

## ABSTRACT

The Grotesque versus the Heroic:  
An Examination of the Female Barbarian Warrior Motif in Ancient Greek and Latin Sources

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This thesis examines how ancient authors used the motif of the female barbarian warrior to depict their enemies. Although the specific details vary amongst the authors, overall this motif is used to underscore the grotesqueness of the barbarian enemy and the heroism of those who conquer them. Several members of the intelligentsia of Classical Athens (such as Aeschylus and Euripedes) include this Amazon motif to emphasize the grotesqueness of the East. In his *Histories*, Herodotus also portrays several of his characters as manly warrior-women (such as Tomyris, Pherentime, and Artemesia) in order to exemplify the inverted eastern world. However, in Hellenistic literature, the fighting barbarian woman emerges as a more conflicted image. Depending on the source, the female barbarian warrior motif associates Alexander the Great with either Achilles, who subjugates Troy, or with Agamemnon, who is made weak by eastern influence. In closing, this thesis examines how the Romans, the inheritors of Alexander's empire use the same motif to discuss and imagine their own barbarian enemies and heroes.

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THE GROTESQUE VERSUS THE HEROIC:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE FEMALE BARBARIAN WARRIOR MOTIF IN  
ANCIENT GREEK AND LATIN SOURCES

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## PREFACE

There has been much scholarship on the portrayal of Amazons in Greek and Roman literature and myth. These studies have primarily focused on what the Amazon motif reveals about how the ancient Greeks viewed women and how they viewed their own patriarchal system. This thesis, however, treats the Amazons as only one manifestation of a larger category of motifs: the female barbarian warrior. The female barbarian warrior category, as is evident in the term, is actually an amalgam or overlapping of three different categories of things: women, barbarians, and enemy warriors. The boundaries between these three categories are fluid. In the Greek mind, women, barbarians, and enemy warriors all seemed intrinsically opposed to traditional Greek society and could all be classified under the large umbrella category of “things to be feared as possible threats to Greek civilization.”<sup>1</sup> Since the Greeks found all three of these categories frightening when taken individually, a creature that embodied all three of these dangerous characteristics would only be all the more fearsome and treacherous in the Greek imagination.

All three elements of the female barbarian warrior motif are essential to its composition as a grotesque image. Moby Dick is not terrifying simply because he is white, nor simply because he is a whale, nor simply because he has a record for killing men.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is all three of these elements combined that make him terrifying and a whaler’s worst nightmare. In the same way, the female barbarian warrior (or the Amazon

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<sup>1</sup> See Diagram 1.

<sup>2</sup> Melville 1988: 207-215.

which is included within this family of motifs) is not terrifying simply because she is female. Just as Moby Dick is a fearsome foe because he is a whale—a creature of a completely other realm—and a skilled killer of sailors, the female barbarian warrior is also a fearsome foe because she is a barbarian and a destroyer of men, specifically Greek men. The female barbarian warrior's gender, when considered in light of traditional Greek womanhood, only serves to make her otherness and gruesomeness all the more disturbing, just as the soothing and alluring whiteness of Moby Dick makes his maliciousness all the more abhorrent because it gives sailors the false impression of mildness prior to being attacked.<sup>3</sup> While the female barbarian warrior's femininity might be a core part of what makes her image terrifying, it is only a part. Her otherness as a barbarian and her might as a destroyer of men are also crucial elements to the female barbarian warrior motif.

Consequently, rather than examining what the female barbarian warrior motif, or the Amazon-type, reveals about how women were viewed in Greek society, this thesis examines what the female barbarian warrior motif, or the Amazon-type, reveals about how barbarians were viewed in Greek society. Although the sub-categories of things to be feared in the Greek mind-set were fluid, this thesis analyzes the female barbarian warrior motif primarily as an expression of the barbarian other, rather than an expression of the female other. The motif of the female barbarian warrior portrays the barbarian other as grotesque.

Chapters one and two address how the female barbarian warrior motif in the literature of Classical Athens portrays the barbarian as grotesque. Chapter one examines the appearance of Amazon-types and actual Amazons in various tragedies and comedies,

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<sup>3</sup> Melville 1988: 208.

such as Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, *Eumenides*, and *Agamemnon*; Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Iphigenia at Tauris*; and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The purpose of chapter one is to provide a tradition and context within which Herodotus' use of the female barbarian warrior motif in his *Histories* can be examined. Chapter one demonstrates how Herodotus' contemporaries were using the female barbarian warrior to portray the unnatural elements of the barbarian other.

Chapter two begins the shift of focus on female barbarian warriors in Greek literature in general to the appearance of this motif in ancient historical accounts. Chapter two analyzes the appearance of female barbarian warriors in Herodotus' *Histories*. These characters include Queen Nitocris of Babylon, Queen Tomyris of the Massagetae, Pherecyas of Cyrene, Artemisia of Halicarnassus, and the Sauromatae tribe. Chapter two demonstrates how Herodotus, like his contemporaries in Classical Athens, also uses the motif of the female barbarian warrior to illustrate the grotesque inherent in the barbarian identity.

Chapters three and four examine how the female barbarian warrior motif evolved in its portrayal of the barbarian during the Hellenistic era and the following era of the Roman Empire. Chapter three examines how various ancient sources (both Greek and Roman) handle the episode of Alexander's purported affair with the Amazon queen, Thalestris. In the sources on Alexander, the female barbarian warrior motif still presents the barbarian as a grotesque and threatening other. However, in the Hellenistic sources, there emerges a positive and negative reading on the hero who interacts with such a woman. Previously, in Classical Athens, the Amazon motif was meant to illustrate the unnaturalness of the barbarian other. In the Hellenistic era, the female barbarian warrior

motif takes for granted the unnaturalness of the barbarian and instead reveals more about the character of the hero who interacts with her. In the Hellenistic era, the motif begins to be used to either glorify or disparage the character of the hero, rather than simply denigrating the barbarian.

Analyzing Plutarch's *Pompey* and *Antony* as examples, chapter four demonstrates how these elements of the female barbarian warrior motif remained in the historical literature of the Roman Empire. In Plutarch's two biographies, the female barbarian warrior motif also assumes the grotesque element of the barbarian, but, like in the Hellenistic era, the motif is used to either glorify or to disparage the hero who interacts with the fighting barbarian woman.

Throughout this thesis, I reference the myths of Theseus, Heracles, and the myth regarding Achilles and Penthesilea as foundational early usages of the Amazon motif. In order for the reader to better understand these sections of the thesis, I have provided a general summary of the myths. Theseus is the son of King Aegeus of Athens and Aethra of Troezens.<sup>4</sup> (However, Poseidon is also said to have "enjoyed" Aethra the same night as Aegeus but "generously conceded" paternity to Aegeus. Because of this, and other events, Theseus could in his later life claim whichever father was best for the particular situation). Medea of Corinth had promised Aegeus that, in exchange for him giving her refuge in Athens, she would help him produce an heir through her witchcraft. On his journey back to Athens Aegeus stops in Troezens to visit his old comrades Pittheus and Troezen. Under the influence of the spell which Medea was casting on all of them from afar, Pittheus makes Aegeus drunk and sends his daughter, Aethra, to bed with him. In

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<sup>4</sup> Graves 1955: 323-325.



the morning, Aegeus tells Aethra that if she is pregnant, she should rear the child in Troezens secretly. Then King Aegeus, on his way back to Athens, hides his sandals and sword (symbols of royalty) under a great rock. If, when the boy was grown, he could remove the rock and recover these tokens, he was to be sent to Athens. Theseus is reared in Troezens and King Aegeus is unaware of his existence until he turns sixteen years old. At this time, Theseus “pulls the sword from the stone” and travels to Athens. When Theseus arrives, Medea tries to poison him since she had married King Aegeus in the intervening years and had sons by him. This was prevented by King Aegeus and Theseus was joyfully acknowledged by Aegeus in Athens with great fanfare.

Greatly admiring his cousin Heracles, Theseus attempts to imitate Heracles’ exploits along his journey. One of these exploits included Theseus’ affair with an Amazon queen. Theseus, according to some sources, sails to the land of the Amazons and captures Antiope, the queen of the Amazons.<sup>5</sup> Some sources call her Hippolyta. Another discrepancy among the sources deals with how exactly Theseus and Antiope came together. Downplaying Antiope’s kidnapping, some sources claim that she fell in love with Theseus after a long siege and went willingly with him. In Greece, she later births Hippolytus. To avenge the kidnapping of their queen, the Amazons invade and assault the city of Athens. At some point, Theseus decides to put aside Antiope and marry Phaedra, sister of King Deucalion the Cretan, for a political alliance. (Antiope was never Theseus’ legal wife.) Enraged, Antiope invades the wedding feast, fully armed, threatening to massacre the guests, and so she is killed by Theseus. Some say that Antiope even leads the Amazon army into the feast, causing a battle between Greeks and Amazons. Other

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<sup>5</sup> Gantz 1993: 282-286.

sources locate this battle at the Acropolis. Some say that Antiope dies in this battle between the Amazons and Athenians: some say she fights alongside the Amazons to avenge either her kidnapping or her rejection some say she dies fighting for the Athenians alongside Theseus. Regardless, she is eventually eliminated, providing Theseus with the opportunity to marry Greek Phaedra.

Penthesilea, an Amazon (a Queen of the Amazons, according to some sources) comes to aid the Trojans in their war with the Greeks.<sup>6</sup> Some sources say Penthesilea joins the war to achieve honor and glory in battle. Other sources relate that she was required to seek refuge with Priam after killing her sister, Hippolyta (also known as Antiope), in the fight at the wedding of Phaedra and Theseus. Whatever the reason, she displays great valor on the battlefield, taking the lives of many Greeks. Some say that she drives Achilles himself from the field on several occasions—some even claim that she kills him, but Zeus, at the plea of Thetis, restores him to life. At last he runs her through with his sword. Some sources purport that Achilles grieves with regret after he kills her. Beholding her corpse, he is awe-struck and recognizes the beauty he just destroyed. She is buried by the Trojans.

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<sup>6</sup> Graves 1955: 313.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Female Barbarian Warrior Motif within Athenian Tragedy and Art

Aeschylus (525–459 BC), Euripides (480-405 BC), and Aristophanes (ca. 446–386 BC), as well as various contemporary Athenian artists used the female barbarian warrior motif to emphasize the “otherness” of the peoples and cultures in the Persian East, portraying that region as a wilderness in which the natural order had been inverted. The female barbarian warrior motif appears explicitly in the literature and art of Herodotus’ time in the character of the Amazon.<sup>1</sup> Amazons are directly mentioned and depicted in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and *Eumenides*; Euripides’ *Hippolytus*; on the shield of Athena Parthenos; the Painted Stoa murals; and Classical pottery. Although Amazons are not directly mentioned in *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, *Iphigenia at Tauris*, and *Lysistrata*, these works contain implicit allusions to Amazons and their way of life. The female barbarian warrior motif in the person of the Amazon may serve a slightly different function in each of these works; the motif is used throughout to underline the ‘otherness’ and grotesqueness of the Eastern barbarian.

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<sup>1</sup>The Amazon figure in Greek culture: Hardwick 1990: 14-36; Dowden 1997: 97-128: Although several sources disagree on the details of their lifestyle, Amazons were generally defined as female warriors from the Euxine Sea region who did not accept men into their society except for the purpose of procreation. The sources that claim that men did live in their society, state that men were treated like slaves.

### *Amazons in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound*

In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Zeus exiles the disobedient Titan, Prometheus, to "the world's limit," which is "the Scythian country, an untrodden desolation."<sup>2</sup> In the very first line, Aeschylus establishes the setting: Scythia, a far-away uncivilized space, a chaotic world untamed by any human order. As the plot unfolds, Aeschylus reveals that Scythia is unruly and frightening because it is a land whose inhabitants are characterized by a lack of understanding and adherence to what the Greeks consider their naturally ordained place in the cosmos and society. The denizens of Asia are portrayed as grotesque: neither totally man nor animal, neither fully man nor plant, neither exclusively male nor female. For example, the only mortal character Prometheus meets in the play is Io. Although she was originally an Argive princess, she was desired by Zeus and he commanded her father Inachus, king of Argos, to cast her out of the house.<sup>3</sup> At the moment of her exile, Io was turned into a cow and was chased by Hera's gad-fly out of Europe, deep into Asia. Prometheus meets Io at this point in her wandering, as she is entering Scythia, located above the Euxine Sea, far from Greece.<sup>4</sup> Though she once fit into nature's categories, she has been made into a monstrous creature. She is both maiden and cow—human and animal. She no longer fits neatly into the natural categories of identity. However, as Prometheus will soon reveal, Io is not the only grotesque creature in Asia. Through the mouth of Prometheus, Aeschylus paints the eastern lands as a world of bizarre misfits and those who cross natural boundaries. In this world, a cow-maiden

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<sup>2</sup> Aesch. *PB*.1-2 (trans. David Grene).

<sup>3</sup> Aesch. *PB*. 640-689.

<sup>4</sup> Waterfield 2008: Map A.

and a Titan who is being punished for crossing ordained boundaries and teaching others to do likewise, do not seem so out of place.

When Prometheus recounts and foretells Io's wanderings in Asia, he describes the creatures she encounters as straddling natural boundaries. He speaks of the children of Phorcys, "swan-formed hags, with but one common eye, single toothed monsters," "mortal-hating" Gorgons, and "talking oaks".<sup>5</sup> Even the most recognizably ordinary creatures in Prometheus' account, vultures and men, are set apart with an exotic element. The vultures are the gruesome "sharp-toothed hounds of Zeus, with no bark"; the nation of black men "live hard by the fountain of the sun where is the River Aethiopus"; and the Arimaspians are one-eyed, horse-riding men "that live around the spring which flows with gold, the spring of Pluto's river".<sup>6</sup>

It is within this cataloguing of the exotic misfits of Asia that Aeschylus mentions the Amazons.<sup>7</sup> Looking solely at Aeschylus' description, what makes the Amazons fit into this category of exotic misfits is mainly that they are "the race of women who hate men".<sup>8</sup> These women are not externally deformed like some of the creatures that Aeschylus described previously, but they are grotesque because of their lifestyle. The Amazon lifestyle is the complete inversion of what is expected of women in Greek society.<sup>9</sup> Rather than resembling the women of Greek society, Amazons share more in common with the men of Greek society, while still having female physiognomy. In this

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<sup>5</sup> Aesch. *PB*. 795-797, 799-802, 832 (trans. David Grene).

<sup>6</sup> Aesch. *PB*. 804-810 (trans David Grene).

<sup>7</sup> Aesch. *PB*. 724.

<sup>8</sup> Aesch. *PB*. 724 (trans. David Grene).

<sup>9</sup> Tyrell 1984: 27, 44-45, 66; Hardwick 1990: 17-18.

way they blur what the Greeks considered the natural boundaries between male and female.<sup>10</sup>

The fundamental building block of Greek society was the *oikos*, or the household.<sup>11</sup> Quoting Aristotle, Tyrell writes:

Patriarchy is a form of social organization based on dominance, the dominance of men over women, husband over wife, father over mother and children, older man over younger, and the father-line over the mother-line. As Aristotle pronounces in *Politics*, ‘The male is by nature more suited to rule than the female (except where the household has been set up contrary to nature) and the elder and more mature more than the younger and immature.’ The core of Athenian patriarchy is the household (*oikos*). On it depended the individual and the state, and it, in turn, depended for survival on its economic resources and on marriage to bring in new members.<sup>12</sup>

The Greek *oikos* was traditionally the institution that provided stability and security in Greek society by giving every member of the community a specific role to play—a purpose to fulfill.<sup>13</sup> Tyrell states that in the Greek warrior society, the father was seen as both the defender and breadwinner of the *oikos*, and the mother’s main priorities were to both protect the treasures brought into the household by the father and to produce children, especially male children who would replenish the warrior population.<sup>14</sup>

Illustrating these roles, Tyrell references the work of the Achilles Painter on a *lekythos* from about 440 BC:

The scene, a warrior’s farewell to his wife, depicts the inside/outside polarity of marriage. The woman is seated and her scarf or headdress, mirror, and jug hang on the wall; the scene is indoors, in the women’s

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<sup>10</sup> Tyrell 1984: 57

<sup>11</sup> Tyrell 1984: 27.

<sup>12</sup> Tyrell 1984: 27.

<sup>13</sup> Tyrell 1984: 27.

<sup>14</sup> Tyrell 1984: 45, 64; Aristoph. *Lys.* 870-897.



chambers. The man stands before her, his departure imminent. His helmet and shield correspond to her accouterments on the wall, the tools of their separate spheres in marriage. Hers are for beauty and allurement; his, for defense. That theme is present in the shield's profile of an eye. Turned toward her, it connotes protection and watchfulness; more often the eye was done in full as an apotropaic device. The couple's sexual relationship is suggested by transparent clothing.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to this touching image, Tyrell also references the Penthesilea cup by the Berlin Painter, in which Achilles plunges his sword into the Amazon Penthesilea in what Tyrell calls "a sexually violent portrayal of the Amazon dysfunction of marriage".<sup>16</sup> The contrast of the roles of the Greek woman and the Amazon in these two works is clear. When one does not fulfill one's role correctly within the *oikos*, if, for example the woman attempts to usurp the man's role as warrior, then the result is violence and a lack of stability. If every member of society abided by these expectations, the fabric of society would not fray, and the community could weather both external and internal threats. In the eyes of the Greeks, the patriarchal system of the *oikos* was foundational to maintaining order and security within society. Consequently, those who challenged Greek society's foundational *oikos* system or adopted a different system were automatically viewed by the Greeks as a threat to their society as a whole.

What makes Amazons grotesque is that they hate men, whether that claim has a martial or sexual connotation, or both, the result is the same. Amazons refuse marriage. They have sexual relations for the sake of procreation, but there is no marriage within their society. In contrast, the pinnacle of the Greek woman's existence was her identity as wife and mother. In addition to refusing to fulfill their natural role as women, Amazons also usurp the responsibility of the man as the warrior and defender. Tyrell

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<sup>15</sup> Tyrell 1984: 27.

<sup>16</sup> Tyrell 1984: 27.

argues that one of the functions of the Amazon myth was to create a framework within which to better explain and validate the Greek patriarchal system through “postulating the absurdities and horrors of its opposite.”<sup>17</sup>

Although Aeschylus’ Amazons are not physically grotesque like some of the eastern monsters he describes through the mouth of Prometheus, the Amazons are grotesque in their lifestyle. Amazons blur the categories that characterize the domains of male and female.<sup>18</sup> Because they fail to fit into the strict categories and roles of Greek civilization, they are considered uncivilized, and even monstrous.

In *Prometheus Bound*, Asia appears as an uncivilized and chaotic world populated by creatures who fail to live in the Greek system of *oikos*. Just as Prometheus was thrown out of heaven by the “father of the gods”, Io was exiled from her *oikos* by her father. The Amazons are also outside of the *oikos*, but they were not exiled from the security and stability of the *oikos*. They choose to live outside of it. They were not rejected by the patriarch; they reject the patriarch. They reject men as fathers, husbands, and soldiers. There is a reason that Aeschylus describes the Amazons as living on the other side of the River Insolence (*Υβριστήν ποταμόν*). Just as Prometheus was hubristic enough to violate the natural boundaries between the mortal and immortal by giving mankind all forms of technology, so the Amazons are hubristic enough to transgress the boundaries of Greek gender roles, or what the Greeks considered the natural gender roles within the *oikos*.

Andrew Stewart argues that Amazons are frequently painted as nubile girls because adolescent girls were in a transition period in regards to their role in the *oikos*.

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<sup>17</sup> Tyrell 1984: 28.

<sup>18</sup> Tyrell 1984: 57.

They are still a part of their childhood home, but they are of marital age and about to leave home. Their presence also introduced the risk of adultery, seduction, and shameful scandal for the family. Amazons were portrayed as teenage girls because they too were “unripe, undeveloped, undomesticated, and unrestrained” by the institution of marriage.<sup>19</sup> Stewart also likens Amazons to the mythical Centaurs, arguing that Amazons represent the “the wild, untamed, unmarried, and potentially lustful female, the bestial in woman” just as “Centaurs represent the same kind of male, more beast than man.”<sup>20</sup> These bestial tendencies posed a threat to the *oikos* system, and to attempts at societal order. As the play unfolds, Aeschylus uses the theme of rebellion against the traditional Greek social system of the *oikos* to cast the Asian region in terms of hubris and monstrosity.<sup>21</sup> In *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus’ allusion to the Amazons serves as a small puzzle piece that contributes to his grand portrait of the East as chaotic, barbaric, and totally uncivilized in comparison to the stabilizing Greek societal system.

#### *Amazons in Aeschylus’ Eumenides and Agamemnon*

Aeschylus makes another direct reference to Amazons in lines 685-690 of his *Eumenides*. Aeschylus uses the Amazon (or female barbarian warrior) motif differently from how he used it in *Prometheus Bound*. Previously, Aeschylus conjured up the Amazons in the mind of his audience in order to reinforce his portrayal of Asia as an

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<sup>19</sup> Stewart 1995: 571-597, 579-580.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart 1995: 580.

<sup>21</sup> Tyrell 1984: 44, 56.

“untrodden wilderness”.<sup>22</sup> In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus alludes to the Amazons as a metaphor for the central conflict of Orestes’ trial before the Athenian jury.

In his article “The Athenian Image of the Foreigner,” Lissarrague argues that the depiction of the mythical war between the Pygmies and the Cranes in art (specifically on the Francois Vase), and its description in literature (specifically in *Iliad* 3.1-6), served as a metaphor for the main scene at hand.<sup>23</sup> Quoting the *Iliad*, Lissarrague shows how Homer likened the Trojans to the Cranes, and the Greeks to the Pygmies in his description of the battle at Troy. The central scene of the Francois Vase illustrates the feats of the Greek heroes in war. Painted on the base of the vase beneath this central and prominent Greek scene is the portrayal of the Pygmies fighting the Cranes. The Pygmies and Cranes motif served as a metaphor of the main story at hand. The war between the Pygmies and the Cranes was a miniature version of the basic plot of hero versus enemy. Its appearance highlighted the heroic theme of the main plot or the main depiction.

In the same way that the war between the Pygmies and the Cranes serves as a metaphor for the Trojan War on the Francois Vase, so do the Amazons serve as a metaphor for the central conflict of Orestes’ trial in the *Eumenides*.<sup>24</sup> After Apollo and the Eumenides have presented their cases for and against Orestes, Athena calls the men of Attica to vote and decide the case:

If it please you, men of Attica, hear my decree now, on this first case of bloodletting I have judged. For Aegeus’ population, this forevermore shall be the ground where justices deliberate. Here is the Hill of Ares, here the

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<sup>22</sup> Aesch. *PB*. 640-689 (trans. David Grene).

<sup>23</sup> Lissarrague 2002: 102- 105.

<sup>24</sup> Tyrell makes a similar point about this passage when he says that the Amazons in this passage are imperialists: Tyrell 1984. Their attempted domination of Athenian society paralleled the threat of Persian invasion. If the Amazons had been victorious, “women would rule over men as men ruled in everyday life over women”: Tyrell 1984: 16.

Amazons encamped and built their shelters when they came in arms to rise, new city, and dare his city long ago, and slew their beasts for Ares. So this rock is named from then the Hill of Ares. Here the reverence of citizens, their fear and kindred do-no-wrong shall hold by day and in the blessing of night alike all while the people do not muddy their own laws with foul infusions. But if bright water you stain with mud, you nevermore will find it fit to drink. No anarchy, no rule of a single master. Thus I advise my citizens to govern and to grace, and not to cast fear utterly from your city. What man who fears nothing at all is ever righteous? Such be your just terrors, and you may deserve and have salvation for your citadel, your land's defence, such as is nowhere else found among men, neither among the Scythians, nor the land that Pelops held. I establish this tribunal. It shall be untouched by money-making, grave but quick to wrath, watchful to protect those who sleep, a sentry on the land. These words I have unreeled are for my citizens, advice into the future. All must stand upright now, take each man his ballot in his hand, think on his oath, and make his judgment. For my word is said.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting that Athena would mention the Amazons, providing an ostensibly superfluous etymology, at the very time that she is asking the Athenian jury to cast their judgments on the case of Clytemnestra versus Orestes. She mentions the invasion and threat of the foreign man-killing women just as she asks the jury to decide between Clytemnestra, who killed her husband, and Orestes, who killed his mother to avenge his father. In this scene, Aeschylus alludes to the Amazon invasion of the Areopagus as a metaphor for Clytemnestra's murder of her husband.

In the *Agamemnon* (the first tragedy of the three part *Oresteia*) and *Eumenides* (the ending tragedy of the three part *Oresteia*), Clytemnestra possesses qualities resembling those of an Amazon woman. She is described repeatedly as being manlier than is natural for a woman, and as having qualities that are usually associated with the East alone. In line ten, the watchman says that he is looking out for the signaling of Troy's capture for "such is the ruling of a woman's hopeful heart, which plans like a

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<sup>25</sup> Aesch. *Eum.* 681-710 (trans. Richmond Lattimore).

man.”<sup>26</sup> Later, Clytemnestra rejoices in the slaughter of the Trojans that she knew was occurring at that very moment and she declares her gladness at Agamemnon’s imminent homecoming. In response, the Chorus says that Clytemnestra has spoken “wisely like a sensible man”.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, although the Chorus praises Clytemnestra’s ‘manliness’ in rejoicing at the slaughter of Trojans, Agamemnon subsequently rebukes her when she contradicts him, saying, “Surely this lust for conflict is not womanlike?”<sup>28</sup>

More indirectly, Aeschylus compares the treacherous actions of Clytemnestra’s sister, Helen, to those of a lioness who was raised and lovingly nurtured in a household, but who then betrayed that very household by mauling the flocks, and even the family members.<sup>29</sup> Aeschylus writes, “What a god had caused to be reared as an inmate of the house was a priest of Ruin.”<sup>30</sup> This description of Helen foreshadows the violence of Clytemnestra at the end of *Agamemnon*. Similar to these two lionesses, the Achaeans who sack Troy are also likened to disguised lions who suddenly shed their tame mask, attack and kill the unsuspecting. “And on account of a woman a city has been ground into dust by the Argive beast, the offspring of the Horse, the shield-bearing host which made its jump about the time of the setting of the Pleiades; a lion, eater of raw flesh, leaped over the walls and licked its fill of royal blood.”<sup>31</sup> In her secretive machinations and murder of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra resembles both her devious sister and the Greeks

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<sup>26</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 10-11 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>27</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 351 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>28</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 940 (trans. Richmond Lattimore).

<sup>29</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 717-736. See also Sommerstein’s note on these lines.

<sup>30</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 735-736 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>31</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 823-828 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).



in warfare. Rather than fulfilling the role of the wife, protecting the belongings of the home and producing life, she usurps the role of the man, the role of warrior.<sup>32</sup> Like the Greek warriors in Troy, Clytemnestra slays Agamemnon like a “two-footed lioness”.<sup>33</sup>

Clytemnestra’s usurpation of the male role as warrior is further underscored in her testimony of how she accomplished the murder:

Then I struck him twice, and on the spot, in the space of two cries, his limbs gave way; and when he had fallen I added a third stroke . . . Thus, having fallen, he forced out his own soul, and he coughed up a sharp spurt of blood and hit me with a black shower of gory dew—at which I rejoiced no less than the growing corn rejoices in the liquid blessing granted by Zeus when the sheathed ears swell to birth.<sup>34</sup>

As the woman of the house in the classical Greek world, Clytemnestra is supposed to produce life, not death. Any type of ‘dew’ coming from Agamemnon to Clytemnestra should be an expression of and precursor to life, not evidence of death. What is horrifying in Clytemnestra’s rant is that she equates the hate of murder with the joy of birth. She relished seeing and feeling her husband’s gushing blood just as crops rejoice at feeling rain. Like an Amazon and like a warrior, Clytemnestra revels in the thrill of killing men, rather than the joy of producing children.<sup>35</sup>

Clytemnestra’s manliness and war-like spirit are highlighted even more by the contrast between her and her lover, Aegisthus. In contrast to the way she describes

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<sup>32</sup> Tyrell discusses the specific attributes of Clytaemestra’s repudiation of marriage: Tyrell 1984. He details how chaos engulfs the household after Clytaemestra’s murder of Agamemnon because the identity of every family member becomes unfulfilled. The children become orphans; Aegisthus a concubine-type character; and Clytaemestra becomes the man of the house.

<sup>33</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 1258-1261 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>34</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 1384-1392 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>35</sup> Also see Tyrell 1984 for more information about how Clytaemestra turns this sacred model of reproduction on its head. He says, “Her act of repudiating marriage destroys order throughout the cosmos” (39). Tyrell (93-100), further analyzes Clytaemestra as an Amazon figure in *Agamemnon*.

Clytemnestra, Cassandra calls Aegisthus a “strengthless lion”.<sup>36</sup> Aegisthus does not even appear until after Agamemnon is dead, and the Chorus accosts him saying, “You woman! You, the stay-at-home, did this to those who had just returned from battle—at the same time as you were defiling the man’s bed, you planned to kill the commander of the host like this?”<sup>37</sup> They then accuse him of planning Agamemnon’s death, but not having the courage “to do the deed with his own hands.”<sup>38</sup> Like an Amazon, Clytemnestra has completely reversed the gender roles of her society. She murdered the patriarch of her household. She brought another man into the house, but he is not her husband, only her subservient lover.<sup>39</sup> Aegisthus stays in the woman’s domain of the house and plays the wife’s more passive role, while Clytemnestra dons the qualities of a warrior, the role of the Greek man.

Clytemnestra not only resembles the Amazons in that she is more manly than is natural for a woman, but she also resembles the Amazons in that her character is likened to and associated with the barbarians of Asia. According to Tyrell, the Persian war brought an “assimilation of Amazons and Persians” in the cultural mind of the Greeks.<sup>40</sup> Although the Amazons’ weaponry held neutral symbolism before the Persian Wars, afterwards the weaponry became “a value-laden code of oppositions” between Greek and barbarian principles. The Amazons became another motif through which the Greeks

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<sup>36</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 1224. See Sommerstein’s note for line 1224.

<sup>37</sup> Aesch, *Ag.* 1625-1627 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>38</sup> Aesch, *Ag.* 1633-1635 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>39</sup> Tyrell 1984: 36, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Tyrell 1984: 49.

could represent and express their Persian enemy.<sup>41</sup> After the Persian Wars, Amazons in Greek art were no longer portrayed in the hoplite armor, but in Persian dress, complete with horses, bows, axes, spears, javelins, and extravagant armor.<sup>42</sup> Essentially, this equipment emphasized the individual combat of the Persian hordes, rather than the cooperative combat of the Greek phalanx. As was evidenced previously in *Prometheus Bound*, after the Persian War, the Amazons were assimilated into the motifs that portrayed the Asian Other. Consistent with the lot of the Amazon motif of the Classical period, Clytemnestra is also closely associated with the Persian East in both *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*.

When Clytemnestra greets Agamemnon upon his return from Troy, she inappropriately tempts him to embrace Asiatic hubris. To Agamemnon's confusion and discomfort, Clytemnestra does not greet him as a modest Greek wife, but she delivers an extravagant, long-winded, sycophantic soliloquy in honor of her lord's *nostos*. She offers firstly unbidden information concerning her sufferings during Agamemnon's absence. In the last portion of her greeting, Clytemnestra glorifies Agamemnon profusely flattering him:

The watchdog of his homestead, the forestay that saves the ship, the firmly-footed pillar that supports a lofty roof, a father's only son; as land appearing to sailors in despair, as the daylight that is such a fair thing to behold after a storm, as a flowing spring to a thirsty traveller. Such, I say, are the appellations I hold him worthy of—but let us not court jealousy, for we have endured many sufferings already.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Lissarrague 2002: 119-120.

<sup>42</sup> Tyrell 1984: 49-52; Physical examples: Von Bothmer 1957.

<sup>43</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 895-901 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

Surprised and put-off by her greeting, Agamemnon responds, “You have made a speech that was like my absence—you stretched it out to a great length; but to be fittingly praised is an honor that ought to come to me from others.”<sup>44</sup> Sommerstein explains the latter part of Agamemnon’s response saying that either the Greeks believed that individuals should not be publicly praised by their own family members in case their words are perceived as biased compliments, or the Greeks believed that a woman should not make public speeches.<sup>45</sup> Either way, Clytemnestra’s welcome-home speech is unseemly and disconcerting in the eyes of Agamemnon. Aggravating the situation, Clytemnestra commands her two maidservants to spread the ground before Agamemnon’s feet with fine fabrics and crimson lest “the foot that sacked Troy” touch the earth.<sup>46</sup> This command is inconsistent with her comment immediately preceding, in which she said that she would cease her exaltation of Agamemnon lest she spark the gods’ jealousy with any more praise. The gods would be jealous because Clytemnestra is addressing Agamemnon more like a god than a man. In addition, by offering intricately embroidered tapestries as carpet for his feet, Clytemnestra tempts Agamemnon to claim a prestige and an honor that is far above his station. She tempts him to succumb to hubris.

In the classical period, the Greeks often associate this type of hubris with the Persians and Amazons.<sup>47</sup> Stewart argues that the Greek association of Persians with Amazons does not reveal the cravenness of the Persians, but rather their inability to

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<sup>44</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 914-917 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>45</sup> See Sommerstein’s note on line 917.

<sup>46</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 905-909.

<sup>47</sup> Stewart 1995: 584.

“know when to stop, learn from their mistakes”. It shows them as lacking “the classical virtue of *sophrosyne*”.

Sophrosyne is the self-knowledge that leads to a measured self-control, a virtue that is conspicuously manifested in such classical monuments as the Parthenon frieze and Doryphoros of Polykleitos. But whereas Greek men can know their boundaries, can develop rational self-control and resistance to excess, women and barbarians cannot.<sup>48</sup>

In this scene, Clytemnestra is flouting society’s expectations of her station and encouraging Agamemnon to ignore his place as well, and give in to excess.

In Herodotus’ *Histories*, Xerxes attempts to bridge the Hellespont, the one thing standing between him and Europe. When a storm arises and destroys his bridge, Xerxes has the Hellespont scourged with three hundred lashes, a pair of fetters thrown into the sea, and some say that he sent branders to the sea to brand the rebellious water. Those thrashing the sea were to proclaim Xerxes’ mastery over the unrevered “turbid and briny river”.<sup>49</sup> All the architects of the first bridge were beheaded. Xerxes challenges the god of the Hellespont and blatantly dishonors Poseidon, claiming to be more worthy of fear and subservience than the god himself.

Aeschylus also deals with this theme of Persian hubris in his *Persai*. In her introduction, Hall writes, “Some see the play’s structure as dependent on its theological shape: hubris is the unifying theme, indeed *Persians* is the one play in the entire extant literature—not just in Aeschylus—which is genuinely and fully founded upon *hubris*.”<sup>50</sup>

When describing the scene of Xerxes bridging the Hellespont, the Chorus describes

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<sup>48</sup> Stewart 1995: 584.

<sup>49</sup> Hdt. 7.34-35 (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>50</sup> Hall 1996: 18.

Xerxes as driving “his godlike flock against every land in two movements: an equal of the gods, born of the golden race...”<sup>51</sup> At the end of the play, the ghost of Darius, the voice of insight in the play, says:

For Zeus stands over and chastises arrogant minds, and he is a stern assessor. So in the light of this, use sensible words of warning to admonish Xerxes to behave temperately and stop offending the gods with his boasts and excessive confidence.<sup>52</sup>

Both Persians and Amazons fail to remember their place—they lack *sophrosyne*.

Consequently, they are hubristic in their grasp for excess and glories beyond their station.

In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra tempts Agamemnon to act with hubris in the same way as Xerxes. Horrified by her lavish praise, Agamemnon censures Clytemnestra for behaving like a barbarian: pampering him like a woman, prostrating herself before him, strewing his path with valuable clothes, and revering him as a god and not as a man.<sup>53</sup>

Clytemnestra then attempts to justify her actions by saying, “And what do you think Priam would have done, if he had had a success like this?”<sup>54</sup> Clytemnestra asks Agamemnon to behave with the hubris of an Eastern emperor.

According to Agamemnon, Clytemnestra is also adopting the Asiatic concept of gender roles. The medicine men of Classical Athens claimed that the environment of Asia made men soft, while it made women hard.<sup>55</sup> In accordance with this, Agamemnon accused her of trying to make him soft like a woman, and herself hard as a man. When she insists that he walk on the tapestries, Agamemnon says that she is pampering him,

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<sup>51</sup> Aesch. *Pers.* 75-80 (trans. Edith Hall).

<sup>52</sup> Aesch. *Pers.* 827-832 (trans. Edith Hall).

<sup>53</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 914-930.

<sup>54</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 935 (trans. Alan Sommerstein).

<sup>55</sup> Tyrell 1984: 97.



softening and spoiling him with luxury. She exerts her will over his. He responds that her insistence is unwomanly, and that he is being subjugated to her. Here again, Clytemnestra resembles an Eastern Amazon in how she makes the rules that the men around her must follow. Through her *hubris*, Clytemnestra's behavior is associated with that of the barbarians in Asia, just as the Amazons in Greek art and literature are more emphatically linked to Asia—and especially Persia—after the Persian Wars.

Considering the resemblance of Clytemnestra to an Amazon woman—a female barbarian warrior—it is no surprise that Athena would reference the Amazons' invasion of Athens right as the jury is about to vote on the case of Orestes. With Clytemnestra taken in this light, Orestes is portrayed as a hero of the state, rather than a murderer. He freed the state from the threat of domestic chaos caused by the invasion of barbaric principles and practices. Just as Theseus saved Athens from the barbaric Amazon invasion, Orestes saved his household from the destructive influence of Clytemnestra. Aeschylus alludes to the Amazon invasion to provide a metaphor for Clytemnestra that illuminates the gravity of the threat she posed to the household and the state as an Amazon-type. This renders Orestes action justifiable, even heroic, rather than culpable and worthy of the death penalty.

#### *Amazons in Euripides' Hippolytus*

Similar to the way that Aeschylus alludes to Amazons in his *Eumenides* in order to use that motif as a metaphor to illuminate the main conflict of the tragedy, Euripides, one of Herodotus' later contemporaries, used the Amazon motif as a metaphor in his

*Hippolytus*. Opening the play, Aphrodite, who essentially runs the whole show from behind-the-scenes, declares her scheme:

Mighty and of high renown, among mortals and in heaven alike, I am called the goddess Cypris. Of all who dwell between the Euxine Sea and the Pillars of Atlas and look on the light of the sun, I honor those who reverence my power, but I lay low all those whose thoughts toward me are proud. . . . The truth of these words I shall shortly demonstrate. Theseus' son Hippolytus, offspring of the Amazon woman and ward of holy Pittheus, alone among the citizens of this land of Troezen, says that I am the worst of deities. He shuns the bed of love and will have nothing to do with marriage. Instead, he honors Apollo's sister Artemis, Zeus' daughter, thinking her the greatest of deities. . . . To this pair I feel no ill will: why should I? Yet for his sins against me I shall this day punish Hippolytus.<sup>56</sup>

Aphrodite proceeds to explain her plans for Hippolytus' punishment: she will cause Phaedra, his step-mother, to fall in love with him, and his father, Theseus, to discover this after Phaedra kills herself and leaves a suicide note falsely accusing Hippolytus of raping her. Finding and believing the suicide note, Theseus then invokes Poseidon and beseeches him to kill Hippolytus. In the end, the only one left alive of the family is Theseus. As Aphrodite says in the prologue, this tragedy demonstrates the consequences that one faces when he or she fails to honor Aphrodite, the bed of love, and marriage.

Hippolytus is the son of Theseus and the Amazon queen. As is seen in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the Greeks believed that parentage determined and revealed present identity. Because he spurns Aphrodite and the institution of marriage, Hippolytus is a sort of male version of his Amazon mother, Hippolyta.<sup>57</sup> Tyrell writes, "The boy who refuses his destiny is a male imagined, similarly by virtue of his marginality, as hermitic (Melanion),

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<sup>56</sup> Eur. Hipp.1-22 (trans. David Kovacs).

<sup>57</sup> Stewart 1995: 590: "Several scholars have suggested that Euripides' *Medea* and *Hippolytus* were responses to Pericles' Citizenship Law of 451, proclaiming that exogamous unions and their fruit must turn bad." A more positive reading of Euripides' barbarians: Saïd 2002: 62-100.

non-sexual (Hippolytus), hypersexual (Adonis), or as feminized.”<sup>58</sup> Tyrell argues that Hippolytus is a symbol of a refusal to mature—a failure to follow “the nature of things”. Hippolytus refuses to perform his duty to the state by providing sons through marriage. He is “socially useless”.<sup>59</sup> Hippolytus’ refusal to follow the natural path of maturity and submit to the demands of the *oikos* eventually leads to the destruction of his family. Like Clytemnestra, although Hippolytus was Greek, he adopts a grotesque barbaric spirit of rebellion and hubris against the *oikos* structure, and this leads to the destruction of his community.

Euripides’ character Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Tauris* has a similar experience except that her unnatural Amazon-like condition was not chosen but forced upon her by her exile in the East. Tauris was a peninsula located on the northern edge of the Euxine Sea, between the Euxine and Palus Maeotis with Scythia directly to the West, and the Caucasus directly to the East.<sup>60</sup> Once again, grotesque Amazon-like behavior is associated with the Persian East and the Persian barbarian. Although Amazons are not explicitly referenced in this tragedy, Iphigenia is an Amazon-type—granted unwillingly—because she lives in the Greek’s concept of the exotic East, she kills men, and she fails to fulfill to the expectations of the Greek woman within their *oikos* system. Iphigenia is forced into a role contrary to her female nature—she must preside over death—and she is prevented from accomplishing her natural role as a woman—producing life. Before Orestes arrives at the temple, Iphigenia bemoans her state:

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<sup>58</sup> Tyrell 1984: 77.

<sup>59</sup> Tyrell 1984: 85.

<sup>60</sup> Suzanne, Bernard. "Tauris." *Plato-Dialogues*. November 28, 1998. <<http://plato-dialogues.org/tools/loc/tauris.htm>> (February 18 2014).

From the beginning my fate has been ill-starred. From the night my mother loosed her maiden girdle the Fates that look on childbirth have spun out for me a harsh bringing up! What a fate I have, I who was wooed by the noblest of the Greeks! Me as the first-born in her chamber Leda's ill-fated daughter bore, nurtured as a victim for my father to misuse and a beast for sacrifice in which there is no joy. Then on the sandy shore of Aulis they set me down from the horse-drawn chariot to be bride ill-wed—ah me!—to the Nereid's son, oh woe! And now as a stranger I dwell in a house that borders on the Hostile Sea, with no husband, children, city, or friend. I do not sing in honor of Hera at Argos or weave with my shuttle upon the sounding loom the likeness of Athenian Pallas and the Titans in colors various: no, with blood-stained death of foreign men, death no lyre accompanies, I stain the altars, men who wail their piteous cry and shed their piteous tear. And now I no longer think of these: it is the one dead in Argos that I weep for, my brother, whom I left at his mother's breast, still a tender shoot, a young babe, in the arms and embrace of his mother, Orestes, Argos' scepter-bearing king.<sup>61</sup>

In this pathos-infused scene, Iphigenia grieves the loss of her family, and her loss of Greek womanhood. She who was once wooed by the most excellent Greek princes, she who was destined to honor Hera the goddess of marriage with song, she who would have adorned Athena the divine protectress of Athenian men and society with her finest woven textiles, is now imprisoned in the wild East and forced to sacrifice men to the virgin

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<sup>61</sup> Eur. *IT*. 203-235 (trans. David Kovacs).

huntress Artemis. Rather than living in a house of abundant life and joy, she dwells in a barren house of human sacrifice and “piteous cries” on the border of a hostile sea. Her labor is not to weave and produce children, but to stain the altars with the blood of men.<sup>62</sup> Like Hippolytus, Iphigenia is not following “the nature of things.” There is a time for virginity and there is a time for death, but there is also a time for marriage and life. Iphigenia is being forced to live in a perpetual state of the former, and never progress to the latter. Referring to the human sacrifice, Iphigenia says she cannot believe that one of the goddesses, especially a daughter of Zeus, could be so wicked and inconsistent.<sup>63</sup> Challenging the temple system, Iphigenia asks how this goddess, who will not allow any mortal who has had contact with blood or death to come to her altar, will then demand human sacrifice. Rather, she claims that the people of the region project their own evil desires onto those of the goddess for surely Artemis does not want to be worshipped this way.

Not only is Iphigenia prevented from fulfilling her natural role, the role she was born to play as a woman in Greek society, she is forced to be involved with the sole work of men—she is forced to kill other men. Orestes’ horror when he thinks that the laws in Tauris decree that men should be killed by women in the temple demonstrates the grotesqueness of this idea in the Greek mindset.<sup>64</sup> Iphigenia’s relief that she did not sacrifice Orestes demonstrates the horror again that the woman of an *oikos* should harm that very same *oikos* by harming the men within it. Iphigenia could have killed Orestes

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<sup>62</sup> It is revealed later that Iphigenia does not actually slit the throats of the victims, but rather prepares them for sacrifice through the ritual cleansing: Eur. *IT*. 620-624. However, it is evident from this scene and the latter one that Iphigenia still feels responsible even though she does not do the actual bloody work.

<sup>63</sup> Eur. *IT*. 380-391.

<sup>64</sup> Eur. *IT*. 610-626.

just as their monstrous Amazon-like mother killed their father. Orestes' rescue of Iphigenia restores her to her natural state, restores her to her proper home and her proper role within Greek society, and in a sense prevents the barbaric plight of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. The daughter does not kill the son as the mother killed the father.

While Euripides' character Iphigenia despises and eventually escapes the Amazon-like role, his other character Medea does not. Medea was a princess from Colchis, another Eastern kingdom on the southeastern shore of the Euxine Sea. The Greek hero Jason takes her from her land back to Corinth, and she attempts to assimilate into Greek society. Although an eastern barbarian and a woman, Medea herself is not a warrior *per se*, but regardless, she exhibits Amazon qualities by threatening the *oikos*. Like Clytemnestra, Medea harms the *oikos*, dragging it down from safety and stability into chaos through her violence. While still in Colchis, Medea gruesomely murders her own brother in order to save Jason's life.<sup>65</sup> In her own words, she betrayed her father's household for the sake of foreign Jason. Later, after years of living with Jason in Corinth, Medea's destructive qualities re-emerge. Discovering Jason's betrayal, Medea curses the household of Jason and his new Greek bride, saying, "Oh mighty Themis and my lady Artemis... May I one day see him and his new bride ground to destruction, and their whole house with them...."<sup>66</sup> She also curses her and Jason's household, saying, "O, accursed children of a hateful mother, may you perish with your father and the whole

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<sup>65</sup> Eur. *Med.* 166-167, 465-519.

<sup>66</sup> Eur. *Med.* 160-64.



house collapse in ruin!”<sup>67</sup> Later actualizing these curses, Medea kills their two sons, and Jason’s young Greek bride.<sup>68</sup> She crushes both Jason’s households.

Before she commits these crimes, Medea meets King Aegeus, the ruler of Athens, and beseeches him to take her in as a suppliant when she flees Corinth. Aegeus agrees.<sup>69</sup> According to the mythic tradition, Medea will eventually marry Aegeus, the father of Theseus. When youthful Theseus reveals himself as Aegeus’ son and heir, Medea tries to kill him as well.<sup>70</sup> This Eastern woman, though not a warrior *per se*, exhibits a pattern of destroying the *oikos* through violence, particularly in the cases of Jason and Aegeus killing Greek sons before they have a chance to grow into heroic men. In this way, she resembles an Amazon.

#### *Amazons in Aristophanes’ Lysistrata*

In his comedy, *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes uses the Amazon motif as a metaphor to illustrate the transformation of submissive Greek wives into dangerously rebellious women, following Aeschylus’ and Euripides’ examples. However, Aristophanes spins the motif with a humorous ironic reversal: The Athenian wives employ Amazon tactics, imitating their resistance to sex and their invasion of the Acropolis, for the sake of saving the Greek way of life, and restoring the traditional patriarchy, rather than destroying it. This reversal contributes to the comedy because, while these women use the same tactics as the Amazons, they are not emulating these women warriors because they too are

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<sup>67</sup> Eur. *Med.* 112-114.

<sup>68</sup> Eur. *Med.* 764-795.

<sup>69</sup> Eur. *Med.* 708-718.

<sup>70</sup> Plut. *Thes.* 12.

“haters of men” but rather because they are “lovers of men.” In his introduction, Halliwell writes this about the women’s sex-strike and invasion of the Akropolis:

But while this [Lysistrata’s two-fold scheme] creates a scenario which involves a kind of ‘battle of the sexes’, the women’s aim is purely and simply to bring the war to an end and thereby to restore a world of peace in which marital harmony and erotic fulfillment... can prevail. . . . the women of *Lysistrata* do not seek a permanent change in the balance of power between the sexes. They want a return to normality in their married and family lives.<sup>71</sup>

These women neglect their role in Greek society of producing and tending children, and caring for the home in order to restore the patriarchy, not to rebel against it like Clytemnestra.

In regards to Lysistrata’s plan to storm the Acropolis, Aristophanes is exploiting a prominent and well-known Amazon motif of the age. After the Persian Wars, during Cimon’s prominence in Athens (479-461 BC), the myth of the Amazon invasion of the Acropolis first appears.<sup>72</sup> Later, in 473, Cimon depicts the myth within the frescoes of his Theseum monument.<sup>73</sup> Plutarch describes Cimon as “a peacemaker among the Greeks and a conqueror of Persians”.<sup>74</sup> Pairing Cimon with Lucullus, Plutarch describes how Cimon subdues the Persian forces abroad and becomes a sort of Athenian deliverer of the Greeks.<sup>75</sup> However, in his battles against the Persian Empire he also expands and creates

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<sup>71</sup> Halliwell 1998: 82. Halliwell’s analysis is particularly evidenced in lines 100-110, in which Lysistrata complains that there is not a “glimmer of males—not a single adulterer left!” Aristoph. *Lys.* 107. The character Myrrhine even swears (perhaps a bit impulsively) that she would be willing to cut herself in half and serve herself as a sacrificial flat-fish to get her husband back: Aristoph. *Lys.* 116-117.

<sup>72</sup> Stewart 1995: 580.

<sup>73</sup> Stewart 1995: 582.

<sup>74</sup> Stadter 1998: 115; See also Plu. *Cim.* 8.

<sup>75</sup> Plu. *Cim.* 120.

a new Athenian empire.<sup>76</sup> Cimon not only helped the Greek allies to obtain dominance over the Persians, but he also was pivotal in establishing Athenian dominance over the rest of the Greek allies. Previously, Athenian generals would greatly pressure and punish allies for not sending troops, but Cimon allowed them to get away with it to their own detriment. Plutarch writes:

Consequently, before long he had used the money and wages provided by the allies [in place of men for military service] to make the Athenians the master of those who paid them. The point is that the Athenians were always at sea and constantly under arms; as a result of the allies' failure to undertake military service themselves, they were becoming seasoned and trained fighters. And so the allies acquired the habit of earing and currying favor with the Athenians, and gradually became tribute-paying subjects instead of allies, and lost their freedom.<sup>77</sup>

Plutarch makes Cimon's imperial tendencies clear in his description of the Athenian invasion of Scyros.<sup>78</sup> Plutarch includes two pretenses for the invasion: 1) the pirates who were causing trouble at Scyros, and 2) his desire to reclaim Theseus' bones which were thought to be at Scyros and to restore them to their proper burial place in Athens. Cimon builds a sanctuary for the bones—a sort of monument to the patron hero of Athens. Cimon commissions the walls of the monument of be painted with four frescoes: 1) The end wall portrays the battle of Oinoe; 2) the rear wall portrays the two scenes of an

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<sup>76</sup> Plut. *Cim.* 125, 127, 129.

<sup>77</sup> Plut. *Cim.* 129 (trans. Robin Waterfield).

<sup>78</sup> Plut. *Cim.* 125-127.

Amazonomachy and Troy Taken; 3) the other end wall portrays the battle of Marathon.<sup>79</sup> Many have interpreted the mythical depictions of Amazonomachy, the Amazon invasion of Athens, as an allegory of the Persian invasion of 480 BC.<sup>80</sup> The Athenians emphasize their forefathers'—including Theseus—mythical victory over the Amazons in order to justify their protection and dominance over the other Greek allies (despite the fact that they actually had to abandon their city when the Persians invaded in 480 BC).<sup>81</sup> This allegory, though mythical, provides a poignant example for imperial Athenian propaganda because it emphasizes their might and victory over the common Greek enemy, the Persian Empire and the frightening East.<sup>82</sup>

Consequently, this motif continued to be used in the monuments of imperial Athens. Pericles (449-429 BC), was the dominant politician during the first part of Aristophanes' life. Pericles initiated the building of the Parthenon in 447 BC, which was completed in 432 BC.<sup>83</sup> The Parthenon featured two Amazonomachies—one on the shield of Athena Parthenos, and the other on the fourteen metopes on the west front.<sup>84</sup> Typically, the only women who were imagined to be storming the Acropolis were Amazons, the man-hating eastern barbarians who were determined to destroy Greek

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<sup>79</sup> Stewart 1995: 582.

<sup>80</sup> Stewart 1995: 582.

<sup>81</sup> Stewart 1995: 582; The importance of the Amazon tombs in Athens to the Athenian image as being conquerors of the foreign enemy: Dowden 1997. Dead Amazons function as exempla of Athenian might and defense of freedom, thereby providing a justification based upon precedent for their empire. For a better understanding of the myth itself, not just Cimon's exploitation of it, see Plutarch's *Theseus*.

<sup>82</sup> The Athenian potters of this period exploited the symbolism of these frescoes, also using the Amazons as depictions of the human Persian other: Stewart 1995: 582-583.

<sup>83</sup> Stewart 1995: 585.

<sup>84</sup> Stewart 1995: 585. For more analysis of the actual images in the Amazonomachy on the Shield of Athena Parthenos: Harrison 1996: 107-133; Cohon 1991: 22-30.

society, but in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes ironically twists this motif in comedic fashion by having Athenian housewives storm the Acropolis for the salvation of traditional Greek society.

In addition to these over-arching themes of the plot, Aristophanes also includes several specific allusions in the text that associate Lysistrata's force of housewives with the Amazons. The housewives are repeatedly associated with Scythians. In line 196, the women make an oath to abide by Lysistrata's plan in Scythian fashion by drinking undiluted wine.<sup>85</sup> Later, when the Commissioner attempts to negotiate with the women holding the Acropolis, losing patience, he blasts, "You, Scythians!"<sup>86</sup> In their charge against the Acropolis gate in an attempt break down the door and reclaim the Acropolis, the Chorus of old men sing about their past military exploits against barbarians, and then reflect in horror that they now must fight domestic women as well.<sup>87</sup> In this reflection, Lysistrata and her women are added to the catalogue of the old men's past enemies. Throughout the play, the women are called monsters and animals, which, as seen earlier, are associated with the East.<sup>88</sup> The women are also likened to tyrants, as the old men imagine themselves to be following the examples of the heroic tyrannicides.<sup>89</sup> All the former—Scythians, monsters, ferocious animals, and tyrants—are associated with the East.

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<sup>85</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 196.

<sup>86</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 440-460.

<sup>87</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 254-305.

<sup>88</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 465- 475.

<sup>89</sup> Aristoph. *Lys.* 620-625.

In his article, “Greeks and Others: From Antiquity to the Renaissance,” Robert Browning states that ‘the Other’ “is more often seen as a single group which is the antithesis of Us, marked by weakness where We display strength, by vice where We show virtue.”<sup>90</sup> Among Herodotus’ contemporaries, the Amazon—a type of the female barbarian warrior motif—was an expression of the Other to the Greek. She represented all things anti-Greek, all things barbarian, chaotic and frightening. Aeschylus used the Amazon motif in his *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, and *Eumenides* as a metaphor of the vice of hubris, a rebellion against traditional Greek societal standards, which one of the main characters of these plays violated. Similarly, Euripides also explicitly and implicitly alluded to the Amazon motif in order to demonstrate the danger in failing to fulfill the traditional Greek ‘nature of things,’ the danger of degeneration from civilization to chaos. , Aristophanes uses the same motif but being a comedian, he twists it to his own purposes by replacing the Amazons with housewives, who seek to save the Greek civilization by acting like Amazons, and in the end they and their families live happily ever after in peace. In all these plays, the Amazon motif represents the grotesque alternatives that present themselves if the Greek way of life were forsaken.

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<sup>90</sup> Browning 2002: 257-277.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Female Barbarian Warrior Motif in Herodotus' *Histories*

Like his contemporaries, Herodotus also used the female barbarian warrior motif to express the inverted world of the East. In his *Histories*, the female barbarian warrior appears in the persons of Queen Nitocris of Babylon, Queen Tomyris of the Massagetae, Pherentime of Cyrene, the Sauromatae tribe, and Artemisia of Halicarnassus.<sup>1</sup> Like Clytemnestra, these eastern warrior-women defend their families, but, in so doing, they violate the boundaries of nature, surpassing their male barbarian counterparts in virility.<sup>2</sup> Associating Persia with the formerly mentioned exempla of female barbarian warriors, Herodotus uses this type to illustrate the inverted world of the East, a frightening world where a woman's masculinity surpasses that of her male counterpart.

#### *Queen Nitocris of Babylon*

Female barbarian warriors in the *Histories* are defenders of their own cultures and families, whether the external threat is the Persian Empire or another people.<sup>3</sup> In Book one, chapters 185-187, Herodotus introduces the Assyrian queen of Babylon, Nitocris. Herodotus first suggests the martial element of Nitocris by associating her with another

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<sup>1</sup> Nitocris: Hdt. 1. 184-191; Tomyris: Hdt. 1.201-214; Pherentime: Hdt. 4.162, 165-167, 200- 202, 205; Sauromatae: Hdt. 4.21, 57, 102, 110-17; Artemisia: Hdt. 7.99; 8.68-69, 87-88, 93, 101-103, 107.

<sup>2</sup> Dewald 1992: 97.

<sup>3</sup> Dewald 1992: 97, 107-108.

Assyrian queen, Semiramis.<sup>4</sup> Although many Babylonian rulers contributed to the construction of the walls and temples, Herodotus only mentions two of them in any detail: the queens. First, Herodotus says that Semiramis built the dykes on the plain, which were beneficial to the Babylonians for both irrigational and defensive purposes.<sup>5</sup> Nitocris is not only linked with Semiramis through their common title and similar construction projects, but also in their mythological identities. According to How and Wells, Queen Semiramis appears in “wild Greek fables” as a sort of Assyrian Catherine II, “distinguished equally in war and sensuality.”<sup>6</sup> If this is the case, it is interesting that Herodotus does not explicitly relate these tales here, especially since he does relate ‘an almost certainly’ fictional story about Nitocris in I.187.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, if these ‘wild Greek fables’ were widespread then the simple mention of Semiramis might evoke the image of an exotic queen famous for her martial ferocity and sensuality in the mind of his audience. If the dropping of Semiramis’ name did evoke these sentiments, then it serves as an appropriate segue to Herodotus’ description of the fortifications that Nitocris added to the city.

Although Herodotus does not describe Queen Nitocris as personally wielding weapons (like his other female barbarian warrior types), she can be considered a warrior because she took military action to defend her city from invading forces. Describing Nitocris as wiser (συνετωτέρη) than Semiramis, Herodotus remarks that Nitocris

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<sup>4</sup> Hdt.1.184.

<sup>5</sup> How and Wells 1989: 143.

<sup>6</sup> How and Wells 1989: 143.

<sup>7</sup> Asheri 2007: 205; How and Wells 1989: 143: These mythical stories about Semiramis also reflect the characteristics of the goddess Ishtar. Perhaps Herodotus did not include these myths because he considered them to be primarily about Ishtar, and not Semiramis.



“noticed the size and restlessness of the Median Empire, saw that other places, including Ninus, had been taken by them, and took all the precautions she possibly could.”<sup>8</sup>

Herodotus proceeds to relate how Queen Nitocris “ἐκ βάθεος περιέβαλετο” or “threw up a defense out of the waters” by altering the River Euphrates, constructing embankments along the river, and creating a marshland.<sup>9</sup> So great were Nitocris’ added contortions of the Euphrates River that a vessel floating on it passed by a single village three times. According to Herodotus, Nitocris intended to discourage and deter the Persian invasion of Babylon by making the river less navigable and accessible through her labyrinthine alterations of the river, combined with the construction of the marsh.<sup>10</sup> The marsh not only served to slow the current, consequently slowing any crafts sailing on the river, but it also was a reservoir which could be released to flood the whole valley in times of distress.<sup>11</sup> Nitocris, like the other Amazon-types in the *Histories*, serves as a guardian of her own society.<sup>12</sup>

In her military efforts and protection of Babylon, Nitocris proves to be manlier and more sagacious than her son Labynetus. Nitocris foresaw the Median invasion and made extensive defensive preparations.<sup>13</sup> Nitocris was equipped; Labynetus was caught off-guard.<sup>14</sup> Babylon did have provisions stowed away in case the Persians besieged the

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<sup>8</sup> Hdt.1.185.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt.1.185-186.

<sup>10</sup>How and Wells 1989: 144.

<sup>11</sup> Asheri 2007: 204-205.

<sup>12</sup> Dewald 1992: 97.

<sup>13</sup> Hdt.1.185-186.

<sup>14</sup> Hdt.1.188, 191.

city, but this simple precaution was not sufficient against the stratagem of Cyrus.<sup>15</sup>

Ironically, Cyrus used the same tactic of diverting the river which Queen Nitocris had used to fortify the city.<sup>16</sup> Cyrus diverts the river until it is shallow enough to ford, and then he blocked the water, and led his men into Babylon through the water gates.<sup>17</sup>

Herodotus writes:

Now if the Babylonians had known beforehand or learnt what Cyrus was planning, they would have shut all the gates that opened on the river and themselves mounted up on to the walls that ran along the river banks, and so caught their enemies as in a trap. But as it was the Persians were upon them unawares....<sup>18</sup>

In a scene that seems to foreshadow the feast of the Massagetae army, not only does Cyrus catch the Babylonians by surprise, but he enters the city while they are dancing and making merry at a festival. Cyrus catches both the Babylonian and the Massagetae men lethargic and made vulnerable by their own excess.<sup>19</sup> While Nitocris had the astuteness to be alert and prepared for the Median invasion, her son, Labynetus, did not possess such sagacity and forethought. Cyrus' equal in tactics, Nitocris uses the same technique to defend Babylon as Cyrus eventually uses to conquer it after her death. In these chapters, Nitocris behaves in a manner that is stereotypical of the upstanding Greek male, whereas Labynetus acts in a manner stereotypical of the effeminate barbarian.<sup>20</sup> Nitocris' equaling and surpassing of her male counterparts in war exemplifies the inverted nature of the East

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<sup>15</sup> Hdt. 1.190

<sup>16</sup> Hdt.1.191.

<sup>17</sup> Hdt.1.191..

<sup>18</sup> Hdt.1.191..

<sup>19</sup> Hdt.1.191, 211.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart 1995: 583-584.

and the barbarians who dwell there. The East emerges as a grotesque land where “the men become women and the women become men.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Queen Tomyris of the Massagetae*

Such gender inversion and martial guardianship is also exemplified in Book One by Queen Tomyris of the Massagetae. In initially introducing her, Herodotus attributes these qualities of unnatural manliness and martial skill to Tomyris implicitly by casting her within the context of an Amazon. Like the Amazons in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, Queen Tomyris dwells deep in the exotic and monstrous East, specifically the Caucasus.<sup>22</sup> Herodotus writes that, in order to reach her territory, Cyrus had to reach the far away Caspian Sea and the lofty Caucasus, in which many nations dwell. Herodotus describes the people of these mountains as animal-like: they “live on the fruits of the wild wood” and “men and women here (they say) have intercourse openly, like beasts of the flock.”<sup>23</sup> Herodotus writes, “These [the Massagetae] are said to be a great people and a mighty, dwelling towards the east and the sunrise, beyond the Araxes [River] and over against the Issedones; and some say that they are a Scythian people.”<sup>24</sup> Later Herodotus reveals that they are warlike and ruled by a queen.<sup>25</sup> This description implicitly associates the Massagetae with the Amazons, who are always imagined in Greek thought as a

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<sup>21</sup> Hdt. 8.88.

<sup>22</sup> The following two chapters will demonstrate how later historians show-cased tales of their heroes meeting Amazons in the Caucasus, and how that motif evolved within the traditions of the Hellenistic and Roman Empire.

<sup>23</sup> Hdt.1.203 (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>24</sup> Hdt.1.201 (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>25</sup> Hdt.1.205, 215-216.

mighty people, ruled by a queen, residing in a vague far away eastern place.<sup>26</sup> The Scythians also have far eastern associations and connections with Amazons, which led, as we eventually see in *Histories* book IV, to the creation of the Sauromatae tribe.<sup>27</sup>

Just as the Scythians tried to pacify and dominate the Amazons by wooing them, so Cyrus also tries to court Queen Tomyris.<sup>28</sup> When Cyrus marches to the Araxes River and threatens to invade Massagetae territory, he first attempts to form an alliance with Queen Tomyris by marrying her.<sup>29</sup> However, Herodotus records that Tomyris knew that Cyrus was not desirous of her as much as he was of her kingdom. Tomyris rejects Cyrus' romantic advances and evades being deceived by his "guile" (δόλος).<sup>30</sup> This is the first instance in which Herodotus suggests that Tomyris is manlier than Cyrus. Cyrus initially attempts to conquer Tomyris with deceitfully gentle persuasion and guile, resorting to a tactic which the Greeks would have considered to be womanly and ignoble, rather than challenging her in battle as the Greek hero Achilles had done to Penthesilea.<sup>31</sup> In the Greek imagination, Greek heroes destroy Amazons because, in their ambiguously man-and-woman state, Amazons are a threat to the natural order of the world. In contrast, Cyrus actually stoops to using womanly tactics—making himself effeminate—to entice a manly queen.

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<sup>26</sup> Hardwick 1990: 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt.4.110.

<sup>28</sup> Hdt.1.205; Hdt. 4.111.

<sup>29</sup> As mentioned earlier, Alexander the Great will also have a romance with an Amazon in the Caucasus: Plut. *Alex.*46. Pompey will encounter Amazons in battle at the Araxes River: App. *Mith.* 2.12.103. These instances are addressed in chapters three and four.

<sup>30</sup> Hdt. 1.205.

<sup>31</sup> Eur. *Med*; Munson 1988: 92-93; Dowden 1997; Stewart 1997: 576.

As Cyrus acts in a womanly way in his first interaction with Tomyris, the queen acts with manliness. She demands that Cyrus be content in ruling his own people and allow the Massagetae to maintain their autonomy.<sup>32</sup> However, if Cyrus insists upon a battle, Tomyris offers to fight either on the Persian side of the Araxes or on the Massagetae side. At this point, Tomyris' communication is straightforward and not inflamed with personal ire. Tomyris' calm address is completely reversed after Cyrus slaughters one third of the Massagetae army and captures the prince Spargapises, Tomyris' son, by luring him and the army to a banquet, and then ambushing them after they were intoxicated.<sup>33</sup> Then the conflict becomes exceedingly personal. Enraged on behalf of her people, Tomyris says:

Bloodthirsty Cyrus, be not uplifted by this that you have done; it is no matter for pride if the fruit of the vine—that fruit whereof you Persians drink even to madness, so that the wine passing into your bodies makes evil words to rise in a flood to your lips—has served you as a drug to master my son withal, by guile and not in fair fight. Now therefore take this word of good counsel from me: give me back my son and depart unpunished from this country; it is enough that have done despite to a third part of the host of the Massagetae. But if you will not do this, then I swear by the sun, the lord of the Massagetae, that for all you are so insatiate of blood I will give you your fill thereof.<sup>34</sup>

Cyrus paid no attention to this message, and the Massagetae and Persians then joined in the severest (ἰσχυροτάτην) battle fought among Barbarians.<sup>35</sup> The shameful massacre of her people, inflicted not through the strength of combat but through the deceit of drugs, drives Tomyris to command this fiercest battle, in which the greater part of the Persian

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<sup>32</sup> Hdt, 1.206.

<sup>33</sup> Hdt.1. 207, 211-213.

<sup>34</sup> Hdt.1.212.

<sup>35</sup> Hdt.1.214.

army and Cyrus himself perished. Wrathful still at the injustice of the massacre of her vulnerable men and especially her son, Tomyris literally fulfills her threat by forcing a wine-skin full of blood down the throat of Cyrus' corpse. Assuring his audience that this story of Tomyris is the most credible, Herodotus quotes her saying, "Though I live and conquer thee, thou hast undone me, overcoming my son by guile; but even as I threatened, so will I do, and give thee thy fill of blood."<sup>36</sup>

Tomyris' victory over Cyrus places her in juxtaposition with both the defeated Cyrus and her defeated son, Spargapises. These juxtapositions reveal Tomyris to be manlier than both her male counterparts, further demonstrating the inverted world of the East. In their conflict, Cyrus behaves in a manner more befitting of a woman, attempting to conquer through guile, and Tomyris behaves in a way more befitting of a man, conquering through war. Just as Nitocris surpasses her son in manliness, Tomyris of the Massegatae also outstrips Cyrus and her son in war-like violence. It is not until after the capture of her son and the slaughter of a third of her army that Tomyris lashes out in extreme violence. Prior to the false banquet incident, Tomyris tried to use diplomacy in dealing with Cyrus.<sup>37</sup> However, in response, Tomyris denounces Cyrus and his shameful ruse, saying that he beguiled her son "with drugs and not by force in war" (τοιούτῳ φαρμάκῳ δολώσας... οὐ μάχῃ κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν).<sup>38</sup> With a bloodthirsty

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<sup>36</sup> Hdt. 1.214.

<sup>37</sup> Hdt.1.206; Notice also that Croesus of Lydia is the one who recommended the tactic of luring the Massagetae army into a false sense of safety with a luxurious banquet, and ambushing them in such a vulnerable state. Earlier Herodotus had mentioned that the Persians had learned all their ostentatious and effeminate practices from the bad influence of luxurious Lydia: Hdt. 1.71.

<sup>38</sup> Hdt.1.212.

tone, Tomyris swears to punish Cyrus for his bloodthirstiness.<sup>39</sup> Thus far, Cyrus had sought to conquer the Massegetae with guile and tricks, what the Greeks would consider womanly tactics. In contrast, Tomyris assumes the traditional role of the man in the Greek *oikos*, and confronts her enemies with severe war—not subtlety and craftiness.

Herodotus refers to the battle through which Tomyris seeks her vengeance as the “severest (ισχυροτάτην) battle among Barbarians,” as the two armies were for “a long time battling foot to foot and neither would give ground.”<sup>40</sup> Tomyris’ superior violence is evident in that the greater part of the Persian army perishes, including Cyrus himself. Tomyris also appears supreme in violence in the way she shames Cyrus’ corpse after it is captured. Cyrus shames Sparagapises by luring him with luxury and feasting.<sup>41</sup> Sparagapises, upon recovering his senses, finds himself in chains, and promptly kills himself, supposedly for shame of being so successfully conned. Tomyris, however, shames Cyrus by forcing a wine-skin full of Persian blood down his corpse’s throat. Tomyris is not subtle. Motivated by the agony of personal tragedy, Tomyris exhibits manly violence in her desecration of Cyrus’ body. Tomyris conquers in war; Cyrus attempted to conquer with guile and he failed to conquer in war.

Tomyris’ virility is also more apparent in comparison with that of her son. Tomyris appears more astute than her son. Tomyris’ son rashly indulges in the Persian feast after killing all the Persian injured. He does not seem to consider that the feast was a trap.<sup>42</sup> Tomyris’ son is mastered by Cyrus’ guile, whereas Tomyris was not when he attempted

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<sup>39</sup> Hdt.1.212.

<sup>40</sup> Hdt.1.214.

<sup>41</sup> Hdt.1.213- 214.

<sup>42</sup> Hdt.1.211.

to seduce her.<sup>43</sup> Not only is Sparagapises obviously beguiled by Cyrus' trick, he is destroyed by his own excess, over-indulgence in luxury, and in the *φάρμακον* of wine.<sup>44</sup> Then, later, Sparagapises is also excessive in his self-punishment.<sup>45</sup> Being released from his chains in the Persian camp, Sparagapises immediately kills himself, rather than trying to outsmart or destroy the enemy. Tomyris, in contrast, is not excessive, at least not until after the death of her son. She is cautious in considering how to meet the Persians, determining which side of the Araxes to fight on and attempting to use diplomacy first in warning Cyrus to leave. Nor does she give up hope and resort to self-annihilation after the capture of her son. Rather she extracts justice from Cyrus, shaming his corpse in a way resembling the way he had shamed her son. Excess and lack of self-control were normally associated with womanly weakness in Greek thought.<sup>46</sup> In this mother-son relationship, the mother seems to be more logical and controlled, and thus more manly, than her son. In a manner similar to Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, Herodotus' female barbarian warriors—or Amazon-types—violently defend their own, but in so doing they blur what the Greeks considered to be the natural boundaries between male and female.

### *Pherentime of Cyrene*

Like the comparisons of Tomyris and Nitocris with their male counterparts, the juxtaposition of Pherentime with her male comrade, Amasis, at the siege of Barce also

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<sup>43</sup> Hdt.1.205.

<sup>44</sup> Hdt.1.212.

<sup>45</sup> Hdt.1.213.

<sup>46</sup> Stewart 1995: 584.



demonstrates the inverted world of the East. Pherentime emerges as a female barbarian warrior, adopting the manly characteristic of war-time violence; while Amasis appears as effeminate, manifesting the female attributes of trickery. Similar to Tomyris, Pherentime of Cyrene desires to avenge wrongs done to her son. Although she is driven to defend her child by natural inclination, she too transgresses what the Greeks would have considered to be the natural boundaries between manhood and womanhood in her lust for vengeance. Herodotus demonstrates the unnatural manliness of Pherentime through the lips of King Evelthon of Cyprus. Pherentime first attempts to support her son militarily after their family is dethroned and exiled from Cyrene.<sup>47</sup> Taking refuge in Cyprus, Pherentime repeatedly asks the king there to give her an army so she and her son can retake Cyrene. King Evelthon repeatedly gives her every gift except for the army she wants. At last, Evelthon sends her a golden spindle and distaff, and wool, saying that “these, and not armies, were gifts for women.”<sup>48</sup> Such a gift might have suited Penelope, but it would not do for fighting Pherentime. After her son’s assassination in Barce, Pherentime finally receives the army she had been requesting. The Persian governor of Egypt (though somewhat of a treasonous character himself) agrees to supply her with an army and enables her to avenge her son’s murder.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the Greek king of Cyprus, the Persian governor of Egypt supports Pherentime in her transgression of natural boundaries and her usurpation of the male role of warrior.

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<sup>47</sup> Hdt.4.162.

<sup>48</sup> Hdt. 4.162 (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>49</sup> Hdt. 4.167; Herodotus also notes that the governor’s ulterior motive was to gain Barce as his own territory: Hdt. 4.165, 200, 205.

In chapters 200-201, Pherentime's manliness is underscored by her violence or severity as seen in juxtaposition with the guile of Amasis. Like Cyrus, Amasis destroys his enemies through the use of womanly guile (δόλος), rather than manly force.<sup>50</sup> Cyrus follows the advice of Croesus of Lydia and lures the Massagetae army into vulnerability through the illusion of peace and feasting.<sup>51</sup> Tomyris accuses Cyrus of winning not in "μάχη κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν" but through δόλος.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Amasis, the Persian general besieging Barce alongside Pherentime, realizes that the Barceans would never be seized through force (κατὰ τὸ ἰσχυρόν), but through guile (δόλος).<sup>53</sup> Amasis lures the Barceans into a vulnerable position by swearing an oath not to hurt them as long as the earth remains, if they open the gates and surrender. The Barceans erringly trust him, not knowing that the Persians had created a false floor under the dust, which they promptly destroyed, disturbing the earth, as soon as they were in the city. The "change" in the earth allowed them to attack the Barceans without breaking their oath. Just as Cyrus successfully killed or captured a third of the Massagetae army through his guile, so Amasis subjugated Barce.

In contrast, Pherentime's contribution to the siege is not characterized by the feminine attribute of trickery, but by the masculine attribute of severity. Pherentime's violence against the people of Barce in the name of vengeance is overwhelming: Pherentime took the most guilty of the Barcaeans... and set them impaled round the top of the wall; she cut off the breasts of their women and planted them round the wall in like manner. As for the remnant of the Barcaeans, she bade the Persians take them as their booty, save as many as were of the house of Battus [her

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<sup>50</sup> Hdt.1.212.

<sup>51</sup> Hdt.1.207-208, 211.

<sup>52</sup> Hdt.1.212.

<sup>53</sup> Hdt.4.201.

husband] and not accessory to the murder; to these she committed the governance of the city.<sup>54</sup>

In 1.205, Herodotus condemns Pherentime saying that she died the foul death of worm infestation because the gods were paying her back on account of her “exceedingly severe vengeance” (λίην ἰσχυραὶ τιμωρίαι). Pherentime’s vengeance is so severe that it resembles, if not surpasses, that of her son. Upon returning from Samos with an army, Arcesilaus attacks the anti-tyranny party in Cyrene, the party who had exiled him and his mother.<sup>55</sup> Herodotus says that some of his enemies fled, some were sent to Cyrene to be slain, and some took refuge in a private tower.<sup>56</sup> Arcesilaus “heated these earthen vessels in an oven” by barricading and lighting the tower on fire, burning alive all his enemies who were inside. This sounds gruesome, but this fierce punishment had a longer history and perhaps was more expected than the corporal mutilation and exhibition of mutilated body parts which Pherentime exacted upon Arcesilaus’ assassins.<sup>57</sup> Corcella notes that Pherentime’s action against these assassins would certainly have been viewed as repulsively barbarous by the Greeks.<sup>58</sup> Like Queen Tomyris, Pherentime not only defeats the murderers of her son, but she also desecrates their corpses and their memory with war-like violence.

Concluding book four, Herodotus describes how justice is done to both Amasis and Pherentime for their unnatural behavior, for the former’s adoption of feminine guile

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<sup>54</sup> Hdt.4.202 (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>55</sup> Hdt.4.164.

<sup>56</sup> Hdt.4.164.

<sup>57</sup> Corcella 2007: 692, 720; Hdt. 4.202.

<sup>58</sup> Corcella 2007: 720.

and the latter's adoption of masculine martial violence. Amasis and his forces are harassed and slain by Libyan tribes during the whole of their return journey to Egypt.<sup>59</sup> Just as Pherentime mutilated the bodies of her enemies, so do the gods mutilate and infect her body with breeding and festering worms. Herodotus concludes that Pherentime's foul death was the divine consequence of her "over-violence."<sup>60</sup> Both Tomyris and Pherentime resorted to severe (ἰσχυρός) violence in avenging and defending their sons against a foreign people, but, in so doing, they usurped the male role of warrior and transgressed the natural boundaries between men and women as defined by the Greek *oikos*.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Artemisia of Halicarnassus*

In books seven and eight of his *Histories*, Herodotus introduces another barbarian warrior-woman who is both amazing and grotesque because of her inability to be categorized. Artemisia is neither fully Greek, nor fully barbarian; she is neither fully woman nor fully man. Rather than abiding by the rules the Greeks considered to be set by nature, Artemisia straddles the boundaries of two crucial identity categories: nationality and gender. Herodotus describes Artemisia upon her entrance into his narrative:

She was daughter to Lygdamis, on her father's side of Halicarnassian lineage, and a Creatan on her mother's. She was the leader of the men of Halicarnassus and Cos and Nisyrus and Calydnos, furnishing five ships. Her ships were reputed the best in the whole fleet after the ships of Sidon; and of all his allies she gave the king the best counsels. The cities, whereof I said she was the leader, are all of

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<sup>59</sup> Hdt.1.203.

<sup>60</sup> Hdt. 4.205.

<sup>61</sup> ἰσχυροτάτην: Hdt.1.214; ἰσχυραὶ: Hdt.4.205.

Dorian stock, as I can show, the Halicarnassians being of Troezen, and the rest of Epidaurus. Here ends what I have said of the fleet.<sup>62</sup>

Emphasizing that Artemisia is from Halicarnassus and is commanding Dorian Greek sailors, Rosaria Munson argues that Artemisia is less of an embodiment of the barbarian ‘other’ as much as she is a reflection of mercenary Greek heroes like Themistocles.<sup>63</sup> However, Artemisia is, in fact, fighting for the Persians, even providing the Persians with the best ships in the whole fleet. Artemisia is not just tangentially connected to the Persian operation, but she is one of Xerxes’ most influential advisers (as stated above).<sup>64</sup> After consulting with his other advisers, Xerxes dismisses them all and asks for Artemisia’s advice privately, which he does follow.<sup>65</sup> Xerxes even trusts Artemisia with escorting his children back to Asia.<sup>66</sup> As Munson observed, Artemisia’s nationality and allegiances are confused. She is a Greek leading other Greeks in assisting the Persians to conquer the mainland Greeks.

This ambiguity and confusion is intensified in the ship-wrecking scene.<sup>67</sup> At the Battle of Salamis, Artemisia rams an ally Persian ship in order to elude an Athenian ship that was chasing her.<sup>68</sup> Fooled into thinking that she was fighting for the Greeks, the pursuing Athenian ship sails away to a more threatening target. She not only fools the Athenian ship into believing that is fighting for the Greek cause, but she simultaneously

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<sup>62</sup> Hdt. 7.99. (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>63</sup> Munson 1988: 91-92, 95; more discussion: Dewald 1992: 109-110.

<sup>64</sup> Hdt. 7.99; 8.87-88, 101-103.

<sup>65</sup> Hdt. 8.101-103.

<sup>66</sup> Hdt. 8.104-107.

<sup>67</sup> Hdt. 8.68-69.

<sup>68</sup> Hdt. 8.87-88.

fools Xerxes. He believes that the ship she obliterated was an Athenian ship not another Persian one, and so she rises even more in his esteem.<sup>69</sup> As in book seven, Artemisia again emerges as an indefinable and ambiguous character: a person who is neither fully Greek nor barbarian.

Just as Artemisia is neither fully Greek nor fully barbarian, she is neither fully male nor fully female when considered in light of the standards of Greek society. When Herodotus first mentions her, he tells us that she is a mother of a very young son.<sup>70</sup> When she exits Herodotus' narrative, Artemisia again appears in a motherly role as she is entrusted with Xerxes' young sons.<sup>71</sup> However, the majority of her time—the many scenes between her entrance and exit—are not spent nurturing, but fighting, counseling, commanding, and excelling in the male realm of war. Herodotus writes that although Artemisia had a son and her whole kingdom relying on her, she “followed the host under no stress of necessity but of mere high-hearted (*ἀναγκαίης*) valor.”<sup>72</sup> Not only does Herodotus tell us that Artemisia has the best ships and counsels, but he shows her in action. In 8.68-69, Xerxes calls a council and he sends one of his generals, Mardonius, to question the captains about their opinions of a sea battle at Salamis. When all the other captains fear to tell the truth and stoop to obsequious agreement with Xerxes, Artemisia does not.<sup>73</sup> She expresses her mind, despite being the only representative of her view, far from the majority opinion. She says: “Tell the king, I pray you, Mardoinius, that I who

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<sup>69</sup> Hdt. 8.87-88.

<sup>70</sup> Hdt. 7.99.

<sup>71</sup> Hdt. 8.104.

<sup>72</sup> Hdt. 7.99.(trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>73</sup> Hdt. 8.68-69.

say this have not been the hindmost in courage or in feats of arms in the fights near Euboea. Nay, master, but it is right that I should declare my opinion...”<sup>74</sup> Although her view is contrary to the optimistic feeling of the majority of the Persian force, Artemisia’s boldness wins the favor of Xerxes, and he appreciates her even more than before as a “woman of worth.”<sup>75</sup> Artemisia is both wise in council and brutal in battle. There were no survivors from the Calyndian ship Artemisia rammed.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, Artemisia emerges as a type of Penthesilea (except a Penthesilea who never met an Achilles). Just as Penthesilea and her Amazons fought for the eastern King Priam, so Artemisia fights for the Persian emperor, Xerxes, playing an important role in strategy counseling and the battle itself. Contrary to the structure of the Greek *oikos*, Artemisia serves partially in both the roles of mother and warrior.

As he did with Nitocris, Tomyris, and Pherecyte, Herodotus portrays Artemisia as outshining and surpassing her male peers in the masculine realm of war. Herodotus describes Artemisia as extraordinary through the formulaic language of exception, saying twice, once in book seven and once in book eight, that he will neither name nor recount the deeds of any Persian captain, except Artemisia.<sup>77</sup> In comparison with the other ships’ captains, Artemisia’s performance in the Battle of Salamis was so impressively fierce that Xerxes exclaimed, “My men have become women, and my women have become men.”<sup>78</sup> Artemisia not only surpasses her male counterparts in battle, but also in her bold counsel.

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<sup>74</sup> Hdt. 8.68. (trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>75</sup> Hdt. 8.69.(trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>76</sup> Hdt. 8.88.

<sup>77</sup> Munson 1988: 91.; Hdt. 7.99; 8.87.

<sup>78</sup> Hdt.8.88. (trans. A.D. Godley).

Munson emphasizes that Herodotus portrays the other advisers as slaves (men coerced into their involvement at Salamis). These men are especially servile in the way that they will not freely speak their minds at the council.<sup>79</sup> Later, Artemisia herself refers to Mardonius as just Xerxes' servant (δοῦλος).<sup>80</sup> She says that if the Greeks overpower Mardonius, then the Persian loss of prestige is negligible because Mardonius is only a servant of Xerxes. However, if Mardonius vanquishes the Greeks, then Xerxes, not Mardonius will get the glory because Mardonius is only a servant. Munson says that, in contrast, Herodotus portrays Artemisia as a commander fighting by her own volition.<sup>81</sup> Also, Artemisia's triumphs result in her receiving glory, not Xerxes. Artemisia's freedom makes her manlier than the servile commanders.

Finally, the last man who Artemisia is juxtaposed with is the eunuch, Hermotimus. In book 8 (104-107), Artemisia is tasked to work with Hermotimus in escorting Xerxes' children to Ephesus. Previously, Artemisia was fighting alongside barbarian troops whom both she and Xerxes had likened to women.<sup>82</sup> In her last appearance, Artemisia is associated with a man who is even more explicitly woman-like than the poorly performing barbarian sailors. Herodotus' association of manly Artemisia with the womanly Hermotimus illustrates Xerxes' comment that his "men have become women, and his women have become men" in an even more vivid and grotesque way.

Like the female barbarian warrior mentioned formerly, Artemisia's surpassing of her male counterparts in virility exemplifies the upside-down and grotesque eastern world

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<sup>79</sup> Hdt. 8.67-68; Munson 1998: 95.

<sup>80</sup> Hdt. 8. 102.

<sup>81</sup> Munson 1998: 94.

<sup>82</sup> Hdt. 8.69, 88.



as the Greeks saw it. In the East, a “woman of worth” is not a loyal and longsuffering mother and wife like Penelope, but a woman-warrior like Artemisia.<sup>83</sup> In the East, a trustworthy man is not a general like Mardonius, but a eunuch like Hermotimus.<sup>84</sup> Xerxes sends his general, Mardonius, on his mission as a servant (δοῦλος), while he sends the eunuch, Hermotimus, with his children as a (φύλακος).<sup>85</sup> Through Artemisia, Herodotus portrays an Asia is opposite from Greece, a place where natural boundaries as established by the *oikos* are non-existent.

### *The Sauromatae*

Herodotus introduces the Sauromatae as one of the allies of the Scythians against Emperor Darius’ invading Persian forces.<sup>86</sup> In his detailed catalogue of the Scythian allies, Herodotus recounts the heritage of the Sauromatae, claiming that they were descendants from a group of Amazons stranded in Scythia who eventually married the native Scythians.<sup>87</sup> These stranded Amazons had been captured, but they slew their captors while at sea and, not knowing how to steer the ship, were shipwrecked in Scythia. They soon began practicing their familiar method of survival—hunting and raiding, which brought them into conflict with the Scythians. However, realizing that these

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<sup>83</sup> Hdt. 8.69.(trans. A.D. Godley).

<sup>84</sup> Hdt. 8.105: “the foreigners value eunuchs more than perfect men, by reason of the full trust that they have in them.”

<sup>85</sup> Hdt. 8. 102, 104.

<sup>86</sup> Hdt.4.102.

<sup>87</sup> Hdt.4.110.

invaders were women, the Scythians decided to woo them as an alternative to fighting them.<sup>88</sup> The Scythians sent out their youngest men to live near the Amazons and to win their trust by imitating their way of life.<sup>89</sup> In light of the Greek *oikos*, this story already seems strange because the women are fighting and slaying enemies, while the corresponding men of the story are being passive, protecting themselves through coaxing rather than coercion.

Eventually, the Amazons accept the young Scythians' company.<sup>90</sup> Although each Scythian unofficially marries an Amazon and the Amazons learn to speak the Scythian language, the Amazons refuse to follow their new partners back to their parents' houses, and to be assimilated into the Scythian culture.<sup>91</sup> Rather, the Amazons insist that the Scythians take their inheritance and follow *them* to a new territory across the Tanais River.<sup>92</sup> Rather than these Scythian youths taming the Amazons and assimilating them into their traditional Scythian culture, as Theseus assimilated the Amazon queen into his Greek culture, the Scythian youths are absorbed into Amazon culture.<sup>93</sup> The Amazons refuse to follow the men back to their village. They demand instead to be followed across the Tanais River.<sup>94</sup> Tyrrell notes that this is the exact opposite of Greek custom, in which the wife packs her belongings and permanently leaves her family in order to be forever

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<sup>88</sup> Hdt.4.111.

<sup>89</sup> Hdt.4.111-112.

<sup>90</sup> Hdt.4.113.

<sup>91</sup> Hdt.4.414; Brown and Tyrrell 1985: 299-300.

<sup>92</sup> Hdt.4.415.

<sup>93</sup> Brown and Tyrrell 1985: 300.

<sup>94</sup> Brown and Tyrrell 1985: 299.

assimilated into the family of her husband.<sup>95</sup> Fulfilling the role of the Greek wife rather than the husband, these Scythian men submit to the will of their new partners. This alienates them from their previous families and leads them into a whole new culture, location, and heritage.<sup>96</sup> In this scene, these Amazon women appear in the masculine role in marriage, while the young Scythian men appear in the feminine role of marriage.

The inversion of the Greek *oikos* within Sauromatae culture continued on into era of the Persian Empire. Herodotus says that in order for a Sauromataean girl to earn her marital rites, she must first excel in her martial responsibilities. In other words, before she can marry, she must have killed an enemy warrior.<sup>97</sup> He says that some girls die unmarried because they failed to accomplish this task. In order for a Sauromataean woman to participate in the continuation of life through marriage and childbirth, she must first succeed in defending her people through warfare. In contrast to the expectations of Greek women within the *oikos* who are expected to foster the life of the household, the Sauromatae girl must take life before she can give it. Once again, Herodotus suggests that the East is a chaotic land with confusing and ambiguous boundaries (if there are any boundaries at all), a land where "women become men and men become women." The customs and cultural heritage of the Sauromatae women also suggest that Sauromataean women surpass their male counterparts in violence and virility. As mentioned formerly, Sauromataean women are required to kill an enemy before marriage.<sup>98</sup> To some extent, this is not terribly different from the Greek association of

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<sup>95</sup> Brown and Tyrell 1985: 299-300.

<sup>96</sup> Brown and Tyrell 1985: 300-301.

<sup>97</sup> Hdt.4.116-117.

<sup>98</sup> Hdt. 4.117.

death and marriage. In Greek thought, marriage is compared to death, and death to marriage, but it is normally the bride who does the dying.<sup>99</sup> The bride is the one who leaves behind her family and enters into a completely new form of existence. On the other hand, the Sauromataean custom turns this Greek association on its head because the bride is not doing the dying, but the killing. Rather than the Greek idea of the bride dying (in the sense that she is leaving her old life for a new life) before she is married, the Sauromataeans believe that the bride must kill before she is married. It is as if she must take life, before she can give it. This marriage custom of the Sauromatae reveals that violence is an integral part of their culture, and especially fundamental in the identity of Sauromataean women.

Perhaps this Sauromataean custom, which Herodotus portrays as relatively contemporary to himself, was founded in their Amazon heritage. The stranded Amazons who essentially eloped with the Scythian youths refused to die to their past and instead insisted that their partners die to theirs. In this story, the Scythian youths leave their homes for the eastern wilderness, taking their inheritance as a Greek bride might a dowry, never to return home.<sup>100</sup> Herodotus writes:

To this too the youths consented; and crossing the Tanais they went a three days' journey from the river eastwards . . . Ever since then the women of the Sauromatae have followed their ancient usage; they ride a-hunting with their men or without them; they go to war, and wear the same dress as the men.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Think of Nausikaa riding in the “funerary cart” to go meet Odysseus. Also the myth of Persephone.

<sup>100</sup> Brown and Tyrrell 1985: 300.

<sup>101</sup> Hdt.4.116 (trans. A.D. Godley).

Depicting the Scythian youths as similar to Greek brides, Herodotus reveals the manliness of the Amazons, the ancestors of the Sauromatae. Consistent with the Greek premise that heritage informs and determines the present, Herodotus shows through this Amazon story the virility of Sauromataean women, who now kill before they are wed and hunt with or without the men.

Queen Nitocris, Queen Tomyris, Pherecyas of Cyrene, Queen Artemisia, and the Sauromatae are all exempla of the female barbarian warrior type. Whether these women are fighting against Persia or for Persia in the *Histories*, their identities are inextricable from the Persian Empire. They are remembered because of their interaction with it. All of these women surpassed their male associates in manliness: whether it be in their wisdom, discernment, martial skill, or violence. Regardless, the motif of the female barbarian warrior in Herodotus' *Histories* exemplifies the lack of order and natural boundaries in the East. This chaotic inversion emphasizes the foreignness and otherness of the eastern Barbarian.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Hartog 1988: 213.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Female Barbarian Warrior Motif in Hellenistic Sources: Alexander and Thallestris

After the Persian Wars, the fifth-century Greeks used the Amazon motif to display the grotesqueness and danger of the barbarian world, including the barbarian lifestyle which diverged from Greek customs. In reference to the eastern expansion of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), the Amazon motif emerges in the sources as a Janus-faced image that contains both a positive and negative angle. On the one hand, Plutarch's, Arrian's, and Diodorus' inclusion of the stories about the interaction between Alexander and the Amazon queen situates Alexander the Great positively in the heroic tradition, illustrating his *arête*. On the other hand, the difference between Alexander's interaction with Thallestris and the usual behavior of heroes towards Amazon queens—namely that he neither rapes nor kills her—raise the question of whether or not Alexander is a failed hero. In addition, some ancient historians—like Pompeius Trogus and Quintus Curtius Rufus—use the Amazon motif as a negative illustration of how Alexander was corrupted by too much intimacy with the East. In the former sources, the Amazon motif casts Alexander in the light of Achilles; in the latter, the Amazon motif casts Alexander in the shadow of Agamemnon.

In his book *Faces of Power*, Andrew Stewart explores the many self-images that Alexander had to project in order to maintain the allegiance and cooperation of all the portions of his vast empire.<sup>1</sup> Stewart divides Alexander's different portraits into four categories: 1) the Macedonian portrait; 2) the mainland Greek portrait; 3) the eastern

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart 1993: 85-86.

Greek perception; and 4) that of the Egyptians, Persians, and Indians. Alexander's self-representation towards the Macedonians focused on establishing his close affinity with the Homeric heroes.<sup>2</sup> In order to cultivate this image, Alexander hired Callisthenes and Cleitarchus as court historians.<sup>3</sup> Tasked with kindling enthusiasm among the troops, Callisthenes wrote panegyric works that "represented the king as the true successor of Homer's heroes" and supported the king's claim to be the son of Zeus.<sup>4</sup> Cleitarchus would later emerge as the most popular source for the life of Alexander among ancient historians and he too portrayed Alexander as "reliving the exploits of the heroes."<sup>5</sup>

What specifically made Alexander so appealing to the Macedonians was his excellence, his *arête* in what his nobles and Companions all did best: fighting, hunting, and drinking.<sup>6</sup> However, this "drinking" was not complete revelry, for Alexander also seems to have been best in self-mastery. Stewart notes that Alexander's self-mastery was indirectly linked to his mastery over others. By publicly maintaining a strict self-discipline over his own body, Alexander appeared to be ranked above ordinary mortals for even the most natural human needs seemed to hold no sway over him. This superior self-control "reinforced his *arête* and thus strengthened his hold over his companions."<sup>7</sup> Although Alexander was ambitious, he also had *sophrosunē*. He knew when to stop

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<sup>2</sup> Stewart 1993: 87-88.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart 1993: 10-12.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart 1993:10.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart 1993: 12. Cleitarchus is also believed to be one of the main primary sources for ancient historians on Alexander's and Thalestris' rendezvous: Bosworth 1995: 103.

<sup>6</sup> Stewart 1993: 87; italics are mine.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart 1993: 87.

before becoming hubristic, unlike Aeschylus' Persians.<sup>8</sup> According to Stewart, the quality that made Alexander so charismatic among the Macedonians, who were steeped in the culture of the *Iliad*, was his ostensible Homeric thirst for excellence and glory, his *arête* and *doxa*. He did not wish to inherit a kingdom that offered him luxury and ease, but he desired to conquer for himself a kingdom abounding in opportunities for his unrelenting ambition.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander's image as "the true successor to the Homeric heroes" was expressed in sculpture, coins, and iconography of all sorts. In sculpture, Alexander's "bloom of youth" and leonine hair was emphasized.<sup>10</sup> Stewart says that these strikingly unique qualities likened him to Achilles, the young hero of the *Iliad*, who, despite his youth, was the most ferocious in his pursuit of *arête* and *doxa*. He had gained the throne of Macedon when only twenty, set out to conquer Persia when only twenty-two, and succeeded in that endeavor when only twenty-five. His youth made the standard image of the paternal bearded king inappropriate. Rather, Alexander chose to cast himself as the eternally youthful and invincible hero, a new Achilles.<sup>11</sup> Expressing this kinship through his actions, Alexander blatantly linked himself with Achilles by adopting "Achilles" as his nickname and by making a serious and long pilgrimage to Achilles' tomb at Troy.<sup>12</sup> Emulating Achilles, Alexander sacrificed to Thetis before the Battle of Issos, ordered his enemy Batis dragged behind a chariot as Achilles had done to Hector, and he battled the

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<sup>8</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 4; Hamilton 1999: 12.

<sup>9</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart 1993: 75-77.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart 1993: 75.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart 1993: 80; Plut. *Alex.* 5,15.



river Akesines just as Achilles had attacked the river of Scamander.<sup>13</sup> Stewart states that Alexander's "emulation of Achilles had become a *topos*, offering a prepackaged guide to his motivations and goals."<sup>14</sup> By expressing this Achilles-like *mhnis* on behalf of his *arete* and *kleos*, Alexander legitimized his power in the Macedonian perspective.

In an attempt to appeal to the values of the mainland Greeks, Alexander also associated himself with Heracles, claiming descent from him as well. Stewart describes the coins that Alexander minted in Greece, saying that Heracles and his weapons were on the bronze coins, while Zeus Olympus was depicted on the silver.<sup>15</sup> This iconography declared Alexander's kinship with Heracles, and indirectly his kinship with Zeus. Although Heracles was mortal, he was extraordinary, and Alexander, at the very least, was claiming the same for himself.<sup>16</sup> Through these icons on his coins Alexander legitimized his rule of the Greeks by appealing to their traditional heroes.

Alexander might have also indirectly associated himself with the Greek heroes who had triumphed over the barbarian hordes in the past, specifically Theseus. Stewart describes Alexander's gold coin as depicting a helmeted head of Athena and a winged Nike with the inscription "of Alexander." Stewart suggests that this design was meant to cast Alexander's conquest of Asia as a war of revenge against Persia. These icons expressed the legitimacy of his power over mainland Greece as *hegemon*, leader of the

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<sup>13</sup> Stewart 1993: 81.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart 1993: 81.

<sup>15</sup> Stewart 1993: 93, figures 29-31; Arr. *Anab.* 4.15. 5-6; 5.24.8; 4.7.5; 7.1-4; 19.6.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander's association of himself with Heracles raises the question of whether Alexander saw himself as divine since Heracles himself was eventually allowed to join the gods on Olympus.

free Greeks and conqueror of the barbarians.<sup>17</sup> By associating himself with the Parthenon and with Greek vengeance against and triumph over the eastern barbarians, Alexander seems to portray himself to the Greeks as a sort of Theseus figure in order to legitimize his power.<sup>18</sup>

This association of Alexander with Theseus is also hinted at in the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii, which is accepted as a copy of a fourth-century painting depicting the Battle of Issos.<sup>19</sup> In this mosaic, Darius and the Persians greatly resemble the Amazons as they were portrayed in Greek art, wearing turbans and elaborately patterned, bejeweled clothing.<sup>20</sup> The resemblance of Darius and his forces to past depictions of Amazons is made more explicit in the earliest images of Alexander's campaigns (made around 330 BC), the Apulian vases.<sup>21</sup> In these vases, the Persian forces are not only made to look like Amazons in their apparel, but also in their womanly physique. Through continuing the Greek tradition of effeminizing the Persians in art, the barrier between Persian men and Amazons became very thin. The more the defeated and retreating Persians looked like Amazons, the more the triumphant Alexander looked like Theseus, the hero who annihilated the Amazons invading Athens.<sup>22</sup>

Just as the previously mentioned images were used to link Alexander with past Greek heroes, so the Amazon motif in the historical accounts of Alexander shows how he

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<sup>17</sup> Stewart 1993: 93.

<sup>18</sup> See also Plut. *Cim.* 8-10; Cimon gained legitimacy by portraying himself in the same way, as a Theseus-type Greek victor against the offending barbarians.

<sup>19</sup> Pomeroy and Burstein 2008: plate XI; Comparison: Bothmer 1957: Plates LXXX.1- LXXXI.6.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart 1993: 144.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart 1993: 153.

<sup>22</sup> Plut. *Thes.* 26-28.

is a successor to the feats of the heroes. Alexander's meeting with Thallestris, the Queen of the Amazons is recorded in Plutarch's *Alexander* (46-47), Arrian (7.13), Diodorus Siculus (17.77.1-3), Pompeius Trogus (12.3.5-8), and Quintus Curtius (6.5.24-32). Elizabeth Baynham suggests that this episode, though disclaimed by some of the sources as improbable, was still included as a form of *mythopoiesis*.<sup>23</sup> Alexander's encounter with Amazons situated him squarely in the tradition of heroes, because his heroic predecessors had met an Amazon at some point in their myths. Achilles had fallen in love with Penthesilea after killing her, Heracles had killed Hippolyte to claim her girdle, and Theseus had kidnapped and raped an Amazon. (In some versions, Theseus had married Antiope, the kidnapped Amazon).<sup>24</sup> If Alexander was to be shown as the successor of these great heroes, then he too must have interaction with Amazons.

#### *Alexander and Thallestris in Plutarch's Alexander*

Plutarch's inclusion of Alexander's rendezvous with the Amazon queen acts as a *topos* that associates this great conqueror with the heroes of old. In these cases, the Amazon motif serves as a small part of a grander scheme and image. This aspect of the Hellenistic Amazon motif can be seen in a comparison of Plutarch's account of the Amazon queen incident with that of his *Theseus* biography.<sup>25</sup> In Plutarch's account, Alexander resembles Theseus in that his sexual conquest of the Amazon queen serves as an allegory for his imperial action in the East. However, the imperial actions of the two

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<sup>23</sup> Baynham 2001: 122.

<sup>24</sup> Baynham 2001: 116; Gantz 1993: 313-314, 224-25, 397-400, 284-85; Dowden 1997: 97-102.

<sup>25</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 46; Plut. *Thes.* 26-28.

heroes differ in that Alexander does not simply cause havoc in the East, and then leave like Theseus did in his rape and kidnapping of Antiope.

In at least three of his lives—*Romulus*, *Theseus*, and *Cimon*—Plutarch (45-120AD) establishes a correlation between sex and imperial conquest.<sup>26</sup> Plutarch paired his life of Theseus with the life of Romulus. This was appropriate because both figures were the mythical founders of great empires; however, both figures also utilize rape in the expansion of their empire. The rape of the Sabine women is portrayed as necessary for the survival of Rome in Plutarch's *Romulus*.<sup>27</sup> In *Theseus*, Plutarch provides several traditions of Theseus' kidnapping and rape of the Amazon queen and a catalogue of all Theseus' marriages, "neither honorable in their beginnings nor fortunate in their endings."<sup>28</sup> In Plutarch's *Cimon*, Cimon exalts the Theseus' myth and the Amazonomachy in order to create a paradigm that would legitimize his spreading of Athenian imperialism.<sup>29</sup> Yet this Theseus who is glorious for his martial and political prowess is also infamous for his widespread rape of women, and that mischief is what caused the Amazon invasion of Athens in the first place. In this sense, it would appear that sexual conquest and imperial conquest go hand in hand. The two are so close that the former can even be an allegory for the latter.

Baynham notes that previous meetings between Greek heroes and Amazons often did not turn out well for the Amazons. Dowden makes a similar observation when he says that "Amazons do a lot of dying." It is a key element of the mythical construct of

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<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Rom.* 3,14.

<sup>27</sup> Plut. *Rom.* 14.

<sup>28</sup> Plut. *Rom.* 14-15; Plut. *Thes.* 29. (trans. Bernadotte Perrin.

<sup>29</sup> Plut. *Cim.* 8-12, 16; Stewart 1995: 582.

Amazons in general, and especially of named Amazons, that they should perish.<sup>30</sup> He goes on to say that Amazons must either die literally, like Penthesilea or Hippolyte, or die by ceasing to live like Amazons, like Antiope, in order to glorify their corresponding Greek hero.<sup>31</sup> This idea is also reflected in the Greek verb for marriage, δαμάζω, which can mean 1) to overpower; 2) to tame, break in, bring under the yoke (of animals); 3) to make subject to a husband, to be seduced (of maidens); 4) to strike dead.<sup>32</sup> The various uses of this word suggest the connotations of violence, conquest, and force that are associated with the seduction or marriage of maidens. The dead Amazon and the married Amazon both display the invincibility and power of the hero credited with taming her.

In *Theseus*, Plutarch states that Theseus sailed to the Amazons' coast with his own fleet, rather than with Heracles. Plutarch gives this description of the kidnapping:

Bion says that even this Amazon he took and carried off by means of a stratagem. The Amazons, he says, were naturally friendly to men, and did not fly from Theseus when he touched upon their coasts, but actually sent him presents, and he invited the one who brought them to come on board his ship; she came on board, and he put out to sea.<sup>33</sup>

The Amazons eventually invaded Athens to retrieve their queen.<sup>34</sup> By then, it was too late. She was already in part dead to her past Amazonian way of life. She had borne Hippolytus to Theseus, some traditions say that she even married Theseus, and she died fighting on his side rather than that of her people. Regardless of whether Theseus rapes or marries Antiope, both interactions are a form of sexual conquest. Either way, Antiope had

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<sup>30</sup> Dowden 1997: 117.

<sup>31</sup> Dowden 1997: 123-124.

<sup>32</sup> Definitions: Liddell and Scott 1940: δαμάζω.

<sup>33</sup> Plut. *Thes.* 26 (trans. Bernadotte Perrin).

<sup>34</sup> Plut., *Thes.* 26-28.

relinquished her barbarian, Amazonian ways and had been (whether forcibly or voluntarily) assimilated into Athenian society, into the Athenian empire.

As he did in his *Theseus*, Plutarch includes in his *Alexander* biography the Macedonian leader's sexual encounter with the Amazon queen as a motif to demonstrate Alexander's domination of the East. This sexual encounter as a motif demonstrates how Alexander is a successor to the Greek heroes, but it also suggests that he might even surpass the feats of the heroes in his modifications of the motif.

Plutarch aligns Alexander with the heroes by describing the supernatural portents that affirmed Alexander's eastern expedition.<sup>35</sup> First, Alexander visits the Pythia to seek the god's will about his campaign.<sup>36</sup> However, he arrives on an unfavorable day for omens so the Pythia refuses to prophesy. Alexander takes her arm and pulls her to the temple, apparently intending to force her to prophesy.<sup>37</sup> Unable to escape his grasp, the Pythia cries out that he is ἀνίκητος, unconquerable. Alexander replies that she gave him exactly the words he wanted to hear. This story shows the centrality of invincibility to Alexander's image, which again associates him with the mythical heroes.

When Alexander came to take the coast, the kings of Cyprus and Phoenicia surrendered to him without any resistance. This was not the case with Tyre.<sup>38</sup> While besieging Tyre, Alexander has two supernatural dreams: one about Heracles, and one about a satyr. In the former, Heracles was standing on the wall of Tyre, and he extended his hand out to Alexander, welcoming him into the city. Plutarch states that some of the

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<sup>35</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Further discussion on Alexander's use of force: Hamilton 1999: 34-35. Although some argue that this was not an aggressive action as much as it was a chiding gesture, I have my doubts.

<sup>38</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 24.

Tyrians also had dreams in which Apollo appeared to them and reported Heracles' treachery. In response, these Tyrians bound Heracles' cult statue with ropes and nailed the base to the ground in order to punish the hero for his treason.<sup>39</sup> Despite the martial and spiritual resistance of the Tyrians against the fate of their city, Alexander overcame the city and conquered it. In this episode, Alexander is again associated with a great hero—even a demi-god—and depicted as having the hero's blessing. This legitimizes Alexander's rule by supporting it with divine sanction and a supernatural portent.

The second dream that Alexander has during the siege of Tyre was of a satyr. In the dream "a satyr seemed to tease him from a distance and then eluded him when he tried to catch him, but eventually surrendered after Alexander had run around after him, pleading with him over and over again to give up. His diviners split the word up and told him, plausibly, "*Tyre* will be *yours*."<sup>40</sup> The dream of the satyr is not only appropriate for the siege of Tyre because of the pun, *sa Tyros* or "your Tyre."<sup>41</sup> Being traditionally associated with Dionysius, maenads, lust, luxury, pleasure, and the East, the satyr is a perfect image with which to represent the wealthy eastern trade city of Tyre. Just as Alexander exercises *sophrosunē*, mastery over his own animalistic desires, so he will also exercise and exert control over the grotesque and untamed East.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hamilton 1999: 63: "J.G. Frazer (on Pausanias 3.15.7) cites many other examples (ancient and modern) of the fettering of images to prevent desertion." Frazer also points to the Roman practice of inviting the guardian gods of the city under their siege to join their side.

<sup>40</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 24 (trans. Robin Waterfield).

<sup>41</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 24 (trans Robin Waterfield); Stadter 1998: 453.

<sup>42</sup> *Sophrosune* in the East: Stewart 1995: 571-597.

In the mythical tradition, both satyrs and Amazons have been cohabiters of the same category of motifs which depict eastern barbarians as untamed, animalistic, lustful, and grotesque.<sup>43</sup> Alexander could be seen as heroic in that he tames the Amazon just as Theseus tamed Antiope. Although Plutarch seems doubtful that the Amazon story actually happened, citing all the sources who supported it and those who did not, he does say that the visit is recorded by most writers. He concludes his explicit mention of the Amazon queen by saying, “Anyway our admiration for Alexander will not be decreased if we disbelieve the story of the Amazon or increased if we believe it.”<sup>44</sup> It seems curious that Plutarch would even include the Amazon story if he was just going to dismiss it so quickly. However, the motif is relevant to a speech that Alexander gives in the following chapter, chapter forty-seven:

Alexander was worried about his troops refusing to continue with the campaign, so leaving the main body where it was, and taking only the best of them—20,00 foot-soldiers and 3,000 cavalymen—with him to Hyrcania, he won them over by telling them that at the moment the easterners could see them face to face, but that if all they did was cause havoc in Asia and then leave, the enemy would regard them as not better than women and not hesitate to attack them. . . . This is almost verbatim quote from a letter of his to Antipater, and he goes on to say that after he had finished speaking they all shouted out loud, calling on him to take them wherever he wanted in the world.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike his heroic predecessors, Alexander does not want to just “make havoc” in Asia and then leave. He does not want to just kill the Amazon queen for her girdle like Heracles, nor does he want to just kidnap, rape, and compel her to adopt Macedonian or Greek culture like Theseus did his Amazon queen. He does not want to repeat Theseus’

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<sup>43</sup> Lissarrague 2002: 120-121; Stewart 1995:580, 583-584; In art: Bothmer 1957: Plates VI, Plate XXII.2-3, XXIII. 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 46 (trans. Robin Waterfield).

<sup>45</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 47 (trans. by Robin Waterfield).



mistake and provoke another Amazonomachy like the one Theseus brought upon Athens. Rather, in Plutarch's account, Alexander makes a more permanent imperial subjugation of the East by making his own presence more ubiquitous and permanent through a fusion of cultures. Plutarch writes:

After this, then, he began to assimilate his way of life even more closely with that of the locals, and also tried to get them to adopt Macedonian customs. He was of the opinion that while he was away on a lengthy expedition political stability would follow from fusion and co-operation, achieved through goodwill, rather than from the use of force.<sup>46</sup>

In this passage, Plutarch positively portrays Alexander's modification of imperial conquest from force—rape and kidnapping—to a fusion of cultures—procreation. The difference between Alexander's treatment of the Amazon queen with Theseus' treatment of Antiope parallels the differences in their style of imperial conquest.

#### *Alexander and Thallestris in Arrian*

Like Plutarch, Arrian doubts the factual authenticity of the story about Alexander interacting with Amazons. However, he does allow that the tale conjures up memories of heroes of the past—Heracles, Theseus, and the Athenian warriors who triumphed in the Amazonomachy. His conclusion that these alleged Amazons were really just actresses adorned and trained by Atropates, satrap of Media, raises the question of what Atropates' motive was in making such a show. Arrian writes that after Alexander had seen the horses in the Plain of Nysa, Atropates presented him with a hundred women whom he claimed were Amazons. The women bore axes and small targets for shields and, according to some, they rode with one breast exposed. Arrian says that Alexander sent

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<sup>46</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 47 (trans. by Robin Waterfield).

them away from the army so they would not be harmed by the Macedonians or foreign troops; but he bade them announce to their queen that he was coming to see her in hope of offspring.<sup>47</sup> First, Arrian doubts very much that Alexander ever said such a thing, and that such women ever came to see him. Arrian believes that by Alexander's time the Amazons had become extinct since Xenophon never mentioned them in the records of his travels. Arrian does qualify his stance on the existence of Amazons by saying that he believes that they must have existed at some time since tradition taught that Heracles, Theseus, and the Athenians faced such female warriors. Nonetheless, he states that if Atropates presented Alexander with a feminine cavalry, they were probably some other foreign women taught to ride and attired in the traditional Amazon fashion.

As Arrian exemplifies, the appearance of such women draws the Greek imagination back to the mythical heroes. The appearance of Amazons before him casts Alexander in the role of Theseus, and situates him among the company of heroes. Perhaps Atropates intended to flatter Alexander with an exhibition that was loaded with such implications. Perhaps Atropates was giving Alexander the gift of an effective propaganda image. It is impossible to discern Atropates' motives for certain, if indeed he did present Alexander with such women, but the appearance of the Amazon motif in this scenario does associate Alexander with the heroes of the past.

However, Arrian's description of the Amazon incident not only groups Alexander with the heroes because he interacted with Amazons, but it also reveals something different about Alexander. Alexander neither raped nor had sexual relations with these women. On the contrary, he actually sends them away so they will not be touched or

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<sup>47</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.13.3; Alexander did not take Atropates' Amazons to be real warriors: Baynham 2001: 121.

“overpowered” by his army. Arrian also relates (although he doubts that it actually happened) that Alexander sent the women away promising to meet their queen and give her offspring. As in Plutarch’s account, Arrian’s use of the Amazon motif suggests cooperation with the East, rather than coercion.

*Alexander and Thallestris in Diodorus’ account*

The correlation between sexual conquest of the Amazon and imperial subjugation of the East is also present in Diodorus’ story about Thallestris and Alexander. However, like Plutarch and Arrian, Diodorus (ca. 60s-30sBC) portrays Alexander as not being forceful with Thallestris. Similar to Theseus, Alexander was approached by the Amazons when he came to their border.<sup>48</sup> However, Alexander did not have to use deceit to sweep Thallestris off her feet. She had actually come for the very purpose of procreating with him. According to Diodorus, she explained that Alexander was the greatest of all men, while she excelled all women in strength and courage—therefore it was reasonable to expect that the children of these two finest parents would have qualities surpassing those of everyone in the world. Thallestris is accompanied by a troop of Amazon soldiers, but they are not there to rescue her from Alexander and destroy the Macedonian forces like the Amazon invasion of Athens. The troop is there to support Thallestris in love-making, not war-making. This passage gives the impression that, unlike Theseus, Alexander used cooperation rather than coercion to further his empire and conquest.

Although Diodorus resembles Plutarch and Arrian in transforming the Amazon motif from one of coercion to one of cooperation, he does not cast such fusion in a completely positive light. In Diodorus’ portrayal, Alexander’s interaction with Thallestris

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<sup>48</sup> Diod. 17.77.1-3.

is slightly too cooperative and passive. Diodorus describes Alexander as “marveling” (θαυμάζοντος) at the queen’s arrival and the dignity of her women. After she tells him that she had come to get a child from him, Alexander is “delighted” (ἡσθεὶς). He then “acceded to her request, spent thirteen days having sexual relations with her, and then sent her home after honoring her with impressive gifts.” Alexander did not seek out Thalestris like the heroes sought out the Amazon queens of the past. Rather, he was actually surprised by her arrival. After already giving Thalestris thirteen days of his time, he still sent her home with impressive gifts. Alexander’s behavior in this episode is reactive, rather than proactive.

After the departure of the Amazons in Diodorus’ account, Alexander begins to adopt eastern customs.<sup>49</sup> In this account, Alexander begins to seem slightly more comparable to Herodotus’ Scythian youths, whose descendants with the stranded Amazons eventually became the Sauromatae, rather than the Homeric heroes.<sup>50</sup> These youths were such passive men that, when they tried to woo the Amazons, the Amazons “tamed” them instead, leading these Scythian youths off into Amazon homes and culture, rather than following their husbands back into the Scythian village. Similarly, after thirteen days with Thalestris, Alexander adopts eastern customs, such as the Persian diadem, Persian dress, the protocol of the Persian court, and the concubine system. Essentially, becoming comfortable in his prosperity and success, “he began to imitate the Persian luxury and the extravagant display of the kings of Asia.”<sup>51</sup> Diodorus does qualify

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<sup>49</sup> Diod. 17.77; Baynham 2001: 123.

<sup>50</sup> Hdt. 4.110-114, 414; Brown and Tyrrell 1985: 299-300.

<sup>51</sup> Diod. 17.77 (trans. Peter Green).

his long description of these new ostentatious procedures, saying that “Alexander, as a matter of fact, employed these customs rather sparingly and kept for the most part to his accustomed routine, not wishing to offend the Macedonians.”<sup>52</sup> Even so, Diodorus’ account, unlike the later and more optimistic accounts of Plutarch and Arrian, begins to use the Amazon motif as a symbol of the corruption of the East, a tradition which Pompeius Trogus (59 BC- AD 17) and Quintus Curtius Rufus (AD 41-79) would follow and further develop. As is reflected (though only slightly) in Diodorus’ account, the Amazon motif was not only used to cast Alexander in the light of Achilles, but also in the shadow of Agamemnon.

#### *Alexander and Thallestris in Pompeius Trogus*

Pompeius Trogus lived and wrote during the beginnings of the Roman Empire. Pompeius’ uncle had fought as a cavalry squadron-leader for Pompey the Great against Mithridates, and his father had served as a diplomat and correspondent for Julius Caesar. Consequently, Pompeius Trogus had probably grown-up familiar with the workings of empire and with the vicarious experience of sustaining an empire at its extremities.<sup>53</sup> The Pompei Trogi had been Roman for three generations by the time Pompeius was born so, as is evident by his father’s eminent position under Caesar, they had become quite “Romanized” despite their Celtic origin. Pompeius’ heritage helps explain the distinctly

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<sup>52</sup> Diod. 17.77.

<sup>53</sup> Yardley and Heckel 1997 : 2-3.

Roman interpretation and negative reading of the Amazon motif as a corrupting eastern influence on Alexander.<sup>54</sup>

In chapter three of book twelve, Thallestris is immediately placed in opposition to Macedonian heritage in that she is juxtaposed with Macedonian women.<sup>55</sup> Pompeius writes:

After this all his soldiers were expecting to return home, for they believed that the war was over, and they were already embracing in their imagination their wives and children. At this point Alexander summoned the army to an assembly. He told them that their illustrious battles meant nothing while the barbarians of the East remained secure, that it was not Darius' life but his kingdom that had been his objective... Inspiring anew the hearts of his men with this speech, he went on to subjugate Hyrcania and the Mardians. It was here that he encountered Thallestris, or Minythia, the queen of the Amazons. Accompanied by three hundred women, she had travelled thirty-five days through thickly-populated terrain in order to have a child by the king. Her appearance and the purpose of her coming aroused general surprise: she was strangely dressed for a woman and she came seeking sexual intercourse. The king paused for thirteen days for this purpose and Thallestris left when she thought she had conceived.<sup>56</sup>

The Macedonian soldiers are ready to return to their homes, their cultures, and their families, but Alexander persuades them to stay longer in the East. Because of this, the Macedonians proceed to conquer Hyrcania and the Mardians. Their traversal into this territory brings them into contact with some of the most exotic inhabitants of the East, the

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<sup>54</sup> Yardley and Heckel 1997 : 9: Pompeius Trogus' original unedited work has been lost. His work that survives was edited by the Roman, Marcus Junianus Justinus—Justin, who could have lived as early as 144AD to as late as c. AD 395. Justin edited the work out of his leisure, and he says of his work: "I excerpted from his forty-four published volumes all the most noteworthy material. I omitted what did not make pleasurable reading or serve to provide a moral, and I produced a brief anthology of sorts to refresh the memory of those who had studied history in Greek, and to provide instruction for those who had not". This statement of Justin's intentions does not make totally clear how much he might have changed—added or deleted—of Pompeius' work.

<sup>55</sup> Women in Ancient History as guardians of culture: Dewald, 1992: 97; 107-108; Modern women as guardians of culture: Tocqueville 2009 :140-152.

<sup>56</sup> Just. 12.3.2-7. (trans. J.C. Yardley).

Amazons. The Macedonian forces stray farther from home—farther from their own customs, cultures, and families. As a result, they encounter Thallestris and her troop of three hundred women, wearing apparel and behaving in an assertive manner that the men considered surprising for a woman. Despite his previous exhortations to push forward, Alexander pauses and spends thirteen days with Thallestris. After she leaves, Alexander himself begins to dress differently and act according to the culture of the East and contrary to his Macedonian heritage.<sup>57</sup> He “assumed the dress of the kings of Persia and a diadem, something former Macedonian kings had never worn—submitting as it were to the rules of those whom he had defeated.”<sup>58</sup> Pompeius proceeds to describe the many ways in which Alexander copied “the Persians in their excesses as well as their dress.”<sup>59</sup> 1) he divided his nights among the “troops of royal concubines,” 2) hosted extravagant feasts, 3) he “embellished his dinner-parties with games in keeping with royal splendor,” 4) and he began to terrorize his own men as if he were their enemy.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Pompeius also writes that Alexander encouraged his men to take wives among the native women, giving rise to a new type of Macedonian soldier.<sup>61</sup> “The Descendents” were Macedonian but they had never been to Macedon, although they were trained and reared from a young age to guard and fight in the Macedonian forts. Expressing the overall Macedonian disgust with Alexander’s adoption of Eastern customs, Pompeius writes:

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<sup>57</sup> Alexander’s adoption of Persian customs: Heckel 1997: 203-210.

<sup>58</sup> Just. 12.3.8 (trans. J.C. Yardley).

<sup>59</sup> Just. 12.3.10 (trans. J.C. Yardley).

<sup>60</sup> Just. 12.3.11; 12.5.1.

<sup>61</sup> Just. 12.4.2-11.

He had forgotten that great power is lost, not won, by such conduct. Meanwhile there was general resentment throughout the camp that Alexander had so far fallen away from his father Philip's example as to disown the glory of his fatherland and adopt the habits of the Persians—on whom those very habits had brought defeat at his hands!<sup>62</sup>

In this context, the appearance of Thallestris acts as a preface to the following description of Alexander's medism. Rather than returning to their homes and wives, the Macedonians plunge deeper into the East. Here, ushered in with the rendezvous of Alexander and Thallestris, the Macedonians gradually begin to exchange their traditional culture—dress, social practices, political expectations, and families—for a new eastern version. The Amazon queen acts as a personification of the corrupting and subduing influence of the East: just as Alexander began to act like a Persian after thirteen days with Thallestris, so the Macedonians will be radically transformed and “easternized” after years spent in Asia.

*Alexander and Thallestris in Quintus Curtius Rufus*

Quintus Curtius Rufus (ca. AD 41- AD 79), like the Athenian tragedians of the fifth century BC, portrays the Amazons as grotesque and emblematic of the unnatural East. Consistent with Pompeius, Quintus Curtius locates Alexander's meeting with Thallestris after the conquest of the Mardi tribe.<sup>63</sup> However, Quintus Curtius elaborates on the conquest of the Mardi describing the tribe's martial practices. He describes their territory as “greatly fatiguing for an army,” not only because of the “ranges of mountains,

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<sup>62</sup> Just. 12.3.12-12.4.1 (trans. J.C. Yardley).

<sup>63</sup> Curt. 6.5.11-32; Just.12.3.4.



lofty forests, and impassable rocks,” but also because of the “novel fortifications” of the Mardi.

Trees are purposely planted close together; while their branches are still tender, they bend them down with their hands, twist them together, and again insert them in the earth; then as if from another root, more vigorous trunks spring. They do not allow these to grow in the direction which Nature carries them, but they join them together as if interlacing them. When they are clad in abundant foliage, they hide the ground; and so the secret snares, so to speak, of the branches shut in the road by a continuous hedge.<sup>64</sup>

This tribe fights with guerilla warfare, capitalizing on their natural surroundings and trickery. Most frightening perhaps was their ability to twist nature in such a way as to serve their own means. In addition, Quintus also likens the Mardi to “wild beasts” because they were accustomed “to crawl under the thickets, assailing their enemy with weapons from their concealed position.”<sup>65</sup> Consistent with this theme, he also likens Alexander and his army to hunters who have to trace them to their lairs and slaughter them there. Like the fifth-century Greek tragedians, in this description of an eastern tribe, Quintus Curtius portrays the East as a place where the boundaries between human and animal, natural and unnatural are blurred. Quintus Curtius Rufus’ Asia resembles the topsy-turvy barbarian world imagined by the post-Persian War Athenians.

As in his description of the Mardi, Quintus Curtius also emphasizes the grotesque elements of Queen Thallestris. He writes:

The clothing of the Amazons does not wholly cover the body; for the left side is nude as far as the breast, then the other parts of the body are veiled. However, the fold of the robe, which they gather in a knot, does not reach below the knee. One nipple is left untouched, and with it they nourish their

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<sup>64</sup> Curt. 6.5.14-16 (trans. J.C. Rolfe).

<sup>65</sup> Curt. 6.5.17.

female children; the other is seared, in order that they may more easily stretch their bows and hurl their spears.<sup>66</sup>

Like the Mardi with the trees, the Amazons alter their bodies contrary to nature by searing one breast. He also implies that they rebel against the natural motherly instinct of the woman by only nourishing their female children, and by choosing to partake in death and war, rather than life and child-rearing.

Once again, consistent with the Athenian model of the Other, Quintus Curtius Rufus portrays these female barbarian warriors as crossing not only the boundaries of nature, but also the boundaries of virtuous self-restraint. Using fire imagery similar to that which the poet Virgil (70BC-19BC) used to describe the Phoenician Queen Dido, Quintus emphasizes Thallestris' sexual desire for Alexander. He writes that she was "fired with a desire to visit the king" (*Haec, cupidine visendi regis accensa*).<sup>67</sup> He also emphasizes Thallestris' desire over that of Alexander, first, saying that Thallestris' passion exceeded that of Alexander. Then that she "compelled" (*perpulit*) him to stay and that the thirteen days were spent "satisfying her desire," (*in obsequium desiderii eius absumpti sunt*) rather than his.<sup>68</sup> Like a satyr or a centaur, Quintus' Thallestris is overly passionate, governed by animalistic desires rather than human reason. While Thallestris is made to look animalistic, Alexander is placed in the passive feminine role.

Quintus' Thallestris is not only associated with a lack of sexual self-restraint, but also with a lack of self-control in every other excessive luxury. This is first foreshadowed by the fact that Thallestris, in this account at least, visits Alexander at Darius' old palace.

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<sup>66</sup> Curt. 6.5.27-28 (trans. J.C. Rolfe).

<sup>67</sup> Curt. 6.5.25.

<sup>68</sup> Curt. 6.5.32.

No sooner has Alexander moved into Darius' conquered palace than Thallestris arrives. After she leaves, Alexander has been transformed to resemble the luxurious Persian emperor more than ever before. Alexander, who once possessed *sophrosune*, adopts "haughtiness and wantonness" (*superbiam ac lasciviam*):

It was in fact at this time that Alexander gave loose reign to his passions, and changed continence and self-control, eminent virtues in every exalted fortune, to haughtiness and wantonness. Regarding his native customs and discipline of Macedonians kings, wholesomely restrained and democratic, as too low for his grandeur, he strove to rival the loftiness of the Persian court, equal to the power of the gods..."<sup>69</sup>

Quintus records that Alexander began to impose *proskunesis* on the Greeks; wear Darius' diadem; bear Darius' seal ring in addition to his own; force his generals to don Persian attire, acquire the same number of concubines as Darius; and acquire all the eunuchs that came with the concubinage system, who were also accustomed to prostitute themselves.<sup>70</sup> In response to all this cultural change, the Macedonian soldiers, those "novices at voluptuousness" who were veterans of Philip's army, then believed that "more had been lost by victory than had been gained by war."<sup>71</sup> They had been conquered. They were the ones who had surrendered their identity to "alien and foreign habits."

In the account of Quintus Curtius Rufus, the female barbarian warrior, or Amazon motif, is used to be emblematic of the grotesque, unrestrained, and corrupting influence of the East. Quintus uses Thallestris as a personification of the East—grotesque, wild, alluring, powerful, lustful, and corrupting. Just as Alexander's intimacy with Thallestris

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<sup>69</sup> Curt. 6.6.1-3 (trans. J.C. Rolfe).

<sup>70</sup> Curt. 6.6.1-8.

<sup>71</sup> Curt. 6.6.9-10.

led to Medism so his excessive familiarity with the customs of the dangerous East could lead to destruction.

In the sources for Alexander the Great, the usage of the Amazon motif, the motif of the female barbarian warrior, is as diverse as the reactions to the great Macedonian conqueror. Some more positive sources, like Plutarch and Arrian, use the motif of the female barbarian warrior to aid them in the *mythopoiesis* of portraying Alexander as successor of the heroes. Alexander not only is successor to the heroes because he too has an encounter with Amazons, he also conquers them in a more effective manner because he uses cooperation rather than coercion. While Plutarch applauds this mode of imperial conquest, Diodorus condemns it and uses the Amazon motif to highlight the weakness of Alexander. In his account, he is ordered around by an Amazon queen and this weakness ushers him into Medism. Following the tradition of Diodorus, Pompeius Trogus and Quintus Curtius use Alexander's encounter with Thallestris to emphasize his corruption—his exchange of “civilized” Macedonian customs for the barbaric traditions of Asia. In the Hellenistic sources, the Amazon motif emerges as a Janus-faced image that either presents Alexander as an Achilles, a conqueror of the East, or as an Agamemnon, a king conquered by the East.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Female Barbarian Warrior and the Roman Empire

In addition to Alexander's empire, Rome also inherited the tradition of the Amazon motif. Just as the female barbarian warrior emerged as a Janus-faced image—a motif with dually positive and negative connotations—in the Hellenistic sources, so too does it appear in the sources for the Roman Empire. On the one hand, the appearance of Amazons or Amazon types may serve to link a Roman hero to past heroes in the Greek tradition, just as the motif associated Alexander with Achilles, Theseus, and Heracles. On the other hand, it may demonstrate the corrupting influence of the Eastern world, just as it initiated Alexander's turn to Medism. In their accounts of Pompey the Great's eastern expedition against Mithridates VI, both Plutarch (c. AD 45- c. AD 120) and Appian (c. AD 95 – c. AD 165) use the Amazon motif positively to portray Pompey as a successor of Alexander. Although Plutarch uses the female barbarian warrior motif to suggest Pompey's ascent to glory in his *Pompey*, later, in his *Antony*, Plutarch utilizes the same motif to portray Antony's descent to ruin. Plutarch casts Antony as a great Roman general ruined by the corrupting influence of the East in the person of Cleopatra. Preceding Plutarch by about a century, Virgil also uses the female barbarian warrior motif in the characters of Dido and Cleopatra to comment on both the glory and downfall of Roman leaders.

### *Amazons in Plutarch's Pompey*

In the second chapter of his *Pompey*, Plutarch states that people often view Pompey as similar to Alexander the Great. Commenting on Pompey's physical appearance, Plutarch notes "the slight up-turn of his hair" and the nobility, dignity, freshness, charm and kingliness that characterized Pompey's face, making it resemble that of Alexander.<sup>1</sup> Just as Alexander bore the nick-name Achilles while growing-up, so, according to Plutarch, Pompey bore the nick-name of Alexander. Also like Alexander, Pompey is renowned for his self-restraint and military achievements even in his youth.<sup>2</sup> The most notable similarity, however, is that both leaders became mighty generals and conquerors of the untamed East.

Pompey deliberately develops this connection with Alexander as a conqueror of the East in his public image.<sup>3</sup> In 61 BC, Pompey was awarded a two-day triumph in which he paraded the Eastern kings and pirates he had subdued into Roman hegemony, evidencing Roman domination of land and sea. Although he himself never reached India, Pompey arranges for Ebony trees from India to be carried in the triumph, perhaps likening himself to Alexander the Great by alluding to Alexander's exploit to India.<sup>4</sup> He also wears a cloak in the triumph which he claimed had belonged to Alexander.<sup>5</sup> Taken together, all three of Pompey's triumphs demonstrate that he had conquered the world, or,

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<sup>1</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 2.

<sup>2</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 1-2; Plut. *Alex.* 4-5,9; Stewart 1993: 74-82.

<sup>3</sup> Waterfield 1999: 217; Östenberg 2009: 148-149, 284.

<sup>4</sup> Östenberg 2009: 284.

<sup>5</sup> Östenberg 2009: 284.; Plut. *Pomp.* 46.1; App. *Mith.* 117

as he said, that “he had found Asia on the edge of the Roman realm and had made it at the center.”<sup>6</sup> Highlighting Pompey’s succession to Alexander’s legacy as the conqueror of the East, both Plutarch and Appian mention Pompey’s interaction with Amazons near Hyrcania.

After his victory over the pirates, Pompey was given the command of the war against Mithridates VI.<sup>7</sup> Pompey sent his fleet to patrol the waters between Phoenicia and the Bosphorus, while he took 30,000 legionaries and 2,000 cavalry marching against Mithridates on foot.<sup>8</sup> Having chased his barbarian rival through various territories, Pompey finally confronted Mithridates at the Euphrates River.<sup>9</sup> In Plutarch’s account, Mithridates’ army was obliterated: 10,000 of his men were killed, and his cavalry, initially 800, was reduced to three survivors. One of these three survivors was Hypsicrateia, a concubine of Mithridates. However, this concubine was not a helpless girl, but a woman “who was always being manly and foolhardy” (ἀεὶ μὲν ἀνδρώδης τις οὔσα καὶ παράτολμος).<sup>10</sup> Such language being used in reference to a woman hearkens back to other “manly” women, such as Clytemnestra, whom characters in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* describe as having “manly-minded” hope (ἀνδρόβουλον), speaking like a wise man (ἄνδρα σώφρον’), and lusting for battle in an “unladylike” manner (οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἱμείρειν μάχης).<sup>11</sup> Just as Plutarch highlights the noble element of

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<sup>6</sup> Östenberg 2009: 284; Pliny. *Nat.* 7.26.99.

<sup>7</sup> Further discussion: McGing 1986.

<sup>8</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 32.

<sup>9</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 31-32.

<sup>10</sup> My translation.

<sup>11</sup> Aesch. *Ag.* 10-11; 351; 940; See chapter two above.

Pompey's character by mentioning that some called him Alexander, so Plutarch underscores the manliness of Hypsicrateia by mentioning that Mithridates often called her *Hypsicrates* as a nick-name, rather than the feminine form of her name.<sup>12</sup> Not only is Hypsicrateia described as a manly woman, but Plutarch also says that at the time of her flight she was dressed as a Persian, and he reiterates that she was riding a horse. Such a reiteration would seem superfluous unless it was added for emphasis. In Plutarch's portrait of her, Hypsicrateia, Mithridates' concubine, matches depictions of Amazons in Greek art, appearing as a manly woman dressed as a Persian and astride a horse.<sup>13</sup> Resembling Clytemnestra in her manly character and a Persian in her costume, Hypsicrateia most certainly enters the narrative as an Amazon-type, a female barbarian warrior.

Plutarch's seemingly superfluous tangent about this Amazon-like woman is actually not superfluous at all, but rather is a symbol of power and domination in the East. In his "*The Selling of the King: A Note on Mithridates' Eupator's Propaganda in 88BC*," Dennis Glew argues that there were three key elements to Mithridates' propaganda program: 1) the establishment of a reputation for liberality, or *philanthropia*; 2) the establishment of a strong connection with Alexander the Great; 3) and the promise of debt cancellation and property redistribution.<sup>14</sup> Glew suggests that these three elements were interwoven and gathered under the second element of emulating Alexander the Great. By displaying the qualities of *philanthropia* and justice (through social

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<sup>12</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 32.

<sup>13</sup> Bothmer 1957: Plate LXXX 1-5b.

<sup>14</sup> Glew 1977: 253-256.



revolution), Mithridates presented himself as an imitator and heir of Alexander the Great, which buttressed his claim to supremacy in the East.<sup>15</sup> If modern scholars accept Plutarch's inclusion of Hypsicrateia as a *factual* description, then perhaps Mithridates had his concubine, Hypsicrateia, dressed in Amazon fashion in order to symbolize his own domination of the East. If Arrian's suspicions are correct in his *Anabasis* when he describes Atropates presenting Alexander with a troop of Amazon women, this would not be the first time that an eastern woman, dressed and trained to play the part of the tamed, cowed Amazon, appeared with a Greek conqueror for the purpose of symbolizing his domination of the East.<sup>16</sup> Affecting to appear as a second Alexander and legitimate emperor of the East, Mithridates might have manufactured his own Thallestris in the person of Hypsicrateia.

Although Hypsicrateia might have been intended to glorify Mithridates as a second Alexander, she actually disgraces him and exalts Pompey instead in the scene that Plutarch describes. Hypsicrateia's portrayal as an Amazon woman actually situates Pompey as a more legitimate successor of Alexander than Mithridates. Pompey attacks the army of which Hypsicrateia is a part, slaughters the multitude, and forces Mithridates, Hypsicrateia, and the other survivor to flee with nothing left to lose but their lives. In his domination of both this Amazon woman and her male commander, Pompey proves himself to be the true successor of Alexander. By interacting with Thallestris, Alexander emulated Heracles, Theseus, and Achilles in their varying exploits, interactions, and scenes of domination of the Amazons. By describing the retreating Hypsicrateia in terms

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<sup>15</sup> Glew 1977: 255.

<sup>16</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.13.3; see chapter 3 above.

of an Amazon fleeing before Pompey's power, Plutarch casts Pompey in the role of the Western conqueror and hero—another Alexander, another Achilles.

In a sense, Hypsicrateia's appearance as the fleeing Amazon foreshadows Plutarch's next reference to Amazons in *Pompey*. After his major defeat at the Euphrates River, Mithridates flees to Armenia and seeks refuge there from his son-in-law, King Tigranes.<sup>17</sup> However, Tigranes refused Mithridates entry, put a price on his head, and invited Pompey to invade Armenia.<sup>18</sup> According to Plutarch, Mithridates then fled through Colchis as an alternative.<sup>19</sup> After going through Armenia and receiving the homage of Tigranes, Pompey's journey inevitably takes him through the Caucasus and into contact with the tribal peoples of those territories, most importantly the Iberians and Albanians.<sup>20</sup> The Iberians were determined to resist Pompey because they had never been held under the hegemony of any of the previous empires—Median, Persian, nor Macedonian. Plutarch writes that they "had even avoided Macedonian rule because Alexander had left Hyrcania in a hurry."<sup>21</sup> Treading the same territory that Alexander had traversed centuries before, Pompey had the opportunity to surpass even Alexander by subduing a tribe that had never been conquered by past empires. Plutarch says that, despite the fierce fighting, Pompey defeated the Iberians, killing nine-thousand and capturing ten thousand.

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<sup>17</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 32.

<sup>18</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 33.

<sup>19</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 32.

<sup>20</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 34.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 34.

In the next chapter, Pompey pursues Mithridates to Lake Maeotis, but before he has a chance to fight him, the Albanians foment a rebellion behind him. Pompey has to backtrack to quell their revolt.<sup>22</sup> Plutarch describes the Albanian army, composed of 60,000 foot soldiers and 12,000 horsemen, as having inadequate weaponry and being arrayed in animal skins. When the forces met, Plutarch says that the Albanian king, Cosis, charged directly at Pompey and hurled a javelin at him. Although the javelin hit the flap of his breastplate, Pompey was unhindered and proceeded to slay Cosis by running him through at close quarters. After the death of King Cosis, the battle ends quickly. Plutarch records the general belief that there were Amazons among the Albanian forces. He says that when the Romans were collecting the spoils from the enemy dead they found Amazonian shields and boots, but no female corpses. By stating that Amazonian armor was found, but no female bodies, Plutarch casts some doubt upon whether Amazons were actually present in the battle just as he reserves room for reasonable doubt in his account of Alexander and Thallestris.<sup>23</sup> However, as mentioned above, Plutarch includes Thallestris' visit in *Alexander* in order to align Alexander with past heroes—like Theseus—and even to show how Alexander surpassed those heroes in the success of his conquest.

Plutarch does something similar in his *Pompey*. Even if Plutarch doubted whether or not Amazons were in fact at Pompey's battle with the Albanians, he still intentionally includes them in his narrative in order to convey Pompey's resemblance to past western, imperial heroes. According to the Trojan War mythic cycle, Achilles, the premiere Greek warrior in the Trojan War, defeated and killed Penthesilea, an Amazon queen who was

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<sup>22</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 35.

<sup>23</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 46.

fighting on behalf of the eastern Trojan kingdom.<sup>24</sup> Modeling his epic after that of Homer, Virgil also included the Amazon queen, Camilla, among the ranks of Aeneas' enemies.<sup>25</sup> By including the Amazons' participation in the Albanian battle, Plutarch underscores Pompey's greatness by likening him to past legendary western heroes.

### *Amazons in Appian's Roman History*

In Appian's account of Pompey's battle with the Albanians and Iberians in the Caucasus, the Amazon motif is used as one of three elements to cast Pompey in terms of a mythical hero. Appian (c. AD 95 – c. AD 165) writes that Pompey at once pursued Mithridates as far as Colchis. Then, believing that Mithridates was no longer a threat since he had been chased out of his kingdom, Pompey veered from his course "to gain knowledge of the country visited by the Argonauts, the Dioscuri, and Hercules, and he especially desired to see the place where they say that Prometheus was fastened to Mt. Caucasus."<sup>26</sup> Appian explicitly associates Pompey's exploring expedition in the Caucasus with the exploits of the mythical heroes.

Next, Appian says that all the tribes in the area accompanied Pompey on his journey except the King of the Albanians, the King of the Iberians, and their forces. Rather, these rulers set an ambush to attack Pompey and his army at the Cyrtus River.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dowden 1997: 99; Stewart 1995: 576-77.

<sup>25</sup> Although Plutarch's *Pompey* deals with subject matter that occurred before Virgil wrote his *Aeneid*, Plutarch himself did not write until many years after the life of Virgil. Consequently, Plutarch would have been familiar with the *Aeneid* and it might have influenced his work.

<sup>26</sup> App. *Mith.* 2.12.103.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Appian's account of this battle differs from that of Plutarch. The given names of the kings, the number of men in the Albanian-Iberian force, and Pompey's strategy used to defeat them are different.

To the barbarians' misfortune, Pompey discovered the ambush and drove the assailants into a thick wood. Appian writes:

These people are skillful forest-fighters, taking cover and attacking without showing themselves. So Pompey surrounded the wood with his army, set it on fire, and pursued the fugitives when they ran out, until they all surrendered and brought him hostages and presents.<sup>28</sup>

This scene resembles the one described by Quintus Curtius Rufus about Alexander's battle against the Mardi, a tribe who dwells on the Hyrcanian border, in the Caucasus region. Quintus Curtius describes the terrain with its lofty forests and mountains as very rough and challenging for the army to cross.<sup>29</sup> He writes, "The natives, however, being accustomed to crawl under the thickets like wild beasts, then also had entered the woods and from concealment were assailing their enemy with weapons." (*Incolae autem ritu ferarum virgulta subire soliti tum quoque intraverant saltum occultisque telis hostem lacescebant*). In response, Alexander, "tracing them to their lairs as hunters do, slew many of them." Finally, after the Mardi take his horse captive, Alexander orders his men to encircle the forest and he threatens to leave none of the Mardii alive if they do not return the horse. Terrified, the Mardi return the horse along with other gifts. Then, Alexander razes the forest to the ground, forcing the Mardi to surrender their nation. The similarities of these two accounts suggest that Pompey was not just learning about past heroes during his exploring expedition, but he was actually re-living their heroic feats.

Very soon after Alexander's battle with the Mardi in Quintus Curtius' account, the Amazons appear on the scene with the visit of Thallestris.<sup>30</sup> Following this same

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<sup>28</sup> App. *Mith.* 2.12.103.

<sup>29</sup> Curt. 6.5. 11-21; see also chapter 3 above.

<sup>30</sup> Curt. 6.5.24-32. See also chapter 3 above.

pattern, Pompey also encounters Amazons after his battle with the Caucasus tribes in Appian's account.<sup>31</sup> Unlike Plutarch, Appian says that there were in fact Amazons themselves found among the enemy:

“Among the hostages and prisoners many women were found, who had suffered wounds no less than the men.”<sup>32</sup>

Appian notes that he is not sure whether these women were of a neighboring nation, the Amazons, or if all female fighters are called Amazons among the barbarians.

Nonetheless, Pompey's encounter with the Amazons further proves his greatness because his experience in the Caucasus, facing fierce forest-fighters and Amazons, parallels that of Alexander and, by association, the mythical heroes of empire.

Regardless, Pompey must have considered the appearance of these women important for his public image because he included them in the triumph he was given in Rome.<sup>33</sup> According to Östenberg, the appearance of Amazons in Pompey's triumph sent several messages to the Roman public: first, it linked him to “mythical subjugators of Amazons” like Heracles, Theseus, and Alexander the Great; secondly, it demonstrated his supremacy or at least equality with his rival, Lucullus, who had sacked Themiskyra, the alleged city of Amazons; thirdly, by putting such distant outsiders on display it communicated that Rome was so dominant that their power had reached all the way to the unknown worlds.<sup>34</sup> In his triumphs, Octavian followed Pompey's example of

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<sup>31</sup> App. *Mith.* 2.12.103.

<sup>32</sup> App. *Mith.* 2.12.103

<sup>33</sup> Östenberg 2009: 148-149. Östenberg says that Plutarch and Appian do not explicitly name the barbarian warrior women in the triumph as Amazons, but they do call them Scythian queens. As Appian says, these women were generally supposed to be Amazons. Östenberg says that their presence in the triumph was important because of their queenly status and their identification with mythical Amazons.

<sup>34</sup> Östenberg 2009: 148-149.

displaying conquered female barbarian warriors as evidence of Rome's imperial might. He once marched a troop of Gothic warrior women in one of his triumphs, and he had hoped to march Cleopatra in his triumph after the Battle of Actium.<sup>35</sup> In order to escape this humiliation, Cleopatra had committed suicide.<sup>36</sup> As an alternative, Octavian featured a statue of Cleopatra wearing one of her pearl earrings.<sup>37</sup> It was said that she had dissolved the earring's partner in a cup of wine just for the pleasure of drinking it. Hence, the surviving earring became a symbol of eastern decadence, prodigality, and *hubris*. By displaying it in his triumph, Octavian proclaimed his subjugation of eastern vice and grotesque behavior, placing himself in the tradition of the Greeks who had saved the West from the grotesque influence of the East. Representing Cleopatra, the statue of the Egyptian warrior-queen humiliated in the triumphal march represented Octavian's rescue of Roman virtue and culture—a restoration of the world to how it was ordained to be.

Virgil paints a similar patriotic image in 5.570-574 and 5.535-538 of his *Aeneid*. In these lines, Aeneas's son, Iulus, symbolizing the past and future of Rome, rides on the back of a Sidonian horse, a *pignus amoris* given to him by Dido, the barbarian warrior-queen who killed herself because Aeneas abandoned her. A darker reading of the image of Iulus riding a horse given to him by Dido interprets the image as one of conquest and domination. In this shadow, the image recalls Aeneas' sexual conquest of Dido and Rome's eventual conquest of Carthage in history. As in a Roman triumph, Iulus flaunts

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<sup>35</sup> Östenberg 2009: 148-149.

<sup>36</sup> Östenberg 2009: 156; Plut. *Ant.* 84, 86.

<sup>37</sup> Östenberg 2009: 106-107.

the spoils of a conquered nation in this primitive parade and military ritual of Roman boys.

### *Amazons in Plutarch's Antony*

Plutarch uses the female barbarian warrior motif again in his life of *Antony*, but the motif is utilized in that biography in a negative way rather than a positive one. In *Antony*, the barbarian warrior woman is manifested in the person of Cleopatra and her character is developed through her interactions with Antony. Like the conflict over Alexander and Thalestris among the Hellenistic sources, the tension in *Antony* lies between the themes of cultural fusion in empire and moral corruption through intimacy with the East. Like Thalestris in Pompeius Trogus' and Quintus Curtius Rufus' accounts, Cleopatra is portrayed in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Plutarch's *Antony* as both a female barbarian warrior and as an Eastern queen.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Modern Age most remembers Cleopatra for her glamorous entrances when she first meets Caesar and Antony or for her tragic suicide, Aeneas' shield in book eight of the *Aeneid* actually presents Cleopatra as a warrior.<sup>39</sup> Virgil writes:

*Sequiturque (nefas) Aegyptia coniunx. Una omnes ruere ac totum supare  
reductis convolsum remis rostrisque tridentibus aequor. . . .regina mediis  
patrio vocat agmina sistro, necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit anguis*

and there follows him [Antony] (O Shame!) his Egyptian wife. All rush at once, and the whole sea foams, upturned by the sweeping oars, and triple-

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<sup>38</sup> Although Cleopatra is portrayed as an Eastern queen, she is, of course, really Greco-Macedonian.

<sup>39</sup> Virg. *A.* 8.678-690



pointed beaks. . . . In the midst the queen calls upon her hosts with their native cymbal, nor as yet casts back a glance at the twin snakes behind.<sup>40</sup>

Here Cleopatra is depicted as leading her own hosts, not simply supplying Antony with troops but actually commanding them alongside the rebellious Roman general.<sup>41</sup> In his article “Vergil and Pheidias: The Shield of Aeneas and of Athena Parthenos,” Robert Cohon argues that Virgil purposefully crafted Aeneas’ shield in book eight to allude to the shield of Athena Parthenos, which depicted the battle between the Athenians and Amazons. He argues that while Cleopatra is not explicitly referred to as an Amazon, “she does appear as a manly woman-warrior” in the central image of the shield which depicts the Battle of Actium.<sup>42</sup> Robert Cohon also states that the Amazonomachy was sometimes adopted in Roman art to allude to the Battle of Actium.<sup>43</sup>

In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Cleopatra is also associated with Eastern vice through her avatar in the epic, Dido. Like Cleopatra, Dido is also compared—though perhaps to a lesser degree—to a manly woman-warrior in *Aeneid* 4 (130-140), when Virgil describes the glory of Dido coming out for the hunt:

*it portis iubare exorto delecta iuventus; retia rara, plagae, lato venabula ferro, Massylique runt equites et odora canum vis. Reginam thalamo cunctantem ad limina primi Poenorum expectant, ostroque insignis et auro stat sonipes ac frena ferox spumantia mandit. Tandem progreditur magna stipante caterva, Sidoniam picto chlamydem circumdata limbo. Cui phaestra ex auro, crines nodantur in aurum, aurea purpuream subnectit fibula vestem. Nec non Phrygii comites et laetus Iulus incedunt...*

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<sup>40</sup> Virg. *A.* 8.688-690, 696-697.

<sup>41</sup> In chapter 56 of his *Antony*, Plutarch describes Cleopatra’s contribution of troops, but in Virgil’s image she is explicitly shown to be leading them herself during the battle.

<sup>42</sup> Cohon 1991: 28.

<sup>43</sup> For the indirect association between the Amazon and Cleopatra: Hardie 1997: 52.

When sunlight has burst forth, there issues from the gates a chosen band of youth; with meshed nets, toils, broad-pointed hunting spears, there stream forth Massylian horsemen and their strong, keen-scented hounds. As the queen lingers in her bower, the Punic princes await her at the doorway; her prancing steed stands brilliant in purple and gold, her tresses are knotted with gold, a buckle of gold clasps her purple cloak. With her pace a Phrygian train and joyous Iulus.<sup>44</sup>

Like an Amazon, Dido is a skillful equestrian and archer. In addition, Virgil also describes Dido's grand entrance into the narrative of the *Aeneid* as resembling the entrance of Artemis—another manly woman-warrior—accompanied by her graces.<sup>45</sup> Cleopatra is also likened to a goddess in her first entrance: she appears adorned like Aphrodite, sailing on a barge accompanied by her servant boys playing reed-pipes and her maiden attendants dressed as graces and sea nymphs.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, both Dido and Cleopatra attempt to win the favor of their corresponding Roman guest with sumptuous feasts.<sup>47</sup>

In *Aeneid* 4.31-54, Anna, Dido's sister, encourages Dido to seek marriage with Aeneas for the following political reasons: 1) to gain the Trojans as an ally against other kingdoms, 2) to add political prestige to the city through his presence. 3) to produce admirable children who would bless Carthage. Cleopatra's first visit with Antony also seems to be motivated by political necessity according to Plutarch: she had furnished Antony's enemies with troops previously and she came to make amends.<sup>48</sup> However, the

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<sup>44</sup> Virg. *A.* 4.130-140. trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough.

<sup>45</sup> Virg. *A.* 498-504.

<sup>46</sup> Kleiner 2005: 104; Plut. *Ant.* 26.

<sup>47</sup> Virg. *A.* 1.695-756; Plut. *Ant.* 26-27.

<sup>48</sup> Stadter 1999: 523.

“marriage” of both Dido and Cleopatra with their corresponding Roman leaders is frowned-upon in the Roman sources, and, in a sense, their marriages are the first step to their tragic suicides.<sup>49</sup>

After their marriages to Aeneas and Antony, both Dido and Cleopatra are accused of weakening their Roman husbands and causing them to fail in their duty and devotion to their fatherland. In *Aeneid* 4.219-237, Aeneas is distracted by Carthage from his destiny to found Rome. In regards to Aeneas’ shirking, Zeus exclaims “In what hope does he tarry among a hostile people and pays no heed to Ausonia’s race and the Lavinian field?” Delivering Zeus’ message, Hermes comes to Aeneas, sporting Sidonian clothes and laboring to build Dido’s city, and Hermes exclaims “Are you now laying the foundations of lofty Carthage, and building up a fair city and all for a woman’s whim? Alas! With never a thought of your own realm and fate!”<sup>50</sup> Such cultural corruption and Medism is also displayed in Virgil’s description of Antony on Aeneas’ shield. This Antony, a once-promising Roman general corrupted by his shameful *Aegyptia coniunx*, is described as a sort of Xerxes—a Persian “victor from the nations of the dawn and from the ruddy sea,” coming to destroy the western world with his “barbaric might and varied arms.”<sup>51</sup>

In a similar way, Cleopatra is also accused of distracting and ruining Antony in Plutarch’s biography. Her machinations are described in *Antony* 26-29:

She abducted Antony so successfully that while his wife Fulvia was fighting Caesar in Rome in defence of his affairs, and while there was a Parthian army hovering near Mesopotamia, with Labienus newly appointed by the Parthian king’s generals as commander-in-chief for the

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<sup>49</sup> Virg. *A.* 4.160-170, 522-705; Kleiner 2005: 131; Plut. *Ant.* 86.

<sup>50</sup> Virg. *A.* 4.259-278; Kleiner 2005: 84,104.

<sup>51</sup> Virg. *A.* 8.685-686.

planned invasion of Syria, he was carried off by her to Alexandria where he indulged in the pastimes and pleasures of a young man of leisure, and spent and squandered on luxuries that commodity which Antiphon called the most costly in the word—namely, time.<sup>52</sup>

Plutarch continues his tirade, saying that they spent tons of money wastefully. Plutarch accuses Cleopatra of distracting Antony night and day with various entertainments and amusements. He underscores Antony's subservience and the vileness of the whole situation by saying that they even went around the city in servant's clothing so they could partake in whatever they wanted without being recognized or blamed.

Viewed in comparison with the relationship of Aeneas and Dido, Antony's and Cleopatra's romance appears to be one that results in corruption and Medism. Just as Alexander adopts corrupt eastern practices after spending thirteen days with the queen of the Amazons, so Antony fully embraces his proclivities for luxury and sloth that had already begun to manifest themselves before his encounter with Cleopatra.<sup>53</sup> Previously Antony had kept the wrong company, associating himself with actors, singers, hedonists—namely Curio—and Clodius, “the most defiant and vile of the popular leaders of the time.” Plutarch also indirectly emphasizes Antony's excesses by describing Antony's extravagant father in the first chapter and citing the Emperor Nero as one of Antony's descendants in the last chapter.<sup>54</sup> However, Antony's faults are forgivable until they climax with his intimacy with Cleopatra. Plutarch writes:

For a man such as Antony, then, there could be nothing worse than the onset of his love for Cleopatra. It awoke a number of feelings that had

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<sup>52</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 28.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter 3 in regards to the negative readings of the Alexander and Thalestris encounter. Examples of Antony's vile proclivities: Plut. *Ant.* 1-2, 6, 9, 10, 14, 21, 24, 28, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 1, 87.

previously been lying quietly buried within him, stirred them up into a frenzy, and obliterated and destroyed the last vestiges of goodness, the final redeeming features that were still holding out in his nature.<sup>55</sup>

Later, Plutarch also refers to the romance as an “awful calamity.”<sup>56</sup> Plutarch says that Cleopatra “caught” and “vanquished” Antony, describing her romance with Antony in terms of domination by a manly warrior-woman.<sup>57</sup>

On the contrary, Plutarch describes the East’s perspective of Cleopatra’s and Antony’s first meeting, saying, “The notion spread throughout the city that Aphrodite had come in revelry to Dionysus, for the good of Asia.”<sup>58</sup> This perspective raises an alternative view to Antony’s relationship with Cleopatra being a product of drugs and bewitchment: through this lens, the romantic and eventual marriage alliance of Cleopatra and Antony can be viewed as one of imperial cultural fusion.<sup>59</sup> In chapter 36 of *Antony*, Plutarch, despite the negative tone, does record Antony’s defense of his cooperation with Cleopatra:

And he only made things worse by recognizing the twin children she [Cleopatra] had borne him, whom he called Alexander and Cleopatra, surnamed respectively Sun and Moon. But he was good at glossing over disgraces, and so he used to say that the greatness of the Roman Empire showed not in what they took, but in what they gave, and that the more royal blood contributed towards the next generation of a family’s children, the more that family enhanced its nobility. At any rate, he used to say that his own ancestor was fathered by Heracles, a man who did not rely on just a single womb for the continuation of his line, and was not cowed by laws like Solon’s which tried to regulate conception, but he followed his natural

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<sup>55</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 25.

<sup>56</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 36.

<sup>57</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 25.

<sup>58</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 26.

<sup>59</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 36-37.

inclinations and left behind him the origins and foundations of many families.

In this passage, Antony justifies his relationship and alliance with Cleopatra by citing the example of Heracles. He casts his alliance with Cleopatra as something that he is doing to further the conquest and influence of the Roman empire, rather than something that will demean his fatherland. Like Plutarch's Alexander, Antony seems to believe in an imperial policy of cooperation rather coercion.<sup>60</sup> Acting upon this principle, Antony begets children with his equivalent of an Amazon queen, Cleopatra, just as Alexander attempted to beget a child with Thalestris according to her wishes.

Antony's policy of cooperation over coercion is also manifested in his "theatrical" Alexandrian triumph in *Antony* 54. Plutarch says that Antony appeared on a stage sitting on a golden throne with Cleopatra and their children, all also sitting upon golden thrones, in a gymnasium filled with crowds of people.<sup>61</sup> At this venue, Antony proclaimed Cleopatra the queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Africa, and Coele Syria, with Caesarion—Cleopatra's son by Caesar—as her joint ruler. He also names his sons by Cleopatra as "kings of kings" and entrusts and divides among them Armenia, Media, Parthia, Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia. This proclamation was complete with meaningful costumes. Plutarch says that Antony's son Alexander was dressed in Median and Armenian clothes, while his other son Ptolemy was wearing the traditional Macedonian and Greek clothing. Cleopatra wore a robe that made her look like Isis. While Plutarch states that the Romans viewed this ceremony as "over-done and anti-Roman," Antony viewed it as an expression of unity among the various cultures and peoples of the empire. It expressed his policy of

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<sup>60</sup> Chapter 3; Plut. *Alex.* 47.

<sup>61</sup> Kleiner 2005: 110-111.

cooperation over coercion. Nonetheless, the perspective of Octavian, being the view of the victor, prevailed: Antony's relationship with Cleopatra was subsequently portrayed and seen as Medism—a form of treachery to the fatherland through a spurning of Roman belief, culture, and ideology.

In the sources for the Roman Empire, the female barbarian warrior motif, like in the Hellenistic sources, is either used to display the glorious heroism of the man interacting with the warrior-woman, or is used to symbolize the man's corruption through too much intimacy with the East. In the Amazon encounters of Plutarch's *Pompey*, his *Antony*, Appian's *Roman History*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, the figure of Pompey emerges as a triumphant Achilles—a dominator of the East—and the character of Antony emerges as a defeated Agamemnon—a victim corrupted by Eastern vice.

### *Conclusion*

In Classical Athens, the barbarian was portrayed as grotesque through the image and motif of the female barbarian warrior. The usage of this motif in Classical Athens does not just demonstrate Greek thought about women, but it also reveals Greek thought about the barbarian other. The sub-categories of fearsome things are fluid in the Greek imagination: they blend and combine. Consequently, the images that are created are even more terrible than before when they consisted of only one unnerving element. Being an amalgam of three things the Greeks considered threatening to their society, the female barbarian warrior is a monster. Her inseparable association with the East in the Greek imagination illustrates how monstrous they considered their barbarian enemies in the East to be.

During the Hellenistic era, exemplifying the unnaturalness of the barbarian enemy ceased to be the main focus and purpose of the female barbarian warrior motif. Rather the idea that the barbarian was unnatural became an accepted element of the motif that could be assumed. In the Hellenistic era, the female barbarian warrior motif emerged as more illustrative of Greek heroes who interacted with female barbarian warriors. A good example of this development is found in the various treatments of Alexander's affair with Thalestris. Depending upon their personal views of Alexander's strategies for subduing the East, the ancient authors recount Alexander's affair with the Amazon queen as either a positive example of his heroism in taming the East, or a negative example of his succumbing to the grotesque influence of the East.

As is exemplified in Plutarch's opposite usages of the female barbarian warrior motif in his *Pompey* and *Antony*, Roman authors inherited and also utilized this tradition of the female barbarian warrior motif. However, further research is needed to better understand how the authors of the Roman Empire used the female barbarian warrior motif to depict their barbarian enemies. It is intriguing that the authors who treat Alexander the Great's affair with Thalestris with the most contempt are Quintus Curtius Rufus and Pompeius Trogus (as summarized by Justin), both of whom seem to be patriotic Romans. Why would Quintus Curtius and Pompeius Trogus condemn Alexander's affair with Thalestris so harshly? This is indicative of how Romans viewed their barbarian enemies. It raises the questions of how the Romans thought European empires should interact with the eastern peoples and tribes, and of what historical events developed those views. Further research should also be done on how female barbarian warrior types, other than those in *Pompey* and *Antony*, are treated in Roman historical



sources. This research should include an examination of Polybius' Queen Teuta of Illyria and Tacitus' Celtic queen, Boudicca. Further research should examine how Tacitus applies the female barbarian warrior motif, which is normally used in reference to eastern barbarians, to a barbarian enemy from the West. Although further study is needed to better illuminate how the Romans adopted the female barbarian warrior motif in their illustrations of their own barbarian enemies, it is certainly evident that they, as successors of the Athenian empire, adopted and adapted the female barbarian warrior motif for their own purposes.

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