



Good day Worthy Knights

In this part 9, we explore the concept of Damnatio Memoriae. (Wikipedia)



Following the battle, Constantine ignored the altars to the gods prepared on the Capitol to receive sacrifices appropriate for the celebration of his victorious entry into Rome, and the new emperor instead went straight to the imperial palace without performing any sacrifice.

He chose to honour the Senatorial Curia with a visit, where he promised to restore its ancestral privileges and give it a secure role in his reformed government. There would be no revenge against Maxentius' supporters.

But Maxentius was condemned to damnatio memoriae, all his legislation was invalidated and Constantine usurped all of Maxentius' considerable building projects within Rome, including the Temple of Romulus and the Basilica of Maxentius.

Damnatio memoriae is the Latin phrase literally meaning "damnation of memory" in the sense of removal from remembrance. It was a form of dishonour that could be passed by the Roman Senate upon traitors or others who brought discredit to the Roman State.

Etymology

The sense of the expression damnatio memoriae and of the sanction is to cancel every trace of the person from the life of Rome, as if he had never existed, in order to preserve the honour of the city; in a city that stressed the social appearance, respectability and the pride of being a true Roman as a fundamental requirement of the citizen, it was perhaps the most severe punishment.

Lucius Aelius Sejanus suffered damnatio memoriae following a failed conspiracy to overthrow Emperor Tiberius in 31. His statues were destroyed and his name obliterated from all public records. Coins from Augusta Bilbilis, originally struck to mark the consulship of Sejanus, have the words L. Aelio Seiano erased.

Practice

In Ancient Rome, the practice of *damnatio memoriae* was the condemnation of Roman elites and Emperors after their deaths.

If the Senate or a later Emperor did not like the acts of an individual, they could have their property seized, their names erased and their statues reworked. Because there is an economic incentive to seize property and rework statues anyway, historians and archaeologists have had difficulty determining when *damnatio memoriae* actually took place. The practice of *damnatio memoriae* was rarely, if ever, an official practice.

Any truly effective *damnatio memoriae* would not be noticeable to later historians, since by definition, it would entail the complete and total erasure of the individual in question from the historical record. However, since all political figures have allies as well as enemies, it was difficult to implement the practice completely.

For instance, the Senate wanted to condemn the memory of Caligula, but Claudius prevented this.

Nero was declared an enemy of the state by the Senate, but then given an enormous funeral honouring him after his death by Vitellius.

While statues of some Emperors were destroyed or reworked after their death, others were erected. Historians sometimes use the phrase *de facto damnatio memoriae* when the condemnation is not official.

As indicated, among those who did suffer *damnatio memoriae* were Sejanus, who had conspired against Emperor Tiberius in 31, and later Livilla, who was revealed to be his accomplice. The only emperors that are known to have officially received a *damnatio memoriae* were Domitian and later the co-emperor Publius Septimius Geta, whose memory was publicly expunged by his co-emperor brother Caracalla, in 211.

Examples of *damnatio memoriae* in modern times include the removal of statues of Stalin and other Communist leaders in the former Soviet Union.

Ukraine successfully dismantled all 1,320 statues of Lenin after its independence, as well as renaming roads and structures named under Soviet authority.

In a somewhat analogous fashion, in the United States, the monument for the Battle of Saratoga has a blank niche where Benedict Arnold's name is missing from the list of victorious generals.

Various other Revolutionary War monuments either omit his name, or in the case of West Point, anonymously list only his rank and date of birth.

The treatment of Chinese Statesman Zhao Ziyang following his fall from grace inside the Chinese Communist Party is regarded as a modern case of *Damnatio Memoriae*.

The diplomatic practice of *persona non grata* has thematic similarities to *damnatio memoriae*.