

Amazons! The Myth, the Meme, the Reality

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Who were the Amazons?



Who were the Amazons?

- 3 main concepts:

1. Man hating

“And as for their children, they mutilated both the legs and the arms of the males, incapacitating them in this way for the demands of war” (Diod. Sic. 2.45.1-5).

“If any male children were born, they put them to death. The girls they bred up to the same mode of life with themselves, not consigning them to idleness, or working with wool, 11 but training them to arms, the management of horses, and hunting; burning their right breasts in infancy, that their use of the bow might not be obstructed by them; and hence they were called Amazons” (Just. *Epit.* 2.4.10-11).

2. One breasted

“they cultivated the manly virtues, and if ever they gave birth to children through intercourse with the other sex, they reared the females; and they pinched off the right breasts that they might not be trammelled by them in throwing the javelin, but they kept the left breasts, that they might suckle” (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.9).

3. Purpose to fight Greek men in Amazonomachies - *Antianeirai*

“the women train for war just as do the men and in acts of manly valour are in no wise inferior to the men” (Diod. Sic. 2.44.1).

How did this story develop?

- Earliest sources:

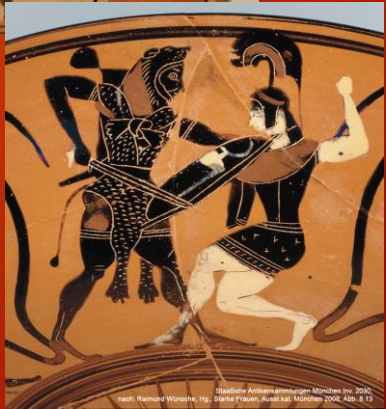
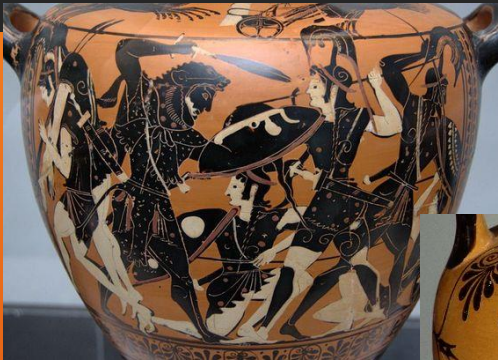
- *Iliad* 3.184-190- The Amazons attack the Phrygians who were aided by a young Priam

“I journeyed to the land of Phrygia...being their ally, was numbered among them on the day when the Amazons came, the peers of men.”

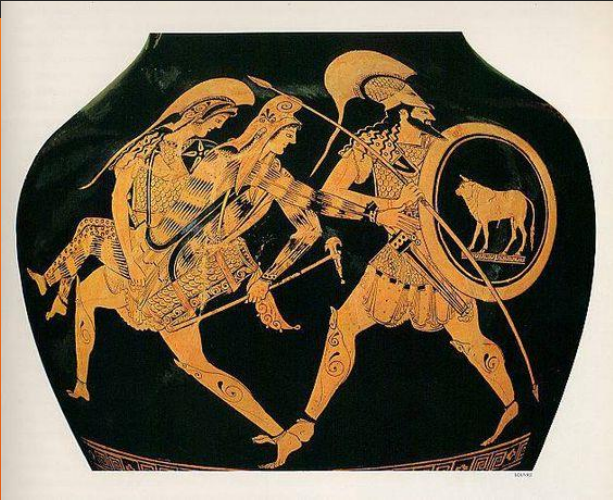
- *Iliad* 6.186- Bellerephon, victor over the Chimaera, the Solymi, and the Amazons. “and thirdly he [Bellerephon] slew the Amazons, women the peers of men.”



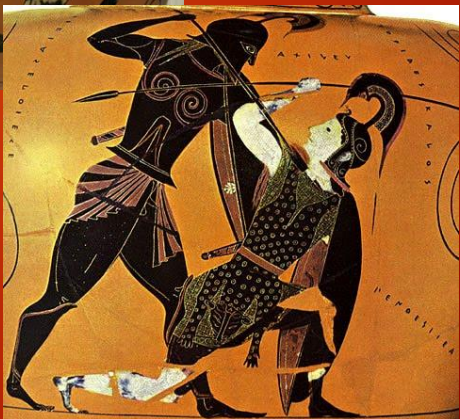
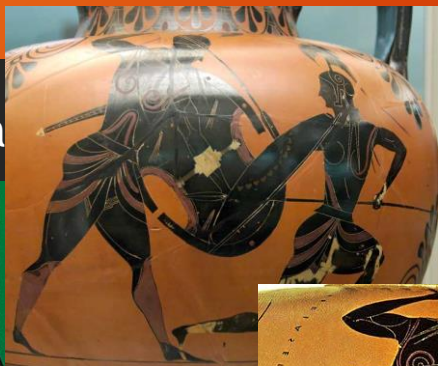
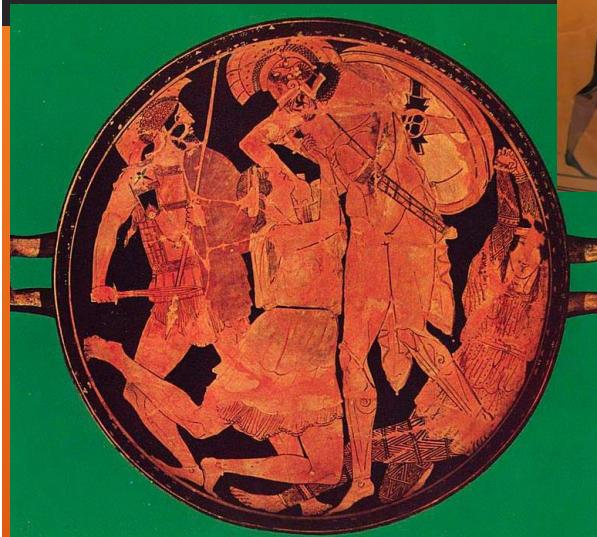
Heracles and Hippolyta



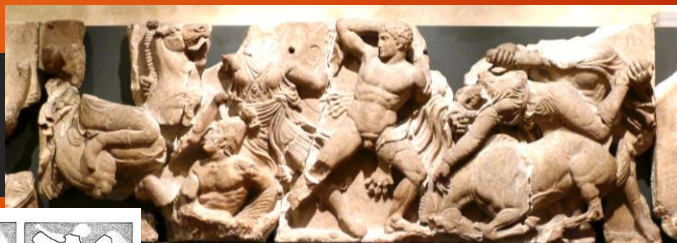
Theseus and Antiope



Achilles and Penthesilea

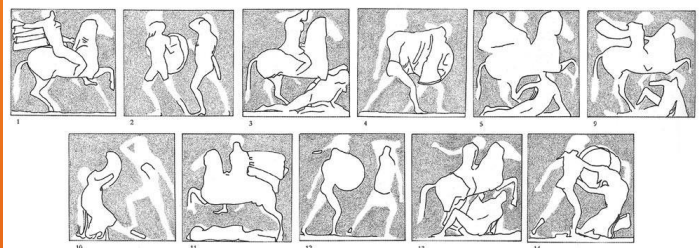


Monumental depiction



Heracles and Hippios, Temple Bassae Frieze

Achilles slaying Penthesilea, Temple Bassae Frieze

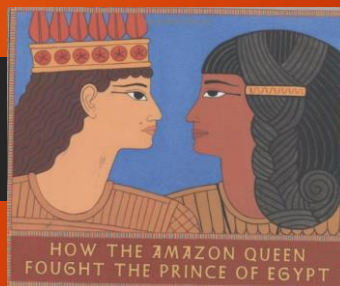


Athenian Amazonomachy, Parthenon West Metopes, recreation by Oxford University



Hellenistic and Roman

- Popularity of the stories - Pedikhons and Serpot
- The Alexander Romance - connecting the Macedonian-Greek empire to the Classical Greek past
- Roman coins show Greek literary influence



Depiction of event from 1696 translation of Curtius



Medieval and Renaissance

- Amazons virginal, but not "proper" womanly ideal
- Romance aspect popularized and edited to fit ideals
- Hippolyta in Boccaccio's *Teseida*:

"It will not be a disgrace for us to be conquered by such an excellent man, since every man realizes that we are women, and so we are" (1.121).

Alexander meeting with Thalestris



Penthesilea arriving at Troy

Her death at the hands of Achilles



Achilles mourns Penthesilea



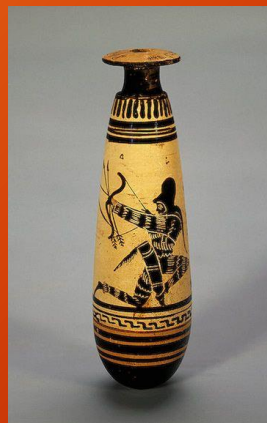
Modern

- Colloquialisms- Old Battle Axe
- Geography- Amazon River, Brazil
- Popular Culture- Wonder Woman, Xena, Buck Rogers, Futurama
- Modern warrior women- Amazon Brigades



The Reality

- *Amazones antianeirai*
~~- A- without mazon=mastos??~~
- Not one breasted; Not man hating
 - Hellenized Indo-European
 - *Amazones* = men and women
 - *Antianeirai*- weirdest trait
- Real group became Meme



The Reality

- Archaeology - Scythians, Thracians, Sarmatians
- Girls and boys raised to ride, hunt, and fight
- Kurgan burials - 37% armed female
 - Burial goods
 - Skeletal evidence

