

Aphaia: A Goddess on Her Own

The goddess Aphaia was associated with the hunt, seafaring, warfare, fertility, birth and childcare, and coming of age (Polinskaya 2013). There are strong similarities between these spheres of control and those of Artemis, whose spheres of control are mainly the hunt, wild animals, seafaring, mistress of animals, coming of age and transitions, wildness, and childbirth (Budin 2018, 1-3). This paper will explore the relationship between the goddesses Aphaia and Artemis by juxtaposing their respective mythological narratives and the archaeological evidence of their worship. The Temple of Aphaia at Aegina, as well as the literary tradition surrounding Aphaia, are murky and complicated. The Temple of Aphaia at Aegina was attributed by early scholars to Zeus Hellanios and later to Hera until finally it was attributed to Aphaia. The literary tradition involving Aphaia is a complex. Pausanias, Antonius Liberalis and Callimachus all tell mythological stories of Britomartis while other authors, such as Aristophanes in *Frogs*, mention her in passing, usually in association with Artemis.

The mythological stories of Britomartis, depending on the author, vary slightly in terms of narrative and their connection to Artemis. However, they all have a version of her fleeing Crete and being saved by nets, giving her the name Diktyнна, who was a goddess worshipped on Crete. She then fled to the island of Aegina where she was named Aphaia, meaning the one who disappears since she vanished into the sacred grove of Artemis on Aphaia where her cult grew and where the temple now resides. Aphaia is only worshipped on Aegina, whereas Britomartis and Diktyнна are worshipped on Crete and several other places. In every story she is connected to Artemis. However, the sphere of influence that Aphaia commands is unique to her and while in many places there is overlap, it still varies from that of Artemis, including male priests and

dedicators to Aphaia (Polinskaya, 2013. 189). In addition to the overlapping spheres of influence, Aphaia, as Britomarits, is described as a girl who wants to remain a virgin, a characteristic that is the same as Artemis.

The Temple of Aphaia at Aegina was built around 470 BCE. There is also archaeological evidence of a Bronze Age Mycenaean cult with a varying archaeological assemblage which suggests a female goddess associated with childcare, fertility, hunting, and the sea, which are all characteristics that are seen with the later Aphaia (Pilafidis-Williams, 1987. 342). This Bronze Age cult may be a predecessor to the later Aphaia. This cult does not have existing evidence of a temple or altar but there are sufficient archaeological remains to still make interpretations about the function and realms of control of the associated divinity.

By using archaeological remains to interpret spheres of influence and styles of worship and social roles of the respective goddesses as well as the literary traditions, this paper will show the relationship between Aphaia and Artemis. Through comparing styles of worship and social roles, this paper will compare the relationship that each goddess had with their respective worshippers, which is an important step towards understanding their relationship to each other. This paper will show that Aphaia, rather than simply being the Aeginan version of or being an epithet of Artemis, was a unique goddess with a similar origin to Artemis but ultimately with her own local persona and a distinct cult influenced by, and potentially drawn from, the Bronze Age cult goddess.

Bibliography

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