

FROM ARTEMIS TO DIANA

THE GODDESS OF MAN AND BEAST

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Cover illustration: A wall tapestry from Egypt depicting Artemis. Dated to the 5th or beginning of the 6th century AD.

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A SANCTUARY FOR ARTEMIS IN THE LAND OF THE AMAZONS?

LUIS BALLESTEROS-PASTOR

Since ancient times, Themiscyra was considered the site of the Amazons par excellence. To this place on the Black Sea, next to the mouth of the mighty Thermodon, Heracles went to obtain the belt of Hippolyte. Theseus also travelled there, either alone or with Heracles. The Argonauts also passed by Themiscyra on their journey to Colchis.¹ The memory of the Amazons' homeland remained powerful, and when the Roman armies reached there, their generals strove to profit from the propagandistic effect which represented them as conquerors of these legendary warrior-women, thus emulating Heracles and Alexander the Great.² But, for lack of excavations, Themiscyra's links with the Amazons seem to remain solely in the realm of myth, without any traces which record that this legendary kingdom had its centre in this little village situated in a region considered for centuries to be at the edge of the world. A village which, however, was insistently sung about by poets and recorded by historians.

In this paper we will try to demonstrate that in Themiscyra there may have existed a sanctuary to the goddess Artemis, who is repeatedly linked to the world of the Amazons.³ Our deduction is based on an aspect that seems marginal in Appian's account of the siege of this place by L. Licinius Lucullus. Appian relates that the inhabitants of the town introduced bears and swarms of bees inside the tunnels dug by the Romans under the wall.⁴

At first sight, it could be considered only a stratagem which would reflect the fierceness of the fight. But the question is, why bears and bees? On one hand, the bear was an animal that could be found in the Greek forests as well as in those of Anatolia; on the other hand, the bees of Themiscyra were famous for their honey.⁵ But we might also propose another interpretation: the bears and the bees were both animals linked to the worship of Artemis. The bee, symbol of chastity and of domestic work, was also the

animal representation of the inversion of roles that the Amazon's world represented within the human world.⁶ The bee was in particular related to the Ephesian Artemis, whose sanctuary, so the legend recounts, was founded by the Amazons.⁷ Furthermore, the bee was present in the Athenian rituals of the *Thesmophoria*, devoted to Demeter, in which the women bore the ritual name of *Melissai*, and took the appearance of Amazons.⁸

The bear is an animal which is closely linked to Artemis. The maiden Atalanta was, under the protection of Artemis, suckled by a she-bear, when she was abandoned by her father at Mount Partenius. Iphigenia was, according to certain traditions, transformed into or replaced by a she-bear. The bear is also related to the myth of Callisto, who was changed into a she-bear as a punishment imposed by Artemis. Although the connection between this goddess and the bears was present in several Greek sanctuaries, in particular from the Peloponnese, the best attested example is undoubtedly the festival of the *Arkteia* which was celebrated in the sanctuary of Brauron. There the Athenian girls appeared disguised as she-bears, part of a *rite de passage* into womanhood. 10

The relation between Artemis Brauronia and the Black Sea was well known. As the legend says, Iphigenia returned from the savage lands of the Taurians to the sanctuary of Brauron. 11 There she would have placed the image of the goddess to whom she had been priestess. But the relation between bears and the worship of Artemis is also attested in Anatolia: the city of Cyzicus was located on a peninsula called "Of the Bears" (Arktonnesos), on which were Mount Arktouros, and Mount Dindymus which was sacred to Artemis.¹² We must also remember the connection between the worship of Artemis and the autochthonous cults of the Mother of the Gods: in the Pontic Kingdom, the goddess Mâ was identified with Artemis.¹³ The Romans related Mâ to Bellona, and linked her with the Moon as well. 14 In this same sense, Hecate was related to Artemis, and was worshipped at the mouth of the Halys.¹⁵ The Amazons have been considered priestesses of a moon goddess, and represented with shields like a crescent moon. But we must also remember that Artemis, as goddess of the waters and bearer of light, was regarded as protectress of navigation, and was also closely linked to the world of Greek colonization. 16 In the Black Sea, apart from the aforementioned examples, one could say that the places where Artemis was worshipped draw an almost continuous line along the coast in the region of Greek settlements.17

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The links between the Amazons of Themiscyra and the worship of Artemis are reflected in the works of several ancient authors. The most clear and illustrative accounts are those of Diodorus Siculus and Pompeius Trogus. Diodorus¹8 tells us that the first queen of the Amazons stood out among her fellows for her strength and for her qualities as leader. This queen may have founded the "great city" of Themiscyra, where she built a famous palace. She also conquered the neighbouring territories up to the Tanais River, and died fighting bravely. Her daughter devoted herself to emulating her mother, and, besides the sacrifices to Ares, performed others in honour of the Taurian Artemis. This second queen led important conquests from Thracia to Syria. Several generations later, Hippolyte was defeated by Heracles. "A few years after" this episode, Penthesilea fought in the Trojan War and was killed at the hands of Achilles. She was the last important Amazon queen. With her death, the strength of the Amazons diminished.

The account of Trogus (abbreviated by Justin)¹⁹ clarifies on one hand the former passage in Diodorus, but on the other makes it more complicated. According to this version, the first Amazons were the wives of a group of Scythians that, once expelled from their homeland by a faction of the nobility, installed themselves at the Thermodon. The death of the husbands in the war compelled the wives to take power in order to defend themselves from the neighbouring tribes. Just as with the Scythian princes who had led the exiles, there were two queens: Martesia and Lampeto, who made war alternately, and proclaimed themselves daughters of Mars. In the reign of Antiope and Orithya, Heracles kidnapped Melanippe, and Theseus, Hippolyte, sisters of those queens. Orithya, who was fighting abroad, convinced the Scythians to wage war against the Greeks, and this coalition was defeated by the Athenians. After Orithya, Penthesilea came to the throne. The Amazons that remained after the Trojan War subsisted with great difficulties, and survived until the time of Alexander, when Talestris united with him in order to conceive a child. After Talestris' death, the race of Amazons disappeared.

From these accounts, we can deduce that the link between the Amazons of Themiscyra and Artemis is clear enough. But the establishment of the worship of this goddess does not seem to have been an original characteristic of the Amazons, which in a first stage were only linked to Ares, as warrior-women.²⁰ This relation to Ares is a very common attribute in

the ancient ethnography when speaking about warlike peoples. We might think, for example, of the Scythians, to whose race it was said that the Amazons belonged.²¹ In this sense, we must take into account that Trogus speaks about two queens who are sisters, as Castor and Pollux were brothers, and clearly related to the Spartan realm.²² In fact, in the education of the Spartan women, we can find evident echoes of the Amazonic world.²³

The arrival of the worship of Artemis at Themiscyra would be represented by the myths in the second generation of Amazons, when Orithya (whom we could identify with the second queen cited by Diodorus) would have worshipped this goddess along with Ares, and would have trained her fellows in hunting and furthermore strictly preserved her virginity. In both accounts, Orithya belongs to the same time period as the arrival of Theseus and Heracles, and it is she who leads the attack against Athens. This may induce us to connect the worship of Artemis in Themiscyra with the arrival of Greek colonists, perhaps adapting local cults, which, as we have seen, may have been very widespread in Anatolia. In fact, Heracles appears repeatedly as a hero who civilizes the countries that he visits. ²⁴ This is also consistent with the image of Artemis as civilizer of the Taurians in some versions of Iphigenia's legend. 25 Likewise the archaeological evidence shows us that the relation to Artemis was not an original aspect of the Greek view of the Amazonic world, because this link was not generally disseminated until the last years of the 6th century BC.26 Most of the ancient writers recognized that in their own times the Amazons of Themiscyra had been wiped out.²⁷ In fact, none of the extant accounts of the wars between Rome and Pontus records any presence of Amazons in this town. This region of the Pontic coast was already part of the known world, and would have belonged to the *chora* of Amisos.²⁸ Several works from the first century BC., such as that of Theophanes of Mytilene on Pompey's campaign, might place the Amazons in Albanian territory, a remote and unknown region, that seemed a likely setting for mythical encounters.²⁹

That "palace" of the Amazons cited by Diodorus must have actually been a sanctuary of Artemis. Its location, near the sea (but not directly on the shore) and near a source of potable water, would have been similar to other sanctuaries of this goddess.³⁰ The use of living bears in the Themiscyrians' fight against Lucullus may indicate that they were preparing some kind of sacrifice to the divinity who protected this place. As J.-P. Vernant affirmed, Artemis is the goddess invoked in those moments in which

the fight becomes truly violent, those in which the division between the rational and the savage is blinded by the desperation of the warriors.³¹

Why does Appian not speak explicitly about Artemis rituals in Themiscyra? Firstly, we must keep in mind that this author records a favourable point of view towards Lucullus. It is for this reason that Appian dwells on a siege that does not represent an especially remarkable episode of this campaign, neither from the strategic point of view nor from the material one ... but it is remarkable from the epic point of view: through it we can establish a relation linking Lucullus with Heracles and Alexander.³² In the second place, Appian limits himself to summarizing his sources. In the third place, Lucullus must not appear to break the rules established by the divinity, because this Roman was favoured by a sign from Artemis Anaitis upon crossing the Euphrates.³³

In short, the worship of Artemis in Themiscyra may have arisen from the contact of the Greeks with a place particularly favourable for its wealth of fish and honey, for its estuary which favoured a location of cabotage, and as a route to enter a region of Anatolia especially rich in iron. In this place, previous autochtonous cults may have been adapted and at the same time "physical" and ritual support was given to the presumed presence of warrior-women, whose image the Greeks adapted to their world, with some aspects based on the Spartan model.

But Artemis was also the goddess of boundaries, and the Thermodon, without having the same significance as the Halys or the Tanais (not only physical frontiers, but also cultural and spiritual), was no doubt on the edge of the *oikoumene*, that area where civilization blurs into savage lands, where the real world appears veiled by the mythic and fantastic, and, also, where the males and females confuse the missions that the Greek spirit had assigned to each.³⁴ It is a real geography, but imaginary at the same time; a geography that is marked, as on many occasions, by the hunter goddess.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Kathleen Culver for the review of the translation. Selected references in Graves 1985, I, 440-445, II, 154-164; Argoud, des Courtils & Rémy 1988. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Second International Congress on Black Sea antiquities (Ankara 2001).
- 2 Daumas 1992; Ballesteros-Pastor 1997; *idem* 1998, 80-81; Baynham 1991.
- 3 On Artemis: Wernicke 1895; Graves 1985, vol. I, 99-103; Gantz 1993, I, 97-99. On her relation to the Amazons: Tyrrell 1984, 55, 77, 86; Blok 1995, 312-316, 420-424.

- 4 App. *Mith.* 78. On this stratagem, see also Aen.Tact. 27.4.
- 5 Arist. *Hist.an.* 5.22 (554b); Plin. *NH* 11.19.59; Ael. *NA* 5.42.
- 6 Detienne 1974, 60-68; Vernant 1979, 110-114.
- 7 Talamo 1984; Graves 1985, vol.II, 156; Fleischer 2002.
- 8 Detienne 1979, 210-211; Tyrrell 1984, 69-71; Dowden 1997, 127.
- 9 Graves 1985, vol.I, 101, vol.II, 368.
- 10 See in particular: Dowden 1987, 9-47; id. 1989; Brulé 1987; id. 1990; Sourvinou-Inwoood 1988; id. 1990; Grebe 1999; Gentili & Perusino 2002; Ekroth 2003, 62-66; Cole 2004, 210-230.
- 11 Graves 1985, vol.I, 93; Gantz 1993, vol.I, 99. On the origins of that myth and its relation to Brauron, see Ekroth 2003.
- 12 Ap.Rhod. 1.985-986, 1149-1151; Plin. NH 5.32.141; Strab. 12.8.11; App. Mith.76; Val. Fl.3.20-23.
- 13 Wernicke 1895, c.1374; Olshausen 1990, 1887. See also her relation with Orestes: Cass. Dio 36.11.1; Paus. 3.16.7-8; Procop. Pers.1.17.13; cf. Strab. 12.2.3, 12.2.7; Ballesteros-Pastor 2000, 144.
- 14 Lunais 1979, 86-92. On Bellona and the Amazons, see Val. Fl. 4.603-605.
- 15 Ap.Rhod. 4.244-246. On the relation between Hecate and Artemis, see Wernicke 1895, cc.1356-1357; Lunais 1979, 140-150. Hecate received libations with honey (Ap.Rhod. 3.1035-1036). The Goddess from Pessinus is called Artemis in Polyaen. 8.39. Men, god of the Pontic dynasty, was also a moon god: Olshausen 1990, 1887. On the relationship of that region of the Euxine to the Underworld, see Ballesteros-Pastor & Álvarez-Ossorio 2001, 10-11.
- 16 De Polignac 1997, 169-175. On the Amazons as priestesses of the moon, see Graves 1985 vol.1 444. On that description of the shield in literary sources, see Verg. Aen.11.663; Sen. Phaedr. 402-403; Ag. 218; Med. 214; Sil. Pun. 8.429.

- 17 Wernicke 1895, cc.1408-1412. On the worship to Artemis in the Pontic Kingdom, see Olshausen 1990, 1874-1875.
- 18 2.45-46.
- 19 Just. *Epit*.2.4; Oros. 1.15. The accounts of Trogus and Diodorus could have derived from Ephoros (Dowden 1997, 110-111).
- 20 See further, e.g.: Ap.Rhod. 2.385-386, 967; Val.Flac. 4.601-603; Lys. 2.4; Apollod. 2.5.9; Blok 1995, 312.
- 21 Dowden 1984, 41-43; 1998, 107-114; Blok 1995, 409-419. On the Scythian cult to Ares, see Hartog 1974.
- 22 Cf. Graves 1985, vol. I, 305-312. The diarchy of the Amazons appears also in Ap. Rhod. 2.386-7. A diarchy of two brothers appears also in other myths of foundation in Trogus (Just. *Epit.* 2.4.1-2; 43.2.1-3.1), and in Arrian's account of the origin of the Parthian Empire (Arr. *Parth.* fr. 1 = FGrH 156 F 30).
- 23 See Fantham et al. 1994, 59; Arrigoni 1985, 69; Hinge 2003, 64-65. On the relations between the Spartan rites de passage and those of Brauron, see Vernant & Vidal-Naquet 1987, II, 37-41.
- 24 See Galinsky 1972; Lacroix 1974; Jourdain-Annequin 1990; Mele 1996, 153-161.
- 25 Callim. 3.174-5.
- 26 Blok 1995, 312-315, 328, 403.
- 27 See, for instance, Sall. *Hist.* fr.3.73M; Strab. 11.5.4; Mela 1.150.
- 28 Strab. 12.3.9.
- 29 FGrHist 188 F1 (apud Plut. Pomp. 35.3-4). However, Theophanes insists on their identification with the Amazons from the Thermodon.
- 30 Dowden 1987, 35-36; Cole 2004, 186-187, 192-194.
- 31 Vernant 1988; Ellinger 1993; Cole 2004, 188-189.
- 32 Vide supra n.2.
- 33 Plut. *Luc.* 24.4-5; Ballesteros-Pastor 1998, 81.
- 34 On that significance of the river Thermodon, see Ballesteros-Pastor & Álvarez-Ossorio 2001, 7-9.

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