

Heroic Sacrifice or Tainted Honor: Portrayals of Military Suicide in Herodotus' Histories

As ancient military history has widened its perspective on war and society, it has allowed for new topics to come under discussion and scrutiny. Within this new change, death and defeat have become prominent themes for analysis. While death might seem an obvious topic for the study of war and violence, new approaches have moved deaths off the battlefield. Recent studies have included the treatment of dead soldier's homecoming (Rees-2022), the societal interaction with war dead (Kucewicz-2020), and the construction of memory concerning defeat and loss (Trundle-2017). Suicide, in the context of military death, remains relatively untouched by contemporary scholarship. This essay investigates military suicide within the world of Herodotus' *Histories*, specifically looking at the case studies of the three Spartans who survive the initial Battle of Thermopylae only to commit suicide later. This is done to understand the motivations and societal pressures that would force an individual to make such a decision. In addition, this essay also takes into consideration why Herodotus chose to include these accounts and what was the lesson his intended audience was supposed to gain from hearing about them. The study of suicide, in the context of military affairs, provides a window into a societies expectations of its fighting men, and the manner and motivations of those men, should they fail to meet those expectations.

Bibliography

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