

# The Nature of Artemis Ephesia

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Both material and literary evidence reveal the syncretistic and multivalent nature of the goddess of the Ionian city of Ephesos. Artemis Ephesia, as the Greek appellation of an indigenous deity identified as Kybele or Hekate, retained many of the functions and traits of her Anatolian predecessor while also taking on aspects of the traditional Greek Artemis. Tied intrinsically to Ephesos, she was patron goddess and protector of the city, as well as an international guarantor of refuge for suppliants. She was also a liminal goddess, who was associated with transitions from childhood to adulthood (especially for girls). Lastly, she was a fertility goddess whose role as such became exaggerated as she was assimilated into the Pan-Hellenic religious tradition.

Both ancient authors and modern scholars agree that when the Ionians founded Ephesos they appropriated the already-existing cult of a local goddess and called her by the name of Artemis. Pausanias records that the cult of Artemis Ephesia pre-dated the Ionian migration,<sup>1</sup> but he does not speculate on her original identity. The provenance of Artemis Ephesia may be located in two local goddesses, Kybele and Hekate. Excavations on the northeast slope of Mt. Panayirdag, near Ephesos, reveal that the area had originally been the sacred space of Kybele and was later claimed by Artemis for use in the procession route to the Artemision.<sup>2</sup> Artemis also took over Kybele's function as guardian over the graves along the route, and a series of altars dedicated to her marked out her predominance.<sup>3</sup> The cult statue of Artemis Ephesia recalls many aspects of Kybele. If the protuberances on the chest of the

<sup>1</sup> *Descriptio Graeciae* 7.2.6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Brenk, "Artemis of Ephesos: An Avant Garde Goddess," *Kernos* 11 (1998) 161, Knibbe: 142-143.

<sup>3</sup> Dieter Knibbe, "Via Sacra Ephesiaca: New Aspects of the Cult of Artemis Ephesia," *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia*, ed. Helmut Koester (Valley Forge PA, 1995) 144.

famous statue can at any instance be identified as breasts,<sup>4</sup> they may recall the fertility aspect of Kybele preserved in her Greek counterpart.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the lions, rams, and bulls in relief on the shoulders and legs of the statue “denote the goddess who fosters the life of the wilds and fields,” and the bee imagery seen on the statue’s feet and on coins is also a feature of some cults of Kybele.<sup>6</sup> Bengisu hypothesizes that the dual cult of Artemis and Kybele was eventually consolidated into the worship of Artemis Ephesia alone.<sup>7</sup>

It is also likely that Artemis Ephesia took over the identity of another indigenous goddess, Hekate. Hekate was nurturer of the young, a protector of cross roads, and was also worshipped in liminal places.<sup>8</sup> There was certainly an affinity between Hekate and Artemis Ephesia, as evidenced by a shrine or statue of Hekate located in the Artemision.<sup>9</sup> Ephesos’ closeness to Karia, which is Hekate’s homeland, and the fact that the Greek city was founded on an older Karian settlement, which already had a temple to the Karian goddess,<sup>10</sup> provide strong evidence that the two goddesses were conflated.<sup>11</sup> In addition, a myth recorded by Eustathius<sup>12</sup> underlies the connection between Artemis and Hekate. The story recounts how a woman inhospitably received the goddess Artemis, who was visiting a man called Ephesos in the city of the same name. In anger, the goddess changed her into a dog, but then took pity on her and transformed her back into human form. Ashamed, the woman hanged herself, but Artemis brought her back to life, dressed her in her own costume, and gave her the name of Hekate. Johnston suggests that the woman’s death was a virgin suicide, and that a more extended version of the myth might have included the transformation of the woman’s body into a cult statue; thus the story becomes an explanation for a transitional ritual for maidens performed from classical times at Artemis’ sanctuary in Ephesos and a model of the ritual practice of dressing and washing a cult statue.<sup>13</sup> John-

<sup>4</sup> Scholars agree that the appendages were not originally breasts, but rather ornaments decorating the statue, possibly the scrota of bulls sacrificed to the goddess (see discussion in Thomas, 86-87, n.12). See page 11 for a discussion of their later identification as breasts.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of The Greek States*, vol. 2 (New Rochelle NY, 1977) 481.

<sup>6</sup> Farnell, 481.

<sup>7</sup> Rose Lou Bengisu, “Lydian Mount Karios,” *Cybele, Attis and Related Cults*, ed. Eugene N. Lane (New York, 1996) 10, n.34.

<sup>8</sup> “Hecate,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition, eds. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (New York, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Strabo *Geographia* 14.1.23, Pliny, *Historia Nat.* 36.32

<sup>10</sup> Pausanias *Descriptio Graeciae* 7.2.6-9.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead* (Berkeley, 1999) 245.

<sup>12</sup> *Eust. ad Od.* 12.85

<sup>13</sup> Johnston, 242-243.

ston recognizes that previously the angered goddess must have been Hekate, who changed the woman into a bitch because that animal was sacred to her.<sup>14</sup> Here we have a myth that may have been an *aition* for rituals associated with the cult of Artemis Ephesia, in which the goddess has been transformed from Hekate to Artemis.

If we recognize that Kybele and Hekate are also associated with each other,<sup>15</sup> and with the Persian Anaiti, we may conceive of Artemis Ephesia as a syncretism of one or more regional goddesses with the Greek Artemis familiar to the Ionian settlers. Artemis Ephesia shares an almost identical birth narrative and birthday (6<sup>th</sup> of Thargelion) with the Greek goddess; the daughter of Zeus and Leto, she and her twin brother Apollo were born at Ortygia. During the birth the Kuretes, guardian demi-gods, by banging their weapons together, frightened away the jealous Hera and thus helped to conceal the newborns. The only significant difference in the myth is the Ephesian identification of Ortygia with a site near Ephesos, while the traditional myth locates Ortygia on the island of Delos.<sup>16</sup>

Ephesian coins from just before the Hellenistic period into the Roman period<sup>17</sup> display iconography referring to Artemis' Greek-style nativity, and referencing in general the Greek characterization of Artemis Ephesia.<sup>18</sup> Brenk has catalogued coins showing the image of a date palm, which represents Artemis' birth under a sacred palm, a stag and in one case a quiver, bow, and arrows,<sup>19</sup> emphasizing her identity as a huntress and mistress of wild things.<sup>20</sup> Yet Farnell argues that Artemis Ephesia did not share the Greek Artemis' connection with hunting.<sup>21</sup> If this is the case, the Ephesians may have been using traditional hunting iconography that caused Greeks to understand that their goddess was indeed Artemis, although this aspect of the Greek Artemis was not actually present in Artemis Ephesia. It is not until the Roman period that the Artemis "Ephesia" type (a representation of the unique

<sup>14</sup> Johnston, 244.

<sup>15</sup> "Hekate belongs to that circle of Phrygian-Thracian cults of which the chief figure is an earth-goddess, and the orgiastic ritual a marked characteristic. And we find that Hekate comes to be related to Cybele" (Farnell 507).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Oster, "Ephesus as a Religious Center Under the Principate I: Paganism Before Constantine," *ANRW* 2, 18/3 (1990) 1707-1708; Brenk, 169.

<sup>17</sup> When Attalos III of Pergamon bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in 133 BCE, Ephesos came under Roman rule. ("Ephesus," *OCD*.)

<sup>18</sup> "In the Classical period Artemis' iconography crystallized into a particular version of the iconographical schema 'young parthenos', a version that includes several variants; usually she has a bow and arrow, and she is often associated with a deer" ("Artemis," *OCD*).

<sup>19</sup> Brenk, 158-159.

<sup>20</sup> "Artemis," *OCD* 183.

<sup>21</sup> Farnell, 482.

cult statue) is represented regularly on coins, with the “Greek” Artemis type shown on the other side.<sup>22</sup> Brenck argues that this dual iconography indicates the double nature of Artemis Ephesia as a co-opted Anatolian goddess re-invisioned as the Greek Artemis; the inclusion of the “Ephesia” type of the goddess was an effort by Ephesos to identify the unique Anatolian provenance of their Artemis to the greater Roman world.<sup>23</sup>

Artemis Ephesia’s associations with both native Anatolian goddesses and her Greek prototype illuminate the important aspects of her nature, starting with her role as guardian of Ephesos. The turret-crown on the head of Artemis Ephesia’s cult statue symbolizes that she, like Kybele, oversees the well-being of her people.<sup>24</sup> The Ephesians are called the τροφς, “nursling” of their goddess.<sup>25</sup> The goddess’ name, Artemis, may come from the word αρτεμες, “safe and sound.”<sup>26</sup> Ancient writers understood it to mean that either Artemis was herself “healthy, well ordered, and a lover of virginity” or that, alternatively, she “makes her devotees happy, safe, and healthy.”<sup>27</sup> The Ephesians also applied the epithet επηκοος, “listening, giving ear to, listening to prayer”<sup>28</sup> to their goddess, which demonstrates their belief that she would hear their supplications and watch over them.<sup>29</sup> Another designation of Artemis Ephesia emphasizes her tutelary function. Callimachus calls the goddess “Upis” in his discussion of the founding of the cult in his Hymn to Artemis.<sup>30</sup> Farnell explains that Upis was a name of Artemis, which the Greeks derived from the verb *opizesthai* and interpreted as “watcher.”<sup>31</sup> Once again we find that Artemis Ephesia’s nomenclature points her out as a protector of her city.

Perhaps in the connection between the *Ephesia grammata*, words of power in the ancient world, and the cult of Artemis Ephesia, we may find another indication of the goddess’s perceived ability to guard the inhabitants of Ephesos. Pausanias records that these letters were inscribed on the feet, girdle, and crown of the cult statue of Artemis.<sup>32</sup> Both spoken and written, the *Ephesia grammata*

<sup>22</sup> Brenck, 160.

<sup>23</sup> Brenck, 157-170.

<sup>24</sup> Farnell, 481; “Cybele,” *OCD*.

<sup>25</sup> Oster, 1702.

<sup>26</sup> L.S.J.

<sup>27</sup> Oster, 1722-1723.

<sup>28</sup> L.S.J.

<sup>29</sup> Oster, 1723.

<sup>30</sup> Callimachus *Hymnus in Dianam* 237-258.

<sup>31</sup> Farnell, 488.

<sup>32</sup> Chester C. McCown, “The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief,” *TAPA* 54 (1923) 129.

<sup>33</sup> McCown, 131.

could ward off evil and save one from harm. Menander writes of how someone walked around a newly-wed couple chanting the *grammata*,<sup>33</sup> which suggests that they provide a shield against evil for the bride and groom in their new life together. Plutarch reports that the letters could be used to drive away demons. He also writes that the Lydian king Kroisos had cried aloud the Ephesian letters when he was being burned alive on a pyre after being conquered by Kyros, and that this spell or invocation caused rain to extinguish the fire.<sup>34</sup> Anaxilas describes how a self-important provincial stitched up the Ephesian letters in a pouch and carried it around as an amulet.<sup>35</sup> A 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. lead tablet from Crete provides an example of such a written amulet with the inscribed Ephesian letters meant to act apotropaically.<sup>36</sup> There was also a legend of how an Ephesian boxer defeated his Milesian opponent repeatedly until the *Ephesia grammata* were found tied to his ankle; after they were removed he was trounced three times in a row.<sup>37</sup> This last anecdote illustrates how the *Ephesia grammata* actually protected a citizen of Ephesos. Whether or not the “Ephesian” appellation of the letters originally referred to the city of Ephesos or its goddess,<sup>38</sup> the ancients perceived a link between the *Ephesia grammata* and Artemis Ephesia. It made sense that the mystic *grammata*, which could safeguard the speaker, writer, or wearer of the letters, were conjoined with a goddess who had great power to watch over Ephesos.

Further, Herodotos and Aelian both pass down a story that illustrates Artemis Ephesia’s tutelary capacity. They recount how the Ephesians saved their city from being destroyed by the invading Lydian king Kroisos by connecting the walls of the city to the sanctuary of Artemis seven stades distant with a rope. They claimed that the whole city was thus encompassed within the sacred space of the goddess, which was an unassailable place of refuge.<sup>39</sup> Even in the mythic past, the goddess’ sanctuary guaranteed safety. Pausanias describes how Amazons came there when escaping from Dionysos and then later from Heracles, and that some continued to dwell there along with others utilizing the sanctuary’s protection up to and after the time of the Ionian’s advent.<sup>40</sup> The Artemision as a refuge for suppliants gained international renown in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, attracting important politi-

<sup>34</sup> Kotansky, 111.

<sup>35</sup> McCown, 131.

<sup>36</sup> Kotansky, 111-112.

<sup>37</sup> McCown, 131.

<sup>38</sup> See McCown, 129-130 for a good discussion of the term’s etymology.

<sup>39</sup> Herodotos *Historiae* 1.26; Aelian *Var. Hist.* 3.26.; Thomas, 98-99.

<sup>40</sup> Oster, 1715.

cal dissidents<sup>41</sup> as well as catering to the needs of the city's population. Strabo records how the sanctuary retained its status as an asylum throughout its history, although the boundaries of the safe space continued to be altered.<sup>42</sup> Debtors could seek protection within the sanctuary, and even female slaves with allegations of abuse against their masters could flee there and remain unmolested at least until the outcome of the trial.<sup>43</sup> The *Etymologicum Magnum* records that sheep were never sacrificed to Artemis Ephesia "because of the sanctity of the woolen fillet which the suppliant bore."<sup>44</sup> Thus Artemis Ephesia functioned as a savior for both illustrious and common persons alike, and her role as guardian of Ephesos was extended to protect foreigners in the city as well as citizens.

While this aspect of Artemis Ephesia's character solidly identifies her as a poliade goddess, she also had an association with the natural world and transitional spaces between civilization and the wild. Brenk discusses whether the Artemision should be considered an extra-urban shrine, given its placement just outside of the city, and cites de Polignac's theory that such a location represents the goddess's mediating influence between the *polis* and the wild.<sup>45</sup> He also suggests the possibility that the placement of the Artemision indicates how the Ephesians co-opted an ancient cult site, and he concludes that this main sanctuary of Artemis Ephesia must have "retained major links with the Anatolian past."<sup>46</sup> Here we find that indigenous influences expand Artemis' function beyond the city.

As demonstrated by her connection with Anaiti, Artemis Ephesia had a strong association with water. Bengisu calls Artemis Ephesia a "protectress of water sources, lakes and marshes"<sup>47</sup> and reports that originally her worship may have been connected with a fish cult.<sup>48</sup> Indeed Strabo tells us that the Selinus River flowed past the Artemision<sup>49</sup> and Xenophon records that there were fish and mussels in the stream.<sup>50</sup> Cole explains that many Artemis temples were located near natural sources of water.<sup>51</sup> She cites the *hydriai* dedicated to Artemis at several different cult locations (including Ephesos) and

<sup>41</sup> *Descriptio Graeciae* 7.2.7.

<sup>42</sup> *Geographia* 14.1.23.

<sup>43</sup> Oster, 1715.

<sup>44</sup> Farnell, 482.

<sup>45</sup> Brenk, 161-163.

<sup>46</sup> Brenk, 168-169.

<sup>47</sup> Bengisu, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Bengisu, 10, n.35.

<sup>49</sup> *Geographia* 8.7.5.

<sup>50</sup> *Anabasis* 5.3.8.

<sup>51</sup> Cole, 164.

the existence of festivals of Artemis involving maidens to postulate that women and *parthenoi* engaged in rituals of *hydrophoria* to protect sacred springs.<sup>52</sup> While we do not have evidence of these specific rituals at Ephesos, certainly a link with water informed the nature of Artemis Ephesia's divinity.

Artemis Ephesia was also associated with the liminal period of passage from youth to adulthood. Moving from the position of child to adult in the community was a key moment of transition, especially for young women. We have evidence for a ritual procession of adolescent male and female Ephesians, along with its aetiological myths, which indicates that Artemis Ephesia facilitated this turning point in young people's lives. It was called the "Daitis" festival and it included dressing the cult statue of Artemis with new attire and feeding her a ritual meal of salt.<sup>53</sup> Xenophon of Ephesos wrote a romance, in which the protagonists fall in love while participating in this festival. Habrokomes, the leader of the sixteen-year-old ephebes is smitten with Antheia, the leader of the fourteen-year-old maidens when the boys and girls mingle after the procession and sacrifice at the temple. In the story the adolescents carry ritual objects, torches, baskets, and perfumes for the sacrifice, and horses, dogs and people carrying hunting gear follow them.<sup>54</sup> A 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE inscription identifies the "ritual objects" as salt, wild celery, cloth, and *kosmos* (ornaments).<sup>55</sup> Although the myth of Hekate discussed earlier may be an *aition* for this festival,<sup>56</sup> the more conventionally accepted aetiology, found in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, recounts how a group of Ephesian young men and virgins led by one Klymena carried the statue of Artemis to a field by the sea, danced around her and offered her a meal of salt. When the ritual was not repeated the next year the wrathful goddess sent a plague on the young people. Since then the "Daitis" festival took place to appease the goddess and prevent any further retaliation.<sup>57</sup> Romano interprets that the adolescents' participation in the festival (as demonstrated by the example of Habrokomes and Antheia) functioned to arrange new marriages and suppress unofficial unions by integrating the young people into appropriate sexual life. Thus Artemis is a *kourotrophos* in the sense that she supervises a young person from childhood until he or she passes over into adult life.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Cole, 164

<sup>53</sup> Irene Bald Romano, "Early Greek Cult Images and Cult Practices," *Early Greek Cult Practice*, ed. Robin Hagg et al. (Stockholm, 1988) 129; Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, 1979) 130.

<sup>54</sup> *An Ephesian Tale* 1.1-3.

<sup>55</sup> Romano, 128.

<sup>56</sup> Johnston, 243.

<sup>57</sup> Romano, 94.

<sup>58</sup> Romano, 96-101.

Perhaps the legend of the Amazons' connection with the cult of Artemis Ephesia further serves to identify the goddess with (young) women who have not (yet) taken on their normative social function as wives and mothers. The Amazons were a mythical race of female warriors who come from remote Pontic Asia Minor.<sup>59</sup> As mentioned earlier, Pausanias records that the Amazons visited and sacrificed at the sanctuary three times, and even settled down in the vicinity.<sup>60</sup> Callimachus writes of how the Amazons were actually the founders of the cult; they set up an image of the goddess under an oak tree and performed a war-dance around it, where later a sanctuary was built.<sup>61</sup> This ritual is strikingly similar to the one Klymena performs in the "Daitis" myth. Their legendary role in setting up the worship of Artemis Ephesia points to her antiquity and her identity as an Anatolian goddess. As a society outside of society, the Amazons were not fully acculturated females; they hunted and fought, activities normally performed by men. In some stories that have no male consorts at all, while in others their husbands act as stay-at-home dads. They effect an inversion of accepted gender roles, and as such, may reflect the status of maidens about to undergo initiation into adult life.<sup>62</sup>

The last major function of Artemis Ephesia that deserves to be examined is her role as a fertility goddess. If she originated as Kybele, then it is possible that she retained Kybele's association with fertility.<sup>63</sup> However, Oster argues that by the Roman period, after her Hellenization, Artemis Ephesia's origination as the "Great Mother" had been forgotten.<sup>64</sup> The idea, in popular imagination, of Artemis Ephesia as a fertility goddess grew out from the identification of her chest ornaments with breasts. Oster right notes that her lable as *polymaston* was applied only by late, polemical Christian sources.<sup>65</sup> LiDonnici, however, argues that as Artemis Ephesia became more universalized and associated with Isis (an Egyptian fertility goddess) during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the Ephesians may have begun to understand the decorations as breasts "to suggest an extremely nurturant, protective, and sustaining goddess."<sup>66</sup> Thus even the ancients may have understood Artemis Ephesia as a fertility god-

<sup>59</sup> "Amazons," OCD.

<sup>60</sup> *Descriptio Graeciae* 7.2.7.

<sup>61</sup> *Hymnus in Dianam* 237-258.

<sup>62</sup> "Amazons," OCD.

<sup>63</sup> "Cybele," OCD.

<sup>64</sup> Oster, 1725-1726.

<sup>65</sup> Oster, 1725; Minucius Felix Octavius 22.5 (ca. 220 CE); Jerome *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Ephesios proem* (PL 26. 441) (387 CE).

<sup>66</sup> Lynn R. LiDonnici, "The Images of Artemis Ephesia and Greco-Roman Worship: A Reconsideration," *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 85, no. 4 (Oct. 1992) 408.

dess, at least in her earliest and latest incarnations.

In this investigation of Artemis Ephesia, we have discovered that she most probably began as a Anatolian goddess, either Kybele and Hekate, and was later conflated with the Greek Artemis. Her Anatolian and Greek aspects together inform her identity as a protector of Ephesos and of suppliants, a liminal nature goddess associated with adolescent transition into adulthood, and a producer of abundance. As archeology continues to teach us more about Artemis Ephesia and her beginnings, we can anticipate a fuller understanding of the nature of the goddess.

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