

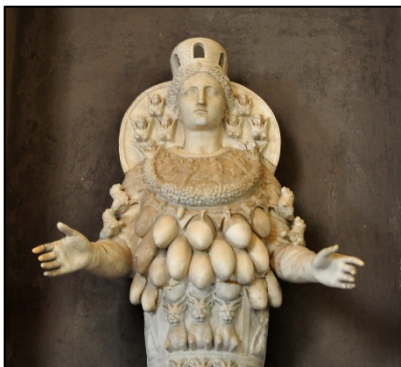
## ***The Worship of Artemis in Ephesus***

Ephesus, the capital of the richest region in the Roman Empire at the time of Paul, was called the “metropolis of Asia.” As such, the city featured many public buildings declaring its superior status. The Temple of Artemis (the “Artemision”) was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Dedicated to Artemis Ephesia (the Roman deity “Diana”), it was first constructed in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE and was the largest building in the ancient Greek world.



The worship of Artemis influenced the city in many ways. As a religious center, the cult provided economic benefits with the production of cultic objects (cf. Acts 19) and a steady stream of pilgrims to festivals. Artemis was understood as having a divine covenantal relationship with the city and its inhabitants. Ephesus jealously guarded Artemis’ honor and the political power it gave the city, even going so far as to refuse the help of Alexander the Great to rebuild the temple. Since various mystery rites were performed in her honor at the temple, the city became known for its culture of magic and superstition in keeping with Artemis’ attributes.

Artemis’ worship persona contained conflicting aspects. The foremost of these was that of a



fertility goddess. Ancient statues from Ephesus show Artemis as goddess adorned with sacred bull scrotums (see picture) and she is described as the protector of childbirth. At the same time, Artemis was also identified with Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft and the moon. Several festivals, some of which were Roman tourist attractions, celebrated Artemis with blood sacrifices. In this aspect of her personality, Artemis was goddess of the underworld who could unlock the gates of death. She is described as a “rotting goddess” with a “decaying body” by 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE Roman writer Lucan.

The all-female cult of Artemis was one of the most powerful in the city, with a counter-cultural model of aggressive female leadership. This dual picture of Artemis as both the *positive* female protector of fertility and the *negative* witch practicing necromancy reflected both the hopes and fears of the larger Roman culture, where women were considered undeveloped males and strict gender roles were seen as foundational to the Empire. This background is behind Paul’s instructions to Timothy in Ephesus for women to “not teach or *authenthein* over a man” (1 Tim. 2:12). The Greek word *authenthein* here, difficult to translate since it only occurs 6 times in all ancient writing, carries a sense of abuse and shame. One can see how the most powerful cult in Ephesus might influence believers to bring these same ideas of aggressive matriarchal dominance into the church, upending the “Household Codes” model set forth by Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians and elsewhere to follow a culturally-acceptable social structure.