



Summary :

After Alexander crossed the Hellespont, the Persian satraps of Asia Minor rallied their available forces on the banks of Granicus River in May/June 334 BC in order to prevent his further advance. Alexander moved against them and, despite the advantage of the enemy in numbers, he managed to suppress them. The result of this success was the full establishment of the invasion and the collapse of the Persian dominance in major part of Asia Minor.

Date

May/June 334 BC

Geographical Location

On the eastern bank of the river Granicus by Adrasteia, a plain of Hellespontic Phrygia.

1. The arrival of Alexander in Asia Minor

A crucial point during [Alexander the Great's campaign](#) was the battle of Granicus, which enabled Alexander to conquer the entire Asia Minor.

In the spring of 334 BC, Alexander's army crossed the [Hellespont](#) and disembarked in Asia Minor without meeting any resistance. From his camp at Arisbe Alexander advanced to the east passing by the cities of Perkote (present-day Umur-Bey), [Lampsacus](#), Coloniae and Hermotus, whereas Priapos which was situated to the north, on the Propontis, surrendered as well.¹ Meanwhile, the Persian forces had gathered at Zeleia (present-day Gönen), at about 100 kms to the east of Arisbe.

When the Persian **satraps** and magistrates were informed about Alexander's crossing over to Asia, they convoked a meeting in order to decide their further actions. Memnon of Rhodes, who was the commander of the mercenaries in the service of the Persian king, and also the latter's protégé, suggested that they should not risk a conflict with an enemy stronger in infantry and led by its own king, when on the contrary, [Darius III](#) was absent. According to Memnon, the best solution would be to retreat, destroying the countryside from where they passed, the crops and even their cities. Thus, Alexander would not find the necessary provisions for his army and would be enforced to depart. Simultaneously, they would have to send troops and naval forces to Macedonia, in order to transfer the war to Europe.

Judging from the result, Memnon's proposals were correct, but the Persians rejected them as being denigrating. Against the tactics of "burned land" stood Arsites in particular, who was hyparch of Hellespontic Phrygia. The Persian magistrates and officers suspected that Memnon wanted to prolong the war, in order to take even more advantage of Darius' favour towards him.² It is also possible that Alexander had ordered his troops not to sack the area which belonged to Memnon, which made him even more suspect in Persian eyes.³ The decision of the military council was to attack immediately in order to stop Alexander's advance. Following this decision, the Persian army marched to the northwest on the plain of Adrasteia and established its defense line on the eastern bank of the river Granicus.⁴

2. The tactics of the two parties

This area was characterised as the "Gates of Asia"⁵ and indeed it was of high strategic importance for the outcome of the campaign. The Royal Road, which connected the Hellespont with [Daskyleion](#), seat of the **satrapy** of Hellespontic Phrygia, passed through the area. Most probably there was also a junction of this road with the one which connected [Cyzicus](#) (present-day Balıkesir) with [Sardis](#).

If the Persians did not repel the invaders there, the way to all those important cities would be open.⁶ Furthermore, the location of the Granicus (present-day Kocabaş Çay) offered an advantage to the Persians who thus forced Alexander to fight a battle on a ground



of their own choice. The relatively high and precipitous river banks was a considerable obstacle, which would made it difficult for the Macedonians to maintain their order as well as to attack against the defenders of those banks.⁷ Although the river was probably neither deep and or particularly broad, it would, however, make the situation difficult for Alexander. Finally, by camping there the Persians secured their access to Zeleia and Cyzicus, and they would have ample provisions in water and forage.⁸

Alexander, on the other hand, had his own reasons for pursuing an immediate fight. He needed a fast victory, in order to relieve himself of the financial problems and the shortage in provisions.⁹ Furthermore, he had to secure at least the area of the Hellespont as a basis for his campaign and for securing provisions. In addition, it would enable him to avoid getting cut-off inland in case the outcome of the campaign was not positive for him. It was also necessary to gain control over a large part of the shores of [Ionia](#) to deprive the Persian fleet from its supremacy in the Aegean and thus to avoid a possible transfer of the war in Europe. However, if Alexander avoided the engagement at Granicus and headed towards Ionia, he would leave the main force of the enemy on his rear.¹⁰ He thus marched towards Granicus and, in spite of Parmenion's objections,¹¹ arrayed his army for battle.

What actually happened then is difficult to say with certainty. The ancient sources offer insufficient and contradictory information. Thus, historians have suggested various versions, following either the description of Diodorus¹² or that of [Arrian](#).¹³ The battle, which took place in the afternoon hours in May/June 334 BC, probably developed in the following way.

3. The opponents

The Persian cavalry consisted of about 20,000 men and was spread along the eastern bank in a depth of 16 cavalrymen, thus creating a front about 2.5 km long. On the left wing Memnon the Rhodian was positioned with a contingent of unknown number and composition, possibly Greek mercenaries and men from his own territory. Next to him was the satrap of [Cilicia](#), Arsames,¹⁴ followed by the hyparch of Hellespontic Phrygia, Arsites, with his [Paphlagonians](#), and then the satrap of [Lydia](#) and Ionia, [Spithridates](#),¹⁵ leading the Hyrcanian cavalrymen. The center was occupied by a large force, of unknown origin, which probably contained Cappadocians as well, led by the satrap [Mithrovouzanes](#).¹⁶ The right wing was held by 2,000 Bactrians, another 2,000 cavalrymen under Reomithras and finally 1,000 Medes.¹⁷ Behind the lines of the cavalry the Persian infantry was arrayed, less than 20,000 men.¹⁸ The Greek mercenaries must not have exceeded 5,000.¹⁹ Commander of all those men was Omares.²⁰

On the opposite bank, Alexander placed at the left wing his 1,800 Thessalian cavalrymen headed by Kalas, and next to him the Greek cavalry of the allies, with 600 men under Philip, and then the 150 Thracian cavalrymen of Agathon. Then followed the six phalanxes of the pezetaeroi, counting 1,500 men each, and commanded by [Craterus](#), Meleager, Philip, Amyntas, Koinos and [Perdiccas](#) and then the 3,000 hypaspists under Nicanor. At the right wing there was Amyntas with 600 sarissa-bearers and 150 Paeonian cavalrymen, then a contingent of 200 [hetairoi](#) under Socrates as well as another 1,600 [hetairoi](#) under Philotas. Finally, at the edge of the array 1,000 bowmen and Agrianae lancers were placed.²¹ In total, Alexander sent to battle 5,100 cavalrymen and 13,000 infantrymen. He undertook the leadership of the right wing himself and placed Parmenion ahead of the left wing.²² The length of the Macedonian front should equal that of the Persians, i.e. 2.5 km, to avoid outflanking. Therefore, the phalanx had apparently a depth of 8 men, the left wing a depth of 10 cavalrymen, whereas at the right wing the cavalrymen must have been slightly more. When the Persians spotted Alexander opposite them, they positioned the denser part of their cavalry at the left wing, by transferring forces from the centre.²³

4. The battle

Alexander ordered the [hetairoi](#) of Socrates' contingent to attack first, together with the Paeonians, the cavalrymen bearing sarissas and a contingent of 1,000 hypaspists.²⁴ After these forces started their attack, Alexander led the [hetairoi](#) together with bowmen and lancers to the main attack. Under the sounds of trumpets and cries they advanced against the stream, deploying their array to a slant position, in order to maintain their integrity and to attack at a front as uniform as possible.²⁵ The attack of the first lines under Socrates and Amyntas was important. It aimed at preventing the power of the enemy throughout the left wing of the Persians. If the



latter, who were already engaged in battle with those contingents, spread their lines further to avoid the imminent encirclement by Alexander, they would leave dangerous gaps in their array. These gaps could be exploited, both by the first lines as well as by the right wing under Alexander, which, finally, moving on the river, reached the opposite bank intact and beyond the left wing of the Persians. By suppressing their freedom of movement, Alexander managed to outflank them while avoiding the same danger for his own army.²⁶

Gradually, the Macedonians prevailed and pushed back their adversaries from the bank, whereas their infantry crossed the Granicus as well. During the fight Alexander's life was endangered, but he was saved by Cleitus. Pressed from all directions, the Persian cavalry did not withstand.²⁷ The phalanxes of the pezetairoi probably were the first ones to break the weakened Persian centre,²⁸ and then both wings started fleeing.²⁹ For the exact role played by the left wing under Parmenion we are not informed at all. It probably acted as a support, entering the fight at a slightly later stage.³⁰ The victors then faced the enemy's infantry, which had remained inactive all that time. Maybe the Greek mercenaries were the only ones who maintained their positions and fought desperately. They were however encircled and finally only 2,000 of them survived and were captured.³¹ On the Persian side about 1,000 cavalymen were killed, counting several officers among them. The losses for the Macedonians were 25 hetairoi, another 60 cavalymen and 30 infantrymen.

The following day, the dead Macedonians, the mercenaries and the Persian noblemen were buried with honours, whereas Alexander sent to Athens as a votive offering 300 Persian armours with the epigram "Alexander son of Philip and the Greeks, without the Lacedaemonians, from the Barbarians who dwell in Asia".³²

5. Causes and results of Alexander's victory

Alexander's victory in his first large scale battle on the territory of Asia was due to a combination of factors. His strategic capability allowed him to assess quickly the situation and to plan a way of action with which he would overcome any obstacles, whereas he attacked personally with decisiveness and courage the most powerful part of the enemy. Naturally, he had in his disposal an army highly capable of fighting, with determination and ability to fulfill their duty.³³ It is worth noting that the Persians on the eastern bank were fighting with the summer sun in their eyes, something which must have weighed on Alexander's decision to fight immediately after he reached the river Granicus.³⁴

The usual accusation against the Persian commanders is that they transformed their cavalry into a motionless power, by placing it on the river bank, thus depriving it from the possibility to attack vigorously and to perform tactical manoeuvres.³⁵ However, the location offered some advantages in terms of tactics and the cavalry was traditionally the best section of the Persian army. It was logical to expect that it would prevail.³⁶ It has also been supported that the Persian officers did not have somebody in charge who would have both a clear plan and the power to apply it, but their command was rather broken. Naturally, there are not proofs for that, and the fact that the battle took place within the territory of Arsites, who committed suicide as responsible for the defeat, maybe turns such allegations void of validity.³⁷ Perhaps the Persians aimed at the natural extermination of Alexander.³⁸ This is indicated by the accumulation of military units against him and by the following dual fights between him and Persian noblemen. It is however worth questioning why they did not use their infantry during the cavalry battle, but rather left it acting as a simple spectator. Whatever might have happened, either due to strategic incapacity, or due to the speed with which the events evolved, it seems that, after the beginning of the battle, the Persian cavalymen depended only on their courage.

As a result of the battle of Granicus, the main Persian forces in the area were eliminated, and lost several commanders, whereas the impact on the morale of the fighting parts was evident. Alexander stabilized his position in the area and the Persian supremacy collapsed throughout major parts of Asia Minor. The next organized and massive effort to refrain Alexander was made possible only much farther to the east, on the plain of [Issus](#).





1. Arr., *An.*, 1.11-12.
2. Arr., *An.*, 1.12, Diod. 17.18.2-3.
3. Polyae. 4.3.15.
4. Diod. 17.18.4
5. Plu., *Alex.*, 16.1.
6. Foss, C., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), p. 499.
7. Arr., *An.*, 1.13. Plu., *Alex.*, 16.2. For the topography of the area and the exact position of the battle there are various views (see bibliography). Present-day Kocabaş Çay is in fact a torrent a few centimeters deep and 7 meters broad. It certainly had much more water in antiquity. See Foss, C., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), p. 501.
8. Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), p. 76-77.
9. Plu., *Alex.*, 15.1.
10. Droysen, J.G., *History of Alexander the Great* 1 (Greek translation), (Athens 1988), p. 197. Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), p. 81-88.
11. Arr., *An.*, 1.13, Plu., *Alex.* 16.2.
12. Diod., 17.19-21; Bosworth, A.B., *Conquest and Empire: the reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1988), p. 39-44. Fox, R.L., *Alexander the Great* (London 1973, repr. 1974), pp. 119-123; Green, P., *Alexander of Macedon* (Middlesex 1970, repr. 1974), pp. 170-181. On persuasive arguments against it, Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), pp. 73-75, 87-88; Badian, E., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), pp. 271-274; Droysen, J.G., *History of Alexander the Great* 1 (Greek translation), (Athens 1988), pp. 193-194, n. 333.
13. The supporters of Arrian's narration (Arr., 1.11-16) present significant differences among them, such as Fuller, J.F.C., *The generalship of Alexander the Great* (London 1958), pp. 147-154; Nikolitsis, N., *The battle of the Granicus* (Stockholm 1974); Tarn, W.W., *Alexander the Great I* (Cambridge 1948), pp. 15-178; Wilcken, U., *Alexander the Great* (New York 1967), pp. 84-88. Here we follow on the basic points Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), pp. 81-86.
14. Arsamenes according to Diod. 17.19.4, Arsames according to Arr., *An.*, and Curt. 3.4.3.
15. Spithrovates according to Diod. 17.19.4, Spithridates according to Arr., *An.*, 1.16.3 and Plut., *Alex.*, 16.8.
16. Diod. 17.21.3; Arr., *An.*, 1.16.3.
17. Diod. 17.19.4.
18. Arr., *An.*, 1.14.4.
19. Although it is insinuated that all the infantry consisted of Greeks, Arr., *An.*, 1.16.6, this was probably not true. Badian, E., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), p. 284-285. Slightly earlier Memnon had only 4,000 men (Polyae. 5.44.4).



20. Arr., *An.*, 1.16.3.
21. Arr., *An.*, 1.14.1-3. In general on Alexander's army see Droysen, J.G., *History of Alexander the Great* 1 (Greek translation), (Athens 1988), pp. 166-180 and notes.
22. Arr., *An.*, 1.14.1.
23. Arr., *An.*, 1.14.4.
24. Arr., *An.*, 1.14.5-6.
25. Arr., *An.*, 1.14.7. Polyae. 4.13.6.
26. Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), p. 75,84.
27. Arr., *An.*, 1.15-16.1.
28. Polyae. 4.13.6.
29. Arr., *An.*, 1.16.1.
30. Badian, E., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), pp. 273-274.
31. Arr., *An.*, 1.16.1-2. Plut., *Alex.*, 16.13-15.
32. Arr., *An.*, 1.16.3-6.
33. Badian, E., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), p. 293; Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), p. 88.
34. Badian, E., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), pp. 290-291.
35. See for example Fuller, J.F.C., *The generalship of Alexander the Great* (London 1958), p. 148.
36. Hammond, N.G.L., "The battle of the Granicus river", *JHS* 100 (1980), p. 88.
37. , E., "The battle of Granicus: A new look", in *Αρχαία Μακεδονία II. Ανακοινώσεις κατά το Δεύτερο Διεθνές Συμπόσιο*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 19-24 Αυγούστου 1973 (Θεσσαλονίκη 1977), p. 283.
38. Tarn, W.W., *Alexander the Great* I (Cambridge 1948), p. 16.

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Glossary :

	hetairoi, the The companions. They were the elite guard of the macedonian king, made up mainly of noblemen and they formed the elite cavalry of the Macedonian army.
	satrap, the The title designated a representative of the Persian king, and was widely used in the Persian language. In ancient writers the term usually designates an official of the Persian empire who assumes highest political and military power within the limits of his <i>satrapia</i> , the division under his command. Alexander the Great introduced the institution to the administrative organisation of his empire in the East. In the Roman empire, the office of the satrap was hereditary for Armenian nobles who administered an Armenian klima (=canton, a historic-geographical unit); in the case of the Armenian territories inside the Roman Empire, the satrap yielded limited power under the suzerainty of the Roman emperor.
	satrapy, the 1. Administrative division of the ancient Persian state. 2. The office of a satrap and the period of his government.

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