“Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora”

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The William Metcalf Lecturer for 2013-2014

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Galbraith Building GB221, 35 St George Street, University of Toronto St George Campus

Although long considered the most significant architectural project of Classical Athens, the Periklean building program still has much to reveal. In questioning modern conventions of viewing buildings on the Acropolis, this presentation reappraises how victory monuments were observed and perceived in the fifth century BC. The starting point is to show that the Mnesiklean Propylaia, the ceremonial gateway into the sanctuary on the Acropolis, is also a monumental exit that frames the island of Salamis, the location of a watershed event in the history and topography of Athens—the defeat of the Persian armada in 480 BC. Instead of seeing the Propylaia as an anomaly, it is argued that it was instrumental to a new tradition of using architecture to orchestrate sightlines between monuments across the city. Buildings on the Acropolis worked in tandem with the stoas in the heart of Athens, the Classical Agora, to create a ritual topography that showcased Athenian heroism and triumph. This analysis therefore widens the canonical perspective of the Periklean program, proposing for the first time that it extended to and incorporated the Classical Agora.

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