
EPHESUS

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MANY MODERN discoveries have drawn attention to the wealth and power of Ephesus as it existed in the time of the Apostle Paul, and these show quite a number of correspondences between archaeology and the Scriptures. The city known to the apostle was one of the most important places in Asia Minor. It was set beside the Cayster river and was both busy and prosperous. It occupied a strategic position as far as land routes were concerned. The harbour needed constant dredging to remain in use, but shipping came to it from north, south, and west. Dr. F. V. Filson describes its advantages: "In the time of Paul, Ephesus was the chief port on the Aegean for the land route which led East into Central Asia Minor and the regions beyond. Thus possessed of sea trade, heavy traffic with eastern regions, and good land routes to both north and south, it was a rich and populous centre". The city benefited greatly from extensive farming country under its control and from the numerous cities within its territory. The official account of the British Museum excavations states: "By far the largest number of objects found there were made either of gold or natural electrum (gold and silver) of varying qualities".

One of the city's greatest assets, however, was the worship of Artemis, as the Greeks called her, or Diana, the Roman goddess identified with her. By this cult, the prestige and revenues of the city were greatly increased. The worship of Diana was at its height when the visit of the apostle, recorded in Acts 19, took place. There were other gods of Ephesus, and the goddess Diana was the patroness of over thirty ancient cities. Nevertheless, Diana of the Ephesians was above all others, and the statement about her (Acts 19:27) "whom all Asia and the world worshippeth" was fully justified.

In honour of Diana was the city's magnificent temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So venerated and regarded as safe was it, that not only Ephesians, but also foreign individuals, kings and people, deposited their money there. The money was loaned and Dr. Filson says that the temple became "the biggest bank in Asia".

When excavations began in modern times, the site of the temple was hard to find. After six years' work, however, it was located at the foot of the hill to the north-east of the city. The building is described as being built on a platform 239 feet wide by 418 feet long to which a flight of ten steps gave access. Ascent of three more steps was necessary to enter the temple itself, which was about 164 feet by 342 feet. More than a hundred columns, six feet in diameter at their base, were inside the temple and some of these were sculptured up to a height of 20 feet. Brilliant colours and gold formed part of the decoration. Within the "cellar", or sanctuary, was the altar, the foundations of which were 20 feet square. The statue of the goddess was erected behind the altar. It was thought that the image fell from heaven, and this belief is referred to in Acts 19:35. It seems likely that the object was a meteorite (which resembled a human figure) worked on by a sculptor to represent the goddess.

Statues

Two notable statues of Diana were found in 1958. The first was life-size and the other twice life-size. They both typified the goddess as being many-breasted. She was regarded as **omphalos** (the navel of the earth)—"the mother of life and nourisher of all created things". The larger image is noteworthy, because there is a representation of the facade of the temple on its crown. The two statues

are from an era later than Paul's time. The goddess was a fertility divinity, believed to ensure the fertility of the land, animals, and human beings.

Ephesus was a very suitable place in which the apostle could preach. It was popular and much visited by country people, especially at times when festivals were held for Diana. The precision of the Bible record is indicated by a consideration of 1 Corinthians 16:8, 9, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries". This indicates that the apostle was in Ephesus during the period March/April, the Greek month "Artemision". This month was dedicated to Artemis. At this time, Ephesus would be thronged with visitors, and would provide a ready audience for Paul.

It is not surprising that the apostle experienced strong opposition from the silversmiths of the city, who made great profits from the sale of souvenirs and religious objects. Their wealth is shown by an inscription dated A.D. 104, which states that Vibius Salutaris made a gift which consisted of 29 statues in silver and gold. About 111 lbs. of precious metal was used. The addition of the craftsmen's wages would add considerably to the total value of the present.

Stirred up by the silversmiths, who vociferously asserted that the worship of the goddess as well as their livelihood was threatened, the workers went about yelling, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!". This roused the mob, who rushed into the theatre, dragging with them Paul's travelling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus. The Jews in the city, fearing that anti-Jewish riots might ensue, since Paul was known to be a Jew, put forward one of their number, Alexander, presumably to explain to the crowd that they had no sympathy with the apostle's aims. When, however, the populace realised, probably from his facial characteristics or his dress, that Alexander was a Jew, the cries about the greatness of Diana were redoubled. After two hours the town clerk managed to quieten the multitude, by reminding them that, if the craftsmen had a complaint against Paul and his friends (though he could not see any grievance), the courts were available to hear it. Further trouble might lead to the city being called to account for the riot.

Quite extensive ruins of the theatre, which was built on the western or harbour side of

the city, still exist. It was some 495 feet in circumference and was capable of holding about 24,500 spectators.

Decline and fall

There is an interesting parallel between a Scripture passage and a document dated over 100 years later. Acts 19:26, 27 reads: "Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands; so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised... whom all Asia and the world worshippeth". The words were those of Demetrius the silversmith.

The document, dated A.D. 160, opens: "Whereas Artemis (Diana), the goddess who presides over our city, which she has made more glorious than all other cities by means of her own divinity, but also among Greeks and barbarians, so that in many places her sacrifices and honour have been neglected". The fears of Demetrius were being realised.

In 1904 Mr. D. G. Hogarth broke open a stone altar and found votive offerings of all kinds and images of Diana within it.

Several details given in Acts 19 have been confirmed by discoveries made elsewhere. Verse 19 describes how, moved by the experiences of an exorcist, Sceva, and his sons, many "which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver" (about £2,000). The books referred to are the *Ephesia Grammata*. The expression "Ephesian Writings" was familiar in the Greco-Roman world for magical texts. It involved a custom associated with the temple of Diana. The "Writings" were magical formulae, combinations of the letters of the alphabet or words believed to possess magical efficacy in cases of sickness, love, domestic problems, etc. They were small scrolls, or letters, worn as a sort of amulet on the body. Clement of Alexandria wrote of them and many have been found in the sands of Egypt.

Magic

The expression used by the vagabond Jewish exorcists, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth" followed the normal pagan formula, e.g. "I adjure you by the god Sabarbarbath-

ioth". The word "deeds" in verse 18 relates to the practice of magicians in revealing their deeds (spells). It is the same as the word used in a heading for an incantation, "An excellent spell (deed) for driving out demons".

Demetrius was probably the leader of the guild of silversmiths. Such guilds (*sunergasiai*) are alluded to in several inscriptions. Many of the objects made by the craftsmen have been found. These include images of the goddess donated to her. Poorer worshippers gave figures made of terra-cotta. Those more wealthy gave images of silver and gold. Hundreds of small shrines (*naiskoi, aediculae*) were manufactured. These were miniatures of the temple and enclosed a small statue of the goddess. There were also coins. A coin belonging to the Roman Emperor Valentinian I shows such a representation.

Acts 19:31 refers to "certain of the chief of Asia" (Asiarchs), who were friends of Paul, and who dissuaded him from facing the mob in the theatre. Asiarchs are mentioned frequently in the inscriptions. They were the guardians of the imperial Roman cult and had special oversight of great festivals in honour of the emperor. There was only one Asiarch at a time in any particular city, and he held office for four years. Thus there would be in Ephesus ex-Asiarchs as well as the current office-holder.

Verse 35 describes Ephesus as a "worshipper" of the great goddess Diana. Numerous inscriptions refer to Diana as great. The word rendered "worshipper" (*neokoras*) is literally "temple-sweeper" or "temple-keeper", i.e. "temple guardian", which indeed the city was. The word was widely used in the past of individuals and peoples responsible for guarding some cult or cultic centre. An inscription from Priene in Asia Minor refers to one who was "temple keeper" (temple official) of Artemis in Ephesus. Later, Ephesus came to be recognised, not only as "temple-keeper" of Diana, but "thrice temple-keeper". Two extra temples were erected in honour of the Emperor, regarded as divine.

The town clerk (verse 35) is known from evidence coming from Ephesus as having been a very important official and the dominant figure in the political administration of the city. He was chairman of popular meetings, which were often held in the theatre.

The word translated "assembly" in the chapter is "ecclesia". It is frequently used in inscriptions from Ephesus, alluding to meetings in the theatre. Dr. Filson writes: "In the New Testament the term 'ecclesia' has the technical theological meaning of a local organised body of believers, or, more often, as 'the body of believers spiritually united to one another and to Christ'".

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ANCIENT HISTORIANS PROCONSULS

"And when they had gone through the isle (Cyprus) . . . they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus" (Acts 13:7).

"And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul" (Acts 18:12).

In both these passages, the word translated "deputy" signifies "proconsul", and it is so rendered in the Revised Version. This fact reveals a quite remarkable agreement with the information given by Roman historians. Roman provinces were of two kinds: those owned by the Emperor, the governor being called a "propraetor", and those belonging to the Senate with a governor known as a "proconsul".

Originally, Cyprus belonged to the Emperor. Later it was transferred to the Senate. The proper title for the governor was therefore "proconsul", as the Scriptures state.

The second passage is even more interesting. Achaia originally belonged to the Senate. It was transferred to the Emperor and then retransferred by the Emperor Claudius to the Senate, thus becoming a proconsulship. The retransfer took place only six or seven years before the occurrences reported in Acts 18. In the following reign, that of Nero, Achaia ceased to be a Roman province.

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