

## ARTEMIS OF THE EPHESIANS

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Acts 19 provides clues as to the false doctrines: the goddess Artemis here bears the moniker "of the Ephesians" added to her name. She is worshiped both in Ephesus and throughout Asia. Her temple and cult are linked to the city's economy. Her temple has great renown. Her followers prioritize her honor. And they know that something relating to the goddess is Zeus-fallen (diopetous, διοπετούς; Acts 19:35).

Thus, the New Testament itself reveals a major religious context from which false teaching of concern to Paul likely originated: the Artemis cult. This background information did not originate with archaeology or inscriptions or linguistics or secular feminism. Scholars working in these disciplines do confirm details that appear in the book of Acts. But the idea that the religious setting in Ephesus might inform Paul's instructions to Timothy in his epistles to his protege comes straight out of the Acts of the Apostles. Scripture helps interpret itself

For hints about what challenges Artemis's followers might have brought to the church, one needs to know what followers of Artemis believed. What was Timothy up against? Were local teachings about origins and creation, deception, women and men, and childbearing on Paul's mind when he crafted warnings?

A husband-and-wife team, the late Drs. Catherine and Richard Kroeger, wrote a book, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence*, to answer some of these questions. They borrowed their title, "I Suffer Not a Woman," from the KJV text of 1 Timothy 2:12. The Kroegers asserted that the main goddess in Ephesus, Artemis of the Ephesians, was a mothering fertility goddess. Such being the case, they concluded that Paul's instruction about women teaching was written to counteract the teachings of Artemis's ancient fertility cult, which they said included temple prostitution. The Kroegers saw Paul's statement about the woman being deceived, coupled with his statement about prohibiting women's speech, as the apostle's solution for dealing with a local problem. They concluded that the apostle's phrase about being saved through childbirth was part of his apologetic against an ancient fertility cult involving sacred prostitution.

Looking at the literature, one can see how scholars building on the Kroegers' work might have come to believe Artemis in first-century Ephesus was a fertility goddess-to which they attributed Paul's focus on childbearing. One scholar who holds this view described the Ephesian Artemis, saying, "As the mother goddess, Artemis was the source of life, the one who nourished all creatures and the power of fertility in nature."

The argument goes something like this: Artemis as depicted in Ephesus had many breasts (see fig. 2.1). Breasts relate to mothering and fertility. So Artemis must be a mother goddess. Because the Amazons are deeply connected with the city's history, the combination of the mother-fertility goddess and Amazon man-hating gave the city an overemphasis on the female principle. In the Kroegers' assessment, a proto-Gnostic view prevailed among converts from the Artemis cult, and Paul was trying to put a stop to their practice of male-female role reversal.

This argument received bad reviews. Reputable Ephesus scholars discredited their conclusions, with key concerns being doubt about the Amazon connection, the lack of evidence connecting Artemis with mothering or fertility, and the late dates for the sources used. Oster observed that polymaston, or "many-breasted" - a word used to describe Artemis of the Ephesians-appeared only in late, polemical Christian sources. Jerome, writing in the fourth century CE, was one of these. Another respected Ephesus scholar asserted that a connection between Ephesus and the Amazons, whom he considered mythical, lacked support. The bad reviews sent a message: in the first century, no such pro-woman mentality in Ephesus existed.

Other scholars, rather than pointing to late dates in connecting Artemis with mothering, pointed to early ones. They saw Artemis as a conflation with a mother goddess in Anatolia dating between the fifth and seventh centuries BCE. But this assertion had the same problems with dates: the evidence was too far removed from the time of the earliest Christians to assure scholars that such thinking was still present at the time of Paul and Timothy. It appeared that some had created a "synoptic construct" when describing Artemis, whose identities across time had been conflated. What Bible interpreters really needed to know was: Who was Artemis of the Ephesians in the world of Paul and Timothy?

Many scholars have downplayed any Amazon connections, but open-air stone carvings in



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a temple in Ephesus dedicated to the emperor Hadrian tell a different story. The reliefs date to about 138 CE within 100 years of Paul and Timothy-and they feature Amazon women as integral to the city's origins.

Although sources seeing Artemis as many-breasted had late dates, and the idea of her as an Anatolian mother goddess had a very early date, one can establish that the Amazon connection was present at the time of the earliest Christians. The reliefs tell how these warrior women came from south of the Black Sea and founded Ephesus, which they named for their leader.

Many have described the Amazons as mythological. But archaeologists in the mid-1990s unearthed evidence of actual warrior women who lived near the Black Sea. The late American archaeologist Jeannine Davis-Kimball found their remains on the plains of Kazakhstan. TammyJo Eckhart, writing about Davis-Kimball's find, observed, "She discovered kurgans, burial mounds, in which both male and female skeletons were found buried with weapons, arrow heads and daggers .... The graves could be identified as belonging either [sic] Scythian, Sauromatian, or Sarmatian nomads living in the region between the seventh and fourth centuries BCE."

Later, Smithsonian Magazine reported on the excavation, saying:

The trail of the Amazons nearly went cold after Herodotus. Until, that is, the early 1990s when a joint U.S.-Russian team of archaeologists ... found over 150 graves belonging to the Sauromatians and their descendants .... There were graves of warrior women who had been buried with their weapons. One young female, bowlegged from constant riding, lay with an iron dagger on her left side and a quiver containing 40 bronze-tipped arrows on her right. The skeleton of another female still had a bent arrowhead embedded in the cavity .... On average, the weapon-bearing females measured 5 feet 6 inches, making them preternaturally tall for their time .... To the Greeks, the Scythian women must have seemed like incredible aberrations, ghastly even .... Strong, resourceful, and brave, these warrior women offer another reason for girls "to want to be girls" without the need of a mythical Wonder Woman.

About the same time, National Geographic ran an article in which an expert on the Amazons said, "The Greeks were both fascinated and appalled by such independent women" and depicted them "as beautiful, active, spirited, courageous, and brave." The article goes on to note that "Quite a few of the losers in duels are shown gesturing for mercy. But among Amazons, not so much. We have about 1,300 or so images of Amazons fighting. And only about two or three of them are gesturing for mercy. So they're shown to be extremely courageous and heroic."

Ample evidence exists from the late empire period that Ephesus indeed had a strong connection with the Amazon women. In the literary record, Strabo (63 BCE-23 CE), a Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian, cites both the Amazon version and the alternate story of Ephesus's founding. Possibly, both narratives circulated simultaneously, or people held to one or the other in the same era. In the iconographic record, statues of Amazon women stood for centuries in the temple of Artemis in Ephesus-one of which, rediscovered in the late nineteenth century, would have been there at the time of the earliest Christians.

In considering what cultural factors might have influenced Paul's instructions to Timothy, one must consider that the influence of Amazons might have been among them-especially because in addition to the stone reliefs in Ephesus, Strabo and others associated these women with the Artemis cult there. And one question leads to many more: If the Amazon narrative affected beliefs, how did they do so? Even if the Amazons were not connected with temple prostitution or mothering or fertility, who were they? Did Paul have concerns about women that related to false teaching coming from worshipers of the goddess Artemis with an Amazon connection? If Artemis and her Amazonian devotees were single, did the women in Ephesus seek to emulate their city's founders and the goddess they worshiped by remaining unmarried? If so, might that explain Paul's advice that young Ephesian widows should marry (1 Tim 5:14)-counsel that stands in contrast with his advice to Corinthian widows, who he thought should remain single (1 Cor 7:8)? Might a strong virginity mindset explain why the church in Ephesus, influenced by Gentile converts, was so full of single females that Paul needed to divide widows into three groups: younger women and two groups of older women, divided according to financial need (1 Tim 5:3-16)?

To understand who Artemis was in Paul and Timothy's day, one must examine the origin stories to which authors contemporary to Paul kept referring. These questions come at an opportune time, as several decades have passed since the Kroegers wrote *I Suffer Not a Woman*. Since then, archaeologists have uncovered many new inscriptions and artifacts, and heated debate has calmed down enough for scholars to approach the data with more openness. Epigraphic evidence uncovered in Ionia and across the ancient world has also become more accessible.

A deep dive into the primary sources is required-beginning with papyri, moving to inscriptions, and ending with statues and visual images. What do the primary sources say about Artemis's background? Who was she at the time of the earliest Christians? And how might knowing the answer shed light on what it means to be "saved through childbearing"?