

# Amazons

In Greek mythology, the **Amazons** (Greek: Ἀμαζόνες, *Amazónes*, singular Ἀμαζών, *Amazōn*) were a tribe of women warriors related to Scythians and Sarmatians. Apollonius Rhodius, at Argonautica, mentions that Amazons were the daughters of Ares and Harmonia (a nymph of the Akmonian Wood). They were brutal and aggressive, and their main concern in life was war.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

Herodotus and Strabo place them on the banks of the Thermodon,<sup>[3][4]</sup> while Diodorus giving the account of Dionysius of Mitylene, who, on his part, drew on Thymoetas, states that before the Amazons of the Thermodon there were, much earlier in time, the Amazons of Libya.<sup>[5]</sup> These Amazons started from Libya passed through Egypt and Syria, and stopped at the Caicus in Aeolis, near which they founded several cities. Later, he says, they established Mitylene a little way beyond the Caicus.<sup>[4]</sup> Aeschylus, at Prometheus Bound, places the original home of the Amazons in the country about Lake Maeotis and they later moved to Themiscyra on the Thermodon.<sup>[4][6]</sup> Homer tells that the Amazons were sought and found somewhere near Lycia.<sup>[4]</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 Heracles. Diodorus mentions that the Amazons traveled from Libya under Queen Myrina.<sup>[4]</sup> Amazon warriors were often depicted in battle with Greek warriors in amazonomachies in classical art.

The Scythian women may have inspired the myth.<sup>[7][8]</sup> 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>[9]</sup>

Palaephatus, who was trying to rationalize the Greek myths in his work On Unbelievable Tales or On Incredible Tales (Greek: Περὶ ἀπίστων ιστοριῶν), stated that the Amazons most probably were men mistaken for women by their enemies because they wore clothing which reached their feet, tied up their hair in headbands and shaved their beards, and also, since they did not exist during his time, most probably they did not exist in the past either.<sup>[10][11][12]</sup>



Wounded Amazon of the Capitol, Rome



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

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## **Etymology**

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The origin of the word is uncertain. It may be derived from an Iranian ethnonym *\*ha-mazan-* "warriors", a word attested indirectly through a derivation, a denominal verb in Hesychius of Alexandria's gloss «ἀμαζακάραν· πολεμεῖν. Πέρσαι» ("hamazakaran: 'to make war' in Persian"), where it appears together with the Indo-Iranian root *\*kar-* "make" (from which Sanskrit *karma* is also derived).<sup>[13]</sup>

It may also be derived from *\*n-mn-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>[14]</sup> 19th century scholarship also connected the term to the ethnonym Amazigh.<sup>[15]</sup> A further explanation proposes Iranian *\*ama-janah* "virility-killing" as source.<sup>[16]</sup>

The Hittite researcher Friedrich Cornelius assumes that there had been the land Azzi with the capital Chajasa in the area of the Thermelon-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). The location of that land as well as his conclusions are controversial. — Gerhard Pollauer<sup>[17]</sup>

Among Classical Greeks, *amazon* was given a folk etymology as originating from *a-* (ἀ-) and *mazos* (μαζός), "without breast", connected with an etiological tradition once claimed by Marcus Justinus who alleged that Amazons had their right breast cut off or burnt out.<sup>[18]</sup> There is no indication of such a practice in ancient works of art,<sup>[19]</sup> in which the

Amazons are always represented with both breasts, although one is frequently covered.<sup>[20][19]</sup> Adrienne Mayor suggests the origin of this myth was due to the word's etymology.<sup>[19][21]</sup>

Greeks also used some epithets for them. Herodotus used the *Androktones* (Greek: Ανδροκτόνες, singular Ανδροκτόνα, *Androktona*) ("killers of men")<sup>[3]</sup> and *Androleteirai* (Greek: Ανδρολέτειραι, singular Ανδρολέτειρα, *Androleteira*) ("destroyers of men, murderesses"),<sup>[4]</sup> in the *Iliad* they are also called *Antianeirai* (Greek: Αντιάνειραι, singular Αντιάνειρα, *Antianeira*) ("those who fight like men") and Aeschylus in his work, Prometheus Bound, used the *styganor* (Greek: στυγάνωρ) ("those who loathe all men").<sup>[6][22]</sup>

## Origins

Herodotus and Strabo placed them on the banks of the *Thermodon* and *Themiscyra*.<sup>[3][4]</sup> Herodotus also mentions that some Amazons lived at Scythia because after the Greeks defeated the Amazons in battle, they sailed away carrying in three ships as many Amazons as they had been able to take alive, but out at sea the Amazons attacked the crews and killed them, then these Amazons landed at Scythian lands.<sup>[23]</sup> Strabo, mention that the original home of the Amazons were in Themiscyra and the plains about Thermodon and the mountains that lie above them, but later they were driven out of these places and during his time they are said to live in the mountains above *Caucasian Albania* (should not be confused with the modern *Albania*), but he also states that some others, among them *Metrodorus of Scepsis* and *Hypsicles*, say that after Themiscyra, the Amazons traveled and lived on the borders of the Gargarians, in the northerly foothills of those parts of the *Caucasian Mountains* which are called Ceraunian.<sup>[24]</sup> Diodorus giving the account of Dionysius of Mitylene, who, on his part, drew on Thymoetas states that before the Amazons of the Thermodon there were, much earlier in time, the Amazons of Libya.<sup>[25]</sup> These Amazons started from *Libya* passed through Egypt and Syria, and stopped at the *Caicus* in *Aeolis*, near which they founded several cities. Later, he says, they established *Mitylene* a little way beyond the *Caicus*.<sup>[4]</sup> Aeschylus, at *Prometheus Bound*, places the original home of the Amazons in the country about *Lake Maeotis* and they later moved to *Themiscyra* on the *Thermodon*.<sup>[4][6]</sup> According to Pseudo-Plutarch, the Amazons lived in and about the Tanais (Greek: Τάναις) river (modern *Don* river), formerly called the Amazonian or Amazon (Greek: Ἀμαζόνιος) river, because the Amazons bathed themselves therein.<sup>[26]</sup> The Amazons later moved to *Themiscyra* (modern *Terme*) on the River *Thermodon* (the *Terme* river in northern Turkey). Plutarch, mentions that the campaign(s) of *Heracles* and *Theseus* against the Amazons was at *Euxine Sea* (modern Black Sea).<sup>[27]</sup> Homer tells that the Amazons were sought and found somewhere near *Lycia*.<sup>[4]</sup>



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

The Amazons were supposed to have founded many towns, amongst them *Smyrna*, *Ephesus*, *Cyme*, *Myrina*, *Sinope*, *Paphos*, *Mitylene*.<sup>[24][4]</sup> At *Patmos* there was a place called *Amazonium*.<sup>[4][28]</sup> Also, on the island of *Lemnos*, there was another *Myrina*.<sup>[4]</sup> The cities of *Myrina* had this name after the amazon *Myrina*.

Apollonius Rhodius, at Argonautica, mentions that at Thermodon the Amazons were not gathered together in one city, but scattered over the land, parted into three tribes. In one part dwelt the Themiscyreians (Greek: Θεμισκύρειαι), in another the Lycastians (Greek: Λυκάστιαι), and in another the Chadesians (Greek: Χαδήστιαι).<sup>[29]</sup>

## Epithets

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Greeks also used epithets for them. Herodotus used the *Androktones* (Greek: Ανδροκτόνες, singular Ανδροκτόνα, *Androktona*) ("killers/slayers of men")<sup>[3]</sup> and *Androleteirai* (Greek: Ανδρολέτειραι, singular Ανδρολέτειρα, *Androleteira*) ("destroyers of men, murderesses"),<sup>[4]</sup> in the Iliad they are also called *Antianeirai* (Greek: Αντιάνειραι, singular Αντιάνειρα, *Antianeira*) ("those who fight like men") and Aeschylus used the *Steganor* (Greek: Στυγάνορ) ("those who loathe all men").<sup>[6][22]</sup>

Herodotus stated that in the Scythian language they were called *Oiorpata*, oior means "man", and pata means "to slay".<sup>[3]</sup>

## Mythology

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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.<sup>[20]</sup>

Strabo, giving credits to Metrodorus of Scepsis and Hypsicles, mentions that at his time the Amazons were believed to live on the borders of the Gargareans. There were two special months in the spring in which they would go up into the neighboring mountain which separates them and the Gargareans. The Gargareans also, in accordance with an ancient custom, would go there to offer sacrifice with the Amazons and also to have intercourse with them for the sake of begetting children. They did this in secrecy and darkness, any Gargareans at random with any Amazon, and after making them pregnant they would send them away. Any females that were born are retained by the Amazons themselves, but the males would be taken to the Gargareans to be brought up; and each Gargareans to whom a child is brought would adopt the child as his own, regarding the child as his son because of his uncertainty.<sup>[24]</sup> He also stated that the Gargarians went up from Themiscyra into this region with the Amazons, then, in company with some Thracians and Euboeans who had wandered thus far, waged war against them. They later ended the war against the Amazons and made a compact that they should have dealings with one another only in the matter of children, and that each people should live independent of the other.<sup>[24]</sup> In addition, he states that the right breasts of all Amazons are seared when they are infants, so that they can easily use their right arm for every needed purpose, and especially that of throwing the javelin and use the bow.<sup>[24]</sup>

Herodotus mentions that when Greeks defeated the Amazons at war, they sailed away carrying in three ships as many Amazons as they had been able to take alive, but out at sea the Amazons attacked the crews and killed them. But the Amazons knew nothing about ships so they were driven about by waves and winds and they were disembarked at the land of the Scythians, there they met first with a troop of horses feeding, they seized them and mounted upon these they plundered the property of the Scythians. The Scythians were not able to understand them because they did not know either their speech or their dress or the race to which they belonged, and they thought that they were men. Scythians fought a battle against them, and after the battle the Scythians got possession of the bodies of the dead, and thus they discovered that they were women. After the battle Scythians sent young men and told them to encamp near the Amazons and to do whatsoever they should do. If the women should come after them, they were not to fight but to retire before them, and when the women stopped, they were to approach near and encamp. This plan was adopted by the Scythians because they desired to have children born from them. When the Amazons perceived that they had not come to do them any harm, they let them alone; and the two camps approached nearer to one another every day: and the young men, like

the Amazons, had nothing except their arms and their horses and got their living, as the Amazons did, by hunting and by taking booty. One day a Scythian and an Amazon came close. They could not speak to each other because they were speaking different languages but the Amazon made signs to him with her hand to come. Later the young Scythians and the Amazons joined their camps and lived together, each man having for his wife her with whom he had had dealings at first. The men were not able to learn the language of the Amazons, but the women learned Scythian.<sup>[3]</sup>

Apollonius Rhodius, at Argonautica, mentions that Amazons were the daughters of Ares and Harmonia (a nymph of the Akmonian Wood). They were brutal and aggressive, and their main concern in life was war.<sup>[1][2]</sup> According to him, the Amazons were not gathered together in one city, but scattered over the land, parted into three tribes. In one part dwelt the Themiscyreians (Greek: Θεμισκύρειαι), in another the Lycastians (Greek: Λυκάστιαι), and in another the Chadesians (Greek: Χαδήστιαι).<sup>[30]</sup> Also, he mention that on an island, the Queens of the Amazons, Otrere (Greek: Ὄτρηρή) and Antiope (Greek: Ἀντιόπη), built a marble temple of Ares. On this desert island there were ravening birds, which in countless numbers haunt it.<sup>[31]</sup> Argonauts passed by Themiscyra on their journey to Colchis. Zeus sent Boreas (the North Wind), and with his help the Argonauts stood out from the shore near Themiscyra where the Themiscyreian Amazons were arming for battle.<sup>[32][33][34][35]</sup>

The King Iobates sent Bellerophon against Amazons, hoping that they would kill him, but Bellerophon killed them all.<sup>[36][37][38]</sup>

The Amazons appear in Greek art of the Archaic period and in connection with several Greek legends. The tomb of Myrine is mentioned in the Iliad; later interpretation made of her an Amazon: according to Diodorus,<sup>[39]</sup>

According to Diodorus, the Amazons under the rule of Queen Myrina, invaded the lands of the Atlantians. Amazons defeated the army of the Atlantian city of Cerne, treated the captives savagely, killed all the men, led into slavery the children and women, and razed the city. When the terrible fate of the inhabitants of Cerne became known among the other Atlantians, they were struck with terror, surrendered their cities on terms of capitulation and announced that they would do whatever should be commanded them. Queen Myrina bearing herself honourably towards the Atlantians, established friendship with them and founded a city to bear her name in place of the city of Cerne which had been razed; and in it she settled both the captives and any native who so desired. Atlantians presented her with magnificent presents and by public decree voted to her notable honours, and she in return accepted their courtesy and in addition promised that she would show kindness to their nation. Diodorus also mentions that the Amazons of Queen Myrina used the skins of gigantic snakes, from Libya, to protect themselves at battle. Later Queen Myrine led her Amazons to victory against the Gorgons. After the battle against the Gorgons, Myrina accorded a funeral to her fallen comrades on three pyres and raised up three great heaps of earth as tombs, which are called "Amazon Mounds" (Greek: Ἀμαζόνων σωροὺς).<sup>[40]</sup>

One of the tasks imposed upon Hercules by Eurystheus was to obtain possession of the girdle of the Amazonian queen Hippolyta.<sup>[41][42][43][44]</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>[45][46]</sup> in which Antiope perished fighting by the side of Theseus.<sup>[20]</sup> 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. In another version of this myth, Theseus made this voyage on his own account, after the time of Heracles.<sup>[27]</sup> 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.

Plutarch, in his work *Parallel Lives*-The Life of Theseus, mentions that Bion said that the Amazons, were naturally friendly to men, and did not fly from Theseus when he touched upon their coasts.<sup>[27]</sup>



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

Amazons attacked the Phrygians, who were assisted by Priam, then a young man.<sup>[47]</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 Pentesilea "of Thracian birth", who was slain by Achilles.<sup>[20][48][49][50][51][52][53]</sup>

The God Dionysus and his entourage fought the amazons at Ephesus, the amazons fled to Samos, but Dionysus pursued them and at Samos he killed a great number of them on a spot which was, from that occurrence, called Panaema (Greek: Πάναιμα), which means blood-soaked field.<sup>[54][55]</sup> In another myth Dionysus united with the Amazons to fight against Cronus and the Titans.<sup>[56]</sup>

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.<sup>[20]</sup>

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*).<sup>[57]</sup> 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?"<sup>[58]</sup>

The Roman writer Virgil's characterization of the Volselian 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>[59]</sup>

# Lists

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

- Quintus Smyrnaeus<sup>[60]</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>[61]</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. Diodorus also mentions Myrina as a queen of the Amazons.<sup>[62]</sup>
- Another list of Amazons' names is found in Hyginus' *Fabulae*.<sup>[63]</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>[64]</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>[65]</sup>
- John Tzetzes in *Posthomericus*<sup>[66]</sup> enumerates the Amazons who fell at Troy: Hippothoe, Antianeira, Toxophone, Toxoanassa, Gortyessa, Idoce, Pharetre, Andro, Ioxeia, Oistrophe, Androdaixa, Aspidocharme, Enchesimargos, Cnemis, Thorece, Chalcaor, Eurylophie, 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.
- 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>[67]</sup> Eustathius gives the same list minus the last two names.<sup>[68]</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>[69]</sup>
- Ainia, presumably accompanied Penthesilea to the Trojan War, killed by Achilles; known only from an Attic terracotta relief fragment.<sup>[70]</sup>
- Ainippe, an Amazon who confronted Telamon in the battle against Heracles' troops.<sup>[71]</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>[65]</sup>
- Amastris, who was believed to be the eponym of the city previously known as Kromna,<sup>[72]</sup> although the city was also thought to have been named after the historical Amastris.<sup>[73]</sup>
- Anaea, an Amazon whose tomb was shown at the island of Samos.<sup>[74]</sup>
- Andromache, an Amazon who fought Heracles and was defeated; only known from vase paintings.<sup>[71][75]</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



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



A Greek rider seizes a mounted Amazonian warrior (armed with a double-headed axe) by her Phrygian cap; Roman mosaic emblem (marble and limestone), 2nd half of the 4th century AD; from Daphne, a suburb of Antioch-on-the-Orontes (now Antakya in Turkey)

be crippled "as the lame best perform the acts of love".<sup>[76]</sup>

- Areto and Iphito, two little-known Amazons, whose names are only attested in inscriptions on artefacts.<sup>[77]</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>[78]</sup>
- Cyme, who gave her name to the city of Cyme (Aeolis).<sup>[79][80]</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>[81]</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>[82]</sup> Her daughter Amazo was thought of as the eponym of the Amazons.<sup>[83]</sup>
- Eurypyle, queen of the Amazons who was reported to have led an expedition against Ninus and Babylon around 1760 BC.<sup>[84][85][86]</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>[87][88]</sup>
- Helene, daughter of Tityrus. She fought Achilles and died after he gravely wounded her.<sup>[89]</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>[90]</sup>
- Lampedo, queen of the Amazons, co-ruler with Marpesia.<sup>[91][92]</sup>
- Latoreia, who had a small village near Ephesus named after her.<sup>[93]</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>[94]</sup>
- Marpesia, queen of the Amazons, co-ruler with Lampedo.<sup>[91][92]</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>[95]</sup> however, she was killed by Telamon.
- Molpadia, an Amazon who killed Antiope.<sup>[96]</sup>
- Myrleia, possible eponym of a city in Bithynia, which was later known as Apamea.<sup>[97]</sup>
- Myrto, in one source, mother of Myrtillus by Hermes<sup>[98]</sup> (elsewhere his mother is called Theobule).<sup>[99]</sup>
- Mytilene, Myrina's sister and one of the possible eonyms for the city of Mytilene<sup>[80]</sup>
- Orithyia, daughter and successor of Marpesia, famous for her conquests.<sup>[91][92]</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>[71]</sup>
- Pitane and Priene, two commanders in Myrina's army, after whom the cities of Pitane (Aeolis) and Priene were named.<sup>[80]</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>[100]</sup>
- Sinope, successor of Lampedo and Marpesia.<sup>[92]</sup>
- Sisyrbe, after whom a part of Ephesus was called Sisyrba, and its inhabitants the Sisyrbitae.<sup>[101][102]</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>[103][104][105]</sup>
- Themiscyra, the eponym of the Amazon capital.<sup>[106][107]</sup>

## Hero cults

According to ancient sources (Plutarch, Theseus,<sup>[108]</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. At the entrance of Athens there was a monument to the Amazon [Antiope](#).<sup>[109]</sup> 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>[110]</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 in the Greek mind had apparently been the goddess [Athena](#). In later art they approach the model of Artemis, wearing a thin dress, girt 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.<sup>[20]</sup> 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>[111]</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>[9]</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](#).<sup>[20]</sup> There were also three standard [Amazon](#) statue types.

Later in the [Renaissance](#), as Amazon myth evolved, artists started to depict warrior women in a new light. [Queen Elizabeth](#) was often thought of as an Amazon-like warrior during her reign and can be seen in many paintings as such. Though, as explained in *Divinia Viagro* by Winfried Schleiner, Celeste T. Wright "has given a detailed account of the bad press Amazons had in the Renaissance (with respect to their unwomanly conduct and Scythian cruelty). She notes that she has not found any Elizabethans comparing the queen directly to an Amazon, and suggests that they might have hesitated to do so because of the association of Amazons with enfranchisement of women, which was considered contemptible."<sup>[112]</sup>



*Battle of the Amazons* by Peter Paul Rubens

Peter Paul Ruben and Jan Brueghel depicted the Battle of the Amazons around 1598, showing many attributes of Renaissance-styled paintings. Amazons also appear in the Rococo period in another painting titled *Battle of the Amazons* by Johann Georg Platzer. As a part of the Romantic period revival, German artist Anselm Feuerbach painted the Amazons as well. His paintings “engendered all the aspirations of the Romantics: their desire to transcend the boundaries of the ego and of the known world; their interest in the occult in nature and in the soul; their search for a national identity, and the ensuing search for the mythic origins of the Germanic nation; finally, their wish to escape the harsh realities of the present through immersion in an idealized past.”<sup>[113]</sup>

## In historiography

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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 BC.

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>[114]</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>[115]</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 Aurelian, captured Gothic women were identified as Amazons (Claudianus). The account of



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

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>[116]</sup>

## Medieval and Renaissance literature

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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>[117]</sup> Afterwards the whole basin and region of the Amazon (Amazônia in Portuguese, Amazonía in Spanish) were named after the river. Amazons also figure in the accounts of both Christopher Columbus and Walter Raleigh.<sup>[118]</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 realm 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>[119]</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".



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

## Historical background

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Classictist 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>[120]</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

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## 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>[121]</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>[122]</sup>

Up to 25% of military burials were of armed Sarmatian women usually including bows.<sup>[123]</sup> Russian archaeologist Vera Kovalevskaya points out that when Scythian men were away fighting or hunting, nomadic women would have had 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>[123]</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>[124]</sup> [125] 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:

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.<sup>[20]</sup>



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

## 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>[126]</sup> placed their possible origins in Minoan civilization, drawing attention to overlooked similarities between the two cultures. According to Myres,<sup>[127]</sup> 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.



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

## Modern legacy

Francisco de Orellana gave the Amazon river its name after reporting pitched battles with tribes of female warriors, whom he likened to the Amazons.<sup>[128]</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>[129]</sup> A festival is also held every year in the Terme district of Samsun Province to celebrate the Amazons.<sup>[129]</sup>

In Greece, female equestrians are also called "Amazons" (Greek: Αμαζόνες).

## In literature and media

### Literature

- Amazon Queen Hippolyta appears in William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and also in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which Shakespeare co-wrote with John Fletcher.
- The Amazon queen Pentesilea, and her sexual frenzy, are at the center of the drama *Pentesilea* by Heinrich von Kleist in 1808.
- William Moulton Marston created a fiction race of Amazon, whose members included the superheroine Wonder Woman
- In Marvel Comics fictional universe Hippolyta and Delphyne Gorgon are Amazons.
- In Rick Riordan's *The Heroes of Olympus*, the Amazons appear in *The Son of Neptune* and *The Blood of Olympus*
- In Philip Armstrong's historical-fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Tupiluliuma*, the Amazons appear as the Am'azzi.
- In the Stieg Larsson novel *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, the Amazons appear as the transitional topics between sections of the book.
- Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo created the fictional queen Calafia, who ruled over a kingdom of black women living on the mythical Island of California.

### Film and television

- Franchises involving Tarzan have featured Amazon tribes:
  - A tribe of Amazons were in the film *Tarzan and the Amazons*.
  - A tribe of Amazons appeared in the *Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle* episode "Tarzan and the Amazon Princess."
- In the television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *Young Hercules*, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*, several tribes of Amazons are featured, with numerous recurring characters including Gabrielle, Atalanta, and Amarice.
- In the animated series *Huntik: Secrets & Seekers*, Queen Hippolyta and the Amazons appear in the episode *Ladies'*

*Choice.*

- In the 2014 *Hercules* movie, a character named Atalanta is depicted as an Amazonian archer and a member of Hercules' traveling band of mercenaries.
- In the season 7 episode 'The Slice Girls' of *Supernatural*, Amazons appear, as they kill their fathers. One of them seduces Dean Winchester and has a child, who quickly ages to a teenager and attempts to kill him, only to be shot by Sam.
- The myth of the Amazons features prominently in the 2017 hit DC film, *Wonder Woman*.

## Games

- In the *Diablo* video games, on the planet of Sanctuary, Askari people, also called Amazons, exist in the Queendom of the Skovos Isles.
- In *Heroes Unlimited* and *Aliens Unlimited* text roleplaying games, there is a race called the Atorians who can be considered Amazons.

## Military units

- Grigory Potemkin, a Russian military leader, statesman, nobleman and favourite of Catherine the Great created an Amazons Company in 1787. Wives and daughters of the soldiers of the Greek Battalion of Balaklava were enlisted and formed this unit.
- The Dahomey Amazons were an all-female military regiment of the Kingdom of Dahomey in present day Benin - the nickname was given by western observers.

## Movements

- Amazon feminism is a branch of feminism that emphasizes female physical prowess as a means to achieve the goal of gender equality.
- During the period 1905–13, members of the militant Suffragette movement were frequently referred to as "Amazons" in books and newspaper articles.<sup>[130]</sup>
- In Ukraine Katerina Tarnovska leads a group called the Asgarda which claims to be a new tribe of Amazons.<sup>[131]</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 Combat Hopak, but with a special emphasis on self-defense.<sup>[131]</sup>

## See also

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- Giantess
- Liburnians (according to Pseudo-Scylax ruled by women)
- Matriarchy
- List of women warriors in folklore
- Timeline of women in ancient warfare
  - Shieldmaiden, female warrior in northern Europe
  - Onna-bugeisha, female warrior in Japanese nobility
  - Women in the military
  - Women warriors in literature and culture

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