Susan Langdon, *Trial by Amazon: Thoughts on the First Amazons in Greek Art*

To Heinrich Schliemann's stunning record of archaeological firsts can be added the discovery, among a handful of pictorial sherds excavated at Tiryns, of the earliest known Amazon in Greek art. Admittedly he did not recognize the fragmentary image as such, and his description of the sherds with "legs of an upright-standing warrior turned towards the right, with a part of the coat of mail with meander stripes," is as far as anyone could decipher this image for half a century.\(^1\) Starting from the small fragments found by Schliemann and Wilhelm Dörpfeld in their Tiryns excavations of 1884-85, and augmented by Emil Kunze during his 1926 excavations, the pieces gradually were reassembled into a small terracotta shield of Subgeometric style. This remarkable object has figured in the literature on the Amazon warrior as mythic and artistic topos, yet it tends to be subsumed into interpretations of later material rather than analyzed within its own cultural context. That the Amazons entered Greek art on the first waves of orientalizing representations of myth may occasion little surprise, and their introduction within the competitive milieu of the early seventh century Argive plain--home of Bronze Age heroes and object of intercommunal conflict--seems satisfyingly appropriate. Yet these warrior women are not strongly associated with the Argolid in myth, art, or cult. Tombs of Amazons, for example, are attested in Attica, Boeotia, Euboea, Megara, and Thessaly, but not the Argolid.

One promising but overlooked starting point from which to explore this puzzle is the ritual context in which the Tiryns shield was found. I am pleased to continue the discussion of this provocative object as a tribute to Gene Lane, who in his teaching as in his research has demonstrated the importance of resiting ritual artifacts within their social and historical settings. It seems especially appropriate that I began my study of this artifact at a cozy desk in North Carolina, Gene and Carol's beloved second home.\(^2\)

Amazons --fierce female warriors of a variable but usually northern origin at the edge of the known world-- are a stock motif of classical art and myth. Their unconventional gynocentric culture has provided western civilization with one of its most useful tropes of alternative culture and classical Greece with a quintessential icon of topsy-turvy, the antithesis of proper social ordering in the polis. The Amazon motif has been readily adapted to changing historical and social circumstances, in both ancient and modern uses.\(^3\) The Athenians, for example, shifted the focus from Achilles to Herakles or Theseus in combat with the warriors, according to prevailing
Interest in gendered and social approaches to Greek culture in recent decades has focused on the ideological value of Amazons to the androcentric society of democratic Athens. Exploited particularly on public works of the fifth century, Amazons represented forces of hostility to marriage in particular and the polis by extension, a point frequently reinforced by their juxtaposition with a centauromachy. These versions share a basic pattern: the Amazon stands as foil for the prevailing social norm, whether that foil happens to represent woman, Persian, or non-Athenian. In this larger fixed sense lies the enduring value of the theme, one of many such fixtures in the Greek imaginary by which art and myth conjoin to construct oppositional analogues to Greek identity.

The very success of such icons tends to blur their origins. The interpretation of the Amazon as the classic Other who stands as antithesis to Greek values is grounded in the social and political realities of Classical Greece, specifically Athens. The tendency in scholarship to reduce this complex theme to a one-dimensional paradigm of (gendered) opposition misses the subtleties with which the Greeks explored and employed it. The Amazons' first appearance in art on the Tiryns shield at the turn of the eighth to seventh century B.C. provides an opportunity to articulate the cultural complexity of the motif. Although its pride of place has been regularly noted, the terracotta image has never been studied as a totality of object and context but simply as a detached, free-floating scene. The history of this image --it was depicted on a votive shield, deposited in a ritual context, situated on the citadel of Tiryns, dedicated to Hera, and created during a period of social upheaval, state formation, and political maneuverings-- suggest that there is a lot more to understand about Amazons and Greeks. This study explores the cultural meanings surrounding the appearance of Amazons in art by examining the Tiryns shield within a coherent artistic and mythical setting as a product of early Iron Age ritual and society.

The terracotta votive shield was made about 700-680 B.C. The larger part of the shield was found in a bothros 22 meters east of the great Mycenaean megaron on the Tiryns citadel, together with material ranging in date from the mid eighth to the mid seventh century. Interpretation of the bothros and its contents is tied to a controversial narrow structure in the megaron (Building T). Long considered an eighth century temple of Hera, the building has become increasingly accepted as a twelfth century reconstruction of the damaged palace. While the date of the bothros and its connection to a nearby Mycenaean altar rebuilt in the eighth century are not disputed, the cult to which these belonged and the identification of the possible temple are uncertain. Ancient authors tell us that Hera had a very old cult on the Tiryns acropolis, but later epigraphic evidence for local cults of Athena, Herakles, and Zeus has led to reassessment of the cults on the citadel that confirms Hera as recipient of the Geometric-period cult. The presence of bronze pins and rings, and female figurines, pomegranates, and wreaths of terracotta gives a very Hera-like character to the votive assemblage found by the earlier excavators. The material from the bothros includes pottery datable to 750-650, several much-discussed helmet-like masks, and fragments of a second, smaller shield of the same shape but somewhat earlier in style. The shield fragments found by Schliemann and Dörfeld join those excavated by Kunze in the bothros, linking the votive deposits.
The shield is decorated in brownish-red slip with added white details. It bears on the front surface a pair of warriors in combat, with a Greek warrior grasping by the helmet plume an attacking female warrior. He brandishes his sword, she aims her spear. The larger context of the battlefield is indicated by three secondary figures, one female and two males, one of whom lies dying at their feet. A bulky bird holding a fish fills the space above the spear of the female protagonist. All three secondary figures are of smaller scale than the primary combatants. The women are identified as female by the faint indication of breasts on the larger figure (the torso of the second is missing), by their smooth chins (in contrast to the bearded male warriors), and by their long garments. These highly patterned slit skirts derive from oriental, specifically Assyrian dress, and are conventionally employed by early Greek artists to characterize monsters, Amazons, and Persians. For nearly a century this Subgeometric Amazonomachy remained an isolated occurrence.

The Tiryns shield is well known, not least for its eerie prefiguring of a famous red figure kylix by the Penthesilea Painter some 250 years later, in which Achilles and Penthesilea dominate the tondo in interlocked, eroticized combat while a comrade of each figure and a dying Greek warrior below fill out the battlefield. Any compositional analysis of the earlier Amazonomachy must begin with its visual source in a series of imported Phoenician silver bowls found around the Mediterranean in the eighth and seventh centuries. All the formal elements, including a triumphant warrior to the left grasping the crest or hair of his foe, the pair flanked by two smaller figures, the large bird overhead, and the crawling or prone figure below, derive ultimately from pharaonic imagery featured in Phoenician bowls. The date and striking resemblance of the Tiryns shield to oriental models indicate that its artist was working more or less directly from such a bowl. The freely translated image on the later kylix raises the possibility that other examples of the shield type may have survived above ground as late as the mid fifth century.

Past interpretations of the Tiryns shield have centered on identifying the specific characters represented, but such an iconographic approach has produced only inconclusive results. Those who favor Herakles for example, identify the Amazon's broad crosshatched belt as Hippolyte's girdle, even though it differs little from the belts worn by the Greeks. The presence of secondary figures, especially the dying Greek, suggests a battlefield but no specific event or location. True to its Late Geometric roots, the scene is both clear in action and rich in generalized detail: Greeks are differentiated from Amazons but not from each other. Nor are the primary actors necessarily distinguished from secondary actors within the constraints of the tondo frame and its inherited scheme. Homeric sources do not mention the most familiar Amazon encounters featuring Achilles, Theseus, and Herakles, which in itself suggests that the entry of the Amazon into Greek culture was not made through the mythical biography of any single hero. The Iliad characterizes them as antianeirai, "equivalent of men" or "manlike," worthy opponents against whom heroes test their mettle. Bellerophon and Priam are the heroes who have met this match (Iliad 3, 188-9; 6, 186). The Amazons, in other words, are fearsome enough for heroes to make their reputation by defeating. The shield fits more easily this Homeric version than the particularized Archaic and Classical duels that pair a hero...
with a named Amazon. On the shield the heroic women appear in the midst of battle and on the verge of defeat. Yet the conflict is not yet over and the Amazons have scored their points as well; the only mortally wounded figure depicted is Greek. The artist could hardly have illustrated the quality of antianeira more clearly.

The striking appearance of the Amazons on the front of the shield has overshadowed the fact that its reverse is also painted. The inside bears the remains of a broken handle. A large centaur with human forelegs extends across the surface, his horse and human parts decorated in linear patterns. The presence of a branch held in either hand and animal companions characterizes him as a creature of woods and hills. From one branch a tiny dappled fawn hangs by its feet. A small stag stands beneath the centaur's horse-like body. The centaur looks back toward three does, the farthest of which nurses a second fawn, while the closest reaches to nuzzle the captured fawn. In contrast with the strongly orientalizing imagery of the outer face, this scene is wholly Greek. Since Achilles and Herakles have connections with centaurs, proponents of both heroes have been able to link iconographically the two sides of the shield. Klaus Fittschen, followed by Josine Blok, demotes all horse/man hybrids, including the figure on the shield and most centaurs in Late Geometric art, to "Rossmenschen," "horse-men," accepting as true centaurs only those involved in narrative situations. This interpretation necessarily precludes any connection with the imagery on the front of the shield. Only Page duBois has suggested that this pairing of motifs anticipates the Classical juxtaposition of Amazonomachies and Centauromachies found on temples and vases.

The peaceful Tiryns centaur, however, is hardly the prototype of his bride-mauling Classical colleagues. I would argue for connecting the two sides of the shield not on the basis of an individual hero's life but on a logic that derives from the object's intended ritual function. Certainly the shield centaur can be identified as Cheiron, the mentor of heroes, on his own iconographic merits. His patterned torso shows him to be dressed, unlike most other Geometric centaurs, and he has human rather than equine front legs. His hunter's catch sets him apart from other Late Geometric centaurs who use their branches for fighting. These collective hallmarks of civilization --clothing, male body, and hunting prowess-- in fact soon become standard iconography for Cheiron. Later sources, moreover, note that Cheiron hunted does and fawns to feed their marrow to the infant Achilles.

There is indeed support for an early identification of a centaur as Cheiron. The well-known Lefkandi centaur, a terracotta statuette of c. 900 B.C., is commonly thought to represent Cheiron on the basis of two features: six incised fingers on his hand and an apparently deliberate gash on the left knee. As on the shield, his broken left hand can be reconstructed as having once shouldered a branch. Cheiron is thus characterized by his wisdom, symbolized in the six fingers of his right hand, and his myth: immortal yet critically wounded on the knee, he chose death over eternal suffering. His patterned torso, if representing clothing, further supports this identification. The figurine was found in unusual circumstances. The head was broken from the body in antiquity and the two parts were placed in separate graves. The head was found in Toumba T.1, which was identified by the small size of two bronze bracelets as the grave of a child, while the centaur's body came from T.3,
possibly the grave of an adult buried with an ivory-handled knife.\textsuperscript{32} It is not difficult to understand why the Cheiron statuette might have been placed in a grave. His wisdom and knowledge encompassed the healing arts, particularly those effective in battlefield wounds (e.g. Iliad 4, 216-19; 11, 829-32); thus, his own wounded figure embodies a comforting tale of ultimate healing. Cheiron's other role in the arts of civilization more satisfactorily explains the breakage and sharing of the Lefkandi terracotta. In myth he is mentor and tutor of heroes of no less stature than Achilles, Jason, Herakles, and Asklepios, roles that translate into ritual as an initiator figure. Indeed, his shamanic knowledge of medicines defines his pedagogical qualifications.\textsuperscript{33} Straddling categories of nature and culture, Cheiron serves as intermediary between the gifts of nature and their cultural transformations. He leads initiation candidates from wild, untamed childhood to maturity through the survival skills and military arts that are the mainstay of young men's rites of passage.\textsuperscript{34}

This interpretation is reinforced by an earlier find from Phylakopi on Melos. A headless terracotta male figure of c. 1150-1120 B.C. found in the West shrine bears strong resemblance to the Lefkandi centaur.\textsuperscript{35} A break at its buttocks, thought by the excavators to be evidence of a detached support strut, has been reconstructed by Angeliki Lebessi as the remains of the equine part of a centaur.\textsuperscript{36} Like the Lefkandi terracotta, this one has a similarly cross-hatched torso. The West shrine at Phylakopi was furnished with two altar-like platforms separated by some distance. The platform to the southwest contained an assemblage of animal and female figurines not unusual for Late Bronze Age shrines, while on the northwest platform the "centaur" was accompanied by other male figurines --a very unusual group for the time.\textsuperscript{37} The excavators believed that this area of the shrine was strongly identified with a male deity or some other male usage. Lebessi now convincingly proposes it as a site of boys' initiation rites involving centaur symbolism for the elite youth of Phylakopi. On the model of better-known Cretan initiation rites, the centaur embodied in demonic form the role of the pedagogue-philetor.\textsuperscript{38} The Lefkandi centaur may have played a similar symbolic role, after which it was intentionally broken to be shared between the young initiate and his teacher.\textsuperscript{39}

Evidence of initiation returns us to the Tiryns bothros where the votive shield was found. Included in this collection of discarded offerings and ritual items were three nearly identical masks which are generally thought to be among the earliest representations of gorgons. Although not yet fully formed Medusas, these masks have the basic elements of grinning, tusked mouths, enormous ears, bulging eyes, and striated cheeks.\textsuperscript{40} The presence of earring holes in the preserved ears of one mask supports a female identification. There is good evidence these masks were used in initiation rites that combined a dramatized contest with the use of frightening imagery. Michael Jameson has used two Archaic inscriptions at nearby Mycenae that mention children in a judged contest to reconstruct similar rites for the local hero Perseus.\textsuperscript{41} Such a ritual would include a performance at which boys were threatened by a person or persons wearing terrifying masks whom they had to fight, perhaps using a sickle, the traditional instrument for sacrifices, decapitating gorgons, and castrations.\textsuperscript{42} Terror and humiliation are standard aspects of maturity rites, and masks are particularly associated with aggression.\textsuperscript{43} Parallels for such masked play in early Greece come from a slightly later series of masks representing a handsome
hero, an old man, and other types used in ritual plays at the Artemis Ortheia sanctuary in Laconia.44

The boys who emerged victorious from this contest would have been graduated from childhood to adolescence, the first of the two ceremonially recognized stages of pre-adulthood.45 It is no accident that the monstrous adversaries embodied in the gorgon masks were female, nor that Perseus was the initiate model. The slaying of a female figure, Philip Slater suggests, could symbolize the boy's readiness to leave the female-dominated household and join the male community.46 The Perseus story includes a particularly telling angle. Perseus was sent on his quest by the local king Polydektes who, wishing to marry the youth's mother, needed to eliminate him; killing the gorgon enabled Perseus to prevent the marriage. The hero is not only the model for the monster-slayer but also the arranger of women's lives and the community's social order, and has thus graduated to adult male obligations. With further parallels in the masks and sickles dedicated at Sparta beginning in the seventh century, these Argolid communities are linked with other Dorian groups in Crete and Sparta in maintaining and transforming archaic institutions long into the historic era.47 There is more to pursue with respect to the gorgon, Perseus, and masks, but what is significant for understanding the Tiryns shield is that they establish a particular ritual activity --initiation via dramatized contest-- commemorated by the offerings in the bothros.

The apparent dedication of the shield to Hera may similarly mark the occasion of a youth's trials in a rite of passage toward adult status in the community, and might even have been used in a play against a masked adversary.48 The shield's diameter of only 40 cm. was determined not by votive function but by the scale of its intended bearer. The image of Cheiron the mentor decorates the inside with the handle, facing the boy as he held it, while on the outside the trial by Amazon looks toward his opponent. The placing of the small but very masculine stag beneath Cheiron's protective body, nicely parallelling the nursing doe behind him, underscores the centaur's role as nurturer of boys. Indeed, such an identification would make a tidy (if logically circular) link with the hero on the reverse as Achilles, Cheiron's most famous pupil who also fought Amazons. Yet the chief local hero at Tiryns, Herakles, was another Amazon-fighter and also one of Cheiron's initiates. Herakles had a cult on the Tiryns acropolis at least by the late seventh century.49 Even if the Amazon-slaying scene were intended in a generalized rather than specific way, this need not have hampered a viewer's specific reading of the imagery.

What exactly does an Amazonomachy signify in the context of initiation? Or to put it another way, how does the context of initiation at Tiryns elucidate the "invention" of the Amazon motif? Homer offers no hints of the Amazons' peculiar gynocentric living arrangements-- later authors elaborate that they kept no husbands, raised no sons, ruled themselves-- and it is not at all certain that the Amazon myth had yet developed.50 All that was initially important was that they were female warriors, and that confrontation with them was a major heroic feat. Without any mention of their social life in epic, there is no evidence that they represented at the outset a threat to civilized society by their rejection of family life and normal gender boundaries. Amazons, as Blok demonstrates, evolved with their epithet antianeirai within the epic tradition as a means of articulating the heroic ethos: "Heroic death was the high
prize of aristocratic masculinity, to be won at an equally high price. The real prize—imperishable fame—could result only from combat between equals. The Amazons, undeniably female, offered not simply more fodder for the heroic canon, but a means to explore the "tension between similarity and difference between heroic opponents, reinforced by the anxiety of masculine identity, [and] cast in the terms of sexual difference...."

Paradox and ambiguity are their raison d'être. As the purpose of passage rites is to redefine the boy as adolescent by strongly signalling his separation from a world of women and his entrance into the world of men, so the Amazons' femininity was central to their significance. The visual impact of the hostile confrontation of male and female can hardly be ignored, and yet it is not emphasized on the shield as it would be in later art. One characteristic of initiator figures is a basic sexual ambiguity that confers a frightening alienness and allows it access to liminalities faced by the initiate. Such ambiguity characterizes the gorgon and the centaur (whose peculiar non-reproductivity is violently at odds with its legendary hypersexuality) and explains the depictions of Amazons in early literature and art as more androgynous than female. Goldberg emphasizes that to Archaic and Classical Athens the Amazons were far from being regarded as simply transgressive women who warranted defeat. Rather, they represented both masculine and feminine gender roles in a way that associated them closely with their patron goddess Athena whose positive qualities they shared: warrior-protectors, beautiful yet subdued in their fertility, talented in the crafts of both men and women. Their ambiguity, which combines male and female natures to create a third, anomalous category, a woman as powerful and active as a man, also renders them sacred, "active figures of mediation." For Goldberg, this role enabled the Athenians to use the Amazons in art and myth to explore the ambiguities and problems inherent in their social and political world. This important insight into the nature of Amazons is equally useful in understanding how they might have played a role in the early Argolid, much like the gorgon and the centaur, as figures of mediation in the social process of maturation.

The shield can thus be interpreted as a complex iconographic entity whose function originates in ritual and whose imagery adapts myth to a specific initiatory role. The Amazons entered art in the context of boys becoming men and preparing, like Perseus, for a lifetime role in the social ordering of a community. Their appearance at the outset of the seventh century in a cult deposit to Hera on the Tiryns citadel becomes easier to comprehend in this social setting. The shield like the gorgon masks can be understood within the local mythic genealogy of the eastern Argive Plain. Perseus and Herakles were the culture heroes of Mycenae and Tiryns, respectively, ancestors of the Perseid dynasty whose Bronze Age past was inextricably rooted in the local landscape. Perseus was revered as the founder of Mycenae, while his great-grandson Herakles was (by one tradition) born at Tiryns, and both communities are linked through the Herakleidai, the exiled descendants of Herakles who returned to claim the thrones of Mycenae and Tiryns. The early elaboration of their cults and mythology at these sites can be seen as part of a strategy of territorial legitimation by emphasizing differences from other communities and from Argos in particular through cult, myth, burial customs, and even dialect. Part of this strategy, Jonathan Hall contends, was the particular honor...
accorded Hera on the two citadels and elsewhere in the eastern Argive Plain. The possible etymological links between Hera, "hero," and Herakles ("the Glory of Hera"), as well as her epic associations with Mycenae and the Argive Plain, support the continuing importance at these sites of the goddess in her Bronze Age guise as helper of heroes. This association places the final piece into the puzzle of the shield and masks. A boy led toward adulthood at Tiryns through role-playing Perseus, Herakles, or a similar hero was initiated not simply into a new communal status but into a group intimately identified with a specific heroic genealogy and its divine patronage under Hera.

This reading, logical as it may seem, is tied to the distinctive identity of Tiryns at the expense of possibilities offered by a less site-specific interpretation. Tiryns and Mycenae may well have had reason to distance themselves materially and mythologically from Argos, but there are also undeniable cultural links among the three cities and indeed the greater Argolid Plain that may further illuminate the meaning of the shield and its imagery. It is important, particularly in the absence of complete publication and especially fabric study, not to assume that the shield was made in Tiryns for local use. Any inter-communal competition and hostilities that might have beset the region would have posed no impediment to the circulation of ceramics in the area. Late Geometric pottery originating in Argos is found in other communities of the eastern plain, including Asine, whose inimical relationship with Argos is well known. Moreover, the shield's Subgeometric painting style belongs to a vigorous tradition that is well attested in Argos and not, as yet, with any certainty elsewhere. Most telling perhaps is the fabric of the shield itself. Schliemann described it as "reddish" with a polished surface. Morgan and Whitelaw noted that for Late Geometric pottery "it is easy ... to distinguish blonde Tirynthian fabric from more orange Argive (which often has a hard burnished surface and a heavy grit content)."

The possibility that the shield was made in Argos rather than Tiryns opens a rich vein of symbolic association. Shields loom large in the cultural traditions of Argos, some elements of which can be traced back into the Early Iron Age. The city could lay claim to the shields of several heroes. That of Diomedes was installed in Argos (Callim., Hymn 5, 11, 35ff.), while Menelaos supposedly dedicated the shield of Euphorbus in the Argive Heraion (Paus. 2, 17, 3). Apollodorus tells that shields were first invented by Acrisios and Proitos, great-grandsons of Danaos (Argos' own culture hero) in their struggle for the throne of Argos (Apoll., Bibl. 2, 2, 1). Best known is the ritual of the Aspis, "the Shield of Argos," a contest in honor of Hera that occurred during the festival of the Heraia (Hecatombaia). The aition as related by Hyginus was embedded in the Proitid genealogy of Argos: Lynkeus became the king of Argos by handing down to his son Abas (father of Proitos and Acrisios) a bronze shield that his father Danaos had dedicated to Hera, thus instituting Argive kingship with Hera's own shield (Hyginus, Fab. 273). The Aspis games were part of the great procession from Argos to the Heraion, in which the winner of a race in armor bore the bronze shield of Hera. Joan O'Brien has claimed this ritual as part of her evidence for a prehistoric "shield goddess" Hera. François de Polignac has more plausibly set the Aspis ritual within a wider phenomenon of military displays and offerings at sanctuaries beginning in the later eighth century that arose from concerns for protecting sovereign territories. The sources for the Aspis games are
Hellenistic and later, and the Heraia festival is epigraphically attested only in the fifth century, although it probably began earlier.\textsuperscript{61}

There is no material or literary evidence of the shield ritual from the eighth or seventh century. It is more plausible to see this later accumulation of shield symbolism at Argos as stemming from the kourotrophic character of Hera in the Argive Plain, which may well have early roots. Hera, along with Athena and Aphrodite, is one of the goddesses who can have a military aspect and serve as protector of citadels, as she does at Tiryns and Mycenae, as well as on the Aspis citadel of Argos. It is these goddesses, rather than male gods, who most often receive votive shields among their offerings. Raoul Lonis has shown that the goddesses' military aspects are derived from their function as kourotrophos.\textsuperscript{62} Accordingly, Hera's role as nurturer of the young and protectress of youths at the point of their initiation into adult military roles is reflected in votive shields of bronze and terracotta found in a number of her early sanctuaries.\textsuperscript{63} Walter Burkert has recognized in the Argive Aspis contest a rite of passage for the youths who, attaining ephebic status, were symbolically carrying on the order of Argos, just as had Lynkeus and Abas, under Hera's power.\textsuperscript{64} Most significant is the evidence from the Samian Heraion, where the large number of Geometric and Archaic votive shields includes two figural examples datable to before 670 B.C., thus providing the best parallels for the Tiryns shield. Preserved only in a small fragment, one of the Samos shields features a spear-bearing warrior who might be female --perhaps another Amazon.\textsuperscript{65} It is undoubtedly significant that recent excavations at the Samian Heraion have reportedly discovered masks reminiscent of those used in initiatory plays at the Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, but these await publication.\textsuperscript{66} Philippe Brize notes close cultic associations of the Samian Heraion with the Argive Heraion (whence came the Samian xoanon of Hera) on the one hand, and with the Sanctuary of Kato Symeon on the other, the latter through epigraphic evidence and votive material of an initiatory character, including miniature shields.\textsuperscript{67} Hera's capacity as patron goddess of citadels and of the military sphere at numerous Greek cities was linked with her important role as overseer to boys' initiations.\textsuperscript{68}

In their earliest preserved artistic representation, the Amazons can best be understood within the specific cultural milieu of the Argive Plain. Their basic sexual ambiguities befit their role in ephebic initiation and their heroic qualities, far from constructing a simple gender role inversion, liken them to qualities of the kourotrophic Hera as warrior goddess. She was revered in the Argolid not only as the special protector of heroes but also, in tales such as those of Herakles rooted deeply in the soil of Tiryns, as the source of heroes' trials and ordeals. Despite these suggestive circumstances, I have resisted naming the hero who slays the Amazon on the Tiryns shield. Although he was undoubtedly known to the original viewers, contemporary evidence from epic literature supports only formulaic combats with interchangeable heroes. This flexibility, in fact, reveals the adaptability of the myth to ritual use. It is significant that Amazons next appear in Argive art on the bronze shield-strap reliefs dedicated at Olympia, Delphi, and Perachora from the late seventh to the mid sixth centuries. Three of the nine known examples bearing Amazonomachies are identified with Argive inscriptions as Penthesilea and Achilles.\textsuperscript{69} The pair appear on attachment plates in vertical series of heroic duels.
and confrontations including Perseus and Medusa, Herakles and the Nemean Lion, Theseus and the Minotaur, and numerous Trojan episodes. Nanno Marinatos has recently demonstrated connections between these shield-strap reliefs and the themes of ephetic initiation, noting the regular appearance of gorgons and other motifs symbolically connected with Artemis as kourotrophos. Although she disregards the Amazonomachy motif, it clearly belongs to the realm of shields, Amazons, and boys' initiations for which the Tiryns shield forms the earliest evidence.

As a culture replicates itself both biologically and culturally through its children, rites of passage are structured to create a new generation of men and women. These rites embody a community's values, identity, and social structures encoded in myth and ritual. The initiation of a boy into adolescence through playing the warrior-hero readily fits the Early Iron Age social patterns of the Argive Plain, where elite male burials are marked by weapons and armor, a definition of masculinity that persists even as burial patterns at Athens and elsewhere abandon this practice. The early role of the Amazons, "equivalent of men," in the construction of male gender marks the beginning of this exceptionally fertile cultural resource that would evolve along with Greek society in the centuries ahead.


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Excellent surveys of the historiography on Amazons in Greek culture are those of Goldberg and Blok. Ilse Kirk looks at modern uses of the myth, 33-37.

Fundamental to these interpretation are the works of duBois (1979, 1982) and Tyrrell (1984).

Blok (126-43 and passim) and Goldberg (89-90, 96) make this point especially well; see also Hardwick (20-3, 32-5).
This is true even of Blok (356-73), who has given the shield its lengthiest analysis since Lorimer's publication. Her treatment of the Amazon image is sensitive and thorough, but she dismisses the imagery of the other side as irrelevant and ignores the object's archaeological context.

Bothros bibliography, Mazarakis Ainian 160 n. 1132; bothros material by category, Jantzen 203-4. This material still awaits complete publication, Hägg 17-18, n. 64.

Frickenhaus et al. 1-13, 31-41; P. Gercke in Jantzen 97-9; Morgan and Whitelaw 87-8; Mazarakis Ainian 159-61 with extensive bibliography, figs. 218-19.

U. Naumann in Jantzen 103-5; Foley 145-7; Antonaccio 92, n. 50; Hall 1995b 598; 1997a 103.

P. Gercke in Jantzen 160; Morgan and Whitelaw 88; Hall 1995b 598.

The fragmentary smaller shield bears on its outside a richly caparisoned horse drawing a chariot, and on the inside a large male warrior duelling with sword and shield. For illustrations, see Lorimer 1947 pl.18 lower; 1950 pl. 10; Courbin 24 fig. 14 bottom. For date, Courbin 23 n. 4. The two shields likely served similar ritual purposes. While these objects and the rest of the bothros still await complete publication, this study will be concerned with only the larger, slightly later shield.

Nauplion museum 4509, 40 cm diam. von Bothmer 1-2, pl. I, 1a-b; Lorimer 1947, 1950 170-71, pl. 9; Schefold pl. 7B; Fittschen 177 SB 83; Jantzen 160 fig. 71; Ahlberg-Cornell 69-70, fig. 105; Blok 356-73.

Lorimer (1947, 135) first noted the similarity of the Amazons' dress to Assyrian male ceremonial garb, as well as other Assyrian-inspired details. See also Ahlberg-Cornell 69 and Markoe 300-1; Blok seems unaware of this identification. Gorgons wear this foreign dress as well: e.g. the Eleusis amphora, Ahlberg-Cornell fig. 203. Later Amazons with this dress: Early Corinthian aryballos, Blok pl. 7; Ahlberg-Cornell fig.174.

A fragmentary terracotta shield from the Samian Heraion, discussed below, has been accepted by some as depicting another Amazon. The next earliest representations of Amazons are a bronze shield band from Olympia (Ahlberg-Cornell 69 no. 44, fig. 102), an aryballos from Samothrace (Ahlberg-Cornell fig. 174) and a small inscribed terracotta relief in the Metropolitan Museum, (42.11.33, Ahlberg-Cornell fig. 103) all dating to the end of the seventh century.

First noticed by Hampe 1952 38, figs. 21-22. Kylix by the Penthesilea Painter in Munich, Antiken. 2668 (J.300), von Bothmer pl. 71, 4.

Morris fig. 18; Markoe 300-1, figs. 5 and 6.
The identity of the Penthesilea Painter’s figures is not certain. The cup has been thought by some to have been influenced by Mikon’s famous painting in the Stoa Poikile in Athens, which depicted Theseus against the Amazons, not Achilles and Penthesilea. On this problem see von Bothmer 147.

For Achilles and Penthesilea: Hampe 1936 81; 1952 30, 45 n.23; Lorimer 1950 170-1; von Bothmer 1-2; for Herakles and Hippolyte: Kunze 151 n. 1; Brommer 72 n. 41; for Herakles and the Amazon queen Andromache, Schefold 24-6.

Boardman (1982) and Blok (349-430) demonstrate that the story of Herakles’ theft of Hippolyta’s girdle originated no earlier than the end of the sixth century.

Fittschen likes Themiskyra as the location, 177-8 and n. 848. Blok (149-50 n.10 and 275-6) objects that Themiskyra could not have been considered a settlement until well after the fourth century B.C.

Blok examines this phrase at length, 146-93. The dating of the Aithiopis, source of the story of Achilles and Penthesilea, is much disputed, particularly in relation to the Iliad. Kopff has argued for their contemporaneity.

Dowden cites a common view that Amazons “exist in order...to be defeated” (1992, 168), but Goldberg demonstrates that this is not at all the case.

Illustrations of this side can be found in Lorimer 1950 pl. 9; Schiffler pl. 6; Hampe and Simon pl. 96.

Lorimer (1950, 170) and von Bothmer (1-2) link the two sides of the shield through Achilles and Cheiron; Brommer (1953, 345) as Herakles and Pholos.

Fittschen 96 R17 and n. 483; Blok 365 n. 46.

duBois 1982 53-4; Blok disputes this, 364-5 and n. 46.

Schiffler 62, 119, 170-2. She does not accept the Tiryns shield figure as Cheiron apparently because of the decoration of his horse part, which precludes interpreting his torso as clothed (65). I do not see that this must follow.

Lorimer 1950 170 n. 7.

Popham and Sackett 215, 344-5.

For interpretation as Cheiron, Auberson and Schefold 158; Popham and Sackett 345.

Popham and Sackett 168-70.

Napier 79-82. Blok (365-6 and n. 49) disputes a tutoring relationship between
Cheiron and Achilles in the *Iliad*. I see Cheiron's ash spear, which Achilles alone (significantly, not Patroklos) can wield to kill Hektor (*Iliad*, 16, 139-44; 19, 30-91; 22, 317-19), as signifying a special connection between the two (Morris 16). It happens to be this spear with which Achilles kills the Amazon Penthesilea, according to Quintus Smyrnaeus (*Posthom*. I, 593).


35 Lebessi 148, pl. 54; Renfrew 223, 226 fig. 6.12 SF 1553, 229.

36 Lebessi 148. E. French also considered a connection between the two figures, in Renfrew 223.

37 Renfrew 223, 370-1; Lebessi 149.

38 Lebessi 148-50.

39 Lebessi 149-50.

40 Jantzen 161 fig. 70; Napier 86, pl. 34; Jameson 219, fig. 8a-b. Marinatos thinks the masks represent lions (60).

41 Jameson 213-15.


43 Turner 172-3; Burkert 1985 260; La Fontaine 100.

44 Carter; Jameson 217, figs. 3-5.

45 Jameson 220.

46 Slater 319-28.

47 Jameson 215; Murray 176-7.

48 The shield and the gorgon masks, while roughly contemporary, were not necessarily used together. Nevertheless, they both suggest dramatizations of heroic contests.

49 Foley 147; Hall 1997b 97 n. 163.

50 Goldberg (92) notes that the attribution of more "feminine" qualities to the
Amazons are late.

51 Blok 435.

52 Napier 89; Turner 95, 106, 173.

53 Goldberg 92-3.

54 Amazons have been discussed in relation to girls' initiation, most notably by Dowden and Zeitlin, who find their "militant virginity" and their patterns of gender inversion to replicate a state of adolescent liminality (Dowden 1989: 62; Zeitlin 136; see also Blok 250 n. 148). Their later attachment to Artemis cults and incorporation into tales of abduction and girdles suggest they were eventually drawn into the tradition of female initiation motifs. The earliest evidence from epic and art, however, supports their original development in connection with warrior codes of honor, definitions of masculinity, and, as I argue here, boys' initiation.

55 This and the following discussion owes much to the work of Jonathan Hall 1995a, 1995b; 1997a, 1997b; contra, Kelly 60-72; Morgan and Whitelaw.

56 Hall 1997b 104-6.

57 O'Brien Chapter 5; Potscher; Jameson, 220; Hall 1997a 103-4.

58 Morgan and Whitelaw study pottery style as an index of these community interactions. I simply note by way of example that works by the same Late Geometric painters are found at sites around the plain. E.g., Coldstream 133 Painter of the Sparring Horses nos. 1, 2 (from Tiryns), 3 (from Argos); 134 Fence Workshop no. 2 (from Tiryns), nos. 3, 4, 5 (from Argos), no. 6 (from Asine).

59 Morgan and Whitelaw 91.

60 Discussions of the Shield of Argos ritual: Arnold 436-8; Burkert 1983 162-4; de Polignac 46; O'Brien 145-7; Kelly 127-8.

61 Amandry; Kelly 128, 193-4 nn. 50, 51; de Polignac 47.

62 Lonis 199-230, esp. 209-11; Brize 134-7; de Polignac 43-5. Hera is kourotrophos for both sexes, but in the present study I am concerned only with her protection of young men.

63 Brize 132-7, figs. 16-19; Levi 223, figs. 16-19, 274 fig. 71, 278, fig. 75.

64 Burkert 1983 163-4.

65 Fragmentary terracotta shield from the Samian Heraion of approximately 700 B.C.: AM 58 (1933) 120, pl. 37, 1; AM 60-61 (1935-36) 285, fig. 7; von Bothmer
2-3, no. 2; Blok pl. 4B; Brize 133 fig. 17. The fragment preserves the upper body of a warrior with spear raised in right hand and facing left. One and possibly two small incised circles on the figure's chest might be breasts. The helmet crest and the earlobe resemble those of the Tiryns figures, but the use of incised details suggests a slightly later date.

66 Masks at the Samian Heraion, Brize 136; at Artemis Ortheia, Carter.

67 Brize 134-5; Ergon 1974, 120; 1976, 181.

68 Iliad 4, 51-6; Lonis 209; Hall 1997b 105; O'Brien 160; Marinatos 92.

69 Kunze 148-51; von Bothmer 4-5 nos. 5-14; Blok 225-8. Bol (69-70) adds two more examples to this list, not included in Blok's discussion.

70 Marinatos 97-105.