Roman Triumph


ROMAN TRIUMPH

By the time of the NT, the spectacular parades that entered through the Porta Triumphalis (“triumphal gate”) of *Rome had become perhaps the most important and well-known political-religious institution of the period. Images of the *emperor in a triumphal chariot were even frequently used on imperial *coins. These lavish pageants or triumphal processions, known as the Roman triumph (Gk thriambe; Lat triumphus), were carried out by special decree of the city of Rome in order to celebrate great victories, to honor the general, consul or emperor who had achieved them and to render thanksgiving to the deity who had granted them. According to the ancient historian Orosius (A.D. 385-418?), 320 such triumphs were celebrated between the founding of Rome and the reign of Vespasian in A.D. 69-79 (Orosius Hist. 7, 9). It is widely recognized that there are two explicit references to the institution of the Roman triumph in the NE 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Colossians 2:15. In addition, J. R. White has argued that it informs the corresponding metaphor of death in 1 Corinthians 15:29-31. Finally, T. E. Schmidt has suggested that the imagery of the Roman triumph is implicit in Mark 15:16-32. An understanding of these important passages is therefore dependent on an awareness of the nature of the Roman triumph itself and of what it meant to lead and to be led through the streets of Rome in such a procession.

1. The Nature of the Roman Triumph
2. The Use of the Triumph Imagery in the New Testament

H. S. Versnel has argued that the Roman triumph in the *Hellenistic period was the result of a long development that extends back into the pre-Roman period of the Etruscan dynasties (late sixth century B.C.). Originally, the triumph was most likely a sacral New Year’s festival in which the king, dressed to represent the deity in his yearly arrival or renewal, was carried into the city in anticipation of a sacrifice, at which time there was a cry for the epiphany of the god in his triumph (Gk thriambe; Lat triumphus). This rite was later transferred to Zeus in *Greece, to Dionysus in Egypt and then to Jupiter in Rome (see Religion, Greco-Roman).

But during the days of the republic, the idea of a human being representing a deity, not to mention embodying his or her presence, was offensive to Roman sensibilities (cf. Diodorus Siculus Bib. Hist. 14.117.6; Livy Hist. 5.23.5; Plutarch Cam. 7.1; Dio Cassius Hist. 52.13.3). As a result, the victorious generals now took the place of the
and esp. Josephus J.W. 6.9.4 §§433-34; 7.5.4 §§123-57, which details Titus’s triumph after his victory over the Jews and is the most extensive of the extant ancient accounts). The glories of the spoils, the story of the battles, the strength of the prisoners of war, the humiliation of the conquered rulers and the final sacrifices and death of the captives were all meant to display vividly the glory, wisdom, power and sovereignty of Rome and its leaders.

Moreover, the entire event took place in recognition of the favor of the supreme god, to whom the triumph as a whole was intended to be an act of worship. Thus, as Versnel has observed, “In no other Roman ceremony do god and man approach each other as closely as they do in the triumph” (Versnel, 1). Hence to be granted such a triumph was the greatest honor Rome could bestow (Livy Hist. 30.15.12). Conversely, to be led to death in such a triumphal procession was the ultimate act of defeat and humiliation.


Though the noun *thriambos* (the triumph) is not found in the NT, its corresponding verb *thriambewò* (“to lead in a triumphal procession,” cf. Plutarch Rom. 25.4; Thes. 4.2; Pomp. 45.1-5) occurs in both 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Colossians 2:15, where Paul employs the image of the Roman triumph metaphorically to describe God’s role as the sole, divine ruler and sovereign victor over his enemies. It is striking, however, that in both these texts the focus is on the direct object of the verb, thereby calling attention to the role of those led in triumph in revealing, ultimately through their death, the glory of the one who had conquered them. Read against this cultural backdrop, Colossians 2:15 affirms that God, having previously conquered and disarmed the rulers and authorities of this age, is now leading them in a triumphal procession (*thriambewò*). Just as being led in a triumphal procession meant being led to death, so too the result of God’s triumph over the rulers of this age is the manifestation of his sovereign glory through the public display of their destruction.

In 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul himself in his role as an apostle (hence the use of the literary or apostolic plural in this verse) is now the object of the verb: “But thanks be to God who always leads us in his triumphal procession (*thriam-
beu) in Christ and [in this way] makes known through us the fragrance of the knowledge of him in every place.” In addition, some scholars have taken the image of the fragrance in this passage (cf. 2 Cor 2:14-16a) to refer to the incense that was sometimes carried along in the triumph, while others (more correctly in my opinion) view it as a reference to the incense of the OT sacrifice.

But ever since John Calvin found it impossible to imagine that Paul could be praising God for leading him like a prisoner of war in such a triumphal procession, the more significant issue has been the application of the metaphor of the Roman triumph itself. Calvin himself, for theological reasons, gave the verb a causative sense, which he recognized was different from the common meaning of the verb, and translated the verse, “Thanks be to God who causes us to triumph.” Rather than being led in the triumph to his death, Paul was now portrayed as sharing God’s triumph like a general walking alongside the chariot.

Although such a rendering is impossible both linguistically (in 1879 Findlay demonstrated that thriambeu, being a transitive verb, was never used in such a factitive sense) and historically (those led in triumph were not the victors), this reading of the text has influenced the translation and interpretation of the passage ever since (cf. Egan’s attempt to redefine it to mean “display,” “noise abroad” or “publicize,” even though there is no textual or linguistic support for such a reading).

More recently, J. M. Scott has argued that although Paul does picture himself as being led in triumph, the image refers not to being led to death but to Paul’s vision of the triumphator’s chariot in front of him, which in the Roman triumph helped to symbolize the deity. Taken in this way, the metaphor points to Paul’s experiences of a Jewish merkabah (= chariot) mysticism, as in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6, since Paul associated the Roman chariot with the chariot vision of God’s glory in Ezekiel 1:15-21 as picked up in the imagery of Psalm 68(67):18-19 (cf. Eph 4:8). In 2 Corinthians 2:14, Paul is thus speaking of being led into mystical experiences of God’s glory, by which he makes God known to others. On the other hand, C. Breytenbach has argued that the metaphor should not be pressed so far but refers simply to Paul’s role as the one who reveals God’s glory as victor, without including the other images of the Roman triumph. In his view, Paul is referring only to his ministry as an apostolic mediator of the knowledge of God in a general sense.

However, such attempts to emphasize a different aspect of the triumph other than Paul’s being led to death as the key to the metaphorical image in 2 Corinthians 2:14 cannot do justice to the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, where Paul has just described his anxiety over the welfare of the Corinthians as he awaited news from Titus, which he reminds the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:28 was one of his greatest experiences of suffering. For Paul, to be led into such situations of suffering as an apostle is to be led to his “death” in Christ and for the sake of the gospel. Nor can it make sense out of the exact parallels between 2 Corinthians 2:14 and 1 Corinthians 4:9 and 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, where Paul’s suffering as an apostle is also pictured in terms of being sentenced to death or delivered over to death as the means by which God reveals his resurrection power (= life) in the world.

In light of these parallels and within the context of 2 Corinthians 2:14 itself, it becomes clear that for Paul, being delivered over to death is a metonymy for suffering (see too 2 Cor 1:8-11). In 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul praises God for his suffering because, rather than calling his apostolic ministry into question, Paul’s suffering is the very means through which God reveals himself in the world (cf. Duff’s helpful analysis of the force of the metaphor as an epiphany process). Only if the image is taken here in all of its grim reality does the text make sense within its own context and within Paul’s larger apologetic for his legitimacy as an apostle. As the former enemy of God’s people who had been conquered by God in his conversion call on the road to Damascus, Paul, now a “slave of Christ” (his favorite term for himself in his role as an apostle), was always being led by God in a triumphal procession “to death” (i.e., into situations of weakness and suffering; cf. 1 Cor 15:31).

In this way Paul makes known the majesty, power and glory of his conqueror, either through his experiences of divine deliverance (cf. 2 Cor 2:8-11) or through his divinely enabled endurance in the midst of adversity (cf. 1 Cor 2:2-5; 4:8-13; 2 Cor 4:7-15; 6:3-10; 11:23-33; 12:7-10; Phil 1:12; 2:25-30; see DPL, Suffering). Hence, 2 Corinthians 2:14 is not an abrupt break in
Paul's argument but the necessary and logical response to the suffering introduced in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 (Hafemann, 35-72, 80-83). In 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul praises God for the very thing his opponents maintained called his apostleship into question.

This interpretation of 2 Corinthians 2:14 has found confirmation in White's argument that this same Pauline use of "death" as a metonym for suffering is the key to understanding not only 1 Corinthians 15:31 ("I die every day") but also the image of "being baptized on account of the dead" in 1 Corinthians 15:29. Instead of being an obscure reference to an unknown ritual lost in history, Paul is referring to the Corinthians' baptism under the ministry of Paul, here pictured in terms of his suffering (i.e., his being dead) as an essential, legitimizing aspect of his apostolic calling and of the gospel of the resurrection that he preached. To be baptized in Christ also meant being identified with those who suffered in Christ and for his people (cf. 2 Cor 4:5). Thus 1 Corinthians 15:29 refers to the convert's identification with Paul's ministry as an apostle, once again pictured in terms of "death" as a metonym for the daily suffering that Paul endures in hope of the resurrection and final reign of God in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:28, 30-32). In Paul's words, "For what will those do who are being baptized on account of the dead [i.e., in response to the ministry of the apostles who suffer for the sake of the gospel]? If the truly dead are not being raised, why then are people being baptized on account of them [i.e., on account of the apostles, since their gospel offers no hope]?" (1 Cor 15:29). Paul would not willingly suffer, and the Corinthian believers would not have accepted his suffering as legitimate, being baptized as a result, were it not for the truth of Paul's gospel.

Finally, Schmidt has speculated that Mark selected and arranged key elements of the passion narrative in Mark 15:16-32 to recall the image of the Roman triumph: the gathering of the whole guard in Mark 15:16; the ceremonial royal robe and crown in Mark 15:17; the real mockery by the soldiers in Mark 15:18-19, who in the triumph would deride the victor to keep him humble; the offer and refusal of the myrrhed wine in Mark 15:23, which in the triumph was given to and refused by the victor and then poured out on the altar of sacrifice; and the placement on the right and left of those crucified with Jesus in Mark 15:27, in mock parallel to those who sometimes surrounded the enthroned ruler in these positions of power during the triumph. For Mark's Roman audience, these elements would highlight that the death of Jesus took place in ways that ironically recalled the adoration of the emperor who led the triumphal procession in his attempts at self-glorification and even deification. Now, however, the real triumph had been celebrated by a defeated king who, though executed himself, was in reality the true Son of God. Against the backdrop of the triumph, "Mark is presenting an anti-triumph in reaction to the contemporary offensive self-divinization efforts of Gaius and especially Nero" (Schmidt, 16). The purpose of such a portrayal is clear: one of the same Roman soldiers who first mocked Jesus as a triumphant king is the one who joins God himself in confessing Jesus' lordship.

See also Roman Emperors; Roman Empire; Roman Military.


S. J. Hafemann

ROMANCES/NOVELS, ANCIENT

Ancient romances, or novels, are modern terms that scholars use for a number of ancient narratives that typically involve an extraordinarily beautiful young couple who fall in love but who must endure various temptations, hardships and humiliations before they, with the help of the gods, can live happily ever after.

1. Romances and Related Narratives
   2. Recent Scholarship on the Romances
   3. The Romances and the New Testament

1. Romances and Related Narratives.

1.1. Extant Romances. Five classic Greek romances have survived intact and are readily available in English translation (see Reardon 1989, 17-588). They are, in chronological sequence, Chariton’s *Ephesian Tale*, Achilles Tatius’s *Leucippe and Cleitophon*, Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe* and Heliodorus’s *Ethiopian Story*. Chariton may have written his romance as early as the mid-first century A.D. and certainly by the early second. The next three—Xenophon, Achilles Tatius and Longus—all belong to the second century A.D., the first two to the early part, the last to the latter part of the century. Heliodorus’s dates have been less secure, vacillating between the third and fourth century, but recently resolved in favor of the fourth (Bowersock, 149-55).

1.2. Evidence of Further Romances. These five complete romances are the most important examples of the genre, but hardly the only ones. References in literature point to other romances—for example, Philostratus mentions a romance called *Araspe and Panthea* and attributes it to the early second-century sophist Dionysius of Miletus (Vit. Soph. 524). Summaries of still other romances are preserved in the Bibliotheca of Photius, ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople (Reardon 1989, 773-97). But it is the sands of Egypt that continue to provide new, if very fragmentary, papyrus evidence of previously unknown novels, about a dozen to date, all of which are now ready available (see Stephens and Winkler; Reardon 1989, 799-827).

1.3. Related Narratives. Finally, a number of related narratives are often included with the romances, such as Dio Chrysostom’s “Hunters of Euboia” (= Or. 7.1-80), the *Alexander Romance*, the epistolary novel of Chion of Heraklea, the Jewish novella *Joseph and Aseneth* and the Christian apocryphal Acts (see Morgan and Stone- man, 117-271; see Apocryphal Acts and Epistles).

2. Recent Scholarship on the Romances.

Scholarship on this considerable body of literature was long dormant, despite occasional contributions, most notably E. Rohde’s massive and erudite *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer* and B. Perry’s *Ancient Romances*. Since the 1970s, however, interest in the romances has burgeoned, so much so that they have become, as one recent assessment puts it, “one of the hottest properties in town” (Bowie and Harrison, 159). The reasons for this renewed interest are many: the current interest in the Second Sophistic, which is the broader literary and intellectual context for the romances; the fascination with contemporary literary theory that has grown out of studies of the romances’ contemporary counterpart, the modern novel; and the increased communication and collaboration among scholars that has been fostered by international conferences and bibliographical newsletters like G. Schmeling’s *Petronian Society Newsletter*.

In any case, scholarship on the romances is growing rapidly, and the growth has not outrun sophisticated and insightful analysis. For example, new editions of the texts continue to appear, including the recent addition of Chariton’s *Callirhoe* in the Loeb Classical Library (Goold). In addition, excellent introductory studies of the romances are now available (Hägg; Holzberg; Schmeling), and scholarship on individual romances progresses on a number of fronts. Not surprisingly, much of this scholarship is concentrated on literary analysis, both of the genre of romance and of specific narratological techniques in the romances (Reardon 1991; Bartsch; Schmeling), but scholars are also using the romances as sources for reconstructing ancient social life, in particular their portrayal of *women*, their understanding of love and their conventions of *marriage* (Egger; Konstan; Schmeling).


Consequently, given the ready availability of texts and translations, along with an extensive and impressive secondary literature, it is a good