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Delos

Dílos

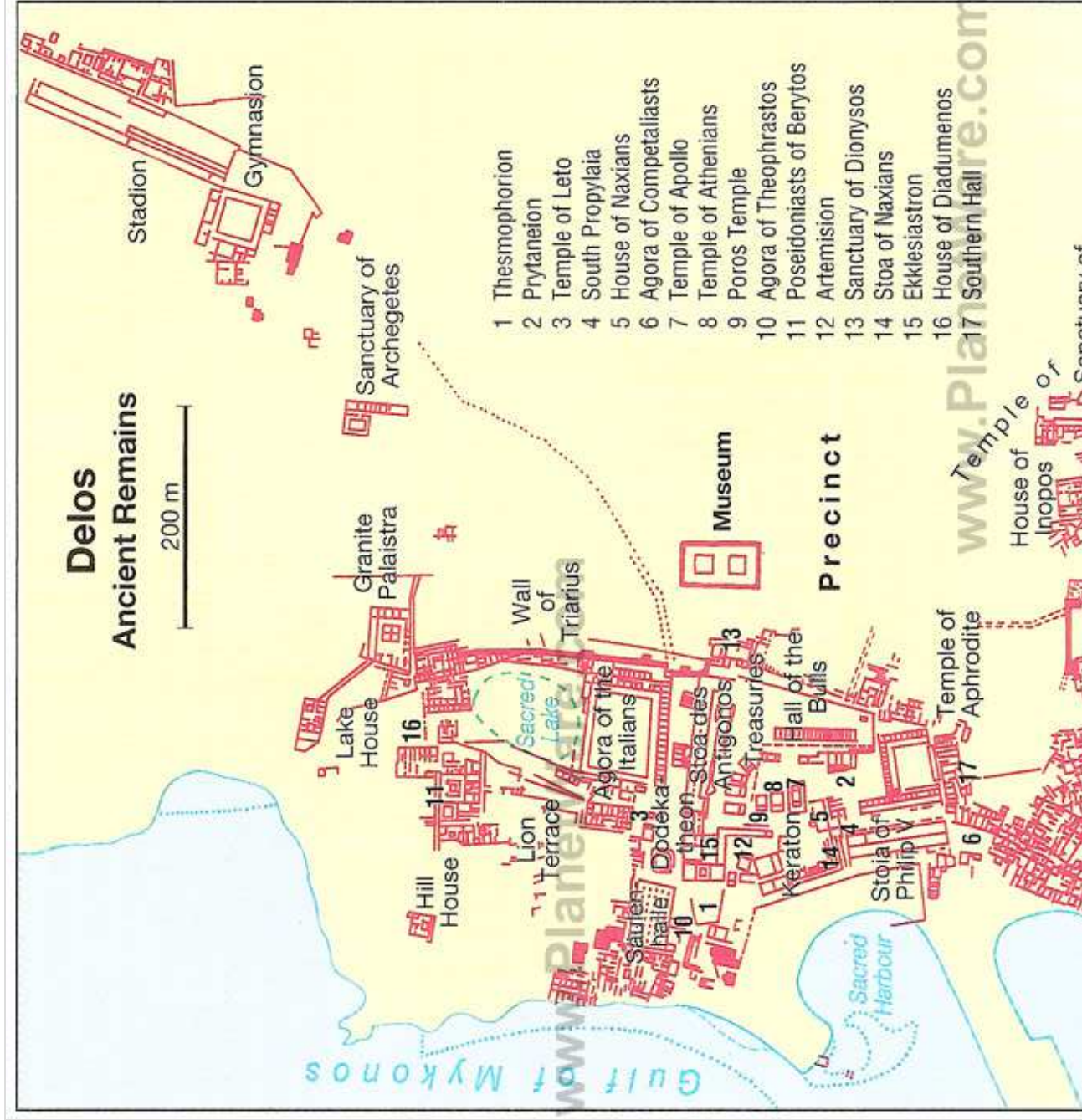


Delos, a rocky island 5km/3mi long and only 1300 m/1420yd wide, lies 10km/6mi southwest of Mykonos. Although it is one of the smallest of the Cyclades, and the smallest of the group formed by Mykonos, Delos and Rinia, Delos, as the birthplace of Apollo, was a place of such importance in ancient times that the surrounding islands were known as the Cyclades since they lay in a circle (kyklos) round the sacred island. The extensive area of remains (excavated by French archeologists from 1873 onwards) is one of the most important archeological sites in Greece.

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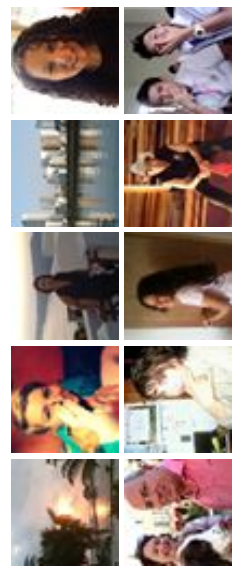
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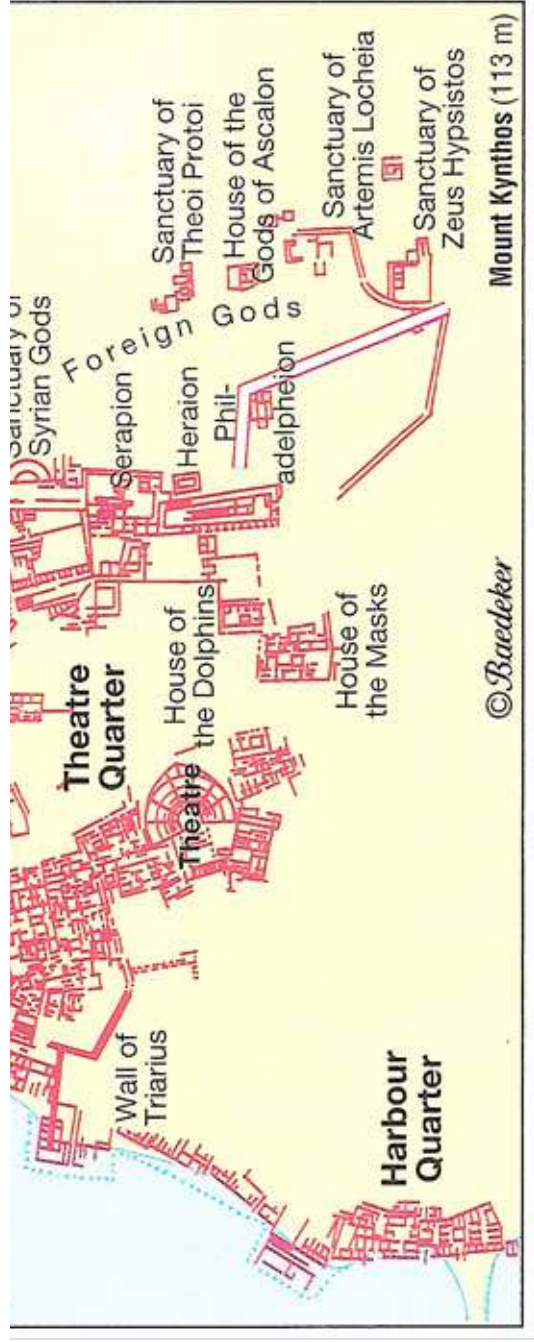
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Delos-Ancient Remains Map

Archaeological Sites

Harbor



On the west side of the island of Delos is the Sacred Harbor (landing-stage), now completely silted up, where delegations attending the annual festival used to land. To the south of this is the old commercial harbor. The coast between the Sacred Harbor and Fourni Bay was lined in a later period with quays (completed in 111 B.C.) and warehouses, remains of which can be seen under water.

★ Sacred Precinct

The Sacred Precinct, which was surrounded by walls and stoas, was approached from the south by a broad paved way running between two Doric stoas above the present harbor. The 87m/285ft long Stoa of Philip V (on the left), open on both sides, has an inscription on the architrave recording that it was built by Philip V of Macedon about 210 B.C. On the right of the road is a smaller stoa with eight shops along the far side. Beyond this, to the east, is the almost square South Agora (first century B.C.). To the north is an open square, on the east side of which are the Southeast Propylaea; on the west side is a passage through the

smaller stoa. This whole area, extending north to the Hall of the Bulls, was occupied in the Middle Ages by fortifications erected by the Knights of St John.

From the South Propylaea (second century B.C.), which have Doric columns on each side on a three-stepped base, the Festival Way ran north, passing over a small esplanade paved with bluish marble and flanked by altars, statues and exedras and then along the west side of three parallel temples of Apollo, finally turning back round the east side of the temples. A shorter route to the east side of the precinct was by way of the long Ionic portico, with narrow open colonnades on each side, just inside the South Propylaea (immediately on right). At its north end is the base of a colossal statue of Apollo, with an inscription (sixth century B.C.) indicating that the statue and its base were carved from a single block of stone; the dedication on the west side ("The Naxians to Apollo") was a later addition.

On the left of the Festival Way, beyond the esplanade, is a precinct containing a stoa and two temples. The larger of the temples, the Keraton, at the southwest corner, was dedicated to Apollo and contained a famous horned altar, regarded as one of the wonders of the world, with rams' horns set round it. The Keraton, believed to be older than the Artemision (shrine of Artemis) in the center of the precinct, is an Ionic temple surrounded by columns built on granite foundations, probably the successor to an earlier temple of the seventh century B.C.

In front of the entrance to the Keraton, which faces south, are a number of bases for equestrian statues, the most northerly and smallest of which bore a statue of Sulla (inscription on rear).

Northwest of the precinct of Artemis is the Thesmophorion, which was dedicated to the cult of Demeter.

To the east of the Artemision, the Festival Way takes a U-turn round the three parallel temples of Apollo. The most southerly of these (fourth-third century B.C.), which resembles the Theseion in Athens in layout, is the largest of the three, covering an area of 26.4m/87ft by 13.55m/44ft. The massive foundations, built on a stratum of grayish-blue slate, show that the temple was peripteral, with 6 by 13 columns.

The pronaos at the east end and opisthodomos at the west end probably had two columns between the antae. The naos measured 11.5m/38ft by 5.6m/18ft. Of the temple itself little is left except the Doric columns and some fragments of the frieze of triglyphs, and of the sculptural decoration only the palmette ornament and the lions' heads from the sima remain.

Immediately north of this temple are the foundations, built in poros limestone, of the Temple of the Athenians (late fifth century B.C.; Doric), with a small pronaos and opisthodomos and a naos divided into two parts. Beyond this is the oldest of the temples (first half of sixth century B.C.), built of poros limestone. In front of this temple is a long statue base on which there were once bronze figures - a monument (third century B.C.) in honor of Proletairos, founder of the royal house of Pergamon.

On the north side of the bend in the Festival Way are five small buildings, four of them facing the three temples. On the basis of their similarity to the corresponding buildings at Olympia and Delphi four of them are believed to be treasuries. The fifth (the most southerly), with a pronaos and opisthodomos, was probably a temple. Facing its entrance is the Prytaneion, seat of the chief magistrate (fifth century B.C.).

Commercial Quarter

At Delos, on the west side of the precinct of Apollo, are propylaea leading out of the Sacred Precinct into the commercial quarter of the city. At the near end of the street, which is lined with shops, is the Agora of the Italians (second century B.C.), a large square area surrounded by two-story colonnaded halls containing shops, workshops and recesses for votive offerings (mosaics). This was the headquarters of the corporation of Roman merchants, who called themselves Hermaists after their patron Hermes. Another similar establishment, the headquarters of the Poseidoniasts of Berytos (Beirut), lay northwest of the Sacred Lake. To the north of the entrance to the Agora of the Italians is the temple of Leto, and farther west is the Stoa of Antigonos (third century B.C.).

★ Hall of the Bulls

The Hall of the Bulls, or Ship Hall, is one of the best preserved buildings on Delos, and dates to the Hellenistic period. Probably designed to house a ship dedicated after a naval victory, it measures 67.2m/220ft from northeast to southwest, with a width of 8.86m/29ft. The building stood on a granite platform approached by three marble steps (still partly preserved), with walls around the sides and the north end; the south end was probably open, with two columns between antae. The interior was in the form of a long gallery with a cavity in the center. Of the sculptural decoration only a nereid and a dolphin are left. At the entrance were pillars preceded by Doric half-columns, with capitals depicting recumbent bulls. The step-like structure southeast of the Hall of the Bulls is part of an altar of Zeus Polieus.

On the east side of the precinct of Apollo was the sanctuary of Dionysos, with several marble phalluses. One of the bases are carvings of scenes from the cult of Dionysos (C. 300 B.C.). Along the north side of the precinct is the Stoa of Antigonos (third century B.C.), with bull's-head triglyphs. Behind the colonnade were rooms for housing representatives sent to the annual festival. Less than half-way along this is a semicircular structure dating from Mycenaean times: the tomb of the Hyperborean Maidens, who attended Leto at the birth of the divine twins.

★ Sacred Lake & Marble Lions

The oval Sacred Lake (now dry), on the shores of which Leto was believed to have given birth to Apollo,

marks the end of the Sacred Precinct at Delos. On a terrace to the west of the lake is a row of

nine marble lions of Naxian marble (seventh century B.C.). In this area, to the north of the lake, were the Old and the New Palaistra (courtyards surrounded by colonnades). Farther northeast are the sanctuary of the Heros Archegetes, which only Delians might enter, the Gymnasion and the Stadion, with its northwest side built against the rock.

★ Archaeological Museum

At Delos, east of the Sacred Precinct, is the Archeological Museum, which contains a good collection of material from the site, although some of the finest items found here are now in the National Archeological Museum and the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens. In the two central rooms are works of Archaic art, including (on the left) a marble tripod base with a ram's head and Gorgons (seventh century B.C.), a sphinx, several kouroi and korai (sixth century B.C.), a head of the Naxian Apollo (on the right) and three seated figures of women (seventh century B.C.). The room to the left of the entrance contains fragments (acroteria and figures from the pediment) from the Temple of the Athenians, herms, funerary stelae, small sculpture, terracottas and pottery. In the room to the right are votive offerings from the temple of Artemis, fragments of sculpture and inscriptions.

Theater Quarter

Between Mt Kynthos and the commercial harbor at Delos is the so-called Theater Quarter (third-second century B.C.), which gives an excellent impression of housing conditions in that period. The narrow, winding streets are paved with slate slabs. The houses, many of which stand 4-5m/13-16ft high, had at least one upper story; the decoration is reminiscent of the First Pompeian style. Particularly notable is the House of the Trident (mosaic pavement).

On the southeast side of the quarter is the Theater, with a Greek-style auditorium extending round more than a semicircle. The four lowest rows have preserved their marble steps, and the seats at the right-hand end of the first row still have their backs. The orchestra was surrounded by a narrow water channel, the stage building by a colonnade, the east side of which served as a proskenion. Below the stage building is a large cistern.

Residential Quarter

To the south of the Sacred Precinct at Delos is the Agora of the Competaliasts (headquarters of the Roman merchants who practiced the cult of the Lares Competales), with statues and a number of small temples.

★ Mt Kynthos

To climb Mt Kynthos, on Delos, follow an ancient road that runs southeast to the dry bed of the river Inopós (which even in antiquity had little water). Immediately west of the gorge is the House of Inopós (second century B.C.), and to the south, farther up the river bed, are the House of the Dolphins (with a dolphin mosaic in the peristyle) and the House of Masks. To the east, on a terrace above the gorge, is the Sanctuary of the Syrian Gods, in which Serapis, Isis, Anubis and Harpokrates were venerated from the second century B.C. From here the ancient road (partly stepped) climbs to the summit of Mt Kynthos (13m/37ft), once crowned by the temple of Zeus Kynthos and Athena Kynthia (third century B.C.), successor to an earlier temple of the seventh century B.C.

From the top of the hill there are extensive views: to the south the hills of Náxos, to the west Syros with its chief town Ermouópolis, to the north the mountainous island of Tínos and to the east Mykonos with its numerous chapels. On the western slope of the hill is a grotto roofed with massive stone slabs containing the base of a statue.

Surroundings

Rínia (Megáli Dílos)

West of Delos is the island of Rínia (also known as Megáli Dílos; area 17 sq. km/6.5 sq. mi), the ancient Rheneia. After the second purification it became the burial-place for Delos, but otherwise was of no consequence. In the 1km/.75mi wide channel between Delos and the southern half of Rínia are two barren rocks, Mikrós Revmatíáris and Megálos Revmatíáris.