

Is a cult statue more than the sum of its parts?

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Received: August 8, 2025 • Accepted: August 19, 2025

Published online: October 9, 2025

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ABSTRACT

Pliny asserted that the cult statue of Artemis Ephesia remained unchanged despite her sanctuary in Ephesus having undergone seven renewals. While some scholars concur with this view, others suggest the existence of multiple statues. This paper examines the history, materials, and structure of the cult statue by utilizing both material and textual sources. The primary inquiries are whether the sanctity of the cult statue is compromised by the replacement of its parts and how the contradiction regarding the existence of one or multiple statues can be resolved. In doing so, this study also reflects on how the statue's continuity contributed to the shaping of collective identity and the preservation of foundational tradition, both in Ephesus and in later contexts of Greek colonization.

KEYWORDS

Artemis Ephesia, Artemision of Ephesus, cult statue, composite statue, sacredness and continuity

Ephesus and Artemis shared a solid and inseparable bond throughout the centuries. The origins of this tight connection remain ambiguous to contemporary researchers; the citizens of the polis, however, believed Artemis was intrinsically linked to their city since her birth.¹ The earliest evidence of cultic activity in the temple of Artemis in Ephesus, referred to as the Artemision, dates to the 11th century BC. According to later tradition, literary sources, foundation myths,

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¹Strab. *Geogr.* 14.1.20; Tac. *Ann.* 3.61–63.

and ritual practices—such as the *Vibius Salutaris* procession² and myth-based commemorations of the goddess's presence, including celebrations of her birth³—emphasize the centrality of the cult statue in shaping the city's foundational sacred tradition and local identity. In addition to its general symbolic and ritual function, certain iconographic features of the statue may have reflected specific aspects of Ephesian tradition. One notable example is the wool fillets⁴ adorning the goddess's arms, visible in several representations. These could be interpreted as symbols of the Artemision's right of asylum,⁵ a sacred privilege that played a key role in protecting the city during periods of external threat. Through such elements, the cult statue not only embodied divine presence but also materially expressed the city's collective identity. The site was likely a cult place, but there is no proof of a permanent construction there.⁶ The oldest structure, identified as a sanctuary, originates from the eighth or seventh century BC.⁷ Although it is possible that Artemis was already the central figure of the cult at this time, its presence in the area can be verified only from the sixth century BC. By this period, the relationship between the city's inhabitants and Artemis had become a key element in the region's religious identity.

This deep historical and mythic integration is also reflected in the diverse traditions concerning the foundation of the Artemision itself. Two traditions exist concerning the establishment of the Artemision in Ephesus. Callimachus's hymn states that the Amazons founded the sanctuary,⁸ while Pausanias asserts that Coressus and Ephesus, semi-divine local characters and progeny of the Caystros River, founded it.⁹ Callimachus's text details the Amazons'

²On the inscription of Salutaris (Inschriften von Ephesos 1.27) and its connection to foundation myth and communal identity, see [ROGERS \(1991\)](#) 80–127. Rogers argues that the procession of cult images through the city ritually reenacted the city's founding narrative, linking sacred space, collective memory, and local identity.

³The birthday of Artemis Ephesia, celebrated on the sixth day of Thargelion (May/June), was one of the most important festivals of the polis. The festival included both a public celebration and a part connected to the goddess's mysteries. The *Curetes*, named after the mythical armed youths who protected Leto during Artemis's birth, played a central role in organizing the ceremonies. As Strabo 14.1.20 notes, the festival involved a banquet and a secret sacrificial ritual, the latter reserved for initiates. The earliest known source attesting to the existence of these mysteries is dated to 302 BCE (IvE 5.1449). For more on the mystery cult of Artemis Ephesia, see [ROGERS \(2012\)](#). For more on the festivals and celebrations in Ephesus, see [OSTER \(1990\)](#) 1708–1711.

⁴For a more detailed discussion of the interpretation of the woolen fillet, see [CORDISCHI \(1997\)](#) 25–38; [SEITERLE \(1999\)](#) 251–54; [FLEISCHER \(2002\)](#) 185–216; [CARSTENS \(2012\)](#) 135–41. [TURCSÁN-TÓTH \(2023\)](#) 113–22.

⁵The right of asylum at the Artemision was invoked from mythological times onward. According to tradition, the Amazons sought refuge there from Dionysos and Herakles; later, when the Ionian leader Androkles expelled the Leleges, the inhabitants of the Artemision precinct were spared (Paus. 7.2.8). Herodotus (1.26) recounts that, fearing an attack from Croesus, the Ephesians physically extended asylum across the city by fastening a rope from the temple columns to the city walls. In Strabo's time the sanctuary still held this status, and its territorial extent was renegotiated multiple times, from Alexander the Great to Mithridates and Augustus, until Roman authorities tried to limit the misuse of the privilege (Strabo 14.1.23; Tac. *Ann.* 3.60–63). The *Etymologicum Magnum* notes that those seeking refuge wore a wreath, carried wool fillets and a branch element which also appear in depictions of the cult statue, suggesting a symbolic link between Artemis's iconography and the sanctuary's protective function.

⁶[KERSCHNER-PROCHASKA \(2011\)](#) 76–77.

⁷Anton Bammer, the archaeologist who excavated the site, dated the building to the eighth century BC. Michael Weiss analyzed stratigraphic and pottery finds and concluded that it dates later, to the early seventh century BC ([BAMMER \[1990\]](#) 137–44; [WEISS \[2002\]](#) 321–26).

⁸Callim. *Hymn* 3.237–45.

⁹Paus. 7.2.7–8.

establishment of a statue beneath a beech tree, which subsequently became the location for the sanctuary's building.¹⁰

One of the most frequently asked questions in research on the cult statue of Artemis Ephesia¹¹ is whether it has remained the same over the 1,000 years of the cult's history.¹² As Pliny shows, the question may have been asked already in Antiquity.¹³ Most scholars agree that the cult statue was a wooden figure slightly smaller than life size, often referred to as a *xoanon*. Johann Friedrich Meyer, a German philosopher and aesthetician, proposed in the late 18th century that there may have been more than one cult statue. He believed that the first statue was lost in the fire at the Artemision in 356 BC, associated with the birth of Alexander, which necessitated the creation of a new one, suggesting that there were at least two statues.¹⁴

In 1950, the German classical archaeologist Georg Lippold posed a similar question. He argued, however, that the change was not due to the fire. Instead, he suggested that an aesthetic shift occurred, with a new form emerging during the Hellenistic period that replaced the old barbarian image.¹⁵

Elizabeth Lichtenecker, another German archaeologist and classical philologist, claimed that three sculptures existed. The oldest was a rudimentary, aniconic idol, supplanted by the Endoeus figure in the final decades of the sixth century BC.¹⁶ The statue was refurbished during the Hellenistic period, with alterations made solely to the ornaments, leaving the cult statue unchanged.¹⁷

The Austrian archaeologists Anton Bammer and Ulrike Muss, who have excavated the Artemision site at Ephesus for several decades, propose that there were three successive cult statues. Their contention is that the replacements of these sculptures were not undertaken for an aesthetic purpose, but rather as a result of two major disasters. The original statue was lost in a flood in the seventh century BC, while the second one was obliterated in the fire of 356 BC. It should be noted that the Artemision was situated in a region often impacted by flash floods.¹⁸

¹⁰TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 19.

¹¹For additional information regarding the research history of the inquiry, see FLEISCHER (1973) 124; TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 35–37.

¹²The cult of Artemis Ephesia endured for approximately 1,000 years, even within the most restricted temporal context. The name of the goddess first appeared in the sixth century BC. The onset of her cult's downfall can be traced to the third century AD when her temple (*Dipteros 2*) sustained significant damage from an earthquake. It was largely restored, although it never recovered its previous grandeur and significance. The decline became increasingly apparent with the ascendancy of Christianity, culminating in Ioannes Chrysostomus's destruction of the cult statue on his visit to Ephesus in 401. This occurrence may be seen as the end of the cult, Ps-Proclus, *Dialysis de Oratione Dominica* 20. For more on this see BENNDORF (1906) 104; KUKULA (1906) 269, no. 405.2. For a concise overview of the construction history of Artemision, along with additional literature, see TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 19–26.

¹³Plin. NH 16.79.213.

¹⁴MEYER (1794) 9.

¹⁵LIPPOLD (1950) 377.

¹⁶Pliny claims that the cult statue of the Archaic period sanctuary was crafted by the Athenian artist Endoeus, who was likely active in the latter part of the sixth century BC, Plin. NH 16.79.214. For more on Endoeus, see NEUDECKER (1997) 1026–27.

¹⁷LICHENECKER (1952) 171–72; FLEISCHER (1973) 124.

¹⁸BAMMER–MUSS (1996) 72–73; MUSS (1999) 597–98.

In contrast, Robert Fleischer, another Austrian archaeologist known for his extensive catalogue of the statues of Artemis Ephesia,¹⁹ follows Pliny the Elder. He asserts that there was only one cult statue.²⁰

Although Lynn R. LiDonnici did not examine the number of statues in detail, she suggested that Pliny's statements should not be understood as indicating that the statue maintained its physical identity but rather that it preserved its form. As this was not the focus of her research, however, she did not elaborate or provide extensive evidence to support this interpretation.²¹ LiDonnici's notion that the sculpture may have undergone physical alterations while maintaining formal consistency merits additional examination. In my previous research, I suggested that the Artemis Ephesia cult statue might be a multi-component work, with its elements in continual change, rendering it both modified and identical.²² This approach provides a new perspective on comprehending the nature of the cult statue. This study examines the impact of the continual change of the statue's components on its sanctity. My primary inquiry is whether the incremental substitution of the original components presented an issue regarding the sacredness of the statue for the contemporaneous people. Paradoxically, it may have been this very capacity for change that enabled the statue to preserve its sacred continuity across centuries—continuity that, for the citizens of Ephesus, was deeply intertwined with their perception of the city's origins and their communal identity.

I shall briefly present the results of my previous study, in addition to the sources upon which they rely. I will then analyse the perception of physical alterations to statues in relation to their sanctity in the ancient Greco-Roman culture. This research may enhance the comprehension of the cult statue of Artemis Ephesia and, consequently, offer insights into the perceptions of the holiness of religious artifacts in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Four ancient authors, Xenophon, Callimachus, Vitruvius, and Pliny, contributed information regarding the cult statue of Artemis Ephesia.²³ None provided a specific description nor indicated that the statue required replacement for any reason; rather, nearly all referenced the material from which it was constructed.

Xenophon states that the cult statue was made of gold.²⁴ He also reported that a cypress replica stood in the sanctuary of Scillus, Peloponnese, which was constructed in gratitude to the goddess for the lucky homecoming of the Ten Thousand.²⁵ Xenophon had visited Ephesus on two occasions, initially, to join the mercenary corps Cyrus the Younger was recruiting, and subsequently,²⁶ when the Ten Thousand successfully fought their way out of the Persian Empire.

¹⁹Currently, there are four catalogues of the representation of Artemis Ephesia. THIERSCH (1935) 1–85, conducted the initial compilation, followed by LICHTENECKER (1952) 33–68; FLEISCHER (1973) 1–39, with subsequent updates in (1978), (1984), and (2009). The author of this study assembled the fourth catalogue, TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 213–66.

²⁰FLEISCHER (1973) 123–25, (1999) 605–609.

²¹Unlike the previous studies and book chapters mentioned, LIDONNICI (1992) 396–404, especially 399, n. 39, highlights the alterations in the ornamentation of cult statues and their meaning, considering the social and political transformations in Ephesus rather than the number of cult statues.

²²TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 28–36, 202.

²³For additional information on this subject, refer to TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 28–34. cf. FLEISCHER (1973) 121.

²⁴Xen. *Anab.* 5. 3.12.

²⁵Xen. *Anab.* 5.3.1–12.

²⁶Xen. *Anab.* 2.2.6, 6.1.23. These lines from Xenophon merely imply his presence in the city but provide no indication of what he did there or whether he saw the cult statue.

The troops designated Xenophon to express gratitude to Artemis for their fortunate rescue. Xenophon was uncertain about his safe return home from Asia Minor, and so he went to the Artemision of Ephesus to deliver the offerings to the goddess via the high priest of the sanctuary.²⁷ It is uncertain whether he went to the Artemision on his first visit in Ephesus, but he should have observed the cult statue on the second trip.

Callimachus *Hymni* 3.238–39 informs us that the Amazons created the statue and established the sanctuary around it. Vitruvius 2.9.13 identifies the statue's material as cedar. Pliny provided the most comprehensive account of the cult statue. He documented the material (vine wood or ebony), the sculptor (Endoeus), and the priests' care of the statue. Pliny noted that information on the cult statue was derived from C. Licinius Mucianus' treatise on the eastern provinces.²⁸

Except for Xenophon, all other sources indicate that the cult statue was constructed from wood. What is the basis for Xenophon's assertion that the figure was made of gold? He had likely seen this cult statue during his tenure in Ephesus, in contrast to other authors who depended on indirect yet credible evidence. Xenophon's journey to the city was briefer than Mucianus', and it is uncertain how near he was to the statue.

Two potential interpretations exist for Xenophon's assertion: Xenophon may have seen the original statue but erroneously thought it was made of from gold. The sculptures of Artemis Ephesia reveal that the figure was embellished with jewellery and garments that concealed the major part of its surface, exposing just the face, hands, and feet. This practice was not unusual; for example, Pausanias mentioned numerous statues of deities that were barely discernible beneath garlands, ribbons, and textiles.²⁹ The *ependytes*, an apron-like garment attached at the waist and covering the lower body, were presumably composed of metal, as were the necklaces and additional ornaments on the breast. The outfit may have also included golden accents. Several small gold plaques from the seventh century BC have been excavated in the area of the Artemision,³⁰ some resembling the ornaments on specific extant replicas of the cult statue;³¹ this suggests such decorations served as embellishments for the statue's later attire, even during Xenophon's age. Alternatively, Xenophon may have briefly observed a golden effigy of the goddess during a procession and erroneously recognized it as the cult statue. Such

²⁷Xen. *Anab.* 5.3.4.

²⁸Mucianus was a first-century AD author, senator, and general who resided in Asia Minor for an extended period. At first, he escaped to that location from Rome following a dispute with the emperor; subsequently, he served as a soldier and ascended to the governorship of Lycia and Pamphylia, and then of Syria. In the final years of his life, he authored several works, including one on the sites of the Roman Empire. This is referenced multiple times by Pliny in his *Naturalis Historia*. Regarding the usage of Mucianus' contributions in the *Naturalis Historia*, see SALLMANN (1971) 45–47. For additional information regarding the life of Mucianus, see KLEIJN-EIJKESTAM (2013) 433–59.

²⁹A statue of Hermes in Athens' Athena Polias sanctuary did not show from under the myrtle branches (Paus. 1.27.1), in Titane the Asclepius sanctuary, a white woolen chiton and cloak covered the statue, making it impossible to tell if it was bronze or wood. Hygieia's statue in the same sanctuary was completely covered by the women's sacrificial locks and ribbons (Paus. 2.11.6), while Ino's statue on the road from Oitylos to Thalamai was covered in wreaths, making it impossible to identify, (Paus. 3.26.1).

³⁰For additional information regarding the gold jewelry and plaques discovered in the Artemision, see PULZ (2009) 63–140, 176–78, 183–98.

³¹A29, A44 This paper references the artifacts representing Artemis Ephesia as indicated in the most recent catalogue. TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 213–66.

processions occurred often in Ephesus. An inscription from 104 AD offers comprehensive guidelines for executing these ceremonies,³² including the tradition of transporting gold and silver effigies of Artemis Ephesia. Even though this inscription was created some four centuries after Xenophon's era, processions gained popularity during the Hellenistic period, rendering it conceivable that he had seen a golden statue at one of these occasions.

Vitruvius and Pliny mention three plants, cedar, vine, and ebony, from which the cult statue may have been made. Pausanias stated that sculptors of the old times used ebony, cedar, cypress, oak, lotus-plum,³³ or yew trees for their carvings; cedar was one of the most commonly used materials for wooden sculpture.³⁴ In his chapter on timber Vitruvius highlights the durability of cedar as the justification for using this wood in making the cult statue in the sanctuary of Ephesus.³⁵ We know little about Vitruvius' life, so that his journey to Ephesus remains uncertain; nonetheless, in book seven of his work, he lists the sources he reviewed, including the works of Chersiphron and Metagenes about the construction of the Ephesian Artemision. Chersiphron and Metagenes were the architects of the Artemision in the sixth century BC. Their texts remained accessible to Vitruvius in the first century BC. Therefore, while it is conceivable that he never beheld the sanctuary or the cult statue, his knowledge derives from a most credible source, if the two architects wrote the book he used.

Pliny *NH* 14 discusses vines and many grape varieties, dedicating a few lines to the vine as a kind of wood, although vine wood was not a typical sculptural material. He also mentions numerous objects crafted from it, particularly a staircase—or perhaps a ladder—utilized to climb to the top of the Artemision. Pliny also observes that these things were likely crafted from old vines growing in the forests.³⁶ Apollonius of Rhodes also mentioned a statue made of this material. The Argonauts created the image of Mater Dindymene from an ancient grape vine found in the forests of Mount Dindymon.³⁷

The other wood Pliny mentions, ebony, was regarded as a unique and precious material, frequently employed for carving statues of deities and heroes. Ebony, however, is not native to the Mediterranean so that it may have been used less than cedar. In several remaining replicas of the cult statue, the parts not obscured by the garment and adornments, the face, hands, and feet are made of black material, and this reveals that the sculptors who made these replicas saw the cult statue, and may also refer to the sculpture's original color (black) and, thus, its material (ebony). Pliny also says that the statue was treated with nard oil; this treatment could also darken the material, rendering it akin to ebony in appearance. This phenomenon was also common in other wooden sculptures.

³²*IvE* 1.27.

³³Pausanias is presumably referring here to the date-plum (*Diospyros lotus*).

³⁴Paus. 8.17.2. The use of cedar for this purpose is also mentioned by Plin. *NH* 5.1.1.

³⁵Vitr. 7. *praef.*

³⁶Plin. *NH* 14.2.9.

³⁷Due to severe maritime storms, the Argonauts were marooned near Cyzicus in North Anatolia. One night, Mopsus the seer receives a prophecy from a halcyon, a kingfisher(?), indicating that they must perform a purification rite in honor of Mater Dindymene to proceed with their voyage. For more on the Argonauts' purification rite, see GIARDINI (2023) 573–90.

All authors, except Xenophon, mention a type of wood as the material for the sculpture. The reasons for Xenophon's divergence from the others have already been elucidated. The source of Callimachus remains unidentified. Vitruvius and Pliny are deemed reliable sources. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the former is based on accounts from the sixth century BC and the latter from the first century AD. Nonetheless, Pliny discloses an additional, intriguing detail: the statue was made up of numerous parts.³⁸ It was constructed from many pieces rather than a singular block of wood. Several fragments from the seventh century BC have been discovered in the area around the Artemision, suggesting the presence of sculptures made from multiple parts.³⁹ They are a forearm,⁴⁰ an eye,⁴¹ a fragment of a finger or toe,⁴² a head,⁴³ and two faces,⁴⁴ which apparently constituted elements of anthropomorphic sculptures composed of multiple pieces. Their dimensions suggest they originated from four statues rather than from a single one.⁴⁵

The most intriguing objects for us are the forearm, the head, and the two faces. On the inner side of the forearm is a square opening for the forearm's connection to the body. The solution allows for two attachment methods: the forearm can be attached to the upper arm from below or from the side.⁴⁶ The second attachment method represents the more secure alternative: it may easily separate from the sculpture in the initial instance. The lateral connection is the same as the hand gesture visible in the sculptures today. The head and facial fragments lack the superior portion of the skull. In all three instances, the face ends in a straight line at the middle of the forehead. The head fragment is a visage sculpted on the convex surface of a half-cylinder. One of its eyes is damaged, and there are no ears. The contours of the eyebrows and eyes are profoundly engraved; perhaps they were filled with tar. A relatively deep cavity exists where the pupil would have been, potentially adorned with a colored semi-precious stone. The superior section of the head fragment features a rounded, planar surface.⁴⁷ The faces, carved on ivory slabs, are damaged with fractured necks. The back sides include a round aperture at the nasal level. Only one of the face fragments retained an ear, which was disproportionately huge compared to the other section of the face. The contours of the eyes and eyebrows are sculpted from the base material and then are made lively through painting.

³⁸Plin. NH 16.79.214: *Adicit multis foraminibus nardo rigari, ut medicatus umor alat teneatque iuncturas, quas et ipsas esse modico admodum, miror.*

³⁹RADNER (2001) 236–44; TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 40–42.

⁴⁰The nearly intact left forearm was excavated in 1971 next to the so-called *naiskos* (Efes Müzesi, Selçuk, inventory number 26/56/73), RADNER (2001) 236–37, 242–43.

⁴¹An out-of-context object, found in 1992, the exact location is unknown (Efes Müzesi, Selçuk, inventory number 116/75/92), RADNER (2001) 239–40, 244.

⁴²The upper phalanx (excavation number: Art. 71/K41), was found near the the so-called *naiskos* in 1973, has been lost, with just a description and an image remaining. RADNER (2001) 236–37, 242, Fig. 4.

⁴³Efes Müzesi, Selçuk, inventory number: 34/32/85; BAMMER (1988) 9, Abb. 12a–12b; RADNER (2001) 237–39, 244, Abb. 6.

⁴⁴BAMMER (1988) 7.8–9. Abb.; RADNER (2001) 238–39, 244, Abb. 7–8. Efes Müzesi, Selçuk, inventory numbers: 75/41/86, 74/41/86.

⁴⁵RADNER (2001) 234–36.

⁴⁶RADNER (2001) 236.

⁴⁷RADNER (2001) 237.

The two face forms—fixed to the cylinder and flat—represent the distinct assembly methods employed in the composite statue sculptures. The cylinder may be placed within a trunk, while the flat face can be secured to the sculpture core through an aperture at the rear. On all three objects, the head is sculpted to the centre of the forehead. In the cylindrical variant, the forehead's edge aligns with the cylinder's upper edge, creating a flat, relatively broad surface that accommodates the positioning of a headdress or veil.

The *polos*, the headdress of the Artemis Ephesian statues, are similarly positioned on the head, covering the upper third of the head and the forehead. In composite sculptures with a face carved on ivory slabs, the large ears would hold up the *polos*. For the cylindrical head, an alternative solution was implemented, as it lacks ears, with the *polos* positioned on the flat surface of the top of the head.⁴⁸

Karen Radner, an Austrian Assyriologist, supports and builds upon the observations of Muss and Bammer, that several goddesses were venerated at the sanctuary's site over a long period of time. This period concluded in the latter half of the sixth century BC, with the beginning of the construction of *Dipteros I*, when Artemis was chosen to take the sanctuary's central figure.⁴⁹ The ivory body parts were found alongside many smaller items, including gold foils, pins, fibulae, buttons, bracelets, earrings, and beads. Radner asserts that these were not only votive offerings but integral components of the costume of the goddess's sculptures. When the components of the composite sculptures or their decorative elements and jewelry became damaged, worn out, or unusable, the sanctuary's priests or attendants interred them within the area, akin to the ceremonial meal vessels. Notably, the arm, finger, head, eye, and face were deposited in different locations, which may have been a deliberate decision. The deposition of these artifacts coincides with the commencement of the archaic temple's construction. This era signifies the founding of the new sanctuary, which, as Bammer and Muss stated, concluded the rival clan cults of the preceding age.⁵⁰ Radner correlates the deposition of the body parts with this change. Nonetheless, there is no definitive evidence to demonstrate that these artifacts were associated with sculptures of distinct goddesses. The shrine may have contained several statues of the same goddess, and these artifacts were interred not due to the amalgamation of cults, but rather because their deterioration rendered them unusable. Radner cautiously addresses the connection between the fragments and the later cult statue of Artemis Ephesia, refraining from making a definitive claim about their direct linkage.⁵¹

⁴⁸RADNER (2001) 239.

⁴⁹Bammer and Muss claim that the devastation of the *peripteros* marked the onset of a new epoch in the history of the Artemision's *temenos*. Based on their analysis of the architectural remnants, they deduced that multiple deities might have held the sanctuary precinct simultaneously, with *Temple C*, the *Hekatompedos*, and other minor cult sites (A-D *Kultbasen*) functioning concurrently, signifying 'autonomous cults of local clans.' This 'competition' persisted until the mid-sixth century BC, when the veneration of Artemis Ephesia overshadowed all other deities. The tangible representation of this transformation was the construction of the *dipteros* (a temple type in which the naos was encircled on all sides by a double peristyle), financially backed by Kroisos, with Artemis as its central figure. BAMMER–MUSS (2009) 173–74. Not all researchers agree with Bammer and Muss. See KERSCHNER–PROCHASKA (2011) 102; KERSCHNER (2017) 48–53. For more details on each theory, see TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 23–24.

⁵⁰BAMMER (1988) 23; BAMMER–MUSS (2009) 173–74.

⁵¹RADNER (2001) 241–242.

Regardless of whether one accepts the theory of Bammer and Muss, the available evidence makes it highly probable that composite cult statue(s)—figure(s) assembled from multiple parts—existed in the Artemision over many centuries. Radner suggests that the fragments dated to the seventh century BC belonged to composite statues and considers it possible that one or more of these sculptures could have served as cult statues. If a part of such a statue broke or became otherwise damaged, the faulty element was deposited within the sanctuary area and replaced on the statue with a new one. Pliny the Elder, in the Roman period, reports that the joints of the cult statue required regular lubrication with oil to preserve the cohesion and structural stability of its parts; this account likewise points to the existence of a composite cult statue in a later period. Although no further evidence is available from the period between the Archaic fragments and Pliny's account, on the basis of these two attestations we may nevertheless assume that the cult statue of the sanctuary was a composite sculpture whose individual parts could be replaced in the event of damage. All of this raises a further question: how can a statue remain sacred when the very parts that compose it are continually renewed?

While not prevalent, it was not uncommon for cult statues or objects to be copied, repaired, or reconfigured in the ancient Greek and Roman world, particularly in cases of damage or deterioration.⁵² The objective for creating a duplicate may have been to mislead, whether with good or bad motives.⁵³ Two instances of the former are the Trojan Palladium and the Ancile;⁵⁴ replicas were created to save the genuine artifacts from theft, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch testify.⁵⁵ Libanius 11.112 tells how Antiochus II wished to copy the religious sculptures of the Cypriots. Unable to acquire the statues by coercion or larceny from the Cypriots, the king's emissaries resorted to deception. They requested authorization to create precise replicas of the statues and, upon completion, clandestinely substituted them for the originals. Consequently, unbeknownst to the Cypriots, they absconded with the original images. In such cases, the sacred essence of the original thing cannot be conveyed to the replica.⁵⁶

There are occasions when the objective of replication or restoration was to mend or recreate broken or deteriorated components, thus preserving the original content of the object.⁵⁷ When a cult object was damaged or destroyed, restoration consisted of not only repairing its physical condition but also of restoring its ritual efficacy and divine mediation. As Polly Weddle notes, “failure to restore a damaged statue could have serious consequences, such as perceived divine retribution in the form of famine or epidemics.” This belief was often reinforced by oracular pronouncements or communal religious traditions that linked natural disasters to divine displeasure.⁵⁸ This understanding extended beyond cult statues to sacred structures, whose preservation was essential for maintaining communal stability and divine favour. Notable examples include Romulus' cottage (*Casa Romuli*) and the ancient *Pons Sublicius*, the oldest bridge in Rome. Restoration of such structures, whether due to damage from storms, floods, or fires,

⁵² ANGUISSOLA (2007) 98–107.

⁵³ ANGUISSOLA (2007) 100.

⁵⁴ For more on the function of the Trojan Palladium see TÓTH (2019) 409.

⁵⁵ The Palladium: Dion. Hal. 1.69.3. On the *ancile*, Liv. 1.20.4, 5.54.7; Ov. *Fast.* 3.377–92; Plut. *Num.* 13.3.

⁵⁶ ANGUISSOLA (2007) 100–102.

⁵⁷ ANGUISSOLA (2007) 100–103.

⁵⁸ WEDDLE (2010) 189–90.

required careful attention to preserving their original form and materials to maintain their sacred function and connection to the divine. The importance of such restorations is underscored by ancient authors such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who described the maintenance of foundational Roman structures,⁵⁹ and Pliny, who emphasized the symbolic role of preserving original materials in sacred architecture.⁶⁰ Restoration thus played a dual role, safeguarding both physical integrity and spiritual efficacy.

Archaeological evidence supports another case: a clay metope from the temple of *Apollo Thermios* in Aetolia, which was likely created during restoration at the turn of the second and third centuries BC, and modelled after an earlier metope from 620 BC.⁶¹

Pausanias describes another instance where restoration was not feasible, necessitating the recreation of a sculpture. Near Phigalia, on Mount Elaion, was a cave that, according to local tradition, served as a refuge for Demeter because she was mourning the abduction of her daughter and because of her anger towards Poseidon, who had pursued her in the guise of a horse. The locals regarded the cave as sacred and erected a distinctive wooden statue of Demeter, which was later destroyed by fire. Following this loss, the inhabitants did not replace the statue, leading to the near abandonment of the cult. The land, however, became infertile, prompting them to seek the advice of the Pythia of Delphi. Acting on Apollo's guidance, they revived the goddess's cult and commissioned Onatas, an Arcadian sculptor, to recreate the statue. This recreation was not merely an artistic endeavor but a sacred act of restoring divine favor and reviving communal identity through the renewed worship of Demeter. Despite the original being lost to the fire, the artist, with the help of a drawing of the earlier cult statue or its copies and aided by divine inspiration, successfully reconstructed the cult statue—not out of wood, but of bronze.⁶² The decision, to replace the original wooden cult statue with one made of bronze, was driven by practical considerations, as the destruction of the wooden statue was caused by its vulnerability to fire. This choice, however, highlights how practical concerns may have overridden the preservation of every detail of the original cult statue, with pragmatic considerations regarding the selection of material taking precedence over traditional fidelity in reviving the cult. In this case, as Anguissola notes,⁶³ the mere identity of form was sufficient to ensure that the new statue carried the same sacral force as the original. The original features were the visible expressions of the same divine power, thus linking the old wooden image and the new bronze statue.

Creating copies retaining the significance of original cult objects was essential for replacing destroyed ones and introducing or disseminating a particular cult across different regions. According to Strabo, the Phocians carried the cult of Artemis Ephesia and copies of cult objects to their newly founded cities, including Massilia.⁶⁴ They worshipped Artemis in Massilia in the same manner as in Ephesus. We know about this Artemis of Massilia from coins, but her image is not identical to the Artemis of Ephesus with which we are familiar. Although the two figures

⁵⁹Dion. Hal. 1.79.11; Pensabene (1990–91) 115–62.

⁶⁰Plin. *HN* 36.23.100.

⁶¹ANGUISSOLA (2007) 104.

⁶²Paus. 8.42.1–7.

⁶³ANGUISSOLA (2007) 105.

⁶⁴Strabo 4.1.4; MALKIN (1987) 69–72; ANGUISSOLA (2007) 101. n. 9; TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 35–37.

share certain features—such as the *ependytes* (a garment covering the lower body) and the presence of a deer—several defining characteristics of the Ephesian Artemis are missing, including the multiple ‘breasts’ and the headdress known as the *polos*. Several scholars, such as Carmine Ampolo and LiDonnici, have suggested that the coins and possibly the Massilian cult statue reflect an earlier version of Artemis of Ephesus, dating back to the seventh century BC.⁶⁵ What this episode ultimately illustrates is not merely the transmission of a cult, but a conscious act of religious positioning. By choosing to carry with them the cult and sacred objects of Artemis of Ephesus—Asia Minor’s most powerful goddess—the Phocaean colonists placed themselves under the symbolic protection and authority of a divine power greater than their local traditions. This act did not erase their original identity but reshaped it: through the adoption of Ephesian religious elements, they projected their new foundation into a broader sacred framework. In this way, the cult statue functioned not only as a religious object, but as a symbol of affiliation—one that lent prestige, continuity, and mythic weight to the colony’s identity.

In ancient Greek and Roman religious practice, the sanctity of cult objects arose not from specific rituals but from the community’s acceptance of them as sacred.⁶⁶ Unlike ancient Egyptian practices, where rituals like the “Opening of the Mouth” or the “Mouth washing” in Babylon⁶⁷ were necessary to confer sacred status, Greek and Roman religion relied on the belief that these objects were inherently connected to the divine. In the Greek and Roman context, however, this transformation was often unnecessary, as the community’s or individual’s faith in the object’s sacredness sufficed to establish its divine connection. Thus, the value of cult objects lay not in their materiality or craftsmanship, but in the collective belief surrounding them. Creating replicas or restoring damaged artifacts was less about preserving physical form and more about maintaining their sacred role and continuity of divine function.

The statues of Artemis Ephesia suggest that the goddess had an elaborate and varying wardrobe. Inscriptions from Ephesus reveal that temple staff were tasked with adorning and dressing the cult statue, a process likely facilitated by removable and replaceable parts. This task may have been easier if certain parts of the sculpture could be removed and replaced.⁶⁸

Coins depicting the cult statue provide insights into these changes. During the transition from the first to the second centuries AD, two stages were added as companions of the goddess. Additionally, the so-called ‘breasts’ shifted in position. Initially, the lower rows appeared below the hips, but by the reign of Claudius, they no longer were below the hips. By Trajan’s time, these elements were entirely above the waist.⁶⁹ This progression suggests continuous changes in the decoration of the cult statue, raising the question of whether the changes also referred to its structure. I do not claim that the composite sculptural fragments discovered in the Artemision area were undoubtedly part of a cult statue of the period, or that they were identical to the later

⁶⁵ AMPOLO (1970) 200–10; LIDONNICI (1992) 389–415.

⁶⁶ The persistence of this phenomenon in a slightly modified form can also be observed in the Byzantine period. TÓTH (2019) 405–13.

⁶⁷ RADNER (2001) 253–55.

⁶⁸ For additional information regarding the inscriptions pertaining to the shrine’s personnel, see ENGELMAN (2001) 33–44.

⁶⁹ For more on the changes of the depiction of Artemis Ephesia on coins see TURCSÁN-TÓTH (2023) 43–53. cf. FLEISCHER (1973) 39–46.

cult sculpture. They differ in size, belong to at least four objects, and date to the seventh century BC—centuries earlier than the first known representations of Artemis of Ephesus. Moreover, as the ancient authors mentioned, these fragments are made of ivory, not wood. Features such as the positioning of the hands, *polos*, and garments suggest, however, that the cult statue may have been a composite sculpture, similar to the figures these fragments represent. The fragments appear to have been buried after being damaged, with new parts created to replace the originals. As seen in other examples, repairing or restoring a cult object, especially while maintaining its form, did not diminish its sacred character. This principle likely applies to this cult statue, which retained its significance despite constant alterations.

If the cult statue were indeed a composite structure with replaceable parts, two seemingly contradictory claims could be reconciled. Pliny's assertion that the cult statue remained unchanged through seven temple reconstructions could coexist with the scholarly opinion that multiple cult statues existed over time. This highlights the dynamic interplay between continuity and change in the sacred practices surrounding Artemis Ephesia. These practices reveal how sacred images—though mutable in form—were perceived as enduring in presence and meaning. Through this continuity, cult statues helped express identity, preserve foundation narratives, and provide symbolic legitimacy for communal self-understanding across time and space. In the case of Artemis Ephesia, this was manifest not only in the statue's visual and structural evolution within Ephesus—where elements like the wool fillets conveyed privileges such as the right of asylum—but also in its transposition to the context of Greek colonization like Massilia, where its presence facilitated a new religious and cultural identity grounded in Ephesian tradition.

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