



Recent Excavations at the Altar of Artemis in Ephesus

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Excavations at the Altar of Artemis at Ephesus in 1973.

Recent Excavations at the Altar of Artemis in Ephesus

One of the major cities of the ancient Mediterranean world, Ephesus is situated on the western coast of Turkey, near the modern village of Kushadası. Extensive Hellenistic and Roman remains give testimony to the greatness which the city once enjoyed; among the ruins, one finds today the scant remains of the Temple of Artemis, a structure dating from the fourth century B.C. It ranked among the seven wonders that were famous throughout the pagan world.

The history of the temple is a very complex matter. Excavations at Ephesus began in 1869 under the direction of an Englishman, John Turtle Wood, who conducted his fieldwork there until 1874. Wood succeeded in locating the temple, which was completely buried, and more than twenty years later in 1895, the Austrian Archaeological Institute took up where he left off. Archaeologists from the Austrian Institute have worked at the site intermittently from then until the present time. They

have uncovered vast portions of the Hellenistic and Roman city and have made some important discoveries in the Sanctuary of Artemis, otherwise known as the Artemision. It is on their most recent excavations that I make this report.

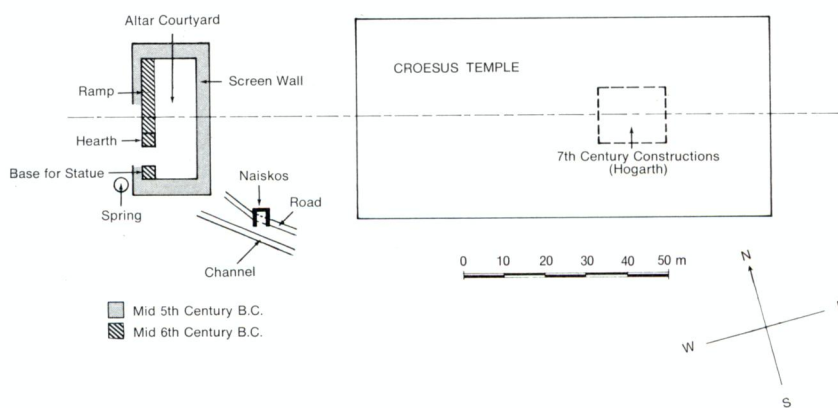
The bulk of the Austrian work at the temple site followed that of an Englishman named G. D. Hogarth, who explored the temple during 1904 and 1905. Hogarth had to labor under extremely difficult conditions; the building was below the level of the water table, and he was forced to use pumps constantly. Despite such circumstances, he successfully unraveled several of the temple's construction periods. Under the pavement of the Archaic temple he found some enigmatic remains from the seventh century B.C. It was he, in fact, who identified the Archaic or so-called "Croesus" temple, an impressive monumental construction which, according to historians, was left unfinished when the Lydian King Croesus conquered Ephe-

sus in the middle of the sixth century B.C. Croesus destroyed the city but left the sanctuary untouched; he even donated several sculptured column drums to the temple. This temple burned down some two centuries later and was replaced by the elaborate fourth-century construction which was destined to be called one of the wonders of the world.

From the very beginning of the archaeological quest, investigators were searching for the altar of the temple. Strabo, the Greek geographer, recorded that the altar associated with the fourth-century structure was filled with statues by Praxiteles, a statement which made the Austrian excavators particularly eager to find it. But not until 1965 did a deep trench dug on the west side of the temple bring to light some of the foundations that belonged to the classical altar. In the course of further investigations, additional information emerged about the earlier Archaic altar and even the early structures beneath it; but with each new find, new problems also arose, and very recent excavations have both illuminated these problems and posed fresh, intriguing dilemmas.

Situated remarkably close to the sea's ancient shoreline, there is a fresh-water spring which seems to have served as a sacrificial place, possibly as early as the tenth century B.C. when the area was invaded by seafaring Greeks. This site's proximity to the seashore may explain why the Greeks chose it. In any event, there are also remains of an ancient road which leads to the spring, and there are indications that a seventh-century cult was located by it. Around the middle of the seventh century, the Ephesians built a small *naïskos*, or shrine, on this road, and in the course of our excavations we found the charred bones of animals burnt for sacrifice together with small votives and pottery sherds. The sherds included examples of the orientalizing and Corinthian styles, and among the votives was a bronze griffin similar to those from Olympos, Miletos and Samos, sites where griffins were used as protomes on large bronze vessels.

We also uncovered several ivories. One, the lower part of a female, may be a fragment from a statuette of a priestess or a goddess, for it has parallels with several statuettes discovered by Hogarth. Another is an ivory ram with a cross-like incision, which was probably once attached to some larger object; indeed, it may have served originally as inlay on a throne together with several

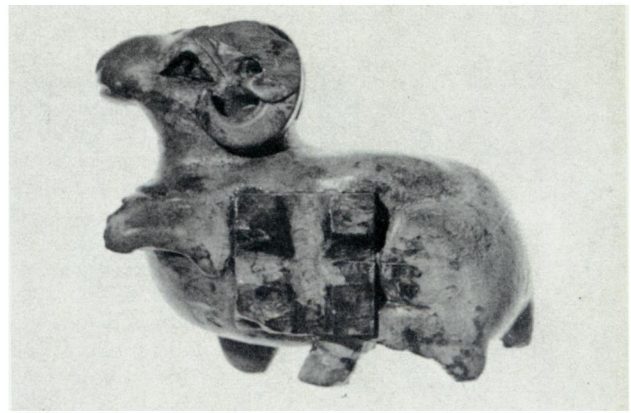


Early structures in the Artemis Sanctuary.



Archaic bronze griffin.

Ivory ram which may have once decorated a throne.



pieces of furniture decoration. Additional finds include a faience hawk and two polychrome terracottas, one a oriental-type head and the other a Daedalic statuette.

The most puzzling of the finds from this particular vicinity is a group of transparent crystals, whose concave surface produces a reducing effect, that is a diminished image of the kind one sees in the bowl of a spoon. These rock-crystal "lenses," as we might call them, have counterparts on Thasos, Paros and Samos, where they have been identified as pedestals for alabaster or oil jars. In my opinion, their transparency and image-reducing capacity strongly suggest that they were used as optical instruments; moreover, since they, like all these other objects, seem to have had considerable value, it might be reasona-



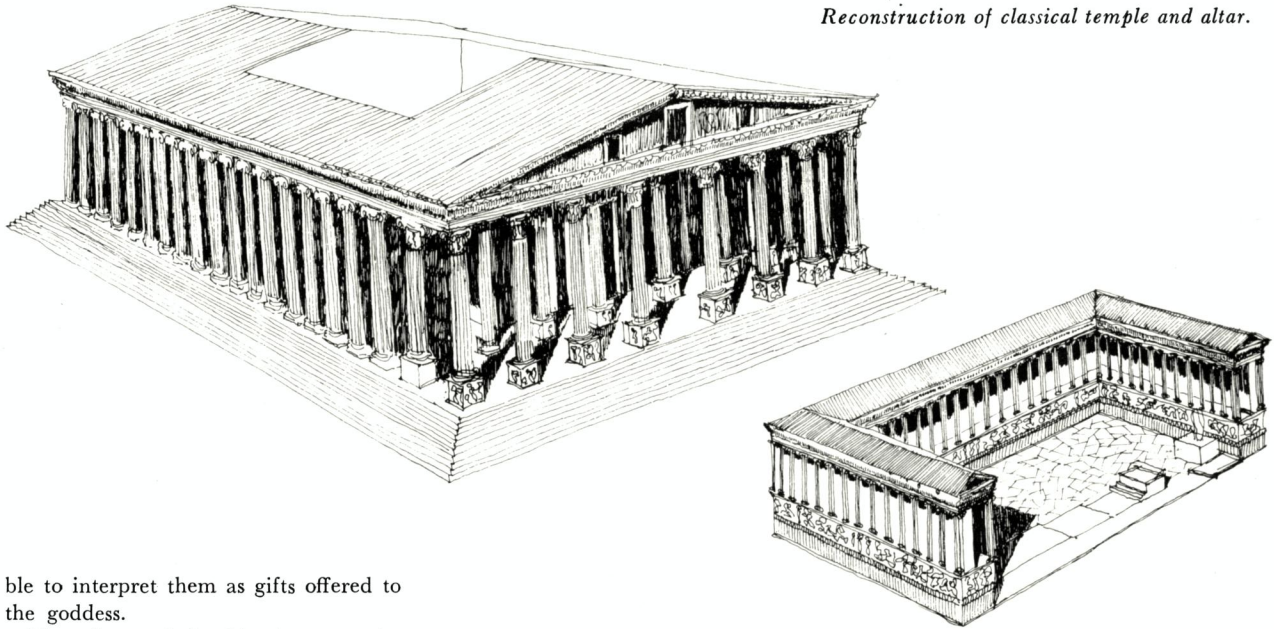
Head of terracotta statuette.



Daedalic statuette.



Rock crystal.



ble to interpret them as gifts offered to the goddess.

The close relationship between the artifacts we found and the material Hogarth found within the temple area itself, which is removed from the shoreline, raises several questions about the nature of the early cult. Did two offering places exist within one sanctuary? Or were there two distinct sanctuaries, each used for the worship of a different deity? It is difficult to say, but the original inhabitants may well have worshipped their nature goddess in a location separate from the one the Greeks selected for the practice of their cult. If so, the archaeological remains may give testimony to the beginning stages of the Hellenization of the Asiatic mother goddess and to a time when the two goddesses existed independently. Their assimilation must have been a gradual process, for only later are we certain that a single great nature goddess was worshipped at Ephesus.

THE ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL REMAINS

In the sixth century B.C. at about the same time as the construction of the Croesus temple, the seaside sacrificial area was covered over by a large floor of compacted earth. Here a new altar was built, one which formed the foundation of the eventual classical altar of Artemis. It consisted of a square base which was used as a hearth for animal sacrifices. A ramp led to it from the north. To the south of the hearth another square base was built; the mason's marks on it can still be seen. It is possible that the cult statue stood on this

second base during sacrificial ceremonies; the priest would then approach with a procession from the north which led him down the ramp to the hearth. Here he would make the sacrifice in view of the statue, which, for this occasion, had been brought especially from the temple. The earthen floor is large enough that a great many people could have taken part in the ceremony.

Several remarkable changes were made in the appearance of this altar during the first half of the fifth century B.C. A screen wall, U-shaped in plan, was built to enclose the altar area. It blocked the view from the temple and thereby probably shielded the ceremony from the gaze of the regular populace. Only privileged men, it seems, could now participate in the sacrifice, a situation which may reflect certain cultural and political events. The sixth century had been a time of progress and rationalism graced with great Ionian philosophers and scientists, and in the subsequent centuries these qualities seem to have disappeared. The upheavals caused by the Persian invasions of the early fifth century were surely a factor in their disappearance.

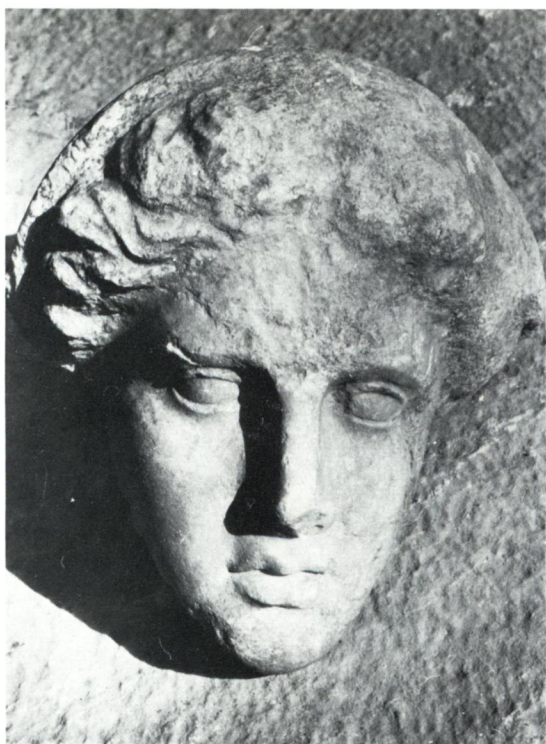
Following the fourth-century burning of the Archaic temple, the altar once again took on a new shape. The base of the screen wall and the hearth were reused as foundations for new constructions. Reliefs covered the screen wall, which now stood above a marble socle carved in a form of a fence, apparently in imitation of an older wooden fence which had previously surrounded the al-

tar area. One of the reliefs was found in 1900 near the theatre; on it was carved the figure of an Amazon. Then, just two years ago in 1972, we unearthed a female head which probably came from this same frieze. Ionic columns stood on top of the frieze and completely surrounded the screen wall. This elaborate monument, which rose to a height of 10 meters, was to influence the design of two later famous altars, the Altar of Zeus at Pergamon and the Ara Pacis in Rome.

The only Hellenistic remnant we found associated with the altar is the head of a horse, perhaps from a quadriga. There is an inscription on one of the altar's anta, surviving from the Roman period, telling that G. Domitius Ahenobarbus, a partisan of Marcus Antonius, was a patron of this sanctuary. In the sixth century after Christ, the altar of Artemis was brought to ruin together with the temple. Both monuments became sources of stone for later constructions, among them the nearby Byzantine Basilica of St. John, one of whose pilaster capitals was cut from a stone taken from the remains of the pagan temple.

Much more remains to be done, and the Austrian Archaeological Institute plans to continue its investigations in the Artemis Sanctuary at Ephesus.

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Female head from the frieze.

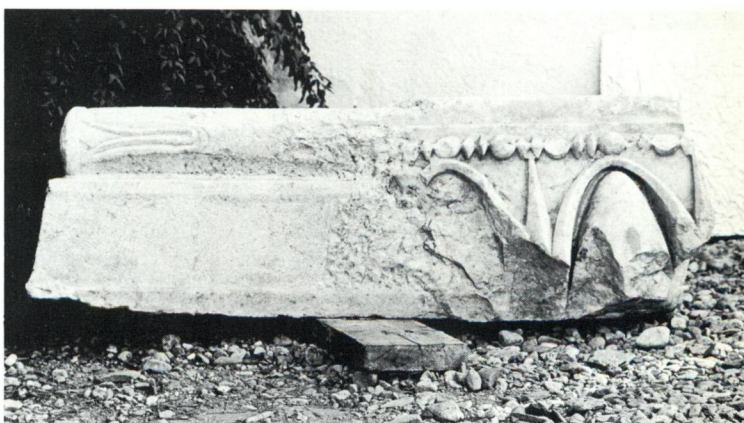


Hellenistic horse's head.



A limestone head, perhaps Cypriote, is associated with the Archaic altar.

Late Roman Republic inscription on an anta of the altar.



Byzantine capital cut from a stone which was originally used in the temple of Artemis. The classical egg and dart moulding has been retained.

