

## Stuck in Middle: The Liminality of Artemis at Ephesus

Artemis has been defined as a liminal goddess by scholars since twentieth-century French structuralists first associated her with the transitional phase of rites of passage. Their work inspired many later scholars, including Jean Pierre-Vernant, to emphasize this idiosyncrasy of Artemis, characterizing it as an inextricable factor of her position within her cult (Vernant 1991). Although broad socio-anthropological theories such as this are often criticized due to their generality, liminality has still served as the basis for our understanding of Artemis and her cult today.

Much of the scholarship surrounding Artemis has focused on her rural iterations, which are easily associated with liminality due to the nature of the *eschatia*, or uncultivated land. Few have analyzed her representations as a city goddess, such as Artemis Ephesia (Budin 2016, 143). This paper aims to determine what qualities of Artemis Ephesia can be attributed to her liminality.

This investigation is primarily achieved through an analysis of the liminal characteristics of her sacred landscape and the transitional nature of her role within the cult, including fertility, city protection, and various ritual practices. Her sanctuary, particularly in terms of its landscape, is considered using literary, archaeological, and geologic perspectives to ensure accuracy and view the area within its time period (Kraft et al. 2007). Ancient authors such as Pausanias have emphasized the marshy landscape of the sanctuary next to the Selinus River, which here highlights not only the liminality of the landscape, but also her role as a fertility goddess (Léger 2015, 15). This type of landscape is a key factor in emphasizing her lordship over transitional areas of human life and nature (Cole 2004). Furthermore, her Ephesian sanctuary corresponds better to her rural sanctuaries that emphasize her liminality than those that emphasize the

integration of the goddess within the *polis*. Its location outside the walls of the city can be characterized as marginal, transitional, or peripheral and as a liminal space between the realm of the living in the *polis* and the chthonic space of the *eschatia*, exemplifying the binary construct of liminality by the French structuralists (Endsjø 2000, 370).

There is also a wealth of archaeological evidence at Ephesus indicating her role there as *kourotrophe*, or child-nurturer. Fertility, specifically pregnancy, is a period of liminality for woman and child. Evidence for Artemis as a fertility goddess, and therefore a goddess in charge of transitions, includes not only the little-understood polymastic statue, but also gold appliques and body part votives, such as vulvas (Léger 2015, 116, Cole 2004, 214). This role as *kourotrophe* was not limited to mortals, rather it extended to bringing fecundity upon the marginal landscape during her procession on the Via Sacra (Rietveld 2006, 120). At Ephesus Artemis is syncretized with other goddesses, primarily Kybele and Hekate, who themselves are often characterized as representing the dualities of life and death (Roller 1999, 114). This syncretism helps emphasize these same characteristics of liminality within Artemis.

In this paper I present a preliminary investigation of elements of the cult and divinity of Artemis at Ephesus and explore the accuracy of “liminal” as a descriptor for the goddess in a broad context. I argue that the cultic aspects of Ephesia demonstrate that even the urban Artemis, a version perhaps antithetical to her popular conception, displays much of the transitional nature scholars use to emphasize her liminality in rural settings.

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