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ALEXANDER¹

[356-23 B.C.]

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My subject in this book is the life of Alexander, the king, and of Julius Caesar, the conqueror of Pompey.² The careers of these men embrace such a multitude of events that my preamble shall consist of nothing more than this one plea: if I do not record all their most celebrated achievements or describe any of them exhaustively, but merely summarize for the most part what they accomplished, I ask my readers not to regard this as a fault. For I am writing biography, not history, and the truth is that the most brilliant exploits often tell us nothing of the virtues or vices of the men who performed them, while on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man's character than the mere feat of winning battles in which thousands fall, or of marshalling great armies, or laying siege to cities. When a portrait painter sets out to create a likeness, he relies above all upon the face and the expression of the eyes and pays less attention to the other parts of the body: in the same way it is my task to dwell upon those actions which illuminate the workings of the soul, and by this means to create a portrait of each man's life. I leave the story of his greatest struggles and achievements to be told by others.

2. On his father's side Alexander was descended from Hercules through Caranus,³ and on his mother's from Aeacus⁴ through Neoptolemus:

1. For places mentioned in this *Life*, see Maps 1, 2 and 4, pp. 433-4, 437.

2. See Introduction, pp. 9-10.

3. Reputedly the founder in the ninth century B.C. of the dynasty to which Alexander belonged. Even in Alexander's day Macedonia still kept some of the characteristics of a Homeric kingdom.

4. The legendary king of Aegina and grandfather of Achilles.

so much is accepted by all authorities without question. It is said that his father Philip fell in love with Olympias, Alexander's mother, at the time when they were both initiated into the mysteries at Samothrace.¹ He was then a young man and she an orphan, and after obtaining the consent of her brother Arybbas, Philip betrothed himself to her. On the night before the marriage was consummated, the bride dreamed that there was a crash of thunder, that her womb was struck by a thunderbolt, and that there followed a blinding flash from which a great sheet of flame blazed up and spread far and wide before it finally died away. Then, some time after their marriage, Philip saw himself in a dream in the act of sealing up his wife's womb, and upon the seal he had used there was engraved, so it seemed to him, the figure of a lion. The soothsayers treated this dream with suspicion, since it seemed to suggest that Philip needed to keep a closer watch on his wife. The only exception was Aristander of Telmessus,² who declared that the woman must be pregnant, since men do not seal up what is empty, and that she would bring forth a son whose nature would be bold and lion-like. At another time a serpent was seen stretched out at Olympias' side as she slept, and it was this more than anything else, we are told, which weakened Philip's passion and cooled his affection for her, so that from that time on he seldom came to sleep with her. The reason for this may either have been that he was afraid she would cast some evil spell or charm upon him or else that he recoiled from her embrace because he believed that she was the consort of some higher being.

However there is another version of this story. It appears that from very ancient times all the women of this region have been initiates of the Orphic religion and of the orgiastic rites of Dionysus. For this reason they were known as Klodones and Mimallones³ and they followed many of the observances of the Edonian and Thracian women who live around Mount Haemus, from whom the word *threskeuein*⁴

1. Between 365 and 361 B.C. when Philip was between seventeen and twenty-one. The mysteries at Samothrace concerned the Cabeiri, earth-gods who promoted fertility and also protected sailors. Although so young, Philip had already been married twice, but still had no son. His first wife died in childbirth in 357, his second a few months later, and he married Olympias in the autumn of the same year.

2. He later accompanied Alexander to Asia as a diviner: see chs. 31 & 33.

3. Macedonian names for Bacchantes.

4. Plutarch derives this word from *Thressai* (Thracian women).

has come to denote the celebration of extravagant and superstitious ceremonies. It was Olympias' habit to enter into these states of possession and surrender herself to the inspiration of the god with even wilder abandon than the others, and she would introduce into the festal procession numbers of large snakes, hand-tamed, which terrified the male spectators as they raised their heads from the wreaths of ivy and the sacred winnowing-baskets, or twined themselves around the wands and garlands of the women.

3. At any rate after Philip had seen this apparition, he dispatched Chaeron of Megalopolis to Delphi to consult the oracle of Apollo. In reply the god commanded him to sacrifice to Zeus Ammon and to revere him above all other deities; but he also warned Philip that he was fated to lose the eye with which he had peered through the chink of the half-open door on the night when he saw the god in the form of a serpent sharing his wife's bed. According to Eratosthenes, Olympias, when she sent Alexander on his way to lead his great expedition to the East, confided to him and to him alone the secret of his conception and urged him to show himself worthy of his divine parentage. But other authors maintain that she repudiated this story and used to say, 'Will Alexander never stop making Hera jealous of me?'

However this may be, Alexander was born on the sixth day of the month Hecatombaeon, which the Macedonians call Loüs, the same day on which the temple of Artemis at Ephesus was burned down.¹ It was this coincidence which inspired Hegesias of Magnesia to utter a joke which was flat enough to have put the fire out: he said it was no wonder the temple of Artemis was destroyed, since the goddess was busy attending to the birth of Alexander.² But those of the Magi who were then at Ephesus interpreted the destruction of the temple as the portent of a far greater disaster, and they ran through the city beating their faces and crying out that that day had brought forth a great scourge and calamity for Asia.

1. The year was 356 B.C. and the date about 20 July. The exact date is controversial and it seems likely that it was manipulated by historians for the sake of a striking coincidence

2. The temple of Artemis at Ephesus was one of the wonders of the ancient world, 425 feet in length and supported by columns 60 feet high. Artemis was the goddess not only of hunting but also of childbirth.

At that moment Philip had just captured the city of Potidaea, and he received three messages on the same day. The first was that his general Parmenio had overcome the Illyrians in a great battle, the second that his race-horse had won a victory in the Olympic games, and the third that Alexander had been born. Naturally he was overjoyed at the news, and the soothsayers raised his spirits still higher by assuring him that the son whose birth coincided with three victories would himself prove invincible.

4. The best likeness of Alexander which has been preserved for us is to be found in the statues sculpted by Lysippus, the only artist whom Alexander considered worthy to represent him. Alexander possessed a number of individual features which many of Lysippus' followers later tried to reproduce, for example the poise of the neck which was tilted slightly to the left, or a certain melting look in his eyes, and the artist has exactly caught these peculiarities. On the other hand when Apelles painted Alexander wielding a thunderbolt, he did not reproduce his colouring at all accurately. He made Alexander's complexion appear too dark-skinned and swarthy, whereas we are told that he was fair-skinned, with a ruddy tinge that showed itself especially upon his face and chest. Aristoxenus also tells us in his memoirs that Alexander's skin was fresh and sweet-smelling, and that his breath and the whole of his body gave off a peculiar fragrance¹ which permeated the clothes he wore.

The cause of this may have been the blend of hot and dry elements which were combined in his constitution, for fragrance, if we are to believe Theophrastus,² is generated by the action of heat upon moist humours. This is why the hottest and driest regions of the earth produce the finest and most numerous spices, for the sun draws up the moisture which abounds in vegetable bodies and causes them to decay. In Alexander's case it was this same warmth of temperament which made him fond of drinking, and also prone to outbursts of choleric rage.

Even while he was still a boy, he gave plenty of evidence of his powers of self-control. In spite of his vehement and impulsive nature, he showed little interest in the pleasures of the senses and indulged

1. This fragrance was also regarded as a sign of his superhuman nature.

2. A pupil of Aristotle and the author of two treatises on botany; best known or his *Characters* (sketches of contemporary social types).

in them only with great moderation, but his passionate desire for fame implanted in him a pride and a grandeur of vision which went far beyond his years. And yet it was by no means every kind of glory that he sought, and, unlike his father, he did not seek it in every form of action. Philip, for example, was as proud of his powers of eloquence as any sophist, and took care to have the victories won by his chariots at Olympia stamped upon his coins. But Alexander's attitude is made clear by his reply to some of his friends, when they asked him whether he would be willing to compete at Olympia, since he was a fine runner. 'Yes,' he answered, 'if I have kings to run against me.' He seems in fact to have disapproved of the whole race of trained athletes. At any rate although he founded a great many contests of other kinds, including not only the tragic drama and performances on the flute and the lyre, but also the reciting of poetry, fighting with the quarter-staff and various forms of hunting, yet he never offered prizes either for boxing or for the *pancratation*.¹

5. On one occasion some ambassadors from the king of Persia arrived in Macedon, and since Philip was absent, Alexander received them in his place. He talked freely with them and quite won them over, not only by the friendliness of his manner, but also because he did not trouble them with any childish or trivial inquiries, but questioned them about the distances they had travelled by road, the nature of the journey into the interior of Persia, the character of the king, his experience in war, and the military strength and prowess of the Persians. The ambassadors were filled with admiration. They came away convinced that Philip's celebrated astuteness was as nothing compared to the adventurous spirit and lofty ambitions of his son. At any rate, whenever he heard that Philip had captured some famous city or won an overwhelming victory, Alexander would show no pleasure at the news, but would declare to his friends, 'Boys, my father will forestall me in everything. There will be nothing great or spectacular for you and me to show the world.' He cared nothing for pleasure or wealth but only for deeds of valour and glory, and this was why he believed that the more he received from his father, the less would be left for him to conquer. And so every success that was gained by Macedonia inspired in Alexander the dread that another opportunity for action had been squandered on his father.

1. A contest which combined wrestling and boxing.

He had no desire to inherit a kingdom which offered him riches, luxuries and the pleasures of the senses: his choice was a life of struggle, of wars, and of unrelenting ambition.

It was natural, of course, that a great number of nurses, pedagogues¹ and teachers were appointed to take part in his upbringing, but the man who supervised them all was Leonidas, a severe disciplinarian, who was also a relative of Olympias. Although his duties were both important and honourable, he did not disdain the title of pedagogue, but because of his natural dignity and of his connection with the queen's family, other people referred to him as Alexander's foster-father and mentor. The person who took on both the title and the role of pedagogue was an Acarnanian named Lysimachus. He was neither an educated nor a cultivated man, but he managed to ingratiate himself by calling Philip Peleus, Alexander Achilles, and himself Phoenix,² and he held the second place in the prince's household.

6. There came a day³ when Philoneicus the Thessalian brought Philip a horse named Bucephalas,⁴ which he offered to sell for thirteen talents. The king and his friends went down to the plain to watch the horse's trials, and came to the conclusion that he was wild and quite unmanageable, for he would allow no one to mount him, nor would he endure the shouts of Philip's grooms, but reared up against anyone who approached him. The king became angry at being offered such a vicious animal unbroken, and ordered it to be led away. But Alexander, who was standing close by, remarked, 'What a horse they are losing, and all because they don't know how to handle him, or dare not try!' Philip kept quiet at first, but when he heard Alexander repeat these words several times and saw that he was upset, he asked him, 'Are you finding fault with your elders because you think you know more than they do, or can manage a horse better?' 'At least I could manage this one better', retorted Alexander. 'And if you cannot,' said his father, 'what penalty will you pay for being

1. The Greek word *paidagogus* signifies a slave whose task it was to accompany a child to and from school and keep him out of mischief. It was not his job to teach.

2. Achilles' tutor.

3. The date is uncertain. Alexander may have been about fourteen. Thessaly was the finest breeding-ground for horses in Greece.

4. The name of a famous breed of Thessalian horses which were branded on the shoulder with the sign of an ox's head.

so impertinent?' 'I will pay the price of the horse',¹ answered the boy. At this the whole company burst out laughing, and then as soon as the father and son had settled the terms of the bet, Alexander went quickly up to Bucephalus, took hold of his bridle, and turned him towards the sun, for he had noticed that the horse was shying at the sight of his own shadow, as it fell in front of him and constantly moved whenever he did. He ran alongside the animal for a little way, calming him down by stroking him, and then, when he saw he was full of spirit and courage, he quietly threw aside his cloak and with a light spring vaulted safely on to his back. For a little while he kept feeling the bit with the reins, without jarring or tearing his mouth, and got him collected. Finally, when he saw that the horse was free of his fears and impatient to show his speed, he gave him his head and urged him forward, using a commanding voice and a touch of the foot.

At first Philip and his friends held their breath and looked on in an agony of suspense, until they saw Alexander reach the end of his gallop, turn in full control, and ride back triumphant and exulting in his success. Thereupon the rest of the company broke into loud applause, while his father, we are told, actually wept for joy, and when Alexander had dismounted he kissed him and said, 'My boy, you must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedonia is too small for you.'

7. Philip had noticed that his son was self-willed, and that while it was very difficult to influence him by force, he could easily be guided towards his duty by an appeal to reason, and he therefore made a point of trying to persuade the boy rather than giving him orders. Besides this he considered that the task of training and educating his son was too important to be entrusted to the ordinary run of teachers of poetry, music and general education: it required, as Sophocles puts it

The rudder's guidance and the curb's restraint,

and so he sent for Aristotle,² the most famous and learned of the philosophers of his time, and rewarded him with the generosity that

1. The speed of change of money values makes it futile to try to convert the asking price of thirteen talents into modern figures. It is enough to say that by the Greek standards of the time this was a very high price.

2. When Alexander was thirteen.

his reputation deserved. Aristotle was a native of the city of Stageira, which Philip had himself destroyed. He now repopulated it and brought back all the citizens who had been enslaved or driven into exile.

He gave Aristotle and his pupil the temple of the Nymphs near Mieza as a place where they could study and converse, and to this day they show you the stone seats and shady walks which Aristotle used. It seems clear too that Alexander was instructed by his teacher not only in the principles of ethics and politics, but also in those secret and more esoteric studies which philosophers do not impart to the general run of students, but only by word of mouth to a select circle of the initiated. Some years later, after Alexander had crossed into Asia, he learned that Aristotle had published some treatises dealing with these esoteric matters, and he wrote to him in blunt language and took him to task for the sake of the prestige of philosophy. This was the text of his letter:

Alexander to Aristotle, greetings. You have not done well to write down and publish those doctrines you taught me by word of mouth. What advantage shall I have over other men if these theories in which I have been trained are to be made common property? I would rather excel the rest of mankind in my knowledge of what is best than in the extent of my power. Farewell.

Aristotle wished to encourage this ambition of his pupil's and so when he replied to justify his action, he pointed out that these so-called oral doctrines were in a sense both published and not published. For example it is true that his treatise on metaphysics is written in a style which makes it useless for those who wish to study or teach the subject from the beginning: the book serves simply as a memorandum for those who have already been taught its general principles.

8. It was Aristotle, I believe, who did more than anyone to implant in Alexander his interest in the art of healing as well as that of philosophy. He was not merely attracted to the theory of medicine, but was in the habit of tending his friends when they were sick and prescribing for them various courses of treatment or diet, as we learn from his letters. He was also devoted by nature to all kinds of learning and was a lover of books. He regarded the *Iliad* as a handbook of the art of war and took with him on his campaigns a text annotated by

Aristotle, which became known as 'the casket copy',¹ and which he always kept under his pillow together with his dagger. When his campaigns had taken him far into the interior of Asia and he could find no other books, he ordered his treasurer Harpalus to send him some. Harpalus sent him the histories of Philistus,² many of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the dithyrambic poems of Telestes and Philoxenus.

At first Alexander greatly admired Aristotle and became more attached to him than to his father, for the one, he used to say, had given him the gift of life, but the other had taught him how to live well. But in later years he came to regard Aristotle with suspicion. He never actually did him any harm, but his friendship for the philosopher lost its original warmth and affection, and this was a clear proof of the estrangement which developed between them.³ At the same time Alexander never lost the devotion to philosophy which had been innate in him from the first, and which matured as he grew older: he proved this on many occasions, for example by the honours which he paid to Anaxarchus,⁴ the fifty talents which he presented to Xenocrates,⁵ and the encouragement which he lavished upon Dandamis and Calanus.⁶

9. While Philip was making an expedition against Byzantium,⁷ Alexander, although he was only sixteen years old, was left behind as regent of Macedonia and keeper of the royal seal. During this period he defeated the Maedi⁸ who had risen in revolt, captured their city, drove out its barbarous inhabitants, established a colony of Greeks assembled from various regions, and named it Alexandroupolis. He also took part in the battle against the combined armies of Greece at Chaeronea,⁹ and is said to have been the first to break the line of the

1. See ch. 26.

2. Author of a history of Sicily. See *Life of Dion*, ch. 11.

3. Partly because of Aristotle's connection with Callisthenes. See chs. 53-6.

4. See ch. 28.

5. He became head of the Academy at Athens in 339 B.C. but declined to accompany Alexander to Asia.

6. See chs. 65, 69.

7. In 340 B.C.

8. A tribe in north-eastern Macedonia.

9. In 338 B.C., one of the decisive battles of Greek history, which resulted in the subjection of the city-states to the Macedonian monarchy.

Theban Sacred Band. Even in my own time an oak tree used to be pointed out near the river Cephissus which was known as Alexander's oak, because his tent had been pitched beside it at that time, and not far away is the mass-grave of the Macedonians who fell in the battle. Because of these achievements Philip, as was natural, became extravagantly fond of his son, so much so that he took pleasure in hearing the Macedonians speak of Alexander as their king and Philip as their general.

But before long the domestic strife that resulted from Philip's various marriages and love-affairs caused the quarrels which took place in the women's apartments to infect the whole kingdom, and led to bitter clashes and accusations between father and son. This breach was widened by Olympias, a woman of a jealous and vindictive temper, who incited Alexander to oppose his father. Their quarrel was brought to a head on the occasion of the wedding of Cleopatra, a girl with whom Philip had fallen in love and whom he had decided to marry, although she was far too young for him. Cleopatra's uncle Attalus, who had drunk too much at the banquet, called upon the Macedonians to pray to the gods that the union of Philip and Cleopatra might bring forth a legitimate¹ heir to the throne. Alexander flew into a rage at these words, shouted at him, 'Villain, do you take me for a bastard, then?' and hurled a drinking-cup at his head. At this Philip lurched to his feet, and drew his sword against his son, but fortunately for them both he was so overcome with drink and with rage that he tripped and fell headlong. Alexander jeered at him and cried out, 'Here is the man who was making ready to cross from Europe to Asia, and who cannot even cross from one table to another without losing his balance.' After this drunken brawl Alexander took Olympias away and settled her in Epirus, while he himself went to live in Illyria.

Meanwhile Demaratus the Corinthian came to visit Philip. He was an old friend of the Macedonian royal family and so was privileged to speak freely. After the formal greetings and courtesies had been exchanged, Philip asked him whether the various city states of Greece

1. This may mean one of pure Macedonian blood, as distinct from the offspring of the semi-barbarous Olympias, who came from Epirus. A marriage with the nobly born Cleopatra threatened Alexander's prospects of succession. The wedding took place in 337. Philip had not divorced Olympias: Macedonian tradition did not require the king to be monogamous.

were at harmony with one another. Demaratus retorted, 'It is all very well for you to show so much concern for the affairs of Greece, Philip. How about the disharmony you have brought about in your own household?' This reply sobered Philip to such an extent that he sent for Alexander, and with Demaratus' help persuaded him to return.¹

10. In the following year Pixodarus, the satrap of Caria, tried to form a family union with Philip, hoping by this means to insinuate himself into a military alliance. His plan was to offer the hand of his eldest daughter to Philip's son Arrhidaeus,² and he sent Aristocritus to Macedonia to try to negotiate the match. Alexander's mother and his friends sent him a distorted account of this manoeuvre, making out that Philip was planning to settle the kingdom upon Arrhidaeus by arranging a brilliant marriage and treating him as a person of great consequence. Alexander was disturbed by these stories and sent Thessalus, the tragic actor, to Caria to tell Pixodarus that he should pay no attention to Arrhidaeus, who was not only an illegitimate son of Philip's but was weak-minded as well: instead, he should offer his daughter's hand to Alexander.

Pixodarus was far more pleased with this suggestion than with his original proposal. When Philip discovered this, he went to Alexander's room, taking with him Philotas the son of Parmenio, one of the prince's companions. There he scolded his son and angrily reproached him for behaving so ignobly and so unworthily of his position as to wish to marry the daughter of a mere Carian, who was no more than the slave of a barbarian king.³ As for Thessalus, he wrote to the Corinthians ordering them to send him to Macedonia in chains, and at the same time he banished four of Alexander's friends, Harpalus, Nearchus, Erygius and Ptolemy. Later Alexander recalled all of these men and raised them to the highest honours.

Not long afterwards a Macedonian named Pausanias assassinated

1. Late in 337 B.C.

2. An illegitimate son of Philip's by Philinna of Larissa. He later succeeded Alexander, see ch. 77 and Appendix. The fact that Alexander could believe the story suggests how precarious he thought his position had become. Cleopatra had already given birth to a girl early in 336 and was again pregnant by the summer.

3. It also seems probable that such a match would have been embarrassing to Philip in view of his plans to invade Persia.

the king: he did this because he had been humiliated by Attalus and Cleopatra and could get no redress from Philip.¹ It was Olympias who was chiefly blamed for the assassination, because she was believed to have encouraged the young man and incited him to take his revenge. It was said that when Pausanias met the young prince and complained to him of the injustice he had suffered, Alexander quoted the verse from Euripides' *Medea*, in which Medea is said to threaten

The father, bride and bridegroom all at once²

However this may be, he took care to track down and punish those who were involved in the plot, and he showed his anger against Olympias for the horrible revenge which she took upon Cleopatra during his absence.³

II. Alexander was only twenty years old when he inherited his kingdom, which at that moment was beset by formidable jealousies and feuds, and external dangers on every side. The neighbouring barbarian tribes were eager to throw off the Macedonian yoke and longed for the rule of their native kings: as for the Greek states, although Philip had defeated them in battle, he had not had time to subdue them or accustom them to his authority. He had swept away the existing governments, and then, having prepared their peoples for drastic changes, had left them in turmoil and confusion, because he had created a situation which was completely unfamiliar to them. Alexander's Macedonian advisers feared that a crisis was at hand and urged the young king to leave the Greek states to their own devices and refrain from using any force against them. As for the barbarian tribes, they considered that he should try to win them back to their allegiance by using milder methods, and forestall the first signs of revolt by offering them concessions. Alexander, however, chose precisely the opposite course, and decided that the only way to make

1. Pausanias had been outraged by Attalus some eight years before.

2. The allusion is to Medea's wish to murder Creon, Creusa and Jason, who in the context are identified with Attalus, Cleopatra and Philip. The murder took place on the day of the wedding of Philip's daughter Cleopatra to Alexander of Epirus in June, 336.

3. According to Pausanias viii, 7, Olympias had Cleopatra (that is, Philip's widow) and her infant son roasted over a brazier. Attalus was executed by Alexander for allegedly treasonable correspondence with Athens. Other accounts suggest that the assassination was organized by Persian initiative.

his kingdom safe was to act with audacity and a lofty spirit, for he was certain that if he were seen to yield even a fraction of his authority, all his enemies would attack him at once. He swiftly crushed the uprisings among the barbarians by advancing with his army as far as the Danube, where he overcame Syrmus, the king of the Triballi, in a great battle. Then when the news reached him that the Thebans had revolted and were being supported by the Athenians, he immediately marched south through the pass of Thermopylae. 'Demosthenes', he said, 'called me a boy while I was in Illyria and among the Triballi, and a youth when I was marching through Thessaly; I will show him I am a man by the time I reach the walls of Athens.'

When he arrived before Thebes,¹ he wished to give the citizens the opportunity to repent of their actions, and so he merely demanded the surrender of their leaders Phoenix and Prothytes, and offered an amnesty to all the rest if they would come over to his side. The Thebans countered by demanding the surrender of Philotas and Antipater and appealing to all who wished to liberate Greece to range themselves on their side, and at this Alexander ordered his troops to prepare for battle. The Thebans, although greatly outnumbered, fought with a superhuman courage and spirit, but when the Macedonian garrison which had been posted in the citadel of the Cadmeia made a sortie and fell upon them from the rear, the greater part of their army was encircled, they were slaughtered where they stood, and the city was stormed, plundered and razed to the ground. Alexander's principal object in permitting the sack of Thebes was to frighten the rest of the Greeks into submission by making a terrible example. But he also put forward the excuse that he was redressing the wrongs done to his allies, for the Plataeans and Phocians had both complained of the actions of the Thebans against them. As for the population of Thebes, he singled out the priests, a few citizens who had friendly connections with Macedonia, the descendants of the poet Pindar, and those who had opposed the revolt to be spared: all the rest were publicly sold into slavery to the number of twenty thousand. Those who were killed in the battle numbered more than six thousand.

12. Among the many outrages and acts of violence which accompanied the sacking of the city, some Thracian troops broke into the

house of Timocleia, a woman of noble birth and character. While the soldiers were plundering her property, their leader raped her and then demanded whether she had any gold or silver hidden. She told him that she had, and led him alone into the garden. There she pointed out to him a well, and explained that while the city was being stormed she had thrown into it all her most valuable possessions. Then as the Thracian leaned over and peered down the shaft, she moved behind him, pushed him in, and hurled stone after stone down on him until he was dead. The Thracians seized her, tied her hands, and led her to Alexander, who immediately saw from her expression and from her calm and fearless bearing as she followed her captors that she was a woman of dignity and spirit. When the king asked her who she was, she replied, 'I am the sister of Theagenes who commanded our army against your father, Philip, and fell at Chaeronea fighting for the liberty of Greece.' Alexander was filled with admiration not only at her words but at what she had done, and gave orders that she and her children should be freed and allowed to depart.

13. After this Alexander came to terms with the Athenians, in spite of their open sympathy with the sufferings of the Thebans. They had been on the point of celebrating the Mysteries of Demeter, but abandoned the festival as an act of mourning, and they treated all the fugitives who reached Athens with the greatest kindness. It may be that Alexander's fury had been sated with blood, like a lion's, or perhaps that he wished to efface his cruel and savage treatment of the Thebans by performing an act of clemency. At any rate he not only agreed to overlook the causes of complaint which he had against the Athenians, but advised them to pay the most careful attention to their affairs, since if anything should happen to him, they might once again become the leaders of Greece. In later years Alexander often felt distressed, we are told, at the harsh fate of the Thebans, and the recollection of it made him milder in his treatment of many other peoples. Certainly he believed that the murder of Cleitus, which he committed when he was drunk, and the cowardly refusal of the Macedonians to cross the Ganges and attack the Indians, which cut short his campaign and robbed him of its crowning achievement, were both caused by the anger of the god Dionysus, who wished to avenge the destruction of his favourite city. And of those Thebans who survived, it was remarked that all who came to him with a

request were granted whatever they asked. So much for Alexander's dealings with Thebes.

14. In the previous year a congress of the Greek states had been held at the Isthmus of Corinth: here a vote had been passed that the states should join forces with Alexander in invading Persia and that he should be commander-in-chief of the expedition. Many of the Greek statesmen and philosophers visited him to offer their congratulations, and he hoped that Diogenes of Sinope, who was at that time living in Corinth, would do the same. However since he paid no attention whatever to Alexander, but continued to live at leisure in the suburb of Corinth which was known as Craneion, Alexander went in person to see him and found him basking at full length in the sun. When he saw so many people approaching him, Diogenes raised himself a little on his elbow and fixed his gaze upon Alexander. The king greeted him and inquired whether he could do anything for him. 'Yes,' replied the philosopher, 'you can stand a little to one side out of my sun.' Alexander is said to have been greatly impressed by this answer and full of admiration for the hauteur and independence of mind of a man who could look down on him with such condescension. So much so that he remarked to his followers, who were laughing and mocking the philosopher as they went away, 'You may say what you like, but if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes.'

Next he visited Delphi, because he wished to consult the oracle of Apollo about the expedition against the Persians. It so happened that he arrived on one of those days which are called inauspicious, when it is forbidden for the oracle to deliver a reply. In spite of this he sent for the prophetess, and when she refused to officiate and explained that the law forbade her to do so, he went up himself and tried to drag her by force to the shrine. At last, as if overcome by his persistence, she exclaimed, 'You are invincible, my son!' and when Alexander heard this, he declared that he wanted no other prophecy, but had obtained from her the oracle he was seeking. When the time came for him to set out,¹ many other prodigies attended the departure of the army: among these was the phenomenon of the statue of Orpheus which was made of cypress wood and was observed to be covered with sweat. Everyone who saw it was alarmed at this omen,

1. The early spring of 334 B.C.

but Aristander urged the king to take courage, for this portent signified that Alexander was destined to perform deeds which would live in song and story and would cause poets and musicians much toil and sweat to celebrate them.

15. As for the size of his army, the lowest estimate puts its strength at 30,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry and the highest 43,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry.¹ According to Aristobulus the money available for the army's supplies amounted to no more than seventy talents, Douris says that there were supplies for only thirty days, and Onesicritus that Alexander was already two hundred talents in debt. Yet although he set out with such slender resources, he would not go aboard his ship until he had discovered the circumstances of all his companions and had assigned an estate to one, a village to another, or the revenues of some port or community to a third. When he had shared out or signed away almost all the property of the crown, Perdiccas asked him, 'But your majesty, what are you leaving for yourself?' 'My hopes!' replied Alexander. 'Very well, then,' answered Perdiccas, 'those who serve with you will share those too.' With this, he declined to accept the prize which had been allotted to him, and several of Alexander's other friends did the same. However those who accepted or requested rewards were lavishly provided for, so that in the end Alexander distributed among them most of what he possessed in Macedonia. These were his preparations and this was the adventurous spirit in which he crossed the Hellespont.

Once arrived in Asia, he went up to Troy, sacrificed to Athena and poured libations to the heroes of the Greek army. He anointed with oil the column which marks the grave of Achilles, ran a race by it naked with his companions, as the custom is, and then crowned it with a wreath: he also remarked that Achilles was happy in having found a faithful friend while he lived and a great poet to sing of his deeds after his death. While he was walking about the city and looking at its ancient remains, somebody asked him whether he wished

1. Modern estimates give totals of about 43,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry: about one quarter of these were the advance guard, which had already crossed to Asia. The cavalry included as many Thessalians as Macedonians, while the other Greek city-states contributed about 7,000 infantry and 600 cavalry. Besides the operational troops, the expedition included reconnaissance staff and many other specialists - geographers, historians, astronomers, zoologists, etc.

to see the lyre which had once belonged to Paris.¹ 'I think nothing of that lyre,' he said, 'but I wish I could see Achilles' lyre, which he played when he sang of the glorious deeds of brave men.'

16. Meanwhile Darius' generals had gathered a large army and posted it at the crossing of the river Granicus, so that Alexander was obliged to fight at the very gates of Asia, if he was to enter and conquer it. Most of the Macedonian officers were alarmed at the depth of the river and of the rough and uneven slopes of the banks on the opposite side, up which they would have to scramble in the face of the enemy. There were others too who thought that Alexander ought to observe the Macedonian tradition concerning the time of year, according to which the kings of Macedonia never made war during the month of Daesius.² Alexander swept aside these scruples by giving orders that the month should be called a second Artemisius. And when Parmenio advised him against risking the crossing at such a late hour of the day, Alexander declared that the Hellespont would blush for shame if, once he had crossed it, he should shrink back from the Granicus; then he immediately plunged into the stream with thirteen squadrons of cavalry.³ It seemed the act of a desperate madman rather than of a prudent commander to charge into a swiftly flowing river, which swept men off their feet and surged about them, and then to advance through a hail of missiles towards a steep bank which was strongly defended by infantry and cavalry. But in spite of this he pressed forward and with a tremendous effort gained the opposite bank, which was a wet treacherous slope covered with mud. There he was immediately forced to engage the enemy in a confused hand to hand struggle, before the troops who were crossing behind him could be organized into any formation. The moment his men set foot on land, the enemy attacked them with loud shouts, matching horse against horse, thrusting with their lances and fighting with the sword when their lances broke. Many of them charged against Alexander himself, for he was easily recognizable by his shield and

1. There is a pun here: Paris was also known as Alexander.

2. May-June: this was the time for the gathering of the harvest.

3. Diodorus gives an account which is more plausible in military terms. According to this Alexander marched downstream under cover of darkness, found a suitable ford, crossed at dawn, and had most of his infantry over before the Persians discovered his new position.

by the tall white plume which was fixed upon either side of his helmet. The joint of his breast-plate was pierced by a javelin, but the blade did not penetrate the flesh. Rhoesaces and Spithridates, two of the Persian commanders then rode at him; he evaded the charge of the one and struck Rhoesaces, who wore a breast-plate, with his spear, but the shaft of the weapon snapped, whereupon he fought with his sword. While he was engaged with Rhoesaces, Spithridates rode up on the other side, and rising in his stirrups brought down a barbarian battle-axe with all his strength upon Alexander's head. The stroke split the crest of his helmet, sheared away one of his plumes, and all but cleft the head-piece, in fact the edge of the axe penetrated it and grazed the hair on the top of Alexander's head. But just as Spithridates raised his arm for another blow, 'Black' Cleitus,¹ as he was called, struck first and ran him through with a spear, and at the same moment Rhoesaces was cut down by Alexander's sword.

While Alexander's cavalry was engaged in this furious and dangerous action, the Macedonian phalanx crossed the river and the infantry of both sides joined battle. The Persians offered little resistance, but quickly broke and fled, and it was only the Greek mercenaries who held their ground. They rallied together, made a stand on the crest of a hill and sent a message to Alexander asking for quarter. In this instance he allowed himself to be guided by passion rather than by reason, led a charge against them and lost his horse (not Bucephalus on this occasion), which was pierced through the ribs by a sword-thrust. It was in this part of the field that the Macedonians suffered greater losses in killed and wounded than in all the rest of the battle, since they were fighting at close quarters with men who were expert soldiers and had been rendered desperate.

The Persians are said to have lost twenty thousand infantry and two thousand five hundred cavalry, whereas on Alexander's side, according to Aristobulus, only thirty four soldiers² in all were killed, nine of them belonging to the infantry. Alexander gave orders that each of these men should have his statue set up in bronze and the work was carried out by Lysippus. At the same time he was anxious to give

1. Commander of the Royal Squadron of Companion Cavalry: called 'Black' to distinguish him from Cleitus the White, an infantry commander.

2. According to Arrian, *Anabasis*, I, 16, 4, twenty-five of Alexander's picked cavalry, the Companions, fell in the first charge: it was these men whose statues were carved by Lysippus.

the other Greek states a share in the victory. He therefore sent the Athenians in particular three hundred of the shields captured from the enemy, and over the rest of the spoils he had this proud inscription engraved:

Alexander, the son of Philip, and all the Greeks, with the exception of the Spartans, won these spoils of war from the barbarians who dwell in Asia.

As for the drinking vessels, purple hangings and other such plunder, he sent it all with the exception of a few items to his mother.

17. This battle brought about a great and immediate change in Alexander's situation. Even the city of Sardis, which was the principal seat of Persian power on the Asiatic seaboard, at once surrendered to him and the rest of the region likewise made its submission.¹ Only Halicarnassus² and Miletus held out, and these cities were stormed and the surrounding territory subdued. At this point Alexander hesitated as to what his next step should be. Time and again he was impelled to seek out Darius and risk everything upon the issue of a single battle, and then as often he would decide that he must build up his strength by securing the coastal region and its resources and training his army, and only then strike inland against the king. It is said that there was a spring near the city of Xanthus in the province of Lycia, which at this moment overflowed and cast up from its depths a bronze tablet: this was inscribed with ancient characters which foretold that the empire of the Persians would be destroyed by the Greeks. Alexander was encouraged by this prophecy and pressed on to clear the coast of Asia Minor as far as Cilicia and Phoenicia. His advance through Pamphylia inspired various historians to compose a highly wrought and extravagant description of his progress. They imply that through some extraordinary stroke of providence the tide receded to make way for him, although at other times it came flooding in strongly from the open sea, so that the beach of small rocks which lies directly under the steep and broken face of the cliffs was hardly ever left uncovered. Menander alludes to this prodigy in one of his comedies, where he says:

1. At this stage of his campaign Alexander made it his policy to support democratic regimes in the Greek cities of Asia Minor.

2. The principal Persian naval base in the southern Aegean. It was defended by Memnon the Rhodian, a mercenary in Darius' service, and was captured in the autumn of 334.

Like Alexander, if I want to meet
 A man, he's there before me in the street,
 And if I am obliged to cross the sea,
 The waves at once will make a path for me.

Alexander makes no mention in his letters of any such miracle, but says that he started from Phaselis in Lycia, and marched through Pamphylia by the pass known as *Klimax*, or The Ladder. It was for this reason that he spent several days in Phaselis, where he noticed in the market-place a statue which had been erected in honour of Theodectas,¹ a former citizen of the place. One evening after dinner when he had drunk well, he had the impulse to pay a convivial tribute to his association with Aristotle and with philosophy, and so he led a band of revellers to the statue and crowned it with a garland.

18. Next he marched into Pisidia where he subdued any resistance which he encountered, and then made himself master of Phrygia. When he captured Gordium,² which is reputed to have been the home of the ancient king Midas, he saw the celebrated chariot which was fastened to its yoke by the bark of the cornel-tree, and heard the legend which was believed by all the barbarians, that the fates had decreed that the man who untied the knot was destined to become the ruler of the whole world. According to most writers the fastenings were so elaborately intertwined and coiled upon one another that their ends were hidden: in consequence Alexander did not know what to do, and in the end loosened the knot by cutting through it with his sword, whereupon the many ends sprang into view. But according to Aristobulus he unfastened it quite easily by removing the pin which secured the yoke to the pole of the chariot, and then pulling out the yoke itself.

After this Alexander marched northward and won over the peoples of Cappadocia and Paphlagonia. He also learned of the death of Memnon,³ the general to whom Darius had entrusted the defence of

1. The author of some fifty tragedies: he had been a pupil of Aristotle, hence Alexander's interest.

2. In March 333 B.C.

3. A Greek mercenary officer from Rhodes. After escaping from Halicarnassus when Alexander captured it, he had been appointed commander of the Persian fleet. In 333 B.C. he captured Chios, overran most of Lesbos and laid siege to Mitylene where he died. The Persians had hoped that he would threaten Alexander's rear by stirring up revolts in the islands and even in mainland Greece.

the coast of Asia Minor, and who, if he had lived, was likely to have offered the most stubborn resistance to Alexander's advance and caused him the greatest trouble. This news confirmed his resolve to invade the interior. By this time Darius was also marching upon the coast from Susa. He was full of confidence in the strength of his forces, for he was leading an army of six hundred thousand men, and he had been encouraged by a dream which the Magi had interpreted in such a way as to please him rather than to discover the most likely meaning. He had dreamed that he saw the Macedonian phalanx encircled with flames and Alexander waiting upon him as a servant and wearing a cloak which resembled one that Darius himself had once worn when he had been a royal courier, and that after this Alexander had entered the temple of Belos and had disappeared. But what the gods really intended to prophesy through this dream, it would appear, was that the Macedonians would accomplish brilliant and glorious exploits, that Alexander would become the ruler of Asia - just as Darius had become its ruler when he rose to be a king from having been a mere courier - and that he would soon die and leave his glory behind him.

19. Darius was also encouraged by the many months of apparent inactivity which Alexander had spent in Cilicia, for he imagined that this was due to cowardice. In fact the delay had been caused by sickness, which some said had been brought on by exhaustion, and others by bathing in the icy waters of the river Cydnus. At any rate none of his other physicians dared to treat him, for they all believed that his condition was so dangerous that medicine was powerless to help him, and dreaded the accusations that would be brought against them by the Macedonians in the event of their failure. The only exception was Philip, an Acarnanian, who saw that the king was desperately ill, but trusted to their mutual friendship. He thought it shameful not to share his friend's danger by exhausting all the resources of his art even at the risk of his own life, and so he prepared a medicine and persuaded him to drink it without fear, since he was so eager to regain his strength for the campaign. Meanwhile Parmenio had sent Alexander a letter from the camp warning him to beware of Philip, since Darius, he said, had promised him large sums of money and even the hand of his daughter if he would kill Alexander. Alexander read the letter and put it under his pillow without showing it to any of his

friends. Then at the appointed hour, when Philip entered the room with the king's companions carrying the medicine in a cup, Alexander handed him the letter and took the draught from him cheerfully and without the least sign of misgiving. It was an astonishing scene, and one well worthy of the stage – the one man reading the letter and the other drinking the physic, and then each gazing into the face of the other, although not with the same expression. The king's serene and open smile clearly displayed his friendly feelings towards Philip and his trust in him, while Philip was filled with surprise and alarm at the accusation, at one moment lifting his hands to heaven and protesting his innocence before the gods, and the next falling upon his knees by the bed and imploring Alexander to take courage and follow his advice. At first the drug completely overpowered him and, as it were, drove all his vital forces out of sight: he became speechless, fell into a swoon, and displayed scarcely any sign of sense or of life. However Philip quickly restored him to consciousness, and when he had regained his strength he showed himself to the Macedonians, who would not be consoled until they had seen their king.

20. There was at this time¹ in Darius' army, a man named Amyntas a refugee from Macedonia, who was acquainted with Alexander's character. When he learned that Darius was eager to advance and attack Alexander as he marched through the mountain passes, he begged the Persian king to remain where he was in the flat open plains, where his immense numbers would have the advantage in fighting the small Macedonian army. Darius said that he was afraid the enemy might run away before he could come to grips with them, and that Alexander might thus escape him, to which Amyntas retorted: 'Your majesty need have no fears on that score. Alexander will march against you, in fact he is probably on his way now.' Darius refused to listen to Amyntas' advice, but broke camp and advanced into Cilicia, while at the same time Alexander marched against him into Syria. During the night they missed one another and both turned back. Alexander, delighted at his good fortune, hastened to catch his enemy in the narrow defile which leads into Cilicia, while Darius was no less eager to extricate his forces from the

1. September 333 B.C. In the late summer and before his illness Alexander had accomplished the difficult march south from Gordium across Anatolia and through the key pass of the Cilician Gates.

mountain passes and regain his former camping-ground in the plains. He already saw the mistake he had made by advancing into country which was hemmed in by the sea on one side and the mountains on the other, and divided by the river Pinarus which ran between them. Here the ground prevented him from using his cavalry, forced him to split up his army into small groups, and favoured his opponent's inferior numbers. Fortune certainly presented Alexander with the ideal terrain for the battle, but it was his own generalship which did most to win the victory. For although he was so heavily outnumbered, he not only gave the enemy no opportunity to encircle him, but leading his own right wing in person, he managed to extend it round the enemy's left, outflanked it, and fighting in the foremost ranks, put the barbarians to flight. In this action he received a sword wound in the thigh: according to Chares this was given him by Darius, with whom he engaged in hand to hand combat. Alexander sent a letter to Antipater describing the battle, but made no mention in it of who had given him the wound: he said no more than that he had been stabbed in the thigh with a dagger and that the wound was not a dangerous one.

The result of this battle¹ was a brilliant victory for Alexander. His men killed one hundred and ten thousand of the enemy, but he could not catch Darius, who had got a start of half a mile or more, although he captured the king's chariot and his bow before he returned from the pursuit. He found the Macedonians busy carrying off the spoils from the enemy's camp, for this contained an immense wealth of possessions, despite the fact that the Persians had marched into battle lightly equipped and had left most of their baggage in Damascus. Darius' tent which was full of many treasures, luxurious furniture, and lavishly dressed servants had been set aside for Alexander himself. As soon as he arrived, he unbuckled his armour and went to the bath, saying 'Let us wash off the sweat of battle in Darius's bath.' 'No, in Alexander's bath, now,' remarked one of his companions. 'The conqueror takes over the possessions of the conquered and they should be called his.' When Alexander entered the bath-room he saw that the basins, the pitchers, the baths themselves and the caskets containing unguents were all made of gold and elaborately carved, and noticed that the whole room was marvellously fragrant with spices and perfumes, and then passing from this into a spacious and

1. The battle of Issus: November 333 B.C.

lofty tent, he observed the magnificence of the dining-couches, the tables and the banquet which had been set out for him. He turned to his companions and remarked, 'So this, it seems, is what it is to be a king.'¹

21. As he was about to sit down to supper, word was brought to him that the mother, the wife and the two unmarried daughters of Darius were among the prisoners, and that at the sight of the Persian king's bow and chariot they had beaten their breasts and cried out, since they supposed that he must be dead. When he heard this Alexander was silent for some time, for he was evidently more affected by the women's grief than by his own triumph. Then he sent Leonnatus² to tell them that Darius was not dead and that they need have no fear of Alexander: he was fighting Darius for the empire of Asia, but they should be provided with everything they had been accustomed to regard as their due when Darius was king. This kindly and reassuring message for Darius' womenfolk was followed by still more generous actions. Alexander gave them leave to bury as many of the Persians as they wished, and to take from the plunder any clothes and ornaments they thought fit and use them for this purpose. He also allowed them to keep the same attendants and privileges that they had previously enjoyed and even increased their revenues. But the most honourable and truly regal service which he rendered to these chaste and noble women was to ensure that they should never hear, suspect nor have cause to fear anything which could disgrace them: they lived out of sight and earshot of the soldiers, as though they were guarded in some inviolable retreat set aside for virgin priestesses rather than in an enemy's camp. This was the more remarkable because the wife of Darius was said to have been the most beautiful princess of her time, just as Darius himself was the tallest and handsomest man in Asia, and their daughters resembled their parents.

At any rate Alexander, so it seems, thought it more worthy of a king to subdue his own passions than to conquer his enemies, and

1. A remark intended to express not admiration but pity for Darius, for thinking that royalty consisted of mere wealth and luxury.

2. A friend who had grown up with Alexander: he helped to save his life in the battle against the Malli (ch. 63), and was himself killed at Crannon (322 B.C.).

so he never came near these women, nor did he associate with any other before his marriage, with the exception only of Barsine. This woman, the widow of Memnon, the Greek mercenary commander, was captured at Damascus. She had received a Greek education, was of a gentle disposition, and could claim royal descent, since her father was Artabazus who had married one of the Persian king's daughters. These qualities made Alexander the more willing – he was encouraged by Parmenio, so Aristobulus tells us – to form an attachment to a woman of such beauty and noble lineage. As for the other prisoners, when Alexander saw their handsome and stately appearance, he took no more notice of them than to say jokingly, 'These Persian women are a torment for our eyes.'¹ He was determined to make such a show of his chastity and self-control as to eclipse the beauty of their appearance, and so he passed them by as if they had been so many lifeless images cut out of stone.

22. When Philoxenus, the commander of his forces on the sea coast, wrote to say that he had with him a slave merchant from Tarentum named Theodorus who was offering exceptionally handsome boys for sale and asked whether Alexander wished to buy them, the king was furious and angrily demanded of his friends what signs of degeneracy Philoxenus had ever noticed in him that he should waste his time procuring such debased creatures. He wrote a letter to Philoxenus telling him what he thought of him and ordering him to send Theodorus and his merchandise to the devil. He also sharply rebuked Hagnon, who had written that he wanted to buy as a present for him a young man named Crobylus, whose good looks were famous in Corinth. And when he discovered that Damon and Timotheus, two Macedonian soldiers who were serving under Parmenio, had seduced the wives of some of the Greek mercenaries, he sent orders to Parmenio that if the two men were found guilty, they should be put to death as wild beasts which are born to prey upon mankind. In the same letter he wrote of himself: 'In my own case it will be found not only that I have never seen nor wished to see Darius' wife, but that I have not even allowed her beauty to be mentioned in my presence.' He also used to say that it was sleep and sexual intercourse which more than anything else, reminded him

1. i.e. because they incite the body to rebel against the discipline of the will.

that he was mortal; by this he meant that both exhaustion and pleasure proceed from the same weakness of human nature.

He was exceptionally temperate in what he ate, as he showed in many different ways, but above all in the answer he gave to Queen Ada,¹ whom he honoured with the official title of Mother and made Queen of Caria. To show her affection for him she had formed the habit of sending him delicacies and sweetmeats every day, and finally offered him bakers and cooks who were supposed to be the most skilful in the country. Alexander's reply was that he did not need them, because his tutor Leonidas had provided him with better cooks than these, that is a night march to prepare him for breakfast, and a light breakfast to give him an appetite for supper. 'This same Leonidas,' he went on, 'would often come and open my chests of bedding and clothes, to see whether my mother had not hidden some luxury inside.'

23. Alexander was also more moderate in his drinking than was generally supposed. The impression that he was a heavy drinker arose because when he had nothing else to do, he liked to linger over each cup, but in fact he was usually talking rather than drinking: he enjoyed holding long conversations, but only when he had plenty of leisure. Whenever there was urgent business to attend to, neither wine, nor sleep, nor sport, nor sex, nor spectacle, could ever distract his attention, as they did for other generals. The proof of this is his life-span, which although so short, was filled to overflowing with the most prodigious achievements. When he was at leisure, his first act after rising was to sacrifice to the gods, after which he took his breakfast sitting down.² The rest of the day would be spent in hunting, administering justice, planning military affairs or reading. If he were on a march which required no great haste, he would practise archery as he rode, or mounting and dismounting from a moving chariot, and he often hunted foxes or birds, as he mentions in his journals. When he had chosen his quarters for the night and while he was being refreshed with a bath or rubbed down, he would ask his cooks and bakers whether the arrangements for supper had been suitably made.

His custom was not to begin supper until late, as it was growing dark. He took it reclining on a couch, and he was wonderfully

1. The sister of Pixodarus of Caria.

2. That is, not reclining, as for the evening meal.

attentive and observant in ensuring that his table was well provided, his guests equally served, and none of them neglected. He sat long over his wine, as I have remarked, because of his fondness for conversation. And although at other times his society was delightful and his manner full of charm beyond that of any prince of his age, yet when he was drinking he would sometimes become offensively arrogant and descend to the level of a common soldier, and on these occasions he would allow himself not only to give way to boasting but also to be led on by his flatterers. These men were a great trial to the finer spirits among his companions, who had no desire to compete with them in their sycophancy, but were unwilling to be outdone in praising Alexander. The one course they thought shameful, but the other was dangerous. When the drinking was over it was his custom to take a bath and sleep, often until midday, and sometimes for the whole of the following day.¹

As for delicacies, Alexander was so restrained in his appetite that often when the rarest fruits or fish were brought him from the sea coast, he would distribute them so generously among his companions that there would be nothing left for himself. His evening meal, however, was always a magnificent affair, and as his successes multiplied, so did his expenditure on hospitality until it reached the sum of ten thousand drachmae. At this point he fixed a limit and those who entertained Alexander were told that they must not exceed this sum.

24. After the battle of Issus² he sent a force to Damascus and there captured the whole of the Persian army's treasure and baggage, together with their wives and children. On this occasion it was the Thessalian cavalry³ who obtained the richest share of the plunder. They had particularly distinguished themselves at Issus, and Alexander had deliberately sent them on this expedition to reward them for their courage, but the booty proved so inexhaustible that there was enough to make the whole army rich. It was here that the Macedonians received their first taste of gold and silver and women and of the

1. Plutarch does his best here to pay tribute to Alexander's self-discipline, but the evidence of this sentence is significant. Nobody in fighting trim who has gone to bed sober would be likely to sleep till midday, or sometimes all day.

2. November 333 B.C. (see ch. 20).

3. These were heavy cavalry customarily placed under Parmenio on the left wing, where they fought a holding action, while Alexander attacked on the right.

luxury of the barbarian way of life, and henceforth, like hounds which have picked up a scent, they pressed on to track down the wealth of the Persians.

However this did not divert Alexander from his strategy of securing the whole of the Asiatic seaboard before striking inland. The kings of Cyprus promptly visited him to hand over the island, and the whole of Phoenicia surrendered to him except for the city of Tyre. He besieged Tyre for seven months,¹ constructing moles and siege artillery on the landward side, and blockading it with two hundred triremes by sea. During the siege he had a dream in which he saw Hercules stretching out his hand to him from the wall and beckoning him to enter. Many of the Tyrians also dreamed that Apollo appeared to them and announced that he was going away to Alexander because he was displeased at what had been done in the city. At this the citizens treated him as if he were a deserter caught in the act of going over to the enemy. They fastened cords to his statue, nailed it to its base and reviled him as a supporter of Alexander. On another occasion Alexander dreamed that he saw a satyr who mocked at him from a distance and evaded his grasp when he tried to seize him, but who at last after much coaxing and pursuing, allowed himself to be caught. The soothsayers gave a plausible interpretation of this dream by dividing the word *sa-tyros* into two, to which they gave the meaning 'Tyre will be thine'. To this day the inhabitants show a well, near which they say Alexander dreamed that he saw the satyr.

In the midst of this siege Alexander led a force against the Arabian tribes who inhabit the mountains of the Anti-Lebanon. During this expedition he risked his life to rescue his tutor Lysimachus, who had insisted on accompanying him, since he claimed that he was neither older nor weaker than Achilles' tutor Phoenix. When the force drew near the mountains, they were obliged to leave their horses and climb the slopes on foot, and the main body pressed far ahead of the rearguard. Lysimachus could not keep up the pace and grew more and more exhausted, but Alexander refused to leave him, since by then it was growing dark and the enemy were close at hand: instead he tried to encourage him and urge him along. But before he knew it, he found himself separated from the main body with only a handful of men and forced to spend a night of bitter cold in country which

1. January–August 332 B.C.

offered him no shelter. At last he saw in the distance a number of scattered watch-fires which belonged to the enemy. It was always his habit in a crisis to encourage the Macedonians by sharing in their dangers, and so, trusting to his speed and agility, he dashed to the nearest camp fire, dispatched with his dagger the two barbarians who were sitting by it, and snatching up a firebrand ran back to his own party. His companions quickly built up a huge fire which frightened some of the enemy into flight, while those who ventured to attack were quickly routed and the Macedonians spent the rest of the night in safety. This is the account of the incident which we have from Chares.

25. The siege finally ended as follows. Alexander was resting the greater part of his army, which was exhausted after the hard fighting it had undergone, but in order to give the enemy no respite he led a small party against the walls. At the same time his diviner Aristander offered up a sacrifice, and after inspecting the omens, confidently announced to all those present that the city would be captured in the course of that month: this pronouncement was greeted with laughter and even some derision because by then it was the last day of the month. The king saw that Aristander was at a loss to explain the omens, and as he was always anxious to uphold the credibility of his prophecies, gave orders that that day should be counted not as the thirtieth of the month but as the twenty-eighth. The trumpet then sounded the advance and he launched a fiercer attack against the walls than he had originally intended. The fighting grew hotter, until the troops who had been left in camp could not bear to stay inactive, but came running up to join the attackers, and thereupon the Tyrians gave up the struggle. So it came about that Alexander captured the city on that day.

In the autumn of the same year he laid siege to Gaza,¹ the most important city in Syria. While he was engaged in these operations, a bird flying overhead let fall a clod of earth which struck him on the shoulder. The bird then perched upon one of the siege engines and immediately became entangled in the network of sinews which were used to tighten the ropes. On this occasion too the portent was fulfilled as Aristander had prophesied: the city was taken, and Alexander was wounded in the shoulder. He sent a great part of the spoils

1. September and October, 332 B.C.

captured at Gaza to Olympias, to his sister Cleopatra and to his friends. He also remembered his tutor Leonidas and presented him with five hundred talents' weight of frankincense and one hundred of myrrh: this was in remembrance of the hopes with which his teacher had inspired him in his boyhood. It seems that one day when Alexander was sacrificing and was throwing incense on to the altar by the handful, Leonidas remarked to him, 'Alexander, when you have conquered the countries that produce these spices, you can make as extravagant sacrifices as you like: till then, don't waste it!' On this occasion Alexander wrote to him, 'I have sent you plenty of myrrh and frankincense, so that you need not be stingy towards the gods any longer.'¹

26. One day a casket was brought to him which was regarded by those who were in charge of Darius' baggage and treasure as the most valuable item of all, and so Alexander asked his friends what he should keep in it as his own most precious possession. Many different suggestions were put forward, and finally Alexander said that he intended to keep his copy of the *Iliad* there. This anecdote is supported by many reliable historians, and if the tradition which has been handed down by the Alexandrians on the authority of Heracleides is true, then certainly the poems of Homer were by no means an irrelevant or an unprofitable possession to accompany him on his campaigns. According to this story, after Alexander had conquered Egypt, he was anxious to found a great and populous Greek city there,² to be called after him. He had chosen a certain site on the advice of his architects, and was on the point of measuring and marking it out. Then as he lay asleep he dreamed that a grey-haired man of venerable appearance stood by his side and recited these lines from the *Odyssey*:

Out of the tossing sea where it breaks on the beaches of Egypt
Rises an isle from the waters: the name that men give it is Pharos³

Alexander rose the next morning and immediately visited Pharos: at that time it was still an island near the Canopic mouth of the

1. About thirteen and a half tons of frankincense and two and a half tons of myrrh. Alexander never forgot a slight.

2. In particular a maritime capital which should eclipse Piraeus, Carthage, Syracuse and any other rival.

3. *Odyssey* iv, 354-5.

Nile,¹ but since then it has been joined to the mainland by a causeway. When he saw what wonderful natural advantages the place possessed – for it was a strip of land resembling a broad isthmus, which stretched between the sea and a great lagoon, with a spacious harbour at the end of it – he declared that Homer, besides his other admirable qualities, was also a very far-seeing architect, and he ordered the plan of the city to be designed so that it would conform to this site. There was no chalk to mark the ground plan, so they took barley meal, sprinkled it on the dark earth and marked out a semi-circle, which was divided into equal segments by lines radiating from the inner arc to the circumference: the shape was similar to that of the *chlamys* or military cloak, so that the lines proceeded, as it were, from the skirt, and narrowed the breadth of the area uniformly. While the king was enjoying the symmetry of the design, suddenly huge flocks of birds appeared from the river and the lagoon, descended upon the site and devoured every grain of the barley. Alexander was greatly disturbed by this omen, but the diviners urged him to take heart and interpreted the occurrence as a sign that the city would not only have abundant resources of its own but would be the nurse of men of innumerable nations, and so he ordered those in charge of the work to proceed while he himself set out to visit the temple of Ammon.²

This was a long and arduous journey, which was beset by two especial dangers. The first was the lack of water, of which there was none to be found along the route for many days' march. The second arises if a strong south wind should overtake the traveller as he is crossing the vast expanse of deep, soft sand, as is said to have happened to the army of Cambyses long ago: the wind raised great billows of sand and blew them across the plain so that fifty thousand men were swallowed up and perished. These dangers were present in the minds of almost all of Alexander's companions, but it was difficult to dissuade him from any course once he had set his heart on it. Fortune, by giving way to his insistence on every occasion had made his resolve unshakeable, and the proud spirit which he carried into all his undertakings had created in him a passion for surmounting obstacles, so that in the end he was able to overcome not only his enemies but even places and seasons of the year.

1. Later the site of the famous octagonal lighthouse.

2. In the winter of 332 B.C.

27. At any rate during this journey the assistance he received from the gods in his difficulties was more readily believed than the oracles that followed, or rather it was because of this assistance that the oracles were believed. First of all the abundant rain and continual showers which fell from heaven relieved the expedition from any fear of thirst, saturated the dry sand so that it became moist and firm to the tread, and rendered the air pure and refreshing to breathe. Besides this whenever the travellers became separated, lost the track, or wandered about because the landmarks used by their guides had become obliterated, a number of ravens appeared and proceeded to guide their march, flying swiftly ahead of them when they followed, and waiting for them when they marched slowly or lagged behind. And what was most miraculous of all, according to Callisthenes, was that if any of the company went astray in the night, the birds would croak and caw over them, until they had found their way back to the track.

When Alexander had crossed the desert and arrived at the shrine, the high priest of Ammon welcomed him on the god's behalf as a father greeting his son.¹ Alexander's first question was to ask whether any of his father's murderers had escaped punishment. At this the high priest commanded him to speak more guardedly, since his father was not a mortal. Alexander therefore changed the form of his question and asked whether the murderers of Philip had all been punished, and he added another inquiry concerning his own empire, and asked whether he was destined to rule over all mankind. This, the god replied, would be granted to him, and he also assured him that Philip's death had been completely avenged, whereupon Alexander dedicated some magnificent offerings to the god and presented large sums of money to his priests.

This is the account which most writers have given of the oracles pronounced by the god, but Alexander himself in a letter to his mother says that he received certain secret prophecies which he would confide to her, and her alone, after his return. Others say that the priest, who wished as a mark of courtesy to address him with the Greek phrase '*O, paidion*' (O, my son) spoke the words because of his

1. The shrine of Zeus Ammon had been regarded for centuries, together with Dodona and Delphi, as one of the three great oracles of the Greek world. The priests of Ammon had contact with those of Zeus in Greece, and since Egypt had become a vassal of Persia, prophecies had begun to look to the kingdoms of the north, Macedonia and Epirus, for the rise of a deliverer and universal ruler.

barbarian origin as 'O, *pai Dios*' (O, son of Zeus), and that Alexander was delighted at this slip of pronunciation, and hence the legend grew up that the god had addressed him as 'O, son of Zeus'. We are also told that while he was in Egypt he listened to the lectures of Psammon the philosopher, and especially approved his saying to the effect that all men are ruled by God, because in every case that element which imposes itself and achieves the mastery is divine. Even more philosophical was Alexander's own opinion and pronouncement on this subject, namely that while God is the father of all mankind, it is the noblest and best whom he makes especially his own.

28. In general Alexander adopted a haughty and majestic bearing towards the barbarians, as a man who was fully convinced of his divine birth and parentage, but towards the Greeks he was more restrained, and it was only on rare occasions that he assumed the manner of divinity. He made an exception when he wrote to the Athenians on the subject of Samos and said, 'I would never have given you that free and glorious city: it was from your master at that time that you received it and now hold it - my so-called father.'¹ By this he was referring to Philip. But some years later, when he had been wounded by an arrow and was in great pain, he remarked, 'What you see flowing, my friends, is blood, and not that

Ichor which flows in the veins of the blessed immortals in heaven.'²

On another occasion too, when there was a loud crash of thunder, and all those in his company were frightened by it, Anaxarchus the sophist asked him, 'Since you are the son of Zeus, could you make a noise like that?' Alexander laughed and replied, 'I have no wish to terrify my friends as you would have me do. It is you who apparently despise my table, because, so you say, what you see on it is merely fish, and not a row of satraps' heads!' For there is a story that this remark had been made by Anaxarchus when he saw a present of small fish that the king had sent to Hephaestion: he seemed to be disparaging and belittling those who undertake immense enterprises and run great risks in pursuit of their ambitions, which in the end leave them no happier or better able to enjoy themselves than other men. At any rate it is evident from what I have said that Alexander did not allow

1. i.e. he was disowning Philip as his father.

2. *Iliad* v, 340.

himself to become vain or foolishly conceited because of his belief in his divinity, but rather used it to assert his authority over others.

29. On his return from Egypt to Phoenicia¹ he honoured the gods with sacrifices and solemn processions and arranged contests of dithyrambic choruses and tragedies: these were remarkable not only for the splendour of their presentation but also for the rivalry between those who organized them. Just as at Athens those who present these spectacles are the *choregi*, rich citizens chosen by lot from the tribes, so on this occasion the sponsors were the kings of Cyprus, each of whom vied to outdo his competitors in the most spectacular fashion. The keenest contest of all took place between Nicocreon of Salamis and Pasicrates of Soli, who had been given by lot the services of two of the most celebrated actors of the day: Athenodorus was assigned to Pasicrates and Thessalus, in whom Alexander was particularly interested, to Nicocreon. Alexander did not reveal his preference until Athenodorus had been proclaimed the victor by a majority of the judges' votes. Then, as he was leaving the theatre, it seems, he remarked that he approved of the verdict of the judges, but would gladly have sacrificed a part of his kingdom rather than see Thessalus defeated. However when Athenodorus, who had been fined by the Athenians for breaking his undertaking to appear at their Dionysiac festival, appealed to the king to write a letter on his behalf, Alexander, although he refused to do this, settled the fine at his own expense. Again when Lycon of Scarpheia, who was giving a successful performance before Alexander, introduced into the comedy he was playing a line asking for a present of ten talents, Alexander laughed and gave him the money.

Darius wrote Alexander a letter² and sent it by the hand of some of his friends. He appealed to Alexander to accept ten thousand talents as a ransom for his Persian prisoners: he further offered him all the territory west of the Euphrates and the hand of one of his daughters in marriage, and on these terms proposed that they should become friends and allies. Alexander told his companions of this offer, whereupon Parmenio said, 'I would accept those terms if I were Alexander.'

1. Early in 331 B.C.

2. According to Arrian (*Anabasis*, II, 25, 1) this episode had taken place earlier, at the time of the siege of Tyre, and Alexander's reply was the conclusion of a more arrogantly phrased letter.

'So would I, by Zeus,' retorted Alexander, 'if I were Parmenio!' In reply he wrote that if Darius would come and give himself up, he would receive every courtesy: if not, Alexander would immediately march against him.

30. However not long after, when Darius' wife died in childbirth, Alexander felt remorse for having written in these terms. It is clear that he was distressed at having lost the chance to show his magnanimity, and he spared no expense to give the queen a magnificent funeral. One of her attendants, a eunuch named Teireos who had been captured with her, escaped from the camp, made his way to Darius on horseback and brought the news of the queen's death. When Darius heard it, he beat his head, broke into lamentations and cried aloud: 'Alas for the evil genius of the Persians! Was it not enough that the king's consort and sister should have become a prisoner while she lived, but she must also be deprived of a royal funeral at her death?' 'As for her burial, sire,' the eunuch replied, 'and all the honours that were due to her state, you have no cause to accuse the evil genius of the Persians. To my knowledge neither your queen Stateira while she lived, nor your mother nor your children lacked any of their former blessings, except for the light of your countenance, which the Lord Oromazdes will surely cause to shine again in its former glory. Neither was she deprived of any funeral ornament when she died, but was even honoured with the tears of her enemies. Alexander is as gentle after victory as he is terrible in battle.'

When Darius heard this, his agitation and misery were so great that he was quite carried away and began to entertain the most extravagant suspicions. He took the eunuch aside into a more secluded part of his tent and said: 'If you have not deserted me like the good fortune of Persia and gone over to the Macedonians, and if I, Darius, am still your lord and master, tell me, I charge you as you revere the great light of Mithras and the right hand of the king, was not her death which I am now lamenting the least of Stateira's misfortunes? Did I not suffer an even crueller blow of fate while she was still alive? Would not my unhappy destiny at least have been more honourable if I had met a harsher and more inhuman enemy? For how can a young man's treatment of his enemy's wife be virtuous, if it expresses itself in such tributes?'

While the king was still speaking, Teireos threw himself at his feet

and implored him to hold his peace. He should not do Alexander so much injustice, he told him, nor shame his dead queen and sister. Nor should he deprive himself of the greatest consolation left him in his adversity, the belief that he had been conquered by a man whose powers raised him above the mortal state: indeed he should admire Alexander for having shown a restraint towards Persian women which even surpassed the valour he had shown against their husbands. While the eunuch reassured the king, he swore the most solemn oaths to attest the truth of his words, and he described the magnanimity and self-restraint which Alexander had shown on other occasions. Then Darius went out to his companions and lifting up his hands to heaven uttered this prayer: 'You gods of my race and my kingdom, grant me above all that the fortunes of Persia may be restored to the prosperity in which I found them. I ask this so that I may be able to requite Alexander for the favours I received from him, when I lost everything that is dearest to me. But if the fated time is at hand when the rule of the Persians must cease, and if our downfall is a debt we must pay to the envy of the gods and the laws of change, grant that no other man but Alexander shall sit upon the throne of Cyrus.' Most historians agree with this account of what was said and done on that occasion.

31. Meanwhile¹ Alexander, after subduing the whole region which lay on his line of march between the Tigris and the Euphrates, resumed his advance against Darius, who was on his way to meet him with a million men.² On this march one of his companions mentioned to Alexander to amuse him that the camp followers had divided themselves for sport into two armies, and had appointed a general and commander for each, one of whom they had named Alexander and the other Darius. At first they had only pelted one another with clods of earth, then they had come to blows with their fists, and finally, inflamed with the heat of battle, they had fought in earnest with stones and clubs. More and more men had joined in, until at last it had become hard to separate them. When Alexander heard of this, he ordered the leaders to be matched so as to fight in single combat: he

1. The late summer of 331 B.C.

2. A propagandist figure. Modern estimates put the Persian strength at a maximum of 100,000 infantry and 34,000 cavalry. On this occasion Darius put his faith in his superiority in cavalry, in which he outnumbered the Greeks by five to one.

himself gave weapons and armour to his namesake, and Philotas gave them to the so-called Darius. The whole army watched this contest and saw in it something of an omen for their own campaign. After a strenuous fight, 'Alexander' finally prevailed, and received as a prize twelve villages and the right to wear the Persian dress. This at least is the story we have from Eratosthenes.

The great battle that was fought against Darius did not take place at Arbela, as the majority of writers say, but at Gaugamela. The word signifies 'the house of the camel': one of the ancient kings of this country escaped the pursuit of his enemies on a swift camel and gave the animal a home there, setting aside various revenues and the produce of several villages to maintain it. It happened that in the month of Boedromion, about the same time as the beginning of the festival of the mysteries at Athens,¹ there was an eclipse of the moon. On the eleventh night after this, by which time the two armies were in sight of one another, Darius kept his troops under arms and held a review of them by torchlight. Alexander allowed his Macedonians to sleep, but himself spent the night in front of his tent in the company of his diviner Aristander, with whom he performed certain mysterious and sacred ceremonies and offered sacrifice to the god Fear. Meanwhile some of the older of his companions and Parmenio in particular looked out over the plain between the river Niphates and the Gordyæan mountains and saw the entire plain agleam with the watch-fires of the barbarians, while from their camp there arose the confused and indistinguishable murmur of myriads of voices, like the distant roar of a vast ocean. They were filled with amazement at the sight and remarked to one another that it would be an overwhelmingly difficult task to defeat an enemy of such strength by engaging him by day. They therefore went to the king as soon as he had performed his sacrifice and tried to persuade him to attack by night, so as to conceal from his men the most terrifying element in the coming struggle, that is the odds against them. It was then that Alexander gave them his celebrated answer, 'I will not steal my victory.' Some of his companions thought this an immature and empty boast on the part of a young man who was merely joking in the presence of danger. But others interpreted it as meaning that he had confidence in his present situation and that he had correctly judged the future. In other words he was determined that if Darius were defeated, he should have no

cause to summon up courage for another attempt: he was not to be allowed to blame darkness and night for his failure on this occasion, as at Issus he had blamed the narrow mountain passes and the sea. Certainly Darius would never abandon the war for lack of arms or of troops, when he could draw upon such a vast territory and such immense reserves of man-power. He would only do so when he had lost courage and become convinced of his inferiority in consequence of an unmistakable defeat suffered in broad daylight.

32. When his friends had gone, Alexander lay down in his tent and is said to have passed the rest of the night in a deeper sleep than usual. At any rate when his officers came to him in the early morning, they were astonished to find him not yet awake, and on their own responsibility gave out orders for the soldiers to take breakfast before anything else was done. Then, as time was pressing, Parmenio entered Alexander's tent, stood by his couch and called him two or three times by name: when he had roused him, he asked how he could possibly sleep as if he were already victorious, instead of being about to fight the greatest battle of his life. Alexander smiled and said, 'Why not? Do you not see that we have already won the battle, now that we are delivered from roving around these endless devastated plains, and chasing this Darius, who will never stand and fight?' And indeed not only beforehand, but at the very height of the battle Alexander displayed the supremacy and steadfastness of a man who is confident of the soundness of his judgement.

As the action developed, the left wing under Parmenio was driven back and found itself hard pressed, first by a violent charge from the Bactrian cavalry, and later by an outflanking movement when Mazaeus sent a detachment of horsemen to ride round the line and attack the troops who were guarding the Macedonian baggage. Parmenio, who was disconcerted by both these manoeuvres, sent messengers to warn Alexander that his camp and his baggage train were lost, unless he could immediately move strong reinforcements from the front to protect his rear. It so happened that at that moment Alexander was about to give the signal to the right wing, which he commanded, to attack: when he received this message, he exclaimed that Parmenio must have lost his wits and forgotten in his agitation that the victors will always take possession of their enemy's baggage in any event, and that the losers must not concern themselves with

their property or their slaves, but only with how to fight bravely and die with honour.

After he had sent this message to Parmenio, he put on his helmet. He was already wearing the rest of his armour when he left his tent, a tunic made in Sicily which was belted around his waist and over this a thickly quilted linen corslet, which had been among the spoils captured at Issus. His helmet, the work of Theophilus, was made of steel which gleamed like polished silver, and to this was fitted a steel gorget set with precious stones. His sword, which was a gift from the king of Citium, was a marvel of lightness and tempering, and he had trained himself to use this as his principal weapon in hand-to-hand fighting. He also wore a cloak which was more ornate than the rest of his armour. It had been made by Helicon, an artist of earlier times, and presented to Alexander as a mark of honour by the city of Rhodes, and this too he was in the habit of wearing in battle. While he was drawing up the phalanx in formation, reviewing the troops, or giving out orders, he rode another horse to spare Bucephalas, who was by now past his prime: but when he was about to go into action Bucephalas would be led up, and he would mount him and at once begin the attack.

33. On this occasion Alexander gave a long address to the Thessalians and the rest of the Greeks. They acclaimed by shouting for him to lead them against the barbarians, and at this he shifted his lance into his left hand, so Callisthenes tells us, and raising his right he called upon the gods and prayed that if he were really the son of Zeus they should protect and encourage the Greeks. Then Aristander the diviner, who was wearing a white robe and a crown of gold, rode along the ranks and pointed out to the men an eagle which hovered for a while over Alexander's head and then flew straight towards the enemy. The sight acted as an immediate inspiration to the watching troops, and with shouts of encouragement to one another the cavalry charged the enemy at full speed and the phalanx rolled forward like a flood. Before the leading ranks could engage, the barbarians began to fall back, hotly pursued by Alexander, who drove the retreating enemy towards the centre, where Darius was stationed.

Alexander had sighted his adversary through the ranks of the royal squadron of cavalry, as they waited drawn up in deep formation in front of him. Darius was a tall and handsome man and he towered

conspicuously above this large and superbly equipped body of horsemen, who were closely massed to guard the lofty chariot in which he stood. But the horseguards were seized with panic at the terrible sight of Alexander bearing down upon them and driving the fugitives before him against those who still held their ground, and the greater number of them broke and scattered. The bravest and most highly born, however, stood fast and were slaughtered in front of their king: they fell upon one another in heaps, and in their dying struggles they clung to the legs of horses and riders, entwining themselves about them so as to hinder the pursuit. As for Darius, all the horrors of the battle were now before his eyes. The forces which had been stationed in the centre for his protection had now been driven back upon him: it had become difficult to turn his chariot round and drive it away, since the wheels were encumbered and entangled with heaps of bodies, and the horses which were surrounded and almost covered by the dead began to rear and plunge so that the charioteer could not control them. In this extremity the king abandoned his chariot and his armour, mounted a mare which, so the story goes, had recently foaled, and rode away. It is believed that he would not have escaped at that moment, had not Parmenio sent another party of horsemen begging Alexander to come to his rescue, because he was engaged with a strong enemy force which still held together and would not give way. In this battle Parmenio is generally accused of having been sluggish and lacking in spirit, either because old age had dulled his courage, or because he had become envious of the authority and pomp, to use Callisthenes' words, which Alexander now displayed. Alexander was vexed by this appeal for help, but at the time he did not reveal to his men the fact that it had been made. Instead he ordered the recall to be sounded on the ground that it was growing dark and that he wished to bring the slaughter to an end. Then as he rode back to the part of the field where Parmenio's troops were supposedly threatened, he learned on his way that the enemy had been utterly defeated and put to flight.

34. After the battle had ended in this way, the authority of the Persian empire was regarded as having been completely overthrown. Alexander was proclaimed king of Asia and after offering splendid sacrifices to the gods, he proceeded to reward his friends with riches, estates and governorships. As he wished to increase his prestige in the Greek world, he wrote to the states saying that all tyrannies were

now abolished and that henceforth they might live under their own laws: to the Plataeans in particular he wrote that he would rebuild their city because their ancestors had allowed the Greeks to make their territory the seat of war in the struggle for their common freedom.¹ He also sent a share of the spoils to the people of Croton in Italy in honour of the spirit and valour shown by their athlete Phaëllus: this man, when the rest of the Greeks in Italy had refused to give any help to their compatriots in the Persian wars, had fitted out a ship at his own expense and sailed with it to Salamis to share in the common danger. Such was Alexander's desire to pay tribute to any manifestation of courage and to prove himself the friend and guardian of noble actions.

35. He then advanced through the province of Babylonia which immediately surrendered to him. On his march he was particularly impressed by the fissure in the earth from which fire continually poured forth as if it came from a well, and by the stream of naphtha which gushed forth so abundantly that it formed a lake not far from the chasm. This naphtha is in many ways like bitumen, but is so inflammable that a flame can set it alight by its very radiance without actually touching it, and it often kindles all the intermediate air. To demonstrate the nature of the liquid and the force of its action the barbarians sprinkled a small quantity along the street which led to Alexander's quarters. Then standing at the far end they applied their torches to the trail of moisture, as it was growing dark. The first drops instantly ignited, and in a fraction of a second with the speed of thought the flames darted to the other end and the whole street was ablaze.

Among the attendants who waited upon the king, whenever he bathed and anointed himself, was an Athenian named Athenophanes, who had the task of providing him with diversions and amusements. On one occasion a boy named Stephanus, who possessed an absurdly ugly face but an agreeable singing voice, was also in attendance in the bathroom, and Athenophanes asked the king, 'Would you care for us to try an experiment with the naphtha upon Stephanus? If it catches fire on him and is not immediately put out, then its strength must be extraordinary and irresistible.' Surprisingly, the boy agreed to try the experiment, and no sooner had he touched the liquid and anointed himself with it than the flames broke out and enveloped his body so

1. In the final phase of the Persian wars, 479 B.C.

completely that Alexander was appalled and began to fear for his life. If there had not happened to be many attendants close by holding pitchers of water for the bath, he would have been burned to death before any help could reach him. Even as it was they had great difficulty in putting out the flames, and his whole body was so severely burned that he was critically ill for a long time after.

It is natural therefore that some of those who wish to reconcile legend with fact should say that this was the drug used by Medea when in the tragedy she anoints the crown and the robe which she presents to Creon's daughter. The fire did not originate from these objects, they explain, nor did it break out of its own accord, but a flame must have been placed near them, with which the liquid was then drawn into contact so quickly that the process was invisible to the naked eye. The rays and emanations which proceed from a flame at a certain distance have no more effect on some substances than to give them light and warmth, but in the case of those which are dry and porous, or possess a sufficiently oily moisture, the heat is concentrated, then bursts into fierce flames and transforms the substance. There has been much dispute as to how naphtha is produced: whether, for example, the liquid combustible matter that feeds the flame flows out from a soil which is naturally oily and inflammable. Certainly the soil of Babylonia is very fiery, so much so that grains of barley are often thrown up out of the earth and bound away, as if the heat of the soil made the ground throb, and in the hottest part of the summer the inhabitants sleep on skins filled with water. When Harpalus, Alexander's treasurer, was left as governor of the province, he was anxious to adorn the royal gardens and walks with Greek plants and shrubs, and he succeeded with all except ivy: the soil would not nourish this, but always killed it. The plant could not endure the temper of the soil which was fiery, whereas ivy loves a cold soil. I hope the impatient reader will bear with digressions of this kind, so long as they are kept within reasonable limits.

36. After Alexander had made himself master of Susa, he found forty thousand talents of coined money in the palace, besides furniture and other treasures of incalculable value. Among these it was said were five thousand talents weight of cloth dyed with purple from Hermione,¹ which still kept a fresh and vivid colour even after it had been

1. A port on the Gulf of Spetsae in the eastern Peloponnese.

stored there for one hundred and ninety years. The reason for this, we are told, is that honey was used in the purple dyes and white olive oil in the white dyes, and each of these substances, it is said, will preserve the lustre and brilliance of the colour and prevent any fading. Deinon also tells us that the kings of Persia had water transported from the Nile and the Danube, and stored among their treasures as a testimony to the extent of their dominions and a proof that they were masters of the world.

37. When Alexander advanced beyond Susa, he found the province of Persis difficult to penetrate: not only was the country mountainous, but it was defended by the bravest of the Persians since Darius had taken refuge there. In spite of these obstacles Alexander found a guide who showed him the way by making a short diversion.¹ This man had a Lycian father and a Persian mother and spoke both Greek and Persian, and it was to him, so the story goes, that the Pythian priestess had referred when she prophesied while Alexander was still a boy that a *lykos* (wolf) would guide him on his march against the Persians. During the advance across Persis the Greeks massacred great numbers of their prisoners, and Alexander has himself recorded that he gave orders for the Persians to be slaughtered because he thought that such an example would help his cause. It is said that in Persepolis, the capital of the province, he found as much gold as he had in Susa, and that it required two thousand pairs of mules and five hundred camels to carry away the furniture and other treasures that were found there.

It was in Persepolis that Alexander saw a gigantic statue of Xerxes. This had been toppled from its pedestal and heedlessly left on the ground by a crowd of soldiers, as they forced their way into the palace, and Alexander stopped and spoke to it as though it were alive. 'Shall I pass by and leave you lying there because of the expedition you led against Greece, or shall I set you up again because of your magnanimity and your virtues in other respects?' For a long while he gazed at the statue and reflected in silence, and then went on his way. It was by then winter, and he stayed in Persepolis for four months to allow his soldiers time to rest. It is said that when he first took his seat on the royal throne under the golden canopy, Demaratus the

1. This brief allusion refers to one of Alexander's most brilliant operations, the forcing of the pass known as the Persian Gates, which on this occasion was guarded by an army of over 40,000 men (in midwinter 331 B.C.).

Corinthian, who was much attached to Alexander, as he had been to his father, began to weep, as old men are apt to do, and exclaimed that any Greek who had died before that day had missed one of the greatest pleasures in life by not seeing Alexander seated on the throne of Darius.

38. In the spring¹ Alexander again took the field against Darius, but a short while before it so happened that he accepted an invitation to a drinking party held by some of his companions, and on this occasion a number of women came to meet their lovers and joined in the drinking. The most celebrated of these was Thais, an Athenian, at that time the mistress of the Ptolemy who later became the ruler of Egypt. As the drinking went on, Thais delivered a speech which was intended partly as a graceful compliment to Alexander and partly to amuse him. What she said was typical of the spirit of Athens, but hardly in keeping with her own situation. She declared that all the hardships she had endured in wandering about Asia had been amply repaid on that day, when she found herself revelling luxuriously in the splendid palace of the Persians, but that it would be an even sweeter pleasure to end the party by going out and setting fire to the palace of Xerxes, who had laid Athens in ashes. She wanted to put a torch to the building herself in full view of Alexander, so that posterity should know that the women who followed Alexander had taken a more terrible revenge for the wrongs of Greece than all the famous commanders of earlier times by land or sea. Her speech was greeted with wild applause and the king's companions excitedly urged him on until at last he allowed himself to be persuaded, leaped to his feet, and with a garland on his head and a torch in his hand led the way. The other revellers followed, shouting and dancing, and surrounded the palace, and those of the Macedonians who had heard what was afoot delightedly ran up bringing torches with them. They did this because they hoped that the act of burning and destroying the palace signified that Alexander's thoughts were turned towards home, and that he was not planning to settle among the barbarians. According to a number of historians it was in this way that the palace was burned down, that is on impulse, but there are others who maintain that it was an act of deliberate policy. However this may be, it is agreed that Alexander quickly repented and gave orders for the fire to be put out.

39. Alexander was by nature exceptionally generous and became even more so as his wealth increased. His gifts were always bestowed with grace and courtesy, and it is this alone, to tell the truth, which makes the giver's generosity welcome. I may mention a few instances of this. When Ariston the commander of the Paeonians¹ had killed one of his enemies, he brought the man's head, showed it to Alexander and remarked, 'In my country, sire, a present such as this is always rewarded with a gold cup.' Alexander laughed and replied, 'Yes, but with an empty one. I will drink your health with a cup full of neat wine, and give it you as well.' On another occasion one of the Macedonian soldiers was driving a mule laden with the king's gold, and when the animal became too exhausted to carry it, he took off the load and put it on his own shoulders. When Alexander saw him struggling along in distress and learned what had happened, he called out as the soldier was about to put down his burden, 'Hold on, don't give up! Finish your journey and take what you are carrying to your own tent.' Indeed he was always more offended with those who refused his gifts than with those who asked for them. He wrote to Phocion telling him that in future he would not regard him as a friend if he declined all his favours, and in the case of Serapion, one of the youths who used to play ball with him, he never gave him anything because he never asked for anything. So one day whenever the ball came to Serapion, he made a point of throwing it to the others, until the king said, 'Aren't you going to throw it to me?' 'No,' retorted Serapion, 'You never ask for it!' whereupon the king burst out laughing and loaded him with presents.

Then there was Proteas, one of the king's drinking companions, who had a reputation as a jester, and who seemed on one occasion to have made the king angry. At this his friends pleaded for him and he himself begged for forgiveness with tears in his eyes, until Alexander said that he pardoned him. 'Then will you first give me something to prove it?' Proteas asked him, whereupon the king gave orders for him to be presented with five talents. His friends and bodyguards were apt to put on airs as a result of the riches he showered on them, and this is revealed in a letter Olympias once wrote him, in which she said, 'I wish you would find other ways of rewarding those you love and honour: as it is you are making them all the equals of kings and enabling *them* to make plenty of friends, but leaving yourself without

1. A regiment of light cavalry from the borders of Macedonia.

any.' Olympias often wrote to him in this strain, but Alexander kept her letters to himself with one exception. Hephaestion was in the habit of reading the king's letters with him, and on this occasion his eye fell on a letter which had been opened. The king did not prevent him from reading it, but took the ring from his own finger and pressed the seal to his lips, so much as to tell him to keep silence.

Mazaeus had been the most powerful of Darius' officials, and although his son was already the governor of a province, Alexander now proposed to add an even larger one to it. The young man declined it, however, and said to him, 'In the past, sire, there was only one Darius, but now you have made many Alexanders.' Besides this he presented Parmenio with the house of Bagoas at Susa, in which it is said clothes were found to the value of a thousand talents. Alexander also wrote to Antipater, warning him to keep bodyguards around him, since he was in danger of plots against his life.¹ He sent a great many presents to his mother, but he would not allow her to interfere in affairs of state or in the management of his campaigns, and when she complained about this, he bore her scoldings with great tolerance. But on one occasion when Antipater had written him a long letter finding fault with her, he exclaimed that Antipater did not understand that one tear shed by his mother would wipe out ten thousand letters such as this.

40. Alexander now noticed that his companions had acquired thoroughly luxurious habits and had become vulgar in the extravagance of their way of living. There was Hagnon of Teos, who wore silver nails in his boots; Leonnatus, who had the dust with which he sprinkled his body for wrestling brought by camel-train from Egypt; and Philotas who hunted with nets that could enclose a space of twelve miles. When his friends bathed, they often anointed themselves with myrrh, rather than with plain oil, and were attended by masseurs and body-servants. Alexander reasoned with them and gently reproved them for these excesses. He told them he was amazed to see that men who had fought and conquered in such great battles could have forgotten that those who labour sleep more sweetly than those who are laboured for. Could they not understand, when they compared their style of living with that of the Persians, that there is nothing more slavish than the love of pleasure and nothing more princely than the

1. Plots laid by Olympias, who was on bad terms with Antipater.

life of toil? How can a man attend to his horse, he asked them, or keep his spear and his helmet clean and bright, if he has lost the habit of using his hands to look after his own precious body? Did they not know that the end and perfection of conquest is to avoid doing the same things as the conquered have done? And so, to set an example, he exerted himself more strenuously than ever in campaigns and hunting expeditions, exposing himself to hardship and danger, so that an envoy from Sparta, who was by his side when he speared a great lion, remarked, 'Alexander, you fought nobly with this lion to decide which of you should be king!' Craterus later had this hunting scene represented in bronze and dedicated it at Delphi: it showed the figures of the lion, the hounds, the king fighting with the lion, and Craterus advancing to help him. Some of these sculptures were executed by Lysippus, and some by Leochares.

41. Alexander made a point of risking his life in this way both to exercise himself and to inspire others to acts of courage, but his friends, because of the wealth and pomp with which they were surrounded, desired only to lead a life of luxury and idleness. They found his expeditions and campaigns an intolerable burden, and little by little went so far as to abuse and find fault with the king. Alexander bore this treatment with great tolerance at first, and remarked that it is the part of a king to do good to his subjects and be maligned for it. And indeed even in the most trivial services which he rendered to his friends, he revealed the affection and regard which he had for them. I will give a few examples of this.

He wrote to Peucestas, who had been bitten by a bear, to complain that he had described his injury to other friends but had said nothing to Alexander. 'Now,' he went on, 'you must write to tell me how you are, and whether you were let down by any of your fellow huntsmen, so that I can punish them.' When Hephæstion was absent on some business, Alexander wrote with the news that while they had been amusing themselves hunting an ichneumon, Craterus had accidentally been run through the thighs with Perdiccas' lance. After Peucestas had recovered from some illness, Alexander wrote to his friend's physician Alexippus congratulating him on the cure. When Craterus was sick, Alexander had a dream in which he offered certain sacrifices to the gods on his friend's behalf and told him to do the same, and he wrote to Craterus' physician Pausanias, when the latter

wished to treat him with hellebore, expressing his anxiety and advising him how to use the drug. Ephialtes and Cissus were the first to bring the news that Harpalus¹ had deserted, and Alexander had them put in chains because he believed that they were making a false accusation against the man. Again, when he was sending home his invalid and superannuated soldiers, Eurylochus of Aegae contrived to have his name put on the list of the sick, and when it was discovered that there was nothing wrong with him, he confessed that he was in love with a girl named Telesippe, and had planned to travel with her on her journey to the coast. Alexander made inquiries about her parentage, and when he found that she was a free-born Greek courtesan, he said, 'I will help you with your love affair, Eurylochus, but since she is a free woman, you must see whether you can win her either by presents or by courtship, but not use other means.'

42. It is in fact astonishing that he could find time to write so many letters to his friends. For example he wrote one ordering a search to be made for a slave belonging to Seleucus who had run away to Cilicia, and another praising Peucestas because he had caught Nicon, a runaway slave of Craterus, and a third to Megabyzus about a slave who had taken refuge in a sanctuary. In this he told him to try, if possible, to lure the slave outside and then arrest him, but not to lay hands on him within the sacred precincts. We are also told that when he was trying a prisoner on a capital charge, he would place a hand over one of his ears while the prosecutor was speaking, so as to keep it free and impartial for listening to the defendant. But later so many accusations were laid before him that he grew harsh and was inclined to believe even the false charges, because so much that he was told was true. Above all, if anybody spoke ill of him, his judgement was apt to desert him and his mood would become cruel and merciless, since he valued his good name more than his life or his crown.

He now set out again in pursuit of Darius,² fully expecting that he would have to fight another battle. However when he learned that the

1. Harpalus, who had been guilty of maladministration during Alexander's campaigns, deserted in 325 B.C. He fled to Cilicia and after Alexander's return from India took refuge in Attica in 324. He was murdered in Crete by one of his fellow-adventurers. See *Life of Demosthenes*, chs. 25-6.

2. In the spring of 330 B.C. Darius had assembled a force of some 6,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry at Ecbatana.

king had been arrested by Bessus, the satrap of Bactria, he sent his Thessalian cavalry back to Greece, after first giving them a gratuity of two thousand talents,¹ besides their regular pay. The pursuit of Darius turned out to be long and exhausting. Alexander covered more than four hundred miles in eleven days, and by this time most of his horsemen were on the verge of collapse for lack of water. At this point he met some Macedonians, who were carrying water from a river in skins on the backs of their mules, and when they saw Alexander almost fainting with thirst in the midday heat, they quickly filled a helmet and brought it to him. He asked them for whom they were carrying the water. 'For our own sons,' they told him, but so long as your life is safe, we can have other children, even if we lose these.' At this Alexander took the helmet in his hands. But then he looked up and saw the rest of his troop craning their heads and casting longing glances at the water, and he handed it back without drinking a drop. He thanked the men who had brought it, but said to them, 'If I am the only one to drink, the rest will lose heart.' However no sooner had his companions witnessed this act of self-control and magnanimity than they cried out and shouted for him to lead them on boldly. They spurred on their horses and declared that they could not feel tired or thirsty or even like mortal men, so long as they had such a king.

43. All his horsemen were fired with the same enthusiasm, but only sixty of his men, so the story goes, had kept up with Alexander when he burst into the enemy's camp. They rode over great heaps of gold and silver vessels which had been scattered on the ground, passed waggons full of women and children that were moving aimlessly about without their drivers, and at length caught up with the Persian vanguard, imagining that Darius must be among them. At last they found him lying in a waggon, riddled with javelins and at his last gasp. He asked for a drink, and when he had swallowed some cold water which a Macedonian named Polystratus brought him, he said, 'This is the final stroke of misfortune, that I should accept a service from you, and not be able to return it, but Alexander will reward you for your kindness, and the gods will repay him for his courtesy towards my mother and my wife and my children. And so through you, I give him my hand.' As he said this, he took Poly-

1. Each of the 2,000 cavalymen received one talent.

stratus by the hand, and died. When Alexander came up, he showed his grief and distress at the king's death, and unfastening his own cloak, he threw it over the body and covered it. Later, after he had captured Bessus, who had murdered the king, he had him torn limb from limb. He had the tops of two straight trees bent down so that they met, and part of Bessus' body was tied to each. Then when each tree was let go and sprang back to its upright position, the part of the body attached to it was torn off by the recoil. As for Darius' body, he sent it to his mother to be laid out in royal state, and he enrolled his brother Exathres into the number of the Companions.

44. Meanwhile he himself with the flower of his army pressed on into Hyrcania. Here he came in sight of a bay of the open sea which appeared to be as large as the Black Sea, and was sweeter than the Mediterranean. He could not obtain any certain information about it, but guessed that it was probably a stagnant overflow from Lake Maeotis.¹ However various geographers had already discovered the truth and many years before Alexander's expedition they had recorded their conclusion that this was the most northerly of four gulfs which run inland from the outer Ocean² and was called the Hyrcanian or Caspian Sea. In this neighbourhood the barbarians surprised the grooms, who were leading Alexander's horse Bucephalas, and captured him. Alexander was enraged and sent a herald with the threat that unless they gave back his horse, he would exterminate the whole tribe, together with their women and children. However when they returned with the horse and surrendered their cities to him, he treated them all kindly, and even gave a reward to the men who had captured Bucephalas.

45. From this point he advanced into Parthia,³ and it was here during a pause in the campaign that he first began to wear barbarian dress. He may have done this from a desire to adapt himself to local habits, because he understood that the sharing of race and of customs is a great step towards softening men's hearts. Alternatively, this may

1. The Sea of Azov.

2. According to the beliefs of Plutarch's time, the outer Ocean encircled the world and the Caspian flowed into it. Alexander planned an expedition to determine whether the Caspian was a lake or a gulf, but did not live to carry it out.

3. In the autumn of 330 B.C.

have been an experiment which was aimed at introducing the obeisance among the Macedonians, the first stage being to accustom them to accepting changes in his own dress and way of life. However he did not go so far as to adopt the Median costume, which was altogether barbaric and outlandish, and he wore neither trousers, nor a sleeved vest, nor a tiara.¹ Instead he adopted a style which was a compromise between Persian and Median costume, more modest than the first, and more stately than the second. At first he wore this only when he was in the company of barbarians or with his intimate friends indoors, but later he put it on when he was riding or giving audience in public. The sight greatly displeased the Macedonians, but they admired his other virtues so much that they considered they ought to make concessions to him in some matters which either gave him pleasure or increased his prestige. For besides all his other hardships, he had recently been wounded below the knee by an arrow which splintered the shin-bone so that the fragments had to be taken out, and on another occasion he had received such a violent blow on the neck from a stone that his vision became clouded and remained so for a long time afterwards. In spite of this, he continued to expose himself unsparingly to danger: for example he crossed the river Orexartes, which he believed to be the Tanais, routed the Scythians and pursued them for twelve miles or more, even though all this while he was suffering from an attack of dysentery.

46. It was here that he was visited by the queen of the Amazons, according to the report we have from many writers, among them Cleitarchus, Polycleitus, Onesicritus, Antigenes and Ister. On the other hand Aristobulus, Chares the royal usher, Ptolemy, Anticleides, Philo the Theban and Philip of Theangela, and besides these Hecataeus of Eretria, Philip the Chalcidian and Douris of Samos all maintain that this is a fiction, and this judgement seems to be confirmed by Alexander's own testimony. In a letter to Antipater in which he describes the details of the occasion, he mentions that the king of the Scythians offered him his daughter in marriage, but he makes no reference to an Amazon. There is also a story that many years afterwards, when Lysimachus had become king of Macedonia, Onesicritus was reading aloud the fourth book of his history, which contained the tale of the Amazon, at which Lysimachus smiled and asked

1. The conical Persian head-dress which was wound like a turban.

quietly, 'I wonder where I was then.' In any case our admiration for Alexander is not diminished if we reject this story, nor increased if we regard it as true.

47. Alexander was by now becoming anxious that the Macedonians might refuse to follow him any further in his campaigns. He therefore quartered the main body on the country and allowed them to rest, but pressed on with his best troops, consisting of twenty thousand infantry and three thousand cavalry, and marched into Hyrcania. He then addressed this picked force and told them that up to now the barbarians had watched them as if they were in a dream, but that if they merely threw the whole country into disorder and then retired, the Persians would fall upon them as if they were so many women. He went on to say that he would allow any of them who desired it to go back, but he called on them to witness that at the very moment when he was seeking to conquer the whole inhabited world for the Macedonians, he found himself deserted and left only with his friends and those who were willing to continue the expedition. These are almost the exact words which he used in his letter to Antipater, and he says that after he had spoken in this way, the whole of his audience shouted aloud and begged him to lead them to whatever part of the world he chose. Once he had tested the loyalty of these troops, he found no difficulty in winning over the main body, indeed they followed him with a will.

From this point he began to adapt his own style of living more closely to that of the country and tried to reconcile Asiatic and Macedonian customs: he believed that if the two traditions could be blended and assimilated in this way his authority would be more securely established when he was far away, since it would rest on goodwill rather than on force. For this reason he selected thirty thousand boys and gave orders that they should be taught to speak the Greek language and to use Macedonian weapons, and he appointed a large number of instructors to train them. His marriage to Roxane¹ was a love match, which began when he first saw her at the height of her youthful beauty taking part in a dance at a banquet, but it also played a great part in furthering his policy of reconciliation. The barbarians were encouraged by the feeling of partnership which their alliance created, and they were completely won over by Alexander's

1. This took place in August 327 B.C.

moderation and courtesy and by the fact that without the sanction of marriage he would not approach the only woman who had ever conquered his heart.

Alexander noticed that among his closest friends it was Hephaestion who approved of these plans and joined him in changing his habits, while Craterus¹ clung to Macedonian customs, and he therefore made use of the first in his dealings with the barbarians and of the second with the Greeks and Macedonians. In general he showed most affection for Hephaestion and most respect for Craterus, for he had formed the opinion and often said that Hephaestion was a friend of Alexander's, while Craterus was a friend of the king's. For this reason a feeling of hostility grew and festered between the two and they often came into open conflict. Once on the expedition to India they actually drew their swords and came to blows, and as their friends appeared and began to join in the quarrel, Alexander rode up and publicly reprimanded Hephaestion: he told him that he must be a fool and a madman if he did not understand that without Alexander's favour he was nothing. Then later in private he sharply rebuked Craterus. Finally he called both men together and made them be friends again. He swore by Zeus Ammon and the rest of the gods that these were the two men he loved best in the world, but that if he ever heard them quarrelling again, he would kill them both, or at least the one who began the quarrel. After this, it is said, neither of them ever did or said anything to offend the other even in jest.

48. Among the Macedonians at this time² few men enjoyed a more prominent position than Philotas, the son of Parmenio:³ he had a high reputation for courage and for his ability to endure hardship and after Alexander he had no equal for generosity and devotion to his friends. At any rate we are told that when one of his intimate friends asked him for money and his steward replied that he had none

1. Probably the ablest of Alexander's younger officers. He became second in command after Parmenio's death in 330 B.C. He led part of the army back from India and in 324 brought the veterans back to Macedonia. He was killed in battle against Eumenes in 321.

2. The narrative now moves back to the period immediately following the murder of Darius, the autumn of 330 B.C.

3. Philotas was older than Alexander: he commanded the Companion cavalry, eight squadrons strong.

to give, he asked the man, 'What do you mean - have I no plate or furniture to sell?' However, Philotas also displayed an arrogance, an ostentation of wealth, and a degree of luxury in his personal habits and his way of living which could only cause offence in his position as a private subject. At this time in particular his efforts to imitate a lofty and majestic presence carried no conviction, appeared clumsy and uncouth, and succeeded only in provoking envy and mistrust to such a degree that even Parmenio once remarked to him, 'My son, do not make so much of yourself.' And indeed Philotas had fallen under suspicion a long while before this. When Darius had been defeated in Cilicia and his treasure captured at Damascus, one of the many prisoners who were brought into Alexander's camp was discovered to be a beautiful Greek girl who had been born in Pydna and was named Antigone. She was handed over to Philotas and he - like many a young man who, when he has drunk well, is apt to talk freely to his mistress in the boastful fashion of a soldier - often confided to her that all the greatest achievements in the campaign had been the work of his father and himself. Then he would speak of Alexander as a mere boy who owed his title of ruler to their efforts. Antigone repeated these remarks to one of her friends, and he naturally enough passed them on until they reached the ears of Craterus, who took the girl and brought her privately to Alexander. When the king heard her story, he ordered her to continue visiting Philotas, but to come and report everything that she learned from him.

49. Philotas had no suspicion of the trap that was being set for him and in his conversations with Antigone he uttered many indiscretions and often spoke slightly of the king, sometimes through anger and sometimes through boastfulness. Even so Alexander, although he now had overwhelming evidence against Philotas, endured these insults in silence and restrained himself either because he had confidence in Parmenio's loyalty, or perhaps because he feared the power and prestige of father and son. But meanwhile a Macedonian from Chalaestra named Dimnos organized a conspiracy against Alexander, and invited a young man named Nicomachus whose lover he was to take part in the plot. Nicomachus refused to be involved, but told his brother Cebalinus of the attempt. Cebalinus then went to Philotas and demanded that he should take them both to Alexander,

as they had something of the greatest urgency to tell him. Philotas, however, for some unknown reason, did not arrange the interview, making out that the king was engaged on more important business, and he did this not once but twice. By this time the brothers had become suspicious of Philotas, and so they turned to somebody else who brought them into the king's presence. First of all they revealed Dimnos' plot and then they made a number of insinuations against Philotas, because he had twice disregarded their requests to see the king.

This news enraged Alexander, and when he learned that Dimnos had resisted arrest, and had been killed by the men who had been sent to fetch him, he became still more disturbed, as he concluded that he had lost the chance to uncover the plot. He felt bitter resentment against Philotas and became all the more ready to listen to those who had long hated his friend. These enemies now said openly that it was folly on the king's part to suppose that a man such as Dimnos who came from the obscure town of Chalaestra would ever have undertaken such a daring enterprise on his own account: it was obvious that he was a mere agent, a tool in the hands of somebody of much greater power, and that Alexander must look for the source of the conspiracy among those who had most interest in keeping it concealed. Once the king had begun to listen to these insinuations and suspicions, Philotas' enemies brought innumerable accusations against him. He was arrested, interrogated, and tortured in the presence of the king's Companions, while Alexander himself listened to the examination from behind a curtain. We are told that when he heard Philotas uttering broken and pitiful cries and pleas for mercy to Hephaestion he exclaimed, 'Ah, Philotas, if you are so weak and unmanly as this, how could you involve yourself in such a dangerous business?' Philotas was executed, and immediately afterwards Alexander sent messengers to Media and had Parmenio put to death as well. This was a man who had rendered many great services to Philip and who, of all Alexander's older friends, had urged him most strongly to undertake the invasion of Asia: of his three sons he had seen two die in battle and now he was put to death with the third.

These actions¹ made Alexander dreaded by his friends, above all by

1. Parmenio's son-in-law Alexander of Lyncestis was also put to death as a possible pretender to the throne: unlike Parmenio he was of royal blood.

Antipater,¹ and caused him at a later date to enter into secret negotiations with the Aetolians and make an alliance with them. These people were especially afraid of Alexander, because they had destroyed the city of the Oeniadae,² and because the king, when he heard of it, had declared that the sons of the Oeniadae would not need to seek their revenge, since he himself would punish the Aetolians.

50. Not long after³ this came the killing of Cleitus, whose treatment on the bare facts of the case appears to have been even more shocking than that of Philotas. However, if we consider both the occasion and the cause, we may see that it was a misfortune rather than a deliberate act, and that it was Cleitus' evil genius⁴ which took advantage of Alexander's anger and intoxication to destroy him. This was how it came about. Some men arrived from the coast bringing a present of Greek fruit for the king. Alexander admired its beauty and ripeness and sent for Cleitus to share it with him. It so happened that Cleitus was in the midst of sacrificing, but he at once left the ceremony, and three of the sheep on which libations had been poured followed him. When the king heard of this, he consulted Aristander his diviner and Cleomantis the Spartan. Since they interpreted this as an evil omen, he ordered them to offer up a sacrifice at once for Cleitus' safety. Alexander was all the more disturbed because two days before he had dreamed a strange dream in which he saw Cleitus sitting with the sons of Parmenio: they were dressed in black and all four of them were dead. However before the sacrifice offered on Cleitus' behalf was concluded, he came at once to dine with the king, who had already sacrificed on that day to the Dioscuri.

After the company had drunk a good deal somebody began to sing the verses of a man named Pranichus (or Pierio according to another account), which had been written to humiliate and make fun of some Macedonian commanders who had recently been defeated by the barbarians. The older members of the party took offence at this and showed their resentment of both the poet and the singer,

1. Antipater had been left as regent in Macedonia in Alexander's absence.

2. A town in Acarnania at the mouth of the Acheloos.

3. Two years after in the autumn of 328 B.C. at Marakanda (Samarkand).

4. It was widely believed that every man receives at birth a *daimon* which is associated with him for life. It may be good or evil. See the *Lives of Dion, Brutus and Julius Caesar*.

but Alexander and those sitting near him listened with obvious pleasure and told the man to continue. Thereupon Cleitus, who had already drunk too much and was rough and hot-tempered by nature, became angrier than ever and shouted that it was not right for Macedonians to be insulted in the presence of barbarians and enemies, even if they had met with misfortune, for they were better men than those who were laughing at them. Alexander retorted that if Cleitus was trying to disguise cowardice as misfortune, he must be pleading his own case. At this Cleitus sprang to his feet and shouted back, 'Yes, it was my cowardice that saved your life, you who call yourself the son of the gods, when you were turning your back to Spithridates' sword.¹ And it is the blood of these Macedonians and their wounds which have made you so great that you disown your father Philip and claim to be the son of Ammon!'

51. These words made Alexander furious. 'You scum,' he cried out, 'do you think that you can keep on speaking of me like this, and stir up trouble among the Macedonians and not pay for it?' 'Oh, but we Macedonians do pay for it,' Cleitus retorted. 'Just think of the rewards we get for all our efforts. It's the dead ones who are happy, because they never lived to see Macedonians being beaten with Median rods, or begging the Persians for an audience with our own king.' Cleitus blurted out all this impulsively, whereupon Alexander's friends jumped up and began to abuse him, while the older men tried to calm down both sides. Then Alexander turned to Xenodochus of Cardia and Artemius of Colophon and asked them, 'When you see the Greeks walking about among the Macedonians, do they not look to you like demi-gods among so many wild beasts?' But Cleitus refused to take back anything and he challenged Alexander to speak out whatever he wished to say in front of the company, or else not invite to his table free-born men who spoke their minds: it would be better for him to spend his time among barbarians and slaves, who would prostrate themselves before his white tunic and his Persian girdle. At this Alexander could no longer control his rage: he hurled one of the apples that lay on the table at Cleitus, hit him, and then looked around for his dagger. One of his bodyguards, Aristophanes, had already moved it out of harm's way,² and the others crowded

1. See ch. 16.

2. This may have made Alexander suspect treachery.

around him and begged him to be quiet. But Alexander leaped to his feet and shouted out in the Macedonian tongue for his bodyguard to turn out, a signal that this was an extreme emergency; then he ordered his trumpeter to sound the alarm, and because the man was unwilling to obey, he struck him with his fist. Afterwards the trumpeter was highly praised for his conduct, because it was chiefly thanks to him that the whole camp was not thrown into a turmoil. Meanwhile as Cleitus still refused to give way, his friends with great difficulty pushed him out of the banqueting room. But soon afterwards he came in by another door, and, as he did so, recited in a loud and contemptuous voice this line from Euripides' *Andromache*

Alas, what evil customs reign in Greece.¹

At this Alexander seized a spear from one of his guards, faced Cleitus as he was drawing aside the curtain of the doorway, and ran him through. With a roar of pain and a groan, Cleitus fell, and immediately the king's anger left him. When he came to himself and saw his friends standing around him speechless, he snatched the weapon out of the dead body and would have plunged it into his own throat if the guards had not forestalled him by seizing his hands and carrying him by force into his chamber.

52. There he spent the rest of the night and the whole of the following day sobbing in an agony of remorse.² At last he lay exhausted by his grief, uttering deep groans but unable to speak a word, until his friends, alarmed at his silence, forced their way into his room. He paid no attention to what any of them said, except that when Aristander the diviner reminded him of the dream he had had concerning Cleitus and its significance, and told him that these events had long ago been ordained by fate, he seemed to accept this assurance. For this reason they brought to him two philosophers, Callisthenes, who was the great-nephew of Aristotle, and Anaxarchus of Abdera. Callisthenes used a gentle and comforting manner towards the king to relieve his suffering, skirting round the subject and never referring to it directly in order to spare his feelings. Anaxarchus, on the other hand, had always pursued an independent approach to philosophy

1. Line 683.

2. Cleitus was some twenty years older than Alexander, whom he had often tended in his childhood: his sister had been the young prince's wet-nurse.

and had acquired a reputation for slighting and looking down on his associates. As soon as he entered the room, he exclaimed, 'Here is this Alexander whom the whole world now looks to for an example, and he is lying on the floor weeping like a slave, terrified of the law and of what men will say of him. And yet all the time it should be he who represents the law and sets up the criterion of justice. Why else did he conquer, unless it was to govern and command? It was certainly not to allow himself to submit like a slave to the foolish opinions of others. Do you not know that Zeus has Justice and Law seated by his side to prove that everything that is done by the ruler of the world is lawful and just?' By using arguments such as these Anaxarchus certainly succeeded in relieving Alexander's sufferings, but he made him in many ways more proud and autocratic than before. He also gained great favour for himself and managed to make Callisthenes' company, which had never been very welcome because of his austerity, even more disagreeable to the king.

The story goes that one day at table, when the conversation turned upon the climate and the temperature of the air, Callisthenes, who took the view of those who said it was colder in Persia than in Greece, was contradicted by Anaxarchus in his usual aggressive manner, whereupon he retorted, 'Surely you must admit that it is colder here, for in Greece you used to wear just one cloak all through the winter, while here you are sitting at table with three rugs wrapped round you.' This remark naturally made Anaxarchus dislike him more than ever.

53. Callisthenes also annoyed the other sophists and flatterers of Alexander's court because he attracted the young men by his eloquence and because he was equally admired by the older generation¹ on account of his orderly, dignified and self-sufficient way of life. His behaviour certainly confirmed the reports which were current as to why he had left Greece, namely that he had come to Alexander in the hope of persuading him to re-settle his native city of Olynthus.² His great reputation naturally exposed him to some envy, but his behaviour at times also made it easy for his detractors to malign him, since he often refused invitations, and when he did appear in company, he was apt to make it plain that he disliked or disapproved of what

1. The older men disliked Alexander's 'orientalism'.

2. Olynthus had been destroyed by Philip in 348 B.C.

was going on by sitting wrapped in a morose silence, so that even Alexander said of him that he could not abide

A sage who is blind to his own interests.¹

There is a story that on one occasion when a large company had been invited to dine with the king, Callisthenes was called upon, as the cup passed to him, to speak in praise of the Macedonians. This theme he handled so eloquently that the guests rose to applaud and threw their garlands at him. At this Alexander quoted Euripides' line from the *Bacchae*

On noble subjects all men can speak well.²

'But now,' he went on, 'show us the power of your eloquence by criticizing the Macedonians so that they can recognize their shortcomings and improve themselves.' Callisthenes then turned to the other side of the picture and delivered a long list of home truths about the Macedonians, pointing out that the rise of Philip's power had been brought about by the divisions among the rest of the Greeks, and quoting the verse

Once civil strife has begun, even scoundrels may find themselves honoured.³

This speech earned him the implacable hatred of the Macedonians, and Alexander remarked that it was not his eloquence that Callisthenes had demonstrated, but his ill will towards them.

54. According to Hermippus, this is the account which Stroebus, the slave who read aloud for Callisthenes, gave to Aristotle of the quarrel between Callisthenes and Alexander. He also says that when Callisthenes understood that he had antagonized the king, he repeated two or three times, as he was taking his leave, this verse from the *Iliad*

Braver by far than yourself was Patroclus, but death did not spare him.⁴

Aristotle seems to have come near the truth when he said that Callisthenes possessed great eloquence, but lacked common sense.

1. A line from an unknown play of Euripides.

2. Line 260.

3. A proverb in hexameters attributed to Callimachus.

4. Achilles to Hector, *Iliad* xxi, 107.

But at least in the matter of the obeisance¹ he behaved like a true philosopher, not only in his sturdy refusal to perform it, but also in being the only man to express in public the resentment which all the oldest and best of the Macedonians felt in private. By persuading the king not to insist on this tribute, he delivered the Greeks from a great disgrace and Alexander from an even greater one, but at the same time he destroyed himself, because he left the impression that he had gained his point by force rather than by persuasion.

Chares of Mitylene says that on one occasion at a banquet Alexander, after he had drunk, passed the cup to one of his friends, who took it and rose so as to face the shrine of the household; next he drank in his turn, then made obeisance to Alexander, kissed him and resumed his place on the couch. All the guests did the same in succession, until the cup came to Callisthenes. The king was talking to Hephæstion and paying no attention to Callisthenes, and the philosopher, after he had drunk, came forward to kiss him. At this Demetrius, whose surname was Pheido, called out, 'Sire, do not kiss him; he is the only one who has not made obeisance to you.' Alexander therefore refused to kiss him, and Callisthenes exclaimed in a loud voice, 'Very well then, I shall go away the poorer by a kiss.'

55. Once this rift between them had occurred, it was easy for Hephæstion to be believed when he said that the philosopher had promised him to make obeisance to Alexander and had then broken his word. Besides this, men such as Lysimachus and Hagnon persistently spread the story that the sophist went round giving himself great airs as though he were determined to abolish a tyranny, and that the young men flocked to him and followed him everywhere, as though he were the only free spirit among so many tens of thousands.

1. The obeisance was originally a gesture which consisted of blowing a kiss, latterly of prostration to the ground. In Persia it was a *social* gesture, performed by the inferior to the superior, and by all Persians to the king. But it was not a *religious* gesture, for the Persians did not worship their kings. The Greeks, on the other hand, prostrated themselves only before their gods. Hence the Persian custom seemed to them an ignoble demonstration of reverence, which degraded the free Greeks to the level of barbarians. Alexander wished to introduce a uniform procedure which would apply to Greeks and Persians equally. The difficulty was that to forbid prostration to the Persians might imply that he was not a real king: on the other hand the Macedonians resented being placed on the same footing as the Persians. For Alexander a possible solution seemed to be to have himself regarded officially, but only officially, as a god by his Greek subjects, and in particular by the Greek cities of Asia Minor.

These slanders spread by Callisthenes' enemies became all the more plausible when the plot that had been laid against Alexander by Hermolaus and his fellow conspirators was discovered. According to these accusers, when Hermolaus asked the philosopher how he might become the most famous of men, Callisthenes said, 'By killing the most famous of men,' and further that when he was encouraging Hermolaus to make the attempt, he told him not to be overawed by Alexander's golden couch, but to remember that he was dealing with a man who was subject to sickness and wounds like anybody else. Yet the fact remains that not one of Hermolaus' accomplices, even under the stress of torture, denounced Callisthenes. And even Alexander himself in the letters which he immediately wrote to Craterus, Attalus and Alectas says that the youths had confessed under torture that the conspiracy was entirely their own and that nobody else knew of it. However, in a letter which he wrote later to Antipater and in which he includes Callisthenes in the general accusation, he says; 'The youths were stoned to death by the Macedonians, but as for the sophist I shall punish him myself, and I shall not forget those who sent him to me, or the others who give shelter in their cities to those who plot against my life.' In these words, at least, he plainly reveals his hostility to Aristotle in whose house Callisthenes had been brought up, since he was a son of Hero, who was Aristotle's niece. As for Callisthenes' death, according to some accounts Alexander ordered him to be hanged, but others have it that he was thrown into chains and died of disease. Chares tells us that after his arrest he was kept in prison for seven months in order to be tried by the Council of the League of Corinth in the presence of Aristotle, but that about the time when Alexander was wounded in India he died of excessive corpulence and the disease of lice.

56. These events, however, belong to a later period. In the meanwhile Demaratus of Corinth,¹ although he was by now an old man, was eager to visit Alexander, and when the king had received him, Demaratus declared that those Greeks who had died before they could see Alexander seated on the throne of Darius had missed one of the greatest pleasures in the world. However he did not live

1. An old friend of Alexander. He had helped to reconcile Philip and Alexander (see ch. 9). This episode seems deliberately placed to contrast Alexander's treatment of a friend with that of an enemy.

long to enjoy the king's friendship, but fell sick and died soon afterwards. He was given a magnificent funeral. The army raised a mound of eighty cubits in height and of a great circumference as a memorial to him, and his ashes were carried down to the coast in a four-horse chariot which was richly adorned.

57. Alexander was now about to launch his invasion of India.¹ He had already taken note that his army was over-encumbered with booty and had lost its mobility, and so early one morning after the baggage waggons had been loaded, he began by burning those which belonged to himself and the Companions, and then gave orders to set fire to those of the Macedonians. In the event his decision proved to have been more difficult to envisage than it was to execute. Only a few of the soldiers resented it: the great majority cheered with delight and raised their battle-cry: they gladly shared out the necessities for the campaign with those who needed them and then they helped to burn and destroy any superfluous possessions with their own hands. Alexander was filled with enthusiasm at their spirit and his hopes rose to their highest pitch. By this time he was already feared by his men for his relentless severity in punishing any dereliction of duty. For example he put to death Menander, one of the Companions, because he had been placed in command of a garrison and had refused to remain there, and he shot down with his own hand one of the barbarians named Orsodates who had rebelled against him.²

About this time a ewe brought forth a lamb whose head was covered with a substance which in shape and colour resembled the tiara of the king of Persia, with testicles on either side of it. Alexander was revolted by this prodigy and had himself purified by the Babylonian priests, whom he had become accustomed to bring on his campaigns for such purposes. When he spoke of this portent to his friends, he explained that he was alarmed not for his own sake but for theirs, because he feared that in the event of his death the gods might allow his power to fall into the hands of some unworthy and feeble successor. However a more encouraging phenomenon followed, which dispelled his misgivings. The head of Alexander's

1. In the spring of 327 B.C.

2. Alexander had reorganized the army to include some Oriental troops especially among the cavalry. His force for the invasion of India may have numbered some 35,000 fighting men.

household servants, a man named Proxenus, was digging a place to pitch the royal tent by the bank of the river Oxus, when he uncovered a spring of a smooth and fatty liquid. When the top of this was strained off, there gushed forth a pure and clear oil which appeared to be exactly like olive oil both in odour and in taste, and was also identical in smoothness and brightness, and this too in a country where there were no olive trees. It is said that the water of the Oxus itself is extraordinarily soft and gives a glossy texture to the skin of all those who bathe in it. It is clear that Alexander was delighted with this portent, if we may judge from a letter he wrote to Antipater, in which he speaks of it as one of the greatest signs of favour ever granted to him by the gods. The diviners, however, interpreted the omen as forecasting a campaign which would be a glorious one but also arduous and painful, for oil, they pointed out, was given to men by the gods as a refreshment for their labours.

58. This was certainly how events turned out. Alexander encountered many dangers in the battles he fought and was severely wounded, but the greatest losses his army suffered were caused by lack of provisions and by the rigours of the climate. But for his part he was anxious to prove that boldness can triumph over fortune and courage over superior force: he was convinced that while there are no defences so impregnable that they will keep out the brave man, there are likewise none so strong that they will keep the coward safe. It is said that when he was besieging the fortress of a ruler named Sisimithres,¹ which was situated upon a steep and inaccessible rock, his soldiers despaired of capturing it. Alexander asked Oxyartes whether Sisimithres himself was a man of spirit and received the reply that he was the greatest coward in the world. 'Then what you are telling me,' Alexander went on, 'is that we can take the fortress, since there is no strength in its defender.' And in fact he did capture it by playing upon Sisimithres' fears. Later, when he was attacking another equally inaccessible stronghold, he was encouraging the younger Macedonians and spoke to one who also bore the name of Alexander. 'You at least,' he told him, 'will have to prove yourself a brave man to live up to your name.' After this the young man fought with the utmost gallantry, and was killed to the great sorrow of the king. On another

1. This operation took place in the winter of 328/7. In this chapter Plutarch describes various incidents at random to illustrate Alexander's character.

occasion when the Macedonians were hesitating to attack the fortress of Nysa, because there was a deep river in front of it, Alexander halted on the bank and cried out, 'What a wretch I am! Why did I never learn to swim?', and he made ready to ford it, carrying his shield on his arm. After he had ordered a halt in the fighting, ambassadors came from a number of the cities he was besieging to beg for terms, and they were amazed to find him still unkempt and clad in full armour. Then when a cushion was brought for him, he ordered the most senior of the ambassadors, whose name was Acouphis, to seat himself on it. Acouphis, who was much impressed with his magnanimity and courtesy, asked what he wanted the people to do to earn his friendship. Alexander told him, 'I should like your countrymen to appoint you as their ruler and send me a hundred of their best men.' At this Acouphis laughed and replied, 'I shall rule them better, sire, if I send you the worst men rather than the best.'

59. There was a prince named Taxiles¹ whose territory, we are told, was as large as Egypt and contained good pasturage as well as fertile arable land. He was a wise ruler, and after he had greeted Alexander, he asked him, 'Why should we fight battles with one another? You have not come here to rob us of water or of the necessities of life, and these are the only things for which sensible men are obliged to fight. As for other kinds of wealth and property so-called, if I possess more than you, I am ready to be generous towards you, and if I have less, I shall not refuse any benefits you may offer.' Alexander was delighted at this, took his hand and said, 'Perhaps you think that after your kind words and courtesy our meeting will pass off without a contest. No, you shall not get the better of me in this way: I shall fight with you to the last, but only in the services I offer you, for I will not have you outdo me in generosity.' Alexander received many gifts from him, but returned even more, and finally presented him with a thousand talents in coin. This behaviour greatly annoyed his friends, but it made many of the barbarians far better disposed towards him.

Now the best fighters among the Indians were mercenaries, whose custom it was to travel from one city to another as they were needed: they defended their clients vigorously and caused Alexander heavy losses. So he concluded a truce with them when they were in one city,

1. The ruler of the great city of Taxila about twenty miles north-west of the modern Rawalpindi.

allowed them to leave, and then attacked them on the march and annihilated them. This action remains a blot on his career as a soldier: on all other occasions he observed the normal usages of war and behaved like a king. As for the philosophers,¹ they gave him as much trouble as the mercenaries, because they denounced those of the local rulers who went over to him and at the same time encouraged the free peoples to revolt: for this reason he had many of them hanged.

60. The events of the campaign against Porus are described in Alexander's letters. He tells us that the river Hydaspes flowed between the two camps, and that Porus stationed his elephants on the opposite bank and kept the crossing continually watched. Alexander caused a great deal of noise and commotion to be made day after day in his camp and in this way accustomed the barbarians not to be alarmed by his movements.² Then at last on a stormy and moonless night he took a part of his infantry and the best of his cavalry, marched some distance along the river past the enemy's position, and then crossed over to a small island. Here he was overtaken by a violent storm of rain accompanied by tremendous bursts of thunder and lightning. Although he saw that a number of his men were struck dead by the lightning, he continued the advance and made for the opposite bank. After the storm the Hydaspes, which was roaring down in high flood, had scooped out a deep channel, so that much of the stream was diverted in this direction and the ground between the two currents had become broken and slippery and made it impossible for his men to gain a firm footing. It was on this occasion that Alexander is said to have exclaimed, 'O you Athenians, will you ever believe what risks I am running just to earn your praise?'

This is the version which Onesicritus gives of the battle.³ But according to Alexander's own account, the Macedonians left their rafts and waded across the breach in full armour, up to their chests in water. After making the crossing, Alexander rode on for more than two miles ahead of the infantry; he calculated that if the enemy attacked with their cavalry he could overcome them easily, and that if

1. The Brahmans of Sind.

2. Alexander could not get his horses to cross in the face of the elephants: the object of his repeated feints was that Porus should cease to send out the elephants to meet every threat.

3. July 326 B.C.

they moved up their infantry, there would still be time for his own to join him. His judgement proved quite correct. He was attacked by a thousand of the enemy's cavalry and sixty of their chariots, and killed four hundred of their horsemen. Then Porus, understanding that Alexander had crossed, advanced against him with his whole army, but left behind a force sufficient to prevent the remainder of the Macedonians from crossing. Alexander, remembering the threat of the enemy's elephants and their superior numbers, attacked their left wing and ordered Coenus to charge against the right. Both flanks of the Indian army were routed, and the defeated troops fell back upon the elephants and crowded into the centre. Here they rallied and a stubborn hand-to-hand struggle ensued, so that it was not until the eighth hour that the enemy was overcome. This is the account we have from the conqueror himself in one of his letters.

Most historians agree that Porus was about six feet three inches tall, and that his size and huge physique made him appear as suitably mounted upon an elephant as an ordinary man looks on a horse. His elephant too was very large and showed an extraordinary intelligence and concern for the king's person. So long as Porus was fighting strongly, it would valiantly defend him and beat off his attackers, but as soon as it recognized that its master was growing weak from the thrusts and missiles that had wounded him, it knelt quietly on the ground for fear that he might fall off, and with its trunk took hold of each spear and drew it out of his body. When Porus was taken prisoner, Alexander asked him how he wished to be treated. 'As a king,' Porus answered, and when Alexander went on to ask whether he had anything more to say, the reply came, 'Those words, "as a king" include everything.' At any rate Alexander not only allowed him to govern his former kingdom, but he also added to it a province, which included the territory of the independent peoples he had subdued. These are said to have numbered fifteen nations, five thousand towns of considerable size, and innumerable villages. His other conquests embraced an area three times the size of this, and he appointed Philip, one of the Companions, to rule it as satrap.

61. After this battle with Porus Bucephalus also died, not immediately, but some while later. Most historians report that he died of wounds received in the battle for which he was being treated, but according to Onesicritus it was from old age, for by this time he was thirty

years old. Alexander was plunged into grief at his death, and felt that he had lost nothing less than a friend and a comrade. He founded a city in his memory on the banks of the Hydraspes and called it Bucephalia, and there is also a story that when he lost a dog named Peritas of which he was very fond and which he had brought up from a puppy, he again founded a city and called it after the dog. The historian Sotion tells us that he learned this from Potamon of Lesbos.

62. Another consequence of this battle with Porus was that it blunted the edge of the Macedonians' courage and made them determined not to advance any further into India. It was only with great difficulty that they had defeated an enemy who had put into the field no more than twenty thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry, and so, when Alexander insisted on crossing the Ganges,¹ they opposed him outright. The river, they were told, was four miles across and one hundred fathoms deep, and the opposite bank swarmed with a gigantic host of infantry, horsemen and elephants. It was said that the kings of the Gandaridae and the Praesii were waiting for Alexander's attack with an army of eighty thousand cavalry, two hundred thousand infantry, eight thousand chariots and six thousand fighting elephants, and this report was no exaggeration, for Sandrocottus,² the king of this territory who reigned there not long afterwards, presented five hundred elephants to Seleucus, and overran and conquered the whole of India with an army of six hundred thousand men.

At first Alexander was so overcome with disappointment and anger that he shut himself up and lay prostrate in his tent. He felt that unless he could cross the Ganges, he owed no thanks to his troops for what they had already achieved; instead he regarded their having turned back as an admission of defeat. However his friends set themselves to reason with him and console him and the soldiers crowded round the entrance to his tent, and pleaded with him, uttering loud

1. The date was September 326 B.C. Alexander did not, of course, reach the Ganges. The river where the troops mutinied was the Hyphasis: the upper Ganges was some two hundred and fifty miles further east. There is much dispute as to his real intentions and whether he planned to advance as far as the 'eastern ocean'. (See Arrian, *Anabasis* 5, 26 for his speech at the Hyphasis.)

2. The Hellenized form of Chandragupta, whose accession took place about 326 B.C. He later wiped out the Macedonian garrisons in India.

cries and lamentations, until finally he relented and gave orders to break camp. But when he did so he devised a number of ruses and deceptions to impress the inhabitants of the region. For example he had arms, horses' mangers and bits prepared, all of which exceeded the normal size or height or weight, and these were left scattered about the country. He also set up altars for the gods of Greece¹ and even down to the present day the kings of the Praesii whenever they cross the river do honour to these and offer sacrifice on them in the Greek fashion. Sandrocottus, who was then no more than a boy, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that in later years he often remarked that Alexander was within a step of conquering the whole country, since the king who ruled it at that time was hated and despised because of his vicious character and his lowly birth.

63. Alexander was now eager to see the outer Ocean. He had a large number of oar-propelled ferries and rafts constructed, and was rowed down the rivers on these at a leisurely speed. But his voyage was by no means a peaceful and certainly not a passive affair. As he travelled downstream he would land, assault the cities near the banks, and subdue them all. However when he attacked the tribe known as the Malli, who are said to be the most warlike of all the Indian peoples, he nearly lost his life. After the defenders had been driven from the walls by volleys of missiles, he was the first² to scramble to the top of the wall by means of a scaling ladder. The ladder was smashed, so that no more Macedonians could join him, and the barbarians began to gather inside along the bottom of the wall and to shoot at him from below. Finding himself almost alone and exposed to their missiles, Alexander crouched down, leaped into their midst, and by good luck landed on his feet. Then, as he brandished his arms, it seemed to the barbarians as if a dazzling sheet of flame suddenly took shape in front of his body, and they scattered and fled. But when they saw that there were no more than two of his guards accompanying him, they rushed in to attack him. Some of them engaged him hand to hand, and rained blows upon his armour with sword and spear as he strove to defend himself, while another, standing a little way apart, shot at him with a bow. The shaft was so well aimed and struck him

1. Twelve altars for the twelve gods of Greece.

2. His object was evidently to shame his own troops into attacking with more *élan*.

with such force that it pierced his breastplate and lodged in his chest between the ribs. The impact was so violent that Alexander staggered back and sank to his knees; his attacker rushed up with his drawn scimitar in his hand, while Peucestas and Limnaeus threw themselves in front of him. Both men were wounded and Limnaeus was killed, but Peucestas stood firm, while Alexander killed the barbarian with his own hand. But he was wounded over and over again, and at last received a blow on the neck from a club which forced him to lean against the wall, although he still faced his assailants. At this moment the Macedonians swarmed round him, snatched him up as he lost consciousness, and carried him to his tent. Immediately the rumour ran through the camp that he had been killed. Meanwhile his attendants with great difficulty sawed off the wooden shaft of the arrow and thus succeeded in removing his breastplate; they then had to cut out the arrow-head, which was embedded between his ribs and measured, so we are told four fingers width in length and three in breadth. When it was extracted the king fainted away and came very near to death, but finally he recovered. Even when the danger was past he remained weak, and for a long time needed careful nursing and was obliged to remain on a diet. Then one day, as he heard a clamour outside his tent, he understood that the Macedonians were yearning to see him, and so he took his cloak and went out to them. After sacrificing to the gods, he once more boarded his vessel and proceeded down the river, subduing great cities and large tracts of territory as he went.

64. He captured ten of the Indian philosophers who had played the most active part in persuading Sabbas to revolt and had stirred up most trouble for the Macedonians. These philosophers enjoyed a great reputation for their ingenuity in devising short pithy answers to questions, and so Alexander confronted them with a series of conundrums. He had previously announced that he would put to death the first man who gave a wrong answer, and then the rest in order according to their performance, and he ordered one of them, the eldest, to act as judge in the contest. The examination then proceeded as follows.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER

Question: Which are more numerous, the living or the dead?

Answer: The living, since the dead no longer exist.

SECOND PHILOSOPHER

Question: Which breeds the larger creatures, the land or the sea?

Answer: The land, since the sea is only a part of it.

THIRD PHILOSOPHER

Question: Which is the most cunning of animals?

Answer: The animal which man has not yet discovered.

FOURTH PHILOSOPHER

Question: Why did you incite Sabbas to revolt?

Answer: Because I wished him either to live or to die with honour.

FIFTH PHILOSOPHER

Question: Which was created first, the day or the night?

Answer: The day, by one day.

When the philosopher saw that the king was astonished by this reply, he added, 'Abstruse questions will necessarily produce abstruse answers.'

SIXTH PHILOSOPHER

Question: How can a man make himself most beloved?

Answer: If he possesses supreme power, and yet does not inspire fear.

SEVENTH PHILOSOPHER

Question: How can a man become a god?

Answer: By doing something a man cannot do.

EIGHTH PHILOSOPHER

Question: Which is the stronger: life or death?

Answer: Life, since it endures so many evils.

NINTH PHILOSOPHER

Question: How long is it good for a man to live?

Answer: So long as he does not regard death as better than life.

Finally Alexander turned to the judge and told him to give his verdict: this was that each of them had answered worse than the one before. 'In that case,' Alexander replied, 'you shall be executed first yourself for having given such a verdict.' 'That is not right, your majesty', returned the judge, 'unless you did not mean what you said when you announced that you would put to death first the man who gave the worst answer.'

65. Alexander distributed presents to all ten and sent them away unharmed. He then sent Onesicritus to those philosophers who

enjoyed the highest reputation but lived a secluded and contemplative life, and invited them to visit him. Onesicritus himself belonged to the school of Diogenes the Cynic, and he tells us that one of the Indians, Calanus, treated him most arrogantly and insolently and told him to take off his clothes and listen to him naked if he wished to hear any of his doctrines, otherwise he would not carry on a conversation, even if the Greek came from Zeus himself. Onesicritus reports that another sage named Dandamis received him more courteously, and when he had spoken at length about Socrates, Pythagoras and Diogenes, Dandamis remarked that they seemed to him to have been men of good natural parts, but to have spent their lives with too submissive an attitude to the laws. According to other writers, however, the only remark which Dandamis made at this meeting was, 'Why did Alexander come all this way to India?' Nevertheless the prince Taxiles was able to persuade Calanus to visit Alexander. His real name was Sphines, but because he greeted everyone he met not with the Greek salutation, *chairete*, but with the Indian word *cale*, the Greeks called him Calanus. It was he, we are told, who first propounded to Alexander the celebrated parable about government, which ran as follows. Calanus threw on to the ground a dry and shrunken piece of hide and put his foot on the outer edge: the hide was thus pressed down at one point on the surface, but rose up at others. He walked round the circumference and showed that this was what happened whenever he trod on the edge: then finally he put his weight on to the middle, whereupon the whole of the hide lay flat and still. The demonstration was intended to show that Alexander should concentrate the weight of his authority at the centre of his empire and not go wandering around the borders of it.

66. Alexander's voyage to the mouth of the Indus occupied seven months. When he reached the open sea with his ships,¹ he sailed out to an island which he himself named Scillustis, while others called it Psiltukis. Here he landed and sacrificed to the gods, and made what observations he could on the nature of the sea and of the coast, as far as it was accessible. Then he offered up a prayer that no man after him might ever pass beyond the bounds of his expedition.

He appointed Nearchus to the supreme command of the fleet with Onesicritus as its chief pilot, and ordered them to follow the

1. In July 325 B.C.

line of the sea coast, keeping India on their right.¹ Meanwhile, he himself set out by land and marched through the territory of the Oreites. Here he endured terrible privations and lost great numbers of men, with the result that he did not bring back from India so much as a quarter of his fighting force. And yet his strength had once amounted to a hundred and twenty thousand infantry and fifteen thousand cavalry.² Some of his men died from disease, some of the wretched food, some of the scorching heat, but most from sheer hunger, for they had to march through an uncultivated region whose inhabitants only eked out a wretched existence. They possessed few sheep and even these were of a stunted breed, and the sea fish on which they subsisted made the animals' flesh rank and un-savoury. It was only with great difficulty that Alexander succeeded in crossing this region in sixty days, but once he reached Gedrosia, he was immediately in a land of plenty, and the satraps and local rulers provided him with all his needs.

67. After resting his force here he set out again and marched for seven days through the territory of Carmania, a march which soon developed into a kind of Bacchanalian procession. Alexander himself feasted continually, day and night, reclining with his Companions on a dais built upon a high and conspicuous rectangular platform, the whole structure being slowly drawn along by eight horses. Innumerable waggons followed the royal table, some of them covered with purple or embroidered canopies, others shaded by the boughs of trees, which were constantly kept fresh and green: these vehicles carried the rest of Alexander's officers, all of them crowned with flowers and drinking wine. Not a single helmet, shield or spear was to be seen, but along the whole line of the march the soldiers kept dipping their cups, drinking-horns or earthenware goblets into huge casks and mixing-bowls and toasting one another, some drinking as they marched, others sprawled by the wayside, while the whole

1. The plan was that the fleet should sail up the Persian Gulf and rejoin Alexander at the mouth of the Euphrates.

2. Alexander is said to have chosen this desert route both to support the fleet by digging wells and establishing depots and to restore his own reputation for superhuman achievement. For the strength of Alexander's operational force see note on ch. 57. Plutarch here seems to be referring to a total which includes all camp-followers. The non-combatants were the principal sufferers on this march.

landscape resounded with the music of pipes and flutes, with harping and singing and the cries of women rapt with the divine frenzy. Not only drinking but all the other forms of bacchanalian license attended this straggling and disorderly march, as though the god himself were present to lead the revels.¹ Then when Alexander arrived at the palace of Gedrosia, he again allowed the army time to rest and celebrated another festival. It is said that one day, after he had drunk well, he went to watch some contests in dancing and singing and that his favourite Bagoas won the prize; thereupon the young man came across the theatre, still in his performer's costume and wearing his crown as victor, and seated himself beside the king. At the sight the Macedonians applauded loudly and shouted to Alexander to kiss the winner, until at last the king put his arms around him and kissed him.

68. Here Nearchus and his officers joined him, and Alexander was so delighted with their reports² of their voyage that he suddenly had the impulse to sail down the Euphrates himself with a large fleet, and then to coast round Arabia and Africa and re-enter the Mediterranean by way of the Pillars of Hercules. He began to have vessels of many different kinds constructed at Thapsacus and to collect sailors and pilots from all parts of the world. But meanwhile the difficulties he had encountered during the whole eastern campaign, the wound he had received in the battle with the Malli, and the heavy losses which his army was reported to have suffered had raised doubts as to his safe return: this combination of events had encouraged the subject peoples to revolt and his various viceroys and satraps to act in an unjust, rapacious and arrogant manner. In short the whole empire was in turmoil and an atmosphere of instability prevailed everywhere. Even at home his mother Olympias and his sister Cleopatra had been intriguing against the regent, Antipater, and had divided the kingdom between them, Olympias taking Epirus and Cleopatra Macedonia. When Alexander heard of this, he remarked that his mother had made the wiser choice, since the Macedonians would never tolerate being governed by a woman. For these reasons he now sent Nearchus back

1. The authenticity of this account is very doubtful. It echoes Dionysius' triumphant return from the conquest of India and probably refers to the celebrations held when Nearchus rejoined the army in Carmania.

2. In December 325 Nearchus landed at Harmezeia and joined Alexander after five days' march inland.

to sea: his plan was to carry the war into the provinces which bordered the coast, while he himself would march down from Upper Asia and punish those of his officers who had abused their powers. He killed Oxyartes, one of the sons of Abuletes the satrap of Susiana with his own hands, running him through with a Macedonian pike, and when Abuletes brought him three thousand talents in coin instead of the provisions which he ought to have supplied, Alexander ordered the money to be thrown to the horses. Then, when they did not touch it, he asked Abuletes, 'What use are your provisions to us?' and ordered him to be imprisoned.

69. One of his first acts when he reached Persis was to distribute money to the women: in this he was following the custom of the Persian kings,¹ who whenever they arrived in this province presented each matron with a gold coin. For this reason, it is said, some of the kings seldom visited Persis, and Ochus never set foot there at all: he was mean enough to exile himself from his native land. Not long afterwards Alexander discovered that the tomb of Cyrus had been plundered and had the offender put to death, even though he was a prominent Macedonian from Pella named Polymachus. When he had read the inscription on the tomb, he ordered it to be repeated below in Greek characters. The text was as follows. 'O man, whoever you are and wherever you come from, for I know you will come, I am Cyrus who won the Persians their empire. Do not therefore grudge me this little earth that covers my body.' These words made a deep impression on Alexander, since they reminded him of the uncertainty and mutability of mortal life.

It was here too that Calanus, who had suffered for some while from a disease of the intestine, asked for a funeral pyre to be made ready for him. He rode up to it on horseback, said a prayer, poured a libation for himself, and cut off a lock of hair to throw on the fire. Then he climbed on to the pyre, greeted the Macedonians who were present, and urged them to make this a day of gaiety and celebration and to drink deep with the king, whom, he said, he would soon see in Babylon.² With these words he lay down and covered himself. He made no movement as the flames approached him, and continued to lie in exactly the same position as at first, and so immolated himself

1. A custom instituted by Cyrus.

2. A prophecy of Alexander's death.

in a manner acceptable to the gods, according to the ancestral custom of the wise men of his country. Many years afterwards an Indian who belonged to the retinue of Augustus Caesar performed the same action in Athens, and the so-called Indian's tomb can be seen there to this day.

70. After Alexander had left the funeral pyre, he invited a number of his friends and officers to dine with him and proposed a contest in drinking neat wine, the winner of which was to receive a crown. The victor was Promachus, who downed four pitchers, or about twelve quarts: the prize was a crown worth a talent, but he lived for only three days afterwards. Of the other competitors forty-one, according to Chares, died of the effects of the wine: they were seized by a violent chill after the drinking.

Alexander now celebrated the marriages of a number of his Companions at Susa.¹ He himself married Stateira, the daughter of Darius, and he matched the noblest of the Persian women with the bravest of his men. On this occasion² he gave a banquet to which he invited all the Macedonians who had already married Persian wives. We are told that nine thousand guests attended this feast and each of them was given a gold cup for the libations. The whole entertainment was carried out on the grand scale and Alexander went so far as to discharge all the debts owed by any of his guests: the outlay for the occasion amounted to nine thousand eight hundred and seventy talents. Antigenes, one of Alexander's officers who had only one eye, contrived to get himself fraudulently enrolled as a debtor. He produced a witness who pretended to have lent him a sum at the bank and repaid him the money. Later the fraud was discovered and Alexander deprived him of his command and banished him from the court. Antigenes had a brilliant military record. While he was still a young man he had served under Philip at the siege of Perinthus, and when he was hit in the eye by a bolt from a catapult, he had refused to leave the fighting or have the dart extracted until he had helped to drive back the enemy and shut them up in the city. He could not endure the humiliation of his disgrace, and it was clear that he intended to kill himself out of grief and despair. The king was afraid that he would

1. Ninety-two of the Companions married Persian women, but many repudiated them after Alexander's death.

2. 324 B.C.

really carry out his intention, and so he pardoned him and told him to keep the money.

71. The thirty thousand boys whom he had left behind to be given a Greek education and military training had now grown into active and handsome men and had developed a wonderful skill and agility in their military exercises. Alexander was delighted with their progress, but the Macedonians were disheartened and deeply disturbed for their own future, because they assumed that the king would henceforth have less regard for them. So when he arranged to send the sick and disabled among them to the sea-coast, they protested that he was not only doing them an injustice but deliberately humiliating them. He had first worn them out in every kind of service, and now he was turning them away in disgrace and throwing them upon the mercy of their parents and native cities, where they would be in worse case than when they had set out for Asia. Why not send them all home and write off the Macedonians as useless, now that he had this corps of young ballet-soldiers, with whom he could go on to conquer the world? These words stung Alexander and he angrily rebuked the Macedonians, dismissed his guards, handed over their security duties to Persians and recruited from these his royal escort and personal attendants. When the Macedonians saw him surrounded by these men, while they were barred from his presence and treated as being in disgrace, they were greatly humbled, and when they considered the matter, they understood that they had been almost beside themselves with jealousy and rage. Finally when they had come to their senses, they presented themselves at Alexander's tent unarmed and dressed only in their tunics, and there they cried out and lamented, threw themselves on his mercy and begged him to deal with them as their baseness and ingratitude deserved. Alexander refused to receive them, although he had already begun to relent, but the men would not go away and remained for two days and nights outside his tent weeping and calling him their master. At last on the third day he came out, and when he saw them reduced to such a forlorn and pitiful state, he himself wept for a while. He reproached them gently for their behaviour and finally spoke to them kindly: afterwards he dismissed those who were no longer fit for service and gave them generous gratuities. Besides this he sent instructions to Antipater that at all public contests and in the theatres these men should occupy

the best seats and wear garlands on their heads. He also gave orders that the orphaned children of those who had died in his service should continue to receive their fathers' pay.

72. In the spring¹ he left Susa for Ecbatana in Media and there, after he had dealt with the most pressing of his concerns, he once more turned his attention to plays and spectacles, since three thousand players had arrived from Greece.² At this time it happened that Hephaestion had caught a fever, and being a young man who was accustomed to a soldier's life, he could not bear to remain on a strict diet. No sooner had his physician Glaucus gone off to the theatre, than he sat down to breakfast, devoured a boiled fowl and washed it down with a great cooler-full of wine. His fever quickly mounted and soon afterwards he died. Alexander's grief was uncontrollable. As a sign of mourning he gave orders that the manes and tails of all horses should be shorn, demolished the battlements of all the neighbouring cities, crucified the unlucky physician and forebade the playing of flutes or any other kind of music for a long time until finally an oracle was announced from the temple of Ammon, commanding him to honour Hephaestion and sacrifice to him as a hero.³ To lighten his sorrow he set off on a campaign, as if the tracking down and hunting of men might console him, and he subdued the tribe of the Cossaeans,⁴ massacring the whole male population from the youths upwards: this was termed a sacrifice to the spirit of Hephaestion. He determined to spend ten thousand talents on the funeral and the tomb for his friend, and as he wished the ingenuity and originality of the design to surpass the expense he was especially anxious to employ Stasicrates, as this artist was famous for his innovations, which combined an exceptional degree of magnificence, audacity and ostentation.

It was Stasicrates who had remarked to Alexander at an earlier interview that of all mountains it was Mount Athos which could

1. 324 B.C.

2. These were the so-called 'Artists of Dionysus'. By the fourth century actors and other theatrical artists had become organized into a guild of this name and travelled all over the Greek world.

3. In this context the word means a semi-divine personage.

4. The metaphor is not inappropriate. The Cossaeans were a mountain tribe who had made brigandage their livelihood.

most easily be carved into the form and shape of a man and that if it pleased Alexander to command him, he would shape the mountain into the most superb and durable statue of him in the world: its left hand would enfold a city of ten thousand inhabitants, while out of its right would flow the abundant waters of a river which would pour, like a libation, into the sea. Alexander declined this proposal, but now he spent his time with his engineers and architects planning projects which were even more outlandish and extravagant.

73. Towards the end of the year Alexander travelled to Babylon. Before he arrived he was joined by Nearchus, who had sailed through the ocean and up the Euphrates: Nearchus told him that he had met some Chaldaeans who had advised the king to stay away from Babylon. Alexander paid no attention to this warning and continued his journey, but when he arrived before the walls of the city, he saw a large number of ravens flying about and pecking one another, and some of them fell dead in front of him.¹ Next he received a report that Apollodorus the governor of Babylon had offered up a sacrifice to try to discover what fate held in store for Alexander, and he then sent for Pythagoras, the diviner who had conducted the sacrifice. Pythagoras admitted that this was true, and Alexander then asked him in what condition he had found the victim. 'The liver,' Pythagoras told him, 'had no lobe.' 'Indeed,' replied Alexander, 'that is a threatening omen.' He did Pythagoras no harm and he began to regret that he had not taken Nearchus' advice, and so he spent most of his time outside the walls of Babylon, either in his tent or in boats on the Euphrates. Many more omens now occurred to trouble him. A tame ass attacked the finest lion in his menagerie and kicked it to death. On another occasion Alexander took off his clothes for exercise and played a game of ball. When it was time to dress again, the young men who had joined him in the game suddenly noticed that there was a man sitting silently on the throne and wearing Alexander's diadem and royal robes. When he was questioned, he could say nothing for a long while, but later he came to his senses and explained that he was a citizen of Messenia named Dionysius. He had been accused of some crime, brought to Babylon from the coast, and kept for a long time in chains. Then the god Serapis had appeared to him, cast off his chains and brought him to this place, where he had

1. The fighting of birds was customarily regarded as an ominous sign.

commanded him to put on the king's robe and diadem, take his seat on the throne and hold his peace.

74. When he had heard the man's story, Alexander had him put to death, as the diviners recommended. But his confidence now deserted him, he began to believe that he had lost the favour of the gods, and he became increasingly suspicious of his friends. It was Antipater and his sons whom he feared most of all. One of them named Iolas was his chief cup-bearer. The other, Cassander, had only lately arrived in Babylon, and when he saw some of the barbarians prostrate themselves before the king, he burst into loud and disrespectful laughter, for he had been brought up as a Greek and had never seen such a spectacle in his life. Alexander was furious at this insult, seized him by the hair with both hands and dashed his head against the wall. On another occasion when Cassander wished to reply to some men who were making accusations against his father Antipater, Alexander interrupted him and said, 'What do you mean? Are you really saying that these men have suffered no wrong, but have travelled all this way just to bring a false accusation?' When Cassander replied that the very fact of their having travelled so far from those who could contradict them might point to the charges being false, Alexander laughed and said, 'This reminds me of some of Aristotle's sophisms, which can be used equally well on either side of a question: but if any of you are proved to have done these men even the smallest wrong, you will be sorry for it.' In general, we are told, this fear was implanted so deeply and took such hold of Cassander's mind that even many years later, when he had become king of Macedonia and master of Greece, and was walking about one day looking at the sculptures at Delphi, the mere sight of a statue of Alexander struck him with horror, so that he shuddered and trembled in every limb, his head swam and he could scarcely regain control of himself.

75. Meanwhile Alexander had become so much obsessed by his fears of the supernatural and so overwrought and apprehensive in his own mind, that he interpreted every strange or unusual occurrence, no matter how trivial, as a prodigy or a portent, with the result that the palace was filled with soothsayers, sacrificers, purifiers and prognosticators. Certainly it is dangerous to disbelieve or show contempt

for the power of the gods, but it is equally dangerous to harbour superstition, and in this case just as water constantly gravitates to a lower level, so unreasoning dread filled Alexander's mind with foolish misgivings, once he had become a slave to his fears. However, when the verdict of the oracle concerning Hephæstion was brought to him, he laid aside his grief and allowed himself to indulge in a number of sacrifices and drinking-bouts. He gave a splendid banquet in honour of Nearchus, after which he took a bath as his custom was, with the intention of going to bed soon afterwards. But when Medius invited him, he went to his house to join a party, and there after drinking all through the next day, he began to feel feverish. This did not happen 'as he was drinking from the cup of Hercules',¹ nor did he become conscious of a sudden pain in the back as if he had been pierced by a spear: these are details with which certain historians felt obliged to embellish the occasion, and thus invent a tragic and moving finale to a great action. Aristobulus tells us that he was seized with a raging fever, that when he became very thirsty he drank wine which made him delirious, and that he died on the thirtieth day of the month Daesius.²

76. According to his journals, the course of his sickness was as follows. On the eighteenth day of the month Daesius³ he slept in the bathroom because he was feverish. On the next day, after taking a bath, he moved into the bedchamber and spent the day playing dice with Medius. He took a bath late in the evening, offered sacrifice to the gods, dined and remained feverish throughout the night. On the twentieth he again bathed and sacrificed as usual, and while he was lying down in the bathroom he was entertained by listening to Nearchus' account of his voyage, and his exploration of the great sea. On the twenty-first he passed the time in the same way, but the fever grew more intense: he had a bad night and all through the following day his fever was very high. He had his bed moved and lay in it by the side of the great plunge-bath, and there he discussed with his commanders the vacant posts in the army and how to fill them with experienced officers. On the twenty-fourth his fever was still worse

1. Plutarch is contradicting the account given by Diodorus Siculus xviii, 117 and Quintus Curtius x, 4. The so-called cup of Hercules was according to Athenæus, a large vessel with two handles.

2. 10 June 323 B.C.

3. 2 June 323 B.C.

and he had to be carried outside to offer sacrifice. He gave orders to the senior commanders to remain on call in the courtyard of the palace and to the commanders of companies and regiments to spend the night outside. On the twenty-fifth day he was moved to the palace on the other side of the river, and there he slept a little, but his fever did not abate. When his commanders entered the room he was speechless and remained so on the twenty-sixth. The Macedonians now believed that he was dead: they thronged the doors of the palace and began to shout and threaten the Companions, who were at last obliged to let them in. When the doors had been thrown open they all filed slowly past his bedside one by one, wearing neither cloak nor armour. In the course of this day too Python and Seleucus were sent to the temple of Serapis to ask whether Alexander should be moved there, and the god replied that they should leave him where he was. On the twenty-eighth towards evening he died.

77. Most of this account follows the version that is given in the journals almost word for word. Nobody had any suspicion at the time that Alexander had been poisoned, but it is said that five years afterwards some information was given, on the strength of which Olympias put many men to death and had the ashes of Iolas, Antipater's son, scattered to the winds on the supposition that he had administered the poison.

According to some writers it was Aristotle who advised Antipater to arrange the murder and it was entirely through his efforts that the poison was provided. They cite a man named Hagnothemis as their authority: he claimed to have heard the details from Antigonus, and according to this story the poison consisted of ice-cold water drawn from a certain cliff near the town of Nonacris,¹ where it was gathered up like a thin dew and stored in an ass's hoof. No other vessel could hold the liquid, which was said to be so cold and pungent that it would eat through any other substance. But most authorities consider that this tale of poisoning is pure invention, and this view is strongly supported by the fact that during the quarrels between Alexander's commanders, which continued for many days, the body

1. A small town in northern Arcadia. The water came from the river Styx. It was not poisonous but intensely cold, as the river rises from the snow-fields of Mount Chelmos. It was because of its supposedly deadly nature that oaths were sworn by the waters of the Styx.

showed no sign of any such corruption but remained pure and fresh, even though it lay for all that time without receiving any special care.

At this time Roxane was expecting a child and she was therefore held in special honour by the Macedonians. But she was jealous of Alexander's second wife, Stateira, whom she tricked into visiting her by means of a forged letter, which purported to have come from Alexander. When she had thus got her into her power she had her murdered together with her sister, threw the bodies into a well, and filled it up with earth. In this crime her accomplice was Perdikkas, who after Alexander's death at once succeeded in concentrating the greatest power in his hands, using Arrhidæus as a figure-head for the authority of the royal house. This Arrhidæus was a son of Philip's by an obscure and humbly born woman named Philinna, and was backward as a result of some disease. This was neither hereditary nor was it produced by natural causes. On the contrary, it is said that as a boy he had shown an attractive disposition and displayed much promise, but Olympias was believed to have given him drugs which impaired the functions of his body and irreparably injured his brain.

THE AGE OF ALEXANDER

NINE GREEK LIVES BY
PLUTARCH

AGESILAUS · PELOPIDAS

DION · TIMOLEON

DEMOSTHENES

PHOCION · ALEXANDER

DEMETRIUS · PYRRHUS

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY

Ian Scott-Kilvert

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PENGUIN BOOKS