

Plan of the South Nekropolis in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, Samothrace

When *The Nekropoleis*, volume 11 of the series, *Samothrace. Excavations Conducted by the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University*, was published in 1998 by Princeton University Press, it did not include a plan of the important nekropolis to the south of the Sanctuary.¹ Within the catalogue of tombs, the author, Elsbeth Dusenbery, refers to grid squares that she calls sections, which clearly indicate a topographic system of recording for this burial region. However, neither the grid system nor the tombs are anchored geographically to the site. The diaries of the excavation of the South Nekropolis did not contain the plan, nor was a copy preserved in the Samothrace Archives at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University.

By happy coincidence, we recently found a copy of the original excavation plan. At the close of the 2013 field season, when the American team was packing its equipment and records into storage in anticipation of the renovation of the Samothrace Archaeological Museum, an envelope containing photocopies of 37 excavation plan sheets on graph paper was found behind boxes of supplies in the conservation lab.² The drawings were immediately recognized as the lost plan of the South Nekropolis.

Each sheet represented a section, and some sheets joined together two sections. The sections were labeled with Roman numerals established by Dusenbery and Andreas Vavritsas during the 1957, 1960, and 1962 excavation seasons. The numeration of the sections roughly reflects the course of the excavation. The corner points of each section were uniquely named so that they could be connected to adjacent sections.³ A master grid sheet showing the locations of the sections and the names of the corner points accompanied the set of individual drawings.⁴

¹ Professor Ioannis Akamatis, a close personal friend of Elsbeth Dusenbery, notes that Dusenbery was very concerned about the plan and discussed with the Press how best to incorporate it, but in the end the project was abandoned (p.c. Ioannis Akamatis).

² The discovery was made by Kathryn Brugioni, conservation student at the IFA.

³ The names of the corner points began with letters of the Roman alphabet, and when these ran out, double letters, Greek letters, and object names such as beer, ale, and cow were used. Clearly never intended for publication, the last point names recall Dusenbery's delightful sense of humor.

⁴ On the master grid sheet, the labeled sections include I-V East, XXXI East, I-XII, XIV-XXV, XXIX-XXXI, XXXIV-XLI, XLIX-LV, LIX-LXI. The recovered folder includes sheets for the following squares: I, I East, II, II East, III, III East, IV, IV East, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XII East, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXIII, XXIV, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXVI, XXXVII, XXXVIII, XLI, L, and LI. In addition, there was a loose drawing of the "bomos" in the Rubble Structure that was labeled as belonging to section XIII.

The plan was conceived relative to the basic geography of the site, with the bed of the ravine set as a north-south axis. The ravine was labeled "East." The squares were then cardinally oriented from this axis. Most of the sections were four meters square. Exceptions include the area immediately to the east, which dropped off into the ravine, and the second row of sections from the east, which were only three meters wide (east to west). The sections were drawn at 1:20 scale. Each burial was marked with the SN number given at the time of excavation. Later, each burial included in the publication was given a new S number for the catalogue.

To make the original excavation plan available to the readers of *Samothrace* volume 11, we united the 37 sections into a single digital plan showing the disposition and relationships of graves and structures in the South Nekropolis as recorded by Elsbeth Dusenbery.

Procedure

We brought each sheet of the plan into AutoCAD as a raster file, where they were scaled and underlain on the grid system of sections by matching their corner points. There were some slight mismatches between objects that crossed between sections. The point marked Ale/K in section VI was clearly out of place, but the adjacent corners that were correctly positioned clarified its proper position. We traced the tombs represented on the composite plan. There were minor inconsistencies of scale between some of the tombs as drawn and as published (see below).

We then scaled the reconstructed map to fit within the current survey of the site and region made with a Leica Total Station. It became immediately clear that the "East" established by the rim of the ravine for the purpose of field recording actually runs 37 degrees west of north. In securing the orientation, we were also constrained by the fact that the section containing the major architectural feature, the Rubble Structure, was not included in the preserved sheets. The diaries chronicling the excavation of the South Nekropolis in 1957, 1962, 1963, and 1964, helped to situate some of the graves in size, position, or relationship. We then attempted to secure the orientation of the plan based on several key tombs that are drawn on the Dusenbery plan and can be seen in the South Nekropolis today.

These tombs include:

1. pithos burial, S189 (SN9A) and the adjacent sarcophagus S124 (SN10) in section I,
 2. the series of four broken blocks forming burial S137 (SN121) in section XV;
 3. sarcophagi S158 (SN24) and S123 (SN29) on the eastern side of sections III-IV East;
 4. tomb S228 (SN282) and the line of stones in section VI;
 5. two unnumbered sarcophagi, one crossing sections II-III and the other inside the "Rubble Structure."
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We also worked with Dusenbery's written locations of certain tombs in relation to the "Rubble Structure," e.g., S152 (SN75).

In general, while the relations of burials within each square appear to be accurate, the overall relationship of the burials across the region should be understood as approximate. Dusenbery did not survey the region. Rather, she worked with a fixed measuring point established at the southeastern corner of the "Rubble Structure." We were unable to achieve a perfect correlation between monuments across the entire region. However, it was possible to identify exactly which tombs she represented. In order to create a viable plan, we made certain adjustments within the squares so that the drawing more closely approximated the surveyed positions of the exposed tombs. In making adjustments, we worked closely with Dusenbery's notes, diaries, and the final publication. We aimed for a margin of error of less than 0.50 m.

The most serious adjustments were made to S19 (SN297), S123 (SN29), and S97 (SN 294) in sections III East-IV East. These burials were shifted south to align with the corresponding surveyed graves. S128 (SN5) and S153 (SN6) in section III East were shifted slightly south to accommodate the aforementioned adjustment. The burials around the Rubble Structure were rotated together to avoid overlapping the wall. These include the following: S185 (SN132) in section VIII, S152 (SN75) in section VII, SN135A in section VIII, SN135B in section VII, SN135C in section XIV, and SN135D in section VII.

We were able to add several features to Dusenbery's plan. Based on descriptions in the diaries and publication, we included six additional burials: S68 (SN204) in section I, S91 (SN205) in section I, S64 (SN9F) in section III, S274 (SN147) in section XIX, S239 (SN231) in sections XXXI-XXXIV, and an unnumbered sarcophagus inside the Rubble Structure. In sections IV East-V East, we added a burial that Dusenbery does not describe but which is clearly visible in the ground today. We also inserted the drawing of the "bomos" found on a silver-toned photocopy of Dusenbery's notes, which we were able to verify based on the blocks today in situ.⁵

Using the dimensions and orientation provided in the publication, we were able to complete partially drawn tombs such as S158 (SN24) in section III East, S242 (SN 105) in sections XV-XVI, S160 (SN125) in sections XV-VIII, S195 (SN182) in sections XXXI-XII, S228 (SN282) in section VI, S172 (SN290) in section L, S 166 (SN 128) in section XV, S238 (SN227) in sections XXXI-XXXIV, S156 (SN138) in sections XX-XXI, S214 (SN17G-2) in section IX, S243 (SN17G-3) in section IX, S258 (SN17G-1) in section IX, and S165 (SN293) in section L. We shortened S124 (SN10), which had been elongated in the process of piecing the squares together, to its correct length. The revised form fits closely with the surveyed grave in situ.

⁵ In the publication, Dusenbery (1998, p. 70) refers to the "bomos" as possibly a subfoundation of a pillar.

From the diaries, it is clear that Dusenbery worked with two sets of sections XVIII and XIX. In her diary, she locates sections XVIII and XIX along the northwest side of the Rubble Structure. However, on her plan, she locates sections XVIII and XIX to the south between sections XVII and XXXVII. Between the plan and the diary we were able to distinguish which tombs belonged to each section. We have labeled the duplicate sections situated along the Rubble Structure as XVIII*bis* and XIX*bis*.

Results

The plan presented here captures the character and complexity of the South Nekropolis. The tombs are in correct relationship to one another, but their precise position in the Nekropolis should be understood as approximate.

The plan has three layers. The plan is layered so that the user can turn off or on the color-coding by period, the catalogue (S) numbers, and the excavation (SN) numbers of the tombs.

The accompanying excel spreadsheet was created to understand the relationship of the information given on the plan to that published in volume 11. The spreadsheet cross-lists the field-assigned SN burial numbers noted on the plan with the S numbers assigned in the published catalogue. Any discrepancies between the descriptions from the publication and what is seen on the plan as well as any revisions and additions we made are described in "Notes and Additions." We have also added published date of each tomb.

Finally, readers should bear in mind that the Dusenbery plan and her published text had set an arbitrary "East" at the edge of the eastern ravine. However, this direction should be understood more accurately as northeast.

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