
Four years ago I reviewed the Dutch edition of this book, a 1991 Leiden thesis\(^1\). That book has recently been remaindered by the publisher, but happily we now have the English edition under review here. I am glad to see that some of the wishes expressed in my earlier review have been fulfilled: above all that the work has been translated into English, but also that the text has been condensed, and that a general conclusion has been added. There have been included a (small) number of illustrations too. Not every change has been an improvement: the arrangement of the Dutch text, with parts, chapters, paragraphs and subparagraphs, was crystal-clear. Now the arrangement of chapter and paragraph headings has lost much of its structuring function, as co-ordination and sub-ordination can no longer be told apart. It is a pity that this translation provided no opportunity for a large scale revision: it is not that I think the book was in serious need of rewriting, but more references might have been updated (several publications which appeared between 1989 and 1993 have, however, been added), and, more importantly, the scope of this study, now limited to Homer and the archaic age, might have been enlarged to take in the classical period. Of course the book is bulky enough as it stands, but some further condensing to make room for a wider perspective without hugely increasing the number of pages would in my eyes have made sense. The author stresses that it is especially the classical period on which recently much work has been done, while what went before has been neglected. The bibliography shows her to be right, but still her work is of a special character, and one would like to see it extended to the classical period (and beyond). I appreciate, however, what the author says about the difficult choice between rapid publication or many years delay due to many other claims on her time. Still, one hopes that she will find time to discuss the subsequent development of the Amazon motif in a companion volume. The high quality of the present book certainly succeeds in whetting one’s appetite.

Those after a straightforward empirical discussion of the Amazon myths, or those after new ammunition to be used in ideological warfare, need not bother. This is a very different book, which
tries to chart the ideological background of the Amazon myth in its several ancient and modern guises. As the title shows, this study consists of two main parts: a first part, about one quarter of the text, which deals with the modern historiography from Creuzer in the early 19th century to, *inter alios*, Tyrrell and DuBois in the 1980s (with some ancient ‘Amazonology’ intermixed); and a second part, the remaining three quarters of the text, which deals with the Amazon myth in early epic and archaic texts, and in the contemporary imagery. Both parts are difficult, dense pieces of writing. They are not so much descriptive or even analytical, but attempts to lay bare the ideological roots of the ways Amazons are talked about or depicted. This is analysis that goes very deep in order to make us see not only what exactly is being said, but also why it is.

Blok avoids to pronounce on the question whether Greek sources on the Amazons report the existence of some unique society, or whether the Amazons are a figment of the (male) Greek imagination. She argues that a myth should above all be looked at as a myth, without asking about a possible extra-mythical background, whether this is a race of Amazons to be located on some map of the ancient world, or those acting out the Amazon role within the context of Greek ritual. Blok does not want to get involved in whatever debate on the Amazons’ historicity (although of course not denying the importance of this debate in the different interpretations which she is interpreting for us), but wants to look at the Amazons as a mental construct, an element in a wider world view as it evolved in archaic Greece in order to comprehend and explain what people perceived around them. That is, Blok discusses myth as an instrument for imparting meaning, thus sharing in the trend of the past decades to study culture as communication, rather than getting stuck at the ‘things themselves’. I sympathize—but also feel that she might have made her own theoretical position somewhat more explicit.

The part of the book that deals with 19th- and 20th-century Amazonology is thorough and convincing—it shows that the usual two pages or so allotted to the historiography of the subject in hand, are not really sufficient, or even useful. An extended ideological unravelling of previous work is necessary to establish where we actually stand, and what preconceptions we are likely to be carrying about with us. Once we have reached the self-reflective and self-reflexive state that is the outcome of this process, we can set out to take a fresh look at the ancient evidence. As does Blok. In