

Theoroi and Initiates in Samothrace: The Epigraphical Evidence

By Nora M. Dimitrova (*Hesperia* Suppl. 37). Pp. xvi + 280, figs. 133, table 1. The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Princeton 2008. \$55. ISBN 978-0-87661-537-9 (paper).

Although religious activities in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods began before the Hellenistic period, interest in the cult on Samothrace expanded after the time of Alexander the Great. Initiates were drawn to Samothrace and left records of their visits. One of the fascinating aspects of the cult demonstrated by these inscriptions is its lack of exclusivity: it was open to men and women, free persons and slaves, Greeks and non-Greeks. Much remains unknown or contested: When did initiation take place? Could visitors undergo both levels of initiation at the same time? Was there a festival at which the initiations took place? This book sheds light on some of these issues. Dimitrova's stated aim is to produce "an edition of all documents pertaining to sacred ambassadors (*theoroi*) and initiates (*mystai* and *epoptai*) in Samothrace" (1). The collected inscriptions belong to the high point of the cult, the 400 years between the early second century B.C.E. and the mid to late second century C.E. Dimitrova identifies 171 inscriptions concerned with *theoroi* or initiates, and in two appendices, she includes eight more relevant inscriptions. This is the first attempt to collect this material in a single volume. Dimitrova brings together inscriptions published in *Inscriptiones Graecae* (IG) 12 8, IG 12 Suppl. 2(1), and various journals—as well as some previously unpublished material. Comprehensiveness alone makes this volume a useful tool for anyone interested in the Samothracian cult.

The epigraphic labor represented by this volume is enormous. Most of the inscriptions have been re-edited by Dimitrova. This has produced some new readings, although some

inscriptions have been damaged since they were originally published, and it is no longer possible to verify readings. In addition, Dimitrova searched through unpublished inscriptions in the Archaeological Museum of Samothrace to look for more material. Each inscription is presented with transcription, bibliography, and two commentaries (epigraphic and general). A substantial number are also illustrated by photograph, drawing, or squeeze (usually when the original has been lost). In addition, Dimitrova has included concordances for those inscriptions already published and for museum inventory numbers. Finally, there are indices of the names of *theoroi*, initiates, and officials.

Dimitrova divides the inscriptions into two main groups: those concerning *theoroi* who were sent by other communities to Samothrace (nos. 1–28) and those concerning initiates (nos. 29–171). The *theoroi* inscriptions are further subdivided. One group, probably dating to the second and first centuries B.C.E., was inscribed on the walls of an unidentified building, possibly a stoa, and possibly in the city of Samothrace (16–17). In many cases, these *theoroi* were made *proxenoi* by the demos of Samothrace, who put up the inscriptions, perhaps in imitation of a similar practice on nearby Thasos (16). At some point, however, this practice disappeared (19), and the remaining space on the building was used by *theoroi* commemorating their initiation into the cult, probably at their own expense. The second group is composed of inscriptions of *theoroi* initiates on other types of monuments. Dimitrova arranges the inscriptions concerning initiates according to the geographic origin of the initiates. Numbers 29–116 preserve infor-

mation about their origins, while for numbers 117–167, that information has been lost.

Because one purpose of this volume is to facilitate future study, it is worth considering whether this organization will assist researchers. The primary division between *theoroi* and initiates is obvious. Dividing the *theoroi* inscriptions between those on wall blocks and those on other objects is reasonable, although it might have been just as sensible to separate the *theoroi* inscriptions into public (the original use of the wall blocks) and private categories, regardless of medium.

Although it is difficult to suggest an alternative, I am not convinced that arrangement of initiates' inscriptions by geography is fruitful. Almost every inscription lists initiates from more than one place; several could have been located in more than one geographical division (e.g., no. 31 is classed under "Peloponnese" because of the reference to Tegea, but it just as easily could have been included with those from the Aegean islands for the sake of Thera). Although Dimitrova cross-references the inscriptions, some regions nevertheless appear to be underrepresented. Moreover, more could have been done to create a sense of order within the geographical divisions. For instance, while the dating of many inscriptions is vague, a chronological arrangement is still possible. In the "Macedonia" section (94–103), number 33 is possibly from the second century C.E., and number 34 is definitely from 113 C.E., but number 35 may date to the second century B.C.E. and number 36 to the second to third century C.E.; finally, number 37 belongs to some point between 38 B.C.E. and 43 C.E. The result is a jumble that prevents the reader from gaining

any impression of how the importance of this region developed.

Dimitrova's own contributions to the debates surrounding the Samothracian mysteries are valuable and based on her intimate knowledge of the inscriptions. Roman dates on several of the initiate inscriptions range from April to November, demonstrating that initiation as a *mystes* was probably available at any point in the sailing season and, therefore, not part of a festival (245–46). The time required to progress from *mystes* to *epoptes*, or full initiate, cannot be determined from the inscriptions, but certain examples may indicate that there was some interval. One inscription (no. 89) lists a number of people who have become *mystai*. Three of them are subsequently listed as *epoptai*. Dimitrova argues that the names of the three *epoptai*, although added by the same hand, were added after the first list and that the spacing of the first list indicated that the stonemason did not know how long the second list would be, supporting the view that some time did elapse between the two rituals (176).

In spite of slight frustration with the organization of the inscriptions, future scholars will be grateful for Dimitrova's efforts with this material. Unless or until many new inscriptions are found, she has succeeded in creating a collection that will serve other researchers well for years to come.

KATHRYN SIMONSEN

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND A1C 5S7
CANADA
KATHRYNS@MUN.CA