TRANSLATIONS FROM GREEK AND ROMAN AUTHORS

# Alexander the Great

## Selections from Arrian

J. G. LLOYD

# ALEXANDER THE GREAT

*Selections from Arrian*

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia



First published 1981

Printed in Great Britain by Redwood Burn Limited
Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 81–9453

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

Arrian
Life of Alexander the Great. – (Translations from Greek and Roman authors)
1. Greek prose literature – Translations into English
I. Title II. Lloyd, J.G.
III. Series
888'.01'08 PA3255

ISBN 0 521 28195 4

The cover illustration is part of a large mosaic from Pompeii depicting the battle of Issus. The mosaic is a copy of an older Greek painting and this detail shows Alexander on his horse, eager for victory. It is reproduced by courtesy of the Mansell Collection.

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# *Alexander the Great*

## *Selections from Arrian*

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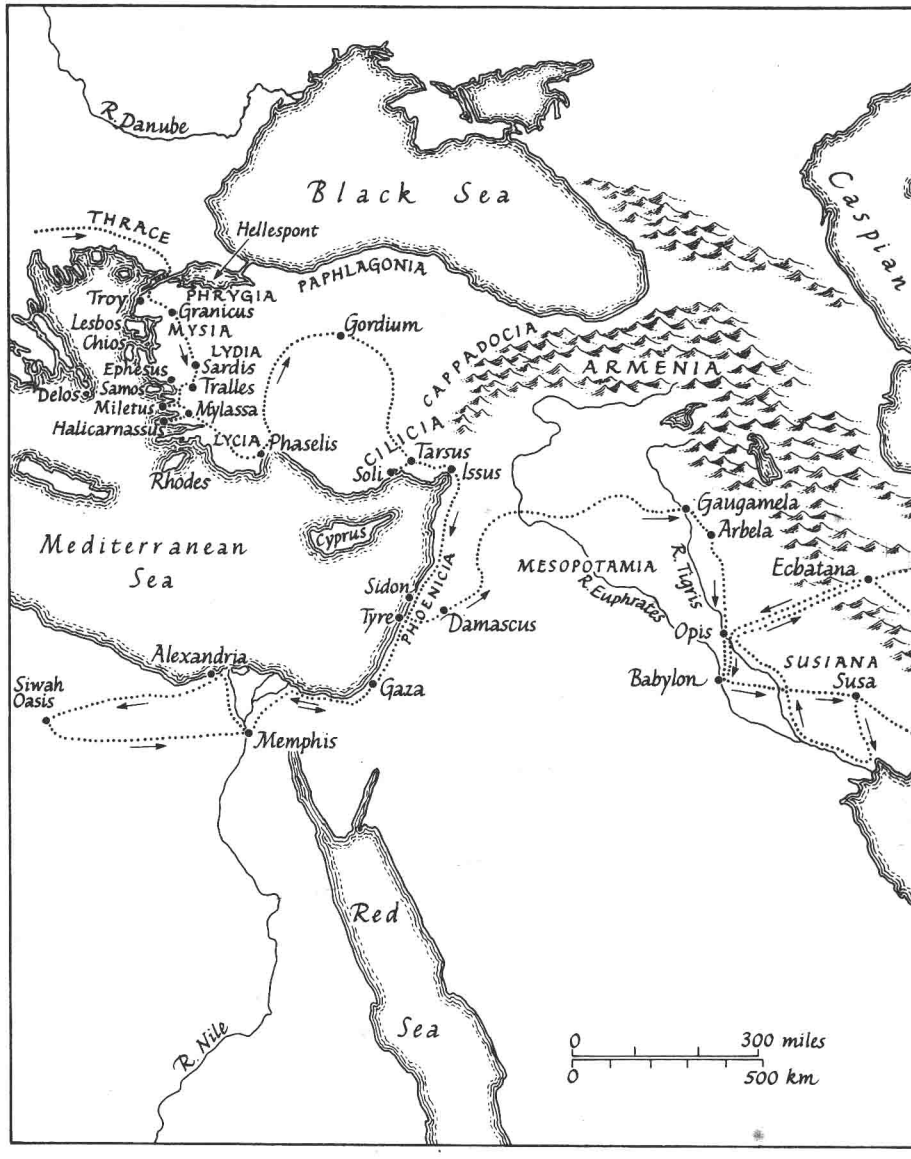
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
*Cambridge*
*London New York New Rochelle*
*Melbourne Sydney*

## Alexander's route




Aral Sea
R. Jaxartes
R. Oxus
Alexandria the Furthest
Samarcand
SOGDIANA
Sea
HYRCANIA
Darius killed
BACTRIA
Khyber Pass
Hindu Kush Mts.
AFGHANISTAN
Aornos
Taxila
PARTHIA
MEDIA
Porus defeated
R. Acesines
Alexander turns back
R. Hydaspes
R. Hydraotes
MALLI
R. Hyphasis
Zarangia
Pasargadae
Persepolis
R. Indus
INDIA
PERSIS
CARMANIA
Pura
GEDROSIA
Pattala
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea

Greece


ILLYRIA
River Strymon
THRACE
MACEDONIA
EPIRUS
THESSALY
Aegean
Sea
BOEOTIA
Thebes
Marathon
Salamis
Athens
Corinth
Sparta
0 50 100 miles
0 50 100 150 km

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# 1 Introduction

In 336 B.C. a young man, aged only twenty, succeeded to the throne of Macedonia on the murder of his father. It was a dangerous throne indeed. His claim to it was likely to be challenged; an attempt on his life was a distinct possibility. Subject peoples to north and south saw this as the perfect moment to rebel. No normal man could have hoped to deal with such problems.

Nearly thirteen years later this same young man, still not thirty-three years old, died at Babylon, in the heart of the Persian empire. Not only had he overcome his difficulties at home, defeated neighbouring tribes, and established himself as the acknowledged leader of his people; even the hosts of Persia had fallen before him in a series of mighty battles, Egypt had accepted his rule, and he had led his armies to India and the very edge of the known world. By the time they turned back his men had covered over eleven thousand miles in eight years, for most of them a journey accomplished every inch on foot. The empire now covered something like two million square miles. You have only to read of the battles, the sieges – especially of Tyre and Aornos – and marches such as the crossing of the Gedrosian Desert, to wonder what sort of men could achieve such things. But the men were normal enough. It was their leader, Alexander, who was unique. Here was a personality to make the difficult easy and the impossible possible.

This book may seem to be a military account, but first and foremost it is the story of a man. It sets out to show what Alexander was like; brave to the point of rashness, passionate to the point of murder, a military genius, administrator and empire builder, but above all an inspiring leader of men. We must begin by examining his background.

**Macedonia**

If you were to study British history of the sixteenth century you would gain a vivid impression of the Elizabethan age. You would read of Drake, Raleigh and Shakespeare, the defeat of the Spanish armada, the elegant life of Elizabeth's court. But it would be clear to you that London and the south were the focus of all that mattered. What you heard of Scotland to the north would leave you with the impression of a less civilised race, disorganised in its feuding tribes and hostile to the more advanced nation to the south. Of course this would be shamefully unfair to the Scots. But the same is true for those who study the history of Greece. Everything seems to centre on Athens; Sparta is treated with

some respect; Corinth and Thebes have their place; but Macedonia is a barbarous land to the north. Yet if we allow ourselves to move on from the fifth century B.C., certainly the golden age of Greek achievement in the arts, to the following century, when so much seems to have fallen into decay, we find one of the most remarkable men of all time, Alexander the Great. And he was a Macedonian.

Macedonia lies at the very north of Greece, cut off from its richer southern neighbours by mountainous country. Communication to the south was by narrow passes, easily blocked. The Macedonians probably came into contact more often with the peoples of southern Europe, modern Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, than with other Greeks. Whether one thought of them as Greek or barbarian depended on one's prejudices. They spoke Greek, with a strong dialect of their own, so that a conversation between an Athenian and a Macedonian would have been like a Londoner talking to a highland Scot. But the Macedonians themselves considered that they were Greek, and it was on this basis that Alexander's father, Philip, established himself, not as the conqueror of Greece but as its leader. In the same belief Alexander took over his father's mantle as the leader of the Greek nation against the barbarian Persians. Macedonian kings did their best to establish contact with the recognised values of Greece. Greek artists and poets were always welcome at the Macedonian court, and the playwright Euripides left Athens in his old age to live out the rest of his life there. When Philip wanted a tutor for his son he invited from Athens the distinguished scholar Aristotle. One of the most important items on the young prince's syllabus was to be the poems of Homer. The religious bond with the rest of Greece was equally strong. Macedonian kings claimed descent from Heracles, and thus also from Zeus; the worship of Dionysus was popular, and Alexander's mother in particular was an active devotee.

In one respect, however, Macedonian development had fallen behind most of the rest of Greece – it was still ruled by kings. The country was a loose amalgamation of tribes, with flexible boundaries as fringe areas broke away, or renewed their loyalty. In such circumstances there was little chance of making democracy work. Government needed a strong leader who could unite the different sections of the country by his own personality, supported by judicious political marriages. It was all a normal king could do to hold his country together, maintain his own position, and ward off his enemies to the north. It needed an extraordinary man to make Macedonia a match for other nations, and doubtless that is why Macedonia's greatness coincides with the rule of two extraordinary men, Philip and Alexander. The target of their ambitions was Persia.

**Greece and Persia**

In the late sixth century B.C the expanding power of Persia came into conflict with the Greeks, whose settlements fringed the coast of Asia

Minor. Persian expansion and Greek resistance created a series of wars culminating in Alexander's 'final solution', the total conquest of the Persian empire. The great stories of the Persian invasion of mainland Greece in the fifth century B.C. are well known; the glorious Athenian victory at Marathon, still remembered by the event held in the Olympic Games and at other athletics meetings, the heroic self-sacrifice of the three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae, Themistocles' cunning which led the Persian fleet into a trap at Salamis. But it is all too easy to think that that is the end of the story. Far from it: the existence of the Athenian empire stemmed from the ideal of uniting the Greeks to resist the Persians, and for a while that is what they did. When Sparta found herself at the head of Greek affairs, after winning her great war with Athens, she accepted her responsibility towards the Greeks of Asia Minor, after some dithering, and Spartan troops operated on Persian soil in the 390s. It was instinctive for Greeks to feel that Persia was the enemy. To a man who wished to establish leadership in Greece a clear way to unite the country behind him, and to divert the cities from quarrels with each other, was to organise a war against Persia.

When Philip secured the throne of Macedonia, acting first in 359 B.C. as regent for his infant nephew, but soon accepted as king in his own right, he spent over twenty years expanding his power throughout Greece. By diplomacy and by conquest he built up the kingdom until in 338 B.C. he defeated the combined forces of his enemies at Chaeronea in Boeotia. Philip used his victory to convene a meeting of the Greek states, which only Sparta (of any consequence) boycotted, and at its first full meeting in the summer of 337 B.C. war was declared on Persia, Philip being formally appointed commander-in-chief. The expressed reason was to take vengeance for the Persian destruction of Greek temples during their invasion nearly one hundred and fifty years earlier. Such was the length of Greek memories, such the depth of feeling against Persia.

Philip immediately began his preparations, and an advance force was sent into Asia Minor to establish a base on Persian soil. His murder a year later, before he himself could join his army, could have put an end to the whole enterprise. But his son was a man of even greater drive and ambition.

**The Young Alexander**

Alexander was born in 356 B.C., when Philip was still struggling to establish himself on the throne of Macedonia and to make his country a force to be reckoned with. His mother Olympias was a princess of the neighbouring kingdom of Epirus, and by all accounts a woman of passion and great personality. Alexander was educated in every way as befitted a future king; the learned Aristotle was his tutor, and his wide interests are demonstrated by the inclusion of historians, artists and

scientists of all sorts in the circle of men closest to him during his conquests. Alexander did not merely wish to conquer, but also to understand and record what he found. Obviously he was outstanding in the arts of war, and his skilful horsemanship is attested by his successfully riding Bucephalas, a horse which no one else could manage, when still little more than a child. Bucephalas remained his favourite horse and accompanied him as far as India.

Alexander's first taste of authority came when he was only sixteen. His father, absent from the capital on a campaign, entrusted the Royal Seal to his son, in effect leaving him to act as regent. A Thracian tribe at once revolted and Alexander led out his army to conquer them. He resettled their captured capital, naming it Alexandropolis after himself. Two years later he led a crucial cavalry charge at the great battle of Chaeronea, which finally established Philip's authority over Greece.

But despite this, in a country such as Macedonia, Alexander could not take it for granted that he would succeed to the throne. Marriage was a matter of political policy; kings took various wives; a son might succeed because of the status of his mother rather than on his own merits. In 337 B.C. Philip took a new wife of full Macedonian blood. Olympias returned home to Epirus, and Alexander quarrelled with his father to the extent of having to leave the country. Although there was a reconciliation, the new queen duly produced a son, and no one could guarantee that Alexander would ever ascend the throne, especially if Philip lived until the new prince grew up. And so it is natural that when Philip was murdered, at his daughter's wedding to Olympias' brother, fingers should point, some at Olympias, some at Alexander. The assassin was a member of Philip's bodyguard, and he was overpowered and killed on the spot, so that no one can show whose agent he was, if anyone's. Certainly a case that could not be proved then cannot be proved now. What is certain is that Alexander was able to secure the throne, Olympias returned to Macedonia and was highly influential in the running of the country, especially during Alexander's subsequent absence in Asia. Of course the new-born prince was 'disposed of' soon to be followed by his mother (roasted alive by Olympias, if we believe one highly coloured, if unlikely, version), and various other relations who may have been dangerous. In no other way could Alexander secure his throne, and ruthlessness had to be a fact of his life.

Outside the country drastic action was equally necessary. The southern Greeks, led by Thebes and Athens, planned to break free of Macedonian domination. Alexander at once headed south. As with so many talented generals speed of movement was one of his outstanding characteristics. Another was his remarkable way of dealing with natural barriers. He avoided the blockade of a pass into Thessaly by cutting steps over Mount Ossa, and his sudden appearance in their midst persuaded his enemies to instant repentance. The Greek alliance formed by

Philip was renewed and Alexander accepted as its lawful leader. He could now turn against his northern neighbours, and a fierce campaign in Thrace and Illyria both reduced the rebels to submission and showed the energy and imagination of this remarkable young man. Unfortunately a rumour reached Greece that he had been killed, and rebellion flared up again, especially in Thebes. If Alexander were to be free to march against Persia his enemies at home had to be crushed once and for all. Within a fortnight he was before the walls of Thebes. This time there was no surrender by the defenders, offers of terms were scornfully refused. The assault was fierce and decisive. The city of Thebes was razed to the ground and those who had survived the fighting, thirty thousand according to some possibly exaggerated versions, were sold into slavery, man, woman and child. Small wonder that Greece cringed before the conqueror. He could turn to the great enterprise of the Persian campaign without any fear of further risings behind him.

**Alexander's Army**

The Macedonian army as created by Philip and developed by Alexander was probably the finest fighting force of ancient times. The hard core of any Greek army was its infantry phalanx, which normally formed the centre of the line. In Alexander's army this was a force of nine thousand men, sometimes called the *Infantry Companions*, divided up into six battalions. These men were heavily armed, and their special weapon was the pike, a thrusting-spear about fourteen feet long. In solid formation they must have looked invulnerable, and indeed unapproachable. However their manoeuvrability was rather limited and their main value was in a set battle. They were supported, and often outshone, by the *Guards*, three battalions each a thousand strong, including the *Elite Corps* later known as the *Silver Shields*. These were more lightly armed than the Infantry Companions and so more versatile in the varying needs of Alexander's campaign. Accordingly they appear far more often in the story. The infantry force was completed by detachments from Alexander's Greek allies and his northern neighbours, of whom only the Agrianians deserve special mention. They figure prominently in almost every action Alexander ever took, especially when speed was essential, and one cannot help but compare their role with that of the Gurkhas of the British army.

In ancient Greek warfare cavalrymen were rarely prominent, but in the open lands of Persia they were vital, and Alexander based much of his success upon them. The *Cavalry Companions*, about two thousand strong, were a crack force, showing a vitality and dash which regularly threw their enemies into confusion, leaving them ready to be mopped up by the infantry. A similar number of cavalrymen came from Thessaley, an area noted for its cavalry, while the Paeonians and Thracians also provided cavalry units which we often find mentioned.

It is clear too that although we know less about them the engineers

and support units of the army were of equally high quality. Their siege and assault equipment was very advanced; for instance their catapults could propel an eight pound missile up to four hundred and fifty yards, and greater weights a proportionately shorter distance. We have only to read of the remarkable siege operations at Tyre, or the ascent of the Rock of Aornos, to see that this army was much more than a body of soldiers. They were men who could accomplish feats which hardly bear thinking of today, and through it all shines the inspiring leadership of a man whose personal example and military genius welded them into the incomparable force which they proved themselves to be.

**Arrian's History**

We shall follow Alexander's story as Arrian recorded it. Arrian was born over four hundred years after the death of Alexander. Although a Greek, he served in the Roman army gaining useful military experience, and governed one of Rome's eastern provinces in territory which had been part of Alexander's empire. But his life's work was the writing of his account of Alexander's campaigns. Obviously the value of his work depends on his sources of information. In Arrian's times several eye-witness accounts existed, written by men who had taken part in the campaigns. Arrian refers frequently to two officers in Alexander's army, Aristoboulus and Ptolemaeus, who subsequently became king of Egypt. Both published their memoirs after Alexander's death, which in Arrian's view made them more likely to be truthful, as they had nothing to gain by flattery of their hero. We may more cynically wonder whether they perhaps could still gain by exaggerating their own parts, praising their friends and criticising their enemies. Their views of the court disputes and scandals can hardly have been impartial. But their evidence must be as good as we can ever hope for, and Arrian seems to have used them thoughtfully and to have compared them carefully.

Another account written at the time was that of Callisthenes who went as official historian to Alexander's expedition. He was an outspoken character and was eventually executed for treason, but what was published can only have been what Alexander was prepared to approve, and was essentially a propaganda document for Greek consumption. Nearchus, Alexander's admiral, was another who published an account after Alexander's death, and Arrian seems to have consulted it for the latter part of his work. In the section dealing with Alexander's death, Arrian also refers to the Royal Diaries. The authenticity of this document, which only seems to have survived in a fragmentary state, is much disputed. A popular theory is that it was eventually published to refute the rumour that Alexander had been poisoned, by giving a detailed account of his last days. We cannot really be sure about the value of any of these accounts, but we can feel confident that Arrian has done his best with the material at his disposal.

It was also inevitable in ancient times that legends should attach themselves to great men. Alexander himself, anxious to support claims of divine descent, was only too ready to encourage such stories, and after his death no doubt all sorts of exaggerated tales became widespread. Arrian would see no reason to doubt many of them, for the mythology which Alexander took for granted was a natural part of Arrian's outlook as well. We can only use our common sense in assessing what we read. But this book presents the story as Arrian told it.

# 2 Conquest of Asia Minor

As soon as his authority was firmly established in Greece Alexander set out on his grand expedition, in May of 334 B.C. He cannot have foreseen how remarkable it would become, and yet his ambition was clear in his first acts. He began by sacrificing to Protesilaus, traditionally the first Greek to land in Asia on the expedition against Troy some 750 years earlier. He then saw to it that he was himself the first to land on this occasion. He visited the site of Troy and sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles, greatest of all the Greek heroes, whose example he proposed to follow. At the temple of Athene he dedicated his own armour, receiving in return a shield and weapons said to date back to the Trojan War. We know the value of propaganda nowadays; so did Alexander.

Meanwhile his army too had crossed to Asia and was ready to seek out the enemy. The Persians only had their locally based forces, with Memnon, the commander of their fleet, advising them. They toyed with adopting a scorched-earth policy while they fell back to join Darius, their king. But they did not yet see why they should go onto the defensive against an invader of their country, and so they decided to give battle. The line of the river Granicus seemed to offer an ideal position, and here we shall take up the story with Arrian. Notice Alexander's personal example – not to mention how close he came to death, and so the ruin of everything, in the very first encounter – and see how skilfully he conducted events after the battle, and used his booty, to strengthen his bond with the army, and so to achieve a propaganda as well as a military success.

Alexander was now advancing towards the river Granicus with his army in battle formation. He had drawn up the heavy infantry in a doubled phalanx, posted the cavalry on the wings, and ordered the baggage columns to follow on behind. To scout out the enemy position Hegelochus was leading a party consisting of the cavalry lancers and about five hundred light infantry. Alexander was not far from the Granicus when riders from the scouting party galloped up at full speed to report that the Persians were drawn up for battle on the far bank of the river. Alexander began at once to make his arrangements to give battle, but Parmenio came to him and put the following argument: