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Hau, Lisa Irene (2013) *Nothing to celebrate? The lack or disparagement of victory celebrations in the Greek historians*. In: Spalinger, Anthony and Armstrong, Jeremy (eds.) *Rituals of Triumph in the Mediterranean World*. Series: *Culture & History of the Ancient Near East* (63). Brill, Leiden, pp. 57-74. ISBN 9789004251007

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Deposited on: 13 June 2014

# Nothing to celebrate?

## The lack or disparagement of victory celebrations in the Greek historians

Lisa Irene Hau

An ancient Greek battle, on land or sea, was a contest of life and death. For an individual, it is one of the most terrifying experiences imaginable. For his family, it could mean the difference between freedom and slavery; for his city-state, the difference between the enjoyment of the wealth of the enemy and extinction.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to imagine a better reason for celebration than victory in such a battle, unless it be victory in a long and gruelling war. Yet, the Greek historians of the Classical and Hellenistic periods preserve information about precious few victory celebrations. This paper will examine what these Greek historians actually say took place in terms of celebration after battles and offer some considerations about the possible reasons for their selectivity and silences on the subject.

Looking first at the three Classical historians, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, we see that they mention a number of customs - or rituals if you will - which took place in the immediate aftermath of victory in battle: in Herodotus, we are often told that items of booty were sent to Delphi as dedications by the victors (e.g. 5.77) and sometimes that prizes were awarded for valour among the victorious army.<sup>2</sup> In Thucydides, we are diligently told after each battle which side put up a trophy<sup>3</sup> and that they gave the enemy dead back under a truce – this, for him and for his historical characters, was clearly the way to tell which side had been victorious. A couple of times we are briefly told that part of the booty was sent to Delphi as a dedication (4.134) or that the prow of a captured ship was dedicated to Poseidon at the end of a naval battle (2.84, 2.91-92), and once, in 7.73, when the Syracusans have defeated the Athenians in the Battle in the Great Harbour, do we hear about genuine celebration of a victory. We shall return to this instance below; for now I just want to note how extraordinary it is that this is the *only* instance of a victory celebration in a work as full of battles and victories as Thucydides' *History*.

Xenophon is very similar to Thucydides in terms of portraying victories and victorious armies and commanders. He is not quite as systematic in his recording of trophies,<sup>4</sup> but he does mention them often

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<sup>1</sup> For more on ancient Greek warfare generally I refer the reader to Pritchett (1971, 1974, 1979, 1985, and 1991), Hanson (1989), Sage (1996), van Wees (2004), and Sabin, van Wees, and Whitby (2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a collection of evidence on the custom of distributing awards for bravery after a battle see Pritchett (1974) 276-290.

<sup>3</sup> Thucydides is the one of the Greek historians most interested in trophies; he mentions 58 in the course of his *History*. For a detailed overview of the evidence for all aspects of the custom of erecting trophies, including tables of the appearance of the word in Thucydides, Xenophon, the Oxyrrhynchus Historian, and Diodorus Siculus, see Pritchett (1974) 246-275; for a more recent discussion of the custom see Trundle in this volume.

<sup>4</sup>He mentions trophies 28 times in the *Hellenika* and the *Anabasis* together.

as well as the custom of giving the dead back under a truce, and both actions are clearly taken as evidence of which side has been victorious.<sup>5</sup> In a throwback to Herodotean preoccupations, he is also keen on mentioning booty dedicated to Delphi and the awarding of prizes for valour. Figure 1 provides an overview of what happens in the immediate aftermath of victory in the three classical historians:

**Figure 1, ‘Rituals’ of victory in the Classical historiographers**

Actions of the victor	Herodotos	Thucydides	Xenophon
Stripping the enemy dead	0	4.72, 4.97, 5.74, 6.70	0
Mutilation of enemy dead	7.238	0	<i>An.</i> 3.4, 4.7, 5.4.17
Putting up a trophy for a land battle (wooden pole with enemy armour)	0	1.30, 1.54, 1.63, 1.105, 2.22, 2.79, 2.82, 2.84, 2.92, 3.91, 3.109, 3.112, 4.12, 4.14, 4.25, 4.38, 4.44, 4.56, 4.67, 4.72, 4.97, 4.101, 4.124, 4.131, 4.134, 5.3, 5.10, 5.11, 5.74, 6.70, 6.94, 6.97, 6.98, 6.100, 6.103, 7.5, 7.23, 7.24, 7.45, 7.54, 8.24, 8.25, 8.26	<i>An.</i> 4.6.27, 6.5.32, <i>Hel.</i> 1.2.4, 1.2.10, 1.4.23, 2.4.7, 2.4.35, 3.5.19, 4.2.23, 4.3.9, 4.3.21, 4.3.91, 4.6.12, 5.2.43, 5.4.53, 6.2.24, 6.4.15, 7.1.19, 7.1.32, 7.2.4, 7.2.15, 7.4.15, 7.4.25, 7.5.13, 7.5.26-27
Putting up a trophy for a sea battle (captured ship or part of ship)	0	2.84, 2.92, 7.34, 7.41, 7.54, 7.72, 8.42, 8.95, 8.106	<i>Hel.</i> 1.5.14, 1.6.35, 5.4.66
Sacrificing to a god in gratitude for victory	0	0	<i>An.</i> 4.6.27, 4.8, 7.8.23, <i>Hel.</i> 3.1.21-23
Giving back the enemy dead under a truce	0	2.22, 2.79, 2.92, 3.109, 4.14, 4.44, 5.74, 6.70, 6.97, 6.103, 7.45, 8.106,	<i>An.</i> 4.2.23, <i>Hel.</i> 2.4.19, 3.5.23-24, 4.3.21, 4.4.13, 6.2.24, 6.4.15, 7.1.19, 7.4.25, 7.5.26-27
Taking back own dead from the battlefield	0	4.44, 4.97, 5.74, 6.70, 6.103, 8.106,	<i>Hel.</i> 1.2.11, 3.2.5, <i>An.</i> 6.4.9
Burial of own dead	8.24, 9.85	5.74, 6.70	<i>Hel.</i> 1.2.11, 3.2.5, <i>An.</i> 6.4.9
Awarding prizes for valour	8.122.5, 8.123.2, 8.124.8,	0	<i>Hel.</i> 1.2.10
Torture of captured enemies	1.86, 3.14-15, 4.203	7.87	0
Execution of captured enemies	2: 3.159-160, 4.203	1.116-117, 7.86	<i>Hel.</i> 2.1.30-32
Organisation of booty, incl. prisoners	1.88-89, 8.121	7.82, 7.85	<i>Hel.</i> 2.3.7-9

<sup>5</sup> See especially the penultimate paragraph of the *Hellenika*: “But the god made it so that both sides set up trophies as if victorious, but neither side prevented those who were setting them up, and both sides granted a truce for the collection of the dead as if victorious, but both sides also collected their dead under a truce as if defeated” (ὁ δὲ θεὸς οὕτως ἐποίησεν ὥστε ἀμφοτέροι μὲν τροπαῖον ὡς νενικηκότες ἐστήσαντο, τοὺς δὲ ἴσταμένους οὐδέτεροι ἐκώλυον, νεκροὺς δὲ ἀμφοτέροι μὲν ὡς νενικηκότες ὑποσπόνδους ἀπέδοσαν, ἀμφοτέροι δὲ ὡς ἡττημένοι ὑποσπόνδους ἀπελάμβανον, *Xen. Hel.* 7.5.26).

Organisation of captured territory	3.159-160	1.116-117, 6.97	<i>An.</i> 7.4.24, <i>Hel.</i> 2.2.1
Building of permanent victory monument	2.102, 2.106, 2.141	0	0
Sending offerings of booty to Delphi	8.121.8, 8.122.2	4.134	<i>Hel.</i> 4.3.21
Dedication of spoils in local sanctuary	5.77, 5.95	0	0
Celebratory religious festival	0	0	<i>Hel.</i> 4.3.21
Celebratory sports festival	0	0	<i>An.</i> 4.8; <i>Hel.</i> 3.2.5
Other celebration	0	7.73	4.7, 5.4 (both barbarian)

The collection of passages in the table provides us with a handful of customs or rituals which seem to have been performed after most, indeed probably after all, victories: putting up a trophy, dedicating part of the spoils to a god, collecting and burying one's dead, and giving back the enemy dead under a truce.<sup>6</sup> The table also shows some differences between the three historians. Some of these doubtless have to do with the personalities of the three - for example, religious celebration of a victory such as sacrificing to a god in gratitude or holding a celebratory religious or athletic festival is mentioned only by Xenophon, who is generally the one of the three most interested in sacrifices of any kind.<sup>7</sup>

Other differences have to do with the different subject-matter of the historians. For example, Herodotus is the only one to mention permanent victory monuments, probably because such monuments were not built by Greeks, but only by non-Greek peoples,<sup>8</sup> who occupy centre stage in Herodotus' *Histories* for the first five books. Similarly, both Herodotus and Xenophon mention instances where the victors mutilate the enemy dead, because this happens when Greeks fight barbarians, not when Greeks fight Greeks. (The mutilation goes both ways: Xerxes cuts off the head of Leonidas at Hdt. 7.238, but the Greek mercenaries in Xenophon's *Anabasis* mutilate the corpses of their barbarian enemies at *An.* 3.4).<sup>9</sup> The non-Greek focus may also be the explanation of why Herodotus does not mention the custom of giving the enemy dead back under a truce: judging from his anecdote that after the Battle of Marathon the dead Persians were still lying around on the battlefield several days later for the late-arriving Spartans to admire (Hdt. 6.120), asking for permission from the victors to collect the dead does not seem to have been part of Persian custom.

<sup>6</sup> For a collection of the evidence for the shame connected with admitting defeat by asking for a truce in order to collect one's dead from the battlefield see Pritchett (1974) 260-262.

<sup>7</sup> Xenophon mentions sacrifices 103 times in the *Hellenika* and the *Anabasis* together, against 21 mentions in Thucydides and 94 in Herodotus.

<sup>8</sup> In this case two Egyptians: Sesostris (2.102) and Sethos (2.141). For some thoughts on the difference between permanent and impermanent victory monuments see Trundle in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> If this kind of thing had happened between Greeks during the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides would surely have mentioned it: it would have been another sign of the decline in morals, on a par with the kin-killing and the corruption of language of which he gives us the detailed description during the narrative of the civil war in Corcyra, and the new cynicism which the Athenians display in the Melian Dialogue.

However, this does not explain why Herodotus does not mention the putting up of trophies after any of the Greek victories. From a historical angle, his silence can be explained either by the theory that the custom only arose in the aftermath of the Persian Wars, or by the opposite theory that putting up trophies was at this date such a commonplace custom that Herodotus did not find it worth reporting.<sup>10</sup> From a narrative angle, it is worth noting that Herodotus' battle narratives are unsystematic and concerned more with individual experiences and achievements than with the overall picture, which might mean that the act of erecting a trophy was left out because it did not fit into the narrative point-of-view.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the outcomes of the famous battles retold by Herodotus were so well known at his time of writing that he did not need to mention a trophy in order to make it clear which side had come out victorious.<sup>12</sup>

In Thucydides and Xenophon, on the other hand, battles are narrated systematically:<sup>13</sup> first the readers are told about the battle order, then the armies advance, then the narrator goes chronologically through the different phases of the battle, and at the end we are told how many men were lost on each side, and who, as the victors, put up the trophy and gave back the dead under a truce.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes we are told about the whole panoply of 'rituals of victory': stripping of the enemy dead, collection and burial of one's own dead, giving back the enemy dead, putting up the trophy. After most battles we are only told about a selection of these 'rituals'; only after the ones deemed most important by the historiographer and therefore narrated in the most overall detail do we get the full list. Thus, the Battle of Mantinea is the only time in Thucydides' *Histories* where we get the full list of these post-victory actions – yet, the whole series of 'rituals' most likely took place after every battle. After all, it would go against common sense (and natural greed) to give the enemy dead back without despoiling them first, and one's own dead always needed to be collected from the battlefield and buried.<sup>15</sup> But the historiographers expected their readers to *know* that these are the things that happen after a battle and did not need to say so explicitly after each and every one.

We therefore need to pay attention to the cases where they do give us this information. Sometimes, as with Thucydides on the Battle of Mantinea, they use the full list of victory rituals to signal the importance of the battle. At other times, they go into detail in order to show how victory norms were broken. Special emphasis is put on the situations where the dead are *not* given back when the herald arrives to ask for them (e.g. at Delium in Thuc. 4.97), or when the defeated are too dejected to even ask for their dead back (e.g. the Athenians after their defeat in Sicily in Thuc. 7.72), or when collecting one's own dead is impossible (e.g. at Arginusai in Xen. 1.6.35), and the highlighting of the behaviour of the

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<sup>10</sup> For the debate over the origin date of this custom see Trundle in this volume, with a useful bibliography.

<sup>11</sup> For a good discussion of Herodotus' battle narratives with a useful bibliography see Tritle (2006).

<sup>12</sup> See Pritchett (1974) 269-270 and 286-288.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sabin (2007) 399-400.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent discussion of Thucydides' battle narratives see Hunt (2006). There is also a thought-provoking discussion of Thucydides' approach to battle narrative in Keegan (2004) 62-71. Nothing comparable has been published for Xenophon's battle narratives as far as I am aware, but some interesting discussion with a bearing on the characteristics of his battle narratives are Gray (1981), Sterling (2004), and Bartley (2008).

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of the evidence for burial of war dead see Pritchett (1985) 94-259.

victors and/or defeated in these situations show that they were serious breaches of the norm, even if the norm is not always spelled out for us.

Observing that the historians do not tell us about all the trophies that were erected or mention every instance of giving back the enemy dead or burying one's own may seem like stating the obvious. It is important, however, because it must force us to ask *what else* in the area of victory traditions the historians have omitted which they expected their contemporary readers to know implicitly. Could it be, for example, that victories were generally celebrated, as we would expect them to be, but that the Classical historians for some reason chose to keep quiet about it? In order to offer an analogy that may help us to answer this question, we shall now turn our gaze to the narratives of the aftermath of victories in our two best preserved Hellenistic historians, Polybius and Diodorus of Sicily. Figure 2 provides an overview using the same categories as Figure 1 with a few extra ones at the bottom:

**Figure 2, 'Rituals of victory' in Polybius and Diodorus**

Actions of the victor	Polybius	Diodorus of Sicily
Stripping the enemy dead	1.11.15, 1.34.12, 5.86.2, 6.39.3-4, 8.30.12, 11.18.6, 18.27.3	8.12.2-3
Mutilation of enemy dead	0	5.29.4 (Gauls), 13.57 (Carthaginians),
Putting up a trophy for a land battle (wooden pole with enemy armour)	4.8.6: Aratos filled the Peloponnese with trophies commemorating his defeats.	11.14.4, 11.61.7, 12.48.1, 12.65.6, 12.74.2, 12.79.7, 13.9.6, 16.20., 13.9.6, 13.19.3, 13.51, 13.40.6, 13.51.7, 13.73, 14.24.4, 14.84.2, 15.34.2, 15.87, 16.4.7, 16.12, 16.20.5, 16.86.6, 18.11, 18.15, 18.32, 20.39, 21.2.3
Putting up a trophy for a sea battle (captured ship or part of ship)	0	12.48.1, 13.9.6, 13.19.1, 13.40.6, 13.47.1, 13.51, 13.78, 20.39.4,
Sacrificing to a god in gratitude for victory	1.36.1, 11.3	13.19.4, 16.18-19, 16.86, 17.46
Giving back the enemy dead under a truce	1.81.2, 5.86.4	12.74, 12.79, 17.25, 14.84, 16.4.7, 16.86, 19.85
Taking back own dead from the battlefield	5.86.2	13.100, 16.20.5
Burial of own dead	3.85.1-5, 5.86.2	11.33, 14.9.6, 17.46, 17.64, 18.32, 19.32, 19.85
Awarding prizes for valour	6.39.9, 3.85.1-3	11.25, 11.33, 11.76, 13.33, 14.53.4, 16.86, 17.46
Organisation of booty, incl. prisoners	1.61.8, 2.31, 2.17.11, 3.85.1-3, 5.94.2-6, 9.42.5-8, 10.16.1-17.5, 10.17-19, 10.40,	11.25, 13.62.4, 32.25.1

	11.3, 14.9, 18.27	
Torture of captured enemies	1.88.5-7	13.33, 13.62.4, 14.53.4, 14.112, 34/35.8
Execution of captured enemies	1.82.1-2, 2.60, 5.54.6-13, 11.3	12.28, 13.33, 13.62.4, 13.106.7, 14.53.4, 14.112
Organisation of captured territory	2.70.1, 5.54.6-13, 5.61.2, 33.10.12-13	12.28, 14.105, 17.46
Building of permanent victory monument	0	0
Sending offerings of booty to Delphi	0	5.9.5, 11.26.7, 11.33.2, 11.62, 11.65.5, 12.29.4, 14.93.3-4
Dedication of spoils in local sanctuary	2.4.1-2	2.46.2, 11.25, 11.26.7, 12.70.5, 13.33, 22.11
Celebratory religious festival	11.3	12.70
Celebratory sports festival	0	11.33
Celebratory procession/triumph	30.25, 1.88.5-7, 2.31, 3.19.12-13, 4.66.8, 11.33.6, 14.23, 16.23, 21.24.16-17 <b>All Roman</b>	3.65.8 (Dionysus), 4.3.1 (Dionysus), 12.64 (Roman), 14.117.6 (Roman), 31.16 (Antiochus IV)
Celebration party	1.36.1, 11.3, 16.23	16.18-19, 16.87
Celebration leading to a reversal of fortunes	1.19.8-11, 3.74.10-11, 4.57.2-58.12	16.18-19

In some respects, the situation here is very similar to the one in the Classical historiographers. Again we see that the most information about battle aftermaths is provided after the battles that are narrated in the greatest detail, i.e. the battles which the historiographer thought the most important.<sup>16</sup> For example, the detailed information Diodorus gives about the aftermath of Alexander the Great's capture of Tyre matches the great detail of the narrative of the siege and the final storm on the city.

With regard to trophies, the situation is even more illuminating. Diodorus mentions trophies often, but by no means after every battle.<sup>17</sup> Polybius, on the other hand, only mentions trophies once, at 4.8.6, but this is to state ironically that the Achaean statesman Aratos the Elder filled the Peloponnese with trophies commemorating not his victories, but his defeats (Plb. 4.8.6) – the implication surely being that the Peloponnesians still put up trophies after every military victory, but that Polybius takes this for granted to such a degree that he finds it unnecessary to mention it. Equally, Polybius never mentions the custom of

<sup>16</sup> On Diodorus' battle narratives see Alganza-Roldan (1987 and 1991).

<sup>17</sup> The pattern of when Diodorus does and does not mention trophies can be explained by the time-honoured theory that Diodorus was extremely influenced by his sources and often changed only the wording, taking over all the information from them unfiltered. Thus, we see that he mentions trophies regularly after most battles in the Greek narrative of books 11-15, in which it is generally agreed that he relied on the historian Ephoros - whose work now survives only in scattered fragments - and also in book 16, for which he probably relied partly on the continuation of Ephoros' work by his son Demophilos. Diodorus does not, however, mention trophies at all in the Sicilian and Italian narrative which runs parallel to the Greek one in books 13-14, and which he most likely took over not from Ephoros, but from Timaios of Tauromenion. Furthermore, he does not mention any trophies in what is extant of the books where he relied on Polybius - a situation which exactly matches Polybius' own record of leaving out this information. For a bibliography on this issue and my views on Diodorus and his sources see Hau (2009).

giving the enemy dead back nor of taking back one's own dead from the battlefield, and only once does he mention burial of the dead – yet, all of these actions must still have been common.<sup>18</sup>

If we turn our attention to the differences between Polybius and Diodorus on the one hand and the three Classical historians on the other, we see first of all that, unsurprisingly, the two Hellenistic historians both describe Roman triumphs. For the purpose of comparing Polybius and Diodorus with the Classical historians, however, the most interesting difference is that the Hellenistic historians *do* in fact mention Greek victory celebrations, though not very often. And when they mention them, they disapprove of them. This disapproval may be the key to the silence about victory celebrations in the Classical historiographers.

Let us return now to the only victory celebration found in the Classical historians, Thuc. 7.73. Here, the Syracusans have soundly defeated the Athenians after almost two years of gruelling warfare which has threatened their city and their very existence. Their general Hermocrates now wants to complete the victory by cutting off and annihilating the retreating Athenians, but when he puts his proposal to the Syracusan authorities, they foresee a problem:

οἱ δὲ ξυνεγίγνωσκον μὲν καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐχ ἤσσαν ταῦτα ἐκείνου, καὶ ἐδόκει ποιητέα εἶναι, τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους ἄρτι ἀσμένους ἀπὸ ναυμαχίας τε μεγάλης ἀναπεπαυμένους καὶ ἅμα ἐορτῆς οὐσίας (ἔτυχε γὰρ αὐτοῖς Ἡρακλεῖ ταύτην τὴν ἡμέραν θυσιά οὔσα) οὐ δοκεῖν ἂν ἑαδίως ἐθελῆσαι ὑπακοῦσαι· ὑπὸ γὰρ τοῦ περιχαροῦς τῆς νίκης πρὸς πόσιν τετράφθαι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐν τῇ ἐορτῇ, καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον ἐλπίζειν ἂν σφῶν πείθεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἢ ὄπλα λαβόντας ἐν τῷ παρόντι ἐξελθεῖν.

*They [i.e. the authorities] recognized the soundness of this argument no less than he did and thought that his plan should be carried out, but as for the common people, who were just beginning to rejoice at having been relieved from the great sea-battle and were moreover celebrating a festival (for there happened to be a sacrifice to Heracles on that day), they thought that they would not easily obey. For in their elation over the victory the majority had turned to drinking in the course of the festival, and the last order they could be expected to obey at this moment was to take up arms and march out. (Thucydides 7.73.2, translation modified from Rex Warner).*

Thucydides does not criticise the Syracusan soldiers; he very rarely criticises or praises anyone in his narratorial voice.<sup>19</sup> But their behaviour fits in with the characterisation he has given of the Syracusans earlier, when he said that they were the people the Athenians came up against which was most like

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<sup>18</sup> For Polybius' battle narratives generally see Marsden (1973) and. A subtle, more literary reading of some battle narratives is Davidson (1991).

<sup>19</sup> For an insightful discussion of Thucydides as narrator see Gribble (1998). Also useful on this topic is Rood (1998).



themselves (Thuc. 7.55) - and the Athenians, we understand from passages like the Corinthian speech in book 1 (especially 1.70) and the launch of the Sicilian expedition in 6.31-32, were impulsive and easily carried away by high hopes for the future which make them celebrate their successes before they have won. If the Syracusans are like the Athenians, then this characterisation must also be true of them, and their victory celebrations, before the enemy army has been completely destroyed, must be seen as reckless and premature. When the situation is saved for the Syracusans by the general Hermocrates, this is to the credit of Hermocrates (a general Thucydides has earlier graced with one of his few direct words of praise),<sup>20</sup> but it does not really remove the stain of unruliness and lack of proper understanding from the Syracusan citizen soldiers.<sup>21</sup>

We see something similar to this in the two Hellenistic historians, but the criticism there is more explicit. In Polybius, the historian's distaste for victory celebrations is obvious in his description of the Carthaginian celebrations after their success in a major battle of the First Punic War and capture of the Roman consul Atilius Regulus:

*Καρχηδόνιοι δέ, κατὰ νοῦν ἀπάντων σφίσι κεχωρηκότων, ὑπερβολὴν χαρᾶς οὐκ ἀπέλιπον διὰ τε τῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εὐχαριστίας καὶ διὰ τῆς μετ' ἀλλήλων φιλοφροσύνης.*

*Now that the Carthaginians had been successful in everything, they did not leave undone any excess of rejoicing either in thank-offerings to the gods or in mutual congratulations.*  
(Polybius 1.36.1)

And again in his description of the Roman celebrations after their victory in the Battle at the Metaurus in the Second Punic War:

*τότε δὲ χαρᾶς ὑπερβαλλούσης ἦν ἡ πόλις πλήρης, καὶ πᾶν κεν τέμενος ἐκοσμεῖτο, πᾶς δὲ ναὸς ἔγεμε πελάνων καὶ θυμάτων, καθόλου δ' εἰς τοιαύτην εὐελπιστίαν παρεγένοντο καὶ θάρσος ὥστε πάντας τὸν Ἀντίβαν, ὃν μάλιστα πρότερον ἐφοβήθησαν, τότε μηδ' ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ νομίζειν παρεῖναι.*

*The city was full of exceedingly great joy, every holy place was decorated, and every temple was full of offerings and sacrificial victims. In a word, they became so optimistic and*

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<sup>20</sup> "A man who was second to none in all-round intelligence, and who during the war had shown himself very capable because of his experience as well as conspicuous for his courage" (Thuc. 6.72: ἀνὴρ καὶ ἐς τᾶλλα ξύνεσιν οὐδενὸς λειπόμενος καὶ κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἐμπειρία τε ἰκανὸς γενόμενος καὶ ἀνδρεία ἐπιφανής).

<sup>21</sup> Hornblower (2008) *ad loc.* interestingly suggests that Hermocrates was Thucydides' source for this passage and that he may have exaggerated the helplessness of the authorities, who may in turn have exaggerated the recalcitrance of the soldiers. Both hypotheses may well be true, and neither detracts from the argument of this paper about Thucydides' contempt for victory celebrations and its reason.

*confident that everyone believed that Hannibal, of whom they had before been so afraid, was now not even in Italy.* (Polybius 11.3.5-6, translation modified from Paton)

The Polybian narrator's disapproval is clear from his use of the words *ὑπερβολήν* and *ὑπερβαλλούσης* ("excess" and "exceeding"), but *why* does he disapprove? Because the celebrations were too lavish, perhaps? This seems unlikely when we compare his description of the celebrations held at Rome at the end of the Second Punic War:

οὔσης δὲ τῆς προσδοκίας τῶν πολλῶν ἀκολούθου τῷ μεγέθει τῶν πράξεων, μεγάλην εἶναι συνέβαινε καὶ τὴν φαντασίαν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τὴν τοῦ πλήθους εὐνοίαν πρὸς αὐτόν. καὶ τοῦτ' εἰκότως ἐκ τῶν κατὰ λόγον ἐγίνετο καὶ καθηκόντως: οὐδέποτε γὰρ ἂν ἐλπίσαντες Ἀννίβαν ἐκβαλεῖν ἐξ Ἰταλίας οὐδ' ἀποτρίψασθαι τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων κίνδυνον, τότε δοκοῦντες ἤδη βεβαίως οὐ μόνον ἐκτὸς γεγονέναι παντὸς φόβου καὶ πάσης περιστάσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ κρατεῖν τῶν ἐχθρῶν, ὑπερβολὴν οὐ κατέλιπον χαρᾶς. ὡς δὲ καὶ τὸν θρίαμβον εἰσήγγε, τότε καὶ μᾶλλον ἔτι διὰ τῆς τῶν εἰσαγομένων ἐνεργείας μιμνησκόμενοι τῶν προγεγονότων κινδύνων ἐκπαθεῖς ἐγίνοντο κατὰ τε τὴν πρὸς θεοὺς εὐχαριστίαν καὶ κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸν αἴτιον τῆς τηλικαύτης μεταβολῆς εὐνοίαν. [...] τούτων δὲ συντελεσθέντων οἱ μὲν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ κατὰ τὸ συνεχὲς ἐπὶ πολλὰς ἡμέρας ἀγῶνας ἤγον καὶ πανηγύρεις ἐπιφανῶς, χορηγὸν ἔχοντες εἰς ταῦτα τὴν Σκιπίωνος μεγαλοψυχίαν.

*"As the eagerness with which he [Scipio the Elder] was awaited by the people corresponded to the greatness of his achievements, the splendour of his reception and his popularity with the commons were both very great. And this was quite natural, reasonable, and proper. For while they had never hoped to expel Hannibal from Italy and cast off the danger which threatened themselves and those dearest to them, the thought that now they were not only once and for all freed from all fear and peril but that they had vanquished their enemies caused a joy that knew no bounds. And when he entered Rome in triumph, they were reminded more vividly of their former peril by the actual spectacle of the prisoners led in procession, and they became passionate with gratefulness towards the gods and love for him who had brought about so great a change. [...] After the triumph had ended, the Roman populace continued for many days to celebrate games and hold festival, the funds for the purpose being provided by the bounty of Scipio."* (Polybius 16.23, translation modified from Paton)

These celebrations are described as being at least as lavish as the ones held after the Battle at the Metaurus. What made them "excessive" then, but "natural, reasonable, and proper" (*καὶ τοῦτ' εἰκότως ἐκ τῶν κατὰ λόγον ἐγίνετο καὶ καθηκόντως*) at the later date is the fact that whereas the Battle at the

Metaurus was just one battle in the war, the celebrations surrounding Scipio's triumph come at the end and victory of the entire war. In other words, the celebrations in Rome after Metaurus and in Carthage after the capture of Atilius Regulus were premature, just like those of Thucydides' Syracusans.

Much the same message is found in Diodorus. One instance is Diodorus 16.18-19, where the Syracusan populace manage to storm the citadel in their city which is occupied by the fearsome mercenaries of their absent tyrant Dionysios II. Then, "elated by their success (μετεωρισθέντες δ' ἐπὶ τῷ προτερήματι)" they turn to drinking and celebrating, neglecting guard duty (ῥαθύμως εἶχον τὰ περὶ τὰς φυλακάς) "with contempt for the men they have defeated (καταφρονούντες τῶν ἡττημένων)", and while they are sleeping it off, the mercenaries attack again and slaughter them in their sleep. Just as in Thucydides, the Syracusans are carried away by their victory celebrations and drink themselves into a stupor even though their enemy is not yet completely defeated. One wonders if such behaviour was perhaps thought by contemporaries to be characteristic of the Syracusans of the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century?<sup>22</sup> However that may be, it is clear that the celebration is both excessive and premature.

However, one interesting passage in Diodorus criticises celebrations that are not premature. This is the description of the celebrations of Philip II after the Battle of Chaironea. This is worth quoting in its entirety:

λέγουσι δέ τινες ὅτι καὶ παρὰ τὸν πότον πολὺν ἐμφορησάμενος ἄκρατον καὶ μετὰ τῶν φίλων τὸν ἐπινίκιον ἄγων κῶμον διὰ μέσων τῶν αἰχμαλώτων ἐβάδιζεν ὑβρίζων διὰ λόγων τὰς τῶν ἀκληρούντων δυστυχίας. Δημάδην δὲ τὸν ῥήτορα κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν καιρὸν ἐν τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις ὄντα χρῆσασθαι παρηρησία καὶ λόγον ἀποφθέγγασθαι δυνάμενον ἀναστῆλναι τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ἀσέλγειαν. [2] φασὶ γὰρ εἰπεῖν αὐτόν, βασιλεῦ, τῆς τύχης σοι περιθείσης πρόσωπον Ἀγαμέμνονος αὐτὸς οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ πράττων ἔργα Θεορσίτου; τὸν δὲ Φίλιππον τῆ τῆς ἐπιπλήξεως εὐστοχία κινήθέντα τοσοῦτο μεταβαλεῖν τὴν ὅλην διάθεσιν ὥστε τοὺς μὲν στεφάνους ἀπορρῆψαι, τὰ δὲ συνακολουθοῦντα κατὰ τὸν κῶμον σύμβολα τῆς ὑβρεως ἀποτρῖψασθαι, τὸν δ' ἄνδρα τὸν χρησάμενον τῇ παρηρησία θαυμάσαι καὶ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας ἀπολύσαντα πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀναλαβεῖν ἐντίμως. [3] τέλος δ' ὑπὸ τοῦ Δημάδου καθομιληθέντα ταῖς Ἀττικαῖς χάρισι πάντα ἀπολύσαι τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους ἄνευ λύτρων, καθόλου δ' ἀποθέμενον τὴν ἐκ τῆς νίκης ὑπερηφανίαν πρέσβεις ἀποστεῖλαι πρὸς τὸν δῆμον τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ συνδέσθαι πρὸς αὐτοὺς φιλίαν τε καὶ συμμαχίαν, εἰς δὲ τὰς Θήβας φρουρὰν ἐγκαταστήσαντα συγχωρῆσαι τὴν εἰρήνην τοῖς Βοιωτοῖς.

*"Some people say that (Philip) in a drinking bout got drunk on unmixed wine and held a celebratory victory procession with his friends through the midst of the prisoners of war, verbally abusing them and gloating at the misfortune of the unhappy people. Demades, the orator, who was at that time among the captives, spoke his opinion freely and plainly and was*

<sup>22</sup> The parallels between this passage and Thuc. 7.73 are noted by Hornblower (2008) *ad loc.*

able to check the king's licentiousness. (2) For they say that he said, *'King, when Fortune has cast you as Agamemnon, are you not ashamed to act as Thersites?'* And Philip, moved by *the well-aimed rebuke*, changed his whole behaviour to such a degree that he threw off the garlands and got rid of the other symbols of arrogance that were part of the procession, and he admired the man who had spoken freely, and freed him from captivity and brought him to his side to honour him. (3) In the end, won over by Demades with Attic charm, he freed all the captives without ransom and, in short, having put aside his *victory-induced arrogance*, he sent messengers to the people of Athens and concluded an alliance with them, and, when he had installed a garrison in Thebes, he made peace with the Boiotians." (Diodorus Siculus 16.87)

Again we see the link between drinking and excessive victory celebrations. The criticism in this case is offered by one of the characters in the story rather than by the narrator; but by calling the criticism a "well-aimed rebuke (τῆ τῆς ἐπιπλήξεως εὐστοχία)", the narrator signals his own disparagement of the behaviour. So why is Philip criticised? Not because his celebrations are premature, for he has now, in fact, won the ultimate victory over his Greek enemies. No, the king's celebrations are criticised for two reasons: because they are undignified – that is the significance of the comparison with Thersites<sup>23</sup> and the appeal to Philip's sense of shame (αἰσχύνῃ) – and because they express "victory-induced arrogance" (τῆν ἐκ τῆς νίκης ὑπερηφανίαν).

And this is where it becomes interesting. Although there are very few descriptions of victory celebrations in Diodorus, this criticism of Philip gives us the chance to put those disparaging descriptions into a larger, moralising context. "Victory-induced arrogance" is extremely common in Diodorus' descriptions of the behaviour of victorious kings and commanders. His victors either suffer from such arrogance and are castigated for it, or they show themselves capable of withstanding its temptations and are praised elaborately (see e.g. 17.38.4-7, 19.95.6-7, and 23.15).<sup>24</sup> What is interesting is the way the criticism of the celebrations of both Philip II and the Syracusans match the expressions used to moralise on other instances of arrogance in victory. Diodorus' message in all the passages is that victorious commanders and peoples should not become arrogant, but stay moderate and dignified in victory because fortune is changeable and he who is victorious today may be defeated tomorrow. From the verbal and mental echoes between these passages and the celebration passages (ῥαθύμως/ῥαθυμία, various expressions for 'victory-induced arrogance', ὑπερβολή, ὑπερηφανία/ὑπερήφανος/ὑπερηφάνως, καταφρονούντες/κατα-φρόνησις/ καταφρονεῖν) it seems that celebrations of a victory might well be perceived as arrogant and overconfident. Presumably, such celebrations could also almost always be

<sup>23</sup> For Thersites see Hom. *Il.* 2.243ff.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the depiction of victorious commanders in the Greek historians with a focus on the avoidance of arrogance see Hau (2008).

perceived as premature, especially if the historian looked at them with hindsight from a sufficiently far-off future.

This theory also fits Polybius. Polybius has an ethics of victory very close to that of Diodorus, with plenty of passages criticising arrogant, abusive victors or praising moderate, dignified ones (see e.g. 2.4.5, 29.20, and 38.21).<sup>25</sup> Even though we do not see direct verbal echoes between Polybius' disparagement of victory celebrations and his criticism of arrogant victors, his frequent admonitions in the latter type of passage never to "deliberate about the future as if it had already happened" (*μηδέποτε βουλευέσθαι περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος ὡς ἤδη γεγονότος*, 2.4.5) and "never to boast unduly of achievements and never place any reliance on present prosperity" (*μήτε μεγαλαυχεῖν ἐπὶ τοῖς κατορθώμασι παρὰ τὸ δέον μήτε βουλευέσθαι μηδὲν ὑπερήφανον μηδ' ἀνήκεστον περὶ μηδενός, μήτε καθόλου πιστεύειν μηδέποτε ταῖς παρούσαις εὐτυχίαις* 29.20) place Polybius' dislike of victory celebrations in a moralising context, particularly when the celebrations are premature.<sup>26</sup>

Now, is it possible to hypothesize that the Classical historians shared these Hellenistic moral qualms about the proper handling of victory, and that this is the reason for their silence about or disparagement of victory celebrations?

Well, in Herodotos there are certainly plenty of admonitions to mistrust good fortune and to stay moderate in success, the most famous of which is Solon's speech to Kroisos (1.32) where he says that the god is jealous (*τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν*), that nothing in human life is stable (*πᾶν ἐστὶ ἀνθρωπος συμφορῆ*), and that for this reason no one should be called happy before he has died well (*πρὶν δ' ἀν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν, μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον ἀλλ' εὐτυχέα*).<sup>27</sup> This would tie in well with a suspicion against celebrations of victory.

In Xenophon, there is nothing as explicit as this, but generally, throughout his writings, those who become arrogant and overconfident in their success tend to come to sticky ends.<sup>28</sup> An example is Jason of Pherae, who is assassinated at the end of a carefully structured passage stressing his greatness and power as well as his overconfident hopes for the future as he prepares to take charge of the Pythian festival and even makes designs on the treasure of Delphi (*Xen. Hel.* 6.4.28-32).<sup>29</sup> Add to this Xenophon's general praise of dignity in military commanders, and it becomes very likely that he disapproved of the kind of victory celebrations described by Polybius and Diodorus.

Finally, in Thucydides, we have seen that the Syracusans were subtly disparaged for celebrating their victory prematurely, as well as for not obeying their leaders. Thucydides explicitly connects the

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<sup>25</sup> See Hau (2008).

<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it has been shown by Eckstein (1995: 285-290) that Polybius disapproved of drunkenness in any context, and it is probably safe to assume that drinking would generally go hand-in-hand with any kind of victory celebration.

<sup>27</sup> Most monographs about Herodotus mention or discuss this aspect of his work. Two studies that discuss it in detail are Harrison (2000) and Mikalson (2003).

<sup>28</sup> See my paper in F. Hobden and C. Tuplin *Xenophon: Ethical Principle and Historical Enquiry*, Brill, forthcoming. The same goes for those who are impious, see Pownall (1998).

<sup>29</sup> For a good narrative analysis of this passage see Gray (1989) *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenika*, London, 163-165.

Syracusans with the Athenians by saying that the two peoples were more like each other than like any other peoples, and at the moment of the Syracusan victory we are in the process of watching the dramatic downfall of the Athenians after their overconfident trust in the future when they launched the Sicilian Expedition at 6.31-32.

This moral connection between victory celebrations and generally arrogant and overconfident behaviour by the victorious may well, then, be the reason for the disparagement of victory celebrations in the Greek historians; but is it also the reason for the relative silence about them? Surely it must have been the norm that victories were celebrated rather than endured in dignified silence, so why do the historians not record such celebrations more often, even if only to use them as negative moral examples?

Perhaps we can reach an answer to this question by analogy. There are many recurring events which the ancient Greek historians, Classical as well as Hellenistic, do not talk about – such as the treatment of wounded men after battle, and the actual life in a soldiers' camp. As we have seen, neither Herodotus nor Polybius mentions the act of putting up a trophy after a battle, although this probably happened after every one, and Polybius is almost completely silent about collecting one's dead from the battlefield and burying them, although we must believe that this also took place every time a battle had been fought. These actions are presumably passed over in silence because 1) everybody knew that they happened regularly, and 2) the historian did not find them intrinsically interesting and did not think that his readers would either. Perhaps this holds true also for victory celebrations? Perhaps such celebrations did take place regularly, but the historians did not generally find them interesting enough to mention.


If that is the case, then the few victory celebrations that were narrated must have been recorded for a reason. And the reason seems to be that they point a moral: the drunken Syracusans in Thucydides prove that they are undisciplined rabble prone to premature celebrations, who would be lost without their leaders – much, in fact, like the Athenians; the Syracusans in Diodorus, a Sicilian himself, merely show the dangers of celebrating victory prematurely. The same message of the impropriety of premature celebrations is found in Polybius' disparagement of the celebrations of both the Romans and the Carthaginians after victories in a single battle, while he can report the celebrations of the Romans after the end of the war with approval. Finally, Philip II, in Diodorus, displays behaviour, which is termed “victory-induced arrogance” and through the comparison with the uncouth and low-born Thersites is stamped as not only undignified, but also as low-class.

And I wonder if this class question did not also play its part in both the disparagement of and the silence about victory celebrations? The drunken Syracusans in both Thucydides and Diodorus are clearly the common people of Syracuse, in Thucydides explicitly opposed to their generals and called dismissively *ἀνθρώπους*. And while Polybius in his brief passages on the premature celebrations of the Romans and Carthaginians does not mention any class distinction, he makes it very clear in his passage about Scipio's triumph (16.23, quoted above) that most of the celebrating is done by the common people. If this was indeed the case – if the ‘real’ celebrations of victory were held by the common people or the common

soldiery – this would be a further reason for our elitist historiographers' lack of interest in these celebrations. Presumably, then, the commanders would celebrate more moderately, or at least behind closed doors, as in the symposia held after athletic victories, and only when this norm was transgressed, as in the case of Philip, would the historian comment upon it.

So, in conclusion: the Greek historians are generally more informative about the immediate customs or rituals of victory, such as the putting up of trophies and giving back of the enemy dead, than about festive celebrations of victory. On both topics we can safely assume that there are many things they do not tell us, which nevertheless happened regularly: just as trophies were erected, the dead collected and buried, and the enemy dead given back under a truce after each battle, thus victories were most likely celebrated more often than not. Such celebrations, however, are generally only mentioned by the historians in order to cast a disparaging light on the celebrants. This negative attitude, I suggest, stems partly from a deep moral suspicion at victors who enjoy their victory, strongly connected with the deep-seated sentiment, common throughout Greek Classical literature, that one should be careful with enjoying good fortune because it is almost certain not to last. Partly, however, the attitude seems to be based on class prejudice: victories are celebrated publically by the common people and soldiery, and such celebrations are sneered at by elitist generals and historians, who would, presumably, hold their own celebrations behind closed doors in the form of symposia. In other words: there was often something to celebrate, but celebration was not the sort of thing a self-respecting historian would spend his ink on.

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