

LEGEND AND FOLKLORE SYMBOLS: AMAZONS

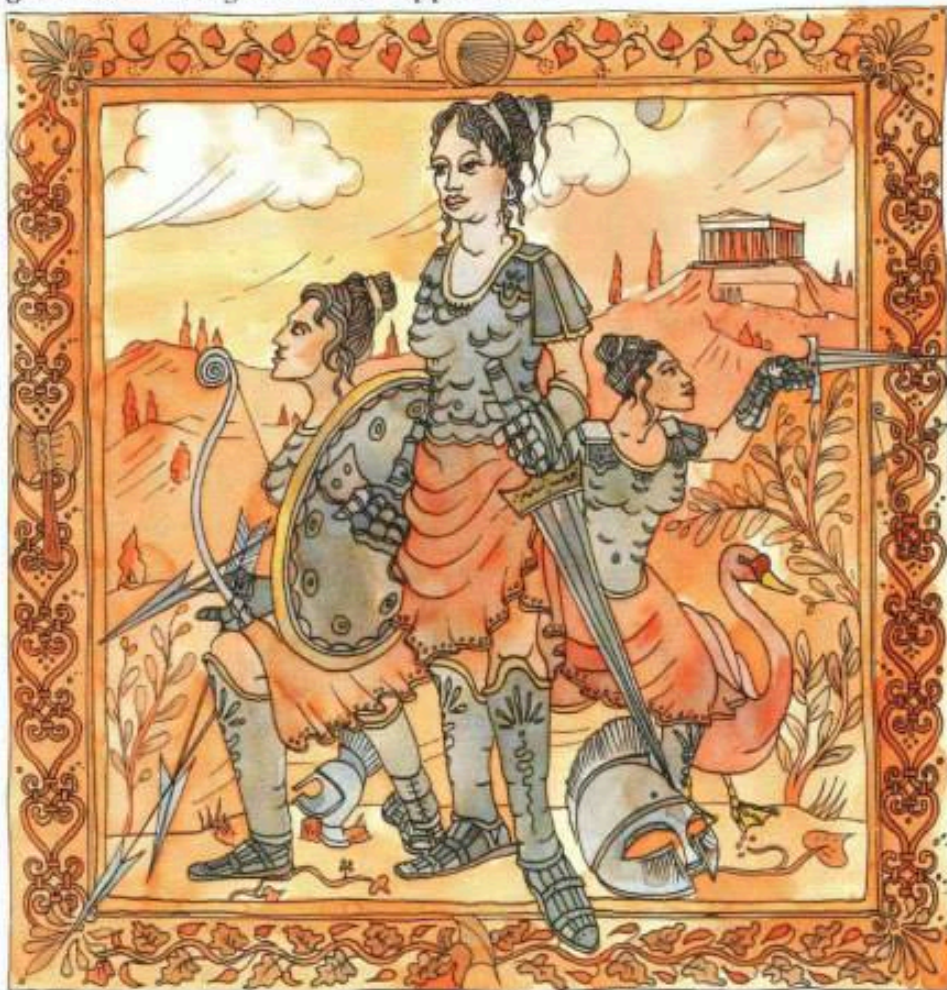
Not all women in ancient times were portrayed as 'damsels in distress'; the Amazons were described as among Greece's most formidable opponents.

The Ancient Greeks never failed to be surprised by gender role-reversal and tales of cultures whose women fought like men were both fascinating and abhorrent to them. Mythological accounts of a race of female warriors called Amazons revealed this mixed reaction of shock and curiosity. In Homer's *Iliad* the Amazons are described as 'antianeirai', meaning 'those who go to war like men', while the historian Herodotus named them 'androktones', 'killers of males'. A false Greek etymology of the name 'amazon' even suggests that the women practised barbaric rituals, such as cauterising a child's right breast at birth to ensure skill with the bow.

The real Amazons

So who were the Amazons of Ancient Greece? It has been speculated that there is some fact to the myth, however, their real importance is undoubtedly mythological. What did the Amazons truly represent?

In later Greek art, Amazons appeared to look like the warrior goddess Artemis.



THE SYMBOLISM OF THE AMAZONS



In early Greek art, the model of the Amazons was not unlike the Greek concept of Athena, goddess of wisdom and war and the arts and crafts. They appeared as beautiful, slim young maidens with bows, spears, double-edged axes, peltas (shields in the shape of a crescent) and helmets. In later art, the Greek idea

An Amazon charm will reveal the warrior in you!

of Amazons changed and they were now associated with Artemis, a Moon goddess and maiden of the hunt. They wore thin and short dresses.

It's thought that the Amazons may not have worshipped the classic Artemis but her Asiatic equivalent of the same name. But they did worship the Greek god of war and Artemis' twin brother, Ares.

Some historians have suggested that the Amazons were not even Greek in origin. As Greek travellers roamed further afield and returned home with tales of strange natives encountered, they may have brought back stories of tribes where women took on the traditional roles and responsibilities of men. These stories evolved into myths about a nation of female warriors.