

# THE ARTEMIS STATUE EXCAVATED AT ABILA OF THE DECAPOLIS IN 1994

by  
W. Harold Mare

In the 1994 Quwayliba/Abila of the Decapolis Excavation season the excavation team, directed by the author, uncovered near the Area A basilica on the acropolis of Tall Abila important evidence relating to the religious life at ancient Abila. Here, just below the surface layers, outside and along the north wall of the basilica, we found a life size, well-sculpted, white marble statue of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt, with a quiver on her back and a small deer positioned on the side of her foot (the other leg and foot are still missing). The statue, measuring ca. 1.64 m in height (without the missing head), is sculpted in the style of other representations of this ancient Greek goddess (possibly a Roman copy). The statue's presence here supports our contention that the builders of this Byzantine basilica constructed the church upon the foundations of an earlier building - a Greco-Roman temple - the evidence for which is seen in the massive foundations upon which the later basilica was also constructed, and also evidenced by the uneven join produced when the builders attempted to connect as carefully as possible the walls of the Byzantine basilica to the wall remains of the earlier structure, and also evidenced by the classical-type column base found in the ruins. What of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the

hunt, and how well in detail and style does the Abila statue of Artemis compare with other ancient marble representations of this classical cult figure?

In Greek mythology, Artemis was the twin of Apollo, a virgin, goddess of fertility, helper of women in childbirth, goddess of agriculture, but also goddess of the forests and hills, lover of animals (particularly the deer and the dog, as well as the bear and the boar), a huntress (αφροτεωρα) goddess, worshipped in the ancient Greek world. Adopted and adapted by Greeks in Asia Minor, Artemis took on attributes of an Asiatic deity. Her sacred items included the laurel and fir tree, and her attributes included the bow and quiver, torch, javelin and crescent. In art Artemis is represented as a tall, majestic, beautiful young woman, and as the huntress goddess, she is generally shown with her bow and quiver, and often accompanied by a deer or dog. Artemis was identified by the Romans with Diana.<sup>1</sup>

## Archaeological/Architectural Evidence<sup>2</sup>

Description: Dimensions and material of the Artemis of Abila statue Fig.1: Maximum dimensions are about 1.64 m high; head, two arms and one leg missing; white marble, well sculpted.

2. Torso consists of quiver on the upper

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1. C. B. Avery (ed.), *The New Century Classical Handbook*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962): 170-174); N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, sec. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978): 126-127; see also K. Ziegler und W. Sontheimer (eds), *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexicon der Antike auf der Grundlage von Pauly's Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*

(Stuttgart: Alfred Druckenmuller, 1964): 618-625.

2. M. Bieber, *Ancient Copies: Contributions to the History of Greek and Roman Art*. (New York: New York University Press, 1977); M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); K. T. Erism, *Aphrodisias: City of Venus Aphrodite*. (New York: Facts on File Publications,

right shoulder; tunic/chiton, well-folded, mantle drapery extending up over the left shoulder and across the back to the right side where it is folded, all of which is tucked in by a high positioned cloth belt.<sup>3</sup>

3. The lower parts include a well-formed leg and foot with sandal: sole indented between the first and second toe (trichides style) with ornamented thong straps coming up from the sole (to which



1. Front view of the Abila Artemis.

1986); K. D. Morrow, *Greek Footwear and the Dating of Sculpture* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991); A. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration*, Vols 1 and 2. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

3. Cf. short military dress, Erim, *Aphrodisias*: 122, 128.
4. Cf. the sole with holes for the attachment of the thong end, in the Hellenistic Aphrodite and Pan

it was attached<sup>4</sup>) between the first and second toe over a cross strap<sup>5</sup> which supported the foot just behind the uncovered toes; the thong then ended at an interlocking mesh of straps (almost like shoe laces), which appear to hold the heel and side leathers<sup>6</sup> and which finally wrap around the lower leg above the ankle and then tie in bows on the front at the ankle.<sup>7</sup>

4. There is a sculptured support post, in shape of a wooden post with knot, supporting the goddess's leg on one side.
5. The hind quarters of probably a deer are preserved: rump, button tail, upper quarters of two legs, and the one leg and two leg bones extending down along the opposite side of the support post (Fig. 2).

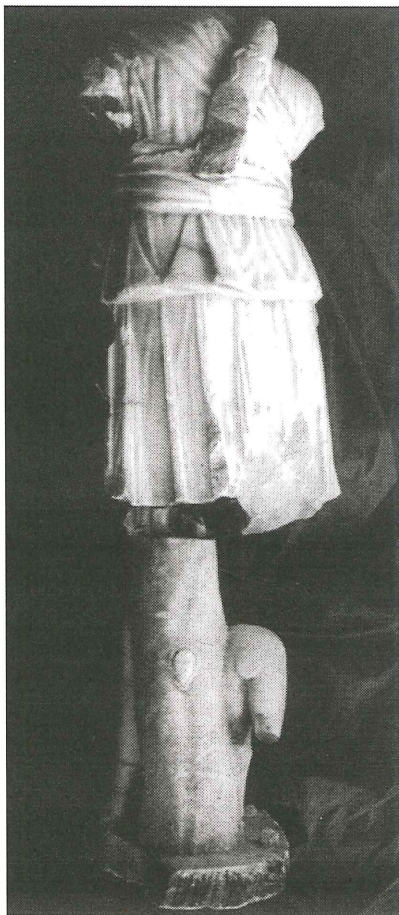
Regarding the Artemis statue itself, attributes are: the tunic/chiton and the mantle drapery; the presence of the quiver; the style of footwear; and the presence of the deer accompanying the goddess.

#### Interpretation of the Artemis of Abila statue

1. From the physiological features presented in the statue, the stance (which is quite open, ready for action), the dress, the quiver and its position just back of the right shoulder, the sandals and the deer, the statue is clearly to be identified with Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt.
2. The open, frontal stance, the short tunic, with over-the-shoulder drapery and tucked in by the belt(s), etc., of the Abila Artemis is similar to the Artemis statue of Versailles (now in the Louvre) which

Group (ca. 100 BC) from Delos, Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: Pl. 72 and p. 93.

5. See Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: fig. 12d, Bassai akrolith, thong designs, Greek or Roman Hellenistic.
6. Cf. Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: 114, pls. 97, 98-102 a,b.
7. Cf. Artemis of Lykosoura, second century, cross band and thong; Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: 91, 94, indented; 93, crossband.



2. Back view of the Abila Artemis.

some have thought pointed to the sculptor Leochares of Athens,<sup>8</sup> who along with other sculptors [Pytheos of Priene the architect<sup>9</sup> and sculptor, Skopas the Parian, Bryaxis of Athens or of Caria itself, Timotheos (home uncertain, cf. Pliny, *Natural History*, chapter 36), and possibly Praxiteles of Athens (Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 7. 13, Preface)] worked on the sculptures of the Mausoleum of Halikarnassos in Caria, south-west Asia Minor, in ca. 353-340 BC.<sup>10</sup> As for the Artemis of Versailles Bieber says,<sup>11</sup> “The Artemis of Versailles, now in the Louvre,

seems to have been conceived as a counterpart of the Apollo of Belvedere [Fig. 200; This Apollo statue also has a quiver on the upper right shoulder] (Fig. 201). She moves from left to right—in the opposite direction from her brother—but the position of the limbs is the same. The youthful goddess is represented hunting. She has shortened her dress by means of two belts, pulling up the material in a long pouch. Her mantle is wound like a shawl around her waist. She moves quickly along, the fluttering dress emphasizing the movement, while she is taking an arrow out of the quiver on her shoulder.”

Now while our Artemis of Abila does not show the flowing movement in the garments, the garments themselves and other items are the same: the short tunic tied in with the belt/sash(es), draperies from the shoulders, the quiver and its position, the treatment of the sandals, with thong, cross-band and the laces, tied above the ankle. About this style of footwear, Morrow comments, that in the Classical period, fourth century BC, the thonged sandal occurs, and examples are to be found in the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos, particularly sandals of the troichades type (i.e., sandals with solid leather around the heel and sides of the foot and laces and straps on the toes and instep, similar to the sandal of the Artemis of Abila), and the krepides sandal (i.e., the thick soles bound on by straps).<sup>12</sup> Morrow also comments about ornate sandals in this period, sandals with carved strap work<sup>13</sup> and indented soles,<sup>14</sup> the latter concept being particularly applicable to the Abila Artemis sandal. Others, however, argue that the san-

8. Bieber, *Ancient Copies*: 71; Figs. 246-248.

9. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture*, Vol. I: p. 180.

10. Those who are said to have worked on the four sides of the Mausoleum structure are Skopas on the east, Bryaxis on the north, Timotheos and Praxiteles on the south and Leochares on the west. Stewart (op.cit.: 180) says that all four of

the sculptors “worked for other East Greek and Mainland centers...”

11. M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*: 63.

12. Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: 70.

13. Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: 71.

14. Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: 83.

dals of the Artemis of Versailles are late Hellenistic, possibly of ca. 100 BC, and therefore cannot be the work of Leochares.<sup>15</sup> However, the sandals of the Artemis of Versailles do show the sole indentation between the first and second toe (even though the strap arrangements may be different), a feature shared by the Abila Artemis, and which occurs, according to Morrow, both in the fourth century BC Classical period<sup>16</sup> and in the Hellenistic period<sup>17</sup>. Possibly the Abila Artemis, as well as the Artemis of Versailles, were sculpted by members of a Greek Hellenistic school, who were followers of Leochares and his compatriots and their school.

An alternative interpretation is that the Abila Artemis and the Artemis of Versailles are later Roman copies, based on these earlier Greek models.<sup>18</sup> However, some of these later Roman copies show a "running"

Diana, with the mantle which comes around the back towards the right hip, stretching out into a "fluttering" position, as Bieber calls it,<sup>19</sup> but this feature is not seen in the Abila Artemis and the Artemis of Versailles, whose trailing mantle hugs more closely to the lines of the right hip. In illustrations of what Bieber calls, "The original and good copies" of Artemis, the "fluttering" detail is not present, neither in the Abila Artemis, nor in the Artemis of Versailles which Bieber depicts<sup>20</sup> showing the short tunic/chiton, with a highly positioned double-twisted belt holding tightly the mantle coming in front over the left shoulder and down the back, and well-positioned quiver high up on the right shoulder, but without fluttering end on the right hip.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

It is better to posit that the Abila Artemis

15. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture*: 283, 284., where he says "Though the Versailles Artemis type is often attributed to the same hand [of Leochares], Pfrommer (1984) has shown that her sandals are late Hellenistic, and argues strongly for a date ca. 100."

16. Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: Pls. 59 a, b, c.

17. Morrow, *Greek Footwear*: Pls. 106, 107.

18. Although we have proposed the interpretation that our Abila Artemis was the work of a member(s) of Greek Hellenistic school, we are careful to note as R.R.R. Smith (*Hellenistic Sculpture*: 75) has commented that "Roman copies have left a vast record of draped goddesses of the fifth and fourth centuries, and very little of their Hellenistic counterparts. As with the senior male gods, the late Classical iconography of familiar goddesses like Athena and Artemis continued, with some updating of stylistic features. The Piraeus bronzes of Artemis and Athena [86] may be taken as typical of both late Classical and early Hellenistic. The Artemis of Versailles type [87], known from close copies, gives a more inspired account of the virgin huntress from the same period." An example of this can be seen in the Artemis from Leptis Magna. This statue, suggested by Smith as a Roman "copy of an original of later 4th cent. B.C. (Tripoli)" has the characteristic short tunic, mantle drapery coming in front over the left shoulder and down the back toward the right thigh, and secured by

the highly positioned double sash/belt, and the quiver positioned on and just above the right shoulder, and the accompanying dog (in some cases the deer/fawn/stag), features so characteristic of the earlier late Classical and Hellenistic statues of Artemis, the Greek huntress goddess in Greece and Asia Minor.

19. Bieber (*Ancient Copies*: Figs. 284, 285, and 286) gives examples of these "running" Diana, all of them with the end of the mantle "fluttering" out behind the right hip; Bieber (*op.cit.* 74) dates these marble copies of the running Diana to the same Roman period as the bronze coin of the time of Commodus, minted in Megara, which also shows on the reverse (Bieber: Fig. 281) a running Diana "in a short fluttering dress and holding a torch and a scepter"; and the running Diana on the reverse of another bronze coin "minted in Marciapolis in Moesia by Macrinus and Diadumenianis in 217 A.D."

20. Bieber, *Ancient Copies*: Figs. 246-248.

21. Of this marble statue Bieber (*Ancient Copies*: 71) says, "A beautiful image of Artemis, a creation of the fourth century B.C., is best known from the statue formerly in Versailles and now in the Louvre (Figs. 246-248). Her pose is similar to that of the Apollo Belvedere, but she moves in the opposite direction. Both works have been ascribed to Leochares, the younger contemporary of Lysippos. This Artemis has often been described as wearing a short chiton

as well as the Versailles Artemis were sculpted by a member of an Hellenistic school who were followers of earlier sculptors of the fourth century BC Classical period. In the case of the Abila Artemis it seems obvious that the work was either done elsewhere, where there was a supply of marble or the marble and a competent

sculptor were brought in to do the assignment.

W. Harold Mare  
Covenant Theological Seminary  
12330 Conway. Rd  
St. Louis, Missouri 63141  
U.S.A.

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and a small shawl. In reality she wears a long chiton and a large mantle...and [there are] similar [ones]...Artemis Colonna and Dresden Artemis attributed to the early period of Praxiteles. A high belt often lies above the long overfold and in Greek clothing divides the peplos into three harmonious parts...Such a belt was used frequently in the Classical period for Artemis as well as Athena. The chiton was worn originally with a mantle, whereby the draping with two belts could be seen clearly. A long pouch was drawn out of the second belt by which the dress could be shortened at will. If

we add the double layer of the pouch to the length of the chiton, it would reach to the ankles. In exact copies the pouch is thick and loose, comprising two layers above a third formed by a skirt." Bieber gives examples of good copies in Figs. 252 (Artemis, Villa Ludovisi-Boncompagni, Rome) and 253 (Artemis, girl of Claudian period represented as Diana, Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Rome); these have most of the features of the Artemis of Versailles (Figs. 246-248), but they have a thin belt and no mantle over the left shoulder.