
The purpose of the Roman Argei ceremony, during which the Vestal Virgins harvested made and paraded rush puppets only to throw them into the Tiber, is widely debated. Modern historians supply three main reasons for the purpose of the Argei: an agrarian act, a scapegoat, and finally as an offering averting deceased spirits or Lares. I suggest that the ceremony also related to war and the spectacle of displaying war casualties. I compare the ancient Near East and Rome and connect the element of war and husbandry and claim that the Argei paralleled the sacred marriage. In addition to an agricultural and purification rite, these rituals may have served as sympathetic magic for pre- and inter-war periods. As of yet, no author has proposed the Argei as a ceremony related to war. By looking at the Argei holistically I open the door for a new direction of inquiry on the Argei ceremony, fertility cults in the Near East and in Rome, and on the execution of war criminals.

The Argei and new year’s sacred marriage both occurred during the initiation of campaign and spring planting and harvest season. Both in the ancient Near East and in Rome, animal victims were sacrificed and displayed through impaling, crucifixion, and hanging for fertility and in war. For both Rome and the Near East war casualties were displayed on sacred trees. Through the Near East cultures a strong correlation existed between impaling, hanging, and crucifixion in war and Sacred Tree fertility worship. By examining Roman tree worship, military rituals, and agricultural ceremonies a similar correlation becomes apparent. On the same day of the Argei, Mars was married to the anthropomorphized new year and within the month became a scapegoat expelled from the city. Additionally, on the first day of the Argei boys became soldiers.
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CHAPTER I
THE ARGEI AS WE KNOW IT

Introduction

The Argei ceremony began in March, just a few short weeks after the new year. The
Vestals harvested the newly sun-kissed, chartreuse braids of unripened *far* - Rome’s oldest
known grain preferred for religious ceremonies.\(^1\) They gathered the young *far* from each of the
twenty-seven sacred fields. After threshing these first-fruitsthey baked offering cakes.\(^2\) The
maidens tied the remaining rushes in bundles resembling bound men, which they hung in the
twenty-seven temples or *sacella Argeorum* of the sacred fields.\(^3\) A few months later, on the ides
of May, the Flaminica Dialis priestess, unbathed and ungroomed with hair in disarray, led the
procession counter-clockwise from each of the sacred temples to the four regions of Rome
gathering the dangling images as they ambled through the roads along the city’s *pomerium*.\(^4\) The
parade finally concluded at the Sublicius bridge overlooking the Tiber, swollen from the melted
snow of the mountains in the distance. The Vestal Virgins carried these bales of foliage, now

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\(^1\) According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 2.25.2, *far* was among the oldest grains
known to the Romans, and was primarily used to initiate sacrifices. Regarding the green first-fruitsthe Romans
harvested spelt after the summer solstice as per Varro, *Re Rustica*, 1.32.1. Even after the calendar adjustments this
eyear March harvest would have likely been about a month prior to full ripening, Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*,
317-318.

\(^2\) Servius, *Auctus, In Vergilii Aeneidos Libros*, 8.77-82; Dionysius had thirty puppets and temples,
Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*, 1.38.3; Some debate exists regarding the number of temples and
corresponding Salii. Graf claimed there may have been only twenty-four. Graf, “The Right of the Argei,” 96.

\(^3\) These were open air temples with sacred gardens. Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, 325; Livy, *Ab Urbe
Condita*, 40.51.8; Ulpian, in Justinian *Digest*. 1.8.9.2.

\(^4\) Dionysius of Halicarnassus placed the celebration on May fifteenth, Ovid on May fourteenth and the
fifteenth. Plutarch gave the full moon of May as the correct date, but tells the reader the ceremony occurred on an
odd instead of an even day. If the festival happened on a full moon, it is possible it may have started as an odd day
and over time and calendar revisions switched to an even day. The original year had ten months, or ten completions
of the lunar cycle, though the ancients added months as needed to keep the seasons fairly accurate. Even the ancients
and eye witnesses disagreed about the elite and mysterious rite. Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.603-660; Plutarch, *Quaestiones
Romanae*, 32; Graf, “The Right of the Argei,” 95; Pearce, “Origins and Festivals,” 1, 6-7. This Argei procession
marked an early form of the *pomerium*, but perhaps the earliest was around the Palatine hill. The triumph also
traversed counter-clockwise around the city along what seems to be the same trail as the Argei. Warren, “Roman
Triumphs and Etruscan King,” 54. *Pomerium* ceremonies related to the protection of borders, war, and agriculture.
dried and bleached from the sun’s rays that pierced through the open-air sacella Argeorum where they hanged. The Vestals cast the packaged blades of wheat into the rushing Tiber. The spectators of the ceremony claimed the Vestals gave these bales a costume fitting of a captive bound by its imitation hands and feet. The Vestals participated in festivals generally related to fertility or agriculture as well as rituals that were among the oldest of Rome’s religious practices, but somehow the Argei ceremony remains a mystery. The debate and origin of this rite continues to plague historians today, as it did those in the late Republic and early Empire who observed it.

Modern investigation into the purpose and details of the Argei ceremony began in the late nineteenth century. Debates and discussions on the topic exploded following the article “Argei” by Wissowa in Pauly’s Encyclopedia. Wissowa, Frazer, and Fowler wrote in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and still receive the most attention on the subject. Currently an abnormal silence rests on the matter of the Argei. The attention devoted to the ceremony in the last few decades is generally mere repetition. This paper reopens discussion on the mysterious rite by suggesting a slightly altered purpose of the Argei by comparing Ishtar, goddess of fertility and war of the ancient Near East, with Mars, god of vegetation and war in Rome.

Modern historians have supplied three main arguments regarding the nature and purpose of the Argei: first as an agrarian act, second as a scapegoat decontamination dedication, and

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5 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae, 1.38.1-4; Varro, De Lingua Latina, 7.44; Festus, Breviarium Rerum Gestarum Populi Romani, 334; Ovid, Fasti, 5.627; Macrobius, Saturnalia, 1.7.28; Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 21; Takács, Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons, 46.

6 Holland, Janus and the Bridge, 316.

7 Some of Ishtar’s alternate names and identities include Inanna, Assuritu, Ashtoreth, Ashtarto, Asherah, Athtar, Astar, Ashtar, Attar, Ashtoret and Astarte, Tanit, and Tanit. Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria, 141; Olyan, Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel, 60.
finally as an offering averting or catering to the deceased or to the Lares.\(^8\) Current theories include one or more of these three purposes.\(^9\) To gather information and analyses the Argei, historians build theories based on surrounding events in the Roman calendar and they also draw conclusions from similar practices. For this reason the Argei is frequently associated with the ceremonies involving the Lares. Using this methodology, this paper suggests that the Argei interrelated with war as well as agriculture and the Lares.

The argument of this paper is based on a few important theories from previous historians and examples of ceremonies and events outside of the Argei. The first chapter describes the Argei ceremony and provides a historiography from ancient authors and then modern authors beginning with the nineteenth century Roman religious historians who have built the current foundation to the rite. The first step in this argument is to consider the elements of the Argei. Next this paper utilizes part of Nagy’s model regarding the relationship of the Lares to the puppets. Davis and Frazer indicated that the Argei puppets originated from the Greek scapegoat practice which the Greeks learned from the ancient Near East new year and sacred marriage Festivals. The Romans may or may not have inherited the practice from the Greeks. However, the Argei paralleled to the Near East new year and sacred marriage which this paper highlights. Davis and Frazer briefly mentioned the parallel but did not fully explore the Roman Argei in association with the ancient Near East. This correlation is expanded in this work.

\(^8\) Lares were chthonic deities or spirits usually interpreted as “the souls of the deceased,” There were multiple types of Lares. Various types included Lares praestites, Lares familiaris, Lares militares, etc. Laing, “The Origin of the Cult of the Lares,” 126, 137. Classical authors were not exactly consistent with their definition of the Lares. Ovid said they were children of Lara, Varro and Festus called them deified dead. Ovid, \textit{Fasti}, 2.535-616; Festus, \textit{Breviarium Rerum Gestarum Populi Romani}, 108; King, “The Organization of Roman Religious Beliefs,” 286-288, 296-297. Traditionally, Lares, Lemures, and Manes were typically souls of the deceased. Lares were typically good protectors, Lemures were usually evil, and Manes could be either good or bad.

Following these basics, chapter II delves into a background and history to the early practices of hanging, impaling, and crucifixion as seen in various cultures of the Near East. These brutal executions and exhibits of bodies are considered in relationship to Ishtar’s cult of fertility and tree worship regarding the Near East new year celebration and sacred marriage. By researching the Near East fertility cult festivals a connection between execution of war hostages and agricultural fertility becomes apparent. Once the interconnection between war executions, displaying human victims, and fertility is established the trend is compared to the Argei.

Chapter III circles back to the Roman world to discuss war ceremonies, fertility rituals, and tree worship as they correlate with one another. After looking at a series of examples it becomes obvious that the Argei, as well as the Near East fertility tree worship cults, especially in the new year festival, related to war. The Argei is currently regarded as an agricultural rite for fertility. This thesis suggests that the ceremony related to war and the spectacle of displaying war casualties. Though the Near East and Rome were very distinct cultures, it is possible that early on they may have shared a common prehistory.\textsuperscript{10} This paper connects the element of war and husbandry and claims that the Argei in addition to an agricultural and purification rite also served as sympathetic magic for pre- and inter-war periods.\textsuperscript{11}

As of yet, no author has proposed the Argei as a ceremony related to war. As the research in this paper unfolds the reader should perceive that some relationship between campaigns and this pastoral and purgative performance existed. The topics of agriculture and

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\textsuperscript{10} The common themes between the Ancient Near East and Rome discussed in this paper could have occurred through syncretization or may contain common element simply through a phenomenon of logic in agricultural societies, as discussed by James, \textit{Seasonal Feasts and Festivals}. Carl Jung called this a collective unconscious, while anthropologists Frazer merely point out similarities to draw conclusions.

\textsuperscript{11} Sympathetic magic combines the two ideas of homeopathic and contagious magic, such that a similar object contains the force and power of the object they resemble, and something that has touched an object contains some power and association to the that object even after removal. For more information on sympathetic magic see Frazer’s \textit{The Golden Bough} chapter 3, which is devoted to sympathetic magic.
fertility seem unrelated in the modern mind, but for the ancient agrarian societies, the topics overlapped. With this in mind, the historian must revisit the Argei debate holistically.

Elements in the Argei

The noteworthy characteristics of the Argei ceremony include the following: a procession through the city, deliberate mindfulness of the borders, the series of Argei temples, the Flaminica Dialis’ somber attire, the rush images made from bundled far, the Tiber, the specific Sublicius bridge, the Vestal Virgins, and the Salii. Each of these elements holds significance in Roman religion. To build a proper foundation for the Argei, each element must be discussed.

Scholars know little about the Argei temples. Varro gave several of the locations. Nagy averred that the Argei temples related to the Lemuria crossroad shrines and that next to each Argei temple rested a consecrated field of the first-fruit far. In the Argei procession to these temples, the Flaminica Dialis dressed in funeral attire. They removed their standard bridal attire on three occasions. The first occasion happened on the ides of March, the beginning of Argei, when the ancilia or ritual shields were moved. The second somber dressing occurred on the ides of May, the completion of the Argei when the effigies were dropped in the Tiber. Vestalia marked the final event. Vestalia, June fifteenth, or the summer solstice, generally signified the

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12 Plutarch, Lives, Marcellus, 21.5. For more information on the correlation between agrarian society and the incorporation of religion into legal aspects of life see Stark, “Gods, Rituals, and the Moral Order,” especially page 623 on which he includes a table of correlation between agrarian societies and concepts of religious morality. For Greek political control through religious practice see Ruebel, “Politics and Folktale in the Classical World,” 11-13.

13 Following Frazer and Wissowa’s popularity on the topic, the Argei became viewed only as a cleansing offering of human sacrifice to the infernal-gods and river deities. Smith, et al., “Argei,” A Concise Dictionary.

14 Approximate locations given on Figure 1. Varro, De Lingua Latina, 5.44-54.

15 See glossary for Lemuria.
lifting of the marriage taboo and the culmination of harvest. The most common thread is that all of these relate in some way to agriculture, but the first certainly contained elements of war and the last elements of fertility. Honoring the dead applied to both Vestalia and the early holidays of May prior to the ides of May. Modern historians have postulated that honoring the dead applied to the March and May Argei ceremonies as well.

Figure 1. Map of Rome. From Kyle, Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome. Indications for the Argei sacraria and Velabrum are mine based on Varro’s description.

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16 Women, or at least the Flaminica Dialis, were not allowed to be married from March to June. Though this time frame is debated. Fowler, The Roman Festival, 117. Toschi described a ritual practiced in Rome on Lake Bolsena in the nineteenth century, on the ides of May, in which a bag of flowers is carried around the chapel in procession for the lady of the mountain. This celebration may have corresponded with festival to Ceres. Toschi, “Roman Festivals,” 10.

17 This idea is discussed more fully in the historiography of this paper.
The Vestal Virgins normally played prominent roles in the oldest of the religious ceremonies. The ceremonies in which they were involved chiefly related to agriculture and fertility for the Roman society as a whole.\(^{18}\) Beard interpreted that the Vestals were both materfamilias matron and maiden, in the form of an eternal bride, for Rome.\(^{19}\) As such, in the Argei, they feasibly fulfilled the eternal bride and mother-goddess role related to the annual new year wedding and the dying god cult.\(^{20}\)

Also among the earliest Roman religious icons were the Salii. The Salii impersonated archaic soldiers.\(^{21}\) They wore a martial cloak, helmet, breastplate, and carried either a staff or spear. The *ancilia* was the most vital part of their attire. The gods bequeathed the first heavenly shield to Numa. Suited in this antiquated armor, the Salii chanted in a language that predated the Latin spoken in the Republic. The shouts befuddled the hearers, who were unaware of the Salii’s lexis. The opening invocation of the chant mentioned Cerus, a god connected to Janus, guardian of the bridge. The name Cerus likely derived from the term *creare*, “to bring forth, produce, make or beget,” and *crescere* “to grow.”\(^{22}\) The Salii only participated in certain ceremonies centered on soldierly celebrations.\(^{23}\)

\(^{18}\) Beard, “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” 15-17. Regarding the fertility, maintaining health, and sacrificial roles of women Rome, the topic is far too vast to tersely describe the importance of women and the Vestals. For more information see: Takács, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, and Schultz, *Women’s Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*.


\(^{20}\) See glossary for a definition of the dying god cult.

\(^{21}\) Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, 565. Note the shields of the Salii, according to Plutarch, Romulus adopted the Sabine’s oblong shields. The Salii’s shields, called *ancilia*, more closely resembled the Mycenaean shields instead of the Argives or Etruscans. The *ancilia* was oblong figure-eight design like the Mycenaean shield whereas the Etruscans used a round escutcheon. The shield shape may indicate migration patterns of the early Indo-European people groups to Italy, or could syncretization. Plutarch, *Lives, Romulus*, 21.1-8.

\(^{22}\) Spaeth, *The Roman Goddess Ceres*, 1.

The Salii’s involvement in the Argei at the Sublicius bridge and their call to a growth spirit, who was related to the bridge guard, highlights the primitive connection between war, borders, and agricultural fertility. The Salii joined in several March fertility and pre-war ceremonies, but bypassed services during war season until October, the end of campaign season rites.24 The Romans divided the year into two parts: March through October, which focused on agriculture and war, and October through March, a time of rest.25 The exception to the Salii’s time of rest was their presence in the triumphal processions.

Processions were prominent in agricultural ceremonies to mark out and protect territory, and in funerals and triumphal parades. The Argei procession consisted of the unkempt Vestals parading the effigies along the perimeter of the borders of the city and to each of the Argei temples. The procession formed a magical wall around the circumference of the traversed area to protect the crops, animals, and people within the border.26 In several Roman holidays participants or officials marched around the edge of Rome in sympathetic magic to protect the city. Protection must have played a role in the Argei procession as it outlined the early city borders on the day young men entered into military service.

The Vestals deliberately carried the Argei puppets through each of the city’s quadrants.27 The mindfulness of the boundaries in this ritual not only strengthens the argument for purification in this ritual, but also spotlights the pre-war nature of this custom.28 Borders symbolized protection. The Roman borders that received magical protection included the

24 James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals, 164-165; as an occasional, or possibly later exception to this, the Salii were present in triumphal processions, Warren, “Roman Triumphs and Etruscan King.” 52.

25 Pearce, Origins and Festivals of the Roman Calendar, 1, 6-7.

26 For more details on the Roman use of borders and processions see Holland, Janus and the Bridge.

27 For more information on the division of the quadrants see also Taylor, “Watching the Skies,” 20-24.

28 Cato, De Re Rustica, 141.3, 144; Varro, Re Rustica, 2.1.9-10; Livy, Ab Urbe Condita, 1.44, 8.10.
pomerium perimeter of the city, crossroads, property lines, or even the threshold of a building. This paper focuses more on the pomerium and property lines because when they were breached crops, animals, and women fell into danger. In the case of the pomerium intrusion frequently equated to war.

Both Rome and the ancient Near East used mimetic images as substitutions and magical items on which to cast curses or cures. These representations fully embodied the value and potential of the people or things they represented. Not only did the Romans use representative dolls, masks, and body parts for magic, but also as votive donations to the gods for healing.29 Girls, upon reaching the age of maturity, dedicated their childhood dolls to Diana as an offering for fertility.30 While considering the value the Romans attached to images, it may at first appear that they represented killing criminals or war captives in the Argei instead of actually executing them.31 However, this conclusion is inconsistent because the Romans continued public executions and ritual killings. Therefore, somatic substitution, though vital to Roman religion, would have been unnecessary when dealing with war captives or criminal, because the actual person could easily be killed, exposed, and thrown into the Tiber. More specifically, war prisoners and lawbreakers were often ritually killed and thrown into the Tiber.32 If, however, the Vestals were enacting a curse on their enemies for the future campaign season the use of effigies would have been necessary. Effigies are necessary when the actual item cannot be used.

Perhaps it could be argued that the spelt dolls represented an indispensable person whom the Romans did not want to kill. In the Argei, the Vestals disposed of the rush people in the

30 See also Merker, “The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore,” 49.
31 The Historiography section will detail ancient and modern scholars who have claimed the rush puppets were substitutions for human sacrifice.
Tiber. The Romans used the Tiber as a dumpster that conveniently displaced waste. Throwing someone in the Tiber would have been a dishonorable burial. Classical sources provide multiple examples in which Romans disposed of criminals or sacrificial remains in the Tiber.\(^33\) Leftovers and waste were also tossed to the Tiber.\(^34\) Likewise, sacrificial offerings were given to the river, not just the remains.

Throwing criminals or war prisoners into the Tiber also commonly occurred because war endangered fertility. Those found flouting god-given edicts or traditions threatened the fecundity of Rome. To deposit trouble makers into the Tiber allowed the gods to correct the problem and restore fertility as they saw fit. Given the Roman burial customs and belief in the afterlife, it would have been peculiar behavior to chuck cherished companions into the Tiber.\(^35\) The Romans continued to throw criminals to the Tiber and would have found it dishonorable to dispose of a loved-one in the Tiber. The Argei participants did neither of these. They threw foliage images to the Tiber. The images could not have represented ancestors, nor did they substitute for war captives, as war captives continued to feed the Tiber. The images received a war captive’s disposal prior to campaign season.

As discussed, boundaries were indispensable in agriculture and war. Water borders and bridges acted as part of the Roman boundaries.\(^36\) The Tiber served as a natural and sacred boundary until the building of bridges.\(^37\) The ceremonies rehearsed at the most religious and

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\(^34\) James, *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals*, 173.


\(^36\) Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, 5, 7. The topic of bridges in ancient ceremonies is vast. For more information on bridges in ancient Rome see Holland’s full work.

\(^37\) For centuries the Sublicius was the only bridge on the Tiber in Rome, though it is debated as to whether or not it was the first. The first bridge was built around 600 BCE. Ibid., 143, 197, 234, 240; Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 40.51, 1.33.
sacred bridge, the Sublicius, mirrored those held at the crossroads. Janus guarded the bridge, and at times personified it. In fact, some say the Salii impersonated Janus as they danced at the Sublicius. Bridge boundaries were interconnected with war. The Fetiales, the priestly keepers of the boundaries who were responsible for declaring war and maintaining public relations, determined the open or shut position of the bridge. The opening of the bridge ordained wartime and its sealing specified peace.

Bridges acted as a borderline and combat icon. This use of bridges in the Argei and tossing bound human-form victims at the original boundary of the city, the Tiber, makes this rite appear undeniably associated with battles. Fowler and Frazer reasoned that the Argei fulfilled a magic rain ritual, or acted as a recompensing formality for building the first bridge over the Tiber because of the involvement of the bridge and water in the ceremony. Frazer, at length, explained the various cultures who disposed of corn-grain spirits or dying vegetation gods in nearby rivers. He argued that various cultures used personified corn spirits in the form of an old man or woman, some a young male or female, others an animal. Graf credited Dumézil as the first to suggest the scapegoat offering, but Frazer had already dedicated a full chapter to the idea.

Another use for the bridge and river, perhaps related to fertility, was the disposal of abnormal infants. A two-headed infant implied a bad war omen and could not escape its fate in the bottom of the Tiber. Janus’ icon is that of a two headed guard, or as twins. This may have

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38 Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, 267.
39 Ibid., 61; Servius, *Vergilii Aeneidos Libros*, 12.198.
been an early form of killing a god. Hermaphroditic infants, crying from neglect and terror, were enclosed in coffins and thrown into the sea or the Tiber. They called these disposals *prodigia* rather than *victima* or *hosta*. This terminology specifies their discard was not seen as a sacrifice, but clearly as an unwanted prodigy, omen, or monster. An animal sacrificial victim had certain requirements. If the animal victim was defiled or found unfit following the *exta*, or meticulous inspection of the victim, a new victim, or *succedanea*, was chosen. This practice of deformed infant disposal may or may not have been related to the Argei, nonetheless, it is relevant to consider for a few reasons. First, the case told by Livy occurred in conjunction with war and during the October ceremonies of purifying weapons. Secondly, the ceremony included elements similar to the Argei, namely, twenty-seven chanting virgins in a procession. And finally, they enclosed the *prodigium* in a coffin, more specifically an *arca*.

The term *arca* is related to the term from which Clerici believed the term Argei derived. The root *arc* translates to coffin or container, but also formed the term *arceo*, “to enclose,” as in closing the borders and bridge. If the Argei derived from the root *arceo* or *arca* then a connection may exist between the Argei and war, because the tossing of malformed infants to avert war or plague, or secure victory in war, was very similar to the practice of tossing effigies into the Tiber at the time the Romans opened the bridge for war.

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43 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 24.1-3. Furthermore, part of the new year’s Festival in the Near East included the beheading of wooden images made in the likeness of the gods.


45 *prodigium* “a prodigy, portent; an enormity, an unnatural thing; a monster”

46 Perhaps this form of disposal was not unlike the Spartans’ disposal of weak, sickly, or misshapen infants to the Apotheia chasm because they would not be able to serve their nation through war. Plutarch, *Lives, Lycurgus*, 16.1-5.

47 The disposal of hermaphroditic infants occurred first in 207 BCE, then in 200, 15, and in 92 BCE. Schultz, *Women’s Religious Activity in the Roman Republic*, 34, 36-37.

In summation, bridge observances could signify scapegoat culpability offerings, rain and fertility rites, war success, purity and *pomerium* protection. The Argei’s location may help modern historians to interpret the primary purpose of the practice as it appears to imply productivity, protection, and purification.

**Etymology**

Festus and Varro related the etymology of the term “Argei” to men of Argos and Hercules’ Argive troops. “*Argei ab Argis*” as Varro stated. The Latin term *argei* is translated as the dolls themselves, the ritual, or the series of chapels associated with the practice. Many modern scholars have attempted etymologic arguments to answer the Argei enigma. Some scholars consider that Argei may have derived from the Greek αρχε, *arche*, or beginning, and simply represented a new year celebration. Fowler noted an article that derived Argei from the Old Persian term *varkas*, meaning wolf. Fowler also mentioned similar bridge agricultural rituals from nearby cultures. These cultures referred to the doll as old or white. Harkening back to the *sexgagenarios de ponte* theory, Fowler recapèd that the Latin root *arg*, meant “white.”

To arrive at the conclusion that Argei derived from the *arc* root, Clerici raised a vital detail that many linguists have missed. Based on several inscriptions using derivatives of the term *rex* Clerici deduced that the guttural “g” sound did not enter into Latin until approximately 231 BCE. This does not mean the Argei began that late, but it does change the direction and approach many historians have taken. Through linguistic analysis Clerici reasoned that the Argei

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51 Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 113. For additional etymology discussions see Harmon, "The Public Festivals of Rome," 1450. See glossary for *sexgagenarios de ponte*. 
did not originate from the Greeks, but rather from the term derived from *arceius*.

However, *arcella, arceo, arca,* and *arcus* all contend with the theory that the Argei was associated with the Lares, about which Clerici agrees.

### Historiography

Authors of the first century BCE through the first and second centuries CE have attempted to illuminate the Argei’s origins. Classical sources largely saw the Argei as a ritual that replaced human sacrifices with rushes, but their explanations vary wildly. Most of these ancient writers associated the Argei with the Greeks. Festus told about an assassination of an ambassador from Argos. The Romans respectfully cremated the corpse and deposited a rush effigy to the Tiber to send the ambassador back to Greece.

Ovid conveyed that the young men of the city wanted their votes valued, so they removed the elderly from the voting assembly by throwing them to the Tiber. Varro validates the debate by mentioning that the votes took place on the bridges, hence the use of the bridge in the disposal of the effigies. Festus associated the Argei chapels with the *sexagenarian* stories. He describes a son hiding his father to avoid the inevitable supposed fate of the elderly in the early fourth century BCE.

But, Ovid did not stop hypothesizing on the Argei. He described the ritual as an evolution...

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53 *Arcella*, a square landmark; see the *tophet* discussion below. *Arceo-* to ward off or enclose, and *arca-* a confinement, coffin, prison cell, or quadrangular landmark; *arcus-* a bow or an arc such as that in a bridge. Clerici, “Die Arge,” 95-96; Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.422.
54 Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 17, 25
55 Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.623-34.
56 Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, 7.44.
from an older practice of human sacrifice involving only two victims. After giving this possible origin he rejected it as a reality. He prayed to Father Tiber to explicate the clandestine observance. Father Tiber, through the ink of Ovid, tells the tale of Hercules, who, lamenting the loss of his troops, fashioned imitations of his fallen brethren and tossed them to the Tiber. Hercules did this as a method of sympathetic magic to send his compatriots home.58

Plutarch agreed with the human sacrifice legend that Ovid discredited. Plutarch described the early Romans literally tossing unlucky Greeks into the Tiber as sacrificial offerings. Plutarch also involved Hercules in the rite as a reformer of the rite, converting the human victims to foliage metaphors. But, Plutarch waffled on the origin. He told the adventure of Evander crafting the Argei practice to aggravate Argive adversaries. In tossing effigies of Argives to the Tiber the imitative magic of enactment encouraged harm to the enemy.59

Dionysus of Halicarnassus, like Plutarch, illustrated the earliest Argei ceremonies involved human fatalities offered to the river for Saturn. Upon observing this behavior Hercules instructed the Romans in the art of substitution via puppet images or masks. Dionysus’ account is not impervious. The anthropomorphism of the pantheon with Saturn most likely came from the third of fourth century BCE. Because the Vestals played a primary role in the rite it is widely assumed that the Argei ceremony predated anthropomorphism of deities.60 Though not unfeasible, Dionysus’ attribution of the rite to Saturn conflicts with a few other ancient historians’ account.61

These ancient writers did not attest to why a singular event required an annual

58 Ovid, Fasti 5.621; Macrobius Saturnalia 1.11.47.
59 Plutarch, Quaestiones Romanae, 32.
60 See Nagy’s hypothesis below for more information on the debate of dates.
61 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae, 1.38.1-4; Cook, “Zeus, Jupiter and the Oak,” 269.
remembrance and re-representation, nor did they elaborate on the Vestals’ involvement, the pomerium procession, or the shrines. These Roman authors further neglected to share the meaning of the procession and perceived mourning dress. Perhaps the meaning of the Flaminica Dialis’s dress was ignored because the somber attire and tangled hair were traditional in bridge ceremonies.62

The last modern, comprehensive, and scholarly publication on the Argei appeared almost thirty years ago.63 The modern authors most frequently documented include Georg Wissowa, Warde Fowler, James Frazer, all of whom wrote about one hundred years ago. Those who wrote expansively in the twentieth century include Harmon, Holland, Davis, and Nagy.64

Harmon and Dumézil paralleled the Argei to an old ritual from the Rig Veda, the Agni, related to the god of fire for the purpose of expelling evil spirits.65 Not only does Harmon’s theory align with the cleansing ideas, it connected the practice with a very early, pre-migration, Indo-European practice. If Harmon and Dumézil’s hypothesis is correct then the origin of the Argei was prior to the orientalization of the Latin people groups in the Italian peninsula, well before the fourth century BCE.66

L. A. Holland focused more on the agricultural basics of the Argei. She claimed the ceremony related to a ritual spelt harvest in the early days of March and May as a first-fruit

63 Graf was published in 2000, but had little to offer that had not already been published.
64 For additional historiographies on the Argei see Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle” and Harmon "The Public Festivals of Rome."
65 Harmon, "The Public Festivals of Rome," 1446, 1455-59; Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 6; Dumézil, Archaic Roman Religion, 331-326. The Indo-European speaking group is subdivided into several families. The Indo-Aryan dialect branched from Indo-Iranian around the early second millennia BCE. The earliest evidence of this linguistic group in India is from the Vedic Sanskrit. When referring to the people group who used Vedic, especially that used the Rig Veda, most sources utilize the term “Vedic” or “Vedic Civilization.”
She insinuated that the scattered shrines included small, sacred fields which the Vestals harvested for the first pre-ripened produce to encourage a fertile and hardy ingathering. She concluded the Argei effigies, disposed of in the Tiber, were the remains of the first-fruit harvest not used in the earlier May rites and the sacred *mola salsa*. Nagy noticed a fallacy in Holland’s logic. On June fifteenth the Vestals removed the remains of the *purgamina* and purified the threshing floor. Nagy thought this disqualified May fifteenth as a celebration to dispose of first-fruit rush waste.

Davis proposed the Athenian Thargelia ceremony as the origin of the Argei. In Thargelia the Athenians supposedly retained war prisoners or criminals, called *pharmikos*, until the appointed day in May. At the prearranged time the captors abused the sexual organs of the hostages and sacrificed them as scapegoat offerings. These prisoners were offered as a first-fruit for the barley harvest. If Davis’ theory about the Argei deriving from Thargelia is correct a

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69 Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 8. *Purgamina*- the remains of harvest that were swept once a year in a sacred ceremony by the Vestals.
70 It is debated as to whether or not the Thargelia ceremony even existed. The main classical source is Hipponax of Kolophon. For more information on the supposed ceremony see also Bremmer, “Scapegoat Rituas in Ancient Greece.”
71 Davis, “The May Tabu on Roman Marriage,” 37-39; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 58.2. *Thargelia* was dedicated to Artemis and Apollo. Artemis is most equivalent to Diana. Etymology reveals that Diana may have come from Ianna, the Near Eastern goddess of fertility and war. And yet there is also a connection with Aphrodite and Astarte (also Ianna), and Venus. Syncretization of the deities may have occurred at multiple times over hundreds or thousands of years. Direct or linear transfers of religious practices are challenging to find. As the religions evolved in seclusion another introduction from a foreign culture was introduced, to then branch and evolve in seclusion which possibly cause similarities and differences a different times and in various ways. Carter, *The Religious Life of Ancient Rome*, 27. The introduction of the practice of the Argei was possibly prior to the anthropomorphic Roman Gods and was probably before the Greek influence on religion. As Fowler considered that Venus originated similarly to Ceres, as a garden goddess. Fowler additionally stated, “We can learn little or nothing... about the origin of Mars...but... we can see pretty clearly what ideas were prominent in his worship even in the early days of the Roman state... He was the Power... to procure the safety of crops and cattle; and secondly... the safety and success of the freshly-enrolled host with its armour and its trumpets.” Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 64-67. As Nagy mentioned, if the Argei was inherited from the Greeks at all, it would have been around 600 BCE during Etruscan rule and trading with the Greeks on the Tiber, but this only strengthens the war connection to the ritual. Macrovich was able to connect the worship of Adonis throughout Syria, Palestine, and Phoenicia. From the
union of fertility, purity, and war is revealed in the Argei because the pharmikoi were either criminals or war captives.

If the Argei rite originated with human sacrifice such as the Thargelia, it is unlikely the Argei victims were the old men of the sexagenarios de ponte, as Festus related, because Romans believed proper burial was needed for an afterlife. The Romans did not think disposal in the Tiber allowed the deceased to rest in peace. However, criminals and enemies of Rome frequently met their death via disposal in the Tiber. As Davis mentioned, the Greek prisoners were held until the annual offering in the Greek culture. The question remains, why did the Romans substitute puppets and yet keep capital punishment for criminals and prisoners of war? Viewing the Argei as pre-war magic solves this problem.

Though the Roman Argei and the Thargelia have similar qualities, it is possible Thargelia was a mythical incident, or that they derived from a common ancestor. Both the rites shared the qualities of purification and agriculture, but there were important distinctions. The ceremonies in which the Vestals’ participated largely related to the fertility of humans, animals, and agriculture, but the Vestals themselves could not execute the sacrificial animals, though they handled the remains of the victims post-execution. In the Argei the Vestals preformed extensive work of

Levant the dying god cult was traced to Cyprus and then Greece. He noted a plate dating around 575 BCE in Aturia with the couple. Marcovich, “From Ishtar to Aphrodite,” 50. If Davis and Frazer’s theory is correct regarding the Persian influence on the Hebrew Purim rite the Hebrews would have adopted this ritual around the same time. Cyprus seems to be the mostly likely location to introduce the syncretization of the god Assur and Ishtar into the practice of the religious fertility goddess of Aphrodite. There she was worshiped as male and female, it is feasible that she entered Rome as a male through Cyprus in the form of Mars. Dominic Montserrat, "Reading Gender in the Roman World," 172–173.

72 Festus, Breviarium Rerum Gestarum Populi Romani, 450.
73 Virgil, Aeneid, 6.320-385; Pliny the Younger, Epistles 7.27; Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, De vita Caesarum, Caligula, 59; Hope, “Trophies and Tombstones,” 87.
74 Ovid, Fasti, 5.621.
75 Hipponax of Kolophon gave only limited information, see Bremmer, “Scapegoat Rituas in Ancient Greece.”
harvesting the far from sacred fields, creating and hanging the effigies, and the procession around the city. If the Argei originated with human victims the Vestals’ cutting the heads of the far would have represented execution and thusly would have violated Vestal Virgins’ killing taboo.

Davis called Thargelia the parent of the Argei and showed the Thargelia may have originated from the Jewish Purim. He claimed that the Israelites adopted element of the sacred marriage into their Purim while under Achaemenid Persian captivity in the sixth century BCE.\(^76\) The existence of Thargelia is debated, but the similarities of the Argei to the ancient Near East sacred marriage may indicate they shared a common ancestor. Davis related the Greek practice of Thargelia to the Hebrew Purim and Passover, and thence to the Babylonian new year. The Babylonian new year climaxed with the execution, display, and mourning of the mock king, representing Dumuzi.\(^77\)

Frazer also revealed that Jewish Purim, described in the Book of Esther, at times coincided with Passover.\(^78\) Davis and Frazer agreed that the Esther description of Haman and Mordecai duplicated of the sacred marriage ceremony in the Near East. Esther represented the goddess Astar, a variant of Ishtar, while the king’s representations were Haman and Mordecai as they were given royal symbols and involved in processions through the city.\(^79\) According to Frazer, the two victims, one killed or expelled and the other released, represented two aspects of

\(^76\) Davis, “The May Tabu on Roman Marriage and a Parallel,” 40.

\(^77\) The Romans practiced Saturnalia with a mock king. Pearce, *Origins and Festivals of the Roman Calendar*, 21.

\(^78\) The Book of Esther was composed in the third to fourth century B.C.E but was set in the early sixth century.

\(^79\) Davies, “The May Tabu on Roman Marriage and a Parallel,” 40.
the same vegetation fertility god, one deceased, the other resurrected.\textsuperscript{80} Talah was the mode of death in the Jewish tradition. Davis agreed that the two pharmakoi in the Thargelia must also represent the fallen and risen aspects of the vegetation god.\textsuperscript{81} Whether the Romans learned the Argei from the Greeks or their Near Eastern ancestors is irrelevant if Thargelia itself originated from the Near East sacred marriage. In either scenario the Argei related to the Near East new year and sacred marriage.

Wissowa described an entirely different origin for the Argei. He inferred that the Romans adopted the Argei observance during the interim between the first and second Punic Wars via the Greeks through the Sibylline Books.\textsuperscript{82} Fowler pointed out that no sources reinforced Wissowa’s conjecture that the ceremony began with the human sacrifice of twenty-seven Greeks or that the Sibylline Books were relevant.\textsuperscript{83} Nagy contributed a suitable alternative to Wissowa’s origin.

Nagy placed the origin of the rite under the Phocaean thalasocracy in the sixth century, a few hundred years prior to Wissowa’s estimate.\textsuperscript{84} The Phocaeans restricted the Etruscans from gaining Sardinia and Corsica and the Etruscans reciprocated. The Etruscans and Greeks constantly fought over these islands during which large executions of Greek captives took place. According to Herodotus, after years of percolating aggression, war broke out between the Etruscans and Phocaeans. Herodotus told how the Greeks participated in annual funeral

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\textsuperscript{80} Perhaps the custom to release one prisoner and crucify one prisoner was also seen in the example of Jesus and Barabbas at Passover. That idea deserves separate research this paper cannot explore. Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18.

\textsuperscript{81} Davis, “The May Tabu on Roman Marriage and a Parallel,” 40. Frazer does not specifically mention Haman and Mordecai as Davis insinuates. Frazer merely detailed Thargelia. Frazer, \textit{The Golden Bough}, 58.2.

\textsuperscript{82} Wissowa, \textit{Religion und Kultus der Römer}, 356.

\textsuperscript{83} Wissowa’s idea is generally rejected. Wissowa, “The Argei”; Holland, \textit{Janus and the Bridge}, 313, 328; Fowler, “Dr. Wissowa,” 115-119.

\textsuperscript{84} Wissowa, “The Argei”; Fowler, “Dr. Wissowa,” 116.
ceremonies for those fallen. At this time, the Greeks would have been the enemy of Etruscan Rome.  

The question remains, why would Etruscan-Rome participate in, adopt, or continue the ritual of their enemies? Though funerary rites may give purpose to the somber behavior, and though the classical authors’ considered the Greeks, there is still a mystery regarding the meaning and the origin of the rite. To place the date following the first Punic War, as Wissowa, poses additional problems.  

As Fowler brought to light, if the Argei was from the Sibylline Oracles and derived from the Greeks, why then were the sacred officials of the Sibylline Oracles omitted from the ceremony? The Romans opened themselves to several foreign practices during the Punic Wars. Nonetheless, the practices adopted in the Punic Wars never lost the stigma as something new and foreign. However, the Romans considered the Argei an old tradition in which the Vestals, Pontifex, and Flaminica Dialis played important roles. It is therefore not probably that the Romans gaining the Argei from the Phocaeans. It is still conceivable that the rite evolved naturally prior to the Indo-European migration as similar rites occurred in the Vedic and even in Semitic Near Eastern cultures (Hebrew, Neo-Babylonian, and Assyrian).

Nagy continued her hypothesis using Harmon and Holland’s ideas to design a theory

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86 Fowler, “Dr. Wissowa,” 118. The Roman’s used far while the Greeks used barley in their religious ceremonies. Holland, Janus and the Bridge, 317.


88 Livy, Ab Urbe Condita, 29.14.5.

89 For example: the outlawing of the Bacchic cult in 186 BCE, the ban on foreign scarified behavior in 213 B.C.E, and exile of Chaldean and Jewish astrologers in 139 BCE. Schultz, Women’s Religious Activity in the Roman Republic, 82-83, 91. Livy’s perspective: “quis in publico sacroue loco novo aut externo ritu sacrificaret,” which I translate as, “no one, in any public or sacred location, may sacrifice in an odd or foreign rite.” Livy, Ab Urbe Condita, 25.1.6-12; Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis, 30.12.

90 Additional details on Vedic and Ancient Near East similarities below.
incorporating purification rites and the Vestals’ agricultural behavior. Nagy confirmed the idea of the Argei as a sequel to the Lemuria in early May.91 The underworld spirits were honored or distracted by hanging items of cotton, wood, or possibly human remains. Nagy, Harmon, Graf, and Holland indicated the Argei dolls were displayed as representations of or dedications to the Lares. Nagy expressed how this theory coincided with the taboo on marriage, the Vestals’ involvement on the bridge, and Plutarch’s remarks of the ceremony as the highest of all purification rites.

Nagy, though joining the Lemure celebration and the Argei, disagreed with Graf and Harmon on the matter of the Argei effigies. To Nagy these replicas could not have represented the Lemures themselves.92 Nagy referred to the twenty-seven sacraria, or “places where sacra have been deposited” implying these Argei shrines stored the rush puppet for the Lemures.93 Nagy drew a parallel between the Argei temples and the crossroad chapels, for the Lares Compitales, upon which wooden balls and woolen human effigies suspended to distract the Lares from harming people. According to Macrobius these were originally human sacrifices of slaves whose heads were hung to distract evil spirits and ward off danger from the household.94 So, there were several examples in which items were hung for the Lares, including human replicas and actual humans. Similarly, during Parentalia, the Romans honored ancestry spirits. The Lares received consideration through the hanging of effigies. Supplementary to the hanging of wooden

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91 This religious ceremony is described in greater detail below.
93 Also known as the Argei shrines. The locations of many of these shrines are lost. Varro, De Lingua Latina, 5.45-54 provided fourteen locations, of these twelve are currently know and marked on the map on Figure 1. Platner, “Argeorum Sacraria,” A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome. Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 15.
94 Macrobius wrote quite late. No other classical authors seem to mention this. The closest parallel is from Plutarch when Jupiter asks Numa for human heads. Pearce, Origins and Festivals of the Roman Calendar, 23; Laing, “The Origin of the Cult of the Lares,” 127-128.
and woolen images, ladies hung their hairnets and supportive undergarments, or \textit{strophia}, within the branches of the trees.\textsuperscript{95}

Nagy mentioned her theory reconciled the marriage taboo. Marriage was forbidden from February to June, though it is debated that the ban only applied in March and May, while April was open for matrimony, this would make a clear link between fertility and the Argei.\textsuperscript{96} During this marriage taboo, war season started, agriculture was at its height, and the Flaminica Dialis could not fix her hair.\textsuperscript{97} Marriage was disallowed during these purity rituals preceding and during campaign season in which the Argei occurred. An element relating the Argei not only to agricultural fertility but also to sexual fertility may be the neglect of grooming one’s hair. The Flaminica Dialis neglected her hair in mourning and bridge ceremonies, but disregarding one’s hair may also be seen in fertility magic. One form of magic instructed women not to tie their hair while pregnant, for this form of binding could imprison the infant in the womb.\textsuperscript{98}

When drawing a parallel with the crossroads ceremony and the Argei Nagy reminded her readers that grain cakes were offered in both the crossroad and the Argei shrines, yet neglected to mention the cakes’ purpose in Liberalia. Liberalia occurred on the day of the March Argei ceremony, in which the cakes were an essential votive offering. Women sold these sacrificial cakes at the crossroads. Though in the Argei the Flaminica Dialis wore mourning or bridge ceremony attire, the other women who sold the cake offerings wore ivy in their hair and watched

\textsuperscript{95} Laing, “The Origin of the Cult of the Lares,” 132-133. This type of behavior across ancient cultures could be associated with mourning, but could also be associated with war. See Frazer’s section regarding the taboos on hair. Frazer, \textit{Golden Bough}, 21.6-8.

\textsuperscript{96} Fowler, \textit{The Roman Festivals}, 69.


\textsuperscript{98} Lux, “Examination of the Lemurs and the Lemuria,” 47.
their young boys become men for Liberalia. Harmon and Nagy connected the Argei with the Lemure rituals on May ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth yet omitted of other ceremonies of March through April primarily focused on fertility and war, especially Liberalia, which literally coincided with the first procession day of the Argei.

In Liberalia, the Salii, or sacred war priests, were responsible for sacrifices. Women adorned their heads with ivy crowns and offered oil and honey cakes. Fowler hypothesized that the Liberalia originally honored Mars, but the Romans later began to honor Jupiter in this rite. On this day that boys received their *toga virilis*, essentially manhood and military service. Fowler considered the Flaminica Dialis’ mourning in the Argei ceremony a result of the initiation of military service. Phallic images led the procession, possibly a portrayal of the manhood or possibly a sign of fertility. Strikingly similar to the Argei and Parentalia, on Liberalia masks or human images were hung in trees. As previously stated, the physical representations were essentially the full essence of that which they replicated. On this day of military initiation rites, originally occurring on the first day of Argei, the partakers noticed the Vestals hanging the Argei puppets and they, in turn, hung images in trees for Liberalia.

Fowler, an expert in Roman religion, and contemporary of Wissowa and Frazer, wrote *The Roman Festivals* which details most Roman holidays. He suggested that the processions in both March and May point to the purification of the land, specifically that within the borders of the city, as they circumambulate the city’s perimeter. He alluded to the similarities between

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100 Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 50-57.
101 Ibid.
103 Later, in the Republic, the date for Liberalia moved.
the Argei and Ambarvalia that occurred in the end of May which ensured healthy growth and harvest. He also speculated that the ceremony may have originated from bridge worship, a theory Holland extended. Fowler ultimately dismissed the idea of bridge worship, but Holland provided a solid argument. Fowler bequeathed two possible conclusions about the use of rush dummies: they acted as substitutes for human victims, or they served as dramatic reenacting, instead of sacrifice. Regarding the reenactment, he compared the practice to the cult of Adonis. Specifically, he noted that the Romans celebrated Liberalia on the same day as the March Argei, though he drew no military connection to the Argei ceremony; neither have any other modern scholars.

Frazer listed extensive examples in *The Golden Bough* regarding the corn spirit and dying gods hurled into rivers or in some cases buried alive. He delineated culture after culture who disposed of their first rushes, images, animals, or even people as the embodied corn spirit. Frazer omitted the Argei from *The Golden Bough*, though his discussion of the dying god cult and the corn spirit showed an uncanny resemblance to the Argei ceremony. Nonetheless, Frazer did discuss the day preceding the March Argei. The participants on March fourteenth expelled the human representation of the old Mars, or Mars of the woods. Moreover, this represented the removal of the old year or old vegetation and the introduction of a new year.

The dying god cult reaches back to the cult of Ishtar. In her various forms across multiple

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106 Harmon sited Hallett, "The Public Festivals of Rome" who mentioned the effigies may have been a sacrifice to Father Tiber. See also Sullivan, “The Prophecy of Father Tiber.”
cultures, she married Dumuzi, a shepherd and later king. Dumuzi represented pastoral elements and good harvest. Their marriage represented fertility and agricultural success. Ishtar, out of jealous or curiosity, manipulated her way into the underworld, forever connecting her cult with features and images from the netherworld. She escaped, but only via a replacement offering, specifically, “the corpse hung from the nail.” For her replacement, after much ado, she offered her own spouse, Dumuzi. He returned to life annually in the spring, during the new year festival where he, in the form of the reigning king, and Ishtar, as a maiden, consummated their marriage and therefore caused a fruitful spring for crops, animals, and mankind. Each new year the marriage was reenacted with the king and a maiden. This ceremony is also known as the sacred marriage. Annually, Dumuzi was forced back to the underworld as the replacement offering; at this time the participants in the cult mourned his death. The dying god cult was observed across multiple cultures. Over thousands of years and multiple cultures there were variations in the tradition. In the Assyrian version Dumuzi spent six months out of the underworld during the summer and Ishtar spent those six months in the underworld. They switched places for winter.

Traditionally, the main performance of the ancient Near East new year took place at Nippur. Lasting for ten days, the city-states joined and each brought wooden images of their patron deities. Towards the end of the celebration the wooden idols were decapitated. The service included predictions for the coming year’s agricultural fertility. On the final day of the new year the sacred marriage occurred. The sexual union was to evoke the fertility of the land and animals. The final day also involved mourning. If the sacred marriage and the Argei were

111 Dumuzi’s alternate names include: Tammuz was Semitic, Dionysius was Greek, Dumuzi was Assyrian, Osiris was Egyptian, Bacchus was Late Roman, Attis with Cybele was the Phrygian Greek, and Adonis was his Phoenician name.

112 Translation from Kramer, The Sacred Marriage Rite, 116; Inana’s Descent to the Underworld, line 246-253.

113 There are several versions of the celebration as it evolved over time and from one culture to the next.
related the day of mourning for the death of Dumuzi may shed light on the Flaminica Dialis’ attire in the Argei.\textsuperscript{114}

Carter explained the gradual migration of Indo-Europeans from the Orient through Sardinia, Corsica, and Malta to the Italian Peninsula. Thence they gradually interbred with the natives of the peninsula forming the Etruscans. Carter’s description of migration has recently been confirmed through bovine DNA tests.\textsuperscript{115} This migration may illuminate the similarities in the ancient Near Eastern religion and the Etruscan and Roman religion. For example, both the Near Eastern peoples and the Etruscans practiced \textit{haruspicy} in the seventh century BCE, while the first known Greek examples seem to appear after the seventh century.\textsuperscript{116} It is possible the Argei was introduced prior to Greek influence in light of these early migration patterns and highly probable when considering the similarities in the Vedic and Near East religions. The argument of the origin of the Etruscans and Latin groups in Italy is endless, and thus far unsolvable. Regardless of how the ceremony entered into the Roman religion, via the Near East, pre-history Indo-European tradition, or the Greeks, the Near East Ishtar fertility cult shared similarities to the Argei. Furthermore, the element of war was present in the Argei and the Near East new year sacred marriage. This paper will look primarily at the Roman and Near Eastern practices though similarities existed in other Indo-European people groups, namely the Vedic and Greeks.

The traditional views of the Argei include purity rituals, protection against the Lares, and

\textsuperscript{114} Ianna’s Decent to the Underworld, see all; Kramer, The Sacred Marriage Rite, 49-84, 107-133. For more information on the new year Festival see Saggs, The Might That Was Assyria, 208-209.


pastoral rituals. A few authors have referred to the Near East as an original source for the rite, but no one has connected the hanging effigy directly to war and fertility. Dumézil and Harmon related the Argei to an old Vedic ritual, the Agni, in which the god of fire was honored and evil spirits were expelled.\(^{117}\) If the ceremonies of the Vedics and Romans were related, then similarities should also reflect with other Indo-European people in the Near East, as well as Semitic people groups in the area whose cultures syncretized. Precedence exists that this ritual had early roots as both a pre-war ritual and a fertility rite. By exploring associations between fertility and war in the Near East and then comparing these practices to elements in Roman religion including tree worship, fertility, war rituals, as well as elements of the Argei service the relationship between the Argei and war will become apparent.

The dolls, created in March, dangled in the temples through some of the most important military and fertility ceremonies. This paper will show several similar examples of displayed victims in conjunction with sexual and agricultural fertility and war in the Near East and Rome. For some reason, historians have segregated the Argei ceremony from war. It has become a recent trend to view military history in conjunction with religious history. Religion dominated both war and agriculture in the ancient world. War, agriculture, and religion were depicted together in art and literature, and were present in both palace and temple. The compartmentalizing present in modern history was absent in these societies.

In the minds of the ancients, the supernatural permeated every part of their existence. Sargon II’s battles reached completion only when he destroyed the enemy’s grain.\(^{118}\) So too, most ancient battles included taking the defeated’s resources or destroying them. The


\(^{118}\) Richardson, “Mesopotamia and the ‘New’ Military History,” 19-20. Sargon II was an Assyrian king in the first half of the eighth century BCE.
interrelationship between soldiers and agriculture is further strengthened when noticing that, in the Akkadian period, soldiers were recalled for emergency harvests. Agricultural concerns synthesized with military service in the Near East and in Rome.\textsuperscript{119}

By looking at the topic of war along with the ideas of fecundity and faith, the act of impaling, hanging, and crucifying war captives becomes strikingly similar to practices seen in agricultural fertility and tree worshiping cults. With this background, a new view of the Argei ceremony will emerge. Now that this groundwork of Argei’s features and the ancient and modern historiography is laid, this investigation will now turn to the use of hanging, impaling, and crucifixion in the ancient Near East fertility cults and war.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 30-31. Fowler also makes the point that agricultural societies “increased their cultivable land by taking forcibly possession in war.” \textit{The Roman Festivals}, 65.
CHAPTER II

WAR, AGRICULTURE, AND FERTILITY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Figure 2. Assyrian relief from the battle of Til-Tuba. Ancient Near East hanging, crucifixion, and impaling, from 645 BCE, at the British Museum.

Figure 3. Continuation of the battle of Til-Tuba. From the palace of Sennacherib.

The most graphic example of fertility worship and hanging can be seen in the battle of Til-Tuba: Fatigued, after bravely fighting, the warrior slays his last victim. His senses still
heightened, his heart still throbbing, he notices the fallen Elamite king. With his dagger, the victorious warrior, still full of adrenaline and passion, yanks the long hair of the already fallen King Teumman. Slowly, he severs the king’s head from his body. Racing back to the palace, treading upon the carpet of slain soldiers, the victorious warrior glories in his magnificent trophy by waving the dribbling remains at the lingering Elamites and to his fellow troops. Now, to present this memento to his lord, Ashurbanipal. The dripping face of Teumman allows the warrior entrance into the king’s presence. Kneeling, the warrior offers the blood-drenched skull to his master. Ashurbanipal gestures to the center of the garden. The warrior looks thither to find a tree, more magnificent than the others. Reverently, the warrior procures a metal band and affixes it through the decapitated’s mouth. He hangs the cranial ornament on an upper branch of the sacred tree. Following this, preparations begin for the victory feast to be held in the garden to celebrate the Assyrian victory over the Elamites.

This animated telling of the mid-seventh century BCE battle of Til-Tuba spotlights a connection between execution of war captives and sacred tree worship. This chapter intends to observe a possible connection between fertility cults and tree worship as they relate to war and forms of execution of criminals in the Near East. Because of the lack of sources asserting a direct connection between tree worship and the display of executed victims (by way of impalement, crucifixion, and hanging) in war, it becomes necessary to look at clues from a wide variety of topics and sources in order to judge the evidence. The scope of this paper cannot accommodate extensive detail on sacred tree worship, fertility cults, and the sacred marriage, but will briefly visit these topics as they intertwine with hanging, impaling, and crucifixion.

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120 Teumman was an Elamite king in the mid-seventh century BCE who attempted to capture Babylon and fought against the Assyrians.
121 Bahrani, “The King’s Head,” 115.
Figure 4. The “Garden Party” scene in the Palace of Ashurbanipal. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, Image 2A; Rodney, “Ishtar, the Lady of Battle,” 214; currently at the British Museum.

Religious or moral beliefs rarely detach themselves from capital punishment.123 Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the religious belief in conjunction with the penalty; thusly tree worship in juxtaposition to hanging, impaling, and crucifixion. Most historians focus either upon religious and legal matters or punishment and war. This chapter proposes an association in the matter of tree worship and the modes of impaling and crucifixion as capital punishment in the Near East.124

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124 Because of the purpose of this work one very specific area of ancient Babylonian, Assyrian, and Syrio-Palestine religions is discussed. For more general information on religion see also Moore, *History of Religion*; Jastrow, *Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria*; and Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*; and Rawlinson, *The Seven Great Monarchies*, Chapter 7.
Defining Terms and Examples of Crucifixion, Hanging, and Impaling

Achaemenid Persians receive the greatest credit for devising crucifixion. The first written source for crucifixion appears under Darius I, in 519 BCE. Modern historians who attribute the first crucifixion to the Persians may have misinterpreted Herodotus’ \( \alpha \nu \alpha \sigma \kappa \omicron \lambda \omicron \pi \sigma \varepsilon \) “to fix on a stake” as “crucifixion.” The modern concept of crucifixion involving a crossbeam probably did not occur until the Roman period. The Code of Assura, 1075 BCE, in law fifty-two, damned women who committed abortion to “crucifixion” or, depending on the translation, “impalement.” Examples of punitive hanging, crucifixion, and impaling exist in both the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi and the Assyrian law code which can be translated as “put on a stake” or “set up on a piece of wood.”

Looking into the Indo-European and Semitic terms for hanging, crucifixion, impaling provides further insight.

The Hebrew term for impalement or crucifixion, תָּלָה or talah, meant to hang, or to put to death by means of hanging. The denotation of talah does not merely imply suspending a victim by their neck, it could also imply impaling or crucifixion.

Genesis 40:19, Esther 5:14, and 7:10 make reference to Egyptian and Persian use of impaling or crucifixion. An

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126 This law is sometimes listed as law 52 or 53. Examples of translation: “A.53. If a woman aborts her own unborn child, and she has been charged and convicted, she is to be impaled and not buried. If she died during the abortion, she is (still) to be impaled and not buried.” Alan Humm, “Middle Assyrian Law Code Tablet A: Based on a comparison of the translations of G.R. Driver & J. C. Miles with that of Theophile Meek.” “I.52. If a woman of her own accord drop that which is in her, they shall prosecute her, they shall convict her, they shall crucify her, they shall not bury her. If she die from dropping that which is in her, they shall crucify her, they shall not bury her.” Arkenberg, Ed., *Ancient History Sourcebook: The Code of the Assura, c. 1075 BCE*.


130 “Within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh off you.” Genesis 40:19. “Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the
additional Hebrew term, רעヤqa, implied a slow execution by hanging or fixing to a stake, especially involved when limbs were removed from the body.131 The Chaldean Lexicon implies hanging as a form of execution as well as in reference to armor. The use of a single term for hanging criminals or captives and armor may have implied a military aspect when the term was used.132 Old Hebrew terminology made no distinction between hanging, crucifixion, or impalement. All of these forms of execution displayed the body.

Herodotus and Thucydides are the oldest Greek sources for impaling and crucifixion. Both of these ancient historians wrote in the fifth century BCE. The Greek term used for “crucify” is σταυροῦ. The term more frequently meant “stake” or “impale.” The primary definition of the term σταυροῦ is “to stake” or “drive down stakes” in these early Greek texts.133 Thucydides used the term multiple times for “stake.” “The Athenians brought up a ship of ten thousand talents burden, which had wooden towers and bulwarks; and from their boats they tied cords to the stakes [σταυρον] and wrenched and tore them up; or dived and sawed them through underneath the water.”134 In another example:

The Syracusans, when they thought both their pallisado [εσταυρωθη] and wall sufficient, and considering that the Athenians came not to impeach them in the work, as they that feared to divide their army and to be thereby the more easy to be fought withal, and that also hasted to make an end of their own wall wherewith to encompass the city, left one squadron for a guard of their works and retired with the rest into the city….The three hundred assaulted and took the pallisado [σταυρωμα], the guard whereof, forsaking it, fled within the wall into the temple ground; and with them entered also their pursuers; but

king to have Mordecai hanged on it… So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided.” Esther 5:14; 7:10.

131 Used in Numbers 25 discussed below.
134 Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War 7.25.5-6.
after they were in were beaten out again by the Syracusans and some slain, both of the Argives and Athenians, but not many.\textsuperscript{135}

Even the Latin \textit{crux} referred to a stake or pole. Only in the later Roman period did the modern idea of crucifixion with a crossbeam develop. Furthermore, the Romans inconsistently used the crossbeam in crucifixion. In the words of Seneca: “I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet.”\textsuperscript{136} The general term crucifixion could still refer to hanging or impalement.

The all-inclusive term for impaling, crucifixion, or hanging applied in Akkadian as well. Additionally, many of the terms used in Akkadian reference sexual fertility and sacred tree worship. The Akkadian terms’ ambiguity gives a glimpse into early concepts or practices that relate the idea of impaling and hanging with sexual and agricultural fertility. The term \textit{retu(m)} not only meant “to nail, drive in, or fix,” but could also mean “impale” and “hang.”\textsuperscript{137} Here again, an ambiguity of terms is noticed in that the one word could mean to nail to something, or impale (to be nailed?) or to hang or be hanged on something.

Another Akkadian term sometimes used for impaling is \textit{magagu} or \textit{maqaqu}. This term occasionally means “to impale,” but more frequently means “to hold out… have cramps or spasms, to stiffen,” and also referred to a penile erections.\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Magagu} is not the only example of Akkadian vocabulary in which the term denotes both sexual fertility and impaling. \textit{Zaqapu} meant “to erect,” “to impale,” “to plant,” “to set up a stake of cedar wood,” or “to have a sexual

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{135}Ibid., 6.100.1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{136}“video istic cruces, non unius quidem generis, sed aliter ab aliis fabricatas: capite quidam conversos in terram suspendere, alii per obscena stipitem egerunt, alii brachia patibulo explicuerunt.” Seneca the Younger, \textit{Dialogue, Ad Marciam, De consolatione}, 6.20.3, translation from Hengel, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{137}Black, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian}.
\item \textsuperscript{138}Ibid., 188.
\end{itemize}
erection.”¹³⁹ In one metaphor, quoted in the sacred marriage ritual, the term applied for both cedar and erection: “At the king’s lap stood the rising cedar.”¹⁴⁰ The word elu(m) which primarily means “to raise” could mean both “to impale” and “to sexually mount.”¹⁴¹ Correlation may not insinuate a conscious link in ideas with these ancients. Nonetheless, etymologic research helps to deduce origins and commonalities among practices, and links between fertility and capital punishment via impaling.¹⁴²

The ambiguities in the Greek, Hebrew, Akkadian, and Latin terms could continue endlessly. A few modern scholars on crucifixion, Ford, Chapman, and Hengel proposed a generic understanding of the term “crucifixion” because the ancients themselves made no distinction. The commonality between impaling, hanging, and crucifixion is that the bodies were displayed, and usually forbidden burial.¹⁴³ The first differentiation of terms appeared in the second century CE with Valerius Maximus and another distinction in the fourth century CE under Constantine.¹⁴⁴

Crucifixion typically involved a slow and torturous form of death while the suspended victim died via asphyxiation, exposure, animals, or starvation.¹⁴⁵ Ford described ancient crucifixion in a more generic sense, as forcing the individual to an immobile state and causing a long slow death over several days. It seems as though the Romans evolved the new form of

¹⁴² Ibid; Lyon, *Beginner’s Assyrian*, 98-107, 114, 118, 128.
¹⁴⁴ Valerius Mazimus indicated decapitation was less cruel than crucifixion, and in the sixth to seventh century Isidore of Seville considered hanging less severe than crucifixion. Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac Dictorum Memorabilia*, 2.7.12; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologia*, 5.27.34; Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World*, 24, 29-30. For a more extensive debates on terminology see: Ford, “The Crucifixion of Women in Antiquity,” 292-294.
execution by way of nailing or binding a tortured victim to a wooden structure in order to prolong the agony and introduce a longer period of suffering before the rebel breathed his or her last. However, in the case of the crucified remains found at Giv‘at ha-Mivtar asphyxiation occurred within a few hours as the victim’s arms were tied to a crossbar. Zias argued that the Roman crossbeam caused death to occur more quickly than impaling because of asphyxiation. The use of wooden implements to restrict or suspend the victim remained consistent, with occasional use of large stones.

Forcing a wooden structure, usually a stake or spear, through the body of the victim, sometimes through the chest, head, or genitals preceded the later idea of crucifixion via externally fixing the victim to a stake. The Assyrians sometimes impaled merely the head or just the hide of a skinned victim, whom they had previously killed. Even in cases where they skewered the entire body, they sometimes killed the individual first.

Hanging, Impaling, and Fertility in the Hebrew Bible

The terms used for impaling, or crucifixion, and hanging overlap. Also, many of these definitions connect to fertility and to terms used in tree cults. The Assyrians and other Near East cultures must have perceived Ashurbanipal’s display of the Elamite king’s head on a sacred tree as ordinary. Analogous actions can be observed throughout ancient civilizations.

Most historians have interpreted the display of executed humans as a deterrent icon, though other possibilities for these actions exist. In the example from Deuteronomy 21: 22:


147 Zias, Joseph and Eliezer Sekeles, “The Crucified Man from Givot ha-Mivtar,” 190. Suffocation is said to take approximately five minutes to an hour according to Zias, “Current Archaeological Research in Israel,” 154-155.

148 Large stones were important icons to both the cult of Ishtar and early Mars.
He hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua gave command and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and raised over it a great heap of stones that stands to this day…. So afterward Joshua struck them [those who hanged Ai] and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they hung on the trees until evening.  

Presupposing the deterrent quality of the display, there appears to be a coinciding agricultural element:

If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

The exhibited corpses caused consequences to the land. The Romans had some concern with the displayed corpses as specific zones were specified for executions. Generally, they were displayed outside of the *pomerium*, or in the case of war captives slaughtered at the mouth of the Tullianum prison, outside of the original *pomerium* that surrounded the Palatine hill.

King David of the Old Testament enacted similar behavior in hanging the hands and feet of those he had slain over the pool of Hebron. “Then David commanded the young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hung them up beside the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the grave of Abner the Hebron.” Here it seems likely the limbs were displayed longer than one day. This adverse relationship to the land remained unique to the Jewish population, as other ancient cultures neglected the removal of the bodies so as to expose them to the elements and forbid burial.

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150 Deuteronomy 21: 22-23.

151 Discussed in greater depth below.

152 2 Samuel 4:12-5:1.

153 Also in 2 Samuel 21 King David obtained the bones of the deceased Saul and Jonathan which the Philistines had previously displayed by hanging. David gave the bones of his beloved friend and revered king a proper burial. One might notice from this passage that the Philistines also participated in the practice of hanging defeated royalty.
The Egyptian practice, if the epic can be trusted, left the victims exposed to wild animals. “within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang [talahl] you on a
tree [עץ, ‘ets], and the birds will eat your flesh off you.” The Pharaoh first removed the head of
his chief baker and then draped it upon a tree. In this example, those suspended in the branches
met execution prior to making their début in the foliage. This story was composed by the
Israelites under Persian occupation. It is likely inaccurate regarding the Egyptian practice, but the
authors may have mimicked Persian or Babylonian behavior. Whether Persian, Babylonian,
Egyptian, or Jewish oral tradition, the tale involved both deterrence and an association with
trees.

Another association between displaying bodies and agricultural fertility appears with the
Gibeonites and King David:

Then he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the
mountain before the LORD, so that the seven of them fell together; and they were put to
death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of barley harvest. And Rizpah the
daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning
of harvest until it rained on them from the sky; and she allowed neither the birds of the
sky to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.

This example revealed two substantial features regarding agricultural fertility and the execution
of war captives. First, the Gibeonites dedicated the war captives to a fertility mountain god,

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154 Genesis 40:19-20.
155 This paper cannot thoroughly discuss the Egyptian connection to the rite of tree worship, crucifixion, or
impalement, but artistic depictions of the Sacred Tree were present in Egypt. In this quote the Pharaoh displayed the
enemy’s head on עץ, ‘ets. The term used here can mean tree or stake. The victims’ heads were removed first, so it is
unlikely that the modern definition of lynching should be applied to the passage for עץ talah. It seems the heads
were truly dangled as ornaments or as a trophy top on a stake. Gesenius, “‘ets” Genenius’s Hebrew and Chaldee
Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures.
156 A similarity may be noted in Herodotus’ description of the Persians (many interpret this as the first
written documentation of Zoroastrianism) who did not bury their dead until after it had been mangled by birds and
dogs. This may indicate that the bodies were displayed prior to embalming. Herodotus, Histories, 1.140.
Yĕhovah. Secondly, they performed the sacrifice by means of some sort of hanging or impalement on a wooden stake during harvest time. The Gibeonites erected the victims, protected them from beast and fowl, and kept them on display until the first rain of the harvest season. These executions occurred during a three year famine in the Levant. An undeniable connection between fertility cults and the execution and display of war casualties is seen in this tradition of the Hebrew Bible. In this event, the Gibeonites offered war casualties and displayed them by crucifixion, impaling, or hanging for the fertility of the land.

The earliest war symbols of Uruk focused on hunting and agricultural military power as seen in their temples and fortifications. At least by the twenty seventh century BCE military symbols included nude captives. This practice may have evolved from the previous agricultural focus. There remained a consistent correlation with the involvement of nude war victims on display via hanging, impalement, and crucifixion.

The Old Testament provides another example of hanging the dead in a manner

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158 Some extensive connections have been made by previous scholars linking Yĕhovah to Ishtar/Asherah the fertility and war goddess of the Near East. Archeological finds show Asherah as Yĕhovah’s consort until the about the sixth century BCE. Because of Yĕhovah and Asherah’s early relationship it is important to look at the early tradition on Yĕhovah. Furthermore, the mention of this practice on the mountain emphasized Ishtar and Yĕhovah’s main area of worship (prior to the temple in Jerusalem) was in the mountains, and high places. These are highly debated topics that cannot be discussed here. For additional sources regarding Yĕhovah’s relationship with Ishtar see also Dever, “ASHERAH, CONSORT OF YAHWEH?” 28-31; Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, 236, 242; Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses,” 16; Snaith, "The Cult of Molech," 124; 1 Samuel 9-12; Boehm, "Child Sacrifice, Ethical Responsibility." 150-155; Paton, "Canaanite Influence on the Religion of Israel," 222; Paton, "The Civilization of Canaan in the Fifteenth Century B.C. II.," 118; Neiman, "A Canaanite Cult-Object in the Old Testament," 58; D.D. Luckenbill, "The Early Religion of Palestine," 375; Exodus 22:29; Micah 6:7; 1 Kings 16:34; Ezekiel 20; Stuckey, “The Great Goddess of the Levant.” 127-140; Olyan, Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel, 33-41. For more information on Etruscans relationship to hilltops see Gallone, et.al. "An Etruscan and Roman hilltop settlement,” For biblical examples of Yĕhovah as a mountain deity see Genesis 22:2; Exodus 3:1, 12; 4:27; 15:17; 18:5; 19:1-23; 24:12-18; Deuteronomy 33:2, 19; 1 Kings 19:11; Psalms 43:3;48:1; 68:16; 87:1; Isaiah 2:3; 14:13; 25:6; 30:29; 33:16; 65:11; and Ezekiel 20:4.

159 This was seen even as Early as the Royal Standard of Ur, 2600 BCE.


161 Perhaps the nude element forced humiliation; however, frequently Ishtar’s worship involved naked sexual acts.
reminiscent of worship, through the figure Moses. He hanged pagan Israelites openly for Yĕhovah.

The LORD said to Moses, ‘Take all the heads of the people and hang them up [עקי yaqa] them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.’ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.’… When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked…. because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.162

Though Moses was a legendary figure, the Book of Numbers was composed during Persian rule, in the early sixth century BCE, when the Persians would have impaled those they conquered.163

In this reference, those executed were punished for worshiping Ba’al-peor, or Baal of Peor, a Phoenician (specifically Tyrenian) mountain god traditionally worshiped for fertility in association with Ishtar.164 The worship of Ba’al-peor enraged Yĕhovah, who then sent disaster. To avert the catastrophic blows from Yĕhovah, the priest impaled a man and a woman with a spear. By this ritual killing, Yĕhovah’s anger subsided and the plague ended.

In this passage of Numbers, those who were speared and displayed had participated in a fertility cult. They received punishment through hanging and impaling as a spectacle for

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162 Numbers 25:4-13. Baumgarten debated the Old Testament idea of death by hanging as opposed to hanging the corpse of those previously executed. Baumgarten, “Does tilh in the Temple Scroll Refer to Crucifixion?” 472-476, 479, 481. This was not the only pagan fertility cult practice in which Moses may have engaged. In the Numbers 21:8-9 event, Yĕhovah instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and raise it on a pole to bring healing to the Israelites. The pole and snake were both sacred icons of Ishtar. The image was destroyed during the Deuteronomic reforms, 2 Kings 18:4. This is an interesting and vast area of study that is omitted from this paper because of time and space. For more information on the Tree and Serpent findings in the Roman area see Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*.

163 For more information on graves from the Persian conquest of the Judean Desert see Zias, “Current Archaeological,” 151, and his bibliography.

164 Note the frequent inscription to Tanit “the face of Baal” on tophets that covered infant sacrifices. Vance, "Literary Sources for the History of Palestine and Syria,” (June 1994),117; Davila and Zuckerman “The Throne of Ashtart Inscription,” 75. A throne of Ashtart found in Tyre included the trinity, the goddess with Baal and Melqarth. Vance, "Literary Sources for the History of Palestine and Syria,” (March 1994), 13. Hosea 9:10-13 indicates the Israelites offered child sacrifice to Ba’al-Poer as they “bring out their children to the slayer.” See also Judges 6 and 2 Kings 23:4-7.
Yĕhovah. This example is not isolated. Yĕhovah, on many occasions, requested victims equivalent to those in Ishtar’s cult. “Do not delay the offering from your harvest and vintage. You shall give me your first born son. Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.” Abraham followed this request of Yĕhovah. Examples include circumcision and offering his first born son in the high places to show his faithfulness and to ensure fertility for more offspring for himself and his livestock as well as his crops.

Yĕhovah, a presumed partner of Ishtar, received fertility offerings through human victims both innocent infants and religiously offensive adults or war prisoners. When looking at the first Jewish Temple, religious icons paralleled temples of Ishtar. Yĕhovah’s involvement in the Ishtar cult, ended in the Deuteronomic reforms of the sixth century BCE, provides written examples of the connection between fertility and war casualties dismembered and displayed through hanging or impaling for the purpose of averting plague or enticing rain. These victims were not merely killed and displayed for the deterrence of deviant deeds.

During the reforms that severed Yĕhovah’s involvement in the Ishtar cult, 2 Kings provides another example of human sacrifice.

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166 The in depth discussion on this matter is not fitting for this paper. Yĕhovah (also known by Yahweh) was a deity local to Mount Sinai who grew into one of many national gods. Like Ishtar and Baal, he was worshiped in the high places and received (and possibly even requested) infant and child sacrifice. He said: Yĕhovah clearly asked for the first born child in a list of sacrificial offerings including animal sacrifices related to harvest. The Jewish kings, patriarchs and prophets sacrificed to Yĕhovah in the high places, though after the Deuteronomist revolution these locations became forbidden. For additional information see the sources listed for Yĕhovah’s relationship with Ishtar.
167 The design, structure, and icons seen in the Temple of Solomon were almost identical to those found in temples of Ishtar. For more information on the similarity between the worship areas of Ishtar and the temple of Solomon see Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses.” In early cults of the Levant participants planted a tree next to the Altar of Yĕhovah as they did with the altars of Baal. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*, 9; Deuteronomy 16:21. Also the Song of Solomon is strikingly similar to sacred marriage poetry, see Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, 85-106; Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses.” 27-33.
He took the *Asherah* pole from the temple of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there…. He also tore down the quarter of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for *Asherah*…. He desecrated the tophet, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice his own or daughter in the fire to Molech. He removed from the entrance of the temple of the LORD the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun…. The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon. Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the *Asherah* poles and covered the sites with human bones…. He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the *Asherah* pole also. Then Josiah looked around, and when he saw the tombs that were there on the hillside, he had the bones removed from them and burned on the altar to defile it, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by the man of God who foretold these things…. So they spared his bones and those of the prophet who had come from Samaria…. Josiah slaughtered [*zabach*] all the priests of those high places on the altars and burned human bones on them. Then he went back to Jerusalem. The king gave this order to the people: “Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written I the Book of the Covenant.” Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had such Passover been observed.168

Even in the removal of the cult of the “vile goddess” and “detestable god” who received child sacrifice, human were immolated on the altar. The term *zabach* refers to “a slaughter for sacrifice.” They were not the remains were not displayed on a tree, but they were forbidden burial. Even those who had been buried were exhumed. The purpose of this example is not to show a relationship between trees, agricultural fertility, displaying the body, and war. Instead, this example gives credence to the previous examples because even in the removal of the pagan cults it is clear that Yĕhovah had become intertwined in the Ishtar cult, even within his own temple. Not only did Solomon build the first temple to Yĕhovah, but also to Ashtar, also known as Ishtar. Additionally, this example shows Yĕhovah received human sacrifices; in fact, Passover seems to be enhanced by the human sacrifices.169 Furthermore, this example shows a contradiction in their belief structure. Even though the earlier examples of hanging and impaling

169 Passover will be revisited later, in regards to human sacrifice.
war prisoners and religiously dissonant individuals through the night caused an adverse relationship to the land, this example exhumed the buried and openly displayed the remains.

Tree Worship and the Sacred Tree

To fully grasp the connection between agricultural fertility and these modes of execution the Near East belief structure of tree worship must be examined. In Near Eastern art a stylized tree reoccurs as an artistic motif. This design is called the sacred tree. The Assyrian Sacred Tree by Mariana Giovino is the most well-rounded and complete modern analysis on the sacred tree cult, providing a survey of the historiography on the topic.170 As one of the more recent historians on the topic, she sifted through many works on the sacred tree concluding that it was a religious symbol, though some arguments state that the icon was merely a decorative pattern. The sacred tree dominates discussions regarding both religious and decorative icons in Assyrian art. The sacred tree generally represented Ishtar and involved images of the king and cone shaped objects.171 The tree was shown by various species of trees, but most commonly the date palm and cedar.172

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170 Giovino summarized the replica of the tree into eight categories: 1) representations as cult objects, 2) perhaps erected in the temple of Ashur, 3) similar objects were found in sanctuaries across Assyria, 4) certain depictions may have represented Assur and other deities, 5) the objects may have represented trees without religious connotation, 6) they may have been substitutes for gods, 7) the objects may have received sacrifices and prayers and purification rituals, and finally 8) the Sacred Tree depictions may have been perceived as powerful or miraculous. Giovino, The Assyrian Sacred Tree: a History of Interpretations, 201.

171 Ashur is the Assyrian form of Mar-duk, or Dumuzi. Ashur took the place of Mar-duk in the sacred marriage in Assyria as Ishtar’s lover.

172 Giovino, The Assyrian Sacred Tree: a History of Interpretations, 2, 3, 33-34. Notice, many depictions of the Sacred Tree are guarded by cherubs such as that in the Genesis tale of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden.
Depictions of the tree often show cherubs standing guard or holding cones. Cones were typically seen as a “vulva” sign or image icon of female nudity or fertility. In primitive or symbolic depictions the female is sometimes carved as a simple triangle. Yet, in the case of the sacred tree depictions the meaning of the cone is still uncertain and debated. Taylor suggested that the cone shaped articles represented artificial fertilization. Rawlinson assumed that the cone was a seed and meant the king should be fertilized. If, however, Ishtar’s fertility cult related directly to war and executing enemies, as this chapter suggests, the depictions may become less ambiguous.

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173 Assante, “From Whores to Hierodules,” 15; Bahrani, “The Hellenization of Ishtar,” 6, 9; Tucker, “A Middle Assyrian Hoard from Khirbet Karhasan, Iraq,” 171-172. Large stones were used in the Near East worship of Ishtar and in several Roman cults, but for the sake of brevity have been limited in this research. Interestingly, the Greek term for these megaliths was *argos lithos*. Macrovich, “From Ishtar to Aphrodite,” 51.

174 Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: a History of Interpretations*, 32-37. The cone shape was used across Indo-European cultures to represent the great mother goddess, associated with fertility. James, *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals*, 34-36.


176 These trees look surprisingly like magnolia trees, and the repetitive flowers seen in Mesopotamian art favor the flower in shape. Additionally, the mysterious cones look remarkably like the magnolia seeds which produce the flowers. See sacred tree images above.
Figure 6. Another sacred tree image. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria*, image 18E

Figure 7. Cherub holds the cone shaped item toward the king. Image is from Nevling, “Sacred Trees…” 131.

Figure 8. Pubic triangle. Terracotta figure from Babylonia from circa 2000 BCE. Currently at the Iraq Museum, Bagdad. Image from Bahrani, “The Hellenization of Ishtar,” 10.
The king oversaw the success of the land both agriculturally and in militarily. So too, in both the ancient Near East and in Rome early monarchies resided over religion. These three responsibilities, religion, agricultural fruitfulness, and military success, were united in the king and in Ishtar. The cone could simply represent Ishtar’s annual union with the king and pledge of military and agricultural success. Since the cone shape symbolized female reproductive organs this could have been a sign of her giving herself to the king, not fertilizing him.

In addition to the cone item seen in sacred tree reliefs, wood itself held an extensive role in the Near East, especially cedar. Cedar was especially used for building and purifying temples. Shalmaneser III received cedar and spears as tributary offering. This cedar was substantial enough to include on the inscription on his throne, and the gifted spears were commemorated on an obelisk. The inscription from an obelisk reads: “The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears.” Inscription from his throne stated: “The tribute of Qalparunda of the land of Unqu –silver, gold, tin, bronze, bowls of bronze, elephant tusks, ebony, logs of cedar…, horses trained to harness –I received.” Humbaba attempted to bribe Gilgamesh to spare his life by offering cedar and

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177 Assante, “From Whores to Hierodules,” 16. The consummation during the sacred marriage was for the purpose of agricultural fertility. If the king personified one member of the sacred union, the cone, representing the fertility organs of Ishtar, reaching to him illustrated the fertility of the land. I disagree with Assante’s statement on page 18: “For the king in Sacred Marriage texts, it means absolute power, wealth, and long life. Fertility conveys none of these things.” Fertility of crops meant all of these things, so too having a large family represented power, legacy, wealth and longevity. The primary focus of the sacred marriage rite was to promote fertility. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, 62-64; Frayne, “Notes on the Sacred Marriage Rite,” 6; Macrovich, “From Ishtar to Aphrodite,” 49.


179 Ibid., 43.

180 Translation from the British Museum for the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III from 858-824 BCE held at the British Museum.

181 The Inscription on the throne of Shalmaneser III section 48, as translated by P. Hulin in “The Inscriptions on the Carved Throne Base of Shalmaneser III,” 55.
myrtle.\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Kiskanu}, a specific type of cedar, revived men and women in Assyrian incantations and magical rites.\textsuperscript{183}

Figure 9. The campaign of Shalmaneser III against Syria. Notice the close up, in the bottom image, where impaling is seen in war with the cone vulva sign in a war scene with impaled victims.\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{182} The Epic of Gilgamesh 5.6.10-30.
\textsuperscript{183} Giovino, \textit{The Assyrian Sacred Tree: a History of Interpretations}, 15.
\textsuperscript{184} Image from Pritchard, \textit{The Ancient Near East In Pictures}, 126.
Poets called Assyria a cedar because of its greatness.\textsuperscript{185} In the height of the Babylonian Empire, Biblical texts refer to Babylon as a “mighty tree.”\textsuperscript{186} The ceremonial bed, constructed of cedar, supported the consummating couple of the sacred marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{187} Cedar resin purified temples across the Near East. The Hebrews used a mixture of bird blood, water, scarlet, hyssop, and cedar as a purification substance for houses.\textsuperscript{188} Likewise, the same mixture, with the absence of the birds and bird blood, was sprinkled in the pyre of the sacrifice of a lactating cow.\textsuperscript{189} This provides a link between fertility and cedar in that the lactating red heifer was chosen as the sacrificial victim.\textsuperscript{190}

Wooden stakes were the impaling implement of choice. It is unknown if the stakes were made of cedar or another species. At times they thrust the stake through the victim’s head or chest, but there were also examples in which the stake entered through the victim’s genitals.\textsuperscript{191} When they impaled the enemy with a wooden object, perhaps this produced sympathetic magic to avert agricultural disasters. According to Frazer, regarding the Greek practice, “The object of beating the human scapegoat on the genital organs with squills and so on must have been to release his reproductive energies.”\textsuperscript{192} Perhaps even the original idea of impaling derived from

\textsuperscript{185} Ezekiel 31; Amos 2; Zechariah 11.
\textsuperscript{186} Daniel 4.
\textsuperscript{187} Kramer, \textit{The Sacred Marriage Rite}, 64.
\textsuperscript{188} Leviticus 14.
\textsuperscript{189} Numbers 19:6.
\textsuperscript{190} Kouwenberg, \textit{Gemination in the Akkadian verb}, 235. The term \textit{parah} for heifer was used for a lactating cow. Gesenius, et.al. “parah,” \textit{Genenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon.} This particular sacrifice was called the red heifer offering. It is remarkably similar to the Roman Fordicidia/Fordicalia sacrifice, in which a pregnant cow was offered and the Vedic offering of the eight footed cow. Additional information on the Fordicidia will be given below. This Jewish sacrifice also paralleled the October Horse offering (described below) as the offering was given to cleanse those who had contact with corpses, and the ashes were saved for continued purification.
\textsuperscript{191} Seneca the Younger, \textit{Dialogue, Ad Marciam, De consolatione}, 6.20.3.
\textsuperscript{192} Frazer, \textit{The Golden Bough}, 58.2. Bremmer also mentions this practice was reported by Petronius C.138 in “Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece,” 300. Squills are a flowering bulb that grow several feet tall. Presumably the flower stalk was used in this ritual. These flowers bloom in mid to late summer.
sexual intercourse, as a penis penetrates a vagina, so the stake impales the victim. Wooden stakes embodied the plant or fertility spirit. As the stick impaled the victim the impaler created a stylized image of the sacred tree (see image). The impaled victim created the branches, while the stake appeared as the trunk.

Near Eastern cultures revered trees. It seems unlikely that they would use a valuable and rare substance merely to slaughter an enemy, and especially to display enemies who had already faced execution. If the purpose of impaling and displaying victims was only to deter deviant behavior then a less valuable and less sacred substance could have been employed. These cultures revered trees and yet used them to impale or crucify criminals. If religious implications were involved in hanging, impaling, and crucifixion, the implementation of wood in these forms of capital punishment begins to make sense in light of tree worship and agricultural fertility cults.

Hanging, Crucifixion, Impaling as a form of Tree Worship in War

When making an investigation into the Near East mindset of war, punishment, fertility, and religion the topics are usually viewed and studied quite separately. On the one hand, there is a specialist of war and punishment, on the other hand there is a master of religion and magic. In the minds of those in the Near East, these concepts were united under Ishtar and the king. While the ancient’s marginalized most female deities, Ishtar stood predominant, imperative to the success of society. The same phenomena of an interrelationship between fertility and war existed in Rome with Mars, the god of both war and vegetation.

It is necessary to look further into the character of Ishtar, and the modes in which she was worshiped, to determine if the brutal executions (in which the body was displayed such as

193 Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria, 124-127.
194 Cato, De Re Rustica, 141.1-4, discussed in greater length in chapter three.
impaling, hanging, and crucifixion) were dedications to her. One method of worship was prostitution for both men and women. Among the high places excavated, the location of Gezer revealed eight large masseboth. Seven masseboth, phallic in form, surrounded the smaller cone shaped stone which showed signs of being rubbed, anointed, and kissed. The worshipers placed an asherah pole among the megaliths. In the debris surrounding the area, archeologists have recovered miniature phallic images. A stone-paved area encircled the masseboth and covered the remains of many immolated infant urn-burials.

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195 “There is one custom amongst these people which is wholly shameful: every woman who is a native of the country must once in her life go and sit in the temple of Aphrodite and there give herself to a strange man.” Herodotus, Histories, 1.199; Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses,” 13; 2 King 23:7 indicates a specific shrine for male prostitutes: “He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for Asherah.”

196 Massebah (singular) or masseboth (plural) were a type of megalith. These were high-standing sacred stones erected for religious purposes, sometimes used for sacrifices. These were common to ancient religions. Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses,” 29.


198 Rawlinson describes the Assyrian Sacred Tree as a May-pole or pillar or Asherah pole. Olyan believed the asherah pole was a wooden image of Ishtar. Ishtar is commonly associated with the Sacred Tree. So too, altars dedicated to Ishtar often have a spike in the center, possibly to hold the victim in place, or perhaps to impale the sacrifice. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the war victims, along with the war scenes, were associated with the Sacred Tree and impaling. It may very well be the case that these war casualties, displayed as warnings to enemies and symbols of valor, were not far removed from the dismembered victims and infants found in the bamah that were dedications to this fertility goddess of war. Giovino, The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations, 21; Philpot, The Sacred Tree: Or, The Tree in Religion and Myth, 8, 112; Oyan, Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel, 2. For additional information on the bamah see also Dever, "Archaeological sources for the History of Palestine, 148-177; Meyers, "The Roots of Restriktion: Women in Early Israel"; Paton, "The Cult of the Mother-Goddess in Ancient Palestine," 34; Wright, "The Temple in Palestine-Syria"; and Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," 406.

199 Ishtar was closely associated with the god Melqarth. In Umm el-Amad, near Tyre, the god Milk-ashtart was worshiped. This deity could have been an amalgamation of the two deities Melqarth and Ashtarte or possibly even a reference to the practice of mlk sacrifice to Ashtart, also known as Ishtar. Mlk was a type of sacrificial offering that at times included human infants and children marked by tophet altars and often practiced in the high places. An extensive amount has been done on the mlk sacrifice itself. For more information on the mlk sacrifice, see Oyan, Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel, 10-14; Moscati, The Phoenicians: Under the Scientific Direction of Sabatino Moscati. 123; Frend, “Review: Carthage without Africa,” 317; Graesser, “Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine,” 42; Markoe, Peoples of the Past: Phoenicians, 115, 136; Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan. 235-237, 242; Vance, “Literary Sources for the History of Palestine and Syria,” (June 1994), 117; Barrick, W. Boyd. "Review of Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament by John Day," 117; Snaith, “The Cult of Molech,” 124; and 1 Samuel 9-12. Archeologists have found similar monoliths consecrated to Yêhovah. Paton, “The Cult of the Mother-Goddess in Ancient Palestine,” 30-31, 37; Masterman, “The Excavations of Ancient Gezer,” (June 1903), 422-423; Masterman, “The Excavations of Ancient Gezer,” (September 1906): 179, 181; Hosea 3:4; Markoe, Peoples of the Past: Phoenicians, 120; Moscati, The Phoenicians: Under the Scientific Direction of Sabatino Moscati, 118; Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria 138-139; Jeremiah 3:6.
traditionally marked the cult of the goddess included phallic figures, cones, megaliths, trees, and standing wooden stakes erected in her honor. In a hymn of praise written by Inheduanna it seems that war was, and impaling may have also been, a form of worship to Ishtar.

Inheduanna quoted Ishtar saying:

I will lay my hand on this instigating country:
I will teach it to fear me…
I’ll bring war [to Ebih], I’ll instigate combat…
I’ll impale it [Ebih] with my sword.

In hymns of praise to Ishtar acts of impaling were glorified. Ishtar was worshiped in open-air temples were located at *bamah*, or high places, “on every high mountain and under every green tree.”

The high places were not isolated to sexual or agricultural fertility worship; they also served as a militarily secure site. The Standard Inscription of Nebuchadnezzar states:

As a further defense in war, at the *Ingur-Bel*, the impregnable outer wall, the rampart of the Babylonians… I made a strong fort… in fifteen days I completed it, and made it the high place of my kingdom…. Inside the brick fortification another great fortification of long stones, of the size of great mountains, I made. Like *Shedim* I raised up its head.

Here Nebuchadnezzar revealed that the high places, a paramount place of worship, served in battle as forts. The temple fortress, in ancient history, frequently acted as a refuge in military sieges. This occurred in a Syracusian and Athenian battle of the Peloponnesian War and in the

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200 One interesting parallel here to the Roman world is the worship of Vesta by the Vestal Virgins. It has been said that the phallic image on the hearth of Vesta was used by the Virgins and in the case of Romulus and Remus’ mother, caused divine conception by Mars, the Roman god of war and vegetation.

201 Inheduanna lived in the early twenty-third century BCE. She was the daughter of Sargon II and priest of Inanna, or Ishtar. Her hymns to Inanna are the first written works with a known author.


204 Inscription quote is from the translation of Rawlinson, *The Seven Great Monarchies*, 79.
Jewish revolts resulting in the destruction of the second Jewish temple. An extra link between war and fertility appear in Nebuchadnezzar’s quote from the term Shedim. The term occurred twice in the Hebrew Bible referring to an evil spirit. The Hebrew Shedim was equivalent to the Akkadian sedu which refers to a plant or growth spirit.

This joining of the military fortification of Nebuchadnezzar and the fertility cult is strengthened further through supplementary research into this demon Shedim. Not only does the Akkadian term sedu relate Shedim to plants, but Psalms mentioned that the Israelites had worshiped Ba’al-peor, mentioned previously as a fertility god, and sacrificing their children to Shedim. In Deuteronomy the Israelites sacrificed to Shedim. A few verses prior to this offering the high places were mentioned. In summation, Shedim received infant sacrifice, related to Ba’al-peor, dwelt around the high places, and assisted in agricultural growth. Nebuchadnezzar’s inscription about a high place fortress referred to a plant demigod who received child sacrifices.

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205 Josephus, Jewish Wars, 6.113-207; Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 6.100 quoted above.

206 Psalm 106:37; Deuteronomy 32:17; Black, A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian, 365; Burton and Grandy, Magic, Mystery, and Science, 120.

207 “They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods; they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them. But Phinehas stood p and intervened, and the plague was checked. This was credited to hi as righteousness for endless generations to come…. they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons [shed], And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters, Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with the blood.” Psalms 106:28-38; Gesenius, et.al., “shed,” Genenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon.

208 “When the Most High [elyown] gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the sons of Israel…. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, And he ate the produce of the field; And He made him suck honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock…. They sacrificed to demons [shed] who were not God [elohiym] whom they have not known, New gods who came lately, Whom your fathers did not dread.” Deuteronomy 32:8, 13, 17. The term elyown or elyown was sometimes used to mean a high place or as Most High God. Shem was translated as “demon,” and occurred only twice in the Hebrew Bible. Both occurrences referred to child sacrifice. Gesenius, et.al., “elyown,” Genenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon.
Examples of Animal Sacrifice in the form of Impaling, Hanging, or Crucifixion

Figure 10. Animals offered and hanged on a sacred tree. This imprint of a cylinder seal dates from mid eighth to seventh century BCE. Image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 11. Altar of Tukulti-Ninurta I around the thirteenth century BCE. Image from University of California, San Diego, discovered by Andrae. See also Wimber for additional information.

As discussed Ishtar, and her lover, received infant sacrifice in the high places as well as animal sacrifices. If the ancients used impaling and crucifixion for fertility sacrifices as well

209 Whichever consort that may have been at that particular time and location: Yêhovah, Baal, Ashur, Marduk, etc.
as deterring deviant behavior, examples of animal sacrifice in such a manner should exist.

Ishtar’s cult centers and *bamah* worship areas included *asherah* spikes and living trees. From figure ten it appears that the animal sacrifices were also displayed on the sacred tree just as war captives were. Similarly, figure eleven shows an altar found in the temple of Ishtar. The relief on the altar depicts the Assyrian priest-king Tukulti-Ninurta, a mid to late thirteenth century predecessor of Ashurbanipal, praying before an altar. It appears there is a spike upon the altar relief. In Ishtar’s cult sacred trees were planted or *asherah* poles were erected next to the altar.²¹⁰ Yet, in this image, the spike was on the altar itself. Perhaps an instrument was affixed to the altar for the purpose of offering animals or infants to the goddess by way of impalement.

Excavations of high places have uncovered not only the remains of infant urn-burials, but also phallic paraphernalia, and dismembered adolescent girls. At Gezer archeologists found a cistern containing the remains of a bisected young girl. Also the remaining skulls of two decapitated girls were also found.²¹¹ The act of dismembering the victim and displaying body parts was also seen with war prisoners. At Gezer’s high place animals, infant, and adolescents were seen in conjunction with Ishtar’s fertility cult.²¹² Dismembering of the victim connects the sacrifice directly to the dying god cult. Osiris was dismembered by his brother, disposed of in the Nile, he later grew into a sacred tree. A wild boar tore Adonis to pieces. These gods show a parallel story to that of Dumuzi, the first husband of Ishtar, as they were mourned and

²¹⁰ Deuteronomy 16:21; Judges 6.


²¹² See Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 47.3-4 regarding extensive discussions relating fertility cults, tree worship, and the dying gods, and dismemberment. Young girl representing the corn spirit or dying god cult were beheaded.
resurrected annually. Dismemberment was enacted on both war captives and sacrifice.

Dismemberment in war, though certainly a bloody and horrific sight, deterred rebels and held essential fertility elements. With Rawlinson’s description of the sacred tree as an asherah pole, it may very well be the case that the animal and infant sacrifices, hung for fertility, were displayed on asherah spike like impaled war casualties.

The crucial fertility celebrations and the new year sacred marriage festival were held in spring; so, too, campaign season began at this time. When considering an interrelationship between war and fertility, it is not coincidental that these overlapped. For example, Cyrus II, mid sixth century BCE, may have taken Babylon during the new year festival. Herodotus implied that Cyrus II timed this siege specifically on the festival of the vernal equinox in order to capture the well-guarded city through trickery. Perhaps more was involved than mere distraction. After the final day of mourning in the new year Festival, Cyrus II’ son preformed sacrifices in one of many temples. Cyrus II himself gave the orders to rebuild the Jewish Temple, and he funded the transportation of cedar trees from Lebanon. Cyrus II is also credited with restoring other pagan temples, like those of the Babylonians.

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213 Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria, 340-341, 343-348. For a later version of this cult in the second century CE the goddess received homage via the hanging of live animals on trees they had cut and erected in a courtyard. Lucian, De Dea Syria, 49.


215 “the Persians took them unawares, and because of the great size of the city (those who dwell there say) those in the outer parts of it were overcome, but the inhabitants of the middle part knew nothing of it; all this time they were dancing and celebrating a holiday which happened to fall then, until they learned the truth only too well.” Herodotus Histories 1.191.6

216 Pinches, "Cyrus"; Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria, 200. This matter is widely debated.

217 2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:2-7, 3:7, 5:13, 6:3; Pinches, "Cyrus."
Criminal Executions

Penalties outside of war also employed wooden stakes as execution devises. In the Code of Assura abortion received one of the more gruesome punishments. They brought the accused woman to a public place, impaled her, and then forbid her burial.\textsuperscript{218} This specific instance of punishment via impaling, crucifixion, or hanging clearly implied a fertility liability.\textsuperscript{219} In the context of Babylonian society, treason received the worst punishment. Hammurabi’s Code 153 states: “If a woman bring about the death of her husband for the sake of another man, they shall impale her.” Here again this includes a fertility risk, but not all fertility risks received punishment through crucifixion. For example, Hammurabi’s Code 154 subjects the father guilty of incest with his daughter to mere exile.\textsuperscript{220}

In addition to the practice of impalement as a capital punishment for intentional fertility risks, there existed a connection between fertility protection and the legal code to crucify or impale alleged witches. Witches, throughout many ancient or primitive cultures, represented a threat to fertility of both people and the land. During extreme weather conditions and other sociopolitical and environmental crisis witches emerge from the woodwork. Even a few of the Akkadian terms for “witch” insinuated natural disasters or infertility such as \textit{ressu}(m) which can also translate “enemy of the land,” and \textit{rabu}(m), which can also mean “earthquake.”\textsuperscript{221} Witches, and other enemies of the nation, were thought to cause droughts, famines, and infertility. They received some of the harshest punishments as malefactors.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{218} The Code of Assura, 52.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., I.52 or A.53.
\textsuperscript{220} Code of Hammurabi, 153, 154, see also 155, 157, and 193.
\textsuperscript{221} Black, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian}, 294, 307.
\textsuperscript{222} Ford, “The Crucifixion of Women in Antiquity,” 292-294. The idea of witches and agricultural demise was not unique to the Ancient Near East. This was seen in Rome and throughout Europe in Medieval and especially Early Modern periods. Cohn described the imaginary life of the Medieval witch—a stereotype he believed did not
Simply because the punishment is used in one instance related to fertility does not mean it is necessarily connected to tree worship in the minds of those who practiced this form of punishment. In addition to impalement and exile, gouging of eyes, drowning, and burning were also enforced in Hammurabi’s Code.\textsuperscript{223} Nonetheless, the punishments generally matched the crime in the “an eye for an eye” concept.\textsuperscript{224} Perhaps the punishment of impaling and hanging were instigated on those who harmed health and fertility. Let it suffice to say that a relationship may have existed between impaling, hanging, and crucifixion and sacred tree worship in fertility cults. From the vast array of examples provided the two topics of fertility cult worship and execution via wooden stakes can no longer be viewed as entirely separate topics.

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fully exist until the fourteenth century. Witches were typically female, visited by Satan, participated in orgies, killed infants and children, and ate them, could fly, attended \textit{sabbats}, renounced Christ, made a pact with the Devil, and performed \textit{maleficium}. According to Bodin, a witch intentionally attempts to change something through diabolical methods. The \textit{Malleus Maleficarum} described three types of witches, those who can harm only, those who can heal, and those who can both harm and heal. Cohn, \textit{Europe’s Inner Demons}, 164-179; Bodin, Jean. \textit{On the Demon-Mania of Witches}. This is an interesting line of study, but, alas, must be omitted from this paper. See also Davies, \textit{Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History}; \textit{Malleus Malificarum} written in the late fifteenth century CE; Stephens, \textit{Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief}; and Ankarloo, and Clark. \textit{Witchcraft and Magic in Europe}.
\textsuperscript{223} Code of Hammurabi, 154, 193, 155, 157 respectively.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 196.
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CHAPTER III
THE ARGEI AS PRE-WAR MAGIC AGAINST WAR CAPTIVES

Roots of Tree Worship in Ancient Rome

At this point, the paper has provided a basic understanding of the Argei ceremony as well as several examples of a correlation between the sacred tree fertility cults and war executions by impaling, crucifixion, and hanging in the ancient Near East. To consider the correlation between fertility cults and war in the Roman Argei ceremony, this chapter will provide examples of fertility and tree worshiping cults in Rome. After launching an investigation in Roman fertility cults and analyzing the elements of the Argei, this chapter will consider post-war triumphs and early acts of war to notice parallels.

No physical archeological remains of tree worship exist from the Etruscans and Romans, though items have been found about sixteen miles south of Rome. The primary sources for tree worshiping were written much later than the origin of the Argei. The reverence of trees in ancient Roman mythology can be seen going back to Romulus and Remus. These founders of Rome, fathered by Mars, god of vegetation and war, and birthed by the Vestal Virgin Rhea Silvia, a woodland goddess, were thrown into the Tiber as infants, like the Argei dolls. They safely beached on the shore at the Velabrum on the roots of a fig tree with the help of the Tiberinus or father Tiber. The Velabrum lies between the Palatine and Aventine hills near the presumed location of the Sublicius, the most sacred bridge, from which the Vestals dropped

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Argei effigies. The Velabrum harbored only one temple, Acca Larentia’s. This goddess of fertility and crops, similar to Ceres, became the foster mother of Romulus and Remus. Most accounts agree that she was associated with the Lares. Nagy, and other scholars, think the effigies were dedicated to the Lares.

So there, at the sacred Velabrum, near the Sublicius, in the shade of the fig tree, a nursing wolf suckled the brothers. Romulus and Remus’ arrival at the shore and the she-wolf mothering behavior were commemorated annually in Lupercalia. Imagery such as the lupine lactating breasts signified fertility and renewal in ancient religions. The fig tree had several qualities related to fertility. The tree’s “milk” was offered to a mother goddess.

This story of Romulus and Remus incorporated tree worship, fertility, and the Lares through Acca Larentia. These qualities existed in the Argei as mentioned in chapter one. What is further needed is a connection between Roman tree worship and war. Roman myths may or may not originate from historic figures or events, but myths explain, correctly or not, tradition and religious rites. Plutarch peppered his stories with references to spirited trees or trees deserving of homage.

To further explore the life of Romulus, Plutarch described the method in which Romulus cared for his deceased brother and foster-father’s bodies by marking the borders of the city, and

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227 For a map of the ancient city of Rome see Figure 1. The Sublicius was sacred to religious ceremonies requiring construction solely from wood. No metal brackets or nails could be utilized in its construction. Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, 335-339.


229 Further fertility connections, Plutarch’s reimagining of the myth include the term *ruma*. *Ruma* may be translated as teat, but the term was connected to the goddess Rumilia who monitors the growth of young children, and the fig tree called *ruminalis* possibly after Romulus. Plutarch, *Lives, Romulus*, 4.


thus, on April twenty-first, Rome was born. This day was celebrated annually as Parilia. On this day partakers utilized several elements related to trees, war, and fertility. In addition to marking the borders of the city, the ceremony involved the dried blood of the October Horse, which was sacrificed to Mars in a ceremony that purified weapons following campaign season, powdered ashes from the young calves sacrificed to Ceres, green laurel-branches, fresh rosemary, and fir-wood to purify the stables and flocks. Fowler indicated that the participants made wooden images of the Pales, or pasture spirits. This festival was held directly between the ides of March and the ides of May, the two important ceremonies associated with the Argei.

An item commonly associated with trees, impaling, and war was the spear. Mars used the spear as a prominent icon. The Forum, the original home of the early kings, and later the Pontifex Maximus, enshrined a sacred spear. According to legend, the spear grew into a sacred cornel tree on the Aventine hill supposedly grew from the spear of Romulus. This tree was preserved, enclosed with an open-air shine, like the temples of Ishtar, and considered sacred.

There also, it is said, grew the sacred cornel-tree, of which the following tale is told. Romulus, once, in trial of his strength, cast thither from the Aventine hill a spear, the shaft of which was made of cornel-wood; the head of the spear sank deep into the ground, and no one had strength to pull it up, though many tried, but the earth, which was fertile, cherished the wooden shaft, and sent up shoots from it, and produced a cornel-trunk of good size. Those who came after Romulus preserved this with religious care as one of the most sacred objects, and walled it in.

Virgil carefully noted another sacred grove and detailed the tree at the location where Aeneas’ spear became fixed. After removing his spear, he revered his spear as a tree, showing that trees

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233 Ibid., 12.1.
234 October Horse, discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, occurred on the ides of October and completed of war season and harvest. On this day the weapons were ritually cleansed and stored until next campaign season. The primary sacrifice for this ceremony was horse impaled with the spear of Mars.
236 Fowler, The Roman Festivals, 80-81.
237 Plutarch, Lives, Romulus, 20.5.
and spears could be sacred.

By chance this was the place where a bitter-leaved wild olive, sacred to Faunus, had stood, a tree revered by sailors of old, where, when saved from the sea, they used to hang their gifts to the Laurentine god, and the votive garments…. Here stood Aeneas’s spear, its impetus had carried it there, fixed and held fast by the tough roots…. Then Turnus mad with anxiety indeed cried: “Faunus, pity me, I pray, and you, most gracious Earth if I have ever honored your rites that the sons of Aeneas have instead defiled by war, retain the steel.”

…Once his spear was released “Aeneas pressed on, brandishing his great spear like a tree.”

To honor the tree, the sailors offered items via hanging. The cult of Ishtar had examples of animal sacrifices hung on the branches of sacred trees. Here the Romans honored trees by hanging votive offerings on their branches. By these two examples it is undeniable that spears were associated with trees. In both examples, the war weapon united with tree worship and in the second example associated Roman sacred trees with hanging offerings. Spears, the most important weapon of war, literally intertwined with sacred trees. So too, they were a central icon in a significant fertility ritual: marriage.

Within the Roman wedding ceremonies, the groom parted bride’s hair with a spear to remind all present that the first marriages transpired through war and the abduction of the Sabine women. Beard suggested the Pontifex Maximus, the regal ruler of archaic Rome, abducted the Vestal Virgins as representative brides, or possibly originally as actual brides. She paralleled the induction of a new Vestal to that of the marriage ceremony, both of which include aggressive seizure. If Beard’s theory is correct on the symbolic marriage of the Pontifex and the Vestals,

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238 Virgil, Aeneid, 12.766-790, 887.
239 Plutarch, Lives, Romulus, 15.5.
this practice may have mirrored the ancient Near East sacred marriage of the king-priest and a maiden.241

Bridges and the Tiber

Some debate, both ancient and modern, lingers regarding the identity of the role of Pontifex as the early king of Rome. Plutarch clarified that the title of Pontifex derived from pons, or bridge, because of their religious duty to oversee the bridges, both structurally and ceremonially.242 The mandate requiring wood as the sole construction material for the religious bridge, the Sublicius, implies the holy or cleansing elements of wood, and perhaps an early form of dendrolatry.

Bridges were paramount in boundaries, protection, and war. The ritualistic opening or closing of the bridge represented war or peace. The sacred Argei service, which marked the original boundaries of the city and culminated on the Sublicius bridge, resonated with symbolic acts essential to war magic. The male youth became consecrated for military service, maidens traversed the boundaries, the Salii danced and chanted in warrior garb, and bridge was the stage for all of these. Walking the boundaries created a magical wall to protect crops, animals, and people from war and pestilence.243

Additional association between bridges and war can be seen in a Roman post-battle ritual. Following a victorious battle the Romans would create a make-shift arc from three spears as a

241 The naditu women (generally considered a class of priestesses, though this status is debated) of Babylon, under the Code of Hammurabi were allowed to own property and conduct business in a similar way. Harris, “The naditu Laws of the code of Hammurapi in Praxis,” 163-164; Beard, “The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins,” 14-18; Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses,” 14.

242 Plutarch, Lives, Numa, 9.1-2; Holland, Janus and the Bridge, 332.

243 For more details on the Roman use of borders and processions see Holland’s extensive theory in Janus and the Bridge.
representation of a yoke and force their subjugated enemies to pass under it. The tri-speared entryway symbolized Janus, the protector of bridges and borders.\textsuperscript{244} The arc resembled the three plank crescent on the sacred wooden bridge, the entrance to the city. The bridge was a symbol of war even abroad. Prior to the Hellenistic introduction of the stone arch, which later decorated the triumphal processions, the bridges and arches were wooden.\textsuperscript{245} Crawling beneath the make-shift arc of spears transformed war prisoners to the status of animals under a yoke fit for a sacrificial offering. The war captives of triumphal processions were usually hanged, displayed, and finally dumped in the Tiber like the Argei dummies a few months earlier.

**Roman Holidays and Celebrations Combining War, Fertility, and Trees**

This chapter has thus far discussed sacred tree worship in Rome and the significance of bridges in war and agriculture. To further notice Rome’s reverence for wood and a possible connection to war it is necessary to look at celebrations regarding war, fertility, and holidays that surrounded the Argei. Volumes have been written on Roman holidays, so disquisition on the holidays remain specific to those related to fertility, war, and impaling, crucifixion and hanging.

**February**

One example of a holiday that included elements of war and fertility is Lupercalia, the annual, nude, race which continued into the fifth century CE Rome.\textsuperscript{246} On Lupercalia, February fifteenth, the Romans sacrificed a dog to remember twin founders of the city.\textsuperscript{247} In Lupercalia, February would have been the end of the calendar year.

\textsuperscript{244} Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, 66, 89; Festus, *Breviarium Rerum Gestarum Populi Romani*, 394.

\textsuperscript{245} Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*, 71.

\textsuperscript{246} Beard, et al., *Religions of Rome: A Sourcebook*, 121.

\textsuperscript{247} Keep in mind, February would have been the end of the calendar year.
the officiates wiped the blood of the animal sacrifice across the face of a few lads and then cleaned their faces with milk. Then they boys ran around the perimeter of the Palatine hill, the oldest line of the *pomerium*, holding whips. They struck women spectators with the whips to induce fertility. The festivities centered around the trunk of the fig tree under which Romulus and Remus were supposedly nurtured by their lupine mother. The use of milk certainly refers to fertility, while the *pomerium* insinuates protection. This was the same route of the triumphal processions, which may link this fertility ritual with war. The location of the ceremony at the fig tree reveals the veneration the Romans maintained for certain consecrated trees.

Ovid believed the Lupercalia honored Faunus, while Livy assumed it memorialized Janus; both gods would be logical in regard to ancient tree worship. Janus would incorporate border protection as well as reverence to wood. The loss of a positive identity of the deity for whom the rite honored suggests the antiquity of the ceremony. The audience of the Argei, in the Republic, was also unclear about the deity they honored. Fowler proposed that rituals without a specific deity attached may have started during the early animistic stage of Roman religion.

Two other similarities existed between Lupercalia and the Argei. Plutarch credited the Arcadian followers of Evander with initiating Lupercalia, because Evander had married Carmenalia, the goddess over childbirth. Plutarch also attributed Evander with initiating the Argei ceremony to aggravate Argive opponents. By tossing effigies of Argives into the Tiber,

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249 Fowler posed that this was the original perimeter of the city, *The Roman Festival*, 310-313; Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 81.


251 For an interesting article on a possible archeological find of the Lupercalia location see also. Pitzer, “Does a cave prove Romulus and Remus are no myth?” Mannhardt and Frazer relay that this was, in its earliest form a human sacrifice of the youth to represent the dying and rebirth of the vegetation spirit. Mannhardt, *Baumkultus*, 97-99; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2.242.

the imitative magic of enactment encouraged harm to the Argives through the spelt replicas. The last similarity of Lupercalia and the Argei can be seen with the Vestals’ sacred cakes of *mola salsa*. The Vestals made these sacred pastries only two other times, for the Argei and for the ides of September. So, like the Argei, on Lupercalia, an archaic fertility holiday, which connected with the *pomerium* border, the Vestals baked sacred cakes of *far*.

The next festival of relevance in February was the Terminalia. This marked the end of the year, but was also focused on the boundaries of Rome. In this rite, land owners decorated their boundary stones with garland, and built altars from a frame composed of wooden stakes. They sprinkled the blood of a lamb and a suckling-pig on the boundary stones. Then the farmers buried the remains of the victims with the first-fruits and cakes under the boundary stones.253 This rite shows several important elements that reach back to the cult of Ishtar in the ancient Near East. The suckling-pig offering overtly resembles the infants offered at the *tophets* cemeteries.254 The boundary stone became an altar and a votive tombstone. The remains of the victims were not fully consumed, but carefully buried under the stone, much like the *tophet* offerings. Furthermore, the sacrifice required an open air ceremony, like those built for Ishtar,


254 *Tophet* is a sacred location for infant burial, though it is frequently assumed (and rationally defended) that it was a burial ground for *sacrificed* infants and children. Schmitz defines the *tophet* as an “open-air sacrificial site.” The Hebrew Bible uses the term to describe the area in the valley of Ben-Hinnom in which the Israelites, among others, preformed holocaust sacrifice of their children. It is debated as to whether the *tophet* areas were a necropolis for children who had died of natural causes and were then offered in burnt sacrifice, or if they were intentionally killed prior to their dedication to the gods. The *tophet* areas were largely located in the Punic West, although similar stone slabs were found in Cyprus and other western Phoenician settlements dating to approximately 498 BCE.254 Carthage remains the largest excavated *tophet* to date revealing approximately twenty thousand animal and infant urn-burials covering a six hundred year span. Moscati, *The Phoenicians: Under the Scientific Direction of Sabatino Moscati*. 123, 304; Wolff, “Archaeology in Israel.” 496; Schmitz, “Review: A Research Manual on Phoenician and Punic Civilization.” 630; Markoe, *Peoples of the Past: Phoenicians*, 133, 136; Shaw, “Phoenicians in Southern Crete.” 176; Harden, “The Pottery from the Precinct of Tanit at Salammbo, Carthage,” 59-63; Clifford, “Phoenician Religion,” 58; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 237.
and the Argei sacellum.\textsuperscript{255}

Perhaps infant sacrifice at these boundary stones was practiced in Roman prehistory. This example of child sacrifice, in particular, the similarity to the Phoenician tradition of sacrificing their first born son for the founding of a city or foundation of a building cannot be overlooked, because the Terminalia offerings closely resembled the first born sacrifices of the Near East.\textsuperscript{256} In this example of Evander, the supposed founder of Lupercalia and the Argei, a further bond between war, human sacrifice, and boundaries (via the founding of the city) is apparent.

Even if Terminalia did not originate or borrow directly from Ishtar’s cult, the elements of fertility through the suckling pig, the importance of setting up wooden stakes, and protection of boundaries were all present in this rite. These three elements unite the concepts of fertility, wood, and war. Similarly, on the first of October, a sacrificial offering was made directly to a beam of wood. This offering probably ensured the safety of the boundaries at the end of war season.\textsuperscript{257} This donation also brings to mind the spike erected on the altar before which King Tukulti-Ninurta kneeled.\textsuperscript{258}

\textit{March}

Commemorated on March first, the Roman new year included laurel branches placed at the \textit{Regia}, a new fire kindled by the Vestals, the relocation of the \textit{ancilia}, and the Salii shaking the ground with their ritual war dances.\textsuperscript{259} Fowler hypothesized that the Argei was once united

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{255} Ovid, \textit{Fasti}, 1.671; Fowler, “Dr. Wissowa,” 117; Wimber, “Four Greco-Roman Era Temples of Near Eastern Fertility Goddesses,” 19-20.
\item \textsuperscript{256} Virgil, \textit{Aeneid}, 5.815-850, 10.517-520, 11.81-82, [23.175-183]; Michels, “Early Roman Religion,” 30; Papaioannou, “Founder, Civilizer and Leader,” 690.
\item \textsuperscript{257} Holland, \textit{Janus and the Bridge}, 79; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, \textit{Antiquitates Romanae}, 2.74.3-5.
\item \textsuperscript{258} See glossary and image in chapter two.
\item \textsuperscript{259} Harmon, “The Public Festivals of Rome,” 1460.
\end{itemize}
with the Plebeian new year festival of Anna Perenna, which took also place on March fifteenth. Anna Perenna tradition involved drunken couples lying within huts made of wooden stakes.\textsuperscript{260} They celebrated on the Campus Martius just north of the Sublicius along the Tiber.\textsuperscript{261} They threw old woman into the Tiber as representations of the old Anna. Then a new form of Anna emerged: that of a young woman.\textsuperscript{262}

The Anna Perenna event was told by Ovid.\textsuperscript{263} He connected the Plebeian rite to the Tyrians. It is possible that the sacred marriage ritual was introduced to the Etruscans or Romans through Tyre. This Anna Perenna commemoration resembled the dying god cult associated with Ishtar.\textsuperscript{264} In fact, in this particular ritual, the old Anna tricked Mars into marriage.\textsuperscript{265} So here Mars mimicked the Near East Mar-duk, a king, priest, god, and groom in the sacred marriage. Two weeks later, on the day before the March Argei procession, the old Mars was expelled from the city.

The purpose of the Argei was unknown by the time the authors of the Roman Republic and Empire described it. Yet, on the ides of March three separate ceremonies (the Argei, Liberalia, the pre-war ritual discussed in chapter one, and Anna Perenna) incorporated war, fertility, the sacred marriage, and hanging images in trees. These three celebrations likely originated as one large and supreme ritual. On this single day, elements of war, fertility, and tree

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\item \textsuperscript{260}Anna is the feminine form of \textit{annus}, or year.
\item \textsuperscript{261} The Campus Martius is also the location of the October Horse celebration described below. This region was a smaller area during the Republic after Augustus reorganized the region. Kyle’s map above would more accurately describe the plain in the earlier periods. For detailed map and notes of the Campus Martius see Coarelli, \textit{Rome and Environs}, 260-304.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Fowler mentioned the similar custom in local cultures through the practice of throwing out the old or the white, or \textit{arg}, thing into the river to usher in spring or the new year. Fowler, \textit{The Roman Festival}, 113, 118-119; Harmon, “The Public Festivals of Rome,” 1450.
\item \textsuperscript{263} Fowler, \textit{The Roman Festival}, 50-53; Ovid, \textit{Fasti}, 3.523; Harmon, "The Public Festivals of Rome," 1461.
\item \textsuperscript{264} Merker, “The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore,” 76.
\item \textsuperscript{265} Fowler, \textit{The Roman Festivals}, 53.
\end{itemize}
worship coincided: encompassing border protection, warrior priests, boys becoming soldiers, displaying human effigies through hanging, the Vestals and Pontifex, the revered bridge, the Tiber, male and female couples drunkenly “resting” beneath a wooden structure, the marriage of Mars and a maiden, and the harvest of the first-fruit grains. These elements combined strengthen the idea that the Argei may have related to both the sacred marriage of the new year and war.

Two days following the Argei, the Salii purified their sacred shields for Mars.266 Continuing with the theme of military purification and preparedness, March twenty-third and twenty fourth were dedicated to purifying the *tuba* and *tibia*, brass military instruments.267 The month of March centered on Mars through agricultural and military rituals.

*April*

April, sandwiched between the two Argei parades, permeated with fertility rituals. It seems the two Argei festivals are end-caps to the fruitful month. On Fordicalia, April fifteenth, the middle of the Argei process, a pregnant cow was sacrificed to Tellus, arguably an amalgamation of Ceres and Bona Dea, for the purpose of an abundant grain harvest.268 What is striking here is that this was a month after the first-fruit Argei harvest and a month before that

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266 Ibid., 57-59. Here Fowler quotes Charisius on his definition of *quinuare*, “to purify.” Charisius states that the Salli purified their sacred shields on this day.

267 Ibid., 62-63.

268 The Greek Demeter, was the “the old woman,” whose daughter portrayed a new young woman, or similar to Anna. Demeter played a role in the dying God cult through Dionysius. See James, *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals*, for a comparison across multiple ancient cultures. Fowler deliberated that Ceres predated the anthropomorphization of the Roman deities, and originally, as a numen, had neither male nor female qualities, and that Ceres predated Greek influence. The construction of Ceres’ first known temple occurred in 496 BCE during a famine. Fowler observed that the architecture of this temple favored Greek style rather than Etruscan. Fowler, *The Roman Festivals*, 73-75; Dames, *Roman Silbury and the Harvest Goddess*, 1-19. Takács and Wissowa discuss a possible connection between the Bona Dea as a female version of Faunus. Additionally, as per Fowler, the mysterious Bona Dea was worshiped on the Aventine hill at a sacred rock, *The Roman Festivals*, 101. This is not unlike the markers needed to worship Ishtar, i.e, sacred stones and high places. Dumézil shows similarities in Fordicalia and the Vedic sacrifices to a cow with eight feet, *Archaic Roman Religion*, 371-373. The Bona Dea, Cerce, and Cybele were mother goddesses with fertility aspects in ancient Rome. For more on Cybele see Rousselle, *Pornia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, 107-128.
first-fruit’s disposal. The Vestals immolated the aborted calf and saved the ashes for Parilia, memorializing the founding of the city by marking the borders, a typical symbol of war rituals. In Parilia, the ashes of the aborted calf and the dried blood of the October Horse were mixed in a purification fire. Men, women, and their sheep leapt through the flames to procure purification and plentiful reproduction. Here again, sacred elements of war (border protection) and fertility merged.

May

The celebrations in May might also shed light on the Argei and its relationship to agricultural fertility, war, and executions via impaling, crucifixion, and hanging. On Laribus, May first, the Romans offered a dog to the Lares, spirits of the dead. The Lares received the canine sacrifice through some form of impaling, as seen on a coin below.

Figure 12. Lucius Caesius, AR Denarius. This coin reveals a dog speared as a sacrifice to the Lares. The coin is from the second century BCE. The obverse side has an image of Vejovis, a Roman god who may have received human sacrifices. The reverse side shows Lares receiving an impaled dog. Image from Ancient Coin Search Engine.

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270 Information regarding this image is from Takács, *Vestal Virgins*, 45. The image on the coin is also described in Duncan et. al., *A catalogue of the Ashmolean Museum*, 150.
Nagy and others have connected the Argei ceremony to the Lares. Still, a further conclusion can be drawn from the impaled mongrel. Bona Dea, the daughter of Faunus, was also recognized on this first day of May. The spirits of the dead were honored through impaled dogs and a great-mother goddess of fertility obtained honor at the same time. Generally, the Lares and Bona Dea are discussed separately; though sharing a holiday may not have been unintentional. In light of the multiple examples in the Near East, the great mother goddess, Ishtar, appreciated impaled offerings. If the Lares were associated with the Argei, as Nagy and others suggested, and the Argei dolls were an offering to the Lares, then this might mean the dolls were hung in the temples by an impaling stick, and in some way associated with Bona Dea. The act of impaling with a spear and the Lares were associated with both war and agriculture.

May ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth continued to focus on the spirits of the dead which is why many historians think the May fifteenth, the final Argei rite, also focused on the Lares. Lares, Lemures, and Manes were typically souls of the deceased who remained, haunted, or caused harm because of an improper burial. These spirits were regularly associated with unburied war casualties. It has been suggested that the Argei puppets rested in the temples in a form of sympathetic magic with the temples representing tombs and the Argei dolls representing the bodies of the unburied ghosts. Symbolic tombs could offer a proper burial for these restless spirits. However, there is a fallacy in this logic. The effigies only dwelt in the temple, or symbolic tomb, from mid-March to mid-May. Then, the bodily images were thrown into the Tiber on the ides of May. Tossing bodies to the Tiber conflicted with proper burial. Therefore, a reenacted funeral procession and burial through a magical ceremony cannot epitomize the

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273 Holland, Janus and the Bridge, 325; Festus, “Argei.”
purpose of the Argei.

One Roman tradition that may provide a better glimpse into matters of restless spirits and improper burial may be seen with Roman soldiers who fell in battle. Roman war casualties were not returned home for a proper burial. They were, nevertheless, buried when possible. The survivors placed their fallen comrades in mass graves. At these battle graves a tree was erected as a monument to the slain soldiers. 274 On the tree the survivors hung armor and weapons from their enemies, similar to those presented in the triumphal processions. The survivors even chained enemy war captives to the tree. 275 To esteem the decreased troops weapons and armor were displayed on an erected tree.

If Nagy’s theory is correct, that the Argei dolls were offerings to the unjustly killed and unburied spirits, and not representations of the spirits themselves, then it follows that the rite may have been associated with war. 276 If the Argei was a pre-war ritual that utilized sympathetic magic, the rush images could have represented the execution and display of future war captives whom the Romans intended to capture in the upcoming campaign season. Perhaps the first Argei dolls were hung to represent the enemy who had executed Roman (or Etruscan) soldiers, disallowed their burial, and thereby created the Lares. This theory is not unlike the Evander legend that the Argei began as a way to aggravate Argive soldiers. What would make a better offering than one of retribution? The Lares, men denied their burial, may have been offered Argei dolls as a magical way to deny their slayers’ burial. If this theory of vengeance, through sympathetic magic, is correct then it would have been comparable to the Roman soldiers chaining their defeated opponents to the memorial trees and hanging the enemies’ armor on the

274 Hope, “Trophies and Tombstones,” 80.
275 Stone grave markers of fallen soldiers became characteristic in the early Empire. Hope, “Trophies and tombstones,” 80, 84.
branches at the mass soldier graves. It would have also paralleled the execution of the war prisoners at the triumphal procession ceremony.277

The Vestals’ procession with the Argei effigies on display could easily be interpreted as imitated war captives displayed and thrown to the Tiber like garbage. In the case of the first three May dates, revering the Lemures, the *paterfamilias* preformed the rituals for ancestral spirits and over those who had wrongfully been killed. The Vestals and Pontifex did not involve themselves in expelling the local spirits. Ovid’s description of these spirits, who were attended in early May, insinuated the spirits had a closer bond to the family as an ancestral spirit than to the state.278 But, if the rush puppets were replicas of future war prisoners, this would have been official business for the society as a whole.

The Vestals’ and the Dialis’ involvement in disposing of the Argei dolls may seem to violate purity protocol because these women were not allowed to slaughter sacrificial victims.279 Yet, they did preserve the ashes of the aborted calf for Parilia and blood of the October Horse to deposit them at the right place and the right time. If the Argei originated with human sacrifice, as Wissowa suggested, this would have disqualified the Vestals from harvesting the grain, binding it into the images of men, and hanging them because they would not have been able to capture and kill human victims. In the scenario of human victims, the harvest, binding, and hanging would have representing capturing and killing the war prisoners. However, if the ceremony originated as sympathetic magic, to destroy those enemies of the Rome who threatened agricultural fertility, as well as a ritual to honor the new year and new campaign season, the Vestals were well within their role to harvest, bind, and hang the spelt figures.

277 Triumphal procession executions will be discussed below.


The Argei began in March, during the pre-war ceremonies. This timing also disqualifies actual war casualties as the original victims displayed and tossed into the Tiber. The Argei began on the ides of March while the weapons of war were still being purified and the campaign season was just beginning. In this sense, representations of human war victims could have been the original victims in a form of sympathetic magic. *Far* was a common offering to the dead. As Nagy mentioned, “premature grain for the prematurely dead” suited the Lares. Though, the creation of an image, made of premature grain, may have represented the desired death of an enemy and served as an offering to the untimely slain Lares.

After discussing elements of burial and the Tiber, it seems unlikely that the Argei puppets represented deceased loved ones because of the river’s negative connotations as a burial option. Additionally, the effigies were bound like criminals. A symbolic offering of a hanged enemy, denied burial, given to the deceased spirit, who had met an early fate without burial, follows the standard rules of like offerings and sympathetic magic.

Ambarvalia, on May twenty-ninth, followed the May Argei ceremony. Ambarvalia safeguarded good growth and harvest. So, fourteen days following the final Argei day, another procession occurred around the border of the city, and around the crops to ensure protection and a bountiful harvest. In this trek, the farmer participants led animal victims, adorned in garland and olive branches, around the city borders, like Triumph prisoners and the Argei puppets. Ambarvalia honored either Ceres or Mars.

The prayer for Ambarvalia, retold by Cato, included requests to Mars, the god of war and vegetation, to protect, provide a healthy harvest, and to purify the area which had been outlined.

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280 Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 21
Mars, I beg and entreat you to be well disposed toward me and toward our house and household. I have ordered an offering of pigs, sheep, and bulls to be led around my field, land, and farm on account of this request, so that you may prevent, ward-off, and remove sickness, both seen and unseen, and barrenness and devastation, and damage to crops and bad weather, and so that you may permit my legumes, grain, vineyards, and shrubbery to grow and turn-out well.281

Most of the spring celebrations revolved around fertility of agriculture, animals, and women as well as purification, protection of borders, and war. Naturally, agrarian societies equated the expansion of borders or infringement upon their borders as agricultural success or loss. War cannot be separated from territorial disputes in pastoral and agrarian societies.

July

July eighth, the Roman Capratine Nones ceremony, combined elements of war, fertility, and tree worship. Plutarch explained two possible origins for the festival: one in remembrance of the day Romulus disappeared, the other to remember the Gauls’ capture of Rome. Due to the Gauls’ success, and recalling the Roman’s behavior with the Sabines, the Latins requested virgins from the Romans. The Romans chose neither to go to war nor to delivering their maidens to the Latins. Instead, they used a wild fig tree to signal to one another. Through the fig tree signals the Romans ambushed their enemy. The annual recognition of the event was called Capratine after the wild fig tree. To remember Capratine Nones, they built booths made of fig trees in which the women of the city were wined and dined.282 This ceremony is significant because it shows the Romans combined the ideas of war, fertility, and tree worship.

October

October Horse, mentioned briefly earlier in this work, is relevant when discussing the Argei as a pre-war ritual. October Horse, on the ides of October, corresponded directly with the ides of March. The ides of March marked the beginning of harvest and of campaign season. The ides of October completed war season and harvest. On this day the weapons were ritually cleansed and stored until next campaign season, and the last of the series of great harvest festivals ended.283

The purpose of October Horse was agricultural fertility, and purification of the weapons of war. Even more significant to this paper, is the relationship between war, fertility, and impaling seen in this holiday. The equine victim of this ritual was impaled.284 The Romans slayed the horse with spear of Mars, the weapon associated with sacred trees. They decapitated the horse and hung its head on the Turris Mamilia.285 They further dismembered this victim and rushed its dripping tail, or possibly the genitals, to the temple of Vesta, where the Vestals preserved the horse’s blood at the Regia hearth for the next year’s Parilia festival.286 This cleansing war ceremony incorporated fertility, harvest, and impaling. The specific Roman hierarchy of animal sacrifices, the suovetaurilia,287 was offered daily in this season, but on the ides of October, they added the horse and impaled it with a sacred spear. This celebration evolved to include the chariot race, from which the winning mares became the chosen victims.288

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284 Ibid., 241-243.
285 Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World*, 19. Terms Turris Mamilia and Regia are defined in the glossary.
287 This sacrifice included three victims, the pig, sheep, and bull.
Figure 13. Alexamenos graffito. Famous graffito from Rome near the Palatine Hill. This carving is generally considered slander against Christians, however, considering the method of sacrifice for the October Horse may have alternate meaning. Perhaps the October Horse head, on display at the Turris Mamilia, did not look different than the graffiti of this donkey head on the cross. By many the image is presumed to represent the crucified Jesus, while others argue it is representative of Seth or Anubis. Perhaps this resembled the October Horse. For additional arguments see also Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*..., 104. Dates for the carving range from first to third century CE.

Julius Caesar used his influence to renew an archaic form of the October Horse sacrament. Caesar ordered the death of two men because of military insurrection. The men were ritually killed by decapitation. Then Caesar had the heads of the insolent impaled and displayed them like the October Horse victims. According to later accounts of this event:

So this man was executed for the reason given, and two others were slain as a sort of ritual observance. The true cause I am unable to state, inasmuch as the Sibyl made no utterance and there was no other similar oracle, but at any rate they were sacrificed in the Campus Martius by the pontifices and the priest of Mars, and their heads were set up near the Regia.

It is also unlikely that the Roman maintained the idea of tree worship in impaling and crucifixions, as Cassius Dio mentioned, they had no record of such behavior in the Sibyl or other known oracles, but their practice of impaling and displaying victims in the manner of the

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October Horse and the Laribus dog may have derived from the Near East. This chapter has revealed how the Roman worship of trees and purity festivals for the new year, agriculture, and war paralleled the ancient Near East.

Through this observation of Roman rituals, several examples of Roman holidays mimicked behavior in the Near East (both with Semitic and Indo-European cultures). These cultures shared common religious practices likely through syncretism or origin. The method in which the October Horse was slaughtered mirrored Vedic animal sacrifice, as does the *suovetaurilia* hierarchy of animal victims. The Indo-European hierarchy, in declining importance, followed: human, horse, ox, sheep, and goat. However, the October Horse was slaughtered differently than the other animal offerings; it was impaled and displayed like the victims of the ancient Near East for Ishtar. The October horse and the Argei were two of the oldest Roman-Etruscan rituals, and strikingly they both have parallels in the Vedic culture. This indicates that these two practices probably preceded Indo-European migration into the Italian peninsula. So too, Semitic similarities existed. The Jewish *parah* sacrifice, of the lactating red heifer, paralleled October Horse with its cathartic properties, it resembled the Vedic eight footed cow sacrifice and the Roman Fordicalia where a pregnant cow was offered.

Though the plausibility of the Romans gaining the Argei from the Phocaeans remains, it is still conceivable that the rite evolved naturally prior to the Indo-European migration as similar rites occurred in the Vedic and even in Semitic Near Eastern cultures (Hebrew, Neo-Babylonian, and Assyrian). It is possible the Argei was introduced prior to Greek influence, especially in light

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292 Dumézil and Harmon related the Argei to an old Vedic ritual, the Agni, in which the god of fire was honored and evil spirits were expelled. Ibid; Harmon, "The Public Festivals of Rome," 1455-59; Nagy, “The Argei Puzzle,” 6.
of these early migration patterns, and it becomes highly probable when considering the similarities in the Vedic and ancient Near East religions.

The season in which the Argei ceremony took place encompassed purification, harvesting the first-fruits of the year, and fertility. The strongest arguments previous historians have used for the Argei as a first-fruit and purification ritual come from its comparison and proximity to other annual ceremonies. Along those same lines of reasoning, the Argei intertwined with the sacred marriage, new year, purity and fertility, and pre-war rituals.

Triumphal Processions

The life of Romulus illustrates further instances of the merging of war, fertility, and tree worship. Romulus abducted the Sabine women, according to Plutarch, for two reasons: to intentionally initiate a war, and for fertility in “uniting and blending the two peoples in the strongest bonds.” Once commencing and winning his war, Romulus adorned himself in fresh sprigs of laurel. He cut an oak and displayed the Sabine king’s armor on the few remaining branches. He lifted this memento as a trophy through the streets of the city in the “first” triumphal march. There was no mention of the discarding of King Acron’s body in Plutarch’s version of this occurrence. Perhaps Romulus offered the spolia opima to the oak, an early form of Jupiter.

After mentioning many Roman observances that combined elements of fertility and war, the Roman triumphal procession should be analyzed because, as a war ceremony, it also

293 Plutarch, Lives, Romulus, 14.6; Plutarch, Quaestiones Romanae, 87.
294 Plutarch, Lives, Romulus, 16.5-6.
contained symbols of fertility and tree worship. In order to claim the Argei was a war ceremony, it is necessary to search this post-war ceremony for parallels. Scholars debate the origin of the triumph as being Eastern, Etruscan, or simply through Romulus or Bacchus as Roman tradition designates. The Near East held similar victory parades. Perhaps parading spoils was merely human nature following a successful battle. Boasting transcend cultural lines. Versnel, in *Triumphus*, recommended that the extensive similarities between the triumphal practices and the Near East new year festival demonstrate that the triumph evolved from Etruria’s vernal new year.

The Romans claimed the first official triumph, of Publius Valerius Publicola in 509 BCE, occurred on an anniversary of Romulus’s victory show, March first; a fitting time to celebrate Mars, war, and the new year. The triumph began in the Campus Martius, the plain of Mars, where Julius Caesar executed his insubordinates soldiers in the manner of the October Horse sacrifice. It was also at the Campus Martius that Anna Perenna was honored on the first day of the Argei ceremony. During the triumph, the successful general, adorned with elements of kingship and divinity, such as a painting their faces red to match the crimson idols, wore purple robe, iron rings, carried an eagle scepter, and held a laurel or olive branch as seen by priest-kings of Etruria and the Near East. Like the kings of the Near East the early Roman kings were representations of the pantheon head, in the case of Rome, Frazer indicates they represented Jupiter. This representation continued after the age of kings through triumphal processions.

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297 Versnel’s idea given by Beard in *The Roman Triumph*, 56.
298 Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 77.
299 Holliday, “Roman Triumphal Painting,” 133.
The triumphant general held the branch in the same way that the rulers of the Near East held branches in battle scenes. Pliny indicated the branch stood for peace, while Masurius Sabinus suggested the branch and the procession decontaminated the participants from the defilement of war. If Masurius Sabinus was correct there would have been no need for the October Horse ritual, and a triumph would have been required after every battle.

Figure 14. Ashurnasirpal II’s Northwest Palace. The cherub king is holding a sacred branch. From around 883-859 BCE. Image from the British Museum.

Figure 15. Ivory engravings recovered in Nimrud. This mage provided by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. There are many images of this nature. Important features of this image include the sacred tree and the winged disc. This winged disc is the icon of war and Assur.

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302 Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 52.
The disagreement among these ancient historians regarding the purpose of the branch may indicate that the tradition was inherited from the Near East. Also included in the procession were exotic plants from the defeated’s homeland like the plants of hanging gardens of Babylon.303

In addition to exotic trees other fertility images present in the triumph, an interesting, yet often ignored, icon of the procession relate openly to fertility. The chariot that carried the triumphant general was endowed with a hanging amulet of a male appendage.304 In excavations of Pompey phallic images were commonly found at bakers and at crossroads.305 This is significant because in Liberalia, celebrated on the first Argei day, phallic shaped cakes were used for the ceremony. Also, the crossroads were likely associated with the Argei temples and were associated with hanging images, possibly originating from the heads of slaves, for the Lemures. Consequently, the phallic symbol of fertility, found readily at Ishtar’s cult centers, was used on the day of the Argei in conjunction with the crossroads and in the triumphs. This sexual appendage in these three occasions combines the elements of fertility and war with the Argei.

303 Ibid., 7.
305 Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 212.
Another image from the triumphal processions can be seen in the coin above. These trophies were created and displayed through the triumph. These trophies included the enemy’s armor erected on tree sacred trunk or stake. Notice how the armor was positioned to appear as a soldier. Each tree had one set of armor placed perfectly. The armor was not randomly hung from branches. The tree was trimmed to look like a man and dressed to look like the executed enemy. Romulus displayed a war captive’s armor on a sacred oak. Pompey and Sulla did the same and commemorated their reiteration with coins. In the Jewish Wars, Vespasian crucified in great numbers. Perhaps the armor displayed in the triumph emulated the defeated’s on-location execution.

During the triumph, war prisoners were marched around and through the city like the animal before an agricultural sacrifice that protected and enriched the land within the borders.

Those who celebrate a triumph temporarily stay the executions of the enemy's leaders so that the people of Rome can witness the beautiful spectacle and the reward of victory when
these men are paraded in the triumph. But when the wagons in the procession begin their
turn from the Forum to the Capitoline, they order the captive leaders to be led into the
Prison to their death. Thus does one same day put an end to both the command of the
victorious general and the life of the defeated foe.309

They did not execute all war prisoners, but to boast about capturing their most hated foes, the
execution of some war captives became the climax of the triumph. Jupiter, Mars, and
Quirinus received honor and three forms of spolia.310 Near the temple of Mars and the
Velabrum, at the mouth of the Tullianum prison, the captives usually hanged or strangled like
animal sacrifices.311

Along with the ceremonial executions, presiding officers performed animal
sacrifices.312 Some debate exists over whether these executions were ritual killings or human
sacrifices.313 Nevertheless, after magically transforming into animals by crawling under the tri-
spanced yoke, the victims were paraded along with the spoils of war and the animals intended
for sacrifice.314 Their bodies of the executed war captives remained exposed and displayed for
several days, until they were dragged to the Tiber and flushed away by the current.315

Romans’ Displaying Sacrificial Victims by Hanging, Impaling, or Crucifixion

The Romans administered crucifixion, impaling, and hanging for the lowest criminals,
such as murders, robbers, traitors, and deceivers, committed by the lowest classes of slaves and

309 Cicero, In Verrem, 5.77.
310 Warren, “Roman Triumphs and Etruscan King,” 53. Taylor, “Watching the Skies,” 1. Quirinus was an
aspect of Janus involved in starting and finishing war, not unlike the opening and closing of the Janus bridge. For
more details on ritual execution and exposure of prisoners via the Scalae Germaniae, carcer, and Tarpeian Rock see
311 Cicero, In Verrem, 5.75-77; Beard, The Roman Triumph, 129, 135.
312 Beard, The Roman Triumph, 129.
313 Ibid., 129-131.
314 Holliday, “Roman Triumphal Painting,” 133.
315 Kyle, Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome, 213-228.
Certainly, by the late Republic, Romans did not connect the idea of crucifixion with sacrifice. Josephus said that the soldiers executed and displayed the war criminals either to make an example, to torture, or out of jest. Josephus claimed that up to five hundred Jews were crucified daily. According to Philo crucifixion entertained the populace. However, impaling and hanging were still used in Roman religion as a method of sacrifice.

Hengel argued that in ancient Roman punishment for high treason was via hanging on an arbor infelix, or infertile tree, as an offering to a chthonic deity. Pliny the Elder said those put on the arbor infelix were erected for Ceres. At Julius Caesar’s insistence, this antiquated penalty for treason was resurrected in the trial of Rabirius. Cicero defended Rabirius by pleading for exile instead of using what he considered an old and barbaric practice on a Roman citizen. Perhaps the executions Caesar implemented, reminiscent of the October horse sacrifice, equated to the arbor infelix executions. From the debate of Cicero it is clear that the arbor infelix execution were old, religiously focused, and related to fertility. Interestingly, Tertullian told of an incident from a Roman proconsul in Africa, by the name of Tiberius, who noticed the Carthaginians practicing child sacrifice by hanging the infants on trees. The proconsul had the practicing priests hanged in the trees surrounding the temple, or on crosses, cotivis crucibus exposuit.

Another example of the Romans displaying human victims in trees appears in the myth of

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316 Hengel, Crucifixion: In the Ancient World, 9.
318 Hengel, Crucifixion: In the Ancient World, 26, 35; Josephus, Jewish Wars, 5.449-452; Philo, In Flaccum, 72-84.
319 Hengel, Crucifixion: In the Ancient World, 39; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae, 2.10.3; Seneca the Younger, Epistulae Morales, 101.10-14; Marcus Minucius Felix, Octavius, 24.7; Pliny the Elder, Historia Naturalis, 18.3.11-13.
320 Cicero, Pro Rabirio,5.9-17; Hengel, Crucifixion: In the Ancient World, 41-43.
321 Ibid., 61; Tertullian, Apologeticus, 9.1-2.
Jupiter the Oak requesting human heads from Numa.\(^{322}\) According to Cook, this myth took its original form from the myth of King Phorbas, in which the king’s sacred dwelling was under an oak tree on the Delphi road. Phorbas physically challenged individuals who traveled on Delphic pilgrimages. After besting these travelers in athletic feats, Phorbas decapitated them and decorated his oak tree with their crania.\(^{323}\) Phorbas displayed those he defeated in the same way King David of the Old Testament Bible and Ashurbanipal displayed their conquered foe.

Figure 18. Marsyas sculpture. Carved first or second century CE as a duplicate of a third century BCE original. Coins from 82 BCE depict the statue as well. Currently owned by the Louvre Museum.

Another example of hanging on a tree is that of Marsyas’ execution. He became a criminal offering to Apollo. He was hanged on a tree because of a song he composed to a fertility mother goddess. Marsyas connected hanging on a tree to fertility cults and treason. Stone recreations of the event were known and publically displayed by the Romans, though the original

\(^{322}\) According to Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 13.2.1, the Roman kings were representations of Jupiter, this representation continued after the age of kings through triumphal processions. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.20; Ovid, *Fasti*, 3.327-344.

\(^{323}\) Cook, “Zeus, Jupiter and the Oak,” 270.
This corpse’s position on the tree in this sculpture resembles impaled and crucified image. He was centered and not hanged from a hefty branch; nor was the Marsyas hanged from erected gallows.

Justin Martyr described the Jewish and Samaritan lamb, slaughtered for Passover, as fixed in the form of a cross. The Mishnah statements contradict this only slightly in that they preferred the stick to enter the lamb through the head rather than through the anus. Either way, the proper preparation of the sacrificial lamb, originally a substitute for the oldest son, involved impaling. Furthermore, the Mishnah requested a pomegranate stake as the impaling instrument. The pomegranate tree, another icon of Ishtar, symbolized fertility. Additionally, the Vestals dressed their hair with small branches from the pomegranate trees, perhaps as a form of potential fertility power to match their consistent bridal garb. These festive twig accessories were forbidden during the Argei months because of the marriage taboo, and possibly to reflect the somber atmosphere of the bridge ceremonies. The Passover directly related to fertility, protection from death, and substitution of the firstborn sacrifice.

What gives the impaled victims of Passover relevance in this section of the paper is Mannhardt’s argument that the October Horse sacrifice descended as a form of the Passover

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324 For the tale of Marsyas see also Plato, Republic, 3.399; Plato, Euthydemus, 285; Ovid, Metamorphoses, 6.382.
326 Mishnah, Pesahim 7:1; Justin Martyr, The Dialogue with Trypho, 40.1-5; Tabory, “The Crucifixion of the Paschal Lamb,” 395-398; The detail on the preparation of the Pascal lamb is not spelled out in the Hebrew Bible as it is was in the Mishna. Numbers 9:12 indicated no bones could be broke on the Pascal lamb, indicating that this victim was not to be dismembered, and therefore because this was specified, one may assume that other sacrificial victims were dismembered. 2 Chronicles 35:13 indicates the lamb was roasted with fire, as opposed to other methods of preparation such as boiling.
327 Holland, Janus and the Bridge, 327-328. Festus, “Tutulum” Breviarium Rerum Gestarum Populi Romani, 484; Servius, Auctus, In Vergilii Aeneidos Libros, 4.137; Cornelius Gellius, Noctes Atticae, 10.15.22-32; Varro, De Lingua Latina, 7.43-45.
The times of year do not coincide, but the form of slaughter used on the victim was similar. Davis related the Passover victims to the sacred marriage, the sacred marriage to Thargelia, and the Thargelia to the Argei. If Mannhardt or Davis’ ideas were accurate, it becomes increasingly plausible that the early forms of war prisoner and criminal crucifixions, or hangings, on the *arbor infelix* and the Argei puppets were related to the sacred marriage, and therefore agricultural fertility. Even if Mannhardt and Davis’ theories are inaccurate, an undeniable relationship existed between fertility and war sacrifices and impaling, crucifixion, and hanging.

The Christian faith emerged much later than the scope of this paper, but Roman Christians perceived the crucifixion of Jesus as a sacrifice, in the form of a Passover lamb, by the first century CE. For some Jews, in the first century CE and later, who joined the Christian-Jewish sect, a crucified human could replace the Passover lamb, or represent a human sacrifice. The handful of individuals that accepted Jesus as a human guilt offering would have practiced either Passover or another form of spring animal sacrifice, and would have also personally seen crucified men on exhibition.

By the first century CE, human sacrifice was not practiced in Rome and the *arbor infelix* punishments or crucifixions were only granted to the lowest members of society. An animal sacrifice had to be inspected and blemish free in order to be fit for sacrifice; criminals and war prisoners were not free of imperfections. Perhaps the illogical choice of utilizing a convicted criminal, in this case Jesus, as the sin offering motivated the graffiti artist to depict the crucified savior as an ass. Nonetheless, there is precedent for earlier animal and human sacrifice in the

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329 Davis, “The May Tabu on Roman Marriage and a Parallel,” 38-41.
330 John 11-19; 1 Corinthians 5:7.
manner of crucifixion, impaling, and hanging. These forms of execution or displays of the corpse were never honorable. The victims were usually criminals or captives. Just like the executions in the triumphal processions, they were dedicated to the gods, but did not require an extensive examination for perfection.

The theory proposed by this paper, that the impaled, crucified, and hanged humans were offered in fertility cults in conjunction with war, was mirrored by the Argei ceremony. The treatment of the Argei puppets followed this same protocol in the form of sympathetic magic. Given that the Argei occurred on the same day as Liberalia and Anna Perenna’s marriage, looking to the Near East cultures with congruent practices of the sacred marriage, and execution of war criminals for fertility helps to complete the theory, especially given the shortage of written sources on the Argei.

Yet even in the written sources that are present, though composed in a later date than the origin of the Argei ceremony, reveal multiple images of stakes and crosses remaining in the Roman World in war scenes. Minucius Felix, in the late second century CE, defended the Christian view as worshiping Jesus and not the cross itself. Felix gave several examples of cross-type structures in the traditional Roman religion. “For your very standards, as well as your banners; and flags of your camp, what else are they but crosses gilded and adorned? Your victorious trophies not only imitate the appearance of a simple cross, but also that of a man affixed to it.” From Felix’s writing it can be gathered that Rome still had religious representations that looked similar to a crucified victim. The hanging of the Argei puppets in the temple from March until May was a public display of a human replica. The significance may have been for purity or for the Lemures. The Romans displayed the Argei image through spring.

beginning with the first unripened far, and continuing a few months, much like the Gibeonites who kept human victims on display until the first rain.³³²

Conclusion

The Romans may have inherited the Argei from the Greeks or from the ancient Near East, but the Argei and new year’s sacred marriage occurred during the initiation of campaign and spring planting and harvest season. Additionally, Mars, the god of war, protection, borders growth, and vegetation parallels the characteristics and modes of worship of Ishtar. Both in the ancient Near East and in Rome, animal victims were sacrificed and displayed through impaling, crucifixion, and hanging. The similarity between the Near East and Roman modes of sacred tree worship, hanging, and displaying victims in connection with agricultural fertility and war can no longer be ignored. For both Rome and the Near East war casualties were displayed on sacred trees.

Of the Argei elements, the procession through the city, deliberate mindfulness of the borders, the Tiber, the Sublicius bridge, and the Salii were all relevant themes in war. The procession through the city, rush images, Tiber, Sublicius bridge rituals, and the Vestal Virgins were frequent images seen in agriculture. The hanging of representative sacrificial images, the dispersement of the sacred shrines, and end of the Argei season in May are similar to celebrations for the Lares. When considering these features it is likely that the Argei related to war, agriculture, and the previously departed spirits.

Through the Near East cultures a strong correlation existed between impaling, hanging, and crucifixion in war and sacred tree fertility worship. By examining Roman tree worshiping

and agricultural rituals a similar correlation becomes apparent. On the same day of the Argei, Mars was married to the anthropomorphized new year, and then became a scapegoat expelled from the city. Additionally, on the first day of the Argei boys became soldiers. On this one day, March fifteenth, the elements of Ishtar’s fertility cult were present. Like Ishtar’s cult, within the Argei, the sacred marriage, the new year, rituals of war, and hanging representative victims were all present.

The intermixing of war and fertility, agriculturally or sexually, were not isolated to the Argei. Examining Roman holidays reveals a strong correlation between war and fertility. Especially in Parentalia and Liberalia when human images were hung in trees for war, honoring the dead, as well as fertility. Additionally, the spear was a weapon of war and an integral part to tree worship and marriage ceremonies. The traditional rituals for bridges involved both war and rain ceremonies. Several other Roman holidays combine elements of war and agriculture.

Finally, the Roman triumph contained many of the same elements as the Argei. The perimeter of the city’s earliest borders were marched, phallic images were worn, and war casualties were hanged and displayed. Additionally, images of men were formed by hanging the enemies’ armor on trees. Through these delineated similarities it is clear that the Argei, beginning the spring growth season and campaign season, related not only to agriculture and the spirits of the dead but also worked as a pre-war magic ceremony paralleling the desired triumphal procession.

By looking at the Argei holistically this research has opened the door for a new direction of inquiry on the Argei ceremony, fertility cults in the Near East and in Rome, and on the execution of war criminals. As this thesis reveals a new angle on the Argei and executions in the

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ancient world, there is undoubtedly more research that can be done in the topics discussed. Though, given the examples and parallels laid out in this work, the theory of the Argei as pre-war magic is highly plausible. However, it is now evident that agricultural and sexual fertility, war, and execution can no longer be viewed as entirely separate topics when researching the ancient world.
APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
**Abores infelix**- Or infertile tree, used as an early form of execution in Rome for treason.

**Acca Larentia**- This goddess of fertility and crops, similar to Ceres, was attributed as the foster mother of Romulus and Remus. Most accounts, however, agree that she was associated with the Lares.

**Ambarvalia** - May twenty-ninth, Ambarvalia, an agriculture related ceremony, followed the May Argei. Ambarvalia ensured good growth and harvest. So, fourteen days following the last Argei another procession occurred around the border of the city and around the crops to ensure protection and good harvest. In this trek the farmer participants led the animal victims, adorned in garland and olive branches, around the city borders, like the Argei puppets. They were offered to either Ceres or Mars.

**Ancilia**- Sacred shields of the Salii.

**Anna Perenna**- On the March fifteenth celebration as the first Argei rite. Anna Perenna including drunken couples of men and women with huts made of wooden stakes. They celebrated on the Campus Martius near the Tiber and the Sublicius. They threw personified Anna, represented as an old woman, into the Tiber. Anna tricked Mars into marriage.

**Asherah pole**- A tree or spike used in the worship of Ishtar.

**Ashur**- The lover of Ishtar, patron god of Assyria, and head of the pantheon. He derived from Enlil after Assyria rose in power. He replaced Marduk in later versions of the Enuma Elish translations. Marduk was the patron god of Babylon.

**Code of Assura**- The Assyrian law code from about 1075 BCE.

**Ba’al-peor**- A Phoenician (Tyrenian) god traditionally worshiped for fertility in association with Ishtar.
Bamah- High places such as mountain tops used for worship. A High Place (also called bamah) was an open-air sanctuary for sacrificial worship. The bamah was generally elevated, either by geological location or constructed terrace, and contained a paved area with some sort of shrine, massebot or altar erected.

Bona Dea- Daughter of Faunus, received recognition on this first day of May.

Campus Martius- The Campus Martius was just outside of the pomerium near the Tiber and Sublicius. It was an area sacred to Mars. This is where the Senate voted whether or not to honor generals through a triumph. Soldiers trained in this area. This is where Julius Caesar executed insubordinate soldiers and hung their heads like the October Horse.

Capratine Nones- July eighth, remembrance of the day Romulus disappeared, the other to remember the Gauls’ capture of Rome which led the Latins to request virgins from the Romans to intermarry, recalling the Roman’s behavior with the Sabines.

Chthonic- Of or pertaining to death, the grave, or underworld.

Cybele- A mother goddess from Anatolia, sometimes associated with the Magna Mater, Rhea and Demeter. She was associated with worship in high places or mountains.

Cyrus II- Mid-sixth century BCE. Persian king who led religious reforms and liberated many subjugated people from Babylonian rule. He conquered Babylon in 539 BCE.

Dumuzi- Shepherded king of the Sumerian myth. The original spouse of Ishtar. He is one of the dying gods along with Tammuz is Semitic, in his various forms he is known as Dionysius in Greece, Dumuzi in Assyria, Dumuzid in Sumer, Osiris in Egyptian, Bacchus in late Rome, Attis with Cybele was the Phrygian Greek, and Adonis in Phoenicia.

Dying god cult- The terminology “dying god” is from Frazer. The belief transcends multiple cultures. The belief involves the death and resurrection of a deity which usually
symbolizes winter and spring. The cult is associated with agricultural fertility. See “Dumuzi” in the glossary for a list of gods. In the Babylonian and Akkadian tradition the god died on the summer solstice.

*Esther*- A maiden from the Hebrew Bible has often been associated with Ishtar of the sacred marriage, as she was chosen for the king.

*Evander*- A character in the Virgil’s Aeneid. Plutarch indicated he may have instigated the Argei to irritate the Argives. Evander espoused Carmenalia, the goddess over childbirth. His followers started the celebration of Lupercalia. He offered to sacrifice his son to found the city of Rome which was possibly a common practice among ancient Near East cultures, and similar to the sacrifice of a suckling pig for the borders during Terminalia.

*far*- Rome’s oldest known species of wheat preferred for religious ceremonies as opposed to barley used by the Greeks.

*Faunus*- A Roman god of the forest and fields.

*Flaminica Dialis*- The wife of the Flamen Dialis, who was a high priest. The number of Flamen Dialis varied, there were three major priests, with their priestess wife, serving as the priest and priestess for Jupiter, Mars and Janus Quirinus.

*Fordicidia*- Roman Fordicidia/Fordicalia sacrifice, in which a pregnant cow was offered. April fifteenth, the middle of the Argei process, a pregnant cow was sacrificed to Tellus, arguably an amalgamation of Ceres and Bona Dea for the purpose of an abundant corn harvest.

*Haruspicy*- Divination by reading entrails of sacrificial victims, especially the liver.
Inheduanna- She lived in the early twenty-third century BCE. She was the daughter of Sargon II and priest of Inanna, or Ishtar. Her hymns to Inanna are the first written works with a known author.

Ishtar- The ancient Near East goddess of fertility and war. Alternate names and identities:

   Inanna, Assuritu, Ashtoreth, Ashtaroth, Asherah, Athtar, Astar, Ashtar, Ashtart, Attar, Ashtoret and Astarte, and at times thought to be Tannit, Tanit.

Janus- God of gates, doorways, and bridges. Janus is depicted with two faces because he looks to the front and back, the future and the past.

Jugurtha- King of Numidia, second century BCE.

Lares- Chthonic deities or spirits usually interpreted as “the souls of the deceased,” There were multiple types of Lares both usually good, as earlier mentioned, but not always. Various types included Lares praestites, Lares familiaris, Lares militares. Lares, Lemures, and Manes were typically souls of the deceased. Lares were typically good protectors, Lemures were usually evil and Manes could be either good or bad.

Laribus- The holiday dedicated to the Lares (hence Laribus) celebrated on May first. The Romans offered a dog to the Lares, spirits of the dead. The Lares received the canine through some form of impaling.

Lemure- Lares, Lemures, and Manes were typically souls of the deceased. Lares were typically good protectors, Lemures were usually evil and Manes could be either good or bad.

Lemuria -May ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth celebrated the Lemuria, evil spirits of the dead, specifically unburied or depraved spirits common to war. This occurs just a few days before the second main event of the Argei.
Liberalia - In Liberalia the Salii, or sacred war priests, were responsible for sacrifices, women adorned their heads with ivy crowns and offered oil and honey cakes. Fowler hypothesized that the celebration originally honored Mars, but later changed to honor Jupiter. On this day that boys received their toga virilis, essentially manhood and military service. Liberalia occurred on March fifteenth, like the first day of the Argei.

Lupercalia - The annual, nude, celebratory race which continued into the fifth century CE. Rome. February fifteenth, the Romans sacrificed a dog to remember the founding of the city. Using the whips they struck women to induce fertility.

Mar-duk - See Ashur.

Masseboth - Large sacred stones, usually found in high places. Unlike a stele, a massebot (plural masseboth, also known as betyl, bethels, obelisk massebha or massebah) was not generally established as an emblem to invoke a memory or historic significance. Rather, the massebot was a sacred stone idol without characteristic features, which both represented and housed a deity. Masseboth were decorative stones frequently placed at altars and worshiped. These served as altar and effigy. Masseboth were established both to the Israelite YHWH and El as well as Astarte, Baal-Hammon and others. These sacred stones were frequently the center of cult worship in open-air sanctuaries. These masseboth, worshiped in open-air sanctuaries, were sanctified and legitimate areas of worship in the Old Testament prior to the Deuteronomy reformation demanding one god and one temple.

Mlk - A type of sacrificial offering in the ancient Near East that, at times, included human infants and children marked by tophet altars and often practiced in the high places. This was a
votive offering, generally for fertility. Usually these were offered to Tanit, a form of Ishtar, and Baal, Marduk/Melqarth.

Numa- The mythical second king of Rome following Romulus.

October Horse- The ides of October completed of war season and harvest. On this day the weapons were ritually cleansed and stored until next campaign season, and the last of the series of great harvest festivals ended. October Horse is the generic name for this holiday directly involved in agricultural fertility and purification of the weapons of war. Even more significant to this paper’s investigation of the relationship between war fertility and impaling, this holiday’s victim, a horse, was impaled. They slayed the horse with the spear of Mars.

Parentalia- A Roman festival honoring deceased parents. This takes place in February.

Parilia- April twenty-first, mentioned above with Romulus, commemorated the birth of the city.

In this festival the ashes of the aborted calve of Fordicalia and the dried blood of the October Horse were used in a purification fire. Men, women, and their sheep leaped through the flames in an effort to ensure purification and fertility.

Passover- A Jewish holiday commemorating freedom from slavery in Egypt. The holiday sacrifice is a lamb, which replaced the first born son.

Paterfamilias- The alpha male of the Roman family unit, typically a father, uncle, or brother.

The paterfamilias was responsible for the religious tradition and family cults, the punishment, and provision of his wife, slaves, and children (and other family members that did not have a husband, such as a mother or sister).

Pharmikos- Human scapegoat sacrifice in Ancient Greek cultures. The victim was generally a criminal.
**Pomerium**- The border of the city of Rome. This border likely changed over time.

**Pontifices**- A high ranking Roman priests. The Pontifex or Pontifex Maximus was the head of the Pontifices.

**Quirinus**- Quirinus was an aspect of Janus involved in starting and finishing war, not unlike the opening and closing of the Janus bridge.

**Regia**- Located in the Roman Forum this was the residence of early Roman kings and later of the Pontifex Maximus.

**Sacella Argeorum**- The sacred twenty-four to thirty temples of the Argei ceremonies in which the rush dolls were displayed from March fifteenth to May fifteenth.

**Sacred Marriage**- Annually Tammuz/Dumuzi again must return to the underworld. In the Near East version Dumuzi is in the underworld for six months during the winter and Inanna/Ishtar is in the underworld during the summer. They meet annually for their sacred union. This was part of the new year Festival in the ancient Near East.

**Sacred tree**- In Ancient Eastern art a stylized tree is a reoccurring motif. The tree is worshiped and often associated with Ishtar, as a symbol or depiction of her.

**Salii**- Sacred war priests, dressed as ancient warriors. They dance and chant in an ancient language.

**Sargon II**- Assyrian king in the first half of the eighth century BCE.

**Scapegoat**- A victim, animal or human, upon which sins, misdeeds, or ill-fate were placed. The victim was a substitute offering, sometimes for an individual or the entire community. The victim was usually sacrificed or expelled.

**Sexgagenarios de ponte**- This is the concept that those over sixty were thrown over a bridge into the Tiber, especially regarding discrepancies in voting.
**Shalmaneser III**- King of Assyria, mid to late ninth century BCE. He campaigned against Babylon and Israel.

**Shedim**- A plant or growth spirit who received infant sacrifices.

**Sublicius bridge**- For centuries this was the only bridge on the Tiber in Rome, though it is debated as to whether or not it was the first. The first bridge was built around 600 BCE. The Sublicius was sacred to religious ceremonies requiring construction solely from wood. No metal brackets or nails could be utilized in its construction.

**Suovetaurilia**- This sacrifice included three victims, the pig, sheep, and bull.

**Sympathetic magic** - Combines the two ideas of homeopathic and contagious magic, such that a similar object contains the force and power of the object they resemble, and something that has touched an object contains some power and association to the that object even after removal. For more information on sympathetic magic see Frazer’s *Golden Bough* chapter three which is devoted to sympathetic magic.

**Tammuz**- Semitic, in his various forms he is known as Dionysius, Greek,-whose cult was associated with human sacrifice, Dumuzi- Assyrian, Osiris-Egyptian, Bacchus- Late Roman, Attis with Cybele was the Phrygian Greek, and Adonis-Phoenician.

**Terminalia**- The end of the year ceremony which heavily focused on the boundaries of Rome. In this rite land owners honor their boundary stones with garland, build altars from a frame composed of stakes. They sprinkled the blood of a lamb and a suckling-pig.

**Thargelia**- An Athenian festival held mid to late May. This was an agricultural celebration in which two human scape goats were beaten or killed.

**Tophets**- A sacred location and burial stone for infant burial, though it is frequently assumed (and rationally defended) that it was a burial ground for sacrificed infants and children.
Schmitz defines the *tophet* as an “open-air sacrificial site,” but the stone platforms in the sacred location serving as both tombstones and altars are also referred to as *tophets*.

*Tukulti-Ninurta*- Priest-king Tukulti-Ninurta, a mid-late thirteenth century predecessor of Ashurbanipal, built the first known temple of Ishtar. He was depicted on an altar relief praying before an altar, upon which a spike stood.

*Teumman*- An Elamite king in the mid-seventh century BCE who attempted to capture Babylon and fought against Ashurbanipal of the Assyrians.

*Tullianum*- The Roman prison located near the Roman forum.

*Turris Mamilia*- An ancient Roman tower that stood in a very populated area. The tower may have been the residence for rivals of those early kings residing in the Regia.

*Vedic*- The Indo-European speaking group is subdivided into several families. The Indo-Aryan dialect branched from Indo-Iranian around the early second millennia BCE The earliest evidence of this linguistic group in India is from the Vedic Sanskrit. When referring to the people group who used Vedic, especially in the Rig Veda most sources utilize the term “Vedic” or “Vedic Civilization.”

*Velabrum*- The shore on which Romulus and Remus banked as infants.

*Vestal Virgins*- Virgin priestesses involved in agricultural and Rome’s most ancient rituals.

Vestalia- June fifteenth or the summer solstice generally signified the lifting of the marriage taboo and the culmination of harvest.

*Yĕhovah*- also known by Yahweh, was a deity local to Mount Sinai who grew into one of many national gods. He was worshiped in the high places and received (and possibly even requested) infant and child sacrifice. Some extensive connections have been made by previous scholars linking Yĕhovah to Ishtar/Asherah the fertility and war goddess of the
Near East. Archeological finds show Asherah as Yēhovah’s consort until the about the sixth century BCE in the Deuteronomist revolution.
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Cicero
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