

Patmos: A Short History (REV27)

Topography and Geography

Patmos (Πάτμος) is a small island in the Aegean Sea (southwest of Ephesus and between modern-day Turkey and Greece).

Patmos is located in the northwest end of the Dodecanese, between Ikaria and Leros, southwest of Samos.

Patmos is of volcanic origin and has a much-indented coastline.



A Woman Working in her Orchard on Patmos

An isthmus only a few hundred meters wide, on which the island's harbor lies, separates the north end of the island from the southern half.

Patmos is 10 miles long and about 6 miles wide along the northern coast.

Patmos is for the most part rocky.

The highest part of the island is Mount Elias, which rises to a height of over 800 ft.

As in most of Greece and the adjacent mainland of Asia Minor, much of the land is treeless.



The Monastery Planned by Christodoulos

Near the city of Patmos there is a good harbor.

The population of the island numbers 3,000, almost entirely Greek.

History

1) The island of Patmos is seldom mentioned by ancient secular authors.

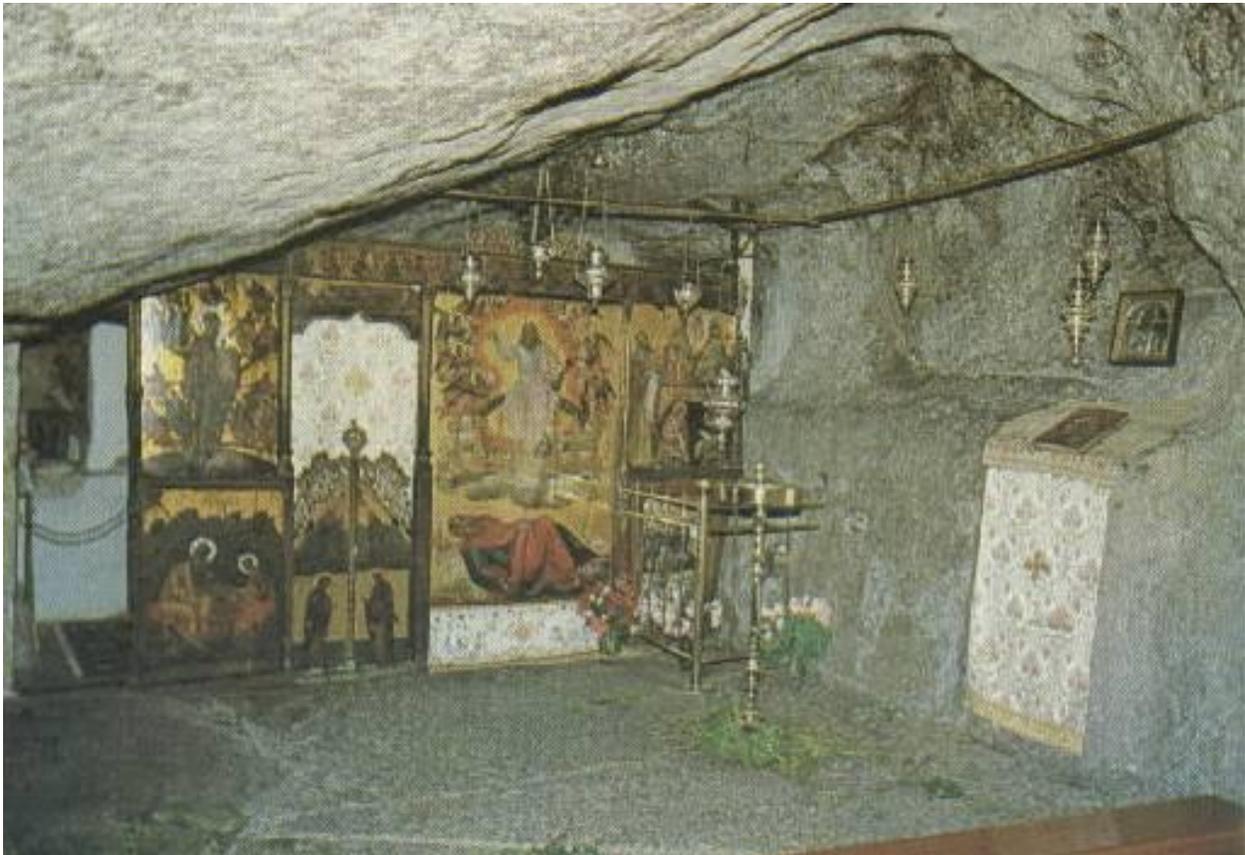
Patmos is mentioned by Thucydides (iii.33) and Pliny (NH, iv.23) and Strabo (x.5).

2) As for the Churchmen, the Apostle John's exile to Patmos under the emperor Domitian was testified to by:

a) Clement of Alexandria (*Rich Man* 42).

b) Tertullian:

“Since, moreover, you are close upon Italy, you have Rome, from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority (of apostles themselves). How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile!”¹

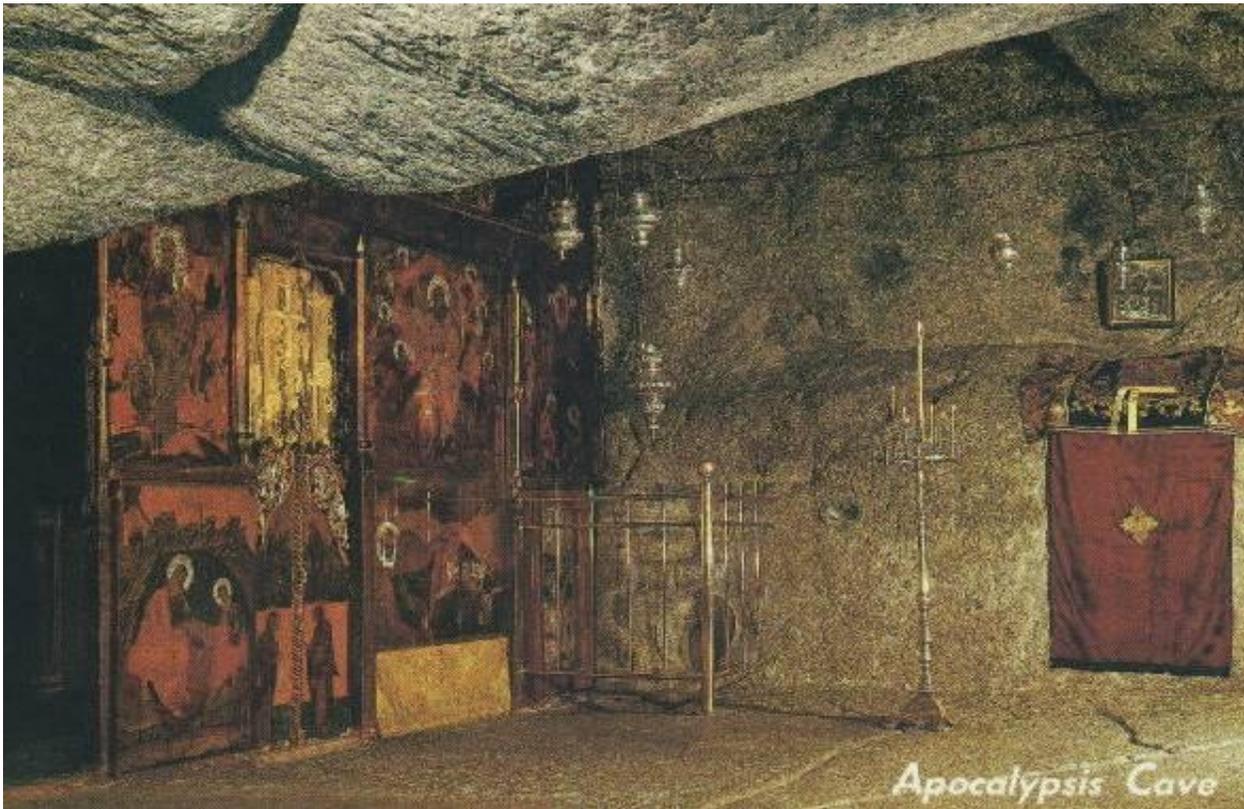


Another Shot of the Cave Where John Lived

¹ Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, XXXVI; from Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume III*.

c) Eusebius:

“The Apostle John and the Apocalypse. IT is said that in this persecution the apostle and evangelist John, who was still alive, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos in consequence of his testimony to the divine word. Irenaeus, in the fifth book of his work *Against Heresies*, where he discusses the number of the name of Antichrist which is given in the so-called *Apocalypse of John*, speaks as follows concerning him: ‘If it were necessary for his name to be proclaimed openly at the present time, it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation. For it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian.’”²



This is the so-called Cave of the Apocalypse

d) Jerome:

“In the fourteenth year then after Nero Domitian having raised a second persecution he was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the *Apocalypse*, on which Justin Martyr and Irenaeus afterwards wrote

² Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Church History of Eusebius*, III. 18; from Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series: Volume I*.

commentaries. But Domitian having been put to death and his acts, on account of his excessive cruelty, having been annulled by the senate, he returned to Ephesus under Pertinax and continuing there until the tithe of the emperor Trajan, founded and built churches throughout all Asia.”³



A View from the Monastery

- e) “According to several early church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius), John was sent to this island as a prisoner following his effective pastorate at Ephesus.”⁴
- f) “Victorinus, the first commentator on the Book of Revelation, stated that John worked as a prisoner in the mines on this small island.”⁵

3) Patmos is mentioned once in the Bible, in **Revelation 1:9**.

It is supposed that its prehistoric inhabitants were the Cariens.

³ Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, IX.

⁴ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The name *Patmos* is generally believed to have come from the word *Latmos*, which is the name of a mountain of Caria (a country in Asia Minor) where the goddess Diana (Artemis), was particularly adored.

Thus, in ancient times the goddess Diana was particularly adored on Patmos; she was considered to be the patron goddess of the island.

Patmos was at times colonized by the Dorians and, later, by the Ionians.

Under the domination of the Romans, the island fell into decline. It was abandoned and used as an exile place.

4) The island has a long history as a prison:

In Roman times Patmos was one of the many places to which Rome banished her exiles.

Even in A.D. 904, after the conquest of Thessaloniki, many of its inhabitants were deported to Patmos as prisoners.

One of these, John Kameniatis, wrote that they found the island deserted and were suffering from severe thirst for six days:

“Thus, we were taken to a certain island called Patmos where we stayed for 6 days, going through every sort of hardships as the place was without water and thirst was tormenting the prisoners.”⁶

5) John’s exile:

In A.D. 95, according to Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome and others, the Evangelist, Theologian and Apostle John was exiled to Patmos (in the 14th year of the reign of Domitian).

John was banished for preaching the Gospel at Ephesus and (probably) refusing to worship the emperor. “When the Emperor Domitian died in A.D. 96, his successor Nerva let John return to Ephesus. During John’s bleak days on Patmos, God gave him the tremendous revelation embodied in this final book of the Bible.”⁷

⁶ Davaris, Dimitris G., *Patmos: The Sacred Island* (Athens: Nikopoulou-Dressos), p.14.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B.



This Greek Icon from the Isle of Patmos Depicts John's Vision on the Island

As a result of John's exile there, the island of Patmos became the center of the Orthodox Religion.

During his exile, John lived in a grotto (a small cave) that today is called simply, “**Αποκάλυψις**” (Apokalypsis). It was in this cave that John is said to have seen his visions. The cave is still pointed out to travelers today.

A text titled, *Voyages and Miracles of St. John the Theologian*, written by his disciple Prochoros, was embraced by the Byzantine tradition and by the Christians in Patmos.

- 6) In the year A.D. 1088, Osios Christodoulos, arrived in Patmos from nearby Kos and work began on the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian.

The island was conquered by the Turks in 1537. Because it offered no resistance, Patmos was granted several privileges by the conquerors.

In the 15th century, refugees from Constantinople settled in Patmos.

In the 17th century, Cretans from Heraklio sought the monastery's protection.

During the dark period of Turkish domination, the Monastery of Patmos had developed the highest educative activity and safeguarded many Greek relics

Both of the famous patriots Xanthos and Themelis, founders of the “Philiki Heteria” (Friendship Association) that aimed to deliver Greece from the Turkish yoke, were sons of Patmos.

Even under the Turks, Patmos began trading with Europe and Asia Minor and the island's shipping industry grew. Local crafts were the major export.

In 1659, the Venetians under Francesco Morosini sacked the island with the exception of the monastery.

Although Patmos was active in the cause of Greek independence it remained under Ottoman rule according to the terms of the Treaty of Constantinople (1832). As a result, the island was cut off from the new western style Greek state and its prosperity declined. Patmos and the rest of Greece was occupied by the Turks for about 380 years.

In 1912, the Italians occupied Patmos and the other islands of Dodecanese. Patmos was occupied by Germans during World War II (1943), who were forced to evacuate it at the beginning of 1945 leaving it to the Allies.

The island acquired its liberty by the end of World War II. On March 7, 1948, it officially became a part of the Greek union. After an official ceremony, the Greek flag was hoisted on all the islands of the Dodecanese.