HELLENISTIC PARADES AND ROMAN TRIUMPHS

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1. Introduction

In the fifth book of his *Deipnosophists* Athenaeus presents vivid descriptions of two Hellenistic parades, first the procession and festival held by the Seleucid king Antiochos IV at Daphne in the 160s BC and then the so-called ‘grand procession’ of Ptolemy II Philadelphos in Alexandria in the previous century.¹ These were spectacular processions that did not merely display the wealth and power of the monarch; they proclaimed it far and wide, to subjects, to foreign delegations that were present, and to those elsewhere in the Mediterranean who only heard rumours of their extraordinary character. The interpretation of these events, however, has often been colored by our knowledge of the Roman triumph, which in turn has itself come under their influence.

In particular, scholars, encouraged by Roman triumphal practices, have looked at these processions and tended to impute an emphasis on victory celebration which is not there in our source material—and may not have been there in Daphne or Alexandria either. Recent scholarly concerns with spectacle, theatre and audience have further tended to bring these two institutions together as large-scale highly visual public ceremonies.² In the process it is easy to forget how fundamentally different the Roman triumph and the Hellenistic parade were—or for ‘parade’ we might prefer ‘procession,’ the more usual translation of the Greek *pompe*—‘parade’ perhaps already carries us too far in the direction of the triumph.

² For example Arthur Eckstein, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 209–10 compares these (‘spectacular victory processions’) and other Greek processions to Roman triumphs celebrating victory; both the Hellenistic processions and triumphs are the subject of Andrew Bell, *Spectacular Power in the Greek and Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) which treats the visual display of power.
This chapter explores the (often imagined) relationship between the two, on the one hand the Hellenistic royal processions, on the other the Roman institution of the triumph. It highlights the very different contexts of each and suggests that scholars have often been too ready to find connections between them, most obviously in the case of Antiochos IV, who is believed by some to have imported elements of the Roman triumph to Syria. The chapter argues that there is little evidence to suggest that either of the two Hellenistic processions under consideration here was intended as a celebration of any particular victory. In so far as victory symbolism was a feature of these Hellenistic processions it was because military success was part of royal ideology. In contrast a Roman triumph could not exist without a victory. The roles of the Hellenistic king and republican Roman general, in relation to their respective processions, are therefore fundamentally different. In our examination of the Roman triumph the focus will be on the Republic, because under the emperors the triumph comes to perform a rather different role, one more like that of these processions for the Hellenistic kings.

Before going any further something should be said about the source material for my two Hellenistic processions, Athenaeus of Naukratis and his *Deipnosophists*. This is a curious writer and curious work. Within the framework of a multi-volume account of a symposium numerous texts are quoted, not infrequently about food, luxury and symposia, the diners at the symposium seeming to have a remarkable facility for remembering even the most obscure texts. Athenaeus is in consequence an invaluable source for lost texts. Nonetheless, how much Athenaeus has shaped his sources, either by editing them or re-contextualising them, is a matter of considerable debate. The old image of Athenaeus as a ‘cut-and-paste’ man is fading.3

The description of the Ptolemaic procession is attributed to one Kallixeinos of Rhodes. In spite of the familiarity with which scholars speak of him almost nothing is known about this writer except that he wrote

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