EPHESUS
The New Guide

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THE ARTEMISION [1]

The sanctuary of Artemis of Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, was discovered and excavated at the end of 1869 on behalf of the British Museum by J.T. Wood, a British railway engineer, after a search of seven years. His successor, D.G. Hogarth, also working for the British Museum in 1904/05, excavated not only this monumental building, but also older structures in the so-called "central base area" in the interior of the temple courtyard. Excavations were resumed by the Austrian Archaeological Institute in 1965 and continue to this day. This work has brought to world attention not only the temple, first built by Croesus in the mid-6th century BC and re-erected after destruction by arson in the late fourth century, and the great courtyard altar, but also the central base in the interior of the temple. A re-examination of the latter led to the extraordinary discovery of a peripteros temple of the 8th century BC, the oldest known example of post-Mycenaean Greek monumental architecture. In connection with this building, a significant hoard of objects was discovered which mainly consisted of amber, most probably part of the pectoral ornamentation of a cult figure.

The reputation that the Artemision enjoyed brought it many votive gifts. During the archaic period in the 7th and 6th centuries BC, it had a special relationship to Sardis, capital of the Lydian empire. This is reflected not only in the initiative shown by the Lydian kings in building the archaic temple, which according to Herodotus (i.92) was also called the Croesus temple because of the columns which the Lydian king donated, but also in the existence of certain types of pottery that are only found in Ephesus and Sardis (e.g. the so-called Ephesian ware). Animals such as rams, peacocks and oxen stand out among the votives figurines along with gold and ivory representations of goddesses (Ephesus Museum Selçuk, Room 6).

Fig. 1: Cult base made of slabs of local chalk marble from the 7th century BC built over by the foundations of the northern part of the ring of columns around the giant temple

Fig. 2: Water conduit near the altar: lead pipes with marble sleeves, 5th century BC (PESENDORFER)

Fig. 3: Ivory lions head, votive offering from the Artemision

Fig. 4: Collection of gold finds from the vicinity of a 7th century BC cult base: female statuette (53 mm) and lion-headed fibulas
The oldest architectural remains in the vicinity of the Artemision consist of a retaining wall of slate and quartz stones. This has been interpreted as a dam wall, built, perhaps, during the Mycenaean period to prevent flooding.

The 8th century BC

A peripetos temple measuring 13.5 x 6.5 m, with 4 x 8 columns and an open cela in its interior, stood, in the second half of the 8th century, in the area which became the courtyard of the subsequent temple. Inside, resting on six columns, a rectangular baldachin housed the cult figure, the xoanon.

Walls and foundations were made of local chalk marl. This peripetos temple appears to have been constantly threatened by flooding. For this reason the entire peristasis had to be raised. A tile roof discovered in 1994, which had been re-used to seal a sacrificial trench, probably belonged to this rebuilding. In a third phase of the construction of the peripetos, the peristasis was abandoned but the cela wall itself was strengthened with a casing.

Very little is known about the construction of the peripetos temple. Neither the appearance of the capitals nor of the entablature has been determined. Only the green slate bases of the wooden columns are preserved. Quite primitive, slightly rounded forms which exhibit a smooth supporting surface, exist together with others which suggest a sort of plinth and torus. The soft green slate material used is conspicuously decorative whereas the wooden columns and masonry of yellowish limestone are more in keeping with the character of the surroundings. This temple with its baldachin already anticipates the later lonic monumental temple.

This peripetral structure cannot, however, have been the oldest building on the site. The stratigraphy shows that the columns of the peristasis belong to an older building phase than the cela wall which must have been inserted later. The existence of a pre-peripetos may therefore be assumed. The ceramic continuum of the site has yielded finds, reaching back into Mycenaean times, which are older than the architecture.

Fig. 1: Early cult buildings in the Artemision, overall plan (AB): peripetos with baldachin for the cult statue (8th century, pink); so-called hecatompedos to the west of it, together with the associated cult base (7th or early 6th century, yellow); older Artemision partly financed by king Croesus (around the middle of the 6th century, green) and late classical altar enclosure (blue).

Fig. 2: The earliest temple buildings in the centre of the Artemision (8th - 6th centuries BC)
The 7th century BC

In the 7th century there was a diagonal path towards the later courtyard altar, a water channel and an apsidal building in the south-west of the Artemision precinct. Another contemporaneous apsidal construction lies between Temple C and the archaic marble temple.

This temple C was erected in the late 7th or early 6th century BC. It lies on the site of the peripteros and shows signs of antae on its west side. Its walls and foundations are also made of chalk marl. Building was presumably discontinued when work on the archaic dipteros began.

Construction of a building was begun in the late 7th century on the west side of the Artemision. Its remains were already found by Hogarth and his architect Henderson who, although they did not know how to interpret them, connected them with the so-called Temple C and dated them accordingly.

The foundations of this building are likewise of yellow limestone and the walls built above them were of marble, as was the threshold which lies in situ on the east side of the foundations immediately in front of the west end of the archaic temple. The temple was 34.40 m long, a dimension corresponding approximately to one hundred Ionic feet, and this led to its designation as hecatompedos ("hundred footer"). The building lies on the axis of the Croesus temple, exactly at a right angle to its western entrance. Not only the use of chalk marl for the foundations, but also the stratigraphy between them support the conclusion that the hecatompedos must be older than the archaic marble temple. Among other things, the fact that the two buildings lie almost fifty metres from one another and have approximately the same dimensions goes counter to a theory according to which the hecatompedos was the altar of Temple C. Both were built before 560 BC and both were obviously never finished. This building complex would more likely have been the Apollo temple mentioned in ancient literature. The entire marble structure of the hecatompedos was incorporated into the foundations of the Croesus temple. Aligned with the hecatompedos on its west lies a base which - like other square or rectangular bases in the later temple courtyard and in the northern temple area - had a cult function, as is indicated by the votive gifts and animal bones found there. The existence of various contemporary cult bases suggests that several deities were venerated at that time.

Fig. 1: Birds-eye view of the foundations of the great altar (left) and the so-called hecatompedos with an associated cult base in line with a projection of its west front