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Andrew P. Boardman

*An Analysis of the Generalship of Alexander III of Macedon: Undermining
or Underlining Greatness?*

*Submitted for degree of M.A.
Department of Classics, University of Durham*

1999

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present a more balanced interpretation of Alexander's worth as a general.

Chapter One considers what shaped Alexander's campaign aims and strategies throughout his reign and how successfully he pursued these aims and strategies.

Chapter Two deals with Alexander's major battles, focusing upon the battles of Issus and Gaugamela. For each battle Alexander's strategic and tactical generalship is analysed.

Chapter Three considers Alexander's sieges. It concentrates on Alexander's conduct at the siege of Tyre, but also examines his command performance at numerous other sieges.

Chapter Four looks at how Alexander handled hostile tribesfolk, national uprisings and guerrilla warfare: his small wars. Three areas are discussed: the Balkan and Illyrian campaigns of 335, the Persepolis campaign of 331/0 and Alexander's operations in the north-east of the Persian empire in the period 329-327.

Chapter Five examines how well Alexander led his men on and off the battlefield.

The conclusion reached is that while Alexander was undoubtedly a fine general, there are many examples that one can cite, which undermine the notion that he was a commander who was unsurpassed in his brilliance.

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I allow consultation by *bona fide* scholars without delay.

The material in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

This thesis contains approximately 49,400 words and thus conforms with the word limit set out in the Degree Regulations.

*An Analysis of the Generalship of
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ABBREVIATIONS

Listed below are the abbreviations used throughout the thesis. The abbreviations of periodicals in general conform to the format of *L'Année Philologique*.

Ancient Sources

Arr.	Arrian (<i>Anabasis</i> unless otherwise stated)
— <i>Ind.</i>	<i>Indica</i>
Curt.	Q. Curtius Rufus
Diod.	Diodorus Siculus
Hdt.	Herodotus
Plut. <i>Alex.</i>	Plutarch <i>Alexander</i>
Thuc.	Thucydides
Xen.	Xenophon
— <i>Anab.</i>	<i>Anabasis</i>
— <i>Hell.</i>	<i>Hellenica</i>

Modern Authors

Atkinson, <i>Comm.</i>	J. C. Atkinson, <i>A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4.</i>
Bosworth, <i>Comm.</i> I	A. B. Bosworth, <i>A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander I.</i>
Bosworth, <i>Comm.</i> II	A. B. Bosworth, <i>A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander II.</i>
Bosworth, <i>C+E</i>	A. B. Bosworth, <i>Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great.</i>
CAH ² VI	Cambridge Ancient History ² VI
Fuller	J. F. C. Fuller, <i>The Generalship of Alexander the Great.</i>
Green	P. Green, <i>Alexander of Macedon.</i>

Hamilton	J. R. Hamilton, <i>Alexander the Great</i> .
Hammond, K.C.S.	N. G. L. Hammond, <i>Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman</i> .
Lane Fox	R. Lane Fox, <i>Alexander the Great</i> .
Marsden, <i>Gaugamela</i>	E. W. Marsden, <i>The Campaign of Gaugamela</i> .

N.B. for full publishing details, refer to Bibliography.

Dates

All ancient dates are B.C.

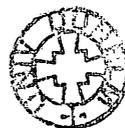
INTRODUCTION

*“His (Alexander’s) generalship has almost always received the recognition it deserves and it would be perverse to attempt to be original about this topic.”*¹

Alexander III of Macedon is still a figure who inspires awe and respect; his place in history as one of the most successful commanders of all time will never be undermined. However, his position as one of the greatest generals is, I feel, more open to debate.

Few who have written about Alexander have questioned his military prowess. In the ancient sources, especially Arrian, his generalship is practically faultless: “He found nothing impossible in any military operations he undertook”.² Many recent scholars have tended to adopt this same stance. According to Burn, “No soldier in history is more indisputably “great” than Alexander”;³ he is “perhaps ... the most incomparable general the world has ever seen” in Green’s view;⁴ “In generalship no one has surpassed him” Hammond states.⁵

Is Alexander’s generalship really a paragon of greatness? Certainly he was more than a mediocre general; mediocrity would not have enabled Alexander to conquer the Persian empire, the largest empire in the world at that time, without a major defeat. Indeed, there are many times during his reign when he does display generalship of a great standard. However, I believe that historians (both ancient and modern), while being quick to highlight those instances when Alexander excels, have been all too ready to pass over (or ignore altogether) episodes in which Alexander’s command performance is far from satisfactory. As a result, it is far too easy to view Alexander’s campaigns as a series of



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effortless victories in which his aims and strategies were always carefully mapped out. Similarly, it is possible to believe that his conduct in battles, sieges and small wars (against hostile tribesfolk) was nothing but impressive, with keen tactical skill and awareness, ingenuity and audacity underlining success after success. Moreover, his leadership can also be taken to epitomise his greatness, with Alexander directing his men in an heroic and paternal fashion at all times. Consequently, with very little attention given to Alexander's faults an unbalanced and one might say biased account of Alexander the general has emerged. It is the purpose of this thesis to try to right that balance. Starting with an overview that examines Alexander's campaigns from 335–323, the thesis will move on to look at a series of particularities, which cover battles, sieges and small wars, before concluding with an analysis of Alexander's worth as a leader of men. In each chapter positive command aspects will be combined with an examination of less commendable traits. In this manner, while aspects of Alexander's competence may be re-affirmed, a less creditable side to his generalship will also be emphasised, one that shows Alexander to be less calculating, erratic, impatient, simple-minded, self-centred, and prone to making mistakes.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹ Hamilton, 164.

² Arr.7.15.3.

³ *Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World*, 203.

⁴ Green, 487.

⁵ *The Genius of Alexander the Great*, 200.

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ALEXANDER'S CAMPAIGN AIMS AND STRATEGIES

Alexander was involved in military action throughout his reign. In this section I take an overview, and try to determine what influenced his direction of affairs and how skilfully he conducted those affairs. I shall show that prior to 327 his intentions were generally dictated by reaction to his immediate circumstances, although long-term planning was not totally absent. However, from 327, having overcome all immediate obstacles and gained possession of Darius III's empire, he gained the inclination and, as he saw it, the freedom, to develop increasingly grandiose plans. We shall see that before 327 (with a couple of notable exceptions) his designs were usually sound, if occasionally rather risky, and were fulfilled. But after 327, when his horizons had widened, his objectives become harder to justify, and if he did succeed it was at great cost or for a short time. We shall see also that his objectives and the course of his campaign were by no means determined only by military factors.

As for Alexander's strategic planning to achieve his aims, we shall see that it was largely competent (if sometimes a little risky). However, he was not complex or inventive but was largely reacting to his opponents, and relied merely on speed, ferocity and boldness.¹

GREECE (335 B.C.): THE BALKANS, ILLYRIA AND THEBES

After becoming king, Alexander's first campaign saw him enter the territory of the tribes to the north and west of Macedonia. In this instance he was primarily reacting to

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circumstance; with the death of his father, unrest had once more erupted in the Balkans and Illyria, with the various tribes there determined to assert their independence and harm Macedonia. Consequently, Alexander was forced to subdue these peoples before they posed a serious threat to his own kingdom. However, it would be wrong to claim that Alexander was simply responding to the events he was faced with; in truth there was probably an element of a more protracted plan. At this early stage Alexander had designs upon the Persian empire: Philip had sent an advance force to Asia Minor and Alexander was keen to follow in his father's footsteps. Moreover, as the newly recognised *hegemon* of the League of Corinth it was his duty to conduct a campaign of revenge against Persia, and his desire for personal glory urged him to strike against the mighty Great King. However, he could not leave Macedonia and embark upon operations against Persia without having first ensured the safety of his own country. Thus, while his campaign against the tribesmen of the Balkans and Illyria may have been born out of a response to their hostile intentions, it was also a calculated move designed to protect his kingdom so that he could look towards Persia.

Some scholars have further claimed that Alexander had a predetermined plan to push towards the Danube and create a natural and defensible frontier for his kingdom.² Certainly the dispatch of ships from Byzantium to the Danube in the early stages of the campaign would seem to suggest that Alexander did have some designs on the river. However, I doubt that Alexander actually envisaged turning it into a permanent defensive barrier. While he did reach the Danube, once his operations were completed he seems to have left no defences and his troops retired to Macedonia. It would be better to argue that his designs on the Danube were inspired less by a military necessity and more by a longing (*pothos*) to cross the Danube as Arrian claims. This may have been born out of a

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wish to outdo his father and Darius I, both of whom had failed to conduct operations across the Danube with any resounding success.³

Alexander's strategy to provide for the security of his kingdom was quite simple. He intended to conduct a rapid march into the territory of the hostile tribes, seek out and dominate the enemy, and react to incidents with a firm hand as they arose. Thus, his troops first marched into the Balkans and quickly dealt with the Thracians, Triballians and Getae. So successful were his operations in this area that he managed not only to gain the good will of the tribes involved, but he also received embassies from people outside his empire.⁴ When news then came that tribes in Illyria were causing greater trouble, Alexander quickly shifted his attention to this theatre, sought out the belligerent tribesfolk there, and swiftly ended the trouble. Indeed no further trouble from Illyria is attested during Alexander's reign.⁵

That Alexander reacted to circumstance rather than followed a preordained plan is evident from what happened next. While he was in the north-west, rumours had reached Thebes that he had been killed; the city, backed by Persian gold, openly revolted. Alexander had to respond to a new crisis, and with operations completed in the Balkans and Illyria, his fresh objective became the subjugation of Thebes. The revolt had to be quashed rapidly: a Macedonian garrison was besieged in the Cadmea and this insurrection might lead other Greek cities openly to oppose Macedon. Furthermore, Alexander could not embark upon his Persian expedition with Greece left in this state.

His strategy to deal with this problem was again plain but astute and effective. Knowing that speed was vital, Alexander took the risk of not going back to Macedonia for reinforcements; instead he conducted a forced march to confront the city and

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succeeded in catching the Thebans off-guard, isolating them from any potential allies. Alexander then stormed the city quickly, relieving his own beleaguered garrison and ending the rebellion in one bold stroke. Thebes was razed and its population sold into slavery, ostensibly at the behest of members of the League of Corinth, although it is likely that they followed a course that they thought would please Alexander. With the situation dealt with in such a rapid, decisive and brutal manner, no other city dared oppose the might of Alexander. Cities that had been contemplating an uprising quickly made their peace and Alexander's hold over the Greek world was confirmed.

These early actions bear the hallmarks of how Alexander was to go about his campaigns (at least until 327). His goals were usually formed as a reaction to circumstances, although long-term planning and non-military considerations could also play a part. His strategies to achieve his aims were then largely simple, relying on aggressive responses to the moves of his opponents, which, despite being occasionally risky, were usually successful.

We shall now see how this pattern continues with Alexander's strike into Persia.

THE CONQUEST OF ASIA MINOR: THE HELLESPONT TO MILETUS

With the security of his kingdom achieved Alexander was able to concentrate on an expedition into the Persian empire. However, it is a matter of controversy what Alexander's exact intentions were at this time. Some scholars have argued that, bolstered by a desire to increase the territory and prestige of Macedon and fired by his own daring ego, Alexander had designs to conquer the entire Persian empire.⁶ Indeed, Diodorus claims that when Alexander landed upon Persian soil for the first time he threw his spear

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into the ground and accepted Asia from the gods “as a spear-won prize”.⁷ This has been taken to mean that Alexander had his sights set upon the whole of Persia (Asia was synonymous with the Persian empire at that time), and that he intended to use Asia Minor as a spring-board from which to strike further into the Great King’s territory. However, I would not go this far. Perhaps Alexander had a dream to acquire the Persian empire, but I would suggest that in reality he had no panoramic and designed plan to conquer all of Persia. I find it easier to believe that Alexander began his campaign with the intention of simply pushing into the Persian empire to see what he could get away with and then taking each step as it came. Given that he was entering a vast and hostile land where he had no way of divining what might happen, this seems the most logical plan of action to attribute to him. Moreover, it would also ensure that he could still extend the territory of Macedonia and gain recognition for himself. Concerning Diodorus’ statement, if one is to believe that Alexander actually behaved in that manner, I would suggest that he was acting for an audience and employing propaganda and boastful words to mark the beginning of this, a momentous expedition. It should not be taken as proof of his designs on the whole of Persia.⁸

One should also bear in mind that Alexander was under pressure to fulfil his duty as *hegemon* of the League of Corinth. Close to Greece and watched intently by the city states, I am sure that Alexander felt more inclined to give thought to a campaign of revenge which would see the Persians humiliated and the Greek cities of Asia Minor freed, than to the conquest of all Persia.

His campaign was launched on the basis of a simple strategy. Leaving Antipater in Greece as his regent with an army to deal with any problems that might occur there, he

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intended to cross the Hellespont and respond to anything the Persians might do. Such a move would doubtless result in a pitched battle, one which Alexander no doubt wanted and envisaged winning. Once he had a victory under his belt, he then intended to free the Greek cities in the immediate area.

Were Alexander's aims and strategies wise?

One might argue that he was wrong to initiate a strike against Asia Minor because the situation at home was still fragile. Many of the cities in Greece had been forced into submission thanks to the display of Macedonian power; they might be tempted to reverse this situation with Alexander's absence. Furthermore, Sparta had never been brought under control and Persia could exploit this. However, I would maintain that Alexander was right to proceed with his invasion when he did. Firstly, he actually had a relatively firm foundation at home. The security force that he left with the competent Antipater was nearly as large as the army he was taking into Asia Minor; this would ensure that the cities of Greece were not tempted to oppose Macedonian rule.⁹ Moreover, Sparta was not the great power it had once been and was, for the moment, isolated in its open opposition to Alexander.

Secondly, Asia Minor itself was ripe for invasion owing to confusion in the Persian empire that had been rife since the beginning of the century. Afflicted by disputes over the succession in the royal house and by rebellions in various satrapies, the empire's whole superstructure had been threatened. Alexander's father had successfully exploited such weaknesses, and even though the gains he had made had been wiped out, Alexander's troops still held a bridgehead across the Hellespont. Added to this, the Persian fleet was away in Egypt having, it seems, just finished putting down a rebellion

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there.¹⁰ One can argue that Alexander would have known about this native revolt and the opportunity that it gave him to cross the Hellespont unopposed.

Alexander's planned strategy was also sound. He could be fairly sure that the Persians would offer battle: after all they needed to protect their territory and banish the invader.¹¹ Moreover, the satraps of Asia Minor would want to impress their Great King by responding with aggression to this threat to his empire. They might also have contemplated a quick victory against an enemy king who was young and inexperienced.

Alexander could also be reasonably confident of a victory in battle. History suggested that the Great Kings took a long time to organise effective responses to threats posed to their territory: for instance the Ionian revolt (499-493) or the invasion of Cyrus (401). In a preliminary encounter, therefore, Alexander would probably face a mere fraction of the Persian military machine. He could also expect such an opposing force to be little match for his own troops. Martial history indicated that even when the Persians were organised and when they outnumbered the Greeks, they still found it extremely hard to win battles. Alexander could place tremendous faith in the ability of his army (which had itself beaten Greek forces), to achieve a victory over the assembled Persian host.

If Alexander was victorious, he could then confidently anticipate that the Greek cities of Asia Minor would welcome him as they had welcomed his father in 336. This would not only give him a firm hold upon the territory which he had acquired, but would also provide him with necessary supplies and money, which he desperately needed to maintain his army since Philip had ended his reign 500 talents in debt.¹² As an added bonus, the city-states, upon hearing of his liberation of Greek compatriots, might not be

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so keen to voice any qualms that they had about Macedonian rule.

The opening moves of his expedition saw matters proceed as planned: Alexander was able to seek out the Persians quickly and defeated them at the River Granicus. However, his plans might not have gone so smoothly if Memnon, the commander of the Greek mercenaries fighting for Persia, had had his way. Before the two sides met, Memnon had stressed the superiority of the Macedonian army and advocated that the Persians retire before Alexander, burning their towns and crops as they went. He believed that denying Alexander access to local supplies would force him to halt his advance and would weaken the Macedonian army, laying it open to a counter-strike. At the same time Memnon suggested that the Persians exploit their own naval advantage and carry the war into Greece. While his plans were sound, the Persian nobles would not consider ceding land to an invader. Moreover, nettled no doubt by reference to the inferiority of their own troops and fear of what the Great King would do if they did retire, they decided to offer battle – an act which played into Alexander’s hands. It would have been interesting to see how Alexander would have coped with Memnon’s more cunning ploy. As it was, he easily overcame the Persian plan.

Defeated, the Persians lost a large proportion of their effective infantry, and so were in no position to contest the occupation of Asia Minor by land. Consequently, Alexander “liberated” the Greek cities in the immediate area at his leisure, and was soon in control of most of the Ionian coast.¹³ This, together with his dispatch of 300 Persian panoplies to Athens to be dedicated as the first fruits of a war of revenge, gained him valuable support back in Greece. Moreover, these freed cities then paid contributions to the upkeep of Alexander’s army, helping him to finance his expedition. Additional revenue

was gained from hostile cities that were forced to pay tribute or, like Sardes, were raided for their treasures.

With these early successes to his name, Alexander was then forced to re-adjust his military thinking upon reaching the coastal city of Miletus; here the Persian navy confronted him for the first time.

THE CONQUEST OF ASIA MINOR: MILETUS AND THE FLEET

Knowing that the Persian navy was in the immediate area, the garrison commander of Miletus, Hegesistratus, had abandoned his plan to submit to Alexander, “taken heart again”, and decided to resist the Macedonian advance (Arr.1.18.4). Unfortunately for Hegesistratus, Alexander’s smaller fleet reached Miletus first and blockaded the city’s harbour. The Persian navy was then unable to help; indeed, even the base that they were using at nearby Mycale was soon neutralised when Alexander sent a small force of cavalry and infantry to prevent their landing there.¹⁴ Reduced to the role of spectators, the Persian fleet saw Miletus fall to Alexander quickly. Nevertheless, with an enemy fleet now on the scene, the situation that the Macedonians faced had changed dramatically. Alexander realised that he had to develop a plan to combat this fresh threat. His successes at Miletus and Mycale had made him realise that the Persian fleet could be neutralised if its bases were captured. Consequently, Alexander decided to continue striking against these bases. What is less certain is how far Alexander intended to go with this plan. Arrian seems to indicate that Alexander began to think in the long term; that he intended to defeat the Persian fleet completely by not only capturing its bases in Asia Minor, but striking against the Syrian coast bases from where the fleet was recruited:

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“By capturing the cities on the coast he would break up the Persian fleet, since they would have nowhere to make up their crews from, and no place in Asia where they could put in” (Arr.1.20.1). While some scholars accept this, I find it difficult to believe that Alexander saw so far ahead. Not only was the Syrian coast far removed from his present location, but it is more likely that foremost on his mind was how to frustrate the Persian fleet in his own locality, rather than the development of some grand scheme to destroy it completely. For this reason I believe that Alexander determined merely to conduct strikes against harbours in western Asia Minor which the Persian navy might use. It is then feasible to suggest Alexander expected that areas that he had captured and passed beyond would keep the Persian fleet away and fend for themselves.¹⁵

Part of Alexander’s planning saw him take the unusual move of disbanding his own fleet. His reasons are far from certain. He may have believed that he had shown at Miletus and Mycale that he needed no fleet to humble the Persian squadrons, but could do this from the land by taking their bases. Also his fleet was inferior to the Persian fleet (he dared not risk a defeat that might induce the Greek cities to revolt); it was expensive to maintain;¹⁶ and the loyalty of the Greek sailors may have been questionable. Whatever his reasons, disbanding the fleet proved to be an ill considered move.

Firstly, without a fleet Alexander could not hope to capture the coastal towns that he aimed for with any efficiency. Miletus should have made him realise that success against coastal towns was best achieved by the collaboration of a navy and land-based troops. As it was, when he besieged Halicarnassus in 334, he found himself in a weak position. Memnon had moored a squadron of ships in the city’s harbour, and without the threat of a Macedonian fleet these ships could easily ferry food and troops into Halicarnassus

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should the need arise. The crews of these ships could also be used to reinforce the garrison. Subsequently, Alexander was forced into a siege with the knowledge that the city could be provisioned indefinitely.¹⁷

Secondly, without a fleet to counter the Persian navy, Alexander could not be guaranteed a hold over recently acquired coastal towns or over the Aegean. If he hoped that the cities which he had captured and passed beyond could fend for themselves, he was to be sorely mistaken. As he continued his conquests in the coastal satrapies of Caria, Lycia and Pamphylia and eventually pressed on to Gordium (See below), the Persian fleet had a free hand to roam the northern coast and make themselves masters of the Aegean. They re-occupied many cities that Alexander had only recently taken himself, and there was even the danger that the Persian high command might exploit the situation to launch an invasion of Greece: clearly Alexander had failed in his aim to frustrate the Persian navy.¹⁸ The situation did indeed look bleak for Alexander, and evidence that he recognised his error comes in his decision to commission a new fleet in 333.¹⁹ It was many months before this initiative bore fruit, but Alexander was saved further embarrassment as Memnon, the man responsible for the impetus behind the Persian counter-attack in the Aegean, died from sickness. Moreover, it appears that even before Memnon's death Darius had decided to switch direction and concentrate his efforts on a land-based campaign. Consequently, he recalled to his own army the mercenaries who had been helping to make the fleet so successful. Hence, the Persian fleet's ability to damage Alexander's operations was reduced and, with the emergence of a new Macedonian fleet, the war in the Aegean eventually reached some kind of parity.

However, Alexander's decision to disband his fleet was to haunt him even later on in

his campaigning. If he had maintained his fleet and added to it, then he might have found himself in a more favourable position when he began his siege of the island city of Tyre. As it was he had no ships (his hastily reassembled fleet was preoccupied trying to curtail the activities of the Persian navy in the Aegean), and so began the siege of the island fortress from a very weak position.²⁰

It is also worth pointing out that Alexander's decision to disband his fleet is evidence against the view that he was a gifted long-term planner. If he had been planning to invade the rest of Persia as early as 334 then surely he might have been tempted to keep his fleet, knowing that he would need it down the Syrian coast.

Overall, it would appear that that Alexander's military planning after his success at Miletus was extremely poor, and harmed him both in the short and long term.

ON TO GORDIUM AND BEYOND TO ISSUS

As noted above, from Miletus Alexander continued his conquest by way of the satrapies of Caria, Lycia and Pamphylia. This route was probably influenced by a desire to secure points along the coast, and so deny bases to the Persian fleet.²¹ However, Alexander did not make a thorough job of it. As Bosworth has pointed out, his route failed to take him into Lower Lycia and, as a result, the next summer saw the Persian commander Pharnabazus engage freely in naval operations in this area.²² Furthermore, Alexander's move southwards did not prevent the Persian fleet from attacking other areas in the north, as has been mentioned above.

Once Alexander had entered the fertile plain of Pamphylia and conducted quick

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operations against the neighbouring cities, he probably considered his subjugation of the coast complete. He had occupied Side and beyond this stretched the Cilician coast, which was extremely rough and lacking in good harbours; there was no need for military excursions here.²³ Thus, he believed he was now free to shift his full attention to the interior and so aimed for the city of Gordium.²⁴ I would suggest that Alexander had still not developed a definite plan to search out Darius and beat him in battle, although he had probably begun to entertain the idea as a possibility. Instead, his move inland was induced partly by his desire to continue his conquests, see what he could get away with and annex more of the Great King's empire. Also, such a move would allow him to adhere to his role as *hegemon* of the League of Corinth, and would go some way to freeing the cities of the Aegean from supplying his army. However, while Alexander definitely had the military might to conduct a successful campaign against the interior, as has been noted above it was a mistake to move on and leave the areas which he had conquered so vulnerable to a counter-strike by the Persian fleet. Moreover, it seems that, in moving to Gordium, Alexander did not make a very good job of securing the land that he passed through. His stay in Pamphylia was not strikingly successful and although he organised various garrison points, the province was hardly fully pacified or organised when he left it.²⁵ It also appears that he left no garrisons in the province of Pisidia (by the end of his reign the area was still stubbornly independent), and in Phrygia he merely left one of his generals, Antigonus, to complete its subjugation while he pressed on to Gordium.

It is at Gordium that Alexander prepared to put into operation a new campaign aim: to seek out the Great King Darius III and attempt to defeat him in battle.

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Why did he consider it an opportune moment to do this?

Firstly, it was around this period that Alexander received news that Darius had collected an army together and was planning to meet him in battle in person; Alexander was quite prepared to oblige the Great King and so reacted accordingly.

Secondly, by undoing the Gordian knot Alexander was given the confidence and impetus for this move. However, I would not argue, as some scholars have done, that in undoing the knot (and hearing the approval of the gods in the form of thunder and lightning that night),²⁶ Alexander became besotted by the prophecy that the person who did so would become Lord of Asia, and so developed a grand desire and design to occupy the whole of the Persian empire. While Alexander was deeply religious and superstitious, he was also a practical man. The Persian empire still stretched on to distant and remote areas. Common sense would have told him that it was futile to think and plan so far ahead, despite the prophecy. For Alexander the time was right to expand his territory yet further and, in so doing, humble the Great King and continue his campaign of revenge for the Greeks; it was not yet the time to be thinking of acquiring all Darius' empire.

His strategy was again quite simple. He intended to make a rapid and aggressive push forward, locate Darius and then beat him in battle. Consequently, leaving Gordium he hastened through the Anatolian uplands into Cilicia and arrived at Tarsus in September 333. From here he then moved eastwards into the defiles of southern Cilicia and prepared to confront Darius, whose position he had learnt was at Sochi, just beyond the passes.²⁷

Alexander's new aim and strategy was ill considered: he risked losing all that he had

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gained thus far. At Gordium he had received word that his plans to subdue the Persian fleet had failed, and he must have been aware that the interior was not completely subdued. However, even though consolidation was advisable, Alexander had no intention of going back. Instead he commissioned a new fleet to deal with the Persian navy and put his faith in his satraps to deal with any local unrest. But this was hardly wise. It was risky to expect a hastily re-assembled Macedonian navy to have an effect on the Persian fleet, and his satraps would be hard pressed to attain complete pacification without the presence of the main army. Perhaps Alexander hoped that by defeating Darius the repercussions would be so favourable as to calm the areas that he was leaving behind. However, this was a tremendous gamble: he might lose regions before he even overcame Darius, and there was no guarantee that he would actually defeat the Great King. Indeed, in seeking out Darius, Alexander ran the risk of having to fight a battle at a site of the Great King's choosing against an army which was likely to outnumber his own.²⁸

Alexander's seemingly hazardous actions were finally vindicated. The Persian offensive in the Aegean was eventually brought under control ensuring some stability in his rear. Moreover, at Issus Alexander did succeed in defeating Darius in battle and this helped to bolster his grip on the territory which he had already acquired. So, even though it was a gamble to adopt the plan of action that he did, it paid off. Ultimately, therefore, it is hard to criticise his generalship when he did in fact succeed.

THE SYRIAN COAST AND EGYPT

Following Darius' defeat at Issus, Alexander was faced with two options: did he pursue the Great King who had fled eastwards, or did he turn his attention southwards

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towards the Syrian coast and Egypt? Alexander decided upon the latter option. Why?

Alexander was still intent on taking the opportunities given to him to carve out his own empire. Circumstances now favoured a push south as Darius was in no position to contest his actions. Moreover, Alexander probably hoped that such a move would effect the disintegration of the Persian fleet and so help to secure his empire. Unlike his earlier attempts to frustrate the Persian navy, he now had the chance to cripple it completely by capturing its home bases along the Syrian coast.

It is also worth pointing out that Egypt itself had strong connections with the Greeks: there had been Greeks there for 300 years or more and the tradition of fighting Greece's wars against Persia in Egypt went back to the time of the Delian League. Given Alexander's Greek background, it seems logical to expect that he would aim for there.

More long-term plans probably played their part as well. It seems likely that Alexander had begun to contemplate another campaign against Darius. Indeed, if there is any truth in the various letters the sources come up with between Alexander and Darius after Issus, then there is no doubt that Alexander intended to confront Darius at a later date: "I shall pursue you wherever you are", are his closing words to the Great King in response to a letter that reached him at Marathus in early 332.²⁹ However, Alexander could not follow such a course if he left areas of potential unrest behind him. Consequently, his decision to go down the Syrian coast was also born out of a desire to secure his rear before he pushed further into the Persian empire.³⁰

Alexander's decision to aim for the Syrian coast and Egypt was astute.

Firstly, the area was a potential threat to his continued advance into the Persian empire. If the sea-board was not secured then the Persians could use it to launch strikes

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against the territories which Alexander had already captured, and against his rear as he progressed deeper into Persia; Alexander could be cut off and isolated. Furthermore, there was always the possibility that Persia would then go further and use the coast to launch a naval assault against Greece, a scenario which Alexander had been wary of since 333.³¹ That Alexander clearly understood these factors is demonstrated by the speech which Arrian attributes to him before the siege of Tyre (Arr.2.17.1-3).³²

Secondly, capturing the home bases of the Persian fleet did indeed offer an excellent prospect of incapacitating Persian naval affairs. Not only would the fleet have nowhere to put in for supplies, but also, having possession of their homes, Alexander could force the squadrons to surrender. There was, of course, the chance that the fleet, although of Phoenician descent, might stay loyal to the Persians. However, faced with the occupation of their cities (and the news that Alexander had defeated the Great King in battle at Issus) it was more likely that they would drift back to the Syrian seaboard and surrender. Moreover, there was even the prospect that Alexander could then force the Phoenician squadrons to join him. In this way he would not only guarantee the security of Greece, his coastal territories and his lines of communications from Persian naval threats, but could use the fleet to aid his own designs.³³ Speed, of course, would be of prime importance. If he could not capture the cities before their squadrons arrived home then, lacking his own fleet, he risked a similar situation to the one that he had faced at Halicarnassus.³⁴ Although eventually successful at Halicarnassus, his lack of a fleet cost him dearly, and he could not afford to be dragged into similar sieges all down the Syrian coast. However, with their squadrons still in the waters around Asia Minor and isolated from Persian help, the Phoenician cities were relatively weak; Alexander could use this isolation, together with his army's proficiency in siege warfare, to capture the cities

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before their squadrons returned home.

Finally, an attempt to wrest Egypt from the Persians would probably meet with little resistance. Egypt had only recently been brought back into the Persian empire following a bitter war which ended more than sixty years of Egyptian independence (in 343-342). Consequently, the locals did not view the Persians with any affection, especially as, according to tradition, Persian conquerors had a habit of offending their religion. Most, therefore, wanted an end to Persian rule and were ready to welcome any organised challenge to it. Alexander could hope to exploit such popular unrest. Moreover, if events turned out as Alexander planned, by the time he reached Egypt there was a good chance that he might have the Phoenician navy under his command. Given Egypt's coastline and the fact that the Nile ran through its heart, a fleet would significantly aid in the removal of any Persian opposition.

Some might argue that despite these factors Alexander should still have gone after Darius. By not doing so he missed the chance to strike at the Great King when he was weakened and demoralised, and allowed him to regroup and prepare another army. However, Alexander would have been foolish to launch himself after Darius without having first secured his rear. Moreover, after Issus Alexander would not have known exactly where the Great King had fled. If he had tried to pursue Darius he would have been drawn further into the Persian empire, trying to catch a foe who remained elusive, while his rear remained vulnerable to attack. Furthermore, a direct pursuit might have led Darius, in desperation, to embark upon a guerrilla campaign. Without first providing for the security of his territories, it would have been extremely hazardous for Alexander to get involved in such a protracted war.

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The wisdom of Alexander's push south becomes clear when it is considered that events transpired more or less as Alexander had hoped. Apart from the sieges of Tyre and Gaza,³⁵ he was able to capture all the cities of the Syrian seaboard with relative ease, adding their squadrons to his own fleet. Following on from this, Egypt then fell without a blow. In the meantime, events in the west had also turned in Alexander's favour: the disintegration of the Persian fleet had ensured that the entire Aegean coast was once more liberated from Persian occupation and "settled by Alexander's *fiat*".³⁶

THE ROAD TO GAUGAMELA

Alexander now decided to strike out in search of Darius. In part he was reacting to circumstance: with his rear relatively secure he was free to initiate such a move and, given that Darius had formed a fresh army to defend his empire, a new threat had emerged. Moreover, Alexander now prepared to challenge Darius for even more of his empire; but how much of it? The correspondence between the two kings after Issus indicates that Alexander now laid claim to, and aimed for the conquest of, the whole of the Persian empire. For instance, writing from Marathus, Alexander told Darius to refer to him as the "Lord of all Asia" or the "King of Asia".³⁷ However, I would argue that Alexander's letters to Darius are not indicative of his true designs. They were made in the flush of victory soon after Issus, and are jingoistic propaganda designed to startle the Great King. Moreover, it is still unlikely that Alexander was looking so far ahead. I find it difficult to believe that as he began his advance to face Darius he was seriously contemplating moving against the yet remote areas of the Persian empire: the north-east satrapies and India. Rather, I feel that Alexander was still intent on taking his conquests

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one step at a time: he would defeat Darius (annexing as much land as he could in the process), see what happened and then make further plans.³⁸

Once again, Alexander's strategy was strikingly straightforward: from Egypt he intended to retrace his steps up the Syrian coast, push eastwards, find Darius' army and defeat it in a pitched battle.

There were a number of risks associated with Alexander's policy. However, I would maintain that Alexander was right to take them on.

Firstly, as Alexander re-traced his steps along the Syrian coast he learned that there was considerable unrest in Greece. According to Arrian, while Alexander was at Tyre for the second time he learnt that the Spartan king, Agis, had initiated a revolt against Macedon in the Peloponnese.³⁹ The Spartans were also actively involved in operations on Crete.⁴⁰ One might argue that Alexander should have immediately turned his attention to affairs in Greece. Instead, he merely sent his admiral, Amphoterus, with a naval squadron (reinforced by 100 Phoenician and Cyprian warships), to help his regent, Antipater, deal with the problem.

However, one can justify Alexander's actions.

He had left Antipater in Greece to deal with just such a threat. Why should he transfer the bulk of his army back to Greece and risk losing a hold over the gains that he had made, when he had forces in Macedon to deal with the situation?⁴¹ Added to this, with the Persians too concerned about their own predicaments, Alexander could be confident that they would not effectively aid such an uprising. Indeed, after Issus the Persians were only prepared to give Agis the paltry sum of 30 silver talents and a mere 10 triremes to aid him in his fight against Macedon.⁴² Moreover, the fleet Alexander sent

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to Antipater would have been useful. Antipater would be able to use the ships to transport his own troops rapidly by sea (if the need arose), and to hinder the transference of soldiers to Sparta from Crete where Agis had gathered a host of mercenaries. Certain diplomatic activities were also designed to help Antipater. At Tyre in 331 Alexander granted an Athenian request for the liberation of the prisoners taken at the Granicus.⁴³ This was to ensure that Athens, arguably the most powerful of the city-states, did not aid Sparta during the revolt.

Consequently, although it was undoubtedly a bold move to leave Antipater to deal with Sparta while he himself moved on, it was not an altogether foolish decision.

The second risk that Alexander undertook by going on the offensive was that Darius might not actually give him the battle he wanted. Darius had seen two of his armies defeated and his counter-offensive in the Aegean repulsed. With Alexander consolidating his hold upon the areas of his empire that he had overrun in 332, Darius' position was without precedent. This meant that there was the chance that the Great King might resort to desperate measures and elect to follow a strategy based upon a combination of "scorched earth" policy and guerrilla warfare.⁴⁴ If this happened Alexander's offensive strategy would meet little reward. Trying to find an evasive enemy while attempting to live off land that had been made barren, Alexander's army would have incurred high casualties and been unable to make any real progress. Curtius (4.9.13) claims that Alexander was wary of this: "He was afraid Darius would make for the interior of his kingdom and would have to be followed through vast stretches of completely desolate land that would furnish no supplies".

However, Alexander was right to gamble that Darius would not shirk the prospect of

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a fight. It was the Persian temperament to defend every inch of their land (as had been demonstrated by the Persian generals in the Granicus campaign), and Darius could not afford to lose face by retreating in the face of an invader. Now that he once more had an army behind him Darius would doubtless try to bring an end to Alexander's conquests. Moreover, the stinging replies which Alexander had made to Darius' proposals of peace (that he would not consider resting until he had defeated him, and that he regarded himself the ruler of the Persian empire), would have further inspired the Great King to give battle.

The third possible risk was that if Darius did offer battle the Macedonian forces might not be able to overcome the Great King's new army. During the time that Alexander was campaigning down the Syrian coast, Darius had managed to create an army that was superior to his earlier ones. Drawing on his experiences from Issus, Darius realised that his main strength lay in cavalry and that he must equip his men better if he was to stand a chance of beating Alexander. Consequently, he had large numbers of horses brought in to be broken and ridden by infantry who were to be converted to cavalymen.⁴⁵ He was also able to assemble a number of cavalry units that were arguably of a calibre comparable to Alexander's Companion cavalry, for instance the Bactrians, Parthyaean and Indians. In re-arming his men he brought into his arsenal shields, swords, and lances of larger dimensions and, so that he could deliver a heavier assault in battle, he gathered more heavily armoured cataphracts and 200 scythed chariots.⁴⁶

Despite this, Alexander was still right to seek a battle. Even though Darius had been given twelve months to re-build and re-organise an army, it was still no match for Alexander's troops. Although Darius had managed to draft some professional cavalry

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contingents, the rest of his army was as weak as ever. Darius could not expect his newly trained cavalymen to pose any problem to their Macedonian counterparts. Training on horseback was one thing; being able to control one's mount in the heat of a battle, in formation, was an entirely different affair, which these fresh troopers had no experience of. Also, to expect his troops, newly armed with sword, shield and lance, to be as proficient with these weapons as the Macedonian army, was asking the impossible. If anything, unused to these weapons in actual combat, and faced by troops who knew how to get the most from them, they would be handicapped. The worth of Darius' chariots was also suspect. The last time they had been used against a Greek phalanx, at Cunaxa in 401, the disciplined Greeks had easily dealt with their assault.⁴⁷ Furthermore, his infantry arm was practically useless. His cherished Greek mercenaries had dwindled in number and, as usual, his native infantry would only make up numbers. Alexander's troops clearly still held the professional advantage.

The one real peril was that in seeking out Darius Alexander would probably have to fight a battle on terrain of the Great King's choosing. After his experiences at Issus, Darius was not going to choose terrain that nullified the potency of his army. If he accepted battle it would probably be on an open plain which enabled him to use his cavalry arm effectively and exploit his vast numbers. Alexander would then have to cope with the prospect of his smaller army being completely overwhelmed. He would be compensated somewhat by the fact that he had a more professional army than Darius (and one which had been reinforced to nearly 50,000 men), and that he knew how to get the most from this formidable force in battle, but he would still have to be careful.

As events were to turn out, Alexander's course of action was again vindicated.

Antipater was eventually able to deal with and overcome the revolt of king Agis by himself, while Alexander's push against Darius proved extremely effective, culminating in a Macedonian victory at Gaugamela (which saw Darius once more flee the battle-field) and the cession of more land to Alexander's empire.⁴⁸

THE CONQUEST OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

With Darius' defeat at Gaugamela, Alexander proclaimed himself the new Great King by right of conquest. By overcoming all the forces that the ruler of the largest and most powerful empire in the world had sent against him, he had earned this privilege.⁴⁹ Having come so far with so much success, I believe it is now that Alexander gave serious consideration to the conquest of all of Darius' empire. However, this need not mean that he subsequently came up with a precise blueprint of how he was going to achieve this. While I would not deny that there is some evidence of calculation, the conquest of the rest of Persia was achieved as much by Alexander reacting to (and surmounting) the circumstances which he found himself faced with, as by forward planning.

i) The Persian heartland and pursuit of Darius

After Gaugamela, Alexander found himself in a similar situation to that after Issus: did he pursue the fleeing Darius or turn his attention elsewhere, this time to the satrapies of Babylonia, Susiana and Persis? Conditions favoured the latter. It would have been unwise to pursue Darius, who had taken to the Armenian mountains during his flight: the difficult terrain would have hindered pursuit. On the other hand, the defeat and flight of Darius had left the aforesaid satrapies relatively unprotected and ripe for take-over.⁵⁰

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Consequently, Alexander decided to strike against the satrapies.

This move was also premeditated. By it Alexander hoped to bolster his own position and cripple Darius' before he again turned his attention to the once Great King. Babylonia, Susiana and Persis constituted the heartland of the Persian world and contained the principal cities of the empire: Babylon, Susa and Persepolis. If Alexander could capture these cities the psychological impact on invader and invaded would be tremendous: Macedonian morale would soar, Persian morale would doubtless plummet. Moreover, if he gained control of these cities he would obtain the prodigious riches in their treasuries. With such wealth to command he could hire countless mercenaries, finance his expedition indefinitely, and underwrite Macedonian supremacy in Greece where the Spartans were still causing trouble. It would also enable him to undermine any remaining Persian opposition by financial machination: a suitable tool to exploit considering that the Persians had used it so many times when involved in affairs against the Greek mainland. The occupation of these cities would also see Alexander wrest vital pools of manpower from Darius.

In view of all these factors, the rewards of capturing the heart of Persia were too great to pass up; Alexander was, therefore, right to continue his conquests.

The Campaign then largely transpired as Alexander had hoped. The capital cities fell effortlessly in quick succession to his advance and Alexander gained control of the area's ample resources.⁵¹ Using garrisons and diplomacy, Alexander soon settled the area and was then at liberty to decide upon his next move.⁵²

Alexander may have hoped that by capturing Darius' capitals he might have induced the defeated king to surrender. Darius had no such intention. He eventually decided to

retire to the north-east of his empire, planning to enrol the manpower of this region to conduct yet another campaign against Alexander.

With the Persian heartland secure, Alexander was free to seek out Darius and end his continued resistance once and for all; Alexander probably hoped then to become the undisputed ruler of the Persian empire.⁵³

In searching for Darius there was the risk that Darius might embark upon guerrilla tactics to try to foil Alexander. However, as Alexander had secured the immediate area, and given that Darius might be overcome before he could raise yet another army, Alexander was right to initiate pursuit. As it was, the campaign was over quickly. Making rapid marches, Alexander eventually caught up with Darius and his forces who were still intent on flight. However, before he could come to grips with Darius himself, the Persian Great King was murdered by nobles in his entourage. These nobles then fled eastwards, and it is one amongst them, Bessus, who gave Alexander cause to implement a new aim.

ii) Overcoming Bessus and the north-east of the Persian Empire

With Darius dead, Alexander shifted his sights to the north-east satrapies. It has been suggested that Alexander's subsequent strike here was undertaken as part of a deliberate plan to secure the north-east frontier of his new empire, probably by reaching the River Jaxartes (The modern day Syr-Darya). While he did undoubtedly achieve this, I would propose that his thrust into this region was dictated more by his wish to react to the actions of Bessus. After conspiring in the murder of Darius, Bessus fled to his satrapy of Bactria, declared himself the rightful heir to the Persian throne and prepared to oppose Alexander. With this new challenge to his supremacy, Alexander was presented with a

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fresh objective: to seek out and kill Bessus, and so become undisputed ruler of the Persian empire. As will be seen later, Alexander then ended up conquering the entire north-east by reacting to the various circumstances which occurred following his pursuit of Bessus.⁵⁴

There was to be nothing novel in Alexander's strategy. He intended to merely push into Bactria and then dominate it by reacting to any opposition that he found; in this manner he hoped to bring about a direct confrontation with his foe.

Was such a policy wise?

There was an acute need to bring Bessus to heel as he actually posed a substantial threat to Alexander. He was a powerful nobleman, related by blood to Darius,⁵⁵ and retained great authority.⁵⁶ In arrogating the title of Great King he probably intended to unite the satraps of the east against Alexander, and thus hold the area and even mount raids against Alexander's land. There was even the threat that he might employ peoples from outside the empire (such as the Scythians),⁵⁷ to help him fight. Alexander understood the danger that Bessus constituted. Speaking to his troops he claimed: "The murderer Bessus is not only in possession of Bactria but is even threatening us".⁵⁸

Alexander also had the resources for this move. With the main treasuries of the Persian empire at his disposal he could easily afford to finance a further push eastwards. Moreover, his army, despite the need to provision garrisons in central Persia, was also relatively strong following a series of reinforcements since Gaugamela.⁵⁹ Alexander comfortably outnumbered Bessus' Bactrian forces, which may be put at around 7,000 men.⁶⁰

However, there were a number of risks associated with Alexander's planning.

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His army was becoming increasingly opposed to the idea of further conquest. After Gaugamela they had been lured, no doubt by the prospect of acquiring riches, to follow Alexander into the Persian heartland. Then after the death of Darius, many of the soldiery probably viewed the war as over and wanted to go home. However, at an assembly Alexander harangued his men in a powerful speech, in which he stressed the danger of retreating whilst Bessus and others were still active.⁶¹ His Macedonians relented, but their lust for further conquest was undoubtedly diminishing. At some stage they might not put their all into further campaigns and so would hamper Alexander's designs.⁶²

Conducting military operations in the north-east would not be easy either. The area was fiercely independent; the Great Kings had rarely visited here. The terrain was also severe, ranging from mountains to tundra and desert lands. Alexander could expect the outnumbered enemy forces to exploit this and conduct a campaign based on guerrilla warfare. There would be no set-piece battles for Alexander.

Lastly, before Alexander could come to grips with Bessus, he would have to march through territory that he had not yet pacified himself. If he moved too quickly, making a meagre job of bringing such land to heel, then there was the risk that hostilities might break out behind him. In the opening phases of the campaign, this in fact happened. After passing through Areia en route to Bactria, he had quickly accepted the submission of its satrap, Satibarzanes, but left only forty mounted javelin-men in the province to police it. Subsequently, as Alexander pressed on he received the news that Satibarzanes had massacred these troops and revoked his earlier submission. Alexander was then forced to retrace his steps and restore order to the satrapy before he could carry on.⁶³

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From then on, however, Alexander's decision to follow Bessus into Bactria proved justified. Not only did it lead to the removal of Bessus as a threat but, as will now be seen, it gave Alexander the opportunity to conquer the whole of the north-east (although this was only eventually achieved after a lengthy guerrilla war).

Despite Bessus' implementation of a scorched earth policy, Alexander was able to maintain his pursuit. Following Bessus drew Alexander into the north-east territories and beyond the River Oxus. At this point Sogdian nobles, seeing the strength of Alexander and reacting to his claim that his quarrel was with Bessus alone, decided to throw in their lot with Alexander. Bessus was then betrayed to Alexander who later executed him. With the menace of Bessus removed and seeing the compliance of the Sogdian nobles, Alexander found himself in a prime position to move through the satrapy of Sogdiana. This he did with relative ease and so reached the northern frontier of the Persian empire, the River Jaxartes. However, while he had now gained the north-east satrapies, he did not yet control them. The betrayal of Bessus by the Sogdian nobles was designed to gain them enough time to organise their own response to Alexander. Thus, while Alexander was on the northern frontier, large areas of the north-east erupted in a series of uprisings. Even though Alexander was duped by the concessive nature of the Sogdian nobles, perhaps he should be blamed for not securing the area in an adequate manner as he moved through it. As it was, he now became embroiled in a bitter guerrilla war, a risk that he had undertaken when he initiated his campaign. Only by reacting to each threat individually and with severity did Alexander eventually ensure his total command over the north-east, but it took him approximately two years to achieve this.⁶⁴

The examination above shows that no grand scheme had been followed in attaining

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the north-east territories. Alexander had been drawn into the area by the activities of Bessus and then gone further when it seemed that he had the good will of the local nobles. Complete subjugation was only achieved by successfully overcoming the uprisings that the nobles of the region later inspired. While he may be criticised for allowing areas of unrest to flare up behind his advance, by again responding effectively Alexander reaped the benefits.

WIDENING HORIZONS

Alexander now became inclined to follow schemes that were more grandiose and extensive. He had come a long way since his expedition had started with a thrust into Asia Minor, based upon limited aims. As ruler of Darius' empire he had no immediate objectives and could afford to look elsewhere for new challenges. With a growing belief in his own invincibility (he had, after all, been undefeated in so many contests), and even, possibly, his own godhead,⁶⁵ his aims were to be more far-reaching. However, he would have been better advised to curtail them.

THE INVASION OF INDIA

After the north-east satrapies, India became Alexander's next target. This was a project that had been maturing in his mind since at least the summer of 328.⁶⁶ But why did he undertake this move?

Various motives have been given, the foremost being that as India had once been part of the Persian empire, Alexander deemed it necessary, as the heir to the Persian

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throne, to reclaim it.⁶⁷ Perhaps too, having achieved so much success, Alexander now wished to conquer the whole of what he considered Asia: "He (Alexander) said that for the time being his own concern was India; for by subduing India he would at once be in possession of Asia as a whole" (Arr.4.15.6).

Others have stated that with so little known about India, adventure and exploration was also a factor. Furthermore, as geographical concepts at the time saw India as the last land before the encircling Ocean, some have interpreted Alexander's move as a strike to search out the eastern frontier of his new empire.⁶⁸

These arguments may be feasible, but I believe that less rational concepts played more of a role: his desire to emulate and out-do those who had come before him, and his heroic nature and insatiable appetite for conquest.⁶⁹ Thus, he wanted to surpass not only Darius' conquests in India, but possibly those of the legendary queen Semiramis as well, whose exploits Ctesias recounted.⁷⁰ He probably also wanted to emulate greater figures. He could, through his invasion, re-trace the steps of Dionysus who was supposed to have come from India to Greece, or follow in the path of Heracles.⁷¹

Was Alexander right to go into India?

Certainly India seemed ripe for invasion. The various independent rulers of India were at feuds with each other and these could be exploited to aid conquest. Alexander was probably aware of these feuds through contact with Indian princes. After he had become master of Bactria he had been joined by Sisicottus whose kingdom lay east of this satrapy, while Taxiles, the ruler of Taxila, had sent envoys to him while he was in Sogdiana.⁷² These princes, while providing Alexander with information on which he could base his military plans, also promised to help him in his conquests, probably in the

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hope, as Bosworth claims, that they could “use the invader’s army to expand their own domains”.⁷³

Noting the fragmentary nature of India, Alexander certainly had the military strength to conquer the land. Despite losses during his conquest of the north-east provinces, his army was still relatively strong. It had been reinforced not only by troops of European descent, but by the addition of Persian forces who now served their new Great King.⁷⁴ Scholars have estimated the size of his invasion force from anywhere between 30,000 and 120,000 (including camp followers). As it was unlikely that Alexander would have to face a combined Indian defence, he had sufficient forces to undertake his invasion, even if one accepts the (rather too conservative) lower figure. Furthermore, Alexander did not have to worry about facing troops which would be superior to his own; Indian troops were no better than the Persian forces which he had already beaten. Indian cavalry was no match for the squadrons of Macedonians or Persians now in Alexander’s service,⁷⁵ and while Indian archers and infantry may have been competent, they could not compare to the experienced soldiers that Alexander commanded.⁷⁶ Moreover, the Indians relied on extremely cumbersome chariots,⁷⁷ which would pose little threat to an army that had easily overcome Persian chariots at Gaugamela. There was only one real threat that the Indian princes posed to Alexander: their use of elephants in battle.⁷⁸ Despite this, in terms of numbers and quality of troops, Alexander far outmatched his prospective Indian opponents.

Despite the above factors, an invasion of India was not necessary; India posed no real threat to his own provinces. Moreover, instead of further conquest, Alexander should have taken the time to ensure the stability of his newly acquired empire. As it

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was, his decision to leave the environment of the “Persian world” gave men the opportunity to cause unrest in his absence. Consequently, when he returned from India he was faced with numerous challenges to his authority. Thus, for example, a certain Baryaxes had, while he was away, “worn the tiara upright and assumed the title of king of the Persians and Medes” (Arr.6.29.3). Also, it seems that the satraps of Carmania and Susiana, Astaspes and Abulites, were both plotting revolution (Arrian clearly states that offences had been committed because “the king had been a long time on his Indian expedition, and it did not seem credible that he would return” (7.4.2)). Even Alexander’s Macedonians were prepared to take advantage of his remoteness to flaunt their own powers: it appears that the generals whom he had left in Media had “plundered temples, disturbed ancient tombs, and perpetrated other acts of injustice against the subjects with presumptuous audacity” (Arr.6.27.4).⁷⁹ While he did put down the upheavals on his return, he was lucky not to have lost large parts of his empire while in India.

Furthermore, any permanent conquest of India would probably require time and patience to achieve. The Persians had been unable to hold on to the area and the Indians would not surrender their independence cheaply. However, Alexander did not intend to stay long in India. When the Chorasmian king, Pharasmanes, had offered to help him conduct operations in the Black Sea area, Alexander had told him to “save up his promises” for, once he had gained control of India, he would “return to Greece, and march thence by the Hellespont and Propontis to Pontus” (Arr.4.15.6) (indeed, Alexander was to spend no more than two years in India). Thus, one may argue that Alexander envisaged a quick campaign (with conquest a mere formality), before he was then free to turn his attention elsewhere. As will be seen later, he was wrong; following

his departure, India did not settle down to Macedonian rule.

As it was, Alexander's initial rapid and aggressive push into India proved effective. The greatest threat to his advance was overcome when he beat the powerful Indian prince, Porus, at the River Hydaspes. With Porus as his vassal, Alexander quickly moved eastwards, crossing the various waterways of the Punjab and receiving the submission of local rulers until he reached the River Hyphasis.

DISSENT AT THE HYPHISIS

It is clear that Alexander wished to cross the Hyphasis; what is less clear is how far he intended to go. It has been suggested that Alexander had in mind only a restricted advance in the interests of safeguarding Porus' kingdom. I would argue differently.

Alexander was not the reserved ruler who had set out from Macedon in 334. He had overcome many obstacles and probably considered himself the most powerful man in the world. Consequently his horizons had expanded: with an army which may have now numbered 120,000 men (including Persians and Indians),⁸⁰ he had probably decided upon a much larger campaign. What were his motives?

With no pressing circumstances to react to, Alexander had the luxury to determine what he wanted to do next. His geographical conceptions, inspired by his teacher Aristotle, would have confirmed in him a belief that the Eastern Ocean was relatively close at hand.⁸¹ Even if his Indian vassals had refuted such a notion (see below), I would still argue that part of Alexander's aim in crossing the Hyphasis was to seek out the Eastern Ocean (and so prove Aristotle right or wrong) and possibly settle upon a natural

boundary for his empire.

Added to this, a simple desire for additional conquest, glory and adventure drove Alexander on. From Indians in his entourage, Alexander must have heard stories about the land beyond the Hyphasis.⁸² Arrian (5.25.1-2) claims that he had heard reports of a “fertile” land inhabited by “good farmers and excellent fighting men”, which was ruled by aristocrats and was strong in elephants. Knowing this “stirred Alexander to a desire for further advance”. The vulgate tradition, meanwhile, mentions that the Indian ruler, Phegeus, informed Alexander of a large kingdom beyond the Hyphasis which was based upon a great river, the Ganges, and which was well equipped for war.⁸³ This too inspired Alexander onward, as “his craving for renown and his insatiable lust for reputation permitted him to think nothing inaccessible or remote”.⁸⁴ Consequently, aware of other peoples to add to his domains, Alexander was inspired to push on.⁸⁵

I would now suggest that Alexander’s planning was unwise.

Firstly, while he may have wished to find the Eastern Ocean and in so doing overcome another kingdom, the distances involved were great. From the Hyphasis to the Ganges spanned approximately “330 km of populated country”;⁸⁶ Alexander would have been drawn into this, extending his already over-stretched lines of communication and inviting rebellion in his recently acquired lands. Moreover, I believe that Alexander had a good idea of the miles to be covered. The sources that indicate that Alexander did not have a good idea cannot be viewed with great confidence. Arrian (5.26.1) has Alexander tell his officers that “there remains no great stretch of land before us up to the River Ganges and the eastern sea”. However, given that he was trying to coerce his men on, he would not relay the true mileage if he knew it. The vulgate tradition then makes Phegeus

tell Alexander that there was only a twelve-day desert march to the Ganges, an estimate which seems highly over-optimistic, but one which Alexander is made to base his plans around.⁸⁷ However, as Brunt has pointed out, “what Alexander learned and what the “vulgate” reports are two different things”.⁸⁸ Moreover, given the various Indian dignitaries who were with him and his thirst for intelligence, I find it difficult to believe that Alexander was only given one such figure. I am sure that he consulted others and so gained a good idea of the distance to be covered. Consequently, he must be criticised for wanting to progress into an area which stretched ever onwards while leaving his own lands vulnerable.

It was also unwise to attempt to embark upon a passage of the Hyphasis given the state his of troops. The elite Macedonian element of the army was, by now, heavily diluted, and many of the soldiers did not want to go on any further. There had been dissent in the ranks since the push into the north-east satrapies but now, with so many more miles covered, the most recent through harsh monsoons or searing heat,⁸⁹ many of the soldiers wanted to go home and see their families.⁹⁰ Morale being so low, they would not give their all in a campaign which took them further away from their homes, especially when it was rumoured that the enemy forces beyond the Hyphasis had large numbers of elephants. Indeed, it was opposition from his Macedonians that undermined Alexander’s plans. Exhausted and forlorn at the prospect of continued conquest, they finally refused to go any further. Their king was forced to look elsewhere for his next course of action.

THE VOYAGE SOUTH

Alexander now determined to carry his advance to the south of India. While he may

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have been provoked into this move by the refusal of his soldiers to go beyond the Hyphasis, it was also premeditated. After the battle of the Hydaspes, Alexander had ordered that a fleet be built so that he could sail down the rivers of the Punjab into southern India.⁹¹ Although he had probably not intended using it so soon (after he had conquered the eastern part of India would have better suited Alexander), his new fleet was waiting for him when he returned to the Hydaspes.

Exploration may have generated his initial wish to head south. Apparently, upon seeing crocodiles in the Indus and Egyptian beans at the River Acesines, Alexander drew the conclusion that the rivers of the Punjab were in fact the source of the Nile and intended to explore this possibility for himself. However, this did not remain of prime importance to Alexander. The Indians amongst his retinue would have been quick to point out the error of his thinking, and confirm that the rivers actually flowed into the Southern Ocean. This knowledge formed the real reason for Alexander's strike south: by way of further conquest (to be achieved, once again, by simply rolling forward and overcoming all opposition), Alexander intended to push the limits of his empire to their natural southern terminus.⁹² From here he would then return home.

However, such a move was not without its dangers.

There was still a great distance to be covered before he reached the Southern Ocean.⁹³ In covering this, Alexander would have to ensure that he pacified the numerous tribes which he was likely to encounter, before he had the urge to move ever onwards. If he did not, then there was the danger, once again, that rebellion would break out in his immediate rear. Moreover, Alexander would be leaving his northern possessions in India far behind, so inviting insurrection there. It also appears that Alexander had actually lost

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interest in that land. He gave Porus control of the territories eastwards from the Hydaspes to the Hyphasis, but stationed no European satrap to watch over him. Furthermore, the Indian prince, Abisares, who had never presented himself before Alexander and yet had previously been hostile towards him, was simply confirmed as governor of his own province following diplomatic correspondence.⁹⁴ Such a situation invited trouble.

Finally, Alexander was doing little to ease the worries of his soldiers. Although initially joyous at the prospect of a retreat, they would soon find that their journey home was to be by a rather extravagant route. Many of them would doubtless feel that they were being duped and would be loath to give their all in continued drives of conquest. This was exceedingly bad man-management and not a good basis upon which to rest a further campaign.

Following the rivers of the Punjab, Alexander launched numerous raids into the interior whenever he learnt of opposition. By such aggressive manoeuvres he managed to dominate the tribes of the area and eventually reach the Southern Ocean. However, he did not achieve this without some of the risks detailed above coming about.

During early operations against the Malli, decline in Macedonian morale is apparent through a reluctance to fight. Thus, during two sieges, the Macedonian offensive faltered because there was unwillingness amongst the troops to attack. In both cases Alexander had to shame his men into mounting the walls by leading the way.⁹⁵ While his men eventually followed him in both instances, the threat that their temperament posed to his operations is quite clear. His troops were nearing the end of their endurance and would not be pushed much further.

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Later, Alexander had to contend with rebellion in his rear. Musicanus, for example, surrendered but then revolted once Alexander had passed through his kingdom.⁹⁶ Local Brahman priests were also responsible for stirring up Indian uprisings.⁹⁷ It was only by planting numerous garrisons and, at times, following a policy of extermination and terror, that Alexander managed to secure the land as he progressed (Cleitarachus mentions that 80,000 Indians were killed at one stage, and large numbers sold into slavery).⁹⁸ This did not endear him to his new subjects and made the prospect of lasting conquest unlikely.

THE MARCH THROUGH GEDROSIA AND DEPARTURE FROM INDIA

Alexander now intended to return to Persia. While his fleet, commanded by Nearchus, took the coastal route, Alexander intended to lead the army through the desert of Gedrosia and arrive in the province of Carmania. Although careful preparations were made for the journey at his base of operations in Patala, the decision to tackle the harsh desert climate and have his fleet sail along a largely barren coast was still a bold one. So why did he opt for it?⁹⁹

Perfectly rational motives are detailed in the sources. Thus, exploration seems to have played its part as Alexander had instructed Nearchus and his fleet to “reconnoitre the coasts ... and islets, to explore thoroughly every bay which they found, to learn about all the cities on the sea-coast, and to discover which land was fruitful and which desert”.¹⁰⁰ It is also feasible that Alexander was hoping to see whether he could establish a link between his lands in Persia and his acquisitions in India. It appears, though, that Alexander was worried that his fleet might “find a land uninhabited ... or inadequately provided with natural products” and so ultimately might be “destroyed”.¹⁰¹ As a result,

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the sources indicate that his decision to go through the desert was determined (in part) by a need to support the fleet by digging wells and establishing provision dumps along the coast.¹⁰²

Less rational motives probably also played their part. His desire to surpass great figures of the past should not be discounted. According to Nearchus, Alexander was well aware of the harsh desert, having heard stories that the legendary Semiramis and Cyrus the Great had both lost armies there. However, instead of being deterred he was inspired to succeed where they had failed.¹⁰³ Moreover, "his perpetual desire to do something new and extraordinary"¹⁰⁴ would have also helped determine the route. It is also possible that Alexander viewed this extravagant feat as necessary in order to restore his reputation for invincibility, which had been dented when his army refused to advance beyond the Hyphasis.¹⁰⁵

Alexander's decision to go through the desert was a mistake.

Firstly, if he undertook this journey as a move to supply his fleet, then his logic was at fault. Indeed, as Badian has noted, how could places be found where wells might be dug in a hostile desert; and even if places were found, how could they be protected against nature and enemy tribesmen? Moreover, could an army moving through the desert afford to lay down provisions when it might need them itself?¹⁰⁶ Such problems were soon encountered. Before entering the desert proper, Alexander had subdued the Oreitae and left troops behind him to arrange matters for the passage of the fleet. However, the Oreitae quickly rescinded their surrender and attacked the occupying forces. Fortunately, in this instance, the Macedonians were able to overcome the threat of the natives and finally arrange supplies for the fleet.¹⁰⁷ However, the precarious nature

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of trying to acquire and protect depots in a harsh, recently subdued land is clear.

When Alexander entered the desert, he was soon forced to leave the coast and march inland in search of the more populous centres of Gedrosia for supplies. While he may have accumulated enough food to send back to the coast in these initial stages, it was to prove a futile gesture: the men who were sent with the convoy of supplies gave in to their hunger and ate the food themselves.¹⁰⁸ Alexander then had to face reality; given the pressing concerns of his army it would be impossible to provision his fleet. The fleet, therefore, had to fend for itself, and contact with it was lost. Indeed, the only supplies that Nearchus acquired from Alexander during his entire coastal voyage were ten days' supply of grain from the territory of the Oreitae. Nearchus' silence on the provision of supplies for him beyond this point suggests that Alexander failed in his task to provide aid for his fleet.¹⁰⁹ However, the fleet was not "destroyed" as Alexander had feared. Although its journey proved difficult, one could say that it fared better than the army: it managed to navigate the coast, secure its own supplies and reach Carmania without serious loss.¹¹⁰ Consequently, it seems that Alexander overestimated his ability to supply the fleet, and given the fact that the fleet was then able to survive without the aid of Alexander's land based troops, his decision to cross the desert to support it looks foolish.

The second point to note is that the army, once in the desert and committed to fending for itself, suffered terrible hardships. The burning heat and distinct lack of water and food soon took their toll, resulting in not only untold discomfort, but numerous deaths. Consequently, while Alexander did eventually make it through the desert, the force that emerged with him was emaciated. The baggage train was lost, the animals

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either dying through exhaustion or being slain for food, and a great deal of the weaker non-combatants present with the army, the women and children, probably died. The number of soldiers who perished will never be known, although the desert must have claimed many of Alexander's able-bodied men also.¹¹¹ Clearly, Alexander had underestimated the difficulties in bringing a large force through this barren region (despite his two-month stay at Patala, it appears that his prior knowledge of the desert environment was inadequate). Moreover, as the fleet managed to survive without the aid of his army, one could argue that Alexander's followers ultimately died to satisfy his egotism and ambition.

Alexander would have done better to look for a different path back to Persia. Although one could not expect him to re-trace his way back through India (the distance was too great), there was an alternative and less arduous route. Before he had reached the Southern Ocean, he had sent a force under Craterus back to Persia via the Bolan or Mulla Pass.¹¹² This force eventually rejoined Alexander in Carmania after completing a journey that had seen it "follow the gentle lushness of the Helmand valley".¹¹³ Alexander should have followed the same route as Craterus.

However, even if Alexander had opted for this more accessible route, he would have still been open to criticism for departing from land only recently assimilated to his empire. While he may have hoped that the savagery of his conquests, together with the garrisons and subservient rulers which he left behind, were enough to secure the territory, he was to be sorely mistaken. India was hardly pacified, and his authority did not remain intact for long. Thus, even his most recent acquisitions were not safe. For example, there was unrest in Patala soon after he vacated the city. Nearchus had

remained there with the fleet awaiting favourable sailing conditions but it appears that he had to leave prematurely following pressure from the locals.¹¹⁴

Alexander's hold on his possessions in the north of India was also precarious. Soon after emerging from the Gedrosian desert, he received news that Philip, satrap of the north-west of India, had been murdered by mercenaries.¹¹⁵ Doubtless there followed much unrest in the area, and Alexander was forced to leave the satrapy under the control of Taxiles until he could replace Philip.¹¹⁶ It also appears that Alexander relinquished his direct control over southern India. According to Bosworth, the satrap of much of the south of India, Peithon,¹¹⁷ was eventually "transferred to the north-west, to the Cophen valley", with Porus' territory being extended south.¹¹⁸ Consequently, Indian princes once more ruled India (even if they were technically clients of Alexander), while a Macedonian presence was only felt in the north-western extremities around the Cophen valley. Even this nominal grip was eradicated soon after Alexander's death, as India then fell to the forces of Sandrocottus (or Chandragupta), thus ending any trace of Macedonian authority in the region.

Alexander's success in India was short-lived. While he was in the region to oversee operations he could maintain some sort of order. However, he never intended staying for long in India,¹¹⁹ and once he departed to pursue other goals retaining India became unfeasible. Knowing this, one has to question Alexander's decision to launch the invasion in the first place.

THE FINAL YEAR AND LAST PLANS

The final year of Alexander's life demonstrates how extravagant projects came to dominate his thinking. Before his death he had begun to formulate plans for a vast

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campaign in the west: he aimed to strike first against Arabia, and then circumnavigate Africa and master the Mediterranean from Egypt to Spain.¹²⁰

Alexander's motives are easy to discern. He had gone as far east as he could, triumphing over all the peoples who dared oppose him and adding them to his empire. Now, having returned to Persia, it was not in his temperament to remain idle or to consolidate his gains. He was "insatiate in winning possessions";¹²¹ he wanted to continue his conquests and so increase his empire and prestige still further, and surpass with great strides all those who had come before him; the west, therefore, beckoned. Arrian (7.1.4) confirms that such designs were in keeping with his character: "None of Alexander's plans were small and petty ... no matter what he had already conquered, he would not have stopped there quietly...he would always have searched far beyond for something unknown, in competition with himself in default of any other rival".¹²²

With Alexander's death in 323, his last plans were abandoned. Consequently one is left to hypothesise whether he was right to entertain such exuberant ideas.

Certainly he had begun to make extensive preparations so that he could carry out his plans. Thus, to supplement Nearchus' fleet, warships were to be constructed in Phoenicia and Cilicia and then transported in sections to Alexander in the east (a recruiting agent was also sent to the Phoenician coast with 500 talents to procure crews). When these eventually began to arrive they found that Alexander had constructed a massive harbour at Babylon to accommodate them (in total a thousand ships could be provided for).¹²³ Moreover, while this had been going on, reconnaissance missions had been commissioned to go down the Persian Gulf to ascertain the nature of the area into which Alexander was about to strike first.¹²⁴ Consequently, by 323 Alexander had a base, the

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beginnings of a navy and information that he could exploit to begin his expedition against Arabia.¹²⁵ Doubtless with the arrival of further ships from the west at a later date, Alexander would be in a position to attempt his circumnavigation of Africa and strike along the Mediterranean coast.

Alexander had also begun to prepare his army for a new campaign. Orders had been sent to Macedon for reinforcements,¹²⁶ while 30,000 Iranian youths had recently swelled his numbers.¹²⁷ These youths, called the *epigonoï*, had been specially trained in Macedonian arms and tactics since 327 and formed a new and separate phalanx. Finally, 20,000 Persians were also incorporated into the Macedonian phalanx itself, while a regiment (hipparchy) consisting mainly of orientals was added to the Companion cavalry.¹²⁸

Despite all these preparations, Alexander would have been unwise to initiate his western campaign.

Firstly, consolidation should have been of prime importance. Alexander's empire was not a secure unit; there had been numerous disturbances in Persia during his time in India, while his gains in India soon began to look unsteady following his departure (see above). Alexander should have realised that there was a need to strengthen his empire in person before he departed for more distant lands. If he had continued with his plans, then his absence would surely have promoted dissent and he would have risked forfeiting areas of his empire.

Secondly, Alexander had actually promoted unrest in Persia by ordering his satraps and generals to disband their mercenary armies in 325.¹²⁹ While this may have been a security measure (these troops had been used as instruments of personal despotism by

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some satraps while Alexander had been in India), it created “chaos and dislocation”.¹³⁰ Many satraps could not afford to raise extra defence forces and so were vulnerable to attack, while many mercenaries, released from service, became renegades in the empire.¹³¹ Alexander had also caused turmoil in Greece by issuing the Exiles’ Decree in 324.¹³² With all cities obliged to welcome back their exiles, there was severe political and social ferment and a growing hostility directed towards Alexander and Macedon (following Alexander’s death, resentment of the Exiles’ Decree probably helped cause the Lamian War and induced many of the defections from Macedon in the early months of this war).¹³³ Consequently, the situation within his empire was not conducive to the launching of another campaign.

Finally, despite the re-organisation of the army, it was not the force that it had once been. In 324 Alexander had discharged 10,000 Macedonians who were unfit for service, and with the deaths of so many of his Macedonian and European mercenaries over the years, his army lacked its elite and the firm infrastructure which had once made it so potent.¹³⁴

The army he had to initiate his new campaign was dominated by inferior oriental troops. While this did not affect his cavalry so much (Persians, after all, were renowned horsemen), his infantry was weakened. The *epigonoi*, although well trained, were inexperienced and would be no direct substitute for the Macedonian phalanx that was now, in turn, corrupted and weakened by Persian troops.¹³⁵ While it would be wrong to claim that Alexander’s new army was an impotent force and that he would not have been able to achieve victories with it, without a large and reliable core of Macedonians and Europeans, any further and immediate conquest would undoubtedly have been more

difficult.

It seems likely, therefore, that further campaigning would have ensured that Alexander suffered major setbacks and losses somewhere. Fortunately for his reputation, his death prevented him from initiating such grandiose plans. However, the fact that he was contemplating schemes which were unsound surely lays him open to criticism.

CONCLUSION

While one cannot deny that Alexander could plan for the long term, one must stress that Alexander was more spontaneous than some academics allow. This is especially the case in the period 335-327. During this time, Alexander's objectives were fairly limited as he primarily reacted to the various threatening situations which he found himself confronted with: the activities of hostile parties in Greece; the movements of Persian nobles in Asia Minor; the diverse manoeuvres and adjustments of Darius; the actions of Bessus and the nobles of the north-eastern satrapies. As a result, his overall campaign advanced in stages, as first one then another menace was dealt with. However, it would be wrong not to credit him with some protracted designs during this stage: his operations in Greece were partly inspired by his wish to secure the area before he invaded Asia; he tried to frustrate the Persian fleet in the Aegean by capturing its bases along the coast of Asia Minor; he secured the Syrian coast so that he could turn his attention to Darius with a secure rear; and he invaded the Persian heartland before he pursued Darius to give himself a firm advantage over his foe.

It is only following the conquest of the north-east satrapies that Alexander's planning came to be dominated by more extravagant and far-reaching designs. As undefeated ruler of the largest empire that the world had seen, Alexander had the luxury

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(and freedom) to ask himself what he wanted to achieve next: his schemes were to encompass India, an eastern and southern boundary for his empire, Gedrosia and a massive western campaign.

327 also marks a turning point in the prudence and accomplishment of Alexander's aims. Prior to this date Alexander's objectives were generally sound, if a little risky on occasion, and generally achieved with resounding success. Only his decision to launch a landward campaign against the Persian navy after his victory at Miletus is open to criticism (and then, despite setbacks, circumstances conspired to give Alexander eventual success). The same cannot be said of his activities after 327. The grand designs that he came up with were generally ill considered. There are effective arguments to be made against a strike into India; wanting to progress beyond the Hyphasis; continuing his conquests into southern India; going across the Gedrosian desert; and wanting to conduct an extensive western campaign. Moreover, at the Hyphasis he was prevented from achieving his goal, and if he did succeed elsewhere, it was at tremendous cost, or ultimately evanescent. Take for instance his crossing of the Gedrosian desert and his short retention of India.

Moreover, military considerations were not always the single element that dominated Alexander's thinking. Thus heroic emulation, and a desire to surpass the achievements of others and make his own reputation insurmountable, often helped shape the course of his campaign. The disaster associated with the Gedrosian desert is proof that it was sometimes costly to base operations on such factors. Ultimately, one can surely question the general whose military decisions were sometimes based upon irrational desires.

Finally, it becomes clear that Alexander was neither a masterful nor complex

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campaign strategist. He tended to rely on one strategy to achieve his aims: responding to the moves of his enemy, he would initiate a simple but rapid, aggressive and bold push against him. While this usually brought him immediate success, it gave Alexander little scope for genuine consolidation. As a result, there were to be many times during his reign when unrest would break out in his rear as he pursued a course of swift and belligerent advancement.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

- ¹ The precise manoeuvres by which Alexander implemented his aims and strategies will be discussed in later chapters.
- ² For example see Fuller, 84 and Green, 124.
- ³ Arr. 1.3.5.
- ⁴ Arr. 1.4.6.
- ⁵ I assume that if there were major trouble we would hear of it. But in general our sources do not tell us much about what was going on except where Alexander was. A thorough analysis of operations in 335 can be found in Chapter Four.
- ⁶ For example see Green, 166-167, with note 26.
- ⁷ Diod. 17.17.2.
- ⁸ Bosworth, *C+E*, 38, also points out that the speech in Diodorus “is not very revealing. There is no indication of the limit of his imperial ambitions, only evidence that he planned to extend his kingdom into Asia”.
- ⁹ Diod. 17.17.5. Note, however, that there has been debate over how far Alexander eventually weakened Macedon by depriving it of too much manpower later on in his campaigning. See for example A. B. Bosworth, *JHS* 106 (1986), 1-12 (for weakening); N. G. L. Hammond, *JHS* 109 (1989), 56-68 (against weakening).
- ¹⁰ Cf. Bosworth, *C+E*, 34 and Lane Fox, 109 ff. However, the dating of the rebellion of Khababash is uncertain; see A. B. Lloyd, *CAH²* VI (1994), 344-345.
- ¹¹ Although if the Persians had followed the advice of the Greek mercenary commander in their service, Memnon, this would not have been the case. See below.
- ¹² Arr. 7.9.6. See also Green, 153-156, who stresses the importance of finance in determining Alexander’s expedition.
- ¹³ It should be noted that “liberation” for these cities was very limited as they now became subjects of Alexander; they were now at the mercy of his whim rather than the Great King’s.

- ¹⁴ Arr.1.19.7-8.
- ¹⁵ To explain Arrian's version, I would claim that he has inadvertently confused his history and amalgamated to this section of his work a piece relating to Alexander's plans before he went down the Syrian coast.
- ¹⁶ Although by this time Alexander's financial worries were eased somewhat by the capture of Sardes and the "contributions" and tributes that he now received from the cities under his control.
- ¹⁷ For a full analysis of Alexander's actions at Halicarnassus, see Chapter Three.
- ¹⁸ On the Persian counter-offensive see A. R. Burn, *JHS* 72 (1952), 81ff; E. Badian, *Hermes* 95 (1967), 174ff; and the more recent article of S. Ruzicka, *Phoenix* 42 (1988), 131ff.
- ¹⁹ Curt.3.1.19.
- ²⁰ For further discussion on this point, and for Alexander's conduct at Tyre, see Chapter Three.
- ²¹ Arr.1.24.3.
- ²² Bosworth, *C+E*, 49-50. See also Arr.2.2.1.
- ²³ See Green, 205, and note 41.
- ²⁴ This, however, was not Alexander's first move against the interior. After Halicarnassus he had sent Parmenion, via Sardes, to campaign in Phrygia (Arr.1.24.3) where the Persian satrap Atizyes still kept his forces under arms. Once Parmenion had secured this area he advanced to meet Alexander at Gordium.
- ²⁵ Arr.1.26-1.27.5.
- ²⁶ Arr.2.3.8.
- ²⁷ I would maintain that once Alexander learnt of Darius' position at Sochi he decided to rest his strategy on a defensive posture in the Cilician Gates. For a detailed analysis of this point and all events surrounding the battle of Issus, see Chapter Two.
- ²⁸ Which did in fact happen.
- ²⁹ Arr. 2.14.9. For further analysis of Alexander's intentions in going after Darius see the section below, "The Road to Gaugamela." As regards the correspondence between Alexander and Darius, while the sources make it clear that Alexander intended to fight

Darius once again, they are complex and confusing on other matters. How often the two kings communicated and what the contents of such letters were is open to debate. An analysis of the sources can be found in Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 227–230.

- ³⁰ I would not argue, as some scholars have done, that Alexander went south to give Darius time to build up another army, so that he could then defeat him in battle for a second time and totally undermine his position. This, to me, seems rather far-fetched; there are clearly more realistic explanations as to why Alexander went south. However, for example see Green, 238-239.
- ³¹ Diod.17.31.3ff; Arr.2.1.1.
- ³² I agree with Bosworth that this speech is more likely to come from the period after the battle of Issus where Alexander would have been wondering whether to go after Darius or down the Syrian coast. Thus, Arrian has “found in his sources a speech in favour of conquering the Levant and turned it into a set piece before Tyre” (Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 238).
- ³³ Indeed Arrian (2.17.4) attributes this line of thought to Alexander.
- ³⁴ See above, “The Conquest of Asia Minor: Miletus and the Fleet”, and Chapter Three.
- ³⁵ See Chapter Three.
- ³⁶ Bosworth, *C+E*, 63.
- ³⁷ Arr.2.14.8-9; cf. Curt.4.1.14.
- ³⁸ Although only of secondary importance, revenge may still have played a part in determining Alexander’s move against Darius. Alexander makes it clear in his reply to Darius from Marathus that he had “been appointed *hegemon* of the Greeks, and invaded Asia in the desire to take vengeance on Persia” for its aggressions to Greece (Arr.2.14.4; cf. Curt.4.1.10ff.).
- ³⁹ Arr.3.6.3. The precise dating of the Spartan revolt led by Agis is hotly contested. For example see P. A. Brunt’s Loeb translation of Arrian, Vol.I, Appendix VI, 480ff; Bosworth, *C+E*, 198ff. (especially footnote number 14 on page 200); and E. Badian in I.Worthington (ed.) *Ventures into Greek History*, 258-92 at 268-81.
- ⁴⁰ Diod.17.48.1; Curt.4.1.39ff.
- ⁴¹ Assuredly, Alexander had reduced these forces by sending recruiting missions back to Macedon. However, when Antipater eventually faced the Spartan king in the decisive battle at Megalopolis he had, according to Diodorus (17.63.1), “not less than 40,000” men. While these would not all have been Macedonian (Antipater had many allied troops to call upon), it shows that Alexander still had a strong force to police affairs

in Greece.

⁴² Arr.2.13.4-5.

⁴³ He had refused this request in 333 (Arr.1.29.6).

⁴⁴ Curtius (4.9.1-2) hints that Darius considered this option: "When Darius learned that his enemy had turned aside from Egypt ... he wondered whether he should halt in the area of Mesopotamia or make for the interior of his kingdom".

⁴⁵ Curt.4.9.3.

⁴⁶ Diod.17.53.1; Curt.4.9.3ff.

⁴⁷ Xen. *Anab.*1.8.20.

⁴⁸ For an elaboration on Alexander's moves before Gaugamela, and the battle itself, see Chapter Two.

⁴⁹ Plut. *Alex.*34.1.

⁵⁰ Cf. Arr.3.16.1-2.

⁵¹ For a detailed analysis of part of this drive, see "The Persepolis Campaign (331/0 B.C.)" in Chapter Four.

⁵² Alexander's diplomatic measures saw him start to employ the vanquished peoples. This was to be a common theme as he pushed his conquests ever eastward. For Alexander's relationship with the defeated peoples see, for example, A. B. Bosworth, *JHS* 100 (1980), 1-21.

⁵³ During the operations that followed Alexander demobilised the troops of the Hellenic League (Arr.3.19.5-6; Plut. *Alex.*42.5; Diod.17.74.3; Curt.6.2.17). This demonstrates that Alexander now considered the war of revenge over; any further conquests were to be undertaken for his own personal gain. That Alexander discharged these troops when he intended to continue his conquests is not cause for criticism. As Bosworth, *C+E*, 97, has pointed out, "The Hellenic infantry had never been used in the front line and its departure did not significantly impair the effectiveness of Alexander's army". Indeed, mercenaries, who were always in plentiful supply and whom Alexander could now easily afford to hire, could fulfil functions that the Hellenic infantry had performed, such as garrison duty.

⁵⁴ Other reasons for Alexander's move into the north-east seem of lesser concern. Exploration has been suggested, but I find it difficult to entertain the notion that this was of over-riding importance (See Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 174ff. and 190). That Alexander wanted to avenge the death of Darius by bringing a traitor and regicide to

justice (for example see Green, 329) is also of dubious standing. While he may have flaunted this intention to court Persian favour, it cannot have been a main reason behind his pursuit of Bessus. Indeed, one can argue that earlier in his campaigning Alexander had thought about killing Darius himself; he had no real affinity with the previous Great King.

⁵⁵ Arr.3.21.5, 30.4.

⁵⁶ He had commanded the Persian left at the battle of Gaugamela.

⁵⁷ Arr.3.25.3.

⁵⁸ Curt.6.3.9ff.

⁵⁹ For detail of reinforcements at this time, see P. A. Brunt's Loeb translation of Arrian, Vol.I, Appendix XIII, 526ff.

⁶⁰ Arr.3.28.8. Curt.7.4.20 puts the figure at 8,000.

⁶¹ Curt.6.3.9; cf. Plut. *Alex.*47.1-2; Diod.17.74.3.

⁶² The fact that Alexander also adopted Persian court dress and protocol in an effort to win native support following Bessus' claim of kingship also alienated his troops.

⁶³ He also deemed it necessary to then bring nearby Drangiana under his control, fearing that its satrap, Barsaentes (one of the murderers of Darius) might also cause trouble.

⁶⁴ See "Alexander's Operations in the North-east of the Persian empire (329-327 B.C.)" in Chapter Four.

⁶⁵ See Bosworth, *C+E*, 278-290, "The divinity of Alexander."

⁶⁶ Arr.4.15.6. Here, Alexander turns down the offer of the Chorasman king, Pharasmanes, to conduct a campaign against the Black Sea region because he has India on his mind.

⁶⁷ Herodotus (4.44) states that Darius I took his empire as far as the Indus and the Southern Ocean. However, after the 5th century direct Persian control over India was not maintained. It is unknown what authority Persia then actually had over India. See Bosworth, *Comm.* II, 148ff.

⁶⁸ For further attention to this point see below, "Dissent at the Hyphasis."

⁶⁹ Arrian (7.1.4) stresses these sides of his character when trying to account for his final plans; see below.

- ⁷⁰ Part of Alexander's desire to cross the Gedrosian desert was to emulate the deeds of this queen; see below.
- ⁷¹ Cf. Curt.8.10.1.
- ⁷² Sisicottus, see Arr.4.30.4 and Curt.8.11.25 (who refers to him as Sisocostus). Taxiles (also referred to as Mophis or Omphis), see Diod.17.86.4 and Curt.8.12.5.
- ⁷³ Bosworth, *C+E*, 119. On his advance to the River Hydaspes, Alexander took with him 5,000 Indians. Arr.5.8.5.
- ⁷⁴ For the use of Persian troops in India see, for example, Arr.5.11.3, 12.2.
- ⁷⁵ As Lane Fox, 337, points out, "the yantras of their epic heroes were only elementary slings and catapults".
- ⁷⁶ According to Curtius (8.14.18ff.), even the Indian archers were practically useless against Alexander when he faced them at the River Hydaspes.
- ⁷⁷ For example see Arr. 5.14.6, 15.2. Cf. Curt.8.14.2ff.
- ⁷⁸ Cf. Lane Fox, 337.
- ⁷⁹ Cf. Curt.10.1.1ff.
- ⁸⁰ Arr. *Ind.*19.5 for the number of men on the Hydaspes, including those from "barbarian tribes".
- ⁸¹ Although he would have already undermined Aristotle's belief that the Eastern Ocean could be seen from the summit of the Hindu Kush. *Meteorologica* 1.350a 21ff.
- ⁸² Hamilton, 117, points out that Alexander probably gained information about the interior while in Taxila, "the principal seat of Hindu learning, situated at the end of the great trade route from the East, to which scholars from all over India came to study". On Alexander's information about India see also A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph*, 74-80.
- ⁸³ Diod.17.93.2-4; Curt.9.2.2-7. Such a kingdom has been identified with the Nanda dynasty.
- ⁸⁴ Curt.9.2.9.
- ⁸⁵ In a speech in Arrian (5.26.3ff.), Alexander considers the tribes beyond the Hyphasis to be "warlike races" who threaten his empire; this may be another reason for continued conquest. However, given that in the speech Alexander is trying to

persuade his officers to accept a further advance, one must view his words with caution.

⁸⁶ Bosworth, *C+E*, 133.

⁸⁷ Diod.17.93.2; Curt.9.2.2.

⁸⁸ His Loeb translation of Arrian, Vol.II, Appendix XVII, 464.

⁸⁹ Seventy days of rain had damaged clothes, armour and morale according to Diodorus (17.94.2-3).

⁹⁰ So Coenus makes clear in his speech to Alexander (Arr.5.27.6).

⁹¹ Diod.17.89.4; Curt.9.1.4.

⁹² Cf. Arr.6.1.

⁹³ According to Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 221, "some 800 miles as the crow flew".

⁹⁴ Abisares probably ruled the territory that comprises modern day Kashmir. For his activities see, for example, Arr.4.30.7; 5.8.3; 20.5; 29.4ff; Curt.8.13.1; 14.1; 9.1.7ff; Diod.17.87.2 (referred to as Embisarus).

⁹⁵ Cf. Arr.6.7.5-6; 6.9.2-3ff; Curt.9.4.30. During the second siege, lack of scaling ladders also seems to have caused the assault to waver.

⁹⁶ Arr.6.17.1ff; cf. Curt. 9.8.16.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Arr.6.16.5. For their implication in Musicanus' revolt, Arr.6.17.2.

⁹⁸ See Curt.8.9.15; cf. Diod.17.102.5-6.

⁹⁹ For Alexander's preparations at Patala see Arr.6.18-6.20.

¹⁰⁰ Arr. *Ind.*32.11.

¹⁰¹ Arr. *Ind.*20.2.

¹⁰² Cf. Arr.6.21.3; 23.1, 4-6. That Alexander marched through Gedrosia in order to pacify it and so round off his empire can be disregarded. The area was mostly desert and its people posed little if no threat to Alexander's land. However, see Green, 431.

¹⁰³ See Arr.6.24.2ff. Such a motive recalls Alexander's wish to emulate Perseus and Heracles by making the desert journey to Siwah. Cf. Arr.3.3.1ff.

¹⁰⁴ Arr. *Ind.*20.2.

¹⁰⁵ I do not concur that Alexander undertook the desert crossing in order to punish his Macedonians for preventing him continuing his conquests east. By the time he set out across Gedrosia, he had sent most of the dissenting Macedonian veterans back to Persia with Craterus along another route (See below). However, see E. Badian, *JHS* 81 (1961), 21.

¹⁰⁶ E. Badian, "Alexander in Iran." *The Cambridge History of Iran* II, 472. Bosworth, on the other hand, has argued that such a plan might have been feasible. Bosworth, *C+E*, 143-144; cf. A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East: The tragedy of Triumph*, 173ff. However, while he is prepared to argue for more accessible provisions, I still feel that they would not have been enough for an army.

¹⁰⁷ Curt.9.10.10; Arr.7.5.5; Arr. *Ind.*23.5. Cf. Diod.17.105.8., who claims, contrary to the other sources, that the Oreitae inflicted heavy losses on the Macedonians.

¹⁰⁸ Arr.6.23.4-5.

¹⁰⁹ Brunt's Loeb translation of Arrian, Vol.II, Appendix XVIII, 477.

¹¹⁰ For Nearchus' story see Arr. *Ind.*21-32.

¹¹¹ The size of Alexander's army upon entering and leaving the desert is a matter of controversy, but it is not necessary for the purpose of this chapter to give precise figures. It will do merely to note that Alexander took a substantial force into the Gedrosian desert, and this was then noticeably reduced during the following march.

¹¹² Arr.6.17.3.

¹¹³ Lane Fox, 390.

¹¹⁴ The Oreitae also soon revolted; see above.

¹¹⁵ Arr.6.27.2.

¹¹⁶ At the time of Alexander's death Taxiles was still in charge of the satrapy.

¹¹⁷ Arr.6.15.4.

¹¹⁸ Bosworth, *C+E*, 239.

¹¹⁹ See above, "The Invasion of India."

¹²⁰ Diodorus (18.4.4ff.) gives the most specific account of Alexander's final military plans; cf. Arr.7.1.2-3; Curt.10.1.17-18. The authenticity of these last plans (which

also include building projects) has been questioned; for example see W.W.Tarn, *Alexander the Great* II, 378ff. However, I am inclined to follow scholars who see no reason to doubt them; they are in line with Alexander's spirit. For example see Hamilton, 155 with note 3; Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 281ff. E. Badian, "A King's Notebook", *HSCP* 72 (1968), 183-204, stresses that, whether authentic or not, they were produced in order to be rejected.

¹²¹ Arr.7.19.6.

¹²² Perhaps one should ask why Arabia was chosen as Alexander's first objective. One should consider its proximity to Alexander's position in Babylon in 323: it was the obvious stepping stone to further conquests. Moreover, Arrian gives numerous reasons for the expedition: the Arabs had sent no embassy to him nor paid him any act of homage, while the abundance of rich spices seems to have further tempted Alexander. Arrian also claims that the invasion was prompted because the Arabs only worshipped two gods and Alexander considered himself worthy to be a third. Considering Alexander's ego and his probable belief in his own divinity at this stage, there might be something in this argument also (Arr.7.19.6-20.2). I do not believe, as Tarn has argued, that exploration played a dominant part in determining Alexander's move. Gaining possessions and acquiring status were more important to Alexander than research.

¹²³ Arr.7.19.3-5; cf. Plut. *Alex.*68.2; Curt.10.1.19.

¹²⁴ Arr.7.20.7ff.

¹²⁵ Alexander had also ensured that the Tigris had been cleared of weirs so as to allow his fleet clear access to the Persian Gulf and Arabia (Arr.7.7.7).

¹²⁶ Cf. Arr.7.12.4.

¹²⁷ Arr.7.6.1; Diod.17.108.1; cf. Curt.8.5.1.

¹²⁸ Arr.7.23.3-4 (Persians in the phalanx); 7.6.3-4 (orientals in the Companion cavalry).

¹²⁹ Diod.17.106.3.

¹³⁰ Bosworth, *C+E*, 148.

¹³¹ Cf.Diod.17.111.1.

¹³² Diod.17.109.1; Curt.10.2.4.

¹³³ Cf. Brunt in his Loeb translation of Arrian, Vol.II, Appendix XXIII, 504-6; Bosworth, *C+E*, 220-228.

- ¹³⁴ On the discharge of troops see Arr.7.12.1-4; Diod.17.109.1. Curtius (10.2.8) states that Alexander retained a "modest" force of 13,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry. These figures may include mercenaries, but even if they do not, it would still mean that Alexander had lost nearly half of the European component of his army by 324.
- ¹³⁵ The Persian infantry, complete with bow and javelin, made up the centre of each file within the phalanx. Macedonians, armed with sarisas, made up the first three ranks and the rear rank (Arr.7.23.3-4). The Persian infantry hardly complemented the Macedonians and were there simply to provide numbers to give momentum to the first three ranks of Macedonians.

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ALEXANDER'S MAJOR BATTLES

According to Hammond, “the brilliance of Alexander’s mind is seen most clearly in his major battles”.¹ I am tempted to agree. Alexander was never beaten in battle and this was largely because of his command performance. He could competently move his troops to a battlefield, deploy them effectively when near to the enemy, issue sagacious and intuitive orders prior to an engagement, and lead his troops with great authority and proficiency during a battle. However, his conduct here, as with all areas of Alexander’s generalship, is not without fault. Moreover, Alexander’s victories should not be credited to his generalship alone; his troops played as much a part in determining his success.

To illustrate the above points I intend to conduct a study of Alexander’s two greatest battles: those of Issus and Gaugamela.² In both cases, I shall focus on his strategic manoeuvres prior to battle and his tactical preparations when in contact with the enemy.

THE BATTLE OF ISSUS (333 B.C.)

PRELUDE TO THE BATTLE: STRATEGIC MANOEUVRES

In analysing Alexander's strategic generalship during the Issus campaign two main factors need to be addressed.

Firstly, there is the question of what type of strategy Alexander undertook, as our main sources for the campaign, Arrian and Curtius, fail to agree on this.

Secondly, after determining what strategy Alexander did in fact follow (and how suitable it was), we must consider why his strategic plan was totally undermined subsequently by Darius.

i) Offensive or Defensive strategy?

The Issus campaign was set in motion from Tarsus in late 333, when Alexander ordered Parmenion into southern Cilicia ahead of the main advance to scout out the area. Generals of antiquity, on the whole, still failed to realise the usefulness of reconnaissance and thus this seems to have been an astute move.³ It appears that Alexander further ordered Parmenion to occupy the passes in the area, which he duly did, ousting any Persian detachments that were there.⁴ After moving to Soli and conducting a rapid seven day campaign against Cilician tribesmen holding out in the surrounding highlands (Arr.2.5.5-6), Alexander then started his own advance to meet Parmenion. During this march, Alexander learnt that Darius was encamped with his army at Sochi, which was "about two marching days from the Assyrian Gates (i.e. the Pillar or Jonah)" (Arr.2.6.1). It is in describing how Alexander reacts to this news that Arrian and Curtius then frustratingly contradict one another, and two distinct and incompatible strategic designs emerge.

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Presenting the traditional and heroic picture of the young king, Arrian attributes to Alexander a strategy based upon attack. Thus, he has Alexander receive a report detailing Darius' whereabouts while staying at Mallus, and then almost immediately set out to oppose the Persian army in its camp. Subsequently, after an exhausting forced march, the Macedonian army reaches Myriandrus in southern Cilicia before nightfall on the second day of the advance. It is from here that Alexander readies himself to strike at the Persian army (2.6.1-2).

Curtius, on the other hand, does not say when Alexander learnt of Darius' position at Sochi, but it is tempting to associate this news with the meeting which he mentions between Alexander and Parmenion at Castabalum, a town one day's march beyond Mallus (3.7.5-6).⁵ From here, Alexander is then made to move to Issus without any sense of urgency, where he conducts a council of war. The result of this conference is that Alexander accepts the advice of Parmenion to adopt a defensive stance based upon the defiles of southern Cilicia, and so moves his army there to await Darius (3.7.8-10).

Scholars have often been more willing to adopt Arrian's account over Curtius'.⁶ This is probably because there is a tendency to regard Arrian as the "best" source, and because the picture presented of Alexander in Curtius seems so far removed from his generally heroic temperament. However, I believe this view to be rather naive.

Firstly, Arrian's account in this instance is flawed. The stumbling block lies in the fact that we are expected to believe that Alexander conducted his forced march from Mallus to Myriandrus, a distance of about 75 miles, in two days. While those scholars who have faith in Arrian's account are prepared to accept this, I cannot. Considering the topography of the general area, the likelihood of such a march being conducted in such a short period of time is hard to believe. The country was rugged and a sequence of defiles had to be negotiated, each one of which would have taken hours to clear.⁷

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Moreover, the various streams that ran across the plain, the Deli Cay, Kuru Cay, Payas Cay, and others, would also have delayed any advance while they were forded. Consequently, I would submit that Arrian's account cannot be accepted at face value; Alexander's lightning march, fuelled by his burning desire to effect an offensive campaign, must be looked upon with suspicion.

Secondly, one should not believe that everything that Alexander did, no matter what the circumstances, had to be dictated by offence; if one does, then one is being duped by Alexander's own propaganda. If conditions clearly went against an offensive policy and there was a far better course to take, then one should credit Alexander with being prepared to abandon his usual bellicose manner. Alexander was confronted with such a situation when he was in the southern passes of Cilicia. Thus, any offensive action would probably have met with failure. Darius' position at Sochi was most impressive; he had marshalled a force that was numerically greater than Alexander's and positioned it upon a wide open plain. From here Darius could bring all his forces to bear on the smaller Macedonian army and use his cherished cavalry to effect the favoured Persian tactic of flank envelopment. Through the reconnaissance reports of Parmenion, Alexander must have appreciated that if he advanced into the plain at Sochi there was a good chance that he would be outmatched. Moreover, Alexander was in no position to attempt a move where defeat was a possibility. In his rear lay Cilicia, and although earlier he had attempted to consolidate his position here with a campaign against the local tribesmen (see above), areas were still inevitably pro-Persian. If Alexander suffered a defeat, he could expect the Cilicians to come out in favour of Persia and cut his lines of communications and retreat; having earlier disbanded his fleet,⁸ Alexander relied heavily on these lines, and would have to win a battle outright to secure them.

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Noting the above problems, I am sure that Alexander would have been quick to appreciate the benefits of a defensive strategy based upon the passes of southern Cilicia. In the first place, it offered the best chance of gaining victory. In the southern defiles Alexander could force a situation similar to Thermopylae.⁹ In attacking the Macedonian position, the Persians would have no advantage of numbers; their infantry, tired after a long approach march, would be afraid of entrapment in the narrow defiles; and their cavalry would be practically useless. Additionally, there was a good chance that with winter coming, Darius would be forced to abandon Sochi soon due to lack of provisions (see below). In such an event Darius would probably not retreat to Babylon, as this would constitute a loss of face (Curt. 3.8.7) and open Syria and Phoenicia to Alexander's advance. Instead he would most probably attempt to enter Cilicia via the Persian royal road (which ran through the southern passes) and so come to grips with Alexander.

Finally, by waiting in the passes, the reinforcements that Alexander was expecting would be able to effect a quicker union with the army.¹⁰ After over a year of campaigning, one major battle, numerous sieges and skirmishes, the Macedonian army was in need of fresh men, especially if it was once again going to face a major Persian force. It seemed sensible therefore to check any advance and wait for such men.

Given the above evidence, it seems far more logical to follow Curtius' account and argue that Alexander actually adopted a defensive strategy for the Issus campaign.¹¹ This then presents us with a greater understanding of Alexander's military ethos. Although by nature an aggressive commander in his planning, he was not averse to subduing his impulses when the situation dictated that he must; this does him credit.

Ultimately, however, Alexander's seemingly adroit strategy was to be undermined by Darius; this was due to a combination of skilful manoeuvres on Darius' part, and a number of military blunders on Alexander's.

ii) The undoing of Alexander's defensive plans

While at Sochi, Darius began to get impatient; Alexander was certainly taking his time in coming forward to engage him. Consequently, he decided upon an overhaul of his initial plan; breaking camp he went in search of Alexander. Even though this step meant abandoning favourable ground, it is quite simple to understand considering the general strategic situation that was developing.

Despite the poor reports that Darius receives in the ancient texts, he was probably a gifted strategist. When his outposts were pushed back from the passes in southern Cilicia by Parmenion's troops, he must have begun to appreciate that the Macedonians might seek to hold these passes against him. However, while there was the chance that the young king would overstep the mark and come to Sochi, Darius was initially content to wait. However, as time passed and reports of the Macedonian positions filtered through to him, Darius must have realised that it was indeed the intention of Alexander to hold the passes and that the Macedonian army, as a result, would be proceeding no further; if he was going to bring Alexander to battle he would have to abandon Sochi. Furthermore, his location was becoming untenable. Where he was, in the Amik plain, he was dependent on land transport for his provisions. With the harvest long over and winter approaching, the area could not support his vast army and so he needed to move.¹² However, he was not about to satisfy Alexander's wishes by moving against him through the southern passes. Darius knew of another pass, the "Amanic Gates", which led through the Amanus Mountains and into Cilicia from the north; he was quick

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to formulate another strategy which exploited this.¹³ Breaking camp, Darius left Sochi and headed north about 150 km to proceed through the Amanic Gates unopposed (Arr.2.7.1; Curt.3.8.13). Once through, he swept down into the plain of Issus, captured Alexander's field hospital at Issus, and moved to take up position on the River Pinarus. The first time Alexander heard of this turn of events was when Macedonian prisoners, released from Issus, brought the news that Darius was in his rear (Curt.3.8.14-16). Understandably, this came as a complete shock to the Macedonian king (Arr.2.7.2; Curt.3.8.17) who was then forced to revamp his own plans and turn his forces north to deal with this new Persian threat.

Darius' part, therefore, in undermining Alexander's defensive plan is clear. However, the success of Darius' keen strategic move was, in part, due to lapses in Alexander's generalship.

Primarily, Alexander failed to monitor Darius closely. It seems that he was so convinced that the Great King was going to move against him through the southern passes that he became complacent. As a result he lost contact with the Persian army when it did move and was then unable to resume contact with it (to cover this point Arrian introduces a thunderstorm which frustrates Alexander's attempts to keep Darius in his sights and held up his own movements: Arr.2.5.2).¹⁴ As a result he remained ignorant of where Darius was moving and so failed to appreciate that the Persians could be effecting a move that would bring them down on his rear through the Amanic Gates.

Alexander's second military blunder then becomes apparent: he had either failed to notice the Amanic Gates or he may have discarded them as a serious route for the Persian army to take; either way his generalship is further at fault. If he was ignorant of the Gates then he should not have been. Upon settling down to conduct a defensive operation, he had plenty of time on his hands while he waited for Darius. Consequently,

he should have taken the opportunity to speak to locals and conduct an exhaustive reconnaissance of the whole area, in order to determine whether there were any routes that might have threatened his position. To blame Parmenion for the failure to uncover the pass will not do; besides, he was sent south by Alexander. Ultimately, if Alexander was unaware of the Gates the blame lies with him as commander-in-chief for not organising his resources to detect the pass.

If, on the other hand, Alexander was aware of the Amanic Gates but failed to keep an eye on them, then his generalship is even more at fault.¹⁵ He should have covered all possible approaches which he knew of; that he might not demonstrates that he did not fully understand the whole strategic picture: that the Gates could be used by a hostile force to turn his flank and threaten his rear.¹⁶

In effect, therefore, by failing to monitor Darius' movements and being ignorant of either the existence or the potential of the Amanic Gates, Alexander gave Darius the initiative and allowed him to exploit fully his new and competent counter plan to effect a strategic surprise.

iii) Alexander's Strategy at Issus: Conclusion

Analysing Alexander's strategic manoeuvres in the Issus campaign, one is initially struck by his adoption of a defensive mode of operation. While this seems far removed from his typically offensive nature it is no reason to reject it as fact. One must credit Alexander with being at least a competent general, who realised the necessity of defence in the given circumstances. While Curtius felt at ease in recording this, Arrian and his sources felt it necessary to distort the truth and make Alexander appear the heroic commander once again. However, while Alexander's strategic aims were sound enough, one can hardly consider the implementation of them adequate. Through lapses

in his generalship he allowed Darius to exploit his own strategic skills, the result being that the Persian army turned his rear and ended up sitting astride his lines of communication.

It now remains to be seen whether Alexander's tactical decisions were any better than his strategic ones.

THE BATTLE: TACTICAL MANOEUVRES¹⁷

Upon information from his scouts that Darius was massing his troops along the River Pinarus (Arr.2.7.2), one of the many outlets that discharge into the Gulf of Iskenderon from the Amanus, Alexander sought to make good his strategic error of judgement. Turning his army around he quickly led it back through the Pillar of Jonah to confront Darius; the scene was set for Alexander's biggest and most demanding battle to date.¹⁸ Caught totally unprepared, he had to advance to meet an enemy army which was probably far larger than his,¹⁹ which had the element of surprise and which was commanded by a general who had already displayed his strategic skills.

In analysing Alexander's tactical response to these pressures the battle will be divided into two phases: the opening moves and the engagement itself.

i) Opening Moves

Alexander's pre-battle tactical orders and moves were well executed and, based largely on defence, effectively countered Darius'. However, the Persian battle-plan had certain flaws that made Alexander's task much easier.

Alexander's immediate problem was how to advance to the Pinarus. Darius had thrown a large force consisting of cavalry and light infantry across the Pinarus to harass the Macedonians as they advanced (Arr.2.8.5; Curt.3.8.28). There was also the danger

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that this force, in combination with Darius' cavalry still on the other side of the river, might then try and envelop Alexander's flanks. To combat such threats, Alexander ensured that his frontage and flanks were always secure. As he descended in column formation from the Pillar of Jonah he gradually extended his frontage as the plain opened out before him. First the line regiments were brought up, and then, when there was room, the cavalry squadrons were fed on to the flanks (Arr.2.8.2-3; Curt.3.9.12). Alexander then assigned his left flank to Parmenion and ordered him to keep this wing tight against the seashore so that it would be impossible to outflank (Arr.2.8.4). This allowed him to limit the cavalry contingent here to the allied Greek cavalry, about 600 strong.²⁰ His right wing was to pose a more difficult problem. As he had descended from the pass he would have noticed that Darius had massed most of his heavy cavalry to oppose his right. Thus, with this wing far more susceptible to envelopment, Alexander concentrated the rest of his cavalry here: the Companions, Thessalians, and light cavalry, about 4,500 in total.²¹

Having secured his advance to the Pinarus, Alexander then had to make final adjustments to his battle-line in order to counter Darius' formation and possible battle plan. He did this with great skill, although he was aided in this because the Great King made no secret of his intentions. Consequently, let us first quickly consider Darius' battle-line and plans.

Unable to hinder the Macedonian progress, the Persian forces south of the Pinarus fell back. However, while the cavalry retreated behind the river to rejoin the bulk of the Persian army, the advance infantry (as ordered)²² withdrew to the foothills of the Amanus, which were beyond the river at 90 degrees to it. These troops then became situated on the right flank rear of the Macedonian army as it advanced, in a prime position to cause trouble.

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Darius' main battle-line was uncomplicated.²³ On his flanks he amassed his cavalry (supported by contingents of light infantry). His strongest flank, however, was his right. Immediately prior to the engagement he shifted the bulk of his cavalry here as he noticed that the terrain on his left was not conducive to cavalry manoeuvres (Arr.2.8.10-11).²⁴ He had also probably noted the lack of cavalry on Alexander's left and decided to exploit this.

Infantry placed along the northern riverbank held the Persian centre. Greek mercenaries were Darius' most potent weapon in this sector, and some of them were positioned behind barricades where the banks of the Pinarus proved more accessible.²⁵ Persian Cardaces supported the mercenaries, although it is unclear whether these troops were on either side of the Greeks or just their left.²⁶

To the rear of Darius' battle-line were positioned the numerous (but weak) native levies.

Viewing these dispositions it is clear that Darius' intended to follow the tried and tested Persian military doctrine of flank envelopment. Thus, while his Greek mercenaries (supported by the Cardaces) held the central section of his battle-line, his cavalry would attempt to turn the Macedonian flanks.²⁷ In the meantime, added pressure would be applied to the Macedonian right flank by the light infantry stationed in the Amanus foothills.

Unfortunately for Darius his plan was obvious and unimaginative. Consequently, Alexander found it easy to develop his own effective counter-measures.

In the first place, Alexander had to deal with the sudden increase of Persian cavalry on his left. It was now obvious that the main Persian thrust would be directed against this flank, yet Alexander did not have sufficient forces in the area to combat this new

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situation (see above). Fortunately, however, Darius was playing into Alexander's hands. Alexander's favourite tactic was to draw the enemy's strongest units forward with a weaker unit of his own as bait. The enemy units would then waste their impetus and cohesion, leaving them vulnerable to a counter-strike.²⁸ Alexander now saw that he could implement this policy. On his left the Persian cavalry would easily over-ride the allied Greek cavalry stationed there but, in so doing, would lose their formation. Alexander planned to bring one of his own units to bear on them when this happened. Consequently, he ordered the Thessalian cavalry contingent from his right flank to reinforce his left. To ensure that he achieved the necessary maximum surprise over the Persian units he further order the Thessalians to conceal their redeployment by riding behind his central infantry detachments.²⁹ Alexander also placed the Cretan archers and Thracian javelin-men on the immediate left of the phalanx to provide additional support, while he wisely secured his rear by setting his foreign mercenaries behind his centrally placed phalanx (Arr.2.9.3).

Despite losing the Thessalian cavalry, Alexander's right flank was still quite strong, consisting as it did of the Companions, *prodromoi* and Paeonian cavalry, supported by light infantry. However, the Persian infantry contingent in the Amanus foothills still posed a threat here. Consequently, he threw part of his right back at 90 degrees to his main battle-line to act as a flank guard. The units involved (the Agrianians, a detachment of Macedonian archers and some cavalry: Arr.2.9.2) subsequently quelled any danger to Alexander's rear by carrying out a successful attack upon the Persian forces there (Arr.2.9.4). Alexander then deemed it necessary to leave only the cavalry in this sector to guard against any further attack. The remaining units of the force were then incorporated into a new flank guard as Alexander was still unconvinced that his right could stand up to a Persian flanking movement. Thus, the Agrianians and archers

were combined with two *ilai* of Companion cavalry and a detachment of Greek mercenary infantry and were placed on the right of the army (Arr.2.9.3-4).

Having organised his battle-line in an effective manner to defend against Darius' moves, Alexander was now ready to engage the enemy.

ii) The Engagement

Once an ancient battle had begun there was no need and no opportunity for an overall command. It was the task of the commander-in-chief to issue general orders for attack or defence, or any other orders which he saw fit, before he found himself in the role of a regimental commander. Then, success on the battlefield would largely be in the hands of his troops and unit commanders. It will be seen that both Alexander and his army adequately fulfilled what was required from them. However, It will also be noticed that the restrictive nature of the battlefield, confined as it was between coast and mountains, did not suit Darius' plans and the vast numbers of the Persian army. As a result the Persians fought from a poor tactical position and consequently it was not too difficult for the Macedonians to overcome them.

The Macedonian Left: a holding action

It seems likely that Darius opened the battle by attempting to outflank the Macedonian left with a cavalry thrust along the coast.³⁰ Darius must have realised that this strike could not hope to be carried out effectively as the coast-line de-limited the area of operation and so prevented the efficient cavalry movements of large numbers of horse. However, with only 600 enemy cavalry facing his attack he must have been confident that, despite this lack of space, his heavy cavalry, or cataphracts, would easily punch their way through. This they subsequently did before then turning to fall upon the Macedonian phalanx.³¹ Unfortunately for Darius, Alexander's tactical move of

transferring the Thessalian cavalry to his seaward flank undermined his offensive. The Persian cataphracts had wasted their momentum and cohesion and were ripe for a counter-strike. Furthermore, the confined space for their large numbers now worked against them: they simply could not carry out the manoeuvres required to foil a riposte.³² Thus, when the fresher, smaller and lighter-armed units of Thessalians attacked, exploiting their own superior mobility and training,³³ the cataphracts were in no position to resist.³⁴ Their offensive was held and, later in the battle, they were put to flight. Thus, Alexander's tactics, his well disciplined troops under Parmenion's experienced hand, and the cramped conditions which prevented effective Persian cavalry manoeuvres, combined to ensure that the Macedonian left flank was held and Darius' hopes of its envelopment thwarted.

The Macedonian Right and Centre: Alexander's strike

Meanwhile, Alexander began to implement his own offensive. While his left flank held the Persian onset there at bay, Alexander gave the order for his right and centre to push across the Pinarus. However, it was to be more than just a simple strike over the river; Alexander also envisaged using his Companion cavalry (which he was to lead) to head a pincer movement from the right against the Persian centre.

The initial onset of the Macedonian right gave Darius no chance to attempt any advance of his own to envelop this flank. However, the action here was possibly less spectacular than our sources indicate. It seems highly unlikely, for instance, that Alexander charged across the river at the head of his Companion cavalry as Arrian relates (2.10.3; 2.10.5). The nature of the riverbed, strewn with rocks, would have prevented this type of action.³⁵ Instead, I would suggest that Alexander first ordered his light infantry and light cavalry units on the right to push across the river and drive the

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Persian forces back somewhat. In the meantime, he then forded the river with his Companion cavalry, *ile by ile*, at a slow pace. Then, while his lighter units held the Persians at bay, he formed his Companion cavalry into wedges on the north bank of the river. Propaganda, intent on covering such an inglorious crossing, is responsible for the unconvincing account of a rapid charge.³⁶

Safely across the Pinarus, Alexander then charged the ranks of the Persian left wing cavalry. It seems that little resistance was provided as the superior discipline and fighting skill of the Macedonians soon broke the Persian left wing and cut it off from the rest of the army (Arr.2.10.4; 2.11.4). This breakthrough achieved, Alexander then skilfully (and astutely) wheeled his Companions inwards towards Darius and the more central Persian units.³⁷ Meanwhile, the commanders of his light cavalry and infantry probably then resumed their role as a flank guard to protect the Companions from the remnants of the Persian left wing.

While Alexander himself contended on the right, his phalanx had managed to break into the Persian infantry centre. Unfortunately for Darius, the terrain prevented him from offering as effective a resistance as he had hoped. Owing to the confined space of the battlefield, Darius had been forced to arrange his infantry with a narrow frontage and in great depth. This meant he could not bring to bear on the Macedonians a substantial part of his army, and so his numerical advantage was effectively negated. Nevertheless, the Macedonian assault upon Darius' centre did have its problems. As the phalanx had advanced, probably *en échelon* with the right-most battalion leading, a gap had appeared in its frontage, which separated the four battalions of the left from the battalions of Coenus and Perdiccas and the hypaspists on the right.³⁸ This was partly due to the precipitous nature of the riverbanks. However, the troops on the right had probably found it easier to break through the Persian line: while they attacked it at a

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vulnerable point between the Greek mercenary infantry and the Persian Cardaces, the battalions on the left were halted by Darius' Greek mercenaries behind their stockades. As a gap then developed, these mercenaries were quick to exploit it, rushing in and killing a *taxis* commander and 120 *pezhetairoi*.³⁹ The situation would have been grave for Alexander had not the discipline of his troops and battalion commanders shown through. The battalions on the right wing routed the Persians before them and then wheeled to their left to envelop the left flank of the Greek mercenaries and so relieve their hard-pressed comrades.⁴⁰

Macedonian victory: Darius takes flight

Darius' position was critical; his right offensive had been held, his middle had been breached, and his left flank had been broken. At this stage there must then have been a convincing collapse of his left centre, where he and the Cardaces were situated. This would have been due to the advance of Alexander's right flank, physically cutting its way through the Persian units and causing panic amongst so many troops packed tightly together. The loss of the Cardaces,⁴¹ would explain why Darius then chose to flee himself. It would also explain why he was able to flee; previously he had been hemmed in by these troops, but as they fled he could slip through them.⁴²

According to Arrian (2.11.7) and Curtius (3.11.16), Alexander began a pursuit of Darius after he had relieved his hard-pressed centre and was sure that Persian resistance was completely finished. However, it is more likely that in the heat of battle Alexander took some of his cavalry and pursued Darius from the moment he left the field. Plutarch (*Alex.*20.10) claims that Darius had a head start of about half a mile, a distance that can be covered on horseback in a matter of minutes. If Alexander had come to the aid of his beleaguered centre before setting off after Darius, then this distance would have been

much greater. It appears, therefore, that this alleged turning back on Alexander's part is little more than an apologetic device which serves to explain why Darius was able to escape and exonerates Alexander from personally neglecting his own troops. It further ensures that Alexander is seen as having finished off the Persian resistance himself, when in fact his dogged and professional troops and their commanders accomplished this without him.⁴³

Fortunately for Alexander's standing, when he began his pursuit of Darius, the battle was essentially won. The Persian left had collapsed, Darius had fled, and units from the victorious Macedonian right were soon pushing towards the centre in a pincer movement to link up with the phalanx. This ensured the total collapse of the Persian centre, while Parmenion, on the left, exploited the falling Persian morale and routed the enemy right. Consequently, while it was irresponsible of Alexander to rush off in pursuit of his own glory, disregarding his valiant troops, he cannot be criticised for leaving his army in a desperate state.

iii) Alexander's Tactics at Issus: Conclusion

Unlike his strategic generalship, Alexander's tactical planning deserves much praise; he easily fulfilled what was required from a commander of antiquity immediately before and during the battle of Issus. Thus, his arrangements prior to the battle secured his line in a most astute way against possible Persian attack. Moving down to the Pinarus he organised his troops so that Darius could not immediately harry or outflank his position. Then, he created a strong and mobile right guard, which effectively dealt with the Persian threat to his right and right flank rear. Elsewhere, he positioned his mercenaries to protect his rear, whilst his left was secured by the cunning use of his allied Greek cavalry and Thessalian cavalry.

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Alexander's decision to launch his own strikes across the river then proved to be wise. He was right to rely on the quality of his troops and commanders to be able to effect a breakthrough, whilst his pincer movement with the Macedonian right proved most effective. Indeed, as colonel-in-chief of the Companion cavalry, Alexander excelled; he managed to co-ordinate a breach of the Persian left flank and then, as planned, wheeled to take on the Persian centre. Thus, it was the judicious blend of Alexander's capable generalship and the fighting quality of his troops, which helped to ensure a Macedonian victory.

However, it should be noted that no real prodigious skill was needed to win the battle. Darius made no secret of his battle-plan and so it was relatively simple for Alexander to adjust his battle-line to counter it. Moreover, the confined nature of the battlefield worked against Darius; he could not exploit his numerical advantage, whilst his army could not effectively manoeuvre when conducting or receiving an attack. Finally, the Persian army was simply no match for the professionalism of the Macedonian troops and their commanders. Consequently, Alexander's generalship cannot be gauged as anything more than competent. To achieve a greater rating he must prove that he can also cope with a battle scenario that demands far more from him and his army.

THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA (331 B.C.)

PRELUDE TO THE BATTLE: STRATEGIC MANOEUVRES

Strategically, the campaign of Gaugamela was not as complex as that of Issus; this is because the plans and movements of Alexander and Darius complemented one another.

After completing operations along the Syrian coast and in Egypt, Alexander determined to strike out in search of Darius and bring him to battle; this would not prove hard achieve.⁴⁴ While Alexander had been in the west, Darius had begun to assemble his army at Babylon ready for another battle. However, the Great King did not intend to offer battle here. As Bosworth points out, Darius was unsure of the loyalty of the populace and the extended residence of a growing army must have heavily strained the food reserves of the region.⁴⁵ With this in mind, Darius moved north in the summer of 331 to the plains of Assyria and eventually picked his chosen battle-site of Gaugamela.

It is also likely that Darius made plans to usher Alexander to his position. He had previously sent his satrap of Syria, Mazaeus, to impede Alexander's passage of the Euphrates so that he would have enough time to find and prepare his battleground.⁴⁶ However, it is possible that Mazaeus was also ordered to burn the Euphrates valley and so force Alexander to turn east towards Darius' general location.⁴⁷ With this achieved he could then shepherd Alexander to Darius' exact position.

Darius was, ironically, playing into Alexander's hands: to find the Great King and achieve the battle that he wanted Alexander merely had to move his army forward.

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Alexander crossed the Euphrates at Thapsacus and then struck eastwards to the Tigris rather than down the Euphrates to Babylon, possibly because of Mazaeus' scorched earth policy.⁴⁸ Moreover, it was probably now clear to Alexander, as Bosworth claims, that Darius had left Babylon and moved north; thus he aimed for Assyria.⁴⁹ Persian scouting parties, who ensured he was moving towards Darius, constantly shadowed his movements. Some of these he captured and they attested that Darius intended to hold the Tigris. After a rapid march to this river, however, Alexander found it devoid of defenders. It had probably been the intention of the captured Persian scouts to deceive Alexander and so draw him further eastwards.⁵⁰ With no opposition, Alexander crossed the Tigris and simply continued to move in a vaguely eastward direction. Soon, contact was made with an advance guard of Persian cavalry. Leading a sortie against them Alexander managed to capture some stragglers, who then informed him that Darius was only 150 stades away concealed by hills that separated the two armies. Accordingly, Alexander pitched camp and rested his troops for four days (Arr.3.9.1; Curt.4.10.15). During this time he probably reconnoitred the immediate area and became well informed about his foe's position and numbers. From this camp it was then merely a matter of advancing to meet the Great King at his chosen site.

Consequently, it should be clear that little strategic skill was required of Alexander in the campaign of Gaugamela. With Darius prepared to fight him and even, it appears, usher him to his prepared battle-site, all Alexander had to do was move his army forward to find the Persian army and be presented with the engagement that he sought.

THE BATTLE: TACTICAL MANOEUVRES⁵¹

Gaugamela was Alexander's largest and most demanding battle. He was significantly outnumbered,⁵² and had to fight on ground which was highly advantageous to his enemy but not to him.

In the following analysis the sagacity of Alexander's tactics will be judged, as too will Alexander's role as a unit commander.

i) Alexander's Tactical Planning

When he was about 30 stades from the Persian army, Alexander halted his advance so that he could rest his men and carry out a more detailed survey of the battlefield.⁵³ With the Persians arrayed in full battle order before him, Alexander examined their positions at leisure. Darius commanded the enemy centre with his Kinsmen and guard. Also present here were what remained of his Greek mercenaries, a unit of Indians, resettled Carians and Mardian archers. In front of Darius' own position were placed 50 scythed chariots and a small contingent of elephants, while to his rear was his native infantry. Darius' wings were again the strongest part of his line. Both were made up of heavy concentrations of cavalry drawn from wide-ranging parts of his empire, and both were further strengthened by advance guards of cavalry and scythed chariots.⁵⁴ Seeing all this, Alexander must have gained an understanding of the Great King's battle plan. Using his chariots he would attempt to create gaps in the Macedonian line and exploit them. Moreover, his powerful cavalry wings would strive to envelop the Macedonian flanks and even surround Alexander's army. Meanwhile, Darius would content himself with keeping his own line intact so that there was no scope for a direct assault by Alexander.

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Essentially (barring the chariots) this was exactly the same plan that Darius had tried to follow at Issus. However, unlike Issus the battle was to be fought on a wide open plain; this suited Darius' plans. Hence, he could exploit his superiority in numbers⁵⁵ and utilise his cavalry arm effectively. Moreover, he had also smoothed out any undulations in the ground so that his scythed chariots would be able to move more freely. Consequently, although Alexander may have been able to again confidently predict Darius' plans, he would not find them as easy to counter them. Thus, his own tactical planning would have to be well thought out.

Alexander took the night to ponder his position before then marshalling his army the following morning and issuing his battle orders.⁵⁶

In light of Darius' strong offensive position, Alexander's main priority was defence. Thus, he organised his army in a rough "tactical square". He created strong left and right flank guards and threw them back *en échelon* from his front, probably at an angle of about 45 degrees.⁵⁷ On the right were light troops, Agrianians and archers, and the "Old Mercenaries" led by Cleander. In advance of these troops was a cavalry screen, first the *prodromoi* and Paeonians and then, in front of the whole body, a contingent of mercenary cavalry under Menidas. The flanking force thrown back on the left comprised the Thracian javelin men, the Cretan archers and the Achaean mercenaries.⁵⁸ In front of these troops were then placed the allied Greek cavalry and Odrysian horse and in front of these the mercenary cavalry under Andromachus.

Alexander's centre was the strongest part of his battle-line. Here was placed the Macedonian infantry phalanx, with the hypaspists in their accustomed place of honour to its right. On the left flank of the phalanx were positioned the Greek allied cavalry and the Thessalians.⁵⁹ To the right of the hypaspists were the Companion cavalry with Alexander. With his centre arrayed like this, it would be extremely difficult for Persian

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cavalry or infantry to breach it. However, there was still the danger of penetration by the Persian scythed chariots. To deal with this, Alexander issued orders before the battle to his infantry that, in the event of the chariots bearing down on them, they were to first try to frighten the horses by creating a din. Then, if this failed, they were to open up their ranks, let the chariots through, attack them as they passed, close the line behind them, and then finish them off.⁶⁰ To protect his Companion cavalry from chariots he had placed a screen of light infantry in front of them.⁶¹ With his flanks and front secure, Alexander did not neglect his rear. Behind the phalanx he arrayed a second infantry line made up of the Hellenic troops of the Corinthian League, and any mercenaries and troops from the Balkans not deployed elsewhere.⁶² He gave orders to this line that if the enemy got into the rear they were to about face and meet them.⁶³

Arrayed in this roughly rectangular shape, the Macedonian battle-line could meet an attack from any direction and was, thus, as secure as it could be against the Persian masses. However, it would be wrong to conclude that Alexander was preparing himself purely for a defensive battle, far from it. Alexander wanted to inflict a defeat upon Darius and only an offensive manoeuvre guaranteed this. However, given Darius' strong position he could not hope simply to launch an assault against the Persian lines (as he had done at Issus). Consequently, any offence would have to work with, and be built upon, his defensive arrangements. Alexander's resultant plan was quite bold. Firstly, he aimed to provoke Darius into attacking his flanks by shifting his army to the right, in an oblique manner.⁶⁴ This would ensure that the Persians had an extensive overlap facing Alexander's left which they would doubtless exploit. It would also force Darius to strike Alexander's right flank to stop it moving on to rougher ground unsuitable for his chariots and cavalry, and into a position where it could outflank his own line. With the battle engaged, Alexander intended to hold his heavily outnumbered

wings by implementing the tactic he had used at Issus. Small bodies of horse would lure larger enemy units into striking, and then stronger units of his own would fall upon the spent enemy formations, thus stabilising the situation.⁶⁵ The infantry detachments on the flanks could also be expected to give aid once the Persian horse had engaged. This course of action would be costly, but there was a very good chance that when Darius saw how stubborn the Macedonian wings were, he would commit more units to undermine them. If this happened, Alexander planned then to launch his Companion cavalry and phalanx against that part of the Persian line from where units had been withdrawn.⁶⁶ Having breached the Persian line these units could then move on and relieve the hard-pressed Macedonian wings.

The theory behind Alexander's planning was logical enough. However, in practice it would be difficult to defend against such a numerous foe: it was a tall order to ask his wings to stand up to such battering, and the decisive counter strike would have to be delivered at precisely the right moment. As Marsden claims, "if he charged too soon, his offensive weapon would be blunted; if he left it too late, the wings might cave in and the heavy cavalry become involved in a fight for its very existence".⁶⁷ Consequently, it now remains to be seen how his arrangements fared in the face of battle.

ii) The Battle

Alexander opened the battle by initiating his planned shift to the right. As he had hoped, this alarmed Darius; the Great King ordered the advance guard of his left wing (namely the Bactrian and Scythian cavalry, about 3,000 horse in total), to wheel forward and block any further Macedonian movement. In so doing they prepared to engage the Macedonian right flank as Alexander had hoped. However, it was Alexander's 400 mercenary cavalry under Menidas who actually initiated conflict on this wing,⁶⁸

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charging the Persian blocking force and compelling them to counter-charge (Arr.3.13.3).⁶⁹ Menidas' small force was soon driven back by the Persians, but not before it had broken the impetus of the enemy cavalry. Subsequently, Alexander threw into the fray a second wave consisting of Aretes' *prodromoi*, the Paeonians of Ariston, and Cleander's mercenaries.⁷⁰ This force managed to halt the enemy horse and compel the Persian commander of the left, Bessus, to commit the remaining Bactrian cavalry, possibly 8,000 in number. The battle on the Macedonian right then became a heated affair. Alexander's troops, using all their skill and training against superior odds, fought to hold their position and give their commander the time that he needed to search for a weak spot in Darius' line.

Meanwhile, Darius had launched his scythed chariots "direct against Alexander" (Arr.3.13.5).⁷¹ Due to Alexander's foresight, not to mention the coolness of his troops under pressure, this tactic failed totally. With great proficiency, the screen of light infantry that Alexander had placed in front of his Companion cavalry shot down the horses of the chariots that came against them, and the Companions remained untouched. Those that came against the Macedonian infantry were equally ineffective. As ordered, the phalanx skilfully opened its ranks, let the chariots through and then, relatively undamaged, closed ranks again. Trapped between the front and rear lines of infantry, the chariots were then quickly dealt with by the troops to the rear.⁷²

Alexander's left flank had also been engaged, as he had foreseen. The fighting here was probably just as frantic as on the right, if not more so; here Parmenion had to deal with a massive overlap by the Persian forces.⁷³ Moreover, according to the vulgate tradition (but not Arrian), the commander of the Persian right, Mazaeus, sent some of his cavalry around the flank to attack Alexander's base camp. While successful, it had little effect on the course of the battle; Parmenion did not withdraw any of his troops

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from the main conflict to deal with this isolated and limited threat.⁷⁴ Time, however, was running out for Alexander; he could not expect his flanks to hold on much longer in the face of superior numbers. Fortunately, at this crucial moment, Alexander spied a gap in the Persian left. Darius' movement of additional units of horse against the Macedonian right had probably caused this, just as Alexander had hoped.⁷⁵ Alexander immediately exploited this opportunity and charged for the gap at the head of a wedge, made up of his Companion cavalry and phalanx.⁷⁶ The Companion cavalry, at the apex of the wedge, were the first to penetrate the gap and succeeded in widening it. They then drove at the exposed flanks of the enemy troops towards Darius, while the phalanx arrived to confront the Persian front itself and rolled over it using its formidable sarisas. Unable to counter this onslaught, Darius' position became critical.

However, as Alexander had surged forward a hole had, in turn, appeared in the Macedonian front.⁷⁷ While the hypaspists and the four rightmost infantry battalions had gone forward with Alexander, the *taxis* of Simmias remained stationary to preserve continuity with the Macedonian left which could not advance owing to Persian pressure (doubtless Craterus' *taxis* also remained, situated as it was to the left of Simmias, Arr.3.11.9-10). Through the resultant gap struck a few units of Persian and Indian cavalry who were stationed in the vicinity of Darius. It appears they managed to breach the second Macedonian infantry line without being challenged,⁷⁸ and reach the Macedonian baggage park immediately to the rear of the army.⁷⁹ They then pillaged it and released some Persian prisoners who had been captured earlier in the battle.⁸⁰ However, the situation was not critical. It is unlikely that the enemy forces were very large and they were soon dealt with by the Macedonian second line of infantry who, in accordance with Alexander's pre-battle orders, turned about, calmly advanced upon the raiders, and put them to flight.

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Meanwhile, Alexander's own strike had been a success. Positioned in the centre of his line, Darius was placed under increasing pressure as the Macedonian assault came gradually closer and the press of fugitives confused his own ranks. Consequently, he eventually took flight.⁸¹ As at Issus, Alexander dashed off in pursuit at the head of his Companion cavalry. However, one cannot excuse his action this time. While his phalanx could continue to finish off the Persian central position, the situation on both flanks was not resolved and his Companion cavalry could have greatly helped the Macedonian cause in either area. On his right the Persians were arguably still in a position to overwhelm his forces, while the standing of his left flank, if anything, was even graver. Indeed, all sources agree that the situation on his left was so desperate that Parmenion sent a message to Alexander reporting that he needed help. The fate of this message is variously reported. According to Plutarch the appeal reached Alexander and prevented him from capturing Darius. Likewise, Arrian claims that upon receiving Parmenion's plea Alexander retraced his steps and resumed the pursuit of Darius only when he was assured of the safety of his army.⁸² However, it is hard to believe that any dispatch rider with a message could have found Alexander in the thick of a battle, especially if he was already pursuing Darius.⁸³ If Parmenion sent a message, Diodorus' report that it never found Alexander is more probable.⁸⁴ The accounts of Arrian and Plutarch are, in fact, overlaid with propaganda. Their intent is to exonerate Alexander from allegations of neglecting his army when the battle was far from over,⁸⁵ and explain why Darius was able to escape.⁸⁶

Fortunately for Alexander, his flanks were secured without his help or that of his Companion cavalry. It appears that once Bessus became aware of the destruction of the Persian centre, he disengaged the Macedonian right and withdrew his forces in good order.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Mazaeus' units attacking the Macedonian left lost their impetus

when news filtered through to them of the deteriorating Persian position. Parmenion was quick to exploit this; he rallied the Thessalian cavalry, launched them at the enemy, and threw them into retreat. It should be noted, however, that the results could have been very different if Bessus had decided to press home his advantage rather than withdraw, or Mazaeus' forces had broken through before they learnt of the Persian situation elsewhere. In this respect Alexander was lucky.

Alexander followed Darius in the direction of the River Lycus (The Great Zab), some 30 km from the battlefield. However, with darkness then approaching he abandoned his pursuit and started back to the battlefield. En route he encountered a large body of retreating enemy cavalry made up of Persians, Parthyaean, and Indians.⁸⁸ The clash that ensued was savage; some sixty Companions fell before the enemy broke clear. Alexander was fortunate that he did not come up against any further enemy formations in retreat, as he was very vulnerable; his horses were blown, his men few. However, he returned without further incident and found that his army had secured victory without him.

iii) Alexander's tactics at Gaugamela: Conclusion

Alexander's generalship at Gaugamela is, for the most part, worthy of a great deal of praise.

While the Persian troops were inferior to his own and he had a good idea of Darius' tactical plan before the engagement began, Alexander was not guaranteed victory. He faced an enemy which outnumbered him significantly and which had the terrain in its favour. That Alexander was eventually successful was in part because of his astute tactical arrangements: his defensive square; his orders to receive chariots and deal with a rear attack; his plans to draw and hold an increasing number of Persian forces on to

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his flanks so that he could strike against a weakened enemy line. Alexander further displayed his brilliance as a field-commander by picking the exact right time to initiate his own strike against Darius' lines.

Alexander's plans relied heavily on the professionalism of his troops and their commanders; they did not let him down as they fought with great skill and resilience against tremendous pressure to make his tactics work. Moreover, Alexander once again displayed his own merits as a regimental commander by leading his Companion cavalry in the charge that ruptured the Persian lines. Thus, as at Issus, it was a judicious blend of Alexander's generalship and his army's excellence that once again brought about success.

However, Alexander's conduct was not completely satisfactory. It was wrong for him to pursue Darius from the battlefield, deserting his troops when the engagement was still in the balance. He had probably only intended his flanks to hold on until he had broken through the Persian centre, and yet once he had achieved this he failed to come to their aid. As it was he was lucky that neither Persian wing pushed home their attacks and that he had a gifted commander in Parmenion to alleviate the pressure on his left. Furthermore, his folly in rushing off after Darius is confirmed when it is noted that he not only failed to catch the Great King for a second time, but nearly met disaster on his way back to the battlefield. These points undermine an otherwise proficient display of his generalship.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

- ¹ Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 260.
- ² The word limit on this thesis prevents an analysis of the battles of the Granicus and Hydaspes.
- ³ The events that surround the battle of Mantinea are evidence of this; cf. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War*, I. 127-133.
- ⁴ Cf. Arr.2.5.1; Curt.3.7.6-7. It is unclear what passes Parmenion occupied. There are two main passes in southern Cilicia - the Pillar of Jonah and the Beilan pass. It is likely that Parmenion ended up occupying both of these.
- ⁵ Cf. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 199.
- ⁶ For instance see Lane Fox, 164ff; Fuller, 98ff; Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 94ff; Hamilton, 66.
- ⁷ At the northern end of the coastal plain there was the Kara Kapu pass, then there was the Merkes Su pass and the Pillar of Jonah further to the south.
- ⁸ See Chapter One.
- ⁹ Cf. Hdt.7.210-2.
- ¹⁰ Curt.3.7.8.
- ¹¹ There is no need to modify Curtius' account, as some scholars have, and argue that a typically offensive minded Alexander was forced to accept such a defensive plan owing to pressure exerted by Parmenion (for example see A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 33). I accept that it was Parmenion who initially suggested the strategy of defence; this is not surprising, his reconnaissance mission ensured that he had the greatest understanding of the situation in the area. However, one need not then claim that he forced Alexander to accept his idea. Given the points raised in this chapter, even a mediocre general would have understood that defence was the only viable course to take; Alexander needed no prompting. Furthermore, given Alexander's temperament, it is nearly impossible to believe that he would have let himself be bullied into adopting a defensive plan of operation, or even worse, simply sat by and let Parmenion, his all too powerful and influential second-in-command, get on with it.
- ¹² There is no need to argue that Darius moved because he planned to split the Macedonian army in two or because he believed that Alexander was intent on staying in Cilicia. For detailed arguments against these points see A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 35ff; Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 200-201.

- ¹³ The Amanic gates may be identified with either the Bahçe or Hasanbeyli Pass.
- ¹⁴ As Green, 226 points out, this is a poor excuse when one considers that the Macedonian army's march-rate was later affected little by the Indian monsoon rains.
- ¹⁵ If A. M. Devine is right in placing the town of Castabalum some 20 miles inland in the Taurus range, then, with Alexander marching so far inland, it becomes increasingly unlikely that he failed to be aware of the pass. See *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 30, with note 48.
- ¹⁶ It will not do to suggest that Alexander deliberately uncovered the Amanic Gates (and hence his lines of communication), as part of an elaborate plan to draw Darius into Cilicia and fight him in the narrow spaces between the Amanus mountains and the sea, so negating Persian numbers. The idea that Alexander allowed Darius to cut his lines of communication is preposterous, especially as when it happened Alexander was not in a prepared position at Issus, but twenty miles away in the southern passes. Furthermore, would Alexander have really followed such a plan that involved sacrificing his field hospital at Issus? I think not. Cf. A. M. Devine *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 31ff.
- ¹⁷ Refer to diagram of battle, page 99.
- ¹⁸ The battle of the Granicus in 334 had been a relatively small and simple affair, with success arguably being achieved more through the professionalism and doggedness of the Macedonian soldier than Alexander's tactical awareness. For a solid account of this battle see A. M. Devine, *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 265-278.
- ¹⁹ Arrian (2.8.8) and Plutarch (*Alex.*18.6) claim Darius' force numbered 600,000; Diodorus (17.31.2) and Justin (11.9.1) give figures of 400,000 foot and 100,000 horse; Orosius (3.16.6) claims Darius had 300,000 foot; Curtius (3.2.4-9) states that the Persian army comprised 250,000 foot and 62,000 horse. All these figures are probably exaggerated to enhance the glory of Alexander, but there is no denying that Alexander's forces were, in all likelihood, greatly outnumbered.
- ²⁰ Arr.2.8.9; 2.9.1; Curt.3.9.8; cf. Diod.17.17.4.
- ²¹ See my dissertation, "The Army of Alexander the Great", for contingent sizes.
- ²² Curt.3.8.28.
- ²³ Cf. Curt.3.9.1-6.
- ²⁴ Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 98, who argues that the Pinarus should be identified with the River Payas, has noted that the river-bed in this section was likely to have been strewn with large and medium sized boulders which would have prevented a cavalry charge.
- ²⁵ Arr.2.10.1; 2.10.5.

- ²⁶ Arrian (2.8.6) claims they were on both sides. In support of this see, for example, Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 102; Green, 228. Opposed to this see A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 47ff.
- ²⁷ The fact that stockades were thrown up in front of the Greeks shows that Darius did not intend them to take the offensive, but to sit tight and hold the line.
- ²⁸ He had used this tactic at the Granicus, and would use it again at Gaugamela.
- ²⁹ Arr.2.9.1. The results of this move will be discussed below.
- ³⁰ Curt.3.11.1. Arrian, however, has Alexander start the battle on his right (2.10.3). As Arrian is keen to present the initiative with Alexander at all times this is not surprising. Moreover, as Alexander himself took no part in affairs on the left, it is little wonder that Arrian does not mention the opening moves of the battle here. Indeed, in Arrian's overall account of the battle, Alexander's left gets little mention; Arrian is content to concentrate on the centre and right of Alexander's line where the king was prominent.
- ³¹ The allied Greek cavalry is conspicuous by its absence from the battle narrative. This would suggest that its stand against the cataphracts was unmemorable.
- ³² Their heavy armour would have also prevented this.
- ³³ Curt.3.11.15.
- ³⁴ Although they did manage to over-run one squadron of Thessalians (Curt.3.11.14).
- ³⁵ Cf. Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 98; A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 45.
- ³⁶ Hammond, *Historia* 41 (1992), 395-406, is under the impression that Alexander led a charge across the river on foot at the head of the *agema* of the hypaspists. However, I am not convinced by his arguments, which seem highly tenuous. For further criticism of Hammond see A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World*, 12 (1985), 52 note 80.
- ³⁷ Darius' actual location is open to debate. Curtius (3.9.4) places him on the left of his battle-line, while Arrian (2.8.11) puts him in the centre. I think it is fair to argue that he was probably situated to the centre-left, flanked by his Cardaces. Cf. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 210; A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 48.
- ³⁸ Cf. A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 12 (1985), 54; Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 106ff.
- ³⁹ Arr.2.10.4-7.
- ⁴⁰ Arr.2.11.1.
- ⁴¹ 60,000 men according to Arrian (2.8.6).

- ⁴² Arrian (2.11.4) notes that Darius did not put up a decent fight before he fled. The vulgate sources, however, mention bitter fighting about Darius and claim he only took flight when his horses began to panic and capture was imminent (Diod.17.34.2-7; Curt.3.11.7-12). On this point, see Bosworth *Comm.* I, 215-216.
- ⁴³ A similar version of events happens at the battle of Gaugamela; see below.
- ⁴⁴ The wisdom of this has already been discussed; see Chapter One.
- ⁴⁵ Bosworth, *C+E*, p.78.
- ⁴⁶ Arrian (3.7.1) and Curtius (4.9.12) claim that Mazaeus had been ordered by Darius to defend the river crossing. However, it is unlikely that Mazaeus was expected actually to halt Alexander; he was hardly given enough troops. Curtius (4.9.7ff., 14ff.) and Diodorus (17.55.1ff.), state that Mazaeus also meant to defend Tigris.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Curt.4.9.7-8. See also Atkinson, *Comm.*, 380; Bosworth, *Comm.*I, 286.
- ⁴⁸ Arrian (3.7.3) claims this was because to the east Alexander had a better chance of acquiring fodder and provisions, and the heat was less intense.
- ⁴⁹ Bosworth, *C+E*, 79. Marsden, *Gaugamela*, 11ff., argues that Darius moved north only after Alexander had crossed the Euphrates and gone east. However, this would mean that Darius, with a cumbersome and slow moving army, covered the distance from Babylon to Gaugamela before Alexander could cover the distance from Thapsacus to Gaugamela. This is unlikely; besides, Diodorus (17.53.1; 53.4ff.) suggests that Darius' preparations were complete before Alexander arrived in Syria (cf. Arr.3.8.7).
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Bosworth, *C+E*, 79.
- ⁵¹ Refer to diagrams of battle, pages 102 and 103.
- ⁵² According to Arrian (3.12.5), Alexander's army numbered 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry; although one cannot ascertain the accuracy of these figures, they seem reasonable. The exact size of Darius' army is more difficult to judge as the sources embellish his forces to enhance the status of Alexander. Arrian's total is highest and, as at Issus (2.8.8), he presents it as hearsay only: 40,000 horse and 1,000,000 foot (3.8.6). Cf. Diod.17.53.3; Plut. *Alex.*31.1; and Curt.4.12.13. Despite such exaggeration, Darius must have had a far greater force than Alexander.
- ⁵³ Arr.3.9.3-4. It was Parmenion who recommended a reconnaissance of Darius' position.
- ⁵⁴ For detailed analyses of the Persian battle order see, for example, Bosworth, *Comm.*I, 297-299; Atkinson, *Comm.*, 401-410. All accounts are based primarily on Arr.3.11.3ff. and Curt.4.12.6ff.

- ⁵⁵ Indeed, Darius' battle-line had a significant overlap at the outset of the battle. Arrian (3.13.1) indicates that the Persian centre faced the Macedonian right wing.
- ⁵⁶ The story of Parmenion suggesting a night attack is probably fictitious, Arr.3.10.1ff.; Curt.4.13.4. An experienced general such as Parmenion would have fully understood the risks inherent in such a move. See Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 295.
- ⁵⁷ For arguments on this point see especially A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 13 (1986), 96 notes 52 and 54.
- ⁵⁸ The last two units are not mentioned by Arrian, but are by Diodorus (17.57.4).
- ⁵⁹ Parmenion commanded the entire left wing, which included the two leftmost battalions of the phalanx. Arr.3.11.10.
- ⁶⁰ Diod.17.57.6; cf. Diod.17.58.1-2; Curt.4.13.33; Arr.3.13.6.
- ⁶¹ Arr.3.12.3.
- ⁶² This line may not have been continuous; see below.
- ⁶³ Arr.3.12.1; cf. Curt.4.13.30.
- ⁶⁴ Cf. Diod.17.57.6.
- ⁶⁵ This certainly happened on the right, as will be seen below. However, there is not enough information for the left wing to determine what happened there.
- ⁶⁶ Due to his defensive arrangements, these units would hopefully be fresh and ready to conduct such an assault.
- ⁶⁷ Marsden, *Gaugamela*, 64.
- ⁶⁸ Arr.3.5.1. Cf. my dissertation, "The Army of Alexander the Great", 19.
- ⁶⁹ Menidas had been given orders at beginning of battle to do this, Arr.3.12.4.
- ⁷⁰ Cf. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 305; A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 13 (1986), 103 with note 108.
- ⁷¹ Cf. Curt.4.15.14ff.
- ⁷² Arr.3.13.5-6. However, it is difficult to believe that the hypaspists could have dealt with the chariots as Arrian claims. This unit was in the front of Alexander's battle-line. See Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 307.
- ⁷³ Although, as Alexander was not present on this flank, there is little precise information about affairs here.

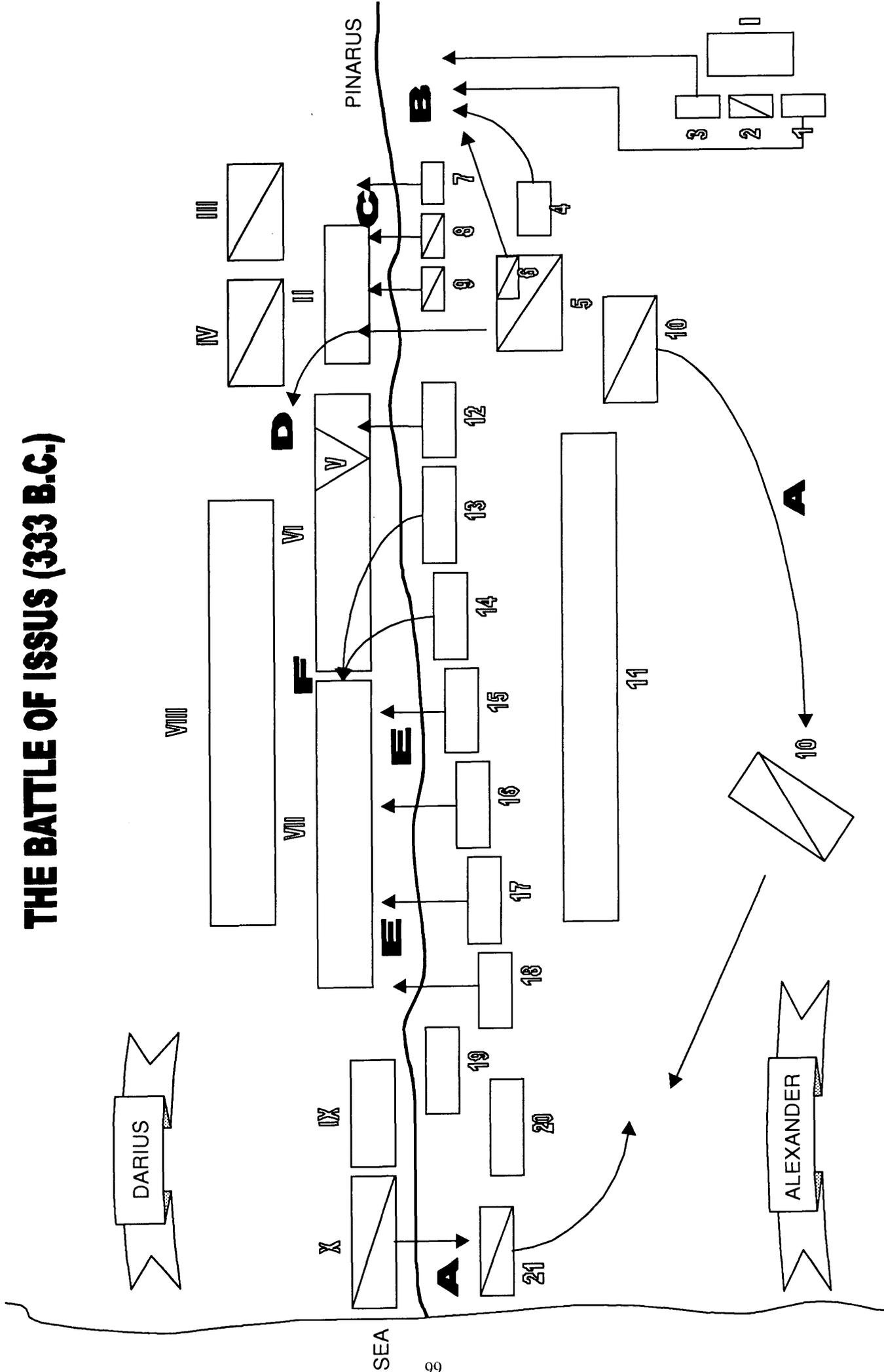
- ⁷⁴ Curt.4.15.5; Diod.17.59.5; Plut. *Alex.*32.5. In support of this version see, for example, Atkinson, *Comm.*, 438ff.; A. B. Bosworth, *Alexandre le Grand: Image et Réalité (Entretiens Hardt 22 [1976])*, 11-12. Opposed to the Vulgate tradition see, for instance, A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 13 (1986), 108, note 124.
- ⁷⁵ As Marsden, *Gaugamela*, 54 suggests, the order of Darius (Arr.3.14.1) for his troops to “attack all along the line” may be the point at which he authorised Bessus to continue pouring men against the Macedonian right flank. Marsden, *Gaugamela*, 56, then claims that the Persian centre was weakened, denying that a gap appeared (using Curt.4.15.20). However, Arrian (3.14.2) clearly states that there was a gap. Cf. A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 13 (1986), 107, note 114.
- ⁷⁶ Arr.3.14.2. Cf. A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 13 (1986), 104 and especially footnotes 119 and 120.
- ⁷⁷ For what follows see Arr.3.14.4-6.
- ⁷⁸ However, this line may not have been continuous. Arr.3.12.1; 3.14.6 indicates that the rear infantry had more than one commander which could suggest a disjunction in the line. Moreover, the dust and chaos of the battle (alluded to in Curtius (4.15.32-33) and Diodorus (17.60.4; 17.61.1)) may have masked the Persian movement, especially if the raiders were small in numbers (Marsden, *Gaugamela*, 59). G. T. Griffith, *The Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World*, 32, suggests that the second line might not have covered the whole of the Macedonian rear.
- ⁷⁹ Cf. Arr.3.12.5.
- ⁸⁰ In support of this see A. M. Devine, *The Ancient World* 13 (1986), 108, note 125. Bosworth, *Comm.*I, 308-309, however, views Arrian’s account with scepticism.
- ⁸¹ He was hardly the first to flee as Arrian claims (3.14.3). However, neither can he have waited for Alexander to come within spear range as the vulgate tradition suggests (Diod.17.60.1ff.; Curt.4.15.23ff.). If he had, escape would have been impossible.
- ⁸² Arr.3.15.1-2; Plut. *Alex.*33.9-10.
- ⁸³ The dust thrown up by troop movements (see endnote 79) would also have prevented riders from knowing where to find Alexander. Bosworth, *Comm.*I, 309-311, has noted that certain scholars are wrong to “compromise” and accept Arrian’s account.
- ⁸⁴ Diod.17.60.7. Curtius (4.16.3) maintains that the message reached Alexander only after “the king had already covered a great distance in his pursuit of the fleeing Persians”.
- ⁸⁵ This in the light of Demetrius’ actions at Ipsus in 301. He left the field at the head of a victorious cavalry charge and then his army was defeated in his absence. Cf. Bosworth, *Comm.*I, 310.

⁸⁶ It may also have been their wish to incriminate Parmenion for premature panic.

⁸⁷ Cf. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 308.

⁸⁸ Arr.3.15.1-2. These were not the same cavalry who had broken through the Macedonian line earlier in the battle. Cf. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 310.

THE BATTLE OF ISSUS (333 B.C.)



THE BATTLE OF ISSUS (333 B.C.)

ORDER OF BATTLE

THE MACEDONIAN ARMY

1. Some of the Macedonian archers
2. Some cavalry (Arr.2.9.2, 4)
3. Agrianian javelin-men
4. Some Greek mercenary infantry
5. Companion cavalry
6. Two *ilai* of Companion cavalry
7. Macedonian archers
8. Paeonian cavalry
9. *Prodromoi*
10. Thessalian cavalry
11. Greek Mercenary infantry
12. Hypaspists
- 13-18. Phalanx battalions
19. Thracian javelin-men
20. Cretan archers
21. Allied Greek cavalry

THE PERSIAN ARMY

- I. Detached infantry
- II. Javelin-men and slingers
- III. Hyrcanian and Median cavalry
- IV. Persian cavalry
- V. Darius and his bodyguard
- VI. Cardaces
- VII. Greek mercenary infantry
- VIII. Persian levies
- IX. Slingers and archers
- X. Persian cataphracts

THE BATTLE OF ISSUS (333 B.C.)

BATTLE MANOEUVRES

- A. Attack by Persian cataphracts; concealed movement of Thessalian cavalry and successful counter-attack.
- B. Creation of a stronger right flank. After dealing with the detached Persian infantry to the rear, the Agrianian javelin-men (3) and the unit of Macedonian archers (1) join with two *ilai* of Companion cavalry (6) and some Greek mercenaries (4) to reinforce the light cavalry and infantry on the right wing (units 7, 8 and 9).
- C. The *prodromoi*, Paeonian cavalry and Macedonian archers lead the assault across the river. Followed by the other light infantry and cavalry units recently arrived on the right, they aim to hold the Persian left in check so that Alexander can move his Companion cavalry forward unhindered.
- D. Alexander's breach of the Persian left by his Companion cavalry and subsequent swing towards Darius and his central units.
- E. Advance of the Macedonian phalanx across the river.
- F. The *taxeis* of Coenus and Perdiccas swing left to come to the aid of the rest of the phalanx.

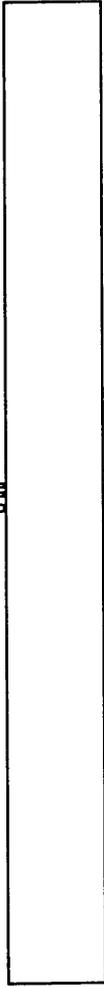


THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA (331 B.C.): INITIAL POSITIONS

VIII



VIII



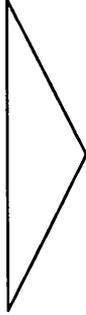
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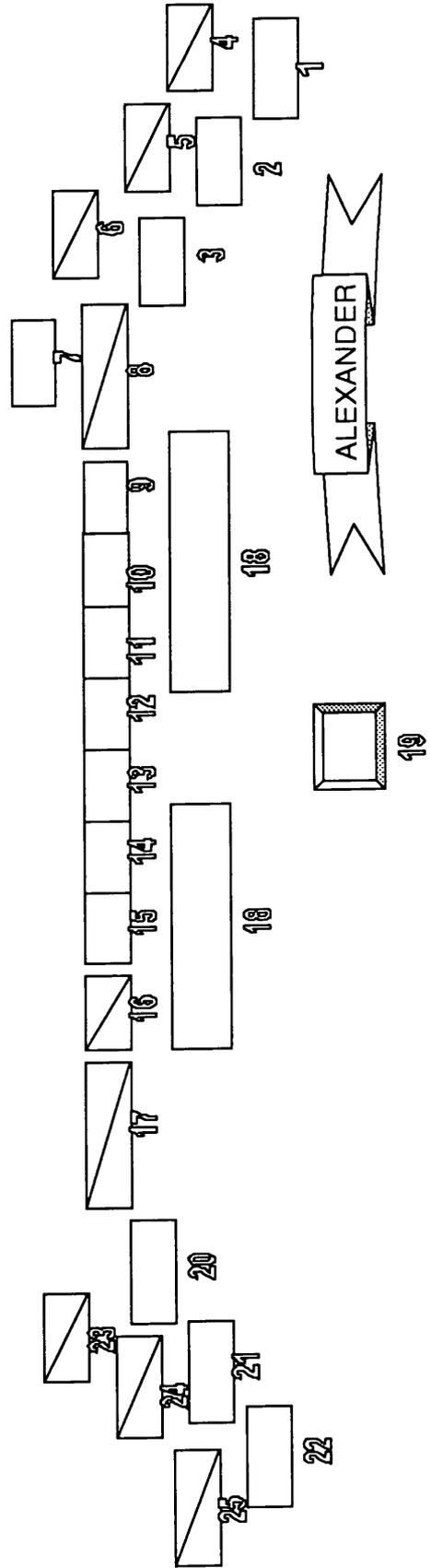
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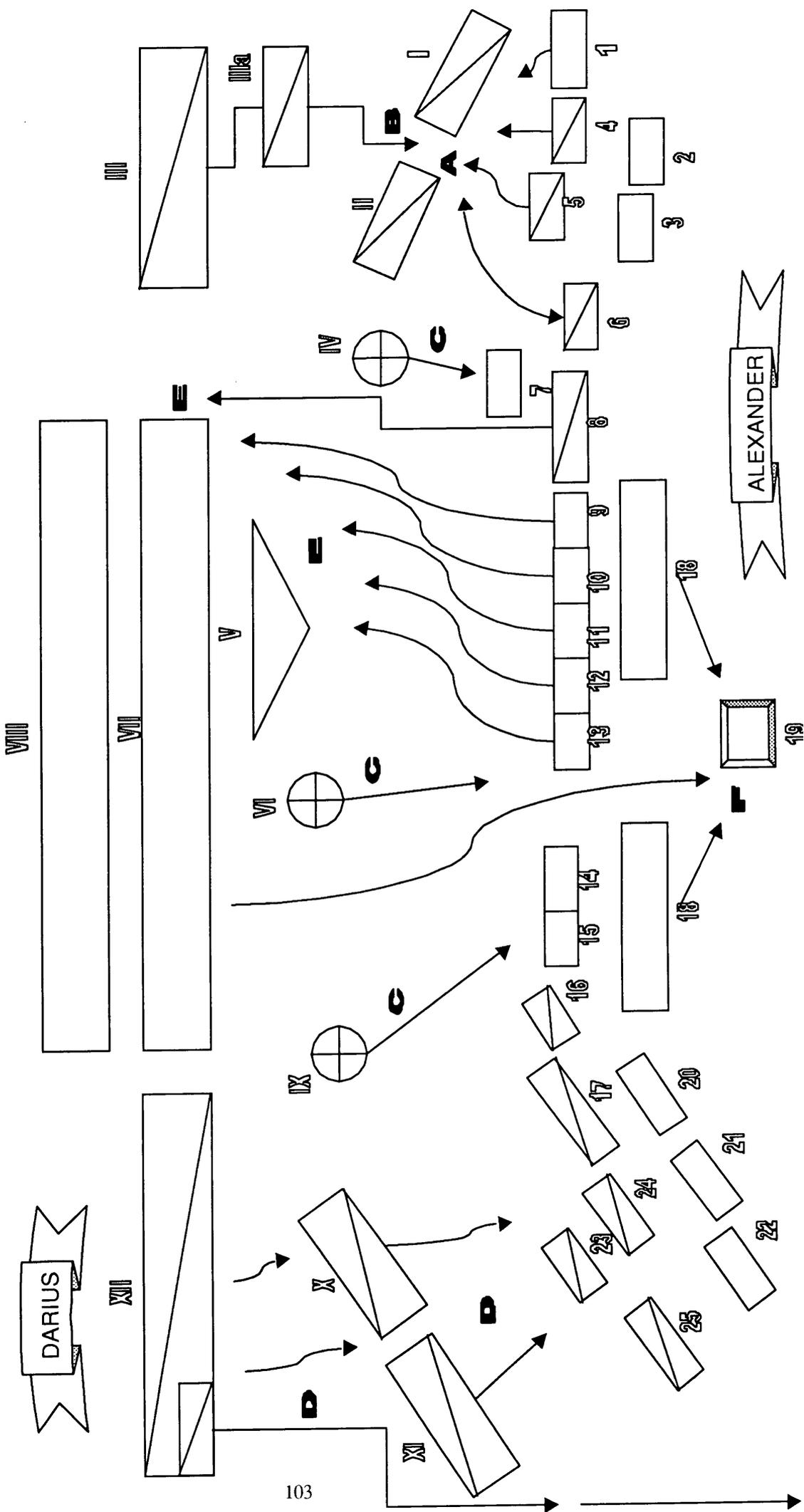
XI



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THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA (331 B.C.): MANOEUVRES



THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA (331 B.C.)

ORDER OF BATTLE

THE MACEDONIAN ARMY

1. Old mercenary infantry
2. Macedonian archers
3. Agrianians
4. Paeonian cavalry
5. *Prodromoi*
6. Mercenary cavalry (Menidas)
7. Agrianians, Archers and Javelin-men
8. Companion cavalry
9. Hypaspists
- 10-15 Phalanx battalions
16. Allied Greek cavalry
17. Thessalian cavalry
18. Greek infantry
19. Baggage-park
20. Thracian javelin-men
21. Cretan archers
22. Achaean mercenary infantry
23. Mercenary cavalry
24. Allied Greek cavalry
25. Odrysian cavalry

THE PERSIAN ARMY

- I. Scythian cavalry
- II. Bactrian cavalry
- III. Left wing cavalry under the command of Bessus
- IIIa. Main body of Bactrian cavalry detached from III
- IV. Scythed chariots - 100
- V. Elephants
- VI. Scythed chariots - 50
- VII. Persian centre: Darius and his Kinsmen and Guard; Greek mercenary infantry; Indians; resettled Carians; Mardian archers
- VIII. Infantry levies
- IX. Scythed chariots - 50
- X. Cappadocian cavalry
- XI. Armenian cavalry
- XII. Right wing cavalry under the command of Mazaeus

THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA (331 B.C.)

BATTLE MANOEUVRES

- A. Move to envelop the Macedonian right by Scythian and Bactrian advance cavalry units.
Counterattack and withdrawal of Menidas.
Subsequent attack of the *prodromoi*, Paeonians and Old Mercenaries.
- B. Attack of the main body of Bactrian cavalry.
- C. Failed attack of the Persian Scythed chariots.
- D. Attack of the Persian right, including contingents sent against Alexander's base camp.
- E. Alexander's main assault against the gap in the Persian line.
- F. Persian raid on the Macedonian baggage-park and its defeat by Alexander's second line of infantry.

CHAPTER THREE

ALEXANDER'S SIEGES

It has been stated that "Alexander the Great revealed himself as a master of siegecraft. He pressed his sieges home with fiery and resourceful determination. No city however strong, and no fort however defended by art and nature, foiled his skilful attack."¹ Certainly, Alexander was successful at all of his sieges. This was largely due to his perceptive direction of operations allied with his audacity and tenacity. Furthermore, while Alexander owed his success, in part, to the professionalism of his troops and the originality of his engineers, it was his ability to harness and direct these men which ensured his victories.

However, not everything Alexander did was praiseworthy. He did not always direct affairs with great dexterity. There are occasional signs of his lacking judgement and allowing the enemy to out-manoevre him, giving way to impatience and, in extreme circumstances, losing control of operations.

The above strengths and failings will become clear as, firstly, I deal in detail with Tyre, perhaps Alexander's greatest siege, before moving on to look at a number of his other sieges.

THE SIEGE OF TYRE (JANUARY 332 B.C.)

In January of 332, Alexander's advance down the Syrian coast came to an abrupt halt at the island city of Tyre. It was the intention of the Tyrians that their city should remain neutral, closed to Macedonian and Persian alike. This was an expedient measure as they waited to see who would be the victor between Alexander and Darius.² However, Alexander was not prepared to allow a city in his sphere of influence neutrality and so settled down to besiege Tyre.³

The siege can be divided into two phases. Lacking a fleet, Alexander first set about building a mole between the mainland and the island from which to initiate a land-based assault. Later, Alexander was able to launch a naval assault against the city owing to the arrival of friendly ships from the Phoenician cities that he already held.

PHASE ONE: THE MOLE**i) A poor military position and a weak plan**

To besiege an island city half a mile offshore,⁴ a naval blockade or assault was the obvious and best course to take. However, as has been noted previously, Alexander's decision to disband his fleet in 334 meant that he had no fleet with him at Tyre.⁵ As a result, he found himself in a poor military position: he had somehow to attack Tyre from the land. He thus settled upon the construction of a mole from the mainland to the city.

This was an extremely weak plan. Firstly, blustering winds whipped up turbulent waves, which crashed into the coast. These would prove a hindrance to any work undertaken on a mole.⁶

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Secondly, while the sea was relatively shallow around the coast, closer to Tyre there was much deeper water.⁷ Together with the inclement nature of the sea, this would make it even harder for a mole to be completed.

Thirdly, any work on a mole would be subject to unchallenged, and potentially very dangerous, attacks from the Tyrian fleet.⁸

Fourthly, if the mole actually made it to the city, the Macedonians would then have to breach the city's strong walls.⁹ This would be made especially difficult, as the Tyrians would doubtless have strengthened their defences facing the mole.

Finally, the ordinary rank and file seems to have realised the folly of such a plan and expressed their reservations.¹⁰ It would be difficult for Alexander to complete a mole when his men were against the idea.

Even before the siege began, it seems that Alexander himself had second thoughts about attempting the mole. He sent heralds to the Tyrians to see if he could avert a conflict, but they were murdered.¹¹ Angered and forced into action, Alexander persuaded his men to begin construction of a mole by claiming that he had had a vision of Heracles inviting him into Tyre.¹²

ii) Problems with the land-based assault

The army set about acquiring material for the mole by demolishing old Tyre (which was situated on the coast), while timber was collected from the surrounding area and from Lebanon. With Alexander directing affairs with his characteristic vigour,¹³ work progressed well and a 200-foot wide mole soon began to take shape.¹⁴ However, the work force had so far had it easy.

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The early phases of construction, across mud flats and through shallow water, presented few problems. However, as the mole closed on the city, deeper water was reached. Work then slowed down, as vast amounts of material were needed to bring the mole above sea level.¹⁵ Seeing this, the Tyrians began to counter-attack. From their battlements they began to fire upon the enemy workforce, while they made good use of their naval superiority by sailing up to the mole and unleashing a barrage of missiles upon the Macedonians. While the Tyrians sustained few (if any) casualties, the unarmed and unprotected labourers suffered great harm and distress.¹⁶ Consequently, Alexander issued orders that two wooden towers were to be built and placed upon the mole. From these his own archers and artillery-men kept Tyrian attacks at bay. At the same time, Alexander also ensured that screens of hide and canvas protected his workers.¹⁷ While these were wise moves, Alexander can be criticised for not taking these precautions earlier, before he had suffered a number of casualties.¹⁸ In effect, he had allowed the enemy to out-manoeuvre him and inflict an early setback.

Despite this mishap, Alexander probably felt he had now rectified the nuisance caused by the Tyrian attacks and could push on with his mole. However, he was sorely mistaken. Proving themselves admirable and aggravating foes, the Tyrians took advantage of the strong winds and drove a fire ship against the towers on the mole.¹⁹ With the towers alight, men in triremes then fired volleys of arrows and slingshot at the parties that tried to douse the flames. At the same time, smaller boats landed along the mole and disembarked men who then proceeded to pull down the protective screens, kill any workmen, and set fire to any siege equipment that escaped the initial fire.²⁰ This commando-style raid left Alexander's siege works in ruins; it took him completely by surprise and he must be admonished for having no response to it. To compound matters,

his misfortune was not over. It appears that around the same time the infrastructure of the mole was damaged by the powerful wind-driven waves.²¹ Indeed, because of these occurrences, it appears that Alexander might even have contemplated giving up the siege.²²

In the end Alexander set about repairing and extending the mole and also ordered more towers to be built and placed upon it.²³ This was a futile expression of bravado. So far the mole had done little more than undermine Macedonian morale and Alexander's men probably had little faith left in the plan, even if it was to proceed in an even grander fashion. Conversely, Tyrian confidence was probably very high. They had outmanoeuvred Alexander with their successful raids upon the mole, and they still had ample time to prepare and strengthen their defences to repel an isolated landward assault. Alexander was in danger of suffering a major setback.

PHASE TWO: NAVAL ASSAULT

i) Acquiring the fleet and preparations at Tyre

The mole's lack of progress, coupled with Tyrian ingenuity and naval superiority, must have made it clear to Alexander that without a fleet his position was becoming increasingly untenable. Fortunately, in the early summer of 332, he received reports that defectors from the Persian Aegean fleet had returned home because their cities had surrendered.²⁴ If Alexander could acquire these ships the siege would be put on a completely different footing: he could combat Tyrian naval raids on the mole and thus take it up to the city walls, and he could launch naval assaults against the city. Consequently, Alexander left his generals in charge of operations at Tyre and made his way to Sidon. Waiting here to enter his service were eighty Phoenician ships, which were

further strengthened by the arrival of smaller contingents from Rhodes, Lycia, Soli and Mallus, and 120 ships from the kings of Cyprus.²⁵ Alexander now had a much bigger fleet than the Tyrians.²⁶

With his armada, Alexander set sail for Tyre. The Tyrians initially planned to engage Alexander but, upon seeing the size of his fleet, they fled back into their harbours and blockaded them against him.²⁷ Alexander then enforced his own naval blockade upon the harbours and bottled up Tyre's entire naval force.²⁸ Having achieved mastery of the sea, he was able to launch naval assaults against the city walls, and could press on unhindered with the mole.

In preparation for his final assault against the city, Alexander instructed his engineers, foremost amongst them Diades, to begin constructing siege engines and weapons.²⁹ Together with engineers from Cyprus and Phoenicia, they produced the most offensive arsenal yet seen in Hellenic siege warfare. Examples of their machines included ship-borne siege towers equipped with scaling bridges, ship-borne siege artillery (including battering rams), and powerful torsion catapults which could fire stones of considerable dimensions.

Alexander must have now felt that victory was close. However, despite his being in a commanding position, setbacks were still to haunt his efforts.

ii) Initial setbacks

While Alexander was making preparations for his final strike, the Tyrians launched another commando-style raid, this time against the Cyprian vessels that were blockading the Sidonian harbour.³⁰ They had noticed that at noon the combat readiness of the Cyprians was lax as they ate their lunch on the boats or even withdrew to the mainland to

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eat. Consequently, the Tyrians camouflaged the entrance to their harbour with a screen of sails and began to make ready a small number of their best boats. Once all was prepared they let down the screens and rowed, silently, up to the Cyprian ships. They took the Cyprians by surprise and managed to sink a number of enemy ships and drive the rest ashore. Alexander was quick to respond when he learnt of this. Ensuring that the Egyptian harbour was secure, he led a number of vessels around Tyre, took the Tyrians in the rear, and so stemmed any further threat to his position.³¹ Despite Alexander's effective riposte, he must be criticised for being caught unawares and allowing the enemy to out-manoeuvre him. The stratagem of attacking while the enemy took his midday meal was not a new one.³² Alexander must have known of this move and should, therefore, have taken steps to protect his fleet against it. Furthermore, he must have realised that something was going on behind the sails of the Sidonian harbour and should have told his blockading force to be more vigilant. Fortunately for Alexander, the Tyrians did not attack in strength and so their raid proved only a minor irritation.

With the Tyrian fleet finally thwarted, Alexander began to assault the city proper from land and sea. He immediately encountered problems in both areas.

The mole, despite his perseverance, finally proved to be a waste of time and effort. Alexander had been able to help its construction by using a screen of ships to protect the workers further. Moreover, to shield the mole from the damaging effects of the sea, he had floated a number of giant trees into a position where they absorbed most of the impact of the powerful waves.³³ These measures ensured that the mole closed upon the city. Alexander then began to bombard the walls and defenders with a concentrated missile barrage.³⁴ However, these efforts proved futile, since the Tyrians had had ample time to build up their defences. They had set wooden towers on the battlements from

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which they could fight and fire missiles down upon the advancing Macedonians.³⁵ They had also put in place a defensive screen of padded leather cushions to break the impact of stones, and had erected revolving wheels that could block and break arrows.³⁶ These preparations ensured that the Macedonian artillery inflicted minimal damage. Despite this, Alexander's soldiers again proved their worth and pressed on with the mole so that it eventually reached the city walls. Alexander was then able to roll up his great siege towers, lower their boarding-gangways, and assault the walls directly.³⁷ Once again, though, the Tyrian defence proved too strong. It seems that their engineers had come up with a variety of simple but effective anti-personnel devices ranging from weighted fishing nets to red-hot sand which, in the end, proved instrumental in beating off the Macedonian attack.³⁸ Macedonian efforts were further hampered because the Tyrians had managed to erect an inner wall in this section and fill in the gap with earth and stones.³⁹ Consequently, as long as it was defended, the section of the city wall facing the mole was virtually impregnable. Alexander was forced to call off his attack; the mole had failed.⁴⁰

Alexander's initial naval attacks also proved disappointing.

He hoped to use ships armed with battering rams to pound the walls of Tyre, while others, acting as troop carriers, would disembark their men over the walls. However, the Tyrians frustrated his plans by dropping large boulders into the sea.⁴¹ These prevented Alexander's ships from coming to rest beneath the city's wall. His efforts to remove these boulders proved painfully slow as Tyrian divers cut the anchor-cables of the ships that were winching the blocks out.⁴² Only when these cables were replaced with chains were the boulders removed, allowing Alexander to bring his ships against the walls.⁴³ Even then his assaults, which were concentrated against the northern side of Tyre,

proved futile.⁴⁴ Using their array of defensive equipment and techniques, the Tyrians defended with their usual resolve (especially good use was made of scythes on poles to cut the ropes that worked the ship-borne battering rams).⁴⁵

Having failed so far, Alexander switched the emphasis of his attack to the southern walls. Here he managed to achieve his first success of the siege; his assault vessels breached the walls and the Macedonians gained entry to the city. However, Alexander's gain was short-lived as the Tyrians drove the Macedonians out, and later repaired the breach.⁴⁶ With the failure of his land and sea attacks it seems that a dejected Alexander contemplated abandoning the siege and marching on Egypt.⁴⁷ However, he again decided to stand fast. He had, after all, been able to breach Tyre's defences once, and he needed a victory now, more than ever, to justify the prodigious effort that had so far gone into the siege. Alexander's decision to continue was to be rewarded.

iii) Final victory

So far, the siege had been a painstaking undertaking and casts a poor light upon Alexander's generalship. However, one has to at least praise Alexander for his tenacity. His resolve had ensured that the siege, despite numerous setbacks, had continued; thus, the chance of success was never fully undermined. Now, in the final stages, Alexander's direction of operations became entirely commendable.

Alexander first lingered for two days before Tyre. This was partly to rest his men and partly to wait for calm conditions at sea.⁴⁸ During this time he would have made his command staff aware of his scheme to take the city. It was to comprise a multi-point assault; numerous attacks would be launched against Tyre's walls from the sea, and another push from the mole would be made.⁴⁹ At the same time, the main part of

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Alexander's fleet was to try to gain entrance to the harbours, while other vessels were to encircle the city lending a hand wherever there was the need. One could claim that at this stage of the siege Alexander had nothing to lose by an all-out assault. However, the plan was much subtler than this. Alexander made it clear to his officers that all of the strikes were to be largely diversionary: the main thrust was to be directed against that part of the city wall that had already been breached. The beauty of the plan was that the Tyrians would have to take every assault seriously, even that from the mole. This would force them to spread their defence around the entire circuit of their walls and harbours. With no focused resistance, Alexander's main effort against an already weakened wall would stand a good chance of success. Furthermore, Alexander probably hoped that a few of his attacks at other points along the wall, although essentially diversionary, might be successful and so contribute to his main assault.

After the two days of meticulous preparation, Alexander struck. His management of affairs displays its more usual efficiency. As instructed, his forces encircled the city and began their various attacks.⁵⁰ While these got under way, he directed the main thrust against the south wall. Firstly he ensured that his ships carrying catapults came to rest in a position from which they could effectively fire their missiles upon the Tyrian defenders. Archers stationed on the ships carrying siege towers and troops enhanced this bombardment. While this torrent of fire kept the defenders at bay, Alexander moved up his heavier siege equipment, his ship-borne battering rams and stone throwers. The rams moved in to specific areas below the walls and started to pound them. Meanwhile, as the stone throwers could not attack the wall in the same place as the rams for fear of their heavy projectiles falling upon them, they were directed against other parts. However, it is possible that the rams and stone throwers took it in turns to attack the same parts of the

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south wall. This bombardment eventually destroyed the parapets of the wall, and killed any defenders who had mounted them.⁵¹ This was what Alexander had been watching for. He quickly ordered the rams and stone throwers to retire and moved up two of his siege towers. As soon as they were in position they dropped their ramps ready for the shock troops which they carried to swarm into Tyre.⁵² I would also suggest that around the same time Alexander ordered any troop-carrying ships that he had in the vicinity to move against the wall and raise their ladders.

Meanwhile, a couple of Alexander's diversionary attacks had also managed to break the Tyrian defences. The Phoenician and Cypriot fleets had forced their way through both harbour barricades to add to the pressure that the Tyrians now felt.⁵³ Alexander's plan of attack and direction of the assault had proved excellent; it was now the turn of his soldiers to exploit this chance of victory.

As soon as the gangways of the two siege towers hit the battlements the troops surged forward. In the thick of the action, Alexander was able to see his men capture the battlements and then push into the city itself.⁵⁴ The Tyrians, realising that their defences had been breached in a number of places, retreated to the centre of their city. However, with Macedonians actually within the walls the end was quick; the defenders of Tyre were quickly subdued and the city itself turned into a bloodbath.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

After seven months Tyre had fallen. However, the city had been destroyed at vast material and human expense,⁵⁶ and, more importantly, Alexander's direction of the siege was faulty. Thanks to his decision to disband his fleet in 334, he began the siege from a

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very poor position: he was forced to construct a mole in order to assault the island city from the land. This was a weak plan and Alexander seems to have appreciated this, for he initially sent heralds to Tyre to try to avoid the siege. For a general to have just one such exacting course available to him cannot but detract from his rating.

The mole soon proved to be a futile endeavour. Inclement weather conditions, the increased depth of the sea, and Tyrian ingenuity and tenacity slowed the progress of the mole and prevented it from reaching the city. The situation was made worse by lapses in Alexander's own generalship: initially he did not protect his workers and the mole from Tyrian attacks and this gave the Tyrians the tactical and moral upper hand. Consequently, it is hard not to criticise this first stage of the siege: Alexander made a bad job of a near-on impossible task.

With the siege going nowhere, Alexander looked likely to suffer a major setback. Luckily Alexander was given a second wind with the arrival of a fleet which enabled him to attack the city from the sea and finish the work upon his mole. But even then he managed to display signs of slackness with his inability to keep the Tyrian fleet bottled up in the harbours. Furthermore, the mole finally proved a waste of time and his first assaults against the city from the sea proved unsuccessful.

Eventually the siege of Tyre was a success, and this was, in part, due to Alexander's generalship. During the long and hard siege he was constantly at hand to encourage and guide his troops, thus ensuring that the prospect of victory was never fully undermined. Moreover, Alexander deserves special praise for his final offensive plans. His idea of a multi-point attack was simple but highly effective, and he organised and directed the conclusive attack with natural aplomb.

However, because of the flaws in Alexander's generalship, Tyre cannot be cited as an example of his mastery of siegecraft. It now remains to be seen how Alexander conducted himself at some of his other sieges.

ALEXANDER'S OTHER SIEGES

COMMENDABLE GENERALSHIP: COMPETENT DIRECTION OF SIEGES

i) Halicarnassus and Gaza

The sieges of Halicarnassus and Gaza demonstrate that Alexander could quickly size up the position of an enemy city, and then competently direct affairs to achieve a speedy breach of its defences.

At the siege of Halicarnassus in 334, Alexander had to besiege a harbour city which had a strong towered wall, three citadels, a moat 45 feet broad and 22 feet deep, and a garrison which was well supplied and strong in numbers. He set about organising an assault upon the city with his customary vigour. Firstly, it appears that he reconnoitred the walls to determine where it would be best to attack.⁵⁷ Once he had found an appropriate place, he built mantlets so that his men could fill in the moat around the city without being molested by enemy missiles.⁵⁸ With the moat filled, he quickly brought up his siege towers and rams so that he could begin assaulting the walls. So effective was this that within a few days two towers of the city had been battered down (along with the intervening curtain wall), and a third tower had been badly shaken. With the defences ruptured, Alexander was in a prime position to take the city.⁵⁹

This pattern of events repeated itself at Gaza in 332. Gaza was a powerful, walled stronghold, situated on a mound and well garrisoned. However, Alexander soon came up

with a proficient method of assault, which saw the city fall within two months.⁶⁰ Primarily, he relied on his sappers to undermine the walls of the city. As the area was predominantly made up of sand, this proved a most effective move. At the same time, Alexander constructed a mound which was level with the city walls. On this he placed his siege engines, which had recently arrived from Tyre. These bombarded the city battlements and gave protection to his sappers.⁶¹ As a result of this combined assault, the walls of the city were soon breached. Quick to exploit this, Alexander led forth his men. The defenders managed to hold out against three assaults, but eventually Macedonian troops gained access and, doubtless under orders from Alexander, proceeded to open the city gates to let in the rest of the army, thus ending the siege.

ii) The Sogdian Rock, The Rock of Chorienes, and The Siege of Aornus

During the sieges of the Sogdian Rock, the Rock of Chorienes and Aornus, Alexander was able to direct affairs so well, and with such boldness, that these strongholds surrendered (or tried to surrender) before he directly assaulted them.

The sieges of the Sogdian Rock and the Rock of Chorienes took place during Alexander's campaigning in Sogdiana, 328/7.⁶² At the Sogdian Rock, Alexander was faced with a stronghold that was situated atop a sheer-faced rock, and which was strongly garrisoned and well supplied.⁶³ A brief attempt to negotiate ended with Alexander being told, mockingly, by the enemy that only men with wings could ever hope to capture their mountain. However, Alexander was unperturbed. His simple plan to invest the Rock shows his inventiveness, boldness and his keen awareness of the psychology of warfare. Calling together the best mountaineers in his army, Alexander instructed them to scale the cliff face of the Rock, out of the sight of the defenders, so that they would reach a position that overlooked the stronghold. He hoped that when the

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defenders saw troops above them they would capitulate. Alexander was taking a gamble; there was no way of knowing if his plan would cause the defenders to surrender. However, there was nothing for Alexander to lose: if his scheme did not work then it did not really matter, and if it did, all the better.

Although there were some casualties during the arduous climb, Alexander's men eventually reached a position that overlooked the stronghold. Although the Macedonians were few in numbers, once the defenders saw these "winged-men" their morale collapsed, and they quickly submitted. Thanks to Alexander's psychological insight, backed by his quick and bold initiative (not to mention the bravery of his mountaineers), the siege was over in a couple of days with hardly any loss of life.

This same acumen undermined the morale of the enemy at the siege of the Rock of Choriens.⁶⁴ This fortress was again said to be impregnable. It was situated upon a sheer-sided mountain, access to which was blocked by a deep ravine which probably had a river flowing through it.⁶⁵ As usual, Alexander was not daunted by this and immediately set about investing the stronghold. His first problem was to get across the ravine. Consequently, he began to bridge the chasm with a causeway of earth that his army piled up on a bed of stakes and wickerwork. It appears that these stakes were driven into the bed of the ravine and then topped with rectangular frames of wickerwork. On top of this bridge-like superstructure the earth was then added as a fill.⁶⁶ This audacious move overawed the defenders who offered their submission before their defences were stormed. Once again, a supposedly invulnerable citadel had been taken due to Alexander's bold direction, with the loss of very few lives.

During the siege of Aornus in 326, a formidable mountain stronghold confronted Alexander.⁶⁷ It was situated upon a plateau over 7,000 feet above sea-level, was

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surrounded by deep rocky slopes and cliffs, had only one hazardous way up, and was abundantly provided with water and arable land.⁶⁸ Alexander had exploited the knowledge of local guides to gain a "bridgehead" upon a slope directly below the stronghold.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, this slope was separated from the plateau and fortress by a ravine.⁷⁰ Many commanders, after marching their men through hostile and difficult terrain to a height of 7,000 feet might have then given up the siege, but not Alexander. As at the Rock of Chorienes, he tackled the ravine with calm assurance and total contempt. While the defenders of Aornus looked on with awe and wonder, Alexander ordered the ravine to be filled so that a mound, supported by a framework of stakes, could be raised against the stronghold.⁷¹ After four days of construction the mound was immediately below the main defences of the fortress, and Alexander moved his siege artillery on to it so that he could shower missiles upon the stronghold. It appears that at this stage also, some Macedonians were able to occupy a small hill that was situated towards the north of the plateau. Alexander then set about connecting his mound with this hill. The psychological effect of these works upon the defenders was much the same as at the Sogdian Rock and the Rock of Chorienes. Overwhelmed by the audacity of Alexander and his troops, and indeed by Macedonian firepower, the Indians began to negotiate.⁷² However, unlike the other sieges, the defenders planned to use these negotiations as a screen so that they might evacuate the fortress at night. Alexander's scouting parties alerted him to the Indian withdrawal and he immediately occupied the plateau with little opposition and attacked those Indians in retreat.⁷³ The end was swift and bloody. Aornus had been captured with relatively little loss thanks again to Alexander's undaunted attack.

POOR GENERALSHIP: INCOMPETENT DIRECTION OF SIEGES**i) Halicarnassus**

The siege of Halicarnassus is an excellent example of Alexander's inability to keep on top of affairs. While it has been seen that he can be commended for the way in which he organised the effective and speedy breach of the city walls, there are many incidents that do not deserve praise.

As has been mentioned earlier, Alexander began the siege in a poor military position because of his decision to disband his fleet.⁷⁴ He then compounded matters by failing to direct the siege with any real coherence.

Alexander was eager to breach the walls quickly and so began operations before he had fully assembled his siege-train. As a result it appears that his initial assaults in the area of the Mylasa gate were abortive.⁷⁵ Surely Alexander should have displayed a little more patience and waited for his siege-engines to arrive?

Even when Alexander had breached the city's defences, his management of the siege was still somewhat suspect.

From the extant sources it emerges that Alexander was unable to prevent an isolated night-attack by two drunken Macedonian soldiers from turning into a full-scale assault upon the breach.⁷⁶ The assault proved to be a costly failure, with Alexander having to parley for his dead.⁷⁷ The impression is that Alexander lost control of affairs. Surely a skilled commander should have been able to prevent such a random and reckless skirmish from developing into a major assault (which would have been ill led and directed given the circumstances)?⁷⁸ Consequently, Alexander must ultimately shoulder the blame for the horrible failure of the episode.

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Alexander's planned attacks against the breach also proved futile. With part of their wall demolished, the besieged had managed to erect an auxiliary lunette of brick. Consequently, whenever the Macedonians penetrated the outer wall, they found themselves enclosed by a secondary crescent-shaped defence, which not only prevented them from gaining access to the city, but also made them vulnerable on their flank and rear and so hampered their attacks.⁷⁹ Alexander was forced to bring up his siege engines to deal with the lunette, but again his operations were hampered. The defenders made a sally against the Macedonians and managed to burn down some of Alexander's siege works. Although the sortie was eventually driven off, even Arrian claims that at this stage in the siege the defenders were having the "best of it" (1.21.6).

Despite these setbacks, which would undoubtedly have frustrated Alexander, he probably felt reasonably confident that Halicarnassus would soon fall. He heavily outnumbered the defenders who could not hang on for much longer now that their city wall had been breached; the lunette would soon be overcome. However, the fortitude of the defenders was again to demonstrate weaknesses in Alexander's command prowess. Throughout the siege the troops within Halicarnassus had constantly issued forth on sallies against the besiegers. While not a major threat to the Macedonian forces these raids were, nevertheless, a constant source of irritation. They led to the burning of siege works and prevented the siege's progress. Indeed, while Alexander was eventually able to see off such raids, he seemed incapable of formulating any plan to prevent them from damaging his works in the first place.⁸⁰ Then, with the breach of their walls, the defenders finally decided that they would not be able to resist a concerted Macedonian attack and so initiated one last great sortie. This caught Alexander completely off guard.⁸¹ At daybreak, the Persian forces attacked the Macedonian siege engines massed

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near the lunette. Simultaneously, another group attacked the Macedonian forces situated near the "Triple Gate" of the city. Many of Alexander's siege engines were set alight and the Macedonian forces began to retreat. To compound matters for Alexander, it appears that Memnon then issued out from the city with a further force to put the finishing touches to the sally. Diodorus (17.26.6), blatantly states that at this juncture "Alexander found himself quite helpless"; he had been successfully and comprehensively outmanoeuvred. In the end, it was not Alexander who retrieved the battle, but Macedonian veterans. At this critical moment, they entered the fray, bolstered the Macedonian resistance and turned the tide of the engagement.⁸² The Persian assault faltered, and there followed a stampede back into the city. Alexander, however, ordered the withdrawal of his forces from combat - it appears that the conflict had gone on all day, and night had fallen. Alexander did not want to risk trying to conduct operations in the dark when his men were tired and in some disarray after a long day's fighting.⁸³ This was the best command decision he made that day. Beyond this, Alexander can only be criticised for failing to organise an effective response to the Persian sally, and for having to rely on the initiative of his veterans to get him out of a very difficult situation.

The final acts of the siege really highlight Alexander's poor command performance. After the failure of his last great sortie, Memnon decided to abandon the city. He had lost many of his men and it would only be a matter of time before the Macedonians fully exploited the breach that they had made.⁸⁴ Consequently, Memnon set light to the city later that night and withdrew his troops to two of the citadels, Salmacis and the island citadel.⁸⁵ Once he understood what was happening, Alexander quickly occupied the city. However, he was in no position to strike against the two citadels: they were strongly defended and easily supplied by sea. On top of this, the morale of his men had doubtless

flagged too much for him to risk an assault. Again, Alexander had been out-manoeuvred. Consequently he razed some of the city, constructed a wall and trench around Salmacis, and left garrisons to watch over the strongholds while he continued on his campaigns.⁸⁶

ii) Gaza

Alexander's early management of the siege of Gaza seems suspect also. It appears that, as at Halicarnassus, he began operations before he had fully assembled his siege-train, and this led to vain attempts to gain access to the city. Thus, his engineers were able to construct a few siege towers hastily from the scanty local resources, but these were put to little use as they sank into the sand that surrounded the city.⁸⁷ This must have proved a great embarrassment to Alexander, while a source of mirth to the defenders. His sappers also attempted to undermine the walls, but found it hard work as they were relatively unprotected. Then a sally from the defenders ground work to a halt. Indeed, during this sally Alexander himself was wounded. Consequently, Alexander was forced to postpone his assaults until his heavier siege engines arrived from Tyre. Only then was he able to organise a more effective assault by co-ordinating his sappers and siege towers (which were placed upon the mound) to break into the city. This being the case, Alexander should have waited in the first place for his siege engines to arrive.

iii) Aornus

During the siege of Aornus, Alexander failed to isolate the enemy upon their plateau fortress and was, as a result, out-manoeuvred.

The early stages of the siege saw Alexander send a small force under Ptolemy to capture the forward position situated below the stronghold. Once this was accomplished Alexander then led the rest of his army to join forces with Ptolemy. However, as he

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moved forward he came under heavy attack. Some Indians had been able to leave the plateau by a southern pass and occupy the heights around the path that Alexander was using.⁸⁸ The ferocity of this attack forced Alexander to retreat, which left Ptolemy isolated upon the mountain.⁸⁹ While Alexander eventually ensured that he and Ptolemy drove the Indians back under a combined attack,⁹⁰ he must be criticised for allowing the Indians to leave their fortress by the southern pass and assume a position where they could harm his operations. Alexander had had several days to survey the geography of the area and was briefed by local guides, so he must have known of the pass.⁹¹ Consequently, he should have blocked it, so isolating the defenders upon their plateau, before he began his approach march.⁹²

GENERAL CONCLUSION TO SIEGES

Alexander could direct a siege with great skill and competence. Thus, at Tyre, he organised affairs for seven months and implemented a most proficient final attack upon the city. At Halicarnassus and Gaza he was able to quickly size up the strength and position of each city and then direct affairs with such skill that the walls of each were speedily breached.

It should be mentioned that in quickly breaching a city's walls and bringing a siege to a successful conclusion Alexander did rely heavily upon the professionalism of his men and of his siege engineers. However, without someone like Alexander to harness their skill and manage them with adroitness, they would never have been so effective.

Alexander also deserves praise for his audacity. This ensured that he was never overwhelmed by tricky positions. Thus, at the sieges of the Sogdian Rock, the Rock of Chorienes and Aornus, where Alexander found himself confronted by arduous obstacles,

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by being bold he gained the psychological advantage and undermined the morale of the enemy so that the sieges were brought to a swift end.

Finally, Alexander's resilience and determination were crucial to operations. His ability to keep a siege alive despite setbacks, such as those suffered at Tyre and Halicarnassus, does him credit. By never giving in to despair, by being stubborn and resolute he ensured that the prospect of victory was never undermined.

Despite the above points, Alexander's direction of his sieges did have its faults.

He was occasionally out-manoeuvred by the enemy, and this was often because of his own lack of judgement, foresight, and general command prowess. Thus, at Halicarnassus one gets the distinct impression that the besieged were always one step ahead of Alexander. Primarily, they defended their city with great gusto and were able to inflict casualties and confusion upon the Macedonians through their constant sorties from the city. Indeed, their final great sally saw Alexander completely befuddled and at a loss, instead of taking remedial action. Then, at the end of the siege, Alexander was powerless to stop the besieged from effecting an organised withdrawal into the citadels of Halicarnassus. This prevented him from achieving complete subjugation of the city and ensured that Persian influence in the area remained a threat.

At Tyre, the defenders were able to gain tactical ascendancy over Alexander by launching a series of successful, and practically unchallenged, commando-style raids against the mole, which left Alexander's siege-works in ruins. Indeed, their task was made easier in the early stages of the siege because Alexander failed to defend his mole and his work force. Later on in the siege, the Tyrians then managed to out-manoeuvre

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Alexander by briefly evading his blockade of the Sidonian harbour; Alexander should have been prepared for this.

At the siege of Aornus the enemy caught Alexander unawares by leaving their fortress and using a pass to put themselves between his force and that of Ptolemy. This was bad enough, but Alexander probably knew about this pass and decided to leave it unguarded.

Alexander could also give way to impatience. At both Halicarnassus and Gaza he began to assault the cities before he had assembled his siege train. These assaults, lacking the necessary machinery, proved futile and should not have been conducted. Moreover, Alexander's eagerness to capture the fortress of Aornus perhaps contributed to his poor decision to leave the pass, which the Indians exploited, open.

It also appears that in one extreme circumstance Alexander could actually lose control of his siege operations. At Halicarnassus he was unable to prevent a drunken show of bravado from two of his men from escalating into a full-scale, disorganised and eventually fruitless assault upon the city walls.⁹³

Finally, it is worth repeating that, owing to his decision to disband his fleet, Alexander twice found himself in a poor military position before a siege. In the same year that he dispersed his fleet, Alexander found himself before the walls of the coastal city of Halicarnassus. Without a fleet he was powerless to prevent the harboured city from provisioning itself and he could not assault the city from the sea. Later, lacking ships at Tyre, he was left with no option but to build the mole to the city. This was a weak plan, which was easily exploited by the Tyrians, and ultimately proved futile.

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Balancing these faults against Alexander's merits, can one really claim that he was a master at siege warfare? I think not.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

- ¹ F. E. Adock, *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*, 59.
- ² Arr.2.16.7. Diodorus (17.40.3) claims that the Tyrians deliberately sacrificed themselves to give Darius time to prepare for another confrontation with Alexander. This has been accepted by some scholars, for instance, Green, 247. However, I agree with Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 238 that it seems unlikely that “Tyre would have imperilled its existence for the sake of Persian long-range strategy”.
- ³ The strategic necessity of capturing the cities of the Syrian coast has already been noted Chapter One.
- ⁴ Cf. Curt.4.2.7; Diod.17.40.4.
- ⁵ See Chapter One.
- ⁶ Curtius (4.2.8) pays special attention to harsh wind and sea as obstacles to the Macedonians. Alexander certainly began his siege in the months when the sea was most rough.
- ⁷ Curt.4.2.9. Arrian (2.18.3) says the sea was about three fathoms deep. Alexander must have questioned locals and been aware of this.
- ⁸ Arr.2.18.2.
- ⁹ These were 150 feet high according to Arrian’s estimates (2.21.4).
- ¹⁰ Curt.4.2.16. Perhaps their reluctance was bolstered by depressing stories circulating around the camp that Tyre had once withstood siege for thirteen consecutive years against a king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century); did the same fate await their efforts?
- ¹¹ Curt.4.2.15.
- ¹² Curt.4.2.17; Cf. Arr.2.18.1.
- ¹³ Arr.2.18.4.
- ¹⁴ Diod.17.40.5.
- ¹⁵ Curt.2.4.22.
- ¹⁶ Arr.2.18.4-5; Diod.17.42.1; Curt.4.2.21-22.

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- ¹⁷ Arr.2.18.6; Curt.2.4.23.
- ¹⁸ The device of protecting building work with siege engines had originated at the siege of Motya; Diod.14.49.3. Alexander may have known of this siege.
- ¹⁹ The stern of the boat was heavily ballasted to raise the bow out of the water. Arr.2.19.2.
- ²⁰ Arr.2.19; Curt.4.3.2-6.
- ²¹ Curt.4.3.6-7; Diod.17.42.5.
- ²² Curt.4.3.11; cf. Diod.17.42.6.
- ²³ Arr.2.19.6; cf. Curt.4.3.8-9.
- ²⁴ Arr.2.20.1-3.
- ²⁵ 4,000 Greek mercenaries from the Peloponnese, also joined him at Sidon; Arr.2.20.5.
- ²⁶ One cannot argue that Alexander should have waited for the arrival of these ships before beginning the siege. When he began operations he could not guarantee aid from this quarter; the Phoenician ships might have stayed loyal to the Persians or, at the first sign of unrest, the Persians might have confiscated their ships. Moreover, he had no idea when the Phoenician naval contingents would arrive home.
- ²⁷ Arr.2.20.6-8.
- ²⁸ Arr.2.20.10.
- ²⁹ Diades is described as “the man who took Tyre with Alexander” (H. Diels, as cited by Bosworth, *Comm.*I, 241). For a good analysis of Diades’ contribution to Alexander’s sieges see E. W. Marsden, “Macedonian Military Machinery and its Designers under Philip and Alexander”, *Ancient Macedonia* II, 211-23. Very little attention is given to Alexander’s engineers in the extant sources. For example see Arr. 2.19.6; 2.21.1.
- ³⁰ Arr.2.21.8-9.
- ³¹ Arr.2.22.3-5.
- ³² The Syracusans used this ploy in 413 against the Athenians; Thuc.7.39ff. For other examples, see Xen. *Hell.*2.1.24ff; Hdt.6.78.
- ³³ Diod.17.42.6.
- ³⁴ Diod.17.42.7.

- ³⁵ Arr.2.21.3.
- ³⁶ Diod.17.43.1-2. Cf.17.45.3-4.
- ³⁷ Diod.17.43.7.
- ³⁸ Diodorus (17.43.7-44.5) gives full details of these anti-personnel devices. The reliability of Diodorus' land-based assault from the mole and the Tyrian defence of their walls has been questioned by W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great II*, 120ff. This has been neatly refuted by A. B. Bosworth in *Alexandre le Grand, Image et Réalité.*" (*Entretiens Hardt* 22 [1976]), 17ff.
- ³⁹ Initially, the Tyrians probably only built an inner wall where the mole was threatening their city. However, once Alexander obtained his fleet and could attack from the sea, the Tyrians probably began to construct an inner wall that stretched the entire circumference of their city. See Diod.17.43.3; Curt.4.3.13.
- ⁴⁰ Even Arrian (2.22.6) suggests this.
- ⁴¹ Arr.2.21.4.
- ⁴² Arr.2.21.5-6.
- ⁴³ Arr.2.21.6-7.
- ⁴⁴ Arr.2.22.6-7.
- ⁴⁵ Diod.17.44.4.
- ⁴⁶ Arr.2.22.7; cf. Diod.17.43.4-5. It seems that a storm may also have helped to scuttle Alexander's assault; Curt.4.3.16-18.
- ⁴⁷ Diod.17.45.7; Curt.4.4.1.
- ⁴⁸ Arr.2.23.1; Curt.4.4.10.
- ⁴⁹ The extant sources do not specifically mention the mole, although Diodorus (17.46.1) hints at it. Given that Alexander intended to confuse the Tyrians, I feel that the mole must have been used as a diversion.
- ⁵⁰ Diod.17.46.1; cf. Arr.2.23.3; Curt.4.4.10.
- ⁵¹ Arr.2.23.1-2; Diod.17.46.3; Curt. 4.4.12. It is unlikely that the wall was breached in such a way that it was split all the way down. When the Macedonians entered Tyre it was not through a breach in the wall at sea level but over the tops of the battlements, battlements which had been shaken so that there was no defence.

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- ⁵² Arr.2.23.1–2.
- ⁵³ Arr.2.24.1.
- ⁵⁴ Arr.2.23.6.
- ⁵⁵ Arr.2.24.3–4.
- ⁵⁶ Arrian's figure of 400 Macedonian casualties is pure propaganda (2.24.4).
- ⁵⁷ Arr.1.20.4–5.
- ⁵⁸ Diod.17.24.4.
- ⁵⁹ Unfortunately, as will be seen later, he did not manage to immediately exploit this.
- ⁶⁰ For the siege of Gaza see Curt. 4.6.7-31; Arr.2.25.4-2.27.7. In reconstructing events I have put more emphasis on Curtius' account. Arrian seems to exaggerate the size of the hill that Gaza is built upon, and the size of the mound that Alexander is able to build in two months (Diod.17.48.7 states the siege lasted two months). For a full explanation of the weaknesses in Arrian's account see Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 258-259.
- ⁶¹ It should be noted that whether Alexander was able to manoeuvre his heavy siege engines onto the sandy mound is open to debate. See Curt.4.6.9; Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 259; Fuller, 218.
- ⁶² The exact date for each siege is open to debate. For an analysis of the problematic chronology see Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 124-127.
- ⁶³ See Arr.4.18.4 - 19.4 and Curt.7.11.1-29 for the main accounts of this siege.
- ⁶⁴ For accounts of this siege see Arr.4.21.1-9; Curt.8.2.19-33, who calls the Rock that of Sisimithres.
- ⁶⁵ Curt.8.2.23. Arrian (4.21.2) claims that the ravine encircled the hill upon which the stronghold was built, and makes no mention of a river that might have run through it. See Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 136.
- ⁶⁶ Arr.4.21.5. This reconstruction follows Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 137. Here Bosworth also claims that Arrian can be interpreted as mentioning that the stakes were driven "into the most rapidly flowing section of the ravine", so complementing Curtius in his assertion that a river needed to be negotiated.
- ⁶⁷ The site of Aornus has been identified by Aurel Stein to be that of the Pir-sar. See his work *On Alexander's Track to the Indus* for a detailed analysis of the site.
- ⁶⁸ Arr.4.28.3.

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- ⁶⁹ Arr.4.29.1-6. Stein identifies this as the slope of the Little Una.
- ⁷⁰ Diod.17.85.6; Curt.8.11.7-8, but not in Arrian. Stein has identified this ravine as that of Burimar, 118-9. This ravine is 180m deep and, according to Stein, separated Little Una from Pir-sar by 500 yards.
- ⁷¹ While Arrian (4.29.7) and Curtius (8.11.8) both mention the stakes, they fail to really describe what they were used for. A framework for the mound seems to be the best suggestion; cf.Thuc.2.75.2. It is also difficult to determine whether Alexander filled in the whole of the ravine. Stein has assumed that this occurred, but see Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 190.
- ⁷² Arr.4.30.2.
- ⁷³ It appears that Alexander might have induced the Indians to retreat by uncovering a pass that blocked their escape. See Diod.17.85.7; Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 192. Cf. Arr.4.30.3.
- ⁷⁴ See Chapter One.
- ⁷⁵ See Bosworth, *C+E*, 48; Green, 196.
- ⁷⁶ Arr.1.21.1ff.; Diod.17.25.5-6.
- ⁷⁷ Diod.17.25.6. Arrian (1.21.3), in his efforts to make Alexander seem unbeatable, represents the assault in a much more favourable light.
- ⁷⁸ Green (196 and 536 note 28) has suggested that Alexander actually launched a night-attack upon the breach, and when this proved a disaster a story that blamed the assault on the drunks was invented to exculpate the King. While this may be possible, surely Alexander knew the dangers of attacking at night and would not have attempted such a move. Cf. Arr.3.10.1-4.
- ⁷⁹ Arr.1.21.4. This lunette was probably encountered during the earlier spontaneous night attack. The defenders had also erected a wooden tower on the wall, inside which were arrow-firing catapults that must have helped inflict heavy losses on the Macedonians. Cf. Arr.1.23.2; Diod.17.26.6.
- ⁸⁰ Arr.1.20.9-10, 1.21.5; Diod.17.24.4-25.4.
- ⁸¹ For details of this assault see Diod.17.26ff.; Arr.1.22.ff. These accounts differ in how they present the sortie. Diodorus indicates that, while the sally was eventually repulsed, it was largely a Persian success. Arrian, on the other hand, portrays Alexander overcoming the attack with relative ease. I would follow Bosworth *Comm.I*, 148 in explaining this divergence. A general picture of Macedonian troops being bested in an engagement was an unthinkable event to record. Consequently, the official tradition has expunged this from history and concentrated instead on the

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- eventual repulse of the attack. This is the version that Arrian has in his history. As a result of this, my reconstruction of the Persian sortie follows the vulgate tradition.
- ⁸² Curtius may be referring to this incident when he twice mentions the bravery of a certain Macedonian veteran, Atarrhias, who saved the day for the Macedonians when the battle around Halicarnassus seemed lost; 5.2.5; 8.1.36.
- ⁸³ Arrian (1.22.7) claims that Alexander was in a position to get into the city but recalled his men because he wished to spare the citizens of Halicarnassus the horrors of a sack and give them a chance to surrender. I find it difficult to believe that Alexander would have really held back if he were in such a favourable position. Furthermore, his scruples seem rather short-lived as he razed part of the city once he gained possession of it: Arr.1.23.6; Diod.17.27.6.
- ⁸⁴ Fuller, 205 also argues that Memnon feared that the city might fall to Alexander by internal treachery.
- ⁸⁵ Arr.1.23.3.
- ⁸⁶ It is unlikely that Alexander flattened the entire city as suggested by Arrian (1.23.6) and Diodorus (17.27.6). As the capital of his ally and adoptive mother, Queen Ada, it seems improbable. It is more likely that his sappers brought down buildings to stop the spread of the fire, while he destroyed the buildings in the vicinity of Salmacis in order to construct the wall that he threw up around it. Besides this, Alexander's men needed billets while they continued the siege. Halicarnassus actually remained a bastion of enemy strength until early in 332, a year after Alexander's initial investment of the city.
- ⁸⁷ Curt.4.6.9.
- ⁸⁸ Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 189 identifies the pass used as the Pezal-Kandao. He also notes (192) that this was the only escape route open to the Indians.
- ⁸⁹ Arr.4.29.2. However, Arrian does not give a lot of attention to the Indian attack, merely stating that there was "opposition". One should look to Curtius (8.11.11–18) to get a clearer impression of what the attack might have been like.
- ⁹⁰ Arr.4.29.4-6.
- ⁹¹ If Alexander actually did not know of the pass then he is still at fault for failing to reconnoitre the area sufficiently. This is a similar episode to Issus where he failed to be aware of, or guard, the Amanic gates.
- ⁹² It appears that after this episode Alexander may have stationed men there. See Bosworth, *Comm.II*, 192.

⁹³ Even if I am being too harsh on Alexander here, and the attack was planned as Green has suggested (see note 78), then he can still be blamed for launching an ill-conceived night-assault that ended in disaster.

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ALEXANDER ON CAMPAIGN: HIS SMALL WARS

This section will analyse how effectively Alexander dealt with belligerent tribesfolk, national uprisings and revolts, and guerrilla warfare, all of which may be categorised under the heading “small wars”. In these campaigns Alexander usually conducted affairs with great skill: keen military awareness, ingenuity and a reliance on surprise attacks usually ensured success.

However, it comes as no surprise that the audacious Alexander was prone to taking risks. On occasion he was wrong to do so; his gambles were based upon weak judgement and consequently he could place himself and his army in precarious situations. Fortunately for his reputation, he always managed to act with great resolve and professionalism, to turn potentially disastrous scenarios of his own making into winning ones.¹

THE BALKAN AND ILLYRIAN CAMPAIGNS (335 B.C.)

In the spring of 335 Alexander turned his attention to his hostile neighbours in the north. For the most part, his operations here demonstrate that at the age of twenty, he was already a most capable commander. However, it is also possible to witness lapses in his military astuteness and an impetuous side to his generalship, which slightly tarnishes an otherwise proficient command performance from one so young.

i) The Thracians

Alexander's first opponents in his northern campaigns were the Thracians, who, to prevent his advance, had blockaded a pass in the Haemus Mountains (Balkans) with a stockade of carts.² It was their intention not only to use these carts as a barrier, but also to launch them down the hillside against the Macedonians as they advanced. They hoped that such an unexpected move would completely disrupt the enemy ranks, causing terror and leaving the Macedonians susceptible to a frontal assault.

As there was seemingly no way around the pass, Alexander, with what was to become his customary audacity, intended to storm it frontally with his phalanx. This was a rather hazardous decision to take; a well-defended pass could prove difficult if not impossible to overcome directly, especially if, as in this instance, the defenders had a surprise ready. However, the mark of Alexander's generalship was his boldness, and this involved taking risks. This time the risk paid off because Alexander directed affairs with great competence.

Alexander immediately grasped that the carts might be used as an offensive and disruptive weapon, and so told his men that they were to open ranks and form lanes through which the carts could pass if they were launched down-hill.³ Moreover, he was aware that this might not be possible in all places, and so added that if ranks could not be opened, his men should stoop or lie down and link their shields closely together so that the carts would pass over them.⁴

As soon as Alexander advanced, the Thracians pushed their carts forward and charged after them. However, thanks to Alexander's foresight, his men were not thrown into the confusion that the Thracians had hoped for. Instead, as Arrian claims, "the event

corresponded to Alexander's advice and conjecture. Part of the phalanx divided, while the carts sliding over the shields of others did little harm."⁵

While the carts failed to cause panic and to destroy the total cohesion of the phalanx, there was still the danger that the on-coming Thracians might score a success against the phalanx as it tried to reform its ranks. However, Alexander had again taken precautions. Acting upon orders which had probably been given before the engagement, his archers on the right of the phalanx fired their arrows into the exposed left flank of the enemy as they charged and so prevented them from coming to grips with the phalanx.⁶ Meanwhile, from the left Alexander led his Hypaspists and Agrianians against the right flank of the Thracians, while the phalanx regained its solidarity and advanced through the middle. However, before he could really bring his column into action the Thracians fled; they were distraught due to the failure of their stratagem, and feared an organised attack.

Alexander must be praised for the tactical awareness which allowed him to divine the intentions of the enemy; for his subsequent orders which nullified the Thracian plans completely; and for his own assault upon the pass which quickly exploited the poor position and confusion of the Thracians.

ii) The Triballians

With the defeat of the Thracians Alexander crossed the Balkans and entered the land of the Triballians, marching on the River Lyginus. At this stage Alexander made his first error. It appears that, despite his use of scouts in many of his campaigns, he failed to use them on this occasion.⁷ This was very risky. As a result, Alexander did not expect or anticipate the counter-march of the Triballians, which enabled them to evade his forces and occupy a position in his rear.⁸ Seeing what had befallen their Thracian neighbours,

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the Triballians probably realised that they could not beat Alexander in the field, and so hoped to harass him using guerrilla tactics from behind.

While Alexander must be criticised for allowing the enemy forces to place themselves across his line of retreat, he did manage to extricate himself with great skill. Turning his army around, it appears that he moved with such rapidity against the Triballians that he caught them unawares: he came across them as they were encamping in a woody glen.⁹ This is the first recorded instance of Alexander using speed to outmanoeuvre and surprise the enemy - it was to become one of his most readily exploited and effective tactics. However, in this instance the dense forest made it difficult for Alexander to attack. Even though the Triballians were now the ones caught off-guard, they had chosen their camp very well. Alexander had to find some way of drawing the enemy out of their entrenched position - he immediately came up with an efficient stratagem.

While he deployed his phalanx and cavalry to his rear, he sent his archers and slingers towards the glen to harass the Triballians. This light infantry was to be bait as well as an effective nuisance.¹⁰ Annoyed by arrows and slingshot, the Triballians stormed out of the glen and drove Alexander's vanguard back. Immediately Alexander sprang his trap - the cavalry which he had positioned either side of his phalanx charged the Triballian flanks, while he himself led the phalanx and the rest of his cavalry in a direct assault against the enemy's centre. The Triballians were quickly overwhelmed and fled.

Alexander had certainly managed to rectify his earlier mistake; using speed to catch the Triballians by surprise and coming up with a keen stratagem to draw them out of their entrenched position deserves much praise. Furthermore, as when facing the Thracians, it was Alexander's insight that governed his tactics and helped ensure success.

He knew that the Triballians, being undisciplined tribesmen, would succumb to the bait believing that they had a quick chance of victory.

The Triballians made no further attempt to prevent Alexander's advance. The bulk of their population, together with their king, joined Thracian refugees and took shelter on the island of Peuce in the Danube. It appears, though, that Alexander was eager to see the complete submission of these people. Prior to his northern campaign, he had ordered warships from Byzantium to sail and meet him on the Danube. He now intended to use these to capture Peuce. However, he had only a few ships; he could not launch a major assault against the island. Consequently, it was a gamble to go on with the operation. When he began manoeuvres, his vessels found it difficult to locate places to land because of the violent current of the Danube and its precipitous banks. When they did land at selected spots, they found them densely defended and, being few in numbers, the ships and their companies could not make any headway.¹¹ Consequently, Alexander was forced to call off the attack; he had failed to assess accurately the military situation confronting him.

It is likely that with the majority of the Triballians isolated on Peuce, Alexander now prepared to overrun their land and await their capitulation.¹²

iii) The Getae

While Alexander waited for the submission of the Triballians, he undertook a brief operation against the Getae with part of his army. These people, who lived north of the Danube, had been gathering along its banks, hoping to deter Alexander from crossing (they might also have envisaged helping the Triballians).¹³ Taking their presence as a challenge and a threat, Alexander decided that he must cross the Danube and deal with

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them. This was a tremendous risk: he did not have an adequate fleet to transport his forces over the river quickly, and the Getae would hardly let him cross unopposed. However, in this instance, Alexander's generalship was to be a match for the task that confronted him.

To solve his transport problem, Alexander ordered his men to stuff their leather tents with hay and straw so that they could be used to help float his army across the river; this was an intelligent move.¹⁴ He also "collected as many as possible of the boats from the countryside made from single tree trunks" (Arr.1.3.6).

Alexander crossed the river by night, to hide his actions from the Getae.¹⁵ Conducting operations in the dark was always hazardous as men and units often became disorientated and lost. However, Alexander was a general who often conducted manoeuvres in the dark; he recognised and readily exploited it to conceal his movements so that he could surprise the enemy.¹⁶ Thanks to his keen direction of affairs, not to mention the professionalism of his soldiers, Alexander's night moves were usually successful. Thus, the Macedonian army managed to cross the Danube intact and undetected.

Once across the river, Alexander hid his men in a deep cornfield, further concealing his movements. With the Getae still unaware that their position had been compromised, Alexander had time to re-organise his troops. He then attacked at dawn, exploiting the confusion in the enemy camp as they awoke. The Getae failed to withstand his first cavalry charge and fled, leaving their settlements open and vulnerable to the Macedonian advance.¹⁷ Indeed, so effective were Alexander's operations that when he returned

across the Danube he found embassies waiting for him from the surrounding peoples, amongst them the Triballians.¹⁸

Consequently, although it had been a risk to try to cross the Danube in the face of the enemy, Alexander's solid generalship had ensured complete success.

iv) The Illyrians: Cleitus and Glaucias

As Alexander retired towards Macedonia he received disturbing news of a threat posed to him by the Illyrian people of the north and west. Cleitus, probably the king of the Dardanians, had allied himself with Glaucias, king of the Taulantians, and they both intended to take up arms against Macedon. Faced with invasion of his kingdom, Alexander moved with his usual rapidity, conducting a series of forced marches to get his troops to the troubled area.¹⁹ Indeed, so swift was Alexander that he was able to arrive in the north-west before the two Illyrian kings had actually joined forces: Cleitus had occupied a fortress on the Macedonian border (which Arrian (1.5.5) names as Pellium), and was still awaiting the arrival of Glaucias. However, Alexander soon foolishly squandered this commanding position.

Alexander risked trying to besiege and defeat Cleitus before Glaucias could come to his aid. This was an extremely ill conceived decision. Sieges were usually protracted and dangerous undertakings at the best of times, and Alexander probably did not have the necessary manpower to achieve a quick success against a well-held stronghold.²⁰ Thus, while Alexander was occupied with the siege, Glaucias came to the relief of Cleitus. He occupied the surrounding mountains, cutting off Alexander's retreat and placing him in the middle of two hostile forces. Even Arrian (1.5.11) claims that the two kings "caught Alexander in a disadvantageous position". Alexander had made a major tactical blunder.

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Alexander can be further criticised for failing to take measures to find out where Glaucias was. If he had made a brief reconnaissance of the area before taking any action (as he should have done knowing that Glaucias intended to help Cleitus), he would have discovered that Glaucias was in the immediate vicinity.²¹ Knowing this Alexander could have better exploited the disunity of the enemy forces. Perhaps he could have tackled Glaucias first as he was out in the open, before then turning on Cleitus. As it was, Alexander's general lack of military perception and his impetuosity placed him in an extremely delicate position. However, as when outmanoeuvred by the Triballians, he calmly and skilfully turned events around to suit himself.

Primarily, Alexander carried out a most innovative and composed tactical withdrawal. The first stage of this saw him instruct his phalanx to drill in complete silence in full view of the enemy. This performance, impressive and eerie in its quietness, so bewildered and unnerved the tribesmen in the surrounding foothills that when Alexander made a sudden move against them, ordering his men to break the stillness with a shattering battle-cry, they fled and took refuge with Cleitus in Pellium.²² This episode gives weight to the argument that Alexander clearly understood the principles and benefits of psychological warfare.²³

Despite this breakthrough, the Macedonian retreat was not complete: Alexander still had to get his men across a river which was closely watched by further enemy contingents stationed on a nearby hill. Consequently, he quickly drove the enemy off this hill and then ordered his phalanx to begin crossing the river. To protect these men he organised a rear-guard of light infantry. This proved to be a wise move as some Illyrians had managed to reform and had begun an advance upon the river. The light infantry, consisting of Agrianian javelin men and archers, managed to hold them at a distance

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while the rest of the Macedonian army crossed. When the time came for the light infantry themselves to cross, the enemy appear to have pushed forward again. To counter this Alexander had placed his siege catapults on the further bank of the river. These now unleashed a covering fire of arrows and heavy stones, which succeeded in keeping the enemy from engaging, allowing Alexander's forces to retire completely in order.²⁴ The use of siege machinery as field artillery was a most inspired and inventive move; indeed, as Fuller has pointed out, it is the first recorded use of catapults as field artillery.²⁵

Despite his withdrawal, Alexander was not prepared to retreat to the heart of Macedonia suffering the humiliation of being bested by tribesmen and leaving his north-west frontier in tatters. Stubbornly, he stayed in the general area waiting for the enemy to make a mistake, sending out scouts to reconnoitre the enemy position around the fortress. This move proved invaluable; reports detailed that the enemy had carelessly camped outside the fortress, failing to put up any defensive works or to post guards (it is obvious that the Illyrians thought that Alexander had been vanquished). Alexander was quick to act. Basing his operations upon a surprise attack once again, he used the night, his favourite ally, to re-cross the river unnoticed and come upon the enemy camp. Then, as with the Getae, he rushed the Illyrians while they still slept. Many of the enemy were slaughtered where they lay, while the rest fled. Cleitus, finding himself deserted, fired the fortress and escaped with Glaucias into the mountains. Alexander's north-west frontier was secured.

Thus, while Alexander must be criticised for undertaking the siege of Pellium, he must be commended for the way in which he turned a precarious situation into a winning one through his fortitude, innovation, and generally skilful direction of affairs.

THE PERSEPOLIS CAMPAIGN (331/0 B.C.)

By the end of 331 Alexander had defeated Darius at the battle of Gaugamela and had occupied Babylon and Susa. The winter saw him begin his march on the heartland of the Persian empire: Persis, and its capital Persepolis. This campaign primarily demonstrates how Alexander could effectively conduct operations in mountainous and hostile terrain. However, as with the Balkan and Illyrian campaigns, it is also possible to detect the occasional lapse.

i) The Uxii

As Alexander marched from Susa towards Persis he entered the territory of the Uxii. The Uxian people comprised two distinct groups: those who lived on the plainland and came under Persian rule, and those who lived in the mountains and had been independent of Persian rule.²⁶ It appears that Alexander had difficulties with both groups.²⁷

His first encounter, with the lowland Uxii, came about because their governor, Medates, had blocked a mountain pass along Alexander's route. Alexander decided to assault the pass, first gathering intelligence regarding the geography of the area. To his credit, Alexander was a general who often liked to understand the exact nature of his position so that he could formulate his tactics accordingly. He got this information by using his own scouts (as has been seen in his operations in 335), and also by exploiting the knowledge of local guides, which he did in this instance. Consequently, Alexander learnt from natives of a path that circumvented the enemy position - he could now attack the pass from the front and rear. Moreover, as Medates had failed to make preparations for a turning manoeuvre, Alexander was able to effect a complete surprise on his enemy.

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Caught unprepared within a pincer movement, Medates abandoned his position and eventually capitulated. Once again, surprise had been integral to Alexander's plans, but his victory here owes more to his astute willingness to extract and exploit local information to put him one step ahead of the enemy.

Having defeated the lowland Uxii, Alexander then came into conflict with the mountain Uxii, who demanded that he pay them a toll to cross their lands as the Persian Great King did. Alexander did not intend to allow tribesmen to dictate terms to him, and originated a plan that would see them humbled. He first invited them to meet him at the pass where they usually received their toll. This was a devious and shrewd move: Alexander had no intention of paying, but by pretending he ensured that the enemy came out into the open and occupied a predetermined position. There, he could take them when he wanted to, and need not worry about guerrilla tactics.

With the Uxians assembling, Alexander questioned local guides and became aware of an unfrequented track that led to the Uxian villages. Taking a part of his army along this path at night, he took the villages by surprise and went on to sack and loot them. Continuing his advance he then made a forced march to occupy the pass where the meeting was to take place before the Uxians could muster there. Craterus was also sent ahead to seize the heights which commanded the probable line of retreat which the enemy would take once dislodged from their position (doubtless Alexander once again exploited local knowledge to learn of this place). The result was predictable: finding the Macedonians already in the pass, and "astounded at Alexander's speed of movement" (Arr.3.17.5), the Uxians fled, but then found themselves confronted by Craterus' force. Caught in the middle, the slaughter inflicted upon the Uxii was considerable. Those who

survived then found that their villages had already been ravaged; they surrendered soon after.

Undoubtedly, the mountain Uxii were completely out-manoeuvred by a tactical plan which expertly incorporated a ruse, night-moves, local intelligence and, above all, rapidity. For acting as he did, and so preventing the Uxii from using any form of guerrilla tactics, Alexander deserves much praise.

ii) The Persian Gates

With the Uxii quickly subdued, Alexander continued his march towards Persepolis. On the way he divided his army. The allied and mercenary forces, together with the baggage, were sent along the main road, under the command of Parmenion.²⁸ Alexander himself took his Macedonian troops, along with his Agrianians and archers, and marched through the mountains towards the Persian capital. Although more hazardous, this was a more direct route. By splitting his army so, Alexander intended to fall on Persepolis with a pincer movement.

Alexander's march brought him to a pass, the Persian (or Susian) Gates, which he found held against him by a Persian army under the satrap Ariobarzanes. Ariobarzanes had prepared his site well, blocking the pass with a wall and placing his men all along the surrounding heights. Despite this imposing defensive position, Alexander took up the challenge and stormed the pass; this proved to be a major miscalculation. As his soldiers advanced they came under a heavy rain of missiles fired from the enemy troops positioned above the pass. This, combined with a stiff resistance from the Persians fighting behind the defensive wall, ensured that Alexander was forced to call off his attack, leaving his dead in the defiles.²⁹ He had suffered a defeat, and now had to re-

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calculate his plans. Another frontal assault was out of the question, so he determined to find out whether he could turn Ariobarzanes' position, as he had with the mountain Uxii earlier in the campaign. Under interrogation, some recently captured prisoners told Alexander that there was indeed a path that could take him behind the Persian location. Alexander's situation had improved, and he determined to make good his initial setback.

Craterus was left before the pass with part of the army. His orders were to deceive the enemy into thinking that Alexander was still encamped there in force by lighting the usual number of campfires. This ruse enabled Alexander to take the majority of his troops, at night, on a march to out-flank the Persian position. This was undertaken with rapidity before the Persians could find out the true extent of Craterus' force.³⁰

Part way through the advance, Alexander divided the forces that he had with him. However, the sources (and scholars) fail to agree as to why Alexander did this. Arrian claims that the split was to enable Alexander to send part of his force to bridge the River Araxes near to Persepolis, while Curtius claims that it was so that Alexander could make two separate attacks from the rear.³¹ Of the two explanations, Arrian's would seem to cast Alexander's generalship in the poorer light: by sending part of his force to the Araxes Alexander considerably reduced his own striking force, a strange move to take considering his earlier losses. Curtius' account, on the other hand, does Alexander's generalship more justice: a surprise, two-pointed attack from the rear, would cause much confusion amongst the enemy ranks.³²

Whatever Alexander's reasons for splitting his forces, when he finally came down upon the Persian position his assault proved successful. He initially came upon a number of Persian picket posts, destroyed two, and forced the occupants of the third to flee into the mountains. He then moved on the Persian main camp, and at this point gave a pre-

arranged trumpet signal that instructed Craterus to attack the pass from the front. The Persians were taken by surprise and, attacked from the front and rear, were thrown into utter confusion (a confusion which was doubtless even greater if Alexander made two attacks from the rear). It appears that Alexander may also have positioned units to ambush any Persians who tried to escape, thus completing a comprehensive victory.³³

Alexander's lack of judgement and impetuosity had resulted in an early setback before the Persian Gates. But after this his competent generalship re-asserted itself. Once again local knowledge, trickery, stealth, speed and surprise were employed with great effect to achieve a memorable victory, one that left Persepolis open to his advance. As Fuller has claimed, "thus ended one of the most hazardous, audacious and profitable of mountain campaigns in history".³⁴

ALEXANDER'S OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH-EAST OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE (329 - 327 B.C.)

By the summer of 329, Alexander had defeated the regicide Bessus and advanced to the north-east frontier of the Persian empire, the River Jaxartes. It was at this point that the Persian nobles in Bactria and Sogdiana, who were supposedly loyal to Alexander, stirred up revolt. Alexander faced a situation that he had so far managed to avoid during his campaigning: unremitting insurrection over a large area, supported by guerrilla warfare. Worse still, peoples living outside the Persian empire also started to apply pressure and give aid to the revolt. Despite a few set-backs, Alexander's command performance against stubborn and often elusive foes, in a struggle that demanded great will-power and patience, is commendable.

i) The seven forts on the north-east frontier (329 B.C.)

Confronted by large-scale disturbances, Alexander wisely set about dealing with one area at a time. Seven fortresses in the vicinity of the Jaxartes were his first objective. He had previously occupied these on his way to the river, but now the natives had risen and massacred his garrisons. Mobility, ferocity, and numerous strike forces were to be Alexander's main weapons here.

While he advanced against the nearest fort, Gaza, he sent Craterus to invest Cyropolis, the largest stronghold with the greatest number of insurgents. This was a most astute move: with the strongest force of rebels contained in Cyropolis, Alexander could deal with the remaining forts without fear of major outside intervention.³⁵ Thus, Gaza, followed by two more forts, fell extremely quickly to Alexander (they were made of mud brick and ill equipped to withstand a siege). The male defenders were all put to the sword, while the women and children were seized as plunder; it was Alexander's intention to terrorise the natives into submission and so ensure that they would never rebel again.³⁶

Around this time Alexander again split his forces: cavalry was sent to the two most distant forts with orders to surround them and prevent their garrisons from escaping. Again, this division proved to be a competent move. When the inhabitants of the remote forts learnt of the fate of their comrades, they attempted to flee but, as "things turned out just as he (Alexander) had guessed" (Arr.4.2.5), the cavalry posted there cut them down. Thus Alexander's foresight ensured that no rebel evaded punishment. Furthermore, within forty-eight hours Alexander had managed to capture five of the hostile forts, a remarkable achievement.

Alexander then moved against Cyropolis. The defence here proved stiffer, but once again it was taken very quickly, with 8,000 of its inhabitants being slaughtered.³⁷ This left only one fort to deal with. Alexander captured this at the first assault and, according to Aristobulus, killed “all he found within”.³⁸

Alexander had contained the first sector of rebellion. His use of mobile strike forces had prevented the enemy from exploiting guerrilla tactics or giving aid to their compatriots: they were isolated within their forts or cut down by his cavalry. Thus their defeat was swiftly achieved, a necessary factor as Alexander had other sectors to pacify. Furthermore, by dealing with these rebels so harshly, Alexander ensured that the area would not rebel again; an imperative state of affairs given his need to move on quickly.

ii) The Scythians (329 B.C.)

News of the uprising had filtered through to the Scythian people living north of the Jaxartes, outside the Persian empire. Eager to profit from the troubled situation and attack the Macedonians, they had begun to mass cavalry on the north bank of the river.³⁹ Equally serious was the news that the Sogdian noble Spitamenes had besieged Alexander’s troops in Maracanda. Confronted by two serious threats, Alexander sent a force to relieve Maracanda and harass Spitamenes, while he dealt with the Scythians in order to secure his north-east frontier.⁴⁰ Alexander’s confrontation with the Scythians shows again how capable a commander he was.

Bereft of transport vessels and with the Scythians on the far bank of the river ready to contest a crossing, Alexander was confronted by a situation similar to the one that he had faced at the Danube in 335. As a result, his first task was to find a way actually to convey his men across the river. This was easily solved: Alexander had rafts built, and

turned once again to the simple but impressive tactic of stuffing tent covers with straw.⁴¹ Next, Alexander had to get his men over the river, a job that would be extremely difficult given that the Scythians were armed with bows and could shower his men with arrows as they attempted to cross.⁴² Ever the creative general, Alexander placed his siege catapults on his side of the river and, as in his encounter with Cleitus and Glaucias, used them as field-artillery.⁴³ It appears that he may also have put some of his catapults on to rafts.⁴⁴ The volleys that these machines hurled towards the Scythians ensured that they retreated somewhat from the river bank. When Alexander saw that he had access to the opposite bank he immediately sent across an advance screen of light infantry to occupy and hold a forward position. This enabled him to bring forward and deploy his heavy infantry and cavalry; he was now in a position to attack the Scythian cavalry hordes directly.

In the following confrontation, it appears that Alexander adopted his favourite tactic of using units as bait to draw the enemy into an unfavourable position. He initially sent forward a small body of horse made up of Greek mercenaries and lancers. The Scythians then encircled this force and began to pick off Alexander's men with their arrows.⁴⁵ This was a classic nomadic tactic, which would see the Scythians flee as soon as the units inside the ring tried to mount a counter-strike, and then reassert a cordon once the enemy grew tired of chasing and reformed.

While the Scythians were engrossed with this easy target, Alexander made his proper move. The details of this are obscure, but it at least appears that a combined and rapid attack of his cavalry and light infantry upon the preoccupied Scythians broke them and put them to flight.⁴⁶ After a brief pursuit the Scythian king surrendered and offered his allegiance to Alexander.

Alexander deserves much praise for the way in which he dealt with the Scythians. He directed affairs with such proficiency and bold innovation that he was able to get his army across the Jaxartes in broad daylight, in a compact formation and without serious loss, despite the presence of enemy forces. Then, with consummate ease, using units as bait and quick battlefield manoeuvres, he successfully countered the classic Scythian battle tactic of aggressive, hit-and-run encirclement.

With the capitulation of the Scythian king Alexander's north-east frontier was secure; he was free to turn his attention to the other trouble spots in his empire.

iii) Defeat at Maracanda (329 B.C.)

As stated above, when Alexander heard that Spitamenes had besieged Maracanda he divided his forces. Keeping the majority of his troops under his own command to deal with the Scythians, Alexander sent only a small detachment to relieve his troops at Maracanda.⁴⁷ While three military officers were attached to this group (Caranus, Andromachus and Menedemus), the overall commander was a certain Pharnuches. He was not an experienced combat officer but according to Arrian (4.3.7), "an interpreter ... who was expert in the language of the barbarians of these parts and seemed in general to be skilful in dealings with them". Obviously, Alexander did not expect major trouble and thought that negotiation rather than fighting was required. He was to be sorely mistaken in taking this gamble.

When Spitamenes learnt of the approach of this relief force, he quickly raised the siege and withdrew westwards. In the course of this retreat he was reinforced by Scythian cavalry and was encouraged to attack the pursuing Macedonian troops. The engagement that followed is variously reported. Arrian, probably following Ptolemy,

claims that the Macedonian troops were unable to cope with the circling hit and run tactics of Spitamenes' troops and were forced to retreat. When the Macedonian commanders then failed to co-ordinate their movements the withdrawal turned into a rout and Alexander's men were massacred.⁴⁸ Aristobulus, on the other hand, tells of an ambush by Spitamenes and the refusal of the Macedonian leaders to accept command at a critical moment, the net result being that the Scythians "cut them all to pieces".⁴⁹ Whichever story one accepts, the sources make it clear that the incompetence of the commanding officers led to the slaughter of the relief force. However, this does not exculpate Alexander from criticism. In sending such a small force to Maracanda under a linguist, he failed to appreciate the serious situation that he faced. Furthermore, by placing a diplomatic officer over three military officers, he ensured that effective decision-making would be difficult. One could argue, therefore, that Alexander merely sent men to their slaughter and ensured that the morale of the rebels was bolstered.

Upon hearing of the defeat of his column, Alexander rapidly marched towards Maracanda, where Spitamenes had once again settled down to besiege the city.⁵⁰ Aware of Alexander's approach, Spitamenes called off the siege once again and retired westwards into the desert, his forces intact and ready to strike again. As it was late in the campaigning season, and as his troops were exhausted after a rapid and long march, Alexander did not attempt to follow the Sogdian noble. Instead he set about devastating the area where he was: the valley of the Zeravshan. Fortresses were stormed and defenders massacred in a calculated campaign of terror aimed at cowing the natives into submission and denying Spitamenes any support over the coming winter;⁵¹ the end of the season saw the west of Sogdiana a wasteland. Leaving 3,000 men to guard the province,⁵² Alexander withdrew to the relatively peaceful site of Bactra for the winter.

However, there were still pockets of restlessness in Sogdiana, and with Spitamenes still very active, the rebellion was far from over.

iv) The north-east provinces (328 - 327 B.C.)

While wintering at Bactra, Alexander received news that many of the Sogdians had decided to turn against him once again. His previous campaign of terror and his garrisons had failed to stamp out all areas of unrest, and doubtless the natives had been bolstered in their resilience by the success of Spitamenes.⁵³ He could expect them to again resist him from their forts and, along with Spitamenes, to adopt guerrilla tactics, striking in small bands before fading away into the countryside or to the natural fortresses of the region. Facing a delicate situation, Alexander approached it with great perseverance, awareness and professionalism. He planned for numerous mobile strike forces to sweep through the troubled localities, destroying opposition in a heavy-handed manner, and garrisoning strategic locations. At the same time, units would be specifically designated to hunt down Spitamenes and so bring an end to his disruptive influence.

Thus, in the spring of 328, Alexander returned to Sogdiana. Once in the province he divided his army into five columns so that he could cope with the widely scattered rebel forces. These then swept through the countryside, storming the fortified places and securing the surrender of villages. When these forces later reassembled at Maracanda their show of arms and ferocity had finally cowed the local populace, defeated a number of rebel bands, and so largely brought the area back under Macedonian control. However, Alexander provided added security by ordering Hephaestion to establish a network of fortified positions throughout the region. These would serve as focal points

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of Macedonian power, policing the security of the area and making it hard for any remaining guerrillas to operate efficiently.⁵⁴

While the final touches were being added to the pacification of the province, Alexander sent Coenus towards Scythia in search of Spitamenes. But Spitamenes managed to evade his pursuers, and engaged the help of the Massagetae (a Scythian people). He surprised a Macedonian fort on the Bactrian border, massacred its defenders, and then advanced on Bactra. Fortunately, Alexander's tactic of having numerous active columns thwarted Spitamenes' move on Bactra: a force under the command of Craterus came across the Sogdian noble and managed to push him back to the edge of the desert.⁵⁵ With a measure of stability restored to Sogdiana, Spitamenes now encountered more difficult times. Wherever he turned he found himself faced by Macedonian garrisons, and Coenus was still under orders to track him down.⁵⁶ This constant pressure eventually undermined Spitamenes' will and forced him to make a dreadful command error. In a last-ditch attempt to restore his situation, Spitamenes foolishly departed from his guerrilla tactics and risked a pitched battle with Coenus. He lost 800 of his cavalry, and the Bactrians and Sogdians that were with him surrendered. Although Spitamenes managed to escape, once his Massagetae allies realised that Alexander was moving against them they cut off his head and sent it to Alexander as a peace offering.

As Alexander wintered at Nautaca at the end of the year, he must have been relatively satisfied with his campaign of 328: most of Sogdiana was now under Macedonian control and Spitamenes had been dealt with. However, there were still a few isolated pockets of unrest that needed attention. Many of the inhabitants of Sogdiana had taken refuge in the rocky fortresses in the east of the province, some of which were reportedly impregnable. Alexander reasoned that if he could shatter the myth of their

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invincibility then the morale of the enemy would be undermined and the rebellion would finally die out. Consequently, in the spring of 327 Alexander advanced against these strongholds.⁵⁷ This saw him undertake the sieges of the Sogdian Rock and the Rock of Choriene, sieges which were over quickly thanks to Alexander's audacity and competent direction of affairs.⁵⁸ The fall of these two supposedly invulnerable strongholds ensured that the focal point and morale of any remaining opposition in the eastern provinces was undermined. However, before moving on to other areas of conquest, Alexander left a huge garrison force behind him to look after affairs; a wise move considering the turmoil he had just overcome.⁵⁹

Alexander deserves much credit for the way in which he conducted operations over the period 328-7. He was undaunted by the news of further revolt and set about dealing with it with calm assurance and skill. In so doing he appreciated that conventional methods of warfare were obsolete when facing guerrillas and so he adapted his tactics accordingly. Thus, by using compact and independent strike forces, he was able to combat many rebel bands, frighten the local populace and so overrun and control separate areas of insurgent territory. Then by establishing strong garrison points he was able to police the area effectively and deny any remaining guerrillas places of rest, supply and recuperation. Slowly the number of trouble spots was reduced, and with the defeat of Spitamenes through these tactics the rebellion was dealt a crushing blow. This was then exploited when Alexander undermined the morale of any remaining would-be rebels by capturing their supposedly impregnable citadels. Almost two years of patience, determination and largely commendable generalship had brought a major rebellion to an end.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis indicates that Alexander's direction of his small wars was mostly quite competent.

He had distinctive and natural tactical awareness, which enabled him to evaluate military situations and so come up with effective manoeuvres to achieve success. Thus he divined how the Thracians intended to exploit their carts at the Shipka (?) pass, and so was able to counter their movements by arranging for his men to receive the carts and the follow up charge. In the same campaign, he was aware of the undisciplined nature of the Triballians and so was able to devise a tactic (the use of units as bait) which exploited this. Perhaps most prominently, he understood the nature and effect of guerrilla warfare when confronted with it in the north-east of the Persian empire, and came up with effective measures to deal with it: the use of independent strike forces, operating in a heavy-handed manner, which then garrisoned the land.

Alexander was also good at gathering intelligence, which enabled him to achieve distinct advantages over the enemy. In the incident with Cleitus and Glaucias, his use of scouts permitted him to learn of, and exploit, the poor position of these two tribal kings as they camped before Pellium. When dealing with the lowland Uxii he obtained the help of local guides to place part of his army in a commanding position behind the pass that these people had blocked. Finally, in dealing with Ariobarzanes at the Persian Gates, he again eventually used guides to turn the satrap's position and achieve success.

Alexander's ingenuity also ensured that he was able to out-class his enemies. Thus his use of siege engines as field artillery against the Illyrians and Scythians was a most inventive measure, which greatly contributed to the success of his operations.

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Alexander also deserves commendation for the way in which he repeatedly utilised surprise to outmanoeuvre and defeat the enemy. In surprising his opposition he often skilfully employed night moves and forced marches, for example, against the Getae (here crossing the river Danube at night to effect his surprise, a most astounding achievement), the Illyrians, the Uxii and the Persians under Ariobarzanes. Trickery was also successfully employed to catch the enemy unawares. The Triballians and the Scythians were both caught out by Alexander's use of units as bait to draw the enemy into poor military positions; the mountain Uxii were so beguiled by Alexander's talk of paying them the toll that they came out into the open and assumed a position which Alexander could easily exploit; while Ariobarzanes was tricked into believing that Alexander was still encamped before the Persian Gates by the actions of Craterus, when in fact Alexander was in the process of outflanking him.

Despite the above points, Alexander's conduct in his small wars was not without its faults. He took risks that failed because he did not give full thought to the position that he was in. He risked moving against the Triballians in his campaign of 335 without first sending out scouts to reconnoitre the area, and so was outmanoeuvred by the enemy. Then, his attack upon the island of Peuce, soon after, was undertaken without an adequate naval force and so failed. During the same campaign, his gamble to besiege Cleitus in Pellium before Glaucias could come to his aid proved a major miscalculation, made worse by the fact that Alexander did not reconnoitre the area and so find out that Glaucias was in the vicinity. His initial frontal attack upon Ariobarzanes' position at the Persian Gates in his campaign of 331/0 also proved a disaster, and could have been avoided if he had first taken time to locate the path which he eventually used to out-flank

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the enemy. Finally, his decision to risk sending only a small force under a linguist to deal with Spitamenes' in 329 proved a complete misjudgement as well.

Some of these failed enterprises managed to place Alexander and his army in very difficult positions. However, with tremendous aplomb, resilience and determination, Alexander always managed to surmount any problems. Thus, after their initial taste of success, the Triballians, Cleitus and Glaucias, Ariobarzanes and Spitamenes were all eventually overcome.

So, while one may again criticise Alexander for certain shortcomings, in righting his wrongs with such skill he manages to redeem himself somewhat, and leave the impression that he was a capable commander.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- ¹ Owing to the word limit of this thesis, I cannot cover all of Alexander's "small wars". Consequently, I have decided to concentrate on three of his campaigns.
- ² Most scholars argue that this is the Shipka Pass, although Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 54 has proposed the Trojan Pass.
- ³ We have seen how Alexander used a similar tactic at Gaugamela in 331 to combat Persian chariots.
- ⁴ Arr.1.1.8-9. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 56 has pointed out that the Macedonians might have formed into something resembling the Roman *testudo*.
- ⁵ Arr.1.1.9-10. Surely, however, the rear ranks of the phalanx must have been harmed as gravity brought the carts down?
- ⁶ Arrian (1.1.11-12) would seem to indicate that these orders were given only after the carts had been launched. However, it is unlikely that Alexander would have had time to issue such orders after the engagement began; given that he had already seen through the ruse he must have realised beforehand that he would have to protect his phalanx from a Thracian charge.
- ⁷ Certainly Arrian does not record the use of scouts at this point. For Alexander's use of scouts see, for example, Arr.1.13.1-2; 3.7.7.
- ⁸ This episode is similar to when he allowed Darius to out-manoeuvre him at Issus in 333. Arrian (1.2.3) seems to play down the Triballian move by claiming that they only found themselves behind the Macedonian forces because they fled before Alexander's advance. This is another instance of Arrian trying to smooth over facts so that Alexander's generalship cannot be censured.
- ⁹ Arr.1.2.4.
- ¹⁰ This is the first recorded use of the tactic that served Alexander so well in his major battles against the Persians.
- ¹¹ Arr.1.3.4.
- ¹² Cf. Bosworth, *C+E*, 30.
- ¹³ Cf. Fuller, 222.
- ¹⁴ Alexander may have got the idea from reading Xenophon. See Xen. *Anab.*1.5.10.

- ¹⁵ He had also probably done his utmost to prepare for the crossing in secret; it would not have been hard to conceal the stuffed tents and confiscated boats.
- ¹⁶ However, Alexander was not blind to the risks of night manoeuvres; see his comments before Gaugamela (Arr.3.10.3).
- ¹⁷ Arr.1.4.4–5.
- ¹⁸ Arr.1.4.6.
- ¹⁹ Alexander's ally, Langarus, king of the Agrianians, invaded the land of the Autariates (another Illyrian tribe) to prevent them from attacking the Macedonian army as it marched (A.1.5.1-3).
- ²⁰ Most scholars would argue that Alexander's force, upon setting out in the spring of 335, was moderate in size. See Fuller, 220; Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 70.
- ²¹ Glaucias must have been close as he turned up the day after Alexander began the siege (Arr.1.5.8).
- ²² Arr.1.6.1-4. It has been conjectured that the Taulantians were so enthralled by the Macedonian drill that they actually edged closer to get a better look, so making Alexander's attack easier. See Fuller, 225; Green, 133.
- ²³ For other examples see Chapter Three and the sieges of the Sogdian Rock, the Rock of Choriènes and Aornus.
- ²⁴ Arr.1.6.8.
- ²⁵ Fuller, 226 note 1.
- ²⁶ Arr.3.17.1.
- ²⁷ Diodorus (17.67) and Curtius (5.3.4–15) mention the action against the Uxii of the plain, while Arrian (3.17) describes operations against the mountain Uxii. Some scholars have argued that there were not actually two distinct incidents and have rejected the vulgate tradition. However, Bosworth's arguments in favour of two seem valid; see *Comm.I*, 321–323.
- ²⁸ Arr.3.18.1; cf. Curt.5.3.16.
- ²⁹ Diod.17.68.2-3; Curt.5.3.17-23; cf. Arr.3.18.3.
- ³⁰ Alexander seems to have covered a distance of 100 stades (12½ miles) during this march; cf. Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 326 on Arr.3.18.5. The sources fail to agree on how quickly Alexander covered this distance. Arrian (3.18.5ff.) claims that it took only one night; cf. Fuller, 232-3; W. Heckel *Athenaeum* 58 (1980), 170; Hammond, *K.C.S.*,

166; Lane Fox, 256. However, Curtius (5.4.22ff.) claims that, through hostile and difficult terrain, it took two nights and a day; cf. Bosworth, *C+E*, 91; Green, 312.

- ³¹ Arr.3.18.6; Curt.5.4.20. In favour of Arrian, see Fuller, Heckel, Hammond and Lane Fox (above, note 30). In favour of Curtius, see Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 327-328; Green, 545 note 9.
- ³² As indeed happens in Curtius 5.4.30.
- ³³ This appears to have been Ptolemy's role in the proceedings. See Bosworth, *Comm.I*, 328. Cf. Green, 312; Lane Fox, 256.
- ³⁴ Fuller, 234.
- ³⁵ Arr.4.2.2.
- ³⁶ Arr.4.2.3-4.
- ³⁷ Arrian (4.3.4) claims that 15,000 men surrendered to Alexander, but we do not hear what happens to them.
- ³⁸ Arr.4.3.5. Arrian notes a difference between the accounts of Aristobulus and Ptolemy: Ptolemy claims that the fort surrendered and that the male inhabitants were distributed amongst Alexander's army.
- ³⁹ Arr.4.3.6. Curtius (7.7.1) adds that the Scythians took up arms because they were wary of Alexander's new city in the area, Alexandria Eschate.
- ⁴⁰ Arr.4.3.6-7. For what happens at Maracanda, see below.
- ⁴¹ Arr.4.4.2-4; Curt.7.8.6. Cf. Arr.1.3.6.
- ⁴² Arr.4.4.2.
- ⁴³ Arr.4.4.4.
- ⁴⁴ Curt.7.9.3, 7.
- ⁴⁵ Arr.4.4.6.
- ⁴⁶ Arr.4.4.6-7; Curt.7.9.10-13. For speculative reconstructions of Alexander's attack see Fuller, 239-240; Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 191.
- ⁴⁷ According to Arrian, 2, 360 men: 800 cavalry, 1,500 infantry and 60 Companions.
- ⁴⁸ Arr.4.5.4-9.

- ⁴⁹ Arr.4.6.1-2; cf.Curt.7.7.31-9.
- ⁵⁰ Arrian (4.6.4) claims that he covered fifteen hundred stades in three days. See Bosworth, *Comm.* II, 35 for a discussion of this point.
- ⁵¹ Arr.4.6.5; cf.Curt.7.9.22.
- ⁵² Curt.7.10.10.
- ⁵³ Bosworth, *Comm.* II, 108-110 has argued that this new threat came from the eastern part of Sogdiana, Alexander already having dealt with the north and west.
- ⁵⁴ Arr.4.16.1-4; cf. Curt.7.10.15.
- ⁵⁵ It is unclear from where Craterus suddenly appeared. Bosworth, *C+E*, 112; *Comm.* II, 117 has argued that he was given command over the four phalanx commanders that were left in Bactria in the spring of 328. Schachermeyr (as cited by Hamilton, 100 with note 16) has added that Craterus might have been returning from operations in Margiane to the west of Bactria.
- ⁵⁶ Arr.4.17.3-4.
- ⁵⁷ This chronology follows Arrian, which the majority of scholars have accepted: Hamilton, Lane Fox, Green, Fuller, Hammond. However, Bosworth, *Comm.*II, 124-127 has noted that Alexander's actions against the Sogdian hill fortresses may have come earlier than Arrian claims.
- ⁵⁸ See Chapter Three for a detailed analysis of his operations against these strongholds.
- ⁵⁹ Arr.4.22.3.

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ALEXANDER AS A LEADER OF MEN

A general's quality is not determined solely by how well he conducts his campaigns and directs his battles. While these elements are important, one should also consider how well a general leads his men, and the relationship that is fostered between a commander and his soldiers. It was in this area that Alexander was most gifted, although even here there are times when he is open to criticism.

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To illustrate his competence in this field there are three areas to consider: his determination to lead by example, his ability to inspire confidence in his men, and his genuine thought and care for his troops. These facets ensured that he fostered a close bond with his men, one that was based upon trust, respect, loyalty and love.

It can be argued that, more than any other general in antiquity or more modern times, Alexander was a soldier-general owing to the way in which he led by personal example.

Hence, for instance, the major battles that Alexander conducted against the Persians saw him leading his troops with the utmost courage and skill from the front.¹ The battle of the River Granicus saw him lead his Companion cavalry across the river to partake in the delicate task of securing a bridgehead against the Persian cavalry on the opposite bank. Indeed, so involved was he in this affair that he nearly lost his life while engaged in a melee against the Persian nobility.² Then, at the battles of Issus and Gaugamela,

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Alexander breached the Persian ranks at the head of his Companions with precision timing, routing those before him and so contributing to the success of his army.³

At sieges too, Alexander was always vigorously involved. For example, this could entail him helping construct the siege works as he did at the siege of Aornus. Here, according to Curtius, he was the first to strip and throw a tree into the ravine which separated him from the stronghold of the enemy: "The shout that followed from the troops revealed their enthusiasm, for none refused a job the king had undertaken before him" (8.11.8). More often, though, Alexander was on hand to assault the besieged and their city. Hence, he played a prominent role in subduing a sally by the defenders at Gaza,⁴ was one of the first over the breached walls of Tyre,⁵ and, heading the attacks against their walls, was instrumental in the capture of two principal Mallian towns.⁶

It was not just in feats of combat that Alexander took the lead; he often suffered the same hardships as his troops. Thus, one can find him conducting the same forced marches as his men, such as the famed pursuit of Darius. Although here the exact distance covered and times involved are open to debate, it appears that Alexander, with a picked body of men, covered something like 200 km in less than a week, in scorching heat over ground that was mostly desert.⁷ This was a tremendous feat and Alexander must be praised, for, in the words of A. F. Wavell, "in a sustained pursuit mobility is dependent mainly on the personal will and determination of the Commander-in-chief, which alone can keep alive the impetus of the troops".⁸

Alexander also shared the fate of his men when dealing with extreme conditions, be it in the frozen mountains of the Hindu Kush, the monsoon rains of India or the searing heat of the Gedrosian desert. The episode in the Gedrosian desert deserves special note. Here Alexander often led the way, and when even his guides lost their bearings, it was he

who scouted ahead and found water and the right course to follow.⁹ He also drank no more than his men, on one occasion refusing water which some soldiers had found and brought to him, pouring it on the ground: "At this action the army was so much heartened that you would have guessed that all had drunk when Alexander had poured away".¹⁰ Of course, as the crossing of the desert proved to be a disaster, these episodes may be mere apologies. However, given the nature of Alexander and the numerous instances of his leading by example, one could believe these claims.

This willingness to lead by personal example brought Alexander close to his men. It also inspired great resolution in them; seeing him in the thick of the action, they were often roused to impress and emulate him. As Arrian (7.28.2) claims, "his skill ... in raising the morale of his troops, filling them with confidence and banishing their fear in danger by his own fearlessness was altogether most admirable".

Alexander fully understood the psychology of war and the importance of confidence; he would have agreed with Napoleon who claimed that in war "the moral is to the physical as three to one".¹¹ Consequently, Alexander went out of his way to ensure that his army had superior morale. Other than inspiring them by leading from the front, he portrayed himself as a majestic, mighty and unbeatable figure. Thus, he would endeavour to dress in a splendid manner to look the part of a puissant king; at the Granicus for instance he was "unmistakable from the splendour of his equipment".¹² Later on in his reign he even portrayed himself as a god to emphasise his power, assuming the guise of Ammon at banquets.¹³

Many of Alexander's actions stressed this powerful image. Along with his bravery in combat he made it clear that no obstacle was too great for him. For instance, he gave short change to the mystery of the Gordian knot and was unperturbed when confronted

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with the reputedly impregnable fortress, Aornus. Indeed on both these occasions he had a profound longing and desire to overcome the problems before him.¹⁴ Added to this, he acted in a high handed and dominant manner when dealing with dignitaries: he constantly degraded Darius in his replies to his correspondence; was ruthless in dealing with Bessus; and yet could be magnanimous to noble foes (such as Porus) and still appear masterful. Such dynamism rubbed off on his army. His men believed that they were led by an almost super-human figure and that defeat was unthinkable; certainly Alexander understood the mentality of his troops.

This is further demonstrated when one looks at the way in which Alexander spoke to his soldiers. He knew how to approach them and what they wanted to hear, and so was able to fill them with confidence when the occasion demanded. At Tyre, for instance, when it looked as though his men were dubious about building the mole across to the city, Alexander responded by claiming that he had had a vision of Heracles inviting him into Tyre.¹⁵ This was to prove a most astute move. At once the superstitious soldiers put aside their fears: if Heracles was indicating that Tyre would fall to them, who were they to question a god, and had they not a great leader to follow in Alexander? Consequently, their confidence began to grow and the construction of the mole was begun in earnest. From then on Alexander was always on hand to inspire and coerce his men with strong words and rewards.¹⁶ In a siege that was to prove protracted and arduous, Alexander's ability to keep his men focused and determined for seven months played a decisive role in gaining victory.

Alexander also inspired his men by delivering jingoistic speeches before his major battles. In meetings with his officers (generally the night before battle), Alexander would draw out points that thoroughly roused them, bringing their self-assurance to the fore.¹⁷

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Hence, prior to Issus, Alexander outlined previous dangers that they had overcome with much aplomb, slandered the enemy, and highlighted the advantages that they possessed.¹⁸ Immediately preceding an engagement, Alexander would also direct announcements to his troops. At Issus he apparently rode in front of his army and “bade them be good men and true, calling aloud with all proper distinctions the names not only of generals but even of commanders of squadrons and companies, as well as any of the mercenaries who were conspicuous for rank or for any brave action”.¹⁹ Those who had been singled out would have striven to live up to his praise, while others would have fought so that they could receive his recognition next time.²⁰

Morale was also kept high by the thought and attention that Alexander showed his troops.

Although he often demanded a great deal from his soldiers he was mindful of the fact that they had to be given time to relax and take their minds off soldiering. Consequently, there are numerous occasions when he allowed his troops to rest and partake in athletic contests and music and literary competitions which he put on (in the early years he even encouraged famous artists from Greece to participate: for example, see Arrian (3.1.4) for the festivals in Egypt).

On occasion, Alexander also attended to the financial concerns of his troops. For example, at Babylon he paid them a gratuity;²¹ at Persepolis he allowed them to loot the wealth of the Persian nobility and so subsidise their payment from the quartermaster; and, towards the end of his reign, conscious that many of his men were in financial difficulties, he paid off all their debts.

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More importantly, Alexander seemed also to appreciate the emotional feelings and needs of his men. For instance, after the siege of Halicarnassus in 334, he allowed recently married Macedonians to go back home to their wives, so that they could spend the winter with them. As Arrian (1.24.2) states, "Alexander gained as much popularity by this act among the Macedonians as by any other".

Perhaps the most poignant glimpses of Alexander's thoughtfulness for his men can be seen in the aftermath of his major battles. Arrian makes it clear that at both the Granicus and Issus Alexander took the time to visit his wounded troops following the engagement (at Issus this was done despite the fact that he was suffering from a wound himself). He would then examine their wounds, taking a personal interest in each man, and encourage them to "recount and boast of their exploits". While he praised and rewarded the living, he would conduct grand funerals for his dead (those who had been first to fall at the Granicus were even honoured by having statues raised to them).²² It was not just his men that Alexander could show special concern for, but their families also. After the Granicus he ordered that the parents and children of those who had fallen were to be free from paying "land taxes and ... all other personal services and property taxes".²³

Collectively, such actions gained Alexander not only the respect and loyalty of his men, but also their love; a claim that not many commanders can make.

PROBLEMS WITH ALEXANDER'S LEADERSHIP

Despite the instances that do Alexander credit, it would be wrong to assume that he always excelled as a leader; there are times during his reign when one can detect a definite tension between himself and his men.

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Relations became strained, for instance, when he adopted a diplomatic stance towards the Persians. Amongst his most prominent “oriental policies” were his use of Persian satraps to look after civil affairs, his selective adoption of Persian dress and court protocol, and his admittance of Persians into his court and army. The Macedonian troops failed to understand that these policies were necessary if Alexander was to maintain order over a vast and diverse empire.²⁴ Instead they viewed Alexander’s favour to the Persians with disdain, anger and fear. However, Alexander did not take the time to reassure his men, and certainly did not try to explain his actions.²⁵ As a result, the close relationship that had developed between commander and soldiery was put under tremendous pressure. Plots against Alexander’s life, such as the one that resulted in the death of Philotas, and the pages’ conspiracy, may have originated in his “orientalism”. Moreover, the “mutiny” at Opis was, in part, a result of the anguish that his men felt when it seemed that he was discharging his loyal Macedonians in favour of Persians.²⁶ While Alexander may have eventually reconciled himself to his troops after the Opis affair, he must be criticised for not trying to put the minds of his men at ease earlier.

Relations were also damaged by Alexander’s desire to go ever forward in search of conquest. By the time that his men reached the Hyphasis River in 326 they were far from their native soil and some had not seen their families and homelands in eight years. When Alexander then asked them to tackle a new kingdom across the river, it must have appeared to many that he had begun to take their loyalty for granted. Unlike earlier occasions, Alexander was not prepared to think of his men’s feelings. They wanted to go home and enjoy the fruits of conquest; Alexander was blinded by a quest for everlasting glory and expected too much of his soldiers. Their refusal to go beyond the Hyphasis is a

significant indicator of the poor relationship that existed between themselves and Alexander towards the end of his reign.

FINAL JUDGEMENT

Despite the tensions, Alexander's men never totally lost their respect, admiration, loyalty or love for him. Two examples will serve to illustrate this; both occur after Alexander had upset his troops through his oriental and expansionist policies.

Firstly, following the serious wound that Alexander suffered while fighting against the Malli in 325, his men displayed their true feelings for him.²⁷ Horrified at the wounding of their king they vented their frustration and fear for his life by massacring the inhabitants of the town that they were besieging.²⁸ Then there was tremendous consternation in the camp, the troops believing that Alexander was dead. Arrian (6.12.1-3) claims that "first lament was raised by the army as a whole ... they were disheartened and could not see who would be the future leader of the army ... and how they would get back safe to their own homes.... Everything seemed to them impracticable and hopeless if they were bereft of Alexander." When the news reached them that Alexander was actually alive, they would not believe it until Alexander had shown himself to them. Then "they shouted, holding their hands to heaven, others to Alexander himself; many even wept ... the whole army clapped their hands again and again.... Then they got near to him on this side and that, touching his hands, knees or clothing."²⁹ These scenes demonstrate the close bond that still existed between Alexander and his men, and how his men loved their king and needed him, despite the fraying tempers of the previous years.

Such exhibitions of anguish and despair are again evident upon the actual death of Alexander. Initially, his troops were devastated by news that he was near to death.

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Suspecting that his demise was being concealed from them, they forced their way into the room where he lay to see him. Full of sorrow, many in tears, they were rewarded by Alexander's efforts to recognise each of them as they filed past his bed.³⁰ Upon news of his death his army was despondent: grief mixed with anxiety over their future and created scenes of bitter lament; his leadership would be sorely missed.³¹

Thus, in the final analysis, Alexander's men still cared deeply for him; this was because they were prepared to remember his admirable leadership traits. More often than not, he was a commander who had a deep affinity with his men, not only because he led as one of them and could inspire them by tapping into their feelings, but also because he often showed that he openly cared for them. For this, and despite his occasional failings, Alexander deserves credit.

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- ¹ Although it should be remembered that this was expected of a commander in the ancient world.
- ² Arr.1.15.8.
- ³ The thigh wound that he received at Issus is clear evidence of his active role in this battle (Arr.2.12.1).
- ⁴ Arr.2.27.1-2. This was despite warnings by a seer that if he became involved he would be injured, as he duly was. Curtius (4.6.11-25) makes it quite clear that Alexander carried on fighting despite his wound.
- ⁵ Arr.2.23.5-6.
- ⁶ Cf. Arr.6.7.4-6; 6.9.
- ⁷ Scholars have put forward various suggestions from 170 miles in 108 hours (Hammond, *K.C.S.*, 172) to 250 miles in less than a week (Hamilton, 91). See also R. D. Milns, *Historia* 15 (1966), 256, challenged by C. Neumann, *Historia* 20 (1971), 196-198. Cf. Arr.3.21.3-10; Curt.5.13.3-13.
- ⁸ A. F. Wavell, *Generals and Generalship*.
- ⁹ Arr.6.26.4-5.
- ¹⁰ Arr.6.26.3.
- ¹¹ As cited by D. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, 155.
- ¹² Arr.1.14.4. His wish to stand out so that his troops could see him prompts parallels with Nelson's similar decision at Trafalgar.
- ¹³ Bosworth, *C+E*, 287.
- ¹⁴ Gordian knot: Arr.2.3.1; Aornus: Arr.4.28.4.
- ¹⁵ Curt.4.2.17; cf. Arr.2.18.1.
- ¹⁶ Arr.2.18.4. This was a common policy; cf. Arr.4.21.3-4; 4.29.7.
- ¹⁷ His words were probably passed on to the rank and file.

- ¹⁸ Arr.2.7.3-9; cf. 3.9.5ff. While it is unlikely that Arrian records precisely what Alexander said at these meetings, he gives a taste of how Alexander would have elevated his men.
- ¹⁹ Arr.2.10.1-2; cf. Curt.3.10.3-10.
- ²⁰ There has been a lot of discussion on the feasibility and authenticity of speeches to soldiers before battle. The most recent item is by M. H. Hansen, *Histos 2* (March 1998, on line), arguing for the impossibility of a set-piece speech to the whole army, when drawn up on the battlefield immediately before the battle. However, while his addresses may not have been extensive, I see no reason to doubt that Alexander could have given brief words of encouragement to troops in his immediate vicinity.
- ²¹ Diod.17.64.6; Curt.5.1.45.
- ²² Cf. Arr.1.16.4-5; 2.12.1.
- ²³ Arr.1.16.5.
- ²⁴ Arrian (7.29.4) claims that his oriental policies were “a matter of policy: by it he hoped to bring the eastern nations to feel that they had a king who was not wholly a foreigner”. Similarly, Plutarch (*Alex.*45.1) believed that if Alexander shared the local habits and customs of the Persians it would be a great step towards “softening men’s hearts”. There is an enormous bibliography on whether Alexander believed in what used to be called the Brotherhood of Man. Most people nowadays would say that as a matter of practical policy he wanted to gain the co-operation of the Persian aristocracy in running the empire, but he did not philosophise about what he was doing.
- ²⁵ A. B. Bosworth, *JHS* 100 (1980), argues that Alexander was sensitive towards his Macedonians, as it was they who always remained on top in the empire, gaining satrapies, Persian wives and so on. However, it was only the higher echelons that gained in this way; the common soldiery obtained none of these benefits and may not have seen them as significant.
- ²⁶ See especially Plutarch (*Alex.*71.1-5) and Arrian (7.8-11).
- ²⁷ On this wound see A. B. Bosworth, *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph*, 53-64 (esp.62-4).
- ²⁸ Arr.6.10.3-4; 6.11.1.
- ²⁹ Arr.6.13.2-3. Curtius (9.4.26ff.) places these events during the campaigns against the Oxydracae.
- ³⁰ Arr.7.26.1; cf. Curt.10.5.1ff.

- ³¹ Curtius (10.5.7ff.) gives an account of the scenes following Alexander's death. However, his description is exaggerated owing to his taste for rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

Alexander was a good general; it would be foolish to deny this. He succeeded to the throne at the age of twenty and by the age of thirty-two he had “conquered the ancient world of his day and set it revolving on a new axis”.¹ Without his competent generalship he would not have been able to achieve this. Indeed, in every area of generalship examined there are numerous examples of Alexander’s keen command talent. However, this does not mean that Alexander should be regarded as a master general, the most gifted commander that the world has seen. It is just as easy to find fault with Alexander’s generalship or to categorise it as ordinary.

An overview of his campaigns shows that Alexander’s intentions were often formed by reaction to the moves of his enemy, and could be determined by irrational desires. This does not suggest a keenly calculating mind (although his aims were generally fulfilled). When Alexander did stretch himself to think in the long term (especially after 327) it is easy to criticise his plans. Moreover, on a grand strategic level, Alexander does not shine as a complex or inventive general, but as a simple and predictable one, who gave little thought to consolidation, preferring instead to always forge ahead with aggression and audacity.

Alexander’s conduct in battle fares better, but again falls short of perfection. At Issus his reliance on a defensive strategy was atypical of his character, but highly commendable. However, this was then undermined when he allowed Darius to outmanoeuvre him. At Gaugamela, while his offensive strategy was again fine, it required no great skill to implement. His tactical conduct during both battles was far more

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impressive, showing ability to counter the moves of his opponent at every turn and organise his troops to win resounding victories. However, it should be noted that at Issus conditions transpired to ensure that no great skill was needed to win the battle, while at Gaugamela a most proficient display was marred by his decision to pursue Darius and leave his army when the battle was still in the balance.

Regarding management of sieges, it is initially easy to praise Alexander. All of his sieges were seen through to their successful conclusion and this was largely thanks to Alexander's boldness and fortitude, coupled with his keen direction of affairs. However, it is again possible to find many instances that cast a less favourable light on Alexander's generalship. He often displayed a distinct lack of command prowess, allowing the enemy to outmanoeuvre him on numerous occasions, could hinder operations through his impatience, and could (in extreme circumstances) lose control of affairs. Consequently, one can disregard the notion that Alexander was a "master of siegecraft".

Highly competent generalship juxtaposed with the occasional lack of judgement and rash decision, best describes Alexander's direction of his small wars. Of positive note, Alexander exhibited great tactical awareness, being able to evaluate military situations with quick proficiency in order to come up with effective moves. His effort to stay one step ahead of the enemy by gathering intelligence is also praiseworthy, and this, together with his ingenuity and reliance on surprise attacks, ensured his many successes. Of less creditable note, Alexander occasionally took risks that failed, as he did not give sufficient thought to his military position. As a result, he often placed himself and his army in very unenviable situations. However, as Alexander always managed to extricate himself with great skill, it is not possible to malign him completely.

CONCLUSION

As a leader of men, Alexander deserves much praise. He led by example, inspired great resolve in his men, and frequently displayed sincere thought and concern for his troops. All of this ensured that he fostered a close bond with his men, making him one of the best-loved generals. However, even here Alexander is open to criticism. His failure to ease the worries of his men as regards his oriental policies ensured that relations became strained, as did his constant search for conquest. Thus, while he may have ultimately retained the affection of his men, it would be wrong to claim that Alexander's leadership was without its flaws.

Collectively the above faults and instances of average generalship undermine the notion that Alexander epitomises great generalship. The aim of this thesis has been to recommend that a more balanced view be taken as regards Alexander's generalship; certainly this can now be adopted.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

¹ J. F. C. Fuller, p.58.

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