

(1813-1818) gave the permission for its relocation with its construction being completed in 1821, on the site where it is located today, at the edge of the Caldera in Imerovigli.

In 1834, due to the relatively large number of monks, the monastery avoided the dissolution provided by a royal decree of the Otto's Regency for those monasteries that had less than 6 monks. From 1849 by decision of the Supreme Court, the monastery passed to the Greek State. The monastery complex occupies a rectangular area around which its buildings are arranged. The central church (katholikon) is dedicated to Hagios Nikolaos, the north chapel to Hagios Panteleimon and the south to Zoodochos Pigi.

The large church of the **Anastasi** (Resurrection) destroyed in the 1956 earthquake, belongs to the Orthodox doctrine and to the same type as Hagios Ioannis Theologos of Fira (17th c.): the post-byzantine cross –in- square churches. The current church was erected in the 1980s in the same type and site of the old one. In the interior, one can see the wooden iconostasis from the now ruined church of Hagios Ioannis Chrysostomos of Imerovigli, as well as icons of the 18th c. of Russian style. It has a large courtyard and being built on a hill, it offers a view to the castle of Skaros but also to the entire central and southwestern part of the island.

The church of **Panagia Malteza**, another post-earthquake church built on the same site as the older one, is located at the highest point of the settlement of Imerovigli. It belongs to the Orthodox doctrine and it is a three aisled domed basilica separated by pillars. According to an inscription surviving above the north door the previous church, which belonged to the cross – in- square type, the church was built in 1839 and was dedicated to Hagios Georgios and former to Hagia Aikaterini. Its iconostasis of the 18th c. adorns the current church of Theotokos. There are also icons from the 18th c., dedications from Russia, and a Roman altar with bucrania used as the base of the Altar.

The church of **Hagios Georgios** which is located on a massive rock in the cliffs of the caldera and stands opposite the Castle of Skaros, and the church of **Hagio Pneuma** (Holy Spirit) just before descending to the castle of Skaros, were destroyed from the earthquake and rebuilt at the same site and in the same type as the originals. A similar case is the church of Timios Stavros, which is located on the old public road of Fira-Imerovigli. In all three cases the original churches dated in 18th – 19th c.

The church Hagios Ioannis Katiforis is located in the middle of the path that connects Imerovigli with the Castle of Skaros. It is a relatively small barrel- vaulted single-nave church of the Orthodox doctrine. From reports of bishops-travelers on the island during the 17th and 18th c. we assume that it originally belonged to the Catholic episkopate. In the interior, a Roman altar is used as the base of the Altar.

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Fira Route

The route is located along the crest of the Caldera, spanning a distance of less than 1 km, along the traditional settlement of Fira which is today the administrative center of the island. As one proceeds through the traditional cobbled path along the Caldera at an altitude of about 250 meters above sea level, a plethora of geological and historical evidence is encountered along the way. The caldera and its vertical walls with the consecutive layers of successive volcanic eruptions, form a unique palimpsest of the geological history of Thera, testifying to the creation of the island and the recent activity of its volcano and thereby emphasizing the unbreakable relationship of the island and the life of its inhabitants with the volcano. Nine post-Byzantine churches, form eloquent witnesses to the coexistence of the Orthodox and the Catholic doctrine on the island from Medieval times until today and have resisted the passage of time and the influx of tourism. They are reminiscent of the recent history of Thera and particularly of the settlement of Fira, which was founded after the abandonment of the Castle of Skaros at the end of the 18th c. On the other hand, the two public museums of the island, the Archaeological Museum of Thera and the Museum of Prehistoric Thera, (located in the middle and the end of the route respectively), are the successors of the first Museum of Thera founded in 1902 which was originally located where the Fabrica and the Metropolitan Church of Hypapanti now stand. The two museums allow visitors to discover the distant past of Thera from the middle of the 5th millennium BC until the end of antiquity in the 4th c. AD. Finally, the route ends with a breathtaking view of the old Bay of Fira (Yialos) as well as of the inactive quarries of Thera earth that present the modern industrial history of the island. The absence of a port made access to the island extremely challenging while the exploitation of the volcanic soil, is indicative of the industrialization of Thera particularly in the 19th and 20th c. until the development of tourism.

The church of Panagia Katholiki (known today as the Three Bells of Fira) (fig. 17), is located on the old road between Fira and Imerovigli. Its construction took place in 1757 and was funded by Loukas Dakoronias. By 1783 it was owned by the Lazarist Monastery of Santorini and subsequently in the 20th c. it passed on to the Catholic Diocese of the island. The building was renovated twice, in 1801 and 1839, and its façade in the late 19th c. It was repaired in 1960 due to the severe damage it had suffered from the earthquake of 1956. A will dating to 1641, mentions two small cave churches in this location, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Theodore. Today the church is dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Thanks to its large size, it stands out despite being surrounded by holiday accommodations, while the small balcony built in front of it, allows visitors to stand facing NW towards the castle of Skaros and the volcanic strata of the caldera, as well as the quarries SW.

The Catholic church of Hagios Stylianos is located at the edge of the caldera and is built on the volcanic rock formations with terraces and retaining walls supporting its lower level. It probably dates before 1757, when it was first mentioned by the

Apostolic Plenipotentiary of Rome, De Stefani the Archbishop of Naxos. It is in the form of a cross – in- square church contracted type. There are two chapels inside the church: one cave chapel and another built along the E - W axis. It stands out due to its location on a busy central street as well as due to its vibrant colors and ornate bell tower, a characteristic element, evident in several Catholic churches of the island.

The **cathedral church of the Catholics, Hagios Ioannis the Baptist** was inaugurated in 1825, under the supervision of Bishop Gasparis Delendas. It is situated in the "Frankish" area of Fira, the district with the large houses of the old Frankish families of the island. The first catholic cathedral of Thera was built in the Castle of Skaros in the late 14th - early 15th c. The church belongs to the type of the cross -domed basilica with an octagonal dome on the outside. Inside the church and in the middle of it under the dome, there are the tombs of the bishops, with Michael Kamilleris being the last to be buried in 1931. The tower - bell of the church was built in 1893 at the expense of Michael Gyzis. A year later, in 1894, the church was renovated by Antonios Galibert. It suffered severe damage

both inside and outside during the earthquake of 1956, when the pulpit, the baptistery and the church organ were destroyed.

The **Archaeological Museum of Thera**, one of the oldest in the Cyclades and in Greece in general, was founded in 1902 to house mainly the finds from the excavations carried out by Hiller von Gaertringen and his associates in the city of ancient Thera. The building that originally housed the museum, was located next to the Metropolitan Church of Fira and both were severely damaged during the earthquake of 1956. With the reconstruction of the settlement of Fira, the Archaeological Museum was relocated to the building that houses it today. The building was erected between 1960 and 1962, and was designed by the architect Konstantinos Dekavallas, the head of the Office of the Settlement of Thera, which was set up specifically for the post-earthquake reconstruction of the island. It reopened in 1968 with an exhibition that included some of the more recent discoveries on the island at that time and presented a chronological exhibition spanning from prehistory to Roman times. The establishment of the Prehistoric Museum of Thera but also new

Fig. 17 Thera, Fira. Church of Panagia Katholiki (known today as the "Three Bells of Fira") (EFAKYK Archive, Photographer: Thanos Kartsoglou)



important finds, made necessary a reformed exhibition to be planned by the Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades. Selected finds from the well documented long-term archaeological research in Thera, give the course of the city-state of Thera throughout antiquity, from the Geometric to Roman times.

According to an inscribed plaque mounted above the entrance, the orthodox church of **Hagia Eirini** was built in 1798 by Nicholas William Nomikos. It is a single - nave church of small dimensions, with a cave sanctuary. The facade of Hagia Eirini is noteworthy as it follows the configuration of the houses with the arrangement of windows on both sides and above the door. Spatially it appears to be “encapsulated” by the private houses that surround it, with the belfry being the only differentiating feature.

The **church of Hagios Ioannis Theologos** (fig. 18) is located in the caldera of Fira, near the church of Hagia Eirini and below the Metropolitan Church of Hypapanti. It is a building of the 17th c. and is a glebe of the homonymous Monastery of Patmos. The existence however in the past, of an altar in the left aisle has led scholars to believe that it served both doctrines. The large building belongs to the type of the post-byzantine cross -in- square churches and stands out even more through the five-step platform on which it is built. The decorative elements on its exterior (red stone colonnades that surround the windows, described by characteristic frames of Ottoman architecture) testify to the renovations that the church has received through the passage of time. One such renovation was completed on August 7th, 1761 by Meletios Sigas according to an inscription built into the church. In the interior, the wood-carved gilded iconostasis of 1897 and the wood-carved episcopal throne of 1842 impress, while it is worth noting that an inscribed Roman altar is used as the base of the Altar. Along with the church of Hagios Minas, which is located in a direct line of sight, they form the two churches that have been portrayed in all forms of art (including paintings, engravings and photography). Another important landmark of the settlement, are the winding stepped streets to the east of the church.

The orthodox church of **Hagios Minas**, also called “Katofirianos” due to its location in the area of the old town of Fira, is a structure of the early 18th c. In 1742 Jacobo Crispi dedicated it to the monastery of Prophetes Elias and in 1816 it was renovated by the abbot of the Monastery Gerasimos Mavrommatis. It belongs to the type of the domed transverse-vaulted church with the characteristic opening in the dome, the so called “phanos” being one of the best examples of this architectural type in Thera. It is distinguished for its elegance, excellent proportions and the harmony of the composition. The “womens quarter” (gynaikonitis) and the auxiliary space to the east are later additions. Imprinted in engravings and photographs already since 19th c., it is undoubtedly one of the most characteristic landmarks of the Caldera of Thera. The free shape of the yard and the layout of the buildings around it, testify the wise adaptation to the rocky ground and the functional management of the narrowness of the available space.



Fig. 18 Thera, Fira. Church of Hagios Ioannis Theologos (EFAKYK Archive, Photographer: Thanos Kartsoglou)



A few meters SE of Hagios Minas, the church of Metamorphosis (Transfiguration of the Christ) stands out between the houses. It follows the Orthodox doctrine and it formerly belonged to the Velouzos family. According to a marble inscription above the entrance door, it dates back to 1776. It is a barrel – vaulted double nave church. The south of the two aisles was built earlier. To the east, behind the sanctuary, there is an area carved into the volcanic soil, which leads us to assume that at the beginning, there was a small cave at the site, which was then extended with the addition of the built church. A characteristic point of the monument is the bell tower, which rises above its entrance. This church has also the characteristic opening in the dome, the so called “phanos”. In the interior there are signed icons of the iconostasis of 1785 and marble tombstones on the floor dating from 1815 and 1827. The open space-plateau in front of the church gives the visitor the opportunity to stand and explore with their own eyes the landscape of the quarries. (fig. 19).

Just south of Fira, the extraction of the “Thera earth” has left an open wound. The removal of the entire layer of volcanic ash and pumice deposited by the catastrophic eruption of the Late Bronze Age as well as the lower strata of pumice are associated with the exploitation of the volcanic ash in the 19th and 20th c., when the export of “Thera earth” was an important factor in the economy of the island. The quarrying operations of the 19th c. were small and the volcanic mineral was used as a building material (hydraulic mortar) in large port projects in Greece and the Mediterranean. This was subsequently followed in the 20th c., by its intensive industrial extraction, because of the development of the cement industry in Greece. The three-storey building of the factory for drying and grinding the Thera earth at the quarry of Fira, was completed in 1929, and had the capacity to process 10 tons per day. The incompatibility of the operation of quarries with the tourist development on the 1970s, alongside the uncovering of several important prehistoric sites within the quarries, as well as the destruction of the landscape, led to the permanent cessation of the operation of the quarries on the island-complex of Thera. Today, the quarries at the edge of the caldera are part of a special protection zone that forbids the construction of buildings and are declared as archaeological sites. In the area of the Fira-Ftellos quarries, buildings of the Middle Cycladic period and cemeteries of the Early/Middle Cycladic periods are also located. Finds from the site, are exhibited in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera.

The history of the **Metropolitan Church of Hypapanti** begins in 1827 when the merchant Markos Velonias built a church in this place, known as “Panagia tou Velonia”. Although of Catholic origin, he was the son of orthodox parents and thus the church belonged from the beginning to the Orthodox doctrine. As the population of the settlement increased, authorities decided to demolish the original edifice and build a new one, larger in size. In 1888 the pastor and then owner, Economos Neophytos Christodoulou Bellonias gave it to public worship.

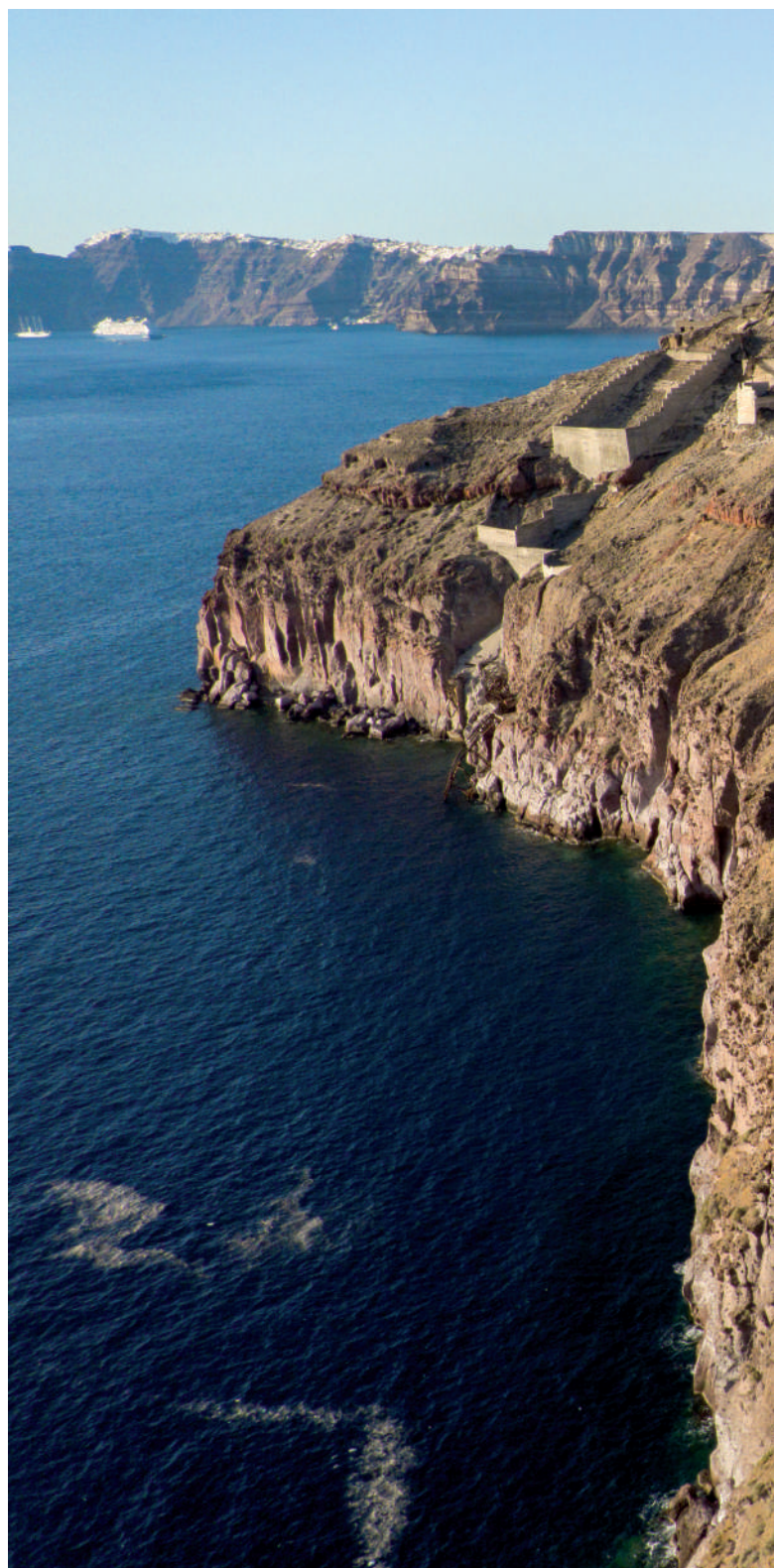


Fig. 19 Thera, Fira – Ftellos quarries
(EFAKYK Archive, Photographer: Thanos Kartsoglou)



The second church, a monument of quite large dimensions, as far as can be seen in photographs of the time, seems to belong to the type of the free cross plan type with twin imposing bell towers in the facade. It bears similarities with churches of the same era in other cities, such as the Metropolis of Athens (1842-1862) and Hagios Vasileios of Tripoli (1855 foundation). However, it was severely damaged by the earthquake of 1956, and thus got demolished. In its place, the current church was founded in 1963 based on the plans of Georgios Nomikos and completed in 1968. It is noteworthy that in front of the new church there was another smaller one, which was demolished after its damage and in order to highlight the metropolitan new church.

In a plot donated by Evangelos Nomikos and designed by the architect Ioannis Koumanoudis, the building of **the Museum of Prehistoric Thera** (fig. 20) was erected in 1970s, in order to house the findings from the excavations at the prehistoric town at Akrotiri. The permanent exhibition, mounted in the second story and organized by the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades in 1999, houses artefacts from several sites on Thera, which date from the 5th millennium BC to the 17th c. BC and bear witness to island's participation in cultural developments in the Aegean over a long period of prehistory, as well as finds from the prehistoric settlement at Akrotiri.

Referring to the history of the archaeological research of prehistoric times on Thera, the geology of Thera, the island's history from the Late Neolithic (4500BC) to the Late Cycladic I period and the heyday of the city at Akrotiri (17th c. BC), the exhibition endeavors to sketch the course of Thera in prehistoric times. Housing works of art from one of the foremost urban centres in the Aegean world, all in an excellent state of preservation, including among others the famous wall-paintings, real masterpieces of art, the Museum of Prehistoric Thera can be considered as an extension of one of the leading archaeological sites in Greece, Akrotiri. From the summer of 2021, the first storey of the Museum houses a temporary exhibition, organized by the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades, displaying exclusively wall paintings from the settlement at Akrotiri.

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Routes along the Caldera of Therasia

The Caldera of Therasia, despite its short length, is particularly rich in monuments. Remains of settlements of prehistoric, ancient and byzantine times, individual monuments of the post-Byzantine period and traditional settlements of the 18th and 19th c., abandoned or active, testify to its historical course over time. Unlike Thera, Therasia remains untouched by the negative consequences of the intense tourist development, a fact that allows its monuments to be composed in inseparable unity with their natural environment.

The Route from Riva to Manola

The small harbor of **Riva**, at the north cape of Therasia, used to be the harbor of Therasia even in antiquity. The geographer Claudius Ptolemy in the 2nd c. AD mentioned the harbor and city of Therasia. In the 19th c., L. Ross and other travelers referred to a few antiquities from the area of Riva, as the remains of the ancient city mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy. Ruins of the Medieval period, east of the church of Phaneromeni were recorded as well. According to the recent research, the city mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy belongs to a settlement, which was developed in rela-

Fig. 20 The wall-painting of the fisherman. Prehistoric town at Akrotiti, West House, Room 5. Museum of Prehistoric Thera (EFAKYK Archive)

