

BAZEOS
TOWER



Sailing on the ARCHIPELAGO



Preface



S. Pinargenti: Archipelago, 1573. Alpha Bank Collection

Within the context of its active, practical participation in cultural matters – not only in the urban centres but in the periphery as well – Alpha Bank decided, in conjunction with the Benaki Museum, to contribute to the exhibition "Sailing on the Archipelago" that is being organised by the "Aeon" Cultural Organisation at Bazeos Tower on Naxos during the summer of 2004.

The artefacts in the exhibition have come from the Benaki Museum and from the Alpha Bank collection of maps and landscape paintings by European travellers to the Aegean from the 15th to the 19th century. In addition, material supplementing this picture of the period has been provided by the National History Museum, the Maritime Museum of Greece and the Numismatic Museum.

In recognition of the on-going efforts and significant work accomplished by the "Aeon" Cultural Organisation, Alpha Bank is pleased to sponsor the printed matter for this exhibition.

ALPHA BANK

Sailing on the ARCHIPELAGO

From Venetian Rule to the Struggle for Independence

The Cyclades, a uniquely beautiful cluster of islands in the middle of the Aegean Sea, form an imaginary bridge between continental Greece and Asia Minor. With a civilisation that goes back in time to 3000 BC, the islands have been washed ceaselessly by the waves of history that have shaped both its natural surroundings and its people.



F.J.J. von Reilly: Aegeo Pelagos, 1789.
Alpha Bank Collection



Byzantine Dromond, model, Maritime Museum of Greece.
During the Byzantine period, the Cyclades belonged to the Aegean Sea theme. The dromond was a ship that protected the maritime domain and ensured Byzantine naval supremacy.

The Duchy of the Archipelago



Venetian Galley, model, Maritime Museum of Greece. Venetian ship propelled by oars and supplemented by sail, which dominated the Mediterranean from the 13th century to the 18th century.

After Constantinople was sacked by the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the Byzantine Empire was carved up among the Franks and the Venetians, the Most Serene Republic of Saint Mark acceded to the position of the dominant naval power in the eastern Mediterranean for the next five centuries. On behalf of the Serenissima, Venetian nobles sought to conquer both the Cyclades and the other islands of the Aegean that had not been included in the division of Byzantine lands. In 1207, Marco Sanudo, one of these nobles, seized a large number of Cycladic islands on which he established the Duchy of the Aegean or of the Archipelago, with headquarters on Naxos.

The gold and silver coins of the Serenissima, ruler of the seas, were recognised as the most stable unit of international currency for trade purposes and widely used by the inhabitants of the islands

Venetian Republic, gold ducato of the Doge Francesco Foscari (1423-1457), Athens, Numismatic Museum



Mapping the Archipelago

As the islands of the Aegean have always been an unavoidable intermediary point in maritime communications between West and East, and a point of both meeting and confrontation between different cultures, they very soon became the object of observation, description and depiction. The persistent mapping of the islands and indeed by cartographers from different countries indicates their importance to the powers of the times.

The word "archipelago" – arcipelago in Italian, archipel in French – which is used to describe a group of islands or a sea with many islands in it, originated in the Aegean as a corruption of the Greek term "Aegiopelago", meaning "Aegean Sea" by Frankish sailors.

Following a long period of intense rivalry, the Ottomans managed to prevail over the Venetians in the Aegean. They abolished the Duchy of the Archipelago in 1566 and annexed all the Cyclades to the Ottoman Empire with the exception of Tinos which remained under Venetian rule until 1715.



Venetian Republic, silver ducato nuovo or ducatello of the Doge Domenico Contarini (1659-1674), Athens, Numismatic Museum.



S. Pinargenti: Naxos, 1573. Alpha Bank Collection



G. Rosaccio: Anafi, 1598. Alpha Bank Collection



G. Rosaccio: Amorgos, 1598. Alpha Bank Collection



G. Rosaccio: Milos, 1598. Alpha Bank Collection

Foreign Travellers from the 17th to the 19th century.

Even though images of the Cyclades were found only sporadically in writings by Europeans who visited Greece from the 17th to the 19th centuries, depictions of them in illustrated travel books and original paintings constitute valuable sources of visual testimony about the landscape, architecture, antiquities, clothing, traditions and customs of the islands' inhabitants in the Middle Ages and during the period of Ottoman rule.



Traditional costume of Ios, 1716, Engraving. Benaki Museum



View of Naxos with Portara, 1799, watercolour by Thomas Hope. Benaki Museum

Seafarers from antiquity to the present day have faced dangers at sea, such as shipwrecks and piracy, by praying, promising and making offerings to the saints both before and after the miracles that saved them.



Engraved offering (tama) depicting a caique with detailed rendering of actual fishing equipment. Benaki Museum.

The Development of Shipping

Social and economic reorganisation in the Aegean began in the early 18th century. To the administrative advantages enjoyed by the Aegean islands as of 1701 were added trade privileges after the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774). At the same time, the abolition of the Venetian Republic by the French (1797), Anglo-French rivalry during the Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815) and the suppression of piracy created further favourable conditions for the islanders to become more active in trade and for the development of Greek merchant shipping.



8 reales, Ferdinand VII of Spain (1808-1823), minted in 1821. Athens, Numismatic Museum. The Spanish thaler, known in Greece from the end of the 17th century as distela or kolonata, was an all-powerful international currency unit; these were the coins that ship owners from seafaring islands hoarded away in their chests.

The Naval Struggle of 1821



Caravel earrings made of gold and enamel, Siphnos, 17th-18th century. Benaki Museum.

By the early 19th century, the Greeks, a traditionally seafaring people, had acquired a noteworthy level of maritime trade, crews with valuable military experience, and a dynamic class of ship owners and captains. When the War of Independence began in 1821, the inhabitants of the Aegean were well prepared for the great struggle.

Mando Mavrogenous led the uprising of her compatriots on Mykonos against the Ottomans. She equipped and manned two ships and took an active part in the naval campaigns against the Turkish fleet. During the War, she was given the title of Lieutenant General, a unique honour for a woman at that time.



Portrait of Mando Mavrogenous, oil painting by Ph. Zonaras, 1901. National History Museum.



Map of Greece, engraving, 19th century.
Benaki Museum.

After the War of Independence, the Cyclades were incorporated into the new Greek state in 1830, and as an integral part of the nation from then on, followed the course of its history

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE EXHIBITION

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

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Yorka Nikolaou, Numismatic
Museum
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Benaki Museum
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Naval Academy,
Lyceum of Greek Women
of Syros,
Catholic Archdiocese
of Naxos and Tinos.

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Municipality of
Drymalia, Naxos.

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Chora-Ayiassos road, Naxos

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Duration of Exhibition:

17/7 – 12/9/2004

Open:

10.00 – 17.00

Weekdays

The printing of this
leaflet was made
possible through
the kind sponsorship
of Alpha Bank

