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The Social and Cultural Construction of Emotions: The Greek Paradigm  
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Working Paper 1  
Prescribed emotions by a Roman magistrate

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**Reference:** SEG XXIII 206.

**Heading:** A Roman magistrate prescribes a joyful mood during a celebration.

**Source:** Inscription, decree.

**Date:** 2/3 CE

**Place:** Messene (Peloponnese).

**Type of monument:** upper part of a stone stele

**Content:** The surviving part of this decree of the city of Messene, passed in 2 or 3 CE either in honour or at the instigation of P. Cornelius Scipio, quaestor of the province of Achaia, perhaps acting as a temporary provincial governor (the usual interpretation of his title, but in fact unnecessary: for the title of *quaestor pro praetore* in Augustan and later times, cf. *ILS* 911, ll. 4–5; 981, ll. 5–6; 1048, ll. 3–4, with A.H.M. Greenidge, *CR* 9 [1895], 258–9), deals mainly with the arrangements for honouring Gaius Caesar put in place at Scipio's behest. These arrangements are of interest for mentioning a whole range of emotions as displayed by Scipio himself and by the civic community of Messene – a sense of rivalry with those who staged celebrations in the past is combined with zeal in honouring the imperial house and reverence towards its members (note in particular a rather exuberant reference to Scipio's vow in line 4). The community (whether this is a honorific decree or implementation of Scipio's request) praises the quaestor's behaviour and apparently expresses gratitude for his actions.

Most importantly, Scipio prescribes the way in which locals should react emotionally to the news of Gaius' military success in the East, and in fact orders them to share his emotions as far as possible. He is 'overjoyed', 'exuberantly joyous' (l. 13: ὑπερχαρής) himself, and asks them to celebrate 'as joyously as they can' (l. 20: ὅσοις δυνάμεθα ἰλαρώτατα). The outward expression of that is also specified: they are to sacrifice 'being idle / free from any work and untroubled' (l. 14: ἀπράγμονας ὄντας καὶ ἀταράχους). While celebration of the imperial house at the instigation of a Roman provincial official is common enough (compare, e.g., the 'calendar decree of the province of Asia' [*OGIS* 458 = *RDGE* 65]), such a prescription of the emotional nature of local celebrations remains unparalleled. Even when emotions are referred to as motives for public celebration or mourning they are normally described, both in Roman official letters and in civic decrees, as the reason for action (as indeed is the case with Scipio's own emotions here) not as a state which the people ought to achieve during the public event.

We can compare the Messene text with the (much more typical in this respect) decree of the *koinon* of the province of Asia and the city of Sardis, setting up very similar celebrations to honour the assumption of the toga of manhood by Gaius (*Sardis* VII.i 8, ll. 1–21, tr. Sherk, *TDGR* 4, no. 104A). There the news from Rome lead to 'everybody being overcome with joy' (*Sardis* VII.i 8, ll. 8/9: ἡδονταί τε πάντες ἄνθρωποι), which in its turn leads to the establishment of holiday and celebrations. While outward appearances ordained by the Sardis decree are remarkably similar to those at Messene (wearing of wreaths, sacrifices, a holiday) the emotional state of the participants is not explicitly prescribed.

A closer comparison is provided by the letter of Paulus Fabius Maximus concerning the calendar reform in Asia, referred to above, where it is stated that people will celebrate

Augustus' birthday more joyfully if the pleasure of entering into office is connected with it (*RDGE* 65A, ll. 19/20: ἡδαιον δ' ἄν ἄνθρωποι τὴν κοινὴν πᾶσιν γενέθλιον ἀγάγοι[εν | ἐ]αν προσγένηται αὐτοῖς καὶ ἰδία τις διὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἡδονή), but even there it is not a prescription, but a practical consideration, and, furthermore, is not addressed to the population as a whole.

The Messene text is therefore of huge interest in the context of the creation of the language of loyalty to the imperial power in the age of Augustus.

*Note on the date:* There may have been a distinction between Κάισαρ and Σεβαστός in our text (blurred in Sherk's translation), and the *Kaisareia* festival may have been connected not with Augustus, but with Julius Caesar (compare A.B. West, *CP* 23 [1928], 260, for the change of name of *Kaisareia* to *Sebasteia* at Argos). In this case, if the date was in any way connected to Roman official calendar, which is not certain, it probably took place in late July (in parallel with the Roman *Iudi Victoriae Caesaris* of 20–30 July). Alternatively, it could have been connected with Augustus' birthday on 23 September. (The fact that sacrifices were offered on Augustus' behalf at the time of the *Kaisareia* is not decisive here.) Some such date seems to be required by Cassius Dio's account of Gaius' first election as consul by popular acclamation (55.9.1–4), which was preceded by demonstrations either (more likely given the usual timetable of Roman elections) at the *Iudi Victoriae Caesaris* or at the *Iudi Romani* of 4–19 September.

Herz (1993) suggests that the *Kaisareia* festival took place in mid-January in connexion with Octavian's assumption of the name of Augustus on 16 Jan. 27 BC, and that the 'first designation of Gaius' then refers to a presumed senatorial decree of Jan. 5 BC, designating him as consul after the assumption of *toga virilis*, and formally confirming what had previously been merely a popular designation. I find this less convincing, particularly given the causal connexion with the arrival of the news from the East, hardly to be expected in mid-winter, and constitutionally problematic nature of such a senatorial decision.

**Translation:** (When) the secretary of the council-members was Philoxenidas, under the (magistracy of) Theodo(ros?). Decree. Since Publius Cornelius Scipio, *quaestor pro praetore*, with unsurpassed **goodwill** towards Augustus and his whole house, having sworn **a single greatest and most honorable vow** to guard it against any harm, as demonstrated since by all his deeds, has also organized the *Kaisareia* games and has spared no expense or enthusiasm, nor sacrifices on behalf of Augustus in thanksgiving to the gods, simultaneously also preparing most of the cities in the province to do the same with him; and learning that Gaius, the son of Augustus, fighting against the barbarians for the safety of all men, was in good health, had escaped danger, and had taken vengeance on the enemy, he, **overjoyed at this best of news**, directed everyone to wear wreaths and to sacrifice, **being at leisure and untroubled**, and he himself sacrificed oxen for Gaius' safety and gave a variety of spectacles, so that on the one hand he made them rival those given in the past, and on the other safeguarded the revered status (of Gaius); he omitted two days from the days of Caesar and made the beginning of sacrifice on Gaius' behalf on the day on which Gaius was first designated consul and instructed us to celebrate this day annually with sacrifices and wearing of wreaths **as joyously** and as ... as possible; (therefore) the members of the council decided on the fifteenth day before the Kalends of [- -]

**Emotions:** joy (*hyperchares*, *hilarotata*); gratitude (*eucharistia*); relief; generosity (*philotimia*); benevolence (*eunoia*).

**Socio-cultural parameters:** Roman provincial administration; war; prescribed emotion; festival; relation between Roman magistrate and the emperor; relation between city and the emperor; religion; revenge; barbarians; emotional display.

**Communicative context:** civic decree; orders of a Roman provincial official.

Text: Γραμματέως συνέδρων Φιλοξενίδα τοῦ ἐπὶ Θεοδῶ[ρου(?)] | *vac.* δόγμα· *vac.* | Ἐπεὶ Πόπλιος Κορνῆλιος Σκειπίων ὁ ταμίας καὶ ἀντιστράταγος ἀνυ||<sup>4</sup>περβλήτω χρώμενος

εὐνοία τᾶ εἰς τὸν Σεβαστὸν καὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ πάντα μίαν τε μεγίσταν καὶ τιμιωτάταν εὐχὰν πεποιημένος, | εἰς ἅπαν ἀβλαβῆ τοῦτον φυλάσσεσθαι, ὡς ἀπὸ τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον ἑαυτοῦ | ἐπιδείκνυται ἔργων, ἐτέλεσε μὲν τὰ Καισάρεια μηδὲν μήτε δαπανὰς ||<sup>8</sup> μήτε φιλοτιμίας ἐνλείπων μηδὲ τὰς ὑπὲρ τᾶν διὰ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ θυσιᾶν | εὐχαριστίας ποτὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἅμα καὶ τὰς πλείστας τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἐπαρχίαν πόλιν συν ἑαυτῷ τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ποιεῖν κατασκευασάμενος· ἐπιγνοὺς δὲ καὶ Γαῖον | τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ τὸν ὑπὲρ τὰς ἀνθρώπων πάντων σωτηρίας τοῖς βαρβάροις μα||<sup>12</sup>χόμενον ὑγιαίνειν τε καὶ κινδύνους ἐκφυγόντα ἀντιτετιμωρῆσθαι τοὺς πολεμῖους, ὑπερχαρῆς ὦν ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀρίσταις ἀγγελίαις, στεφαναφορεῖν τε πάντοτε διέταξε καὶ θύειν, ἀπράγμονας ὄντας καὶ ἀταράχους, αὐτὸς τε βουθυῶν περὶ | τὰς Γαῖου σωτηρίας καὶ θεαῖς ἐπεδαφιλεύσατο ποικίλαις ὡς ἔριν μὲν γείνει||<sup>16</sup>σθαι τὰ γενόμενα τῶν γεγονότων τὸ δὲ σεμνὸν αὐτοῦ δι' ἴσου φυλαχθῆμεν, ἐφιλοτιμήθη δὲ καὶ διαλιπὼν ἀπὸ τᾶν Καίσαρος ἀμερᾶν ἀμέρας δύο τὰν ἀρχὰν τᾶν | ὑπὲρ Γαῖου θυσιᾶν ποιήσασθαι ἀπὸ τὰς ἀμέρας ἐν ᾗ τὸ πρῶτον ὑπάτος ἀπεδείχθη, διετάξατο δὲ ἀμῖν καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ἑνιαυτὸν τὰν ἀμέραν ταύταν μετὰ ||<sup>20</sup> θυσιᾶν καὶ στεφαναφορίας διάγειν ὅσοις δυνάμεθα ἰλαρώτατα καὶ - - - τατα, | ἔδοξε τοῖς συνέδροις πρὸ δέκα πέντε καλανδῶν [- - -]

**Image:** Ἀρχ. Ἐφ. (1965), pl. 41.

**Editions, bibliography:** A.K. Orlandos, Πρακτικά (1960), 215-17; Ἀρχ. Ἐφ. (1965), 110–15; J. and L. Robert, *BE* 1966, no. 201; *SEG* XXIII 206; *AE* 1967, no. 458; J.E.G. Zetzel, 'New Light on Gaius Caesar's Eastern Campaign', *GRBS* 11 (1970), 259–66 (text; transl.; comment.); Sherk, *TDGR* 6, no. 18 (transl.; notes); G. Rowe, *Princes and Political Cultures* (Ann Arbor 2002), 152–3 (text); 144–5 (transl.).

P. Herz, *Klio* 75 (1993), 283–88 [whence *SEG* XLV 293] on the day of the festival; R.K. Sherk, 'The Eponymous Officials of Greek Cities: Mainland Greece and the Adjacent Islands', *ZPE* 84 (1990), 253–4 on Messenian officials in the preamble; W. Eck, *RE* Suppl. XIV (1974), col. 109 no. 333a on P. Cornelius Scipio; R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986), 252; A. Chaniotis, 'Emotional Community through Ritual. Initiates, Citizens, and Pilgrims as Emotional Communities in the Greek World', in A. Chaniotis (ed.), *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean: Agency, Emotion, Gender, Representation* (Stuttgart 2011), 263f.