

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

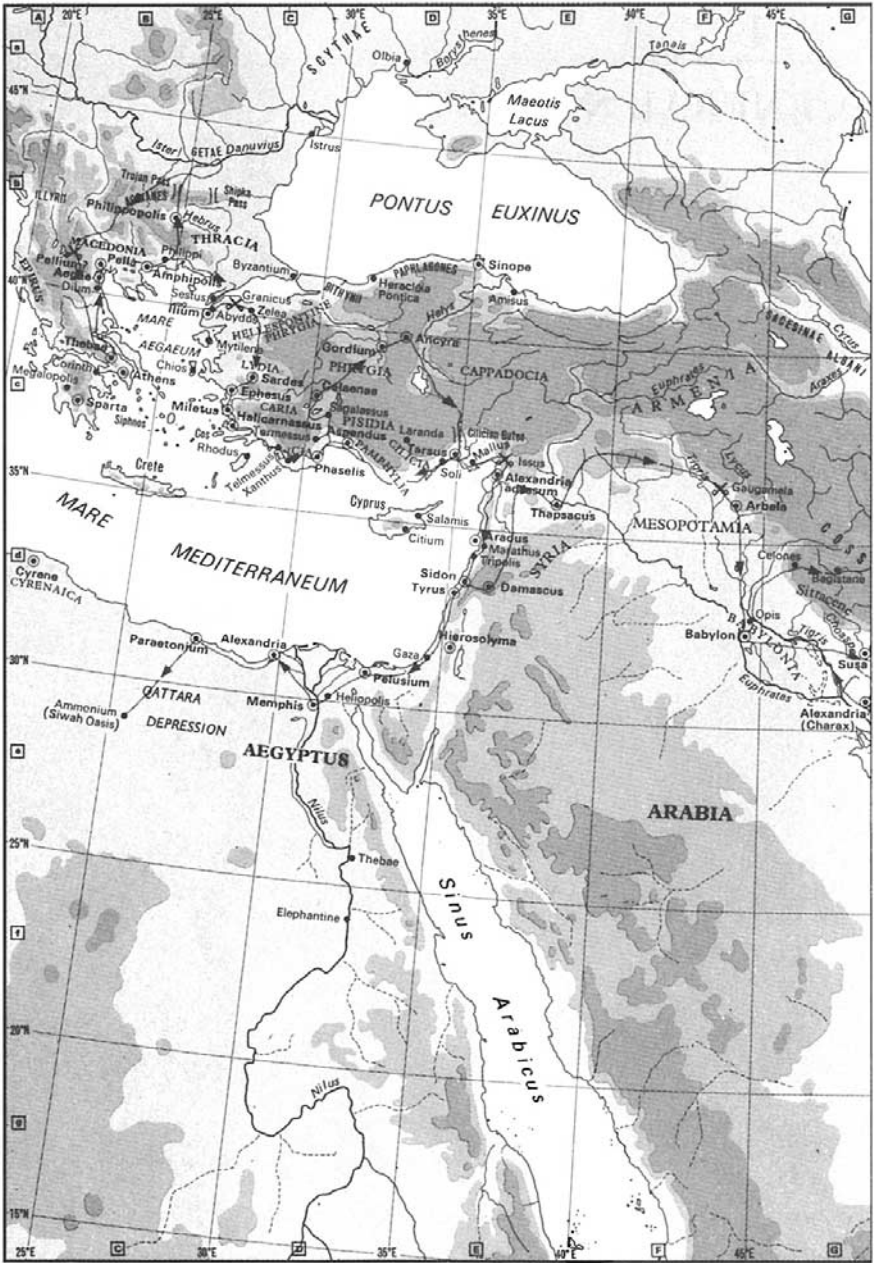
GENERAL NARRATIVE

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1. Alexander's empire.

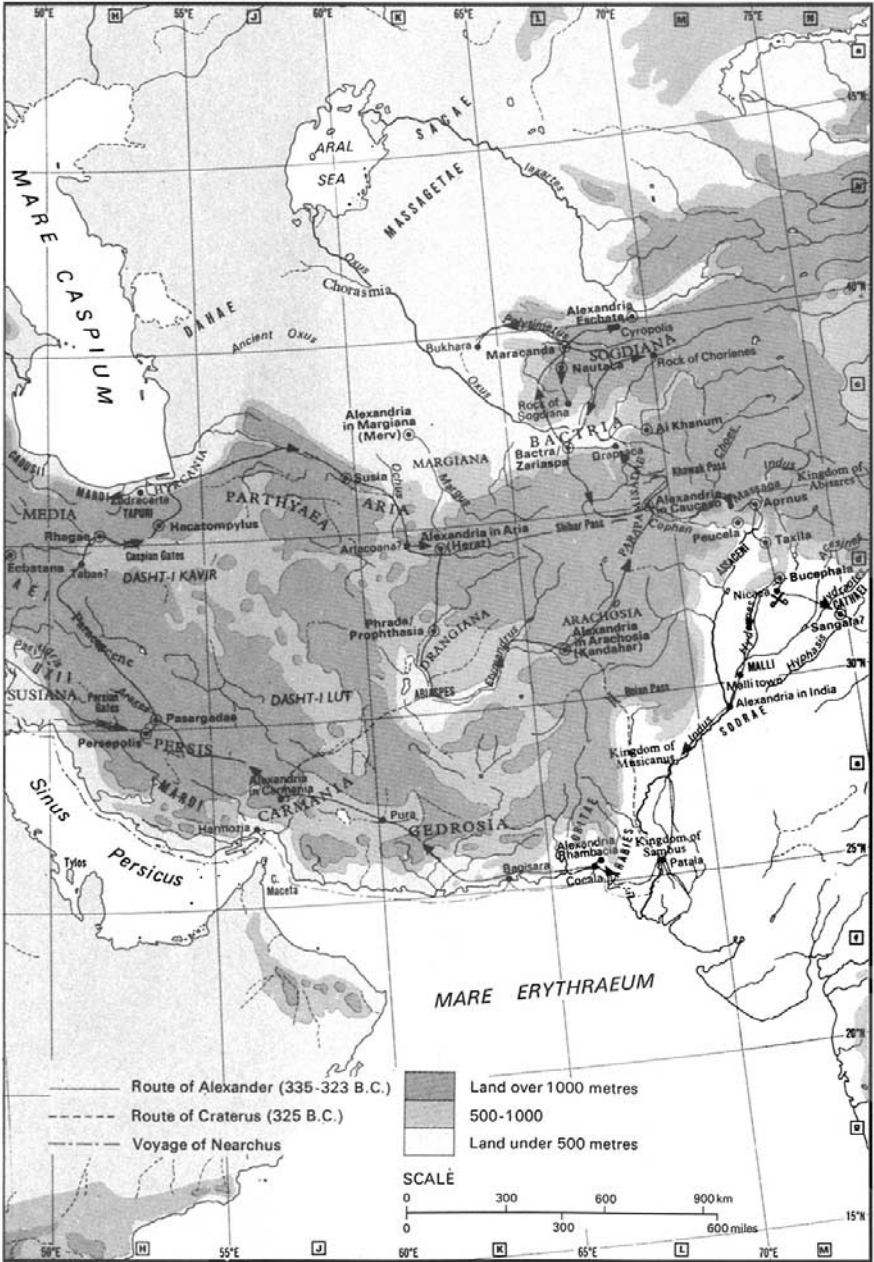
Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

Prologue

1. The legacy of Philip

The period 336–323 B.C. is inevitably designated the age of Alexander. It marked a huge expansion of the imperial boundaries of Macedon, a virtually unparalleled outpouring of resources, material and human. *Imperium terris, animos aequabit Olympo*. The prophecy made for Romulus' foundation applies even more appositely to the milieu of Alexander. His empire was in any sense world-wide, his concept of his person and achievements super-human. From the time of his death his name has been an evocative symbol of worldly glory, alternately eulogised and excoriated as the type of the magnanimous conqueror or the intemperate tyrant; and the history of his reign has all too often been a thinly disguised biography, distorted by the personality and values of its author.¹ This book is an attempt to analyse Alexander's impact on his world without any preconceived model of his personality or motives. *Sine ira et studio* is perhaps an impossible ideal, given the controversial and highly emotive nature of some of the subject matter, but one should at least attempt to base one's interpretation upon the extant sources.² Even there we may find prejudice enough, but we have some prospect of identifying and discounting bias, both apologetic and vituperative. Our history of the period can only be fragmentary, based on episodes randomly highlighted in the literary tradition or the scattering of documentary evidence preserved by chance. We may not go beyond the material at our disposal. Alexander the man will always elude us, thanks to the distorting filter of ancient (and modern) judgements and our grossly inefficient documentation, but the events of his reign can be discussed in context and the focus is occasionally clear. That is a sufficiently important theme. The face of the world was changed within a decade, and the events and the forces at work are worth exposition and discussion, even if the personalities of the main actors are irretrievable.

With equal justice the period might be termed the age of Philip. The

¹ Interesting digests of modern views of Alexander are given by Schachermeyr 1973, 609–57 and Badian 1976a. See also (on the German scene) Demandt 1972.

² See the Bibliography (pp. 295ff.) for a brief review of the source tradition.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Prologue

Macedon that Alexander inherited was the creation of his father. The army he led was forged by Philip. The material resources of the Macedonian throne were acquired by Philip. The system of alliances which turned the Balkans into a virtual annexe of Macedon was Philip's development, and the war against Persia was launched at the end of Philip's reign. In his first years, at least, Alexander was continuing a process begun by his father, and his reign cannot be understood without constant reference to his predecessor. What follows is in no sense a history of Philip, rather a contextual stage setting to introduce the accession of Alexander.

As is well known, Philip came to power in 359 B.C., when Macedon was threatened with dissolution, debilitated by a decade of dynastic feuding and crippled by military defeat at the hands of the Illyrians. During the next twenty-three years he made a world power out of that ruined inheritance, creating a political, military and financial basis for empire. On the political front Macedon was welded into a unity, focused on the person of the king. That came about partly by coercion. After his decisive early victory over the Illyrians (358) Philip was able to dominate the turbulent principalities of Upper Macedonia (Lyncestis, Orestis, Elimiotis and Tymphaea) which straddled the Pindus range between the upper Haliacmon and Epirus and had traditionally maintained their independence of the monarchy of Macedon proper, based on the lower plains. For the first time they became integral parts of the greater kingdom. Their nobility was absorbed into the court at Pella and achieved distinction under both Philip and Alexander.³ At the same time they offered a fertile recruiting ground for both infantry and cavalry; no less than three of the original six phalanx battalions of Alexander came from the upper principalities.⁴

The political union was cemented by marriage. Unashamedly polygamous, Philip contracted a sequence of unions, particularly in the early years of his reign. One of his first wives came from Elimiotis (Phila, the sister of Derdas and Machatus), and there is little doubt that the marriage was designed to help the process of annexation. Other wives came from peripheral non-Macedonian areas: Audata from Illyria, Philinna and Nicesipolis from Thessaly and Meda from the Getic North.⁵ The most important was the formidable Olympias who came from the royal house of Molossia and was taken to Philip's bed by 357 at latest. This marriage linked together the two dynasties on either side of the Pindus and gave Philip direct influence on the Molossian throne. When he ultimately intervened in Epirus, the reigning king Arybbas was deposed in favour of his nephew, Alexander, the brother of Olympias.⁶ These marriages were the linchpins of the great nexus of guest-friends which was to support

³ Note the list of trierarchs in Arr. *Ind.* 18.5–6 and the list of domiciles in Berve 1926, 2.445. The most brilliant, Perdicas and Craterus, were from Orestis.

⁴ See below, p. 259, with the literature there cited.

⁵ On Philip's marriages the prime evidence is a famous fragment of Satyrus the Peripatetic (Athen. 557B–E). On the many problems it presents see Martin 1982, 66–70 and Tronson 1984.

⁶ Cf. Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.504–9; *contra* Errington 1975b.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Philip's interests through the Balkans. At the same time the risk of dynastic conflict which they posed was obviated by the clear superiority that Olympias enjoyed over her fellow consorts.

As the king's network of alliances expanded, the influence of his nobility contracted. Philip increased the élite body of royal Companions (*hetairoi*), attracting immigrants from the wider Greek world. Men who would accept his patronage were given lavish donations of land and status at court. Of Alexander's close circle of boyhood friends three (Nearchus of Crete; Erigyius and Laomedon of Mytilene) were non-Macedonian. Other prominent figures, notably the chief secretary, Eumenes of Cardia, came from abroad. Their loyalty was to the king alone. However intimate and important their functions, they stood apart from the rest of the Macedonian hierarchy, never fully accepted and often resented.⁷ Even after Alexander's death Eumenes' foreign extraction was a liability when he commanded troops, and his own Macedonians were finally to turn against him with the bitter gibe, 'plague from the Chersonese' (Plut. *Eum.* 18.1).

Philip's lavishness to his new men was matched by benefactions to the old nobility. The new acquisitions of land in Chalcidice and Thrace were parcelled out to new and old alike. Polemocrates, father of the great marshal Coenus, obtained estates in the hinterland of Olynthus.⁸ His primary holdings were in Elimiotis, in Upper Macedonia, and he now had interests, directly conferred by the king, in the new territories. Philip was sharing the advantages of conquest while diversifying the power base of his nobility. He also, it seems, founded the institution of the Pages:⁹ the sons of prominent nobles received an education at court in the immediate entourage of the king, developing a personal attachment to him while necessarily serving as hostages for the good behaviour of their families. As a result the nobility was simultaneously coerced and rewarded, diluted and diversified. As the frontiers of the kingdom expanded, loyalty to the crown brought tangible rewards, and those rewards involved financial interests and military obligations outside the old baronial centres of power. In the climate of success and expansion there was less incentive to challenge the supremacy of the king at Pella, and even the influx of favoured Companions from beyond the borders was tolerable.

Philip reigned as an autocrat. The political institutions of Macedon were informal and rudimentary, and there were few practical constraints on a strong king. Like his son, Philip presumably consulted an inner council of intimates on major issues of state,¹⁰ but nothing suggests that the council was anything other than advisory. Again, it might be prudent to consult the

⁷ On the general antipathy between Greeks and Macedonians see Badian 1982, particularly 39–43.

⁸ *SIG*³ 332. On the location see Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.338.

⁹ Arr. iv.13.1: cf. Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.401; cf. 167–8 (though there is no evidence of the institution before Philip; nothing indicates that the assassins of Archelaus were Pages).

¹⁰ Cf. Arr. 1.25.4; Curt. vi.8.1–15, 11.9–10. See further Berve 1926, 1.33–4; Bosworth 1980a, 161–2.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Prologue

opinions of the army on various occasions but there was nothing incumbent on the king to hold regular assemblies and he was in no sense bound by popular opinion.¹¹ It is suggested that by tradition the army exercised capital jurisdiction,¹² but that is a strictly limited area. Even there procedure was apparently fluid and informal, and there was certainly no body of Macedonian statute law. The king operated in a framework of precedent and tradition but, provided that he had the resources and the personality to assert his will, he could do what he liked with the minimum of consultation. That is the constant lament of Demosthenes, that the Greek *poleis* which had public processes of decision-making could not compete with an immensely shrewd autocrat who concealed his actions and policies.¹³ For most effective purposes Philip *was* Macedon. He concluded treaties in his own name with sovereign states, sent his own ambassadors to the Amphictyonic Council, and (like his predecessors) struck coins in his own name. Perhaps the best illustration of the advantages of his position is the fate of the hapless Athenian embassy which travelled to Macedon in the summer of 346 to ratify the Peace of Philocrates. Ratification meant the physical presence of Philip, and the ambassadors were forced to wait impatiently at Pella while the king completed his campaigns in Thrace, increasing the territorial possessions which would be confirmed by the peace. The peace was finally accepted at Pherae, on the eve of his attack on Thermopylae, when it was too late for the Athenians to take effective counter-action.¹⁴ Given that he was the only contractual party on the Macedonian side, his initiative was unlimited.

This considerable freedom of action was underpinned by the huge financial resources of Macedon. The mineral reserves of the kingdom, previously centred in the territory east of the River Axios,¹⁵ were vastly expanded when Philip occupied the site of Crenides in 356 and exploited the rich veins of gold and silver in the neighbouring mines of Mt Pangaeum. According to Diodorus (xvi.8.6) this area alone supplied revenues of more than 1,000 talents and Philip extended his mining operations to Chalcidice, exploiting the deposits in the mountainous terrain north of Olynthus. What is more, as the boundaries of the kingdom expanded, so did its fiscal basis: dues upon landed property and extraordinary levies (*eisphorae*),¹⁶ Philip's financial power was comparatively unmatched, except by the Great King, and it gave him invaluable advantages. Diodorus mentions his capacity to keep a formidable mercenary force and to bribe collaborators in the Greek world. Though emotively expressed, the statement is true and important. Philip did attract a large and

¹¹ See now Lock 1977a; Errington 1978.

¹² Curt. vi.8.25; cf. Errington 1978, 86–90. On the most famous instance, the capital trial of Philotas (330 B.C.), see below, pp. 101ff.

¹³ Dem. xviii.235; cf. i.4, viii.11.

¹⁴ Note the classic description of Demosthenes xix.155–61 (cf. xviii.32). On the details see Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.341–5.

¹⁵ See Borza 1982, 8–12; Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.69–73.

¹⁶ Arr. 1.16.5, on which see Bosworth 1980a, 126.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

versatile body of mercenaries which he could use in the most remote theatres of operation and deploy independently of the Macedonian native levy. In 342/1, when the main army was fully engaged in the Thracian hinterland, he was able to send out two separate mercenary forces, under Eurylochus and Parmenion, to intervene in the affairs of Eretria far to the south.¹⁷ His financial reserves ensured that he never suffered the embarrassment of Athenian generals serving in the north Aegean, who were often forced to maintain their mercenaries by subsidiary campaigning for other paymasters or by simple extortion, euphemistically termed 'good will' payments (Dem.viii.25). His men could be guaranteed continuity of employment and regular payment.

The diplomatic intrigue Diodorus speaks of is equally important. Philip attracted the most prominent figures of the Greek world to Pella, where he entertained lavishly and dispersed huge sums as gifts, in traditional Homeric hospitality. Bribery or guest-friendship, it depended on one's perspective. Philip could buy good-will, encourage political co-operation or even finance dissidents to seize power in their home city. At its starkest the power of money was seen in the Olynthian campaign of 349/8, when Torone, Micyberna and perhaps Olynthus itself fell through internal treachery and (if we may believe Demosthenes) the Olynthian cavalry was betrayed by its commanders.¹⁸ Not everyone who received Philip's money was disloyal,¹⁹ but few can have been unaffected. Every individual and every community which had the money to do so used it for diplomatic advantage; and the system of *proxenia* ensured that nationals of one city were in honour obliged to promote the interests of another. In this sense Philip's activity was almost orthodox. What was unusual was its scale and complexity. Few Greek cities can have been without citizens who had benefited directly from his largesse, and far more than Greeks were affected. Philip had inaugurated his reign with diplomatic payments to his neighbour, the Paeonian king (Diod. xvi.3.4), and he will have acquired allies in the north by payment as much as by conquest. Even relations with Persia might be affected. Refugees from the court of the Great King, men like Amminapes or even Artabazus, were entertained at Pella,²⁰ incurring obligations which might be repaid after their rehabilitation. The advantages were great, the expenses colossal. Philip did not merely spend money, alleges the contemporary critic, Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 224): he threw it away. His treasury was never flush with excess funds, and Alexander himself is alleged to have been severely embarrassed for ready money on the eve of his invasion of Asia.²¹ That is a measure of the expendi-

¹⁷ Dem. ix.58 (somewhat earlier a force of 1,000 mercenaries had dismantled the fortifications at Porthmus). For other evidence of Philip's use of mercenaries see Parke 1933, 162–4.

¹⁸ Dem. xix.265–7; cf. Diod. xvi.53.2 with Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.322–4.

¹⁹ For the situation at Athens see below, pp. 211–13.

²⁰ For Amminapes (Berve 1926, 2 no. 55) see Curt. vi.4.25; for Artabazus (Berve 1926, 2 no. 152) see Diod. xvi.52.3; Curt. v.9.1, vi.5.2.

²¹ Plut. *Al.* 15.2; cf. Arr. vii.9.6; Curt. x.2.24 with Hamilton 1969, 36–7 *contra* Bellinger 1963, 36ff.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ture. What is not in doubt is the magnitude of the royal revenues and the financial power of Macedon.

The greatest resource of Macedonia was probably its population. After his incorporation of Upper Macedonia Philip was master of a territory some 20,000 square kilometres in area, comprising some of the richest agricultural land in the Balkans.²² Its population was necessarily large and was certainly augmented by the internal peace that prevailed in his reign. As always, there are no statistics and no basis for quantification. But for the male population of military age there are some interesting figures. The Macedonian infantry under arms in 334 B.C. numbered 27,000, and there were ample reserves that could be mustered in subsequent years.²³ The cavalry also was numerous and of high calibre – something over 3,000 at the time of Philip's death. These numbers are formidable, and they comprise only the nucleus of Philip's military resources: his native Macedonian forces. With the allied contingents that would normally take the field with him they amounted to an army without parallel in Greek history. Indeed it can be argued that Philip never needed to mobilise more than a fraction of the forces at his disposal. At the climactic battle of Chaeronea his army is estimated at 30,000 foot and 2,000 horse – and that was an army augmented by numerous allies (Diod. xvi.85.5). His campaigns, numerous though they were, never fully exploited his reserves of manpower, and his military strength, it is safe to say, rose steadily throughout his reign.

Mere numbers are only part of the story. Macedon was populous before Philip, but its infantry was a primitive rabble.²⁴ The mobilisation of the foot soldiers as a political as well as a military force may predate his reign,²⁵ but it is highly probable that the introduction of the 12-cubit *sarisa* as the fundamental offensive weapon was his innovation.²⁶ From the beginning of the reign he imposed systematic training, to produce a cohesive and immensely strong formation that could surpass the depth and compactness of the Theban phalanx. This primary striking force was supplemented by light-armed auxiliaries, archers and, in due course, a siege train manned by the finest contemporary military engineers (retained by Philip's gold). The Macedonian cavalry was, as always, superb, and its discipline was sharpened by regular training which evolved the classic tactic of attack in wedge formation. For most of the reign the national army was used on the marches of the kingdom, in relatively brief campaigns against Illyrian or Thracian adversaries. It made few forays into the Greek world proper – to crush the Phocian mercenaries at

²² See Borza 1982, esp. 12–20, suggesting that the coastal lowlands were malarial (cf. Borza 1979).

²³ See below pp. 266ff. and, for more documentation, Bosworth 1986.

²⁴ Thuc. iv. 124.1; see also (an illuminating passage) ii. 100.5.

²⁵ This depends on the very vexed interpretation of Anaximenes, *FGrH* 72 F 4; for recent and different approaches to the problem see Brunt 1976, Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.705–9, Develin 1985.

²⁶ Implied by Diod. xvi. 3.1–2. See Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.421 and, for a different view, Markle 1978.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-40679-6 - Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great

A. B. Bosworth

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The legacy of Philip

11

the Crocus Field (352) and perhaps to finish off the Olynthian campaign. By and large the military profile was as Demosthenes describes it in his *Third Philippic* (ix.49–50): brief opportunistic raids with flexible composite forces of mercenaries, cavalry and light-armed, rather than any large body of heavy infantry. It was generally considered, he says, that Philip could not be compared with Sparta at her prime. Those delusions were rudely shattered by Chaeronea, and even Chaeronea gave an imperfect picture of the true strength of Macedon.

We should also consider the outlying territories, particularly Thessaly and Thrace, which Philip turned into virtual annexes of Macedon. From the beginning of his reign he was involved in the affairs of Thessaly, taking one of his first wives (Philinna) from Larisa, the city traditionally most involved in Macedonian politics.²⁷ Later, in 353, he intervened in the internecine struggle between the tyrant house of Pherae and the Thessalian League, centred around the old capitals of Pharsalus and Larisa. After his crushing defeat of Pherae in 352 he was elected *archon* of an expanded league which now included all Thessaly. What exactly was meant by this is uncertain, but it did apparently give Philip some revenue from imposts on Thessalian trade and control of the joint military forces of Thessaly.²⁸ He could and did intervene in conflict between cities; garrisons were imposed, notably at Pherae, and, more drastically, there were mass exiles from the north-western cities of Pharcadon and Tricca (Diod. xviii.56.5). Inevitably his partisans acquired key positions and he re-established the tetrarchies, the old regional divisions of Thessaly, imposing one of his own men upon each of them as controller.²⁹ Two of those tetrarchs (Daochus and Thrasydaeus) came from Pharsalus and are named by Demosthenes (xviii.295) as quislings. Indeed Pharsalus occupied a dominant position in Philip's Thessaly. It provided the representatives to the Amphictyonic Council as well as a cavalry élite which formed a counterpart to the Macedonian royal squadron (see below, p. 264). The other cities were relatively depressed, but the relatives of Philip's two wives must have exercised power and influence in and beyond Larisa and Pherae. It proved a stable settlement. Both Philip and Alexander worked with the existing aristocracy of Thessaly (Medeus of Larisa enjoyed high favour as a Companion)³⁰ and used the traditional cavalry strength of the territory. There was no attempt to mobilise the depressed peasantry into an effective infantry on the Macedonian model. Thessaly remained comparatively weak under its traditional governing circle, now absorbed to some degree in the Macedonian

²⁷ The chronology is vexed, but the marriage must be early. Cf. Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.225; Martin 1982.

²⁸ For the complex evidence see Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.285–95.

²⁹ Theopompus, *FGrH* 115 F 208–9; *SIG*³ 274 VIII. Cf. Hammond and Griffith 1979, 2.533–8; Martin 1985, 104–10; Errington 1986, 55–7. It has often been argued that Philip also organised a coup at Larisa, exiled his former supporters there and imposed a garrison. This theory rests on highly questionable evidence and should be discarded (Martin 1985, 102–4; 255–60).

³⁰ Berve 1926, 2 no. 521 (see below, p. 171). He was presumably a grandson of Medeus, dynast of Pharsalus in 395 (Diod. xiv.82.5).