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## Public Honours for Panhellenic Sporting Victors in Democratic Athens

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Democratic Athens gave citizens who were Panhellenic victors for life free public dining and free front-row seats at its own games. These honours were otherwise only given to victorious generals and its other significant benefactors. The surprising granting of them to sporting victors requires careful explanation. The Panhellenic victory of one of its citizens gave a city of no importance rare international prominence and one which was a regional power proof of its superiority over its rivals. The only other way which it had to raise its standing was to defeat a rival in battle. Thus the classical Athenians judged a Panhellenic victor worthy of their highest honours, as he had raised their standing without the need for them to take the field.

The treatment of Panhellenic victors by democratic Athens requires careful explanation. This city gave citizens who were victorious at the Olympics or one of the other three Panhellenic games for life free public dining and free front-row seats at its own local games. These honours were otherwise only given to victorious generals and other significant benefactors. Leslie Kurke argued that the granting of such honours to Panhellenic victors was part of the so-called economy of *kudos*, which, she believed, was a magical power which a sportsman gained forever in his victory. For Kurke a city honoured a victor as generously as it did because of his willingness to use his *kudos* in support of its military campaigns and other risky ventures. But in the last several years her theory has been largely refuted. *Kudos* was not a power which a victor had forever. It was the fleeting aid which a deity had given him during his *agōn* or contest. Alternative explanations making better sense of the evidence can be advanced for the roles of victors in the ventures which Kurke highlighted. The extraordinary honours which classical Athens gave a Panhellenic victor can instead be explained in terms of his victory's political value. Thomas Heine Nielsen has put beyond doubt that each Panhellenic sportsman competed as a representative of his *polis*. Thus the Olympic victory of one of its citizens gave a city of no importance rare international prominence and one which was a regional power proof of its superiority over its rivals. The only other way which it had to raise its standing was to defeat a rival in battle. Like other Greek cities, then, classical Athens judged a Panhellenic victor worthy of its highest honours, because he had raised its standing without the need for it to take the field.

One of the highest honours which a Greek city could give a citizen was *sitēsis* or free dining in its Prytaneion.<sup>1</sup> Classical Athenians made a life-long grant of this maintenance in what was their premier public building to those fellow citizens who had gained an athletic or equestrian victory at one of the four recognised Panhellenic games, which were staged every two or four years, on the Isthmus and at Nemea, Delphi and, of course, Olympia.<sup>2</sup> The earliest evidence of *sitēsis* for Panhellenic victory at Athens is the so-called Prytaneion Decree (*IG I*<sup>3</sup> 131), dated on epigraphical grounds to the 430s. Fresh debate on this decidedly lacunose inscription took place throughout the 1970s, out of which came a new, widely agreed reading of the lines which concerned Panhellenic victors.<sup>3</sup> Lines 11 to 18 are now restored as follows:

*And all who have won at Olympia, at the Pythia, on the Isthmus or at Nemea or shall win in the future shall have sitēsis in the Prytaneion and the other gifts in addition to sitēsis according to what is written on the stele in the Prytaneion. And all who have won with a horse-drawn chariot or racing horse at Olympia, at the Pythia, on the Isthmus or at Nemea or shall win in the future shall have sitēsis according to what is written on the stele.*

The „other gifts“ of line 14 undoubtedly included *proedria* or front-row seating at the city’s dramatic, musical and sporting contests, which always accompanied Athenian grants of *sitēsis* until the Roman period (e.g. Aeschin. 2.80; Isae. 5.47).<sup>4</sup> Giving such honours to victorious sportsmen clearly predates the inscription itself, as the decree simply confirms grants of *sitēsis* which are described as traditional (*IG I*<sup>3</sup> 131.5) or as having already been spelt out in an earlier inscription (14–15, 18).

Other Greek cities are known to have staged an *eiselasis* or welcoming home ceremony for citizens who had been victorious at Panhellenic games.<sup>5</sup> In this ceremony a victor was showered with crowns, palm-fronds, ribbons, clothes and other personal gifts and conveyed in a chariot back into the city as part of a grand procession (e.g. Diod. Sic. 13.82.7–8), which regularly culminated at the sanctuary of a local

<sup>1</sup> For this common practice among ancient Greece’s cities, see Miller 1978, 4–13; Nielsen 2007, 94–95.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. [Andoc.] 4.31; Pl. Ap. 36d–e; cf. Ar. Eq. 535–536. Currie 2005, 142–143; Kyle 2007, 81.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Morrissey 1978; Thompson 1971; 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Morrissey 1978, 124.

<sup>5</sup> Currie 2005, 139–142.

city-protecting deity or hero (e.g. Pind. Nem. 5.50–54; 8.13–16; Ol. 9.110–112).<sup>6</sup> Although we lack contemporary evidence putting the issue beyond doubt, the classical Athenians probably staged a comparable civic ceremony for their own Panhellenic victors; for Aristophanes, Euripides and Thucydides assumed that their audiences knew of ceremonial gift-giving to home-coming athletic victors.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, a Roman-period source focuses on the *eiselasis* of the Athenian Dioxippus after his *pankration* victory at the Olympics of 336 (Ael. VH 12.58).

This treatment of Panhellenic victors is noteworthy and requires careful explanation. The Athenian democracy gave *sitēsis* and *proedria* to, among others, victorious generals (e.g. Aeschin. 2.8; Ar. Ach. 281, 573–576, 702–704; Dem. 23.1–7), select descendants of Harmodius and Aristogiton (e.g. Din. 1.101; Isae. 5.47; *IG I<sup>3</sup>* 131.5–7), who were believed to have liberated the city from the Pisistratid tyranny (e.g. Thuc. 1.20), and politicians who had been judged to have outperformed others in their service to the city.<sup>8</sup> Clearly these recipients were civic benefactors of the highest order. The fact that Panhellenic victors were given the same „very big gifts“ and „honours“ tends to suggest that the Athenian *dēmos* judged them to have performed an unsurpassable public service.<sup>9</sup> This is confirmed by the way in which public speakers canvassed their own sporting victories or those of their forebears (e.g. Thuc. 6.16).

Among the tactics which Athenian litigants employed to win over the predominantly lower-class jurors was the cataloguing of public services. The *agatha* or good deeds which were regularly listed were festival and military liturgies, the payment of the *eisphora* or emergency property tax for war, exemplary military service and acts of charity in aid of poor Athenians. If litigants could do so, however, they also mentioned Panhellenic victories. In defence of the late Alcibiades' character, for example, his son mentions not only his father's extraordinary track record as a liturgist (Isoc. 16.35), his winning of the first prize for courage at Potidaea and victories as a general (29–30) and his efforts to restore the democracy (36–37), but also his chariot-racing victory at the Olympics of 416 (31–35). For Demosthenes too this Panhellenic success, along with his military victories, were

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<sup>6</sup> Kurke 1993, 137–140.

<sup>7</sup> Ar. Eq. 498–502; Eur. El. 880–885; Thuc. 4.121.1–2; cf. Plut. Per. 28.4.

<sup>8</sup> For this honouring of politicians for exemplary service, see, for example, Aeschin. 3.178; Ar. Eq. 281–284, 647, 709, 766, 1404; Dem. 20.107–108; Din. 1.102; cf. Isoc. 15.95.

<sup>9</sup> So described by Dem. 20.141 and Isoc. 16.50; cf. 4.1.

among the *euergesiai* or good works which Alcibiades had performed for Athens (21.143–145; cf. Lysurg. 1.51).

In another speech in which a son has to defend his dead father, liturgies and monetary aid for poor Athenians are mentioned alongside equestrian victories at the Isthmian and Nemean Games (Lys. 19.58–64). One of Demosthenes' clients, finally, desperately sought to create *kharis* or a sense of gratitude in the jurors by canvassing how his grandfather had won the *stadion* for boys at the Olympic Games, while his grandfather's uncle had helped to restore the democracy in 411 (58.66–67). Clearly lower-class Athenians thought that the winners of Panhellenic games were worthy of the same recognition as those citizens who had performed an extraordinary feat on the battlefield or in defence of the democracy.

One of the few scholars who have attempted to explain this extraordinary evaluation of Panhellenic success is Leslie Kurke.<sup>10</sup> She considers it to be part of what she calls „the economy of *kudos*“ in which the *kudos* of a Panhellenic victor was shared harmoniously with his city. For Kurke *kudos* was a magico-religious power, which individuals acquired by sporting or military victory and could employ in the future to aid the military campaigns or colonial ventures of their *poleis*.<sup>11</sup> The songs, she suggests, which were commissioned to praise the victory of a sportsman consistently associated this talismanic power with the vegetational crown which he had won and the circulation of his *kudos* among fellow citizens with the dedication of this prize in a local sanctuary (e.g. Pind. Isthm. 1.10–12; Ol. 4.8–12; 5.1–8).<sup>12</sup> In support of her theory Kurke discusses historical episodes where *poleis* apparently involved Panhellenic victors in risky ventures in order to harness their magico-religious power.<sup>13</sup> Thus it was out of a sense of gratitude for this sharing of their *kudos*, she concludes, that Greek cities staged the *eiselasis* for their Panhellenic victors and gave them other generous gifts.

Kurke deserves credit for her nuanced explanation of the usually unremarked standing of Panhellenic victors. In the last several years, however, her theory has been largely refuted.<sup>14</sup> In epic and epinician poetry it is clear that *kudos* is not a power which individuals win and hence possess for the future; rather, it is the discretionary aid which a

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<sup>10</sup> Her explanation continues to garner support (e.g. Golden 1998, 19; Grimbale 2012, 54 n. 46, 70–71).

<sup>11</sup> Kurke 1993, 131–137.

<sup>12</sup> Kurke 1993, 131–132, 137–138.

<sup>13</sup> Kurke 1993, 133–137.

<sup>14</sup> Especially by Kyriakou 2007.

divinity „gives“ a military leader or a competitor in a sporting *agōn* so that he can vanquish his opponents (e.g. Hom. Il. 1.279; 11.300).<sup>15</sup> Certainly, receiving such aid, like victory itself, may be a mark of distinction and he who does so may even be called *kudos* (e.g. 10.87, 555; 11.511), but it is possessed only fleetingly and, as Emile Benveniste observes, „the god grants it now to one and now to another at his good will“.<sup>16</sup> In their songs for sportsmen, it is clear too, Bacchylides and Pindar associated the crown and victory itself much more frequently with the profane phenomena of *doxa* (good opinion) and *kleos* (glory) than they did with *kudos*.<sup>17</sup>

Alternative explanations, finally, which make better sense of the surviving evidence can be made for the roles of Panhellenic victors in the historical episodes which Kurke highlights.<sup>18</sup> The Spartans, for example, stationed them next to one of their kings in battle, because they probably judged it to be a place of honour and also believed, as Plutarch suggests (Mor. 639e7–10; Lyc. 22.4; cf. Xen. Hell. 2.4.33), that there was a close relationship between military and sporting performance.<sup>19</sup> They also gave citizenship to Tisamenus of Elis, as he was from a famous family of military seers and the Delphic oracle had prophesied that he would win five great *agōnes*, which, they came to realise, referred to battles rather than athletic contests (Hdt. 9.33–35).<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Phayllus of Croton had only one solitary trireme, when he brought help to the Greeks before the battle of Salamis, not, as Kurke suggests, because his *kudos* was the substantive aid, but because he had financed and manned the ship on his own initiative (Hdt. 8.47; Paus. 10.9.2), which was a longstanding practice of Greek aristocrats, and it was widely believed that even one or two ships constituted valuable assistance in such circumstances (e.g. Hdt. 8.1, 46, 48; *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 823).<sup>21</sup>

If „magico-religious considerations“ had no part to play in this remarkable honouring of sporting victors by a city, the „only plausible explanation“ would appear to be „the victory’s political potential“.<sup>22</sup> From time to time classical Athenians did mention the benefits of a Panhellenic victory for their *polis*. Their comments serve as an appropriate starting point for piecing together the substance of this political

<sup>15</sup> Kyriakou 2007, 119–130.

<sup>16</sup> Benveniste 1973, 348.

<sup>17</sup> Kyriakou 2007, 130–139.

<sup>18</sup> Currie 2005, 149–151; Kyriakou 2007, 139–147.

<sup>19</sup> Cartledge 1985, 115; Pritchard 2013, 157–159.

<sup>20</sup> Pritchard 2013, 165–166.

<sup>21</sup> For this practice, see Hdt. 5.41, 8.17; Gabrielsen 1994, 24–26.

<sup>22</sup> Kyriakou 2007, 149.

value. The fullest discussion of this topic occurs in the defence speech of Alcibiades the younger, when he canvasses his father's unprecedented entering of seven teams into the contest for four-horse chariots at the Olympic Games of 416 (Isoc. 16.32–34).<sup>23</sup> According to his son, Alcibiades was motivated to compete as lavishly as he did out of consideration of the political advantages which it could bring his *polis*. Thus he saw that *the Greeks made a display of wealth, power and education* at this *panēguris* or Panhellenic festival and that, while *athlētai* or athletic competitors were objects of envy, so too *the cities of victors* became *onomastai* or renowned by name (32). In a round-about way his son suggests that Alcibiades thought Olympic competitors to be *polis*-representatives; for he also believed, it is said, that liturgies at Athens might have been performed *in the name of private individuals* before fellow citizens, but those at this festival were *in the name of the city before all of Greece* (*huper tēs poleōs eis hapasan tēn Hellada* – 32–33; cf. Isoc. 15.301–302). This speaker's claims, of course, should be carefully evaluated, for he was not beyond falsifying, for sake of his own defence, political history and his father's motives for choosing equestrian over athletic contest.<sup>24</sup> But on this topic other evidence appears to corroborate what he says. For example, a sporting victor was clearly identified with his *polis* at the Panhellenic games.<sup>25</sup> The *onoma* (name) of his city or his city-ethnic was given pride of place in the proclamation of his victory immediately after the *agōn*.<sup>26</sup> This identification was reinforced by the commemorative statues of sporting victors which were set up at Olympia: most of their inscribed epigrams identified his *polis* (e.g. *Anth. Pal.* 13.15; Paus. 6.9.9, 16.5), while a few stated that the statue had been commissioned by the winner's own *dēmos* (e.g. Paus. 6.13.11).<sup>27</sup>

These claims of Alcibiades the younger also correspond with what other Athenian litigants and writers for upper-class readers had to say about the advantages of Panhellenic success. Thucydides for one had Alcibiades the elder use almost identical terms to justify his Olympic participation in an assembly-speech: it brought *doxa* to him and his family and *ōphelia* (profit) and *timē* to the city (6.16.1–3).<sup>28</sup> In particular, he argues, his entering of so many chariot-racing teams and then

<sup>23</sup> For this victory, see Mann 2001, 102–113 and especially Grimble 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Pritchard 2013, 71–74.

<sup>25</sup> Currie 2005, 155; Nielsen 2007, 86–90.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Dem. 18.318–319; Eur. HF 957–962; Lys. 19.63; Soph. El. 693–695.

<sup>27</sup> For these statues, see Currie 2005, 143–147; Golden 1998, 84–88; Nielsen 2007, 90.

<sup>28</sup> Kyriakou 2007, 149–150.

his throwing of a lavish party to celebrate his victory gave *the Greeks* an impression of the *dunamis* or military power of Athens which was greater than was actually the case after the costly Archidamian War (2–3). In a similar vein one litigant, like Alcibiades' son, said that his father, by his equestrian victories at Isthmia and Nemea, had brought Athens *timē* (Lys. 19.63), while another claimed that his grandfather *by winning the stadion for boys at Olympia crowned the city (estephanōse tēn polin – Dem. 58.66; cf. [Andoc.] 4.31)*.<sup>29</sup> This last metaphor, which also figures in the epigrams of victors' statues (e.g. Anth. Pal. 16.2; 13.15), is ambiguous.<sup>30</sup> As the victor's crowning is public recognition of his *nikē* (e.g. Eur. El. 613, 886–887; Lys. 19.63), its meaning could be that the Panhellenic victor recognises his victory as his city's or, equally, that he makes his city victorious.

The classical Athenians seem to have lacked an adequately developed set of concepts and terms to describe the representation of a city or group by an individual and hence struggled to explain succinctly the political potential of Panhellenic victory.<sup>31</sup> The claims which they did make, however, along with the clear identification of competitor and *polis* at the games, imply that „the athletic success of its citizens reflected back on the *polis*“ and that the Panhellenic festivals „were not only competitions among individual athletes but also among the *poleis* which they represented“. <sup>32</sup> Thus they provide a classic example of what social scientists call the representational function of sport.<sup>33</sup>

A sporting event has this function when spectators believe that their race, religion or, more commonly, nationality is represented in it against representatives of a rival group and hence that the competition's outcome will impact on their standing relative to each other. „The symbolic meaning of this is further enhanced by the fact that in the world of competing sovereigns, the playing-field is much more level than in the reality of military, political or economic competitive processes. Here all stand a real chance, even the smaller nation-states, who can occasionally enjoy the compensatory pleasure of defeating their bigger brothers.“<sup>34</sup> In Australia and other consolidated democracies the perceived advantage of such international successes has

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<sup>29</sup> Golden 1998, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Kurke 1993, 138.

<sup>31</sup> For this lack, see Keane 2009, 43–44.

<sup>32</sup> Nielsen 2007, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Pritchard 2013, 22–23 with bibliography.

<sup>34</sup> Hedetoft 2003, 71–72.

been the main justification for the massive increase over the last few decades in the public subsidisation of elite sport.<sup>35</sup>

The victory of one of its sportsmen was so politically valuable for a *polis* because of the publicity which a Panhellenic festival gave this success. The *agōnes* of these festivals were the most popular in the Greek world, attracting enormous numbers of competitors, *theōroi* or sacred ambassadors and ordinary spectators from right across the Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup> The best attended games of the *periodos* or circuit was the Olympics, whose stadium of the mid-fourth century could accommodate up to forty-five thousand spectators, but the other three games still attracted crowds in the tens of thousands and of comparable diversity.<sup>37</sup> As a consequence, whatever took place during these festivals or could be otherwise observed had the potential to become known to almost the entire Greek world as official *polis*-representatives, athletes and spectators returned home and reported what they had seen. This helps to explain why classical Athenians commonly said that *the Greeks* in their entirety attended or witnessed a celebration of the Olympic Games.<sup>38</sup>

*Poleis* assiduously exploited this opportunity to gain nationwide publicity (Isoc. 6.95–96). They used Olympia, for example, to display peace treaties or, more regularly, dedications of arms, sculpture or treasuries whose inscriptions advertised their military victories over each other.<sup>39</sup> The seating embankments of the Olympic stadium have yielded up many more dedications of armour and weapons than any other Greek sanctuary or archaeological site.<sup>40</sup> The depositional circumstances of these objects and the presence of postholes in the stadium indicate that they were once part of traditional *tropaia* (trophies) set up as thank-offerings for Zeus. Alternatively victors used the tenth of the booty that they had set aside for Zeus of Olympia to commission sculptures or buildings. For example, the winged Victory by the sculptor Paeonius, which originally sat atop a pillar of 9 metres in height before the temple of Zeus, was set up by the Messenians and Naupactians after their victory, as allies of the Athenians, over the Spartans in 425 (Paus. 5.26.1; *IvO* 259). Thus „Olympia became a

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<sup>35</sup> E.g. Hutchins 2009.

<sup>36</sup> For the *theōroi* which Athens sent to such games, see, for example, Andoc.1.132; [Andoc.] 4.29–30; Din. 1.81; Thuc. 6.16.2.

<sup>37</sup> Nielsen 2007, 55–62.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. [Andoc.] 4.27, 30; Ar. Plut. 583–584; Isoc. 16.31–32; Thuc. 5.50; 6.16.2.

<sup>39</sup> For peace treaties, see, for example, Paus. 5.23.4; Thuc. 5.18.10; Nielsen 2007, 78–82. For victory dedications, see Pritchard 2013, 186–187.

<sup>40</sup> Pritchard 2013, 185.



field of propaganda for the great powers and its Games a continuation of war by other means“.<sup>41</sup>

Thus it was not just fellow citizens but potentially all of Greece that came to learn about the victory which a *polis* had gained by the success of one of its citizens at Panhellenic games. Such a victory gave cities of otherwise no importance rare international prominence and those which were regional powers uncontested proof of the *timē* or worth which they claimed in relation to their neighbours and rivals.<sup>42</sup> That *poleis* did view Panhellenic success as significant for their international relations is apparent in their reactions if one of their citizens seemed to be deprived of his victory unjustly (e.g. Thuc. 5.49–50; Xen. Hell. 3.2.21–31).<sup>43</sup> In 322, for example, Callipus of Athens, who had been proclaimed the winner of the Olympic *pentathlon*, was judged by the Eleans to have bribed his opponents and hence was fined and disqualified (Paus. 5.21.5–7; cf. Aeschin. 2.12). Athens sent one of its foremost politicians, Hyperides, as an ambassador to try to have the judgment overturned.<sup>44</sup> He did not succeed and the city effectively boycotted the Olympics for the next twenty years.

The only other way which a *polis* had to raise its international ranking was to defeat a rival *polis* in battle. The outcome of such a contest was uncertain and could cost the lives of many citizens. Classical Athens, like other *poleis*, considered those of its citizens who had won an athletic or equestrian victory at Panhellenic games to be civic benefactors of the highest order, because they had raised the international standing of their city on their own initiative and without the financial support of the city.<sup>45</sup> „Cities, that is, were actually conscious of the potential of their athletes for their own self-advertisement.“<sup>46</sup> What also made them deserving of such extraordinary honours was that only a few of the city’s sportsmen ever gained a Panhellenic victory. In addition these victors, if they had been athletes, had personally endured the *ponoi* (toils) and *kindunoi* (dangers) of athletic training and competition and possessed the *aretē* and the

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<sup>41</sup> Lämmer 2010, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Cartledge 1985, 113–114; Grimble 2012, 52–53; Lendon 2010, 9–13, 265.

<sup>43</sup> Golden 2011, 9–10; Lämmer 2010, 48–55.

<sup>44</sup> Weiler 1991.

<sup>45</sup> To prepare for competition in local and Panhellenic games individual Athenian athletes or their families paid out of their own pockets for the lessons of an athletics teacher (Pritchard 2013, 34–83).

<sup>46</sup> Currie 2005, 155.

*kudos* or divine aid which were required for athletic success.<sup>47</sup> Thus they had commendably displayed the same virtues as the city's hoplites and sailors did in military victories.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For the requirement of such virtues in athletes and soldiers who wished to be victorious, see Lavrencic 1991; Müller 1996; and especially Pritchard 2013, 164–191.

<sup>48</sup> In 2012 this paper was delivered at the Olympic Athletes: Ancient and Modern Conference, which was convened by the University of Queensland, at Macquarie University and for the Queensland Friends of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens. In 2013 it was delivered at the 34<sup>th</sup> conference of the Australasian Society for Classical Studies, which was convened by Macquarie University and the University of Newcastle and at the University of Edinburgh. I am grateful for the helpful comments of these audiences. I acknowledge too the valuable suggestions of this journal's editors and anonymous referees. This article draws heavily on Pritchard 2013. I thank Cambridge University Press for its permission to do so. The translations of the Greek are my own.

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