SUMMARY: The island of Samothrace lies in the northern Aegean Sea, opposite the mouth of the river Evros. After being colonised by the inhabitants of the island of Samos in the 8th century BC, the isle hosted a famous sanctuary dedicated to the mystery cult of the Cabeiri, who were generally invoked as “Great Gods”. To the Great Gods was devoted Arsinoe II since she became the wife of the king of Thrace, who was himself a protector of the sanctuary; the site was also revered by Ptolemy II, brother and last husband of Arsinoe II. The text sets out to review the archaeological, literary and epigraphic documentation that allows us to frame the sanctuary of Samothrace within the political and institutional dynamics of the early Hellenism.

The interest of the moderns in the island of Samothrace and in the sanctuary of the Great Gods managed by the *polis* of the same name has greatly increased over the last fifty years thanks to the series of volumes that the distinguished Institute of Fine Arts of New York has published on this territory since 1958¹.

---

* Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano
All dates are BC, unless otherwise stated. English translations are from Loeb Classical Library editions.

Through these volumes, scholars have indeed had access to all the materials found on site (inscriptions included) and to an accurate collection of literary sources on which are grounded all the studies on the cults at Samothrace.2

The numerous studies on the sanctuary published in the last thirty years have deepened and sometimes rethought the methodological approach that characterised the works of Karl Lehmann, the undisputed protagonist of Samothrace excavations from 1938 to 1960, the year of his death.3 In particular, scholars have called into question the controversial relations between the reality of the materials brought to light and the contents of the literary sources with respect to the organisation of the cult and the definition of the divinities. In regard to this aspect, and by way of example, suffice it here to mention the fact that according to most ancient authors, ever since Herodotus (II 51), the sanctuary was dedicated to the Cabiri, whereas the votive inscriptions on the island only mention the Megáloí Theoi (Great Gods). Similarly, scholars widely agree on rejecting a reconstruction of the history and use of the sanctuary as rigidly anchored to the literary tradition that undoubtedly testifies to the antiquity of the cult on Samothrace:4 archaeological investigation has in effect systematically refuted an archaic dating of the early stages of construction of the main buildings, enabling scholars to trace the monumental development of the site from the second half of the fourth century only.5

2 The compendium in B. Hemberg, Die Kabiren, Uppsala 1950, is still fundamental as it collects all previous studies.
4 Cf., in particular, the acute remarks in Burkert, Concordia discors, 178-91; Musti, Aspetti della religione dei Cabiri, 141-54.
5 In this respect, cf. the status quæestionis in Mari, Gli studi sul santuario e i culti di Samo-
On the basis of evidence gathered, this paper has three purposes:

1) To offer the reader a brief survey of the presence of the Argead sovereigns in the sanctuary of the Great Gods in the second half of the fourth century.
2) To examine the great attention paid to the sanctuary by Lysimachus, one of Alexander’s Diadochi, governor and then king of Thrace, who in 287 succeeded in becoming king of Macedonia defeating (and banishing) Demetrius.
3) To deepen the issue of the chronology of interest in the sanctuary shown by Arsinoe, daughter of Ptolemy I and Berenice and wife of Lysimachus from 299. She is generally indicated as Arsinoe II by modern scholars to distinguish her from her namesake, the daughter of Lysimachus, who, few years after 299, married the future Ptolemy II (full-sibling of Arsinoe II) and who is normally referred to as Arsinoe I.

1. The sanctuary and the Argeads

The building boom⁶ that changed the face of the sanctuary has justly been put in relation with the political and military boom of Philip II’s Macedonia, not only because the island of Samothrace lies in a geographical area (the northern Aegean) towards which the Macedonian king immediately turned his expansionist aims, but also because the literary tradition is aware of Philip’s special devotion to the cults that were practiced there. According to Plutarch⁷, the first meeting between Philip and Olympias, both still very young, occurred indeed on Samothrace where the two were being initiated into the mysteries of the sanctuary, while, according to Curtius Rufus⁸, Alexander reproached his father for having wasted time on the island, instead of burning and looting Asia.

To the age of Philip is dated a building, for long called Temenos, which is now generally referred to as the Hall of Choral Dancers: as has been recently written⁹,

in Samothrace, 5, published in 1982, Phyllis Williams Lehmann and Denys Spittle restored this building, which they called Temenos, as a rectangular precinct (24,78 x 10,45 m.) with an elegant Ionic propylon of Thasian Marble (ca. 12,30 x 6,20 m) attached to its northeastern corner¹⁰. Today this building appears under a different name and is restored with quite a different form. The Hall of Choral Dancers was a large closed building of

---

⁷ Cf. Plut. Alex. 2, 2; this piece of information is mentioned again, in late antiquity in Himer. IX 12. On the meeting between Philip and Olympias on Samothrace, cf. most recently Greenwalt, Philip II and Olympias on Samothrace, 79-106.
⁸ Curt. VIII 1, 26.
⁹ Marconi, Choroi, Theoriai and International Ambitions, 106-07.
¹⁰ Samothrace, 5/1, 39-80.
Thasian marble, about 34 meters long and 20.7 meters wide, preceded on the north west by an Ionic porch with a recessed central section three bays long flanked by two projecting wings.\(^{11}\)

That the interest in the sanctuary must have captivated not only Philip II but the whole dynasty of the Argeads is confirmed by the presence on site of a dedication by the two heirs of Alexander the Great, Philip III and Alexander IV, the protagonists of a joint kingship following the decisions made by the Macedonians in Babylon after the death of the young king in June 323. The name of the former, the son of Philip II and of the Thessalian Philinna, was actually Arrhidaeus and, with a significant metonymy, he assumed the name of his father upon his accession to the throne; the latter was the posthumous son of the late Alexander and the Persian Roxane, born between August and September 323.\(^{12}\) The dedication is on the architrave of a Doric hexastyle prostyle building on the Eastern Hill, tangent to a circular space surrounded by grandstands. Because initiates into the mysteries of the Great Gods on Samothrace approached the sanctuary from the east, this complex served as a primary gathering place in the initiate’s progress.\(^{13}\) The dedication on the building, albeit fragmentary, was easily reconstructed by scholars: \[\text{\textit{βασιλεύς Φιλίππος \text{x[εξον]}δ[ρ]ο[ς Θεοίς Μεγά\[λοις]}}\]

Given the presence of the plural \textit{βασιλεύς}, the building must have been dedicated in the period between the birth of Alexander IV (August-September 323), “when the compromise establishing the joint rule of Philip III and Alexander IV reached by the Assembly of Macedonians went into effect”\(^{15}\), and the death of Philip III, murdered in October 317. That Arrhidaeus had already been officially involved in religious issues during the reign of his brother Alexander seems to be confirmed in a passage by Curtius Rufus where he is said to have been “taking part in religious rites and sacrifices” with the reigning king.\(^{16}\) Lehmann has even identified Arrhidaeus as the dedicator of another building, known as the Altar Court\(^{17}\), –

---

\(^{11}\) For a precise description of the building, cf. \textsc{Lehmann, Samothrace: A Guide}, 73-78, fig. 32 and plans III-IV, n. 17.

\(^{12}\) About the two recently accessed sovereigns, the decisions made in Babylon and Philip’s mental conditions, cf. \textsc{F. Landucci Gattinoni, Diodoro Siculo. Biblioteca storica. Libro XVIII. Commento storico}, Milano 2008, 8-52.

\(^{13}\) \textsc{Wescoat, Athens and Macedonian Royalty on Samothrace}, 102-03.


\(^{15}\) \textsc{Wescoat, Athens and Macedonian Royalty on Samothrace}, 104.

\(^{16}\) Curt. X 7, 2: \textit{Arrhidaeus, Philippo genitus, Alexandri paulo ante regis frater, sacrorum caerimonialiumque consors modo, nunc solus heres, praeteritur a vobis}.

\(^{17}\) K. \textsc{Lehmann, Samothrace: Sixth Preliminary Report, «Hesperia»}, 22 (1953), 1-24, at 18-20; \textsc{Lehmann in Samothrace}, 4/2, 125.
which is also dated to the last thirty years of the fourth century on archaeological
grounds – supplementing the scarce remains of the dedicatory inscription with his
original name (‘Ἀρριδαίος’), a reading that was, however, strongly criticised by
Fraser who reconstructed the name of the dedicator as ‘Αδαιος Κορράγου (Adaios, son of Korragos)’. To the best of our knowledge, the issue must remain
open; on the contrary, the involvement of Philip III Arrhidaeus (and the young,
and therefore unaware, Alexander IV) in the affairs of the sanctuary appears cer-
tain thanks to the inscription on the architrave of the Doric hexastyle prostyle
building.

Since not only the infant Alexander IV but also the adult Philip III needed a
‘tutor’ – as he was suffering from some pathology (no longer identifiable with
certainty) that undermined his physical and mental integrity beyond the royal
commissioning there must have been someone who actually tended to the imple-
mentation of what was decided. In this context, it is conceivable that the material
author of the project be Craterus, already a close associate of Alexander the Great,
since in the Babylon Settlement he had been assigned an important task certainly
connected with the ‘protection and custody’ of the heirs of the deceased sover-
eign. According to Arrian, Craterus had been appointed ‘protector of the kingship
of Arrhidaeus’ (προστάτης τῆς Ἀρριδαίου βασιλείας); Dexippus says that Cra-
terus had been entrusted with ‘the protection of the kingship, office that was the
very first in prestige in the eyes of the Macedones’ (προστασία τῆς βασιλείας, ὁ
δὴ πρώτιστον τιμῆς τέλος παρὰ Μακεδόνις), while, according to Justin, he had
been delegated to the custody of the royal finances (regiae pecunia custodia).

Although modern scholars have long debated the characteristics of the prostasia
of Craterus – reaching in any case no univocal solutions – it is nonetheless
widely accepted that it also entailed the supervision of the religious aspects of the
reign, which would accord well with the decision to raise a building in the sanctu-
ary of Samothrace. It is therefore possible to assume that Craterus – who reached
Macedonia at the beginning of 322 to fight, with Antipater, the Lamian War –
worked on the project after the capitulation of Athens in the autumn of the same
year. As rightly pointed out by Wescoat, the building on Samothrace displays
huge architectural similarities with the choregic monument of Nicias, built in

---

18 Samothrace, 2/1, n. 9. For a much later date of the Altar Court than that proposed by
Lehmann, see S. Psoma, C. Karadima, D. Terzopoulou, The Coins from Maroneia and the
Classical City at Molyvoti. A Contribution to the History of Aegaean Thrace, Athens 2008 (Mele-
temata, 62), 231-38. The claim in favor of the dedicator being an Adaios from the mid-3rd
century shifts the date of the building nearly a century, but it is not out of the question.
19 Cole, Theoi Megaloi, 18-20, is of the same opinion.
20 Cf. Diod. XVIII 2, 2; Plut. de fort. Alex. II 5 [Mor. 337 d]; Appian. Syr. 52, 261, Iust.
XIII 2, 11; Heid. Epit. in FGrHist 155 F 1, 2. On Philip’s mental conditions, cf. Landucci Gatt-
21 Diod. Succ. 1, 3.
22 Dexippus in FGH 100 F 8, 3-4.
23 Iust. XIII 4, 5.
24 In this respect, cf. Landucci Gattinoni, Diodoro Siculo. Biblioteca storica. Libro XVIII,
18, with bibliography.
25 Wescoat, Athens and Macedonian Royalty on Samothrace, 102-16.
Athens in 320/19\textsuperscript{26}, and these similarities are strengthened by the use, for the construction of the facade, of Pentelic marble, from the mountain of the same name in Attica, instead of Thasian marble, normally used in the sanctuary. The fact that the Doric hexastyle prostyle building on Samothrace, which is so similar to a contemporary Athenian monument, bore the names of the two sovereigns in its dedicatory inscription authorises the hypothesis that the Macedonian establishment wished, on the one hand, to emphasise the cultural ties of the Argead dynasty with the Attic city – which, after the defeat, had been forced to embrace the policy of Macedonia – and, on the other, to increase the importance of the sanctuary of the Great Gods, granting Panhellenic visibility to a cult that had until then only local significance in the northern Aegean\textsuperscript{27}.

Contemporary to the Doric hexastyle prostyle building is considered, again on archaeological grounds, also the Hieron, the building in which took place the second (and most important) stage of the initiation into the mysteries, the so-called \textit{epopteia}, during which, after a purifying confession, the initiate carried out the ritual sacrifice, made the oath of secrecy and was admitted to a revelation (\textit{epopteia}), the contents of which are unknown\textsuperscript{28}. No dedicatory inscription has survived on the Hieron, therefore the identity of its dedicator remains unknown, even if modern scholars have often proposed the name of Philip III whose patronage is certain for the Doric hexastyle prostyle building and controversial for the Altar Court.

\section*{2. The sanctuary and Lysimachus}

Given the silence of the sources, both literary and epigraphic, nothing can be said about the attitude towards the sanctuary showed by Cassander – dynast and later king of Macedonia between 316 and 297, the year of his death – or by his family and heirs – his wife Tessalonice, daughter of Philip II, and his three sons, Philip, Antipater and Alexander. This also due to the fact that in only three years, between 297 and 294, the entire family of Cassander disappeared into a vortex of fratricidal clashes that seem to reecho the forms of great Athenian tragedy, and that are considered by tradition the sign of a terrible divine retribution for the sins, old and new, of the Antipatrids\textsuperscript{29}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{27}] In this respect, cf. notes in COLE, \textit{Theoi Megaloi}, 16-20; MARI, \textit{At di la dell'Olimpo}, 198-202.
\item[\textsuperscript{28}] For a detailed description of the mysteries and the path of initiation, in which the first stage was the \textit{mysis}, cf. COLE, \textit{Theoi Megaloi}, 26-37.
\item[\textsuperscript{29}] For a precise analysis on the sources of these events, see F. LANDUCCI GATTINONI, \textit{L'arte del potere. Vita e opere di Cassandro di Macedonia}, Stuttgart 2003 (Historia- Einzelschriften, 171), 82-87, with ample discussion of bibliography. Most recent updates are collected in EAD.,
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
On Samothrace there is no trace either of the reign of Demetrius Poliorcetes – king of Macedonia from 294 until 287 –, while, on the contrary, two epigraphic documents testify to the existence of long-established relations between the city of Samothrace, in charge of the sanctuary, and Lysimachus, king of Macedonia from 287. In these two inscriptions, Lysimachus is honoured by the inhabitants of the island as a token of thanksgiving for the benefits he had offered: despite referring to different episodes, the two inscriptions display the same unconditional gratitude to Lysimachus and his actions.

The first of these inscriptions, albeit lacking its initial and final parts, still allows an easy reading of the text which has been known since the beginning of the twentieth century:

\[IG\text{ XII/8, 150}\]

1[— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — επειδή]

[βασιλέας Δυστιμάχος ἔ[ν τε τοῖς ἄλλοις]
δὴ[α[τ]ελεῖ πάσαν ἐπιμέλειαμ ποι[ού]-
μενος τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ τῆς πόλεως, νῦν [τε]
5[τ]οὺς ἀσεβῆςαντας εἰς τὸ ἱερόν καὶ
[ἐ]γερήσαντας συλήσαι τὰ ἀναθήματα
[τ]ῇ ἀνατεθέντα [ὑ]πὸ τῶν βασιλεῶν καὶ
[τ]ῶν ἄλλων Ἐλλήνων καὶ ζητήσαντας
[ἐμ]πρήσαι τὸ τέμενος τῶν θεῶν καὶ
[εἰς]πιθήκασαν νῦκτωρ ἐπ’ ἀδικίαν
[καὶ] ἀσεβεῖαι τοῦ ἱεροῦ μετὰ τῶν ἐπι-
[πλ]ευσάντων ἐγ νυκτῶι παρά
[Π]υθαγόρου, παραγενομένου ὁ βασιλεύς[c]
[ε]ἰς τός τόπος δέδοκεν ἐγγόδους
10[τ]ῇ πόλει καὶ ἀφέσταλκε πρὸς τὸν
[δήμ]ον, ὅπως τύχοισι τῆς προσηκού-
[σ]ι]ς τιμωρίας, καὶ τάλα συντέταχε
[κα]λός καὶ μεγαλοπρεπός, περὶ
[πλ]ει[ς]που ποιομένου τῆ πρὸς τοὺς
15[θ]ε]ὺς εὐσφάλειν· ἀγαθῆ τύχη
[βασιλέας Δυστιμάχος καὶ τῆς πόλεως[c]·
[ἐν]ήπισθαι τῶι δήμωι ὅπως ἀν ἄξιας
[χρ]ιτας ἀποδιδόν ἡ πόλις τοῖς
[ε]ὐεργέταις, ἱδρύσασθαι βοῶιν
20[β]ασιλέας Δυστιμάχου εὐεργέτου
[ὡ]ς κάλλιστον καὶ θειεί κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν
[κ]αὶ ποιμενον τοὺς ἐννέα ἄρχοντας
[κ]αι στεφανηφορεῖν τοὺς πολίτας
25[πά]ντας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτη, ποιείν δὲ ...
The king proved his benevolence not only in the “care” (epiméleia) of the sanctuary and the city (lines 2-4), but also in military aid, which he himself offered to the community when it was attacked by a group of unidentified sacrilegious people. They, who “had desecrated the Hieron, had begun plundering the offerings consecrated by the kings and all the other Greeks, and tried to set fire to the Temenos of the gods”, were led by a certain Phitagorus (lines 5-13), perhaps to be identified as the head of a body of mercenaries of the northern Aegean. Once at the site, the king returned the ill-gotten gains to their rightful owners and punished the guilty, behaving in such a way as to show the utmost reverence for the gods (lines 14-20). If the severity of the risks incurred by Samothrace was proportional to the gratitude shown by the islanders to their “benefactor” (euergetes), the danger must have been truly remarkable. The Samothracians decreed indeed divine honours of great relevance to the glory of Lysimachus: the building of an altar; solemn annual public sacrifices; the procession of the nine archons, supreme magistrates of the city; and the stephaneporia of all citizens (lines 21-29).

This decree is dated by modern scholars to a time following the escape of Demetrius from Macedonia, in 288, because only then had Lysimachus the opportunity to expand his control over some of the islands of the northern Aegean, taking advantage of the collapse of Poliorcetes’s maritime empire. Thus, the mercenaries led by Phitagorus can be assumed to have previously been in the service of Demetrius, and, once they lost their leader, to have disbanded, devoting themselves to piracy.

The emphasis on the euergesia of Lysimachus resurfaces also in the second inscription, which was found during excavations between 1965 and 1967, was provisionally published in 1968, yet still lacks a definitive edition:

McCredie, Samothrace, «Hesperia», 37 (1968), 220-21

It is a decree of the Boule of Samothrace, and the 15 surviving lines contain the reasons for its enactment: king Lysimachus, friend and protector of the city, had

---

previously offered benefits to the citizens and had recently returned them the continental “holy land” which in the past king Philip and king Alexander had offered and dedicated to the gods (lines 1-8). Here we report only the first eight lines of the inscription because the following seven are severely mutilated and basically unreadable – although J. and L. Robert, in a succinct note, have hypothesised that in lines 9-15 the people praised Lysimachus for having condemned the usurpers of the “holy land” to return not only the fields but also all revenues made since banishing their legitimate owners.

The continental holy land cited in the text belonged to the so-called Perea that Samothrace had in Thrace, on the coastal strip facing the island, and that is mentioned in literary sources between the fifth century and the heyday of the Roman imperial age. According to Herodotus, who writes about the crossing of this territory by the army of Xerxes, the settlements controlled by the Samothracians stretched between the plain of Doriscus to the east and the Thracian town of Stryme to the west. These settlements are mentioned also in the Periplus of Pseudo-Scyllax, who cites the Samothracian emporia between Maroneia and the river Ebro, and in Strabo, who is aware of the existence, in the same area, of two small communities (πολίχνια), Temyra and Karakoma.

The kings Philip and Alexander who consecrated the land returned by Lysimachus to the Great Gods of Samothrace have been identified by modern scholars, albeit hypothetically, as Philip III and Alexander IV (not Philip II and Alexander III), due to the presence in the sanctuary of the dedicatory inscription by the two monarchs during their coregency. However, it cannot be ruled out a priori that Philip II may have been the first donor, and that the donation be then stabilised in aeternum by Alexander III, which would make superfluous any additional confirmation on the part of the successors. In any case, the inscription, on the one hand, reaffirms the interest of the kings of Macedonia in the sanctuary of Samothrace, and, on the other, attests to the continuity of this interest under Alexander’s Diadochi too, who strongly claimed the bond, no longer dynastic but ideal, with the Argeads themselves. It is indeed clear that the emphasis expressed by the Samothracians on the benevolence not only of Lysimachus but also of the two deceased kings has no other purpose than to make clear to anyone reading the inscription that a connection existed between those who had first served the Gods of Samothrace and those who still did all they could for them.

34 On the features of the Perea of Samothrace, cf. C. CARUSI, Isole e peree in Asia Minore, Pisa 2003, 190-95.
35 Hdt. VII 59, 2; 108, 2.
36 [Scyl.], Per. 67.
37 Strabo VII fr. 47.
38 On the dedicatory inscription, cf. supra, p. 70. On the identification, cf. MCCREDIE, Samo-thrace, «Hesperia», 37 (1968), 221, that does not rule out the possibility that the kings may be Philip II and Alexander III. CH. HABICHT, Literarische und epigraphische Überlieferung zur Geschichte Alexanders und seiner ersten Nachfolger, in Akten des VI. Internationalen Kongresses für Griechische und Lateinische Epigraphik, München 1972, München 1973, 367-77, at 371-72, is instead strongly in favour of Philip III and Alexander IV.
The sacredness of the Perea is attested at least until the first century AD, to which we date two ὅροι found on the coast of Thrace, near Alexandroupolis. On one of these boundary stones, only ἱερὰ χώρα is mentioned whereas on the other are explicitly cited the gods of Samothrace (ὁρος ἱερας χωρας των θεων ἐν Σαμοθράκη)\(^{39}\).

Lysimachus’s double intervention in favour of the island has led modern scholars to inquire into the real relations between the sovereign and the island at that time: the documents have been regarded as proof that Lysimachus was master of Samothrace\(^{40}\), but, as has been noted\(^{41}\), there is nothing in the language (of the inscriptions) which inevitably implies that the city was dependent on him at the time. Such ceremonious honors, including worship with a cult-title, are attested beyond doubt in cities that were wholly autonomous, and nothing can be argued from them. The description of the operation by which Lysimachus saved the sanctuary makes no reference to a garrison, and the king’s presence may have been casual, and connected with his own participation in religious ceremonies. There is no evidence, therefore, in the inscription itself that Samothrace was not independent at the time. Nevertheless, the alternative possibility remains, and perhaps is probable on general grounds.

However, in the Hellenistic period the Greek poleis remained formally independent, but, from the time of Philip II of Macedon, they had been unable to cope with the royal armies on the battlefield, due to their weakness, both economic and demographic. Thus, they actually found themselves to depend for their survival upon the benevolence of the various monarchs who controlled the neighbouring territories. This is certainly the case of Samothrace: to defend themselves against pirate attacks, the islanders had to turn to Lysimachus, the undisputed lord of Thrace and Macedonia\(^{42}\). The divine honours offered by the Samothracians to Lysimachus made public a relation of reciprocity in which the “weight” of the sovereign was very different from that of the polis.

3. The sanctuary and Arsinoe II

The “solid presence”\(^{43}\) of Lysimachus on Samothrace seems to be confirmed by the relations existing between the Sanctuary and Arsinoe II, daughter of Ptolemy I and Berenice, wife of Lysimachus from around 299\(^{44}\).

\(^{39}\) Epigraphes tes Thrakes tou Aigaiou: metaxy ton potamon Nestou kai Hovrou (nomoi Xanthes, Rhodopes kai Hovrou), ed. by L.D. LOUKOPOULOU et al., Athens 2005, 434; 448.

\(^{40}\) Cf. for example, W.W. TARN, Antigonos Gonatas, Oxford 1913 (=_ 1969), 117-18.

\(^{41}\) Cf. FRASER in Samothrace, 2/1, 5.

\(^{42}\) On the (difficult) relations between the Greek poleis and Hellenistic monarchs, cf. F. LANDUCCI GATTINONI, L’ellenismo, Bologna 2010, 37-41.

\(^{43}\) For this expression, cf. FRANCO, Il regno di Lisimaco, 155.

\(^{44}\) On this marriage and, in general, on the figure of Arsinoe, cf. E.D. CARNEY, Arsinoe of Egypt and Macedon, Oxford 2013, passim, with extensive discussion of bibliography.
At the time, Lysimachus was a mature man of great experience. In 319 he had married Nicaea, one of Antipater’s daughters, and about fifteen years later Amastris, widow of the tyrant of Heraclea; his heir in pectore was the young Agathocles, son of Nicaea. For purely political reasons did Lysimachus marry a girl aged less than twenty years overlooking the huge age gap. His marriage to Arsinoe, to whom, between 298 and 293, three children were born, was only broken by his death at Corupedium, in 281, while after dramatic events, the still young Arsinoe was able to return to Egypt, becoming the beloved bride of her brother Ptolemy II. This was the first case of a marriage between full-siblings in the dynasties of Macedonian origin, which would give way to a custom that was to become increasingly deep-rooted in Egypt in the following generations. Ptolemy II even attributed divine features to his marriage to Arsinoe, founding the cult of the theoi adelphoi, that is, the “sibling-gods” – namely the royal couple, Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II —, which accompanied the cult of the theoi soteres, the “saviour-gods” — that is, their own parents, Ptolemy I and Berenice —, that he had previously instituted.

Arsinoe II certainly enjoyed great power in the years that she spent at the court of Thrace. Tradition accuses her to have caused the downfall of Lysimachus’ dynasty, as she convinced her husband to eliminate his son and heir Agathocles, accused of treason, to make room for her eldest son Ptolemy. Furthermore, a decree of Delos proves, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Arsinoe fulfilled an official role at the side of her husband: the decree in honour of the Spartan Demaratus, collaborator and “friend” of king Lysimachus, mentions indeed the eunoia (goodwill) of the people of the island towards king Lysimachus and queen Arsinoe.

It is undeniable that Arsinoe II left a great memory of herself on Samothrace, as she was the dedicator of the so-called Rotunda of Arsinoe (o Arsinoion) which was located north of the processional road leading into the Sanctuary from the Eastern Hill:

The Rotunda is the largest enclosed free space in a round building in the Greek world. The building rests on a deep limestone foundation, while most of the superstructure is constructed in Thasian marble. Above the foundation, a smooth, enclosed drum, making up roughly two-thirds of the building, supports a gallery formed by Doric pilasters on the exterior and Corinthian half-columns on the interior. Between the pilasters are panels decorated with sacrificial imagery of bucrania flanking rosettes. On the interior, the relief panels take the form of altars decorated with pairs of bucrania or pairs of rosettes. The

---

45 Cf. Iust. XXIV 3, 5
46 On these circumstances, cf. CARNEY, Arsinoë of Egypt, passim; LANDUCCI GATTINONI, Il testamento di Alessandro, 99.
47 Cf. CARNEY, Arsinoë of Egypt, 44-48; LANDUCCI GATTINONI, Il testamento di Alessandro, 139-45.
50 SHAW in Samothrace, 7/1, 29.
original conical roof was covered with scale-shaped terracotta tiles. Following a massive earthquake in the Roman early Imperial period, the roof was converted to an octagonal shape and covered with a Corinthian tile system. Whether or not the structure had windows in the gallery remains debated. A single Doric doorway located on the southeastern side of the Rotunda, provided the only entrance. The floor probably was made of earth, as no trace of pavement or under-pavement survives.

The reference to Arsinoe II is attested as certain based on the discovery of a large part of the dedicatory inscription, whose gaps, however, leave open the question of the dating of the building – which has as its termini post quem and ante quem, respectively, the marriage of the still adolescent Arsinoe with Lysimachus in 299, and her death as long-reigning queen of Egypt between 270 and 268.

The dedication was inscribed on six marble blocks of the Doric epistylium of the Rotunda and, as mentioned, is severely mutilated. A single block (along with some stone chips) has survived, to which must be added the drawing, elaborated by Heinrich Kiepert in 1842, of another block which was already lost in May 1873, as the Austrian archaeologist Alexander Conze launched the first real campaign of excavations on Samothrace. On the basis of these (scarce) finds, the inscription can be reconstructed at least partially in the following way, as Roux did in 1992:

Samothrace 7/1, 231

[βασιλείσσα Ἀρσινόη βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου θυγατρί]
[βασιλέως ἡ ἑοὶ Μεγαλίως].

As evident, in the second line there are two major gaps, the first referring to the name of the person who was, at the time, the husband of Arsinoe II, and immediately after that, another missing piece of information which has been assumed to refer to the type of building.

---

51 The description of the Rotunda can be found at http://www.samothrace.emory.edu/visualizing-the-sanctuary/interactive-plan/rotunda-arsinoe

52 The traditional date of 270 as the year of the death of Arsinoe II was recently confirmed by CH. THIERS, Ptolémée Philadelphe et les prêtres d’Atoum de Tjékou. Nouvelle édition commentée de la «stèle de Pithom» (CGC 22183), Montpellier 2007, 190, while it has been refuted by E. GRZYBEK, Du calendrier macédonien au calendrier ptolémaïque: problèmes de chronologie hellénistique, Basel 1990, 103-12, who has dated the death of the queen to 268. The conclusions by Grzybek have generally been welcomed by the historians of Hellenism, because 268 would better fit information relative, in particular, to the Chremonidean War, while have been rejected by papyrologists and Egyptologists – as also by recent reflections in THIERS, Ptolémée Philadelphe et les prêtres d’Atoum de Tjékou. The issue remains open. For a recent study on the chronology of Ptolemaic Egypt, cf. C. BENNETT, Alexandria and the Moon. An Investigation into the Lunar Macedonian Calendar of Ptolemaic Egypt, Leuven 2011 (Studia Hellenistica, 52).

53 On the history of how the inscription was found and on its first edition, cf. A. CONZE et al., Archäologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake, Wien 1875, 15-16.

54 ROUX in Samothrace, 7/1, 231.

55 As highlighted by ROUX in Samothrace, 7/1, 235, for the second gap no elements are so certain as to enable choosing one option among the many proposed by FRASER in Samothrace, 2/1, 50, n. 10 (το ἱερὸν; τὸν οἶκον; τὸν ναὸν; τὴν θόλον).
With regard to the first gap, modern scholars have wondered whether it may be supplemented with the name of Arsinoe’s first husband, Lysimachus – who married her in 299 and died in 281 – or of Ptolemy II – her third (and last) husband, from around 278, upon her return to Egypt, to her own death between 270 and 268. The name of Arsinoe’s second husband cannot be assumed because her marriage to Ptolemy Ceraunus really lasted the space of a morning, and ended with the flight of the queen to Samothrace. Ptolemy Ceraunus was the half-brother of Arsinoe II, as he was the son of Ptolemy I and Eurydice; the latter had been replaced in the heart of her husband precisely by Berenice, the mother of Arsinoe II and Ptolemy II. Arsinoe II married Ceraunus in winter 281/0 when he, after murdering Seleucus, had just obtained the throne of Macedonia. According to Justin56, Arsinoe, who had recently lost Lysimachus, defeated and killed at Corupedium in February 281, had accepted this new marriage in the (vain) hope to secure the future of her children, who were instead instantly and cruelly killed by her newly-wed husband. Heartbroken by this tragedy, Arsinoe escaped her husband and took refuge in the sanctuary of the Great Gods; from whence, under unknown circumstances, she managed to flee to Egypt, where, as said, she became the beloved bride of her brother Ptolemy II57.

Initially Conze had supplemented the gap with the name of Ptolemy II (βασιλέως Πτολεμαῖος γυνῆ)58, but, impressed by the objections that immediately arose, he later opted for the name of Lysimachus59 which has been canonical ever since (βασιλέως Λυσίμαχου γυνῆ). In particular, as Fraser reminds us – who conforms to this supplement60 –, according to Wilamowitz61, if the text had mentioned Arsinoe’s husband Ptolemy II, who married her years after the death of their father Ptolemy I, deified post-mortem as θεὸς Σωτήρ, the name of the father of the dedicator should have been accompanied, at the least, by the epithet Σωτήρ. This epithet is indeed cited in the two identical dedicatory inscriptions engraved on both façades (western and eastern) of the monumental Propylon built by Ptolemy II on Samothrace, which include the name of Berenice, last wife of Ptolemy I and mother of both Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, deified with her husband in the cult of the theoi soteres, the “savior-gods”62:

*IG* XII/8, 228

βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος Πτολεμαῖου καὶ Βερενίκης Σωτήρων Θεοῦ Μεγάλου.

According to Fraser63, thus,

56 Iust. XXIV 1, 1-3; 1, 10.
57 For a compendium of these events, cf. Landucci Gattinoni, Il testamento di Alessandro, 156-64.
58 CONZE et al., Archäologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake, 15-16.
59 A. CONZE et al., Neue Archäologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake, Wien 1880, 111.
60 FRASER in Samothrace, 2/1, 49-50, n. 10.
61 WILAMOWITZ in «AZ», 33 (1876), 174 (non vidi).
62 IG XII/8, 228; the most recent edition is by FRASER in Samothrace, 10/1, 95, which, however, only re-echoes Fraser’s in Samothrace, 2/1, 50-51, n. 11.
63 FRASER in Samothrace, 2/1, 50.
the supplement βασιλεύ[ς Λυσιμάχου] γυ[νή] is evidently correct. βασιλεύ[ς Πτολεμαίου] γυ[νή], the original supplement, referring to Philadelphus, is not possible since Ptolemy I is evidently regarded as still living. The dedication can then only belong to the period when Arsinoe was married to Lysimachus [...], very probably to the years 287-281, when Lysimachus was king of Macedon.

Roux, however, has questioned the by now canonical supplement βασιλεύ[ς Λυσιμάχου] γυ[νή] and has preferred the original βασιλεύ[ς Πτολεμαίου] γυ[νή], disputing the idea that the lack of references to the deification of Ptolemy I be a sure sign of his being alive at the time of the dedication of the tholos. In particular, Roux points out that Ptolemy I is not qualified as Soter in the dedicatory inscriptions of the statues of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II, which were erected by admiral Calliocrates of Samos at Olympia following their wedding, thus several years after the death of their father in the early spring of 282:

IvO 306

βασιλέα Π[τολεμαίον βασιλέως]
Πτολεμ[αίου καὶ βασιλι[σσής Βερενίκης]
Καλλικράτης [Βοισκου Σάμιος]
Δι [Ολυμπίω.

IvO 307

βασ[ι]λεσαν Ά[ρσινόν βα]σιλέως
Πτολεμαίοι κ[αι βασιλισσής Βερενίκης]
Καλλικράτης [Βοισκου] Σάμιος
Δι Ο[λυμπίω].

In order to support his idea and to date the Rotunda to the Seventies of the third century, when Arsinoe II was queen of Egypt, Roux insists on two points in particular:
1) the formulary of the dedications was very variable, and thus in the years following his death Ptolemy I could be referred to without the title of Soter;
2) the impressiveness of the Rotunda proves the undying gratitude of Arsinoe II to the Great Gods, and this gratitude could only arise after they had protected her when, fleeing from her second husband Ptolemy Ceraunus, she had taken refuge in the sanctuary of Samothrace managing to escape death.

Roux, therefore, believes that, once safely arrived in Egypt, Arsinoe developed the idea of consecrating in her name a large building in the sanctuary of the island, to give thanks to the gods who had saved her in time of danger, omitting, for reasons that can no longer be determined with certainty, both the title of Soter next to the name of her father and the name of her mother Berenice tout court. About the omission of any reference to her mother in particular, Roux has ven-

64 Roux in Samothrace, 7/1, 231-39.
65 Iust. XXIV 3, 9-10.
tured the hypothesis that Arsinoe II intended to avoid highlighting the fact that her marriage to Ptolemy II had occurred between full-siblings, which would make it incestuous in the eyes of the Greeks.

If, on the one hand, this argument seems rather weak to me – given that the whole story of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II is a hymn to their relationship – it is instead undeniable that the formulary of the dedications could vary considerably, expanding or reducing the space devoted to the listing of the titles of the sovereigns. Suffice it here to consider, for instance, that among the most recent finds at the sanctuary of Poseidon on the island of Calauria there is an inscription in Doric dialect in which the city of Methana, refounded as Arsinoea in honour of the Queen of Egypt, offers two statues (now lost), one of Ptolemy II and one of Arsinoe II, to the deity. The two royals are referred to simply as Φιλάδελφοι with no mention of their parents, whereas in the contemporary dedications by Callicrates at Olympia both parents are mentioned, albeit lacking any epithet referred to the two monarchs, apart from their royal title:

WALLENSTEN - PAKKANEN, A New Inscribed Statue Base, 155-65

Despite the ambiguity of the evidence, in the choice between the two supplements (βασιλεύως Λυσιμάχου γυνή - βασιλεύως Πτολεμαίου γυνή) the first hypothesis is strengthened by a direct and immediate comparison with the text of the dedicatory inscription at the Propylon of Ptolemy II, which, if we accepted the supplement βασιλεύως Πτολεμαίου γυνή, would have to be considered substantially contemporary to the Rotunda of Arsinoe.

As already noted, in the text, Ptolemy II mentions the name of both his father and his mother (long deceased) and grants them the epithet of Σωτήρ, thereby explicitly showing his willingness to exalt their deification, which, among other things, was the seal of his royal legitimacy. Given the proximity of the two monuments, no plausible reason would have kept Arsinoe II from aligning herself with what her husband Ptolemy II had decided to do in the same place: since in her dedicatory inscription there is no trace of the epithet Σωτηρίου for her father, it seems clear that he was still alive. Therefore, Roux’s hypothesis is not convincing and it is better to return to Wilamowitz’s canonical view: the Rotunda was dedicated by Arsinoe during her marriage to Lysimachus, when her father was actually still alive, and with the dual indication of descendancy and marital bond she wanted to

---

67 Cf. Carney, Arsinoe of Egypt, 70-82, with extensive discussion of bibliography.
69 Cf. supra, p. 79 for the text of the inscription.
highlight the close ties of friendship between the two ruling dynasties of Egypt and Macedonia. Of these bonds Arsinoe was a sign and guarantee, as she was the daughter of Ptolemy I of Egypt and the wife of Lysimachus of Macedonia, who, for his part, in the same years, was offering his royal and beneficial protection to the sanctuary and to the whole island of Samothrace.

4. Conclusion

In this perspective, it may have been precisely the awareness of such previous protection (and the hope in the gratitude of the islanders) to lead Arsinoe II to seek refuge in the sanctuary, after Lysimachus’ death, in order to escape the fury of her second husband, Ptolemy Ceraunus. And the Great Gods of Samothrace responded positively to the pleas of the woman: after the storm, at Alexandria Arsinoe finally found not only peace but also a new kingdom beside her brother-husband Ptolemy II. The mysterious deities of Samothrace granted to the queen their powerful protection, as they had done 100 years before, when they had presided over the marriage between Philip and Olympias, the ideal incipit of the Macedonian empire that changed the history of Greece and of the entire Eastern Mediterranean with the conquests of Alexander, always and forever the undeniable paradigm of all Hellenistic kings.

So, the great Gods of Samothrace seem to have been really the protectors of the Macedonian World.

---

70 On this piece of information, in Plut. Alex. 2, 2, cf. supra, p. 69.