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978-0-521-43264-1 - Sources for Alexander the Great: An Analysis of Plutarch's Life and Arrian's Anabasis Alexandrou

N. G. L. Hammond

Excerpt

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PART ONE

PLUTARCH'S SOURCES FOR
THE NARRATIVE PASSAGES

1

ALEXANDER'S ORIGIN, BOYHOOD
AND RELATIONS WITH PHILIP

1. The introduction

In the introduction, covering the two *Lives* which he knew would attract both interest and criticism more than any other *Life*, Plutarch warned his readers that he was writing 'not Histories but Lives' of Alexander and of Caesar. In the immediate context he pointed out that he was not committed to recording all the famous acts of the two men, and that he should be allowed to find indications of personality often in their sayings and even their jests.¹ What he did not say but may have expected his readers to infer from this introduction was that he would be treating his evidence not with the historian's insistence on accuracy but with the biographer's love of traditional anecdotes.

The first sentence of the actual *Life of Alexander* lives up to Plutarch's warning words. 'Alexander's descent, as a Heraclid on his father's side from Caranus, and as an Aeacid on his mother's side from Neoptolemus, is one of the matters which have been completely trusted.' While the Heraclid and Aeacid descent went unquestioned by ancient writers,² the citation of

¹ Sayings of Alexander appear first in 4.11 and 5.4; the sayings and the jests of Caesar during his stay with the pirates are recorded in *Caes.* 2.

² That Alexander, son of Amyntas, was a 'Hellen' from Argos was confirmed by the Hellanodicae at Olympia c. 500, no doubt by checking that his ancestors were members of the Temenid house there (Hdt. 5.22 with *HM* 2.3f.); and the descent of the Molossian royal house from Aeacus was asserted in a poem by Pindar c. 485

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Caranus as the founding father in Macedonia – and so analogous to Neoptolemus in Molossia – was not only controversial but must have been known to be controversial by Plutarch. For he was conversant with the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, which had looked to Perdikkas as the founding father in Macedonia.³ Caranus was inserted as a forerunner of Perdikkas in Macedonia only at the turn of the fifth century; he appeared as such in the works of fourth-century writers, such as Marsyas the Macedonian historian (*FGrH* 135/6 F 14) who on my analysis⁴ was used by Pompeius Trogus (*Prologue* 7 'origines Macedonicae regesque a conditore gentis Carano'). Thus the dogmatic statement of Plutarch, that Caranus was the forerunner, should have been qualified, if he had been writing scientific history. But because the statement conveyed a belief which Alexander certainly held in his lifetime it was justified in the eyes of a biographer and in the eyes of those who were more concerned with biographical background than with historical facts. If Plutarch had been challenged, he would no doubt have claimed that his belief was based on his own wide reading of authors who had studied the origins of Macedonia and provided 'completely trusted' data.⁵

2. Chapters 2.2, 9.5–10 and 10.6–7

When Plutarch wished to express doubt about the historicity of an event or an anecdote, he made use of the conventional expressions 'it is said', 'they say', 'it seems' (we shall encounter them again in Arrian's *Anabasis*). The next sentence (2.2) provides an example. It opens with the word λέγεται: Philip

(Hammond *Ep.* 490f.). Alexander I advertised his Heraclid descent by showing the forepart of a lion on his coinage. Genealogies were carefully preserved and were regarded as genuine for royal houses (as at Sparta) and other houses in the sixth century.

³ Hdt. 137.1 and 139; Thuc. 2.100.1, giving the same number of generations; see *HM* II 4.

⁴ In *CQ* 41 (1991) 501. The head of a young man wearing a diadem without string-ends, which appeared first on the coins of Archelaus and was repeated on coins of Aëropus and Pausanias, was probably the head of Caranus.

⁵ He no doubt read Pompeius Trogus, *Historiae Philippicae*, who described the coming of Caranus to Macedonia, as we see from Just. 7.1.7–10 (cf. 33.2.6).

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'is said' to have fallen in love etc. The reader is thereby warned that in Plutarch's opinion this episode is less worthy of trust than what preceded (Alexander's descent) and than what is to follow (the dreams of Philip and of Olympias). The doubt which Plutarch raised has been stated more emphatically by modern writers, e.g. by G. T. Griffith in a footnote: 'the love match ... seems ruled out by chronological improbability'.⁶ The chronological factors which bear on Philip 'still a lad' (μειράκιον ὄν ἔτι) and Olympias 'an orphaned child' (παιδὸς ὀρφανῆς γονέων) falling in love and 'so' marrying are as follows. Born in 383 or 382, Philip ceased to be a lad by 363/2;⁷ Olympias was orphaned probably in 360;⁸ and the marriage, which Plutarch implies followed quickly⁹ on their meeting in Samothrace, did not take place until 358/7, when Philip was some twenty-five years old. Individual details may have been true (e.g. meeting in Samothrace, falling in love); but the combination of them is certainly false,¹⁰ Arybbas was wrongly described as the brother of Olympias, whereas he was her uncle. Whoever first publicised this false account lacked the knowledge of the Macedonian and Molossian royal houses which was characteristic, for instance, of Hieronymus of Cardia (he died c. 260), and assumed that his readers also were ill-informed. When we try to identify the originator of the false account, we shall look for someone writing after 260, careless of detail and substance, and distrusted by Plutarch (see. p. 9 below).

There are some links between this passage (2.2) and two later passages (9.5–10 and 10.6–7). At 9.5–6 Philip, though

⁶ *HM* II 215 n. 2. He did not give his own reasons but referred the reader to the excellent arguments of H. Strasburger in *RE* 18.1 (1939) 178.

⁷ Hamilton *C* 2f. cites authorities for putting the upper limit at 21 years of age (cf. *PA* 11.6 and *Demosth.* 23.2); Plutarch called Caesar 'a lad' at what he thought to be a similar age (*Caes.* 1.7–2.7).

⁸ So G. N. Cross, *Epirus* (Cambridge, 1932) 37.

⁹ As implied by οὐτως; thus Strasburger loc. cit. 'unmittelbar darauf geschlossen'. The translation by Perrin, 'Philip betrothed himself to her at once' is inaccurate; the literal meaning is 'and so Philip fixed the marriage'.

¹⁰ It has been suggested that Curtius referred to the meeting in reporting Alexander's retorts to Cleitus and others (8.1.26); but Alexander was referring to events after the battle of Chaeronea, and he censured Philip and others for being at the mysteries when they ought to have been invading Asia.

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'beyond the age' for such an affair (in 337 he was forty-five!), fell in love with 'the girl' Cleopatra and married her. This marriage caused quarrels within the women's quarters to spread like an infection into the kingdom, and it led to 'many grievances and great differences which were still further aggravated by the viciousness of Olympias, a jealous and passionate woman, who exacerbated Alexander'. It has to be borne in mind that marrying for love at any level and especially at that of royalty was an aberration: for as Sophocles showed, a man who yields to love 'is mad' (*Antigone* 790). The evil consequences of Philip's mad passion, which had led him to marry Olympias and now Cleopatra, followed rapidly. For in Plutarch's account a dreadful quarrel ensued between Philip and Alexander. In consequence of it Olympias and Alexander left Philip's court (9.11).

But worse was to follow. Cleopatra and her uncle Attalus were responsible for the outrageous treatment of a young man, called Pausanias, who failed to obtain redress (10.6) and assassinated Philip.

Though most of the blame rested with Olympias, who had exhorted and exacerbated the young man, yet a degree of accusation attached also to Alexander. For it is said (λέγεται) that, when Pausanias met Alexander after that outrage and complained to him, Alexander quoted the verse of Medea: 'the giver of the bride, the bridegroom and the bride'.¹¹

The expression 'it is said' had been used of the love-match at 2.2. It shows now, as it did then, that Plutarch doubted the veracity of his source.

Athenaeus, writing towards A.D. 200, has left us a summary of what Plutarch appropriately called Philip's 'marriages and passionate loves' (9.5). Whereas Philip generally married 'with war in view' (we might say with policy in mind, for the Macedonian state was continuously at war),¹² 'he fell in love with Cleopatra, the sister of Hippostratus and the niece of

¹¹ The implication was that Pausanias should kill Attalus, Philip and Cleopatra; and there was the further idea that Alexander's words were prophetic.

¹² I gave this meaning in *HM* II 153. Griffith agreed with me in *HM* II 214 but he translated 'in the course of war' which seems to me mistaken. See L-S-J s.v. *κατά* B III 1.

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Attalus, married her and by bringing her in alongside Olympias ruined his whole life' (557d). The climax was mentioned by Athenaeus at 560c: 'entire households were overturned through women – that of Philip, father of Alexander, through the marriage with Cleopatra'. In other words the marriage with Cleopatra led to the quarrels with Alexander and to the assassination of Philip at the instigation of his wife Olympias, events which Athenaeus did not trouble to report but which are retailed by Plutarch at 9.7–11 and 10.6–7. In both cases Philip's surrender to passionate love was a fatal folly. Olympias brought him the loss of his right eye (3.2); and thereafter Cleopatra (10.6) and Olympias worked on Pausanias until he murdered Philip.

That Plutarch at 2.2, 9.5–10 and 10.6–7 and Athenaeus at 557b–e and 560c were abbreviating drastically a common source which gave a much longer account is certain.¹³ Thus at 10.6 Plutarch's mentions of Pausanias and of his failure to obtain redress are so abbreviated that they are almost unintelligible; and similarly Athenaeus failed to explain how the marriage with Cleopatra proved fatal to the life of Philip. The missing information was no doubt in the common source. We owe to Athenaeus the name of the source: Satyrus, *Life of Philip*, which was written around the middle of the third century B.C. and no longer survives.

We may pause to consider the extent to which Satyrus' account was used by later authors. Plutarch and Athenaeus both liked Satyrus' story of the unseemly quarrel between Attalus and Alexander at the wedding-feast of Philip and Cleopatra (9.7–10, and 557d–e). Justin referred briefly to Philip drawing his sword and chasing Alexander, as an incident arising from Alexander's fears of a rival being considered for the throne (9.7.3–4). Plutarch retailed the throwing of a tankard by Alexander, Philip drawing his sword against his son but tripping and falling in a drunken stupor (9.7–10); Athenaeus had Alexander and Attalus throw tankards at each other but did not mention the fall of Philip (557d–e). The account of

¹³ As I argued in *THA* 87–90.

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Satyrus had already been used by Pompeius Trogus, whose version is indicated in the abbreviated reports of Justin.

Philip marries Olympias, daughter of Neoptolemus, king of the Molossians, the marriage being procured by her cousin on the male side ('fratre patrueli'),¹⁴ the guardian of the virgin,¹⁵ namely Arybbas, king of the Molossians, who was already married to Olympias' sister, Troas. This was the cause of death and of all evils for him; for instead of gaining additional territory through kinship with Philip Arybbas lost his own kingdom and died in exile. (Just 7.6.10–11).

Plutarch simply had Philip 'persuade her brother Arybbas' to agree to the marriage (2.2). Athenaeus had Philip acquire the kingdom of Molossia by marrying Olympias, and he transferred (or repeated) the cliché about marriages leading to disasters to the clash between the two wives, Olympias and Cleopatra (557d and 560c).

The reader of Athenaeus will wonder how the marriage with Cleopatra resulted in the death of Philip. The answer is provided most fully by Justin, the ultimate source being Satyrus, *Life of Philip*. According to him the assassin of Philip, Pausanias, a young Macedonian noble ('nobilis ex Macedonibus adulescens'),¹⁶ had been violently raped in his first years of puberty by Attalus, and at a later date he had been the victim of a dirty trick by Attalus; for he was made drunk at a dinner and was submitted like a male prostitute to the lust of Attalus and Attalus' guests. Thereafter Attalus made him the butt of his contemporaries. Pausanias complained often to Philip, and when he saw his enemy promoted and himself put off 'not without mockery', Pausanias transferred his anger to Philip himself and exacted from the unfair judge the revenge which he was unable to take upon his enemy (9.6.4–8). 'It has been believed', continued Justin, 'that he had been also incited by Olympias, and that Alexander himself had manifestly been not unaware of the plan to kill his father ... the two of them

¹⁴ Arybbas was not a cousin but an uncle of Olympias. Plutarch may have misread the common source, when he called Arybbas the brother of Olympias at 2.2.

¹⁵ This virgin condition was stated for Cleopatra at 9.6, *παρθένον*, where his source was probably Satyrus.

¹⁶ Plutarch at 10.6 called Pausanias a *νεανίσκος*.

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are believed to have impelled Pausanias to commit so great a crime' (9.7.8). The expressions 'creditum est' and 'creduntur' warn us that Justin doubted the veracity of the source. Plutarch was briefer. He mentioned an outrage committed on Pausanias (but without describing what it was), Pausanias' inability to obtain 'justice', Olympias inciting Pausanias, and Pausanias' murder of Philip. Like Justin, Plutarch entered a cautionary phrase, 'it is said', when he went on to incriminate Alexander as being privy to Olympias' plan (10.6–7).

Justin seems, then, to have been totally uncritical in accepting the sensational account of Satyrus, except that he warned us by adding 'creditum est' and 'creduntur' when he wrote of Olympias and Alexander planning the death of Philip. Plutarch showed a doubt about the love story of the young prince and princess when they were being initiated at Samothrace; and he carelessly changed Attalus' relationship from cousin to brother (2.2). He swallowed the full account of the quarrel at the wedding-feast, the drunkenness of Philip, and the exacerbation of Alexander by the evilly jealous Olympias (9.5–10). But he chose to omit the racy account of the sexual assaults on Pausanias and the inattention 'not without mockery' which Philip gave to Pausanias' complaints. Like Justin, Plutarch entered a *caveat* when he came to the suggested complicity of Alexander in the plot to kill Philip; but he seems to have accepted without any reservation the involvement of Olympias as the instigator of Pausanias.

The doubts which Justin and Plutarch expressed about the veracity of their source, Satyrus, on certain points (the love-match at Samothrace, the instigation by Olympias of the assassin Pausanias, and the complicity of Alexander in the plot) were fully justified. Satyrus simply did not know certain facts: the ages of Philip 'the lad' and Olympias 'the orphan' at their supposed love-match in Samothrace, the date of their marriage, the relationship of Arybbas and Olympias, and the age of Pausanias who, as we shall see, was no 'youth'. Satyrus' version of some of the events was more sensational and less likely to be true than that of Diodorus, who was following a

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different source, probably Diyllus.¹⁷ Thus, whereas Satyrus had Attalus rape Pausanias when he was a boy and then after making him drunk organise a gang-rape of Pausanias, in which Attalus himself took the lead, Diodorus gave a different and more detailed story, which ended with the sexual abuse of Pausanias by Attalus' muleteers, Philip's anger at the outrage, Philip's promotion of Pausanias, and Philip's need of the services of Attalus as a general in Asia. The assassination was staged differently by Satyrus and by Diodorus. According to Satyrus there were no Bodyguards ('sine custodibus corporis' in Just. 9.6.3) and Philip was killed in a narrow place (i.e. in the *parodos*) when he was between the two Alexanders. According to Diodorus Philip sent his Friends ahead and entered the *orchestra* alone, his various guards being at some distance from him, and it was one of the Bodyguards, Pausanias, thus a high-ranking officer,¹⁸ who ran forward and killed the king. Of these two accounts that of Diodorus is certainly to be preferred; for it is very detailed and is derived without doubt from an eyewitness.

Satyrus made Pausanias a young lad, a victim of sexual abuse on a grand scale. Diodorus had a young Pausanias (probably a Page) and an older Pausanias, who was promoted to be a Bodyguard (one could not go higher).¹⁹ He provided an account of their relations with Attalus and with the king, mentioned only one instance of sexual abuse (that by Attalus' muleteers), and explained the reasons for the actions which

¹⁷ See my article in *CQ* 31 (1937) 84, 86 and 90 and *THA* 32ff. with n. 20.

¹⁸ In *HM* II 403 Griffith argued that the word 'Bodyguard' was wrongly used of Pausanias and others in Diodorus 16.93.3 and 94.4, and that the error was due to a confused use of the term. But Diodorus is perfectly clear: he applied the term *σωματοφύλαξ* to Pausanias, Leonnatus, Perdikkas and Attalus and the term *δορυφόροι* to the guards who were to stand far off (16.93.1 and 94.3); and the promotion of Pausanias was *κατὰ τὴν σωματοφυλακίαν* and not *κατὰ τὴν δορυφορίαν*. Berve II 233 n. 1 thought that the *Somatophylakes* were Hypaspists; but why did Diodorus not call them that? Berve is followed by J. R. Fears, 'Pausanias, the assassin of Philip II', *Athenaeum* 53 (1975) 115 n. 14. See also *LCM* 4.10 (1979) 215f. and W. Heckel in *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 279f.

¹⁹ According to Diodorus the older Pausanias had once been the favourite of the king, *φίλος γεγωνός* (16.93.3); it was later that he saw another Pausanias in that position. Griffith in *HM* II 684 missed the meaning of the perfect tense of *γεγωνός*, when he wrote of the two Pausanias as rivals for the king's favours.

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Philip took (16.93.3–9). Again the account of Diodorus is far superior to that of Satyrus.

Satyrus, unlike the surviving Alexander-historians, made Olympias and Alexander privy to the plan of Pausanias. Justin doubted the truth of Satyrus' interpretation; Plutarch limited his own doubt to one element in that interpretation, Alexander's complicity. The rest of Satyrus' account of Olympias' participation in the affair, as it is reflected in Justin 9.7.9–11, is utterly fantastic. Olympias provided horses for the assassin's flight, ran to join in the funeral of Philip, put a gold wreath on the head of the crucified Pausanias that very night, cremated Pausanias' corpse, covered the remains with a tumulus and inaugurated annual sacrifices in honour of Pausanias. The placing of the gold wreath was 'something which no one other than she could have done while the son of Philip was alive', the implication being that Alexander, being privy to the plot, let his mother go scot-free. It is evident that Satyrus was writing not history but propaganda, which was as false as it was malicious.

The circumstances under which such propaganda was started are not in doubt. When Olympias engineered the deaths of Philip Arrhidaeus and Eurydice, whose claims had been supported by Cassander, the son of Antipater, Olympias accused Antipater and his sons of having caused the death of Alexander by a deadly poison.²⁰ Plutarch reported that accusation, but he made it clear that he did not believe it to be true (77.1–5; see p. 147 below). When Cassander engineered the death of Olympias in 316 B.C., he circulated the rumour that Olympias had instigated the murder of Philip and had honoured the assassin Pausanias.

Now that we have analysed the sources of these chapters of the *Life* and made comparisons with accounts in other writings we can see that Satyrus was a most untrustworthy author, and that accounts which derived from other sources for the same events are generally to be preferred by the modern historian. Where source-analysis has not been attempted, most

²⁰ See *HM* III 140f.

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scholars have simply felt free to pick and choose such incidents as appealed to them personally and suited their subjective idea of the personalities of Philip and Alexander.²¹ Such an approach is uncritical and unsound.

3. Chapters 9.11 to 10.5

We have seen that Plutarch was drawing on Satyrus for 9.5–10 and for 10.6–7. The question, then, is whether he was using Satyrus for the intervening passage, with which we are now dealing. That he did so for the withdrawal of Olympias to Epirus, and of Alexander to Epirus and thence to Illyria (9.11), is clear from the similar statement in Justin 9.7.6 ('in Epirum cum matre, inde ad reges Illyriorum').²² In 9.12–14 Plutarch reported the persuasion of Philip by Demaratus and the persuasion of Alexander by Demaratus which resulted in the return of Alexander (nothing being said of Olympias). Justin also referred very briefly to the difficulty which attended the reconciliation: 'vixque revocanti mitigatus est patri precibusque cognatorum aegre redire compulsus' (9.7.6). Justin went on to say that Olympias would have engaged her brother Alexander in war against Philip, if Philip had not diverted Alexander by staging the wedding of Alexander and his

²¹ The contemporary and unassailable evidence is that of Aristotle. While listing examples of outrageous treatment (ὑβρίεις) such as killing a ruler, he included 'the attack on Philip by Pausanias for letting Pausanias be outraged by Attalus and company', ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ Ἀττάλον (*Pol.* 1311a33f.). Aristotle was concerned simply to give an example; his aim was not to 'give the lie to the official version that he [Pausanias] was merely a tool of others'. (Brunt *L* 1x). Ellis, accepting Diyllus as the probable source of Diodorus (306 n. 56), nevertheless called it 'the official version' and divided Justin's account into two versions. Macedonia had no Ministry of Information; what was made public was the verdict of the State Court, that two sons of Aëropus had been privy to the plot. Most writers repeat the longer version, that of Diodorus (e.g. Ellis 223), but yield to the temptation of adding a colourful point or two from Justin (e.g. Griffith in *HM* II 684ff. adding Olympias making the journey of return from Epirus 'as fast as the horses could travel', an elaboration of Just. 9.7.10 'ad exequias cucurrisset'). To entertain the idea that Olympias or/and Alexander were privy to the plot, as E. Badian did, for instance, in *Phoenix* 17 (1963) 244ff., is to put faith in passages which we have been warned by Justin and Plutarch not to trust.

²² The plural indicated that there were 'kings' in Illyria and not a single 'king of Illyrians' as F. Papazoglou has maintained; see my article in *BSA* 61 (1966) 239ff.