[Argomento] Musical competitions of Alexander the Great at Menfi (Egypt), for the first time

[Fonte] Flavius Arrianus, *Alexandri Anabasis* III 1, 4

[Periodo] 350–300 BC (332 BC, November-December)

[Testo] **III 1.1.** Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ ἐπ' Αἰγύπτου, ἵναπερ τὸ πρῶτον ὡρμήθη, ἐστέλλετο, καὶ ἑβδόμῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀπὸ τῆς Γάζης ἐλαύνων ἦκεν εἰς Πηλούσιον τῆς Αἰγύπτου. ὁ δὲ ναυτικὸς στρατὸς παρέπλει αὐτῷ ἐκ Φοινίκης ὡς ἐπ' Αἴγυπτον· καὶ καταλαμβάνει τὰς ναῦς ἐν Πηλουσίᾳ ὁρμούσας. **2.** Μαζάκης δὲ ὁ Πέρσης, ὃς ἦν σατράπης Αἰγύπτου ἐκ Δαρείου καθεστηκώς, τήν τε ἐν Ἰσσῷ μάχην ὅπως συνέβη πεπυσμένος καὶ Δαρεῖον ὅτι αἰσχρᾷ φυγῇ ἔφυγεν, καὶ Φοινίκην τε καὶ Συρίαν καὶ τῆς Ἀραβίας τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐχόμενα, αὐτῷ τε οὐκ οὔσης δυνάμεως Περσικῆς, ἐδέχετο ταῖς τε πόλεσι φιλίως καὶ τῇ χώρᾳ Ἀλέξανδρον. **3.** ὁ δὲ εἰς μὲν Πηλούσιον φυλακὴν εἰσήγαγε, τοὺς δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν νεῶν ἀναπλεῖν κατὰ τὸν ποταμὸν κελεύσας ἔστε ἐπὶ Μέμφιν πόλιν αὐτὸς ἐφ' Ἡλιουπόλεως ᾔει, ἐν δεξιᾷ ἔχων τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν Νεῖλον, καὶ ὅσα καθ' ὁδὸν χωρία ἐνδιδόντων τῶν ἐνοικούντων κατασχὼν διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου ἀφίκετο ἐς Ἡλιούπολιν· **4.** ἐκεῖθεν δὲ διαβὰς τὸν πόρον ἦκεν ἐς Μέμφιν· **καὶ θύει ἐκεῖ τοῖς τε ἄλλοις θεοῖς καὶ τῷ Ἄπιδι καὶ ἀγῶνα ἐποίησε γυμνικόν τε καὶ μουσικόν· ἦκον δὲ αὐτῷ οἱ ἀμφὶ ταῦτα τεχνῖται ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος οἱ δοκιμώτατοι.** ἐκ δὲ Μέμφιος κατέπλει κατὰ τὸν ποταμὸν ὡς ἐπὶ θάλασσαν τούς τε ὑπασπιστὰς ἐπὶ τῶν νεῶν λαβὼν καὶ τοὺς τοξότας καὶ τοὺς Ἀγριᾶνας καὶ τῶν ἱππέων τὴν βασιλικὴν ἴλην τὴν τῶν ἑταίρων. **5.** ἐλθὼν δὲ ἐς Κάνωβον καὶ κατὰ τὴν λίμνην τὴν Μαρίαν περιπλεύσας ἀποβαίνει, ὅπου νῦν Ἀλεξάνδρεια πόλις ᾤκισται, Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐπώνυμος.

[Traduzione] **III 1.1.** Alexander now set out for Egypt, his original goal, and marching from Gaza arrived after six days at Pelusium in Egypt. His fleet coasted along with him from Phoenicia towards Egypt; **2.** and he found them already at anchor at Pelusium. Mazaces the Persian, who had been appointed satrap of Egypt by Darius, on learning how the battle of Issus had gone, of the shameful flight of Darius, and that Phoenicia, Syria, and the greater part of Arabia were in Alexander's hands, and being without any Persian force, received Alexander in a friendly way into the cities and the country. **3.** Alexander put a garrison into Pelusium, told the officers of his fleet to sail up the river as far as Memphis and went in person towards Heliopolis, with the river Nile on his right; he took over all the districts on his route through the surrender of the inhabitants, and traversed the desert to reach Heliopolis. **4.** Thence he crossed the river and **went to Memphis, where he sacrificed to the gods, especially Apis, and held athletic and musical games; the most famous performers in both athletics and music came to him there from Greece**. From Memphis he sailed downstream toward the sea, taking on board the hypaspists archers and Agrianians, and from the cavalry the royal squadron of the Companions. **5.** When he had reached Canobus and sailed round Lake Mareotis, he went ashore where the city of Alexandria, named after him, is now situated. [transl. by P. A. Brunt, 220-221]

[Commento] This is the first of the two celebrations organized by Alexander the Great in Memphis, the capital of Egypt, which also included musical contests. After the Battle of Issus (333 BC, 1 November), instead of pursuing Darius III, Alexander chose to turn southward, progressively securing control over Syria and Coelesyria (333-332 BC, winter: seizure of the treasury at Damascus), Phoenicia (332 BC, July: capture of Tyre after a seven-month siege), and Palestine (332 BC, October: fall of Gaza). So, he opened the way to Egypt, reaching Pelusium from Gaza in just seven days (332 BC, November). From there, he advanced directly to Memphis, accepting the voluntary surrender of all the cities he encountered along the way. Once in Memphis, Alexander performed sacrifices in honour of the gods—particularly the Egyptian Apis—and he held here both athletic and musical

contests too, enlisting the most renowned *technitai* (professional artists and performers) who had in the meantime arrived from Greece.

In his account of this episode, Arrian employs an enumerative structure, which clearly reflects the use of an annalistic source. The identical approach is evident in his account of the contests in Soli, i.e. Arrian, *Alex. anab.* II 5, 8 (see entry). The Arrian's text does not provide definitive evidence to affirm that the religious ceremony in honour of Apis and the other deities and the athletic and musical contests were simultaneously, i.e. components of a single event. Nevertheless, such an interpretation is highly plausible, especially since previously, in the sacrifices and competitions in Soli, this connection is explicitly affirmed by the account of Curtius Rufus, *Alex*. *Hist*. III 7, 2 (see entry).

The sacrifice held by Alexander the Great reflects certainly historical-cultural and religious-political motivations. Firstly, Apis, foremost among the deities invoked, held a significant position both in Egyptian religion and Greek tradition, where he was identified with Epaphus. The generic reference to "other gods" likely denotes the deities Osiris and Ptah, since in the Egyptian religious context Apis was understood as the "soul of Ptah and Osiris". So, Alexander embraced a divinity meaningful both to Egypt and to the Greek world, particularly to the Greek community that had long resided in Egypt (*Hellenomenphites*); and evidently the Arrian's annalistic source mentioned explicitly Apis alone, given the importance of this goddess. Secondly, Apis was a deity against whom the Persian kings had perpetrated multiple sacrilegious offenses occurring both in the long (Cambyses in 525/524 BC) and in recent past (Artaxerxes III Ochus in 343/342 BC). So, by performing sacrifices to Apis, Alexander chose a deity that ensured his acceptance as a pro-Egyptian ruler and, especially after his visit to the temple of Amon, as a new pharaoh of divine Egyptian descent too. See Linforth 1910, 84-89; Ehrenberg 1965, 408-413; Dascalakis 1987, 93-94, 98; Mastrocinque 1987, 305-308.

The competitions held in Memphis, unlike those in Soli, did not include neither a military parade nor the torch race during this event (but the parade will come back for the second celebration at Memphis). This change in the celebration's previous program seems to be due to the fact that, on this occasion, Alexander had no military victory to commemorate (both the Persian satrap Marzakes and all of Egypt had surrendered to him without resistance). Also, unlike in Soli, Alexander engaged "the most famous performers in both athletics and music", i.e. the τεχνῖται, skilled professionals who came from Greece. The term τεχνῖται can refer to various professionals, including athletes and artists such as actors, musicians, and others. Since shortly after at Tyre Alexander held a another similar, but more elaborate, celebration (Plutarch in *Alex. Vita* 29.1-6, see entry), scholars suggest that the "technitai" at Memphis were probably the same performers who will appear later at Tyre. See Bosworth 1980, 262-263; Sisti 2004[3], 463 Le Guen 2014, 252, 260-261.

Some evidence the scholars have tried to provide in order to clarify why, once in Memphis, Alexander was joined by professional performers from Greece, actually the most renowned musical (and athletic too?) performers of Greece. On one hand, Alexander likely planned this celebration in Egypt well in advance, dating back to when Egypt became his goal, i.e. after the Battle of Issus, when he decided not to chase Darius III and turned to Syria, Phoenicia and Palestina. Indeed, Arrian III 1.1. introduces this passage by noting that "Alexander now set out for Egypt, his original goal". And this detail helps explain why the artists were already present (ἦκον) when Alexander performed the ceremony for Apis/Epaphus, despite it occurring in mid-winter, a season generally unfavourable for travel by sea: Alexander must have presumably called the artistic (and athletic?) performers immediately after Issus. See Bloedow 1998, 131-136; Le Guen 2014, 265, 268.

On the other hand, as Alexander advanced toward Egypt, he conquered or annexed Syria, Cyprus, Sidon, Tyrus and Phoenicia, and Palestina, i.e. he secured progressively the eastern Mediterranean coastline and made maritime travel from Greece increasingly safe from the Persian or Greek enemy navy. Arrian once again provides confirmation of this. In *Alex. Anab.* III 5,2 (see entry) he refers to a period just a few months later the first agonistic event in Memphis and shortly before the second one, and informs that Alexander was reached exactly in Memphis by multiple foreign delegations, a contingent of 400 Greek mercenaries led by Meneta—sent by Antipater, who governed Greece and

Macedonia on Alexander's behalf—and 500 cavalrymen commanded by Asclepiodorus from Thrace. See Bloedow 1998, 136-141.

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[Parole chiave] Alexander the Great, musical competitions, athletic competitions, *technitai*, professional artists, professional performers, Apis, Epaphus.

[Saulo Delle Donne]