

Cultural Routes

Oia Route

Although famous for its view of the Caldera, its sunsets and its traditional architecture with its cave-houses, the bustling Oia has still a significant number of monuments of its long history. Its current name is due to a decree of King Otto that was published in the Official Gazette on 11.01.1834, according to which the settlement of Hagios Nikolaos in Epano Meria or Epanomeria is renamed Oia, from an ancient toponym, which, as it was later documented, belonged to the northern part of the ancient city of Thera, in the modern settlement of Kamari. The castle as well as numerous churches along the Caldera, bear witness to its history during the Byzantine and post-Byzantine period, while the captain's houses reflect its great economic prosperity in the 19th c., with the development of the Thera shipping for the export of wine, Thera volcanic soil and other Thera products.

The Patriarchal and Stauropegic **church of Hagia Aikaterini** (fig. 14) is firstly mentioned in a purchase document on December 15, 1714 by William Dargenta (Darzenta) to the ecclesiastical official, Barbario (Barbarigo). November 12, 1716, the monk Ioannikios Barbarigos according to his will, granted the renovated church and the estates that belonged to him to his nieces. However, the most important document for the history of the church is the patriarchal sigil issued in June 1764 by the Ecumenical Patriarch Samuel A. Hantzaris (1763-1768), a document that renewed and ratified an older sigil of Patriarch Parthenios, in which he officially recognized the autonomy of the church. Therefore, its founding dates back to the 17th c. Later, the church is mentioned in documents of the 19th c., while we know that it contributed financially to the Greek Revolution of 1821 by offering 45 grosis. Today it belongs to the Manolis I. Darzenta family.

The church, built outside the castle of Hagios Nikolaos, belongs to the type of the domed transverse-vaulted church. To the south, a chapel of Hagios Nikolaos has been added. An episcopal throne is built inside the sanctuary and a wooden iconostasis of the early 18th c. with the signed icons of the Mykonian painter Christodoulos Kalergis (1722) and Emmanuel William Barbarigos, adorns the interior. The large octagonal dome in the external is quite impressive and explains why the church can be identified even in Basil Barkij's drawing.

The upper part of the bell tower collapsed due to the earthquake of 1956, but the church was not damaged. Since then, and until the construction of the new church of Panagia Platsani, it was the cathedral of Oia. The property of the church includes the patriarchal sigil and many holy books and relics dating from the 18th c.



Fig. 14 Thera. Church of Hagia Aikaterini (EFAKYK Archive, Photographer: Thanos Kartsoglou)



The **church of Hagia Paraskevi**, built probably before 1745, belongs to the Orthodox doctrine and is located within the old district of Fanari or Garbini Mills, an area at the northwestern end of the settlement.

The bell tower of the church makes it recognizable, as its flattened facade, confuses the visitor about the character of the building. It is a cross-vaulted single - nave church. On the north narrow facade, it communicates with another area, looking like the church in the exterior, which today serves as an auxiliary room.

The monument, although surrounded by houses, offers the visitor from its courtyard, an unobstructed view of the original Venetian core of the castle of Hagios Nikolaos and of the bay of Ammoudi. It is also possible for one to perceive the construction on multiple levels, as the houses emerge either from the natural rock or from one inside the other, eliminating any trace of horizontal construction.

The **Kasteli of Hagios Nikolaos or Epano Meria or Epanomerea** was built on the 110m. high rock of the caldera, by the D' Argenta family, in the place given in 1372 from the Duke of Naxos,

Nikolo the 3rd Dellacarcheri. In 1480 it is mentioned in a dowry agreement in Skaros, during the marriage of Dominico Pizani with the Fiorenca Crispi, daughter of the Duke of the Aegean, Jacobo III Crispi. The castle is mentioned in many travelers' reports, such as Bartolomeo da li Sonetti in 1485, Ortelius in 1570, Rosaccio in 1606 and Dapper in 1703. All the above named the settlement "San Salvator" with only Antonio di Milo giving the name "Apanomerea" in 1590. The name "S. Nicolo Porto" was mentioned in a map of 1688 in the drawing of the Ukrainian traveler, F. Piacenza. The most detailed plan of the area however comes from the Russian monk V. Grigkorovich - Barskij, (fig. 21) who in 1745, depicted it in a plan, as an extensive and densely populated settlement on the island.

In 1782, Choiseul Gouffier, (fig. 15a) mentioned the settlement as "San Nicolo" and described in detail its residential and natural environment. The fortified original core of the "San Nicolo" settlement, on the top of the rocky caldera's environment, consisted of high three-storey and four-storey buildings, joined together by few openings in their higher parts, which formed the so-called *castelli*. As it can be seen from the plan of Choiseul - Gouffier, at

Fig. 15a Thera, Oia. Kasteli of Hagios Nikolaos, map of Choiseul-Gouffier, 1782
(Source: <https://el.travelogues.gr/item.php?view=44421> (18.05.2021))





Fig. 15b Thera, Oia. At the top of the hill the Kasteli of Hagios Nikolaos in 1936 (Source: Canaday Doreen D., Blegen Library Archives, The American School of Classical Studies <https://www.searchculture.gr/aggregator/edm/ASCSA/000065-%3A48387>) (23.05.2021)

the entrance of the castle there was the present ruined from the earthquake of 1956, Goulas. Goulas, from the Turkish word Kule, meaning fortress, was the donjon of the medieval castle and the palace of the local feudal lord. The approximately 11 m. high building of rectangular floor plan, with dimensions 14,50 X 8 m., had at least one more level, which ended in a roof (figs. 15b-c).

In the place of the ruined today church of Panagia Platsani, a cross-in-square church of the early 19th c., one must look for the worship place a "capella" of the initial phase of the settlement, which along with the Donjon formed the power dipole. In a second phase, the settlement must have expanded to the north and southeast, around the rock where there was the initial castle, with the entrance in the area near the Hagios Nikolaos Church, in today's "Loggia". The third phase of the settlement is depicted in

Fig. 15c Thera, Oia The Kasteli of Hagios Nikolaos or Epano Meria (EFAKYK Archive, Photographer: Thanos Kartsoglou)



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-