

BOOK REVIEW

The Sanctuary of Athena at Sounion. By BARBARA A. BARLETTA. *Ancient Art and Architecture in Context* 4. Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2017. Pp. xviii + 342. Hardback, \$75.00. ISBN: 978-0876619674.

Any mention of Sounion immediately conjures images of the mid-5th century Temple of Poseidon dominating the promontory of the southern tip of Attica. To the northeast of the ruins of the canonical Doric temple, however, another two temples were constructed on a lower hill: the so-called “Small Temple” and one in the Ionic order. The Ionic structure, the first known to exist in Attica, revealed a highly unusual plan with adjacent colonnades on its south and east sides (though none on the north or west). It was described by Vitruvius (4.8.4), who noted its unique arrangement, identifying the monument as the Temple of Athena. The Sounion sanctuary, including the Athena temple, was excavated by the Greek Archaeological Society during the late 19th-early 20th century, under the direction of V. Stais, who suspected that much of its building material had been removed for reuse in later structures. His suspicions were confirmed when the American School of Classical Studies at Athens undertook excavations in the Athenian Agora in the early 1930s, and uncovered architectural members once belonging to Athena Sounias. The Agora discoveries inspired Homer A. Thompson, the excavation director, and William Bell Dinsmoor Jr., the site’s architect, to collaborate on a catalogue and architectural study of the remains. The current book by Barletta, relies heavily on the unpublished (and undated) manuscript of Thompson and Dinsmoor, both in its content and format, yet reworks their descriptions, makes fresh observations (including about dates) and adds new material.¹

The book is organized into six chapters that cover past investigations of the sanctuary of Athena, the Small Temple and the Temple of Athena from its

¹ Sadly, the author herself passed away before the current manuscript was complete. The final text was prepared for publication by David Scahill, as explained in the Forward.

construction and context to its afterlife and later history. The first chapter, concerned with excavations and previous scholarship, also describes the other elements of the sanctuary, such as a votive pit (*bothros*), the *temenos* walls and an altar. A plan that indicates the find-spots of relevant material in the Agora (fig. 29) is particularly useful for readers to consult both here and at later points in the book, as is the catalogue of architectural finds from the Agora that follows the main text. Chapters 2 and 3 offer in-depth presentations of the two temples, their remains, plans, elevations and, in the case of the Athena temple, reconstructions of the designs adorning once beautifully painted ceiling slabs and restored elevations of the building from all four sides. It is in Chapter 4, *The Temple of Athena in Context*, that we begin to hear the author's own voices more clearly. She compares the temple, deconstructed into many parts, to other Ionic structures in Attica and the Cyclades, southern Italy, Sicily and East Greece. Ultimately, her search for "influences" or a "contemporary model" comes up short, given the unusual character of the building, and leading her to conclude that architects drew on "ideas from different geographical regions and ... styles" (217). For those whose interests extend beyond the nuts and bolts of construction, the final chapter on the end of the temple's life (perhaps destroyed by Philip V of Macedon in 200 BC) and the transfer of its members to Athens for reuse in the Late Roman (post-Herulian) fortification walls and in the Southeast Temple (1st half of the 2nd century AD), the latter prominently situated along the Panathenaic Way, is a real treat. Barletta uses this as an opportunity to discuss at length the phenomenon of "itinerant" buildings, the most famous example being the Temple of Athena from Pallene, a 5th-century Doric building, which was reinstalled on the northern side of the Agora as the Temple of Ares in the Augustan period and later seen by Pausanias (1.8.4). She further explores different types and ways of recycling ancient materials, from Greek, Roman and later times, as well as the possible motivations for the practice (e.g. plunder, economy/resources, past associations, quality of material) and both positive and negative connotations of it. The sections on postclassical architectural recycling, although better understood, seem tangential here.

Given the unusual circumstances of publication and the challenges of using legacy data, it is hardly surprising that the writing feels uneven in places. Despite the author's best efforts, at times it is difficult to disentangle the words and

analyses of Thompson and Dinsmoor from those of Barletta. Importantly, this volume must be consulted in conjunction with G. Theodoropoulou-Polychroniadis, *Sounion Revisited: The Sanctuaries of Poseidon and Athena at Sounion in Attica* (2015), who examines the excavated finds and their contexts. Taken on its own, the book under review adds significantly to the story of Classical Greek architecture, as well as to the diversity and complexity of ancient sanctuaries and cult activities. The book is exceedingly well-illustrated, with both original drawings made by Dinsmoor and many additional photographs provided for comparison or to illustrate certain points. All in all, the result is a beautifully produced tribute to the author's own career as a specialist in Ionic architecture and to two great figures of the past remembered for their contributions to the archaeology of Athens and Attica.

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