

# Aryan Women Warriors – The Amazons

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## 1. Gender Equity in Battle



Amazons battling Greeks. A scene on a lekythos (oil vase) like the Darius Vase c.420 BCE attributed to the so-called Eretria Painter. Patterned leggings and short tunics together with crescent shaped shields were considered 'Persian' attire. Credit: Wikimedia.

There is perhaps no greater manifestation of gender equity than the ability to fight and die for one's nation on the battlefield – and to rise to the highest ranks in a nation's military, assuming command of an army of both women and men. Aryan history is replete with such a norm from ancient times to the present.

In this article, we will briefly focus on one example, the little known tradition of the Amazons and the modern heirs to that tradition – Kurdish women warriors.

## 2. Origins of the Word 'Amazon'

The English word 'Amazon' comes to us via a similar Greek word. According to fourth century CE Greek grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>, the Greek word is derived from the Old Persian 'Amazakaran' meaning 'to make war'. 'Amazakaran' is in turn derived from the Old Persian 'hamazan' meaning 'war' or 'warriors' and 'kar' meaning 'to do'/'to make'.<sup>2</sup>

Setting mythology aside, our research shows that the Amazons of old were not a tribe or subgroup of the Aryans. Rather, they were a tradition within several Aryan groups especially in the western Aryan lands.

## 3. Greek Depictions of the Amazons

Greek art and friezes are replete with the Greeks battling 'Amazons' – from the Battle of Troy onwards. Herodotus cites the Battle of Troy as the genesis of the Greco-Persian wars.<sup>3</sup> In Greek art, the 'Amazons' are frequently shown wearing clothing that Greco-Roman artists used to depict 'Persians'. One such artifact is the 'Darius Vase' that shows Achaemenid Persian King Darius the Great being counselled to go to war with Greece. Another similar artifact is the 'Eretria Painter

Vase'. Given that Greeks did not permit their women to become soldiers, encountering women who were their equal in battle gave rise to a considerable mythology that clouds our perceptions even today.

#### 4. Location of the Amazons

Roman soldier and historian Ammianus Marcellinus (c.320-c.390 CE), a native of Antioch, Anatolia (today's Antakya, Turkey, close to Kurdish enclaves), states that the Amazons dwelt in lands that stretched from the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea – lands that were once part of western Aryana and perhaps just north of and adjacent to the Kurdish lands of today.<sup>4</sup>



Map showing the region inhabited by the Amazons: from the SE Black Sea, the Thermodon River, S. Caucasus Mtns, to the SW Caspian Sea.

#### 5. The Tradition Continues in Kurdistan



Kurdish SDF Commander Rojda Felat with her fellow soldiers. Credit: pbs.twimg.com

Rojda Felat, a Kurdish woman general, commands the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkmen and Circassian militias fighting the Islamic State and Al-Nusra Front in the Syrian Civil War. Kurdish women make up a large part of the forces.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> In the gloss to the lexicon of obscure Greek words compiled by 4th century CE Greek grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria, we find *ἀμαζακάρων πολεμεῖν. Πέρσαι* (amazakáran: polemeín. Pérsai) meaning "amazakaran: 'to make war' in (Old) Persian". q.v. Xenia Lidéniana Lagercrantz (1912) 270ff, cited in Hjalmar Frisk's Greek Etymological Dictionary (1960–1970) and Wikipedia. A. Shapour Shahbazi (1942-2006) in an 1989 Iranica article notes that the word 'Amazons' was derived from Old Iranian *\*maz-* [i.e. '(a)maz' meaning 'combat'] leading to the folk name or ethnonym *\*ha-mazan* meaning 'warrior'. Shahbazi cites J. Pokorny in *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern) I, p. 1959.

<sup>2</sup> A more complete explanation is at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.ca/2015/06/amazons-kurdish-women-warriors.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Herodotus' *Histories* 1.1-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus* 8.18-27.