

THE HERAION OF SAMOS

SAMOS



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Heritage
Convention



The Heraion of Samos was one of ancient Greece's most important sanctuaries. It was located 6 km from the ancient city of Samos (present Pythagorio), with which it was politically and administratively connected. The faithful arrived at the sanctuary by traversing the Sacred Way or by sea. The Samian Heraion lies in a fertile plain formed by the silting of the river Imbrassos. Myth has it that the goddess was born on the bank of this river beneath a willow tree. Thus the willow was considered Hera's sacred tree. The establishment of the sanctuary in this particular marshy area continually created static problems for the temples erected there. The ancient Samians' insistence on building temples in honor of the goddess Hera on the same site, despite the problems they encountered, was owing to the close relation between the cult of the goddess and the particular spot.

The cult

The cult of Samian Hera is attested from the Late Bronze Age, specifically the Mycenaean period (2nd half of the 2nd millennium BC), referring to the Mother Goddess, the "begetter of all", as the Lesbian poet Alcaeus called her. The goddess's first cult statue was wooden (*a xoanon*), and according to the traveller Pausanias was brought to Samos from Argos by the Argonauts, who founded her cult. Both men and women served as "caretakers" of the sanctuary. The presence of peacocks at the site was characteristic, as they were considered the goddess's sacred birds.

History of the Sanctuary - The Buildings

The ruins of a Prehistoric settlement that came to light during excavation north and northeast of the large temple and north of the Sacred Way date to the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC). The settlement was made up of large houses built of unbaked brick, and it was protected by a wall around 2200 BC. The ruins have been covered to protect them.

During the 2nd millennium BC, i.e. during the Mycenaean period, there was a small stone altar, a temple-shaped building to protect the wooden cult statue, and a willow, the goddess's sacred tree, on the site. This picture of the sanctuary remained the same after the colonization of the island by the Ionians around 1100 BC. The small number of finds from the Protogeometric and Geometric periods shows the cult's limited dissemination. An interesting development at the sanctuary is observed in the 8th c. BC, when the altar (6) became rectangular and was surrounded by paving. The first temple of Hera, the **Hekatompedos I (3)**, was 100 feet long (hence its name: *hekataton*=one hundred, *pod*=foot), was built west of the altar. The ratio of its length to width was 5:1. Its walls were brick, and were supported on a low stone foundation, while its tile-covered saddle roof rested on a series of wooden supports. **Hekatompedos II (3)** was built in the 7th c. BC following the destruction of the first temple. It rested on a stone platform (*crepidoma*) and had wooden surrounding columns (*peristasis*). The altar was renovated at this same time.

A major building transformation of the sanctuary was observed in the mid-6th c. BC. Between 570-560 BC, the enormous **Temple of Hera (2)** was built under the supervision of the architect **Rhoicus** and the artist **Theodor-**



os. This temple's dimensions made it unique. Hekatompedos II was covered over by the new building. The new temple was *dipteral* and 52.5x105 m. Interior columns divided the cella and front porch (*pronaos*) into three parts, called *aisles*. The magnificent column flutes were done in soft limestone with a revolving wheel (*lathe*) invented by Theodoros. The fluted columns, estimated to have been 18 m tall, were of poros stone. The architrave was wooden; the roof was covered with terracotta tiles and palmette antefixes. This temple was characterized as a marvel of Ionic architecture, but it was destroyed by earthquake a few years after its completion. During the tyranny of **Polykrates**, work began on a **new temple** (the great temple) (1) even larger than the preceding one. "The largest of all the temples known to us" Herodotus wrote in his *Histories* when he gazed upon it in 460 BC. It was *dipteral*, and measured 55.16x108.63 m.

Its difference in size from the temple of Rhoicus was due to the placement of another row of columns so that the total number rose to 155. Today, only one of these is preserved *in situ* on the southern side of the temple. The original height of the columns was 20 m. These were made of marble, while the rest of the structure was of poros stone. The column bases were decorated horizontally with fluted spirals and torus. The columns were unfluted, and at their top they were surrounded by a carved decorative band done in colour. The capitals of the exterior columns were Ionic, with volutes and floral decoration; those of the interior columns carried an ovolo moulding. The walls of the *pronaos* were probably decorated with sculptured figures. The architrave was wooden. Scholars believe that this temple was never completed, because after Polykrates' death in 522 BC domestic strife among

his successors began, resulting in Samos's economic and political decline. Building material from the temple was probably used in the construction of the walls of the ancient city and for other buildings.

The cult center was the monumental **altar (6)** measuring 36.5x16.5 m. Its original superstructure was a light-coloured limestone, but it was renovated with marble in the Roman period. The altar was a courtyard surrounded on three sides by a protecting wall (height: 5-7 m) that concluded above in *cymatia* (ovolo mouldings). On the interior it was decorated with a relief frieze featuring scenes of battles with wild animals and sphinxes. Both ends of the wall were adorned with elaborate crowning elements. The top of the altar was covered by a slab of fireproof green serpentine. It was on this altar that cows were sacrificed, as may be concluded from the large number of bovine bones found during excavation. The accumulation of ash atop the altar created an "altar of ash", which Pausanias compares with the altar of Zeus at Olympia.

When Athens occupied Samos in 439 BC and many Samians were sent into exile, Athenian cleruchs settled on the island bringing with them the worship of their own gods. An economic recovery and accordingly, building activity appeared in the Heraion following 322 BC with the repatriation of the Samians in accordance with a decree issued by Alexander the Great that was implemented after his death. There was repeated work on the temple of Hera. During the Hellenistic period, the sanctuary area became a place where Samian politicians introduced themselves. Belief in the ancient Greek gods waned, and gods coming from the east appeared (Cybele, Isis, Zeus Ammon, Annubis, Serapis).

In the 1st c. BC, Samos became a Roman province. After the Roman Civil War ended in 31 BC, the Heraion experienced some prosperity. During the

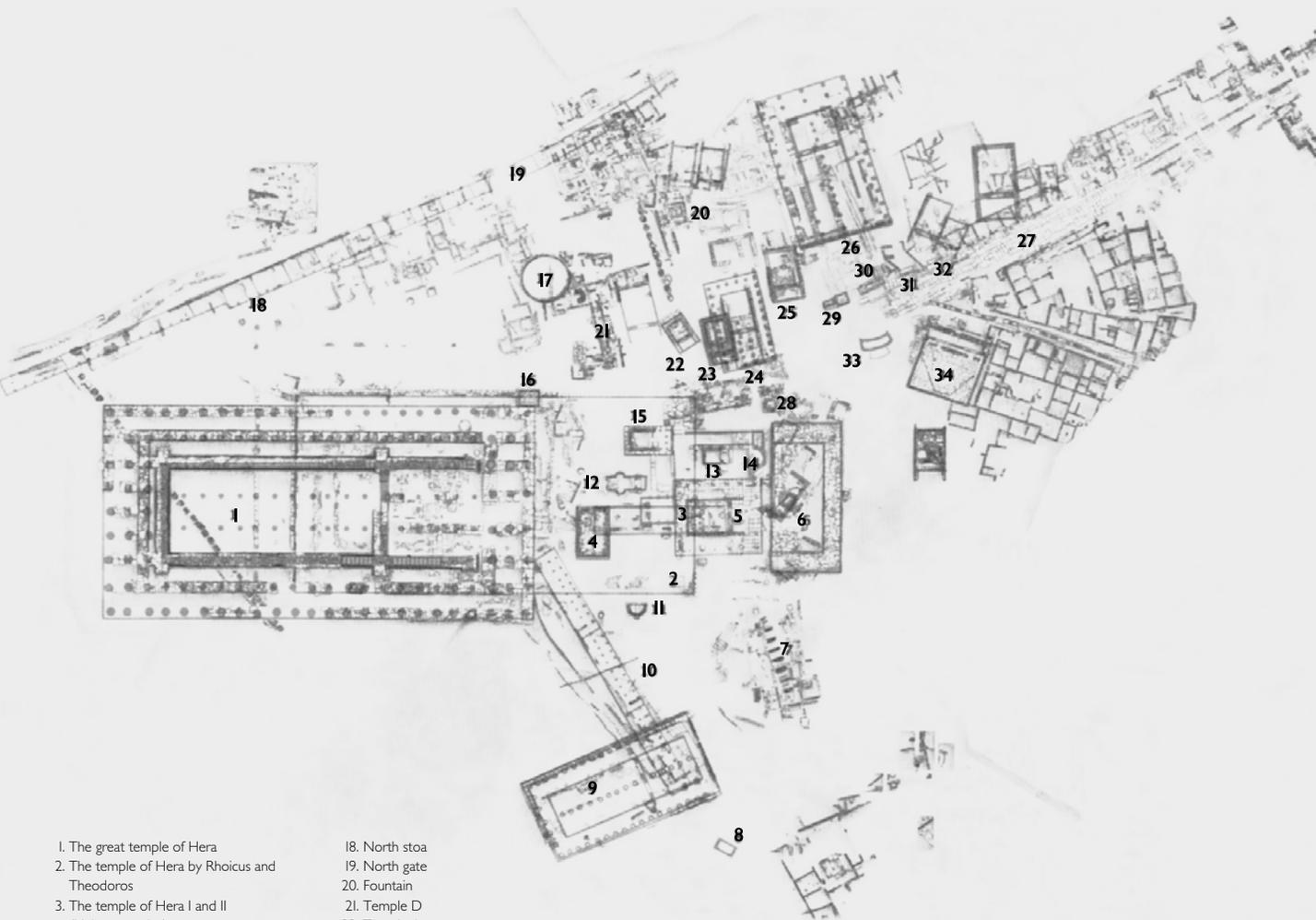
reign of Octavian Augustus, the Samians built a temple in the city in honor of Octavian and Rome, and proceeded to develop the temple and altar of Hera. The large temple became a storehouse for earlier votives, and a **peripteral temple (5)** was built to store the cult statue. At the same time, the archaic altar was renovated with marble. During these years, a related inscription leads us to believe that Augustus's wife Livia was worshipped at the Heraion together with Hera. By the late 1st and early 2nd c. BC, the sanctuary had become insignificant. In the mid-2nd c. AD, a **Corinthian temple (15)** (7.4x12 m), dedicated to an unknown deity, was built on the site, and the last temple was built in the 3rd c. AD with a rectangular podium of cast masonry and marble revetments featuring moldings above and below. The most important project in the 2nd and 3rd c. AD was the paving of the **Sacred Way (27)**. From the late 2nd c. AD onward, a large part of the precinct was covered by respectable one- and two-story houses with small interior peristyle courtyards, mosaic floors, and systems for water and drainage. The settlement's residents also had a small **bath-establishment (12)**. The destructive earthquake of AD 262 and looting by Germanic tribes led to the settlement's abandonment and desolation in the mid-3rd c. AD. In the 4th c. AD, the ancient buildings were demolished and their building materials sold in Asia Minor. In the 5th-6th c. AD, a three-aisled **Early Christian basilica (14)** was built that incorporated ancient architectural members and fragments from votives. The basilica was destroyed late in the 1st millennium AD, and in its place a new cross-in-square domed (*quincunx*) church was built in the 16th c. The apse preserved today at the site belongs to this church. Worship continued at the same site during the 18th c., when a small chapel was built there. The chapel was demolished when excavations of the sanctuary site began.



In the precinct there were also other **buildings** dedicated to the Great Goddess and to other gods (**21-26**). Along the length of the Sacred Way there were densely-set, important monuments. Sculptural groups as well as the superb **group of statues**, work by the sculptor **Geneleos (30)**, and a great number of typical votives adorned the Sacred Way; colossal marble *kouroi* kept a vigilant watch over the sanctuary. Most of the votives were gathered along the northern edge of the Sacred Way to receive natural sunlight; a few, like the **sculptural group by Myron (33)** – three bronze figures on a shared base, with the theme of Herakles' apotheosis to Mt. Olympus in the presence of Zeus and Athena – and the votive stelai, lie south of the Sacred Way. An entire ship had even been dedicated to the goddess by the Samian seafarer Kolaios, who in the 7th c. BC got as far as the Pillars of Herakles, perhaps even as far as Cornwall in England. The **base for**

the ship (7), which was composed of stone benches, is covered over today to protect it. The small rectangular temple-shaped buildings facing the Sacred Way were apparently “treasuries” in which valuable votives were stored. During the lengthy excavation at the site, clay, bronze, wooden, steatite, ivory, faience, and limestone votives by the faithful were found. The uniqueness of many of these as well as their excellent state of preservation ranks them among the most important finds from antiquity. Some of these superb pieces are displayed in the Vathy Archaeological Museum on the island. Their provenances from all parts of the then-known world (Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Iran, Luristan, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Cyprus) as well as many cities of Greece (Sparta, Athens, Corinth, Crete) demonstrates the Samian Heraion's international prestige and its importance for the global community. It was this that led to its inclusion in UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.





- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. The great temple of Hera | 18. North stoa |
| 2. The temple of Hera by Rhoicus and Theodoros | 19. North gate |
| 3. The temple of Hera I and II (Hekatompedos) | 20. Fountain |
| 4. Monopteros building | 21. Temple D |
| 5. Roman peripteral temple | 22. Temple A |
| 6. Altar | 23. Temple E |
| 7. Base for a ship | 24. Temple C |
| 8. Cistern | 25. Temple B |
| 9. South building | 26. North building |
| 10. South stoa | 27. Sacred Way |
| 11. Honorary monument for the Cicerones | 28. Circular monument |
| 12. Roman Baths | 29. Dedication base |
| 13. Small Roman temple | 30. Geneleos' sculptural group |
| 14. Early Christian basilica | 31. Honorary monument for Gaius and Lucius Caesar |
| 15. Corinthian temple | 32. Base for the honorary statues of two Roman consuls |
| 16. Roman statue base | 33. Myron's sculptural group |
| 17. Circular building | 34. Hellenistic rectangular building |



THE HERAION OF SAMOS

SAMOS



i Fax: 22730 95277, T: 22730 62811

TEXT: MARIA VIGLAKI-SOFIANOU

TRANSLATION: DEBORAH BROWN-KAZAZIS

GENERAL SUPERVISION: ARF, PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT



ΜΝΗΜΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΟΥΣΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ
MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS OF GREECE
e-Ticketing system



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
Ministry of Culture and Sports



Archaeological Resources Fund
www.tap.gr