



Greece & Rome (2024), 71.1 22–40 © The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.  
doi:10.1017/S0017383523000219

## KISSING BAGOAS\*

An anecdote, ascribed to Dicaearchus by Athenaeus (13.603.a–b) and found also in Plutarch (*Alexander* 67.7–8), details Alexander’s kissing of the eunuch Bagoas during theatrical contests in Carmania in 325 BCE. This article examines the enthusiastic response that this encounter is said to have elicited from Alexander’s soldiers. It is suggested that this impromptu kiss was read as a display of homoerotic behaviour that was fundamentally Greek, and even as a gesture of Greek domination over Persians, and that, as such, it was welcomed by the army as a momentary departure from the increasingly Persianized behaviour of the king himself and of his court. Further, consideration is given to the possibility that the choral contest in which Bagoas is reported to have competed prior to the kiss may have been an innovative form of pyrrhic dance, in which for the first time the dancers depicted Dionysus’ conquest of India.

**Keywords:** Alexander the Great, Greek homosexuality, eunuchs, Persianization, pyrrhic dance

In Carmania in 325 BCE, Alexander held a set of *agōnes* (contests) that furnish the backdrop for one of the many entertaining vignettes that dot the Alexander traditions, a story that includes one of the more colourful minor figures of Alexander’s campaigns: the eunuch Bagoas. Fresh from a choral victory in the theatre, so the anecdote goes, Bagoas came through the audience to sit by Alexander and, to the delight of the Macedonian soldiers present, received a kiss from the king. The story is variously attested. It appears in Athenaeus, where Dicaearchus’ *On the Sacrifice at Ilium* is cited as the source:

\* I wish to thank the *Greece and Rome* referees for their invaluable suggestions which have greatly improved this paper, and also my colleague N. O’Sullivan for his expert guidance in matters of Greek philology. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

φιλόπαις δ' ἦν ἐκμανῶς καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ βασιλεύς. Δικαίαρχος γοῦν ἐν τῷ περὶ τῆς ἐν Ἰλίῳ θυσίας Βαγῶου τοῦ εὐνούχου οὕτως αὐτὸν φησὶν ἠττάσθαι ὡς ἐν ὄψει θεάτρου ὄλου καταφιλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀνακλάσαντα, καὶ τῶν θεατῶν ἐπιφωνησάντων μετὰ κρότου οὐκ ἀπειθήσας πάλιν ἀνακλάσας ἐφίλησεν.

King Alexander was also madly in love with boys. In any case Dicaearchus, in the work *On the Sacrifice at Ilium*, says that he was so overcome by Bagoas the eunuch that in view of the entire theatre he bent him over and kissed him passionately and then, when the spectators shouted approval, he obliged and again bent him over and kissed him. (Athen. 13.603.a–b = Dicaearchus fr. 83 Mirhady; trans. Mirhady, adapted<sup>1</sup>)

It features also in Plutarch:<sup>2</sup>

λέγεται δ' αὐτὸν μεθύοντα θεωρεῖν ἀγῶνας χορῶν, τὸν δ' ἐρώμενον Βαγῶαν χορεύοντα νικῆσαι καὶ κεκοσμημένον διὰ τοῦ θεάτρου παρελθόντα καθίσει παρ' αὐτόν· ἰδόντας δὲ τοὺς Μακεδόνας κροτεῖν καὶ βοᾶν φιλήσαι κελεύοντας, ἄχρι οὗ περιβαλὼν κατεφίλησεν.

It is said, too, that [Alexander] was once viewing some choral contests, being inflamed with wine, and that his beloved, Bagoas, was in the victorious chorus and, still bedecked, went through the theatre and sat beside him. At this sight the Macedonians clapped and, shouting, demanded that he [Alexander] kiss him [Bagoas], until he embraced him and kissed him passionately. (Plut. *Alex.* 67.7–8)

The anecdote could clearly serve a number of themes. While nothing can be said with confidence of Dicaearchus' purpose, this being the sole item cited from his work *On the Sacrifice at Ilium* (although see below for a suggestion), the castings of the tale in Athenaeus and Plutarch impute to Alexander various forms of lack of restraint and self-control. For Athenaeus this is a story illuminating Alexander's sexual inclinations, one that substantiates the assertion that Alexander was a lover of boys (*philopais*). Athenaeus' speaker explicitly notes the lack of moderation in that inclination (he was 'madly' in love: *ekmanōs*), an implication emphasized by the highlighting of Alexander's emotional response to Bagoas' presence (Alexander is 'overcome')

<sup>1</sup> D. Mirhady's texts and translations of the fragments of Dicaearchus appear in W. W. Fortenbaugh and E. Schürtrumpf (eds.), *Dicaearchus of Messana. Text, Translation and Discussion* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Despite the reservations of E. Badian, 'The Eunuch Bagoas', *CQ* 8 (1958), 151 n. 3, Dicaearchus is usually supposed to be Plutarch's source too; see, for example, N. G. L. Hammond, *Sources for Alexander the Great. An Analysis of Plutarch's Life and Arrian's Anabasis Alexandrou* (Cambridge, 1993), 126. The differing inclusion of detail may be explained by the purposes to which Athenaeus and Plutarch deployed the material, as detailed below, if not also to the literary freedom of each in the rendering of the essential scenario.

[*hēttasthai*]), by the intensity of the kiss (*kataphilein*) that Alexander delivers first of his own volition, and by the vigour of his embrace which bends Bagoas back (*anaklan*).<sup>3</sup> A striking contrast is afforded by a passage in Xenophon, who uses Agesilaus' refusal of a kiss from the young, aristocratic and beautiful Persian Megabates to illustrate the self-mastery (*enkrateia*) of that Spartan king. Alexander's active kissing of Bagoas indeed far transgresses the model of the disciplined Agesilaus, who will not even consent to be the recipient of a kiss. The Socrates of Xenophon similarly links *sōphrosynē* (self-restraint, moderation) itself to the principle of refraining from kissing youths.<sup>4</sup> Athenaeus' subsequent listing after the Bagoas story of a number of other anecdotes that instead insist on Alexander's self-control (for example, by privileging his friendships over his lusts) further establishes the function of this anecdote within a contended discourse around the characterization of Alexander's sexual behaviour.<sup>5</sup>

Plutarch's interests in the story lie in a different direction. Plutarch notoriously characterizes Alexander in his *Life* as a man 'relentless in his pursuit of empire but self-controlled in most non-military

<sup>3</sup> *Kataphilein* suggests a greater intensity than *philein*; the terms are juxtaposed at Xen. *Mem.* 2.6.33. The former is used especially in erotic contexts, such as at Alciphron 3.31; Xenophon uses *kataphilein* of kisses between wives and husbands (e.g. *Cyr.* 6.4.10), and it is used of the action to which Alexander's friend Charon urges the king in a sympotic context in an anecdote – this time from Carystius of Pergamum – about another beautiful boy that follows the Bagoas anecdote in Athenaeus. Plutarch's use of *kataphilein* is discussed further below. This is not to deny that *philein* too could be used of erotic kisses: see J. Hendersen, *The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, second edition (Oxford, 1991), 181. For the vigour of the verb *anaklan* see *DGE* s.v. ἀνακλάω, where this very passage of Athenaeus is treated; this vigour is evident also in [Lucian] *Asinus* 10, where the verb is used in a passage in which sexual activity is likened to wrestling, and the protagonist is challenged by his amorous partner: 'First, of course, you must go into a cinch with me, and then you must bend me back, attacking and gripping me tight, allowing no gap between us' (πρῶτον δὲ κατὰ λόγον ὡς ἄμμα σφίγγε, εἶτα ἀνακλάσας ἐμβάλε καὶ σύνεχε καὶ μὴ δίδου διάστημα; translation, M. D. Macleod, *Lucian. Volume VIII* [Cambridge, MA, 1967]). By rendering *anaklan* as intransitive, the translation of the Athenaeus/Dicaearchus passage in S. Douglas Olson, *Athenaeus: The Learned Banqueters. Volume VII* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), in which Alexander merely 'leaned back and kissed [Bagoas]' (similarly D. Ogden, *Alexander the Great. Myth, Genesis and Sexuality* [Exeter, 2011], 162), rather disguises the intensity of Alexander's action; the active forms of *anaklan* are in fact transitive, as indicated both by *LSJ* and *DGE* (and I can find no examples to indicate the contrary). For Alexander's 'bending' of Bagoas, see further below, n. 33.

<sup>4</sup> On Agesilaus and Megabates, see Xen. *Ages.* 5.4–6, and on Socrates, Xen. *Symp.* 4.25–6, with P. Pontier, 'Xenophon and the Persian Kiss', in F. Hobden and C. Tuplin (eds.), *Xenophon. Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry* (Leiden, 2012), 612–18; J. Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love* (London, 2007), 342–3.

<sup>5</sup> Athen. 13.603b; similarly Plut. *Alex.* 22.1–2 (Alexander rebukes friends who wish to win favour through the provision of beautiful boys), or (so Plut. *Regum et imperatorum apophthengata* 180 f., *Amat.* 760c–d) restrains his impulses when he discovers that his friends harbour inclinations towards the same youths. Cf. Davidson (n. 4), 371–3 on the Alexander material.

situations, and especially in his amorous relationships'.<sup>6</sup> Thus in the early chapters of the biography, in which Alexander's temperament is delineated, Plutarch describes him as largely uninterested in the pleasures of the body and claims that he 'indulged...with great moderation' (Plut. *Alex.* 4.8), claims for which Plutarch furnishes proof in later episodes throughout the biography.<sup>7</sup> The erotic dimensions of the Bagoas story are not disguised by Plutarch: he labels Bagoas as Alexander's *erōmenos* (boy lover), and the term used of the kiss itself (*kataphilein*, present also in Athenaeus/Dicaearchus) is typically used by Plutarch of erotic encounters, especially in anecdotes about *hetairai* and their lovers (such as Lamia and Demetrius Poliorcetes, or Aspasia and Pericles).<sup>8</sup> He does, however, employ less emphatic language than Athenaeus in describing the embracing of Bagoas (merely *periballein* [embrace] rather than *anaklan*); in his version, too, Alexander's kiss is delivered not spontaneously but only after the soldiers demand it, where the explicitly theatrical framing of the scenario raises the possibility that the passion of the delivered kiss had something of a staged quality to it. However we assess the erotic elements in the text, though, if this is principally a story about Alexander's sexuality, its very inclusion by Plutarch is curious indeed; he felt no compulsion to address the question of Alexander's more significant relationship with Hephaestion.<sup>9</sup> For Plutarch, the emphasis instead is perhaps on the interlude of drunkenness and Dionysian licence that followed

<sup>6</sup> So J. Beneker, 'No Time for Love: Plutarch's Chaste Caesar', *GRBS* 43 (2002/3), 13; so fundamental is Alexander's restraint to Plutarch's characterization of him that Beneker suggests that it has had a profound effect on his parallel biography of Caesar, prompting him to '[minimize] the role played by Caesar's lovers and his sexual appetite'. Plutarch, for example, makes no mention of Caesar's supposed affair with the Bithynian king Nicomedes, despite the widespread attention that this garnered at Rome: see Suet. *Iul.* 49, and further discussion below.

<sup>7</sup> Notable as such proofs are Alexander's very proper interactions with Darius' famously beautiful wife and daughters in their captivity: thus *Alex.* 21, 30. P. A. Stadter, 'Subject to the Erotic: Male Sexual Behaviour in Plutarch', in D. A. Russell, D. Innes, H. M. Hine and C. B. R. Pelling (eds.), *Ethics and Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1995), 228–9 notes also that Plutarch provides rationales other than simple *eros* (desire) for Alexander's extramarital liaison with Barsine, and for his union with Rhoxane.

<sup>8</sup> Plut. *Per.* 24.9, *Demetr.* 19.6; compare also the Trojan women and their husbands at *De mul. vir.* 244a, *Quaest. Rom.* 265b–c, and Fulvia and Antony at *Ant.* 10.9 (the last of these using the same combination of embracing [*periballein*] and kissing as *Alex.* 67.7).

<sup>9</sup> So Stadter (n. 7), 229. Hephaestion's affection for Alexander – a potentially significant relationship, given the high offices to which he was elevated – is remarked upon briefly at Plut. *Alex.* 47.10 in a non-sexual context. For discussion see Davidson (n. 4), 373–9.

upon the tortuous crossing of the Gedrosian desert in 325.<sup>10</sup> The relevant chapter of the *Alexander* opens with a treatment of the famed 'Bacchic revel' through Carmania, in which Plutarch focuses on the drinking involved with the concomitant neglect of military discipline:

εἶδες δ' ἂν οὐ πέλτην, οὐ κράνος, οὐ σάρισσαν, ἀλλὰ φιάλαις καὶ ῥυτοῖς καὶ θηρικλείοις παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἄπασαν οἱ στρατιῶται κυαθίζοντες ἐκ πίθων μεγάλων καὶ κρατήρων ἀλλήλοις προέπινον, οἱ μὲν ἐν τῷ προάγειν ἅμα καὶ βαδίζουσιν, οἱ δὲ κατακείμενοι . . . τῷ δ' ἀτάκτῳ καὶ πεπλανημένῳ τῆς πορείας παρείπετο καὶ παιδιὰ βακχικῆς ὕβρεως, ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρόντος αὐτοῦ καὶ συμπαραπέμποντος τὸν κῶμον.

Not a shield was to be seen, not a helmet, not a spear, but along the whole march with cups and drinking horns and flagons the soldiers kept dipping wine from huge casks and mixing bowls and pledging one another, some as they marched along, others lying down. . . Then, upon this disordered and straggling procession there followed also the sports of Bacchanalian license, as though Bacchus himself were present and conducting the *kōmos* (revel). (Plut. *Alex.* 67.4–6, trans. Perrin, adapted)

From this scene Plutarch transitions to the festivities held in Carmania, and thus to the kissing of Bagoas; this too is portrayed as undertaken in the spirit of licence that has characterized Alexander's recent progress, with the king 'inflamed with wine (*methuōn*)' while watching the *agōnes*.<sup>11</sup>

Modern treatments of this anecdote have tended similarly to concentrate on its exposition of Alexander's character.<sup>12</sup> In what follows, I aim to examine instead what this anecdote may suggest about the dynamics between Alexander and his army. More specifically, I propose that, like the more famous and contested kissing (*proskynēsis*) in Alexander's reign, the episode of Bagoas' kiss has something of a cultural significance, and that the enthusiasm of the soldiers for Alexander's kissing of Bagoas can be understood against the backdrop of the increasingly autocratic and 'Persianized' nature of Alexander's kingship and of the tensions that this created within Alexander's camp.

<sup>10</sup> *Contra* Hammond (n. 2), 125. For Alexander's drunkenness as a 'constant theme' of Plutarch's *Alexander*, see T. Whitmarsh, 'Alexander's Hellenism and Plutarch's Textualism', *CQ* 52 (2002), 182.

<sup>11</sup> A Bagoas similarly appears in a drinking context at Ael. *VH* 3.23. M. B. Charles and E. Anagnostou-Laoutides, 'Aelian *VH* 3.23: Alexander and Bagoas' House', *Athenaeum* 106 (2018), 704–10, question the identification of this Bagoas with the Bagoas of Plutarch, Athenaeus, and Curtius.

<sup>12</sup> So W. W. Tarn. *Alexander the Great. Volume 2: Sources and Studies* (Cambridge, 1948), 319–22, in a discussion of Alexander's sexuality; rejecting any imputation of homosexuality to Alexander, Tarn aimed to reduce Bagoas to a literary invention.

Both extant versions of the story feature Alexander's interaction with his soldiers. They formed (at least part of) the audience for the contests at Carmania, and their endorsement of the amorous display is emphasized in both Plutarch and Athenaeus: in Plutarch, the kiss is delivered after the gesture was loudly demanded by the soldiers; in Athenaeus, Alexander kisses Bagoas of his own volition, then accedes to a second kiss at the enthusiastic behest of the audience. Their approval for a gesture that – in elite philosophical circles at least – would be regarded with opprobrium is consistent with the fostering of military camaraderie through sexual banter attested in other contexts: thus, for example, in listing the traits that endeared the young Antony to his soldiers, Plutarch observes:

ἦν δέ που καὶ τὸ ἐρωτικὸν οὐκ ἀναφρόδιτον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τούτῳ πολλοὺς ἐδημαγῶγει, συμπράττων τε τοῖς ἐρώσι καὶ σκωπτόμενος οὐκ ἀηδῶς εἰς τοὺς ἰδίους ἔρωτας.

Somehow even his conduct in the field of love was not without its charm, indeed it actually won for him the favour of many; for he assisted them in their love affairs and submitted pleasantly to their jests upon his own amours. (Plut. *Ant.* 4.5, trans. Perrin)

There may, however, be a further key aspect in which, in his kissing of Bagoas, Alexander elicited the approval of the rank and file. The act of kissing had, after all, become highly politicized in Alexander's court as an element of the king's adoption of Persian protocols. Within those protocols, kissing held an important place; it made visible social hierarchies, and was among the complex of gestures that constituted *proskynēsis* in the Achaemenid context.<sup>13</sup> As had been observed as early as Herodotus, Persians greeted each other with a kiss: in the case of social equals, this would be a kiss on the mouth, while a social inferior might bestow a kiss on the cheek of a man his (slight) superior, while a kiss might be blown from a distance (often after a gesture of obeisance) to one significantly superior in station.<sup>14</sup> In the case of the Persian king, his bestowal of a kiss served to mark out those recognized

<sup>13</sup> On *proskynēsis* see now most fully E. V. Rung, 'The Gesture of *Proskynēsis* in the Achaemenid Empire', *Klio* 102 (2020), 405–44 with discussion of earlier scholarship.

<sup>14</sup> Hdt. 1.134. For the kiss on the mouth as a mark of honour or as denoting kin, see (with analysis in Pontier [n. 4], 614, 619–20) Xen. *Ages.* 5.4 ('it is the custom among the Persians to bestow a kiss on those whom they honour'); Xen. *Cyr.* 1.4. 27–8 (Cyrus' kinsman bid him farewell with a kiss on the mouth 'after the Persian custom', and the Mede Artabazus asks Cyrus whether it is a 'custom in Persia' to kiss one's kin), cf. 5.5.6 (Cyrus approaches Cyaxares 'to kiss him according to custom').

as his kin. Rung summarizes thus the Achaemenid protocols for interaction with the ruler:

[M]ost people were obliged to perform *proskynēsis* (the royal official in the form of hand-kissing with/without a small bow while the rest of the people performed it as prostration, bowing down or kneeling). Exceptions were made for the royal family, who did not perform *proskynēsis* but kissed the king and got a kiss from him.<sup>15</sup>

Alexander's infamous experiment(s) with the introduction of *proskynēsis* in Bactra in 327 had drawn upon these Persian usages. In Chares' account of the attempt, Alexander had required the select group dining with him to blow a kiss, in return for which they were kissed by the king.<sup>16</sup> As Pontier has noted, Alexander was here attempting to forge something of an uncomfortable amalgam of Persian gestures, with the motif of subordination (the blown kiss) answered and compensated by a gesture of kinship from the king – a kinship granted at his favour.<sup>17</sup> The quip of Callisthenes, who made little of the king's withholding of a kiss after his own omission of the blown kiss ('Well, then, I shall go away the poorer by a kiss!'), was thus a pointed attack; this Greek set more store on his independence than on a conceded kinship with the king, disdaining the deferential mode of kissing that Greek writers had emphatically identified as Persian custom.<sup>18</sup>

Alexander's employment of Persian modes of kissing was not confined to the Bactra episode. In the tense atmosphere of the discharge of his veterans and the ensuing rebellion at Opis, Alexander spurned his Macedonian *hetairoi* (companions) and summoned instead select Persians, permitting only his kinsmen among them to give him the 'customary' kiss (τούτοις νόμιμον ἐποίησε φιλεῖν αὐτὸν μόνοις, Arr. 7.11.1, where the 'custom' is clearly an allusion to Persian practice).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> So Rung (n. 13), 412.

<sup>16</sup> Chares *FGrH* 125 fr. 14a–b (Chares fr. 10 Cagnazzi) = Arr. 4.12.3–5; Plut. *Alex.* 54.4–6. All references to Arrian are to the *Anabasis*, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>17</sup> Pontier (n. 4), 626–7.

<sup>18</sup> For Callisthenes' quip, see the version of Chares in Plut. *Alex.* 54.6. A slightly different nuance is embedded in the speech that Arrian attributes to Callisthenes in his alternative scenario around the attempted introduction of *proskynēsis*, a speech in which the emphasis throughout is on the distinction between human and divine honours. 'Those who greet their fellow-men kiss them, but as for the gods, since they are set far above us and we may not even touch them, hence they are honoured by *proskynēsis* before them' (Arr. 4.11.3, trans. Iliff Robson, adapted). The contact kiss and the distanced kiss here still function as indicators of the differentials of rank (or lack thereof) between the two parties.

<sup>19</sup> For its customary nature, see n. 14. The reference to the select Persians who here 'replace' the *hetairoi* likely betokens Alexander's recreation of the elite Achaemenid 'kinsmen' (συγγενεῖς),

This kiss is the focal point of the speech given in Arrian to one Callines, the spokesman of the Macedonian soldiers who were now contrite over their attempted rebellion ('This, o king, is what grieves the Macedonians, that you have made Persians your kinsmen...and they are permitted to kiss you, but no Macedonian has tasted this privilege', Arr. 7.11.6–7, trans. Iliff Robson), and Alexander's reconciliation with his Macedonian troops is effected by granting them the privilege of kissing the king.

Significantly, however, the kissing of Bagoas was of a very different sort. It cannot be accommodated within the framework of Persian protocol: Bagoas was no kinsman of the king, nor is there any evidence that he held a position of high authority in Alexander's court (or indeed had done so previously in Darius' court).<sup>20</sup> Instead, as noted above, both Athenaeus and Plutarch cast the kiss as sexual in nature, and the homoerotic mode of kissing belonged to a Greek, not Persian, cultural context. This is not to deny any presence of homosexual practices in Persia; it is the case, however, that Greek traditions ascribed the origins of Persian pederastic liaisons to the Greeks. The famous *locus* here is in Herodotus, who (shortly after his detailed description of the Persian practices of kissing in salutation) notes the Persian alacrity in adopting foreign customs, claiming 'their luxurious practices are of all kinds, and all borrowed: the Greeks taught them pederasty' (Hdt. 1.135.1, trans. Godley).<sup>21</sup> While a simplification (and possible misrepresentation) of the truth, what is important here is the existence of such views closely

---

on whom see M. B. Charles, 'Achaemenid Elite Cavalry: From Xerxes to Darius III', *CQ* 65 (2015), 24–31.

<sup>20</sup> Eunuchs could occupy high offices within the Persian hierarchy: see P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander. A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. P. T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN, 2002), 274–7, cf. L. Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE* (Edinburgh, 2013), 38–40. An earlier Bagoas was appointed chiliarch by Artaxerxes III in 343: Diod. Sic. 17.5.3. (For the duties of the chiliarch, see Briant 222–3; A. W. Collins, 'The Office of the Chiliarch under Alexander and the Successors', *Phoenix* 55 [2001], 268–74.) It is presumably with this older Bagoas that Davidson (n. 4), 380, confuses Alexander's Bagoas when he describes the latter as 'probably the master of the Persian court'. The younger Bagoas was certainly not master of Alexander's court: the chiliarchy (for Alexander's adoption of which, see Diod. Sic. 18.48.4–5) was bestowed upon Hephaestion (Arr. *FGrH* 156 fr. 1). The only office with which Alexander's Bagoas might be associated is that of a trierarch in the Indus fleet, if the Bagoas son of Pharnuches named by Arrian (*Indica* 18.8) is to be identified with the eunuch. That identification is, however, far from certain: see M. B. Charles and E. Anagnostou-Laoutides, 'Curtius 6,5,22–3, Darius III and the Eunuch Bagoas', *RhM* 161 (2018), 170 n. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Plutarch (*De malignitate Herodoti* 857b–c) took issue with Herodotus on this point; interestingly, his 'proof' that such relations were native to Persian custom was the pre-existing praxis of castration in Persia.



linking Persian homosexuality – and more particularly pederasty – with Greek culture within the Greek traditions. The divergence between the two cultures is at play in an anecdote in Xenophon (he himself the source of much of our material on Greek understandings of the Persian kiss) about the mocking by members of the Persian elite of the relationship between one Sambaulas and an ugly youth. Sambaulas is asked if he and the youth live ‘in the Greek fashion’ (κατὰ τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν τρόπον) and is taunted to kiss him ‘as a kinsman’ (*Cyr.* 2.2.28, 31).

Moreover, for Greek observers of Alexander’s day, not even Bagoas’ condition as a eunuch would have rendered an erotic connection between him and the king as being in accordance with Persian norms. Tales of erotic connections between eastern kings and eunuchs do appear in Roman Imperial-period sources, and the representation of Bagoas in Curtius (whose treatment of the eunuch displays such an ‘elaborate moralistic structuring’ as to render it virtually worthless<sup>22</sup>) is consistent with these later attitudes. He remarks upon the herd of eunuchs who attended the royal concubines and who were themselves the objects of the king’s sexual pleasure (6.6.8 *ipsi muliebria adsueti*: they were accustomed to acting as women), and claims that Bagoas had been Darius’ sexual favourite before he assumed that same role for Alexander (6.5.23; cf. 10.1.25 *Alexandrum obsequio corporis devinxerat sibi*: [Bagoas] had bound Alexander to him by submitting his body<sup>23</sup>); Curtius’ Orxines, moreover, labels Bagoas the king’s whore (*scortum*).<sup>24</sup> In classical Greek authors, by contrast, issues of eroticism and sex are largely absent; instead, themes of revenge, court intrigue, and tyrannical leanings (among others) dominate the image of the Persian eunuch.<sup>25</sup> Ctesias, for example, gives a eunuch a pivotal role in the death of the last Median king Astyages, while Theopompus recounts

<sup>22</sup> So Ogden (n. 3), 167.

<sup>23</sup> Curtius (6.7.2) uses almost identical language (of men bound by a sexual union) in the context of the conspiracy against Alexander that resulted in the demise of Philotas, and among those conspirators he describes Nicomachus as Dimnus’ *scortum*. For Curtius, then, there is a link between such relationships and political intrigue.

<sup>24</sup> For another story about sex, see Aelian *VH* 12.1. This is not to suggest that later attitudes to eunuchs were entirely divergent from earlier Greek views, for the political machinations that characterize early treatments are present later: compare Plut. *Ant.* 60.1; Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.9–10; Curt. 10.1.37.

<sup>25</sup> On the key thematic interests of classical Greek authors, see C. M. Erlinger, *How the Eunuch Works. Eunuchs as a Narrative Device in Greek and Roman Literature* (PhD diss., OH, 2016), 40–88, with 44 especially on the absence of sex as a *topos* in Classical discussions. For the contrasting prevalence of sexual interests in Roman views of eunuchs, see Charles and Anagnostou-Laoutides (n. 20), 181–2.

the execution by the Persian king of Hermias, the eunuch tyrant of Atarneus, for his alleged conspiracy with Macedon against the Persian throne.<sup>26</sup> Greek writers do single out a particular eunuch as being the ‘favourite’ of the king – thus Bagapates for Cyrus and Izabates for Cambyses (Ctesias *FGrH* 688 fr. 9, 13) – but the eunuch’s influence is not specified as sexual. There is also at times an emphasis on the physical beauty of boys selected as eunuchs, but everyone around the Great King (including the king himself) was notoriously beautiful, and again the selection of beautiful boys need not imply sexual usage<sup>27</sup> – just as Alexander’s own introduction into his Companion cavalry of Asians ‘conspicuous for handsomeness’ (so Arr. 7.6.3, in a list of Alexander’s alleged ‘Persianizing tendencies’) speaks to an ongoing concern for beauty around the king rather than to a sexual agenda. For classical writers, interest in Persian sexual behaviours is concentrated on concubines and multiple wives and not on eunuchs.<sup>28</sup>

For what it is worth, too, claims of homosexual behaviour are in fact more prevalent around the Macedonian court. Notable is Theopompus’ diatribe against the character of Philip II and his entourage, in which the open keeping of ‘two or three male prostitutes’ features among a litany of complaints about Macedonian behaviour (*FGrH* 115 fr. 225b). Theopompus’ critique is highly rhetorical, but a clustering of anecdotes about the Macedonian kings and their male lovers (and about same-sex relationships within groups such as the *basilikoi paides*, the royal pages) do suggest that male homosexual relationships were a visible part of Macedonian culture and indeed were less tightly constrained by social conventions than those in places like Athens.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ctesias *FGrH* 688 fr. 9; Theopompus *FGrH* 115 fr. 250, 291, cf. Hermias’ identification as a slave and a eunuch by the Chian orator Theocritus in *Epigrammata Graeca* 56 Page. For Hermias’ alleged intrigue see also Dem. 10.32; Callisthenes *FGrH* 124 fr. 3. On scheming eunuchs in the Greek tradition, see further Briant (n. 20), 268–72; L. Llewellyn-Jones, ‘Eunuchs and the Royal Harem in Achaemenid Persia’, in S. Tougher (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London, 2002), 22–3, 34–8.

<sup>27</sup> On the beauty of boys selected as eunuchs, see for example Hdt. 6.39, 8.105; for the beauty of the king and all those around him, see Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3.2–3; Plato *Alc.* 121d, cf. Plut. *Alex.* 21.6.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Hdt. 1.135; Dinon *FGrH* 690 fr. 27, and more generally Llewellyn-Jones (n. 26), 22–30; D. Lenfant, ‘Polygamy in Greek Views of Persians’, *GRBS* 59 (2019), 15–37. There are repeated claims that there were (almost) as many concubines as days in a year: see Plut. *Artax.* 27; Athen. 12.514b (= Heraclides *FGrH* 689 fr. 2), 13.557b (= Dicaearchus fr. 77 Mirhady); Diod. Sic. 17.77 (of the harem adopted by Alexander). On the number of concubines, see further Briant (n. 20), 280–2.

<sup>29</sup> On homosexuality in Macedon, see Davidson (n. 4), 365–71. M. A. Flower, *Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric in the Fourth Century BC* (Oxford, 1994), 104–11, argues for a stratum of truth in Theopompus’ calumny.

From the perspective of the Greeks themselves, then, the lack of a sexual dimension in a eunuch's traditional service of the Persian king will have located Alexander's gesture within recognized Greek, rather than Persian, sexual behaviours (in terms of sexual behaviours, it is Alexander's acquisition of Darius' harem of concubines that signals the reverse, that is, Alexander's 'going Persian'<sup>30</sup>). To kiss Bagoas was to embrace a Greco-Macedonian mode of conduct; in the eyes of the onlooking army, it was to impose such a mode upon a Persian and to Hellenize him. This functional 'Hellenization' of Bagoas is in fact evident in both literary versions of the episode.<sup>31</sup> In Plutarch's version, Bagoas' status as a eunuch is entirely ignored and he is designated instead as the king's *erōmenos*, while Athenaeus embeds the story in a conversation about the Greek love of boys in which all the specific historical and mythological examples offered are drawn from a Greek context, and in which the only consideration of such affairs in Persia is a quotation of Herodotus' claim (at 1.135, mentioned above) that the Persians 'learned about sex with boys from the Greeks'.<sup>32</sup> Read in terms of recognized Greek sexual behaviours, moreover, Alexander's treatment of Bagoas signalled the Persian's submission to his dominance; this is most explicit in Athenaeus' version, in which the boy is not merely embraced but 'bent over' (*anaklan*) by the king.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.77.6–7 includes the harem among the Persian elements adopted by Alexander; see above n. 28 on the Greek interest in the multiplicity of the Persian king's women. In a passage closely echoing that of Diod. Sic. 17.77, Curtius (6.6.8) lists concubines and eunuchs among the sexual Persian trappings assumed by Alexander, but as noted Curtius seems to betray a rather later, Romanized conception of eunuchs.

<sup>31</sup> So too Ogden (n. 3), 170, observing also that Curtius emphasizes Bagoas' youth (*pueritia*) in a way that is consistent with his configuration as an *erōmenos*.

<sup>32</sup> Beyond this passing mention of Persians, Athenaeus' interlocutor notes also that the Celts had a preference for sex with boys, even despite the beauty of their women.

<sup>33</sup> On *anaklan*, see above (n. 3). K. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality. Updated, and with a New Postscript* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 101–3, observes that, in (largely Attic) vase depictions of intercourse between Greek homosexual lovers, the *erōmenos* remains upright and is only rarely bent over (a position more usually assumed by women); an honourable *erōmenos* does not submit readily to his *erastēs* (older lover). While the vigour of Alexander's embrace presumably tips Bagoas backwards, with Alexander angled over him to plant a kiss and the king's torso thus aligned atop Bagoas' chest (rather than Alexander grasping Bagoas from behind and bending him *forwards* in anticipation of penetration, the situation depicted on the vases), Alexander's gesture nonetheless made a visual statement of his domination; compare [Lucian] *Asinus* 10, quoted above (n. 3), where *anaklan* appears in a scenario in which the extended application of wrestling terminology lends an explicit element of domination and submission to the sexual congress there described. Sexual submission is famously linked to political submission and articulated around the notion of the defeated Persian being 'bent over' in the so-called Eurymedon vase; in the inscription on this wine jug, a figure in oriental garb states 'I stand bent forward' or 'I am the bend-over' (*kuptein*: a term with obscene possibilities, cf. Archil. fr. 42 West) while approached by a Greek figure

Such a display will have resonated particularly well in a festive context, the purpose of which was in part to celebrate the Greco-Macedonian conquest of that farthest-flung outpost of the Persian empire, namely India.<sup>34</sup>

On this reading, the Bagoas who features so briefly in the theatre anecdote of Athenaeus and Plutarch's *Alexander* serves a rather different literary function from the more extensively treated Bagoas of Curtius' account (hence perhaps Curtius' omission of the theatre anecdote).<sup>35</sup> Curtius' Bagoas in fact signals the Macedonian king's increasing orientalism and – in a fashion perhaps relevant to the experience of powerful imperial wives and freemen for Curtius' Roman audience – his increasing susceptibility to the intrigues of a court system in which women and 'others' exercised undue influence.<sup>36</sup> In Curtius' narrative, the arrival of Bagoas at Alexander's court almost directly prefaces the introduction (at 6.6.1–8) of Alexander's 'decline' into orientalism and dissolution:

*Hic vero palam cupiditates suas solvit continentiamque et moderationem, in altissima quaque fortuna eminentia bona, in superbiam ac lasciviam vertit.*

It was in fact at this time that Alexander gave loose rein to his passions, and changed continence and self-control, eminent virtues in every exalted fortune, to haughtiness and wantonness.<sup>37</sup> (Curt. 6.6.1, trans. Rolfe)

---

clutching his *phallos*. See A. C. Smith, 'Eurymedon and the Evolution of Political Personifications in the Early Classical Period', *JHS* 119 (1999), 128–9, cf. 138–9.

<sup>34</sup> Arr. 6.28.3 (of the intent of thank-offerings, which he lists in the context of the Carmanian athletic and theatrical contests).

<sup>35</sup> Curtius' omission may, of course, stem simply from ignorance, although Dicaearchus' works were circulating widely in Roman circles, as indicated by citations not only by Athenaeus but also by Cicero (implying a favourable judgement on him at *Att.* 2.2.2, 2.12.4 = Dicaearchus fr. 8, 9 Mirhady), Gellius, Varro, Pliny, and Seneca (for detail see the index at 128–37 of the edition of the fragments by Mirhady [n. 1]).

<sup>36</sup> See further S. Müller, 'Alexander, Dareios und Hephaistion. Fallhöhen bei Curtius', in H. Wulfram (ed.), *Der Römische Alexanderhistoriker Curtius Rufus. Erzähltechnik, Rhetorik, Figurenpsychologie* (Vienna, 2016), 33–4; for Charles and Anagnostou-Laoutides (n. 20), 180–2, Curtius' Bagoas functions to demonstrate Alexander's decline into oriental luxury and tyranny. Erlinger (n. 25), 92, argues that throughout the Alexander traditions the narrative function of eunuchs 'is to draw attention to the fact that someone is acting in a manner foreign to the normative expectations for behavior based on ethnicity' (that is, Alexander is thus shown as increasingly orientalized).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Curt. 10.1.40–2, remarking upon the moral decline of Alexander as evidenced by Bagoas' influence on him. Curtius' Bagoas is indeed a figure of political intrigue, one whose gifting to Alexander by Nabarzanes secured the pardon of that Persian for the regicide of Darius III and whose own machinations led to the condemnation and execution of Orxines, the satrap of Persis: see Curt. 6.5.23 and 10.1.25–6 with Badian (n. 2), 144–50, and Ogden (n. 3), 167–70, on these episodes.

It is similarly with the corruption of Alexander's court that Bagoas is linked when he makes his only other appearance in Plutarch, where (in the *De adulate et amico* 65c–d rather than the *Alexander*) he is included in a clique of flatterers such as Medius of Larissa, under whose influence Alexander submitted 'to be worshipped, bedecked and fantastically tricked out...after the manner of a barbaric idol', while the downfall was contrived of good men like Callisthenes, Parmenion, and Philotas.<sup>38</sup> The episode of Bagoas in the theatre, by contrast, marks a brief interlude in which Alexander seemingly returns to his own cultural norms and even to his role as a leader in a campaign of Hellenic revenge.

Those norms are themselves accentuated by the markedly Greek cultural context in which the episode is framed: the theatre with its choral *agōnes*. Alexander's *agōnes mousikoi* (musical contests) functioned often as displays of Greek identity; those in Carmania themselves followed a revel that the sources understand, in a fundamentally Greek fashion, as a Dionysian *kōmos*.<sup>39</sup> (That it is Plutarch who documents this cultural context is unsurprising, given his pervasive interest in the *Alexander* in questions of Alexander's ambivalent Hellenism.<sup>40</sup>) This quintessentially Greek setting itself may have encouraged Alexander's spontaneous and public performance of the kiss. Further, the ritual licence associated with the theatre perhaps encouraged the interaction between Alexander and his soldiers.<sup>41</sup> There is something of a parallel in the songs sung by troops during triumphs in Rome, songs which had a strong Saturnalian element whose licence may have been encouraged by the ritual context of the procession itself.<sup>42</sup> In his triumph following

<sup>38</sup> The identification of this Bagoas (and the homonymous men in Arr. *Indica* 18.8 and Ael. *VH* 3.23, none of whom is stated to be a eunuch) with the Bagoas of the theatre is again not beyond question: cf. above (n. 20).

<sup>39</sup> For Alexander's theatrical contests as an expression of Greek identity, see B. Le Guen, 'Theatre, Religion and Politics at Alexander's Travelling Court', in E. Csapo, H. Rupprecht Goette, J. R. Greene, and P. Wilson (eds.), *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century* (Berlin and Boston, 2014), 269–70. For discussion of the type of *agōnes* in Carmania, see the addendum below.

<sup>40</sup> For Plutarch and Alexander's Hellenism, see Whitmarsh (n. 10).

<sup>41</sup> The licence of Greek theatre is most frequently focused on the debate around the degree of freedom of speech accorded to playwrights (on which see, for example, S. Halliwell, 'Comic Satire and Freedom of Speech in Classical Athens', *JHS* 111 [1991], 48–70); that audiences enjoyed a freedom of emotional expression (different from the norms of ordinary life) is suggested by Plato *Resp.* 605c–e.

<sup>42</sup> On this triumphal song, see F. Hickson Hahn, 'Triumphal Ambivalence', in D. Dutsch and A. Suter (eds.), *Ancient Obscenities. Their Nature and Use in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds* (Ann Arbor, 2015), 160–2. M. Jehne, 'Invectivity in the City of Rome', in F. P. Polo (ed.), *The*

his Gallic campaign, Caesar's troops notoriously made merry (among a variety of slurs) with his alleged affair with the Bithynian king Nicomedes. That topic had long been deployed against Caesar by his political enemies such as Cicero and Bibulus, with the calumny gaining added bite from the assumption that Caesar, as the younger man, had assumed the passive role.<sup>43</sup>

Even within the carnival atmosphere of the theatre, however, Alexander's good-humoured response is notable, and speaks to his alignment with Greek modes of behaviour. Again the later example of Caesar is illuminating. Dio (43.20) claims that while Caesar was angered by his soldiers' taunts about Nicomedes to the extent of denying under oath the existence of the affair, he was otherwise pleased by their display of *parrhēsia* (free and frank speech). *Parrhēsia*, a very Greek virtue, and Alexander's intolerance of it stand at the heart of two significant Alexander episodes prior to Carmania – Alexander's murder of Cleitus, and the downfall of Callisthenes – and, while the source traditions on Callisthenes' fall may be the product of later developments, the death of Cleitus is unambiguous and is linked to his outspoken criticism of the king in another Greek context, the symposium, in which some ritual licence could have been expected.<sup>44</sup> Alexander's tolerant response to his soldiers in Carmania, then, marks a moment of departure from the overbearingly hierarchical style of monarchy that Alexander had been increasingly adopting.

It is this cultural dimension of the gesture of kissing Bagoas – its ostentatiously Greek nature, staged within the Greek cultural space of theatrical competitions – that may have fed the enthusiasm of the soldiers upon which our traditions comment. It played well to a Macedonian rank and file who had not welcomed the 'Persianization' of the king and his court. Their discomfiture had been, of course, less pronounced than that of some highly-ranked members of the court who had been the immediate target of elements such as the experiment with *proskynēsis*, and it is only when 'Persianization'

---

*Triumviral Period. Civil War, Political Crisis and Socioeconomic Transformations* (Zaragoza, 2020), 213–14, argues that the triumph was one of the ritual spaces in which 'interaction and communication were bound to certain rules. One of them was the privilege of the soldiers to chant malicious quips about their commander'.

<sup>43</sup> Suet. *Iul.* 49.

<sup>44</sup> For Cleitus: Arr. 4.8.5; Plut. *Alex.* 51.3–5. Callisthenes' *parrhēsia*, which is embodied in the speech against *proskynēsis* ascribed to him by Arrian (4.11), is explicitly noted at Arr. 4.12.7; Plut. *Alex.* 53.5; Philod. *PHerc.* 1675 col. 5 lines 26–32.

began directly to impact the troops themselves – as it did when Alexander introduced the 30,000-strong *Epigonoí* (young Persians trained in the use of Macedonian weapons) – that an open backlash from the army itself is seen.<sup>45</sup> Curtius, however, explicitly includes the troops in his discussion of the reception of Alexander's initial adoption of Persian dress and customs (a discussion that prefaces the campaign against Bessus), and Plutarch similarly implies that the dislike which Alexander's public wearing of a Persianized costume elicited was widespread among the army from the start.<sup>46</sup> Arrian also alludes to a long-standing disdain among the troops for the king's 'Persianization' when he makes the rank and file his key focus in his treatment of the arrival of the *Epigonoí* at Susa and the ensuing mutiny of the troops at Opis.<sup>47</sup> To men displeased by Alexander's Persian trappings, the display of a Greek mode of behaviour, and its imposition on a Persian whose culture of kissing was markedly different, will have been welcome entertainment.

I do not mean to suggest here that Alexander's impromptu kiss marks any actual reversal of his policies. It certainly did not foreshadow any backing away from the incorporation of foreign customs or peoples, even if other aspects of the king's behaviour at the time might have suggested otherwise: the 'reign of terror' – Alexander's removal of delinquent satraps and generals – was in full swing, one effect of which was to reduce the number of Persian satraps drastically and

<sup>45</sup> In addition to the resistance of some of the elite to *proskynēsis*, Craterus is singled out for his staunch adherence to Macedonian dress and customs: so Plut. *Alex.* 47.9, *Eum.* 6.3 (notably, in the latter his opposition to Alexander's Persianization is coupled with his popularity with the rank and file). For the arrival of the *Epigonoí* with ensuing complaints from the army about Alexander's 'Persianization' see Arr. 7.6.1–5, 7.8.1–2. This is not to argue that Persianization was the primary trigger of the eventual Opis uprising (on which see J. Roisman, *Alexander's Veterans and the Early Wars of the Successors* [Austin, TX, 2012], 44–60), but it is plausible that discontent on this issue added fuel to that episode.

<sup>46</sup> Curt. 6.6.9–11, where the hostility is felt 'throughout the camp', and especially by the veterans of Philip, who are said to have displayed 'open revulsion'. Curtius goes so far as to insinuate that army's discontent was reaching mutinous levels from the very start of Alexander's 'Persianization' (so 6.6.12); this is likely rhetorical embellishment, but his association between the army's displeasure and the idea of open rebellion may have its grounding in the later incident at the Opis. At Plut. *Alex.* 45.3–4, a notice that Alexander began to wear his Persianized dress *outside* the confines of the court is followed by the statement that the sight offended the Macedonians. In the section of his narrative that corresponds to Curt. 6.6, Diodorus also hints at Macedonian displeasure at Alexander's initial adoption of foreign customs but does not specify the loci of that displeasure, saying only that Alexander was sparing in his use of his new customs because he did not wish to upset the Macedonians (17.77.7; cf. Plut. *Alex.* 45.2 for Alexander's desire to avoid provocation through his hybrid dress).

<sup>47</sup> At Arr. 7.8.2 the army is said to have been 'annoyed during the whole campaign', cf. 7.6.1.

thereby perhaps to create the impression of a lessened reliance on the Persian elite.<sup>48</sup> Carmania would see the arrival of further ‘barbarian’ cavalry whose presence would feature, alongside the *Epigonoi*, among the Macedonians’ grievances at Susa where the mass marriages were famously staged,<sup>49</sup> and the later tensions at Opis would ultimately show that Alexander did not intend to rely exclusively on Greco-Macedonian personnel; nor did he intend to disdain Persian customs (including the kiss as a marker of social privilege in his court). But in the atmosphere of the revived bond between king and army that seems to have been forged by the shared hardship of the Gedrosian crossing and the shared revels that followed, and in the atmosphere of Greek licence within the theatre, the troops – always eager to be on good terms with Alexander – recognized a king whose theatrical gesture had made him once again, albeit briefly, publicly one of their own, and they responded with enthusiasm.<sup>50</sup>

#### Addendum: the choral *agōnes* at Carmania

At *Alex.* 67.7 (quoted above), Plutarch does not specify the kind of choral contest in which Bagoas had competed. Contests of choruses might suggest dithyrambs, a form of choral song performed with dance and traditionally associated with Dionysus.<sup>51</sup> The mention of Bagoas’ ‘decorated’ state would fit well with dithyrambic competition, in which (at Athens at least) performers were elaborately costumed and in which

<sup>48</sup> E. Badian, ‘Harpalus’, *JHS* 81 (1961), 17, lists the victims. Besides a number of Persian satraps, also victims of the reign of terror were none other than the officers who had implemented the murder of Parmenion, a death that had caused deep division between Alexander and the rank and file (see Arr. 6.27.3 ff. and Curt. 10.1.1 ff. on the summoning of Cleander, Sitalces, Agathon, and Heracon). The demise of these men too will doubtless have been well received by many of the troops.

<sup>49</sup> Arrival of Zarengian, Areian, and Parthian cavalry in Carmania: Arr. 6.27.3, with P. Brunt, ‘Alexander’s Macedonian Cavalry’, *JHS* 83 (1963), 43; see too A. B. Bosworth, ‘Alexander and the Iranians’, *JHS* 100 (1980), 15–16. For complaints about the cavalry: Arr. 7.6.3–4; 7.8.2.

<sup>50</sup> Roisman (n. 45), 38–9, discusses the displays of emotion by the troops at the Hyphasis mutiny and notes their ‘emotional neediness and attachment’ to the king. Arguably, their approbation of his gesture in Carmania speaks to this same desire for an emotional bond.

<sup>51</sup> As P. Ceccarelli, ‘Circular Choruses and the Dithyramb in the Classical and Hellenistic Period: A Problem of Definition’, in B. Kowalzig and P. Wilson (eds.), *Dithyramb in Context* (Oxford, 2013), 154, observes, the terminology for choral contests is variable: dithyrambic contests are rarely referred to directly as dithyrambs in official inscribed records, and both dithyrambs and other circular choral contests such as pyrrhic dances (on which see *ibid.*, 164) might be designated with similar terminology, for example as *kyklioi khoroi* (circular choruses). It is just such vague terminology that we get for Alexander’s festivities at Tyre in 331 BCE, where he held *khoron kykliōn agōnes* (contests of circular choruses) alongside contests in tragedy: Plut. *Alex.* 29.1.



members of the victorious chorus probably received crowns (as certainly did their *chorēgos*, the financier of the chorus).<sup>52</sup> Another possibility may be pyrrhic dance, a form of dance in which the participants carried shields and mimicked battle movements.<sup>53</sup> That Alexander may have included pyrrhic contests at his festivals has some inherent plausibility, given that among the many varied traditions on the origins of pyrrhic dancing some drew a connection to Alexander's own ancestor through the Molossian line, Neoptolemus/Pyrhus; one of the authorities to do so was none other than the Macedonians' favourite playwright, Euripides, in a play (the *Andromache*) well known to Alexander.<sup>54</sup>

There is, moreover, a rather tantalizing note in Athenaeus that pyrrhic dances had by his time become associated with Dionysus, and that the dancers 'portray Dionysus and the Indians, and the story of Pentheus' (14.631b). Any implication by Athenaeus that a Dionysian connection as such for pyrrhic was a late development is misleading.<sup>55</sup> The imitation of Dionysus and the Indians, however, cannot predate Alexander, for the myth of Dionysus' conquest of India was itself a product of Alexander's campaign.<sup>56</sup> Might, then, this particular manifestation of the pyrrhic have originated with Alexander and his Carmanian festival? In his investigation of Athenaeus' 'bacchic pyrrhics', Slater was already prompted to suggest Alexander more generally as the innovator. He does not speculate about the festival at which such an innovation may have been introduced, but draws attention to the story that, after Alexander's discharge of his veterans at Opis, the

<sup>52</sup> P. Wilson, 'Costing the Dionysia', in M. Revermann and P. Wilson (eds.), *Performance, Iconography, Reception. Studies in Honor of Oliver Taplin* (Oxford, 2008), 102.

<sup>53</sup> See above (n. 51) for the ambiguity between dithyrambic and pyrrhic in official records. Late references to pyrrhic dance suggest that sumptuous apparel might be worn by its performers, just as by those of the dithyrambic choruses: see Fabius Pictor *FRHist* 1 fr. 15 Cornell; Plut. *De sera* 554.

<sup>54</sup> Neoptolemus/Pyrhus and the pyrrhic dance: Hesychius π 4464, citing Archil. fr. 304 West, with P. Ceccarelli, *La pirrica nell'antichità Greco romana. Studi sulla danza armata* (Pisa and Rome, 1998), 195–204. For Neoptolemus as originator of pyrrhics in Euripides' *Andromache*, see F. Cairns, 'Pyrrhic Dancing and Politics in Euripides' *Andromache*', *QUCC* 100 (2012), 36–7. For Alexander's deep knowledge of Euripides, and for citations of that poet (including from his *Andromache*) within the court, see A. B. Bosworth, 'Alexander, Euripides and Dionysos: The Motivation for Apotheosis', in R. W. Wallace and E. M. Harris (eds.), *Transitions to Empire. Essays in Greco-Roman History, 360–146 BC in Honor of E. Badian* (Norman and London, 1996), 142–6.

<sup>55</sup> See W. J. Slater, 'Problems in the History of Drama II: The Bacchic Pyrrhiche', *Phoenix* 47 (1993), 201; P. Ceccarelli, 'Dancing the *Pyrrhichē* at Athens', in P. Murray and P. Wilson (eds.), *Music and the Muses. The Culture of Mousike in the Classical Athenian City* (Oxford, 2004), 108–11, for early Dionysiac pyrrhics at Athens.

<sup>56</sup> Bosworth (n. 54), 141. In his *Alexander and the East. The Tragedy of Triumph* (Oxford, 1998) 119–27, Bosworth traces the development of Alexander's belief in the presence of Dionysus as conqueror in India.

retiring Macedonians derided the recently arrived *Epigonoí* as '[Alexander's] young *pyrrhichistai* with whom he could go on and conquer the world' (Plut. *Alex.* 71.2, trans. Perrin, adapted).<sup>57</sup> The events at Opis took place, of course, in the year following the Carmanian festival; had Alexander introduced the pyrrhic as a portrayal of Dionysus and the Indians at the festival, the snide reference to the young Persian *Epigonoí* as *pyrrhichistai* by those who had actually conquered India (the retiring veterans) would have real sting – and particularly so if another young Persian, Bagoas, had earlier performed as a pyrrhic dancer at Carmania, providing a precedent for the training of a Persian in Greek fashion but thus imputing eunuch-like status to the *Epigonoí*.<sup>58</sup>

The context in Carmania is, moreover, particularly fitting for such an innovation. A close engagement with the figure of Dionysus is evident throughout Alexander's time in, and return from, India. That engagement had culminated in the 'Bacchic *kōmos*' that preceded the Carmanian festival (so Plut. *Alex.* 67.6, quoted above) and, in a notice about the festivities themselves, Arrian specifies that Alexander offered thank offerings *for his conquest of India*.<sup>59</sup> An innovation in pyrrhics representing 'Dionysus and the Indians' would fit well in this context. It could also be noted that, while in India, Alexander's entourage had been struck by the Indians' own propensity to dance 'in the satyric fashion' and had associated that propensity with what they believed to have been Dionysus' presence in the region; some forms of 'satyric dance' were themselves akin to pyrrhic dance.<sup>60</sup> Such considerations might encourage the posited link between Alexander and new depiction in pyrrhics of Dionysus among the Indians.

Could Dicaearchus' prime interest in the Bagoas story in his *On the Sacrifice at Ilium* in fact have been the festival in Carmania and its new form of pyrrhic contest, rather than (for example) in Alexander's sexual

<sup>57</sup> Slater (n. 55), 203.

<sup>58</sup> Further, Bagoas' apparent proficiency in the contest is made comprehensible by a strong tradition of a rather similar armed dance within Persia: see Xen. *Cyr.* 8.7.1; cf. Athen. 4.155b with I. Campos Méndez, 'Los Aqueménidas y la Danza pérsica: entre religion y espectáculo', *Antigüedad, religiones y sociedades* 15 (2017), 24–7.

<sup>59</sup> Arr. 6.28.3. Arrian himself was sceptical about the preceding *kōmos* (6.28.1–2) – perhaps unjustifiably, so D. Gilley, 'Alexander and the Carmanian March', *AHB* 20 (2006), 13.

<sup>60</sup> Arr. *Indica* 18. The Indian dances are here likened particularly to the type of Greek dance called the *kordax*. Although the *kordax* was associated more typically with Greek comedy than with choruses of satyrs, it did have an occasional place in satyr-plays (see M. Griffith, 'Slaves of Dionysos: Satyrs, Audience and the Ends of the *Oresteia*', *Cl. Ant.* 21 (2002), 223 n. 98). A more typically satyric dance was the *sikinnis* (Athen. 14.630b), which was said to resemble pyrrhic dancing: see Athen. 14.630d and Ceccarelli (n. 55), 108.

inclinations, as some have suggested?<sup>61</sup> This hypothesis requires, of course, that Plutarch's version of the story also derives ultimately from Dicaearchus, since it is in Plutarch and not Athenaeus that we get mention of Bagoas as choral competitor. Dicaearchus was certainly interested in the origins and evolution of Greek musical and cultural forms (see especially fr. 72–4, 84, 89–93, 100, 105–9 Mirhady), and himself discussed the origins of *kyklioi khoroi* in a work titled *On the Dionysiac Contests* (fr. 99 Mirhady); the origins of the pyrrhic chorus in particular seem to have been a matter of some scholarly dispute among the Peripatetics.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Arrian indicates that Alexander's sacrifices at Troy – which were, in Badian's view, the topic of Dicaearchus' *On the Sacrifice at Ilium*<sup>63</sup> – included one undertaken with his descent from Neoptolemus in mind: Alexander offered sacrifice to the Trojan king 'praying Priam not to be wroth with the race of Neoptolemus, of which he himself was a scion' (so Arr. 1.11.8, trans. Iliff Robson). A digression on Alexander's subsequent development of Neoptolemus' pyrrhic dance at Carmania – and with it, the picturesque detail of the king's interaction with his young Persian pyrrhic dancer – could have been readily accommodated in Dicaearchus' discussion of this gesture at Troy.

LARA O'SULLIVAN

University of Western Australia, Australia

[lara.osullivan@uwa.edu.au](mailto:lara.osullivan@uwa.edu.au)

<sup>61</sup> Thus Ogden (n. 3), 160–2, links Dicaearchus' material to anecdotes concerning Alexander and Hephaestion at Troy (anecdotes that, by evoking comparison with Achilles and Patroclus, elicited discussion of the nature of their relationship; Ogden suggests that the Bagoas material might have functioned as an elaboration on Alexander's sexual inclinations). This is indeed a possibility. One should, however, discount the position of Tarn (n. 12), 319–22, who also assumed that the focus of Dicaearchus' anecdote was sexual but argued also that this treatment was hostile in intent, based on a posited 'Peripatetic hostility' towards Alexander. Badian (n. 2), 154–6, has already shown that a Peripatetic agenda against Alexander is itself a mere spectre. Use of the figure of a eunuch to damage Alexander would, moreover, be a risky ploy by a Peripatetic; the school's relationship with the eunuch Hermias, tyrant of Atarneus, was a source of difficulty for the Peripatetics themselves, at least from the late 320s BCE onwards: see L. O'Sullivan, 'Reinventing *Proskynesis*: Callisthenes and the Peripatetic School', *Historia* 69 (2020), 275–6.

<sup>62</sup> Aristoxenus (fr. 103 Wehrli) ascribed the origins of the pyrrhic dance to a Spartan named Pyrrhichus, while for Aristotle (fr. 534 Gignon) it derived from the dance performed by Achilles around Patroclus' pyre. If Ogden is correct (n. 61) that the *On the Sacrifice at Ilium* was concerned with the relationship of Alexander and Hephaestion and its mirroring of Achilles and Patroclus, the Aristotelian connection of pyrrhic dance with Achilles and Patroclus might give another framework for understanding the inclusion by Dicaearchus of what is here suggested to be material on Alexander's development of pyrrhic dance.

<sup>63</sup> Badian (n. 2), 151 n. 5.