



Postcolonial Amazons: Female Masculinity and Courage in Ancient Greek and Sanskrit Literature

By Walter Duvall Penrose Jr.

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Scholars have long been divided on the question of whether the Amazons of Greek legend actually existed. Notably, Soviet archaeologists' discoveries of the bodies of women warriors in the 1980s appeared to directly contradict western classicists' denial of the veracity of the Amazon myth, and there have been few concessions between the two schools of thought since.

Postcolonial Amazons offers a ground-breaking re-evaluation of the place of martial women in the ancient world, bridging the gap between myth and historical reality and expanding our conception of the Amazon archetype. By shifting the center of debate to the periphery of the region known to the Greeks, the startling conclusion emerges that the ancient Athenian conception of women as weak and fearful was not at all typical of the world of that time, even within Greece. Surrounding the Athenians were numerous peoples who held that women could be courageous, able, clever, and daring, suggesting that although Greek stories of Amazons may be exaggerations, they were based upon a real historical understanding of women who fought.

While re-examining the sources of the Amazon myth, this compelling volume also resituates the Amazons in the broader context from which they have been extracted, illustrating that although they were the quintessential example of female masculinity in ancient Greek thought, they were not the only instance of this phenomenon: masculine women were masqueraded on the Greek stage, described in the Hippocratic corpus, took part in the struggle to control Alexander the Great's empire after his death, and served as bodyguards in ancient India. Against the backdrop of the ongoing debates surrounding gender norms and fluidity, *Postcolonial Amazons* breaks new ground as an ancient history of female masculinity and demonstrates that these ideas have a much longer and more durable heritage than we may have supposed.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Walter D. Penrose, Jr. is an Associate Professor of History at San Diego State University. He earned his doctorate at the City University of New York Graduate Center with a dissertation entitled "Bold with the Bow and Arrow: Amazons and the Ethnic Gendering of Martial Prowess in Ancient Greek and Asian Cultures." He specializes in the history of gender and sexuality in ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and South Asian contexts and has also published articles on gender, sexuality, and disability in the ancient Mediterranean, as well as on Sappho in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

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