



Summary :

General Information

Area: 26.988 km²

Coastline length: 40 km

Population: 313

Island capital and its population: Chalki (313)

Administrative structure: Region of South Aegean, Prefecture of the Dodecanese, Municipality of Chalki

Local newspapers: *The Halki Visitor* (is being published at Symi)

Local radio stations: Radio Chalki

Museums: Chalki Folklore Museum

Archaeological sites and monuments: Ancient settlement of Chalki at Chorio, Mediaeval castle at Chorio

Traditional settlements: Emporeio, Chorio

Natural monuments: The island has been included in the European network "NATURA 2000" and has been declared an Important Bird Area in Greece

Cultural clubs: Mylos, Chalkites Association at Athens and Peiraius

Conferences: Chalki International Seminars sponsored by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)

Events: Lyre and folk couplets contest

Festivals: The Chalki Festival (September 1st-15th)

Religious feasts: On the eve of the Decapitation of St John at the monastery of St John Alarga (August 29th), Dormition of the Virgin Mary at Panagia Choriani at Chora (August 15th), Holy Cross at the monastery of Stavros (September 14th), Palarnoti, Panormiti or Archangelos Michael at the church of Archangelos Michael (November 8th), St John Konta at Signi, On St George's day at the church of St George

1. Introduction

Chalki is located southwest of [Rhodes](#), in the Karpathian Sea, just 11 miles from the coast of Kamiros, with which it is connected with small boats. It is an arid, mountainous and waterless now island. Maistro, Profitis Ilias, Merovigli and Amali are its highest tops. Up to World War II it was systematically cultivated and produced cereal, pulse, grapes, wine and olive oil. Over the past few years, people are no longer engaged in land cultivation because of [emigration](#). Residents still work in stock farming though, especially goats and sheep. There is also a small production of honey and cheese, consumed mostly by locals. Residents usually occupy themselves with fishing, whereas a fish-breeding unit has been established at Arri. There are no forests, save few olive trees and the shrub vegetation covering mountain slopes. The traditional settlement of Emborios, or Nimborio, with its two-storey neoclassical houses illustrates the island's prosperity during the 19th century. Over the past years, residents have restored some of these houses, without disrespecting traditional [architecture](#). As a result, they have created a colorful settlement with blooming gardens and stone-paved streets.

2. History



Ancient writers have cited the island with several names: Chalki (Thucydides), Chálkeia or Chalkeía (Stefanos of Byzantium and Pseudo-Scylax), Chalkía (Strabo, Theophrastus and Pliny). Its residents are called Chalkeatai or Chalkitai on inscriptions. Theories on where *Chalki* comes from, as well as on its meaning, are still being checked. Strabo's attestation about a settlement, a temple dedicated to Apollo, and an important port is very significant. Theophrastus and Pliny cited Chalki's fertile land, which allowed residents to cultivate it twice a year and gather two harvests.

We have limited knowledge on [Prehistoric](#) Chalki since only shards and obsidian evincing past habitation have been recently found at Trachia and Pontamos. Until now, we have no attestations or findings from [Geometrical and Archaic Times](#), whereas no myth refers to the island.

Chalki's first historical appearance is in 478/477 B.C., in the tax lists of the A' Athenian League. In Thucydides's records of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), the port of Chalki was very significant for the battles of 412/411 B.C., since it was a base and a refuge of the Athenian fleet that fought the Rhodians after their alliance with the Spartans.

In the 4th century, Chalki enjoyed a short period of independence. Important findings from the Classical necropolis at Pontamos illustrate its heyday. They also evince relations with Athens, Rhodes and Thasos. According to Theophrastus, who called Chalki a Rhodian island, in the late 4th century it came under the influence of Rhodes. We have some 3rd century inscriptions referring to Chalki as one the *ktoines* (municipalities) of Rhodian city Kamiros and to some Chalkeans as *damiourgoi* (officials) of Kamiros. The port of Chalki was an anchorage for the mighty Rhodian fleet, since the west coasts of Rhodes were not appropriate for docking. During Hellenistic Times, that fleet made sure the seas and trade were safe. At the same time, the island was included in the dense network of observation posts established by the Rhodians on the Dodecanese and the opposite Asia Minor coast in order to control the moves of their rivals' ships. Chalki and Rhodes went down the same historical path up to Roman Imperial Times.

Architectural parts from basilicas at Pefkia and Zies evince habitation continued during Paleochristianic Times (4th-6th century A.D.). Soon after Rhodes was taken over, the Knights Hospitallers took over Chalki too (1309). Along with [Tilos](#), the island was granted as a feud to Barello Assanti in 1366 and was later leased to Dragonetto Clavelli in 1385. It is quite interesting that during [the Knights' Rule](#) Chalkeans migrated to Rhodes in 1450, and to Basilica and Amartos in 1492/1493 with the official permission of great magister Pierre d'Aubusson (1476-1503).

The island obviously suffered predations by [Ottomans](#). According to knights' documents, Chalki could not therefore protect and feed its residents. After taking over Rhodes in 1522, the Ottomans also took Chalki over. During the Ottoman Rule, Chalkeans were allowed to elect elders and enjoyed some kind of self-government. Ottoman documents tell us that Chalki and [Kalymnos](#) were paid to send a quantity of sponges to the imperial court annually.

The following story about Morosini (1658) illustrates the significance of Chalki as an observation post even during the Ottoman Rule. When the Venetian admiral tried to take over Rhodes, he failed because Chalkeans had warned the garrison in time. In a fit of rage, Morosini set the cave on mount Klisoura on fire; all Chalkeans had gathered there suffocating. Its folk name ever since is Kameno Spilio, meaning *Burnt Cave*. Thanks to trade, [seafaring](#) and [sponge fishing](#), Chalki flourished in the early 19th century. Decline started in the early 20th century, since the privileges it enjoyed throughout the Ottoman Rule were withdrawn, and sponge fishing was therefore immensely damaged.

In 1912, the [Italians](#) put an end to the Ottoman Rule and kept Chalki and the rest of the Dodecanese under their control up to 1943, when the Germans took over. The Dodecanese islands were incorporated into the [Greek state](#) on March 7, 1948.

3. Archaeological sites and monuments

Built on a hill slope, Chorio is the island's main archaeological site, located 2 km to the west of Emporios. Chalkeans lived there protected by [pirates](#) up to the 19th century. The ancient settlement is located there, and on the top of the hill, we have remnants of the Mediaeval castle walls. Remains of retaining walls from ancient residences are still extant among abandoned stone-built houses. Near



the top of the hill, there are two rock-hewn thrones inscribed with *Zeus of Hecate*. According to the votive inscription of the priest of god Asclepius, a small temple dedicated to the god had probably been built there. Near the entrance of the Mediaeval castle, there is a built-in coat of arms of great magister Pierre d'Aubusson (1476-1503). In the court, a deserted church of St. Nicolas is still extant with remains of 15th and 17th century frescoes.

The ancient necropolis stretched along the foot of the hill to the beach of Pontamos, outside of Nimborio. Rock-hewn chamber tombs –still visible now– were found when the road was built in the '60s. At the beach of Pontamos, the Italians studied 19 of these tombs in 1931. They found significant funeral gifts, mostly red-figured Attic pottery (4th century B.C.). Amongst others, they found a red-figured epinetron (a part used for spinning wool) depicting women in their daily occupations, and a red-figured **rhyton** with masks of Hercules and a Silenus. Nowadays, they are housed in the Museum of Rhodes. A small Hellenistic tower has survived among stone fences and later stone-built faviform [farmhouses](#) called *kyfes*, at Kefali. That is the westernmost peninsula of the island, an inaccessible place since there is no road leading there. The *kyfes*, which were mostly built with ancient building material, are found particularly on Chalki and probably date from Mediaeval and Later Times.

The island is scattered with painted churches dating from the 8th to the 15th century evincing the island's unbroken historical continuity during Byzantine Times. Such are: Aghios Nicolaos at Kastro, Aghios Andreas at Andramasos, Aghios Nikitas at Amali, Panagia Odigitria at Ai-Yannis, Panormitis at Plagia, Aghios Zacharias at Phiniki, Aghios Georgios at Kokkenos and Panormitis at Ai-Yannis.

4. Traditional and later architecture

Of all later monuments, quite interesting are the traditional settlement of Chorio, the neoclassical houses of Nimborio, and the windmills outside the settlement, near the modern cemetery. The buildings standing out in the settlement are the tower with the clock in front of the town hall, and the church of St. Nicolas (1861) with its marble façade and the imposing bell-tower. The building of the Customs House now housing the Post Office, and the building of the Harbor Master's Office are typical of the [Italian architecture](#) of the time between the two World Wars.

5. Folk culture – folk art

It is also worth mentioning the folk culture of Chalki, as expressed through folk songs and couplets, tradition and fables, dances and customs, the folk speech, its textiles and embroidery.

There is a special custom followed on August 6, the day of the Savior. It probably has ancient Greek routes. In the past, the day of celebration began with commemorating the dead at the cemetery. After the service was over, a "war" with fruits, vegetables and sweets began, and spread on the entire island. Residents of Chorio and Nimborio are divided into two teams: the Trouliani versus the Tsirimiotes at Chorio, and the Trouliani versus the Chirini at Nimborio; the road to Pontamos divides them. This custom, although a lot different now, has survived up to today.

Another custom found only on Chalki is the "batikiasma", followed on Good Friday, after the procession of the Epitaph. "Batikiasma" is a kind of auction: all Chalkeans bid for the Epitaph; "Batikiasma" is making the highest offer.

6. Museums

A small Folklore Museum is housed in the room of the Greek Women's College, behind the Town Hall. There we can find, amongst others, the Chalcean attire, the wedding bed, old furniture and few ancient findings, such as amphorae from a shipwreck and part of a sculptured stele.



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Glossary :

	rhyton, the libation vessel with an outlet at the bottom of the vessel allowing the slow outflow of the liquid.
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