

[Topic] Musical competitions of Alexander the Great in Tyre (Phoenicia)

[Source] Flavius Arrianus, *Alexandri Anabasis* III 6, 1

[Period] 350–300 BC (331 BC, late spring, end of April/beginning of May)

[Text] **III 6. 1.** Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ ἅμα τῷ ἤρι ὑποφαίνοντι ἐκ Μέμφιος ἦει ἐπὶ Φοινίκης· καὶ ἐγεφυρώθη αὐτῷ ὃ τε κατὰ Μέμφιν πόρος τοῦ Νείλου καὶ αἱ διώρυχες αὐτοῦ πᾶσαι. ὡς δὲ ἀφίκετο ἐς Τύρον, καταλαμβάνει ἐνταῦθα ἦκον αὐτῷ ἤδη καὶ τὸ ναυτικόν. ἐν Τύρῳ δὲ αὐθις θύει τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ καὶ ἀγῶνα ποιεῖ γυμνικόν τε καὶ μουσικόν. **2.** ἐνταῦθα ἀφικνεῖται παρ' αὐτὸν ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν ἡ Πάραλος πρέσβεις ἄγουσα Διόφαντον καὶ Ἀχιλλέα· ξυνεπρέσβευον δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶ οἱ Πάραλοι ξύμπαντες. καὶ οὗτοι τῶν τε ἄλλων ἔτυχον ὧν ἕνεκα ἐστάλησαν καὶ τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους ἀφῆκεν Ἀθηναῖοις ὅσοι ἐπὶ Γρανίκῳ Ἀθηναίων ἐάλωσαν. **3.** τὰ δὲ ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ ὅτι αὐτῷ νενεωτερίσθαι ἀπήγγελλο, Ἀμφοτερὸν πέμπει βοηθεῖν Πελοποννησίων ὅσοι ἔς τε τὸν Περσικὸν πόλεμον βέβαιοι ἦσαν καὶ Λακεδαιμονίων οὐ κατήκουον. Φοίνιξι δὲ καὶ Κυπρίοις προσετάχθη ἑκατὸν ναῦς ἄλλας πρὸς αἷς ἔχοντα Ἀμφοτερὸν ἔπεμπε στέλλειν ἐπὶ Πελοποννήσου.

[Translation] **III 6. 1.** When spring began to show itself, Alexander started from Memphis for Phoenicia; bridges were made for him to cross over the river Nile at Memphis and over all its canals. When he reached Tyre, he found his fleet had already arrived there. **At Tyre he sacrificed a second time to Heracles** (cf. Arrian, *Alex. Anab.* II 24, 6) **and held athletic and musical games.** There the *Paralus* from Athens reached him, bringing Diophantus and Achilles as envoys; the entire crew of the *Paralus* were associated with them in the embassy. They achieved all the objects of their mission; in particular Alexander gave up to the Athenians all the Athenians captured at the Granicus (cf. Arrian, *Alex. Anab.* I 29, 5). On learning that there was a movement of revolt against him in the Peloponnese, he sent Amphoterus to help the Peloponnesians who were loyal in regard to the Persian war and were not giving ear to the Lacedaemonians. Orders were also given to the Phoenicians and Cyprians to send to the Peloponnese a hundred ships in addition to those he was despatching under command of Amphoterus. [transl. P. A. Brunt]

[Comment] In 331 BC, at the beginning of spring, Arrian places Alexander's departure from Memphis to Phoenicia, but not his arrival in Phoenicia itself nor his arrival in the city of Tyre specifically. Consequently, the gymnastic and musical contests held in Tyre in honour of Heracles in 331 BC, when Alexander was already in the city, cannot be placed at the beginning of spring.

These contests must be placed between late April and early May, in any case by the end of June 331 BC. The *terminus post quem* is evidenced by the long journey that Alexander had to cover from Memphis to Tyre, as well as by the fact that (see Curtius Rufus, *Histories of Alexander* IV 8, 9–16) Alexander left for Phoenicia because of the rebellions in the land of Samaria, towards which he headed from Memphis *quanta maxima celeritate potuit* (see Curtius Rufus IV 8, 10). The *terminus ante quem* is evidenced by the fact that, coming from Tyre, Alexander had already crossed the Tigris River in September 331 BC (see Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* III 7, 6), after stopping briefly in Thapsacus in July (Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* III 7, 1); and this was respectively two and one months after his stay in Tyre in the 331 BC, but six months after the departure from Memphis to Phoenicia.

In 331 BC, Alexander offers “a second time” (αὐθις) sacrifices in Tyre in honor of Heracles. Indeed, he already sacrificed the previous year (i.e. after capturing Tyre) in honor of Heracles, who was identified with the Phoenician god Melqart (Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* II 24, 6). And now, as returned to Tyre in 331 BC, he celebrates his victory in Samaria by dedicating a golden crater and thirty paterae again to Heracles/Melqart (Curtius Rufus, *Alex. Hist.* IV 8, 16: *his compositis, Herculi Tyrio ex auro crateram cum XXX pateris dicavit*).

In 331 BC in Tyre, Alexander held ‘a second time’ gymnastic contests too. These contests had already been organized the previous year, always after the capture of the city: they took place in the sacred

area of the temple of Heracles and included a torch race (Arrian, *Anab. Alex.* II 24, 6). Evidence for these contests in 332 BC also comes from an inscription found at Amphipolis in Macedonia, dating to shortly after 323 B.C.: the inscription records the victories of Antigonus Callas, one of Alexander's companions, in the arm-running race and the stadium (Inscr. stor. 113 Moretti = *CEG* 879 Hansen). Therefore, similarly sport competitions were probably held again in Tyre in 331 B.C., with members of Alexander's army taking part once more.

Lastly, in Tyre in 331 BC Alexander also held musical contests and that's for the first time in this city. These contests are often identified with the dithyrambic and tragic contests mentioned by Plutarch, *Alex.* 29.1–6 (see specific entry). However, Plutarch's account suggests that those contests were a different event from these discussed here. In fact, unlike Plutarch's account, Arrian makes it clear that: (1) these musical contests were held together with gymnastic contests as a thanksgiving for the recent victory in Samaria and so were planned immediately after the campaign ended; (2) they took place within the sacrifice to Heracles/Melqart, the god of Tyre and also a war god, and, together with the gymnastic contests, formed a kind of victory celebration (τὰ νικητήρια, sc. ιερά); (3) they were organized quickly, without long preparation, and probably involved – similarly as the gymnastic ones of 331 AD – soldiers, companions, and other people already present with Alexander in Tyre.

[Essential bibliography] EDITIONS AND COMMENTS: P. A. BRUNT, *Arrian, Anabasis of Alexander. Books I-IV*, Cambridge, Mass. 1976, 236-239 (translation); J.E. ATKINSON, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni. Books 3 and 4*, Amsterdam 1980, *comm. ad loc.*; A. B. BOSWORTH, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander. Vol. I: Commentary on Books I-III*, Oxford 1980 (rist. 1998), 278-279 (comment); F. SISTI, *Arriano, Anabasi di Alessandro. Vol. I: Libri I-III*, Milano 2004³ (2001¹), 214-215 (text), 476-477 (comment); J.E. ATKINSON, Q. Curzio Rufo, *Storie di Alessandro Magno*, vol. I (Libri III-V), traduzione di V. Antelami, Milano 2003³ (1998¹), 136-139 (text), 367-369 (comment); *Iscrizioni storiche ellenistiche*, testo critico, traduzione e commento a cura di L. MORETTI, vol. II: *Grecia centrale e settentrionale*, Firenze 1975, 105-107 (iscr. nr. 113); *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*, saeculi IV a.Chr. n., edidit P. A. Hansen, Berolini et Novi Eboraci 1989, p. 276 (iscr. nr. 879, with edition and comment).

STUDIES: See the studies mentioned about Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 29, 1-6 (see the specific entry). The agones reported by Arrian here have always been studied together with those described by Plutarch, as they are usually regarded to coincide each other. That contrasts with the interpretation proposed here. At this regard, see S. DELLE DONNE, "Alessandro Magno e gli splendidi agoni a Tiro", in *Secoli di mezzo. La poesia e la musica greca del IV secolo a.C.* Atti del Convegno conclusivo del progetto PRIN 2022 (10-12 novembre 2025, Museo Universitario, Chieti), Urbino 2026, forthcoming.

[Keywords] Alexander the Great, Samaria, Tyre, Gymnastic competitions, Musical competitions, Herakles, Melqart

[Saulo Delle Donne]



UNIVERSITÀ
DEL SALENTO
L'Ateneo tra i due mari