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ANCIENT AMAZONS – HEROES, OUTSIDERS OR WOMEN?

By LORNA HARDWICK

The network of associations of the word Amazon still plays a part in the shorthand of modern discourse. Its connotations may vary from a slightly comic praise of sporting excellence in women to underlying insinuations that Amazons are not quite feminine. When applied by politicians and journalists to the women in the Peace Camp at Greenham Common during the 1980s, for example, the epithet Amazon carried the implication that these women rejected men and had developed a society apart (therefore (*sic*) they must be subversives, lesbians, communists, hippies – etc. etc.). Modern usage perhaps emphasizes the unusual or even threatening associations; Amazons are, for whatever reason, outside the ‘normal’ parameters of life-style and achievements. Ancient usage presupposed an additional element, Amazons as a subject for artistic and poetic interest. The reasons why this was so do much to explain how and why the image of the Amazons communicated certain associations and how these in turn relate to underlying assumptions about the framework of Greek society and its values.

Various scholars have used the methods of anthropology, psychology, and history to assess the ancient evidence. Any one method on its own is likely to lead to reductionist conclusions. In a seminal article on methodology, S. Pembroke has shown the poverty of attempts to use concepts from modern anthropology without reference to the historical and intellectual context in which the ancient descriptions and representations were produced.¹ Equally, assumptions about the historical authenticity of content can be challenged by formal and structural analysis.

The Amazon legends basically draw on the image of a war-like society of women, living on the borders of the known world, renowned for archery and riding skills. Written sources give a considerable amount of information about the supposed geographical location of the Amazons, their customs, and life-style. Such detail does not imply that they actually existed, nor even that the Greeks thought they did. The Greeks, in fact, knew comparatively little about their past, or even their neighbours. Study of descriptions and representations of the Amazons helps elucidate the Greeks’ construction of images relating to the little-known. Analysis of structure (and especially the use of implied contrast and polarity) in the various

stories and descriptions shows portrayal of the Amazons in a symmetrical relationship with the way the Greeks perceived their own identity. Changes and developments in the description and portrayal of Amazons therefore throw into relief the very characteristics of society and values which were of most significance to Greek writers and craftsmen and help us to chart shifts of emphasis. (Significantly, Amazons are not represented in cultures based on non-Greek emblems and norms.)

S. C. Humphreys has identified a quality possibly common to rational discourse and works of art as ‘the structure of communication in such a way that it contains within itself enough information to make it readily comprehensible’.² When dealing with myth and legend, the nature of the communication process broadens to include symbols ‘the relation between which is not explicitly made in narrative but is supplied by the social experiences of the audience’.³ It will be the intention in this paper to explore ways in which analysis of the image of the Amazons in Greek writing, painting, and sculpture both provides a thread of cultural continuity of reference and reveals major landmarks in the development of the self-image of the Greeks.

Amazons as Heroes

In *Iliad* 3.171ff. Helen is sitting by Priam watching the Greeks who have come to attack Troy. She identifies some of the leading Greeks for his benefit. Priam points out the outstanding figure of Agamemnon and she identifies him. Priam seems overawed with the number and stature of the Greeks and recalls how he once went to Phrygia and was deeply impressed with the numbers of his allies there, although even this fighting strength is now outranked by the Achaeans. He refers to a specific occasion when he was camped with the Phrygians and the Amazons attacked. The epithet he applies to the Amazons is *antianerai*, ‘a match for men’, ‘man-like’, the implication being that in war they have the appearance and fighting strength of men. The epithet emphasizes their male type, while the context emphasizes their status as opponents.⁴ The Phrygians are presented by Priam as second only to the Achaeans in his experience of fighting numbers of men, yet the Amazons took them on.

A second example from the *Iliad* uses a different story to build on this effect.⁵ Before they fight, Glaucus tells Diomedes about his family tree and his descent from Bellerophon, who was expelled from Argos by King Proteus as the result of a false accusation from the

king's wife. The king sent Bellerophon off to Lycia with a secret death warrant and the king there set him various tasks in order to ensure his death. He had first to fight the Chimaera, then the Solymi, and thirdly the Amazons 'who go to war like men'. When he succeeded in these tasks, the Lycian king realized Bellerophon was favoured by the gods so he was given the king's own daughter in marriage. The episode reveals again the two aspects cited from the first Homeric example – the epithets likening the Amazons' qualities to those of men and the contextual stress on their military reputation. In addition, a third aspect emerges. This is the status to be acquired from defeating the Amazons and the way this is presented as a task or trial for someone aspiring to heroic achievements and victories. For example, the ninth labour of Heracles is to obtain the Amazon queen's girdle while the rape and abduction of their queen by Theseus, the Athenian demi-hero, is followed by Amazon invasion of Attica. This is reflected in other episodes from myth.

Some of the aspects stressed by Homer are taken up by Pindar, as we might expect. An example occurs in *Olympian* 13, written for Xenophon of Corinth, whose father won the foot-race at Olympia in 504 and who himself in 464 won the stadium (or short foot-race) and the pentathlon on the same day. Praise of the victor's family is interwoven with that of Corinth and of famous Corinthians, among whom (perhaps inappropriately) he includes Medea and also (more appropriately) Bellerophon. Pindar describes Bellerophon's taming of Pegasus and then his defeat of the Amazons:

he assailed from the lonely bosom of the chill air that army of womankind, the archer host of Amazons.⁶

This time the Amazons are *gunaikeion straton*, still military but recognizably feminine. Pindar is clearly more interested in the poetic possibilities of the Amazons rather than the Chimaera or Solymi (other tasks of Bellerophon) who receive only a passing reference. Pindar draws on similar associations of ideas in *Nemean* 3.38, where the Amazons with their brazen bows are presented as mighty opponents, the context this time being a celebration of the exploits of Peleus and Telamon (as might be expected since the victor being celebrated came from Aegina). Peleus' achievements are referred to again in a fragment.⁷ He went first to the plain of Troy, secondly in quest of the girdles of the Amazon, and then on the expedition of Jason, after which Medea was brought back to Greece.

These examples show that the Amazons had a stock role as an index of heroic achievement. Their figurative importance is the product of an aristocratic way of looking at the world. They were

worthy opponents – so they are worth defeating. In Homer their femininity (or lack of it) is hardly a factor but by the fifth century Pindar (working to an anachronistic value system in which aristocratic kudos is still to be gained from heroic associations) exploits the poetic mystery to be found in the association of military prowess, femininity, and remote geographical location. In *Olympian* 8 Apollo rushes off to the Amazons after helping build the walls of Troy. They are described as ‘well horsed’ and living on the farther (Asian) side of Troy.⁸

Amazons as Outsiders

The geographical and ethnographic interest is taken up by Herodotus. Writing in the mid-fifth century not long after Pindar, he includes information about the Amazons in an extended passage discussing the origins of the Sauromatae, one of the tribes bordering the area round the Black Sea, beyond Thrace and Scythia.⁹

Herodotus’ version of the legend is that Amazons taken prisoner by Greeks killed their captors on the high seas and, after landing on Scythian territory, founded a new society based on independence and activity with merit proved in battle, since they rejected the secluded life of the Scythian women. Some Scythian young men went with them and a new tribe, the Sauromatae, was founded. Herodotus’ account is significant for the specific treatment of the contrast between the Amazonian and the secluded way of life for the women. His comparative ethnography is doubtless spurious, but his choice of special features emphasizes firstly that the Amazons evolved their way of life as a response to capture and escape, and secondly presents their separateness as a form of dissent from the conventions of life for Greek women, which he projects on to the Scythians. ‘We’ (the young men say) ‘have parents and property.’ The Amazons reply:

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

The contrast in approach with Homer is total. This interest in presenting the Amazons and their life style in terms of a direct opposition to the then developed conventions of the Greek *oikos* occurs also in the Ionian historian Hellanicus. Writing near the end of the fifth century he published a history of Attica which refers to the supposed Amazon invasion. According to Hellanicus, the Amazons had crossed over the frozen Bosphorus. He explains the

significance of their name. Their right breasts were removed by cauterization (to facilitate archery, presumably). He describes them as ‘a golden-shielded, silver-axed, female, male loving, male infant killing host’. Most of the description is in direct contrast to the qualities expected from women in the Greek *oikos*.¹¹ Herodotus explores the Amazon rejection of seclusion by focussing on their alternative form of social organization. Hellanicus emphasizes their dissent by emphasizing polarity in attributes and values and adds the phrase ‘male infant killing’. This practice is not suggested in Herodotus, although he does refer to their Scythian name as the equivalent of man killers. This is implicit in their initiation requirements for marriage:

They have a marriage law which forbids a girl to marry until she has killed an enemy in battle; some of their women, unable to fulfill this condition, grow old and die in spinsterhood.¹²

Writers less interested in patterns of social organization than is Herodotus tend to use attention-compelling epithets to create a stereotype – for example, in the *Prometheus Bound* of [Aeschylus] the image of the Amazons is used as part of the scenery of geographical and cultural distance and strangeness:

The Amazons of the land of Colchis,
Virgins fearless in battle,
the Scythian hordes who live at the world’s end . . .¹³

The theme is taken up in Prometheus’ description of Io’s future wandering:

you come to Caucasus itself, the peak
Of all that range, where from the very brows the river
Floods forth its fury. You must cross the topmost ridge
Close to the stars and take the pathway leading south
There you will find the warlike race of Amazons
Haters of men.¹⁴

The epithets used in the *Prometheus Bound* are unusual in that they draw attention to threatened masculinity. (It is not clear whether the hatred is to be deduced from the Amazons’ social and marital customs or their virginity.)

The more detailed versions of the Amazons legend concentrate on one of two main areas of threat. The first, as shown by Herodotus, draws on the related themes of geographical remoteness, ‘otherness’, and implicit or explicit rejection of Greek norms of female behaviour and therefore of social structure. The second adds a quasi-historical dimension and is specifically Atheno-centric. In this type of reworking

the Amazons are not merely ‘other’ but invaders. The perceived threat is politicized territorially.

A detailed example can be found in the *Panegyricus* of Isocrates, published in or after 380 B.C. The overall context is Isocrates’ attempt to persuade the Greeks to unite against Persia or rather to recognize re-assertion of Athenian leadership. To raise the morale of Greek readers, Isocrates refers to Greek defeat of earlier invaders from the East and includes that of the Scythians led by the Amazons, daughters of Ares.¹⁵ Isocrates says that not one Amazon lived to return to her own land, and those at home deposed their rulers because of this defeat (the *politeia* of the Amazons is considered in Greek terms). Isocrates also refers to the manner in which the Amazons tried to divide the Greeks. In this and other ways the whole sequence is a typical Isocratean use of myth-as-history with the added dimension that he locates current problems and attitudes in the past in order to use the example as an aid to his rhetoric about the present.

In a parallel passage in his very late work the *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates refers to the Amazon invasion as the result of the abduction of their queen Hippolyte by Theseus.¹⁶ He says she came for love and the passage reads like a variation on the Helen/Paris theme. He gives the Amazon incursion status alongside other invasions repulsed by Athens, such as those from Thrace, the Peloponnese, and those led by Darius, King of Persia, and Xerxes. All these, he says, were routed in battle and had their *hybris* put down. Athens thus emerges with her heroic status enhanced.

The important points about Isocrates’ usage are firstly his mythical/historical/rhetorical method which enables us to draw inferences about the kind of association of arguments which had persuasive force in the fourth century; secondly his concentration on the Amazons as an invading force, simultaneously a threat to Athens and a yardstick for her heroic status; thirdly the association of the Amazons with the Scythians and by analogy with the Persians, implying a barbarian threat from the East. In Isocrates the function of the Amazons is politicized and is used to highlight both Hellenic values *and* the fourth-century imperatives of a redrawn Athenian imperialism. The frame of reference is in contrast to that found in Herodotus where there is a strong interest in portraying an *alternative* society. However, the change in emphasis from Herodotus to Isocrates does not merely reflect the demands of genre. It is significant that this association of the defeat of the Amazon invasion with the demands of Athenian hegemony does not fully emerge until the fourth century, when the (to the Greeks) more acceptable aspects of

the Athenian Empire were being retrospectively justified. (This should alert us to some potential problems in interpreting fifth-century usage. I shall return to this aspect later.)

Isocrates' aim is to enhance the prestige of Athens by merging the associations of historical and legendary victories. A similar theme is explored in a significantly different way in the *Funeral Oration*, attributed to Lysias.¹⁷ The Amazons are described as formidable in their own territory ('considered as men for their courage rather than as women for their physical nature'). However, the speech writer claims that when they encountered the Athenians they found that against *agathoi* not merely their bodies but also their achievements and capability seemed womanish and they were defeated. The inference is that the reputation of the Amazons was gained against inferior men. When they came up against Athenians the limitations of both the Amazons and their previous opponents were exposed.

However, such a conjunction of contempt occasioned by both race and gender is unusual when applied to Amazons. For example, the treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, one of the less rigorously scientific elements in the Hippocratic corpus, contains a series of anecdotes suggesting that Asians are weaker or more effeminate than Greeks (climate and despotic government are two of the reasons suggested).¹⁸ Discussion of the Sauromatae tribe follows and although the name of Amazon is not used, the characteristics of the female virgin warriors are broadly those attributed to the Amazons by Herodotus. The Hippocratic author makes the specific point that the tribe is both European and different.¹⁹ Any attempt to make a simple identification between the Greeks' view of the Amazons and their attempts to generalize about Asiatics is therefore not well supported by the evidence.

Amazons as Women

The theme of Athenian defeat of Amazons is taken up by Plutarch in his life of Theseus.²⁰ Plutarch was writing at the turn of the first and second centuries A.D. and his account combines mythical and quasi-historical elements. Geography and topography are important. He locates the Amazons near the Black Sea, and says that some accounts claim Theseus sailed there with Heracles on a campaign and won Antiope as a prize. Others say that Theseus went on his own after the time of Heracles and captured Antiope. Plutarch favours this version (which is hardly surprising given the subject of the work), and adds that she may have been captured by a trick, since the Amazons were

well disposed towards other people and did not try to run away. Presumably Plutarch regards this characteristic not as a human virtue but as a feminine attribute, a step on the way towards the female subservience represented by rape and abduction. Whatever the origins of the matter, the expedition resulted in a war which Plutarch says was ‘anything but a trivial or womanish affair’.

Plutarch gives the fighting a specific location. According to his account the Amazons overran the surrounding part of Attica and pitched camp outside Athens. Hand to hand fighting took place near the Pnyx, and the tombs of those who fell are situated in the street leading to the Piraeic gate. On one flank the Amazons were successful but on the other they were driven back and many killed. After three months a peace was arranged through Hippolyte – this and not Antiope being the name of the Amazon Theseus married in Plutarch’s version. Amazon graves were also supposed to have been situated in Megara and Thessaly (presumably along their route to Athens). Plutarch also refers to a story *The Rising of the Amazons* which he dismisses as a fable.

The significant features of Plutarch’s treatment are the association with Theseus (combining minor-heroism and Athenian orientation), the Amazons’ status as invaders, and his attribution to them of Hellenic feminized characteristics. These include not only their attitude to Theseus when he went to their country but also the behaviour of Antiope on the journey back to Athens, in spite of the attentions of her Greek admirers. Her sexual loyalty to Theseus is a significant Hellenized element in Plutarch’s version, grafting echoes of the Penelope theme on to the initial subjugation by sexual force.²¹

Plutarch’s Amazons therefore bring together two separate elements in the legend. As an individual the abducted queen is Hellenized, partly to glorify Theseus, partly to reflect the supremacy of the values of Hellenic culture. Yet alongside the idealization of the individual sexual loyalty which follows defeat or capture, Amazons as a group are also presented as invaders of Athens, to be gloriously defeated. Although Plutarch refers to a number of written sources, now lost, it is matter of speculation as to how far his interpretation was influenced by presentation of the Athenian version of the legend in painting and sculpture.

Strabo is the one source which self-consciously attempts to bring together several layers of meaning in the legend and to attempt to criticize them. He wrote somewhat earlier than Plutarch, at the beginning of the first century A.D. The key passages are in Book 2.²² He gives a good deal of apparently precise geographical information, concluding that the territory the Amazons were said to inhabit lies in

the mountains above Albania or in part of the Caucasus mountains. Their occupations are ploughing, planting, pasturing cattle, and training horses. The elite (*malista*) mostly hunt on horse back or practice war-like exercises. They specialize in throwing the javelin and to allow free use of the arm the right breast is seared off in infancy. They also use the bow, *sagaris* (a single edged weapon), and a light shield. They use the skins of wild animals to make helmets, clothing, and girdles. These activities occupy ten months of the year, but there are two special months in spring when they go up into the neighbouring mountains with Gargarians for sacrificing and mating (this is done at random and in darkness). Female children are retained, the males go back to the Gargarians (contrast Hellanicus). The Gargarians are supposed to have made an expedition with the Amazons, then revolted from them. (The word used by Strabo *apostantas* implies *political* strife.) Then they made war, which ended with a pact that both sides would live independently and only have dealings in matters concerning children.

Strabo points out that accounts of other peoples should usually keep a clear distinction between mythical and historical elements – things *ancient* and *false* and *monstrous* are to be called myths. But the Amazons, he says, are unique in that the same stories are told now as in early times, although, he says, they are beyond belief. He finds the tales incredible on two grounds:

1. an 'army of women' could never be organized without men, either into a polis or an ethnos (i.e. he rejects the idea because females lack political skills);
2. such a group could never make gains in the territory of others, not only close neighbours but even into Ionia and across the sea to Athens (i.e. he rejects the idea of military prowess because they are female *and* remote outsiders from Greece).

Strabo recounts a number of stories associating the Amazons with the founding and naming of cities (including Ephesus, Smyrna, Kyme, and Myrine), and adds Alexander to the list of those whose semi-heroic status is claimed by association with them. Strabo also refers to the Amazon expeditions of Priam and Bellerophon. Much of his information seems to be derived from Herodotus, but the main significance of his account lies in his attempt to assess the credibility of the very detailed stories in his possession. He at least makes us more aware of the blurred distinctions between myth, tradition, and history and the variety of ways in which the same mythological framework could communicate. Yet the core of his rejection of the stories is not lack of historical evidence, but because 'to believe these stories is the same as saying the men of those times were women and

the women men' – in other words the Amazon stories challenge the received categories of the Hellenic worldview.

Thus a chronological study of the written sources reveals two key changes in perspective. In the heroic episodes the function of the Amazons is not just to make a good story, although of course they do, but to point up or embellish the virtues and achievements of the heroes. Their life style and customs represent an adaption of the ethos of the warrior elite of Homeric epic. They are to be admired, even if admiration is tinged with a degree of amazement. However, once the Amazons are perceived as a group (in contrast to heroic individuals) and once they leave their remote lands, both their achievements and their life style begin to be presented as a challenge to Greece. Defeating them in battle and/or abducting their leader begins to be formalized not merely as a sign of the supremacy of the mythical heroes but as a sign of the historical supremacy of the Greeks (and most notably the Athenians) over outsiders.

Then, eventually, defeated individual Amazons are presented as assimilated to the property and power orientated framework of exclusive citizenship and the *oikos*, by displaying qualities of submission and loyalty valued in Greek females. But the translation from outsider to woman is not a necessary progression. Outsiders can remain different if they stay away but if they move place, willingly or unwillingly, they must conform or be defeated.

The apparently chameleon-like presence of the Amazons in the written sources in a variety of contexts is explained partly by their status as an artistic *topos*. The balance changes between emphasis on status, race, social organization, or gender, according to the experience of the historical audience, and according to the context and purpose of the source. The resulting difficulties of systematic interpretation can be highlighted by analysis of the presentation of the Amazons in painting and sculpture.

Amazons in Art

C. H. Hallet has usefully restated the view that artistic traditions have their own logic and momentum, and may strike the eye or ear of the ancient viewer or audience in a way which is impossible for us to experience because we are in the tradition of what has followed.²³ Thus when we look at sixth-century and fifth-century vases we have to contend with the fact that the associations made by the Hippocratic authors and in the fourth century by Isocrates (for example) are part of *our* cultural experience, but not necessarily that of archaic and

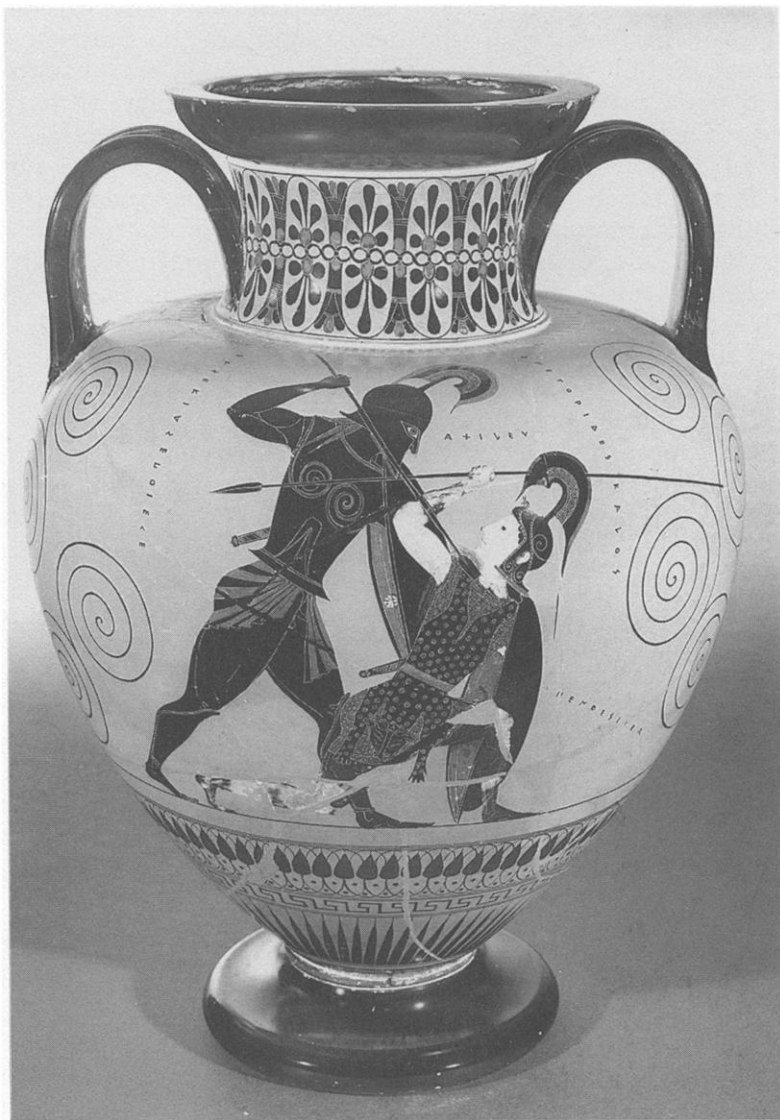


Fig. 1 Trojan Amazonomachy. Achilles killing Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons. Attic Black Figure Neck Amphora. Potted by Exekias and attributed to him as painter c. 540–30 B.C. (Ht. 41.6 cm. BM Cat. Vases B 210).
(Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

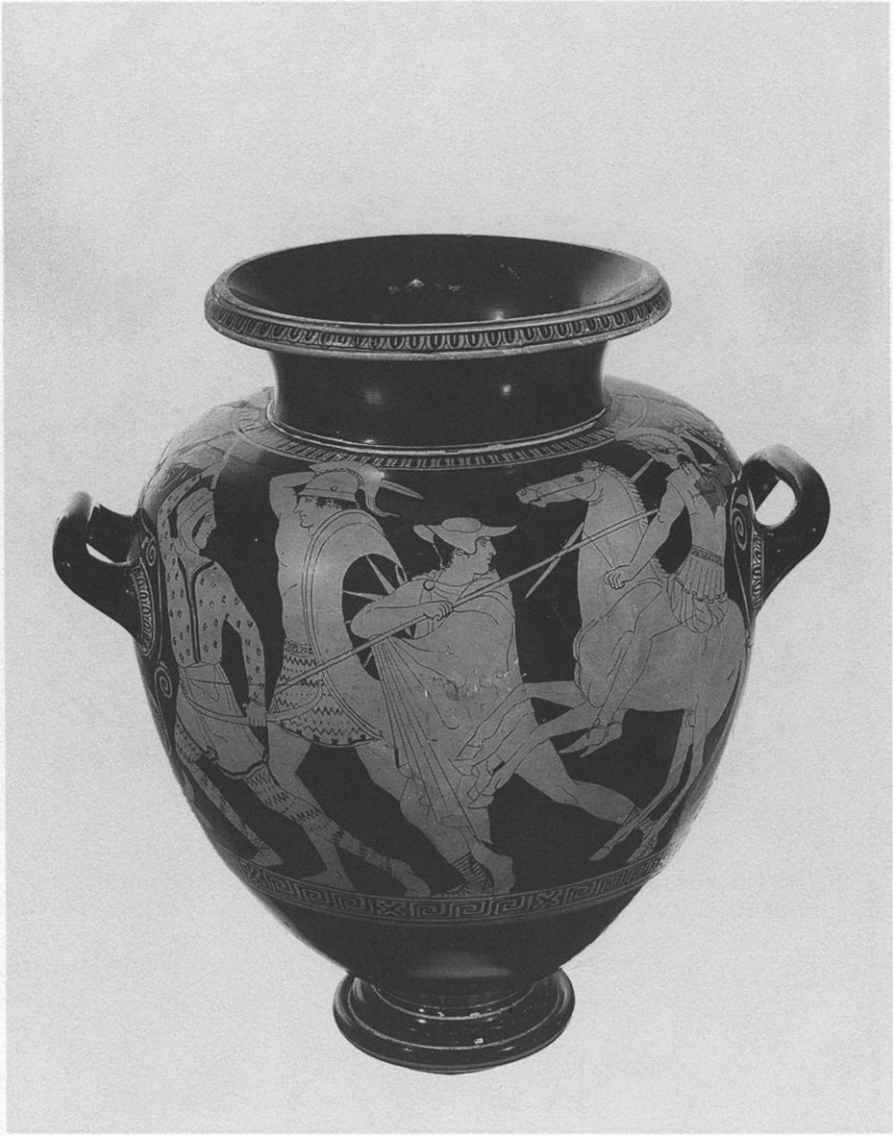


Fig. 2 Mounted Amazonomachy. Battle between two Amazons and Theseus and a Companion.

Attic Red Figure Stamnos from Gela, Sicily, by Polygnotos. c. 450–40 B.C. (Ht. 45.6 cm. Cat. 522).

(Reproduced by permission of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

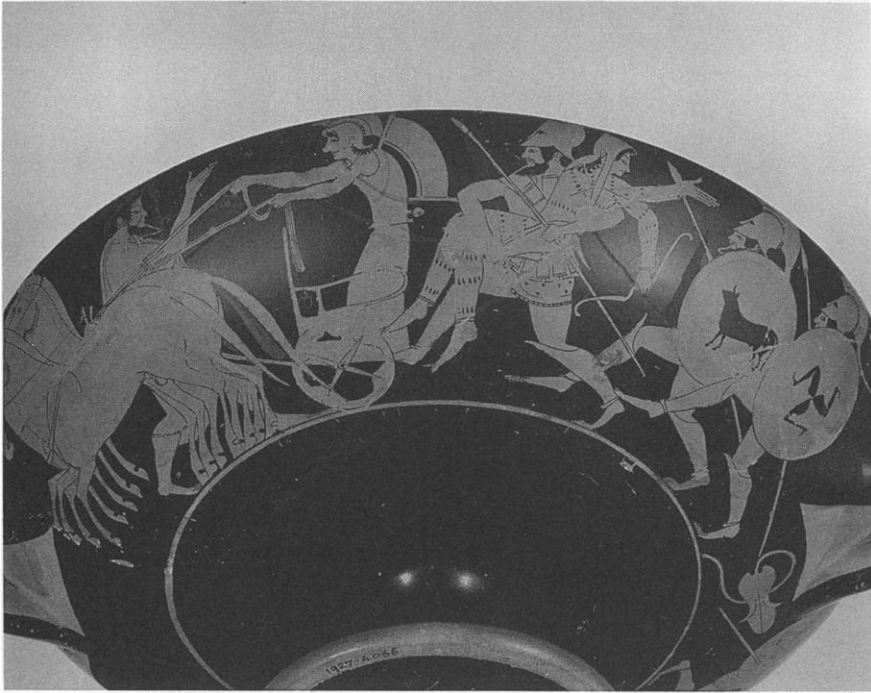


Fig. 3 The Abduction of Antiope by the Expedition of Theseus and Herakles. Exterior of Attic Red Figure Kylix, provenance unknown, c. 510 B.C. by Oltos (diameter 32.75 cm. Cat. 1927.4065).
(Reproduced by permission of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)



Fig. 4 Greeks Fighting with Amazons.

Bassae: Temple of Apollo. Frieze, block 16. *c.* 420 B.C. (Ht. 0.61 cm BM Cat. Sculpture 537).

(Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

early classical painters. The artist's formal communication may be the best guide to the social and cultural experience which is assumed in the audience. Key questions are whether it is possible to construct a typology common to both vase painting and sculpture and whether the chronological pattern and changes of emphasis correspond to that identified in the written sources. The essential basis for such an enquiry has been provided by D. von Bothmer.²⁴ His monumental work of scholarship contains a detailed catalogue of virtually every known instance of Amazon representation in Greek art, analysed under almost every possible heading according to chronology, type, numbers represented, with whom, doing what, moving left, moving right, alone, in company, mounted, dismounted, etc.

The earliest recognizable Amazon occurs on a fragmentary terracotta native shield of Argolic shape.²⁵ The workmanship suggests local Argive make. It has been dated to the turn of the eighth and seventh centuries. The earliest Amazons in Attic Black Figure do not appear until the second quarter of the sixth century. Of course, this does not mean that none existed before – but there are none in surviving Proto-Attic or first generation Attic Black Figure. On Black Figure the legend is mostly told on neck amphorae of ovoid shape.²⁶ In all there are over seventy examples, most of them battle scenes. Some of these may represent the Trojan battle but in most the lion-skinned Heracles figures prominently. Some of the pots are inscribed and Heracles is named seven times. Among the Amazons, Andromache is the most popular as the opponent of Heracles (named five times). In all there are nine names for Greek heroes and twenty-six for Amazons, of which sixteen are certain. None of the non-Heracleian battles are inscribed.

So two features stand out – firstly the primacy of interest in the Heracles version of the legend and secondly the interest in individual Amazons. This could reflect the influence of the aristocratic concentration on the individual as hero, or respond to the demands of current achievement in drawing and painting technique, or both. The representations which are not battle scenes are mainly statuesque single Amazons (cf. Athene figures). There is an absence of portrayal of social scenes on extant early Black Figure pots. Another striking point is the enormous variety in the type and design of armour and weapons. The Amazons are variously portrayed in Attic and Corinthian helmets and caps, some have greaves, some of the archers wear boots. This suggests Amazons were portrayed in whatever garb was familiar to the painter and that they were not primarily perceived as having a communal identity.

In developed Black Figure (from the mid-sixth century to the end

of Black Figure) the Heracleian part of the legend continues to be prominent, with Heracles featuring in single combat against various opponents, some named.²⁷ Amazon costume seems more consistently Athenian in type. Although there are some exceptions, they are predominantly portrayed as *hoplites*. Social scenes appear, with Amazons shown in the same occupations as male warriors – arming, setting out for battle, returning from battle with their dead, leading horses, riding out, dismounting, harnessing and driving chariots. There are some unexpected scenes, notably an Amazon in *oriental* dress approaching an altar but this characterization is exceptional in Black Figure.²⁸

The transition to Red Figure is marked in subject matter by an interest in the abduction of Antiope. For example, a scene on the outside of an Attic Red Figure cup attributed to Oltos (c. 510) shows the abduction scene.²⁹ The chariot waits with its driver. Theseus runs up carrying Antiope. The Amazons are in hot pursuit, one dressed as a hoplite, the others as mounted archers wearing pointed hats and trousered combinations. This is typical of an increased importance for Theseus as the legend becomes more Atheno-centric. There is also an increasing tendency to depict Amazons in *eastern* dress – trousers and sleeves and sometimes pointed caps, often armed as archers rather than hoplites. The oriental emphasis testifies to increased knowledge and interest about the East in the second half of the sixth century. It should be noted these scenes date from before Persian wars and there is no evidence of contempt in the presentation.

Oriental themes are also depicted in Amazon scenes on white ground alabstra. The finest (from Delphi and now in Athens) depicts Penthesilea, who is named.³⁰ She carries bow and arrows and axe and is dressed in sandals (a new feature), a sleeved and trousered combination with Attic helmet and a shirt or apron. A quiver is by her side. A Maenad is portrayed on the other side of the alabastron. An example in London shows an overdressed Amazon by a palm tree.³¹ Another, in the Louvre, shows an Amazon approaching an altar on both knees.³² Her quiver and bow are hung up behind and there is a palm tree behind the altar.

However, the major characteristic of the representation of Amazons in early classical and classical Red Figure is the resurgence of the large set-piece battles. Von Bothmer has identified seventeen vases spanning half a century, which show the large battles on a grand scale, ranging all the way round the vase.³³ These pots cover most of the scenes on which vase painters have drawn for small representations, although the smaller ones show a more limited coverage of the

various aspects of the legend, most concentrating on the battles with the Athenians, with some depiction of Trojan Amazonomachy, mostly featuring Penthesilea. Despite the military context, the portrayals of the Amazons reflect the stylistic developments of mature Red Figure and the Amazons are generally depicted in a positively feminine way with breasts exposed and drawn in the correct perspective (although there are still a few examples of drawing in the archaic style). The right breast seems not to be depicted as mutilated. The inference to be drawn is problematic. Was that part of the legend not generally known at that time? If known, was it considered incredible? Or was it simply unaesthetically acceptable to painters? If it was generally known and acceptable might we not expect it to be used as an identifying feature, like Heracles' club and lion skin?

One influential conclusion which both ancient and modern commentators have drawn from the mature Red Figure concentration on set piece battles is that style and subject matter reflect the monumental Amazonomachies created in Athens between 460 and 438 B.C. by Mikon and Pheidias.³⁴ However, a causal relationship is difficult to prove from the available evidence. While it may be reasonable to hold that both vase painting and public painting and sculpture draw on the same public interest in battle themes, to prove that vase painting necessarily and narrowly followed public art in style and composition (or, for that matter, in stressing the topicality of the Athenians' own struggle) would require detailed analysis of a range of examples with precise dating and special attention to chronology.

In fact the three distinct types of Amazonomachy (Trojan, Heracleian, Athenian) are more securely identifiable in vase painting than in public art. Significantly, the outstanding extant examples of Trojan Amazonomachy are from private art, while vase painting is also an important source for the 'slide' from emphasis on Heracles to that on Theseus and Athenian Amazonomachy (Theseus appears initially as a member of Heracles' expedition and then becomes more prominent). Identifications are assisted by the use of inscription and by the conventions of iconography.

The problems of identification and interpretation of particular battle scenes in public sculpture can be illustrated by the debate about the representations on the Athenian Treasury building at Delphi. The subjects of the marble metopes and acroteria are the exploits of Heracles and Theseus. Some scholars identify this as the Heracleian expedition to Themiskyra in which, according to some sources, Theseus participated. However, other identifications emphasize the role of Theseus and interpret the scenes as referring to the Amazon invasion of Attica. This is especially so if they follow Pausanias'

dating for the building.³⁵ Pausanias thought the treasury was built out of the spoils of Marathon. Given an early fifth-century date, the representation of a mythological counter-part to the Persian invasion would be appropriate, but if the building dates from the last decade of the sixth century, which has been suggested on stylistic grounds, then the Heracleian emphasis may be just as likely.³⁶ This would match the emphasis in archaic and transitional sculpture on the labours of Heracles, for example, on the twelve marble metopes from the temple of Zeus at Olympia. Pausanias describes the subject of the metopes as the labours of Heracles.³⁷

The Heracleian theme was taken up in a number of examples in classical sculpture, notably the metope on the east side of the Hephaisteion which depicts the seventh in the cycle of nine Heracleian labours. These metopes are generally taken to be earlier than those of the Parthenon but later than Olympia. The Olympia representation may have been influential in choice of subject and perhaps composition and may account for the confusion between Heracleian and Athenian Amazonomachy identification in some of the later examples, since it introduced Theseus as a companion of Heracles. According to Pausanias, Theseus' role was shown on one of the crossbars on the throne of Zeus.³⁸

The best preserved of the three friezes on the base of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus depicts Greeks fighting Amazons. Reconstruction gives an unbroken sequence of twelve figures. There are three single combats between Greek and Amazon. Heracles can be identified by club and lionskin. Another of the Greeks may be Theseus. The example shows the persistence of the Heracleian Amazonomachy through classical sculpture (Mausolus died about 353 B.C.). (The other battle frieze on the monument shows Lapiths and Centaurs.)

J. P. Barron has argued influentially that the subjects of the various metopes from the Parthenon are all significantly inter-related – battles between gods and giants, Greeks and Amazons, Lapiths and Centaurs.³⁹ B. F. Cook relates these to conflict between East and West, asserting that 'all seem to refer allegorically to the Persian Wars in the early fifth century'.⁴⁰ Barron sets what is represented at a more abstract level, arguing that the battle depicts 'the triumph of reason and order over chaos and the triumph of Hellenism over barbarism', these being 'the laurels upon which the Athens of Pericles now rested'.⁴¹

However, analysis of the Funereal Speech attributed by Thucydides to Pericles suggests that the Athenian self-image promoted in Periclean Athens took as its 'laurels' military virtues (derived from

competitive heroic values) and the ethos of a citizenship exclusive to Athenians.⁴² As was shown above, these are precisely the values celebrated by a careful reading of the contexts in most of the written sources referring to Amazons up until the end of the fifth century. Only in the Hippocratic writings and in the post-imperial apologia of Lysias and Isocrates do there begin to emerge racial generalizations about Hellenism and barbarism and the natural order of (male) Greek supremacy. In the mid-fifth century Herodotus could open his histories by giving equal status to the heroic deeds of Greeks and barbarians.⁴³

More work needs to be done on the relationship between Athenianism and Hellenism in the fifth and fourth centuries, on typologies of superiority and their chronological and rhetorical contexts, and on the relation between Greek ideas of ‘other’ and ‘inferior’. Interpretations of the Funeral Speech have suffered when distorted by the influence of the cultural (and post-imperial) rhetoric of the fourth century. The same danger may be present in the case of interpretations of fifth-century public sculpture. The dynamic, acquisitive, and aggressive imperialism communicated by Thucydides had no need to present its victory as one for ‘reason and order’ nor to present the epic triumph of the men of Marathon and Salamis as ‘emergence from chaos’. The Athenians celebrated a citizen version of heroic *time* (hence the association with Heracles and Theseus), and there was little heroic reputation to be gained in setting out to defeat the ‘womanish’ and ‘feeble’.

Recent scholarship has called attention to the manner in which modern imperial powers may stigmatize the traditions of conquered foreign peoples as ‘feminine, emotional, naturally submissive’.⁴⁴ However, it is a mistake to assume that the use of such ideas can necessarily be projected backwards on to the *fifth-century* Athenians. At the time they defeated the Persians and began to develop their hegemony (*over fellow Greeks*), military virtues *were* virtues. The status of the winner was enhanced by merit in the defeated. They had no need to take refuge in cultural apologia, even if contempt for the defeated ‘barbarians’ developed later. Furthermore, the Amazons are not presented or depicted in terms of the more negative characteristics attributed by Greeks to barbarians. Their lives are not shown as luxurious or effeminate, they do not flee, make a lot of noise, nor live in subjection to a ruling tyrant (to name only those ‘differences’ which along with more positive qualities were attributed to the Persians in the early fifth-century play by Aeschylus).⁴⁵

Depiction of the Amazons in fifth-century public sculpture, therefore, can be interpreted as a statement of the association of the

Athenians with the victories of the heroes and provides further evidence for the persistence of tradition emblems into fifth-century culture. Far from being thought contemptible, the Amazons continue their role as heroic artistic *topoi*; their depiction draws on the association with a network of legendary references to outstanding achievement. And they continue to be celebrated for their own artistic interest. Unfortunately the paintings by Mikon in the Theseum and Painted Porch are lost, but they have been described in sufficient detail by ancient writers to give an adequate idea of the composition, the number of participants, and the possible names of Athenians and Amazons. Pausanias and Arrian mention the subjects and we know that Mikon painted Amazons on horseback from a reference in Aristophanes.⁴⁶ Furthermore, evidence from Pliny and from the existence of Roman marble copies of the Ephesian Amazons (which were probably bronze) indicates that *single* Amazons were the subject of a sculpture competition in the fifth century, in which Polykleitos and Pheidias were said to be contestants.⁴⁷

If the role of the Amazons as rhetorical and artistic *topoi* had been changed and they had become historically or ideologically assimilated to fifth-century *debate* about the world, we should expect them to play a much more prominent role in drama. But in the extant plays barbarian threat to Greece is represented in the *Persians*, conflict about values in *Antigone* (for example), alienation of the foreigner in *Medea*. The Amazons recur as fringe motifs, emblems of geographical remoteness (*Prometheus Bound*), yardsticks for heroism (*Heracles*), exceptions to the conventional disgrace entailed by death at the hands of a woman (*Eumenides*),⁴⁸ and *exempla* of the capacity of women to achieve male standards of excellence (*Lysistrata*).⁴⁹ There is a lack of evidence about whether fifth-century dramatists had any interest in exploring (for example) Antiope's 'dilemma' in deciding on which side to fight when her fellow Amazons came to rescue her from Theseus.

There are more complex implications underlying the simple schematic polarities between the social organization of Greeks and Amazons shown in Herodotus and Strabo. These are explored to some extent by Plato, but his approach draws more from the historical example of Sparta than from the legendary society of the Amazons and his failure to mention them shows that the Amazons had no status as a 'real' alternative society. In *Republic* 5 women are assimilated to Guardian status on the grounds that

There is therefore no function in society which is peculiar to woman as woman or man as man; natural abilities are similarly distributed in each sex and it is natural for women to share all occupations with men . . . They must play their part in war and all other duties of a Guardian.⁵⁰

It follows from this, in view of the duties of Guardians, that the traditional life of the *oikos* is impossible for the female elite and other arrangements have to be made. Just as important, there is no need for these ‘Amazonian’ qualities in the life of the ordinary people who lack the special duties and privileges of the elite.

M. Lefkowitz assumes a more general application of the *oikos*-based perspective in her reading of the Amazons legend:

The Amazons and other mythical women who attack men are destructive to themselves as well as to the rest of society; the myth’s message is directed both to women and to men and warns that anyone who withdraws from or hates ordinary family life (*sic*) becomes dangerous to society as a whole.⁵¹

But the sources show that Amazons were not only used as touchstones for implicit comment about the citizens’ democracy (to which Lefkowitz’s remarks might apply) but also as emblems of heroic achievement. There is more than one kind of society. In Plato’s Guardian state Amazonian qualities might be used to promote excellence, not to undermine it. More important, Lefkowitz ignores the crucial point that the Amazons were not always aggressive. They were defiant when attacked (which is a different thing). The polarity in classical thought was conventionally between the ideas of aggressive male and submissive female; the idea of an aggressive female might therefore be a challenge. However, the concept of a holistic psychology relating to attitudes and life style which could be self-sufficient and *neither submissive nor aggressive without provocation*, is implicit in the sources (including Herodotus) and specifically mentioned by Strabo and Plutarch. It is that possibility, rather than the crude oppositions of traditional gender stereotypes, which represents the real challenge to Greek social and political assumptions. However, that challenge was insufficiently comprehended (then as now) to be formalized in debate about Greek attitudes and practices.

Amazons as such remain ‘other’. Some of the tensions and polarities addressed in the written sources were progressively internalized in Hellenic debate in the fifth century. After the fifth century the essential qualities of the Amazons could be either hijacked for Plato’s radicalized Utopia or denied them by the contempt for race or gender evident in the post-imperial perspectives of Lysias and Isocrates. But in art they retained something of their individuality and heroic associations. Evidence from painting and sculpture therefore remains a vital check on generalizations about the direction and chronology of development of the coded attitudes presented in the written sources. The ancient evidence both benefits from insights

suggested by modern perspectives and also challenges the claims of those perspectives to provide exclusive coherent interpretations.⁵²

NOTES

1. 'Women in charge: the function of alternatives in early Greek tradition and the ancient idea of matriarchy', *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967), 1–35. Pembroke argues that the similarities in structure in the examples of customs of marriage and sexual intercourse attributed by Herodotus to non-Greeks do not suggest a historical relativism but indicate rather the construction of an image of foreigners, with practices and values alien to those of Greeks, and in symmetrical tension with them.
2. *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London, 1978), p. 241.
3. Discussed in Humphreys, *ibid.*, pp. 265–75 with reference to B. Bernstein, *Class Codes and Control* Vols. 1–3 (London, 1971).
4. *Iliad* 3.189.
5. *Iliad* 6.186.
6. Pindar, *Ol.* 13.87–90 (tr. J. E. Sandys).
7. Pindar Fr.158 (Bergk) = 172 (Loeb).
8. Pindar, *Ol.* 8.47.
9. 4.110–8.
10. 4.114 (tr. A. de Selincourt).
11. Fr. 16, 17 in F. Jacoby, *FGr H* 3 B 45–46.
12. 4.117.
13. [Aeschylus], *Prometheus Bound* 410–5 (tr. P. Vellacott).
14. *Ibid.*, 719–24.
15. Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 68–70.
16. Isocrates, *Panathenaicus* 193.
17. Lysias, *Funeral Oration* 18.
18. Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* 33.
19. *Ibid.*, 43.
20. Plutarch, *Theseus* 26–28.
21. Compare the attitudes implicit in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Nights Dream* Act 1, scene 1, 16ff.: Theseus to the Amazon queen, 'Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword/And won they love doing thee injuries.'
22. 2.5.1–4.
23. 'The Origins of the Classical Style in Sculpture', *JHS* 106 (1986), 71–84.
24. *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford, 1957).
25. Nauplia Museum 4509. Drawing and photo D. von Bothmer, *ibid.*, Plate 1.
26. *Ibid.*, chapter 2.
27. *Ibid.*, chapter 3.
28. Olpe, Munich 1745 (repainted). Bothmer, Plate LXVIII no. 6.
29. Oxford 1927. 4065. Bothmer, Plate LXVIII no. 6.
30. Athens 15002, signed by Pasiades as potter.
31. London B673. Bothmer, Plate LXXIII no. 3.
32. Paris, Louvre CA 1710. Bothmer, Plate LXXIII no. 7.
33. Bothmer, chapter 10.
34. *Ibid.*, chapter 9, p. 147.
35. 10.11.5.
36. Discussed by Bothmer, *op. cit.*, chapter VII, pp. 117–9.
37. 5.10.9.
38. 5.11.4.
39. *An Introduction to Greek Sculpture* (London, 1981), chapter 5.
40. *The Elgin Marbles* (London, 1984), p. 19.
41. *Op. cit.*, pp. 95–96.
42. P. Walcot, 'The Funeral Speech: a Study of Values', *G&R* 20 (1973), 111–21, N.

Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1986), passim.

43. 1.1.

44. Ashis Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (Oxford, 1980) explores (in relation to colonialist domination of India) the polarity of 'warrior' masculine and 'passive' feminine as 'normal' forms of gender, challenged by Gandhi. In a different context D. Cairns and S. Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester, 1988) chapter 3, 'An essentially feminine race', discuss ascendancy attitudes to the Celtic tradition in Ireland.

45. The usage is discussed by S. Goldhill, 'Battle Narrative and Politics in Aeschylus' *Persae*', *JHS* 108 (1988), 189–93.

46. *Lysistrata* 678–9.

47. *N.H.* 34.53; Amazon statue (marble copy) Met. Museum, New York 32.11.4.

48. Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 625–8.

49. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 670ff. and cf. 404.

50. 5.455 (tr. H. D. P. Lee).

51. *Women in Greek Myth* (London, 1986), p. 27.

52. I should like to acknowledge the helpful comments and suggestions made by members of the London Classics Seminar and the Women in the Arts Research Seminar at the Open University.

NEW SURVEYS IN THE CLASSICS

The editors regret that it has not been possible to produce the Survey planned for this year. Next year's Survey, on Greek Art and compiled by B. A. Sparkes, will be longer than usual and extensively illustrated. It will be issued to subscribers with the April 1991 number of *Greece & Rome*.