



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, October 8, 2024

Bonna D. Wescoat, American School of Classical Studies at Athens

From City to Sanctuary on Samothrace

ABSTRACT

The Sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace has long drawn our attention; the adjacent city, not so much. The story of the Sanctuary is largely written in terms of external influences, with little credit given to the role the Samothracians played in maximizing their most valuable asset. And yet within the largely unexcavated city, a magnificent fortification wall as well as marble spolia in the Gattilusi towers bear witness to a powerful and vibrant polis. Our current research aims to better understand the relationship of the ancient city to the Sanctuary of the Great Gods by investigating the gates and passages connecting city to sanctuary and the evidence for human activity on the land in between. The kinetic and sensorial aspects that shaped religious encounter on Samothrace likely began well before the prospective initiate reached the Propylon of Ptolemy II. Between 2022-2024, we explored the fortification wall with the aim of identifying the path ancient pilgrims followed from city to sanctuary. Key features of the structure we have named the West Gate strongly suggest it served as the main passage. Located just to the northeast of the Propylon of Ptolemy II, its two chambers were separated by a monumental doorway and adorned on all sides with tiers of cuttings for stelai. This level of communication and display is unparalleled elsewhere on the island and would be fitting for the primary sacred gate. In a second initiative, systematic field survey of the land between the city wall and the Sanctuary has provided a further body of evidence for understanding the dynamic relationship between the city and sanctuary. Evidence for dense habitation, as well as burial and industry in this interstitial zone, speak to the close interaction between city and sanctuary.

The seminar takes place Tuesday, October 8, 2024, 17.00 (Athens) with live presence at the Swedish Institute and online via Zoom.

To participate, please register at:

<https://www.sia.gr/en/events.php?eid=434#ParticipationForm>