



Penthesilea und ihre Schwestern – Amazonen als Bauform des Heldenepos
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The study „Penthesilea and her Sisters - Amazons as a Structural Element of Heroic Epic“ is the first to systematically examine all representations of amazons in extant heroic epic, namely Homer’s *Iliad*, the Epic Cycle, Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*, Statius’ *Thebaid*, Silius Italicus’ *Punica* und Quintus of Smyrna’s *Posthomerica*.

Amazons, mounted warriors from the Black Sea Region, have appeared for centuries in Greco-Roman art and literature. As a subject of historical and mythological research they are, on the basis of both their gender and their ethnicity, regularly interpreted in terms of alterity and therefore seen as representatives or symbols of the Other. In literary studies, however, Amazons have so far only been examined as individual figures. In contrast to historical and mythological research, this study distinguishes two groups of amazons, who are already in the epics compared to each other regarding their actions and demeanour. One group, the ethnic amazons, is formed by the mounted female warriors from the Black Sea region. The other group consists of martial women of local descent and is called „regional amazons“. The starting point of this study is that amazons form a structural element of epic. It thus opens up for the first time the interpretative potential offered by the intra- and intertextual references of the poems. The amazon-episodes are first surveyed diachronically and in a second step analyzed thematically.

Central to the diachronic as well as to the thematic analysis of amazons are two complementary concepts, which have been borrowed from gender studies: *transgendered* and *sex-role-crossover*. The term *transgendered* is used to describe an activity, thought or social position as appropriate for both sexes. Role expectations, however, still influence the perception. The opposite of *transgendered* is expressed by the term *sex-role-crossover*. The term is negatively connoted and used to indicate that a person appropriates a role that is actually reserved for the opposite sex.

Of particular interest in the thematic part of the study are those aspects of the amazons which are usually seen as symptoms of gender alterity or ethnic alterity. It is for this reason, that especially the appearance, the descent and the fighting of the amazons are examined in separate chapters. The analysis shows that alterity is not the essence of the amazons’ description but that various roles of the amazons are manifest in their appearance. An amazon can be characterized as

an attractive daughter-in-law or partner (Vergil, Quintus of Smyrna), as a leader (Vergil, Silius Italicus, Quintus of Smyrna), as a Homeric hero (Quintus Smyrnaeus) or as a wife and mother-to-be (Statius). In all epics, however, their beauty, charisma, clothing and armour characterize the women primarily as warriors.

The descent of the amazons is generally interpreted by researchers as signal of ethnic alterity. Careful analysis, however, shows that the depiction of the amazons' descent brings various aspects of both ethnic and regional amazons to the fore. The ethnic amazons are descended from Ares/Mars, the god of war. They are thereby portrayed as predestined for war and as divinely inspired warriors. In addition, in the case of Valerius Flaccus and Quintus of Smyrna, the amazons are characterized by a very strong father-daughter-bond. Despite their human descent, the regional amazons of Vergil and Silius Italicus also have a special relationship to the divine world. They are predestined for war just like de ethnic amazons, but the emphasis lies more on their education than on their birth.

A comparison between the portrayal of male and female warriors shows that martial prowess is described and valued in very similar ways in men and women. The analysis of the amazons' depiction thus demonstrates that fighting in battle is characterized as *transgendered* throughout the epics. Even though the role-expectations of the intended audience are triggered in some places, it is evident that there is no structural difference in the representations of male and female warriors. In the latest epic of the corpus, Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, the question of whether or not women are capable of fighting is explicitly discussed by two women. The conclusion is that the difference between the aptitude for war of women and men lies in their education, not in their nature.

The consistency of the presentation of amazons through the ages in Greek and Latin epic and the numerous intra- and intertextual references demonstrate that „amazons“ are indeed a structural element of epic. The thematic analysis, moreover, provides an unexpected insight into the construction of gender in epic. It shows not only that amazons are characterized as warriors by their appearance as well as by their descent, but also demonstrates that active participation in warfare in Greco-Roman epic must be considered as *transgendered*.

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