

# Amazons

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The **Amazons** (Greek: Ἀμαζόνες, *Amazónes*, singular Ἀμαζών, *Amazōn*), also known as *Oiorpata* in Iranian and Scythian, were believed to have been a nation of all-female warriors in Greek mythology and Classical antiquity. Herodotus placed them in a region bordering Scythia in Sarmatia (modern territory of Ukraine). Other historiographers place them in Anatolia,<sup>[1]</sup> or sometimes Libya.<sup>[2]</sup>

Notable queens of the Amazons are Penthesilea, who participated in the Trojan War, and her sister Hippolyta, whose magical girdle, given to her by her father Ares, was the object of one of the labours of Hercules. Amazon warriors were often depicted in battle with Greek warriors in amazonomachies in classical art.

The Amazons have become associated with many historical people throughout the Roman Empire period and Late Antiquity. In Roman historiography, there are various accounts of Amazon raids in Asia Minor. From the Early Modern period, their name has become a term for female warriors in general. Amazons were said to have founded the cities and temples of Smyrna, Sinope, Cyme, Gryne, Ephesus, Pitania, Magnesia, Clete, Pygela, Latoreria and Amastris; according to legend the amazons also invented the cavalry.<sup>[3]</sup>



Wounded Amazon of the Capitol, Rome.



Amazon preparing for a battle (Queen Antiope or Armed Venus), by Pierre-Eugène-Emile Hébert 1860 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).

## Contents

- 1 Etymology
- 2 Origins
- 3 The myth
  - 3.1 Lists
  - 3.2 Hero cults
  - 3.3 In art
- 4 In historiography
- 5 Medieval and Renaissance literature
- 6 Historical background
- 7 Archaeology
  - 7.1 Scythians and Sarmatians
  - 7.2 Minoan Crete
- 8 Modern legacy
  - 8.1 In literature
- 9 See also
- 10 References
- 11 Further reading
- 12 External links

## Etymology

The origin of the word is uncertain. It may be derived from an Iranian ethnonym *\*ha-mazan-* "warriors", a word attested as a denominal verb in Hesychius of Alexandria's gloss «ἡμαζακάραν· πολεμεῖν. Πέρσαι» ("hamazakaran: 'to make war' in Persian") and which also appears together with the Indo-Iranian root *\*kar-* "make" in Sanskrit *karma*.<sup>[4]</sup>

However, Hittite researcher Friedrich Cornelius assumes that there had been the land Azzi with the capital Chajasa in the area of the Thermodon-Iris Delta on the coast of the Black Sea. He brings its residents in direct relation to the Amazons, namely based on its name (woman of the land Azzi = 'Am'+ 'Azzi' = Amazon) and its customs (matriarchal custom of promiscuous sexual intercourse, even with blood relatives)<sup>[5]</sup>

Alternatively, a Greek derivation from *\*ḡ-mḡ-gw-jon-es* "manless, without husbands" (*a-* privative and a derivation of *\*man-* also found in Slavic *muzh*) has been proposed, an explanation deemed "unlikely" by Hjalmar Frisk.<sup>[6]</sup> 19th century scholarship also connected the term to the ethnonym Amazigh.<sup>[7]</sup> A further explanation proposes Iranian *\*ama-janah* "virility-killing" as source.<sup>[8]</sup>

Among Classical Greeks, *amazon* was given a popular etymology as from *a-* (ἀ-) and *mazos* (μαζός), "without breast", connected with an etiological tradition that Amazons had their right breast cut off or burnt out.<sup>[9]</sup> There is no indication of such a practice in works of art,<sup>[10]</sup> in which the Amazons are always represented with both breasts, although the left is frequently covered (see photos in article). Adrienne Mayor suggests the origin of this myth was due to the word's etymology.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

## Origins

The legendary Amazons are believed to have lived in Pontus,<sup>[12]</sup> which is part of modern-day Turkey near the southern shore of the Euxine Sea (the Black Sea). There they formed an independent kingdom under the government of a queen named Hippolyta or Hippolyte ("loose, unbridled mare"). This area is known to have been occupied in the Late Bronze Age by a transhumant group known to the Hittites as the Kaška; though they were not directly known to Greeks, modern archaeologists have detected that they finally defeated their enemies, the Hittites, about 1200 BCE; they left no inscriptions. The Amazons were supposed to have founded many towns, amongst them Smyrna, Ephesus, Sinope, and Paphos. According to the dramatist Aeschylus, in the distant past they had lived in Scythia (modern Crimea), at the *Palus Maeotis* ("Lake Maeotis", the Sea of Azov). According to Plutarch, the Amazons lived in and about the Don river, which the Greeks called the Tanais; but which was called by the Scythians the "Amazon". The Amazons later moved to Themiscyra (modern Terme) on the River Thermodon (the Terme river in northern Turkey). Herodotus called them *Androktones* ("killers of men"), and he stated that in the Scythian language they were called *Oiorpata*, which he asserted had this meaning.

## The myth

In some versions of the myth, no men were permitted to have sexual encounters or reside in Amazon country; but once a year, in order to prevent their race from dying out, they visited the Gargareans, a neighbouring tribe. The male children who were the result of these visits were either killed, sent back to their fathers or exposed in the wilderness to fend for themselves; the girls were kept and brought up by their mothers, and trained in agricultural pursuits, hunting, and the art of war. In other versions when the Amazons went to war they would not kill all the men. Some they would take as slaves, and once or twice a year they would have sex with their

slaves.<sup>[13]</sup>

The intermarriage of Amazons and men from other tribes was also used to explain the origin of various people; for example, the story of the Amazons settling with the Scythians (Herodotus Histories 4.110.1-117.1).<sup>[14]</sup>

In the *Iliad*, the Amazons were referred to as *Antianeirai* ("those who fight like men").

The Amazons appear in Greek art of the Archaic period and in connection with several Greek legends. They invaded Lycia, but were defeated by Bellerophon, who was sent against them by Iobates, the king of that country, in the hope that he might meet his death at their hands.<sup>[15][16]</sup> The tomb of Myrine is mentioned in the *Iliad*; later interpretation made of her an Amazon: according to Diodorus,<sup>[17]</sup> Queen Myrine led her Amazons to victory against Libya and much of Gorgon.

They attacked the Phrygians, who were assisted by Priam, then a young man.<sup>[18]</sup> In his later years, however, towards the end of the Trojan War, his old opponents took his side against the Greeks under their queen Penthesilea "of Thracian birth", who was slain by Achilles.<sup>[19][20][21][22][23][24]</sup>

One of the tasks imposed upon Heracles by Eurystheus was to obtain possession of the girdle of the Amazonian queen Hippolyta.<sup>[25][26][27][28]</sup> He was accompanied by his friend Theseus, who carried off the princess Antiope, sister of Hippolyta, an incident which led to a retaliatory invasion of Attica,<sup>[29][30]</sup> in which Antiope perished fighting by the side of Theseus. In some versions, however, Theseus marries Hippolyta and in others, he marries Antiope and she does not die; by this marriage with the Amazon Theseus had a son Hippolytus.

The battle between the Athenians and Amazons is often commemorated in an entire genre of art, amazonomachy, in marble bas-reliefs such as from the Parthenon or the sculptures of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus.



Amazon wearing trousers and carrying a shield with an attached patterned cloth and a quiver. Ancient Greek Attic white-ground alabastron, c.470 BCE, British Museum, London.



Thalestris, Queen of the Amazons, visits Alexander (1696)

The Amazons are also said to have undertaken an expedition against the island of Leuke, at the mouth of the Danube, where the ashes of Achilles had been deposited by Thetis. The ghost of the dead hero appeared and so terrified the horses, that they threw and trampled upon the invaders, who were forced to retire. Pompey is said to have found them in the army of Mithridates.

They are heard of in the time of Alexander, when some of the king's biographers make mention of Amazon Queen Thalestris visiting him and becoming a mother by him (the story is known from the *Alexander Romance*). However, several other biographers of Alexander dispute the claim, including the highly regarded secondary source, Plutarch. In his writing he makes mention of a moment when Alexander's secondary naval commander, Onesicritus, was reading the Amazon passage of his

Alexander history to King Lysimachus of Thrace who was on the original expedition: the king smiled at him and said "And where was I, then?"

The Roman writer Virgil's characterization of the Volscian warrior maiden Camilla in the *Aeneid* borrows heavily from the myth of the Amazons.

Jordanes' *Getica* (c. 560), purporting to give the earliest history of the Goths, relates that the Goths' ancestors, descendants of Magog, originally dwelt within Scythia, on the Sea of Azov between the Dnieper and Don Rivers. After a few centuries, following an incident where the Goths' women successfully fended off a raid by a neighboring tribe, while the menfolk were off campaigning against Pharaoh Vesosis, the women formed their own army under Marpesia and crossed the Don, invading Asia. Her sister Lampedo remained in Europe to guard the homeland. They procreated with men once a year. These Amazons conquered Armenia, Syria, and all of Asia Minor, even reaching Ionia and Aeolia, holding this vast territory for 100 years. Jordanes also mentions that they fought with Hercules, and in the Trojan War, and that a smaller contingent of them endured in the Caucasus Mountains until the time of Alexander. He mentions by name the Queens Menalippe, Hippolyta, and Penthesilea.

In the Grottaferrata Version of *Digenes Akritas*, the twelfth century medieval epic of Basil, the Greek-Syrian knight of the Byzantine frontier, the hero battles with and kills the female warrior Maximo.

- She was descended from some Amazons.
- Taken by Alexander from the Brahmins.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Lists

There are several (conflicting) lists of names of Amazons.

Quintus Smyrnaeus<sup>[32]</sup> lists the attendant warriors of Penthesilea: "Clonie was there, Polemusa, Derinoe, Evandre, and Antandre, and Bremusa, Hippothoe, dark-eyed Harmothoe, Alcibie, Derimacheia, Antibrote, and Thermodosa glorying with the spear."

Diodorus Siculus<sup>[33]</sup> lists twelve Amazons who challenged Heracles to single combat during his quest for Hippolyta's girdle and died against him one by one: Aella, Philippis, Prothoe, Eriboea, Celaeno, Eurybia, Phoebe, Deianeira, Asteria, Marpe, Tecmessa, Alcippe. After Alcippe's death, a group attack followed.

Another list of Amazons' names is found in Hyginus' *Fabulae*.<sup>[34]</sup> Along with Hippolyta, Otrera, Antiope and Penthesilea, it attests the following names: Ocyale, Dioxippe, Iphinome, Xanthe, Hippothoe, Laomache, Glauce, Agave, Theseis, Clymene, Polydora.

Yet another different set of names is found in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*.<sup>[35]</sup> he mentions Euryale, Harpe, Lyce, Menippe and Thoe. Of these Lyce also appears in a fragment preserved in the *Latin Anthology* where she is said to have killed the hero Clonus of Moesia, son of Doryclus, with her javelin.<sup>[36]</sup>

John Tzetzes in *Posthomerica*<sup>[37]</sup> enumerates the Amazons who fell at Troy: Hippothoe, Antianeira, Toxophone, Toxoanassa, Gortyessa, Iodoce, Pharetre, Andro, Ioxeia, Oïstrophe, Androdaïxa, Aspidocharme, Enchesimargos, Cnemis, Thorece, Chalcaor, Eurylophe, Hecate, Anchimache, Andromache the queen. Concerning Antianeira and Andromache, see below; for almost all the other names on the list, this is a unique attestation.



A helmeted Amazon with her sword and a shield bearing the Gorgon head image, Tondo of an Attic red-figure kylix, 510–500 BCE

Stephanus of Byzantium provides an alternate list of the Amazons who fell against Heracles, describing them as "the most prominent" of their people: Tralla, Isocrateia, Thiba, Palla, Coea (Koia), Coenia (Koinia).<sup>[38]</sup> Eustathius gives the same list minus the last two names.<sup>[39]</sup> Both Stephanus and Eustathius write of these Amazons in connection with the placename Thibais, which they report to have been derived from Thiba's name.

Other names of Amazons from various sources include:

- Aegea, queen of the Amazons who was thought by some to have been the eponym of the Aegean Sea.<sup>[40]</sup>
- Ainia, presumably accompanied Penthesilea to the Trojan War, killed by Achilles; known only from an Attic terracotta relief fragment.<sup>[41]</sup>
- Ainippe, an Amazon who confronted Telamon in the battle against Heracles' troops.<sup>[42]</sup>
- Alce, who was said to have killed the young Oebalus of Arcadia, son of Ida (otherwise unknown), with her spear during the Parthian War.<sup>[36]</sup>
- Amastris, who was believed to be the eponym of the city previously known as Kromna,<sup>[43]</sup> although the city was also thought to have been named after the historical Amastris.<sup>[44]</sup>
- Anaea, an Amazon whose tomb was shown at the island of Samos.<sup>[45]</sup>
- Andromache, an Amazon who fought Heracles and was defeated; only known from vase paintings.<sup>[42][46]</sup> Not to be confused with Andromache, wife of Hector.
- Antianeira, succeeded Penthesilea as Queen of the Amazons. She was best known for ordering her male servants to be crippled "as the lame best perform the acts of love".<sup>[47]</sup>
- Areto and Iphito, two little-known Amazons, whose names are only attested in inscriptions on artefacts.<sup>[48]</sup>
- Clete, one of the twelve followers of Penthesilea. After Penthesilea's death she, in accord with the former's will, sailed off and eventually landed in Italy, founding the city of Clete.<sup>[49]</sup>
- Cyme, who gave her name to the city of Cyme (Aeolis).<sup>[50][51]</sup>
- Cynna (?), one of the two possible eponyms (the other one being "Cynnus, brother of Coeus") of Cynna, a small town not far from Heraclea.<sup>[52]</sup>
- Ephesos, a Lydian Amazon, after whom the city of Ephesus was thought to have been named; she was also said to have been the first to honor Artemis and to have surnamed the goddess *Ephesia*.<sup>[53]</sup> Her daughter Amazo was thought of as the eponym of the Amazons.<sup>[54]</sup>
- Eurypyle, queen of the Amazons who was reported to have led an expedition against Ninus and Babylon around 1760 BCE.<sup>[55][56][57]</sup>
- Gryne, an Amazon who was thought to be the eponym of the Gryneian grove in Asia Minor. She was loved by Apollo and consorted with him in said grove.<sup>[58][59]</sup>
- Helene, daughter of Tityrus. She fought Achilles and died after he gravely wounded her.<sup>[60]</sup>
- Hippo, an Amazon who took part in the introduction of religious rites in honor of the goddess Artemis. She was punished by the goddess for not having performed a ritual dance.<sup>[61]</sup>
- Lampedo, queen of the Amazons, co-ruler with Marpesia.<sup>[62][63]</sup>
- Latoreia, who had a small village near Ephesus named after her.<sup>[64]</sup>
- Lysippe, mother of Tanais by Berossos. Her son only venerated Ares and was fully devoted to war, neglecting love and marriage. Aphrodite cursed him with falling in love with his own mother. Preferring to die rather than give up his chastity, he threw himself into the river Amazonius, which was subsequently renamed Tanais.<sup>[65]</sup>
- Marpesia, queen of the Amazons, co-ruler with Lampedo.<sup>[62][63]</sup>
- Melanippe, sister of Hippolyta. Heracles captured her and demanded Hippolyta's girdle in exchange for

her freedom. Hippolyta complied and Heracles let her go. According to some,<sup>[66]</sup> however, she was killed by Telamon.

- Molpadia, an Amazon who killed Antiope.<sup>[67]</sup>
- Myrleia, possible eponym of a city in Bithynia, which was later known as Apamea.<sup>[68]</sup>
- Myrto, in one source, mother of Myrtilus by Hermes<sup>[69]</sup> (elsewhere his mother is called Theobule).<sup>[70]</sup>
- Mytilene, Myrina's sister and one of the possible eponyms for the city of Mytilene<sup>[51]</sup>
- Maximo (Amazon).
- Orithyia, daughter and successor of Marpesia, famous for her conquests.<sup>[62][63]</sup>
- Otrera, consort of Ares and mother of Hippolyta and Penthesilea.
- Pantariste, who killed Timiades in the battle between the Amazons and Heracles' troops.<sup>[42]</sup>
- Pitane and Priene, two commanders in Myrina's army, after whom the cities of Pitane (Aeolis) and Priene were named.<sup>[51]</sup>
- Sanape, who fled to Pontus and married a local king. "Sanape" means "from wine country" in Circassian. According to a commentary, it was purported to mean "drunkard" in the local language.<sup>[71]</sup>
- Sinope, successor of Lampedo and Marpesia.<sup>[63]</sup>
- Sisyrbe, after whom a part of Ephesus was called Sisyrba, and its inhabitants the Sisyrbitae.<sup>[72][73]</sup>
- Smyrna, who obtained possession of Ephesus and gave her name to a quarter in this city, as well as to the city of Smyrna.<sup>[74][75][76]</sup>
- Themiscyra, the eponym of the Amazon capital.<sup>[77][78]</sup>

## Hero cults

According to ancient sources, (Plutarch Theseus,<sup>[79]</sup> Pausanias), Amazon tombs could be found frequently throughout what was once known as the ancient Greek world. Some are found in Megara, Athens, Chaeronea, Chalcis, Thessaly at Skotousa, in Cynoscephalae, and statues of Amazons are all over Greece. At both Chalcis and Athens, Plutarch tells us that there was an Amazoneum or shrine of Amazons that implied the presence of both tombs and cult. On the day before the Thesea at Athens there were annual sacrifices to the Amazons. In historical times Greek maidens of Ephesus performed an annual circular dance with weapons and shields that had been established by Hippolyta and her Amazons. They had initially set up wooden statues of Artemis, a bretas, (Pausanias, (fl.c.160): Description of Greece, Book I: Attica).<sup>[80]</sup>

## In art



Two female gladiators with their names *Amazonia* and *Achillea*.

In works of art, battles between Amazons and Greeks are placed on the same level as- and often associated with- battles of Greeks and centaurs. The belief in their existence, however, having been once accepted and introduced into the national poetry and art, it became necessary to surround them as far as possible with the appearance of natural beings. Amazons were therefore depicted in the manner of Scythian or Sarmatian horsemen. Their occupation was hunting and war; their arms the bow, spear, axe, a half shield, nearly in the shape of a crescent, called *pelta*, and in early art a helmet, the model before the Greek mind having apparently been the goddess Athena. In later art they approach the model of Artemis, wearing a thin dress, girtle high for speed; while on the later painted vases their dress is often peculiarly Persian – that is, close-fitting trousers and a high cap called the kidaris. They were usually on

horseback but sometimes on foot. This depiction of Amazons demonstrates just how closely, in the Greek mind, the Amazons were linked to the Scythians. Their manner of dress has been noted to bear a striking similarity to the traditional dress of nomadic peoples from the Crimea to Mongolia.<sup>[81]</sup> Amazons were described by Herodotus as wearing trousers and having tall stiff caps. The double sided axe was the most emblematic of their weapons.<sup>[3]</sup> Amazons can also be identified in vase paintings by the fact that they are wearing one earring. The battle between Theseus and the Amazons (*Amazonomachy*) is a favourite subject on the friezes of temples (e.g. the reliefs from the frieze of the temple of Apollo at Bassae, now in the British Museum), vases and sarcophagus reliefs; at Athens it was represented on the shield of the statue of Athena Parthenos, on wall-paintings in the Theseum and in the *Stoa Poikile*. There were also three standard Amazon statue types.

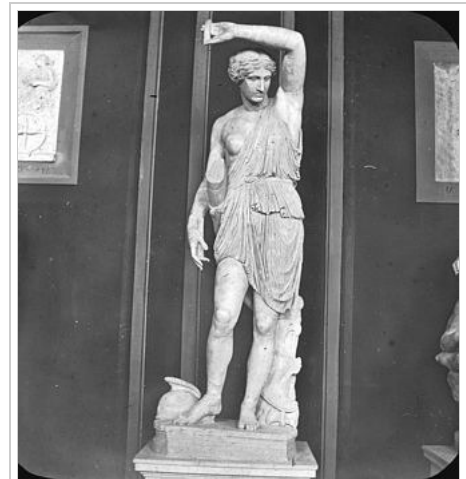
## In historiography

Herodotus reported that the Sarmatians were descendants of Amazons and Scythians, and that their wives observed their ancient maternal customs, "frequently hunting on horseback with their husbands; in war taking the field; and wearing the very same dress as the men". Moreover, said Herodotus, "No girl shall wed till she has killed a man in battle". In the story related by Herodotus, a group of Amazons was blown across the Maeotian Lake (the Sea of Azov) into Scythia near the cliff region (today's southeastern Crimea). After learning the Scythian language, they agreed to marry Scythian men, on the condition that they not be required to follow the customs of Scythian women. According to Herodotus, this band moved toward the northeast, settling beyond the Tanais (Don) river, and became the ancestors of the Sauromatians. According to Herodotus, the Sarmatians fought with the Scythians against Darius the Great in the 5th century BCE.

Hippocrates describes them as: "They have no right breasts...for while they are yet babies their mothers make red-hot a bronze instrument constructed for this very purpose and apply it to the right breast and cauterize it, so that its growth is arrested, and all its strength and bulk are diverted to the right shoulder and right arm."<sup>[82]</sup>

Amazons came to play a role in Roman historiography. Caesar reminded the Senate of the conquest of large parts of Asia by Semiramis and the Amazons. Successful Amazon raids against Lycia and Cilicia contrasted with effective resistance by Lydian cavalry against the invaders (Strabo 5.504; Nicholas Damascenus). Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus pays particularly detailed attention to the Amazons. The story of the Amazons as deriving from a Cappadocian colony of two Scythian princes Ylinos and Scolopetos is due to him. Pliny the Elder records some surprising facts pointing to the valley of the Terme River as possibly being their home: a mountain named for them (the modern Mason Dagi), as well as a settlement Amazonium; Herodotus (VI.86) first mentions their capital Themiscyra, which Pliny locates near the Terme.<sup>[83]</sup> Philostratus places the Amazons in the Taurus Mountains. Ammianus places them east of Tanais, as neighbouring the Alans. Procopius places them in the Caucasus. Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica* III, chapter 52) mentioned that besides Pontus Amazons existed much older race (at that time entirely disappeared) of Amazons from western Libya, and retells their mythological story which includes Atlantis and Greek mythology.

Although Strabo shows skepticism as to their historicity, the Amazons in general continue to be taken as historical throughout Late Antiquity. Several Church Fathers speak of the Amazons as of a real people. Solinus embraces the account of Pliny. Under Aurelianus, captured Gothic women were identified as Amazons



Amazon in combat, infl. Polyclitus, Rome. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Goodyear Archival Collection

(Claudianus). The account of Justinus was influential, and was used as a source by Orosius who continued to be read during the European Middle Ages. Medieval authors thus continue the tradition of locating the Amazons in the North, Adam of Bremen placing them at the Baltic Sea and Paulus Diaconus in the heart of Germania.<sup>[84]</sup>

## Medieval and Renaissance literature

Amazons continued to be discussed by authors of the European Renaissance, and with the Age of Exploration, they were located in ever more remote areas. In 1542, Francisco de Orellana reached the Amazon River (*Amazonas* in Spanish), naming it after a tribe of warlike women he claimed to have encountered and fought on the Nhamundá River, a tributary of the Amazon.<sup>[85]</sup> Afterwards the whole basin and region of the Amazon (*Amazonía* in Spanish) were named after the river. Amazons also figure in the accounts of both Christopher Columbus and Walter Raleigh.<sup>[86]</sup> Famous medieval traveller John Mandeville mentions them in his book:

"Beside the land of Chaldea is the land of Amazonia, that is the land of Feminye. And in that real is all woman and no man; not as some may say, that men may not live there, but for because that the women will not suffer no men amongst them to be their sovereigns."<sup>[87]</sup>

Medieval and Renaissance authors credit the Amazons with the invention of the battle-axe. This is probably related to the Sagaris, an axe-like weapon associated with both Amazons and Scythian tribes by Greek authors (see also Thracian tomb of Aleksandrovo kurgan). Paulus Hector Mair expresses astonishment that such a "manly weapon" should have been invented by a "tribe of women", but he accepts the attribution out of respect for his authority, Johannes Aventinus.

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* contains a country of warrior women, ruled by Queen Orontea; the epic describes an origin much like that in Greek myth, in that the women, abandoned by a band of warriors and unfaithful lovers, rallied together to form a nation from which men were severely reduced, to prevent them from regaining power. The Amazons and Queen Hippolyta are also referenced in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in "The Knight's Tale".

## Historical background

Classicist Peter Walcot wrote, "Wherever the Amazons are located by the Greeks, whether it is somewhere along the Black Sea in the distant north-east, or in Libya in the furthest south, it is always beyond the confines of the civilized world. The Amazons exist outside the range of normal human experience."<sup>[88]</sup>

Nevertheless, there are various proposals for a historical nucleus of the Amazons of Greek historiography, the most obvious candidates being historical Scythia and Sarmatia in line with the account by Herodotus, but some authors prefer a comparison to cultures of Asia Minor or even Minoan Crete.

## Archaeology



Dahomey Amazons were so named by Western observers due to their similarity to the semi-mythical Amazons

## Scythians and Sarmatians

Speculation that the idea of Amazons contains a core of reality is based on archaeological findings from burials, pointing to the possibility that some Sarmatian women may have participated in battle. These findings have led scholars to suggest that the Amazonian legend in Greek mythology may have been "inspired by real warrior women".<sup>[81]</sup>

Evidence of high-ranking warrior women comes from kurgans in southern Ukraine and Russia. David Anthony notes, "About 20% of Scythian-Sarmatian 'warrior graves' on the lower Don and lower Volga contained women dressed for battle similar to how men dress, a phenomenon that probably inspired the Greek tales about the Amazons."<sup>[89]</sup>

Up to 25% of military burials were of armed Sarmatian women usually including bows.<sup>[90]</sup> Russian archaeologist Vera Kovalevskaya points out that when Scythian men were away fighting or hunting, nomadic women would have to be able to defend themselves, their animals and pasture-grounds competently. During the time that the Scythians advanced into Asia and achieved near-hegemony in the Near East, there was a period of twenty-eight years when the men would have been away on campaigns for long periods. During this time the women would not only have had to defend themselves, but to reproduce, and this could well be the origin of the idea that Amazons mated once a year with their neighbours, if Herodotus actually based his accounts on fact.<sup>[90]</sup>

Before modern archaeology uncovered some of the Scythian burials of warrior-maidens entombed under kurgans in the region of Altai Mountains and Sarmatia,<sup>[91]</sup> <sup>[92]</sup> giving concrete form at last to the Greek tales, the origin of the Amazon story had been the subject of speculation among classics scholars. In the 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica* speculation ranged along the following lines:



Mounted Amazon in Scythian costume, on an Attic red-figure vase, c.420 BCE

While some regard the Amazons as a purely mythical people, others assume an historical foundation for them. The deities worshipped by them were Ares (who is consistently assigned to them as a god of war, and as a god of Thracian and generally northern origin) and Artemis, not the usual Greek goddess of that name, but an Asiatic deity in some respects her equivalent. It is conjectured that the Amazons were originally the temple-servants and priestesses (*hierodulae*) of this goddess; and that the removal of the breast corresponded with the self-mutilation of the god Attis and the galli, Roman priests of Rhea Cybele. Another theory is that, as the knowledge of geography extended, travellers brought back reports of tribes ruled entirely by women, who carried out the duties which elsewhere were regarded as peculiar to man, in whom alone the rights of nobility and inheritance were vested, and who had the supreme control of affairs. Hence arose the belief in the Amazons as a nation of female warriors, organized and governed entirely by women. According to J. Viirtheim (*De Ajacis origine*, 1907), the Amazons were of Greek origin [...]. It has been suggested that the fact of the conquest of the Amazons being assigned to the two famous heroes of Greek mythology, Heracles and Theseus [...] shows that they were mythical illustrations of the dangers which beset the Greeks on the coasts of Asia Minor; rather perhaps, it may be intended to represent the conflict between the Greek culture of the colonies on the Euxine and the barbarism of the native inhabitants.

## Minoan Crete

When Minoan archeology was still in its infancy, nevertheless, a theory raised in an essay regarding the Amazons contributed by Lewis Richard Farnell and John Myres to Robert Ranulph Marett's *Anthropology and the Classics* (1908),<sup>[93]</sup> placed their possible origins in Minoan civilization, drawing attention to overlooked similarities between the two cultures. According to Myres, (pp. 153 ff), the tradition interpreted in the light of evidence furnished by supposed Amazon cults seems to have been very similar and may have even originated in Minoan culture.

## Modern legacy

In Ukraine Katerina Tarnovska leads a group called the Asgarda which claims to be a new tribe of Amazons.<sup>[94]</sup> Tarnovska believes that the Amazons are the direct ancestors of Ukrainian women, and she has created an all-female martial art for her group, based on another form of fighting called "Fighting Hopak," but with a special emphasis on self-defense.<sup>[94]</sup> French photographer Guillaume Herbaut lived with the Asgarda and photographed them in 2004.<sup>[95]</sup> As of 2009, the group consists of 150 women.<sup>[96]</sup>

The city of Samsun in modern-day Turkey features a recently constructed "Amazon Village" museum, created to bring attention to the legacy of the Amazons and to generate both academic interest and popular tourism.<sup>[97]</sup> An iconic statue of the museum is the prominent figure of a fierce female warrior, flanked by two buildings designed to look like lions.

A festival is held every year in the Terme district of Samsun Province to celebrate the Amazons.<sup>[97]</sup>

## In literature

- Amazon Queen Hyppolyta appears in William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- The Amazon queen Penthesilea, and her sexual frenzy, are at the center of the drama *Penthesilea* by Heinrich von Kleist in 1808.
- During the period 1905-13, members of the militant Suffragette movement were frequently referred to as "Amazons" in books and newspaper articles.<sup>[98]</sup>
- The comic book superheroine Wonder Woman is the Amazon princess Diana of Themyscira, created by William Moulton Marston (the inventor of the Systolic Blood Pressure Test and a scholar with an interest in women's rights<sup>[99][100]</sup>). She is the daughter of Queen Hippolyta, who, in turn, is inspired by Queen Hyppolyta of the Greek Mythology.
- The Amazons are featured as supporting characters in Rick Riordan's fantasy novel *The Son of Neptune*. It presents Amazon.com as a front for their society in the modern world. The novel also depicts the ghost of the Amazon Queen Otrera as a minor antagonist.
- Last of the Amazons, in which Theseus, the legendary King of Athens, sets sail to the north coast of the Black Sea inhabited by a race of female warriors (Steven Pressfield 2002).
- In the popular Japanese cartoon One Piece (manga), the main character visits an island called Amazon Lily containing giant-sized women ruled by the Amazonian queen Boa Hancock.



*Departure of the Amazons*, by Claude Deruet, 1620

## See also

- Amazon feminism
- Artemis
- Athena
- Dahomey Amazons
- Giantess
- Liburnians (according to Pseudo-Scylax ruled by women)
- List of women warriors in folklore
- Matriarchal religion
- Matriarchy
- Shieldmaiden
- Sitones
- Terra Feminarum
- Themis
- Timeline of women in ancient warfare
- Valkyrie
- Virago
- Warrior women
- Women warriors in literature and culture
- Women in the military
- Wonder Woman
- Xena: Warrior Princess



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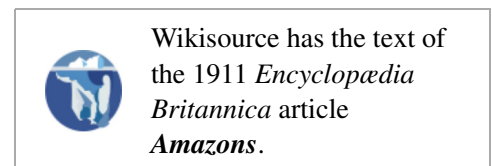
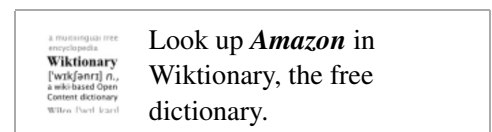
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## External links

-  "Amazons". *New International Encyclopedia*. 1905.
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# Amazons

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

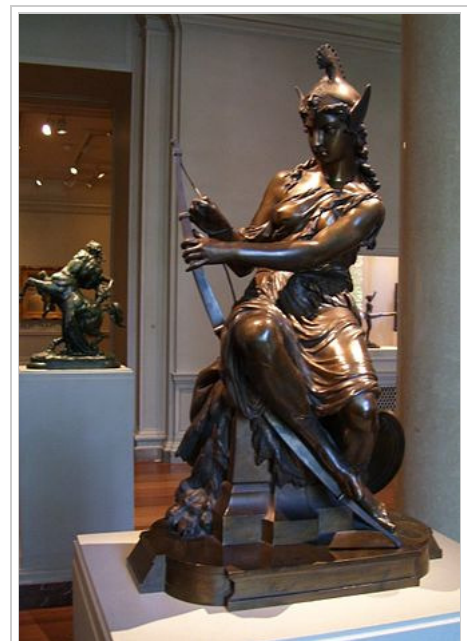
The **Amazons** (Greek: Ἀμαζόνες, *Amazónes*, singular Ἀμαζών, *Amazōn*), also known as *Oiorpata* in Iranian and Scythian, were believed to have been a nation of all-female warriors in Greek mythology and Classical antiquity. Herodotus placed them in a region bordering Scythia in Sarmatia (modern territory of Ukraine). Other historiographers place them in Anatolia,<sup>[1]</sup> or sometimes Libya.<sup>[2]</sup>

Notable queens of the Amazons are Penthesilea, who participated in the Trojan War, and her sister Hippolyta, whose magical girdle, given to her by her father Ares, was the object of one of the labours of Hercules. Amazon warriors were often depicted in battle with Greek warriors in amazonomachies in classical art.

The Amazons have become associated with many historical people throughout the Roman Empire period and Late Antiquity. In Roman historiography, there are various accounts of Amazon raids in Asia Minor. From the Early Modern period, their name has become a term for female warriors in general. Amazons were said to have founded the cities and temples of Smyrna, Sinope, Cyme, Gryne, Ephesus, Pitania, Magnesia, Clete, Pygela, Latoreria and Amastris; according to legend the amazons also invented the cavalry.<sup>[3]</sup>



Wounded Amazon of the Capitol, Rome.



Amazon preparing for a battle (Queen Antiope or Armed Venus), by Pierre-Eugène-Emile Hébert 1860 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).

## Contents

- 1 Etymology
- 2 Origins
- 3 The myth
  - 3.1 Lists
  - 3.2 Hero cults
  - 3.3 In art
- 4 In historiography
- 5 Medieval and Renaissance literature
- 6 Historical background
- 7 Archaeology
  - 7.1 Scythians and Sarmatians
  - 7.2 Minoan Crete
- 8 Modern legacy
  - 8.1 In literature
- 9 See also
- 10 References
- 11 Further reading
- 12 External links

## Etymology

The origin of the word is uncertain. It may be derived from an Iranian ethnonym *\*ha-mazan-* "warriors", a word attested as a denominal verb in Hesychius of Alexandria's gloss «ἡμαζακάραν· πολεμεῖν. Πέρσαι» ("hamazakaran: 'to make war' in Persian") and which also appears together with the Indo-Iranian root *\*kar-* "make" in Sanskrit *karma*.<sup>[4]</sup>

However, Hittite researcher Friedrich Cornelius assumes that there had been the land Azzi with the capital Chajasa in the area of the Thermodon-Iris Delta on the coast of the Black Sea. He brings its residents in direct relation to the Amazons, namely based on its name (woman of the land Azzi = 'Am'+ 'Azzi' = Amazon) and its customs (matriarchal custom of promiscuous sexual intercourse, even with blood relatives)<sup>[5]</sup>

Alternatively, a Greek derivation from *\*ḡ-mḡ-gw-jon-es* "manless, without husbands" (*a-* privative and a derivation of *\*man-* also found in Slavic *muzh*) has been proposed, an explanation deemed "unlikely" by Hjalmar Frisk.<sup>[6]</sup> 19th century scholarship also connected the term to the ethnonym Amazigh.<sup>[7]</sup> A further explanation proposes Iranian *\*ama-janah* "virility-killing" as source.<sup>[8]</sup>

Among Classical Greeks, *amazon* was given a popular etymology as from *a-* (ἄ-) and *mazos* (μαζός), "without breast", connected with an etiological tradition that Amazons had their right breast cut off or burnt out.<sup>[9]</sup> There is no indication of such a practice in works of art,<sup>[10]</sup> in which the Amazons are always represented with both breasts, although the left is frequently covered (see photos in article). Adrienne Mayor suggests the origin of this myth was due to the word's etymology.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

## Origins

The legendary Amazons are believed to have lived in Pontus,<sup>[12]</sup> which is part of modern-day Turkey near the southern shore of the Euxine Sea (the Black Sea). There they formed an independent kingdom under the government of a queen named Hippolyta or Hippolyte ("loose, unbridled mare"). This area is known to have been occupied in the Late Bronze Age by a transhumant group known to the Hittites as the Kaška; though they were not directly known to Greeks, modern archaeologists have detected that they finally defeated their enemies, the Hittites, about 1200 BCE; they left no inscriptions. The Amazons were supposed to have founded many towns, amongst them Smyrna, Ephesus, Sinope, and Paphos. According to the dramatist Aeschylus, in the distant past they had lived in Scythia (modern Crimea), at the *Palus Maeotis* ("Lake Maeotis", the Sea of Azov). According to Plutarch, the Amazons lived in and about the Don river, which the Greeks called the Tanais; but which was called by the Scythians the "Amazon". The Amazons later moved to Themiscyra (modern Terme) on the River Thermodon (the Terme river in northern Turkey). Herodotus called them *Androktones* ("killers of men"), and he stated that in the Scythian language they were called *Oiorpata*, which he asserted had this meaning.

## The myth

In some versions of the myth, no men were permitted to have sexual encounters or reside in Amazon country; but once a year, in order to prevent their race from dying out, they visited the Gargareans, a neighbouring tribe. The male children who were the result of these visits were either killed, sent back to their fathers or exposed in the wilderness to fend for themselves; the girls were kept and brought up by their mothers, and trained in agricultural pursuits, hunting, and the art of war. In other versions when the Amazons went to war they would not kill all the men. Some they would take as slaves, and once or twice a year they would have sex with their

slaves.<sup>[13]</sup>

The intermarriage of Amazons and men from other tribes was also used to explain the origin of various people; for example, the story of the Amazons settling with the Scythians (Herodotus Histories 4.110.1-117.1).<sup>[14]</sup>

In the *Iliad*, the Amazons were referred to as *Antianeirai* ("those who fight like men").

The Amazons appear in Greek art of the Archaic period and in connection with several Greek legends. They invaded Lycia, but were defeated by Bellerophon, who was sent against them by Iobates, the king of that country, in the hope that he might meet his death at their hands.<sup>[15][16]</sup> The tomb of Myrine is mentioned in the *Iliad*; later interpretation made of her an Amazon: according to Diodorus,<sup>[17]</sup> Queen Myrine led her Amazons to victory against Libya and much of Gorgon.

They attacked the Phrygians, who were assisted by Priam, then a young man.<sup>[18]</sup> In his later years, however, towards the end of the Trojan War, his old opponents took his side against the Greeks under their queen Penthesilea "of Thracian birth", who was slain by Achilles.<sup>[19][20][21][22][23][24]</sup>

One of the tasks imposed upon Heracles by Eurystheus was to obtain possession of the girdle of the Amazonian queen Hippolyta.<sup>[25][26][27][28]</sup> He was accompanied by his friend Theseus, who carried off the princess Antiope, sister of Hippolyta, an incident which led to a retaliatory invasion of Attica,<sup>[29][30]</sup> in which Antiope perished fighting by the side of Theseus. In some versions, however, Theseus marries Hippolyta and in others, he marries Antiope and she does not die; by this marriage with the Amazon Theseus had a son Hippolytus.

The battle between the Athenians and Amazons is often commemorated in an entire genre of art, amazonomachy, in marble bas-reliefs such as from the Parthenon or the sculptures of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus.



Amazon wearing trousers and carrying a shield with an attached patterned cloth and a quiver. Ancient Greek Attic white-ground alabastron, c.470 BCE, British Museum, London.



Thalestris, Queen of the Amazons, visits Alexander (1696)

The Amazons are also said to have undertaken an expedition against the island of Leuke, at the mouth of the Danube, where the ashes of Achilles had been deposited by Thetis. The ghost of the dead hero appeared and so terrified the horses, that they threw and trampled upon the invaders, who were forced to retire. Pompey is said to have found them in the army of Mithridates.

They are heard of in the time of Alexander, when some of the king's biographers make mention of Amazon Queen Thalestris visiting him and becoming a mother by him (the story is known from the *Alexander Romance*). However, several other biographers of Alexander dispute the claim, including the highly regarded secondary source, Plutarch. In his writing he makes mention of a moment when Alexander's secondary naval commander, Onesicritus, was reading the Amazon passage of his

Alexander history to King Lysimachus of Thrace who was on the original expedition: the king smiled at him and said "And where was I, then?"

The Roman writer Virgil's characterization of the Volscian warrior maiden Camilla in the *Aeneid* borrows heavily from the myth of the Amazons.

Jordanes' *Getica* (c. 560), purporting to give the earliest history of the Goths, relates that the Goths' ancestors, descendants of Magog, originally dwelt within Scythia, on the Sea of Azov between the Dnieper and Don Rivers. After a few centuries, following an incident where the Goths' women successfully fended off a raid by a neighboring tribe, while the menfolk were off campaigning against Pharaoh Vesosis, the women formed their own army under Marpesia and crossed the Don, invading Asia. Her sister Lampedo remained in Europe to guard the homeland. They procreated with men once a year. These Amazons conquered Armenia, Syria, and all of Asia Minor, even reaching Ionia and Aeolia, holding this vast territory for 100 years. Jordanes also mentions that they fought with Hercules, and in the Trojan War, and that a smaller contingent of them endured in the Caucasus Mountains until the time of Alexander. He mentions by name the Queens Menalippe, Hippolyta, and Penthesilea.

In the Grottaferrata Version of *Digenes Akritas*, the twelfth century medieval epic of Basil, the Greek-Syrian knight of the Byzantine frontier, the hero battles with and kills the female warrior Maximo.

- She was descended from some Amazons.
- Taken by Alexander from the Brahmins.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Lists

There are several (conflicting) lists of names of Amazons.

Quintus Smyrnaeus<sup>[32]</sup> lists the attendant warriors of Penthesilea: "Clonie was there, Polemusa, Derinoe, Evandre, and Antandre, and Bremusa, Hippothoe, dark-eyed Harmothoe, Alcibie, Derimacheia, Antibrote, and Thermodosa glorying with the spear."

Diodorus Siculus<sup>[33]</sup> lists twelve Amazons who challenged Heracles to single combat during his quest for Hippolyta's girdle and died against him one by one: Aella, Philippis, Prothoe, Eriboea, Celaeno, Eurybia, Phoebe, Deianeira, Asteria, Marpe, Tecmessa, Alcippe. After Alcippe's death, a group attack followed.

Another list of Amazons' names is found in Hyginus' *Fabulae*.<sup>[34]</sup> Along with Hippolyta, Otrera, Antiope and Penthesilea, it attests the following names: Ocyale, Dioxippe, Iphinome, Xanthe, Hippothoe, Laomache, Glauce, Agave, Theseis, Clymene, Polydora.

Yet another different set of names is found in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*.<sup>[35]</sup> he mentions Euryale, Harpe, Lyce, Menippe and Thoe. Of these Lyce also appears in a fragment preserved in the *Latin Anthology* where she is said to have killed the hero Clonus of Moesia, son of Doryclus, with her javelin.<sup>[36]</sup>

John Tzetzes in *Posthomerica*<sup>[37]</sup> enumerates the Amazons who fell at Troy: Hippothoe, Antianeira, Toxophone, Toxoanassa, Gortyessa, Iodoce, Pharetre, Andro, Ioxeia, Oïstrophe, Androdaïxa, Aspidocharme, Enchesimargos, Cnemis, Thorece, Chalcaor, Eurylophe, Hecate, Anchimache, Andromache the queen. Concerning Antianeira and Andromache, see below; for almost all the other names on the list, this is a unique attestation.



A helmeted Amazon with her sword and a shield bearing the Gorgon head image, Tondo of an Attic red-figure kylix, 510–500 BCE

Stephanus of Byzantium provides an alternate list of the Amazons who fell against Heracles, describing them as "the most prominent" of their people: Tralla, Isocrateia, Thiba, Palla, Coea (Koia), Coenia (Koinia).<sup>[38]</sup> Eustathius gives the same list minus the last two names.<sup>[39]</sup> Both Stephanus and Eustathius write of these Amazons in connection with the placename Thibais, which they report to have been derived from Thiba's name.

Other names of Amazons from various sources include:

- Aegea, queen of the Amazons who was thought by some to have been the eponym of the Aegean Sea.<sup>[40]</sup>
- Ainia, presumably accompanied Penthesilea to the Trojan War, killed by Achilles; known only from an Attic terracotta relief fragment.<sup>[41]</sup>
- Ainippe, an Amazon who confronted Telamon in the battle against Heracles' troops.<sup>[42]</sup>
- Alce, who was said to have killed the young Oebalus of Arcadia, son of Ida (otherwise unknown), with her spear during the Parthian War.<sup>[36]</sup>
- Amastris, who was believed to be the eponym of the city previously known as Kromna,<sup>[43]</sup> although the city was also thought to have been named after the historical Amastris.<sup>[44]</sup>
- Anaea, an Amazon whose tomb was shown at the island of Samos.<sup>[45]</sup>
- Andromache, an Amazon who fought Heracles and was defeated; only known from vase paintings.<sup>[42][46]</sup> Not to be confused with Andromache, wife of Hector.
- Antianeira, succeeded Penthesilea as Queen of the Amazons. She was best known for ordering her male servants to be crippled "as the lame best perform the acts of love".<sup>[47]</sup>
- Areto and Iphito, two little-known Amazons, whose names are only attested in inscriptions on artefacts.<sup>[48]</sup>
- Clete, one of the twelve followers of Penthesilea. After Penthesilea's death she, in accord with the former's will, sailed off and eventually landed in Italy, founding the city of Clete.<sup>[49]</sup>
- Cyme, who gave her name to the city of Cyme (Aeolis).<sup>[50][51]</sup>
- Cynna (?), one of the two possible eponyms (the other one being "Cynnus, brother of Coeus") of Cynna, a small town not far from Heraclea.<sup>[52]</sup>
- Ephesos, a Lydian Amazon, after whom the city of Ephesus was thought to have been named; she was also said to have been the first to honor Artemis and to have surnamed the goddess *Ephesia*.<sup>[53]</sup> Her daughter Amazo was thought of as the eponym of the Amazons.<sup>[54]</sup>
- Eurypyle, queen of the Amazons who was reported to have led an expedition against Ninus and Babylon around 1760 BCE.<sup>[55][56][57]</sup>
- Gryne, an Amazon who was thought to be the eponym of the Gryneian grove in Asia Minor. She was loved by Apollo and consorted with him in said grove.<sup>[58][59]</sup>
- Helene, daughter of Tityrus. She fought Achilles and died after he gravely wounded her.<sup>[60]</sup>
- Hippo, an Amazon who took part in the introduction of religious rites in honor of the goddess Artemis. She was punished by the goddess for not having performed a ritual dance.<sup>[61]</sup>
- Lampedo, queen of the Amazons, co-ruler with Marpesia.<sup>[62][63]</sup>
- Latoreia, who had a small village near Ephesus named after her.<sup>[64]</sup>
- Lysippe, mother of Tanais by Berossos. Her son only venerated Ares and was fully devoted to war, neglecting love and marriage. Aphrodite cursed him with falling in love with his own mother. Preferring to die rather than give up his chastity, he threw himself into the river Amazonius, which was subsequently renamed Tanais.<sup>[65]</sup>
- Marpesia, queen of the Amazons, co-ruler with Lampedo.<sup>[62][63]</sup>
- Melanippe, sister of Hippolyta. Heracles captured her and demanded Hippolyta's girdle in exchange for

her freedom. Hippolyta complied and Heracles let her go. According to some,<sup>[66]</sup> however, she was killed by Telamon.

- Molpadia, an Amazon who killed Antiope.<sup>[67]</sup>
- Myrleia, possible eponym of a city in Bithynia, which was later known as Apamea.<sup>[68]</sup>
- Myrto, in one source, mother of Myrtilus by Hermes<sup>[69]</sup> (elsewhere his mother is called Theobule).<sup>[70]</sup>
- Mytilene, Myrina's sister and one of the possible eponyms for the city of Mytilene<sup>[51]</sup>
- Maximo (Amazon).
- Orithyia, daughter and successor of Marpesia, famous for her conquests.<sup>[62][63]</sup>
- Otrera, consort of Ares and mother of Hippolyta and Penthesilea.
- Pantariste, who killed Timiades in the battle between the Amazons and Heracles' troops.<sup>[42]</sup>
- Pitane and Priene, two commanders in Myrina's army, after whom the cities of Pitane (Aeolis) and Priene were named.<sup>[51]</sup>
- Sanape, who fled to Pontus and married a local king. "Sanape" means "from wine country" in Circassian. According to a commentary, it was purported to mean "drunkard" in the local language.<sup>[71]</sup>
- Sinope, successor of Lampedo and Marpesia.<sup>[63]</sup>
- Sisyrbe, after whom a part of Ephesus was called Sisyrba, and its inhabitants the Sisyrbitae.<sup>[72][73]</sup>
- Smyrna, who obtained possession of Ephesus and gave her name to a quarter in this city, as well as to the city of Smyrna.<sup>[74][75][76]</sup>
- Themiscyra, the eponym of the Amazon capital.<sup>[77][78]</sup>

## Hero cults

According to ancient sources, (Plutarch Theseus,<sup>[79]</sup> Pausanias), Amazon tombs could be found frequently throughout what was once known as the ancient Greek world. Some are found in Megara, Athens, Chaeronea, Chalcis, Thessaly at Skotousa, in Cynoscephalae, and statues of Amazons are all over Greece. At both Chalcis and Athens, Plutarch tells us that there was an Amazoneum or shrine of Amazons that implied the presence of both tombs and cult. On the day before the Thesea at Athens there were annual sacrifices to the Amazons. In historical times Greek maidens of Ephesus performed an annual circular dance with weapons and shields that had been established by Hippolyta and her Amazons. They had initially set up wooden statues of Artemis, a bretas, (Pausanias, (fl.c.160): Description of Greece, Book I: Attica).<sup>[80]</sup>

## In art



Two female gladiators with their names *Amazonia* and *Achillea*.

In works of art, battles between Amazons and Greeks are placed on the same level as- and often associated with- battles of Greeks and centaurs. The belief in their existence, however, having been once accepted and introduced into the national poetry and art, it became necessary to surround them as far as possible with the appearance of natural beings. Amazons were therefore depicted in the manner of Scythian or Sarmatian horsemen. Their occupation was hunting and war; their arms the bow, spear, axe, a half shield, nearly in the shape of a crescent, called *pelta*, and in early art a helmet, the model before the Greek mind having apparently been the goddess Athena. In later art they approach the model of Artemis, wearing a thin dress, girtle high for speed; while on the later painted vases their dress is often peculiarly Persian – that is, close-fitting trousers and a high cap called the kidaris. They were usually on

horseback but sometimes on foot. This depiction of Amazons demonstrates just how closely, in the Greek mind, the Amazons were linked to the Scythians. Their manner of dress has been noted to bear a striking similarity to the traditional dress of nomadic peoples from the Crimea to Mongolia.<sup>[81]</sup> Amazons were described by Herodotus as wearing trousers and having tall stiff caps. The double sided axe was the most emblematic of their weapons.<sup>[3]</sup> Amazons can also be identified in vase paintings by the fact that they are wearing one earring. The battle between Theseus and the Amazons (*Amazonomachy*) is a favourite subject on the friezes of temples (e.g. the reliefs from the frieze of the temple of Apollo at Bassae, now in the British Museum), vases and sarcophagus reliefs; at Athens it was represented on the shield of the statue of Athena Parthenos, on wall-paintings in the Theseum and in the *Stoa Poikile*. There were also three standard Amazon statue types.

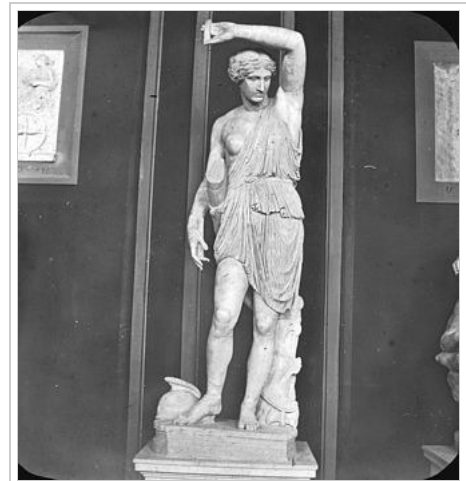
## In historiography

Herodotus reported that the Sarmatians were descendants of Amazons and Scythians, and that their wives observed their ancient maternal customs, "frequently hunting on horseback with their husbands; in war taking the field; and wearing the very same dress as the men". Moreover, said Herodotus, "No girl shall wed till she has killed a man in battle". In the story related by Herodotus, a group of Amazons was blown across the Maeotian Lake (the Sea of Azov) into Scythia near the cliff region (today's southeastern Crimea). After learning the Scythian language, they agreed to marry Scythian men, on the condition that they not be required to follow the customs of Scythian women. According to Herodotus, this band moved toward the northeast, settling beyond the Tanais (Don) river, and became the ancestors of the Sauromatians. According to Herodotus, the Sarmatians fought with the Scythians against Darius the Great in the 5th century BCE.

Hippocrates describes them as: "They have no right breasts...for while they are yet babies their mothers make red-hot a bronze instrument constructed for this very purpose and apply it to the right breast and cauterize it, so that its growth is arrested, and all its strength and bulk are diverted to the right shoulder and right arm."<sup>[82]</sup>

Amazons came to play a role in Roman historiography. Caesar reminded the Senate of the conquest of large parts of Asia by Semiramis and the Amazons. Successful Amazon raids against Lycia and Cilicia contrasted with effective resistance by Lydian cavalry against the invaders (Strabo 5.504; Nicholas Damascenus). Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus pays particularly detailed attention to the Amazons. The story of the Amazons as deriving from a Cappadocian colony of two Scythian princes Ylinos and Scolopetos is due to him. Pliny the Elder records some surprising facts pointing to the valley of the Terme River as possibly being their home: a mountain named for them (the modern Mason Dagi), as well as a settlement Amazonium; Herodotus (VI.86) first mentions their capital Themiscyra, which Pliny locates near the Terme.<sup>[83]</sup> Philostratus places the Amazons in the Taurus Mountains. Ammianus places them east of Tanais, as neighbouring the Alans. Procopius places them in the Caucasus. Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica* III, chapter 52) mentioned that besides Pontus Amazons existed much older race (at that time entirely disappeared) of Amazons from western Libya, and retells their mythological story which includes Atlantis and Greek mythology.

Although Strabo shows skepticism as to their historicity, the Amazons in general continue to be taken as historical throughout Late Antiquity. Several Church Fathers speak of the Amazons as of a real people. Solinus embraces the account of Pliny. Under Aurelianus, captured Gothic women were identified as Amazons



Amazon in combat, infl. Polyclitus, Rome. Brooklyn Museum Archives, Goodyear Archival Collection

(Claudianus). The account of Justinus was influential, and was used as a source by Orosius who continued to be read during the European Middle Ages. Medieval authors thus continue the tradition of locating the Amazons in the North, Adam of Bremen placing them at the Baltic Sea and Paulus Diaconus in the heart of Germania.<sup>[84]</sup>

## Medieval and Renaissance literature

Amazons continued to be discussed by authors of the European Renaissance, and with the Age of Exploration, they were located in ever more remote areas. In 1542, Francisco de Orellana reached the Amazon River (*Amazonas* in Spanish), naming it after a tribe of warlike women he claimed to have encountered and fought on the Nhamundá River, a tributary of the Amazon.<sup>[85]</sup> Afterwards the whole basin and region of the Amazon (*Amazonía* in Spanish) were named after the river. Amazons also figure in the accounts of both Christopher Columbus and Walter Raleigh.<sup>[86]</sup> Famous medieval traveller John Mandeville mentions them in his book:

"Beside the land of Chaldea is the land of Amazonia, that is the land of Feminye. And in that real is all woman and no man; not as some may say, that men may not live there, but for because that the women will not suffer no men amongst them to be their sovereigns."<sup>[87]</sup>

Medieval and Renaissance authors credit the Amazons with the invention of the battle-axe. This is probably related to the Sagaris, an axe-like weapon associated with both Amazons and Scythian tribes by Greek authors (see also Thracian tomb of Aleksandrovo kurgan). Paulus Hector Mair expresses astonishment that such a "manly weapon" should have been invented by a "tribe of women", but he accepts the attribution out of respect for his authority, Johannes Aventinus.

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* contains a country of warrior women, ruled by Queen Orontea; the epic describes an origin much like that in Greek myth, in that the women, abandoned by a band of warriors and unfaithful lovers, rallied together to form a nation from which men were severely reduced, to prevent them from regaining power. The Amazons and Queen Hippolyta are also referenced in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in "The Knight's Tale".

## Historical background

Classicist Peter Walcot wrote, "Wherever the Amazons are located by the Greeks, whether it is somewhere along the Black Sea in the distant north-east, or in Libya in the furthest south, it is always beyond the confines of the civilized world. The Amazons exist outside the range of normal human experience."<sup>[88]</sup>

Nevertheless, there are various proposals for a historical nucleus of the Amazons of Greek historiography, the most obvious candidates being historical Scythia and Sarmatia in line with the account by Herodotus, but some authors prefer a comparison to cultures of Asia Minor or even Minoan Crete.

## Archaeology



Dahomey Amazons were so named by Western observers due to their similarity to the semi-mythical Amazons

## Scythians and Sarmatians

Speculation that the idea of Amazons contains a core of reality is based on archaeological findings from burials, pointing to the possibility that some Sarmatian women may have participated in battle. These findings have led scholars to suggest that the Amazonian legend in Greek mythology may have been "inspired by real warrior women".<sup>[81]</sup>

Evidence of high-ranking warrior women comes from kurgans in southern Ukraine and Russia. David Anthony notes, "About 20% of Scythian-Sarmatian 'warrior graves' on the lower Don and lower Volga contained women dressed for battle similar to how men dress, a phenomenon that probably inspired the Greek tales about the Amazons."<sup>[89]</sup>

Up to 25% of military burials were of armed Sarmatian women usually including bows.<sup>[90]</sup> Russian archaeologist Vera Kovalevskaya points out that when Scythian men were away fighting or hunting, nomadic women would have to be able to defend themselves, their animals and pasture-grounds competently. During the time that the Scythians advanced into Asia and achieved near-hegemony in the Near East, there was a period of twenty-eight years when the men would have been away on campaigns for long periods. During this time the women would not only have had to defend themselves, but to reproduce, and this could well be the origin of the idea that Amazons mated once a year with their neighbours, if Herodotus actually based his accounts on fact.<sup>[90]</sup>

Before modern archaeology uncovered some of the Scythian burials of warrior-maidens entombed under kurgans in the region of Altai Mountains and Sarmatia,<sup>[91]</sup> <sup>[92]</sup> giving concrete form at last to the Greek tales, the origin of the Amazon story had been the subject of speculation among classics scholars. In the 1911 *Encyclopædia Britannica* speculation ranged along the following lines:



Mounted Amazon in Scythian costume, on an Attic red-figure vase, c.420 BCE

While some regard the Amazons as a purely mythical people, others assume an historical foundation for them. The deities worshipped by them were Ares (who is consistently assigned to them as a god of war, and as a god of Thracian and generally northern origin) and Artemis, not the usual Greek goddess of that name, but an Asiatic deity in some respects her equivalent. It is conjectured that the Amazons were originally the temple-servants and priestesses (*hierodulae*) of this goddess; and that the removal of the breast corresponded with the self-mutilation of the god Attis and the galli, Roman priests of Rhea Cybele. Another theory is that, as the knowledge of geography extended, travellers brought back reports of tribes ruled entirely by women, who carried out the duties which elsewhere were regarded as peculiar to man, in whom alone the rights of nobility and inheritance were vested, and who had the supreme control of affairs. Hence arose the belief in the Amazons as a nation of female warriors, organized and governed entirely by women. According to J. Viirtheim (*De Ajacis origine*, 1907), the Amazons were of Greek origin [...]. It has been suggested that the fact of the conquest of the Amazons being assigned to the two famous heroes of Greek mythology, Heracles and Theseus [...] shows that they were mythical illustrations of the dangers which beset the Greeks on the coasts of Asia Minor; rather perhaps, it may be intended to represent the conflict between the Greek culture of the colonies on the Euxine and the barbarism of the native inhabitants.

## Minoan Crete

When Minoan archeology was still in its infancy, nevertheless, a theory raised in an essay regarding the Amazons contributed by Lewis Richard Farnell and John Myres to Robert Ranulph Marett's *Anthropology and the Classics* (1908),<sup>[93]</sup> placed their possible origins in Minoan civilization, drawing attention to overlooked similarities between the two cultures. According to Myres, (pp. 153 ff), the tradition interpreted in the light of evidence furnished by supposed Amazon cults seems to have been very similar and may have even originated in Minoan culture.

## Modern legacy

In Ukraine Katerina Tarnovska leads a group called the Asgarda which claims to be a new tribe of Amazons.<sup>[94]</sup> Tarnovska believes that the Amazons are the direct ancestors of Ukrainian women, and she has created an all-female martial art for her group, based on another form of fighting called "Fighting Hopak," but with a special emphasis on self-defense.<sup>[94]</sup> French photographer Guillaume Herbaut lived with the Asgarda and photographed them in 2004.<sup>[95]</sup> As of 2009, the group consists of 150 women.<sup>[96]</sup>

The city of Samsun in modern-day Turkey features a recently constructed "Amazon Village" museum, created to bring attention to the legacy of the Amazons and to generate both academic interest and popular tourism.<sup>[97]</sup> An iconic statue of the museum is the prominent figure of a fierce female warrior, flanked by two buildings designed to look like lions.

A festival is held every year in the Terme district of Samsun Province to celebrate the Amazons.<sup>[97]</sup>

## In literature

- Amazon Queen Hyppolyta appears in William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- The Amazon queen Penthesilea, and her sexual frenzy, are at the center of the drama *Penthesilea* by Heinrich von Kleist in 1808.
- During the period 1905-13, members of the militant Suffragette movement were frequently referred to as "Amazons" in books and newspaper articles.<sup>[98]</sup>
- The comic book superheroine Wonder Woman is the Amazon princess Diana of Themyscira, created by William Moulton Marston (the inventor of the Systolic Blood Pressure Test and a scholar with an interest in women's rights<sup>[99][100]</sup>). She is the daughter of Queen Hippolyta, who, in turn, is inspired by Queen Hyppolyta of the Greek Mythology.
- The Amazons are featured as supporting characters in Rick Riordan's fantasy novel *The Son of Neptune*. It presents Amazon.com as a front for their society in the modern world. The novel also depicts the ghost of the Amazon Queen Otrera as a minor antagonist.
- Last of the Amazons, in which Theseus, the legendary King of Athens, sets sail to the north coast of the Black Sea inhabited by a race of female warriors (Steven Pressfield 2002).
- In the popular Japanese cartoon One Piece (manga), the main character visits an island called Amazon Lily containing giant-sized women ruled by the Amazonian queen Boa Hancock.



*Departure of the Amazons*, by Claude Deruet, 1620

## See also

- Amazon feminism
- Artemis
- Athena
- Dahomey Amazons
- Giantess
- Liburnians (according to Pseudo-Scylax ruled by women)
- List of women warriors in folklore
- Matriarchal religion
- Matriarchy
- Shieldmaiden
- Sitones
- Terra Feminarum
- Themis
- Timeline of women in ancient warfare
- Valkyrie
- Virago
- Warrior women
- Women warriors in literature and culture
- Women in the military
- Wonder Woman
- Xena: Warrior Princess



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## External links


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- Wounded Amazon (<http://www.amazons-info.com/>)
- Herodotus on the Amazons (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Hdt.+4.110.1>)
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