Alexander the Great and the
Conquest of Macedon Against Persia

By: Stasz Kaszuba

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Introduction

In this paper I am going to explore the triumph and tragedy of Alexander the great's military accomplishments and early death. First off, let’s get something straight. The Persian empire has been around for a very long time and was constantly raiding and conquering parts of Greece. Basically the Greeks hated the Persians and the Persians hated the Greeks. With this in mind, many believed that Alexander's conquest was partly revenge for all that Persia had done to torture both the Macedonians and the Greeks. He was a very expansionist ruler though. One of the most famous in history seeing as he brought about the hellenistic period, a part of history where almost every civilization in the middle east was impacted by the Greek culture.

Brief history of Macedon

Macedon was a small city-state in the northern part of Greece founded in 808 BC. By the 4th century BC, the Greek city states of Sparta, Athens, and Thebes were slowly expanding to dominate most of southern Greece. It was around this time that Alexander's father, Philip II developed a more advanced army of phalanx men, armed with a new type of pike called a “sarissa” that was much longer than the Greek short pikes, and just as durable. In 357 BC, Philip II married a princess named Olympias from the Greek empire of Epirus. One year later, Olympias gave birth to a boy and named him Alexander. His name would go down in history as Alexander the Great and he would conquer most of the known world.
Alexander's childhood

Alexander owes many of his accomplishments to his family and private instructors. His father, Philip II, developed the most successful army of the ancient world and taught him how to be a leader. Leonidas of Epirus (a relative of his mother) taught him how to fight and ride a horse. His father hired Lysimachus who taught him how to read, write, and play the lyre, and Aristotle, a private tutor, taught him his political skill.

Battle of Gaugamela

The Battle of Gaugamela was the last encounter between Alexander and king Darius the third of persia and secured Macedonian control over most of the vast Persian Empire, including the lush, fertile valleys of Mesopotamia and Babylon. Darius, having figured out that he could not beat the Macedonians in infantry combat, decided to rely solely on cavalry in this battle and even hired scythian horse archer mercenaries to harass the heavy macedonian infantry. Alexander held control over a ridge overlooking the field, and saw that Darius had flattened the land and cleared all obstacles on the field for better use of his chariots. Seeing this, and the large amounts of heavy and light cavalry that could easily outflank his phalanxes, Alexander took time to make his decisions, for he knew that Darius understood that an attack on the hill would be suicidal. Alexander even let slip a rumor of a night attack on the Persian positions which Darius heard from his spies. This urged the king to keep well over half his forces ready for battle so the majority of his army was exhausted by the morning. This was probably a contributing factor to
Alexander’s victory that led to the dissolution of Persia. Alexander knew that the battle would not be in his favor, and deployed his troops in a very cautious battle line, with most of his forces defending the flanks except for his sarissa pikemen that held the middle. In the end, king darius was defeated again and fled the field of battle, his army decimated.

The Battle of Issus

The first battle between Alexander the Great and King Darius of Persia took place near the small port-town of Issus. Alexander had a very powerful land force, but lacked a strong naval force, so he was forced to disable the Persian ports located across the southern coast of Turkey to cut off naval support to the Persian army. He successfully dismantled all but one of the Persian ports, and marched his army to take it out and establish full control over the southern coast of modern day Turkey.

Darius, however, received word from his spies that Alexander was marching to Issus. He gathered an army made up mostly of light Persian cavalry and Greek mercenaries except for Dariuses personal force of the Immortal Infantry of the Persian Empire which consisted of exactly 10,000 highly trained heavy infantry.
The two armies met on the bank of the Pinarus River, with Darius´ infantry positioned on the left and center and his cavalry on the right. Alexander´s second in command, Parmenion, led a large group of Thessalian cavalry on the right while Alexander commanded the elite companion cavalry. The Macedonian phalanx was positioned in the center and almost immediately charged across the river toward the Persian center. It was raining, and the steep banks of the river became extremely muddy, and as the heavy Macedonian phalanxes struggled through the mud, Persian archers rained arrows upon them. By the time they had reached the Persian infantry, many had fallen. However they were able to organize into phalanx formation and drove at the Persian infantry and Greek mercenaries. Meanwhile, Persian cavalry charged Parmenion on the right flank and hit with devastating force, killing many of Parmenion's Thessalian cavalry in the first charge. Then, seeing that his phalanxes were struggling against the large amounts of Persian infantry, Alexander led his companions to strike the Greek mercenaries on Darius´ left. His charge was extraordinarily effective and after smashing right through the Persian lines, he slammed into the Persian immortals´ rear, and forced Darius to retreat. Even though the persian cavalry had almost completely won the right flank, seeing Darius´ bodyguard running in terror sparked a mass route among their forces.
Military

The main force of the Macedonian army was the phalanx men, also referred to as Companion infantry who carried long, two handed spears called sarissa that were twenty feet long. They also utilized another infantry type, called shield bearers. Shield bearers had large shields and shorter, six to eight foot spears. They also had swords as a backup weapon. They were far and away the most versatile troops in the Macedonian military, because they could use a phalanx or just all out charge. They were also often employed to protect the flanks of the main infantry line. Cavalry were the backbone of the Macedonian military before Philip II came along and vastly improved the infantry. Most macedonian cavalry used nine foot lances. Each spear had a metal tip on both ends and they used these to jab and cut their way into the heart of the enemy army. The most elite cavalry in the Macedonian army were the Companion cavalry who, after vigorous training, became the personal bodyguard of the general and could dominate many other cavalry types. Macedonian cavalry also used a different formation than most other cavalry. They charged in the shape of a wedge with the leader in front so they could easily divide the enemy line in half. This also made it easier for them to better interpret were everyone else was going because in was like a game of follow the leader, but with stabbing and trampling your enemies to death.

Tactics

Macedon also invented many revolutionary battle strategies. One of Macedon's most famous battle tactics was the hammer and anvil. Basically the Greek phalanx men engage and hold the enemy infantry while the companion cavalry swing around and charge the back. The infantry was the anvil and the cavalry was the hammer. Hannibal of Carthage centuries later utilized this
tactic against the Romans and it was very effective. At the battle of Gaugamela, Alexander himself came up with a strategy that, as far as we know, was the first time it was ever employed. Darius had amassed large amounts of professional heavy cavalry from all corners of the Middle East, so Alexander decided to deploy his army in a shallow crescent moon shape with the companion infantry in the middle and shield bearers on the left and right sides and cavalry forming a loose second line. This made it very difficult for Darius to outflank the Macedonians and led Macedon to victory. Also at Gaugamela Alexander's phalanx men had to fight many chariots and came up with an ingenious solution. They would open their ranks to let the chariots charge in then rain javelins upon the riders and surround and stab them to death.

**Land conquered**

Alexander conquered a lot of land, plain and simple. Modern day turkey, egypt, the northern arabian peninsula, part of india, and all the land in between were all his after finally defeating the Persians. Actually, Alexander didn't kill Darius. Bessus governor of Babylon murdered his leader in his sleep, and took up the crown. He was soon killed after by the enraged Macedonians, and Alexander became king.

**The Death of Alexander the Great**

One of the primary contributing factors to Alexander's death was the Mallian campaign of 326 BC. Alexander, on his way home, encountered the warring tribes of the Mallians and Oxydracians. When their scouts reported that a massive Greek army was on the horizon, the tribe chiefs agreed to a momentary peace in order to repel the invaders. Alexander easily swept
through the Oxydracian lands without much resistance and split his army into many small forces that pillaged the mostly unguarded land. When he reached the Mallian land, however, he found a large army guarding the only ford for miles. A swift cavalry charge, followed by a flanking, maneuver by Alexander's shield bearers caused the entire army to be rout. Later, Alexander's army reunited and laid siege to the Mallian capital of Multan. They took the outer walls fairly easily, but the citadel was holding out, and after a few days of failed attempts to storm the stronghold, Alexander himself grew impatient and charged the enemy walls, with only a scaling ladder and a few of his bodyguards. He successfully scaled the wall and hacked through the enemy ranks, but was hit with an arrow that pierced his left lung. This foolish act of bravery caused a violent storm among his troops, as the busted open the gates and scaled the walls. Since all thought he had been killed they showed no mercy, and slaughtered everyone, including the women and children. Alexander wasn't dead yet, and the surgeon Kritomedos removed the arrow from his chest. After he had returned to the city of Susa, he died of a fever in the year 323 BC. It is believed that he could have been killed as the result of an infection from the arrow wound. When Alexander died, his empire fractured and each of his generals secured a large amount of land and each founded a new kingdom. And so ended the largest empire that had yet existed, so ended the reign of Alexander the Great.
PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


