

Archaeological site of Aphaia on Aigina



It is situated on the top of a hill covered with pines, in the NE part of the island, and is distinguished by the very good preservation of the Late Archaic temple.

The sanctuary was initially dedicated to the cult of Aphaia, a local deity later assimilated by Athena. Finds dating from the prehistoric period – including figurines of breeding women – point to the conclusion that the

cult was established very early, possibly in the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. Judging from votive offerings and, mostly, from building activity, the sanctuary flourished mainly in the Archaic period. At the end of the period, around 500 B.C. and a little later, the sanctuary assumed the monumental form it preserves today. The area was evened off by the construction of isodomic walls which retained the earth on which the temple was erected, along with the altar, the propylon and various lesser buildings. A second period of prosperity came in the mid-4th century, leaving its traces on the remodelling of the altar and the construction of new buildings to the SE of the temenos. Pottery evidence of the following periods suggests restricted activity on the site until the beginning of the 1st century B.C., when the sanctuary definitely declined.

It is mentioned by Pausanias in the 2nd century A.D. Later on, probably in the 3rd century A.D., the metal clamps bonding the architectural members of the temple, were removed and, as a result, parts of the superstructure collapsed. Its position, though, was not forgotten in the following centuries. In 1811, the English Cockerell and the German von Hallerstein, stole the sculptures of the pediments and transferred them abroad, to sell them later to king Ludwig I of Bavaria. Today they are on display in the Alte Glyptothek of Munich.



The first systematic archaeological investigation was begun in 1901 by the German Ad. Furtwaengler. Work was resumed in 1966 by the German D. Ohly, who excavated on the site until 1979 and was continued by his collaborators until 1988.



The Temple

The imposing temple was built in ca. 500 B.C. An earlier building existed on the same position, built in the 6th century B.C. but it was burnt down in around 510 B.C. It was Doric, peripteral, with 6 x 12 columns, made of poros stone. Its destroyed architectural members were buried during the construction of the artificial terrace on which the new temple was erected. The new temple is also Doric, peripteral, with 6 x 12 columns.

The pronaos and the opisthodomos are flanked by two columns in antis. The cella is divided into three aisles by two two-storied colonnades, of five Doric columns each. The temple measures 13.77 x 28.81 m. on the stylobate and is made of local poros. All the porous surfaces of the temple were covered with stucco except for the crepis. Inside the temple, the chryselephantine statue of the goddess was kept, protected by railings in the pronaos and opisthodomos.



The Altar

At the middle of the facade of the temple, a ramp, 2.90 m. wide, was constructed, connecting the temple with the altar. The latter, was located to the east of the temple and was 12m. wide.

Propylon

It was situated in the south part of the temenos and gave access to the sanctuary. Both its facades - north and south - ended in two columns between antae (in antis). The inner transverse wall had an opening at the middle. The northern room ended at three stairways leading to the interior of the sanctuary.

Apart from these main structures, a house for the priests was built to the SE of the sanctuary, while outside the enclosed area, near the propylon, religious activity connected with Pan, was attested. Votive offerings were erected around the temple.