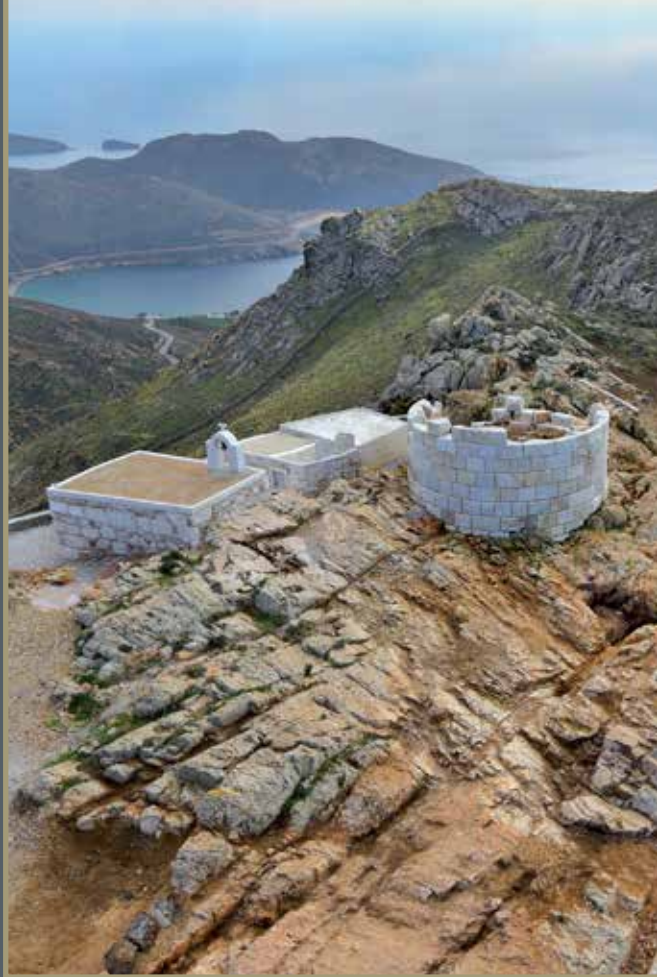




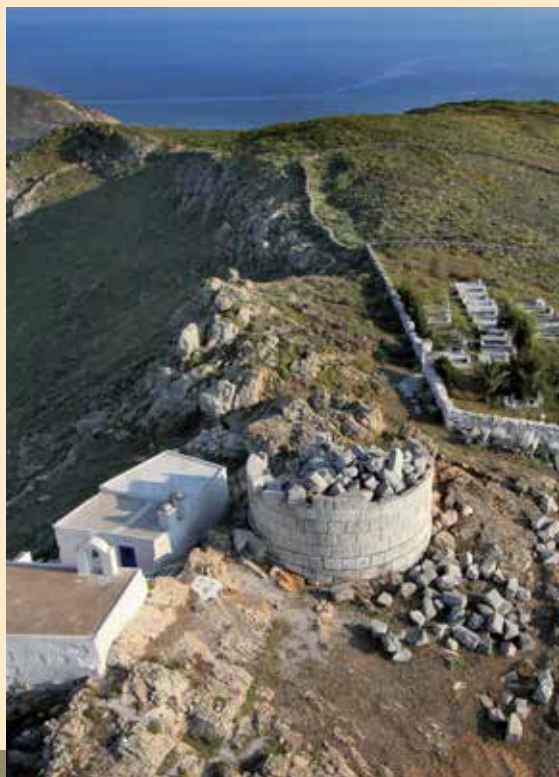
the White Tower on Seriphos

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORT
GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF ANTIQUITIES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
21st EPHORATE OF PREHISTORIC AND CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES

The marble tower, known as “The White Tower” (Aspros Pyrgos), is an independent ancient defensive construction, which was erected in the countryside of Seriphos. It is built on a naturally fortified site, with all round visibility, on the rocky spine of the mountain chain which bounds the bay of Koutalas on the northwest, commanding to the southwest part of the island which is richest in metals.

It is similar to the isolated defensive towers of the Greek mainland and islands. These are particularly numerous in the Aegean, especially the Cyclades. They were built mainly in the late 4th and 3rd centuries BC and had various and multiple functions according to the particular characteristics of their settings.

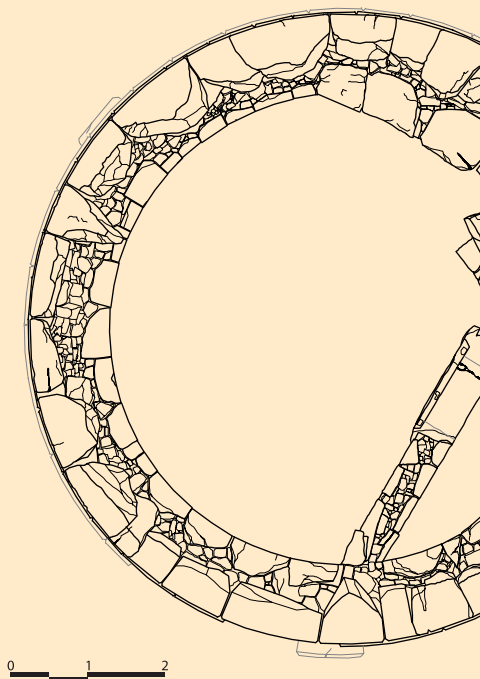
Always visible, the ruins of the White Tower are mentioned briefly by foreign travellers of the 18th and 19th centuries who visited Seriphos and travelled in the southwest of the island, by earlier researchers as well by those who, in one way or another, recorded the history of the island. In 1771, indeed, Count Pasch van Krienen, considering it a temple of Apollo, carried out an excavation nearby and, as he reports, a few paces away found a tomb which contained various finds. These he must have taken away with him and their fate is unknown.



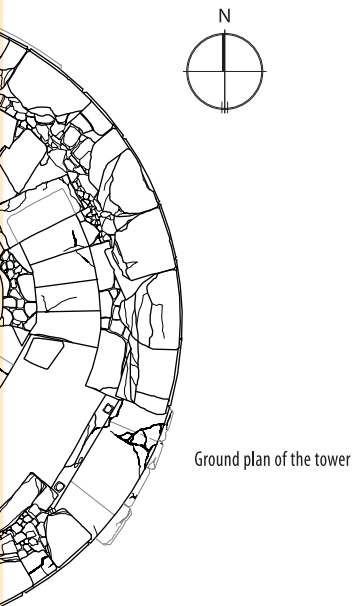
The White Tower with fallen stones in its interior and all around, view from the north (2011).

The White Tower is built of white local marble and firmly founded on the sloping rock. It is circular in plan and has an exterior diameter of 8.34 m. The wall-construction is meticulous. Its double wall is 1.05 m. in thickness with the outer face constructed on the pseudoisodomic system with well-cut slightly convex marble blocks fitted together without any binding agent in courses whose thickness decreases progressively as the wall rises. The inner face is built of smaller stones of various shapes and sizes.

The monument is preserved to ground floor level and a maximum height of 4.95 m. On the basis of the building material (over 750 marble blocks), it is reckoned to have had two upper floors and an overall height of 12 m. The entrance, on the southeast, was 2 m. high and closed by a two-leaved door. The threshold is monolithic, as is the lintel which was discovered inside the church cell, also the door-jambs which survive complete in the foundations of the adjacent church. A spiral staircase gave access to the upper floors, and its first five monolithic treads are preserved *in situ*. It starts immediately to the right of the entrance and rises against the inner face of the wall. On the ground floor a cross wall isolates the staircase, creating two separate spaces. The entrance to the second and larger space was closed also with a two-leaved door. The recess under the staircase was perhaps used for storage. At higher levels there were arrow-slots and windows. The roof was probably flat.



Around the tower, ancillary constructions were related to it. An ovoid roughly rock-cut and plaster-lined cistern was found a short distance northwest of the tower, while to the northeast, on the site now occupied by the chapel of Agios Charalambos (exactly below its foundation level), are the remains of another smaller, rectangular cistern, also rock-cut and coated with plaster. Beside it are traces of another, larger. A few metres to the west of the tower, a natural cave-like hollow in the rock with its opening widened artificially was used as a depository for pottery in the late Hellenistic period (2nd/1st century BC).



On the basis of the finds –various kinds of items of everyday use, mainly terracotta household implements (for cooking, storage, tableware)–, the tower was built in the 4th century BC and remained in use until the 7th century AD. It seems that its use was continuous until the 3rd/4th century AD, when it appears to have become restricted. During the following centuries, until the 7th century AD, use of the tower seems to have been sporadic. In fact its upper part had already been partly destroyed. The reasons for its destruction or abandonment and the date of its final collapse remain unclear.



The staircase leading to the upper floors.

The constructional features of the tower, together with its commanding position, which allows oversight of land and sea, suggest a defensive character and function as a watchtower, signal station, guard post, or a refuge in time of need. The finds throw no light on its specific use, though this was ensured for many generations by the strong construction, even after it had ceased to serve the purpose for which it was originally built. Nevertheless, its presence in this particular area where all the indications are that there was extensive ore-mining in later Classical, Hellenistic and Roman times, suggest a connection with these and, further, with the other two towers in the area, Psaropyrgos and the tower at Phlea, together with which the White Tower seems to form a network of oversight and protection of the mining and metalworking activities of the region.



Black-glaze lamp,
late 4th c. BC.



Kantharos (wine cup)
with incised decoration,
3rd/2nd c. BC.



Amphora,
product of a North African workshop,
1st/2nd c. AD.



Amphora,
product of a Cretan workshop,
2nd/3rd c. AD.



Pithos (jar) with incised inscription
ΑΛΚΙΔΗΜΟΥ (of Alkidemos) on the rim,
2nd/1st c. BC.



The White Tower is the best preserved of the ancient towers so far known on Seriphos.

Its incorporation in the project “Refurbishment and Display of Aspros Pyrgos on Seriphos” within the Regional Operational Programme for Crete & the Aegean Islands 2007-2013, which was implemented by the 21st Ephorate of Pre-historic and Classical Antiquities (2011-2014), provided an opportunity for the tower to be permanently protected, for its character to be documented, for valuable information about its chronology to be recovered and finally for its surrounding area to be laid out for display and fuller understanding.

Visitors can see an ancient monument in the countryside, in an environment as yet untouched by urban development. They can get an idea of its size from the surviving section together with the greater part of the building material assembled on the site. Surveying the neighbouring buildings, they can further understand how an ancient monument can be preserved over time by forming a part of the life of subsequent generations.





Mine workers build the cell for festival meals by the White Tower
(photo: Exhibition of rocks and mining tools organized by the Municipality of Seriphos at Mega Livadi).

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, which saw the acme of modern ore-mining on Seriphos, a cemetery for the mining settlements in the area was established a few metres to the south of the ancient tower. Its circuit wall and tombs utilised marble blocks fallen from the tower. Perhaps at the same time, on the opposite side and almost up against the tower, a little church dedicated to Agios (St.) Charalambos and its festival cell were constructed of ancient marbles.

The White Tower after the removal of fallen stones, view from the south (2014).





Hypothetical reconstruction of the White Tower

Text: P. Pantou
English translation: LTES Ltd.
Plans: Aim. Bendermacher-Geroussis
Photographs: Archive of the 21st EPCA
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Layout: Th. Ioakeimidis

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