

## Inscriptions Writing History: Locating and Connecting the Cult of Artemis Amarysia to Epigraphical Finds at Amarynthos

Artemis Amarysia was a powerful cult figure in Euboea from the Neolithic period to the Byzantine period. The deity's preeminence within the greater Eretrian *polis* guaranteed the Artemision as Euboea's most renowned shrine, sacrosanct to the identity and *ethnos* for all of Euboea (Fachard 2017). This paper looks at the recent epigraphical discoveries made by ESAG's Amarynthos project, that provides the location for, aid in the identification of, and gives information on the socio-political factions of the cult, shedding light on the Artemision's international spheres of influence within the greater Hellenic world.

Ancient literary sources, inscriptions, and material finds have definitively confirmed the site of the Amarynthos (Reber 2018). The epigraphical and literary evidence is crucial since archaeological remains primarily survive as spolia in nearby local churches (Verdan 2021). Amarynthos clearly had a sanctuary because as the "high-goddess of the Euboeans," Artemis was so important to the region, both politically and ideologically (Nilsson 1906). Without these epigraphical finds, the placement of Amarynthos would have been largely improbable.

Amarynthos has consistently been occupied since the Bronze Age, particularly on the slopes of the Paleoekklisies Hill. Material finds near the base of the hill include Mycenaean wheel-made figures and pottery sherds dating to the EH, MH, and LH periods. A Linear B tablet found in Thebes incised with the toponym *a-ma-ru-to*, suggests the reference to a settlement at Amarynthos (TH Of 25). Together, this uncanny etymological connection and material finds substantiate a long-established occupation of this site since the Bronze Age.

Classical and Hellenistic inscriptions found in Amarynthos' gymnasium, an *epiphanestatos topos* or privileged storage place of public documents (Ducrey 2018), preserve festival regulations

and military treaties that reveal how the Artemision “played a pivotal role” by “acting as a middle-ground to resolve disputes and forge a collective identity” (Verdan 2021). Benefactors erected honorific dedications, while laws were erected regarding the establishment of and regulations for sacrifices pertaining to the cult of Amarysia. Military documents carved onto stone, like one between Eretria and its rival-city Histiaia, declare that this document was to specifically be erected here in this gymnasium. An inscribed stele recalls a semi-mythical war between Eretria and Chalkis, further placing the site at Amarynthos within the historical and cultural landscape of the Euboean region.

The epigraphical sources found at Amarynthos, and the iconography inscribed onto them, give insight towards the ideological and socio-political activities of the site, especially when connected to the cult of Artemis Amarysia and the Artemision. A dedicatory bronze inscription is thought to be “clearly related to cultic activities” (Verdan 2021), while pottery scratched with graffito references the image of an archer god or hero, possibly even Artemis herself. A fragmentary marble base mentions the “ὁ δ[ῆμος ὁ Ἐρετριέων],” a recorded model seen contemporaneously in three other places (*IG XII 9, 276-278*). This pedestal would have supported a bronze statue of an Artemisiac Triad, depicting an image of Artemis, Apollo, and Leto. Another copy was discovered as spolia in a nearby Byzantine church with the same inscription.

The influence of Artemis Amarysia and her cult following was so extensive it reached beyond Euboean borders; visitors from outside the *poleis* traveled to Amarynthos to join-in on the Artemisia’s festivities. Satellite sanctuaries also existed, like the Athenian deme of Athmonon in modern-day Marousi. While it was geographically separated from Amarynthos, people celebrated a festival similar to the Artemision. An official 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian document mentions a “[sanctuary] of Artemis Amarysia from Athmonon” (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 426, 65-69*). The sanctuary also had a

possible connection to the same Amarysian deity worshipped at Amarynthos (Paus. 1.31.5). The socio-political influence of the cult following of Artemis Amarysia at Amarynthos was wide-reaching and deeply-rooted in the Euboean region. The archaeological discoveries of ESAG's Amarynthos project, specifically the inscriptions in conjunction with material from Thebes and Athens, have been crucial in helping to explain and understand the festival of Artemision and the cult's standing within the larger context of the Hellenic world in antiquity.

### Bibliography

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