

THE AMAZON WARRIOR OF ARMENIA, A GODSEND GIFT

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***"The thing about tourism is that the reality of a place is quite different from the mythology of it."* Martin Parr**

Since the poet Homer of Iona (800 B.C. - 701 B.C.) of epic adventures of the *Iliad and Odyssey*, the intriguing stories of Amazon warriors have ignited the imagination of the ancient world. Their fascinating personalities and unorthodox lifestyles have been woven into many myths and legends in action-packed poems of the *Iliad*. The Greeks have popularized the mythology of a tribe of women who supposedly hated men and lived without them in their territory in the Sipone, the Pontus area of the Black Sea of the Anatolian peninsula, immediately northwest of the Armenian Highlands. For procreation, the Amazon women would spend the night with Gargangean tribe of only men and then return to their home in the morning. They would keep a female baby and either kill the male baby or return it to its father.

Geographers now call Ancient Near East as Eurasia, which has served as a bridge between Europe and Asia, absorbing the influence of both continents by blending distinct cultures of its own. Many scholars now consider Armenia as the birthplace of civilization based on a number of vital recent archeological evidence along the Euphrates River. While today the majority of its people are Muslim and speak Turkish, not too long ago, it was populated by the aborigine Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians.

Homer called Near East a "land of dreams," for having a rich history that often blends fact with myth. In the vast east, amid the majestic mountain ranges of Armenia, reigns supreme the iconic Mount Ararat, the reputed resting place of Noah's Ark after the Biblical Flood 4,358 years ago (in 2,348 B.C.). A few miles from Europe, on Anatolia's western shores stood Troy, the site of the legendary Trojan War. And to the north of the peninsula, along the coast of the Black Sea, lay the fabled land of the Amazons, the mythical tribe of fierce female warriors, captivating the admiration of the ancient as well as the modern world.

The Amazon warriors fought in the legendary Trojan War and their grand army invaded Athens. They fought against the greatest Greek champions such as Hercules, Theseus, and Achilles. The news of their impending attack used to send shock waves through empires. They inspired fear into the mightiest of all kings. These were the beautiful, horse-riding, bow- and-arrow wielding warriors to be respected by any worthy adversary.

Herodotus, Plato, and Strabo never doubted their existence and their stories. Thousands and thousands articles and books have been written about the Amazon warriors. Amazon-like warriors featured in the stories of various countries such as Egypt, Persia, Middle East, Central Asia, China, and very recently in Armenia. Of the prior discoveries of graves of supposedly Amazon warriors, none had the trappings of a true Amazon warrior who had to show serious wounds from having been engaged in battles. To cash in on the popularity of this creature, Hollywood has made

innumerable movies about them, especially the latest one being the popular *Wonder Woman* (Lynda Carter) TV shows and WW84 *Wonder Woman* Movie.

After a brief introduction to the recent discovery of an Amazon warrior buried in Armenia, some of its important implications of this Godsend gift will be discussed.

While fossils of female warriors have been unearthed elsewhere in Eurasia, but none had convincing aspects for being an Amazon warrior until in 2017 in Armenia they found the remains of a young female warrior. interred with her weapons and jewelry. She had a number of battle wounds such as in her knee from an arrow shot and was apparently axed to death in combat.

A well-known German researcher of Hittite History, named Friedrich Cornelius, has suggested that the term Amazon is formed by the word Am - a popular word for mother or woman (also in Hittite language) - in combination with the name of the land **Azzi (proto-Armenia)** , so Amazon means Woman of the Azzi (of Hayassa-Azzi kingdom).

In 2017, Dr. Anahit Khudaverdyan, an accomplished archaeologist, and her colleagues of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia announced the breaking news that they had discovered the grave of a 5ft 5in tall injured female warrior in her 20s who had died during the Iron Age. Based on the wounds to her skeleton, she may have been the kind of Amazon warrior about which the ancient Greeks have extensively written.

The skeleton of a 3000 year old woman was found at the Bover I necropolis near the town of Shnogh (means "abundant soil" in Armenian) in the Lori province (marz) in a flexed manner with ceramic vessels and jewelry, dating 8th to 6th century B.C. On account of her jewelry, she was at first thought to be a high-status member of society. Bover used to be a place for animals to shelter in winter, close to world-renowned Haghpat and Sanahin monasteries.

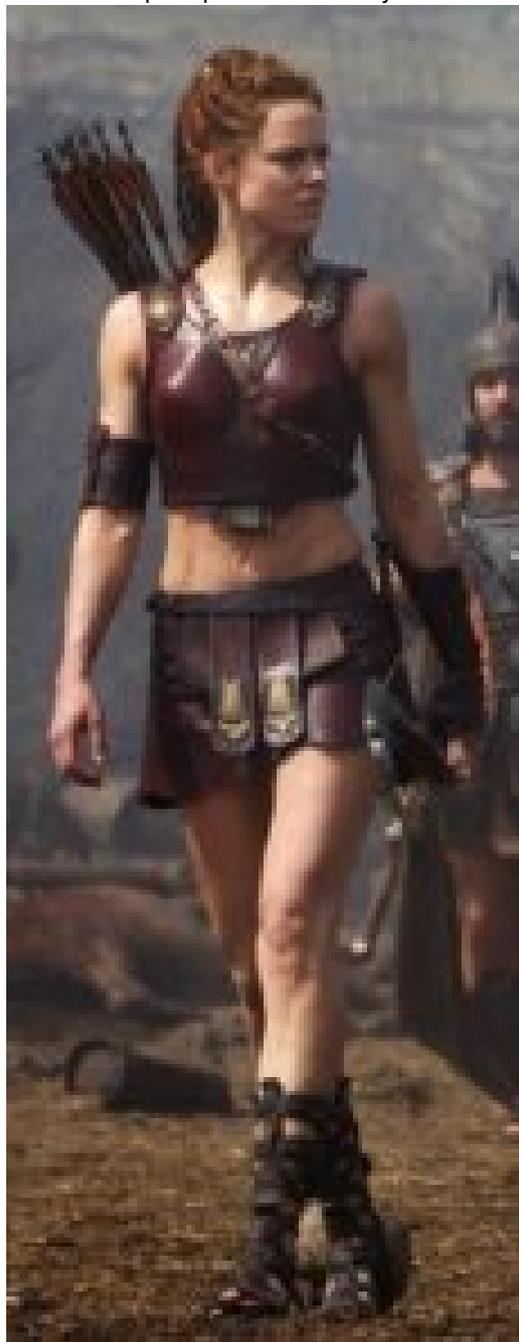
Later on, scars on this woman's strong and injured bones suggested that the remains of this ancient woman are those of a legendary Amazon warrior. The type of woman who had captured the admiration of the ancient Greeks was held in wonderment. The sheer lionization of these fierce warriors continued all the way to the present.

Upon inspection of her body, the researchers concluded that she was a trained archer adapted to drawing a bow across her chest. Moreover, her thigh bones were quite well developed with muscles, perhaps due to special military training activities such as horse riding. An iron arrowhead was found, lodged in her left knee that had healed long before her death. In addition to this injury, the woman's left hip and right thigh bone showed chop marks and a stab wound in her left lower leg. She must have been axed to death. All these wounds indicate that she must have suffered many different kinds of cuts before her death in battle. The archaeologists think they have finally found a real Amazon warrior.

Accordingly, here are some of the salient implications of this important find for Armenia and for

those who are interested to know and appreciate the existence of the Amazon warriors of Eurasia.

The implication of the find of the Amazon warrior grave in Armenia is crucial since it is in the territory the Greeks have known them to live. Every country has had female warriors, every country has had tomboys, and every country has had a program to train their females against the marauding nomadic people of mostly Turkic and Mongolian origin exploding from the Central Asia steppes.



Constant vigil for marauders for plunder was more frequent and widespread in those days. These females should not be confused with the Amazon warriors. The Greeks for generations have written about them as living in the Black Sea area in the close vicinity of Greater Armenian Kingdom. Therefore, the Amazon warriors may have also inhabited the Armenian Highlands.

Another implication of the find in Armenia is that the Armenian archaeologists claim to have found a

~~necropolis, not a single grave as other countries did, were cemetery, especially an ancient historical~~ burying ground. While any graveyard can be loosely called necropolis, but the word is best used to describe a very large burying ground made up of tombs or the ancient grave site of a famous or powerful historical figure just like the pyramid at Giza (in Egypt) is located in a necropolis of pharos. In Latin, necropolis literally means "a city of the dead," from the Greek burial site *Nekropolis*. Armenia has found a necropolis rather than a grave of one or two female warriors of the past. As excavations proceed, it is expected to find more skeletons of Amazon warriors in the designated necropolis of Amazon warriors.

Myth or fact, the implication is that the Amazon warriors have captivated the imagination of many ancient writers, notably of Homer who included them in the legendary Trojan wars. Since the time of Homer, stories told of fierce warriors dwelling beyond the Mediterranean world, striking fear in the mighty empires of antiquity. Amazon warriors may very well been an abstraction, its absolute power, combat capability, and independence of men, have had a definite appeal to the ego of the feminists. As a result, there are many people who would like to see a certainty as to where these brave and capable soldiers lived and died.

As for Armenia, the implication is very simple. The find is a real Godsend gift to this tiny country that can benefit immensely from visitors to the necropolis of Amazon warriors. Imagine a promotional statement like: Visit Bover I in Armenia to see the real Amazon warriors' necropolis. This presents a real window of opportunity to offer tourists sites in Armenia other than beautiful ancient churches and monasteries; enchanting landscape; great food and drinks; and unforgettable hospitality of warm, welcoming people ready to accommodate their guests.

The Amazon warrior is one of the major unsolved mysteries of the world. There is unbridled curiosity about Amazon warriors whether they existed and, in fact, were brave and capable soldiers. Women as well as men would like to see these mysteries unraveled once for all. Therefore, there would be an abundance of people waiting to visit Armenia if the site is properly promoted to the archaeological tourist. Armenia is also home to the oldest winery, the oldest leather shoes, the oldest stone tools, etc. in the world. A travel package deal will be very attractive.

The following three strategies should enable an archeological site to be successful in attracting visitors and will put Shnogh town on the world map as a destination to see a real Amazon warrior: Make the site come alive, make the site relevant, and make it an exciting experience through narrative.

Make the Site Come Alive. Archaeological sites suffer from being filled with collapsed columns, broken statues, and scattered skeletons. It would be hard for visitors to interact with the "dead". Therefore, we need to challenge them with interactivity to inject some enthusiasm in them before they become bored. We need to find ways to add beauty, to appeal to the senses, to create aesthetic pleasures, and to make pleasant memories.

As you would agree, ideas have changed the world; let some ideas change Armenia as well for the better. First off, let us place the picture of an Amazon warrior in action on a horse-back as though in combat at the airport in Yerevan (the capital city of Armenia) to generate excitement and anticipation of visiting the site. At the archeological site (Bover I), have a young girl on a horse back in an Amazon warrior costume, carrying the same kind of weapons, wearing the replicas of jewelry, and attired scantily in leather slit skirts would add ambience to the site. Additionally, put a platform for the visitors to mount the horse to sit behind the Amazon girl for a photo op. Naturally, sugar daddy Diaspora could finance a canopy over part of the necropolis as a shelter for the find and the tourists.

Another girl could be dressed up as *Wonder Woman* as a volunteer docent. Other ideas include rubber arrows for the kids to use at a target; an Amazon life-size warrior photo stand-in (also called a face-in-the hole board, photo cutout board or comic foreground) is a large board with an Amazon warrior archer image printed on it and that has one or more holes cut out where people can stick their face through the board for humorous effect and photo ops; and, finally, distribute free Amazon warrior bands and bandanas for all to wear and take home with them as small souvenirs.

It would be a great idea to bring the warrior's skeleton to life by recreating the possible physical appearance of the girl based on her bones and imputed muscles. For the missing parts, CT (computerized tomography) can help create a virtual 3D image and then a plastic cast is made of her life-size body. With a promotional slogan and tagline like "See the real Amazing Amazon warrior in all her glory of strength and beauty." Millions and millions of people would like to see "a real" Amazon woman.

Make the Site Relevant. In the 21st century, modern culture of the world predominantly views time as linear. What is passed is passed, but we want to attract more visitors to an ancient site, then we want to make the past relevant. Values such as courage, competition, intelligence, beauty, honesty, etc. have not changed throughout history. They just need to be re-interpreted to become relevant again.

Center to the concept of relevancy for an archaeological site or complex is the notion of what mattered in the past with what is popular at the present. Women have always been strong, look at *Wonder Woman*, the "descendant" of the Amazon warriors. Throughout history, perhaps woman have always wanted to be treated equally, tacitly, if not vociferously. This wish has not been the product of the 19th or the 20th century alone. As in the past, modern women are still fighting for recognition.

The Amazon warriors symbolize the quest for acceptance, respect, and equality. These women warriors have inspired the strong and capable Amazon warrior myths. In recent years, new archaeological finds such as in Armenia substantiate the fact they existed. Although they were not a matriarchal society, the ancient people of Armenia lived within a social order that was more accepting and accommodating the female members than our current society does. History has it

that in the Armenian society of the past, many wives have taken arms to fight along their husbands in battle against the enemy. Then as now, the quest of the Amazon warriors are as relevant to today's society as it was to ancient people.

Make it a Narrative. Visitors to archeological sites are usually confronted with dates, facts, and statistics of the finds. Very few people would remember them and find them interesting. Therefore, storytelling is the best approach to introducing the finds. To make the site more attractive, we should capitalize on the power of storytelling which is the most memorable method of communication known to humankind.

When we analyze the language used by museums, we notice that they systematically focus on the explanation, almost entirely ignoring the experience. Research shows that people remember information when it is woven into narratives "up to 22 times more than facts alone". A story is nothing but facts "wrapped into emotions". The Armenian archeologist Dr. Anahit Khudaverdyan tells the story of the Amazon warrior how she got wounded and killed rather than just resorting to explanation of dates, facts, and statistics. That is why we remember stories far more efficiently than facts alone. It behooves all Armenians to make the Armenian Amazon warrior find an exciting experience through narrative so people would remember and want to see her one of these days when COVID-19 virus bids goodbye to the world.

As women of the world feel to be misrepresented, misjudged, and even maligned in the areas of human power and capabilities, they are hungry for equality with men. When it comes to gender, they have been rated as second class citizens. Compared to men, women have been the prohibitive underdogs. Perhaps Homer wanted to elevate the image of the female underdog. As a result, he must have created the strong, brave and capable Amazon warriors. Homer or whoever wrote the epic poems of the Iliad, must have been a person of high moral standards for he or she had represented women as brave, capable, beautiful, and endowed with big hearts of a warrior. Sophocles (in Electra) said: "Remember: women may not be too weak to strike a blow."

Ironically, if Homer would come to visit us today, he would be appalled to see how the vast majority women of the world are being treated --as inferior to men. The world still holds the same attitudes toward women that they belong in the kitchen, serve in the bedroom, and take care of children. Forty percent (40%) of the world women are not supposed to show their faces in public. Is this a progress or regress from the days of the Glory that was Greece?! You be the judge of it.

In sum, Armenia has produced evidence of the women warriors that must have inspired the Amazon warrior myths. The archaeological find of a young woman representing a true Amazon warrior is a Godsend gift to Shenogh town in Armenia for the iron-age gift that won't stop giving. What is more, these warriors have universal appeal around the world for they are apolitical and non-religious figures whose stories have entertained us for many, many years. Additionally, they are not exactly inconspicuous flowers on long stems, so to speak. Ancient Greek mythologists and sculptures have

represented the Amazon females as being tall, strong, and quite head turners into the bargain. Men as well as women like to see beautiful women. They are a thing of admiration and beauty on the sexy side of the equation. There is a pent up demand to see a real one.

As you know, the travel and tourism industry is the lifeblood of many economies around the world. In the 21st century, tourism has become the biggest industry in the world. Shnogh town will become an archaeological paradise destination with researchers finding thousands of treasures to put this humble town on the list of tour agents --for tourists will beat a path to see the Amazon warriors. From Yerevan, it is only 69 miles (111 Km) north of the capital city. Perhaps, we should even change the name of Shnogh to Amazon City or nickname it as such. UNESCO treasures of Haghpat and Sanahin monasteries in the beautiful wooded area of Lori province (marz), and the Godsend gift of Amazon warriors in the nearby town of Shnogh will put Armenia on the world map for archaeological tourism.

Even a picture like the above one will attract attention at the Yerevan airport.

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There are no comments yet.