

Alexander's Battles in Persia

Diodorus 17.17.3-5

He visited the tombs of the heroes Achilles, Ajax, and the rest and honoured them with offerings and other appropriate marks of respect, and then proceeded to make an accurate count of his accompanying forces. There were found to be, of infantry, twelve thousand Macedonians, seven thousand allies, and five thousand mercenaries, all of whom were under the command of Parmenion. Odrysians, Triballians, and Illyrians accompanied him to the number of seven thousand; and of archers and the so-called Agrianians one thousand, making up a total of thirty-two thousand foot soldiers. Of cavalry there were eighteen hundred Macedonians, commanded by Philotas son of Parmenion; eighteen hundred Thessalians, commanded by Callas son of Harpalus; six hundred from the rest of Greece under the command of Erigyus; and nine hundred Thracian and Paeonian scouts with Cassander in command, making a total of forty-five hundred cavalry. These were the men who crossed with Alexander to Asia. The soldiers who were left behind in Europe under the command of Antipater numbered twelve thousand foot and fifteen hundred horse.

Battle Tactics: Gaugamela

Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 3.14.1-4.

When now Darius brought on his entire phalanx, Alexander ordered Aretes to charge the Persian cavalry that was wheeling round the Greek right wing trying to enclose it. Alexander himself led on his army in column, but when Aretes and his cavalry unit had been sent off to attack the Persians who were wheeling round the Greek right and had broken in some degree the front of the Persian phalanx, Alexander wheeled toward the gap, and making a wedge of the companion cavalry and the part of the phalanx that was at this point, he led them on at the double and with a loud battle cry, he charged straight at Darius. Now for some little time it became a hand to hand fight, but when the cavalry with Alexander and Alexander himself, fell on the enemy heavily, actually pushing the Persians and thrusting spears at their faces, with the Macedonian phalanx, solid and bristling with its pikes, had now got to close quarters with them, Darius nervous as he had been all along. saw nothing but terrors all around. He was himself the first to turn and ride away. Those too of the Persians who were trying to envelop the Greek right took fright at the vigorous charge of Aretes and his men. At this place indeed the Persian rout was complete and the Macedonians following up kept slaughtering the fugitives.

Battle Tactics: Issus

Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 17.23.1-3

He roused his soldiers with appropriate words for a decisive effort and marshalled the battalions of foot and the squadrons of horse appropriately to the location. He set the

cavalry along the front of the whole army, and ordered the infantry phalanx to remain in reserve behind it. He himself advanced at the head of the right wing to the encounter, having with him the best of the mounted troops. The Thessalian horse was on the left, and this was outstanding in bravery and skill. When the armies were within missile range, the Persians launched at Alexander such a shower of missiles that they collided with one another in the air, so thickly did they fly, and weakened the force of their impact. On both sides the trumpeters blew the signal of attack and then the Macedonians first raised an unearthly shout followed by the Persians answering, so that the whole hillside bordering the battlefield echoed back the sound, and this second roar in volume surpassed the Macedonian war cry as five hundred thousand men shouted with one voice. Alexander cast his glance in all directions in his anxiety to see Darius, and as soon as he had identified him, he drove hard with his cavalry at the king himself, wanting not so much to defeat the Persians as to win the victory with his own hands. By now the rest of the cavalry on both sides was engaged and many were killed as the battle raged indecisively because of the evenly matched fighting qualities of the two sides. The scales inclined now one way, now another, as the lines swayed alternately forward and backward. No javelin cast or sword thrust lacked its effect as the crowded ranks offered a ready target. Many fell with wounds received as they faced the enemy and their fury held to the last breath, so that life failed them sooner than courage.

Darius' Offer Before Gaugamela

Diodorus Siculus, Library, 17.54.1-5

On the other hand, just as he had previously sent envoys to Alexander to treat for peace, offering to concede to him the land west of the Halys River, and also to give him twenty thousand talents of silver, but Alexander would not agree, so now again Darius sent other envoys praising Alexander for his generous treatment of Darius's mother and the other captives and inviting him to become a friend. He offered him all the territory west of the Euphrates, thirty thousand talents of silver, and the hand of one of his daughters. Alexander would become Darius's son-in-law and occupy the place of a son, while sharing in the rule of the whole empire. Alexander brought together all his Friends into a council and laid before them the alternatives. He urged each to speak his own mind freely. None of the rest, however, dared to give an opinion in a matter of this importance, but Parmenion spoke up and said: "If I were Alexander, I should accept what was offered and make a treaty." Alexander cut in and said: "So should I, if I were Parmenion."

Mutiny on the Hyphasis

Diodorus Siculus, Library, 17.94.1-5

Alexander observed that his soldiers were exhausted with their constant campaigns. They had spent almost eight years among toils and dangers, and it was necessary to raise their spirits by an effective appeal if they were to undertake the expedition against the Gandaridae. There had been many losses among the soldiers, and no relief from fighting was in sight. The hooves of the horses had been worn thin by steady marching. The arms and armour were wearing out, and Greek clothing was quite gone. They had to clothe themselves in foreign materials, recutting the garments of the Indians. This was the season also, as luck would have it, of the heavy rains. These had been going on for seventy days, to the accompaniment of continuous thunder and lightning. All this he accounted adverse to his project, and he saw only one hope of gaining his wish, if he might gain the soldiers' great goodwill through gratitude. Accordingly he allowed them to

ravage the enemy's country, which was full of every good thing. During these days when the army was busy foraging, he called together the wives of the soldiers and their children; to the wives he undertook to give a monthly ration, to the children he distributed a service bonus in proportion to the military records of their fathers. When the soldiers returned laden with wealth from their expedition, he brought them together to a meeting. He delivered a carefully prepared speech about the expedition against the Gandaridae but the Macedonians did not accept it, and he gave up the undertaking.

HISTORY OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

[HOME](#)

Burning of Persepolis by Alexander the Great

Diodorus, The History of the world, 17.20-22
Translated by M.M. Austen

As for Persepolis, the capital of the Persian kingdom, Alexander described it to the Macedonians as their worst enemy among the cities of Asia, and he gave it over to the soldiers to plunder, with the exception of the royal palace.

It was the wealthiest city under the sun and the private houses had been filled for a long time with riches of every kind. The Macedonians rushed into it, killing all the men and plundering the houses, which were numerous and full of furniture and precious objects of every kind. Here much silver was carried off and no little gold, and many expensive dresses, embroidered with purple or with gold, fell as prizes to the victors.

But the great royal palace, famed throughout the inhabited world, had been condemned to the indignity of total destruction. The Macedonians spent the whole day in pillage but still could not satisfy their inexhaustible greed. [...] As for the women, they dragged them away forcibly with their jewels, treating as slaves the whole group of captives. As Persepolis had surpassed all other cities in prosperity, so she now exceeded them in misfortune.

Alexander went up to the citadel and took possession of the treasures stored there. They were full of gold and silver, with the accumulation of revenue from Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, down to that time. Reckoning gold in terms of silver, 2,500 tons were found there. Alexander wanted to take part of the money with him, for the expenses of war and to deposit the rest at Susa under close guard. From Babylon, Mesopotamia and Susa, he sent for a crowd of mules, partly pack and partly draught animals, as well as 3,000 pack camels, and with these he had all the treasure conveyed to the chosen places. He was very hostile to the local people and did not trust them, and wished to destroy Persepolis utterly. [...]

Alexander held games to celebrate his victories; he offered magnificent sacrifices to the gods and entertained his friends lavishly. One day when the Companions were feasting, and intoxication was growing as the drinking went on, a violent madness took hold of

these drunken men. One of the women present (she was an Athenian called Thais [1]) declared that it would be Alexander's greatest achievement in Asia to join in their procession and set fire to the royal palace, allowing women's hands to destroy in an instant what had been the pride of the Persians.

These words were spoken to young men who were completely out of their minds because of drink, and someone, as expected, shouted to lead off the procession and light torches, exhorting them to punish the crimes committed against the Greek sanctuaries. Others joined in the cry and said that only Alexander was worthy of this deed. The king was excited with the rest by these words. They all leaped out from the banquet and passed the word around to form a triumphal procession in honor of Dionysus.

A quantity of torches was quickly collected, and as female musicians had been invited to the banquet, it was to the sound of singing and flutes and pipes that the king led them to the revel, with Thais the courtesan conducting the ceremony. She was the first after the king to throw her blazing torch into the palace. As the others followed their example the whole area of the royal palace was quickly engulfed in flames. What was most remarkable was that the sacrilege committed by Xerxes, king of the Persians, against the Acropolis of Athens was avenged by a single woman, a fellow-citizen of the victims, who many years later, and in sport, inflicted the same treatment on the Persians.

Note 1:

She was the lover of the Macedonian commander Ptolemy, a friend of Alexander, his biographer and the future king of Egypt.