

In this topic, we will explore the links between myth and the portrayal of power. In the Greeks and Romans' world, myths were more than just stories; myths stood as symbols of power that was used to define a civilisation, city, family or even an individual. When combined with architecture and sculpture they could stand as statements of power for those exhibiting them. For the Greeks we will examine the Athenian use of the Centauromachy on the Parthenon. We will also examine the Amazonomachy as depicted on the Temple of Apollo at Bassae.

The Centauromachy			The Amazonomachy		
1	Lapiths	A mythical race of humans based in Thessaly, northern Greece. They were a legendary, law-abiding tribe.	14	Amazons	The Amazons were a mythical race of women who came from Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). As a race they stayed clear of men except when they needed to repopulate. If they gave birth to a son, the baby was killed; if it was a girl, they became an Amazon.
2	Centaur	A mythical race that were half-horse, half-man, who were depicted as savage, uncivilised, and aggressive creatures. Unlike men, they lived in caves, hunted wild food, and fought with rocks.	15	Greeks	The rival to the Amazons, and someone the Amazons sided against, were the Greeks. There were two great battles between the Greeks and the Amazons.
3	Origin of the Centaurs	King Ixion was the ruler of the Lapiths and he had taken a liking to the Goddess, Hera. Zeus tricked Ixion when he made an image of Hera out of the clouds, Ixion coupled with the cloud, and the rains from the clouds gave birth to the Centaurs.	16	Battle 1: Heracles and Hippolyte	The first major battle was between Heracles and the Amazon Queen, Hippolyte, during his ninth labour.
4	Centaur and Lapiths Related	The father to the Centaur race was, therefore, also the King of the Lapiths.	17	Battle 2: The Attic War	The second major battle is called the Amazonomachy and happened after the ninth labour, when Heracles brought back an Amazonian bride for Theseus as a gift. The Amazons declared war on Athens, but were defeated by an army led by Theseus and Heracles.
5	Centauromachy	The mythical battle that took place between the Lapiths and the Centaurs. The Lapiths represent the civilised world, the Centaurs the barbaric, uncivilised world.	18	Amazonomachy	The two major battles represent the Amazonomachy and came to represent Greece's triumph over the foreign people.

Temple of Apollo at Bassae Frieze: Amazonomachy

19	Bassae	Bassae is a small town around 36 miles southeast of Olympia.
20	Temple of Apollo	Despite being a small town, it does contain a temple of some stature dedicated to the god, Apollo. It was built in 450BC by Iktinos, the same architect who helped design the Parthenon.
21		The frieze of the Temple of Apollo is unique in that it is displayed inside the columns rather than the outside, like all other temples. It allows the viewer to see the whole thing from one place.
22	Temple of Apollo Frieze	The frieze depicts the Heracleian Amazonomachy, which was Heracles' battle with the Amazons for the belt of Hippolyte.
23		The frieze is an Ionic one, which means it is a continuous frieze allowing the story of the battle to be displayed easily.
24	Frieze Design	Friezes, like metopes, were designed with three aims: (1) to be instantly recognisable to the viewer; (2) to create realism and movement; and (3) to fill the space so as not to leave big blank areas.

Parthenon Metopes: Centauromachy

9	Metopes	The Centauromachy is displayed on the metopes of the Parthenon. Of the 92 metopes that ran around the Parthenon, 34 were dedicated to the Centauromachy.
10	Metope Design	Metopes were designed with three aims: (1) to be instantly recognisable to the viewer; (2) to create realism and movement; and (3) to fill the space so as not to leave big blank areas.



11		(1) To be instantly recognisable: The Centauromachy is a great example of a recognisable story, and the centaur in the middle dominates the scene.
12	Example of a Metope	(2) To create realism and movement: The centaur rearing up on his hind legs gives a real sense of action in the scene, especially with the Lapith cowering underneath him. The whole scene has a sense of victory for the centaur in this scene.
13		(3) To fill the space: The scene has minimal blank space and the artist has filled the space cleverly. The centaur fills much of the scene with his hind legs filling the bottom left hand corner, and his arms filling the top right. It is likely he held a weapon which would have filled the top left hand corner, and, of course, the lapith fills the bottom right hand corner.



25		(1) To be instantly recognisable: The Amazonomachy is a great example of a recognisable story, and the scene shows a man fighting two women. Amazons were often depicted showing one bare breast, and this can be seen on the Amazon on horseback.
26	Example from the Frieze	(2) To create realism and movement: The drapery on the right-hand woman depicts the movement of the woman towards the left. The Amazon and man in conflict show a mid-fight scene as the Amazon tries to flee. However, the horse is somewhat out of proportion.
27		(3) To fill the space: The sculptor has used action well to fill the spaces. The left and right characters almost mirror each other in pose. The bent knees suggest action, while fitting them neatly into the space. The horse fills the centre of the scene, and the Amazon being pulled back cleverly bridges the gap between them.