

## Questions from Profs. Dan Curley & Greg Spinner

Thursday, July 23, 2020 12:00pm EDT

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### Which ancient literary authors discuss in detail the Roman triumph?

Submitted: Janet B. '79

Like so many facets of Roman culture, the sources are many and varied. Livy offers accounts of specific triumphs throughout the remains of his history, *Ab urbe condita*, and generalizes a bit at 31.48. Pliny in *Naturalis historia* 15 does the same. But we cobble together our overall understanding of the triumph from many different authors, historians and poets alike. Mary Beard's recent book on the Roman Triumph is a solid and contemporary review of the ancient evidence.

### Is there anything to be said regarding the ancient, triumphal route's more circular nature vs. the more linear papal procession?

Submitted: Sarah D. '17

The nighttime procession in the Holy Year 1300 is rather circuitous, avoiding a direct route so as to include many stops along the way that materialize collective Christian memories. The *possesso*, on the other hand, is more linear than the other two routes we discussed, and derives its power as much from crossing the cityscape as from claiming the legacy of Peter at the Lateran, as the new Pope is enthroned as the Vicar of Christ. While the details of the routes certainly matter, the overall design may be less significant than the way symbols are paraded and orchestrated for public viewing.

### Are these parades paradigms for parades in other ancient cultures?

Submitted: Jodie S. P'24      [Rabbijodie@rsns.org](mailto:Rabbijodie@rsns.org)

Processions were common for Greek festivals, predating the Roman Triumphs. But marching with sacred objects is such a common ritual practice, found throughout the ancient world in the East and the West and points between, that it becomes hard to discern which traditions influenced other traditions. Still, a rather straight line can be drawn from modern military parades back to the Triumph.

### How does the Latin word *pompa* relate to parade?

Submitted: Dylan C. '97

The Latin *pompa* means any kind of procession, and then comes to signify "ostentation" in general — and from this we get the English notion of "pomp." Taking a cue from Shakespeare, Edward Elgar named his military marches *Pomp and Circumstance*; the first of these contains the famous, stately processional we associate with commencement ceremonies around the world.

### Can you address the similarities and differences between these parades and modern day protests.

Submitted: Jodie S. P'24

Some modern day protests take the form of parades, appropriating civic norms of acceptance. One thinks of the Woman Suffrage Procession (begun in 1913) or, more recently, Gay Pride parades (beginning in 1970 with the "Christopher Street Liberation Day" march that marked the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots). Because parades are spectacles, and spectacles openly display power dynamics, they also become sites for contesting those priorities and privileges.

### **Would everyone participate/view in these parades? Or were they closed/exclusive in some way?**

*Submitted: Krista Z. '09*

The Roman Triumph was for victorious generals and their retinues only, and participation by ordinary citizens was limited to spectating. The papal *possesso* included members of the clergy and Roman nobility. The Jubilee procession, while led by the pope and his retinue, required the participation of as many Christians who could join in.

### **How much does the hilly topography and the rutted roads influence the route?**

*Submitted: Wendy R. '63*

Regardless of the era, the processions required good infrastructure in order to be successful. Fortunately, we know a lot about the network of ancient Roman roads and streets — the Romans were excellent engineers — and that helps us to reconstruct the routes in large part. All of the parades we discuss would have taken place on major thoroughfares. There was no point trying to cram a line of horses, floats, and foot traffic into a constricted and narrow street or one in poor condition. And major roads also afforded room for spectating.

Hills were another matter. The *clivus Capitolinus*, the road that led from the Forum to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, was wide and well maintained, and it made concluding the Triumph on this rather steep hill feasible. In the Jubilee procession of 1300, the approach to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore on the Esquiline Hill would have been far more gentle and rather easy to do on foot. But note how the papal *possesso* sometimes went around the Capitoline Hill, rather than over it. The hill was less a destination than a passing landmark, so the need to ascend it was less acute.

### **Why those routes? What was behind the determination to pass that way?**

*Submitted: Diane D.*

As noted, good infrastructure makes some routes more practical than others. But a parade held again and again, like the Roman Triumph or the *possesso*, also bears the ever-increasing burden of tradition — the *onus* of doing things the way they have always been done. A commander or pope looking to break with tradition could do so, traveling new ground as they saw fit, but only if that space were meaningful and able to accommodate the procession.

One force for making space meaningful is memory. The Jubilee of 1300 seems to have been chosen to highlight certain Roman memories, particularly those that show the triumph of Christianity over Rome's pagan past.

### **Can you talk about art shown in the videos?**

*Submitted: Susan*

The video on Roman Triumphs shows two paintings. (1) Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar* (1482–1494). (2) Rubens' *A Roman Triumph* (ca. 1630). Both are fanciful renderings, but rooted in serious study of the remains of old Roman topography, infrastructure, and material culture. The video on Christian processions uses a variety of "official" renderings of the papal *possesso* over the centuries, including two from the Folger Library in D.C., and one from the Vatican Carriage Museum. In our videos we always try to acknowledge author and/or source in the credits. We've included a link below to the full Mapping Rome video series, so you can revisit both videos and get more information on the various artworks shown. And you might also enjoy some of the other videos from our course.

**The full Mapping Rome video archive is accessible at**

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