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## **TRAVELLING FEMALE ENTERTAINERS OF THE HELLENISTIC AGE**

PASI LOMAN

Scholars have tended to disregard female entertainers of the Hellenistic – and all other periods of Antiquity – as prostitutes or otherwise disreputable women. Moreover, while the existence of girls who played the flute, for example, at men's drinking parties is well known, it is not usually acknowledged that many women practised music as a profession in a wider sense, e.g. travelling to and performing at Panhellenic festivals. Indeed, when we have evidence for women travelling around the Greek world performing to festival audiences, these women have usually been seen as rare, pretty much unique, cases. It will be argued in this paper that the scarcity of evidence for professional female entertainers is due to the nature of sources – i.e. there was a much larger female artistic community in the Hellenistic period than the sources would at first glance imply – and that this has led to an underestimation of the number of female entertainers. A case will also be made that many of the women working in the entertainment industry came from good families; by no means were all or even most female entertainers slaves or prostitutes. It is of particular interest that the women we shall discuss were not restricted to performing at private parties and local gatherings, but many of them travelled far and wide because of their profession, even taking part in Panhellenic competitions. In this paper, we shall go through some of the evidence for women poets, musicians, dancers and acrobats who are known to have travelled from one location to another in order to perform at private or public gatherings. At the very end of this paper, a brief mention will be given to female entertainers who travelled with armies and who had an important role in boosting the morale of the soldiers.

## Poets

There were more women poets in the Hellenistic period than ever before. Moreover, we have unambiguous evidence to demonstrate that women who composed poetry also travelled to festivals in order to perform and compete. Successful women poets received civic honours and financial rewards on par with men.

A well-known woman poet who won competitions in the third or second century BCE was Aristomache of Erythrae. Plutarch mentions that she appears twice in the records kept by the treasuries of Delphi as the victor in epic verse at the Isthmia.<sup>1</sup> Assuming that she came from the *Boiotian* city of Erythrae, Aristomache had to travel nearly one hundred kilometres to Corinth in order to take part in these competitions. In ancient terms, this is a considerable distance. It is very striking that Aristomache was sufficiently committed to her artistic calling that she travelled such significant distances so that she could perform and compete. That she actually won competitions, at least two and possibly more, is truly remarkable, for she no doubt had to compete with men, who probably would have had better education than she had had.<sup>2</sup>

Probably the most famous travelling female poet of the Hellenistic age is, however, Aristodama of Smyrna. Epigraphic evidence suggests that she travelled widely and achieved considerable fame already in her own lifetime. She received awards of *proxeny* in at least two cities. Firstly, the Lamians commemorated her, among other things by giving her citizenship, as a reward for giving several recitations of her poems, which were favourable to the Aitolians and their ancestors.<sup>3</sup> The second (known) city that offered her awards was that of Chalai[on] in Thessaly.<sup>4</sup> We know of her visit to this city from a commemorative inscription, found at Delphi, which

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<sup>1</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 675b.

<sup>2</sup> We do not have any evidence for artistic competitions that would have had separate categories for men and women; unlike in athletics, for example. The first scholar to emphatically argue that male and female musicians competed in the same category was Lee (H.M. Lee, "*SIG*<sup>3</sup> 802: Did Women Compete Against Men in Greek Athletic Festivals?", *Nikephoros* 1 (1988) 103–117, esp. 109).

<sup>3</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 532 = S. Burstein, *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII*, Cambridge 1985, no. 64.

<sup>4</sup> *SEG* II 263.

is very similar to the one inscribed by the Lamians. The rewards she was awarded were also almost identical to the ones she received at Lamia, with the exception that at Chalaïos she was additionally crowned and awarded one hundred drachmas monetary prize.<sup>5</sup>

Aristodama and Aristomache are not the only Hellenistic women poets known to have travelled. Another similar poet was a woman called Alkinoe. She was a citizen of the Aetolian city Thronion, but she is attested as visiting or moving to Tenos, where an inscription relating to her and her poetry has been found.<sup>6</sup> Although the inscription states explicitly that Alkinoe came from Thronion, Bielman has suggested that her roots were, in fact, in Asia Minor, but this view is based on somewhat dubious onomastic comparisons.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the inscription clearly indicates that Alkinoe was mobile; she had travelled from Thronion to Tenos. Moreover, it seems that she travelled because of her profession.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *SEG* II 263, ll. 14–29. It is to be noted that Aristodama did not travel alone; she toured with her brother Dionysios. He clearly profited from his sister's talent, for he too received the rights of a proxenos, citizenship, and inviolability (*SEG* II 263, ll. 30–31).

<sup>6</sup> *IG* XII 5, 812.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bielman, *Femmes en public dans le monde hellénistique*, Paris 2002, 219–220. To support her case, Bielman mentions that one Demetrius of Ephesos had a son by the name of Alkinos, but since this was a common name in many regions, it can surely not be used as evidence for his, or the woman poet Alkinoe's, origins.

<sup>8</sup> The inscription does not reveal any accompanying *kyrios* for Alkinoe, but this need not necessarily mean that she travelled alone. On this issue, see C. Vatin, *Recherches sur le mariage et la condition de la femme mariée à l'époque hellénistique*, Paris 1970, 267. The inscription referring to Alkinoe is extremely fragmentary. Indeed, it is to be noted that Bouvier has insisted that the inscription is too fragmentary to establish Alkinoe's profession (H. Bouvier, "Une intruse dans la littérature grecque", *ZPE* 40 [1980] 36–38). This view has not, however, won any support (*SEG* XXX 1066; Bielman [above n. 7] 219–221). For those of us who are working with the printed editions of this inscription only, it is difficult to judge, but one is inclined to believe that she was a poet. This is not simply because editors before and after Bouvier have found it possible to interpret the inscription in this manner, but also because the restoration of this inscription has been aided by our knowledge of the line lengths, as well as comparisons to other similar inscriptions. In any case, even if we cannot be absolutely certain about her profession, there is no doubt at all concerning her mobility. The words 'Alkinoe', and 'from Thronion' are not among those that have had to be restored, i.e. they are clearly visible on the stone (which was found in Tenos). Similarly we know that this is an official honorific decree, because the word for 'people' (or *deme*), is clear and in a place we would expect it to be in such an inscription. We can, therefore, be sure that Alkinoe went from Thronion

The survival rate of inscriptions such as the ones referring to Aristodama and Alkinoe cannot have been great. It is reasonable to assume that many similar inscriptions have been lost, or damaged beyond restoration. It would appear plausible, therefore, that there were other women poets who received similar honours, we just don't happen to have evidence for them. It would be too much of a coincidence if the inscriptions relating to the *only* two travelling women poets had survived.

None of the poetry written by Aristodama, Alkinoe or Aristomache survives. There are four Hellenistic women poets from whom some texts have come down to us, namely Anyte, Erinna, Moero, and Nossis. While we have only very few biographical details for these women, it appears that at least some of them were mobile. For example, since Anyte makes some references to the sea in her poems, it has been argued that she would have travelled [from Tegea] at least as far as the Peloponnesian coast.<sup>9</sup> A coastal city that we are fairly certain that she visited is Naupactos in southern Aetolia, or West Locris to be more precise, for Pausanias recalls a story of Anyte sailing there. Details of the story must clearly be fictional, but it probably has got a historical origin. According to Pausanias, then, Anyte was inspired by the healing god Asclepios at Epidauros to go to Naupactos in order to stop a man becoming blind. On arrival, Anyte gave the man a sealed wax tablet, which he was miraculously able to read and thus regain his vision. Fortunately for Anyte, the text on the wax tablet required him to give her money!<sup>10</sup> We may never be able to trace the true origins of this fantastic story concerning Anyte's visit to Naupactos.<sup>11</sup> It would seem probable, however, that she *did* visit the city of Naupactos and/or have some connection with the city.<sup>12</sup>

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to Tenos, and that for one reason or the other [the council and] the people erected an honorific inscription for her.

<sup>9</sup> S. Barnard, "Hellenistic Women Poets", *CJ* 73 (1978) 204–213, esp. 204. Two possible places of origin are given to Anyte: Tegea in Arcadia and Lesbos (Pollux, 5,48). Based on her Doric dialect, scholars are convinced that Tegea is the more likely birthplace of this poet. This impression is given more weight by references to the Arcadian god Pan in her work (J. McIntosh Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre. Women writers in Classical Greece and Rome*, Carondale and Edwardsville 1989, 67).

<sup>10</sup> Paus. 10,38,13.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder (above n. 9) 68.

<sup>12</sup> Barnard (above n. 9) 210. Two epigrams by Anyte herself further indicate that she indeed was mobile, or that she at least had "a wider range of social contacts within the

## Musicians

The tendency among scholars has been to dismiss all female musicians of Antiquity as prostitutes. It was in this vein that Herfst, for example, omitted musicianship almost entirely from his study on women's work in Ancient Greece. Even he admits, however, that some of these women musicians were not prostitutes or *hetairai*.<sup>13</sup> That some flute-girls, and other musicians, were indeed *hetairai*/prostitutes, or *vice versa*, is not in doubt. However, Starr has made a very compelling case for this to have been the exception, not the rule, i.e. the majority of flute-girls would have been professional (freeborn) musicians, who made their living by music, not by selling sex. As he points out, some vase-paintings do indeed depict nude flute-girls, which would imply that they were not respectable ladies, but in majority of the vases that picture flute-girls the girls are fully dressed. Moreover, even the few exceptions may be explained by male erotic imagination.<sup>14</sup> Lewis, in a recent study on female iconography on Greek pottery, has independently come to similar conclusion, i.e. the scenes in pots do not imply that flute players would have habitually been prostitutes, and the passages in Aristophanes and Menander are not decisive evidence.<sup>15</sup> She also highlights the fact that female flute players abound in vase paintings depicting wedding processions, sacrifices, and other occasions that have nothing to do with the sex industry.<sup>16</sup> Starr further notes that while flute-girls and prostitutes are often mentioned in the same connection by the ancient authors, they are

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Greek world than we might otherwise guess" (Snyder (above n. 9) 70). A) *The Lydian dust holds this Amyntor, son of Philip, who touched iron-hard battle with his hand many times. Nor did grievous sickness send him to the House of the Night, but he perished holding his round shield over his comrade-in-arms* (Anyte 6 [Snyder] = *Anthologia Palatina* 7,232). B) *This man, while he was alive, was Manes; now that he has died, his power is equal to that of the great Darius* (Anyte 7 [Snyder] = *Anthologia Palatina* 7,538). Both of the poems suggest some kind of connections with Asia Minor and/or beyond it (Snyder (above n. 9) 70). It is mainly the names that appear in the poems, as well as the 'Lydian dust,' which point to this conclusion. The first of these poems, obviously, refers to a Macedonian soldier – Philip being a traditional Macedonian name.

<sup>13</sup> P. Herfst, *Le travail de la femme dans la Grèce ancienne*, New York 1979, 71–73.

<sup>14</sup> C.G. Starr, "An Evening with the Flute-Girls", *PP* 33 (1978), 401–410, esp. 405, 408–410.

<sup>15</sup> S. Lewis, *The Athenian Woman. An Iconographic Handbook*, London and New York 2002, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis (above n. 15) 96, figs. 1.17–18, 1.26, 1.31, 1.33.



talked about as different groups and their fees are separately itemised.<sup>17</sup> Lewis makes a useful comparison with the bad image Victorian actresses had; while some may have been strippers or prostitutes, many were respected professionals.<sup>18</sup> Bélis, also, in her book *Les musiciens dans l'antiquité*, has indicated that even respectable women played music in public, and occasionally travelled to distant places to perform, both at religious and secular events.<sup>19</sup>

Until the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, professional musicians, especially on public occasions, were predominantly men.<sup>20</sup> Gradually, however, women were given more and more opportunities, too. In one of his many epigraphic studies, Louis Robert demonstrated already in the 1930s that women did indeed play music to audiences in public; occasionally at places other than their home *poieis*.<sup>21</sup> Among the inscriptions used by Robert is an honorific inscription commemorating a second century BCE female harpist from Kyme, who performed with a choir at Delphi.<sup>22</sup> Bielman, who offers a French translation of this inscription, has argued that this anonymous female harpist, whose father is named as Aristocrates of Kyme, travelled to Delphi without a guardian.<sup>23</sup> She does not, however, provide compelling evidence to support this claim.

A similar inscription from Delphi, dating to 86 BCE, commemorates Polygnota, an artist of the same genre, from Thebes.<sup>24</sup> Polygnota did not

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<sup>17</sup> Starr (above n. 14) 409–410.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis (above n. 15) 96–97.

<sup>19</sup> A. Bélis, *Les musiciens dans l'antiquité*, Paris 1999. Bélis mentions that in principle respectable Greek women of Hellenistic (as well as Classical) period were not meant to play music in public, or practice music as a profession in any case. According to her, married women in particular would not have been expected to do this, let alone take part in competitions. Yet, almost at the same breath she admits that some (young) women did play music in public (37).

<sup>20</sup> Starr (above n. 14) 402–404.

<sup>21</sup> L. Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques*, Paris 1938, 36–38. Moreover, the inscriptions he cites illustrate that the women who played the harp, for instance, would often have been accompanied by a choir of women (37–38).

<sup>22</sup> *SIG*<sup>2</sup> 689 = Bielman (above n. 7) no. 45; Robert (above n. 21) 38.

<sup>23</sup> Bielman (above n. 7) 229.

<sup>24</sup> H.W. Pleket, *Epigraphica II: Texts on the Social History of the Greek World*, Leiden 1969, no. 6 = M. R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant (eds.), *Women's Life in Greece and Rome. A Source Book in Translation*, London 1992<sup>2</sup>, no. 306; cf. Robert (above n. 21) 38.



make her trip to Delphi alone but with her cousin and nephew.<sup>25</sup>

An inscription dating to 45 CE records various victories won by the three daughters of Hermesianax – mostly in equestrian events – these victories include Hedeia winning a children's singing contest at the Sebasteia at Athens.<sup>26</sup> While this inscription comes from the Roman imperial period, it indirectly suggests that the games in which the three daughters of Hermesianax won their victories – those at Delphi, Isthmia, Nemea, Sicyon and Epidaurus – had allowed women to compete, at least in the equestrian events, for a relatively long time. This is, as Harris has argued, because the three sisters entered various competitions and kept coming back for the games, having the trouble to travel fair distances year after year; all this indicates that female participation in the games was well established by the time these three women took part.<sup>27</sup>

Lee has argued that the small number of (known) victorious female musicians, as opposed to victorious men, reflects a small number of female contestants.<sup>28</sup> However, we have to keep in mind that women had to compete with men.<sup>29</sup> This is significant, because in the Hellenistic period

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<sup>25</sup> Lefkowitz and Fant (above n. 24) 216; Bélis (above n. 19) 54. At any rate, Polygnota must have been from a respectable family because both her patronymic and city of origin are mentioned in the commemorative inscription (S. B. Pomeroy, "Technikai kai Mousikai: the Education of Women in the Fourth Century and in the Hellenistic Period", *AJAH* 2 (1977), 51–68, esp. 54). The rewards she received for her *profession* were considerable; her efforts were clearly much appreciated and respected.

<sup>26</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 802 = Lee 1988: 103, translation on pages 103–104 = Lefkowitz and Fant 1992: no. 206. Harris's false argument that Hedeia's victory at the Sebasteia came in a competition open only for girls is based on his mistranslation of a passage in *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 802. He translates *παῖδας* as 'girls' rather than as 'boys' or as 'children' (H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics*, Westport Connecticut 1964, 180).

<sup>27</sup> H. A. Harris (above n. 26) 180.

<sup>28</sup> Lee (above n. 2) 109–110.

<sup>29</sup> Lee (above n. 2) 108–10; See also M. Dillon, "Did Parthenoi Attend the Olympic Games? Girls and Women Competing, Spectating, and Carrying Out Cult Roles at Greek Religious Festivals", *Hermes* 128 (2000), 457–480, esp. 463. "The Isthmian victor lists from 3 A.D., which designates the athletic events as being for *paidēs ageneoi*, or *andres*, gives the musical events without any further description. We would expect a designation by sex similar to that by age if from Aristomache's time there had been separate women's competitions in musical events" (Lee [above n. 2] 109; *SEG* XI 61–62). "In contrast, if we assume all-female musical contests, we must then suppose that such events had existed at Isthmia when Aristomache won her prizes, and that they were then discontinued, only to be revived in the time of Hermesianax and his daughters" (Lee

women still had limited access to education – albeit that the situation had improved dramatically since the Archaic and Classical periods – and education was vital for learning to play an instrument, let alone for mastering it to the point of being able to win competitions.<sup>30</sup> It follows that women had a smaller pool of talent, diminishing the chances of many naturally talented individuals coming through. In other words, women had a disadvantage and the small number of known female victors need not reflect the number of women who entered the competitions. It may also be true that proportionately as well as numerically fewer of the educated women actually entered competitions than of the educated men, hence it is remarkable that any woman managed to win competitions (and it is even more amazing that we happen to have epigraphic evidence for them).

Professional female musicians evidently had job opportunities in a wide area also out of the festival/competition scene. Private individuals and clubs hired musical entertainment from time to time too.<sup>31</sup> All this, of course, is well known. However, it has not been widely acknowledged that occasionally this type of female musicians would have been summoned to work in far away places. It is very difficult to find direct evidence for this phenomenon, but the parties organised by Straton, the fourth century king of Sidon, may be representative of similar gatherings by other members of the Greek elite:

Straton used to arrange his parties in the company of flute-girls, singing girls, and girls who played the harp; and he used to summon many courtesans from

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(above n. 2) 110). Indeed, as Lee suggests, it would be odd if there was a c. three hundred-year gap between women taking part in musical competitions – from third/second century BCE (Aristomache) to 45 CE (Hermesianax's daughters). The non-appearance of women in lists of victors in the interim period would best be explained by lack of success, i.e. women did compete but not many (if any) managed to beat male rivals.

<sup>30</sup> W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, Cambridge MA and London 1989, 133, 141. As Harris has noted, there is no evidence at all for girls or women receiving formal education before the Hellenistic period (96). Towards the end of the Classical era there seems to be a growing sense that girls should be allowed access to schools; children of both sexes would, for example, attend schools in Plato's ideal cities (Plato, *Laws* 7,804c–e). During the Hellenistic period girls certainly did enjoy this privilege, at least in some cities, as is evident from a second century inscription from Teos, which concerns the foundation of a school and the wages of the teacher, who was to teach boys and girls (*SIG*<sup>3</sup> 578).

<sup>31</sup> W. L. Westermann, "Entertainment in the Villages of Graeco-Roman Egypt", *JEA* 18 (1932) 16–27.

Peloponnesus, many singing girls from Ionia, besides girls from every part of Greece, some of whom were singers, some dancers; he was in the habit of getting up contests among them in the company of his friends.<sup>32</sup>

It is to be noted that Straton summoned female musicians and courtesans as separate and distinct groups, so it appears that the musicians were not *hetairai*. He clearly was after distinguished talent, which was not readily available within or nearby his kingdom.<sup>33</sup>

Straton was by no means unique in his taste for imported entertainment. Probably all of the Hellenistic courts employed *foreign* musicians, both temporarily and permanently. Some of these women were also mistresses of the kings. For example, Lamia, the infamous mistress of Demetrius Poliorketes, is said to have played the flute for Demetrius.<sup>34</sup> Glauce, the harpist/kitharist who was believed by the ancients to have been so beautiful that even some animals fell in love with her, was the mistress of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. She had migrated to Alexandria from Chios and was not only a musician and a singer, but a composer, too.<sup>35</sup> A Samian flute player and dancer, Aristonica, is known to have immigrated to Alexandria to work at the Ptolemaic court; this probably took place during the reign of Ptolemy IV.<sup>36</sup>

All the female musicians we have mentioned were exceptional in one way or the other; some of them were victorious in competitions – thus they were particularly skilful; we only hear of winners – while others belonged to the small circle of women who played in the royal courts of the Hellenistic kings. It is fair to assume that in addition to these women, there would have been many women who took part in musical competitions but did not win, and women whose clients were less illustrious than the Ptolemies, for example.<sup>37</sup> Such women almost certainly existed (in considerable

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<sup>32</sup> Athen. 12,531B–C; cf. Diod. 16,42ff.

<sup>33</sup> It was not only in private symposiums that offered opportunities for musicians. Flute-players, for example, were required in religious processions, choruses, and at the theatres to accompany dramas (Starr [above n. 14] 402).

<sup>34</sup> Plut. *Dem.* 27,4.

<sup>35</sup> Theoc. *Id.* 4,31; Plin. *nat.* 10,26,51; Athen. 4,176C–D; cf. Ael. *NA* 1,6; 5,29; 8,11; *VH* 9,39; *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* no. 14718.

<sup>36</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 753d; *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* no. 14715.

<sup>37</sup> A kitharist called Satyra is a unique exception. She worked in the Alexandrian household of Apollonios, the famous third century businessman. Correspondence

numbers?), but there is little reason why they would have left any lasting memorial of themselves; they were unlikely to receive honorific inscriptions, and the ancient authors would have had no reason to write about them. Had Glauce, for example, been hired by a wealthy patron at Dura Europus or some other Greek city in Asia Minor instead of Ptolemy II at his Alexandrian court, the ancient authors would not have been interested in writing about her, regardless of how beautiful she was.

## Dancers and Acrobats

A fascinating papyrus concerning a female dancer has survived from late third century Egypt:

Sosos, son of Sosos, Syracusan, of the *epigone*, has hired himself to Olympias... of Attika (? *Athenian*), dancer, acting with Zopyros, son of Marikkos (?), Galatian of the *epigone*, as her guardian, to work with her as a flute-player for twelve months from the month of Hyperberetaios of the 16<sup>th</sup> year for a wage of forty-five bronze drachmas per month. And Sosos has received in advance from Olympias 50 bronze drachmas. He shall not fail to appear at any festival or any other engagement at which Olympias is present and he shall not provide service for anyone else without the authority of Olympias. The keeper of the contract is Olympichos, son of Herodotos, Kleopatrous.

[...] Sosos is about 30 years of age, short, large, with honey-coloured skin. Olympias is about 20 years of age, short, with white skin and round face. Sopyros is about 40 years of age, of medium height, with honey-coloured skin and a round face. Olympichos is about 40 years of age, of medium height, with honey-coloured skin, a large face and a bald forehead. The contract was written in year 16, Hyperberetaios.<sup>38</sup>

This papyrus, which dates to January/February 231 BCE, brings up a number of interesting issues. The first notable fact is that Olympias is the centre of all action, albeit that she is not writing the document herself: a flute-player is being hired *for* her; *she* pays for the services of the musician from *her* own resources; Sosos, the flute-player, follows *her* when *she* has 'a gig' to do and not the other way around, moreover she has a *monopoly* for

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between Satyra and her employer has survived in the Zenon papyri (*P.Cair.Zen.* 59028, 59059, 59087). We do not know where she came from, however; she may have been a local woman, perhaps a second-generation immigrant.

<sup>38</sup> *CPR XVIII* 1 = J. Rowlandson (ed.), *Women and Society in Greek & Roman Egypt. A sourcebook*, Cambridge 1998, no. 215.

his services. Yet, despite her powerful position, Olympias was not able to act independently; being a woman she needed a guardian. However, the guardian does not seem to have been a blood-relative of hers; she appears to have been able to hire a 'manager' of sorts to act as her *kyrios*.

Although young, only twenty years of age, Olympias had evidently been performing for some time and with considerable success, as she was able to employ a musician (and a manager?). Everything from the hire of a flute-player to the mention of them attending festivals (in plural) and 'other engagements' (= private parties?) implies that Olympias really was a full-time professional, who devoted all her time and efforts to pursuing her artistic trade. For the current study, the most significant fact is that she clearly travelled because of her profession. Also notable is the fact that she is said to be from Attika; providing evidence, therefore, that Greeks, including women, *from Greece* continued to migrate to Egypt in the late third century BCE.<sup>39</sup>

There are other papyri relating to the hire of female dancers, some of which also indicate that such dance professionals were mobile due to their profession. We have, for example, a papyrus from Philadelphia, dating to 206 CE – so late for our current study, but not unique nor anything that could not and did not occur in earlier centuries – in which a woman called Isidora, a castanet-dancer, from Artemisia (in Philadelphia) employs two fellow dancers to perform at her house. The papyrus includes the terms of the contract, including rate of pay and a promise to provide transport to and from her place.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know the distance between the party and the homes of the hired dancers; it is possible, therefore, that they were no further than from another part of the city.

Other than poets, musicians, and dancers we have very little evidence for women being involved in what could be called the entertainment industry (the sex industry being separate from this). A rare exception is an inscription referring to a Kleopatra. She appears on the last line of an

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<sup>39</sup> It is possible, though one feels unlikely, that the reference to her origin only refers to her ancestors' origin, i.e. that she was born in Egypt. If that was the case, we would still have evidence of female mobility from Greece to Egypt through her, for her white skin reveals that there had not been any mixed unions between Greeks and Egyptians among her ancestors; her family, both the paternal and maternal lines, must have originated from Greece or from one of the Greek cities in Asia Minor.

<sup>40</sup> *P.Corn.* 9 = Rowlandson (above n. 38) no. 216 = Lefkowitz and Fant (above n. 24) no. 309



inscription listing the people taking part in an audition, ἐπίδειξις,<sup>41</sup> at the festival for Apollo (or Dionysios) at Delos in 268.<sup>42</sup> In fact, she appears on two similar lists in exactly the same manner.<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to establish what exactly this Kleopatra did, for the term used to describe her, θαυματοποιός, can cover a wide range of activities and professions: juggler, acrobat, rope dancer, contortionist, magician etc. The term derives from θαυμαποιέω, to do wonders.<sup>44</sup> The word Bielman has chosen to use in her French translation of this inscription is 'saltimbanque.' A conjurer or a magician would indeed be most plausible profession for this Kleopatra, given the traditional association of women with magic in Antiquity. Hall, however, calls her a specialist trick dancer.<sup>45</sup> Even if the exact nature of her performance remains a mystery, we can be sure that she was an entertainer of some sort. Bielman tentatively suggest that Kleopatra – and other women like her – travelled independently and not with any group; the fact that Kleopatra is named separately from the other people in the same list has led her to this conclusion.<sup>46</sup>

It is impossible to quantify the (travelling) female entertainers of the Hellenistic period. A register of all known artists in Greek Antiquity, compiled by Stephanis in 1988, may give only some very tentative guidance as to the number of female versus male artists.<sup>47</sup> This list includes the names of 3023 artists, of whom 104 are women (these figures include fictional characters in the plays of Aristophanes and other playwrights). Women's proportion of all the known artists is, therefore, less than 4%, which is hardly a huge figure, but not entirely negligible either. It is also of interest that recent studies on the artistic associations, the διονυσιακοὶ τεχνῖται, by Aneziri and Le Guen, have not revealed any women who would have

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<sup>41</sup> An audition was a presentation in or at the margins of a festival (Bielman (above n. 7) 211).

<sup>42</sup> *IG XI 2*, 110 = Bielman (above n. 7) 40.

<sup>43</sup> *IG XI 2*, 112; *IG XI 2*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> Bielman (above n. 7) 211.

<sup>45</sup> E. Hall, "The Singing Actors of Antiquity", in Easterling, P., and Hall, E. (eds.), *Greek and Roman Actors. Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, Cambridge 2002, 22n.63.

<sup>46</sup> Bielman (above n. 7) 213. She makes further observations, including on the age of these artists (between 15 and 22 years), but these are not relevant for the current study.

<sup>47</sup> I. E. Stephanis, *Διονυσιακοὶ τεχνῖται*, Heraklion 1988.



belonged to these clubs in the Hellenistic or any other period.<sup>48</sup>

### Female Entertainers at Military Camps

One special group of travelling female entertainers deserve the final word, namely those who travelled with armies; here we are talking about musicians, dancers, and prostitutes. From Athenaeus we learn that in 440 BCE Pericles's troops were accompanied by a group of prostitutes, *hetairai*, when they lay a siege on Samos.<sup>49</sup> Cyrus's famous mercenaries, the so-called Ten Thousand, had female entertainers and prostitutes with them on their campaign.<sup>50</sup> Alexander allowed prostitutes and entertainers to follow his army. It was claimed in Antiquity, in fact, that he *always* had both male and female flute players among his troops.<sup>51</sup> The most famous, or infamous, of the women who travelled on Alexander's trails was Thais, the future wife of Ptolemy I Soter; she was reportedly behind the burning of Persepolis.<sup>52</sup> Even though many of the Hellenistic mercenaries brought their wives and families with them on campaigns, there no doubt was a whole hoard of entertainers and prostitutes among the camp followers too.<sup>53</sup>

### Conclusion

Ancient historians are often vulnerable for criticism that they base their arguments on meagre evidence, and form great generalisations on few isolated examples. Although few fragmentary pieces of evidence are often all we have to work with, such criticism is usually justified and one should

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<sup>48</sup> S. Aneziri, *Die Vereine der dionysischen Techniten in Kontext der hellenistischen Gesellschaft* (= Historia Einzelschriften 163), Stuttgart 2003, 221–223; B. Le Guen, *Les associations de technites dionysiaques à l'époque hellénistique*, 2 vols., Nancy 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Athen. 13,572f.

<sup>50</sup> Athen. 13,576d; Xen. *Anab.* 6,1,1–13.

<sup>51</sup> Athen. 12,539a.

<sup>52</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 38.

<sup>53</sup> For discussion on the number and importance of female camp followers, see P. Loman, "No Woman No War: Women's Participation in Ancient Greek Warfare", *G&R* 51 (2004), 34–54, esp. 44–54.

indeed be careful about making definite arguments unless there is plenty of clear evidence to support one's case. When it comes to professional female entertainers, however, we can acknowledge that there are good reasons why we would not have much evidence for them even if/when there were plenty of such women. The fact that they do not appear to have joined, or allowed to join, the artistic associations explains the shortage of references to female entertainers to a degree, but there are other reasons too. In competitions women competed with men, but they would have found it much more difficult to win due to their inferior education – and perhaps due to the conservative tastes of the judges – hence there evidently were only very few victorious female musicians or poets, for example. Yet, we do have some references, both in literature and the epigraphic records, to women who won artistic competitions, which makes it extremely tempting to conclude that there were other women who took part but did not win. We are unlikely to ever have clear evidence for such women, but it would appear very unlikely that the few women we know to have won competitions would have been the only women ever to have participated in such competitions.

In addition to competing women, there will have been women who travelled from place to place reciting their poetry, for example. We are lucky to have evidence for a few such women. These women must have been exceptional in their skills, as the lavish awards they were granted by various cities indicate – only the very best could have received such huge sums of money, for example. It is fair to assume, however, that there would have been some or even many other women who visited foreign cities and performed at public gatherings, but with less success and leaving, therefore, no lasting memorial of them. Moreover, there will probably have been many more inscriptions commemorating women entertainers than have survived to the day; the ones we have can and must be seen as a tip of an ice berg (just how big the 'ice berg' was is impossible to tell).

We also have to remember that there were many women who made their living by performing at private parties. While the evidence is again scarce, we have seen that occasionally such women were commissioned to perform at foreign cities, most notably at royal courts, but probably at other elite houses too. The ancient authors were, on the whole, not interested in describing the events at private gatherings, let alone the lives and backgrounds of the female entertainers who performed outside the court circles.

A close examination of the available evidence and careful consideration of the nature of our sources has given grounds to argue that the ancient source material is misleading concerning the number of professional female entertainers who made a living by performing at various types of events in many different locations. This leads us to conclude that not only did entertainment industry give more employment opportunities to women of various backgrounds than has previously been acknowledged, but also to point out that the social and cultural contribution of these women will have been of some significance. The value of travelling female entertainers was of particular importance for the armies of Greek antiquity, especially the Hellenistic mercenary armies.

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