The Convict's Gibbet and the Victor's Car: The Triumphal Death of Marcus Atilius Regulus and the Background of Col 2:15*

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Abstract

This article will suggest that scholars have overlooked a model plausibly lurking in the background of Col 2:15 which parallels the triumphal death of Christ: namely, the crucifixion of Regulus. Regulus was a general who achieved a near-mythic status during the First Punic War by his sacrificial death, in which his perseverance on the gibbet was seen as even greater than riding in the victor's car. Tertullian credited Regulus as having set the precedent for enduring the torments of the cross, while others declared him as having overcome through death not only his human foes but also Lady Fortune. Regulus' story enjoyed so much widespread popularity it was admitted in the curriculum of Roman schools by the middle of the first century CE. Because Regulus' epic contains low-hanging fruit, ripe for comparison with Christ's crucifixion, Christians drew upon the story of Regulus from at least as early as Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Arnobius, and Augustine. Nevertheless, scholars have overlooked the possible parallels with Regulus' story and Christ's triumphal death in Col 2:15. I will first provide a composite depiction of Regulus' military life and sacrificial death along with its reported ramifications in order to tease out similarities and differences with Col 2:15 and finally conclude with comments concerning the significance of including the legend as additional background for

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the verse. In short, I will propose that reading Regulus' story in comparison with Col 2:15 supports an anti-imperial and/or a supra-imperial reading of the letter.

Keywords

Colossians, Col 2:15, crucifixion, Regulus

Introduction

The stories Rome told served not as "empty rhetoric, poetic hyperbole, or pragmatic flattery" but as part of the "ideological glue that held the empire dynamically together."[1] Rome used its particular legends to propagate its superiority over the nations and to profess its God-given office to rule the world.[2] This imperialism provided the early church "fertile ground for reflection" regarding "how elements of the theological and christological vision . . . intersect, engage, and even imitate Roman imperial claims."[3] New Testament authors borrowed from this amalgam of vocabulary, metaphors, and myths that the empire employed. According to Karl Galinsky, they did so, not least because their audiences understood these things, but also because it enabled them 1) to mimic and repurpose those imperial furnishings and 2) to oppose and construct alternatives to them.[4] In other words, this process helped early believers define and articulate their own *politeuma* and ideals.[5]

According to scholars, Col 2:15 is a prime example of this practice.

> ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας
> ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.
>
> By the cross,[6] God made a public spectacle of the powers and authorities,
> stripping them off and leading them in a triumphal parade. (My translation)

[1] John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2005) 10.

[2] John Granger Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World* (WUNT 2/327; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) 133.

[3] Arthur M. Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities: Reading Colossians in Its Roman Imperial Context," *RevExp* 116 (2019) 446–57, at 451.

[4] Karl Galinsky, "In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult: A Cooperative Agenda," in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 222. See also Warren Carter, "Roman Imperial Power: A New Testament Perspective," in *Rome and Religion* (ed. Brodd and Reed), 137–51.

[5] Harry O. Maier, *Barbarians, Scythians, and Imperial Iconography in the Epistle to the Colossians* (WUNT 2/193; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 389.

[6] There is a question as to whether "Jesus" or "the cross" is the antecedent of ἐν αὐτῷ. In other words, is it "in Christ" or "in his cross" (τῷ σταυρῷ) where victory is seized and triumph obtained? Although τῷ σταυρῷ is the more immediate antecedent, the significance here is minimal, since Paul construes God as overcoming the powers through Christ and his cross. See Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018) 260; Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 112; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1984) 128. It could also refer to the triumphal procession; see Murray J. Harris, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Colossians and Philemon* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010) 100.

The irony of this verse is striking. God took from the hands of the powers the imperial instrument of death and disgrace and turned it into the instrument of their disablement and defeat.[7] Considering Christ's crucifixion a universal triumph is a colossal reversal,[8] where Jesus's death at the hands of the Romans is placed "in its strongest light—triumph in helplessness and glory in shame."[9] As J. B. Lightfoot put it, here "the convict's gibbet is the victor's car."[10]

Most scholars focus on the debate surrounding Col 2:15 regarding the translation of ἀπεκδυσάμενος as "stripping off" or "disarming," and that of θριαμβεύσας with respect to the imagery of the victory parade.[11] At the same time that they attend to terminological allusions to the pomp of the Roman Empire, there is a visual model lurking in the background that parallels the triumphal death of Christ: namely, the storied crucifixion of Marcus Atilius Regulus.[12] As I will recount in more detail

[7] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 110–11; and Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009) 81. The powers here could refer to political or spiritual powers or both. See Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase "hai archai kai hai exousiai"* (SNTS 42; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 7–43; Adam Copenhaver, *Reconstructing the Historical Background of Paul's Rhetoric in the Letter to the Colossians* (LNTS 585; London: Bloomsbury, 2018) 205; Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (vol. 1 of *The Powers*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992) 64–66; Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities," 446–57.

[8] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 170.

[9] J. B. Lightfoot, *Colossians* (13th ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 192.

[10] Ibid., 192. Christ's cross is likened to a chariot in triumphal parade; Dunn, *Colossians,*168. See also Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians,* 111. This claim has consequently led to a long tradition of theological reflection with respect to the Lord's conquest on the cross (i.e., *Christus Victor*). See John M. G. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) 84; and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 60.

[11] On the triumphal procession, see Christoph Heilig, *Paul's Triumph: Reassessing 2 Corinthians in Its Literary and Historical Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017); Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Roger David Aus, *Imagery of Triumph and Rebellion in 2 Corinthians 2:14–17 and Elsewhere in the Epistle* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005) 1–84; and H. S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Cf. Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 59–66.

[12] Scholars' tendency to overlook this model may have something to do with Martin Hengel's dismissal of the parallel due to the dubious details surrounding Regulus's crucifixion (Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] 64). See also Yann Le Bohec, "L'Honneur de Régulus," *Antiquités africaines* 33 (1997) 87–93; F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (6 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 1:94. Cf. Elimar Klebs, "Atilius 51," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (ed. Georg Wissowa, Wilhelm Kroll, and August Friedrich von Pauly; Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1992) 2092; Theodor Mommsen, *The History of Rome* (trans. William Purdue Dickson; 2 vols.; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1895) 2:184 n. 1; and J. F. Lazenby, *The First Punic War: A Military History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996) 106; Rosa María Marina Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana. El *Exemplum* de M. Atilio Régulo, De Tertuliano a Agustín" *Polis* 23 (2011) 153–70, at 153–54. Although contemporary scholars may question the degree of historical accuracy regarding Regulus's crucifixion, Cicero and many others in the ancient world did not. Nevertheless, the argument of this

below, Regulus was a decorated military general,[13] who achieved a near-mythic status during the First Punic War by his sacrificial death, in which his perseverance (*patientia*) on the gibbet was seen as even greater than riding in the victor's car (*currus*).[14] Consequently, Regulus was credited for having set the precedent for gladly (*libenter*) bearing the "exquisitely cruel torments of the cross,"[15] and as having overcome through his death not only his human foes but also the cosmic power Lady Fortune.[16] As Ettore Pais concludes, Regulus became Rome's "genuine representative" (*schietto rappresentante*) of those willing to sacrifice their life for the name and greatness of their people (*pronta a sacrificare la vita per il nome e la grandezza della propria gente*).[17] Similarly, to borrow from Rosa María Marina Sáez, in much of Latin literature, Regulus was not just a paradigm (*paradigma*) of all the virtues Rome held most dear, he was the incarnation of them all.[18]

As we will discuss further below, the widespread popularity of Regulus's story—his military victories on land and sea, his two terms as an elected official, his legendary triumph over a monstrous snake, and his selfless act of handing himself over to a horrible death—is attested in its frequent occurrence in Greek, Latin, and early Christian authors (e.g., Diodorus, Polybius, Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Silius Italicus, Quintilian, Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Arnobius, and Augustine). His tale became one of the empire's favorites, to the point of being admitted in the academic curriculum by the middle of the first century CE.[19] If people knew of Regulus as much as the evidence for his popularity suggests, it is likely some first-century believers viewed his legend as a lens and point of comparison with Christ's death. In that case, they plausibly considered Jesus's triumphal crucifixion as surpassing that of Rome's most illustrious hero, who also was said to have conquered his enemies through the cross.

To explore this notion further, I will first survey recent imperial-critical readings for Col 2:15 in order to set up the argument that if these scholars' conclusions regarding the political language surrounding the verse stand, it is plausible that

article is the allusion to the legend of Regulus, not the actual historical event.

[13] Regulus was also elected as suffect in 267 and 256 BCE; see G. K. Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," *CW* 96 (2003) 375–85.

[14] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.545. On the *currus triumphalis*, see Versnel, *Triumphus,* 56. Unless noted otherwise, all translations of ancient sources come from the respective volumes in the LCL.

[15] Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.18. "(If we take the torture) of the cross, of which so many instances have occurred, exquisite in cruelty, your own Regulus readily initiated the suffering which up to his day was without a precedent."

[16] See Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, 1:16–26.

[17] Ettore Pais, "I tormenti inflitti ad Attilio Regolo e l'autenticità della tradizione Romana," in *Ricerche sulla storia e sul diritto pubblico di Roma* (Rome: Loescher, 1921) 411–37, at 433. See also Gaetano de Sanctis, *Storia Dei Romani* (2nd ed.; 3 vols.; Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967) 1.153 §155.

[18] Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 153. See also Bohec, "L'Honneur de Régulus," 93.

[19] Steele Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995) 111.

an allusion to Regulus's victorious crucifixion would play a part.[20] Next, I will recount the story of Regulus's life and various versions of his death, along with its reported ramifications, so as to tease out similarities and differences with Col 2:15. Finally, I will conclude with comments concerning the significance of including the legend as additional background for the verse. I will infer that reading Regulus's story in comparison with Col 2:15 supports an imperial-critical reading of the letter, wherein the cross of Christ simultaneously caricatures and transcends the ubiquitous Roman standard.

It is important to note that this article does not seek to supplant other readings of the verse but aims to expand those accounts, especially in the interest of showing how the early church took prevailing ideas—imperial or otherwise—and "adapted and redeployed them as a means of forging a unique religious and social identity."[21]

Imperial-Critical Readings of Col 2:15

There has been a recent uptick in scholars interested in the relationship of Colossians to the imperial context.[22] Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat are notable examples of those who underscore the politically charged notes in Colossians. In fact, they argue the letter should be read as an explosive tract that seeks to subvert Rome by proclaiming an alternative metanarrative of redemption and by presenting a competing gospel at variance with the empire's.[23] Col 2:15 stands for them as a clear case in point, where Christ's work in disarming the powers exercised his sovereignty over Rome: "This rule was established on the cross and confirmed in the resurrection. Rome could not keep Jesus in a grave sealed by the empire."[24]

According to Harry O. Maier, "a first-century Christian audience hearing the letter read aloud would immediately have recognized imperial-sounding themes, greeted as it was daily by ubiquitous imperial images."[25] Of these, Maier considers the portrayal of a Roman triumph in 2:15 a "most recognizable parallel with imperial ideals."[26] He reasons that with respect to this political symbol, Colossians declares a destabilizing truth: it is from the beams of Christ's cross, in the body of his death, "that a new *imperium* issues forth"—wherein enemies are pacified not through the

[20] On the imperial critical approach to Colossians, see Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities," 446–57.

[21] Harry O. Maier, "A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire," *JSNT* 24 (2005) 323–49, at 327.

[22] This relates to Warren Carter's plea for scholars to resist "spiritualized and individualized readings" that either render the empire invisible or dismiss it altogether (Carter, "Roman Imperial Power," 138). See also Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities," 446–57; and Maier, "A Sly Civility," 323–49.

[23] Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004) 7, 226. See also Brian J. Walsh, "Late/Post Modernity and Idolatry: A Contextual Reading of Colossians 2:8–3:4," *ExAud* 15 (1999) 1–17.

[24] Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed,* 155.

[25] Maier, "A Sly Civility," 326.

[26] Ibid.

execution of subjects but by the crucifixion of the divine king.[27] Maier infers that in light of the appropriation of imperial imagery with the celebration of Christ's cross, Col 2:15 stands as a crux of the letter—pointing backwards to the author's earlier use of Roman political ideology (especially in 1:15–23) and preparing the way for more of it in the following chapters (especially in 3:11–4:1). He argues that, as with 2:15, these passages challenge the depictions of the empire and its *triumphus*, which Rome lifted up to declare its entitlement to rule the world.[28]

In a similar vein, N. T. Wright argues that τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας in 2:15 includes Roman powers who had overreached themselves by crucifying the Lord of glory because they were angered by Christ's challenge to their sovereignty.[29] Nevertheless, by stripping Jesus naked, holding him up to public contempt, and celebrating a triumph over him, God paradoxically stripped them naked, held them up to public contempt, and led them in his own triumphal procession.[30] As a result, Wright concludes, the cross becomes "the source of hope for all who had been held captive under their rule, enslaved in fear and mutual suspicion."[31] Now that Christ has broken the hold of these powers, the behavior of their world, "its distinctions of race and class and sex, its blind obedience to the 'forces' of politics, economics, prejudice and superstition—have become quite simply out of date, a ragged and defeated rabble."[32]

Although Scot McKnight concludes that some scholars have pressed the anti-imperial theme "so hard at times to hurt the cause," he still discusses the apparent intersection between the letter's claims and those of Rome.[33] The critical issue, he states, is how concerned the author of Colossians is with the tension between Rome and the kingdom of God. For example, while McKnight does not see the reference to "the power of darkness" in Col 1:13 as pointing directly to the empire, he considers Rome as playing a part in this domain. In other words, the author conceives the powers of darkness as composed of "deep, cosmic, demonic personal realities" that enslave structures and bind society in an infernal attempt to thwart God's plan.[34] Therefore, McKnight infers, the authorities whom Christ disarms in 2:15 refer to supernatural beings at work in the empire's earthly structures.[35]

Most recently, Arthur Wright Jr. likewise argues that even if Colossians does not provide "a full-throated, 'gloves off' assault on the Roman Empire . . . it necessarily

[27] Ibid., 348.

[28] Ibid., 341. Cf. Max Mühl, *Die antike Menschheitsidee in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975) 82.

[29] N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (TNTC; Cambridge: Tyndale, 2008) 121.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 63–64.

[34] Ibid., 126.

[35] Ibid., 257.

intersects with and engages Roman imperial claims."[36] According to him, 2:15 comes into even sharper tension with the sociopolitical framework of the empire when one takes into account that the author has just mentioned how Christ is the head of every ruler and authority (v. 10) in whom the fullness of deity dwells (v. 9). Roman ideology "categorically placed the emperor at the pinnacle of power" and "presented crucified persons as crushed and annihilated by the empire—not superior to it."[37] He concludes that in 2:15 the author "flips the script of imperial triumph to demonstrate the power and superiority of God." In contradistinction to Rome's government, Christ's reign is envisaged not "in dominating violence or overwhelming military force, but rather in weakness, sacrifice, and self-giving love."[38] Although the defeat of these rulers was accomplished on the cross, the author's parting words—"remember my chains" (4:18)—remind the audience that Rome's oppressive structures paradoxically remain.[39]

This article seeks to follow in the line of these scholars and to reinforce their conclusions by suggesting that if there are political dimensions related to Jesus's execution depicted in Col 2:15 (as they argue), then it is likely that an allusion to Regulus's crucifixion would accompany them. In the following section, then, I will survey Regulus's life and various accounts of his death by Greek and Roman authors before and during the first century CE, in addition to those in early Christian texts. With that historicization in place, I will then set up a comparison between Regulus's execution and Jesus's crucifixion as construed in Colossians.

Regulus's Life and Various Accounts of His Death

Before discussing the various versions of Regulus's death for comparison with Jesus's in Col 2:15, a brief sketch of his life is important. In ancient Rome, Regulus had obtained considerable fame for his military campaigns and had even celebrated a triumphal procession.[40] Later in his career, he won a famous naval victory, which enabled his army to invade Africa.[41] In this campaign, Regulus gained the empire vast quantities of spoils and—to prepare for a second victory parade—sent the booty back to Rome along with officers and troops he had captured.[42] Meanwhile,

[36] Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities," 451.

[37] Ibid., 455.

[38] Ibid., 456.

[39] Ibid., 457.

[40] Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 10.37.13–15. Cf. the ministry of Lucius Aemilius Paulus, who celebrated two triumphal processions. See Aus, *Imagery of Triumph,* 1–7.

[41] Polybius considered this "the longest, most unintermittent and greatest war" in memory (264–241 BCE) (Polybius, *Hist.* 1.63.4–5). Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 23.15.7. Cf. Polybius, *Hist.* 1.31.2–3; and Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.18–20. Cf. Klebs, "Atilius 51," 2087; and Mommsen, *The History of Rome,* 2:181. On this naval battle, see Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, 1:85–86; Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 81–96; Bohec, "L'Honneur de Régulus," 87–88.

[42] Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.21. Cf. M. Cary and H. H. Scullard, *A History of Rome down to the Reign of Constantine* (3rd. ed.; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 171–72; Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 100; Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," 376–78. See also William R. Nifong, "Promises Past:

outside the walls of Carthage there arose a fabled serpent that killed a number of Regulus's troops.[43] Regulus slew the fantastic beast, flayed it, and sent its wondrous skin to Rome.[44]

This was the limit to Regulus's good fortune, however.[45] On the brink of defeat, the Carthaginians tried to make a peace treaty with Regulus,[46] but he responded with terms so unreasonable that the "peace framed by him was no better than slavery."[47] Rather than take such a deal, the Carthaginians decided instead to enlist the help of Xanthippus, a seasoned Spartan commander.[48] Around May 255 BCE, Xanthippus led an army of mercenaries whose cavalry outnumbered the Roman troops eight to one.[49] In addition to this, the Spartan lined up one hundred war elephants against Regulus's soldiers.[50] (Unfortunately for the Romans, countering a stampede of fighting elephants was not in their military school's curriculum.)[51] The ensuing battle came to be known as one of the most comprehensive and disgraceful defeats in the nation's history—"a day that Rome shall ever mark in black."[52] In it, almost all of Regulus's troops were wiped out,[53] with the greater number of them "trampled to death by the vast weight of the elephants," and the remainder shot down by

Marcus Atilius Regulus and the Dialogue of Natural Law," *Duke Law Journal* 49 (2000) 1077–126, at 1077. On the terms ΘΡΙΑΜΒΟΣ and TRIUMPHUS, see Versnel, *Triumphus,* 11–55. Silius Italicus has Regulus's wife recount Regulus's last parade, when his shoulders gleamed with a purple robe of the *vestis triumphalis* as the Roman lictors marched forth to execute his prisoners (Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.440–445). On the *vestis triumphalis,* see Versnel, *Triumphus*, 56.

[43] Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 100. See Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.140–180; and Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 18. Cf. Richard B. Stothers, "Ancient Scientific Basis of the 'Great Serpent' from Historical Evidence," *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science Society* 95 (2004) 220–38. According to the tale, the snake was 120 feet in length and "as thick as it was long" (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 11.22). The monster had been spawned by the earth in her terrible wrath, created for the defense of Africa (Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.150; Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.18–20).

[44] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.140–295; Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 11.8.13.

[45] In light of what happened next, some ancient authors considered the strange episode with the snake as portending what Tyche was about to do to Regulus. This follows her reputation as one who reverses a person's lot "at the moment of extreme prosperity" (Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, 1:92–93). See also Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," 377.

[46] On the debate as to who actually initiated the treaty, see Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 101–2; and Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius,* 1:90.

[47] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist*. 23.12.1.

[48] Cary and Scullard, *A History of Rome*, 172. Cf. Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 102–3; and Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, 1:91.

[49] Erving R. Mix, *Marcus Atilius Regulus: Exemplum Historicum* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), 135. See also Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 103.

[50] Mommsen, *The History of Rome,* 2:181; and Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius,* 1:91–92.

[51] In return, Regulus placed most of his soldiers in the center to offset Xanthippus's elephants. The strategy horribly failed and set the troops up to be trampled all the more. Cf. Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," 381; Lazenby, *The First Punic War*, 104–5; and Cary and Scullard, *A History of Rome*, 172.

[52] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.335–45; Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.23.

[53] Thirteen thousand of them from approximately 15,000 infantry men. See Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," 381.

the cavalry as they stood in their ranks.[54] Along with five hundred other troops, Regulus was captured and carried away. Then, in retribution, the Carthaginians marched against the African towns who had shown friendship to Regulus, and the Carthaginians crucified the town leaders because of their association with him.[55] As we will see in the next two sections, this is essentially the end of Regulus's story for the Greek historians, but emphatically not for the Roman ones.

Greek Accounts of the *Shameful* Death of Regulus

In stark contrast to the heroic status the Latin authors would later attribute to Regulus, the Greek historian Diodorus (60–30 BCE) considered Rome's so-called champion a prideful, power-grabbing blowhard. Diodorus even goes out of his way to pause his narrative to underline the hubris of Regulus and denounce his errors so that others might avoid Regulus's mistakes. In fact, according to Diodorus, no right person could ever fail to condemn Regulus for his arrogance and folly (τὴν ἀφροσύνην καὶ τὴν ὑπερηφανίαν; 23.15.1). For one thing, Diodorus explains, Regulus should have accepted the Carthaginians' peace treaty. Then he would have spared Rome an extremely long and costly war. Then he would have left for himself an enduring legacy as a man of mercy and philanthropy (ἡμερότητος καὶ φιλανθρωπίας). Then he would not have been known as the general whose arrogance led to the eventual deaths of one hundred thousand Roman troops.

Diodorus scoffs at how, instead, Regulus—impressed with his own success—"robbed himself of the highest renown," by dealing so arrogantly with the Carthaginians that the *daimonion* (τὸ δαιμόνιον) was roused to righteous vindication (νεμεσῆσαι) against him.[56] As a result, in exchange for the great esteem Regulus had earned, he received exponentially more dishonor and disgrace, heaped upon him by the very hands of those who had previously sought reconciliation with him. He who showed not a trace of pity received none in return (23.15.7). Rather, in their vengeance the Carthaginians cut off Regulus's eyelids and penned him in with a savage elephant that mortally mangled him. Diodorus concludes: "Thus, the great general, as though driven by an avenging fury, breathed his last and died a most wretched death" (23.16.1).

Although not as harsh as Diodorus, Polybius (208–125 BCE) also considers Regulus's defeat a humiliating example. For Polybius, the precept garnered from Regulus's life is not about an honorable death but about what happens when a person foolishly trusts fickle Lady Fortune, especially when that person is enjoying success. Polybius concludes with this somber comment: "Regulus who had shortly refused to take pity or mercy on those in distress was now, almost immediately

[54] Polybius, *Hist.* 1.34.7–8.
[55] Orosius, *Hist.* 4.9.9. Cf. Cook, *Crucifixion,* 156–57.
[56] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 23.15.2.

afterward, being led captive to implore pity and mercy in order to save his own life."[57] Polybius ends here and does not mention how Regulus died.

As we will see below, these sober accounts stand in contrast to the Roman portrayals of Regulus's death.

Roman Accounts of the *Triumphal* Death of Regulus

Before comparing Regulus's execution with Jesus's in Col 2:15, it is important to survey what Roman authors were saying about Regulus before the end of the first century CE. This section will focus on the accounts of Cicero (ca. 106–43 BCE); Horace (65–8 BCE); Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–65 CE); Silius Italicus (ca. 28–103 CE); and Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE).[58] All of these writers poured out excessive praise for Regulus. Silius Italicus even referred to him as "the hope and pride of Hector's race" (*spes et fiducia gentis Hectoreae*),[59] who set forth the pattern of joyfully persevering the torment of the cross.[60] Similarly, Quintilian considered him the preeminent professor of virtue—an instructor of courage and righteousness, simplicity and endurance, faithfulness and self-control.[61]

According to Regulus's passion narrative by Silius Italicus, Lady Fortune captured Regulus and dragged him through the Carthaginian streets in a triumphal procession. As she paraded him before a hostile crowd with both his hands bound fast behind his back, the Roman onlookers grieved in lament that a servant of god and his chosen city had to be doomed to die in Africa.[62] As a veritable Roman, though, Regulus's spirit remained unbroken (*infractus*), and he met the Carthaginians' glares with a calm and collected gaze.[63] Due to his sterling reputation, the Carthaginians rightly presumed the Romans would pay a handsome price to get their general back. They therefore sought to set up a cease-fire or, at least, a prisoner exchange.[64] By their calculations, Regulus's single ransom was equal to all of their warriors imprisoned in Rome. Before sending the general home to make the deal, his captors made Regulus swear mighty oaths to the gods promising he would come back to Carthage if, for any reason, the Senate rejected the peace agreement or refused to release the prisoners.[65]

[57] Polybius, *Hist.* 1.35.1.

[58] On other Roman authors who referred to Regulus, see Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 154.

[59] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.340–45.

[60] Ibid., 1.6.530–35.

[61] Quintilian, *Inst*. 12.2.30. Literally: "fortitudinem, iustitiam, fidem, continentiam, frugalitatem, contemptum doloris ac mortis melius."

[62] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.340.

[63] Ibid., 6.365–70; cf. Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.23.

[64] For more on this, see Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 153–54.

[65] Circa 247 BCE; see Gaetano de Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani* (4 vols.; Italian edition; Turin: Bocca, 1907–23), 1.152 §154.

What the Carthaginians did not know was that Regulus had also prayed to his god. He asked the "ruler of the universe, the source of justice and truth" to give him success in convincing the Romans to reject the Carthaginian offer—since Regulus would rather go to Hell (*Stygios*) than to see his nation strike "so base a deal."[66] Around 250 BCE, Regulus returned home with that hope.[67] He addressed the senators and then made his startling move. Much to the dismay of the Carthaginians and the Romans alike, rather than taking the offer, Regulus demanded that the Senate deliver him back over to the Carthaginians and roundly refuse the request for reconciliation.[68] So, the Carthaginians moved to arrest him and take him back to Africa.[69]

Having already resigned himself to his fate, Regulus would not change his mind.[70] And, true to his word, he remained unmoved by any plea to flee. According to Horace, even though Regulus knew full well what the barbarian torturer was preparing for him, he pushed aside any who attempted to delay his return.[71]

> 'Tis said he put away his chaste wife's kisses and his little children,
> as one bereft of civil rights,
> and sternly bent his manly gaze upon the ground.[72]

Traditions vary as to what exactly Regulus's horrible tortures entailed.[73] As mentioned above, some sources state that his captors cut his eyelids off and forced him to stare at the sun.[74] Others say Regulus was placed in an iron maiden–like

[66] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.465–90.

[67] Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," 379.

[68] According to Dio, "There is no single respect," Regulus reasoned, "in which reconciling with Carthage is advantageous to Rome" (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 11.8.15).

[69] For more on this, see Nils Rücker, "Exempla fidei: Die Figur des Regulus in der Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis," in *Noctes Sinenses. Festschrift für Fritz-Heiner Mutschler zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Andreas Heil, Matthias Korn, and Jochen Sauer; Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011) 397–406.

[70] Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 153–54.

[71] Horace, *Carm.*3.5.40–50. Literally: "atqui sciebat quae sibi barbarus tortor pararet. Non aliter tamen dimovit obstantes propinquos et populum reditus morantem." According to Dio, Regulus declared: "As for me I know that manifest destruction awaits, but even so, I consider Rome's public advantage above my own personal welfare" (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 11.31).

[72] Horace, *Carm.* 3.5.40–50: "Fertur pudicae coniugis osculum parvosque natos ut capitis minor ab se removisse et virile torvus humi posuisse voltum." See also Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.495–520. Cf. Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.23; and Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 11.8.15: "To any friend who would beg him to escape, the general explained: I have sworn to the Carthaginians to return, and I will not transgress my oaths, not even when these vows have been given to my enemies."

[73] Some sources say the Carthaginians made Regulus drink poison; others state that before his execution, the torturers cast Regulus into utter darkness, sentencing him to solitary confinement (e.g., Augustine, *Civ.* 1.15; cf. Klebs, "Atilius 51," 2087–90).

[74] See Cicero, *Fin.* 5.27.82; *Pis.* 43; *Off.* 3.27.100. As a result, according to this account, the general eventually died from lack of sleep.

contraption, "a specially constructed receptacle bristling with spikes."[75] This is how Seneca describes it in *De Providentia*:

> Nails pierce Regulus' skin,
> and wherever he rests his wearied body,
> he lies upon a wound;
> his eyes are stark in eternal sleeplessness.
> But the greater his torture is,
> the greater his glory shall be.[76]

Finally, some report that Regulus was hung on a cross, so as to experience the *summum supplicium* (extreme punishment) of all conceivable tortures and the ultimate avenue of shame.[77] In this light, Seneca included Regulus in his list of noble deaths. "Many men have overcome various trials"—Socrates conquered hemlock; Mucius, fire; and "Regulus, the cross" (*crucem*).[78] Moreover, in one account, a bystander details how he watched Regulus hanging high upon the tree in Carthage as the general looked upon Italy from his lofty cross (*cruce sublimis*).[79] Further, the Carthaginians celebrated their crucifixion of Regulus. For example, Hannibal's shield had engravings of a triumphal parade proceeding past Regulus hanging "glorious in suffering."[80]

Nevertheless, rather than imprisonment and crucifixion humiliating Regulus, according to Cicero, the experience rendered Regulus's actions even more worthy of admiration (*omnibus admirabilior*). Cicero went so far as to say that none of the general's famous victories should be counted less honorable than his final disaster.[81] To be sure, Cicero reasoned, "Regulus had fought great wars (*bella magna*), had been a consul twice, and had [even] celebrated a triumph (*triumpharat*)"; yet his act of fidelity (*fidem*) in enduring torture and nobly facing a disgraceful death is greater and more glorious (*praeclara*) than any other achievement in his life.[82] Cicero also argued that it was "for the sake of honor" that with "full pleasure" (*perpetienti voluptarius*) Regulus chose to undergo such wretched (*miserabilis*)

[75] Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 11.8.15; Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.540–45; and Cicero, *Pis.* 43. Cf. Augustine, *Civ.* 1.15, who describes it as having the "sharpest of nails on all sides" (*clavisque acutissimis undique confixo*).

[76] Seneca, *Prov.* 3.69: "Figunt cutem et quocumque fatigatum corpus reclinavit, vulneri incumbit, in perpetuam vigiliam suspensa sunt lumina. Quanto plus tormenti tanto plus erit gloriae."

[77] Crucifixion was the common form of execution practiced in Carthage. Hengel, *Crucifixion,* 64.

[78] Seneca, *Ep.* 98.12. Cf. *Prov.* 3.11.

[79] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.340–45.

[80] Ibid., 2.430–40.

[81] Cicero, *Fin.* 2.20.65. See Alan Brinton, "Cicero's Use of Historical Examples in Moral Argument," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 21.3 (1988) 169–84. Cicero mentions Regulus many times in his speeches and essays, "which seem to represent a planned program of philosophical and moral exposition" (Mix, *Regulus,* 35). See also Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.25, where he argues that the general's imprisonment and crucifixion in no way sullied (*deformata*) Regulus's dignity (*maiestas*).

[82] Cicero, *Fin.* 2.20.65.

torment, having so much virtue that "when he was being slowly put to death . . . he enjoyed a happier lot than had he remained at home."[83]

According to Roman lore, the torture and death of Regulus did not produce the result the Carthaginians desired. Not only was Regulus reported to have gained esteem from his death, he also was said to have achieved victory through it.[84] In fact, it was claimed that Regulus did more damage to Carthage in fetters than when his hands were free.[85] The ramifications of Regulus's noble death expanded beyond humanity. In a doxology dedicated to the general, it is written that his *veneranda virtus* (venerable virtue) transcends space and time.

> His laurels will green throughout the ages,
> as long as unstained *Fides* keeps her seat in heaven and on earth,
> and as long as Virtue's name is worshipped there.[86]

Likewise, Cicero called upon Lady Virtue to testify to Regulus's merit on behalf of humankind. "I do not even have to speak," Cicero declared, "for Virtue herself will not hesitate to exalt Marcus Regulus for me."[87]

The report of Regulus's defeat of his captors on a cross does not stop with his conquest of his human enemies, but it extends to his having endured the wounds and weapons (*tela*) of Lady Fortune (Tyche).[88] According to Seneca, Tyche did not defeat Regulus. Rather, she established him as a pattern of faithfulness and perseverance ("documentum fidei, documentum patientiae"); consequently, in enduring utmost shame, Regulus purchased enduring fame.[89] By the end of the first century CE,

[83] Cicero, *Fin.* 2.20.65 and *Off.* 3.27.100. See Brinton, "Cicero's Use of Historical Examples," 177–78.

[84] From the ancient Roman's perspective, Regulus's *fides* found its justification in Scipio's victory over Carthage and the resulting unfolding of Rome's majestic destiny and ideological influence (Mix, *Regulus,* 55).

[85] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.465–70. "Regulus' defeat inspired instead a sense of reawakening" (La disfatta di Regolo ispirò invece un senso di resipiscenza) (de Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani*, 1.153 §155). Moreover, it made the Romans as intent on avenging Regulus as on gaining a victory for Rome; see Florus, *Epit.* 1.18.26. However, the final victory of this first war came still thirteen years later, the prolongation of which set up the eventual success of Hannibal. It was in reality "fifty years later and on much the same ground" that Scipio would "exact a measure of revenge for the defeat of Regulus" (Tipps, "The Defeat of Regulus," 385).

[86] Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 6.545–50. Literally: "longo revirescet in aevo gloria, dum caeli sedem terrasque tenebit casta Fides; dum virtutis venerabile nomen, vivet; eritque dies, tua quo, dux inclite, fata audire horrebunt a te calcata minores."

[87] Cicero, *Fin.* 2.63–64.

[88] Cicero, *Pis.* 43. Cf. Mix, *Regulus,* 37. As Florus put it in the 2nd cent. CE, by Regulus's execution the general triumphed "victorious over his victors . . . even over Tyche herself" (*Quid aliud quam victor de victoribus atque etiam . . . de fortuna triumphavit*); *Epit.* 1.18.26.

[89] Seneca, *Prov.* 3.9. Seneca goes on to place Regulus's model over against that of Maecenas, who drugs his body with wine and beguiles his mind with a thousand pleasures. Nevertheless, according to Seneca, Maecenas will no more be able to close his eyes while he lies on his bed than Regulus could as he lay upon his cross—with his severed lids. In stark contrast to Maecenas, however, Regulus found consolation because he suffered hardship for the sake of what is right, and the general could, therefore, ever fix his eyes on his just cause. This is beyond the scope of

Regulus's story and the resulting moral lessons from it were so codified that the very mention of his name would have triggered recall of these associations.[90]

In sum, according to the Romans, Regulus set the precedent of nobly bearing the cross. He receives perennial praise as one who, by his death, overcame his foes—including the cosmic power, Lady Fortune. Thereby, in addition to the pattern he set for honorable suffering, Regulus provided the world a lasting model of selfless loyalty.[91] Outside of the New Testament, there is no example in the ancient world of a triumphal crucifixion as consonant with Col 2:15 as Rome's celebrated death of Regulus. Having now surveyed the Greek accounts leading up to the first century CE and the Roman accounts during the first century CE, it will be beneficial to summarize how the first Christians drew upon the Regulus legend.

Early Christian Accounts of the Death of Regulus

In her work on Christian apologists, Carole Straw demonstrates how "'one-upmanship' arguments were the core of a rhetorical strategy by which early Christians hoped to crush their pagan opponents"; thus, for example, the believers in Jesus would belabor the point that even though non-Christian champions "had valiantly despised death and all sorts of savage treatment," their heroes were still "far outshone by the Christian martyrs."[92] According to Straw, the Christian writers used the language of heroic death even as they modified the meaning thereof and rejected the worldly attitude behind it. Thereby, as the Christian arguments revealed "an identity with their adversaries' cultural values, as well as a transcending of them," they defeated the unbelievers "on their own terms."[93]

In this vein, Christians from at least as early as the second century referenced the Roman account of Regulus's execution.[94] They did so from as early as Tertullian

this article but perhaps an area for further research: Regulus is often placed in juxtaposition with someone who is considered a slave of pleasure. For instance, see also Cicero, *Fin.* 2.20.63–65.

[90] Paul C. Burns, "Roles of Roman Rhetorical *exempla* in Augustine's *City of God,*" *StPatr* 38 (2001) 36.

[91] Regulus's veneration continued in the ensuing centuries—being honored by Christians and non-Christians alike in poetry, prose, and art, from Horace to Milton to early American laws. Similarly, William Havard states that Regulus's story exists to point out "the blackness of our vices by the brightness of his virtues . . . to scatter the seeds of virtue in the bosom of the rising generation" (William Havard, preface to *Regulus: A Tragedy* [London, 1744]). Regulus appears in works of histories, biographies, "lyric poetry, moral and theological essays and letters, and compendia of various types. Throughout, the influence of rhetoric is felt" (Mix, *Regulus,* 39). Cf. Nifong, "Promises Past," 1079.

[92] Carole Straw, "'A Very Special Death': Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context," in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives in Martyrdom and Religion* (ed. Margaret Cormack; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 39–57, at 40. See also Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 155.

[93] Straw, "'A Very Special Death,'" 40.

[94] For the influence of the Regulus tale on *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis,* see Rücker, "Exempla fidei," 397–407. See also Markus Janka, "Der Musterrömer Regulus und die Römerwerte. Neues zur Prisca Virtus Romana," in *Brandenburger Antike-Denkwerk. O tempora, o mores. Relevanz*

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(ca. 150–250 CE), Minucius Felix (ca. 150–250 CE),[95] Arnobius (ca. 250–330 CE), and Augustine (ca. 354–430 CE).[96] For example, according to Minucius Felix, over against Regulus—Rome's esteemed crucified hero—the church's "children and tender women not only voluntarily submit to and endure the inhuman torture of the cross, but by the grace of God they also laugh and scorn the beams (not even to mention the wild beasts and other paraphernalia of punishment!)."[97] Arnobius provides another example. He uses Regulus to respond to his opponents, who claimed Christ was debased by his death on the cross. Arnobius reasons: if Regulus's death by a similar torture did not sully his reputation, "why then Christ's?"[98]

As with the Romans, Tertullian praises Regulus as one who would not allow his own life to be counted for the lives of many (*unus pro multis*). Rather, "for the price of many," Regulus willingly endured crucifixion—so that even "in captivity, he conquered" (*in captivitate victorem*!).[99] Moreover, Tertullian states that the champion experienced not one but a great number of crucifixions (*tot cruces*), having been "pierced on every side with nails from without."[100] According to Tertullian, Regulus's exit was glorious, and there was "no reckless presumption, no desperate delusion" in his contempt of death. Why is it, then—Tertullian reasons—that the Romans can honor one who is willing to suffer for his empire but despise a Christian willing to suffer the same for her God? Tertullian points out their inconsistency in discounting Christians. Since the Romans themselves seek to give the likes of Regulus immortality by casting a sculpture, painting a picture, or carving an inscription, Tertullian concludes:

> So far as you can manage it with monuments,
> you yourselves give dead men a sort of resurrection.
> But the man who hopes for a real resurrection from God,
> if he suffers for God—you consider him a mere fool![101]

In short, "Romans have their statues, Christians their resurrection."[102]

Just as Regulus's death had ironic ramifications, so did that of Christian martyrs. Tertullian therefore needles the magistrates to go ahead and please their constituents by sacrificing the Christians. "Torture us, rack us, condemn us, crush us!" And do so with cruelties "each more exquisite than the last."[103] Such torture, he concludes,

und Relativierung von Wertbegriffen (ed. Ursula Gärtner; Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2013) 37–63. On the evolution of how Christian authors referred to Regulus, see Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 154–68.

[95] Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 37.5–6.

[96] See Augustine, *Civ.,* 1.15. Cf. Burns, "Roles of Roman Rhetorical *exempla*," 37.

[97] Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 37.5–6.

[98] Arnobius, *Adv. Gent.* 1.40. See Sáez, "Retórica y Pensamiento en la Apologética Cristiana," 158.

[99] Tertullian, *Mart.* 4; idem, *Apol.* 50.6.

[100] Tertullian, *Mart.* 4.

[101] Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.11.

[102] Straw, "'A Very Special Death,'" 41.

[103] Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.12. He illustrates this increasing degree of torture by referring to the rape of

is "the bait that wins more men for our school. We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed."[104]

Similar to the Latin authors, Augustine surmised that among all the empire's heroes worthy of honor and renowned for virtue, none was greater than Regulus—Rome's "most noble example" (*nobilissimum exemplum*).[105] According to Augustine, when Regulus marched "without a doubt" (*sine ulla dubitatione*) back to Carthage, he did so with an "unconquerable spirit" (*invictum animum*), "fearlessly" (*intrepidus*) to face his "terrible end" (*exitia revertit*). Augustine concludes that Regulus remained as one whom Fortune neither "corrupted" (*corruperit*) nor "crushed" (*fregerit*).[106] He also uses Regulus's story in an apologetic argument—not to denounce Regulus but Regulus's gods. According to Augustine, Regulus's defeat teaches that the Roman gods fail their worshipers. The very gods to whom Regulus swore allowed him—a devout acolyte and virtuous man—to be both conquered and led captive, tortured and put to death "by a most horrible kind of punishment."[107]

In short, early Christian writers follow the legend of Regulus that was broadcast throughout the empire in the first century and beyond. These authors tend to fall in step with the Roman accounts that praise him as a champion for his faithful endurance and victorious death. They also take the legend as an opportunity 1) to defend the glory of Christ's crucifixion, 2) to relegate Regulus's death to a status not nearly as noble when compared to the execution of Christians, and 3) to defame the Roman gods. I will return to these references in the next section and in the conclusion.

Now that the background has been set, we are in a good position to compare Regulus's execution to that of Jesus's in Colossians.

Comparison

According to the author of Colossians, God was pleased through the blood of Jesus to reconcile all things in heaven and earth to himself (Col 1:19–20).[108] As a result of Christ's crucifixion, the church has redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and citizenship in the heavenly kingdom (Col 1:13–14).[109] On the beams, Jesus overcame the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them (Col 2:15). Although numerous other allusions are submerged beneath the notion of Christ having triumphed through the cross (garnering glory in shame and conquering in

a young Christian girl, whom they savagely condemned "to the pander rather than the panther," 50.13.

[104] Ibid., 50.13.

[105] Augustine, *Civ.* 1.24; 1.15. Augustine refers to Regulus a total of seven times in the book (1.15, 1.24, 2.23, 2.29, 3.18, 3.20, and 5.18). For more on Augustine's use of Regulus, see Burns, "Roles of Roman Rhetorical *exempla*," 31–41.

[106] Augustine, *Civ.* 1.24.

[107] Ibid., 1.15.

[108] See Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities," 446–57.

[109] See Maier, "A Sly Civility," 323–49.

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captivity),[110] Regulus's crucifixion should be considered alongside them.[111] For while the idea of defeating human and/or celestial powers is not uncommon in the ancient world,[112] it is quite anomalous (outside of the New Testament) to find that victory occurring through crucifixion unless one is referring to Regulus.[113] Jesus and Regulus are the only two people before the end of the first century whose mortal gibbet is the victor's car, in which they ride in triumph over cosmic powers.[114]

Considering Regulus's model beside Col 2:15 provides additional roots for understanding the depiction of the crucified Christ in the letter. In other words, by putting the two figures in juxtaposition, the language of Colossians gains fresh relief, as the reflecting resemblances highlight the differences between the two. For instance, although the cross was the instrument of shame, neither Jesus's nor Regulus's death was considered as having besmeared their respective reputations. Just the opposite![115] This, though, is where a resemblance "smuggles in" a disconnection,[116] for whereas Regulus did not lose his individual dignity on the cross, the implications of Jesus's death go further in Colossians. By Christ's cross,

[110] E.g., see Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 13–152; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 189–92; C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 101; Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon,* 111; Roy Yates, "Colossians 2.15: Christ Triumphant," *NTS* 37 (1991) 573–91, at 574. Cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) §5:1; R. B. Egan, "Lexical Evidence on Two Pauline Passages," *NovT* 19 (1977) 134–62; and G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's Use of θριαμβεύω," *Expositor* 1:10 (1897) 403–21; A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1974) 153; and F. Field, *Notes on the Translation of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899) 181–82.

[111] Of course, determining what model or models are submerged beneath a text is "not necessarily a straightforward or simple process" and "possible backgrounds and texts cannot be neatly separated from one another"; further, "it is likely that each possible background both interprets and is interpreted by the other" (Erin M. Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and Pauline HUIOTHESIA Metaphors* [Leiden: Brill, 2017] 115, 145). See also Cilliers Breytenbach and J. C. Breytenbach, "Paul's Proclamation and God's 'Thriambos,'" *Neot* 24 (1990) 258; and Luke Timothy Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 138.

[112] Rather than ruling out one background in favor of another, scholars should weigh all of the possible models, since each one could contribute to the overall meaning of the text. Both the author and the audience of this letter could have been influenced by multiple backgrounds, especially since the Colossian audience was comprised of people from diverse ethnic groups and social stations (e.g., Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; see Col 3:11). The various perspectives of individuals in each group could result in different models being conjured up in their particular minds.

[113] Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008) 146.

[114] See Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.545; and Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 192.

[115] See Arnobius, *Adv. Gent.* 1.40.

[116] According to Peter Zhang, a comparison brings forth striking points of coherence and smuggles in "disconnections as part of the deal" (Peter Zhang, "Corporate Identity Metaphor as Constitutive Discourse in Miniature: The Case of New China Life," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 68 [2011] 381).

God also conferred dignity to the world.[117] That is to say, the spot where Rome sought to bestow utmost shame on Jesus became the source of lasting honor for Greeks and Jews, the circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians and Scythians, slaves and free (Col 3:11).[118]

Several more examples demonstrate how the similarities of Regulus's triumphal death create a foil for the figure of the cross in Colossians. For instance, Regulus was pleased to endure crucifixion because he refused peace and turned down reconciliation with the Carthaginians. Conversely, in Colossians, God was pleased by Jesus's crucifixion to bring peace to the world and to reconcile all things to himself (Col 1:20). Regulus initially rejected the opportunity for reconciliation with his Carthaginian enemies. He even asked God (the ruler of the universe and genuine source of justice and truth[119]) to help him convince the Senate to reject the second Carthaginian attempt at a cease-fire. In stark contradistinction, God (the Father of Jesus Christ, who is firstborn over all creation) gave reconciliation and peace to those who were alienated from him and hostile to him (Col 1:15–21). Because of Christ, God forgave sinners and lawbreakers their transgressions, and he canceled the χειρόγραφον (certificate of debt) that opposed them (2:13–14). Also, Regulus went so far as to sacrifice his body to prevent his life from serving as a ransom for the empire's enemies. He would rather face Hell, he said, than for his nation to have peace with Carthage. Yet Jesus died and faced the grave to redeem God's enemies, so that his Father could transfer them from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of his son (Col 1:13–14). His sacrifice called his enemies to be reconciled and to live in one accord as one unified body, wherein his word would richly dwell and his peace would finally rule (Col 3:15–16).

Not only is there a difference with respect to the ramifications of Jesus's and Regulus's actions on their respective enemies, but there is also a strong contrast between the ramifications on the peoples associated with the two heroes. As mentioned above, after Regulus's actions failed, the Carthaginians who had surrendered to him and made a pact with him were ostracized and crucified as a result. In comparison, the Colossians who had received Christ Jesus as Lord were buried with him (in baptism) and raised with him through faith in the power of God (Col 2:6–12). Whereas Regulus's African friends shared in his tragic fate, those aligned with Christ—in addition to his burial and his peace—share in his inheritance and the hope of his glory (Col 1:12, 27; 3:4). Despite the victory enacted in Jesus's death, his followers still faced persecution. Just as Christ's death did not have the effect his enemies desired, according to Tertullian, the execution of the Lord's followers likewise had unintended consequences: their blood is seed and the bait that wins even more people to their faith (*Apol.* 50.13).

[117] McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians,* 260.
[118] Maier, "A Sly Civility," 323–49.
[119] Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.465–90.

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Furthermore, (G)od allowed Regulus and Jesus to endure torture and death. In their deaths, they both were reported to have conquered their conquerors. Consequently, Regulus's death was praised by his countrymen and exalted by Lady Virtue "as long as unstained *Fides*" kept her seat in heaven. In comparison, the gospel about Jesus Christ was proclaimed in all the earth (Col 1:6). Both figures therefore came to serve as universal paragons of righteousness, endurance, faithfulness, and self-control. But even beyond the everlasting memory of Regulus's glory and over and above Lady Virtue's extolling of his name in heaven, all the fullness of deity dwells in Jesus (Col 2:9), whom God raised from the dead and seated at his right hand (Col 3:1).[120] To borrow from Tertullian, Regulus may have his statue, but Christ has his resurrection.[121]

Finally, both stories are marked with irony. Regulus was one battle away from celebrating a second triumphal procession for Rome, an extraordinary achievement indeed.[122] Instead, the tables were turned, and he, the servant of god and his chosen city,[123] was separated from his spoils, attacked by τὸ δαιμόνιον,[124] and marched by Lady Fortune in a spectacular victory parade. In contrast, according to Col 2:15, God flipped the script so that the previously condemned Messiah is now honored in the matchless, cosmic triumphal procession, having despoiled those who had crucified him.

With these initial comparisons made, we are now in a better position to make conclusions concerning the overall significance of including Regulus's legend in the background of Col 2:15.

Conclusion

With respect to understanding imperial and civic elements in the background of texts, Gregory Snyder accuses New Testament scholars of having too narrow a focus and too instrumental an approach.[125] As a result, Snyder complains, these scholars often allow the foreground to determine what elements are given weight and attention. This "not only imports distortions and exaggerations but also leaves important things out of the account."[126] Perhaps this is also the case for Col 2:15, since the imagery of Regulus's tale served as one of the countless, yet conspicuous,

[120] Cf. Augustine, *Civ.* 1.15. Cf. also, Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 26.3.

[121] Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.11. See Straw, "'A Very Special Death,'" 41.

[122] For a champion to celebrate two triumphal processions was rare in Rome; see Aus, *Imagery of Triumph*, 7–8.

[123] See Silius Italicus, *Punica* 6.340.

[124] Greek authors such as Diodorus and Polybius highlighted Regulus's pride, which not only got the general executed but also led to the deaths of Roman soldiers and Carthaginian sympathizers. If the Colossians were familiar with the Greek versions of Regulus's death, they might also have highlighted the merciless hubris of the Roman hero that led to his defeat by τὸ δαιμόνιον over against the compassion and victory of Christ.

[125] H. Gregory Snyder, "Response to Karl Galinsky, 'In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult: A Cooperative Agenda,'" in *Rome and Religion* (ed. Brodd and Reed), 227–34.

[126] Snyder, "Response to Karl Galinsky," 228.

facets of the empire's framework and *politeuma*, which was designed to remind inhabitants how much more superior the Romans were to those from other nations (including barbarians, Scythians, Greeks, and Jews; cf. Col 3:11).[127]

If Col 2:15 already employs Roman political language in comparison to Christ, as scholars such as Walsh and Keesmaat, Maier, Wright, McKnight, and Wright Jr. argue, then it is plausible that an allusion to Regulus's victorious crucifixion would accompany it. In light of the expansive popularity of Regulus's story and the parallel of conquering powers on a cross, rather than "Could the Colossian audience have picked up on an allusion?" the question seems to be "How could they have not?" As to whether it supports an anti-imperial[128] or a "*supra*-imperial" reading of Colossians,[129] the latter may be an unintentional version of the former—since Caesar would certainly consider insulting, if not treasonous, any implication (inadvertent or otherwise) that he was lesser than or insignificant to a Jewish carpenter-king. Nevertheless, in that Colossians does not give a direct "full-throated, 'gloves off'" assault on Rome (in comparison, for example, with the book of Revelation),[130] the supra-imperial reading is preferred. That is, in Colossians Christ is not depicted as directly against Rome but as wholly exceeding it. In other words, the delineation of Jesus's triumph on the cross does not just stand alongside or in the face of Roman examples like Regulus, which were used to publicize the empire's God-given role to subjugate the nations and to bring them under its control.[131] Rather, for the Colossian believers, Christ's victory would surpass Regulus's legend "in a far more perfect way."[132] Through it, God conquers all the powers, pacifies all the nations, and restores dignity to the world.

Since it is difficult to say whether the author of Colossians intended to allude to Regulus's notorious death or whether the early church would have made the connection even if the author did not, it will be helpful to borrow from Richard Hays's criteria for testing the legitimacy of allusions in Paul's writings.[133] First, this

[127] This is not meant to endorse the Rome-centric view, which classicists have abandoned. See Galinsky, "In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult," 215–25. But even if, as Galinsky argues, Justin Hardin goes too far in saying "imperial ideology wrapped its fingers around every fabric of society," Rome's *politeuma* carried enough weight to influence believers more often than not. Cf. Justin Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult* (WUNT 2/37; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

[128] Cf. Maier, "A Sly Civility," 323–49; Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*; and Walsh, "Late/Post Modernity and Idolatry," 1–17.

[129] See Karl Galinsky, "The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?" in *Rome and Religion* (ed. Brodd and Reed), 1–21; idem, "In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult," 215–25; and Snyder, "Response to Karl Galinsky," 228. See also McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 62–65; and John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 363–87.

[130] Wright Jr., "Disarming the Rulers and Authorities," 451.

[131] Of course, this divine initiation was considered to be under the direction of the *divi filius*, their "divinely established ruler." See Maier, *Barbarians, Scythians, and Imperial*, 386, 388.

[132] Galinsky, "In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult," 222.

[133] Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 1–33.

proposal for Col 2:15 fits Hays's availability criterion, since the Regulus story was so pervasive in the first century. Furthermore, similar to Hays's volume criterion, the idea of overcoming enemies and achieving glory through a cross is distinct enough to Regulus and Jesus for there to be an allusion here. As mentioned above, they are the only two figures in the first century CE reported to have conquered their enemies by the cross. With respect to thematic coherence and historical plausibility, this reading underlines a (direct or indirect) subversive imperial theme that scholars consider recurring in Colossians, and it fits with the early church's tendency to draw on political stories and images for their own ends, as already exemplified by the use of the triumphal parade in Col 2:15.

With respect to the history of interpretation criterion, Christians from at least as early as the second century reflected on Regulus in their works. Like Arnobius's reference, the proposed allusion places the executions of Regulus and Jesus side by side—neither execution was considered shameful. And, similar to Minucius Felix's and Tertullian's maneuvers, the allusion denigrates Regulus's death in light of Christian crucifixion. While second-century apologists exalted Christ-following women and children over Regulus's cross, this proposal suggests Colossians does so with Christ. What is more, Augustine used the story to denounce Roman gods in comparison to the Christian God. If early Christians saw their followers outstripping Regulus and his gods, it is not farfetched to imagine them seeing their God's work through the Lord's death transcending Regulus's as well.

As to whether the proposed reading meets Hays's satisfaction criterion (in that it provides an insightful reading), the Regulus allusion does further elucidate and enhance Col 2:15. In this case, Christ's triumphal death echoes that of Regulus—but does not replicate it. It thereby minimizes the significance of the very image on which it draws.[134] That is to say, in light of the suggested allusion, the preeminence of Jesus's victory in Col 2:15 would (intentionally or not) provide a subtle twist to Rome's model causing it to slip. It presents a superior alternative to Regulus—thus transcending the imperial standard "even as it mimics it."[135]

[134] Cf. Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of the Book of Revelation," *TynBul* 37 (1986) 61–94.

[135] Maier, "A Sly Civility," 349; and Carter, "Roman Imperial Power," 148. Cf. Rosemary Canavan, *Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae: A Visual Construction of Identity* (WUNT 2/334; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 189–90. According to Canavan, regarding "the visual construction of identity in Colossians," the borrowed imagery was "not essentially a polemic against the Romans. Rather . . . it emulated a common cultural practice [that] . . . corresponded with that used by the Roman regime to assert itself via images as the omnipotent power" (p. 189). The Regulus story could serve in a similar way for the Colossians.