

Mytilene



Unique
Approaches

The city of Mytilene is one of the most complex ones I have seen since Algiers. There are 3 cities here, each with its own character: one eastern, one Greek and one European...

(Kostas Ouranis)

MYTILENE

Unique Approaches

TEXTS

Makis Axiotis – Doctor – PhD Cultural Technology	● The Watermill of Kamares
Ioanna Vallina – Architectural Engineer NTU	● The Cemetery of Saint Pantelemonas
	● The Mansions of Sourada
Athanasios Kalamatas – PhD Theology AUTH	● The Cathedral of Saint Athanasios
	● Saint Therapon
	● The Middle School
Ioannis Kourtzellis – Archaeologist at the 20th EPCA PhD in Cultural Informatics	● The Northern Harbour
	● The Ancient Theatre
	● The Euripus – Ermou Street
	● The Southern Harbour
	● The Fishtank of the Roman Era
Thalia Kyriakopoulou – Archaeologist at the 20th EPCA	● Mytilene of the Roman Era
Athina-Christina Loupou – Archaeologist at the 14th EBA & Deputy Director of the 20th EPCA	● The Byzantine and Ottoman Castle
	● The Ottoman Monuments
	● The Catholic Church
Stratis Tzimis – Philologist	● The Statue of Liberty
Stratis Frantzeskos – Architect	● The Historic Centre – Ermou Street

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FOREWORD

This publication is part of the subproject "Thematic printed material in two languages (Greek, English)" of the Action: **"Development and implementation of an integrated program promoting the physiognomy of the intervention area "** and it concerns the city of **Mytilene**.

The main objective is to promote the city through 17 carefully selected sites (approaches), which will highlight the features of the city through attractive routes. The purpose of the album is to guide visitors to discover extraordinary archaeological and architectural "treasures" and to experience Mytilene personally, through its unique historical and cultural idiosyncrasies.

Today, as the gateway to the island, Mytilene welcomes a large number of tourists every year while maintaining its natural and manmade wealth, not having suffered the negative effects of mass tourism. In this context, the objective of the Chamber of Lesvos is mild tourist development through alternative and thematic tourism. The publication was designed to focus on visitors wishing to experience the city effectively, in its various dimensions and facets.

The novelty of a city, of course, cannot be confined to specific benchmarks. It is the combination of living culture, ethics and customs, traditional and daily habits, a unique culinary culture, intense cultural activity, mood and island hospitality. All this combines to form a unified and unique whole, which every visitor has the opportunity and ability to experience.

Modern Mytilene, the administrative capital of the North Aegean and the seat of the University of the Aegean, bustles with year round liveliness, embraced by its numerous tavernas, cafes, bars, restaurants, and abundant artistic events, splicing the past with the present in perfect harmony, making Mytilene a timeless city.

THE PRESIDENT
OF THE CHAMBER OF LESVOS
Thrasyvoulos Kalogridis

The Northern Harbour

The north harbour of Mytilene is found northwest of the city's castle. The Epano Skala district was originally used as a cemetery in ancient times (Lesvonaktos Street), and again later in the Ottoman period. During the Hellenistic period, impressive stoas enhanced the shoreline, while the roman baths served the citizens and visitors at the busy harbour.

The city experienced its first great boom in the development and establishment of colonies already in 8-7 BC, as a result of commencing commercial



contact mainly with Asia Minor.

Ancient writers made references the main usage of each harbour. Stravon, describing Mytilene, calls the north harbour "Mega" and Aristotelis calls it "Maloenta". The alias "Emborikos" (commercial trade) which describes its basic purpose was used for many centuries. During the Classical years the harbour expanded and replaced the smaller interior port which dated from ancient times.

The manmade bay of the harbour is defined by two breakwaters. The largest one on the castle side is 250-260 metres in length and 7.5 metres in width. The northwestern breakwater is 75-100m in length and 8.5m wide. Both of them were constructed in the same way as the city walls are made on land, but with rocks along the sides large enough to withstand the crashing waves caused by the northwind, which Aristotelis called the "Thivanas". The harbour entrance is estimated to have had an opening of about 100 metres. The destruction of the breakwaters and the degradation of the harbour led to the gradual sedimentation of the harbour basin, as well as the Euripus strait.





R.J.Koldewey dated the basic construction of the port in the second half of the 5th century BC during the Peloponnesian War, based on the witness account of Thucydides (III,2,2). The newer submarine research favours the second half of the 4th century BC, as the time of construc-

tion. The same study expressed the opinion that the defensive wall of the city continued on top of the breakwaters, occupying the external sides, while the interior sides were used as a jetty for passengers and commercial boats. Koldewey also believed that the harbour did not have any other internal harbour constructions along the length of the beach.

However an excavation in 1999 unearthed the western end of the pier near the eastern side of the IKA building. This monumental western entrance of the Euripus strait was part of the ancient cobbled quayside and a jetty that goes out beneath the monument of the "Asia Minor Mother", providing very important information not only for the ancient topography of the city, but also for the dating of this massive public works project.

Interesting finds from the archaeological site on Nikomideias Street provide clues to the usage of the northern harbour's seaside area. The site revealed part of a large roman building with many rooms, mosaic floors with geometric shapes, and wall paintings around an open colonnaded atrium with a shallow water cistern (an impluvium). To the west of the building, believed to be a taverna or a bordello, a part of a late Classical wall of the 4th century BC, was uncovered. In the 3rd and 2nd century BC, the site was used as a workshop (for making vessels, bronze sculpture, terracotta). Imported red-figure pottery from South Italy as well as local grey pottery from the ancient years were also found.

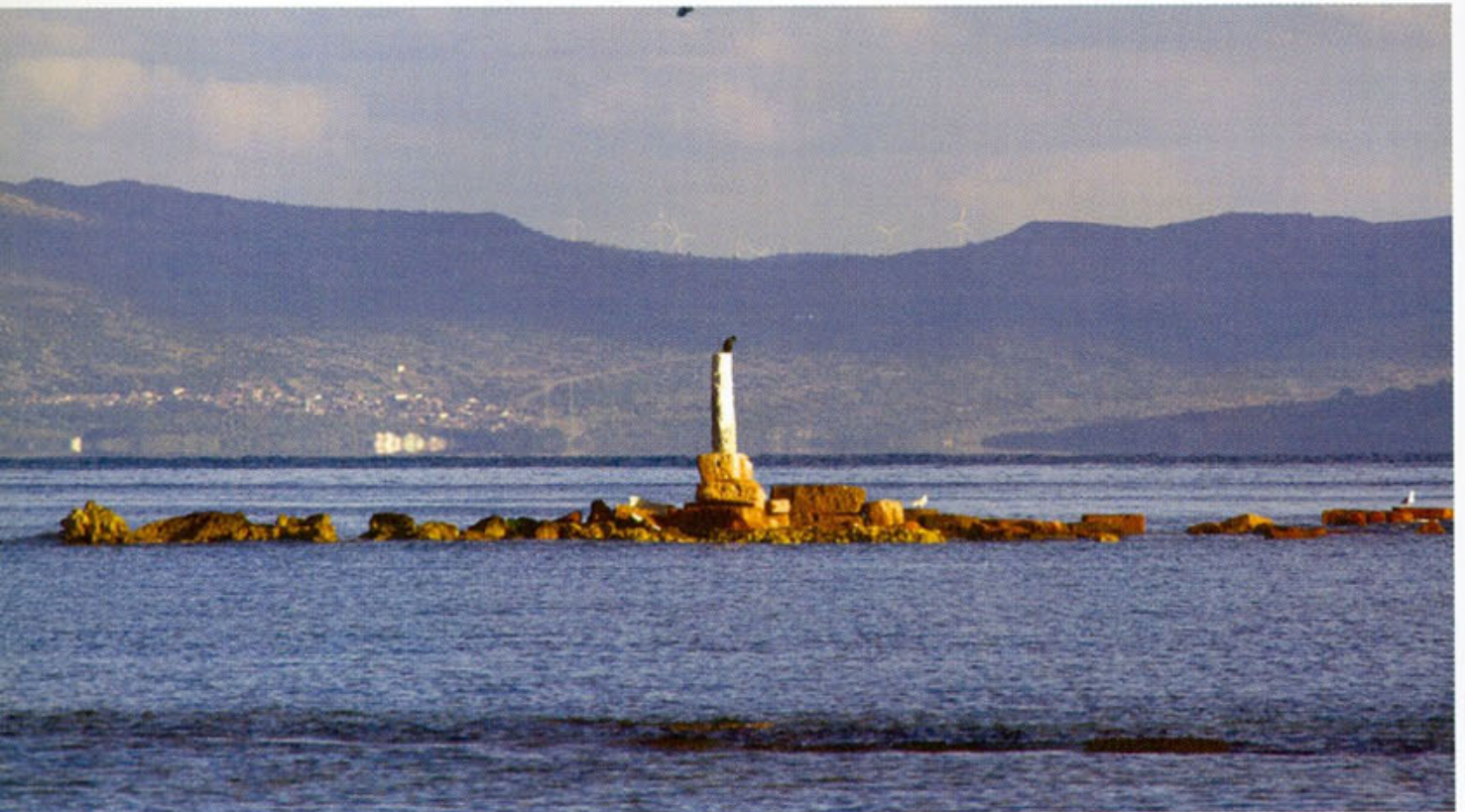
In the Early Christian era the harbour began to fill with sediment. Despite this, it continued to be the main passenger entrance and commercial port of the island. The Gattilusi rulers of Lesbos emphasized trade and strengthened the defense of the city through the castle. At that time the harbour was known as Saint George's harbour. In 1373, the Loranda Tower is purported to have existed at the mouth of the harbour, and was later destroyed when the Ottomans occupied the island in 1462. They in turn built a lighthouse on the eastern breakwater at the entrance to the harbour. This lighthouse survived until the end of the 18th century. The ancient coastal port buildings have long been covered over, however based on local memories that describe the harbour as resembling a stone paved floor, the legend of the cobblestone paved harbour floor persists.

The north harbour was the main port of the city until 1870 when the Chris-

tian Greeks began to play a leading role in the economic and commercial activity in the region, using the south harbour as their base.

The separation of the national and religious communities during the 17th to 19th centuries is the main reason for the decline of the value of the Epano Skala region and the relocation of commerce to the southern harbour. The northern part of the city did not prosper for various reasons such as the fact that to the west of the castle was an Ottoman cemetery. Moreover, land belonged to the governor of the city Hasan Pasha Jelaerlis, then to Halim Bey and later property rights moved to the Greek family of Kourtzis. At the same time, refugees from the Asia Minor Disaster initially set up camp in the region of Epano Skala and the Lower Castle.

Photographs of the beginning of the 20th century show the seaside of Epano Skala with the Ottoman Mosque, the baths and the houses with their characteristic *sachnisi* (glassed in wooden overhangs). With the liberation of Lesvos, the abandonment of old houses, the Asia Minor Disaster and the decision of the local authorities to build homes for the refugees in the *Sinikismos*



district (1929), the conversion of mosques into churches, the expansion of the seaside road to the interior of the harbour, the construction of the "Refugee Market", and unregulated building, the region has acquired its current image. Of the elaborate mansions which once enhanced the Epano Skala region, the early mansion of Halim Bey (1850-1880), the current Municipal art gallery on Mikras Asias Street, still exists. The only opulent urban house built in the region of Epano Skala is the Ioannis Georgiadis Mansion, built in the Second Empire style of L'Ecole des Beaux Arts circa 1885 and situated close to its factory. Today the Georgiadis Mansion hosts cultural events.

COMMERCIAL STOA OF THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Invoking the admiration of ancient writers for the architecture of the ancient city of Mytilene during the Hellenistic and Roman Era, at least five stoas are known to have existed in the wider area of Epano Skala.

In a more recent context, this district was the site of the Ottoman community's cemetery during the 18-19th century. Then in the 1930s, work began on erecting the "Refugee Market" along the seashore. The "Refugee Market",

built on the commercial stoa of Epano Skala, managed to survive up until the end of the 20th century.



In 2000, before the building of a new town hall, extensive excavation research was carried out in which the entire stoa was revealed, as well as the outer defensive

wall of the city and a bathhouse (12x11.5m). Dating from a later Roman Era, this bathhouse has a square floor plan of six rooms and conduits and it was built on top of a small part of the stoa, clearly indicating the end of the grand building's use.

The stoa dates from the Hellenistic Era (the last quarter of the 4-3 century BC) as revealed by its architectural features. Rectangular in shape with an east to west orientation, the largest section of the stoa was uncovered measuring 87 m in length and 16 m in width. The stoa is defined by walls made of stone blocks from local quarries, built according to the isodomic system*. The northern wall is part of the defense wall of the city.

In the interior of the building there was a colonnade supporting the roof. Ancient sources refer to the existence of arcades which adorned the shoreline of the city and served increasing activity (sale of goods, supply of the northern harbour).

The use of the arcade was most likely mercantile in nature as it was located at the heart of the commercial harbour of the ancient city. An inscription of the 3rd century BC records the existence of commercial arcades next to the wall, one of which we know was used for the sale of ceramic pottery or the sale of wheat.

The stoa is an ornate two story building of a Doric style with impressive marble architectural details.

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