

PALATIA

Palátia, a small islet joined to the main island by a causeway, is known for the famous **Portára**, the largest Archaic Greek monolithic doorway still surviving, and the most conspicuous ruin on Naxos: its silhouette dominates views from the island and the sea alike. The Portára is the only standing element remaining from a temple, built c. 530 BC under the tyrant Lygdamis and subsequently left uncompleted. It expresses the prosperity, confidence and technical mastery of Naxos at that time, marking its harbour entrance with what would have been the grandest temple in the Cyclades. Later, the temple was occupied by a 6th-century Christian basilica with an inscribed apse. The Venetians used the remains of the temple as a quarry for the walls of the Kastro. The temple may have been intended for Dionysus, or more likely Apollo. The size of the doorway gives an idea of the monumental structure it was meant to be part of, now thought to have been planned as a full peripteral temple. Local mythology holds that it was on this tiny islet that the sleeping Ariadne woke to see her faithless lover's ship disappear over the horizon to Athens, and grieved until she was found by Dionysus.

Aerial view of the Portára, fronting temple ruins of the 6th century BC.



ARIADNE ON NAXOS

Ariadne was the daughter of King Minos of Crete and his wife Pasiphaë. When Theseus, prince and pre-eminent hero of Athens, came to Knossos in Crete as part of a human tribute of Athenian youths and virgins which was sent each year to King Minos as expiation for the death of his son Androgeus in Attica, Ariadne glimpsed him and fell in love with him. She provided him with a ball of wool to help him escape again from the Labyrinth once he had slain the Minotaur: as she did so, she asked Theseus to promise that he would marry her in return and take her with him when he escaped, so that she would avoid the wrath of her father. Theseus agreed.

Theseus achieved his mission and escaped successfully from the Labyrinth. He and Ariadne fled north: their first stop was Naxos. While Ariadne slept, Theseus set sail for Athens and abandoned her: she awoke to find him gone. Dionysus, finding Ariadne grieving and seeing her beauty, fell in love with her. He presented her with a gold wreath set with precious stones; later this was placed in the heavens as the constellation of Corona Borealis. Ariadne bore Dionysus a number of children, and in antiquity festivals celebrated her story: a mourning festival which recalled her sleep, abandonment and grief; and a subsequent festival which celebrated her awakening, marriage and new lease of life.

The story, as Plutarch recognised (*Theseus*, 20), had many versions, and there were many explanations of Theseus' behaviour. Homer implies that Ariadne was already married to Dionysus when she followed Theseus from Crete, and that she was killed on Dia by Artemis at the request of Dionysus. Anacreon and Apollonius of Rhodes say that she bore Dionysus sons: Anacreon says one, Apollonius four, Hyginus six. Diodorus Siculus and Pausanias claim that Theseus left Ariadne because the gods commanded him to, since Fate would not allow him to marry her. Ovid and Hyginus suggest that Theseus was simply a cad. Plutarch mentions that in some accounts Ariadne came to Cyprus (not Naxos), already pregnant by Theseus, who abandoned her there. In any case, he adds, the Naxiots themselves claimed that there were two different Ariadnes, one for Dionysus and another for Theseus. The story of Ariadne and Theseus encapsulates the ambivalent view that Naxos had of Athens. History had taught Naxos not to trust the city or its people.

Clearly visible on the ground are the two parallel lines of meticulously cut and interlocked blocks of foundations for the walls of the cella (measuring c. 37m by 15.5m by 12m high). The outlines of the antae and the distyle pronaos beside the portal, and of the opisthodomos (also distyle) at the opposite end, are both discernible. All is of exquisite marble and excellently finished. Many of the blocks still possess 'knobs' on their surface, left uncut so as to provide a 'handle' to help with lifting and transporting. These would have been removed and smoothed before completion.



a simple and unsophisticated ware, often with unusual forms, traditionally unglazed, but now with a number of decorations derived from Byzantine traditions.

From the well-protected bay with its lovely beach, a road climbs steadily to the more densely inhabited plateau of eastern Siphnos. Almost exactly 4km up the road from the harbour is the beautiful wayside **church of the Ághii Anárgyri**, built over a sacred spring reached down some steps through from the west corner of the church. Visible directly across the valley to the northeast is the silhouetted profile of the **Kambaraníó ancient tower** (early 5th century BC). Of the many ancient towers of Siphnos (*see box opposite*), this is unusual for its decorated doorway.

THE ANCIENT TOWERS OF SIPHNOS

There are the remains of more ancient towers—55 of them—on Siphnos than on any other Aegean island. One quarter of those known so far in the Aegean are here. The island with the next largest concentration, Thasos (33 towers), was also known for mining precious metals in antiquity; thus fortified towers probably played an important role, in an age before bank vaults, in guarding the mines and in temporarily storing the valuable ore until it was coined, bartered or shipped elsewhere. It seems that the construction of the Siphnian towers began soon after the extortion of 100 talents from the islanders by Samian adventurers in c. 524 BC, and that during the 5th century a network of intercommunicating watchtowers around the island was designed to provide an early-warning system in case of attack. While this accounts for about 20 towers, the remaining 30 are harder to explain, especially as the mines were in decline. Perhaps some served as places of refuge in case of pirate raids.

The towers are round (a shape convenient for defence), and often had two or more floors; some had water cisterns in their base; all had well-designed doorways to accommodate robust doors with bolts. A great range of refinements in execution and material adds to their fascination. When they survive to an appreciable height, the towers are majestic, and they appeal through the simple beauty of their craftsmanship.

Further beyond Kamáres, the road rises to a T-junction (Stavrí). To the right and behind is Apollonía, merging into Exámbela to the south; to the left is Áno Petáli, merging with Artemónas to the north. Together they form a continuous settlement along the central ridge. Ancient Siphnos was at the site of Kastro below; another ancient settlement, Apollonia, must have been somewhere beneath today's Apollonía.

Apollonia

Apollonia has been the island capital since 1836. A small **museum of folklore** (*open daily in high season*) is in the small Plateía Iróon just before the centre. It has a heterogeneous collection of island memorabilia: agricultural tools and weaponry, traditional unglazed pottery, textiles, embroideries, but especially traditional Siphnian women's costumes.

Above the square, the serpentine street which climbs to the south constitutes the heart of the town, lined with elegant 18th-century houses and a succession of interesting churches, nearly all of which are entered from the south side—a Siphnian peculiarity. A beautiful example is the first church on the left, the **church of the Nativity of Christ** from 1587, with its flat schist roof. Further up on the opposite side is the early 18th-century **church of the Tímios Stavrós**, and just beyond it, the **church of the Taxiárchis** (1650), its exterior embellished with coloured faience dishes (north) and an

Across the road from the entrance to the New Archaeological Museum is the **Old Natural History Museum** (map p. 504, C2; open daily except Mon, 10–2; free). The main collection has been moved to Sígri (see p. 522). The permanent exhibition is on the history and cultivation of olives and the production of olive oil, including a 60,000-year-old volcanic fossil from Santorini bearing the clear impression of olive leaves.

THE CASTLE OF MYTILENE

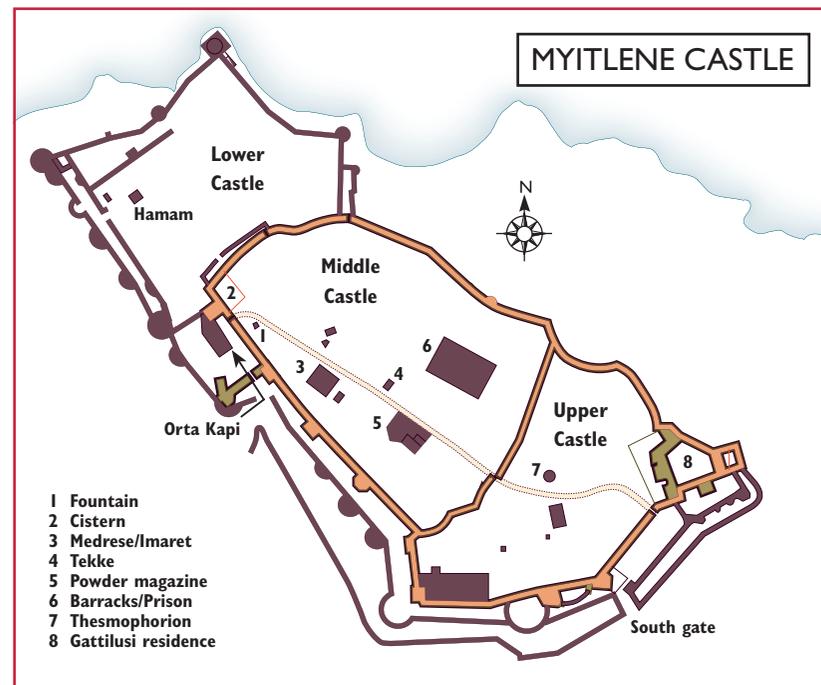
There are two entrances to the castle (map p. 504, C1; open daily except Mon, 8–3), one from the south and another from the west by the Orta Kapi, 150m north of the New Archaeological Museum. The description below assumes entry by the latter.

HISTORY OF THE CASTLE

The impressive quantity of spolia incorporated in the castle walls gives an idea of the extent of the destruction wreaked on the ancient town when the castle was first built. The first post-antique fortress here is said to have been erected in the 6th century AD, under the Emperor Justinian: the innermost of the three successive gates on the west side is Byzantine, and it marks the northwestern limit of the Byzantine castle. The enceinte was strengthened and further fortified to the south and west by the Genoese Gattilusi overlords, between their coming into possession of the castle in 1355 and a catastrophic earthquake in 1384 that wrought considerable damage to the structure and killed all of the ruling family save for a single son, Francesco II. What was rebuilt was considerably damaged again by the Turkish assault of 1462. In 1501, under Sultan Beyazit II, the Lower Castle, protected by a circular bastion at the northernmost point, was added to protect the north harbour. The interior was densely inhabited in Ottoman times; many of the ruined buildings still visible inside date from the 16th–19th centuries.

The Orta Kapi and Lower Castle

The Ottoman **Orta Kapi** ('Middle Gate') is virtually invisible from the outside, and protected by a circular bastion to the left as you approach. It leads into a passage and thence through a second (medieval) gate into an enclosed area between the Ottoman and the original Byzantine/Gattilusi walls. From here a third (Byzantine) gate, with a massive ancient marble block as its lintel, leads into the wide open interior, scattered with ancient spolia. To the right is an **Ottoman fountain (1)** and to the left a deep and well-preserved **cistern (2)**, whose design is both elegant and functional. Opposite are the remains of a square Ottoman house of the 17th century. To the north, visible from stairs which give access to the top of the intermediate wall to the left, lies the **Lower Castle**, which extended the fortifications as far as the northern shore and the harbour. It was protected by a circular bastion at its northern extremity and enclosed a large



area with a great many houses, a hamam, a fountain, a Turkish oracle-shrine, and the Christian cave-church and sacred spring of the Panaghía Galatoussa, all of which can be reached from the road which circles the castle on the seaward side and breaches the lower walls in the north.

The Middle and Upper Castle

A paved path leads uphill to the south from the Byzantine gateway, passing the many-domed block of the **Ottoman medrese (3)** above and the **imaret** below. Immediately beyond the medrese was the hamam, and to the left of the path is a small, domed **tekke (4)**, or living quarters for dervishes, with its fireplace still intact. The three buildings together formed a complete religious unit.

The military buildings are further up: a massively-built **gunpowder magazine (5)** to the right of the path, and a large 17th-century **barracks and prison (6)**, arranged around a courtyard, to the left. Steps up to the top of the walls in the southwestern corner provide excellent views of the sharper lines of the final 17th-century Ottoman additions, the outermost walls and bastions, designed with emplacements for artillery. Below this area is an extensive undercroft of vaulted, subterranean spaces, endowed with a well-head and sanitary facilities; these were used for protecting and housing the populace during times of siege.