

Theatre, Religion, and Politics at Alexander's Travelling Royal Court¹

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Today scholarship is paying ever more attention to the special interest Macedonian monarchs felt for the Greek theatre, from the end of the fifth century, as well as to the part they played in its diffusion beyond the borders of ancient Greece². If archaeology dates the first theatre building in Dion of Pieria from the end of the fifth century³, Diodorus of Sicily tells us that scenic contests were there first inaugurated in honour of Zeus and the Muses by King Archelaus, who reigned from 413 to 399⁴. We also know that the monarch invited to his court, among other artists, Agathon and Euripides, and that the latter composed an eponymous tragedy for the monarch that was possibly performed at Aegae⁵. Afterwards, Philip and Alexander organised in turn dramatic competitions, one after the destruction of Olynthus in 348⁶, the other after the sack of Thebes in 335 and just before his departure for Asia⁷. Some scholars believe that by doing so Philip and Alexander profoundly transformed theatrical activity by detaching it from its religious roots for the first time⁸.

In attempting to judge the validity of such a claim, I propose to examine Alexander the Great's use of theatre during the course of his expedition. In doing so I intend first of all to determine as precisely as possible the number of dramatic spectacles he initiated, to describe the context of each, and then to study the manner of their organisation. Unfortunately, we know nothing of the dramas produced here, not even their names, with one exception, a 'small' satyr play ('dramation'), *Agen*, which survives in title and a few verses⁹. I will therefore make use of the latter as a basis for considering the nature of the works that might have been produced during the royal campaigns. Armed with the collected data, and the conclusions and hypotheses supported by such information, I will then try to explain the monarch's fascination with the theatre; a fascination that seems to have increased as his empire expanded. In doing so, I will pay particularly close attention to the religious and political dimensions of the theatre practiced at court and/or on campaign in the years 334–323.

¹ I would like to warmly thank Eric Csapo, Dick Green and Peter Wilson for inviting me to the colloquium they organised in such an exciting manner and more particularly Eric Csapo for translating my paper.

² Cf. Wilson 2000, 287–289; Revermann 1999–2000, 451–467; Csapo 2010, especially chapters 3 and 6; Moloney forthcoming and in this volume.

³ Csapo 2010, 99, n. 132. According to G. Karadedos 1986, 340 the Classical theatre would have been located in the same spot as the later theatre.

⁴ D. S. 17, 16, 3; D. Chr. 2, 2.

⁵ Csapo 2010, 99; contra: Jouan – Van Looy 1998, 281. On the theatre at Aegae, see Wiles 1997, 38f.; see Moloney, this volume.

⁶ D. S. 16, 55, 1; schol. D. 19, 192.

⁷ D. S. 17, 16, 3–4 locates the festivities at Dion, while Arr. 1, 11, 1 locates them at Aegae. See the discussion in Mari 1998, 137–167.

⁸ Cf. Rehm 2007, 190; Csapo 2010, 173.

⁹ Ath. 13, 586d. 595e–596b (= TrGF 91 T 1).

I. Theatre and theatrical events held during Alexander's expedition

I.1 Sources and problems

Although the figure of Alexander the Great has been studied and reinterpreted through the ages, and although works on his divinity are numerous¹⁰, there are surprisingly few synthetic analyses of the Macedonian conqueror's piety¹¹. Fewer still address, even in a superficial manner, the entertainments that were periodically held over the course of his expedition, whether athletic, musical (i.e. 'mousikos': musical *stricto sensu* and/or dramatic) or a combination of the two.

These topics have received little or only occasional passing comment, apart from Helmut Berve's magisterial book¹² and several recently published articles by Edmund F. Bloedow¹³, Winthrop Lindsay Adams¹⁴, and Lawrence A. Tritle¹⁵. However none of them asks the fundamental question: what meaning or significance did the theatrical contests really have and how did they differ from the athletic and/or equestrian contests? Further, none of them provides a link between the artistic competitions that took place and the function the Macedonian king hoped the theatre would perform. In short, theatre has never occupied a central place in these discussions.

One has to begin by admitting that the sources that document the agonistic (and especially the theatrical) activities that took place during Alexander's expedition are generally problematic in character and limited in utility. Exclusively literary,¹⁶ the sources are at times contradictory, and mostly highly allusive; they usually indicate only that games were held and say nothing of their true intentions or purposes. To limit myself to one example, in his *Life of Alexander*¹⁷, Plutarch evokes the many tragic, auletic and citharodic games (πλείστους γέ τοι θεῖς ἀγῶνας οὐ μόνον τραγῳδῶν καὶ αὐλητῶν καὶ κιθαρω-

¹⁰ See Worthington 2003, 236–272, which gives the basic bibliography and summarises the major articles of Tarn (1948), Badian (1996) and Cawkwell (1994) on the divinity of Alexander. One should add Badian 1981, 27–71 and Worthington 2004, 199–206.

¹¹ That is to say, Alexander's relations, whether as an individual or in his capacity as monarch, with the realm of either the Greek pantheon or the gods of conquered people and places (cf. Fredricksmeier 2003).

¹² Berve 1926, especially, I 89–96.

¹³ Cf. Bloedow 1998. He starts collecting (not without lacunae) all the games occurring between 334 and 324. But he limited his study to the two sets of games that Alexander staged in Memphis, being only interested in the time of the departure from Greece of the 'most famous' performers that the king invited (or summoned) to his celebrations.

¹⁴ Cf. Adams 2007. His principal aim is to demonstrate that Plutarch is wrong when he asserts that Alexander disliked the Olympic Games or, at least, the 'professional' athletes. For that, he concentrates his analysis on the athletic and

equestrian games, to which sometimes torch races and 'musical' contests were added by the king, and interprets them as visible instruments of his policy.

¹⁵ Cf. Tritle 2009. He tries to elucidate the place and function of some artists and athletes of Greek origin who are associated with Alexander through all or part of the campaign. In so doing, he brings a new perspective to the longstanding debate on 'pro- and anti-Macedonian Greeks', namely the reasons why some Greeks joined Alexander's cause, while others vigorously opposed him.

¹⁶ The testimonia are preserved by the following authors: Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander* (with Atkinson 1980 and 1994); Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* (with Hamilton 1969) and *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander the Great*; Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* (with Bosworth 1980 and 1995; Sisti 2001; Sisti – Zambrini 2004) and *Indica*; Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* (with Cherubina et al. 2001).

¹⁷ *Plu. Alex.* 4, 11 (= 666c).

δῶν), which the king sponsored, by a simple statement of the fact with no further detail. Though scarcely less laconic, Arrian of Nicomedia is nonetheless one of our most valuable sources because he scrupulously notes the different occasions on which Alexander organised contests, as well as the nature of the contests on each occasion. Thus, after mentioning that the monarch proceeded to conduct sacrifice(s), he notes if the contests that followed were gymnastic ('agones gymnikoi'), or, if relevant, included horse races ('agones hippikoi') and/or torch races ('lampades'), and also if they were accompanied by 'musical' competitions ('agones mousikoi'). The value of this information is so much the greater because the stereotyped manner of its formulation might indicate an origin in a primary source such as the Royal Diaries, which Arrian would have copied without embellishment¹⁸. The facts, however, are far less clear than one might hope. The adjective 'mousikos', which Arrian uses systematically and exclusively in such cases (either after or before the adjective 'gymnikos'), in fact designates both musical contests, strictly speaking, and contests that combine music and drama. At times it is impossible to determine the exact nature of the competitions attested in our sources and we are forced to resort to pure hypothesis.

Let us take a closer look at the situation and, for clarity's sake, let us tabulate the available information on all the competitions held by Alexander. Grouping the data in this way will allow us to reflect more easily on the reasons that prompted Alexander, at a given time and place, to inaugurate one type of competition in preference to another.

Table 1 (see also pl. 10)

| Place and date ¹⁹ | Arrian | Diodorus | Plutarch | Curtius | Athenaeus |
|--|---|--|----------|--|-----------|
| 1. Soli (Cilicia) Early summer 333 | Anabasis 2, 5, 8 A. sacrificed to Asclepius • procession of the entire army • torch relay race ('lampas') • athletic and 'musical' contest (ἀγὼν γυμνικός καὶ μουσικός) | | | 3, 7, 3–4 A. <i>Aesculapio et Minervae ludos celebravit</i> ²⁰ . | |
| 2. Tyre (Phoenicia) July/ August 332 | Anabasis 2, 24, 6 A. sacrificed to Heracles. • procession of the army • naval review • athletic games • torch relay race 'en toi hieroi' (ἀγὼν γυμνικός καὶ λαμπάς) | 17, 46, 6 A. carried out magnificent sacrifices to Heracles | | | |

¹⁸ Adams 2007, 130.

¹⁹ I adopt the chronology used in the volume of Heckel – Tritle 2009, IX–XIII.

²⁰ On the goddess Minerva/Athena, not mentioned by Arrian, see the commentary in Atkinson 1980, 173f.

| Place and date ¹⁹ | Arrian | Diodorus | Plutarch | Curtius | Athenaeus |
|--|---|----------|---|--|-----------|
| 3. Memphis (Egypt) End 332 or beginning 331 | Anabasis 3, 1, 4 A. sacrificed primarily to Apis and to the other gods. • athletic and ‘musical’ contest (ἀγών γυμνικός και μουσικός) | | | 4, 7, 4 Mazakes delivers more than eight hundred talents of gold with the royal furniture. | |
| 4. Memphis (Egypt) Spring 331 | Anabasis 3, 5, 2 A. sacrificed to Zeus Basileios • procession with Alexander’s forces under arms • athletic and musical contest (ἀγών γυμνικός και μουσικός) | | | | |
| 5. Tyre (Phoenicia) March/April 331 | Anabasis 3, 6, 1 A. sacrificed a second time to Heracles. • athletic and musical contest (ἀγών γυμνικός και μουσικός) | | Life of Alexander 29, 5; On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander the Great 2, 334e. • no mention of the athletic games • procession • contests of “dithyramb” and tragedies • “choregoi” • actors of tragedy | 4, 8, 16 • no mention of games • dedication of a gold krater and thirty pateres to Tyrian Heracles | |
| 6. Susa (Susiana) May/June 331 | Anabasis 3, 16, 9 A. sacrificed with the traditional ceremonial (τῷ πατριῷ νόμῳ) • torch relay races (‘lampas’) • athletic contest (ἀγών γυμνικός) | | | | |
| 7. Zadrakarta (Hyrkania) July 330 | Anabasis 3, 25, 1 A. Sacrificed to the gods according to custom (ὡς νόμος). • athletic contest (ἀγών γυμνικός) | | | | |

| Place and date ¹⁹ | Arrian | Diodorus | Plutarch | Curtius | Athenaeus |
|--|--|---|----------|---|----------------------------|
| 8. On the River Tanaïs (Scythia) Summer 329 | Anabasis 4, 1–2 A. sacrificed to the usual gods (ὡς νόμος αὐτῷ). • athletic and equestrian games (ἀγῶν ἵππικὸς καὶ γυμνικὸς) | | | | |
| 9. On the bank of the Indus River (India) Late winter 327/6 | Anabasis 5,3, 6 A. sacrificed to the gods to whom he usually offered sacrifice (ὅσοις αὐτῷ νόμος). • athletic and equestrian games (ἀγῶν γυμνικὸς καὶ ἵππικὸς) | | | | |
| 10. Taxila (India) Beginning 326 | Anabasis 5, 8, 3 A. offered the customary sacrifices (ὅσα οἱ νόμος). • athletic and equestrian games (ἀγῶν γυμνικὸς καὶ ἵππικὸς) | | | | |
| 11. On the bank of Hydaspes River (India) May 326 | Anabasis 5, 20, 1 A. sacrificed to the gods the customary thanksgivings for victory (τὰ νομιζόμενα ἐπινίκια). • athletic and equestrian games (ἀγῶν γυμνικὸς καὶ ἵππικὸς) | 17, 89, 3 A. sacrificed to the Sun. | | 9, 1, 1 A. sacrificed to the Sun. | Ath. 13, 586d–595e? |
| 12. On the bank of the Hyphasis River (India) Late June 326 | Anabasis 5, 29, 1–2 A. sacrificed, according to his custom (ὡς νόμος), to the twelve gods for which altars had just been built. • athletic and equestrian games (ἀγῶν γυμνικὸς καὶ ἵππικὸς) | | | | |

| Place and date ¹⁹ | Arrian | Diodorus | Plutarch | Curtius | Athenaeus |
|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| 13. On the bank of the Hydaspes River (India) End of September 326 | Anabasis 6, 3, 1–2 Indica 18, 11–12 A. sacrificed and poured to different gods and to three rivers. • musical and athletic contests (ἀγῶνες μουσικοὶ καὶ γυμνικοί) | | | | Ath. 13, 586d–595e? |
| 14. After crossing the desert (Gedrosia) September/October 325 | | 17, 106, 1 • seven days: komos in honour of Dionysus. | Life of Alexander 67, 1–8 (702c–d) • seven days: komos in honour of Dionysus • ‘panegyris’ is at the royal palace of Gedrosia • choral competitions (ἀγῶνες χοροῶν) with victory of Bagoas | 9, 10, 2, 4–29 • seven days: ‘Bacchanalia’ | Karystios of Pergamon = Ath. 10, 434f Dicearchus, fr. 23 Wehrli = (Ath. 13, 603a–b) |
| 15. Salmous (Karmania) Late December 325 | Anabasis 6, 28, 1–3 A. sacrificed thanks-offerings (“kharisteria”) for his conquest of India, and on behalf of his army • musical and athletic contest (ἀγὼν μουσικός καὶ γυμνικός) Indica, 8, 36, 3 A. sacrificed thanks-offerings for the safety of his host to Zeus Soter, Heracles, Apollo Alexikakos, Poseidon and all the gods of the sea • procession • athletic and musical contest (ἀγὼν γυμνικός καὶ μουσικός) | 17, 107, 4 • σκηνακοὺς ἀγῶνας ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ | | | |

| Place and date ¹⁹ | Arrian | Diodorus | Plutarch | Curtius | Athenaeus |
|--|--|--|---|---------|---|
| 16. Near the borders of Persia and Susiana February? 324 Kalanus' suicide | Anabasis 7, 3, 2 • procession (horses and men) | | Life of Alexander 70, 1 • drinking contest | | Chares of Mytilene (Ath. 10, 437a–b) In honour of Kalanus • athletic and musical contest (γυμνικὸς ἀγὼν καὶ μουσικὸν ἐγκώμιον) • drinking contest |
| 17. On the road to Susa (Susiana) March 324, when Alexander's and Nearchus' forces met. | Indica 42, 6–8 • A. sacrificed for the preservation of his fleet and those who had embarked in it • contests (without specification) | | | | |
| 18. Susa, weddings (Susiana) April 324 | | | | | Chares of Mytilene (Ath. 13, 538b–539a)²¹ • performances (ὑπεκρίθησαν) • actors of tragedy • actors of comedy |
| 19. Ecbatana (Media) October 324 | Anabasis 7, 14, 1 A. offered a sacrifice, as he usually did after some successful event (ὡσπερ αὐτῷ ἐπὶ ξυμφοραῖς ἀγαθαῖς νόμος). • athletic and musical contest (ἀγὼν γυμνικὸς καὶ μουσικὸς) | 7, 110, 4 • “agones thymelikoï” | Life of Alexander 72, 1 (704e) • A. was busy with theatres and festivals (ἐν θεάτροις καὶ πανηγύρεσιν) • three thousand artists coming from Greece | | Ephippus (Ath. 13, 537e–538b) festival in honour of Dionysus (θυσία) |
| 20. Babylon Early 323 Hephaestion's funeral | Anabasis 7, 14, 10 A. ordered sacrifice always to be offered to Hephaestion as a hero (Anabasis 7, 14, 7). • athletic and musical contest (ἀγὼν γυμνικὸς καὶ μουσικὸς) • 3000 competitors in all | 17, 115, 6 • sacrifices to Hephaestion as god coadjutor (Alexander's decree). • Hephaestion should be worshipped as a god (response from Ammon) | | | |

²¹ See also, with a less complete description, Aelian VH 8, 7.

This gives rise to several observations:

1. If I am not mistaken, there are in total nineteen instances (Dion or Aegae excluded) when Alexander set up ‘agones’²², not counting the extraordinary wedding ceremonies held in Susa in April 324 (no. 18)²³. In the latter instance the tenth book of Chares of Mytilene’s *History of Alexander*²⁴ records that numerous artists were summoned from all corners of the Greek world, among them three actors of tragedy and three actors of comedy. Nonetheless Alexander’s Great Chamberlain (‘eisangeleus’), who, in his official capacity, must have been responsible for the preparations of the ‘wedding’, never at any time employs the term ‘contest’ (‘agon’) when describing the festivities or the part played in these festivities by the various invited artists. On the contrary, he has recourse to the appropriate technical verbs that evoke the precise activity of each artist: thus “hypokrinesthai” for the actors or “kitharoiden” for the kitharodes. And as he uses, in the case of the rhapsode Alexis of Taras, a form of the verb “epideiknunai”, which refers precisely to a display outside a competition, one has to suppose that, if theatre had a place in the magnificent wedding at Susa, it was uniquely in the form of individual performances by stage artists²⁵ and not plays performed by troupes in the context of a competition²⁶.
2. On one single occasion (no. 17, at the time of the reunion of Nearchus and Alexander on the road to Susa in March, 324) we are completely ignorant of the nature of the competitions organised, because Arrian, our only authority, contrary to his usual practice, provides no details.
3. No contests appear to be exclusively ‘musical’ (‘mousikoi’).
4. Sometimes there are no ‘musical’ contests at all and three different sorts of competitions appear²⁷: entirely athletic games²⁸, athletic games and torch relay races²⁹, athletic and equestrian games³⁰. The choice of competition clearly depended on both the specific place in which they were carried out and their intended purpose and effect³¹. The Macedonian king had no difficulty initiating athletic competitions, given the soldiers at his disposal. For these soldiers, competitions afforded an opportunity to show off their physical prowess and to claim the prize of victory. Alexander could just as easily have

²² I thus correct the mistaken figures given by Bloedow 1998 and Adams 2007.

²³ Arrian (*An.* 7, 4, 4–7) explains that the marriages were celebrated according to Persian custom and he also names some of Alexander’s companions who were given foreign wives, but he does not mention any competition. Diodorus’ mention of the wedding (17, 107, 6) is extremely brief and also makes no reference to an ‘agon’. The same is true of Plutarch (*Alex.* 70, 2) and Quintus Curtius (10, 3, 11–12).

²⁴ All we know about the work of this Greek, who was in Alexander’s service from the beginning of the expedition, we owe to the fragments preserved by Athenaeus (cf. Payen 2007).

²⁵ According to Diodorus (16, 91, 5) Philip II wanted to organise ‘musical’ competitions at the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra in order to celebrate the gods in a way that would at-

tract the largest number of Greeks. In this case there is a clear link between competitions and religious practices (cf. my part III below). In my view the very nature of the mixed marriages at Susa made the production of whole plays in competition impossible, as part of the audience would not be able to appreciate them fully.

²⁶ Cf. below.

²⁷ Sometimes connected to other events like processions (nos. 1. 2. 4. 5. 15. 16) or a naval review (no. 2).

²⁸ At Zadrakarta (no. 7).

²⁹ At Soli (no. 1); Tyre (no. 2); Susa (no. 6).

³⁰ On the bank of the Tanais River (no. 8); on the bank of the Indus River (no. 9); at Taxila (no. 10); on the bank of the Hydaspes River (no. 11); on the bank of the Hyphasis River (no. 12).

³¹ Cf. below.

had recourse to professional athletes, some of whom are securely attested as participants in the expedition, either in its entirety or in part³². Dramatic competitions were a much more complicated matter, as he could not have relied entirely on members of the army.

5. As for the 'musical' contests ('mousikoi agones'), there are eight documented instances: in some of them theatrical competitions are assured, in others they are only probable or very uncertain. Let us review all the attested 'musical' competitions in order, reserving the much-debated case of the Agen for last.

I.2 The agones mousikoi

A. Certain Instances of Dramatic Competitions

Tyre, March/April 331 (no. 5)

Returning from Egypt, which he took at the end of 332, Alexander stopped at Tyre once again in spring 331 (he had taken Tyre after a long siege the previous summer) and although he had, at that time, celebrated his victory with every manner of festivity, including a gymnastic contest and a torch race (no. 2), on this second visit he organised somewhat different competitions (no. 5). While Arrian records the setting up of musical contests, employing as usual the adjective "mousikos", Plutarch mentions some dithyrambic and tragic contests³³. He also informs us that, in this city, Alexander staged games resembling the Athenian Great Dionysia. Similarities can be found, looking at the overall organisation of the event itself, in the presence of judges³⁴ and 'choregoi' (they were two Cypriot kings newly allied to Alexander: Nikokreon of Salamis and Pasikrates of Soli)³⁵. Similarities can also be seen in the nature of the competitions, which included choruses and tragedy, as is clear from the presence of the two famous actors of tragedy, Athenodoros³⁶ and Thessalos³⁷. Even comedy was performed, but apparently separately from the official contests, as Plutarch refers to the comic actor Lykon of Skarphaea³⁸ at the end of his narrative in both the *Life of Alexander* and in his work *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander the Great*.

³² E.g. the Athenian Dioxippos, star 'pankратиast' and Olympic champion. Cf. Tritle 2009, 124f.

³³ Plu. Alex. 29.5; *Moralia* 334e. If the two works give nearly the same information, the perspectives are nonetheless different. In *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander the Great* (*Moralia* 334e), Plutarch uses the dramatic entertainments at Tyre as much to emphasise the king's esteem for and interest in the fine arts as to draw a moral from the story: after the defeat of his favourite actor, he shows Alexander to be "a man who imposes his law on all men, but submits himself to the law of justice".

³⁴ In *On the Fortune or the Virtue of Alexander the Great* (*Moralia* 334e), it is made clear that they are the most renowned of the Macedonian generals ("οἱ δοκιμώτατοι τῶν στρατηγῶν").

³⁵ Cf. Wilson 2000, 287–288. Quintus Curtius mentions neither sacrifices nor games, but he does speak of the embassies and the payment they received. He also explains that the kings of Cyprus "who deserted Darius to come over to his side and who sent him a fleet at the time of the siege of Tyre, received the honours they deserved".

³⁶ Berve 1926, no. 30; O'Connor 1908, no. 11. 13; Stephanis 1988, no. 75; Heckel 2006, 61.

³⁷ Cf. Berve 1926, no. 371; O'Connor 1908, 103, no. 239; Stephanis 1988, no. 1200; Heckel 2006, 264f.

³⁸ Berve 1926, no. 478; O'Connor 1908, no. 319; Stephanis 1988, no. 1567; Heckel 2006, 152.

Karmania, Sept/Oct. 325 – late December 325 (nos. 14 and 15)

The events that followed the debilitating crossing of the Gedrosian desert are particularly difficult to reconstruct because of an apparent contradiction in the available documentation. Methodical analysis indicates, nonetheless, that the conqueror at first resided in the regional capital Pura. Afterwards he reached a part of Karmania, which Diodorus alone calls Salmous³⁹, which is today most easily placed at the western side of the valley of the Halil Rud, in the general vicinity of the modern town of Khanu⁴⁰. The gymnastic and ‘musical’ competitions that took place there (no. 15) were marked by the arrival of Nearchus, the commander of the fleet, whom Alexander was impatiently awaiting⁴¹. Though begun in his absence in commemoration of the successful crossing by the army of the desert of Gedrosia⁴², these festivities continued in public jubilation as thank-offerings for the safe arrival of the fleet⁴³.

There is no doubt that theatre had a prominent place in the celebrations because Diodorus specifically uses the term ‘skēnikos’ to specify the nature of the competitions. One should not however suppose the existence of a permanent theatre there: at that date, in fact, the theatre which Diodorus mentions three times could only have been a temporary construction⁴⁴. Still, these festivities offered a fitting epilogue to the famous episode of the Bacchanalia (no. 14), for which Paul Goukowsky has advanced excellent arguments to show that the testimony of the vulgate tradition should probably not be rejected. Despite Arrian⁴⁵, a ‘komos’ in honour of Dionysus could probably have taken place between Pura and Salmous, even if it did not shine with all the *éclat* conferred by later tradition⁴⁶.

³⁹ D. S. 17, 106, 4.

⁴⁰ Cf. Bosworth 1988b, 150 n. 386.

⁴¹ The king sent scouts daily to meet him as soon as he was informed by the hyparch of Harmozeia that he was on his way (Arr. Ind. 8, 34, 4).

⁴² Arr. An. 6, 28, 3.

⁴³ Arr. Ind. 8, 36, 3. It is probably one and the same place, since Arrian mentions no change in Alexander’s location from the moment when, after his stay in Pura the capital of Gedrosia, he arrived in Karmania (according to Aristobulus, FGrHist 139 F 50) and the moment when Nearchus joined him (according to Nearchus, FGrHist 133 F 1).

⁴⁴ D. S. 17, 106, 4–5. Pace Revermann (1999/2000, 457) who considers the ‘theatron’ of Salmous a ‘remote theatre’. In doing so he takes the theatrical practice evoked by his source documents to imply a permanent building. This is why he makes the error of doubting the claims of J.-C. Moretti (1992) and D. de Bernardi Ferrero (1966/1974, IV 9) for whom theatre in the Near East is born only after Alexander’s conquest. The two specialists in theatre architecture speak only about archaeologically recoverable buildings; their claim says nothing about theatre practice in these regions. Others have also mistaken the term ‘theatron’ as it is used in descriptions of Alexander’s conquests: e.g. Pretagostini 2003, 173 and Sbardella

2003, 190 n. 24 who thinks a ‘theatron’ “nella città della Media non doveva mancare”. In using the term ‘città’ (‘polis’) he implies the presence, at that date, of the building whose presence Pausanias considers a necessary condition for a settlement to be considered a Greek ‘city’, which the Achaemenid royal capitals were not. For the record, Babylon had an important Greek community before 300 and its theatre, excavated by Robert Koldewey in 1904 and attested in cuneiform documents (Van der Spek 2001, 445–446), shows three principal phases. The first phase, unfortunately without discussion, was associated by Mallwitz (Wetzel, Schmidt, Mallwitz 1957, 19) with the very beginning of the Hellenistic period. The other two phases are associated with the mid-second century and with the reign of Mithridates II (123–86) respectively. In the second century A. D. the building, mentioned in a contemporary Greek inscription, was completely remade. Note that all the dates proposed by Mallwitz were based on political considerations (the assumption that periods of peace favoured major building programs such as that required for a theatre). Potts 2011 brings nothing new compared to Van der Spek 2001.

⁴⁵ Arr. An. 6, 28, 3.

⁴⁶ Cf. Goukowsky 1981, 47–64.

Ecbatana, October 324 (no. 19) and Babylon, early 323 (no. 20)

With regard to the celebrations at Ecbatana (no. 19) that followed the mutiny at Opis, our sources once again offer inconsistent reports. According to Arrian, a 'musical' contest was set up after Alexander arrived in this town and a week before the death of Hephaestion, which brought a premature end to the festival. However the games here seem not to have been dramatic, as Diodorus uses the adjective 'thymelikos' which means exclusively musical, as opposed to theatrical. Plutarch, for his part, relates that after taking care of urgent business, Alexander "immersed himself once again in spectacles and festivals" (ἦν ἐν θεάτροις καὶ πανηγύρεσιν), for which three thousand professionals came from Greece to participate⁴⁷. Though the expression he uses contains the word 'theatron' (a usage echoed in other passages of his work)⁴⁸, it doubtless designates every manner of artistic display that could be performed in a 'theatron', whether musical or dramatic⁴⁹. The scale of the gathering of artists nonetheless seems to me to indicate a large variety of specialisations, or, in other words, to suggest the joint presence of musical and dramatic artists⁵⁰. Nonetheless, Arrian associates this massive convocation of 'technitai' not with Ecbatana, but with the city of Babylon and with Alexander's decision to arrange Hephaestion's funeral there with "a gymnastic and musical contest, much more magnificent than any of the preceding, both in the multitude of competitors and in the amount of money expended upon it"⁵¹.

Two interpretive possibilities present themselves as a priori equally likely. The first is to trust Diodorus and to allow that Ecbatana had only athletic and musical competitions in the strict sense. The second is to suppose that Diodorus (i.e. his source) wrongly employed the term 'thymelikos' and that both musical and theatrical contests were indeed celebrated in the Median capital. These contests would probably even have finished by the seventh day of the competitions, which, according to Arrian, was also the seventh day of Hephaestion's illness and the time when the 'paides' confronted each other in the stadium⁵². On this hypothesis, Arrian (or his source) chose to locate the mass-arrival of artists from Greece in Babylon rather than in Ecbatana with this sole aim: adding splendour to the funeral celebrations of one of Alexander's dearest companions, in Babylon, rather than in Ecbatana⁵³. In this way he gave special emphasis to the depth of Alexander's affection for Hephaestion. I am nonetheless aware of the weakness of such an interpretation: all of our sources agree that the funeral of Hephaestion was an unusual event, for which the gathering of three thousand competitors would be particularly appropriate. The artists would also have had more time to reach their destination. In addition, one might say that an event

⁴⁷ Plu. Alex. 72, 1.

⁴⁸ Cf. Plu. Moralia 341a. 817b; Ant. 57, 1, 3; Oth. 5, 5, 3.

⁴⁹ In his treatise *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* (Moralia 1104d), Plutarch makes careful distinctions between 'khoroi', 'theatra' and 'Mousa'. When he makes a clear reference to spectacles of his own day (e.g. Brut. 10, 6, 4), he is careful to distinguish between spectacles ('theatra') and gladiatorial combats ('monomachiai').

⁵⁰ The exact number reported by Plutarch is of little importance: he testifies to an event of memorable amplitude.

⁵¹ He adds the following: "It is said that these men, a short time after, also competed in the

games held at Alexander's own funeral". Hephaestion's body was conveyed by Perdikkas and the army to Babylon at some time in the months following his death (Arr. 7, 14, 1–10; D. S. 17, 110, 7–8; Plu. Alex. 72; Just. Epit. 12, 12, 12). The funeral took place after the second group of ambassadors came from the Greek cities (Arr. 7, 23, 2; D. S. 17, 114, 1).

⁵² Their category is the 'agon gymnikos' mentioned by Arrian.

⁵³ At the wedding in Susa, Alexander expressed his wish to have as his nephews and nieces Hephaestion's children. For this reason he gave him as wife a daughter of Darius and a sister of his own wife (Arr. An. 7, 4, 5).

on this scale seems better justified in the context of a ‘national’ funeral than as a celebration of Alexander’s political success in the aftermath of the mutiny at Opis.

However, other scholars use a passage of Ehippus of Olynthus to argue that theatre formed part of the contests at Ecbatana. Ehippus followed the expedition in the capacity of an overseer of the mercenary force⁵⁴. Making a point of denouncing the drunken Alexander’s taste for luxury, he reports that the Macedonian king organised a sacrifice in honour of Dionysus at Ecbatana, that the sacrifice was very expensive and that it was followed by a spectacle offered by the satrap Satrabates for the entertainment of the army which attracted large crowds. It is true that nothing is said of any such competition in the preserved fragment, but the splendour of the ceremonies would be easier to understand if a large number of artists were actually present and if there were among them theatre professionals who had come to compete at the time. On the faith of a few verses of the *Agon* transmitted by Athenaeus⁵⁵, still other scholars hypothesise that the play was performed at Ecbatana, and possibly on the occasion of the festival described by Ehippus. I shall come back to this⁵⁶.

B. Nearly Certain Instances of Dramatic Competitions

Memphis, end 332 or beginning 331 (no. 2) and spring 331 (no. 3)

Dramatic contests are not formally proved for the Egyptian city of Memphis where competitions qualified simply as athletic and musical (*γυμνικοὶ καὶ μουσικοὶ*) were organised on two separate occasions, according to Arrian. The first occasion (no. 2) was just after Alexander’s arrival in Egypt and his bloodless occupation of the country. Arrian at that time mentions the arrival from Greece for the festival of the most famous (*οἱ δοκιμώτατοι*) ‘technitai’, but he gives no further detail and no additional clues can be found in the available documents.

In itself the substantive ‘technites’ need not refer exclusively to men of the theatre: it refers to any individual who possesses practical know-how (or a ‘*techne*’). In addition, it is possible that the term, in the context of ceremonies referred to as ‘*mousikoi*’, refers only to musicians, instrumentalists or rhapsodes. In reality, however, the importance lent to the event by the adjective ‘*dokimotatoi*’ and the twinning of competitions from the two central institutions of Greek culture (the theatre and the gymnasium) suggest, in my opinion, that there gathered at Memphis not only the flower of Greek athleticism but also the best artists embodying the arts of the Muses in the theatre, a mixture of musicians and scenic artists⁵⁷. Among them I would very readily include Thessalos⁵⁸, because of his already close ties with Alexander, as well as Athenodoros, though probably for more strictly professional reasons. I would add, following Bloedow⁵⁹, that there seems no need to suppose that Arrian’s text is at fault and consequently to allow only the existence of the celebrations of spring 331 (no. 4), as some have argued, on the pretext that this gives more time for artists to get to the ancient capital of Egypt⁶⁰. If two festivals were organised there in succession,

⁵⁴ Arr. An. 3, 5, 2–3.

⁵⁵ Supra, n. 9. Athenaeus is the only author who tells us anything about the play.

⁵⁶ See below.

⁵⁷ This idea is already in Will (1986, 82f.) who nonetheless rejects the holding of a competition at the end of 332 or beginning of 331.

⁵⁸ See below, at notes 86 and 92.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bloedow 1998.

⁶⁰ They could have come along with the many ambassadors that arrived from Greece, according to Arr. An. 3, 5, 1.

it is because, far from being redundant, they probably did not perform exactly the same function. This much is demonstrated by the sacrifices that preceded them. In marking the Macedonian victory over Egypt, the first celebration manifested the new king's attitude towards foreign and Greek divinities. The second celebration, no less politically important, was the consequence of the revelations made to the monarch by the oracle of Ammon⁶¹. Both sets of competitions were probably made possible by the rough seas that kept the same artists in the vicinity over the interim⁶².

C. Instances where Dramatic Contests are not Excluded

Soli, early summer 333 (no. 1)

The competitions attested at Soli at the beginning of the summer of 333 follow both the convalescence of Alexander after he fell ill at Tarsus and the victory of his troops at Hali-carnassus under the leadership of Ptolemy and Asandros. No certainty is possible in this case as we have, once again, nothing more to go on than Arrian's use of the term 'mousi-kos'.

D. The Controversial Case of the Dionysia at Hydaspes

On the bank of the Hyphasis River, late June 326 (no. 13)

Myrtilos, one of the Deipnosophists of Athenaeus, twice mentions a satyr drama entitled *Agen*, whose presumed author would be Python of Catana or of Byzantium, unless it is a composition by Alexander himself. Myrtilos first mentions the play in the context of a general discussion about courtesans with important connections to statesmen and philosophers, and then when he specifically turns to the relationship between Glykera and the king's treasurer, Harpalus⁶³. The second mention occurs a little later, when Myrtilos, after being interrupted by a question from Ulpian, resumes his catalogue of the 'fair women'⁶⁴. Taking up the list of Harpalus' mistresses, he draws heavily on material from Posidonius⁶⁵, Dicaearchus⁶⁶, Theopompus⁶⁷, Philemon⁶⁸ and Alexis⁶⁹ to evoke two of them, Pythonike and Glykera once again. He then cites the *Agen* as a supplementary witness ("sunepimarturei") of the favours lavished upon them by Harpalus. He begins by repeating exactly the same information about the play as earlier (name, genre, author) and he adds that the *Agen* was performed ("edidaxen" and "edidachthe")⁷⁰ on the occasion of the Dionysia celebrated on the banks of the Hydaspes after Harpalus had deserted ("apostantos") and fled to the sea ("phygontos")⁷¹.

⁶¹ Arr. An. 3, 4, 5.

⁶² Alexander might have taken this into consideration when programming the second series of contests.

⁶³ Ath. 13, 586d.

⁶⁴ Ath. 13, 595e–596a.

⁶⁵ Ath. 13, 594e.

⁶⁶ Ath. 13, 594f.

⁶⁷ Ath. 13, 595a.

⁶⁸ Ath. 13, 595c.

⁶⁹ Ath. 13, 595d.

⁷⁰ Ath. 13, 595e.

⁷¹ I fully agree with Pretagostini's (2003, 163–164 and n. 9) rejection of the hypothesis of Cipolla 2000, 144–152. It seems to me implausible to equate Harpalus' flight (to use Athenaeus' term) with the trip he made to Tarsos with his new mistress Glykera according to Theopompus' Letter to Alexander (Ath. 13, 595d–e = FGrHist 115 F 254b).

Scholars have been divided for many years on the question of the date (between 327/6 and 324/3) and the precise location of the play's performance⁷² (from the banks of the Hydaspes⁷³ to Ecbatana⁷⁴, passing through Salmous⁷⁵ and Susa⁷⁶; it could even have been produced for the first time at Athens, as Tritle recently suggested⁷⁷). The discussion centres on the apparent incompatibility of the two last pieces of information offered by Athenaeus: in effect it seems impossible that the play was performed in India and that at the same time Harpalus had already left Babylon. To complicate matters, the very dating of Harpalus' flight has long excited controversy and a consensus has only recently formed in favour of the year 324⁷⁸.

We are indebted to Bruno Snell, an unconditional partisan of the year 327/6, for having untangled one of the knots surrounding the problem by providing an unassailable explanation of verse 4 (κατέγνω διὰ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτοῦ φυγῆν). The presence of the word 'phyge', joined with the substantive 'pragma', induced many past and present commentators (among them Athenaeus⁷⁹) to detect an allusion to the flight of the corrupt treasurer, fearing for his life as a result of his criminal activity⁸⁰. Snell insisted on the contrary that good philological method required that the verse in question be understood first and foremost in the context of the plot. In doing so he proposed the following translation: "he (=Harpalus) condemned himself to exile because of his love affair". Here there is no other exile than that of a tearful lover who, from a desire to escape from the pleasures of this world, takes refuge in the sanctuary that he built for a deceased lover. This interpretation has the merit of releasing Athenaeus' testimony from all suspicion, since it does away with its supposedly contradictory character.

Nonetheless, for the satyr play to have some point and for the audience to derive some pleasure from this image of Harpalus⁸¹, one has to allow that, before the performance of the play, Alexander's camp was well informed of the escapades of a man who generously spent the realm's money on his darling courtesans. Unfortunately we are unable to date with any precision the letter sent by Theopompus to inform the monarch of the sacrilegious and reprehensible conduct of his treasurer⁸². We know only that when Alexander was on the banks of the Hydaspes, Harpalus displayed his undivided loyalty by providing

⁷² A convenient bibliographical list is in Krumeich et al. 1999, 594 n. 4. Add Cipolla 2000.

⁷³ B. Snell (1964, 113–117) dates the performance to 326 and locates it in the Punjab.

⁷⁴ This is the opinion of Berve 1926 (338f. s. v. Python) who discusses the other scholarly positions, Beloch's among them. The latter assimilates the sacrifice to Dionysus mentioned by Ehippus to a full-scale Dionysia including dramatic competitions during the course of which Hephaestion died, and so he supposes that the play was performed at Ecbatana. He also takes the reference to Hydaspes to indicate the Hydaspes in Media (and not in Punjab) mentioned by Verg. G. 4, 221.

⁷⁵ Cf. Goukowsky 1981, 72f.; Bosworth 1988b, 149 n. 385, also locates the performance of the satyr play in Karmania "sometime before the summer of 324".

⁷⁶ According to Droysen (1883) the play was performed during the weddings at Susa "because

it was precisely the time of the Great Dionysia", and Athenaeus confused the Choaspes (the river of Susa) with the Hydaspes.

⁷⁷ According to Tritle 2009, 128, two references in the play to the Athenian situation "suggest an Athenian debut". This confuses the location of the events performed in the play and the location of the performance itself. Contrary to what he writes, there is nothing in the surviving verses that allows us to suppose that the drama "would have provided some good laughs, at both Harpalus' and Alexander's expense".

⁷⁸ Cf. Krumeich et al. 1999, 594 n. 3.

⁷⁹ His conclusions are based on the few verses that he subsequently cites.

⁸⁰ Cf. D. S. 17, 108, 4–6.

⁸¹ For the need to take account of the audience in establishing the date, see Pretagostini 2003, 172f.

⁸² Cf. Theopomp. Hist. FGrHist 115 F 253–254b (=Ath. 595a–e).

him with seven thousand footsoldiers⁸³: at that time no division appears to have come between the two men. Besides, if we once again take up Arrian's testimony we find that Alexander would have organised competitions on the banks of the Hydaspes on two different occasions. First, he celebrated his victory over Porus in May 326 by mounting an ἀγὼν γυμνικός καὶ ἱππικός (no. 11), which by nature appears to exclude all scenic contests; afterwards, in September of the same year, he inaugurated ἀγῶνες μουσικοὶ καὶ γυμνικοὶ (no. 13). Only the Indica, however, mentions the event; the Anabasis is content to mention only the performance of the customary propitiatory sacrifices that took place before the army went down river. Thus, although the presence of the adjective 'mousikos' might warrant the hypothesis of theatrical performances, the divergence between the two versions of the same episode, by the same author, considerably complicates the task of the Alexander historian, who has no criterion for privileging one source over another, as is often done, since the only documents at his disposal are literary texts. This first problem is compounded by two others: no military, political or even diplomatic success is present here to justify the organisation of 'musical' and gymnastic competitions. Moreover, whichever date and agonistic context you take into consideration, the holding of a festival celebrating Dionysus, and under the name of Dionysia, seems highly improbable in May or in September, or at least contrary to general religious practice.

Should we therefore give up on our Dionysia on the Hydaspes? Let us suspend the question for now and discover if it is possible to learn anything about the organisation and program of the various theatrical events whose places and dates we have attempted to determine.

II. Organisation and Program of the Scenic Contests

We cannot be too cautious about taking the Great Dionysia at Athens as a model for the scenic contests put on by Alexander's itinerant court, if only for the simple reason that the monarch had no theatre building of durable construction in the regions he traversed. Nonetheless, it required no great preparation to transform a space into a temporary show-place: one need only think of the way that at Delphi in the fourth century the Pythian stadium was provisionally fitted with a wooden 'skene' for dramatic performances. Scene decoration could be just as summary. I would like to adduce as proof the first verses preserved from the Agen, which are probably from the play's prologue. On the right of the set there is an entrance to the underworld⁸⁴, hidden by rose bushes (ll. 1f.); to the left the fa-

⁸³ Curt. 9, 3, 21.

⁸⁴ If however one reads πέτρωμα with Sbardella 2003, 177–179 instead of the neologism φέτωμα proposed by Snell in this corrupt passage and follows Sbardella's interpretation that the word refers to the monumental tomb that Harpalus had built at Babylon for his mistress Pythionike, then we have to replace the entry to the underworld on the set with a massive wooden structure representing a 'naos'. A device of this sort would present no difficulty. Sbardella 2003, 186–187, moreover, draws attention to the adjective ἄοργος (Agen l. 2), which also appears in a fragment of Sophocles (TrGF F 748) where it is used as a substantive

referring to Lake Avernus in Italy. The name was also given by the Macedonians to an imposing natural rock relief located near the upper course of the Indus and the site of memorable military engagements by Alexander's soldiers (D. S. 17, 85, 1 and Arr. An. 4, 28–30). The adjective would have made a particularly striking contrast, and one desired by the author of the Agen, between two symbols: on the one hand the important site remembered by Alexander and his troops, and on the other, the building created by the dissolute ambition of Harpalus. About the archaeology of those monuments: Scholl 1994, 254–261.

mous (“kleinos”) temple (l. 3) that Harpalus had built for his deceased mistress, Pythionike (l. 8). One had only to add a façade representing the temple to the natural landscape. As for the costumes, we can imagine that they were more or less elaborate depending on the circumstances and the time allowed to create them, unless the acting troupes who appeared during the expedition brought them with their baggage. But the recruitment of the theatre people needed for stage duty may, on the contrary, have been a far trickier matter.

II.1 The Recruitment of Actors

The sources make it obvious that an important number of athletes and artists of every description gravitated toward Alexander during his campaigns and attended his court on a more or less long-term basis⁸⁵. We know, for example, that he was accompanied throughout his expedition by seven or eight poets who were able to put his exploits into verse. Among them there was at least one tragic poet, Neophron of Sicyon. The *Suda* attributes one hundred and twenty plays to him and makes him a confidant of Callisthenes of Olynthus, whose unhappy fate he shared⁸⁶.

As for actors, there can be no doubt that they increasingly enlarged the army’s train as they learned of the king’s military success, of the competitions he organised and of the largesse he demonstrated. Some of them were not destined to return to their cities of origin until after the death of the king. One of this group may be the tragedian Thessalos whom Alexander held in such high esteem⁸⁷ and whose presence is attested at Tyre in 331 (no. 5) and at Susa in 324 (no. 18) and seems likely for Ecbatana (no. 19) and Babylon (no. 20). This is a different case from his lucky rival Athenodoros, who probably came to Tyre with the Paralos or with another vessel belonging to the travelling fleet, and then returned to Athens where he won the Great Dionysia of 329 (IG II² 2318 l. 360). We nonetheless find him again among the artists invited to the wedding at Susa. His example suggests that if all artists did not reside continuously in proximity to Alexander, they nonetheless moved easily between their homes and the conqueror’s army⁸⁸.

Another noteworthy tragic actor, Aristokritos⁸⁹, who was among the twenty-two named artists who performed at Susa⁹⁰, may also have remained a permanent member of Alexander’s entourage, even though his presence is not noted at any other moment of the expedition. Nothing in fact prevents us from thinking that, after the example of Thessalos, he was content to offer his artistic talents to the monarch at competitions or at exhibitions and that he also offered his talents as an ambassador, whenever needed⁹¹. One recalls that

⁸⁵ Tritle 2009, 122–129.

⁸⁶ Snell (TrGF 15) strangely makes him a contemporary of Euripides (probably because it is said that the *Medea* of Euripides was attributed to him) and he brackets the part of the text of the *Suda* that connects him with Alexander’s expedition.

⁸⁷ The tradition claims that he would have given his kingdom to see Thessalos triumph over Athenodoros at Tyre (Plu. Alex. 29, 3).

⁸⁸ Tritle 2009, 129.

⁸⁹ Berve 1926, no. 125; O’Connor 1908, no. 65; Stephanis 1988, no. 352; Heckel 2006, 47.

⁹⁰ One could also name Lykon, Phormion (Berve 1926, no. 811; O’Connor 1908, no. 498; Stephanis 1988, no. 2579; Heckel 2006, 222) and Ariston (Berve 1926, no. 140; O’Connor 1908, no. 74; Stephanis 1988, no. 377; Heckel 2006, 49).

⁹¹ Tritle 2009, 123. That Kittos and Ephialtes, who were recruited to bring the news of Harpalus’ defection to Alexander (Plu. Alex. 41, 8), were also themselves actors has by no means been demonstrated.

in the recent past (spring 336) both Thessalos (in Alexander's name)⁹² and Aristokritos (in Philip's) were charged to negotiate with Pixodarus, the dynast of Caria, for the hand of his daughter (in the first case for Alexander, and in the second case for Philip's bastard son, Arrhidaeus).

Some actors might thus be at the king's direct disposal⁹³ to participate in various competitions, either alone, or at times with the aid of local artists⁹⁴. This is easily imaginable in the case of the 'agones mousikoi' of Soli, since it was a Greek city where many citizens will have received the sort of education that would enable them to perform in a dramatic spectacle. On the other hand we might suppose that the dramatic contests of Salmous, celebrated at the end of 325, were made possible by the theatre personnel who were present in the army ranks, or at least not very far away from them. Awaiting the return of Alexander in one of the ancient Achaemenid capitals, they would have had no difficulty reaching his camp, simply by following the crowd of soldiers, generals and satraps that he summoned to Karmania⁹⁵.

Moreover, the available documents repeatedly report an invitation (or a summoning) of artists from Greece (Memphis, no. 3; Susa, no. 18; Ecbatana, no. 19; Babylon, no. 20)⁹⁶. The king clearly wanted to add lustre (and publicity) to the ceremonies he planned: at times by emphasising the quality of the participants (the most famous artists are said to have come to Memphis), at times by stressing their number. The number three thousand is in fact mentioned both for Ecbatana and/or Babylon. Its historical accuracy is of less importance than its capacity to attest the power of attraction that Alexander hoped might be felt across the Greek world. Engaging artists from abroad nonetheless required organisation on an entirely different scale, since account had to be taken of the time needed for advertisement, for recruiting artists, and for transporting them to the place of their performance⁹⁷.

Because of our sources' silence⁹⁸, scholars are forced to resort to learned calculations that most often have no better foundation than their own guesswork. To take the analysis of E. F. Bloedow as an example, it would have been the very day after the Battle of Issus (in November 333) that Alexander, whose goal was clearly Egypt from the first hours of the expedition⁹⁹, made it known that he desired the presence of reputed professionals in Memphis, the Egyptian capital. Had he waited until the fall of Tyre to take this decision the deadline would have been too soon, it seems, for the artists to arrive on time.

⁹² Plu. Alex. 10, 1–2.

⁹³ The same goes for athletes. See Tritle 2009, 124f.

⁹⁴ Far from mutually exclusive, the two hypotheses can be combined.

⁹⁵ Arr. An. 6, 27, 3–6.

⁹⁶ For the divergent scholarly views on this matter, see Bloedow 1998, 132 n. 7–9.

⁹⁷ As they were doubtless sometimes forced to wait a long time for the king, some of them would certainly have tried to profit in the meantime by offering displays of their talents.

⁹⁸ For the sake of comparison, epigraphic sources for craftsmen indicate, for example, that during the course of the construction of the sanctuary at Epidaurus, the members of the commission in charge of the construction, along

with messengers and heralds, went to Athens, Corinth and Argos, cities known to be recruitment pools, to advertise the awarding of contracts. Something similar probably happened in the case of actors. Before the creation of the associations of the Artists of Dionysus, recruiters must have gone to the theatre capital, Athens, to make known Alexander's intentions and to hire actors. Cf. Le Guen 2010, 516.

⁹⁹ Bloedow (1998) reminds us that not only does Arrian say this explicitly (An. 3, 1, 1), but that Quintus Curtius also makes it clear, when the resistance that Alexander meets almost impels him to give up the siege of Tyre (Curt. 4, 3, 3). Was it not also for strategic reasons (to secure the Mediterranean coast before pursuing Darius in the interior) that he came to the country?

In the case of the mixed marriages of Susa, which involved, judging from the stated nationalities¹⁰⁰, performers invited from Magna Graecia, from Central Greece and from Anatolia, there is no way of knowing when Alexander conceived of the idea or advertised the planned festivities. Nonetheless, as the journey on the Royal Road from Sardis to Susa took about two months by foot (reduced to a little more than a dozen days by horse¹⁰¹), two or three months at least were absolutely necessary to manage all the above procedures, with the further condition that the sea be continuously navigable. One can therefore assume that Alexander made known his desire to organise a sumptuous spring wedding in Susa, enhanced by the presence of famous artists, just as easily from Pura, the capital of Gedrosia, as from Salmous in Karmania, i. e. in the final months of the year 325.

As for the competitions in Ecbatana, if one chooses to follow Plutarch's version¹⁰², I tend to think that among the three thousand artists invited to come to the Medean capital in autumn 324, some must in reality have come directly from Susa or other royal residences, while others learned of the king's invitation when they were in Greece, where they were recruited only once the weddings had taken place. From Ecbatana all would then have proceeded to Babylon for the 'agones mousikoi' that were put on as part of the funerary ceremonies in memory of Hephæstion. A little later, as Arrian stresses, the same artists would have been in a position to take part in the funeral of the Macedonian king himself. If some such scenario is correct, then we must suppose that Alexander took upon himself to institute contests that included dramatic competitions on two different occasions, but separated by only a relatively short interval, before his death.

II.2 The Dramas that were Performed

It was not, therefore, too great a task for Alexander to attract – including from Greece – actors, or even dramatic poets to participate in the theatrical competitions that he decreed during his conquests, especially as he had highly persuasive financial resources at his disposal¹⁰³. But what were the plays that they performed? To what genre did they belong? Were they new plays or re-runs from the repertoires of the troupes that presented themselves, or were they royal commissions? And did they require the participation of a chorus? We have to admit that we are very badly informed on all of these points.

Plutarch twice mentions tragic performances: first in a generalisation¹⁰⁴, and then when he depicts the competition at Tyre. At Tyre it is very likely that two tragic troupes confronted one another (and not three as at the Great Dionysia in Athens), seeing that we know the identity of the two protagonists and that these are the only actors traditionally mentioned by name in the documents. On the other hand we know nothing about the tragedies: who composed them; their titles; or their relation to the performance context. They must nevertheless have included choruses, after the fashion of tragedies performed in Classical Athens, since two Cypriot kings were appointed by Alexander as 'choregoi'. Nothing, however, is said about the identity of the choreuts nor about their recruitment. I tend to

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Tritle 2009, 126. They could be misleading, if some of the performers were already with Alexander.

¹⁰¹ Hdt. 5, 52–54. These calculations are based on marching speeds of 25 km per day, with regularly interpolated rest days.

¹⁰² See above, at n. 47.

¹⁰³ In addition to war booty there was the wealth stored in the royal treasuries.

¹⁰⁴ Plu. Alex. 4, 11.

think that, in the army of the conqueror, there was no lack of men with a Greek education who were able to dance and sing on the occasion, whether Greeks by birth or Macedonians brought up at court: there is no doubt that many among them knew their 'classics'. Such are the men who very probably formed the indispensable chorus of satyrs impersonating Magae (l. 5) in the satyric 'little drama' ("dramation") called Agen. But some plays could perhaps have been performed without a chorus, as is often supposed for the Hellenistic period, when there was no longer uniform practice in staging. In addition to tragedy and satyr play, the latter attested by the example of the Agen¹⁰⁵, comedy must also have had a place in Alexander's itinerant court, to judge from the presence of comic actors, connected with 'musical' competitions, in the monarch's entourage.

As to the contents of the works offered to an audience probably composed of soldiers and generals of the army and sometimes officers of state and ambassadors on diplomatic missions to the king, we know nothing beyond the 19 verses of the Agen that survive¹⁰⁶. There is nothing to be gained here by revisiting the metrical characteristics of the play or its imitation in two places of Sophocles, all of which have been well discussed by Bruno Snell¹⁰⁷. For us the important thing is the theme. From the two fragments that have come down to us through Athenaeus it emerges that the action takes place in Babylon¹⁰⁸ and that the plot is not drawn from mythology, according to custom¹⁰⁹, but from current events. The two main characters are in fact: Agen (l. 16), alias Alexander, simultaneously head of the army and of the theatrical troupe, and whose importance to the play is evident from the fact that he gives his name to the drama; and Harpalus (l. 16), also, according to Myrtilos/Athenaeus, nicknamed Pallides (l. 3), i. e. "man of the race of Phallus", according to Meineke¹¹⁰, who suspects an allusion to his personal penchant for the female sex, or "son of Pallas", in the opinion of Dana Ferri Sutton, who sees there a malicious allusion to the relationship between Harpalus and Athens¹¹¹. In the female roles we find his deceased mistress, Pythionike (ll. 7f.) and his new concubine, Glykera (l. 18). From the mouth of the character who stands alone on stage when the passage transmitted by Athenaeus begins we learn first of all that Harpalus, maddened by passion and grief, has taken refuge (l. 4) in a temple that he had built for Pythionike (l. 8) and that the Magae who found him in this miserable condition (l. 6) have succeeded in convincing him to allow them to bring the dead woman back to the upper world¹¹². The exposition continues after a short lacuna.

¹⁰⁵ It was perhaps performed independently of any tragedy in accordance with a practice that became normal in the Hellenistic period, as shown by several lists of plays and prizes.

¹⁰⁶ At Ath. 13, 595e–596a, we first find a group of eight verses, followed by a gloss by Athenaeus/Myrtilos on the meaning of the name Pallides, then, after an apparently very short lacuna, another eleven verses, of which the last five are the same as those already quoted in Ath. 13, 586d.

¹⁰⁷ For a parodic allusion to Aeschylus' Persians, see Sbardella 2003, 188–190. The chorus of Magae, the wretched Harpalus and the monumental tomb of Pythionike (cf. n. 84) echo the chorus of noble Persians, who together with Atossa bring forth the εἶδωλον of the deceased Great King Darius, who appears on top of his imposing tumulus.

¹⁰⁸ It is in fact at Babylon that Pythionike died and Harpalus erected one of the two monuments he had made for her, according to Theopompus, FGrHist 115 F 253.

¹⁰⁹ It is nonetheless difficult to generalise given the very small number of satyr plays for which we have enough verses, beyond mere titles, to gain an idea of their content.

¹¹⁰ Meineke 1867, 280. His emendation of the manuscript (Pallides changed to Phallides) and his interpretation are accepted by Snell 1971, 109 n. 10.

¹¹¹ Sutton 1980, 96.

¹¹² This is a very common plot type, found notably on vases linked to satyrs, that has individuals emerging from out of the earth. Cf. Krumeich et al. 2001, 31. 56; Pretagostini 2003, 171 n. 31.

A discussion takes place between two characters who occupy the stage, one of whom seems well acquainted with developments at Babylon (ll. 9. 14f.) where he is possibly a resident, and the other has just arrived from Athens, where, we learn, the economic situation has also grown considerably worse: Harpalus sent the Athenians a considerable quantity of grain in return for which he received Athenian citizenship. The grain however only represents a down payment (“arrabon”, l. 18) for the arrival of the prostitute named Glykera.

Even though neither of the events mentioned (the famine at Athens¹¹³, the granting of citizenship to Harpalus in gratitude for his aid) can be dated with any precision in the years 326–324 (or help us determine the place of performance), the political tendencies of the drama are very clear. Harpalus is here openly ridiculed and his mercantile transactions with Athens, a city in revolt against Macedonian domination, are denounced. Moreover, the fact that the play is designated a ‘dramation’ suggests to me that it was composed quickly to address immediately current affairs. That Alexander could be suspected of authorship strongly inclines me to the belief that he commissioned the piece and that he requested that he be given the lead role as avenger of these injuries¹¹⁴. That the dramas themselves could directly serve his political projects in this way is a possible explanation for the monarch’s infatuation with dramatic competitions¹¹⁵. Do we find similar examples elsewhere? And can we articulate more precisely the reasons for Alexander’s promotion of the theatre in the course of his expedition?

III. Theatre, Religion and Politics at Alexander’s Travelling Court

If we cast another glance at the chronology of the scenic competitions inaugurated by the king, we find two distinct periods of activity, at the beginning and at the end of his campaign.

| | |
|--|--|
| Soli (Cilicia), beginning of summer 333: dramatic contests possible | next to the River Hydaspes, May or end of September 326: performance of the Agen? |
| Memphis (Egypt): • end 332 /beginning of 331 • spring 331 dramatic contests very probable | Karmania, 324: • between Pura and Salmous, Bacchic komos • at Salmous before and after the arrival of Nearchus: dramatic contests certain |
| Tyre (Phoenicia), March/April 331: dramatic contests certain | Susa (at the weddings), 324: dramatic entertainments |
| | Ecbatana, 324: dramatic contests possible |
| | Babylon, 324: dramatic contests certain |

¹¹³ Raymond Descat (2004, 371f.) demonstrated that the famine lasted longer than usually thought, stretching from the 330s to 318, and consequently that it was related to structural problems affecting Athenian agriculture.

¹¹⁴ I concur with Pretagostini 2003, 163.

¹¹⁵ See also Sutton 1980, 79f. and Cipolla 2000, 139.

The first period is when Alexander closely follows the Mediterranean coastline; the second is when he has completed his conquests, at a time of the possible beginning of a second phase of activity more fully focussed on the administration of the empire. This second period generally coincides with a significant increase in the number of theatrical events, notably in the royal capitals of Susa, Ecbatana and Babylon. If Alexander was able to acquire actors without great difficulty, as we have seen¹¹⁶, during these two phases of his expedition, it is also because favourable circumstances converged at these times: in the first case proximity to the Greek world, the source of his entertainers, and in the other case, a cessation of hostilities followed by the development of the colonial foundations. It is not at all surprising that no dramatic contest is attested for the period beginning with the king's return from Phoenicia in spring 331 (no. 5) and the stopping of his military advance in India at the end of June 325, on the banks of the Hyphasis (no. 12), when the war was in full swing, the army often divided into several columns and the enemy in various locations adopting the tactics of guerrilla warfare.

Thus, as W. L. Adams has convincingly demonstrated, Alexander was not indifferent to the type or place of the competitions he organised¹¹⁷. His decisions, the fruit of careful consideration, took into account the current situation and the specifics of the places in which he made camp. Adams notes, for example, that he held torch-races because they were favoured by the Macedonians, as is evident from the Gymnasiarchal Law of Beroa¹¹⁸. He nonetheless put an end to torch-races when he entered the Iranian plateau, possibly out of respect for the religious sensibilities of the Persians (fire being sacred to the Zoroastrians). This implies that 'agones' – at least of this type – were set up with more than the desires of his soldiers taken into consideration. Several passages in our sources indicate as much. Equestrian competitions appear at a time in the campaign when the cavalry began to play a major role in operations against the Iranian and Scythian populations who were just as practised in horsemanship as the Macedonians. One can believe that the king neglected no opportunity to shore up his alliance with conquered peoples and no opportunity to train his soldiers by diversifying their sporting activities.

Still, the competitions decreed by the king, whatever their precise nature (athletic or 'musical' in the broad sense of the term), all shared the common aim of providing the soldiers, whether they participated or merely spectated, with relaxation and leisure and a chance to forget for a time the hard realities of combat. The most striking example, from this point of view, is the competitions that were held after the formidable passage through the Gedrosian desert, competitions which A.B. Bosworth even took to be a form of therapy¹¹⁹.

This being said, it remains to ask why Alexander decided to have recourse not only to 'gymnic' competitions, but also to dramatic competitions and to determine what specific virtues dramatic competitions might possess beyond other forms of competition.

III.1 Alexander, Champion of Greek Culture

In acting as he did, the conqueror doubtless assumed the posture of a champion of Greek culture, and its two principal venues, the gymnasium and the theatre. In laying claim to an area of supremacy long held by the city of Athens, Alexander went far beyond the politics initiated by Archelaus, one of his fifth-century predecessors on the Macedonian throne.

¹¹⁶ See above, ch. II. 1.

¹¹⁷ Adams 2007, 129–138.

¹¹⁸ Adams 2007, 132 n. 30.

¹¹⁹ Bosworth 1988b, 147.

The proof, apart from the direct involvement of his soldiers in the ‘gymnic’ and equestrian competitions, not to mention the professionals who sometimes joined them¹²⁰, is the number of artists he attracted to his itinerant court and the very fact that musical and dramatic competitions could be held at all during his expedition.

His desire to measure himself against the uncontested cultural capital of the Greek world in the Classical period is equally evident in the artists that he heaped with his favours: they were the best ones (οἱ δοκιμώτατοι), those already well known in Athens, due to their victories at the city’s Dionysian festivals. Such were Thessalos and Athenodoros, both of them present in Tyre and Susa. But also Lykon of Skarphea, who was a comic artist twice victorious at the Lenaea in the mid fourth century. Philodemus in the Rhetoric (I. 197, 9–10) portrays him as the equal of Kallippides and Nikostratos, who were the best among the actors of tragedy that performed at the end of the fifth century. We can also cite another comic actor, named Phormion, who took part in the celebrations in Susa and may have won at the Lenaea in the mid-fifth century. Another important point must be stressed regarding Athenodoros. The Athenians, as reported by Plutarch in the passage in which he mentions the festivities at Tyre, fined him for his absence from the city. Even though the circumstances in which it occurred are unclear, it is crucial to know if that event took place at the same time as the Phoenician contest, since both took place in March/April. We could suppose that Athenodoros preferred to perform in Tyre rather than in Athens and was therefore fined for breaching his contract. This could give us some idea of the incredible attraction coming out of the royal court, as soon as the military campaign began.

Alexander’s desire to make himself the very incarnation of Greek culture is also evident in certain traits of his personality: he was so deeply infatuated with tragedy that he asked Harpalus to send him in the upper satrapies many texts produced by the three most famous tragedians of the fifth century BC, Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus (in this meaningful order). In addition, our sources depict him quoting, on several occasions, verses from Euripides’ plays. For example, at the last symposion of Medeios, a series of performances culminated with the king himself reciting by heart a scene from Euripides’ *Andromeda*¹²¹. In the prelude to the ‘proskynesis’ he quoted the *Bacchae* (l. 266). This presupposes that the king knew by heart his ‘classics’ or large fragments of them. Doubt however remains about the historicity of all these stories, which could have been invented *post eventum*, in order to serve political purposes. Alexander could then have been portrayed as a man able to use his wide knowledge of drama to apply them in crucial political situations.

Willing to set up dramatic contests, as I suggest, partially in order to compete with Athens (and win), the king also had them viewed by hordes of spectators. This is particularly true in Tyre, where ambassadors from Athens, Rhodes, and Chios, were, as we know, received in large numbers. This applies in Karmania too, where the crowd was composed of Craterus’ soldiers, many satraps, generals in charge of the army in Media, and sailors led by Nearchus. In Susa, where Arrian suggests that as many as ten thousand weddings were celebrated, the crowd could have also been enormous, and the same goes for Ecbatana and Babylon. It is no longer just the soldiers who fill the ranks of the audience, but the entire court.

¹²⁰ Cf. Tritle 2009, 123–125.

¹²¹ Ath. 12, 537d, via Nikoboule.

III.2 Theatre, Dionysism and royal ideology

Let us turn our attention once more to the second time period that I distinguished and in particular to the increasing number of theatrical games that coincided with Alexander's return from India. In my opinion, this did not happen by chance, but with a purpose. From 328 on, Dionysus is prominent in our sources; they draw many parallels between the god's and the king's conquests. However, some scholars have argued, generally, that Dionysus' presence and achievements in India were made up and invented from the image of the historical Alexander, with the king merging with the god only after his death¹²².

Far from being convinced by such claims, I totally agree with Bosworth's arguments¹²³. No sources refer to any sort of relationship between Dionysus and India before 325. Yet, the myth of Dionysus' conquests became a reality at this date, after the army reached the north of the Syr-Darya and as it progressed on Indian soil. That is when soldiers discovered ivy, a symbol associated with the god, and considered it tangible evidence of the limits of Dionysus' penetration in the country. Alexander surpassed even these boundaries.

As he was coming back from his journey to India, a journey full of military exploits, he became the representation of Dionysus on earth¹²⁴. In this move I recognise one of the chief reasons for the importance he gave theatre after this date. At his death the Diadochi and the Hellenistic monarchs followed in his footsteps, realising that through drama they could appropriate for themselves the image of New Dionysoi, endowed with all the qualities attributed to the god. Theatre therefore became a vehicle for highlighting or emphasising some of the main elements of the royal ideology, which we could briefly list as follows:

- The king is to be seen as a warrior – and a victorious one: almost all the games¹²⁵, regardless of their kinds, were held after a victory¹²⁶ or in commemoration of a victory¹²⁷, and in one case (the victory over Porus, no. 11) the technical term “epinikia” appears. It is for this reason that the theatre also served as the place par excellence for the display of martial valour: it is highly significant that at the conclusion of the mutiny at Opis, Alexander ordered Antipater to grant to each of the veterans who might return to Macedonia both ‘prohedria’ in all competitions and in the theatre and the right to sit wearing a crown¹²⁸.
- The king is to be seen as a saviour: the festivals held in Karmania (no. 15) are the best example of this, seeing that the sacrifices performed by the king are clearly described as ‘kharisteria’, i. e. thanks offering to the gods as much for the conquest of India as for the well-being of the army¹²⁹.

¹²² Among them Goukowsky 1981.

¹²³ Bosworth 1996a, 119–132.

¹²⁴ For Pretagostini (2003, 165–166. 169f.) as well Alexander is the incarnation of Dionysus and it is no coincidence that he plays the role of Agen. He supposes, moreover, that Dionysus appears as a *deus ex machina* in the final scene to punish Harpalus and his supporters. This is perfectly plausible.

¹²⁵ The most notable exception – already mentioned above, after n. 71 – is the competitions that would have been held before going down the Hydaspes (no. 13). For the ‘agones’ attached to the funeral of Hephaestion, see below.

¹²⁶ Whether success in battle (nos. 1. 2. 7. 8), a surrender without the shedding of blood (nos. 3. 6. 9. 11) or the happy conclusion of troubles affecting the army (cf. the mutiny at Opis, which was followed by the festival at Ecbatana, no. 19; the cessation of conquests in India, no. 12).

¹²⁷ See nos. 4. 5. 10. 14. 15.

¹²⁸ Plu. Alex. 7, 8f. At Athens as at Rhodes, in the Hellenistic period, the theatre was in the service of civic ideology: before the start of the contests, war orphans were awarded a panoply by the grateful city.

¹²⁹ See also, supra, nos. 1 and 17.

- The king is to be seen as rich and generous: the evidence concerning the prizes given away by Alexander to victorious actors and poets is again deceptive and frustrating for us. We only know, for instance, that Lykon of Skarphea was offered ten talents after he made the king laugh, by asking him for this amount as he was performing. We are also informed that the winner in a drinking competition organised at Kalanos' death was offered one talent, the second thirty minas, and the third ten (no. 16). On the other hand, the king's generosity is abundantly documented. He compensated Athenodoros for the fine he received for breaking his contract with Athens. Plutarch also reports that a gifted, but poor and unknown poet was told, a few days after Alexander's death¹³⁰: "If you had lived in Alexander's times, you would have been offered a Cyprus or a Phoenicia for each of your verses". Nothing would better suggest the huge and unparalleled economical appeal of the king's travelling court for all the artists of the time.

From the foregoing discussion it emerges unequivocally that Alexander used the theatre for purely political purposes during his expedition. By this means he could immediately make felt the full extent of his power. This in my opinion is what is at stake in the Agen¹³¹. For this reason it is all the more regrettable that we are unsure of the time and place of the production, because the significance of the play is altogether inseparable from the context in which it was staged. It is context in the final analysis that gives whatever political meaning it may have.

Given the documents at our disposal, the only reasonable stance is that taken by Bruno Snell when he urges scholars not to extrapolate beyond what appears in the surviving verses and to stay close to the plot that those verses allow us to broadly reconstruct. I cannot support him, however, when he takes for granted the truth of Athenaeus' claims about the Dionysia on the Hydaspes. Indeed the clues provided by Arrian, along with other considerations¹³², sooner call Athenaeus' claims into question. I therefore think that, until more information is available, we must limit ourselves to considering all the possible places where the play might have been produced and refuse to make any final judgment.

From Salmous to Ecbatana and then Babylon, Alexander would have had three opportunities to produce the Agen. As on any of these three occasions Harpalus' flight was known to everyone, the personal satire would have been more trenchant: added inevitably to the exile of the despairing lover who had lost all interest in life would be the historically verified fact of his inglorious departure. Moreover, between the end of the year 325 and the spring of 323, the question of the divinity of Alexander was a burning issue, and one has no difficulty imagining the public response to this portrait of a man so debauched as to devote a post-mortem cult to his mistress Pythionike, under the name of Aphrodite Pythionike¹³³, at a time when only Alexander could lay claim to cultic honours. In the years 325–324 an audience would have experienced more pleasure than any earlier audience in seeing, at the end of the play, the punishment by Agen (king of the satyrs?) not only of a man who was guilty of having demanded such inappropriate displays of deference as

¹³⁰ Plu. *Moralia* 333e.

¹³¹ Pretagostini (2003, 162. 170–272. 275) rightly, in my view, explains that the form of a satyr play was adopted, in preference to comedy, because it was best suited to the allocation of the leading role to the character of Dionysus-Alexander, but also because it permitted recourse to the characteristic features of

Old Comedy that were no longer current in New Comedy: the appearance on stage of historical figures, 'onomasti komoidein', a focus on sexual excess, and the non-observance of Porson's law.

¹³² Cf. above, after n. 71.

¹³³ Theopomp. *Hist. FGrrHist* 115 F 253 = Ath. 595a–c. Cf. Flower 1997, 258–262.

'proskynesis' for his new prostitute, Glykera¹³⁴, but of the eternally insubordinate Athens as well. The last preserved verse of the *Agen* in fact contains a veiled threat towards the city that may have had a double meaning: when the character who comes from Athens explains in what should be the expository prologue of the play that the grain sent by Harpalus was sent for Glykera, but that the deposit ("arrabon") risked being for the Athenians the guarantee of their destruction, one suspects an allusion to an event which will take place before the end of the play. But one also immediately calls to mind the passages of Quintus Curtius¹³⁵ and Justin¹³⁶ which indicate that Alexander, enraged by the behaviour of the Athenians as much as by that of Harpalus, had ordered his fleet to prepare to sail to Europe and punish them.

Let us add that a performance of the *Agen* would have had an incomparable success at Babylon in the context of Hephaestion's funeral with the audience encouraged to measure the gulf between a heroic cult, created for a man of valour, in conformity with religious norms, one even legitimised by the oracle of Ammon¹³⁷, and one of the most sacrilegious of all cults, given to a woman whose sole merit was to have, during the course of her life, made a business of selling her charms¹³⁸.

The essential point is that the *Agen* is a work with an undeniable political charge. The denunciation of the characters that it introduces and the virulence of the satire could only have had greater force if the play was produced in 324 and not two years earlier. By serving the statesman Alexander's interests in this way, theatre allowed him both to conduct battles in a different, non-military, arena and to demonstrate his capacity to become the new director of cultural life in the Greek world. Theatre nonetheless remained fundamentally an act of piety, as in the past. All of the conqueror's theatrical competitions during his expedition were organised within a religious framework¹³⁹. At Babylon they formed an integral part of the rites paid to Hephaestion. They were, moreover, always preceded by sacrifices according to the strictest dictates of tradition, as Arrian repeatedly shows¹⁴⁰. It is of little importance that some of them had no connection with Dionysus. At Dion in Macedonia the theatrical contest inaugurated by Archelaus celebrated Zeus and the Muses. But above all the ever-growing kinship that the monarch sought with Dionysus upon his return from India authorised and justified, in my opinion, a practice that only grew more widespread in the last three centuries before our era. The only exception that comes to mind is

¹³⁴ Theopomp. Hist. FGrHist 115 F 254b = Ath. 595d–e.

¹³⁵ Curt. 10, 2, 2.

¹³⁶ Just. Epit. 13, 5.

¹³⁷ Arr. An. 7, 14, 6–7; Plu. Alex. 72, 3; Hyp. Epit. 21. The vulgate tradition (D. S. 17, 115, 6; Just. Epit. 12, 12, 12) speaks wrongly of worship as a god (cf. Bosworth 1988b, 288 n. 14).

¹³⁸ There is also a striking parallel between the participation at the funeral of Pythionike of a great chorus of illustrious performers (τεχνιτῶν τῶν ἐπισημοτάτων) according to the description of Poseidonius (Ath. 13, 594e) and the presence of the three thousand 'technitai' mentioned by Arrian at the funeral of Hephaestion. Moreover Sbardella 2003, 189–190 would also see in the incorporation of the scene of the Magae, once capable of calling forth the

spirit of the Great King for the benefit of the State but now involved in the resurrection of a woman who deserved three times over the name of prostitute, an intentional parody of the tragic model for the purpose of emphasising Alexander's growing hostility towards the Babylonian priests and more particularly the Chaldeans, devoted to the cult of Baal, who begged the conqueror to give up his march on Babylon on the pretext of an inauspicious oracle delivered by their god, when in reality they feared they would lose, with the return of the king, the revenues from the temple that they shared in anticipation of its reconstruction (Arr. An. 7, 16, 5f. and 17).

¹³⁹ Contra: Mikalson 1998, 118f.

¹⁴⁰ See Table 1 above for all the forms of sacrifice performed by Alexander.

the weddings at Sousa. But let us make no mistake: there were here no regular competitions, only displays by actors comparable to those widely attested in post-Hellenistic times outside of official competitions. If there were innovations in theatrical practice during the lifetime of Alexander it was, on the one hand, the birth of the royal Dionysism that forged, on the ideological front, the link between victory, theatre and monarchical power, and, on the other hand, the introduction of performances by theatrical artists in festive contexts, like banquets, where previously there had only been musicians, jugglers and other entertainers. Competitions retained their cultic connections with divinities or heroes intact. At the itinerant court of the Macedonian king, theatre in competition more than ever played a role that was every bit as political as it was cultural and religious.