



Warrior Women: The Amazons Of Dahomey And The Nature Of War

Robert Edgerton

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Some prominent anthropologists have been joined by an eminent military historian in declaring that military combat - at all times and in all places - has been a male activity. They advance many reasons for this pattern, some more plausible than others. In fact, although warfare is typically conducted by men, in various places and at various times, women have fought bravely and well, and in the West African kingdom of Dahomey during the nineteenth century, they formed the elite corps of a successful army. Many European visitors to Dahomey commented favorably on their military bearing, finding them more impressive in discipline and maneuver than male Dahomean soldiers. When France invaded Dahomey in the early 1890s, their superior weapons won the war but all those French officers and men who wrote about their bloody battles against Dahomey declared not only that these women warriors were superior to male Dahomean soldiers, but that they were the equal of the French. Edgerton describes the history of these "Amazon," as they became known, their recruitment, training, and battle experience. Of particular interest to scholars interested in culture and gender today, these women believed that in order for them to carry out their martial roles, they had to transform themselves into men. How this was done, how the Amazons lived and fought, and what their experiences might mean for the understanding of women and warfare both in the past and present day are the subjects of this book.

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