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Toward an Archaeology of Secrecy: Power, Paradox, and the Great Gods of Samothrace

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ABSTRACT

The mystery cult of the Great Gods of Samothrace offers productive material for theory building with respect to the archaeology of secrecy in ritual contexts. The social practice of secrecy builds political power and relies on communicative strategies that simultaneously conceal and reveal, employing culturally specific codes involving abstraction, ambiguity, metaphor, and allusion. Samothrace increased its secrecy as it grew in prestige: archaeological materialization of this secrecy includes euphemistic inscriptions and magnetized iron rings used as tokens of initiation. The rings use myth, philosophy, and ritual practice to communicate the initiate's status while emphasizing the rites' resistance to disclosure. [secrecy, Greece, initiation, iron, magnetism]

Secrecy, Georg Simmel proposed over 100 years ago, is a social practice that informs our speech, institutions, and cognitive processes (Simmel 1908). Secrecy is more than keeping silent: it is possession of knowledge, announcement of that possession, and the public demonstration that one will not reveal it—the latter often in accordance with culturally recognized dictates of discretion. Secrecy is thus a cultural practice, which is ultimately a performance of individual status, built about the question of knowledge. The knowledge being concealed is ultimately irrelevant—indeed "knowledge" may well be put in quotation marks, as it may be entirely fictive, and the social forms it generates are unrelated to its propositional content. It does have, however, significant cognitive ramifications, as the need to announce and to hide simultaneously draws on symbolic vocabularies and performative practices unique to each society. Secrecy in the Kongo will look different from secrecy in Greece—but these will manifest analogous dynamics of disclosure and discretion.

The embodiment of secrecy—its translation into material form—has drawn theoretical discussion in art history and archaeology as well as in cultural anthropology. Archaeological discussions have focused primarily on built spaces that show restricted spatial and visual access, hidden loci within shrines, "trick" objects that create illusions, and distribution of finds suggesting restricted access (Commenge et al. 2006:788; Hastorf 2007; Levy 2006:13; Peatfield 1994:153). These studies emphasize the physical movement of participants through spaces that constrain perception, allowing investigators to reconstruct the cognitive experience of restricted access and thus, potentially, the sequence in which or moment at which the participant's social status changed from exclusion to inclusion. Art historical investigations emphasize moveable artifacts, whose visual surfaces manifest repeated acts of occlusion and penetration without yielding any visual clues as to the material concealed. The most substantial distinction between discussions in these two disciplines is not in the objects studied but the sources of social information and the position of secrecy in the investigation—as a datum to be explored, or a hypothesis to be argued. Art historical investigations position their objects in ethnographic accounts, local informants, and lived experience: they begin with the knowledge that the objects in question enable the cultural practice of secrecy. Prehistoric archaeological investigations, on the other hand, pursue secrecy as a hypothesis for the function of spaces and

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objects, without contemporary, contextual evidence of the social practices involved. Ethnographic analogy, contemporary local myth and legend, and historical texts are frequent additions to these investigations; a theoretical framework for testability has yet to emerge.

A promising archaeological focus for a more articulate archaeology of secrecy is the cult centers that flourished in the ancient Mediterranean from the seventh century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E., dedicated to rituals the Greeks called *mysteria*—initiations whose procedures and meaning were sealed by secrecy. Popular etymology derived *mysteria* from the Greek verb *muein,* meaning to close the eyes or mouth. Ancient exegetes observed that the word referred both to the sacred obligation for discretion and to a more transcendent sensibility that the experience of the rites exceeded the capacity of human speech (Burkert 1985:276). Contemporary texts from a wide range of literary genres—history, poetry, comedy, and epigram—confirm the centrality of secrecy to the rites, and so let us proceed from knowledge rather than hypothesis of this social praxis. These texts also demonstrate rhetorical and performative strategies strikingly parallel to those observed in studies of secrecy among living cultures. The use of texts as informants has a long and problematic history in Mediterranean archaeologies, which developed, in the 19th century, in the search for a transparent relationship between the textual and material world (Dyson 1993; Morris 1994). The historical texts relevant to ritual secrecy are doubly complex, as they respond to the rhetorical strategies of their own genres as well as the cultural imperatives of discretion. The thoughtful, nuanced integration of these texts with material evidence is fundamental in bringing the Greek mysteries into the archaeological discussions of secrecy.

Among the mystery cults, the sanctuary of the Great Gods of Samothrace offers particularly rich material for theorizing the material embodiment of secrecy in ritual contexts. Archaeological approaches to the ritual experience have emphasized how topography and architecture shaped the experience of initiates as they moved through the site (Clinton 2003; Cole 1984:26–37; Wescoat 2006). In this chapter, I focus on artifacts rather than architecture: dedicatory inscriptions and magnetized iron rings worn as tokens of the Samothracian cult. These materials, combined with the textual tradition of the gods of the rites, reflect practices of secrecy that are responsive to local contexts, the institutional structures of Greek mysteries, and political powers. The textual tradition is unusually complex even for a mystery cult, both as a purely literary phenomenon and for its inexact relationship to material remains. The bulk of the texts are fragmentary; they reflect a high degree of confusion regarding the identity of the gods, and they come from very different historical periods, primarily the fifth century B.C.E. to the second C.E. but as late, in some cases, as the 12th century C.E. The perspectives of their authors range from the sympathetic to the skeptical, including ancient historians who seem to have been initiates themselves and the early Christian fathers who wrote in order to discredit the rites. These texts name, moreover, divinities who do not appear in the inscriptions or images from the site itself. Archaeological approaches to the rites have, as a result, often omitted these textual traditions from the interpretation of the material remains. Models of secrecy, however, suggest that the absence of the gods from the inscriptions, and the confusions of the written record, are both natural outcomes of secrecy as a social practice.

My investigation begins with a survey of theoretical developments in secrecy since the time of Simmel and the appropriateness of these theories for the Greek mysteries. I then turn to the Samothracian site as an archaeological testing ground for the embodiment of secrecy as a ritual practice, and conclude with the parameters of testability that could profitably be brought to an archaeology of secrecy.

Secrecy in the Anthropological Tradition

Simmel's concepts have developed substantially in the century since their first publication. Applications to sociological and ethnographic contexts have yielded structural-functionalist (Fulton 1972; Little 1949, 1966), Marxist (Murphy 1980), sexual (Kratz 1990), and semiotic models (Bellman 1984; Piot 1993:353) and comparisons between secrecy and privacy (Bok 1982; Warren and Laslett 1980), deceit (Petersen 1993), modernity (Kolig 2003; Pellizzi 1994), the mass media, and Christianity (Meyer 2006). Studies of secrecy are often but by no means always concerned with ritual; organized crime, terrorism (Schneider and Schneider 2002), intelligence agencies (Tefft 1980), and everyday communications (Beidelman 1993; Piot 1993) demonstrate the saturation of the practices of secrecy into numerous realms of activity, in both contemporary and traditional cultures.

Throughout these developments, the political power and communicative paradox of secrecy remain fundamental. Secrecy is power: the distinction between those who know and those who do not defines the boundary of a group and articulates ranks within it. Its political force relies on the knowledge of the secret's possession by those who are excluded from the information itself. This gives rise to the paradox that the possession of a secret must be known but its contents remain undisclosed (Beidelman 1993:41; Bellman 1981; Roberts 1993). Simple curiosity regarding the contents

of the secret generates one level of power among the possessors; another comes from the visible boundaries of the group thus formed. The more elaborate the boundaries, the greater the implied power of the group and its secret, and the more substantial the prestige accorded to both. To the extent that the secret is shared by previous generations, the group may extend into the invisible realms of the dead (Fernandez 1982:262; Quarcoopome 1993); when a secret society exists in numerous villages, members enjoy the pragmatic power of supralocal communication, which may otherwise be complicated by distinctions in dialect, distance, and local customs (Bellman 1984). The boundary into and out of the group, in addition, is capable of elaboration in order to increase prestige. Boundaries may mask the locus of the secret under a cloak of the everyday and nonvaluable, direct attention away from the secret itself and to another realm, or be elaborately worked, finely crafted in both semantics and materials (Strother 1993).

Field studies of secrecy focus on the social structures, relationships, and practices surrounding secrecy. These prove more culturally significant than the contents of the secret itself (Beidelman 1993; Erickson 1981; Middleton 1973; Murphy 1980:193; Nooter 1993a:20; Piot 1993; Rappaport 1971:71). As foci of investigation, they offer data that are both more accessible than the secret and capable of discussion without violation of the fieldworkers' or the culture's ethical code (George 1993; Rohatynskyj 1997; Wagner 1984:153). There is often, in fact, no secret at all, or the secret consists of cultural information already widely known (Bellman 1984:86–88; Picton 1990:194). Beidelman notes that Kaguru children already have many snatches of information about adult experience, but their initiation into adulthood connects these pieces of information to complex ideas about the structure of kinship groups and how marriage works in the replacement of ancestors (Beidelman 1991, 1993). The practice of secrecy places the facts of sexuality into an associative web, unique to its culture, which articulates the matters to which it is relevant. It creates relationships among potentially discrete semantic ranges, grounded in the realities of social organization, local history, myth, and ecology. Its mastery is a measure of acculturation: to be able to keep a secret is the sign that one is a responsible adult. This is not only because it reflects the possessor's self-restraint and regard for the group that controls the secret; it is a measure of the individual's mastery of the categories of knowledge and behavior that define his society. Secrecy is the public face of the act of knowing. Whether the secret exists or not, the systems around it are cultural realities.

While the practice of secrecy is integral to political power, its paradox unfolds in cultural genres of communication (Gilbert 1993; Quarcoopome 1993; Wagner 1984). These offer numerous strategies for secrecy's expression, in both visual and verbal form. Visual strategies of secrecy include concealment, containment, accumulation, abstraction, and coding (Nooter 1993b:24). Concealment is the least complex strategy: the Yoruba king's crown has long strings of beads that shield his face from easy view, and powerful medicines are applied inside, which remain completely hidden (Barth 1975:217; Quarcoopome 1993). Receptacles protrude from some Zaire sculptures to contain the medicines given by chiefs and counselors; nails are driven into others to activate the powers of the medicines they contain; *nkisi* figures from the Kongo are activated by song (Nooter 1993b:24, cat. 18, 38, 39). The presence of the hidden power is announced, its constituents concealed, and actions required from human agents in order to make the medicines come to life. Understatement ensures a secret through the appearance of the ordinary, using unremarkable materials and minimalist forms. The *boli* of the Komo associations among the Bamana exemplify the principle of accumulation: these are enigmatic objects, composed of layers of organic materials, to which new layers are constantly added in the form of sacrificial residue (McNaughton 1979:23–44). These accumulations recollect the ritual action that created them and provide metaphoric reflection on the epistemology of initiation in which knowledge is acquired only gradually.

Abstraction highlights the relationship between secrecy, material artifacts, and initiation. Visually, it is the process by which local myths and legends are translated into geometric and other essential forms: the aesthetic results are immediately accessible, the semantic becomes opaque. The traditions these communicate are accessible only to those members of the culture who have been properly instructed (Biebuyck 1973:93). Geometric patterns in Bamana and Kuba textiles, and the *lukasa* memory boards of the Luba, encode myths, proverbs, and historical knowledge (Nooter 1993c:50). Verbal and auditory expressions reinforce these visual articulations; they may also work independently of them. The *wulu nuu* devil is created by auditory illusion alone among the Fala Kpelle: the Poro leader goes through the town blowing on a horn, which produces a high-pitched sound like a terrified human scream. Members follow him, slapping their arms against their sides to simulate the sound of the witch being beaten (Bellman 1980:68). It is a striking example of communal complicity in the illusion and the communication of a familiar narrative, involving a complex cultural type, without recourse to the visual.

Ambiguity, metaphor, and allusion are key mechanisms of secrecy in both visual and verbal form (Barth 1975:26; Bellman 1984:53–78; Roberts 1993). These work through a principle of plurality: the greater the number of possible interpretations, the more difficult it is for the uninitiated

to correctly determine the relevant choice. Myths are particularly rich in these qualities and accordingly significant in the articulation of secrecy. Composed of condensed and variable semantic elements, subject to local and situational adaptation, myths support a continual expansion of interpretations. This enables graduated steps of initiation, which reverse and invert previous meanings as initiates proceed, and a paradoxical capacity for secrecy to change over time. Polysemnity of this sort is the conceptual opposite of secrecy through silence (Picton 1990:194).

Several principles emerge from this overview that may be applied to archaeological analysis. The first is to focus on the local. Secrecy is universal but not constant; it is socially and culturally constructed and must be considered within the societal frameworks in which it operates (Barth 1975; Nooter 1993a:18). We may expect the articulation of secrecy in one site to use the semantic range distinct to it and strategies that may or may not appear in analogous cultic contexts. The second is to investigate the combination of elements drawn together in the practice of secrecy. Secrecy is not silence but an interplay of numerous mechanisms, visual, verbal, audible, physical, and metaphoric. The challenge of secrecy is not simply to enumerate those elements that have played a role at the site but to consider the pattern of their interaction. Third is the importance of the cognitive as well as the experiential in analysis of a given site. Local myths and metaphors are essential elements in the creation of secrecy; they should become serious resources for archaeological interpretation. The characteristics that make them ideal for secrecy's operation—ambiguity, allusion, polysemnity, plurality—are precisely those that have problematized them for the archaeological record, where their key function is often the identification of iconography. This kind of direct correspondence has little relevance, however, for the practice of secrecy, which relies on more nuanced relationships between patterns and structure, shifting themes, and variations in type.

Models of Secrecy and Mediterranean Mystery Cults

Political power, local tradition, social prestige, and complex semantic webs characterize the mystery cults of the ancient Mediterranean. The Greeks applied the term *mysteries* to a bewildering range of ritual types: local cults named for their city-states, whose priesthoods were held by local aristocrats; initiations and purifications offered by wandering priests whom Plato deemed charlatans (*Republic* 3645); and the great international sanctuaries such as Samothrace and its Athenian counterpart Eleusis. Patron gods range from well-known figures from the Greek mythological pantheon to divinities known only in local tradition. The benefits of initiation, suggested in oblique statements by initiates and angry denunciations from Christian writers, may include salvation in the afterlife, economic prosperity, safety at sea, or stability for the city. What unifies this disparate range is the practice of secrecy—a behavioral definition, which recommends the appeal to anthropological and sociological models. The social dynamics of the rites vary significantly according to their institutional type. Political power accrued naturally to the international mysteries, whose sanctuaries were ideal locations for the advertisement of a ruler's wealth and closeness with the gods. Hadrian's gifts to Eleusis, for example, both reflected his philhellenism and increased his own prestige (Clinton 1989). The Macedonians and the Diadochi used Samothrace to analogous effect, adorning the sanctuary with innovative architecture and ostentatious dedications (Lehmann 1998:21–22). This dynamic characterized non-mystery sanctuaries as well; Pausanias' *Description of Greece,* written in the second century C.E., reflects a broad Mediterranean sensibility for sanctuaries as the must-sees of ancient travel. Specific to mystery cults, however, is the potentially subversive political force of the group of initiates. The Orphic cult of Leibethra and the Pythagorean associations of southern Italy suggest the capacity of mysteries to generate rebellion and anti-polis revolutionary groups (Burkert 1972:115–118; Graf 1988; Redfield 1991; Vinogradov 1991; von Fritz 1963:211–218). The voluntary nature of initiation underwrites these threats: scholars have long distinguished mysteries from other initiatory rites by the fact that they are undertaken by personal choice, in contrast to rites of passage stipulated by the city-state in response to the transition from youth to adult, or citizen to soldier. Gruen notes that Roman legislation of the Bacchic mysteries in 186 B.C.E., rather than simply outlawing the cult, brought these potentially threatening sociogenic forces under state control (Gruen 1990:34–78).

Rootedness in the local landscape and intimate connections with civic identity mark innumerable smaller mysteries that filled the Greek countryside (Graf 2003). Local myths connect these to city founders or heroes and set them in the deep mythic prehistory from which local aristocrats then claimed direct descent. Priesthoods were filled by local worthies, and the celebration of the mysteries was part of the annual festival calendar. The mysteries of the Great Goddesses in Andania, for example, were founded by Kaukon, a great-grandson of Gaia. When the Thebans and Argives sought to reestablish the Messenian state, they also reestablished the mysteries, claiming that this Kaukon appeared in a dream to the commanders of the Thebans and the Argives and gave them the instructions for the rites (Pausanias 4.26–37). In

Boiotian Thebes, local legend claimed that the Kabeiroi inhabited the land long ago and that Demeter herself gave them the mysteries. A sherd from the sanctuary depicts Pratolaos, "first man," emerging from the ground while a figure named Kabeiros looks on: this is a rare iconographic example of autochthony, a mythical birth from the soil, which could be used to claim territorial ownership. Pausanias describes how the Kabeiroi claimed their territory through their cult long after they themselves had faded into prehistory. Those who sought to celebrate their mysteries anywhere other than Thebes were overtaken by divine justice; armies who entered the sanctuary were struck by lightning bolts or, overcome by divine madness, flung themselves to their deaths into the sea (Pausanias 9.25.5–10). For sites like Andania and Thebes, the annual celebration of the mysteries renewed local identity, expressed through the mythic construction of prehistory and facilitated through the priesthoods and benefactions of powerful local families.

Participation in the mysteries, whether an annual event or once-in-a-lifetime experience, created considerable social prestige. Texts identify initiation as the mark of heroes and sages; archaeological evidence reflects the concern to advertise initiation, both at the sanctuary and beyond, from the sixth century B.C.E. onward. All of the Argonauts, including Herakles, Jason, Orpheus, and the Dioskouroi, became Samothracian initiates (Diodorus Siculus 5.48.5–49.6); some dedications in the sanctuary may have borne inscriptions suggesting that the Argonauts set them up (Cole 1984:68–69). Herakles was so eager for Eleusinian initiation that Demeter herself established the lesser mysteries in order to qualify him for the rites—and so provided a mythic foundation for a new stage of the rites, located at Athens itself (Diodorus Siculus 4.14; Colomo 2004). Porphyry and Iamblichus, writing in the third century C.E., both claimed that Pythagoras, the great Presocratic sage of the sixth century B.C.E., became an initiate into the mysteries of Cretan Zeus, Samothrace, and Leibethra, among others (Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* 17; Iamblichus, *de Vita Pythagorica* 146). Funerary inscriptions for historical persons show the same enthusiasm for initiation into many different mysteries, an achievement listed along with civic offices and family name (Cole 1984; Dimitrova 2008). Dedications at the sanctuaries reflect the desire to leave a permanent memorial of one's initiation: the cheapest are inscriptions scratched onto pottery; the more elaborate inscriptions in stone offer lists of individuals initiated together, or declare the dedication of statues and buildings to the gods.

The seriousness with which initiates adhered to the practice of secrecy complicates both the textual and material evidence available for investigation. Ancient authors pointedly declined to reveal anything about the rites: of Samothrace, Herodotus wrote coyly, "anyone who has been initiated into the rites of the Kabeiroi . . . knows what I mean" (Herodotus 2.51); Apollonius of Rhodes bid farewell "to the island itself, and to the daimones who dwell therein, whose rites it is not lawful for us to sing" (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.915–921).

The mysteries were also described in terms suggesting transcendence of the limitations of human speech: cosmic visions, ecstatic experiences, terror and confusion, and emerging from the rites as a stranger to one's self. Aristotle is said to have claimed that one did not learn the mysteries but experienced them (Aristotle fr. 15 Rose; Burkert 1987:89–116). These experiences are not depicted, but signaled through the iconography specific to the gods of the rites. Vase paintings depict the white clothing stipulated for Orpheus' adherents; the torches that lighted the Eleusinian initiations; the wreaths, fawnskins, and ivy-wrapped, pinecone-topped rods of Bacchic rites. The latter appear as well on sarcophagi, reflecting the promises specific to Bacchic initiates for a better afterlife, and are mentioned in the gold plates inscribed with instructions for the netherworld that have been found in burials in Sicily, southern Italy, and Macedonia (Burkert 1985:276–295). These materials offer relatively direct correspondence between the textual and material evidence for the cults, even though the texts—both epigraphic and literary—are elliptical, poetic, and evocative, and the images highly condensed. Samothracian data, as we shall see, exceed these in obscurity.

Samothrace: Location and Cult

Samothrace is located in the far northeastern Aegean, at the very edge of the Greek-speaking world (Figure 5.1). The island consists mostly of Mt. Phengari, which at 5,459 feet is the tallest peak in the region and a valuable beacon for sailors, who made great use of such landmarks in navigating these waters (Lehmann 1998:15–17; Pliny, *NH* 4.73). Historically and culturally it was linked to the Thracian mainland, 29 nautical miles to the north, and the Anatolian coast to the east, visible from the top of Mt. Phengari. Thracian language lingers in island toponyms, and settlements from the 11th and 9th centuries B.C.E. show Thracian architectural and burial customs (Graham 2002:248–249). Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century B.C.E., noted that the language of the indigenes was used in the cult even in his day, nearly five centuries after the Greeks arrived on the island (Diodorus Siculus 5.47.14–16). These sixth-century Greek settlers seem to have mingled peacefully with the local population, who were already celebrating feasts in the area of the sanctuary. The Greeks established a city on the north

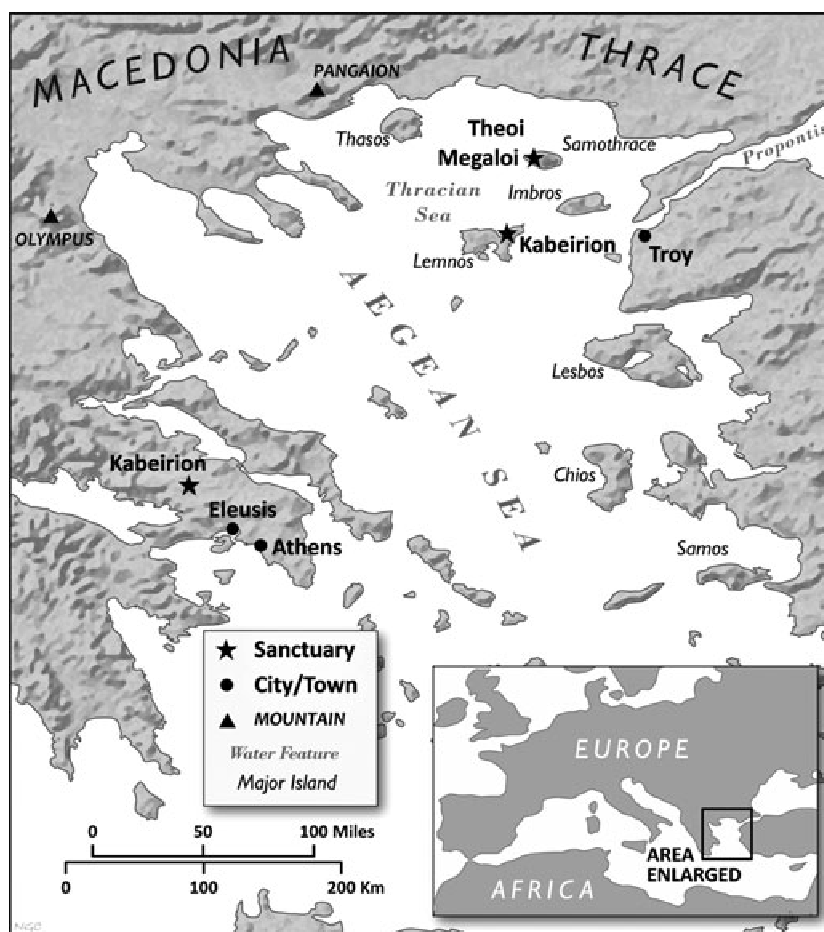

Figure 5.1. Sites mentioned in text: Samothrace, Lemnos, and sites around the Aegean Sea. Map by N. Caselli.

shore of the island, facing the mainland opposite and at a relatively small remove from the island's main harbor. By the end of the fifth century B.C.E. they had established a series of settlements on the Thracian mainland, which seem to have been vital for their economic survival: Samothrace offered limited arable land and but one poor harbor. These mainland settlements took advantage of the thin strip of arable land along the coast and the capacity to connect seafaring traffic moving along the Thracian coast with overland routes controlled by Odryssian Thracians. Samothracians have been called, in modern historiography, the "pioneers of Odryssian trade." Their facility with sea travel provided an ideal partner for the Thracians, who were characteristically disinclined to maritime traffic. The economic prosperity of the Samothracian Greeks was short lived: after a floruit in the sixth century B.C.E., the settlement declined in prosperity, as their decreasing responsibilities on the Athenian tribute lists reflect (Archibald 1998:146–147; Funke 1999).

The fortunes of the cult, however, increased steadily from the fourth century B.C.E. onward, as Hellenistic princes and foreign dynasts competed with each other in the magnificence of their votives (Cole 1984:16–25; Lehmann 1998:24–25). The impetus for this internationalization was the Macedonian royal house, for whom Samothrace provided an analogue to Athens' mysteries at Eleusis. The royals had and advertised strong dynastic and personal connections to the site: Plutarch records that Philip and Olympias, the parents of Alexander the Great, met during their initiation into the mysteries (Plutarch, *Alexander* 2.2); Arsinoë sought asylum on the island when she fled from Ptolemy Keraunos (Justin, *Epitome* 24.3.9). These connections transformed the sanctuary into a locus for competitive display and a showcase for some of the most elaborate and innovative monuments of Hellenistic architecture. The Rotunda of Arsinoë is the largest closed round building known in Greek architecture; the entrance to the sanctuary, the Propylon, represents the

first exterior use of the Corinthian column and is among the earliest of the barrel-vaulted tunnels in Greek architectural history (Boyd 1978; Lehmann 1998:62–70, 94–96; McCredie 1965:118 n. 51, 1979:2–6). These monuments helped transform the Samothracian cult into one of the most prominent mysteries of the ancient Mediterranean world, second only to Eleusis in stature.

Unlike Eleusis, however, the identity of the gods of the rites is difficult to discern. Greek authors from the fifth century B.C.E. onward identified the Samothracian gods as Kabeiroi. The Kabeiroi were daimones, divine creatures less powerful than Olympian gods but greater than ordinary mortals. Greek writers use the term "daimon" to describe demoted gods of previous generations, the spirits of the dead, the individual conscience inside every man, and the divine protectors of cities and territories (Smith 1978). The Kabeiroi vary in form from one site to another, assuming the form appropriate for the followers of the dominant male deity wherever they appear (Blakely 2006:17–52). On Imbros they were associated with Hermes, the god whose image was stamped on the island's coins (Hemberg 1950:37–43); on Lemnos they were sons and attendants of Hephaistos, who landed on the island after his expulsion from Olympus (Blakely 2006:50). Kabeiroi had a long history in ritual practice on the islands of the northeastern Aegean. They were the gods of the mysteries on Lemnos and Imbros, Samothrace's two closest neighbors in the Thracian sea; Strabo identified these three islands as the places most famous for their worship (Hemberg 1950:3–43, 160–170; Strabo 10.3.7). Their only sanctuary on the Greek mainland is located at Boiotian Thebes, the city founded, in legend, by the Phoenician prince Kadmos after he was initiated at Samothrace and took Harmonia, a princess of the island, as his bride (Kühr 2006:91–106). Lemnos and Imbros figured prominently in Athenian international interests as outposts on the Athenian shipping route into the Black Sea, one of the city's most important sources of grain (Stroud 1998). Athens took possession of both islands at the end of the sixth century B.C.E., by which time the Lemnian cult was already well established. The Athenians modified the rites by introducing elements from their own ritual practice, but they maintained the Kabeiroi as a deep-rooted regional tradition (Beschi 2000; Graham 2002:249–255).

The Samothracian cult was different from the rites on Lemnos and Imbros in its association with other daimones as well—Kouretes, Korybantes, and Idaian Daktyloi (Hemberg 1950:16–18; Lehmann 1958:63–67, 74–79). Like the Kabeiroi, these are corporate groups; the distinctions among them are often unclear, and they are frequently combined with each other in texts that have nothing to do with Samothrace. Their greatest commonality is their association with pre-Greek cultural strata. They were positioned mythologically at the transition from one divine generation to another and legendarily at the encounter between Greeks and pre-Greeks. Strabo, writing in the first century B.C.E./C.E., remarked that his contemporaries confused the daimones with ethnic groups the Greeks encountered in contests over territory (Strabo 10.3.7). Their territorial ownership may be articulated in their birth from local divinities; alternatively, they may be born directly from the earth itself or may watch over the men who are. A black-figure vase from the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi at Boiotian Thebes shows the Kabeiros stretched out on a dining couch, observing a figure labeled "first man" (Pratolaos) emerge from the ground. A lyric fragment, possibly of the sixth century B.C.E., recounts the various loci where the earth gave birth: it lists Kouretes at Mt. Ida, Korybantes in Phrygia, Eleusis at the local field of Raras, and the "beautiful child Lemnos, born in the unspeakable rites of the Kabeiros" (Page 1962:522–523, no. 985). The daimones also figure frequently in the euhemeristic tradition, literature that recounted the first inventors of such essential arts as armor, beekeeping, musical rhythms, and written laws. Daktyloi were associated particularly with metallurgy, Korybantes with ecstatic dances in arms, Kouretes with young male warrior bands who, in ritual practice, provided the points of identification for young men coming of age. The daimones thus signal a historical era fuzzily located at "the dawn of time," as well as an ontological category that hovers between mortal and divine.

None of the daimones appear in the material evidence from Samothrace. Inscriptions refer to the gods of the rites only as *Theoi* or *Theoi Megaloi*—a euphemism meaning "great gods"—and there is no iconographic indication of their presence (Cole 1984; Hemberg 1950:49–131). What the site does manifest, however, is an extraordinarily high number of the ritual installations that, in the Greek ritual vocabulary, are associated with archaic ritual practice and earth-dwelling powers. These structures are maintained throughout the long history of the sanctuary, installed and carefully reinstalled as the site's buildings are constructed, destroyed, and replaced. These are combined with highly innovative materializations of the site's ritual and legendary history. These affirm a sense of habitus on site that lay beyond the experience of any individual initiate; they also parallel the semantic range of the daimones who remain invisible in epigraphic and iconographic form.

The Samothracian sanctuary is located on the northern shore of the island, immediately outside the walls of the ancient town (Figure 5.2). Despite this proximity, it is difficult to investigate how the cult functioned vis-à-vis civic identity. The town itself has not been archaeologically explored, nor do inscriptions from the site give titles of the priests

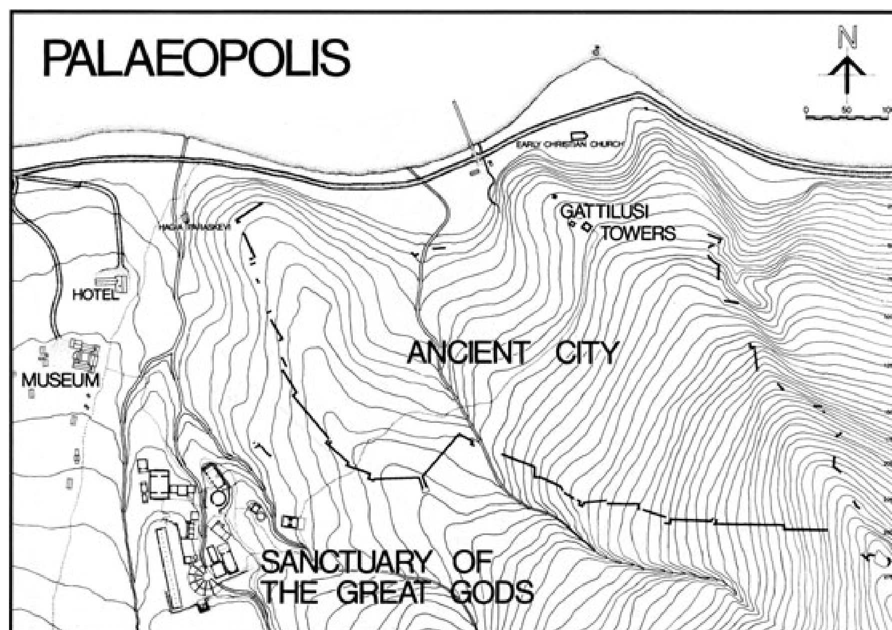

Figure 5.2. Sketch map of the city Palaeopolis and the Samothracian site. Drawn by J. Kurtich; Lehmann 1998:pl. 50, fig. 23. Courtesy Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

and other cult officials who would presumably be citizens. Two titles that appear on inscriptions from the sanctuary refer to magistrates of the Samothracian town: these are the *basileus* or "king," apparently a civic official with authority over the sanctuary's affairs, and an *agoranomos,* "supervisor of the market," possibly in charge of the Samothracian public festival. The *basileus'* name was used to date some of the inscription lists and decrees found in the sanctuary (Cole 1984:36–40).

Four physical structures and types—the circular area known as the Theatral circle; archaising ritual installations in the form of offering pits and sacred stones; the Hall of Choral Dancers; and a faux Mycenaean doorway—materialize the ritual and fictive Samothracian past. Initiates entered the site through an elaborate gate, the Propylon (Figure 5.3, #26). First dedicated in the early third century B.C.E., this structure was part of the physical experience of transitioning from profane to sacred space from that time onward. The Propylon spans the first of two stream beds that served as natural boundaries for the sacred area of the site. Between them lie the buildings dedicated to ritual practice, as per the norms of Greek architecture and the epigraphic evidence; those to the west of the second stream were used for post-initiation entertainment, lodging, and votive display. Initiates would first enter the Theatral circle (Figure 5.3, #25). This is a paved circular area approximately nine meters in diameter, set into a natural basin on the slope of the hill. Five concentric steps surround the circle, steps too narrow to have been seats, but likely places for initiates to stand and observe the proceedings that took place in the center (Figure 5.4). The circle was first built in the fifth century B.C.E.; by the end of that century, a series of monumental bases, apparently for life-size bronze statues, appeared in connection with the structure. More than 20 bases have now been found. Their placement on the topmost steps of the circle meant that initiates were literally surrounded by life-size images. The identity of the images remains unknown: neither the statues themselves nor inscriptions naming them have survived (Wescoat 2006). Analogy with other sites suggests legendary founders and some of the numerous Greek heroes who became initiates—Jason and the Argonauts, Odysseus and Menelaos, Orpheus, or Dardanos, the legendary founder of Troy. Mortal, historical figures are also likely, particularly the Macedonian patrons who chose in this way to make themselves part of the physical reality of every initiatory group. These individuals would tower over the new initiates by virtue of the height of the statue bases, and would partially surround them as well, literally bracketing the new initiates in material forms that embodied the history of ritual in this space. Clues as to the nature of the rituals themselves come from one archaeological find and one textual source. An altar found elsewhere on the eastern hill may have stood at the center of the circle; the Roman author Livy describes a *praefatio sacrorum,* a declaration that no

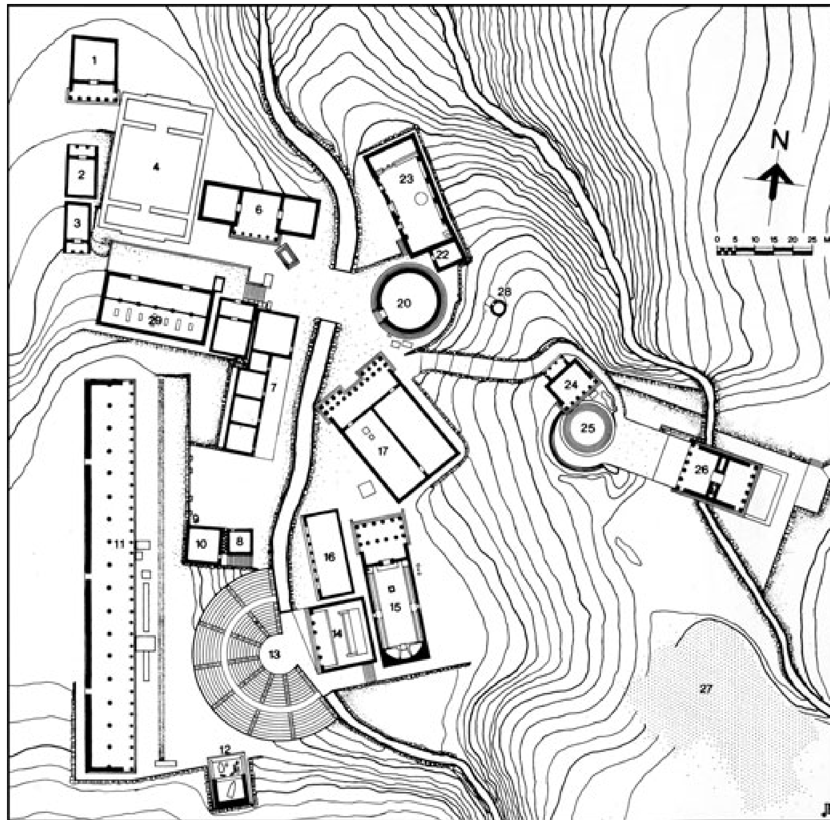

Figure 5.3. Plan of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, Samothrace. 1–3, Late Hellenistic buildings; 4, unfinished early Hellenistic building; 6, Milesian dedication; 7, dining rooms; 8, 10, unidentified niches; 9, archaistic niche; 11, stoa; 12, Nike monument; 13, theater; 14, Altar Court; 15, Hieron; 16, Hall of Votive Gifts; 17, Hall of Choral Dancers; 20, Rotunda of Arsinoë II; 22, sacristy; 23, Anaktoron; 24, dedication of Philip III and Alexander IV; 25, theatral area; 26, Propylon of Ptolemy II; 27, southern necropolis; 28, Doric rotunda. Drawn by J. Kurtich; Lehmann 1998:plan IV. Courtesy Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

unclean person may participate in the rites (Livy 45.5.4). The circle is a likely location for such preliminary cautions (Cole 1984:26; Lehmann 1998:96–98; McCredie 1968: 216–219).

Departing from the circle, the initiates would proceed down the steep ravine to the sanctuary proper. Six buildings in the heart of the sanctuary—the Anaktoron (Figure 5.3, #23), the Arsinoeion (#20), and the Orthostate structure that preceded both of them, the Altar Court (#14), the Hall of Choral Dancers (#17), and the Hieron (#15)—offer an abundance of structures that are chthonic in focus, that is, dedicated to earth-dwelling powers. These are offering pits, shafts, and channels that allow offerings to be poured into the earth and rock altars. The persistence of these forms through the site's history materializes the history of ritual practices that, in the Greek ritual vocabulary, evoke archaic and prehistoric patterns (Cole 1984:28; Donohue 1988:121–150, 177–194, 219–231; Gaifman 2010). These semantics are consonant with the chthonic, archaic, and pre-Greek nature of the Kabeiroi; the *bothroi* have intriguing parallels in the Kabeirion at Boiotian Thebes (Schachter 2003). They may also reflect the pre-Greek history specific to this region, as they are prevalent in the Thracian cults of the mainland (Archibald 1999:459).

The architectural topography of the Anaktoron, Arsinoeion, and Orthostate structure is complex. Two prior constructions lie beneath the remains of the imperial-period Anaktoron and the third-century-B.C.E. Arsinoeion. The earliest of these is a low terrace, 2.5 meters wide, retained by a wall of field stones, visible in the plan as the easternmost wall beneath the circular Arsinoeion (Figure 5.5). This provided, it seems, a raised platform for viewing rites that

Figure 5.4. Eastern hill of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods. Photo by Bonna D. Wescoat.

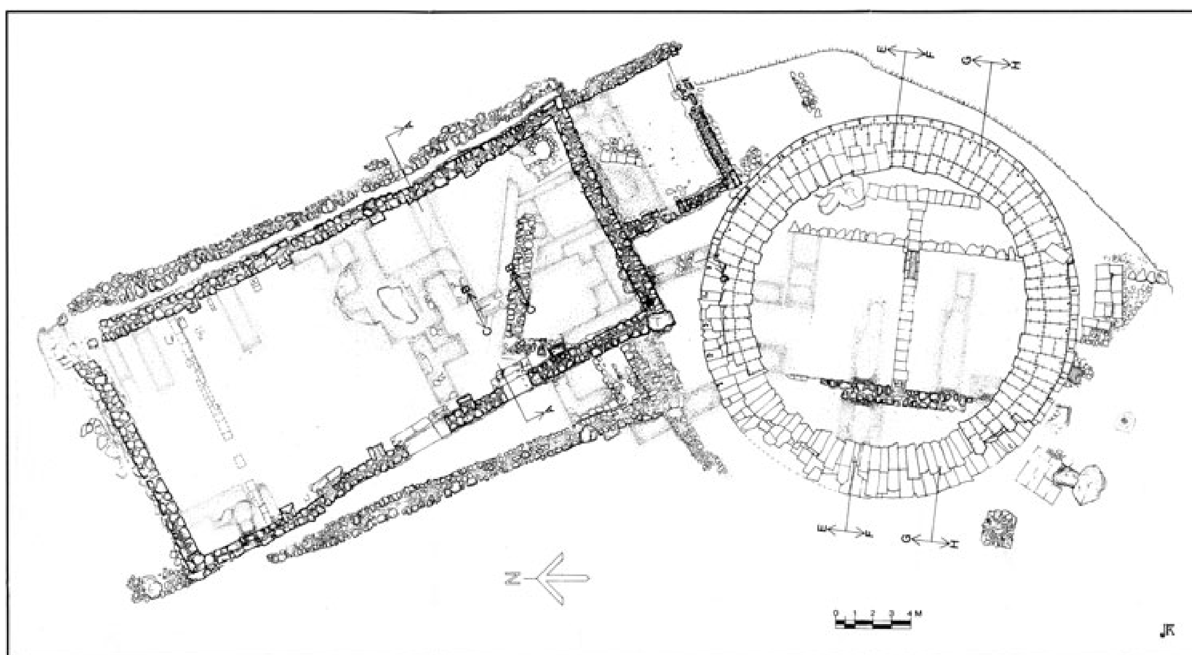

Figure 5.5. Plan of the Anaktoron, the sacristy, the Rotunda of Arsinoë, and earlier remains. Drawn by J. Kurtich, 1976; Lehmann 1998:fig. 26. Courtesy Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

took place in the area in front of it. Built into the wall was a gigantic stone with a leveled-off surface and a channel for pouring libations; stones to the side seem to have formed steps up to the top (Lehmann 1950:7–8, 1951:2–3). This wall was eventually incorporated into the fourth-century Orthostate structure, a rectangular building of 30.5 meters north–south and 12 meters east–west, whose remains are visible beneath the southern portion of the Anaktoron and the circular walls of the Arsinoeion. Two cross-walls divided this structure into three square sections, which may have been open-air rather than roofed. The southernmost of the three squares yielded evidence of a sacrificial pit, its top level with the floor, constructed of clay and small stones. The pit extends five feet into the earth and was topped by a domed

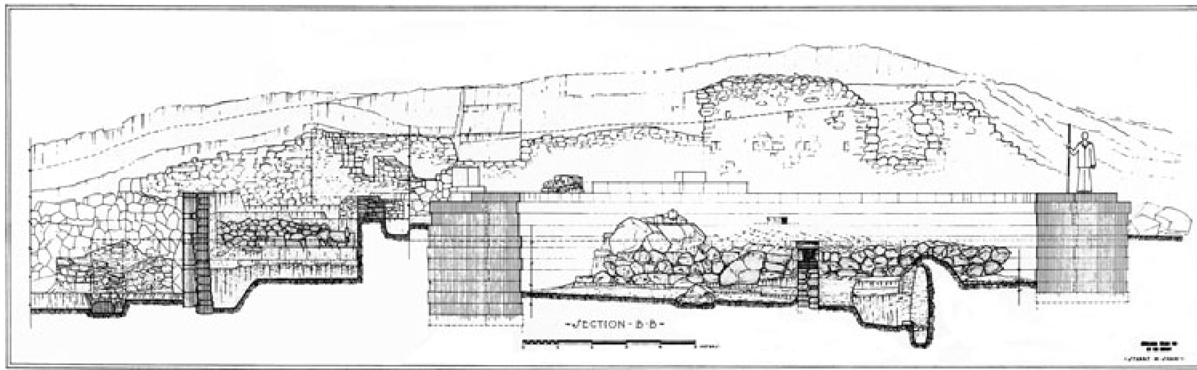

Figure 5.6. North–south section through southern part of Anaktoron, sacristy, and Arsinoeion. Lehmann 1950:pl. 7, fig. 16. Courtesy of the Trustees of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

construction 2.5 meters in height (Figure 5.6). Figure 5.6 is a cross-section of the Arsinoeion; the shaft and dome are the features closest to the right-hand wall and are positioned 15 meters to the left of that wall. The shaft cuts deeper into the earth than any of the other structures. This shaft, which may have been framed by boards, gave access on its northern side to a piece of marble positioned in the bottom, onto which liquid offerings were poured (Lehmann 1950:11–12; McCredie 1979:28–32). This concern for libation to chthonic powers persists in the later buildings in this portion of the site.

The Anaktoron was built over a fourth-century structure in nearly the same position; the only wall of this earlier structure visible in the plan lies to the west of the Anaktoron's western wall (Figure 5.5) (Wescoat 2010:22). The Anaktoron, like the Orthostate structure, is divided into three sections: visitors entered from the three doors on the western side; a grandstand supported on wooden scaffolding on the eastern and northern side provided privileged viewing areas for those witnessing the rite. The southeastern corner of the building contained an ovenlike structure, square on the outside and circular inside; a threshold, too narrow to allow entrance but wide enough for a person to stand on, offered access. The interior has a recess that separates its upper from its lower part. Lehmann suggested that this supported a lid that was removed in the course of rituals to give access to the stone inside it, which seems to have been the object of libations (Lehmann 1940:334).

The third-century rotunda dedicated by Queen Arsinoë II manifests the same conservative pattern vis-à-vis chthonic concerns. Approximately three meters to the right of its door is a deep, nearly square shaft, 0.8 meters by 0.9 meters, lined with stones, which runs down to the natural soil of the Arsinoeion's substructure. This shaft yielded a quantity of sheep's bones and several rams' horns, typical offerings for underworld gods (Lehmann 1951:9–11; McCredie et al. 1992:239–241). Nearby is an outcropping of blue-green porphyry, and there is a smaller rock of the same kind, with a flattened surface, on its northeastern side. Both are surrounded by fine Classical period pavement, made of the same material as the Orthostate structure. Lehmann identified this stone and its flattened counterpart as a sacred rock and an altar that received libations (Lehmann 1951:3–5, 7, 1998:72). The same combination of natural rock and paving occurred inside the area of the Altar Court (Figure 5.3, #14), where a natural outcropping of purple and green porphyry some three meters high served as the sacrificial place in the sixth century B.C.E. A 3.8-meter portion of the clay pipe that drained the sacrificial liquids is still in situ; yellow tufa fragments suggest a floor of the same material as that around the rock altar outside the Arsinoeion. A built altar covered this space in the second half of the fourth century B.C.E., retaining the sacred nature of the space though not the archaic form of the altar itself (Lehmann and Spittle 1964:109–116).

The same pattern of conservatism, conscious archaizing, and attention to chthonic powers characterizes the Hall of Choral Dancers and the Hieron. The Hall of Choral Dancers (Figure 5.3, #17) was the earliest and largest of the sanctuary's buildings and consisted of an elegant Ionic propylon fronting a building that was divided into two aisles. Set into the marble floor of the western aisle were two *bothroi,* or libation pits (Marconi 2010:124 and n. 25). These installations were present in the seventh-century-B.C.E. version of the building and were reconstructed with the rest of the building in ca. 340 B.C.E., very likely as the gift of Philip II of Macedon (Lehmann 1998:78; Lehmann and Spittle 1982:271–272). Lehmann notes that this kind of interior installation for offerings occurs almost exclusively in Archaic and earlier structures. The fourth-century building

Figure 5.7. Detail of frieze from Hall of Choral Dancers. Phyllis W. Lehmann, Samothrace, vol. 5, 1982:188, fig. 160. © 1982 Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

also bore a remarkable frieze of dancing maidens, the first example in Greek architecture of the archaizing sculptural style. The maidens have the features, proportions, and gait of figures appropriate to their date, but the stylized folds in their garments and their swallow-tailed mantles allude to the remote past (Figure 5.7; Hadzi 1982; Lehmann and Spittle 1982:3–12; Marconi 2010).

The Hellenistic Hieron (Figure 5.3, #15) dominates the view of the sanctuary; it is the latest of three structures on this location, begun in about 325 B.C.E. and completed 175 years later (Lehmann et al. 1969b:51–132). An *eschara,* an offering pit for burned offerings, which shows signs of long exposure to fire, occupied the center forepart of the floor in the nave. The floor of the Roman period building, ca. 200 C.E., covered this pit; two square depressions in the limestone pavement, close to the western parapet, suggest that portable hearths replaced its function in this period (Lehmann et al. 1969a:128–129, 151). Marble benches lining the walls repeated the interior configuration of the Anaktoron. Unique to this building is a semicircular apse at the southern end of the cella. The shape was invisible to visitors both inside and outside the building: doors blocked the view from the cella, and the building's rectangular exterior betrays no sign of the curved walls within. A conelike roof over this area further created a cavelike space. Curved apses are common in Geometric and Archaic cult buildings, but extremely rare later; this apse was maintained through all three phases of the Hieron's history (Lehmann et al. 1969a:155 and nn. 4–5). Inside the apse, a "choir" section of two steps surrounded the semicircular floor; the floor itself may have consisted simply of beaten earth in the Hellenistic period, but was paved in the Roman. A large half-oval hole is carved into one of the Roman period floor blocks. The block's opening is roughly picked in two layers and may have supported a lid comparable to that proposed for the structure in the southeastern corner of the Anaktoron. Its shape echoes the cavernous shape of the apse itself; the opening grants access to a large chunk of red porphyry bedrock, which is at its highest point in this area (Lehmann 1950:6, 1951:20–27; McCredie 1979:33).

Two further data demonstrate the materialization of the distant and pre-Greek past at the Samothracian site. On the western hill of the sanctuary, an area occupied by the theater, the *stoa* or covered walkway, and numerous honorary dedications, the retaining wall for Hellenistic room 10 includes a structure identified as an Archaistic niche (Figure 5.3, #9). This is a faux doorway built in the style of Mycenaean tombs of the Bronze Age Greek mainland, consisting of a trilithon door topped by the relieving triangle typical of Mycenaean engineering. The door leads nowhere, but evokes the prehistoric and heroic past appropriate for Dardanos, the legendary founder of the rites and of the city of Troy, and for the Argonauts, whose voyage and initiation took place, in mythological chronology, even before the Trojan war (Alcock 1997:21–22, 29; McCredie 1974). At a less monumental level, ceramic inscriptions evoke the pre-Greek stratum of the site and offer unusually strong correlation between the literary and the material evidence for the cult. Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century B.C.E., claimed that the Samothracians used many words of the autochthonous, pre-Greek owners of the island in their rites (Diodorus Siculus 5.47.14–16). Over 70 ceramic inscriptions from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E. are written in what has been identified as the language of the Thracian substrate, now confirmed through a substantial corpus of ceramic graffiti from the temple of Apollo in Mesembria, ancient Zone, on the Thracian mainland. The sacred language of the rites thus corresponds to the language of the pre-Greek indigenes—the historical correlates of the mythological daimones evoked in the textual record (Bonfante 1955; Brixhe 2006). The cheapness and quantity of the offerings suggest a ritual experience available to even the humblest initiate; that Diodorus records the practice some three centuries after the latest of the inscriptions suggests the longevity of the practice.

These data from the site—ritual installations, architecture, iconography, and inscriptions—suggest a materialization of two aspects of the site's history. The point of entrance to the sacred space, chthonic offerings, and the use of an archaic language embody a history of ritual praxis; now-missing statues and a Mycenaean-style doorway evoke the legendary and mythological personae whose actions constituted the narrative of the site's past. Visitors who could afford the cost of a stone inscription had the opportunity to add their own initiation to this ongoing narrative, and they did so increasingly as the cult increased in prestige over time. These inscriptions are simultaneously textual and monumental; approached through sociological models of secrecy, they offer fresh insight into the absence of the daimones from the material record of the cult. Initiate lists appear both on and off site on Samothrace, carved on free-standing pillars, on stele, and on blocks fitted into the walls of buildings. They date from the second century B.C.E. to as late as the third century C.E. The lists reveal a significant amount about the initiates themselves. People were often initiated in groups coming from the same city or family, making up the retinue of an official, or traveling together on the same ship (Cole 1984:40). The names of some 700 initiates are preserved, along with the cities from which they came, some indications of their date of initiation, and some reflections on their occupations; they are usually ordinary citizens, even slaves, and more often men than women. The stones also specify whether an initiate achieved only the first level of initiation, known as *myesis,* or the second and higher form, *epopteia* (Dimitrova 2008:241–248).

What the inscriptions do not record is the name of the gods of the rites. They share this characteristic with the inscriptions on major dedications, set up by the wealthy and powerful, and the decrees relevant to the festivals held on the site, which begin in the third century B.C.E. The gods of the rites are simply referred to as *Theoi,* "gods," or *Theoi Megaloi,* "great gods." *Theoi Megaloi* is not unique to Samothrace but is familiar in Greek ritual practice as a euphemism for gods whose names should not be spoken (Cole 1984:126, nn. 475, 478; Hemberg 1950; Henrichs 1991). On Samothrace, the term appears only on dedications made by foreign dynasts after the death of Alexander the Great (Cole 1984:1–2; Lehmann 1960:27). The dates for these opaque titles are important: they coincide with the centuries in which the sanctuary was firmly established as a locus for competitive display, and gifts to the gods created and reflected the international prestige of the giver. This encourages us to consider the euphemism in light of the cult's capacity to generate prestige. The anthropological models examined previously reflect the capacity of secrecy to create status and signal social privilege; the degree of secrecy can be increased over time in order to further bolster an institution's prestige. This pattern appears in other ritual contexts in the ancient Mediterranean: practitioners of magic raised their own status by restricting access to their practices (Lamberton 1995); the requirements for ritual secrecy at Eleusis increased over time in order to bolster the prominence of the cult (Bremmer 1995). The stone inscriptions themselves represent a new mechanism for signaling and so increasing the site's prestige—they made accessible, even to the initiates who could not afford great statues or votive monuments, a permanent presence at the site that transcended the temporal boundaries of their initiation. The euphemistic titles further increased the prestige of initiation by enrolling the gods in the familiar ritual category of those whose names could not be spoken. Literary sources that precede the inscriptions by two centuries identify the gods of the rites as Kabeiroi. The site's distinctive conservatism and the persistence of the gods on Lemnos and on Imbros make it unlikely that the daimones fell from use over time, but very likely that, fitted with a new title, they augmented the status of the rites through the social dynamics of secrecy.

Secrecy, Semantics, and Small Finds

If the daimones of the textual tradition are thus admitted to the analysis of the rites, the material token of the cult—magnetized iron finger rings—takes on a new semantic density that reflects the theoretical outlines of the aesthetics of secrecy. We learn of the rings first from the Roman author Lucretius who, in the first century B.C.E., wrote that a Samothracian ring leaped as if it wished to flee, and iron filings went mad, when a magnetic stone was brought close to them (Lucretius, *DRN* 6.1043–1047). The tradition had a long life: Pliny, in the second century, claimed they were made of iron but covered in gold (Pliny, *NH* 32.33); Isidorus, four centuries later, knew of them as gold rings with iron heads (Isidorus, *Origines* 19.32.5); as late as the 12th century C.E., Samothrace was one of several places where magnets were said to have been invented (*Etymologicum Magnum* s.v. *magnetis;* Zenobius IV.22).

The first iron rings were found on the Samothracian site in 1950; 32 have now been recovered. Nineteen of these have an identical form, a large flat bezel that shows no signs of holding a stone but could bear an image or inscription. All but four of the rings were found in excavation fill and so elude positive dating. The exceptions, from the necropolis, are two examples from the Archaic period, sixth to early fifth century B.C.E.; one from the fourth/third century B.C.E.; and one from ca. 200 B.C.E. (Cole 1985:30, n. 238; Dusenbery 1988:986, 1000–1001; Lehmann 1998:30).

The style of the bezeled rings may suggest a Ptolemaic date (332–30 B.C.E.). The majority of these came from the West Hill, an area that had no sacred buildings but structures dedicated to votive display and the comforts of visitors. In this area were dining rooms, many coins, and a *stoa* yielding inscriptions recording lists of initiates; it seems that this is where the initiates ate, slept, and perhaps purchased tokens of their initiation, the famous iron rings, to take home with them (Lehmann 1998:104–107).

Iron rings are not a rarity in the Greek world and appear in temple inventories along with other goods dedicated to the sanctuaries (Harris 1995:51; Payne et al. 1970:178, 190; Raubitschek 1998:62). They bear no particular semiotic weight in these contexts. In sacred laws, however, the allusive and metaphoric force of the form and the material come to the foreground. These prohibit the wearing, carrying, or use of iron in the sanctuary or by its officials. Rationale for the restrictions suggests an archaizing sensibility, evoking a time when iron was not yet in common use, or the contemporary use of iron for weapons (Moraux 1965:150; Triantaphyllopoulos 1980; Wächter 1910:115). Rings are more often prohibited than prescribed in sacred contexts, possibly because of sacred laws that forbid any kind of knot or bond in the presence of the god (Eitrem 1915:61–63; Hemberg 1950:110 n. 2; Plassart 1909:139; Wächter 1910:115). The use of an iron ring as a token of a cult, acquired from the site itself, is surprising in light of these regulations. It would seem more appropriate for nonsacred contexts, in which jewelry, and particularly rings, had a great deal of social work to do, communicating status, ownership, affiliation, and identity (Calinescu 1996). The rings of Samothrace would rank, at first observation, fairly low on this communicative spectrum. They were made of a visually unremarkable and inexpensive metal, iron, which could be polished to a suitable shine to provide a kind of poor man's silver. Nor were they famous for iconography or engraving. One evocatively engraved ring from the site, made of silver, bore a logo of two entwined snakes and two stars, the iconographic signals of Hermes, the alpha male of the island, and the Dioskouroi, young male heroes frequently identified as the gods of the rites (Figure 5.8; Lehmann 1940:355). While this raises possibilities for iconography on the iron rings, the surviving examples are too corroded to reveal any sign of images or indications of a band to hold a carved gemstone.

Figure 5.8. Samothracian silver ring showing snakes and stars. Drawing after Lehmann 1940:fig. 39, by M. Luttrell. Courtesy Archaeological Institute of America/American Journal of Archaeology.

What made the rings the signs of the site, however, was not merely their iron, but their magnetization. Magnetism offered two pathways for the rings to represent the rites. The first is its potential to recall a moment of ritual action and to stand in metonymous relationship with the island itself. Noting the tradition that magnetism was discovered on Samothrace, Cole proposed that the stones that received ritual attention represented lodestones and that a demonstration of magnetism could have been part of the ritual sequence (Cole 1984:30). Plato's metaphor of divine inspiration (Plato, *Ion* 533d) moving along a chain of iron rings like a magnetic force suggests that the rings would connect the initiates to the force of the island's goddess. Lehmann proposed that this goddess was analogous to Anatolian goddesses celebrated through stone altars and chthonic rites, appropriate for the island's cultural connections to the east (Lehmann 1950:8–11). Rings, charged through the apparently magical force of the island's lodestones, would then demonstrate the bond between the goddess, the initiates, and the island itself.

The metaphoric dimensions of magnetism support a model more consonant with the complexity of Samothracian myths, anthropological models for secrecy, and the capacity of symbols to reflect the structure of rituals as a whole. Magnetism was widely noticed, but not understood, in Mediterranean antiquity. Texts from the Presocratics of the sixth century B.C.E. to the church fathers of the sixth century C.E. reflect energetic debate about its nature; the theories fall into two general categories. The first began with Empedocles (*DK* 31 A 89), who proposed that magnetism was the manifestation of pores and emanations, invisible to the human eye, which let one body exert power over another. The second starts with Thales, who equated magnetism with animation: magnets were said to have a soul, hands and feet, gender, volition, and a need to "eat" or be nourished (*DK* 11

A 22; Pliny, *NH* 36.25; Porphyry, *de Abstinentia* 4.20.264–265). The conception of a magnet as a stone with a soul, or a daimonic force, was long lived; as late as the fourth century C.E., the ceasing of magnetic power was described as the stone "breathing its last" (*ekpnein*) (Ausonius, *Magnus Moselle* 316). Folk customs that claimed that the daimones feared iron encouraged the use of the metal for charms to keep daimones at bay (Hopfner 1974:para. 596). Church fathers described the use of magnets to persuade the gullible of the presence of invisible, daimonic forces (Rufinus, *Historiae ecclesiasicae* 1027.15–1028.1, Ps.-Prosper Aquitanus 834C; Radl 1988:102, 106). These texts, nearly 1,000 years after Plato's *Ion,* reflect the longevity of the concept that magnetism penetrated the divide between the visible and invisible worlds.

The metaphoric range of magnetism is put to ritual work in the context of magic and medicine. This is also a realm with abundant textual and material evidence for rings as tokens of ritual power (Bonner 1950; Hopfner 1974:para. 580–581; Michel 2004). Gemstones appear most frequently in both the archaeological and textual evidence, but the ring's metal band carried metaphoric weight as well, and rings made of metal only, often iron, appear frequently in the literature (Eitrem 1915:63). Ritual preparations augmented and accessed the powers inherent in the materials. These rituals are described in terms appropriate to mystery initiations, as the rings are purified, sanctified, and initiated: the rituals included the inscribing of words and images, but not invariably (Halleux and Schamp 1985:167, 328; Parca 1996:222 n. 15; Socrates and Dionysius, *Peri Lithon* 28). Writing on preserved artifacts shows signs of deliberate obscurity, appropriate for the concern to maintain secrecy in magical rituals (Betz 1995).

As wearable power created in secret rites, these magical amulets and rings offer an appealing comparison for the Samothracian tokens: they represent a pan-Mediterranean cultural category, suitable for a cult whose internationalism expanded over time. Applications of magnetism beyond Samothrace demonstrate the rhetorical principles behind their ritual effectiveness. Magnets offered metaphors of vision, being the stone that exerted an invisible power, and attraction, as it drew things to itself. Magnetic amulets let the user see all he wished, view the future, or peer into the cosmos (*Cyranides* 1.7, 1.21, 1.24; Radl 1988:64). Magnetic powder, strewn on glowing coals, could create the hallucination that a house was falling in, causing potential thieves to flee (Damigeron, *de Virtutibus Lapidum* 30). Galen and Pliny describe the uses of magnets to cure diseases of the eye and remedy problems with vision (Galen, *de Naturalibus facultatibus* 12.204; Pliny, *NH* 36). The magnet's powers to draw things together suited it for love charms as well as poetry, and by extension to tests of fidelity: a magnet placed under the bed pillow would make a faithful wife embrace her husband but would cast a cheating spouse out onto the floor. The same power made it a metaphor for persuasion, so that magnetic amulets ensured success for public speakers, whether they addressed prayers to the gods or orations to fellow citizens (Gregory Theologos, *Poemata Theologica* 2.1.244, 2.2, 2.29; Halleux and Schamp 1985:153–155; Michel 2004:203–207; Orphica oftlineLithica, *Kerygmata* 11). Medical applications for the stone that could draw things together include remedies for infertility, as the magnet could draw and hold the male seed to the womb; it could also hold blood inside as needed and so work to stop abdominal bleeding (Hippocrates, *Diseases of Women* 243; Soranus, *Gynecology* 3.10).

No ancient authors explain why it is that magnetism should be a sign of Samothracian initiation; the logic of the imagery is apparent, however, in the plurality of opinions themselves. Despite the energy of the debates regarding the magnet, agreement eluded ancient philosophers and scientists, and magnetism remained as inscrutable as it was invisible. Cicero, writing in the first century B.C.E., noted that magnetism was a rhetorical trope for the enigmatic (Cicero, *de Divinatione* I.39.86, 7.13, 9.16). Wearers of Samothracian rings could thus manifest the power of their tokens, but they could not offer any explanation for it. This makes the rings an ideal response to the aesthetics of secrecy: the possession of a secret must be announced, but the secret itself maintained, if the secret is to have any social efficacy. The traditions that saw magnetism as a daimon in the stone suggest an even more complex semantic level, which connects the rings to the intricate mythological traditions of the site.

Among the many daimones associated with Samothrace were a group called the Idaian Daktyloi. These were *goetes,* magicians with particular powers to intervene between the living and the dead. In the fourth century B.C.E., the historian Ephoros wrote that they came to Samothrace from their home on Trojan Mt. Ida, bringing spells, mysteries, and initiations; they taught Orpheus himself, who then introduced mysteries to Greece (Ephoros, *FGH* 70 F 104). They were famous for the invention of iron; their group name, "Fingers of Ida," inspired endless punning in the ancient world, including the proposal that it referred to the fingers of the craftsman (Pherekydes, *FGH* 3 F 47; Phoronis, *PEG* fr. 2; Sophokles, *TGF* fr. 337; Stesimbrotos, *FGH* 107 F 12a, 12 b; Strabo 10.3.22). Three of the Daktylic brothers bore overtly metallurgical names: Damnameneus, "hammerer," Akmon, "anvil," and Kelmis, who was metonymic for iron itself. Kelmis appears in an Alexandrian proverb, "Kelmis in iron"; behind the proverb was a well-known story that this Daktyl offended the great mother goddess. As punishment,

he was locked up inside Mt. Ida and turned into iron (Zenobius 4.80). Clement of Alexandria characterized his fate as fratricide and suggested that the tale was the heart of the Samothracian mysteries (Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.14–16). This Mt. Ida was also one of the places for magnetism's discovery: legends told of a Trojan shepherd named Magnes who, pasturing his flocks on the mountain slopes, found that a magnetic force seized his iron shoe nails and the tip of his walking staff (Pliny, *NH* 36.127). This association with magnetite takes more anthropomorphic form in the figure of Herakles the Daktyl. This god was celebrated in Boiotian Hyettos, one of the rare Greek centers for magnetite mining; his cult statue there took the form of an unworked stone, very likely a piece of the local magnetite, associated with healing powers (Etienne and Knoepfler 1976:180; Gruppe 1906:778; Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1959:34 n. 67). Diodorus Siculus reports that women in Crete and the Peloponnesos make incantations and amulets in his name, because of his status as a magician and his skill in initiations; Grotanelli notes that these amulets may have borne his image (Diodorus Siculus 5.64.6–7; Pausanias 9.27.8; Grotanelli 1972). Since magnetite was known as *Herakleia lithos,* "the Herakleian stone," as well as *magnetis* (Etienne and Knoepfler 1976:178–179), it is equally likely that the amulets were made of magnetite itself. Their use by women would be appropriate for the stone's responsiveness to women's concerns, including colic, difficult childbirth, and infertility (Blakely 2006:228–239).

This association between the Daktyloi and magnetism casts light on Kelmis, the daimon trapped inside iron. Mythologically, he is an appropriate image of the daimonic theory of magnetism. As a strategy of secrecy, he reflects the principle of containment, analogous to the breath of Bemba ancestors or relics hidden in their statues. As an image of performance, the rings charged with his force find ethnographic analogy in the need to activate hidden powers—driving a nail through the Zaire figures or providing a song for the Kongo *nkisi.* The rings are artifacts with an implicit performative moment, as suggested in Lucretius' description of Samothracian rings and iron filings placed in a bronze bowl and exposed to a magnet to demonstrate the force of magnetism (Lucretius, *DRN* 6.1043–1047). Such demonstrations would reveal at once both the hidden power of the ring's material and the initiatory status of its owner.

In magic, iron, magnetism, medicine, and amulets, the Daktyloi bring together key semantic elements of the iron rings that were the signs of the cult. These connections, however, are neither unambiguous nor immediately clear. No iconography clarifies their relationship to the island; they are far more associated with sites other than Samothrace; and they were not the only supernaturally powerful inventors of iron but shared that claim with Cyclopes, Chalybes, and other legendary races. They also share their association with the rites with the Kabeiroi, Kouretes, and Korybantes—a situation Strabo dismissed as confusion and attributed to the fact that the groups were essentially interchangeable. The Daktyloi's intricate correlation to the semantics of the rings, however, suggests a more purposeful strategy for this hyperabundance. The ritual categories the daimones characteristically fill offer one of the few distinctions among them. The Daktyloi are magicians; the Kabeiroi are patrons of mystery initiations; Kouretes and Korybantes are patrons of the armed dance and most often blended with each other for that reason. This dance is rooted in the myth of their birth from the earth as full-grown, fully armed warriors, in order to dance around the infant Zeus and so protect him from his father's cannibalism (Blakely 2006:40–44). In ritual contexts, such dances answered a narratological need: Lucian, in the second century C.E., wrote of "dancing out the mysteries" (Lucian, *On the Dance* 15). These distinctions among the daimones suggest that their combined presence on the island was occasioned less by their interchangeability than by their capacity to articulate discrete aspects of the ritual sequence itself. That the daimones of the island's myths reflect on the structure of the rites resonates with the ethnographic evidence that the rites constitute the secret itself—which has no independent propositional content. Samothrace's mythological layers, reflecting on its own structures, would remain opaque to those who had not experienced initiation and unspoken by those who had.

Conclusion

Anthropologies of secrecy encourage archaeological approaches that take a local focus, explore myth seriously, and place the experiential and the cognitive side by side. Brought to Samothrace, these approaches have suggested ways in which the site, its inscriptions, and the small finds of iron rings reflect the relationship of secrecy to political power and the paradoxical quality of its communication. These results, and through them the value of this particular marriage of archaeology and anthropological theory, may be judged on three criteria: coherence, the identification of new questions, and the contribution of archaeology to the anthropological discussion.

The measure of coherence is not only the number of disparate elements brought together but also the identification of strategies that are replicable and adaptable over time. On Samothrace, the models of secrecy reveal a cogency among the physical and textual traditions of the site that lies outside the comparison to Eleusis or the correlation between

material and text. The restriction of entrance and lines of sight, euphemisms, abbreviations, and a thematic repetition of the archaic and the chthonic—in language, iconography, ritual installations, and architecture—resonate with themes and dynamics articulated in the site's mythologies. These myths enable the dynamics of secrecy through productive ambiguity and expanding polysemnity. They also, however, elude firm dating. The earliest evidence can never be considered more than the date at which the myth took literary form, and it often consists of abstracts and fragments from works now lost. In the study of living cultures, such concerns are irrelevant, as investigation is located in the present; in an archaeological project, they cannot be ignored. However appealing the coherence that emerges from the combination of myths and material evidence, its relevance in the site's historical context must be tested rather than assumed.

The local focus of the investigation responds to this need. On Samothrace, the archaizing and chthonic focus common to the site and the myths is relevant to the economic concerns that characterized Greek interaction in the region. Samothracian Greeks depended for their economic well-being on successful mediation with the Thracians. The myths evoke them through the narratological type of the daimones who embody the pre-Greek inhabitants of the territory; the use of the Thracian language on site reinforces the concept. An encounter with pre-Greek daimones on the Samothracian site thus becomes a ritual embodiment of the encounters that enabled Greek commerce and settlement in the region, responding to an economic concern as essential and perennial as the agriculture celebrated at Eleusis. Graham has noted how the indigenous traditions of Lemnos drew a response from the Athenian Greeks, who maintained the rites but Atticized them with torches and nocturnal celebrations; the result was a cult that articulated both Greek and local traditions. Samothrace suggests an opposite strategy toward an analogous end, as the signals of indigenous, archaic, and autochthonous culture were not only maintained through the life of the rites but even fabricated in the later period of the site's floruit (Graham 2002:254–255).

This responsiveness to local need suggests a flexibility that is reflected as well in the cult's ability to change over time. These changes responded to the cult's growing prestige, which at once demanded and benefited from increased publicity. Neither the euphemisms in the inscriptions nor the tradition of magnetized rings appears in the earliest evidence for the cult; the relevant inscriptions do not appear until after the death of Alexander in 322 B.C.E., and the first evidence of the rings' magnetism comes in the first-century-B.C.E. writings of Lucretius. While both inscriptions and rings reflect familiar Greek cultural conventions, their force as mechanisms of secrecy derives from the cluster of daimones who are unique to the Samothracian rites. These daimones are present in the earliest textual evidence for the mysteries; it is their oblique materialization in these announcements of initiation that constitutes an innovation. The ritual secrecy that defines the cult as a mystery is thus linked to innovation and change.

Models of secrecy yield several new approaches, methodological and interpretive, for Samothrace. They clarify the limitations of comparison with Eleusis and suggest the productive potential of a comparison with Lemnos—celebrating the same gods, situated in the same sea, and yet divergent enough in their histories to generate more-focused questions regarding the dynamics of the Samothracian cult itself. They challenge the traditional archaeological approach to myth, which is limited to iconographic and epigraphic manifestations on site, and propose a broader reach into evidence from ritual types beyond the sanctuaries. At a historical level, the exclusion of the daimones from inscriptions problematized their semantic relevance for the cult. To the extent that the daimones may have enabled discussion of a perennial economic concern—the interaction between Greeks and non-Greeks—their inclusion in the analysis of the rites open further doors for investigation, which focus on the social and historical dynamics of human interaction rather than the contents of the secret itself.

It is in the question of secrecy and change over time that archaeology's capacity for contribution to the anthropological discussion is most clear. Archaeology is uniquely positioned to measure the capacity for change over the *longue durée* and in a supraregional context. For Samothrace, we are not limited to imagining the moment when Lucretius' informant demonstrated the powers of his Samothracian ring—the kind of interpersonal exchange that is essential for the ethnographic experience. Samothrace responded to the challenge of innovation by reinventing its own history and by materializing the secrecy that defined the rites in portable, wearable tokens of initiation. These tokens created and responded to the rise of social power that is, as Simmel and the anthropologists inform us, the essence of secrecy's practice.

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