



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

*The Temple of Diana at Nemi: anatomical votive*

### **Penny Boreham:**

In the myth of Hippolytus, the goddess Diana is presented as an androgynous, chaste goddess, a huntress whose values are set in opposition to the more overtly feminine and sensual ones of Aphrodite. Hippolytus is not the only myth which emphasises Diana's role as a hunter, a virgin, and a punisher, but yet hidden in the remains of the Temple of Diana we catch glimpses of an altogether softer side of the goddess's persona. Professor Katharina Lorenz expands on one particular object, a terracotta statue of a woman.

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

It's a statue of a woman standing with one of her legs moving, and she's dressed in a kind of fairly thick garment, what makes her really interesting is that we can actually see some of her intestines because her abdomen is opened up and we can see her colon and her kidneys, and her liver, so very unusual in that. We have lots of female terracotta's from the Sanctuary, but this is the only one where we can actually see inside, as it were.

### **Penny Boreham:**

It's interesting that despite Diana's rather formidable portrayal in myth, this model seems to suggest that her followers at the temple may have turned to her for nurturing at times of crisis in their lives.

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

Basically we call it a votive, which means that it is an object which someone dedicates to a god in order to wish for something, or to thank for something. In this particular case, obviously there's a clear emphasis being made on the interior organs, so we can deduce from that that this was probably dedicated by someone who had a problem with their inner organs. And this ties in very nicely with a whole range of other votive offerings we have from Nemi. They are not just confined to females, or statues of females, or even organs of females like wombs for instance, we have a couple of wombs from Nemi, but we also find things like eyes, hands, limbs, arms, legs, feet, ears, so pretty much every body part is represented as a votive offering in Nemi, and these were probably also deposited by people who either wanted to wish for better health, or who already had received healing and wanted to thank the goddess because they were in the belief that the goddess had kind of improved their health, helped them on the way to become healthy again.

### **Penny Boreham:**

This may be an early example of a tradition that still continues in Southern Italy to this day. In small rural churches you can still find models of limbs or hands, or organs donated as votives, and they have a link with health concerns.

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

Now, the general idea is with these terracotta objects that they were probably produced close to the site so that they didn't have to travel very far, and that people had stalls in the sanctuary, outside the sanctuary, for customers sort of where to buy it and take it into the sanctuary. Very, very kind of simple, straightforward approach. You buy something, you put it there, you put a wish with it, you do the rite, and then you go away again.

### **Penny Boreham:**

It is interesting that for Diana's followers at the sanctuary, it was evident she was regarded as someone who women in particular would turn to for healing.

### **Katharina Lorenz:**

Diana has kind of a second identity that she is associated with precisely these parts of especially female life, things like procreation, so this makes her the goddess to whom people would turn in order to, and especially women would turn, in order to wish for these things. And also she has a very interesting position with a view to the underworld in Greek and Roman thinking. She normally carries two torches and we have some pieces from Nemi as well where she's represented with torches, and the issue of light and the kinds of torches, indicate that she's a figure who crosses the boundary between the real world and the underworld, so she's kind of a transitional goddess in all sorts of ways, and this is obviously also something which plays a role then when you think about the situations people are in when they kind of wish for their health, they turn to Diana because she's the person who can turn around fate, and she can bring people back, as it were, from the underworld, and this makes her a particularly powerful goddess to turn to.

**Penny Boreham:**

And what can we learn about the person who donated this object? We can probably speculate that it might have been given by, or on behalf of a woman. And there are other things we can glean from its workmanship.

**Katharina Lorenz:**

In this particular case, again coming from the archaeological evidence, we can probably say, okay, the object as such is not such an expensive object, fairly cheaply to produce. What is quite interesting is that actually the intestines, they are not made from a mould, but they are kind of hand-moulded and put in there. So it's kind of a customised piece, as it were, so the person who did this, (a) had probably a very big interest in dedicating it, but also might have been someone with slightly more money to spend on such an item.

**Penny Boreham:**

So in the minds of Diana's worshippers the portrayal of the goddess's character they'd gleaned from myth would have been subtly interwoven with various other influences and local traditions. In the next section we'll follow more clues about the lives of the people who worshipped at the temple.