

The Origins of the Temple Architecture and Cult of Apollo at Didyma

The plan of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma is unusual and varies from the traditional Greek temple, but few scholars adequately explain why the temple is different. With a severe lack of historical evidence to help us understand Didyma, other than Pausanias's quote "the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma is older than the settlement of the Ionians" (Parke 1985), scholars are forced to make assumptions based on the architecture itself. While some argue for an Egyptian influence as the reason for the strange layout, other scholars suggest that the temple layout is related to the influences of the local cult of Apollo in the Anatolian region (Brown 2004; Parke 1986). In addition to the local cult, architectural traditions of the culture may also have affected the temple plan (Mellink 1985). In this paper, I explore the differences and similarities of the Didymaion to other oracular Apolline temples, such as those at Delphi and Claros, and propose that this occurs primarily due to an Anatolian cultural influence.

The Didymaion is known to be one of the largest temples known in antiquity, as well as one of the most unusual. Like other Apolline oracular sites, the temple incorporates a separate area for the oracle, the *adyton*, but there are few other similarities (Parke 1986). The temple layout is far from regular and manipulates the visitor controlling their behavior and offering "opportunities to affect their experience" (Hollinstead 2015). As they move through the temple, the worshipper would have encountered an unusual god-sized threshold, been forced through claustrophobic side passages to enter the open air *cella*, and possibly climb a large staircase leading to an upper level of the temple (Tomlinson 1976). All of these features are extremely rare, and it remains largely unexplored as to why this temple strays so far from others in design.

In trying to understand the temple at Didyma, it is necessary to look at other oracular temples dedicated to Apollo and possible influences from local culture. The ruins of the

Didymaion have similarities both to temples dedicated to Apollo on the Greek mainland, specifically Delphi, and in Asia Minor, Claros (Parke 1986). It is argued that the Delphic cult to Apollo, due to its prominent Panhellenic status, was incredibly influential on the Hellenistic revival of the oracle at Didyma in 334 BCE, when Alexander visited the site (Ibid.). Additionally, Claros is significant to the discussion of the Didymaion because it too has strange architecture that differs from the common temple plan (Parke 1985). These sites, while influential or similar, do not directly mimic the plan of the Didymaion. However, Anatolian traditions could be influencing the architecture. It has been argued that Apollo himself has his origin as the “hunter” god in the Anatolian religion (Brown 2004). The Greek Apolline cult at Didyma goes back at least to the Archaic time period; however, the cult itself stems from Anatolian culture or at least likely had a longer tradition at Didyma specifically (Brown 2004; Park 1985).

Local traditions in cult, referenced by Parke, and architecture directly influence later generations regardless of whether these people were culturally Greek, Anatolian, or a hybrid (Mellink 1985; Parke 1985). This appears to be what affected the plan of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma. I conclude that it is possible to extrapolate from the rare architectural plan at Didyma some of the activities of the oracular cult of Apollo. This information will help to gain a greater understanding of Hellenistic and Eastern Greek religious architecture, the origins of the cult of Apollo, Greek colonization, and numerous other topics.

Bibliography

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