

## Alternative Forms of Piety: Execution, Trophies, and Triumphalism

Robert Turcan explains that the Romans “lived in obsessive fear of hazards,” constantly praying to the gods for survival. Seeking a god’s help required an act of piety or reverence towards the god one sought help from. An act of piety was traditionally a religious and ritualistic affair that required strict protocol. Libations, prayer, and sacrifice were necessary for the ritual and were completed upon an altar in a temple. This panel seeks to look at alternative forms of piety such as piked war trophies, purging through religious execution, and personifications as a part of Roman cosmology seen on triumphal monuments. Papers include: “Apotropaic Human Trophies via Crucifixion, Hanging, and Impaling”, “Blood on the Altar and Bodies in the Air: Religion in Roman Executions”, and “Part of the Pantheon: Personifications as Representations of Piety in Roman Triumphal Monuments”.

### “Apotropaic Human Trophies via Crucifixion, Hanging, and Impaling”

Hanging, impaling, and crucifying in battle showed power, punished, and prevented revolts, but it also held religious significance. Exposure punishments not only punished, but invoked fear in both enemies and potential insurgences. This paper demonstrates that preceded by the Ancient Near East, the Greeks and Romans used corpses as make-shift trophies as apotropaic magic and as donative offerings. The paper further looks at both the etymology and representations of staked humans through hanging armor trophies such as the Greek and Roman *tropaeum* and associated terminology, as well as sympathetic magic. Foust’s paper dispute theories of Greco-Roman trophies proposed by Woelcke, Trundel, Prichett, Konstan and Meineck, A. B. Cook, and Kinnee. Through etymology and textual examples of staked humans

and *tropaeum*, the paper suggest Greeks and Romans offered both to the victory-altering spirits as apotropaic magic donatives.

#### “Blood on the Altar and Bodies in the Air: Religion in Roman Executions”

Executions were common in the ancient world. They were used as a method to remove malcontents, lawbreakers, or enemies from not only the population, but from the sight of the gods. Religion played a large part in executions throughout the Mediterranean and the Romans were particularly good at the practice. Roman methods of execution were both varied and creative: everything from beheading to hanging from trees to live burial. Most importantly, they were steeped in religious traditions that were handed down from the time of the Monarchy, embedded in their laws, and enforced on conquered territories. This paper explores several methods of Roman execution and the religious beliefs within them.

#### “Part of the Pantheon: Personifications as Representations of Piety in Roman Triumphal Monuments”

Among the battle scenes, depictions of the emperor, and fortifications seen on triumphal monuments such as the Column of Trajan, and Arches of Titus and Septimius Severus, are personifications of military virtues and natural phenomena. Military gods such as *Virtus*, *Honos*, and river gods such as *Danuvius* can be seen on these monuments among the battle friezes. These human representations were considered gods themselves and prayed to for help in war. Praying to virtues allowed these qualities to be manifested into the devotee while rivers were prayed to for safe crossing. As military gods, personifications of rivers and virtues can be interpreted as symbols of the emperor’s piety in triumphal monuments due to their assistance in Rome’s dominance and recognition of their power. Although sacrificial scenes are more traditional, the depiction of these personifications represent the emperor’s piety as well. This

paper will argue that personifications of personal virtues and nature can and should be interpreted as references to the emperor's piety because they were venerated as gods due to their assistance in war.