

HISTORY · MILITARY HISTORY SUB-SERIES

# Military History: Alexander the Great

Alexander's campaigns as military history — from Philip's army and the destruction of Thebes, through the Granicus, Issus, Tyre, and Gaugamela, to the guerrilla war in Central Asia, the Hydaspes and the mutiny at the Hyphasis — closing with his death in Babylon and the first wars among his generals.

10 Chapters

Philip Osztramok

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: PICKING UP FROM PHILIP II'S REFORMS

# Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 1 · Introduction: Picking Up From Philip II's Reforms

*In thirteen years, from 336 to 323 BCE, Alexander III of Macedon led an army from northern Greece to the Indus valley and destroyed the largest empire the world had yet seen. This course follows those campaigns as military history: the army, the battles, the sieges, and the decisions behind them. It begins where Military History: The Greeks, Chapter 9, deliberately stopped — with the army Philip II built.*

## Where This Course Fits

| Course                                  | What it covers                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Military History: The Greeks, Chapter 9 | Philip II's reforms, the sarissa phalanx, and the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE)                                        |
| <b>This course</b>                      | Alexander's own campaigns, from his accession in 336 BCE to his death in 323 BCE, and the immediate military aftermath |
| Greek & Roman History, Chapter 5        | The political story after Alexander: his successors and the Hellenistic kingdoms                                       |

## The Army Alexander Inherited

Alexander didn't build his army; his father did. What Alexander added was the skill to use it in almost every kind of war — open battle, siege, mountain fighting, and counter-guerrilla campaigns.

|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>THE PHALANX (PEZHETAIROI)</b><br>Heavy infantry carrying the sarissa, a two-handed pike up to about 6 metres | <b>THE HYPASPISTS</b><br>Elite, more flexible infantry who linked the phalanx to the cavalry and |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

long. Its job was to hold and pin the enemy's centre.

were often used for the hardest tasks, such as storming walls.

### THE COMPANION CAVALRY

Macedonian noble heavy cavalry, usually led by Alexander himself, charging in a wedge formation. This was the army's striking arm — as Alexander showed leading it at Chaeronea, aged eighteen.

### ALLIES AND SPECIALISTS

Thessalian cavalry, Greek allied infantry, Agrianian javelin-men, Cretan archers, and engineers who built siege towers and catapults.

### COMBINED ARMS

The key idea, already present under Philip, was that each part had a job: the phalanx held, light troops screened, and the cavalry delivered the decisive blow, often into a gap the enemy's own movement had created. Watch for this pattern at the Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela.

## The War Philip Planned

### 338 BCE

Victory at Chaeronea leaves Macedon the dominant power in Greece.

### 337 BCE

The League of Corinth, an alliance of Greek states, names Philip its leader for a war against Persia — officially revenge for the Persian invasions of Greece 150 years earlier.

### 336 BCE

An advance force under the generals Parmenion and Attalus crosses into Asia Minor. That summer Philip is assassinated, and Alexander, aged twenty, becomes king (Chapter 2).

### 334 BCE

Alexander crosses the Hellespont with around 32,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry, joining the advance force (Chapter 3).

### THE ENEMY: THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

Persia's empire stretched from the Aegean to the Indus and from Egypt to Central Asia, divided into provinces run by governors called satraps. It could raise far larger armies than Macedon and had huge wealth.

### DARIUS III

Became king in 336 BCE, the same year as Alexander. His armies included excellent cavalry and thousands of Greek mercenaries, such as those led by Memnon of Rhodes.

## How Do We Know? The Source Problem

Several men who marched with Alexander wrote accounts of the campaigns, including his official historian Callisthenes, his general Ptolemy (later king of Egypt), the officer Aristobulus, and the admiral Nearchus. **None of their works survives.** What we have are later writers who used them.

| Surviving source                   | Written                                | Mainly based on                                         |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Diodorus Siculus, Book 17          | 1st century BCE                        | Cleitarchus, who wasn't an eyewitness                   |
| Quintus Curtius Rufus              | 1st century CE (two of ten books lost) | Largely Cleitarchus, some Ptolemy                       |
| Plutarch, <i>Life of Alexander</i> | Around 100 CE                          | Many sources; more interested in character than tactics |
| Arrian, <i>Anabasis</i>            | 2nd century CE                         | Ptolemy and Aristobulus, both eyewitnesses              |
| Justin                             | Uncertain                              | A short summary of an earlier lost history by Trogus    |

**READ EVERY NUMBER WITH CARE**

Our best source, Arrian, wrote more than four centuries after the events, and his main source, Ptolemy, had good reasons to make himself and Alexander look good. The other main tradition, often called the "vulgate," comes largely from Cleitarchus and includes more dramatic stories. Ancient figures for Persian army sizes are often hundreds of thousands, far beyond what modern historians think possible. This course gives the ancient figures where useful, but flags them.

**A FAMILIAR PROBLEM**

Every course in the Military History sub-series has had to separate the popular story from what the evidence supports. Alexander is the extreme case: he became a legend within his own lifetime, and the legend has shaped almost everything written about him since.

## The Course at a Glance

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**336–335 BCE**

Securing Macedon and Greece; the destruction of Thebes (Chapter 2)

**334 BCE**

The Granicus (Chapter 3)

**333 BCE**

Issus (Chapter 4)

**332 BCE**

The Siege of Tyre (Chapter 5); Egypt (Chapter 6)

**331 BCE**

Gaugamela (Chapter 7)

**330–325 BCE**

Bactria, Sogdiana, and India (Chapter 8)

**323 BCE**

Death in Babylon (Chapter 10)

## Questions to Sit With

How much credit for Alexander's victories belongs to Philip, who built the army?

If the eyewitness accounts are all lost, how far can we trust any detailed description of Alexander's battles?

Why might a war "for revenge" on Persia have been useful to Philip politically, whatever his real aims?

### Quick Reference — Chapter 1

- Alexander's campaigns ran from 336 to 323 BCE, from Macedon to the Indus
- He inherited Philip II's army: the sarissa phalanx, hypaspists, Companion cavalry, and allied and specialist troops working as a combined-arms system
- The League of Corinth (337 BCE) named Philip leader of a war on Persia; an advance force crossed in 336 BCE; Alexander crossed in 334 BCE with about 32,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry
- The enemy was the Achaemenid Persian Empire under Darius III, also king from 336 BCE
- All eyewitness accounts are lost; the main surviving sources are Arrian (based on Ptolemy and Aristobulus) and the "vulgate" tradition (Diodorus, Curtius, Justin), with Plutarch alongside

## What's Next

**Chapter 2: Alexander's Succession & the Real Consolidation of Macedon.**

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 2 · Alexander's Succession & the Real Consolidation of Macedon

*In 336 BCE Alexander was twenty, newly king, and surrounded by threats: rival claimants in Macedon, restless Greek cities, and warlike tribes on his northern borders. Within about eighteen months he had dealt with all of them — ending with the destruction of one of Greece's most famous cities. Only then could the invasion of Persia (Chapter 1) go ahead.*

## The Assassination of Philip, 336 BCE

### AEGAE, 336 BCE

At the old royal capital of Aegae, Philip celebrated the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra to the king of Epirus. As he entered the theatre, he was stabbed to death by Pausanias, one of his own bodyguards, who was killed while trying to escape.

### WHO WAS BEHIND IT?

The ancient sources give a personal motive: Pausanias had been badly abused and felt Philip had failed to punish those responsible. But suspicion also fell on Alexander's mother, Olympias, who had been pushed aside when Philip married a new wife, and even on Alexander, whose position as heir had seemed at risk. Alexander blamed Persian money. No firm evidence settles the question, and historians still disagree.

## Securing the Throne

With the support of senior figures, especially the general Antipater, the army acclaimed Alexander king. He then moved quickly against anyone who might challenge him.

### RIVAL CLAIMANTS

Amyntas, the son of Philip's elder brother and a possible rival for the throne, was executed. So were others accused of involvement in the murder.

### ATTALUS

The uncle of Philip's last wife, and a commander of the advance force in Asia, had insulted Alexander's right to rule. He was killed on Alexander's orders.

### OLYMPIAS'S REVENGE

Philip's last wife and her infant child were killed, reportedly on the orders of Olympias. Alexander's position was now secure, if brutally so.

## Greece and the Northern Frontier

### Autumn 336 BCE

Several Greek states see Philip's death as a chance to break free. Alexander marches south so quickly that resistance collapses; he is confirmed as leader of the League of Corinth and of the war on Persia.

### Spring 335 BCE

He campaigns in Thrace, defeating the Triballians and even crossing the Danube at night to scatter the Getae on the far bank.

### Summer 335 BCE

Illyrian kings attack from the west. Alexander wins at Pelion, in difficult mountain country, partly by staging a precise parade-ground drill of his phalanx that alarmed and confused the watching enemy before he attacked.

### WHY THE NORTH MATTERED

Macedon couldn't leave for Asia with hostile tribes on its borders. These campaigns also tested the army in rough terrain against unconventional enemies — experience it would need again in Bactria and India (Chapter 8).

## The Destruction of Thebes, 335 BCE

### A RUMOUR AND A REVOLT

While Alexander was fighting in Illyria, a rumour spread that he had been killed. Theban exiles returned from Athens, killed pro-Macedonian officials, and besieged the Macedonian garrison in the city's citadel. Persian money was encouraging revolt, and Athens sent weapons.

### THE MARCH AND THE ASSAULT

Alexander marched south over three hundred miles in about two weeks. The Thebans at first refused to believe it was really him. He offered terms; they refused. After a short siege, Macedonian troops broke into the city.

| Outcome     | Details                                                                                      |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Deaths      | About 6,000 Thebans killed in the fighting                                                   |
| Enslaved    | About 30,000 people sold into slavery                                                        |
| The city    | Razed to the ground; only its temples and the house of the poet Pindar were spared           |
| Who decided | Formally, Alexander's Greek allies in the League, several of whom were old enemies of Thebes |

### AN EXAMPLE TO GREECE

Thebes had been the leading military power in Greece only a generation earlier (Military History: The Greeks, Chapter 8). Its destruction was a deliberate warning.

Other states dropped their plans to rebel, and Athens, which had supported the revolt, made peace quickly. For the rest of Alexander's reign, Greece caused him little serious trouble.

## Questions to Sit With

Did Alexander benefit so much from Philip's death that the suspicion against him is fair, or is that reasoning too simple?

Was the destruction of Thebes a military necessity, a political calculation, or both?

What does the speed of the march to Thebes suggest about the army Alexander inherited?

## Quick Reference — Chapter 2

- Philip II was murdered by his bodyguard Pausanias at Aegae in 336 BCE; who was behind it is still debated
- Supported by Antipater and the army, Alexander removed rivals including Amyntas and Attalus
- He restored control of Greece in 336 BCE and was confirmed as leader of the League of Corinth
- In 335 BCE he campaigned in Thrace, crossed the Danube, and defeated the Illyrians at Pelion
- Thebes revolted on a false rumour of his death; after a march of over 300 miles in about two weeks, he destroyed the city, with about 6,000 killed and 30,000 enslaved

## What's Next

## Chapter 3: **Crossing Into Asia: The Battle of the Granicus (334 BCE).**

## CHAPTER 3: CROSSING INTO ASIA: THE BATTLE OF THE GRANICUS (334 BCE)

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 3 · Crossing Into Asia: The Battle of the Granicus (334 BCE)

*In spring 334 BCE, with Macedon and Greece secured (Chapter 2), Alexander crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor. The Persian governors of the region chose to fight him at the first good defensive line they could find: the banks of the Granicus River. It was the first of Alexander's three great battles against Persia, and the closest he came to dying in any of them.*

### The Crossing

The army crossed from Europe into Asia unopposed; Persia's large fleet made no attempt to stop it. The ancient writers describe Alexander visiting Troy, honouring the hero Achilles, whom he claimed as an ancestor, and throwing a spear into Asian soil as a sign that he meant to win the land by conquest. Whether or not every detail is true, the message was deliberate: this was presented as a Greek war of revenge, in the tradition of Homer's heroes.

### The Persian Decision

#### MEMNON'S ADVICE

Memnon of Rhodes, a Greek commander serving Persia, urged the satraps not to fight. Instead they should burn crops and villages, leave Alexander's army without supplies, and use Persia's naval strength to carry the war to Greece.

#### THE SATRAPS' REPLY

The satrap Arsites and the others refused to destroy their own lands and subjects' property. They also distrusted Memnon, a foreigner. They chose to defend the line of the Granicus instead.

#### THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Memnon's strategy might have worked. Alexander's army carried few supplies and he was short of money. Refusing battle and starving the invader is the same kind of strategy Fabius used against Hannibal (Military History: The Romans, Chapter 3) — and, like Fabius's, it was politically unpopular.

## The Battle, May 334 BCE

|            | Macedonian army                                                                       | Persian army                                                                                                                  |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Commander  | Alexander, with Parmenion                                                             | A council of satraps, including Arsites and Spithridates                                                                      |
| Strength   | Modern estimates of the force engaged are around 18,000                               | Ancient figures range up to Justin's impossible 600,000; modern historians favour much smaller numbers, perhaps around 15,000 |
| Deployment | Phalanx in the centre, Companion cavalry on the right, Thessalian cavalry on the left | Cavalry lining the steep far bank, Greek mercenary infantry behind them                                                       |

### WHEN DID ALEXANDER ATTACK?

According to Arrian, Parmenion advised waiting until dawn, and Alexander refused, attacking at once across the river late in the day. Diodorus says the army crossed at dawn the next morning without a fight. The two traditions can't both be right, and historians still debate which to believe (see the source table in Chapter 1).

### THE CAVALRY FIGHT

An advance force was sent into the river first, drawing the Persian cavalry into close fighting on the muddy bank. Then Alexander led the Companion cavalry across, angling against the current, and a fierce cavalry battle followed. The Persians deployed their cavalry, not their infantry, at the water's edge, so the

fighting was hand to hand between horsemen, where the Macedonians' lances gave them the advantage.

ALEXANDER NEARLY KILLED

In the thick of the fighting a Persian noble struck Alexander's helmet with his sword. As the satrap Spithridates raised his weapon to strike from behind, Cleitus the Black, commander of the royal squadron, cut off his arm. Cleitus saved the king's life — a debt that makes his later fate (Chapter 8) all the darker.

Once the Persian cavalry broke, the phalanx crossed. The Greek mercenaries, who had barely fought, were surrounded. Alexander refused them terms, and most were cut down.

The Aftermath

| Outcome           | Details                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Macedonian losses | About 115 killed, according to the ancient figures (probably understated)                                                                                                          |
| Persian losses    | Several thousand, including many of the commanders                                                                                                                                 |
| Greek mercenaries | About 2,000 captured and sent to Macedonia in chains as traitors to the Greek cause                                                                                                |
| The spoils        | 300 suits of Persian armour sent to Athens, inscribed as won by "Alexander son of Philip and the Greeks, except the Spartans" — a pointed reminder that Sparta had refused to join |

334 BCE

Sardis, the main Persian centre in western Asia Minor, surrenders without a fight.

334 BCE

Miletus is besieged and taken. Alexander then disbands most of his own fleet, too weak to face Persia's and too expensive to keep. His plan: defeat the Persian navy on land, by capturing its harbours.

#### Autumn 334 BCE

Halicarnassus, defended by Memnon, holds out through a hard siege; the city falls, but its citadels resist for months.

#### 333 BCE

Memnon leads a Persian naval counter-offensive in the Aegean, but dies of illness — removing Persia's most dangerous commander.

## Questions to Sit With

Why do you think the satraps chose to fight at the river instead of following Memnon's advice?

Alexander led the charge himself and nearly died. Was this reckless, or essential to how his army fought?

Was defeating a navy by capturing its harbours a clever strategy or a dangerous gamble?

### Quick Reference — Chapter 3

- Alexander crossed the Hellespont in spring 334 BCE and visited Troy, presenting the war as a Greek crusade
- The satraps rejected Memnon's scorched-earth advice and defended the Granicus River
- May 334 BCE: Persian cavalry held the bank, Greek mercenaries behind; Arrian and Diodorus disagree on the timing of the attack
- Cleitus the Black saved Alexander's life by cutting off Spithridates's arm
- About 115 Macedonians were killed; about 2,000 Greek mercenaries were captured; 300 suits of armour were sent to Athens

- Sardis surrendered, Miletus and Halicarnassus were besieged, and Alexander disbanded his fleet to defeat Persia's navy on land

## What's Next

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Chapter 4: **The Battle of Issus (333 BCE).**

## CHAPTER 4: THE BATTLE OF ISSUS (333 BCE)

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 4 · The Battle of Issus (333 BCE)

*At the Granicus (Chapter 3), Alexander fought Persia's regional governors. At Issus he faced the Great King himself, Darius III, with the main royal army. Darius out-manoevred Alexander and got behind him — and then fought on ground so narrow that his greatest advantage, numbers, counted for almost nothing.*

### Before the Battle

#### Spring 333 BCE

At Gordium, Alexander "solves" the Gordian Knot, said to promise rule of Asia to whoever untied it — in the best-known version, by cutting it with his sword.

#### Summer 333 BCE

At Tarsus, Alexander falls dangerously ill after bathing in the cold river Cydnus, delaying the army.

#### Autumn 333 BCE

Darius assembles a huge army in Babylon and waits on the open plain of Sochoi in Syria, ideal ground for his cavalry.

#### Early November 333 BCE

Alexander marches south along the coast toward Syria. Darius, tired of waiting, crosses the mountains by a northern pass and comes down behind him at Issus, where he kills the sick and wounded Macedonians left there.

#### DARIUS OUT-MANOEUVRES ALEXANDER

For once, Alexander was caught by surprise: the enemy was between him and his supply lines. But Darius had left the open plain for the narrow coastal strip, where

the space between the sea and the mountains was only about 2.6 km wide. Alexander turned his army around and marched back north to fight there.

## The Two Armies, 5 November 333 BCE

|           | Macedonian army                                     | Persian army                                                              |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Commander | Alexander                                           | Darius III, in person                                                     |
| Strength  | About 37,000, including about 5,100 cavalry         | Ancient figures of 250,000–600,000; modern estimates about 50,000–100,000 |
| Centre    | The phalanx, facing the river Pinarus               | Greek mercenary infantry, with Darius behind them in his chariot          |
| Right     | Alexander with the Companion cavalry and hypaspists | Persian infantry, partly on the slopes                                    |
| Left      | Parmenion, with the Thessalian cavalry by the sea   | Massed Persian cavalry, facing Parmenion                                  |

## The Battle

### 1. THE CHARGE

Alexander led the Companions across the Pinarus against the Persian left, which broke. He then swung toward the centre — toward Darius himself.

### 2. THE CENTRE STRUGGLES

The phalanx, crossing the river and climbing its steep banks, lost its formation. The Greek mercenaries attacked the gaps, and the fighting was fierce; about 120 Macedonian officers fell here.

### 3. THE LEFT HOLDS

### 4. DARIUS FLEES

By the sea, the Persian cavalry crossed the river and pressed Parmenion hard. The Thessalian cavalry held on long enough for the battle to be decided elsewhere.

As Alexander's cavalry drove toward him, Darius turned his chariot and fled, later leaving it and his weapons behind. When news spread, the Persian army collapsed.

COMBINED ARMS IN ACTION

This was the pattern described in Chapter 1: the phalanx pinned the centre, the left flank held, and the Companions delivered the decisive blow. Notice that it only worked because both the centre and Parmenion's wing survived the pressure long enough.

DID DARIUS RUN TOO SOON?

The Greek and Roman sources, written from the Macedonian side, present Darius's flight as cowardice. That judgement is disputed. A king who was captured or killed would lose the whole war at once; escaping let him raise another army, which he did. Also, much of what we know about Darius comes from people with every reason to make him look weak beside Alexander.

The Aftermath

| Outcome          | Details                                                                                                                    |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Losses           | Ancient writers claim around 100,000 Persians killed, an impossible figure; Macedonian losses were far lower but real      |
| The royal family | Darius's mother Sisygambis, his wife Stateira, and his children were captured in the Persian camp and treated with respect |
| Treasure         | The royal camp was captured, and Parmenion soon seized Darius's war chest and baggage at Damascus                          |

A FAMOUS STORY

According to the ancient accounts, when Alexander and his friend Hephaestion visited the captured royal women, Sisygambis bowed to Hephaestion, the taller of the two, thinking he was the king. When she realised her mistake, Alexander is said to have told her not to worry, because Hephaestion "too is Alexander." It may be embellished, but it shows how the tradition wanted Alexander remembered: generous in victory.

### DARIUS OFFERS PEACE

Darius wrote asking for his family back and for friendship. Alexander replied demanding to be treated as lord of Asia. A later offer, made probably while Alexander was besieging Tyre, reportedly gave up all lands west of the Euphrates and a huge ransom. Parmenion is supposed to have said he would accept, "if I were Alexander." Alexander answered that so would he, "if I were Parmenion."

Alexander didn't chase Darius east. Instead he turned south along the coast of Phoenicia, toward the cities that were home to Persia's fleet — continuing his plan to defeat the Persian navy on land (Chapter 3).

## Questions to Sit With

Darius's manoeuvre was brilliant, but led him onto the wrong ground. What does that suggest about the difference between strategy and tactics?

Was Darius's flight a failure of courage or a sensible decision? How much does the answer depend on who wrote the sources?

Why do you think Alexander refused Darius's peace offers, when he could have kept half an empire?

## Quick Reference — Chapter 4

- Before Issus: the Gordian Knot (spring 333 BCE) and Alexander's illness at Tarsus
- Darius left the open plain at Sochoi, came down behind Alexander, and forced a battle on a coastal strip about 2.6 km wide
- 5 November 333 BCE: about 37,000 Macedonians against a much larger Persian army (modern estimates 50,000–100,000)
- The Companion charge broke the Persian left and drove at Darius, who fled; the phalanx struggled at the Pinarus and Parmenion held the left
- Darius's family was captured and treated with respect; the treasure at Damascus was seized
- Darius offered peace, reportedly including lands west of the Euphrates; Alexander refused and turned south toward Phoenicia

## What's Next

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Chapter 5: **The Siege of Tyre (332 BCE).**

## CHAPTER 5: THE SIEGE OF TYRE (332 BCE)

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 5 · The Siege of Tyre (332 BCE)

*After Issus (Chapter 4), most of the Phoenician coast surrendered. The island city of Tyre did not. Taking it cost Alexander about six months and required something close to a feat of engineering: building a road across the sea. It is one of the most famous sieges in history, and its result can still be seen on a map today.*

### Why Tyre?

#### THE TRIGGER

The Tyrians offered friendship but would not let Alexander into the island city to sacrifice to their god Melqart, whom the Greeks identified with Heracles. They meant to stay neutral.

#### THE REAL REASON

Alexander's plan was to defeat Persia's navy by capturing its bases (Chapter 3). A strong, independent Tyre behind him could shelter a Persian fleet and threaten his supply lines and Greece itself.

#### THE PROBLEM

The city stood on an island about a kilometre offshore, with walls reported as up to 150 feet high on the landward side, and a strong fleet of its own.

### The Causeway

With no fleet able to challenge Tyre's, Alexander decided to build a causeway (a mole) across the strait, so his siege engines could reach the walls. It was made of stone and timber, much of it taken from the old mainland city, and was about 200 feet wide.

● **January 332 BCE**

Work begins. Near the shore the water is shallow and progress is quick.

● **Early months**

As the causeway reaches deeper water and comes within range of the walls, Tyrian archers, catapults, and ships attack the workers. Two tall siege towers are built at the end to protect them.

● **Spring 332 BCE**

The Tyrians sail a fire ship, packed with pitch and other fuel, against the causeway. The towers burn, and a sortie by boat wrecks much of the work. Alexander orders a wider causeway built.

**ENGINEERING AS A WEAPON**

Siege engineering had grown fast under Philip, and Alexander's army travelled with specialists who built towers, rams, and torsion catapults (Chapter 1). Tyre was the greatest test of those skills, and showed that this army could win without an open battle.

**Winning the Sea**

The causeway alone wasn't enough. What changed the siege was a fleet. After Issus, the Phoenician cities whose ships served Persia had surrendered to Alexander, and their crews returned home.

| Source of ships                                   | Approximate number |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Phoenician cities (such as Sidon, Byblos, Aradus) | About 80           |
| The kings of Cyprus                               | About 120          |
| Other allies                                      | About 23           |

| Source of ships | Approximate number |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Total           | About 223          |

THE STRATEGY PAYS OFF

This is Chapter 3's plan working exactly as intended: by capturing Persia's harbours on land, Alexander turned Persia's own navy into his. With it, he blockaded Tyre's two harbours and could attack the walls from any side, not only from the end of the causeway.

The Assault

RAMS ON SHIPS

Battering rams and catapults were mounted on ships, lashed together in pairs to make stable platforms. The Tyrians dropped large stones into the water to keep them away, and divers cut the anchor cables; the Macedonians hauled the stones out and switched to chains. The rams probed the walls for weak points until, on the south side, a section gave way.

THE CITY FALLS, JULY 332 BCE

Alexander launched a combined attack: the fleet forced its way into both harbours while troops, including the hypaspists, crossed from ships onto the breach. Alexander himself was among the first on the walls. Once inside, the Macedonians, furious after the long siege, showed little mercy.

| Outcome                | Details                   |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Killed in the fighting | About 6,000–7,000 Tyrians |

| Outcome  | Details                                                            |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Executed | About 2,000 men; Curtius says they were crucified along the shore  |
| Enslaved | About 30,000                                                       |
| Spared   | Those who took refuge in the temple of Melqart, including the king |

### A SIEGE CHANGED THE MAP

Alexander's causeway never went away. Over the centuries, sand carried by the sea built up against it, and the island of Tyre became a peninsula joined permanently to the mainland — as it remains today.

## Gaza

Marching south toward Egypt, Alexander met one more stronghold that refused to surrender: Gaza, on a hill near the coast. It took about two months, with siege mounds built up against the walls, and Alexander was badly wounded in the shoulder. After it fell, the road to Egypt was open (Chapter 6).

## Questions to Sit With

Was six months at Tyre a sensible use of time, or should Alexander have left it behind and chased Darius?

What made the fleet more decisive than the causeway? Could the causeway have succeeded without it?

Why do you think the defeated Tyrians were treated far more harshly than the cities that surrendered?

## Quick Reference — Chapter 5

- Tyre, an island city about a kilometre offshore, refused to admit Alexander; he besieged it from January to July 332 BCE
- He built a causeway about 200 feet wide across the strait; a Tyrian fire ship destroyed its siege towers
- After Issus, the Phoenician and Cypriot fleets joined him: about 223 ships in all
- Ship-mounted rams breached the south wall; the city was stormed
- About 6,000–7,000 were killed, about 2,000 executed, and about 30,000 enslaved; those in the temple of Melqart were spared
- The causeway turned Tyre into a permanent peninsula; Gaza fell after a two-month siege, opening the way to Egypt

## What's Next

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**Chapter 6: Egypt & the Founding of Alexandria.**

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 6 · Egypt & the Founding of Alexandria

*After two hard sieges at Tyre and Gaza (Chapter 5), Egypt fell without a battle. Alexander spent the winter of 332–331 BCE there, and it was one of the quietest periods of his campaigns — but it produced two things that lasted: a new city that became one of the great cities of the ancient world, and a claim to divine ancestry that shaped how Alexander saw himself.*

### A Conquest Without a Battle

#### AN UNPOPULAR MASTER

Persia had reconquered Egypt only about a decade earlier, in 343 BCE, and its rule was resented. Many Egyptians had no reason to fight for it.

#### A SATRAP WITHOUT AN ARMY

The Persian governor, Mazaces, had lost many of his troops, sent north to fight at Issus. With no fleet and no field army, he surrendered Egypt and its treasury as soon as Alexander arrived.

#### RESPECTING THE GODS

At Memphis, the old capital, Alexander sacrificed to the sacred Apis bull and other Egyptian gods and held Greek games. Egyptian temple inscriptions later gave him the titles of a pharaoh.

#### WAS ALEXANDER CROWNED PHARAOH?

It's often said that Alexander was formally crowned pharaoh at Memphis. No reliable ancient account describes such a ceremony; the story comes mainly from the

later, legendary *Alexander Romance*. What is certain is that Egyptian priests treated him as a legitimate pharaoh, and he was shown as one in temple reliefs.

### THE MILITARY POINT

Egypt finished the plan begun at Miletus (Chapter 3): with the Phoenician ports and Egypt in Macedonian hands, the Persian fleet had no bases left in the eastern Mediterranean and soon broke up. Egypt also brought huge wealth and grain. Alexander now controlled the whole coastline behind him before turning inland.

## The Founding of Alexandria, 331 BCE

### THE SITE

West of the Nile Delta, near the Egyptian village of Rhakotis, lay a strip of land between the sea and a large lake, with the island of Pharos just offshore. A causeway to Pharos would create two natural harbours — an idea Alexander had just seen work, in reverse, at Tyre.

### THE PLAN AND A FAMOUS OMEN

The city was laid out in a regular grid by the architect Dinocrates of Rhodes. The ancient story says that, lacking chalk, the builders marked the outline of the walls with barley meal, and birds came down and ate it. The seer Aristander said this meant the city would feed many people — a flattering reading of what might have seemed a bad sign.

### ALEXANDER NEVER SAW IT BUILT

Alexander left Egypt a few months after the founding and never returned alive. The city was built by his governor Cleomenes and then by the Ptolemies, the Macedonian dynasty founded by his general Ptolemy. It became a centre of Greek learning, the

home of the famous Library and the Pharos lighthouse — and, eventually, of Alexander's own tomb (Chapter 10).

## The Journey to Siwa

Early in 331 BCE, Alexander made a long detour west along the coast and then south across the desert to the oasis of Siwa, home of a famous oracle of the god Ammon, whom the Greeks identified with Zeus.

### THE JOURNEY

The trip was dangerous: water ran short and guides lost the way. The ancient writers say sudden rain saved the party, and that birds (or, in Ptolemy's version, two snakes) guided them to the oasis.

### THE ORACLE

Alexander went into the temple alone and never revealed what he was told, saying only that he had heard what he wanted to hear. The priest reportedly greeted him as the son of Ammon.

### A POSSIBLE SLIP

Plutarch passes on a story that the priest, trying to speak Greek, meant to say "my son" but slipped and said something like "son of Zeus." It is probably an invention, but it shows ancient writers were already sceptical.

### WHY DOES THIS BELONG IN A MILITARY COURSE?

The visit had no military purpose, and it cost weeks. But Alexander's belief in his divine descent grew after Siwa, and it later caused real friction with his Macedonian officers, who resented a king who seemed to be claiming to be more than a man (Chapter 8). How much he truly believed it, and how much it was political theatre for his Egyptian and Asian subjects, is still debated.

## Organising Egypt

Before leaving in spring 331 BCE, Alexander divided the government of Egypt among several men, with separate military commanders, garrisons, and a civilian administration. Arrian says he did this deliberately, because Egypt was too rich and easy to defend to trust to any one governor. Then he marched back north, toward the Euphrates and Darius.

## Questions to Sit With

Why did Egypt surrender so easily when Tyre and Gaza fought so hard?

Was the journey to Siwa a waste of time militarily, or did it serve a real political purpose?

Why would Alexander split Egypt's government among several men instead of appointing one strong governor?

## Quick Reference — Chapter 6

- Egypt, reconquered by Persia only in 343 BCE, surrendered without a fight; the satrap Mazaces handed over the treasury
- Alexander honoured Egyptian gods at Memphis and was treated as pharaoh; a formal coronation isn't reliably recorded
- Taking Egypt completed the plan to defeat Persia's navy by capturing its bases
- Alexandria was founded in April 331 BCE near Rhakotis and Pharos, planned by Dinocrates of Rhodes; the barley-meal omen story
- Alexander visited the oracle of Ammon at Siwa and was reportedly hailed as the god's son

- He divided Egypt's government among several officials before marching north in spring 331 BCE

## What's Next

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Chapter 7: **The Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE).**

## CHAPTER 7: THE BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA (331 BCE)

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 7 · The Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE)

*Darius had learned from Issus (Chapter 4). This time he chose the battlefield himself: a wide, flat plain in northern Mesopotamia, where his much larger army and his cavalry would have room to surround the Macedonians. Gaugamela was the battle that decided who would rule the Persian Empire — and it is often called Alexander's masterpiece.*

### The Approach

#### Summer 331 BCE

Alexander leaves Egypt (Chapter 6), marches through Syria, and crosses the Euphrates and then the Tigris, which Darius leaves undefended.

#### 20–21 September 331 BCE

A near-total eclipse of the moon. Alexander's seer Aristander declares it a sign against the Persians. Because astronomers can date the eclipse exactly, it also helps historians fix the date of the battle.

#### Late September 331 BCE

The two armies find each other near Gaugamela. Darius has had the ground levelled so his chariots can charge.

#### "I WILL NOT STEAL MY VICTORY"

Arrian reports that Parmenion suggested a night attack, to avoid facing the huge Persian army in daylight. Alexander refused, saying he would not steal his victory. There was also a practical reason: night fighting was chaotic, and a victory won by surprise might leave Darius able to claim he hadn't really been

beaten. Darius, fearing just such an attack, kept his army standing in arms all night.

## The Two Armies, 1 October 331 BCE

|                      | Macedonian army                                                                | Persian army                                                                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strength             | About 47,000: about 31,000 heavy infantry, 9,000 light infantry, 7,000 cavalry | Ancient figures of 250,000 to a million; modern estimates vary widely, often around 100,000 |
| Special weapons      | Torsion artillery and engineers, not used in the field here                    | About 200 scythed chariots and 15 war elephants (which seem not to have fought)             |
| Strength of position | Discipline, flexibility, and the Companion cavalry                             | Numbers, open ground, and a much longer line that could overlap both Macedonian flanks      |

## Alexander's Plan

### AN OBLIQUE LINE

The army advanced at an angle, with its right wing, led by Alexander, forward and its left wing, under Parmenion, held back. It also edged to the right, away from the ground Darius had levelled.

### A SECOND LINE

Behind the main line stood a second line of infantry, ready to turn and face the rear if the Persians surrounded the army.

### ANGLED FLANK GUARDS

On each wing, cavalry and light troops were placed at an angle, like

the sides of an open box, to absorb attempts to get round the flanks.

### AN OLD IDEA, USED BOLDLY

Leading with one strong wing and holding the other back was the idea behind Epaminondas's oblique order at Leuctra (Military History: The Greeks, Chapter 8). Alexander's version was designed not just to win on one wing, but to pull the enemy's line apart.

## The Battle

### 1. THE CHARIOTS FAIL

The scythed chariots charged. Light troops shot down many drivers and horses, and where chariots got through, the infantry opened lanes in their ranks and let them pass harmlessly, to be dealt with behind.

### 2. A GAP OPENS

As Alexander kept moving right, Persian cavalry on Darius's left rode out to stop him getting round. This stretched the Persian line, and a gap opened between their left wing and centre.

### 3. THE WEDGE

Alexander formed the Companions and part of the phalanx into a wedge and drove straight into the gap, toward Darius himself. As at Issus, Darius fled, and the Persian centre began to collapse.

### 4. TROUBLE ON THE LEFT

Meanwhile Parmenion's wing was hard pressed by Persian cavalry under Mazaeus. A gap opened in the phalanx, and Persian horsemen rode through it to plunder the Macedonian camp, until the second line turned and drove them off.

### DID ALEXANDER BREAK OFF THE PURSUIT?

Arrian says Alexander stopped chasing Darius to help Parmenion, and that the left wing had already held by the time he arrived. Some historians suspect the sources, hostile to Parmenion after his later execution, exaggerated his difficulties and

blamed him for Darius's escape. Either way, Alexander chased Darius as far as Arbela, about 70 miles away, but Darius escaped again.

## The End of an Empire

### October 331 BCE

Babylon surrenders without a fight, handed over by Mazaeus, whom Alexander makes its governor. The city's treasure falls to Alexander.

### Late 331 BCE

Susa, another royal capital, surrenders with an enormous treasury.

### 330 BCE

Alexander forces the Persian Gates, a mountain pass defended by the satrap Ariobarzanes, and takes Persepolis, the ceremonial capital. Its great palace is burned — as revenge for the Persian burning of Athens in 480 BCE, or, in another tradition, after a drunken feast.

### July 330 BCE

Fleeing east, Darius is arrested and murdered by his own satrap Bessus. Alexander finds the body and gives him a royal burial.

### WHY GAUGAMELA WAS DECISIVE

Issus had cost Darius an army. Gaugamela cost him the empire: he couldn't raise another army of that size, and the heartland of Persian power — Babylon, Susa, Persepolis — fell within months. With Darius's death, Alexander claimed to be his rightful successor as king of Asia.

## Questions to Sit With

Darius chose the ground and still lost. What did Alexander do to take away the advantages of that ground?

Was refusing a night attack sound military judgement, or pride?

Should the burning of Persepolis be seen as a military act, a political message, or neither?

### Quick Reference — Chapter 7

- Gaugamela was fought on 1 October 331 BCE, after a lunar eclipse on 20–21 September that helps date it
- About 47,000 Macedonians faced a much larger Persian army (often estimated at around 100,000) with 200 scythed chariots on prepared ground
- Alexander refused Parmenion's suggestion of a night attack
- He advanced obliquely to the right, with a second line and angled flank guards
- The chariots were neutralised; a gap opened in the Persian line; the Companions' wedge drove at Darius, who fled
- Parmenion's wing was hard pressed and the camp raided; Darius escaped via Arbela
- Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis fell; Darius was murdered by Bessus in July 330 BCE

## What's Next

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**Chapter 8: The Real Conquest of the East: Bactria, Sogdiana & the Indian Campaign.**

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 8 · The Real Conquest of the East: Bactria, Sogdiana & the Indian Campaign

*Darius's death in 330 BCE (Chapter 7) ended the great battles against Persia, but not the fighting. For the next five years Alexander's army fought in the mountains and deserts of Central Asia and then in India — a harder, slower war of guerrilla resistance, fortress sieges, and one last great battle. It was also the period when tensions inside Alexander's own army turned deadly, and when that army finally refused to go on.*

## Trouble Inside the Army, 330–327 BCE

### PHILOTAS AND PARMENION (330 BCE)

Philotas, commander of the Companion cavalry, was accused of failing to report a plot against Alexander and executed. His father Parmenion, Alexander's most senior general (Chapters 3–7), was murdered on Alexander's orders at Ecbatana without trial.

### CLEITUS THE BLACK (328 BCE)

At a drunken feast at Maracanda (Samarkand), Cleitus, who had saved Alexander's life at the Granicus (Chapter 3), taunted him for adopting Persian ways and taking credit for Philip's achievements. Alexander killed him with a spear, then was overcome with grief.

### PROSKYNESIS AND CALLISTHENES (327 BCE)

Alexander tried to introduce proskynesis, the Persian custom of bowing before the king. Greeks and Macedonians saw it as worship fit only for gods. The court historian Callisthenes openly refused and was

later arrested over a plot by the royal pages; he died in captivity.

#### **KING OF MACEDON OR KING OF ASIA?**

All three crises had the same root. To rule a vast empire, Alexander took on Persian dress, ceremony, and officials — and, after Siwa (Chapter 6), a claim to be more than an ordinary king. Many Macedonians felt he was turning into the kind of ruler they had marched east to defeat.

## **Bactria and Sogdiana: A Different Kind of War**

### **329 BCE**

Alexander crosses the Hindu Kush into Bactria in pursuit of Bessus, who has proclaimed himself king. Bessus's own allies hand him over; he is mutilated and later executed as a regicide.

### **329 BCE**

On the Jaxartes River, the empire's northern edge, Alexander founds a city, Alexandria Eschate ("the Furthest"). He defeats Scythian nomads across the river, using catapults to cover the crossing — an early use of field artillery.

### **329–328 BCE**

The Sogdian noble Spitamenes leads a revolt and ambushes and destroys a Macedonian detachment. Alexander splits his army into mobile columns and builds a network of fortified posts.

### **328 BCE**

Spitamenes is defeated and then killed by his own allies, who send his head to Alexander.

### **327 BCE**

The Sogdian Rock, a cliff-top fortress, is taken after about 300 volunteers climb its rock face at night; around 30 fall to their deaths. Among the captives is Roxana, whom Alexander marries.

WHY IT WAS SO HARD

Here there were no enemy armies to beat in a single day. Spitamenes used speed, horse archers, and local support, struck at isolated units, and vanished into the steppe. Alexander's answer — mobile columns, forts, and marriage alliances with local nobles — is a pattern later armies fighting insurgents would recognise (compare Military History: The British Empire, Chapter 7).

India, 327–326 BCE

In 327 BCE Alexander crossed back over the Hindu Kush into the Indus valley, the eastern edge of the old Persian Empire. The ruler of Taxila allied with him; after storming several strongholds, including the steep mountain fortress of Aornos, he advanced to the Hydaspes River (the modern Jhelum), where King Porus was waiting.

|                 | Macedonian army                                | Army of Porus                                               |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strength        | Around 40,000 infantry and 5,000–7,000 cavalry | Estimates of 20,000–50,000 infantry and 2,000–4,000 cavalry |
| Special weapons | Horse archers from Central Asia                | Between 85 and 200 war elephants, and chariots              |

CROSSING THE RIVER, MAY 326 BCE

The Hydaspes was swollen by monsoon rains, and Porus held the far bank with his elephants, which would terrify horses trying to cross. For nights on end, Alexander marched troops noisily up and down the bank, until Porus stopped responding. Then, leaving Craterus with part of the army at the main camp, he took a picked force about 27 km upstream and crossed at night, in a thunderstorm that covered the noise, using an island to screen the crossing and hay-stuffed skins as floats.

THE BATTLE

Porus turned to face him. Alexander's cavalry attacked the Indian flanks and drew off their cavalry, while the phalanx engaged the elephants. The elephants caused heavy losses at first, but as their drivers were killed, the wounded, panicking animals trampled their own side. The Indian army was surrounded and broke.

#### **"TREAT ME AS A KING"**

Porus, wounded, fought on until almost the end. Asked how he wished to be treated, he is said to have replied: "As a king." Alexander restored him to his kingdom, enlarged it, and made him an ally. Nearby he founded two cities, Nicaea ("Victory") and Bucephala, named after his horse Bucephalus, who died around this time.

## **The Mutiny at the Hyphasis, 326 BCE**

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Alexander pushed on east to the Hyphasis River (the modern Beas). Beyond it, reports said, lay great kingdoms with even more elephants. There the army stopped. After eight years and thousands of miles, soaked by the monsoon, its equipment worn out, the soldiers refused to go further.

#### **THE ARMY SAYS NO**

Alexander appealed to them and then shut himself away in his tent for three days, hoping they would change their minds. They didn't. The officer Coenus spoke for them, asking him to lead them home. In the end Alexander let the omens for crossing be declared unfavourable, built twelve great altars to mark the limit of his advance, and turned back. It was the only time his own army defeated him.

## **The Road Back, 326–325 BCE**

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**326–325 BCE**

The army sails and marches down the Indus to the sea, fighting peoples along the way. Storming a town of the Malli, Alexander leaps into it almost alone and is shot through the chest with an arrow; he nearly dies.

### 325 BCE

The admiral Nearchus takes the fleet along the coast toward the Persian Gulf, while Alexander leads much of the army west through the Gedrosian desert. Heat, thirst, and flash floods kill a large number of soldiers and followers; Arrian says the losses were worse than in all the fighting in Asia.

## Questions to Sit With

Were the killings of Parmenion and Cleitus signs of Alexander's weakness, or the price of ruling a new kind of empire?

Why was the war against Spitamenes harder than the battles against Darius?

Was the army right to refuse to go on at the Hyphasis? What does the mutiny tell us about the limits of even the most successful commander?

### Quick Reference — Chapter 8

- Philotas was executed and Parmenion murdered (330 BCE); Alexander killed Cleitus (328 BCE); the proskynesis dispute led to Callisthenes's downfall (327 BCE)
- Bessus was handed over and executed; Alexandria Eschate was founded on the Jaxartes (329 BCE)
- Spitamenes led a guerrilla revolt until his death in 328 BCE; the Sogdian Rock was taken by climbers in 327 BCE, and Alexander married Roxana
- Hydaspes (May 326 BCE): a night river crossing about 27 km upstream in a storm; Porus's 85–200 elephants were turned against his own army; Porus was

restored as an ally

- At the Hyphasis (326 BCE) the army refused to go further; Alexander built twelve altars and turned back
- On the return, Alexander was nearly killed among the Malli, and the Gedrosian desert march caused heavy losses (325 BCE)

## What's Next

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Chapter 9: **Alexander's Real Military Innovations & Their Legacy.**

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 9 · Alexander's Real Military Innovations & Their Legacy

*Alexander never lost a major battle. But which parts of his success were really his own, and which did he inherit? And why did the armies of his successors, built on his model, eventually lose to Rome? This chapter steps back from the campaigns (Chapters 2–8) to answer those questions.*

### What Alexander Inherited

As Chapter 1 showed, the army was Philip's creation. Alexander didn't invent the sarissa phalanx, the Companion cavalry, the combined-arms system, the professional drilled soldier, or the siege train. Philip had also kept the baggage train small, making soldiers carry much of their own gear, which made the army fast.

#### BEWARE THE WORD "INNOVATION"

Popular accounts often credit Alexander with inventing things his father had already built. His real achievement is arguably less about new weapons or formations and more about how he used and adapted them, against a wider range of enemies than any earlier Greek or Macedonian army had faced.

### What Alexander Added

#### ADAPTABILITY

Pitched battles on a river bank, a narrow coast, and an open plain (Chapters 3, 4, 7); great sieges (Chapter 5); mountain warfare and counter-guerrilla campaigns (Chapters 2 and 8); and a battle

#### AIMING AT THE COMMANDER

At Issus and Gaugamela, the decisive blow was aimed at Darius himself. In a system that depended on the king, his flight could make an entire army collapse.

against elephants (Chapter 8). Few commanders have succeeded in so many kinds of war.

### RELENTLESS PURSUIT

Alexander followed up victories hard, as after Gaugamela and in the long hunt for Darius and Bessus, turning battlefield wins into political results.

### SIEGES ON A NEW SCALE

Tyre's causeway, ship-mounted rams, and the storming of mountain fortresses such as Aornos and the Sogdian Rock pushed siege warfare further than before.

### ARTILLERY IN THE FIELD

On the Jaxartes (Chapter 8), catapults covered a river crossing against nomad cavalry — an early example of artillery supporting an army in open battle, not only in sieges.

### USING ASIAN SOLDIERS

He added horse archers and Iranian cavalry to his army and ordered about 30,000 young Persians to be trained and armed in the Macedonian way. These troops, the Epigoni ("successors"), arrived in 324 BCE.

### LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Alexander fought in the front rank at the Granicus, at Tyre, and among the Malli, and was wounded many times. It inspired his men, but it was a real risk: his near-death at the Malli town (Chapter 8) shows how close the whole enterprise came to ending with one arrow. His army had no clear successor if he fell — a weakness that would matter greatly in 323 BCE (Chapter 10).

### THE LIMITS

Brilliance on the battlefield didn't solve everything. The guerrilla war in Sogdiana took about two years; the Gedrosian desert march cost many lives through poor planning; and at the Hyphasis the army refused to go on (Chapter 8). Alexander could beat any army, but not exhaustion, distance, or the limits of his own men.

## The Successors' Armies

After Alexander's death, his generals divided his empire and fought each other for decades (Greek & Roman History, Chapter 5). Their armies were built on his, but they changed in important ways.

|             | Alexander's army                                   | Later Hellenistic armies                                              |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The phalanx | One part of a balanced team, used to pin the enemy | Larger, heavier, and with longer pikes; more and more the main weapon |
| Cavalry     | The decisive striking arm                          | Often a small proportion of the army, less used for shock charges     |
| Elephants   | Faced as an enemy weapon at the Hydaspes           | A standard part of many armies                                        |
| Soldiers    | A core of Macedonians plus allies                  | Growing reliance on mercenaries, as Macedonian manpower ran short     |

## The Phalanx Meets the Legion

### 197 BCE

At Cynoscephalae in Thessaly, on broken hilly ground, the more flexible Roman legions break up a Macedonian phalanx that has lost its formation.

### 168 BCE

At Pydna, the phalanx at first pushes the Romans back, but gaps open as it advances over uneven ground. Roman units push into them, and the Macedonian cavalry never intervenes. The kingdom of Macedon is ended soon afterward.

### THE LESSON OF BALANCE

Rome's flexible manipular legion (Military History: The Romans, Chapter 2) was designed for broken ground. But the phalanx lost partly because it had been turned into something Alexander had never used it as: a weapon meant to win on its own. Without strong cavalry and light troops to protect its flanks and fill its gaps, its

rigidity became fatal. The balanced combined-arms system was the real secret, and the successors let it decay.

## The Legend Among Generals

Alexander became the model commander for later generals. Hannibal is said to have ranked him the greatest of all commanders; Julius Caesar, according to his ancient biographers, wept before a statue of Alexander because he himself had achieved so little at the same age; and centuries later Napoleon listed him among the great captains whose campaigns should be studied.

### STORIES ABOUT THE LEGEND

Some of these anecdotes are themselves suspect. The story of Hannibal's ranking comes from a supposed conversation with Scipio Africanus that many historians think was invented. What is certain is how powerful Alexander's reputation became — which is one more reason why the sources on him (Chapter 1) need careful reading.

## Questions to Sit With

Was Alexander a military innovator, or the brilliant user of an army someone else designed?

Why do you think the successors made the phalanx heavier and relied less on cavalry?

Is it fair to judge Alexander's system by battles fought more than a century after his death?

### Quick Reference — Chapter 9

- Most of the army's system — the sarissa phalanx, Companions, combined arms, the siege train, a light baggage train — was inherited from Philip
- Alexander's own contributions: adaptability across many types of war, aiming at the enemy king, hard pursuit, larger-scale siege warfare, field artillery, and the use of Asian troops, including the 30,000 Epigoni
- He led from the front and was often wounded; there was no clear successor if he fell
- Later Hellenistic armies had heavier phalanxes with longer pikes, less cavalry, elephants, and more mercenaries
- Rome defeated the phalanx at Cynoscephalae (197 BCE) and Pydna (168 BCE), partly because the balanced system had decayed
- Hannibal, Caesar, and Napoleon all admired Alexander, though some of the stories are doubtful

## What's Next

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**Chapter 10: Capstone: Alexander's Death & the Real Fragmentation of His Empire.**

## Military History: Alexander the Great

Chapter 10 · Capstone: Alexander's Death & the Real Fragmentation of His Empire

*In June 323 BCE, in Babylon, Alexander died at the age of 32, after a reign of just under thirteen years. He left the largest empire yet seen, an army that had never lost a major battle — and no adult heir and no plan for what should happen next. This chapter covers his final years and death, the crisis that followed in Babylon, and the first wars among his generals. It then looks back across the whole course.*

### The Last Years, 324–323 BCE

#### Early 324 BCE

Back in Persia after the Gedrosian desert (Chapter 8), Alexander punishes governors who misruled in his absence.

#### 324 BCE

At Susa, Alexander and about 90 of his officers marry Persian and other Iranian noblewomen in a mass wedding.

#### 324 BCE

At Opis, Alexander announces that veterans will be sent home. Resenting the new Persian units (Chapter 9), the Macedonian army mutinies. Alexander begins giving Persians Macedonian unit titles, and the soldiers give way; the two sides are reconciled at a great banquet.

#### Autumn 324 BCE

Hephaestion, Alexander's closest friend, dies suddenly at Ecbatana. Alexander's grief is extreme; that winter he campaigns brutally against the Cossaeon hill tribes.

#### Spring 323 BCE

In Babylon, Alexander prepares a new expedition, probably to Arabia, and a larger fleet.

# Death in Babylon, June 323 BCE

## THE FINAL ILLNESS

After a series of banquets, Alexander fell ill with a fever that grew worse over about two weeks. He lost the power of speech, and his soldiers were allowed to file past his bed. He died around 10–11 June 323 BCE.

## WHAT KILLED HIM?

Nobody knows. Suggestions include malaria, typhoid, other infections, the effects of years of heavy drinking and old wounds (especially the chest wound from the Malli, Chapter 8), and poison. A poisoning story, blaming Antipater's family, circulated soon after his death, but it was politically useful to Antipater's enemies, and most historians doubt it. Without a body or reliable medical detail, the question can't be settled.

## "TO THE STRONGEST"

Asked on his deathbed to whom he left his empire, Alexander is said to have answered "to the strongest," and to have given his signet ring to his general Perdiccas. The first story may well be a later invention that fitted what happened next. Either way, Alexander made no workable plan for the succession.

# The Crisis at Babylon

Alexander left no adult son. His wife Roxana was pregnant; his only surviving half-brother, Arrhidaeus, was an adult but was thought unable to rule alone. The army split.

| The cavalry and senior officers |           | The infantry                  |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Leader                          | Perdiccas | Meleager, a phalanx commander |

|           | The cavalry and senior officers                     | The infantry                                                     |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Candidate | Roxana's unborn child, if a son                     | Arrhidaeus, a son of Philip and a full Macedonian                |
| Concern   | Keeping power in the hands of the senior commanders | Resentment of a half-Asian heir, after the tensions of Chapter 8 |

### THE ARMY DIVIDES ALONG ITS OWN LINES

The split followed the army's structure: cavalry against infantry, nobles against the rank and file. The two sides came close to fighting in the streets of Babylon before the Greek secretary Eumenes helped negotiate a compromise. The same infantry that had refused to go on at the Hyphasis (Chapter 8) was again showing it could not be ignored.

### TWO KINGS

Arrhidaeus became king as Philip III. When Roxana's son was born later in 323 BCE, he became joint king as Alexander IV. Perdiccas became regent, the real ruler.

### A PURGE

Soon afterwards Perdiccas had the leaders of the infantry opposition executed, and Meleager was killed.

### THE PROVINCES SHARED OUT

The generals were given provinces to govern: among them, Ptolemy took Egypt, Antipater kept Macedonia and Greece, Antigonus held much of Asia Minor, Lysimachus received Thrace, and Eumenes Cappadocia.

## The First Wars, 323–320 BCE

323–322 BCE

The Lamian War: Athens and other Greek states revolt against Macedon. Antipater is besieged at Lamia but relieved; the Greeks are defeated on land at Crannon and at sea, ending Athens's independence as a naval power.

### 321 BCE

Ptolemy intercepts Alexander's funeral carriage, on its way to Macedonia, and takes the body to Egypt — a claim to Alexander's legacy. It was later placed in a tomb in Alexandria (Chapter 6).

### 321–320 BCE

The generals turn on Perdiccas. He invades Egypt, but a disastrous attempt to cross the Nile drowns many of his soldiers, and his own officers murder him.

### 320 BCE

At Triparadisus, the surviving generals redivide the empire. Antipater becomes regent.

### WHERE THE STORY GOES NEXT

These were only the first of the Wars of the Successors, which lasted decades. Both kings were murdered within about fifteen years, and the empire broke up into separate kingdoms, including the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Asia. That political story is told in Greek & Roman History, Chapter 5; the military legacy of these kingdoms is in Chapter 9 of this course.

## Looking Back Across the Course

| Thread                          | Where it appeared                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Philip's army and combined arms | Chapter 1's system, used at the Granicus, Issus, Gaugamela, and the Hydaspes (Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8), and allowed to decay by the successors (Chapter 9) |
| Defeating a navy on land        | The plan begun at Miletus (Chapter 3), completed at Tyre and in Egypt (Chapters 5, 6)                                                                  |

| Thread                          | Where it appeared                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The source problem              | Disputed figures and stories in almost every chapter, from Philip's murder (Chapter 2) to "to the strongest" |
| King of Macedon or king of Asia | Siwa (Chapter 6), the killings of Parmenion and Cleitus (Chapter 8), Opis, and the army split at Babylon     |
| The limits of one man           | The Hyphasis mutiny, the desert march (Chapter 8), and an empire that didn't survive its founder             |

### CLOSING THE MILITARY HISTORY SUB-SERIES

This course fills the last gap in the site's Military History sub-series, between the Greeks' own warfare (Military History: The Greeks) and the Roman legions that later defeated Alexander's successors (Military History: The Romans). A lesson from the sub-series' final course (Military History: US Wars in Asia — Korea & Vietnam) applies here too: winning battles, however brilliantly, is not the same as reaching a lasting political result.

## Questions to Sit With

If Alexander had lived another twenty years, could his empire have held together? What would it have needed?

Was his failure to plan for the succession a personal failing, or a problem any Macedonian king would have faced?

Looking back across the course, what do you think was Alexander's single greatest military strength, and his greatest weakness?

### Quick Reference — Chapter 10

- 324 BCE: the Susa weddings, the Opis mutiny and reconciliation, and Hephaestion's death
- Alexander died in Babylon around 10–11 June 323 BCE, aged 32, after about two weeks of fever; the cause is unknown and poisoning is doubted
- "To the strongest" and the ring given to Perdiccas may be later stories; there was no workable succession plan
- The cavalry under Perdiccas and the infantry under Meleager nearly fought; the compromise made Philip III and the infant Alexander IV joint kings, with Perdiccas as regent
- The provinces were divided among the generals (Ptolemy in Egypt, Antipater in Macedonia, Antigonus in Asia Minor, Lysimachus in Thrace, Eumenes in Cappadocia)
- The Lamian War (323–322 BCE), Ptolemy's seizure of the body (321 BCE), Perdiccas's failed invasion of Egypt and murder, and the Triparadisus settlement (320 BCE) began the Wars of the Successors

## Course Complete

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This completes **Military History: Alexander the Great**, 10/10 chapters — and with it, every course in the site's Military History sub-series.