CHAPTER 3

ARTEMIS: VIRGIN MOTHER OF THE WILD, PATRON OF AMAZONS

Artemis was another Greek goddess who possessed the title Parthenos. In this chapter, I explore her mythology to argue that she, like Athena, was originally considered a Virgin Mother. I also consider her connections with Athena/Neith and, continuing the argument of the historicity of the Amazons who venerated these deities, offer a unique analysis of the possible relationship of the Thermadon Amazons of West Asia and the Libyan Amazons of North Africa.

In brief, Artemis was variously imaged as the twin sister of Apollo, the goddess of the Arcadan “nymphs,” the fierce patroness of Tauris and Brauron, and the nurturing nature goddess of Ephesus. Underneath such imagery, one may discern a much older, pre-Hellenic goddess who was a parthenogenetic creatrix. The argument that in her earliest manifestation Artemis was understood to be a self-generative goddess is supported by the fact that in her most primitive aspect she was considered simultaneously a Mistress of the Wild Animals, a goddess of fertility and nature, and a Parthenos (Virgin). She also demanded women’s chasteness, yet protected those who gave birth. These seeming paradoxes are resolved if one understands her to be a Virgin Mother who produced life from within herself without a male consort. As in the case of Athena and Metis, Artemis also had a mother, Leto, whose attributes suggest that she, too, was in a parthenogenetic relationship with her daughter.

In this chapter, I show that Artemis’s many similarities with the auto-genetic Neith/Athena further supports the position that she was originally considered parthenogenetic and lends credence to the idea that she may even have had roots in North Africa. Iconographically, both goddesses shared the symbols of the bow and arrow and the bee, for example. Like Neith, Artemis was depicted in many instances as a warrior goddess.

M. Rigoglioso, Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity
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and patron of the Amazons. I argue that the Thermadon Amazons who venerated Artemis may, in fact, have been descendants of the Libyan Amazons reported to have colonized much of the West Asian region, where the Thermadon Amazons were later believed to have dwelt. Evidence pointing in this direction includes the presence of the city name Myrina in ancient Anatolia, which I suggest may have referenced the Libyan queen Myrina as an ancient ancestress. That both Libyan and Thermadon Amazons may have shared a common cultural heritage again points to the possibility that the two virgin mother goddesses whom they venerated may have had common roots in Africa.

Artemis as Creatrix

As she was known in Greece, Artemis seems to have had four distinct and overlapping identities, which may reflect how she was seen and adopted during different time periods and in various regions. In one of her aspects, she was the twin sister of Apollo and daughter of the Leto (e.g., *Hymns to Artemis* 9.2 and 27.3). In a second, she was the goddess of the nymphs of Arcadia, the mountainous, forested center of the Peloponnesus. In a third form, she was centered in Tauris and Bauronia, where at one time human sacrifices may have been offered to her. In her fourth aspect, she was the Asiatic fructifying and all-nourishing nature goddess of Ephesus in Anatolia.

Classics scholars generally agree that the goddess Artemis originated in the pre-Greek era. Her name does not appear to be Greek, and, according to Guthrie (1967, 99), in her early form she was “one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the deities worshipped by the inhabitants of pre-Hellenic Greece, of Western Asia Minor, and of Minoan Crete.” He thus contends (101) that the patriarchal northern invaders who established what was ancient Greece found this goddess already in place when they came to occupy these regions, and incorporated her into what became the Olympian pantheon. Artemis’s identification with the Phrygian Cybele, who yoked lions to her chariot, and the Cappadocian Ma, has prompted suggestions of her possible Asiatic origin; she also may have derived from the Minoan Mistress of the Animals or from an Arcadian cult (Guthrie 1967, 99, 106). On Crete, she was identified with the mother goddesses Britomartis, Dictynna, and Eileithyia.

Artemis’s probable pre-Greek aspect as goddess of nature may be reflected in her Homeric title *Potnia Theron*, Mistress of the Wild Animals (Homer *Iliad* 21.470). In Greek mythology, her realms were always the mountains, where she was said to have dwelt (Callimachus *Hymn 3 to Artemis* 19–20). Numerous animals were sacred to her or depicted by