

Give a detailed account, including variants, of Alexander's encounter with Thalestris in the sources.

Alexander the Great was the king of Ancient Greece's Macedon kingdom between 336 and 323BC. In the modern world, he is seen as one of the most courageous and dominant military forces of the ancient world. However, it is also apparent that with these great military conquests, came a fulfilled sex life. There are many ancient sources that discuss many of Alexander's sexual encounters, including that with Thalestris- Queen of the Amazons- in roughly 330BC. For example, Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*- which has been published by David Townsend in 1995- discusses this encounter in detail. Firstly, he discusses how the Amazon queen approached Alexander's camp with "virgin retinue" (Townsend, 1996)- meaning a group of virgins to accompany the queen, most likely as an offer to Alexander. This source then discusses how Thalestris discussed with Alexander how his "meagre body ill fit his frame", shortly following up with "sometimes mightier courage dwells inside a middling body" (Townsend, 1996). This clearly shows how the Amazon queen could not argue that Alexander was not a powerful leader. This could be the reason for the queen's next suggestion to him, as she tells him that she came to see him to "fill her womb and leave again" (Townsend, 1996). The reasons she gives for this offer include how if a female is born the child would keep the queen's powerful characteristics, and how if a male is born the child then he'd be returned to his father. This extract from the source ends with saying how the queen achieved what she wanted, and left to her city right away. This clearly shows what their encounter was like, as it was clearly carried out in a move to produce a powerful offspring that either of them could use as an heir to their thrones.

However, it is apparent that another ancient source- Quintus Curtius Rufus's *Historia de Preliis*- also discusses the encounter between Alexander and Thalestris, but includes a different aspect of the story. This source discusses the letters sent between the two leaders prior to them initially meeting. The first letter from Alexander discusses his previous military conquests, and threatens Thalestris that the same would happen to the Amazons if a tribute is not paid. Thalestris responds to this with a letter of her own, in which she says how the Amazons could put a fight unlike any other civilisation Alexander had conquered beforehand. Thalestris then proceeds to discuss how the Amazonian men and women live apart- only meeting up once a year during a festival to carry out sexual relations- and how there are "two hundred and fourteen thousand women, all undefiled by men" (Quintus Curtius Rufus, n.d.). Thalestris then ends her letter with a warning to Alexander and his army, saying how they should not feel proud if they win, as they would have only defeated women. This prompts Alexander to reply with a letter one more time, saying how they could have a battle if the Amazons wanted, or they could merely meet up peacefully and "converse", although the use of this word is vague and may suggest

something else. This extract ends with the Amazons sending Alexander's army 20 horses in a sign of peace. It is clear that both sources have different accounts on how this encounter occurred, yet it is clearly agreed that something did in fact happen between Alexander the Great and Thalestris.

Reference List

Quintus Curtius Rufus, n.d.. *Historia de Preliis*. Pp. 76-79.

Townsend, D., 1996. *The "Alexandreis" of Walter of Châtillon A Twelfth-Century Epic*. pp. 131-133.