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Peter Meineck and David Konstan, eds., *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. xiv, 310. ISBN 978-1-137-39885-7.

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Pick a war, any war, and one can usually select a defining battle injury: blunt trauma by clubs, maces, and battle hammers = Anglo-Saxon skirmishes; amputations = American and French revolutions, US Civil War; gangrene and sepsis = US Civil War; lung injuries and trench foot = World War I; and more recently, traumatic brain injuries = Gulf War conflicts. Common to many conflicts in many times, however, has been Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Combat Trauma (the term preferred in *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*) variously called Combat Stress Reaction (in the recent Middle East fighting), Battle Fatigue (in World War II), Shell Shock (World War I), and Soldier's Heart (US Civil War). Using current definitions, the essayists in this volume examine ancient Greek literature for evidence of PTSD.

The book is an outgrowth of a conference on "Combat Trauma and the Ancient Stage,"¹ organized with the goal of bringing together American veterans and the general public for discussions of war and society. The editors, David Konstan and Peter Meineck (both New York Univ.), have written on the emotions of ancient Greeks and the use of cognitive studies in analyzing Greek tragedies. Here they cull articles by thirteen scholars who argue that PTSD was, in fact, known to the Greeks from Homer onward and that it affected both combatants and their families.

The contributors, primarily classicists, address various topics, including whether PTSD existed in ancient Greece (Konstan); the effect of the brutality of war on local communities (Kurt Raaflaub, Brown Univ.); the experiences of women, both modern and ancient, following war (Corinne Pache, Trinity Univ., San Antonio); and psychological degeneration in the ancient world (Lawrence Tritle, Loyola Marymount Univ.). Tritle, who served as a lieutenant in the US Army during the Viet Nam War, has written extensively on ancient warfare. He contributes here a particularly poignant and perceptive essay on PTSD and the ongoing debates in current literature about its existence today or in the distant past. He brings to bear biochemistry and evolutionary biology to bolster his arguments:

These unhappy but true verdicts find confirmation in the scientific study of the human condition, the biochemical and physiological secrets of which and their impact on us humans continue to be revealed almost daily. The problem is that too few in the humanities pay attention to these. No less important, scientists and other researchers in the medical community focus on the recent past to explain the varied responses to battles while also ignoring literature, either Homeric, Greek drama, or that of the World Wars and Viet Nam, which record and preserve perhaps the truest voices of trauma and memory.² Of these voices, it is clear that those of the ancient world—Homer and Herodotus, the philosophers Gorgias and Lucretius, and the unknown witnesses recorded on the Epidaurian miracle inscriptions—while separated by millennia provided examples not only of battlefield horrors, but how those horrors continued into life after the battle.... (98)

Jason Crowley (Manchester Metropolitan Univ.), a specialist in the human experience of war, discusses with keen insight the incidence of PTSD in antiquity, comparing the American infantryman's experience with that of the Athenian hoplite. After sketching the history of PTSD, he evaluates the retrospective application of modern medical and psychiatric terminology and diagnoses. He includes a helpful bibliography of works on these topics.

1. At NYU, 20-21 April 2011.

2. See, e.g., J.H. Laurence and M.D. Matthews, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychology* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2012).

Sara Monoson (Northwestern Univ.) examines the influences of Socrates's combat experiences³ on his philosophy. She maintains that his multiple "deployments" and exposure to war trauma forged in him a personal resilience that shaped the way he faced his later trial and execution.

In a bit of a departure, Nancy Rabinowitz (Hamilton College), an authority on women in the ancient world, devotes her essay, "Women and War in Tragedy," to the effects of war on women both as prizes of the victors and as those left behind to endure in the absence of their men.

Nancy Sherman (Georgetown Univ.), a medical ethicist, addresses in great detail the issue of trust in war. She takes as her test case the Sophoclean character Philoctetes, a Greek warrior abandoned by his comrades because of an incurable affliction he suffers en route to the war at Troy. Specifically, she explores the attempts by Odysseus, using Neoptolemus as an intermediary, to obtain Philoctetes's bow (necessary for victory at Troy), through trickery and deception. The development of a bond of mutual trust between the young Neoptolemus and the long-suffering Philoctetes ultimately produces a stalemate that requires the divine intervention of Heracles for resolution.

Alan Sommerstein (Nottingham Univ.), in "Combat Trauma in Athenian Comedy: The Dog That Didn't Bark," examines three Aristophanic plays—*Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata*—set in the context of the long, demoralizing Peloponnesian War. In each case, he finds that "the main action of the play consists in an attempt (always successful) by the hero or heroine either to end the war or to opt out of it..." (226). Additionally, for each play, he lists and interprets the kinds of suffering that war brought to the Athenians.

In "The Battered Shield: Survivor Guilt and Family Trauma in Menander's *Aspis*," Sharon James (Univ. of North Carolina) considers the "transmitted" trauma of war, specifically PTSD, survivor's guilt, family trauma, and depression as they affect members of a family whose warrior-relative is thought dead. The complicated effects of his presumed death (until he returns) are analyzed in detail.

The penultimate essay "When War Is Performed, What Do Soldiers and Veterans Want to Hear and See and Why?" is by Thomas Palaima (Univ. of Texas), who has studied creative responses to war, especially in music and song, prose writings, and drama throughout history. His examples range from Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles to Walt Whitman, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Bruce Springsteen, and Johnny Cash. His is, oddly, the only essay that highlights the grisly physical trauma depicted in the *Iliad*: for example, "a ghastly decapitation in which the beheaded body of a soldier momentarily stands spurt-ing blood and spinal fluid upward like a fountain..." (266). He then vividly compares this to a first-person report of an IED death witnessed in Iraq. He concludes, "Write or speak or sing or act in a style that is direct, blunt, matter-of-fact, clear of vision, sincere, urgent, deep of feeling and humane, and you have a good chance of being heard by soldiers and veterans. This has been true for over three thousand years..." (275).

Writing from a first-person viewpoint, Paul Woodruff (Univ. of Texas), an author and playwright who was a junior officer in Viet Nam, compares Sophocles's *Electra* to Henrik Ibsen's *Ghost* in a study of opposites affected by the trials of war. He then compares the two plays to his own *Ithaca in Black and White*, written several years after his Viet Nam tour in order to purge recurring thoughts of two men who died because he could not provide timely help. His portrayal of a modern Ulysses as a Viet Nam vet will strike a chord for many who have undergone the sort of suffering Woodruff's play depicts.

Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks is not a historical study of war. The essays it collects are fundamentally inspired by the groundbreaking work of psychiatrist Jonathan Shay. In his *Achilles in Vietnam*,⁴ Shay, who has treated many veterans suffering from PTSD, attempts to apply the modern diagnosis of "combat trauma" to the war-weary characters of Homer's *Iliad*. In doing so, however, he, presumably quite unintentionally, gives short shrift to the many other devastating and incapacitating injuries sustained in combat. Shay's preference for the term "combat trauma" over "PTSD" is reflected in the book under review. In my view, this renaming of a well accepted psychiatric diagnosis is a serious weakness of the book. More generally, the application of a single authority's concepts (and biases) by essayists with little or no compe-

3 E.g., at the siege of Potidaea and the Battle of Delium during the Peloponnesian War.

4. Subtitle: *Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (NY: Atheneum, 1994).

tency in the relevant field is ill-advised and will disappoint readers with actual experience, either personal or professional, of PTSD.

One wishes the editors had included more contributors with medical, especially psychiatric, training and more with actual combat experience, as well as more discussion of the range of battlefield injuries (that is, all types of combat trauma). Also useful would have been more citations of anthropologists, archeologists, and forensic pathologists regarding PTSD, if not all forms of combat trauma. Having both medical and military experience, I resent the limiting of the term “combat trauma” to PTSD. It does a disservice to both veterans and civilians who have sustained war injuries of any sort.

With these caveats, I congratulate Peter Meineck and David Konstan on their good efforts to encourage a dialogue between veterans on the one hand and authors and artists on the other. *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks* is rich in novel and suggestive interpretations of classical literature in the context of combat trauma.