

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Deborah Gera. *Warrior Women: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus*. Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997. xi + 252 pp. Nlg 151.00 US \$95.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-10665-9.

Joyce Tyldesley. *Hatchepsut: The Female Pharaoh*. New York: Viking, 1996. xvii + 270 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-670-85976-4.

Reviewed by Barton C. Hacker (Smithsonian Institution)
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Women on the Edge of Ancient War

Although these are both fine books, neither has a great deal to say about women and war, nor indeed about ancient military institutions and warfare in general. Because the available literature on women and war in the ancient world is so scanty, however, even relatively marginal scholarly treatments are not to be ignored.

Deborah Gera holds an Oxford doctorate in classics and currently lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. *Warrior Women: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus* contains brief notices of fourteen Greek and barbarian women of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. The book has two major parts. The first is an introduction to the treatise as a whole, including the Greek text and its translation in parallel columns ("Text and translation," pp. 5-11). In the second section, Gera analyzes the anonymous notices in exhaustive (and exhausting) detail, drawing upon the full array of classical sources and an extensive bibliography of modern commentary. This is a monograph clearly intended for classical scholars and not for very many of the rest of us.

Notwithstanding its meticulous scholarship, *Warrior Women* is badly mistitled. It contains little about its titular subject or even, for that matter, about war, which appears largely as a more or less incidental activity of the states these women ruled. There are two modest exceptions. a section of the introduction called "War, weaving, and wiles: gender roles" briefly discusses "Women at

war" and "Plato's female guardians" (pp. 24-26). In the book's second part, the section on Zarinaea, a Scythian queen, examines the ancient identification of the Scythians as a race of warrior women along with Zarinaea's battlefield exploits and the links between Scythians and Amazons (pp. 88-95).

Joyce Tyldesley has a different problem in reconciling title and subject in *Hatchepsut: The Female Pharaoh*. As a pharaoh, Hatchepsut (or Hatshepsut, the U.S. spelling) adopted a male persona and reigned for two decades, but too little is known about her/him for a real biography. Tyldesley therefore gives us a life and times woven into three main strands: the king and her/his immediate family (the Tuthmosides), how she/he was remembered after her/his death, and the latter-day study and interpretation of her/his life and reign. She does this very well. An Oxford-trained archaeologist, Tyldesley wears her erudition lightly, offering her intended general audience a fascinating word-and-picture glimpse into Egypt at the middle of the second millennium BCE.

Hatchepsut's aggressively militaristic family founded the Eighteenth Dynasty, inaugurating the New Kingdom. While accepting the traditional pharaonic role as head of the armed forces, Hatchepsut maintained a relatively peaceful twenty-year reign. Accordingly, military matters form only a small part of Tyldesley's story. Her second chapter, on the Tuthmosides, devotes several pages

(pp. 21-29) to the organization of the New Kingdom Egyptian army without mentioning women. Chapter Eight, "War and peace," does discuss Hatchepsut's military exploits and policies (pp. 137-45) but devotes equal space both to her/his male persona and to the country's foreign trade.

Both these works touch on the topic of women and war; in neither is it a major topic. Although they address quite different audiences, both provide solid scholarship

within their chosen spheres. Each may offer interested readers reliable (if small) pieces of the puzzle of women's relation to war in the ancient world.

This review was commissioned by Reina Pennington for H-Minerva.

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