

The Mask Behind the Shield: Comparing Combat Trauma Amongst Greek and Roman Soldiers

In the Greek and Roman world, the concept of mental disability was nuanced and evolved to reflect medicinal knowledge and socio-cultural ideals of the time. This is especially true when attempting to understand the mentality of soldiers across antiquity. Stemming from debates around the mental dichotomies of Homeric heroes, scholars coined the idea of “combat trauma” to explore the individualized experiences of battle cross-culturally. Like the fate of Ajax, overwhelming emotions and shame led to suicide amongst soldiers who either sought to escape their pain or restore their honor in extreme cases. By using primary literature and secondary scholarship from both times, this presentation analytically compares the experiences of both Greek and Roman soldiers identified with combat trauma and the cultural acceptance of suicide in the face of honor. The comparison also identifies how both civilizations dismissed or aided in the livelihoods of their soldiers experiencing psychological distress. By pursuing this approach, this presentation seeks to understand how both populous perceived mental inflictions in the ancient world.

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