



MONUMENTAL ADVENTURES

at the greek unesco monuments

THE MEDIEVAL CITY OF RHODES



8

► credits

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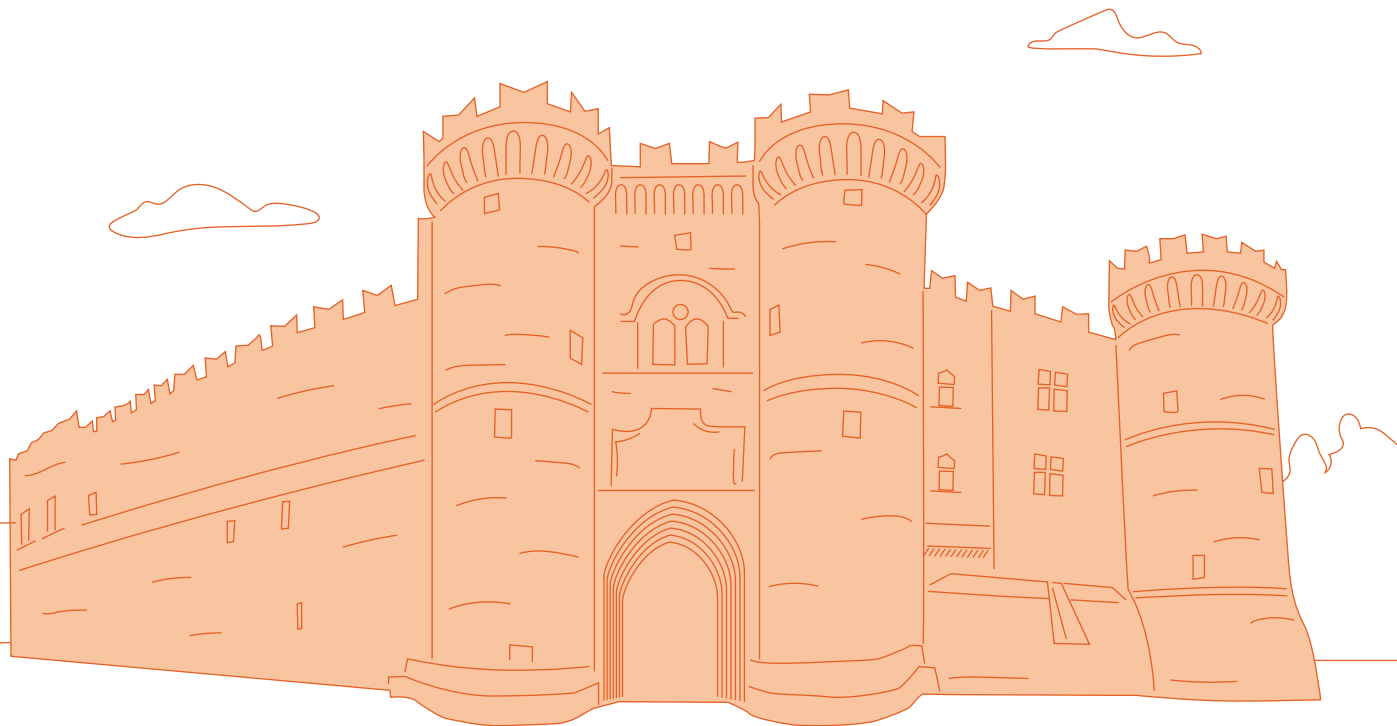
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MONUMENTAL ADVENTURES
at the greek unesco monuments

The Medieval City of Rhodes

Ten steps to...



1

Here was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Colossus was the giant statue of the god Helios (Sun) that towered over the city's harbours', placed in the ancient sanctuary of the god of the Sun.



2

The entrance to the main harbour was closed with a large chain.

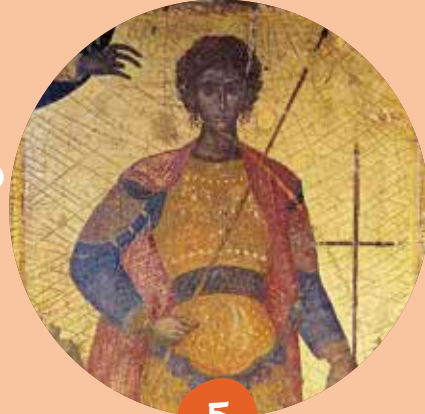
The chain connected the two strong towers of the harbour.



3

It is "indeed the city of the sun that befits its divine beauty"².

Built according to the Hippodamian city planning system, the ancient city had strong fortifications, wide streets around equal sized building blocks and an underground water supply and sewage system³.



5

Here the worship of Saint Fanourios became widely popular from the 14th c. onwards.



7

Many Knights' emblems can be seen on the walls and medieval buildings of the city⁴.

These emblems provide valuable evidence for the reliable dating of the city's monuments and the building activity of the people to whom they belong.

...Rhodes!



9

In 1856 the biggest earthquake in Greece of 8.2 Richter magnitude occurred on this island.

The history of Rhodes includes powerful earthquakes that caused great destruction. The Cretan scholar Ioannis Plousiadinis also describes a tidal wave (tsunami) that hit the city of Rhodes during the 1481 earthquake.



4

The conquest of the city by the Ottomans in 1522 shook Europe and was even the subject of an opera.

"The Siege of Rhodes" by William Davenant (1656) is considered England's first opera.



6

The papal church offered indulgences (indulgentia) for sale. Some of the revenues were used to reinforce the fortifications of the city.



8

In medieval times it was a typical Mediterranean castle city.

The city had splendid secular and ecclesiastical buildings of Gothic and Renaissance architecture.



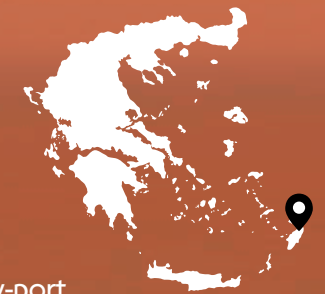
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It is one of the best-preserved fortified port cities of the Aegean.

The fortifications and the splendid monuments of chivalrous Rhodes caused the admiration of foreign travellers.

The Medieval City of Rhodes...

The City of Knights



WHAT?

- Medieval fortified city-port of the Aegean.

WHERE?

- Regional Unit of Rhodes, Region of South Aegean.

WHEN?

- 1309: conquest by the Knights of St John.
- 1522: conquest by the Ottomans.

what do the numbers say:

197.6 acres

THE EXTENT

of the fortified city
(equal to 112 football fields)



8,000

INHABITANTS

of the city of the Knights



6,375 sqm

THE AREA

of the Palace of the Grand Master



3,500 m

THE PERIMETER

of the walls

...in the UNESCO List!

The monument was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List based on the following criteria:



BYZANTINE
POST BYZANTINE
PERIOD

YEAR OF REGISTRATION:

1988

critterion ii

The fortifications of Rhodes, a city long considered to be impregnable, show the influence of the West on the military architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean.

critterion iv

The old city of Rhodes, with its Frankish and Ottoman buildings, is a unique set of a fortified settlement with important religious, secular and military monuments.

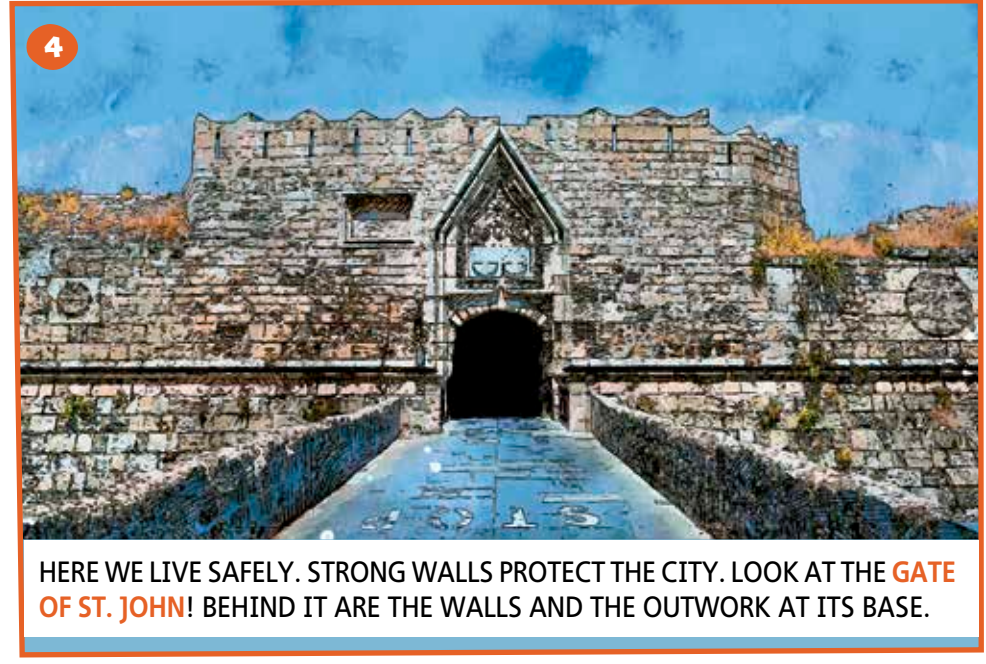
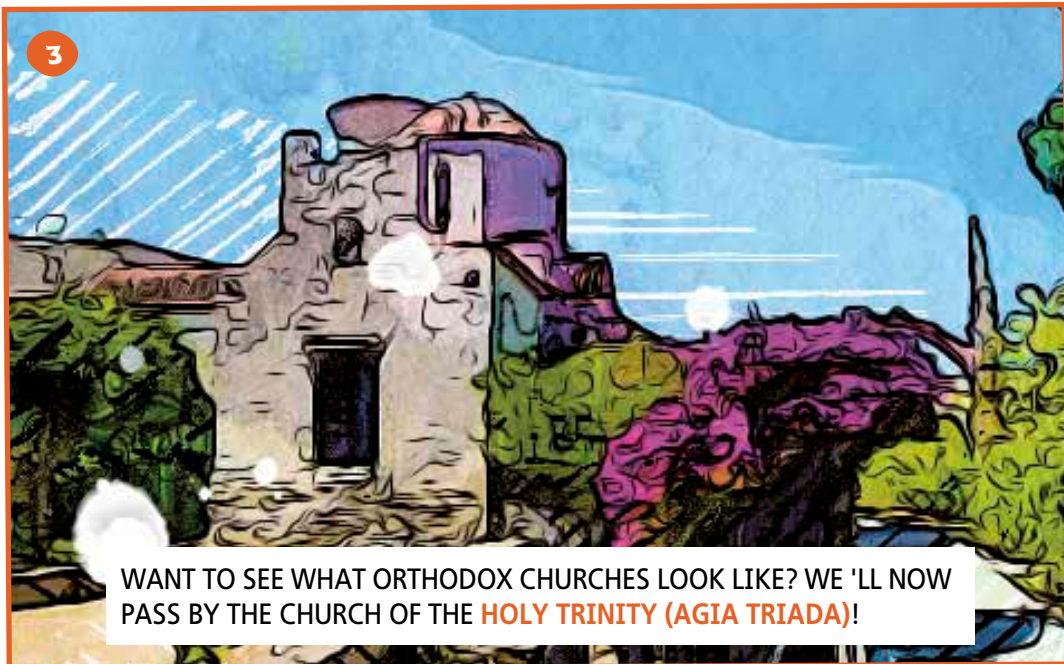
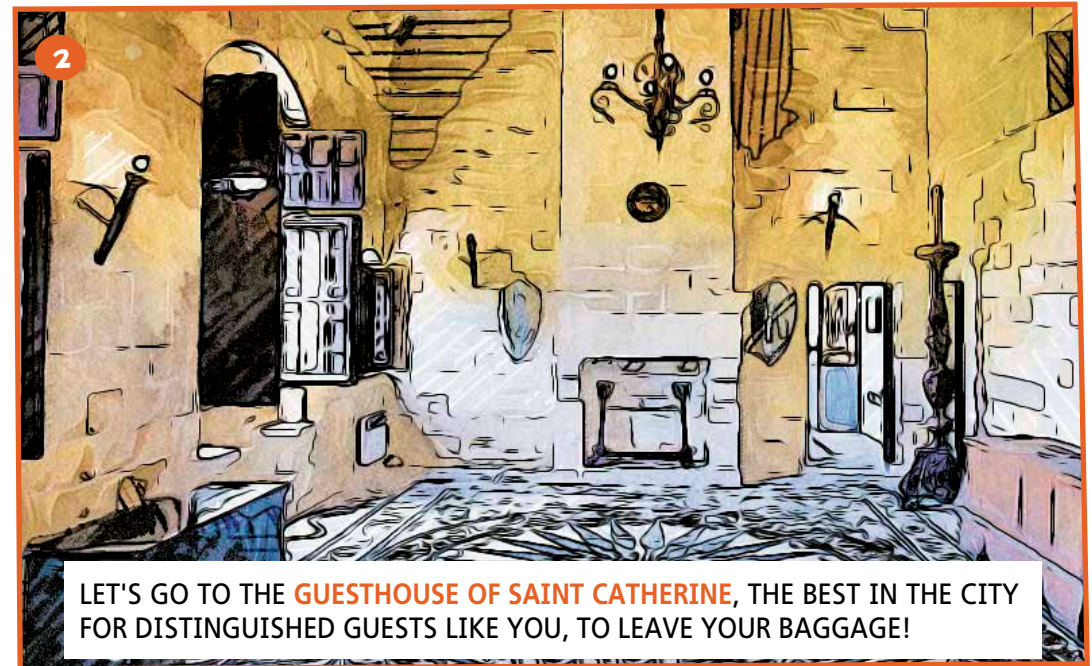
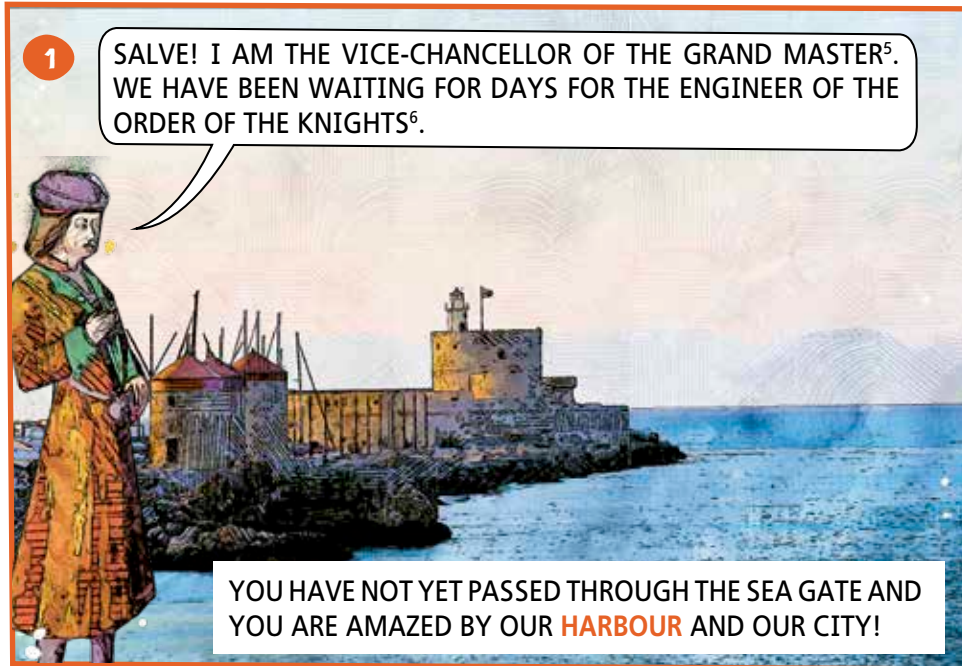
critterion V

Built on the northern tip of the island, Rhodes is one of the most beautiful Gothic-period cities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its main harbour was formerly adorned by the Colossus, work of Chares of Lindos; one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

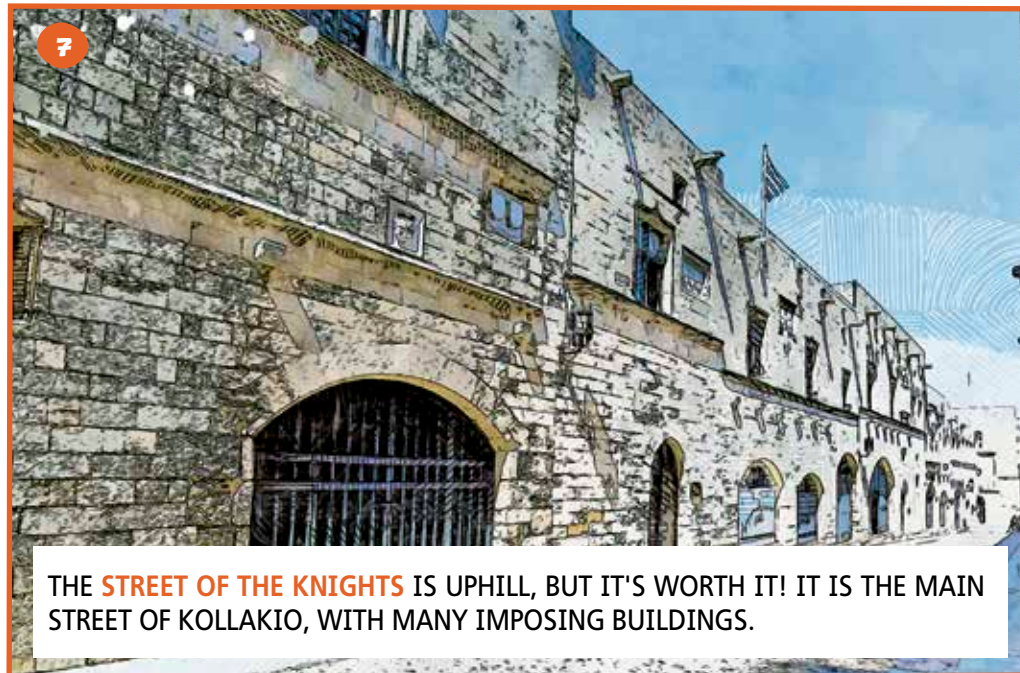
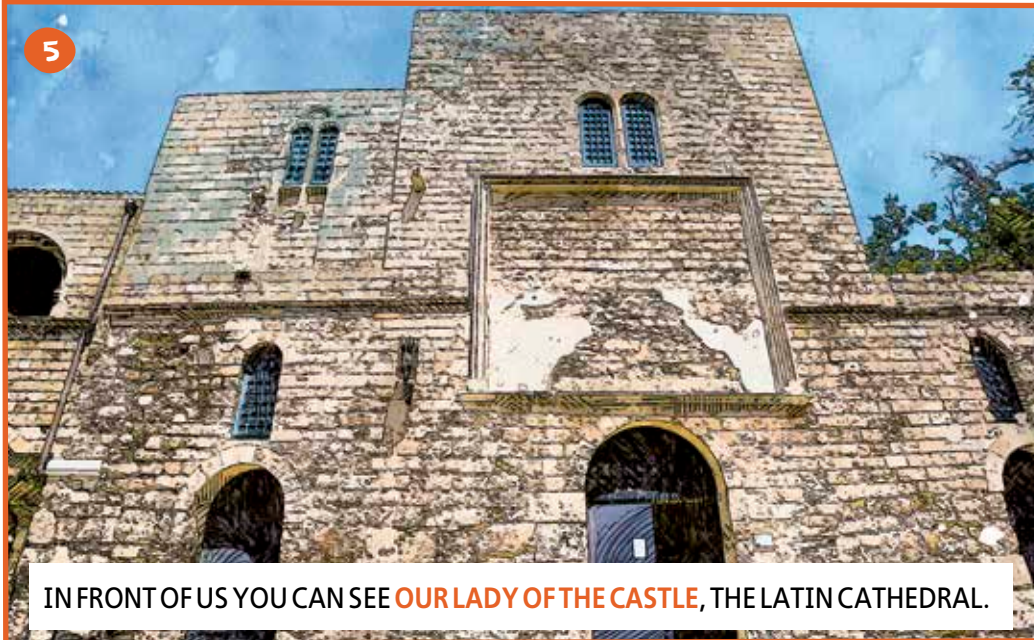
56
KNIGHTLY
CASTLES
in the Dodecanese

1. General view of the city.

Walking around the Medieval City...



...of Rhodes with vice-chancellor Guillaume!



The environment...

Myrtles and lemon trees, lavenders and roses... the gardens of Rhodes

The Medieval City of Rhodes was famous for its beautiful gardens, important landmarks in the city. Most of them were recreational areas, not excluding the production of produce, for example at the garden of the New Hospital where medicinal herbs were systematically cultivated.

Visitors rave about the fruit trees, exotic animals and statues that adorned the famous garden founded by the Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson (1476–1503) near the Grand Palace.



2. Hartmann Schedel, Wood engraving of medieval Rhodes, 1493.



3. The garden of the New Hospital.

...and the landscape

- Rhodes is located in the northernmost part of the island, where five natural harbours are formed.
- Its key geographical position, close to the Asia Minor coast and at the crossroads of the sea routes between East and West and North and South, contributed decisively to its emergence as an important trading post and port of the Mediterranean, already since ancient times.
- The landscape is of unparalleled natural beauty, but continuous habitation and building works have decisively altered the natural features of the terrain and landscape.

Green details

The Knights of St John introduced the cultivation of sugar cane to Rhodes and organised the production and distribution of sugar, which was a valuable product in medieval times.

Rhodes through time

Foundation of the city of Rhodes after the *synoikismos* (dwelling together) of the three ancient cities of Lindos, Kamiros and Ialysos. Prosperity of Rhodes during the Hellenistic period (323–42 BC) and evolution into one of the most glorious Greek cities.

408 BC



Unsuccessful siege of Rhodes by the Macedonian general Demetrius I the Poliorcetes.

305–304 BC



Siege and capture of Rhodes by the Roman senator Gaius Cassius Longinus.

42 BC



Rhodes is still the capital of the Byzantine *Province of the Islands* and is flourishing.

early 6th c. AD



Rhodes is the capital of the *Province of the Islands* under the *Diocese of Asia*.

314 AD



The city of Rhodes gets strong walls. Since the late 7th c. Rhodes belongs to the Byzantine naval theme (administrative region) of the *Caravisiens*—a later theme of the *Kibyrians*.

2nd half of the 7th c. AD



Rhodes is plundered by the Syrian emir Moab, later first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus (661–680 AD).

653/654 AD



Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) granted commercial privileges to the Venetians and established a Venetian trading post at Rhodes.

1082





1230

Succession of Rhodes to the Empire of Nicaea. In 1278 the island is ceded by the Byzantine Empire to the corsairs.



1309, August 15

Occupation of Rhodes by the Knights of St John.



1444

Siege of Rhodes by the Mamluks of Egypt.



1522

The huge Ottoman army under the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent occupy Rhodes after a 5-month siege and the Knights of St John leave the island permanently.



1480, May 23 – August 18

Rhodes is besieged for many months by the Ottoman Sultan Mohammed II the Conqueror.



1912–1947

Occupation of the Dodecanese and long-term rule in the Dodecanese by the Italians.



1948, March 7

Annexation of the Dodecanese to the Greek state, following the Treaty of Paris, by which Italy ceded the Dodecanese to Greece (1947, February 10).



1960

Declaration of the entire medieval city as a historical monument of conservation.



1988

Inclusion of the monument in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Historical figures through the ages

Governors, besiegers and scholars from the West and the East shaped in their own way the life and course of the island as a crossroads of civilisations.



GRAND MASTERS

Most of the Grand Masters, that is the Latin governors of Rhodes, were distinguished for their moderate and prudent policies towards the indigenous population.



Juan Fernandez de Heredia (1310–1396)

A skilled warrior and politician, distributor and orderer of valuable books, the scholar from Aragonia was the initiator of the first history corpus about the Greek area.

Pierre d'Aubusson (1423–1503)

from Auvernes in France, was one of the most important Grand Masters of Rhodes. After successfully repelling the Ottomans in 1480, he was made a cardinal in 1489 and later the legate of Asia. He was an engineer himself and saw to the strengthening of the fortifications of Rhodes.



Many Grand Masters undertook considerable building activity and contributed to cultivating the arts and literature.

OTTOMAN BESIEGERS



Muhammad II
(1432–1481)

In 1480 the army of the Sultan that 27 years before had conquered Constantinople laid a fierce four-month siege to the city of Rhodes. Thanks to the brave resistance of the Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson and the defenders, the siege failed, but the city suffered enormous losses and destruction.



Suleiman I the Magnificent
(1494–1566)

Many months of siege of Rhodes by Sultan Suleiman I led to the capitulation of both parties and the surrender of the city to the Ottomans in December 1522.

ARTISANS, MASTER CRAFTSMEN AND ENGINEERS

The craftsmen that carried out the building works of the fortifications of Rhodes, were referred to as *mastores* (*magistri muratores*). The *head of the mastores/ craftsmen* (*protomagistro*) was responsible for the design and management of the fortifications or other public constructions.

In an inscription of 1457, inscribed on the gate of St. John, there is reference to the most famous mastoras (builder), Manolis Kountis.



LATIN SCHOLARS



Cristoforo Buondelmonti
(c. 1385–c. 1430)

The Florentine monk and geographer stayed for 8 years in Rhodes. His work “*Liber Insularum Archipelagi*”, a standard for his time, is an encyclopaedia with maps and texts about the Aegean Sea.



Guillaume Caoursin
(1430–1501)

French scholar who lived in Rhodes and served as Vice-Chancellor of the Order. His description of the siege of the city by the Ottomans in 1480 is one of his important works.

GREEK SCHOLARS



Emmanuel Georgillas
(c. 1445–c. 1500)

The Rhodian scholar and priest is best known for his rhyming work “*The Plague of Rhodes*” which refers to the plague epidemic that broke out in the City of the Knights in Rhodes in October 1498.



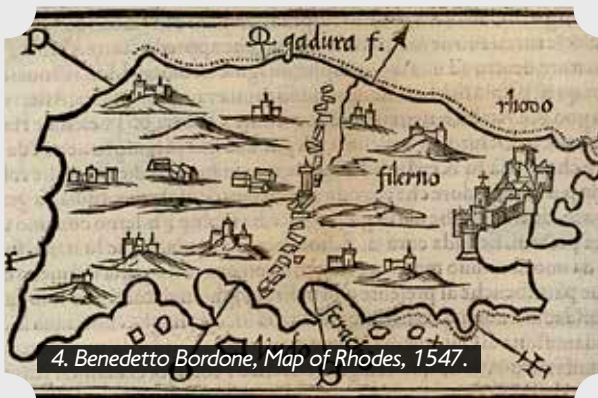
Georgios Kalyvas
(–1527)

The cleric and scholar from Rhodes, among other things, described the fall of Rhodes to Suleiman in 1522. After the siege, having lost both property and enriched library, he left Rhodes for Sitia in Crete, where he founded a School.

A monument is born

TRAVELLERS AND CARTOGRAPHERS

Rhodes, early on, attracted the interest of foreign travellers and cartographers, often on their way to the Holy Land.



4. Benedetto Bordone, Map of Rhodes, 1547.

In their works, called *isolaria*, valuable information about life on the island is included, while many of the city attractions are often described.

OLD AND NEW SCHOLARS

The study of the history of the Knights of St. John had already begun in medieval times!



The history of the siege of Rhodes in 1480 was recorded by the scholar Guillaume Caoursin (1430–1503). The work of the historian Giacomo Bosio (1544–1627), who was himself a member of the Order, remains an irreplaceable source for the history of the Knights of St John.

In the 20th c. Greek and foreign researchers excavate in Rhodes and take the lead in restoring and promoting the island's many monuments.

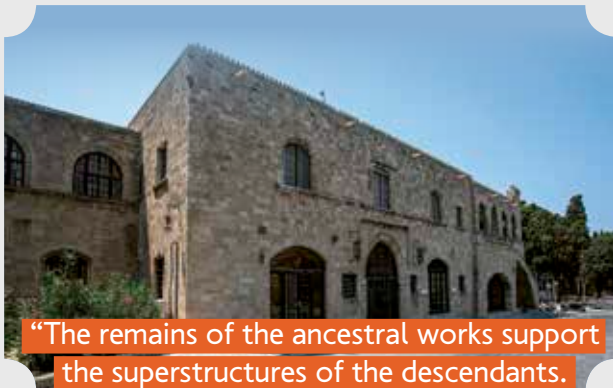
The recording of the fortifications and monuments of the city by the French architect and archaeologist Albert Gabriel (1883–1972) was an important scientific work during the Italian occupation (1912–1947).

Among later researchers, the archaeologist Elias Kollias (1936–2007), is considered the founder of the modern study and promotion of the cultural heritage of Rhodes.



THE ESTABLISHMENT THE OF THE "ITALIAN RHODES"

During the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese (1912–1947), the Italians undertook extensive archaeological excavations and drastic restoration work on the Knights' monuments of the medieval city of Rhodes.



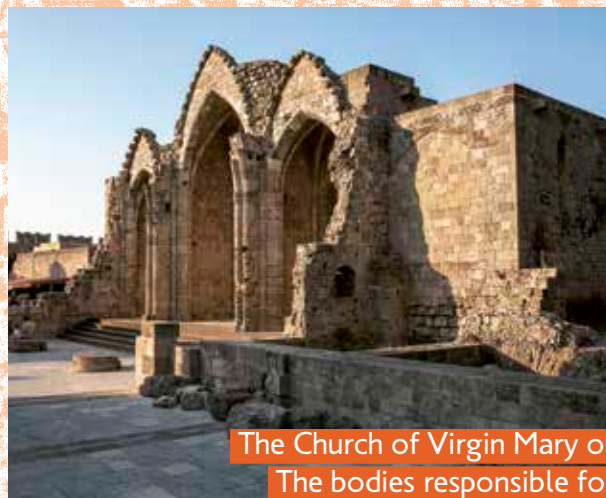
"The remains of the ancestral works support the superstructures of the descendants.

1930 AD, Fascist year IX"⁷

In the context of the fascist political ideology, particular emphasis was placed on the "Latin-Knightly" identity of the monuments, with no regard neither for preserving the original form nor for the later building phases of the Turkish occupation.

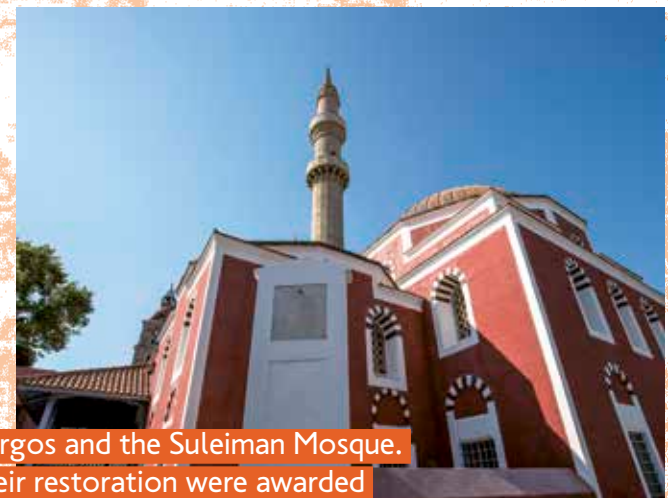
RESTORATION WORKS

The Greek state soon after the integration of the Dodecanese (1947) intervened to declare most of the monuments as historically preserved, and in 1960 the entire medieval city was declared a historical monument protected by the Archaeological Service.



The Church of Virgin Mary of Burgos and the Suleiman Mosque.

The bodies responsible for their restoration were awarded by Europa Nostra, the pan-European cultural heritage organization.



In 1985, the Rhodes Medieval City Conservation and Restoration Office (1985–2005) was set up to promote the medieval city of Rhodes, which is a lively residential area with a large tourist population, and, in 1998, the Scientific Committee for the Monitoring of Projects in the Monuments of the Medieval City of Rhodes (1998–2016) was established. The two bodies, in addition to their scientific and restoration work, aimed to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of the old city.

The restoration works of the medieval city is currently continued by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Dodecanese.

A unique monument...

A castle city by Mediterranean standards

The present form of Rhodes, one of the most beautiful and well-preserved castle cities of the Aegean, is the result of many periods and influences, mainly of that of the Knights Hospitallers, when the city flourished and acquired the urban organisation, the strong fortification walls and the multitude of buildings that today's visitor encounters.



5. Gate D' Amboise.



6. Palace of the Grand Master.

During the period of the Knights Hospitallers, the city quadrupled in size and was divided by an inner wall into two unequal parts. In the northern and smaller one, the *Kollakio*, where the members of the knightly Order lived, were gathered the administrative and ecclesiastical buildings of the city. The main axis was the *Street of the Knights*. The southern and larger part of the city, *Burgo*, was where the rest of the population lived. Burgo was crossed by the *Commercial Street*, with shops, workshops and warehouses. At the higher, north-western end of *Kollakio*, rose the palace of the Grand Master, the military and administrative centre of the city and also the last line of defence for the population in the event of a siege.

Medieval Rhodes had three ports: the main port of the city, protected by two high towers and closed by a chain, Mandraki and Acadia.



Under Western rule

After the Fourth Crusade, most of the Aegean islands came under the rule of the Venetians, the mighty naval power of the time.

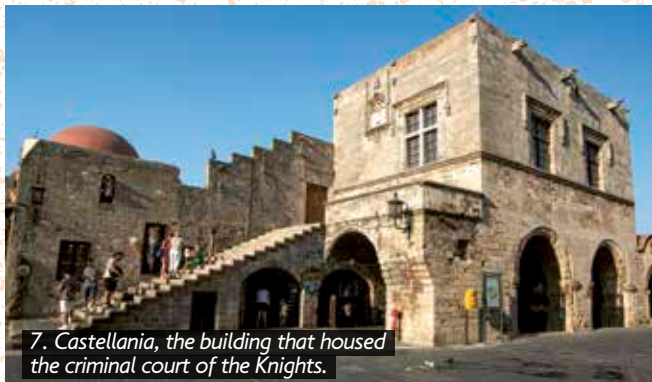
In Rhodes the Knights Hospitallers achieved the conditional capitulation of the Byzantine emperor for the surrender of the city in 1309.

Soon they extended their rule over most of the islands of the Dodecanese. Thus began a new historical period for the area, that lasted for about two centuries. In 1522, after a long siege by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the Knights of St John left Rhodes to settle in Malta, leaving behind a number of monuments as indelible traces of their long presence on the island.

...with timeless radiance ★

The Order of the Knights Hospitallers of Jerusalem

The Order of the Knights of St John, as named after its patron Saint John the Baptist, is one of the military monastic orders founded during the Crusades to care for the Western pilgrims to the Holy Land and defend the Roman Catholic Church. Gradually, they also acquired a military character and fought against the Muslims. The monk-warriors of the Order left the Holy Land with the fall of Acre in 1291 and the subsequent dissolution of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. At first, they took refuge in Cyprus, until they settled in Rhodes in 1309.



7. Castellania, the building that housed the criminal court of the Knights.



8. Guesthouse of the Langue of Auvergne.



High officials, one from each *Langue*, participated in the administration and made up the Council (Conseil).



The knights came from various countries in Northern and Western Europe. Those with the same ethnicity formed a *Langue*⁸. The elected head of state was the Grand Master, who ruled until his death.

A unique monument...

Rhodes, the impregnable city

The Knights of St John took particular interest in the fortification of the city of Rhodes, the political and administrative centre of the knightly state, which, apart from numerous enemies, had to face the constant threat of the Ottomans. Some of the most remarkable fortifications of the period in the Eastern Mediterranean were built here.



9. Gate of the Canons.



10. Part of the fortification and the circular tower of Italy (Carretto).



The harbour of Rhodes with the chain in an engraving of the 16th c.

The wondrous walls

The Knights of St John, prompted by the expanded use of gunpowder and firearms since the 15th c., repaired and extended the city walls. With a perimeter of 3.5 km and a thickness of up to 14 m, they were regularly reinforced with towers with strong bastions, a large moat 20 to 60 m wide, strong bastions, and strong longitudinal ramparts, the walls of Rhodes were admired by medieval travellers, who considered the city of Rhodes to be impregnable and a stronghold of Christianity in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The “chain tax”

In 1462 a special tax of 2.5% on the value of goods entering the port of Rhodes was imposed to cover the cost of the fortifications. This tax had to be paid, so that the chain blocking the entrance would sink into the sea thus allowing the ships to enter the harbour.

...with timeless radiance ★

The Castles of the Knights of St. John in the Dodecanese

The Knights of St John developed a dense network of fortifications in the Dodecanese. They modernised the existing castles of Rhodes and the islands under their rule, built new ones, and developed a dense network of watchtowers for early warning of the population in case of danger.



The knightly castle of Krac des Chevaliers in the medieval Holy Land, now Syria, is a World Heritage Site.



11. Neratzia Castle, Kos.



12. Castle of Kolossios, Cyprus.

Outside the borders!

The Knights of St John are associated with a large number of powerful castles in their respective territories, in the Holy Land, Cyprus and Malta.

There are estimated to be 56 Knights' castles in the Dodecanese, 21 of which are located on the island of Rhodes. In most of them, the inhabitants only fled in case of emergency. Rhodes, as well as the castle of Neratzia and possibly Antimachia on the island of Kos, were the only castles where the population was permanently settled. In the event of a siege, the inhabitants of the surrounding islands fled to the well-fortified castle of Rhodes.

Castles – refuges

A unique monument...

A crowded city

Medieval Rhodes was inhabited by a heterogeneous multitude of people from different social, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The predominant population of the town was the indigenous Greek population, mainly living in *Burgo*. Within the walls, apart from the few Knights of St John, lived Latin people from Western and Northern European countries, who formed a local aristocracy, bringing the Western way of life to Rhodes. An important population element of the city were also the Jews, while Armenians, Arabs from Syria and Egypt, Turks and Mauritanian merchants and even gypsies were also present. Rhodes was also home to many slaves.



13. The harbour of Rhodes.



14. Panagia tou Kastrou (Our Lady of the Castle).
Byzantine church of the 11th c.



15. Panagia tou Kastrou, Fresco of Saint Lucia, 14th c.

“Many wear silks,
velvets, cashmere,
All kinds of silhouettes,
wide sleeves...”

Emmanuel Georgillas,
The Plague of Rhodes, 1498.

Economic prosperity

The diplomatic and commercial contacts of the knights gave a boost to the city's economy. The port of Rhodes became one of the most important in the Eastern Mediterranean. Most of the trade was conducted mainly by Catalans, Genoese and Venetians, not excluding Greek merchants.

Rhodian “eclectic” trend in the arts

The monuments of Rhodes often combine selected elements of Byzantine art with features of Western European, Gothic and Renaissance art, giving them a special and unique character.

...with timeless radiance

Rhodes, cultural crossroads

Today's city is a typical example of a timeless multicultural Mediterranean city. Within the medieval fortification architectural elements from all historical periods blend harmoniously, reflecting the city's long history, while forming a charming ensemble that takes us on a journey through time!



The iconic Grande Albergo delle Rose hotel in the harbour, in its original form (1927), where the founding of the State of Israel was signed in 1948.



17. View of the city.

Great tourist growth

During the Italian occupation (1912-1947), the Italians intended the “Island of the Sun” as a tourist attraction for wealthy travellers. The monuments of the town, the golden sandy beaches of the island, the beautiful natural environment, and the hospitality of the inhabitants contributed to the development of tourism from the 1960s onwards.

Several films have been made in the ideal setting of the medieval town of Rhodes, which has been described as the “Hollywood of Greece”.

The premiere of the film “The Guns of Navarone” (1961) was held in London in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, a wonderful opportunity to showcase the island.

Film Set

Monumental dialogues



GREECE



Old Town of Corfu

One of the best-preserved fortified port cities of the Mediterranean in the Ionian Sea during the Venetian rule.



MALTA



Valletta

The historic capital of Malta, where the Knights of St John settled after they departed from Rhodes in 1530. At least 320 monuments of different periods are preserved within the city walls.



GREECE

Castle of Mytilene

One of the strongest castles-harbours, an excellent example of Genoese fortification architecture in the Northeastern Aegean.

YEMEN



Old City of Shibam

A 16th-century fortified city with impressive towering clay towers, known as “The Manhattan of the Desert”.

A message today...

“Hospitallers”⁹

One of the main missions of the Knights of St. John was the treatment of the Crusaders and pilgrims in the Holy Land.

This mission was unhindered throughout the activity of the Order. Since the 12th century they had already been operating a large hospital in Jerusalem, near the Holy Sepulchre.

The foundation of the first hospital in Rhodes, known as the Old Hospital, was decided as early as 1313, soon after the installation of the Order on the island. In 1440 began the construction of the second hospital (New Hospital) within the *Kollakio*. The imposing two-storey building today houses the city's Archaeological Museum and consists of many rooms around a large, square inner courtyard.

The Knights of St John also assumed the care of the poor, widows, orphans and the hospitality of pilgrims.



18. Interior of the "New Hospital" in Rhodes.

...for a better tomorrow!

Goals 2030 >



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING >

Ensure a healthy life and promote well-being for people of all ages!

1. The giant bronze statue of the Sun God Helios, the patron of the island, was the work of the sculptor Chares of Lindos in early 3rd century BC as a sign of gratitude for protecting the city from the long siege of Demetrius the Poliorcetes. It collapsed in the earthquake of 226 BC and does not survive today.

2. “for it is indeed the city of Helios, which is suitable for the god’s beauty”, Pindar, (first half of the 5th c. BC), According to Pindar, when Zeus distributed the earth to the Olympian gods, Helios was absent. He then complained to Zeus and asked to be granted the land, which would rise from the sea at sunrise. The island of Rhodes emerged next day and Helios, struck by its beauty, bathed it with his rays. Since then, Rhodes has been the island of the Sun, the brightest and shiniest island.

3. Hippodamus of Miletus (5th c. BC) is considered the “father of urban planning”, as he designed Miletus, Rhodes, Piraeus and many other ancient cities. The Hippodamian system designs the ideal city by laying out parallel and vertical streets to create building blocks and spacious squares with appropriate orientation. The location of administrative buildings, temples and houses were precisely defined, as were the underground water supply and sewerage.

4. Emblem is the unique, distinctive symbol associated with an aristocratic family or another form of organisation (political, religious, knightly Order, etc.). At least 191 different emblems are preserved in Rhodes, most of them carved in stone and built into the walls and buildings of the knightly era.

5. Our guide is inspired by the high court, scholar and Vice-Chancellor Guillaume Caoursin. The story is set in the early 16th c. when expert engineers and architects arrived in Rhodes to examine and strengthen the walls at the invitation of the Grand Masters. The Ottomans finally conquered Rhodes in 1522, but strengthening the walls was an ongoing priority until then. For example, the Italian engineer Matteo Gioeni and the Italian architect Basilio dalla Scuola arrived in Rhodes in 1519 at the invitation of the Grand Master Fabrizio del Carretto (1513–1521) to strengthen the fortifications in the face of the Turkish threat.

6. For the “Order of the Knights of St. John the Baptist” or “of the Hospital”, see p. 18 ff. pp. 19, 25.

7. It is a translation of an Italian inscription on the wall of the modern building of the Municipal Gallery, which was built in 1930, over the ruins of knightly buildings, to house Italian businesses.

8. The *Langues*, i.e. the nationalities, were eight: Provence, Auvergne, France, England, Germany, Italy, Aragon and Castile. Each *Langue* had its lodging (*auberge*), a guesthouse where its members lived. They also fought in a particular area of the fortification.

9. The Knights of St John were also known as Hospitallers or Knights of the Hospital.

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