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Rubens' *Battle of the Amazons* as a War-Picture. The Modernisation of a Myth*

Venus and Mars became constant elements in the work of Peter Paul Rubens and expressed his vehement rejection of war, his yearning for peace and felicity¹. Even in the period of armistice during the Thirty Years' War, he dealt with these themes, probably because he was, as court painter to Archduke Albert and Isabella from 1609, close to the political events of the time. During the armistice between the protestant and catholic areas of the Low Countries (agreed by treaty for a duration of twelve years, 1609 to 1621) Rubens painted the goddess Venus disarming Mars². Venus brings peace by mastering the armed god of war as described by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*. That Rubens used this source for his picture has already been demonstrated by Reinhold Baumstark³. Later on, in the *Council of the Gods* 1625 (now in the Louvre) he used the figure of Venus disarming Mars to express the peace policy hoped for and expected of Maria de' Medici during her regency in France⁴. The mythological figures were demonstrably not employed by Rubens without ulterior meaning. On the contrary, they were often designedly related to contemporary events⁵. But even pictures on ostensibly neutral subjects are marked by the constant danger of war⁶. One of the most daunting images of violence, the *Battle of the Amazons* in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, has, however, not yet been viewed in this context [Fig. 1]⁷. The picture (121 x

165 cm) is unique for its time in being a history painting expressing no triumph, but showing, rather, a battle as a scene of cruel slaughter in which even the victors are no heroes.

The picture has not been conclusively dated. As part of the collection of the spice-merchant Cornelius van der Geest in the famous picture by Willem van Haecht in the Rubens House in Antwerp (the picture shows the Archducal couple Albert and Isabella), Rubens' *Battle of the Amazons* was in earlier times often dated 1615, the year in which the couple visited the gallery [Fig. 2]. But the gallery picture was not painted until 1628, and even then not with the purpose of documenting the visit. It is in fact a fictitious composition, as not all the individuals there portrayed were in fact assembled in Antwerp—which means that the picture cannot be relied on to date the *Battle of the Amazons*. Otto von Simson and others assume a date towards the end of the second decade of the century, while the most recent proposal (by Rüdiger an der Heiden) is 1617⁸. Lucas Vostermann's copper-engraving of the Rubens painting bears the *Imprimatur* 1619, which rather favours a later dating of the picture. The actual engraving is dated 1623, the year in which Rubens' diplomatic activity is proved. In view of this, the painting could arguably have been painted under the shadow of the imminent and indeed inevitable resumption of hostilities. This supposition is



1) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Battle of the Amazons», Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

strengthened by the fact that Rubens employed none of the known literary programmes, but adapted the theme to achieve a novel and subjective portrayal of violence⁹.

In coming to terms with important antecedent works of art in preparation for the *Battle of the Amazons* Rubens made use of Titian's *Battle of Spoleto* as well as Leonardo da Vinci's *Battle of Anghiari*¹⁰. Titian's picture was intended for the Doge's Palace, where, like all the pictures in the Great Council Hall, it glorified

the history of Venice. In Titian's opinion the picture was "the most difficult task anyone had ever undertaken up to that time." He received the commission in 1513, but did not deliver the picture until 1538. In 1577 it was destroyed in the fire in the Doge's Palace. A copy of it (now in the Uffizi Gallery) has been preserved, as well as a copper-engraving by Giulio Fontana (1569). There is also an autograph drawing in the Louvre [Fig. 3]. This large sheet is the only surviving compositional working-drawing



2) Wilhelm van Haecht, «The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest», Rubens-House, Antwerp.

of Titian's, and shows the dramatic conflict between the armies of Pope Alexander III and of Frederick Barbarossa, the outcome of which was decided on a bridge when the imperial troops turned in flight and were pursued by the papal forces¹¹. The subject of the battle on the bridge was subsequently repeated in important pictures by Giovanni Ruggieri and Marco Ricci¹².

Leonardo depicted the battle of the Florentine troops against Milan in the Hall of the 500 of the Palazzo Vecchio in

Florence. Michelangelo was to have painted the triumph of Florence over Pisa in the battle of Cascina. As is well known, the projected mural was abandoned because of technical problems, but has been preserved in copies, the best known of which is the sheet in the Louvre drawn over by Rubens in about 1603 [Fig. 4]¹³. Leonardo had shown the struggle for the standard, in which two cavalymen from each of the opposing sides fight over the flag which the fleeing standard-bearer is in dan-



3) Titian, «The Battle of Spoleto», Musée du Louvre, Paris.

ger of losing. The motif of the battle on the bridge combined with the struggle for the banner takes up both Titian's and Leonardo's ambitious versions of the heroic and patriotic battle-picture. While the Venetian, however, has his warriors pursue one another over the bridge to the left, Rubens showed, in the corresponding area of his picture, the attempted defence yet actual defeat of the Amazons. The site of the conflict is very restricted, and the outcome of the Battle—the annihilation of the women—will be determined on this narrow bridge. The arch-form determines, here, the swirling circular movement of men and beasts as they fight, plunge down into the river and finally drown. Rubens has based the scene in the centre of the picture on Leonardo's invention, but with modifications. Again, two warriors from each side grabbing for the banner are involved, but while Leonardo shows the climax of the struggle, Rubens gives us the end. The Amazon standard-bearer can defend herself no longer and is brought down by two attacking Greeks. Thus two celebrated battle-scenes, both preserved only in copies, are alluded to by Rubens as he measures himself against his forbears. Yet the Flemish painter profoundly modifies both the history-paintings he avails himself of. The battles depicted by Leonardo and Titian are based on historical fact, and both pictures were to have been placed in the



4) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Battle of Anghiari», Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Council Rooms of Venice and Florence to glorify the troops of the respective cities. Rubens deployed the battle-scenes to depict a mythological theme that glorifies nothing, and then further loaded the work with several more terrifying motifs. Over the keystone of the bridge lies the trunk of a Greek whose head has been cut off by the Amazon Queen as she storms away. She is identifiable by her helmet, her dappled steed, and her position at the head of the army of women [Fig. 5]. Blood gushes from the severed neck of the trunk into the river in which other Amazons are drowning.

This brutality far exceeds the norm for battle-pictures, and is further heightened by the theme of men fighting against women. The beauty of the individual naked bodies even their violently distorted attitudes, heightens the horrifying effect. Thus, directly in the foreground, beside two graceful, nymph-like Amazons, a swollen woman's corpse is seen floating in the river; while beside one dead woman who seems merely asleep, lies another whose awkwardly contorted posture clearly denotes death [Fig. 6]. The horror-motifs of the severed head and the open neck-wound are prominently located above centre and to the right, that is, almost in the middle of the picture. And finally, the central scene depicts not a two-sided conflict, but two armed Greeks simply butchering the already defeated unarmed Amazon standard-bearer.

The Amazons occupy a special position in Greek culture as warlike women, the respected opponents of the most



5) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Battle of the Amazons», detail.

important heroes of mythology. They were very frequently presented in literature, shown on vase-paintings, and as statues by the greatest sculptures in antiquity. The best-known figures are from the Sanctuary of Artemis in Ephesus, for example the *Amazonne Mattei* copied from Phidias in the Vatican Museum. According to the myth, some of the Amazons (the two Queens Penthesilea and Hippolyta for instance) were descended from Ares the war-god, but they all venerated the virgin Artemis, goddess of the hunt, whose protection they enjoyed. Both deities patronise conflict and killing, as is emphasised in ancient literature. But while Ares favours raging battle-scenes, Artemis permits only limited and meaningful killing. The figure of the armed woman stands between and integrates the nature of the two deities¹⁴.

This unusual race of women was localised in what is now Anatolia near the river Thermodon, or sometimes in other parts of Asia Minor. The Amazons were led by a queen even braver in war than her companions, and distinguished by a belt. In territories bordering Greece they were involved in conflicts with the heroes of Greek story, principally through their—the Amazons'—alliance with Troy. As a result of this conflict, their history was determined by a major battle which they lost¹⁵. Nonetheless the Amazons are treated respectfully in ancient literature, and shown fighting with truly martial courage. In the *Iliad* they are described as the equals of men. Bellerophon slew the “man-equalling Amazons”¹⁶. Demosthenes alludes to their courage in battle¹⁷. In Plutarch we read in the biography of Theseus: “For the Amazons, not averse to men by their nature,



6) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Battle of the Amazons», detail.

are said by no means to have fled from Theseus when he came to their coast, but, on the contrary, to have brought him the gifts befitting a guest... This was the cause of the war with the Amazons, which should not be regarded as a petty womanish undertaking.”¹⁸ The Amazonaion in Athens, too, with the putative tomb of the Amazonian Antiope who was abducted by Theseus, proclaimed respect for the warlike women¹⁹.

Achilles himself, according to Ovid, would have perceived defeat at the hand of Penthesilea as a hero's death: “If it was

your fate to fall by a woman's hand, you would rather have fallen to the axe of the princess of the river Thermodon."²⁰ Vergil described the Amazon-figure as soldier, virgin, and queen who went into battle with naked breast, and dared do battle with man: "bellatrix audetque viris concurrere virgo"²¹. Boccaccio disseminated her fame in the fourteenth century in *De claris mulieribus*, describing her as beautiful, strong and brave. She is said to have fought on the Trojan side out of love for Hector, and to have died for the Trojan cause. He does not mention Achilles. Vergil set the Amazon Camilla, fighting on the side of the Latins, against Aeneas. She is so strong that the Etruscan Arruns begs Apollo that he might defeat Camilla to win honour, as he wants no war-booty from a defeated virgin²². The poet describes the Amazon's death as a cruel penance for having taken part in war²³.

The tragedy of the Amazons consists in their unusual presumption in retaining their independence as women and exalting their virginity to a virtue, and lastly in fighting, with weapons even, against men, especially Greek heroes. The femininity of the women-warriors, emphasised in texts and pictures by the exposed breast, is from the point of view of the male authors, incompatible with the bearing and use of arms. The life-bestowing nature of women contradicts the death-dealing aggressivity of warriors²⁴. Thus the Amazons belong to the world of topsy-turvy and were relegated to the realm of the improbable already by the authors of antiquity²⁵.

But the warlike women, described and portrayed as beautiful and desirable, met each one her individual doom in conflict with men. When Achilles recognised his opponent Penthesilea as a woman he fell in love with her, but in the battle he had fatally wounded her as a warrior equal to men. Hercules killed, on the battlefield, Hippolyta with whom he had a love-relationship; and Antiope died in the battle before Athens after being abducted by Theseus and made a mother. So the Amazons are in principle, though indeed daughters of Ares, neither negative figures nor "Dark forces of chaos", for they are precipitated into misfortune by relationships assigned to them by fate²⁶.

The emphasis laid on their courage, their battle-prowess, and above all their constantly-stressed equality with men, gives the Greeks the moral right to subject and to kill them. Thus ancient representations of battles with the Amazons, as on the sarcophagus of the Capitoline Museum (180 AD), do not tone down the conflict, but show the brutal slaughtering of the already-defeated women. The theme of the antique sarcophagus is the hopelessness of their struggle, and the superiority of the Greeks. Though the Amazons appear as respectable opponents, they must be overcome because inimical to Hellenism. By contrast, the duel between Achilles and Penthesilea was given special relief as an individual destiny.

Accordingly, the Battle with the Amazons before Troy is often shown with the Greek hero fighting the Queen, who in her armour is not recognised as a woman. On the Amazon sarcophagus in the Belvedere from the third century AD, for example, giant-sized Achilles standing in the middle holds the dying Penthesilea—a picture that harks back to the Menelaus-Patroclus group, and expresses rather the tragedy of loss than any triumph over the womanly opponent. A further important theme in literature and art is the ninth labour of Hercules. He was to steal the golden belt of Hippolyta given her by her father Ares to distinguish her above the rest of the Amazons²⁷. The Amazon was even prepared to give him the belt as a love-gift, when Hera in the form of a warrior spread the rumour that Hercules wanted to abduct the Queen. The Amazons attacked him, and it came to a battle in which the demigod, thinking the Amazon had broken her word, killed her and removed her girdle. This battle is often represented on sarcophagi showing the labours of Hercules, and is shown as his triumph over his opponents—in for example the third-century work in the Borghese gallery. This episode leads naturally to the story of Theseus, who abducted the Amazon Antiope whom he loved, and brought her to Athens. Whereupon her companions tried to rescue her from Attica, and attacked Athens. Antiope was killed in the battle, and Theseus buried her in the city. Furthermore, Jason fought against the Amazons during the expedition of the Argonauts, and Dionysus met them on his way back from India. Thus the female warriors encountered the most important heroes of Greek antiquity.

None of these themes however can be firmly related to Rubens' picture. Nor did he use his Amazon-portrayal to come to terms with antiquity in general, as no references to the frieze-like Amazon battles of the sarcophagus bas-reliefs or any other motifs from antique art can be established. Well-nigh insoluble problems crop up in such attempts, and lead to radically different interpretations of the picture as scholars try to demonstrate the presence of "the battle of Theseus", "Hercules robbing Hippolyta of her girdle" or "Achilles with Penthesilea", as well as the overriding theme of the battle between the sexes²⁸. This strongly suggests that Rubens decided against using a literary or iconographic tradition, and interpreted his theme in an entirely new way.

In Renaissance and later art, too, the theme of the Amazons' fight against their masculine opponents is revived, but can now be represented independently of the Greeks. Further, and in contrast to antique art, the killing of women is not, in principle, a heroic deed, neither is it connected with any significant individual destiny. The figure of the Amazon is in general seen as positive in the modern reception of antiquity.

In the first place, literary descriptions of the Amazon continue to exercise an influence. Antonio Salamanca, in a series of copper etchings, showed a sequence of warlike women from antiquity, including the Amazon Queen Penthesilea, and Thalestris; and Antonio Tempesta dedicated to Marisia Guerriera an etching (1597) in a series of nine Roman heroes and heroines²⁹. Luca Giordano's *Death of Hippolyta* (private collection, Parma) shows the heroic death of the girdled Amazon Queen, not, as might be expected, Hercules who robbed her.

The Amazonian armed and helmeted woman as a type of Minerva is allegorically interpreted—by Cesare Ripa among others—as the personification of *ragione* or *lega*. In the etchings illustrating Johann Sadelyer's *Mirror of Princes*, Pallas Athena personifies the art of war, according to Stradanus. The goddess has been shown ever since antiquity armed with the lance (a weapon thrown from a distance, and later used to symbolise the virtues combatting the vices). The “noble art of war” associated with Pallas Athena in the various *Mirrors of Princes* refers to the strategic directing of armies from a distance, and is formally distinct from battle as such³⁰. Athena attacks only Ares in direct hand-to-hand fighting³¹. The Amazons, however, often fight with the axe or sword, weapons of close combat and attributes of Ares. Such close combat is hardly compatible with femininity. Indeed, a battle is normally interrupted when women intervene, as when the Sabines are reconciled with the Romans, a theme several times painted by Rubens³². The martial aggressivity of the armoured woman serves, accordingly, to personify negative concepts. In an etching of the seven deadly sins by Jacob Malham after paintings by Hendrik Goltzius, *ira* appears as an Amazon-resembling warrior with drawn sword. In Ripa, she personifies *inimicitia mortale*, “*donna armata, sarà di aspetto fiero, e tremendo*”—and *ira*.

Renaissance and later representations of the battle of the Amazons, such as the picture in Potsdam recently ascribed to Rubens' teacher Otto van Veen, rather concern themselves with the struggle between the sexes than the cruelty of war [Fig. 7]³³. The picture shows Hercules robbing Hippolyta the Amazon Queen of her girdle. The protagonists of the picture are the naked hero warding off two equally naked and writhing Amazons, and Hippolyta clearly shown with her girdle and carrying the severed head of a man. This is the representation of a strong, dangerous woman who must, in the end be struggled with and brought down by the hero—while the hero struggles in fact with two attacking women at once. Thus the battle of the Amazons becomes the struggle of the civilising Greeks against a savage and uncivilised tribe of women. Such representations of intersexual conflict comment on the *querelle des*

femmes which, in the 16th and 17th centuries, broke out again and again with the purpose, on the women's part, of winning equal rights if not actual superiority³⁴. Often, however, Renaissance and later Amazon pictures are decorative in character, like the numerous representations of the theme by Claude Deruet³⁵.

In Rubens' picture, by contrast, an extremely brutal conflict between men and women is shown, the helmeted Queen recedes into the background (as in Otto van Veen) and no girdle is to be seen. The *Battle of the Amazons* in the Munich Alte Pinakothek shows no erotic tension between men and women expressed through bodily struggle (as in Otto van Veen's picture) instead of through force of arms³⁶. On the other hand, the one-sidedness and clarity of the antique theme is abandoned by Rubens. He exhibits a battle in which fearsome losses are suffered on both sides.

In many of his pictures Rubens shows himself a connoisseur of mythology depicting the ancient world with the exactitude of an antiquarian as (among other witnesses) his friend the archaeologist Peiresc reported³⁷. The painter is known to have read the ancient authors, employed literary quotations and treated antiquarian material with great exactitude, especially in historical paintings, as is clear from his correspondence. It is precisely this renunciation of the practice of portraying well-known figures from literary sources in this picture, that directs us to follow Rubens' tracks in this case outside the realm of literature.

The theme of the *Battle of the Amazons* had previously been treated by Rubens and already the tragic nature of the women's struggle steadily intensified through his works. An early drawing in London, prompted by van Veen's picture as well as by sarcophagus base-reliefs, shows the traditional fight between Hercules and Hippolyta in the centre [Fig. 8]³⁸. Rubens asked Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, whom he had met in Antwerp in 1612, for permission to draw an antique frieze in the Earl's possession depicting the battle of the Amazons³⁹. It is particularly when we contrast the Munich picture with the earlier sketch in London that major changes become evident. What is emphasised in the later picture is the death of the women. The concentration of attention upon identifiable heroes in the middle of the picture is abandoned, and the antiquarian motif of an Amazon held by the hair is no more to be seen.

But the fundamental difference between Rubens' drawing and his painting in the Alte Pinakothek is the newly-won freedom from known literary narrative. This is what gives the picture its exemplary distinction. It shows the battle itself, the merciless slaughtering of men and women, not a definite moment in, say, the duel between Achilles and Penthesilea, or



7) Otto van Veen, «The Battle of the Amazons», Bildergalerie, Potsdam.

Hercules' robbing Hippolyta of her girdle, or Theseus' battle against the Amazon invaders. On the contrary, the red-cloaked Amazon standard-bearer on the bridge, in contrast to representations on antique sarcophagi, looks away from the spectator, faceless, and so, anonymous. Her turning away shows the total novelty of Rubens' conception of the theme⁴⁰.

No longer, in Rubens, are any heroes recognisable, nor any identifiable tragic figures such as might restrict the picture's reference to a literary background and give it a humanist character. The location on the river Thermodon shows this to be a border-conflict. It does not fit Theseus' battle to defend Attica, much less the Trojan war, nor does it fit Lycia where



8) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Battle of the Amazons», British Museum, London.



9) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Battle of the Amazons», detail.

Bellerophon defeated the Amazons. Theseus' battle on the river Thermodon does indeed involve the abduction of Antiope, but Rubens' picture presents us, in the central area, not with the abduction, but the death of a woman. The only other remaining context to be considered would be the Herculean labour that took place in the land of the Amazons, but the figure of Hippolyta with the golden girdle—which after all was the objective of the task—is not to be found in Rubens' picture. One might identify Hercules himself in the mounted figure on the bridge far left by the lion-skin over his head, but he remains subordinate and is thus by no means the protagonist of the battle. Besides, it would be untypical for the demigod to be shown on horseback⁴¹. And finally, the figure need not be Hercules on account of the lionskin on his head, as Rubens provides others too with this heroic attribute. In an early work he portrayed Aeneas with such a lionskin, and in the painting of *The Death of Decius Mus* two warriors appear at once with this headgear⁴². On the contrary, the mounted man with the lionskin provides further confirmation of Rubens' abandonment of literary as well as pictorial convention.

And finally, the actions of the principal figures in the central group on the bridge, of the Amazon Queen, and of various subordinate figures as well, show differences from the heroism of traditional depictions of mythological themes. In the centre of the picture the imminent death of a defenceless anonymous woman is shown [Fig. 9]. The standard of the unarmed Amazon is lowered, two Greeks have seized her. A

half-naked, muscular man is pulling her from her horse, and has raised a bloodstained dagger to stab her, and an armoured horseman has raised his sword to split her skull. This determined attack on the part of the two Greeks appears extremely cruel, inasmuch as the Amazon is already in a slumped, defenceless posture. The annihilating stroke from the sword raised high above head-level and aimed at the lower-lying victim is found elsewhere in Rubens' work, mostly in representations of the death of wild animals in hunting scenes. It is from this superior stance that George kills the dragon, and men slay lions or hippopotamuses in a hunting *melée*⁴³. And with the same brutality, the mounted warrior above the centre of the picture raises her weapon for an annihilating blow upon the Greek horseman who is concentrating too hard on the standard-bearer to be able to react to this other attack. The unrestrained violence is therefore found on both sides, and is on neither side heroic.

Compositionally, the killing of the Amazon is arranged to present the very opposite of a heroic death. Rubens here does not attempt to resemble and outdo earlier battle-pictures⁴⁴. It can be meaningfully compared with the already-mentioned picture of *The Death of Decius Mus in Battle in Vaduz*, painted earlier by Rubens for otherwise unknown "Gentilhomini Gennoesi" [Fig. 10]⁴⁵. The fatal neckwound of the Roman consul is moved to the centre of the picture, and the hero's face is turned towards the onlooker, fully-lit and pointed heavenwards up at the gods. His opponents, the Latins, slay him in



10) Peter Paul Rubens, «The Death of Decius Mus», Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein, Vaduz.

mid-battle even as, grasping his blood-flecked sword, he receives the fatal blow as the haruspices had ordered. The Amazon in the Munich picture is, by contrast, killed while unarmed and defenceless. While Decius Mus there clings to his horse's mane and looks up into the Heavens to see the streaming light, here the Amazon's head is directed towards her standard. The Consul looks forward to being taken up to join the gods; the Amazon sees her fate in the standard she is in the act of losing. This struggle for the standard constitutes the central point of tension in the picture, much as in Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, which Rubens had studied intensively. As in Leonardo's picture, both attackers and defenders have seized the staff of the banner, so that the opponents are, by its means, united. While Leonardo accentuates the violent shock of the enemies colliding around the standard, in Rubens' picture the issue has already been decid-

ed, the standard-bearer having been worsted in the struggle. The bond between the opponents will be hacked to pieces by the Greeks an instant later.

The allusion to Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* makes clear the novelty of Rubens' picture compared to traditional battle-pictures showing winners and losers in a just war. Where Leonardo disposed four armed men around the standard, Rubens opposed two men to two women. The men are armed, while the woman they are in the act of killing is not. The woman further off has raised her hand to deal a blow, to be sure, but her weapon is not visible. Moreover it is too late for her to rescue the standard-bearer from the two threatening opponents—her brave attack is futile. Through confrontation between men enjoying an advantage over their women opponents, Rubens expresses more sharply the hopeless defeat being inflicted at the centre of the picture.

Characteristic of the accentuation of violence through the opposing of men against women is, moreover, the reversal of the figure of Athena. The Amazon Queen on the grey-roan horse is wearing an antique helmet adorned with a bright feather crest like that worn by the goddess Pallas in the *Council of the Gods*—a helmet clearly different from those (either plain or decorated with coloured feathers) of the other Amazons [Fig. 5]. Again, unlike the other Amazons, the Queen is in armour, another feature which assimilates her to Athena. She does not, however, bear a Medusa-head on her shield, but carries, near it, a severed man's head. The figure of Pallas from the various *Mirrors of Princes* who there celebrates the virtue of well-considered strategy, has here been changed into a woman practising close combat and bearing before her a severed head. The Amazon's outward appearance, reminiscent of the goddess, is at variance with her actions,—and this is achieved principally by means of the severed head and the way it is carried.

Rubens borrowed the motif of the cut-off head from the much more moderate scheme provided by the *Battle of the Amazons* painted by Otto van Veen and now in the Potsdam gallery—borrowed, but modified it⁴⁶. A woman triumphantly displaying the cut-off head of a man is, in the 17th century, to be identified either with Judith (who, God permitting, killed to save her people) or with the widespread convention employed in prints to show American Indian cannibals or to personify America⁴⁷. Rubens takes up a motif which in van Veen signified the violence of an untamed wild woman, and transforms it into a woman desperately fighting and driven to extremes by the cruelty inflicted on her people. The headless trunk at the centre of the picture recalls (as van Veen's picture does not) the trunk of Holofernes shown in countless pictures of Judith—who, in this precise period, the beginning of the 17th century, was portrayed in art as particularly energetic. The motif assimilates the Amazon in the Munich picture to the biblical heroine. The battle which in van Veen's picture is fought between the sexes, rages here between two peoples. In contrast however to the biblical, and indeed other heroines, the Amazon has bloody hands. This clearly distinguishes the Munich picture from traditional battle and other mythological pictures, in which the wounds of the victims are shown, but not the bloody hands of the inflictors. Here, the act of killing has stained the hands of the slayer, who is a woman to boot. Titian too had, in the *Battle of Spoleto* shown the bodies of the slain, but these were men slain in battle by other men, which, though a cruel destiny, does not trigger the revulsion with which we react to the reciprocal slaughter of men and women. Further, Rubens had earlier on avoided directly showing the onlooker the neckwound of the beheaded Argos in his picture

*Juno and Argos*⁴⁸. The shocking effect of the motif placed almost at the centre of the Munich picture, together with the bloody hands of the Amazon, is calculated to make clear the horror of war. The attack by a Greek warrior shows that the apotropaic effect of the severed head (exerted by the Medusa head on the Aegis of Pallas, as also by the head of Holofernes in Judith's hand) is absent here. The threat to the Queen anticipates again the forthcoming defeat of her people.

The behaviour of the other side too displays an unusual degree of brutality. At the lower left edge of the picture lies a naked female corpse in a forced, unnatural position next to her companion who, though herself also dead, seems asleep [Fig. 6]. The contorted posture of the fallen Amazon is the consequence of the violence being done to her by the victor. The Greek is pulling the cloak from under the body of the dead woman, with his foot placed on the inside of her naked thigh—that is, he is despoiling a corpse, an action quite unknown in the depiction of mythological themes. He is not taking weapons or armour, but her cloak—a deed without analogue in ancient literature⁴⁹. Plundering on the battlefield is, however, a familiar theme in the 17th century, and is decried as a particularly repulsive and shameful act of war in contemporary Italian and Dutch art—in, for example, the picture painted at about the same time by the battle-painter Sebastian Vrancx *The Plundering of Wommelgem Village* [Fig. 11]⁵⁰. Rubens was later to employ the motif again in his picture *Heinrich IV in the Battle of Ivry* to characterise that contemporary battle⁵¹.

The Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, who is considered the founder of international law, conceded that as the killing of enemies is allowed by the rules of warfare, the robbing of the dead cannot be forbidden:

“Non esse contra naturam, eum quem honestum est necare dixit Cicero. Quare mirum non est si ius gentium corrumpi ac rapi permiserit res hostium quos interficere permiserat.”⁵²

His attitude is in the main, however, that the dead should be buried in accordance with the laws of warfare, and that grief over the dead should overcome the hatred between the warring sides: “Quare et hostibus publicis deberi sepulturam omnes sentiunt.”⁵³ Further, it was the received opinion in the ancient world that to abandon a dead body unburied was a disgraceful act, as is made clear in the myth of Antigone.

Thus the robbing of the dead Amazon points to a quite specific contemporary custom. Battlefield booty is taken into account in 17th century legislation governing the conduct of war. Thus Article XXV in the “Articulis-Briefff” of the Emperor Ferdinand III specifies:

“Item/ es sol sich in Schlachten oder Stürmen/ und in derselben Eroberung niemand auff Plünderung begeben/ oder umb Guth annähmen/ es sey dann die Wahlstatt und Plätze zuvor erobert/ sondern in guter Ordnung bleiben/ bey Vermeidung Lebensstrafe.”

“Item: in the course of battles or assaults, or while the victory is still being won, no-one shall go forth to plunder. [This they may do] only if the field has already been won. On the contrary, everyone must remain in good order—on pain of death.”

Article XXVI continues: “Es soll auch keiner auß dem Lager auff Beute gehen oder anders wohin ziehen/ ohne Wissen und Willen seines Hauptmanns.”⁵⁴ (“Furthermore, no-one is to leave camp on plundering expeditions or to go anywhere else, without the knowledge and permission of his captain.”)

Plundering was, to be sure, widespread in antiquity, as is clear from Grotius’ text, but the theme is not treated in the literature that Rubens studied. In the *Iliad*, Achilles’ booty is described, but no instance of robbing corpses on the battlefield. Neither Plutarch nor Vergil describe battles as expeditions in search of plunders thus the action of the Greek in Rubens’ picture receives no legitimation from literature. Although this kind of plundering was part of the practice of the 17th century, it was punishable, for plundering was permitted only after the conclusion of the battle. In Rubens’ picture though, the battle is still in full swing. Plundering at such a juncture was presumably quite customary in the 17th century, as shown by the painter of the *Battle of Ivry*; but it was severely punished, as specified in Carl Gustav’s “Letters on the articles of war”:

“Wenn eine Festung/ Läger oder Stadt/ mit stürmender Hand eingenommen wird/ sol keiner plündern oder Beute machen/ ehe und zuvor die Festung gänzlich erobert/ die Besatzung oder Bürgerschaft ihre Waffen niedergelegt/ und der Feind gedämpffet/... wer darwider handelt/ sol entweder am Leben/ oder auch wol nach der Sachen Beschaffenheit/ allein mit dem Eisen... gestraffet werden.”⁵⁵

“Whenever a fortress, camp or town is taken by storm, nobody shall plunder or carry off booty until the fortress has been completely won, the occupants or inhabitants have laid down their arms, and the enemy has been defeated... whosoever infringes this rule shall pay the penalty either of death or some other punishment as

appropriate, the punishment to be inflicted by cold steel...”

Thus the Greek is committing a completely unheroic act of war, one which was penalised in the 17th century. And in this scene too, the theme is further intensified by the conflict being between man and woman. The foot placed on the thigh of the warrioress suggests, also, a necrophilic rape, as the placing of a man’s leg between a woman’s thighs is a conventional gesture signifying sexual intercourse. It is to be seen, for example, in Rubens’ depiction of the rape of Lucrece by Tarquin, painted about 1610⁵⁶. Like the Greek warrior in the *Battle of the Amazons*, Tarquinius is shown tugging at the woman’s garment. The robbing of the body thus becomes a deed of violence, a desecration of the corpse of a slain enemy. This very motif—kicking or trampling—was emphasised by Rubens as a destructive act, as becomes clear from his commentary on the late picture in the Pitti Palace, *The Terrors of War*, where Ares tramples books underfoot: “egli calca le belle lettere et altre galanterie.”

The plundering and insulting of the corpse by trampling dishonours the Amazon; her heroic death in battle is deprived of its dignity. For this reason any idea of *parti-pris* on the part of the painter in favour of the Greeks and against the “barbaric Amazons” is to be rejected⁵⁷. The women in Rubens’ picture are humiliated victims and brutal perpetrators at the same time, and engaged in a hopeless struggle. Despite their courage, famed in literature, and the consistently heroic deeds of individual warrioresses, they here become victims, their heroism leads to defeat, death and desecration, and is accompanied besides by the cruel actions of the other Amazons—which also bring about merely their death. Complementary to the man’s severed head in the Queen’s hands, is the face of an Amazon sinking in the water.

Rubens’ picture treated with unusual emphasis the death as well as the bloodlust of men and women. Antique themes are, in general, but seldom employed in Renaissance and later art to portray massive violence against or by women. One example, though, is Vincenzo Rossi’s cycle on the labours of Hercules in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, where the *Battle against the Amazons* is portrayed with extreme cruelty. Rossi lost interest in the labours, became steadily less classical, and ended up representing pure brutality, not only in the case of the Amazons⁵⁸. In principle, however, violence against women has been, ever since the 14th century, a motif of extreme cruelty and injustice—Giotto’s *Iniustitia* in the Arena chapel in Padua, and Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Bad Government* in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena are examples from Medieval art. Pietro da Cortona showed, in his portrayal of the Iron Age in



11) Sebastian Vrancx, «The Plundering of the Village Wommelgem», Kunstmuseum im Ehrenhof, Düsseldorf.

the Palazzo Pitti, violence against women without any erotic component as the greatest cruelty. In Rubens' *Funeral of Decius Mus*, too, woman suffering male violence is shown "as a typical motif in Roman portrayals of triumphal processions."⁵⁹ In the iconographic tradition, besides, Renaissance and later art treats the general theme of sexual violence against women, as in the rape of Lucrece, the kidnapping of Persephone, etc. Violent deeds perpetrated by women on the other hand refer, in the iconographic tradition, almost exclusively to the Old Testament theme of the beheading of Holofernes by Judith, and the tale of Jael and Sisera, murders committed by women against men to rescue their people.

Ancient art on the contrary did not shrink from the dramatic climax of cruel deeds perpetrated against women. Battle sarcophagi showed how the Amazons were killed, and a common motif is a woman whose long hair is held by a Greek as he prepares to kill her with his sword. The motif is traceable back to Phidias who showed it on the shield of Athena in the Parthenon⁶⁰. Rubens used this in the London drawing, where Hercules is seen in the middle of the picture about to take the belt from the slain Hippolyta. In his extremely violent portrayal of the *Battle of the Amazons* in Munich, however, Rubens did not strive for the authenticity that might have derived from an antique example, for his picture refers to no such specific inci-

dent. For all his antiquarian research—visible in the helmet and armour—Rubens carefully avoided the well-known motif of Phidias, known to him through the Roman sarcophagus bas-relief and appearing in the London drawing⁶¹.

In the light of his copious borrowings from antiquity and his emphasising of the usefulness of ancient examples, this procedure employed for the Munich picture is remarkable⁶²—namely, the complete renunciation of any pictorial or literary reference, in a mythological battle-picture. In Rubens' narrative works, themes are frequently conceived in a novel way and made dramatic even while remaining in the frame of iconographic and literary traditions, the *Adoration of the Kings* for example in the Potsdam gallery, in which a Roman soldier in the retinue anticipates the capture scene. In the picture of Meleager and Atalanta in Munich, too, he shows the huntress (whose beauty prompted the fateful love of Meleager) as Venus. The boar's head, so important in the myth itself and in Ovid, is less evident⁶³. This very independent treatment of sources renovates the narrative and purveys a highly personal view of things. In the case of the *Battle of the Amazons*, the painter decided not to depict an individual destiny or play a variation on antique battle-pictures, but accentuated, instead, the existential drama of the personages, men and women, in an act of war.

It is precisely the fighting and suffering of women that heightens the repulsive impression of violence. This is seen above all in the contrast between the intrinsic beauty of naked women's bodies and their disfigurement by death. The right arm of the man's torso on the bridge hangs lifelessly down to point to the river in which Amazons are floating, and on the bank of which other women lie killed. The corpse of the desecrated Amazon faces the spectator head-down, her arms hanging lifelessly in the blood-stained water, and her whole figure appearing crude. This contortion is, however, the result of the Greek trampling her and violently altering her posture, which, so we imagine, would originally have been similar to that of her beautiful companion lying dead beside her as if asleep. The Greek's violent intervention makes evident the fact that she is dead, her awkward posture as the victim of his trampling deprives her of all grace as the contrast between her and the figure beside her clearly shows. This is similarly evident in the escaping women swimming away in the foreground, figures which are repeated in the *Flight of Cloelia* in Dresden. In the latter picture they personify heroines and are, besides, similar to Rubens' river-goddesses or sea-nymphs. The blood-tinted water provides an estranging setting for the graceful figures, which are very different from the stiff, ungainly floating bodies of the women. The beautiful bodies in this picture do more than serve the cause of decorum; their primary function is to demonstrate disfigurement through death.

The re-interpretation of content and Rubens' rejection of the scheme provided by sarcophagi can be explained in the light of contemporary historical circumstances. The unusual brutality of the battle here represented suggests a connection with scenes of war being acted out in his own country. The myth is applied to the present⁶⁴. The owner of the *Battle of the Amazons* is known to have been Cornelis van der Geest, a close friend of Rubens. The spice-merchant had secured a number of commissions for Rubens, most notably the *Erecting of the Cross* then in the Walpurgis Church, now in Antwerp cathedral. Van der Geest is addressed, in the engraving of the latter picture, as "auctor" and "praeceptor". Presumably Rubens gave him the *Battle of the Amazons* as a token of gratitude for securing this major commission⁶⁵. The mythological theme without identifiable heroes, and the medium-sized format suggest that the picture was from the beginning conceived not as picture for a princely gallery, but rather for the collection of a bourgeois.

The picture (mentioned earlier) by Willem van Haecht shows the art-chamber ("Constcemer") of Cornelis van der Geest. Haecht's purpose was to show as many of the collector's pictures as possible, as well as the highly-placed friends of art there assembled. The *Battle of the Amazons* is placed at the focal point of the perspective, near the window, and excellently lit⁶⁶. Haecht's picture shows Archduke Albert and his wife Isabella who represented the Spanish crown in Holland, and who visited the spice-merchant in 1615. This does not, however date Rubens' picture reliably, as other paintings shown here by Haecht were not painted until after 1620. Wladislaw Sigismund of Poland is also shown, who was not in Antwerp until 1624. Moreover, Ambrogio Spinola, the commander-in-chief of the Spanish troops is presumed to be among those present. Next to Sigismund stands Jan van Montfort, Master of the Mint, and Antonis van Dyck, then the collector himself, then in the doorway van Haecht, who lived in the collector's house and looked after the collection. Thus the assembly includes not only art-connoisseurs discussing Quentin Massys' *Madonna* (he was the founder of the Antwerp School of Painting) but political heads as well, men who decide matters of war and peace.

The painted gallery accords the *Battle of the Amazons* central prominence. It is the largest picture shown, hangs above the principal personages, and is at the focal point of the whole composition. Art, however, needs peace, just as commerce does. The current threat of war hung over the painter and the merchant-collector alike⁶⁷. The *Battle of the Amazons* shows the effects of violence on men and women, and associates contemporary warfare with the mythological battle. This theme of war was dealt with differently by Rubens when he

painted for the collector than from when he painted for kings: for them he painted the Olympian Gods⁶⁸. The position of the picture, however, even though it corresponded to no historical situation, and its proximity to the Archducal couple, shows the potentially scandalous nature of the subject. In van der Geest's collection, Rubens' painting of an ancient theme alludes to a currently imminent conflict. Because of this contemporary relevance it is employed as the background for the contemporary personages assembled in the art room. The unusual portrayal of contemporary war-practices in this extremely dramatic battle-picture must have spoken very directly to the onlookers. It is, on the other hand, the way Rubens deals with the schemata provided by Titian and Leonardo that wins for his picture the prominent place it enjoys in Willem van Haecht's *Atelier of Apelles*⁶⁹. It appears, in this picture, in the company of other important representations of mythological subjects, like Correggio's *Io*, Titian's *Venus and Diana*, or Domenichino's *Hunt of Diana*. The van Haecht picture, too, emphasises the novelty of Rubens' work.

Rubens pressed vigorously for the publication of the *Battle of the Amazons* in an engraved version. The copper-engraving by Lucas Vostermann was the biggest engraving ever printed in the Netherlands up to that time, consisting of six plates and measuring 85.5 x 119.7 cm. From the quality of the engraving and the size, only one third smaller than the original, it can be seen how high a standard of virtuosity Rubens demanded for the reproduction of this particular work. This again demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the picture. The engraving is dated 1623, but Rubens was in 1619 already busying himself with obtaining Dutch authorisation for its publication—moreover, as his very first named engraving, as is proved by a letter of 23 January 1619. In the letter Rubens gives the title simply as "A battle between Greeks and Amazons", in contrast to the quite specific titles of the other works⁷⁰. The turning away from any literary programme was deliberate, for the theme of this work is pure violence, permitting no possible political identification. The imprimatur for this engraving, so demanding in its production, draws together all the parties to the current conflict, the king of Spain, the Archduke and the States General: "Cum privilegijs Regis Christianissimi, Principum Belgarum et Ordinum Bataviae."

Rubens dedicated the print to Aletheia Talbot, wife of the already-mentioned Thomas Howard Earl of Arundel, Lord Marshall of England and art-collector who became Rubens' patron and allowed him to study his collection of antiquities. The inscription reads:

"EXCELLENTMAE HEROINAE ALATHIAE TABOTH MAGNI
COMITIS ARUNDELLI SUPREMI BRITANNIAE MARISCHAL-

CI CONIVGI LECTISSIMAE HANC AMAZONUM PUGNAM
OBSEQUII ET OBSERVANTIAE ARGUMENTUM PETRUS
PAULLUS RUBENS L.M.D.D."

As Arundel was appointed Lord Marshall only in 1621, the dedication was obviously altered at a later date⁷¹. Thus the reason for the dedication was not the military rank of the husband; the wife herself is the principal addressee.

The dedication of this copper engraving to the Countess—highly esteemed by Rubens, and the wife of the important art-collector—also rules out a negative interpretation of the Amazons. The artist would hardly have dedicated to a woman in this position a large and widely distributed depiction of female figures of bad repute. The inscription may contain an allusion to the Amazon-frieze in the Arundel collection that Rubens had studied. In addition, though, the picture of the fighting women with a dedication to a heroine pays homage to the Baroque princess as *femme forte* and patriot. Women of the upper aristocracy had themselves painted as Amazons in the 17th century, and Rubens too employed the term Amazon as an honourable form of address to a baroque princess⁷². Isabella of Castille had already allowed herself to be celebrated as "católica amazona", and Joan of Orléans as prototype of the strong woman had even earlier been equated with an Amazon⁷³. The regency of women in time of war, especially in France under the leadership of Catarina Medici, Maria Medici (painted by Rubens as Bellona the war-goddess) and Anna of Austria, gave contemporary relevance to the concept of the *femme forte*, which found expression in ever more pictures and engravings. It became in the 20's and 30's of the 17th century quite the fashion to describe or portray the figure of a baroque princess as an Amazon, and Rubens followed suit⁷⁴. The sheet dedicated to Aletheia Talbot thus had a further contemporary meaning. The dedication of a picture on this theme to a woman was a way of identifying her as politically engaged. Like the picture of van der Geest, the engraving for Aletheia Talbot evoked the reality of contemporary war.

In the dangerous situation that obtained when the armistice expired, Rubens created a strong, emphatic representation of a battle in which both sides suffer dreadful losses and are guilty of cruel and dishonourable practices. Elements of Rubens' later war-pictures are already present in this painting. Particularly prominent is the figure of the Greek about to stab the Amazon standard-bearer—a figure which is only slightly modified to become Ares in *The Horrors of War*.

By 1623 at the latest Rubens was already, as a diplomat, involved in the politics of his country. He, more than any other artist of the century, dealt with theme of the current war in his pictures. After the *Battle of the Amazons* he painted the pic-

tures of peace and war that made him so famous that Luca Giordano showed him in the act of painting subject-matter of this kind⁷⁵. The *Battle of the Amazons* stands aside from the literary and iconographic tradition but very much under the shadow of the current war, or the fear of its breaking out again. A letter to Doctor Johann Faber then living in Rome makes it clear that Rubens welcomed the peace or at any rate the armistice in his country and saw in it a reason for staying in Antwerp.

His first diplomatic letter (30.9.1631) to the Chancellor of Brabant, Pierre Pecquius, shows that Rubens was already fully engaged in the political endeavours to renew the armistice⁷⁶. In a letter (1.8.1631) to the Conde Duque Olivarez, Prime Minister of Spain the painter wrote: "Io non ho giammai trattato di guerra, come V(ostra) Ex(cellenza) ne po far fede, ma procurato sempre, in quanto ho potuto, la pace da per tutto."⁷⁷ The *Battle of the Amazons* makes this thought drastically clear; all glorifying whatsoever of war as a heroic way of striving for peace is nullified by the cruelty of both sides. The

coarsening effects exerted on men by all war-operations becomes a theme in Rubens long before Jacques Callot's denunciation of its cruelties in the famous series of engravings *Les Misères et les Malheurs de la guerre* in 1633.

In a similar historical situation Francisco de Goya referred to Rubens' painting and, in *Dos de Mayo*, quoted the butchering of an already mortally-wounded man, the victim lying athwart the plane of the picture, the position of the attackers, and further off, the wounded horses and the slain bestrewing the ground. These representations are extremely brutal; heads twisted back over slit-open throats, and pools of blood dominate the picture; the combattants resemble the opponents in Rubens. Werner Busch's observation on *Dos de Mayo* could just as well be applied to the *Battle of the Amazons*: "there, everything that moves is shot at, beaten, stabbed."⁷⁸ While Rubens used the antique of a hopeless struggle of heroic women to issue a political warning of impending slaughter, the contemporary political component of a mythological picture is applied by Goya to the situation of *his* time.

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¹ Cf. Baumstark, R., "Ikonographische Studien zu Rubens' Kriegs- und Friedensallegorien", *Aachener Kunstblätter*, 45, 1974, pp. 125-234.

² Rubens, *Venus and Mars*, painted around 1671, in the castle in Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg).

³ Baumstark, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-186. Cf. also Winner, M., "Götterrat als Friedensbild", *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst*, 1998, pp. 113-134.

⁴ Winner, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁵ Kaulbach, H. M., "Peter Paul Rubens: Diplomat und Maler des Friedens", in 1648, *Krieg und Frieden in Europa, II: Kunst und Kultur*, Exhibition Catalogue, Münster 1998, pp. 565-574.

⁶ Justus Müller Hofstede established, in Rubens' early work, when seen against the background of the political history of Flanders, the presence of political engagement, and demonstrated this in the case of the painter's portrayal of Nero (privately owned in London) as a hybrid, sick ruler. See: Müller Hofstede, J., "Rubens und die Porträtsbüste des 'Vitellius' aus der Sammlung des Kardinals Grimaldi", in *Rubens and His World*, Antwerp 1985, pp. 109-122.

⁷ Von Simson, O., *Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Humanist, Maler und Diplomat*, Mainz 1996, p. 148 ff. Von Simson mentioned, to be sure, the powerful depiction of the subject, and hinted at the presence of political meaning inasmuch as the warlike Amazons threaten peace. But the classical theme remains, for Von Simson, the main thing.

⁸ Von Simson, *op. cit.*, p. 148; An der Heiden, R., *Die Alte Pinakothek. Sammlungsgeschichte, Bau und Bilder*, Munich 1998, p. 302.

⁹ While admittedly the representation of violence can also be interpreted as intending sublimity in the work of Rubens and of some of his contemporaries too, the meaning of the *Battle of the Amazons* can be established by appealing to its content—which is in fact the case with most of Rubens' pictures.

¹⁰ Warnke, M., *Peter Paul Rubens. Leben und Werk*, Cologne 1977, p. 81.

¹¹ Chiari Moretto Weil, M. A., "Per un catalogo ragionato dei disegni di Tiziano", *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 6, 1991, p. 50 ff.

¹² Both in private collections in Parma. Ricci's picture with its figures falling into the water seems influenced rather by Rubens than by Titian, *La battaglia nella pittura del XVII e XVIII secolo*, cf. Exhibition catalogue, Parma 1994.

¹³ The chalk drawing was long considered an original by Titian, but was in 1986 ascertained by Julius Held to be a leaf from the 16th Century, and classified as one of the many reworked drawings by Rubens, cf. J. S. Held, *Rubens. Selected Drawings*, Oxford 1986, No. 49.

¹⁴ Simon, E., *Die Götter der Griechen*, Munich 1985, p. 149 ff.; 255 ff.

¹⁵ Only the Amazonian Queen Thalestris had a peaceful relationship with Alexander the Great, to whom she even wished to bear a child, cf. Poeschel, S., "Alexander Magnus Maximus—Neue Aspekte zur Ikonographie Alexanders des Grossen im Quattrocento", *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, Vol. 23/24, 1988, pp. 63-73.

¹⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, III, 189; VI, 186. For relevant literature, see Blok, J., *The Early Amazons. Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth*, Leiden, N.Y., Cologne, 1995.

¹⁷ Kleinbaum, A. B., *The War Against the Amazons*, N.Y., 1983, p. 13.

¹⁸ Plutarch, *Vitae parallelae*, I, 26 (Theseus); I, 27.

¹⁹ Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio*, I,2,1; Plutarch, *Vitae parallelae*, I, 32.

²⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII, 611.

²¹ Vergil, *Aeneid*, I, 490 ff.

²² Vergil, *Aeneid*, XI, 790 f.

²³ Vergil, *Aeneid*, XI, 841 f.

²⁴ Frohaus, G., "Schwert in Frauenhand: Emanzipationsmodell oder Schreckensvision?", in *Schwert in Frauenhand. Weibliche Bewaffnung*, Exhibition catalogue, Solingen 1998/99, p. 10.

²⁵ Wagner-Hänsel, B., "Männerfeindliche Jungfrauen? Ein kritischer Blick auf Amazonen in Mythos und Geschichte", *Feministische Studien*, 1, 1986, p. 87 ff.

²⁶ Von Simson, *op. cit.*, p. 149, interprets the Amazons negatively.

²⁷ Plutarch, *Vitae Parallelae*, I, 27, see Schauenburg, K., "Der Gürtel der Hippolyte", in *Philologus*, 104, 1960, p. 1.

²⁸ Cf. Steingraber, E., *Die Münchner Pinakotheken. Meisterwerke aus den Bayerischen Staatsgemäldesammlungen*, Munich 1972/77, p. 50; Warnke, *op. cit.*, p. 81 f., Heiden, *op. cit.*, pp. 302-304.

²⁹ Cf. Exhibition Catalogue, *Galerie der starken Frauen*, Munich/Berlin 1995, p. 158.

³⁰ Cf. for example Exhibition Catalogue *Der Welt Lauf. Allegorische Graphikserien des Manierismus*, Stuttgart 1997/98, No. 8.5.

³¹ Homer, *Iliad*, XV, 123 ff. Rubens drew this assault in about 1635/37, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

³² E.g. Rubens, *The Reconciliation of the Romans and the Sabines*, about 1630, Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

³³ Otto van Veen, *Battle of the Amazons*, end of the 16th century, Potsdam Picture Gallery. Julius Held attributed the picture to the youthful Rubens. Justus Müller Hofstede instead classified it as a work of Otto van Veen and dated it in the late 1590's. Otto von Simson also stripped the painting from Rubens' work; Von Simson, *op. cit.* p. 34.

³⁴ Schlumbohn, Chr., "Der Typus der Amazone und das Frauenideal im 17. Jahrhundert. Zur Selbstdarstellung der Grande Mademoiselle", *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 29, 1978, p. 79 ff.

³⁵ Claude Deruet, *The Amazons*, around 1619, Strassburg, Musée des Beaux-Arts. As well as the four pictures in Strassburg, other representations of Amazons are listed in the posthumous inventory of the painter's works.

³⁶ Cf. Rubens, *The Abduction of Leucippus' Daughters*, about 1618-1620, Munich, Alte Pinakothek, cf. von Simson, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

³⁷ *Codex diplomaticus Rubenianus*, ed. Rosse, M. and Ruelens, Ch., III, Antwerp 1900, 85, No. CCIC; letter from Pereisc dated 1.12.1622. "Di modo ch'io non volsi mancar di trovarmi all'assignatione, il che non fu inutile poiche V. S. m'haveva scritto in particolare dei soggetti, che se ben gli altri sapevano in generale che erano della Vita di Costantino, nulladimeno non sapevamo il particolare di ciascheduna historia, ch'io gli andai esponendo, non senza ammirazione dell'esatezza di V. S. in esprimere gli abiti antichi, sino alle clavi delle calighe ch'io vidi con grandissimo gusto, sotto il piede d'un cavaliere seguitante Massenzio."

³⁸ Rubens, *Battle of the Amazons*, 1602-1603, London, British Museum, 252 x 430 mm, cf. Müller Hofstede, J., "Rubens und Italien", in *Peter Paul Rubens Exhibition Catalogue*, Cologne 1977, p. 181.

³⁹ This drawing, dated around 1628/30 is privately owned in England. A copy by Willem Panneels of a lost painting is in Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, Kongelige Kobbersticksammling, cf. Garff, J., Fuente Pedersen, Eva de la, *Rubens Cantoor. The Drawings of William Panneels*, Copenhagen 1988, I, p. 179 f., No 243.

⁴⁰ The cautious, but frequent attempts to name the figures made in the relevant literature obscure Rubens' intention, c.f. Kuhn, R., "Peter Paul Rubens. Die dramatische Erzählung des Bethlehemischen Kindermordes gegenüber der epischen Erzählung der Amazonschlacht", in *Rubens. Kunstgeschichtliche Beiträge*, Constance 1979, pp. 73-100.

⁴¹ The unusual representation of Hercules on horseback is exemplified by a work of Bertoldo di Giovanni, Modena, Galleria Estense. It refers to various appearances of Duke Ercole I d'Este on horseback. The Duke claimed the demi-god as his ancestor. Cf. Draper, J. D., "Ercole a Cavallo", in: *Giovinetta di Michelangelo*, Exhibition Catalogue, Florence 1999, p. 260.

⁴² Rubens, *Flight of Aeneas*, around 1602, Musée National de Fontainebleau; *The Death of Decius Mus the consul*, 1617, Vaduz, collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein.

⁴³ Rubens, *St. George's Fight with the Dragon*, around 1606, Prado, Madrid; *Lion-hunt*, 1621; *Hippopotamus-hunt*, 1615/16, both in Munich, Alte Pinakothek, cf. Renger, K., *Alte Pinakothek München: Peter Paul Rubens: Löwenjagd. Hochzeit in Procuratione*, ed. Kulturstiftung der Länder, 1997.

⁴⁴ Kuhn, *op. cit.*, p. 91, compared the *Battle of the Amazons* with battle-pictures by Uccello, Leonardo, Titian, and with Raffael's *Expulsion of Heliodor*.

⁴⁵ Von Einem, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁴⁶ Held, J. S., *Rubens-Studien*, Leipzig 1987, p. 17ff.

⁴⁷ One of the best-known and most-copied representations of the presentation of the head is that of Cristofano Allori, around 1610, Florence, Palazzo Pitti; for example an early 17th century copper-engraving from Antwerp by Crispijn de Passe shows America in this way, c.f. Poeschel, S., *Studien zur Ikonographie der Erdteile in der Kunst des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1985, Cat. no. 75. Rubens in his "big" Judith took his bearings from Caravaggio, cf. Exhibition Catalogue *Bilder nach Bildern*, Münster 1976, No 140.

⁴⁸ Rubens, *Juno and Argos*, 1611, Cologne, Wallraff-Richartz-Museum.

⁴⁹ Cf. for example *Iliad*, XXII, 258 f. and 331.

⁵⁰ Sebastian Vrancx, *The Plundering of the village Wommelgem*, around 1620, Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum im Ehrenhof. See Vander Auwera, J., "Historische Wahrheit und künstlerische Dichtung" in: *1648 Krieg und Frieden in Europa*, op. cit., pp. 461-468.

⁵¹ Rubens, *Henry IV in the Battle of Ivry*, 1627-30, Florence, Uffizi.

⁵² Grotius, Hugo, *De iure belli ac pacis*, Aalen 1993, Reprint of the first edition Paris 1625, p. 673.

⁵³ Grotius, op. cit., p. 435.

⁵⁴ *Corpus iuris militaris*, Frankfurt 1676, p. 53.

⁵⁵ *Corpus iuris militaris*, op. cit., p. 85.

⁵⁶ Formerly in the Picture Gallery in Sanssouci, Potsdam, subsequently lost in the war. Cf. unambiguous representations by Raffael, *Isaac and Rebecca*, Vatican, Logge di Raffaello, or Annibale Carracci, *Venus and Anchises*, Rome, Palazzo Farnese.

⁵⁷ Cf. von Simson, op. cit., p. 148.

⁵⁸ Venturi, A., *Storia dell'arte italiana*, X, Milan 1936, pp. 305-318.

⁵⁹ Von Simson, op. cit., p. 162.

⁶⁰ Cf. Bober, P. P. / Rubinstein, R. O., *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, Oxford and N.Y. 1991, p. 177 for treatment of the motif and its reception.

⁶¹ The Amazon battle-pictures now in the "Palazzo dei conservatori" in Rome, were known. They were sold to the Medici in 1584, along with the fragment in the Vatican Museum, Bober/Rubinstein, op. cit., pp. 175-179.

⁶² Cf. Winner, op. cit., p. 128 f.

⁶³ Rubens, *Adoration of the Kings*, around 1620, Picture Gallery, Potsdam; *Atalanta and Meleager*, around 1635, Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

⁶⁴ McGrath, E., *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard. Subjects from History*, London 1997, p. 20: The story, reported by Herodotus, of Tomyris the Queen of the Massagetae who took revenge on the blood-thirsty Cyrus, King of the Persians, was similarly regarded. The Amazon was regarded as one of the exemplary heroines of antiquity, which is how she appears in a series of engravings by Antonio

Salamanca. Rubens' picture in Milan shows her as a determined and self-possessed heroine—in count Cigogna Mozzoni's collection, and the Louvre, Paris. Berger's thesis (referred to without bibliographical reference by McGrath) that the picture was painted for Archduchess Isabella is however not tenable, and the conclusion that it portrays her as threatening Holland with war, is unlikely. Rather, the theme of a woman behaving like an Amazon, punishing a man and demanding his head, is widespread and positively evaluated. It can moreover be politically interpreted though not necessarily with reference to Isabella; it may signify Belgium.

⁶⁵ Von Simson, op. cit., p. 119.

⁶⁶ Held, J., "Artis Pictoriae Amator: An Antwerp Patron and His collection", in *Rubens and His Circle*, Princeton 1982, pp. 35-64.

⁶⁷ DaCosta Kaufmann, Th., "Krieg und Frieden, Kunst und Zerstörung, Mythos und Wirklichkeit: Überlegungen zu Lage der Kunst im Dreissigjährigen Krieg", in *Krieg und Frieden in Europa*, II, pp. 163-172.

⁶⁸ Winner, op. cit., p. 118.

⁶⁹ Willem van Haecht, *The Studio of Apelles*, Den Haag, Mauritshuis.

⁷⁰ *Codex Diplomaticus Rubenianus*, II, Antwerp 1998, 200, No. CLXXXIV.

⁷¹ Howarth, op. cit., p. 3.

⁷² Neysters, S., "Die Grande Mademoiselle als Amazone", in Exhibition Catalogue, Düsseldorf and Darmstadt, *Die Galerie der starken Frauen*, Munich 1995, p. 112.

⁷³ Schlumbohn, Chr., "Die Glorifizierung der Barockfürstin als *Femme forte*", in: *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg 1979, I, p. 113; also *Amazone*, op. cit., p. 78 ff.

⁷⁴ Schlumbohn, *Amazone*, op. cit., p. 78 ff.

⁷⁵ Luca Giordano, *Homage to Rubens*, Madrid, Prado.

⁷⁶ *Codex Diplomaticus Rubenianus*, III, 253-255, No. CCCL.

⁷⁷ Quoted after Baumstark, op. cit., note 1.

⁷⁸ Busch, W., *Das sentimentalische Bild. Die Krise der Kunst im 18. Jahrhundert und die Geburt der Moderne*, Munich 1993, p. 85.