

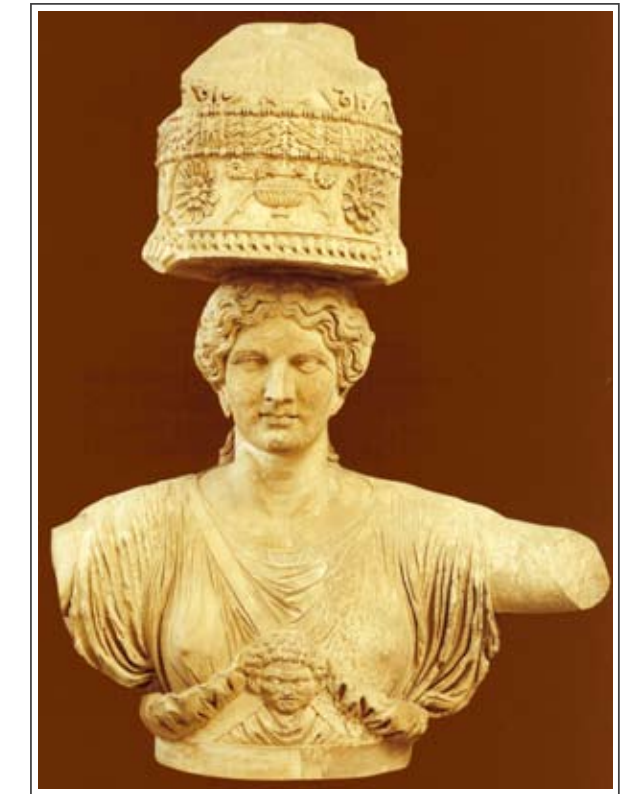
A caryatid from Eleusis, near Athens

A caryatid is a sculpted female figure that acts as an architectural column. This is the upper part of one of a pair that flanked the gateway to the inner courtyard of the sanctuary of Demeter, Greek goddess of fertility. It was part of a building programme begun around 50 BC, by which time Greece was a Roman province. This Roman caryatid resembles the better-known Greek caryatids of the Erechtheion, a temple of the 5th century BC on the Athenian Acropolis. The deliberate reference to classical Athens, a city admired by the Romans, emphasises the connection between Athens and the sanctuary at Eleusis. The Eleusinian Mysteries, one of the most important of all Greek religious festivals, began with the worshippers walking the twelve miles from Athens to Eleusis. The festival was still important in the Roman period, and some Roman emperors

were initiated into the cult. Since participants were sworn to secrecy, details of the ceremonies remain a mystery to this day, but they were connected with rituals of rebirth and the afterlife.

The caryatid was removed from Eleusis in 1801 by E.D. Clarke. The local people used to heap manure around it, believing it protected the fertility of their fields. Clarke identified it as Demeter, but it is more likely to represent a priestess. The figure is very worn, having stood for centuries above ground, but the gorgon head at her breast and the sacred container (*cista*) on her head are still visible. The second caryatid from the other side of the gateway is much better preserved. Excavated in the late 19th century, it is now in the Museum at Eleusis.

Made in Attica, Greece,
about 50 BC.
Found at the Sanctuary of
Demeter at Eleusis, Attica
Marble (Pentelic)
Given by E.D. Clarke, GR.I.1865



The second caryatid;
the drapery, around the
right breast is restored
(Eleusis Museum no. 5104).
(Photo Hellenic Ministry of Culture,
Archaeological Receipts Fund / Y. Fafalis)