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ANCIENT HISTORY

J198

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ALEXANDER THE GREAT 356-323BC SOURCES AND KEY LEARNING

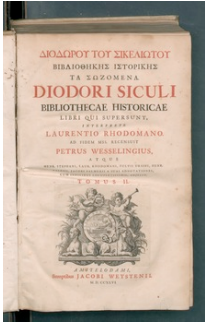
*Peter Wright
Blackpool Sixth*



Alexander the Great, 356 – 323 BC

Key sources:

Source	Period	Aims and agenda	Key problems	Views on Alexander
<p>Plutarch</p> 	Lived AD 46 – AD 120	<p>Wrote the '<i>Parallel Lives</i>' comparing famous Greeks to Romans.</p> <p>Each 'Life' comparison attempted to give a moral lesson.</p> <p>Alexander was compared to Julius Caesar.</p>	<p>Plutarch wrote '<i>biography, not history</i>'.</p> <p>More concerned with character over political and military achievements.</p> <p>Plutarch did not write in great detail – he states that he will '<i>merely summarise</i>' Alexander's life.</p> <p>Plutarch highlighted supernatural events and dreams as omens. Plutarch was a priest at the important Temple of Apollo at Delphi.</p>	Overall, Plutarch is positive about Alexander.
<p>Arrian</p> 	Lived approx. AD 86 – AD 146	<p>Arrian was a Greek and felt that Alexander's achievements had not been recorded well enough by historians.</p> <p>Arrian wanted to preserve and celebrate Alexander.</p> <p>Arrian had political and military experience under the Roman emperor, Hadrian.</p> <p>Factual and chronological style, e.g. in descriptions of battles</p> <p>Interest in strategy and tactics as a military historian</p>	<p>Wrote much later than Alexander's life.</p> <p>Used positive sources of information for his coverage of Alexander (Ptolemy and Aristobulus) which do not survive so we cannot check Arrian is being accurate.</p> <p>Arrian mostly excuses Alexander's more negative deeds.</p> <p>However, Arrian does sometimes criticise Alexander's actions.</p>	Positive about Alexander – viewed him with ' <i>ungrudging admiration</i> '.

<p>Diodorus</p> 		<p>Wrote the 'Library of History' between 60 and 30 BC.</p> <p>Like Plutarch, Diodorus was a moralist – he hoped that readers would learn a lesson from his history.</p>	<p>Diodorus' work is incomplete.</p> <p>Wrote much later than Alexander.</p> <p>Diodorus used an older historian (Ephorus) for his information whose work does not survive.</p>	
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A major problem for any historian of Alexander is that there are **no contemporary sources** (written at the time) that survive.

All of our ancient sources (e.g. Plutarch, Arrian and Diodorus) wrote hundreds of years after Alexander's death.

The information they used was written by people who knew and liked Alexander. Unfortunately, none of this original material has survived. This means that there is no way we can check that our writers are being completely accurate!

It also means that, because our writers were pro-Alexander and their information was also pro-Alexander, Alexander is often shown in an extremely positive light.

Introduction – Greek concern about the expansion of Macedon under Philip II

Demosthenes' 'Philippic' speeches

This extract of Demosthenes' Third Philippic is not spec material. It is included here to support a general introduction lesson regarding Macedon's increasing influence in the Greek world under Philip II (Alexander's father). The Athenian orator, Demosthenes, was attempting to persuade the Athenians that Philip II and the Macedonians were a threat to Athens and the Greek world.

Many speeches, men of Athens, are made in almost every assembly about the hostilities of Philip, hostilities which ever since the treaty of peace he has been committing as well against you as against the rest of the Greeks.

...I say we ought to maintain peace. But if any man supposes this to be a peace, which will enable Philip to master all else and attack you last, he is a madman. Defend yourselves instantly, and I say you will be wise: delay it, and you may wish in vain to do so hereafter.

...That Philip from a mean and humble origin has grown mighty, that the Greeks are jealous and quarreling among themselves, that it was far more wonderful for him to rise from that insignificance, than it would now be, after so many acquisitions, to conquer what is left.

...But I observe that all people, beginning with you, have conceded to him a right, which in former times has been the subject of contest in every Greek war. And what is this? The right of doing what he pleases, openly fleeing and pillaging the Greeks, one after another, attacking and enslaving their cities.

...You were at the head of the Greeks for seventy-three years, the Spartans for twenty-nine; and the Thebans had some power in these latter times. Yet neither you, my Athenians, nor Thebans nor Spartans, were ever allowed by the Greeks to act as you pleased; far otherwise. When you, or rather the Athenians at that time, appeared to be dealing

harshly with certain people, all the rest, even such as had no complaint against Athens, thought proper to side with the injured parties in a war against her.

And yet in regard to Philip and his conduct they feel not this, although he is not only no Greek and no way similar to Greeks, but not even a barbarian of a place honorable to mention; in fact, a vile fellow of Macedon, from which a respectable slave could not be purchased.

...And we the Greek community, seeing and hearing this, instead of sending messages to one another about it and expressing anger, are in such a miserable state, so entrenched in our miserable towns, that to this day we can attempt nothing that interest or necessity requires; we cannot combine, or form any alliance; we look unconcernedly on the man's growing power, each trying to enjoy the interval that another is destroyed in, not caring or striving for the salvation of Greece: for none can be ignorant, that Philip, like some course or attack of fever or other disease, is coming even on those that yet seem very far removed.

Alexander's youth

Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 2–3

On his father's side, Alexander was descended from Heracles through Caranus. On his mother's, he was a descendent of Aeacus (Achilles' grandfather) through Neoptolemus. This is beyond doubt. Philip is said to have been initiated into the mysteries at Samothrace with Olympias, when he was still a young man. He fell in love with her when she was an orphan and proposed marriage to her, after persuading her brother, Arymbas, to consent. The bride, on the night before they slept together in their bedroom, thought that there was a peal of thunder and that a **thunderbolt fell on her womb**. From the blow much fire sprung up, and then it broke into flames that went everywhere, before being extinguished. Philip, at a later time, after his marriage, **dreamt that he was putting a seal on his wife's womb**. In his opinion, the carving on the seal had **the image of a lion**. When the other seers considered the vision, they thought that Philip needed to keep as close an eye as possible on his marriage relations. Aristander of Telmessus said that the woman was pregnant, because a seal is not used on empty things, and that she was carrying a child who was bold in spirit and had a lion-like nature. In addition, **a snake** was seen stretched out next to Olympias' body as she slept. And they say that this, more than anything else, reduced Philip's love towards his wife, and that he no longer slept with his wife, either because he feared some spells and enchantments might be used against him by his wife or because he was avoiding association with her, as she was the partner of a superior being.

...

3

After this vision, Philip sent Chaeron of Megalopolis to Delphi. They say that he brought back an oracle from the god which told him to sacrifice to Zeus Ammon and honour this god very highly. He would, however, **lose the eye** which he had put to the chink in the door when he had seen the god in the form of a snake sharing the bed with his wife. Olympias, as Eratosthenes says, sent Alexander on his expedition, and told him about the secret surrounding his conception, and told him to be proud of his birth. Others say that she rejected the idea and said "Alexander must stop slandering me to Hera."

And so, Alexander was born early in the month of Hecatombaeon, which the Macedonians call Loüs, on the sixth day. This was the day when the **temple of Ephesian Artemis was burnt**. Hegesias the Magneian made a statement about this which would have been able to extinguish the fire with its coldness. For he said that it was not surprising that the temple of Artemis was burned down as the goddess was at work delivering Alexander. All the Magi who were at Ephesus at that time thought that the disaster of the temple was a symptom of another disaster. They ran about, beating their faces and shouting out that on that day a curse and **a great disaster for Asia had been born**. Philip, on the other hand, had just taken Potidaea. Three messages came to him at the same time. The first, that the Illyrians had been conquered in a great battle by Parmenio; the second that his race-horse had won a victory at the Olympic Games, and the third was about the birth of Alexander. He was delighted by these things, as you would expect. The seers raised his spirits even higher still when they said that **a son born at the time of three victories would be unconquerable**.

Key learning:

- Alexander descended from Greek heroes Herakles (through his father) and Achilles (through his mother).
- Alexander's mother came from Epirus... this meant that Alexander was only half-Macedonian.
- Plutarch tells us of many divine signs that signified Alexander's birth... Alexander was destined for greatness.

Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 6–9

6

Philoneicus the Thessalian brought Bucephalas to sell to Philip for 13 talents. They all went down to the plain to inspect the horse, and he appeared to be difficult and completely unmanageable, not allowing anyone to ride him or responding to the voice of any of Philip's men, but rearing at all of them. Philip

was annoyed and ordered them to **take the horse away as it was completely wild and untrained**. Alexander was there and said, "What a horse they are losing when they cannot handle him through lack of skill and patience." At first Philip kept quiet, but when Alexander said the same thing many times and was in great distress, he said, "Do you find fault with your elders because you know more than they do or are better able to handle a horse?" Alexander replied, "I could certainly manage this horse better than anyone else." "And if you don't, what penalty should you pay for your recklessness?" Straightaway Alexander said, "By Zeus, I will pay the price of the horse." This made everybody laugh, and then father and son made an agreement about the penalty. At once Alexander ran up to the horse and, taking the reins, turned him towards the sun, as he had noticed that **the horse was disturbed by seeing his own shadow** falling in front of him and dancing around. Then he calmed the horse a little by doing this and stroked it, and when he saw that it was full of spirit and energy he took off his cloak quietly, leapt up and seated himself safely. Then gently directing the bit with the reins without striking the horse or tearing his mouth, Alexander held the horse back. When he saw that the horse had stopped misbehaving and was eager for a run, he spoke more boldly, kicked with his heels and gave the horse his head. At first those with Philip were terrified and kept quiet. But when Alexander came back proud and overjoyed, everyone there cried out and his father is said to have cried with joy; when the boy had dismounted he kissed him on his head and said, "**My child, you must seek a kingdom equal to yourself; Macedonia is not big enough for you.**"

Key learning:

- Alexander tamed the horse Bucephalas – he realised the horse was scared of his own shadow.
- Philip, Alexander's father, viewed this as an example of Alexander's ambition.

7

[1] Seeing that his son's nature was resolute and that he did not like to be forced to do things but was easily convinced by argument to do the right thing, Philip tried rather to persuade him to order him. [2] Because he did not entirely trust the direction and education of the boy to the teachers of music and other studies, as this was a matter of greater importance. It required, as Sophocles says, "**The rudder's guidance and the bit's restraint**", he sent for the most well-known philosopher, **Aristotle**, and paid him a fee which was noble and appropriate. [3] Sometime before, Philip had destroyed the city of Stageira, of which Aristotle was a citizen; he now repopulated it again and brought back those of the citizens who were in exile or who had been enslaved.

[4] He gave them the sanctuary of the nymphs at Mieza as a school, where to this day the locals point out the stone seats and shady walks of Aristotle. [5] Alexander appears to have studied not only Aristotle's ethical and political philosophy but also his secret and deeper doctrines, which philosophers do not share with many people. [6] For when Alexander had just crossed into Asia and learnt that Aristotle had published an account of these matters in a book, he boldly wrote a letter to him on behalf of philosophy, of which this is a copy: "*Alexander sends greetings to Aristotle. [7] In publishing an account of your private doctrines you have not acted properly; what will distinguish me*

from other men if the private doctrines in which you trained me will be available to everybody? I would rather excel the rest of mankind in my knowledge of what is best than in the extent of my power. Farewell.” ...

8

In my opinion Aristotle was more responsible than anyone else for Alexander’s interest in healing. Not only was Alexander interested in theory but he also offered help to friends when they were ill and he suggested remedies and changes to the way they looked, as can be seen in his letters. He was naturally interested in learning and was a keen reader. He considered and called the *Iliad* a manual of military skill, and he took with him a copy corrected by Aristotle which was called the *Iliad of the casket*; he always **kept it by him under his pillow** together with a dagger, as Onesicritus relates. When he could not get hold of other books on his campaign into Persia, he ordered Harpalus to send some. He received from him the books of Philistus together with many tragedies by Euripides and Sophocles and Aeschylus, and also the dithyrambs of Telestus and Philoxenus. He admired Aristotle from the beginning and loved him not less, as he himself said, than his father, as he gained the gift of life from his father, but from Aristotle he had learnt how to live nobly. In later years he was more suspicious of Aristotle, not that he did him any harm but his friendliness towards him was less warm, which was proof of an estrangement between them. However, his natural interest and enthusiasm for philosophy, which he demonstrated since childhood, did not leave him as he grew older as can be shown by his respect for Anaxarchus and the 50 talents he gave Xenocrates and his close association with Dandamis and Calanus.

Key learning:

- **Philip wanted Alexander to be educated by Aristotle – a famous philosopher.**
- **Aristotle’s teaching gave Alexander a love of learning and knowledge.**
- **Alexander’s favourite book was the Iliad – he even slept with a copy under his pillow.**

9

When Philip was making an expedition against the people of Byzantium, **Alexander, aged 16, was left in charge of affairs in Macedonia** and was keeper of the king’s seal. When the Maedi revolted, he overcame them. After capturing their city he drove out the barbarians and settled a mixed population there and **renamed the city Alexandropolis**. He was present at and **took part in the battle against the Greeks at Chaeroneia**, and it is said that he led the charge against the Sacred Band of the Thebans. Still even in my time an ancient oak tree is pointed out as Alexander’s tree next to the River Cephissus where he pitched his tent at the time of the battle; the general burying place of the Macedonians is close by.

Because of this, as one might expect, **Philip was very fond indeed of his son and was even delighted when he heard the Macedonians calling Alexander their king, and Philip their general. But the disturbances in the royal household, brought about by his marriages and his love affairs, caused problems** in his kingdom very similar to those in the women’s quarters of the palace and resulted in great quarrels **between Alexander and his father**, which the bad temper of Olympias, an envious and sullen woman, made still worse, as she encouraged the young man. **The most obvious quarrel was brought about by Attalus at the time of Philip’s marriage to Cleopatra**; Philip fell in love with a young girl, even though he was too old for her. Attalus was her uncle and when he was drunk at a banquet he called on the Macedonians to ask the gods for a legitimate inheritor of the kingdom from Philip and Cleopatra. Stung by this remark Alexander said, “Do I appear to you to be a bastard, you fool?” And he threw a cup at him. Philip drew his sword and stood up to face Alexander, but fortunately for both of them because of his anger and the wine he tripped and fell over. Alexander insulted him and said, “Look at this man, my friends, who is preparing to cross to Asia from Europe, who comes a cropper crossing from one couch to another.” After this drunken brawl he took Olympias and put her in Epirus, while he spent time amongst the Illyrians.

Meanwhile Demaratus the Corinthian, who was a friend of the family and prepared to speak his mind, went to Philip. After they greeted each other, when Philip asked how the Greeks were agreeing with each other, Demaratus replied, “It is certainly very appropriate, Philip, to be worried about Greece, when you have filled your own house with such strife and difficulties.” Philip realised he was right, and sent for Alexander and brought him home with Demaratus’ help.

Key learning:

- Alexander gained military experience from an early age.
- The Macedonian soldiers viewed Alexander with respect which greatly pleased Philip.
- However, Philip's marriages caused problems – Alexander and Philip argued at Philip's wedding when Alexander reacted angrily to Attalus' suggestion that he was not a legitimate heir to the throne.

The murder of Philip (336 BC)

Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 16.91–16.94

16.91

... [2] In 336 BC, King Philip, chosen as leader by the Greeks, began a war against the Persians and sent Attalus and Parmenio into Asia; he gave them part of his army and told them to free the Greek cities. He was anxious to start the war with the gods' blessing, so he asked the Pythian priestess if he would defeat the king of the Persians. She gave him the following reply: "The bull is garlanded; it has come to an end; there is the one who will make the sacrifice." [3] Philip, although he found this oracle unclear, interpreted it as favourable to himself that the oracle foretold that the Persian would be killed like a sacrificial animal; but in fact the truth was the complete opposite as it meant that Philip was to be killed at a festival during the sacrifices to the gods like a garlanded bull. [4] Yet as he expected the gods to fight on his side he was very happy that Asia would be captured by the Macedonians. So at once he ordered magnificent sacrifices for the gods and arranged the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra; her mother was Olympias. It was her brother, Alexander, King of Epirus that Philip had given Cleopatra to. [5] As he wanted as many of the Greeks as possible to take part in the festival and the worship of the gods, he arranged magnificent musical contests and splendid banquets for his friends and guests. [6] For that reason he sent for his own personal guest-friends from all over Greece, and told his friends to invite as many as possible of their own friends from abroad. He was very keen to show himself as well disposed to the Greeks and to repay the honours shown to him when he received complete control of Greek forces with appropriate entertainment.

16.92

[1] In the end, many hurried to the festival from all over Greece, when the games and the marriage [of Philip's daughter Cleopatra] were celebrated in Aegae in Macedonia. Not only did many famous individuals crown him with gold crowns but the majority of the important cities also did so, including Athens. ...

16.93

[1] The theatre was full when Philip entered wearing a white cloak; his bodyguards had been ordered to accompany him at a distance; he wanted to show everyone that he was protected by the common good will of the Greeks and did not need any other protection. [2] So great was his success at this time; everyone was praising and blessing the king. Then incredible and completely unexpected was the plot against the king which brought about his death. [3] So that my account of these matters may be clear, I will set out the reasons for the plot. Pausanias was a Macedonian by birth who came from the district of Orestis, and he was a bodyguard of the king and a friend because of his beauty. [4] When he saw that another individual called Pausanias was becoming close to the king, he used abusive language against him, saying that he was a hermaphrodite and would readily accept the advances of anyone who approached him. [5] The other Pausanias, unable to put up with this violent abuse, remained silent for a time, but then he shared with one of his friends, Attalus, what he was going to do and brought about the ending of his own life willingly and in an unusual manner. [6] A few days later, when Philip was in a battle with Pleurias, King of the Ilyrians, Pausanias stood in front of the king and took all the blows aimed at him and so died. [7] These events became common talk. Attalus, who was one of the inner circle who had great influence with the king, summoned the other Pausanias to dinner and gave him a great deal of unmixed wine. Then he gave the inebriated Pausanias to the muleteers for violence and drunken excess. [8] When Pausanias sobered up from his heavy drinking, he was very angry at the violence done to him while he was drunk and he made a complaint about Attalus before the king. Philip was angered by the lawlessness of the act, but he did not wish to show his anger both because of his relationship with Attalus and because he needed him at the time. [9] Attalus was the nephew of Cleopatra, the woman who had

just been married by the king, and he had been appointed general of the advance party sent into Asia, as he was a brave man in war. Because of this the king wished to calm Pausanias' justified anger for what he had suffered, so gave him worthy presents and promoted him within his bodyguard.

16.94

[1] Pausanias preserved his anger, just as it had been, and was keen not only to avenge himself on the one who had wronged him but also on the king who had failed to grant him revenge. He was supported in this plan by the sophist Hermocrates; he had been a pupil of this man, and during his studies had asked how a man might become most famous. Hermocrates replied that he might achieve this if he killed the man who had achieved the greatest deeds, as the killer of such a man would be remembered together with the man he killed. [2] Pausanias applied this saying to his personal anger, and, allowing no postponement of his plan because of his sense of being wronged, put his plan into action during this festival in the following manner. [3] He positioned horses by the gates to the city and went to the entrance of the theatre with a Celtic dagger hidden from view. When Philip told those friends who were accompanying him to go into the theatre before he did, the bodyguards kept their distance, then Pausanias, seeing that the king was alone, ran up to him and striking him straight through the ribs left him dead on the ground; then he sprinted for the gates and the horses he had readied for flight. [4] At once some of the bodyguards rushed to the body of the king, while the others poured out in pursuit of the killer; in this group were Leonnatus and Perdiccas and Attalus. Pausanias had a head start and would have leapt onto a horse before they reached him, if he had not caught his boot on a vine and fallen. Because of this, the men with Perdiccas caught up with him as he was getting up from the ground and killed him with their spears.

Key learning:

- **Philip was murdered by one of his guards at the wedding of his daughter - Philip had not correctly understood a prophecy given to him.**
- **Philip was using the wedding of his daughter to show he had complete control over Greece – the Greek cities were invited to send representatives to the wedding.**
- **The guard that murdered Philip, Pausanias, was angry that he had been insulted... Philip had done nothing to punish those involved.**

Alexander's invasion of Persia

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 1.11–16

Alexander's visit to Troy

11

When he [Alexander] had completed these things, he went back to Macedonia. He made the sacrifice to Olympian Zeus which still remained from the time of Archelaus and put on the Olympic Games at Aegae; others say that he held a contest for the Muses. Meanwhile, it was announced that the **statue of Orpheus**, son of Oeagrus the Thracian in Pieria had been **sweating constantly**. Different seers interpreted this in different ways, but Aristander of Telmessus, a seer, encouraged Alexander to be bold. He said that it was clear that there would be a lot of work for the poets of epic and choral songs and writers of odes in composing poetry and singing hymns about Alexander and the actions of Alexander.

At the beginning of spring, he marched to the Hellespont. **He had given control of things in Macedonia and Greece to Antipater**. He himself led the infantry with the lightly armed troops and the archers who were not much over 30,000 in number, and cavalry of over 5,000. His route was past Lake Cercinitis going towards Amphipolis and to the delta of the River Strymon. He crossed the Strymon and passed Mount Pangaeum. He then made his way to Abdera and Maronea, which were Greek cities that had been established by the sea. From there he went to the River Hebrus, and crossed this easily. Then he went through Paetica to the Black River. He crossed this and came to Sestus within twenty days in total after his departure from home. When he came to Elaeus he sacrificed to Protesilaus at his

tomb, because Protesilaus seems to have been the first of the Greeks to disembark in Asia when they came to Troy with Agamemnon. The reasoning behind the sacrifice was that he wanted his landing in Asia to be more fortunate than that of Protesilaus.

Parmenio was appointed to organise the transport of most of the infantry and the cavalry from Sestus to Abydos. They embarked on 160 triremes and many other cargo boats. The most common story holds that Alexander went from Elaeus to the Achaean harbour; he himself steered the admiral's ship. When he was in the middle of the channel of the Hellespont, he sacrificed a bull to Poseidon and the Nereids, and poured a libation from a golden cup into the sea. **They say that he was the first to disembark from the ship onto Asian soil in full armour.** He set up altars to Zeus of Safe Landings, Athena and Heracles, both where he had started from in Europe and in the place where he disembarked in Asia. **He then went on to Troy and sacrificed to Trojan Athena, and dedicated his full suit of armour in the temple, and took down in their place some of the sacred weapons that were preserved from the Trojan War.** They say that the royal guards carried these before him into battle. He then sacrificed to Priam as well on the altar of Zeus of Enclosures (as the story goes), asking that the anger of Priam should not be visited on the race of Neoptolemus, as Alexander himself was descended from him.

12

Menoetius the helmsman crowned Alexander with a golden wreath when he arrived at Troy. Then Chares the Athenian came from Sigeum, along with others both Greeks and locals ... **Some say that Alexander placed a crown on the tomb of Achilles, while Hephaestion crowned the tomb of Patroclus. Alexander, as goes the story, declared Achilles happy because he had Homer to proclaim his fame to future generations.** However, Alexander might well have considered Achilles to be happy not least for this reason, because, setting on one side his good fortune in other respects, there was a significant gap here for **Alexander, and his great deeds were not brought to a wider public in a manner worthy of his achievement, either in history or poetry.** Alexander was not even celebrated in songs in the way that Hiero, Gelo and Thero were, and many others not worthy to be compared with him, so that **Alexander's achievements are less well-known than the very insignificant deeds of ancient times.** For example, the expedition into Asia of the Ten Thousand with Cyrus against King Artaxerxes, the misfortunes of Clearchus and those who were captured with him, and their return to the coast under the leadership of Xenophon are far better known to mankind because of Xenophon's account than Alexander and all that he achieved. Yet Alexander did not campaign in someone else's army, nor did he flee a great king, and only defeat those who tried to prevent his return to the coast. No other single individual, either Greek or barbarian, has achieved such incredible success on so many occasions and to such an overwhelming extent. **For that reason I have myself started writing this history, as I think I'm up to the task of bringing Alexander's deeds to a wider audience.** Whatever my abilities as a writer may be, I do not need to write my name here, for it is not unknown to my contemporaries, nor is my country nor my family, nor the successes that I've had in public life in my own country. But I do state this, that these stories are and have been from my youth, my country and my family and my successes. It is for that reason that I consider myself worthy of the finest writers in the Greek language, since my subject, Alexander, was the finest of warriors. ...

Key learning:

- **After succeeding Philip as king, Alexander's armies invaded Persia. Alexander left Antipater in charge of Greece.**
- **Alexander visited the site of Troy (remember he loved the Iliad) and left offerings at Athena's temple and the tomb of Achilles.**
- **Arrian thought that Alexander's life had not been celebrated enough by historians and poets. Arrian wanted to correct this by writing about Alexander's life and campaigns.**

The Battle of Granicus River, 334 BC

Arrian 13

In the meantime Alexander marched forward to the River Granicus with his army in battle order; he had drawn up his phalanx of hoplites in two lines, with the cavalry on the wings and the baggage animals following behind. Hegelochus led the force given the task of finding out what the enemy were doing, which consisted of some lancers on horseback and about 500 light armed troops. When Alexander was not far from the River Granicus, some scouts

quickly rode up to him and told him that the Persians were drawn up for battle on the far side of the Granicus. At this point, Alexander began to organise his whole army for battle, but **Parmenio** came up to him and said, *“In my opinion, O king, it would be good in this situation to set up camp on the riverbank just as we are. I do not believe that the enemy will dare camp near us as we outnumber them in infantry, and by doing this we will ensure that the army can easily cross the river at dawn; for we will be able to do this before they can get ready for battle. But as things are, I think it would be dangerous to make the attempt, because it is not possible to lead the army through the river in a broad line of battle. You see how there are many deep stretches in the river, and the banks are very high and extremely steep in places; the enemy cavalry drawn up in battle order will be upon us as we come out of the river in marching formation and in no proper order, which puts us in a very weak position. The first defeat would be difficult in the present situation and damaging for the outcome of the whole campaign.”* **Alexander** said, *“I understand what you say, Parmenio. I would be ashamed, if I crossed the Hellespont easily, and then this little stream (he disparaged the Granicus by describing it like this) prevented us from crossing just as we are. I feel not making an immediate assault is not worthy of the glory of the Macedonians nor my own cleverness in dealing with dangers. I think the Persians would be encouraged to believe they were worthy opponents of the Macedonians because they have not suffered anything straightaway to cause them fear.”*

14

Once he had said this, **Alexander sent Parmenio to take control of the left wing**, while he went along his forces to the right. He had already put in position number of commanders. On the right there was **Philotas, son of Parmenio, in charge of the companion cavalry**, the archers and the Agrianian javelin men; next to him was Amyntas, son of Arrabaeus, who was in charge of the lancers, and the Paeonians and the squadron of Socrates; next were the royal guards, under the leadership of Nicanor, son of Parmenio; then the phalanx of Perdiccas, the son of Orontes, and next to that, the troops led by **Coenus**, son of Polemocrates, then those led by Amyntas, son of Andromenes, and finally on the right wing the phalanx led by Philip, son of Amyntas. On the left wing, the Thessalian cavalry were positioned first, under the leadership of Calas, son of Harpalus, and next to them the allied cavalry, commanded by Philip, the son of Menelaus; then Agatho led the Thracian contingent; beyond them were infantry battalions, the phalanx of **Craterus**, than those of Meleager and Philip, right up to the middle of the whole battle line.

The **Persian cavalry numbered about 20,000**, and there were about the same number of foreign mercenary infantry; they were all drawn up for battle stretched out along the banks of the river, the infantry behind the cavalry. The land beyond the riverbank provided a commanding position. Whenever they got a clear sight of Alexander aiming at their left flank (he stood out because of the splendour of his armour and the excited reaction of the men around him), they drew up the squadrons and cavalry in close formation at that point on the bank.

For some time both armies stood on the edge of the river and kept quiet because of their worries about what would soon happen, and there was a profound silence on both sides. The Persians were waiting for the Macedonians to enter the channel, so that they might attack them when they came out. **Alexander leapt up onto his horse and told those in his entourage to be brave and follow him**; he ordered the advanced guard of cavalry and the Paeonians to go first into the river, under the leadership of Amyntas, son of Arrabaeus, together with one contingent of infantry and before them the squadron of Socrates under Ptolemy, son of Philip, which happened to be the leading contingent of the whole cavalry on that particular day. Alexander himself led the right wing when the trumpet sounded, and led his men chanting the battle cry to the God of Battle into the river, continually stretching out his battle line at an angle as the current pulled on them, to ensure both that the Persians did not attack him in his flank as he came out, and that he might engage with them, as far as possible, in proper formation.

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Where those with Amyntas and Socrates first reached the bank, the Persians assailed them with missiles from above; some threw javelins from their high position on the bank into the river, while others, where the ground was more level, went down to meet them as far as the water. There was a great thrusting of cavalry, some trying to get out of the river, while others tried to prevent them; there was a great shower of javelins from the Persians, while the Macedonians were fighting with their spears. **But the Macedonians, as they were greatly outnumbered, began to struggle in the first assault, since they were defending themselves from the river on ground that was not firm and from a lower position, as the Persians held the high bank.** A further significant problem was that the most powerful part of the Persian cavalry had been drawn up at this spot, and the sons of Memnon, and Memnon himself, threw themselves into danger with them. The first of the Macedonians who engaged with the Persians were cut down by them, though they were brave men, apart from those of them who were driven back towards Alexander as he

approached. Alexander was already near, bringing with him the right wing, and he led the attack against the Persians where the whole mass of cavalry and the leaders of the Persians were stationed. Around him a fierce battle was waged; and in the meantime, wave after wave of Macedonian battalions crossed the river, by now with much less difficulty. **The battle was fought on horseback**, but it seemed much more like an infantry battle. Horse struggled with horse and man with man; the Macedonians strove to thrust back the Persians completely from the bank and force them into the plain, while the Persians tried to prevent the Macedonians leaving the river and thrust them back into it. Alexander's men were already beginning to get the upper hand partly through their strength and experience, but particularly because they were fighting with the cornel-wood spears against lighter and shorter weapons.

At this point in the battle Alexander's spear was broken; he asked Aretas, a groom in the royal entourage, for another spear, but his spear was also broken, and he was struggling in the battle, fighting bravely with one half of his broken spear. He showed this to Alexander and told him to ask someone else; the Corinthian Demaratus, one of his companions, gave him his own spear. Alexander took it, and seeing Mithridates, the son-in-law of Darius, riding far in front of the rest at the head of a wedge shaped formation of cavalry, he rode out ahead of his own line and struck Mithridates in the face with his spear and brought him down. **In the meantime, Rhoesaces charged at Alexander and struck Alexander's head with his sword; he broke off part of the helmet, but the helmet deflected the blow.** Alexander struck him in turn, thrusting his lance through his cuirass into his chest. **Spithridates had already raised his sword to strike Alexander from behind, but Cleitus, the son of Dropides, struck him first on the shoulder, and cut off Spithridates' arm together with the sword he was holding.** Meanwhile those of the cavalry who managed to get out of the river bed kept coming to join those around Alexander.

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The Persians were now being struck in their faces by lances from all sides, both men and horses, and they were being pushed back by the cavalry; they were also suffering a great deal at the hands of light armed troops, who had mingled with the cavalry, and they first began to give way at that point where Alexander was thrusting himself into danger in the front line. **But when the Persians' centre had given way, then also both wings of the cavalry were broken, and there was at that point the general flight from the battlefield.** About 1,000 Persian cavalryman perished. There was not a lengthy pursuit, because Alexander turned against the foreign mercenaries; the great mass of these remained where they had first been drawn up, more through surprise at the unexpected turn of events than through a sure reckoning of the reality of the situation. Alexander led his phalanx against them and told the cavalry to fall upon them from all sides, and soon there was a general massacre, not a man escaping unless he hid amongst the dead; about 2,000 were taken prisoner. Many Persian commanders were killed during the battle: Niphates, Petenes, and Spithridates, satrap of Lydia, together with Mithrobuzanes, ruler of the Cappadocians, and Mithridates, the son-in-law of Darius; also Arbupales, son of Darius, son of Artaxerxes, and Pharnaces, who was the brother of the wife of Darius, and also Omares, the commander of the mercenary forces. Arsites fled from the battle to Phrygia, and there he died by his own hand, as the story goes, because the responsibility for the present disaster was judged by the Persians to be his.

As for the Macedonian dead, about 25 of the companions fell in the first attack; there are bronze statues of these men set up at Dium, created by Lysippus on Alexander's instruction, because he was the only sculptor Alexander judged worthy of portraying himself. Of the rest of the cavalry about 60 died, and about 30 of the infantry. Alexander buried these men on the next day with their weapons and other equipment; to their parents and children he gave remission of land tax and all other taxes either on personal possessions or services. **He showed great consideration for those who were wounded**, and went around all of them himself, looking at their wounds and asking how they received them; he gave them the opportunity to say what they had done and to boast about their achievements to him. He also buried the leaders of the Persians and the mercenary Greeks who had marched with the enemy and died; **he bound in chains all those mercenaries he had taken prisoner and sent them to Macedonia to work as slaves**, because, although they were Greek, they had fought for barbarians against Greeks, contrary to the general agreement amongst Greeks. **He also sent to Athens 300 Persian panoplies (shields) as a dedication to Athena** on the Acropolis and he ordered this inscription to be placed on them: *'Alexander the son of Philip and the Greeks apart from the Lacedaemonians took these from the barbarians who live in Asia and set them up here.'*

Key learning:

- **The older and more experienced general, Parmenio, did not think that Alexander should attack the Persians at the river... Alexander ignored this advice.**
- **Alexander was very nearly killed but was saved by a Macedonian called Cleitus.**
- **After the Persians had fled, Alexander attacked the Greek mercenary soldiers who had been fighting with the Persians.**
- **Alexander honoured the dead and sent gifts back to Macedon and to Athens.**

The Gordian Knot (333 BC)

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 2.3

When Alexander came to Gordium, he had a very strong desire to go up to the acropolis, where the palace of Gordius and his son Midas was, to see Gordius' wagon and the knot on the yoke of the wagon. There is a strong tradition amongst the local peoples about that wagon; they claimed that Gordius was one of the ancient Phrygians and a poor man, who had a small plot of land to work and two yokes of oxen, one for the plough and one for his wagon. Once when he was ploughing, an eagle settled on the yoke and stayed sitting there until it was time to free the oxen from the yoke. Gordius was amazed by what he had seen, and went to consult the Telmissian prophets about the omen; for the Telmissians were clever at explaining divine signs and the ability to do so was passed on within families, women and children as well. When he came to one of their villages, Gordius met a young girl drawing water and he told her about what had happened with the eagle; as she happened to be of a prophetic family, she told him to return to the very spot and sacrifice to Zeus the King. He asked her to come with him and direct the sacrifice for him, and he sacrificed just as she instructed him. Then he married the girl and they had a child called Midas. When Midas had grown up to be a handsome and noble man, the Phrygians were troubled with civil disagreements amongst themselves; they were given an oracle which told them that a wagon would bring them a king and that this man would end their civil strife. While they were still holding discussions about this, Midas arrived with his mother and father and stopped at the assembly in the very wagon. The Phrygians interpreted the oracle to mean that this was the man whom the gods had told them would come in a wagon; so they made Midas king, and he brought an end to the civil strife, and he placed his father's wagon on the acropolis as an offering to Zeus the King for sending the eagle.

In addition to this, there was a story about the wagon, that whoever undid the knot of the yoke of the wagon was destined to rule Asia. The knot was made of cornel bark and it was impossible to see where it began or ended. Alexander was not able to discover how to undo the knot, but he did not wish to leave it still fastened, in case this provoked some disturbance amongst the many people there. **Some writers say that he struck the knot with his sword and cut through it and claimed that it was now undone;** however Aristobulus says that **Alexander took the peg from the pole,** which was a bolt driven through the pole all the way, and which held the knot together; he then drew the yoke of the pole. I am not able to say for certain what exactly Alexander did about this knot, but he and his companions certainly returned from the wagon as if the oracle about the untying of the knot had been fulfilled. That very night there was thunder and lightning in the heavens; because of this on the next day Alexander offered sacrifice to the gods that had shown these omens and also how to untie the knot.

Key learning:

- **In Persia there was a town called Gordium. The town was famous for a prophecy that stated that whoever could untie an impossible knot would become the 'King of Asia'.**
- **Alexander either cut the knot with his sword *or* removed the peg that held the knot together.**

The Battle of Issus (333 BC)

Alexander mosaic from Pompeii (House of the Faun)



The Alexander Sarcophagus



There are no inscriptions on the sarcophagus. Though it is called the Alexander Sarcophagus, in fact, it does not belong to Alexander the Great. It is thought to be the sarcophagus of Abdalonymus, the king of Sidon or Mazeus (a Persian governor appointed by Alexander).

Each of its four sides incorporates refined sculptures, and the whole piece is considered to be the most exclusive work of art dating from the Classical Greek period.

The most significant of all scenes depicted shows Alexander the Great likely confronting one of his major rivals, the king of Persia, Darius III. This scene is observed on one of the long sides of the sarcophagus and has been traditionally interpreted to be the battle of Issus of 333 BC, when the Persian troops were heavily defeated.

Alexander is shown wearing a piece of lion skin (link to Heracles and the Nemean lion) on his head and, mounted as he is, the Persian troops are just about to be attacked by his spear. Additionally, next to his ear, a ram horn, the symbol of the Egyptian god Amun is seen. Two more figures of history are supposedly recognizable on the same relief of the battle. The first familiar face seems to be the warrior's close friend Hephaestion, and the second one that of Perdiccas, a notable general of Alexander's army who greatly helped the Macedonian campaign against the Persians.

The second long side of the sarcophagus depicts Alexander hunting some lions along with Darius and the Persians, or maybe, as other accounts suggest, one other figure, that of Abdalonymus. A Phoenician king of Sidon, Abdalonymus is thought to have been appointed a king, by Alexander himself, shortly after the battle of Issus.

The shorter ends of the artefact depict two more scenes. The first is another fight, perhaps that of Gaza. And the second possibly represents Abdalonymus again, who is hunting a panther.

Siege of Tyre (332 BC)

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 2.24

As for the men on the ships, the Phoenicians, who happened to be moored near the harbour which faced towards Egypt, forced their way in and after destroying the booms began wrecking the ships in the harbour; some they rammed while they were at sea, and others they forced onto the shore. At the other harbour which faced towards Sidon there was not even a barrier across the entrance, and the Cyprians sailed in and captured the city on this side straightaway. The majority of the Tyrians, when they saw that the wall had been captured, deserted it and gathered together at what is called the shrine of Agenor, and there they turned to fight the Macedonians. **Alexander fell upon them with his royal guards, and slaughtered some of them fighting there**, then pursued those who fled. There was a great massacre, since those who were coming from the harbour now had control of the city and Coenus' battalion had entered it. **In their anger the Macedonians turned on everything**, annoyed at the time wasted on the siege and also because the Tyrians had captured some of them as they were sailing from Sidon, and marched them up onto the wall where they could be seen from the camp and killed them and hurled them into the sea. **About 8,000 Tyrians** died, and in that attack the Macedonian losses consisted of Admetus who was first to capture the wall, showing himself a brave man, and with him about 20 of the royal guards; in the whole siege about 400 men died.

Many of the Tyrians fled to the sanctuary of Heracles: amongst these were the men of greatest authority and the King Azemilcus, and some envoys from Carthage who had come to their mother city to honour Heracles in accordance with an ancient custom. Alexander granted an amnesty to all of these; **he enslaved the rest, some 30,000 in number, both Tyrians and foreigners**. Alexander offered a sacrifice to Heracles and held a procession for him with all his contingents under arms; his ships also sailed past in honour of Heracles, and Alexander held athletic games and a torch race in the sanctuary as well. He placed the siege engine by which the wall had been breached in the temple, and he also dedicated the Tyrian sacred ship which he had captured during the attack. This is how Tyre was captured in the archonship of Nicetus at Athens in the month Hecatombaeon.

Key learning:

- **Alexander had defeated the Persian King, Darius, at the Battle of Issus, 333 BC.**
- **Alexander needed to attack the island-fortress city of Tyre in order to control the coast line.**
- **The Siege of Tyre last for six months and was very frustrating for the Macedonians. The city was captured with great violence.**

Battle of Gaugamela (331 BC)

Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 31–33

31: Build up to the Battle of Gaugamela

When **Alexander** had brought all the territory from the Greek coast to the Euphrates under his control, he **began to march against Darius, who was coming to face him with a million men**. One of his companions told him (as something very amusing) that the camp followers for fun had divided themselves into two groups and had appointed a leader and general for each side, calling one Alexander and the other Darius; at first they hurled lumps of earth at each other, then fought with their fists, and finally, overexcited by the contest, they went as far as stones and clubs, as there were many men on either side and they did not want to stop. When Alexander heard this, he told the leaders to fight in single combat, and he provided the armour for the leader dubbed 'Alexander', while Philotas did the same for 'Darius'. The whole army watched the spectacle, as they considered that the result would give an indication of what would happen in the future. The battle was a tough one and in the end the one called Alexander was victorious and received as a prize 12 villages and the right to wear Persian dress. This is the story told by Eratosthenes.

There was an eclipse of the moon during September about the time of the beginning of the Mysteries at Athens, and on the 11th night after the eclipse, when the armies were in sight of each other, **Darius kept his forces at arms and went through the ranks by torchlight, but Alexander, while his Macedonian forces were resting, stayed in front of his tent with the seer Aristander, performing secret rites and offering sacrifices to the god Fear**. The older of his companions, amongst them Parmenio, when they saw the whole plain between the River Niphates and the Gordyaeon Mountains bright with the fires lit by the barbarians and heard a confused din of voices like the roar of the open sea, were amazed at the number of the enemy, and told each other that it would be a great and difficult task to win so great a battle in the light of day. They went up to the king when he completed his sacred rites and **tried to persuade him to attack the enemy by night** and in this way they covered up the most terrifying aspect of the coming contest with darkness. Alexander gave a memorable reply, **"I do not steal my victory"**. Some thought this a childish and empty-headed reply, as if he were making light of so great a danger. However, there were others who felt that Alexander showed confidence at a critical moment and that he had weighed up what would happen correctly, as he didn't want to give Darius any reason for confidence in another battle if he were defeated, blaming the night and the darkness as before he blamed mountains and narrow passages and the sea. Alexander knew that Darius would not stop fighting through lack of weapons or men since he had so great an army and so vast an empire, but only when he gave up any hope of success and was convinced by clear-cut and utter defeat.

32

When his companions had left, Alexander is said to have slept in his tent for the remaining part of the night, much more deeply than he usually did; when his commanders came to his tent in the morning they were amazed and gave the order themselves for the soldiers to have breakfast. Then, as the right moment for battle was approaching, **Parmenio went into his tent and standing beside the bed called his name two or three times**. When he had woken him he asked Alexander how he could sleep as if he had just won a victory, when he was about to fight the greatest battle all those he had fought. Alexander replied with a smile, "Why do you say that? Don't you think we have

already won a great victory as we are freed from chasing through this vast expanse of desolate land after Darius as he flees from battle?" Not only before the battle, but also in the very midst of dangers he showed himself great and confident in the calculations he had made.

Key learning:

- **Some of Alexander's generals wanted to launch a night attack – Alexander refused to 'steal a victory'.**
- **Alexander was confident of victory.**

The battle begins

In the battle on the left wing Parmenio was pushed back and was in difficulty, when the Bactrian cavalry fell on the Macedonians violently and with great force; Mazaeus sent some cavalrymen around the edge of the battle to attack those who were protecting the Macedonian baggage. **Then Parmenio, concerned by both these events, sent messengers to Alexander to tell him that the camp and the baggage were lost, unless he sent very quickly some strong assistance from the front line to those at the rear.** At that point, Alexander happened to be giving the signal to advance to those with him; when he heard the message from Parmenio, he said that Parmenio was not thinking straight but had forgotten in his confusion that those who were victorious gained whatever the enemy had in addition to their own, while those who were being defeated must not think about money or about slaves but how best they might fight bravely and die a noble death. Alexander sent this message to Parmenio and then put on his helmet – he had been wearing the rest of his armour since he left his tent; he wore a belted Sicilian tunic, with a double breastplate over it which was part of the spoils captured at the Battle of Issus. His helmet was made of iron, though it gleamed like pure silver, made by Theophilus; there was a neck piece fitted to it, also made of iron, set with precious stones; he had a sword marvellous for its lightness and tempering, a gift from the King of Citium, and he used a sword for the most part in his battles. He wore a cloak more elaborate in its craftsmanship than the rest of his armour; it had been made by Helicon the ancient, and was a mark of respect from the city of Rhodes, which had presented it to him; he also usually wore this in battle. As long as he was riding through his troops, issuing orders or encouraging them, giving instructions or reviewing his men, he used another horse, sparing Boucephalas as he was past his prime; but when he set out for battle, Boucephalas was brought to him, and he mounted him and at once led the attack.

33

On this occasion **he said a great deal to the Thessalians and the other Greeks**; when they urged him to lead them against the barbarians, he took his spear in his left hand and with his right, as Callisthenes says, he appealed to the gods in prayer that if he truly was the son of Zeus they should protect and strengthen the Greeks. Aristander the seer, in a white cloak with a golden garland on his head, rode along pointing to an eagle which hovered above the head of Alexander and then made a straight flight towards the enemy, which brought great encouragement to those who saw it; after encouraging each other, the cavalry raced at full speed towards the enemy, and the infantry phalanx rolled forward like a wave. Before those at the front could engage with the enemy, the barbarians gave ground, and the Greeks came after them, as Alexander drove those who were conquered into the middle of the battlefield where Darius was. He saw him from a distance through the dense ranks of the Royal Squadron, a tall, noble-looking man, travelling in a high chariot, protected by many splendid cavalrymen, drawn up in close order around his chariot and ready to face the enemy. But when they saw Alexander close by, terrible in appearance and driving those who were fleeing towards those who stood their ground, they were terrified and the majority scattered. **The best and most noble of them were slaughtered in front of the king and falling on top of one another hindered the pursuit, entangling both riders and horses.**

But Darius, as all the terrors of the battlefield were before him and he could see the forces assigned to his protection driven back towards him, left his chariot and his weapons, and, they say, mounted a mare which was newly foaled and escaped from the battlefield. For it was not easy to turn his chariot and ride away on it, as the wheels were blocked, entangled with so many dead bodies, and the horses were trapped and hidden by the great number of those who had fallen, and were rearing up and terrifying the charioteer. **It is believed that he would not**

have escaped if some of the cavalrymen of Parmenio had not come to Alexander, asking him to bring help, as there was still a considerable force of the enemy in the field where they were, and they were not yet surrendering. **Many have blamed Parmenio for being sluggish and ineffectual in this battle**, either because old age had already undermined his bravery or, as Callisthenes says, he was depressed and envious of the authority and self-importance of Alexander's power. At this point, the king, although he was annoyed by the summons, did not tell his soldiers the truth, but recalled his forces, on the grounds that it was dark and he wanted to stop the slaughtering. As he rode towards the part of his forces that was in danger, he heard as he was travelling that the enemy had been completely vanquished and was in flight.

Key learning:

- **Alexander's general, Parmenio, asked Alexander for help at the start of the battle.**
- **Darius panicked when he saw his army being defeated and fled the battle. Darius has also fled from the previous battle at Issus.**
- **Parmenio asked Alexander for help a second time. This meant that Darius escaped again.**
- **Plutarch is very critical of Parmenio in this battle.**

Arrian, Anabasis of Alexander 3.9–15 on the Battle of Gaugamela

9

When the Persians' scouts he had captured told Alexander about Darius' preparations for the battle, he stayed where he was when he heard this information from them for four days; he gave his army some time for rest after their journey, and fortified his camp with a ditch and a palisade; he decided to leave behind his baggage animals and all the soldiers who were not fit for combat, while he would march out to battle himself with those who were ready for battle carrying nothing except their weapons. He took his army out of the camp at night and marched them off at about the second watch, as he wanted to engage with the barbarians at dawn. When Darius was informed that Alexander was already approaching, he got his army ready for battle; in just the same way, Alexander was leading his men in battle formation. The armies were about 60 stades¹ apart, but they could not yet see each other; there were hills in front of both armies.

When Alexander had covered about half the distance, and his army was just beginning to come down the hills, he caught sight of the enemy forces and brought his own phalanx to a halt. Once again, he summoned his companions, generals, squadron leaders and the commanders of allied and mercenary forces and held a council of war to discuss whether he should press on towards the enemy from where they were straightaway, or follow Parmenio's advice to set up a camp where they were and reconnoitre the whole area, in case there was something suspicious or a serious obstacle, or ditches anywhere, or stakes concealed in the ground; the organisation of the enemy forces could also be checked more carefully. It was decided to follow Parmenio's advice, and they set up camp where they were, organised ready for the coming battle.

Alexander took with him some light armed troops and the companion cavalry, and made a circuit of the whole area where the purpose of the whole expedition would be decided. When he returned, he summoned again the same leaders, and told them they needed no encouragement from him for the battle ahead; for a long time they had received their encouragement from their acts of bravery and the noble deeds so often accomplished already. However, he thought that they should rouse up the men under their command, each man his own company or squadron, since in the coming battle they would not be fighting over Coele-Syria or Phoenicia or Egypt, as before, but the decision was to be made at that very time about who would control the whole of Asia. There was no necessity for long speeches to encourage towards noble deeds men who possessed the right qualities, but they should urge each man to consider in time of danger his own place in the great scheme of battle; they should be completely silent, when that was called for in the advance, and again should make a great shout, when shouting was called for, and they should make their battle cry as fearful as possible, when the time came for the charge and the battle cry; the leaders should obey orders sharply when they received them, and deliver those orders sharply to their squadrons; and every one of them should remember that the whole enterprise was at risk if they did not attend to their duties, but if they put all their energy into what they were doing, they would together achieve success.

10

Alexander offered these brief words of encouragement, and was in turn encouraged by his commanders to have confidence in them; **he ordered his army to eat and get some rest**. Some authorities say that **Parmenio went to him in his tent, and advised him to attack the Persians at night**, as they would not be expecting this and would not be in battle order and would be in a more anxious frame of mind because of the darkness. But, because others were also listening to this conversation, **Alexander replied that stealing the victory would be shameful, and that Alexander ought to win his battles openly and without trickery**. These noble words of his showed confidence amid dangers rather than arrogance; in my opinion, he accurately estimated what would happen in some such way as this: at night, whether armies have been prepared well or badly for battle, many things happen contrary to expectation, and confound the stronger side, while offering an opportunity for victory to the weaker side against the expectations of both. Alexander took many risks during his campaigns, but he realised that fighting at night was dangerous; in addition, if Darius was again overwhelmed, but in a secret nocturnal attack by the Macedonians, he might deny that he was weaker and led weaker troops, and further if his own forces suffered a setback unexpectedly, all the territory around them was friendly to their enemies who knew the area well, while they did not know the terrain and were surrounded by hostile forces, not the least element of which were the prisoners of war, who would join in the attack against them at night not just if they suffered a defeat, but even if they appeared to be less than completely successful. For these reasons, I praise Alexander, and also for his arrogant preference for open dealings with his enemies.

11

During the night Darius and his army remained drawn up for battle as they had been from the start, because they did not have a secure camp around them and they feared as well a night attack by the enemy. More than anything else, **Persian preparedness for the crisis was undermined by their having stood so long in battle formation and by the fear** which usually is felt before great danger; this was not produced by the immediate crisis of battle, but nagged at the soldiers' morale over a long period of time and dominated their thoughts. ...

[11.3–12 omitted]

13

When the armies were very close to each other, Darius and his immediate entourage were clearly visible; there were the Persians, who had golden apples on their spears, together with Indians, Albanians, the 'transplanted' Carians and the Mardian archers, all drawn opposite Alexander himself and the royal squadron. Alexander kept leading his forces a little to the right, and the Persians mirrored what he was doing, moving their left wing far beyond the edge of Alexander's army. The Scythian cavalry were riding along Alexander's line, and were already engaging those who were drawn up in front of Alexander's men; nonetheless, Alexander still kept leading his men to the right and had almost made his way clear from the area trampled level by the Persians. At that point, Darius was afraid that if the Macedonians got to the ground that had not been levelled, his chariots would be useless, so he ordered those troops drawn up in front of his left-wing to ride around a Macedonian right-wing where Alexander was leading, to prevent them going any further to the right. When this happened, Alexander ordered the mercenary cavalry, led by Menidas, to attack. The Scythian cavalry and those of the Bactrians who were stationed with them charged at them in response, and as there were considerably more of them against a small force, put them to flight. Alexander ordered the mercenaries and the Paeonians under the command of Ariston to charge, and the barbarians gave way. The rest of the Bactrians engaged with the Paeonians and the mercenaries, and turned back to the battle those of their own number who were fleeing, making this a full-scale cavalry battle. Greater numbers of Alexander's men were dying, hard pressed by the number of barbarians and also because the Scythians and their horses were better protected for the fight. Even so, the Macedonians withstood their charges, attacked them strongly, squadron by squadron, and began to break their formation.

In the meantime, the barbarians sent into battle their scythe-bearing chariots towards Alexander himself, in an attempt to disrupt his phalanx. They had no success in this, for as soon as they began to get close, the Agrarians and the javelin throwers led by Balacrus, who were drawn up in front of the cavalry of the companions, hurled their weapons; they grabbed hold of the reins, dragged the men out of the chariots and stood around the horses and struck them. There were a few that got through the Greek battle line, for, as they had been ordered to, the Greeks moved apart at those points where the chariots attacked; this was the reason some got through safely and passed through those they were attacking without doing any damage. The grooms of Alexander's army and the royal guards finished them off.

14

When Darius engaged with the whole of the battle line, Alexander ordered Aretas to attack those of the Persian cavalry who were riding around the right wing to encircle him; he himself led those with him for a short time further to the right, but when the cavalry who had been sent to help against the Persians who were encircling the right wing had broken their frontline to some extent, he turned through the gap and made a wedge formation with the companion cavalry and the part of the main phalanx stationed there, and then led them at a run with a full battle cry straight at Darius himself. For a short time there was hand-to-hand fighting; but when the cavalry around Alexander and Alexander himself pressed strongly on the Persians, thrusting them back and striking their faces with their spears, and the dense Macedonian phalanx, bristling with pikes, had already fully engaged with them, **Darius himself, who had now been terrified for a long time, could only see dreadful things around him and was the first to turn and flee**; those of the Persians who were riding round the right wing were also thrown into abject terror when those with Aretas attacked forcefully. It was at this point that the rout of the Persians became general, and the Macedonians, following after them, began to slaughter those fleeing. But the men with Simmias were no longer able to keep up with Alexander in the pursuit, as they were fighting where they stood, because it was reported that the left wing of the Macedonians was in trouble. When their formation was broken, some of the Indians and Persian cavalry made a dash through the gap as far as the baggage animals of the Macedonians; and the fighting there became desperate. The Persians boldly pressed their attack, most of their opponents being unarmed and not expecting anyone to cut through the double line of the phalanx and attack them. In addition, when the Persians attacked, the foreign prisoners of war joined in the assault upon the Macedonians. However, the forces assigned to support the first phalanx realised what was happening, and changing their formation, just as they had been ordered, fell upon the Persians from the rear, and killed many of them massed around the baggage, though some escaped and fled. The Persians on the right wing had not yet realised that Darius had fled, but had outflanked Alexander's left wing and attacked the troops with Parmenio.

15

At this point in the battle, when the Macedonians were fighting on two fronts for the first time, **Parmenio sent a messenger to Alexander saying that his forces were struggling in the battle and were in need of assistance. When Alexander heard this message, he stopped his pursuit of Darius, and turned with the companion cavalry and charged at the right wing of the barbarians.** First of all, he attacked the enemy cavalry that was fleeing the battlefield, the Parthyaean, some Indians and the Persians who formed the strongest and most numerous part of the enemy army. This turned out to be the bloodiest cavalry encounter in the whole battle. The barbarians were drawn up in depth by squadrons; they turned and engaged at close quarters with Alexander's men; there was no longer any javelin throwing or manoeuvring, as you usually get in cavalry encounters, but everyone strained every sinew to make a breakthrough for himself, as the only way of achieving safety, and they fought without holding back, as if they were no longer fighting for somebody else's victory, but for their very own safety. Here fell about 60 of Alexander's companions, and Hephaestion himself and Coenus and Menidas were wounded. Alexander defeated these enemies as well.

All of those who broke through Alexander's men began to flee as fast as they could; Alexander was now on the point of engaging with the right wing of the enemy. In the meantime, the Thessalian cavalry fought outstandingly and were the equals of Alexander in the engagement. The Persian right-wing was already beginning to flee when Alexander attacked them, so Alexander turned away and started once again his pursuit of Darius; he pursued him as long as it was light. The forces with Parmenio pursued those they had been fighting and followed them. Alexander crossed the River Lycus and set up camp there to allow his men and horses a short rest; Parmenio captured the Persian camp, together with their baggage, elephants and camels.

Alexander allowed the cavalry with him to rest until the middle of the night and then again went on as quickly as he could to Arbela, intending to catch Darius there with his money and other royal equipment. He arrived at Arbela next day, having travelled in pursuit all of 600 stades² after the battle. He did not capture Darius at Arbela, as he had kept fleeing without any rest; but he did capture his treasure and all his equipment, and once again Darius' chariot was captured together with his shield and his bow. **About 100 of Alexander's troops died**, and more than 1,000 horses from wounds and from their suffering during the pursuit; about half of these came from the companion cavalry. **The barbarian dead numbered about 300,000**, but many more than this were captured alive, together with the elephants and all the chariots which had not been destroyed in the battle. Such was the ending of the Battle of

Gaugamela, in the month Pyanepsion when Aristophanes was archon in Athens; Aristander’s prophecy turned out to be true that Alexander’s battle and victory would be in the same month in which the moon suffered an eclipse.

Key learning:

- **Darius kept his army on battle alert all night. Alexander ordered his army to eat and rest.**
- **Parmenio asked Alexander to attack at night but Alexander refused.**
- **Darius was the first to flee during the battle.**
- **Parmenio did need help but Arrian did not criticise this (unlike Plutarch).**

Babylonian Astronomical Diary tablet mentioning the Battle of Gaugamela

The Battle of Gaugamela and Alexander’s entry into Babylon (331 BC)

Observe

3’ “[... lunar] eclipse, in its totality covered. 40th minute of the night [totality? ...] – broken (on the original) – Jupiter set; Saturn [...];
4’ [...] during totality the west wind blew, during clearing the east wind. [...], fourth? ...; during the eclipse, death and plague.”

encamped in front of the king. On the 24th (1 October 331 BC), in the morning, the king of the world [erected his] standard [...].
Opposite each other they fought and a heavy defeat of the troops [of the king he inflicted].
The king, his troops deserted him and to their cities [...]
[to the l]and of the Gutians they fled.

38

The diary consists of two tablets, which do not join. The part on which the historical information is written is the left part of a larger tablet of which at least half is lost. This means that only half or even less of the left part of the tablet is preserved. From the other tablet only the upper half of the obverse is preserved. The text is clearly written and reading does not pose many problems.

The Diary concerns month VI (= Elul = 8th September to 7th October) and month VII (= Tishri = 8th October to 6 November) 331 BC

In this passage **Darius III is referred to as “the king” and Alexander is referred to as “the king of the world”.**

At the beginning of this tablet the astronomical phenomena are recorded. Panic occurred because of the advance of the army of Alexander. This army must have been mentioned in the break. Macedonians are often referred to as “Hanaeans”, a western nomadic tribe and kingdom on the middle Euphrates in the Middle Babylonian period. This belongs to the archaizing tendency of diaries and chronicles in rendering geographic names. The same holds true for “Gutians” (people living to the east of the Tigris) in line 18’.

Reverse

3’	That month (VII = Tishri), from the 1st until [... . On the nth day
4’	Greeks came to Babylon (saying) as follows: “Esagila [will be restored]
5’	and the Babylonians to the treasury of Esagila [their tithe will give.”]
6’	On the 11th day (18 October 331) in Sippar an order of Al[exander to the Babylonians was sent]
7’	[as follow]s: “Into your houses I shall not enter.” On the 13th day (20 October 331) [Greeks entered]
8’	[the Sikil]la gate, the outer gate of Esagila and [they prostrated]
9’	[themselves]. The 14th day (21 October), these Greeks a bull, [...]
10’	[n] short [ribs, n] fatty tissues (of the intestines as sacrifice) [... sacrificed.]
11’	[On the nth day] Alexander, the king of the world, entered Babylon [...]
12’	[... Hor]ses and equipment [...]
13’	[...] and the Babylonians and the people [of the land ...]
14’	[...] a parchment letter to [the Babylonians ...]
15’	[...] as follows: [“...]

Lines 4’–9’

The restorations are speculative, but we know from Arrian (Anab. VII.17.2) that it was Alexander’s plan to rebuild Esagila, and we know that Babylonians did pay tithes to the treasury of Esagila for the specific purpose of removing the debris of Esagila. That high functionaries enter the temple “and prostrate themselves” is a recurring theme in the diaries.

Line 10’

Elsewhere it is recorded that the “rations of the king for the goddess Isshara” contain, among other things, 10 short ribs of the bull and 5 fatty tissues of the sheep.

Key learning:

- This archaeological source seems to back up Arrian and Plutarch’s versions of the Battle of Gaugamela.
- Alexander seems to have been accepted as the legitimate King of Persia.

The Persian Gates (January 330 BC)

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 3.18

Then Alexander sent out with Parmenio the baggage, the Thessalian cavalry, the Greek allies, the foreign mercenaries and all the more heavily armed soldiers, so that he could lead them to Persepolis along the main road. Alexander himself made a forced march along the road through the mountains with the Macedonian infantry and the companion cavalry, plus the light cavalry, the Agrianians and the archers. **But when he came to the Persian Gates, he discovered that Ariobarzanes, the Persian satrap, had built a wall there and had encamped by the wall with about 40,000 infantry and 700 cavalry to stop Alexander passing through.** At that point he pitched camp, and on the next day he drew up his army and marched up to the wall. But it became clear that it would be hard to capture the wall because of the difficult nature of the terrain. As his men were in difficulty since they were under assault from engines of war on higher ground, Alexander went back to his camp. Prisoners told him they could lead him round by another route, so that he could get through the pass, though he found out that the road was rough and narrow. So he left Craterus in the camp with both his own squadron and that commanded by Meleager, together with some archers and about 500 cavalry. He told Craterus that when he learned that Alexander had got right round and was getting close to the Persian camp (the trumpets would signal this clearly), at that point he should attack the wall.

Alexander went on by night and after travelling about 100 stades, he took Perdicas' men, the shield-bearing guards, the lightest armed archers and the Agrianians, together with the royal brigade of the companion cavalry and, in addition, one squadron of cavalry with four companies. With these Alexander wheeled round towards the pass where the prisoners led him. He ordered Amyntas, Philotas and Coenus to lead the rest of the force towards the plain and to make a bridge over the river which they had to cross to get to Persia. He himself continued on a track that was difficult and rough, for the most part at a quick pace. He attacked the first barbarian guards before daylight, and destroyed them, and he did the same to the second group he encountered. The majority of the third group fled, though they did not flee into the camp of Ariobarzanes but into the mountains just as they were, terrified by Alexander's attack. **For this reason he was able to attack the enemy's camp before dawn without his approach being observed.** At the moment he attacked the ditch of their camp, the trumpets signalled to those with Craterus, and Craterus attacked the forward fortification. The enemy, being attacked from all sides, fled without facing the Greeks, but they were completely trapped, with Alexander pressing against them from one direction and Craterus' men running at them from another. Most of them were compelled to turn round and flee back into their fortifications, which were now under the control of the Macedonians. For Alexander expected that this was how things would turn out, and had left Ptolemy there with about 3,000 foot soldiers. So the majority of the barbarians were cut down by the Macedonians in hand-to-hand fighting. Others died in the terrible flight that occurred, hurling themselves over the cliff edge. Ariobarzanes himself managed to flee to the mountains with a few horsemen.

Key learning:

- **After the Battle of Gaugamela, Alexander moved to take the capital of the Persian Empire, Persepolis. This contained a huge treasury.**
- **Alexander was held up in a narrow mountain pass by Persian forces commanded by Ariobarzanes.**
- **After initially being forced back, Alexander split his forces and attacked the Persian positions at night.**

The Burning of Persepolis, 330 BC

Arrian, Anabasis of Alexander 3.18

Alexander then led his men quickly to the river, and there he found the bridge already built over it, so he easily went across with his army. **Then from there at a quick pace he marched to Persepolis, arriving before the guards could plunder the treasury.** He also took the money at Pasargadae in the treasury of Cyrus the First. **He appointed Phraortes, son of Rheomithres, satrap over the Persians.** He burnt down the Persian palace, even though Parmenio advised him to keep it safe. There were many reasons for this but especially because Parmenio thought it was not a good idea for Alexander to destroy what already belonged to him; because of this the men of Asia would not come over to his side since it appeared he had decided not to keep control of Asia, but only to conquer and then depart. But Alexander claimed that he wanted to take vengeance on the Persians for what they did during the invasion of Greece when they razed Athens to the ground and burnt down the temples and for all the other problems they had caused the Greeks. But in my opinion, Alexander did not act sensibly in doing this and what happened was not an effective punishment on those ancient Persians.

Key learning:

- **Arrian claims that Alexander destroyed the palace at Persepolis (against Parmenio's advice) in revenge for what the Persians had done to Greece 150 years earlier. Arrian thought that Alexander 'did not act sensibly'.**

Plutarch, Life of Alexander 38

After that, as he was about to march against Darius, Alexander happened to be taking part in a merry drinking party with his companions; women also came to meet their lovers and shared the wine and partying. The most famous of the women was an Athenian called Thaïs who was the mistress of Ptolemy, who became King of Egypt afterwards. Partly to praise Alexander gracefully and partly to amuse him, as the drinking went on, she began to speak in a way that suited the nature of the country she came from, but was not a suitable thing for her to be saying. She said that she was being paid back that day, for all the hardship caused to her by wandering about Asia following his army, by relaxing luxuriously in this way in the splendid Persian palace. But she said that it would be an even greater pleasure to go for fun to set fire to the house of the Xerxes who had burned Athens. She wanted to light the fire herself with Alexander watching, so that it would be said that the women following Alexander's army had given a greater punishment to the Persians on behalf of Greece than all the famous commanders on sea and land. As soon as she had said this, there was loud clapping, and the people with the king eagerly encouraged him, so that he gave in to their wishes, and jumping to his feet, with a garland on his head and a torch in his hand, he led the way. The party followed and surrounded the palace with shouts and dancing. The rest of the Macedonians who heard about it ran there joyfully with torches because they hoped that burning and destroying the palace was a sign that Alexander wanted to go home and did not plan to live among the barbarians. Some writers say that this is the way the deed was done, but others say it was planned beforehand. However, it is agreed that Alexander quickly thought better of it and ordered the fire to be put out.

Key learning:

- **Unlike Arrian, Plutarch thought that Alexander was drunk when he destroyed the palace.**
- **Plutarch states that Alexander was persuaded by Thaïs – the mistress of Alexander's general, Ptolemy.**
- **The Macedonian soldiers thought that this meant they were finally going home.**
- **According to Plutarch, Alexander regretted his actions.**

Death of Cleitus (328 BC)

Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 50–51

50

Not much later occurred the events which led to the death of Cleitus, which at first glance seems much more savage than the incident involving Philotas; yet if we consider both the reason and the moment when it occurred, we see that it was **not done deliberately** but through some misfortune of the king, whose **anger and drunkenness** provided a pretext for the evil genius of Cleitus. This is how it came about. There came some men bringing Greek fruit from the coast. Alexander admired the ripeness and the beauty of this fruit and sent for Cleitus, as he wished to show him what he had been given and to share it with him. Cleitus happened to be offering sacrifice, but he stopped the rite and came: three of the sheep which had been prepared to sacrifice followed him. When the king learnt this, he spoke with the seers Aristander and Cleomantis the Spartan; when they said that this was a bad sign, he ordered a sacrifice to be made as quickly as possible on Cleitus's behalf. For Alexander himself had seen something strange in his sleep two days before: he dreamt he saw Cleitus sitting with the sons of Parmenio who were dressed in black, and they were all dead. Cleitus didn't complete his sacrifice, but came immediately to dinner, although the king had offered a sacrifice to the Dioscuri. Heavy drinking had already started when some songs were sung, composed by a certain Pranichus (or, as some say, Pierio), intended to shame and ridicule some generals who had recently been defeated by the barbarians. The older men there were annoyed and abused the poet and the singer, but Alexander and those sitting with him enjoyed listening to them and told him to carry on. By this time Cleitus was drunk, and being by nature rough in temper and stubborn he became very angry, saying that it was not right that the Macedonians should be insulted in the presence of barbarians and enemies, when they were better than those who were laughing, even though they had had some bad luck. When Alexander claimed that Cleitus was making excuses for himself when he called cowardice misfortune, Cleitus stood up and said, "*Yet this cowardice of mine has already saved you, son of a God though you are, when you turned your back on the sword of Spithridates, and you have become so powerful through the blood and wounds of Macedonians that you deny Philip was your father and make yourself the son of Ammon.*"

51

Annoyed by this, Alexander said, "You wretch, do you think you can get away with saying that sort of thing about me all the time and splitting the Macedonians into factions?" "*Even now, Alexander, we don't get away with it,*" he said, "*since we pay such a high cost for our suffering, and we call happy those who already have died before they saw Macedonians beaten with Persian sticks or having to ask Persians before we approach our king.*" Cleitus spoke out boldly like this, and those with Alexander were on their feet and abusing him; the older men tried to quiet things down. Alexander turned to Xenodochus of Cardia and Artemius of Colophon, and said, "*Don't the Greeks seem to you to walk amongst the Macedonians like demigods amongst wild beasts?*" Cleitus would not give up, and told Alexander to say whatever he wanted openly, or not to invite to dinner men who were free and who exercised free speech; he should live with barbarians and slaves who would offer obeisance before his Persian belt and his white tunic. Alexander could no longer control his anger, but picked up one of the apples on the table and threw it at Cleitus and began to look for his sword; one of his bodyguards, Aristophanes, took it away before he could find it. The rest of them still around him asked him to stop, but he leapt up and shouted out in Macedonian, calling for his armour bearers (this was a sign of great tumult), and he ordered his trumpeter to send a signal and then struck him with his fists when he did not do so straight away. This man was later given much credit as he was responsible for not disturbing the whole camp. When Cleitus would not give up the quarrel, his friends with difficulty thrust him out of the hall. Cleitus tried to enter again through a different door, declaiming very contemptuously and boldly this line of Euripides from his play *Andromache*: "*Alas, what evil customs reign in Greece!*" Then Alexander, taking a spear from one of his guards, came face-to-face with Cleitus as he drew back the curtain in front of the door, and ran him through. He fell with a groan and a bellow, and at once Alexander's anger vanished. When he returned to his senses and seeing his friends standing around him speechless, he dragged the spear out of the dead body and tried to impale himself in the neck, but was prevented by his bodyguards, who restrained him and carried him by force into his bedroom.

Key learning:

- **Plutarch thought that Cleitus' murder was not Alexander's fault. Alexander and Cleitus were both drunk. Cleitus was 'rough in temper'.**
- **Various omens predicted Cleitus' death e.g. the incomplete sacrifice and the dream.**
- **Cleitus was angry with Alexander and criticised him in public.**
- **Alexander ran Cleitus through with a spear.**

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.8–4.9

8

I will now take this opportunity, even though these events occurred a little later, to explain what happened concerning the death of Cleitus, son of Dropides, and the misfortune which affected Alexander. The Macedonians held one day sacred to Dionysus and Alexander's sacrificed to Dionysus on that day every year. Various authorities say that on this occasion Alexander was neglectful of Dionysus, but did offer sacrifice to the Dioscuri, an idea which came in to his mind for no particular reason. The drinking after the sacrifice went on for a long time (Alexander had begun to organise his drinking parties in a different and somewhat barbarian manner), but during a drinking bout on that occasion there was some talk about the Dioscuri, in particular that Tyndareus' role in fathering them had been taken away and the honour given to Zeus instead. Some of those who were there (the sort of men indeed who have always damaged and will never stop damaging the interests of the kings they serve) by way of flattering Alexander, suggested that Castor and Pollux could not be compared with Alexander and what Alexander had achieved. In their drinking, others even made comparisons with Heracles; they said that envy always prevented the living from receiving the honour they deserved from their contemporaries.

Cleitus had clearly been annoyed for a long time by the way Alexander had changed his behaviour to a manner more appropriate for barbarians and also by the conversations of those who were flattering him; now, stimulated by the wine, he refused to allow them to insult divine beings or to do a favour for Alexander which in reality was no such thing, by belittling the achievements of the ancient heroes. **He said that not even the deeds of Alexander were so great and wonderful as they claimed them to be; he had not achieved by himself, but for the most part they were the achievements of the Macedonians.** What he said really hurt Alexander. **I do not approve of his words** either, as I think it sufficient, at such a drink-sodden party, for each man to stay silent about his own views while avoiding the mistakes made by other flatterers. When some of them, again trying to please Alexander, suggested without any justification that the achievements of Philip were neither great nor wonderful, Cleitus was no longer able to restrain himself, showing respect for what Philip had achieved, but belittling Alexander and all he had done; he was now very drunk and he reproached Alexander a great deal, because after all his life had been saved by Cleitus himself, during the cavalry battle at the Granicus against the Persians. Moreover, he raised his right hand insolently at Alexander and said, *"This is the hand, Alexander, that saved you at that time."* **Alexander could no longer endure Cleitus' drunkenness and insolence**, and leapt up in anger towards him, but was held back by those who were drinking with him. Cleitus did not stop insulting Alexander, and then Alexander shouted out a summons for the royal guard; when no one obeyed him, he said that he was in the same position as Darius, when he was arrested by Bessus and his followers, and all he had left was the title of king. His companions were no longer able to restrain him, and he leapt to his feet; some say that he grabbed a spear from one of his bodyguards and struck Cleitus with this and killed him, while others reported that he used a pike taken from one of the guards. **Aristobulus does not record what the reason was for this drinking bout, but he placed the blame on Cleitus alone**, since when Alexander was angry and leapt up towards him to kill him, he was taken outside through the doors beyond the wall and the ditch of the citadel, where these events were taking place, by Ptolemy, the son of Lagus, one of the bodyguards; he was not able to resist turning back again, and came face-to-face with Alexander, as he was shouting out *"Cleitus"*, and replied, *"Here I am, Alexander"*; he was then struck with a pike and died.

9

For my part, I firmly place the blame on Cleitus for his insolence towards his king; I feel pity for Alexander for his misfortune, because at that time he showed that he was controlled by two vices, anger and drunkenness – a sensible man should not be mastered by either of them. **But I praise Alexander for what happened afterwards, because straightaway he accepted that he had done something terrible.** Some historians claim that Alexander placed the

pike against a wall and tried to throw himself on to it, as it was not right for him to continue living after he had killed his friend under the influence of wine. However, the majority of writers do not say this, but claimed that he went to his bed and lay there mourning, and calling out Cleitus' name and also that of his sister, Lanice, daughter of Dropides, who had nursed him: how nobly he had repaid her nursing when he had grown to manhood, as she had seen her children die fighting on his behalf, and her brother killed by his own hand. He would not stop calling himself the killer of his friends, and he **refrained from drinking and eating for three days** and took no care at all of his physical needs. In this situation, some of the prophets began talking about the anger of Dionysus, because Alexander had not performed the sacrifice to him. Alexander was persuaded with difficulty by his friends to take some food and to look after his bodily needs, to some extent. He performed the sacrifice to Dionysus, since he was not unwilling to believe that this terrible event was due to the anger of a god rather than to his own depravity. I strongly approve of Alexander's behaviour at this time, since he did not offer justification for the crime he committed, nor did he become still worse by defending and championing his mistake, but he accepted that, being just a man, he had done wrong. Some say that **Anaxarchus the sophist was summoned** and came to Alexander to console him; he found him lying on the bed groaning, and said with a laugh, "*Do you not know that the wise men of old placed Justice by the throne of Zeus for this very reason, because **whatever is determined by Zeus, is done with Justice?** In just the same way, the acts of a great king must be considered just, firstly by the king himself, and then by all other men.*" By saying this, he consoled Alexander at that time, but, in my opinion, he caused a great problem for Alexander, far greater than the one he was facing at that time (if in fact he gave this opinion as a philosopher, that there is no need for a king to think seriously about his actions and do what is just, but rather he should consider 'just' whatever a king does in whatever way).

Key learning:

- **Cleitus was angry about Alexander being compared to heroes such as Herakles. Cleitus did not like how Alexander had changed his habits to fit in with the 'barbarians' (orientalism).**
- **Cleitus was drunk and insulted Alexander in public. Alexander killed Cleitus. Arrian places the blame for this on Cleitus.**
- **Alexander regretted his actions and a philosopher called Anaxarchus came to comfort him. Anaxarchus said that Alexander was justified in killing Cleitus. This may have made Alexander more autocratic (acting like a tyrant).**

Callisthenes refusal to perform proskynesis⁴ and Persian influences on Alexander

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.9–4.12

9

... There is a strongly held belief that Alexander wanted people to perform **obeisance** before him, based on the idea that **his father was Zeus Ammon** rather than Philip, and he was already very much taken by the customs of the Persians and the Medes, as shown by his **change of clothing** and the different way he was attended at court. There were **plenty of flatterers** prepared to support this, the most important being two sophists in his entourage, Anaxarchus and Agis of Argos, an epic poet.

10

Callisthenes of Olynthus, a pupil of Aristotle and a man somewhat rough in manner, **did not approve of this idea. I myself agree with him about this**, though, if his remarks have been accurately reported, I do not accept his claim that Alexander and his deeds depended on his skill as a historian, and that he had not come to gain fame from Alexander, but rather to make him famous amongst men. Another claim he made was that Alexander's share in divinity was not dependent on the lies Olympias told about his birth, but rather on what he would record in his history on Alexander's behalf and publish to mankind. ...

... The following story is told about how he **opposed Alexander over obeisance**. Alexander had agreed with the sophists and the most distinguished Persians and the Medes in his entourage that they would bring up this issue at a

drinking bout. **Anaxarchus** started the ball rolling by saying that it would be much more just to consider Alexander a god than Dionysus and Heracles, not because of the scale and nature of what Alexander had done, but because Dionysus was a Theban and had no relationship to the Macedonians, and Heracles was from Argos, with no link to Macedon except for the family of Alexander; for Alexander was descended from Heracles. **Macedonians would more properly offer divine honours to their own king.** For there was no question that when Alexander departed this life the Macedonians would honour him as a god; it would be so much more just to **honour him in this way while he was alive** than after his death, when he would gain nothing from it.

11

When Anaxarchus had said something along these lines, those who were in on the plot commended what he had said and were in fact willing to begin doing obeisance, but **the majority of Macedonians were annoyed** by his words and kept quiet, though Callisthenes responded, *"In my opinion, Alexander is worthy of all honours appropriate for men; but men have marked out which honours are suitable for men and which for gods in many ways. For example, we build temples and set up statues and sanctuaries for the gods and offer sacrifices to them and libations, and hymns are composed for the gods, while panegyrics are written for men; not the least significant difference concerns the custom of obeisance. Men receive a kiss when someone greets them, but the gods, because I suppose they sit above us and it is not right to touch them, are honoured for this reason with obeisance; dances are also held for the gods and paeans are sung in their praise. There is nothing wonderful about this, since even among the gods some honours are prescribed for one but not another, and, by Zeus, there are further honours prescribed for heroes, which are different from those offered to the gods. So it is not right to throw all of this into confusion and make men look more important than they are through excess of honours, while casting the gods down, in so far as we have the power to do so, to a lower level not fitting for them, by giving equal honours to men. If some ordinary person were to take upon himself royal honours through an unjust vote or election, Alexander would not put up with it. The gods would have much better reason to be angry with all those men who took on divine honours or allowed others to bestow them. Alexander both is and appears to be the bravest of brave men, and the most kingly of kings, and the best possible commander of all commanders. You, Anaxarchus, should have offered an explanation like this, if anyone should, and should have prevented those who argued against you, because you spend time with Alexander on account of your wisdom and the training you offer. It was not appropriate for you to start a discussion of this sort, as you should remember that you are not advising or attending the court of Cambyses or Xerxes, but the son of Philip, descended from Heracles and Aeacus, whose ancestors came from Argos to Macedonia and have continued ruling the Macedonians not through force but through custom. **Divine honours were not offered by the Greeks even to Heracles himself, while he was still alive,** and in fact not even after his death until the God in Delphi declared that he should be honoured like a god. If we must think in a barbarian way, because we are having this conversation in a barbarian country, I ask you, Alexander, to remember Greece, for whom you made this whole campaign, to bring Asia under Greek control. And consider this, **when you return home, will you compel the Greeks, who are the most free men there are, to perform obeisance before you, or will you leave the Greeks alone, and only force this disgrace on the Macedonians;** or will you make a broad distinction regarding the honours due to you, that you will be honoured by Greeks and Macedonians in a Greek and human way, and by barbarians alone in a barbarian way? But if it is said that Cyrus, the son of Cambyses, was the first to accept obeisance and that this humiliating practice has become a custom for the Persians and the Medes because of him, you should remember that the Scythians, poor men but independent, brought Cyrus back down to earth, and later Darius as well, and the Athenians and the Spartans did the same for Xerxes, while Clearchus and Xenophon together with their Ten Thousand brought Artaxerxes to his senses, and then Alexander, without receiving the obeisance, did the same for Darius."*

12

By saying this, **Callisthenes annoyed Alexander a great deal, but the Macedonians tended to agree with him.** Alexander noted their reaction, so he told the Macedonians not to concern themselves any further about obeisance. When silence fell, the oldest of the Persians stood up and in turn offered obeisance before Alexander. When one of the Persians seemed to make his obeisance in an awkward fashion, Leonnatus, one of the companions, poked fun at his abject posture. Alexander was angry with him at the time, though this did not last for long. The following story is also told. Alexander sent round a golden loving cup, first to those with whom there had been an agreement about obeisance; the first to receive it drank from the cup and then **stood up and performed obeisance and was kissed by Alexander,** and this was done in turn by all of them. When it was Callisthenes' turn to drink, he stood up and drank

from the cup and approached Alexander, wanting to kiss him without performing obeisance. At the time, Alexander happened to be speaking to Hephaestion, and so did not notice whether Callisthenes had performed the ceremony of obeisance. As Callisthenes approached Alexander to kiss him, Demetrius, the son of Pythonax, one of the companions, told Alexander that he had not performed obeisance. **Alexander did not allow him to embrace him**, and Callisthenes said *"I will leave you, deprived of one kiss."* ...

Key learning:

- **Anaxarchus made a speech stating that obeisance should be performed to Alexander as a god. Alexander would, no doubt, be worshipped after his death, so why not worship him now?**
- **Callisthenes argued that this was wrong and that not even great heroes such as Herakles had received obeisance.**
- **The Macedonians agreed with Callisthenes and Alexander abandoned his policy to force Greeks and Macedonians to perform obeisance.**

Silver tetradrachm minted by Lysimachus showing Alexander with horns Zeus Ammon and Athena



(obverse) Head of Alexander the Great, diademed and wearing a ram's horn; dotted border.

(reverse) Athena Nikephoros (Athena of victory) seated; Nike in outstretched right hand crowning, inscription with wreath; spear resting behind; left arm resting on shield; to left, cult image; at bottom, crescent. Inscription ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΛΥΣΙΜΑΧΟΥ = of King Lysimachus

Meaning = This coin depicts Alexander as divine and victorious. The conquests of Alexander the Great changed the world for ever. Following Alexander's death in 323 BC his generals divided his vast empire between themselves and began to squabble over his legacy. In the period of turmoil that followed, the image of the deified Alexander played an important part, as his successors tried to cast themselves as his heir. Various monarchs used coin designs in this context.

Silver tetradrachm minted by Ptolemy I showing Alexander with elephant scalp headdress



(obverse) Head of Alexander the Great, wearing elephant's scalp and aegis, with horn of Zeus Ammon, dotted border.

(reverse) Athena Alkidemos (Athena defender of the people) standing, holding shield and spear, right; front, eagle, right; dotted border. Inscription ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ = Of Alexander

Meaning = Alexander is victorious – the elephant links to the defeat of Porus, Alexander is divine - the ram's horn and eagle link to Zeus as does the aegis which was a protective goatskin cloak worn by Zeus.

The siege of the Aornus Rock (326 BC)

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 4.28–30

28

When those in Bazira found out about this, they abandoned hope about their own situation; they left the city about the middle of the night and fled to the rock. The rest of the barbarians were doing the same thing: everyone abandoned their cities and began to flee to the rock called Aornus which is in their territory. **For this rock is a significant feature in this area, and the story goes that not even Heracles the son of Zeus was able to capture it.** Whether in fact the Theban Heracles made it as far as India, I am not able to confirm with any certainty; I rather think that he did not, for men often exaggerate the difficulty of all difficult tasks by claiming that not even Heracles was able to complete them. With regard to this rock, I think that Heracles is mentioned to add to the glamour of the story. It is said that the rock is about 200 stades^s around the base, and about 11 stades^s in height at its lowest point; and there is only one way up, cut by hand from the rock and difficult. At the top there is plenty of clean water, as a spring comes up on the summit from which drinkable water flows; there is woodland and good land for planting crops, enough for a thousand men to work.

When **Alexander** heard about this, he was overcome with a **strong desire to capture this mountain** as well, especially because of the story about Heracles and the rock. He made Ora and Massaga forts to control the territory, and fortified the city of Bazira. The forces with Hephaestion and Perdikkas fortified another city called Orobatis for him, and they left a garrison there and made their way to the River Indus. When they arrived there, they at once started to build a bridge across the river as Alexander had told them to. Alexander appointed Nicanor, one of the companions, satrap over the land on the southern side of the Indus. Then he led his forces towards the Indus, and he made terms with Peuceolaotis, a city not far from the river; he left a garrison of Macedonians there, under the command of Philip. Alexander then subdued other small settlements along the Indus, accompanied by Cophaeus and Assagetes who were the rulers of the area. When he reached the city of Embolima, which is situated close to the Aornus Rock, he left Craterus there with part of the army. He told him to collect as much corn as possible into the city together with everything else needed for a long stay so that the Macedonians, using the city as their base, could wear down those who were holding the rock by a long siege, if it were not captured by direct assault. Alexander took the archers and the Agrianians and Coenus' troops; he selected both those with the lightest and heaviest armour from the rest of the phalanx. Then with these forces and about 200 of the companion cavalry and 100 horse-bowmen he made for the rock. On this day he set up camp where he thought best, and then on the next day he went forward a little towards the rock and set up camp again.

29

In the meantime some local men came to him, and surrendered, promising to lead him to where the rock could most easily be attacked; they claimed it would not be difficult for him to capture the place. Alexander sent with them his bodyguard Ptolemy, the son of Lagus, who was put in charge of the Agrianians and the other light-armed troops and men selected from the shield-bearing guards. He ordered Ptolemy, when his men had captured the position, to secure it with a strong garrison and to signal to him that the position was under control. Ptolemy went on a track that was rough and hard to travel, but he managed to secure the position without being seen by the barbarians. When he had fortified the position with a stockade and ditch all round, he set up a beacon on the mountain from where it was likely to be visible to Alexander. The flame was seen at once, and the next day Alexander led his army out. As the barbarians defended themselves effectively, he [Alexander] achieved nothing further because of the difficult terrain. When the barbarians realised that Alexander did not achieve anything in his assault, they turned back and attacked Ptolemy's men. There was a fierce battle between them and the Macedonians: the Indians tried to destroy the stockade, while Ptolemy worked hard to guard his position. The barbarians got the worst of it in the close fighting, and as night came on they retreated.

Alexander selected one of the Indian deserters who was completely trustworthy and knew the area well, and sent him to Ptolemy with a letter during the night. In this he told Ptolemy that as soon as he attacked the rock from below, he should come down from the mountain to attack the barbarians and not try to keep his fortified position under guard; in this way the Indians, under attack from both sides, would be confused about what to do. At dawn Alexander set off from his camp and led his army to the track by which Ptolemy had gone up without being seen. His intention was that if he forced his way up by this route and joined his forces with Ptolemy's men, the task of capturing the rock would no longer be difficult. And that is how things turned out.

Until the middle of the day there was a fierce battle between the Indians and the Macedonians: Alexander's men were striving to reach the track, while the Indians were firing their weapons down on those who were attempting to ascend. But the Macedonians did not cease their efforts, pressing on one after another, while those who had been at the front rested; with great difficulty in the afternoon they gained control of the pass and joined forces with Ptolemy's men. Now that the whole army was brought together they pressed on again against the rock itself. But they were still not able to make their way up the rock, and on that day this was the end of the fighting.

Just before dawn Alexander ordered each of his men to cut 100 stakes; once this had been done, he piled up a mound of earth against the rock starting from the hilltop where he had set up camp. His plan was from there to fire arrows and missiles from machines against the rock's defenders. All those in his army joined with him in piling up the mound. Alexander himself watched his men, and praised those who completed their task with enthusiasm, but punished those who failed to do so in such an urgent situation.

30

On the first day his army piled up a mound about a stade⁷ in length. On the next day a combination of slingers firing from that part of the mound that was already completed and machines hurling missiles drove back the attacks of the Indians against those who were continuing to extend the mound. This work continued for three days without a

break, and on the fourth day a few Macedonians forced their way up and seized a small hill which was about the same height as the rock. Alexander, without taking a break from the task, pressed on with the mound, as he wanted to join his mound to the hill which the Macedonians already held for him. **The Indians were frightened by the extraordinary daring of the Macedonians who had forced their way onto the hill.** As they saw that the mound was now linked to it, they ceased from fighting any longer and sent heralds to Alexander, claiming they were prepared to surrender the rock if he would make a truce. But they had decided to spend the day delaying the agreement of the truce and then during the night to scatter each to their own homes. When Alexander realised this, he allowed them time to start their withdrawal and to remove the guard around the rock. He waited until they began to retreat, but then taking about 700 of the bodyguards and shield-bearing infantry he was himself the first to climb up to the part of the rock the Indians had deserted. The Macedonians came up after him at various points, pulling each other up where necessary, and then at an agreed signal they turned on the departing barbarians and killed many of them while they fled. Others retreated in blind panic and died by hurling themselves off the cliffs. **In this way Alexander gained possession of the rock which Heracles had not been able to conquer.** He performed a sacrifice on the rock, then organised a garrison, putting Sisicottus in charge of it, a man who had deserted from the Indians to join Bessus in Bactria, and then, when Alexander gained control of the country, he had joined his army and been completely trustworthy.

Alexander then set out from the rock and attacked the land of the Assaceni. For he was told that the brother of Assacenus had fled into the mountains in that area with his elephants and many of the local barbarians. When he came to the city of Dyrta he did not encounter any of those who lived there in the territory near the city. The next day he sent out Nearchus and Antiochus who were in charge of the shield-bearing guards. He put Nearchus in charge of the light armed Agrianians and Antiochus in charge of his own contingent and two others as well. They were sent out to check out the surrounding area and to see if they could catch some of the barbarians to find out about the state of local area. Alexander was particularly anxious to find out about elephants. He set off himself for the River Indus, and the army went ahead to make a road for him, as this part of the country was otherwise difficult to cross. There he captured a few barbarians, from whom he learned that the Indians of that area had fled to Abisares, but that they had left their elephants to feed by the River Indus. He told these men to lead him to where these elephants were. Many Indians are hunters of elephants, and Alexander kept them with him and treated them with considerable respect; then he hunted the elephants with them. Two of the elephants died in the hunt after hurling themselves over a cliff, but the rest were captured and were drawn up with the army under the control of drivers. When they came across some high-quality timber by the river side, this was cut down for Alexander by the army, and ships were made, which were then taken down to the bridge over the River Indus; Hephaestion and Perdikkas had built this some time before on Alexander's instructions.

Key learning:

- **The Rock of Aornos was a fortress that the Greek hero Herakles had failed to take.**
- **Alexander wanted to capture the site so he could claim to have out-done Herakles.**

Revolts & the mass marriages at Susa (324 BC)

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.4

At this point Alexander sent Atropates to his satrapy after he reached Susa. He arrested and killed Abulites and his son Ozathres, because they had administered the Susians badly. **Many offences had been committed by those who were in charge** of the countries which Alexander had conquered. These related to temples, graves and the subjects themselves, because the king had been undertaking the expedition to India, and it did not seem credible that he would return from such a great number of nations and elephants! **They thought that he would be killed beyond the Indus**, Hydaspes, Acesines and Hyphasis. The disasters which happened to him in Gedrosia did yet more to encourage the satraps to despise any idea of his return home. Not only this, but Alexander is said to have become quicker in giving credence to accusations at this time, as if they were to be believed all the time, and to give great

punishments even to those who were convicted of small offences, because he thought they might carry out great offences based on the same thoughts.

Key learning:

- **Alexander had left important Persians in charge of cities he had conquered while he invaded India.**
- **Many of these Persians did not think that Alexander would survive so they had abused their positions of power.**

He also held weddings at Susa for himself and his companions. He himself married **Barsine, the eldest of the daughters of Darius**, and another woman in addition to her, **Parysatis, the youngest of the daughters of Ochus**, according to Aristobulus. **He was already married to Roxanne**, the daughter of Oxyartes from Bactria. To Hephaestion he gave Drypetis, another daughter of Darius and the sister of his own wife. For he wanted Hephaestion's children to be cousins to his own. To Craterus he gave Amastrine the daughter of Oxyartes, Darius' brother; to Perdiccas, a daughter of Atropates, satrap of Media. Ptolemy, his bodyguard, and Eumenes, the royal secretary, married the daughters of Artabazus, Artacama and Artonis respectively. Nearchus married the daughter of Barsine and Mentor; Seleucus the daughter of Spitamenes from Bactria, and **likewise the other Companions – about eighty in all – married the most noble daughters of the Persians and the Medes**. These marriages were conducted according to **Persian custom**. Thrones were put out for the bridegrooms in turn, and after they had drunk, the brides came and sat next to their bridegroom. The bridegrooms took them with their right hand and kissed them. The king led the way and did this first. All of these marriages took place at the same time. These particular actions more than any other showed Alexander to be one of the people and a lover of his companions. After they had received their brides, each bridegroom led her home. **Alexander gave them all dowries**. He ordered all the Macedonians who had married Asian women to register their names; there were more than 10,000. Alexander gave these people gifts on their weddings as well.

Key learning:

- **Alexander married two Persian wives – one was the daughter of Darius and the other was the daughter of Darius' rival, Ochus.**
- **Alexander also ensured that his trusted generals, companion cavalry and 10,000 soldiers also took Persian wives.**

Death of Hephaestion (324 BC)

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.14

At Ecbatana, Alexander offered a sacrifice, just as he was accustomed to do after any success, and held athletic and musical contests, and there were also drinking bouts with his companions. At this time, Hephaestion fell ill; on the seventh day of his illness, they say that the stadium was full, as there was an athletic competition for boys on that day; when Alexander was told that Hephaestion was in a bad way, he quickly left to go to him, but he was no longer living by the time he arrived. **Writers have given very different accounts of Alexander's grieving; they all agreed that his grief was very great**, but there are different versions of what he actually did, dependent on the goodwill or envy each felt towards Hephaestion or Alexander himself. For those who recorded his reckless excesses seem to me to consider that whatever Alexander did or said in his great grief for the friend closest to him of all men either adds to his glory or bring shame upon him, on the grounds that such behaviour was not fitting for a king or for Alexander.

Some say that for the greater part of that day he **flung himself down beside the body** of his friend groaning and did not wish to be separated from him, until he was forcibly removed by his companions; in other accounts, he lay

beside the body all day and all night; other writers say he **hung the doctor Glaucias**, either because of the wrong drug being given or because he saw Hephaestion drinking heavily and allowed him to continue. I think it is likely that **Alexander cut his hair** over the body, especially because he had been eager to emulate Achilles ever since boyhood. Some accounts add that Alexander himself for some time **drove the chariot on which the body was carried**, though this does not seem credible to me. There are others who write that he **ordered the Temple of Asclepius (Greek god of healing) at Ecbatana to be utterly destroyed**, a barbarian act in no way appropriate for Alexander, but more in keeping with the arrogance of Xerxes in divine matters and the chains which it is said he hurled into the Hellespont to punish it. There is another story written in the history which seems to me quite plausible, that, as Alexander was riding to Babylon, he was met on the road by many embassies from Greece, amongst them some from Epidaurus; they got from Alexander what they asked for and he gave to them an offering to take to Asclepius, saying, "*Asclepius has not treated me fairly, as he did not save for me the companion who was as dear to me as my own life.*" According to most historians, **Alexander ordered that Hephaestion should always receive rites appropriate for a hero**, and some say that he sent to the oracle of Ammon to ask the god whether he allowed Hephaestion to receive sacrifices as a god, but that permission was not granted.

These details can be found in all the accounts, that **Alexander did not taste food** or take any care of his body for two days after the death of Hephaestion, but lay groaning or in a grief-filled silence. He ordered a **funeral pyre costing 10,000 talents** to be prepared for him in Babylon, and some claim the cost was even greater. It was announced that there should be public mourning throughout the whole barbarian land. Many of Alexander's companions out of respect for him dedicated themselves and their weapons to Hephaestion. Eumenes was the first to do this, a man who had recently quarrelled with Hephaestion; he did this so that Alexander would not think he was happy at the death of Hephaestion. Alexander never appointed anyone else in place of Hephaestion as commander of the **companion cavalry**, so that the name of Hephaestion might continue to be attached to the battalion; it was still **called Hephaestion's** and the standard made on his instructions was still carried before it. Alexander intended to hold athletic and musical contests, which were to be much more remarkable in the number of contestants and in the money lavished on them than any previous contests; he prepares 3,000 competitors in total. A little later, it is said, these men competed at the tomb of Alexander.

Key learning:

- **Alexander was devastated when his close friend Hephaestion died unexpectedly.**
- **Arrian details some of the ways that Alexander mourned Hephaestion's death.**

Death of Alexander (323 BC)

Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 73–77

73

As Alexander was travelling to Babylon, Nearchus came to accompany him, after he had sailed to the Euphrates through the great sea, and he told the king that some Chaldaeans had met him who advised that Alexander should keep away from Babylon. Alexander was not concerned about this, and carried on his way; when he came to the walls of Babylon, he saw **many ravens flying around and striking each other**, some of which fell at his feet. Later he was informed that Apollodorus, the general in charge of Babylon, performed the sacrifice to find out about the king's future, and so he summoned Pythagoras the seer. Pythagoras did not deny that this was happening, so Alexander asked him what the sacrifice showed. When he was told that the **liver of the victim had no lobes**, he said, "*Alas, this is a powerful sign.*" He did not harm Pythagoras. He was annoyed that he had not followed Nearchus' advice, and he spent most of his time in his tent outside Babylon or sailing on the Euphrates. **Many omens troubled him**: for example, a **tame ass set upon the largest and most noble lion** in his collection and kicked it to death. On another

occasion, when he stripped for exercise and was playing ball, when it was necessary to get dressed again, the young men who were playing ball with him **saw a man sitting silently on his throne, wearing his crown and his royal robes**. When this man was asked who he was, for a long time he did not speak. When he came to his senses, he said that he was called Dionysius, and was born in Messenia; he had been brought to Babylon from the coast because of some accusation made against him, and had been a long time in chains; just recently the god Serapis had visited him and loosened his chains, and sent him to this place, telling him to take the robe and the crown and sit silently on the throne. 74

When he heard this, Alexander did away with the man, just as the seers told him to; **but he became low-spirited and now had little expectation of divine support and was suspicious of his friends. He was fearful of Antipater and his sons**; one of them, Iolas, was his chief cup-bearer, while Cassander had just recently arrived in Babylon. Cassander had seen some barbarians performing obeisance, and as he had been brought up as a Greek and had never seen such a thing before, he laughed out loud rather rashly. Alexander was furious, and grabbing him by his hair with both hands he banged his head against the wall. On another occasion, when Cassander wanted to say something against those who were making accusations against Antipater, Alexander stopped him and said, *“What do you mean? Would men come on such a long journey if they did not have real grievances, but were bringing false charges?”* When Cassander said that this very thing was a sign that the charges were false, because they were a long way from any proof, Alexander burst out laughing and replied, *“These are the famous arguments of the followers of Aristotle which can be used on either side of a question; you will suffer for it, if it appears you have wronged these men in any way.”* Those who were there say that a terrible and deeply ingrained fear overwhelmed the spirit of Cassander, to such an extent that, many years later, when he was now King of the Macedonians and in control of Greece, while he was walking around in Delphi and looking at statues, he suddenly caught sight of a statue of Alexander and at once he was struck with a shuddering and suffered physical distress, and with difficulty recovered himself, as he had become faint at the sight.

75

Alexander, since he had become **troubled about divine matters and fearful in his mind, now treated everything unusual or strange, however insignificant, as a portent or omen**. The royal palace was full of people sacrificing and purifying and making predictions of the future. It is true that disbelief in divine matters and contempt for them is a terrible thing, but terrible also is superstition, which, just as water always flows down to the lowest point, **now filled Alexander’s fearful mind with foolishness**. In spite of this, when some answers from the gods were brought to him about Hephaestion, he put aside his grief, and again took part in sacrifices and drinking parties. He gave a magnificent banquet for Nearchus and those who had sailed with him, then he washed, as he was accustomed to do before going to sleep; but Medius invited him out, so he went out drinking with him. **After drinking through all of the next day, he began to suffer from a fever**; this did not happen when he drank from a cup belonging to Heracles, nor did he get a sudden pain in his back as if he had been struck by a spear, as some authors think they must write, as if they were inventing the tragic and moving finale of a great event. Aristobulus says that he got a maddening fever, and when he was very thirsty he drank wine; after this, he became delirious and **died on the 30th day of the month Daesius**.

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The following details about Alexander’s illness are recorded in the court journals. On the 18th day of the month Daesius, Alexander slept in the bath house because he had a fever. On the next day, he washed and went to his bedroom, where he spent the day playing dice with Medius. Then he washed late and performed his sacrifices to the gods; he ate and suffered a fever through the night. On the 20th day, he washed again, and performed his usual sacrifices; then he lay in a bathhouse, and spent time with Nearchus and his companions, listening to what they had to say about the voyage and the great sea. The next day he did the same, but was more inflamed, and he suffered badly during the night; the following day, he ran a very high fever. He was carried out and spent the day beside the great bath; he spoke with his commanders about the posts that needed filling in the army, and how they might fill these posts with reliable men. On the 24th day of the month, his fever was again very high and he was carried outside to offer sacrifice. He told the most important of his commanders to wait in the courtyard, and they spent the night there outside. He was carried to his palace on the other side of the river on the 25th day, where he slept a little, but the fever did not lessen. When his commanders came to his bedside, he was unable to speak, and he was the same the next day; because of this the Macedonians thought that he had died, and they came shouting to the doors of the palace, and they began to threaten his companions until they overwhelmed them. The doors were thrown open for them, and all the Macedonians, one by one, without their weapons, filed past his bed. On this day,

companions of Pytho and Seleucus were sent to the Temple of Serapis to ask if they should bring Alexander there; the god replied that they should leave him where he was. On the 28th day, towards evening, he died.

77

Most of this is word-for-word as it is written in the court journals. At the time of Alexander's death, no one had any suspicion of poison, but it is reported that five years later Olympias, after receiving information, put a number of men to death and scattered the ashes of Iolas, on the grounds that he had administered the poison. Those who claim that Aristotle advised Antipater to arrange Alexander's death and that the poison was provided entirely through his efforts provide as proof of this a certain Hagnothemis, who claimed to have heard it from King Antigonos; according to this story, the drug was icy cold water from a particular cliff in Nonacris, which was gathered up like a light dew and carried in an ass' hoof; no other container would hold the water, but it would cut through them because of its coldness and pungency. **The majority of historians consider this story about the poison to be completely made up;** strong support for their view is given by the fact that during the strong disagreements between the commanders over many days after Alexander's death his body lay unattended in a stifling hot place, and showed no sign of such a drug, but remained pure and undefiled.

Roxanne happen to be pregnant at this time and was honoured by the Macedonians because of this. She was jealous of Stateira and deceived her through a letter she forged; when Stateira came to where Roxanne was waiting for her, she killed both her and her sister and threw the dead bodies into a well; Perdikkas knew what she was doing and helped her. Perdikkas held the greatest authority in the immediate aftermath of Alexander's death, and took Arrhidaeus around with him as a token of the royal power; he was Alexander's brother, though his mother was a common woman of no reputation, and he was lacking in intelligence because of a disease which afflicted him; this did not affect him through nature or of its own accord, as it is reported that when he was a child he displayed a pleasing and a noble character. Later he was ruined by drugs given to him by Olympias which ruined his mind.

Key learning:

- **Plutarch shows that before Alexander's death there were a great number of omens and signs.**
- **Alexander became increasingly suspicious and fearful.**
- **Alexander was especially concerned that Antipater and his sons might try to harm him.**
- **Plutarch used the official 'court journals' to describe how Alexander died. Plutarch did not believe that Alexander had been poisoned.**

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.24–26

24

Alexander's own death was already near. Aristobulus claims that the following incident was a portent of what was to come. Alexander was allocating to the Macedonian squadrons the forces who had arrived with Peucestas from Persia and from the ocean with Philoxenus and Menander; he was thirsty and went away from his seat, leaving the royal throne empty. There were couches on either side of the throne which his companions were sitting on. **Then someone of no importance** (some say a prisoner under arrest but unbound) **saw that the throne and couches were empty**, with eunuchs standing around the throne; the companions stood up with the king as he left; the fellow passed through the eunuchs, **went up to the throne and sat down**. The eunuchs did not remove him from the throne because of a Persian custom, but they tore their clothes and beat their breasts and faces as if something terrible had occurred. When this was reported to Alexander, he ordered the man who had sat on the throne to be tortured on the rack, as he wanted to find out if he had done this in collusion with others as part of a plot. All he said was that it had come into his mind to do this; because of this, the seers were all the more prepared to say that this did not bode well for Alexander. Soon after this, Alexander was making his usual sacrifices to the gods for good fortune and some other rites suggested by prophecy; then **he held the banquet with his friends and drank late into the night**. It is recorded that he gave the army sacrificial victims and wine, contingent-by-contingent. Some historians say that he wanted to leave the drinking party and go to his bed, but Medius, one of the most trusted companions at that time, met him and asked him to continue drinking with him, for the party would be an enjoyable one.

25

The court journals have the following account: he **drank and partied with Medius**, then he got up, washed and went to sleep; then the next day again he dined with Medius and once again drank far into the night. Then he left the drinking bout and washed, and after bathing, he ate a little and slept where he was, because **already he was running a fever**. The next day he was carried out on the couch to perform the sacrifices he usually did every day, and when he had done that, he lay down in the men's quarters until dark. Then he gave instructions to his commanders about the journey and the voyage; the infantry were to get ready to depart after three days, while those who were sailing with him had to be ready after four. From there he was carried on his couch to the river, and he sailed across the river on a boat to a garden, and there he bathed again and rested. The next day, he bathed again and sacrificed as usual; he went to his covered bed, and lay down talking with Medius. He told his officers to meet him at dawn. When he had done this, he ate a little and was again carried to his covered bed and was in a fever the whole night continuously. The next day he bathed, and after bathing, he sacrificed. He gave instructions to Nearchus and the other commanders about how the voyage would be organised in two days' time. On the next day he washed again and made the appropriate sacrifices; after he made the sacrifices **he no longer had any relief from his fever**.

But even so, he summoned his commanders and ordered them to make sure that all was prepared for the voyage. He washed in the evening, and after he washed he was already in a poor state. On the next day he was carried out to the house near the swimming pool, and made the appropriate sacrifices; although he was ill, nevertheless he summoned the most important of the officers and again gave instructions about the voyage. On the following day, he was carried out with some difficulty to the sacrifices, and he made the sacrifices, and still continued to give instructions to his commanders about the voyage. The next day although he was in a poor state he still performed the appropriate sacrifices. He told his generals to wait in the courtyard, and other senior officers outside the doors. He was now **very ill indeed** and was carried from the garden to the palace. When his commanders came in, he recognised them, but he **said nothing more and was speechless**. He ran a **high fever** during the night and during the next day, and through the day and night that followed.

26

All this can be found written in the **court journals**, as can the following: his soldiers wanted to see him, some because they wanted to see him while still alive, while others, because there were reports that he was already dead, suspected that his death was being kept secret by his bodyguards. **The majority were eager to see Alexander because of their grief and their longing for the king**. They say that he was unable to speak, as the army went past, but he greeted each of them, raising his head with difficulty and making eye contact with them. The court journals say that Pithon, Attalus, Demophon and Peucestas, together with Cleomenes, Menidas and Seleucus spent the night in the Temple of Sarapis, to ask the god whether it would be more agreeable and better for Alexander to be brought to the sanctuary of the god and to ask for help and to be cared for by the god. The answer returned by the god was that he should not be brought into the sanctuary, but it would be better for him to stay where he was. The companions announced this reply, and soon afterwards Alexander died, as this, after all, was now what was 'better'. Aristobulus and Ptolemy have written no more than this. Some historians have also recorded that his companions asked him to whom he left his kingdom, and he replied, "*To the best man*"; others say that in addition he said that there would be great funeral games over his dead body.

Key learning:

- **Arrian describes how Alexander was struck down with a fever after a drinking party.**
- **Despite being seriously ill, Alexander continued planning his next campaign and fulfilled his religious duties.**
- **The Macedonian soldiers were desperate to see Alexander one last time.**

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 7.28–30

28

Alexander died in the 114th Olympiad, when Hegesias was archon in Athens. By Aristobulus' reckoning, he was 32 years 8 months old. He was King of Macedonia for 12 years and 8 months. He was a very handsome man, most **capable of hard work**, very keen in judgement; he was **outstanding in bravery**, and his **love of honour** and in his capacity for risk, and he was most **attentive to religious matters**. He showed **great self-control** over the pleasures of

the body, and as for the pleasures of the mind, he was **insatiable only for glory**. He was very quick to see what needed to be done in situations that were still uncertain, and he was very successful in judging what was likely to happen from the facts available to him. He was **very experienced** in organising, arming and equipping his troops, and he was **outstanding in raising the spirits of his troops**, and filling them with confident expectation, and dispelling their terror in dangerous circumstances through his own lack of fear. When it was clear what needed to be done, he did it with the **greatest boldness**, and whenever he had to secure an objective before any of the enemy even suspected what would happen, he was very skilful at taking the initiative and acting first. Arrangements or agreements made with him were absolutely secure, and he was very successful at avoiding the tricks of those who tried to deceive him. He made very little use of money for his own pleasure, but **never held back when helping anyone else**.

Key learning:

- **In this extract Arrian discusses all of Alexander's positive attributes.**

29

If Alexander made mistakes through haste or anger, or if he was led on to act in a barbarian and rather arrogant manner, for my part, I do not consider these serious faults, if one considers reasonably **Alexander's youth** and his continual success and the nature of such men as associate, and will always associate, with kings to please them, not for the best of motives, but for evil. I know that the **remorse he showed** when he had done wrong because of the **nobility of his nature** was unparalleled amongst the kings of old. The majority of men, even if they acknowledge that they have done wrong, think they can hide their mistake by making out that what they did was well done; but in this they are mistaken. In my opinion, the only remedy for wrongdoing is to agree that one has done wrong and to be clearly repentant for it; the sufferings of those who have been harmed would not seem so bad, if the man who has harmed them admits that he has not acted well, and for the wrongdoer also there is some reasonable expectation for the future that he will not behave badly in a similar way again, if he has shown remorse for what he has done wrong in the past. That Alexander kept claiming **divine origin for himself does not seem to me a serious fault**, and perhaps it was a device directed at his subjects to gain greater respect. Alexander does not seem to me to be a less distinguished king than Minos or Aeacus or Rhadamanthys, whose birth was attributed to Zeus by men of old without any insolence; so too with Theseus, son of Poseidon and Ion, son of Apollo. As for Alexander's adoption of **Persian dress**, this seems to me a device aimed at the barbarians to make sure that the king did not appear completely foreign to them, and also at the Macedonians, to give him some relief from Macedonian sharpness and insolence. For the same reason in fact, in my opinion, he mixed the cream of the Persian forces into his Macedonian battalions, and the Persian nobleman into his best divisions. As Aristobulus says, his drinking bouts were not long because of the wine, as **Alexander drank little wine, but because of his friendship with his companions**.

30

If any writer wants to reproach Alexander, he should not do so by bringing together all those actions of his he considers reproachable, but rather he should review everything that Alexander did altogether, and then let him consider what sort of a man he is himself, and what sort of success he has achieved, before he reproaches a man like **Alexander who reached the peak of human success**, undisputed king of both continents, whose name reached every corner of the world; since the writer is himself a meaner person who has pursued trivial goals and not even achieved these. In my opinion, there was no race of men, no city in those times, not even a single man the name of Alexander had not reached. **So I do not believe that a man without equal in all the world would have been born without the involvement of the gods**. Oracles are said to have shown this at the time of Alexander's death, and visions and dreams came to different people; so too the honour paid to Alexander by men up to the present day and the greater than human memory of him; even now after so many years further oracles in his honour have been granted to the Macedonian people. **I have myself criticised in this history some of Alexander's actions, but I'm not ashamed of my admiration of Alexander himself**. I have criticised some actions because of the truth in my opinion,

and at the same time to emphasise the benefit for men; I started on this history for that reason and I also have been helped by god.

Key learning:

- **Arrian refutes the major criticisms often used against Alexander.**
 1. **Alexander's arrogance: Alexander was young, successful and surrounded by flatterers.**
 2. **Alexander killed his friends - he always showed remorse and was truly sorry.**
 3. **Alexander claimed to be divine - other historical figures had done this before him and it was a trick so his subjects would respect him.**
 4. **Alexander adopted Persian customs – he did this so that the Persians would not view him as a foreigner**

This Source Book was created by Peter Wright of Blackpool Sixth as part of the Classics for All Ancient History GCSE Resource Project.