



Seppuku: A History of Samurai Suicide

Andrew Rankin

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This astonishing book charts the history and practice of ritual samurai suicide from ancient times until the 20th century through primary sources, both literary and historical, many of them never before translated into English. The author has worked from documents such as medieval war tales, records of the samurai domains, and execution handbooks. The book benefits from an extensive introduction, footnotes, and bibliography, but is written also to appeal to the general reader. It is divided into four basic sections: "History to 1600" looks at cases of ritual suicide taken from historical texts from the 8th to the 17th century. "The Seppuku Ritual" draws on previously untranslated seppuku manuals from the 18th and 19th centuries to explain the correct procedure and etiquette, as well as the different stomach-cutting procedures, types of swords, attire, location, and even the refreshments served at the seppuku ceremony. "History after 1600" focuses on famed cases up to and including the 20th century, and "Paradigms" offers a selection of short quotations from authors and commentators down the centuries that sum up Japanese and non-Japanese attitudes to seppuku.

"As for when to die, make sure you are one step ahead of everyone else. Never pull back from the brink. But be aware that there are times when you should die, and times when you should not. Die at the right moment and you will be a hero. Die at the wrong moment, and you will die like a dog." -- Izawa Nagahide, *The Warrior's Code*, 1725

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