

“THE ENDURING GODDESS: Artemis and Mary, Mother of Jesus”

Carla Ionescu

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## Abstract:

Tradition states that the most popular Olympian deities are Apollo, Athena, Zeus and Dionysius. These divinities played key roles in the communal, political and ritual development of the Greco-Roman world. This work suggests that this deeply entrenched scholarly tradition is fissured with misunderstandings of Greek and Ephesian popular culture, and provides evidence that clearly suggests Artemis is the most prevalent and influential goddess of the Mediterranean, with roots embedded in the community and culture of this area that can be traced further back in time than even the arrival of the Greeks. In fact, Artemis' reign is so fundamental to the cultural identity of her worshippers that even when facing the onslaught of early Christianity, she could not be deposed. Instead, she survived the conquering of this new religion under the guise of Mary, Mother of Jesus.

Using methods of narrative analysis, as well as review of archeological findings, this work demonstrates that the customs devoted to the worship of Artemis were fundamental to the civic identity of her followers, particularly in the city of Ephesus in which Artemis reigned not only as Queen of Heaven, but also as Mother, Healer and Saviour. Reverence for her was as so deeply entrenched in the community of this city, that after her temple was destroyed, and Christian churches were built on top of her sacred places, her citizens brought forward the only female character in the new ruling religion of Christianity, the Virgin Mary, and re-named her *Theotokos*, Mother of God, within its city walls.

The fundamental position of this work is that a fusion took place between the ancient worship of Artemis in Ephesus, and the elevation of Mary to *Theotokos*, and that this fusion is not a result of the church-initiated action to convert the Ephesians, but rather the Ephesians forcing the early church to accommodate their traditions of Artemis by reshaping and reinterpreting the authority and responsibilities of the Virgin Mary.

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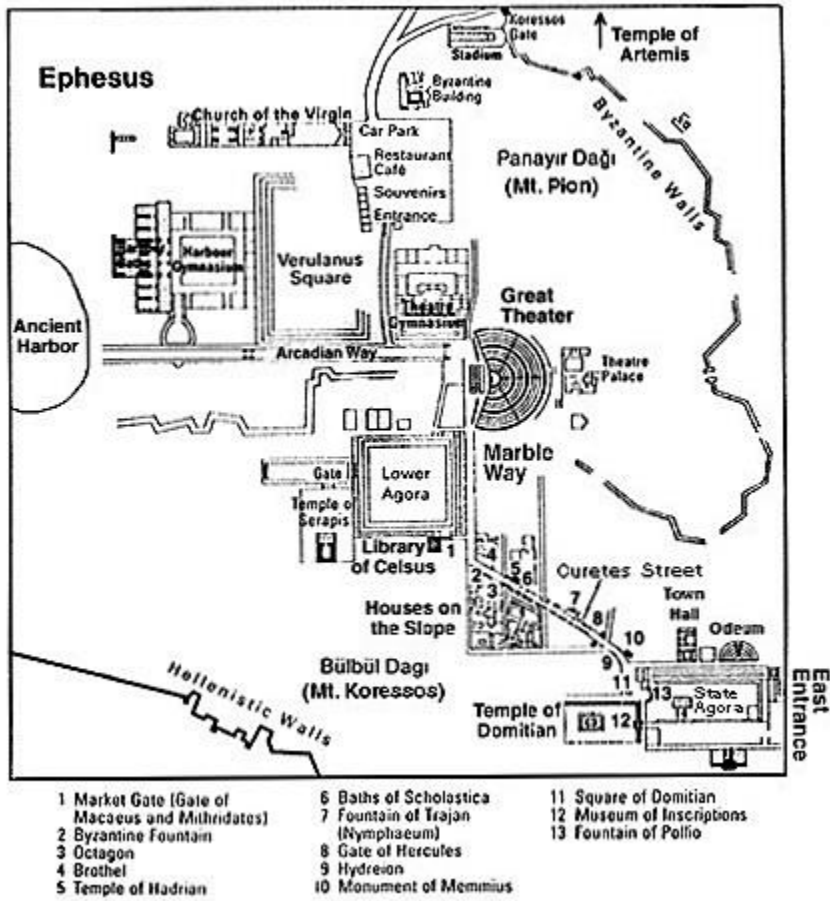
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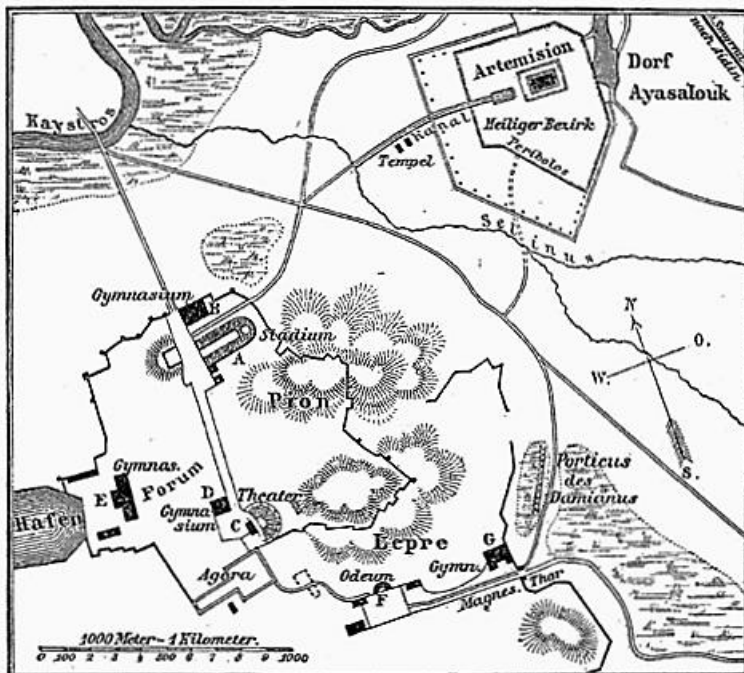
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## THE ENDURING GODDESS

*Now is come the last age of the Cumaean prophecy:  
The great cycle of periods is born anew.  
Now returns the [Virgin]...  
Now from high heaven a new generation comes down.*  
- Virgil *Fourth Eclogue* (4-7)

### INTRODUCTION

I came across Artemis Ephesia in an undergraduate biblical studies class. I was working on a paper about the worship of Greek deities in the broader Mediterranean area and stumbled upon a picture of her unique statue in Ephesus. I remember staring at the photograph trying to reconcile the familiar depiction of her as *Mistress of the Hunt* in Greek myth, with her being revered as Mother, Healer, and Queen, by the Ephesians. Since that time, I have noticed numerous details from Greek history, archeology and ritual culture, often glimpsed through obscure passages in ancient texts and in the writings of unsuspecting contemporary scholars. I have collected these seemingly random pieces and assembled them here.

Classical Greek historians claim that the most popular Olympian deities are Apollo, Athena, Zeus and Dionysius. Tradition states that these divinities played key roles in the communal, political and ritual development of the Greco-Roman world. My research shows that this deeply entrenched scholarly tradition is fissured with misunderstandings of Greek and Ephesian popular culture. In this work I provide evidence that clearly suggests that Artemis is the most prevalent and influential goddess of the Mediterranean, with roots embedded in the



community and culture of this area that can be traced further back in time than even the arrival of the Greeks. In fact, Artemis' reign is so fundamental to the cultural identity of her worshippers that even when facing the onslaught of early Christianity, she could not be deposed. Instead, she survived the conquering of this new religion under the guise of Mary, Mother of Jesus.

This work demonstrates that the customs devoted to the worship of Artemis were fundamental to the civic identity of her followers, particularly in the city of Ephesus in which Artemis reigned not only as Queen of Heaven, but also as Mother, Healer and Saviour. Reverence for her was so deeply entrenched in the community of this city, that after her temple was destroyed, and Christian churches were built on top of her sacred places, her citizens brought forward the only female character in the new ruling religion of Christianity, the Virgin Mary, and re-named her *Theotokos*, Mother of God, within its city walls. The fundamental position of this work is that a fusion took place between the ancient worship of Artemis in Ephesus, and the elevation of Mary to *Theotokos*, and that this fusion is not a result of the church initiated action to convert the Ephesians, but rather the Ephesians forcing the early church to accommodate their traditions of Artemis by reshaping and reinterpreting the authority and responsibilities of the Virgin Mary.

This finding has strategic implications. Paul's attempt to replace the Ephesian Goddess with a male deity, the Christ, was found wanting. Rather, early Christianity was pressured by popular devotion into accepting both a Goddess and a God. The strategy of confrontation was

replaced by one of accommodation, the clear result of popular demand by the laity. It also testifies to the enduring power of the feminine within religious practice and belief.<sup>1</sup>

## A SURVEY OF LITERATURE

It was extremely difficult to dig through scholarly works on archaic Greek ritual and myth only to find that Artemis had been largely ignored and set aside as a young virgin girl who loves animals and the hunt. While Homer and Herodotus did nothing to convey the influence of Artemis in Greek culture, Pausanias (c. 110-180) was able to illuminate the complexities and plethora of her worship and temples. I spent many hours tracing Pausanias' footsteps and noting every corner, seaside, and city where a temple to Artemis was found. Pausanias cites dozens of such sites, many of which still exist today as one drives around the Peloponnesus. Numerous other primary sources were consulted in the hope of piecing together the earliest worship of Artemis and her etiology. Aeschylus, Hesiod, and Callimachus are some of the foundational primary texts when looking at the tradition of the Greek Artemis. Their writings are mostly analyzed in Chapter One and Two, and used to establish the mythological position of Artemis in

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this work the sources and discussion presented here are based on Early Christian and Greco-Roman representations of the divine feminine. Jewish traditions regarding the feminine divine during this time period, e.g. the concept of *shekhina*, the feminine presence of God that dwells in Israel, is reflected in rabbinic writings (e.g. *b. Sanh.* 39a, 103b; *b. Yoma* 56b). These writings address a manifestation of the feminine-masculine relationship expressed in the connections between Asherah and Yahweh, or Wisdom (*hochmah*, which is feminine) and Yahweh. Although the context of Early Christian mythology is based in Jewish traditions, and Mary was a Jewish woman, the narrative analysed in this work shows that Early Christian authority, as well as the Ephesians of this time, did not explicitly discuss or debate Judaic elements.

the Greek pantheon. However, it is Pausanias' records of Artemis at Ephesus that provide reference to the pre-Greek traditions of this area.

During the course of this research I have come across numerous artifacts describing the authority, influence and widespread worship of Artemis, that it is truly surprising no one has put them together before. This collection of data identifies Artemis as Parthenogenetic Mother, Virgin, Saviour, Healer of all, and the Queen of life and death. The stories and ritual practices of the cult of Artemis all over the Mediterranean are often dismissed as remnants of mythology; however, I find it difficult to believe that this is fiction, alone, and argue that they point to something more important about the actual beliefs and rites of those who worshiped, and fought for her, despite the repeated conquering of new cultures and religions.

While primary sources were used to identify the remnants of worship in the ancient period, secondary scholarship was consulted in order to contextualize this material. Early scholarship such as the work of Maria Gimbutas, Elinor Gadon, Rianne Eisler and Rosemary Radford Ruether were foundational in addressing the archaeological and anthropological debates about the position of female deities in the Neolithic period. Many of the goddesses described in these texts are now viewed as archetypal and can be observed throughout history and into modern culture. The use of such texts supports my argument for the fusion of ancient mythologies into conquering religions in the Mediterranean and modern-day Middle East. Although these authors disagree about whether or not goddesses transitioned easily within a variety of communities, most of these scholars agree that some form of synthesis can be evidenced from both archeological and anthropological findings.

Ruether maintains that although women were gatherers and agriculturists there is no logical reason to believe that they also did not hunt or participate in other activities labelled “male.” She agrees with Cynthia Eller when she states that even if female participation in “male” activities is true, that does not make these cultures matriarchal or matrifocal. Although she recognizes Gimbutas as a published and credible archaeologist, she does criticise her significant leaning towards the interpretation that her findings are enough evidence to create a matriarchal world ruined by patriarchal barbarians. Ruether is hesitant to rely on evidence found from the early Neolithic period because we simply have no evidence of ancient conceptions of religion and ritual; she also criticizes Gimbutas for presenting a monotheistic Goddess culture in this area that simply does not have any supporting evidence.<sup>2</sup>

Other secondary texts of Greek and Roman religious cultures are specialized in the developments of myth and the status of religious practices and rituals within these communities. Pamela Sue Anderson’s work on the significance of myth is fundamental in rethinking the importance of stories and legends in the contextualizing of culture and ritual. Anderson claims that myth is different from constitutive reason which determines empirical knowledge. Unlike empirical knowledge, myth does not create knowledge by either compiling empirical facts or manipulating the value of words. Instead, myths are necessary in setting the limits of human knowledge and so they serve a practical function. Any attempt to force myths into the role of constituting knowledge is dangerous as it ignores the distinction between contingent knowledge and the necessary conditions of belief.<sup>3</sup> Myths are stories which are distinguished by a high degree of constancy, and their narrative core invites an equally pronounced capacity for marginal

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<sup>2</sup> Ruether 2005, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson 1998, p 27.

variation. These two characteristics make myths transmissible by tradition, and their constancy produces the attraction of recognizing them in an artistic, or ritual representation.<sup>4</sup> That being established, it is then inadequate to merely propose that any religion can “conquer” and move against the old myths and traditions without consequence. According to Anderson, a mere reversal of power cannot confront the mythical configurations of the divine reality especially as myths are viewed as expressions of our desires, loves, and fears, which remain part of our personal and cultural histories.<sup>5</sup> Again this demonstrates the power of popular devotion, a bottom-up approach to developing theology.

Helmut Koester’s collection of essays and Dieter Knibbe’s research provide supporting evidence that the myth of Artemis at Ephesus was foundational to the civic identity of the Ephesians. Listing numerous processions, festivals, and celebrations of sanctuary and wealth, the Ephesians saw themselves as favored by their all-powerful goddess. She reigned supreme in her city and was revered by emperors, politicians, and powerful individuals, as well as commoners, pilgrims, and foreigners. Koester suggests that being Ephesian meant being a follower of Artemis, and therefore the identity of the citizens was deeply rooted in their daily worship of this female divinity. Knibbe’s work provides evidence that the Artemis of Ephesus was significantly altered from the Artemis of Greek myth, and this is clear in the depictions of her images at Ephesus, and her position as Mother, Saviour and Queen. The Ephesians enjoyed centuries of prosperity and singularity, and successfully resisted the influence of numerous foreign gods and goddesses brought in by conquering outsiders. According to Knibbe, the worship of Artemis lasted well into the fourth century despite the repetitive attacks of Christianity. However, by the

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

fifth century, the conversion of many Ephesians to Christianity forced the citizens of the sacred city into a religious dilemma; how could they reconcile their civic identity as worshipers of an all-powerful female divinity with the new single-minded, male-centered, religion offered by the early Christian church? A compromise is required, a compromise that maintained the Ephesian identity as unique and singular, but could also be synthesized into the encroaching traditions of the Christian church.

Sally Cunneen argues that during the first few centuries of the early church, the exclusion of female images left many people, whose experience was to connect with life-producing powerful female divinities, feeling isolated and helpless. This work argues that at Ephesus, the pressure for the elevation of Mary as *Theotokos*, Mother of God, helped to eradicate this disconnection for the Ephesians. We can catch a glimpses of the Virgin Mary as a medium through which the congregation can challenge the assumptions of power and hierarchy in every era. Cunneen states that women have related to Mary in other ways than have been suggested to them, and this becomes incorporated into mainstream religion. The tendency of popular assumptions to trickle up and merge with church teaching is particularly clear in the hard-won unity of the view that culminated in the declaration of Mary as *Theotokos* at the Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cunneen 1996, p. 356.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

For this work, I have approached ancient and secondary texts and iconography using a number of methodologies, which, given the nature of what is being proposed, warrant some attention. First and foremost, I utilize the methodological approach of neo-euhemerism.<sup>7</sup> This means I analyze mythology and legends as sources of important clues about historical events, as well as, ancient cultural, and cultic, practices. The term *neo-euhemerism* derives from the fourth-century writer Euhemerus who investigated the actions and places of birth, and burial, of the divinities of popular religion, and claims that the gods were simply deified human beings or great heroes who were revered because they had benefited humankind in some significant way. This method of interpreting Greek myth is known as classical euhemerism, and was revived in the nineteenth century, particularly in the work of Nilsson, whose research is fundamental to my work. Nilsson argues that the Greek epics originated in the aristocratic society of Bronze Age Mycenaean culture, and reflected the deeds of historical persons, as well as describing contemporary events, while mixing mythical and folktale elements.<sup>8</sup> Harrison similarly assumes that myth reflects broader historical contours of Greek and pre-Greek culture.<sup>9</sup> Farnell, too, throughout his classic five volume work, *Cults of the Greek States*, conjectures that various myths may have been indicators of actual customs and rituals.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rigoglioso 2009, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Nilsson 1932, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison 1903, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> Farnell 1977, p. 297.

It should be noted that reading myth as history violates the assumption of scholars that myths are predominantly fictional in nature.<sup>11</sup> Of course I acknowledge that myth has fantastical elements, and has suffered at the hands of politics, archaic monarchies, and other influential individuals.<sup>12</sup> While myth and ritual have been politically and culturally manipulated, I concur with Nilsson that they embody at least some measure of reliability, a representation of chronology, and a source of communal practice that can be used to establish the strength of belief in forming cultic relationships and bonds. Nilsson notes, “The glory and fame of ancient poets depended not, like that of modern poets, on the invention of something new and original, but rather under presentation of the old traditional material in new and original fashion.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is arguable that myths are not always, or necessarily, purely in the realm of fiction, but may contain genuine relics, or traces, of historical events and cultural practices.

In support of this position, Birnbaum provides an amplified theoretical discussion of folklore as a repository for secret, subversive, and often subjugated and repressed religious beliefs, particularly in regards to women, the feminine, and the subaltern.<sup>14</sup> This theoretical claim can be expanded to include not just material found in folklore, but also the biographies of the goddesses and gods of the Greek pantheon. It is this material that is significant in establishing the significance of goddesses such as Artemis in the cultural and communal mosaic that develops in the Mediterranean for more than 2000 years. The repetition of symbols, responsibilities, titles, and sacred spaces, collaborates the perspective that myth and belief are initiated and established

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<sup>11</sup> Dowden 1995, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Guthrie, 1967, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Nilsson *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Birnbaum 1993, p. 3-35.



by the community, and passed down from generation to generation, as a form of identity, and inclusivity.

Ultimately myth and worship are a pastiche of histories, hidden codes, and politico-religious programs and propaganda, and so they require multiple methods in their decipherment and analysis. As a result, I do not approach them from only one vantage point. Often I apply a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, as well as what Rigoglioso calls, “a gnostic lens,” that is, viewing myths as expressions of mystical concepts corresponding with more esoteric aspects of Greek religion.<sup>15</sup>

## **DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION**

My thesis begins by describing the influential nature of Artemis both in the Greek world and in Ephesus. I do this in two chapters because it is necessary to trace the significance of her common worship throughout various communities in the Mediterranean. Chapter One investigates the traditional role given to Artemis ‘The Huntress’ as she is labelled by scholars in the field of classics. Here, her traditional role as described by Homer, Aeschylus, Plato and other Greek writers is outlined. The worship of Artemis as identified by these individuals is like looking at puzzle pieces without ever putting together the puzzle. Scholars, both ancient and contemporary, have looked at her rituals, traditions and history as individual pieces. None have actually put together this puzzle to clearly see that, in fact, the Greek Artemis was arguably more

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<sup>15</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p.10.

influential than any other female goddess in the Olympian pantheon, almost equal to her brother Apollo in the number of worship centres and in the wealth of her temples.

Chapter Two then examines her extremely powerful influence in the city of Ephesus. Here, the beginning of her reign as Queen of Heaven can be traced as far back as the Amazons, and some argue even further, to an ancient and now lost goddess of the forests and the natural realm. It is this aspect of Artemis' history that has inspired me to begin this research and follow it to its inevitable conclusion. This chapter outlines her history in this city as well as the fundamental impact her rule had over the civic identity of the citizens who lived here. This in-depth examination of the control and inspiration her congregation had over the lives of these citizens through the 1st to 4th centuries C.E. takes us through power struggles, violence and eventually the conquest of this city by early Christians and their dual pantheon of Jesus and Mary his Mother.

Since it is my contention that Mary slips into the seat of Artemis, especially at Ephesus, it is crucial that my research investigate the origins of this new Queen of Heaven. In so doing I trace the evolution of beliefs about Mary through a series of primary texts, Gospels, Non-Canonical writings, culminating in the Proceedings of the Council of Ephesus. In the late 1st century, in the infancy narratives of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, we find Mary singled out from all human mothers into being the vehicle for divine incarnation while experiencing a virginal conception and herself remaining a virgin. Her role here is that of a Jewish mother, a strong presence throughout Jesus' mission and a presence at his crucifixion. In the mid-second century document, *The Infancy Gospel of James*, we find Mary herself having a special birth, later referred to as an 'Immaculate Conception'. This important writing that almost made its way

into the canon of the New Testament also paves the way for depicting Mary as more than human, achieving Goddess status. Alongside growing beliefs in Mary as a perpetual virgin, as a new Eve undoing the fault inherent in humanity's fall, and a sense that she was a partner with Jesus in the act of redemption, we trace the growing power of Mary within the Christian community. This culminates in the violent debates in the 4th century – witnessed in the records of the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. -- with her achieving the status of *Theotokos*, Mother of God, rather than some lesser title such as Mother of Jesus' humanity. Chapter Three outlines the earliest depictions of Mary as provided by the canonical Gospels. Here we examine Luke and Matthew who provided early Christians with primary glimpses of the life of this young Jewish mother and her position within this new community. We see the Virgin as young girl, mother and as inspiration to Jesus' disciples after this crucifixion. In this same chapter we will look at a mid-second century C.E. document, *The Infancy Gospel of James*. This work catapults Mary into goddess status and is the catalyst for the complexities of the violent debates that take place three hundred years later at the Council of Ephesus.

Chapter Four investigates the acrimonious debate between Nestorius (c. 386-450), the Archbishop of Constantinople and his nemesis, Cyril of Alexandria (c.376-444). Their back-and-forth debate about the nature of Christ's Incarnation sparks the more popular question of what made Mary "special," so special as to be chosen as his mother. The heated struggle between these two men led to the establishment of the Council of Ephesus in the summer of 431 CE. It is no mistake that the council convened in the "city of goddesses" nor is it a mistake that it is here that the Virgin was finally named *Theotokos*, or Mother of God. Although this does not make Mary a goddess per se, it elevated her to the status of "more than" human or as a "special" human, which is exactly what the Ephesian community needed now that they had completely lost

their goddess Artemis and consequently their ancient civic identity. No other city wanted Mary to be named Mother of God, Queen of Heaven as much as Ephesus because of their ancient connection and characterization as the city of goddesses. In tracing the historical evolution of beliefs about Mary, standard second sources – Pelikan, Jordan -- have been consulted. These works are especially good on noting the way in which Mary evolves in tandem with evolving beliefs about her son, Jesus. From a Jewish human teacher into a dying-rising saviour God-human, the result of a Virgin Birth in which God becomes incarnate – all this within the same four centuries. In many ways beliefs about Mary parallel beliefs about Jesus as Christians thrashed out how to express the person of Jesus (how he is both human as well as divine) and how Jesus relates to the other persons of the Godhead (whether of the same or identical substance). What these works ignore, however, is the other process, the relationship of devotion to Mary to the devotion to Artemis and the popular desire to infuse Christianity with the feminine divine in addition to the maleness of the Trinity.

Chapter Five pulls together all the pieces of this neglected puzzle to create the end result which I have labelled “fusion.” Fusion is defined as the blending of two matters to create one entity. It is my position that the virgin Artemis was not transformed into the Virgin Mary. Rather it is that Mary was simply fused into the long established communal practices of Ephesus without any change to civic identity. The evidence for this is based on corresponding mythologies, epithets and roles, and the social need for a Goddess. Almost all rituals remained the same; a new church was built where people could worship in the absence of their now destroyed temple; and all of Artemis’ titles and epithets were fused into the doctrine of Marian worship. Thus, Mary did not struggle through a transformation, and the citizens of Ephesus did not need to go through a transition. What happened was that one virgin was fused with another.

## NEW INSIGHTS OFFERED IN THIS WORK

Almost no scholarship observes the fusion of Mary and Artemis of Ephesus. Yes, there is the often-discussed feminist perspective that, “Mary replaces many goddesses in cities and villages conquered by Christianity,” but this is almost always presented as an established missionary strategy used by early Christianity as it expanded, and not a phenomenon in which those who were conquered are able to force their conquerors into re-establishing and redeveloping a foundational character in their new religion. Pelikan, Jordan, and Warner all mention that Mary replaced Artemis at Ephesus, but their definition of replacement is simply that Mary was the only available female in Christianity, and therefore, the only option for communities who were used to worshipping a goddess. While there is truth in this claim, I argue that what happened at Ephesus is singular and unique to later events of Christian domination. When Paul first arrived in Ephesus, centuries before the early church was established, his goal was to erase and depose the rule of Artemis, and place Jesus on her ancient, sacred pedestal. He was run out of town by the Ephesians, barely surviving the escape. As Christianity became the official Roman religion, the Ephesians found unique opportunities presented in some of the stories of Mary, particularly in the *Infancy Gospel of James*, and were able to manipulate her small presence in the Synoptic Gospels into a larger epic tale of the Mother of God. Thus, Ephesus is arguably the geographical location in which the tradition of Mariology originated, and it began not as a replacement, but as determined effort on the part of a deeply rooted, ancient goddess culture, to keep almost all of their archaic traditions of Artemis alive. As Christianity attempted to uproot archaic traditions, the citizens of the city of goddesses refused to replace Artemis with a new male god, and fought to synthesize their archaic traditions in worship of Artemis Ephesia into the new vessel that Christianity provided, which was the Virgin Mary.

Thus, disguised as the vessel of the Incarnation, Mary underwent a metamorphosis that was intended to preserve the traditions and beliefs associated with the *topos* of an ancient Mother Goddess.<sup>16</sup> It is my position that the Ephesians manipulated, pushed, and accommodated, early Christianity into changing its version of Mary as young Jewish mother, into a powerful, ancient, and deeply rooted *Theotokos*, Mother of God. Thus, we see that the earlier strategy, pioneered by Paul to replace the Goddess with a male Divine-Human, was set aside for one that stressed accommodation, to synchronize theology with popular devotion. In addition, we see the enduring power of Goddess, the presence of the feminine divine within a matrix of male divinity.

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<sup>16</sup> Berger 1985, p. 168.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EARLY ARTEMIS: GODDESS OF TRANSITIONS

#### 1. The Evolution of the Religion of Artemis

This chapter investigates the origins and development of the “early Artemis.” Specifically, it traces how the religion of Artemis evolved from earlier forms of worship, from the prehistoric through to the early Christian period. Here her primitive origins, her classical Greek subjugation, her continued survival through the embodiment of secondary Greek goddesses, as well as the proliferation of her many titles and temples found in almost every corner of the Mediterranean will be examined. As this analysis will demonstrate, the religion of Artemis was remarkably adaptive, inventive and creative as it evolved to meet new cultural demands.

Classics textbooks and scholarly journals devote very little time to the goddess Artemis. She is positioned as the sister of Apollo, goddess of the hunt and the Mistress of Animals. If one were to ask a lay person about the goddess Artemis, it is likely that they would not even recognize the name. Unlike her sister Athena, who gained notoriety not only among scholars but also among many feminist movements, both academic and spiritual, Artemis has mostly been dismissed as a secondary goddess who stands in the shade of her famous brother. My research will show that this is simply not the case. Not only is Artemis one of the most popular goddesses of the Mediterranean, her rituals and places of worship are both complex and deeply rooted in pre-Greek pantheons from all over Western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Myths and ritual in ancient cultures are inseparable. As James Redfield notes “the natives live the culture; for them myth and ritual by explaining each other, make further explanations unnecessary.”<sup>17</sup> This suggests that myth and ritual evolved together, likely a better view than determining which came first. Thus, in considering the worship of Artemis, it is clear that ritual, entrenched in early pre-Greek culture, fundamentally influences her multifaceted myths. For Redfield, the myth is not an explanation, but an interpretation of the ritual.<sup>18</sup> This means that myths are built and created not to explain the physical performance of the ritual, but to interpret the psychological, emotional, and spiritual experience of those who participate in these rites.

Rituals, or the rites of the cult, are the physical manifestations of belief. In the performance of ritual, the community shares not only their faith and traditions but also their shared stories or mythos. Consequently, physical participation bonds the community and allows the interpretations of myth to be modified, embellished, and transformed through each generation. This results in the phenomenon in which early rituals and myths are absorbed by later cultures. This chapter will discuss how Artemis envelops and absorbs earlier rituals and traditions as well as the mythological attributes of her pre-Greek predecessors.

The religion of Artemis evolved from an early tribal and perhaps nomadic period. Her stories were founded in nature worship and, according to Rigoglioso, she is one of the few early parthenogenetic goddesses, who evolve into representations of the divine in Greek culture. More importantly, she is a figure whose fluidity is fundamental to her popularity, her transformations, and her prolific worship. All the rituals of Artemis described in this chapter will show evidence of some form of pre-Hellenistic ritualistic practice. This evidence will include imagery, symbolic

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<sup>17</sup> Redfield 1990, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.



characteristics and myths of origin. Since most early worship shows evidence of religions focused on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, it is easy to imagine that, for the Greeks, adapting the stories of the conquered community was easier than changing their communal practices. The images, symbols and myths of the ritual are foundationally significant. Conway states that “myths are used because the unconscious understands only symbols and pictures not words.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, applying mythological tales to symbols such as the sacred trees, the wilderness, and iconic weapons such as bows and arrows, assists in the transition of belief from one culture to another. Myths are collective stories and traditions, that is, they are told in a specific group, and also to outsiders. Ritual is a form of collective behavior and evokes a specific audience.<sup>20</sup> We will see this practice repeated over and over in the cult of Artemis. She is a goddess with predynastic Egyptian and Minoan roots, who is enveloped in fantastic stories written by Homer and other Greek writers, and whose prominence travels throughout the Mediterranean, and rests momentarily in Ephesus.

There is clear evidence that Artemis evolved from a far more ancient and primeval period. Her name does not appear to be Greek, and according to Guthrie, in her early form, she was “one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the deities worshiped by the inhabitants of pre-Hellenic Greece of western Asia minor, and of Minoan Crete.”<sup>21</sup> He contends that the northern “barbarians” who invaded and eventually established the area referred to as Greece had found the goddess already in place when they came to occupy this region.<sup>22</sup> Recognizing her importance, they thought to embed their values and traditions into the already existing ritual structure.

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<sup>19</sup> Conway 1994, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Redfield 1990, p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Guthrie 1967, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Outsiders of a culture must integrate their communal practices with the system of belief already in place, in areas which they conquer. Consequently, the invaders assimilated the pre-existing goddess into the Olympian pantheon, as Artemis, while keeping some of her foundational characteristics.

When considering the importance of manipulating the messages and hierarchical positions of characters and events, we must consider their significance in the lives of ritual participants. Paris notes that “Myths are complex. They do not lend themselves to dogmatic teachings. The adventures of mythic persons, gods and goddesses, are movements of consciousness; they illustrate our inter- and intra-personal conflicts, our interdependence and our participation in the sacred.”<sup>23</sup> This shows that even though the ritual practice is a physical manifestation of communal belief, the mystical relationships between the participants and the divine are also significant in the success of individual cults.

Though Homer is one of the earliest Greek texts in which Artemis plays a prominent role, she is already significantly evolved from her earlier manifestations. Farnell argues that Homer provides us with a late-stage transformation of Artemis as young maiden hunter, rather than the once powerful Mother Goddess of Minoan and Mycenaean religion.<sup>24</sup> That being said, Homer does refer to her as *Potnia Thea* or Goddess Queen.<sup>25</sup> This title harkens back to her more definitive role as an all-encompassing earth goddess. Despite this elite heritage, Homer mainly refers to her as *Potnia Theron*, or Goddess of Beasts. Under this title he primarily positions her as the archer, the slayer of beasts, and the virgin who delights in arrows (e.g. *Odyssey* 6.100 –

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<sup>23</sup> Paris 1986, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Farnell *op. cit.*, v. 2 p. 427.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley 1993, p. 89.

109). Hesiod (*Theogony* 14, 918) and the Homeric *Hymn to Artemis* (9, 27, and 28) do the same. As we will see in the following section, this supports both Rigoglioso's and Farnell's claims that Artemis' more primitive aspects have been assimilated under the guise of sister, and leader of nymphs.

## **2. From Egypt to Greece: The Egyptian Transformation of Artemis *Agrotera***

As Artemis *Agrotera*, the Huntress, the goddess is often described in association with the wilderness, with nature, but particularly with her bow and arrow. Homer often identifies her as the goddess who loves archery and the slaying of beasts. Unlike her Ephesian counterpart the Greek Artemis is often painted and/or sculpted wearing a quiver of arrows, and attended by a stag or several dogs. In Ephesus she stands in between two lions. The mountains, rivers and groves are her sanctuary and she can be both unforgiving and merciful. Her lack of male companionship and her violently guarded chastity, make her the prime incarnation of traditions that trace their roots to predynastic Egypt.

Artemis *Agrotera* seems to have evolved from two Egyptian deities: Neith, the Mistress of the Bow and Arrow, a goddess whose primordial existence is embedded in Egyptian thought, and Bastet [also known as Bast, Pasht, and Boubastis], the cat goddess who delights in dancing and music, and is representative of the moon, marriage, and motherhood.

### A. *Neith: Mistress of Arrows*

Neith was one of the oldest of all Egyptian deities and one of the most important divinities during the early historic period.<sup>26</sup> I contend that Artemis inherits the imagery, weapons, and worship of Neith as part of her pre-Greek heritage. In particular, Artemis inherits the attributes or traits associated with Neith. There is strong evidence that Neith's worship was widespread in predynastic times.<sup>27</sup> Near the beginning of the First Dynasty (c. 2920 – 2770 B.C.E.), Aha, the first historical king of Egypt dedicated a temple to her at Sais.<sup>28</sup> Her emblem of crossed bows appears on some decorated pottery as early as the last phase of the predynastic period (c. fourth millennium B.C.E.).<sup>29</sup> That Neith was widely worshiped in the earliest dynastic period and enjoyed a dominant role in the Egyptian royal court is evident from the fact that nearly forty percent of dynastic personal names incorporate her name, four of those are royal women of the First Dynasty, two of them clearly queens and related to the first three dynastic kings.<sup>30</sup>

A text from the Ramesside period of the New Kingdom (1304-1075 B.C.E.) affirms that she was held to be the “great and divine Mother” in primeval times, and she is said to have mediated the dispute between Horus and Seth for divine kinship.<sup>31</sup> In dynastic times she was the most important goddess, and possibly the most important divinity in general, of the Northern

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<sup>26</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Budge 1915, v. 1 p. 450; Hollis 1995, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Emery 1961, p.51.

<sup>29</sup> Petrie 1901, pl. 20 no.11; Adams 1988, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Lichtheim 1973-80, v. 2 p. 215.

Kingdom. Her cult reached its height during the Old Kingdom at Sais (c. 2525-2134 B.C.E.) but continued to be important in the Middle and the New Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

In the Old Kingdom the Egyptians characterized this goddess as “Neith from Libya, as if she were the chieftaness of this neighboring people with whom the inhabitants of the Nile Valley were at all times at war” (Kees 1961, 28). Herodotus and other Greek writers saw her as originating in Libya as well, though there are two symbols that suggest that her worship may have originated in prehistoric times in ancient Libya which is the Greek term for all of North Africa to the West and Southwest of Egypt.

Neith’s symbolic image is that of a pair of crossed arrows sometimes laid over a shield-like sign. Rigoglioso claims that this image is the equivalent of a similar symbol found in the predynastic period, thus stressing its great antiquity.<sup>33</sup> In her anthropomorphic form, Neith frequently holds in her hand a bow and two arrows, and in later times she was called Mistress of the Bow and Ruler of the Arrows.<sup>34</sup> Such symbolism may indicate that Neith was originally the goddess of war, or the goddess of the hunt, but there is little mythological evidence to support this theory.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, the symbol of the bow and arrow has been handed down to Artemis as they are the goddess’ most identifiable weapons. Along with the title of Mistress, Artemis inherits the attributes of this goddess of antiquity both in her depictions, as well as her demeanor.

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<sup>32</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Lesko 1999, p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 27.

One Egyptian text speaks of Neith as having set her arrow to her bow and slaying all of her enemies.<sup>36</sup> In her funerary mode, Neith is depicted as shooting arrows at evil spirits to protect the deceased.<sup>37</sup> Herodotus (4:180) confirms that Neith was worshiped by the Libyan (Ause) tribe of his day, and that this worship involved a combat ritual among the tribes' maidens. Although Artemis does not slay evil spirits, she is famous for setting her bow and arrow and slaying those who offend the gods, as well as those who break her rules of chastity and privacy. That Auses, according to Herodotus, is a location that has been identified as contemporary Tunisia, indicates that at least in the Classical Greek period, the worship of this goddess had extended well past Western Egypt.



**Fig. 1: Representation of the goddess Artemis Orthia in the usual stance of Potnia Theron on an archaic ivory votive offering, (National Archaeological Museum of Athens)**

The evolution of Artemis from Neith is evident in Homer, where he primarily refers to Artemis as *Potnia Theron*, or Mistress of Animals, or *Agrotera*, that is, Goddess of the Wilderness, (Iliad 21.470).

Just like Neith she “draws her golden bow . . . The tops of the high mountains tremble and the tangled wood echoes awesomely with the outcry of beasts.” (Homeric *Hymn 27 to Artemis*).

Aeschylus refers to her as "Mistress maiden, *despoina nymphê*, ruler of the stormy mountains." (Aeschylus Fragment 188, from Orion, *Etymologicum* 26. 5). The Homeric *Hymn to*

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<sup>36</sup> Budge *op. cit.*, v.1 p. 462.

<sup>37</sup> Sayed 1982, p. 81-85.

*Aphrodite* (5.16) describes Artemis “with shafts of gold *khryselakatos* loves archery and the slaying of wild beasts in the mountains.”

Duplicated characteristics suggest that Artemis is the Greek interpretation of the Egyptian Neith. Her label as the Hunter, and her use of arrows to punish offenses, and protect those under her care, show a direct correlation between Egyptian tradition, and Greek myth. The similarity in imagery and the overlapping of attributes between the Egyptian Neith and the Greek Artemis, represent overwhelming evidence that Artemis is the inheritor and/or direct descendant of this very ancient tradition.

#### *B. Bastet: The Frenzy Loving Goddess*

At Bubastis, Artemis is popularly connected to the Egyptian goddess Bastet, also known as the Egyptian goddess Pasht or Bast. Bastet is the counterpart of Hathor (the goddess of motherhood) and similarly delights in dancing and music. Her head is that of a cat and she is usually represented with a cistern of dancing women in her hand, and a basket in her arms. When these characteristics are omitted it is difficult to distinguish between her as the Cat, or the Lion’s head of the goddess Sekhmet (the mighty one).<sup>38</sup> Adolf Erman notes that Egyptians found a connection between these two goddesses and their two animals “For even though Sekhmet is a terrible goddess of war and strife, the question arises whether both of these divinities did not develop originally from such a sky goddess as Neith.”<sup>39</sup> Bastet was also worshiped all over Lower Egypt, but her cult was centred in her temple at Bubastis, which is now in ruins. Bubastis

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<sup>38</sup> Erman 1907, p. 13 – 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

was the capital of ancient Egypt for a time during the Late Period, and a number of pharaohs included the goddess in their throne names. As Mistress of Animals, Artemis is often represented standing in between two lions, particularly in Ephesus. The cat/lion representation is especially significant because of the animal's connection to the moon. Plutarch makes this connection by describing the cat as a "fickle, nocturnal, prolific animal, [which] widens its eyes at the full moon" (Plutarch *Isis and Osiris*, 63). Artemis is often referred to as the goddess of the moon, whether she inherits this title from her Egyptian heritage, or this namesake is granted to her due to her overlap with Hecate and Selene, she remains intrinsically connected to her Egyptian roots.

Herodotus writes that "The Egyptians hold solemn assemblies not once a year, but often. The principal one of these and the most enthusiastically celebrated is that in honor of Artemis at the town of Boubastis" (*Histories* 2. 59). Each year on the day of her festival, the town is said to have attracted some 700,000 visitors both men and women (but not children), who arrive in numerous crowded ships. The women engage in music, song, and dance, drinking wine on their way to the temple, where great sacrifices were made in her honour. This accords well with Egyptian sources which prescribe that leonine goddesses are to be appeased with the "feasts of drunkenness."<sup>40</sup> The worship of Artemis at times includes festivals of wild and "drunken" behavior. She is often the divine counterpart of Dionysus and described as the frenzy-loving goddess.<sup>41</sup> Her love of dancing, racing, and competition, as well as the wildness and freedom of the natural realm make her a fitting vessel for the Egyptian Bastet.

There are several times where Herodotus refers to Aeschylus, who identifies Artemis with Bastet and Apollo with Horus; Aeschylus also identifies Leto with the Egyptian goddess

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<sup>40</sup> Velde 1999, p. 164–5.

<sup>41</sup> Downing 1996, p. 179.



Uto (Herodotus 2.155). According to legend, Apollo and Artemis are still brother and sister, but their parents are Dionysus represented as Osiris, and Isis. Leto (Uto) is made into their nurse and preserver (Herodotus 2.156). The tradition of Artemis as Bastet is well documented into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (C.E.); Pausanias claims "Artemis [the Egyptian goddess Bastet] was the daughter, not of Leto but of Demeter [Egyptian Isis] which is the Egyptian account." (Pausanias 8. 37. 6). This is later confirmed by Liberalis in his *Metamorphoses*

Typhon felt an urge to usurp the rule of Zeus and not one of the gods could withstand him as he attacked. In panic they fled to Aegyptus (Egypt) . . . When they fled they had changed themselves in anticipation into animal forms . . . Artemis [became] a cat [i.e. the Egyptian goddess Bastet] (Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses* 28).

These traditions allow us to see the ancient implications of the worship of Artemis and her primeval connections with the territory of North Africa.

The evidence provided in the Egyptian traditions of Neith and Bast, supports my conclusion that Artemis has far more complex roots than previously considered by scholars. It can be concluded that she inherits her bow and arrow, her sense of justice and protection, and her elite status as *Potnia Thea* or Goddess Queen from the tradition of Neith. In addition, this shows that she inherits her wild and carefree attributes, as well as her preference for the natural realm, from the tradition of Bast. But the worship of Artemis is much more convoluted and widespread than just her Egyptian roots. The mantle of her inheritance reaches deep into Minoan traditions and further into the Mycenaean world. In the next section we will look at how Artemis represents the fundamental figure through which ancient Minoan divinities survive, despite being conquered and/or married off to the gods of the Greeks.

### 3. Minoan Traditions: Artemis as the Mistress of Animals

The connection between Artemis and the Minoan Mistress of Animals has been supported by scholars for the last 40 years. Her inheritance of the symbols, rituals, and attributes of the goddess of Nature will be evidenced here. Marinatos claims that after the dissolution of the Mycenaean world, at the end of the Bronze Age, the Dorians met with a fragmented deity whom they recast according to their own religious beliefs and social institutions.<sup>42</sup> However, much of the Dorian fundamental beliefs and ritual practices, along with the goddess they primarily worshiped, survived well into the Classical period. The Mistress of Animals, who often appears in the function of Huntress armed with a bow or spear<sup>43</sup> can be easily identified with the earliest descriptions of Artemis as *Iokheaira* ‘Of Showering Arrows’ (Homer *Iliad* 9.538) or *Khrysalakatos* ‘Of the Golden Distaff’, she who “delights in arrows” (Homeric *Hymn to Artemis* 9.1). And although most scholars agree that the Minoan Mistress of Animals is directly linked to the Greek Mistress of Animals, some components of both the character of the goddess, and the ritual worship of her cults, require further analysis.

Both the divine nature and function of the Mistress of Animals show that Artemis is of Minoan origin. Nilsson notes that “Artemis is not the goddess of Classical mythology, the sister of Apollo, but a ruder and more primitive type of deity which was widespread especially in the Peloponnesus and among the Dorian peoples; she is in fact the most popular goddess of Greece at least in the cult of the simple rustic people.”<sup>44</sup> This Artemis is the goddess of wild nature who is not in touch or altered by the hand of man. She roams about in the mountains and forests, in

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<sup>42</sup> Marinatos 1993, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Nilsson 1971, p. 389.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 503.

the shadowy groves and the wet meadows, and she hunts and dances together with her nymphs, who depend on her as their fearless Protector. Dances are very common in her cult. These dances are of orgiastic and at times indecent character; sometimes the dancers wear masks. Such a scene does not fit with the Greek tradition of a virgin goddess. In tandem with this, the Minoan goddess is never shown inside a shrine. She manifests herself within a natural environment seated under a tree, or on a rock.<sup>45</sup> Pausanias claims that in “Dereion [in Lakedaimonia], there is in the open an image of Artemis *Dereatis*, and beside it is a spring which they name *Anonos*, when Artemis cannot be worshipped, [a representation of] her temple is often erected in a grove or near a natural spring” (Pausanias 3. 20. 7). Further to the worship of Artemis, which is often established in a grove or a near a natural spring, she is also specifically associated with the worship of trees.

In addition to the shared characteristics between Artemis and the Mistress of Animals, Nilsson further suggests that the worship of Artemis also contains remnants of an equally popular Minoan divinity, the goddess of Nature. The Minoan Nature goddess was a goddess of fertility, not of agrarian fertility, but of the fertility of humans and animals. She helped females to bring forth their young and assisted women in the pangs of childbirth; she fostered young animals and the small children of man. She is intimately connected with one form of the tree cult, established around the sacred Bo tree, which conveys life and fertility.<sup>46</sup> Artemis inherits such characteristics; she is a goddess of fertility, particularly in her Ephesian incarnation, she helps women in childbirth and she is often worshiped in the guise of a tree. Pausanias describes her worship as a myrtle tree in Boiai, a village in Lakedaimonia, as follows “they built a city on

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<sup>45</sup> Marinatos 1993, p. 160.

<sup>46</sup> Nilsson 1971, p. 389.

the site of the myrtle, and down to this day they worship that myrtle tree, and name Artemis *Sôteira* [Saviour]" (Pausanias 3. 22.12). Nilsson notes that there is a close connection between the goddess of the tree cult, and the Mistress of Animals. Both being nature goddesses, it would not be unnatural to regard them as forms of the same deity.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, Artemis inherits the attributes of the Mistress of Animals, whose close associations with other Minoan goddesses of Nature would also be inherited. Here again we see her embodying the imagery, weapons, responsibilities, and attributes of her earlier counterparts. This provides further evidence that Artemis is not a divinity created by the Greeks as part of their pantheon, but a goddess that was already deeply rooted in Mycenaean territory, who was more easily transfigured into a goddess that could be categorized as Greek, rather than removed.

To further substantiate this claim we will look at two popular Minoan goddesses whose attributes become fundamental in the Greek worship of Artemis; Eileithyia whose main role is as protector and nurse, and Britomartis whose chastity and ferocious protection of her virginity become an emblematic factor in the myths and culture of Artemis' worship.

#### A. *Artemis as Minoan Eileithyia: She Who Comes to Aid*

Eileithyia seems to be a name for one form of the Minoan Nature goddess and it is probable that the Homeric tradition derives from the Minoan age.<sup>48</sup> Pausanias supports her pre-Greek roots by referring to Lykian Olen, an earlier poet who wrote a hymn to Eileithyia in which he describes her as "the clever spinner" identifying her with Fate and making her older than Kronos

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399.

<sup>48</sup> Marinatos *op. cit.*, p. 165.

(Pausanias 8. 21. 3). He also confirms that she was born in the cave at Amnisos and that Hera was her mother (Pausanias 1.18.5). Nilsson's discussion of the archeological findings at the cave to Eileithyia in Amnisos, supports the tradition that this is the location where Homer claims Odysseus anchored his boat (Homer, *The Odyssey* 19. 188). Thus, a cult to Eileithyia can clearly be traced back as far as the Minoan period.

Initially, Homer describes this goddess in plural form, "The hard Eileithyiai (Spirits of Childbirth) . . . Hera's daughters, who hold the power of the bitter birth pangs." (Homer, *Iliad* 11. 270). Aelian also uses a plural form when describing "the Eileithyiai" (Aelian, *On Animals* 7. 15); however, the goddess is often depicted as one female deity, and more often than not, she is merged with Artemis. In fact, according to at least one early writer, Artemis and Eileithyia share the same mother. Nonnus writes that "She [Aura] hated Artemis and would not call upon her in her pains; she would not have the daughters of Hera [the Eileithyiai], lest they as being children of Bakkhos' (Bacchus') stepmother should oppress her delivery with more pain." (Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 48. 794). This might explain the plural use of Eileithyia's name, and her overlapping worship as Artemis.

Eileithyia is one of the three children Zeus and Hera conceived together and "out of love" (Hesiod *Theogony* 921). Her name means "she who comes to aid" or "relieve" from the Greek word *elêluthyia*. Her Roman counterpart was *Natio* (Birth) or *Lucina* (Light bringer). She is often depicted as Artemis, or alongside Artemis. For example, the Orphic Hymns describe that "When racked with labour pangs, and sore distressed the sex invoke thee [Artemis Eileithyia], as the soul's sure rest; for thou Eileithyia alone canst give relief to pain, which art attempts to ease, but tries in vain. Artemis Eileithyia, venerable power, who bringest relief in labour's dreadful hour." (*Orphic Hymn 2 to Prothyraea*). In addition to being the goddess of childbirth she also assists all

animals in procreation and labour, "In spring the Eileithyiai (Birth-goddesses) deliver most part of the fishes from the heavy travail of spawning . . . not even on the fishes have the Moirai (Fates) bestowed easy birth, and not alone to women upon earth are there pains, but everywhere the birth-pangs are grievous." (Oppian, *Halieutica* 1. 476). Clearly this is a tradition that can be traced through the popular evolution of Artemis as assistant in child birth.

Although there are conflicting details, Eileithyia's presence is fundamental in the account of the birth of Herakles. The Homeric tradition has Eileithyia helping Alkeme deal with premature labour set on by jealous Hera (Homer, *Iliad* 19. 103). Later traditions claim that, in fact, Eileithyia, as a favour to her jealous mother, is responsible for initiating the premature labour and for keeping Alkeme in labour pains. Diodorus writes that,

Zeus, whose mind was fixed upon the birth of Herakles (Heracles), announced in advance in the presence of all the gods that it was his intention to make the child who should be born that day king over the descendants of Perseus; whereupon Hera, who was filled with jealousy, using as her helper Eileithyia her daughter, checked the birth-pains of Alkeme (Alcmena) and brought Eurystheus forth to the light before his full time. (Diodorus 4. 9. 4).

Either way, Eileithyia plays a crucial role in the birth and survival of Herakles, who is one of Zeus' favoured human sons.

Interestingly, Eileithyia is also responsible for the successful, and *single*, birth of Zeus' most favoured divine son, Apollo. This tradition claims that Leto, pregnant with Apollo, went into labour on the island of Delos. Leto suffered through nine days and nights with labour pangs and although other goddesses crowded around her, none could ease her pains. The goddesses sent out Iris to bring Eileithyia, promising her a great necklace strung with golden threads, nine cubits long. As soon as Eileithyia set foot on Delos, the pains of birth seized Leto, and she was ready to give birth to Apollo. She wrapped her arms around a palm tree and the child leaped forth to the light (Homeric *Hymn 3 to Delian Apollo* 89). This becomes particularly important

when we consider Artemis as virgin mother. According to Rigoglioso, Artemis comes from matriarchal line of pre-Greek goddesses that were involved in parthenogenetic conception.<sup>49</sup> Rigoglioso also asserts that “the Apollonian element was a later insertion into what was originally a pre-Greek story depicting matriarchal consciousness.”<sup>50</sup> This point of view of matrilineal ancestry shows that Artemis is more likely the sister of Leto, or the partner of Leto, rather than her daughter. According to this tradition Artemis is not even present at her “twin” brother’s birth. In fact, there is no sister, or other sibling mentioned in this account. This connects to the very real possibility that Rigoglioso puts forward that Artemis was a primordial goddess, whose worship survived into the Hellenistic period, but who originally played the role of Virgin Mother, and included all life cycles rituals for both her male and female worshippers. Through her worship as Artemis Eileithyia she encompasses all attributes of Protector. In this role she is the helper, the Saviour, the great Mother Goddess, and Guardian of all those who ask for her mercy.

Traditionally the argument is that Artemis takes on the mantle of Eileithyia and absorbs her attributes, specifically the role of Protector. However the evolution of Artemis is much more complex. I suggest that Artemis was the only possible goddess who could have absorbed these characteristics of Eileithyia due to her already expansive inheritance of the Mistress of Animals and the goddess of Nature. Artemis is the only logical deity who can carry all the above roles without compromising the quality, and morality, of ritual worship. In addition, if she is a parthenogenetic goddess or Virgin Mother, as Rigoglioso claims, it makes sense that she is not born of Leto but assists her in birthing Apollo as Eileithyia. The insertion of Artemis as being

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<sup>49</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

the first to jump out of Leto's womb and then assist in the birth of her brother is clearly a post-Homeric addition. This addition is further evidence of Artemis' continuous transformation and adaptation: she is the medium through which the community maintains their ritual practices while allowing some modification to their mythological interpretation. Artemis is the vessel into which all goddess-related images and attributes come to be placed.

*B. The Story of Minoan Britomartis: Artemis Inherits Virginal and Vengeful Attributes*

Another interesting incarnation of Artemis that is woven through the Minoan pantheon is the tradition of Britomartis. Her name is usually derived from *britus*, sweet or blessing, and *martis*, or *marna*, a maiden, so that her name means the sweet or blessing maiden. (Pausanias 3. 14. 2.) Britomartis, who is sometimes called Diktyнна, was born at Caino, in Crete. Her parents are Zeus and Carme, the daughter of Euboulos who was the son of Demeter. She invented the nets *diktya* which are used in hunting, which is why she is sometimes called Diktyнна, and she passes her time in the company of Artemis (Diodorus, 5. 76. 3). Similar in their communal worship, over time, Britomartis and Artemis are merged into the same goddess.<sup>51</sup>

The intricacies with which these two goddesses are blended are phenomenal. Callimachus, in his *Hymn to Artemis*, describes Britomartis as “the goodly archer” who escapes the advances of King Minos of Crete for nine months by hiding under oak trees and in the meadows (Callimachus *Hymn 3 to Artemis* 188). When Minos continues to pursue her, she leaps into fishermen's nets (Strabo, *Geography* 10. 4.12). Britomartis and Artemis were the first who

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<sup>51</sup> Conway 1994, p. 33, Britomartis or Diktyнна was an ancient Cretan form of a virgin Huntress and may have well been the original form of Artemis.



wore the bow and arrow, holding quivers on their shoulders, and according to at least one account, on their right shoulders they wore the quiver strap, and “always the right breast showed bare” (Callimachus *Hymn 3 to Artemis* 188). This last trait involving a naked right breast is clearly an allusion to Artemis’ connection to the Amazons, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Britomartis, like Artemis, is also “ever-virgin” and thus described as the “most loved” of Artemis’ hunting companions (Callimachus *Hymn 3 to Artemis* 190-1). Nonnus describes her as “love-shy Britomartis” (Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 33. 332), while other accounts of her guarded maidenhead are almost identical to that of Artemis: “Zeus made love to her [Carme] and fathered Britomartis who avoided the company of mankind and yearned to be a virgin for always” (Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses* 40). It is because of this self-imposed chastity that she hides from Minos, and avoids all male attention. As they share similar moralities and attributes, and Britomartis passes most of her time in the company of Artemis, it stands to reason that many communities worshiped them as the same goddess, to which they built temples and sacrificed in the same locations (Diodorus 5. 76. 3). This overlapping association of ever-virgin is both what endears Britomartis to Artemis, but also alludes back to a more ancient past, when as Rigoglioso claims, powerful goddesses were parthenogenetic and chose to remain untouched by men.<sup>52</sup>

Diodorus states that Britomartis was known as *Diktyнна* “She of the Nets” because she invented the net used in hunting (Diodorus 5.76.3). Aristophanes gives credit for this invention to Artemis by using the name *Diktyнна* when referring to her in his play "O Artemis, thou maid divine, *Diktyнна* (of the Nets), huntress, fair to see" (Aristophanes, *Birds* 1358 ff.). The Orphic *Hymn to Artemis* also refers to her as “torch-bearing Goddess, *Diktyнна* divine." (Orphic *Hymn*

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<sup>52</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 51.

36 to Artemis) and Apuleius, names her the “the arrow-bearing Dictynna Diana “(Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 11.5). This shows an intriguing cross-sectionality in titles and responsibilities between these two divinities. Even in Sparta, where the cult of Artemis *Limnaie*, Of the Lake, is deeply ingrained in the community, she is recognized as Britomartis of Crete (Pausanias, 3.14.2). Consequently, we can clearly see a correlation between imagery in myth, and cult association and ritual. It is easy to see why Artemis and Britomartis are often considered the same divinity. It is also part of the pattern that surrounds ritual practice and worship of Artemis.

The pattern of worship has provided us with evidence of the ancient and widespread roots of Artemis' veneration. As the evolution of the religion of Artemis shows, she is the bridge between pre-Greek civilizations and the Greeks of the Mediterranean. She embodies an inheritance of many rituals and responsibilities of her pre-Greek divine collaborators. She is the carrier of the divine feminine and the connector through blood, ritual, and sacred tradition. In Section 2 we identified that some of her characteristics come from Egyptian traditions: qualities such as her weaponry, and her protection of the weak [young, old, human, animal, etc.] as well as attributes such as dancing, competition, playfulness, and her love for the wilderness in nature. In this section we have discussed her Minoan and Mycenaean heritage. Through this lens we have seen her inherit the role of nurse, caregiver, she who eases pain, as well as her attitude towards virginity, her severe chastity, and her custom of having numerous female followers, and nymphs. This analysis has provided clear evidence that Artemis is the sole surviving deity after the Greeks conquered most of the Mediterranean. Her embodiment of these numerous qualities is clearly an attempt by the already existing, or native community, to keep their indigenous practices and rituals within their group. Consequently, Artemis carries the mantle of her earlier

companions into Greek culture and is therefore one of the sole links to prehistory. Her survival is the key to understanding how ritual practice affects communities, their history, and their beliefs.

In the next section the worship of Greek Artemis and the continuous evolution of her divine characteristics will be examined. Several of her roles will be highlighted, particularly her role as Saviour, as Patroness of Initiation, as well as her blood thirst, which often places her in the trifecta position of Judge, Jury and Executioner. As we have already seen, all of these attributes have evolved from her pre-Greek status, but it is important to understand not only her significant position as a goddess of antiquity, but also the magnitude of her influence on the Greek community of her worshippers.

#### **4. The Embodiment of Duality: Representations of Artemis in Greek Ritual**

##### *A. Sôteira: Artemis as Saviour*

One of the fundamental roles that Artemis plays in Greek ritual is as *Sôteira*, Saviour. Under this title, Artemis is worshiped for a variety of saving deeds. As the *Sôteira* who heals, she cures Eurypylos of his madness and he builds a temple in her honor (Pausanias 7. 19. 1 - 20. 1). Her temple in Megara stands in honour of *Sôteira* built as an offering for her assistance to the Megarians in battle (Pausanias 1. 40. 2). According to legend, it is under this title as Saviour that she assists Theseus in defeating the Minotaur. Pausanias states,

In the market-place of Troezen is a temple of Artemis Saviour, with images of the goddess. It was said that the temple was founded and the name Saviour given by Theseus when he returned from Crete after overcoming Asterion the son of Minos. This victory he considered the most noteworthy of his achievements, not so much, in my opinion, because Asterion was the bravest of those killed by Theseus, but because his success in unravelling the difficult Maze and in escaping unnoticed after the exploit made credible the saying that it was divine providence that brought Theseus and his company back in safety. (Pausanias 2:31:1).

Additionally, Artemis *Sôteira* is also worshipped by surviving Trojans, who settled in the city of Boeae and built their city around the sacred site of the myrtle tree (Pausanias 3:22:12).

Consequently, Artemis' role as Saviour differs from the Christian conception of salvation which focuses on eternal life and redemption from death. However, as the Goddess who provides for a pain-free or less painful transition from life into death, Artemis *Sôteira* plays a significant role in the performance of last rites for her worshipers.

When Odysseus encounters the ghost of his mother Antikleia in the underworld he asks her if she died of illness, or by the arrows of Artemis (Homer, *The Odyssey*, 11.163). Homer writes of an island called Syria, above Ortygia, where the sun always shines, and there is good land, and no one grows old or has any sickness because Apollo of the silver bow comes with Artemis and uses their gentle arrows to give all the citizens of this island an easy and peaceful death (Homer, *The Odyssey*, 15.403). Artemis is often at the center of a painless death and many of her followers pray to her for a merciful sleep. In the latter half of *The Odyssey* Penelope wishes that Artemis would give her the peace of death, and pierce her heart with a golden arrow and ease her pain (*The Odyssey* 18.202 and 20.061). There is something powerful in the position of Artemis as Saviour. Here she is not just protectress or mother as in Artemis Eileithyia, here she straddles the boundaries between life and death. She is the merciful killer. This duality between the active healing which gives life, and the active slaying which takes life, is what makes Artemis singularly important within the Greek pantheon.

Callimachus, refers to Artemis as Queen, and asserts that when Artemis was a young girl sitting on her father Zeus' knees, asking him to allow her to keep her maidenhood forever and receive her bow and arrows, she also asked him to be *phosphorus* or the Bringer of Light, which became one of her many titles (Callimachus 3.1). One of her most popular temples as Bringer of

Light is at Messene in the sanctuary of Asklepios (Pausanias 4. 31.10). Zeus is more than delighted to give her all that she asks for: “three times ten cities and towers more than one live vouchsafe thee – three times ten cities that shall not note to glorify any other God but to glorify the only and be called of Artemis. And thou shall be Watcher over Streets and Harbors” (Callimachus 3.28). Thus, in addition to her being *phosphorus*, she is also *enodia*, Protector of the Mariners. Under this title she is sometimes also called *Euporia*, Saviour of Ships (Apollodorus 1.570). Consequently, Artemis is not only Saviour through mercy, that is, people don’t only pray to her for protection and peaceful death, she is Saviour in a way that is omnipresent. As the Bringer of Light her luminance literally saves ships, harbors, and all Greek citizens who depend on these facilities to survive.

In her role as *Sôteira*, Artemis inhabits the personal spaces of her community of worshipers. As a goddess of mercy she is invoked as *Selasphoros* or *Phôsphoros* meaning ‘Light-Bringer’ and she is often *Hêmerasias* or ‘She Who Soothes’. Nilsson argues that these are positive and nurturing attributes that were granted to her in the Classical period,<sup>53</sup> and while this may be true, it is significant that her ritual worship expanded from Huntress, or goddess of wilderness, to the Saviour of her supplicants and the Protector of communities and cities. I argue that this attribute most of all makes her the most popular Hellenistic goddess of all the Olympians.

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<sup>53</sup> Nilsson *op. cit.*, p. 503.

### B. *Artemis Strangled: The Patron of Initiation*

*Apankhomene*, the strangled goddess, is another surname of Artemis. Tradition claims that in the neighbourhood of the town of Caphyae in Areadia, in a place called Condylea, there was a sacred grove of Artemis Condyleatis. Once, some children playfully tied a rope around the neck of her statue and claimed she was strangled. They were stoned to death by the village people. Later the *gynaikes* of Caphyae were struck with a disease and all their children were stillborn. The villagers saw this as a sign of the wrath of Artemis for stoning of children. The Oracle ordered that the children should be buried properly, and annual sacrifices made to them since they were wrongly killed. From then on Artemis was called *Apankhomene* or Strangled (Pausanias 8.23. 6-7). This legend embodies the role of the goddess in children's lives. In her position as *Kourotrophos*, meaning bringing up boys or rearing boys, she protects their upbringing and leads them to adulthood, receiving dedications of children's toys and garments.

It is important that in this legend we see that the children are correct to call Artemis "strangled," as this title reveals a more ancient truth. The earliest use of the term *Apankhomene* arises from the image of hanging vegetation deities on trees.<sup>54</sup> This traces her roots back to the Minoan period before Artemis was attached to her name. King argues that strangulation for the Greeks meant giving no blood. In the field of sacrifice the shedding of blood issues a communication between men and the gods (Herodotus 4.60). However, as a form of human death, strangulation or hanging evoked horror (see for example Phaedra in Euripides *Hippolytus* 778 and 802). As a form of suicide, strangulation and the option to give no blood in the face of violence such as rape or unwanted defloration, is traditionally appropriate.<sup>55</sup> As eternal *parthenos*

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<sup>54</sup> Farnell 1896, p. 428.

<sup>55</sup> King 1993, p. 119.

Artemis does not shed her blood in the hunt, in sex or in childbirth. This mode of death can be associated with her being strangled. Fundamentally, the duality of Artemis strangled is primarily evident in the fact that she is a goddess who does not bleed, but who makes others bleed.

King posits that Artemis being strangled, and therefore without blood, allows her to lead in the transitions of the *parthenoi* or virgins, into *gyne* or maiden, by initiating them into this new phase of life which is identified with menstruation, marriage and child birth. Artemis is both bound and can release, her duality in this ritual, and her position as a transitory agent between child and woman, or child and man, is fundamental. On one end, Artemis is *Lysizonos*, the releaser of the girdle [the girdle is put on at puberty and later dedicated to Artemis as a part of the marriage process]. A special girdle is worn on the wedding night and a woman unties her girdle to give birth.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Artemis is powerful in the lives of women and invoked by women during childbirth often as *Lysizonos*, and after childbirth the girdle is dedicated to her.<sup>57</sup> King notes that also dedicated to her is the *Lochia*, often one of Artemis' names, which is the placenta.<sup>58</sup> This clearly depicts her responsibility as overseer of the transition of young people from *parthenoi* and into being full *gynaikes*.

On the other hand, Artemis stands as *Philomeirax*, Protector of young girls, whose successful conversion from virgin maiden to effective procreator is solely her domain. Pausanias refers to her as *Lygodesma*, meaning bound with the plant called *lygos* or *agnos castus*. This epithet is an alternative title to Artemis *Orthia*, and it is explained by the account in which this cult image was found in a thicket of the *agnos* plant, which made it stand upright (*orthos*)

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

(Pausanias 3.16.11). Claude Calame has isolated several possible connections between Artemis and the *lygos/agnos* plant<sup>59</sup>. He states that in the ancient world the plant was used for anything from wicker work and perfume making, to medicine, and all other ritual purposes. The *lygos/agnos* plant has flexibility as it can be made into rope which can bind, and its medical qualities encourage menstruation and lactation.<sup>60</sup> The analogy between Artemis straddling both the very early stages of life, and the reproductive stages of women, is further evidenced when we consider that Artemis, as strangled, is bound with the *lygos*, and she is also the releaser of the girdle or beginning of menstruation, which is induced by *agnos* when ingested. Thus, she spans the two temporal aspects of “woman:” strangled, non-bleeding *parthenos* and released bleeding *gyne*.<sup>61</sup> Yet though she is concerned with the evolution from one period of life to another, she herself stays firmly on one side. She remains in the position of *parthenoi* while dictating and assisting in the development and success of the *gynaikes*.

Thus, Artemis *Apankhomene* is another example of how the goddess encompasses all aspects of life despite their seemingly opposite elements. By clinging to her ancient roots she maintains the wilderness, the violence, and the freedom of being a Nature goddess. At the same time, in wearing the mantle of her responsibility in Greek ritual she exhibits the qualities of nurse, Saviour, and Mother. These attributes can be clearly seen as she is revered both as Protector and as terrifying Enforcer. Artemis is the embodiment of opposites, duality, and the paradox of protection and punishment. Like many of her predecessors, from whom she inherits all responsibilities, she is a goddess of totality. As the goddess in charge of the sum of all aspects

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<sup>59</sup> Calame 1997, p. 285-9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>61</sup> King *op. cit.*, p. 123.



of Greek life, it is only logical that Artemis preside not only over rituals that involve healing, birth, marriage, and other life-giving rituals, but she must also oversee rites that involve aspects of war, sacrifice, and blood. This supports the argument that Artemis is a goddess of transition and life passages, playing a fundamental role in the community of her followers at all stages in their lives.

*C. The Bear of Brauron and Artemis Orthia: Blood Thirst and Sacrifice*

The cult of Artemis Brauronia had two sanctuaries: one at the ancient site of Brauron (from which the goddess derives her name), the other is situated at the heart of Athens, on the Acropolis. The tyrant of Athens, Pysistratus, was originally from Brauron, and is credited for setting up the cult on the Acropolis therefore changing this community from a local, to a state cult. After that, there was a procession every four years from the Temple of Artemis Brauronia on the Athenian Acropolis, to Brauron, in honour of the goddess and her priestess, Iphigenia. Initially, it is easy to identify one aspect of Artemis' duality here when considering that this procession encompasses two different urban spaces, the city and the village. In addition to this, the rituals that took place at Brauron provide us with a much more complex identity for Artemis.

The sanctuary of Brauron was excavated by John Papadimitriou in 1948. Unfortunately, he died suddenly in 1963 and the excavation project took another 40 years to become public. While much of the archeological findings have been catalogued, it appears that only a small sample has been published of the "hundreds and hundreds of *krateriskoi* found all over the sanctuary" at Brauron.<sup>62</sup> Artemis of Brauron, also known as the Taurian Artemis is mystical, and

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<sup>62</sup> Moon 1983, p. 235.

her worship was orgiastic and connected, at least in early times, with human sacrifices.

According to Greek legend, there was in Tauris a goddess, whom the Greeks identified with their own Artemis, and to whom all strangers that were thrown off the coast of Tauris, were sacrificed. (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 36.). It is this worship at Brauron that exposes the significance of Artemis in Greek life.

The rituals at Brauron are said to be initiation rituals for young girls that were thought of as *arktoi* “she bears.” Since there are no bears in Greece during Pausanias’ times, this link must be very ancient<sup>63</sup>. It is important to note that the testimonium on which interpretations of these rituals were made, is mostly dependant on the passage in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, in which the chorus describe the various ritual functions they undertook: “*arrephoros* at seven, miller for *Archegetis* at ten, then "wearing (or shedding) the *krokotos*, I was bear at the Brauronia, and then being a pretty girl, I was *kanephoros* wearing a fig necklace" (Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 641-646).<sup>64</sup> The life cycle of a bear, their behaviour and similarities with man were studied in ancient times by Aristotle, Theophrastus and Pliny. However, archaeological evidence for the image of a bear as mother goes back to the Neolithic period. This Neolithic image portrays the “notable tenderness of the mother beast for her cub as an image for human mothering.”<sup>65</sup> Baring and Cashford suggest that the bear is “probably the oldest sacred animal of all.”<sup>66</sup> These images are linked to the Brauron initiations into womanhood and motherhood, as well as the suggestion that Artemis is a derivative of an ancient bear goddess. The authors note that the bear is “the oldest

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<sup>63</sup> Papadimitriou 1963, p. 113 suggests that at Brauron the identification of Iphigenia with Artemis is a remnant of the prehistoric cult which worshipped the great Mother Goddess.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton 1989, p. 460.

<sup>65</sup> Baring and Cashford 1991, p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

animal hunted for food in the northern hemisphere, and also the oldest animal whose remains have been given a ritual significance.”<sup>67</sup> This complex imagery of the bear both as caregiver, but also as a large violent animal, is in many ways an anthropomorphic representation of the goddess herself. Under her care young women are protected in the transition from child to adult; however, there is also an animalistic character to this ritual. In order to be transformed from girl to woman, the youth must shed the uninhibitedness of her childhood and offer it as sacrifice to Artemis.

This is a ritual of “wildness.” Where coming of age girls are seen as being especially hormonal, they were said to be in the grip of the wild independent goddess herself. By performing these rituals, it was believed that the goddess would guide the girls to maturity. Walbank agrees that the *arktos* were prepubescent girls, who shed their saffron robes as an initiation rite at the age of ten.<sup>68</sup> As evidence he refers to an inscription which states “Then I was a miller of corn; and when I was ten years old I let drop for the *Archegetis* (Artemis) my yellow robe as a bear at the Brauronia.”<sup>69</sup> These robes were then dedicated to Artemis.

Before marriage every Athenian girl had to sacrifice to Artemis *protelia*. Childish things would be dedicated to the goddess here as the girls were seen to be leaving their prepubescent “wildness” behind, and entering womanhood and marriage (the realm of the goddess Hera). It is for *protelia* that Lloyd Jones argues Iphigenia is brought to Aulis.<sup>70</sup> The first appearance of Iphigenia as daughter of Agamemnon is in the *Cypria* fragment. Here, Stasinus describes how

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> Walbank 1981, p. 276.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>70</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1983, p. 91.

Iphigenia is brought to her father under the guise of marrying Achilles (Stasinus of Cyprus, *Cypria* Fragment 1). Hesiod states that Iphigenia is not killed, but she is turned into Hecate and made a handmaid of Artemis (Hesiod, *Catalogues of Women* Fragment 71, and Pausanias 1. 43. 1). In the *Cypria* Iphigenia is carried off to Tauris and made into a goddess by Artemis (Stasinus of Cyprus, *Cypria* Fragment 1). In the *Metamorphoses*, Liberalis describes the event as follows

Artemis made a bull calf appear by the altar instead of Iphigenia whom she carried off far away from Greece, to the Sea of Pontos with its welcoming name of Euxinos, to Thoas son of Borysthenes [the Dnieper River]. She called the tribe of nomads there Taurians because a bull (tauros) had appeared instead of Iphigenia on the altar. She also named her Tauropolos. (Liberalis, *Metamorphoses* 27).

It has long been conjectured that Iphigenia was originally a Minoan goddess and later subordinated to Artemis.<sup>71</sup> It is believed that Iphigenia and Orestes brought the image of Artemis from Tauris, and landed at Brauron in Attica, where the goddess derived the name of Artemis Brauronia (Pausanias 1.23.9, 1.33.1). This wooden image, we are told by Pausanias, was carried away by Xerxes, King of Persia, who looted Athens and the nearby regions after his victory over the Greeks (Pausanias, 8.46.3). It is at Brauron, Iphigenia is said to have died and been buried. The myths surrounding Artemis Brauronia, particularly in regards to Iphigenia, reveal an intriguing aspect of the duality of Artemis at this location. Although this appears to be a ritual centered in the lives of women, as they transition from prepubescent to adult, the association between the goddess and the very masculine image of a bull require a more complicated analysis of both this particular ritual, and the myths that inspire it. Further examination will reveal that the rituals performed at Brauron, as well as the Spartan rite of sacrifice for Artemis *Orthia* represent relics of this ancient past that have been transfigured by the moralities of the Hellenistic period.

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<sup>71</sup> Farnell *op. cit.*, p. 55.

The Brauronian Artemis was also worshipped in Sparta as Artemis *Orthia*, goddess of the steep, or “she who stands erect.” The latter, sometimes understood as a phallic symbol, may correlate with the fact that only boys participated in this ritual. Her image is said to have been brought over, or stolen, from Brauron and consequently drove men mad.<sup>72</sup> Tradition states that some quarrel or competition of the earliest tribes of Sparta led to violence and death around the altar of Artemis. After the slaughter there was a plague and the Oracle prescribed that the altar should be soaked in blood. The citizens selected an individual by lot who would be the human sacrifice (Herodotus 1.65). This original tradition was eventually considered barbaric, and the ritual was adapted by Lycourgos so that boys were scourged at her altar in such a manner that it became sprinkled with their blood. This cruel ceremony was believed to have been introduced in the place of human sacrifices.<sup>73</sup> According to Redfield, these were not boys but warriors, and instead of one of them dying they could all bleed together.<sup>74</sup> This is a very Spartan ritual, in that it involves physical sacrifice in the sacred place of the divine. More interestingly, the ritual of the community is inscribed on the body of its citizens and denies differences both natural and cultural, so that all men are treated in exactly the same way.<sup>75</sup> Since this is clearly an initiation rite, we can see that Artemis is present in the transformation from child to adult of every Greek citizen, not just women. This is further evidenced when we look at the tradition of the Taurian Artemis.

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<sup>72</sup> Redfield 1990, p. 128.

<sup>73</sup> Dictionary of Antiquity s. v. Braurônia and Diamastigôsis

<sup>74</sup> Redfield *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129 Redfield claims that the demand of the God is equality and thus the function of the divine within Spartan ritual is to make sure this equality is maintained. Artemis is the embodiment of this sentiment as she presides over both male and female initiation rites in which participation is both necessary and equal.

Orestes is said to have continued on from Brauron, and established the cult of Artemis Tauropolos. A kindred divinity, if not the same as the Taurian Artemis, her worship was connected with bloody sacrifices, and she is said to have produced madness in the minds of men if they looked upon her statue (Sophocles, *Ajax* 172). Artemis is able to cure this madness in her role as Healer, but she does this sparingly and only for those she deems worthy of her gift. According to Sophocles, Artemis *Tauropolos* was originally a designation of an ancient Taurian goddess who oversaw males' rites of passage. The name *Tauropolos* has been explained in different ways, some supposing that it means the goddess worshipped in Tauris, who protects the country of Tauris, or the goddess to whom bulls are sacrificed (Sophocles, *Ajax* 172); while others explain it to mean the goddess riding on bulls, drawn by bulls, or killing bulls (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1457). Both explanations seem to have one thing in common, namely, that the bull was probably the ancient symbol of the bloody and savage worship of the Taurian divinity. The bull is mostly referred to by Classics scholars as an ancient and prolific symbol of masculinity. It is intriguing that Artemis is associated with this symbol, however not surprising when we consider her duality as a goddess of bloodshed and retribution, often viewed as Greek male characteristics, as well as mercy and healing, often viewed as Greek female responsibilities. This shows the complexity of cultic practice which places Artemis in the position of presiding divinity in the early lives of Greek boys and girls.

#### *D. Artemis Triklaria: The Trifecta of Judge, Jury, Executioner*

The cult of Artemis *Triklaria* or “unyielding” can be traced to the old town of Patras, while it was still an Ionian community. Pausanias tells us that they had a precinct and a temple in her honor where they used to celebrate every year with a festival and an all-night vigil (Pausanias

7.19.1). The priesthood of the goddess was held by a maiden until the time came for her to be married. Tradition states that at one time a particularly beautiful maiden named Comaitho had an equally beautiful lover named Melanippos. The couple wanted to get married but both their parents declined their request for a wedding. Overwhelmed by their desire for one another they made love in the temple of the goddess (Pausanias 7.20.1). Artemis was angered by this transgression and “began to destroy the inhabitants; the earth yielded no harvest, and strange diseases occurred of an unusually fatal character” (Pausanias 7.20.5). The community sent for the Oracle at Delphi, and the Oracle named the guilty party, and commanded that they be sacrificed to the goddess, and that afterward each year the most beautiful *pais* and *parthenos* (youth and maiden) should be sacrificed to ease Artemis’ wrath. For this sacrifice the river flowing by the sanctuary of *Triklaria* was called *Ameilikhos* or Relentless. Previously the river had no name.

Pausanias tells us that this human sacrifice to Artemis came to an end when the Oracle claimed that a strange King would come to their land bringing a strange divinity (Pausanias 7.19.8). Legend claims that when the Greeks conquered Troy, and the spoils were divided, Eurypylos received a box containing the image of Dionysus which when looked upon drove Eurypylos mad. In a moment of clarity he inquired at the Oracle at Delphi about a solution for his crisis. The Oracle told him that he would come across a people offering a strange sacrifice and that there he should set down his box and make the place his home. Once he made port near Aroe he witnessed the sacrifice of two young people for Artemis *Triklaria* and realized that this is the sacrifice the Oracle had predicted. While he realized he had found the place to call home, the people of Patras recognized him as the fulfillment of their own oracle. Thus the ritual of human sacrifice was ended. The name of the river changed to *Meilikhos* or “yielding” and by the

road that ran from the sea to the shore Eurypylos established a sanctuary and dedicated a stone statue to Artemis *Sôteira* in memory of his healing (Pausanias 7.18-21). It is significant that Artemis can be considered both unyielding, requiring human sacrifice, and Saviour, healing the illnesses that befall her devotees. This points to the intrinsic position the worship of Artemis occupies in the lives of this community. That the goddess is “unyielding,” and requires a bloody sacrifice as retribution, is not surprising if we consider her Egyptian and Minoan ancestry. Here we see that despite her role as Saviour, and merciful goddess, Artemis inspires fear, dread, and respect which are characteristics of primeval matri-focused goddess traditions.

Thus the duality and complexity of Artemis has been clearly evidenced. She is not a goddess whose worship is uniform, or who singularly occupies a theme, event, or lifecycle in Greek life. Her divinity is a combination and intersection of all aspects of human existence; from the beginning of life at birth, through the innocence and wilderness of childhood, she guides the initiations and transitions of both boys and girls into adulthood, marriage, procreation, as well as war, violence, and sacrifice, and when her devotees have reached the end of their existence they pray to her so that she may gift them with a peaceful death. In addition, her worship involves all geographical spaces from the city, to the village, to the sea, and to the mountains. As a result of her all-encompassing dominion over the lives of the Greeks it is logical to consider that Artemis may have also had a primary position in the rituals that involve the mysteries of the afterlife. The next and last section of this chapter will discuss evidence that supports the view that Artemis was not only a goddess whose worship and traditions completely enveloped human life, but that she also had a fundamental role in Greek mystery religions whose details and practices remain largely obscure and unknown. Her evolution from Neith to Bast, possibly Hathor and even Isis,<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Erman 1907, p. 13.



as well as her inheritance of Minoan deities such as the Mistress of Animals and the goddess of Nature, support the claim that she is very likely the mystery goddess known only as *Despoine*.

### 5. *Artemis Despoine: Mistress of Mysteries*

An analysis between *Despoine* (Mistress), the mysterious and unnamed daughter of Demeter, the predynastic Egyptian goddess Neith, the Mistress of the Bow, and the Minoan Mistress of Animals, points directly to the worship of Artemis. Having been gifted with the term Mistress, while inheriting the mantle of responsibility from her prehistoric past, it is logical that we find Artemis associated with the most mysterious of Greek goddesses. Since the mystery goddess only carries the title Mistress, I argue that she is the incarnation of an older parthenogenetic female divinity, tied to the land from a far more ancient period, when goddesses were imagined as dual, or in equal partnerships.

The sanctuary of Despoine (the Mistress), is in Arkadia. This sanctuary houses a temple with a bronze image of Artemis *Hegemone* (Leader). From here there is an entrance into the sacred enclosure of Despoine (Pausanias 8. 37. 1 - 8. 38. 2). The mystery of Despoine is described by Pausanias as follows,

Those about the sanctuary say that Despoine was brought up by Anytos, who was one of the Titanes [perhaps here the Kouretes, Curetes], as they are called . . . This is the story of Anytos told by the Arkadians. That Artemis was the daughter, not of Leto but of Demeter, which is the Egyptian account, the Greeks learned from Aiskhylos (Aeschylus) the son of Euphorion. Despoine became worshipped in a sanctuary at Lycosura west to the town of Megalopolis. This is a very important site for the study of ancient mystery religions, although this cult remained regional than PanHellenic. (Pausanias 8. 37. 6 - 8. 38. 2)

The correlation between Artemis and Despoine is layered under the many transmigrations of Egyptian and Minoan goddesses who wear the mantle of Mistress. Nilsson argues that “the

connections of Minoan Crete with Egypt were closer than those with any other country, and to this fact due regard must also be taken when dealing with religion.”<sup>77</sup> Consequently, it is extremely probable that a natural evolution from Egypt to Mycenae to Greece would take place through the community of Artemis.

It is no coincidence that in the sanctuary of Despoine in Arkadia, Pausanias finds multiple representations of Artemis. Her impressive statue in front of the entrance to the mystery cult stands at least six feet tall, and is made of bronze (Pausanias 8.37.1). Inside the sacred sanctuary by the side of the statue of Demeter, stands another statue of Artemis “wrapped in the skin of a deer, and carrying a quiver on her shoulders, while in one hand she holds a torch, in the other two serpents” (Pausanias 8.37.1). Artemis plays a fundamental part in this mystery religion, and it is clear through the physical position of her temple statues that she is either the unnamed daughter of Demeter, or her equal.

Kerenyi supports the claim that the cult of Despoine was a continuation of a Minoan Goddess.<sup>78</sup> His connection is supported by material evidence from the Minoan – Mycenaean period. In the mysteries, Demeter was viewed as a second goddess under her daughter, Despoine. The myths were connected with the first Greek-speaking people who came from the north during the Bronze Age. The two goddesses had close connections with the rivers and the springs. They were related to the god of rivers and springs, Poseidon, and especially with Artemis, who was the first nymph. The concept of partnership between two goddesses has both Minoan and Egyptian roots. In Egypt Neith is often part and/or paralleled to Hathor, who is often part and/or paralleled to Bast, who was often part and/or parallel to Sekhmet. This union of two goddesses whose

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<sup>77</sup> Nilsson *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Kerenyi 1967, p. 88.

characteristics complement each other has deeply ancient roots. In Minoan religion this complementary relationship between two goddesses also exists. The Hagia Triada sarcophagus (1400 B.C.E.) depicts two reliefs that partner up two female deities.<sup>79</sup> The goddesses in the goat-drawn chariot are mirrored with the goddesses in the griffin-drawn chariot. Marinatos notes that the two pairs are counterparts to each other; two chthonic goddesses paralleled to two celestial goddesses.<sup>80</sup> Therefore the coupling of Demeter and Despoina has widespread pre-Greek origins in material culture and imagery.

Despoine's epithet as Mistress is the fundamental feature that connects her to early goddesses as well as to Artemis. The Minoan goddess is titled the Mistress of Animals, and as mentioned above, the term Mistress is also commonly used in reference to the Egyptian Neith. Aeschylus refers to Artemis as "Mistress" *despoina nymphê* who is ruler of the stormy mountains (Aeschylus Frag. 188). More convincingly, the Arcadians also have a mountain called Cnakalos "where every year they celebrate mysteries in honor of their Artemis" (Pausanias 8.2 3.3). On his travels Pausanias finds additional places where Demeter, "her daughter" and Artemis have been long worshipped "[In the] temple and statue of Demeter and her daughter [at Phlious, Sikyonia] . . . is also a bronze statue of Artemis, which appeared to me to be ancient." (Pausanias 2. 13. 5). Nilsson contends that Artemis is akin to an especially Arcadian type of goddess, or rather, a pair of goddesses, who are for this reason also identified with Demeter and Kore (Persephone).<sup>81</sup> The Arcadians referred to these goddesses as the Mistress *despoine* or the

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<sup>79</sup> Marinatos *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> Nilsson *op. cit.*, p. 504.

Saviour *sôteira*. These were said to be very strange beings; the garment of Despoine is decorated with dancing figures with animal heads in human garments.



**Fig. 2: From L-R: Artemis, Demeter, Veil of Despoina, Anytus, Tritoness from the throne. Elements are from the cult sculptural group in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens.**

The Artemis of this group held a torch in one hand and two serpents and the other. This depiction shows that these goddesses are akin to the Mistress of Nature and the Animals.

This umbilical connection of Artemis and her predecessors survives well past the Hellenistic period and into the development of early Christianity. Walbank confirms this in his analysis of a late Palestinian inscription<sup>82</sup> that marks Artemis with the title *Despoine*.<sup>83</sup> The importance of this inscription will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. Consequently there can be little doubt that the epithet of ‘Mistress’ was popularly applied to Artemis as part of what

<sup>82</sup> SEG xvi 787, line 2 according to Walbank the title “despoine” is a very late inscription from Palestine. Walbank claims that an earlier version of the inscription from the Classical period does not have the word *despoine* as referring to Artemis however he acknowledges that during the Palestinian period an addition has been made to her titles and *despoine* is a definite reference to Artemis. It is significant that in the later period Artemis is considered *despoine*. This, and her later connection to the Virgin Mary is analysed in Chapter Five.

<sup>83</sup> Walbank 1981, p. 79.

Nilsson calls an introduction of an indigenous deity into the Greek pantheon.<sup>84</sup> He asserts that the Greeks purposely maintained several religions of indigenous origin while assimilating divinities into their own religious structure. To that end, even Christianity, a religion of much more imperious and intolerant character was not able to wipe out at all traces of the old religion. This statement is evidenced in later traditions in which the Orthodox Church grants the title *despoine* to the Mother of God. For example, St. John of Damascus refers to the Virgin Mary as Mother of God *Theotokos* and Mistress *despoine*.<sup>85</sup>

As already mentioned, it is logical that Artemis evolves into the realm of the afterlife. One of the most significant aspects in making this connection is her title as Mistress. This is especially important because it is easy to trace the repeated inheritance of this title in the worship of Artemis. Artemis evolves over time and space from the Egyptian Neith, referred to as the Mistress of the Bow and Arrow, to the Minoan Mistress of Animals and eventually to the Greek Mistress of the Hunt. Although there is some controversy about whether or not other Greek pantheon goddesses such as Hera and Athena are referred to as Mistress,<sup>86</sup> it is popularly agreed among scholars that Artemis is the only goddess to whom the title *despoine* applies prolifically. As a result, it is not a surprise that she, not Hera or Athena, stands inside the temples of mystery cults and guards the door to the afterlife. This position will become especially significant when we consider the worship of Artemis in Ephesus, and her continual evolution into early Christian tradition.

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<sup>84</sup> Nilsson *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Ware 2002, p. 37.

<sup>86</sup> Walbank *op. cit.*, p. 80.

## 6. Goddess of Transitions: A Conclusion

The religion of Artemis is a complex phenomenon, similar in description to the various forms of Christianity, whose religious worship evolved over two thousand years. Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christianity share some features in common – myths as well as rituals – but they differ significantly as well in terms of beliefs and the interpretation of rituals. The same is true of Artemis' worship, which shares some of the ritual commonalities, but differs in terms of myths of origins. The religion of Artemis seems to have four distinct and overlapping identities, likely reflecting a process of adaptation as the religion was developed and modified at different times and in different areas of the Mediterranean. In one form, Artemis is the twin sister of Apollo and daughter of Leto (e.g. *Hymn to Artemis* 9.2 and 27.3). In another aspect, she is the goddess of the nymphs of Arcadia, the mountainous forested center of the Peloponnesus. At Tauris and Brauronia, she is found in a form where her worship at one time included human sacrifices (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 36.). While different, all these reflect the worship of Artemis and testify to her popularity and sustaining power throughout various cultures of the Mediterranean in a variety of forms. She was the deity who united cultures and peoples around the centrality of the Goddess. In a sense, Artemis was the first international Goddess. She is the repository of all goddess attributes and images.

The evolution of the religion of Artemis extends at least as far back as predynastic Egypt, through Minoan and Mycenaean culture and on into Greek times. It is evident from this history that Artemis is the key figure through which goddess ritual, tradition, and community worship, is preserved and adapted over space and time. Artemis likely became the most popular goddess of the Mediterranean. Her popularity and the devotion of her followers is evident not only in her numerous titles and incarnations, but particularly in the moments in which she is called upon or

adored. Moments that begin with birth, and move through the life experiences of both Greek males and females. She is as equally responsible for a successful marriage [in Brauron] as a successful battle [in Sparta], and she participates in the final transition from dying to crossing into the mysteries of the afterlife.

Artemis is a creature of margins, at home in the mountains and marshes, and comfortable within the city gates. If we consider the forests and mountains as a representation of childish abandon and wildness, and the economies and politics of cities as a representation of adulthood, then we can agree with Redfield who supports the argument that the setting of myth as well as the place of ritual is largely metaphorical. As a result of this metaphorical logic of myth, Artemis presides over the boundary between child and adult, and is often patroness of initiations.<sup>87</sup> The initiation for both male and females which Artemis oversees with a severe discipline is fundamental to Greek life. The coming-of-age ritual is an event without which Greek citizens could not move forward and become successful in their respective responsibilities. Redfield states that every ritual symbolizes and strengthens the community that connects it. The specific content of the ritual further specifies that particular community.<sup>88</sup> The ritual authenticates the transition of the individual and allows the community to come together in the acceptance of the individual's new identity. Clearly Artemis is the only pantheon goddess who can command both order and prestige in this practice. Her attributes which encompass on the one hand her nurturing, kindness and mercy, while on the other hand display her discipline and chastity, as well as her vengeful nature, assures the community that the ritual is both familial and political.

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<sup>87</sup> Redfield *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Artemis is a goddess of totality. In many aspects she is the Saviour *Sôteira*, the Light Bringer *Phosphorus*, the One Who Soothes *Hêmerasia*. In others she is Huntress of the Wilds *Agrotera*, who delights in the Showering of Arrows *Iokheaira*, she who rigorously protects her chastity which is reflected in her titles as Virgin or Maiden *Parthenos*, as well as Revered Virgin *Aedoeus Parthenos*. Most importantly, she is a Royal Princess *Basileis*, a goddess Of the First Throne *Protothronia*, who reigns unmatched throughout the Mediterranean as Goddess Queen *Potnia Thea*. This multitude of titles, attributes, incarnations, and constant adaptation provide more than sufficient evidence that Artemis is the Goddess for all peoples at all times in all places. Her cult worship is as varied as the people who devote themselves to her. This diversity reflects the goddess' sphere of influence as both the agent through which community history is inherited, as well as the medium through which community culture is maintained. Her devotees are not a uniform cult that is simply transported from one place to another, from one time to another, but an array of various forms of worship that are embedded within each locality and its unique cultural practices all under the aegis of Artemis.



## CHAPTER TWO

### ARTEMIS EPHESIA: THE PEOPLE'S GODDESS

In Chapter One we saw how Artemis evolved from earlier Goddesses. As the Huntress and Mistress of Animals, the Greek Artemis incorporated the ancient customs and traditions of earlier indigenous communities. In this chapter, we will examine the epicentre of Artemis worship, the establishment of her primary base in Ephesus, her magnificent world-renowned Temple and her rituals. Along the way we will note how the worship of Artemis at Ephesus was built upon the worship of Cybele, and how she was made to embody the Mother Goddess by incorporating the traits of earlier indigenous traditions. This chapter will discuss how the Ephesians came to inherit their powerful and ancient customs, their wealthy and famous city, and especially their goddess who reigned supreme as the Mother of Gods, the Protector of the dead and the “Goddess of the First Throne.”

#### **1. Ephesus: Origin and Geography**

The city of Ephesus has a long and tumultuous history. Its significance lies in its early geographical location which marked this settlement as the greatest harbour on the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea.<sup>89</sup> The city shifted in five distinct locations over time, each within a small area. Ephesus' original site -- marked as *Ephesus I: Aya Suluk* (St. John Area) on modern archeological maps -- was situated on the northern slopes of the hills of Mount Koressos and Pion, and south of the Cayster River. This harbour was meant to serve as a great merchant trade

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<sup>89</sup> Ramsay 1901, p. 167

point as well as a well-stocked arsenal. Strabo describes some of the architectural difficulties of the early city as follows,

The city has both an arsenal and a harbour. The mouth of the harbour was made narrower by the engineers, but they, along with the king who ordered it, were deceived as to the result, I mean Attalus Philadelphus; for he thought that the entrance would be deep enough for large merchant vessels. But the result was the opposite, for the silt, thus hemmed in, made the whole of the harbour, as far as the mouth, more shallow. Before this time the ebb and flow of the tides would carry away the silt and draw it to the sea outside. (Strabo 641.24)

The silt from this primary location, however, has since formed a fertile plain, and has caused the coastline to move farther west. The second site, *Ephesus II* -- the Artemisian area -- reveals that the unfortified, late Archaic and Classical city, was farther inland and closer to the location of modern Selcuk. In Roman times, a sea channel was maintained, with difficulty, to a harbour well west of Mount Pion. By the late Byzantine period this channel had become useless. With the exception of some archaic graves, there has been little exploration of the Archaic or Classical settlements. *Ephesus III: Port of St. Paul* was founded at the base of Mount Koressos and is said to be the largest phase of the city's development. Preston Duane Warden and Roger Bagnall calculate that Ephesus had approximately 40,000 male citizens at its peak during *Ephesus III*.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, it is estimated that the overall population of the city would have exceeded 250,000 inhabitants, which would make it perhaps the fourth largest city of its day behind Rome, Alexandria and Antioch.<sup>91</sup> This sizeable city was an economic stronghold in Asia Minor, and justified the title "The Supreme Metropolis of Asia."<sup>92</sup> It is during this period that the worship of Artemis Ephesia also reached its peak. Incorporating both Anatolian roots in Greek

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<sup>90</sup> Wagner and Bagnall 1998, p. 220.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

characteristics the Artemis of Ephesus was a goddess like no other. In her city she commanded absolute loyalty in exchange for sanctuary mercy and extreme wealth.

#### A. *Establishing and Re-establishing*

The first phase of the city of Ephesus was established and re-established on numerous occasions and by a widespread and varied group of both indigenous and foreign communities. The ancient Greeks believed that the mighty Oceanus and his consort Tethys spawned thousands of water deities each linked to a specific river.<sup>93</sup> Of these, the river Cayster (Kucuk Menderes) had its headwaters in Anatolia (modern Turkey) on Mount Tmolos, and its silt flowed into the Aegean Sea near this ancient city of Ephesus. Pausanias claims that the river god Cayster had fathered the first Ephesian and named him Ephesus. As he writes, “However, it was not by the Amazons that the sanctuary was founded, but by Coresus, an aboriginal, and Ephesus, who is thought to have been a son of the river Cayster, and from Ephesus the city received its name.” (Pausanias 7.2.7) Other sources suggest that the name Ephesus could have been derived from *Aphasa*, an ancient Mycenaean city of the *Ahiyava* Kingdom in southwestern Asia Minor, or perhaps from *Apasas* the name of a legendary Amazon warrior Queen. The name *Apasas* literally means “City of Mother Goddess.”<sup>94</sup>

Guy Maclean Rogers notes that there were at least 50 original tribes of Ephesus before the time of the Ionian foundation.<sup>95</sup> Towards the end of the 13th century B.C.E., the Greek peninsula was invaded by Dorians coming from the north. The invasion extended as far as the

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<sup>93</sup> James 2003, p. 29.

<sup>94</sup> Laale 2011, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Rogers 1991, p. 13.

south of the peninsula. Settlements were completely destroyed. The indigenous people living in the region (the Achaeans) could not stand the pressures of the Dorians and they sailed into the Aegean Sea in ships under the command of Androclus, son of King Codrus of Athens who was famous for his heroic feats. Strabo states that “Androclus, legitimate son of Codrus, the King of Athens, was the leader of the Ionian colonisation... and that he became the founder of Ephesus; and for this reason, it is said, the royal seat of the Ionians was established there” (Strabo 632-3). Seeking new areas to establish their exceedingly growing population, legend claims that Androclus followed the bees as an omen of where he should settle his people. Philostratus the Elder writes that, "When the Athenians set out to colonize Ionia, the Muses in the form of bees guided their fleet; for they rejoiced in Ionia, because the waters of Meles are sweeter than the waters of Cephisus and Olmeius." (Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 2.8) In honor of the guiding bees, Ephesians later minted their image on their silver coins. The bee became an important symbol of Ephesus, and of Artemis herself.<sup>96</sup>

Androclus and his followers subsequently established themselves along the western and southwestern shores of Ionia and Caria probably between 1000 and 800 B.C.E., prior to the time of the epic poets Homer and Hesiod.<sup>97</sup> The difficulties in establishing a city on this constantly changing landscape forced Androclus to consult the Delphic Oracle. Using an earlier source, Creophylus' *Chronicles of the Ephesians*, Athenaeus, a Greek writer from Naucratis in Egypt, writes:

The founders of Ephesus, after suffering many hardships because of the difficulties of the region, finally sent to the Oracle of the God and asked where they should place their city. And he declared to them that they should build a city “wheresoever a fish shall show them and a wild boar shall lead the way.” It is said, accordingly, that some fishermen

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<sup>96</sup> The significance of this symbol will be explored further in Chapter Five.

<sup>97</sup> Laale *op. cit.*, p. 6.

were eating their noonday meal in [between] the place today called 'Oily' and the sacred lake. One of the fish popped out with the live coal and fell into some straw, and the thicket in which a wild boar happened to be was set on fire. The boar, frightened by the fire, ran up a great distance on the mountain and was brought down by [Androclus'] javelin and fell where today stands the temple of Athena [Athenaeum]. (Athenaeus, VIII. 361d-e)

In seeing the prophecy complete, Androclus decided to drive out the Carians and Leleges, as well as the Lydians, who had dwelt in this area for hundreds of years, and established the city of Ephesus. Consequently, the early city of Ephesus faced numerous battles between the indigenous inhabitants of the area and the conquering Ionians.

However, not all communities pre-established in this area were besieged or exiled.

Pausanias describes that peace treaties and oaths of friendship that were offered to those who lived around the Anatolian sanctuary as follows:

But Androclus the son of Codrus (for he it was who was appointed king of the Ionians who sailed against Ephesus) expelled from the land the Leleges and Lydians who occupied the upper city. Those, however, who dwelt around the sanctuary, had nothing to fear; they exchanged oaths of friendship with the Ionians and escaped warfare. Androclus also took Samos from the Samians and for a time the Ephesians held Samos and the adjacent islands. (Pausanias 7.2.8)

According to Hans Willer Laale, it is this blending and overlapping of myth, ritual, and religious beliefs that led to the development and dramatic influence of Artemis Ephesia. While the indigenous culture of this area had deep Anatolian roots and is said to have worshiped the goddess Cybele, when the Greeks arrived on the scene they replaced this early Mother Goddess, a goddess of nature, with their own goddess of nature, Artemis of the Hunt.<sup>98</sup> The goddess of the Hunt fit well into the shoes of her predecessor as she was already well-known for basking in the wilderness, protecting the young, and being the authority on rituals concerning the life cycles of her followers. Thus, as Roger states, Ephesus was a center of religion centuries and perhaps

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

millennia before it became a political capital: "...for in Asia Minor religious feeling clings with marvelous persistence to definite localities."<sup>99</sup>

This religious attachment exhibited by the Ephesians, and their severe loyalty to their city and their goddess, is later evidenced when King Lysimachus attempts to move the city on to a new site during his brief reign over this region. According to legend, the great future of Ephesus had been foreseen by the King. As soon as he came into possession of the Ionian coast in 287 B.C.E., he sketched out a plan for a great city worthy of being the capital of Asia. Strabo describes the challenges faced by Lysimachus while trying to resituate the city:

Lysimachus built a wall round the present city, but the people were not agreeably disposed to change their abodes to it; and therefore he waited for a downpour of rain and himself took advantage of it and blocked the sewers so as to inundate the city; and the inhabitants were then glad to make the change. He named the city after his wife Arsinoe; the old name, however, prevailed. (Strabo 640.21)

Thus, Lysimachus compelled the Ephesians to abandon their site and to construct a new fortified city at the shore, in the area between Mounts Pion and Coressus. Lysimachus' city included over 9 km of fortification walls, a sheltered harbour, and extensive wharves and warehouses.<sup>100</sup>

Unfortunately, the completion of his plans was prevented by his death. His great new city, called Arsinoe after his wife, sank back to the second great level of the older Ephesus and resumed the ancient name.

During the third and second centuries B.C.E. control of Ephesus changed hands frequently. In 133 B.C.E., it was part of the Attalid Kingdom given over to Rome. Ephesus became the capital of the Roman Province of Asia and one of the largest and most important commercial centers of the eastern Empire. Ephesus was granted special honors by Rome and

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<sup>99</sup> Rogers 1994, p. 136.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

many monumental buildings and architectural adornments were added to the city. Through Roman engineering the harbour was kept open despite the silting of the river.

### *B. The Temple of Artemis Ephesia*

Despite the many challenges of settling and maintaining the city and its harbour, Ephesus' cultural life was focused on its powerful and all-encompassing Mother Goddess, Artemis Ephesia, and her inviolable and sacrosanct temple, the Artemision.

The Temple of Artemis Ephesia, known as the Artemision, was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was located within the city of Ephesus, and was completely rebuilt three times before its eventual destruction by the Goths in 263 C.E.<sup>101</sup> Only foundations and sculptural fragments of the latest of the temples remain at the archeological site today.

The first sanctuary, antedated the Ionic immigration by many years, and dates to the Bronze Age. Pausanias states, "The sanctuary of Apollo at Didymi, and his oracle, is earlier than the immigration of the Ionians, while the cult of Ephesian Artemis is far more ancient still than their coming." (Pausanias 7.2.7) Excavations in 1987-88<sup>102</sup> confirmed that the site was occupied as early as the Bronze Age, with a sequence of pottery finds that extend forward to Middle Geometric times, when a peripteral <sup>103</sup>temple with a floor of hard-packed clay was constructed in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. The peripteral temple at Ephesus offers the earliest example of a peripteral type on the coast of Asia Minor, and perhaps the oldest known example of post-Mycenaean Greek monumental architecture. Tradition claims that this earlier shrine of

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<sup>101</sup> Clive 1979, p. 86 – 7.

<sup>102</sup> Bammer 1990, p. 137–160.

<sup>103</sup> Greek, from noun *perípteros* meaning encompassed round with columns, or having a row of columns on all sides.

Artemis stood on the seashore, which means it must evidently have been above the sea level.<sup>104</sup> The earliest cult statue of Artemis Ephesia was most likely made of wood, and would have been centered within this archaic sanctuary.<sup>105</sup> The sanctuary measured 13.5 x 6.5 m with 4x8 m columns surrounding an open cella within its interior. Inside, resting on six columns, a rectangular baldachin housed the cult figure. Callimachus, in his *Hymn to Artemis*, attributed the sculpting of this early wood figure to the Amazons:

For thee, too, the Amazons, whose mind is set on war, in Ephesus beside the sea established an image beneath an oak trunk, and Hippo performed a holy rite for thee, and they themselves, O Upris Queen<sup>106</sup>, around the image danced a war-dance – first in shields and armour, and again in a circle arraying a spacious choir. And afterwards around that image was raised a shrine of broad foundations. That it shall never behold nothing more divine, naught richer. (Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis*, 233, 248)

In addition to this wooden figure, there may have been a sacred tree and other sacred objects in the interior, as well as other statues and cult images.<sup>107</sup> Animals such as rams, peacocks and oxen stand out among devotional figurines along with gold and ivory representation of goddesses.<sup>108</sup>

By the seventh century B.C. E., Ephesus fell to the Cimmerians, and in the sixth century it came under the control of the Lydians. King Croesus demolished the city walls and forced the inhabitants of Ephesus to build a new unfortified city farther inland. He moved the city which was standing on Mount Pion to a flat plane further to the east. Since the old temple was destroyed by a flood, Croesus funded its reconstruction, which began around 560 B.C.E., under

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<sup>104</sup> Ramsay *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>105</sup> Lethaby 1917, p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> Farnell notes that the term title *Upris* was a name of Artemis which the Greeks interpreted as “watcher.” Farnell 1909, p. 488.

<sup>107</sup> Lethaby *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ephesus the New Guide* 2000, p. 44.



the Cretan architect Chersiphron and his son Metagenes.<sup>109</sup> According to Laale, construction took about 120 years and involved a significant amount of marble, as well as ingenious machinations and technologies employed to transport the columns from the quarries to the temple on rollers.<sup>110</sup> Several difficulties contributed to the time and cost needed to construct the sanctuary. Pliny the Elder notes the issue with respect to the foundations of such a massive and heavy structure:

... To ensure that the foundations of so massive a building would not be laid on shifting, unstable ground, they were underpinned with a layer of closely trodden charcoal, and then with another layer of sheepskins with fleeces and shorn. The length of the temple overall was 425 feet, and its breadth 225 feet. There were 127 columns, each constructed by different King and 60 feet in height. Of these 36 were carved with reliefs. (Pliny the Elder, 23-79)

According to tradition, Metagenes was struggling with making sure that the lintels were lifted into place, when one night while sleeping he saw before him Artemis who told him that “she herself had laid that stone.” Indeed, when he woke up the next morning, the stone had been “adjusted merely by dint of its own weight.”<sup>111</sup> Among the offerings originally made by Croesus to the temple of Artemis were oxen of gold and the greater part of the pillars, some of which were inscribed with his name (Herodotus 1. 92). Over the centuries that followed and down to the time of Alexander the Great, the temple in its interior was decorated by a great number of notable painters, sculptors and craftsmen. Strabo writes that the altar of the Artemision “was filled, one might say, with the works by Praxiteles.”<sup>112</sup> (Strabo 14.1.23.) Thus, the temple

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<sup>109</sup> Laale *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>112</sup> 370 – 330 B.C.E.

Artemision attracted attention from all over the ancient world for its size, antiquity, and beauty, as well as the collection of magnificent artworks in its precinct.

Both Thomas and Laale agree that one aspect of this temple captured the imagination of Roman period writers more than any other: the inviolability of the sanctuary.<sup>113</sup> This reputation can be traced back to the Persian conquest of Ephesus in which according to Herodotus everything but the temple of Artemis was destroyed. As Herodotus records, "...The temple of Artemis was the only Greek temple spared by Xerxes." (Herodotus 8. 103, 107, Strabo 14.1.5) An often cited passage calls the sanctuary the "common bank of Asia" and the "refuge of necessity" (Aristides, *On Harmony*, 24), testifying to the Temple's importance, not only as a religious centre but as a commercial enterprise offering an inviolable place of refuge.<sup>114</sup>

The world-renown Temple of Artemis became the major attraction of Ephesus and the foundation for its cultural life as well as commerce, trade and tourism. Stories circulated about how conquerors of the city itself spared the temple out of piety for the goddess. According to Claudius Aelianus, when Kroisos marched against the city Pindaros, the tyrant who ruled the city at the time, devised a plan in which he used the temple to protect the destruction of the city by claiming that the entire city was a sanctuary of Artemis. Aelian writes that "Pindaros advised the Ephesians to layout ropes and attach them from the gates in the walls to the columns of the temple of Artemis, so that they would allow the city to be dedicated to Artemis, and he thereby devised to confer the right of asylum to the city." (Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 3.26) As it turned out Kroisos spared the city in the same way, and perhaps for the same reasons, that Xerxes had spared the temple during the Persian war. Consequently, the Ephesians were reputed to provide

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas 1990, p. 99 and Laale *op. cit.*, p.60-1.

<sup>114</sup> As we shall see, one of the most important attributes of Artemis is as Protector of the city.

such security of the temple and its wealth that they would sooner strip off the clothing of the goddess than touch one of the deposits in her sanctuary:

You know about the Ephesians, of course, and that large sums of money are in their hands, some of it belonging to private citizens and deposited in the temple of Artemis, not alone money of the Ephesians but also of aliens and of persons from all parts of the world, and in some cases of commonwealths and Kings, money which all deposit there in order that it may be safe, since no one has ever yet dared to violate that place, although countless wars have occurred in the past and the city has often been captured... They [the Ephesians] would sooner, I imagine, strip off the adornment of the goddess than touch this money. (Dio Chrysostom 31.54-55)

The sanctuary of the temple of Artemis served not only as a depository of wealth but also as an asylum for those who needed political, religious and/or physical protection. The right of asylum is said to originate in mythological times when the Amazons sought refuge in the sanctuary as they were being pursued by Dionysius and later by Heracles: “It is a fact that the women from the Thermodon, as they knew the sanctuary from of old, sacrificed to the Ephesian goddess both on this occasion and when they had fled from Heracles; some of them earlier still, when they had fled from Dionysus, having come to the sanctuary as suppliants.” (Pausanias 7.2.7) Thus, the characterization of Ephesus as the last hope of desperate individuals, and the haven of possible security for those battered by fate,<sup>115</sup> was carried throughout the centuries and remained one of its most fundamental features.

The second time the Artemision was destroyed was in 356 B.C.E., not long after its completion, in a vain act of arson by Herostratus, who set fire to the wooden roof-beams, seeking fame at any cost: “A man was found to plan the burning of the temple of Ephesian Diana so that through the destruction of this most beautiful building his name might be spread through the whole world” (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 8. 14. 5). This devastating act

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<sup>115</sup> Thomas *op. cit.*, p. 102.

of arson is said to have coincided with the birth of Alexander the Great (around 20/21 July 356 B.C.E.). To the Ephesians, the temple's destruction was at first inconceivable. Plutarch writes that, "All the Magi, who were then at Ephesus, looked upon the fire as a sign which betokened a much greater misfortune: they ran about the town, beating their faces, and crying, "That the day had brought forth the great scourge and destroyer of Asia" (Plutarch, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 2.713b). Unable to attain fame any other way, the mad pyromaniac had set the temple to flame in order to make a name for himself.<sup>116</sup> For this outrage, the Ephesians sentenced Herostratus to death and forbade anyone from mentioning his name. (Valerius Maximus, 8.14.5) But a strange twist of fate intervened. The Artemision had gained recognition throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, and so its violent and wasteful destruction did not go unnoticed. But neither did its perpetrator whose name was later noted by the Roman historian Theopompus.<sup>117</sup>

Many Ephesians blamed the goddess Artemis for being absent that day and unable to protect her temple. Plutarch remarked that Artemis was too preoccupied with Alexander's delivery to save her burning temple. He writes: "He [Hegesias the Magnesian] said, namely, it was no wonder that the temple of Artemis was burned down, since the goddess was busy bringing Alexander into the world." (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 1.665.3) This assertion suggests an intriguing connection between Artemis Ephesia, as the Mother Goddess of Ephesus, and the traditional figure of the Greek Artemis, the goddess of childbirth. Both roles are fitting in explaining her absence the night in which her sanctuary is destroyed. The fire was a great loss to the city of Ephesus and its citizens. Most of the temple's ancient works of art were consumed by

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<sup>116</sup> Laale *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, William (1849). *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*. p. 439.

the flames, weapons, tapestries, sculptures, and many other treasures were irreparably damaged.<sup>118</sup>

When Alexander the Great entered Ephesus in 334 B.C.E., he recalled all of the citizens who had been banished for supporting his cause.<sup>119</sup> Alexander saw that the temple of Artemis was not yet finished, and he proposed to finance it and have his name inscribed on the front. His offer was delicately refused by the Ephesians who flattered him by arguing that “A God cannot build a temple for a God.”<sup>120</sup> The Ephesians did not want Alexander involved in rebuilding their temple because they were well aware of his pattern of control and domination over buildings or places in which he invested his wealth. Consequently the Ephesian magistrates hired several architects, Chirocrates, Paeonius and Demetrius along with others, to rebuild the temple in the original dimensions, but on a higher base. The greatest sculptors of the age worked on the temple and it was completed nearly a century later. The last reconstruction of the Artemision was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. While passing through Ephesus a century later, Antipater of Sidon, who compiled the list of the Seven Wonders, described the finished temple as follows:

I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand. (Antipater of Sidon, *Greek Anthology*, 9.58)

This reconstruction survived some 600 years, and continued to thrive well into the 2nd century C.E. Rick Strelan describes a Roman edict of 162 C.E. acknowledging the importance of

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<sup>118</sup> Laale *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Artemision, the annual Ephesian festival to Artemis, and officially extends it from a few holy days over March and April to a whole month. This extension makes this festival one of the largest and most magnificent religious festivals in Ephesus' liturgical calendar.<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, in 267 C.E., the Temple of Artemis Ephesia was set aflame and completely destroyed in a raid by the Goths, an East Germanic tribe.<sup>122</sup> According to Clive Foss, the remains were extensively quarried for building stone in the early Christian era.<sup>123</sup> At least some of the stones from the temple were used in construction of other buildings. When the Emperor Justinian was building the monumental Christian church in Constantinople -- Hagia Sophia -- he used some of the columns that originally belonged to the temple of Artemis: "Justinian had materials brought for his new temple from all over his empire. He had also brought all the columns of all the temples spread out in Asia Minor. Among these, were the columns of the Artemis Temple at Ephesus."<sup>124</sup> Thus the building blocks of the sacred sanctuary that was the heart of the city of Ephesus for centuries were laid as foundational stones for a new religious and political authority.

The fundamental importance of the temple of Artemis in Ephesus cannot be overstated. It was central to the identity of the Ephesians, as the characteristics of the temple reflected the attributes of its followers. Sanctuary, mercy, loyalty, and the goddess that encompassed all aspects of life and death were situated within this temple. It is not a surprise that the Ephesians spent so much of their time money and creative effort to continuously rebuild and reconstruct a

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<sup>121</sup> Strelan 1996, 57 – 58, and footnote 83. The edict was made as a form of official apology and compensation; a senior Roman official had unwittingly offended the goddess by conducting business during one or more of her holy days. The political, economic and religious importance of Ephesian Artemis was undiminished more than one hundred years after Paul's visit.

<sup>122</sup> Herwig Wolfram, Thomas J. Dunlap, tr., *History of the Goths*. 1988, p. 52.

<sup>123</sup> Foss 1979, p. 86-7.

<sup>124</sup> *St. Sophia: Construction for the Third Time*

fortress that held their ritual history and communal practices. At the heart of this metropolitan community was a deity that combined the primordial ritualistic powers of archaic Anatolian culture with the glamorous, independent attributes of a full-fledged Olympian goddess.

## **2. Artemis Ephesia: Goddess of the First Throne**

One of the most significant differences between the Artemis of Ephesus and the Greek Artemis can be found in the foundational myths of her Anatolian heritage. While the Greek Artemis embodies many aspects of nature, rites of passage, and involvement in the life of her followers, the Artemis of Ephesus represents a much more complicated and powerful divinity. Artemis Ephesia originates from the Mother of the Gods herself. Her direct connections through the Amazons to the goddess Cybele, places her in a position of power the likes of which the Greek Artemis could never reach. There are two aspects of Artemis Ephesia that will be discussed here. The first is her establishment in the area of Ephesus as a powerful deity. Legends of the most famous and feared community of women, the Amazons, were responsible for creating her powerful pre-eminence. This connection explains in part the fearsome and authoritative position Artemis holds in Ephesus. Here she is not merely the goddess of the Hunt: she is a warrior goddess, a mother, a creator, and the powerful source of the embodiment of divine strength. Whether or not they existed – the ancient Greeks thought they did -- the Amazons were not only feared, they were respected. This respect was not due to their representation as women, but to their mythological skill as soldiers. Thus, since the Amazons were viewed as tribal women who were unbending, nonconforming, and unforgiving, their goddess had to be equally unrelenting and severe.

The second aspect that makes Artemis Ephesia so very different from her Greek counterpart is her Cretan inheritance. As seen in the previous chapter, the Greek Artemis also incorporated some early Minoan and Mycenaean characteristics. Most of these involved being the Mistress of Animals, a nature goddess, and a nurturing divinity. And while these provide the Greek Artemis with a significant amount of influence, her main identity remains as an Olympian daughter, sister, and helper. In contrast, the Artemis of Ephesus inherits the characteristics, responsibilities, and authority, of the Cretan “Mother of Gods,” Cybele. This inheritance provides Artemis Ephesia with a powerful royal lineage, a worldly responsibility, and complete dominion over all Ephesian citizens. The “Mother of Gods” attribute is a foundational difference that transforms the traditional Greek attributes of Artemis into a whole new dimension: she rivals the authority and influence of Zeus. Thus, in Ephesus, Artemis is not just an Olympian. As Cybele, her authority predates the Olympians, and through this early Cretan practice she embodies the Titan Rhea, and even the all-encompassing Mother Goddess Gaia.

#### *A. The Arrival of the Amazons*

Material and ritual investigation point to the reality that Artemis Ephesia began as the Anatolian goddess Cybele, and was later conflated with the Greek Artemis. Artemis’ Anatolian and Greek aspects inform her identity as Protector of Ephesus and of its suppliants, as well as a nature goddess associated with adolescent transition into adulthood, and as a producer of abundance.<sup>125</sup>

Tradition states that long before the Trojans fought the Greeks, the Amazons established a sanctuary for their Asiatic nature goddess, Cybele, at the foothills of Mount Solmissus near

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<sup>125</sup> Lesser 2006, p. 51.



Ephesus.<sup>126</sup> Legend claims that the Amazons are founders of the earliest shrine at Ephesus when they arrived in the area as fugitives, claiming its asylum. Even though he disagrees, Pausanias credits Pindar with the story that the Amazons established the sanctuary on their way to Athens, "... he [Pindar] says that this sanctuary was founded by the Amazons during their campaign against Athens and Theseus." (Pausanias 7. 2. 7) However, Pausanias maintains that Pindar was incorrect in his assertion that the shrine was founded by the Amazons. He says that long before they started on their Attic campaign they had twice taken refuge at the Artemession, once from Heracles, and, earlier still, from Dionysus: "It is a fact that the women from the Thermodon, as they knew the sanctuary from of old, sacrificed to the Ephesian goddess both on this occasion and when they had fled from Heracles; some of them earlier still, when they had fled from Dionysus, having come to the sanctuary as suppliants." (Pausanias 7.2.7) Whether or not the legendary Amazons established the sanctuary at the early site of the city of Ephesus, or by taking refuge at the site, it was believed by the ancient Greeks that they established it as a sanctuary; the tradition of their presence and settlement in this area becomes the foundation for the infrastructure of the worship of Artemis Ephesia. Consequently, it is clear that their myths played a significant role in establishing the shrine as a place of sanctuary.

It is reasonable to infer from these various sources that in the traditions of the Ephesian temple the Amazons were prominent. Even Pausanias, who denies that the Amazons founded the shrine, ascribes to their fame a large measure of the prestige which belonged to the cult of Ephesian Artemis all over the Greek world. He mentions this first in his list of reasons for the great reputation of the shrine:

But all cities worship Artemis of Ephesus, and individuals hold her in honor above all the gods. The reason, in my view, is the renown of the Amazons, who traditionally dedicated

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<sup>126</sup> Laale *op. cit.*, p. 3.

the image, also the extreme antiquity of this sanctuary. Three other points as well have contributed to her renown, the size of the temple, surpassing all buildings among men, the eminence of the city of the Ephesians and the renown of the goddess who dwells there. (Pausanias, 4.31.8)

Thus Pausanias describes a unique combination that contributes to the goddess' renown: a powerful indigenous mythos, an immense architectural structure, and the severe and fundamental loyalty and worship of the city's inhabitants. The consolidation of these factors establishes the dominion of Artemis Ephesia.

Apart from her name it would be difficult to recognise the Greek Artemis in the deity of Ephesus. The sacred statue of Artemis Ephesia is described as an image attired in a *polymastros* or a multi-breasted vest, wearing a turret crown on her head. The turret-crown, later to be a significant feature on the head of the cult statue, symbolizes that she, like Cybele, oversees the well-being of her people.<sup>127</sup> Traditionally, scholars have interpreted her breasts as perhaps representing eggs, acorns, scrotum of bulls, bags of amulets and other elements. Patrick Clayton explains that:

The peculiar many breasted statue of Artemis Ephesia represents a Mother Goddess, the breast symbolizing the fertility of women. The statue is rigid, the lower portion like an Egyptian mummy case. The decorative elements, stags, bulls, lions, griffins, sphinxes, sirens, these, are creatures originally of the East. (Clayton 1996, p. 87)<sup>128</sup>

There may be other interpretations of her "breasts" and these will be discussed in Chapter Five.

This image was made out of wood, set upright and fastened so that it would not topple.

According to Pausanias it was an image of "...a goddess held in honor above all else."

(Pausanias, 4. 31.8) Callimachus recites how the Amazons would dance around the sacred sculpture in preparation for their battles,

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<sup>127</sup> Farnell *op. cit.*, p. 481.

<sup>128</sup> Price 1996, p. 35.

The Amazons, whose minds are set on war, in Ephesus beside the sea established an image beneath an oak trunk, and Hippo (then Queen of the Amazons...) performed a holy rite... And around the image danced a war dance - first in shields and in armor, and again in a circle arrayed a spacious choir. (Callimachus *Hymn III* 237-258)

This connection to the Amazons seems like a natural link between what Aeschylus describes as a “warlike race”<sup>129</sup> of women who stand in direct contrast to the secluded way of life that Greek women experienced, and the characteristics of the Greek Artemis. Artemis the Huntress is independent, skilled with a bow and arrow, and violent in her defense of her followers and sacred animals. According to Herodotus, Amazon women evolved their way of life as a response to capture. In his version of the legend, the Amazons were taken prisoners by the Greeks. On the high seas, they killed their captors and landed in Scythian territory.<sup>130</sup> Here they founded a new tribe, the Sauromatae, based on independence and rejected the “good” life of Scythian women.<sup>131</sup> Herodotus states the Amazons describe themselves as follows,

We are riders; our business is with the bow and spear and we know nothing of women’s work; but in your country [Scythia] no woman had anything to do with such things and your women stay-at-home in their wagons occupied with feminine tasks and never go to hunt for any other purpose. (Herodotus 4.114)

Thus, their customs present their separateness as a form of dissent from the conventions of life for Greek women. Consequently, the Amazons valued their independence, hunting and wandering freely through the wilderness. They were often regarded, by Herodotus, for instance, as men killers: “They have a marriage law which forbids a girl to marry until she has killed an enemy in battle; some of their women, unable to fulfill this condition, grow old and die in spinsterhood.” (Herodotus, 4. 117) Herodotus contended that his knowledge was gained as an

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<sup>129</sup> Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound*, 415.

<sup>130</sup> Hardwick 1990, p. 17.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

initiate, and that the mysteries of Samothrace were of Pelasgic origin: “For the Athenians were then already counted as Greeks when the Pelasgians came to live in the land with them and thereby began to be considered as Greeks.” (Herodotus 2.51) Herodotus clearly considered the Pelasgians as a non-Hellenic race who preceded the Hellenes in the occupation of Greece, and therefore we must interpret his remarks about the Cabiria as meaning that these rites were instituted by a pre-Hellenic people.<sup>132</sup> It is not difficult to identify this early community with the pre-Ionic inhabitants of Samos, who, according to Pausanias, settled Samothrace:

The Samians fled and some of them made their home in an island near Thrace, and as a result of their settling there the name of the island was changed from Dardania to Samothrace. Others with Leogorus threw a wall round Anaea on the mainland opposite Samos, and ten years after crossed over, expelled the Ephesians and reoccupied the island. (Pausanias, 7.4.3.)

Thus, the worshippers of Cybele in Samothrace can be said to share similar traditions to those who honoured her in Crete, Lydia, and Phrygia. This explains why the Samothracian goddess closely approximates the form of Cybele, and that we find the Amazons consecrating this island to the Mother of the Gods.<sup>133</sup> It is logical then that the colonists of Samothrace were bound by strong ties, probably of blood, to the pre-Ionic population of Ephesus and its geographical area, by whom the shrine of the Ephesian Artemis was founded; a shrine indissolubly connected with the Amazon tradition.

Further support of the argument that the Amazons brought their Cretan Mother Goddess to Ephesus is through the use of symbolism. The double-axe is a religious symbol which occurs frequently wherever there are remains of pre-Hellenic, Minoan or Mycenaean material evidence,

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<sup>132</sup> Myres 1907, p. 27.

<sup>133</sup> Diodorus, 3. 55.

and this appears as the regular symbol of various forms of the Asiatic Mother.<sup>134</sup> It is no coincidence that the Amazons use the battle-axe as their foundational weapon.<sup>135</sup> Hence, there is a direct symbolic connection between the myths of Amazonian tribes in which the worship of Cybele was deeply rooted, to the communities which predominated in Crete and other lands where similar cultural traditions flourished before the rise of the Hellenic states.

In addition to the symbolic use of weaponry in worship, further material evidence supports the connection between the Cretan Mother Goddess and Artemis of Ephesus. An inscription which dates from about the 3rd century B.C.E. uses the name *Selasphoros* or Light Bringer, when referring to the goddess Crete.<sup>136</sup> It is the dedication of a votive offering: "To the Healer of diseases, to Apollo, Giver of Light to mortals, Eutyches has set up in votive offering (a statue of) the Cretan Lady of Ephesus, the Light-Bearer." (C.I.G. 6797)<sup>137</sup> This inscription is almost identical to the lament ascribed by Sophocles to Oedipus Rex, "Lyceian Lord, scatter, I pray thee, for our aid thine unconquerable darts from thy gold-twisted bowstring and with them the fire-bearing rays of Artemis with which she rusheth over the Lycian mountains." (Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 204-208) Here, the Cretan Light-Bearer may easily be the fire-bearing Artemis of Lycia.

According to Pausanias, the Cretan Lady of Ephesus may have also been addressed as *Lycaea* or Of the Wolves. This term is used for Artemis at Troezen. The 2nd century C.E. community of Troezen was unable to explain the application of the epithet. Pausanias states that "near the theater a temple of Artemis Lycea (Wolfish) was made by Hippolytus. About this

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<sup>134</sup> Anderson *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> C. I. G. 6797 in Anderson 1967, p. 36.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

surname I could learn nothing from the local guides, but I gathered that either Hippolytus destroyed wolves that were ravaging the land of Troezen, or else that Lycea is a surname of Artemis among the Amazons, from whom he was descended through his mother.” (Pausanias 2. 31.4) Most scholars agree that this Artemis *Lycaea* was the goddess of Ephesus, Perge, and Lycia, who was known as the Cretan Lady of Ephesus.<sup>138</sup>

Thus it can be concluded that one of the fundamental differences between the attributes of Artemis Ephesia and the Greek Artemis was due to the foundational myth that she is a goddess established by the Amazons. Alongside the implications of an infrastructure of worship based on a community of independent, aggressive, and nonconforming women of the ancient world Artemis’ Anatolian and Cretan inheritance establishes her divine rule as all-encompassing and all-powerful. The attempt by the Greeks to incorporate their Huntress into this elaborate pre-established community only further supports the argument that the goddess who ruled Ephesus was a deity so fully entrenched within this geographical space, and within the identity of the community living there, that she could not be removed. Consequently the incorporation of the Greek Artemis into Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, resulted in a divinity that enveloped all aspects of the human experience.

#### *B. Artemis - Cybele: Mother of the Gods*

One of the most worshiped deities of the ancient world was the Phrygian goddess, Cybele. This deity may have evolved from an Anatolian Mother Goddess whose ritual remnants may have been found at Çatalhöyük, and date back to the 6th millennium B.C.E. Walter Burkert places her among the "foreign gods" of Greek religion, a complex figure combining the Minoan-

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Mycenaean tradition with the Phrygian cult imported directly from Asia Minor.<sup>139</sup> One of the earliest material depictions of the 'Great Mother' is described by Takács as a terracotta statuette of a seated (mother) goddess giving birth with each hand on the head of a leopard or panther.<sup>140</sup> In Phrygian art of the 8th century B.C.E., the cult attributes of the Phrygian Mother-goddess include attendant lions, a bird of prey, and a small vase for her libations or other offerings.<sup>141</sup>

In the 2nd century C.E., Pausanias attests to a Magnesian (Lydian) cult to "...the Mother of the Gods" whose image was carved into a rock-spur of Mount Sipylus. This was believed to be the oldest image of the goddess, and was attributed to the legendary Broteas, "...the Magnesians, who live to the north of Spil Mount, have on the rock Coddinus the most ancient of all the images of the Mother of the gods. The Magnesians say that it was made by Broteas the son of Tantalus." (Pausanias 3.22.4) The gigantic remains of such a figure at Mount Sipylus, though lacking inscriptions and much eroded, are consistent with later representations of a seated Cybele, with a supporting or attendant lion beneath each arm. At Pessinos in Phrygia, the Mother Goddess, as identified by Pausanias as Cybele, took the form of an unshaped stone of black meteoric iron, and may have been associated with, or identical to, Agdistis, Pessinos' mountain deity. In his description of the story of Cybele/Agdistis' birth, Pausanias translates the names of the Phrygian sky-god into Greek as Zeus and the earth-goddess as Gaia: "Zeus [or rather the Phrygian sky-god], it is said, let fall in his sleep seed upon the ground, which in course of time sent up a Daimon, with two sexual organs, male and female. They call the Daimon Agdistis [Cybele]. But the gods, fearing Agdistis, cut off the male organ." (Pausanias 7. 17. 8) No

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<sup>139</sup> Burkert 1985, p. 177.

<sup>140</sup> Takacs 1996, p. 376. See Vermaseren: *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults: Essays in Memory of M.J. Vermaseren*.

<sup>141</sup> Simpson 1996, pp. 198–201.

contemporary text or myth survives to attest the original character and nature of Cybele's Phrygian cult. Images and iconography in funerary contexts, and the ubiquity of her Phrygian name *Matar* or Mother, suggest that she was a mediator between the "boundaries of the known and unknown:" the civilised and the wild, the worlds of the living and the dead.<sup>142</sup>

From around the 6th century B.C.E., cults to the Anatolian Mother-goddess were introduced from Phrygia into the ethnically Greek colonies of western Anatolia, mainland Greece, the Aegean islands and the westerly colonies of Magna Graecia. The Greeks called her *Mātēr* or *Mētēr* Mother, or from the early 5th century *Kubelē*. Pindar refers to her as, Mistress Cybele the Mother.<sup>143</sup> In Greece, as in Phrygia, she was *Potnia Therōn* or Queen of Beasts<sup>144</sup> with her mastery of the natural world expressed by the lions that flank her, sit in her lap or draw her chariot. She was readily assimilated to the Minoan-Greek earth-mother Rhea, "Mother of the Gods," whose raucous, ecstatic rites she may have acquired. As an exemplar of devoted motherhood, she was partly assimilated to the grain-goddess Demeter, whose torchlight procession recalled her search for her lost daughter, Persephone.<sup>145</sup> It is easy to understand how the attributes of Cybele were easily incorporated into the characteristics of the Greek Artemis. There are significant overlapping similarities that make Artemis the best possible heir to these ancient traditions. Arriving with the Greeks, Artemis the Huntress is already mistress of the animals, and in this form she is flanked by a variety of wild beasts. As the goddess of childbirth and the divinity of transitions, she is in the best position to take over all nurturing, life-giving

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<sup>142</sup> Roller 1999, p. 110-4.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125, citing Pindar, fragment 80 (Snell), Despoina *Kubela Mātēr*.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 1999, p. 135; *Potnia Theron* can sometimes be found as a title in ancient sources, but is sometimes a scholarly inference drawn from iconography.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170 - 176.



responsibilities. The one aspect that Artemis Ephesia inherits strictly from Cybele and her Anatolian roots, is their position as Mother Goddess or the Great Mother. If Pausanias is correct in his retelling of the legend in which Agdistis (Zeus) removes his male genitals and becomes a female goddess Cybele, then one can argue that Cybele/Artemis embodies both male and female qualities and therefore is a complete parthenogenetic divinity. This explains why Artemis Ephesia is constantly referred to as Queen and reigns supreme in the Ephesus pantheon.

Further evidence that Artemis Ephesia directly inherits the worship of Cybele can be found in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. Apollonius describes the Amazons engaged in ritual in which they venerate a black stone placed on an altar in an open temple situated on an island off the coast of Colchis,

Then all together they went to the temple of Ares to offer sacrifice of sheep; and in haste they stood round the altar, which was outside the roofless temple, an altar built of pebbles; within a black stone stood fixed, a sacred thing, to which of yore the Amazons all used to pray. (Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 2. 1168)



Due to its resemblance to the Black Stone of Pessinus, it seems impossible to interpret the stone mentioned by Apollonius otherwise than as the symbol of Cybele, although it was placed in a temple of Ares.<sup>146</sup>

**Fig. 3: Black Artemis Ephesia, Capitoline Museum, Rome.**

This visual tradition survives in the numerous depictions of Black Artemis Ephesia [Fig. 3]. Florence Mary Anderson claims that the darkness of the Artemis Ephesia statues is related directly to the darkness

<sup>146</sup> Anderson *op. cit.*, p. 17.

of the wood from which the Amazonian Cybele cult statue was sculpted.<sup>147</sup> Interestingly, the Black Artemis Ephesia sculptures provide potential evidence that the protrusions on her torso cannot be breasts, as they would logically also be sculpted in dark wood.

Frederick Brenk argues that this dual iconography indicates the double nature of Artemis Ephesia as a co-opted Anatolian goddess re-envisioned as the Greek Artemis; the inclusion of the “Ephesia” type of the goddess was an effort by Ephesus to portray the unique Anatolian provenance of their Artemis to the greater Roman world.<sup>148</sup> Laale supports this claim suggesting that for the sake of unity, the population of Ephesus gradually commingled their religious beliefs and practices and by doing so they changed the revered image of the Greek Artemis of the Hunt, the twin sister of Apollo into the many breasted statue of Artemis Ephesia which embodies the native Anatolian Mother Goddess Cybele.<sup>149</sup>

### *C. Goddess of the First Throne*

There is clear evidence that a gradual metamorphosis of power and tradition took place in Ephesus. Despite the attempt by the Greeks to superimpose their tradition of the Artemis, Goddess of the Hunt known for her severe approach to chastity, virginity, and rejection of marriage, onto the attributes of the Anatolian goddess of motherhood, creation, and an all-encompassing authority, they remained unsuccessful. Artemis Ephesia retained much of her pre-Hellenic attributes and her royal lineage. This can be clearly seen in some of the discussion around her title *Protothronia*<sup>150</sup> or Goddess of the First Throne.

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>148</sup> Brenk 1998, p. 160.

<sup>149</sup> Laale *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>150</sup> Strelan *op. cit.*, p. 157.

Pausanias describes an epithet within the temple of Ephesus in which Artemis is labeled “Goddess of the First Throne,” also referred to as, the womb that encompasses the world: “But in the sanctuary of Ephesian Artemis, as you enter the building containing the pictures, there is a stone wall above the altar of Artemis called Goddess of the First Seat.” (Pausanias 10.38.6)

According to Rick Strelan, despite the fact that this epithet is found within the temple of Ephesus we cannot make the automatic assumption that Artemis Ephesia is Artemis *Protothronia*. He proposes that at best, she is an aspect of Artemis, and that there is a possibility that a cult or ritual existed which was associated with her, and specifically for her, *in that aspect*.<sup>151</sup> Things become further complicated if we consider that Callimachus also uses this epithet for Artemis in his *Hymn to Artemis* (1.228). Interestingly, the Artemis he is referring to is not the Ephesian Artemis but appears to be an Artemis known at Chesion and Imbrasus, which is a cape and river in Samos. There is some evidence of a link between Samos and the Ephesians. Athenaeus describes a tradition in which Ephesus was first settled by 1000 slaves from Samos. He goes on to say that, “the Ephesians are descended from these ancestors” (*Deipnoso.* 6.92). Plutarch also recalls a story in which the Amazons fled from the Ephesians to Samos (*Greek Questions*, 56). Thus, Strelan concludes that the Artemis of Samos was most likely known as *Protothronia* and that it was this Artemis whose epithet Pausanias finds in the temple in Ephesus. Assuming that Strelan's position is correct, the overlapping motif of royalty and divine authority of Artemis Ephesia is still significant. Her position as Queen is completely unrelated to her Greek counterpart and fundamentally different than any other Olympian deity. It is not difficult to trace the link between an all-encompassing Mother Goddess, the Anatolian Cybele, to the Queen of Beasts or Mistress of Animals, referring to the Greek Artemis, and finally to Artemis Ephesia,

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

the Goddess of the First Throne. In fact, all of these attributes complement each other, and are further supported in the worship and festivals that were celebrated monthly by Ephesians in her honour. Artemis Ephesia embodied all attributes of divine Mother, Warrior and Protector, but it was her position as Mother of the Gods, and/or Queen above all others, that led to her lasting influence in the Mediterranean. Thus, it is not a surprise that the Ephesians were fundamental believers, and identified themselves not only with their great and flourishing city, but also with the rituals and traditions associated with their great goddess.

### **3. Processions, Rituals and Beliefs**

#### *A. Processions*

According to Rogers, processions meandered through the narrow streets of Ephesus almost daily.<sup>152</sup> In these processions celebrants carried representations of deities and forms of art such as sculpture, painting, or ritual objects that honored the divine. They often stopped at sacred places for specific acts of ritual, prayer and/or sacrifice. Processions normally began and ended at the temple of the deity being worshiped, and temple or civic authorities carefully regulated participation in these celebrations.<sup>153</sup> In his extensive work on processions Rogers notes repeatedly that this specific tradition had significant political impact on the citizens participating in the procession, as well as those who witnessed this event. He states that, “Essentially, these processions helped to create and confirm a civic identity for each city.”<sup>154</sup> This shows that processions themselves are a type of nonverbal means of communication by which the Ephesians negotiated their personal and social identities over space and time. Placing processions within a

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<sup>152</sup> Rogers *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81 – 2.

wider social framework we must consider the donor, the city authorities, the participants in the procession, and the audience, which all played a role for their own reason. It is the combined actions of all of the celebrants which endowed the procession with the social significance it held for the Ephesians.

Connor supports this idea that processions, and ritual, are a symbolic expression of civic concerns, and further suggests that this tradition can be viewed as a commentary on the internal dynamics of a city and its relationship with the outside world.<sup>155</sup> He notes that the procession formula can be seen in the novelistic account by Xenophon of Ephesus of the procession in honor of Artemis. The heroine of his *Ephesian Tale*, Anthia, is introduced dressed as Artemis in the procession where all can behold her beauty,

...the girls in the procession were all decked out as if to meet lovers. Of the band of maidens the leader was Anthia... a prodigy of loveliness [who] far surpassed the other maidens... She carried bow and javelins and dogs followed at her heels. Time and again when the Ephesian saw her in the sacred procession they bowed down as to Artemis. And now to when Anthia came into view the entire multitude cried out in astonishment; some of the spectators asserted that she was the very goddess; others declared she was a replica fashioned by the goddess. But all did obeisance to her and bowed down and called her parents blessed. (Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*, I.2.2)

Xenophon's story is a reflection of the third and later style of a procession to the Artemision, in which the goddess is represented by the most beautiful woman, and has returned from hunting accompanied by hunters, dogs, and a crowd of people.<sup>156</sup> This is a later representation of a more traditional Greek Artemis depicted in the role of the Huntress. Connor points out the political and social significance of the Ephesians playfully participating in a cultural pattern they all share.<sup>157</sup>

This shared drama and ceremony serves as an expression of popular consent of two-way

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<sup>155</sup> Connor 1987, p. 41.

<sup>156</sup> Knibbe 1995, p. 154.

<sup>157</sup> Connor *op. cit.*, p. 44.

communication between the deity and her worshipers, between citizens and noncitizens, and between those who hold political power over those who do not. Anthia, dressed as Artemis, claims a special power, and consequently, a special status for having the chief privilege of divine dress. There are numerous examples in history where humans have the special honor of dressing up as gods. For example, Alexander the Great famously put on the horns of Ammon and at other times appeared as Artemis, Hermes and Heracles.<sup>158</sup> Thus, being elected for divine dress is a public honor that is both political and carries deep social significance.

Little is known about the earliest processions for the cult of Artemis in Ephesus. Knibbe notes that not every goddess had processions.<sup>159</sup> He claims that there are three different types of processions that can be distinguished in Ephesus. First are the processions from the Artemision around Panayirdag which occurred on certain days. There is little material or literature to describe the mysteries of these celebrations. Knibbe suggests that these processions probably took place during the holy month of Artemis which is called “Artemision.” The sacred wooden statue of Artemis was probably carried on a four wheeled carriage. The statue would have been dressed and adorned with the necessary care that was given to her in the Imperial period by women of high society within the city who served as at the “adorners of the goddess.” The procession presumably stopped at the altars along the road, where worshippers sang, prayed, and made offerings. When Artemis had returned to her temple all those who had participated in the procession would be invited to a common meal.<sup>160</sup> Both Rogers and Knibbe agree that because of the nocturnal character of Artemis it can be assumed that these processions took place during

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>159</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

the night.<sup>161</sup> These nocturnal celebrations may have also been inherited from the Anatolian goddess Cybele whose celebrations were often nocturnal. Knibbe claims that this can be corroborated through coins which depict Artemis holding a torch as well as her presentation on the reliefs of the so-called Parthian Monument.<sup>162</sup> As noted earlier, the symbolism of Artemis Ephesia holding a torch is a partial assimilation of the grain-goddess Demeter, whose torchlight procession recalled her search for her lost daughter, Persephone. Demeter is a figure of devoted motherhood, and as we have seen in Chapter One, the Greek Artemis is repeatedly associated with the cult of Demeter, particularly in the mysteries of the Mistress, or Despoina. Thus we can state with some confidence that Artemis Ephesia absorbs all of the significant qualities of powerful antecedent goddesses to become a singular reigning divinity over Ephesus.

Lastly, one of the most significant and least documented festivals or processions for Artemis Ephesia involve the processions to Ortygia on the 6th of Thargelion, (the 6th of May) which was the month dedicated to Artemis' birthday. According to Rogers, the myth of Artemis' birth at Ephesus was the theological blueprint that the Ephesians enacted every year in the grove of Ortygia, from at least the time of King Lysimachus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. until the reign of Emperor Commodus in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.<sup>163</sup> He notes that the birth of Artemis was not just a story told to Ephesian children by their parents, but it was the main event of the Ephesian calendar and was performed by generations of Ephesians as their most important religious festival. It was like the Fourth of July and Christmas all-in-one. Artemis gave the Ephesians their essential civic identity. The primary purpose of this ritual was to connect those who watched and

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<sup>161</sup> Rogers *op. cit.*, p. 111, Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>162</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>163</sup> Rogers *op. cit.*, p. 145.

acted in this drama to their ancestral traditions.<sup>164</sup> These festivals served to reinforce the worship of Artemis and reminded all Ephesians of her significant and foundational role in their civic, social, and spiritual life. Alongside the processions were numerous rituals and traditions that hearkened back to Ephesus' archaic past, and to the depths of Artemis Ephesia's primordial roots.

### *B. Rituals and Traditional Practices*

One of the most significant differences between the Greek Artemis, the Huntress, and Artemis Ephesia stems from their place of birth. While the rest of the Greek world believed Artemis to have been born on the island of Delos, for the Ephesians, the birth of the goddess took place in Ortygia near Ephesus, and it was celebrated there annually. Strabo describes Leto arriving on the coast: "On the same coast, slightly above the sea, is also Ortygia, which is a magnificent grove of all kinds of trees, of the cypress most of all. It is traversed by the Cenchrius River, where Leto is said to have bathed herself after her travail." (Strabo, 14.1.20) He goes on to describe how the Curetes banged on their metal armor in order to drown out the birthing cries of Leto, and successfully concealed the birth of Artemis and Apollo from jealous Hera. Strabo claims that "A general festival is held there annually; and by a certain custom the youths vie for honor, particularly in the splendor of their banquets there. At that time, also, a special college of the Curetes holds symposiums and performs certain mystic sacrifices." (Strabo, 14.1.20) The Ephesians, normally of high or upper class, dressed up as Curetes each year at the celebration of the mysteries and re-enacted their role in the birth of Artemis.<sup>165</sup> In performing this ritual, the

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<sup>164</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>165</sup> Rogers *op. cit.*, p. 145.



Ephesians partake in the biggest birthday celebration party of the city, as well as reaffirm their vital contribution not only to Artemis, but to the very existence of Ephesus itself. Rogers argues that this ritual performance was so foundational for the Ephesians that it played a major role in creating a sacred identity, as well as a corporate role which defined the Ephesians for all times as Artemis' protectors and defenders against hostile and jealous deities. The traditional practices surrounding the birth of Artemis support the position that Artemis Ephesia was fundamentally different than her Greek counterpart. The loyalty of her worshipers, as well as her priests and priestesses, was renowned and respected throughout the Mediterranean.

The priestly worship of Artemis Ephesia harkens back to her Anatolian roots as Cybele. In fact, there is significant overlap between the ritual of castration for male priests for Cybele, Artemis and later Magna Mater at Rome. Strabo describes the priests of Artemis Ephesia as follows:

They had eunuchs as priests, whom they called Megabyzi. And they were always in quest of persons from other places who were worthy of this preferment, and they held them in great honor. And it was obligatory for maidens to serve as colleagues with them in their priestly office. But though at the present some of their usages are being preserved, yet others are not; but the temple remains a place of refuge, the same as in earlier times. (Strabo, 14.1.23)

Here Strabo seems to equate the male priests, the Megabyzi, as equivalents of the virgin priestesses alongside whom they served. Christine Thomas confirms that eunuch priests do appear, and are related to, Anatolian cults and that this practice lasts well into the Imperial period.<sup>166</sup> For example the *Magna Mater* at Rome was served by eunuch priests called *galloi*. This custom is described by Pliny as a practice brought by worshipers from Asia Minor who

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<sup>166</sup> Thomas *op. cit.*, p. 91.

established the cult.<sup>167</sup> The mythological counterpart of these eunuch priests is the unfortunate Attis who castrated himself in a burst of insanity for being unfaithful to his lover Cybele.<sup>168</sup> Self-castration in honor of a god was often described as a frenzied and bloody rite in which the aspiring priest consecrated himself to the divinity. This practice falls out of favor before Strabo writes about it in the beginning of the 1st century C.E. Epigraphic evidence suggests that as early as the mid-4th century B.C.E. the Megabyzi were no longer eunuchs.<sup>169</sup> By the time of Pausanias, the male personnel of Artemis Ephesia are no longer castrating themselves but remain chaste for the one year in which they serve her. Thomas notes that this is a political strategy which incorporates Artemis Ephesia's early Anatolian roots with her Greek attributes.<sup>170</sup>

While the majority of the rituals surrounding the worship of Artemis Ephesia were founded in festivals and processions around the city of Ephesus, there was at least one ritual that involved the bloody sacrifice of bulls, and the gruesome adornment of the cult statue with their bleeding testicles.<sup>171</sup> According to the bones found in the Artemision the practice of animal sacrifices continued well into the 2nd century C.E. The Swiss archaeologist Gerard Seiterle was one of the first scholars to suggest this practice of bulls being offered to the goddess in bloody slaughter and their testicles fixed on her cultic statue.<sup>172</sup> This early finding supports some of the suggestions by scholars that the circular breast-like shapes found on Artemis Ephesia's vest are in fact bull genitalia. This ritual practice may point to the archaic concept that the power of the

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<sup>167</sup> According to Pliny, the priests of the Mother of the Gods called *galli* castrated themselves with Samian pottery (*Natural History* 35.45.165).

<sup>168</sup> This is the version that Ovid tells in his *Fasti* 4.223-44. Other versions attribute the self-castration to different causes.

<sup>169</sup> Thomas *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>171</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>172</sup> Seiterle 1979, p. 3-16.

goddess is renewed in this way, so that she can strengthen the world of nature and allow even the dead to receive a share of her vitality.

Knibbe notes that Artemis Ephesia was not only a mistress of nature, but also a Protector of the dead. During her birthday procession she is said, from time to time, to stop at grave sites on her sacred way around Mount Pion. This sacred way was originally a circular cemetery encircling the entire mountain, however after King Lysimachus founded Arsinoeon in the west and south slopes of Mount Pion in approximately 300 B.C.E., only the semicircular eastern and northern portion of this processional road continued to serve as a cemetery.<sup>173</sup> This role as Protector of the dead is significantly different for Artemis of Ephesus, when compared to her Greek counterpart. Although Artemis the Huntress aids the elderly into a peaceful death, alongside her brother Apollo, and is often called upon by her followers while on their deathbed, the Artemis of Ephesus plays a significant role in the continuity of Ephesian afterlife. In Ephesus she is the protectress of those in the afterlife, and through the ritual of her procession she stops to make sure that those who have passed on remain under her care.

In addition to ceremonial processions and ritualistic animal sacrifice, another significant and widespread traditional practice in the worship of Artemis Ephesia is the gifting of garments to her cultic statue. In her work, Sokolowski identifies an inscription that contains an order for the death for 45 inhabitants of Sardis who have been accused of attacking a sacred embassy sent from Ephesus to Sardis with an offering of cloaks for Artemis.<sup>174</sup> The inscription describes how the official ambassadors dispatched to the shrine of Artemis in Sardis had to take an offering of cloaks for the goddess “according to the ancient custom.” The use of offering cloaks and

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<sup>173</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>174</sup> Sokolowski 1965, p. 427.

garments is very old and popular among the Greeks, but it is especially common in the worship of Artemis. As the Greek goddess of marriage and child birth Artemis was often favored with gifts of clothing by young women and girls. She would often receive garments in thanks for a happy marriage or fortunate childbirth. Hippocrates in the treatise on female disease relates a story in which he claims that girls suffering from irregularity in their menstrual cycle will fall into a fit of madness. His advice is that the girls bring an offering to Artemis, especially their most precious piece of clothing (Hippocrates, *Diotima* 349). This tradition of dedicating pieces of clothing to the goddess can be found repeatedly in the Greek world. It was customary for clothes to be offered by women in childbirth to Artemis of Brauron, and the treasuries of Artemis on the Acropolis are full of pieces of dress dedicated by women to the goddess. Sokolowski notes that the shrine founded in Sardis by the Ephesians seems to be a branch of the famous Ephesian Artemis. Consequently the cloaks were sent there as an offering to the cultic statue.<sup>175</sup> The dispatch of cloaks to Sardis seems to have had the intention of providing Artemis with new clothes. The assault on the Ephesian embassy seems to have been out of envy of some persons who were opposed to the admission of the Ephesian cult into Sardis. There is no further information on whether or not the tribunal pronounced the death sentence on the persons participating in the assault, or whether or not a trial took place. Neither is there any information on whether or not the sentence was carried out at all; however, this inscription is a useful illustration in the severity of consequence for ritual transgression. It is clear that the Ephesians took their rituals for the goddess very seriously. Ensuring the protection and mercy of their civic deity was of utmost importance.

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

### C. *Ephesia Grammata*

Artemis Ephesia's most notable responsibility is her role as guardian of the inhabitants of Ephesus. The turret crown she wears in Ephesus symbolizes that she, like Cybele, oversees the well-being of her people.<sup>176</sup> According to Lesser, the Ephesians are often called the “nurslings” of their goddess.<sup>177</sup> In addition, Callimachus refers to her as “Upis Queen” (237-258) in his discussion of the founding of the Ephesian cult in his *Hymn to Artemis*. Farnell notes that the title *Upis* was a name of Artemis which the Greeks interpreted as “watcher.”<sup>178</sup> Her position as she who “listens, or gives ear to”<sup>179</sup> prayer has allowed scholars to connect her worship to what Anaxilas Comicus refers to as the “auspicious Ephesian letters.”<sup>180</sup> He describes how a self-important provincial stitched up these Ephesian letters in a pouch and carried around as an amulet, “Oiling his skin with yellow unguents, flaunting soft cloaks, shuffling fine slippers, munching bulbs, bolting pieces of cheese, pecking at eggs, eating periwinkles, drinking Chian wine, and what is more, carrying about, on little bits of stitched leather, lovely Ephesian letters.” (Anaxilas, *The Harp-Maker*, from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* XII. 548C)

Considerable research has been done on what is now referred to as the *Ephesia Grammata* which is a collection of words that can be both spoken or written that have the ability to ward off evil and save one from harm. Menander suggests that saying the words out loud around a newlywed couple will protect them from other witchcraft or evil magic: “He walks around those getting married, speaking the Ephesian warding magics.” (Menander, *Kock Com.*

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<sup>176</sup> Farnell *op. cit.*, p. 481

<sup>177</sup> Lesser *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>178</sup> Farnell *op. cit.*, p. 488.

<sup>179</sup> Lesser *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>180</sup> McCown 1923, p. 128.

Att. Frag. III, 108) Even Plutarch suggests that the letters could be used to drive away demons, “For just as sorcerers advise those possessed by demons to recite and name over to themselves the Ephesian letters, so we, in the midst of such warblings and caperings, “Stirred by frenzies and whoops to the tumult of tossing heads,” if we bethink ourselves of those hallowed and venerable writings and set up for comparison songs and poems and tales of true nobility, shall not be altogether dazed by these performances...” (Plutarch, *Moralia* 706E) The six words are as follows: *askion kataskion lix tetrax damnameneus aisia*, and according to Pausanias these letters were inscribed on the feet, girdle, and crown of the cult statue of Artemis Ephesia.<sup>181</sup> It is uncertain what the words mean. McCown notes that they may have been the names of six different favourable *daimons* that could be called on for protection, or luck.

What is significant about the *Ephesia Grammata* is how quickly and famously it caught on. According to Lesser, the roots of this practice could be traced back to the 4th century B.C.E. to a Cretan tablet that is inscribed with these Ephesian letters.<sup>182</sup> Viewed as archaic incantations against evil, and a symbol of protection for the Ephesians by their goddess, the *Ephesia Grammata* is the material medium through which the protection of Artemis can be physically experienced by her followers. Plutarch writes that the Lydian King Kroisos cried out the Ephesian letters while burning on the pyre, and that the power of the letters brought the rain which extinguished the flames.<sup>183</sup> Another legend describes an Ephesian wrestler who was undefeated because he was wearing the letters in a satchel attached to his ankle. When this was discovered and the satchel was removed, he lost thirty times in a row: “And in the Olympics,

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>182</sup> Lesser *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

when a Milesian and Ephesian were wrestling, the Milesian could not defeat his opponent in wrestling because that other one had the Ephesian letters on a knucklebone. When this was revealed, and they were removed from him, the Ephesian fell thirty times in a row.” (Suida s.v. *Ephesia Grammata*) All of these stories are evidence of how Artemis Ephesia physically protected her citizens not just through their production of processions, ritual, and sacrifices, but through the act of wearing a set of words that infused them with the security and safety she offered. It is unclear whether or not the original Ephesian letters refer to the city, or its goddess, nonetheless, the mystic *Grammata* which could safeguard the speaker, wearer or writer of the letters, was a symbol of an integrated relationship with the goddess who reigned supreme and watched over Ephesus.

#### 4. Conclusions

The worship of Artemis Ephesia remains a paradox, a combination of two religious expressions, the earlier Greek Artemis as well as the earlier religion of Cybele. As the symbol of a thoroughly Hellenistic city, this all-encompassing goddess remains unnervingly alien, strange, and Anatolian.<sup>184</sup> Consequently, two religious traditions became incorporated into one that, in time, swept the Roman world.

Overall, the nature of worship and dominion of Artemis Ephesia was notably different from the worship and responsibilities of the Greek Artemis. Due to the acculturation of the Olympian traditions into pre-existing Anatolian practices, the two divinities shared similar attributes. For example, they were both viewed as virginal, both had the power to heal, both participated in life-cycle events such as child-birth and marriage, and they were both often

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<sup>184</sup> Brenk 1998, p. 170.

referred to as *Soteira* or Saviour. These characteristics incorporated into the Ephesian Artemis from the Greek Artemis contributed greatly to the smooth transition of Greek religious practices within the early Ephesian community.

There were, however, some significant key aspects of Artemis Ephesia that allowed her to embody the complexities and responsibilities of both primordial traditions – not just the prior Greek expressions of the cult of Artemis but also that of Cybele. Of these aspects, none are more compelling than her inherited position as “Mother of the Gods,” and “Queen of The First Throne” from Cybele. In this form, and often depicted as trailed by a castrated boy or youth, the Ephesian goddess remains supreme, aloof, and unsubordinated.<sup>185</sup> The Artemis of Ephesus reigns in a position of divine royalty; her temple vast in both fortune and renown, her worshipers more loyal to the sanctity of her traditions than their own homes, her sanctuary undisturbed and sacrosanct even in the face of her most violent enemies. She is the Watcher and Protector of all, the source of milk and honey, and Mother to those who come to her for mercy and benevolence.

With her eunuch priests, her monthly processions, and her numerous festivals and ritual sacrifices, the goddess of Ephesus ruled freely and without opposition well into the early Christian period. Her temples ranged from all corners of the Greek world: from central Greece at Delphi to Thebes, all across the south through Sparta and Brauron, and north, surrounding the area of Thessalia. Her worship covered many islands of the Aegean Sea including Delos, Rhodes and Crete, as well as many areas that are now modern Turkey, from Ephesus to Byzantium, Phrygia, and Pylai. Across the Greek colonies and around the Mediterranean temples and invocations of her name can be found up into Scythia (modern Ukraine), Khersonesos in Iberia (modern Spain), Massilia (Marseilles) in Southern Gaul (modern France) and the Capua and

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.



Henetoi regions of Italy including Syrakouse in Sikelia (modern Sicily).<sup>186</sup> A Temple to Artemis still survives today in the Hellenistic city, Jerash, in northern Jordan and a statue of Artemis has been discovered in Israel. Thus Artemis is a goddess unlike any other. She simultaneously embodies and incorporates ancient, Hellenic, and Roman ideologies of power, extravagance, and communal ritual. By the 2nd century C.E., she is one of the few goddesses whose traditions remain ingrained within her community.

In the coming chapters evidence will be presented that suggests Artemis Ephesia's reign in Ephesus did not collapse or disintegrate due to a lack of worship or belief. In fact, the cycle of incorporation was refashioned, and Artemis of Ephesus was reincorporated, and acculturated, by Christian colonists who arrived in Ephesus carrying their dual pantheon in much the same way the Ionians did 3000 years before. As we shall see, the legacy of the Ephesian Artemis lives on, but in, and under, another guise.

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<sup>186</sup> D'Este 2005, p.17.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE VIRGIN MARY: A NEW CULT ON THE HORIZON

The evolution of the Greek Artemis from earlier Goddess religions was traced in Chapter One. Chapter Two continued the investigation, noting the transformation of the Goddess into the Artemis of Ephesus, incorporating elements from the Greek Artemis and also from the earlier Anatolian religion of Cybele. Thus this mature Artemis flourished from the third century B.C.E. through to the third century C.E. when her great temple was destroyed by the Goths. For 600 years or more, the Ephesian Artemis reigned supreme among the Goddess religions of the Mediterranean world, worshipped in a variety of forms and with various attributes throughout the Roman Empire. Protector, Saviour, Healer, Helper, the Goddess of life's passages, the Mother of Gods – these were some of her major traits as a civic, political and religious being. With the sack of her temple by the Goths in 262 C.E., however, the religion of Artemis was severely threatened, an act comparable in its impact to the Roman destruction of the Jewish Second Temple in 70 C.E. That devastation led to the reconstitution of Judaism along rabbinic rather than priestly lines. Similarly, the destruction of Artemis' temple in Ephesus, the epicenter of her worship, leads to many questions. Was this the end of Artemis' reign as the supreme Goddess of the Mediterranean? Could her religion be reconstructed, just as Judaism had been?

While Artemis was at the height of her powers, another religion was in the process of formation. Christianity, as it separated from Judaism and incorporated elements from the Greek mystery religions, would soon rise to prominence, and, with it, another female figure was poised to capture the role of Goddess. For that story, we turn to a discussion of doctrines about Mary, mother of Jesus. In this chapter we will examine the evolution of beliefs about Mary during the

first two centuries of the Common Era; in Chapter Four, attention will be placed on the mature Mary, the *Theotokos* or Mother of God.

### **1. Mary: A Girl Like Any Other**

One of the most amazing transformations within early Christianity was the evolution of Jesus, a human, born within Judaism and likely married, who became God incarnate and the second person of the Trinity, all within the space of some 300 years. A similar transformation can be seen through the figure of Mary who evolved from a young Jewish mother with a child not of her betrothed, into a supreme female figure of the Roman world. How did this transformation come about? According to George Tavard, the genesis of Mariology began as a result of lacking information both in Jewish Scriptures and the early writings of the New Testament. Tavard states,

Since there was nothing in the Jewish Scriptures that could in anyway be considered a revelation concerning the Mother of the Messiah to come, and very little in the writings of the New Testament concerning the Mother of the Messiah already come, the thinkers and pastors of the early Church had to look elsewhere for suitable models. As the centuries passed they knew less and less of the actual place and role of women, and specifically mothers, in Judaism. Therefore, the only area where they could look was no other than the cultural context of their civilization, the religious, philosophical and social traditions of Greece and Rome. The experience of women and mothers in Greek and Roman civilizations would help shape the message of the Fathers of the Church and, by the same token, their reflections on the Virgin Mary.<sup>187</sup>

Tavard goes on to suggest that historically a Jewish model for Mary may have been sought, since the first few generations of Christians were most likely Jews in the Diaspora, but decades of conflict with Roman government and the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. led to a division

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<sup>187</sup> Tavard 2005, pp. 109.

between the emerging rabbinical Judaism and those who followed the writings of Jesus' disciples. Tavad claims that,

After the revolt of Bar Kokhba in 135, the followers of Jesus in the Roman Empire could not wish to be identified as a Jewish group... They were therefore not likely to look to Judaism for a model of womanhood that would throw light on the woman who had been the Mother of the Lord.<sup>188</sup>

We don't know how much power, sexuality, or agency the historical Mary really had. Out of the four gospels in the Christian New Testament, there are only two -- Matthew and Luke -- that mention Jesus' miraculous birth. Even within these limited texts we learn nothing of Mary as a historical person. Her only purpose in these two gospels is to sanctify both the entrance and exit of Jesus into and out of the physical world. Although the Synoptic gospels are essentially similar, they differ somewhat in their accounts of the events in Mary's life, her contribution to the Jesus movement as well as her influence on her son.

In addition, the leaders of early Christianity never mention Mary. James, the brother of Jesus and head of the "Jesus Movement," the Torah-observant wing of early Christianity, is silent, and the Ebionites, as this faction came to be called, viewed Jesus' birth as a natural one. Moreover, the earliest Christian writer, Paul, leader of what scholars called the "Christ Movement," that is, the non-Jewish, non-Torah-observant wing of early Christianity, never even mentions her, except to say that Jesus was "born of a woman." Contemporary Jewish sources such as Josephus never refer to her, although the latter does cite the death of James in 62 C.E. as well as the earlier death of John the Baptist.

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

*A. The Last Virgin Birth: The Stories of Matthew and Luke*

In her work on the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary, Marina Warner notes that in the pre-Christian Empire, virgin birth was not biology or history, just a shorthand symbol commonly employed to designate a person's divinity.<sup>189</sup> According to Warner, the early Christian community used this foundational myth of a virgin birth to set an enduring seal of approval on asceticism, as well as a key argument in their position that Jesus' special birth was the most significant and perhaps the last virgin birth to take place.<sup>190</sup>

Historically, Mary makes her first appearance in the Gospel of Matthew. While this gospel is placed as the first gospel in the New Testament, scholars date it to about 80-90 C.E., some 50 to 60 years after Jesus' execution in the early 30s. Thus, this document chronologically follows the Gospel of Mark, and is strongly influenced by Mark. Essentially Matthew rewrites Mark, changing some details along the way, and adding a birth and death narrative. The Gospel of Mark -- dated earlier to approximately 60-70 C.E. -- contains no virgin birth narrative. One would imagine that a miraculous virginal pregnancy would have been a primary focus of Mark's work since this Gospel author seems obsessed with miracles. One-third of his gospel has to do with miraculous doings. As such, we are left with no information about Jesus' conception or birth in this, the earliest dated gospel. Consequently, we must use Matthew as our first point of reference for the life of Mary. Even here we must be careful since the Ebionites used a version of the Gospel of Matthew which did not contain a virgin birth story, and it is not known which version of Matthew was the earliest.

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<sup>189</sup> Warner 1985, p. 34.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Mary becomes pregnant by the Holy Spirit while Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, is away: “When his [Jesus] mother had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1. 18). Upon finding Mary in this condition, Joseph wants to quietly hide her, but the Angel of the Lord approaches him and tells him that his betrothed is, in fact, a virgin and that this is a sacred and most special event:

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, plan to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 1.19-20)

Matthew associates this to the Isaiah prophecy that: “...the virgin will bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel” (Isaiah 7. 14). Matthew then goes on to say that Joseph did not have relations with Mary *until* she bore her son, and they named him Jesus: “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus” (Matthew 1.24-5). This passage seems to imply that Matthew’s birth narrative does not support the ideology of the perpetual virginity of Mary. This is the first story in the Gospels that depicts a virginal conception and the virgin birth of Jesus. Despite this being a miraculous event, Matthew appears more interested in connecting this special birth to a prophecy about Jesus, rather than discussing the experiences of Mary, who has been charged with bringing into the world a son that will be the salvation of humanity.

From this point on, in the Gospel of Matthew, Mary becomes the insignificant caregiver labeled as “mother” to Jesus. We briefly see her and Joseph escaping the wrath of Herod, and then the Gospel is solely focused on the life and teachings of Jesus the adult. We read that the

family went up to Jerusalem annually for Passover. There is only one incident in which we see Mary mentioned again and that is when Jesus is being rejected in his own home. Here Mary is mentioned as his mother, as well as the mother of his four brothers (James, Jose, Simon, and Judas) and nameless sisters:

He [Jesus] came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and the deeds of power? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? Are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?” (Matthew 13.54-6.)

There is nothing said about Mary that is out of the ordinary here. This passage has been interpreted in various ways, for example, Jesus’ siblings are often considered step-siblings or cousins. This interpretation is part of a later theological discussion which revolves around the sanctity and virginity of Mary’s body. However, it seems that, at least for Matthew, Jesus’ brothers and sisters are most likely his natural siblings.<sup>191</sup> This seems logical from the perspective of Mary as a young Jewish woman who, despite her experience with her first child, would have gone on to build a family with Joseph. She seems to have become a traditional Jewish mother who must have continued to bear other children for her husband, Joseph. In addition, the people of Nazareth, even by Matthew’s account, are not aware of the miracle of Jesus being born of a Virgin. In fact, Mary is mentioned as his mother only, and once again the focus of this chapter is Jesus’ teachings and the fact that he did not do many miracles in his home town because of their unbelief.

A Virgin birth narrative also occurs in the Gospel of Luke. This gospel differs in many details from that of Matthew. Scholars also believe that Luke, like Matthew, must have used the

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<sup>191</sup> See Matthew 1.25., 12.46. “While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him.”

Gospel of Mark as a source for some of his work, but once again we are faced with a dilemma as this gospel contains the story of a Virgin birth while, as mentioned above, the Gospel of Mark makes no mention of it. According to tradition, “Luke” is a physician, friend of Paul. Most biblical scholars today, however, understand this gospel and the Book of Acts to be anonymous (this can of course be said for all four gospels). Lukan authorship is not claimed anywhere in the Gospel of in Acts, and the discrepancies existing between the portrait of Paul in Acts and in his authentic letters cast doubt on just how familiar the author was with Paul.

Warner selects Luke as the source for all the great mystery surrounding the Virgin.<sup>192</sup> It is in this gospel that the stories of the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, and the purification (or presentation of Christ in the temple) occur. Luke is the only one to describe the mysterious scene when Jesus is lost and found among the teachers in the temple. Interestingly, this is the only occasion apart from the wedding feast of Cana when Jesus and his mother speak to each other. In Luke’s gospel, Mary speaks four times; in Matthew, she is silent.<sup>193</sup> An early tradition held that Luke received the story of Jesus’ birth from Mary herself, and there are many local tales that portraits of the Virgin by ‘Luke’ can be found in several Mediterranean towns. According to Warner these passages may have originated among a community of early Christians which centered on St. John in Ephesus where the virgin may have traditionally lived with him after the Ascension.<sup>194</sup>

Luke devotes much of the early part of his gospel to elaborating on the details of Jesus’ miraculous birth. He outlines the dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary:

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<sup>192</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



The Angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the son of the most high, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1. 26-38.)

This conversation is entirely missing from the earlier Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew, the unnamed angel announces Jesus’ birth to Joseph in a dream. For Luke, the angel is Gabriel, and he announces the birth to Mary while she is awake. In addition, Luke strongly connects Mary’s familial relationship to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” (Luke 1.39-42) This description of the visit between Mary and Elizabeth while they are both pregnant with their sons will be used later in the *Infancy Gospel of James* which will outline a more detailed narrative concerning Mary’s life and contribution to the Christian faith.

Luke also includes a series of detailed events of the early life of Jesus that are found in none of the other synoptic gospels. This includes Mary giving birth to her firstborn son and placing him in a manger because there was no place for them at the inn (Luke. 2.6-7.), as well as shepherds who come to visit Mary, Joseph, and the infant, because angels appeared to them and proclaimed that: “...to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is the Messiah the Lord.” (Luke 2.11.) Luke also notes that the infant is circumcised and named “Jesus” according to the Jewish Law, the Torah: “After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2. 21.) Unlike Matthew, Luke presents Mary’s perspective on each of these occasions. In all of these situations Mary is portrayed as a loving and sometimes anxious mother, but there seems to be nothing “magical” or supernatural about her position.

Jaroslav Pelikan states that so dominant was Mary's perspective in the way Luke narrated the story of the birth of Jesus that early Christian readers were driven to inquire where the details had come from since they did not appear in other accounts.<sup>195</sup> Luke labels himself *parekolouthekoti* which is a Greek word that refers to someone who has done some historical research.<sup>196</sup> Thus, he claims to draw on several sources, perhaps firsthand accounts, but this creates a problem since Luke not only did not belong to the original twelve disciples of Jesus, he was not even a disciple of one of these. Rather, as mentioned previously, he was believed to be a pupil and the beloved physician of the apostle Paul,<sup>197</sup> who himself was not one of Jesus' original disciples, nor an individual who had ever met the Jesus of history.<sup>198</sup> Thus, we are left with a complicated conclusion: either the story of the Virgin birth was rampant among early Christians followers but Mark did not bother to write it down, which is highly unlikely, or Matthew and Luke have a similar source that has been lost to scholars, and thus, to history.

In trying to establish what can be said reliably about the Mary of history rather than the Mary of pious myth, scholars are faced with a number of problems. One has to do with the alleged miracle of virginal conception and virgin birth, attendant with all the trappings of mythology – angels, shepherds, threats to the child, and so on. This is compounded with two other issues. Was Mary, mother of Jesus, present at the crucifixion and at the tomb following the Sabbath? The gospels are strangely mysterious in this respect – they are not as explicit as one would expect. In addition, there are also many 'Marys' within the New Testament, and this creates enormous confusion.

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<sup>195</sup> Pelikan 1996, p. 17.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>197</sup> As mentioned previously, all four gospels are anonymous writings.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

## *B. The 'Other' Mary*

### Gospel of Matthew

There are several women referred to as Mary or simply “mother of” in the Gospel of Matthew, and it is important that we filter out the character of Mary, the mother of Jesus, from other ‘Marys’ such as: Mary mother of the James and Joseph; “the mother of” the sons of Zebedee; and Mary of Magdala popularly referred to as Mary Magdalene.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, is described as the mother who asks Jesus to allow her sons to sit on his right and left:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with their sons, and kneeling before him, she has to favor of him. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one on your left, in your kingdom.” (Matthew 20.20-1)

These two young men, James and John, sons of Zebedee are mentioned earlier when Jesus calls the first disciples: “As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, and abode with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called to them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and follow him” (Matthew 4.21-2.)

This is further complicated by the woman named Mary who is the mother of James and Joseph. This Mary is named as one of the women who are present at the death of Jesus:

“...among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” (Matthew 27.56.) Matthew does not clarify whether this Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, is also Jesus’ mother, the Virgin Mary, or another mother of two sons who happen to have the exact same name as Jesus’ first two brothers.<sup>199</sup> In the next

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<sup>199</sup> See Matt. 13.55 for reference of the Virgin Mary as the mother of the brothers of Jesus, James and Joseph.

scene, at the burial of Jesus, we find that the two women who are present are Mary Magdalene and “the other” Mary: “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.” (Matthew 27.61.) Again, Matthew doesn’t clarify which Mary is present at the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It seems logical that if Mary, the mother of Jesus, is present at his death and resurrection Matthew would have written it as such. That would provide fitting symmetry: Mary, his mother, present at his birth as well as at his death and re-birth. The only time that Matthew explicitly refers to Mary the Mother of Jesus, however, is during the first two chapters where Mary becomes pregnant and gives birth to Jesus after which Joseph takes “the child and his mother” on their journey to Egypt escaping the wrath of Herod, and again upon their return to Nazareth.<sup>200</sup> From this point on Mary, the Mother of Jesus is no longer referred to as such in this gospel. It is important to note that the mother of the sons of Zebedee is never referred to as Mary. Thus, when Matthew describes the “other Mary” who is present at both the death and burial of Jesus, as well as a witness to his resurrection, it is very possible that this Mary is the mother of James and John who may or may not be Jesus’ biological brothers.

### Gospel of Mark

Although it is difficult to disentangle all the ‘Marys’ within the gospel of Mark, it is perhaps most important that this “other Mary” and Mary Magdalene are the first and sole witnesses to his resurrection. Jesus appears to the two of them first and asks them to go and tell his disciples of his return: “...then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers

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<sup>200</sup> Matthew 2.11., 2.13-4., 2.21.

to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Matthew 28.10) Thus, for Matthew these two women are first witnesses to the most significant event since Jesus’ miraculous birth.

As already mentioned, the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the canonical gospels, makes no mention of a virgin birth or any details concerning the childhood of Jesus. In reading the death burial and resurrection of Jesus in Mark we find that there are several references to a Mary who is the mother of James the Less, and of Joses, which is a nickname for Joseph.<sup>201</sup> Thus, there are more ‘Marys’ that enter the life of Jesus. We see this Mary at the crucifixion:

There were also women looking on from a distance, among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15.40-1.)

It is evident that this Mary – the Mary who is mother of James the younger and of Joses -- is a loyal follower and has been with Jesus for some time. We see her again at the burial when Mark tells us that: "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid." (Mark 15.47.) And we finally see the women again at the resurrection of Jesus: “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen they went to the tomb.” (Mark 16. 1-3.) Thus, just as in Matthew, Mary Magdalene, this “other” Mary, and Salome are the first to arrive at the tomb. They are the first to witness the resurrection and although they do not see an Angel as Matthew describes, they see a young man dressed in white who tells them that Jesus was crucified and has been raised, and that they should go tell his disciples, and Peter, that he is going to meet them in Galilee:

But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you’re looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But

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<sup>201</sup> Tabor 2006, p. 35.

go, tell his disciples and Peter that he's going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." (Mark 16. 6-7)

Hence, Mark and Matthew tell an almost identical story about the presence of the women who are close to Jesus, present at his death, burial, and crucifixion. What is different, and significant, is the naming of this "other" Mary. She is not presented as Mary the Mother of Jesus, but as the mother of James and Joseph. James Tabor presents a convincing argument that the Mary who is mother of James and Joseph is also Mary, Mother of Jesus. He argues that the historical reality of Mary, as a young Jewish married woman of her time, is lost in later forms of ascetic piety and assumptions about "holiness" which are imposed on Christian culture for dogmatic or political reasons.<sup>202</sup> According to Tabor, "The teaching of the "perpetual virginity" is simply not found in the New Testament and it is not part of the earliest Christian creeds."<sup>203</sup> The first official mention of the idea does not come until 374 C.E., from a Christian theologian named Epiphanius.<sup>204</sup> Tabor also references the Helvidian view, which is a belief named after Helvidius, a later, 4th century Christian writer, whom Jerome seeks to refute. Unlike Epiphanius or Helvidius, Eusebius, an early 4th century church historian regularly quotes early sources and refers, himself, to the brothers of Jesus "after the flesh," evidently understanding them as children of Mary and Joseph.<sup>205</sup> According to this tradition, most early Christian writings before the later 4th century C.E. take for granted that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were the natural born children of Joseph and Mary. Only later are they said to be "cousins" or "step-siblings," in order to protect

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>204</sup> The idea of Mary's "perpetual virginity" was affirmed at the 2nd Council of Constantinople in 553 C.E. and the Lateran Council in 649 C.E. Although it is a firmly established part of Catholic dogma it has nonetheless never been the subject of an infallible declaration by the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>205</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 2. 23. 3. 19.

the growing belief in Mary, ever-virgin. Here we witness theology driving history, just as we've seen in the goddess mythology, where the spiritual beliefs of a community establish cultural and political development.

### Gospel of Luke

The continual academic, and theological, debate about whether or not Mary and Joseph continued to grow their biological family after the birth of Jesus is further inflamed by the vagueness and overlapping information we find in the last two gospels in the New Testament, the gospels of Luke and John. Despite Luke's overwhelming detail of the birth and childhood of Jesus his work remains very vague when referring to "the women" who attended his death, burial and resurrection. At Jesus' crucifixion Luke only tells us that: "... all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things" (Luke 23. 49.) He refers to these unnamed women again at his burial: "... the women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments." (Luke 23.55-6.) This was the day before the Sabbath so the women rested, and according to Luke, returned on the first day of the week at dawn:

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. (Luke 24. 2-9)

What is particularly interesting about Luke's depiction is that "the women" remain unnamed

throughout the ordeal of Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial, but here, at the resurrection, once they have received the good news of Jesus rising again the women are then purposely identified by Luke. He states specifically: "Now it was Mary Magdalene; Joanna; Mary the mother of James; and the other women with them who told this to the apostles." (Luke 24.10)

Let's examine each of these women explicitly mentioned by Luke. It is especially significant that just as in Mark and Matthew, Luke confirms that the first witnesses are all women, but it is more significant that he specified these three. First, Mary Magdalene: recent work has provided convincing evidence that Mary Magdalene plays an exclusive role as a close companion of Jesus, perhaps his closest.<sup>206</sup> She, after all, had accompanied Jesus throughout his 3-year mission, was explicitly named as being present at the crucifixion, and in the early morning after the Sabbath, had been prepared to run to the temporary tomb to anoint his body for proper burial, a responsibility reserved only the closest female member of a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish family. It is significant that no gospel identifies Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in this crucial role. Secondly, Joanna: she is mentioned earlier in Luke's gospel as the wife of Chuza, Herod Antipas' chief steward, a very high position within the Herodian establishment (Luke 8.3.) Establishing the identity of these two women leaves us with a remaining mystery, who is this Mary, mother of James? Could this Mary be the Virgin Mary, who, as identified by Tabor, is the Mother of Jesus as well as the biological mother of James and John? This conclusion seems to be the most logical option when deciphering the naming of women at the resurrection according to Luke.

### Gospel of John

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<sup>206</sup> Jacobovici and Wilson 2014, p. 157.



This question of “which Mary” is further complicated when examining the retelling of this event in the Gospel of John. John presents Mary, the Mother of Jesus, at the crucifixion alongside a woman identified as Jesus’ aunt, Mary’s sister, who was also named Mary and is referred to as the wife of Clopas, “... meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” (John 19.25.) It is here that Jesus has his last interaction with his mother, a request described only by John in his gospel, “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son?” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” (John 19.26-7.) This last communication between mother and son is the last time we see Mary in the New Testament. It is from this request described by John that the tradition of Mary coming into the care of John the disciple, is born. John is then rumored to have escaped with his charge to Ephesus where both he and Mary lived out their last days. This will become especially significant in the next chapter when we discuss the importance of Mary in Ephesus, the city of the great goddess.

### In Summary

All four gospels note that women from Galilee, who followed Jesus, were present at his crucifixion, and attended to his burial. Of these women that are identified are: Mary Magdalene (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John); Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses/Joseph (Matthew, Mark); Salome (Mark); the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matthew) and Joanna (Luke). According to Tabor, Salome, mentioned only by Mark is very possibly Jesus’ sister, or perhaps, in Matthew, the mother of Zebedee.<sup>207</sup> In Luke’s account he drops the names and

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<sup>207</sup> Tabor *op. cit.*, p. 251.

simply says that “women” were present. It is noteworthy that Matthew alone calls her the “other Mary.” We do not know “another Mary” who has two sons named James and Joses, other than Mary the Mother of Jesus. These are the very names, even including the nickname ‘Joses’ (that Matthew consistently edits<sup>208</sup>) of her first two sons born after Jesus. (Mark 6.3.) By the time we reach John’s gospel there are three Mary’s clearly identified: Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of Jesus, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas. According to the 2nd century C.E. writer Hegesippus, who preserved valuable early traditions about the Jesus family, Clopas is the brother of Joseph, Mary’s guardian/husband.<sup>209</sup> Using this evidence, Tabor provides a plausible argument that Joseph, who was significantly older than Mary, may have passed away while Jesus was still young and that according to Jewish law, Clopas, became his “replacer,” and married his widow Mary, Mother of Jesus.<sup>210</sup> His firstborn son, James, the brother who succeeds Jesus, legally becomes known as the “son of Joseph” after his deceased brother in order to carry on his name. This is a persuasive reconstruction further evidenced by the fact that Joseph appears in none of the Gospels during Jesus’ adult life or his death and resurrection, and Clopas is mentioned only once in the entire New Testament (John 19.25). Tabor suggests that he and his brother Joseph were much older than Mary,<sup>211</sup> and this is further indicated in the Gospel of John when Jesus, the eldest son in the family, just before his death, handed his mother over to the care of a mysterious “beloved disciple.” Although there is some debate on whether this disciple is

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>209</sup> Eusebius, *Church History* 3. 11.

<sup>210</sup> According to the Torah, or Law of Moses, the oldest surviving unmarried brother was obligated to marry his deceased brother’s widow and bear a child in his name so that his dead brother’s “name” or lineage would not perish. This is called a “Levirate marriage” or *yibbum* in Hebrew, and it is required in the Torah (Deuteronomy 25. 5-10.)

<sup>211</sup> Tabor *op. cit.*, p. 135.

James or John, nonetheless, Jesus' giving his mother into the care of another indicates she was a widow.

Consequently, if we accept that Mary the mother of James and Joseph is the same as Mary the Mother of Jesus, then at least three of the Gospels (the earliest three) place her at the crucifixion and resurrection of her son, and two of the Gospels tell the story of the miraculous virginal conception and birth of Jesus. Through these earliest writings we can conclude that even though Mary seems to have a passive role, as a young Jewish mother she performs the tasks expected of her – for example, giving birth, child rearing, witnessing the torture and death of her son. Her continuous presence points to a bond of mother and son that is not necessarily supernatural, or divine, in nature. However this close relationship captures the imagination of early Christian followers in such a fundamental way that even the small glimpses in conversations that take place between Mary and her son become significant in the latter deification and worship of the Virgin Mary.

### *C. The Relationship of Mother and Son: A Partnership – Co-Redemption*

Religion is not defined by theologians alone. Almost all biblical references show Mary in relation to her son. Carl Olson notes that Mary, his mother, more than anyone else, was partner to the mysterious nature of her son.<sup>212</sup> Although their interactions are scarce throughout the New Testament, even this minimal amount of communication, points to a reciprocal relationship of respect and understanding. It is logical to assume, particularly in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, that Mary knew her son was going to be “special.” Only Luke allows readers an insight into Mary’s perspective on the development of her son. Her reactions appear to be the natural

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<sup>212</sup> Olson 2002, p. 82.

reactions every mother has towards her child, despite the unusual events that happen due to the uniqueness of who her son is meant to be. We see this right away after Jesus' birth, when Luke describes Mary's reaction to the visit of the shepherds who have been guided by angels to see the Saviour, who is the Messiah: "When they [the shepherds] saw this, they made known what had been told to them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all of these words and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2.17-9.) Knowing that Jesus was exceptional, Mary continued to raise her son according to the Law. After eight days she had him circumcised and gave him the Jewish name, *Yeshua*, "he [God] saves." (Matthew 1.21) According to David Bivin, *Yeshua* was the fifth most common Jewish name, 4 out of the 28 Jewish High-Priests in Jesus' time were called *Yeshua*.<sup>213</sup> This was the name given to him by the angel who came to her before Jesus was conceived in the womb (Luke 2.21) and every year she took him up to Jerusalem for the festival Passover (Luke 2.41.). It is during this festival, when Jesus is twelve years old, that Luke tells us how he stayed behind in the temple and remained there unbeknownst to his parents for three days. When they finally found him it is Mary, who is both astonished and relieved, who speaks to him:

When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you and great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ... Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. (Luke 2.48-52)

There is an interesting paradox developing here: Luke's attempt at depicting the normal reaction of parents who have lost their child stands in contradiction with Jesus' response to his mother which clearly alludes to her knowledge of his unique relationship with God. It is this paradox

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<sup>213</sup> Bivin 1991, p. 12.

that contributes to the adoration of Mary, primarily as mother, but more importantly as mother of an extraordinary child. Luke solidifies the relationship between mother and son by providing the early Christian community with the only view into the early life of Jesus. Unfortunately for readers of Luke, once Jesus becomes an adult, his mother Mary fades into the background of the story. As we have seen in the section above, she may have been at his death, burial, and resurrection, but this remains debatable as Luke does not specifically identify Mary the Mother of Jesus anywhere else in his recollection of Jesus' adult life.

The Gospel of John is traditionally dated to approximately the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. Although John does not mention Jesus' birth, or any part of his childhood, he does provide his readers with an episode which describes Jesus first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. This miracle comes at the request of his mother, and she alone instructs the guests to do what he says. John writes that Jesus and his disciples had been invited to a wedding, and when the wine ran out, his mother requested that he do something about it:

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ... Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. [Then] the steward tasted the water that had become wine... Jesus did this, the first of his signs... (John 2.3-11)

Once this miracle was performed Jesus revealed his glory and according to John, his disciples believed in him. Olson claims that this episode is fundamental in establishing the complementary relationship between Jesus and his mother.<sup>214</sup> What is intriguing about this event, although perhaps not surprising, is that Mary fully understands her son's ability to perform miracles. She doesn't ask him, "Can you turn water into wine?" She simply requests that he perform this task.

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<sup>214</sup> Olson *op. cit.*, p. 82.

His response seems to be more concerned with revealing the fact that he can perform miracles which may imply that there is secret knowledge shared between mother and son that has not been observed by anyone else. It is fundamentally significant that it is Mary who primarily decides when, and how, Jesus must reveal his miraculous potential. An argument could be made that Jesus' respect for his mother, as evidenced by him completing the task she requests, is an indication of the expected regard shown by a son to his mother. More than that, his acquiescence can be perceived as his deference to her authority in his life due to her being especially selected to have been the vessel through which he entered the world. Warner disagrees, suggesting that Jesus doesn't seem to like his mother at this point in the story and in fact, treats her abruptly until the end, when he leaves her in the hands of the disciple he loved best.<sup>215</sup> While it is true that Jesus responds to his mother in what appears to be a detached manner, this does not negate the fact that he obeys her demand.

Much has been made of this brief but significant interaction between Mary and her son. Scott McKnight proposes that this incident creates an interesting comparison of the two aspects of Mary: one, the pious loving mother who holds her baby and brims with pride, the other is the Mary who reprimands Jesus for being lost in the temple and reminds him that there is no wine at the party.<sup>216</sup> Additionally, Pheme Perkins claims that the wine incident at the wedding supports a view that Mary is working from the private sphere of women, and that this is significant for her relationship to women, as a woman, but also as Mother of God.<sup>217</sup> Henry Thompson goes even further, presenting an argument that the early Christian community used this incident to establish

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<sup>215</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>216</sup> McKnight 2007, p. 28.

<sup>217</sup> Perkins 1990, p. 25.

the “need” for Mary as intermediary, rather than Christ alone.<sup>218</sup> She sees a need first, before Jesus; she responds to this need first, again before Jesus; and she gets Jesus to do her bidding – all indications of her closeness to ordinary people.

Consequently, the reading of all four gospels in the New Testament leaves us with more questions about the life of the historical Mary than answers. The gospels never outline who she was as an individual. According to these early writings we know nothing about her life, her sayings, beliefs or anything that made her especially noteworthy. A more imperative question that troubled early Christian communities was why is she so important? Why was she chosen to be the Mother of Jesus?

Where the gospels failed to have answers and/or information, writers filled in the gaps with tales of sacredness, deification and purity that elevated Mary to the standard expectation of a Hellenistic goddess. One of the central arguments of my thesis is that in the absence of a goddess figure presented by Christianity, the people of the Mediterranean, their community long familiar with the divine female in their worship, demanded that Mary must have been sacred in order to have been chosen for this miraculous task. The deification of Mary was the only acceptable answer to the question, why this Jewish girl? Why not another? This process of deification begins with the *Infancy Gospel of James*.

## **2. *Infancy Gospel of James*: The Virgin Brings Salvation**

The *Infancy Gospel of James* is the only “primary” source that deals with the potential divinity of Mary. Considered to be written around 145 C.E., this document is an important stepping stone in Mary’s transformation from young Jewish mother to divine being. It is here

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<sup>218</sup> Thompson 1901, p. 476.

that, for the first time, Mary is portrayed as “more” than human. Sally Cunneen refers to Mary as the heroine of early 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. Christianity.<sup>219</sup> Pelikan claims that the account of Mary in the New Testament is so tantalizingly brief, and the contrast between the biblical evidence of the traditional material so striking, that anyone who comes to consider the biblical references to Mary for the study of her elements of devotion, and the doctrine of her worship, must deal with the information found in the *Infancy Gospel of James*.<sup>220</sup> According to Pelikan, it is problematic that both the Gospel of Matthew, and the Gospel of Luke, make it unambiguously clear that it was as a virgin that Mary conceived her son. This matter produces a puzzling discrepancy since the rest of the New Testament remained so silent on the subject.<sup>221</sup>

The *Infancy Gospel of James* is also known as the *Protoevangelium of James*. According to Ron Cameron the word *Protoevangelium* implies that most of the events recorded in this “initial gospel” of James occur prior to those recorded in the gospels of the New Testament.<sup>222</sup> James’ infancy gospel appears in approximately one hundred and thirty Greek manuscripts, but the majority of these texts come from the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. or later. Cameron notes that the earliest known manuscript of the text was found in 1958 and dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E., however, Cameron claims that many of its readings seem to be secondary.<sup>223</sup>

It is evident that passages from Matthew and Luke are harmonized into a single story and/or in some instances the two texts are conflated. Cameron observes that it is by combining composite traditions with the harmony of the synoptic infancy stories that the *Infancy Gospel of*

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<sup>219</sup> Cunneen 2001, p. 14.

<sup>220</sup> Pelikan *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>222</sup> Cameron 1982, p. 108.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.



*James* has constructed the dramatic scenes of its text. The author of this gospel claims to be James, the brother of Jesus.<sup>224</sup> Ronald Hock argues that the author cannot have been James because he relies significantly on the gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>225</sup> Since James dies at the hands of the high priest Ananias in 62 C.E., and as we have seen in the above section, the gospels of Matthew and Luke were composed in the late 70s and 80s C.E., the *Infancy Gospel of James* must be pseudonymous, composed well after these events.

This text likely emerged out of debates about the logical consequences of viewing Jesus as divine. That is, if Jesus is divine, then the body which brought him into the human world must be more than just human; it too, must be divine. Hence Mary's special birth, later referred to as an immaculate conception, demonstrates that she was conceived without male involvement.<sup>226</sup> The debate around Mary's "special" conception will be discussed in detail in this section. By creating the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, Mary is placed in the position of deity or a divine-human, parallel to her son.<sup>227</sup>

It is not unusual in the ancient Mediterranean world for a god to have a human mother. Dungan and Cartlidge outline several similar births to that of Jesus in their collection of birth stories entitled, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*. This work features the births of Asklepios, Herakles, Isocrates, and many others. Their research shows that it was not remarkable for an important figure in mythology to have a special birth. In fact, it is rather the norm. It is

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<sup>224</sup> Jacobovici and Wilson 2014, It's the height of irony that this gospel is attributed to James, the disciple/brother of Jesus. James led the Jesus Movement after the Jesus' death and it is believed that he had an ordinary birth, not a miraculous one.

<sup>225</sup> Hock 1995, p. 41.

<sup>226</sup> According to later church doctrine, the Immaculate Conception refers to the fact that she was born without original sin.

<sup>227</sup> This kind of argument is susceptible to an infinite regress. Why, then, was Mary's mother Anna so special, etc. and etc. *ad infinitum*.

also not unusual for such individuals to have a human mother. All of the above mentioned gods and heroes had a human mother and no one questioned what made her special enough to bring forth this half divine being. In the case of someone like Asklepios, the god of healing, his human mother is simply a reference in his life story.<sup>228</sup> Although he was one of the most popular gods of the Hellenistic world no one asked why Asklepios' mother was chosen to give him birth. There are no writings that she is special and/or handpicked by a god for some special future reason. A suggestion can be made that there is more at work within the early Christian community than simple myth making; that the reason for Mary's transformation has more to do with communal ritual and culture, rather than historical explanation (of course, the birth of Jesus also has similar myth making features). Cameron suggests that the *Infancy Gospel of James* is using, and expanding, the birth narratives while carrying forward the aetiological tradition of the gospels, including the traditional enumeration of heroic feats, and the birth of the holy family. The pastoral scenes in the narrative of Jesus' birth recall other infancy narratives in antiquity, and are part of a tradition of Christian propaganda which sought to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus among heroes and gods.<sup>229</sup>

#### A. *Mary: A Virgin Above All Others*

The *Infancy Gospel of James* is one of the pillars on which the question of "why Mary" is answered. Hock suggests that Mary's purity is so emphasized that it becomes thematic.

Consequently, the only answer to the fundamental question of "why Mary" is that no one could

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<sup>228</sup> Cartlidge D. and Dungan D. 1980, p. 120-123.

<sup>229</sup> Cameron *op. cit.*, p. 120.

have been any purer.<sup>230</sup> Her miraculous conception provides convincing evidence that she, too, had a “pure” birth. It is important to note here the discussion, and later dogma, around Mary’s “special” birth and the Catholic Church’s tradition of the Immaculate Conception. Although the belief that Mary was sinless and conceived immaculate has been widely held since Late Antiquity, the doctrine was not dogmatically defined until 1854, by Pope Pius IX in his papal statement, *Ineffabilis Deus*.<sup>231</sup> The Catholic Church celebrates the *Feast of the Immaculate Conception* on December 8; in many Catholic countries, it is a holy day of obligation or patronal feast, and in some a national public holiday. According to John McGuckin, the feast of the conception of the ‘Most Holy’ and ‘All Pure Mother of God’ was celebrated in Syria on December 8<sup>th</sup> perhaps as early as the 5th century.<sup>232</sup> Note that the title of *achrantos* (spotless, immaculate, all-pure) refers to the holiness of Mary, not specifically to the holiness of her conception. McGuckin argues that, “The celebration of the Mother of God as immaculate (*achrantos*), is a clear and universal recognition of her exceptional and iconic sanctity. Orthodoxy did not follow the path of Roman Catholicism in moving towards a recognition of her Immaculate Conception.”<sup>233</sup> Much of the debate surrounding Mary’s special birth can be traced back to the possible interpretations of the moment of Mary’s conception in the *Infancy Gospel of James*. In this section, we will consult several translations by scholars whose work is foundational in the interpretation of this gospel.

*The Infancy Gospel of James* begins with the trials of a deeply pious, elderly couple, Joachim and Anna. A distressed and perplexed Anna is unable to conceive with her wealthy and

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<sup>230</sup> Hock *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>231</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 490-493, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p122a3p2.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a3p2.htm)

<sup>232</sup> McGuckin 2011, p. 218.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

extremely devout husband Joachim. Concerned that he and Anna have not been given any offspring despite his continuous offerings, Joachim recalls the actions of Abraham and retires into the wilderness where he fasts for 40 days and 40 nights:

And Joachim became extremely frustrated and went away to the history of the twelve tribes of his people, saying to himself, “I will look in the history of the twelve tribes of Israel and see whether I am the only one who has not conceived a child in Israel.” And he searched and found that all the righteous people had raised children in Israel. And he reminded himself about the patriarch Abraham and that the Lord God gave his son Isaac to him in his last days. Then, Joachim was extremely frustrated and did not appear to his wife, but gave himself to the desert and pitched his tent there. He fasted forty days and forty nights. All the while, Joachim was saying to himself, “I will not go down for food or drink until the Lord my God visits me; prayer will be my food and drink.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 1. 6-11)

Not only is the connection to Abraham<sup>234</sup> made clear in reference to the conception of Mary, but so is the long-standing canonical tradition of enlightenment, or exchange, by fasting for forty days and nights.<sup>235</sup> While Joachim is away, Anna mourns the assumed death of her husband, because he has been gone so long, and her inability to conceive. Feeling desolated Anna has an intriguing conversation with her servant Juthine. Juthine implores Anna to wear a special head covering, given to her by “one who makes such things” that will bring about conception. Anna recoils from the offer stating that she will not wear an item made by a “crafty” person:

When the great day of the Lord was drawing near, her servant Juthine said to her... Take this headband which the leader of the activity gave me... Then, Anna said, “Get away from me. I did not cause these things, even though the Lord God has humbled me greatly. Perhaps a crafty person has given this to you and you have come to cause me to partake of your sin.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 2. 2-5)

It seems evident that the infancy gospel uses this conversation to solidify the fact that Anna did not use superstition, or other rituals, to conceive her child. Nor had she had intercourse with her

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<sup>234</sup> See Genesis 21:2, God blesses the womb of Sarah and gives her a son named Isaac.

<sup>235</sup> See Moses in Exodus 24:11, 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9; of Elijah in I Kings 19:8; and of Jesus in Matthew 4:2.

husband in the prescribed amount of time to get pregnant. All of this is undertaken to make sure that the reader understands the authenticity of Mary's "special conception." She then proceeds to take off her mourning clothes, put on her bridal gown, and sit under a laurel tree: "So Anna also became extremely frustrated and removed her mourning garment, washed her head and clothed herself with her wedding dress. Around the ninth hour, she went down to her garden to walk around. She saw a laurel tree and sat down under it." (*Infancy Gospel of James* 2. 7-9.)

There are several significant things to note here. The first is that Anna removed herself from mourning and purifies her body by washing herself. This is a clear statement that the miraculous conception is not a result of sadness but hope and joy. This is confirmed by the fact that Anna puts on her wedding dress, reminding the reader that she is a married woman under the Law, and sits under a tree. Sitting under a tree to receive divine knowledge or blessing is a long-standing tradition that can be found throughout antiquity.

After much lament and prayer, an angel of the Lord appears to Anna and reveals to her the will of God. Anna is overwhelmed with the benevolence of the divine and promises to offer her child as a servant in the temple:

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood in front of her, saying, "Anna, Anna, the Lord God has heard your prayer. You will conceive and give birth and your child will be spoken of everywhere people live." And Anna said, "As the Lord God lives, whether I give birth to either a male or a female child, I will bring it as an offering to the Lord my God and it will be a servant to him all the days of its life." (*Infancy Gospel of James* 4. 1-2)

Thus, when Anna is blessed with a child after being barren her entire life she is, in fact, carrying the child of God. The conception of Mary is not only an example of the divine will of God, but according to the angel's prophecy, this child that has been given to Anna will be spoken of, everywhere that people live. It is here that we need to further analyze some of the translations of whether or not Anna conceived Mary without sexual intercourse with Joachim. In Robert

Miller's collection of gospel analysis titled, *The Annotated Scholars Version of the Complete Gospels*, the statement of the two messengers, and Anna's happy exclamation, point to a miraculous conception without Joachim's presence. The translation is as follows, "Look, your husband Joachim is coming with his flocks," You see, a messenger of the Lord had come down to Joachim and said, "Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Get down from there. Look, your wife Anna is pregnant." (*Infancy Gospel of James* 4. 3-4) As Joachim approached the gate, Anna throws her arms around his neck confirming her miraculous pregnancy,

And so Joachim came with his flocks, while Anna stood at the gate. Then she spotted Joachim approaching with his flocks and rushed out and threw her arms around his neck: "Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me greatly. This widow is no longer a widow, and I, once childless, am not pregnant!" And Joachim rested the first day home. (*Infancy Gospel of James* 4.5-9)

This translation makes it evident that Anna was pregnant before, or as, Joachim arrived home from his long meditation in the wilderness. Although Hock and Cameron are slightly more conservative in their translation of this section in the gospel, their interpretations are nearly identical to Miller's work. Cameron's interpretation of the messengers' message is as follows, "... Go down; behold, your wife Anna has conceived [shall conceive]<sup>236</sup>... "for behold the widow is no longer a widow, and I, who was childless, have conceived [shall conceive]."<sup>237</sup> Thus, there is some hesitation to confirm whether or not Anna is pregnant before Joachim arrives with his sheep, or after. However, Miller argues that,

The mss differ over whether Anna *is pregnant* or will be pregnant. The future tense would be more likely if the word *rested* in the next sentence were a euphemism for sexual intercourse, but since this word is used for Joseph in much the same circumstances (see 15:2) and no such euphemism is intended there, it is probably better to prefer the literal

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<sup>236</sup> Cameron inserts bracket addition as possible meaning of the word 'rested' that comes at the end of 4:9.

<sup>237</sup> Cameron 1982, p. 111.

meaning and so the present tense (*is pregnant*). Thus, Anna's conceiving a child becomes as much a miracle as later Mary's will be.<sup>238</sup>

Consequently, Mary was "chosen" and special, and in fact, she is constantly referred to as "chosen" or "special" in this gospel. The sacredness of Mary begins at the moment of her conception with the certainty that she will be extraordinary, and above all others.<sup>239</sup>

### *B. Mary's Childhood: A Study in Contradictions*

According to the *Infancy Gospel of James*, Mary is taken to the temple in Jerusalem at the age of three, where she is raised by Hebrew virgins and fed by angels: "While Mary was in the temple of the Lord, she was fed like a dove and received food from the hand of an angel." (*Infancy Gospel of James* 8.2.) This is clearly myth-making, not just the reference to angelic food, but also there is no historical evidence that the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the focal point of Jewish worship, ran a daycare centre. Cunneen claims that Mary entering the temple at such an early age is an example of the limitations put on women during the period of early Christianity. During the 2nd century C.E., women could only gain an education as consecrated virgins or widows. Consequently, viewing Mary as a lifelong student (i.e. growing up in the temple, observing priests, weaving materials presumably involved in ritual) allows women more opportunity for education and independence within the mostly patriarchal structure of the Early Church.<sup>240</sup> Stephen Shoemaker supports this position, describing Mary's liberation of women

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<sup>238</sup> Miller 1994, p. 385.

<sup>239</sup> The ancient world, not knowing about ova, attributed the development of the fetus solely to the male "seed" which was implanted into a female vessel. (Laqueur, Thomas. 1990. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Exactly when and how peak fertility occurred in females, for instance, was not known until 1827 when the Estonian embryologist Karl Ernst von Baer discovered an ovum in a female dog and charted female ovulation.

<sup>240</sup> Cunneen *op. cit.*, p. 325.

through virginity.<sup>241</sup> This concept can be traced back to antiquity where virginity symbolized not only sexual virginity as in the case of the Vestals, but also independence and self-direction.<sup>242</sup>

This type of piety can be found in Greek myth and folklore, particularly those that evolved around the worship of Artemis. An argument can be made that there is an early similarity between the Mary in the *Infancy Gospel of James* and the Artemis of Greek myth -- they both have divine fathers, they are both described as precocious young girls, and they are both raised on sacred ground by divine “handmaids.” Artemis is attended to by nymphs while Mary is fed by angels and sacred virgins. In fact, Mary’s purity is so fundamental to her character that from the moment of her birth to the moment she walks into the temple her feet have only touched the ground once:

When she was six months old, her mother set her on the ground to test whether she could stand. And after walking seven steps, she came to her mother's breast. And her mother picked her up, saying, “As the Lord my God lives, you will not walk on this earth again until I take you to the temple of the Lord.” And she made a sanctuary in her bedroom and would not permit anything common or impure to pass through it. And she called the pure daughters of the Hebrews and they played with her.  
(*Infancy Gospel of James* 6. 2-5)

This passage is necessary to support the belief that Mary’s physical body remained untainted and immaculate throughout her young life. She was not soiled by the earth, nor touched by anyone or anything which was impure. Furthermore, on her first birthday Mary’s father Joachim prepared a celebration in which he invited “all” the priests and people of Israel:

When the child's first birthday came, Joachim held a great celebration. He invited the high priests and the priests and the Sanhedrin and the whole nation of Israel. And Joachim brought the child to the priests and they blessed her, saying, “God of our ancestors, bless this child and give her name eternal fame among all generations.” And all the people said, “Let it happen, amen.” And he brought the child to the high priests and they blessed her, saying, “Exalted God, look upon this child and give her a final blessing which will not be succeeded.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 6. 6-9)

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<sup>241</sup> Shoemaker 2005, p. 445.

<sup>242</sup> Cunneen *op. cit.*, p. 330.



Although this birthday party seems massively exaggerated – the whole nation of Israel -- even by 2<sup>nd</sup> century standards of storytelling, this public acknowledgment of sacredness and the prophecy of Mary’s future will become fundamentally important when we discuss the reaction of the priests to her virginal pregnancy.

This affirmation of her distinction is further confirmed by the statement made by the priests upon receiving her in the temple:

“The Lord God has magnified your name in all generations; in you, at the end of days, will the Lord God manifest his deliverance to the children of Israel.” And he set her down on the third step of the altar and the Lord God poured grace upon her. She danced triumphantly and every house in Israel loved her. (James 7. 6-10)

This statement is not only grandiose in the welcoming of a young Jewish girl, but it is also prophetic. Mary is not just any child, she is the being through which the Lord God will deliver all salvation at the end of days and every house in Israel has recognized her as the medium of this prophecy.

### *C. Virginal Conception: Mary as a Second Eve*

Even though she is recognized by the high priest, and the nation of Israel, as the one who will bring deliverance to the world, Mary could not escape the defilement of her physical body. Despite the fact that her corporeal form had almost never touched the earth, and angels and virgins cared and fed her, when Mary turned twelve years old the fact that she was about to begin menstruating frightened the priests that raised her: “When she turned twelve, a group of priests took counsel together, saying, “Look, Mary has been in the temple of the Lord twelve years. What should we do about her now, so that she does not defile the sanctuary of the Lord our

God?” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 8. 3-4) In the face of this dilemma an angel of the Lord appears to Zachariah<sup>243</sup> and commands him to select a guardian for Mary from among the widowers of the people. Among the widowers is an older man named Joseph who is a carpenter. When Joseph holds the rod distributed by the high priest a dove flies out of it: “Finally, Joseph took his rod. Suddenly, a dove came out of the rod and stood on Joseph's head. And the high priest said, “Joseph! Joseph! You have been chosen by lot to take the virgin into your own keeping.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 9. 6-7) Despite the miraculous sign of a dove flying out of a wooden rod, Joseph refuses to take Mary under his guardianship due to the fact that he is “old and already has sons.” Zachariah convinces Joseph that this is the will of God, and Joseph being a God-fearing man, concedes to take Mary under his care. He then proceeds to leave her at home while he goes off to build houses.

While Joseph is away the high priest is looking for virgins to weave a curtain for the temple of the Lord and he remembers, almost as an afterthought, that Mary who now lives with Joseph is a descendent of the tribe of David: “And the high priest remembered that the child Mary was from the tribe of David and was pure before God.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 10.4.) This is significant because the *Infancy Gospel of James* uses the evidence provided by Luke who identifies Mary as a member of the house of David: “... to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.” (Luke 1.27.) The Gospel of Matthew clearly identifies Joseph, not Mary, as a descendent of the house of David in the first chapter of his work that details the genealogy of Jesus: “... and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who was called the Messiah. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations... and from the deportation to Babylon to the

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<sup>243</sup> According to *The Infancy Gospel of James*, Zachariah, husband of Elizabeth and future father of John the Baptist, was high-priest when Joseph was chosen.

Messiah, fourteen generations.” (Matthew 1.1-17.) This discrepancy raises significant questions about the genealogy of Jesus, but more importantly for this work, this discrepancy creates a controversy as to the virginity of Mary.<sup>244</sup> If Matthew is correct and Jesus inherits the Davidic line through Joseph, this clearly implies that Joseph is his father. The *Infancy Gospel of James*, concerned solely with the virginity and purity of Mary’s body, uses only the reference found in Luke which identifies Jesus as a Davidic descendent through Mary.

The *Infancy Gospel of James* takes great care to describe the details of the virginal conception. An angel of the Lord approaches Mary while she is gathering water, and tells her she will become pregnant through the word of God: “Suddenly, an angel stood before her saying, “Do not be afraid Mary. You have found grace before the Lord of all. You will conceive from his word.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 10. 5) Mary is distressed at the news and questions the angel about the mystery of how she will conceive:

Upon hearing this, however, Mary was distraught, saying to herself, “If I conceive from the Lord God who lives, will I also conceive as all women conceive?” And the Angel of the Lord said, “Not like that, Mary. For the power of God will come over you. Thus, the holy one who is born will be called son of the most high. And you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 10. 6-8)

This passage is clearly written so that readers understand that Mary conceives Jesus without the physical act of intercourse, and without any human interception. Ironically, or perhaps purposely, Mary becoming pregnant through the power of God “pouring over her” is almost identical to the legend of princess Danae, who according to Sophocles was impregnated by Zeus who came to her in the guise of a shower, or light of gold:

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<sup>244</sup> Luke also identifies this connection between Jesus and Joseph in 2.4 ‘Joseph belongs to the house of David’, and 3.23 ‘He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli...’, Luke’s connection is described through Joseph as ‘Jesus father’ though it is unclear whether this is a biological or marital connection.

So too endured Danae in her beauty to change the light of the sky for brass-bound walls, and in that chamber, both burial and bridal, she was held in strict confinement. And yet was she of esteemed lineage ... and guarded a deposit of the seed of Zeus that had fallen in a golden rain." (Sophocles, *Antigone*, 944)

This miraculous conception, one of the many ways in which Zeus impregnated his human lovers, led to the birth of the Greek hero Perseus. The *Infancy Gospel of James*' possible allusion to this famous Greek narrative confirms Warner's suggestion that the early Christian community used the popularity of miraculous conception of heroes and gods while simultaneously removing themselves from polytheistic traditions.

Once the mechanics of virginal conception are made clear by the angel, Mary piously accepts her duty. The *Infancy Gospel of James* tells us that Mary is fourteen years old when she becomes pregnant (*Infancy Gospel of James* 9.23) and since Joseph left her at the age of twelve, when he took her under his care, it is clear that he has not known her as man and wife. It is here that the Virgin becomes perceived as the new, or second, Eve. Around the same time as this document was written, Justin Martyr (155 C.E.) wrote that the holy scriptures teach us concerning Christ:

...that He became Man by the Virgin so that the course which was taken by disobedience in the beginning through the agency of the serpent, might be also the very course by which it would be put down. For Eve, a virgin and undefiled, conceived the word of the serpent, and bore disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced to her the glad tidings that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the powers of the Most High would overshadow her, for which reason the Holy One being born of her would be called the Son of God. And she replied: "Be it done unto me according to thy word." (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*)

This tradition of Mary as the second Eve continues among second century C.E., church fathers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, who fully support the idea that through Mary's innocence and obedience, she erases the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden, and cleanses womankind. The infancy gospel further amplifies the connection of Mary to Eve by describing the reaction of

Joseph in finding Mary pregnant upon his return. In his anguish and distress Joseph compares his situation to the plight of Adam:

“Who has set this trap for me? Who did this evil in my house? Who stole the virgin from me and defiled her. Has not the story of Adam been repeated with me? For while Adam was glorifying God, the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her and defiled her, so it has also happened to me.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 10. 4-5.)

If this argument is to be believed by the faithful, then Mary, just like Jesus, has been sent to erase the sins of the past and to become the way of salvation for human beings. Jesus is described by Paul as a second Adam: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.... And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [was] a quickening spirit... The first man [is] of the earth, earthy; the second man [is] the Lord from heaven.” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45, 47) It seems logical to argue that Mary is equal to Jesus in many aspects of her offering salvation to women, and fulfills her duties as piously as Jesus does. A large body of work is dedicated to the liberation of women through Mary as a second Eve by later theologians, scholars, and believers. However, the scope of this research expands only through the first three centuries C.E., and must remain focused on only the writers of this period.

#### *D. The Virgin Birth: Doubt and Apprehension*

One of the most perplexing events in the *Infancy Gospel of James* is the reaction of the priests when they discover that Mary has become pregnant through a miraculous conception.

Mary is automatically vilified by the high priest:

And the high priest said to her, “Mary, what is this? How have you humiliated yourself? Did you forget the Lord your God, you who were raised in the holy of holies and received from the hand of an angel? You who heard their songs and danced before them, what is this?” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 15. 10-12)

Although both Mary and Joseph repeatedly argue for their innocence and attest to the miracle that God has performed through Mary, the high priest remains unconvinced. Furthermore, he

demands that Joseph and the very pregnant Mary undergo a “truth” test to prove that they are guilty and have committed a sin:

And the high priest said, “I will give you the water of the Lord's wrath to drink and it will make your sin clear in your eyes.”... And he made the young girl drink also and sent her out into the desert. And she came back unharmed. And all the people were astonished that their sins were not revealed. (*Infancy Gospel of James* 16. 3-6)

The drinking of the Lord’s wrath evidently refers to a practice mentioned in the Hebrew Bible:

The priest will write these curses on special paper and wash them off into the bitter water, so that when the woman drinks this water, the curses will enter her body... If the woman has been unfaithful, the water will immediately make her unable to have children, and she will be a curse among her people... This is the ceremony that must take place at my altar when a husband suspects that his wife has been unfaithful. (Numbers 5.23-30)

The high priest’s reaction to Mary’s virginal conception is particularly unusual, especially given all the events leading to this moment which have been clearly arranged as evidence of Mary’s sacred purpose. Her special birth, her first birthday party where the priests and the nation of Israel gathered to celebrate her, the prophetic words exclaimed upon her entrance into the temple, and her miraculous and divinely orchestrated upbringing seem to point in the direction of an exalted purpose. However, despite all of these early manifestations of Mary’s uniqueness the high priest’s reaction is to question, test, and deny. It can be argued that the fact that Mary and Joseph survive the trials of the high priest’s examination further proves the will and magnitude of God, the automatic response of doubt and suspicion is unexpected and appears out of place.

Mary has not only remained a virgin after conception but according to the *Infancy Gospel of James* she remains a virgin even after giving birth.<sup>245</sup> The infancy gospel describes a great blinding light appearing for a few moments and as it dissipates, Mary is holding her new son Jesus:

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<sup>245</sup> This plot development can be seen as anticipating the belief that Mary was “ever-virgin” and provides a myth to underpin this belief.

And immediately, the cloud withdrew from the cave and a great light appeared in the cave so that their eyes could not bear it. And a little while later the same light withdrew until an infant appeared. And he came and took the breast of his mother, Mary. (*Infancy Gospel of James* 19. 15-6.)

Then the midwife, a witness to this miracle of birth, came out of the cave and rejoiced by sharing the news with Salome: “And the midwife departed from the cave and met Salome and said to her, "Salome, Salome, I have to describe this new miracle for you. A virgin has given birth, although her body does not allow it” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 19.18). It is significant that the midwife knew that Mary’s hymen remained intact from her own personal experience, not merely from Joseph's words. Cameron suggests that the driving force behind the doctrine of virginal birth is that it was a unique event, divinely wrought only once in all of human history.<sup>246</sup> The same can be said of the Resurrection; belief in these two miracles is absolutely obligatory for Christians.

Salome doubts this miracle and proceeds to examine Mary for her “virginal nature:” “And Salome said: “As the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and investigate her, I will not believe that a virgin has given birth.” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 19.19) This physical exam clarifies that Salome is looking for the presence of an intact hymen. A virgin birth here implies that giving birth in this matter does not disturb biology. Her disbelief is comparable to that of the disciple Thomas in the Gospel of John: “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (John 20.25.) Salome finds Mary “intact” and according to the *Infancy Gospel of James* her hand burns for having dared to question Mary’s sacredness. The only way to heal her damaged hand is to hold the baby Jesus: “And Salome went to the child and lifted him up,

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<sup>246</sup> Cameron *op. cit.*, p.118.

saying, “I worship him because he has been born a king to Israel.” And at once Salome was healed and left the cave justified” (*Infancy Gospel of James* 20. 10-1). This is analogous to Thomas’ reaction after touching the nail scars of Jesus when he exclaims: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20.28.) It is worth quoting Jesus’ response to Thomas: “Jesus said to him, “Have you believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20.29.) Thus, Jesus castigation of those who need proof in order to believe can be applied to the *Infancy Gospel of James* and the reaction of those who question, or are suspicious of, the miracle of Jesus’ virginal birth. It is clear that early Christian followers were both aware and concerned with Mary’s physical body. It is also apparent in the *Infancy Gospel of James* the author wants to make sure readers understand that Mary’s body did not go through any of the physical changes associated with being pregnant or giving birth, i.e., no distension of the uterus, no disruption to the hymen, etc.

Thus, Mary is positioned as Perpetual virgin. She never ever had sex, and hence no children, other than Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. Her body remains a sacred vessel even after Jesus’ death, and she becomes the ultimate figure of sacrifice, nurture and asceticism. She is the perfect mother, the perfect woman, and certainly the perfect Christian. Hock notes that a major development found in the *Protoevangelium of James* is that Mary is no longer a virgin in the ordinary sense of a young woman of marriageable age, but a virgin of extraordinary purity and unending duration.<sup>247</sup> *The Infancy Gospel of James* makes the case that Mary was special, chosen specifically by God to be the bearer of God incarnate. Consequently, her birth had to be special, undertaken without any male involvement whatsoever. Her upbringing, education and protection by Joseph were also special and contributed to her ongoing purity. Just as Jesus’

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<sup>247</sup> Hock *op. cit.*, p. 90.



special birth suggests his divinity, so, too, does Mary's special birth hint at hers. With no human male "seed," and nothing contributed by the female in 1st century biological thinking, the only implication is that Anna's conception of Mary must be of divine origin. Hence Mary, like Jesus, must be a divine-human.

### 3. Conclusions: The Significance of Belief in Theological Tradition

As we have seen, where the gospels failed to have answers and/or information about the young Jewish mother who gave birth to Jesus, writers filled in the gaps with tales of sacredness, deification and purity that elevated Mary to the standard expectation of a Hellenistic goddess. More of this will be discussed in the next chapters, but it is important that we focus on the fundamental feature that catapulted the divinity of Mary from popular understanding, to theological tradition.

One of the most peculiar attributes of Mary's worship is the paradoxical belief in the combination of her virginity with her maternity.<sup>248</sup> Both are common elements found in the gospels of Luke and Matthew, as well as the *Infancy Gospel of James*. A strong example of this mystery found in earlier Greco-Roman tradition is in the tradition of Artemis Ephesia who is worshiped as both virgin and mother in the city of Ephesus. Henry Thompson insists that the beliefs and practices in regard to the Virgin Mary are a result of growth, rather than original inheritance, from the days of Jesus and his apostles.<sup>249</sup> He argues that the practice of hero and/or ancestor worship can be traced back to through the Hebrew Bible and into antiquity. According to Thompson, Christianity presented: "... abstract ideas inseparably connected with the concept

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<sup>248</sup> Pelikan *op. cit.*, p. 378.

<sup>249</sup> Thompson *op. cit.*, p. 475.

of a purely spiritual, nonmaterial God which prove difficult of comprehension to the common man of post-apostolic days.”<sup>250</sup> Consequently, an argument could be made that Christianity and its “heroes” developed not out of a vacuum of spiritual belief, but rather as a result of absorbed historical traditions and ritual practice. Mary’s attributes of purity, virginity, and unwavering chastity, as well as her warmth, nurturing and protection are inherited from the observance and worship of Artemis. Not to get too far ahead of our story however, Thompson argues that Artemis is the only possible goddess of antiquity who could personify the virtue of Mary. He states: “In the midst of an age as impure as any history records, there was not lacking an ideal of cold, beautiful, unwavering chastity, personified in the Greek Artemis.”<sup>251</sup> Thus, the tradition and ritual of Artemis, particularly in Ephesus, provide the platform which suggests that she was the only true “pure” deity among all the gods of antiquity and the only one to be clearly connected to Mary. Connections between Mary, Mother of Jesus, and the Ephesian Artemis will be discussed in Chapter Five.

It seems evident, at least in part, that the celebration of virginity and the cultivation of asceticism came about in repulsion against what were taken to be the excesses of sexual self-indulgence in late antiquity.<sup>252</sup> Pelikan suggests that the similarities in attributes between Artemis and Mary, particularly in consideration of their position on virginity and severe chastity, were easily integrated in order to make the transition of conversion to Christianity as complacent as possible.<sup>253</sup> Shoemaker supports this argument by clarifying the significance of Mary in Jesus’ life. As we have seen above, Mary is not only the purest human female to ever walk the earth, as

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<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>252</sup> Pelikan *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

well as the vessel through which Jesus miraculously enters the world, she is the only character in the New Testament who understands Jesus' "true" purpose: she knows why the shepherds and magi come to his birth, she understands why he remains in the temple for three days as a child, and she is the initiator of his performance of miracles. In addition, as this chapter has shown, she is present at his crucifixion, death, and burial, and according to Matthew one of the women who is entrusted with spreading the word of his resurrection. Shoemaker argues that Mary's presence is fundamental, even if sparse in the New Testament and that this implies Mary shares in the secret and intimate knowledge of her son.<sup>254</sup> This subtle yet indispensable participation of Mary in the ministry of Jesus, leads Shoemaker to conclude that Mary may have been more active in the development of the early Christian community than the gospels lead us to believe.<sup>255</sup>

Consequently an argument could be made that this tradition of a more active Mary significantly persuaded the conversion of female followers. Thompson notes that women converted to Christianity in large numbers during the first four centuries:

The chastity of its [Christianity] female converts was no small element in the forces which account for its wonderful progress during the first four centuries. It was not strange, rather it was inevitable, that the Mother of Jesus, the highly favored among women, the one who stood closest to Christ in his worldly relationships, the lovely model of sweet, gracious, modest womanhood, should be accounted worthy of prime distinction...<sup>256</sup>

Consequently, the community of early Christians, particularly Gentiles immersed in Hellenistic culture, spread throughout the lower Mediterranean, begin to demand an even higher position for Mary. For them, her life story as described in the gospels is more than the story of a

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<sup>254</sup> Shoemaker, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>256</sup> Thompson *op. cit.*, p. 478.

mere human female with a sacred duty. For them, the only valid position for Mary's life and devotion is that of equality with the fruit of her womb.

The growing emphasis on Mary proceeded in various stages. First, as virgin mother of Jesus. Then as she herself having had a special birth, suggesting her divine-human status. Then as the new or Second Eve. Then her role as a co-redeemer, for not only having reversed the fault occasioned by Eve but also as the instrument of salvation, mother of Jesus, the Saviour. What remains is her crowning achievement, Mary as *Theotokos*. In essence, if Jesus is the incarnation of God, then Mary must be considered the Mother of God. This prestigious claim sets Mary up as a quasi-Goddess figure similar to the ever virgin Artemis of Greece and Ephesus, and to that we turn in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *THEOTOKOS: EPHESUS THE CITY OF GODDESSES*

As we have seen, by the 4th century Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was said to have had an Immaculate Conception and to be the Virgin, the new Eve, and to share in the process of salvation with her son, Jesus. As doctrines evolved about the status of her son, and his proximity to divinity, so, too, did her status change. The most startling development occurred in the 5th century when Mary was proclaimed *Theotokos*.

In this chapter we will examine the records of the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. and the writings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople and Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, to ascertain why she was called *Theotokos* and what this title meant to its defenders. The debate was intense, with Nestorius and Cyril advancing opposing points of view. Much of the debate was tied up with evolving beliefs about Jesus, especially surrounding specific interpretations of the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. Cyril's views won and Nestorius and his followers were excommunicated. Consequently, the theology of Mary as *Theotokos* fitted best with the evolving theology of the Trinity conceived of as a hypostatic union between the divine and human aspects of the incarnate son of God. Clearly, getting beliefs about Jesus and Mary right were crucial to church membership....and salvation.

The first section of this chapter will endeavor to provide evidence that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, likely also traveled with John to Ephesus where she resided in a small house on top of Panaghia Kapoli, a hill located approximately ten miles outside of Ephesus.<sup>257</sup> These traditions

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<sup>257</sup> Mary being in Ephesus does not necessarily mean that she was buried there. There are various burial traditions including that she was buried in Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem; that she ascended corporally

are fundamental in explaining the popularity of Ephesus for early Christians, as well as its significance of being the location in which Mary, the Mother of Jesus, becomes *Theotokos*, Mary the Mother of God.

However, before we can arrive at the heated controversy between Cyril and Nestorius about the significance of the Virgin Mary, we must first consider early church fathers, and their testimony evidence which supports the tradition that John the Apostle fled from Jerusalem to Ephesus, proceeded to teach and make converts, and eventually died and was buried under the hill of Ayasoluk. Some early writers also thought that this John – John of Ephesus, that is, John the Apostle -- also wrote the Book of Revelation. While contemporary scholars are skeptical that John of Ephesus was John the Apostle, and also the John of Patmos who wrote the Book of Revelation, this was decidedly not the view of the early church. They were virtually unanimous that there was only one “John” and that he was one of Jesus’ original disciples.

## **1. The Tradition of Mary in Ephesus**

### *A. John of Ephesus = John the Apostle*

The tradition of John the Apostle, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, retiring, or escaping to settle in Ephesus, can be traced back to biblical record. In the Gospel of John, Jesus, while on the cross, famously utters, “When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19. 26-7) While contemporary scholars may debate the identity of the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” this

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into heaven in which case there would be no burial site; or that she is buried in Talpiot just south of Jerusalem along with other members of the family of Jesus. Conversely, Mary being buried in or near Jerusalem does not preclude her having been in Ephesus after the crucifixion.

individual has most commonly been identified with John, one of the original disciples. The historical scholarship analysed here will support the argument that after the crucifixion of Jesus, John escaped persecution, taking the Virgin Mary with him and settling in the city of the great goddess, Artemis.

The belief that John wrote, taught and died at Ephesus is so pervasive that even Pope Celestine I, writing to the Council of Ephesus in 431 refers to the entrenched convention that Ephesus was John's last home. He states, "I exhort you, most blessed brethren, that love alone be regarded in which we ought to remain, according to the voice of John the Apostle whose relics we venerate in this city."<sup>258</sup> Pope Celestine's conviction that John settled in Ephesus was based on several early Christian writings supporting this tradition. Other writers more or less contemporary with Polycrates (c. 130 – 196) assume rather than assert John's Ephesian connection. Clement of Alexandria, for example, says that after Domitian's death (96 C.E.) "John the Apostle" moved from the island of Patmos to Ephesus a statement which may go back to Hegesippus.<sup>259</sup> Hegesippus (c. 110 – 80 C.E) was as a Christian chronicler of the early Church who may have been a Jewish convert<sup>260</sup> and certainly wrote against heresies of the Gnostics and of Marcion. The date of Hegesippus is insecurely fixed by the statement of Eusebius that the death and apotheosis of Antinous (130) occurred in Hegesippus' lifetime, and that he came to Rome under Pope St. Anicetus and wrote in the time of Pope St. Eleuterus (Bishop of Rome, c.

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<sup>258</sup> "The Letter of Pope Celestine to the Synod of Ephesus." *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 221.

<sup>259</sup> Clement. *Quis diues saluetur*, 42 (quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eeel.*, iii. 23.6). The case for seeing the authority of Hegesippus behind this statement is presented by H. J. Lawlor. *Eusebiana* (Oxford. 1912). pp. 51 ff.

<sup>260</sup> W. Telfer marshals Eusebius' reasons for concluding so, in "Was Hegesippus a Jew?" *The Harvard Theological Review* 53.2 (April 1960:143-153)

174–189). Hegesippus' works are now entirely lost, save eight passages concerning Church history quoted by Eusebius.

One of the earliest references we have in support of John settling at Ephesus is Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who is believed to have been born around the year 69 or 70 C.E. Not many details of Polycarp's early life are known. According to Maxwell Staniforth in *Early Christian Writings*, Polycarp is thought to have been a native and lifelong resident of the Roman proconsular province of Asia (what is now western Turkey) which became a new center for the Christian world after the fall of Jerusalem in 70. In particular, writes Staniforth, the last surviving apostle, John, "had made his home in Ephesus, and his name and influence had become a magnet for all that was most vital in Christendom. The young Polycarp himself was one of his disciples, and in later life was fond of recalling his precious memories of the saint."<sup>261</sup>

Polycarp served as bishop of Smyrna for approximately sixty years, from the closing years of the first century to the mid-second century. The early-third-century theologian Tertullian writes that according to "original records," it was the Apostle John himself who ordained Polycarp to that office. He states,

Let them exhibit the origins of their churches, let them unroll the list of their bishops, coming down from the beginning by succession in such a way that their first bishop had for his originator and predecessor one of the apostles or apostolic men; one, I mean, who continued with the apostles. For this is how the apostolic churches record their origins. The church of Smyrna, for example, reports that Polycarp was placed there by John; the Church of Rome, that Clement was ordained by Peter. (Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, 32.)

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<sup>261</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.3, Polycarp does not quote from the Gospel of John in his surviving letter, which may be an indication that whichever John he knew was not the author of that gospel, or that the gospel was not finished during Polycarp's discipleship with John. Weidmann suggests (Weidmann 1999:132) that the "Harris fragments" may reflect early traditions: "the raw material for a narrative about John and Polycarp may have been in place before Irenaeus; the codification of the significance of a direct line of succession from the apostle John through Polycarp may arguably be linked directly to Irenaeus".



It is significant to note, that the early church writers claimed that John the Apostle did not just settle in Ephesus, but he instructed and promoted young Christian s leaders in the early church. This points to an apostolic authority in the development of church doctrines and teachings.

The primary source most Johannine scholars rely on as evidence that John of Ephesus is identical with John the Apostle is the work of Irenaeus. Irenaeus, a second-century theologian and student of Polycarp, recorded his memories of his mentor. The following is a letter written by Irenaeus to Florinus, who was labelled a “heretic,” about Polycarp’s dedication to passing on the teachings of the Apostles. Although Irenaeus’s original account is lost to history, Eusebius quoted a portion of it,

When I was still a boy I saw you [Florinus] in Lower Asia in Polycarp’s company. . . . I can describe the place where blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings out and comings in, the character of his life, his personal appearance, and his addresses to crowded congregations. I remember how he spoke of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord; how he repeated their words from memory; and how the things that he had heard them say about the Lord, His miracles and His teaching, things that he had heard direct from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, were proclaimed by Polycarp in complete harmony with Scripture (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5).

According to Carl Clemen, Irenaeus not only claims repeatedly that the Apostle John spent the closing years of his life in Ephesus but, more importantly, refers to the testimony of the presbyters who claim to have seen him in Asia. Irenaeus states,

. . . Those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the [validity of] the statement. Whom then should we rather believe? Whether such men as these, or Ptolemæus, who never saw the apostles, and who never even in his dreams attained to the slightest trace of an apostle? (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.22.5)

According to Irenaeus who was the student of Polycarp, who studied under John of Ephesus, the latter was, in fact, John, the Beloved Disciple, one of Jesus’ original twelve Disciples. For

Irenaeus, John of Ephesus is always “the Disciple of the Lord.” Thus, from a theological perspective, we have a linkage of early eye-witnesses to the authenticity of John the Apostle being one and the same as John of Ephesus.

Thus we have established that there was a tradition within the early Church that John the Apostle settled in Ephesus. This had a twofold effect. First it linked the early Christian community in Ephesus back to someone who had spent time with Jesus. Moreover, it would powerfully establish the legitimacy of the Ephesian bishops. Bearing this motivation in mind, we now move to consider further evidence which suggests that John remained at Ephesus until his death. The primary source for this, is a statement by Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, (189-199). In this statement, Polycrates defends the practice of observing Easter on the fourteenth day of the appropriate lunar month, after the Jewish tradition regarding Passover, regardless of the day of the week on which it fell. He invokes the authority of the great *stoicheia* by which he means Christians of the first generations who died and were buried in the province of Asia. There are no primary texts remaining written by Polycrates but Eusebius records the following,

The time of John’s death has also been given in a general way, but his burial place is indicated by an epistle of Polycrates (who was bishop of the parish of Ephesus), addressed to Victor, bishop of Rome. In this epistle he mentions him together with the apostle Philip and his daughters in the following words: “For in Asia also great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the last day, at the coming of the Lord, when he shall come with glory from heaven and shall seek out all the saints. Among these are Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who sleeps in Hierapolis, and his two aged virgin daughters, and another daughter who lived in the Holy Spirit and now rests at Ephesus; and moreover John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and being a priest wore the sacerdotal plate. He also sleeps at Ephesus” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3. 31.2-3).

As Polycrates was bishop of Ephesus less than a hundred years after John the Apostle is said to have died there, his testimony that John died at Ephesus provides substantial additional support for the tradition that John of Ephesus was John the original disciple of Jesus. Despite the lack of archeological or historical evidence, it is clear that early Ephesian Christians believed strongly

that Jesus' Beloved Disciple made his home in their sacred city and that this was recognized by other early Church leaders.

Henry Barclay Swete refers to several writers from the end of the second century onwards who assumed that John of Ephesus was one and the same as the Apostle John. Swete's strongest testimony concerning the identity of John involves the writings of Justin Martyr,

And further, there was a certain man with us (in Ephesus) whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place (Justin Martyr, *Dialogues with Trypho*, 81. 306-7).

Justin was at Ephesus in the mid-second century and for the last year or two of his residence there, he was a Christian. Swete reasonably infers from Justin's statement that at Ephesus the title of Apostle had begun to be attached to John as early as 130, i.e., within little more than 30 years after his death.<sup>262</sup> Thus, there are numerous early church figures that testify that John of Ephesus is John the Apostle and that he resided, wrote and died in Ephesus. As we have seen, prominent early church leaders such as Polycarp, Irenaeus, Polycrates, Tertullian and Justin Martyr were convinced that this tradition was the most accurate and was built upon both first-hand experience and second-hand teachings. For these early writers, this linkage of eye-witness testimony that their John, that is, John of Ephesus, was John the Beloved Disciple, was vitally important. It extended their teaching and authority back to one of the original disciples of Jesus. Their investment in him being the Beloved Disciple was political, and their need to have his authority support their credentials points to the uncertain and unstructured beginnings of the early church.

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<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

Modern scholars have used the claims of early church writers such as Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr, as well as biblical references, to discuss and support the early church tradition that John the Apostle remained in Ephesus. In *Reading John in Ephesus*, Sief Van Tilborg is one of the several modern historians who defend the claim that John the Apostle settled in Ephesus after the crucifixion. To clarify, Van Tilborg claims only that “John” came from a Hellenistic city, and Ephesus is one possibility. That being said, Van Tilborg’s research suggests that the Ephesian rituals of worship for their goddess Artemis, were so closely paralleled to those of the early Christians, that it was not an accident that John the Apostle was able to successfully settle and teach in this famous city. Van Tilborg repeatedly states that the people of Ephesus were primed to accept early Christian teachings and beliefs and infuse them with their own unique brand of worship. Van Tilborg argues that the way in which people see Jesus in the Johannine Gospel can be compared with the way in which Ephesians dealt with their political and religious authority figures. One of the most important passages in the Gospel of John refers to Jesus’s judgment and rage in front of the temple,

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:13-22).

According to Van Tilborg aspects such as the double meaning of “temple” (as the building in Jerusalem, and as Jesus’ body) the commerce in and around the temple area, especially the

relation between temple worship and the currency converters, as well as a large number of commercial words (the sellers; the money changers; money tables) are unique in comparison with the Synoptics. For someone in Ephesus this passage would resonate: the situation was not in far off Jerusalem but right on their doorstep. They would have drawn significant parallels. Commerce in and around the Temple of Artemis, for instance, parallels the business in and around the Second Temple in Jerusalem as the following passage from Dio Chrysostom (40-115) indicates:

You know about the Ephesians, of course, and that large sums of money are in their hands, some of it belonging to private citizens and deposited in the temple of Artemis, not alone money of the Ephesians but also of aliens and of persons from all parts of the world, and in some cases of commonwealths of Kings (Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 31.54).

Dio Chrysostom would have been a contemporary of John of Ephesus and himself a resident there.

Van Tilborg uses this text to support his argument that John the Apostle may have settled in the city of Ephesus. His analysis implies that early Christians in Ephesus would have made the connection between the ancient philosophy of the sanctity of the Temple of Artemis, and the newer Christian philosophy/approach to a temple of the body, about which Jesus is preaching in the Johannine text.

The death of John of Ephesus occurred after the beginning of Trajan's reign, therefore not before the year 98, when any personal follower of Jesus who survived must have been of advanced age. Irenaeus writes about the death of John as follows, "...those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan." (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 22. 5) According to F. F. Bruce, the site on the hill of Ayasoluk had been chosen as the

place where John is said to have been buried. The Basilica of John was originally a mausoleum and church until the 4th century. In fact, beneath the fourth century church a system of subterranean vaults was found, one of which lies directly under the altar. At one time these catacombs could be entered by a steep and narrow stepped passage, which was later blocked up, except for an air shaft that had an exit close to the altar. Some years before the Council of Ephesus, Augustine of Hippo reported a rumor that the earth above John's tomb at Ephesus visibly moved up and down as if someone were breathing there below. By the sixth century the Basilica was largely in ruins; thus, Justinian I ordered a reconstruction and built an extravagant new Basilica. It was modeled after the now lost Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. The ruins of the Church of John still exist near Ephesus and his burial place is marked.

In conclusion, it was a common belief amongst early Christian writers that John of Ephesus was identical with John the Apostle. Polycarp, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr all support the view that John settled in Ephesus. F. F. Bruce states,

The basilica of St. John commemorates a Christian tradition going back, as surely as do the Roman basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul, to the mid-second century, and probably earlier still. Even in its ruined state it bears silent witness to those ... great luminaries" who fell asleep in pro-consular Asia, among whom" John the disciple of the Lord" (with his school or circle) occupies a pre-eminent place.<sup>263</sup>

The strength of this narrative is such that it lasted for hundreds of years, and is embedded in the belief of the Ephesians with such fervour that even Pope Celestine I could not escape mentioning it in his letter to the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century. Ephesus was the city of John, the Beloved Disciple.

So, if the Apostle John fled Jerusalem sometime after Jesus' crucifixion, what happened to Mary? Biblical tradition states that John the Apostle was charged with taking Mary, the

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<sup>263</sup> Bruce 1977, p. 340.

Mother of Jesus, with him, away from Jerusalem. Since we have established that early church fathers accepted that John retired, and was buried in Ephesus, it follows, that the Virgin Mary went with him.

### *B. Evidence of the Virgin in Ephesus*

According to the Gospel of John, as interpreted by early Christians, John the Apostle had been charged by Jesus -- his dying words -- that he should take care of Mary, his Mother. It is not surprising, then, that he would have brought her with him to Ephesus.

That John, Mary, and other disciples left Jerusalem after the crucifixion is highly likely, partly to bring the message to all corners of the earth, but also to escape imminent persecution. Jesus had been arrested and crucified on political grounds, claiming to be “King of the Jews.” His family and followers were suspect. Some did remain in Jerusalem, for example, Jesus’ brother James, but others scattered east (Thomas), south (Mark) and still others around the Mediterranean. There are traditions that Mary Magdalene went with others to southern France. There is also a well-established tradition that Mary, Mother of Jesus, went to Ephesus. In all instances, records are scanty and we are left to rely on isolated passages that reflect traditional beliefs.

That the Virgin Mary went with John to Ephesus is based on a strong tradition evident in the beliefs of the citizens of Ephesus, remarks made at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and in the writings of later authors Bar-Hebraeus (1226-1286), Tillemont (1637- 1698), Calmet (and Pope Benoit XIV (1675-1758)). In his work *Mary: The Help of Christians*, Bonaventure Hammer states that Mary's Ephesian residence rests on five fundamental pieces of evidence.

The first is a passage in the synodal letter of the Council of Ephesus which reads, “Wherefore also Nestorius, the instigator of the impious heresy, when he had come to the city of the Ephesians, *where John the Theologian and the Virgin Mother of God St. Mary* [italics mine]... estranging himself of his own accord from the gathering of the holy Fathers and Bishops. . .” (Hammer, p. 96). Consequently, the primary piece of evidence is an introductory sentence in Council documents dated around 431. Hammer suggests that the somewhat incomplete statement in the letter (in italics above) could also be read as, “where John the Theologian and the Virgin... Mary have a sanctuary” (Hammer, p. 98). This passage clearly reflects the view that Ephesus is the city of John and also of Mary.

The second piece of evidence put forth by Hammer is the writings of Bar-Hebraeus (or Abulpharagius), a Jacobite bishop of the thirteenth century. Bar-Hebraeus relates that John took Mary with him to Patmos, then founded the Church of Ephesus, but he does not describe how, or where, the Virgin died.<sup>264</sup> Born in 1226 in what is now Turkey, Bar-Hebraeus was renowned as a scholar and theologian. He died in 1286 in Persia. Writing mostly in Syriac and Arabic, Bar Hebraeus wrote on philosophy, poetry, language, history and theology, including a comprehensive history of the world, the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*.<sup>265</sup> His testimony is written almost a thousand years after the Council of Ephesus issued the synod letter. On the other hand, Sir Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge argues that Bar-Hebraeus was particularly known for his collection of old books, manuscripts and lost scripture. From this it can be inferred that Bar-Hebraeus may have had what he believed was reliable documentation for this claim. Budge supports the diligence with which Bar-Hebraeus approached his theological writing by claiming

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<sup>264</sup> Hammer *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>265</sup> From the Introduction to Budge 1932, p. 12.



that he spoke several ancient languages, read everything he could get his hands on and was one of the most respected historians and theologians of his time.<sup>266</sup>

The third piece of evidence Hammer presents in support of the Virgin being in Ephesus is a statement by Pope Benedict XIV which confirms the belief of early Christians that Mary followed John to Ephesus and died there. Furthermore, Hammer claims that Benedict XIV intended also to remove from the Breviary the writings which mention Mary's death in Jerusalem, but died before carrying out his intention.<sup>267</sup> Later writers such as Augustin Calmet, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine monk, and Louis Sebastien Lenain de Tillemont, a French ecclesiastical historian also of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, continue to perpetuate the tradition of Mary's temporary residence and death in Ephesus. In his work, *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, Calmet claims the following about the last days of the Virgin,

She was with the apostles at his [Jesus] ascension, and continued with them at Jerusalem, waiting the coming of the Holy Ghost. After this, she dwelt with John the evangelist, who take care of her as his own mother. It is thought he took her with him to Ephesus, where she died in extreme old age. There is a letter of the ecumenical council of Ephesus, importing, that in the fifth century, it was believed she was buried there.<sup>268</sup>

Calmet goes on to discuss the possibilities of the Virgin's final resting place at Jerusalem, but the details of this tradition as just as vague and secondarily validated as her location at Ephesus. In the end, Calmet's research comes to the following conclusion, "... no one knew what her end was. The sentiment of the church at this day, are, that she is dead; but they are divided as to her rising again, or whether she awaits the general resurrection, at Ephesus, or at Jerusalem, or elsewhere."<sup>269</sup> It is important to reiterate that the Virgin Mary's residing for a while in Ephesus is not incompatible with a burial in, or near Jerusalem.

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<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>267</sup> Hammer *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>268</sup> Calmet, Augustin, C. Taylor, and R. Edward 1832, p. 380.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380.

Tillemont, Calmet's contemporary, similarly addresses the strength of the tradition that the Virgin may have spent some time at Ephesus. He repeats the evidence presented in the synod letter of the Council of Ephesus, as well as the well-known tradition that if John the Apostle settled in Ephesus, and was entrusted with the care of the Virgin by Jesus as outlined in the Gospel, then it seems highly likely that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, would have accompanied John in his travels and spent time there.

### *C. The House of Mary: Miraculous Revelations*

The tradition that the Virgin Mary lived in Ephesus is exceptionally powerful. Many Catholic Christians even today make pilgrimages to Ephesus in her honour. The finding of 'Mary's House' relies solely on the visions of a pious nun and there is no archeological or textual evidence to prove that the Virgin lived, or died, at this site. That being said, the events surrounding the discovery and consecration of this building are significant in establishing the long-held belief that Mary remained at Ephesus until her death. Christians, both of ancient Ephesian descent, and modern worshippers, dedicate their lives, prayers and pilgrimages to what they believe to be the site of the Virgin's last days. This physical connection to the *Theotokos* allows this ancient metropolis to continue to hold its title as The City of Goddesses.

Both folklore, and popular opinion, mark the Ephesians as the last of the early Christians to have had the Virgin in their midst. Today, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* names several places where Mary, the Mother of Jesus, may have found her last resting place,

As to tradition, there is some testimony for Mary's temporary residence in or near Ephesus... In Panaghia Kapoli, on a hill about nine or ten miles distant from Ephesus, was discovered a house, or rather its remains, in which Mary is supposed to have lived. The house was found, as it had been sought, according to the indications given by Catherine Emmerich in her life of the Blessed Virgin... In 451 Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem, testified to the presence of Mary's tomb in Jerusalem... Another witness for the existence of a tradition placing the tomb of Mary in Gethsemani is the basilica erected

above the sacred spot, about the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century... It has been seen that we have no absolute certainty as to the place in which Mary lived after the day of Pentecost. Though it is more probable that she remained uninterruptedly in or near Jerusalem, she may have resided for a while in the vicinity of Ephesus, and this may have given rise to the tradition of her Ephesian death and burial. There is still less historical information concerning the particular incidents of her life.<sup>270</sup>

Consequently, if the Ephesians held the view that John the Apostle moved with Mary to Ephesus, it is not surprising that they also claim to know the location of Mary's house.

Donald Carroll's work reveals that in the 11<sup>th</sup> century Seljuk Turks conquered the area of Ephesus and Izmir and some of the surviving Christians escaped the isolated mountainous region surrounding the city.<sup>271</sup> These early Christians of Ephesus later became known as the villagers of Kirkindje who kept the Marian Ephesus tradition alive. These traditions became popular among the locals, and pilgrims, after the visions of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century stigmatic Augustinian nun named Anne Catherine Emmerich.<sup>272</sup>

Catherine Emmerich's visions of Mary's life in Ephesus were recorded by the German poet Clemens Brentano and, according to Heather Abraham, were instrumental to the shrine's ultimate discovery in 1891. Born in 1774 in a small town in western Germany, Emmerich became an Augustinian nun at the age of 29.<sup>273</sup> In 1812 witnesses claimed that she began to bear the *stigmata* that included a cross over her heart, and wounds from the crown of thorns. According to Carroll, "...witnesses to the event reported that as she prayed her face became flushed and she was seized by high fever. Then all of a sudden she was infused by brightness that specifically illuminated her hands and feet, which were seen to be covered with blood as if they were punctured" (Carroll 2000, 42). After the appearance of the *stigmata* Emmerich began to

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<sup>270</sup> Maas, Anthony. "The Blessed Virgin Mary." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 15. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. 28 May 2015 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464b.htm>.

<sup>271</sup> Carroll 2000, p. 33.

<sup>272</sup> Abraham 2008, p. 16.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

attract visitors, including Clemens Brentano who spent the next six years recording her visions. However the shrine was not discovered until 1891, approximately seventy years after the death of Emmerich when, according to Abraham, Sister Marie de Mandat-Grancey of the convent in Smyrna (Izmir) presented visiting priests with a copy of Brentano's work and encouraged them to go to nearby Ephesus and investigate the validity of Emmerich's visions.<sup>274</sup>

Eugene Poulin writes that the expedition led by Father Jung, a Catholic priest, and his associates, left Smyrna and travelled to the seaside town of Kusadasi. Led by a local guide, they climbed up the side of Nightingale Mountain, and upon reaching the crest the overheated party found a group of Turkish women harvesting tobacco and inquired as to where they could find water and some shade under which they could rest.<sup>275</sup> The women directed them farther up the mountain to the "monastery where there is a fountain."<sup>276</sup> Having no knowledge of a monastery in the area the expedition continued up the mountain until they came upon a well, and a short distance from the well they discovered the rooms of a small stone house. Emmerich had described John as building a house of stone on the mountainside where several Christian families were living in nearby caves.<sup>277</sup> Convinced that they had uncovered the House of Mary exactly as described by Emmerich in her visions, the expedition announced that they had found the Virgin's last resting place. Reacting almost immediately to this report, Vatican officials authorized several other expeditions and ordered an investigation of the rooms and the surrounding areas.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>275</sup> Poulin 1999, p. 22.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>277</sup> Carroll 2000, p. 60.

<sup>278</sup> Abraham *op. cit.*, p. 19.

After the discovery of the shrine, the Vatican sent Catholic priests to investigate the authenticity of the rooms by interviewing local people from the nearby mountain village of Kirkindje. The villagers are described by Abraham as a last group of known lineal descendants of the Ephesian Christians who converted to Christianity in the first century.<sup>279</sup> These descendants were said to have been practicing the traditions of their ancestors believing that the ruins on Nightingale Mountain were, in fact, the remains of Mary's earthly home. According to Michael Duicy, further investigations into ancient Ottoman land registers revealed that Mary's House was listed as "The Three Doored Monastery of the All Holy."<sup>280</sup> This supports Abraham's research, and Father Jung's claim that the women in the tobacco field had referred to the rooms as "the monastery." This also explains why the villagers of Kirkindje referred to this area of sacred space *Panaghia Capouli* or The Gate of the All Holy."<sup>281</sup> Duicy, whose work appeared in a 2006 *Zenit* article commemorating Pope Benedict's XVI's celebration of Mass at Our Lady of Ephesus, states the following about the site,

It was the *Panaya up Kapoulou Monastiri* as the Orthodox Christians of the area called it – the "Monastery of the Three Doors of Panaya, the All Holy." These Greek Christians used to go to the site as pilgrimage during the octave of the feast of Mary's Dormition on August 15. The Vincentian priest did some research among the residents of the area and confirmed the existence of a centuries old devotion which recognized in the ruined chapel the place of the last residence of *Meryem Ana* Mother Mary.<sup>282</sup>

According to Abraham, the Kirkindje continued their annual pilgrimages until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. During the rebuilding of the Turkish Republic the Christians fled in the villages populated by Muslim Turks who also embraced these ruins as a holy site connected to

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<sup>279</sup> Abraham *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>280</sup> Michael P. Duicy, *What's the Latest News on Mary's House in Ephesus?* International Marian Research Institute <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq2/yq381.html> (November 29, 2006).

<sup>281</sup> Abraham *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>282</sup> Duicy, M. *What's the Latest News on Mary's House in Ephesus?* International Marian Research Institute <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq2/yq381.html> (November 29, 2006).

the Virgin Mary. The Kirkindje Christians were later relocated to Greece as refugees and then were dispersed into various parts of the country.<sup>283</sup>

Although some Christians continue to claim that Mary's place of death was in Jerusalem, the Catholic Church has continued to view the shrine as an ancient site of worship. Pope Leo XIII formally recognized Mary's House as an official place of pilgrimage in 1896.<sup>284</sup> Later, Pope Pius X granted a plenary indulgence for the remission of sins to pilgrims who make the journey to Mary's House and in 1967 Pope Paul VI made the first papal visit to the shrine bringing with him a bronze lamp as a present for the Blessed Virgin.<sup>285</sup> A decade later Pope John Paul II visited the shrine where he celebrated an outdoor mass for thousands of pilgrims. In 2006 Pope Benedict XVI celebrated mass at the House of Mary and stated the following, "Archaeological investigations have demonstrated that this place has been since time immemorial a place of Marian devotion, loved also by Muslims, who go there regularly to venerate her whom they call *Meryem Ana*, Mother Mary" (Pope Benedict XVI, 2006). Although the area has received much Papal attention, and thousands of pilgrims flock to the shrine every year, the Vatican has never officially affirmed the site as the place of Mary's death and Assumption. Despite this, Christians, Muslims, and other tourists, continue to flock to Western Turkey to visit the small stone house on top of Nightingale Mountain.

Whether or not the Virgin actually lived and died in Ephesus remains in the realm of continuous debate. For the purpose of this work, it is the fundamental *belief* of the Ephesians that Mary travelled and settled with John in the city of Goddesses that is of significance. It is based

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<sup>283</sup> Abraham *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>284</sup> Deutsch 1965, p. 44.

<sup>285</sup> Carroll *op. cit.*, p. 75.

on the strength of this belief that the Council of Ephesus called their 3<sup>rd</sup> Ecumenical meeting to be held in this city. It is here, that after the heated debates between Nestorius and Cyril, the position of Mary as “Mother of God” was established. It is also in this city that the Western and Eastern Churches became divided as Mary’s position of “more than” woman but less than God was fervently and violently fought over.

## **2. The Council of Ephesus**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ecumenical Council of 431 C.E. took place in the city of Ephesus, in the Church of Mary, and revolved around a heated discussion regarding the complex nature of Jesus as Incarnate, and as a divine human entity. This intense ecumenical battle was motivated by the already well established use of the title *Theotokos* in referring to Mary. The theological debate was led by two outstanding rivals: Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople who favored the conjoined understanding of Christ’s two natures, and Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria who embraced “hypostatic union” as a theological explanation of the unity of the complex divine-human being of Christ. These theological disputes came to the fore, ignited by the unresolved debate about the correct way of describing, or addressing, Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Three primary sources will be consulted in support of reconstructing the main contours of the debate, focusing in part on the nature of Jesus and the correct way of speaking about Mary. There are three English translations of the Minutes of the Council and Nestorius’ and Cyril’s letters; “Extracts from the Acts” in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume XIV; the translations by Eirini Artemi of the letters written by Cyril and Nestorius outside of the Council found in the *Patrologia Graeca*; and finally, the “The Council of Ephesus – 431 A.D.” which is

a collection of the Acts of the Council, found on the Papal Encyclicals Online website.<sup>286</sup> These documents are the primary sources of this chapter, and are fundamental to the debate encompassing the status of Mary as *Theotokos*, or Mother of God.

It is significant that the Council was held in Ephesus, and more specifically in the Church of Mary. The Church of Mary is located approximately two miles away from the Temple of Artemis. Although the Church was built closer to the Ancient Harbour, and is significantly smaller, it is positioned parallel to the Temple and faces in the same direction (see Fig. 4: #13 The Church of Mary, #74 The Temple of Artemis). This second-century Roman building was originally called the 'Hall of the Muses' and according to Stefan Karweise its main purpose was education and cultural inspiration.<sup>287</sup> After Christianity became the official religion of Rome this site was reclaimed as the very first Church of the Virgin Mary. It was built in a dual tubular model, of approximately 260 meters in length, with columns in the form of a fine basilica with a baptistery.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils., Erini Artemi. 2006. *Cyril of Alexandria's Critique of the term Theotokos by Nestorius Constantinople*. Acta Theologica. 1-16.

<sup>287</sup> Karweise 1995, p. 311-20.

<sup>288</sup> Karweise *op. cit.*, p. 315.



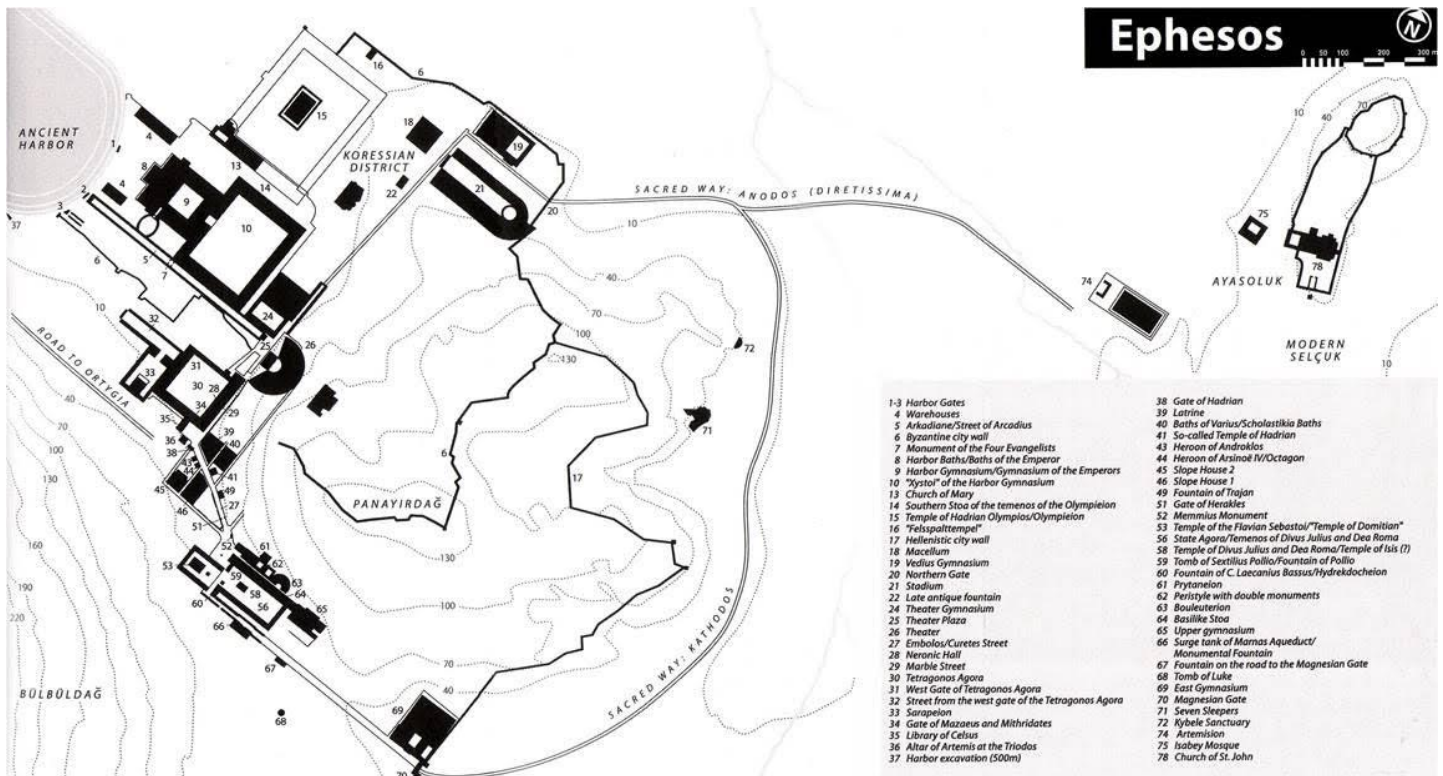


Fig. 4. Map of Ephesos Archeological Sites.

The church served as a cathedral and was the seat of the Bishop of Ephesus throughout Late Antiquity. Since this was the Council that proclaimed Mary *Theotokos*, it is important that the bishops chose this site to debate her position in the church.<sup>289</sup> Michael Carroll argues that the Council's debate regarding the two natures of Christ was motivated by the Ephesians' use of the title *Theotokos* in referring to Mary. Carroll writes that it was a:

...dispute over Mary that ignited the entire controversy. Increasingly, at least in the East, Mary had been called by the title *Theotokos*, which many people of the time interpreted as "Mother of God."<sup>290</sup>

The fact that the Council of Ephesus met in the very first Church consecrated to the Virgin Mary, to discuss the increased pressure to establish her as *Theotokos*, Mother of God, by the Ephesians

<sup>289</sup> Abraham *op. cit.*, p.14.

<sup>290</sup> Carroll *op. cit.*, p. 84.

as well as numerous other Christians, supports the argument that the Virgin Mary encompassed the extremely diverse interpretations of the divine by Early Christians.

#### *A. Cyril and Nestorius' Fight for the Body of Christ*

##### *Before the Council: A Summary*

The Council was, in a sense, the outcome of a much longer debate. Cyril, who opposed Nestorius' teachings, initially wrote his "Letter to the Monks" in 423 without using Nestorius' name, but repudiating his teachings, thus undermining his authority. Cyril along with Nestorius' opponents claimed that Nestorius was denying the reality of the Incarnation (the hypostatic union of God and Christ), which was against the faith of the Creed that was decreed at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325. Nestorius, in his reply to Cyril's first letter, indicated that he found Cyril's intrusion into his sphere of influence offensive and disagreed with his doctrine.<sup>291</sup>

In 430 Cyril wrote his second letter, this time directly using Nestorius' name (this letter will be discussed at length in the Cyril of Alexandria section below). By the end of 430, Nestorius desperately wrote to Pope Celestine I explaining his Christology, as well as his continued debate with Cyril, but he did not receive a reply. Meanwhile, Cyril also appealed to Pope Celestine I, by sending him a full account of Nestorius' teachings, and his letters to Nestorius condemning Nestorius as a heretic. Pope Celestine I disapproved of Nestorius' teachings and instructed Cyril to communicate a notice to Nestorius to renounce his

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<sup>291</sup> "Second Letter of Nestorius to Cyril. Condemned." *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 192.

teaching in ten days or face excommunication.<sup>292</sup> The Pope's judgment was carried to all the bishops and patriarchs.

So others joined in the debate. John, the Patriarch of Antioch, was a friend of Nestorius and had been a fellow-student. When the debate about the word *Theotokos* began, he warned Nestorius not to make a disturbance, showing that this title for the Virgin Mary had been constantly used, by Orthodox Fathers.<sup>293</sup> Although John decided to support his long-time friend against Cyril, he urged Nestorius to submit to the Pope's judgment and not lose his head because the East and Egypt were against him. Despite this friendly warning, Nestorius refused to recant his teachings.

#### *The Problem with Theotokos: The Nestorian View*

In 428 Nestorius was installed as Bishop of Constantinople by Emperor Theodosius II. As soon as his position was established he started a series of lectures in the Cathedral to explain the "right" faith. He attacked the tradition of calling the Virgin Mary the *Theotokos*. According to Erini Artemi, the fundamental reason for the debate, which led to the formation of the Council of Ephesus and the eventual excommunication of Nestorius from the Catholic Church, was as follows: Nestorius of Constantinople refused to give Mary, Mother of Christ, the predicate *Theotokos*, God – bearer, Mother of God. The reaction to this sermon and, in particular, to the condemnation of *Theotokos* was immediate and unfavourable.<sup>294</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, also known as Socrates Scholasticus, was a fifth-century Christian church historian wrote the

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<sup>292</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 193.

<sup>293</sup> *John of Antioch*. Catholic Encyclopedia. Web. 17 June 2015.

<sup>294</sup> Artemi 2012, p. 1.

following about the clergy's reaction to Nestorius' position, "He disturbed many of the clergy and all of the laity in this matter. Everywhere he forbade the word *Theotokos*."<sup>295</sup>

The fall of Nestorius and his uncompromising ideas about the Mary, the Mother of Jesus, began with his desperate and unanswered letter to Pope Celestine I, (mentioned in the above section). Written in the early part of 430, this letter shows his concern for the "heretics" who have "misinterpreted" the position of Mary in relation to the birth of her son,

It is a sickness not small, but akin to the putrid sore of Apollinarius and Arius. For they mingle the Lord's union in man to a confusion of some sort of mixture, insomuch that even certain clerks among us, of whom some from lack of understanding, some from heretical guile of old time concealed within them are sick as heretics, and openly blaspheme God the Word Consubstantial with the Father, as though He had taken beginning of His Being of the Virgin Mother of Christ, and had been built up with His Temple and buried with His flesh, and say that the flesh after the resurrection did not remain flesh but passed into the Nature of Godhead, and they refer the Godhead of the Only-Begotten to the beginning of the flesh which was connected with it, and they put it to death with the flesh, and blasphemously say that the flesh connected with Godhead passed into Godhead.<sup>296</sup>

Nestorius emphasized the disunity between Christ's human and divine natures. It is with this understanding of the divinity of Jesus that Nestorius argued that the title of Mary should be *Anthropatokos* meaning "mother of man." His letter went unanswered and unacknowledged by Pope Celestine I so Nestorius proposed a compromise. He suggested the title of *Christotokos*, or the Mother of Christ.<sup>297</sup> He continued to emphasize the disunity between Christ's human and divine natures, and divide into two the person of Christ. He overemphasized the human nature of Christ at the expense of the divine and therefore, he called Mary *Christotokos*, Birth Giver of Christ, and not *Theotokos* Birth Giver of God.<sup>298</sup> This was especially problematic as the

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<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>297</sup> Carroll 1986, p. 84.

<sup>298</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 193.

Ephesians already understood the title of *Theotokos* to affirm Mary's importance and high status in the Christian pantheon.<sup>299</sup> Many ascetic and pious monks considered Nestorius' teachings heretical and did not participate with him in the Holy Communion. Nestorius then started a series of sermons reiterating the duality of Christ's divine and human nature. Nestorius told his congregation that Mary bore a mere man, the vehicle of divinity, but not God.<sup>300</sup> He taught that Mary gave birth to the incarnate (human) Christ, not the Divine Logos who existed with the Father from before the beginning of time. He questioned how it can be possible that an infant is to be called God, so one must either deny the Godhead of the only-begotten to have become man, or else admit the same of the Father and the Holy Spirit, for the Divine nature is numerically one.<sup>301</sup> To Nestorius, Cyril's doctrine of Incarnation where Jesus' manhood was united by God the Son to His own self, was of a heretical mixture.

For Nestorius, this heresy was unacceptable. In his second letter to Cyril, (written before the Council) he referred to the teachings of Paul as evidence of the dual incarnation of Christ, "For what does [Paul] say? "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped," in order that Christ might be called without impropriety both impassible and passible: impassible in godhead, passible in the nature of his body."<sup>302</sup> In considering Nestorius' theology, the possibility that God made himself human, and human means to be a sinner, is heresy. He insisted that Cyril had superficially understood the words of his teaching and of the Fathers. Nestorius urged,

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<sup>299</sup> Carroll *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>300</sup> Artemi *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>301</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>302</sup> Artemi *op. cit.*, p. 10.

By reading in a superficial way the tradition of those holy men (you were guilty of a pardonable ignorance), you concluded that they said that the Word who is coeternal with the Father was passible.<sup>303</sup>

He asked Cyril to scrutinise their language and he would discover that,

... the divine fathers never mentioned that the consubstantial godhead was capable of suffering, or that the whole being that was coeternal with the Father was recently born, or that it rose again, seeing that it had itself been the cause of resurrection of the destroyed temple.<sup>304</sup>

He could not accept that God was embodied in flesh and experienced the weaknesses and flaws of the human condition since the Fall. For him, the humanity of Christ was absolute and Jesus could only be viewed as the Son of God, or one who bears God within him, but not the Incarnation of God himself. In order to avoid the assumption that the Son had two natures he referred the conjunction of the natures in one person, Christ, "... division of natures into manhood and godhead and their conjunction in one person."<sup>305</sup> He spoke ironically about the Word's second generation from the Virgin Mary. He did not allow the birth of the Word as a human, because he supported the fact that Mary gave birth to Christ and not to God. The conjunction of Christ's natures resulted in the rejection of the title *Theotokos* for the Virgin Mary, "... the holy virgin is more accurately termed Mother of Christ (*Christotokos*) than Mother of God (*Theotokos*)."<sup>306</sup> He quoted biblical passages which he interpreted to fit his own perspective, and referred only to Christ's human nature. He argued that the Gospels proclaimed only Christ and not God, as the son of David, the son of Abraham. The Son of God was sent by his Father, "in the likeness of sinful flesh."<sup>307</sup> By this phrase he explained that the Son of God

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<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

had never become perfect human, but that he was only perfect God. Thus, he proved that Christ was a man, in whom the Word of God dwelt. Consequently, if something different was claimed, it would be the, "...mark of those whose minds were led astray by Greek thinking or were sick with the lunacy of Apollinarius and Arius or the other heresies or rather something more serious than these."<sup>308</sup> Thus, even before being called to the Council of Ephesus in 431 Nestorius had made up his mind about the position of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and her very human role in the birth of Christ. Unfortunately, his position fell in the minority, and he was outmaneuvered by the much more popular, and favorable, position of Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria.

#### *Hypostatic Union: How Cyril Understood the Incarnation*

Cyril was greatly disappointed with Nestorius' teachings. When Cyril heard of Nestorius' position against *Theotokos*, he realised that he had found the scandal he was seeking. The rivalry between Alexandria and Constantinople was well known in early Christendom and scholars agree that there was more than theology afoot. Cyril was anxious to assert his authority as Patriarch over his rival and was looking for any hook on which to catch him. He strategically composed his famous and important, "Letter to the Monks," which was then freely circulated throughout Egypt and reached Constantinople and Nestorius. Artemi describes that in this letter he pointed out that the Incarnation meant that God the Son united to Him His own human nature which He took, as completely as soul and body are united in each of us, and in this way His Passion and Death were His own, though He, as God, could not suffer.<sup>309</sup> Cyril believed that

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Nestorius's teaching, epitomized in his attack on the labelling of the Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, presupposed a merely external association between an ordinary man and the Word. From this point of view, the Incarnation was not a real fact. It was a simple illusion, a matter of "appearance" and "empty words."<sup>310</sup> If Christ's passion, suffering and saving acts were not those of the Word incarnate, but of a mere man, there was no redemption for mankind. For Cyril, Nestorius's refusal of the term *Theotokos* was a "scandal" for the entire Christian world.<sup>311</sup>

Cyril purposely used the words 'Christ' and 'Son' in order to make obvious to Nestorius that the first one referred to the humanity of Jesus, and the second expressed his deity as the Word of God. This was a real union of two natures, which Cyril referred to as a "hypostatic union." This term was introduced for the first time by Cyril's Christological teaching, in order to expose Nestorius' falsehoods.<sup>312</sup> Artemi describes Cyril's position as follows,

As had been the case earlier with the Trinitarian doctrine, Cyril was fully conscious of the necessity of positing the union of Incarnation at the level of person, not that of nature. As in the Trinity, there were not three natures and three persons - which would be tritheism - or one nature and one person in three different modes (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) - which would be modalistic monarchianism. In the Incarnation, there was one person, but two natures.<sup>313</sup>

The two natures found their union in the one divine hypostasis and yet maintained their distinction. In Cyril's words:

The natures, however, which combined into this real union were different, but from the two together is one God the Son, without the diversity of the natures being destroyed by the union. For a union of two natures was made, and therefore we confess One Christ,

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<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>312</sup> Theodorou 1955, p. 81.

<sup>313</sup> Artemi *op. cit.*, p. 7.



One Son, One Lord ... two natures, by an inseparable union, met together in him without confusion, and indivisibly.<sup>314</sup>

Thus, for Cyril, God came through the Virgin Mary and became human in complete unity.

Consequently, God lived through Jesus among humans, as well as suffered and died on the cross for his people. For Cyril, God placed himself inside the womb of the Virgin Mary and conceived himself in the flesh which then came through her as all human children enter the world. In addition, He was capable of experiencing the human condition of pain, suffering and eventually death. This, for Cyril, is God's greatest sacrifice for His people: the experience of the flesh in exchange for the salvation of His followers. Thus he states,

Rather do we claim that the Word in an unspeakable, inconceivable manner united to himself hypostatically flesh enlivened by a rational soul, and so became man and was called son of man, not by God's will alone or good pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person alone. Rather did two different natures come together to form a unity, and from both arose one Christ, one Son. It was not as though the distinctness of the natures was destroyed by the union, but divinity and humanity together made perfect for us one Lord and one Christ, together marvellously and mysteriously combining to form a unity. So he who existed and was begotten of the Father before all ages is also said to have been begotten according to the flesh of a woman ... If, however, we reject the hypostatic union as being either impossible or too unlovely for the Word, we fall into the fallacy of speaking of two sons. We shall have to distinguish and speak both of the man as honoured with the title of son, and of the Word of God as by nature possessing the name and reality of sonship, each in his own way. We ought not, therefore, to split into two sons the one Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>315</sup>

In this way, the concept that "the Word became flesh" means that God became human and entered the world through the Virgin Mary. Jesus is not two people, the Son and God, but rather a cohesive fusion of both entities. Thus, Cyril interprets the word Incarnate literally, meaning God embodied in flesh. This, he saw as the account of "true" faith, and those who did not support this interpretation, such as Nestorius, were accused of heresy and condemned. For Cyril

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<sup>314</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 198.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

the rejection of the term *Theotokos* was tantamount to denying the divinity of Christ and falsifying the Divine Incarnation. Consequently, the belief in *Theotokos* is fundamental to the “correct” interpretation of the embodiment of God in Jesus. This is of most significance in our study of Mary, because it supports the notion that the worship of Mary as *Theotokos* is implicit in the belief of the Incarnation. For Cyril, the Ephesians, and all those who understood Mary, as the Mother of God, the Nestorian heresy, and denial of *Theotokos*, could not continue unchecked. Thus, when Emperor Theodosius II ordered him to appear in front of a synod that would discuss this growing debate centered on the position of the Virgin Mary in the birth of Christ, Cyril saw his opportunity to make *Theotokos* officially part of Church doctrine.

#### *The Acts and Verdict of the Council of Ephesus*

Emperor Theodosius II, seeing that the whole empire of the East was divided between Cyril and Nestorius, wrote to Cyril that it was his “...will that the holy doctrine be discussed and examined in a sacred synod, and that be ratified which appear agreeable to the right faith, whether the wrong party be pardoned by the fathers or no.”<sup>316</sup> This shows that he did not consider either Pope Celestine I’s letter or Cyril’s accusations as final decisions without the approval of a synod of bishops. He called the opening of the Council on June 7, 431. Cyril and Nestorius were in Ephesus well before the opening of the Council, and arrived on the same day. Despite Nestorius’s invitation to share in the Vesper service together that evening, they did not meet.<sup>317</sup> The Council was presided over by Cyril<sup>318</sup> and was delayed 15 days because of

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<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>317</sup> *Council of Ephesus*. Catholic Encyclopedia. Web. 24 June 2015.

<sup>318</sup> L’Huillier in *The Church of the Ancient Councils* states that a group of bishops, Cyril, Memnon of Ephesus, and Juvenal of Jerusalem took a decisive role.

the late arrival of the Roman and Antiochian delegates. The Council was convened without the Antiochians who arrived five days later and the papal representatives who arrived only in July.

When Nestorius arrived in Ephesus he received a hostile reception where he was consistently perceived as the enemy of Jesus' mother. The bishop of Ephesus, Memnon, even went so far as to close his churches to him and his allies. Ironically, it had been Nestorius who sent a petition to Emperor Theodosius asking him to call for an 'International Synod of Theologians' from various ecclesiastical provinces to review the whole theological debate that was becoming more heated between himself and Cyril. However, Nestorius had in mind a limited gathering of expert theologians, and not a general ecumenical council of bishops. He also hoped that the gathering would meet in Constantinople, so he could preside and gain the opportunity to try and condemn Cyril.<sup>319</sup> Nestorius arrived with 16 bishops, while Cyril brought 50 bishops. Memnon of Ephesus was present with 52 bishops, and the Palestinian delegation was made up of 16 bishops.<sup>320</sup>

There were many delays in the arrivals of both Roman legates and the eastern bishops led by John of Antioch, so Cyril made his move and opened the council without them on June 22nd. Six more sessions followed in July (July 10, 11, 16, 17, 22 and 31).<sup>321</sup> He sent three times for Nestorius, who was in Ephesus, but Nestorius chose not to attend the Council and stayed home. In his absence Cyril and approximately 198 bishops<sup>322</sup> began the council of Ephesus by

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<sup>319</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 195.

<sup>320</sup> *Council of Ephesus*. Catholic Encyclopedia Web. 24 June 2015.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* cite three interrupted sessions.

<sup>322</sup> *Council of Ephesus*. Catholic Encyclopedia Web. 24 June 2015.

analysing the validity of Nestorius' claims in the communications sent back and forth between himself and Cyril debating the nature of Christ as both human and divine.

The first session was set in the centre of the Church of Mary. The Acts of the Council note that *The Nicene Creed* was recited after which the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius was read. Cyril was adamant about the position of the Virgin Mary in relation to the Incarnation of the dual nature of Christ. His letter makes this clear,

This was the sentiment of the holy Fathers; therefore they ventured to call the holy Virgin, the Mother of God, not as if the nature of the Word or his divinity had its beginning from the holy Virgin, but because of her was born that holy body with a rational soul, to which the Word being personally united is said to be born according to the flesh.<sup>323</sup>

After the entire letter was read, Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, said:

This holy and great Synod has heard what I wrote to the most religious Nestorius, defending the right faith. I think that I have in no respect departed from the true statement of the faith that is from the creed set forth by the holy and great synod formerly assembled at Nice. Wherefore I desire your holiness [i.e. the Council] to say whether rightly and blamelessly and in accordance with that Holy Synod I have written these things or no.<sup>324</sup>

According to extracts from the Acts, a number of bishops then gave their opinion, all favourable to Cyril, "And all the rest of the bishops in the order of their rank deposed to the same things, and so believed, according as the Fathers had set forth, and as the Epistle of the most holy Archbishop Cyril to Nestorius the bishop declared."<sup>325</sup> Once this had been established, and most of the bishops were in support of Cyril, Palladius, the bishop of Amasea, said, "The next thing to be done is to read the letter of the most reverend Nestorius, of which the most religious presbyter Peter made mention; so that we may understand whether or not it agrees with the exposition of

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<sup>323</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 198.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

the Nicene fathers....”<sup>326</sup> After this letter was read, Cyril asked the synod to judge the letter based on whether or not it seemed to be constant with the faith set forth by the Nicene Creed. According to the extracts from the Acts, the majority of the bishops agreed with Cyril and supported the following statement,

Whoever does not anathematize Nestorius let him be anathema. Such an one the right faith anathematizes; such an one the holy Synod anathematizes. Whoever communicates with Nestorius let him be anathema! We anathematize all the apostles of Nestorius: we all anathematize Nestorius as a heretic: let all such as communicate with Nestorius be anathema.<sup>327</sup>

Having gained their support Cyril began reading his third letter to Nestorius, followed by the 12 anathemas against Nestorius which was formally approved by the Council of Ephesus. It is in this third letter to Nestorius that Cyril’s position on the divinity of Christ is made clear. The following paragraph encompasses Cyril’s defensive argument in support of the Virgin Mary’s position as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God,

For although visible and a child in swaddling clothes, and even in the bosom of his Virgin Mother, he filled all creation as God, and was a fellow-ruler with him who begot him, for the Godhead is without quantity and dimension, and cannot have limits. Confessing the Word to be made one with the flesh according to substance, we adore one Son and Lord Jesus Christ: we do not divide the God from the man, nor separate him into parts, as though the two natures were mutually united in him only through a sharing of dignity and authority (for that is a novelty and nothing else), neither do we give separately to the Word of God the name Christ and the same name separately to a different one born of a woman; but we know only one Christ, the Word from God the Father with his own Flesh. And since the holy Virgin brought forth corporally God made one with flesh according to nature, for this reason we also call her Mother of God, not as if the nature of the Word had the beginning of its existence from the flesh.<sup>328</sup>

Cyril’s argument that God was embodied Flesh that came through the Virgin Mary was already widely accepted, and Cyril’s proposal of the Twelve Anathemas seemed to have been approved

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<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

by the Council of Ephesus. Although most of the Twelve Anathemas deal with the nature and Incarnation of Christ, it is significant that the very first anathema for which Nestorius is excommunicated deals with the position of Mary and reads as follows,

If anyone will not confess that the Emmanuel is very God, and that therefore the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God, inasmuch as in the flesh she bore the Word of God made flesh [as it is written, "The Word was made flesh"] let him be anathema.<sup>329</sup>

After reading all Twelve Anathemas, Nestorius was condemned by the bishops along with his apostles, and whoever communicated with him. The first session was then concluded with the reading of the letter of Pope Celestine I which was passed without any opinion.

Although Cyril had “won” this battle against the Nestorian concept of Incarnation it was not without its costs to his reputation. John of Antioch, a long-time supporter of Nestorius, did not take the action of Cyril at the first Council of Ephesus lightly. Upon his late arrival in Ephesus, John immediately held his own Council. Along with the forty-three other bishops present, they deposed Cyril and Memnon, and excommunicated all their adherents who would not repudiate Cyril's Twelve Anathematisms. This back and forth excommunications of church leaders shows the uncertainty and lack of structure of the early Christian church during the fifth century. It also points to a well-established process of debate, and rhetoric, performed by Eastern Church leaders who went to great lengths to philosophically support their theological understanding of biblical scripture and tradition.

Before the second session of the Council began, an Imperial letter arrived in which Cyril was rebuked for his haste, and the bishops were commanded to await the arrival of an Imperial Commissioner in Ephesus. However, when these legates arrived -- the bishops Arcadius, Projectus and the priest Philip -- they gave their support to Cyril. The second session of the

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<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Council was held at Memnon's residence on July 10, which included the newly arrived papal delegates who asked that the letter be written in Latin and to be read as well as the minutes of the Council. The third session took place the next day in which the papal delegates confirmed that they had read the Acts of the first synod, and decided that the synod's statements and decisions were in accordance with the canons and Church discipline.<sup>330</sup> The third session took place the next day in which the papal delegates confirmed that they had read the Acts of the first synod, and decided that the synod's statements and decisions were in accordance with the canons and Church discipline. During this session, papal delegates signed the minutes of these three sessions and sent a letter to the Emperor of the synod's decision. The following two sessions were held without the presence of John of Antioch. In session four, on July 16, John was asked to come forward to the synod but he did not even receive the synod's convoy.<sup>331</sup> Consequently, during session five, the next day, another summit was sent to John of Antioch but he did not respond. John refused to accept any of their edicts and was then himself excommunicated by the now Cyrillian party.

Sessions six and seven of the Council mostly dealt with Nestorian bishops whose support for Nestorius was causing tension. Session six dealt with two cases of Nestorianizing priests and led to a declaration that any departure from the Creed that was established by the first Ecumenical Council would be condemned.<sup>332</sup> The seventh and last session, held on July 31, dealt with the bishops of Cyprus who convinced the Council that they were anciently, and rightly,

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<sup>330</sup> *Council of Ephesus*. Catholic Encyclopedia Web. 24 June 2015.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

exempted from the jurisdiction of Antioch, and thus should not have to face the consequences of being excommunicated alongside John of Antioch.<sup>333</sup>

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “The orthodox were triumphant at Ephesus by their numbers and by the agreement of the papal legates. The population of Ephesus was on their side. The people of Constantinople rejoiced at the deposition of their heretical bishop.”<sup>334</sup> All parties, Cyril, Nestorius, Memnon and John tried to appeal to the Emperor to support their positions. By the end of July 431 Emperor Theodosius, overwhelmed by the continued accusations surrounding the Council, decided to depose all three bishops, Cyril, Memnon, and Nestorius, and to send a new commissioner to Ephesus. Letters and appeals continued to befall the Emperor from each bishop and their supporters until Theodosius, despairing of a solution, dissolved the Council, sending Nestorius back to his monastery at Antioch, and ordering the consecration of a new bishop of Constantinople. Everyone was free to go home and Cyril arrived in triumph at Alexandria. However, the accusations of bribery and manipulative tactics followed him and he was pressured to make peace with the Emperor as well as John of Antioch and his supporters. Although Cyril insisted that Nestorius be condemned for his beliefs he did agree to withdraw the anathemas. This placated John who was more interested in rebuilding the peace between their churches than Nestorius’ position on the divinity of Christ.<sup>335</sup>

Nestorius was banished to Arabia, but actually went to Upper Egypt. This precipitated the Nestorian Schism, by which churches supportive of Nestorius, especially in Persia, were severed from the rest of Christendom and became known as Nestorian Christianity. Nestorianism began

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> John used a policy of moderation and concession, as far as was possible without sacrificing the Faith of Ephesus... *John of Antioch*. *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Web. 17 June 2015.



to spread in the East outside the Empire, in places such as Persia and surrounding regions. Nestorius himself retired to a monastery, always asserting his orthodoxy, where he wrote a biography of his life entitled *The Bazaar of Heracleides*. The book needed a pseudonym because the Emperor had ordered that all his writings be burned and destroyed.

Overall, the battle between Cyril and Nestorius over the correct interpretation of the Incarnation of Christ was long and often almost violent. The definition of Christ's divine relationship with God directly affects the importance of his relationship with his human mother. How the church interprets the Incarnation leads to the emphasis they place on the sacredness of the Virgin Mary, and her place as the medium, or vehicle, through which the natural and the divine collaborate to become one with each other. As the first of Cyril's anathemas deals directly with the significance of Mary's position as *Theotokos*, an argument can be made that Mariology is cultivated out of Christology. The underlining debate of the Council of Ephesus is founded on the perspective of what went on in the womb of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Thus, it is clear, that the understanding of Mary's position as *Theotokos* is implicit in what became widely accepted as the correct interpretation of the Incarnation.

### *B. The Importance of Theotokos to the Christian Faith*

#### *Terminology: The Meaning and Use of Theotokos*

Bishop John Pearson traces the history of the word *Theotokos* to the early Greek Church, "... this name was first in use in the Greek Church, who, delighting in the happy compositions of that language, called the Blessed Virgin *Theotokos*."<sup>336</sup> While Schaff agrees with Pearson's position on the Greek Church using the term, he argues that this name had been used for the

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<sup>336</sup> Pearson 1877, Art. III. 36.

Virgin Mary as early as Dionysus, the Bishop of Corinth, who lived in approximately 171. Both Schaff and Pearson agree that among the Latins the term *Mater Dei*, and *Dei Genetrix*, was commonly used when speaking about Mary even before the time of Pope Leo I in the third century. If there is some question as to whether or not the term *Theotokos* is a proper equivalent to terms such as *Mater Dei*, *Dei Genetrix* and *Deipara*, Schaff answers it thus, "...this point has been settled by the unvarying use of the whole Church of God throughout all the ages, from that day to this."<sup>337</sup> According to Schaff the term *Theotokos* was a term well ingrained in church theology and is the very word used by Bishop Alexander in a letter from a synod held at Alexandria in 320. Here, the term *Theotokos* was used to successfully condemn the Arian heresy more than 100 years before the meeting of the Council of Ephesus.<sup>338</sup> Thus, Schaff argues that, "... in the case of the *Theotokos* the word expresses a great, necessary, and fundamental doctrine of the Catholic faith."<sup>339</sup> Early church writers such as Athanasius of Alexandria used this term when describing the Virgin Mary, "...as the flesh was born of Mary, the Mother of God, so we say that he, the word, was himself born of Mary."<sup>340</sup>

While the term *Theotokos* has been widely approved to be directly translated as the Mother of God, it only remains to consider whether the objection to this translation is based on a theological point of view. As stated in the previous section, some members of the Early Church, were concerned that by labeling the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, there is an inherent implication that the Godhead has its origin in Mary, and not God. This is because the very essence of the term implies that Mary is a 'Mother' of a *theos*, God. Consequently, the danger of

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<sup>337</sup>*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. XIV, the Seven Ecumenical Councils p. 210.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

using this term is that it places Mary in an ambiguous position; she is no longer just a young Jewish girl giving birth to a human man, she is the Mother of a divinity. This resonates, and invokes, some of the Greek myth traditions of female deities such as Gaia, Rhea and Hera, who give birth to sons who are gods. Of course Church tradition teaches that it is not of the Godhead that Mary is the Mother, but of the Incarnate Son who is God. Schaff explains this as follows,

All that every child derives from its Mother that God the Son derived from Mary, and this without the cooperation of any man, but by the direct operation of the Holy Ghost, so that in a fuller, truer, and more perfect sense, Mary is the Mother of God the Son in his incarnation, than any other earthly mother is of her son."<sup>341</sup>

Be this as it may, it is easy to understand Nestorius's concerns. He believed that Mary was a human being and that God cannot be born of a human being. We have seen that Cyril of Alexandria denied the rejection of the term *Theotokos* and would not accept any of the other terms provided by Nestorius. Cyril believed that the Word was united with human nature hypostatically. For Cyril, the statement that the Virgin Mary bore only a human Christ was a denial that Christ was also God, and this would make Christ just another saint. Thus, in the Incarnation of the Son of God, the most important role belongs to *Theotokos*.<sup>342</sup> However, while the debate about the terminological position of the Virgin Mary in the birthing of the Christ/God was heatedly debated by bishops, church writers, and other religious intellectuals, the laity must have found it severely confusing to understand the very thin line on which Mary's "specialness" or "more than human, less than God" identity lay. According to Artemi, it is obvious that the Virgin Mary brought forth a corporal God made with one Flesh. This means that the body of Mary was able to withstand and nurture the corporal God while in the womb, and be a gateway

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

<sup>342</sup> Artemi *op. cit.*, p. 12.

for the Son/God to enter the human realm. The fact that Cyril's first anathema enforces the acceptance of the title *Theotokos* shows clearly that the term was significant to the teaching of Christology. Without the teaching of this hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ the redemption of the human race from the shackles of death and sin would be impossible, and the salvation of humanity would have been null and void. Thus, the teaching of Nestorius is clearly subversive of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and therefore the importance of the word *Theotokos* cannot be exaggerated.

*Transitions: Why the Virgin Mary Became the Mother of God*

It is undeniable that Mary's rise to fame accelerated in the fifth century. According to Michael Jordan, "It was good public relations to promote Mary as *Theotokos* because this sent an uncompromising message to various sects... all of whom claimed that Christ had never been human and that his "mother" was therefore an irrelevance."<sup>343</sup> Thus, by making Mary, the human mother, also the Mother of God, Cyril and his supporters were able to figuratively "kill two birds with one stone;" they reinforced church doctrine that Jesus was a human man, and were able to support their theology of Incarnation by making Mary, the Mother of God. However, Mary's newly acquired title *Theotokos*, had an undeniably pagan ring to it<sup>344</sup>. Jordan claims that, "... within a comparatively short space of time, it was being used as a justification for showering her with the kind of adoration that would otherwise have been reserved for a deity."<sup>345</sup> As a result,

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<sup>343</sup> Jordan 2003, P. 217.

<sup>344</sup> Henry Thompson criticizes the early Christians, as well as the Vatican, for giving into the polytheistic need of the "masses." His essay points out that once Constantine converted, it was easier and faster to assure that the masses convert if some polytheistic allowances were allowed. These "allowances" came in the form of saint veneration, but more importantly the worship of the Virgin Mary.

<sup>345</sup> Budge 1915, p. 630.

some church critics and historians argue that bestowing Mary with the title of *Theotokos* was merely a starting point in her transformation, or perhaps reformation, into a Christian version of an ancient goddess.

During the fourth century a different Cyril, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote many discourses on the sanctity of the Virgin Mary. In his *Homily on the Dormition*, Cyril often refers to Mary as the “throne” and a “place of abode for her Son.”<sup>346</sup> Many early Christians who worshiped the Virgin Mary saw her as a human being who was born, lived and died as most other human beings, “This is the day wherein the Queen, the Mother of the King of Life, tasted death like every other human being, because she was flesh and blood. And, moreover, she was begotten by a human father, and brought forth by a human mother, like every other man.”<sup>347</sup>

Cyril of Jerusalem is an important figure because his writings highlight the contradictory feelings and beliefs of Early Christians regarding Mary. He defines her as a human being, made of flesh and blood, who came from a humble Jewish family, but he cannot deny the complexity of her being chosen to bring forth God in the Flesh, which should render her unique and perhaps “more than” mere human. Cyril’s work pinpoints the fundamental dilemma underlying the debate between Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria, in Ephesus a hundred years later.

Cyril of Jerusalem was adamant about the Virgin Mary being human not myth. He admonishes those who would make her a “goddess” or place her in familiar Greco-Roman structures of myth, “For we are wholly unable to follow the fictitious statements which are found in the fabulous lives of her, and which resemble the writings of the Greek poets, who in their

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<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 630.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 630.

works on theology relate mere myths about their gods.”<sup>348</sup> The irony here is that while Cyril spends much of his time writing about how Mary was not a “god” in the Greek or “pagan” sense of the word, he outlines at least two paragraphs on the genealogy and “unique” birth of the Virgin Mary as outlined in the *Infancy Gospel of James*. According to Cyril, the Virgin Mary went on to perform miracles, set up an early form of nunnery and even counseled the Apostles in their missions and teachings,

And she used to do many mighty works, and perform healings among the people, which were like unto those that were wrought by Jesus our God, but she never permitted the Apostles to know, for she fled from the praise of men. And the Apostles were closely associated with her at all times when they were preaching. She gathered round about her a multitude of virgins, she assisted them, and she made them to rejoice in the benefits of virginity--she who had drawn nigh unto her God, Who at length came and took up His abode in her womb for nine months--and she showed the way, and that the entrance into heaven, to her beloved Son, was good and without obstacle.”<sup>349</sup>

Thus, although the Virgin Mary is clearly human, she is also more. She has a unique birth, a mystical upbringing and continues to be more than “just human” even after the crucifixion of her son.

### **3. *Theotokos*: A Conclusion**

Consequently, although Mary was human, God “chose” her womb as the channel for his embodied flesh. Thus, the name *Theotokos* is an accurate title for the female body through which God enters the world in the flesh of his Son. Interestingly, there are a plethora of Greek characters that are parented by a deity father and a mortal mother. Zeus, primarily, and also Poseidon, both had a multitude of affairs with mortal women, with Zeus having to shield them

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<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632.

from his wife Hera after she was alerted to the infidelity. It is undeniable that Jesus, as God made flesh, and entering the human realm through Mary, the *Theotokos*, harkens back to early Greco-Roman traditions of the relationship between the divine and the mortal world. It is no surprise then, that the lay community of Early Christians, specifically in Ephesus would have seen this as strongly connected to their myths with which they were familiar.

Thus, we see the various bishops struggling with the idea of incarnation and trying to find the appropriate words, not only to describe the divine embodiment of God within the human but also then to speak accurately about Jesus' mother. Nestorius, concerned with preserving Jesus' humanity, chose to speak of Mary as the 'Mother of Christ' or the 'Mother of Jesus' humanity.' But Cyril won and his allies won the day: Mary was nothing less than Mother of God.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE ENDURING GODDESS: A PROCESS OF FUSION

In the above chapters we have examined both Artemis and the Virgin Mary in their individual and historical contexts. Through this analysis, it is evident that Artemis has been overlooked as being one of the most important, if not the preeminent, Goddess of the Mediterranean world. It is my position that Mary came to occupy the same station as Artemis, at first in Ephesus, and then throughout the Mediterranean. Similar beliefs, roles, and worship, testify to this blending of the virgin Artemis into the Virgin Mary. This can be more accurately labelled as fusion. Fusion is often defined as the process, or result, of joining two or more things together to form a single entity; in this case, the act of bonding or binding two aspects, beliefs, rituals or communities in order to form one complete entity. This is my interpretation of what took place in Ephesus in the first 400 years of the Common Era. Through this process Artemis doesn't become the Virgin Mary, but using the transformative concept of fusion she survives under the guise of Mary, Mother of God, through shared roles, rituals and communal myths.

#### *Timing is Everything*

According to Jennifer Larson, "Artemis of all the gods is second only to Apollo in the number of shrines and temples through the Greek world."<sup>350</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. "I have seen the walls and Hanging Gardens of ancient Babylon," wrote Philon of Byzantium, "the

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<sup>350</sup> Larson 1997, p. 256.



statue of Olympian Zeus, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the mighty work of the high Pyramids and the tomb of Mausolus. But when I saw the temple at Ephesus rising to the clouds, all these other wonders were put in the shade."<sup>351</sup> Consequently, it is not an accident that this world-renowned sanctuary of Artemis was ultimately destroyed by a Christian mob led by John Chrysostom in 401 C.E. This was just as the Christians were coming into the ascendancy in Ephesus, and approximately 30 years before the Council of Ephesus convened in this city to debate the subject of Mary as *Theotokos*.

This transformational symbiosis from one form of worship, the Ephesians in their goddess temple, to a new form of worship, Mary as Mother of God, had initially begun several hundred years before the final destruction of Artemis' temple; long before Christianity was accepted as the religion of Rome, and several hundred years before the Council of Ephesus set foot in the city. According to the Acts of the Apostles<sup>352</sup>, Paul of Tarsus, the great first-century Christian missionary, is facing considerable resistance in Ephesus. During his stay in Ephesus, a silversmith named Demetrius begins to incite the people against Paul and his "new" religion claiming that the very divinity of Artemis and her position of power in Ephesus is being challenged. Demetrius states,

There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." When they [the Ephesians] heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater (Acts 19. 27-31.).

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<sup>351</sup> Price 1988, p. 162–3.

<sup>352</sup> Ancient writers thought of Luke, the travelling companion of Paul, as the author of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Gospel of Luke. Most modern scholars view both as having an anonymous authorship.

This incident is evidence that there was instant tension between the Ephesians and their devotion to their goddess Artemis, and the introduction of Paul's Christianity and his new male divinity. The tension escalates to such a degree between Paul and the Ephesians that he fears he may not make it out alive from this city. Thus, the goddess was deeply entrenched in her city by the time Christianity begins to make its way through the city gates. Koester claims that, "... in 112 C.E. the cult of Artemis was still going strong despite Christian control."<sup>353</sup> Koester goes on to describe that the emperor Augustus was now faced with a major problem in Ephesus: how is it possible to detach the city from long standing worship of Artemis without committing an act of impiety against the goddess? This evidence suggests that the city was so deeply rooted in its goddess, and her history, that not even the mighty emperor, and kings before him, were able to dismiss her.<sup>354</sup> According to Koester, Artemis retained this position until she was "deposed" by Christianity in 401. In actual fact, a deposition never happened. Artemis, along with all her myths, titles and responsibilities, survived in the worship of the Virgin Mary; not as a transformation, but as a direct infusion of one religion into another.

According to Sally Cunneen, it was the exclusion of female images in the concept of divinity by the Latin Church that left many people whose experience was connected with the life-producing power of goddesses feeling isolated and helpless. The devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, helped to eradicate some of this disconnection.<sup>355</sup> Henry Adelbert Thompson supports Cunneen's argument as he insists that hero/ancestor worship had a great influence on the development of Mary's "pagan" style following. He claims that this "new" invisible Christian

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<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>355</sup> Cunneen *op. cit.*, p. 327.

God, was too far away for converts to connect to. Due to the fact that traditional “pagans” were used to an intimate connection with their gods, Thompson argues that they could not fully integrate an abstract God into their religious communities. The result of this need for both a physical and emotional connection to the deity, is saint veneration.<sup>356</sup> Thompson does admit that Church fathers tried to differentiate between this veneration of Mary, and the true worship of God, but he admits that it is doubtful the masses ever grasped this distinction.<sup>357</sup> Thompson goes on to identify that the most ideal, beautiful, and unwavering representation of chastity was personified in the Greek Artemis. According to him, Artemis was the only true “pure” deity among all the gods, and the only one to be clearly connected to Mary.<sup>358</sup> Consequently, an argument arose that there was a need for Mary, rather than Christ alone. Since Church leaders were powerless to curb popular mood and fancy, the adoration of the feminine ideal was embodied within the peculiar relationship between Mary and Christ.<sup>359</sup>

In summary, it was perfect timing that Paul, and Christianity, stepped into Ephesus at a time when the worship of Artemis was still influential and fundamental to the citizens of the city. By 162-163 a vote of the Council and the people of Ephesus, confirmed by the Roman governor, ordered that the entire sacred month of Artemis should be free from all work.<sup>360</sup> Although her popularity is said to have begun declining due to flooded streets that made it difficult to get to her temple, as well as the new trendy cults of “mystery” religions who were more sympathetic to human problems than she was, Artemis remained a fundamental force in her city. According to

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<sup>356</sup> Thompson *op. cit.*, p. 475.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.* p. 475.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 485.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

the archeological finds of Dieter Knibbe, the Ephesians were still worshiping their ancient goddess well into the late fifth century.<sup>361</sup> Thus, for well over 300 years the goddess Artemis and Mary, the Mother of God, dwelt in the city of Ephesus where citizens were capable of understanding, and connecting, the experiences of two female representations of divine power. This chapter will present the resulting fusion of the ancient, and the new, represented in the embodiment of the divine Artemis into the tradition of the human Mary.

## **1. A Synthesis of Life Narratives and Mythology**

### *A. Virgin Births and Virgin Mothers*

There are at least three aspects of the religion of Artemis and the worship of the Virgin Mary that were fused to create a spirituality that Ephesians could accept when converting from worship of a singular goddess, to the dual partnership of mother and son in early Christianity: mythology, titles and/or roles and the importance of worship.

The birth and life narrative of every deity is developed in direct correlation to the bond that they establish with the community that worships them. We have seen that both Artemis and Mary have legendary births. Artemis' birth dictates her divine character. According to several traditions, Leto had relations with Zeus, for which she was hounded by Hera all over the earth. She finally reached Delos and gave birth to Artemis, who thereupon helped her deliver Apollo.<sup>362</sup> She then goes on to become one of the most influential goddesses in Ephesus, and in the Greco-Roman world. She is famous for her skill in the hunt, her swift punishments to those who offend

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<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>362</sup> Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1. 21 (trans. Aldrich) (Greek mythographer C2nd A.D.)

her, and her perpetual virginity. The Virgin Mary also has a miraculous birth narrative. As we have seen in the previous chapter on the *Infancy Gospel of James*, her mother Anna prays to God for a child and while her husband is away she becomes pregnant with a daughter. Mary is said to have an Immaculate Conception, and spends most of her young life in the temple where she is treated as a living divinity. She is approached by the angel Gabriel who tells her she will bear a son through the word of God. After the birth of Jesus, according to the tradition of James, Mary is, and remains, a perpetual virgin. An argument can easily be made here that in fact, the birth narratives of both females do not need fusion as they are fundamentally similar. Although Artemis has no children, she assists in the birth of her brother Apollo, who is arguably as impressive and dominating in Greek religion as Jesus is in Christianity. Artemis has been granted eternal *parthenia*<sup>363</sup> by her father Zeus, and once Mary has Jesus she could also be said to have been granted eternal *parthenia*.<sup>364</sup> In her work on the Virgin Mary, Maria Warner tells us of the many instances in the Greco-Roman world in which virgin births took place. According to Warner's work, Christians tried to prove that their virgin birth was the most significant, and perhaps the last virgin birth to take place.<sup>365</sup> Thus, the role of "ever virgin" becomes central to the successful act of fusion between Artemis and Mary.

Scholars have often dismissed Artemis as Mary's predecessor due to the fact that most see her in the classical Greek depiction of young virginal Huntress. However, Homer's rather late description of her as *Potnia Theron*, Mistress of the Wild, may not be the correct interpretation of the complexities which exist in the archaic worship of Artemis. Two scholars,

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<sup>363</sup> *Parthenia*, the Greek word for virgin, often refers to an unmarried young woman who still lived with her father and never had sex.

<sup>364</sup> King *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>365</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 113.

the Scottish classist Williams Keith Chambers Guthrie, and the New Scholar Award winner Marguerite Rigoglioso, have made some interesting observations about the position of Artemis as Virgin Mother. Guthrie claims there are many clues that Artemis was originally considered a Virgin Mother. His work shows that Artemis, and her priesthood, was believed to undergo a transition from pure parthenogenesis to *hieros gamos*<sup>366</sup> practice.<sup>367</sup> Her position as parthenogenetic goddess is evident particularly in her identity as the Asiatic fructifying and all nourishing nature goddess of Ephesus. As discussed in Chapter One, Artemis originated in the pre-Greek era. Her name does not appear to be Greek and according to Guthrie, in her early form she was, "...one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the deities worshiped by the inhabitants of pre-Hellenic Greece of Western Asia minor, and of Minoan Crete."<sup>368</sup> He states that it was the patriarchal invaders who settled in ancient Greece, and found this goddess already in place, that incorporated her into what later became the Olympian pantheon. In Ephesus, her unique statue reflects her attributes as goddess of the animals, fertility, and nurture. The large protrusions on her chest, are often suggested to be breasts, and a variety of animals and insects cover her entire body and crown.<sup>369</sup> Such imagery led Guthrie to conclude that Artemis was, in the earliest Greek religion, an earth goddess associated with wildlife, the growth of fields, and human birth. Guthrie suggests that she was worshiped in this "old way" right through classical times.<sup>370</sup> According to Rigoglioso, the only other primal Greek goddess similarly characterized was Gaia, and she was

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<sup>366</sup> Greek, meaning "holy marriage," refers to a sexual ritual that plays out a marriage between a god and a goddess, especially when enacted in a symbolic ritual where human participants represent the deities.

<sup>367</sup> Guthrie 1967, p. 99.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>369</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>370</sup> Guthrie *op. cit.*, p. 100.

the parthenogenetic creatrix of all nature's animal manifestations. Therefore, Rigoglioso proposes that in her original form, Artemis too, was a parthenogenetic goddess.

Like the Virgin Mary, Artemis holds the title *parthenos*, virgin and appears under this title in numerous ancient primary texts. A multitude of examples such as the Homeric *Hymn 27* where she is called 'Revered Virgin', as well as inscriptions on her sacred statues in places such as the Black Sea, and Thrace, where Artemis is depicted as a *parthenos* war goddess, show the influence of her worship, which was wide spread and extremely popular all over the Mediterranean and the Asiatic world.

Artemis is especially unique because of the seemingly contradictory fact that she is a virgin, yet is also worshipped as "all Mother."<sup>371</sup> She is a fierce guardian of her followers' chastity and the Protector of those who give birth. Guthrie notes that the "childlessness" of Artemis that was characteristic of her in classical times, and later, was not "original." According to him, her identification with Eileithyia the goddess of childbirth is, "... a strong indication that she was once... a patron of women's life in all its phases, and was therefore supposed to have experienced them all herself."<sup>372</sup> Rigoglioso suggests that Artemis may have experienced all of life phases except for sexual union. The paradoxical aspect of Artemis' sexual status is resolved if we consider the possibility presented by both Guthrie and Rigoglioso that, "Artemis was originally a parthenogenetic goddess, at once virgin, and generative."<sup>373</sup>

The concept of female parthenogenesis amalgamates well with the worship of Mary as Virgin Mother, as well as *Theotokos*, Mother of God. Like Artemis, Mary is virginal both in her

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<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>372</sup> Guthrie *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>373</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 85.

piety, and her sexual status. As discussed in Chapter Three, the *Infancy Gospel of James* presents Mary's purity as tied directly to the reason for which she is chosen by God to give birth to Jesus. It is her pureness of heart, as well as the pureness of her body, that the author of James gives us as reason for which she is chosen to bring into the world the Incarnation. Although Christians view the conception of Jesus as a collaboration between the divine will of God and the physical womb of Mary, this act fits well into the definition of parthenogenesis; that is, Mary conceives her Son without the intervention, or assistance, of male organic matter. Therefore she can be viewed as creatrix, independent of male participation. Consequently she remains a virgin, and retains her virginal purity, just as Artemis keeps hers. This concept of virgin births is not unique to only Artemis and Mary. According to Warner, there are many instances in the Greco-Roman world in which virgin birth takes place. Warner argues that Mary's virgin birth of Jesus was the most significant and perhaps the last virgin birth to take place.<sup>374</sup> This fits well into the argument presented by Thompson earlier in this section that Mary was the perfect vessel to accommodate and embody the ancient worship of Virgin Mother carried through Artemis for over a millennium.

### *B. Partner, Accomplice, Collaborator*

The concept of a divine partnership can be traced back to centuries before Christianity. Early collaborations among male and female god pairs in the Mediterranean were extremely common, and often depicted under the umbrella of marriage. Most of the time these pairs were both husband/wife, and brother/sister; primary examples of these relationships in the Greek

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<sup>374</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 147.



pantheon are Rhea and Kronos, and Zeus and Hera. I have stated in this work that many of these relationships began as female centred; that is, according to most scholars, the female divinities were initially worshipped alone, and then became partnered up with male divinities as the trends of civilization moved towards an agricultural, and patriarchal, family structure. That being said, the importance and authority of a divine ruling pair did not diminish. In this section we will analyze the responsibility and position as partner, and accomplice, in the divine pairs of Artemis and Apollo, and Mary and Jesus. This investigation is significant because it provides us with further evidence that Mary did not just step into the position of partner with her son due to her maternal connection to him, but rather was elevated to her status as *Theotokos* in order to embody, and fulfil, a deep and long standing tradition of a male/female partnership without which Christianity could not have reached the level of popularity it later gained.

One of the most popular legends surrounding the birth of Artemis is her collaboration in the birth of her twin brother Apollo. Greek legend states that, immediately after her own birth, the newborn Artemis assisted her mother through nine days of labor and delivery until her brother Apollo emerged.<sup>375</sup> Artemis and Apollo were extremely attached to their mother, who had gone through such an ordeal to bring them into the world. Not long after their birth, the giant Tityus attempted to rape Leto in a sacred grove near Delphi. Leto called out the names of her children, who quickly rescued her by shooting arrows into the giant, killing him instantly. For Tityus' offense, Zeus consigned the giant (who was his own son) to eternal torment in the

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<sup>375</sup> Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1. 21 (trans. Aldrich) (Greek mythographer C2nd A.D.): "Of the daughters of Koios . . . Leto had relations with Zeus, for which she was hounded by Hera all over the earth. She finally reached Delos and gave birth to Artemis, who thereupon helped her deliver Apollo. Artemis became a practised huntress and remained a virgin."

Underworld.<sup>376</sup> Always close to his twin sister, both were known for their skill as archers, their energetic pursuit of their goals, and their swift and merciless punishment of those whose behavior they found insulting, or offensive. When Niobe boasted that she was a better mother than Leto, since she had produced six sons and six daughters instead of just a measly set of twins, Apollo and Artemis took offense. Taking their bows and arrows with them, they found Niobe's children and Apollo killed the sons while Artemis dispatched the daughters. Niobe's grief was so great that her tears caused the rivers to overflow their banks.<sup>377</sup> Apollo also had a jealous streak. When Artemis fell in love with the hunter Orion, Apollo missed her company and affection. Aware that Orion was swimming in the ocean, Apollo ran to find Artemis and gathering up their bows and arrows, rushed down to the beach with her. Pointing to Orion's head, barely visible on the horizon, Apollo wagered that she couldn't hit the black object in the sea with her arrows. Artemis, a fierce competitor, and exceptional archer, accepted the wager. With her steadfast aim, she unknowingly killed the man she loved.<sup>378</sup>

Artemis and Apollo were depicted as constantly being together and, as a result, they were worshiped in the vicinity of one another. They often shared sacred spaces, or favoured the same cities. One of the most interesting connections of this shared worship is the temple of Apollo in Didyma. Located about 11 miles south of the ancient port city of Miletus, on the western coast of modern-day Turkey, the Temple of Apollo at Didyma was the fourth largest temple in the ancient Greek world. Although lesser known than the Oracle in Delphi/Greece, Didyma was the main sanctuary for the once mighty city of Miletos. The temple location is just south of

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<sup>376</sup> Pausanias 3. 18. 9.; also according to Pausanias, Tityus' gigantic tomb was said to be found near Panopeus, and his fall by the arrows of Artemis and Apollo was represented on the throne of Apollo at Amyclae (Pausanias 4.4.).

<sup>377</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library* 3.46.

<sup>378</sup> Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2.34.

Ephesus, and scholars have argued that the very purpose of the temple was to rival, or complement the massive influence and authority claimed by Artemis in neighbouring Ephesus. Joseph Fontenrose states that the word Greek *didymaios* can be translated as “twin” and many have viewed this temple of prophecies to belong to both Apollo and Artemis. Although Fontenrose finds no evidence to support that this was a twin temple, and suggests this building was solely the domain of Apollo, he concedes that the Didymean family worshiped in this city was Apollo and Artemis, and Zeus and Leto, with Artemis *Pythie*, oracle or prophet, as the most venerated deity next to her brother,

The goddess Artemis *Pythie*, appears to have been the most venerated goddess of Didyma after Apollo *Didymeus*. The cult of Artemis at Didyma may have been as old as the cult of Apollo; she was worshiped there in the seventh century B.C.E. at the latest. Her archaic *temenos*<sup>379</sup> has recently been discovered, and an inscription of probably the sixth century B.C.E. records an offering to her and Apollo.<sup>380</sup>

Fontenrose’s research supports the widely accepted tradition of viewing Artemis and Apollo as a male/female collaborative pair. Supportive evidence of the twins together in worship is the discovery at Pompeii, in March of 1817, when two veteran soldiers stumbled across two large scale bronze statues of Apollo and Artemis centuries after the city was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79. According to the Getty Museum website, Artemis is posed with her arms outstretched to hold a bow and arrow, which matches that of the statue of her brother; the two sculptures were likely created as a pair.<sup>381</sup> The statues were placed at the entrance of the

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<sup>379</sup> Temenos (Greek: τέμενος; plural: τεμένη, temene) is a piece of land cut off and assigned as an official domain, especially to kings and chiefs, or a piece of land marked off from common uses and dedicated to a god, a sanctuary, holy grove or holy precinct: The Pythian race-course is called a temenos, the sacred valley.

<sup>380</sup> Fontenrose, 1988, p.123.

<sup>381</sup> "Apollo from Pompeii: An Ancient Bronze (Getty Villa Exhibitions)." Apollo from Pompeii: An Ancient Bronze (Getty Villa Exhibitions). Web. 05 Aug. 2015.

Temple of Apollo in Pompeii which validates the idea that the twins were often viewed as two sides of a complementary pair.

Thus, the twins fulfilled the many attributes of the divine male/female relationship in almost every way except for sexual union, or procreation. They shared similar characteristics and complementary responsibilities; both siblings excelled at the skill of archery, and they enjoyed hunting together. In addition, both had the power to send plagues upon mortals. Artemis was the Protector of young girls, while her brother was the Protector of young boys. According to Callimachus in his *Hymn to Artemis*, Artemis always preferred the company of her brother, even while in her father's house, "And thyself thou enter thy Father's house, and all alike bid thee to a seat; but thou sittest beside Apollo." (Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis*, 3.162) This shared relationship allowed both gods to garner power and authority in their pantheon. The male/female, brother/sister bond allowed them to encompass the many experiences and challenges faced by their followers. Together, they embodied the dual nature of human beings, male and female, without the constraints, and stresses of romantic or intimate relations, which were often played out in the romantic partnerships of Zeus and Hera, or Rhea and Kronos. Perhaps this is why, as a pair, they were favoured in worship, and collectively accumulated a vast amount of wealth, buildings and fame in the Mediterranean world.

As Artemis and Apollo were viewed as the perfect male/female partnership, it is the position of this work, that Mary and Jesus embodied exactly this successful relationship under the development of Christianity. We first see Mary acting in partnership with Jesus in the *Gospel of John*. While at the wedding in Cana, the guests run out of wine, and Mary turns to her son simply stating, "They have no more wine" to which Jesus replies "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." (John, 2.2-4) This gospel interchange is often used by

scholars to exemplify one, that Mary knew Jesus was capable of performing miracles and turning the water into wine, and two, that Jesus obliged his mother in her request despite his initial hesitation. Thus, the gospel reveals to us how Mary intercedes in faith by asking Jesus to “show” his Incarnation by performing a miracle. As Christ is an embodiment of God's self-proclamation and self-incarnation of His own saving power, Mary is also an embodiment of the human “yes” to God's will. As such, she is the primary intercessor of the Church to Christ.

The initial comparison between wife and Church began with Paul. In his letter to the Ephesians he compares the wife and the Church as follows, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands’ everything.” (Ephesians, 5. 23-4) Consequently, at Cana, Mary asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast which can be interpreted as a metaphorical wedding of the son in which he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride. According to Jordan, this partnership, or marriage, of Church and Christ, or Mary and Jesus, was comparatively easy to implement in the early church, especially following the decision of naming Mary *Theotokos*. This sacred partnership simultaneously harkens back to the male/female relationships of Hellenistic gods, while partnering the hierarchical body of the Church with the spiritual goal of salvation through the Incarnation of Christ. By becoming the ‘Bride of Christ’<sup>382</sup> Mary accepts her position as intercessor and accomplice. Through her acceptance to receive God in her flesh, she acknowledges her mission as an intercessor from God to man; through her request at the

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<sup>382</sup> “From this Christianised idea of the relationship between celestial partners it was a comparatively easy step to identify Mary with the Church and, therefore, to place her in spiritual marriage with God. Mary became the bride of Jesus, her divine son, and her husband Joseph was deemed an irrelevance” (Jordan, 2003, p. 223)

wedding of Cana, she acknowledges the validity of her position as mediator from man to God. Her partnership with Jesus allows Mary to evolve from a young Jewish mother, to triumphant Virgin. According to Jordan, this development is most evident in Early Christian art which depicts Mary's rise to celestial royalty. This process took centuries, and it is evident that as Mary gained popularity and began to embody the role of sovereign, Queen and Mother, Jesus tended to be downgraded, and his icons were progressively eclipsed by his venerated mother.<sup>383</sup>

By the mid-fifth century, at the time of the Council of Ephesus, and during the building of the Roman Church of S. Maria Maggiore under Pope Sixtus III, many wealthy sponsors funded the creation of mosaics depicting various biblical scenes throughout the Church. Several of those depicting the Nativity scenes show Mary in a submissive role to Christ but, according to Jordan, one group of paintings, commissioned by an unknown benefactor, depict Mary as a Roman empress seated before a line of martyrs who offer her their crowns.<sup>384</sup> Jordan states that these scenes have now been worn away beyond trace, leaving us with only historical commentaries on the pieces. Warner confirms the records about these initial royal depictions of Mary by describing the elaborate decorations Mary wore in these mosaic scenes, "... Mary, her black hair dressed under a narrow diadem, robed in a pearl-sewn cloth of gold, with a huge collar of gems, takes her seat on her son's right hand as she receives the three magi in imperial audience."<sup>385</sup> These illustrations were commissioned in Rome at the same time that the Council of Ephesus was debating Mary's role as *Theotokos*. According to Warner, several decades after her accepted title as Mother of God, Mary occupies a much more prominent position in the

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<sup>383</sup> Jordan 2003, p. 230.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>385</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 105.

Nativity scene, "... in the later basilica S. Apollinaire Nuova of the Ostrogothic King Theodoric (474-526) at Ravenna... the Virgin, not the Christ child, extends a welcoming hand to the barbarians, who, in gorgeous costume, present her with gifts."<sup>386</sup> Thus, Mary becomes a symbol of divine custodian which becomes the tool through which the Church gains authority on earth. Her humanity makes her an earthly sovereign, while her partnership with Jesus makes her a divine mediator. According to Warner, from the sixth century onwards, the triumphant Virgin becomes an important medium of propaganda through which politics, and piety, interacted to form the cult of Mary in the West. Warner states, "The more the papacy gained control of the city, the more the veneration of the mother of the emperor in heaven, by whose right the Church ruled, increased."<sup>387</sup> Consequently, artistic representations of Mary as sovereign, dressed in regal garments, and holding her son become central pieces to Church art all over Christendom. Through her elevated position as celestial interceptor Mary's real nexus of powers lies in her role as mediator between God and humans. Thus, Mary embodies the role of partner, or accomplice, in the salvation of humanity alongside her son/partner, and through her intervention on behalf of her constituents they find their way into the divine grace of God.

Aristophanes speech, in Plato's *Symposium*, retells the myth that each human being, at the beginning, was divided in two by Zeus, and destined to spend his/her life searching for their other half, "Thus anciently is mutual love ingrained in mankind, resembling our early state and endeavouring to combine two in one and heal the human sore..."<sup>388</sup> Although this is a convoluted aetiological myth which explains both sexual preference, and the purpose of

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<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>388</sup> Aristophanes' Speech from Plato's *Symposium*, Trans. by B. Jowett from *Collected Works of Plato*, 4th Edition, Oxford U. Press, 1953 (189c-189d) p 520 to (193d-193e) p 525.

procreation in ancient Greek thought, it can be seen as the foundational story for the concept of fusion. Warner states that when it came to the relationship of Christians to their God, there was a fundamental desire, both physiological and emotional, to be one with, or in union, with God. Metaphors of merging, dissolving, fusing and absorbing in the grace of the divine become central to worship in Christianity.<sup>389</sup> This concept of union is represented in the complementary relationship of Mary and Jesus, where two become one, but without the experience of sexual union, which is forbidden by the Church. This acetic coupling is identical to the relationship of Artemis and Apollo. In the case of the Greek brother/sister relationship, the amalgamation of two beings in one is even more pronounced as Artemis and Apollo are twins and, at least from a biological perspective, are two halves of the same fertilized egg. These connections between the Artemis/Apollo and Mary/Jesus pairs further support the argument that the worship of Artemis was prolific, and deeply entrenched in ancient Mediterranean spirituality, and that the changes and manipulations applied to Mary, her role, title and relationship to Jesus, were easily maneuvered to converge with a belief system that had been in place for hundreds of years and could not have been eradicated.

### *C. The Role of Our Virgin, Our Queen, Our Saviour*

In addition to their fantastical birth narratives, both females play a role in the redemption and salvation of their followers. This is evidenced in the plethora of epithets and/or titles that both divinities share. This shared exultation proves that in fact, Artemis was not transformed into the Virgin Mary, as much as the Virgin merged into the Artemisian community and “sat on her

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<sup>389</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 133.



throne.” Some of the well-known titles for Artemis are related to nature, such as goddess of the hunt, the lake, the oak tree, ad continuum. However, many of her other titles are closely related to her role in the salvation and mercy which she granted her followers. Names such as: *Orsilochia* or Helper of Childbirth, *Selasphoros* and/or *Phôsphoros* or Light-Bringer, Hêmerasias or She who Soothes and *Hymniê* Of the Hymns. These names proclaim Artemis’ significance in the lives of her followers both as Healer, and as a Mother figure. Consequently, this suggests that Artemis was in fact “the People’s Goddess,” and that her followers relied on her mercy to get through the gruelling tasks of living.

Although these roles are extremely significant when comparing Artemis’ community to that of the Virgin Mary, they are not enough to truly explain the fusion that happened in the fourth century. The position of mother and healer is common among Greco-Roman goddesses. This is mainly because of the traditional roles of women in the home, and in child bearing. What makes Artemis unique, and in turn allows Mary to become unique, are her dominant roles as *Sôteira* meaning Saviour, *Potna Thea* or Goddess Queen, *Khrysothronos* Of the Golden Throne and/or *Aidoios parthenos* or Revered Virgin. Artemis held these titles long before they were awarded to Mary in scripture, or in prayer.

In many ways Artemis was both redeemer in her role as Saviour, and ruler in her role as Queen. With the dawn of Christianity, particularly in Ephesus, we see these roles divided into male and female counterparts. Jesus is the Saviour while Mary becomes the Queen of Heaven. They both sit on Golden Thrones and many Christians have argued that Mary serves as Co-redemptrix to her Son. Thus, it is easy to see that the Virgin Mary was not a transformation of Artemis, she was infused into communal worship and practices reserved for the goddess and awarded these titles *because* Artemis already held them for hundreds of years before Christians

arrived on the scene. Yet, while Artemis plays an independent role in the redemption of her followers, Mary needs Jesus as the anchor to her role as Saviour. However, this small detail may have been insignificant to the citizens of Ephesus who were well accustomed to their primary goddess having a brother/husband relationship with Apollo and could easily adjust to the son/husband relationship defined by Mary.

According to Jaroslav Pelikan, the Greek word *theosis*, deification or divinization, came to stand for a distinctive view of the meaning of salvation summarized in the Eastern Patristic formula current already in the second and third centuries, “God became human so that man might become divine.”<sup>390</sup> This defined the human participation in the divine nature of God; the Incarnation of the divine in the person of Jesus Christ with the promise of salvation for humanity. As Mary played a central role in the Incarnation of Jesus, it is reasonable that Early Christian worshipers, familiar with the tradition of gods and goddesses in human flesh, accepted and promoted the possibility that Mary herself was an embodiment of divinity. This duality of both human and divine places Mary at the forefront of worship, particularly in Ephesus, where the familiarity with a female goddess was deeply entrenched in the community. The Virgin Mary becomes leader, Queen, and the key to salvation for her followers. Pelikan states that, “Augustine identified the Virgin Mary as “*nostra tympanistria*” because like Miriam before the children of Israel she led the people of God, and the angels of heaven in the praise of the Almighty.”<sup>391</sup> His reference to Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, refers to the following passage in Exodus,

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand;  
and all the women went out after her with timbrel's and with dances.  
And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;

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<sup>390</sup> Pelikan *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. (Exodus 15:20-1)

The Hebrew Bible presents Miriam's life as one of service and leadership, as she was the acknowledged leader of all the women who fled from Egypt with their families. Pelikan argues that Mary's leadership is parallel to that of Miriam's, and this simultaneously connects her to an earlier well-established tradition in Judaism while granting her credibility, and precedent, as leader in the more modern Christian tradition. The concept of the Virgin Mary as Saviour is fundamental in the popular conception and worship of her as a leader in salvation. This popular worship continues for another thousand years, and by the time we reach medieval Christendom Mary's worship is engrossed in her position as supreme Protector. By the early 14<sup>th</sup> century the Virgin Mary has numerous feasts and rituals that honor her as Queen of Heaven, and revere her position as Virgin Mother. Numerous feasts that support Mary's sovereignty as Queen are celebrated throughout the year by Christians of all denominations. Some of the most venerated of the feasts are: February 2, *The Purification of the Blessed Virgin*, March 25, the *Annunciation of Our Saviour to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, May 1, *Queen of Heaven*, May 31, *Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, August 15, *Assumption into Heaven*, August 22, *Queenship of Mary*, September 8, *Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, December 8, *Immaculate Conception*.<sup>392</sup>

Laurel Broughton describes Mary as the centerpiece in the popular medieval procession of Siena, Italy that takes place every year on June 9<sup>th</sup>. Broughton states that, "... the figure in the painting of the Virgin defines the central axis of the painting and dwarfs the images of numerous Saints Angels and Sieneese civil officials at flanker throne the painting clearly indicates that not only is Mary Queen of Heaven, she is Queen of Siena."<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Broughton 2000, p. 245. (See Benard, Elisabeth Anne., and Beverly Ann. Moon. *Goddesses Who Rule*).

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

Of course, as Michael Jordan points out, this elevation of Mary from housewife to Mother of God, and Queen of Heaven, had been in the making even before Cyril of Alexandria called for the meeting of the Council of Ephesus. Jordan claims that,

The earthly Mother of Jesus was about to be “packaged” as the star of an apocryphal mystery play with a new persona that both transcended and distorted the realities of her life. In twentieth century terms, it was akin to that generated for a “goddess” of the cinema screen; in the religious climates of the fifth century, it must have conveyed much of the ideal of a “sanitized” diva.<sup>394</sup>

This process may have been directly linked to the manner in which the growing popularity of Christianity was spreading. Due to the early nature of the young religion, those who controlled the “media” were able to change early elements of the life of Mary, and replace them with a more popular biography. Jordan claims that from the beginning of the fifth century the stories surrounding Mary, the Mother of God, moved further and further away from anything found in the earliest Christian texts.<sup>395</sup>

By 1260, in the city of Sienna, Mary had been elected the supreme Protector and the Cathedral was dedicated to her bodily Assumption into heaven. The tradition of the Assumption can be traced back to the fifth and sixth centuries but did not become dogma until 1950 when Pope Pious XII declared Mary’s death and Assumption to be part of the Catholic faith. Legend tells us that upon her bodily arrival into heaven Christ crowned his mother as Queen,

Hence the revered Mother of God, from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination, immaculate in her conception, a most perfect virgin in her divine motherhood, the noble associate of the divine Redeemer who has won a complete triumph over sin and its consequences, finally obtained, as the supreme culmination of her privileges, that she should be preserved free from the corruption of the tomb and that, like her own Son, having overcome death, she might be

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<sup>394</sup> Jordan *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven where, as Queen, she sits in splendor at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages.<sup>396</sup>

Broughton argues that this belief in her elevation to monarch after her death provided her with the setting worthy of a regal stature.<sup>397</sup> It is easy to connect the position of Mary as supreme ruler, and Protector of this city, to Artemis who is the supreme Protector of the city of Ephesus. This is evidence that once again Mary does not just replace the authority and responsibility of goddesses who came before her; she is not a “new goddess” placed on top of old divinities, she *is the body* that carries within her the ancient roles of her predecessors by amalgamating all aspects of worship, belief, and ritual of the old, and funneling it into a representation of the divine that early Christians can easily assimilate into. As Queen of Heaven, Mary resembles a number of near Eastern goddesses who bear that title; however, whereas Mary comes to embody characteristics shared with a number of ancient goddesses, she remains human. Mary’s status derives from her relationship with Jesus; she gives him humanity which is a unique quality that distinguishes him from other gods. The loving bond between mother and son positions her as mediatrix. Some medieval theologians argue that praying to Mary for her intercession was felt by many of the congregation to be more effective than praying directly to Christ.<sup>398</sup> Thus, from a simple maid of Nazareth found in the Gospels, to Queen of Heaven, Earth and Hell, Mary’s evolution as a sovereign in Western Christianity rendered her a potent cultural force pervading almost every aspect of medieval culture. Through celebration songs of praise, miracle stories,

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<sup>396</sup> *Munificentissimus Deus*, Selected Documents of Pope Pius XII (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference), 38, 40, 44-45, 47).

<sup>397</sup> Broughton *op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

and visual images, Christians expressed their veneration for Mary as Queen acknowledging her political, military, and salvific strengths.<sup>399</sup>

## 2. The Importance of Titles and Roles in Successful Fusion

There are numerous aspects that contributed to the successful fusion between Artemis and the Virgin Mary, particularly in the city of Ephesus. One of the fundamental ways in which Christianity succeeded in its conquest of this city was by allowing the members of this community to maintain their essential beliefs and traditional forms of veneration.

Traditionally in the worship of Artemis, women have always relied on her to bless them in their abilities to bear children. The custom of offering their garments to Artemis in prayer to be saved from the madness of their empty wombs has been long documented.<sup>400</sup> Artemis is often named “the releaser” in the ceremony in which the girdle, which is put on at puberty by a young girl, is later dedicated to Artemis as a part of the marriage process. Artemis has always been singularly powerful in the lives of women<sup>401</sup>, and invoked during child birth. Often, after child birth, the girdle is offered to her in thanks for a healthy mother and child. In addition, mothers also dedicate to her the *lochia*, often one of Artemis’ names, which is the placenta. Although many women may invoke the name of the Virgin Mary before and during childbirth, Christianity does not have a particular ritual of dedication neither of a girdle, or the placenta, at the church, or in the name of the Virgin. However, according to Koester, the oldest hymn to Mary of the Orthodox Church names Mary, “She who has woven maidenhood into motherhood.”<sup>402</sup> This

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>400</sup> King *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>402</sup> Koester *op. cit.*, p. 375.

clearly can be connected to King's research in which Artemis is responsible for this exact life ritual for women. Thus, in a male centered religion such as Christianity, where the only female in the pantheon is Mary, it is only logical that she would have been given the responsibilities of her divine predecessor. This is not as much a transformation as a necessary replacement. While women made up a large part of the congregation, and child birth is a necessity for the growth of any community, these significant, albeit female centered, rituals had to remain central to the takeover of any new religion.

#### *A. Motherhood and Fertility*

Before the Virgin Mary was given authority over the domain of nurturing and protecting her followers, the Greek Artemis was worshiped under several titles of Caregiver and Protector. While at Ephesus, Artemis Ephesia was expressively viewed as a goddess of fertility and protection. Some of the titles of worship for Artemis include: *Philomeirax*, Friend of Young Girls, *Paidotrophos*, Nurse of Children, *Orsilokhia*, Helper of Childbirth, and *Hêmerasia*, She who Soothes. The epithets served as foundations on which the people of Ephesus were able to adapt Artemis into the realm of Kybele, *Magna Mater*, the Mother Goddess that ruled this area from archaic times and through the early Hellenistic period.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Artemis of Ephesus was a significantly different goddess than the Greek Artemis. At the core of the worship of Artemis Ephesia was entrenched belief in her position as fertility goddess, and Mother to her people. Scholars often discuss her association with child birth, and her role as Protector of the young. In Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis* we hear Artemis declare that because her own mother gave birth to her without pain, she

will be forever the Protector of pregnant women, or women in childbirth.<sup>403</sup> She is also revered as the Saviour of all women, particularly those who have been unfairly treated by men, but she also presides over wedding feasts, assists women in becoming pregnant and watches over the offspring of her followers. According to Knibbe, the Ephesians had been performing animal sacrifices as fertility rites in her temple for hundreds of years,

There were offerings of incense and according to the bones found in the Artemision sacrifices of a great variety of animals. On certain occasions a series of bulls were offered to the goddess in bloody slaughter and it was suggested by early Swiss archaeologists that their testicles were fixed on the statue of Artemis this rite reveals the archaic concept that the power of the goddess was renewed in this way so that she could intern strengths in the world of nature and allow even the dead to receive a share of her vitality.<sup>404</sup>

Thus, Artemis was not only the mistress of earth fertility, but also the Protector of the dead.

Knibbe states that she visited the dead from time to time in a procession on her sacred way around Mount Pion.<sup>405</sup> The sacred way was originally a circular cemetery encircling the entire mountain. Consequently, Artemis inherits all fertility rituals, and takes on the responsibilities of life and death, and of nourishment and protection that originally belonged to the Phrygian Mother.

One of the unique ways in which we can see a direct fusion between Artemis Ephesia and the Virgin Mary is in the artistic tradition of black fertility statues. There are three major archaic goddesses that have been popularly sculpted in dark stone, or wood, before the establishment of Christianity. Stephanie Lyn Budin claims that the first of these was Isis, and there is much evidence to support her theory. According to Budin, Isis is the first divinity who was associated with the fertility of the black soil irrigated by the flooding of the river Nile. Her priests wore

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<sup>403</sup> Callimachus, *Hymn to Artemis* 3. 21-2.

<sup>404</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.



black, and burned incense, and the most sacred of her images were made from black basalt.<sup>406</sup> Kybele was another great Mother Goddess whose cult arrived from Asia Minor, and she was brought to Rome in the form of a black stone. The last dark skinned divinity to be worshipped well into the Roman period was Artemis of Ephesus. The statue presented in Fig. 5 is part of the Farnese collection at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. This statue is a second century Roman copy of the original Artemis Ephesia sculpted during a revitalization of the cult of Artemis in Ephesus, promoted by Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian. Often associated with soil, earth, and the cosmic darkness of the womb, these black sculptures embodied the epitome of fertility and nourishment.

As early as the second and third centuries, and overlapping the Roman revival of black Artemis Ephesia, the Virgin Mary begins to be represented in art using archaic symbols of fertility. Jordan states that one of the earliest surviving representations of Mary can be found inside a Roman catacomb. In this catacomb mural, Mary is drawn with the infant Jesus, and her hair is styled in an unusual fashion with the lower ends curling out in the shape of what Jordan refers to as “the Greek letter *omega*.”<sup>407</sup> Jordan claims that, “In much of the ancient pagan world the *omega* design, associated with fertility and the uterus, was loaded with cryptic meaning that relied, ironically, on a misunderstanding of the female anatomy.”<sup>408</sup> Budin supports this statement by confirming that the *omega* symbol was often used in Egyptian ritual and art to depict a cow’s uterus, though in the case of Isis, and even the Syrian goddess Astarte, the *omega* symbol is often inverted so that it looks like the goddess is wearing a large pair of horns.<sup>409</sup> Thus,

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<sup>406</sup> Budin 2011, p. 204.

<sup>407</sup> Jordan *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>409</sup> Budin *op. cit.*, p. 204.

we begin to see the amalgamation of Mary with archaic fertility goddesses early on in Christian worship. One of the most concrete pieces of evidence that the worship of Mary is merged effectively with the worship of Artemis is the case of the black madonnas. According to Cunneen, many of the early seventh and eighth-century sculptures of the black madonnas, found mostly in France and Spain, were viewed as monuments to miracles witnessed by faithful followers and pious pilgrims. Cunneen states, “They were carried in slow processions among the people – reminiscent of processions for the Great Goddess – so that people could touch Mary, hold up their sick children to her, or have her bless special objects.”<sup>410</sup> In addition to healing properties, legends spread that the Virgin chose those who would discover her statues. Most black madonnas were found in a natural setting like a bush, cave, or near a river. Those to first come in contact with them were rural citizens, often children, and/or young women. Cunneen claims that these statues had significant symbolic power, and those who worshiped them appropriated the Virgin with supernatural powers reminiscent of pre-Christian “pagan” beliefs,

People did not want to think that such statues were carved by human hands; they sensed that the great natural forces of life and death were present in them... For ordinary people in small towns these local madonnas, portable representations of the Incarnation, summed up their hope of intimate contact with the divine. At the same time they incorporated the elemental force of human life that their ancestors, since prehistoric times, had perceived in the goddess.<sup>411</sup>

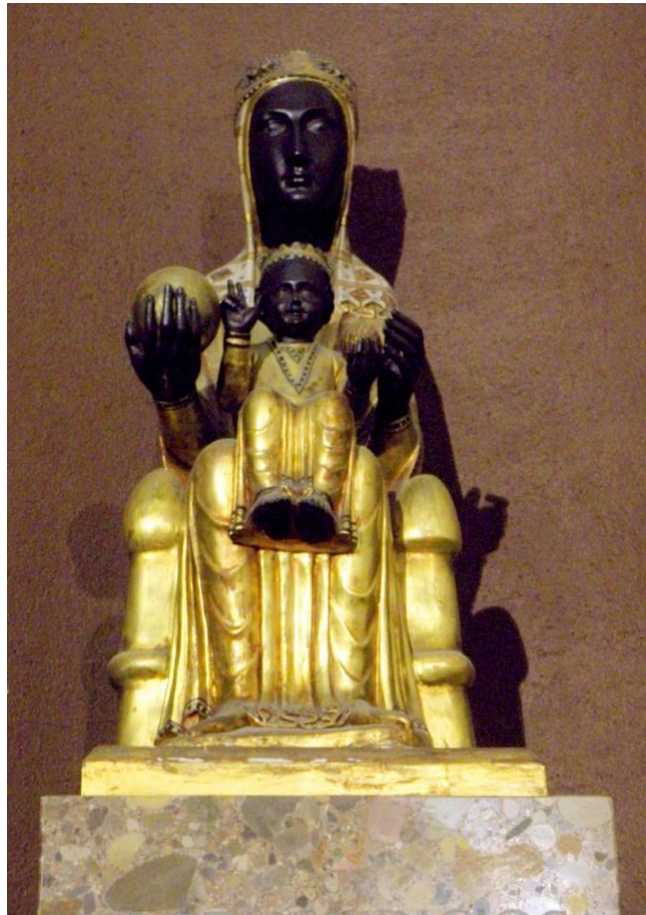
Thus, it is difficult to separate pre-Christian reverence for the goddess of fertility from the Christian imagery of the Virgin Mary. Often people would attest that the black madonna, having been found in the field, may have come in contact with the bull, an archaic symbol of power. These tales evoked mystery and long held beliefs of both male and female representations of procreation and fecundity. Although most church men, as Cunneen argues, did not share in these

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<sup>410</sup> Cunneen *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

beliefs, they were willing to commission such artistic representations of the Mother of God, convinced she was capable of healing.<sup>412</sup> This ancient belief in icons as the mediums of miraculous powers allowed early Christian converts to feel comfortable within the parameters of a new and young religion.



**Fig. 5: Left. Artemis (Diana) Ephesia, National Archeological Museum, Naples, Italy.**

**Fig. 6: Above. The Virgin of Montserrat, Monserrat Shrine, Spain.**

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

It is important to point out that all versions of the black madonna include both Mary and the infant Jesus sitting on her lap. This is more in line with the depiction of Isis holding Horus, and although Isis was one of the original black mother and son sculptures, and often wore the upside down *omega* symbol of fertility, it is especially interesting that the only goddess from the plethora of divinities found in the Greco-Roman pantheon to be sculpted in the dark stone, is Artemis. That being said, it is not surprising that only Artemis Ephesia is sculpted in the archaic ways of the Mother Goddess; she was, after all, also known as the “all Mother,” the Goddess Queen, and the provider of milk and honey.

#### *B. The Cult of Milk and Honey*

The statement, “flowing with milk and honey” has often been used to describe wealth, fertility, wisdom and even the Promised Land. Milk and honey are nature’s two nurturing elements that require no agricultural knowledge, or machinery. Thus, it is no surprise that both Artemis Ephesia, and the Virgin Mary, are almost always associated with these two sacred elements of nature.

According to Rigoglioso, bees have always been a symbol of prophecy and parthenogenesis, and often a totem for the Virgin Mother. They were seen as having the power of “fore-knowing” because they seemed to be able to predict the weather, wind, rain, frost or sun, which ancient writers deduced by observing them “choosing” to stay close, or leave their hives, on a given day.<sup>413</sup> They were also thought to swarm, or converge, on houses and public buildings on the days leading up to important events. The early association to prophecy is also due, in part,

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<sup>413</sup> Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.40, 627b.10; Pliny, *Natural History* 11.10.

to the ancient practice of making “mead,” which was originally made from fermented honey and water, and later wine.<sup>414</sup> This connection between honey being viewed as the main ingredient of the intoxicant, led to the belief that the second temple of Delphi was “built by bees” from beeswax and feathers.<sup>415</sup> Arthur Bernard Cook states that bees have often been connected to wisdom and supernatural knowledge. Cook states,

Moreover, the connection between prophecy/supernatural knowledge, entheogens, and honey is suggested by the common claim that’s special poets and sages, including Hesiod, Pindar, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, Lucan, and Ambrose, were said to have been “fed by bees” during infancy in order to have bread in them wisdom and eloquence.<sup>416</sup>

Rigoglioso claims that the *Pythia*, or Oracle, at Delphi also took this intoxicant to assist in her revelations.

In addition, bees were thought to represent virginity due in part to the queen bee’s reproducing parthenogenetically. The queen bee produces males, or drones, spontaneously out of her own body without the need for fertilization by sperm.<sup>417</sup> Despite the fact that ancient naturalists were not aware of the role of the queen bee, and the generation of the hive, there are many traditions that connect parthenogenesis in the ancient mind to bees. Pliny points out in his *Natural History* that no one had ever witnessed sexual intercourse among bees. This gave them a reputation of being chaste, or virgins, and led to a variety of ideas, or suggestions, of how bees reproduced. Pliny confirms that bees were observed hatching in their cells, but other writers, such as Virgil, speak of their spontaneous generation, their parthenogenetic birth, from flowers.<sup>418</sup> Consequently, an inevitable connection between bees-prophetess-virgin was formed.

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<sup>414</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>416</sup> Cook, 1895, p. 7-8.

<sup>417</sup> Rigoglioso *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>418</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 11.16; Virgil *Georgics* 4.197 – 203.

Julia Sissa further adds to this connection in her claim that Oracles were chosen, in part, because of their resemblance to Artemis,

It is said that in ancient times oracles were delivered by virgin because of their physical purity and their resemblance to Artemis. They were in effect well-suited to keep the secret of oracles they rendered.<sup>419</sup>

Thus, virgins who represent Artemis are chosen at Delphi, to drink the “special” honey drink, to grant prophecy to Greek rulers, and the elite.

Similarly, early Christian writers were also fascinated with what appeared to be the sacred life of bees. According to Fiona Griffith, the observed pattern of bee behavior served as an important example for monastic life, especially for the female monastic life.<sup>420</sup> In its industry, communal living, and subordination of the individual to the community, the bee had traditionally been held up as a model citizen, and the hive served as a figurative structure for a model state. The centrality of the bee to the store of Christian symbolism was emphasized by Ambrose, a bishop of Milan, who lived in the fourth century, and praised the bee for its hard work, cooperation, and peaceful hierarchy.<sup>421</sup> Of course, the most significant aspect of bee behavior for early Christians was its ability to procreate without coitus. As with the Greeks, the bee remained a symbol of chastity and virginity. By presenting the bee as a symbol of purity in his *De virginibus*, Ambrose popularized the virginal reputation of the bee.<sup>422</sup> Subsequently, this symbolism was widely adopted by later Christian writers beginning with the writing of pseudo-Augustine who thought that bees reproduce without desire,<sup>423</sup> later with Venantius Fortunatus,

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<sup>419</sup> Sissa 1990, p. 35.

<sup>420</sup> Griffith 2007, p. 102.

<sup>421</sup> Ambrose *De Virginibus*, Griffith *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

for whom the bee was, "fertile and its chaste bed",<sup>424</sup> along with Aelfric, who wrote that bees give birth in purity,<sup>425</sup> and Aldehelm, who comments, "The bee I say by virtue of the special attribute of its peculiar chastity is by the undoubted authority of the Scriptures agreed to signify a type of virginity in the likeness of the Church."<sup>426</sup>

The connection between the virginity of bees and the Virgin Mary appears in the writings of Hildebert of Lavardin, an eleventh century writer and ecclesiastic, who stated, "The virgin is a little bee who makes wax and procreates without coitus."<sup>427</sup> Hilderbert's identification of the Virgin with the bee appeared in a sermon for the Feast of the Purification. The Virgin Mary became increasingly associated with the bee, since like her, it brought forth its young without sin. As AElfric commented,

There is no woman like her, for neither before, nor since, was there a virgin who bore a child and afterwards remained a virgin, save her alone. Nevertheless, there are some creatures who propagate without intercourse, and both mothers and daughters are virgins: these are bees. They bring forth their offspring in purity. From the honey, they nourish their brood, and the young are brought forth in virginity, and the older ones remain virgins.<sup>428</sup>

By the 11th century, the poem *Vestinut Silve* (*Carmina Cantabrigiensia* no. 23) conflates distinctions between the bee and the Virgin Mary completely,

None among the birds is like the bee,  
who represents the ideal of chastity,  
if not she who bore Christ in her womb inviolate.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Fortunatus, Venantius *Honorius Clementianus*, (see Judith W. George 1995).

<sup>425</sup> Aldhelm 1919, p. 125.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Similarly, in his sermon on the wax of the Easter candle *De cereo Paschali*, pseudo-Augustine asserts that the bee reproduced without desire.<sup>430</sup> Thus, early Christian writings, and later medieval literature, explicitly likened the bee's chastity, and its ability for parthenogenesis, to that of the Virgin Mary.

In addition to the image of the virginal, hard-working bee, Sissa states that honey had medicinal purposes, and was commonly used as a remedy for female reproductive complications such as inducing girls' first period, assisting in difficult labors, and soothing the womb after child birth. Other medicinal potions or "cures" were made using honey for ailments such as infertility, abortion, the repositioning of a displaced uterus, and so forth.<sup>431</sup> We have already seen how Artemis was almost always associated with rituals involving child birth, as well as any other aspects of the female reproductive system. Thus, her association with honey is complementary both due to her virginity, and her severe protection of women. More interestingly, it is only in her presentation as Artemis Ephesia that she wears bees on her wrap-around garment. A close up of her statue is presented in Fig. 7, which shows one side of her tunic. There are several bees to be found on both sides, as well as on the back of her dress.



**Fig. 7: Artemis Ephesia. National Archeological Museum, Naples, Italy.**

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<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>431</sup> Sissa *op. cit.*, p. 45-8.



According to George Elderkin, the association of Artemis Ephesia with bees can be traced back to archaic cultures such as the Cretans and Minoans, as well as her early Greek roots at Delphi, in the temple of her brother Apollo. Elderkin states,

The early association of the bee with the cult of Artemis is attested by varied evidence. It appears not only upon the strange polymastoid statue of the Ephesian goddess but upon the earliest coins of her city. As the owl was the emblem of Athena at Athens, so the bee seems to have been the emblem of Artemis at Ephesus. Although the extant examples of the polymastoid statue are all of late date, it is hardly possible that the type with its medley of elements can have been a late Hellenistic creation.<sup>432</sup>

An example of the coins of Ephesus attributed to Artemis can be found in Fig. 8. Elderkin states that the use of these bee-stag coins began in approximately 300 B.C.E., or earlier, and some were still in use during the early Christian period, up until the second century.<sup>433</sup>



**Fig. 8: Coins of Ephesus often show the Bee and Stag, emblems of Artemis Ephesia. These date to around 300 B.C.E.**

Thus, an argument can be made that Artemis Ephesia did not only hold the title of Goddess Queen, or Queen of the Beasts, she could have easily, and additionally, held the title of Queen of Bees. If that is the case, especially at Ephesus, it is possible that the early Christian worship of Mary was purposely molded to take on the form of this very ancient goddess. This is not just the placement of Mary on the throne of Artemis; these are specific characteristics that require the complete, and complementary, union of mythology, worship, and belief, to fuse together.

<sup>432</sup> Elderkin, 1939, p. 203.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Artemis is not transformed into Mary, nor is Mary a simple replacement goddess for Artemis. From the evidence we have gathered it is easier to say that Artemis is fused into Mary, and therefore Mary is just one of the newer metamorphoses that this very ancient divinity undergoes. This position is further supported when we consider Warner's research on the ritual elements of mother's milk, and the suckling of infants.

It has been a long tradition that goddesses have suckled their divine offspring, and one can trace the nursing of infant gods by their divine mothers as far back as the first discovered civilization. Two thousand years before Christ, the goddess of Ur offered her son her breasts; a thousand years later, in Egypt, Isis nourishes Horus; in Mexico statues dated to 1000 B.C.E. have been discovered of female deities nursing their babies.<sup>434</sup> In Africa, all along the Lower Congo, the Ivory Coast, and the Gold Coast, sacred mothers nurse their sacred infants, and in India later sculptures show the infant Krishna with his mother Devaki.<sup>435</sup> This natural nourishment, and bond, of mother to child has been celebrated, honored, and ritualized by human beings as far back as we can trace history. Thus, it is not surprising to find the image of the Virgin Mary nursing Jesus in early Christian literature and art. Warner states that despite the fact that the Virgin as mother was exempt from intercourse, or labor, one natural biological function that was permitted to her in the Christian cult, was suckling.<sup>436</sup> Warner states,

Milk symbolized the full humanity of Jesus at one level, but it also belonged in an ancient and complex symbolic language. For milk was a crucial metaphor of the gift of life... The milk of the Mother of God became even more highly charged with the symbolism of life, for the life of life's own source depended on it.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Feininger 1960, p. 38.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>436</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p.192.

<sup>437</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 193.

Consequently, it is the unique intensity of Mary's milk that is able to nourish and feed the divine in Jesus that becomes intertwined with the Christian mystery of the incarnate God. This is no ordinary mother feeding her child, this is not even a goddess mother feeding a goddess son, this is a human woman, albeit a special human woman, suckling the divine, whose human body depends on this nourishment to grow into the man who is the vehicle for humanity's salvation. In the apocryphal *Odes of Solomon*, written before the third century, milk is the agent of conception of the Logos. Mary describes the virgin birth as a series of exchanges of wisdom and power,

A cup of milk was offered to me: and I drank it in the sweetness of the delight of the Lord. The son is the cup, and He who is milked is the Father, and the Holy Spirit milked Him, because his breasts were full, and it was necessary for him that his milk should be sufficiently released.<sup>438</sup>

Here, milk has a metaphysical significance which harkens back to classical Greek myth, particularly that of the upbringing of Zeus, and even Dionysus. As an infant, Zeus was suckled by Amaltheia who was the wife of Melisseus. Melisseus comes from the word for bee, *melissa*, and can be translated as "bee-man." While Amaltheia provided Zeus with milk, her husband provided him with honey. Similarly, in some accounts of the infancy of Dionysus, the nymph Macris raised him on milk and honey.<sup>439</sup> Moreover, the physical quality of mother's milk carried the symbolism of purity; white, gleaming, and moist, it carried the imagery equivalent to astral light. For the Romans, this connection between milk and the eternity of the heavens is exemplified in the myth of the creation of the Milky Way. Legend claims that [one night Juno's milk, while she was nursing Hercules, sprayed across the sky and created the Milky Way, and our galaxy.<sup>440</sup> In fact, the Greek word for milk is *galaktos*. According to Warner, for Christians,

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<sup>438</sup> J. Rendell Harris, *Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, 1909; quoted in T.D. Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth*, 1962, p. 62.

<sup>439</sup> Elderkin *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

the complex symbolism that associated the virgin with milk and suckling, transformed her into the nursing mother of many penitents, visionaries, and Saints.<sup>441</sup>

At Ephesus, Artemis Ephesia, was famously known as the many breasted Mother Goddess, a tradition that we have seen traces back to the Anatolian Kybele. Traditionally, scholars have discussed the polymastoid (mammary-like) nature of the top body of her statue as representative of breasts, the scrotums of bulls, eggs, acorns, or bags of amulets. Clayton states that the globe like protrusions must be breasts as they are a definitive symbol of the Mother Goddess, “The peculiar many breasted statue of Artemis Ephesian represents a Mother Goddess, the breasts symbolizing the fertility of women.”<sup>442</sup> Others, such as Gerard Seiterle, suggest that the oval appendages do not represent breasts, but, rather, sacrificial bull testicles/scrota.<sup>443</sup> This idea gained momentum especially since Artemis Ephesia, and Artemis *Tauropolos*, were associated with bull sacrifices, if not also detached scrota. Interestingly, Elderkin claims that, “The close association of the bee and the bull, which later found expression in the strange superstition that bees sprang from the bodies of bulls, may date from the Minoan age.”<sup>444</sup> At Ephesus the bee played an important role in the cult of Artemis, and there the youthful wine-pourers of Poseidon were called *tauroi*, or taurus. Therefore, Artemis Ephesia can be viewed as a bee-goddess, and seems perfectly at home among the *tauroi*, and her title of Artemis *Tauropolos* is appropriate. This shows that the nodules on her upper body at Ephesus can also be interpreted as beehives. Whether the statue of Artemis Ephesia wears many breasts, bull scrota, or beehives, she is nonetheless a representation of nourishment, fertility, and the benefactor of her people who

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<sup>441</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, P.199.

<sup>442</sup> Clayton 1996, P.87; quoted in Price, M. *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*. 1996.

<sup>443</sup> Seiterle 1979, p. 25.

<sup>444</sup> Elderkin *op. cit.*, p. 212.

bestows on them the sacred gift of milk and honey. Like the Virgin Mary, she allows her followers to feed from her body, and her icons represent the very connection between the natural fertility of Mother Goddess in the health, well-being, and sustenance of her people.

There is so much overlap between the representation of Artemis Ephesia and the Virgin Mary as the givers of life's essence, the immortal food of milk and honey, that it is difficult to label this as simply a case of transformation. Artemis Ephesia reigned supreme in the hearts of her citizens for a thousand years, and when the Ephesians could no longer worship her openly, they began to look for ways in which they could fuse the myths, roles, and ceremonies of the Virgin Mary, into their archaic goddess. Earlier texts such as the *Infancy Gospel of James* (discussed in detail in Chapter Three) provided the Ephesians with stories of the special birth of Mary, and her unique, "sacred" upbringing, that were similar to the childhood tales of gods and goddesses throughout the Mediterranean. Mary's favour with God, and her pious yet courageous nature seemed to fit well with the favour Artemis found with Zeus and her stern protection of chastity and purity. Although the early Christians may not have purposely encouraged the converted Ephesians to look for similarities between Artemis and Mary, these two divinities were easily comparable in their personalities and responsibilities. By connecting the roles and stories of both Artemis and Mary, the Ephesians freely synchronized their ancient form of worship with the new and imposed rituals of Christianity. In doing this, they continued their worship with very little interruption, as well as almost no adjustments to their ethics, values, or ways of life. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the shared characteristic of virginity and chastity in the worship of both Artemis and Mary.

*C. Chastity, an Old Form of Currency*

One of the complementary ways in which the Ephesians were able to fuse their divinity with that of the early Christians was through their shared concept of abstinence as the most essential aspect of piety. The worship of Artemis had a long tradition of chastity. In Ephesus, those who entered her temple and became her priests and priestesses remained eternal virgins. Thus, the Christian concept of the convent for women, and celibacy for men can be seen as directly linked to this type of worship that was already in place in Ephesus long before the Christians arrived. This is very much a Mary archetype for both: ever virgin, and the concept of being married to God. According to Paris,

Artemisian spirituality is familiar to the priests and nuns of the Catholic faith. Like Hippolytus, they believe that spirituality cannot be obtained without chastity. And they are right, if one hold to the spirituality of the virgin (be it the Virgin Mary or the Virgin Artemis), for this form of surpassing requires a solitude incompatible with the requirements of relationships.<sup>445</sup>

This teaching of abstinence in Christianity can be traced back to the letters of Paul whose advice about chastity and marriage can be found in 1 Corinthians as follows,

I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided (1 Corinthians 7:32-33).

Thus, the concept of abstinence was familiar to the Ephesians, and welcomed by the Christians, which allowed for the successful binding of these religions in a city where the worship of virgins was already an established tradition.

It seems evident, at least in part, that the celebration of virginity, and the cultivation of asceticism, came about in repulsion against what was taken to be the excesses of sexual self-

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<sup>445</sup> Paris 1986, p. 127.

indulgence in late antiquity. Pelikan notes that Roman moralists such as Tacitus described the most dangerous enemy of chastity as a “softness of mind.”<sup>446</sup> Consequently, women who were viewed as chaste, or remained virginal, exemplified a new type of purity in their service to the Christian God, and the immortal offspring of their faith. As expected, the apologists for Christian asceticism fixed on the Virgin Mary as a model of the life of virginity and self-denial.<sup>447</sup> In addition to self-denial, Cunneen suggests that, “Sexual renunciation replaced martyrdom and Mary becomes the heroine of this new asceticism.”<sup>448</sup> Thus, Christian women were expected to suppress the desires of the body and focus on developing the strength of their mind and spirit. This new asceticism required that women do not marry, or focus on the act of procreation. This harkens back to the Greco-Roman establishment of virgin goddesses, priestesses, and vestals. Elizabeth Clark’s work on Vestal Virgins describes the nature and responsibilities of these young women who devoted their lives to their city and spirituality. However, as Clark notes, “In the ancient world virginity symbolized not only sexual virginity as in the case of the Vestals but also independence and self-direction.”<sup>449</sup> As a result, many women preferred the service of their gods despite the ascetic discipline because once in the service of the temple, or Church, no one “owned” them, and they no longer had to be married. Shoemaker claims that one of the attractions of virginity for early Christian women was that it brought independence from men.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Tacitus was against the excesses of what he considered barbarian pleasure noting that he preferred “... Honest pleasure in contrast of a barbarian virtue with the dissolute conduct of the Roman ladies.”; Quoted in Pelikan, p. 115.

<sup>447</sup> Pelikan *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>448</sup> Cunneen *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>449</sup> Clark *op. cit.*, p. 155-184.

<sup>450</sup> Shoemaker *op. cit.*, p. 445.

Thus, the Virgin Mary is perceived to be free from the bonds of marriage, and this gives her some independence. According to Naomi Goldenberg, the Virgin is, "...like the goddesses before her, who do not have husbands. It seems that marriage, and not femaleness, creates a chain of obedience and control."<sup>451</sup> Goldenberg goes on to discuss the early Christian attraction to the androgynous; early Christian worship and asceticism freed women because it focused on the non-sexuality of the body, while liberating both men and women from the gender expectations associated with their physical bodies. Thus, women became non-bodied, and because of this, they were able to participate freely in education, ritual, and dedicate themselves in the same way as men to monastic living. The Virgin Mary embodies all the traits desired by early ascetic Christian men and women. Warner claims that in many cases, those who were struggling with their celibacy, and bodily desires, were advised to "pray to Mary."<sup>452</sup>

In the Greco-Roman tradition we have seen that no other goddess is as committed to virginity and chastity as Artemis. Thompson notes that Artemis was the only true "pure" deity among all the gods, and the only one to be clearly connected to Mary.<sup>453</sup> Artemis is not only a virgin goddess, but she protects her chastity violently; she kills those who attempt to take her purity. So severe was her vow of celibacy, that she punished her own priestesses if they were caught consorting with men. One of the most famous examples of her wrath was in her treatment of Kallisto. Kallisto, was an Arkadian princess, and companion of the goddess Artemis. When she was impregnated by Zeus, she attempted to hide her condition from the goddess, and violated

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<sup>451</sup> Goldenberg *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>452</sup> Warner *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>453</sup> Thompson *op. cit.*, p. 478.



the holy circle of virgins by remaining within their company beyond her time. Artemis was angry when she discovered the deception, and transformed Kallisto into a bear.<sup>454</sup>

It's important to clarify that "virginity" was very differently defined in ancient Greece. For the Greeks, sexual abstinence was an after effect of virginity, not the definition of the word. The ancient Greeks did not believe the hymen existed, and virgin births were a regular occurrence rather than a rare miracle.<sup>455</sup> According to Sissa, the Greek word for virgin, *parthenos*, often refers to an unmarried young woman who still lived with her father and never had sex. Greek men wanted to ensure that their wives would bear legitimate heirs, so daughters were kept under strict supervision, and seclusion to ensure that they had not been exposed to any other men before meeting their husbands.<sup>456</sup> The one interesting exception was at certain festivals for Artemis, such as the rituals of Brauron and Sparta, where unmarried women performed dances that the men watched, and this was often men's only opportunity to see their future brides. In the cases where a young woman did have sex, that did not necessarily end her *parthenia*, or virginity. Sissa writes, "Penetration by a male organ deflowered a virgin, yet the event existed only if it was found out by family and society, or revealed by its consequences: the parthenic state depended on sexuality, hence on the body, yet was also a purely negated fact."<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Hesiod, *The Astronomy Fragment 3* (from Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi Frag 1.2*) (trans. Evelyn-White) (Greek epic C8th or 7th B.C.): "The Great Bear [Constellation Ursa Major]. Hesiod says she [Kallisto] was the daughter of Lycaon and lived in Arcadia. She chose to occupy herself with wild-beasts in the mountains together with Artemis, and, when she was seduced by Zeus, continued some time undetected by the goddess, but afterwards, when she was already with child, was seen by her bathing and so discovered. Upon this, the goddess was enraged and changed her into a beast. Thus she became a bear and gave birth to a son called Arkas . . . but [later] Zeus delivered her because of her connection with him and put her among the stars, giving her the name Bear (Arktos) because of the misfortune which had befallen her."

<sup>455</sup> Sissa *op. cit.*, p. 79-83.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82

Thus, if no one knew a woman had sex, she was still a *parthenos*. Unmarried women, who managed to conceal a pregnancy, were allowed to give birth under strange circumstances (usually only applicable in myth), or who bore a child without anyone having discovered the circumstances under which the child was conceived, were said to have had a “virgin birth,” and their sons were known as *partheniai*, or sons of virgins.<sup>458</sup>

At Ephesus, Artemis Ephesia embodied the Greek characteristics of her myths as Protector and the Enforcer of chastity and sexual restraint, as well as the provincial attributes of her archaic predecessor of nurturing Mother and fertile goddess. As such, she presented the ideal female divinity for both the Ephesians, and the early Christians. Since Mary’s virginity is not mentioned in the synoptic Gospels, nor is the virgin birth discussed in any of Paul’s letters, scholars agree that this concept of Mary as *parthenos* is representative of the merging between the popular beliefs and practices of the laity, and the ascetic reactionary concerns of the early Church.

As a result, as Christianity became more and more restrictive in worship and belief, Ephesian converts influenced the early Church to amalgamate the characteristics of their ancient virgin goddess, into the new religion’s representations of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

### **3. Changing of the Gods: A Conclusion of Fusion**

It is evident that the communal rituals and traditions of worship of the goddess Artemis remained fundamental in the veneration and devotion to Mary. One of the main aspects of fusion, however, is the community itself. Communal customs and/or routines are central to the success of religious structures. Although both the religion of Artemis and Christianity follow a

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<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79-83.

“top down” framework of power and control, the congregation still retains some level of influence on their religious leaders. The “need” for Mary rather than Christ alone was a dominant factor in worship of Mary, and early Church leaders were powerless to affect the laity’s adoration.<sup>459</sup> The veneration of the feminine ideal, together with the peculiar relationship of Mary and Christ, designated her the Queen of Heaven, and made her the singular candidate to embody the archaic traditions of earlier societies.

#### *A. Communal Identity*

In her work on communal identity and worship, Naomi Goldenberg claims that, “The most important feature of any religion is its myths.”<sup>460</sup> Mythic images are indeed pictures, but more than a story or illusion, they are pictures that involve a community both physiologically, in the bodily reactions to legend, and spiritually in the individual’s higher thoughts about them. The function of religions’ human belief is to provide people with myths to live by. One of the valuable functions that great religious traditions serve is in the unification of large groups of people around a given set of symbols.<sup>461</sup> Worship and belief is possible only if the members of the religious community acknowledge that they are all somehow alike and that they can all feel the importance of the same set of images and symbols. Thus, human beings enjoy the feeling of sharing common myths and common histories.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Thompson *op. cit.*, p. 476-480.

<sup>460</sup> Goldenberg *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

There is little doubt that Artemis gave the Ephesians their essential communal and civic identity.<sup>463</sup> This civic identity depended on the mythology and proper worship of the goddess.

Knibbe states,

When Augustus decided to make Ephesus the capital of Asia and Romanize its architectural appearance, he encountered the same problem that had troubled Lysimachus three hundred years earlier: How was it possible to detach the city from the Artemision without committing an act of impiety against the goddess?<sup>464</sup>

This archaic reign of Artemis, at Ephesus, remained central to the Ephesian character, and their sense of a place in the world, late into the fourth and fifth century. Such cultural dependence on the goddess supports the notion that, just as the city was losing the temple of Artemis, sacked by the Goths in the third century, they gained a new incarnation of her through embracing the role of Mary within the growing Christian community in Ephesus.

The exclusion of female images by the Christian church left many people whose devotional experience was connected with life-producing power of Artemis feeling isolated and helpless. According to Cunneen, the devotion to Mary, Mother of God, helped to eradicate some of this disconnection.<sup>465</sup> For many early converts Mary belonged to the people, not to the Church, which is similar to the deeply personal sentiment the Ephesians held for their earlier goddess. Even though Mary is not an independent deity in the Christian pantheon, it is clear that the Ephesians could only accept the doctrine of Christianity by accepting one Virgin in place of another. According to Thompson, “The influence of tradition was the main factor in the worship of Mary; church leaders were powerless to curb popular mood and fancy.”<sup>466</sup> Communal identity

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<sup>463</sup> Rogers *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>464</sup> Knibbe *op. cit.*, p. 146-7.

<sup>465</sup> Cunneen *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>466</sup> Thompson *op. cit.*, p. 480.

dictated that the Ephesians continue to worship a fierce and powerful female deity. With the destruction of their sacred temple and the dispersing of their religious rulers they were faced by an invasion of a new fundamentally male spirituality. The potential for conflict was accelerated by their already tumultuous relationship with Christianity from the days that Paul first arrived rallying the flag of his male Saviour god. Thus, it was only logical that Mary would play a significant role in the adaptation of Christianity in this “city of goddesses.” This fit well enough among early Christian leaders as Artemis was viewed as the only true or “pure” deity among the Greco-Roman gods and thus the only one who could be clearly connected to Mary.<sup>467</sup> Although Mary was not as dominant in her reign as Artemis, Shoemaker argues that the Ephesians, and consequently other early Christians in the Mediterranean, shaped the image of the Virgin into a more powerful and influential representation that more closely resembled the familiar depiction of the female divinity they had been worshipping for centuries.<sup>468</sup> This argument is further supported in the 4<sup>th</sup> century when it is no accident that the Virgin is named *Theotokos* in the very city that found her life to be the most powerful doctrine in the Christian tradition.

In addition to the metaphysical fusion of Artemis and Mary, Helen Mendelovici-Saradi adds an interesting physical act of synthesis that alleviated whatever remaining doubt the Ephesians may have experienced about their conversion. Mendelovici-Saradi’s research shows that most temples were not destroyed in order to subjugate the earlier, “pagan” community. She claims that in fact, many temples were kept as “museums” or “art gallery” style buildings where people could go to admire the architecture, or art of the Greco-Roman world, without any religious connection. She also claims that many of the Roman and later Byzantine nobility would

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<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 475.

<sup>468</sup> Shoemaker *op. cit.*, 441.

collect pieces of Greco-Roman art found in temples and display them in their homes in order to assert their economic status.<sup>469</sup> Ramsay's work supports this theory suggesting that after Christianity forced its way into Ephesus, many of its citizens took stones from the temple of Artemision and placed them in their homes because of the sacred natural abilities of such relics, and their unique connection to Ephesian spiritual history.<sup>470</sup>

### *B. The Enduring Goddess*

In 1977 Pope Paul VI issued a declaration which reiterated banning women from being ordained as Catholic priests. This document states that because Christ was a man, and he chose only male disciples, it only follows that women can never serve as chief officials in the Catholic hierarchy. Pope Paul uses an impressive knowledge of how image and symbol operate in the human mind to build his case against female priests. His statement is as follows,

The priest is a sign... A sign that must be perceptible, and which the faithful must be able to recognize with ease... When Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally there would not be this "natural resemblance" which must exist between Christ and His minister if the role of Christ were not taken by man. In such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself, was, and remains a man.<sup>471</sup>

Thus, according to Pope Paul, the religious follower cannot feel a connection between the priest and Christ, if the priest does not embody the gender of the divinity. If his argument is embedded in the ideal that a religious male can only follow a male deity, than a similar argument can be made that a religious female can only follow a female deity. Although no single image of a woman can reflect all the important values of all females, Goldenberg argues that because Mary

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<sup>469</sup> Mendelovici-Saradi, Helen 1990, p. 47-61.

<sup>470</sup> Ramsay *op. cit.*, p. 167-177.

<sup>471</sup> Goldenberg *op. cit.*, p. 5-6.

is the sole female symbol in Christianity, through her all previous goddesses and all possibilities for women are fused.<sup>472</sup> Thus, for people who were deeply connected to a goddess tradition for centuries, they needed a female to help them make the transition to Christianity; Mary filled the role.

If religion can only be replaced by religion, as Jung once wrote,<sup>473</sup> then the religion of worshipping Artemis could only have been fused into a religion that worshiped another female deity. This explains why over time Mary is portrayed as having an active influence in the development of Christianity, instead of the passive role she is often given in the gospels who mention her.<sup>474</sup> The Ephesians did not so much need to identify their own individual gender with their goddess because they had been worshipping her for generations, but they did need for her to be female, and carry all the roles, epithets, and responsibilities, that had been a part of their personal and communal identity for over a thousand years.

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<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>474</sup> Shoemaker *op. cit.*, p. 467.

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