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ALEXANDER AND THE AMAZONS

in memoriam, Alexander Scobie

One of the more intriguing stories in our historical traditions on Alexander the Great is the king's alleged sexual encounter with an Amazonian queen. The historicity of this tale was doubted even in antiquity and in modern times is often dismissed, understandably enough, as plain silly; for instance, in a recent paper, Elizabeth Carney facetiously remarks, 'we are not . . . really tempted to believe that Alexander got chummy with any Amazons!'[1] Carney's essay addresses two prominent themes in the Alexander traditions: the series of exchanges between Alexander and Parmenion, and the occasions when the Macedonian king shut himself away in his tent to sulk like Achilles. She explores the complex relationship between fact, reported fact, and literary embellishment, and clearly for Carney the Amazon tale represents a polar end of the spectrum, which can be safely classified as 'fiction'.

But what is often passed over is why the Amazons should feature in the historical accounts of Alexander at all, and, equally, why they are as well represented as they are and at different times during the king's reign.[2] The Amazons appear, in one context or another, in all our main Alexander sources, from the *Alexander Romance* (where one might most likely expect to find them) to the sober Arrian.[3] The sole exception is the *Metz Epitome*—and here we cannot be completely sure that they were not in the original text, but were mentioned just before the point where our extant text begins, or were edited out in some stage of the epitome's compilation.

Even outside Alexander historiography the Amazons are among the most emotive and evocative figures in Greek culture. Amazon ethnography is a complex subject. Most traditions purporting to be 'historical' regard them as a race of female warriors, who dwelt around the Thermodon river, close by the Black Sea in remote Scythian territory.[4] The Amazon theme was also systematically exploited in *mythopoiesis*

[1] See E. Carney, 'Artifice and Alexander history', in A. B. Bosworth and E. J. Baynham (edd.) *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction* (Oxford, 2000), 263–85, at 264.

[2] Fundamental modern analyses of the Amazon in Alexander historiography are H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage* (Munich, 1926), 2.419, no. 26; E. Mederer, *Die Alexanderlegenden bei den ältesten Alexanderhistorikern* (Stuttgart, 1936), 87ff.; W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1948), 2.326–9, J. Hamilton, *Plutarch* 'Alexander'*: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1969), 123–7. More recently, see M. Daumas, 'Alexandre et la reine des Amazones', *REA* 94 (1992), 347–54; J. E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 5 to 7.2* (Amsterdam, 1994), 197–200; J. C. Yardley and W. Heckel, *Justin, Epitome of the Philippic* History *of Pompeius Trogus*, Books 11–12 (Oxford, 1997), 1.200–3. The three episodes concerning Amazons occur at separate intervals: the visit of the Amazon queen, Thalestris (330/29 B.C.); the negotiations with the Scythian chief over a marriage alliance and the ambitions of Pharasmanes (328); and the Atropates incident late in 324.

[3] For the Amazon queen and her visit to Alexander, see Curt. 6.5.25–32, Diod. 17.77.1–3, Strabo 11.5.4 C505, Plut. *Alex.* 46, Just. 12.3.5–7, cf. Just. 2.4.33. For the Amazons in the *Alexander Romance*, see Ps.-Call. 3.25–6 (ed. W. Kroll, Berlin, 1926). The story of the Amazons appears in all the Greek recensions as well as the Latin text of Julius Valerius. The most accessible English translations are R. Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (Harmondsworth, 1991), 143–5 and A. M. Wolohojian's translation of the Armenian text, *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes* (New York, 1969), 141–3. On Arrian's treatment of the Amazon myth, see *Anab*. 7.13, with A. B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander* (Oxford, 1988), 65–7.

[4] There are some variations in location; see Atkinson (n. 2), 186 for a concise summary. For

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(especially Athenian); in art,[5] literature, and oratory from the late sixth to the fourth centuries B.C. In fact, as recent studies by du Bois and Blake Tyrrell have pointed out, there is a certain current of ambiguity, tinged with downright hostility expressed in a considerable amount of the mythological tradition.[6] Heracles, Theseus, and Achilles, three of the most popular heroes of Greek mythology, have famous encounters with Amazons, all of which end tragically for the Amazon concerned. Achilles falls in love with the beautiful Amazon Penthesilea after he has just dispatched her;[7] Theseus rapes an Amazon and his marriage to one ends in disaster; and Heracles (at least in some versions of the story) kills Hippolyte, the queen of the Amazons, to obtain her girdle.[8] The hostility may run deeper than just the concept of Amazons as barbarians or 'others'. They are portrayed as feral and unnatural creatures, at the same time as charming and dangerously alluring. They are ambivalent beings who take on male *arete* and share masculine pursuits with Artemis, as well as enjoy her protection; they are sexually arousing but do not behave with passive servility or make good wives and mothers for good Greek men. Yet despite the Amazons' ominous background, Alexander III of Macedon follows his heroic predecessors.

THE ANCIENT SOURCES ON ALEXANDER AND THALESTRIS

The amorous dalliance between the Macedonian king and the Amazonian queen is common to all three 'vulgate' authors, Diodorus, Curtius, and Justin, and can most likely be traced back to Cleitarchus.[9] In fact he is openly cited as a source for the story by Plutarch (*Alex*. 46.1). In 329/8 B.C. an Amazon ruler called Thalestris[10] approached Alexander when he was campaigning in Hyrcania, a rich and settled region in the south-east reaches of the Caspian Sea, on the border of Parthia. This country had been described by Hecataeus as mountainous and wooded, but although the Greeks may have heard of it, it was barely known to them, situated as it was in the eastern part of the Persian empire.[11] The nomadic tribes, the Saca peoples including the Dahae and later Parthians, lived in the desert areas to the north-east. Strabo, in

important treatments of Amazonian ethnography, see J. Carlier, 'Voyage en Amazonie grecque', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiae Hungaricae* 27 (1979), 381–405; J. Blok, *The Early Amazons* (Leiden, 1995), 83–104; K. Dowden, 'The Amazons: development and functions', *RhM* 140 (1997), 97–128, at 103–16.

[5] For a comprehensive treatment of Amazon iconography, see D. von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford, 1957); *LIMC* 1.586–668.

[6] See W. Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (London, 1984); Page du Bois, *Centaurs and Amazons* (Ann Arbor, 1982); and more recently, Dowden (n. 4) who in particular explores the significance of the wounded or dead Amazon in mythology.

[7] The episode of Achilles' love for Penthesilea apparently dates back to the eighth century B.C. from a reference to Arctinus' epic *Aethiopis*; the most elaborate ancient treatment was the fourth-century A.D. poem by Quintus of Smyrna. See Blake Tyrrell (n. 6), 78–82, also R. Schmiel, 'The Amazon queen: Quintus of Smyrna, Bk. 1', *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 185–94.

[8] The traditions give several names for Theseus' Amazon, but the most common are Antiope and Hippolyte; for the various references in the sources, see J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus* (London, 1921), 2.143, n. 2. On Heracles and the Amazon queen, see Apollodorus 2.5.9 (Fraser, ibid. 1.203 with n. 1); according to Apollonius (2.966), Heracles caught Hippoyte's sister, whereupon the queen gave him her girdle as ransom.

[9] For an explanation of the terminology, see N. G. L. Hammond, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1983), 1ff.; cf. Bosworth (n. 3), 8–9.

[10] She is called *regina* in Curt. 6.5.25, *basilissa* in Diod. 17.77.1. Just. 12.3.5 gives the alternative name of Minythyia. It is possible that Trogus knew of another source which offered more information on Amazons, cf. Just. 2.4.

[11] For Hecataeus' description of Hyrcania, see Athen. 2.70b = *FGrH* I F 291.

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his own version of the Amazon tale (11.5.3–4), was extremely critical of Cleitarchus' understanding of geography. There was a common but erroneous geographical conception which maintained that the Taurus, Caucasus, and Hindu Kush ranges formed a vast, unbroken, east–west mountain chain.[12] But thanks to Eratosthenes, Strabo had better knowledge. Prior to his comments on Alexander's meeting with the Amazon queen, he had noted (11.1.5) that Cleitarchus had made the 'Isthmus' between Lake Maeotis and the Caspian far too narrow, even claiming that either sea periodically washed over it. Also, according to Cleitarchus, Thalestris' own kingdom was located between the Caucasus mountains and the Phasis river, near the Thermodon (Curtius 6.5.24), implying that she would have reached Alexander easily in Hyrcania. In fact, Hyrcania was a considerable distance—some 6,000 stades or about 1,500 kilometres—from the Thermodon. For Strabo, the difficulty was not so much a warrior queen coming down out of the steppes to meet Alexander, but rather that she was supposed to be from the Phasis and the Thermodon—which, by Cleitarchus' reckoning were quite close to the Caspian. So Cleitarchus' erroneous geography was a good reason to debunk his credibility and the story.[13]

According to Diodorus (17.77) and Curtius (6.5.26) the Amazon queen arrived with a fully armed escort of three hundred of her women warriors. Her expressed reason for visiting the king (common to all the vulgate traditions) was to conceive a child by a great father, or, as Tarn remarked, 'for the same purpose for which the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon'.[14] Since Alexander had proved himself the greatest of all men and Thalestris was superior to all other women in strength and *andreia* (manly courage) she reasoned that a child born to the two of them must excel all other human beings. Curtius adds the detail (6.5.29) that Thalestris looked the conqueror up and down first, as though a little sceptical at what she saw; our sources suggest that Alexander was a short man[15] and obviously his physical appearance did not match the fame of his achievements. However, she persisted in her request and, according to Justin, Diodorus, and Curtius, spent thirteen days with the king, presumably to maximize the chances of conception (cf. Just. 12.3.5–7 *ut est visa uterum implesse*).

[12] See R. Stoneman's lucid discussion, 'Romantic ethnography', *Ancient World* 25 (1994), 93–107, at 99–102; also on Cleitarchus' faulty understanding of geography, see L. Pearson, *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great* (New York, 1960), 214–15, with n. 14; on the Thalestris episode, 220–1.

[13] For Cleitarchus' description of the Isthmus, see *FGrH* 137 F 13.

[14] See Tarn (n. 2), 2.323. According to Xenophon, *Anab.* 1.2.12, another queen, Epyaxa of Cilicia, was rumoured to have had sexual intercourse with Cyrus the Younger in order to keep his favour, while her husband cultivated Cyrus' opponent, his brother Artaxerxes.

[15] Cf. Curt. 7.8.9; Alexander is said to be of *modicus habitus*, cf. the *Itinerarium Alexandri* 13 which describes the king as being of 'medium height'. The traditions are not specific on Alexander's height, beyond the implausible information of Ps.-Call. 3.4 (cf. the Armenian version [n. 3], 120) that Alexander was only 3 cubits tall (about 4 ft. 6 in.). While it is likely that people in antiquity were on average shorter than they are now in western society, Ps.-Call.'s context, namely the personal duel between Alexander and Porus, suggests deliberate exaggeration of Alexander's shortness for dramatic effect; see E. Baynham, 'Who put the "Romance" in the *Alexander Romance*? The *Alexander Romances* within Alexander historiography', *AHB* 9.1 (1995), 1–13. We should also keep in mind that the height (or lack of it) of a famous personage may be defined according to a particular perspective. For example, hostile British traditions have consistently described Napoleon Bonaparte as 'short' when he was about 5 ft. 6 in. tall, certainly not exceptionally short even by today's standards. Elsewhere, our Alexander sources are emphatic that he was shorter than Hephaestion (cf. Diod.17.35.5, Curt. 3.12.6, *Itin. 37*) and Darius (Diod. 17.66.3, Curt. 5.2.13), but since we do not know how tall either of these men was, the comparison is not particularly helpful.

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From Plutarch we learn that the Thalestris story had a very early origin, yet the way that Plutarch casts the tale is quite interesting. He says 'the majority of sources' (*οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν*) record the tale as an actual event of the reign, including the so-called first-generation historians, Cleitarchus of Alexandria, Polycleitus of Larisa, and Onesicritus. Then he counterbalances the claim by giving another list of writers—again including contemporary sources such as Ptolemy and Aristobulus—who asserted that it was a *plasma* (a fiction). But it is not entirely clear whether Plutarch meant that Ptolemy and Aristobulus had actually stated that Thalestris' visit was nonsense, or whether they had merely omitted it—and certain evidence tends to support the latter. Arrian at 7.13.3 claims that the episode of Atropates and his troop of bogus Amazons was not in Ptolemy and Aristobulus, and if, at an earlier stage, either of them had claimed outright that the visit of Thalestris was fiction, it would have been a good opportunity for Arrian to have said so. In other words, since Arrian himself is clearly doubtful about the existence of Amazons in Alexander's time, open denial of the Amazon queen story by his two main authorities could only have strengthened his case.[16] But if Aristobulus and Ptolemy knew of the Thalestris tale (and it seems very likely that they did), they may have found the idea either absurd or slightly distasteful. In any case Ptolemy occasionally omitted personages from his own history who appear as important figures in traditions elsewhere: a most celebrated example is his omission of his mistress Thais from his account of the burning of the royal palace of Persepolis. Moreover, the alleged contemporary doubt surrounding the Thalestris episode is illustrated by other anecdotal evidence; according to Plutarch (*Alex*. 46.2), when one of Alexander's successors, Lysimachus, was listening to Onesicritus' history and heard of the king's encounter with the Amazon, he was supposed to have smiled and pointedly asked, 'And where was I at the time?'

Plutarch is non-committal on the story's historicity, but it is significant that he felt compelled to address it and display some knowledge of its distribution in the literary traditions. This was possibly a literary topos, since Strabo (11.5.4) also claims that there were many writers who discussed Amazons (including Thalestris). The parallel between Plutarch and Strabo is quite striking; although Strabo does not give a list of names, his general sentiment is that those historians who are considered to be 'most believable' (*οἱ πιστευόμενοι μάλιστα*) do not mention the episode of Alexander and the Amazon queen, whereas those that do vary in their descriptions. We do not know the authors whom Strabo considered trustworthy, but since he followed Eratosthenes in considering that Cleitarchus was unreliable, it is possible that Eratosthenes himself may have originally given a similar compilation to Plutarch's list. Since we know virtually nothing about the last four authors whom Plutarch cites, we cannot be certain that they all pre-dated Eratosthenes; it is possible that Plutarch may have also known the latter's work and supplemented it with some additional esoteric names.[17]

Powell's thesis that Plutarch simply took the names of his sources from some kind of Hellenistic encyclopaedia has largely been rejected;[18] likewise, Tarn's suggestion of

[16] So A. B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander* (Oxford, 1995), 2.102.

[17] See Hamilton (n. 2), 124–6 on Plutarch's list; Philon of Thebes, Hecataeus of Eretria, and Philip the Chalcidian are unknown; Philip of Theangela in Caria wrote a chronicle in the third century, cf. *FGrH* no. 741.

[18] See J. E. Powell, 'The sources of Plutarch's Alexander', *JHS* 59 (1939), 229–40; for Tarn's criticisms, see (n. 2), 2.308. Recent discussion of Plutarch's use of sources has shown Powell's view to be unsubstantiated; see, in particular, C. Pelling, 'Plutarch's method of work in the

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a separate monograph on the Amazons, although supported by some scholars, also seems unlikely.[19] Instead, interest in Amazons seems to have been more general. Educated critics in the Graeco-Roman world did take Amazon stories seriously enough to consider whether they were truth or fiction and to entertain the notion that, although these women did not exist in their own times (or even Alexander's), they may have done so at an earlier time. In fact, the extinction of the Amazons offered considerable opportunities for speculation. Although the sceptical Strabo claims that the Amazons are a good example of myth related as history (cf. 11.5.3–4), he does not reject outright the idea of their existence (Strabo 10.5.1, cf. Plutarch, *Theseus* 27). Most Graeco-Roman critics seemed to place the race's decline after the death of Penthesileia, who had been killed during the Trojan War.[20] In an interesting variant, Trogus claims that Alexander's paramour Thalestris died soon after returning to her kingdom and her race died with her (Just. 2.4.33). The topos of the Amazons' disappearance was also embraced by Arrian (as we shall see), but his interest seems to have been fairly peripheral. In some of his other works he merely refers to the regions where the Amazons were supposed to have lived.[21]

However, if the Thalestris episode was not true, we have to ask why Cleitarchus (or Onesicritus)[22] would have fabricated it with its particular emphasis, and secondly, if there is a kernel of historical truth to Alexander and the Amazon, where might we find it? I shall return to the first question presently: for now the second issue is somewhat easier to answer.

THE MAKING OF THE MYTH AND ITS TRANSMISSION

Most modern scholars have followed the direction offered by Plutarch. He notes (*Alex.* 46.3) that in Alexander's correspondence to his regent Antipater the king does not refer to a meeting with an Amazon, but alleges that a Scythian chieftain had offered him his daughter in marriage. We cannot say whether Plutarch saw these letters himself or even if they were authentic, but the material clearly refers to events from 328 B.C.; hence a little later than his immediately preceding context of 330/29 B.C. One should emphasize that Plutarch's overall account in chapters 45 and 46 is very confusing in terms of location and chronology. In *Alexander* 45 Plutarch discusses Alexander's adoption of Median costume, which took place when the king had marched into Parthia; this episode leads into a digression on Alexander's wounds and physical toughness, which Plutarch illustrates with an anecdote relating to Alexander's crossing of the Jaxartes (*Alex.* 45.4). He then introduces the incident of the Amazonian queen and it is unclear whether the 'here' of the opening sentence (ἐνταῦθα, *Alex.* 46.1) refers to the country beyond the Jaxartes, or whether Plutarch had shifted his narrative back to Hyrcania. Certainly it is from that location that he continues events in chapter 47. As we have seen, Cleitarchus was explicit that the meeting with Thalestris took place in Hyrcania. Given Plutarch's general approach in chapter 46 of balancing authors who claim the Amazon queen was real as against those who deny her existence, it seems more likely that he has simply used the letter to

Roman lives', *JHS* 99 (1979), 74–96, also 'Plutarch's adaptation of his source material', *JHS* 100 (1980), 127–40.

[19] See Tarn (n. 2), 2.308, with Hamilton (n. 2), 124.

[20] See Bosworth (n. 3), 66.

[21] Arrian, *Peripl.* 15.3, cf. *Bithyn.* F. 48–50.

[22] So P. Pédech, *Historiens compagnons d'Alexandre* (Paris, 1984), 87–9.

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Antipater, which belongs to a slightly later time, to support those writers who were sceptical. He does not mean that both incidents happened beyond the Jaxartes.[23]

A more elaborate version of the diplomatic negotiation between Alexander and the Scythian chieftain appears in Arrian (4.15.1–3) and Curtius (8.1.9), again with some differences in the location and time. According to Arrian, when Alexander was on the Tanais, he sent some envoys to the Saca people beyond the river (Arrian 4.1.1); these later returned to him in Bactra, accompanied by representatives of the new Scythian king, who proposed the hand of his daughter (in order to strengthen the alliance between himself and Alexander). If Alexander himself was reluctant to undertake such a union, the Scythian king was equally agreeable for leading Macedonians to marry noble Scythian women. Within the same context Arrian also refers to the arrival of the king of the Chorasmians, Pharasmanes, who governed a large region south of the Aral Sea. He tried to entice Alexander into joining him in a campaign of conquest by saying that his territory had a common frontier with the Amazons. Tarn evidently misinterpreted Arrian's emphasis; rather than accept that Pharasmanes had learned enough of Greek traditions and habits to cleverly use Amazons as a bait, he argued that somebody in Alexander's entourage, or even the king himself, had asked the Chorasmian ruler about Amazons out of curiosity and Pharasmanes, not really having a clue about what the Amazons were supposed to be, but showing 'the usual Oriental desire to please' replied, 'Oh—yes, I have lots: in fact they are my neighbours.' Tarn supported this condescending speculation with an Irish joke, completely missing the point that Pharasmanes had wanted to use Alexander in order to extend his own territory.[24] As indicated earlier, Arrian's other reference to Amazons (*Anab*. 7. 13) was related as a *logos*. It concerns an incident that supposedly occurred in 324 B.C. after Alexander had returned from his campaign in India. Atropates, the satrap of the large, wealthy, and powerful province of Media, sent Alexander a troop of one hundred female cavalry, who he declared were Amazons. They were armed with little axes and light bucklers instead of regular cavalry shields, and it was claimed that their right breasts were smaller than their left (possibly because their left shoulders and breasts had been padded) and were uncovered in battle.[25] But the reference to their fighting techniques was undoubtedly meant to enhance the story. Although the description concurs with certain aspects of traditional Amazonian appearance, within Arrian's passage they sound very decorative and deliberately sexy. It is possible that these women were even intended for sexual gratification—prostitutes who had been taught to ride and who were playing out a contrived fantasy. While Arrian himself does not

[23] On the problem of *ἐνταῦθα*, see Hamilton (n. 2), 123. Atkinson (n. 2), 198 suggests that Onesicritus, rather than Cleitarchus, may have been Plutarch's source for both episodes.

[24] See Tarn (n. 2), 2.327–8, with n. 1: A prospective tenant, inspecting an Irish shoot, became suspicious when to every question the keeper replied that the birds were very numerous, and said: 'I don't suppose you have any Encyclopaedia Britannicas here?' 'None have come this year', replied the Irishman, 'but last year a pair nested on the island.' On Pharasmanes' ambitions, see A. B. Bosworth, 'A tale of two empires: Alexander the Great and Hernán Cortés', in Bosworth and Baynham (n. 1), 23–49, at 41, who compares Pharasmanes' efforts with those of Cortés. The latter's original commission from Velázquez had included searching for Amazons.

[25] The smaller right breasts of the women may have been an allusion to the tradition that Amazon women cauterized their right breasts in order to draw bows easily (cf. Curt. 6.5.28, Just. 2.5. 11, Strabo, 11.5.1, 504) and hence part of the colour, like the reference to the troop's alleged participation in battle. But there is nothing in Arrian's text which suggests that such mutilation had been actually been carried out on Atropates' Amazons. If they *did* appear lop-sided, one explanation might be that since a shield is normally carried on the left arm, the women may have given their left sides additional padding for support and comfort—which perhaps created the impression that their right breasts were smaller.

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state this, it is evident that he considered the women to have been intentionally dressed as Amazons (7.13.6). In any case, Alexander's reaction was the opposite of the satrap's expectation. To Tarn's great approval, the king sent the troop away so that they would not be molested by his army (7.13.3); the inference is that unlike true Amazons, they were not capable of looking after themselves and Alexander did not take them seriously as soldiers. It is also possible that if tales of the king's earlier alleged liaison with an Amazon queen were already in circulation, he wished to retain exclusive rights; in other words, he might not have wanted encounters with Amazons to become commonplace and for his marshals and troops to enjoy similar favours. Curiously, the very basis of the vulgate version, namely Thalestris' initiative to procure a child by the best father available, has apparently been reduced or garbled to a heroic 'play-acting' remark on Alexander's part. He tells the women in Amazon costume to give their queen a message that he would visit her one day and impregnate her. Thus there appears to be a link between the two accounts; however, it does not necessarily mean that the Atropates story directly spawned the tale of Thalestris, or vice versa.[26] The boast could have been more general: virility and fecundity were prime attributes of Alexander's ancestor and great role model Heracles. Not only the Argeads of Macedonia but half of the Peloponnese claimed descent from that most beloved and lusty of Greek heroes.

If the Atropates episode is historical and not simply a late invention,[27] it is likely that the wily satrap was trying to flatter the king and maintain his favour. He was evidently already highly placed. His daughter had been given to Perdiccas at the mass marriage ceremony at Susa and he had arrested and personally delivered to Alexander at Pasargadae a Mede called Baryaxes, who had tried to proclaim himself a king of the old pre-Persian Median stock.[28] Arrian's preceding context provides us with some plausible reasons for Atropates' elaborate presentation of a group of attractive women warriors. While Alexander was *en route* from Opis to Ecbatana, he passed through the Nesaean plain, where the Persian royal horse herds, formerly consisting of 150,000 pure-bred mares, had been so seriously depleted by brigandage during the king's absence that they were now down to about a third of the original number.[29] Since they were pastured in Atropates' satrapy, they would have been his responsibility. The Amazon charade could well have a ploy to distract Alexander's attention or to amuse him: on his return to Carmania, the king had been ruthless in executing satraps and subordinates whom he had decided had abused their power when he was away. But it is also possible that the display was calculated merely for entertainment. Alexander himself held lavish games, theatrical shows, and parties at Ecbatana and the presentation of the make-believe Amazons may have been part of the festive atmosphere.[30]

Nevertheless the story prompts an academic digression from Arrian, himself a man of considerable education and literary reputation. He doubts that Amazons were around in Alexander's time, because Xenophon, who had lived earlier in the fourth century, had not seen any. In fact the sole reference to Amazons in Xenophon's

[26] See below, n. 31.

[27] So P. A. Brunt, *Arrian. History of Alexander and Indica* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 2.495.

[28] On the marriage of Atropates' daughter to Perdiccas, see Arrian, *Anab*. 7.4.5; Baryaxes 6.29.3.

[29] Cf. Diod. 17.110.6, with a variant in the figure.

[30] The victims included many Persian nobles, Astaspes, Orxines, Abulites, and Oxathres; see E. Badian, 'Harpalus', *JHS* 81 (1961), 16–43, at 17 and now also a detailed discussion, 'Conspiracies', in Bosworth and Baynham (n. 1), 50–95. On the entertainments at Ecbatana, Arrian, *Anab*. 7.14.1, Diod. 17.110.8; see also Badian's remarks (next note).

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Anabasis (4.4.16) concerns their weaponry and it is impossible to tell from the context whether Xenophon regarded the Amazons' existence as genuine, or whether he was merely referring to familiar iconography.

To summarize, the Saca princess episode and the Pharasmanes story have been used to explain how the Thalestris story may have developed. In a similar fashion, others have seen a link between the Atropates episode and the tale of Thalestris.[31] But recently Bosworth has pointed out that Cleitarchus clearly reported two separate episodes: Thalestris' visit to Alexander in Hyrcania, and the Scythian king's offer of his daughter when Alexander was at Maracanda (Curt. 8.1.9). For Bosworth, the most likely historical explanation of the Thalestris story was that Alexander may have been visited in Hyrcania by some native princess of Sacan stock, accustomed to ride and shoot, who came with a mounted group of females that were also carrying weapons.[32] Since it seems highly likely that there were nomadic Scythian women who practised these customs, Greek identification of them with Amazons must indeed have been irresistible.[33] In addition, if Bosworth is right about Alexander's staff not only consciously promoting the king's heroic emulation of predecessors like Dionysus and Heracles, but also finding evidence which suggested that these benefactors of mankind had been there before the king, one could also suggest that his meeting with an Amazon was an inevitable part of such contemporary *mythopoiesis*.[34] Both Heracles and Achilles had had encounters with Amazons; therefore Alexander must have one. Indeed, we would be more surprised if the traditions had said Alexander never even saw an Amazon, let alone made love to one. The durability of the Amazons' appeal is also demonstrated in Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*, whose subject was well known for his *imitatio Alexandri*. Plutarch's source was most likely Theophanes, Pompey's historian and propagandist, who had a role not unlike that of Alexander's Callisthenes. When Pompey had defeated King Cosis during the Mithridatic campaign, his men came upon Amazonian weapons and boots but no female bodies. Nevertheless, according to Appian (*Mithr*. 103.482–3), Pompey displayed wounded female prisoners—who were supposed to be Amazons—in his triumph; if these barbarian women had been dressed up accordingly, Pompey's sense of theatre was no less than than Atropates'.[35]

Yet I think we can add a little more. Amazons would have obvious appeal to

[31] Mederer (n. 2), 90–1 and Berve (n. 2), 2.419; so too, E. Badian, *Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge, 1985), 2.484 with n. 2.

[32] Bosworth, *Arrian* 2. 103, cf. R. Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London, 1973), 276.

[33] Bosworth (n. 32). Also, nearly twenty years ago, archaeologists excavating around the Don in the territory of the former Soviet Union claimed to have found clear evidence of a gynaecocracy within the Sarmantian/Sauromatian culture, which was the name of the female tribe that Herodotus 4.110–18 described. See K. F. Smirnov, 'Une Amazone du IV^{e} siècle avant n.e. sur le territoire du Don', *DHA* 8 (1982), 121–41. Not all scholars accept these findings; more cautious is G. Clark in her review of Blake Tyrrell (cf. *LCM* 10. 5 [1985], 78–9), and some reject the idea of any historicity behind the myth completely; see Blok (n. 4).

[34] See A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East* (Oxford, 1996), 98–133.

[35] Plutarch, *Pompey* 35.3. According to Strabo (cf. *FGrH* 188 F 4 = Strab. 11.5.1), Theophanes located the Amazons near the Albani (in the vicinity of the Thermodon). On the episode's relation to Pompey's imitation of Alexander, see L. Ballesteros Pastor, 'La Leyenda de las Amazonas en la Historia de Mitrídates Eupátor', *Χαῖρε. Homenaje al Prof. F. Gascó* (Seville, 1997), 241–7, at 246, n. 29 for bibliography. See also H. Heftner, *Plutarch und der Aufstieg des Pompeius: ein historischer Kommentar zu Plutarchs Pompeiusvita* (New York, 1995), 252–4. On Pompey's *imitatio Alexandri* in general, see O. Weippert, *Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit* (Diss. Julius-Maximilians-Universität zu Würzburg, 1972), 69–104; C. Bohm, *Imitatio Alexandri im Hellenismus* (Munich, 1989). I am grateful to Dr Jane Bellemore for drawing my attention to Pompey's Amazons.

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pan-Hellenic sentiment, but if Cleitarchus or others were trying to give the story a pan-Hellenic spin, one might have expected Alexander and his army to have triumphed over the barbarian warrior women in military contest. After all, the victory of Greek over Amazon had been stridently proclaimed in iconography and literature for more than two hundred years. Moreover, Thalestris in our main historical accounts is not described as a foreign enemy who willingly submits to Alexander and offers him tribute as the Amazonian leaders do in the *Alexander Romance*.[36] Instead, the vulgate text is explicit that Thalestris has deliberately chosen Alexander in order to create a child with him, and the implication is worthiness of partnership, not domination and submission. In Curtius, Thalestris is accorded due recognition of her royal rank; she sends Alexander a message that a queen is on her way to meet him and she is immediately given permission to proceed (Curt. 6.5.26).

The context of the Thalestris story in the vulgate also provides some clues. In Diodorus, Curtius, and Justin Thalestris' visit occurs just before Alexander's adoption of Persian dress and customs. The Latin accounts—Justin, Curtius, and the *Metz Epitome*—give a very negative tone to this aspect of Alexander's orientalism, as does Arrian.[37] The derivative writers, especially Curtius and Arrian, would both have been very well aware of its treatment in subsequent times as a rhetorical topos, and Arrian gives his own opinion rather than those of his sources. Yet there is sufficient evidence to indicate that contemporary Macedonian reaction (at least in some quarters) to Alexander's Median garb was hostile.[38] Diodorus' account is the least critical, even alleging (17.77.7) that Alexander employed Persian customs rather judiciously at first, as he was wary about offending his fellow Macedonians. The source for the vulgate tradition on the king's change of attire was most likely Cleitarchus and it is difficult to know what his own attitude to this issue may have been. If, as seems certain, Cleitarchus was writing during Ptolemy's regime,[39] much would have depended on his master's example; one would surmise that he could hardly condemn Alexander for wearing the costume of his subject peoples if Ptolemy Soter himself was already dressing as pharaoh. Although it seems highly unlikely that Ptolemy ever adopted native costume, at least certainly not as his usual attire, there may have been some degree of Egyptian cultural recognition.[40]

[36] Ps.- Call. 3.25–6: the Amazons offer to pay Alexander 100 talents of gold annually as well as send him a force of 500 warriors and 100 horses to serve with him for a year. There is no sexual liaison between Alexander and the Amazon queen in Pseudo-Callisthenes. The Amazons describe themselves as a race numbering 270,000 virgins and stipulate that if any woman from the force sent to Alexander loses her virginity, she is to remain with his army. In the γ recension the Amazons ask Alexander for a portrait and he sends them his spear to worship (see Stoneman [n. 3], 195). This may have had a sexual innuendo for a contemporary audience although of course the military symbolism is foremost. However, on Alexander's chastity as a motif in the Alexander Romance, see Stoneman (n. 12), 103.

[37] Curt. 6.6.2ff., Just. 12.3.8–4.11, Diod. 17.77.4–6, *Metz Epit.* 1–2; cf. Plut. *Alex.* 45.1–2, *Mor.* 330a, Arrian, *Anab.* 4.7.4, Val. Max. 9.5 ext 1. Arrian initially criticizes the king's costume as part of his eastern excesses; he modifies his attitude in the necrology at 7.29.4.

[38] Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 45.3, Arrian, *Anab.* 4.14.2 and Curt. 8.7.12, where Alexander's Median dress is given as a grievance by Hermolaus.

[39] The date of composition for Cleitarchus' history is controversial: see E. Baynham, *Alexander the Great: The Unique History of Quintus Curtius* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 69, n. 43. The majority of scholars now favour *c.* 310 B.C. as the most likely time for the composition of Cleitarchus' history; see most recently, L. Prandi, *Fortuna e realtà dell' opera di Clitarco*, *Historia* Einzelschriften 104 (Stuttgart, 1996), 66–71.

[40] The literary evidence for much of Soter's internal reign in Egypt is very thin. In Athenaeus' section on *truphe*, Ptolemy I is not recorded as having worn foreign or extravagant clothing,

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This is not the place to explore Alexander's orientalism or the so-called 'policy of fusion'. There are, however, two pieces of evidence that have not been given full attention before, not so much for their significance in the promotion of reconciliation between Asiatics and Macedonians, but rather for their possible connection to the tale of Thalestris.

THE AMAZONIAN QUEEN AND 'VERSCHMELZUNGSPOLITIK'?

First, the Alexander Sarcophagus, which was probably commissioned by the ruler of Sidon, Abdalonymus, is one of the earliest, extant examples of attested Alexander iconography. Abdalonymus was made ruler of Sidon, most likely by Hephaestion, after the battle of Issus in 333.[41] The precise date of the monument, excavated in the royal necropolis, is uncertain, but it was probably made some time between 317 and 306 B.C.[42] One side displays a hunting scene in which Persians and Macedonians co-operate together and the figure usually identified as Alexander is wearing an eastern-style chiton with sleeves and an overfall, like those of the Persians.[43] Alexander's adoption of mixed dress post-dated Abdalonymus' appointment by some three years, and it was commemorated in marble on his sarcophagus, along with the message of harmony. It is not likely that Cleitarchus or any of the other early historians saw the sculpture for themselves, rather that Abdalonymus was continuing to celebrate a strand of official propaganda originally emanating from his late sovereign lord of Asia, which had filtered back to his own court.[44]

Secondly, in Curtius' account of the army's mutiny in 324 B.C., when Alexander delivers a passionate speech to his assembled foreign troops (10.3.11–14), he claims the reason for his marriages to Roxane, the daughter of the Bactrian noble, Oxyartes, and Darius' daughter was to beget offspring, so that by this sacred alliance (*hoc sacro foedere*) he might abolish all distinction between vanquished and victor, since Asia and Europe now belonged to the same kingdom (*Asiae et Europae unum atque idem regnum est*). This is the clearest emphasis that the future was to belong to an élite class consisting of the children of these mixed marriages; one might also recall the king's

unlike Alexander or Demetrius Poliorcetes; cf. Athenaeus 12.535f–6a, 537d. From the earliest Ptolemaic period, dedicatory statues of the royal house from the Greek ruling class used Egyptian styles and material with bilingual inscriptions, which seems to have been encouraged by the king (see P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* [Oxford, 1972], 1.70 with nn. 233, 234), but elsewhere in the late fourth and early third centuries cultural fusion between Greeks and Egyptians remained limited. It is difficult to determine what Ptolemy's court or private dress may have been.

[41] On the appointment of Abdalonymus as ruler of Sidon, see Curt. 4.1.19–21, Just. 11.10.8–9; cf. Diod. 17.47; also Berve (n. 2), 2.3 no. 1, R. A. Billows, *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State* (Berkeley, 1990), 444–5 for prosopographical information.

[42] On the Alexander Sarcophagus in general, see V. von Graeve, *Der Alexandersarkophag und seine Werkstatt* (Berlin, 1970); W. Messerschmidt, 'Historische und ikonographische Untersuchungen zum Alexandersarkophag', *Boreas* 12 (1989), 64–92; A. Stewart, *Faces of Power, Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley, 1993), 294–306; on the monument's date, see also now O. Palagia, 'Hephaestion's pyre and the royal hunt of Alexander', in Bosworth and Baynham (n. 1), 167–206 at n. 84.

[43] The 'Alexander' figure on the other side of the sarcophagus also wears Oriental dress; see Palagia (n. 42), nn. 89 and 90.

[44] On Abdalonymus' support of cultural integration in the iconography of the sarcophagus, see J. Borchardt, 'Die Dependenz des Königs von Sidon von persischen Grosskönig', in R. M. Boehmer and H. Hauptmann (edd.), *Beiträge zur Altertumskunde Kleinasiens, Festschrift für Kurt Bittel* (Mainz, 1983), 105–20, at 119–20.

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earlier statement justifying his marriage to Roxane (8.4.25–6), namely that his ancestor Achilles had also united with a captive female.[45]

Of course, in using any reference from a speech in Curtius, one is faced with the problem of determining how much was in the original source and how much was Curtius' own rhetorical interpretation and embellishment. The speeches in Curtius are normally held up as the most notorious examples of free composition by the historian, and without a model for comparison such as we have elsewhere (for instance with the speeches of Hermolaus, or the mutilated Greek captives),[46] where we can say Curtius probably elaborated on material that he had before him, it is often very difficult to judge either way. In this case we do have both a corresponding context and the barest outline of a speech (in *oratio obliqua*) from Justin's epitome of Trogus (12.12.1–2). In particular, there is the same emphasis on uniting the conquered and conquerors through marriage, which suggests that Trogus may have used the same source as Curtius.

It is also important that the theme of cultural fusion through children is given ambivalent treatment in both Curtius and Justin. In the former, despite Alexander's posturing, his marriage to Roxane is given very hostile colouring, especially from the Macedonian perspective. Their resentment was not so much because Alexander was marrying a non-Macedonian. After all, marriage to foreign princesses was a common Macedonian diplomatic court practice. Philip II was the son of an Illyrian woman while Alexander himself was descended on his mother's side from the Molossian royal house. Rather, the problem was that Roxane was from a conquered race and Alexander was intending to father a child from beaten stock who would then rule over the victors (8.4.29: *ex captiva geniturus qui victoribus imperaret*). The question also surfaces again during the debate on the succession among Alexander's generals after the king's death in Babylon (10.6.13)[47] where vehement objections are raised to either Roxane's child (if it proves male) or Barsine's son, Heracles. But how do we know whether Curtius or Justin/Trogus are in fact reflecting contemporary thought from an early source and not just Roman rhetoric and prejudice?[48] This is a difficult question, since Diodorus' treatment of the disputed succession at Alexander's death is extremely sparse and Arrian's history of the period survives mainly in the brief excerpts of Photius.[49] Yet there is a contemporary tradition, albeit anecdotal, that indicates Alexander himself had been trying to promote the idea of the value of marriage to barbarian women. According to Nicoboule, an obscure figure who is credited with an early account describing Alexander's final days, at Medius' banquet the king allegedly declaimed a large section from Euripides' play the *Andromeda*. We do not know what lines Alexander quoted, but the play's subject was the marriage of Perseus (Alexander's ancestor) to the Ethiopian princess, Andromeda.[50] However, even if the tale is true, any

[45] The captive female meant is most likely to be Briseis.

[46] Curt. 8.7.1–2 (Hermolaus), 5.5.5–6; see Baynham (n. 39), 48–51.

[47] Cf. Just. 13.2.5–13.

[48] So N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Macedonia* (Oxford, 1988) 3.102, n. 1, who claims that the Macedonian infantry had accepted Roxane's unborn child and had even given her a guard (App. *Syr*. 52). But we do not know at what stage this happened; it could well have occurred after the infantry had been forced to accept Perdiccas' settlement. Besides, in addition to protecting Alexander's pregnant widow, the guard would have also prevented any attempt to smuggle in a changeling.

[49] Diod. 18.2 (the claims of Alexander's offspring are omitted in this context); cf. Arrian, *Succ.* 1.1.

[50] See Athen. 12.537 d = *FGrH* 127 F 2; also A. B. Bosworth, 'Alexander, Euripides and

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political message it contained was clearly rejected by Alexander's companions; despite the extravagant festivities of the mass marriages at Susa, only one marshal, Seleucus, kept his Persian bride after Alexander's death.

Where does the Thalestris story fit into this? The difference is that her child would be free-born—the proud offspring of the bravest of men and the bravest of women. This was the ideal—which Roxane could never measure up to. Alexander's Amazon queen therefore represents a shift in ideology from previous perceptions of the warrior woman; she means something quite different. Cleitarchus turned her into a counter-symbol, promoting eugenics between monarchs. Thalestris did not linger around Alexander's court to share in his brave new world, but, ironically, Cleitarchus may have carefully accounted for her absence. According to Curtius, Alexander asked her to undertake military service with him; her response was that she needed to return to her own kingdom. But she would be carrying the embryo of her future heir, which she hoped would be female. She promised that she would return a male to his father (Curt. 6.5.30–1). Elsewhere and perhaps outside Cleitarchus' history, she is recorded as returning to her kingdom and sadly, if somewhat conveniently, dying shortly after her arrival.[51] There was no scion left to become yet another pawn in the struggles between Alexander's marshals on the king's death, because Thalestris herself never existed beyond the imaginations of Cleitarchus and some of his contemporaries. Yet she was not intended as a warning to Alexander about the dangers of unity with orientals,[52] nor as a sign of his moral degeneration. On the contrary, by dint of her very identity as a powerful icon to the Greeks, she became an early romantic expression of an aspiration, namely reconciliation between the conquerors and the barbarians (or rather, those who were deemed worthy) that was to prove equally fleeting and illusory.[53]

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Dionysos', in R. W. Wallace and E. M. Harris (edd.) *Transitions to Empire, Essays in Greco-Roman History, 360–146 B.C., in Honor of E. Badian* (Norman, 1996), 141–66, at 144 with nn. 23–6.

[51] Just. 2.4.33; see also above, n. 10.

[52] So Daumas (n. 2), at 352ff.

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