



## **Myth in the Greek and Roman Worlds: the Temple of Diana at Nemi**

### *Nemi and myth*

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I think one of the exciting things about myth in the Greek and Roman worlds is the way it pervaded society. You can imagine a Roman walking down the street and you can imagine all the things he might have seen – the buildings, sculptures, the coins in his pocket – all these types of things were influenced by myth. It was something that people couldn't escape, it surrounded them. For us gaining an insight into another society helps us see our own society sometimes more clearly, and I think myth is something that not only pervaded Greek and Roman society but pervaded our own society. We still have those links back to ancient myth, in our buildings, in our architecture, in our language. All sorts of common references in everyday life in, in modern society reflect and build on Greek and Roman myth.

We wanted to include examples in A330 that covered different evidence, different approaches, and different chronological periods, but we also wanted to think about how myth works and functions, and so we particularly wanted to look at myth in very specific contexts so, for example, we look at political contexts in Rome and how emperors used myth, and then equally we look at sort of everyday, ordinary contexts, how people, ordinary people use myth in their everyday lives.

This album focuses on the Sanctuary of Diana at Nemi. Nemi lies to the south of Rome and is situated on a lake which in Roman times was known as the Mirror of Diana, and at this site they developed a temple and a sanctuary, which flourished from the 2nd century Before Common Era. And in this album we're looking at this site but more specifically at certain votive items that have been recovered from the sanctuary.

One of the interesting aspects of the votive offerings is the wide range of items that are involved, and also the expense we can imagine was involved with some of these items. So on the one hand we have quite simple items like clay lamps, and on the other we have quite ornate statue groups. Now a clay lamp would have been a cheap and cheerful gift to give to the goddess, but you could personalise it by the choice of image perhaps that was impressed onto the lamp, and then on the other hand you have people such as a chap called Fundilius Doctus who was making quite serious statements about himself by setting up a statue group, which expressed his social mobility, but tended to overlook the fact that his background was that of a slave.

Some of the votive offerings were in the shape of body parts: eyes, ears, limbs, and we believe the way these functioned were that if somebody was poorly in that part of the body they would make an offering of a replica of that part of the body to the goddess, hoping that she would heal it for them, or equally it may have been a gift given after the healing had occurred, or been perceived to have occurred. So I think this helps us to understand the active role and relationship that was going on between people on the one hand, and the goddess on the other. In times of illness and anxiety people turned to the goddess for help, and Diana was perceived as a goddess of healing, and a figure who in some ways bridged the gap between this world and the next. She was an intermediary, if you like, for the sick and even in some cases perhaps for the dying.

There is very little evidence for the actual temple at Nemi in terms of archaeology, architecture and what remains on the ground, but what the site overall shows is myth in action, it shows cultic practices and links between mythical figures such as Virbius and Diana. And also the evidence that does survive, or at least the material evidence that survives, which

is mainly votive offerings, again shows myth in action and is very evocative of how the cult centre would have operated and worked in ancient times.