

[Topic] Musical competitions of Alexander the Great on the river Hydaspes (Jhelum, Pakistan)

[Source] Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* XIII 68, 595d-596b

[Period] 350–300 BC (326 BC, May/October)

[Text] (68) μετὰ δὲ τὴν Πυθιονίκης τελευτὴν ὁ Ἄρπαλος Γλυκέραν μετεπέμψατο καὶ ταύτην ἑταίραν, ὡς ὁ Θεόπομπος ἱστορεῖ (*FGrHist* 115 F 254b), φάσκων ἀπειρηκέναι τὸν Ἄρπαλον μὴ στεφανοῦν ἑαυτὸν, εἰ μὴ τις στεφανώσῃε καὶ τὴν πόρνην.

ἔστησέν τε εἰκόνα χαλκῆν τῆς Γλυκέρας ἐν Ῥωσσῶ τῆς Συρίας, οὗπερ καὶ σὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἀνατιθέναι μέλλει. παρέδωκέν τε αὐτῇ κατοικεῖν ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις τοῖς ἐν Ταρσῶ καὶ ὄρᾳ ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ προσκυνουμένην καὶ βασιλίσσαν προσαγορευομένην καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις δωρεαῖς τιμωμένην, αἷς πρέπον ἦν τὴν σὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν σοὶ συνοικοῦσαν.

συνεπιμαρτυρεῖ δὲ τούτοις καὶ ὁ τὸν Ἀγῆνα τὸ σατυρικὸν δραμάτιον γεγραφώς, ὅπερ ἐδίδαξεν Διονυσίων ὄντων ἐπὶ τοῦ Ὑδάσπου [τοῦ] ποταμοῦ, εἴτε Πύθων ἦν ὁ Καταναῖος ἢ ὁ Βυζάντιος ἢ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς. ἐδιδάχθη δὲ τὸ δράμα ἤδη φυγόντος τοῦ Ἀρπάλου ἐπὶ θάλατταν καὶ ἀποστάντος. καὶ τῆς μὲν Πυθιονίκης ὡς τεθνηκυίας μέμνηται, τῆς δὲ Γλυκέρας ὡς οὔσης παρ' αὐτῷ καὶ τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις αἰτίας γινομένης τοῦ δωρεᾶς λαμβάνειν παρὰ Ἀρπάλου, λέγων ὧδε (*TrGF* 91 F 1).

ἔστιν δ' ὅπου μὲν ὁ κάλαμος πέφυχ' ὅδε
φέτωμ' ἄορνον. οὐξ ἀριστερᾶς δ' ὅδε
πόρνης ὁ κλεινὸς ναός, ὃν δὴ Παλλίδης
τεύξας κατέγνω διὰ τὸ πρᾶγμ' αὐτοῦ φυγῆν.

5 ἐνταῦθα δὴ τῶν βαρβάρων τινὲς μάγοι
ὀρῶντες αὐτὸν παγκάκως διακείμενον
ἔπεισαν ὡς ἄξουσι τὴν ψυχὴν ἄνω
τὴν Πυθιονίκης.

Παλλίδην δ' ἐνταῦθα ἐκάλεσε τὸν Ἄρπαλον. ἐν <δὲ> τοῖς ἐξῆς τῷ κυρίῳ καλέσας αὐτὸν φησιν·
ἐκμαθεῖν δέ σου ποθῶ

μακρὰν ἀποικῶν κείθεν, Ἀτθίδα χθόνα
10 τίνες τύχαι καλοῦσιν ἢ πράττουσι τί.
[A] ὅτε μὲν ἔφασκον δοῦλον ἐκτῆσθαι βίον,
ἱκανὸν ἐδείπνουν· νῦν δὲ τὸν χέδροπα μόνον
καὶ τὸν μάραθον ἔσθουσι, πυροὺς δ' οὐ μάλα.

[B] καὶ μὴν ἀκούω μυριάδας τὸν Ἄρπαλον
15 αὐτοῖσι τῶν Ἀγῆνος οὐκ ἐλάσσονα
σίτου διαπέμψαι καὶ πολίτην γεγονέναι.

[A] Γλυκέρας ὁ σῖτος οὗτος ἦν· ἔσται δ' ἴσως
αὐτοῖσιν ὀλέθρου κοῦχ ἑταίρας ἀρραβῶν.

[Translation] [68] After Pythionice died, Harpalus sent for Glycera, who was also a courtesan, according to Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 254b), who claims that Harpalus refused to allow anyone to put a garland on his own head unless they also garlanded his whore.

In addition, he set up a bronze statue of Glycera in Syrian Rhossus, where he intends to set up statues of you and himself as well. He also gave her permission to live in the royal palace in Tarsus, and he watches as she is bowed down to by the local people, addressed as "Queen," and granted the other honors that properly belong to your mother and the woman who lives with you.

Additional evidence in regard to these matters is supplied by the author of the miniature satyr play **Agen** (whether this was Python of Catana or Byzantium, or the king himself), who staged it during the festival of Dionysus celebrated on the banks of the Hydaspes River. The play was

put on after Harpalus had already run away to the coast and revolted. The author refers to Pythionice as dead, and to Glycera as being with Harpalus and as responsible for the Athenians receiving gifts from him, putting it as follows (Python *TrGF* 91 F 1, 1-8):

(A.) Where this reed grows there's a
birdless [corrupt]. This structure on the left, on the other hand,
is the famous temple of the whore, which Pallides
built-and then condemned himself to exile for what he'd done.
When some of the barbarian magi here
saw the terrible state he was in,
they convinced him they could summon up the soul
of Pythionice.

He called Harpalus "Pallides" in this passage. But in what follows immediately after this, he refers to him by his proper name and says (Python *TrGF* 91 F 1, 8-18):

(A.) Since I'm living a long way from there,
I'm eager to learn from you what the situation
† they call † Attica, and how they're doing.

(B.) When they claimed they'd been reduced to slavery,
they had enough for dinner. But now all they eat
is beans and fennel, and no wheat at all.

(A.) Indeed, I hear that Harpalus sent
them 10s of 1000s of measures of grain – at least
as much as Agen did – and became a citizen.

(B.) This grain belonged to Glycera; maybe it'll be
earnest money for their deaths, not the courtesan's! [transl. D. Olson]

[Comment] The focus of this source is Python of Catania or Byzantium, together with his satyr drama entitled *Aghén* (i.e., *The commander*). Of this drama, the source preserves a textual excerpt of eighteen lines and supplies a series of additional details: (1) that it was a satyr drama, but of limited extent (cf. the diminutive δραμάτιον), or at any rate not a complete satyr play [Vahtikari 2014, 107], although elsewhere the same Athenaeus (*The Learned Banqueters* II 35, 50f) refers to it simply as a σατυρικὸν δράμα; (2) that it concerned Harpalus, along with his beloved courtesan Pythionice, already deceased, and his new courtesan Glycera; (3) that within the play Harpalus was called “Pallides,” an epithet to be understood either as “son of Pallas,” that is, of Athena—since he had been granted Athenian citizenship [Sutton 1980a, 96]—or as “of the race of the Phallus,” in reference to his sexual licentiousness [Snell 1964, 104 and n. 9; Günther 1999, 599]; (4) that it was performed after Harpalus had already fled by sea and defected; and (5) that it was staged by Alexander’s will “during the festival of Dionysus celebrated on the banks of the Hydaspes River” (Διονυσίων ὄντων ἐπὶ τοῦ Ὑδάσπου [τοῦ] ποταμοῦ). The excerpt itself provides three further details, which complete the picture: (1) that the scene is set near “the famous temple of the whore” (πόρνης ὁ κλεινὸς ναός), constructed by Harpalus and the cause of his exile, a temple that appears to have been dedicated to Pythionice; (2) that Harpalus had generously supplied the city of Athens with abundant grain; and (3) that, in recognition of these benefactions, Athens granted him citizenship.

More specifically, Harpalus had been a friend and treasurer of Alexander since 331 BC at Tyre. From 330 BC he served at Ecbatana as treasurer of both the Macedonian royal treasure and the treasure transferred there from Persepolis. From about 329 BC he also controlled the Babylonian treasury and was appointed satrap of the homonymous satrapy. In Alexander’s absence he administered these resources with conspicuous prodigality and a notoriously dissolute lifestyle, attested by numerous anecdotes, including those alluded to in the satyr drama: Harpalus summoned the Athenian courtesan Pythionice to Babylon, installed her in the royal palace, and showered her with gifts; after her death he dedicated to her a temple at Babylon, under the name Aphrodite Pythionice, and erected an beautiful tomb in Attica along the Sacred Way to Eleusis; he later summoned another Athenian

courtesan, Glycera, ordered that she be received as a queen on her arrival at the royal palace in Tarsus, and set up a statue in her honour at the city Rhossus in Syria.

When, however, Alexander the Great returned from India, Harpalus realized that he would be caught up in the punishment of disloyal satraps and generals being carried out by Alexander himself already after his exit from the Gedrosian desert and during his stay in Carmania, that is, in the winter of 325/4 BC. For this reason, in the spring of 324 BC he fled to Cilicia and from there sailed to Athens, taking with him 6,000 mercenaries and 5,000 talents from the Babylonian treasury. He expected a favourable reception at Athens, both because of the resources he carried and because he had earlier been granted Athenian citizenship in recognition of his substantial grain donations to the city (Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* XIII 68, 596b = Python of Catana or Byzantium, TrGF 91 F 1, 16 = the passage here considered). He was, however, initially refused entry and withdrew with his fleet to Cape Taenarum; later, he was admitted, but only as private and after negotiations and bribes, among whose recipients was Demosthenes, and after a donation of 700 talents. However, once in Athens, Harpalus was arrested and his money confiscated; nevertheless, he escaped to Megara and from there sailed to Crete, where he was killed either by one of his officers, Tibron, or by a Macedonian named Pausanias. In this passage, Athenaeus does not state explicitly that Python's work was performed in the context of a musical competition, but two considerations support this interpretation. First, Athenaeus reports a satyr drama performed during the *Dionysia* (ἐδίδαξεν Διονυσίων ὄντων), and these festivals, especially when modelled on the Athenian model, included theatrical competitions; indeed, Alexander organized other *Dionysia* in this manner at Tyre in 331 BC (Plutarch, *Alex.* 29.1–6; see specific entry). Second, Athenaeus consistently describes Python's work as a satyr drama (Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* XIII 50, 586d; II 35, 50f; cf. passage under discussion too), and the *Dionysia* customarily concluded, after the tragedies, with the performance of such dramas. The *Agén* may therefore have formed part of a larger festival that included artistic and literary contests [Vahtikari 2014, 107].

Concerning the dating of this event, Athenaeus' testimony places it in the spring of 324 BC. On the one hand, it was in the spring of that year that Harpalus' departure—as already noted—may be considered a “flight” and “defection” from Alexander, undertaken to avoid the expected punishment. On the other hand, Pythonice probably died in 326/325 BC, since Theopompus, when referring to the monument for this same courtesan commissioned by Harpalus, states that it had “long been completed” (μνημα πολὺν ἤδε χρόνον ἐπιτετελεσμένον), evidently in relation to the moment when he wrote to Alexander denouncing Harpalus while Harpalus himself was still in Babylon (Theopompus *FGrHist* 115 F 253 = Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* XIII 67, 595a–c), i.e. in relation to the spring, perhaps April, of 324 BC [Goukowski 1981, 72–73, 74–75].

Concerning the location of the *Dionysia*, Athenaeus explicitly mentions ‘on the banks of the Hydaspes River’ (ἐπὶ τοῦ Ὑδάσπου [τοῦ] ποταμοῦ). This information, however, creates a chronological problem. Alexander was at the Hydaspes in May 326 BC for the decisive battle against Porus, rajah of the Pauravas (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* V 9.4; 11.1; 19.4; 20.1), and remained in the region from June until late autumn, since the retreat from India began in November 326 BC (Arrian, *Anab.* V.29.5; VI.1.1). He was therefore at the Hydaspes two years before 324 BC, i.e. before the year of Harpalus' flight and defection.

Faced with this chronological discrepancy, scholars have taken widely divergent views. It is impossible to consider them all, and some are clearly untenable [for a summary and references to the numerous studies, see: Snell 1964, 112–119; Sutton 1980b, 77–79; Guenther 1999, 594–595; Heckel 2006, s.v. “Harpalus” 230 and notes 138–139, and 240 s.v. “Python (1)”]; Cipolla 2000, 137–139, 140–141; Vahtikari 2014, 106 n. 129; Le Guen 2014, 261–263].

On the one hand, those who defend the 326 BC dating and the Hydaspes location aim to clarify the reference to Harpalus' flight mentioned by Athenaeus and so the πρᾶγμα' αὐτοῦ φυγὴν in line 4 of Python's *Agén* too. Among the main proposals, Snell argues that it's Athenaeus who wrongly connects the flight cited in line 4 of Python to Harpalus' flight to Athens in 324 BC; rather, the flight should be understood within the context of the drama, as the “flight” of Harpalus, in love, to the temple in

Babylon of his beloved, right deceased, Pythionice [Snell 1964, 113–117]. Cipolla, by contrast, identifies the “flight” from Babylon and Harpalus’ defection with the flight he undertook in 326 BC, when he welcomed the new courtesan Glycera in Tarsus rather than Babylon, both to enjoy the relationship more freely and to avoid the scandal caused by the temple he had built for Aphrodite Pythionice [Cipolla 2000, 144–146, 149–151].

On the other hand, those who defend the 324 BC dating must clarify the location on the Hydaspes River. Among the main proposals, Beloch [Beloch 1927, 434–436] identifies the Hydaspes not with the better-known tributary of the Indus, but with the homonymous river mentioned by Virgil (*Georgics* 4.211, with Servius’ scholia), which flows in Media. He therefore suggests that Python’s *Aghén* was performed in the capital of Media, Ecbatana, when—in late autumn 324 BC—Alexander held solemn musical and gymnastic contests there (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.14,1 e 10: see specific issue), during which his beloved Hephaestion died. Droysen [Droysen 1833 = 1877 = 2014, 219–221] proposed emending ἐπὶ τοῦ Ὑδάσπου ποταμοῦ to ἐπὶ τοῦ Χοάσπου ποταμοῦ, seeing a likely scribal error. Since the Choaspes flows through the satrapy of Susiana, he suggested that the reference was to the celebrations Alexander held at Susa in spring 324 BC, including the famous weddings of ninety-two of his *Companions* and of Alexander himself. Finally, Goukowsky – thanks to the historical sources and notes already provided by Kiessling [Kiessling 1914, coll.37-39] – identifies this river with a homonymous Hydaspes in southern Iran (possibly the modern Halīl Rūd), near the western border of ancient Carmania, specifically not far from ancient Salmous. This is where Alexander established his winter quarters in 325/324 BC (December–January) and also the area where, after his retreat from India and the crossing of the Gedrosian and Carmanian deserts, he was joined both by Clearchus, who had led the fleet (Arrian, *Indica* 32–33), and by Craterus, who had commanded the remainder of the army that had not followed Alexander into Gedrosia and Carmania (Arrian, *The Anabasis of Alexander* 6.17.3; 6.27.3). By this identification thus Goukowsky places the episode close to Harpalus’ flight in spring 324 BC and provides a context in which Alexander had both the reason (the reunion of the entire expedition) and the resources (with Craterus’ troops, the actors accompanying the army could also arrive and perform the *Aghén*) to organize the *Dionysia* celebrations, naturally the ones held in winter [Goukowsky 1981, 68-74].

Today the more probable dating is 324 BC. Here, 326 BC is adopted for methodological and substantive reasons. Methodologically, it is important to keep separate what comes from Athenaeus and what comes from Python of Catania. The association of the flight and defection with Harpalus’ flight to Athens in 324 BC is not in Python, but in Athenaeus; and He refers to the flight of 324 BC because it was more famous and attested in the sources he used about the two courtesans, Pythionice and Glycera, particularly Theopompus (*FGrHist* 115 F 254b = the passage here considered; *FGrHist* 115 F 253 = Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 67, 595b–c). From a substantive point of view, Alexander was on the Hydaspes several times between May and October 326 BC (Arrian, *The Anabasis of Alexander* 5.8,3–4; 5.9,1ff.; 5.11,1ff.; 5.19,4ff.; 5.19,5; 6.1,1; 6.4, 2 and 4; 6.3,1–2). On at least two occasions he also held contests. One was gymnastic and equestrian (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 5.20.1: May 326 BC, after the victory over Rajah Porus, held within sacrificial and victory rites). Another combined athletic and musical element (Arrian, *Indica* 18.11–12, see specific issue: early November 326 BC, when the fleet was ready for navigation to begin the retreat from India, held within sacrifices to several gods). Thus, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that these *Dionysia* and the associated performance of the *Aghén*, could have taken place in 326 BC, nor to argue that the period from May to October of that year did not offer a suitable occasion for such events, including the *Dionysia*.

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[Saulo Delle Donne]

