

CAMPAIGN AGONES: TOWARDS A CLASSIFICATION OF GREEK ATHLETIC COMPETITIONS

By Christian Mann

Summary: At several occasions during his campaigns, Alexander the Great staged gymnastic, hippic and musical competitions. Until now scholars have assumed that the king founded new festivals, but the ancient evidence makes it quite clear that it were singular, non-recurrent events. Competitions like that, for which I suggest the term “campaign *agones*”, are also known from other Greek armies. “Campaign *agones*” should be added to the well-known categories (competitions at recurrent festivals, funeral contests, gymnasium *agones*) as a distinct, although less important, category in the Greek agonistic world.

When it comes to the classification of ancient athletic competitions, historians have devoted nearly all their attention to the differences between “crown contests” (*agones stephanitai*) and “prize contests” (*agones thematikoi*). There are different opinions how these terms should be understood and whether they provide us with historically useful analytical categories.¹ However, both expressions refer to a type of competition that was held in a certain location and within a fixed cycle of one, two, or four years. These competitions typically involved predetermined disciplines and age groups and were dedicated to particular deities, for example Zeus Olympios, Apollon Pythios, or to deified kings. They bore

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1 Fundamental work on this subject was done by Harry Pleket (1975: 56-71; 2004: 80-83). For the *status quaestionis* see Parker 2004; Remijnsen 2011; Slater 2013.

names derived from the deity in question, like Olympia, Pythia, or from monarchs such as *Basileia*. These cyclic *agones* were doubtlessly the most important and prestigious events in ancient Greek sport – which explains why research has so far been concerned mostly with them. However, there were other types of athletic competition that merit attention.

In a recent study, Thomas Heine Nielsen presented a catalogue of athletic competitions in Archaic and Classical Greece, laying a new foundation for further investigation.² Nielsen demonstrates conclusively that even before the celebrated “explosion agonistique”³ in the Hellenistic and the Roman Imperial Era, the number of *agones* was very high. Nielsen differentiates between “competitions at recurrent religious festivals” (chapter 1.3.1), i.e. the cyclic *agones* mentioned above, and “funeral contests” (chapter 1.2), which are prominent in Homer and attested also in Archaic inscriptions as a rather common element of aristocratic funerary practices. During the Classical period, funeral games fell into disuse but were still held at some occasions, e.g. in 374/3 B.C. for King Euagoras of Salamis in Cyprus.⁴ Because of Nielsen’s focus on the earlier periods of Greek history, he makes no mention of the contests in gymnasia, which were important during the Hellenistic and the Roman Imperial Era.

But there is another kind of athletic contests, mentioned by Nielsen only in passing: Non-cyclic competitions that took place at one single occasion, but not as part of a funeral reception: “... contests which were staged only once, to mark victory in war, the burial of a great man, or some other important event”.⁵ Nielsen refers to the competitions staged by the “Ten Thousand” after reaching the Black Sea and to five sets of *agones* during the campaigns of Alexander the Great. It is this type of athletic contests, rarely mentioned in publications on ancient sport, that will be discussed in this article, the goal being to analyze its defining characteristics and to establish it as a new category of Greek athletics. I want to suggest the term “campaign *agones*” to identify this category.

2 Nielsen 2018a; cf. id. 2016.

3 Robert 1984: 38.

4 Isoc. *Euagoras* 1. Roller 1981a is fundamental on athletic funeral games, providing an overview of the literary and epigraphic sources. For funeral games on black-figure ceramic see Roller 1981b.

5 Nielsen 2018a: 28.

The most detailed description of a campaign *agon* in Greek literature is a passage in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Early in 400 B.C., when the Greek army reaches Trapezus on the Black Sea and the end of danger and all their troubles seems near, the men celebrate this fortunate turn of events. They offer sacrifices to Zeus Soter, Heracles, and other divinities; afterwards, they elect the Spartan Dracontius to be the leader of the upcoming competitions:

[26] When, accordingly, the sacrifice had been completed, they turned over the hides to Dracontius and bade him lead the way to the place he had fixed upon for his race-course. He pointed out the precise spot where they chanced to be standing, and said, "This hill is superb for running, wherever you please." "How, then," they said, "can men wrestle on ground so hard and overgrown as this is?" And he replied, "The one that is thrown will get hurt a bit more." [27] The events were, a stadium race for boys, most of them belonging to the captives, a long race, in which more than sixty Cretans took part, wrestling, boxing, and the pancratium ...; and it made a fine spectacle; for there were a great many entries and, inasmuch as the comrades of the contestants were looking on, there was a great deal of rivalry. [28] There were horseraces also, and the riders had to drive their horses down the steep slope, turn them around on the shore, and bring them back again to the altar. And on the way down most of the horses rolled over and over, while on the way up, against the exceedingly steep incline, they found it hard to keep on at a walk; so there was much shouting and laughter and cheering.⁶

6 Xen. *An.* 4.8.26-28 (transl. C.L. Brownson): [26] ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ θυσία ἐγένετο, τὰ δέρματα παρέδωσαν τῷ Δρακοντίῳ, καὶ ἠγεῖσθαι ἐκέλευον ὅπου τὸν δρόμον πεποικηκῶς εἶη. ὁ δὲ δεῖξας οὐπερ ἐστηκότες ἐτύγχανον οὗτος ὁ λόφος, ἔφη, κάλλιστος τρέχειν ὅπου ἂν τις βούληται. πῶς οὖν, ἔφασαν, δυμήσονται παλαίειν ἐν σκληρῷ καὶ δασεῖ οὕτως; ὁ δ' εἶπε· μᾶλλον τι ἀνιάσεται ὁ καταπεσών. [27] ἠγωνίζοντο δὲ παῖδες μὲν στάδιον τῶν αἰχμαλώτων οἱ πλείστοι, δόλιχον δὲ Κρήτες πλείους ἢ ἐξήκοντα ἔθειον, πάλην δὲ καὶ πυγμὴν καὶ παγκράτιον ἕτεροῖτ', καὶ καλὴ θέα ἐγένετο· πολλοὶ γὰρ κατέβησαν καὶ ἄτε θεωμένων τῶν ἐταίρων πολλὴ φιλονικία ἐγίνετο. [28] ἔθειον δὲ καὶ ἵπποι καὶ ἔδει αὐτοὺς κατὰ τοῦ πρανοῦς ἐλάσαντας ἐν τῇ θαλάττῃ ἀποστρέψαντας πάλιν πρὸς τὸν βωμὸν ἄγειν. καὶ κάτω μὲν οἱ πολλοὶ ἐκαλινδοῦντο· ἄνω δὲ πρὸς τὸ

Here we find some of the events familiar from Olympia and other big festivals: foot races, wrestling, boxing, pancratium, and horse races. There were no chariot races, which is hardly surprising, but other disciplines too, such as the *diaulos* and the *hoplites*, the jump, the discus throw, and the javelin throw, are absent as well unless they were mentioned in the lacuna after the pancratium.⁷ Naturally, the soldiers did not have access to a stadium or a hippodrome, and Xenophon makes a point of emphasizing the challenges posed by their improvised sports venues. As far as the competitors are concerned, he explicitly states that the stadium race among boys was mostly, but not exclusively, undertaken by prisoners of war. In the other disciplines it was the soldiers themselves who competed. The Cretans among them dominated the long-distance run since this discipline was very popular on their island.⁸ The audience was the army, including perhaps the female camp-followers, if we follow the emendation of τῶν ἐταίρων to τῶν ἐταιρῶν.⁹ We can probably concur that the hides of the sacrificed animals were offered as prizes since there can hardly be any other explanation of why these were handed over to Dracontius. Furthermore, there are other attestations of hides being used in this manner; Homer already mentions them as common prizes for runners.¹⁰

Xenophon chronicles two other *agones* in his *Anabasis*, though very briefly. In March of 401 B.C.,¹¹ when the army camped at Peltae, sacrifices were offered according to the Arcadian Lycaea and under the direction

ἰσχυρῶς ὄρθιον μόλις βάδην ἐπορεύοντο οἱ ἵπποι· ἔνθα πολλὴ κραυγὴ καὶ γέλως καὶ παρακέλευσις ἐγίνετο. Cf. Diod. Sic. 14.30.3.

For this *agon*, see Golden 1998: 1-5 (cf. Golden 1997: 327-31); Nielsen 2007: 16; Kyle 2016: 224.

7 A lack of *diskoi* and *halteres* might have prevented two of the disciplines, but we know that officers of Alexander's army had athletic equipment carried during the campaigns (Ath. 12.539c; Plut. *Alex.* 40.1).

8 Nielsen 2018a: 81-82, with references. The famous Ergoteles of Himera, Olympic victor in 472 and 464 B.C., was a citizen of Cnossus before he moved to Sicily.

9 Golden 1998: 5.

10 Hom. *Il.* 22.159-61.

11 Dated according to the chart in Lee 2007: table 1.

of the Arcadian Xenias, followed by an athletic contest with golden strigils as prizes. Xenophon explicitly states that Cyrus himself was among the spectators, so the Persian prince attended his mercenaries' typically Greek spectacle.¹² This *agon* was inspired by a festival held back in Greece, but it was not intended as precise imitation. For example, during the Arcadian Lycaea, the winners were offered bronze shields and not golden strigils.¹³ The third *agon* in Xenophon's *Anabasis* took place in March 400 B.C. when the Greek soldiers held processions and gymnastic contests at Cotyora, separated according to their ethnic origins.¹⁴

By far the largest number of campaign *agones* attested in the ancient sources refers to another famous *anabasis*, that of Alexander the Great and his army. Arrian mentions 16 sets of competitions from the passage over the Hellespont in 334 B.C. to Alexander's death in Babylon in 323 B.C. For most of them, Arrian is the only source, but some are referred to by other authors:

- 333 B.C. at Soli/Cilicia: gymnastic and musical contests (Arr. *Anab.* 2.5.8; Curt. 3.7.3f.)
- 332 B.C. at Tyre: gymnastic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 2.24.6)
- 332 B.C. at Memphis: gymnastic and musical contests (Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.4)
- 331 B.C. at Memphis: gymnastic and musical contests (Arr. *Anab.* 3.5.2)
- 331 B.C. at Tyre: gymnastic and musical contests (Arr. *Anab.* 3.6.1; Plut. *Alex.* 29)
- 331 B.C. at Susa: gymnastic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 3.16.9)
- 330 B.C.: at Zadracarta/Hyrcania: gymnastic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 3.25.1)
- 329 B.C. at Alexandria Eschate: gymnastic and hippic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 4.4.1)

12 Xen. *An.* 1.2.10: ἐντεῦθεν ἐξελαύνει σταθμούς δύο παρασάγγας δέκα εἰς Πέλτας, πόλιν οἰκουμένην. ἐνταῦθ' ἔμεινεν ἡμέρας τρεῖς· ἐν αἷς Ξενίας ὁ Ἄρκας τὰ Λύκαια ἔθυσσε καὶ ἀγῶνα ἔθηκε· τὰ δὲ ἄθλα ἦσαν στλεγγίδες χρυσαῖ· ἐθεώρει δὲ τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ Κύρος. For Cyrus' eventual motives, see Nielsen 2015: 251-52.

13 Pind. *Nem.* 10.45-48; cf. Ringwood 1927: 97; Nielsen 2018b: 412.

14 Xen. *An.* 5.5.6: ἐν δὲ ταύταις πρῶτον μὲν τοῖς θεοῖς ἔθυσσαν, καὶ πομπὰς ἐποίησαν κατὰ ἔθνος ἕκαστοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ ἀγῶνας γυμνικούς.

- 327 B.C. at the Indus River: gymnastic and hippic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 5.3.5f.)
- 326 B.C. at Taxila: gymnastic and hippic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 5.8.3)
- 326 B.C. at the Hydaspes River: gymnastic and hippic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 5.20.1)
- 326 B.C. at the Hyphasis River: gymnastic and hippic contests (Arr. *Anab.* 5.29.1f.)
- 325 B.C. at the Indus River, before the departure of Nearchus' fleet: gymnastic contests, organized by Nearchus (Arr. *Ind.* 21.2)
- 325/4 B.C. in Carmania: gymnastic and musical contests (Arr. *Anab.* 6.28.3; Arr. *Ind.* 36.3; Diod. Sic. 17.106.4f.)
- 324 B.C. at Ecbatana: gymnastic and musical contests, drinking contest (Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.1; Plut. *Alex.* 72.1; Diod. Sic. 17.110.7f.)
- 323 B.C. at Babylon: gymnastic and musical contests (Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.8-10)
- 323 B.C. at Babylon: naval contest (Arr. *Anab.* 7.23.5)

The attribution of sources to events is not entirely clear in all cases, and there is a debate whether the two *agones* at Memphis might have been a single one, and so other historians reach slightly different numbers.¹⁵ However, the overall result, i.e. the very high number of agonistic events during the campaigns of Alexander the Great, remains the same. A crucial element of these competitions is their non-recurrent character. It is important to emphasize the fact that they were not intended as foundations of new festivals since they have often been misinterpreted as such – even by experts of ancient sport like Louis Robert and Luigi Moretti. According to Robert, Alexander founded the *Basileia* in Egypt, Moretti

15 Will 1986: 82-83; Oliva 1993: 95-96; Miller 2004: 196-97; Adams 2007: 130-38; Di Nanni Durante 2015: 17-20; Lehmann 2015: 208-13. So far, there is no debate on Alexander's *agones* since the studies mentioned here ignore the results obtained by the other authors.

The *agon* that Alexander is said to have organized to honor the Indian sage Calanus is unanimously excluded from the list, since its historicity seems fairly questionable: The competition is mentioned only by Athenaeus (10, 437a) and Claudius Aelianus (VH 2.41), but not by Arrian, despite the fact that he describes the death of Calanus in great detail (*Anab.* 7.3; cf. 7.18.1). In addition, it would have been the only *agon* that included musical disciplines during Alexander's campaign east of the Persian heartland.

says the same for the *Asclepieia* at Soli and the *Heracleia* at Tyre; building on these statements, Di Nanni Durante recently asserted that Alexander instituted new *agones* from Asia Minor to India.¹⁶ Without a category like campaign *agones* in mind, such a misinterpretation is hardly surprising. However, the ancient sources do not support this point of view. Quite the contrary, in fact: with regard to the *agon* in Soli, for example, Arrian states that Alexander – after recovering from a serious illness – offered sacrifices to Asclepius and held competitions.¹⁷ This is something entirely different from the foundation of a new festival called *Asclepieia*. Similar phrasing is used to describe the first *agon* at Tyre when Alexander sacrificed to Heracles/Melqart and held gymnic contests as well as a torch relay.¹⁸ Nothing points to continuity with the penteteric *Heracleia* mentioned in 2 Maccabees; as was the case with the Egyptian *Basileia*, the festival is most likely a Hellenistic creation.¹⁹ Founding *agones* was not uncommon to Greek monarchs and tyrants before Alexander, even in the house of the Argeads: King Archelaus had instituted an *agon* at Dium that Philipp II and Alexander himself held as well.²⁰ And in the Hellenistic period, the establishment of agonistic festivals was a popular method of rulers' self-presentation;²¹ however, no initiatives of this kind can be traced back to Alexander.²²

16 Robert 1933: 136; Moretti 1975: 106; Di Nanni Durante 2015: 11.

17 Arr. *Anab.* 2.5.8: Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ ἐν Σόλοις θύσας τε τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ καὶ πομπεύσας αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ στρατιὰ πᾶσα καὶ λαμπάδα ἐπιτελέσας καὶ ἀγῶνα διαθείς γυμνικὸν καὶ μουσικόν.

18 Arr. *Anab.* 2.24.6: Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ ἔθυσέ τε καὶ πομπὴν ἔστειλε ξὺν τῇ δυνάμει ὠπλισμένη· καὶ αἱ νῆες ξυνεπόμπευσαν τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ, καὶ ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ λαμπάδα ἐποίησε.

19 2 Macc. 4.18-20; in the commentaries on this passage, we consistently find the postulate of continuity (e.g. Schwartz 2008: 226-27).

20 Diod. Sic. 17.16.3; Arr. *Anab.* 1.11.1.

21 See Mann 2018a: 466-73, with further bibliography.

22 By choosing to neither establish *agones* nor take part in horse and chariot races himself, Alexander deviates from the usual behavior of Greek monarchs; see Mann forthcoming.

Another argument for the non-recurrent, situational nature of Alexander's agonistic events is the victory of a Macedonian who competed successfully during the first *agon* at Tyre:²³

When Alexander conquered with the spear the island-city of Tyre and exalted Heracles with prize-bringing competitions, Antigonus, son of Callas, was the first of the *hetairoi* to win double wreaths for the hoplite and the stadium race.

This inscription, the only epigraphic testimony for the competitions during Alexander's campaigns, provides us with important information on the participants and disciplines. Antigonus was the champion of not one but two disciplines, which were also part of the standard program of the Olympic Games and numerous other *agones*. Obviously he considered his agonistic triumph at Tyre a major achievement so he spent money on a poet and a monument to have it remembered after his return to Macedonia. The main goal of the poem is to present Antigonus as the first (of all the *hetairoi*) who won two victories in Alexander's campaign *agones*.²⁴ The contest itself is connected to the situation, the conquest of Tyre; although ἡνίκα makes it clear that some time had passed between the contest and the erection of the monument, there is no hint in the epigram that points at a recurrent festival.

It stands to reason that we can generalize and assume that the gymnastic contests held during Alexander's campaigns included the usual combat sports and races, analogous to the competition of Greek soldiers mentioned in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. As far as the hippic contests are concerned, we can expect them to have been horse races, not chariot races, since the latter require much more elaborate preparations: suitable terrain, chariots, and trained charioteers are essential and it is unclear how

23 This is an inscription on the base of a statue in Amphipolis (C. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, AD 26 Mel. (1971) [1973] 120-27; Moretti 1975: no. 113; SEG XXXXVIII 716bis):

ἡνίκα Ἀλέξανδρος Τυρίαν δορὶ νῆσον ἐρεῖ[ψας]

Ἡρακλέα τιμαῖς ἠῦξεν ἀεθλοφόροις,

Ἄντιγονος Κάλλα δισοῦς τόθι, πρῶτος ἐταίρων,

ὀπλίτου σταδίου τ' ἀμφέθετο στεφάνους.

24 Being the "first" (woman, Ionian etc.) is a common motif in agonistic epigrams, see the examples collected in Ebert 1972.

these could have been provided at the spur of a moment.²⁵ During the second competitions at Tyre, dithyramb and tragedy are verified as musical disciplines.²⁶ The sources even name famous actors who arrived from Greece, specifically to take part in the competitions. The same is reported for the first *agon* at Memphis and the *agon* at Ecbatana; for the latter, the number of actors who showed up is specified as 3,000.²⁷ The literary sources offer no information on the participants who competed in the gymnastic and hippic competitions but we can safely assume that it was the soldiers themselves who competed here. The inscription found in Amphipolis proves that even high-ranking Macedonians were involved since, even though this Antigonus is not mentioned anywhere else, he doubtlessly was one of the *hetairoi* and was able to afford a victory monument after returning to Macedonia. According to Arrian, a gymnastic *agon* for boys was held in 324 B.C. in Ecbatana;²⁸ as was the case in Trapezus, its participants may partly have been prisoners of war.

Apart from the two most famous *anabaseis* there is only sporadic evidence of campaign *agones*. According to Herodotus, Xerxes, who had previously already held a naval competition,²⁹ after arriving in Thessaly organized a horse race in which the Persian riders competed with their Thessalian allies. Even though the latter were considered the best horse breeders in all of Greece, they fell far behind the Persians.³⁰ Thucydides chronicles a competition that never took place but that can indicate an established practice: when, in the winter of 418/7 B.C., the Argives had joined forces with the Spartans, they urged Athens to retreat from the fortress built close to Epidaurus. The Athenians sent Demosthenes to bring home the troops. However, he had different plans and cunningly

25 Günther 2013: 296 assumes chariot races while providing neither proof nor arguments.

26 Plut. *Alex.* 29.

27 Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.4 (Memphis); Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.8-10; Plut. *Alex.* 72.1 (Ecbatana). Here, Plutarch obviously confused the *agon* during which Hephaestion died with the funeral games held in his honor.

28 Arr. *Anab.* 7.14.1.

29 Hdt. 7.44.

30 Hdt. 7.196: ἐν Θεσσαλίῃ μὲν ἄμιλλαν ποιησάμενος ἵππων τῶν τε ἐωυτοῦ ἀποπειρώμενος καὶ τῆς Θεσσαλίας ἵππου, πυθόμενος ὡς ἀρίστη εἶη τῶν ἐν Ἑλλησι· ἔνθα δὴ αἱ Ἑλληνίδες ἵπποι ἐλείποντο πολλόν.

used a ruse: seeing that the Athenians were a minority among the garrison's soldiers and knowing they would surely be defeated in case of a conflict, he lured the soldiers out of the fortress under the pretense of organizing a gymnastic *agon*. Afterwards, he locked the gates and let no-one back in except the Athenians.³¹ Thucydides also details that during their departure for the fatal Sicilian expedition in 415 B.C., the ships raced to the island Aegina.³² In both cases, the *agones* are mentioned only in passing, which actually is an important point: Thucydides apparently felt no need to explain to his readers why a ruse that included a competition was successful in the first case and why the Athenian fleet held a rowing race at the start of such an important campaign.

In the Hellenistic period, quite surprisingly, sources for campaign *agones* are scarce,³³ but there is one important passage explaining the commander's motivation: in 226 B.C., the Spartan king Cleomenes invaded the territory of Megalopolis and ravaged the land. Moreover, in a hastily constructed theater, he organized musical competitions, forcefully recruiting a group of actors that had just happened to pass by and offering a prize of 40 minae. Plutarch clarifies that it wasn't Cleomenes' need for entertainment that made him stage this performance; instead, he wanted to demean his enemies and show the world that he had everything under control.³⁴ Therefore, organizing an *agon* in enemy territory seems to have been a demonstration of power.

31 Thuc. 5.80.3: ἀσκήσαι δ' αὐτὸ βουλόμενος ἄθλα προύθηκε ταῖς τε ὀπλιτικαῖς τάξεσιν, ἣτις ἄριστα σωμαίων ἔχοι, καὶ ταῖς ἰππικαῖς, ἣτις κράτιστα ἰππεύουσι καὶ πελτασταῖς δὲ καὶ τοξόταις ἄθλα προύθηκεν, ὅσοι κράτιστοι πρὸς τὰ προσήκοντα ἔργα φανεῖεν. Cf. Hornblower 2008: 206: "the trick depends on Greek inability to resist watching an athletic tournament."

32 Thuc. 6.32.2: ἄμιλλαν ἤδη μέχρι Αἰγίνης ἐποιούντο.

33 A TLG search has not led to any results for Polybius and other Hellenistic historians, but there might be references beyond the agonistic keywords.

34 Plut. *Cleom.* 12: ἐμβαλὼν οὖν εἰς τὴν Μεγαλοπολιτικὴν ὠφελείας τε μεγάλης ἤθροισε καὶ φθορὰν πολλὴν ἀπειργάσατο τῆς χώρας, τέλος δὲ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνίτας ἐκ Μεσσηνίας διαπορευομένους λαβὼν, καὶ πηξάμενος θέατρον ἐν τῇ πολεμίᾳ, καὶ προθεῖς ἀπὸ τετταράκοντα μνῶν ἀγῶνα, μίαν ἡμέραν ἐθεᾶτο καθήμενος, οὐ δεόμενος θέας, ἀλλ' οἷον ἐντρυφῶν τοῖς πολεμίοις καὶ περιουσίαν τινὰ τοῦ κρατεῖν πολὺ τῷ καταφρονεῖν ἐπιδεικνύμενος.

Let us now recapitulate the characteristics of campaign *agones*: they took place on provisionally prepared grounds that served as a substitute for stadiums, theaters, and hippodromes. The gymnastic, hippic, and musical disciplines of the campaign *agones* are those found on the programs of recurrent festivals celebrated in Greek sanctuaries, but their number was reduced, as armies usually did not enact the full catalogue of disciplines and the competitions did not consistently include multiple age groups. However, if a fleet was present, rowing regattas could be added to the program.³⁵ Victors were rewarded with material prizes such as strigils and hides or with monetary prizes. We cannot rule out prize wreaths, but they are not conclusively documented since the reference to a winner's wreath in the epigram of Antigonus, son of Callas, may also have been meant as a metaphor. As for the participants, we have to differentiate between the various disciplines: the soldiers usually competed in the gymnastic and hippic contests; prisoners of war also competed, especially during the boys' competitions. On the other hand, the musical performances were delivered by professionals who were either specifically recruited for the occasion or who permanently accompanied the army.

Determining the functions of such campaign *agones* is made difficult by the fact that only few explicit statements concerning them can be found in the sources. The connection to the gods was important, but, as sacrifices and prayers do not need competitions, Greek religion cannot explain the campaign *agones*. First, we need to differentiate between horse and boat races on the one side and musical and gymnastic disciplines on the other. The former can be seen as training for the subsequent battles since the velocity of triremes and cavalry were crucial to military success. It therefore makes sense from a functional point of view to test and improve the troops' performance. An entirely different case must be made for musical disciplines, which bring no military advantage,³⁶ and the gymnastic disciplines, which are only loosely connected to battle scenarios. A good soldier, like a good athlete, did indeed have to be in excellent physical shape; however, Greek individual sports were rather ill

35 Regattas were also added to the agonistic disciplines during the funeral games for Euagoras (Isoc. *Euagoras* 1).

36 The *aulos* was important for the hoplite phalanx (e.g. Thuc. 5.70), but the musical competitions were not connected to this military function.

sued as a preparation for battle.³⁷ Drilling exercises that improved coordination between several troop contingencies, as the Spartan King Agesilaus organized in 395 B.C. at Ephesus, for example, are more efficient by far. After assembling his army for the subsequent Persian campaign, Agesilaus offered prizes to the best units of the individual troop categories while refraining from organizing individual sports competitions.³⁸

As for the function of the musical and gymnastic competitions during campaigns, scholars have developed some hypotheses regarding Alexander's *agones*. This focus is understandable, since the comparatively high number of competitions connected to Alexander's campaigns suggests that they were of particular importance to this king and his army. Some scholars assume that they provided relaxation for the soldiers,³⁹ others suppose that they were intended to introduce the Oriental 'barbarians' to Greek culture.⁴⁰ The first idea could certainly hold true in some cases; however, it offers no definitive explanation, since soldiers could have also relaxed on rest days without these competitions. On the other hand, the second theory cannot explain the many competitions that took place far from any major settlement. If we look for characteristics that all campaign *agones* have in common, we first have to dismiss the idea that campaign *agones* developed as victory celebrations. It is true that Alexander staged gymnastic and hippic competitions after the battle at the Hydaspes River, but there were no such events following the big battles of the Granicus River, Issus, or Gaugamela. Therefore, Bosworth's rather curt comment "Alexander's usual reaction to happy events"⁴¹ has to be refined. If we do try to find a common denominator, we must conclude that campaign *agones* mostly took place before or after important stages of the campaign: before the Athenian fleet set sail for Sicily, before Alexander and his army left the Mediterranean coast to set out for the Persian

37 On the complex relation between war and sports in ancient Greece, see the detailed discussion provided by Angeli Bernardini 2016.

38 Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16-19.

39 Weiler 1975: 275; Adams 2007: 131.

40 Oliva 1993: 101; Di Nanni Durante 2015: 11.

41 Bosworth 1995: 27.

heartland, and before he crossed the Indus River, after the Greek mercenaries had reached the Black Sea, after Alexander had recovered from a serious illness, and after his army had crossed the Gedrosian desert.

So it seems that one motif was to accentuate certain stages of the campaign by holding competitions with special reference to the king, since any campaign *agon* would be explicitly traced back to the king if he was the leader of the army, be it Alexander or Cleomenes. Another purpose of these *agones* was to strengthen the army's coherence. During any competition, the soldiers, despite the competitive nature of the event, felt like a community – more so with sports competitions than with musical disciplines. Xenophon's report of the interaction between participants and audience highlights this explicitly.⁴² Another motive may have been that organizing an *agon* was to symbolically take possession of the place in which it was held. This could have been one of the reasons behind Alexander's competitions at Memphis, since Egypt was conquered without a fight, which meant that the Egyptians had never gotten to see the full power of the Macedonian army. As for Cleomenes' spectacle, we are explicitly told that his motive was to assert his dominance over Megalopolis, a *polis* that had been a thorn in the Spartans' side ever since its foundation.

As is clear, the competitions discussed here show some major differences: there is a variety of disciplines and a variety of functions. Nevertheless, there are enough common features to assign them an agonistic category of their own. Most of the evidence concerning the campaign *agones* refers to Alexander the Great, and it needs an explanation why this kind of competition was so important for him.⁴³ On the other hand side, there is also evidence for campaign *agones* before and after Alexander, and other scholars might find more examples in the sources once the new category is established.

I will conclude with a brief look on the spectrum of Greek *agones*. Building on the definition of campaign *agones* suggested here, I classify the Greek athletic competitions as follows:

42 Xen. *An.* 4.8.27f.

43 See Mann forthcoming.

1. Competitions at recurrent religious festivals, in Nielsen's terminology (2018a), were by far the most important group. A specific characteristic is their cyclic repetition. It would be misleading to call them "religious competitions" because, even though they were always combined with ritual acts like sacrifices and processions, this was not a unique characteristic: funeral games and campaign *agones*, too, were always accompanied by ritual acts.⁴⁴ The feature that sets this group apart from all others is its connection to a sacred place: be it a big Panhellenic sanctuary for an Olympian deity or a *heroon* for an *oikistes*, for example for Miltiades the Elder on the Thracian Chersonese or for Brasidas in Amphipolis.⁴⁵ Even just the statue of a heroized man, located in a gymnasium, sufficed as a cultic location, as the example of Aigiale on Amorgos shows: here, a father organized a sacrificial celebration with processions and gymnastic competitions for his deceased son.⁴⁶ Equally diverse were the prizes⁴⁷ and the disciplines included, and diverse were the competitions' prestige in the Greek world and, of course, the social and regional origins of the participants. But nevertheless they share common features, recurrent competitions of this kind took place from the Archaic period until late Antiquity.
2. Funeral contests were, *per definitionem*, connected to a burial. However, the competitions did not necessarily take place immediately after the person's death; instead, they could be announced far and wide so that athletes from other *poleis* and regions had a chance to attend as well⁴⁸ and thus make the event more prestigious. Contrary to cyclic *agones* held in honor of the dead, funeral games did not require the heroization of the deceased. This type of competitions might have been the earliest one, from which other *agones*

44 The question of whether the ritualistic context had any influence on the athletic performance has so far sparked various research positions but no debate (see Mann 2017: 429-34, with bibliography).

45 Hdt. 6.38; Thuc. 5.11.

46 IG XII(7), 515 (= Laum 1964: no. 50); for a discussion and interpretation of the long inscription, see Helmis 2003; Ekroth 2017: 391-92.

47 Overviews by Papakonstantinou 2002; Mann 2018b.

48 On the regions the participants of funeral games came from, see the collection of sources by Roller 1981a: 1-5.

developed; at any rate, ancient sources attribute such an origin to many recurrent *agones*. For example, the Nemean and Isthmian games were said to have had their roots in the burials for Opheltes and Melicertes.

3. *Gymnasium agones*: This category can already be found in Klee's study of 1918, who lists the *Theseia*, the *Herakleia* of Chalkis and an *agon* in Chios.⁴⁹ Their defining features are special disciplines like *euexia*, *philoponia*, and *eutaxia*,⁵⁰ the combination of athletic disciplines with artistic skills like reading⁵¹ or with military disciplines like using a catapult or a slingshot, and the restriction of participation to certain age groups of young *polis* citizens.⁵² *Gymnasium agones* could either be held as part of an annual festival for the gods like the *Hermaia* in the gymnasium of Beroia,⁵³ which makes them resemble cyclic *agones* (category 1), or they could take place without explicit reference to a deity. For instance, the same gymnasiarchical decree from Beroia does not only mention the *Hermaia*, but also that the *paides* were supposed to demonstrate their prowess thrice a year, the winners being honored with wreaths.⁵⁴ An honorary decree from Sestos praises the gymnasiarch Menas for having organized monthly competitions in gymnasia and for therefore having led the youth of the *polis* to *andreia* and *philoponia*; the disciplines mentioned are javelin throwing, archery, and foot races.⁵⁵ *Gymnasium agones* are on record from the 4th century B.C., reaching their peak during the Hellenistic and the Roman Imperial Era.

49 Klee 1918: 42-45.

50 See Crowther 1991; Gauthier & Hatzopoulos 1993: 102-5.

51 *Syll.*³ 959 (Chios, 3rd/2nd cent. B.C.).

52 *Syll.*³ 1061 (Samos, 2nd cent. B.C.). On military exercises in Hellenistic gymnasia, see Chankowski 2004; Kah 2004.

53 *EKM 1. Beroia 1*, ll. B 45-71.

54 *Ibid.* ll. B 23-26: ἐπαναγ|καζέτω| δὲ καὶ τοὺς παιδοτρίβας ποιῆσθαι ἀπόδειξιν τῶν παίδων | [τ]ρίς ἐν τῷ ἐνιαυτῷ κατὰ τετράμηνον καὶ καθιστάτω αὐτοῖς κριτάς, | [τ]ὸν δὲ νικῶντα στεφανούτω θαλλοῦ στεφάνῳ. For a commentary and references to similar epigraphical inscriptions, see Gauthier & Hatzopoulos 1993: 75-76.

55 *IK Sestos 1*, ll. 30-43, 53-74.

4. Campaign *agones*: Their defining characteristics are the campaign context and their non-recurrent nature: they were not intended for repetition. Hippic and gymnastic competitions were common, musical performances are also documented, and even regattas could occur in the case of naval forces. The sources mainly report campaign *agones* during the 5th and 4th century B.C., the campaigns of Alexander the Great marking the peak period for this type of competition, at least as far as documentation goes.

The classification presented above is in no way intended to suggest a hermetical division between the individual types of *agones*. Naturally, there were overlaps and borderline cases: the competition in Babylon during Hephaestion's funeral mentioned above can be interpreted as a funeral contest, even though it shares some features with campaign *agones*; the *Hermaia* and *Herakleia* in Hellenistic gymnasia, named after the most important deities of this institution, can be seen as competitions at recurrent religious festivals as well as gymnasium *agones*. The classification detailed above is therefore not meant to overly systematize; instead, it should much rather serve as a reminder of the great variety of the Greek agonistic world apart from the Olympic and other cyclic competitions.

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