

# ***Different Gentes, Same Amazons: The Myth of Women Warriors at the Service of Ethnic Discourse***

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*This article aims to examine the narrative of the Amazons as part of a political and ethnic discourse. It pays particular attention to the connection between the tale of the Amazons and the history of the origins of the Goths. The *Historia Augusta* and Jordanes' *Getica* are among the most significant sources for shedding light on the versatility and the popularity of the saga of the Amazons. It also highlights the authors' lexical strategy of identifying the ancient Amazons with one or more barbaric groups. This cultural operation allowed them to integrate the old story of women warriors into their historical narrative. In the last part of this article, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* is taken into consideration, stressing continuities and discontinuities in Adam of Bremen's use of the tale of the Amazons.*

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## **Introduction**

The myth of the Amazons is among the most popular tales of ancient literature, which has enjoyed millennia of popularity.<sup>1</sup> Since antiquity,

<sup>1</sup> Two recent and detailed works on the subject, which contain an extensive bibliography, are Mayor, *The Amazons*, and Schubert and Weiß, *Amazonen zwischen Griechen und Skythen*.

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numerous authors have both adapted this myth to their political and cultural climate and used it as a part of their ethnic discourse. Amazons appear in some of the most famous epic narratives. The deeds of Amazonian Queens, such as Penthesilea and Hippolyta, intertwine with the adventures of Heracles, Theseus and the epic of the Trojan War. Amazons could also cross over from mythical to historical accounts. Most famously, numerous sources report the encounter of the Amazonian Queen Thalestris with Alexander the Great during his campaign in Central Asia.<sup>2</sup> Modern scholars have shown an equally profound interest for the subject and promoted positivist, social, political and psychoanalytical interpretations of this myth, which continues to exercise a certain influence on modern popular culture to this day.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not they were referring to ‘real’ female warriors,<sup>4</sup> Greek and Roman people of letters used the myth of the Amazons with, at least,

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For a shorter but accurate overview focused on the diffusion and use of the myth in antiquity, see Dowden, ‘The Amazons: Development and Functions’. In regard to the Medieval ‘Nachleben’ of the Amazons, see Reinle, ‘Exempla weiblicher Stärke?’ Finally, for an easily accessible and visually rich overview of the subject, see the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Historical Museum of the Palatinate, ‘Amazonen: Geheimnisvolle Kriegerinnen’.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Munding, ‘Alexander and the Amazon Queen’; Stoneman, *Alexander the Great*: 128–49.

<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive overview of nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations is in Blok, *The Early Amazons*: 21–143. For a thorough critique of the interpretation of the myth as a reflection of a ‘matriarchal prehistory’, see Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*. More recently, Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons*: 16–26. For an analysis of how ‘tough’, ‘strong’ or ‘warrior’ women are portrayed in late-twentieth-century media and pop culture, see Inness, *Tough Girls*; Early and Kennedy, *Athena’s Daughters*.

<sup>4</sup> For a short overview of the archaeological evidence from the Eurasian steppe, cf. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*: 328–29. For a detailed study, cf. Guliaev, ‘Amazons in the Scythia’. Early Medieval cases are not as frequent but a few graves, especially ‘Horse Tumuli’, seem to sustain the existence of female warriors also in a later period, cf. Beck, ‘Pferdegräber’. For the case of women buried with horses in southern Slovakia, see Pohl, *Die Awaren*: 306. Most recently, the case of the so-called Birka female Viking warrior has enjoyed large scientific and popular coverage. Considered as a man for a long time, the buried body—warrior grave labelled Bj 581—has been proved to be female by genomics. On this, see Hadenstierna-Jonson, Kjellström, et al. ‘A Female Viking Warrior Confirmed by Genomics’. On the female burials in the site of Birka, see Wicker, ‘Christianization, Female Infanticide, and the Abundance of Female Burials at the Viking Age Birka in Sweden’. More generally, on the subject of gender and mortuary archaeology, see Effros, ‘Skeletal Sex and Gender in Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology’. If one excludes examples of single noble women that took arms, such as Artemisa I of Caria or Boudicca, historiographical accounts testifying the active participation in war of women are quite

three different aims. First, recurring to the Amazons' narrative, they could translate experiences and accounts of female barbaric warriors into terms both familiar and exciting for their audience.<sup>5</sup> Second, depicting a society in which the gender hierarchy was reversed, they could either exalt or denigrate the morality of their own world and consequently use this tale for bolstering a certain political agenda.<sup>6</sup> Third, as pointed out by Patrick Geary in his *Women at the Beginning*,<sup>7</sup> the tale of the Amazons could play a significant role in the account of origins of Late Antique and Early Medieval *gentes*.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, the myth of the Amazons played a pivotal role in defining the *other* because it represented an upside-down society in terms of gender roles and a quintessentially barbarian, uncivilised way of life. On the other hand, this gendered representation of the *other* could also serve to define and support a strong idea of the *self*. If used to describe a peripheral society, a reference to the old myth highlighted 'how things should not be done' and so justified the established gender hierarchy. If included in an *origo gentis*, the tale served to integrate the account of the origins into a much broader and popular record of the past.

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rare. See, for example, Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, LXXII.3.2; Nikephoros, *Breviarium Historicum*, XIII. On Cassius Dio's passage, see Schnegg, 'Darstellungen von Frauen in Kriegssituationen in der Römischen Geschichte des Cassius Dio': 266–70. On Nikephoros' reference, see Pohl, *Die Awaren*: 248–55.

<sup>5</sup> On this point, see Wenskus, 'Amazonen zwischen Mythos und Ethnographie': 69–72; Schmal, 'Frauen für die Freiheit?': 224–28.

<sup>6</sup> On this subject, specifically in the context of the fifth century Athens, see Stewart, 'Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens'.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Geary, *Women at the Beginning*: 7–42. On the role of women in ethnic narratives centred on Early Medieval *gentes*, see Pohl, 'Gender and Ethnicity'; Reimitz, 'Geschlechterrollen'; Pohl, 'Geschlechterrollen und Frauenbilder bei Paulus Diaconus'.

<sup>8</sup> Under the title 'origines gentium' the scholarly literature indicates Latin and vernacular texts dating from the sixth to the thirteenth century that describe the genesis of some European peoples, such as the Franks, the Lombards, the Saxons or the Danes. Such accounts are found, for example, in Jordanes's *Getica*; in Fredegar's *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV*; in Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*; in the *Res gestae saxonicae* composed by Widikund of Corvey or in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus. The term 'origines gentium' does not refer to a homogenous genre, since these narratives of origins are often embedded in larger texts of different nature. For a pioneering study on this subject, see Bickerman, 'Origines gentium'. On this type of source the entry 'Origo gentis', written by Wolfram et al. and contained in the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskund*, is a very solid starting point. See also, Reynolds, 'Medieval "Origines gentium"'; Borri, 'Arrivano I barbari a cavallo!'; Mortensen, 'Stylistic Choice'. Finally, see the contribution by Walter Pohl in this issue.

This multifaceted meaning of the tale of the Amazons shines through the pages of the texts that I will take into consideration. A close analysis of a few passages contained in the *Historia Augusta*, Jordanes' *Getica* and Adam's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* will shed light on the adaptability and the enduring popularity of the saga of the Amazons. While in the *Historia Augusta* the reference to the Amazons is revealing but cursory, the myth of the women warriors plays a significant role in Jordanes' *Getica*. Finally, I will stress continuities and discontinuities in Adam's way of reusing and reshaping this old myth.

### Ten Women *de Amazonum genere*

It is not without advantage to know what manner of triumph Aurelian had, for it was a most brilliant spectacle. [...] furthermore, there were led along in order four tigers and also giraffes and elks and other such animals, also eight hundred pairs of gladiators besides the captives from the barbarian tribes. There were Blemmyes, Axomites, Arabs from Arabia Felix, Indians, Bactrians, Hiberians, Saracens and Persians, all bearing their gifts; there were Goths, Alans, Roxolani, Sarmatians, Franks, Suebians, Vandals and Germans—all captive, with their hands bound fast. [...] There were led along also ten women, who, fighting in male attire, had been captured among the Goths after many others had fallen; these a placard declared to be of the race of the Amazons—for placards were borne before all, displaying the names of their nations.<sup>9</sup>

This text comes from the *Life of Aurelian*, a biography included in the so-called *Historia Augusta*. The authorship of this work remains a matter of debate,<sup>10</sup> and its composition is placed by the *communis opinio* between the last decade of the fourth and the first years of the

<sup>9</sup> *Historia Augusta, Divus Aurelianus* (Vol. III), 33–34: 259–61. Many aspects of this work remain a matter of debate. The bibliography on this source is immense, but a solid starting point is represented by the volumes of the *Historia-Augusta-Colloquium* published from 1964 to 2014. For other influential work on the subject, see Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*; Syme, *Historia Augusta papers*; Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*: 743–82; Ratti, 'L'Histoire auguste'.

<sup>10</sup> Ratti has strongly proposed to identify Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, a politician and an intellectual figure of the late fourth century, as the author of the *Historia Augusta* in addition to Ratti, 'L'Histoire auguste'; Rimbault, 'Peut-on identifier l'auteur de l'Histoire Auguste?'; Ratti and Nardelli, 'Historia Augusta contra christianos'. *Contra*, cf. Den Hengst, 'The Discussion of Authorship'.

fifth century. If many aspects of this work are still obscure, there is little doubt that its author was a pagan, a defender of the prerogatives of the senate and a strong opponent of eunuchs at court, child emperors and the *princeps clausus* (the concept that emperors could, or even should, never leave the imperial palace).

The quoted passage represents a fragment of an exhaustive description of the triumphal ceremony, which Emperor Aurelian celebrated in 274 AD. In addition to its colossal proportions, this triumph raised the interest of ancient and modern authors especially because it included Zenobia, the famous Queen of Palmyra. Since the work of Elke Merten,<sup>11</sup> the *pompa triumphalis* of Aurelian has been considered a combination of a pinch of historical data and a good dose of rhetorical devices. If, on the one hand, it seems certain that Aurelian led a triumph in Rome in 274 AD, an event attested to also by Eutropius,<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, many of the details in this account seem exaggerated and historically inaccurate.

In the author's narrative, the presence of the Amazons aims to enhance the significance of the emperor's victory. The tale of the Amazons reflects the fascination with the otherness of distant peoples, but here it serves also as an argument in the Roman political discourse. Thanks to the *titulus* bearing the name of the Amazons, the readers could compare Aurelian to the protagonists of the myth. An allusion to the Amazons seems moreover wholly appropriate in a passage that deals at length with Queen Zenobia. The portrait of this woman contains such numerous allusions to the epic of the Amazons that the audience of the *Historia Augusta* could easily consider the queen of Palmyra as a sort of modern Amazon. As in the case of the ancient female warriors, the author's judgement of Zenobia is a mixture of conflicting emotions, such as terror and fascination.<sup>13</sup> According to the *Historia Augusta*, Zenobia had a clear and virile voice and reigned *non muliebriter neque more femineo*.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Arab Queen Mavia,<sup>15</sup> she is not depicted as a warrior queen, but she inspired fear in the neighbouring peoples and was particularly gifted in another activity in which the Amazons excelled: the hunt. Like the Amazon Queen Sinope,

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Merten, *Zwei Herrscherfeste*: 101–40.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Eutropius, *Breviarium*, IX.13.2.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Frézouls, 'Le rôle politique': 133–36.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Historia Augusta*, *Gallieni Duo* (Vol. III), 13.3.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Schmitt, 'Mavia'.

who was praised for her virginity, Zenobia is described as an extremely chaste woman who lay with her husband only for reproduction.<sup>16</sup>

Although some characteristics of her government, such as her reigning on behalf of her son or her ability to speak multiple languages, place her next to other mythological and historical figures, including Dido and Cleopatra,<sup>17</sup> her fall echoes the tales of death and captivity of the Amazons. The image of Zenobia parading in golden chains through the streets of Rome alludes to the fate of the queen of the Amazons (either Antiope or Hippolyte depending on the version of the myth) who was abducted by Theseus and taken to Athens.<sup>18</sup> Finally, while her life and rule had symbolised a radically different, if not antithetical, way of life for a woman, her last years appear as a restoration of the usual gender and social hierarchy. In a magnanimous gesture of forgiveness, Aurelian granted her life and an estate at Tibur, where Zenobia lived *more Romanae matronae*.<sup>19</sup> In conclusion, the presence of Amazons and of Zenobia in the account of the ceremony allows the author to present Aurelian's triumph as a victory that enters the mythical dimension and is equivalent to a reaffirmation of the Roman civilisation over barbarism.

### **Looking for Synonyms: Amazons, Scythians and Goths**

In light of the above, the reference to the Amazons appears to be a significant part of the author's political discourse. But also its meaning on an ethnic level remains to be discussed.<sup>20</sup> In the passage in question,

<sup>16</sup> This detail has been interpreted also as part of a pagan polemic, which aimed to portray non-Christian women as chaste as the Christian ones, see Ratti, 'Nicomaque Flavien Senior': 242–43.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lippold, 'Rolle und Bild der Frau': 362.

<sup>18</sup> At least some of the readers were familiar with this story, since it is included in the 12th book of Statius' *Thebaid*, a first-century epic that enjoyed a certain popularity during Late Antiquity. Cf. Statius, *Thebaid*, XII.519–86. On the reception of this text, see Zissos, 'Reception': 542–47. On the political implications of the image of Theseus in 'Statius' *Thebaid*', Coffee, 'Statius' Theseus'.

<sup>19</sup> According to Eutropius her descendants continued to live in Rome, see Eutropius, *Breviarium*, IX.13. On the contrary, the sixth-century Greek author John Malalas refers to the decapitation of Zenobia after the triumph, see Ratti, 'Malalas, Aurélien et l'Histoire Auguste': 483–85. For an extensive analysis of Zenobia's destiny, see Hartmann, *Das palmyrenische Reich*: 411–26.

<sup>20</sup> On this aspect, in addition to Geary, *Women at the Beginning*: 29–32 and Pohl, 'Gender and Ethnicity': 34–35, see Zecchini, 'I cervi': 353–54.

in fact, the author does something more than just mention the Amazons. He adds an apparently conflicting piece of information. While the placard describes these 10 women as part of the people of the Amazons, we are told that they ‘had been captured among the Goths’. The same paradox, that is, the coexistence of a known ethnonym and the term ‘Amazons’ that the author seems to use as an ethnonym, can be found in the work of the second-century Greek author Appian. While Mithridates VI, King of Pontus and Armenia Minor, was seeking refuge in the Cimmerian Bosphorus, Pompey launched an offensive in the Caucasus, invading the territories occupied by the Iberians and the Albanians. The South Caucasus was at that time a rather exotic and unfamiliar region for the Romans.<sup>21</sup> During his campaign Pompey encountered an army of Amazons. Appian’s account of this event presents some striking similarities with the *Historia Augusta*.<sup>22</sup> The text follows:

Among the hostages and prisoners many women were found, who had suffered wounds no less than the man. These were supposed to be Amazons, but whether the Amazons are a neighbouring nation, who were called to their aid at that time, or whether any warlike women are called Amazons by the barbarians there, is not known.<sup>23</sup>

Implicitly or explicitly, both Appian and the *Historia Augusta* leave to the reader the decision of whether the word ‘Amazons’ is an ethnonym, which defines an all-female people or a term that is applicable to the

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*: 152–70.

<sup>22</sup> Whether Appian was among the sources used by the author of the *Historia Augusta* remains matter of debate. In the *Historia Augusta* the name ‘Appian’ hides the historian Herodian, see Rohrbacher, ‘The Sources of the *Historia Augusta* Re-examined’: 123, 161. However, one piece of information present in the *Life of Hadrian*, 22.13 and in the *Life of Antoninus Pius*, 2.11, that is, Hadrian’s decision of appointing former praetors of consular rank to serve as judges in Italy, seems to be derived from Appian, *Historia Romana*, XIII.38.1. Cf. Adams, *Marcus Aurelius*: 91, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Appian, *Historia Romana*, XII.15.103, in White, *Roman History*: 437. For a similar account of Pompey’s campaign, see Plutarch, *Vitae Pompeii et Agesilai*, 35. In Plutarch’s narrative, the reference to the Amazons maintains an air of mystery. Roman soldiers bumped into Amazonian shields and buskins while despoiling the fallen barbarians, but female bodies were nowhere to be found. The narrative echoes Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV.111.1. In this passage, the Scythians realize that they are dealing with female warriors only after having seized some of their dead bodies.

female warriors of a certain *gens*.<sup>24</sup> Diverging from Appian, the author of the *Historia Augusta* describes the Goths as the people that counted the famous female warriors among its ranks. The obvious question is why the author decided to connect the myth of the Amazons with the Goths or, as formulated by Patrick Geary, ‘how Amazons became Goths?’<sup>25</sup> While the Caucasus was frequently considered as the dwelling place of the Amazons,<sup>26</sup> the peoples, who, in the eyes of Greek and Roman intellectuals, could claim a special vicinity to the Amazons, were the Scythians and the Sarmatians.<sup>27</sup> Focusing on historiographical sources, the history of these peoples has been intertwined with the tale of the Amazons since Herodotus. The historian of Halicarnassus represents the first case in which the Amazons play a central role in the account of the origins of a known people. In Book 4 of his *Historiae*, one reads how the *gens* of the Sarmatians came to exist: a group of Amazons mingled with young Scythians and, once the women convinced their men not to return to their homeland, the mixed group relocated and formed the new *gens* of the Sarmatians.<sup>28</sup> Later writers tended to identify the Amazons with the Scythians. Works as influential as Justin’s *Epitome* of the now lost *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus and Isidor’s *Etymologiae* describe female Scythians as ancestors of the Amazons (while Scythian men were considered as ancestors of Parthians and Bactrians).<sup>29</sup>

The identification between Gothic women and Amazons appears thus as an innovation introduced by the author of the *Historia Augusta*. Assimilating the Amazons to the female Goths requires nevertheless a precedent mental operation: the equation ‘Goths = Scythians’. In other words, only after Roman writers started considering the Goths as descendants of the Scythians did they begin to connect the tale of the Amazons with the history of the Goths. The Greek historian Dexippus was

<sup>24</sup> Strabo expresses similar doubts when he directly challenges the idea of a ‘nation without men’, see Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.5.3.

<sup>25</sup> Geary, *Women at the Beginning*: 29.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.5.1–4. The entry ‘Amazones’ on the Tabula Peutingeriana is located North of the Caucasus.

<sup>27</sup> On the influence exercised by the myth of the Amazons in the descriptions of Scythians and Sarmatians offered by ancient authors, see Ivantschik, ‘Amazonen’: 79–85.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, IV.110–17.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Justin, *Epitome*, II.1; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX. 2.62. Since the work of Trogus did not survive, I will refer from now on only to Justin. On the subject, see Yardley, *Justin and Pompeius Trogus*: 3–6.



the first, who labelled the Goths as Scythians. In spite of its fragmentary nature, the work of Dexippus, which deals with third-century Romano-Gothic wars, attests to the use of the erudite and anachronistic ‘Scythian’ in place of ‘Goths’, starting from its own title: Σκυθικά.<sup>30</sup> Thanks to the study of François Paschoud, it can be argued that that the author of the *Historia Augusta* knew and referred to Dexippus’s text, which could therefore be his source for this equation.<sup>31</sup> The oldest Latin example of the equation ‘Scythians = Goths’ comes from the *Adversus nationes*, a work written by the Christian apologist Arnobius at the beginning of the fourth century.<sup>32</sup> Although he does not identify the Scythians explicitly with the Goths, Arnobius alludes most likely to the Goths when he writes:

If they [the Gods] willed that the Alemanni, the Persians, and the Scythians be subdued because Christians lived and dwelt among those peoples, how did it happen that they granted victory to the Romans when Christians lived and dwelt among those peoples also?<sup>33</sup>

The juxtaposition with ‘Alamanni’ and ‘Persae’, who, like the Goths, during the second half of the third century repeatedly raided Roman provinces, as much as the reference to the presence of Christians among these *gentes*, encourages us to consider the ethnonym ‘Scythians’ as a sort of synonym for ‘Goths’.

Moving to the period in which the *Historia Augusta* was composed (between the last decade of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century), the use of the ethnonym ‘Scythians’ for referring to the ‘Goths’ appears to have been a widespread habit among Greek authors. The speech addressed to Emperor Arcadius, written by Synesius in 399, represents a particularly valuable example because the author states clearly the reason behind this anachronistic lexical choice. Calling the Goths ‘Scythians’, the author carries out a sort of ‘defence mechanism’.<sup>34</sup> That is to say, his belief

<sup>30</sup> The text has been recently translated and commented in German, see Martin, *Dexipp von Athen*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Paschoud, ‘L’Histoire auguste et Dexippe’.

<sup>32</sup> For a detailed study on this author, see Simmons, *Arnobius of Sicca*.

<sup>33</sup> Arnobius, *Adversus nationes*, I.16, in McCracken, *Arnobius of Sicca: The Case Against the Pagans*: 70. The existence and the nature of the connection between the *Historia Augusta* and the work of Dexippus is however open to debate. On this, see Martin, *Dexipp von Athen*, 64–66.

<sup>34</sup> The expression is borrowed from psychology and applied to Synesius in Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*: 7.

was that new ethnonyms (such as ‘Goths’) did not prove the existence of new peoples but were actually forgeries made by the barbarians to frighten the Romans.<sup>35</sup> While the oration of Synesius reflects the point of view of a rhetorician, Zosimus, who wrote around 500, it attests the use of ‘Scythians’ for ‘Goths’ also in historiographical sources.<sup>36</sup> In coeval Latin sources, the equivalence ‘Getae = Gothi’ appears to have been held more widely,<sup>37</sup> but the connection between ‘Scythians’ and ‘Goths’ is traceable.<sup>38</sup> That Amazons and Goths could be part of the same story is first established by the poet Claudian.<sup>39</sup> In two of his works (*In Eutropium* and *De raptu Proserpinae*)<sup>40</sup> we are told that in the past Amazons crossed the path of the *Getae*, both in a military and in a peaceful fashion. Since the Alexandrine poet refers to the Goths always as *Getae*, contributing to

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Synesius, *De regno*, XI.6. Fittingly, Giusto Traina has defined this expedient as ‘un acte de guerre psychologique’, see Traina, ‘De Synésios à Priscus’: 285. For a precise analysis of the anti-Scythian passage of the *De regno*, see Heather, ‘The Anti-Scythian Tirade’; Cameron and Long, *Barbarians and Politics*: 109–21.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Zosimus, *Historia nova*, I.23 (battle of Abritus); IV.20–24 (precedents and battle of Adrianople); IV.25.1 (Goths are described as one of the Scythians peoples).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Jerome, *Liber Hebraicarum Quaestionum in Genesim*, X.2; Orosius, *Historiae Adversus Paganos*, I.16.2. Dedicated to the history of the Goths, the work of Jordanes attests to this equation from its own complete title *De origine actibusque Getarum*. Moreover, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX.2.89.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Pacatus, *Panegyricus II*, cited in *XII Panegyrici Latini*, 32.3–5 (Goths, together with Huns and Alans, are considered as one of the *Scythicae nationes*). This linkage between Scythians and Goths is still present in Isidore, *Etymologiae*, IX.2.27 (Magog as the forefather of both *gentes*). In recalling these examples, it is important to specify that using ‘Scythians’ for ‘Goths’ did not function as a perfect equation but rather as a tendency. Greek and Latin authors show a certain flexibility and even imprecision in managing these ethnonyms. The same *Historia Augusta* attests to this, since in its pages ‘Scythians’ and ‘Goths’ could be used both as interchangeable terms (*Gallieni Duo*, XII.6–10; *Claudius IX*.4–8; 12.1–2) and as names referring to ethnic entities of different size. In *Gallieni Duo*, VI.2, for example, ‘Scythians’ are described as *pars Gothorum*, so as a sub-group of Goths. Moreover, in Late Antiquity, ‘Scythians’ became an umbrella term which could be widely applied to very different barbaric groups. For example, ‘Scythians’ have been previously used for ‘Sarmatians’, see Wolfram, *Die Goten*: 54. See also, Zosimus, *Historia Nea*, I.48.1 (Scythians used for Vandals). On this, see Saunders, ‘Aurelian’s Two Iuthungian Wars’: 313–20. Finally, see Maurice, *Strategikon* IV.3 (Goths as a Scythian tribe), XII.2 (Avars, Turks and others whose way of life resembles that of the Hunnish peoples are included in the chapter that deals with characteristics and tactics of the Scythians).

<sup>39</sup> For an introduction to the author, still particularly significant is Cameron, *Claudian*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Claudian, *In Eutropium*, I.256–59; *De raptu Proserpinae*, I.62–66.

the acceptance and spread of this equation among later Latin authors,<sup>41</sup> these cursory remarks can be interpreted as the first instance in which Amazons and Goths appear to share a part of their distant past.

For all the reasons mentioned above, the word choice of the *Historia Augusta* now assumes clearer significance. Once a strong association between the two ethnonyms was established, it was possible for cultivated authors, who desired to show their ethnographic knowledge and find suggestive and archaic names, to transform the Amazons from female Scythians into female Goths. Claudian had been the first in introducing the tale of the Amazons in the history of the Goths. Finally, while Claudian maintained Amazons and *Getae/Gothi* as two distinct peoples and had relegated their encounter to an epic and distant past, the author of the *Historia Augusta* blurs the line between them and considers both Amazons and Goths as protagonists of a recent and known historical event.

### **Orosius and Jordanes: The Amazons as Protagonists of the Gothic Past**

Writing in the second decade of the fifth century, Orosius confirms the success of the lexical choice found in the *Historia Augusta*.<sup>42</sup> Scrupulously following Justin's account, the Christian historian describes the myth of the Amazons from the time of Queens Marpesia and Lampedo to Queen Penthesilea's participation in the Trojan War. After this brief summary, the author suggests a revealing parallel between the actions of the Amazons and the behaviour of the Goths. While the Amazons had raided far and wide, devastating both Europe and Asia, the contemporary Goths settled for a small piece of land and asked as petitioners to sign a treaty with the Romans. In his polemics with the pagan intellectuals, who blamed the Christians for the defeats suffered by the Romans against the barbarians, Orosius portrays the Goths as a threat much less destructive than the Amazons ever were. He argues that in the pagan past these female warriors had brought destruction on the greater part of the Earth, while in the contemporary Christian time, their husbands became good Christians and mild subjects of the empire.

<sup>41</sup> On the ethnonyms used by Claudian when he refers to the Goths, see Colombo, 'Gli etnonimi barbarici': 305–10.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Orosius, *Historiae Adversus Paganos*, I.15–16.

The identification of the Amazons with Gothic women becomes more explicit in the work of Jordanes. Composing his *Getica* in 551/552, Jordanes does not limit himself to mentioning the old saga of the Amazons but includes a large part of this narrative into the ancient history of the Goths.<sup>43</sup> The first mention of the female warriors is particularly significant.

Then, as the story goes, Vesosis waged a war disastrous to himself against the Scythians, whom ancient tradition asserts to have been the husbands of the Amazons. Concerning these female warriors Orosius speaks in convincing language. Thus we can clearly prove that Vesosis then fought with the Goths, since we know surely that he waged war with the husbands of the Amazons.<sup>44</sup>

This passage highlights Jordanes' attitude to older literary traditions and his ability to manage ethnonyms in accordance with his ideological goals. In his attempt of integrating the history of the Scythians with his account of the Gothic past, Jordanes displays here different layers of authoritative sources and shows his capacity to incorporate the diverse pieces of information at his disposal. Initially, he refers to the story of Vesosis, later indicated as the king of the Egyptians,<sup>45</sup> who at first waged war against the Scythians and later was forced by them to retreat to his homeland. First told by Herodotus,<sup>46</sup> Jordanes' version of the story follows closely the account present in Justin's *Epitome*.<sup>47</sup> Reporting this event, Jordanes does not mention any specific author or text in which he found such a tale, but he simply introduces it with a generic *ut fertur*.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Jordanes, *Getica*, 7. Cf. Pohl, 'I Goti d'Italia': 249; Christensen, *Cassiodorus*: 236–41. On the relation between Jordanes and the *Historia Augusta*, see Schwartz, 'Jordanes et l'Histoire Auguste'; Mastandrea, 'Vita dei principi e Storia Romana': 212–19.

<sup>44</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 44, trans. Mierow: 13.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Jordanes, *Getica*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Herodotus, *Historiae*, II.103, II.110. The account of the *Getica* diverges from Herodotus in two points: first, the name of the Egyptian King—Sesostris in Herodotus, Vesosis in the *Getica* and second, the outcome of the war—the Scythians lose the war in Herodotus, while they are victorious in the *Getica*.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Justin, *Epitome*, II.3. The only small difference between the two accounts is the reference to the obstacle that prevented the Scythians from invading Egypt. In Justin one reads only a generic reference to the Egyptian *paludes*, while Jordanes mentions the impassable Nile and the fortifications which the pharaoh built for defending his empire from the raids of the Ethiopians. Justin's version of the story is unoriginally repeated by Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, I.14.

The second step in Jordanes' line of reasoning is considering Scythians as *Amazonarum viri*. Also in this instance Jordanes does not specify his source, but he provides additional information, defining it as a *prisca auctoritas*. In both cases Jordanes could refer to Justin's *Epitome*. Not only does Justin recount the facts in a very similar manner, but he also appears to be the source for the name of the Gothic king who defeated Vesosis. The Scythian King is called Tanaus in the *Epitome* and Thanais by Jordanes.<sup>48</sup>

Once he established the equation 'Scythians = husbands of the Amazons', Jordanes could introduce the Goths in the mix. Contrary to the previous cases, here Jordanes explicitly mentions Orosius as his source. Moreover he emphasises the value of this testimony, stating that the pupil of Augustine had spoken about the Amazons' *professa voce* (with convincing language). As mentioned earlier, Orosius had drawn a comparison between the destruction once provoked by the Amazons and the temperate behaviour of the Goths towards the Romans. Thanks to the influential witness Orosius, Jordanes has proven the equivalence '*Amazonarum viri* = Goths' and can now come to the logical conclusion of his argument. Since both Scythians and Goths are the husbands of the Amazons, 'Scythians' and 'Goths' are synonyms. When the Pharaoh Vesosis fought the Scythians, he was in other words fighting the Goths. Finally, Jordanes completes the chain of equivalences, stating that Vesosis battled against the *Amazonarum viri*. Jordanes' argument appears as a transitive relation, whose prepositions are introduced by an appeal to authority ('as the story goes', 'as an ancient tradition asserts' and 'as Orosius says'). The following table can help to elucidate the reasoning of the author.

<i>ut fertur</i>	Vesosis waged a disastrous war against the Scythians
<i>prisca auctoritas</i>	The Scythians are the husbands of the Amazons
<i>Orosius</i>	The Goths are the husbands of the Amazons
<i>unde</i>	
Vesosis waged a disastrous war against the Goths	
Vesosis waged a disastrous war against the husbands of the Amazons	

On the one hand, Jordanes incorporates into his work information drawn from older and authoritative sources, such as Justin's *Epitome* and

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Christensen, *Cassiodorus*: 236–39.

Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos*. On the other hand, he does not shy away from adapting this material to support his own agenda.<sup>49</sup> The text of Justin does not equate the Goths to the Scythians nor does Orosius mention the Goths in relation to the Pharaoh Vesosis. However, by combining the accounts of these two authors, Jordanes could appropriate this popular event of the history of Scythians in his shaping of the Gothic past.

When he narrates the beginnings of Gothic history, Jordanes also follows a geographical principle. Although numerous chronological gaps hardly make his narrative coherent, Jordanes reuses old tales regarding the Scythians when he describes what happened to the Goths living in Scythia. In other words, in his account the Goths take possession of the history of the Scythians when they migrate into Scythia. As a result, the Goths also acquire the past of the Scythians' wives: the Amazons. Thus, after the deeds of Thanasis, Jordanes continues to list the feats of the Amazons, following the usual pattern drawn by Justin and Orosius (from the Queens Marpesia and Lampeto until the time of Alexander the Great). Finally, following the same line of reasoning that integrated the war of Vesosis into the history of the Goths, in the account of the deeds of the Amazons *feminae Gothorum*, *Scythicae gentis feminae* and *Amazones* function as synonyms.

The observations made regarding the use of ethnonyms and the reuse of the old tale of the Amazons lead to the first conclusion. The work of Jordanes can be considered as the final stage of the cultural operation set in motion by the *Historia Augusta*. The innovation introduced in the account of Aurelian's triumph, that is, the idea of matching the myth of the Amazons with the history of the Goths, paved the way to Jordanes' eclectic narration of Gothic history. Because Amazons, Scythians and Goths were all protagonists of the same story, Jordanes' readers could access the distant past of this 'new' *gens* following a known path. Old stories of

<sup>49</sup> On the debate on 'how much Roman' and 'how much Gothic' the history of Jordanes is—a theme that is not discussed here—the ground-breaking studies are Wolfram, *Die Goten*; Goffart, *Narrators*. More recently, see Wolfram, *Gotische Studien*: 207–40. Contra, Goffart, 'Jordanes' Getica'; Gillett, 'The Mirror of Jordanes': 402–08. As overviews of the subject, see Liebeschuetz, 'Making Gothic History'; Reimitz, 'The Historian as a Cultural Broker': 44–48. Moreover, see Zecchini, 'Cassiodoro e le fonti dei Getica'; Brodersen, 'Könige im Karpatenbogen'. More generally on the interplay between ethnography, pre-ethnographic data and politics, see Amory, *People and Identity*: 277–320; Pohl, 'Der Gebrauch der Vergangenheit'.

Scythian kings and Amazon queens were popular and evocative. Thanks to their integration, Jordanes could provide the Goths with a glorious past and clarify, in the eyes of his Roman audience, some aspects of the early history of the Goths, which would have remained otherwise obscure.

This sophisticated literary strategy, however, contains one side effect. Together with popularity, the incorporation of the myth of the Amazons carries into the history of the Goths the moral judgement that ancient authors expressed towards these female warriors. In other words, by presenting the Amazons as Gothic women, Jordanes could insinuate in readers' minds the disparaging value attached to these figures and consequently negatively influence their attitude towards the Goths. The author alludes to this danger when, at end of the chapters devoted to the Amazons, he writes: 'But say not "Why does a story which deals with the men of the Goths have so much to say of their women?" Hear, then, the tale of the famous and glorious valor of the men.'<sup>50</sup>

Anticipating potential critics, Jordanes sets aside the myth of the Amazons and hastens to provide examples of Gothic men who he believes deserve to be remembered. Conversely, the Amazons are relegated to the distant past of the *gens* and regarded as a brief interval in a history dominated by men. Directly addressing his readers, Jordanes appears willing to prevent them from judging the Goths only through the deeds of their war-like women. Because men, who are known as 'men of', cannot be praiseworthy, lingering on the feats of the Amazons would have been the equivalent of presenting the Goths as effeminate.

### **Retelling the Old Story: Adam of Bremen's Reuse of the Tale of the Amazons**

The analysis of Jordanes' text has supported an interpretation of the role played by the myth of the Amazons in an ethnographic context. The incorporation of this tale into Jordanes' account of Gothic history demonstrates both its enduring popularity and its adaptability. On the other hand, the prudence that Jordanes shows when referring to Amazons demonstrates the strong ideological potential of this myth. After Jordanes,

<sup>50</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 44, in Mierow, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths in English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*: 18. Geary is inspired by Jordanes' question for examining the origin of the myth of Bohemia; see Geary, 'Cur in feminas tamdiu perseverat?'

we find the Amazons participating in the origin myth of other medieval *gentes*. In the seventh-century *Chronicle of Fredegar*, the retreat of the Amazons from the Trojan battlefield, an episode also recorded in earlier accounts,<sup>51</sup> forced the inhabitants of the city to flee. This event triggered the genesis of the Franks.<sup>52</sup> In his *Historia Langobardorum*, Paul the Deacon describes the encounter between the Lombards and the Amazons as an important episode of the distant past of this *gens*.<sup>53</sup> The author pictures the warrior women preventing the Lombards from crossing a river, but Lamissio, a young Lombard man who later became King, faced and killed the strongest of the Amazons, thus gaining passage across the river.<sup>54</sup> Paul questions the chronology of this episode because, as attested by known *veteres historiae*, the last Amazons were exterminated before the time this event could take place. The author provides, however, a possible explanation. The silence of the ancient authors is a consequence of their very scarce knowledge of the region where Lombards and Amazons met. This thesis is corroborated by the author's mention of a coeval source of information. Paul had heard from someone that to his day the *gens* of the Amazons were still alive *in intimis Germaniae finibus*.<sup>55</sup>

The testimony of Paul the Deacon shows the possibility to reinvent the old story, not only by changing the ethnic affiliation of the Amazons but also through altering completely its temporal and spatial coordinates. Once the focus of authors' interests changed, the location and chronology of the Amazons had to be updated. This further literary and cultural innovation appears particularly evident if one takes into consideration one last example: the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*.

<sup>51</sup> The Amazons were led by their queen Penthesilea. The deeds and death of this queen are described in Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica*, I. See also, Dares the Phrygian, *De excidio Troiae Historia*, XXXVI. For a short but detailed list of Early and Late Medieval reuse of the ancient narrative, see Pohl, 'Gender and Ethnicity': 29.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV*, II.4. See also the contribution by Kivilcim Yavuz, in this volume.

<sup>53</sup> For a recent analysis of this passage, which includes a thorough bibliography, see Haubrichs, 'Die Erzählungen des Helden': 142–43.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, I.15.

<sup>55</sup> For a similar attempt of rationalizing the old myth made by Procopius of Caesarea, see Maas, 'Strabo and Procopius': 81–83. In general for the literary strategies used by Paul the Deacon in describing events, whose veracity he seems to doubt, see Pohl, 'Paulus Diaconus und die Historia Langobardorum'.



This text, written by Adam of Bremen in c.1072–75,<sup>56</sup> contains the history of the Hamburg-Bremen diocese between the eighth and the eleventh century, focusing on the long process of Christianisation of Northern Europe.<sup>57</sup>

In the *Gesta* there are five passages that refer to the Amazons.<sup>58</sup> In Book 4, the author incorporates the Amazons into his ethnographic description of the lands and peoples of the North. Following, yet accentuating, Paul's reasoning, Adam pushes the dwelling place of the Amazons, which he calls *terra feminarum*, even further away from their classical location. In Adam's work the women warriors inhabit the edges of the Earth. When mentioning the exact location of the Amazons, however, the author is imprecise: the women are said to be living both on the shores of the Baltic Sea and in the Riphean Mountains,<sup>59</sup> neighbouring the Swedes. This incongruousness is the result of Adam's attempt of mixing Late Antique ethnographical data and contemporary reports.<sup>60</sup> Similarly to Jordanes, the decision of reusing the older geographical material has a lexical basis. According to Adam, there is no mention of the Baltic Sea nor the Norwegians in the older texts, not because the ancient *doctores* knew nothing about them but because they simply used a different terminology.

<sup>56</sup> Adam worked at the text until his death (October 12 of a year between 1081 and 1085) adding numerous *scholia*. For a German translation, see Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, ed. and trans. Trillmich and Buchner: 137–499. The following passages are taken from the English translation, see Tschan and Reuter, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. For an analysis of its purposes, see Goetz, 'Geschichtsschreibung und Recht'; Goetz, 'Constructing the Past'. For a detailed examination of Adam's cultural background and his representation of the North, see Sarcia and Stok, *Devotionis munus*: 101–57.

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of this centuries-long transformation, see Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia*.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, III.16(15); IV.14; IV.17; IV.19; IV.25. For an introduction to the subject, see Andres, 'Adamo di Brema'.

<sup>59</sup> Adam places these mountains in Scandinavia, to the east of the town of Sigtuna, while Late Antique and Early Medieval geographers have put them more approximately in the extreme North of the world, either in Europe or between Europe and Asia, see Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, VI.663; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XIV.8.8.

<sup>60</sup> Adam calls some of his sources by name, for example, Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, IV.12—Martianus Capella; IV.20—Einhard; IV.21—Solinus and Orosius. On Adam's way of reusing Roman ethnographic material, Parroni, 'Surviving Sources': 354–55. Regarding the shifting geographical location of the Amazons during the Middle Ages, with a specific attention to cartographical sources, Baumgärtner, 'Amazonen'.

Thus, the Baltic Sea of Adam and his contemporaries is equivalent to the Scythian or Meotic swamp of the ancients,<sup>61</sup> while the Danes, the Swedes and the Norwegians are no different from the old Hyperboreans.<sup>62</sup> In other words, it was sufficient to update the ancient ethnic and geographic terminology in order to reuse centuries-old ethnographic information. On the other hand, from time to time, Adam validates his account with the testimony of his contemporaries, such as Sven Estridsen, King of Denmark, or Bishop Adalward the Younger.<sup>63</sup>

The geographical distance of the Amazons translated into their profound physical and cultural otherness. They do not only represent an example of a distorted gender hierarchy, but they are biologically different because their modes of reproduction appear as non-human. Adam is in fact inclined to believe that Amazons are impregnated by monsters and, while their female offspring are beautiful women, the male become Cynocephali. Adam expresses no doubt about the existence of the dog-headed people and asserts that they were often seen in Russia as captives.<sup>64</sup> This innovation, the mixture of the tale of the Amazons with the myth of the dog-headed people, reflects Adam's peculiar way of reusing and integrating classical narratives. The North imagined by Adam was populated by old *gentes* and

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, IV.20.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, Schol. 130.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the king of the Danes as testimony in *Gesta*, V.25 or Bishop Adalward in *Gesta*, Scholium 123 (119). On the relationship between Late Antique ethnographic knowledge and some contemporary reports in Adam's narrative, see Fraesdorff, 'The Power of Imagination': 316–22.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, IV.25. For an overview of the relation between 'gender' and 'monstrosity', see Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender'. Adam's Cynocephali bark like dogs, but instead of being dog headed, they have their heads on their breasts. This characteristic was attributed by ancient geographers to the Blemmyae, see for example, Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia*, I.48; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, V.46; Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, XXI.5. One can recognize a similar mixture of traits also in Adam's description of the *Scritefini*, who are said to run as fast as beasts, a quality attributed to the Troglodytes, see for example, Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, LIX.9; Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, VI.702; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, IX.2.129. The relocation of the Cynocephali from the Eastern and Southern ends of the *ecumene* (India or Africa) to its Northern edge predates Adam. A collection of sources regarding the Cynocephali is in Lacouteux, 'Les Cynocéphales. Étude d'une tradition tétralogique de l'Antiquité au XII<sup>e</sup> s.' On the meaning of the Cynocephali both in ethnic and in Christian discourse, see Bruce, 'Hagiography as Monstrous Ethnography'; Wood, 'Categorising the Cynocephali'; Wood, 'The Ends of the Earth': 205–10.

*monstra*, yet their names could be new, as in the case of the Norwegians, and their characteristics could be the result of the combination of different narratives and ethnographic traditions.<sup>65</sup>

Diverging from Jordanes, Adam does not include the Amazons into the history of any precise *gens*, but his use of the old story is more than a mere display of erudition. Similarly to the author of the *Historia Augusta*, in another section of his work, Adam provides the Amazons with a near and precise temporal frame.

The Swedes, who have expelled their bishops, were in the meantime pursued by divine vengeance. First, indeed, when one of king's sons, named Anund, was sent by his father to extend his dominions, he came into the land of the women, who we think were Amazons, and he as well as his army perished there of poison which the women mingled in the springs.<sup>66</sup>

The text continues adding two further calamities that struck the Swedes: *siccitas* and *frugum sterilitas*.<sup>67</sup> The divine wrath was triggered by the banishment from Sweden of the Clergyman Adalward the Elder and other *fratres Bremensis ecclesiae* who were sent from the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen for administrating the Swedish church. According to Adam, in taking this decision, the King of Sweden, Emund the Old, had been malevolently advised by Osmund, an *episcopus acephalus* who corrupted the neophytes.<sup>68</sup> The punishments eventually functioned in redeeming the Swedes who decided to send legates to the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen to make amends for their misbehaviour. This sequence of events follows a

<sup>65</sup> On the overlapping of the categories of 'monstrosity' and 'barbarism' in Medieval Mappae Mundi, see Münkler, 'Experiencing Strangeness': 198–200. For the tradition of the North as the realm of the *other par excellence*, see Fraesdorff, *Der barbarische Norden*: 179–200.

<sup>66</sup> Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, III.16(15), in Tschan and Reuter, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*: 126–27. The event is also in Scholia 123, where Adam mentions Adalward the Younger, Bishop of Sigtuna, as his source.

<sup>67</sup> Although we are dealing with some of the most common calamities included in Christian narratives, the expression *frugum sterilitas* recurs in very few instances, see for example, Jerome's *Commentary on Jeremiah* IV.49.2. The connection seems suitable, since Jerome is commenting on Jeremiah XXII, 10, a passage of the section known as False Prophets. Similar to the False Prophets, Osmund was a false preacher, whose actions provoked divine rage.

<sup>68</sup> The context of this episode is the fight for the ecclesiastical authority in Sweden. Supported by Gregory VII, Swedish Kings, such as Emund the Old and Harald Hardrada, tried to establish a national church at the expense of the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen.

common path: a sinful action, the consequent divine punishment and the final redemption. In the story there are, however, two peculiar elements. First, the Amazons poison their enemies, using a weapon that ancient authors never attributed to them. Second, diverging from the *Historia Augusta* and Paul the Deacon, Adam's Amazons are neither defeated nor captured. On the contrary, their victory seems to serve a precise purpose in the author's agenda. Killing Anund and his army, the Amazons act as an instrument of God's punishment and serve to correct the impious actions of the Swedes, guilty of having listened to a malicious preacher.

In conclusion, one can recognise both continuity and change in Adam's use of the ancient myth. Adam drew extensively on Late Antique and Early Medieval sources, but his Amazons are definitely unsuitable for enriching the past of any given people. Instead of being the 'wives of the Scythians' or 'wives of the Goths', they are said to be the 'mothers of the Cynocephali'. On the other hand, even if Adam places the Amazons halfway between ferocious barbarians and half-human monsters,<sup>69</sup> not only does he not express any doubt about their existence, but he even decides to incorporate them in his main narrative, that is, the story of the evangelisation of the North as the fundamental *raison d'être* of his diocese.

## Conclusion

The texts analysed reflect some of the cognitive and literary strategies put in place by Late Antique and Medieval authors. In their narrative, ethnic and gender boundaries and reasoning overlap and influence each other. The story of the Amazons was so popular that its integration into an account of a given event meant the amplification of its historical value. On the one hand, the references to Amazons both elevated the meaning of Aurelian's victory and clarified the distant past of the Goths. On the other, their inclusion could be interpreted by Jordanes' readers as a reason for discrediting the valour of Gothic men. Finally, Adam's audience could recognise in their victory over Anund God's decision to punish the Swedes for their sins.

<sup>69</sup> In *Gesta*, IV.19, we find the reference to the Amazons and the Cynocephali between the description of ferocious barbarians infesting the islands of the Baltic Sea and other uncivilised peoples such as Wizzi and Anthropophagi. In *Gesta*, IV.25, Amazons are recounted, together with Cynocephali, Cyclopes and other groups, as one of the *monstruosi hominum greges* dwelling on the Riphean Mountains.

In conclusion, drawing upon case studies that date between the fourth and the eleventh century, this contribution highlights the longevity and the evocative power of the tale of the Amazons. This narrative was retold and reshaped in order to endorse and substantiate different political and religious agendas. While the cultural and social milieu, as well as the religious affiliation of the authors, changed, the myth of the Amazons, borrowing the words of Paul Veyne, continued to be useful in supporting a given programme of truth.<sup>70</sup> The Amazons could be entered into the author's time or his recent past, but their saga reflected the image of an ultimate *other* that defied the historical changes.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the story served to give meaning to realities, which were remote both spatially and chronologically. It could be applied to the most distant peoples or to the most archaic past of a given *gens*. Relegating the Amazons to this dimension, the authors, all men, could at the same time include and delimit the role of women in their narratives.<sup>72</sup> Amazons' death, capture or the abrupt end of their story marks the passage from a primordial, mythical *origo* to history, which is dominated by men.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* On the relationship between myth and historical truth, with a special attention to the case of the Amazons, see Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula*: 21–61.

<sup>71</sup> See the attitude of Paul the Deacon in this regard.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Pohl, 'Gender and Ethnicity': 43. Geary uses the words 'Writing Women Out' in the title of his chapter about Amazons, see Geary, *Women at the Beginning*: 26.

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