

# The Regalia of Artemis Ephesia

The ancient travel-writer Pausanias remarked that, “All cities worship Artemis of Ephesus, and all individuals hold her in honour.”<sup>1</sup> This was not an overstatement. The spread of the cult of Artemis Ephesia throughout the Greek world was extraordinary. By the late Hellenistic period, many cities within the territories ruled by the Greeks had a temple or shrine dedicated to the highly regarded goddess, or to a version of her.<sup>2</sup> However, it was the city of Ephesus alone which had a particularly strong and lasting bond with their goddess.<sup>3</sup>

Artemis of Ephesus was quite unlike Greek goddesses, and she had a unique and distinctive appearance.<sup>4</sup> This essay looks at the features of her dress, and at what these features symbolise. But it begins with a brief history of Artemis which helps to explain her importance and power.

## THE ANATOLIAN GODDESS OF AYASOLAK BECOMES ARTEMIS OF EPHEBUS

The origin of Artemis and her cult are “shrouded in obscurity”<sup>5</sup> and predate the Ionians settling in south-western Anatolia around 1050 BCE.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless Dieter Knibbe, a

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<sup>1</sup> *Guide to Greece* 4.31.8. Pausanias wrote his *Guide* in the early second century CE, but in this quotation he was writing about a time before 150 BCE. Quotations from Pausanias' *Guide* are taken from Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's *St Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> In the Hellenistic period the original locale of deities became less important, and some gods (e.g. Isis) became universal deities. This is because gods were no longer assumed as being immanent in a terrestrial realm or location, but were increasingly regarded as elevated to a celestial realm. Luther Martin, *Hellenistic Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 59. This is true for Artemis who, nevertheless, maintained a strong bond with her original locale, Ephesus.

<sup>3</sup> There were dozens of gods worshipped in Ephesus during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, but only Artemis held the unique and powerful position as patron of Ephesus.

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Lynn Budin, *Artemis* (London: Routledge, 2016) 22.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians at Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004, 2007) 19.

<sup>6</sup> Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 7.2.6.

foremost archaeologist of ancient Ephesus, suggests the goddess started out as a sacred tree on the south western slopes of Mount Ayasolak.<sup>7</sup> Knibbe writes that Artemis began as a “tree goddess and a timeless symbol of fertility”.<sup>8</sup> The earliest statues of the goddess of Ayasolak are thought to have been carved from wood, without detail,<sup>9</sup> but decorated with removable items. There was a custom throughout western Anatolia of dressing and decorating archaic cult statues.<sup>10</sup>

At some unknown point, the Ionians named the indigenous Anatolian goddess after the Greek goddess Artemis. When king Croesus of Lydia conquered Ephesus in around 550 BCE, he promoted the Anatolian, that is, Ephesian, Artemis “to the position of first-ranking deity”,<sup>11</sup> and he funded the first marble temple built for her. Around the same time, probably to coincide with the building of the temple, a new cult statue of Artemis was carved by the famous sculptor Endoios.<sup>12</sup> This statue is believed to have looked like an ordinary, and unadorned, young woman.

Adapting to political influences and the changing social culture in Ephesus, the goddess and her cult evolved. Like most cults in the Greek world, the cult of Artemis underwent a process of Hellenisation,<sup>13</sup> and some of the mythology and attributes of the Greek Artemis

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<sup>7</sup> From 800 BC onwards, this spot was the site of successive temples devoted to Artemis.

<sup>8</sup> Dieter Knibbe, “Via Sacra Ephesiaca: New Aspects of the Cult of Artemis Ephesia”, *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia*, Helmut Koester (ed.) (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995) 143. Richard Oster, however, argues that there is simply no evidence in primary sources which associates Artemis Ephesia with fertility. “Ephesus as a Religious Center Under the Principate I: Paganism Before Constantine”, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 18.3 (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1990) 1726.

<sup>9</sup> Selahattin Erdmegil, *Ephesus*, transl. Nuket Erasian (Istanbul: Net Turistik Yayınlar, 1986) 27. Lynn R. LiDonnici writes, “It is likely that the early image was a typical archaic plank-like wooden *xoanon*.” “The Images of Artemis Ephesia and Greco-Roman Worship: A Reconsideration”, *Harvard Theological Review* 85.4 (1992) 398.

<sup>10</sup> LiDonnici, “Images of Artemis”, 391.

<sup>11</sup> Knibbe, “Via Sacra Ephesiaca”, 143.

<sup>12</sup> LiDonnici, “Images of Artemis”, 398-99.

<sup>13</sup> The Greeks typically identified, and associated, foreign gods with their Greek gods, and they used Greek mythology and other Greek concepts to interpret foreign gods and their cults. This custom, called *interpretatio graeca*, facilitated the religious syncretism that would be a feature in the Hellenistic period.

were attributed to the Ephesian Artemis.<sup>14</sup> The removable decorations of Artemis probably changed overtime too, but around 150 BCE, if not before, her attire became somewhat standardised.<sup>15</sup> The earliest representation of this standardised figure, that can be dated, is found on cistophoric coins minted in Ephesus in 133 BCE.<sup>16</sup> As well as coins, numerous statues show a uniformity in how the goddess was represented: her clothing, as well as her person, now being cast in metal or carved in stone.<sup>17</sup> In this standard representation, Artemis typically wears a crown, garments, and accessories that are intricate and rich in symbolism.

### **HER CROWN: SOVEREIGN PATRON AND PROTECTOR OF EPHEBUS**

Some surviving statues, and several coins, show Artemis Ephesia wearing a mural crown which depicts her city's walls. Other Anatolian goddesses are also sometimes depicted with similar crowns (e.g. Cybele of Phrygia), as does Agatha Tyche who was often chosen to be the patron goddess of cities newly founded by Alexander's successors. Artemis's mural crown symbolised her ability to protect Ephesus and its defences, and it indicates she was a tutelary (guardian) deity. Importantly, however, while there are several statues of Artemis wearing a mural crown, "all of these with one exception (now lost . . .) are restorations."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Greek Artemis and Ephesian Artemis share the story that Zeus is their father, Leto is their mother, and Apollo is their twin brother. The goddesses also share the story that they acted as midwife in the delivery of their twin brother.

<sup>15</sup> LiDonnici, "Images of Artemis", 390.

<sup>16</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians at Ephesus*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> For this essay I have looked at images of three statues, all carved from white marble, and housed in the Ephesus Museum at Selçuk, Turkey: [inv. 712](#) "Great Artemis" (height 292 cm); [inv. 713](#) "Small Artemis" who is missing her head; and [inv. 718](#), "Beautiful Artemis" (height 174.5cm) who wears a *polos* crown. These are very similar to a [statue](#) housed in the Vatican Museum in Rome.

I have also looked at images of a statue, [inv. 6278](#), housed at the National Archaeological Museum at Naples. This statue is almost identical to the statues already mentioned, but the goddess's skin and hair is cast in bronze and is black in colour, and her attire is carved from cream-coloured alabaster. Her colouring is similar to a statue of Artemis Ephesia made from bronze and marble (height 115 cm), [inv. 1182](#), and housed in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. LiDonnici suggests that the dark colour of her skin and hair may be meant to represent the dark wood of the archaic statues. "Images of Artemis", 392.

These six statues date from between the second century BCE to the second century CE.

<sup>18</sup> LiDonnici, "Images of Artemis", 395

Other statues depict Artemis wearing a crown which represents her temple. Perhaps this was her more usual crown.

Still other statues depict the goddess as wearing a simple *polos* on her head, sometimes with a veil attached. A *polos* looks somewhat like an upturned basket, and was made by weaving natural fibres together. Greek women had stopped wearing *poloi* in the Classical period, but it remained a common headdress for goddesses.<sup>19</sup>

Artemis's crowns symbolised her sovereignty and divinity. She was sovereign over Ephesus and had a unique covenant bond with the city.<sup>20</sup> The goddess was the city's divine protector and patron, and in return, the Ephesians were guardians of her temple. Her name "Artemis" was thought to be derived from a Greek adjective which mean "safe and sound". Strabo, the ancient geographer, writes, "Artemis has her name from the fact that she makes people *artimeas*."<sup>21</sup> The supposed "benefits she confers on others goes a long way towards explaining her popularity in Ephesus."<sup>22</sup>

Underneath her crown, the goddess's face has a benign, calm expression, and her hair is usually neatly and simply tied back, or hidden. Her face and hair look similar to the face and hair of many statues of pretty young Greco-Roman women, and are unremarkable.

### **HER ZODIACAL GARLAND: "QUEEN OF THE COSMOS"**

All the surviving statues of Artemis have several garlands around her neck. The objects in the garlands can vary, but they usually include a strand of acorns under a thick wreath of

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<sup>19</sup> F.J. Kluth, "Polos, Crown of a Goddess", *The Role of Women in the Ancient Art of Greece*. <http://www.rwaag.org/polos> The *polos* is "indicative of divinity in Greek iconography . . . the Anatolian goddesses Kubaba and Hapat wear comparable head gear." Budin, *Artemis*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Oster, "Ephesus as a Religious Center", 1728.

<sup>21</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 14.1.6.

<sup>22</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Ephesus*, 14.

seeds or nuts.<sup>23</sup> Typically, there is another garland which features symbols of the zodiac.<sup>24</sup>

Artemis Ephesia is the only deity of the Greco-Roman world who appropriated the signs of the zodiac as part of her costume and character.<sup>25</sup>

In the Hellenistic age a cosmological revolution was happening. Ptolemy would write about this new way of looking at the universe in his *Tetrabiblos* in the second century CE, but, already in the Hellenistic period, thinkers were seeing the universe in a new way.<sup>26</sup> They believed that immediately surrounding the earth (which was presumed to be the centre of the universe) there was the large sublunar region, which in turn was surrounded by seven planetary spheres.<sup>27</sup> It was thought, “The terrestrial, sublunar realm was sharply separated from the celestial, supralunar realm by an abyss of cosmic space populated by elemental and demonic powers. These powers controlled the terrestrial realm, even as they were controlled by the celestial deities.”<sup>28</sup> This new understanding brought with it a new emphasis on cosmic forces and astrology in religious beliefs. Artemis’s zodiacal garland seems to signify that she possessed an authority and power superior to cosmic forces and astrological fate.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, in one inscription she is called “the Queen of the Cosmos”; in another she is called a “Heavenly God”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Budin refers to the wreath as a “wreath of pollination”. If this is correct, it is one of several symbols which associates Artemis with bees. *Artemis*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> The zodiacal garland may be a first century BCE or CE addition to the statue. Fleischer, however, believes it was a regular part of her adornment in the early Hellenistic period. *Artemis von Ephesos*, 70-72.

<sup>25</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 21.

<sup>26</sup> Writing in the mid first century CE, Pliny the Elder summarises the new concept of the cosmos in his *Natural History* 2.4 (6). People in Greek and Near Eastern cultures had previously thought that the earth was a flat disc, with the heavens arched above it, and the underworld below it.

<sup>27</sup> The area of the supposed rotation of Saturn around the earth occupied the most distant planetary sphere. The rotation of the moon around the earth occupied the closest sphere, with the rotations of Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars and Jupiter in between.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians* (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 21.

<sup>30</sup> Richard E. Oster, “The Ephesian Artemis as an Opponent of Early Christianity”, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1976) 40. The goddess Isis, who became the most popular goddess of the late Hellenistic and Roman periods, was also considered to be a heavenly queen who governed the elements, the stars, and

## THE OVAL OBJECTS ON HER MIDRIF: VITALITY, VIRGINITY, FERTILITY?

Immediately below her garlands is one of the more perplexing features of Artemis's appearance. She has numerous<sup>31</sup> smooth, oval-shaped, protuberances on her midriff which are interpreted differently by scholars. It was thought by some that these objects were her breasts,<sup>32</sup> but Robert Fleischer has shown that these objects are not part of the goddess's body.<sup>33</sup> This is clearly seen in statues where Artemis's skin (her face, neck, hands, toes) and hair are cast in bronze and are dark in colour, but her crown and her clothes, which includes the protuberances, are carved from white marble or cream alabaster.<sup>34</sup>

Similar protuberances have been found on two fourth century BCE figures of the male god Zeus Labraunda. (The site of ancient Labraunda is approximately 120 km south of the site of ancient Ephesus.) Labraunda and Ephesus were inhabited by Carians before the Ionian invasion. So these oval objects may have been a feature of some Carian deities dating back to the second millennium BCE. Going further back in time, western Anatolia was inhabited by Hittites. Sarah P. Morris suggests the oval objects are leather goatskin pouches called

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the planets. M.J. Vermaseren, "Hellenistic Religions", *Historia Religionum: Handbook for the History of Religions*, Vol 1. C. Jouco Bleeker and Geo Widengren (eds) (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 506.

<sup>31</sup> The number of these objects varies from statue to statue, but the usual number is roughly around fifteen to twenty-five.

<sup>32</sup> LiDonnici maintains the objects, influenced by the breast-feeding iconography of Isis, may have been regarded as breasts in the Roman period, and possibly earlier, but not with a sense of fertility. Rather, she believes they indicate that Artemis was the sustainer, nourisher, and protector of Ephesus. "Images of Artemis", 404-408.

<sup>33</sup> See Robert Fleischer, *Artemis von Ephesos und verwandte Kultstatuen aus Anatolien und Syrien* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 74-88.

<sup>34</sup> Bulbous amber pendants, dating from the Geometric period (900-700 BCE), have been found in archaeological excavations of the temple site of ancient Ephesus. These amber pendants resemble the shape and size of the oval objects and may well have adorned an ancient *xoanon* of the Ephesian goddess. Anton Bammer, "A Peripteros of the Geometric Period in the Artemision of Ephesus", *Anatolian Studies* 40 (1990) 152, 153, 157.

*kurša* that the Hittites filled with magic charms and fetishes.<sup>35</sup> This is a real possibility, but there are other suggestions about what these objects may be.

Knibbe, and others, believe the objects are bulls' testicles. The relative size (compared with, for example, the acorns) and shape of the protuberances match the size and shape of bulls' testicles. Following Gerhard Seiterle,<sup>36</sup> Knibbe writes, "On certain occasions, a series of bulls were offered to the goddess in bloody slaughter and . . . their testicles were fixed on the statue of Artemis."<sup>37</sup> If these objects are testicles, they probably symbolised the goddess's vitality. Knibbe believes: "This rite reveals the archaic concept that the power of the goddess was renewed in this way, so that she could in turn strengthen the world of nature . . ."<sup>38</sup> Lynn LiDonnici, following Robert Fleischer, writes however that "much of the reasoning behind [the objects being bulls' testicles] appears weak".

Another suggestion is that the protuberances are bees' eggs. The objects are the same shape as the eggs of the common bumble bee (*Bombus terrestris*) and other bees.<sup>39</sup> There is ample evidence that Artemis was associated with bees. Bees and winged "bee-people" feature on the side panels of her skirt. Also, in the early Roman period, one of her cult statues, known as the "Beautiful Artemis" was erected between two beehives carved of stone.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, in the Greek world, bees were thought to reproduce asexually and became a symbol of chastity. Artemis was considered a chaste virgin. (Quite unlike other goddesses, Artemis Ephesia is never associated with a male consort.) Bees became the symbol of

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<sup>35</sup> See Sarah P. Morris, "The Prehistoric Background to Artemis Ephesia: A Solution to the Enigma of her 'Breasts'?" *Der Kosmos der Artemis*, Ulricke Muss (ed.) (Wien: Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut, 2001) 135-151.

<sup>36</sup> See Gerhard Seiterle, "Artemis—die große Göttin von Ephesus", *Antike Welt* 10 (1979) 3-16.

<sup>37</sup> Knibbe, "Via Sacra Ephesiaca", 142.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>39</sup> In ancient times, the bees of Anatolia were known for their good honey production and non-aggressive behaviour. Honey bees were even exported from Anatolia. Anon. "Turkish Delight: Ancient Israelites Import Honeybees", *Biblical Archaeology Review* 36. 6 (Nov/Dec 2010)

<sup>40</sup> Inv. 718, Ephesus Museum.

Ephesus and appear on Ephesian coins, such as the tetradrachma minted in the early Hellenistic period.

There is no scholarly consensus as to what the protuberances may represent. Yet it is thought by some that, as well as the garlands of seeds and nuts, they are an indication that Artemis was a fertility goddess. In a similar vein, some scholars have assumed that Artemis Ephesia began as an Anatolian mother goddess, or was influenced by such a goddess, particularly Cybele, the Phrygian “Great Mother”.<sup>41</sup> While aspects of the Artemis cult may have been influenced by Anatolian cults in archaic times, Artemis was distinct from Cybele. Cybele and Artemis had their own separate cults in Ephesus.<sup>42</sup> If Artemis had begun as a fertility and/or mother goddess, there is no evidence of this in the Greek and Roman periods. Nevertheless, it is typically thought that the oval objects signify vitality in some way.

### **THE ANIMALS ON HER DRESS: “MISTRESS OF WILD BEASTS”**

Artemis wears a long, tight, sheath-like skirt, called an *ependytēs*, that reaches to her feet. There is a gathered frill at the base of the garment with just her toes visible. This garment is quite unlike that of other goddesses of the Greek world, and unlike the short chiton worn by the Greek Artemis. It is more typical of Anatolian gods, as is the rigid, upright stance of the statue, with the arms bent at the elbows in a right angle.

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<sup>41</sup> Nicole Loraux has cautioned against attributing the origins of goddesses on a hypothesised Great Goddess, as it can “obscure our understanding of the ways in which these figures met the needs of individuals and cities at specific points in antiquity.” Nicole Loraux, “What is a Goddess?”, *A History of Women* Pauline Schmitt Pantel (ed.) Arthur Goldhammer (transl.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 29; quoted by LiDonnici, “Images of Artemis”, 389. Furthermore, Budin notes, “Lynn Roller has argued convincingly that the goddess of Ephesos cannot be identified with the Anatolian Meter (“Mother”) or Kybele.” *Artemis*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> “The cult of Cybele was present in Ephesus for a long period of time (evidence exists of its presence in the fifth century BC and also in the late Hellenistic period, and times in between). But the archaeological evidence clearly depicts a Cybele different from Artemis even if not totally unrelated to her. . . . There is no evidence of Artemis and Cybele combined or associated in a cult at Ephesus . . .” Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis and the Jews in Ephesus* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996) 90.



On Artemis Ephesia's skirt are various protomes of animals arranged in rows, or tiles. Some of the animals are difficult to identify. Furthermore, while some protomes are of real animals, others are of mythical animals which look terrifying . . . or terrified. Morna Hooker identifies the animals as lions, griffins, horses, bulls, and bees.<sup>43</sup> The goddess also has two lions on each sleeve who are gazing up at her. On some surviving statues there is a disk behind Artemis's neck and head, possibly representing the moon, with still more creatures on it.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the "Beautiful Artemis" stood between two stags (as well as the two beehives) on either side of her on her pedestal.

In the *Iliad* (composed circa 800 BCE) the Greek Artemis is referred to as the "Lady (or Mistress) of Wild Beasts" (*potnia therōn*) (*Iliad* 21.470). This epithet, and the idea behind it, seems to have been attributed to the Ephesian Artemis during the Hellenistic period. The Ephesian goddess is covered and surrounded by animals and was thought to have power over them. That Artemis had authority over wild animals may explain the figures of real animals on her clothing, but what about the mythical creatures? Clinton Arnold, in his book *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, states:

. . . a single common feature may be discerned among all religious diversity in western Asia Minor: people had an extraordinary fear of hostile spiritual 'powers'. Through their practices and rituals . . . religion and magic claimed to offer relief from this oppressive fear, and even promised means of control over the dreaded demonic realm.<sup>45</sup>

As "Queen of the Cosmos" Artemis of Ephesus supposedly had authority and power over demons and over the demonic realm situated in the cosmic abyss. Thus the creatures

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<sup>43</sup> Morna D. Hooker, "Artemis of Ephesus", *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64. 1 (2013) 44. Fleischer notes that the animals are of Greek origin rather than near eastern or Anatolian. *Artemis von Ephesos*, 98.

<sup>44</sup> Artemis, along with Hecate, and especially Selene, were all regarded as lunar goddesses. Selene was sometimes identified with Artemis.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 167.

“appear to be in a posture of surrender to the great power of the goddess.”<sup>46</sup> Arnold states that the rows of animals “demonstrate the compelling authority [Artemis] was believed to have possessed over *all* powers since mythical antiquity.”<sup>47</sup>

The power of Artemis Ephesia was invoked in prayers and magic spells by her devotees. (Some aspects of pagan religion and magic were practically indistinguishable in the Hellenistic period.) Pausanias (not the travel-writer, but the lexicographer) wrote that the magical *Ephesia Grammata* “seem to have been written discreetly and obscurely on the feet, girdle, and crown of Artemis.”<sup>48</sup> The *Ephesia Grammata* were six “magic” words with no apparent meaning. Yet, they were popular and used orally, or in written form, for all kinds of magic spells.<sup>49</sup> No trace of the *Ephesia Grammata* has survived on any statues of Artemis, however.

## CONCLUSION

The Ephesian Artemis was clothed from head to foot in garments and decorations that signified her power. While retaining some Anatolian features, her appearance primarily signified that she possessed a vital power which included power over cosmic forces and astrological fate, as well as power of wild animals and demons. With this power, Artemis benevolently protected her city of Ephesus for over a millennium. As sovereign, she had a pervasive and potent influence on the daily life of the Ephesians, and they reciprocated by regarding their goddess with devotion and loyalty.

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<sup>46</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 21. (Italics added.)

<sup>48</sup> Pausanias, quoted by Eustathius, in his *Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* 19.247. Quoted in Arnold, *Power and Magic*, 23

<sup>49</sup> Fritz Graf, “Ephesia Grammata”, *Brill's New Pauly*. Antiquity volumes edited by Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider. Brill Online (2014).

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