



AMAZONS I. INTRODUCTION

AMAZONS, designation of a fabulous race of female warriors in Greek beliefs, writings, and art, fancifully explained as *a-mazos* (breastless or full-breasted, see Toepfer, in Pauly-Wissowa I/2, cols. 1765f.). Its derivation from Old Iranian **maz-* (combat), producing a folkname **ha-mazan* “warrior” (J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern, I, p. 1959) is also disputed (M. Mayrhofer, “Das angebliche iranische Etymon des Amazonen-Namens,” *Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani*, II, Brescia, 1969, pp. 661-66). The Greeks placed the Amazons on the edge of the world they knew: first, on the Thermodon in northeast Asia Minor and later on the Tanais; and on the Caucasus or even on the Jaxartes as geographical explorations pushed “the East” further (Toepfer, *ibid.*, cols. 1755f.). Thrace (Virgil *Aeneid* 2.659f.) and Libya (Diodorus 3.53f.) were also claimed as their habitat. Originally, they were associated with Asia Minor, where many cities (Myrine, Cyme and Ephesus) were alleged as their foundations (Diodorus *ibid.*; Strabo 12.3, 21; Tacitus *Annals* 3.61.2), and they were made the children of Harmonia—a nymph—and Ares, the clan god to whom they sacrificed white horses. Artemis was another of their chief deities (Toepfer, *op. cit.*, cols 1764f.). Later, however, they were connected with the Scythians as the ancestors of the Sauromatae (Herodotus 4.110-17) or the wives of Asia Minor Scythians whom their neighbors had vanquished (Justin 2.4). The Massagatae Scythians who defeated and killed Cyrus the Great east of the Caspian Sea were said to be ruled by an Amazon-like queen (Herodotus I, 20 s f.), and it was on the Jaxartes that an Amazon queen came to Alexander’s camp with 300 female warriors to beget children from him and his Macedonian notables (Arrian *Anabasis* 4.15,



4, 7.13, 4; Curtius 6.5, 24f.; Plutarch *Alexander* 46). Dionysus also conquered them on his Eastern campaign, a modification, it is claimed, of Alexander stories (W. R. Halliday, *The Greek Questions of Plutarch*, Oxford, 1928, p. 210f.).

The Amazon's particular importance is due to their popularity in art from the 7th Century B.C. onward. They are represented in vase paintings and sculptured reliefs in various mythical episodes, against Achilles, Heracles, Theseus and Bellerphone, particularly after the Persian invasion of Greece. For in the mythical invasions of Attica by the Amazons and the defuse of Theseus, implications of the Persian expedition and its fate were perfectly evident. This was highlighted by the oriental background or connections of the Amazons, evidenced especially in their costume—short tunic, Iranian trousers, often variegated and elaborately patterned, and pointed hat with cheek flaps and long neck-guard—and their equipment; the bow, the javelin and the light, crescent-shaped shield, also recalled Oriental arms, as can be seen from such Graeco-Persian monuments as the Heroon of Gjölbaschi, the Nereid Monuments, and the Alexander Sarcophagus (A. Klügmann, *Die Amazonen in der attischen Literature und Kunst*, Stuttgart, 1875; Pauly-Wissowa, I/2, cols. 1761-89; E. Bielefeld, *Amazonomachia: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Motivwanderung in der antiken Kunst*, Halle, 1951; D. Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art*, Oxford, 1957; A. Sh. Shahbazi, *The Irano-Lycian Monuments*, Tehran, 1975, p. 82).

The Amazons have also found their way into Persian literature and romances through the Alexander-romance of the Pseudo-Callisthenes (*The History of Alexander the Great: being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, ed. and tr. E. A. W. Budge, Cambridge, 1889, pp. 127f.).

See also [Eskandar-nāma](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.