INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

In 325 BC, Alexander sailed out from the Indus delta into the Ocean, the vast body of water which, according to ancient thought, encircled the world. Here he sacrificed bulls to Poseidon and, after pouring libations, hurled the golden cup and bowls into the sea as a thank-offering. The scene was hauntingly reminiscent of the ceremony conducted on the Hellespont in 334. In less than ten years, the Macedonian army had conquered the vast territories of the Achaemenid kings, including the fringe areas of the Punjab and the Indus, the most formidable empire of the ancient world. It had followed the path of unbroken victories from the familiar confines of the Aegean to the edge of the earth, overcoming everything in its way: armies, terrain, climate, all invariably hostile. Now the conquerors prepared to return to the west – some by sea, others along the coastal deserts – to consolidate their victory and contemplate the magnitude of their accomplishments. Little did they know that within two years their beloved king would be dead and their labors seemingly wasted. Most of those who returned to Europe were impoverished, their health broken by years of physical hardship. Others, if they did not die on campaign, were destined never to see Macedonia again, embroiled instead in the bitter struggles

of Alexander's successors. The average soldier, whose efforts brought wealth and fame to his king and a small group of Companions, was left only with the scars of combat and slowly fading memories of that glorious adventure in the east.

The age of Alexander the Great marks a turning point in world history. The defeat of the Greek city-states (*poleis*) by Alexander's father, Philip II, at Chaeronea in 338 BC and the consequent formation of the League of Corinth, which forged an alliance of Greek states under the Macedonian king as *hegemon* or supreme military commander (and director of foreign affairs), put an end to the debilitating, internecine wars of the fourth century. But with peace came war; for it was undesirable that a finely tuned war-machine such as the Macedonian army, now augmented by troops from the new allies and by growing numbers of mercenaries, should lose its edge as well as its livelihood. To reintegrate these fighting forces into their respective states would have economic as well as political consequences. And to create a league without a military purpose – that is, to create a new definition of "us" without identifying "them," the "other" against whom one must be on guard – denied the forcibly united Greek world its *raison d'être*. Indeed, from this point on, the Greek world was destined to subordinate its cherished system of independent *poleis* to a series of alliances (often reincarnations of this same league) and the overarching authority of kings.

Fortunately, the common enemy was not far to seek, and a mandate for the League was easily formulated. For more than two centuries, the Greeks who dwelt on the Aegean littoral had lived in the shadow, if not always under the direct authority, of the Persian king. The Greeks of Asia Minor had been incorporated first into the Lydian kingdom and then, between 547 and 540, into the Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great. For it was Cyrus who terminated the reign, and perhaps even the life, of the wealthy king, Croesus.[1] An ill-conceived and poorly executed rebellion at the beginning of the fifth century gave the Persians a pretext for attacking those Greeks who lived beyond the Strymon River, particularly the Athenians and Eretrians, who had given brief but half-hearted aid to the rebels in 498. The Athenian victory over Darius I's forces at Marathon in 490 and the paradoxical expulsion of Xerxes'

huge invading force ten years later are well known. Indeed, these events led to the first serious union of Greek states, the so-called Delian League. But the effectiveness of this league and the commitment of its members depended entirely on the reality of the Persian danger. As this receded, especially after the Greek victory at the Eurymedon (c. 468), and once the official war against the barbarian was terminated by the terms of the Peace of Callias (449), the Delian League evolved into an Athenian empire, which compelled military service and the payment of tribute, and found a political and military counterweight in the Peloponnesian League, led by Sparta.

This shift in power led to the Peloponnesian War, a drawn-out affair (431–404) that ended in the total destruction of the Athenian Empire and of the balance of power in the Greek world. And, although Sparta emerged as the dominant *polis*, it had achieved this position by accepting financial aid from Persia and by abandoning its traditional isolationism. Soon it became clear that the Great King could act as arbiter of Greek affairs and guarantor of peace treaties, especially those, such as the Peace of Antalcidas in 387/6, that came to be designated as a "Common Peace" (*Koine Eirene*).[2] Hence, it was no misrepresentation to speak of the Great King as "the common enemy of all Greeks" (Dem. 14.3), one who could "sit on his throne playing the arbitrator for the Greeks in their wars and corrupting their politicians with gold" (Plut. *Ages.* 15.1). The extent of Persian intervention is doubtless exaggerated, but there was sufficient evidence of subversive activity that contemporaries were quick to see the gilded hand of the King or his satrap behind virtually every action, just as today the conspiracy theorist attributes every international crisis to the machinations of the CIA. Not surprisingly, then, came the reports that the assassination of Philip II, which brought Alexander the Great to the throne in 336, had been masterminded and financed by the Persian Court.

Whether the accession of Alexander accelerated the decline of Persia is uncertain. Philip II had a reputation for proceeding with caution and consolidating his gains before moving on. His conquests may at first have been restricted to Asia Minor, and his destruction of Achaemenid power might have been partial or slow in its completion. It might, on

the other hand, have produced a more lasting union of east and west. It was not, however, his fate to lead the expedition, and Alexander's accomplishment was the direct result of his own methods. For better and for worse, the world was changed in a few short years, even if the consequences of these changes took three centuries to manifest themselves fully. Notions of a benign conquest that brought culture and moral elevation to the benighted barbarians, suggested by Plutarch at the height of Roman power and further developed against the backdrop of the British Empire and its pretensions about "White Man's Burden," are now dismissed as relics of a misguided age and poor historical method.[3] But an exchange of ideas between east and west did occur, and under Roman domination the language of the eastern empire was Greek, through which some of the most influential ideas of the Near East were disseminated throughout the Mediterranean world.

This book is not about the impact of Alexander's conquests but rather the means by which these were effected, from the formulation of policy to the generation of propaganda and the attainment of its ends by military means. Propaganda both justifies and facilitates action, but it can be a double-edged sword. In Alexander's case the Panhellenic cause and the inferiority of the barbarian were stressed from the very beginning, and even if many saw through the transparency of the vengeance motif, most were prepared to accept the view that barbarians were slaves by nature, cowardly and effeminate. What served the needs of conquest in the early years confounded the attempt to stabilize and consolidate the newly won empire in the years that followed.

HOW DO WE KNOW? SOURCES FOR ALEXANDER THE GREAT

CHAPTER TWO

Ancient historians have long had to contend with the fact that their knowledge of the past is based on limited, often secondary and unreliable evidence. Statistical analyses fail for want of sufficient data; historical interpretation falters on the broken ground of textual corruption, authorial bias, and the unintentional but misguided superimposition of Roman ideas and institutions on Greek subjects. Documentary evidence is often lacking, or spotty, and almost always in need of at least partial restoration. And such documents as survive are those recorded on nonperishable material, such as stone or metal, or on papyri which have survived as a result of unusual climatic conditions. But, whatever the form of these primary documents, they rarely if ever survived because of the intrinsic value of the information they contained. Rather, inscriptions on marble or limestone were reused as building material, as doorposts, lintels, foundation stones, or steps. Where their inscribed sides have been exposed to the elements or the tread of human feet, their messages have generally been obscured, if not entirely obliterated. In other places, stones have been cut into two or more pieces and their information scattered and partially lost. Histories survived on papyri in many cases because someone

found a more important use for the writing material and recorded bills of sale, land registers, or other accounts on the reverse side. Other evidence survives on palimpsests, texts that have been erased so that the medium could be reused; but traces of the ink remain and these texts are sometimes legible under ultraviolet or infrared light.

Although the works of some forty contemporary or near-contemporary Alexander historians have been lost, we nevertheless have a substantial collection of the fragments of their histories,[1] along with a surviving corpus of information ranging from a few contemporary inscriptions and coin types to works of art.[2] To these we may add sources from the period of the "Successors," which made use of Alexander's image and mystique; and we have a relatively large number of extant sources (written between 300 and 500 years after the king's death). The extant sources are supplemented by the works of writers who cannot be regarded strictly as historians and biographers – geographers, ethnographers, antiquarians, tacticians, lexicographers, and writers of anecdotes and philosophical and rhetorical treatises. Although the amount of surviving information may seem minuscule in comparison with what is available to, say, U.S. Civil War historians, by the standards of ancient history the Alexander sources are indeed numerous.

The Major Lost Historians

It is virtually certain that the royal chancery kept a record of some kind – in the form of a journal or diary – of day-to-day events. But modern scholars question how much detail it contained and how useful (especially for the military historian) its contents were. The authorship of the *Ephemerides* is attributed to Eumenes of Cardia or Diodotus of Erythrae, the latter perhaps a pseudonym. Where other writers claim to be quoting from the journal, the information is banal, dealing with the king's eating, drinking, and sleeping habits. The work may, at least, have preserved an accurate itinerary and may have been consulted by the man who has been called Alexander's "official historian." This was Callisthenes of Olynthus, a kinsman of Aristotle (Alexander's former tutor), who appears to have recommended him for the task. He served as a combination war correspondent and propagandist and appears to have

sent his history (*Alexandrou Praxeis* or "Deeds of Alexander") back to the Greek world in annual installments. To him we may ascribe a good deal of the Panhellenic sentiment that pervades the accounts of the early years and the rather heroic image of the young king. But Callisthenes fell into disfavor as a result of his opposition to the introduction of *proskynesis* and he was executed in 327 for his alleged involvement in the conspiracy of Hermolaus. The last events recorded by his pen appear to belong to the year 329. His value as a military historian has been impugned by Polybius – though one might add that Polybius was critical of most who wrote before him – and his treatment of Alexander's leading general, Parmenion, bordered on character assassination. Nevertheless, traces of his work can be found in most surviving Alexander historians.

Three others who participated in the conquest may have begun to compose histories during Alexander's lifetime. Chares of Mytilene, who was the king's chamberlain and usher (*eisangeleus*), may have kept notes (if he did not write entirely from memory) for a work that would focus primarily on what went on at court.[3] Onesicritus of Astypylaea and Nearchus the Cretan are best known for their service with the fleet, which sailed down the Indus River to its mouth and, from there, followed the coast, sailing into the Persian Gulf and up the Tigris River. They made conflicting claims, each appropriating for himself the rank of admiral of the fleet. Nearchus exposes the mendacity of Onesicritus, who was merely the chief steersman of Alexander's ship, but exaggerates his own achievement.[4] It appears that they published very soon after the king's death, and Nearchus is on record as having read an account of his voyage to Alexander during his final days.[5]

The works of Callisthenes, Onesicritus, and Nearchus were used by Cleitarchus of Alexandria, arguably the most sensational (and also the most popular) of the lost historians. Cleitarchus did not accompany the expedition, but he did have access to both written sources and eyewitness informants. Furthermore, his father, Dinon, was an author of *Persika* and familiar with the affairs of the Persian Empire in the fourth century BC. Bringing together diverse sources and flavoring his work with a liberal dose of rhetoric and moralizing, Cleitarchus became the best known of the first generation Alexander historians. Cicero, in a letter to

his brother, Quintus, shows that Cleitarchus' work was still popular in the late Republic. Not surprisingly, most of the major surviving histories of Alexander are based on Cleitarchus. But, whereas Cleitarchus was often critical of the king, two other participants in the campaign wrote accounts that defended the king's actions and omitted certain episodes that placed him in an unfavorable light.[6] These were Ptolemy son of Lagus – a former general and, at the time he wrote his work, the king of Egypt – and Aristobulus of Cassandreia, an engineer with an interest in geography and antiquities. Both were used in the second century AD by Arrian and they constitute the apologetic tradition concerning Alexander.

Numerous other lost accounts are known from fragments and citations only. These include the works of surveyors (*bematistai*), flatterers and gossip-mongers, hack poets and rhetoricians. Some were bitterly hostile, others hagiographers; virtually all were more credulous than critical. Several were dismissed as worthless by Alexander himself. For example, when Choerilus of Iasus composed an epic poem in which Alexander appeared as Achilles, the king remarked: "I would rather be Thersites in Homer's *Iliad* than the Achilles of Choerilus."[7] Such stories, nevertheless, made their way into the extant sources, though generally their contributions are bracketed and treated with caution.

The Major Extant Sources

The surviving histories of Alexander can be divided into two groups: the popular tradition (often called the "Alexander Vulgate," though this term is more confusing than helpful), represented by Diodorus of Sicily, Pompeius Trogus (whose work survives only in summaries and in the epitome of Justin), Quintus Curtius Rufus, and (to some extent) Plutarch;[8] and the apologetic tradition preserved in Arrian (and the derivative *Itinerary of Alexander*).

The earliest extant source for Alexander is the seventeenth book of Diodorus' *Bibliotheke* (a universal history). This was, in fact, a double-sized book: despite the fact that the sections dealing with the events of 330/29–327/6 are lost, the surviving text runs to about 175 pages in the Loeb Classical Library format, compared with the roughly 130 pages

for Book 16 and 100 pages for Book 18. It was Diodorus' practice to follow a single primary source for each section of his work, and for his account of Alexander he used Cleitarchus, though as elsewhere he supplemented this source with information from other writers.[9] Nevertheless, his history not only is stylistically Cleitarchean but also contains numerous passages that are virtually identical (allowing for the differences between Greek and Latin) to corresponding sections of Curtius.

Not much later, another writer of world history, a Romanized Gaul from Vasio (modern Vaison-la-Romaine), Pompeius Trogus, devoted Books 11–12 of his *Philippic History* to Alexander, basing his work either directly on Cleitarchus or on the intermediary writer of the first century BC, Timagenes of Alexandria. Trogus' history has been lost, largely on account of the success of Justin's abbreviation, though the epitome does not do justice to the original.[10] W. W. Tarn rightly asked: "Is there any bread at all to this intolerable deal of sack?" His answer was "Not much,"[11] but, used with caution, the source is of greater value to the historian than Tarn was willing to concede.

It appears that Trogus was read by Q. Curtius Rufus, who was indebted to him stylistically. He wrote the only full-scale Latin account of Alexander, treating his subject in ten books and basing his history on Cleitarchus, but adding valuable details from Ptolemy. Of his ten books, the first two are lost, as are the end of Book 5 and the beginning of Book 6, as well as substantial parts of Book 10.[12] The historian may be identical with one (if not both) of the known Curtii Rufi of the first century AD. Suetonius names a Quintus Curtius Rufus in a list of grammarians and rhetoricians who belong to the late Republic and early Empire. (It is, of course, tempting to regard the author of the *History of Alexander* as a rhetorician, considering the nature of the work.) Tacitus and Pliny the Younger know a soldier and politician of the same name, a man who rose from obscurity to hold the praetorship in the reign of Tiberius and was proconsul of North Africa at the time of his death in AD 53.

Plutarch (AD c. 50–120), the famous philosopher and biographer, belonged to the local nobility of Chaeronea, the very place where Philip II defeated the Athenians and Thebans in what some have

portrayed as the last stand of "Greek freedom." We may use the word "freedom" advisedly – for it was a loaded term in antiquity just as it is today – but Plutarch, despite gaining Roman citizenship, took his Boeotian origins seriously. For our purposes, Plutarch is best known for his *Life of Alexander*, one of the *Parallel Lives* (Alexander was paired with Caesar), of which all but those of Epaminondas and Scipio survive. But he also provides valuable information, and interpretations, in his *On the Virtue and Fortune of Alexander* I–II and the *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*. It is important to remember, however, that Plutarch was writing biography and not history, that he emphasized *ethos* over *erga* or *praxeis*, and that he repeated stories that elucidated a man's character even when he suspected their historicity.[13]

It is the last of the major extant historians, Arrian of Nicomedia, who enjoys the best reputation, especially among military historians.[14] Lucius Flavius Arrianus Xenophon was a Bithynian Greek whose family obtained Roman citizenship in the middle of the first century AD, if not earlier. Born in the last decade of that century, or perhaps as early as AD 85, Arrian held a number of political offices under the emperor Hadrian, but eventually became a citizen of Athens. In his writings, and to a certain extent in his life, he modeled himself on his namesake Xenophon, and his *Anabasis Alexandrou*, in seven books, resembles Xenophon's account of the Ten Thousand in no small way.[15] The influence of Arrian's work can be seen in the *Itinerarium Alexandri*, an anonymous work composed around AD 340 and dedicated to Constantius II.[16] But in the tradition of Alexander history, Arrian's account, based on Ptolemy and Aristobulus, stands alone as a work of *apologia*. Military historians have in general praised him, although his use of terminology is often vague and inconsistent.

Source Criticism

Source criticism (*Quellenforschung*) has, in recent times, been treated with a measure of disdain, and it has been dismissed as old-fashioned and pedantic. Indeed, the method is susceptible to abuse. Some have regarded the slightest disagreements in detail between extant authors as evidence of the use of different primary sources, failing to take into