

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF EPHESUS



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NEW YEAR'S DAY

1 Kaisaros, 9 Kalends October



THE DIVINE ARTEMIS SENDS BIRTHDAY WISHES

Publius Aurelius Serapion, priest of Artemis, strode with pride past the crowd that had gathered outside the great Artemision for the sacred procession. A hundred or so had prescribed roles in the procession; a thousand more devotees had made the kilometer-and-a-half trek from the city's northern gate simply to participate.

He saw many faces in the crowd that were unfamiliar to him from his five decades of moving through the streets and fora of Ephesus, no doubt a good number of them tourists who had made their way here to see the temple that was lauded as one of the seven greatest architectural wonders of the world. Serapion recalled once seeing a visitor from Athens standing before the temple, weeping. He inquired of him what had affected him so.

"How can I now go back to Athens and take pride in our Parthenon? It would take four such houses of our goddess Athena to fill just this *one* of Artemis!"

Great indeed is Ephesian Artemis, Serapion mused with satisfaction.

Flanked by two acolytes bearing torches and clothed fully in white as he was, Serapion could feel his movements attract the attention of the crowd and savored the moment. It was no small honor to have been selected to lead the procession of Artemis on this day, and it was at no small cost to himself that he subsidized this honor, so he intended to enjoy it to the full. In the manner typical of Roman priests, he solemnly draped a fold of his freshly bleached cloak over his head before ascending the fourteen broad steps to the temple platform. Over a hundred columns stretched twenty meters toward the sky, forming a forest of marble before him as the great bronze doors of the sanctuary opened in a slow yawn at his approach. He and his attendants passed over the threshold and into a great hall lined with marble vaults on either side. In these were housed the wealth and treasures of Roman Asia's cities and nobility, the goddess herself standing as surety for their inviolable safety.

They passed into an open courtyard at the heart of the temple, at the far end of which stood the goddess's chamber. Her doors stood open this morning, and Serapion felt a surge of awe as he looked upon the great cult statue, standing fifteen meters tall. This was not Artemis as the Greeks imagined her, a young huntress with bow, quiver, and buskins, but an otherworldly Artemis, sporting the zodiac as her necklace, wearing dozens of winged griffins as her garment, adorned with several rows of eggs across her bosom as symbols of her life-giving bounty and fertility. On her head sat a crown representing the principal buildings of the city of Ephesus, for the city's fortunes indeed rested upon her strength and goodwill. Her arms were outstretched in a gesture of invitation, and Serapion felt himself indeed in the embrace of her favor this day.

In front of the great cult image stood a more portable manifestation of the goddess, a little more than two meters tall,

attended now by a dozen young virgins, daughters of the Ephesian elite. They had already washed the goddess in pure water drawn from a nearby spring and anointed her face and hands with sacred oil. Now they were dressing her in fine silk vestments, as the professional priests who formed part of the temple staff looked on, instructing them in the ritual procedures. Twelve young men, also offspring from the best families, filed in to carry the goddess on her dais to the cart that awaited her in front of her temple. Serapion watched with pride as his own son, Hippicus, helped shoulder the divine load. One of the professional priests of the temple stood before both the

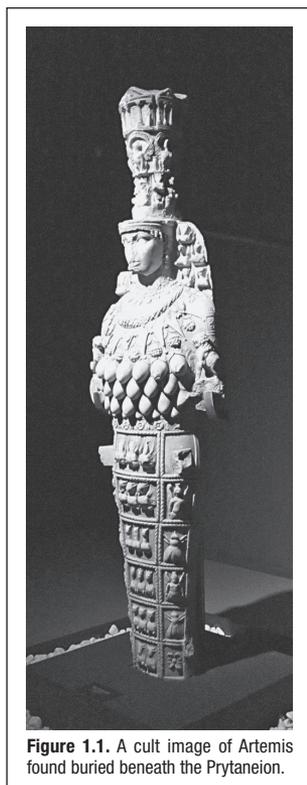


Figure 1.1. A cult image of Artemis found buried beneath the Prytaneion.

portable statue and the great cult image, raised his hands in a gesture of invocation, and prayed that the goddess would inhabit her smaller representation and travel with them to bless the city and to honor her divine colleague. He then nodded to Serapion to begin the procession.

Serapion led the way back toward the front of the sanctuary. As he emerged with his attendants through the great bronze doors, the image of Artemis hoisted aloft behind him, the musicians made their instruments sound, and the crowd burst into shouts of acclamation of the goddess. Serapion nodded to acknowledge his wife, Aurelia Isidora, who had been standing in attendance apart from the crowd with all of

their household. Serapion had gone so far as to order the majority of the slaves from his estates in the countryside to travel into town and make his entourage the more impressive—at the cost of three days’ productive labor on their part. As Serapion passed them, he registered the absence of one of his domestic slaves. A drop of adrenaline caused his pulse to quicken slightly as a wave of anger temporarily overwhelmed the more pleasant sensations of pride he had been indulging. He scanned the group again. *Euplus. He’s not here.* Over the next twenty paces he worked to stifle his sense of outrage and compartmentalize his anger. *I will not allow that slave to cast a shadow over my enjoyment of this day’s glory. And I will have satisfaction when next I see him.*

Serapion’s honorary priestly colleagues—the *kourētai*, the small band of elite Ephesian males whose subvention of the cult purchased for them visibility, prestige, and influence—fell in line behind the cult image. They were followed by seven *aulētai*, who began to blow the melody of a familiar hymn to Artemis through their reed-pipes over the harmonies of seven harpists playing on their *kitharas*, who fell in step behind them, followed by a choir of fourteen voices reciting hymns that told of Artemis’s virtues and mighty deeds on behalf of the world. Young men carrying torches spaced themselves out along the procession between women carrying baskets full of cereal offerings and incense, teenage girls dressed in hunting attire leading hounds on leashes, and temple servants leading a bull with garlands made from woven vines and flowers adorning it. Serapion’s household took their place next, at the head of the throng of worshipers who would follow.

It took a full half-hour for the procession to cross the marshy plain on the raised dirt path leading from the temple to the city, swatting insects as they walked. *No greater benefaction could be given to the city than a paved road—perhaps even a covered,*

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

The principal wind instrument was the *aulos* (Latin *tibia*). The aulos consisted of two separate pipes, each with a double reed in one end as the source of the resonance; a hole on the underside, where the thumb rested; and five holes on the upper side (only four of which could ever be covered by the fingers). Each pipe thus had the capacity to sound six different notes. It is not entirely clear how the *aulētēs* would play his or her aulos. The prevailing theory is that both pipes were played in unison. Two pipes were played because the imperfect tuning of the instruments created a bolder sound. It is also possible that different notes were played on each pipe, or that the *aulētēs* could alternate a drone effect on either pipe while playing melody on the other.³ *Auloi* were crafted in different sizes, similar to the family of recorders in the modern period (sopranino, soprano, alto, tenor, bass, and contrabass).

The name given to the pan flute suggests an origin in ancient Greece, though this instrument was known as the *syrix*. In the classical world, the pipes were all of the same length. The pipes were made



Figure 1.2. A young woman playing the aulos.

to sound at different pitches by being filled to a different level with beeswax. There was also a kind of transverse flute crafted by drilling mouth and fingering holes into a hollow reed. Because both hands could cover holes on a single pipe, the flute had a range of ten notes.

The two principal stringed instruments were the kithara and the lyre. The kithara—the “harp” commonly encountered in Revelation (Rev 5:8; 14:2; 15:2) and an emblem of the god Apollo—was made of a single piece of wood, typically with seven strings stretched over the hollowed-out soundboard. The lyre resembled the kithara, save that it was frequently constructed of a wooden frame inserted into a tortoise shell, which functioned as the resonator box. Both appear to have been played by a combination of plucking particular strings with the



Figure 1.3. Apollo holding a kithara.

left hand and strumming with a plectrum held in the right hand (with the possibility of dampening certain strings with the left hand).

The *salpinx*, or trumpet (see 1 Cor 14:8; 15:52; Rev 8:2, 6), was essentially a thin metal tube about a meter long with a ball-like bell in the Greek period and the more familiar flared bell in the Roman period. It had no keys, so the

player could only sound notes in the harmonic scale (octaves, fifths, and eventually high thirds) by manipulating the tension on his or her lips and thus the speed with which they vibrated at the head of the column of air

in the tube. The Romans developed a circular version of this, the *cornu*, which had the same limitations.

Greeks and Romans also had a number of percussion instruments at their disposal. Most basic was the *tympanon*, a hand drum made by stretching animal skin over a round frame. Singers and dancers might also employ *krotala*, essentially a precursor of the castanet, or *cymbala*, a smaller and thicker version of the cymbals familiar to us that produced a higher pitch (see 1 Cor 13:1). A kind of rattle called a *sistrum* was emblematic of the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis; similar instruments might have been used in broader contexts. And, of course, there was the gong (1 Cor 13:1).

³See the more complete discussion in John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Routledge, 1999), 41-46. Landels provides a thorough treatment of all the instruments named here as well as a musical analysis of surviving pieces of ancient notation, with several reconstructions of ancient hymns and songs.

paved road—from the Artemision to the city's two principal gates, Serapion thought. It had been discussed many times in the Bouleuterion, but other civic priorities continued to claim all the disposable funds of leading citizens of any magnitude. *At least the rains haven't started yet.*

They came at last to the southeastern gate of the city, the one whose road led east to Magnesia and then to Tralles and Laodicea. The procession passed through the city's fortification wall, up a street lined with small shops, and began pouring at last into the civic forum. The broad, open pavement was about the size of the Artemision, surrounded by columned porticoes and civic offices and public buildings. On any other day, this was the administrative and judicial nerve center of the city. Today, however, it was the sacred courtyard of the Temple of Dea

Roma and Divus Augustus, the goddess Roma and the deified Augustus.¹ The space had been thronged already with several thousand worshipers, though city officials had maintained a wide, open path through the forum and a large space before the Augusteion specifically for this procession.



Figure 1.4. The excavated foundations of the Temple of Divus Augustus and Dea Roma.

¹The precise identification of the temples of Divus Julius and Divus Augustus in the Ephesian civic forum is a matter of debate. Peter Scherrer argues that the freestanding temple in the center of the forum was the Temple to Divus Julius and Dea Roma decreed to be built there by Augustus in 29 BC, when Ephesus was made the capital of the province, while a double temple between the Prytaneion and Bouleuterion was dedicated to Augustus and Artemis. See Scherrer, *Ephesus: The New Guide* (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2000), 4-5; Scherrer, "The City of Ephesos from the Roman Period to Late Antiquity," in *Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia*, ed. Helmut Koester, Harvard Theological Studies 41 (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 1-25. Steven Friesen and S. R. F. Price, however, argue for the identification adopted here (with the smaller temple beside the Prytaneion being dedicated to Artemis and Julius Caesar). See Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 11n21; Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101; Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 254).

As he led the goddess into the forum, Serapion's eyes first fell on the bath complex in its northeast corner—which he would be sure to visit after the morning's festivities were concluded. To its west he scanned the Basilica Stoa, a great three-aisled hall built for the city by Sextus Pollio nearly a century ago. Typically a venue where magistrates and, on occasion, where the governor himself heard legal cases, today it was filled with Ephesians who had come to witness the main events in the forum. An inscription carved above its outer columns in letters the size of a forearm across the entire architrave read: "To Artemis of the Ephesians; Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of a god; Tiberius Caesar, son of Augustus; and to the Ephesian people."² It was the perfect backdrop for today's annual event, Serapion mused, for Artemis of the Ephesians had come out with her retinue this morning specifically to pay her respects to the deceased-yet-deified Emperor Caesar Augustus on his birthday.

The *aulētai* and kitharists reached a cadence and fell silent as Serapion, his attendants, and the goddess moved forward into the space before the divine Augustus's temple. A row of Ephesian noblemen, the folds of their cloaks also draped over their heads, stood before the Augusteion in a V-shaped formation surrounding a small, flaming altar. Each held a shallow bowl in his right hand. One of them, an elderly gentleman whose girth seemed merely a physical manifestation of his great ego, stepped forward from the center of the formation, and Serapion addressed the man in his most sonorous and solemn intonations.

"Julius Damas Claudianus, worthy priest of our great god Augustus: our great goddess Artemis, protectress of Ephesus, patroness of the Ephesian people, and friend to all who are friends of Rome, brings greetings to her divine colleague, the god Augustus Caesar, on this, the anniversary of his holy birth."

²Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 95.

Serapion extended his arms, gesturing to gifts that were not yet visible. At his cue, the maidens bearing grain and incense came forward. The temple priest followed, leading the garlanded bull to the iron ring beside the altar, to which he securely tethered its neck.

“Publius Aurelius Serapion, holy and honorable *kourētēs* of the great goddess Artemis: our great god Augustus, bringer of peace to the whole world, welcomes his divine colleague and

ROMAN ASIA'S CALENDAR

Like most of Alexander's empire, the city of Ephesus grew accustomed to using the Macedonian calendar. With the advent of Roman rule, the Macedonian calendar (like local calendars elsewhere in the Roman Empire) coexisted with the Roman calendar. The latter was itself brilliantly reformed by Julius Caesar between 47 and 45 BCE, bringing the Roman year and the solar year into closer synchronism than ever before and eliminating the need for adding an extra (short) month every other year.

In or around 9 BC, the Provincial Assembly of Asia proposed a contest—a victor's wreath for the person who could devise the most appropriate honors for the emperor Augustus. The winner was Paullus Fabius Maximus, the Roman proconsul of Asia at the time. He recommended that Asia adopt a new calendar—reordering its very sense of time—around Augustus. He reasoned that, since Augustus's accession to rule marked the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity for the whole world, Augustus's birthday would henceforth be appropriately considered Asia's New Year's Day, a perpetual reminder of the new beginning he gave to all. Local officials would begin their terms of office henceforth on that day as well. At the same time, the name of the (new) first month of the Macedonian calendar year was to be changed from

extends his gratitude to her for renewing their friendship by her visit this day and by these gifts, worthy of a god, worthily given by a god.”

The maidens each dropped to one knee, bowed their heads, and held their baskets aloft. The priests of Augustus now came forward in two lines, some scooping up a portion of grain, others a portion of incense, from the baskets and circled inward to approach the flaming altar. Each in turn poured out the contents

Dios, named in honor of Zeus, to Kaisaros, with the first day of Kaisaros falling on September 23, Augustus's birthday.

The assembly's decree in support of the proposal is nothing short of messianic, praising the recommendation because

the Providence that sets all the things pertinent to our lives in order, showing diligent care and extravagance, bestowed the most perfect adornment on life by offering us Augustus, whom she filled with excellence to benefit humanity, even as she sent to us and to those after us [a Savior] who would make war to cease and order [all things]. . . . The day of the god's birth constituted for the world the beginning of the good news that would come about through him.^a

The decree itself was carved in white marble and set up in the provincial temple of Rome and Augustus in Pergamum as well as imperial shrines in district capitals and beyond. The most substantial physical remains of the inscription were found at Priene, which has given its name to the inscription.

^aTranslation mine. See further Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 32-35; F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982), 215-22.

of his bowl over the fire, the grain sending up flaming cinders and the incense clouds of smoke, the fragrance of which began to fill the courtyard.

Another man in priestly attire, who looked to be about Serapion's age, stepped forward. He was unknown to Serapion, but he was clearly an imperial priest. His black-and-gray locks flowed out from under a metal headband bearing miniature busts of the goddess Roma and the divine Augustus, visible beneath the fold of his cloak that he had draped over his head. He stood tall and confidently before the bull and extended his right hand, fingers outstretched, before its eyes.

"Do you consent to be given to the god Augustus?" the priest inquired of the animal. As he pivoted his hand up and down at his wrist, the bull followed it, thus appearing to nod in approval.

The priest deftly sliced the bull's jugular with the curved blade he held in his left hand, and an attendant stepped forward with a basin to catch a portion of the blood as the priest from the Artemision dispatched the animal quickly with a hammer's blow to the skull. The animal collapsed instantly to the ground. The priest of Augustus from Pergamum received the basin and turned to pour its contents slowly over the flame, so that the fire evaporated the liquid before the latter could quench the fire, symbolically transferring the bull to the birthday god. At this, a choir of young Ephesian men began to chant a hymn in the god's honor.

*A new year begins today
even as, one hundred and fifty-three years past,
a new age had begun on this day
with Augustus's birth—then mere Octavianus,
whom no one yet suspected was destined by the gods,
in their unfailing goodwill toward humanity,
to usher in an everlasting peace on earth*

*through the everlasting dominion of Rome,
the great anchor for the circle of the lands,
the stabilizing power that brought prosperity
back for all peoples. . . .*

When the hymn had ended, the goddess took her leave of her divine colleague through her mouthpiece, Serapion, who then led the procession on to complete the remainder of its circuit through the city. He and his torchbearers conducted Artemis and her lengthy entourage past the Augusteion toward the northwest corner of the civic forum. There they began their descent down the street called the Embolos, the “wedge,” since it cut diagonally across the normal grid pattern of the streets on its way to the lower city—the commercial and entertainment districts. Serapion passed first a series of smallish monuments, with a great square opening up on the left—the principal approach to the new Temple of Domitian, the living emperor and god, the inaugural ceremonies for which were just a month away and occupying the attention of the greater part of the city’s elite. A few more strides and he was surrounded by shops on both sides of the street, with tightly packed residential buildings crawling up the hillsides above them. Some residents appeared at the thresholds of their shops, burning incense on small portable altars to honor the goddess as she passed by. Interspersed among them along the sides of the road were statues of long-deceased residents, honorific inscriptions below them perpetually proclaiming their generosity or service toward their city.

As the procession neared the lower end of the Embolos, Serapion looked up and to the left, where his own sprawling townhouse was located. On a rooftop terrace just below his own, he caught sight of his neighbor, Caius Flavius Amyntas, watching the procession as it approached. He felt a sudden rush of indignation,

remembering all at once his neighbor's conspicuous withdrawal from all things properly pious and the strange incantations that rose from his dwelling on the night of the first day of every week. He could not continue to allow impiety to go unchallenged in his city, so he halted the procession.

"What's this, Amyntas?" Serapion called out conspicuously, feigning surprise. "Not joining in the sacred rites of our city—today of all days?"

"Your pardon, most esteemed Serapion. I had wanted to come but have been unwell since last night."

Unwell indeed . . . since you caught that sick superstition.

"My prayers have been rising alongside your own today," Amyntas added. "Of that you can be assured."

A number of the onlookers, satisfied with this expression of piety, waved and wished him good health, turning their attention back to Serapion in expectation of the latter's resumption of his course. Serapion smirked knowingly at Amyntas and allowed the procession to advance. As he turned the corner onto the street that would take him past the great theater, Serapion glanced back over his shoulder once more at Amyntas.

Artemis, he prayed silently, cleanse your city—and especially its nobility—of the foul infections of impiety, and hold not their presence among us against us.

A SYMPOSIUM IN THE PRYTANEION

His duties to Artemis fulfilled, Serapion spent the early hours of the afternoon in the baths, then retired to his townhouse at the base of the Embolos to prepare himself for the evening's festivities. His prominent role in the day's rites assured him an invitation to dinner with the city fathers and visiting dignitaries. With the sun setting behind him, Serapion made his way back up the Embolos toward the civic forum.

He walked past several smaller parties as groups of friends and associates, well supplied with meat from the many animals sacrificed earlier in the day along with bread and ample wine provided at public expense, gathered around fires in the front rooms of shops or in smaller courtyards. As he neared the top of the Embolos, he could hear the sounds of larger gatherings of locals in the civic forum and smell the pleasant odor of meat roasting on many fires.



Figure 1.5. The Embolos, in the direction of the civic forum.

He headed toward the first large public building on his left—the Prytaneion, the “hearth” of the city on the corner of the civic forum. As he crossed its forecourt, he looked with satisfaction upon its front columns, into which had been carefully inscribed hundreds of names. He paused at the threshold to touch his own name, not far above the blank column drums that would be engraved with the names of future colleagues and successors in this priesthood. He continued past the sacred hearth burning in the vestibule, attended perpetually by two of the city-owned slaves in twelve-hour shifts, through a sacred cult hall, and into the dining facilities to the rear of the complex. He stood before three large couches arranged as three sides of a square around a low table.

“Welcome, Publius Aurelius Serapion,” announced the elderly priest of Augustus who had presided over the morning’s liturgy.

“My thanks, noble Julius Damas Claudianus,” he replied.

“Please join us here on my couch,” Claudianus said, slightly raising himself from the cushions with his left arm and beckoning with his right. “I am acting as host tonight in the absence of our illustrious proconsul, Marcus Fulvius Gillo, though he has spared us his chief of staff, Aulus Julius Quadratus of Pergamum, here to my right. As one of the *kourētai* of Artemis—and perhaps the only person present who is officially attached to the Prytaneion—it is fitting that you also occupy a place at the host’s couch.”

Serapion smiled at Claudianus’s gentle attempt to soften the blow of not being given the vacant seat at the middle couch, the place for the most honored guests, and took the place nearest him on the couch to his left. He had barely situated himself when another man—the imperial priest from Pergamum who had overseen the sacrifice of Artemis’s bull—entered the hall.

“I hope I’ve not kept you waiting.”

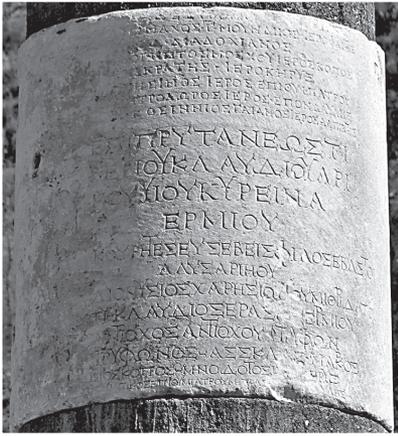


Figure 1.6. A column drum from the Prytaneion showing the inscribed names of priests and other office holders.



Figure 1.7. The forecourt of, and entrance into, the Prytaneion.

THE TITLE *NEŌKOROS*

During the classical and Hellenistic periods, the *neōkoros* was a functionary in Greek temples whose duties might best be compared to that of custodian or sexton in modern churches. The title itself meant “temple sweeper.” Its usage and meaning changed in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods and came to refer to a temple’s primary benefactor for some term, generally a citizen who undertook a major role in underwriting the cost of the upkeep or other major expenses of a temple and its cultic activities, often enjoying therefore the honor and prestige of assisting in the rites performed. It is therefore often translated as “temple warden” or “temple keeper.”

Ephesus began to use the title to describe its relationship to the great Artemision, which sat less than a mile from its city walls and with which it enjoyed a particularly close association (see Acts 19:35). The goddess worshiped there was, after all, Diana/Artemis of the Ephesians, as attested not only by the record of Acts 19:28, 34 but by many provincial and civic coin mintings that celebrated *Diana*

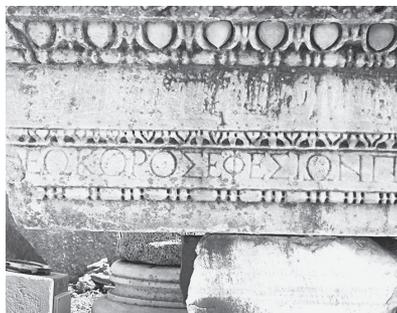


Figure 1.8. An inscription from the reign of Trajan in which Ephesus describes itself as a *neōkoros* city.

Ephesia on their reverses. It came to be applied informally at some point in the first century specifically to cities that were awarded the right to host the province-wide cult of a particular emperor. By the time Ephesus constructed its temple for the provincial cult of the Flavian household, this meaning had become more or less the technical sense of the term.

“Not at all,” Claudianus assured him. “Gentlemen, this is Nicolaus, son of Strato, of Pergamum, one of the assistant priests of the Temple of the Goddess Roma and the Divine Augustus there, who was so kind as to grace our ceremonies today on the birthday of the god.”

The other guests voiced their greetings as Nicolaus removed his outer cloak and handed it to an attendant.

“Since this is Augustus’s birthday, and since you come as a representative of the leading temple dedicated to his worship in our province, it is only fitting that you be given the highest place tonight.”

“I am honored indeed, noble Claudianus,” said Nicolaus as he took the position on the middle couch closest to the host.

“We have assigned places of honor alongside you to our esteemed guests from Smyrna—Claudius Aristophanes Aurelianus and Julius Menekleus Diophantes,” Claudianus said, indicating the other two men on the middle couch. “Both are priests associated with the Provincial Temple of Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate in Smyrna; Aurelianus is a colleague of mine on the provincial council as well. But these three men here,” Claudianus said as he turned toward the couch opposite his own and gestured toward its occupants to give added weight to his words, “are the best men, the *first* men, in Ephesus.”

The oldest of the three made a pantomime of objecting.

“No, Aristion, it’s true, and there’s no point denying it,” Claudianus went on. “This gentleman is Tiberius Claudius Aristion, who has been named high priest and warden of our Temple of Domitian *and* gymnasiarch-elect of the Harbor Gymnasium, still unfortunately under construction, in recognition of his prominent and significant support underwriting both projects.”³

³Tiberius Claudius Aristion is known from inscriptions in Ephesus to have been an active leader in the cult of Domitian at its inauguration and for decades after. He went on to

The others prevented Claudianus from continuing by cheering Aristion both for his munificence and for the signal honors it won for him.

“Well deserved, well deserved,” Claudianus said, affirming the interruption. “And next to him is Titus Flavius Montanus, whose devotion and generosity toward the Temple of Domitian and its associated rites has also distinguished him above his peers. In recognition of this, he has been named *sebastophant* of the imperial mysteries of the divine Domitian and *agonothetēs* for life of the imperial games that shall be held in honor of the divine Domitian here every two years.⁴ And next to him is Gaius Vibius Salutaris, another gentleman whose piety and benefactions show him to be a true friend of Artemis and a friend of Caesar.”⁵

Nicolaus exchanged greetings with the three Ephesian dignitaries.

“Of course you know Quadratus, your fellow Pergamene. There beside him is Publius Aurelius Serapion, another citizen of Ephesus.”

“Yes, the priest of Artemis who officiated with such piety and decorum this morning,” Nicolaus acknowledged. Serapion nodded appreciatively.

Two slaves who had been waiting for Claudianus’s signal came forward, one bearing a small brazier and the other a cup of wine and shallow bowl with a small amount of crushed incense. The

hold most of the major public offices in Ephesus through at least AD 112. See Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 162-63; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 70, 114. Claudianus is also named in an inscription as a leader in the provincial assembly and imperial cult in the 90s (Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 162), though nothing more of his biography is known.

⁴Titus Flavius Montanus is known from an inscription to have held these offices as well as the office of high priest of the Flavian temple at some point between AD 90 and 112 (Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 114).

⁵An inscription in Ephesus names a Gaius Vibius Salutaris as *philartemis kai philokaisar*, “a friend of Artemis and friend of Caesar,” as evidenced by some benefaction of his.

first placed the brazier in front of Claudianus on the table, while the second handed him the bowl of incense. Raising himself again with his left arm, he emptied the bowl over the fire. He gave the bowl back to the slave and took the cup into his right hand.

“We give thanks to the goddess Hestia, protector of hearth and home, in whose sacred precincts we meet.”

Claudianus poured a small amount of wine over the fire.

“We give thanks to the goddess Artemis, protector of Ephesus and guarantor of its future.”

He poured the wine a second time.

“Above all this day, we give thanks to the god Augustus, through whom Providence has established the new world order, this golden age of peace and prosperity. May it endure forever, world without end.”

Claudianus emptied the goblet over the brazier, which the slave then dutifully removed as a line of female slaves entered with goblets of wine and water for each guest and several plates of their first courses—bread made from the finest ground wheat, still steaming from the oven; a variety of olives, cheeses, and nuts; and slices of tomato, cucumber, and eggplant marinated in wine and herbs.

“Marcus Fulvius Gillo, our noble proconsul, sends his personal greetings to each one of you and his regrets that he could not entertain you personally on your visit,” Quadratus announced on his behalf. “As most of you are aware, he has been in Pergamum for the celebration of the divine Augustus’s birthday at the provincial temple there.”

“And in our city,” Nicolaus added, “the celebration of the anniversary of the divine Augustus’s birth is part of a *three*-day event that began two days ago on the birthday of his wife, the divine Livia Augusta. Your *one*-day festival is more on the scale of our monthly celebration on the first day of every month.”

Serapion raised an eyebrow as he reached for some bread and goat cheese, wondering which of his fellow citizens would take the bait.

“It’s only proper, of course, for the provincial center of Augustus’s cult to celebrate in the most lavish manner,” Aristion replied, a little defensively. “I expect that our celebrations in honor of the birthday of our lord and god Domitian next month, and ever after, will outpace those of the rest of Asia Minor taken as a whole.”

“Laodicea has almost completed its local temple honoring Domitian,” Aurelianus of Smyrna reported. “It promises to be quite magnificent.”

“Magnificent?” Aristion hissed, inflating slightly like a provoked toad. “Before you leave here, you will see a temple worthy of being called ‘magnificent,’ a temple worthy of the divine Domitian and worthy of a *neokorate* city.”

“Yes,” Claudianus interjected in an attempt to direct the conversation away from the perpetual civic rivalry, “we’ve arranged for you all to tour the sacred precincts of the new temple—Asia’s Shared Temple of the Augusti in Ephesus, as the provincial council has named it.⁶ Aristion, where do we stand in our preparations?”

Aristion allowed himself to deflate into a more relaxed demeanor.

“The temple’s chief offices and most supporting ones have been filled. A few remain vacant, including a position in the council of *neopoioi* opened up by the untimely death of Lucius Claudius Philometor.”

“In terms of financing the cult, we could do just fine without the full complement,” Montanus added, “but we want our support base to be as strong as possible as we inaugurate the new temple.”

“We plan to take up the matter tomorrow when the city council meets,” Aristion declared as three slaves returned to

⁶This is the title given to the complex in dedicatory inscriptions placed on the premises by other cities in the Roman province of Asia (Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 45-46).

clear the table of the platters of appetizers, now well picked over. “Final preparations for the rites themselves and for the inaugural games are also well in hand, even though the new bath facilities by the harbor will not be ready in time to accommodate the athletes competing in the first Domitianic Games. The training grounds, at least, will be serviceable.”

“I’m certain the baths in the gymnasium beyond the theater will suffice,” Serapion said reassuringly.

“Do let us know,” Claudianus added, “if either Aurelianus of Smyrna here or I myself can offer help in any way. As members of the provincial council entrusted with the oversight of all these cult centers, we want nothing to be lacking. The more thoughtfulness and resources we put into these shrines and their rites, the greater the honor and imperial favor enjoyed by the whole province.”

“And this new Temple of Domitian has brought significant recognition to the great city of Ephesus at long last,” Aurelianus added. “I’ve noticed the newer inscriptions of civic decrees around the city written in the name of ‘the council and people of the temple-warden city of the Ephesians,’ putting your enjoyment of the honor front and center in your self-identification.”

“The honor’s been too long deferred,” complained Salutaris. “Ephesus, the home of the great Artemision, the capital city of the Roman province! We should have been awarded an imperial neokorate decades ago.”

“It’s no secret, Aurelianus, that we are proud indeed,” Montanus admitted “to have gained at last the same distinction that you in Smyrna and your neighbors in Pergamum enjoy.”

“There are still *distinctions* to be made among distinctions,” Quadratus interjected.

Aristion and Montanus looked across at the chief of staff quizzically.

“Ah,” Nicolaus said with a slightly embarrassed smile. “My fellow citizen refers to a fresh inscription in our own city recording a decree by ‘the council and people of the first-to-be-awarded-a-temple-wardenship city of the Pergamenes.’”

The company enjoyed a good laugh at the clever one-upmanship—all save for Aristion, who was clearly not amused.

“Let’s suspend our rivalries for one evening,” Claudianus said diplomatically, “and savor our common boast that our *three* cities enjoy the distinction of hosting the only three provincial temples of the imperial cult in Roman Asia to date. Local temples to the deified emperors may abound throughout the province, but the emperors themselves made the selection of our three fair cities to receive the title of *neōkoros*, and to be the guardians and perpetuators of their cult.”

The Ephesians, Smyrnaeans, and Pergamenes raised cups of wine to one another and drank to their success in rising to the top places in the province, however disputed the rankings within that top circle might remain.

Claudianus signaled once again to the steward, who disappeared momentarily from view.

“The chief priest of the provincial temple of Rome and Augustus in Pergamum will be here personally to celebrate the rites in the Ephesian Augusteion on the first day of next month,” Nicolaus announced, “the day before the inaugural rites of your splendid temple on the birthday of our lord and god Domitian.”

“I have learned of this,” Aristion said, “and wish to extend to him the honor and courtesy of taking part with me in the inaugural ceremonies in Domitian’s temple.”

The Prytaneion’s slaves now emerged with trays bearing the main courses.

“We have reserved the choicest parts of this day’s sacrifices for your pleasure tonight, gentlemen,” Claudianus announced, nodding to the steward for the details.

Gesturing toward each dish in turn, the steward announced: “Roasted tenderloins of beef accompanied by a wine and juniper glaze; thinly sliced beef heart, slow-cooked in a well-herbed broth; beef liver, minced and flash-fired with garlic, onion, and olives; and the sweetbreads, poached and pan-seared in oil seasoned with ginger and wine. I pray that our efforts delight you.”

“We give thanks again to the divine Augustus,” Claudianus said dutifully, “for allowing us to share his table this day.”

As the slaves served portions of each dish to the guests and filled the cups again with wine, Serapion screwed up the nerve to raise a delicate issue.

“I am delighted that my city now has the honor of a provincial temple, and I, for one, would not begrudge Pergamum its claim to hold preeminence for being the first among us to propose such honors for an emperor a century ago.”

He paused a moment to chew thoughtfully.

“I do, however, begrudge the presence of people in our midst for whom the gods mean nothing, who regard the honors we show our emperors as an empty show and look with contempt upon our celebrations today.”

Aurelianus was the first to guess at Serapion’s meaning.

“You’re referring to the Jews in our cities? Those narrow-minded, antisocial atheists who think our gods to be so many sticks and stones?”

A number of Aurelianus’s fellow diners snorted their assent to his inference—and his characterization of the monotheists in their midst.

“Jews are *born* into their folly,” Serapion replied. “Our noble emperors have granted them toleration, even affirming their rights after their disgraceful revolt against the Roman peace. I’m thinking rather of once-honest, gods-fearing Greeks and Romans turning their backs on religion.”

“The Christ cult,” ventured Nicolaus.

“Precisely.”

“But they’re just another Jewish faction, aren’t they?” Claudianus objected.

“That’s not what the Jewish community in Smyrna would say,” interjected Aurelianus. “They’ve made it quite clear that we are not to associate the Christ-followers in Smyrna with them.”

“Which leaves me wondering why we continue to tolerate them in our midst,” said Serapion. “Our cities vie with one another to house a particular temple to a particular emperor, and then turn a blind eye to pockets of our populations who spit on our temples and our piety. If the emperor were to learn of this, he would be right to blame us for not enforcing unity and proper religion among our cities’ people.”

Several around the triclinium nodded and grunted their assent to Serapion’s implicit challenge.

Nicolaus could not permit the consensus to go unchallenged. “We were speaking a few moments ago about the importance of observing distinctions. I would urge you to take care not to paint every member of a group in the same colors.”

“What do you mean, Nicolaus?” asked Claudianus.

“Gentlemen, would it surprise you to learn that I myself am a devotee of the *Christos*?”

Their silence said that it had.

At last Serapion ventured, suspecting that the Pergamene was playing a joke on them, “How can you be a Christian *and* a priest of Augustus?”

“Not all who bear the name ‘Christian’ deny the gods and our emperors their due. Indeed, the *Christos* himself had taught his disciples, while he was a mortal on earth, to give to God what belonged to God and to give to Caesar what was rightly Caesar’s.”

Claudianus did not suppress a surprised grunt at this new information. The other dignitaries sat in silent attention to hear more of this explanation.

“Some Christians, I grant you, are tainted by the same atheism that characterizes the Jewish people from among whom the *Christos* himself came, but this is far from universal. Other Christians—like myself—can be just as supportive of the authorities on whom our common prosperity depends as anyone else, and just as dutiful toward the gods.” Nicolaus pressed his case further. “There are a good number of Christ-followers in Pergamum who are of the same mind—and in Thyatira as well, I know for a fact. A woman of some means there has helped curb the exclusivist tendencies of the group and nurtured a more wholesome respect for the city’s pantheon.”

“What, then,” Serapion asked, “is the attraction of this foreign superstition to a man like yourself?”

“We can all acknowledge our dependence upon the gods and the divine emperors for the preservation of the state and our common well-being. But what about our individual fates in this world and, even more pressing, on the other side of death? The *Christos* died and returned to life to bring assurance that death is not the end and that fear of death need not tyrannize us throughout our lives. For this gift I honor him, even as I honor our emperors for their great benefactions toward humankind.”

“Your own position in the cult of Augustus leaves me no room to contradict you,” Serapion conceded, “but not all known to be Christians in Ephesus are so pious as yourself.”

“I would simply ask you, most of whom are colleagues alongside me in the cult of the emperors, not to judge any group by its ugliest members. If all were to be judged thus, what group, what race, what city, would escape a bad reputation?”

“A fair point, Nicolaus,” Claudianus acknowledged. “The gods of Rome are not jealous of other gods—as long as those gods are not jealous of the gods of Rome.”

The other guests nodded their approval of Nicolaus’s explanation. Claudianus signaled the steward once again, and the slaves of the Prytaneion cleared away the remains of the main course, brought bowls of water for the guests to wash their fingertips, and began to set out varieties of local fruits, sliced and served with nuts and date honey. Cups were refilled with wine, and conversation continued long into the night about local and provincial politics.

Serapion could not keep himself from musing throughout the evening, however, about what deeper enmity against the public good lurked in the heart of his neighbor Amyntas when other Christians, such as this Nicolaus, had no difficulty giving the gods their due.

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