2013

(Ad)dressing the Other: The Amazon in Greek Art

Annaliese Elaine Patten
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Patten, Annaliese Elaine, "(Ad)dressing the Other: The Amazon in Greek Art" (2013). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 24.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.27>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

(Ad)ressing the Other: The Amazon in Greek Art

by

Annaliese Elaine Patten

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

Art History

Thesis Adviser

George Armantrout, PhD

Portland State University

©2013

Abstract The mythological Amazon represents the opposite of Greek ideals, contrasting the Ancient Greek identity and their societal ideals. In this thesis, I reconsider the role of the Amazon in Greek art between 750 and 400 BCE with particular focus on costume as an indication of a gendered and ethnic Other. This construction of the Other is conveyed through poetic description and visual motif in the minor arts. Responding to previous discourse, I will provide an alternative exploration of Athenian propensity to relegate unwanted foreign traits into the portrayal of the Amazon. The illustrated clothing is adapted to the scope of local knowledge on foreign customs, limited initially to neighboring East Greeks, and encompassing Scythian archers towards 550. The Amazon represents the Persian enemy metaphorically in public art under Perikles following the Persian Wars. Depicting the feminine Amazon as an eastern enemy is a realization of internal and external threats of infiltration challenging Greek cultural standards. By 450, the mythological Amazon's identity is that of the feminine barbarian constructed in response to apprehensions of domestic and foreign peril of the Greek state.

Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to my friends and family who have supported my educational endeavors, especially my Gammy, Dinny, and Nana, who passed before seeing its completion.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my very great appreciation to Dr Armantrout for his valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development of this research work. His willingness to give his time so generously has been very much appreciated. I would like to offer my special thanks to Dr. Anne McClanan for her comments on feedback for my thesis presentation.

Assistance provided by Nora Quiros and Honors Director Ann Fallon, PhD in setting up the final leap towards graduation is greatly appreciated.. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Laurie Cosgriff and Dr. William York for their continued advice and support of my education.

I am particularly grateful for the assistance given by my mother, Jill for reading and editing my thesis in the dark of night and my father, Frank for instilling an interest in Ancient Greece in my childhood. Thank you to my dear friend Ally and my loving companion Sam for being present during all needed moments with a hot cup of tea.

**(Ad)dressing the Other:
The Amazon in Greek Art**

Annaliese Elaine Patten

The visualization of the Amazons in Greek art informs both historians and art historians alike of Greek cultural standards between 750 and 400 BCE. Through a representation of opposites, the Amazons stood for an uncultured and uncivilized barbarian. The Athenians responsible for the mythology creation utilized the Amazon mythology to fulfill the metaphysical role of the Other, the opposite of Greek values. This myth, present in visual art as early as ca. 750 BCE, reveals ancient ideals of gender and ethnicity. Often described as the “anti-male” and “barbarian” in literature, the Amazon has been cast as a man-hating banshee. The character of the Amazon is described in both literature and visual art. The manners and customs discussed in the literary accounts often do not match those in the visual treatment of the Amazon. Descriptions by Greek authors, such as Herodotus and Strabo can be countered with the substantial visual record in decorated pottery and other arts. This discrepancy does not devalue the traditional literature on the Amazons but rather places it in a position of comparison, revealing a complex notion of the Other in Greek art. The Amazon legend functioned to signify the barbarous social customs that were considered unacceptable to the male audience of the Greek polis.

To fully encompass all crucial parts of the constructed Amazon myth, it is necessary to consider both textual and visual evidence, combining both historical and art historical methodology. The literary account of the Amazons is one based in quasi-historical record. These primary sources are limited as few have survived in full and most not at all. However, the written description of the ancient understanding of the Amazons is necessary. Working with what is available it is possible to reconstruct a preliminary understanding of the Amazon disposition – one that is indicative of the relationship between the Amazons and the east. Homer, Herodotus, and Hellanicus each contribute similar anecdotes to the narrative of the Amazon that is easily compared to later Strabo and Plutarch's more detailed accounts of the Amazons' behavioral patterns and provenance. Additionally, it is possible to see the underlying philosophical foundation associating the Amazon with the east in the Hippocratic corpus following the tradition of polarity.

Just as there are limitations of understanding within in literature on the Amazons, there are limitations on what can be learned of the social understanding of the Amazons through art. It is not possible to convey the Amazon's provenance through imagery, or at least not directly. Visual cues such as oriental costume hint toward eastern origin and a visual association with the eastern barbarian. Throughout the ample collection of Amazons in Greek art, compiled in Dietrich von Bothmer's *Amazons in Greek Art*, it is clear that the Amazon takes the form and uniform opposite from that of the Greeks.¹ The illustrated clothing is restricted to the scope of local knowledge on foreign customs, limiting initially to neighboring East Greeks and expanding to Scythian archers towards 550. A consistent characteristic, and likely the most outstanding feature of the Amazon in art, is the masculine garments and use of weapons. Through the

---

¹ Dietrich von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1957).

chronology of Greek art from 750 to 400 BCE, the boundaries of gender and ethnicity are pushed to encompass more and more of the eastern fashion. Amazons came to represent the Persian enemy through mythological metaphor as tensions rose and fell surrounding the Persian Wars. By 450, the mythic Amazon's identity is that of the feminine barbarian constructed in response to apprehension of domestic and foreign peril of the Greek state under Periklean rule.

The Question

The question of why Greeks needed Amazons is one started as early as 1867 with J. J. Bachofen's attempt to understand the myth as matriarchy. Marxists, feminists, Freudians, Jungians, and followers of the Goddess all supported this now testified historical notion of matriarchy. Contesting early twentieth century scholarship followed the theoretical philosophies of the humanities: the positivist, the political and the psychoanalytic. Walther Leonhard (1911) produced a positivist understanding of the Amazons as a musing of historical conflict with beardless Hittites, rife with racist undertones of unspecified "mongoloid" type. Roger Hinks (1939) outlines a politicization of the Amazon myth as concealed memory through mythological subjection of historical events. He argued that the representation of Amazonomachies was the symbolic situation standing in for the historic past, a notion partially taken up today. These early scholars did not refute Bachofen's insistence of the importance of the matriarchy of the Amazons and rather incorporated his argument into their own.

Amazon psychology was dominated by Freudian psychoanalysis, providing useful insight into the construction of Greek mythology at large. Schultz Engle (1942) and Phillip Slater (1968) provide psychoanalytic treatments of the Amazon myth, focusing on masturbatory

horseback riding and Athenian sex antagonism respectively. Slater's contemporaries were in the feminist and structuralist vein. Many ideas are similar between these schools of thought but the overlap does not seem conscious. It was generally argued by both the psychoanalysis scholars and the structuralists that Amazon society mirrored the structure of the Greek polis metaphorically. Another common factor between them was the stress on female tyranny and matriarchy in the development of Greek notions about barbarians, a notion that is taken up by following scholars addressing similar questions about the origins and identity of the Amazon myth.

Classical archaeologist Dietrich von Bothmer (1957) compiled a comprehensive catalogue of every Amazon in Greek art found up to 1957. In his catalogue, von Bothmer discussed the visual data in detail down to the very direction each Amazon was facing providing limited visual analysis focusing primarily on the identification of the Amazon figure. It was in this contemporary time period combining psychoanalytic and structuralist methodology that the frescoes of Mikon were reconstructed from literary knowledge and that the bulk of art historical research identified Amazons in decorated pottery.

While the classical archaeologists busied themselves with iconographic representation, the structuralists turned to interpreting the Amazon. Having created many of the dualities known in Greek history, such as Vernant (1988) and Vidal-Naquet's (1972) notion of marriage being for women and war for men, structuralist conclusions have held strong in many of the current theories today. From this dualist point of view, the Amazon society was the inverse of the Greek polis which had been fashioned as a men's club. This argument has continued support and is still widely accepted as the basis for understanding Greek mythology. The feminists seem to have agreed with the construction of duals but argued additionally the Amazon matriarchy as the

opposite of masculine tyranny (duBois 1982), an argument that is greatly simplified and problematic for its assumptions and generalizations of Greek mythology and society. Following this era in scholarship was a direct response countering over-generalization and over-simplified notions of masculinity. Mary Lefkowitz (1986) argues that the formation of the Amazon myth predated the formation of Athenian sex politics (an area of scholarship that this thesis regrettably cannot address in full). Realistically Greek men would have suffered just as much as women in an Amazon invasion. The Amazon myth functions here as a warning to those desiring to wander from expected social norm.

The late 80s and early 90s brought a rejection of the negative stereotype of the Amazons which had been constructed from textual analysis. Reexamination of the ancient texts clarified the establishment of literary motif and provided an alternative view to the Amazon myth. The Amazons represented the complex notion of the Other symbolically that the Scythians and Persians held in reality (Lorna Hardwick 1990). The relationship between sex and violence is both empowering and demonizing of feminine Amazon. David Castriota (1992) reverts to earlier arguments of the 60s and 70s (Pollitt 1972) acknowledging cultural binary oppositions, emphasizing the victory of order over chaos and the cohesion between woman and wild beast. Castriota's earlier work does not delve into the more complex problems within the Amazon myth construction, a problem that he addresses more recently in his exploration of the femininity of the Amazon (Castriota 2011).

Countering this scholarship on the representation of the Amazon in Greek literature and mythology are the reports of an excavation of a series of mounds argued to be the physical remains of the said mythic Amazons (Davis-Kimball, Yablonsky, and Bashilov 1995; Guliaev 2003). Having found the skeletal remains of female warrior surrounded in burial with weapons,

it has been argued that these women fulfill the role of the Amazon. However, it is not possible to prove these remains to be the mythological Amazons as the presence of females buried with weapons and armor is not a singular event and is only one possible explanation and the least likely.

The most recent work on the Amazon in myth and Greek art is the exploration of the message of ethnicity (Stewart 1995), an expansion of the idea of Amazon as barbarian (Harrison 2002 and Castriota 2011), and the symbolic relationship between Persia and Greece (Boardman 2000). Included within this discussion is scholarship addressing the role of women in Greece (Dillon 2002 and Ferarri 2003) which has enlightened feminine expectations and roles in Ancient Greek society. Additional notable elements to the discussion presented are athletic costume (Serwint 1993) and Greek ideas of gender specific clothing in Ancient Greece (Miller 1999). While the description of Amazon costume was included in the discussion of the Amazon's otherness previously, it is only very recently the costume itself being recognized as important to discuss on its own (Stellings-Hertzberg 2011). The following paper aims to follow this most recent scholarship questioning the situation of the Amazon in Greek art through the lens of their very attire.

Amazons in the Literary Tradition

Mention of the legendary Amazon warriors in ancient Greek texts provides a preliminary understanding of the Greek social climate of this persistent and long lasting myth. While the origin of the Amazons is disputed in the ancient texts, they all strongly suggest the Amazon's threat to the Greek way of life by challenging social customs in addition to a threat of physical

invasion. The very nature of Greek language and the Greek literary tradition identifies the Amazons as different from Greek expectations of normalcy. Traditions of epic poetry in Greek culture suggest that the first written accounts of the Amazon legend were not the origin of the myth or the beginning of its prominence in Greek culture. The Amazon legend was primarily communicated orally before being recorded as proven by an Amazon depicted on a mid-seventh-century votive shield of Argolic make [Plate I, 1]. The earliest description of the Amazon is in the epic poem, the *Iliad*, dated to about 725 BCE. Traditionally attributed to Homer, the *Iliad* is regarded as the literary foundation to Greek myth and culture; its epic poetry outlines Greek traditions and social structures. The complexity of Greek language and the specificity of descriptive words can provide an understanding of basic expectations of the Greek world and a preliminary understanding of character of the Amazon in mythology.

The name Amazon itself has an etymological tradition. The most common and most widely accepted etymology, *a-* [non or no] *mastos* [breast], makes the name mean 'breastless'. It has been assumed by ancient Greek writers and the following scholars that this indicated the physical removal of the breast by cauterization.² Mentioned in many of the classic texts, most notably Homer's *Iliad* and Herodotus' *Histories*, the Amazon is described in literature as having the breast removed to facilitate movement in battle (discussed below). The Amazon is continued to be described in this manner into the modern era. Countering this literary and scholastic tradition is the artistic depiction of the Amazon in Greek art, where the construction of the Amazon was based in a separate system of symbolic meaning. The mysterious lack of breastless Amazons in Greek art directly challenges the literary description and problematizes the accepted

---

² Josine H. Blok, *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995): 22.

etymology for the name, Amazon.³ The literary description and the visual depiction of the Amazon do not agree on this very basic notion. (The artistic treatment of the Amazon will be discussed in more detail in the following section.)

The name, meaning *breastless*, is a literary convention that offers only a limited understanding of the Amazon myth through history. Another understanding of the name implies a “sexual unripeness of the nubile adolescent” with the lack of prominent or fully grown breasts signifying womanhood.⁴ The breastlessness here is not that of removal but that which is due to youth and inexperience. With this etymology, the Amazon is either reckless and self-harming or youthful and wild. Both understandings of the attributed breastless etymology refer to one of the most feminine of body parts. A descriptive name such as this clearly indicates a gender divide and a lack of Greek tradition within the society of the Amazon through the disregard for natural order either through rejection of the feminine body through auto-mastectomy or by their inexperience in the world of women. The very nomenclature suggests an incomplete or broken female form missing the essential parts of the female body.

Other alternative etymologies have been provided more recently.⁵ The name has also been read as *bread-less*, with the root *maza* for bread. This could easily suggest a hint of an uncivilized community due to their inability to make bread, bread being the symbol of civilization. Another less common attribute of the etymology of the name Amazon is *-zoone*, with the prefix *ama-*; “with girdles.” This meaning has been introduced most recently in the scholarship on the mythological symbolism and the identification of the Amazon as feminine, led

---

³ Stewart, “Imag(in)ing the Other,” 579.

⁴ Blok, *The Early Amazons*, 23.

⁵ Ibid, Note 6 to Chapter One.

primarily by feminist scholarship. This etymology is also preferred to those who study the myth of Herakles and his quest to bring back the girdle of the Amazon Hippolyte.

The multiple etymologies of the name Amazon provides historians and art historians alike with a challenging exploration into the construction of mythological figures. The Amazon name indicates characteristic difference in all four possible etymologies listed above. The Amazon can be understood as breastless (either physically or symbolically), breadless (lacking civilization) or girdled. The name itself implies either gender or cultural otherness, ideas that are also present in the literary descriptions of the Amazon.

The epithet employed in the *Iliad* to describe the Amazons is ἀντιάνειραι, defined by Richard John Cunliffe as ‘a match for men’ or ‘man-like’ with the first part of the term, *anti*, meaning either ‘opposite to’ or ‘antagonistic to’.⁶ This term is most closely related to the Greek ἀντήνωρ, defined by Liddell and Scott as ‘instead of a man’ or ‘other than a man’, while the epithet itself is specifically of the Homeric dialect.⁷ The Homeric use of ἀντιάνειραι suggests a distancing and identifying qualifier of the Amazons of gender. They neither fit the description of the Greek male role nor do they fit the role of the typical Greek female. This position as non-male is still threatening given Cunliffe’s translation, ‘a match for men’, indicating that the Amazons were not only feminine, opposite of masculine by gender, but also worthy opponents in battle who warred like men.⁸

⁶ *Iliad*, 3.171; Richard John Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), s.v. ἀντιάνειραι. Andrew Stewart, “Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens,” *Poetics Today* 16.4 (1995): 576.

⁷ LSJ, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th edition, s.v. ἀντήνωρ.

⁸ *Iliad*, 6.186.

The name and epithets of the Amazon provides a starting point to understanding the Amazon mythology but does not supply the extended discussion of the Other that is in the literature. The Amazon is often reported with great interest in gender and social difference. As William Blake Tyrrell aptly pointed out, "Amazons blur the categories that classify the domains of male and female."⁹ Herodotus' *Histories* from the fifth century BCE provides more detail to the seemingly barbarous Amazon legend. Having escaped Greek capture, the Amazons settled Scythia among the Sauromataean tribe. In response to the chiding Scythian men, the Amazons are recorded to have said the following:

We are riders; our business is with the bow and spear and we know nothing of women's work; but in your country no woman had anything to do with such things and your women stay at home in their wagons occupied with feminine tasks and never go out to hunt or for any other purpose.¹⁰

The Amazon does not fit either gender expectation. Carolyn Dewald notes that Herodotus "always attempts to report the habits that seem odd to Greek eyes" providing instant contrast to the Greek way of life.¹¹ While Herodotus does not detail the costume or dress of the mythic Amazons, his description of weaponry and his insistence on the Amazon's horseback riding culture supports visual data of pottery decorated with Amazons. Not only are the bow and spear, fighting tools of men, visual tropes employed by artisan workshops but also symbols of masculine culture in the hands of women. The Amazons "who attack men are destructive to

---

⁹ William Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons, A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984): 57.

¹⁰ Herodotus, *Histories* 4.110.

¹¹ Carolyn Dewald, "Women and Culture in Herodotus' *Histories*," in Helene P. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (Gordon and Breach Science Publishers: New York, 1981): 101.

themselves as well as to the rest of society; the myth's message is directed both to women and men and warns that anyone who withdraws from or hates ordinary family life becomes dangerous to society as a whole" and seen as acting with hubris.¹²

Bow and spear operate as poetic indication of the Amazon's wild and untamed character. These poetic symbols of masculinity spurn a further separation between the Greeks and their constructed Other deeper than just the rejection of the ideas of Greek *oikos*, household structure. Hellanicus, an Ionian historian from Lesbos writing in the late 5th century, reports the Amazons as removing the right breast by cauterization.¹³ To facilitate the use of the bow cauterization of the left breast was seen as necessary for freedom of movement.¹⁴ Strabo writes much later in the beginning of the first century CE of the self-cauterizing of the Amazon's breasts in infancy for the use of the bow in later battle.¹⁵ Strabo takes his commentary on Amazon culture even further insinuating animalism with his description of their animal skin clothing and aggressive demeanor suggesting a connection between self-harm and the non-human. The act of auto-mastectomy acts as a description of the Other, in this instance the non-human Other. However, as will be discussed below, there are no breastless Amazons in art, nor is the bow introduced into the visualization until around 550 BCE, one hundred years after the first bow-less Amazon.

While the link between cauterization and archery is important symbolically, it is also necessary to consider the physical nature of the story detailing of cauterization. Self-mutilation was considered distasteful by the Greeks because it removed balance and symmetry of one's self and was only done when necessary to restore balance to a harmed or otherwise asymmetric body.

---

¹² Lorna Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders or Women?" *Greece & Rome* 37.1 (1990): 34.

¹³ Hellanicus, fr. 16 as cited in Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 17.

¹⁴ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 18.

¹⁵ Strabo, 2.5.3-4.

Removing one's breast voluntarily would be to literally remove one's self from the feminine body and thus the Greek patriarchy to preserve the femininity of the left breast for the survival of the matriarchal Amazon line.¹⁶ Additionally, Amazons controlled procreation while men were described as having to attend children in their mother's absence.¹⁷ Both matriarchy and the reversal of child care would be against the Greek natural order. The basis of Greek medicine and philosophy was the perpetuation of balance, a model which the Hippocratic corpus easily extended to encompass geography and natural philosophy. Removing a breast would disrupt the natural symmetry of the body, going against nature in addition to the rejection of expected motherhood.¹⁸ With this view, the Amazon was consciously acting against the natural order of things, seemingly choosing an unbalanced world. This choice would be seen as a rejection of patriarchal foundations of society and natural order – a threat to the Greek worldview.

The discussion of the Amazon gender construction reveals a set of ideals that are different from the expected Greek normalcy. The gender of the Amazon is assembled with a strong feminine lead that is dissimilar from the Greek male-led society creating a distinct gender Other. The otherness of the Amazon's culture is constructed in a similar manner. The construction of the Amazon femininity is supported by the description of the Amazon's place of origin as coming from the east. While many different locations will be discussed as the given provenance for the Amazon tribe, the general terms eastern and oriental will be used interchangeably to indicate any land that is east of Greece. These terms are supported by current academia and are understood in the field to indicate the region of the Near East and not East Asia

---

¹⁶ Blok, *The Early Amazons*, Note 2 to Chapter One.

¹⁷ Tyrrell, *Amazons*, 54.

¹⁸ Hellanicus fr. 16 and 17 as cited in Tyrrell, *Amazons*, 21. Hippocratic Corpus, *Airs, Waters, Places*.

geographically. All of the descriptions of the Amazons' provenance fall within this defined eastern region.

The given provenance of the Amazons helps scholars understand the legend's role in forming the Other in Greek cultural history. Greek writers mention of the Amazon as coming from east of Greece, but only in a vague sense causing many scholars to wonder at any possible specific location.¹⁹ Herodotus placed the Amazons in Scythian territory while Hellanicus states that the Amazons had "crossed the frozen Bosphorus" to reach Attica.²⁰ Later, Pindar (*Olympian* 8, ca. 480 BCE), was more explicit placing the homeland of the Amazons on the farther Asian side of Troy near the Black Sea and beyond Thrace and Scythia.²¹ Plutarch located the Amazons near the Black Sea in his *Life of Theseus*.²² As the Amazon legend grew older, the position of the Amazon homeland is located as farther and farther away from Athens and mainland Greece to the east. The Amazon was placed in the category of the foreign Other through geographic and cultural difference.

Although vague, the geographic placement of the Amazon is consistently in the east. The cultural and behavioral description of the Amazon is also representative of what the Greeks thought of as eastern or oriental regional culture. The description of Amazon provenance often

---

¹⁹ John Boardman, *Persia and the West: An Archaeological Investigation of the Genesis of Achaemenid Art* (London:Thames & Hudson, 2000): 7.

²⁰ Herodotus, *Histories* 4.110-8. Hellanicus fr. 17 as quoted in Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 17. Hardwick identifies the frozen Bosphorus as the modern day Bering Strait.

²¹ Pindar, *Olympian*, 8.47.

²² Plutarch, *Theseus*, 26-28. This description is considered problematic due to the extremely biased information he provides in his biographies.

included a cultural rejection, such as the rejection of “women’s work” in Herodotus’ *Histories*.²³ Cultural association with non-Greek customs with the East is apparent. The Amazon adhered to the non-Greek culture of the East and took on the identity of the eastern Other.

In *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates relates the Amazon’s invasion of Athens as leading the Scythians. Hardwick reads this as an “association of the Amazons with the Scythians and by analogy with the Persians implying a barbarian threat from the East”.²⁴ Writing after 380 BCE, Isocrates had a different understanding of foreigners than those who had lived previous to the Persian Wars, one that emphasized a generalized and eastern Other. The association between Scythia and Persia is supported by Greek conventions of dualities and the strong tradition of generalizing the foreign. The Scythians and Persians are seen as an eastern threat to Greece. The characteristics of these two cultures are combined into a poetic description of the non-Greek. Since the Amazons also fell into this category of the non-Greek, the association between the Scythians, Persians, and Amazons is natural.

The east was seen as inferior and feminine, an idea supported by the Hippocratic corpus. In *Airs, Waters, Places*, the east is seen as frail and those inhabiting the East as weak.²⁵ This view also surmised that women were naturally weaker than men, prone to uncontrollable appetite, immoderation, and insatiable desire.²⁶ Since the Amazon had traditionally been placed to the East of Greece, they took on these assumptions of the natural order. The Amazons,

---

²³ *Histories*, 4. 110.

²⁴ Hardwick, “Ancient Amazons,” 19.

²⁵ Hippocratic Corpus, *Airs, Waters, Places*, 33.

²⁶ David Castriota, “Feminizing the Barbarian and Barbarizing the Feminine: Amazons, Trojans and Persians in the Stoa Poikile,” in Judith M. Barringer and Jeffrey M. Hurwit (eds.) *Periklean Athens and its Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005): 94.

although often cited to have the strength of men in battle, were considered weak easterners, synonymous with Persian imperialism.²⁷ The Amazons were directly associated with the Scythian tribes to the near northeast past Thrace as well as the Persians to the further East, past the Bosphorus. Foreigners to Greek customs and lands, the Amazons were a legend constructed to represent the Other – an other that is feminine, inferior, weak, and alien.

A tradition of dualism promotes the historical understanding of gender discrepancy in Greek culture. Contrasting sets – Greek/barbarian, male/female, and human/animal – are outlined as basic qualities of Greek characterization as noted by Page duBois.²⁸ DuBois argues that these polarities can be summed up to a “circle of equals” with congruency between Greek, male, and human, while leaving the opposites of such similar matches as equals themselves; the opposite of the Greek/male/human being as the barbarian/female/animal. The same goes for the basis of the dual same/other:

On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until ‘later’ what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible.... In the one case “to differ” signified nonidentity; in the other case it signifies the order of the *same* [sic].²⁹

Such distinctions are chosen by Greek writers to describe the non-Greek, the Amazons being the non-Greek society in question. Their position as non-Greek would align them naturally with the barbarian. Similarly, they are not characterized by masculine features but feminine. The last

²⁷ Castriota, “Feminizing the Barbarian,” 94.

²⁸ Page duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982): 4.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, from “Différance,” as quoted in duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons*, 5-6.

association outlined by duBois is that of the animal, boiling down the Amazons as the barbarous, feminine, and animalistic Other.³⁰

However, Amazon qualities are often both masculine and feminine, both Greek and barbarous, embodying Greek fears of the corruption of Greek tradition into the very creation of the myth of the Amazon women warriors. This duality is present in the descriptions of Amazon attitudes toward men and Greek custom. An inherent problem with the idea of opposite is limiting as there can be multiple others to a sole. The sets given by duBois limit the barbarian as not respected while male barbarians were often quoted with respect. Rather than understanding the Amazon as the opposite of singles, it is necessary to view the Amazon as a construction of the other of many diverse characteristics.

The construction of the eastern identity for the Amazons has been noted by many scholars in the historical and art historical fields.³¹ Hardwick argues that Herodotus and other contemporary Greek writers on the Amazon legend concentrate on two major themes of threat to Greek tradition. The first are the "themes of geographical remoteness, "otherness", and implicit or explicit rejection of Greek norms of female behavior and therefore of social structure" and second the assumption of a "quasi-historical dimension and [that which] is specifically Atheno-centric."³² Each writer retroactively discusses themes of culture and gender threats. Amazons are considered the Other due to their geographic location outside of Greece and proximity to Asian culture. However, it is also clear that the Amazon women were an intriguing curiosity due to their stubborn refusal to adhere to Greek feminine custom. The Amazons are even further

---

³⁰ duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons*, 5.

³¹ Besides afore mentioned Blok, Tyrrell, and Hardwick, notable scholars as Andrew Stewart and John Boardman have addressed the problem of identifying the other as the eastern foreigner.

³² Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 23.

engendered with their refusal to adhere to local Scythian customs as noted by Herodotus. Even the earliest text provides a retroactive image of the Amazons.

Amazons in Visual Art

The most significant discrepancy in the narrative of the Amazon myth is the difference between the textual and visual representation of the legendary warrior women. The descriptions of Amazon customs in Greek text are not supported by the visual rendering of comparable characteristics. The image of the Amazons needs to be reconciled. As Lorna Hardwick aptly points out, an "artist's formal communication may be the best guide to the social and cultural experience which is assumed in the audience."³³ The artistic representation of the Amazon is key to comprehending the meaning and ancient understanding of the Amazon myth from its earliest representations in Black Figure to the more schematic motifs of fourth-century sculpture.

Even with the Amazon portrayed as deviating from expectations of Greek society, they still are depicted following artistic conventions. In Black Figure pottery, women are depicted with white flesh. The Amazon is represented with feminine white skin conveying virtue as well as sexual allure. Feminine skin in Black Figure is legible immediately if the white paint has not worn off, but women are also discernible by clothing and hairstyle, characteristics that the Amazon did not adhere to. This convention is not applicable to Red Figure where one has to rely on stylistic information to understand the scene pictured.

---

³³ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 28.

Another constant is the presence of both breasts in artistic illustration. The Amazons' gender is pronounced as they were also depicted with both breasts fully intact, as they had been in the earliest representation. With this visual information, the breastless Amazon is a convention and a literary theme based in the folk etymology of the nomenclature rather than the artistic mythological construction. This part of the literature is easily disregarded by artisans because of the poor visual aesthetic it would produce. Andrew Stewart argues that representing this aspect of the myth would have destroyed the Amazon's sexual allure and eroticism.³⁴ Auto-mastectomy does not appear in the extensive collection of Amazon decorated pottery.³⁵

Following another convention, the Amazons were never portrayed fully nude - a convention common for male figures and female prostitutes only, keeping the Amazon within the realm of the covered female. Warring males in both Black and Red Figure are nude save for a breastplate or insignia. Women were usually shown clothed. As discussed below, the Amazon never fully enters the masculine since to be a warring man she would have to be completely naked. The only nudity associated with the Amazon is the naked breast, possibly the first step towards full nudity and masculinity. However, we do not see the following steps as they seem to be halted immediately by Greek principle. Athletic girls are also portrayed with bare breast, wearing a one-shouldered short chiton suggesting an association with the youth and virility of athletic girls.

The Amazon's attire is essential to understand the construction of the Amazon in Greek myth. Clothing has the ability to represent both gender and culture, two of the most common characteristics in fashion today. Clothing has long been a signifier for social, economic or

---

³⁴ Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," 579.

³⁵ von Bothmer's *Amazons in Greek art*. Not one Amazon is depicted with the breast removed.

demographic place. The cultural construction of the Amazon in art is seen through the clothing depicted on the Amazon. The costume changes with the growing construction of the Other in Greek art with the association with the East. The clothing of the Amazon also conveys feminine qualities with additional masculine attire, commenting on the gender politics and expected sex roles of Greek society. These cultural and gendered constructions are further associated with the Amazon construction of the Other in their association with the feminized East. The construction of the Amazon as an eastern Other starts as early as the middle of the seventh-century and continued past the constraints of this exploration into the Roman era.

Early depictions of Amazons vary in costume and attributed weaponry combining aspects of both Greek and oriental typecast often in more solitary posed compositions.³⁶ The earliest recognizable Amazon in Greek art is on a fragment of a terracotta votive shield of Argolic shape and make found in Tiryns [Pl. I, 1]. While fragmented, it is still possible to make out the details of the scene which is supported by the representative line drawing.³⁷ Of five warriors, three wear short tunics and two wear what seems to be a peplos open at the side. The tunic wearing warriors appear to have beards while the central peplos wearing figure is depicted with crude breasts, identified as an Amazon. It is not clear if the upper body is meant to be bare or the costume to drape open.³⁸ The identification of the feminine warrior figure as an Amazon has been dated to the middle of the seventh century BCE.³⁹ Additional early pottery shows Amazon

---

³⁶ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 28.

³⁷ Courtesy of von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art*, Plate I, 1b.

³⁸ von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art*, 1.

³⁹ This date was under speculation when von Bothmer was writing the notes for his catalogue in 1957.

With additional evidentiary archive and current knowledge it is possible to narrow down his "turn of the eighth to the early seventh century" down to the mid-seventh century by the similarity of the Argive vessel depicting the Blinding of Polyphemus.

warriors in this garb with a Corinthian style helmet, a combination that von Bothmer believed was the key to identifying early Amazons up to 600 BCE.⁴⁰ Other identifications have been posed, such as Geras or other female mythic figures like Athena.⁴¹ Many pieces have inscribed identifications of specific Amazons of literature.

Von Bothmer suggested the representation of non-Athenian garb signified the Other to a more localized early Greece. His observation is significant for an early understanding of the Amazon as an indicator of non-Greek values. The votive shield is comparable to a vessel of a similar style with the earliest depiction of the blinding of Polyphemus [Pl. I, 2] also made in Argos between 670 and 640 BCE. This places the earliest identified Amazon outside of Athens, challenging von Bothmer's argument for a non-Athenian type as the feminine warriors were portrayed in distinctively Athenian hoplite armor. This depiction of the Amazon in Athenian and thus local wear maintains the Amazon's position as the Other as the costume and weapon accompaniments are recurrently gendered as masculine. While the gender description of the Amazon will be further discussed in detail below, it is important to note that this early representation of the Amazon is conveyed heavily through the mismatch of gender clothing and the feminine character. The Amazon does not change in depiction to an easternized or orientalized Other until the following century with the production of Attic Black Figure.⁴²

---

⁴⁰ von Bothmer, *Amazons in the Greek Art*, 5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Black Figure from Attica increases around 600 BCE with the majority of artisans traveling from Corinth and Argos, significantly increasing production in Attic clay. This is due to cultural movement and a shift in politics luring artisans who could work with fewer restrictions within Athens' comparatively relaxed laws.

The earliest Attic Black Figure Amazons do not appear until the second quarter of the sixth century with the image of the Amazon suddenly growing in production in ovoid neck-amphora.⁴³ These vases vary in the type and design of the armor, which weapons they are wielding, and the type of clothing the Amazon is depicted to wear from Attic tunic to Corinthian caps, greaves and boots. The Amazon is depicted in the clothing of foreign cultures most familiar to the artisan, often extending only as far as East Greek island fashion. The convention of the nude male warrior counters the consistently clothed Amazon. The Amazon's clothing takes on the likeness of non-Athenian fashion beginning with the nearest eastern neighbors.

A group of Attic Black Figure pottery, known as the Tyrrhenian group, dates to about 560 BCE and is composed of Corinthian inspired Attic Black Figure neck amphorae representing the Amazon as a feminine Greek. Similar to the Argive votive shield, this scene portrays the Amazon in terms understandable to local artisans and local viewers knowledgeable about customs and fashions of their nearest neighbors. In one amphora portraying Herakles and Andromache found in Vulci, the Amazon wears a costume of Athenian type similar to that of a hoplite [Pl. II, 1]. A difference in gender identifies the Amazon as a non-Greek, both through the convention of white flesh and the masculine attire. Consequently, the possibility of a cultural background of the Amazons is not fully realized and they are placed in a generalized sphere of the Other.

A common standby in literature that is also seen in the artistic representation is that of the Equestrian Amazon [Pl. II, 2]. Shown riding horseback, the Amazon performs an activity reserved for the flat plains or rolling hills of non-Greek cultures. Since Greek geography tended to be more rocky and mountainous, it was unsuitable for warfare from the saddle. The Amazon's

---

⁴³ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 28. von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art*, 6.

depicted familiarity with horseback riding places them as having a cultural experience and geographic origin different from that of mainland Greece. The Amazon falls into the realm of the Other through a cultural signifier but also through the masculine symbol of the horse. In Greek culture, the horse was a sign of power and social wealth associated with land capable of providing an area to graze. The horse and horseback riding culture signifies deterrence from the standard of social division as well as a masculine role taken on by the Amazon who is defined as feminine. The depiction of the Amazon on horses appears in prominence around the same time as the easternized Tyrrhenian group and continuing past 400 BCE.

This period following 550 BCE marks a shift in the costume of the Amazons with an increased tendency “to depict Amazons in *eastern* [sic] dress – trousers and sleeves and sometimes pointed caps, often armed as archers rather than hoplites.”⁴⁴ Increased knowledge of the East in the second half of the sixth century prompted a costume change in the Amazon women. Pants and sleeves, uncommon fashion in Greece, matches the descriptions of eastern traders traveling within Greece in the late sixth century. An amphora from ca. 550 displays a Scythian archer with a distinct thin pointed beard [Pl. III, 1]. The actively squatting archer draws his bow wearing a matching patterned sleeved shirt and trousers and a pointed cap with long flaps that is prominent in the depiction of Amazons in this time.⁴⁵ This piece does not depict an Amazon but rather a Scythian archer whose oriental customs and manners of dress would have been well known in Athens by this time as seen in this Attic Black Figure plate depicting a

---

⁴⁴ von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art*, 6.

⁴⁵ Warren G. Moon (ed.) *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983): 129.

Scythian archer playing a trumpet [Pl. III, 2].⁴⁶ The clothing of the Scythian is mirrored in the depiction of the Amazon as a direct commentary on the Amazon's cultural difference.

Associations through locality and between Scythians and Amazons caused the Amazons to take on an eastern style of dress.⁴⁷ As Athens becomes more familiar with eastern style costume and customs around 550, stereotypical eastern characteristics are exploited to represent the Other in art. The *ependytes*, the generic costume of an easterner combined Scythian and East Greek styles into the generic image of the eastern Other.⁴⁸ This long sleeved with pants attire under a sleeveless tunic is seen in many of the following examples changing in very small ways to incorporate different aspects. An olpe from ca. 520 from the Munich collection [Pl. III, 3] shows an individual Amazon dressed in the long sleeves and trousers. Her Scythian cap has two points and her bow sits on the ground behind her right foot. She is recognizable as an Amazon, rather than a Scythian, due to the lack of a pointed beard.⁴⁹ The application of a Scythian type garment is prominent in this period between 550 and 400 BCE.⁵⁰

A typecast costume of the easterner is solidified in the first quarter of the fourth century. A White Ground alabastron from Delphi dated to ca. 480 - 470 depicts Penthesilea, her name inscribed, carrying bow, quiver, and axe.⁵¹ She is dressed in the *ependytes* sleeves and pants

---

⁴⁶ Scythians were often employed as a police force due to limitations of political hubris restricting one citizen from retaining another citizen. The Scythians did not fall into this category and were able to actively retain law breaking citizens.

⁴⁷ Margaret C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1997): 171.

⁴⁸ Miller, *Athens and Persia*, 49.

⁴⁹ This vase has been repainted and some of the original detail has been lost.

⁵⁰ Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," 596.

⁵¹ Athens 15002.

combination with an Attic helmet. This Amazon wears sandals, a new addition to a quickly expanding wardrobe of the easterner. The quiver replaces the spear from early Amazon representations, taken from the Scythian archer and given to the feminine barbarian. A similar alabastron dated to between 470 to 460 BCE has the addition of a palm tree on its alternate side [Pl. III, 4]. Here, the Amazon is wearing a costume very similar to the description of the *ependytes* but not patterned.⁵² This Amazon wears slipper-like shoes and no headgear.

Later depictions of Amazons continue to employ this clothing type. The Penthesilea Painter Nave Vase [Pl. IV, 1] depicts Penthesilea and an accompanying Amazon being overcome by Achilles. The Amazon that is not identified lays on the ground line. She is depicted wearing an *ependytes* under a loose tunic similar to a chiton.⁵³ Penthesilea wears only the belted chiton. Another later Red Figure from about between 450 and 400 BCE portrays an Amazon wearing the mixture of the *ependytes* and the loose chiton [Pl. IV, 2]. She is shown leaning against a staff or spear and is not engaged in physical confrontation.

The *ependytes* becomes an indicator for the Amazon in Greek art and is employed consistently after 570 in decorated pottery from Athens as an identifier of the Amazon's eastern origins.⁵⁴ The Amazons came to represent the Other through the application of culturally eastern clothing. However a gendered representation of Amazons is also prominent. In general, the

⁵² Identified as an *anaxyrdes* by H. A. Shapiro, *Art, Myth, and Culture: Greek Vases from Southern Collections* (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art and Tulane University, 1981): 88.

⁵³ The *ependytes* has previously been identified as tattoo, another signifier of non-Greek and barbarous ideals from the East. See Beth Cohen, ed. *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000).

⁵⁴ Niki Stellings-Hertzberg, "An Atypical Pairing of an Amazon and a White Lekythos," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, Recent Acquisitions (2011): 75.

sixth-century BCE saw a sudden increase of images with women, the Amazons just being one of many depictions of female form. These portrayals have been argued by Andrew Stewart to signal the “curiosity, anxiety, desire, pride in possession, the need to control, and sheer brute sexism” of Greek male patrons.⁵⁵ The Amazons are distinctly characterized as feminine with their prominent breasts and white flesh, suggesting a counter to the male led Greek society.

As discussed earlier, the Amazon’s were described as lacking feminine experience to make them a grown woman - virgin and deficient in world experience.⁵⁶ Herodotus described the Amazons as unwed girls, employing the term *parthenoi*, to denote a prepubescent girl.⁵⁷ Young girls represented the epitome of female beauty and unrestrained lust. The depiction of *parthenoi* is not wholly feminine or masculine but something in between as erotic interest. White skin, intact breasts, and clearly feminine body are present in the depiction of the Amazon. In addition to these common artistic conventions, the Amazon is related to the athletic young girls through the chiton in both relief and free standing sculpture.

A small bronze figurine of a female runner dated to ca. 560 BCE [Pl. V, 1] matches descriptions of the clothing of athletic girls – a short chiton pinned at the shoulder leaving the right arm and breast exposed.⁵⁸ The pose, with legs widened, knees bent, and arms up, one holding the hem of the skirt of her chiton, suggests she is running and is similar to that of the male runners on Panathenaic amphora or the winged female runners and gorgon found in both Black and Red Figure [Pl. V, 2]. This specific figurine is marked by the British Museum of

---

⁵⁵ Stewart, “Imag(in)ing the Other,” 578.

⁵⁶ Stewart, “Imag(in)ing the Other,” 578.

⁵⁷ *Histories*, 4.114.

⁵⁸ Nancy Serwint, “The Female Athletic Costume at the Heraia and Prenuptial Initiation Rites,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 97.3 (1993): 406.

London as Laconian make for its adherence to Laconian workshop features – slender bodies, thin legs, thick thighs, small underdeveloped breasts and long faces – possibly made as a souvenir of the Heraia.⁵⁹ This figurine has also been read as an erotic pursuit by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood placing the running figure in the front of an erotic pursuit with her head turned backward to view her pursuer.⁶⁰ Following suit with Sourvinou-Inwood's argument, the Amazon is positioned as the pursued erotic object by wearing the athletic short chiton. The eroticism of the Amazon's femininity is characterized by the athletic costume customarily reserved for the young female of ideal beauty.

Larger sculpture also depicted the Amazon in a very similar belted chiton representing athletic parthenoi and East Greek fashion. Rather than the oriental costume and armor, the Amazon wears the short chiton with breast and shoulder bare in monumental relief [Pl. VI, 1] and free standing sculpture [Pl. VI, 2 and 3]. The motif of the athletic girl, more specifically her loose clothing, relates the Amazon to the athleticism and eroticism of unwed girls. The youthful and sexually free Amazon would have been a direct challenge to Greek social norms. Within these two examples of the Wounded Amazon from the 4th century, the bare breast and scanty dress is evocative and alluring. The fabric clings to the body sensually revealing the forms underneath. Not only does the chiton reveal the clearly feminine features of the Amazon but also connects the Amazon with the carefree and unrestrained youth of prepubescent athletic girls. While the chiton can indicate the youthful femininity of athletic girls it could also represent common fashion of East Greek and Mediterranean as functional attire. Since the weather of the Mediterranean was hot nine months out of the year, the short tunic would be a necessity to

---

⁵⁹ Serwint, "The Female Athletic Costume at the Heraia," 407.

⁶⁰ Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "A Series of Erotic Pursuits: Images and Meanings," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 137.

survive the humidity and hot temperatures of the regional climate. The hot eastern weather was viewed as exotic and sexually alluring and would have placed the Amazon in a similar position of sexualized character.

As Gloria Ferrari argues, the women represented in Ancient Greek visual arts fulfill their roles of femininity that is tied directly to their physical beauty.⁶¹ The ways in which figures are represented are often based in their action and not gender. Women were typically well groomed and elegantly dressed when fulfilling their role as women, the best example being the common fountain scene with women collecting water [Pl. VII, 1]. The Amazons break the gender code, being physically feminine but acting masculine. The early costume of armor and weaponry is clearly not of the feminine realm. The chiton, although not necessarily a feminine or masculine garment, suggests a sexuality different from that shown in the depiction of alternative female scenes. The Amazon character thus falls into a vague third gender representation, neither fully female nor male.

To represent their disrespect for established gender roles, Amazons are depicted in clothing unlike that found in depictions of Greek women [Pl. VII, 2]. The Amazons' two possible dress codes, the chiton or the *ependytes*, are both indications of the Other. Neither male, nor quite yet fully female, the Amazons are shown to wear the same clothing as athletic girls, wild and untamed. Likewise, their representation in eastern Greek dress places them as outside of mainland Greece both geographically and physically. Both youthful and eastern qualities create a sense of eroticism that permeates the representation of the Amazon. Even when Amazons are depicted wearing Athenian armor in early Black Figure, they are not adhering to set social customs, marking gender disparity. Amazons act and dress as men, never quite female or

---

⁶¹ Gloria Ferrari, "Myth and Genre on Athenian Vases," *Classical Antiquity* 22.1 (2003): 45.

male. The Amazon physically represented a strong-willed and defiant youthful woman, capable of defeating constructed gender standards and escaping cultural and social oppression.

This gendered construction of the Amazon in Greek art is countered by the sudden increase in public monument where the Amazon was employed as metaphor for the defeat of the Persians following 480 BCE.⁶² While the depiction of Amazons in pottery continued a similar schema preceding the Persian Wars, public art under Periklean rule following 450 altered the representation of the Amazon adding another layer of mythological construction. The Amazon in public art is somewhat of an outlier, representing a specific Other, the Persian enemy, rather than a generalized eastern Other. The use of the Amazon myth as metaphor for the Persian Wars, along with other mythological battles, suggests an ancient Greek understanding of the Amazon as an Other to the Greek state.

A preoccupation with depicting the Amazon as a historical enemy is realized in some of the first instances of public monument in the Greek world. Portraying the Amazon presence as a physical threat, the Amazon myth acts as a metaphor for the Persian enemy, symbolizing the hubris of the uncivilized and greedy Xerxes. This association between Amazon and Persian combines notions of the feminine east and the non-Greek barbarian aligning the Amazon with the Other. Expanding the discussion of simple gender representation, Amazons were the representation of the feminine east. After the Persian Wars, Greek attitudes toward eastern customs became hardened by their warring interactions with Persian armies. The realization of the threatening eastern evil-doer is embodied in the already present myth of the Amazon.⁶³ The

---

⁶² Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 29.

⁶³ Xerxes has often been described by modern and ancient writers as having committed hubris. Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," 585.

Amazon, with the already solid foundation of the Other, was employed as a metaphor for eastern hubris.

The Stoa Poikile is one such public monument portraying an amazonomachy along with other mythological scenes [Pl. VIII, 1]. The middle section, attributed to the painter Mikon, rendered Theseus battling Amazons and Centaurs to retrieve Minos's ring from the bottom of the sea.⁶⁴ The Stoa Poikile once stood on view in the Athenian agora, its vision surviving solely from literary description and contemporary Attic vases based on Mikon's work.⁶⁵ The Stoa Poikile used women as the primary mythic analogue for the Persian defeat, employing chiton-wearing Amazons as the enemy to defeat.⁶⁶ Oriental depiction was exchanged for a more local and metaphorical presentation. Large scale battles with mythological beings – Amazons, Giants [Pl. VIII, 2], and Centaurs – represented the battle over chaos and appeared on large Red Figure symposium vases that are understood to be small copies of the larger monumental relief work by Mikon.⁶⁷

The Parthenon also held an amazonomachy on the metopes of the west end. Dated between 446 and 440 BCE, the metope reliefs portray the mythological invasion of Athens by the Amazons which is commonly understood to reference the Persian Wars.⁶⁸ The metopes have been severely damaged and are barely recognizable [Pl. VIII, 3] but are known through literary description. The amazonomachy was accompanied on the East and South sides of the building by both a Gigantomachy and a Centauromachy respectively. These scenes reflect the Persian

---

⁶⁴ Pausanias, 1.17.2-3.

⁶⁵ Castriota, "Feminizing the Barbarian and Barbarizing the Feminine," 90.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 29.

⁶⁸ Castriota, "Feminizing the Barbarian and Barbarizing the Feminine," 89.

Wars in the battle between the civilized Greek and the eastern barbarian. The west metopes portraying scenes of Amazons battling Athenians incorporates the Amazon myth into the structure of Greek mythology as metaphor, solidifying the Amazon's place as an Other to Greece.

The role of the Amazon myth in the representation of the Persian Wars has just recently been explored. Scholars Stewart and Castriota have questioned the effect of applying the added layer of the Amazons' gender to the mythological metaphors found in public art. However, their exploration of this problem has yet to acknowledge the effect of the Amazon character in Greek mythology. The Amazon is a construction of the Other, as represented in the minor arts, but when applied to a larger medium as metaphor, the Amazon is both finalized as the eastern Other but also internalized as a deeper part of Greek culture and mythology. After 450, the Amazon became a symbol for the hubris of non-Greek, eastern barbarians in the highly ethically intolerant Greek society.

Xenophobia ran a strong course amid the aftermath of the Persian Wars with Perikles' Citizenship Law of 451. Enacted two years before established peace with Persia, this law barred anyone "not born of native Athenians on both sides" citizenship within Athens, a clear attempt to protect the relatively new Greek democracy from mass immigration and aristocratic tyranny.⁶⁹ This xenophobia is exposed within the myth of the Amazon. Year 449 marked peace with Persia led by Perikles. By his decree many projects were created to commemorate the victory over Persia, most notably the chryselephantine statue of Athena with the gold shield by Pheidias. On this shield is the depiction of Athenians in battle with Amazon warriors [see Pl. III, 2]. The placement and audience of the Stoa Poikile and other public monument correspond to a change

---

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Athenian Politics* 26.4 as quoted in Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," 587-588.

toward a Greco-centric mindset. The metopes of the Parthenon were also decorated with Centauromachy and Gigantomachy. Having just battled with the epitome of hubris, the Greeks saw Persians as corrupt. The Amazon and the Persian embodied the Greek fears of an invading barbarian society.⁷⁰

The years from 450 to 400, Periklean Athens doubled the number of painted vases with Amazon battle scenes.⁷¹ These vessels took on a schema mimicking sculptural treatments in the Piraeus and the Parthenon metopes. The bow and quiver becomes the standard weapon accompanying an Amazon in Red Figure. During this time, the silver axe of literary record forms into a consistent motif of the Amazon warrior in decorated pottery and monumental art.⁷² Portraying the Amazons as human rather than bestial or grotesque monsters, the Amazons are distinguished from the Greeks by their clothing and weaponry.⁷³ The Amazon reflected Greek xenophobia in the representation of barbarian costume, the mythology of the Amazon visually burned into western memory.

Conclusion

The Amazon warrior became a visual stand-in for the unwanted and threatening eastern Other, feminine by geographic association with the east and masculine by action and dress. Scythian dress and weaponry was applied to the feminine form. Descriptions from the literary tradition convey the Amazon as non-masculine, non-Greek and barbarous. The full breasted

---

⁷⁰ Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," 585.

⁷¹ Ibid, 586.

⁷² London 99.7-21.5. See von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art*, plate LXXVII.

⁷³ Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," 583.

threatening and sensual figure merges with the fear of the barbarian into a symbol of the collective Other in the Greek minor arts. The depiction of the Amazons did change through time, from non-Athenian to non-Greek expanding knowledge of neighboring cultures. The conception of the Amazon is founded in Greek values and customs, opposing Athenian values and customs.

Contrasting expected feminine virtue, artisans depicted the Amazon in non-Athenian clothing. The Amazon disinterest in feminine roles and their penchant for war implements would have been unusual to the Greek eye, threatening social hierarchy. The Athenian construction of this mythological tribe was created to represent a counter for Greek behavioral expectations. The Greek fear of being overturned is materialized in the myth of the Amazons both internally by the feminine and externally by the barbarian. The Amazon myth functioned as a reminder to Athenian citizens to behave within acceptable societal norms. The Greeks actively distanced themselves from the Other in history and art, the formation of the Amazon myth revealing Greek ethnic intolerance in the attempt to preserve the Greek self. The Amazon, as the quintessential opposite of the Greek patron, functioned as an indicator of the formation of the Greek identity.

References

- Bachofen, Johann J. *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Blok, Josine H. *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth*. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1995.
- Boardman, John. *The Greeks Overseas: Their Early Colonies and Trade*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1999.
- Boardman, John. *Persia and the West: An Archaeological Investigation of the Genesis of Achaemenid Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2000.
- Casson, Lionel. *Ancient Trade and Society*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984.
- Casson, Lionel. *The Ancient Mariners: Seafarers and Sea Fighters of the Mediterranean in Ancient Times, Second Edition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Castriota, David. *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century Athens*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- Castriota, David. "Feminizing the Barbarian and Barbarizing the Feminine: Amazons, Trojans, and Persians in the Stoa Poikile," in *Periklean Athens and its Legacy: Problems and Perspectives*, edited by Judith M. Barringer and Jeffrey M. Hurwit, 89 – 102. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.
- Cohen, Beth ed. *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000.
- Constantine, David. *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Cunliffe, Richard John. *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977.
- Davis-Kimball, Jeannine, Leonide T. Yablonsky, and Valery Bashilov, eds. *Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes in the Early Iron Age*. Berkeley, CA: Zinat, 1995.
- Dillon, Matthew. *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- duBois, Page. *Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Prehistory of the Great Chain of Being*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982.
- duBois, Page. *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

- Engle, Schultz. "The Amazons in Ancient Greece." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 11 (1942): 512 – 54.
- Ferrari, Gloria. "Myth and Genre on Athenian Vases." *Classical Antiquity* 22.1 (2003): 37 – 54.
- Foley, Helene P. *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1981.
- Green, Peter. *The Greco-Persian Wars*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Guliaev, Valeri I. "Amazons in the Scythia: New Finds at the Middle Don, Southern Russia." *World Archaeology* 35.1, *The Social Commemoration of Warfare* (2003): 112 – 125.
- Hall, Edith. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Hardwick, Lorna. "Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders, or Women?" *Greece and Rome* 38 (1990): 14 – 36.
- Harrison, Thomas. *Greeks and Barbarians*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Heller, Thomas C., Sosna, Morton, and Wellbery, David, eds. *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and Self in Western Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.
- Herodotus, *The Histories*, Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt, Revised with Introduction and Notes by John Marincola, Penguin Books, 2003.
- Hinks, Roger. *Myth and Allegory in Ancient Art*. London: Warburg Institute, 1939.
- Homer, *Iliad*, Translated by Robert Fagles, Introduction and Notes by Bernard Knox, Penguin Books, 1990.
- Lefkowitz, Mary. *Women in Greek Myth*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- Leonhard, Walther. *Hettiter und Amazonen*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1911.
- Liddle, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stewart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th edition.
- Malkin, Irad ed. *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Miller, Margaret C. *Athens and Persians in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

- Miller, Margaret. "Reexamining Transvestism in Archaic and Classical Athens: The Zewadski Stamnos," *American Journal of Archaeology* 103.2 (1999): 223 – 253.
- Moon, Warren G. ed. *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Morris, Ian. *The Greeks: History, Culture, and Society*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010.
- Pollitt, J. J. *Art and Experience in Classical Greece*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- Serwint, Nancy. "The Female Athletic Costume of the Heraia and Prenuptial Initiation Rites," *American Journal of Archaeology* 97.3 (1993): 403 – 422.
- Shapiro, H. A. *Personifications in Greek Art: The Representation of Abstract Concepts 600-400 B. C.* Zurich: AKANTHVS, 1993.
- Shapiro, H. A. *Art, Myth, and Culture: Greek Vases from Southern Collections*. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1981.
- Slater, Phillip. *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, Christiane. "A Series of Erotic Pursuits: Images and Meanings." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 131 – 153.
- Stelling-Hertzberg, Niki. "An Atypical Pairing of an Amazon and a White Lekythos." *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin, Recent Acquisitions* (2011): 74 – 79.
- Stewart, Andrew. "Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens." *Poetics Today* 16.4 (1995): 571 – 597.
- Tyrrell, Wm. Blake. *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking*. Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*. New York: Zone Publishing, 1988.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. New York: Zone Publishing, 1988 [first published in 1972].
- Vidal-Naquet, Pierre. *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- von Bothmer, Deitrich. *Amazons in Greek Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.

PLATE I

1. Penthesilea and Achilles of Argolic shape. Photo and Drawing.
 Mid Seventh-Century, found in Tiryns
 Nauplia 4509, photo and drawing courtesy of von Bothmer, Pl. I, 1 a-b

2. Blinding of Polyphemus, detail
 ca. 670 from Eleusis
 Image courtesy of the Theoi Project

PLATE II

1. Herakles and Andromache of The 'Tyrrhenian' Group, Detail
ca 565-550 BCE, found in Vulci
Boston 98.916

2. "Warrior Women", Amazons on Horses
ca. 510 BCE, Attributed to the Leagros Group
British Museum GR 1837,0609.47

PLATE III

1. Ajax and Hektor (with Scythian Archer), Detail
ca. 550 BCE
Munich 1408

2. Scythian Archer playing a trumpet
ca. 520 BCE, attributed to the Psiax Painter
British Museum

3. Olpe with Amazon, repainted
ca 520 BCE
Munich 174

4. White Ground Alabastron with Amazon and Palm Tree
ca 470-460 BCE, attributed to the Syriskos Painter
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond 78. 145

PLATE IV

1. Penthesilea Painter name vase
ca. 470 BCE
Staatliche Antikensammlungen 2688

2. Red Figure Amazon Detail
ca. 450-400 BCE
Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 5029

PLATE V

1. Bronze figure of a running girl
Sixth-Century BCE, Laconian make
British Museum of London GR 1876,0510.1

2. Red Figure Neck Amphora with Gorgon, Detail
ca. 530 BCE
J. Paul Getty, Malibu 86.AE.77

PLATE VI

1. Athenian and Amazon

From the shield of Pheidias's statue of Athena Parthenos
Piraeus, Image courtesy of von Bothmer, Pl. LXXXVII, 4

2. Statue of a Wounded Amazon, restored
bronze original, 4th century BCE
New York 32. 11. 4

3. Statue of a Wounded Amazon, unrestored
4th century BCE
Trier

PLATE VII

1. Fountain Scene, Detail
ca. 520 BCE
British Museum GR 1843,1103.49

2. Nolan Neck Amphora, depicting an Athenian and an Amazon
ca. 440 – 430 BCE, Attributed to the Dwarf Painter
Metropolitan Museum of Art 56.171.42

PLATE VIII

End Wall	Rear Wall		End Wall
1. Oinoe	2. Amazonomachy	3. Troy Taken	4. Marathon
author unknown	Mikon	Polygnotos	Mikon and Panainos
(History)	(Myth)		(History)

1. The Stoa Poikile (Painted Stoa) in the Athenian agora:

Probable arrangement of the frescoes, ca 460 BCE

Table courtesy of Andrew Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other," Figure 3.

2. Gigantomachy, Detail

ca 400-390 BCE

Louvre S1677, Image courtesy of the Theoi Project

3. Drawing of the remaining Parthenon West Metopes

Original Construction of the Parthenon, started 447 BCE; metopes, ca. 446 – 440 BCE.

drawing origin unknown