

Coos (Cos)

Coos is an island off the coast of Caria, Asia Minor, one of the Sporades, under Greek control since 1948.

Coos is mentioned in connection with Paul's third missionary journey in Acts 21:1, and in its relations with the Jews in 1 Macc. 15:23; Josephus Ant. xiv.7.2; 10.15.

Cos is a long, narrow island oriented E-W. About 23 mi (37 km) long, it has a circumference of 65 mi (105 km) and consists of an area of 111 sq mi (287 sq km). It is divided into three parts or regions: an abrupt limestone ridge along the eastern half of the southern coast, a rugged peninsula at the west end, and along the northern coast a central lowland of fertile soil which produces an excellent quality of grapes. The harbor is at the eastern end of the island. Mt. Oromedon, a landmark for navigators, rises in the middle of the island to a height of 2500 ft (762 m).

Cos was settled by Greeks as early as the 15th cent b.c. During the 5th cent the city-state joined the Delian League and suffered considerable destruction during the Peloponnesian War (431–404). A member of the Second Athenian Alliance, it revolted successfully against Athens in 354. Coming under the control of Alexander, Cos subsequently oscillated between Macedon, Syria, and Egypt to find its greatest glory as a literary center under the protection of the Ptolemies, when it was the home of such great figures as the poet Philetas. In the 2nd cent Cos was loyal to Rome even before it became a part of the province of Asia. Herod the Great was one of the benefactors of the people of Cos. Claudius, influenced by his Coan physician Xenophon, made Cos a free city and conferred immunity from taxation upon it in a.d. 53.

One of the most beautiful ports of the ancient world, Cos not doubt was most famous as a health resort. It was the site of the first school of scientific medicine and the sanctuary of Asclepius (Aesculapius). The island had a healthful climate and hot ferrous and sulfurous springs, which the great Hippocrates (ca 460–377 b.c.), the father of medicine, first used to cure his patients.

The sanctuary of Asclepius (the god of healing) was excavated by Rudolf Herzog of Tubingen University, 1898–1907. He uncovered a sanctuary on three terraces set in a sacred grove of cypresses about 2 mi (3 km) from the town. The topmost terrace had a Doric temple built of white island marble, surrounded on three sides by a U-shaped portico with its open side facing the lower terraces, and dating ca 160 b.c. The middle terrace dated ca 280 b.c. and supported a great altar faced by a small temple and other structures. The lowest terrace had a U-shaped portico with its open side facing the one on the top level. Dated ca 350–250 b.c., this portico contained rooms where the patients slept.

When an earthquake nearly devastated the city of Cos in 1933, the Italians, who then controlled the island, availed themselves of the opportunity to excavate the ancient city. They found a planned Hellenistic town with main cross streets, a stadium, and a surrounding wall; and they found evidence of occupation at the site as early as Mycenaean times. At the lower level of the sanctuary the excavators uncovered Roman baths which utilized the healing waters of the island's springs and which (by inscriptions) dated to Nero's reign — and thus to the time of Paul's ministry.

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia