

Chios

Chios is shaped like a bow aimed at the Asia minor coast and stretches 32 mi (51 km) North and South and 8–18 mi (13–29 km) East and West. While the north end of the island is mountainous (highest altitude 4255 ft [1296 m]) with steep coasts, there are four plains (mostly in the south) with very fertile soil. Even though there is no real watercourse on the island, luxuriant vegetation is made possible by numerous springs. The place was renowned in antiquity for its wine, figs, wheat, and gum mastic. The last was obtained from the lentiscus tree by making incisions in the branches from which a sort of resin would flow and form a gum. This still constitutes an important element of the economy of the place.

Chios was especially noted in antiquity for its claim to be the birthplace of Homer, for its school of epic poets, and its sculptors. To Glaucus of Chios was ascribed the invention of iron-welding early in the 7th cent b.c. The chief city, located in the south-eastern part of the island and bearing the same name as the island, was founded on the finest harbor of the eastern seaboard of the Aegean; eighty ships could anchor in her roadstead. The place where Homer is said to have collected his pupils around him is still pointed out to the traveler at the foot of Mt. Epos, 6 mi (10 km) N of the capital. In reality it is a sanctuary of the mother goddess Cybele, with altar and figure of the goddess accompanied by two lions carved in the native rock.

The oldest inhabitants of the island were Leleges, Cretans, and Carians; they were conquered by the Ionians, who made Chios one of the most flourishing states in Ionia. Incorporated in the Persian empire under Cyrus in 546, Chios fought heroically against her overlord during the Ionian revolt forty-six years later. Crushing the revolt, the Persians burned the cities and temples of the island and car-

ried off her most beautiful girls. During the 5th cent b.c. Chios joined the Delian League (Athenian Alliance) and remained loyal until 413. For her insurrection she suffered terribly at the hands of the Athenians, who ultimately recaptured the entire island. During the 4th cent Chios joined the Second Athenian Alliance and revolted successfully only a few years before conquest by Alexander the Great. Independent during the early Hellenistic era, she allied with Rome during the 2nd cent and was virtually depopulated by the sack of 86 b.c., carried out by Mithridates in his temporarily successful contest with Rome.

The Roman general Sulla restored the Chians to their homes and bestowed on them the rights of a free city, which implied local autonomy and in certain respects the privilege of being governed according to native law, while many of their neighboring cities in the province of Asia were governed according to Roman law. Chian efforts to regain prosperity were interrupted by a violent earthquake during the reign of Tiberius. The Roman emperor helped in the rehabilitation, and a reasonable degree of prosperity had been attained by the time Paul sailed by.

Subsequently Chios remained part of the continuing Roman empire, with its capital at Byzantium. In 1307 Turkish pirates subjugated and laid waste the island; the Turks took over the island in 1566. In the war of the Greek revolution, the Chians joined the Greeks (Feb. 1821) but were overpowered by the Turks. The Pasha decreed that the island should be utterly devastated: 23,000 Chians were massacred and 47,000 sold into slavery. Only five thousand escaped. During the Balkan war of 1912 the Greek fleet took the island and subsequently it was reunited with Greece.