
I/ALEXANDER: A UNIVERSAL MONARCHY

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- *The young king: his education* ■ *Campaigns in the Balkans*
 - *Thebes revolts and is destroyed* ■ *Preparation for war*
against the Achaemenid Empire
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Alexander, the third of that name in the Macedonian dynasty of the Argeads, was hardly 20 years old when, in the summer of 336, the murder of his father Philip was the unexpected cause of his accession to supreme power. In recent times the father-son relationship had grown tense, Philip having abandoned his queen Olympias, mother of Alexander, for the sake of a new marriage with a young Macedonian woman, Cleopatra, who gave him a daughter. But soon after the king's death, the resolute character of the young prince, benefiting from the advice and support of Antipater, one of his father's foremost friends, secured his unchallenged succession. Introduced by Antipater to the assembly of the Macedonian people, he was soon acclaimed and acknowledged as king. At the same time, a series of state-ordered murders brought about the disappearance of (actual or suspected) claimants and adversaries: a first cousin of Alexander's, whom Philip had ousted from power in order to take his place; the child born to Philip by Cleopatra; Cleopatra herself; her uncle Attalus. Such merciless rivalries, such settlements of accounts by bloodshed, were to be a permanent feature during the entire history of Hellenistic monarchies. The Greeks soon invested the new sovereign of Macedon with the same authority as that granted to Philip after his victory over the city-states in 338. The Amphictyonic Council, as well as the Council of the League of Corinth (the puppet alliance of Greek states set up by Philip after that victory), acknowledged his paramount position and confirmed him as head of the federal army which, in compliance with decisions made in 337, was to lead an expedition into Asia against the king of Persia. Alexander took up without any hesitation or delay the grand project devised by his father.

In spite of his youth, he was well prepared for such an endeavor, both at the psychological level and from the point of view of ability. How could the heir to

the dynasty of the Argeads, which traced its ancestry to Heracles son of Zeus, not have a sense of his mission? Philip had taken pleasure in commemorating such an illustrious origin by striking, in the very year of Alexander's birth (356), gold coins bearing Heracles' effigy. On the side of his mother Olympias, daughter of Neoptolemus king of Epirus, Alexander's ancestry had its roots in the ancient dynasty of the Aeacids (see the lexicon), descended from Achilles (on the importance for the Greeks of such connections with the heroes of mythology, see pp. 210–11). The twin memory of the achiever of the Twelve Labours and the youthful hero of the *Iliad* was to haunt the mind of the young king, eager to equal their feats. Such a glorious ancestry was in the eyes of the Greeks the hallmark of the Hellenic *persona* of the king of Macedon, who could, on the other hand, rely on the fidelity of the people from which he had sprung. The Greek cities did not feel that they were allying with a barbarian, since for generations the Macedonian dynasty had been allowed, as Greeks, to take part in the Olympic Games, where they won prizes. In conformity with tradition, the education of the young prince had been entrusted to Greek masters, one of them (it appears) being the rhetor Anaximenes of Lampsacus (see p. 11). Then, for three years, from his thirteenth to his sixteenth year, Alexander's tutor was the greatest mind of the time, Aristotle of Stagira, whose teaching of philosophy and imparting of his encyclopedic knowledge were to leave an enduring impression on him. Later the king felt able to say that, while he had received from Philip the gift of life, his debt to his master Aristotle was to have learned how to live nobly. Nurtured on Greek literature, he would quote from Homer's poems or Euripides' tragedies, which haunted his imagination. In the course of his long adventure in Asia he was to show his scientific curiosity regarding those exotic lands, their indigenous peoples, and their beliefs and mores. This reflected the Hellenes' eager interest in geography and ethnography since the days of Hecataeus of Miletus in the fifth century BC, and Herodotus, who continued his work: a trend kept alive by historians like Xenophon, and developed into a system by the researches of Aristotle and his school. Alexander was, of course, bilingual. He would address his subjects and his devoted soldiers in Macedonian, a language distantly related to Greek. But it was in Attic Greek, already the most widespread dialect in the Greek-speaking world as a result of Athens' prestige in the political and economic fields, its cultural aura, that he would converse with his usual companions (his *Hetairoi*) and with foreigners.

His faith in his nation's greatness, his belief in his own destiny, the sterling qualities of his mind and character – all these the young prince had already been able to demonstrate by his father's side. At the age of 16, in 340/39, while Philip was leading an expedition against Byzantium, Alexander, who directed the business of the Macedonian state in the king's absence, founded the first city to bear his name, Thracian Alexandropolis, which has kept this name up to our

own time. This was a significant foundation, to be followed by many others. Two years later, at the battle of Chaeronea in 338, Philip did not hesitate to put his son in direct command of the heavy cavalry, whose charge, on the left wing of the Macedonian formation, was to carry the day. The young man's ardor, a spirit in combat that carried his troops along by the power of example, was in evidence at every moment of his career as a warrior, often turning the tide of battle in his favor.

In conformity with his father's policy, Alexander had no wish to make war in Asia without having solidly reinforced his battle lines in Europe. Before making for the bridgeheads set up beyond the Straits by the Macedonian general Parmenio, he had to ward off the threat that hung on his northern and western borders from the age-old unruliness of barbarian tribes. This was the goal of short and brilliant northward campaigns in the spring of 335, when he subdued certain Thracian tribes, headed back to the Danube, and crushed beyond the river the nomadic Getae who sometimes dared to cross it. The Greek colonies on the western shore of the Black Sea (Apollonia on the Pontus, Odessus, Istrus), whose confidence had thus been restored, rallied to the Macedonian side. In the west he had to bring to heel the pillaging Illyrians among the Balkan Mountains. While Alexander was engrossed in the task of chastising those barbarians and strengthening his hold on the Macedonian army by means of such forays into the hinterland, the experienced politician Antipater filled the position of Regent at Pella, showing that his loyalty could be counted upon without any reservation.

In Greece proper nevertheless, there remained a number of people like Demosthenes, who had in no way renounced their hatred of Macedon. They did not lack the means to take action: the new king of Persia, Darius III Codomannus, whose reign started in 336, anxious to ward off the threat of a Macedonian invasion, liberally distributed among the Greeks funds that were to buy consciences and cover the expenses of war against Alexander. When an unfounded rumour emanating from faraway Albania reported Alexander's death in combat with the Illyrians, the opportunity seemed to have arisen to erase the memory of Chaeronea. Thebes, the great loser in that battle, rose in revolt in response to the city's democrats, who besieged the Macedonian garrison placed by Philip in the citadel of the Cadmea. The Athenians, roused by Demosthenes, were very much tempted to join the revolt. In the Peloponnese, Arcadia and Elis were less sure. Was the Macedonian hegemony established by Philip to be put in question again?

The counterblast was shattering. In the autumn of 335 Alexander took just thirteen days to come back from Illyria by mountain tracks, gather around him contingents from other Boeotian cities which were jealous of Thebes, and, with the help of the Phocians, crush the Theban troops and occupy their city. Mindful of the institutions put in place by his father, he adroitly left it to the Council of

the Corinthian League, the supposedly united voice of the Greek cities, to determine the punishment to be meted out to those guilty of having broken a sworn alliance with Philip. The Council's sentence was terrible: the city of Thebes was to be razed to the ground and its entire population driven into slavery. Alexander enforced this severe punishment, which was not, be it said, contrary to the traditional right of war among the Greeks, but which had seldom happened to such an important and venerable city. His object was to strike terror into the opposition by the power of example – a goal that was attained in full. Out of a whole city destroyed to its foundations, the king spared only one house, the one that had been the residence of the poet Pindar – testimony to his admiration for the culture on which he had been nurtured by contact with his Greek teachers. The Athenians, spared by Alexander as they had been by Philip after Chaeronea, made a show of attentive subservience. Any risk of an uprising against Macedonian authority was henceforth removed. Indeed, no serious sign of it appeared until the end of Alexander's reign, with one serious exception: Agis of Sparta went to war in 332/1 against Macedonian control in the Peloponnese, but was crushed by Antipater (see pp. 16 and 32).

Peace having been restored in mainland Greece, the Corinthian League, in agreement with the king of Macedon, whom it had acknowledged as head of an expeditionary force, decided that war on the Achaemenid empire was to start the following spring (334). The contingents from the Greek cities gathered at Amphipolis. Numerically they were unimportant – scarcely 7,000 infantry and 600 cavalry, a derisory contribution in comparison with the Greek mercenary troops, numbering over 50,000, under the command of the Great King. Athens, the most populous of Greek cities, had provided no more than 700 soldiers and twenty warships (it may be noted in passing that naval power was not destined to play any more than a back-up role in later operations). The bulk of Alexander's army was made up of Macedonians, Thessalian cavalry, and barbarians enrolled in Thrace and Illyria. More than the hoplites of the League it was those hardy troops, bonded to the king by personal allegiance, who were to conquer Asia. For that was very much Alexander's goal. As he set foot for the first time on the Asian bank of the Dardanelles, he drove his spear into the ground, symbolically taking possession of it, thus renewing the gesture attributed by epic tradition since the *Cyprian Songs* to Protesilaus, the first Greek to land on the shores of Troy. The epithet *doriktetos*, "conquered by the spear," was henceforth to designate, throughout the Hellenistic period, territory occupied by right of conquest and administered by virtue of that right. At the moment of embarking on a great adventure that would end with his life, Alexander was implicitly laying the foundation of a new order legitimizing the use of force beneficial to the privileged one, the favorite of the gods, who granted him victory. The consequences of that gesture were to be felt for a long time.

■ *The sources of Alexander's history: Diodorus, Plutarch,
Arrian*

How do we know the history of those ten years or so which, from 334 to 323, so radically transformed the destiny of the western world? Surprisingly, no contemporary account, nor even one from someone chronologically close to the events, has been preserved. Yet there had been no lack of such narratives, whether in the form of an official history (like the one written by the philosopher Callisthenes, Aristotle's nephew, until his tragic death in 327 – see pp. 26–7) or as memoirs left by many of the king's companions. Among such writings were those of Ptolemy, the general who was to rule Egypt, of Nearchus, the admiral who led the fleet from the Indus to the Persian Gulf, and of the engineer Aristobulus, whose work, written with some benefit of hindsight, won widespread fame. The royal archives or *Ephemerides*, carefully kept by a Greek, the chancellor Eumenes, were a sort of daybook, with a wealth of documents, to which was added the king's correspondence, an abundant one (our texts mention seventy-two letters by him), though the allegedly preserved ones appear in some cases to be of doubtful authenticity. Contemporaries who wished to preserve the memory of the Conqueror's exploits without themselves having any claim to personal involvement made more or less direct use of these documents, as well as of accounts by participants in the events. Included among them are Alexander's former tutor Anaximenes of Lampsacus (see p. 8), but especially the historian Clitarchus, an intimate of Ptolemy, anxious to show in a favorable light the part (an important one by all accounts) played by an officer who gave promise of a royal future. Parallel with these serious works, a pamphlet literature – some pieces hostile, the rest favorable to the Conqueror – reflected the interest of public opinion in a historical figure of exceptional stature.

Yet, from such an abundant body of writing, nothing, or almost nothing, has come down to us by direct transmission. We know of it only through much more recent adaptations or compilations, the most ancient in the latter category being that of Diodorus (second half of the first century BC). Book XVII of his *Historical Library* presents the first uninterrupted narrative of the history of Alexander at our disposal. It rests on a combination of many sources, among which Clitarchus appears to have received preferential treatment. A lively and document-based account, it makes agreeable reading, filled with anecdotes meant to underscore the king's heroic qualities and his generosity. Quintus Curtius, Justin, and especially Plutarch derive from the same composite tradition, with Clitarchus the dominant contributor, which we call the *Vulgate* (not to be confused with Jerome's Latin version of the Bible). Arrian's case is different. He combined with

extensive scholarship a first-hand acquaintance with public affairs (he administered Cappadocia under the emperor Hadrian in the second century AD). In his work called *The Anabasis*, intentionally adopting the title once chosen by Xenophon for his narrative of the expedition of the Ten Thousand through the Achaemenid empire, he tries to offer a critical account of Alexander's expedition. Another work of Arrian's, the *Indica*, recounted Nearchus' sea voyage from the Indus delta to the Persian Gulf. Arrian grants privileged status to the evidence of Ptolemy and Aristobulus: hence the amount of divergence, sometimes striking, from the *Vulgate*. We need not take into account the fanciful embellishments which have over the centuries gone into the making of the *Romance of Alexander*, attributed to an apocryphal Callisthenes, and its numerous medieval versions in various languages (including French). Our knowledge of the Conqueror and his exploits therefore rests ultimately on a dual tradition: the *Vulgate* and Arrian. A few interesting inscriptions and a number of numismatic data add little to what these texts have to say. While the sequence of events and their chronology are well enough established, factual details sometimes remain obscure; nor is their proper interpretation certain. But the mere listing of Alexander's victories and the magnitude of his successive endeavors, viewed in the context of the territorial dimensions of his conquests and the challenge they presented, are eloquent enough on their own, as will soon be demonstrated.

■ *The landing in Asia* ■ *Battle of the Granicus* ■ *Conquest of Ionia, then of southern Asia Minor* ■ *Alexander in Phrygia: the Gordian knot* ■ *Departure for Syria* ■ *The battle of Issus and its consequences* ■ *Capture of Tyre* ■ *Alexander's rejection of Darius' peace proposal* ■ *Conquest of Egypt* ■ *Foundation of Alexandria* ■ *Submission of Cyrene* ■ *Alexander's visit to the Oasis of Ammon*

The army that had landed in Asia, in the region of Abydos on the strait of the Dardanelles, was none too impressive in its size: about 30,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry. It was to face the much larger force of the Great King, Darius III Codomannus, whose reign, like Alexander's, had begun in 336, and who owed his accession to the throne to a palace revolution. He certainly was no equal to his adversary in leadership. Yet his authority over his subjects, nurtured in a centuries-old tradition of obedience, his resources of manpower and hoarded wealth, the sound organization (marked by smoothness and efficiency) of his empire, presented him as a formidable foe to an invader from abroad – and rightly so.



Map 1 Western Anatolia.

Trusting in his superiority, apparently based on such solid foundations, he found it unnecessary to take personal charge. He left the conduct of operations in Asia Minor to his generals – his Persian satraps in command of the provinces of Anatolia, and the Rhodian Memnon, head of an important contingent of Greek mercenaries. Memnon would have liked to resort to a scorched-earth policy, allowing the invading army to move into a land stripped of its resources in order to be more certain to crush it. But the satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia refused to allow his province to be ravaged, and it was decided that battle would be joined without delay. After a pilgrimage to the site of Troy in memory of his ancestor Achilles, Alexander came back to his troops in Abydos and, proceeding eastward, met the enemy waiting on the bank of the Granicus, a minor coastal river flowing into the sea of Marmara. A spirited charge by the Macedonian cavalry, led by the king himself, threw the Persian squadrons into disarray after a violent clash and won the day. Alexander himself joined the fray without restraint. If one of his companions, Clitus the Black, had failed to intervene, he would have fallen victim to a Persian horseman. His flair and boldness foiled the enemy's plan. The Greek mercenary force, the mainstay of the Great King's infantry, was hacked to pieces after the rout of the cavalry left its flanks exposed. In that very first encounter Alexander had shone in his adversary's eyes as a star in the ascendant, while confirming his prestige as a leader and a warrior among his generals and his troops.

The fallout from the battle of the Granicus was immense; and Alexander showed as much clearheadedness as resolution in making the most of his victory. Not only Hellespontine Phrygia, but also the rich province of Lydia, the heartland of western Anatolia, with its capital Sardis, the centre of Persian power in Asia Minor, followed by the Greek cities of Ionia, surrendered or rallied under his authority. In the provinces he brought under his sway, Alexander appointed Macedonian officers as satraps to replace Achaemenid officials, without modifying the existing system of local administration. In the Greek cities Priene, Ephesus, Miletus (the only one that had to be won over by force), he pretended to reinstate autonomy and independence, inherent characteristics of the *polis*. As Persian power had been accustomed to seek its support among local tyrannies or oligarchies, the sequel to its collapse was as a rule the advent of democratic regimes, the Great King's supporters stepping aside in favor of the opposite party. In contrast, in Greece proper the Macedonian throne more often supported oligarchical, even tyrannical, rule. There was no question of ideological preference, but rather a choice imposed by circumstances. It mattered little to Alexander whether the administration of Greek cities complied with one style of government in preference to another, provided it showed some regard for his own views. His one concern in Asia was to substitute his authority for that of the Great King, making the best possible use of local conditions. The diversity of these he left untouched, since it suited his purpose. He therefore took care to

demarcate the Greek cities' own territory, exempt from payment of tribute, in contrast with the rest of the land, which was royal property. Conscious of such a privilege and grateful for being freed from the Achaemenid yoke, the Greeks of Asia were the first to grant divine honors to Alexander in his lifetime, and to celebrate these with the foundation of a special cult. Adulation of that kind, of which Agesilaus had until then been the sole beneficiary, was to have an extraordinary history.

Leaving Ionia, Alexander made for the south. Without delay he set about the conquest of the southern coast of Asia Minor. Caria rallied under his authority, with encouragement from the aged princess Ada, sister of the late Mausolus. Her other brother, Pixodarus, had in times past thrust her aside from power: the young king treated her with honor and respect, even consenting to be adopted as her son. He thus applied for the first time a novel policy of personal understanding with native princes, a practice he often went on to use in the future. Nevertheless the coastal city of Halicarnassus, the principal port of Caria, to which Memnon had retreated, backed by a still untouched and powerful Persian fleet, warded off his first assaults. He subdued the city after a long siege, and Memnon managed to escape by sea. Though the season of rough weather was starting, Alexander worked his way along the coastal regions of Lycia and Pamphylia, subduing each in turn. He then marched inland in a northerly direction, through Pisidia and Phrygia, where, in the very heartland of Anatolia, at Gordion, the ancient capital of King Midas, he joined up with the expeditionary force he had sent from Caria under Parmenio's command. There it was that in the winter of 334/3 he saw in a sanctuary the chariot that had belonged to the founder of the Phrygian dynasty, Gordius. An ancient tradition promised the empire of Asia to the one who managed to undo the intricate knot that bound the yoke to the beam of the wagon. If we are to believe some of his historians (whose version modern critics are not inclined to endorse), he cut the famous Gordian knot with one stroke of his sword. True or false, this story is a perfect illustration of the Conqueror's eagerness to impress the popular imagination, his respect for the premonitory meaning of oracles, his disinclination to put off action. For this reason its celebrity is well deserved.

Meanwhile Darius and his generals were reorganizing their armies, a process not without drama. Memnon, making good use of his fleet, had occupied Chios and landed on Lesbos, but he died on the latter island while besieging Mytilene. Thus did the Great King lose the best strategist he had: the Persian fleet was to play no more than a minor role in future, carrying out a few raids in the Aegean. Darius was concentrating his troops in Syria, where he had summoned Memnon's Greek mercenaries. The Athenian Charidemus advised him to rely on these men, if he wanted to confront the Macedonian army with a tough, seasoned, and homogeneous force. But the Iranian nobles' jealousy toward that Greek caused the rejection of a piece of advice that would have been salutary, and Charidemus,

who had not accepted such a verdict with good grace, earned the Great King's wrath and died at the hands of the executioner. Thus it was that a sizable army, but a heterogeneous one, awaited Alexander's assault. The mercenaries made up the battle formation, with the Asiatic light troops and the Iranian cavalry on the wings.

Alexander did not allow his attention to be distracted by the Black Sea coast, but entrusted one of his best generals, Antigonus, with the task of watching over Phrygia and guarding the Halys river, the eastern frontier of his Anatolian conquests, against any hostile attempt. Antigonus was to show himself worthy of his king's trust till the end of his reign. Free from worry in that direction, Alexander left for Syria, clearly demonstrating his purpose not to limit his ambition to the conquest of Asia Minor. Detained for a while by sickness at Tarsus in Cilicia, he was treated by Philip, a doctor from Acarnania. As Philip was in the act of handing him a potion, Alexander received a letter from Parmenio warning him that Philip had been bribed by Darius' agents and intended to poison him. The fearless king handed the letter to the physician and drained the cup. The trust that bound him to his friends proved stronger than a slanderous accusation. His conduct on that occasion indicates the degree of devotion he was capable of instilling in those close to him.

When Alexander had recovered, he crossed the mountain passes leading to Syria and descended into the coastal plain of Alexandretta in the autumn of 333. As he advanced to the south he suddenly learned that Darius, moving in the opposite direction by chance (though not by design), had in his turn crossed the mountains and occupied Issus behind the invader's lines. The Macedonian army thus found itself cut off from Asia Minor. Doubling back immediately, Alexander confronted Darius' army, a larger one, on the opposite bank of the Pinarus, a minor coastal river that flows into the inner part of the gulf of Alexandretta, near Issus. The two armies confronted each other in positions that were reversed – Alexander facing north, the Persians south. A cavalry charge personally led by the king, on his right wing, determined the outcome of the battle after a keen fight. Darius turned round and fled in his chariot, starting his army's rout. Most of his Greek mercenaries, who had put up a courageous fight, escaped in good order. Many of them made their way back to Greece, where they enlisted in the service of Agis the Spartan king (see pp. 10 and 32). In Darius' baggage-train, abandoned in Damascus, the Macedonians found his splendid tent, his luxurious furniture. Most important, they captured the Great King's mother, his wife, his two daughters, and his son. Far from treating the captive women as slaves, which the laws of warfare allowed, Alexander showed them – especially the queen mother – great respect, and reassured them about the fate of Darius, whom they believed dead. Such compassion made a deep impression: the king's restraint and generosity won great praise.

Even more than the battle of the Granicus, that of Issus brought prestige,

glory, and benefit to Alexander. Cut off from his rearguard, he turned a dangerous position to his advantage, using the narrowness of the field to prevent his adversary from deploying greater numbers of troops. Leading the decisive charge in person, he got the better of Darius himself, who, terrified, sought safety in flight. The dramatic face-to-face encounter between the Macedonian and Persian kings, between a spirited horseman and a distraught figure turning to flee in his chariot, was a scene that struck the popular imagination and inspired artists. The famous mosaic that was discovered in a wealthy house in Pompeii (now in the National Museum of Naples: see pp. 386, 389 and p. 428 in the bibliography) is a faithful reproduction of a painting dating back to a few decades after the event, but drawing upon eyewitness accounts. Only a few figurative documents are so rich in historical significance. Now he was in possession of the treasures left behind in the Persian camp, Alexander was rich enough to pay for the pursuit of the war without appealing for finance to the none-too-willing cities of Greece. In that one day in the month of October 333, almost the whole western portion of the Achaemenid empire was handed over to Macedonia.

Darius, seeking refuge beyond the Euphrates, launched his troops in vain against the centre of Asia Minor: Antigonus firmly warded off every assault on the new frontier of the Halys river. Meanwhile, Alexander subdued Syria and Phoenicia, where only the city of Tyre, trusting in what appeared to be an impregnable position, rejected the Conqueror's demands. It took eight months to subdue, at the cost of heavy losses. Its population was slaughtered or sold into slavery. Deprived of its last base, Darius' fleet, which the Persian general Pharnabazus had at some point tried to bring together with a view to operating in the Aegean Sea, had dispersed or surrendered. Cyprus and Rhodes, first adopting a wait-and-see attitude, eventually joined the stronger antagonist. The whole of the eastern Mediterranean, with the lands bordering it, Egypt excepted, was henceforth subservient to Alexander.

Darius could gauge the immensity of his defeat. Not only had he lost his Asian dependencies bordering the Mediterranean, but even some regions untouched by Alexander's campaign were breaking loose from the Achaemenid empire. This was the case with the provinces of Northern Anatolia, Bithynia or Paphlagonia, for example, while the loyalty of Cappadocia or Armenia was far from sure. The Great King decided to safeguard his future and cut his losses. He sent a letter to Alexander that reached him during the siege of Tyre. In that message he offered, beside an enormous ransom for the liberation of the captive women of royal blood, to give up all the conquered territories and their dependencies, in other words, Asia Minor up to the Halys, and Syria and Palestine up to the Euphrates. As a pledge of his good faith he offered one of his daughters in marriage to the Macedonian conqueror.

The offer was seductive: it amounted to much more than the dream of Isocrates, who had seemed a visionary to many when he incited the Greeks and Philip to

conquer Asia Minor. There now appeared the prospect of an extensive Macedonian empire, astride the Aegean sea and the Straits, stretching from Illyria to Jerusalem. It would bring together under one rule a diversity of wealthy countries, encircling the Greek cities now reduced for good to the status of allies, if not of subjects, and forming a more powerful state than had ever been seen in the Mediterranean from time immemorial. Alexander had the terms of the proposed arrangement read out before his council. Parmenio, a seasoned warrior with a wealth of experience and honor, immediately shouted, "I would say 'yes' if I were Alexander." "So would I," was the king's reply, "were I Parmenio." This rejoinder, reported by Plutarch, is perhaps apocryphal, but illustrates very well the huge gap between the young king's grand ambition and the cold calculations with which his closest subordinates buttressed their hopes. We shall see later the consequences of such a difference in outlook.

Rejecting Darius' proposal, Alexander, intent on pursuing his career of conquest, decided to win control of Egypt, the only one of the western provinces of the Achaemenid empire which still eluded his grasp, before seeking another encounter with the Great King, who was regrouping his army in Mesopotamia. Delayed for two months by the siege of Gaza, where he was seriously injured, he next appeared at Pelusium, on the eastern edge of the Nile delta. The satrap who governed Egypt in Darius' name decided not to fight and, negotiating with the Macedonian conqueror, turned the country over to him. Conscious of the special character and the richness of that part of the empire, Alexander did not entrust it to an officer, but kept it under his direct control, content with putting a Greek native of the land, Cleomenes of Naucratis, in charge of local finance. He spent the winter of 332/1 in Egypt. It was then that, acting on advice received in a dream, the king founded a city which he called Alexandria, after his own name. It faced the coastal island of Pharos already known to Homer, at the borders of the Delta and Marmarica. The new city was provided with the traditional institutions of Hellenic states. It was soon populated with citizens from every quarter of the Greek world. Its large and safe harbors were to encourage the exchange of local agricultural produce, brought there from one generation to another by the channels of the Nile, for goods from all parts of the Mediterranean world. Its foundation meant the definitive opening to the outside world of the richest region of Antiquity.

It is not known what circumstances prompted Alexander to venture far away to the west to visit the Oasis of Ammon, in the midst of the Libyan desert. This was the seat of an Egyptian oracle, which the Greeks had long known and consulted, fully aware of its foreign character. A mental process of assimilation often illustrated in their religious history urged them to find in the Egyptian god revered in the oasis of Siwah none other than Zeus. They would therefore depict him with the features of their supreme god – decked in a strange head-dress, a ram's horns framing his bearded face. As Alexander believed in his own direct

descent from Zeus through his ancestor Heracles, it was normal that he would plan to consult that god's oracle. Ammon's oasis, which had agreed to submit to the Great King's authority, welcomed the arrival of the Conqueror, to whom the Greek city of Cyrene had sent gifts as a token of allegiance. Thus did the trip to Siwah, halfway toward the rich province of Cyrenaica, allow him to extend his authority to the whole of Hellenized Libya, without the need to go there in person.

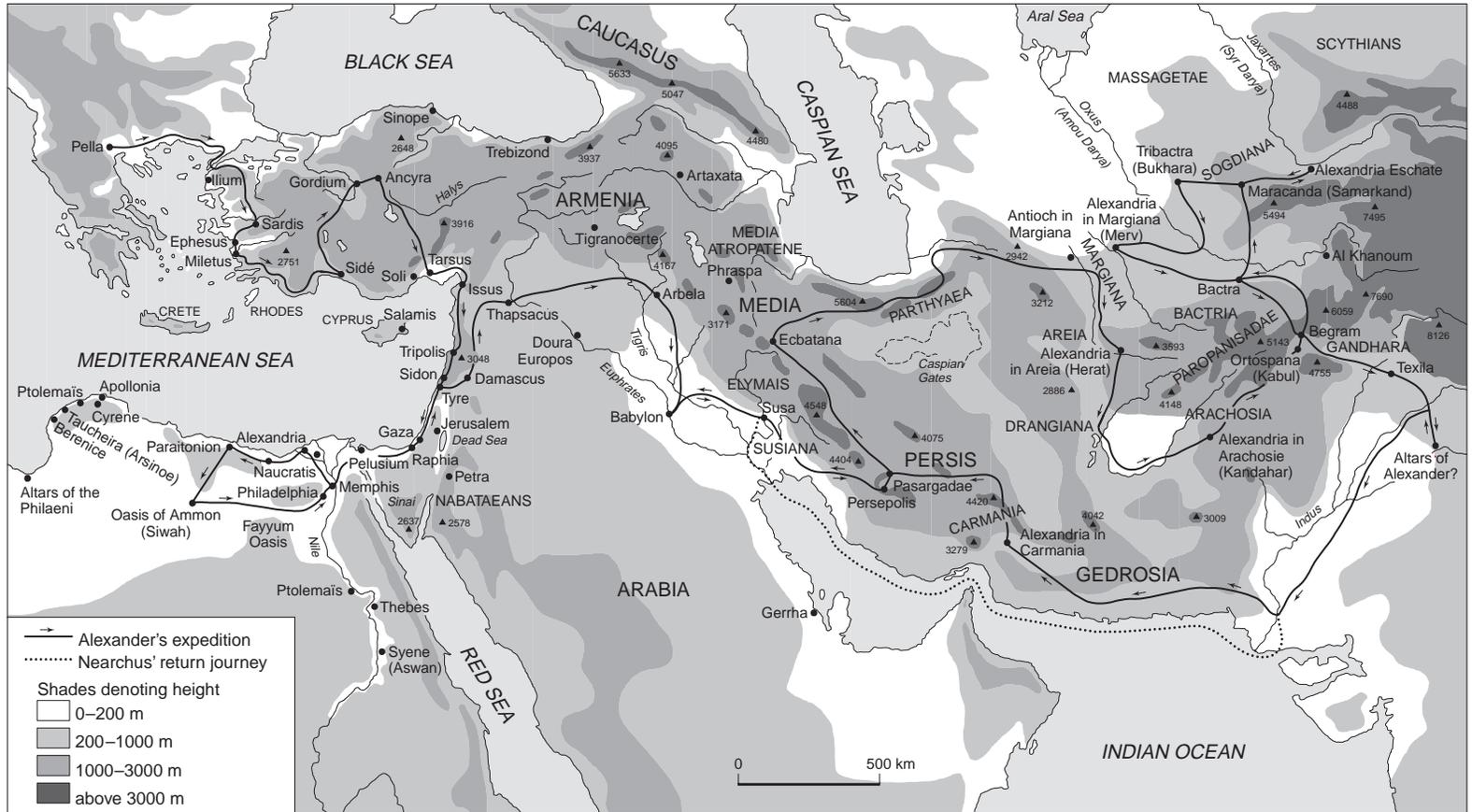
From Paraitonion (Marsa-Matruh), where Cyrenaean envoys had come to meet him, the king and his companions moved on into the utter bleakness of the desert to reach Siwah, following a track on which many a caravan had gone astray. There is a tradition that when their passage encountered difficulties, sacred animals, birds or snakes, appeared and put them on the right track. When Alexander reached the far-flung oasis, the priests of Ammon hailed him by the title which by tradition they gave to the Pharaoh, "Son of Râ" the Sun-god, synonymous with Ammon. Such a term, taken literally, later appeared to the Greeks to guarantee the king's direct descent from divinity. Alexander did not reveal what answers he had received from his "divine" father's oracle. But popular imagination, struck by the strangeness and the remoteness of its location, welcomed the fables that were soon prompted by that visit. The importance of the Siwah venture for the later development of the royal cult should not be discounted.

Once back in Egypt, Alexander decided it was time for him to resume the conquest of Asia. The more remote areas in the western part of his dominions were now stable. That was a result of the submission of Cyrene, the dispersion of Pharnabazus' fleet, deprived of any base for its operations, and the firm administration of Macedon and Greece by Antipater, who a few months later managed to check an armed revolt by Agis III, king of Sparta. Leaving Memphis in the spring of 331, Alexander reached Tyre, where he took various political and administrative measures. He ordered, for instance, the liberation of Athenian prisoners, which won gratitude in their city, and entrusted Harpalus with responsibility for the war chest that was later to finance the army's expenses. Then, warned that Darius was gathering in Babylon an army of considerable size, he marched on Mesopotamia, leaving those Mediterranean shores that he was destined never to see again.

- *Alexander's return to Asia* ■ *Battle of Arbela* ■ *Capture of Babylon and Susa* ■ *Destruction of Persepolis by fire*
 - *Discharge granted to soldiers at Ecbatana* ■ *Murder of Darius*
 - *Philotas' supposed plot: the execution of Parmenio* ■ *Conquest of Afghanistan* ■ *Campaigns in Bactria and Sogdiana*
 - *Chastisement of Bessus* ■ *Clitus put to death* ■ *The marriage of Alexander and Roxane* ■ *The proskynesis incident*
 - *The march to the Indus river* ■ *Occupation of Taxila*
 - *Operations against Porus* ■ *The army reaches the Hyphasis*
 - *The retreat towards the Indus* ■ *The descent to the coast*
 - *The return*
-

That was the beginning of an amazing venture lasting nearly seven years, inspired by a truly Oriental mirage. Alexander, having definitely disposed of Darius, had replaced him as sovereign of the Persian section of Asia. With a handful of men, Macedonians and Greeks, reinforced according to circumstances by allies recruited locally, he was to march through the Middle East, crossing mountains and deserts, well beyond Mesopotamia and Persia, the heartland of the Achaemenid empire. He would skirt the Caspian Sea, cross and subdue Afghanistan, strike northward over the plains of central Asia, beyond Samarkand up to the Syr Daria, clear the formidable barrier of the Hindu Kush twice, eventually emerge by the upper reaches of the Indus river near Kashmir, and conquer the Punjab. That long march was punctuated by violent clashes with warlike tribes, as the army confronted hostile Nature and followed scarcely cleared tracks, far away from regular sources of help. It took four years, from 330 to 326. It was interrupted by pauses of a few months in various places, to allow the army to recuperate and the king himself to organize the process of conquest. When he had reached India and once again been a victor, his troops' reluctance to go any further compelled Alexander to decide to march back, by another route, which he covered in a little more than a year. It is worth retracing briefly the stages of that stupendous expedition, in which one man's dynamism overcame every obstacle and dazzled his contemporaries and posterity.

In the summer of 331 Alexander left Syria for Mesopotamia, leading an army of 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry. He crossed the Euphrates at Thapsacus, on the high road from Sardis to Susa, then the upper Tigris, without meeting any serious opposition. Darius III, who had gathered far greater forces from all the eastern provinces of his empire, planned to choose his own field of battle so as to crush the invader in one encounter through the larger numbers at his disposal,



Map 2 Alexander's conquests (drawn by P. Goukowsky).

especially of cavalry. Besides, he had a weapon by which he set much store: a massive group of chariots armed with scythes fixed on the front part of the beam and on the wheel-hubs, which were intended to throw the Macedonian phalanx into disarray under their impact. To use these to their greatest advantage he awaited his enemy in the plain of Gaugamela, northeast of ancient Nineveh (Mosul today). As he had previously stopped at Arbela, the name of this place was wrongly used for a long time as the designation of the decisive battle that took place at Gaugamela on October 1, 331. Confronted by a much larger enemy force, Alexander extracted every possible advantage from a tactic marked by foresight and subtlety. He arranged his troops in a formation like the Greek letter *π*, both wings tilted along the uprights like the rungs of a ladder so as to avoid being encircled. In the central position of his arrangement he placed in front the phalanx, light troops that riddled with missiles Darius' scythed chariots. Alexander himself took his station on the right wing, with the elite of his cavalry.

There ensued a violent clash, the Macedonian left wing being hard-pressed by the massive force of the enemy cavalry. But in the centre the charge from the scythed chariots, thrown into disarray by the shafts that mowed down horses and charioteers, did not deliver the impact expected. The phalanx opened its ranks to make way for the last chariots, which were soon forced to surrender. Finally Alexander led in person his Companions' assault on the enemy's centre, where Darius had placed himself. As he had done at Issus, Darius lost his nerve, turned round his state chariot, and fled. On that occasion too the Great King's flight determined the outcome of the battle. While Darius was taking shelter in Ecbatana in Media, Alexander, having taken possession of the field at Gaugamela after a last, and very bloody, encounter with the Persian cavalry, was hot in pursuit of the defeated army as far as Arbela, thus confirming his victory.

He soon entered Babylon, where one of Darius' best generals, Mazaeus, a brilliant fighter at Gaugamela, came over to Alexander's side and was rewarded with the satrapy of Babylonia – accompanied, however, by a general and a treasurer both of whom were Macedonians. Alexander was demonstrating his wish to make accessible to Darius' erstwhile servants the top posts of the new administration with which he was replacing the former one in his capacity as "King of Asia," an appellation to which he judged himself entitled henceforth. Then, in the ensuing weeks, Susa, the capital of the Achaemenid rulers, surrendered to the Conqueror, who confirmed in his office the Persian satrap who had just handed the city over to him.

The capture of Susa not only bore glaring testimony to the collapse of the Persian monarchy, but put at Alexander's disposal the fabulous hoards of precious metals which the ancestors of Darius had brought together in that city. The king was going to use them without delay to finance his further endeavors, not forgetting to send a share of them to Antipater, thus helping him maintain his authority over Greece and the Aegean. Aware of the resources now com-

manded by the Macedonian sovereign, mercenaries did not hesitate to offer their services. They were a source of recruitment indispensable to Hellenistic armies, and turned out to be valuable help for Alexander in his lengthy eastern expedition.

From Susa the king made for Persepolis, a city of magnificent palaces built by the Achaemenids. Entrusting Parmenio with the bulk of the army, which was to follow the direct road to that city, he put himself at the head of a light column. In the dead of winter, at the cost of great hardship and hard-won encounters with the Uxians, a barbarian tribe, he crossed the mountains and forced the passes called the Persian Gates, breaking down a valiant defence. The capture of Persepolis crowned that winter campaign, in which the Conqueror had shown that, for all the glory of his previous victories, he would still choose for himself the hardest task in the pursuit of his designs. Under his orders the great palace of Persepolis was set on fire, not (as was claimed by a romantic tradition) in a fit of drunken folly or transported by Dionysiac frenzy, but to avenge by some spectacular deed Xerxes' acts of destruction in Greece during the second Persian war. Nothing could better demonstrate to the Greeks that their acknowledged leader had fully accomplished the task for which they had acclaimed him as their commander, and that Philip's promises had been kept. Furthermore, the destruction of Persepolis by fire, which followed the capture of Susa, proclaimed to Asia the end of the Achaemenid empire, and the replacement by a new authority of the one that had belonged to Cyrus the Great's descendants. From Ecbatana Darius had sought refuge in Hyrcania, southeast of the Caspian Sea, beyond the passes east of Teheran which are called the Caspian Gates. He was accompanied by the satraps of the eastern provinces of the empire, among them Bessus, satrap of Bactria, who had commanded the left wing of the Persian army at Gaugamela. Alexander, having put in order the affairs of the recently conquered regions, had gone in pursuit of the Great King in the spring of 330. When he in turn had reached Ecbatana, he did not wish to proceed further without being assured of his troops' loyalty. That prompted him to dismiss the contingents from the Greek cities, which had accompanied him as leader of the League of Corinth since his crossing into Asia. Such a decision was meant to mark an official end to the Greeks' common endeavor, for it had been crowned with success by Alexander's victory at Gaugamela and the downfall of the capitals of what had been Persia. Henceforth the grand design that was to sweep the army along toward a faraway and mysterious East would belong to Alexander alone, and to those bound to him by personal allegiance. Greek soldiers who decided to stay with him would do so individually as mercenaries, not as members of contingents provided by the cities. Many of them were tempted to do so, attracted by the Conqueror's prestige and the prospect of conquest.

Leaving half the army under Parmenio's orders at Ecbatana, Alexander made for Hyrcania by forced marches, with troops that were far from numerous. On

the way there, he learned that Bessus and the other satraps had deposed Darius and intended to take over in their own name the responsibility for resisting the invader. Soon afterwards his scouts found Darius' corpse, which the satraps, after murdering him, had abandoned in the course of their retreat. Alexander ordered royal honors to be paid to the dead monarch, and proclaimed himself his heir and avenger. After this, in contrast with the plain etiquette, devoid of pomp, of the Macedonian monarchy, in the presence of his newly won Asian subjects, the king adopted the sumptuous ceremonies and the intricate protocol of the Persian court. He looked upon himself as both the sovereign of Macedonia and the Great King's successor. The Asian people bowed before such demands more readily than the Macedonians or the Greeks, who were shocked by such ambivalence. We shall soon see the outcome of that situation.

Bessus meanwhile, having found shelter in his own satrapy of Bactria, had taken the title of Great King under the name of Artaxerxes. As Alexander marched on his enemy, the defection of the satrap of Areia (a region of western Afghanistan), who had pretended to be his ally, forced him to modify his plans. Putting off for a while the conquest of Bactria, he turned southward and occupied Drangiana, near the river Helmund and its lakes. He then made a momentous decision, which must have seemed necessary for the conduct of future operations. Parmenio, the seasoned elderly general who had long enjoyed his full confidence, was hardly showing any diligence, from Ecbatana where he was still in command of one half of the army, in backing the advance of an expedition that had penetrated so deep into the heartland of Asia. The king decided to get rid of him and to use him as a warning. He seized the occasion of an imprudent act on the part of Philotas, Parmenio's son, who accompanied Alexander as leader of the elite corps of the *hetairoi*. A plot, real or imaginary, against the king was disclosed. Proof was given that Philotas, though informed of it, had failed to warn the king. Charged before the army, which, in accordance with Macedonian custom, had gathered as an assembly, he was declared guilty, tortured, and put to death. A confession had been wrung from him, implicating his father. Alexander forthwith sent orders to Ecbatana for Parmenio to be executed. The command of Parmenio's former troops, when they had joined up with Alexander in Drangiana, was handed over to the Macedonian Craterus. Two close friends of the king's, Hephæstion and Clitus the Black, shared the command of the *hetairoi* after Philotas' death. Among the officers appointed to major positions after that crisis are the names of Ptolemy and Perdikkas, who were to play important parts in future events.

Having thus reorganized and reinforced his army, Alexander, in spite of the winter, resumed his march on the east and penetrated into Arachosia (the central region of Afghanistan), where he founded a city, Alexandria in Arachosia (Kandahar). He had already founded another city in Drangiana, and was to multiply similar foundations in central Asia as landmarks of his progress. In each of

them, once the plan had been marked out and the religious ritual performed, he would leave a contingent of Greeks or Macedonians, who were to be settlers as well as soldiers, and of traders. As he pursued his northward journey, he spent the balance of the winter at Kabul. In the spring of 329, he advanced to the foot of the lofty chain of the Hindu Kush and there founded Alexandria “under the Caucasus,” the latter name being mistakenly extended to those mountains in the Himalayas. Wherever he went he would appoint Macedonian or Persian governors, strengthening to his advantage the Achaemenid administration in the Oriental provinces of the empire, as they were subdued one after another.

His main objective remained the northern provinces beyond the Hindu Kush: Bactria and Sogdiana. Bactria, a rich agricultural plain, extended to the river Oxus (Amu Darya), not far from which was the city of Bactra (Balkh), its capital. Sogdiana, beyond the Oxus, had as its northern boundary the river Jaxartes (Syr Darya), which, like the Oxus, flows west and northwest until it joins the Aral Sea. Its two principal centers were Maracanda (Samarkand) and Buchara. Further on was the unexplored land of the Scythian nomads, the Massagetae (toward the northwest and the Aral Sea) for example, or the Sacae of central Asia. It took three years, from the spring of 329 to that of 326, to reduce those northern provinces to submission. That was at the cost of fierce battles in which Alexander again put his own life at risk, received many injuries, and had to use an extremely flexible strategy and constantly renewed tactical invention. There is nothing more fascinating than a blow-by-blow account of that major episode of his grand venture, with its constant reversals of fortune, its moments of brutal drama, its triumphs. He was isolated, with far fewer men, a long way from any help from the motherland. Yet he had to subdue a region as vast as Asia Minor, fringed by an inhuman wilderness and impregnable mountains, inhabited by fierce tribes as well used to guerrilla warfare on horseback as to ambushes on rugged terrain. At each step in that great operation one is made aware of Alexander’s genius.

First he eluded Bessus, who was awaiting him at the foot of the passes of the Hindu Kush. That formidable barrier he cleared by a pass situated further east, in a circuitous movement that handed over to him the whole of Bactria, which Bessus had to abandon, taking cover in Sogdiana. In his turn Alexander crossed the Oxus. The lords of Sogdiana, to earn his goodwill, handed over Bessus, betrayed by his own as he had betrayed Darius. Alexander had him tried and tortured, as a betrayer of his sovereign: in accordance with Oriental custom his nose and ears were cut off, then he was sent to Ecbatana, there to undergo the ultimate penalty and be nailed to a cross. Meanwhile the king had advanced up to the Jaxartes, after occupying Samarkand, and had founded on the river’s edge the most northerly city to bear his name, Alexandria the Farthest (*Eskhaté*), on the present site of Khodjend. He had even crossed to the northern bank, in spite of the Saca cavalry, thanks to cover afforded by catapults massed on the south bank to back up the operation: that was the first ever tactical use made of a

concentration of machines against cavalry. An agreement reached with the Sacae, as a result of that show of force, allowed Alexander to retrace his steps to Sogdiana to fight a rebellion that had broken out behind his advancing force. He wintered at Bactra, and started on a systematic reinforcement of his Asian contingents.

The year 328 was taken up with a variety of policing operations, directed either at incursions on the part of nomads from the steppes, or against smoldering embers of resistance which had to be put out in various parts of Sogdiana. In the intervals between those expeditions, Alexander found relaxation in hunting parties, and was faithful to the Greek custom of prolonged banquets every night, with conversations marked by familiarity. On the occasion of one of those drinking bouts, one of his dearest companions, Clitus the Black, his spirits heated by wine, went to the length of repeatedly provoking the king with hurtful remarks, blaming him for having introduced novelties that would not have been to his father's liking. Alexander at first kept calm, but ended up by giving vent to his anger: he seized a guard's spear, and as Clitus, overcoming the efforts of those present, returned to scoff at him, he transfixed him at one stroke. Such a violent reaction, whatever the excuse put forward, seriously disturbed the king, who gave way to a deep-seated melancholy, declining food for many days and pleading guilty to having killed the friend who had saved his life at the Granicus. He took many weeks to recover from that moral crisis.

Yet the demands imposed by conquest helped him at that time, claiming action on his part to ward off new threats or reduce to submission the last centers of rebellion. Alexander had already stormed some mountain strongholds in Sogdiana. In January of 327 he began a new operation against one of those fortresses, situated on an almost inaccessible rock, held by the troops of a local prince, Oxyartes, who used it as a safe refuge for his family. The Macedonian troops scaled that mountain amid snow, and the stronghold had to give in. Oxyartes' daughter, Roxane, was among the prisoners. Politics, if not love, impelled Alexander to marry her. The rebel lords came on side as a result of that marriage, demonstrating as it did a will to hold an even balance between Macedonians and Asians both in service to the kingdom and in royal favor. This became evident when Alexander appointed as satrap of the important province of Media the Persian Atropates, who had held the same office under Darius.

Such appointments must have aroused jealousy among the Macedonians. Nor were they favorably impressed by innovations in protocol like the practice of *proskynesis* (prostration) customary at the Achaemenid court, which Alexander wished to preserve as a sign of respect for his own person. Some Greeks at the king's court, the philosopher Anaxarchus for instance, expressed support for the adoption of that custom. Nevertheless, it was sharply at odds with Macedonian tradition and Greek mores, in which prostration could only be considered the homage due to divinity. Aristotle's nephew, Callisthenes, who composed the annals of Alexander's reign and had so far been a dedicated servant of his pres-

tige, did not conceal his hostility to *proskynesis*, a position openly supported by a large number of Macedonians. Faced with such widespread feeling among his compatriots, the king decided not to impose a ritual that they disliked. But he bore Callisthenes a grudge. Not long after, an inept plot was uncovered on the part of a few young men of the royal escort (what is called the Pages' Conspiracy). Callisthenes had imprudently uttered condemnatory remarks about tyranny, likely to cause offense to the king. He was accused of being implicated in that plot and put to death with those responsible for it. The Aristotelian philosophical school, the Peripatos, never forgave Alexander for having struck down one of its representatives, and showed toward him a hostility which Plutarch, many centuries later, still thought it necessary to counter.

It took three years of strenuous effort to subdue the northern provinces. If he was to complete his annexation of all territories that had once been under Achaemenid overlordship, Alexander now had to forge ahead eastward, toward India. Greek historians, from Hecataeus to Ctesias, mentioned the conquest by Darius the Great of the Indus basin, which had in later times cut loose from his successors' authority. Alexander planned a reconquest. Therefore in the summer of 327, leaving one of his lieutenants in Bactria with adequate occupation forces, he crossed the Hindu Kush in the reverse direction to go back to the Kabul area, and again advanced eastward. While he was still in Afghanistan, it was announced to him that the Indian kingdom of Taxila, on the left bank of the Indus, had come on side. It thus became possible to gather in that kingdom, along the banks of the Indus, enough troops to control the whole of that imperfectly known region, and advance beyond Taxila, further than the Achaemenids had ever dared to lead an army. He decided to march without haste and find time to bring over those troops. Among them were counted a substantial number of Greek, Phoenician, Egyptian, and Cypriot sailors needed to man the vessels that were to sail down the Indus, after being built *in situ*. Leaving Hephaestion to lead the bulk of the army to Taxila, he took command of another column, which advanced further north into the mountains, though forced to do battle on many occasions with warlike tribes. In the spring of 326 his march led him through the town of Nysa, whose inhabitants worshipped a local god whom the Greeks, in accordance with their age-old custom of assimilating their own divinities to those of foreign lands, judged to be Dionysus. That was the origin of the myth of Dionysus' travels in India, which was to gain much popularity in Hellenistic mythology. Soon after, Alexander crossed the Indus on a bridge of boats and joined Hephaestion at Taxila. A considerable army, more than 100,000 men strong, had gathered there. The native king was at war with his eastern neighbor, Porus, whose kingdom extended beyond the Hydaspes, a sub-tributary of the Indus, and hoped for decisive help from the Conqueror in that conflict. The operations that followed constitute Alexander's last major military exploit and set the extreme limit of his eastward advance. They took place in the summer of 326.

Porus led a strong army. Its most powerful component was a massive force of 120 war elephants. It was the first time Alexander's troops had faced such enemies. They posed much too serious a threat for him to try to cross the river while they awaited him on the opposite bank. But he managed to elude the enemy's watch by dividing his own forces, and eventually managed to cross the river upstream from the spot where Porus was waiting for him. The two leaders met in a pitched battle on the left bank of the Hydaspes. Once more Alexander's tactical superiority won the day. By a skillful maneuver, he put out of action the enemy's cavalry before his own infantry joined battle with the elephants. The latter, after a prolonged and bloody encounter, were at last defeated, and Porus, who fought mounted on one of them, was injured and taken prisoner. As a tribute to his courage, Alexander treated him as a king and had him cared for by his own physicians. An agreement made with the Indian prince left him in possession of his kingdom, restored peace with the neighboring kingdom of Taxila, and granted him military assistance to help him overcome a number of local tribes. In those far-flung areas, Alexander chose, as Darius had done, a protectorate regime in preference to direct governance. Nevertheless, a Macedonian satrap, Philip brother of Harpalus, was to represent the king's authority over the whole area, supervising in his name the native princes.

The victory over Porus, won at such a high price, dazzled everyone. It was later commemorated by an issue of coinage displaying a degree of documentary precision of truly exceptional quality in the tradition of numismatics. On the reverse it showed Alexander on horseback pursuing in person Porus' war elephant. The king founded two cities in the area: Nicaea, on the site of the battlefield, celebrated his victory (*niké*); the other, Bucephala, was so named in memory of Bucephalus, the famous horse he had ridden since his early youth and which had just died. Next, after offering sacrifices of thanksgiving, he decided on Porus' suggestion to push even further east, while Craterus brought to completion the building of the ships which were to be used later for the journey down the Indus. While fighting the tribes that still held that eastern part of the Punjab, Alexander reached the bank of the Hyphasis. He prepared to cross that river to explore the unknown lands that stretched far away toward the Orient, in the basin of the Ganges, where the almost fabulous kingdom of the Gangaridae was supposed to be found. Then, in an army sorely tried by losses incurred in recent battles and by unceasing monsoon rains, a mutiny broke out against which the Conqueror's prestige proved powerless. The exhausted soldiers were convinced that going any further would mean the loss of all hope of return, and obstinately refused to follow their king beyond the Hyphasis. When he realized that it was impossible to bend his soldiers' resolve, Alexander, as a realistic statesman, gave in to them. As a signpost of the outermost limit of his conquests he caused to be erected close to his camp, on the right bank of the Hyphasis, twelve monumental altars, each in honor of one of the twelve major Olympian divinities. Then, after solemn

sacrifices, he gave the order for the return journey to start, hailed by an army whose confidence in its leader had been renewed.

Back on the Hydaspes, Alexander, having thus subdued the Punjab and part of Kashmir, completed his preparation for the journey south. When the fleet of a thousand ships was ready, it was placed under the command of the Cretan Nearchus, an excellent choice. The signal was given early in November 326, and the army started on its march in two main columns. One moved, under Craterus' command, along the Hydaspes, then the Indus on the right bank; the other, under Alexander and Hephaestion, on the left bank. Thus they enclosed Nearchus' fleet as it sailed down river. Only the eastern column had to fight, in the first part of its progress, between the Hydaspes and the Hyphasis. Opposition was put down without mercy. It was then that the king, during an assault on a citadel, came close to losing his life. He had been the first to climb a ladder on to the surrounding wall. There he remained alone with two or three companions, and with them jumped inside the fort. Seriously wounded in the chest by an arrow, he fainted, but his soldiers came to his rescue in the nick of time. This episode filled with high drama throws light on what remained to the end a defining trait of Alexander's character, an urge to be personally involved in combat. In his eyes, as traditionally for the Greeks, physical courage, *areté*, was the foremost quality of a hero.

These operations occupied the army until the spring of 325. Near the confluence of the Indus and the Hydaspes, a new Alexandria was founded. Dividing up his troops for the return journey, Alexander had sent Craterus in the direction of Kandahar, over the mountains by the Mulla Pass, with part of the phalanx and the heavy components of the army (the elephants and the engines of war). He was instructed to meet up with the king in Carmania, north of the opening on the Persian Gulf. Alexander himself was to accompany the fleet, and undertook to push on to the Indus delta and the Ocean river. He had a harbor built at Pattala, on the northern tip of the delta, subduing the surrounding area. On reaching the sea he offered a sacrifice to Poseidon; throwing a gold cup into the waves, he prayed to the god to extend his protection to Nearchus' fleet. The ships were to reach the Persian Gulf by hugging the inhospitable coast of Baluchistan, gathering on their way every piece of information that would allow the establishment of a regular sea route between Mesopotamia and the mouths of the Indus. To ensure the safety of such a difficult passage, Alexander meant to follow the same itinerary as Nearchus, skirting the seaboard. Combined operations of this kind, a column moving on land and a fleet hugging the coast, each affording support to the other, were familiar to ancient armies.

The plan was foiled by geographical and climatic factors. Nearchus was delayed by the monsoon, yet, without heavy losses, he overcame a number of difficulties and reached the Straits of Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. The broken coastline prevented Alexander from marching close to the sea.

He had to entrust himself to the inland deserts, in Gedrosia, where the army, hard-pressed by hunger and thirst, lost men and beasts. The latter end of his progress was less difficult. In December 325 he reached Carmania, where Nearchus and Craterus met up with him. Another Alexandria was founded, and great religious celebrations, accompanied by sacrifices and athletic competitions, marked the end of those lengthy trials for the reunited forces and their king.

■ *The empire reorganized* ■ *Punishment meted out to unfaithful satraps* ■ *Harpalus' treason* ■ *Athens' prudent policy under Lycurgus and Phocion* ■ *Agis III's failure and death* ■ *Conclusion of the Harpalus case: Demosthenes' exile* ■ *The edict on the return of the banished* ■ *The grant of divine honors to Alexander* ■ *The nuptials at Susa* ■ *The Macedonian veterans' mutiny: reconciliation at Opis* ■ *The death of Hephaestion*
■ *New plans of conquest* ■ *The death of Alexander*

Soon after his return Alexander had to take stern measures to put an end to the liberties taken by a number of powerful men, encouraged as they had been by his prolonged absence. Many satraps had failed to send supplies to the army during its difficult crossing of Gedrosia. For such culpable negligence they paid with their lives. The same penalty was meted out to Cleander, who had submitted Media to periodical extortion: the king could not allow his native subjects to be robbed. All satraps were ordered to dismiss any mercenaries recruited for their personal service: the king reserved for himself exclusive control of the armed forces. Even his friend Harpalus, the confidential agent to whom Alexander had handed over the management in Babylon of the royal treasury, had taken for granted the rumored death of the king, injured in battle while in India, and been guilty of embezzlement. He had lived the sumptuous life of a sovereign, demanding for his mistresses a deference due to queens. Learning of Alexander's return, he left Babylon for Cilicia, taking from the royal treasury the considerable sum of 5,000 talents, which he spent on the recruitment of mercenaries. When he saw that the king's authority was reasserting itself unchallenged, he thought he would find refuge in Athens, where a powerful party still harbored enmity toward the Macedonian monarchy.

Since their defeat at Chaeronea in 338 and the destruction of Thebes in 335, which had left Greece proper terror-stricken, the Athenians had maintained an attitude of cautious reserve. No doubt Demosthenes and Hyperides, champions of the struggle with Philip, were no less resolved to fight Alexander. Nor had

they lost all credit with the people. That had been demonstrated by the famous lawsuit involving Ctesiphon in 330, in which Aeschines, Demosthenes' old enemy, had indicted Ctesiphon for having – illegally, according to him – placed before the Council a proposal to bestow a crown of gold on Demosthenes, as a mark of honor. In that lawsuit, the occasion on which the famous orator delivered in his friend's defense the celebrated speech *On the Crown*, the real matter at issue was the policy of hostility toward Macedonia. The outcome of the case, Ctesiphon's acquittal by a large majority and Aeschines' exile to Rhodes, was evidence of the state of public opinion. Far from being hostile to Demosthenes for having placed the city in the ranks of the vanquished, the Athenians were grateful to him for having so eloquently championed the glorious tradition of national independence. Yet Athens, conscious of reality, was wary of a premature break with the dominant power, whose resources far exceeded her own. She followed the wise advice given by the patriot and competent administrator Lycurgus. He urged that finances be set in order and that morale be restored by the punishment of cowards and traitors (his speech *Against Leocrates*, delivered in 330 against an Athenian who had fled his city at the time of Chaeronea, illustrates his feelings on the subject). Finally, he wanted the city to be endowed with a new land army and a new fleet. The influence he exerted on his fellow-citizens for twelve years, from 338 to 326, had made them heal their city's wounds. They built an arsenal, fitted out the military harbor of the Piraeus, and renewed their fleet, adding to the traditional triremes, quadriremes, and quinqueremes, larger and more powerful vessels that carried more oarsmen. Furthermore, with a view to reviving among the people a feeling for age-old tradition, a variety of measures reorganized the celebration of cults, the moral bonding agent of the city. Shrines were beautified, for example that of Dionysus, where the theater, formerly a wooden structure, was given stone tiers of seats. Out of faithfulness to the past a *ne varietas* (that is, a standard edition) of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, glories of Athens since the previous century, was established. Sculpted portraits of those tragedians were erected at public expense. The ancient institution of the *ephebeia*, which introduced Athenian youths between the ages of 18 and 20 to military service, was reorganized in a style that aimed to revive an ancestral practice. Athletic installations, the stadium where the Panathenaic competitions were held, gymnasia and palaestrae were improved or rebuilt to allow young men to train in physical fitness. To oversee the reestablishment of the armed forces, the citizens elected many times in succession Phocion, a veteran of former struggles with Philip. He was widely respected for his military talent and integrity, and was endowed with qualities that embodied the ancient ideal of manhood. The picture of him that Plutarch has painted has remained legendary. To the renowned austerity of his virtue was added a sound appraisal of the existing balance of power. With his conservative turn of mind guided by clarity of vision, he prepared for war while advising peace.

Alexander tactfully flattered Athenian susceptibility by gracious gestures, sending to the city some of the spoils from the battle of the Granicus or freeing Athenian prisoners who had been mercenaries in the service of the Great King. The Athenians were quite willing to follow Lycurgus' or Phocion's advice. They thanked the king for freeing the prisoners by bestowing on him a gold crown. The Spartan king, Agis III (see pp. 10, 16), appealed to them to take part in the war that his city, which was not a member of the League of Corinth, waged in 331 against Antipater, with an army reinforced by mercenaries who had escaped from the battle of Issus. But they abstained. Marching on his Arcadian neighbors, Agis laid siege to the federal city of Megalopolis, founded in 369 by Epaminondas as a rallying point for the Arcadian tribes and a counterweight to Sparta in the Peloponnese. Soon Antipater and the Macedonian army came to the help of the city, which put up a victorious resistance. In a pitched battle which took place nearby, Agis was defeated and killed. The Macedonian hold on Greece proper was thus confirmed until the end of Alexander's reign.

In the Aegean Sea the economy had fallen on hard times, but that was a contributing factor to an undisturbed peace. From 330 to 326 a series of bad harvests brought about a serious shortage of cereals in the whole of the peninsula, especially in large populated areas like that of Athens, where supplies depended on imports by sea. An inscription from Cyrene demonstrates how in those years of hardship Hellenic solidarity came into play and helped weather the crisis. The African colony, whose territory was one of the granaries of the Greek world, quotes figures in an inscription about cereal supplies that it sent at that time to a number of cities, large and small. These amounted to 805,000 medimni (more than 40,000 tonnes), 100,000 to Athens alone. When the problem of daily bread became serious to such a degree, no one could be tempted into making war.

Thus it was that when Harpalus appeared before the harbor of the Piraeus in the spring of 324 with a squadron and a few thousand mercenaries, the Athenians refused to receive him. Sending his troops to Cape Taenarus, the large mercenary market, he begged to be admitted into Athens as a suppliant. His request granted, he strove, by distributing financial aid around him, to win the city over to his cause. When Alexander sent a request for his unscrupulous treasurer to be extradited, Harpalus was jailed. He soon escaped and joined his mercenaries, first at Cape Taenarus, next in Crete, another important mercenary market, where the Lacedaemonian Thibron, one of his lieutenants, caused him to be murdered. But his stay in Athens had serious repercussions. Demosthenes, who had been involved in Harpalus' arrest and the confiscation of various sums of money in his possession, was accused before the Areopagus of having been bribed. He was found guilty and had to seek exile in Troezen.

Meanwhile Alexander, back in the heart of his Asian empire, was taking important measures aimed at ensuring internal security in the complex world he was governing. It was right for component states to be pacified and prosperous

before he started on new ventures. At Susa, at the end of the winter of 324, he promulgated an edict (*diagramma*) addressed to the Greek cities, instructing them to recall their exiled citizens and return their belongings to them. Indeed, there was hardly a single city where political discord had not caused proscription, sometimes on a massive scale. Alexander's goal was to put an end to a situation harmful to the internal peace of states, by restoring a fatherland to thousands of banished people. No doubt such a measure meant interfering with the domestic concerns of member cities of the League of Corinth, an eventuality which was not provided for by the pact agreed between them and the king of Macedon. But in actual fact what Greek state, when it exercised hegemony, had ever shrunk from such interference? The blanket measures prescribed by Alexander could be put forward as an act of generosity and magnanimity. To give it greater resonance, the king had it proclaimed by Nicanor of Stagira, Aristotle's adopted son, at the celebrations taking place at the Olympic Games in the summer of 324. An inscription from Tegea and another from Mytilene show how that return from banishment was translated into fact, not always without harmful effects.

To consolidate his moral authority among the Greek cities, Alexander asked them, through the agency of local friends and supporters, to acknowledge his own personal divinity, which had seemed evident to him since he consulted Ammon's oracle. Such an acknowledgment was to be enshrined in the institution of a cult honoring him as an "invincible god," *theos anikétos*. In itself the apotheosis of a mortal appeared in no way objectionable to the ordinary Greek, who found in current myths, like those of Heracles or Asclepius, more than one well-established example of authenticity. Besides, recent history supplied precedents like that of Lysander, a memorable one. No doubt scruples or skepticism in certain minds balked at such attempts. Agesilaus had received with derision the wish of some to honor him like a god. But Hellenic polytheism, favorable as it was to the most varied beliefs provided they fitted in with the ritual forms in customary usage, did not reprove such novelties if they were supported by the authority of an oracle and, obviously, by power and success. The Greek cities of Asia had shown the way after their liberation from the Persian yoke. It was the turn of the cities of Greece proper to follow the same path, without apparent eagerness. Alexander's choice for the reverse of a silver coin, a tetradrachm struck in 324 to 323 by the royal mint in Babylon, in which care had evidently been taken to make him look like a god, shows how earnest he was to have his own cult established.

At variance with general willingness in Greece, Macedonians as a whole, and Antipater in particular, did not follow that initiative. As long as Alexander was alive, no cult was dedicated to him in his native country. Fidelity to the ancient forms of monarchy was very much alive and popular feeling was mistrustful of innovations. Yet Alexander had just inaugurated one of these, in a striking fashion. At Susa in the spring of 324 he celebrated with great solemnity his marriage

with two Persian princesses of the Achaemenid family, one the daughter of Darius III, the other of his predecessor, Artaxerxes III Ochus. He already had for a wife Roxane, daughter of Oxyartes, who had married him in Bactria and was to bear him a posthumous son. Polygamy had no place in Greek custom but corresponded to Oriental usage. Its adoption by Alexander was understood to imply acceptance of such a custom by the master of the immense Asian empire. Already the king had sometimes appeared in public in Persian dress. People could not forget what concessions he had made to the etiquette of the Achaemenid court. The wish to bring about a welding of the diverse components of his states – in the first place the union of the Macedonian and the Iranian ones, the foremost among them – was made even more evident by other marriages, those of his principal lieutenants with Iranian women. Hephaestion, his closest friend, married another daughter of Darius. In a similar fashion Craterus, the Greek Eumenes, and Seleucus (founder-to-be of the Seleucid dynasty) set an example by choosing a wife from the noble families of Persia – an example that was followed by 10,000 Macedonian soldiers. All these marriages, known as the “Susa Nuptials,” were celebrated at the same time as the king’s, an occasion of festive rejoicing that made a widespread impression.

It was not without some misgiving that quite a few veterans saw the descendant of the Argeads embarking on a policy of fusion between the Greek world, to which they felt they belonged, and the barbarian world against which they had carried on a hard fight. Many of them did not contemplate ending their lives in Asia, even beside their sovereign. Thus it was that when Alexander proposed that they should return to Macedonia if they so wished, the vast majority of them agreed, with an enthusiasm that soon degenerated into open mutiny. The boldest among them did not hesitate to give vent to harsh criticism of the king. Disturbed at the sight of a rebellion in which some of his most senior veterans took part, Alexander’s reaction was marked by both severity and an appeal to their better feelings. The ringleaders were arrested on his orders by loyal troops and handed over to the executioner. Simultaneously, by a passionate harangue, he won over the hearts of the mutineers. A sacrifice ensued, at Opis on the Tigris, accompanied by solemn prayers for the restoration of concord. The banquet that followed brought together Macedonians and Persians in brotherly union; 10,000 veterans then took their leave of Alexander, before returning to Macedonia under the leadership of Craterus and Polyperchon. On the king’s instructions, rich farewell presents had been given to them. For other veterans who agreed to stay in the Orient a district was set apart in a new city, Alexandria on the Persian Gulf. It was given the name of the capital of Macedonia, Pella.

Another trial, which left him sorely afflicted, was awaiting Alexander in the autumn of 324, in the course of his stay in Media, at Ecbatana. This was the death of his friend Hephaestion. Of all his companions this one was dearest to the king, who had bestowed on him the foremost dignity in the realm by ap-

pointing him as *chiliarch*, a Greek title given in the Achaemenid empire to one holding the position of prime minister. His death in the full bloom of youth filled the sovereign with grief. After consulting the oracle of Ammon, Alexander decided to hold a sumptuous funeral in honor of his friend. The catafalque that was built for him in Babylon, described in great detail by Diodorus, was one of unheard-of lavishness, wrought in the most precious materials and adorned with priceless statues. If anything was to move the king, it had to be above the common measure.

When he had overcome his grief, Alexander threw himself into the planning of his next endeavors with his usual eagerness. His plan was, on the one hand, to exploit the resources of his Asian realm by the development of river transport and sea trade, using to advantage the discoveries Nearchus had made on his return journey from India. On the other hand, he wished to extend the frontiers of the empire. He led a brief winter campaign against the Cosseans in the Zagros. He contemplated northern expeditions toward the Caspian Sea, southern ones toward the Red Sea, and in the immediate future the conquest of Arabia, the coast of which his vessels were beginning to reconnoitre, starting both from the Persian Gulf and from the Gulf of Suez. Early in the spring of 323, while he was making these preparations, numerous delegations arrived from Greek cities, asking for help in meeting difficulties caused by the return of the banished. The envoys approached him with crowns, as they would a god. Others kept coming from far-off regions of the western Mediterranean, from southern Italy, from Etruria or Carthage, paying their respects to a sovereign whose fame and power were exalted far beyond the boundaries of the Greek world. Among these barbarian embassies, tradition also lists Ethiopians, Iberians, and Celts from the Danube area. The whole universe known to the Ancients appeared to bow in reverence before Alexander.

The manifold activities described above had no doubt weakened his tough constitution, already put to a severe test by injuries sustained in battle and the strain of his travels. In early June 323, when the Arabian expedition was about to start, Alexander was brought down by a bout of fever, which in a few days drained him of all strength. On June 13, 323, he died in the palace of Babylon. Sickiness had deprived him of the time to provide for his succession. He was not yet quite 33.

■ *Alexander's denigrators* ■ *The originality of his grand design*
 ■ *Its aftermath in world history*

While Alexander's glory has survived through the ages, securing for him the leading place among conquerors within human memory, conflicting judgments

have been passed on the man and his achievements. The hatred felt by the adversaries of the Macedonian monarchy never laid down arms, even faced with the young prince's generous acts of forgiveness or his benefactions. Their role was taken over after Callisthenes' death by the hostility of some philosophers of the Peripatetic school, who never forgot the capital punishment meted out to their founder's nephew. The age-old mistrust harbored by intellectuals toward war leaders, even those endowed with the highest degree of culture, reinforced such an attitude of denigration with the passage of centuries. For how could one's contempt for the powerful that the world admires be better expressed than by passing a severe judgment on the most illustrious among them? This is the drift of the famous anecdote about Diogenes the Cynic replying to Alexander, who had asked what he could do for him, "Get out of my light." The fame of great men has always clouded the judgment of many who find some sort of revenge for their own humble position by belittling achievements too dazzling for them. Paul-Louis Courier, writing to the Hellenist Guilhem de Ste Croix, who took a special interest in Alexander, put in stark terms that state of mind:

Please do not extol your hero [he wrote]. He owed his glory to the times in which he lived. Otherwise, what more did he possess than such men as Genghis Khan, as Tamerlane? No doubt he was a good soldier, a good captain. But those are common virtues. In any army you will find a hundred officers capable of commanding it with success . . . As for him, he achieved nothing that could not have happened without him. Long before his birth, it was written that Greece was to take possession of Asia . . . Fate handed over the world to him. What did he do to it? Please do not reply, *Would that he had lived on!* For day by day he had turned fiercer and more of a drunkard.

Here a brilliant pamphleteer betrays the bitterness of an ordnance officer to whom circumstances, and no doubt his lack of drive and his pride, had denied the promotion he expected. He thus carried back to Alexander the critical judgment, devoid of any allowances, that he had often passed on Napoleon and his marshals. The historian's duty, however, is to steer clear of summary preconceptions, but first and foremost to look at the facts. These speak for themselves in the case of Alexander.

It is true that many Greeks in the fourth century, following the example of Isocrates, were in favor of a war of conquest against the Achaemenid monarchy that would allow the restoration among Greek cities of the moral unity they had known at the time of the Persian wars. Yet no one imagined that an operation of that nature could go beyond the liberation of the Aegean seaboard. Had Philip lived to undertake it, there is reason to believe that his realism would have imposed limits on his ambition, and that in response to Darius' offer he would have behaved like Parmenio (see p. 18), not like Alexander. Never in the course of his stupendous venture did the Conqueror stop being its conscious (and sole) origi-

nator, despite the resistance and apprehension of his associates. His aim was not only to bring under his authority the Great King's former possessions, but to reach in the east the furthest confines of the world down to the Ocean river, before exploring south and north, as is made clear by the preparations made in the year 323. His ambition was obviously to bring under unified control the whole extent of the inhabited world, the *Oikoumené*, to use the Greek term. That was a dream taken over from the great Achaemenid sovereigns, Darius or Xerxes, but enlivened by an original view of the complex nature of the world and the mutual relationship of nations. As the undertaking unfolded, one can see, at every step, the plan that was meant to be translated into reality. A great distance separates the conflagration at Persepolis, an act of atonement for a past that it was to expunge, from the Susa Nuptials. These were meant to create the climate of a brand-new future – a universal monarchy, gathering under the same stewardship Macedonians, Greeks, and barbarians, inspired by the same loyalty toward their sovereign and professing for each other a feeling of mutual esteem, as happened at the banquet at Opis. Institutions marked by flexibility, with their components of Greek and barbarian custom, were to ensure coexistence, if not a perfect blend. There was nothing Utopian in such a scheme, provided its author had at his disposal the time needed for its execution. The sovereign's authority, which imposed itself on everyone and (as was shown in many instances) knew how to assert itself, was the one bond able to keep united in a vast empire of that size such a diversity of peoples. This Alexander had understood. He alone was capable of bringing to completion the enterprise that he had thought out with a clear vision and on which he made a beginning in such a masterly fashion. That his death meant the rapid collapse of the system he had initiated does not prove its lack of viability. It shows that a man of Alexander's calibre was needed to put it in place and be its guarantor. His successors, aware of their shortcomings, were soon to scale down their aims to a level that they thought suited such men as they were. Yet even these often had to be reduced further!

The demonstration of a universal monarchy was, however, not wasted. It was later to be put to use by Augustus, in a manner adapted to the changed times. The Roman empire was in large part the realization of Alexander's dream. That was certainly the thought of the artist inspired to create the Great Cameo of France, now in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris. Above the enthroned couple of Tiberius and Rome, a deified Alexander hovers in the empyrean, at the side of Augustus in apotheosis, and handing over the government of the world to his far-off successor.



Plate 1 The (so-called) Sarcophagus of Alexander: detail (Istanbul Museum; photo Hirmer Fotoarchiv).

The Sarcophagus, built for a local dynast in the late fourth century, was found in the necropolis of the princes of Sidon in Phoenicia. The features, reminiscent of the Conqueror's, of a horseman wearing a helmet shaped like a lion's head on one of the four upright faces, have led to the monument being given that name. Lively reliefs adorn its four sides. The side shown here portrays scenes of lion and deer hunting, in which Greeks (in heroic nudity) and Orientals in Persian dress take part. The ornamentation is made up (in vertical order) of meanders (or Greek braids), ova, beads and reels, hearts-and-darts (see p. 286).