

BOOK REVIEW

Women & War in Antiquity. Edited BY JACQUELINE FABRE-SERRIS and ALISON KEITH. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 341. Hardcover, \$55.00. ISBN 978-1-4214-1762-2.

This much-needed volume is the result of the 2009 symposium that launched the European Network on Gender Studies in Antiquity (EuGeStA). Its sixteen essays (all written or translated into English) open the doors to an aspect of ancient warfare that has received too little attention thus far, that of women's role in war, both as historical actors and as a lens through which war was imagined. Both Greek and Roman topics are addressed, ranging from the Homeric epics to Claudian's Late Antique epic-panegyrics, from tragedy to elegy, from Carian queens to Roman Imperial women.

The essays are divided into two parts, one focused on literary criticism, the other with a historical approach. That said, the greatest strength of the volume as a whole is the fruitful dialogue between historians and literary critics that blurs the apparent structural and disciplinary divide. Another strength is the editors' forthrightness about what kinds of claims the extant ancient sources allow us to make. Written or produced by men and for men, the vast majority of our literary, historical, and material sources can be of little help in reconstructing the female experience of war in antiquity; instead, they "simultaneously bear witness to male views of female identity and to emotions and conduct that they themselves regard as characteristic of the female sex" (4).

Rather than summarizing each contribution, I highlight here several essays that exemplify the range and originality of the volume's contents. To begin the collection, Philippe Rousseau challenges the traditional interpretation of Hector's famous words to Andromache (*Il.* 6.490–3), commanding her to return to her weaving and leave the conduct of war to men, as a maxim about normative gender roles. He reads these lines together with two passages in the *Odyssey* that closely repeat them, when Telemachus addresses his mother at *Od.* 1.356–59 and again at *Od.* 21.350–53, and argues for an intentional intertextual relationship between the three passages, with the *Odyssey* quoting the *Iliad*, and the latter *Odyssey* passage

referring to the former. Based on his analysis of all three passages, Rousseau proposes that the famous Iliadic passage is no gnomic statement, but rather that Hector is referring to the *specific* battle that forced his brief withdrawal inside the walls of Troy. Therefore, by overgeneralizing Hector's words, we may have been misrepresenting the Homeric attitude towards women and war.

Yet not all women were shut out of battle like Andromache. Judith Hallett tackles the representation of warrior women in Rome, in an essay that synthesizes ancient historical narratives, Roman elegy, and sling-bullet inscriptions from the Perusine War to deconstruct the portrait of Fulvia, the infamously overbearing wife of Mark Antony (among others). Hallett deftly uses these diverse sources to argue that Plutarch's characterization of Fulvia as a woman who wished "to rule a ruler and command a commander" (Plut., *Ant.* 10.3) was born out of elegiac notions of the *domina*, who combined feminine sensuality with masculine power. Or, perhaps, Fulvia herself helped give birth to the *domina*-figure: Hallett ends the essay by emphasizing the importance "of exploring the intersections between historical reality and literary fiction, of recognizing that even historical Roman women are 'written,' and of considering if 'written women' may also be historical" (262–63).

The collective actions of women in Greek warfare are the focus of the essays written by Stella Georgoudi and Pascal Payen, which the editors wisely juxtaposed to draw attention to their conflicting theoretical frameworks. Georgoudi takes as her premise that women were involved in Greek civic life in a number of ways, whereas Payen maintains that women are absent from Greek war and reflections thereupon *precisely because* they were not citizens and were thus excluded from civic life. According to Payen, if barbarian women and the female relatives of tyrants are excepted, Greek women only engage in warfare as defensive warriors who act collectively; a famous foreign queen like Tomyris or Artemisia thus represents an inversion of male, civic order. Georgoudi, on the other hand, dismisses the idea of "inversion" or "anomaly" as an explanation of women's role in Greek war. By examining accounts of women's collective actions in war, she instead proposes that we should talk about women's "participation," "collaboration," and "cooperation" with the men of their communities.

Women and War in Antiquity is a remarkable collection of historical and literary research, one that has much to interest the generalist, yet is sure to be an essential text for scholars of both ancient warfare and gender in antiquity. There are, of course, topics whose absence are surprising (e.g., warmongering queens of the Hellenistic world, the phenomenon of the war-bride, *Lysistrata* and the farce of

women at war, etc.), but instead of criticizing Fabre-Serris and Keith's volume for these gaps, we should congratulate them for editing a volume that shows how much exciting work there is still to be done on women and war in antiquity. As women in the United States military are cleared for combat missions, as the Senate debates whether women should be eligible for the draft, as female refugees from war-zones migrate throughout Europe and North America, it is all the more important to examine deep-seated historical ideas about women as participants, victims, and symbols of war. This excellent volume lights the way.

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