



Περίληψη :

Χρονολόγηση

1912-1943

Γεωγραφικός Εντοπισμός

Islands of the Dodecanese

1. Periods of the Italian Rule

The Italian Rule in the Dodecanese (1912-1943) can be divided into four periods according to the principles of international law:

1. From May 5th 1912 (landing of the Italians on the islands) up to October 18th 1912, when the Italo-Ottoman peace treaty was signed in Ouchy. That was a temporary war occupation (*occupatio bellica*). During this period, the islands' regime didn't change.
2. From October 18th 1912 up to August 20th 1915, when Italy proclaimed war against the Ottoman Empire. That is the so-called period of "*occupatio in pignore*" Military occupation was seen as guarantee for the execution of the treaty of Ouchy.
3. From August 20th 1915, the occupation became "*occupatio de facto*" lasting up to July 24th 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne was signed and the islands were finally ceded to Italy.
4. From July 24th 1923, the occupation became legal (*occupatio de jure*); the islands were a dominion (*possedimento*) of the Italian Kingdom and not a colony (*colonia*). They were under the administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not under that of Colonies. This period ended in November 1943 with the capitulation of Italy and the capture of the islands by the Germans.

The Italian Rule, which had a decisive impact on the Dodecanese, can also be divided according to historical criteria, that is, according to the main axes of the Italian policy on the islands. These axes follow the changes in Italian political life and are represented by the two main governors of the Dodecanese, who had very wide jurisdiction.

The first period stretches from 1912 up to the final ceding with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

The second period could be called "Mario Lago period" (1923-1936), after the name of the then governor of the islands. It is identified with the fascists' ascend to power.

Finally, the last period from 1936 up to 1943 could be called "De Vecchi period" after the then governor of the islands and member of the *Quadrivirato* of Fascism. This period is connected with the imperial character of fascism and the declaration of the *imperium*.

2. Axes of the Italian policy on the islands

2. 1. 1912-1923

Concerning diplomacy, the islands during this first period belonged to the [Ottoman Empire](#). This period is characterized by the diplomatic struggle of Dodecanesians to integrate the islands with Greece –with a transitional period of autonomy– and that of Italians to annex them into Italy. From the beginning of Italian rule, the Dodecanesians declared their decision for autonomy and integration into Greece at the [Patmos](#) Conference (June 16-18 1912). Many considered untimely the mention of integration at that moment. The reactions of the Dodecanesians climaxed with the bloody Easter of 1919, when the Italians used violence to suppress the



demonstrations of Greeks on [Rhodes](#). Those reactions also led to the treaties of Titoni-Venizelos (July 27, 1919) and Sèvres (1920) that opened the road for the integration. After the Greek defeat in Asia Minor and the expatriation of Asia Minor Christians to Greece, as well as after the fascists' ascend to power in Italy and their rejection of the treaties, the islands came finally under Italian domination with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

The Italian administration's main goal during that period was to weaken the community and ecclesiastical institutions, as well as to reduce the power of economically prominent Greeks, who practically administered the islands up to that moment. At the same time, a tremendous archaeological project under the guidance of the celebrated mediaevalist Giuseppe Gerola and the archaeologist Amedeo Maiuri was put forward in order to provide legitimation to Italian rule, which thus could be seen as a continuation of the Hospitallers' era. On the other hand, because of the uncertain future, Italians only planned fundamental infrastructure works serving occupation forces. Some examples are a small expansion of the road network, the building of slaughter-houses and the the placing of street lamps. The most important though was the modernization of the water supply network.

The occupation also marked an intervention cutting the Dodecanese off the broader Aegean islands region and the Asia Minor coasts. Under these circumstances, some constraints had been imposed on Greek ships, islanders' movements and sponge fishing. These measures had a serious impact on the economy and supply of the Dodecanese. This resulted to an intense [migratory wave](#) leading to a 30% decrease of population, while deaths resulting from famine had also been recorded.

2. 2. Mario Lago Period (1923-1936)

During this period, there was a radical change in the nature of the Italian domination in the Dodecanese owing to the Italian de jure occupation and the ascend of Mussolini to power. We should also mention that the identification of this period with one person is nothing but coincidental. The governor had very broad legislative, administrative and judicatory jurisdiction.

This period is characterized by the attempt to Italianize the islanders. In fact, with the Royal Decree of December 15, 1925, the islanders were considered Italian citizens with Dodecanesian nationality and were not required to do military service. With the 1926 school regulation, the educational system changed: communal schools were no longer under the superintendence of the Orthodox Church, teaching the Italian language became mandatory and a School for teacher training would also be founded. In 1929, studying – or post-graduate studies – at the University of Pisa became mandatory for the exercise of a profession requiring university studies. That was also accompanied by scholarships for Dodecanesian students. Similarly, they intervened in Church affairs with an unsuccessful attempt to found an autonomous Church of the Dodecanese and reinforce the position of the Roman Catholic Church. The Italians introduced in the Dodecanese the fascist youth organizations, while they intended to Italianize names. To a great extent, those measures were aimed at forming and imposing an Italian Dodecanesian identity in juxtaposition to the Greek.

A series of legislative regulations dealt a crushing blow to the traditional agricultural economy of the islands, such as the 1924 forestall law, which imposed numerous restraints on cultivation and made appropriating land from the state easier. This deteriorated farmers' position and often led to their proletarianization. Save rebuilding the economy with the invasion of Italian businesses, Italian planning was mostly aimed at developing tourism. In 1933, 200,000 brochures and 30,000 tourist guides were printed in four languages. At the same time, 11 shipping companies connected the Dodecanese (mostly Rhodes) with the entire Mediterranean Sea.

Though the numbers reported by several sources differ greatly from each other, there is no doubt that the migratory wave increased immensely during the Italian Rule. Migration was caused mainly by socio-economic factors, but it was encouraged by the favorable stance of the Italian authorities intending to establish Italian colonists in the place of emigrants. Their efforts had disappointing results, since in 1936 Italians in the Dodecanese were no more than 16,711, most of whom had settled on Rhodes and [Leros](#). Italians of Rhodes and [Kos](#) were farmers and had settled at new settlements organized as farming businesses. Those of Leros generally worked for the army and lived at the facilities of the city of Porto Lago at Lakki.

What marked the Italian Rule in the Dodecanese though was their [activity in town planning](#). Besides, Lago himself would call this remarkable zoning, planning and building activity aimed at the colonization of places "stone policy".



Their interference in town planning was not of the same extent on all islands. On Rhodes, Kos and Leros it was quite significant, defining up to now the character of these islands. On the rest of the islands, they only constructed middle-sized command posts and public service buildings dominating the ports. In May 1923, architect Florestano di Fausto was called from Rome in order to design anew the city of Rhodes. After the 1933 earthquake, the city of Kos was designed anew by Rodolfo Petracco. He also designed Porto Lago at Lakki of Leros, the only newly founded city. All of this interference in town planning was followed by the construction of imposing buildings and significantly improved the urban net. It was all based on extended practically inexpensive mandatory expropriations of building plots and residences.

Colonization policy was not limited in cities. A series of controversial decrees also changed the uses of land and its forms. Characteristic examples are the 1924 forestall law and the establishment of land register. The first one benefited impressively the environment but also damaged the agricultural economy. The latter organized and rationalized the uses of land but also became the medium for extensive changes of ownership.

2. 3. De Vecchi Period (1936-1940)

As the fascist regime became harsher with the declaration of the empire (*imperio*), Lago was substituted for tetrarch fascist Cesare de Vecchi. He became governor and had both political and military power. De Vecchi's main goal was radical italianization and institutional modernization of the islands. Therefore, he imposed radical changes in education with the new school regulation (July 21 1937), which practically established the total domination of the Italian language at schools (teaching Greek was only optional and with no books in the first classes of primary school). Moreover, the system of administration, balancing between the traditional "communal" system and the modernizing expectations of Italian fascism, altered significantly in 1937, when new mayors were appointed, the *podesta*, directly depended from the governor. The racist law for the preservation of the purity of the Italian race was also introduced in 1938. At the same time, a series of decrees imposed absolute equalization with the Italian law. Mixed courts of orthodox, muslim and Jews were abolished and their cases were heard in civil courts. Concluding contracts and issuing certificates came from religious communities under state services.

De Vecchi didn't make any new development plans; he just carried out those of his predecessor, whom he accused of being "orientalist" among others. His loathing for what he thought was of "orientalist style" made him change the exterior of buildings. Their façades were covered with *pietra finta* lime-cast (Italian for "fake stone"). It was a mixture of cement with sinter powder, similar in color and texture to the sinter of the buildings of the Knights' era. Such examples are the Hotel of the Roses and the Court House, which were radically changed. The few buildings constructed were characterized by the monumental fascist architecture aiming to inspire awe and respect among residents. This period ended when Italy entered the war. Three years later (1943), after the fall of Mussolini and the capitulation of Badoglio, the Germans would take over the islands ending formally as well the Italian presence on the islands.

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