

The Real Amazons in Literature, Art, and Archaeology

by Laura Nees Cardie

It has long been debated as to the extent to which the Amazons can be called real historical women. Yet, with archaeological studies discovering the burials of ancient warrior women in the Eurasian Steppes, it is becoming more apparent that there is truth in the myths. The Greeks' awareness of these women to the East is also apparent due to their depictions in art and literature from as early as the 8th century BCE, which included historical travel writers such as Aristean from the 7th century BCE. Adrienne Mayor promotes an important approach to the study of the real Amazons by using archaeological discoveries of warrior women to the East alongside the historical accounts of Greek writers to prove that the Amazons were based upon these historical women. Building upon this, the real Amazons can be further verified by considering the mythic accounts together with the historical ones, demonstrating how the latter influenced the former; an approach that will be the focus of this paper.

Ken Dowden argues that myth is the opposite of history¹ and that "mythology tells us nothing of value... even if it is based on a kernel of truth"². However, this statement is quite contradictory, for if myth has elements of truth to it, surely then it does have elements of historical value as well; providing there is also historical evidence to support the claims. This is especially the case when looking into the function of myth. Despite the complexity of defining myth, it can be fair to say that some myths were used by the Greeks to explain the world around them. For example, the Eleusinian myth and the Pandora myth, with the former rationalising the seasons³ and the latter the creation of the first woman, as well as how evil entered the world⁴. So, in turn, the Amazon myth could have been used to understand the warrior women to the East, who had different customs and statuses to those within the Hellenic city-states⁵. While Greek women were expected to remain in the home and focus on domestic tasks and child-rearing, these Eastern women rode and fought with men and although they did not live in a matriarchal society, the Greeks may have adapted this detail in the Amazon myth to understand

¹ Dowden 1992; 4

² Dowden 1992; 49

³ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; 398-402. Also, Demeter has received the epithet "bringer of seasons" (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; 54, 193, 493)

⁴ Hesiod, *Works and Days*; 80-82 & 94-95

⁵ Sparta perhaps being an exception with Wilde arguing that they would appear "quintessentially Amazon" (Wilde 1999; 23) to the Athenians; however, Spartan women were not expected to fight.

why they were different to Greek women; explaining why they had not been domesticated by men.

One of the complexities of myth is its fluidity. Helen Morales states that "myth is a complex game of production and reception that involves selecting some parts of a narrative and suppressing"⁶ and this is evident in the transformative nature of the Amazon myth. We see them develop over the centuries depending on the aims of the individual author. Homer in the 8th century BCE calls them "equals of men"⁷ to depict them as formidable enemies to strengthen the heroism of the Greeks. Then, Aeschylus in the 6th century BCE described them as those "who loathe all men"⁸ in Prometheus' foretelling of Io's arduous wanderings. Meanwhile, Hellanikos in the 5th century BCE calls them the complete opposite as "man-loving"⁹ in his logographical account of the Amazons and Scythia. These authors all choose to select the 'otherness' of the Amazons while suppressing or exaggerating their fierceness. Lyn Webster Wilde argues that this reveals the growing fascination with the Amazons¹⁰, but this can be taken further to show the ambiguity of the Amazons' relationships with men. This results in an adaptable concept that changes depending on the function they must serve to the individual author. Therefore, although these women were not part of a matriarchal society, that does not mean that they did not influence the creation of the Amazon myth; despite what some scholars claim¹¹.

In this paper, I will demonstrate the origins of the Amazon myth as the ancient warrior women of the Eurasian Steppes. Using ancient Greek literature and art, I will explore the awareness and portrayal of these Amazonian women in both historical and mythic accounts, and how these two genres overlap. Then, I will relate this to the archaeological evidence found in the Eurasian Steppes and the influence it had on these Greek interpretations. By accepting the existence of Amazons in the real ancient world, we can look at the themes of gender and culture with a new understanding and reveal the interesting complexities that accompany the study.

⁶ Morales 2007; 9

⁷ Homer, *Iliad*; 3.189 & 6.186

⁸ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*; 725

⁹ Hellanikos; FGH 323a F 17c

¹⁰ Wilde 1999; 3

¹¹ Tyrell 1984; 24. Pomperoy 1976

Amazons in Literature

The earliest written accounts of these warrior women come from Homer who describes them in the 8th century BCE as the "equal of men"¹² followed by Arctinus, in the 7th century BCE, who continued the story of the *Iliad* in his now-lost epic poem the *Aethiopsis*¹³. The epic begins where the *Iliad* ended, with the arrival of the Amazons after the funeral of Hector. Arctinus describes the Amazon Queen Penthesilea as a skilled fighter who "dominates the battlefield"¹⁴, and who takes on the great Achilles, thus proving that the Amazons were an equal foe as implied by Homer. From then on, the myths of the Amazons were adapted in various genres, as previously mentioned, throughout the Greek and Roman periods. Yet, in all versions, they remained the fierce women who were the equals of the Greek heroes.

However, it is through the accounts of historical travel writers that an argument can be made for the existence of real Amazons. The accounts of the warrior women in the Eurasian Steppes being brought to Greece by these writers were transformed into the legends of the Amazons¹⁵. The first known account comes from Aristeeas, in the 7th century BCE, who was the first to link the Amazons to the Sarmatians, when he was travelling the region, in his now-lost work the *Arimaspea*¹⁶. Although lost, we know of his writings from Herodotus who references this work in his *Histories*; thus, we can also assume that this work was also a source and influence for this later writer¹⁷. In the mid-5th century BCE, Herodotus also writes of his own travels north of the Black Sea, where he heard the tales of warrior nomad women from the Eurasian Steppes whom he named 'Amazons'¹⁸. The story goes that after the Greeks won the battle at Thermodon against the Amazons and took them captive, the women attacked the crew onboard the boat and ended up in Scythia. The men there, believing them to be foes, attacked but when they realised they were women, the Amazons and Scythians joined and lay together.

"Ever since then the women of the Sauromatae have followed their ancient ways; they ride out hunting, with their men or without them; they go to war and dress the same as the men"¹⁹.

¹² Homer, *Iliad*; 3.189 & 6.186. Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι is often mistranslated to 'against men' due to the English prefix anti but the actual translation is 'equals of men'; 'anti' = 'equivalent', 'aneirai' = 'men'. Mayor 2014; 23

¹³ Arctinus may even have been a pupil of Homer and thus following the same intended story (Stewart 1995; 576)

¹⁴ Arctinus of Miletus, *The Aethiopsis Fragment 1* (From Proclus, *Chrestomathia ii*)

¹⁵ Guliaev 2003; 124. Murphy 2003; 98

¹⁶ Dowden 1992; 104

¹⁷ Mayor 2014; 56-58. Herodotus, *The Histories*; 4.13

¹⁸ Davis-Kimball & Littleton 1997; 45

¹⁹ Herodotus, *The Histories*; 4.110-117

Thus, Herodotus subtly explains why these women were so different to Greek women, for they came from an inferior race who have not been civilised by men.

Herodotus is one of two vital 5th century BCE sources, the other being Hippocrates²⁰. In his treatise, *Airs, Waters, and Places*, Hippocrates discusses the impact the climate has on the health and character of the inhabitants of certain areas and while he does not name the Amazons in his text, Hippocrates discusses the uniqueness of the Scythian Sauromatae in the same way as Herodotus;

"Their name is Sauromatae. Their women, so long as they are virgins, ride, shoot, throw the javelin while mounted, and fight with their enemies."²¹

Both accounts focus on the skills of these Eastern warrior women and consequently influenced the contemporary portrayals of the Amazons. Lorna Hardwick highlights the clear connection Herodotus makes between the Sauromatae and the Amazons, and the overlapping attributes of Hippocrates' description of the female warriors with those of the Amazons²². For example, they were skilled horse-riders just as the Amazons were known for, with Euripides using the epithet "horse-riding Queen of the Amazons"²³ to describe Hippolyta in his play *Hippolytus*, the Amazon Queen's son. Furthermore, perhaps the most significant attribute is that they go to war with men, which is the purpose behind their references in multiple myths. They fight with the Trojans during the Trojan War²⁴, they are attacked by Herakles²⁵ and on another occasion Bellerophon²⁶ during their individual tasks, and they go to war with Theseus and his city, Athens²⁷. The overlaps between the historical and mythic sources reveal that these two groups of women were connected, with the historical influencing the mythic. Eileen Murphy asserts that the repetition of these details in the myths may show how they "evidently were based on

²⁰ Stewart 1995; 577

²¹ Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places*; 17

²² Hardwick 1990; 20

²³ Euripides, *Hippolytus*; 308. Also, Lysias, a 4th century BCE orator, asserts that "they were first of all to mount horses" (Lysias, *Funeral Oration*; 4). Similarly, Pindar says describes the "Amazons with their fine horses" (Pindar, *Olympian Ode*; 8.48)

²⁴ Arctinus of Miletus, *The Aethiopis Fragment 1*. Quintus of Smyrna, *Fall of Troy*; 1.22. Virgil, *Aeneid*; 1. 490. Seneca, *Troades*; 236. Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History*; 2.45

²⁵ Euripides, *Heracles*; 408-418. Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*; 2.5.9. Hyginus, *Fabulae*; 30.10. Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History*; 2.45

²⁶ Homer, *Iliad*; 6.186. Pindar, *Olympian Ode*; 13.89. Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*; 2.33

²⁷ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*; 1.2.1. Plutarch, *Theseus*; 26-27. Justinus, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic Histories*; 2.4

some kernel of truth"²⁸. Therefore, this indicates that the Greeks had knowledge of the real warrior women in the nomad societies to the East who formed a foundation for the myth of the Amazons. So, as some scholars have noted²⁹, the stories of the warrior women could have come over to Greece from the reports of Greek travel writers and sparked an interest in the imaginations of the poets and playwrights.

Moreover, the Amazons in literature reveal not only the stories from the Eurasian Steppes but also what was on show in Greece that related to the Amazons being real. For example, we know from authors such as Pausanias and Plutarch that in places like Athens and Thessaly, there were Mycenaean tombs that were so old to the Classical Greeks that they reappropriated them to the fallen Amazons who fought against Theseus in Athens³⁰. Also, from Euripides' play, *Herakles*, we learn that Hippolyta's belt, taken by Herakles during his ninth labour, was still on show in the Temple of Hera in Mycenae³¹. Adrienne Mayor suggests that these artefacts may have even been genuine Scythian objects³² and if this was so, this point further contributes to the awareness of the culture of the Scythian and nomadic tribes to the East. These objects functioned as a way of presenting the triumphs of the Greeks over the non-Greeks/barbarians, a factor that was ingrained into the mythic function of the Amazons. Some scholars argue that the Amazons' way of life was viewed by the Greeks as being a distorted version of their own. Thus, going against the customs of the Greek *oikos* and in turn the Greek woman's lifestyle³³. However, Andrew Stewart takes this further by claiming that the Amazon myth was also a warning to "those who withdr[e]w from or reject[ed] ordinary society"³⁴. Again, these ideas can be taken even further when looking into the function of the Amazon myth by explaining the use of portraying the Amazons as opposites in order to understand why there were warrior women. By taking on the appearance of a Greek male by participating in male activities such as horse-riding, fighting and leading a society, the Amazons take on the role of the 'Other' and consequently are inferior to Greek society, as is evident by the tombs and trophies of defeated Amazons, on show. Therefore, the Amazon myth has been taken from the reports of these women to the East and

²⁸ Murphy 2003; 98

²⁹ Davis-Kimball & Littleton 1997; 48. Tyrell 1984; 24. Guliaev 2003; 124

³⁰ Plutarch, *Theseus*; 27. Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*; 1.2.1. Mayor 2014; 276-77, 285. Larson 1995; 112-113

³¹ Euripides, *Herakles*; 308

³² Mayor 2016; 970 & 2021; 132

³³ Hardwick 1990; 17. Pomperoy 1976

³⁴ Stewart 1995; 574

transformed into the mythic race that continuously catches the imaginations of ancient writers across a range of genres.

Amazons in Art

Despite the varying identification of their homeland in ancient literature, "the geographic placement of the Amazon is consistently in the East"³⁵, marking their connection to the real nomad warrior women and influencing their representation in ancient art. Many scholars note that the depiction of the Amazons' iconography depended upon the knowledge of the individual painter with the key to their portrayal being to appear as the 'Other' to the Greek viewer³⁶, whether that be through their clothes, weaponry, or gender discourse. Also, with the growing knowledge of the non-Greek world to the East, the artists could then begin to use these Eastern stereotypes to illustrate the Amazons in what was believed to be their homeland. So, by looking at the ancient art of the Amazons in the same way as the ancient literature, relating the mythic Amazons to the historical East, the origins of the Amazon myth can be revealed to be connected to the awareness of the nomad women in the Eurasian Steppes through their depiction, adaptation, and function.

The first known image of the Amazons in art comes from a clay votive shield found in Tiryns, from the early 7th century BCE³⁷. It depicts two Amazons and three Greeks, one of whom is lying on the ground. Though fragmented, it is clear that the late geometric style takes influence from the Near East in its patterned design and that the fighters were females due to the indication of breasts and long skirts, a method that preceded the use of white skin in black-figure vase paintings³⁸. Susan Langdon comments that these designs were derived from the Assyrian dress, a feature used by early Greek painters to illustrate the 'Others' in art³⁹. Hence, this proves that in art as well as literature, the Amazons were connected to the East from the start. Moreover, the identity of the main Greek figure on the shield is unknown but scholars have suggested multiple theories; one being that as the shield was found in the Tiryns' Temple of Hera, the story may relate to Herakles' task to retrieve the belt of Hippolyte, which was set by King Eurystheus of Tiryns, with Hera being the main antagonist to the hero⁴⁰. Another interpretation relates the

³⁵ Patten 2013; 13

³⁶ Hardwick 1990; 28. Shapiro 1983; 106. Patten 2013; 20. Stewart 1995; 572

³⁷ Tiryns clay votive shield from the early 7th century BCE (ca.700-680 BCE), Nafplion Archaeological Museum

³⁸ Markoe 1996; 50. Langdon 2002; 3. Mayor 2021; 131.

³⁹ Langdon 2002; 3

⁴⁰ Glenn Markoe sees this as a "straightforward" interpretation (Markoe 1996; 50). Meanwhile, Adrienne Mayor acknowledges the anonymity of the figure but suggests Herakles as a possibility (Mayor 2021; 131). Langdon resists identifying the hero but notes Herakles as a possibility (Langdon 2002; 7)

narrative to the story of Achilles and Penthesilea during the Trojan War with the dates aligning with the epics the *Iliad* and the *Aethiopis*⁴¹. Meanwhile, Langdon argues that though the contemporary viewer would have recognised the figure, the formulaic combat of epic literature provides a flexibility that allows the hero to be interchangeable⁴². Instead, she focuses more on the ritual use as relating to the rite of passage for young boys⁴³, which could be expanded on by linking the need to defeat the 'Other' – as referenced through the Amazons and the Centaurs being depicted on the shield – relating back to the need to explain the real warrior women as contrasts to the Greek norms through mythicising them. By defeating the Amazons, if even ritually, the Greeks are reaffirming their superiority over the 'Other' and thus metaphorically fighting the "embodi[ment of] the Greek fears of an invading barbarian society"⁴⁴ to the East; a reoccurring theme and function in the art of the Amazons.

During the second quarter of the 6th century BCE, Amazons began to be depicted on black-figure vases in ways that indicate foreignness to the individual painter, as mentioned before. The Archaic Tyrrhenian neck-amphora⁴⁵ and the Vulci amphora of Herakles killing Amazon Queen Andromache⁴⁶ portray Amazons in the Athenian hoplite costume which reflects the 'Otherness' – and thus the foreignness of the Amazons – through the gender discourse⁴⁷; with the fact that warrior women went against Greek customs. Another way to show their 'Otherness' is demonstrated by the Amazon frieze from The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus⁴⁸ and the Penn University Attic Black-figure neck-amphora⁴⁹ through the Amazons presentation as horse-riders. "Since Greek geography tended to be more rocky and mountainous, it was unsuitable for warfare from the saddle... also through the masculine symbol of the horse"⁵⁰ the Amazons once again go against the Greek norms. Their foreignness is linked to the flat plains of the Eurasian Steppes resulting in the functionality and traditions of using horses. Moreover, the choice to depict them with bows and arrows, as shown in the Penn neck-amphora, reveals further the intention to display the fact the Amazons were the opposite of the Greeks. Fighting with a bow

⁴¹ Patten 2013; Pl. I, 1. Langdon notes Achilles as another possibility (Langdon 2002; 9)

⁴² Langdon 2002; 9

⁴³ Langdon 2002; 6-10

⁴⁴ Patten 2013; 31. Stewart 1996; 583

⁴⁵ Archaic Tyrrhenian neck-amphora (ca. 560 B.C.E) Museum of Fine Art, Boston

⁴⁶ High Archaic black figure neck-amphora of Herakles killing Amazon Queen Andromache, attributed to Camtar Painter (ca. 570-560 BCE), Vulci Museum

⁴⁷ Patten 2013; 21

⁴⁸ The Amazon frieze from The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (350 BCE) British Museum

⁴⁹ Attic Black-figure neck-amphora (Late 6th century BCE) Penn University Museum

⁵⁰ Patten 2013; 21

in contrast to a sword or spear, was not a Greek custom⁵¹ as they preferred face-to-face fighting. So, it was often a characteristic of the Eastern warriors in art; especially the Scythians⁵², where both the Amazons and the historical warrior women originated from. Therefore, this demonstrates the continuous impact of the awareness of the historical people from the East and the development and function of the Amazon myth.

The growing interest and knowledge of the East during the late 6th century BCE, as argued by many scholars⁵³, consequently influenced the way artists depicted the Amazons in their work. Hardwick claims that the main two inspirations for the costume of the Amazons came from the Thracians and the Scythians⁵⁴, a view that can be proven through the Penn neck-amphora which depicts Amazons with Scythian caps and patterned trousers, along with one armed with a Thracian pelta and spear. Expanding on this, Hardwick links the introduction of the Scythian-dressed Amazons with the "mercenaries [who] were hired by Peisistratos to form a corps of archers in the Athenian army"⁵⁵, proving the awareness the Greek artists had of Eastern iconography. Furthermore, it can be argued that through the Greek travel writers, the knowledge of Eastern traditions was growing during this time as well. Hardwick claims that the depiction of the Amazon Scythian archer disappeared by 500 BCE, with the departure of the mercenaries. However, the patterned clothing and horse-riding Amazons continued to be portrayed in art as shown by the 420 BCE Attic red-figure neck-amphora in Berlin⁵⁶, showing the embedded connection between the two races.

The Persian War provoked another change in the depiction of the Amazons, starting in the 5th century BCE, as they began to take on the appearance of the Persian invaders⁵⁷. Although the quantity of their iconography decreased in this period, they began to appear on a larger scale through their depictions on public monuments such as the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus⁵⁸, the Stoa Poikile and even the Athenian Parthenon. This was a political manoeuvre to celebrate the Greek's triumph over their Eastern invaders by linking back to the myth of the Amazons to promote their repeated superiority. This is unsurprising, as Annaliese Elaine Patten says⁵⁹, for

⁵¹ Shapiro 1983; 110-111

⁵² Shapiro 1983; 110

⁵³ Hardwick 1990; 29. Shapiro 1983; 106. Patten 2013; 22

⁵⁴ Shapiro 1983; 106

⁵⁵ Shapiro 1983; 112

⁵⁶ Attic red-figure neck-amphora of a riding Amazon in Scythian costume, (420 BCE) Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin

⁵⁷ Hardwick 1990; 31. Patten 2013; 14. Shapiro 1983; 114. Stewart 1996; 582.

⁵⁸ Figure 5 shows the Amazons in Persian caps and riding horses showing them as distinctively the Eastern other.

⁵⁹ Patten 2013; 14

the Thracians, Scythians and Persian were all non-Greeks from the East who were a threat to Greek society, just like the Amazons were. Expanding upon this, the connection of the Amazons and their connection with these peoples can be related back to the literature previously mentioned as well as Athenian orator Isocrates' famous speech which promoted the union of the Greek states against Persia around 380 BCE.

"The races which have the strongest instinct for domination and the greatest power of aggression—the Scythians and the Thracians and the Persians... our territory was invaded by the Thracians... and by the Scythians, led by the Amazons"⁶⁰.

This speech connects the literary accounts of the Amazons with their visual representations, highlighting their function not only in the mythic past but also in the historic records as former Eastern invaders who fought alongside the real peoples the Greeks encountered.

Therefore, the art of the Amazons shows these warrior women as distinctively Eastern and the 'Other' from their illustrated first appearance. Whether a female hoplite, Thracian, Scythian, or Persian, the Amazons are firmly shown as not only a non-Greek but also the practitioners of customs that were the opposite of those of the Greeks. When explored in parallel with the literature on Amazons, they are located in the same area as the real warrior women of the Eurasian Steppes and continue to present the need to explain them as opposing the Greek norms. Moreover, the argument that the Amazons were based on real women is strengthened when both the literature and art are explored in conjunction with the discovered burials of these warrior women.

Amazons in Archaeology

Excavations in European Scythia uncovered 270 graves of warrior women from the 7th century BCE to the 1st century BCE; leading Archaeologists to estimate that 37% of warrior graves were female⁶¹. These women were buried with both typical feminine objects, along with armour and weapons, provoking scholars to name them the Amazons from myth⁶². In some cases, due to the original gender identification methods, some warrior women were misinterpreted as men, and it was only in recent years that this has been corrected with modern

⁶⁰ Isocrates, *Panegyricus*; 67-68

⁶¹ Fialko 2018; 31. Mayor 2014; 63. Murphy 2003; 98

⁶² Anthony 2007; 329. Ascherson 1996; 112. Clayton 2001-2; 75. Fialko 2018; 31. Guliaev 2003; 114. Mayor 2014; 64 & 80.

methods⁶³. This led some to believe that the inclusion of weapons in the graves was just ceremonial. However, analysis of the bones reveals otherwise, with these women presenting "injuries of the 'military' character"⁶⁴. Moreover, the women were buried with the same honours and traditions as the men⁶⁵, showing a different approach to gender in Scythian society, while also linking to the representations of Amazons as 'equals of men'. Another trait of the Amazons, horse-riding, is evident in the burials of the Scythian warrior women whose graves contained horse equipment and in one case the remains of a horse, and whose bones reveal bowed legs; an effect of a lifetime of riding⁶⁶. Some women's bones even showed healed traumas that resulted from falling off their horses or fighting horseback in battle⁶⁷. Therefore, the existence of these graves found in the homeland of the Amazon race with dates overlapping their introduction into Greek literature and art, proves that there is some truth in the foundation of the myth.

Some examples of Scythian burials include the 1991 excavation of 5th/4th century BCE Scythian mounds between the Don and the Dnieper where 112 graves of 'Amazons' were uncovered; such as the 31 warrior women graves at the Elizavetovsky cemetery, along the Don river⁶⁸, and burial mound No. 5 near Zelenoe in Kherson containing the graves of three armed females⁶⁹. The ages of these armoured women, between 16 and 30 years old, suggest to scholars that this society included a "form of lightly armed auxiliary units for specific age and social groups of the Scythian women"⁷⁰. Another excavation in the region revealed earlier burials including Bobrica Kurgan 35 from the 7th/6th century BCE containing a warrior woman and her horse, and Zelenojie Kurgan 5, which held 3 girls between 10 and 15 along with a variety of weapons, armour, and tradition feminine goods⁷¹.

Additionally, the Middle Dom cemeteries reveal that women played a role "in the military structure of the steppe"⁷²; for example, Durovka 16 contained the remains of a warrior woman between the ages of 30 and 35 whose bones reveal her to be a rider⁷³, while burial mound No.6

⁶³ Davis-Kimball 1997; 41. Mayor 2014; 64-65. Murphy 2003; 11. Taylor 1994; 395

⁶⁴ Fialko 2018; 42. Also Fialko 2018; 31. Ascherson 1996; 111. Davis-Kimball & Littleton 1997; 48. Mayor 2014; 68. Murphy 2003; 11 & 98

⁶⁵ Fialko 2018; 42. Murphy 2003; 8, 11 & 98

⁶⁶ Fialko 2018; 38. Guliaev 2003; 114. Mayor 2014; 65.

⁶⁷ Murphy 2003; 68. Mayor 2014; 80

⁶⁸ Mayor 2014; 70

⁶⁹ Hasanov 2018; 139

⁷⁰ Guliaev & Savchenko 1995. Also, Fialko 1991; 13. 2018; 38. Guliaev 2003; 115

⁷¹ Fialko 2010; 119-127. Hasanov 2018; 143. Mayor 2014; 70.

⁷² Balgabayeva 2016; 5277

⁷³ Kozlovskaya 1996

contained a warrior woman aged 20-25, along with the remains of a horse⁷⁴. Archaeologists used other grave goods such as jewellery and grand structures to indicate that the graves belonged to wealthy women. However, for the purposes of this study, what is interesting about the artefacts is that they included a "Greek amphora with oil or wine"⁷⁵. This is not an isolated case as Greek amphoras appear in Kurgan 4 and Kurgan 30 along the Don River⁷⁶; highlighting both the trade that occurred between the two societies and subsequently showing the Greek's awareness of these warrior women. We also know that "archaeologists recovered pointed battle-axes, daggers, and swords in leather scabbards painted with geometric, curvilinear, and zigzag designs"⁷⁷ matching those illustrated on Greek vases; further proving the Greeks' knowledge of the warrior women in the Eurasian Steppes.

However, this does not mean that the Greek representation of these Eastern women, in the form of the Amazon myth, was always completely historically accurate. The evidence suggests that they lived in a mixed society⁷⁸ despite Herodotus claiming that they lived by themselves and never intended to live the way Scythian women do;

"[who] stay in their wagons and do women's work, and do not go out hunting or anywhere else"⁷⁹

We also know that Scythian women "did not spend all their time sitting around in wagons but that they were also engaged in heavy physical labour"⁸⁰, as Herodotus states. Instead, by looking at both the literary and archaeological evidence, the parallels between these Scythian women and the Amazons become apparent; women who take an active role in the physical side of living in the Eurasian Steppes. This way of life to the Greeks would have seemed unnatural, while to the Scythians their nomad lifestyles would dictate different customs with the burials showing that it would be more practical for women to wear male clothing such as trousers – partnered with jewellery to become more feminine – and ride alongside the men⁸¹. Thus, the Amazon myth separates the non-Greek customs of the Scythian women from what would seem natural to them, to confer why there were warrior women in the East. The 'Other' to Greece after all comes

⁷⁴ Guliaev & Savchenko, 1995

⁷⁵ Guliaev & Savchenko, 1995

⁷⁶ Mayor 2014; 70

⁷⁷ Mayor 2014; 79

⁷⁸ Clayton 2001-2; 75

⁷⁹ Herodotus, *The Histories*; 4.114

⁸⁰ Murphy 2003; 96

⁸¹ Clayton 2001-2; 76. Fialko 2018; 38. Fialko even indicates that the written and artistic sources of Amazons in male clothing come from the appearance of real Scythian women.

from a distorted view of their own world, with the barbarians living the complete opposite way to the lives of the civilised Greeks. So, the Amazon myth originates from seeing these fighting, horse-riding, and un-Greek women, who threaten the traditions established by Greek men and place them into a mythical race where they can be controlled and subdued.

Conclusion

When it comes to assessing whether or not the Amazons were real, there is a clear answer. Though the Amazon figures in myth were fictional, there were warrior women whose appearance, customs and homeland correspond with those of the Amazons, as several scholars have demonstrated. This paper has expanded upon this by exhibiting how the ancient Greek literature and art from as early as the 8th century BCE, along with the recent archaeological finds in the Eurasian Steppes. Herodotus and Hippocrates' reports of Scythian women who rode and fought like men, and Queens Hippolyte and Penthesilea from myth, share the same characteristics to the extent that both the mythical and the historical are called Amazons. Meanwhile, the Tiryns votive shield, vase paintings and monuments all highlight the foreignness and strangeness of the Amazons. They take on the characteristics of the contemporary writings and knowledge to depict these warrior women in the same fashion as those living in the Eurasian Steppes; with their weapons, horses and clothing marking them as the 'Other'. Lastly, the archaeological evidence proves not only the existence of warrior women but that the accounts of the Amazons were based in truth. These discoveries and similarities have challenged our previous attitudes toward the Amazons and opened scholarship up to accepting the theory of the Amazons being real historical women. Thus, themes of gender and culture in the ancient world can be studied with a new understanding and the complexities that come with the study can be explored further; breaking the stereotypical opinion of how women lived in those periods.

Furthermore, by considering the function of myth was partly as a flexible tool for the ancients to use as a way of understanding the world around them, the Amazons can be seen as the Greek reaction to the knowledge of a society where gendered roles were defined differently. Rather than recognising that this was a natural custom of race, the Greeks became protective of their way of life; inspiring the writers and artists of the time to form a picture of an untamed barbarian race who are ultimately defeated by the heroic Greek male. Thus, by examining the range of literary genres and material evidence, both mythic and historical, the real Amazons can be revealed.

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