Thira, Municipality of Thira (Capital: Hora or Fira, 2.112), Community of Oia (763).

Museums: Archeological Museum of Fira, Museum of Pre-historic Thira (Fira), Cultural Centre of Thira (Gizi building), Ecclesiastical and Folklore Museum of Pyrgos (Monastery of Propjet Elias), Nautical Museum of Oia, Folklore Museum of Lignos (Kontohori). Santorini Wine Museum

Archeological sites and monuments: Prehistoric setting of Akrotiri, Ancient Thira, Mediaeval setting of Skaros, Heroon at Perissa, Byzantine church of Episkopi, Church of St. Nikolaos Marmaritis at Emporeio, George Emmanuel Argyros Mansion at Messaria

Traditional settlements: Akrotiri, Emporeio, Oia, Pyrgos, Fira, Foinikia, Hemerovigli

Natural monuments: Caldera. The Palaia and Nea Kammeni as well as Prophet Elias have been included in the European network "NATURA 2000"

Cultural clubs: Society for the Promotion of Studies on Prehistoric Thera, Association for the Protection of the Environment "Foivos", Thera Cultural Club, Thera Cine-Club

Events: "Hefaisteia" in August, "Kamariano thalassino panighiri" (sea feast at Kamari) in August, "Odi sto Kastelli" at Pyrgos in early September

Festivals: Santorini Jazz Festival at Kamari, Santorini International Music Festival at Fira in early September, Earthdance-International Dance Festival for peace at Perissa

Religious feasts: On St George's day at Oia, On St Anarghiri's day at Megalochori (July 1st), On Prophet Elias' day at Fira (July 20th), On St John's day at Monolithos (July 24th), Transfiguration of the Saviour at Akrotiri (August 6th), Dormition of Virgin Mary (Panagias Episkopis) at Kamari, at Mesa Gonia, at Akrotiri and at Megalochori (August 15th), Agion Epta Paidon at Foinikia (August 4th), Kyra Panagias at Oia (August 23d), On the eve of the Decapitation of St John at Perissa (August 29th), Panagias Myrtidiotissas at Kamari (September 24th), On St Averkios' day at Emporeio (October 22d), Feast of Purification at Oia (February 1st)

Sport clubs: Karterados Sport Club, Santorini Nautical Sport Club, Sport Club "Lava", Sport Club "Panthiraikos", Pyrgos Sport Club, Sport Club "Thyella Kamariou Kykladon", Panionios Sport Club of Santorini

1. Settings

Santorini, or Thera, is the southernmost Cycladic island along with [Anafi](#). It is 134 miles away from Piraeus and 68 miles away from Iraklio, Crete. Its [volcanic ground](#) and its function as a station of naval communications between Crete and mainland Greece have defined its cultural development from the antiquity up to now. Because of its circular shape, it used to be called Stroggyli ("round"); after the great eruption of its volcano in the 17th century B.C., its central part sank, creating an impressive lagoon, the caldera. The ground now has quite many lowlands and is also waterless. Profitis Ilias at 567 m is its highest peak. Its coasts, especially on the eastern side, are extremely gentle and not too partitioned, forming beautiful beaches.

The landscape of Thera, along with its archaeological sites and its settlements' architecture, which is adapted to the [geomorphology](#),



is a unique geological and environmental phenomenon. Much of the island's current [tourist](#) development is based on that, turning it into one of the top tourists hotspots worldwide.

2. History

2.1. From Prehistoric to Byzantine Times

The settlement of Akrotiri, which flourished during the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C., is the main and richest source of information on the culture of prehistoric Thera. This site had been inhabited since the Late Neolithic (5th millennium) and Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium B.C.). During the [Mesocycladic Period](#), it had close contacts with Minoan Crete and mainland Greece. It turned thus into a cultural, economic, trade and art center of the Aegean, reaching its heyday in the Late Cycladic I Period. The violent eruption of the volcano (circa 1650 B.C.) led to the desertion of the settlement and the preservation of the remains of this significant cultural center under the volcanic ash.

After being deserted for 2-3 centuries, the island was re-inhabited in the Mycenaean Period (bulge of Monolithos). Phoenicians settled there in the 13th century B.C. and named it Kallisti ("the most beautiful one"), whereas Spartans colonized it in the late 12th century B.C. with their leader Theras; the island was named after him.

In historical times, the center of the island was located on the eastern coast, on the rock of Mesa Vouno, where the city of ancient Thera developed. Its habitation was uninterrupted from Geometrical up to Late Roman Times (9th B.C.-3rd A.D.). In the 6th century, Thera minted a coinage of its own and connected its future with the course of its mother-city Sparta during the Peloponnesian War. During Hellenistic Times, the island developed and was used as a naval and military base of the Ptolemies, whereas during the Roman Times it did not engage in any particular activities.

2.2. From Byzantine Times to the Latin Rule

The only significant information we have regarding the island during the Early [Byzantine Period](#) is that it turned to Christianity from the 4th century A.D. on and founded the "Diocese of Thera". We also know that Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) founded the church of Panagia Episkopi at Gonia, at the center of the island, maybe as the katholicon of a monastery, whereas Thera came under the Aegean Theme from the 9th century A.D. on.

After the Sack of Constantinople by the [Franks](#) in 1204, Thera became the see of one of the four Latin dioceses of the Duchy of the Aegean and was granted along with Therasia to baron Iakovos Varotsis up to 1335 when it came under the suzerainty of Nicola Sanoudo, the duke of Naxos, which was the capital of the Latin state. The Franks named the island Santorini after the church of Saint Irene (Santa Irene), which was what they first saw while approaching the island. In the following years, Frankish families of the Sanoudi, the Crispi and the Pisani exchanged the island up to 1487, when it came under [Venice](#), along with the [Duchy of the Aegean](#).

[Pirate](#) raids defined its development during the Frankish Rule, while the latinization of some of its residents created a new religious status between them.

2.3. Ottoman Rule and Modern Times

In 1537, [Hayreddin Barbarossa](#) pillaged Santorini, which finally came under the [Ottomans](#) in 1566, who granted special privileges to its residents. This resulted to the growth of trade and seafaring, turning the island into a leading center with a great fleet and contacts with the major ports of the time (Alexandria, Constantinople). Trade and seafaring were the main fields of its development even after the [Greek State](#) was established, highlighting the island and its residents' economic independence. Since the Axis Powers occupied the Greek territory, Santorini came initially under the Italian rule in 1941. After Italy capitulated in 1943, the Germans occupied it up



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to its liberation in 1944.

A significant event from its Modern History was the severe earthquake of 1956, which led a great part of the population to leave the island, indicating thus the major role of natural phenomena in the shaping of human life and activity in Santorini.

(Konstantinos Tsonos)
 (Transl. Onoufrios Dovletis)

3. Archaeological sites and monuments

3. 1. Akrotiri

3. 1. 1. Site and excavation chronicle

The prehistoric settlement of Akrotiri stretches across a small valley, at the south end of Santorini, near the modern village of the same name. It had two natural harbours, protected from the strong north winds which blow in the area: the first can still be seen where the settlement intersects the sea, while the second, located on the east side, has been embanked with various materials over the years. The proximity to Crete acted as a catalyst for the town of Akrotiri since its early years. Under suitable weather conditions, one can see the Cretan mountains Psiloritis and Lefka Ori looming imposingly in the background.

Akrotiri is one of the most important prehistoric settlements that have been excavated in the Aegean, with finds of great significance, which contributed immensely to the understanding of the [Cycladic civilization](#) from the 4th until the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C.

French researchers Gorceix and Mamet were the first to mention the existence of prehistoric ruins in Akrotiri (1867), whereas the German Zahn (1899) focused his research on Potamos, a site east of Akrotiri, where remains of the same period were located and excavated. A subsequent surface survey, carried out in 1962 by professor Spyros Marinatos, was aimed to locate the sites investigated by the previous researchers. Marinatos further wished to confirm his theory that the destruction of the palaces in Crete resulted from Santorini's volcanic eruption in the middle of the 15th century B.C. Hence, in 1967, he began organised excavations on the site, which lasted until 1974; from 1976 until nowadays they have been carried on under the direction of professor Christos Doumas and the Archaeological Society of Athens.

3. 1. 2. Finds

So far, an area of approximately 11.000 square meters has been investigated. However, it has been estimated that it only constitutes one tenth of the total extent of the settlement.

Research in the area, as well as in the entire island, is being significantly hindered because of the volcanic materials, ash (aspa) and pumice, which have covered the largest part of its surface. In certain places, volcanic layers rise as high as 60 m., concealing all evidence of inhabitation prior to the large volcanic eruption. In the region of Akrotiri, the process of soil erosion, due to natural agents (water-wind), significantly whittled down these layers, revealing some few architectural remains that have been of interest to the researchers.

The town, whose ancient name is not known, was ruined by the large volcanic eruption during the transition from the early to the mature phase of the Late Cycladic I period (middle of 17th century B.C.). Inhabitation in the area began at the end of Neolithic times. Pottery of that period was unearthed mainly in the southern part of the town; unfortunately, no architectural remains have been found there.

Evidence of inhabitation during the Early Cycladic period (2800-1800 B.C.) is provided by numerous finds: architectural remains, pottery, a large number of stone and clay figurines, stone tools, but also jar burials (the custom of burying the dead in jars: egchytrismos) inside chambers cut into the soft natural volcanic rock. According to Christos Doumas, these chambers constitute the



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cemeteries of the Early Cycladic period. The respective settlement must have been in the immediate vicinity; however, only a limited number of its architectural remains have been unearthed, as they were either destroyed during subsequent reconstructions or still lying under the dwellings of later periods.

During the Middle Bronze Age (1800-1650 B.C.), Akrotiri was transformed into a cosmopolitan port town and enjoyed great prosperity. It was at that period that most buildings were founded; they survived until the final collapse, although repairs needed to be carried out mainly due to frequent earthquakes. The town-planning was dense, with an extended grid of cobbled streets, leading from one end of the town to the other, squares and a well-developed sewage system. Towards the end of that period, an extensive network of relations and exchanges, both commercial and cultural, has been developed between Akrotiri, which by then was an important urban centre, and the rest of the Cycladic islands, the Dodecanese, continental Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Egypt and Palestine. Essential or luxury goods were travelling from and to various destinations.

The town reached its peak towards the middle of the 17th century B.C., just before it was destroyed by the eruption. Its inhabitants had acquired a high level of skills and technical expertise, mirrored in the products of material culture, which have survived to this day. They were skilled mariners, fishermen, carpenters, builders, stone dressers, potters, basket weavers and jewelers. The art of wall painting also prospered during that period. The majority of the buildings that have been unearthed so far have wall paintings in one or more rooms, usually on the upper floor, but sometimes also on the ground floor. The building of Xeste 3 and maybe that of Xeste 4 (its excavation has not yet been completed) are an exception, containing larger wall paintings with a comprehensive iconographic programme. Based mainly on the finds, these buildings are estimated to have been administrative or religious centres. The wall paintings are particularly important to archaeological research because they function like photographs of that period, as they seem to faithfully depict various practices and rituals which otherwise would have remained unknown to us.

The absence of human relics from the town, later to be destroyed by the volcano, reveals that its inhabitants had abandoned it, warned about the upcoming eruption by an earthquake. The town cemetery has not been unearthed yet; it is assumed that during the Middle Bronze Age (18th – 19th century B.C.) it must have been moved to the outskirts of town, which had greatly expanded; it is probable that the “burial” chambers of earlier periods had been abandoned.

Finds did not confirm Marinatos’ hypothesis that the volcanic eruption was responsible for the destruction of the palaces of Crete, nor his belief that Akrotiri constituted a Minoan colony. The influence that Minoan Crete exerted on the inhabitants of Akrotiri was significant and multidimensional. However, they preserved their distinctive Cycladic character, while assimilating and adapting the new elements into their own culture. This is clearly evident in all domains of activity.

The question of the absolute dating of the eruption remains open. Those in favor of a “low” date place it at around 1500 B.C., while those in favor of a “high” date, between 1700 and 1610 B.C.

(Frangoula Georma)
 (Transl. Eirini Papadaki)

3. 2. Ancient Thera and other ancient monuments

Apart from Akrotiri, which is the most important and most popular site of Santorini, Ancient Thera is also an extensive site of equal interest. It was built like an amphitheater on the naturally fortified rock of Mesa Vouno (396 m), on the eastern side of the island. A part of the road network has been preserved, as well as remnants of public buildings (agora, stoa, “garrison barrack”, gymnasium, theater, baths), sanctuaries of kings and gods (temples of the Ptolemies, Dionysus and Apollo the Pythios, the Temenos of Artemidoros Pergaios, the Monument of Apollo Karneios) and many more private residences. Because of the unapproachable and steep grounds, this site can be accessed through a path with signs or from the hill of Profitis Ilias or through a picturesque zig-zag route at the beginning and then following a path from Kamari. The tour over the ancient sites ends with the three-aisled paleochristianic basilica of Perissa and the temple of goddess Vasilisa (3rd century B.C.) between Emporios and Megalo Chorio. The latter was turned into a church of Aghios Nikolaos o Marmaritis.



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3. 3. Monuments of Mediaeval and Later Times

Regarding monuments dating from the Frankish Rule, one can visit the remains of the mediaeval settlement of Skaros with the catholic monastery of Panagia tou Rozariou (“Virgin Mary of the Rosary”), near Imerovigli. One can also visit the fortified settlement of Pyrgos at the center of the island. A part of the walls has been preserved there, and there are also many 16th-17th century churches (an underground church of Ahios Nikolaos of Kisiras or the Thetokaki with a wood-carven chancel screen and icons).

To the southeast of Pyrgos, one can get to the monastery of Profitis Ilias (early 18th century) through a picturesque route. It houses the Ecclesiastical-Folkloric Museum with 15th century icons from Crete, 8th century hand-written codices, ornaments and canonicals, as well as a library. In the folkloric section of the Museum, examples of household stuff and traditional tools are also exhibited. The private collection of P. Nomikos is also integrated into the museum. It includes objects coming from old mansions.

Finally, the 11th century church of Panagia tis Episkopis, which is accessible through a negotiable dirt road from the settlement of Episkopi Gonias, is a typical example of the Byzantine presence on the island.

4. Occupations of modern residents

Nowadays, residents mostly occupy themselves with tourism, as well as land cultivation, fishing and seafaring. Because of its volcanic origin, the ground is very fertile but waterless. It favors thus the cultivation of early vegetables (tomato, fava beans, white aubergine) and cereals. The wines of Santorini are worldwide known, because of the intensive quality vine cultivation, combined with traditional cooperage. We must also mention the seasonal limited saffron gathering, a self-sown plant on the Cyclads with a long tradition since prehistoric times –as demonstrated on frescoes from Akrotiri– up to today. Its therapeutic and pharmaceutical properties had made its processing extremely popular in ancient times, whereas its use in cooking and dyeing of traditional garments managed to revive its gathering procedure, which is really a small ceremony for those taking part, especially women. Saffron gathering is not widespread of course, but its mere presence and preservation of this specific tradition on Santorini reflects the symbolic significance of the scenery and the residents’ relation with it.

5. The modern image of Santorini

The island’s settlements are built on the brow of the caldera, offering visitors a captivating view. Visitors can also enjoy the peculiar architecture and the unique volcanic scenery through a main road network and plenty of picturesque paths. Fira, the capital, creates the modern image of the island, combining traditional and later architecture of tourist character.

The image of the modern capital is built up by the Archaeological Museum of Thera houses findings from ancient Thera and historical times, the Museum of Prehistoric Thera with a modern and representative exhibition of numerous findings from Akrotiri, the catholic Cathedral and the Monastery of Dominican nuns, as well as the Ghisi mansion (1700) with maps and paintings from the Cyclads. At the same time, the rest of the settlements (e.g. Oia, Imerovigli, Pyrgos) have preserved a more traditional image complementing the scenery of modern Santorini.

(Konstantinos Tsonos)

5. 1. Oia

Oia, or Apano Meria (“Upper side”) is 10km from Fira, right opposite the islet of Therasia. The community of Oia is comprised of Oia, Perivolos, Finikia, Tholos and Ammoudi and Armeni, two beautiful beaches at the base of the Caldera, accessible with steps from Oia.

The settlement of Oia, already an administrative center before the Ottoman invasion, was based on trade and seafaring. It prospered in the late 19th century and the early 20th. In 1890, it had a population of 2500. We should also mention that 130 ships of the fleet of



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Santorini belonged to residents of Oia, while a small shipyard operated at Armeni.

Oia has a notable Naval Museum housing exhibits from its naval history.

Modern Oia is a significant pole of attraction standing out for its peculiar architecture with caved-in houses and manors. It's also widely known for its beautiful sunset attracting visitors from all over the world. The latter, lined up with their cameras in the summer evenings, create a peculiar distinctive social image typical of the phenomenon of mass tourism.

Because of its peculiarity, the community of Oia was not administratively integrated into the rest of the municipalities of the island. It's still a separate administrative unit.

(Eva Kekou)

6. Viticulture

Grape has been one of the most significant wealth-producing factors for Santorini ever since the Antiquity. There is evidence or suggestions for vine culture during the 2nd millennium B.C. coming from the prehistoric settlement Akrotiri, located at the south end of the island. Charred seeds of grape have been found in the archaeobotanic remains, as well as a clay winepress indicating wine making. Large jars with taps coming from buildings of the settlement were used for storing wine, whereas the ideogram of wine identified in a Linear A inscription illustrates its significance for the settlement.

Nowadays, vine culture is still farmers' main occupation; cultivation of split peas, local tomato and barley comes next. According to 2001 data, cultivable land on Santorini was about 6250 acres, 75% of which was used for vine culture.

For hundreds of years, residents have established a special way of trimming, called "coil": they shape branches into a coil without supporting them, in order to protect the fruit from strong winds. It also uses the moisture of land in this waterless environment.

Santorini was lucky since insect phylloxera, which has destroyed countless crops around the world, hasn't "visited" the island. Therefore, varieties haven't changed, and some of them (assyrtiko, aidani, athiri and mandilaria to a smaller extent) are closely associated with Santorini. The island's best-known wines are the white dry Nykteri and the red sweet Vinsanto; both fall into the category "Appellation of Origin of Superior Quality". "Nykteri" is a name related with the word night, the time when its fruit is pressed. "Vinsanto" comes from Italian and means either "holy wine" (vino santo) or "wine of Santorini (vin- santo-).

The most active winemaking corporation of the island is the Association Cooperatives of Theraic Products - Santo Wines. Companies Boutari, Sigalas Wine Houses, Canava Argyros, Canava Roussos, Volkan Wines, Hatzidakis Winery, Venetsanou Winery and many more come next. Most of them have an extensive experience on wine making. They offer a wide variety, excellent quality and promote Theraic products both in Greece and abroad with many honors and awards.

(Frangoula Georma)
 (Transl. Onoufrios Dovletis)

7. The volcano of Santorini

The huge void created under the Aegean area after the sinking of the African lithosphere plaque was the exit valve for the liberation of a great quantity of magma, melted stone rich in anthrax. This activity caused the forming of the active volcanic arch of the South Aegean, a geographical zone that comprises all of Greece's active volcanoes, starting from the Isthmus of Corinth and the Methana peninsula and ending, via [Milos](#) and Thera, at [Nisyros](#).

Thera's volcano lies almost at this arch's middle and has diachronically proved to be the most active of all. Approximately 2.5 million years ago, SW of Santorini, the first great explosion of magma material occurred, creating the volcanic complex of the area around



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the Christianá islets, while the magma's volcanic activity continued at the Santorini complex one million years ago with an even stronger exit towards the earth's surface, which created the central cavity (crater) of the volcano, at the centre of which the peak of an underwater volcano could be seen.

7. 1. The destructive eruption

The volcano's greatest eruption, according to scientific research, occurred in the middle of the 17th century B.C. (1630 B.C.) and its result was the destruction of the prosperous settlement of Akrotiri, on the island's SW part, which had developed a very important culture with a social, urban, economic and artistic flourishing and engaging in important merchant exchanges with the Minoan civilization, being one of Eastern Mediterranean's main cultural centres. This settlement was located in 1967 by Sp.Marinatos under a thick layer of volcanic ash and pumice, an indication of the great extend of the explosion that left the island almost uninhabited for 2-3 centuries.

7. 2. The first earthquakes

The eruption was preceded by a strong earthquake of middle depth that drove the inhabitants outside their settlements and led them to provisional camps. This evacuation was the cause why during the excavations there were no human skeleton found inside the settlement. The inhabitants would come back between the earthquake and the eruption to save their belongings, to repair their houses and to collect their dead and any recyclable building material, but when the volcano's final eruption happened, they had already abandoned the settlement en masse, probably warned by the smaller vibrations.

7. 3. The eruption

The first phase of the eruption comprises, after the opening of the crater in the middle of the island, of the expelling at a height of many kilometres of a small quantity of pumice and tephra, which covers the whole island with a rosy grainy layer 2-3 centimetres thick, whereas the following continuous layers of pumice reach at Firá the height of 6 meters. At the same time, the tephra creates a fiery cloud, which under the influence of the winds spreads over the Cyclades, moves towards the southeast and with the help of the rain covers many areas of the Eastern Aegean and the coast of Middle Asia ([Rhodes](#), [Kos](#), [Miletus](#)). During the next, paroxysmal phase of the eruption, huge quantities of pumice and tephra are expelled horizontally at a height reaching 35 kilometres, with a great speed from the crater, forming over the island a massive retention cupola, whose collapse caused the sudden and violent spreading of the tephra towards the periphery. At the same time, fiery lava pours out of the volcano and, after it solidifies, it covers the whole island, reaching a thickness of up to 50 meters at its centre.

7. 4. The tidal waves

The volcanic material, estimated in approximately 30 cubic kilometres, that was expelled from the volcano, created a huge magma subterranean chamber, whose roof's collapse dragged with it a big part of Santorini island, causing the gradual retreat of the volcanic void and the formation of the caldera (85 km² in extent, 7-11 km in diameter and 780 m in depth, out of which 450 m under sea level). Following that, the violent entrance of the sea inside the caldera via the gaps at the north and the west, and the parallel abrupt change of the seabed caused huge and strong tidal waves (tsunami), which first struck the coasts of Crete and the Southeast Aegean and then it is estimated that they reached even the coasts of the Eastern Mediterranean. Out of the earlier round shape of the island, after the eruption, only Thera, Therasia and Aspronisi remained on the surface, whose arrangement reminds of the prehistoric island's periphery.

7. 5. Later eruptions

During historic times periodical eruptions of the volcano occur, which create an underwater volcanic cone, whose peak is formed by the Palaia Kameni (46 A.D.), the Mikri Kameni (1570 A.D.) and the Nea Kameni (1707 A.D.). The continuous eruptions of the last century (1926, 1939, 1950) cause the temporary evacuation of the island by its inhabitants, something that reminds how life on this



island is unbreakably connected to one of Greece's most important active volcanoes.

7. 6. The volcano and cultivation

We should especially mention the island's soil, which is extremely dry, but also fertile enough, ideal for the cultivation of premature vegetables (tomato, fava beans). Since the 18th century onwards, on the island the cultivation of vines is particularly developed, causing it to be considered a unique cultivation. The quality of the vineyards and the wine is high and the soil, which absorbs the warm vapours, freed by the volcano and transmits them to the vines, plays an important role on that, assisting their smooth maturing and substituting the lack of water. Nature always balances things and proves that she has the mechanisms to transform into advantages what superficially look like disadvantages. Today, Santorini wines are worldwide famous for their quality and taste, although, because of the tourism, the number of people producing wine has been lowered. In the old days, a whole network of traditional professions lived out of the vine cultivation, such as the animal drivers who would transport it throughout the island, the coopers who made the sturdy barrels, into which the wine matured, the winders, who tried, with wires and other mechanisms, to protect the vineyards from the strong winds that struck the island and of course the farmers who were the base of this whole system.

7. 7. The volcano and tourism

The popular image of Santorini today is one of the most impressive and particular landscapes in the whole world. The grey-brown and grey-ash colour of the Thera soil combined with the traditional settlements, built on the edge of the biggest caldera in the world create a natural and at the same time human environment. This proves radically different from the rest of the Aegean, being an object of admiration and making the island a tourist destination of first priority worldwide. The volcano is the base of the contemporary tourist economy and fame of the island, contributing to the flowing of funds and the organization of the economic activities of the inhabitants.

Santorini's volcano defines and characterises life on the island and is the cause which makes it so different amongst thousands of other small and big islands of the Aegean Archipelago. If it wasn't for the volcano, Santorini would have probably been another just beautiful Greek island, such as its neighbours. However, the caldera's impressive presence and the vapours that often pour out of the crater of the active volcano reveal how fragile the borders between prosperity and destruction are and remind us how every civilization was founded on the fall of the previous ones. Meanwhile, the image of Akrotiri is a testimony to how uneven the battle between man and nature can be.

7. 8. The volcano and the myth of Atlantis

Another form of influence of the volcano has to do with the myths that have been reproduced concerning the cultural level of the island before the great eruption. The attraction the myth of Atlantis has had since antiquity, combined with the sometimes opportunistic and sometimes naïve connection of prehistoric Thera with the sophisticated but punished by the gods for her excess, city described allegorically by Plato, has been imprinted in the common memory and has many times been used to justify popular ideals of cultural vanguard and superiority, especially after the discovery of the settlement at Akrotiri. Of course, this "pulp" philology is simultaneously a lucrative editorial activity for the cunning, reminding how many indirect ways there are for someone to live out of the Santorini volcano.

(Konstantinos Tsonos)

8. Santorini, Architecture

8. 1. Introduction

The particular geological conditions of the island have led to original architectural and urban directions and choices.

Santorini's [traditional architecture](#), while being part of the architecture of the Aegean, has been formulated according to the special



conditions of the island, which has exploited, creating a totally unique and complex building environment.

Buildings operate by themselves but also as a total, organized in living units through a sincere and balanced relationship with the place and the “oddities” of the land.

8. 2. Traditional architecture

8. 2. 1. Categories of settlements

The settlements of Santorini can be distinguished according to the following categories:

Linear, that develops on the edge of the volcanic crater, like Fira and Oia.

Fortified, that develops around the walls of a fortified nucleus, like Pyrgos and Emporeios.

Subterranean, that follows the branches of a river, dug into the Thera soil, like Vothonas, Foinikia and Karterado.

8. 2. 2. Building material and buildings

The unique building materials in Santorini have attributed very much to the particular plastic forms of the local traditional architecture:

The black stone, a very hard material for the masonry.

The red stone, solid for doorposts, lintels and investments and porous for the construction of vaults.

The pumice stone for living terraces above the vaults.

Aspa or Thera soil, through the layers of which the subterranean rooms are dug, but also an ingredient of excellent plasters with great mechanical strength for the construction of vaults and cross-vaults with no armament.

Since Santorini never possessed wood, subterranean and vaulted constructions have helped greatly the saving of building wood.

Subterranean buildings are dug on the vertical face of the layers of the volcanic Thera soil. The façade of the dugout is closed by a stone wall with openings for the light and ventilation of the inside, almost always symmetrical: the door on the central axis, windows on the right and left and a small skylight over the door.

Vaulted constructions are built over the ground or are semi-built (a part towards their entrance is built, while the rest remains subterranean). The vault is developed usually on the axis of the built walls.

The construction of the vaults is a special traditional technique that has developed with time and with the help of the workmen’s experience. Local building materials are used with an impressive facility and economy. Detachable wooden moulds are used again and again, as well as pumice gravel with minimal weight and strong cast plasters with excellent static and hydraulic qualities.

The vault, according to the people’s needs, is left either bare, or invested with pumice to create a living floor. As the water is a precious good in the islands, the vaults and the flat terraces are part of a system for the collection of rain water in the, usually subterranean, cisterns.

The houses in Santorini –built or dugout- are divided also in [rural](#) and urban according to their position at the edges or the centre of the settlements.



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Rural houses are found in the countryside or the perimeter of the settlements. They are mostly a unit of one-storey buildings: the main house and the basic auxiliary rooms around it (oven, cistern, stable, chicken-coop, kanava, i.e. the workhouse for the production of wine).

Urban houses are located inside the settlements and have an irregular plan and extremely ingenious ways for saving space and making rooms approachable. They have fewer auxiliary spaces and usually develop in two different levels.

In central areas of the settlements, mainly with the emergence of the new social group of the wealthy ship-owners and merchants during the 19th century, mansions appeared. New quarters with mansions were created, such as Sideras in Oia. Mansions have a monolithic impressive volume and symmetrical monumental facades.

8. 3. Modern architecture

The architecture in Santorini today seems to wanders trying to balance on different trends and directions. Most people of course act according to the extreme financial-tourist exploitation with every mean available.

Whether it is the expensive and fascinating or the most popular version, architectural production is based on the mimic and exploitation of traditional forms with no adding and lacking the result of a sincere relationship with the essence of tradition.

(Paraskevi Filippa)
 (Transl. Ioannis Nakas)



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