

11-2016

**Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Alison Keith, eds., *Women and War in Antiquity*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. 360. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-4214-1762-2) \$55.00.**

Aaron Seider  
*College of the Holy Cross*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj>

---

## Recommended Citation

Seider, Aaron (2016) "Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Alison Keith, eds., *Women and War in Antiquity*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. 360. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-4214-1762-2) \$55.00." *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 4 , 290-293.  
Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol43/iss4/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New England Classical Journal* by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.

advantageously to understanding spatial and functional aspects of, say, the Spanish Steps in Rome, the (indoor but deliberately public) *Grand escalier* at the Opéra Garnier in Paris, or, for that matter, of Pre-Columbian sites in the New World.

*NECJ* 43.4

Pieter Broucke  
Middlebury College

Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Alison Keith, eds.,  
*Women and War in Antiquity.*

Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. 360. Cloth  
(ISBN 978-1-4214-1762-2) \$55.00.

A stimulating collection of papers edited by Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Alison Keith, *Women and War in Antiquity* explores the role of women in what the ancients regarded as the most masculine of realms. Delivering roughly equal coverage of Greek and Roman topics, this volume's sixteen chapters are divided into literary (Part I) and historical explorations (Part II), all of which have their origin in the inaugural meeting of the European Network on Gender Studies in Antiquity (Eu-GeStA) in 2009. The scholars in this collection supply thought-provoking interpretations of some of the most central aspects of antiquity from the perspective of gender studies. Although there are moments where one may quibble with a particular point or question a specific approach, the volume provides fresh insight and opens up avenues for further exploration. For those interested in gender studies, the book showcases the potential for gaining new insights through the application of theoretical perspectives, while the energetic readings of particular subjects undertaken in its individual chapters will benefit interested scholars. Since space is limited, my review concentrates on the book's introduction and representative chapters from its two parts.

Fabre-Serris and Keith divide their introduction between an exposition of the volume's central questions and a description of its individual chapters. They offer a series of points that distinguish their book's contents and subtend its arguments:

their collection brings together papers on Greece and Rome as well as the literary and the historical; and it explores the roles women could play in ancient warfare by moving away from an oppositional model toward “multifaceted approaches to and perspectives on gender relations” (2). The majority of the introduction previews the chapters to come, and while these paragraph-long capsules lucidly present each scholar’s argument, it may have been worthwhile to decrease the space devoted to prospective summary in favor of a more extensive consideration of the pieces’ potential dialogue on the collection’s major themes. The editors, for instance, remark how the concluding discussion in 2009 moved toward the redefinition of “masculine” and “feminine” in antiquity, a fresh perspective that fit productively with the conference’s consideration of modern writing on war by women. It would have been worthwhile here to synthesize how the book’s current papers both contribute to this new movement in gender studies and connect with women’s writing on modern conflicts, particularly given that, as the editors rightly note, one of the challenges of studying these topics in “antiquity is that women’s perspective on war is known only through writings by men” (4).

In “War, Speech, and the Bow Are Not Women’s Business,” the first of nine chapters in Part I, Philippe Rousseau analyzes three Homeric passages where a man attempts to stop a woman from asserting control over a specific situation. Differing only by a word, these three and a half verses are first spoken by Hector to Andromache about war in *Iliad* 6, and then are repeated twice by Telemachus to Penelope, first about speech in *Odyssey* 1 and then about the bow in *Odyssey* 21. Arguing convincingly that these repetitions with variation are meaningful, Rousseau explores how the connections between these passages figure the gender of different spaces and roles in society. Rousseau’s analysis provides insight into the relationships between Hector and Andromache in the *Iliad* and Telemachus and Penelope in the *Odyssey*, and it would be productive to follow up his brief remarks comparing Telemachus and Hector’s behavior with analysis of Penelope and Andromache as well, particularly given the opportunity to study the intersection of gender with age.

A later chapter in the literary part of the book, “Women and War: From the Theban Cycle to Greek Tragedy,” takes the Homeric epics as background for an exploration of how Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* and Euripides’ *Phoenissae* construct the familial and political roles of women. In her discussion of these tragedies, Louise Bruit Zaidman concentrates on scenes where the female chorus, Jocasta, or Antigone address Thebes’ conflict, which fluctuates between an external and civil war. Zaidman shows how in the *Seven* the female chorus moves from a passive to

an active role, offering “a collective voice” (90) which ends by mourning the funerals it was unable to prevent. Euripides’ play concentrates on specific members of Laius’ family, and by considering Antigone’s behavior in relation to Helen’s in the *Iliad*, Zaidman shows how Antigone evolves from a fearful girl into the leader of the city’s lamentations. Zaidman perceptively remarks on the significance of this tragedy’s praise of Equality given its performance in a time when Athens was beset by external and internal conflicts, and her comments illuminate how greater consideration might be given to how the male actors’ performance of these complex and powerful female voices could have impacted their audiences.

The volume’s second part considers the historical relationship between women and war, and a representative example from its seven chapters is Pascal Payen’s suggestive contribution, “Women’s Wars, Censored Wars? A Few Greek Hypotheses (Eighth to Fourth Centuries BCE).” Here, Payen engages with the writings of Nicole Loraux, a frequent interlocutor for *Women and War*, and argues that there has been a habit in feminist studies “to leave women on the fringes,” far from “the same forms of violence and the same excesses as men in time of war” (218). Yet, surveying the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides, Payen shows the participation of barbarian women in open warfare and of Greek women in street battles against invading armies, and his examples of the latter raise particularly intriguing questions about the gendering of a fight that is truly collective as opposed to combat waged by all-male phalanxes.

In “Women and *Imperium* in Rome: Imperial Perspectives,” Stéphane Benoist analyzes the characterization of Roman and barbarian women as a reflection on the men with whom they are associated. Benoist argues that the forceful presence of women in war, a “naturally masculine” arena, “signals not only their misconduct but also the dysfunction of masculine political institutions” (274). Benoist’s overall argument is convincing, but it would be beneficial to further ground some of the chapter’s specific claims, which concern sources as diverse as Tacitus’ *Annales*, the *Historia Augusta*, and inscriptions from the *CIL*, in a more extensive consideration of genre and rhetorical aim, particularly in terms of exploring the implications for women’s agency as the principate develops.

As I hope my review makes clear, Fabre-Serris and Keith have assembled an impressive collection of papers that offer insightful interpretations of the relationship between women and war in a variety of Greco-Roman literary and historical contexts, with the chapters not described here treating topics such as Seneca’s *Troades*, elegiac mistresses, women’s actions in warfare in ancient Greece, and the literary representation of Fulvia. To scholars interested in gender more generally or

in the specific topics of individual chapters, this volume's penetrating exploration of a variety of evidence will prompt productive questions for further thought.

*NECJ* 43.4

Aaron Seider  
College of the Holy Cross

Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds.  
*Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World.*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 296. Cloth  
(ISBN 978-0-19-027829-8) \$74.00.

This handsome volume in honor of David Konstan brims appropriately with insightful, authoritative scholarship of considerable breadth, spanning the classical world from Archaic Greek poetry through St. Augustine. A richly textured collection, it expands the category of emotion to encompass diffuse affect and attitudes such as goodwill or positive outlook. At the same time, its focus on hope, joy, and affection begins to counterbalance the grave and occasionally morose emphasis previous scholars have placed on negative emotions arising from situations of conflict, suffering, and loss (e.g. Braund 2003, D. Cohen 1995, Sternberg 2005). All foreign terms are translated and/or transliterated as needed. With the exception of the essay by Ed Sanders, the contributions are directed toward scholars and graduate students. The eleven essays fall into three sections: one on hope, the next on joy and happiness, and the last on fellow feeling and kindness.

The bottom layer in this Festschrift cake, as it were, is Hope. Observing that emotion metaphors furnish a helpful bridge between cultures, Douglas Cairns examines the metaphorical construction of *elpis* in archaic and classical Greek poetry. He deftly explores whether *elpis* even constitutes an emotion. Is *elpis* "hope," marked by fervent desire, or is it "expectation," a more rational calculation that can foresee bad outcomes as well as good ones? Some instances are ambiguous; in others, the context points clearly to one of those two meanings. Cairns concludes that our desiderative hope "is a distinct and prototypical sense of *elpis* in archaic and classical Greek" (44). And in those cases, he asks, is *elpis* helpful or destructive, i.e., bound up with folly and ruin? Cairns finds: "Homeric epic is a significant exception, but