

The Torture of Bodies in Byzantium After the Riots (Sec. IV-VIII)*

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The Byzantine state was a world power that inherited the ethno-linguistic diversity of the Roman period. The consistency of the empire was ensured by the subjects' loyalty to the central government and, since the 4th century, by belonging to the Christian religion. In terms of political ideology, the territory was inalienable, which implied the preservation of the right over all provinces that had been under the rule of Rome over time. Although Constantinople no longer effectively controlled many of them, their temporary masters were subjects of the empire, whose title could be revoked at any time. From this point of view, any form of insubordination of those who governed various territories was considered a crime of lese majesty. Typically, this accusation was brought to those who wanted to usurp the throne, asserting these claims by assuming the symbols of imperial power, among which the purpura had the strongest meanings. In the struggle for power, the success marked the difference between a contender and the legitimate emperor chosen by God through the senate, army, and people.¹ After gaining the throne, sovereigns always strived to make violent changes in order to ensure succession among their own families, but failed to do so before the 8th century.² Starting from the 10th century, when the principle of birth in the purple was imposed, only the

* This work was supported by CNCSIS-UEFISCSU, NO. 215 /5.10.2011, PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0730.

1 ANASTOS, 1979, pp. 183f.

2 SCHREINER, 1991, p. 184.

fact of being a member of the leading family justified imperial aspirations.³

The conflicts between pretenders and the imperial power are designated in historiography by the generic term of “insurrection”, “revolt”, or “riot”.⁴ Such a choice in terms of terminology is justified by the difficulty to distinguish between “civil” and “military” spheres, as both components participated in actions against the imperial power.⁵ The explanation lies in the fact that Constantinople was very difficult to conquer by external pretenders without relevant support from the inhabitants. The inhabitants of the capital often sanctioned government abuse and sometimes their opposition resulted in emperor’s overthrow.⁶ The causes of these urban riots are complex, ranging from military threats hanging over the Empire to social and economic reasons.⁷ Urban violence was also present in urban centers in Italy, its intensity reflecting the solidity or the weakness of imperial power in the peninsula.⁸

The annihilation of riots resulted in a large number of victims, and their leaders were considered enemies of imperial power, which determined exceptional punitive measures taken against them. Thus, it was preferred that the enemies were captured alive, only to be subjected to public torture with their bodies or parts thereof to be exposed in public space. The display of prisoners in humiliating poses and their corpses’ exposure were widely practiced in ancient times. In Ancient Rome, such treatment was applied to those sentenced for serious crimes, especially if they were guilty of rebellion against the central power. This was because Roman emperors⁹, who had a monopoly over body violence through the justice that they managed, performed the execution of sentences in public.¹⁰ However, during the Roman Republican period, freemen could not be legally tortured, but in the imperial era, this interdiction applied also to men of the lower classes as

3 IBID., pp. 186f.

4 KÆGI JR., 1981, p. 4.

5 IBID., p. 11.

6 GREGORY, 1979, pp. 220-223.

7 NICHANIAN, 2010, pp. 28f.

8 BROWN, 2002, pp. 76-86.

9 BELL, 1997, p. 129.

10 GIL, 1998, pp. 265-267.

well as slaves.¹¹ Our goal here is to reconstruct how these practices applied to the bodies of the defeated in the struggle for power evolved since the Christianization of the Roman Empire. We also aim to highlight new meanings of these practices over the 4th-8th centuries.

The subject we propose has been mentioned in historiography among the researches on triumphal ceremonies. Specialized studies have shown that there was certain continuity between pagan Rome and Christian Constantinople of the 4th-5th centuries in terms of how victories were celebrated and the treatment applied to the bodies of the defeated.¹² However, the ceremonies in late antiquity accentuated the imperial majesty, as they became ritualized and staged.¹³ The crowd continued to participate in the parade, gathered on both sides of the road, and launched various insults.¹⁴ Once the Roman capital was moved to Constantinople, the celebration of military victories was organized in an almost liturgical manner, and the most important moments consisted in the exposure of prisoners and spoils and the cheers of the crowd in honor of emperors. On these occasions, sovereigns entered the capital on the road that began at Hebdomon¹⁵, the Byzantine equivalent of the Field of Mars in Rome.¹⁶ The 5.5 km long road started from the Golden Gate, passed through the Augustaion Forum, and ended at the Hippodrome, where prisoners and trophies were exposed. The triumphal path was created in about 100 years and remained unchanged after 435.¹⁷ Triumphal ceremonies were auxiliary elements indispensable for the power, as military victories were the main factors that legitimated emperors since the 7th century.¹⁸ The Hippodrome became the place where all celebrations of imperial victory took place.¹⁹ The architectural configuration favored “crowd control” and the repression of popular riots, as it was the case in the Nika riot.²⁰ Many practices applied to prisoners were abandoned, such

11 BURY, 1958, II, p. 414.

12 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 89.

13 IBID., p. 90.

14 RIVIÈRE, 2004, pp. 86-88.

15 MANGO, 2000, pp. 173f.

16 DAGRON, 1974, p. 98; pp. 108-110.

17 MANGO, 2000, p. 180.

18 NICHANIAN, 2010, p. 33.

19 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 92.

20 BROWNING, 1971, pp. 111f.

as the show with wild beasts set on barbarian prisoners and the gladiatorial fights, which were replaced by horse races.²¹

Captive enemies were brought before the emperor who stood in the imperial box (*kathisma*) in the Hippodrome, and prostrated (*proskynesis*) in front of him thus recognizing his supremacy.²² This practice was inherited from the Roman past, when the defeated leaders were brought in front of the victorious emperor, who stood on a throne in the presence of the troops. Those guilty of attempts of usurpation were ritually stripped of their insignia before being forced to prostrate before the legitimate emperor. In 534, to celebrate the victory of General Belisarius against Vandals²³, King Gelimer was brought to Constantinople with his family, 15,000 prisoners, and the treasure.²⁴ The ceremony consisted of two parts, the first being the parade along the most important street of the capital, and the second, the display of spoils and prisoners in the Hippodrome. King Gelimer was brought before the imperial box and bowed in front of Justinian I (527-565), a gesture that turned him into a “defeated usurper, a rebel against the Roman order”.²⁵ The emperor humbled the defeated by *calcatio colli*, the ancient gesture in which the latter was trampled, as an expression of the former’s total victory.²⁶ After the defeat of the Isaurian revolt in 498, its leaders were driven through Constantinople in chains, then taken to the Hippodrome and placed under the feet of Emperor Anastasius I, who watched the race from the imperial box.²⁷

Continuity in early medieval victory celebration does not imply identity with pagan Antiquity, as emperors took care to thank the deity for the help in achieving the victory. Since the time of Theodosius I, the rituals of power underwent a significant Christianization process. The main aspect was the celebrated liturgical processions of supplication with priests and people, in order to obtain divine guidance for victory.²⁸ For example, when he received the news of Vitalian’s defeat, Emperor

21 MCCORMICK, 1986, pp. 78f.

22 GUILLAND, 1969, pp. 462-490.

23 EVANS, 1996, pp. 132f.

24 DOWNEY, 1960, p. 41.

25 MCCORMICK, 1986, pp. 128f.

26 IBID., pp. 56-58.

27 EVAGRIUS, 2000, p. 180.

28 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 107.

Anastasius (581-518) organized a procession of thanks giving and victory spectacles.²⁹ Very importantly, the rites of Christian victory developed independently of other secular festivities, like the triumphal parades and circus show.³⁰

After Christianity became official, the celebration of victories continued to include the parade of heads on poles. According to Roman tradition, beheading was not applied to all those sentenced to death, but only to citizens³¹, and was traditionally executed with the ax.³² After the removal of the heads, they were displayed in the city, while the bodies were thrown into the Tiber, and into the sea, after the capital was moved to Constantinople.³³ The parade of usurpers' heads exerted a profound and sinister impact on the collective mind, while their exposure was destined to prove the victory and to attract the subjects' loyalty, by showing who the winner was.³⁴ From this perspective, it was not by chance that John Malalas, author in the 6th century, mentioned in his chronicle the entry of David in Jerusalem, with Goliath's huge head on a pole, as a sign of victory.³⁵ Emperor Constantine the Great had Maxentius' head thrust onto a spear and carried through the city of Rome so everyone could see it.³⁶ In 411, the usurper Constantine's head was presumably sent to Ravenna, from which it was dispatched to provinces.³⁷ During the next year, the usurpers Jovian and Sebastian's heads were carried in triumph through the streets of Ravenna.³⁸ After the defeat of Isaurians Illus and Leontius, and their beheading in 488³⁹, emperor Zeno revived the ancient ritual of the parade of heads in Constantinople.⁴⁰ The ritual ended at the Hippodrome; the heads were

29 MALALAS, 1986, p. 227.

30 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 111.

31 RIVIÈRE, 2004, pp. 141f.

32 CANTARELLA, 1991, pp. 154-156.

33 RIVIÈRE, 2004, pp. 86-88.

34 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 85.

35 MALALAS, 1986, p. 251.

36 LENSKE, 2006, p. 70.

37 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 56.

38 Theophanes Confesor believed that the head was sent to Rome (THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 126), but Michael McCormick thought that the destination was Ravenna (MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 56, n. 72).

39 BURY, 1958, I, p. 398.

40 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 60.

subsequently taken to St. Canons in Syncae, where the show continued to attract the crowd.⁴¹ Anastasius I also faced an Isaurian revolt, which he defeated in 498 and the heads of the dead rebel leaders were sent to the capital.⁴²

The repressions of riots of the population of Constantinople were treated as real armed confrontations, and the riot leaders were punished, like usurpers, in an exemplary manner, even though triumphal ceremonies were not organized on these occasions. Emblematic in this regard is the Nika revolt that took place between 11 and 18 January 532, an occasion where the irrational force of the crowd manifested, epitomized by circus parties⁴³ developed in the Hippodrome.⁴⁴ The population of the capital proclaimed Hypatius as emperor⁴⁵, a nephew of the former emperor Anastasius I⁴⁶, and acclaimed him in the arena.⁴⁷ Encouraged by Theodora⁴⁸, Justinian I (527-565) turned to the army⁴⁹, and the repression occurred also at the Hippodrome.⁵⁰ The intervention of Generals Belisarius and Mundus⁵¹ caused major damage in Constantinople⁵², as the tradition claimed the huge number of 30,000 deaths.⁵³ Hypatius and his brother Pompeius were arrested⁵⁴ and beheaded, and their bodies were thrown into the sea.⁵⁵ Since the usurper's body was washed ashore, the emperor exposed him in public with an inscription naming him the false emperor; subsequently, he was

41 MALALAS, 1986, p. 218.

42 EVAGRIUS, 2000, p. 180.

43 DVORNIK, 1974, p. 127; CAMERON, 1976, pp. 105f.; p. 123.

44 EVANS, 1996, p. 119.

45 EVAGRIUS, 2000, p. 213; EVANS, 1996, pp. 121f.

46 JANIN, 1964, pp. 62-64; DOWNEY, 1960, p. 42.

47 CHRONICON PASCALE, 1989, p. 122.

48 EVANS, 1984, pp. 380-382.

49 GREGORY, 1979, p. 30.

50 BURY, 1958, II, pp. 46f.; BROWNING, 1971, pp. 111f. The Hippodrome became the place where political punishments (capital, or mutilations) were performed (JANIN, 1964, pp. 183-194).

51 GUILLAND, 1964, pp. 510-514. On Belisarius' role in the suppression of this riot in the Hippodrome see CHASSIN, 1957, pp. 56f.

52 EVANS, 1996, pp. 124f.

53 CAMERON, 1976, pp. 278-280.

54 CHRONICON PASCALE, 1989, p. 125.

55 EVAGRIUS, 2000, p. 213.

given to his relatives after a few days.⁵⁶ The repression of the Nika revolt was seen as a military victory, since Emperor Justinian made public its defeat in a newsletter sent to “all the cities”.⁵⁷

The overthrow of Emperor Mauricius (582-602) was a turning point in terms of political violence⁵⁸, which brutally reactivated the massive involvement of the army in changes of power on the imperial throne.⁵⁹ The events of 602, which were the culmination of ten years of military unrest in the Balkans⁶⁰, began when the army refused to obey the imperial command and hailed Phocas as emperor.⁶¹ After this moment, the soldiers left for Constantinople⁶², where they arrived on November 21st-22nd.⁶³ The military revolt coincided with the failure in the relationship between the emperor and the population of the capital, the dissatisfaction of the latter being caused by the fact that the very harsh winter of 601-602 delayed the delivery of grains from Egypt.⁶⁴ After an incident caused by famine, the emperor was stoned and insulted on his way to church.⁶⁵ Maurice was forced to rely on the demes to defend the long walls of the city, but these had few fighters⁶⁶, who soon deserted anyway⁶⁷, so the situation more and more resembled the Nika riot.⁶⁸ Therefore, the cause of Mauricius’ overthrow was not that he “had been betrayed by the demes”, according to the traditional interpretations suggested by Theophylact Simocatta, but “the result of negligent and unpopular rule”.⁶⁹ The patriarch crowned the usurper Phocas on November 23 in the church of St. John of Hebdomon⁷⁰, and on Sunday,

56 CHRONICON PASCALE, 1989, p. 126.

57 MALALAS, 1986, pp. 280f.

58 Broadly on the genesis and progress of this military riot and mauricius’ execution on november 27, 602, see KAEGL JR., 1981, pp. 101-114.

59 TREADGOLD, 1995, p. 206.

60 KAEGL JR., 1981, p. 101.

61 JONES, 1986, I, p. 413.

62 SHLOSSER, 1994, p. 73.

63 STRATOS, 1968, I, p. 45.

64 IBID., p. 41. After an incident caused by famine, the emperor was stoned and insulted on his way to church (SHLOSSER, 1994, p. 74).

65 SHLOSSER, 1994, p. 74.

66 CAMERON, 1976, pp. 280f.

67 DVORNIK, 1974, p. 128.

68 CAMERON, 1976, p. 122.

69 OLSTER, 1993, p. 49.

70 STRATOS, 1968, I, pp. 49f.

November 25, he entered the city and crossed it in a triumphal procession, which ended in the Hippodrome.⁷¹ Theophylact described the execution of Maurice and his family according to whom the former emperor's sons were murdered before their father's eyes, followed by his own beheading.⁷² Their bodies were thrown into the sea, and the heads were brought to Phocas, who had them exposed for several days on a stand in Hebdomon.⁷³

Between 602 and 717, the empire's political life was marked by the end of peaceful ascension to the throne. The struggle for power became endemic and involved both military forces and civilian population. The absence of emperors from the army camp and military campaigns during the 5th-6th centuries was one of the factors that facilitated the military unrest. Political ambitions of several generals, the delay of military pays and the soldiers' difficult living conditions were additional factors. Most riots in Constantinople were generated by economic causes, such as excessive taxation and gaps in food supply. Others referred to various abuses of the imperial power and the persecution of certain categories of citizens. Moreover, riots multiplied during the 7th century due to increasing external military pressures.⁷⁴ The success of several pretenders was determined by the concentration of soldiers for campaigns under the command of some ambitious generals.⁷⁵

At the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the following, violence was exacerbated, so the defeated suffered extreme tortures. Such punitive excesses were meant to strengthen the power of some emperors who ascended the throne by force and to discourage potential candidates. At this time, the burning of bodies, which was a punishment from archaic Roman past, was reactivated. In fact, this practice continued, as evidenced by the fact that in 332, the usurper Kalokairos of the island of Cyprus was defeated, and along with those responsible, he was executed at Tarsus in Cilicia by being burned alive.⁷⁶ Moreover, such penalties were applied for sexual vices of the monks and for

71 THEOPHYLACT, 1986, p. 225.

72 IBID., p. 227.

73 IBID., pp. 228f.

74 KAEGL JR., 1981, p. 139.

75 IBID., pp. 201f.

76 THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 49.

witchcraft⁷⁷, but Byzantine sources mentioned them also in some cases of heretics' punishment.⁷⁸

The reign of Phocas (602-610) was a military and economic disaster⁷⁹; the emperor was known for the ferocious suppression of his opponents, which made him the image of a tyrant *par excellence*.⁸⁰ From the beginning of his reign, he faced the uprising of Narses in Mesopotamia, whom he burned alive in the Hippodrome, in front of the people, as an example to all other generals with ambitions of plotting against the emperor.⁸¹ More and more rebels challenged the legitimacy of the emperor, due to his seizing power violently, which was seen as an act of desecration of power, and his arbitrary government marked by cruelty.⁸² In 610, the exarch of Africa⁸³ decided to send his son Heraclios the Younger to Constantinople to capture Phocas⁸⁴, after the city defenders had betrayed the latter.⁸⁵ According to the information provided by Patriarch Nikephoros and by *Chronicon Pascale*, Phocas' genitals and right arm were amputated, and the corpse was carried through the city.⁸⁶ His head was exposed in public⁸⁷, and the body was taken to the Forum Bovis and thrown into the fire, along with those of some collaborators.⁸⁸ This incident triggered an annihilation process, which aimed both the destruction of images⁸⁹, and the damnation of the tyrant's memory.⁹⁰ Thus, his body was dismantled in order to show the

77 BURY, 1958, II, pp. 412f.

78 THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 260.

79 HALDON, 1990, pp. 36f.

80 JENKINS, 1966, p. 19.

81 STRATOS, 1968, II, p. 60.

82 On the perception about Phocas' reign and the legend around it, see OLSTER, 1993, pp. 1-21.

83 KAEGLI, 2003, p. 80.

84 OLSTER, 1993, pp. 17-19.

85 KAEGLI, 2003, pp. 38-45.

86 JANIN, 1964, pp. 59-62.

87 KAEGLI, 2003, pp. 38-45.

88 NIKEPHOROS, 1990, p. 37. See KAEGLI, 1973, p. 310. On Forum Bovis, where Phocas' body was burnt, see JANIN, 1964, pp. 69-71.

89 STRATOS, 1968, I, p. 91.

90 On Heraclios' return to Constantinople, after the victory against the persians in 628, the triumphal procession arrived to Forum Bovis, where 18 years before the bodies of Phocas and his lieutenants had been burnt, for celebrating the day when tyranny was crashed (IBID., pp. 240-245).

fraudulent character of the power he had exercised. The act symbolized the downgrading to the lowest stage of social organization, as the body was subjected to humiliating punishment, which was usually applied to ordinary criminals or slaves, according to legal codes.

The early years of Constans II's reign (641-668) were emblematic for the political, economic, and military crisis the empire was facing. A series of centrifugal tendencies occurred at this time⁹¹ in Africa⁹² and Italy.⁹³ The following emperor, Constantine IV (668-685) captured and suppressed his fathers' killers, Patrician Justinian being among those executed. The latter's son, Germanos, the future ecumenical patriarch, protested violently, but was punished by castration, although he had already become a member of the monastic race.⁹⁴ However, emasculation was applied in exceptional cases, here to punish a potential usurper; the act preceded its preventive application, for the sons of some pretenders or deposed emperors. Nasal mutilation remained dominant, also in the struggle for power within the imperial family.

During the second half of the 7th century, the influence of the military power increased, as proven by the frequent rebellions in this period and particularly during the twenty years of anarchy between 685 and 717, which was probably the most obscure period of Byzantine history.⁹⁵ In this context, mutilation was used to eliminate both potential claimants within the imperial family and deposed emperors charged of tyranny. The most common mutilation was the cutting of nose, used also in 695 when Justinian II was overthrown.⁹⁶ In this latter case, people also played a key role, as shown by Theophanes Confesor.⁹⁷ The supporters of the pretender Leontios surrounded the imperial palace and captured Justinian II, who was taken to the Hippodrome.⁹⁸ The citizens of the capital wanted an execution, but Leontios spared the life of the deposed emperor and had his nose and

91 HALDON, 1990, pp. 60-63.

92 STRATOS, 1975, III, pp. 62-67.

93 IBID., pp. 106-111.

94 IBID., 1978, IV, pp. 8-14.

95 KAEGLI, 1981, pp. 157-185; pp. 186-208; TREADGOLD, 1990, p. 203.

96 See the progress of events in STRATOS, 1980, V, pp. 69-74.

97 THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 515.

98 HEAD, 1972, p. 93; TREADGOLD, 1990, pp. 94f.

tongue cut off, after which he exiled him to Cherson.⁹⁹ The crowd took revenge also on the main collaborators of the deposed emperor, namely the monk Theodotos, who was logothete of the genikon, and the sakellarios Stephen the Persian, and dragged them through the main street to the Forum Bovis, where they burnt them.¹⁰⁰

Following a series of adventures that took him to the courts of Khazar and Bulgarian khans, whose support he managed to obtain, Justinian II took back the throne in the spring of 705 and captured the two emperors who reigned after his overthrow.¹⁰¹ On February 15, 706, he celebrated his restoration by parading his rivals, decked in chains, through the streets of the capital. They were taken to the Hippodrome, and the emperor placed his feet on their necks for the period of the first race, after which they were sent to the Kynegion for execution, like criminals.¹⁰² During his next reign, Justinian II proved to be a bloody tyrant, so that he was suppressed during a riot, which had started in Crimea¹⁰³ under the leadership of Philippikos Bardanes.¹⁰⁴ The execution was not followed by a Christian burial, but his beheaded body was thrown into the sea, and his head sent to be exposed in Rome and Ravenna.¹⁰⁵ To follow the same line, according to Patriarch Nikephoros, after Justinian's overthrow, his son Tiberius was killed "like a senseless animal".¹⁰⁶ These violent practices alternated with decisions taken in the spirit of Christianity, so that the Life of St. Stephan the Younger mentioned that on March 25, 717, Emperor Theodosius III agreed to abdicate, as he did not want Christian blood to flow. There were other cases when exemplary punishment was applied to those defeated in the struggle for power. Thus, the former Emperor

99 NIKEPHOROS, 1990, p. 97.

100 THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 515.

101 HEAD, 1972, pp. 114f.; TREADGOLD, 1990, pp. 212f. Justinian II returned to the throne on August 21st, but acted against the two barely on February 15th 706, as the last of them was captured in December (TREADGOLD, 1990, p. 212).

102 HEAD, 1972, pp. 102-111; pp. 116f. On the celebration of triumph, see also MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 73.

103 TREADGOLD, 1990, p. 217.

104 The latter was exiled by Tiberius III Apsimaros because he was telling of a dream in which he became emperor (SUMMER, 1976, pp. 287-289).

105 HEAD, 1972, p. 148.

106 NIKEPHOROS, 1990, p. 113.

Anastasius II did not resign himself to losing the throne and, with the support of the Bulgarians, started a revolt against Leo III (717-740). The rebel was betrayed and handed over to the sovereign, who beheaded him on June 1, 719, along with the archpriest of Thessalonica. Patriarch Nikephoros also showed that “an equestrian race was performed and their heads, affixed to poles, were paraded through the Hippodrome”¹⁰⁷ after the execution. Moreover, common punishments at the time were applied to other conspirators, such as cutting noses off, confiscation of assets and exile.

The issue of succession continued to generate violence throughout the 8th century, as was the case when, after Leo III’s death on June 18, 741, his son Constantine succeeded on the throne.¹⁰⁸ Shortly after, he had to face a two-year insurrection instigated by his brother-in-law Artavasdos, an important military commander in Anatolia.¹⁰⁹ Taking advantage of the emperor’s departure on an expedition against the Arabs, the claimant was able to obtain support from Patriarch Anastasios, who accused Constantine V of having embraced Arianism. The crowd gathered in front of the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia proclaimed Artavasdos, who was thus able to enter the city, was crowned, and reined with full rights for a year.¹¹⁰ This period ended after Constantine V’s victory in August 742, which made him gain control over Anatolia and allowed him to land in Europe. As famine was raging in Constantinople, Artavasdos allowed non-fighters to leave the city, which turned into a general exodus, and on November 2, he attempted to follow, but was soon captured.¹¹¹ Constantine V killed many important people in Artavasdos’ entourage, and blinded others or even cut off their limbs.¹¹² To show the people that the usurpation was over, the head of the chief of the party, who supported the rebels in the capital, was hung from the Arch of the Milion for three days.¹¹³ The

107 *IBID.*, pp. 127-129.

108 Constantine V was born in 718 and was baptised on October 25th, the same year (LOMBARD, 1902, p. 22).

109 *IBID.*, pp. 22f. artavasdos gave the action a significant religious content, associating it with the iconophile resistance (GERO, 1977, pp. 14-20).

110 LOMBARD, 1902, pp. 24-26.

111 *IBID.*, pp. 27f.

112 THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 581.

113 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 134.

usurper and his two sons were blinded and, together with other supporters, were paraded in chains in the Hippodrome during the games organized to celebrate the triumph.¹¹⁴ Patriarch Anastasius, who had collaborated with the usurper, was also brought into the arena, beaten, and forced to ride backwards.¹¹⁵

After confrontations with enemies outside the empire, Constantine V also organized triumphal entries, such as those celebrating the victories against the Bulgarians.¹¹⁶ Therefore, according to Theophanes Confessor, after the defeat of Khan Telez at Anchialos, on June 30, 763, the emperor entered the capital fully armed, accompanied by the soldiers and the Bulgarian prisoners yoked to wooden shackles, after which the members of *demes* beheaded them outside the Golden Gate.¹¹⁷ This gesture can be considered as rather an exception, which must be understood in terms of the emperor's extreme hostile attitude toward the Bulgarians and an expression of imperial propaganda.¹¹⁸ According to the cited source, a strange episode occurred shortly thereafter; Constantine V captured a "renegade from the Christian faith" in the Balkans, who was fighting against the empire. The emperor ordered, "they amputate his arms and legs [...] in the presence of physicians, dissect him alive from the genitals to the chest so as to comprehend the construction of the human body". After this operation, which reminded of experiments that took place ancient medical science, his body was burned.¹¹⁹

Although many practices during the 8th century were still maintained from the pagan Roman period with respect to how the bodies of prisoners of war were treated, the trend of keeping them alive and mutilating them was increasingly evident. In 793, Constantine VI quashed a revolt in the Armeniakon theme and, after the execution of the leaders, he organized a triumphal entry into the capital through Blachernai gate on June 24. On this occasion, one thousand rebels paraded with "their faces tattooed in ink with the words 'Armeniac

114 IBID.

115 LOMBARD, 1902, p. 29.

116 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 135.

117 CAMERON, 1976, pp. 302-304.

118 HALDON, 2003, p. 245.

119 THEOPHANES, 1997, p. 603.

plotter””, after which they were exiled to Sicily and other islands.¹²⁰ According to classical antiquity thinking, the destruction of the face was equivalent to the cancelation of personal identity, which automatically implied marginalization. Political offenses were sanctioned by mutilation with strong symbolic significance, most of them directed towards the face, which is explained by that the face was the main channel of social communication. Moreover, disfigurement was practiced extensively since the 8th century when – amid the iconoclastic doctrine – it was associated with the fight against the fascination for human face from the early Byzantine period.¹²¹

Once Christianity was adopted, emperors were seen as guarantors of the unity of faith and integrity of the state. Any claim against these envoys of God signified the challenging of the order established by the Divinity. Despite these ideological transformations, the general frame of the celebration of military triumphs of the pagan past was maintained during the analyzed period. However, since the late 4th century, there was a more pronounced Christian influence, like liturgical procession of thanksgiving and church service. They developed parallel with the classic scenario of imperial victory celebration. Large-scale human sacrifices, held in the arena by facing the beasts, and gladiators fighting were abandoned. However, the defeated bodies took the central place in these events, as the celebration of victory implied their and their accomplices’ public humiliation. However, the practice of beheading the corpses of defeated enemies and the exposure of skulls in the city was maintained. This way of action was based on the ancient tradition of the supernatural power of the head, to which Christian thinking added the belief that the head was the seat of the soul.

Since the 7th century, a number of changes occurred in terms of the treatment applied to the defeated bodies. They more rarely resorted to a series of pagan practices, such as throwing them into the sea or burning the body. Nevertheless, the burning of bodies continued to have profound meanings from a Christian perspective, equivalent to eternal damnation. Although in 775, Emperor Constantine V, the main promoter of iconoclasm, was buried in Justinian’s mausoleum, Michael III ejected his remains and burnt them after the restoration of the icons’

120 *IBID.*, p. 644.

121 MCCORMICK, 1986, p. 142.

vation. From this moment the mutilation of those attempting to usurp the supreme power was preferred, and the change of emphasis was related to the Christian view of corporal punishment, which allowed the individual to regret his deeds. The bodies of the convicts had to carry the traces of the guilt, as any crime against the power was treated as a sin. Therefore, the mutilations can be interpreted both as gestures of social exclusion and as a compromise between the Roman punitive tradition and Christian moral requirements that limited the death penalty.¹²² The torture of prisoners' bodies was gradually abandoned in the 9th century, except for a significant episode when the body of the rebel Thomas the Slav was dismembered in 823. After the 8th century, the Empire went on the offensive, and emperors increased the number of triumphal ceremonies during which the bodies of prisoners were treated according to a model that appeared in the period of transition that was the subject of this presentation.

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122 BURY, 1958, II, p. 415.

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