

ARTEMIS

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All that fuss about Apollo's birth didn't faze Artemis. She was the older twin, anyway. Besides, love was not a fixed pie, to be divided up and then gone. Her parents Leto and Zeus both adored her. As for the rest of the gods, Artemis couldn't really have cared less who they praised or didn't. She felt no need for flattery.

While Apollo was almost instantly an adult, Artemis enjoyed her childhood. As a bud of a girl, she sat on Zeus' lap and asked for a bow and arrows. Not huge, obvious, threatening things like the ones Apollo carried. She wanted slender silver arrows and a small, sweetly curving bow. But she didn't want anyone to get confused and think she herself was sweet. When her father presented her with these gifts, she gave his beard a quick yank rather than a dainty kiss. And when the great smithy god pulled her onto his knee, she plucked out the hairs on his chest, making the poor god




look a bit like a dog with mange. No one could predict what Artemis might do next.

And while her brother went in white, trying to make everyone confuse him with the sun god Helios, Artemis wore stylish high boots and a short tunic of many colors, and men looked at her. They said she was as dreamy as the moon goddess Selene. Though she didn't invite their glances, it felt good to be watched.

Her brother surrounded himself with the nine Muses. Artemis surrounded herself with innumerable sea nymphs and wood nymphs. Plus she had swift hounds, some half white that nearly disappeared they ran so fast, some with hanging ears that fluttered like feathers, and one all speckled brown and pink like a quail egg. Together they hunted rabbit and porcupine and gazelle and lynx and stag. No, this young goddess was never lonely.

Artemis never married, but she was rarely alone. Dogs and sea nymphs and wood nymphs ran with her on the hunt through woods as prey fled from the famed archer.





And, unlike Apollo, she never sought the praise of people. She preferred, in fact, to keep her distance from them, holding hands with her retinue of nymphs in wide circle dances that made the very mountains shiver with pleasure.

It was only when birthing women found their labor pains too great that she entered cities; for there was something about her that eased newborns' way. It was natural, she guessed. Hadn't she herself flowed from her mother like a good wish, after all? She would put on gold armor and travel in her golden chariot pulled by brawny bucks with towering antlers, all bridled with gold, all caught by her with nothing but her bare hands, and spare these women so much grief. Now that was something worth getting praised for.

But not all women recognized they owed their good fortune in childbearing to Artemis. One of the ungrateful was Niobe, daughter of the god Tantalus. She and her husband Amphion, a son of Zeus, had six brave and strong sons and six beautiful and graceful daughters. Niobe crowed with pride. She claimed the people of Thebes should make offerings to her, rather than to Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis. It made sense to Niobe: She had twelve children when Leto had only two. She vastly underestimated the danger of making Leto her rival.

Leto went complaining straight to her children, both famed archers. Apollo tracked down Niobe's sons as they



An Amazon warrior on horseback

WARRIOR Women

In Greek mythology Amazons were skillful archers who lived without men—like Artemis. But unlike the hunter Artemis, they were warriors on horseback. While many scholars call them fictitious, the Greek historian Herodotus claimed they are based on ancestors to

the Sarmatians, living from the fifth to the fourth century B.C., whose women rode into battle beside men. Others see their origin in tribes in southern Ukraine and Russia, or in Crete during Minoan times, all cultures that had women warriors.



hunted on Mount Cithaeron. He shot arrows into all. Artemis wouldn't let Niobe get off that easily, though. Only the cruelest of acts could make it clear that gods would tolerate no challenges. Artemis wanted the mother to witness each arrow as it hit the mark. She entered Niobe's home and shot arrows into her girls.

Niobe sank to the ground like a stone. But again she was not allowed even this cold end. This bereft mother wasn't a senseless stone; no, no, she felt arrows hit her children over and over. She cried forever, a constant fountain. That sent a message, all right.

Apollo could do what he wanted. But Artemis was a force to be reckoned with in her own right. Women knew it. That was enough for her.

