

Aegina, Panhellenism, and the Persian Wars: A New Analysis of the Temple to Aphaia

Since their entrance into scholarly discussion, the temple to Aphaia on Aegina and its pedimental sculpture have garnered significant debate due to their contested chronology. Andrew Stewart's landmark study on the origins of the severe sculptural style dated both temple and sculpture to after 480 B.C.E. (Stewart 2008). In this paper, I use historical, formal, and iconographical analyses to pursue a new interpretation of this temple based on Stewart's redating

A date after 480 B.C.E. changes current understandings of the temple and its sculpture in three principle ways. First, it places the temple's construction within a more precise and much different historical context compared to previously argued chronologies (Watson 2011). Aegina supported the Persians in their first invasion of Greece from 492-490 B.C.E. (Hdt. 6.49), but, during the second Persian invasion, played a crucial role at the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C.E. (Hdt. 8.86). Despite the island's contribution to the Greek naval victory, a close reading of the *Histories* shows that, in the decades after the invasions, poleis still viewed Aegina suspiciously as an eastern sympathizer. Second, the temple's redating places its sculpture within the iconographical and artistic trends of the early Classical Period. The sculptural groups' depiction of two Trojan War myths were part of a new Panhellenic visual language. This iconography posited "the other" in opposition to a constructed Greek identity. Moreover, with the addition of new formal analyses, the pediments can now be viewed as part of the severe style phenomenon, which developed rapidly and ubiquitously after 480 B.C.E. The severe style imposed a relational reading for viewers by implicitly juxtaposing the temple's sculpture with other recently erected monuments across the Greek world. Finally, the redating means both pedimental groups were created simultaneously and were intended to be viewed in tandem. Previous studies have considered the east pedimental group a "replacement" for an earlier original (Ohly 1976).

Instead, both Trojan War myth scenes were mutually reinforcing, creating a coherent panhellenic and regional expression of victory.

Considering these new data points, I conclude the temple and its sculpture were intended as a united visual program to articulate Aeginetan identity in the aftermath of the second Persian invasion. The temple asserted “Greekness” amid the codification of ethnicity in the Classical Period. However, this visual display was inherently polyvalent in its use of Panhellenic visual language and a distinctly regional subtext. This challenges recent explanations that argue the temple was a symbolic monument in Aegina’s conflict with Athens (Watson 2011).

Bibliography

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