

This summer I participated in the American Excavations Samothrace 2022 Field Season, program costs for which were partially made possible with the funding from the Archaeological Institute of American's Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship. This six-week excavation took place on the island of Samothrace, located in the northern Aegean Sea, which is the home to the Hellenistic Sanctuary of the Great Gods. It is the site of one of the most important mystery cults of the Mediterranean world and has architectural and archaeological remains indicating continuous use from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. American excavations of the sanctuary began in 1938 and is currently co-sponsored by the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University and Emory University. The team of approximately 30 members (which includes archaeologists, conservators, geologists, geomorphologists, geographers, numismatists, and architects) from various institutions around the world was directed by Dr. Bonna Wescoat, the director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

As someone anticipating pursuing Greek Archaeology as a career, this opportunity to visit Greece for the first time and participate in an excavation proved to be an unparalleled experience. Not only was I able to learn first-hand about archaeological methods and practices through involvement in nearly all facets of the project, which I will discuss further below, but I was able to get a better understanding about the physical artifacts and structures that cannot be fully comprehended within a purely academic environment. Additionally, it was incredible to get to meet so many other students and scholars whose interests overlapped with my own. Coming from a particularly small Classics program, this was my first time really getting to know such a number of individuals and professionals who study Greek archeology and related fields.

In recent years, the project has turned to studying the movement of ancient initiates from the island's ancient city to the sanctuary as well as how they navigated through the space. Not

only did this research focus align with my own interest in phenomenology, but also my interest in ancient Greek religion, art, and architecture. This summer, Dr. Dimitris Matsas, Emeritus Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Rhodope, lead a surface survey (Palaiopolis Archaeological Survey) which I participated in that studied the hillside and ravine between the city and sanctuary, including a portion of the fortification walls, for the very first time. Students collected and quantified pottery sampled from a grid comprised of 20m x 20m squares, ultimately allowing geographers to create a heat map of the ceramics found. While the majority of pottery sherds found consisted of basic, undecorated vessels, some notable ceramic finds include figurines in varying states of preservation and fragments of Byzantine vessels with brightly colored glazes. Finds from the survey were then taken to the registrars for cleaning, processing, and storage. In the afternoons for the first three weeks of the excavation, and due to the immense amount of pottery and ceramic roof tiles collected, new members were recruited for making sure that these ceramic finds were properly washed.

The project's supervisor of excavation, Dr. Andrew Farinholt Ward of Emory University a previous professor of mine from Indiana University, arrived after the end of week 3, providing a perfect elision for the end of the field survey project and the beginning of excavation efforts in earnest. Soon, there were four trenches opened and in operation, honing in on studying areas such as the central ravine, the stoa plateau, the Hellenistic theater, and one of a set of dining rooms. While I had had previous paleontological excavation experience, this was my first time digging in an archaeological context. I was assigned to join a small team in investigating the ancient Hellenistic theater located within the sanctuary, where we discovered an intact drainage pipe which helped to transport water from the top of the sanctuary and away from its monuments and ritual spaces. We also found several rows of seating. Our 2m x 1m trench was located at the

top of the theater, meaning we had to work very carefully on this steep terrain both when digging and when moving up and down the theater to discard soil at the slope's base. The team of three or four often had to take turns performing different tasks, such as digging, picking with a large iron pick, sifting, sweeping, removing zambelli (large rubber buckets) of soil, and more, due to the trench's small size. Fortunately, my teammates and trench supervisor were extremely nice individuals with a great sense of humor, making the long, hard hours of digging in the direct sun go by quickly. Ultimately, our findings helped allow project architects to finalize the reconstruction of what this ancient structure looked like.

Due to some injuries that occurred throughout my time with the excavation, I was able to explore other aspects of the project that I may not have otherwise. One example is archival research I performed using old excavation plans from the 1980s as well as delving through the old excavation diaries to help answer questions regarding the foundations of a specific wall that abutted a small trench that was to be reexcavated by one member this summer. Other research projects like that were undertaken to assist in the excavation teams' study of their own trenches. I also had the opportunity to spend some time with the topographic survey team and assist their efforts in the field with staking out survey grid units and marking out special finds and features to be input into the Geographic Information System (GIS) program. Finally, I was tasked with a project of digitally tracing orthographic photos using Adobe Illustrator of each of the trenches' plans and sections as was appropriate. Each trench was photographed several times over the course of its excavation, from opening to closing. After delineating features from nonfeatures, I would overlay indicators specifying stratigraphic units. As this was an extremely large project and time on site did not allow for its finalization, I have continued to work on these orthophoto tracings post-season as a student assistant for American Excavations Samothrace. I will also be

continuing to perform research and proofing for the project's upcoming excavation report for *Hesperia*.

My experiences on Samothrace this summer were like none other. Not only did I learn invaluable skills in the field, both through the survey and through excavation, but I was able to explore some of the many shapes and forms that archaeology can take within a large-scale project. Such an excavation requires a great number of specialties and coordination amongst its members in order to be successful. It also demands a certain level of flexibility of members, and when that can be achieved, the more we are able to learn, both from the materials that we are studying, but also of each other. A major lesson for all archaeologists is understanding that what we study is ultimately the remains of people and individuals with stories of their own – a fact that was really driven home for me during this excavation. Coming away from my time on Samothrace has supplied me with the hands-on knowledge of proper archaeological practices and methods, stronger archival research skills, and an even stronger love for ancient Greek archaeology and culture. I offer my most sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Archaeological Institute of America for awarding me the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship, without which this opportunity would not have been possible.

## Photos



A group photo of the team standing in front of a replica of the Nike of Samothrace, the famous Hellenistic sculpture found at the site.



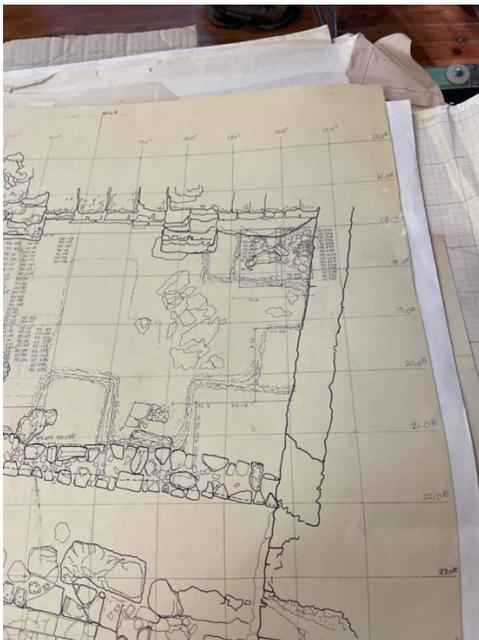
A rack of ceramic sherds that have been washed and laid out to dry. They have been organized by lot numbers based on their find spot.



My trenchmates and I with large smiles after having discovered the drainage pipe, one of our main goals for this trench.



Here I am holding one of the big iron pick axes used to dig through hard rocks and soil, with the Hieron's remaining columns in the background.



One of the maps from the 1980s I used to study the foundations of a wall.



My friend Sarah demonstrating the lengths we sometimes have to go for archaeology.