

RHODES

Located southwest of Turkey, Rhodes is the largest of the Dodecanese islands belonging to Greece. (The term “Dodecanese” means “Twelve Islands,” even though there are many more smaller islands within this group located in the southeastern Aegean Sea.) Rhodes measures about 50 miles long and 24 miles wide at its farthest points and is shaped like an arrowhead. In antiquity Rhodes was a major trading center, functioning as a gateway to the Aegean islands. Positioned on its western side and rising to roughly 4,000 feet, Mount Attavyros served as a landmark for sailors as they navigated the seas. Rhodes was admired in the ancient world for its achievements in sailing, commerce, politics, and culture.

The island of Rhodes was inhabited perhaps as early as 4000 B.C., although little remains from those early years besides pottery fragments. Some evidence found at Rhodes—including Linear A script and pottery from Crete—indicates that the Minoans came there in the Middle Bronze Age. One place where they established a colony was Ialysos (1600-1425 B.C.). The Minoans were followed by the Mycenaeans, who came about 1450 B.C. Mycenaean tombs have been discovered at Ialysos and elsewhere.

When the Dorians settled Rhodes (twelfth to tenth centuries B.C.), they built three key cities: Lindos, Ialysos, and Camirus. Homer attributed the habitation of those cities on Rhodes to a valiant warrior named Tlepolemus, who had brought three tribes of his people there from Greece. Homer also stated that Tlepolemus had led nine ships from Rhodes with men from the three cities to fight in the Trojan War (*Iliad* 2.653-670). Diodorus Siculus reported similar events, yet with some variation. He claimed that the island was already inhabited by Greeks when the exiled Tlepolemus arrived, that Tlepolemus divided the island into three parts and founded the three cities, and that Tlepolemus became the king of Rhodes and commanded its inhabitants in the Trojan War (*Library of History* 4.58.7-8). The three cities of Rhodes (Lindos, Ialysos, and Camirus) and three neighboring cities (Cos, Cnidus, and Halicarnassus) composed the Dorian Hexapolis (Herodotus *Histories* 1.144.1; Strabo *Geography* 14.2.6). Tourists can visit the sites of Lindos, Ialysos, and Camirus today and see many of their ancient ruins, including temples, stoas, theaters, baths, private houses, and fountain houses.

According to Greek myth, when Zeus was dividing up the earth as an inheritance for the gods, the island of Rhodes was submerged in the sea and not yet visible. Helios, who had been absent and overlooked, chose Rhodes for his land allotment. The island emerged from the sea, and it was granted to Helios. The sun god slept with the nymph Rhodos there, and he fathered seven sons. One of them had three sons of his own; and they were named Lindos, Ialysos, and Camirus. The three grandsons of Helios were each given a city on the island, and those cities received their names (Pindar *Olympian Odes* 7.55-79). The island itself was named after the nymph Rhodos (Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.55.4; 5.56.3).

The Rhodians were highly respected for their naval power and commerce. Their unwritten laws governing sea navigation influenced the Aegean islands as well as the Mediterranean coasts. At some point in the first millennium B.C., those laws were codified in the “Maritime Law of Rhodes.” That legislation may have included rules about navigation, harbor protocol, maritime trade, replacing lost cargo, and crew injuries. Although that work is no longer extant, some of its laws were adopted by the Romans into their legal system. A few of those were ultimately preserved in the law code of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (A.D. 533). Regarding cargo, Rhodian Law stipulated the actions to be taken if valuables were stolen by pirates or if they had to be thrown overboard during storms to save the ship from sinking (see Acts 27:18, 19, 38). As preserved in Justinian’s *Digest*, the Roman emperor Antonius Pius (A.D. 138-161) responded to one such complaint by saying, “I am indeed lord of the world, but the Law is the lord of the sea. This matter must be decided by the maritime law of the Rhodians, provided that no law of ours is opposed to it” (*Digest* 14.2.9).

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied from 593 to 571 B.C., likely mentioned Rhodes’ commerce. In some English versions of the Bible, Rhodes is named in Ezekiel 27:15 as one of the many peoples who traded with Tyre, making that Phoenician city wealthy. The NIV reads, “The men of Rhodes traded with you, and many coastlands were your customers; they paid you with ivory tusks and ebony.” The reading “Rhodes” follows the Greek Septuagint and the Syriac Peshitta, rather than the Hebrew text which has “Dedan” (see KJV). The probable scribal error in the Hebrew text (*ddn* for *rdn*) is easily explained, since the letters *daleth* (*d*) and *resh* (*r*) are almost identical and are easily confused. “Rhodes” fits the progression of places better, as Ezekiel moved from west to east—Tarshish, Greece, Asia Minor, “Rhodes” and “coastlands” (“isles”; KJV), Palestine, Aram, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and back to Tarshish. Moreover, “Dedan” (in Arabia) is listed later in the progression in Ezekiel 27:20.

The Persians troubled the island of Rhodes early in the fifth century B.C. For example, they besieged and overtook Lindos about 490 B.C. (*Lindian Chronicle*). After the Persians were defeated by the Greeks, the Rhodians joined the Delian League (which began in 478 B.C.) and enjoyed the protection of the Athenians. The Rhodians’ participation in the league also expanded their commerce, as they interacted with other Greek entities. After the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta broke out in 431 B.C., Rhodes remained neutral for many years. However, about 412 B.C., the island decided to join the Spartans (Peloponnesians) against the Athenians. It may be that Dorieus of Ialysos, the great Olympian, was responsible for this alliance (see Xenophon *Hellenica* 1.5.19; Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 8.35, 44).

In 408 B.C., the three key cities on the island—Lindos, Ialysos, and Camirus—united to build the new city of Rhodes (“synoecism”). It was constructed by a harbor at the northeastern tip of the island, just above Ialysos. Rhodes was purposefully designed by the famous city-planner Hippodamus of Miletus (Strabo *Geography* 14.2.9; Aristotle *Politics* 1267b [2.8]). The building of the new city, which served as the capital, ushered in the Golden Age of the island. Even so, this period was not without difficulty as Rhodes continually changed alliances.

At the city of Rhodes, the people celebrated the greatest of all their festivals, the “Halieia,” in honor of their patron sun god Helios (Athenaeus *Diepnsophists* 13.12; Xenophon *Ephesiaca* 5.11). The summer festival was held each year with the lesser games; but the greater games bestowing the highest honors took place every four years. The games included musical contests, athletic competitions, horse races, and chariot races. As prizes, winners may have received a wreath of white poplar (whose shining brilliance was symbolic of Helios) or a vessel (imitating the black-figured Panathenaic amphoras). The crowning sacrifice of the festival took place when a chariot pulled by four white horses (a quadriga) was driven into the sea. This act represented the imagined celestial activity of Helios, who was given credit for the sun traversing the sky each day and setting every evening into the sea (on the western horizon of the Mediterranean). The city had temples, a gymnasium, an odeon, a stadium, and a hippodrome. Other gods worshiped on the island include Apollo, Zeus, Athena, Artemis, Aphrodite, and Dionysus. (Irene Arnold, “Festivals of Rhodes,” *AJA* [Oct-Dec 1936]: 435; Sven Schipporeit, “The New Order of Time and Cult in Synoecized Poleis,” *CHS Research Bulletin* [online].)

After Alexander the Great defeated the Persians in the 330s B.C., Rhodes fell under the umbrella of his Greek Empire. Following the death of Alexander (323 B.C.) and the division of his kingdom, Rhodes formed strong cultural and commercial connections with the Ptolemies in Alexandria, Egypt. Like Alexandria, Rhodes became an important educational center. Several men who taught or studied at Rhodes were famous in the Mediterranean basin for the disciplines in which they excelled:

- (1) Sculpture (Chares, Agesander, Athenodorus, Polydorus, and Pythocrates),
- (2) Architecture (Dinocrates),
- (3) Astronomy / Mathematics (Hipparchus and Geminus),
- (4) Philosophy (Hieronymus and Poseidonius),
- (5) Rhetoric / Grammar (Aeschines and Dionysius Thrax).

In 305 B.C., Antigonus, the ruler of Macedonia, instructed his son Demetrius to besiege Rhodes in order to break the Rhodian alliance with Ptolemy in Egypt. The Rhodians favored Ptolemy because the majority of their revenues as well as their food supply came from Egypt. Regarding the attraction of other nations to Rhodes, Diodorus Siculus explained, “The city of the Rhodians, which was strong in sea power and was the best governed city of the Greeks, was a prize eagerly sought after by the dynasts and kings, each of them striving to add her to his alliance” (*Library of History* 20.81.2). Diodorus gave a lengthy account of how Demetrius brought numerous warships to Rhodes and continuously attacked the city with massive siege engines. Because of his ingenuity in building siege equipment and the force of his attacks, Demetrius was nicknamed “Poliorcetes,” which means “Besieger.” After a year of relentless attacks, he gave up on the siege in 304 B.C. and signed a peace agreement with Rhodes (*Library of History* 20.81—88, 91—100).

Demetrius left a large amount of military equipment on the island, which was sold by the Rhodians. They took the proceeds of their sales and had Chares of Lindos build an enormous bronze statue of Helios to honor their patron sun god. One document explains, “To you, Helios, yes to you the people of Dorian Rhodes raised this colossus high up to the heaven, after they had calmed the bronze wave of war, and crowned their country with spoils won from the enemy. Not only over the sea but also on land they set up the bright light of unfettered freedom” (*Palatine Anthology* 6.171). This monumental statue was 105 feet high; and it took 12 years to build, being completed around 280 B.C. (Pliny *Natural History* 34.18 [41]). Known as the “Colossus of Rhodes,” it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The other six ancient wonders included: (1) the Walls of Babylon, (2) the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, (3) the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, (4) the Great Pyramids of Memphis (Giza), (5) the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, and (6) the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus (Philo of Byzantium *On the Seven Wonders of the World; Greek Anthology* 8.177; 9.58). In place of one of these, other listings may substitute the Pharos Lighthouse of Alexandria.

The original location of the Colossus is uncertain, since no ancient record provides that information and the image no longer exists. (1) Some have envisioned it straddling the harbor. Today, at Mandraki Harbor, twin columns crowned by a stag and a hind mark the supposed footprints of the statue. Even so, the engineering logistics make that particular design unlikely.



Mandraki Harbor (Rhodes)

(2) Others have pictured the statue as standing at the end of a breakwater of the harbor. This would correspond with later Roman statues being set up at their ports. (3) Still others place it in the heart of the ancient city, near the Temple of Helios. It was customary for the ancient Greeks to set up statues of their gods near or inside their temples.

In the 220s B.C., the statue was destroyed by an earthquake and lay on the ground, broken at the knees. It was left untouched because of an oracle, which likely predicted that moving the broken pieces would bring calamity on the city (Strabo *Geography* 14.2.5). Pliny the Elder wrote,

This statue fifty-six years after it was erected, was thrown down by an earthquake; but even as it lies, it excites our wonder and admiration. Few men can clasp the thumb in their arms, and its fingers are larger than most statues. Where the limbs are broken asunder, vast caverns are seen yawning in the interior. Within it, too, are to be seen large masses of rock, by the weight of which the artist steadied it while erecting it (*Natural History* 34.18 [41]).

According to the Byzantine historian Theophanes, in A.D. 653 the Arab Mauias took control of Rhodes and sold the remnants of the Colossus to a Jewish merchant from Edessa in Upper Mesopotamia (*The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997], 481). The bronze could be melted down and repurposed.

Another important work thought to have been produced by Rhodian sculptors is the Winged Victory (Nike) of Samothrace. It was probably dedicated by the people of Rhodes after a naval victory early in the second century B.C. (see the *Samothrace* section).

Over the next few centuries, the Rhodians had an oscillating relationship with the Romans, who steadily grew in power. Due to the Rhodians' aid during the Roman-Seleucid War, the Romans rewarded Rhodes with control over Lycia and Caria in the Treaty of Apamea (188 B.C.) (Polybius *Histories* 21.24.7-8; 21.45.8; 22.5.2). The Rhodians tried to remain neutral during the Third Macedonian War between Rome and Macedon (171-168 B.C.); but their appeal to Rome on behalf of Macedon near the end of the war was costly (*Histories* 27—30). Rome released Lycia and Caria from Rhodes' oversight, declared Delos to be a free port, and deprived Rhodes of its harbor rights (167 B.C.). Those actions had a disastrous economic and political impact on Rhodes (*Histories* 30.5.12; 30.21.3-5; 30.31.4-20). It was reduced to being an educational center for the families of Roman nobility. More than a century later (43 B.C.), the Roman conspirator Cassius—who had been educated at Rhodes—invaded the city and plundered it. This was a shrewd tactical move, since the Rhodians were more favorable to his enemies, Octavian and Antony (Appian *Civil Wars* 4.65—73; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 47.33).

Near the end of the third missionary journey (c. A.D. 57), after addressing the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20), Paul sailed straight to Cos. The next day, he sailed to Rhodes, then Patara, and over to the Phoenician coast on his way to Jerusalem. "Rhodes" in Acts 21:1 most

likely refers to the capital city of the island. By the time Paul came to Rhodes, it was simply a beautiful city with a glorious past. His ship probably used Mandraki harbor (see page 4). He may have seen remnants of the Colossus that were still lying somewhere on the ground.

One local tradition is that Paul's ship landed at Lindos, on the eastern coast of Rhodes. In that case, the name "Rhodes" in Acts 21:1 must be interpreted generally as the island and not specifically as the capital city. The site at Lindos is known today as "St. Paul's Harbor." Even so, Acts 21:1 indicates that a "straight" course was taken from Miletus to Cos; and the same seems to be true for Rhodes and Patara, which appear in rapid succession. Sailing from Cos to Lindos, however, would not be the shortest route. Another local tradition is that Paul engaged in mission work on the island, but that idea does not agree with his hurried schedule (Acts 20:16).



"St. Paul's Harbor" (Lindos)

Above the harbor, the acropolis of Lindos features a theater, defense fortifications, stoas, a propylaea, and temples. The Temple of Athena Lindia is the most prominent one there. The numerous empty statue bases may have been left behind at the same time Cassius plundered the "sacred treasures" of Rhodes in 43 B.C. (Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 47.33.4).



Relief of a Trireme (c. 180 B.C.) Commemorating a Naval Victory (Lindos)

Tourists visiting the city of Rhodes today encounter not only the ancient Greek ruins of the acropolis but also architecture from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The medieval buildings were associated with a Catholic order known as the “Knights of St. John” or “Knights Hospitaller.” This order originated in Jerusalem, but then moved to Cyprus and later to Rhodes. Dedicated to John the Baptist, the order began as a hospital in Jerusalem to care for poor, sick, or injured pilgrims in the Holy Land. However, as time passed, it also assumed military functions. The Knights of St. John often defended their territory from Muslim invaders and established strongholds elsewhere.

The Knights came from several different regions. The Street of the Knights in Rhodes was divided into seven languages, representing England, Germany, Italy, France, Aragon, Auvergne, and Provence. Each of those groups was responsible for defending a section of the fortifications. An “inn” or “palace” housed each language group. The Palace of the Grand Master was built on the site of a Byzantine fort from the seventh century A.D.; it has more recently been rebuilt by the Italians. The former Hospital of the Knights of St. John now serves as the archaeological museum; a weathered lion statue stands guard in the courtyard. The museum features many mosaics, sculptures (including one of Aphrodite), black-figure wares, sarcophagi, and catapult stones.



The Street of the Knights (Rhodes)



Coats of Arms for an Inn
on the Street of the Knights
(Rhodes)



Fortification Tower
(Rhodes)



Lion Statue at the Archaeological Museum of Rhodes
(Former Hospital of the Knights of St. John)



Catapult Stones from the Sieges Rhodes Endured

The Knights of Rhodes were defeated by the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman in 1522. The Knights were allowed to leave Rhodes, taking the wealth they could carry with them. The Ottoman Turks exercised power over Rhodes from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. From 1912 to 1943, the Kingdom of Italy maintained control of Rhodes and the other Dodecanese Islands; and the Italian Social Republic ruled them from 1943 to 1945 during World War II. In 1947, Rhodes and the other Dodecanese Islands came under Greek authority.