



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

*The Temple of Diana at Nemi: temple model*

### **Penny Boreham:**

Professor Katharina Lorenz is Associate Professor in Classical Studies at Nottingham University. An archaeologist by training, her research interests include the ancient temple in Nemi, about 25 kilometres south-east of Rome. This was once a thriving sanctuary in a beautiful clearing, next to a small lake, which came to be known as the 'Mirror of Diana'. Now many of the objects found at the site of the temple by British archaeologists are stored in the back rooms of Nottingham's Regional Museum. Katharina Lorenz showed us round, and led us to view a model of a temple.

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

This is the place where this marvellous model is housed, a terracotta model of what we call a Tuscan temple. It's dated to the 4th or 3rd Century BC so it's a very early Republican piece, and it's dated because of stylistic similarities to other architectural terracottas which we have, and it's quite big, it's about I think one-and-a-half metres in length, and perhaps 59 centimetres in height so it's a very substantial piece.

### **Penny Boreham:**

So what is this object and what does it tell us about this class of temple?

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

Our little temple here is a very unusual and interesting piece of evidence to understand better the architecture behind the Tuscan temple, but I think the most interesting element of this particular temple model are the decorations of the pediment area, the gable area, and here we have little antefixes showing figural heads, and also we have three plaques, reliefs, which were tipped up over the three main beams that had held the roof construction, and they show us figurative scenes as well, and here in a kind of miniature scale in this model. These figural decorations on the Nottingham model it's very difficult to make out what exactly is depicted. We have male and female figures, we don't really know what's going on. They might not look like much at the moment in the model because it's all, you only see that they're kind of clay-coloured, but in antiquity, like the big temples, also this model was actually painted so the figures, and also other bits and pieces of the decoration would actually really stand out because they would be in colour, and would be very, very vivid and very vibrant.

### **Penny Boreham:**

So why would anyone want to bring a model temple into a full-size temple, and what was its role in the rituals that happened there?

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

The answer is we don't really know. It was probably not an architectural model for like an architecture competition for the building of the temple on the site, that's a modern concept, that wouldn't have been the case in antiquity, and the most straightforward idea people have come up with is that it was also a votive of some sort, something people dedicated to the sanctuary in order to get something from Diana or from the deities which were worshipped at the sanctuary. There's lots of detail in the model, which doesn't really make sense in a votive, or doesn't make too much sense in the votive, but I suppose you could argue that it's a religious object so it has detail but doesn't necessarily have to have some sort of function. It's enough to have the detail to make it a powerful religious object.

### **Penny Boreham:**

This miniature seems to represent a class of temple, Tuscan temples, that in many ways is a mystery to archaeologists. As the supporting columns were made of wood, which over time leaves virtually no traces to help us recreate its appearance, we only have the evidence of the

shape of the foundations, plus whatever we can glean from broken fragments and scattered roof tiles. So could this model temple, this miniature, be an indirect source of evidence telling us about an actual temple that existed in the Sanctuary of Diana?

**Katharina Lorenz:**

A temple of kind of similar shape could have been as part of the sanctuary but unfortunately we don't have many archaeological finds to document what exactly was at the site. The archaeological context is that we were dealing with something which is normally referred to as a terrace sanctuary; we have different terraces which are kind of staggered on top of each other, leading away from the shore of the lake and up the slopes of this kind of volcanic crater. So the only thing we really have to go by is the architectural decoration which has been found in the sanctuary area, which indicate there were different phases of temple building activity, or at least there must have been different buildings to take the terracotta decoration, and so it's a lot of guesswork to go into how to think about the architectural development of a temple and the sanctuary.

**Penny Boreham:**

But even in the face of extensive excavation the Temple of Diana at Nemi still holds on to its secrets, so perhaps one great value of the miniature is that it can help to bring the temple to life.

**Katharina Lorenz:**

I suppose the miniature might help us to understand some of the atmosphere, some of the vibes of this particular place with its kind of figural decorations, this continuous kind of confrontation with figures of myth, and also with the religion behind the site. The miniature can also be used as a little kind of gateway into getting an idea about these kind of religious spaces with the big porch, the big kind of entrance areas of where it lures people in, and then this kind of rather obscure kind of back part where people weren't necessarily allowed into, and where all sorts of kind of interesting rituals probably took place.

**Penny Boreham:**

So this model may give us a window into the religious context of a place like Nemi. In the next section we look at another object, which may challenge our understanding of the goddess, Diana herself.