

War Is Women's Business: Women and War Trauma in Greco-Roman Epic and Tragedy

In the words of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*: "war will be women's business!" (*Lys.* 538). *Lysistrata*'s words pointedly revise Hector's warning to Andromache: "war will be men's business" (*Il.* 6.492). By claiming war as women's business, *Lysistrata* calls attention to the burdens, both emotional and physical, that women shoulder in wartime.

Although research on ancient combat trauma has generally focused on men's experiences (Shay 1994, 2002; Tritle; Meineck and Konstan), recent scholarship has addressed the ways women are also implicated in and traumatized by war (e.g. Fabre-Serris and Keith, Raaflaub). This panel builds upon this emerging trend by focusing on women's experiences of war-related trauma in epic and tragedy. Our papers offer new approaches by applying modern trauma research to poetic representations of women in wartime. Each paper focuses on different aspects of women's war trauma: as wives and mothers of soldiers, as witnesses and victims of war violence, and as combatants. Together, these papers provide new perspectives on the various ways war *is* women's business, investigating how women experience and respond to war violence across the genres of epic and tragedy.

Panelist # 1 examines Penelope's immobility and resilience within the context of recent research on spouses of soldiers who went missing in action. This paper argues that, like many spouses of MIA soldiers, Penelope experiences her loss of Odysseus as an ongoing trauma in which Odysseus is psychologically present, but physically absent. This paper re-evaluates the *Odyssey*'s narrative strategies and its depiction of Penelope's grief, arguing that the epic was and is relevant to spouses of missing soldiers.

Panelist # 2 considers the tragic laments of mourning mothers in terms of their emphasis on the toil (*ponos*) of childbirth, a traumatic wound that has been re-opened through the loss of a

child in war. This paper relates the trauma of mourning mothers to the trauma of the entire community, considering how these mothers' laments express the historical reality of Athenian experience in the Peloponnesian War.

Panelist #3 considers the intervention of the Italian mothers in the conflict before the walls of Laurentum in *Aeneid* 11 within the context of the contemporary experience of female combatants in Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). Focusing on recent examples of female interventions in the conflict against ISIS, this paper unpacks the brief Vergilian passage and argues that it is a realistic representation of a female civilian response to nationalist conflict.

Panelist # 4 investigates Andromache's mourning for Hector in Seneca's *Troades* within the context of ancient and modern accounts of hallucination brought on by extreme grief at the loss of a spouse in combat. This paper concludes that Seneca portrays Andromache's grief realistically, revealing the traumatic effects of war on a spouse and mother in ways relevant to both ancient and modern women's experiences of war.

The panelists range from junior to established scholars, and our respondent is an internationally recognized expert on women and war in Greco-Roman poetry. Each paper will last 15 minutes, with five minutes for questions, leaving time for discussion conducted by the respondent, who will present brief remarks.

Bibliography

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