



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

[Source] Plutarchus, *Alexandri vita* 29, 1-6

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

[Text] 1. Εἰς δὲ Φοινίκην ἐπανελθὼν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου, θυσίας τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ πομπὰς ἐπετέλει καὶ χορῶν [ἐγ]κυκλίων καὶ τραγικῶν ἀγῶνας, οὐ μόνον ταῖς παρασκευαῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς ἀμίλλαις λαμπροὺς γενομένους. 2. ἐχορήγουν γὰρ οἱ βασιλεῖς τῶν Κυπρίων, ὡσπερ Ἀθήνησιν οἱ κληρούμενοι κατὰ φυλάς, καὶ ἠγωνίζοντο θαυμαστῇ φιλοτιμίᾳ πρὸς ἀλλήλους. 3. μάλιστα δὲ Νικοκρέων ὁ Σαλαμίνιος καὶ Πασικράτης ὁ Σόλιος διεφιλονίκησαν. οὗτοι γὰρ ἔλαχον τοῖς ἐνδοξοτάτοις ὑποκριταῖς χορηγεῖν, Πασικράτης μὲν Ἀθηνοδώρῳ, Νικοκρέων δὲ Θεσσαλῷ, περὶ ὃν ἐσπουδάκει καὶ αὐτὸς Ἀλέξανδρος. οὐ μὴν διέφηνε τὴν σπουδὴν πρότερον ἢ ταῖς ψήφοις ἀναγορευθῆναι νικῶντα τὸν Ἀθηνοδώρον. 4. τότε δ' ὡς ἔοικεν ἀπιὼν ἔφη τοὺς μὲν κριτὰς ἐπαινεῖν, αὐτὸς μέντοι μέρος ἂν ἠδέως προέσθαι τῆς βασιλείας ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ Θεσσαλὸν ἰδεῖν νενικημένον. 5. ἐπεὶ δ' Ἀθηνοδώρος ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ζημιωθεὶς, ὅτι πρὸς τὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν Διονυσίων οὐκ ἀπήνησεν, ἤξιον γράψαι περὶ αὐτοῦ τὸν βασιλέα, τοῦτο μὲν οὐκ ἐποίησε, τὴν δὲ ζημίαν ἀπέστειλε παρ' ἑαυτοῦ. 6. Λύκωνος δὲ τοῦ Σκαρφέως εὐημεροῦντος ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ καὶ στίχον εἰς τὴν κωμωδίαν ἐμβαλόντος αἴτησιν περιέχοντα δέκα ταλάντων, γέλασας ἔδωκε.

[Translation] 1 When he had returned from Egypt into Phoenicia, he honoured the gods with sacrifices and solemn processions, and **held contests of dithyrambic choruses and tragedies which were made brilliant, not only by their furnishings, but also by the competitors who exhibited them.** 2. For the kings of Cyprus were the choregi, or exhibitors, just like, at Athens, those chosen by lot from the tribes, **and they competed against each other with amazing ambition.** 3. Most eager of all was the contention between Nicocreon of Salamis and Pasicrates of Soli. For the lot assigned to these exhibitors the most celebrated actors, to Pasicrates Athenodorus, and to Nicocreon Thessalus, in whose success Alexander himself was interested. 4. He did not reveal this interest, however, until, by the votes of the judges, Athenodorus had been proclaimed victor. But then, as it would appear, on leaving the theatre, he said that he approved the decision of the judges, but would gladly have given up a part of his kingdom rather than to have seen Thessalus vanquished. 5. And yet, when Athenodorus, who had been fined by the Athenians for not keeping his engagement in the dramatic contest of their Dionysiac festival, asked the king to write a letter to them in his behalf, though he would not do this, he sent them the amount of the fine from his own purse. 6. Furthermore, when Lycon of Scarpheia, who was acting successfully before Alexander, inserted into the comedy a verse containing a request for ten talents, Alexander laughed and gave them to him. [transl. B. Perrin]

[Comment] These contests took place in Tyre in 331 BC, following Alexander's return from Memphis in Phoenicia [Oliva 1993, 94-95; Tritle 2009, 126-127; Le Guen 2014, 252; Vahtikari 2014, 103-105]. During this time, the musical contests mentioned by Arrian in *III 6.1* also took place (see the specific entry). However, it appears that the two events were not the same. The musical contests here in question occurred after Alexander's return to Tyre from Egypt (Εἰς δὲ Φοινίκην ἐπανελθὼν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου “when Alexander has already returned”), i.e. during his stay in the capital of Phoenicia, which likely lasted at least two months (see Arrian *III 6, 1* entry, for the relevant chronology). In contrast, the earlier contests were held when Alexander first returned to Tyre and immediately after the military campaign in Samaria. The contests here in question were exclusively musical competitions, held after ceremonies dedicated to multiple deities, including processions. In contrast, the earlier contests were held alongside gymnastic games, were exclusively in honor of Heracles/Melqart, and were specifically held to give thanks for the victory in Samaria. Besides, Plutarch describes here the musical competitions as being dedicated to Dionysus and based on the model of the Great Dionysia in Athens. There were processions (probably before the contests),

cyclical choruses, i.e. dithyramb performances. There were also choregoi and as choregoi were prominent figures like the kings of Cyprus, Nicocreon of Salamis [Heckel 2006, 179-180] and Pasicrates of Soli [Heckel 2006, 193]. Also took part famous tragedy actors, such as Thessalus, Alexander's favourite, and Athenodorus, as well as well-known comedy actors like Lycon of Scarfea. Unlike the earlier contests, these musical competitions were clearly organized in advance and aimed at being prestigious events, which they actually were, thanks to their organization (ταῖς παρασκευαῖς), the spirit of competition (ταῖς ἀμίλλαις), and the impressive emulation among the artists (θαυμαστῇ φιλοτιμίᾳ πρὸς ἀλλήλους) [Oliva 1993, 94-95, 96; Lindsay Adams 2014, 339; Le Guen 2014, 257, 264, 268-269; Vahtikari 2014, 103-105].

The importance of this event is also highlighted by the fame and prestige of the actors selected, now under contract for Alexander. The tragic actor Athenodorus: before this performance in Tyre, he had won at the Great Dionysia and possibly also at the Lenaia in 342 BC, and later he would win again at the Great Dionysia in 329 BC. Moreover, he would return to perform, but not in a competition, for Alexander the Great during the famous 'Weddings of Susa' in 324 BC [Heckel 2006, 61; Vahtikari 2014, 103-105, 108-110]. The tragic actor Thessalus: before this performance in Tyre, he had already won at the *Great Dionysia* in 347 and 341 BC, as well as at the *Lenaia* in 356 BC (for the second time). He too would return to perform for Alexander, but not in a competition, at the aforementioned 'Weddings of Susa' in 324 BC. [Heckel 2006, 265; Vahtikari 2014, 103-105, 108-110]. Finally, Lycon of Scarfea: before Tyre in 331 BC, he had won at the Lenaia in 350 BC, and like Thessalus and Athenodorus, he would also perform at the 'Weddings of Susa' in 324 BC [Heckel 2006, 152; Vahtikari 2014, 103-105, 108-110].

On the basis of Plutarch's remark that Lycon of Scarpheia "was performing successfully in the theatre" (εὐήμεροῦντος ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ) it has been suggested that the musical competitions may have taken place in a theatre, or at least in a specially constructed venue, may be temporary [Vahtikari 2014, 103-104].

It is not possible to determine how the choruses were composed or which theatrical works were performed in Tyre. However, it has been suggested that the choruses may have consisted of members of Alexander's army with a Greek education, and thus able to dance or perform when needed; alternatively, that the plays were staged without the choruses [Le Guen 2014, 266-267]. Regarding the plays performed, it has been suggested that they were tragedies or comedies focused on Heracles, Achilles, and/or Dionysus, staged either in full or in part. Indeed, these three mythological figures were closely linked to the ancestry of Alexander the Great and were also popular subjects in Athenian theater during his time; moreover, it is documented that the famous actor Thessalus, mentioned earlier, played the role of Achilles in both Astydamos II's *Achilles* and Evaristes' *Achilles* at the Great Dionysia in 341 BC [Vahtikari 2014, 112-113].

[Essential Bibliography] EDITIONS AND COMMENTARIES: *Plutarchi Vitae parallelae*, vol. II.2: *Philopoem et Titus Flamininus - Pelopidas et Marcellus - Alexander et Caesar*, recognoverunt Cl. Lindskog et K. Ziegler, iterum recensuit K. Ziegler, editionem correctionem cum addendis curavit. H. Gärtner, Lipsiae 1994 (text), 191; Plutarco, *Alessandro*, introduzione, traduzione e note di D. MAGNINO, Milano 1987, 104-107 (translation); *Plutarch Lives: Demostens and Cicero; Alexander and Caesar*, translated by P. PERRIN, Cambridge, Mass. 1919, 310-311 (translation); *Plutarch, Alexander. A Commentary*, by J. R. Hamilton, Oxford 1969, 75-76 (commentary). STUDIES: A. OLIVA, "Agoni sportivi e musicali nell'*Anabasi* di Arriano", *Nikephoros* 6, 1993, 93-104; W. HECKEL, *Who's Who in the Age of Alexander the Great. Prosopography of Alexander's Empire*, Malden, Mass. - Oxford - Carlton 2006; L. A. TRITLE, "Alexander and the Greeks. Artists and Soldiers, Friends and Enemies", in *Alexander the Great. A New History*, ed. by W. HECKLE and L. A. TRITLE, Chichester 2009, 121-140; W. LINDSAY ADAMS, "Sport Spectacle and Society in Ancient Macedonia", in *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. by

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[Keywords] Alexander the Great, Tyre, procession, musical competitions, Dionysos, festival of Dionysos, circular choruses, dithyrambs, choregi, Nicocreon of Salamis, Pasicrates of Soli, actors, tragedies, Athenodorus, Thessalus, comedies, Lycon of Scarpheia

[Saulo Delle Donne]

