Unveiling the Goddess

Artemis of Ephesus as a symbol of nature at the turn of the nineteenth century

Frederika Tevebring

In 1807 Alexander von Humboldt published his *Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen nebst ein Naturgemälde der Tropenlander,* a translation from French of one of the volumes written as a result of his five-year expedition to Latin America. The German translation includes a frontispiece by Humboldt's friend, the Danish artist Bertel Thorvaldsen. The image shows a statue of Artemis of Ephesus being unveiled by Apollo.[1] At the base of the statue lies a tablet with the inscription *Metamorphose der Pflanzen,* a reference to Humboldt's much-esteemed friend Goethe to whom the frontispiece is dedicated. In a letter to Goethe Humboldt expresses his enthusiasm for the image and how he looks forward to presenting the book to his friend. "After so many years of absence I did not want appear before you in any other way but through this small tribute, which is a testimonial of my deep reverence and profound gratefulness towards you," and "my friend Thorvaldsen in Rome has come up with this vignette for me. It refers to the synthesis of Poetry, Philosophy and Natural sciences brought together in your person."[2]

Thorvaldsen's picture was not the first of its kind; the unveiling of the ancient goddess had been a reoccurring pictorial trope in discourses on the pursuit of philosophical and scientific knowledge since the seventeenth century, when it also became increasingly popular on frontispieces to scientific treatises. Goethe himself had made use of similar images on several occasions. Goethe, however, had used this image to criticize what he considered an unseemly approach to nature by natural scientists.

Was then Humboldt's frontispiece with the image of the unveiled goddess an uninspired recourse to the conventional imagery associated with scientific works? Moreover, was his dedication of this type of image to Goethe, as the French philosopher Pierre Hadot has argued, a *faux pas* that can only be explained through Humboldt's ignorance of Goethe's work?[3]

With Humboldt's frontispiece as a starting point and following a brief summary of the goddess's reception from the sixteenth century, I will discuss how the image of Artemis of Ephesus as a symbol of nature was deployed as part of a discussion on how man could and should relate to nature at the turn of the nineteenth century. Was nature to be understood as a potentially threatening realm that needed to be dominated by human

Frontispiece to the German translation of Alexander von Humboldt's *Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen nebst ein Naturgemälde der Tropenlander* (1807), after a drawing by Bertel Thorvaldsen. It shows a statue of Artemis of Ephesus being unveiled by Apollo. (Yale Collection of German Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.)

ingenuity, a source of material wealth, or aesthetic pleasure? I argue that Humboldt's use of the figure of Artemis of Ephesus must not have been an unaware choice going against Goethe's criticisms of science. Rather, I hope to show that Humboldt, just as many of his contemporaries, used this particular image as a means to illustrate his own attitude to the field of natural studies.

The peculiar iconography of the statue in Humboldt's frontispiece easily identifies it as Artemis in her guise as the tutelary deity of Ephesus, the city in Asia Minor where she held a temple counted as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. On Humboldt's frontispiece the goddess is depicted in the typical iconography preserved on coins and in Roman copies of her cult statue.[4] The goddess is standing with her legs close together and covered by an *ependytes,* a tightly wrapped garment covered with depictions of animals and plants, including bees, the symbol of Ephesus. That this garment, not otherwise common on Greek sculpture, caused confusion for many post-antique viewers is clear from the many later renderings of the goddess in which her lower body is turned into a pillar. Further she is wearing a *chiton*, this garment is visible on her upper body and her feet, coming out under the *ependytes*. Her arms are bent and she is reaching towards the observer with her lower arms. On her head she is wearing a *polos* or mural crown, typical of city goddesses in Asia Minor. What looks like a nimbus seen from the front is made up by fabric falling from her head. On the ancient statues of Artemis, the free space above the protuberances covering her chest is usually adorned by figures, such as small Nikai. Above these she wears one or more rows of wreaths. Apart from the *ependytes*, animal figurines and mythical creatures also appear on her arms and shoulders, and emerge out of the nimbus. The original cult statue kept in the temple was likely dressed and adorned with textiles, flowers, and other removable items and ephemeral materials, explaining variations between statues in the depiction of clothing and adornments.[5]

The most distinguishing attribute of the Ephesian Artemis is surely the many protuberances on her upper body, giving the impression that the goddess is covered in a plethora of breasts. On the statue in Humboldt's frontispiece there are three rows of protuberances but ancient statues often sport up to five. Most likely these protuberances depict items that were originally part of the goddess's ephemeral apparel: on multi-colored statues they are the same color as the garment, not the skin. Similar pectoral decorations can be found on other deities from the area, notably also on the male Zeus Labraundos. All this indicates that the protuberances were originally not meant to depict breasts although what exactly they depicted remains unclear. At the time of late antiquity however, and especially in the eyes of Christian writers, they had come to be reinterpreted as such.[6] The interpretation of the protuberances as breasts still colors many scholarly and popular ideas of the goddess. In her modern reception

she has been known under her late Roman denotation *Diana Multimammia,* or the Greek equivalent, *Artemis Polymastov,* both meaning the "many-breasted." The goddess's identity as the "many-breasted" has been so firmly established in iconographical reception that it has often sufficed for a figure having one or two extra breasts to convey all the connotations carried in the image. Already the earliest post-antique references and visualizations of the goddess bear witness to a, perhaps unsurprising, fascination with her many breasts. The earliest scholarly study of Artemis of Ephesus is a treatise by the Jesuit scholar Claude Menestrier, written in the 1630s and published posthumously in 1657. Almost all the statues depicted in the plates accompanying Menestrier's book have nipples, even in the cases where there are none in the original statue.

When the image of Artemis Ephesia was rediscovered in the sixteenth century there already existed an established tradition of portraying nature as a woman, Natura, with milk flowing from her breast or nurturing the world at her breast.[7] Sixteenth century images of Natura associate her with procreative maternity, fertility, and as a source of material wealth, as for example Zorach has shown in the context of the French Renaissance.[8] It is in the light of this tradition that we must interpret the earliest appearances of Artemis Ephesia, for example the architect Pirro Ligoro's rendering of her as a fountain, sprouting water from her many breasts, in the spectacular renaissance garden of Villa d'Este.[9] The use of the goddess as a symbol of nature is present already in her very first post-antique depiction. In the early sixteenth century Raphael included her in his decoration of the Stanza della Segnatura. Above *The school of Athens,* Raphael placed an allegory of philosophy, personified as a seated female figure.

Small figurines of Artemis Ephesia hold up the armrests of Philosophy's throne, illustrating the notion of Philosophy resting upon but being elevated above nature.[10] In the early stages of her reception history, the goddess represented an idea of nature as a source of materiality for humanity but also as an entity apart from human civilization.

As Artemis first starts appearing on frontispieces to scientific treatises in the seventeenth century the connotation is still that of an entity juxtaposed to human intelligence and mind, but now the emphasis is on the uncovering and control of her mysteries. Her first occurrence in a scientific context is likely the frontispiece to Gerard Blasius's *Anatome Animalium* (Amsterdam, 1681).[11] Similarly to Humboldt's *Ideen,* Blasius's frontispiece shows nature – here with four breasts – being unveiled, but by a female personification of knowledge or science. Surrounding the two female figures are wild beasts of various kind and at the front of the picture two putti are respectively at work cutting open a rabbit and studying organs laid out in front of him. Blasius's contemporary, Anton van Leeuwenhoek, also used the image of the unveiled goddess. The frontispiece to his *Anato-*

mia seu interiora rerum (Leyden, 1687) shows nature with five breasts, unveiling herself in front of an assembly of figures. Immediately in front of her sits a female figure, probably a personification of science, looking at nature with a microscope and taking notes on what she sees. The unveiled nature in the work of Blasius and Leeuwenhooek is to be understood as literally. Writing on anatomy and the microscope respectively, the two scientists unveiled nature's secrets by opening her up and looking inside her. At least in Blasius's frontispiece the relation of science to nature is characterized by discovery and control, indicated by the animals seemingly coming to pay tribute at the scene and by the two submissive felines, one of which is held by nature on a leash. The frontispiece illustrates how nature, otherwise threatening, can be controlled and pacified.

The unveiling of the goddess, as an image illustrating the pursuit of scientific knowledge of nature, proliferated in the time between the works of Blasius and Humboldt. A later example is the funerary monument of the Danish naturalist Otto Friedrich Muller (1730–1784). The stele celebrates Muller's scientific achievements with a picture of Death pulling aside a curtain to reveal a temple with Artemis Ephesia. The Latin inscription of the monument translates as follows: "guided by experience he stepped into the Temple of Nature, and after removing her veil, he saw the Goddess's face."[12]

The image of the veiled Artemis has itself no ancient equivalent; the Ephesian Artemis was never depicted or described as veiled. Rather, the origin of this image must be sought in the Ephesian Artemis' association with the Egyptian goddess Isis. The syncretism of the two goddesses goes back to late antiquity and is upheld in their modern reception. Through her association, and sometimes identification, with Isis, the image of Artemis of Ephesus became part of the reception of Moses, and his posited involvement with Egyptian religions, that flourished in the wake of the Enlightenment. A variety of thinkers, from William Warburton to Karl Leonhard Reinhold argued that Moses had been initiated into the Egyptian mysteries. Central to this debate was Plutarch's account of the temple of Isis at Sais. The inscription of this temple read, in Plutarch's account: "I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered."[13] Schiller, who took a keen interest in Egyptology, was inspired by this quote and the theories of Reinhold for his poem "Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais" (1795). The poem tells of a young novice arriving at Sais. The temple's hierophant shows him the veiled goddess and quotes the cautioning words of the temple "Let no rash mortal disturb this veil." The young man, however, cannot contain his curiosity and in the night, he returns to the temple to lift the veil. The next morning the priests of the temple find him:

The last is said : – and he has drawn the veil.
"Now," ye will ask, "what object met his gaze?"
I know not. Void of consciousness and pale,
So on the morrow was he prostrate found
By the attending Priests at Isis' feet.
Whate'er he saw, whatever then he learned,
His lips have never told : but gone for aye
Was all the former gladness of his life,
And sorrow bore him to an early grave.
"Woe be to him," his warning voice would say
When urgent questioners around him pressed,
"Woe be to him who seeks for Truth through sin!
For Truth so found no happiness will yield."[14]

In his poem Schiller, without pinpointing any one particular mode of inquiry, cautions about trying to gain knowledge without proper preparation. It is his thirst for knowledge that drives the young man to make the journey to Sais, and it is his curiosity and his lack of respect for the more experienced elder, as well as towards the nature of the wisdom he seeks, that is his undoing.

Novalis also returns to Plutarch's quote in his *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1798–1799). Like Schiller, Novalis was probably introduced to the image of the veiled picture at Sais through its reception in mystic religious movements. The literature of Rosicrucianism had especially captured Novalis' fascination during his time in Freiburg.[15] If Schiller's poem is an older man's warning to a heedless and impatient younger generation, Novalis approaches Sais from the viewpoint of the *Lehrlinge,* the excited young novices in their excitement about the hidden truths about to be revealed.

> So I too will describe my Firgure, and though no mortal lift the veil according to that Inscription, we must seek to become immortal. He who will not lift the veil is no true Disciple at Sais.[16]

In the second part of the poem, titled *Die Natur,* Novalis further explores what he understand under the term nature and how humans can relate to this realm. Novalis names two professions – both in which he had experience – concerned with the understanding and description of nature: the poet and the scientist. While, according to Novalis, nature shows herself to the poet in her most vivacious and spirited side, the scientist sees nature dead and fragmented. Comparing the approach of poets to nature with that of natural scientists he writes:

> While the latter deliriously pursued the Fluent and Fleeting, the former sought with keen knives to detect the inner construction and the interrelatedness of sinew and muscle. Nature the Friend died under their hands, and left but dead or palpitating remains. While through the

> Poet, as though moved by generous wine yet still more inspired, she gave forth the most divine and joyous utterances.[17]

He concludes that it is the company of poets that the true lover of nature should seek.

While Novalis argued that the poet was best suited to understand nature, artists made similar claims for their trade. For the decoration of the entrance hall to the London Royal Academy of Arts, Benjamin West, the Academy's president between 1792 and 1805 and 1806 to 1820, prepared the painting *The graces unveiling nature*. In West's painting it is neither scientists nor poets, but the muses, protectoresses of the arts, who are unveiling the many-breasted goddess. But this idealization of the intimate relationship between artist and nature and her function as the artist's main source of inspiration was also questioned, even ridiculed. In a now lost drawing from 1791, the Austrian artist Joseph Anton Koch depicted a young artist at a crossroad, choosing between ancient art and wild nature as his source of inspiration.[18] In Koch's picture, the solemn gracefulness of the classical statue is contrasted with the personification of nature, a grotesque conglomerate of mismatched parts, including the torso of Artemis Ephesia. William Hogarth playfully refers to similar concerns in his engraving *Boys peeping at nature*.[19] In an early version of the image from 1730 a small faun tries to peek underneath the dress of an Artemis Ephesia-esque bust while a little girl is shooing him off. Two other children frame the central group – making the composition reminiscent of Blasius's frontispiece with its busy putti in each corner. The two children in Hogarth's picture are both busy depicting nature. The left child sits facing the bust, painting her image, while the right one is turned away from her, drawing with the help of a compass. Through the two children and the faun, Hogarth presents us with three different approaches to nature. The child in the right corner illustrates the scientific approach, using an instrument for his depiction, but without paying actual attention to the figure before him. The faun illustrates the inappropriate curiosity and, finally, the leftmost child, the only one directly looking at the statue and the one whom the Artemis figure herself faces, depicts the artist's view.

As seen from these examples the reception of Artemis of Ephesus draws from and combines several iconographical traditions. In her figure associations to femaleness, motherhood and fertility, but also the exotic, secrets, and mysteries were brought together. While some of these characteristics were borrowed from or influenced by Artemis' association with the Egyptian Isis, another important figure also often identified with the Ephesian Artemis is Cybele. Like Artemis, Cybele is commonly found as the tutelary goddess of cities in Minor Asia, a function indicated in their iconographical feature the turret crown. Their modern reception often allows the two goddesses to borrow features from each other. It is possible

that Cybele's name "mother of gods" influenced the interpretation of Artemis of Ephesus as a mother figure.[20] Certain overlaps might have existed already in antiquity, although there are few indications that Cybele was worshipped at Ephesus.[21] Despite their iconographical similarities and the tendency both in reception as well as in scholarship to equalize them, caution is advisable in drawing too strong an identity between the two figures. Interpreting ancient goddesses as different versions of one original 'great goddess' has been a common trope in scholarship, primarily with a feminist agenda.[22] Such attempts, however, often overlook the individual traits of goddesses, and risk subsuming their often complex and individual characteristics under a single function, most often fertility and motherhood.

Despite the dominance of these traits in the reception of Artemis of Ephesus, one should not forget that during her long worship at Ephesus the realms over which the goddess presided extended well beyond the realms of childbearing and wild nature to include civic identity, administration, protection of the city and, perhaps most prominently, economic management and prosperity.

The importance of gender and the erotic overtones in many of these images cannot be overlooked. The choice of personifying Nature as a woman can be explained by the female gender of the word 'nature' in many languages, but as Rebecca Zorach has pointed out, there is more to the choice of female personifications and their display as erotic objects.[23] The image of a man – or female representations of the male realm of science – uncovering a static female figure carry strong connotations of dominance. Furthermore, the reoccurring depiction of Artemis as a statue chooses to depict nature as a realm produced and dominated by man. The underlying connotations of these images are highlighted when compared to a second important strand in the reception of Artemis of Ephesus. Apart from the context of science and philosophy, Artemis of Ephesus also proliferated in images from midwife handbooks.[24] In these images, connected to the traditionally female trade, the goddess is rarely shown as a static figure that hides (statue) but rather as an active figure that participates and interacts.

The importance of the female figure is kept in the eighteenth century but, as seen from the examples above, the same imagery of unveiling the female is now used to express opinions opposed to those illustrated in the images of Blasius and Leeuwenhoek. In the eighteenth century the image of the unveiled goddess is reinterpreted as an image cautioning respect towards that what should be hidden. The image was used in this way not only among poets, but also by scientists. The aforementioned grave monument to Otto Friedrich Muller is one example. On Muller's grave stele the scientist is not shown to reveal nature's secrets, or forcing them from her, but rather to be an initiate to a secret knowledge of which he has proven himself worthy. A similar caution is illustrated on the frontis-

piece to Andreas Segner's *Einleitung in die Naturlehre* (1750). This shows a veiled figure striding through a rural landscape. Her back is turned away from the viewer but the sistrum in her hand associates her with ancient Egypt. Three butterfly-winged putti are observing the goddess. One of them is putting his finger to his lips in a cautioning gesture; a second is busy measuring the footsteps of the goddess while the third is trying to lift the fringe of her long garment to look underneath. The putti's activities together with the text below the picture, *Qua livet,* "insofar as it is permitted," reminds the viewer of the limits and possibilities of scientific research. Making this image the "entrance" to his work, Segner presents himself to the reader as the hierophant guiding the initiate into the secrets of nature, while reminding the reader that the task of the scientist is not to unveil nature, to present all her secrets, but only to describe her traces. In this way, Segner recognizes the tradition of the picture and deploys it in his own work, arguing that it is possible to approach nature through science while still respecting her integrity.[25] Kant mentions Segner's frontispiece in a footnote in his *Critique of judgement*. This frontispiece, Kant argues, illustrates the "sacred shudder" that should dispose the mind of anyone about to enter into the study of nature.[2]

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the image of Artemis of Ephesus and her veil had become a reoccurring trope deployed to express various ideas on who could approach nature and in which way. Were nature's secrets revealed through scientific inquiry, or through artistic depiction? Goethe – to whom, we recall, Humboldt's frontispiece was dedicated – himself both a poet and scientist, returned to this image several times to express his particular standpoint. In *Faust I* Goethe has Faust exclaim the following lines directed at his scientific tools:

> I stood before the door, you should have been the key;
> Your wards are intricate but do not turn the lock.
> Mysterious in broad daylight,
> Nature's veil can not be filched by you,
> And what she keeps back from your prying spirit's sight
> You will not wrest from her by lever or by screw.[27]

Similarly with the above-mentioned examples, nature is here personified and gendered. The text conveys to the reader an image of a coy, strong-willed Nature, who herself chooses with whom she shares her intimate secrets.[28] In the 1836 poem *Genius, die Büste der Natur enthüllend,* Goethe unites the theme of the Egyptian mysteries with the image of Artemis Ephesia to criticize the inquiry into nature's secrets in even harsher terms:

> Respect the mystery;
> Let not your eyes give way to lust.

Nature the Sphinx, a monstrous thing,
Will terrify you with her innumerable breasts.

Seek no secret initiation
beneath the veil; leave alone what is fixed.
If you want to live, poor fool,
Look only behind you, toward empty space.

If you succeed in making your intuition
First penetrate within,
Then return toward the outside,
Then you will be instructed in the best way.[29]

Goethe also deployed the motif of unveiling in a positive, less critical way. For a celebration of the homecoming of Archduke Karl August in 1814, Goethe commissioned the art school of Weimar to be decorated with emblematic paintings. One of these, which Goethe would reuse for his own jubilee in 1825, was named just as the abovementioned poem: *Genius, die Büste der Natur enthüllend*.[30] At a first glance the composition of the image is not much different from that of Humboldt's frontispiece. A putto is shown pulling aside a veil covering a bust of Artemis Ephesia. The motif of the unveiled bust is mirrored in the background, where a landscape is being revealed behind a curtain. However, as has been argued by Pierre Hadot, Goethe's deployment of this motif celebrates a rather different approach to nature than Humboldt's frontispiece.[31]According to Hadot, it is not nature herself that is being unveiled but rather the artistic image of her. As Hadot points out, Goethe repeatedly insisted that nature was not veiled at all, but always showed herself in her full splendor.[32] For Goethe, understanding nature was not achieved by taking her apart to reveal her inner workings, but through learning to see what is already shown – a task he saw more fitting for the artist than the scientist.

If Goethe privileged the artistic depiction of nature to the scientific inquiring into it, was Humboldt's dedication of the frontispiece then indeed, as Pierre Hadot argues, a *faux pas?* Humboldt's scientific method was based less on experiments than on the careful and extensive collecting of empirical data. Trained as a geologist, his interests also included botany and zoology, and he was a keen anthropological and linguistic observer. During his five-year journey through Central and South America, Humboldt carried with him an impressive array of instruments to take a variety of measurements, including those of elevation, temperature, atmospheric pressure, and humidity. Humboldt's understanding and description of nature, however, did not end with detailed empirical observations and the graphic tables resulting from them. In the introduction to his *Ideen,* Humboldt expresses his conviction of the possibility of a more universal description of nature and adds that he does not think that, "the true natural philosophy (*naturpilosophische*) study can be harmful to empirical

examinations."[33] Humboldt sought to link scientific data with textual descriptions and visualizations. In the preface to his *Ansichten der Natur* he explained his wish to create a "view of nature on an enlarged scale, the display of the concurrent action of various forces or powers, and the renewal of the enjoyment which the immediate prospect of tropical scenery affords to sensitive minds."[34] Humboldt wished to produce an image of a place or phenomenon that is able to take into account its scientific as well as its aesthetic qualities. These efforts are perhaps most beautifully exemplified in Humboldt's *Tableau physique,* an image of the Chimborazo based on a sketch by Humboldt that accompanied the *Ideen.* The view of the mountain is complemented with an intersection of it and, on the sides, tables with scientific data. The image is thus a depiction as well as a description of the mountain. Humboldt's work on developing isothermal maps is another example of his attempts of bringing together an artistic and a scientific depiction of nature. As he wrote himself, the aim of combining artistic and literary approaches to nature was to enhance the immediate enjoyment of nature by supplying insights into the powers and forces of nature.[35] Humboldt valued the aesthetic pleasure in nature as a vital part of the scientific understanding of it. In the words of Joan Steigerwald, his aim was to "harmonize his aesthetic vision with precise measurement and to write nature's laws in a figurative language."[36] With his ingenious methods of illustrating nature, Humboldt combined text and picture so as to bridge the gap between the artist's and the scientist's view of nature.

As we can see, Humboldt's unveiling of Nature has more in common with the unveiling of the artistic visualization of nature, as in the emblem favored by Goethe, than with the anatomic revealing celebrated in Anton Blasius's frontispiece. Humboldt did not believe that scientific data on its own was sufficient to describe nature, but neither was an aesthetic depiction. As he wrote in his letter to Goethe, nature was unveiled through a "union of poetry, philosophy and natural knowledge."[37] As made clear in his letters to Humboldt, Goethe was very curious about the *Naturgemälde.* When the original didn't reach him on time, he undertook an effort of composing one himself according to Humboldt's descriptions.[38] There is no reason to believe that Goethe did not understand the dedication in this way, as a celebration of the artist/scientist's capability to *illustrate* nature rather than to reveal it.

Using the frontispiece of Alexander von Humboldt's *Ideen* as a starting point, I have wished to show how the image of Artemis of Ephesus was utilized within a debate on the appropriate approach of man to nature. This debate spanned over the fields of natural science, art, and poetry and was carried out in images as well as in words.

Allegories similar to that of the Ephesian Artemis as symbolizing nature – exotic, erotic, mysterious, many-breasted – can be utilized and played

with to express various views of what they represent. Because of our familiarity with many symbols and their connotations, we can, for example, understand when an image of blind justice peeking under her blindfold is a comment on, say, the unfairness of a current political scandal. Examinations of images such as Artemis of Ephesus, whose symbolic connotation have fallen out of use, allow us to recognize and interpret the discourse in which it was utilized. In her study of the motif of nature as a book in the sixteenth-century Netherlands, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has argued that the motif of referring to nature as a book became popular in particular because of the ambiguity of this image. Although reading the book of nature was a recurring trope, there was not a consensus on what relationship to nature this trope was meant to illustrate.[39] This allowed it to be deployed to express various notions of how nature could be approached. Similarly, I argue that the deployment of Artemis of Ephesus was popular because of the different relations to nature this image could express. The many and various connotations associated with this prevalent image made it ideal to express and negotiate new views on nature. The image thus also became an instrument with which to situate the work within a dialogue with earlier and contemporaneous images.

Artemis of Ephesus thus not only symbolized changing notions of the relation between man and nature, but also played a part in bringing about these changes.

Summary

Unveiling the Goddess. Artemis of Ephesus as a symbol of nature at the turn of the nineteenth century. By Frederika Tevebring. Peculiar as they might find it, few people today would be able to name or even recognize the image of Artemis of Ephesus, the ancient tutelary deity of Ephesus. From the beginning of her post-ancient reception in sixteenth-century Rome up until the nineteenth century, however, the image of the goddess was a reoccurring trope in text and print culture. Known under various names (Artemis of Ephesus, Isis, Diana Ephesia or Multimammia) and characterized by what was interpreted as a multitude of breasts, the image of the goddess came to symbolize nature, making her particularly popular on frontispieces to scientific treatises.

Particularly prolific were images showing Artemis being unveiled, often by a scientist or a personification of science or enlightenment, an allegory of nature's exploration through human ingenuity. However, a closer comparison between these images reveals striking differences. In this article I argue that these differences indicate that Artemis of Ephesus was not simply a signifier for a homogeneous idea of "nature". Rather, she was deployed to illustrate various and often conflicting notions of what nature is and, importantly, how man could interact with her. Using the frontispiece

to Alexander von Humboldt's *Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen* as my starting point, I explore how the image of Artemis Ephesia was deployed at the turn of the nineteenth century, a time when the methods and foundations of Enlightenment natural science were increasingly questioned. Understanding Humboldt's frontispiece in a dialogue with earlier and contemporaneous images will show how the iconography of Artemis of Ephesus was used to partake in an ongoing debate on human's relation to nature.

Notes

1. Alexander von Humboldt: *Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen* (Tubingen: F.G. Cotta, 1807).

2. Ludwig Geiger: *Goethes Briefwechsel mit Wilhelm und Alexander von Humboldt* (Berlin: Bondy, 1909), 297 (all translations from German are mine unless otherwise stated).

3. Pierre Hadot: *Zur Idee der Naturgeheimnisse. Beim Betrachten des Widmungsblattes in den Humboldtschen "Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen"* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982), 22.

4. Among the type described belongs, for example, the so-called great Artemis in Seljuk from the 2nd century AD. For a discussion of the canonical type and its description by H. Thiersch see Robert Fleischer: *Artemis von Ephesos und verwandte Kultstatuen aus Anatolien und Syrien* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 116.

5. A.L.: "Artemis. II. Ikonographie." *Der neue Pauly*, 59; see also Fleischer: *Artemis von Ephesos und verwandte Kultstatuen*, 130.

6. Lynn R. LiDonnici: "The Images of Artemis Ephesia and Greco-Roman worship. A reconsideration", *The Harvard Theological Review,* 85, No. 4 (Oct. 1992): 389ff, 396.

7. On the history of female personification of nature cf. Andrea Goesch: *Diana Ephesia. Ikonographische Studien zur Allegorie der Natur in der Kunst vom 16.–19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M: Peter Lang, 1994), 21ff; Peter Dronke: "Bernard Silvestris, Natura, and personification", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld institutes,* 43 (1980): 29.

8. Rebecca Zorach: *Blood, milk, ink, gold. Abundance and excess in the French renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2005), esp. 83ff.

9. Cf. Marjatta Nielsen: "Diana Efesia Multimammia. The metamorphoses of a pagan goddess from the Renaissance to the age of Neo-Classism" in Tobias Fischer-Hansen & Birte Poulsen (eds.): *From Artemis to Diana. The goddess of man and beast.* Acta Hyperborea. 12. (2009), 455ff, 465–466.

10. Cf. Hermann Thiersch: *Artemis Ephesia. Eine archaologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1935), 92, ill. 131.

11. Cf. Goesch: *Diana Ephesia,* 224.

12. Cited from Marjatta Nielsen: "Diana Efesia Multimammia", 477–478, see also 475ff for more examples on similar depictions.

13. Plutarch: *Isis and Osiris* in *Moralia V* trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 9.354. The reception of this quote and the debate on what it said about Moses and Egyptian religion is as rich and complex as the reception of Artemis of Ephesus with which it is entangled and cannot but very briefly and insufficiently be mentioned here. Cf. Jan Assman: *Moses der Agypter. Entzifferung einer Gedachtnisspur* (Munchen & Wien: Carl Hansen Verlag, 1998), 175–184.

14. Friedrich Schiller: *The veiled image at Sais* in *The poems of Schiller,* trans. E.P. Arnold-Forster (London: William Heinemann, 1901).

15. Paul Kluckhohn & Richard Samuel (eds.): "Einleitung der Herausgeber". *Novalis Schriften* 1, third ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1977), 72.

16. Novalis: *The disciples at Sais and other fragments*, trans. Una Birch (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), 97. Cf. Karl Willhelm Friedrich Schlegel: *Ideen 1. Die Forderungen und Spuren einer Moral, die mehr*

ware als der praktische Teil der Philosophie, werden immer lauter und deutlicher. Sogar von Religion ist schon die Rede. Es ist Zeit den Schleier der Isis zu zerreifien, und das Geheime zu offenbaren. Wer den Anblick der Gottin nicht ertragen kann fliehe oder verderbe.

17. Novalis: *The disciples at Sais and other fragments*, 100–101.

18. Cf. Marjatta Nielsen: "Diana Efesia Multimammia", 479, Fig. 21

19. Cf. Pierre Hadot: *The Veil of Isis. An essay on the history of the idea of nature,* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 239.

20. In this case too, caution is advised in how we interpret the ancient connotations of terms such as "mother" when used as a term of reverence addressed to a deity. It should suffice to remind the reader that Zeus common name "father" has not caused him to be recalled as a fertility figure.

21. Richard E. Oster: "Ephesus as a religious center under the Principate, I. Paganism before Constantine" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Romischen Welt* II.18.3 (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1990), 1688

22. For a comment on this tradition see for example Patricia Cox Miller's review essay of *The goddess obscured and pagan meditations*, in *Signs* 13 (Summer, 1988), 866–869, and Brigitte Roder, Juliane Hummel & Brigitta Kunz: *Gottinendämmerung. Das Matriarchat aus archäologischer Sicht* (Munchen: Droemer Knaur, 1996).

23. Zorach: *Blood, milk, ink, gold,* 122–123.

24. Goesch: *Diana Ephesia,* 51–76.

25. Cf. Pierre Hadot: *The Veil of Isis,* 241.

26. Immanuel Kant: *Critique of judgement,* §49.

27. Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Faust I,* transl. Charles E. Passage (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 670ff

28. Cf. Ann B. Shteir: "Iconographies of Flora" in Ann B. Shteir & Bernard Lightman (eds.): *Figuring it out. Science, gender and visual culture* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 3–27, for an interesting comparison to the deployment of the goddess Flora in popular and scientific treaties in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain.

29. Goethe: "Genius die Buste der Natur enthullend," cited in Pierre Hadot: "Isis has no veils," in *Common Knowledge,* 12.6 (2006) 351.

30. Cf. Pierre Hadot: "Isis has no veils."

31. Pierre Hadot: *Zur Idee der Naturgeheimnisse* and "Isis has no veils."

32. Hadot: "The veil of Isis".

33. Alexander von Humboldt: *Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanzen*, iv.

34. Alexander von Humboldt: *Aspects of nature,* trans. Mrs Sabine (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), vii.

35. Alexander von Humboldt: *Aspects of nature*, viii.

36. Joan Steigerwald: "Figuring nature/figuring the (fe)male. The frontispiece to Humboldt's ideas towards a geography of plants" in Ann B. Shteir & Bernard Lightman (eds.): *Figuring it out,* 54ff, 66.

37. Letter from Humboldt to Goethe, Feb. 6. 1806. Ludwig Geiger: *Goethes Briefwechsel mit Wilhelm und Alexander von Humboldt*, 297.

38. Letter from Goethe to Humboldt, April 3, 1807, in Ludwig Geiger: *Goethes Briefwechsel mit Wilhelm und Alexander von Humboldt*, 299.

39. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein: *The printing revolution in early modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 187ff.