

Prometheus: a Case Study of Archaic and Classical Greek Exposure Punishment

The Promethean myth offers the oldest Greek accounts of crucifixion. This manuscript approaches the Archaic and Classical versions of the Promethean myth to extract information on capital punishment in the ancient world, more specifically, crucifixion. Martin Hengel, a historian of Judaism in the Hellenistic period, wrote the most extensive history of crucifixion to date including a four page chapter on Promethean execution, (Hengel, 11-14). Hengel's section combines Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman sources inadvertently overlooking the progression of the myth over time and the changes in the method of crucifixion by culture.

However, the nature of crucifixion changed through both time and civilization. A full study of Greek crucifixion would look at the earliest Greek authors such as Hesiod to Hellenistic material. To prove the necessity of an incremental and chronological approach to both crucifixion and the Promethean myth, this document focuses only on the eighth century to fifth century BCE, dissecting terminology used in Hesiod, Aeschylus, Plato, and comparing artistic depictions. Eighth to fifth-century vase depictions of Prometheus supply a rich source to help unfurl the history of crucifixion and terminology used for exposure punishments.

The complete study of Prometheus's suffering should not end with the fifth century as does this case study. Due to the development in the Promethean punishment, a chronological approach provides a beneficial perspective. New generations used the myth adjusting details to maintain relevancy to their sociopolitical needs. The Promethean myth faced significant vulnerability to gradual modification and reinterpretation not only because of its religious nature, but also because of the myth described the administration of punishment. Plato's version exemplifies such reinterpretation directly showing political divergence in the implementation of punishment at the end of the Classical period.

Hengel's general definition of crucifixion as torture via affixing one to or upon a structure of wood or stone by nails, chains, ropes, or impaling, is further explicated by considering Indo-European roots, examples of word usage, and accounts provided by Homer, Thucydides, Herodotus, and Darius I. The study of Archaic to Classical Promethean torture reveals clear changes in the idea of punishment by exposure. Common ingredients to all of the accounts included reveal Prometheus as bound to a pillar or cliff. Hesiod used ambiguous language but, given the collected examples, the punishers do not impale Prometheus, contrary to some translations. Dissimilarity in the accounts occurs most frequently in the binding descriptions. Every story, except for Plato's, fits the general definition of crucifixion first described by both Herodotus and Darius I. Consistent elements include display or exposure as part of the sentence. Conclusions show Archaic to Classical forms of crucifixion and the change of said punishment within the context of the Prometheus myths, yet in small case studies conclusions must remain theoretical warranting integration into broader research on the topics of mythology and punishment.

PRIMARY:

Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*

-----, *Prometheus Unbound*

Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*

Herodotus, *Histories*

Hesiod, *Works and Days*

-----, *Theogony*

Homer, *Iliad*

-----, *Odyssey*

Inscriptions of Behistan

Plato, *Gorgias*

-----, *Protagoras*

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

MNE 1309. Prometheus Bound. The Louvre

T20.1C. Prometheus & The Eagle. Musei Vaticani, in Vatican City.

T21.3 Prometheus or Zeus. The Louvre.

T21.5 Herakles & Prometheus Lyomenos. National Museum in Athens.

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