

There are few more dramatic events in history than a mutiny: conspiracy, violence, political or religious ideologues, and the often important historical ramifications serve to make mutinies intriguing subjects. Almost every field of historical study boasts at least a few scholars interested in this phenomenon, and consequently these apply the theories and procedures from their area of expertise to understand mutinies as historical phenomena. This presentation demonstrates how these different theories and approaches taken from various fields of study can be combined to understand mutinies as a category of human action throughout history and, in return, how such an understanding illuminates mutinous incidents reported in the Roman Republican army.

Historians examining the modern era often possess numerous investigative tools to analyze mutinies. For example, they might have access to government records (that in some cases contain the actual list of mutineers' demands and their correspondence), as well as accounts of the men involved (including not only commanders, officers and government officials, but in many cases those of the soldiers themselves). Oral histories can also provide a valuable source of information to the historian. Psychological research on the motivations and reactions of soldiers to the requirements of their service help inform the mindset of the typical soldier. In total, sources such as these can provide a detailed picture of military life and the causes of mutiny.

The methods by which those historians with more plentiful evidence approach the study of mutinies can be profitably applied to the study of mutinies in the ancient Mediterranean world. This comparative approach posits that although soldiers are often separated by great gulfs in time, culture and technology, warfare had a dramatic effect on those in combat and, despite the above differences, human beings generally respond in similar ways to what in many respects were similar military experiences. Time and place are of less significance than biochemical and physiological constants. Modern studies have demonstrated the universality of response to trauma and, no matter their origin, soldiers in battle are at risk for problems associated with combat trauma (even soldiers from so-called militaristic societies). Extensive studies already have compared the similarities between the ancient Greek and the modern battle experience. Evidence of these same problems in Roman armies further demonstrates that they are not new nor invented. These parallels provide an historical basis from which to study the personal and social impact of war. The analysis suggests that battle trauma sometimes led directly to military disintegration and mutiny both in the Roman army and in armies throughout world history.