



Summary :

The coordinated march of Macedonian and other Greek troops that reached the Indian peninsula (336-324 BC), under the command of Alexander from the Macedonian kingdom, brought a radical change in the political, economic and social conditions of the Eastern Mediterranean, which led to the shaping of the Hellenistic kingdoms. This process was determined to a large extent by the role played by the Greek cities in Asia Minor, as they became the connecting points between the Greek and the Persian political formations.

Date

336-324 BC

Geographical Location

Asia, Indian peninsula

1. Introduction

After [Alexander](#) threw his javelin on Asian grounds, before he crossed the Hellespont, he initiated a brand new and significant chapter in ancient history: the expansion of the Macedonian kingdom until the confines of Anatolia, and the shaping of a very large empire compared to what the Greeks were so far used to. The undercurrent symbolism in the above proceedings is strong and indicative of Alexander's intention to seize foreign lands, according to the Greek and Macedonian concepts.

The conquest of Asia very much depended on the occupation of Asia Minor's towns. For the Greeks, the double meaning of the word 'Asia', which was very often identified with Asia Minor, indicates that most likely only Asia Minor was the young Macedonian king's initial target.¹ Alexander presented himself to the Greek towns of Asia Minor as the one who wished to reestablish democracy. The Greek Asia Minor towns were already included in the Corinthian League, when in 337 BC the Corinthian Conference decided that Philip should order the Disruption of the Persian Empire.² In reality, these cities were at least the military starting-point from which Greek troops would be launched to the inner regions of the Persian kingdom.

2. Sources

Philological evidence, as well as testimony of other kind, allows us to a large extent to recompose the data related to the expedition. In order for philological sources to be rightly evaluated, certain factors such as the time that separated the writers from the actual facts and also the expedience of their writings should be seriously considered. The most significant, yet not unbiased, ardent supporters of Alexander were Callisthenes (nephew and son of Aristotle who participated in the expedition), Cleitarchus, who lived at the end of the 4th century BC, Nearchus, Alexander the Great's admiral, Onesicritus, [Ptolemy](#) and Aristobulus. Among the first extended narrations that are dated to between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD, those of Diodorus, Justinian, Curtius Rufus, Plutarch and [Arrian](#) (who draws information from Aristobulus and Ptolemy) can be distinguished. Finally, the well-known Story of Alexander the Great is not a particularly reliable source, as it contains a lot of fictional narrations. The information provided by philological evidence is completed by numerous inscriptions and the –relevantly recent– systematic classification of Alexandrian mints that are known to us.³ At the same time, research over Alexander's portraits is being conducted, while the two most significant art exhibits associated with Alexander – the 'sarcophagus of Alexander' and the wall painting at Pompey – have been extensively studied.⁴

3. Preparation of the expedition

Alexander's ascension to the throne (son of Philip II, who was king of Macedon), after his father's murder probably in October of 336 BC, not only ensured the continuity of the Macedonian Argead / Temenid dynasty, but also allowed Alexander to continue the



foreign policy that his father had laid out.

Young Alexander received a kingdom in a much better state than the one that Philip had encountered in 359 BC. The latter had planned carefully and without effort its military, political and economic strengthening over the previous years. Due to the reinforced Macedonian army he had spread to south Greece and, after the battle of Chaironeia (338 BC), he united all of his allied Greek states that were his fellow-members in the so called Corinthian League (338/337 BC), in order to march united against the Persians.

Together with the Macedonian seat, the young offspring of the Argead dynasty also inherited his father's ambitious plan to bring this expedition to an end. After he initially suppressed every opposition force in Macedonia and the mainland, he moved on to systematic preparations, in order to satisfy the main demand of the Greek city-states in classical times, which was to coordinate a Panhellenic expedition against the Persian kingdom.

4. Macedonian army

At the centre of these preparations laid the Macedonian army, which unavoidably shared the expedition burden. Since Philip's time, the fellows (selected equestrians) had been separated by the infantry fellows (infantrymen armed with the Macedonian 'sarissa', a spear approximately 6 m. long).⁵ Sources show that the latter did not differ substantially from the Greek soldiers (hoplites) and that, due to their high level of education, they formed a very flexible scheme that could be used both in inaccessible lands and in close combat.⁶ The Hypaspists formed a special category, as they were basically the king's guards. They were armed just like the infantry fellows and were used in missions that demanded velocity and flexibility. A special sector of Hypaspists was comprised of the Argyraspids, while our knowledge on the Asthetairoi is very limited.⁷ The keystone of the Macedonian troops' organization was the principle of the so-called combined arms battle. The ultimate goal was the combination of various arms within a flexible organic entirety, which would be in position to effectively adjust to different conditions of conflict, in arrayed battles but also in conflicts at mountainous areas.⁸ In the process of the expedition it seems that the percentage of Macedonians was being reduced, as they were substituted by mercenaries, but also by local, mainly Iranian, military units. The Macedonian 'scheme' was completed by the navy, which, apart from military operations, was used for the more effective exploration of the Anatolian coasts.⁹

5. The army's finances

It is known to us that war preparations for the expedition to Asia Minor cost an overall of 800 talents. Since, however, Philip's death the Macedonian treasury was in debt of 500 talents,¹⁰ the contribution of the Greek city-states in the preparation expenditure was of immense significance. The way in which Alexander's troops were paid remains unidentified. It is known that towards the beginning of the expedition coinage was issued in the Macedonian capital Pella and in Amphipolis, in order to cover the initial expenses of the army.¹¹ Evidently, this amount was not intended to cover the entire cost of the expedition; the troops were often paid by the booty that was acquired in war enterprises.

6. Alexander's motives

The fulfillment of Philip's vision to lead a Greek army against the Persians was a self-evident motive for Alexander's expedition against the Persians. The precise targets that he had set, or how faithful he remained in the adaptation of his father's visions, remain unknown to us. Besides, it is clear that he was influenced by the heroic ideal that appeared in the Homeric epics. At this point, ancient sources – mainly Arrian and [Strabo](#) (who draws information from Callisthenes) – are in tune with modern bibliography.¹² At any rate, it can be assumed that Alexander's targets were reshaped according to the newly emerged situation after each military success.

7. The passage to Anatolia

After Alexander suppressed the weak reactions of certain Greek city-states against him, he left the 60-year-old Antipater behind as general of Europe, and confided him with the supervision of the Greeks and the [Thracians](#), as well as the protection of the



Macedonian borders. He took the lead of the Greek troops in the march against the Persian kingdom, which had managed to recover due to the coordinated efforts for reorganization made by [Artaxerxes III](#) (358-338 BC).

The [battle at Granicus river](#) (334 BC) was a milestone for the expedition, after which the greatest part of Asia Minor fell in Alexander's hands without significant resistance.¹³ Three hundred Persian armours from the total booty were dedicated to the goddess Athena at the Parthenon, bearing the inscription "Ἀλέξανδρος Φιλίππου και οι Έλληνες πλην Λακεδαιμονίων από των βαρβάρων των την Ασίαν κατοικούντων" ("Alexander, son of Philip, and the Greeks, except the Lacedaemonians, from the barbarian inhabitants in Asia"). Besides, an honorary monument was dedicated at the central sanctuary at Dion. In 333 BC Alexander attempted to conquer the Persian fleet by land; he captured its base and arrived at [Cilicia](#). After he forced the Persian troops (under the king's leadership) to flee from the [battle at Issus](#) of Cilicia,¹⁴ he moved towards the south. After the siege of Gaza the road to Egypt had been opened, allowing him to control the coast of Eastern Mediterranean. Alexander respected the local traditions. In Egyptian texts he is clearly encountered with Pharaonic titles, as the son of Ammon Rah.¹⁵ In fact, he had visited the oratory of Zeus Ammon at the oasis of Siba, in the Libyan dessert. There the prophet, the highest of priests, called him son of Zeus.¹⁶

In the end of April of 331 BC Alexander crossed Phoenicia and Syria, heading towards the centre of the Persian kingdom. He forced king [Darius](#) to flee, in an undecided battle that took place in 331 BC at the plain of Gaugamela, in the area of Mosoule (northern Iraq), and was himself proclaimed king of Persia. Following this, the [satrap](#) Mazaios, who had fought at Gaugamela at the side of the king, handed Babylon to him, where the people and the priests welcomed him as their monarch. Alexander honoured the local ancient gods and traditions once more, by ordering the repair of the central sanctuary that was dedicated to the patron god Mardouk, which had undergone damage. He sat ostentatiously in the throne of the Great Kings of Persia at Sousa in December of the same year, and used the treasures of the Persian kingdom for the issuing of coinage. Finally, he handed Persepolis (the religious capital of the Persian state) to his soldiers for plundering in 330 BC. Towards the end of his stay there the royal palaces were committed to the flames.¹⁷ However, Alexander visited the grave of Cyrus at Pasargades and turned Ecbatana into an administrative centre. After the murder of Darius by the satrap Vissus in 330 BC, Alexander was the successor of the Achaemenids. He honoured the Persian king, by allowing his burial to take place in the predetermined site of the carved rocks in Persepolis. With Persepolis as a starting-point, his army passed Ecbatana, crossed Iran, modern-day Afghanistan and finally Indocus, until it reached Bactria. At Sogdiane the conflict received the form of a guerilla war, as the attacks came from the heart of the desert. At the side of the Iranians nomad horsemen also fought. At the banks of the river Iaxartes (Syr Daria), in the heart of the Persian kingdom, the last Alexandrian town, Alexandria Eschate, was founded. In the beginning of 327 BC Alexander wedded Roxane, daughter of Oxyartes who was governor of Sogdiane, wishing to be acceded to the local aristocracy.

The Macedonian king introduced himself to the towns of Asia Minor as the subversive person of tyranny or oligarchy, and the one who would reestablish democracy. His Greek-speaking soldiers, however, were troubled by the fact that Alexander had added certain Persian and Median symbols on his uniform, like the diadem, the belt and the tunic, and that he had adopted elements of the Persian court rituals. When he attempted to make his worship by the Greeks and the Macedonians mandatory, involving some type of kneeling and the kissing of the hand, the reaction of the Greeks was inevitable. This reaction became excessive when Alexander's three closest associates – Philotas, Parmenion (father of Philotas) and Cleitus (who had rescued Alexander at Granicus river) – were executed, along with the sons of all the kings. These incidents discredited Callisthenes, Alexander's Greek court writer.

8. The passage to India

After Alexander passed river Indus, in the spring of 327 BC, and was accepted at Taxila, he attacked the most serious enemy of this town, king Porus, who dominated Eastern Pentapotamia, beyond the river Hydaspes. In 326 BC the fleet that was under Nearchus' command followed the way of return, aiming at the same time to explore the sea route from India to Persia. In one of the most serious battles that took place in this journey, the king got seriously injured, when an arrow penetrated his chest. A part of the army and clothing had been sent earlier on through the northern road to the centre of the kingdom (under [Craterus](#)). The army set off in the autumn of 325 BC. Yet, not only did it fail to create supply bases for the fleet, but it also faced great difficulties from hunger and thirst, windstorms and floods, which resulted to the survival of only 15,000 men. The fleet, despite the serious problems of supply, reached the straits of Armozeia (Ormouz) almost without any losses. With Alexander's arrival at Sousa, the expedition towards the



borders of the 'oecumene' was almost finished.

9. Conclusion

Alexander the Great's expedition to Asia Minor was the biggest opening of the Greek towns towards the East, and thus created new, unfamiliar horizons for the so far limited Greek dominion. In addition, it took place in a time when the Achaemenid state, after its reorganization in the years of the king Artaxerxes III Ochus, was no longer a "giant with clay legs", as modern researchers describe it. The new requirements that were set by the expansion of Hellenism in reality signaled the beginning of the end for the microcosm of the Greek city-states and the beginning of the era of the Hellenistic kingdoms. The strong symbolism of javelin throwing on the grounds of Asia Minor by the Macedonian king was very much taken advantage of by later Hellenistic leaders, who tried to profess in every possible way that their country was *mutatis mutandis*, namely 'occupied'.

The direct impact of Alexander's expedition on the Persian dominion was the contact of the [Persian subjects](#) (in the wider sense of the term) with the Greek civilization. The mingling of different tendencies took place through the political integration of the two elements on an administrative level (e.g. the preservation of satraps in the Persian Empire, the foundation of Greek-style cities – plenty of which were named 'Alexandria' – throughout the entire Empire), on a social level (e.g. encouragement of intermarriages between Greek soldiers and Iranian women), and on a cultural level. Alexander was the one who set the foundations for this far-sighted strategy, even if the progressive assimilation of elements from the Persian culture in his daily behaviour was an unfamiliar change to his followers. The Greek cities of Asia Minor played a decisive role in the mixture of the Persian-Iranian and the Greek-Macedonian elements, not only because they were the first ones to have succumbed to the Macedonian conqueror, but also because by definition they were accustomed to the Greek civilization and functioned as intermediaries between the Greeks and the Persians.

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1. See Lauffer, S., *Alexander der Grosse* (München 1981), p. 71, ft. 15. It has also been assumed that the term 'Asia' was perhaps used for 'Phrygia'. See Gehrke, H.-J., *Ιστορία του Ελληνιστικού Κόσμου*, trn. A. Chaniotis (Athens 2000), pp. 204-205. (orig. *Geschichte des Hellenismus*, ¹ München 1990).
 2. For the relevant bibliography see Gehrke, H.-J., *History of the Hellenistic World*, trn. A. Chaniotis (Athens 2000), pp. 210-211
 3. For the reliability of the study of sources see Heisserer, A.J., *Alexander the Great and the Greeks. The Epigraphic Evidence* (Norman, Oklahoma 1980). See Goukovsky, P., "Reserches récentes sur Alexandre le Grand (1978-1982)", *REG* 96 (1983), pp. 225-253. The basic study of Alexander's mints is made by Price, M.J., *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus* (London – Zürich 1991). See Touratsoglou, I., *Alexander of the coins* (Nikosia 2000), with a more updated bibliography.
 4. See, for instance, Stewart, A., *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics* (Berkeley 1993)· Pollitt, J.J., *The Art in the Hellenistic period*, trn. A. Gazi (Athens 1994).
 5. On the Macedonian cavalry see Brunt, P.A., "Alexander's Macedonian Cavalry", *JHS* 83 (1963), pp. 27-42.
 6. Archaeological evidence proves that in Philip's and in Alexander's time the Macedonian army used not only the *sarissa*, but also another, shorter javelin, whose length was 2.5 m: see Andronikos, M., "Sarissa", *BCH* 94 (1970), pp. 91-114. At the same time, they certify the use of bigger round shields by the Macedonian army in the same period: see Liampi, K., *Der Makedonische Schild* (Athen 1999). These data complete the philological sources that present the infantrymen as a flexible military body. See Gehrke, H.-J., *Ιστορία του Ελληνιστικού Κόσμου*, trn. A. Chaniotis (Athens 2000), pp. 205-207.
 7. The suggestion that the body of the *Argyraspids* was formed right after Alexander's era does not appear to be very valid. See Lock, R.A., "The origins of the Argyraspids", *Historia* 26 (1977), p. 373. See Anson, E.M., "Alexander's Hypaspists and the Argyraspids", *Historia* 30 (1981), p. 117. On the *Asthetairoi* see Bosworth, A.B., "Asthetairoi", *CQ* 23 (1973), p. 245.
 8. For relevant bibliography see Lauffer, S., *Alexander der Grosse* (München 1981), p.52, ft. 18· Berve, H., *Das Alexanderreich auf*



prosopographischer Grundlage 1 (München 1926), p. 103· Gehrke, H.-J., *Ιστορία του Ελληνιστικού κόσμου*, trn. A. Chaniotis (Athens 2000).

9. See Marsden, E.W., "Macedonian military machinery and its designs under Philip and Alexander", *Αρχαία Μακεδονία* 2 (1977), p. 211. On the navy, see Hauben, H., "The expansion of Macedonian Sea-Power under Alexander the Great", in *Alexandre le Grand. Image et réalité* (Fondation Hardt, Entretiens 22, Vandoeuvres – Genève 1975). On the army's supply see Engels, D.W., *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1978).

10. Arr. *Anab.* 7.9.6· Plut., *Alex.* 15 (who draws information from Aristobulus, Onesicritus and Douris).

11. On the issuing of coinage by Alexander related to his expedition and on the issuing of later coinage in his name, see Price, M.J., *The Coinage in the Name of Alexander and Philip Arrhidaeus* (London – Zürich 1991).

12. See, for example, Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.1· Strabo 17.1.43· Gehrke, H.-J., *Ιστορία του Ελληνιστικού Κόσμου*, trn. A. Chaniotis (Athens 2000), pp. 202-203, with references to the older bibliography.

13. From the extant descriptions concerning the battle, by Diodorus and Arrian, the first one opposes the topographical observations of more recent researchers: see Gehrke, H.-J., *Ιστορία του Ελληνιστικού Κόσμου*, trn. A. Chaniotis (Athens 2000), pp. 208-209.

14. The tracing of the exact location in the battlefield is linked to whether the river Pinarus can be identified with Deli Chai [Janke, A., "Die Schlacht bei Issos", *Klio* 10 (1910), p. 137], or with Payias more towards the South (Engels, D.W., *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1978), p. 131. Hammond, N.G.L., *Alexander the Great. King, Commander, and Statesman* (Bristol 1989), p. 94.

15. Wilcken, U., "Alexanders Zug in die Oase Siwa", *Sitzungsberichte* (Berlin 1928), p. 576.

16. On the route-march to the Siwa oasis see Wilcken, U., "Alexanders Zug in die Oase Siwa", *Sitzungsberichte* (Berlin 1928), p. 576· Langer, P., *Alexander the Great at Siwa*, *AncW* 4 (1981), p. 109.

17. It remains under discussion whether the arson of Persepolis was an act of drunkenness or an intentional act. The second possibility is supported by Andreotti, R., "Die Weltmonarchie Alexanders des Grossen in Überlieferung und geschichtlicher Wirklichkeit", *Saeculum* 8 (1957), p. 170· Wirth, G., "Dareios und Alexander", *Chiron* 1 (1971), p. 133. Berve, H., *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographische Grundlage* 2 (München 1926), p. 175 and Lane Fox, R., *Alexander the Great* (London 1973), p. 260 support the first suggestion.

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Glossary :

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 *satrapia*, 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.

talent, the

Numismatic weight unit. The silver talent equaled 60 mnai or 6000 silver drachmas.

Sources

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Quotations

K. P. Cavafy, «Στα 200 π.Χ.»

«Αλέξανδρος Φιλίππου και οι Έλληνες πλην Λακεδαιμονίων –»

Μπορούμε κάλλιστα να φανταστούμε

πως θ' αδιαφόρησαν παντάπασι στην Σπάρτη

για την επιγραφήν αυτή. «Πλην Λακεδαιμονίων»,

μα φυσικά. Δεν ήσαν οι Σπαρτιάται

για να τους οδηγούν και για να τους προστάζουν

σαν πολυτίμους υπηρέτας. Αλλωστε

μια πανελλήνια εκστρατεία χωρίς

Σπαρτιάτη βασιλέα γι' αρχηγό



δεν θα τους φαινόταν πολλής περιωπής.
Α βεβαιότατα «πλην Λακεδαιμονίων».
Είναι κι αυτή μια στάσις. Νιώθεται.
Έτσι, πλην Λακεδαιμονίων στον Γρανικό·
και στην Ισσό μετά· και στην τελειωτική
την μάχη, όπου εσαρώθη ο φοβερός στρατός
που στ' Αρβηλα συγκέντρωσαν οι Πέρσαι:
που απ' τ' Αρβηλα ξεκίνησε για νίκη, κ' εσαρώθη.
Κι απ' την θαυμάσιαν πανελλήνιαν εκστρατεία,
τη νικηφόρα, την περίλαμπρη,
την περιλάλητη, την δοξασμένη
ως άλλη δεν δοξάσθηκε καμιά,
την απαράμιλλη· βγήκαμ' εμείς·
ελληνικός καινούριος κόσμος, μέγας.
Εμείς οι Αλεξανδρινοί, οι Αντιοχείς,
οι Σελευκείς, κ' οι πολυάριθμοι
επίλοιποι Έλληνες Αιγύπτου και Συρίας,
κ' οι εν Μηδία, κ' οι εν Περσίδι, κι όσοι άλλοι.
Με τες εκτεταμένες επικράτειες,
με την ποικίλη δράσι των στοχαστικών προσαρμογών.
Και την Κοινήν Ελληνική Λαλιά
ως μέσα στην Βακτριανή την πήγαμεν, ως τους Ινδούς.
Για Λακεδαιμονίους να μιλούμε τώρα!
(*Poems 1897-1933*, Ikaros 1984)

Chronological Table



336 BC: Philip II is murdered. Alexander succeeds him

335 BC: Destruction of Thebes

334 BC: Beginning of the campaign against the Persians. Battle at Granicus

333 BC: Victory of Alexander at Issus

331 BC: Victory at Gaugamela

330 BC: Destruction of the palace at Persepolis. Darius III is murdered

330-327 BC: Conquest of northeast Iran

327-325 BC: Campaign to Pentapotamia

326 BC: Battle at Hydaspis against Porus

325 BC: Return from India

323 BC: Death of Alexander. Succession arrangements. Philip III and Alexander. Distribution of satrapies

Chronological Table