



SOUNION

ATTICA





On the rocky peninsula that projects into the sea at the south-east tip of Attica, the Athenians built sanctuaries to their two most important deities: Poseidon and Athena. The temple of Poseidon, god of the sea, was built on the summit of the rock, which rises 60 m above the sea, and is surrounded by stout walls; two temples to Athena Sounias were erected at a lower level.



The peninsula of Sounion has been inhabited since the Prehistoric period, and there seems to have been some form of cult there in Mycenaean times, since Homer is the first to describe Sounion as "sacred". He relates that on the journey back from Troy, Menelaos buried his steersman Phrontis here. The excavations at the beginning of the 20th century revealed that there was an organised sanctuary here already in the Geometric period (10th-7th c. BC), and some of the earliest kouros of Greek art were erected in the open-air sanctuary of Poseidon in the early 6th c. BC (these Kouros are now in the Athens National Archaeological Museum).

The construction of the temple of Poseidon and the propylon leading to it began in the early 5th c. BC. It was of poros, a very majestic structure, as befitted the great god of the sea, whose cult was becoming increasingly important, with the growth of Athenian naval power. This temple

was destroyed during the Persian invasion, however, before it could be completed. Another was erected on its site – a marble Doric peripteral temple with 6 x 13 columns. There was a frieze above the cella and on the interior of the *pteron*, with scenes from the Centaur's battle and the Giants' battle. Parts of this frieze are exhibited in the Lavrion Museum.

On the north side of the enclosure wall built around the temple was the entrance with a monumental portico, and there were colonnades on the west and north sides to cater for visitors. The entire sanctuary was encircled by a strong defence wall, which prevented access from the north and east.



In 412 BC, during the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians strengthened the fortress, which occupied a strategic position, commanding the entrance to the Saronic and South Euboean gulfs, and protecting the whole of southern Attica. In 332 BC it was captured by the Macedonians, who



were expelled by Demetrios Poliorketes in 307 BC. Despite Athenian resistance, it fell into the hands of the Macedonians once more in 263 BC, to be retaken by the Athenians in 229 BC.

In the years 104-100 BC, a thousand revolted slaves from the silver mines at Lavrion established themselves at Sounion.

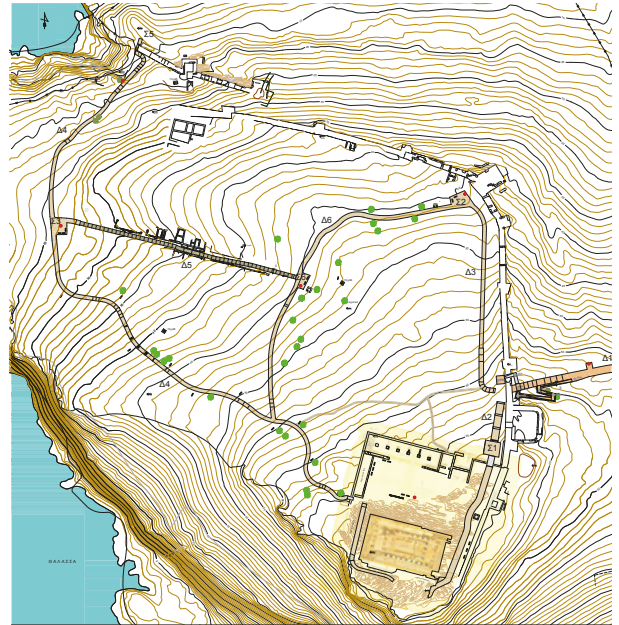
The traveller Pausanias, who visited Sounion in the 2nd c. AD, mentions only the temple of Athena in his "Attika". In the

centuries that followed the sanctuary was abandoned.

The sanctuary of Athena Sounias is on a lower hill, about 400 m north/north-east of the headland. Two temples to Athena are preserved within a polygonal enclosure. The earlier, small temple (600-550 BC) consists of a



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| 1. Sanctuary of Athena Sounias | 4. Sanctuary of Poseidon |
| 2. Eastern hill | 5. Fortress |
| 3. Tourist pavilion | 6. Shiphsheds |



rectangular cella with two Doric columns on the front. At the rear of the cella is preserved the base of the cult statue of Athena. There was a small altar in front of the temple. After this was destroyed by the Persians, a new, larger temple was built, similar to the earlier one, but with two Ionic colonnades added to the east and south sides.

An irregular circular enclosure near the temples is probably to be identified with the sanctuary of Phrontis, mentioned in Homer.

At the west end of the headland are preserved two shiphsheds protected by the fortification wall. They consist of two slipways, deep, long cuttings in the rock, on which rested a wooden structure that protected the bottom of the ships when they were dragged out of the sea. The ships were kept here for use in case of emergency.

The sanctuary of Sounion, with its strong fortress, was directly connected with the metal-bearing region of Lavreotiki. On the mountains of Lavreotiki are preserved many ancient mining installations, and there are marble quarries in the area of Agrileza, which supplied the material for the temples of Poseidon and Athena.



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