

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

[Source] Plutarchus, *De Alex. virt. aut fort. or.* II, 2, 334e

[Period] 350–300 BC (331 BC, late spring, May/June)

[Text] 2. Ἀλλ' Ἀλέξανδρος εἰδὼς τίνων δεῖ θεατὴν εἶναι καὶ ἀκροατὴν καὶ τίνων ἀγωνιστὴν καὶ αὐτουργόν, ἦσκει μὲν ἀεὶ διὰ τῶν ὄπλων δεινὸς εἶναι καὶ κατὰ τὸν Αἰσχύλον «βριθὺς ὀπλιτοπάλας, δάιος ἀντιπάλοις» (Eschilo fr. 353a Radt). ταύτην τέχνην ἔχων προγονικὴν ἀπ' Αἰακιδῶν, ἀφ' Ἡρακλέους (Plut. *Alex. Vit.* 2), ταῖς δ' ἄλλαις τέχναις τὸ τιμᾶν ἄνευ τοῦ ζηλοῦν ἀπεδίδου κατὰ τὸ ἔνδοξον αὐτῶν καὶ χαρίεν, τῷ τέρπειν δ' οὐκ ἦν εὐάλωτος εἰς τὸ μιμεῖσθαι. **γεγόνασι δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν τραγωδοὶ μὲν οἱ περὶ Θετταλὸν καὶ Ἀθηνόδωρον, ὧν ἀνταγωνιζομένων ἀλλήλοις, ἐχορήγουν μὲν οἱ Κύπριοι βασιλεῖς ἔκρινον δ' οἱ δοκιμώτατοι τῶν στρατηγῶν.** ἐπεὶ δ' ἐνίκησεν Ἀθηνόδωρος, «ἐβουλόμην ἄν' ἔφη μᾶλλον ἀπολωλεκέναί με μέρος τῆς βασιλείας ἢ Θετταλὸν ἐπιδεῖν ἠττημένον.» ἀλλ' οὐτ' ἐνέτυχε τοῖς κριταῖς οὔτε τὴν κρίσιν ἐμέμψατο, πάντων οἰόμενος δεῖν περιεῖναι, τοῦ δικαίου δ' ἠτᾶσθαι. κωμῶδοι δ' ἦσαν **οἱ περὶ Λύκωνα τὸν Σκαρφέα.** τούτῳ δ' εἷς τινα κωμῳδίαν ἐμβαλόντι στίχον αἰτητικὸν γελάσας ἔδωκε δέκα τάλαντα.

[Translation] 2. But Alexander, knowing well in what matters he should be merely a spectator and listener, and in what he should play the chief role, trained himself always to be formidable in arms, and, in the words of Aeschylus, 'Sturdy contender in arms, baleful to all that oppose' (Aesch. fr. 353a Radt). This art he inherited from his ancestors, the Aeacidae, and from Heracles (Plut. *Alex. Vit.* 2, 665 b); but upon the other arts he freely bestowed honour without jealousy according to their worth and artistic excellence; but he was not so easily carried away by the pleasure they give him as to try to imitate them. **The tragic actors of his time were the group that centred about Thettalus and Athenodorus. At the contest of these two, the kings of Cyprus defrayed the expenses of the performance and Alexander's most celebrated generals served as judges.** When Athenodorus won, 'I would rather,' said Alexander, 'have lost half my kingdom **than see Thettalus defeated.**' However, he did not intercede with the judges nor find fault with the judgement, since he felt that, while he must be superior to all men, yet he must submit to Justice. **The comic actors of his time were the group that centred about Lycon of Scarpheia.** When Lycon inserted in one of his comedies a begging verse, Alexander laughed and gave him ten talents. [transl. by F. C. Babbitt]

[Comment] This testimony clearly pertains to the musical competitions held by Alexander the Great at Tyre in May–June 331 BC, which are also described by Plut. *Alex. vita* 29.1–6 (see the specific entry). Indeed, the testimony reports a series of events associated with these musical competitions: the presence of the actors Thessalus, Athenodoros, and Lycon; the indication that Thessalus was Alexander's favorite; the anecdote of Alexander's refusal to intervene on Thessalus' behalf; the account of Lycon receiving ten talents from Alexander; and the mention of choregia, with the indication that the choregoi were the kings of Cyprus. However, this testimony reveals explicitly a number of additional details compared to the previous one: that Thessalus and Athenodoros performed as tragic actors, while Lycon as a comic actor; that each of the three actors was in Tyre not alone but with his own troupe; that the judging responsibilities in the competition were assigned to the most renowned generals of Alexander's army; that, for this reason, the audience must have consisted of the rest of the army. These data, on the one hand, weakens Le Guen's hypothesis that the choruses in these competitions were made up of members of Alexander's army, as the three actors were in Tyre with their entire troupes [Le Guen 2014, 266-267]. On the other hand, it supports Vahtikari's theory, which argues that the musical competitions in Tyre were clearly held in a theatre [Vahtikari 2014, 103-104], since, once again, the actors arrived in Tyre accompanied by their full teams of performers and assistants.

[Essential Bibliography] EDITIONS AND COMMENTARIES: *Plutarchi Moralia*, vol. II, recensuerunt et emendaverunt W. Nachstädt, W. Sieveking, J. B. Titchener, Leipzig 1935² (rist. 1971), 93-120, esp. 95-96; Plutarco, *La virtù o la fortuna di Alessandro Magno*, trad. it. e note a cura di L. CECCHET, in Plutarco, *Tutti i moralia*, testo greco a fronte, coordinamento di E. LELLI e G. PISANI, Milano 2017, 610-643 (Greek text) and 2621-2626 (introductions and notes), esp. 624-625 (Greek text) e 2625 (notes). STUDIES: B. LE GUEN, “Theatre, Religion and Politics at Alexander’s Travelling Royal Court”, in *Great Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.*, ed. by E. CSAPO, H. RUPPRECHT GOETTE, J. R. GREEN, P. WILSON, Berlin – Boston 2014, 249-274; V. VAHTIKARI, *Tragedy performances outside Athens in the late Fifth and the Fourth Centuries BC*, Helsinki 2014.

[Keywords] Alexander the Great, choregi, actors, theatre companies, tragedies, Athenodorus, Thessalus, comedies, Lycon of Scarpheia, theater, competition judges, strategoi of Alexander the Great

[Saulo Delle Donne]