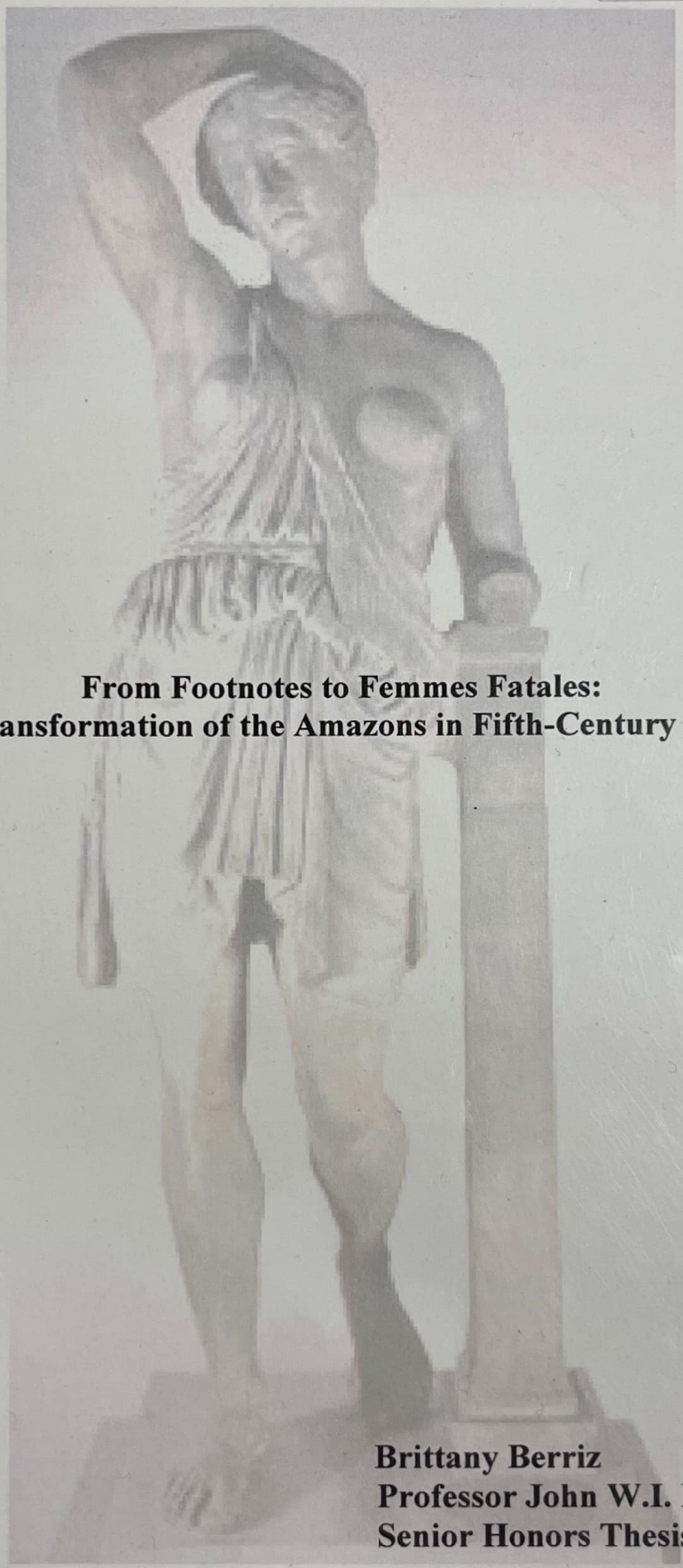

From Footnotes to Femmes Fatales: The Transformation of the Amazons in Fifth-Century Athens

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A peculiar thing has happened in the case of the account we have of the Amazons; for our accounts of other peoples keep a distinction between the mythical and the historical elements; for the things that are ancient and false and monstrous are called myths, but history wishes for the truth, whether ancient or recent, and contains no monstrous element, or else only rarely.

—Strabo, first century A.D.

An Introduction to the Amazons

The myth of the Amazons is surely one of the most popular and highly romanticized myths that come to us from ancient Greece, yet it is also one of the most misunderstood. Although the Amazons have continued to enjoy popularity in art, literature, and modern discourse, explored in the more recent past by such famous names as William Shakespeare and Peter Paul Rubens, the context in which they made sense to the ancient Greeks has been entirely lost. While debates continue over whether the Amazons actually existed, such discussion is beyond the scope of this paper and is irrelevant with regard to the ways in which the ancient Greeks used the myth to comment on their past or, more tellingly, on their present. While it would appear that the large majority of Greeks did in fact believe them to have existed at some point, what is more important is that the ancient Greeks consciously and repeatedly reconstructed the myth of the Amazons to suit their own propagandistic social and political purposes. Nowhere is this more evident than in fifth-century Athens, where the myth enjoyed a surge in popularity as it was continuously redefined and expanded to reflect the changing political and social environment of the newly formed democracy.

In order to understand how the Athenians manipulated the myth of the Amazons to reflect, and in some cases influence, the socio-political environment of Athens in the fifth century, it is necessary to analyze the construction of the myth and how the Amazons were viewed prior to the Classical period. It is only through such analysis that we can trace how and why the Amazons were transformed from monstrous foes in the works of Homer to sexually enticing female warriors who were as threatening for their sexuality as for their military prowess in the Classical era. While the way in which the

Amazons were transformed reveals itself through examination of the art and literature in which they were depicted, *why* they were transformed is another matter entirely. To see how the Athenians constructed the Amazons' identity in a way that allowed them to use them as propaganda, we must look for what each version of the myth says about gender relations and current events, and about more abstract ideas such as sexuality, citizenship, government, and identity. To ascertain such information, it is important to approach each myth with a number of questions in mind. Where and when did the myth originate? When and where did it first appear in print? In art? What evidence exists in terms of placing it chronologically and geographically? What was going on politically, economically, and socially at that historical moment? How might this have influenced the particular telling of the myth? How did the myth change over time? What might account for the change? If it is the first time that a myth appears, what might explain its development or entrance into social consciousness at this time? What is the motivation of the author in recounting this myth? What elements remain the same throughout various myths and what elements change?

While the primary sources available for such examination are rich in both number and variety, ranging from historiographies, funeral orations, and plays to both public and private works of art, there are several limitations to these sources that necessarily accompany discussion of matters of antiquity. Although we have a number of sources from which to work, we are left to piece together a narrative from those sources that happened to survive to the present day and not necessarily those that would have been the most instructive. Similarly, while many of the sources date from the specific periods with which we are dealing, a significant number were written or created centuries later.

Though their removal from the events discussed should be taken into account when analyzing their validity, they are nevertheless valuable sources of information that should not be discounted, especially given the relative scarcity of ancient sources. Finally, we face the issue that arises from trying to construct a coherent narrative from the pieces that can be gleaned from various sources that frequently contradict one another. Despite these drawbacks, however, the literary, historiographical, and artistic sources that remain are both numerous and instructive enough to allow us to piece together a compelling narrative of how the Amazons rose from mere footnotes in the conquests of Greek heroes to become the embodiment of the Athenians' greatest fears in the fifth-century democracy.

Homer's Amazons

Ironically, it is in Homer's *Iliad,* the quintessential celebration of masculine virtue in battle, that the earliest literary or artistic reference to the Amazons is made.[1] Calling his new daughter-in-law to him as the Greeks and Trojans first surveyed each other on the field of battle in Book Three, Priam, king of the Trojans, asks Helen to name for him the Greek heroes assembled below. Looking on as she proceeded to point out Agamemnon, her former brother-in-law and the leader of the Greeks, Priam became "lost in reverie and wonder," claiming:

> How lucky you are, son of Atreus, child of fortune, your destiny so blessed! Look at the vast Achaean armies you command! Years ago I visited Phrygia rife with vineyards, saw the Phrygian men with their swarming horses there—multitudes—the armies of Otreus, Mygdon like a god, encamped that time along the Sangarius River banks. And I took my stand among them, comrade-in-arms the day the Amazons struck, a match for men in war. But not even those hordes could match these hordes of yours, your fiery-eyed Achaeans![2]

[1] With regard to transliteration, I have chosen to utilize the Latinized version of names and terms (i.e. Pericles rather than Perikles) and have changed quoted passages to maintain consistency throughout.
[2] Hom. *Il.* 3.220-231

The Greek term *antianerai,* the epithet used to describe the Amazons and translated here as "a match for men in war," presents an interesting dilemma to the scholar trying to decipher how the Amazons were viewed in this early period. Though some, such as Andrew Stewart, translate the term as "antimen," [3] setting the Amazons up as an "other" against which the Greeks heroes defined themselves, others, including Lorna Hardwick, favor the translation of "a match for men," or "man-like." While Stewart's translation is interesting—for it identifies the Amazons as being of the opposite sex and antagonistic to the Greeks on the battlefield—it is Hardwick's translation that has enjoyed greater popularity among scholars and will thus form the basis for analyzing this passage.

If Hardwick's translation is to be believed and *antianerai* can be translated to mean "a match for men" or "man-like," a translation favored by Robert Fagles in the passage above, Homer's use of the term takes on a whole new significance, one that shows what a dramatic change the role of the Amazons would undergo in fifth-century Athens. As equals to or a "match for men," Hardwick notes that the implication is that "in war they have the appearance and fighting strength of men," something which emphasizes "their male type, while the context emphasizes their status as opponents."[4] The status of the Amazons is heightened by the fact that they engaged the Phrygian army in battle, an army, according to Priam, that was second in size only to the Greeks his Trojans now face.[5] Given this fact, the Amazons that Priam encountered in Phrygia can perhaps best be seen as a compositional tool used to elevate the status of the heroes they

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[3] Andrew Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens," *Poetics Today* Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter 1995): 576.
[4] Lorna Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons—Heroes, Outsiders, or Women?" *Greece and Rome* 2nd Ser., Vol. 37, No. 1 (April 1990): 15.
[5] Ibid.

encountered, for the greater the opponent defeated, the greater the valor to be had by the victorious.

While Homer refers to the Amazons in passing to elevate the status of the king of the Trojans—for he too fought alongside the Phrygians against the female warriors—it serves a second important function that helps to chronologically and geographically locate the Amazons within Greek history. Priam's encounter with the Amazons places them in a period antedating the Trojan War, [6] a fact that would later allow them to be portrayed as contemporaries of Heracles and Theseus. It further serves to establish them "as liminal figures, living somewhat beyond the outskirts of the Greek world," an idea which is explored by later sources who continue to place the Amazons further away from the Greek homeland as its borders expanded proportionately with Greek participation in imperial expansion.[7]

Homer's second mention of the Amazons in the *Iliad* is perhaps even more fleeting and indirect, though it does much to elaborate on the role the Amazons had in the repertoire of Greek mythology. Before engaging in hand to hand combat in Book Six, Glaucus and Diomedes discuss their lineage, wherein the former mentions that he is descended from "faultless Bellerophon," whose story many Greeks knew. Describing the trials of the famous hero, Glaucus recounts:

> There is a city, Corinth, deep in a bend of Argos, good stallion country where Sisyphus used to live, the wiliest man alive. Sisyphus, Aeolus' son, who had a son called Glaucus, and in his day Glaucus sired brave Bellerophon, a man without fault. The gods gave him beauty and the fine, gallant traits that go with men. But Proetus plotted against him. Far stronger, the king in his anger drove him out of Argos, the kingdom Zeus had brought beneath his scepter. Proteus' wife, you see, was mad for Bellerophon, the lovely Antea lusted to couple with him, all in

[6] Mary Florence Bennett, *Religious Cults Associated With The Amazons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), 2.
[7] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 576.

> secret. Futile—she could never seduce the man's strong will, his seasoned, firm resolve. So straight to the king she went, blurting out her lies: 'I wish you'd die, Proetus, if you don't kill Bellerophon! Bellerophon's bent on dragging me down with him in lust though I fight him all the way!' All of it false, but the king seethed when he heard a tale like that. He balked at killing the man—he'd some respect at least—but he quickly sent him off to Lycia, gave him tokens, murderous signs, scratched in a folded tablet, and many of them too, enough to kill a man. He told him to show them to Antea's father: that would mean his death. So off he went to Lycia, safe in the escort of the gods, and. . . the king of Lycia gave him a royal welcome. . . . When the tenth Dawn shone with her rose-red fingers, he began to question him, asked to see his credentials, whatever he brought him from his in-law Proetus. But then, once he received that fatal message sent from his own daughter's husband, first he ordered Bellerophon to kill the Chimaera—grim monster sprung of the gods, nothing human, all lion in front, all snake behind, all goat between, terrible, blasting lethal fire at every breath! But he laid her low, obeying signs from the gods. Next he fought the Solymi, tribesmen bent on glory, roughest battle of men he ever entered, so he claimed. Then for a third test he brought the Amazons down, a match for men in war.[8]

Having successfully completed these nearly impossible tasks, as well as single-handedly defeated the best men of Lycia who ambushed him on his return, the king realized that Bellerophon was favored by the gods and turned from his attempt to kill him, instead giving him the hand of his daughter in marriage, a favorable tract of land, and royal honors. As in the case of Priam, Bellerophon's status as a hero is elevated by his victory over the Amazons, who, as "a horde of warrior women who strive against men, and with whom conflict is dangerous even to the bravest of heroes," are seen as foes that are so formidable and dangerous that battle against them was all but meant to ensure the death of the hero.[9] Reminiscent of the Priam account, the Amazons are described in a way that is meant to relate them to the men they fight against, not as a group to be considered individually by the qualities they possess. Their identity being constructed in opposition to the men they encounter, they are depicted not as women who happen to fight well in

[8] Hm. *Il.* 6.178-220
[9] Bennett, *Religious Cults,* 2.

battle, but instead as women who are "the peers of men," or more specifically, "women who fight like men." It is interesting to note that the poet cannot, or does not, attempt to distinguish the Amazons in any other way or to elaborate on any other characteristics, something which is indicative of the fact that their novelty lies in the astonishing idea that women were capable of fighting as well as men—even the best of the Greek heroes.

Despite these similarities, however, the Bellerophon episode introduces a more complex image of the Amazons than that seen in Priam's account, as the novelty of their existence takes on a more monstrous and unnatural connotation. When viewed alongside the other challenges posed to him, his encounter with the Amazons can be seen as part of a pattern that is rather telling with regard to how they were viewed by the ancient Greeks. His first encounter with the Chimaera—part lion, part serpent, and part goat—is particularly indicative of the challenges posed to Bellerophon, as the beast was not only an unnatural hybrid of three different animals, but was furthermore female rather than male. Having thus defeated this monster, he was forced to engage in battle with the Solymi, fierce warriors who had traditionally been enemies of the king. The fact that Homer portrays these male warriors as the most difficult of the foes encountered by the hero is perhaps not surprising given their number and gender, but one must wonder if this is not a backhanded commentary on the nature of the Amazons themselves. Following the Chimaera and the Solymi as the last of the challenges posed to Bellerophon, it is perhaps easy to see the Amazons as a mixture of the two foes that came before them. They are fierce warriors who "fight like men," or more specifically, like the Solymi, yet they are female and are thus an unnatural mixture of gender attributes, much as the female Chimaera is an unnatural hybrid of animals. The fact that two out of the three challengers

that Bellerophon faced were female is perhaps appropriate given that he found himself in his current perilous position because he had spurned the sexual advances of a woman in power, a theme that resonates with later uses of the myth of the Amazons in fifth-century Athens.

Amazons in the Archaic Period: The Story of Achilles and Penthesilea

While the only direct references to the Amazons in Homer's *Iliad* are those made with regard to Priam and Bellerophon in an attempt to elevate their status as heroes, the tradition of Amazon participation in the Trojan War as allies of the Trojans was expanded upon in the late eighth century by Arctinus of Miletos, a supposed pupil of the poet. Allegedly composing his continuation of the *Iliad,* entitled the *Aithiopis,* circa 700 B.C., Arctinus began his tale with the story of Penthesilea, an Amazon warrior who rode alongside the Trojans against the Greek invaders. [10] While Andrew Stewart notes that only the first two lines and a few other scraps remain of this work, the outline of the addition fortunately survives in the work of the Byzantine scholar Proclus, thus allowing modern readers access to a major change in the development of Amazon mythology and an opportunity to view the story that was to inspire many Greek artists. As recounted in Proclus's *Chrestomathia,* the story of Achilles and Penthesilea began as follows:

> The Amazon Penthesilea, daughter of Ares and a Thracian by birth, arrives to aid the Trojans in war. As she is fighting valorously Achilles kills her and the Trojans bury her. Achilles kills Thersites for slandering him and carping at his alleged love for her; whence there is a division among the Greeks about the murder of Thersites.[11]

Continuing the tradition of what Hardwick describes as the Amazons' "stock role as an index of Heroic achievement," wherein "their figurative importance is the product of an

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[10] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 576.
[11] Ibid.

aristocratic way of looking at the world," as "they were worthy opponents—so they are worth defeating,"[12] Arctinus's pairing of the Amazons with Achilles—the ultimate Greek hero—elevates the status of the Amazons as much as that of the hero they were meant to celebrate. As such, Arctinus's characterization of the Amazons aiding the Trojans is the richest seen thus far, for a number of reasons.

First, the poet presents the Amazons not only as being a worthy opponent of the greatest of Greek heroes, but he further presents them, for the first time, as worthy of being allied with the Trojans, who boast their own outstanding heroes in the persons of Hector and Aeneas. Arctinus further expands upon the rather one-dimensional portrayals of the Amazons seen in Homer, as they are no longer depicted as a group whose sole identity can be defined by their likeness to men in battle. Instead, he fleshes out the image of the Amazons by presenting an individual Amazon whom he not only specifically names, but furthermore describes as being "valorous" rather than merely "man-like" in battle. For the first time, an Amazon is depicted not as an unnatural anomaly who is masculine in her abilities, but as an individual woman who is valorous of her own accord. The fact there is no epithet bearing any allusion to the masculinity of her physical attributes or actions is particularly telling with regard to how far the image of the Amazons had progressed, as is the romantic implication found within the lines.

The idea that a Greek hero could have any romantic or sexual feelings toward an Amazon is unprecedented in Greek art or literature up until this point, something which would appear to indicate the flexibility and malleability of the image of the Amazons in Greek mythology. Although Achilles had killed Penthesilea in hand-to-hand combat, Arctinus insinuates that he had fallen in love with her along the way, or at least that his

[12] Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 16.

comrades in arms had reason to believe that this was the case. Despite the originality of this notion, however, it must be noted that Achilles responds to this accusation with rage—killing Thersites for making such a slanderous comment, something which indicates that there is some sort of abnormality and impropriety associated with such a notion. The episode can thus be seen as a transition between the archaic image of the Amazons and the later, Athenian one in which an Amazon is worthy of marrying Theseus, the heroic king of Athens. While the full transition would not come until much later, as Stewart notes, "the important point is that Arctinus built male desire for the Amazons into this poem, and this innovation stuck."[13]

While Proclus's account only briefly mentions Achilles's alleged love for Penthesilea without expanding upon it in great detail, it is possible that Arctinus's lost account said a great deal more about the supposed romance.[14] Although there is no way to know the validity of such a suggestion, it may help to explain why such a large number of Arctinus's literary and artistic followers used it as a starting point for constructing an elaborate romance between the hero and the Amazon. For example, in his chapter on the Trojan War in his extensive compilation of Greek mythology, the mythographer Apollodorus claims that, after killing many men in battle, Penthesilia "died at the hands of Achilles," whereupon the hero "fell in love with her and killed Thersites for mocking him."[15] Whereas Arctinus, through Proclus, suggested the possibility of a romance and claimed that Achilles killed Thersites for suggesting such a disgraceful thing, Apollodorus presents the romance as factual and claims that Achilles killed his fellow Greek for challenging his love for the female warrior.

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[13] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 577.
[14] Bennett, *Religious Cults,* 3.
[15] Apollod. *E.* Epitome 5.2

Though literary sources were quick to take up the notion of a romance between Achilles and Penthesilea, the artistic representations that remain today appear to take a very different, perhaps more traditional, approach to the subject. According to Stewart, some have "sought to read the motif of the doomed romance into these images, but they are usually ambiguous, as is Proclus."[16] Instead, Stewart reads a more political message into the images, noting that "made suddenly topical by the Cimmerian invasion of Ionia, the theme of Penthesilea's arrival and death soon appeared in pictorial form," with "a votive shield from Tiryns, made around 675," being the earliest example of the episode, or for that matter, of the existence of Amazons, in Greek art.[17] The coincidence of the invasions of Ionia by the Cimmerians, a group of Thracian nomadic tribes, at the end of the eighth century with the appearance of the Penthesilea episode in Greek art is perhaps not surprising given that Arctinus gave the Amazon a Thracian background. In light of this fact, it is not difficult to read the depiction of the Thracian Penthesilea and Grecian Achilles in combat as an allegory of the attacks by the Thracian Cimmerians against the Greek cities of Ionia.

The votive shield alluded to by Stewart is the subject of a lengthy discussion offered by Dietrich Von Bothmer in his extensive work entitled *Amazons in Greek Art.* Cataloguing practically every known example of the Amazons in the art of ancient Greece, Von Bothmer claims that the "the earliest recognizable Amazons occur on a fragmentary terra-cotta votive-shield" found by Schliemann in 1884.[18] Although a large portion of the shield is missing, Von Bothmer argues rather convincingly that the primary figures can be made out as Achilles and Penthesilea. A composition of five figures, with

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[16] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 577.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Dietrich Von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1.

a single prostrate figure lying between a primary figure aided by a smaller one on each side, the shield can be roughly dated to approximately the turn of the eighth century or slightly later, the latter being favored by Stewart. The gender and ethnic differences of the figure groups are evident upon closer inspection, as the beards on the faces of the two warriors on the left identify them as male, while their short tunics mark them as Greek. The figures on the right, however, are identifiable as female by the "crude indications of feminine breasts in the chief warrior on the right," while the fact that they are wearing a "kind of peplos, open at the side," serves to distinguish them as being, if not specifically Amazons, as clearly different from their Greek opponents.[19]

While Von Bothmer notes that some scholars hold that the Greek hero is Heracles and not Achilles, he argues that the existence of the hunting centaur on the interior of the shield recalls Chiron, "the foster-father of Achilles, as he appears on a proto-Attic neck-amphora in Berlin," [20] though it is also possible that the existence of the centaur is a commentary on the nature of the Amazons as a hybrid between men and women, much as they are of men and horses. Despite these doubts, however, the date of the piece recommends the hero as Achilles, especially given that the shield was believed to have been created around the same time as the Cimmerian invasions.

A number of bronze relief shield strips depicting Achilles and Penthesilea, ranging in date from the late seventh to the middle of the sixth century show an interesting pattern that harkens back to Homer's early portrayals of the Amazons as an unnatural amalgamation of male and female. Making it easier for modern scholars attempting to identify the scenes depicted, the name Penthesilea is inscribed on three of

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

the reliefs, and given the similarity in composition between all nine, it is easy to see them as part of the same tradition and thus the same episode. Facing toward the right, Penthesilea, who "wears a short chiton and a high-crested helmet and is armed with a spear," "breaks down on her knees before Achilles," who "wears greaves, corslet, and Corinthian helmet and carries a smallish Boeotian shield."[21]

While there is nothing remarkable or out of the ordinary in these depictions, aside from the fact that they pictorially represent a woman engaging a man in battle, it is the images on the other panels that accompany the Amazon episode that say a great deal about the continuity of the way in which the Amazons were viewed from the time of Homer to the period immediately following Arctinus. Among the other panels, one can see a recognizable pattern develop, as the majority of the images depicted represent creatures such as the sphinx or, more frequently, a battle between a Greek hero and an animal or hybrid creature, including Heracles and the lion, Heracles and the Geryon, Theseus and the Minotaur, and Perseus and Medusa. That the Amazons are pictorially as well as verbally depicted in such company would appear to indicate that this was how they were both literally and figuratively viewed by the ancient Greeks—as one among a large number of aberrant foes that were a result of unnatural intercourse between gods and animals. While the image of the Amazons as monstrous would change under Athenian tutelage, the theme of unnatural sexuality would continue to be associated with the myth of the Amazons, though in fifth century Athens it was overt female sexuality that was seen as deviant and a thing to be feared.

[21] Ibid., 4. See figure 7 for a similar depiction of the Achilles and Penthesilea episode.

Heracles and the Amazons in Sixth-Century Athens

While the Amazons had long been known to the larger Greek world, they enter into the Athenian consciousness "suddenly, in force and without apparent antecedents" sometime after 575 B.C.[22] Although the story of Heracles and the Amazons was not written down until c. 417 B.C. when Euripides penned his play entitled *Heracles,* the Amazons first appear as opponents of the hero in Attic black-figure vases, where the scenes depicted are most likely that of Heracles' ninth labor. Despite the fact that there are no written records of Heracles' encounter with the Amazons until fifth-century Athens, others of his twelve labors had been recorded prior to this period, namely in Book 11 of the *Odyssey* and in artistic representations including the depiction of his tenth labor—the stealing of the cattle of Geryon—that accompanied the image of Penthesilea and Achilles on the shield strips dating from the sixth or seventh century. The most common account of his labors that has come down to us holds that Hera, in her continued hatred of Heracles, caused a fit of madness in him during which he killed his wife Megara and their three children. Having recovered himself, he sought advice from the priestess of Apollo at Delphi, who instructed him to go to Tiryns and to serve King Eurystheus for twelve years, performing the tasks he set for him, with the promise that, if he managed to successfully complete all twelve tasks, he would gain immortality.[23]

The fact that the Amazons factor into the twelve challenges posed to Heracles is not surprising when viewed in light of the trials of Bellerophon, and to a lesser degree, Priam and Achilles, for, as Hardwick notes, it can be seen as part of a tradition wherein

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[22] William Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 2.
[23] Robert J. Lenardon and Mark P.O. Morford, *Classical Mythology: Sixth Edition* (New York: Longman, 1999), 419-420.

there is "status to be acquired from defeating the Amazons," something which leads to their being "presented as a task or trial for someone aspiring to heroic achievements and victories."[24] Building upon and expanding the tradition begun with the Bellerophon episode, the existence of an Amazon challenge within Heracles's twelve labors is complicated and somewhat transitional, for it paints two very different pictures of the Amazons, something which serves to bridge the traditional, monstrous image of the past, and the more civilized image that would be created at the turn of the fifth century.

Ninth among the twelve labors, it is interesting to note that the Amazons represent the sole human challenge posed to Heracles, for every other obstacle is of an animalistic or inanimate nature, prominent among them being—in traditional fashion—a large number of monstrous creatures that are of a hybrid nature, including the Lernaean Hydra, Geryon, and Cerberus, the three-headed hound of Hades.[25] While the Amazons are certainly less monstrous than these creatures, it is difficult not to see their inclusion among such a list as a commentary on the deviant nature of the Amazons, especially given the fact that not one of the labors posed to Heracles involved a male human. Despite this fact, however, the tale of Heracles' ninth labor also does much to dispel prior notions about the Amazons, promoting instead the idea that their female aspect was worthy of romantic attention and that, contrary to popular belief, they were not necessarily hostile to men in general, or more specifically, to Greeks.

Sent, as in his other labors, by King Eurystheus of Mycenae to bring back the girdle of the queen of the Amazons for his daughter Admete, Heracles undertook the expedition accompanied by a number of heroes, though their names and numbers

[24] Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons," 16.
[25] The Lernaean Hydra was a beast with nine heads that doubled when cut off, while Geryon was a three bodied monster who guarded cattle alongside a giant and a two-headed dog.

frequently changed.[26] Although he did not write his *Library* until the late first century B.C. or early first century A.D., Apollodorus's account of Heracles's Amazon expedition is the most complete and succinct account that survives, and appears to be in keeping with those earlier sources he was undoubtedly working from. Describing the encounter, he wrote:

> Heracles' ninth labor was to bring Eurystheus the belt of Hippolyte. She was the queen of the Amazons, who were skilled in warfare and lived around the Thermodon River. . . . Hippolyte wore the belt of Ares as a sign that she was their leader. Heracles was sent after this belt because Admete, Eurystheus' daughter, wanted it. . . As Heracles sailed into the harbor at Themiscyra, Hippolyte met him. She promised to give him the belt when she learned why he had come. But Hera, assuming the appearance of one of the Amazons, passed through the crowd saying that the foreigners who had just arrived were carrying off the queen. The Amazons hurried to the ship, armed and on horseback. When Heracles saw them with weapons he suspected a trick, so he killed Hippolyte, took away her belt, and fighting off the rest, sailed away and put in at Troy.[27]

While, as discussed above, the account contains the traditional elements wherein the hero must militarily defeat the famed warrior women to elevate his own status, Apollodorus's account introduces an element that had yet to be seen in accounts of the Amazons—the idea that they lived by Greek codes of hospitality and were not necessarily diametrically opposed or antagonistic to the Greeks. Following traditional rites of guest-friendship, Hippolyte welcomes Heracles and offers to give her girdle—a cherished gift from Ares, the father of the Amazons, and a symbol of her leadership—willingly, an indication that the Amazons were neither bestial in behavior nor all that different from their masculine Greek counterparts. The fact that Hera, continuing to scheme against Heracles, incites the Amazons against the hero through trickery recalls a theme that has been, and will

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[26] Always included on the expedition was the hero Telamon, though Peleus, the Argonauts, and Theseus were all added to the ever changing myth at some point.
[27] Apollod. *E.* 2.5.9

continue to be, traced throughout the Amazon narratives, that of a jealous or scorned woman presenting the object of her wrath with a female challenge to overcome. The revenge they seek to take is thus poetically well conceived, as the hero must overcome the most ferocious of females militarily, while, increasingly as the myth develops, protecting himself from the sexual wiles of females both at home and abroad.[28]

Seeking to place the myth's Athenian origins within a historical context, Tyrrell argues, rather persuasively, that there was a more than likely political origin behind the sudden appearance of Amazons on Attic black-figure vases in the sixth century. Claiming that Pisistratus, the tyrant of Athens from 545-527, sought to align himself with Heracles as a source of legitimization, he focuses on the status given the hero in Attica and his particularly special connection to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens. Pisistratus's influence on the polis dated as far back as 561, when he first took advantage of the factionalization that resulted from Solon's reforms in 594 and insinuated himself as tyrant. Though he was expelled twice before he was able to gain a stranglehold over the political process, he managed to consolidate his power base in Athens by 546. As the first tyrant to rule Athens successfully, Pisistratus undoubtedly sought to legitimize his rule in the eyes of the masses, as it was this group that provided his main power base.[29] Given his position, it would appear that he sought legitimization on two fronts—through the fostering of patronage and public works, and by aligning himself with Heracles, the most popular figure in Attica at the time.

In the first case, Robert Kebric notes that Pisistratus "took particular pains to look after their [the populace's] interests," initiating a large number of public building projects

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[28] This idea will be explored in more detail later in the context of gender and sexuality in the Periclean Period.

[29] Robert B. Kebric, *Greek People,* Third Edition, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001), 106.

to help alleviate unemployment, lessening taxation (something he was able to do because of his own personal fortune), encouraging trade, and providing loans to whoever was in need of them. On this front, at least, he appears to have gained a great deal of success, as his rule has traditionally been viewed as rather effective, evidence of which can be seen in the writings of Plato and Aristotle.[30] His attempt to connect himself to Heracles may be less certain, though associating himself with the hero was perhaps a sound choice given the success and popularity that Heracles enjoyed in Attic cults in the sixth century as a result of his special connection to Athena. The patron goddess and protector of Athens, it was she who was traditionally held as aiding the Greek hero in his twelve labors. Given his popularity and connection to the most important figure in Athenian political and religious life, the hero would appear to be a logical figure for a tyrant trying to legitimize his power to turn to, for if Pisistratus could present himself as Heracles, he would in essence be appropriating the divine favor of Athena for his own rule.

While Tyrrell notes that the evidence is somewhat circumstantial, it would appear that Pisistratus did in fact try to connect himself to both the hero and his patron deity, evidence of which can be seen in his "return from his second exile (546 B.C.) in a chariot driven by a tall woman dressed as Athena," a propagandistic move likely "intended to strike a parallel with Athena's introduction of Heracles into Olympus."[31] John Boardman further argues that Attic art depicting this episode underwent a similar change at this time, for the typical iconography that had Athena introducing Heracles to Olympus on foot was replaced by a version in which the goddess and hero arrived in a chariot.[32] Though whether the changes in the artistic representations of the episode reflected or

[30] Ibid.
[31] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking*, 3.
[32] John Boardman, "Herakles, Peisistratos and Eleusis." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies,* Vol. 95 (1975): 1.

influenced Pisistratus's return is uncertain, what is important is that it shows a direct correlation between the tyrant and the Greek hero. If Pisistratus was in fact trying to portray himself as a modern Heracles, as it appears he was, the question of why the hero's encounter with the Amazons gained such a degree of artistic popularity over his other labors still remains. In order to answer this, we must turn to an examination of the Heraclean Amazonomachies that enjoyed popularity in sixth-century Athens.

In discussing the appearance of the Amazons in Athenian art, Von Bothmer notes that "neither proto-Attic nor the first generation of Attic black-figure has left any representation of Amazons," while "in Attic vase-painting, Amazons do not appear until the second quarter of the sixth century, arriving suddenly, and in force, without any apparent antecedents."[33] Their appearance in the second quarter of the sixth century does appear to coincide with the timing of Pisistratus's rule over Athens, though the significance of this fact is debatable. The Amazon episode was not the only one of Heracles' labors to enjoy popularity at this time, nor was it the most popular, for that honor went to the episode in which he battled the Nemean Lion. After this episode, of which there are 650 surviving examples of Attic Black Figure vases, however, the Amazon labor is by far the most popular, with a substantial 368.[34] Given the fact that all of Heracles' labors enjoyed artistic popularity at the time because of his connection to Athena, one has to wonder why the Amazon episode enjoyed particular popularity. Was there a larger political message to be read in their proliferation, or was it merely that the Amazons provided a Heraclean episode in which the artistic and poetic possibilities had reached new heights in the wake of the Achilles and Penthesilea episode? Though we

[33] Von Bothmer, *Amazons in Art,* 6.
[34] Josine H. Blok, *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth,* trans. Peter Mason (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1995), 379.

may never know for sure, examination of the artistic evidence appears to suggest that it is the latter and not the former explanation which should be give the most credence at this time.

While there are well over seventy Amazonomachies[35] dating to 575-550 alone, most of which clearly depict battles between Heracles and the Amazons (while the rest are unidentifiable and may be representations of Achilles and Penthesilea),[36] there is nothing truly striking in the figures, aside from the fact that the girdle does not appear to be present in any of them.[37] The majority of the scenes from this period depict a large number of Greeks and Amazons engaging in combat, while those that survive from the middle of the sixth century to the end of Attic black-figure vases undergo an unusual transformation. The mass groups of combatants steadily give way to images that depict Heracles accompanied by a much smaller group of Greek heroes, each of whom engages in hand-to-hand combat with an Amazon with whom he is paired. This sequence in turn gives way to scenes in which the Greeks no longer have their own opponents, but instead assist Heracles in his fight against the Amazons, until these too give way to episodes in which Heracles fights alone.[38] As Von Bothmer notes, "by far the greatest number of Attic black-figured vases give the Amazonomachy of Heracles *without* his companions," engaging either a single Amazon or many at a time (see figure 1).[39]

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[35] An Amazonomachy is an artistic representation of a battle in which the Amazons are featured.
[36] Von Bothmer, *Amazons in Art,* Chapter 2.
[37] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 2.
[38] Von Bothmer, *Amazons in Art,* 30.
[39] Ibid., 42.

Figure 1: Heracles and Amazons, Plate LXIX. 4a[40]

While this narrowing of focus toward Heracles may be an attempt to single out the prowess of the hero as a single individual in the context of Pisistratus' tyranny, as it would be in his interests to provide a heroic precedent for the dominance of one over many, what is perhaps most remarkable about these Amazonomachies is just how unremarkable they are. They almost uniformly lack the not-so-subtle insinuations of monstrosity that accompanied the earlier Achilles scenes, and they fail to introduce any new, striking element to the image of the Amazons, something which may indicate that the Amazons' popularity in Attic art during the sixth century was merely a result of the artistic possibilities that they presented, as Heracles' ninth labor allowed for many variations in pictorially depicting a complex and visually engaging composition of multiple figures. If the Amazons' entrance into Attic art was merely due to the popularity afforded to Heracles in sixth-century Athens and the artistic possibilities that they provided in light of the Achilles episode, and not to any larger political purpose, the

[40] All Plate numbers refer to Von Bothmer's *Amazons in Greek Art*.

change that Amazonomachies underwent in the fifth century is thus all the more striking, for it is here that the Amazons come into their own as a didactic subject of Greek art and literature.

Despite the prolonged popularity of Heraclean Amazonomachies during this period, there was a steady decline in the number that were being produced in Athens as the end of the sixth century approached, something which can likely be attributed to two key factors, one artistic and the other political. According to Tyrrell, by the end of the sixth century "artists had exhausted the potential of the black-figure technique," favoring instead the advent of red-figure vases, where the figures were left the color of clay and the background was painted, something which allowed for a greater degree of realism and emotional expression.[41] Coinciding with this new artistic development, however, to be discussed in greater detail in the next section, was the rise to power in the late sixth century of the Alcmaeonidae family and their greatest member, Cleisthenes, who was responsible for initiating democratic reforms within Athens. The shift in political organization no doubt called for a change in the kind of hero worshipped in Athens, something which made Theseus, with his connections to Heracles and his democratic pedigree, an easy source to turn to. Whether the arrival of an exciting new technique encouraged artists to search for exciting new topics that could serve as outlets for their newfound ability to enjoy greater artistic expression, or whether they were reacting to the political and cultural atmosphere around them, one thing is certain: the depiction of the Heraclean Amazonian myth on Attic vase painting was being replaced by the myth of Theseus and the Amazons, something which would have great ramifications for the fate of the Amazons in the propaganda machine that was fifth-century Athens.

[41] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 3.

Theseus and the Amazons in Fifth-Century Athens

In order to understand why the Theseus myth replaced the Heraclean one at the end of the sixth century, it is necessary to consider together the political atmosphere of Athens at this time and the democratic pedigree traditionally assigned to Theseus that recommended him as a specifically Attic hero. Although this necessarily requires a short digression from the Amazon narrative, it is imperative to the understanding of how and why the myth was incorporated into the new political identity of Athens, for from this point on the myth is inextricably intertwined with that of Theseus and cannot be considered independently. Given this fact, a clear understanding of how the Athenians viewed Theseus is vital to any analysis of how they viewed the Amazons and used them for their own propagandistic purposes. In order to understand the advent of the Theseus myth into the Athenian consciousness, however, one must first understand the profound shift in the Athenian political structure and ideology that was taking place at the end of the sixth century.

Noting that the deeds of Theseus dramatically increase in Attic vase painting circa 520-510 and begin to include the rape of the Amazon Queen Antiope, Stewart places the creation of the now lost epic *The Theseis* "under the tyrant Hippias (527-510) or under the fledgling democracy of Cleisthenes (archon in 508)," as it is his belief, as well as that of many others, that the increased popularity of Theseus in Attic art was a response to its epic formulation.[42] It is equally probable, however, especially if the *Theseis* was introduced under Hippias, that its author was responding to "the conscious collaboration of Athenian artists in creating a rival for the more venerable hero, Heracles, who had

[42] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 577.

hitherto dominated the field both in sculpture and in ceramic art."[43] Whether or not the introduction of Theseus's epic poem or his promulgation in Attic art originated under Cleisthenes or slightly before him, it is nevertheless possible to see how the hero was consciously being intertwined with the politics of the newly founded democracy.

When Hippias, the son and successor of Pisistratus, was forced out of power in Athens in 510, the polis was thrown into chaos as factional struggles broke out among the newly restored aristocracy. The chaos lasted until Cleisthenes, a liberal member of the prominent Alcmeonid family, gained the upper hand in Athenian politics in 508 by appealing to the citizen population through the introduction of democratic reforms that were intended to widen popular participation in Athenian government.[44] Reorganizing the political structure of the polis so that "full power lay in the citizen assembly," Cleisthenes introduced a system of "equal rights," or *isonomia,* removing the remaining obstacles to popular rule. In theory, "the kin-based, faction-ridden politics of the past supposedly gave way to a 'one-man, one-vote' system in which the good of society took precedence over any special interests groups," though full democratic reforms would not be realized until the middle of the fifth century.[45]

The shift in the structure of the Athenian government and the transferring of power from the family of Pisistratus to that of Cleisthenes undoubtedly initiated a need to replace the hero of the old rulers with one more in line with the reforms of the new, something which may very well explain the rise in Theseus's popularity in art toward the end of the sixth century. Though he did not enjoy the fame or cults that Heracles had in

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[43] John N. Davie, "Theseus the King in Fifth-Century Athens," *Greece and Rome* 2nd Ser., Vol. 29, No. 1 (April 1982): 25.
[44] Chester G. Starr, *The Ancient Greeks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 48; Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 7.
[45] Starr, *Ancient Greeks,* 48; Kebric, *Greek People,* 145.

Attica, Theseus's renown was, ironically, limited for the most part to that region due to the myth of the minotaur and his rape of Ariadne, both of which "reached back to the earliest stratum of Greek mythology." Because of his special connection to Athens and the egalitarian elements found in his myths, it is easy to see the logic in Tyrrell's claim that "he was adopted by Cleisthenes and his family, the Alcmaeonidae," and that it was they who "were responsible for casting Theseus as the founder of Athenian democracy, the king who abdicated for his people."[46]

To tie Cleisthenes and the Alcmaeonidae family to Theseus, Tyrrell highlights the building campaign begun under their tutelage and the artistic allusions made to Theseus on a number of significant buildings at this time. Claiming that within a few years of the expelling of Hippias the Athenian treasury and Etretrian Temple of Apollo, the former featuring scenes of a joint Amazon expedition by Theseus and Heracles and the latter a depiction of the rape of Antiope, were built, Tyrrell argues that both "point to the Alcmaeonidae for their inspiration," as does the proliferation of the episode in vase painting following the construction of these two major public works. His main argument for a connection between the Athenian Treasury at Delphi and the Alcmaeonids lies in the fact that the family sought refuge on the island during their exile, where they rebuilt the temple and thus gained a great deal of influence over the oracle.[47] Aside from the fact that the treasury is held as a contemporary of the rebuilt temple, the inclusion of Theseus—the hero who belonged exclusively to Athens and gained dramatically in popularity under Cleisthenes—would appear to indicate that the treasury was built by

[46] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 3.
[47] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 7.

someone seeking to establish a connection between themselves and the democratic hero.[48]

The connection between the Alcmaeonids and the Temple of Apollo Daphnephorus at Eretria is similarly circumstantial, though it too offers enough evidence to suggest that there was in fact a connection. When Cleisthenes managed to seize power, the nobles who opposed him appealed to Sparta, which had aided in the expelling of Hippias, for assistance. In 507, the Spartans invaded Attica while the Boeotians and Chalcidians attacked from the northwest and northeast, respectively. The Spartan attack having fallen apart over internal divisions before it reached Athens, Cleisthenes turned his attention to the Boeotians and Chalcidians. Once the Athenians had expediently dealt with the former, they crossed over into Euboea, where they engaged and defeated the Chalcidians, the traditional enemies of the Eretrians. Claiming that it was the Eretrians who likely transported the Athenian troops across the strait into Euboea, Tyrrell draws a connection between Cleisthenes and Eretria, something which is echoed in the decoration of the Temple of Apollo.[49] Featuring images which included Athena and Theseus' abduction of Antiope (see figure 2), the temple has an undeniably Athenian theme to it, something which may have to do with the fact that it is frequently attributed to the Athenian sculptor Antinor. When taken together, the timing of the building, the prominence of Athenian themes, the fact that the sculptor was an Athenian, and the role that Eretria played in aiding Cleisthenes make a strong case for Alcmaeonid influence. Having thus sketched the democratic reforms initiated by Cleisthenes and his attempts to

[48] Though the date of the treasury has been debated, with some favoring Pausanias' claim that it was built out of the spoils of Marathon in 490 as a way of expressing gratitude, the inclusion of Heracles alongside Theseus and the lack of references to the victory lead me to agree with the majority of scholars who place the temple closer to 510

[49] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 8.

connect himself with Theseus, it is time to examine exactly what the democratic pedigree of the hero was.

Figure 2: Theseus Abducting Antiope, West Pediment of the Eretrian Temple of Apollo, Eretria Museum, Plate LXVII. 1

According to John N. Davie, "of all Greek heroes, Theseus, few would deny, has the greatest claim to enshrine all the best qualities of the Athenian citizen, not least in his championship of the *demos,* celebrated by poets and painters alike of the classical period."[50] Traditionally depicted as a contemporary and cousin of Heracles, the exploits of the Athenian hero Theseus were strikingly similar to those of the son of Zeus, an emulation which is frequently explained as resulting from the great deal of admiration that the latter had for the former from an early age, though it can also be seen as a transitional element that links the Attic hero with the one he was replacing. A descendent

[50] Davie, "Theseus the King," 25.

of Erechtheus on his father's side and of Pelops, the "strongest of the kings in the Peloponnesus," on his mother's, Theseus was the son of Aegeus, the king of Athens, and Aethra, the daughter of Pittheus, the king of Troezen.[51] According to the legends recorded by Plutarch, a second century A.D. biographer, in his *Parallel Lives,* King Aegeus had received an oracle from the Pythian priestess instructing him to abstain from lying with a woman until he had returned to Athens. Finding the oracle a bit ambiguous, or perhaps a bit distasteful, Aegeus sought advice from Pittheus, renowned throughout the Greek world for his wisdom. Understanding the oracle for what it was, Pittheus managed to trick Aegeus into having intercourse with his daughter Aethra, a union which resulted in the conception of Theseus. Realizing that a child might result from the night's events, Aegeus left a sword and a pair of sandals hidden under a rock, disclosing the location only to Aethra with instructions that, should she bear a son, he should be brought to the location when he came of age. If, upon the disclosure of the location, he was able to lift the rock under which the sword and sandals were hidden, he should be sent in secrecy to his father in Athens in order to claim his rightful place as heir to the kingdom. The need for secrecy was stressed by Aegeus, as his rule was continually threatened by the ambitions and plotting of his nephews, the sons of his brother Pallas.

Upholding the wishes of Aegeus, Aethra kept the story of Theseus's real birth a secret from her son, allowing Pittheus to spread the rumor that he had been fathered by Poisedon, a deity who enjoyed a particularly special relationship with Troezen. When he had come of age and proven himself worthy of the knowledge, Aethra took Theseus to the place designated by his father and informed him of his true heritage, whereupon the youth easily lifted the rock and removed the contents hidden within. Eager to set out to

[51] Plut. *Thes.* 3.1

Athens and to prove himself the equal of his cousin Heracles, Theseus decided to leave at once, choosing to forgo the trip by sea in favor of the more difficult land route, much to the dislike of his mother and grandfather, both of whom tried to discourage him from pursuing such a rash course of action. According to Plutarch, Theseus had "long since been secretly fired by the glorious valour of Heracles, and made the greatest account of that hero. . . until by night his dreams were of the hero's achievements, and by day his ardour led him along and spurred him on in his purpose to achieve the like."[52] The fact that Heracles was his cousin was especially influential in Theseus' decision to pursue the more dangerous route to Athens, something noted by Plutarch when he claimed that

> he thought it a dreadful and unendurable thing that his famous cousin should go out against the wicked everywhere and purge the land and sea of them, while he himself ran away from the struggles which lay in his path, disgracing his reputed father by journeying like a fugitive over the sea, and bringing to his real father as proofs of his birth only sandals and a sword unstained with blood, instead of at once offering noble deeds and achievements as the manifest mark of his noble birth.[53]

The emphasis placed on his connection to—and competition with—Heracles serves a dual purpose. While it explains why Theseus was so determined to prove himself, it also serves to highlight the connection between the hero that had enjoyed popularity in Athens under the sixth-century tyrannies with the one that was increasingly replacing him in the wake of the democratic reforms.[54] The difference in the nature of their victories is also rather telling in this regard, for Heracles was renowned for killing monsters and beasts while Theseus made his name slaying criminals, something which would appear to indicate that the new democracy favored a hero who was more

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[52] Plut. *Thes.* 6.7
[53] Plut. *Thes.* 7.2
[54] The need for such a transition can also be seen in the Athenian Treasury, for the battle with the Amazons is depicted as a joint expedition between the two, something which serves to phase out the Heraclean Amazonomachy while simultaneously introducing the Theseus episode.

concerned with maintaining civilized standards of law and order than with hunting down fantastic creatures who posed no direct threat to the polis.[55] Despite the numerous dangers he faced en route to Athens, however, Theseus nevertheless managed to arrive unscathed, though there he was to find more obstacles lying in his way.

Having recently fled from Corinth in the wake of the murderous rampage in which she killed her two children and the new bride of Jason, her former husband, Medea had sought refuge in Athens, marrying Aegeus largely for the protection he could provide her. Recognizing Theseus as soon as he arrived and fearing for the security of her own future, Medea sought not only to hide Theseus's identity from her husband, but to convince Aegeus to kill the newcomer at the upcoming feast. Convinced of his wife's wisdom, Aegeus acquiesced to her demands, going so far as to give Theseus a poisoned cup. Luckily for him, however, Theseus, hoping to reveal his identity subtly, pulled out the sword left by his father to carve his meat, something which proved to be a lifesaving measure. Recognizing at once the sword he had hidden years before, Aegeus knocked the poisoned cup out of Theseus's hands, recognizing him then and there as his son and the heir to the throne of Athens. Although the sons of Pallas immediately went to war over this decision, Theseus managed to defeat them while simultaneously courting the favor of the citizens of Athens. Celebrated for his "manly valour," something which is interesting considering his later exploits with the Amazons, Theseus mastered the Marathon Bull before volunteering to be one of the youths sent to Crete as a sacrifice to the Minotaur in reparation for the death that the son of King Minos had suffered while in Athens. It is interesting to note that in recounting this story, Plutarch explored several accounts of the

[55] As will be seen in later sections, the Amazons that Theseus fights undergo a similar transition, for they lose the monstrous connotation still associated with Heracles and increasingly take on the characteristics of those groups who pose a direct threat to Athens in the fifth century.

myth, including the possibility that Minos merely held funeral games in which the Athenian youths were given as slaves to the winner. In doing so, he no doubt hoped to show an attempt to scrutinize the accounts of his predecessors so as to discern the truth, a tactic similarly employed in his later treatment of accounts of Theseus and the Amazons.

Regardless of the "accuracy" of the details, however, there are two important things to be taken away from Plutarch's discussion of the Minotaur story, the first being the fact that Theseus's decision to volunteer for the dangerous mission showed his concern for the equanimity of the populace in Athens and his desire not to "disregard but [rather] to share in the fortune of his fellow-citizens."[56] In emphasizing this particular character trait of Theseus, Plutarch undoubtedly reflected the traditional association of Theseus and the future of Athens as the most celebrated of democracies, particularly as it existed in the fifth century.[57] The second important thing to be taken away from Plutarch's account, though more of narrative import, is the outcome of the encounter with the Minotaur, wherein Theseus, upon sailing back to Athens after his glorious victory, forgot to switch the sail from black to white, the latter signifying success, something which led his grieving father to throw himself into the ocean, thus giving his name to the Aegean Sea.

Ascending to the throne in the wake of this tragedy, Plutarch describes Theseus as having "conceived [of] a wonderful design, and settled the residents of Attica in one city, thus making one people of one city out of those who up to that time had been scattered about and were not easily called together for the common interest of all." He further

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[56] Plut. *Thes.* 17.2

[57] For an account of how Theseus, the king of the Athenians, came to be celebrated for his democratic tendencies, see John N. Davie's "Theseus the King in Fifth-Century Athens," *Greece and Rome* 2nd Ser., Vol. 29, No. 1 (April 1982): 25-34.

noted that "the common folk and the poor quickly answered to his summons" while "to the powerful he promised government without a king and a democracy, in which he should only be commander in war and guardian of the laws, while in all else everyone should be on an equal footing."[58] To further support the idea of Theseus as a democratically minded leader, Plutarch referenced both Homer and Aristotle, claiming "that [the fact that] he was the first to show a leaning towards the multitude, as Aristotle says, and gave up his absolute rule, seems to be the testimony of Homer also, in the Catalogue of Ships, where he speaks of the Athenians alone as a 'people.'"[59] As we shall see, this particular aspect of Theseus's legend, though it first appeared as part of the political propaganda initiated by Cleisthenes in the late sixth century, would prove to be a potent vehicle for the expression of the unique socio-political atmosphere that permeated every aspect of Athenian society in the fifth century.

Having established the political context in which Theseus became the dominant figure in Athenian mythology, it is now time to turn to the exploration of how the Amazons fit into this mythological framework, and why they became, even at this early time, such an appropriate expression of the new political identity of the Athenian democracy. On the most basic level, the focus placed on the Amazon myth can be seen as a transitional element that provides a thread of continuity between the myth of Heracles, popular until the end of the sixth century, and the introduction of the Theseus myth as its replacement in the Athenian pantheon. While the traditional exploits of Theseus had long been a part of ancient Greek mythology, the episodes involving his encounters with the Amazons took on a new and much more significant role in Athenian society than those of

[58] Plut. *Thes.* 24.1-24.2
[59] Plut. *Thes.* 25.2

Heracles in the wake of the tumultuous events that the polis was embroiled in the late sixth and fifth century.

The legend of Theseus and the Amazons is a complex and often convoluted one, as there appears to be no single story recounted by a majority of authors, but rather a variety of stories that place different emphases on the nature of his encounter. Some, such as Philochorus (third century B.C.), speak of a single encounter in which Theseus accompanied Heracles on his ninth labor, while others, including Pherecydes (ca. 450's) and Herodotus, differentiate between this initial encounter and a later one in which he met and subsequently raped (or depending on the source, fell in love with) and married the Amazon queen Antiope. The anomaly in the sources is discussed at length by Plutarch:

> he [Theseus] also made a voyage into the Euxine Sea, as Philochorus and sundry others say, on a campaign with Heracles against the Amazons, and received Antiope as a reward for his valour; but the majority of writers, including Pherecydes, Hellanicus, and Herodotus, say that Theseus made this voyage on his own account, after the time of Heracles, and took the Amazon captive. And 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 to sea.[60]

Besides introducing a third possibility—that of trickery—to the traditional debate over whether Theseus raped and kidnapped Antiope or whether she fell in love with him and went back to Athens willingly, this particular passage in Plutarch is loaded with implications about the way in which Amazons were depicted, as it indicates that there was at least one significant view that held that the Amazons were not man-hating, as they would so often be later depicted.

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[60] Plut. *Thes.* 26.1-26.2

The abduction of the Amazon queen is not limited to large scale public monuments or literary sources, however, but appears in numerous vase paintings dating largely from the late sixth to early fifth centuries.[61] Frequently taking the Eretrian Temple of Apollo as a model (see figure 2),[62] the vase paintings almost uniformly show Theseus forcibly carrying off Antiope, either by chariot (figure 3) or on foot (figure 4), while she appeals for help to her companions.

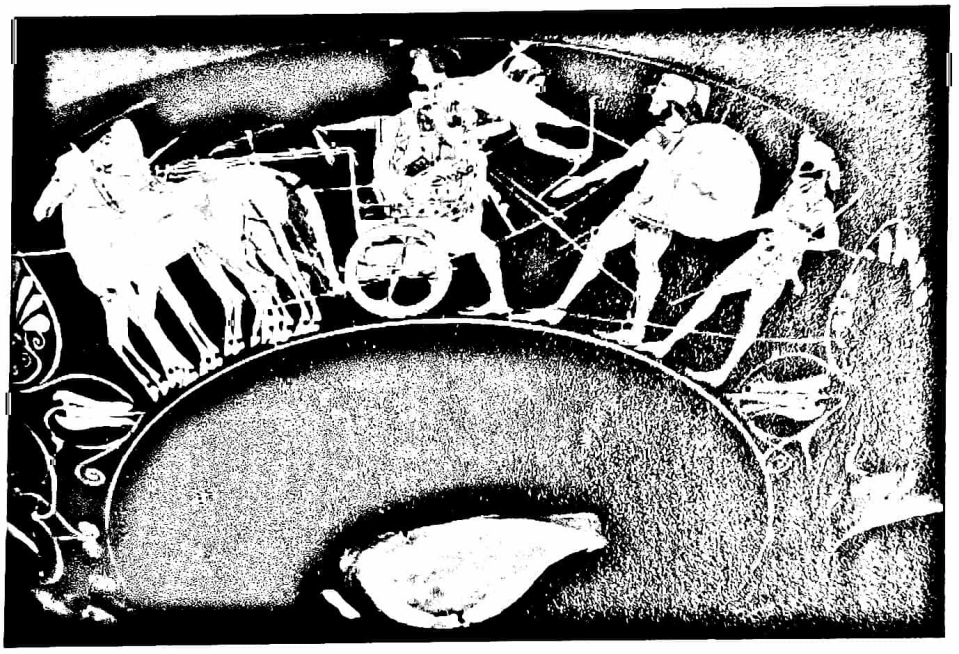

Figure 3: Theseus Abducting Antiope, Attic Red Figure, c. 520-510 B.C., Plate LXVIII.4[63]

[61] Why the artistic depiction of the abduction of Antiope was so short lived will be discussed at length in the next section.
[62] Von Bothmer, *Amazons in Art,* Chapter 8.
[63] Image taken from: www.perseus.tufts.edu

Figure 4: Theseus Abducting Antiope, Attic Red Figure Amphora, Attributed to Myson, ca. 500-490 B.C., Plate LXVII.5[64]

Though these images pre-date the Persian invasions, the Amazons, who carry bows and axes, are depicted in oriental trousers and caps, something which is perhaps not surprising given the fact that their homeland on the Thermodon River placed them within the confines of Asia Minor. What is interesting to note however, is the fact that the political and propagandistic utilization of the Amazons is becoming more widespread and much easier to trace. As the similarities between these images and the temple at Eretria show, the artistic programs of large scale public monuments, dictated by the influential, were copied and disseminated to wider audiences by the artists at the time, as were the political messages that accompanied them.

While the Theseus and Antiope episode goes much further than all its predecessors in elaborating upon the possibility and plausibility of a romantic liaison between a Greek hero and an Amazon, it is politically and socially significant in a

[64] Ibid.

number of other ways as well. To begin with, the episode lends an unprecedented degree of legitimization to the Amazons, as the fact that Theseus marries Antiope—regardless of whether or not it was against her will—places them within a distinctly Greek context, as she is obviously neither too monstrous nor too foreign to be the wife of Athens's greatest hero. Ironically, however, the legitimization given to the Amazons can also be seen in the Greeks' ability to reverse their traditional lifestyle through violence and removal from their homeland, and subsequently in the Amazons' ability to be domesticated into Greek society. Thus, the fact that Theseus "domesticates" not just any Amazon, but their queen, making her subject to his will as both a Greek male and the King of the Athenians, is loaded with implications about the way in which Athenian males saw themselves and their female counterparts in the new democracy.

Noting that the introduction of the rape of Antiope into Attica coincided with the "fall of the Peisistratid tyranny in 510 and the beginnings of Athenian democracy: the quintessence of the Greek men's club," Andrew Stewart convincingly argues that Theseus's Amazon exploits can be seen as part of Athenian males "vigorously scrutinizing the proper place of women in their reorganized society," evidence of which can be seen in the proliferation of images of women in the late sixth century, among them "courtships, abductions, explicit erotica, courtesans, maenads, the Acropolis korai, and of course, Amazons."[65] The fact that the proliferation of Amazons in art was occurring simultaneously with women being increasingly depicted in a decidedly sexual manner—whether as rape victims in abduction scenes, objects of sexual desire in depictions of courtesans or erotica, archetypes of femininity in the korai statues, or as sexually deviant in their depictions as maenads—says a great deal about the way in which Amazons were

[65] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 578.

now being viewed in the context of the Athenian democracy. Contrary to their having been previously seen as monstrous and decidedly foreign, they were now objects of sexual desire and therefore made to be subservient to Greek men who ruled both in the political and domestic realms. Theseus's rape of Antiope and his bringing her to Athens thus shows a dramatic shift: whereas heroes were previously concerned with conquering their warrior aspect through killing them, they were now concerned with conquering their female aspect through rape and subjugation.

The objectification of the Amazons marked a major transformation in the Athenian construction of their identities. Whereas they had originally been the "equals of men" in the early hero stories, they were increasingly seen as conquests to be had in the bedroom as well as on the battlefield.[66] Interestingly, however, the rape of Antiope and the objectification of the Amazons were only possible after the Achilles and Heracles episodes introduced their feminine aspect, for their masculinity in the early episodes would not have been compatible with the propagandistic use of the Amazons in the late sixth and fifth centuries. When viewed in this manner, it would appear that Theseus's rape of Antiope was not entirely novel, but served to place the foreign Amazons within a Greek sociological construction, for if sexual domination was equated with political domination, and if the men in power could claim that Theseus, the democratic founder of Athens, had managed to conquer and domesticate the Amazons—the ultimate embodiment of everything that was sexually and potentially threatening to their male domination and whose society was the antithesis of their own—they could provide a

[66] The objectification of the Amazons reaches its climax in the Periclean period, something which will be discussed in a later section.

powerful artistic symbol and a mythological precedent with which to further consolidate their rule.

The treatment of the Amazons as a symbol of the sexual and political subjugation of females by the males that dominated the Athenian democracy can be clearly seen in the way in which older, more traditional episodes of the myth were changed to bring them more into line with the direction being pursued with the development of the rape of Antiope. The story of Achilles and Penthesiliea, for example, took on a distinctly new element in Athenian art in the fifth century, one which exploited the sexual elements that had previously only been hinted at. This can be seen in the examination of a particularly expressive kalpis (a type of water jar) dating to the late sixth / early fifth century. The hydra in question depicts what Von Bothmer refers to as a nude Greek and a wounded Amazon, though he adds that the Greek figure closely resembles known depictions of Achilles done by the same painter, a fact which would appear to indicate that "the young warrior on the kalpis is *probably* Achilles," with the Amazon thus being Penthesilea.[67] Though Von Bothmer does not provide an approximate date for the kalpis, he considers it the earliest in a grouping whose dates appear to range from the late sixth to mid-fifth century. As such, the vessel in question can generally be dated with some degree of confidence around the same time, placing it within the period of early Athenian democracy. If this is in fact the case and the kalpis is of Achilles and Penthesilea done around the turn of the century, the scene depicted shows an entirely new dimension of the episode, as it introduces a level of sexual violence that had been missing from earlier scenes (see figure 5).

[67] Von Bothmer, *Amazons in Art,* 145.

Figure 5: Achilles and Penthesilea, late 6th century, Plate LXXI.1

The nude form of Achilles lunges, spear extended, over the fallen Penthesilea, who reaches out her right arm as if to ward off the coming blow or in an expression begging for mercy. The positioning of the male body is such that it dominates and towers over the female laying prostrate below, leaving the viewer with an impression that he has both physical and psychological power over his fallen female counterpart. What is most interesting about the scene, however, is the positioning of Achilles' spear, as he thrusts it directly from his pelvis to that of the Amazon, something which gives his weapon an undoubtedly phallic connotation. As such, the spear striking the death blow takes on a double meaning, as it can be seen as the tool that militarily/politically subjugates the female warrior and as the instrument by which a man can bring about the sexual/domestic subjugation of a woman.

While the Achilles and Penthesilea episode visually explored the idea of Amazons as the victims of Athenian sexual violence, it is generally held that Heracles's

encounter with the Amazons can be read in a similar manner. As recounted in Euripides's *Heracles* (417):

> Across the inhospitable surge of the sea he went against the host of the horse-riding Amazons. . . on the deadly quest for the girdle of the gold-decked robe of the warrior maid. Greece took from the barbarian maid the famous spoil, which is now kept safe in Mycenae.[68]

While the reference to Greece's taking a war prize from a barbarian army can be easily read as a reference to Greece's, and more specifically Athens's, defeat of the Persians earlier in the century, something which will be discussed at great length later, Tyrrell makes an interesting and persuasive argument as to the significance of the Amazon queen's girdle. As recounted earlier, Apollodorus's account of the myth claims that the girdle was given to Hippolyte by Ares to signify her leadership over the female warriors, something which would indicate that the girdle was in fact a masculine "warrior's belt for securing his tunic and armor," though the fact that it was desired by the princess Admete points to its being a "woman's girdle" with "the elegance to grace a woman's waist."[69] While the ambiguity of the nature of the girdle would appear to reflect the ambiguous nature of the Amazons themselves, Tyrrell claims that "the contradiction vanishes when we see the girdle not as a girdle but a homologue for the Amazon's liminality," as Heracles is able to triumph over the masculine side of the Amazon by killing her warrior persona, while the triumph over her female side can be seen in the violent taking of the girdle.

Arguing that *zoster*, the word used to describe her girdle, can be read as a synonym of *zone*, the common word for a woman's girdle, Tyrrell asserts that Heracles symbolically rapes Hippolyte when he takes her girdle by force, as a woman's loosening

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[68] Eur. *Her.* 408-419
[69] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking*, 91.

"her *zone* for a man was both a prelude to and a metaphor for her sexual submission." This being the way to effectively "humiliate and aggregate the Amazon's female aspect," Tyrrell further asserts that this theme reaches its full potential and becomes explicit "with Theseus, Athenian hero and rapist *par excellence.*" [70] Though he uses the term rapist somewhat lightly, it is fascinating to note that the hero the Athenians consciously chose to champion their new government and ideology was in fact just that—a man who was known for having raped Ariadne, Helen, and the daughters of Cercyon and Sinis long before he even came into contact with Antiope. Knowing his penchant for violence toward females, it is hard to imagine that the Athenians would have chosen him unless they saw this not as a problem, but rather as a further indicator that his pedigree—including these episodes—reflected the values that were of the utmost importance to the new democracy.

Given that, within the new democratic system, Athenian males were now able to define themselves as much by what they were—Athenian-born male participants in a democratic political process—as by what they were *not*—female, foreign, or disenfranchised—it is not surprising that the Amazons, as a distinct ethnic and gender group and not just a compositional foe for Greek heroes, became the model against which Athenians defined themselves in their art and literature. As such, the encounter between Theseus and the Amazons cannot be properly analyzed without putting it into the context of the later fifth century, for it is here, in the Age of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars and the imperialism of Pericles, that the story of the Amazons' revenge for the rape of Antiope significantly first appears, evidence of which can be seen in the introduction and proliferation of the story in Athenian art at this time.

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[70] Ibid.

Amazons and the Persian Invasions in the Early Fifth Century

Paige duBois's observation that "there is no fixed version of a myth," as "it is available to be interpreted and reworked by every teller," is an appropriate thought with which to begin our examination of the Amazons in a post-Persian invasion Athenian world, for it is here that we can see how rapidly the meaning and substance of a myth could be altered to reflect changing circumstances, even within a relatively short period of time.[71] Not long after Cleisthenes's reforms were introduced in Athens, the fledgling democracy was faced with the daunting task of having to defend itself—and the rest of Greece—from the threat of the Persians, who invaded the Greek mainland first in 490, and again in 479. While Herodotus cites the Persians' reasons for attacking Greece as their desire to seek revenge for Greek—specifically Athenian—participation in the Ionian Revolt,[72] it is equally possible that they were seeking to consolidate control over their Greek territories in Thrace and Macedonia.[73]

While we may never know their exact motivations, what is certain is that Persian forces sent by the emperor Darius attacked Greece by sea in 490, taking control of Naxos, Euboea, and Eretria in rapid succession before reaching Marathon, where they were confronted by a joint force of Athenians and Plataeans. When support for Hippias, the deposed former tyrant of Athens, failed to materialize as the Persians had hoped, they engaged the Greek forces in battle and were decisively defeated, forcing them to retreat to Persia and allowing the Athenians to claim that they were the saviors of all of Greece.

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[71] Paige duBois, Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982), 27.
[72] The Ionian Revolt was a rebellion of Asiatic Greeks against Persian rule in 499. Although the Athenians and Eretrians sent aid, the rebellion had been successfully quelled by 494, four years before the Persians invaded mainland Greece.
[73] Oxford Classical Dictionary

Unfortunately for the Greeks, however, the victory did not deter the Persians from their desire to conquer Greece, but rather, according to Herodotus, fueled their desire to see the Greeks defeated once and for all.[74]

Although the death of Darius and a revolt in Egypt delayed the second Persian invasion, it nevertheless came a decade later under the leadership of Darius's son Xerxes I, whose determination to defeat the Greeks led him to oversee the campaign in person. Although Herodotus claims that the Persian troops—excluding the naval contingents—numbered 1,700,000,[75] modern estimates place the number at a more likely 100,000, though this was still a significantly larger force than the Greeks had faced ten years before.[76] Consulting the oracle at Delphi upon hearing of the Persians' forthcoming invasion, the Athenians received instructions to rely on the "wooden wall" and took it to mean that they should concentrate on their navy, while an alliance of Greek states was created under the leadership of the Spartans, who had failed to participate in the first war due to a religious festival. Although the Spartans held off the Persian advance by land as long as they could at the Battle of Thermopylae, it was the Greek fleet, after evacuating Attica, that dealt the Persian navy a fierce blow at the Battle of Salamis. Though this victory forced Xerxes and the navy to retire back to Persia, the remaining land army under the control of Mardonius managed to reoccupy Athens after it failed to accept terms. It was not until the Battle of Plataea that the combined Athenian and Spartan troops were able to decisively defeat the Persians and their Greek allies, effectively putting an end to the Persians' second unsuccessful attempt to bring the Greek mainland under its yoke.

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[74] Htd. 7.1
[75] Htd. 7.60
[76] Oxford Classical Dictionary

The Greek victories over the formidable Persians—arguably the greatest world power at the time—played a crucial role in the formation of Athenian identity, as the newly formed democracy could claim that they had played a significant, if not the greatest, role in saving the Greeks from the 'barbarian' invaders. The Athenians parlayed the victories and the continued Persian threat into a casus belli for establishing an imperial empire, while simultaneously using their role in foreign affairs as the primary means to construct a coherent Athenian identity, something which had been missing in the long years before Cleisthenes's reforms and the Persian Invasions. Interestingly for our purposes, it was in the wake of the Persian Wars and the Athenians' embarkation into international affairs that the myth of the Amazons was altered yet again, so that it too served to reflect the Athenians' newfound place as defenders of the "civilized world."

It was in this context, or more specifically under the leadership of Cimon, the son of Miltiades (the hero of Marathon) and the dominant political figure in Athens from 479 until his ostracism in 461, that the story of the Amazons's Attic invasion was first introduced.[77] The rape of Antiope was known from the latter half of the sixth century, though the introduction of the Amazons' quest for revenge for the taking of their queen is not seen in art or literature until this time, something which would appear to indicate that it was, as Stewart notes, "presumably concocted as an analogue for the great victories of Salamis and Plataea."[78] It further served as an artistic and literary device through which the Athenians could celebrate their brave defense of their homeland in the face of an invading barbarian army. Although there may have been other avenues through which to explore the idea of the Persians as a "barbarian other," using the myth of Theseus and

[77] Andrew Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 580.
[78] Ibid., 582.

Antiope and the Amazons's Attic invasion served dual purposes, as it allowed Cimon to further incorporate the Athenian hero into his political propaganda. Through the examination of the artistic program of the Theseum and the Stoa Poikile (both built under Cimon), as well as the numerous vases modeled on the two, we can begin to see how and why the Amazons were used as an allegory for the Persians and as an integral part of Cimon's political propaganda. Having established this, we can thus turn to the myth itself in order to understand why it was of the utmost importance for it to undergo a dramatic transformation in the aftermath of events in the early to mid-fifth century.

While the total number of Amazon scenes appear to have declined during the fifth century,[79] it is interesting to note that they became the focus of large scale public monuments rather than exclusively of private vases, something which is indicative of the shift in their purpose and the nature of their propagandistic potential. The Theseum, the first of two public monuments constructed at this time to feature the Amazons in a propagandistic manner, was built and decorated under Cimon for the express purpose of housing the venerated bones of Theseus. Vigorously prosecuting a program of aggression against Persia through the Athenian-led Delian League, Cimon used a Delphic oracle ordering the Athenians to bring Theseus's bones to Athens in order to capture the island of Scyros in 476/75, as tradition held that it was here that Theseus had been treacherously slain and buried. After enslaving all non-Greek citizens and colonizing it with Athenians, the expedition brought a set of bones back to Athens and installed them in the Theseum, Theseus's sanctuary located southwest of the Agora in the center of Athens.[80]

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 10.

Writing his *Description of Greece* in the first century A.D., the geographer Pausanias described the "sanctuary of Theseus" next to the gymnasium of Ptolemy, providing us with a description of the artistic program of the now lost monument. Painted by Micon and Polygnotus, two of the best known artists of the fifth century, the sanctuary featured scenes from the life of the Athenian hero, including his encounter with Minos, his participation in the battle between the Lapiths and centaurs,[81] and the fight between the Athenians and Amazons—possibly the first depiction of the Attic invasion in art.[82] While there is no direct depiction of the Persian invasions in this early building project, the depiction of the Attic invasion on a major public building less than a decade after the wars—when it had not been depicted until that point—would suggest a direct correlation, as the wars were *the* defining event of the first quarter of the fifth century. Not only were the Persian Wars the defining event, however, they were also the Athenians' greatest source of pride, a fact which made the invasions a likely focus of art and propaganda, especially as the Athenians found a way to tie both Athens' greatest success and its greatest hero together.

Noting that the Theseum "was a harbinger of Athens' imperialism," Tyrrell asserts that the scenes depicted served an expressly political purpose, as Cimon intended for viewers to draw a connection between Theseus's achievements and his own, for "like Cimon, Theseus defeated a sea power (Minos) and overcame foes who were savage (Centaurs) and foreign/Eastern (Amazons)."[83] By connecting his own imperialistic exploits with those of Theseus—for the hero went looking for the Amazons in their

[81] The connection between the centaurs and Amazons will be discussed at greater length in the next section, when the sexual symbolism of both is explored in the context of classical gender relations.
[82] Paus. 1.27.2; Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 10.
[83] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking,* 10-11.

homeland long before they invaded Attica—Cimon was setting the scene for the next logical step—connecting the heroism of the Athenians of the fifth century with that of their ancestors, as both generations had successfully defeated invading 'barbarians.'

If the Theseum alluded to a connection between the Persians and the Amazons, the Stoa Poikile, or Painted Porch, witnessed the fulfillment of this vision. Ten or fifteen years after building the Theseum—perhaps shortly after the Athenians' victory over the Persians at Eurymedon in 469—Pisianax, Cimon's brother-in-law, commissioned Micon, Polygnotus, and Panainos to fresco an open porch he had built on the north side of the agora.[84] While the frescoes, like those of the Theseum, are lost to us, Pausanias once again provides a description of what was depicted. According to the author, the "first painting in the colonnade represents the Athenians arrayed against the Lacedaemonians at Oenoe in Argolis," while "on the middle wall are Theseus and the Athenians fighting the Amazons." "Next after the Amazons is a picture of the Greeks after their conquest of Ilium [Troy]," where the "kings are gathered together to consult on the outrage offered by Ajax to Cassandra." Finally, "the last painting depicts the combatants at Marathon: the Boeotians of Plataea and all the men of Attica are closing with the barbarians."[85] The paintings thus described juxtapose mythological events with recent historical ones in a manner which leads one to draw connections between them.

By placing the two mythological episodes—the Amazonomachy and the taking of Troy—side by side on the rear wall,[86] the program invites the viewer to compare the events that are depicted, an examination which leads to the realizations that both represent a Greek victory over a powerful Eastern people and allude to the rape of a royal

[84] Ibid., 11; Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 582.
[85] Paus. I.15.1-4
[86] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 582.

Eastern woman at the hands of a celebrated Greek hero. While this in itself would appear to make a statement very much in line with early democratic propaganda in which sexual domination was equated with the domination and power of the democracy, the inclusion of the Battle of Marathon on the end wall adds an entirely new dimension to the program. Whereas the Theseum had only implied a connection between the Persians and Amazons, the Stoa Poikile explicitly states it. The building having been planned by Cimon's relative, it is logical to conclude that the artistic program was carefully designed to send a very clear message.

The Persians, like the Amazons and the Trojans, represented an Eastern power vanquished by the valorous Greeks. The Persians, like the Amazons, foolishly invaded Athens and paid the ultimate price. Though both the Trojans and the Amazons could have served as allegories for the Persians in a wider artistic campaign, it was the Amazons who continued to be depicted on vase paintings and monumental art throughout the rest of the century, as their myth continuously proved to be adaptable to changing circumstances. Because the Amazons already enjoyed a great degree of popularity as political propaganda in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, and as they were an Eastern power[87] who could easily be given a motivation for invading Attica, they were an obvious choice as an allegory for the Persians.[88] The extent of their connection, however, is actually much greater. The Amazons were seen as inverting traditional gender roles, participating in the sphere of warfare reserved for men, while the Persians were similarly depicted, as they were frequently portrayed as being effeminate and cowardly, especially when

[87] The homeland of the Amazons is traditionally placed in Asia Minor, near the Thermodon River.
[88] The Amazons' depiction as an Eastern people predated the Persian Wars, for they had long been depicted wearing oriental trousers and hats and as mounted cavalry that wielded weapons such as the ax and bow. In the wake of the Persian Wars, however, this took on greater significance, for the wearing of trousers was seen as a distinctly barbarous while the use of cavalry was characteristic of the Persian army.

compared to the masculine, heroic Greeks. This sentiment is expressed in Pausanias's description of the Marathon scene, as he notes that a number of Persians are depicted as running away from the Greeks, seeking refuge on the ships that could carry them to safety.[89] Stewart further notes that the "Amazons satisfy one obvious requirement for a representation of an alien but nevertheless human enemy: they look and are different from nude Greeks without being bestial, monstrous, or grotesque,"[90] something which shows how dramatically the nature of the Amazons had changed since the inception of the myth (see figure 6 and footnote 88).

Figure 6: Volute Krater Attributed to the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs, ca. 450, Plate LXXV

Having examined how and why the Amazons came to be used as an allegory for the Persians in the mid-fifth century, it is time to turn to the myth of the Attic invasion in order to see how the Athenians were able to reconcile the more problematic aspects of the story with its propagandistic potential. While a number of classical writers discussed the

[89] Paus. 1.15.4
[90] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 583.

Amazons' invasion, it is Plutarch, writing six centuries later, who best condenses the accounts of Hellanicus, Cleidemus, and others. Regarding the prowess of the Amazons and the truth of the invasion, he wrote that fighting the Amazons was

> no trivial or womanish enterprise for Theseus. For they would not have pitched their camp within the city. . . had they not mastered the surrounding country and approached the city with impunity. . . The fact that they encamped almost in the heart of the city is attested both by the names of the localities there and by the graves of those who fell in battle. [91]

Both sides having hesitated to engage one another, Theseus finally joined battle with the Amazons after sacrificing to Fear. Citing Cleidemus' account, Plutarch says that the Athenians engaged the left wing of the Amazon army, which "extended to what is now called the Amazoneum," whereupon the "Athenians were routed and driven back by the women." Luckily for the Athenians, however, "those who attacked the invaders from the Palladium and Ardettus and the Lyceum, drove their right wing back as far to their camp, and slew many of them." After three months of intense fighting, Plutarch claims that a peace treaty was finally orchestrated by Hippolyta, for that "is the name which Cleidemus gives to the Amazon whom Theseus married, not Antiope."[92] Further noting that other sources say that Antiope/Hippolyta was slain while fighting at Theseus's side, Plutarch inadvertently touches on a debate crucial to understanding the transformation that the myth of the Amazons underwent in order to be used as an allegory for the Persian invasions, as there appears to be a dramatic shift in the relationship between Theseus and Antiope in the post-invasion art and literature.

While the idea that Theseus raped Antiope and brought her back to Athens as his wife enjoyed a great deal of popularity in the context of Athens's emergence as a

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[91] Plut. *Thes.* 27.1-27.5
[92] Ibid.

democratic polis, the literature and art produced in the fifth century, more specifically after the Persian Wars, tends to favor, though not exclusively, a version of the myth in which the rape is entirely omitted or placed on the backburner. Although the rape first enters written tradition at this time in the records of Pherecydes (ca. 450's), there is still a great deal of evidence to suggest that the Athenians were consciously moving away from this particular version of the myth. Some, such as Isocrates and Hegias of Troezen, go so far as to say that Antiope fell in love with Theseus and abandoned her homeland to join him in Athens, later fighting alongside him during the Attic invasion (a scene which is depicted with remarkable frequency in both public and private art). Articulating this particular version of events, Isocrates (436-338) claims in one of his speeches written to celebrate the Athenian religious festival known as the Panathenaea that "the Scythians invaded too, with the Amazons, born from Ares, who made the campaign to recover Hippolyta [Antiope] because she had transgressed their existing laws by falling in love with Theseus, returned with him there, and lived with him in Athens."[93] Quoting Hegias of Troezen, Pausanias seconds this sentiment, claiming that "when Heracles was besieging Themiscyra on the Thermodon and could not take it, Antiope surrendered the place because she had fallen in love with Theseus, who had gone with Heracles to the war."[94] While these accounts perfectly exemplify how dramatically the myth could be altered, the majority of authors tended to articulate a less radical alternative, ignoring the rape episode in favor of one of two programs.

[93] Isoc. 12.193
[94] Paus. 1.2.1

The first idea explored by writers such as Isocrates (in a different speech) and Lysias (ca.445-ca.380)[95] claims that the Amazons undertook the expedition in order to realize their imperialistic ambitions toward the Greek mainland. A second account, favored by a number of authors including Herodotus, avoid the issue altogether and do not mention Antiope or Theseus at all, but rather discuss the Attic invasion as part of a long list of Athens' greatest victories, including that over the Persians.[96] Lysias's account of the invasion perhaps best synthesizes the former version, as he claims that the

> Amazons, daughters of Ares, lived long ago by the river Thermodon. . . They were regarded as males by their courage rather than females by nature; they seemed superior to men in spirit, not inferior to them in body. While they were ruling over many races . . . they heard great things about this land of ours. Gathering together the most powerful tribes, thanks to their high reputation and widespread ambition, they attacked our city.[97]

Whichever version one recounted in the fifth century, the important point to realize is that they were undoubtedly making a conscious decision to avoid, as much as possible, the previously held assumption that Theseus had raped and abducted Antiope, and in some cases, such as that above, were seeking to directly place the blame on the shoulders of the Amazons in a manner that paralleled the perceived motivations for the Persian invasions. Perhaps even more important, however, is the realization that they were doing so for a pragmatic and propagandistic reason. If the invading Amazons were to be seen as a metaphor for the invading Persians, and the Athenians the as defenders of civilized life, it would not do to have the Athenians give the Amazons—and the Persians by

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[95] The accounts of Lysias and Isocrates will be discussed at greater length later, in the context of the Athenians' experience in the Peloponnesian War. Important for our purposes here is that they do not mention either Theseus or Antiope, but rather treat the invasion as a historical fact, something which undoubtedly reflects the conditioning the myth underwent in the aftermath of the Persian Wars.
[96] Hdt. 9.27; Lys. 2.4; Isoc. 4.68
[97] Lys. 2.4-2.5

association—a legitimate reason to invade the Greek homeland, especially when the Athenians had aided the Ionian Greeks in their revolt against Persia.

Given these facts, the Athenians were put in a difficult position, as they had to reconcile their desire to use the Amazons as an allegory for the Persians with the preexisting story that had Theseus violently rape and abduct Antiope. While that particular version had been convenient for a male dominated democracy trying to assert its dominance over those that were excluded from political participation—namely females—it would no longer work in the aftermath of the Persian Wars, as the Athenians were looking to place the blame for an Amazonian invasion squarely on the shoulders of the Amazons themselves. The only way to use the Amazon myth as propaganda was therefore to replace the preexisting version of the myth with one in which both Theseus and the Athenians were faultless while still finding a way to bring Antiope to Athens. The latter was necessary not only to keep some thread of continuity between the versions, but also as a means of bringing the Amazons to Attica so that they could be heroically defeated by the Athenians. The importance in transferring the blame from Theseus to Antiope was thus paramount, especially given Herodotus's tracing of the hostilities between the Greeks and Persians to one thing—"woman stealing."

The priority which the Athenians placed on finding a solution can be seen in the priority which Herodotus gives to "woman-stealing" as he addresses the issue of the mythological hostilities between the Greeks and Persians on the first page of his *Histories*. Having introduced himself and his purpose in writing, he launches into the underlying reasons for the conflict in the second paragraph. According to the historian, "learned Persians" placed the initial blame on the Phoenicians, who, when trading in the

Mediterranean, carried off the princess Io along with several other Greek women. In retaliation, the Greeks put in to the Phoenician port at Tyre and carried off Europa, the king's daughter, before later carrying off the princess Medea from Colchis. The stories of these outrages eventually led Paris to justify his stealing Helen out of Greece, as the Greeks had managed to capture two Eastern women without paying any price.[98]

While he introduces the stealing of women as a potential source of conflict between two nations—and thus to be avoided in the Amazon myth—he covers all possibilities by arguing that anyone who would go to war over the theft of a woman is an aggressor who is to be blamed.

> Thus far there had been nothing worse than woman-stealing on both sides; but for what happened next the Greeks, they say, were seriously to blame; for it was the Greeks who were, in a military sense, the aggressors. Abducting young women, in their opinion, is not, indeed, a lawful act; but it is stupid after the event to make a fuss about avenging it. The only sensible thing is to take no notice; for it is obvious that no young woman allows herself to be abducted if she does not wish to be. The Asiatics, according to the Persians, took the seizure of the women lightly enough, but not so the Greeks: the Greeks, merely on account of a girl from Sparta, raised a big army, invaded Asia and destroyed the empire of Priam. From that root sprang their belief in the perpetual enmity of the Grecian world towards them. . . Such then is the Persian story. In their view it was the capture of Troy that first made them enemies of the Greeks.[99]

In light of this assertion, one could legitimately argue that—even if the rape of Antiope did not entirely disappear from Athenian literature or its social conscience—the Amazons were still the aggressors in the invasion, as it was unseemly for a state to go to war over the abduction of one of its women.

Although Herodotus goes on to discuss other causes for the initial hostilities, namely the Lydian king Croesus's attack on the Greek cities of Asia, his discussion of the so-called "woman stealing" is not to be discounted, for the parallels with the issues

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[98] Hdt. 1.1-1.3
[99] Hdt. 1.5

surrounding the Amazons' invasion are rather striking. In addition to his discussion of what constitutes an aggressor, the fact that he introduces the notion that no woman can truly be abducted without her consent sets the stage for the shift in the Antiope episode and provides a second way in which any vestiges of the rape episode could be justified. Following this line of thinking, it could be argued that Theseus's rape of Antiope was not really a rape in the technical (modern) sense of the term, for it implies a sexual act visited upon one against his or her will. If the prevailing idea at this time was that all rapes involved a degree of complicity on the part of the victim, it could be argued that Antiope was a willing player in her abduction, especially given her prowess as the warrior queen, something which would exculpate Theseus of any wrongdoing and once again place the blame on the Amazons. In this way Herodotus not only manages to indirectly highlight the reasons why the shift in the episode is necessary, but furthermore to ensure that the Amazons were to blame, even if the rape did not entirely disappear from the Athenian consciousness. This is not to say that this was necessarily his agenda, however, only that it shows that the Athenians were thinking about similar issues in contemporary situations, a fact that would undoubtedly be reflected in their propaganda at the time.

Sexuality and Gender Identity in Periclean Athens

> Who could believe that an army of women, or a city, or a tribe, could ever be organized without men, and not only be organized, but even make inroads upon the territory of other people. . .even send an expedition across the sea as far as Attica? For this is the same as saying that the men of those times were women and that the women were men.[100] –Strabo, first century A.D.

If the Persian Wars allowed the Athenians to use the myth of the Amazons to explore contemporary events in an allegorical manner, the Periclean period utilized the

[100] Strab. 11.5.3

female warriors to explore issues of sexuality and gender identity in the Golden Age of Athens. Pericles, the political figure most associated with the glory of Classical Athens, first came to prominence in 463/2 as one of the elected prosecutors in the ostracism of Cimon. In 462, he joined Ephialtes in his attack against the traditional powers of the Areopagus, the aristocratically minded council made up of retired archons. Stripping the council of its judicial powers, Ephialtes transferred the judicial responsibility to the Council of Five Hundred and the jury courts, thus elevating the role of the democratic institutions in the polis. The degree to which the nature of Athenian government changed at this time from a fledgling democracy to one completely ruled by democratic institutions and ideology can be seen in Athens's attempts to encourage, or in some cases impose, democratic governments on fellow members of the Delian League.[101] When Ephialtes was murdered, Pericles stepped into the role previously enjoyed by the reformer, becoming the popular leader of the democracy and arguably the most influential man in Athens for the next three decades.

The period in which Pericles served as the leader of the Athenian democracy is often referred to as the Golden Age of Athens, for it was under his tutelage that Athenian imperialism and democracy reached their height and that art, drama, and literature flourished to an unprecedented degree. Transforming the defensive Delian League into a force for Athenian imperialism, Pericles began the practice of accepting tribute from member states on behalf of Athena, revenue which was later used to finance Pericles's ambitious public building projects, the most famous being the Parthenon on the Acropolis. It was also at this time that Athens witnessed a great influx of non-Athenians

[101] P.J. Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World: 478-323 B.C.* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 37-38.

looking to share in the prosperity and culture that Athens had to offer, a development which initiated fears of a population crisis among Athenian citizens. Given that this was a period in which Athenians were enthusiastically exploring their identity as prosperous democrats and imperialists in art and literature, and that it was also the height of the male-dominated democracy between the two great wars that were to benchmark the beginning and end of the century, the Periclean period is therefore an appropriate place to examine gender and sexuality in classical Athens to see how the Amazons were mapped onto the preexisting social order.

The image of the ideal Athenian woman was articulated by Thucydides (c.460-c.400) in his historical treatise on the Peloponnesian War. In a funeral oration he attributes to none other than Pericles himself, the statesman offered these words to the women who lost loved ones in battle with the Spartans:

> Perhaps I should say a word or two on the duties of women to those among you who are now widowed. I can say all I have to say in a short word of advice. Your great glory is not to be inferior to what God has made you, and the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you.[102]

The fact that Pericles supposedly addressed the parents and siblings of those who had been lost before addressing their widows says a great deal about the place of women in Athenian society, as does the fact that their ideal role could be summed up in no more than a "short word of advice." By claiming that the greatest glory a woman could obtain lay in her invisibility to the men around her—regardless of the nature of the attention she received—Pericles was asserting that a woman's place was ultimately in the private sphere of the home, where she would be beyond the reproach or desire of the men who occupied the public sphere of war and business. In addressing his comments to the newly

[102] Th. 2.46

widowed women of the society rather than at the female population as a whole, he was undoubtedly seeking to remind those whose identities were no longer defined by their role as wife of what was expected of single women. As his advice was little more than a thinly veiled warning, one must wonder what threat unmarried women posed, or were perceived to pose, to Athenian society.

Amazons and the Mythology of Sexuality

In order to understand the practical concerns that fifth-century Athenians had with regard to overt female sexuality, we must begin by exploring the religious, mythological, and literary evidence for the way in which female sexuality was more generally viewed in ancient Greece.[103] It is interesting to note that the feminization of destructive sexuality began at the religious level, as the Greek deity associated with love in both its emotional and physical manifestations was the goddess Aphrodite, and not a male divinity. What is even more striking, however, is the fact that Aphrodite was born, as the poet Hesiod tells us, as a result of Cronos's emasculation of his father Ouranos at the instigation of his mother Gaia. The castrated genitals having landed in the ocean,

> they were carried by the sea a long time, [and] all around them white foam rose from the god's flesh, and in this foam a maiden was nurtured. . . . both gods and men call her Aphrodite because she grew out of *aphros,* foam that is. . . from her come young girls' whispers and smiles and deception and honey-sweet love and its joyful pleasures.[104]

While the entire episode is rather intriguing, two elements are of particular importance in understanding the connection between women and sexuality. To begin with, it is a female, in this case Gaia, the mother of the gods, who orders the castration of Ouranos,

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[103] For more information on the mythological evidence for Greek views of women, see P. Walcot's "Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence," *Greece and Rome* 2nd Ser., Vol. 31, No. 1 (April 1984): 37-47.

[104] Hes. *Th.*. 175-206

something which shows the destruction that can result when a female presumes to take the dominant position in sexual politics. Carrying this thought to its logical end, it would appear that this myth served as an allegory in which the Greeks could explore fears that female sexuality served to figuratively, if not literally, emasculate men by stripping them of their traditional power over those in their household, especially females. Secondly, it is worth recognizing that Hesiod connects emotional love, sexual pleasure, and feminine deception in the art of both specifically with Aphrodite and women in general, something which is echoed in his description of Pandora.

When Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and gave it to man, the father of the gods devised a way to punish mankind. Claiming that "the price for the stolen fire will be a gift of evil to charm the hearts of all men as they hug their own doom," Zeus ordered Hephaistos to mix earth and water and with it to "make a face such as goddesses have and the shape of a lovely maiden." Once Athena had taught her domestic skills such as weaving, Aphrodite was to "pour grace round the maiden's head, and stinging desire and limb-gnawing passion," after which Hermes was to "put in her the mind of a bitch and a thievish nature."[105] There is perhaps no clearer mythological expression of the way in which women were perceived in ancient Greece than this story, as the poet makes clear that women were created for the sole purpose of punishing men and that their power to do so lay in their capacity as sexual beings. The fact that she was made to be physically beautiful and sexually desirable is in keeping with the theme of punishment and loss of power, for the idea was to have the men so bewitched by her sexual charms that they would willingly embrace the doom that was destined to be theirs. As if this were not bad enough, however, Hesiod also attributes all the evils in the world to Pandora, for she

[105] Hes. *WD.* 45-109

removed the lid to the box in which Zeus put all the suffering and ills that would befall mankind in later generations, thus "bringing grief and cares to men."[106] Such sentiments were echoed in dramas produced during the period, as well as in the majority of the episodes in which Amazons figured.

While a number of dramatists, among them Euripides, Aeschylus, and Aristophanes,[107] explored themes that dealt with the destructive aspect of female sexuality in the fifth century, the myths in which the Amazons figured, both in this period and earlier, show a direct correlation between Greek fears of female sexuality and the female warriors. In the myth of Bellerophon, Anteia, the beautiful wife of King Proetus, schemed to have the hero killed when he scorned her sexual advances, something which led to his encounter with, and subsequent defeat of, the Amazons. Similarly, Hera, who hated Heracles because he was the product of an extramarital affair between her husband Zeus and another woman, first drove the hero mad so that he killed his wife and children before later inciting the Amazons against him when he was performing acts of penance for his crime.

Though not as direct a reference to the destructiveness of female sexuality, the Achilles and Penthesilea episode also alludes to such issues, for Achilles would not have been fighting the Trojans or their Amazon allies were it not for the actions of Helen, who left her Greek husband for the arms of an Eastern man. Even Theseus, the savior of Athens in the Amazonian invasions, had to deal with a woman scorned, for his stepmother, who tried to kill him when he first arrived in Athens, was none other than Medea. The Eastern wife of Jason, she was driven mad by jealousy and killed her two

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[106] Ibid., 95-96

[107] For further reading see Euripides' *Medea,* Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* and Aristophanes' *The Assemblywomen and Lysistrata.*

children as well as her husband's new bride when he decided to leave her in order to marry a Greek woman. Interestingly, some accounts of the Theseus and Antiope myth bear striking resemblances to the myth of Medea, for there were those who held that Antiope was killed in a raid she led against Theseus and his new bride when he left her to marry a Greek woman named Phaedra.[108] Though Plutarch dismisses such an account, it is nevertheless interesting to see the continuity of themes that existed throughout the Amazon myth.[109] The fact that almost every significant Amazonian episode involved either a woman scorned sending the object of her wrath against a female challenge or was the result of a woman's inability to control herself where sex or love was concerned shows that even early on the Amazons were connected to mythological notions and fears of female sexuality, though it was not until later that they would be made to directly embody such fears.

While the women in the Amazon episodes and Hesiod's discussion of Aphrodite and Pandora draw a direct correlation between female sexuality and both the literal and figurative emasculation of men, the poet takes the theme a step further in his discussion of whether men or women derive more pleasure from sexual intercourse. Preserved as a fragment in *The Melampodia,* frequently attributed to Hesiod, the poet tells the story of how the seer Teiresias was called upon by an arguing Zeus and Hera to weigh in on which gender enjoyed the physical aspects of sex more. Having come across two snakes mating, Teiresias had been turned into a woman when he killed the female, then back into his masculine self when he later killed the male. He thus had the unique perspective of having experienced sexual intercourse as both a man and a woman, and it was on the

[108] Plut. *Thes.* 28.1-28.2; Apollod. *E.* 3.16.16-3.16.19

[109] According to Plutarch, Theseus did not marry Phaedra until after the death of Antiope, though the story of Theseus and Phaedra will be discussed in greater detail later in this section.

basis of this experience that he claimed that "of ten parts a man enjoys only one; but a woman's sense enjoys all ten in full."[110] This answer so enraged Hera that she blinded him, but as a reward Zeus gave him the gift of prophetic sight. The fact that Hera was outraged by his response that women not only enjoyed sex more, but ten times more, than men "says something staggering about the sexuality of women and is hardly flattering in light of the Greek virtue of *sophrosyne* or (basically sexual) moderation."[111]

Defining sophrosyne as the "quintessential classical virtue" in which "self-knowledge. . . leads to a measured-self control," Stewart argues that in the fifth century it was believed that Greek men knew their boundaries and how to exercise proper self control when it came to sex, whereas women and barbarians did not.[112] Because the Amazons embodied both the feminine and barbarian aspects in a single entity, they came to represent both groups' inability to exercise sexual moderation in the context of the civilized polis, though as we will later see, it was the feminine inability to do so that was stressed in this period.

The Amazons' representation of unchecked female sexuality was mostly visual in nature and coincided with explorations of uncontrolled male sexuality in the form of centaurs.[113] While Amazonomachies and centauromachies were frequently depicted side by side so as to draw a direct correlation between the two, it is interesting to note that extreme female sexuality was depicted in a much more realistic, and thus threatening, manner. Though the Amazons and centaurs were both seen as belonging to the past,

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[110] P. Walcot, "Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence." *Greece and Rome* 2nd Ser., Vol. 31, No. 1 (April 1984): 40.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 584.
[113] For a detailed account of how the Amazons and centaurs fit into fifth century notions of marriage and sexuality, see Page duBois's *Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982.

uncontrolled male sexuality was seen as decidedly bestial, personified in an unnatural creature that mixed human and animal virility to achieve such a heightened and violent sexual appetite.[114] The Amazons, however, were in essence mere women who were unnatural not in their physical makeup but in their very real inversion of traditional gender roles. Whereas the Amazons were in fact women, the centaurs were half-man and half-horse and thus distinctly different from Greek males.

The extent of this difference and Greek opposition to uncontrolled male sexuality can be seen in the most popular depiction of centaurs, the battle between the centaurs and Lapiths. The centaurs, having been invited to a wedding where they consumed wine, were unable to check their bestial nature and attempted to rape and carry off the Lapith women, including the bride. As a result, the Lapith (Greek) men, ironically with the aid of Theseus, engaged the centaurs in battle and expelled those that survived from the area. In this manner, the Greek men showed that they were distinguishable from and actively sought to defeat the personification of unbridled male sexuality whereas Greek women could theoretically chose to become Amazons by following in their footsteps and inverting traditional gender norms.

The inclusion of Theseus in both the Amazon and centaur and Lapith episodes is especially intriguing, as it shows that the Athenian hero was responsible for moderating both female and male sexuality. Although both episodes involve his doing so through military achievements, the Amazon episode is especially loaded with implications about ways to temper female sexuality. In the pre-Persian Wars period he achieved his goal by asserting male dominance in sexual intercourse by raping and abducting Antiope, an act that was seen as acceptable in the early democratic period. As has been discussed,

[114] duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons,* 31.

however, the need to reconcile the Amazon episode with Athens' defensive position in the Persian Wars led to a reinterpretation of the myth in which Antiope fell in love with Theseus and willingly joined him as his wife in Athens. Although both versions are exceedingly didactic, the latter is particularly so in the context of the fifth century, for it shows a more "civilized" way to enforce female sophrosyne. Because "a woman's sophrosyne consists in knowing that she must submit herself to male governance," the domestication of Antiope that occurred with her marriage to Theseus showed that "she had come to recognize this" and that "she had abandoned her wild state of *partheneia,* had learned sophroysne, and had submitted herself to the womanly 'work' of marriage."[115] As we shall see, Antiope's abandonment of her "wild state of *partheneia*" would be particularly important to fifth-century Athenians, for in the Periclean Age it was the female and not the barbarian who posed the greatest threat to the polis.

Amazons as Parthenoi

Although Greek ideas about female sexuality may sound chauvinistic to a modern audience in the post-feminist era, there were some undeniably legitimate reasons for the Athenians to fear any sexuality—especially feminine—that existed outside the control of the society. As was the case with most pre-modern cultures, the fifth-century Athenians were deeply concerned with issues of inheritance and ensuring that children were the product of legitimate wedlock and not an illicit union. Because of obvious biological reasons, the maternity of a child was not a concern, though it was impossible to know with any certainty who the father was. Because there was no scientific way to ensure the paternity of a child, the only alternative was to ensure that sexual relations—at least on the part of the woman—remained strictly within the marital domain. The fact that the

[115] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 584-585.

production of children, the main function of marriage, affected not only inheritance of property but also citizenship meant that the community—and the men who ran it—felt that it was their right and duty to regulate sexuality as it pertained to marriage and procreation.[116]

Because marriage was seen as a contract in which control of a woman was transferred from her father or male guardian to her husband for the sole purpose of creating a union in which legitimate citizens could be produced, the virginity of the bride at the time of marriage was essential to ensure the continuation of ordered society, as the contract promised that the woman had been, and would be, the sole property of her husband. As Stewart notes, the issue of virginity was complicated by the fact that the "Greeks denied the existence of the hymen" [117] and thus had no way of knowing whether a girl was a virgin or not, something which made an unmarried, yet sexually aware, female (known as *parthenoi*) an economic and social liability to both her parents and future husband. The issue was so crucial to the Athenians that the law code of Solon, the great sixth-century reformer, held that an unwed woman caught in bed with a man could be sold into slavery by her father or brother, apparently the only crime for which a free Athenian could be enslaved.[118] Since the Greeks could not ascertain the virginity of a bride or the paternity of a child—both of which were crucial to maintaining order in a patriarchal, propertied society—it is not surprising that unregulated female sexuality was seen to pose such a threat to the Athenian way of life.

Although these problems arose in most pre-modern societies, there were some extenuating circumstances in Periclean Athens that made female sexuality a particularly

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[116] Oxford Classical Dictionary
[117] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 578.
[118] Ibid., 579.

pressing concern, the first of which was the composition of the resident population and the second the unique nature of the polis's government. The prosperity and internationalism that characterized the Periclean period inevitably drew a large number of outsiders to the thriving polis, for as Pericles claimed, "our city is open to the world."[119] Though this influx brought many benefits to Athens in the form of skilled labor, artists, and prosperous businessmen, it also posed a significant threat to the power of "true" Athenians. With estimates placing the "metic," or resident alien, population at anywhere from one-fifth to one-half of the total Athenian population, somewhere between 350 and 1000 metic parthenoi would likely have come of marriageable age each year.[120] Because marriages were fundamentally business contracts aimed at maintaining or elevating a family's status, alliances between Athenian men and the daughters of prosperous metics were seen as being mutually beneficial. By marrying a wealthy metic woman, the Athenian male could hope to gain a substantial dowry, while the metic woman would be entrenching her foreign family into the established Athenian culture, as the children produced as a result of the union would be born Athenian citizens. The threat to Athenian women posed by such a large number of metic parthenoi coming of marriageable age each year was thus significant, so much so that scholars have argued that Pericles's Citizenship Law of 451[121] was aimed at discouraging such mixed marriages and controlling the sexual reproduction of Athenian children.[122]

A landmark piece of legislation in Athenian history, the Citizenship Law of 451 stipulated that citizenship be restricted to those who were of Athenian descent on both

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[119] Th. 2.39
[120] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 588.
[121] Also known as the Marriage or Immigration Law.
[122] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 588.

their paternal and maternal sides, something which made marriage alliances between Athenians and non-citizens much less desirable.[123] The urgent need to achieve such a goal had undoubtedly been heightened by the tragedy that had recently struck Athenian fleets operating in Egypt, where they were aiding a local revolt against the Persians. Having been blockaded by Persian forces in 454, the Greeks were forced to burn their own ships, whereupon a large number were killed and the rest forced to surrender. A relief expedition of fifty Athenian ships arrived shortly after the surrender, only to be immediately destroyed by the Persians. Conservative estimates place the loss of life at approximately eight thousand Athenians, or about fifteen to twenty percent of the population, with the majority being men of marriageable age.[124] The devastating loss of such a large number of Athenian men made an already small marriage pool that much smaller while simultaneously increasing the need for the creation of more Athenian citizen soldiers. Taken together, these made a potent case for restricting citizenship in an effort to encourage more inter-Athenian marriages, for in the context of the mid-fifth century, it was foreign women, and not foreign men, who were the greatest threat to the polis.[125] As such, the Amazons, embodying both the foreign and the feminine, came to be a powerful source of propaganda as the inevitable consequence of allowing young, sexually aware, and foreign parthenoi to run rampant in Athens.

The military and political independence of the Amazons having been exploited for various propagandistic purposes by ancient Greek writers in the myths of Heracles

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[123] Interestingly, Pericles himself felt the effect of his restrictive law, as he was forced to beg his fellow Athenians to make his son from his relationship with the metic courtesan Aspasia an Athenian citizen following the death of his two legitimate sons. The request was finally granted by the assembly after Pericles' death in 429.
[124] Ibid., 589.
[125] Ibid.

and Theseus, middle-to-late fifth-century sources added an additional element to the preexisting myths—that of the Amazons' sexuality. Although the insinuation is that both Theseus and Heracles had enjoyed intercourse with the Amazons, the encounters were uniformly violent episodes in which the Greek heroes asserted their masculinity and dominance over the women they ruled and the "others" they conquered by forcing themselves upon the female warriors. The Amazons were thus a convenient symbol through which Athenians could assert both their domination over foreign powers and their proclivity as part of a patriarchal democratic government in which men ran the polis much as they ran their own individual households and the women in it. As such, the novelty of the Amazons lay in their antithetical femininity and militarism, not in their capacity as sexually enticing and independent women. In the Periclean period, however, this aspect of the myth would dramatically change, as the balance of power in sexual politics dramatically shifted and the sexuality of the Amazons adjusted accordingly.

Because theirs was a completely feminine society in which marriage did not take place, the Amazons were technically the equivalent of the *parthenoi* of Athenian society, or unwed girls who had already reached sexual maturity but had not yet been reassimilated into the society in their new role as wives and mothers. As discussed above, the Greeks did not believe that the virginity of a girl could be ascertained, something which meant that parthenoi were not necessarily virginal in the modern sense of the term, but were rather "nubile young women who have had no *open* sexual relationship with a man," meaning that "their sexuality, or lack of it, is socially constructed, in that they are officially presexual beings, defined by public knowledge of their virginity."[126] Though the parthenoi in Athens were kept under strict supervision for this very reason, the

[126] Ibid., 578.

Amazons had no such social regulations, for their feminine society had no reason to be concerned with issues of virginity in marriage or of paternity in childbirth. As such, the Amazons represented the ultimate threat of parthenoi to the "civilized" world, for their sexual freedom was directly connected with their inversion of traditional society.

While authors such as Herodotus and Hippocrates discussed the traditional independence of Amazons, including their freedom to lie at will with the Scythian men they encountered, it was not until Strabo, writing in the first century A.D., that the particulars of their sexual and reproductive habits were articulated. Although five centuries removed from the fifth century B.C., Strabo's accounts of the Amazons clearly build upon those of earlier writers such as Herodotus and Hippocrates, something which would appear to indicate that his information regarding their sexual practices also dates to lost sources from this time. If this is in fact the case, his account of their activities is particularly revealing in light of the fifth century.

> The Amazons spend the rest of their time off to themselves, performing their individual tasks, such as ploughing, planting, pasturing cattle, and particularly in training horses, though the bravest engage mostly in hunting on horseback and practice warlike exercises; that the right breasts of all are seared when they are infants so that they can easily use their right arm for every needed purpose, and especially that of throwing the javelin. . .they have two special months in the spring in which they go up into the neighboring mountain which separates them and the Gargarians. The Gargarians, also, in accordance with an ancient custom, go up thither to offer sacrifice with the Amazons and also to have intercourse with them for the sake of begetting children, doing this in secrecy and darkness, any Gargarian at random with any Amazon; and after making them pregnant they send them away; and the females that are born are retained by the Amazons themselves, but the males are taken to the Gargarians to be brought up; and each Gargarian to whom a child is brought adopts the child as his own, regarding the child as his son because of his uncertainty.[127]

Strabo's account of the practices of the Amazons is loaded with implications about how the Amazons embodied fears of what allowing parthenoi to run unchecked

[127] Strab. 11.5.1

would do. If the Amazons represented parthenoi to the fifth-century Athenians, then Strabo's account of their lives and habits would certainly have painted a terrifying picture, for the implication is that the Amazons had managed to completely marginalize the role of men in their society. They took care of warfare and agriculture, duties traditionally assigned to men, by themselves, and only used men for the express purpose of producing children. The most threatening aspects of his account, however, were the facts that the fathers did not know who their sons were and that the male children were disinherited from the society they were born into by their mothers, something which struck at the heart of Athens's patriarchal and propertied society. This was by far the greatest threat posed by unrestricted parthenoi, for if allowed to be sexually independent, there would be no way of ascertaining paternity and thus inheritance or citizenship.

Although the Amazons came to symbolize parthenoi in the literary sources of the fifth century and later, their connection was also explicitly portrayed in art. Stewart notes that in classical Greek art the Amazons were always "young, slim, and strikingly beautiful," something which recalls the depiction of parthnoi in art, for the early marriage age meant that their bodies were often shown as undeveloped and more boyish than womanlike.'[28] Even more telling, however, is the fact that the Amazons are also shown in an increasingly objectified and sexual way, evidence of which can be seen in their shorter, more diaphanous clothing and the exposure of the right breast popularized by Pheidias in his treatment of the Amazons on the shield of the statue of Athena Parthenos. Whereas older depictions of the Amazons highlighted their masculinity—seen in their wearing of Greek hoplite armor or barbarian trousers—by the Periclean period the artistic trends had largely given way to a depiction in which their femininity was displayed in a

[28] Ibid., 579.

sexually enticing manner, something which served to directly link them with the parthenoi who were at their sexual prime. The extent of this artistic transformation, and its significance, can be seen through examining five rather intriguing images (see figures 7-11).

Figure 7: Achilles and Penthesilea, Athenian Amphora Signed by Exekias as Potter, Third Quarter of Sixth Century, Plate LI.1

Figure 8: Achilles Stabbing Penthesilea, Cup by the Pentehesilea Painter, ca. 455 B.C., Plate LXXI.4

Figure 9: Figure 2:Theseus and the Amazons, Attic Red Figure, ca. 470-450 B.C., Plate LXXVII.2

Figure 10: Theseus, Perithoos, and Amazon, Attic Red Figure, ca. 440-430 B.C., Plate LXXXI.4

Figure 11: Detail of an Athenian and Amazon from the Athena Parthenos Shield, Roman Copy of the Original (447-432), Piraeus Museum, Plate LXXXVII.4

Figures seven and eight, both of Achilles and Penthesilea, are a perfect example of how changes in artistic representations can alter the meaning and significance of a myth in accordance with the social and political atmosphere of the times in which they are produced. In the third quarter of the sixth century, when figure seven was produced, Pisistratus' tyranny was at its height and the democracy not yet imaginable. As such, the depiction of Achilles and Penthesilea fell more in line with the depictions of Heracles and the Amazons that were so popular at this time, something which meant that the focus was not yet on the sexuality of the Amazons, but on their novelty as women warriors and their status as compositional foes for the Greek heroes they faced. By the mid-fifth century, however, with Pericles at the helm of a thriving democratic empire, the emphasis, as has been discussed, was on the sexual threat that the Amazons posed to the male power structure. Whereas Penthesilea puts up a fight in figure seven, warding off Achilles' spear with her own, in the second figure a far more feminine and beautiful warrior, in an outfit

that highlights her beauty as a woman, clutches at Achilles in an intimate manner. Unarmed, she stares into his eyes as she lays her hand on his chest, willing him to mercy though he proceeds to drive his sword, both literally and symbolically, through her heart. In the context of the fifth century, the fact that he is nude and in a position of power over the beautiful Amazon who begs for his mercy, and the fact that he disregards her pleas, is symbolically loaded, for it shows that he is immune to her feminine wiles.

The significance of the shift in the artistic representations of the Amazons can perhaps be seen even more clearly in comparing figures nine through eleven. Though all three depict the battle between the Amazons and Athenians in the wake of the Amazons' Attic Invasion, the artistic differences among them are rather striking. Figure nine, completed sometime between 470 and 450, contains, though to a lesser extent than earlier images, a degree of the Persian allusion to it, for the Amazons depicted are mounted, armed with bows, and retain some elements of the oriental costume popularized around the time of the Persian Wars. Though the oriental or barbarous connotations are not as dominant as in older paintings, there is nevertheless a striking difference between this Amazon and that of figure ten. Painted circa 440-430, the Amazon of figure four is unlike any Amazon that had heretofore been produced in Greek art. More like an Athenian noblewoman in her stature and dress, she is marked as an Amazon only by the bow and ax she wields and the fact that Theseus is about to strike her with his spear. The heroic nudity of Theseus and the direction of his spear—aimed at her breast—lends a similar connotation to the image as that found in the latter Achilles and Penthesilea image, for Theseus manages to pierce her heart just before she is able to bring her ax down upon his head. If Theseus can be read as representing Athens—a notion that is not at all far fetched

given his status as the polis's celebrated hero—it is perhaps not difficult to read the beautiful, and rather Greek-like, Amazon as an allegory for the sexual threat that unmarried females posed to the state. As such, it is up to Theseus, and the democratic leaders by association, to assert both physical and psychological power over the females in their midst, something which is symbolized by Theseus's piercing her with his spear, thus putting an end to the danger she posed.

The detail of an Athenian and Amazon from the shield of Athena Parthenos serves a similar function, for it is here that we can see the degree to which the Amazons were becoming objectified in this period. Her hair grabbed from behind by the Athenian who pursues her, the Amazon arches backward in a manner that allows the artist to fully display her body. Clothed in a short and rather diaphanous dress, her right breast is fully exposed, not by the action that is taking place, but rather by design. By showing her long flowing hair and the curves of her body beneath her clothing (and outside of it), the artist in essence revolutionized the image of the Amazon in Greek art. Whereas they were once barely distinguishable from the males they fought, marked only by differences in their dress or crude indentations meant to signify breasts, the Amazons of the Classical period were erotically enticing female beauties who threatened the polis not only militarily, but sexually as well.

It is fascinating to note that until the fifth century the Amazons were used in a strictly militaristic fashion, with their propagandistic purpose being to elevate the status of Greek heroes, or occasionally, to serve as a symbol in which they could assert their sexual control. In the works of Homer and Arctinos, or on the artistic sources, there is no mention of their affinity for men, their reproductive habits, or their proactive sexuality.

Rather, they were seen as unnatural—in the category of gods and monsters—and as being outside Greek geographical limits. Because of their somewhat fantastic nature and the fact that the Greek heroes actively sought the Amazons, they did not pose a direct threat to Greek society. It is only when they are normalized and enter Greek geographic bounds as allegories of barbarians and foreign women in the fifth century that they came to symbolize a very real threat to Athenian society, a threat seemingly realized in the metic parthenoi.

While the Amazons were seen as representing the threat of parthenoi as a whole, they were also mapped directly onto the fears that surrounded metic parthenoi in the mid-fifth century. As mentioned earlier, the population crisis that gripped the polis at this time heightened fears that true Athenian women and their potential children were being disinherited from their rightful place in society by the influx of wealthy metics and their daughters, something which led to Pericles' Citizenship Act of 451. Because the Amazons were at once foreign women and parthenoi, and because Theseus had in fact married one of their kind, they proved to be a powerful expression of Athenian fears regarding the resident aliens in their midst. Euripides' *Hippolytus,* performed in 428, perfectly demonstrates these fears and serves to instruct its audience as to why Athenian men should marry Athenian women.

The main plot of *Hippolytus* lies, in true mythological tradition, in a woman scorned seeking revenge on the object of her wrath, the woman in this case being Theseus' wife Phaedra, a young Greek woman he married sometime after the death of Antiope/Hippolyte.[129] When Phaedra fell in love with and was rejected by the chaste

[129] Antiope's death is presented in several conflicting versions. The author of the now lost *Thesies* claimed, prior to the Attic invasion, that she was killed when she attacked the bride and groom at the wedding of

Hippolytus, the son of Antiope and Theseus, she committed suicide and left a note claiming that it was the result of having been brutally raped by the youth. When Theseus returned to find his wife dead and his son accused of her rape, he exiled Hippolytus, an action that led to his subsequent tragic death. While the play serves to show the trouble that stems from "exogamous unions,"[130] in this case that of Antiope and Theseus, it further comments on how the offspring of such marriages threatened the children of true Greek or Athenian unions. When Phaedra takes ill as a result of her affliction (love), her nurse tries to bring her to her senses, claiming

> If you die you will be a traitor to your children. They will never know their share in a father's palace. No, by the Amazon Queen, the mighty rider who bore a master for your children, one bastard in birth but true-born son in mind, you know him well—Hippolytus. . . [131]

By calling Hippolytus an illegitimate bastard who will usurp the rightful place of the fully Greek sons of Theseus and Phaedra, Euripides is undoubtedly commenting on the social situation of the Periclean age.[132] In using the product of the union between Theseus, the great Athenian hero, and Antiope/Hippolyte, the exotic foreign Amazon, to show why such marriages should not be allowed to take place, he draws a direct connection between the Amazons and their propagandistic usage as metic parthenoi in the latter half of the fifth century.

The threat that parthenoi, whether metic or native, thus posed to traditional Athenian society lay in the fact that they were sexually mature but had no outlet through

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Theseus and Phaedra, an account which Plutarch dismisses. Others held that she was killed fighting at Theseus' side in the Amazons' Attic Invasion, while still others held that she survived the war and was responsible for negotiating peace between the two.

[130] Ibid., 590.

[131] E. *Hipp.* 305-310

[132] Stewart notes that many scholars see both *Hippolytus* and *Medea* as direct responses to the Citizenship Act of 451.

which to explore their sexuality, for they had not yet entered into marriage, the only acceptable outlet for female sexuality. As women, according to traditional beliefs, were not capable of controlling their sexual appetites, an unmarried, sexually aware female was believed to pose a tremendous threat to her family and future husband, and thus to the society at large. According to this same logic, the institution of marriage must have been an appealing option to both men and women in society, for it gave men control in restricting the sexuality of females to marital unions and the procreation of legitimate children while providing women with the only outlet available to them in which to indulge their voracious appetites. Because Athenian males saw a connection between sexual and political independence, evidence of which can be seen in Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen,* where the women, once in power, initiated sexual emancipation,[133] the fear was that if the parthenoi were not strictly controlled by the patriarchal society, their sexual independence would lead to political power. If they could thus use their sexuality to gain leverage over men, there would no longer be any reason to keep them confined to the private sphere of the home. In short, they would become like the Amazons—sexually, politically, and militarily independent.

The Amazons and the Correlation between Sexual and Political Power

The population crisis that plagued Athens during the rule of Pericles undeniably made the polis uneasy about the state of its citizens' marital and sexual relations, though there was another, more ideological, reason that the polis would be concerned with this matter. As has been discussed in earlier sections, the advent of democratic institutions in Athens led its male citizens to reevaluate both their role in the polis and that of the women who remained outside the political framework. Because citizenship and political

[133] Aristoph. *Eccl.*

participation was restricted to the male population regardless of wealth or property holdings, the single unifying factor between the citizen rulers was the fact that they were Athenian men, something which led to the exploration of such themes in art and propaganda in the late sixth and early fifth centuries. The military success of Athenian men over the Persians, along with the sense of exultation that accompanied the height of Athenian imperialism and democracy in the middle of the fifth century, undoubtedly led to a resurgence in the celebration of masculine ideals in the Periclean age. Because the male population had managed to consolidate democratic power and to all but eliminate external military threats, there remained only one thing that could pose a credible threat to the Golden Age—female sexuality.

While there were, as indicated, pragmatic concerns about the role of women in relation to issues of citizenship and inheritance, there was a much more ideological issue that concerned the men in charge. Although women were considered property by the men who used them as bargaining chips in making marital alliances, and though they were largely restricted to the private sphere, women nevertheless enjoyed a significant degree of power as the bearers of future Athenian citizens and soldiers. Because the production of children was a function of sexual intercourse, engaging in the act was seen as a marital duty on behalf of both the woman and the man. The problem, however, lay in the fact that women were seen as wielding a significant degree of influence over their husbands when it came to sex, so much so that Aphrodite could manipulate even Zeus with the lure of intercourse, while Aspasia, the metic courtesan and longtime companion of Pericles, was accused of wielding an exorbitant amount of influence over the Athenian leader.

The fear that Athenian women could parlay their sexual power into political power was explored at great length by the comedic playwright Aristophanes (c.448-380 BC) in his plays *Lysistrata and Assemblywomen,* while *The Clouds* offered a way for men to reassert their sexual, and by association, political control over the women who threatened them. In the *Lysistrata,* one of the most informative and colorful explorations of sexuality and gender relations in fifth-century Athens, the women of Athens and Sparta, united under the Athenian woman who gives the play its name, undertook a strike in which they swore to abstain from sexual intercourse with their husbands until they agreed to make peace with one another. Although the idea of giving up sex is an unbearable thought to the women who are depicted in typical fashion as being insatiable and unable to control their urges,[134] life without sex with their wives proved to be too much for both the Athenian and Spartan men, as their need for sex accomplished what nothing else had—peace. The women's knowledge of the sexual power that they wielded over their husbands can be seen in Lysistrata's claim that "if we sat around at home all made up, and walked past them wearing only our see-through underwear. . .and our husbands got hard and hankered to ball us, but we didn't go near them and kept away, they'd sue for peace, and pretty quick, you can count on that!"[135] Though exaggerated for dramatic and comedic effect, it was precisely this knowledge on the part of both men and women that made sex such a potentially dangerous issue to the Athenian democracy.

Aristophanes explored a similar notion in his *Assemblywomen* (392/1), though he took it a step further by imagining what would occur if the Athenian women took control of the assembly by disguising themselves as men, sneaking out of the house while their

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[134] Aristoph. *Lys* 130-147
[135] Ibid., 153-158

husbands slept after enjoying their fill of sex, and voting to turn power over to the women of Athens. Once in power, the women in Aristophanes' play essentially turned Athens into a communist society, appropriating all private property and making it communal. By including children in the definition of community property, the women abolished the need to ensure paternity through the restriction of female sexuality, thus eliminating the need for monogamous marriages and allowing females to indulge their promiscuously sexual nature.[136]

Given the perceived dangers that could arise from allowing women to take the upper hand in sexual politics, it is not surprising that men sought to reassert power over their wives by taking the aggressive, dominant role in sexual relations. While this was not an unfamiliar theme in Athens, evidence of which can be seen in Heracles' taking of the Amazon girdle and Theseus's rape of Antiope, Aristophanes gave voice to what had only been artistically articulated in his comedy *The Clouds.* In a discussion between *Right* and *Wrong* (i.e. right and wrong logic or arguments), the virtue of Peleus, husband of the goddess Thetis and father of Achilles, is presented as the reason that the mortal was given the hand of a divinity in marriage, though *Wrong* argues that his virtue was the reason "why she deserted him as well." Arguing that "if he'd been a little less virtuous he might have been a more satisfactory performer under the covers," *Wrong* exclaims "women do *like* some disrespectful handling in bed, you know," the insinuation being that had Peleus asserted his control as the dominant male in the bedroom, his wife would not have presumed to leave him.[137] It was into this convoluted milieu of sexuality and gender politics that the Amazons underwent yet another propagandistic transformation, for in the

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[136] Aristoph. *Eccl.*
[137] Aristoph. *Cl.* 167-171

Periclean period they came to embody the greatest fears of husbands, fathers, and policy makers in Athens.

Up to this point in Greek history, the Amazons had always represented a foreign, exotic threat that existed on the periphery of Greek geography and culture, coming into contact with the latter only in extraordinary circumstances and almost always when a Greek hero went looking for them. In the Periclean period, however, when the greatest threat to Athenian domination lay with the women in its society, the Amazons came to represent an imminent internal threat, something which was a result of the unique gender relations that characterized the period, the rapid expansion of Athenian borders, and the subsequent shrinking of the unknown world. Mapped onto the preexisting gender relations discussed above, the Amazons came to symbolize the ultimate threat to Athenian society, for they were made to embody everything that Athenian men feared—complete and utter female independence in the military, sexual, and political realm.

While the military independence of the Amazons had long been a factor in what made them novel and thus ripe for use as propaganda in a militaristic society, their sexual and political independence became the focus of much discussion as the fifth century progressed. Claiming that the Amazons were a "golden-shielded, silver-axed, female, male-loving, male-infant-killing host,"[138] the Attic historian Hellanicus (c. 480-395) managed to succinctly summarize the exact nature of the threat that the Amazons posed to fifth-century Athenian society. The discussion of their golden shields and silver axes addressed their militaristic independence, while the idea that they were male-loving alluded to their capacity as females endowed with the stereotypical voracious sexual appetite. Although these ideas had existed as part of the Amazon myth for a long time, it

[138] Tyrrell, *Athenian Mythmaking*, 21.

was their inclusion alongside the notion that they killed male infants that gave these previous characteristics a decidedly negative twist. Perhaps the first person to express such an idea, Hellanicus articulated the greatest threat that the Amazons posed to Athenian society, for it was their military and sexual power that enabled them to overturn traditional civilized society through not only disinheriting the male children and denying them of their rightful place, but eliminating them altogether.

Building upon such ideas in his *Histories,* Herodotus, writing in the mid-fifth century, was among the first to articulate the notion that the Amazons consciously rejected Greek ideas of gender roles in favor of pursuing political and sexual independence. Claiming that the Sauromatae were the product of a union between the Scythians and Amazons, the historian held that the Amazons were taken captive after the Greeks' successful campaign to gain the girdle of the Amazon queen. The women warriors, however, were able to murder their captives while at sea, but knowing nothing of navigation, they were blown off course until they landed on Lake Maeotis in Scythian territory.

Once the Scythian men realized who they were fighting, they backed off the attack and instead favored a policy in which a detachment of young Scythians were instructed to get close to the women so as to beget children by them. One young man having successfully bedded an Amazon, the others in both camps followed suit until the women were able to understand the language of the Scythians. Once the groups were able to communicate, the Scythians proposed that the Amazons join them as their wives and return to the Scythian people, to which the Amazons replied

> We and the women of your nation could never live together; our ways are too much at variance. We are riders; our business is with the bow and the spear, and we know nothing of women's work; but in your country no woman has anything to do with such things—your women stay at home in their waggons [sic] occupied with feminine tasks, and never go out to hunt or for any other purpose. We could not possibly agree. If, however, you wish to keep us for your wives and to behave as honorable men, go and get from your parents the share of property which is due to you, and then let us go off and live by ourselves.[139]

By insisting that they could never give up their independence to live as Scythian, and by association, Greek, women did, the Amazons were consciously rejecting Greek society and the gender roles that it ascribed to its citizens. The fact that the Scythian men acquiesced to their request and left their homes and families to be with women who would continue to assert their independence demonstrated the validity of Athenian fears, for the implication is that the sexual power of the Amazons had been parlayed into political power over the men in their lives.

The correlation between the political and military power of the Amazons and the sexual threat that they, along with all women, posed to Athenian society can be seen quite clearly in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata,* the play that showed how sexuality could be used as political leverage in bringing about an end to the Peloponnesian War.[140] In discussing the initiative that the women had taken in withholding sex from their husbands in an act of political and social protest, the leader of the men declared

> If any man among us gives these women the tiniest thing to grab on to, there's no limit to what their nimble hands will do. Why, they'll even be building frigates and launching naval attacks, cruising against us like Artemisia.[141] And if they turn to horsemanship, you can scratch out our cavalry: there's nothing like a woman

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[139] Hdt. 4.114

[140] See page 79.

[141] The reference to Artemisia is particularly interesting, as she was set up by the Persians as the tyrant of Halicarnassus following the death of her husband. In her capacity as tyrant, she joined Xerxes' invasion of Greece, commanding five ships in the Battle of Salamis. As such, she was a recent and realistic example of the military and political threat that women could pose in the fifth century.

> when it comes to mounting and riding; even riding hard she won't slip off. Just look at the Amazons in Micon's painting, riding chargers in battle against men. Our duty is clear: grab each woman's neck and lock it in the wooden stocks![142]

The above passage is loaded with implications about the correlation between the dominant role in politics and in sexual intercourse, for the references to building frigates and launching naval attacks, while referring to militaristic enterprises undertaken by the male leaders of a society, also refer to sexual acts in which the males traditionally took the dominant position. The fear that a woman's mounting and riding will lead to their military engagement of the men in a manner that recalls the Amazons is also an example of a double entendre, for it alludes to the idea that the Athenian women, like the Amazons, will not only ride chargers into battle against men, but will take the dominant role in sexual relations in the equestrian, or woman-on-top, position.[143] The equestrian mode of intercourse was perhaps particularly threatening to Athenian males, as a vase painting that dates from ca. 430 clearly shows that it was a position that enjoyed enough popularity at the time to receive artistic and social attention (see figure 12).[144] Because the men in the passage fear that any leeway granted to the women will lead them to first assume a dominant role in sex and then in warfare and politics, the leader advocates physically restraining the women in the stocks, something which can be seen as symbolizing the need for Athenians to physically restrain women by keeping them indoors.

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[142] Aristoph. *Lys.*, 694-702

[143] Jeffrey Henderson, notes to *Lysistrata,* In *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women,* Translated and Edited by Jeffrey Henderson (New York: Routledge, 1996), 216, notes 148-150.

[144] The reference of many authors to Hippolyte instead of Antiope during this period may have something to do with the fact that Hippolyte can be translated as "loose horse," or "she lets her horses loose." Given the Amazons' proclivity as horsewomen and their Classical associations with promiscuity and sexual intercourse in the equestrian position, the utilization of this name may be seen as an example of a double entendre that hints at both the warrior and sexual nature of the Amazons.

Figure 12: Love Making Scene, Attic Red Figure, ca. 430 B.C. Staatliche Museen, Berlin[145]

Given that the Amazons already possessed the military and political power that Athenian males believed stemmed directly from sexual power, it is easy to see how fifth-century Athenians could retroactively focus on their extreme sexuality so as to be able to use them in a propagandistic and didactic manner. Because they came to embody the threat that sexual freedom posed to Athenian society in the works of Hellanicus, Herodotus, and Aristophanes, it is not surprising that other writers elaborated on these issues by making their accounts of the Amazons strictly didactic. For example, Hippocrates (469-399), building on Herodotus' discussion of the Sauromatae, claimed that though the women, "so long as they are virgins, ride, shoot, throw the javelin while mounted, and fight with their enemies," they only remain virgins until they have killed three enemies, upon which time they are free to marry. He further noted that "a woman

[145] Stewart, "Amazons and Ethnicity," 592.

who takes to herself a husband no longer rides, unless she is compelled to do so by a general expedition," an indication that even the Amazons could be compelled to give up their masculine, barbaric ways upon entering into the civilized union of marriage.[146] In a similar manner, the willing domestication of Antiope in the wake of the Persian Wars and Isocrates' assertion that the Amazons who invaded Attica were utterly annihilated[147] take on a didactic tone as well, for they serve to show that the queen of the Amazons recognized the error of her ways and accepted male rule in Greek society, and those of her sisters who disagreed and sought to challenge the truth of this realization paid the ultimate and just price for their actions.

Athena Parthenos: The Virgin Goddess of War

The extent to which the Amazons were incorporated into the sexual and political propaganda of the Periclean period as a negatively didactic tool is perfectly illustrated when one examines them alongside Athena, the literal embodiment of the ideal Athenian woman. Although she, like the Amazons, was a female warrior who inverted the traditional gender roles of ancient Greece, the patron goddess of Athens was celebrated rather than demonized by the polis as she stood in direct opposition to the Amazons and embodied everything that the Athenians held dear. As the giver of democracy, she, like Theseus before her, blessed her chosen citizens with the gift of representative government. As the goddess of defensive warfare, she protected the polis from invaders, of which there were many in the fifth century. Perhaps most importantly, however, as a virgin goddess she posed no sexual threat to the male hierarchy.

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[146] Hipp. *Airs, Waters, Places* 1.17
[147] Isoc. 4.70

As Hesiod recounted in the *Theogony,* Zeus swallowed his first wife Thetis when she was pregnant with Athena, as he feared that his first born son would overthrow his rule as he had overthrown that of his father. Because she was not the son fated to rise against him, "from his head he himself bore gray-eyed Athena, weariless leader of armies, dreaded and mighty goddess, who stirs men to battle and is thrilled by the clash of arms."[148] Having thus been born from a man without the aid of a woman, Athena was unique in that she was the only female goddess to occupy the male sphere of activity. A "weariless leader of armies" who reveled in rallying men to battle, she was predisposed to support the male position, except for where marriage was concerned.

Articulating this notion in his *Eumenides,* one part of the trilogy that comprised the *Oresteia* (458), the playwright Aeschylus had the goddess claim that "there is no mother anywhere who gave me birth, and, but for marriage, I am always for the male with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side."[149] Because she specifically favored men over women, Athena stood in stark contrast to the Amazons, who, according to the dramatist, were now being depicted as "loath[ing] all men" rather than as lovers of men as they had been in the Heracles and Theseus episodes.[150]

The notion that Athena supported patriarchal values fits in well with the idea that she carried the democratic initiatives of Theseus forward and gave the gift of trial by jury to Athenian men, something which directly ties the play into the political milieu of the period.[151] As noted earlier, Ephialtes, with the aid of Pericles, had stripped the power of

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[148] Hes. *Th.*. 924-926
[149] Aesch. *Eu.* 737-739
[150] Aesch. *PB.* 720-235
[151] This refers to the central issue of the *Eumenides,* where Orestes is acquitted of committing matricide against his mother Clytaemestra, who had killed Agamemnon, Orestes' father and the leader of the Greek forces in the Trojan War.

judicial rulings from the Aeropagus and given it to the jury courts comprised of Athenian citizens. By placing the origins of such a dramatic initiative in the mythological past, and by attributing it to one of the most important figures in Athenian culture, Aeschylus's invented tradition was undoubtedly an attempt to give the reform the status that came with time and honored origins.

In order to reassert male power over the gender-inverting Amazons and those Athenian women who should seek to follow them, Aeschylus used the character of Apollo to give voice to the superiority of men over women using Athena as an example:

> The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interfere. I will show you proof of what I have explained. There can be a father without any mother. There she stands, the living witness, daughter of Olympian Zeus, she who was never fostered in the dark of the womb yet such a child as no goddess could bring to birth.[152]

In order to reconcile male dominance in sexual relations and politics with his secondary role in the production of children, Apollo inverts traditional notions about reproduction by arguing that the real parent, the creator of the child, is "the one who mounts," or the man who takes the dominant position in intercourse. According to this logic, the woman is merely the vessel which holds the seed of life planted in her by the man, for there is no documented case of a woman giving birth without being impregnated by a man, while Athena stood as living proof of a man's ability to give birth without the aid of a woman.[153] In this manner, Athena acts to subvert the Amazons' attempt to destroy the traditional order of things, for the Amazons, being mere women, are forced to overcome

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[152] Aesch. *Eu.* 657-667

[153] The Athenians too saw themselves as having been born without a mother, for they believed that they, alone among Greeks, were autochthonous, born from the land they inhabited.

their hatred for men and to lie with them in order to produce children, while she herself shows how at least one man was able to overcome this very obstacle.

The juxtaposition between Athena and the Amazons was carried on by several other commentators, among them Bacchylides, Lysias, and Isocrates, who set the latter up as direct counterparts to the former when they claimed that the Amazons were the "daughters of Ares." Whereas Athena represented the defensive, civilized aspect of warfare, Ares, "the ruin of men"[154] and her traditional rival, represented the chaotic, aggressive aspect of war, something which, in the context of the fifth century, served to unite the goddess with Athens and Ares with invading armies such as the Amazons. The connection between Ares and the Amazons as invaders of Athens, and the applicability of such a connection to Periclean Athens, was specifically articulated by Aeschylus. When granting the Athenians the tradition of trial by jury, Athena claimed,

> 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 Amazons encamped and built their shelters when they came in arms for spite of Theseus, here they piled their rival towers 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.[155]

By including this speech in his patriarchal and democratically minded play, Aeschylus set the Amazons and Ares in direct opposition to the Athenians and Athena, something which highlights the aggressive, destructive aspect of the former and the defensive, civilized nature of the latter. Because the Hill of Ares, or the Areopagus, was the site of the triumph of Athenian civilization over the invading army which sought to destroy everything that it stood for, Athena felt that the hill's symbolic significance would be

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[154] Hes. *Sh.* 441
[155] Aesch. *Eu.*, 681-690

carried on in having it serve one of the most important functions in what would eventually be a great democracy. Although this is yet another example of Aeschylus inventing a tradition to explain contemporary ideological issues—for, as discussed earlier, the Aeropagus was the name of the aristocratic tribunal that decided judicial matters before the reforms of Ephialtes—it nevertheless shows that the Amazons continued to have a formative role in the articulation of Athenian identity.

While the Amazons and Athena represented polar opposites in aspects of warfare and reproduction, the most important element of Athena's opposition to the Amazons—the fact that she was a virgin goddess and thus not a sexual threat— can be seen in what was probably the single most important building constructed in Athens in the Periclean period. Using the funds collected from member states of the Delian League to finance his building program on the Acropolis, Pericles oversaw the construction of the Parthenon, a magnificent temple dedicated to Athena. While the construction of a temple for the patron deity of a city was far from unusual, what is striking are the aspects of the goddess which the temple celebrates. The eastern cella of the temple was dedicated to Athena Polias, or Athena of the City, while the western cella was dedicated to Athena Parthenos, or Athena the Virgin.[156] Taking its name from the latter of the epithets, the Parthenon thus highlights the two aspects of the goddess most important to Periclean Athenians—her identification with the thriving polis and her virginity. Given her traditional role as the military protector of the city and the outstanding military success of Athens in the Persian Wars and their imperial undertakings, a temple dedicated to Athena Nike, or Athena the Victorious, would perhaps have been the more likely candidate for a temple that was meant to reflect Athens' newfound place as the de facto ruler of much of the

[156] www.perseus.tufts.edu

Greek world. As such, the Athenians' decision to celebrate the virginity of the goddess rather than her military aspect says a great deal about the importance of gender and sexual issues in the polis at this time, as does the prominent placement of the Amazons in the artistic program.

Built between 447 and 432 to replace the two temples to Athena that were destroyed in the Persian sack of 480, the Parthenon was a Doric peripteral temple, meaning that it was rectangular in shape, had a series of low steps on every side, and a colonnade of Doric columns that extended around the entire structure (see figure 13). Comprised of two interior rooms, the larger displaying the cult statue of the goddess and the smaller acting as a treasury, the Parthenon was designed and built by Iktinos and Kallikrates, while Pheidias sculpted the colossal cult statue of the goddess.[157] Because the structure was monumental and involved a great deal of sculptural decoration, it is easiest to see the themes depicted on the temple by breaking it down into three major programs: the metopes, the pediments, and the cult statue of Athena Parthenos.

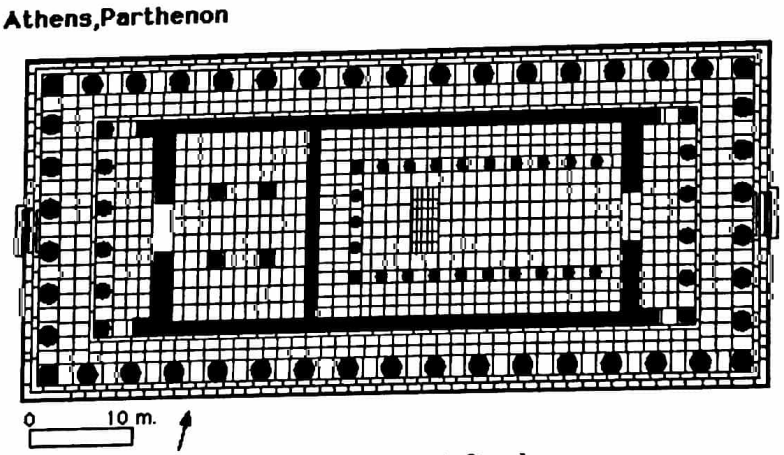

Figure 13: The Parthenon, www.perseus.tufts.edu

[157] http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Parthenon

The metopes on the exterior friezes of the Parthenon are particularly interesting as they are connected by two themes. The west metope depicts a battle between Greeks and Orientals, with the latter group believed to be Amazons despite the battered condition of the remains. The north metope shows a battle between the Greeks and Trojans, including a scene in which Menelaus chases Helen as she attempts to seek sanctuary at a temple. On the east metope can be seen a depiction of the battle between gods and giants, while the south depicts the battle between the centaurs and Lapiths, with the former carrying off a number of Greek women.[158] While all four programs show a battle fought between Greeks (or Greek gods) and "others," among whom the Amazons are included, a second underlying theme is depicted in three out of four of the metopes. The Trojan War with its portrayal of Helen and Menelaus depicts a war fought for the sake of a woman who betrayed her Greek husband to be with an Eastern man. The centaur and Lapith episode shows male sexuality in its extreme bestial form and the effects that such a loss of moderation could have on traditional ordered society. Finally, the Amazon scene highlights the threat that female sexuality and power could pose to Greek society if not checked. As such, the Parthenon metopes show the potential threat that sexuality posed to ordered society and the need for the Athenians to defeat such destructive forces.

The pediments are perhaps less instructive about the place of sexuality in Athenian society, though they do show the role that Athena had in the pantheon and in Athenian society. The East Pediment shows Athena's birth as a fully grown warrior from the head of her father Zeus, who is surrounded by other Olympian deities, while the West Pediment depicts the struggle between Athena and Poseidon over who would be the patron god of Athens. While the first scene shows the importance of Athena's motherless

[158] www.perseus.tufts.edu

birth to the autochthonous and sexually paranoid Athenians, the second episode connects the goddess to the special status enjoyed by the polis, as she was one of two major gods who fought for the honor of representing and serving Athens.[159]

The most fascinating aspect of the Parthenon, however, was the colossal statue of Athena Parthenos by the sculptor Pheidias. Though the statue no longer survives, reconstructions of what it most likely looked like have been made from copies and descriptions from ancient sources such as Pausanias. It is believed that a gold and ivory Athena, adorned with "sandals, a peplos belted over the overfold, an aegis, and a helmet," was free standing with the majority of her weight distributed on her right leg (see figure 14).[160]

Figure 14: Reconstruction of the Athena Parthenos in the Royal Ontario Museum, front view[161]

[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] All images of Athena Parthenos taken from www.perseus.tufts.edu

Holding a spear in one hand and a statue of the goddess Nike in her other, a large shield rested against her legs. Though such an image must have been rather striking for both religious and ascetic purposes, the most instructive aspect of the statue can be seen in the artistic program that decorated the goddess and her accoutrements. Covering the soles of her sandals was a centauromachy, while the birth of Pandora was wrought in relief on the pedestal on which the statue stood, so that the virgin goddess of Athens symbolically conquered the scourge to men that was female sexuality. What it most interesting, however, is that the exterior of the shield depicted none other than an intricate rendering of the battle between the Greeks and Amazons for the Acropolis in which the sculptor introduced the depiction of the Amazons baring their right breast in a sexually enticing manner (see figures 11 and 15). The fact that the Amazons were portrayed in the most sexually explicit manner that had yet been seen takes on even greater significance when one considers the fact that Pheidias, according to Plutarch, "inserted a very fine likeness of Pericles fighting with an Amazon" along with a likeness of the artist himself.[162] Though it may have been a way to commemorate the patron and the architect who together planned and executed one of the most impressive monuments in classical history, the decision to render their likenesses in the images of those men who fought and defeated the Amazons—the embodiment of every threat that faced the polis in the Periclean age—is certainly enlightening about the way in which Pericles, and subsequently the rest of Athens, viewed the Amazons and utilized them for their own propagandistic purposes.

[162] Plut. *Thes.* 31.4

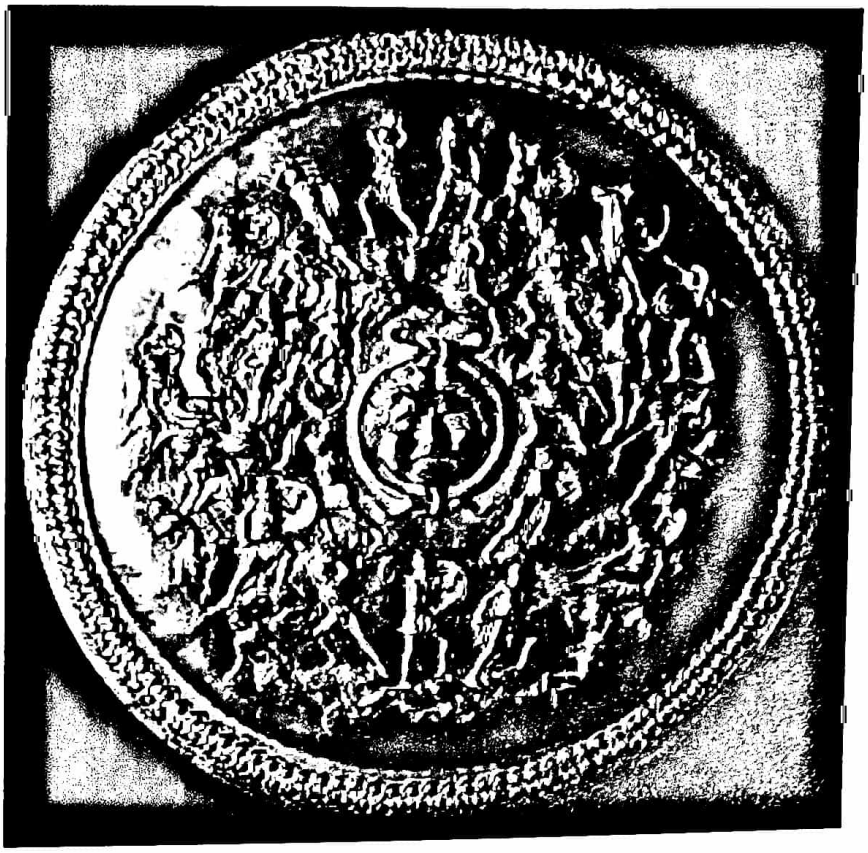

Figure 15: Reconstruction of the Athena Parthenos Shield in the Royal Ontario Museum

The fact that the monumental statue of the goddess Athena in her virgin aspect was covered in themes that represented the threat of sexuality to the Athenians in the period of Pericles speaks volumes about the priority which surrounded such concerns. While the birth of Pandora, who used her sexual wiles to control men, shows the continued threat to the polis, the inclusion of the centaurs, who represented unchecked and violent male sexuality, and the Amazons, who threatened to overturn both sexual and political relations in the male dominated polis, acts a didactic tool that shows how the Athenians were able to overcome such threats in the past. As such, the juxtaposition between Athena and the Amazons on the most important monument built during the Pericelan period shows that the feminine threat to the polis came down to one thing—

sexuality—for the sexually promiscuous warrior women were demonized while the virgin goddess was worshipped and celebrated.

Epilogue

Although the Amazons first entered into Greek literary tradition in the writings of Homer, their legend is truly the product of the transformation they underwent in the social and political context of the fifth century, for in their story can be read the story of Athens—the highs and lows, the successes and failures, the hopes and fears that characterized the polis at the height of its cultural and imperial might. Though the Amazons would never again achieve the same level of popularity in art or literature that they enjoyed in the Classical period, the story of the famed female warriors by no means ended there. While Pericles himself died in 429, only two years into the Peloponnesian War, the Amazons continued to be used as an allegorical representation of the enemy that the Athenians faced, though this time it was the Greek Spartans and not the Persian "barbarians" that the Amazons came to represent. A century later, they would be appropriated by the followers of Alexander the Great to serve as propaganda for his mixed marriage campaign, while William Shakespeare, almost two thousand years later, would make the marriage of Theseus and his Amazon bride the setting for his famous comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The theatrical potential of the female warriors would even be carried far into the twentieth century with the creation of shows such as Xena: Warrior Princess and Wonder Woman, both of which were certainly meant to captivate the imagination of female and male audiences alike.[163] Despite the fact that the

[163] I hope to examine how the myth of the Amazons was used following the Classical period in an expanded and revised version of this thesis to be completed in the spring of 2006. .

modern image of the Amazons has largely lost the social and political significance that made them a potent source of propaganda in the ancient world, the image of beautiful female warriors challenging and seducing the handsome heroes they encountered will undoubtedly continue to enchant audiences for a long time to come, for theirs is a story that has proven itself capable of adapting to time and circumstances so as never to be forgotten.

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