

Barskij's drawing. The castle of Hagios Nikolaos was one of the best fortified castles on the island because it protected three ports used as trading ports.

The church of **Hagios Nikolaos** has been built very close to the southern entrance of the castle, in the area now called "Loggia". Its construction dates before 1580, when due to official Turkish documents (ahnamedes), restrictions on the establishment of churches were set. It belongs to the orthodox doctrine; however it is probable that it was built by the Catholics. The older thesis, according to which the settlement received its name from this particular church, has now been revised.

Its location was naturally fortified, as the stream that flows nearby, still creates a gap in the cliffs, while the building itself, fits harmoniously into the intense geographical relief around which the old main roads pass.

Hagios Nikolaos belongs to the type of the two-storey cross-in-square church – simple four columned and its current form is the result of three chronological phases. The configuration of the facades of the building with the contrast of the local reddish tuff to the white marble of the doors is remarkable. It is located at the edge of the caldera, having the Castle on its axis, and offers a very good view of the North part of the island.

The first **Metochion of Hozoviotissa**, founded in Oia, was located inside the Castle of Hagios Nikolaos, near the original Panagia Platsani and, before 1680, it was called Hagios Sozon. In 1681 the church became Stauropegic. We know that the Metochion was transferred to its current location in the area "Loggia" after 1768, a date mentioned in documents, when the Stauropegic Metochion, "lacking of a housekeeper", was given to the 13th Bishop of Thera.

The current so-called Metochion of Hozoviotissa is dedicated to the Presentation of the Theotokos. It seems possible that after the destruction of the first church on the rocca of Hagios Nikolaos, the second one was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, patroness of the Monastery. The marble tombstone inside Metochion today, bears the date 1878, while the bronze candlesticks the date 1802.

The **church of Anastasi** (church of Resurrection) was built for the orthodox doctrine in the foothills of the caldera, in an area called "Monastery", and dates back to 1865. It is a cross-in-square church of the simple four columned type, of large dimensions, with a two-storey bell tower. An inscription indicates the date 1865, probably referring to the founding of the church, which may have been the example for the neighboring church of Hagios Spyridon. It differs on the façade from both the church of Hagios Nikolaos and of Hagios Spyridon, as on the west side, there are only straight lines and a pediment. The location offers an amazing view from the castle of Hagios Nikolaos to Akrotiri.

The **church of Hagios Spyridon**, erected in 1867 according to the inscription of its lintel, is also a cross-in-square church of the simple four columned type, of large dimensions. Its façade is divided into two zones. At the top there are blind arches, in which windows with skylights open, while lower false pilasters divide the façade into three parts. The dome is octagonal on the outside and the two-storey bell tower rises to the south part of the west side. It is reported before the earthquake of 1956 that the church

has a cave sanctuary and that the prothesis communicates with a cavernous area in the north, where a Roman pedestal with an inscription also existed. The church had as its construction model the adjacent church of Anastasis.

The church **Panagia Platsani (new)** belongs to the orthodox doctrine and is dedicated to the Akathist Hymn. The initial building, an impressive cross-in-square church of the early 19th c., with five domes and plenty of neoclassical elements in its facades, was located inside the castle of Hagios Nikolaos, just a few meters west of Goula and was the landmark of the settlement. It was destroyed by the earthquake of 1956, and today, only its perimeter walls and its covered sanctuary remain visible.

The church was erected after the earthquake in the center of the settlement, at the expense of the Oia's inhabitants, who saved the iconostasis, all the icons and the sacred relics from the ruins of the initial church and transferred them to the new one. The new church was enriched with all the offerings of the inhabitants -mainly the sailors- coming mostly from Russia.

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Imerovigli, the North Route

Between Oia in the north and Imerovigli in the south, in the part of the Caldera that surrounds the bay of Peristeria, on a route dominated by the natural environment, two small churches on the slopes of the Caldera, with excellent view of its gulf, connect the historical route of Thera from Byzantine times until today, with its distant geological history. Around the bay of Peristeria are the main remnants of one of the volcanoes that built the complex of Santorini, the large volcano of Peristeri, whose action dates between 530,000 and 430,000 years ago.

The **monastic complex of Hagios Antonios** (fig. 16) is located in the caldera, at a distance of 2 km north from the settlement of Imerovigli. It consists of two cave chapels linked in front with kind of a rectangular narthex, and a built auxiliary room to their right. The southern cave-chapel is dedicated to Hagios Antonios. According to written tradition, it is dated in the 11th c. The northern, bigger in size and carved almost in the shape of a church, is dedicated to Hagios Georgios. Both chapels bear wall paintings depicting saints and scenes, amongst them The Dormition of the Virgin and The Martyrdom of St. George in the wheel. They date to the Late-Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods. An inscription above the door leading to the northern chapel gives the date 1614, which is probably the date of its wall paintings, as well. The site, offers a panoramic view over the caldera and Therasia just across to the settlement of Oia from the north, and the Skaros from the south.

The **church of Prophetes Elias** is located on the homonymous mountain of the Little Prophetes Elias. It consists of two spaces, the main barrel – vaulted domed church, and the also barrel - vaulted single-nave it was rebuilt chapel to the north. We do not know when exactly it was founded, however after the earth-

quake of 1956 it was rebuilt. In the interior, one can see the north door of the sanctuary painted with the representation of Archangel Michael and the icon of the iconostasis of the Prophet Elias, both works of the early 19th c.

Imerovigli Route

The route through the traditional settlement of Imerovigli's densely built part, along the ridge of the Caldera, where Thera's long history is documented, takes us eminently to its most recent past. Most of the churches found here, along the route, have been rebuilt after the catastrophic earthquake of 1956, during which they were partially or completely destroyed, much as the houses of the settlement. Intact monuments of the post-Byzantine pe-

riod, such as the landmark of Imerovigli, the monastery of Hagios Nikolaos are though also present.

The orthodox **monastery of Hagios Nikolaos**, lies between the settlements of Firostefani and Imerovigli. In 1651 the family of the nobles Michelaki Gyzi, who lived in the castle of Skaros decided after a vision, to convert the private church of Hagios Nikolaos, located near the Dominican monastery, into a monastery. The first nuns were the two daughters of the family, while in 1700-1702 there were 25 nuns according to Tournefort.

In 1687 the monastery was defined by a Patriarchal Sigillion as Patriarchal and Stauropegic, in order to avoid the heavy taxation of the Ottomans. In 1815 the monks made an effort for the relocation of the monastery from the Skaros Castle, the desolation of which, due to the successive earthquakes, had already begun from the 18th c. In 1816 the Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril VI

Fig. 16 Thera, Imerovigli, monastic complex of Hagios Antonios (EFAKYK Archive)



(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