

Bridges

Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome Joint Lecture Series



Friday June 17, 2022 at 18h Rome, 19h Athens time

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Dulce et Decorum - *To Die for the Fatherland in Ancient Greece and Rome*

ABSTRACT

The Roman poet Horace famously wrote *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, 'it is sweet and fitting to die for one's fatherland', an expression that Wilfred Owen, poet and soldier during the First World War, called 'the old lie'. However, my research suggests that Horace's verse did not, contrary to the common opinion, represent a traditional Roman view. In Rome, victory was the only acceptable outcome. Thus, Rome as a society did not celebrate their fallen, nor did they bury them with honours. Instead, in my view, Horace gives voice to a Greek view that lauded the fallen youth and treated them as heroes. I believe further that Cicero was instrumental in introducing the concept in late Republican Rome, and that the idea was exploited by the novel imperial dynastic family, to make sense of the premature deaths of several young male members.

In my lecture, I will analyse and discuss the difference in the Greek and Roman view, while also providing a few examples of how the ancient ideas have been used and misused in other wars, historical and present.

The seminar will take place in a hybrid format, with live presence at the Swedish Institute at Athens, Mitseon 9, and via zoom link.

To register for zoom participation (obligatory), please contact swedinst@sia.gr