

# **The Campaigns of Alexander Study Guide**

## **The Campaigns of Alexander by Arrian**

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# Plot Summary

The author of the Campaigns of Alexander writes during the second century AD, about four hundred years after the fact. Arrian's full name is Lucius Flavius Arrianus, aka Xenophon, and he comes from a wealthy Greek family. He is a recognized historical authority on the life and times of Alexander the Great (July 20, 356-June 10, 323 BC). Aubrey de Selincourt translates the book and J.R. Hamilton adds footnotes to clarify and point out certain disputable facts, largely having to do with the names of places, geography and the numbers of troops involved in the battles.

Alexander begins his campaigns after the assassination of his father and he gains the throne of Macedonia. At twenty years of age, Alexander enlists as many Greeks as he can for his first set of adventures, quelling all opposition to him before making his way to Asia.

While in Asia, Alexander conquers city after city, fortress after fortress. He defeats the main Persian army in a battle famous for his tactical brilliance. In Egypt he is crowned a Pharaoh, which leads to Alexander's delusions of grandeur. He considers himself a god, which is against the ancient religion of the Greeks. Despite this flaw, Alexander founds Alexandria in Egypt, which is still a thriving and vibrant city.

Extending his empire as far as he can, Alexander takes on India. There he meets significant resistance, but he prevails on every challenge. Three mountain strongholds considered unconquerable fall to the Macedonians. However, Alexander's troops grow weary of the constant movement and fighting. They ask to go home, and Alexander capitulates when the signs from the gods turn out negative.

Alexander sails a massive flotilla down the Indus River to the Indian Ocean. He then marches across a terrible desert that results in many deaths along the way. Finally back in his empire, Alexander explores and tries to govern his empire. He takes to drinking heavily, and due to a fever, dies in Babylon. Speculation exists that he may have been poisoned.

The lands that Alexander conquers extend from the northern part of Greece to modern Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, parts of Africa and India. No other military leader had ever accomplished as much, and for this reason alone Alexander is remembered. However, he did try to spread Greek culture throughout the world as well and is also remembered for this. The historian Arrian concentrates on the military aspect, and he is the first author in history to do this. Arrian's work is considered highly accurate from the military perspective.

# Book 1

## Book 1 Summary and Analysis

The author of the Campaigns of Alexander writes during the second century AD, about four hundred years after the fact. Arrian's full name is Lucius Flavius Arrianus, aka Xenophon, and he comes from a wealthy Greek family. He is a recognized historical authority on the life and times of Alexander the Great. Aubrey de Selincourt translates the book and J.R. Hamilton adds footnotes to clarify and point out certain disputable facts, largely having to do with the names of places, geography and the numbers of troops involved in the battles.

Arrian sets out to give the most accurate account of Alexander's campaigns in his time and challenges his readers to first examine the works of Ptolemy and Aristobulus, two contemporaries of Alexander, before passing judgment on Arrian's account. The logic behind this is that Arrian sees no reason for either Ptolemy, involved in most of the battles, or Aristobulus to have lied because Alexander had already died when they wrote their histories. No higher authority existed who might have demand changes to the texts.

In 336 B.C., Philip of Macedon dies at the hand of an assassin named Pausanias. The circumstances of the murder are murky—assassin might have been put up to the task by Philip's son, Alexander, and the king's estranged wife, Olympias. In any case, Alexander ascends to the throne of ancient Macedonia, located north of Athens, at about twenty years of age. Alexander's first action as king is to gather as many Greeks as he can to build an army. His intention is to start a campaign against the Persian Empire, which had been trying to conquer all of Greece for generations. Athens at first resists Alexander's plan but goes along with it when his new army approaches. The next spring Alexander marches toward Thrace, which lies directly east of Macedonia, to quell any possible uprising while his army is off fighting the Persians. The Thracians put up resistance, but Alexander's superior forces win the first battle for control of Thrace. His primary tactic involves the use of archers to keep the enemy in place until the heavy infantry can make their formations and attack. The primary weapon of the Macedonian heavy infantry is a long pike. The phalanx consists of four lines of men, with the back lines resting their pikes upon the shoulders of the front lines. This creates a phalanx that bristles with deadly blades.

A second battle involves Thracians and their neighbors, the Triballians. Alexander must retrace his steps to engage the enemy. He does this so quickly that he catches the enemy on the banks of a river and camping in deep woods. Here Alexander draws them out of the woods into the open with archers and slingers. Alexander then attacks the enemy's flanks with cavalry and its center with a combination of cavalry and infantry. Three thousand enemy fall, while Alexander's army suffers only fifty-five men killed.

Three days later Alexander arrives at the Danube River. His first plan is to cross the river to Pine Island, where more of the Thracians and Triballians have taken refuge, by way of ships that have sailed from the Black Sea to meet him. Landing on the island proves too difficult, but 50,000 Getae troops that have gathered on the opposite bank draw his attention. Using all available craft including fishing boats, Alexander crosses with 1,500 cavalry and 4,000 infantrymen at night.

In the morning Alexander orders his infantry to make a long phalanx line and attacks. Just the fact that Alexander and a part of his army have crossed the Danube unseen upsets the Getae army. The sight of a long infantry phalanx strikes them with fear, and a violent cavalry charge sends them running to their town, four miles away. Alexander pushes on to the town. The Getae people run into uninhabited territory, and Alexander gains the town without a fight, takes anything of value, and burns it down. He and the army camp on the Danube that evening. Alexander makes sacrifices to Zeus and Heracles (Hercules). The young king is strongly connected to the ancient Greek religion and has trust in the soothsayers.

Alexander's victories cause the Triballians, Celts and other tribes in the area to seek out his friendship. His army gains strength from offered troops. Resistance does come from Glaucias, king of the Taulantians, and Alexander attempts to take the town of Pelium. Outnumbered by the enemy, Alexander puts his infantry through impressive drills, which shakes the enemy, and then has the phalanx move forward for the attack. The enemy retreats to the town. Alexander then withdraws his troops while Glaucias follows, but not within range of Alexander's archers. A few days later Alexander catches the army of Glaucias by surprise and attacks at night. The enemy that survives the first attack scatters throughout the countryside.

Meanwhile Thebes, which is to the north and west of Athens, goes into rebellion against Alexander. This threatens to spread across Greece, so he must take action. The Thebans are not aware of Alexander's approach until his army is only six miles away. Upon reaching Thebes, Alexander surrounds the city and waits for the Thebans to abandon their rebellion. One of Alexander's officers loses patience and attempts to break into the city, but the Thebans repel the attack. When Alexander sees his troops being chased away, he orders the mass of his army to attack. The Thebans panic, run into their city, and in the chaos they forget to close the gates. Alexander's army enters the town and defeats the Thebans, but a general massacre of the population follows, including women and children. The horror of this debacle shakes up everyone in Greece to the point where they must transfer the responsibility onto the gods.

After conditions in Greece settle down, Alexander begins his Asian campaign by heading toward Hellespont (Dardanelles), a narrow straight between the Aegean Sea and the inland Sea of Marmara, with an army of 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. Using 160 triremes and merchant ships, the army crosses, and Alexander immediately constructs an altar on the Asian side. He travels to Troy to make sacrifices and to trade his armor for weapons from the Trojan War, which he plans to use as good luck charms, and meets with his army at Arisbe. They begin their march into Asia with the town of

Priapus surrendering without a fight. The first Asian battle takes place at the Granicus River against Persian and mercenary troops.

At first the battle does not go well for the Macedonians, but Alexander charges the cavalry right into the Persians. A close-quarters cavalry battle ensues that resembles the tactics of infantry warfare, and this enables the infantry to gain the river bank. In short order the Macedonians push the Persians back until the enemy breaks and runs.

Alexander next liberates Sardis in Lydia and Ephesus near the coast. The towns of Magnesia and Tralles also voluntarily submit to Alexander because they consider him to be a liberator of the Greeks conquered earlier by the Persians. Alexander ensures the liberation of Lade by anchoring his fleet in the harbor and assigning land troops to fend off any Persian attacks. He then takes Miletus by force. An omen in the shape of an eagle is interpreted for Alexander to mean that he will conquer Asia by land forces, not the navy, so he disbands his fleet to save money. The omen turns out to be true. By taking all the port towns along the coast, Alexander renders the Persian navy useless because it has no friendly ports from which to replenish ship supplies and crews.

At Halicarnassus Alexander encounters a port town that is heavily fortified with Persian and mercenary troops. A siege begins that stretches over several days. The Macedonians press the walls of the city with siege engines, and small battles wage outside the city gates. The Persians decide that the city will soon fall, set it on fire and attempt escape. Alexander orders pursuit and to kill those running from the city while sparing any found within, unless they are caught setting fires.

After securing the coastal towns in Lycia and Pamphylia to the east, Alexander moves northward into Phrygia. The town of Aspendus surrenders and pays tribute to Alexander in the form of 50 talents of silver and horses intended to be paid as tribute to Darius, the Persian king. A talent is the largest measurement of ancient Greek coin, equal to about 50 pounds sterling.

The people of Sagalassus, known as Pisidians, put up weak resistance. Their defense, comprised of nothing but archers with no armor, run away from the Macedonian heavy infantry. Alexander encounters a few other such Pisidian towns that resist on his way to Gordium. Others surrender without a fight.

# Book 2

## Book 2 Summary and Analysis

In Gordium Alexander ponders the Gordian Knot, which ties a cart to a yoke and has a legend around it. If anyone can untie the knot, that person will become the ruler of Asia. Alexander cannot find a way to untie it, so he takes out his sword and cuts through the knot. Another story has Alexander simply removing a pin that releases the cart from the yoke. While this goes on, Darius tries to establish ports in the Aegean Sea, which is only partially successful.

As the Macedonian army makes a large arch through Asia to Tarsus, towns either surrender without a fight or give up plans for fighting as Alexander approaches. Some Persians take off for Darius' court. Alexander becomes ill during this time and receives a note warning him not to trust his physician, Philip. Allegedly Darius had bribed Philip to poison Alexander. Undisturbed by the warning note, Alexander reads it aloud to Philip as he prepares a healing potion. The medicine works—Alexander fully recovers.

At Soli on his way to the Syrian Gates (Beilan Pass through the Amanus Mountains), Alexander fines the town 200 talents in punishment for their support of the Persians. He receives a dispatch informing him that Macedonian troops had secured Halicarnassus and surrounding towns from the Persians. To celebrate this good news, Alexander conducts athletic games, contests in music and poetry and makes sacrifices to the gods. This is his customary celebration for significant gains while building his empire.

Alexander learns that Darius with the entire Persian army is at Sochi, only two days away. He hastens to cross the Syrian Gates, but inclement weather slows him down. Darius has been waiting for Alexander to appear for quite some time. The plain near Sochi is ideal for a cavalry battle, and Darius is sure that fighting Alexander there will result in a quick Persian victory. However, Darius takes poor advice and moves his troops onto less favorable ground near Issus, a port city on the Mediterranean coast. A Macedonian galley spots the Persians moving into the area and reports back to Alexander. Alexander gives his troops a pep talk before heading out to engage Darius.

The Macedonians must file through the Syrian Gates in a narrow line, and by Alexander's orders, at night. As they leave the Gates during the next morning, the terrain widens out so that Alexander can create battalion formations of his heavy infantry and place his cavalry strategically as he approaches the Persian army. The battlefield consists of flat land between the Mediterranean Sea and coastal mountains and is from one to two miles wide. The lines of both armies extend this distance. Alexander detects weakness on his right flank and surreptitiously increases the cavalry squadrons there. When nearly in striking distance, Alexander halts the advance and rides up and down the front of his line, giving encouragement to his troops. Darius does not attempt an attack.



The Macedonian army advances slowly but deliberately until within arrow range. Alexander then leads the charge. Immediately the Persian left flank collapses under the Macedonian right flank that Alexander reinforced before the charge. The Macedonian left has more difficulty, but the right flank cavalry, having put the Persian left on the run, rides up to give aid. Persian cavalry join the fray, but soon the battle outcome is clear. The Macedonians, even though seriously outnumbered, have in short time routed the Persian forces. Darius flees the battlefield, leading the retreat.

Alexander captures Darius' headquarters, including the royal Persian family and its attendants. Three thousand talents are seized from the royal tent, and a dispatch of troops are sent to Damascus to take the rest of Darius' treasure. Alexander extends to the royal family the privileges of their former stations, for which they express gratitude. Darius later sends a letter to Alexander asking for his family back and offering to be allies. Alexander refuses the offer and promises to hunt down the defeated Persian king.

The island fortress of Tyre presents a formidable problem for Alexander. He must take the city in order to secure Egypt, but a good portion of ocean separates it from the mainland. He decides to build a mole in the shallowest part of the ocean, upon which he can bring up his siege engines. Work begins but the Tyrians conduct raids that make further progress impossible. Alexander has two defensive towers built on the mole to protect the workers. This strategy is successful until the Tyrians manage to burn down the towers using a flaming cattle boat. Undefeated, Alexander continues to build the mole even wider to support more towers and siege engines.

Through the use of his navy, since built up with Persian loot, Alexander finally manages to finish the mole and bring the siege engines to bear. A small breach in the wall leads to a landing of troops and the taking of the city. Some of the population seeks refuge at the temple of Heracles. Alexander grants freedom to these people and sells the others off as slaves.

Darius sends an offer of 10,000 talents for the return of his family and suggests that Alexander marry Darius' daughter, thus joining the two kingdoms. Alexander flat refuses. He writes back that he already owns all of Asia and its treasures, and if he wants to marry the daughter of Darius, he will do so with or without father's consent. Upon receiving this snub, Darius begins rebuilding his army.

Alexander decides to lay siege on Gaza, which requires the building of fifty-foot high earthworks for the siege engines. His reasoning is that if he does not conquer the most difficult cities, his prestige will fall among the Persians and Greeks. The siege works and the city is taken, but all the defenders fight to the death. Alexander sells the surviving women and children into slavery.



# Book 3

## Book 3 Summary and Analysis

Alexander's next destination is Egypt, which he enters with no resistance. The former Persian governor of Egypt had been killed at Issus. He orders his fleet to sail up the Nile to Memphis while he marches to Heliopolis. All of Egypt surrenders without a fight. The games that Alexander offers in celebration attract the best performers from Greece. He returns to the Nile delta area and founds the city of Alexandria, which is known as the Pearl of the Mediterranean today.

News of further Macedonian good fortune arrives. Several island and mainland cities have voluntarily come over to the Macedonian side. Flush with victory, Alexander decides to visit the oracle of Ammon in Libya, having been crowned a Pharaoh in Thebes. Pharaohs are considered to be sons of Ammon, originally a tribal god depicted as a ram and later as a man with the horns of a ram growing out of his head. This also ties into Alexander's desire to become a god by outdoing his ancestors, Perseus and Heracles.

The shrine of Ammon stands among olive trees and date palms on an oasis surrounded by desert wilderness. The priest at the shrine greets Alexander as the son of Ammon, since he is a Pharaoh, and supposedly Alexander hears from the oracle what he wants to hear. Exactly what this might have been is unknown, although other historians have given accounts which are suspected to be fabrications.

In the spring, after reorganizing the government of Egypt, Alexander heads into the interior again north and east of Alexandria. He arrives in Thapsacus near the headwaters of the Euphrates River by August, crosses over bridges recently constructed for this purpose, and arrives at Gaugamela on the other side of the Tigris River. Here he encounters Darius and the refortified Persian army.

The two armies prepare for battle over the course of a few days. Alexander has the battlefield reconnoitered for possible hidden trenches and traps, but the Persian army has merely worked to level the land to allow better cavalry and chariot maneuvering. The two massive armies face each other for battle.

Alexander first attacks the Persian left flank with cavalry. The Macedonians being outnumbered and less heavily armored, the attack is repulsed but this still breaks the Persian line. Then the Persians send out their chariots in a charge doomed to failure. The Macedonian javelin-throwers kill the horses, and the rest of the line simply makes way for any chariots that get through. The Persians bring up their main body of infantry while Alexander continues to attack the Persian left flank. This draws the left side even further away from the main line, and Alexander sees his opportunity. He drives a wedge of cavalry and whatever infantry is nearby into the gap, thus surrounding a portion of the

Persian main line. Pandemonium ensues and Darius once again is the first to turn tail and run.

The Macedonian left flank runs into trouble. Persian cavalry breaks through to the pack animals and handlers, where many unarmed men who did not expect the double-strength left flank to break die. A part of the Macedonian line turns around and attacks the Persians from the rear, killing many while others gallop for the hills. However, the left flank continues to fail. Alexander and his cavalry, in hot pursuit of the retreating parts of the Persian army, receives word of the trouble and cuts off to help. A vicious cavalry battle develops, where fighting for survival pushes away any thoughts of victory. Nevertheless, Alexander wins the battle as the entire surviving Persian army runs away.

The next day Alexander takes up the chase for Darius again. He finds the Persian king's treasure in Arbela, seventy-five miles to the south, but no sign of Darius. Alexander then orders his army, now richer with Persian booty, southward to Babylon, which surrenders without a fight, as does the next town, Susa. Here Alexander finds more Persian treasure and spoils from the Persian sacking of Athens.

Near the Persian Gates Alexander encounters resistance from the local tribes known as the Uxians. The Uxians demand payment for safe passage, but Alexander refuses. He marches part of his army by night to the other side of the Uxian forces by way of an alternative route, surrounds and defeats them. He then charges the survivors annual tributes of horses, mules and sheep in exchange for letting them stay on their tribal lands.

Alexander encounters more resistance at the Persian Gates, and this proves to be a harder situation. Local Persians have amassed in the pass, and the Macedonians cannot force their way through. Prisoners inform Alexander of another way through that is a very narrow and difficult trail. He again marches a part of his forces by night to the Persian rear and defeats them. He then presses onward to Persepolis and Pasargadae. At Pasargadae he burns down the Persian palace out of revenge for the invasion of Greece.

Hearing of Darius' whereabouts, Alexander chases the greatly weakened Persian army northward. Many of the Persian troops drop out of the army as Darius runs away from Alexander. Alexander's men also suffer during the chase, and so his forces diminish as well. However, a relative of Darius' by the name of Bessus arrests the king in the hope that Alexander will offer better deals when he catches up. This does not work out so well for Darius. Just as Alexander is about to find the Persian king, the few remaining troops kill him and run away. This happens in July of 330 BC.

Bessus starts rebuilding the Persian army in the Bactra region, about which Alexander hears. After quelling a plot against his life, Alexander goes after Bessus, who has declared himself the new king of Persia. The chase leads into India and the Oxus River. Alexander's army crosses the river by sewing tent skins into flotation bladders. The crossing takes five days. Meanwhile the army of Bessus dwindles when the troops understand that he is only running away, not fighting. Some of the remaining men betray

Bessus and offer him to Alexander. Alexander has Bessus whipped and plans to have him executed.

# Book 4

## Book 4 Summary and Analysis

Alexander runs into resistance from seven towns, the largest being Cyropolis which is populated by a people known as Scythians. He takes all seven towns without much difficulty and begins to fortify one in order to make it another Alexandria, of which there are many founded during his empire-building campaigns. A large number of Scythians gather at the nearby Tanais River and taunt Alexander. Even though the omens are against taking action, Alexander attacks. The fighting is brief and the Macedonians win decisively, but Alexander drinks tainted water which causes him to fall ill with dysentery.

The Scythians, egged on by those who had helped Bessus in his bid to replace Darius, continue to attack but never gain an advantage. Alexander eventually arrests all the offenders. He calls for Bessus, and before sending him away to be executed, has his nose and the tips of his ears cut off.

Having taken to drinking heavily, Alexander finds himself in a drunken argument with Cetius, a friend from childhood, over who has done the better fighting along the way. Alexander becomes very angry and kills Cetius, an act for which he is immediately regretful. For three days Alexander mourns until one of the soothsayers suggests sacrificing to the god Dionysus. After this Alexander returns to his routines, but his notions about being a god become stronger. He wants people to prostrate themselves in his presence, which angers the Macedonians. One of them, a man named Callisthenes, delivers a lengthy argument on why Alexander cannot be considered a god while he still lives. Because Callisthenes' speech agrees with what the other Macedonians think, Alexander drops the idea of prostration. He later finds a reason to kill Callisthenes by connecting him to another assassination plot.

A large number of troublesome natives take refuge at a place called the Rock of Sogdiana. Alexander vows to take the rock because taking it will crush any further resistance in the region. The Rock turns out to be a mountain with sheer cliffs on every side and capped with snow. Alexander offers terms of surrender, but all he gets is a taunting reply that he needs to find soldiers with wings.

Three hundred soldiers with mountain climbing experience volunteer to conquer the Rock. They take strong ropes and iron tent stakes to act as pitons. Although some of the men fall to their deaths, the majority make the climb at night and attain the summit by dawn. The unexpected sight of Macedonians atop the Rock alarms the natives. They imagine a much larger force coming up the mountain and immediately surrender. A short time later Alexander takes another mountain fortress that is supposed to be invincible, the Rock of Chorienes. This involves a march up a narrow, steep trail and the filling of a ravine with rocks. Alexander works his men in two shifts, half during the day and half at night. The enemy tries to use archers against Alexander's troops, but they erect screens and the work continues. Finally the leader of the natives, named

Chorienes, surrenders to Alexander, thus establishing a reputation that no place in the world is safe from the Macedonians.

Marching deeper into India, Alexander meets significant resistance at the foot of a range of mountains near. A force of Indians that vastly outnumbers the Macedonians advance toward them. The Indians do not fare well, even when fighting from high ground. Alexander wins and marches onward. The town of Massaga puts up a stronger fight with 7,000 Indian mercenary troops. Alexander attacks with siege engines and towers for four days, and when the city is about to be taken, the Indians surrender.

Another supposedly unconquerable place, the Rock of Aornos, gains Alexander's attention. Through local guides he determines that part of his forces should take and stockade a piece of land partway up the mountain, then signal Alexander when the job is done. The Indians attack both the forward position and Alexander as he tries to join the two forces. After much fighting, he accomplishes this. The next part of the siege involves building earthworks to the town walls, and the successful completion of this convinces the Indians that the town is doomed. They try to retreat, but Alexander pursues them, killing many. Others jump off cliffs to their deaths rather than face the Macedonians.

# Book 5

## Book 5 Summary and Analysis

Alexander arrives at the Indus River. He builds a bridge out of boats and planks. The boats, anchored with their prows pointing up river and lashed together side-to-side, form the basic bridge. Then planking is laid across the boats to make a stable bridgework, and railings give a greater sense of stability for the animals that cross.

When Alexander enters the town of Taxiles, he receives gifts and learns that a local king named Porus intends to stop the Macedonian army from crossing the Hydaspes River. Alexander orders his men to disassemble the bridge just made in order to cross the Hydaspes in the boats.

Facing Porus across the river, Alexander splits his forces and has them march around to keep Porus guessing what the Macedonians might be planning. The enemy at first tries to follow the movements, but then gives up trying and simply posts lookouts up and down the river. This is exactly what Alexander wants Porus to do.

At a part of the river out of sight from the main enemy force, Alexander selects a likely crossing site. He positions his forces for easy communication among them and to cross the river at the enemy's current position once the battle upriver draws away Porus and his army. At night the initial crossing troops make floats out of skins and straw during a rainstorm that conceals their preparations from the lookouts. The next morning the rain clears and the crossing begins. Porus' lookouts see the Macedonians in the river and ride off with the news.

Alexander first encounters Porus' son with 2,000 cavalry and 140 chariots. The Macedonian cavalry charge scares away the first wave of Indians while killing 400, among them Porus' son. Porus responds by marching toward Alexander with his entire army. He prepares his troops for battle on firm ground suitable for cavalry maneuvers. He places his elephants at intervals, not expecting the Macedonian cavalry to attack the gaps due to how horses become uncontrollable when near elephants. While Porus does this, Alexander allows his troops to rest after their river crossing and subsequent march.

When Alexander attacks, he puts his mounted archers against the Indian left flank followed by cavalry charges. This forces Porus to split his troops to protect the left side. The force of the Macedonian attacks push the Indians backward into their elephants, and thus starts the unraveling of Porus' battle plan. He had expected a frontal assault to the middle, not a flanking maneuver. Then the frontal assault does come while the Indian line falls into disarray. The elephants soon find themselves boxed in by friend and foe, and they do about equal damage to both as the Macedonians jab at elephant eyes with their long pikes. The Indian elephants turn away and begin trampling only the Indians while Alexander's javelin-throwers pour heavy fire onto the elephants' backs. When the elephants become weary and move about listlessly, Alexander surrounds the

force. Meanwhile the Macedonians left on the original riverbank position cross over and provide fresh troops. The Indians suffer tremendous losses.

Porus demonstrates that he is a much better warrior and leader than Darius had been. He fights up until the battle becomes hopeless, and wounded in the right shoulder, then rides away on his elephant. Alexander rides up to Porus, and with great admiration asks what the defeated king might want. Porus answers that he wants to be treated as a king ought to be, and this is his only desire. Alexander gives Porus his kingdom back. The month is May in the year 326 BC.

Alexander moves deeper into India. He receives word that one of the towns he liberated in Asia has revolted, so he sends back some troops to restore order. Indian towns either give up without a fight or put up relatively weak resistance as he moves on. However, his men become weary with the constant movement and fighting. Many do not want to go any further into India. At this point Alexander delivers another pep talk.

He opens with a statement of the problem that some of the troops want to go home, while Alexander wants to push on. A list of significant conquests follow with an emphasis that this is Macedonian power, not just Alexander's, and besides, the towns fall with hardly any effort now. He then ensures the men that the end of war is near. Alexander just wants to see the great ocean that surrounds all the world, as Aristotle, Alexander's childhood tutor, taught him. Next comes a warning. If the Macedonians quit now before the whole job is finished, they risk losing everything they have earned so far. He wraps up by telling his men that he has shared in just as many hardships and deprivations as they have.

A long silence ensues. Finally an officer named Coenus speaks up. He recaps Alexander's main points and then speaks for the common soldiers, not as an officer. Coenus points out that few of the original Macedonians and allies who set out with Alexander at the beginning are alive today. The men miss their families terribly, Coenus pleads, and asserts that leading unwilling men is unwise. He suggests that Alexander return home with the riches already gained, and if he so desires, raise a new army of fresher and younger men. Coenus closes with an appeal to know when to stop and not press luck too far.

Alexander's officers applaud and some weep. Resenting what Coenus had said, Alexander dismisses all his officers. Angrily the next day, he declares to his officers that they can go home if they want. Alexander will forge on ahead. He tells them that he can find plenty of others wanting to conquer the world, and in a final huff, he tells them that they are deserting their king. He then retires to his tent and sulks alone for a few days in the hope that the officers and men will change their minds. This manipulative tactic fails.

Alexander turns to the seers and sacrifices to the gods, hoping to receive good omens for moving onward. All the omens look bad, so he decides to return home. Celebrations follow, the men praise Alexander, and preparations are made to leave the area.



# Book 6

## Book 6 Summary and Analysis

The return home involves taking the Hydaspes River to the Indian Ocean. The flotilla consists of galleys and barges for horses and makes a strong impression on the Indians as it sails down the river at dawn. Alexander stops every so often to handle any native resistance along the way. A portion of his force follows along the riverbank on foot.

The flotilla encounters rapids at the junction with the Acesines River. This frightens both the men and horses, and although the crafts turn about in the eddies, the river is deep enough that most are not damaged. Alexander waits past the rapids to collect wreckage and survivors from the less fortunate boats.

Aware that a people called the Mallians plan to resist Alexander, he takes a portion of his troops to a town where many of the Mallians have taken refuge. Alexander approaches from a waterless desert region, thus surprising the Mallians. The Macedonians take the town with little trouble, as they do subsequent Mallian strongholds and towns until reaching a particular stronghold. Here Alexander gets into a tight spot. He stands on the wall with a few of his guards and decides to jump into the town. The ensuing fight wounds Alexander seriously. He takes an arrow in the upper chest that pierces a lung. His guards fight hard to protect him while the rest of the Macedonians surge in to protect their king and take the town.

While recovering from his wound, Alexander assures his men that he is still alive and kicking by being carried out to a barge where he can be seen. Once strong enough to travel again, Alexander heads to the Indus River. He encounters some resistance on the way to the Indian Ocean, but nothing that cannot be put down quickly. Upon making the delta area of the Indus River, he finds a suitable island for anchorage, and then seeks out a passage to the Indian Ocean.

While on the ocean Alexander sacrifices to the gods before returning to his main body of troops. He tries another branch of the Indus to see if it is easier going than the first, and it proves to be so. He finds an extensive lake of brackish water where many deep sea creatures live. The monsoon season arrives, which is not good weather for sea travel. Alexander decides to take his troops westward across land, paralleling the coastline. He digs wells along the way to provide for the fleet once the monsoon season ends.

The natives encountered along the way make moves as if to resist, but once they see the Macedonians, they reconsider and surrender without a fight. On the way to Gedrosia Alexander encounters a desert that becomes very hard on his troops. Many drop out of the line like sailors being lost at sea, never to be seen again. Most of the animals die along the way, many slaughtered for food. As they approach Gedrosia, Alexander camps near a small stream. This turns out to be a big mistake. Monsoon



rains in the mountains far away create a flash flood, killing the camp followers and the rest of the animals.

The suffering troops finally arrive at Gedrosia, where they take a rest while Alexander adjusts the political situation there. He then moves on to Carmania and joins up with the rest of his army. Alexander's admiral shows up to report on the navel voyage along the coast. Alexander orders him to take the fleet to the mouth of the Tigris River. He then visits the tomb of Cyrus, which has been plundered of all its riches. This disturbs Alexander, so he replaces all the riches.

# Book 7

## Book 7 Summary and Analysis

Back in his Asian empire, Alexander considers sailing down the Tigris River and conquering more lands. Historians speculate as to what extent his ambitions might have been during this time. Alexander does not live long enough to carry them out, but his concerns over the rising Romans are known to be true.

At Susa Alexander holds wedding ceremonies for his men and takes a wife himself, Darius' oldest daughter, Barsine. He gives wedding presents to 10,000 of his men who marry Asian women and pays off their debts. The men at first refuse to accept the debt payments, but Alexander makes it easier for them. He sets up a table and orders the clerks to accept the IOUs of the men without taking down their names.

Shortly before this period, Alexander begins wearing Persian clothing and learns to speak the language. This upsets the Macedonians as they discover this change in their king. An additional contentious point develops when Alexander adds Persians to previously all-Macedonian military units.

This comes to a head at Opis, where Alexander announces the retirement of the veteran Macedonians due to age or disablements. He promises them generous compensation for their service, but the men take great offense at this action and openly express themselves. This in turn angers Alexander. He executes thirteen of his men whom he considers the ringleaders of rebellion. He then goes into one of his long speeches.

Alexander reminds the men how his father brought them up from impoverished herdsmen and craftsmen to be soldiers in the greatest army in the world. He then recounts the greatness of the Asian campaign and all that has been conquered. Reminding the men that he has taken little compensation for his own trouble and has suffered as they have suffered, he goes on to reject them out of hand. He then removes himself and sulks in his tent for a few days.

During this time the Macedonians feel shocked at Alexander's rejection. They plead for his forgiveness, and touched by their repentance, he listens to their main complaint. The men are hurt because he has made Persians his kinsmen. Alexander assures them that they are his kinsmen too, and this raises the Macedonians' spirits. Alexander makes sacrifices and throws a big banquet for the men. Afterwards he lets the men volunteer to return home if they want, pays them for their service and travel time, and throws in a talent for each as a bonus.

The next problem Alexander faces has nothing to do with military tactics or managing his troops. His mother, Olympias, keeps stirring up trouble with her desires to influence everything and everybody. Her headstrong ways become too much for a friend of

Alexander's named Antipater. Just how this conflict is defused is not clear because a page of the original history is missing, but Alexander decides to go on a journey.

Having heard that a rebellion has taken place to the east, Alexander marches there and takes care of the problem. On his way back to Babylon, he receives warnings from wise men that something bad will happen to him there. Alexander considers this but has no recourse but to continue. Nothing bad happens to him in the city, so he dismisses the warnings. Alexander goes with part of his navy to explore, takes care of various small projects and exercises, and returns to Babylon and his death.

Alexander the Great does not die from an arrow or spear. Illness takes him down. This starts with a bout of drinking and feasting that goes on for days, and then a fever hits him that lays him up for a long time. Alexander never recovers, but before he dies he acknowledges all the troops who come to visit him one last time. His date of death is June 10, 323 BC. at the age of thirty-two.

Conspiracy theories arise in his wake. Some claim that Alexander was poisoned due to political intrigues. Alexander may have been a magnificent general, but he seemed to have a difficult time governing his empire. He may have unwittingly made too many enemies. Be that as it may, he managed to conquer more of the known world than any other person before him, and for this he is remembered as a remarkable figure in world history.



# Characters

## Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great is born to Philip of Macedonia on July 20, 356 BC., and his mother is Olympias. He takes the kingship of Macedonia in his twentieth year after Philip is assassinated. This leads to the building of an army consisting of Macedonian and other Greek troops that Alexander leads during his campaigns to conquer much of the known world.

The ambitions of Alexander include the conquering of the Persian Empire and places as far east as the Indus River. He successfully defeats the Persian king, Darius. He takes mountain strongholds in India considered unconquerable. Alexander fights as a ruthless enemy if resisted, but a generous and compassionate leader when he considers the resistance to be honorable. Many of his conquests involve no violence as regions simply allow him to take over. Other situations bring violence to the extreme, where he orders the death of men, women and children.

Alexander follows his religion of the day and even considers himself a living god. He sacrifices to the gods regularly and holds both athletic and literary contests after each significant gain in his ambition to rule the world. He also takes to drinking heavily, which may have resulted in his premature death at the age of thirty-two in 323 BC.

The name of Alexander both terrifies and earns the deep admiration of the ancient world. He founds many cities along the way, the most remarkable being Alexandria, Egypt. This indicates the brilliant military tactician also has other visions, probably instilled by Aristotle, his childhood tutor. Alexander believes the Greek culture is superior to all other cultures in the world. He not only desires to conquer the world but to make it a better place to live for everyone. The city of Alexandria lives on to this day as the Pearl of the Mediterranean, and so does the legacy of Alexander the Great.

## Darius

Darius is the king of Persia and the leader of the Persian Empire. He confronts Alexander personally in two battles, one near the port town of Issus and another at Gaugamela on the Tigris River. The encounters prove disastrous for the Persian army. Darius ends up fleeing from the battle field both times.

The military tactical abilities of Darius cannot withstand the brilliance of Alexander, nor the aggressive attacks of the cavalry and heavy infantry, even when the Persians have the upper hand in deciding the battlefield and outnumber the Macedonians. The defeated king might even admire Alexander for the good treatment the Macedonian affords to the captured royal family. Alexander wants to capture Darius after the second battle, but he runs away with a band of treacherous Persians lead by Bessus. When

Alexander draws near, Bessus and the others kill Darius in the hope that Alexander will not kill them.

The trouble with this thinking is that Alexander considers Darius to be a political equal, although an inferior general. The death of Darius is avenged as Alexander captures Bessus, humiliates him and orders his execution.

## **Philip of Macedonia**

Philip of Macedonia is Alexander's father and king of Macedonia at his birth until Philip's assassination twenty years later. Philip is credited with bringing the Greek city-states together into a semblance of a modern nation, although it will take many more generations before this becomes common in the world. During his time, cooperation is gained by the might of armies and the tactical skill of officers. He leaves Alexander with the potential to build an army strong enough to liberate the Asian Greek city-states. Alexander takes this several steps further and conquers much of the known world.

## **Olympias**

Olympias is Alexander's mother. She is a very feisty and politically involved wife to Philip, and rumored to sleep with a large snake. She is also known to dance wildly during religious ceremonies. Olympias becomes a problem for Alexander after his campaigns. He famously comments that his mother requires too much rent for the time he spent in her womb. Olympias is responsible for turning powers against each other in Greece, and Alexander receives word of this. He does what he can to smooth out the homeland politics, but dies in Babylon before he can return to Greece.

## **Glaucias**

Glaucias is the king of the Taulantians, one of the first rulers to encounter Alexander as he begins his conquests. Alexander's troops, although outnumbered, strike fear into the troops that Glaucias commands by performing impressively disciplined drills. The Taulantians retreat to inside their city, but then follow Alexander's troops as they withdraw. Alexander surprises Glaucias with a night attack. The surviving enemy soldiers scatter across the countryside.

## **Bessus**

After the defeat of the Persian army, Bessus takes off with Darius and runs from Alexander. He kills Darius as Alexander comes near in the hope that Alexander will not kill Bessus. However, Alexander presses on to capture Bessus after hearing that he has declared himself the new ruler of Persia. Alexander eventually catches Bessus, whips him, cuts off his nose and ear tips, and sends him away to be executed.

## **Cetius**

Cetius is a friend of Alexander's from childhood and part of the Macedonian army. During a drinking bout with Alexander and others, Cetius begins bragging about his mighty powers as a soldier. He even goes so far as to claim he saved Alexander's life. Angry and drunk, Alexander kills Cetius, then immediately regrets this action. Alexander mourns for days over losing his childhood friend by his own hand.

## **Callisthenes**

Callisthenes runs afoul of Alexander in a different way. Alexander decides he is a living god and wants those in his presence to prostrate themselves. Callisthenes argues that Alexander cannot possibly be a god. Living people cannot be gods, because gods are not of the earth. After people die they might become gods though, and this is the whole point of Callisthenes' argument. Alexander takes great offense and later implicates Callisthenes in a plot to kill Alexander. Thus, he justifies killing Callisthenes.

## **Porus**

Porus fights against Alexander at the Hydaspes River. Alexander splits his troops and crosses a good portion of them. Porus hears of the crossing, sends his son out to engage and then follows with his main force. The Macedonians kill the son and rout the initial small force. When they engage the main force, the Macedonians encounter Porus' elephants, but they prove to be just as deadly to both sides. After Alexander wins the day, he asks Porus what he wants. Porus says he wants to be treated as a king should be. Alexander gives Porus back his kingdom out of admiration for the man.

## **Coenus**

Coenus successfully argues against Alexander's desire to push on past his most eastern position in India. Coenus' main argument is that the Macedonians are exhausted. They no longer have the will to continue conquering, and so Alexander would do better to freshen his troops. Additionally, Coenus reminds Alexander that his luck has held out all this time, but he should not try to stretch it too far. Alexander reacts like a spoiled child and pouts in his tent, but the tactic does not work. He decides to go back, which makes his men happy and appreciative.

# Objects/Places

## Thrace

Thrace is an area of Greece to the south and east of Macedonia. Alexander begins his campaign to conquer the world in Thrace.

## Thebes

Thebes is a city-state in Greece. Alexander takes the city, and afterwards things get out of hand. The Macedonians massacre the Thebans, and this shocks all of Greece.

## Hellespont

Hellespont, now known as the Dardanelles, is a narrow strip of sea that Alexander must cross to start the conquest of Asia. His army comes over in many ships, some military and others commercial.

## Granicus River

The first battle between Alexander and a part of the Persian army takes place at the Granicus River, to the north and east of Hellespont. At first the battle does not go well for the Macedonians, but Alexander wins through aggressive tactics.

## Halicarnassus

Halicarnassus is a port town that Alexander takes by siege. The soldiers and townspeople set fire to the town and try to escape. Alexander's men chase down as many as they can and kill them.

## Gordium

Gordium, located well into Asia, is where Alexander encounters the Gordian Knot. His solution to the puzzle is to take out his sword and cut the knot.

## Syrian Gates

Alexander's army must cross through the Syrian Gates (Beilan Pass) to reach Darius and the main Persian army at Issus. They cross at night in a narrow column.



## Issus

Issus is where Alexander wins his first big battle against Darius. The battlefield is wide and artificially flattened by the Persian army. Alexander wins with a brilliant flanking maneuver.

## Tyre

Tyre is an island fortress that Alexander takes by siege. The main problem he has is building a mole from the mainland to the island, a distance of about a mile. The fortress eventually falls.

## Gaza

Gaza is a very difficult city to take on the Mediterranean coast. Alexander conquers it because he must prove to the world that no place is safe from the Macedonians.

## Egypt

Egypt surrenders to Alexander without a fight. The Egyptians appreciate being out from under Persian rule and crown Alexander a Pharaoh.

## Alexandria

Alexandria is the name bestowed upon many cities that Alexander founds, but the most famous is Alexandria in Egypt. Alexander takes a personal hand in the design of the city.

## Oracle of Ammon

Alexander travels to the oracle of Ammon in Libya and hears what he wants to hear. He associates himself with the god known as Ammon, which is a ram.

## Gaugamela

Gaugamela is where Alexander defeats the main Persian army for the second time, which in effect destroys the Persian Empire. He chases after Darius but finds only his dead body, Darius having been murdered by his fellow Persians.





## **Persian Gates**

Local Persians block Alexander's route through the Persian Gates, a high mountain pass. Local guides help bring the Macedonians through the mountains by a different but much more difficult route to the Persian rear. Alexander defeats them and clears the pass.

## **Rock of Sogdiana**

Alexander takes the Rock of Sogdiana by having 300 of his men experienced in mountain-climbing scale the sheer cliffs. Just the appearance of the Macedonians on top of the mountain scares the enemy into surrendering.

## **Rock of Chorienes**

Alexander takes the Rock of Chorienes by marching up a narrow trail to a ravine. His men fill the ravine with rocks despite enemy fire. As the siege machines come forward, the enemy surrenders.

## **Rock of Aornos**

Alexander takes the Rock of Aornos by fighting up a narrow trail to the stronghold. He builds earthworks for the siege engines, and when the Indians see this, they try to flee. Alexander's men kill many of them and others jump off cliffs to their deaths.

## **Indus River**

Alexander leaves India by way of the Indus River. His enormous flotilla of men in boats and animals on barges impress the natives, who watch and follow. Alexander also conquers more lands along the way.

## **Indian Ocean**

Alexander sails partway into the Indian Ocean before embarking on the remainder of this journey of world conquest. He believes he has come close to the end of the world, where nothing but ocean exists beyond.

## **Gedrosia**

Gedrosia is the destination of Alexander's march through a very bad desert region. He loses many men and animals to the heat and through thirst. More die in a flash flood.

## **Opis**

At Opis Alexander announces the retirement of the Macedonian veterans. The Macedonians object strenuously, which causes Alexander to kill thirteen of the instigators. He later apologizes and allows the men to voluntarily quit the army.

## **Babylon**

Alexander becomes ill after a bout of drinking in Babylon. The fever kills him, but he has time to say farewell to his officers and troops. Some historians speculate that Alexander was poisoned.

## **Talent**

A talent is an amount of Greek money, equal to about 50 pounds of silver. This is the ancient measure of great wealth, such as that of the Persian Empire in Arrian's history.

## **Siege Engine**

Alexander takes many cities and fortresses by siege, and the siege engine enables this. Most engines are catapults designed to bring down defensive walls and thus enable the Macedonians to enter and capture the city or fortress.

# Themes

## Ambition

Alexander the Great's big ambition is to conquer the Persian Empire, and thus punish the Persian king Darius for his ancestors' attempts at conquering Greece. He especially wants to make him pay for the sacking of Athens. The ambition seems a bit overblown at first. He can muster only so many Greeks into his army, and in the first battle with the Persians, he almost loses. Redeeming failing military tactics, however, he turns around by fiercely attacking and using his cavalry as if infantry. Through brute force he wins the day. Had he lost this first battle to liberate former Greek cities from Persia, history would have been quite different.

However, emboldened with his early successes and with a strengthening army of allies and mercenaries, Alexander moves right along the Mediterranean coast, conquering city after city. Some willingly give up without a fight. Others are more difficult. His monetary resources increase as well, allowing him to build up the army and navy.

The ambition extends to making the world a better place to live in, most notably with the founding of Alexandria in Egypt, toward the western side of the Nile delta area. He plans this city to be like no other in existence and consonant with ideas developed in Greece. His ultimate ambition is not to simply conquer the world, but to improve it as well.

Becoming a living deity is also one of Alexander's ambitions. To many of his fellow Macedonians, this is going too far. They believe in the gods, and although some of the Greek gods once walked the earth, they also believe that deity comes after death. In a way Alexander blasphemes the ancient Greek religion by trying to become a god while on earth.

## Revenge

Alexander the Great is a pleasant enough person until someone opposes him. He takes revenge in the form of killing those who oppose him, although he does demonstrate other emotions when rewarding good leaders by giving them back their kingdoms or lands. Macedonians do not escape his revenge either. Alexander kills several, some of whom he suspects of trying to assassinate him and others who simply go against his ideas.

Mindless revenge also manifests itself in Alexander. He blames the Persian king for the sacking of Athens, although this happens long before Darius is born. Xerxes sacks Athens, not Darius. However, Xerxes is dead and Darius is alive, and so his revenge is directed at the living. Uncertainty surrounds what Alexander plans to do with Darius once he is captured, but killing him may not have been his goal. Keeping the former king of Persia alive to suffer the loss of his empire might have been Alexander's plan for revenge, rather than merely killing Darius.

Alexander comes to regret his destruction of the main Persian palace. He likes the Persian style of clothing and language enough to adopt both, but now he realizes that he has despoiled one of the best parts of what he conquered. Regret for his mindless actions also occurs when he kills his friend from childhood, Cetus. Revenge may be a powerful motivator for Alexander, but it is also one of his greatest weaknesses.

## **Leadership**

Perhaps the most admirable quality of Alexander the Great is his ability to lead men. He uses several techniques while doing this. He is an excellent motivational speaker, arguing with solid logic and appealing to emotions at just the right times. He does not watch his men go into battle as Darius does, but leads them himself and takes wounds just like everyone else. If his troops must go hungry, Alexander goes hungry. If his troops are thirsty, Alexander is thirsty. He demonstrates this dramatically by pouring out a helmet full of water while traversing the desert. If all cannot drink, then neither will Alexander.

Another technique is speed, along with decisive action. Alexander does not suffer over a problem endlessly but comes to a quick solution and follows through. When stymied, he takes bold moves, such as how he builds earthworks to allow his siege engines to take down enemy defenses. He often catches his enemy by surprise, either showing up ahead of the expected time or surrounding the enemy through difficult marches conducted at night.

The battle tactics of Alexander the Great involve starting down one route, recognizing an advantage and exploiting that advantage. This sort of leadership wins the first battle with the main Persian army at Issus. He defeats force after force, army after army through the exploitation of advantages that show themselves. Yet the initial plan must be good enough to bring out the weaknesses of the enemy quickly. A good example of this is how he turns the threat of elephants into a threat for the enemy also while battling Porus' army.

Certainly Alexander has his faults as a leader of men. He sometimes is childish and mopes in his tent when not getting his way. It seems to take him three or four days to work through these emotions, but in the end he comes up with satisfying compromises or, as when confronted with his army's reluctance to push on in India, finally goes along with the men.

## **Historical Legacy**

Alexander earns his place in history. He may not be considered a god any longer, and he may have never gained that status among the ancient Greeks, but his name is still remembered. His history is still documented in various ways, and those interested in his legacy walk the trails that his Macedonians walked.

While alive Alexander knows he is destined to greatness. His father, Philip, had already established greatness in Greece. The son of Philip will be even greater, as Olympias probably impresses upon him. The speculation that the mother and son conspire to assassinate the father fits into the notion that sometimes ambitious people help destiny along. However this may be, Alexander becomes great partly because he believes this to be his destiny. Belief has a powerful influence over the success of any endeavor.

Luck plays a role in making Alexander great. Any number of things could have nipped his greatness in the early years. He could have lost a critical portion of his army in a storm while crossing Hellespont. The first encounter with the Persian army could have easily ended in defeat. The risky night marches in the mountains could have made his forces hopelessly lost in a foreign land. Alexander could have been killed when he takes an arrow that punctures his lung, or one of the plots against his life could have succeeded.

None of this happens. What kills Alexander at the young age of thirty-two is either his weakness for alcohol, an actual deadly illness, or poison. His luck runs out, but his legacy lives on. The empire he built is long gone. Other countries now exist, and places and cities have different names. Yet one historical legacy not only lives on but thrives—the city of Alexandria in Egypt.

# Style

## Perspective

Arrian (Lucius Flavius Arrianus, aka Xenophon, 86-after 146 AD.) writes 400 years after the events he describes. He is considered one of the best ancient historians of Alexander the Great because he had access to historical documents since lost. Arrian also has the distinction of writing the first military-focused history, *The Campaigns of Alexander*.

A student of philosophy and a military man himself, Arrian gives his account of Alexander's campaigns in a style of Greek from 500 BC. This, during his time, is considered the correct Greek in which to write formal books. The translation of such Greek results in formal English. As such, Arrian writes for other scholars and historians, not the common public. Nevertheless, the stories carry with them enough drama and character to be entertaining for the casual reader.

Arrian stays away from analyzing Alexander's personality or including the more outrageous stories surrounding the man. His intent is to present Alexander by what the man accomplishes and how he treats others. Inferring any other things about Alexander is left to the reader. A man who can conquer most of the known world must be quite a person, yet a man who can kill one of his best friends in a drunken argument must also have serious flaws.

Gaining strength in the battle scenes, Arrian's descriptive narration brings out the nature of ancient Greek warfare. The numbers of enemy killed always seem grossly overstated and the losses of Alexander's army understated, but the sense of accuracy regarding the battles carries through. Arrian knows warfare of the second century AD first hand, which is not so different from the way Alexander waged war 400 years before. The author intends to present warfare realistically to his readers, and the resulting stories succeed in doing this.

## Tone

Arrian uses "good" Greek in his original book. This translates into formal and often stilted English, the tone of a pedantic college professor of Greek history. This style weighs down the narrative quite a bit with lengthy complex sentences and elongated paragraphs. The reader may become impatient with the tone and demand that the author get to the point at various parts of the monolog, but of course Arrian cannot hear the complaint.

Objectivity characterizes the tone of formal language, and when Arrian interjects his own opinions, he clearly states the case. This lends a warmer character to the tone, as if the pedantic college professor relaxes out of the academic role, leans against the podium, and addresses the class personally.

The speeches Alexander makes take on a different tone, as expected. He speaks as the CEO of a corporation talking to employees. The Macedonians and others in his army are like the employees of a modern corporation. They need to know what the overall plan is and want to be heard when they have complaints. When Alexander hears discouraging words, he usually goes into one of his childish fits of rage. Arrian withholds comment on this behavior and simply presents it as something Alexander does.

## Structure

Arrian separates the book into seven sub-books, each about the same length and without chapters or subsections. The seven books map to Alexander's campaigns in the following manner:

Book 1—The start of Alexander's campaign in Greece and Asia

Book 2—The first battle with the main army of Persia, the taking of Tyre and Gaza

Book 3—The surrender of Egypt, the coronation of Alexander as Pharaoh, the visit to the oracle of Ammon, the final defeat of the Persian army, the death of Darius

Book 4—The march into India, the taking of the Rock of Sogdiana, the Rock of Chorienes, and the Rock of Aornos

Book 5—Sailing down the Indus River, the defeat of Porus, the decision to return home

Book 6—Alexander's serious wound, sailing into the Indian Ocean, the terrible desert crossing to Gedrosia

Book 7—The disbanding of the Macedonian veterans, the death of Alexander

The overall book flows in a logical progression from start to finish, which makes following the movements of Alexander very easy. The lack of chapters or subsections may reduce the readability for some.

## Quotes

"The Triballians held their own while the fighting was at long range; but once they had felt the weight and drive of the Macedonian infantry in close order, and the cavalry, instead of shooting at them, had begun actually to ride them down in a fierce assault all over the field, they broke and ran, in an endeavor to make their escape through the wood to the river. Three thousand were killed. Only a few of these too were taken alive, because the wood along the river-bank was very thick, and there was not enough daylight left for the Macedonians to finish the job properly. According to Ptolemy, the Macedonian losses were eleven men from the cavalry and about forty from the infantry," (pp. 45-46).

"With Thebes, on the contrary, it was a different matter: the lack of planning, the rapid movement of events which led to the revolt, the suddenness and ease with which the city fell, the slaughter, so appalling and so inevitable where men of kindred stock are paying off old scores, the complete enslavement of a city pre-eminent in Greece for power and military prestige, were, not unnaturally, all put down to the wrath of God," (p. 61).

"Once the centre had failed to hold, both wings of the Persian cavalry broke, too, and the rout was complete. About 1,000 were killed—not more, because Alexander soon checked the pursuit of them in order to turn his attention to the foreign mercenaries, who had remained in their original position, shoulder to shoulder—not, indeed, from any deliberate intention of proving their courage, but simply because the suddenness of the disaster had deprived them of their wits. Ordering a combined assault by infantry and cavalry, Alexander quickly had them surrounded and butchered to a man, though one or two may have escaped among the heaps of dead," (p. 75).

"Alexander was too tired to wake up properly, but the noise the bird made disturbed him, so with his hand he tried to shoo it gently away, but without success; for, far from being scared off by the touch of Alexander's hand, it came and perched on his head, and refused to budge until he was fully awake.

Convinced that the incident was not without significance, Alexander reported it to the soothsayer Aristander of Telmissus, who declared that it portended a friend's treachery; and, in addition, that the plot would be revealed, for swallows are domestic birds, friendly to man and exceedingly talkative," (p. 93).

"Darius now moved; he crossed the high ground by what are called the Amanian Gates—the pass across Mount Amanus—and, making for Issus, established himself without being perceived in Alexander's rear," (p. 111).

"The moment the Persian left went to pieces under Alexander's attack and Darius, in his war-chariot, saw that it was cut off, he incontinently fled—indeed, he led the race for safety. Keeping to his chariot as long as there was smooth ground to travel on, he was forced to abandon it when ravines and other obstructions barred his way; then, dropping his shield and stripping off his mantle—and even leaving his bow in the war-chariot—he



leapt upon a horse and rode for his life. Darkness soon closed in; and that alone saved him from falling into the hands of Alexander, who, while daylight held, relentlessly pressed the pursuit; but when there was no longer light enough to see what he was coming to, he turned back—but not without taking possession of Darius' chariot together with his shield, mantle, and bow. In point of fact his pursuit would have been more rapid had he not turned back at the moment when his line of heavy infantry broke, in the first stage of the battle; he had then waited until he saw that both the Greek mercenaries and the Persian cavalry had been forced back from the river bank," (p. 120).

"Alexander had no difficulty in persuading his officers that the attempt upon Tyre must be made. He himself had further encouragement by a sign from heaven, for that very night he dreamed that as he was approaching the walls of the town Heracles greeted him and invited him to enter. The dream was interpreted by Aristander as signifying that Tyre would be taken, but with much labour, because labour was characteristic of all that Heracles had himself accomplished," (p. 132).

"The two armies were now close together. Darius and his picked troops were in full view. There stood the Persian Royal Guard, the golden apples on their spear-butts, bowmen—the cream of the Persian force, full in face of Alexander as he moved with his Royal Squadron to the attack. Alexander, however, inclined slightly to his right, a move which the Persians at once countered, their left outflanking the Macedonians by a considerable distance. Meanwhile in spite of the fact that Darius' Scythian cavalry, moving along the Macedonian front, had already made contact with their forward units, Alexander continued his advance towards the right until he was almost clear of the area which the Persians had levelled during the previous days. Darius knew that once the Macedonians reached rough ground his chariots would be useless, so he ordered the mounted troops in advance of his left to encircle the Macedonian right under Alexander and thus check any further extension in that direction. Alexander promptly ordered Menidas and his mercenary cavalry to attack them. A counter-attack by the Scythian cavalry and their supporting Bactrians drove them back by the weight of numbers, whereupon Alexander sent in against the the Scythians Ariston's Paeonian contingent and the mercenaries. This stroke had its effect, and the enemy gave ground; but the remaining Bactrian units engaged the Paeonians and the mercenaries and succeeded in rallying the fugitives. A close cavalry action ensued, in which the Macedonians suffered the more severely, outnumbered as they were and less adequately provided with defensive armour than the Scythians were—both horses and men. None the less the Macedonians held their attacks, and by repeated counter-charges, squadron by squadron, succeeded in breaking the enemy formation," (pp. 167-168).

"Those who attempted to fight also made off after losing a few men. Bessus and his friends did not at once abandon the attempt to get Darius away in the wagon, but when Alexander was close upon them, Nabarzanes and Barsaentes struck him down and left him and made their escape with 600 horsemen. The wound proved fatal, and Darius died shortly afterwards, before Alexander could see him," (p. 184).

"The little settlement was fortified more or less, having an outer wall with gates in it. Ptolemy cordoned it off with his mounted troops and announced to the Persians inside



that if they gave Bessus up they would be allowed to go without molestation; he was accordingly admitted, whereupon he seized Bessus and again withdrew, sending off a message to ask Alexander how he wished to be brought into his presence. Alexander replied that he must be stripped of his clothes and led in a dog-collar and made to stand on the right of the road along which he and his army would pass. The order was obeyed, and when Alexander saw him there, he stopped his chariot and asked him why he had treated Darius, his king, kinsman, and benefactor, so shamefully, first seizing him, then hurrying him off in chains, and finally murdering him. Bessus answered that the decision to do what he had done was not his alone: everyone close to Darius at that time had shared in it, and their object was to win Alexander's favour and so save their lives. At this Alexander ordered him to be scourged; and at every lash a crier was to repeat the words of reproach he had himself used as he asked the reason for his treachery. After this humiliating punishment he was sent away to Bactra to be executed," (p. 198).

"The country is desert beyond the spot where the Polytimetus disappears—for disappear it does, in spite of the fact that it is a river of some size. It vanishes into the sand. The same phenomenon can be observed with other rivers in this part of the world—rivers, too, of considerable volume, not mere streamlets such as dry up in the summer: the Epardus, for instance, which flows through Mardia, and the Areius, from which the country of Aria takes its name, and the Etymandrus, which runs through the country of the 'Benefactors,'" (p. 211).

"There is a story about Darius that shortly after the battle of Issus the eunuch who had charge of his wife succeeded in making his way to him. Darius' first question was whether his mother, wife, and children were still alive, and hearing that they not only were, but were also addressed by the title of princess and treated with as much ceremony as when he was on the throne, he proceeded to inquire if his wife still preserved her chastity.

"'She does,' replied the eunuch.

"'And has Alexander offered her no violence—no insult?'

"'My lord,' exclaimed the eunuch with an oath, 'your wife is as you left her, and Alexander is the best of men and the least ready to yield to temptation.'

"Darius raised his hands to heaven in prayer. 'My lord Zeus,' he cried, 'to whom it is given to order the affairs of kinds in this world, keep safe for me now the empire over the Medes and Persians, even as once you gave it to me; but, if it is no longer your will that I be King of Asia, then entrust my throne, I pray, to no man but Alexander.' Thus even enemies are not indifferent to honourable deeds," (pp. 235-236).

"I [Arrian] have not included in this book an account of the Indian way of life, or any description of the strange animals to be found, or any description of the size of the fish and other aquatic creatures in the Indus, the Hydaspes, the Ganges, and elsewhere: nor have I mentioned gold-mining ants and gold-guarding griffons and other queer things which people have invented rather for diversion than as serious history, in the belief that none of the absurd stories they tell about India are likely to be brought to the test of truth. Actually, however, most of these fables were proved or disproved by Alexander and his men—except in a few cases where they themselves were guilty of

invention. They proved, for instance, that the Indians have no gold—at any rate the very considerable section of them which Alexander visited in the course of his campaign—and that their domestic arrangements are far from luxurious. The men are taller than any other Asiatics, most of them being over seven feet, or not much less; they are darker-skinned than any other race except the Ethiopians, and the finest fighters to be found anywhere in Asia at that time. I cannot satisfactorily compare them with the ancient Persians who marched with Cyrus, son of Cambyses, when he wrested the sovereignty of Asia from the Medes and established his control either by force or by consent over so many other peoples as well; for the Persians at that period of their history were a poor nation and lived in a harsh land, and their way of life was as near as may be to the stern discipline of Sparta; nor can I make any certain inference from the Persian disaster in Scythia, not knowing if the cause of it was the unfavourable nature of the ground where the battle was fought, or some mistake made by Cyrus, or the actual military inferiority of the Persian soldiers to the Scythians of those parts," (pp. 260-261).

"Casualties among the animals were very numerous; indeed, most of them perished. Often they were killed deliberately by the men, who used to put their heads together and agree to butcher the mules and horses, whenever supplies gave out, and then eat their flesh and pretend they had died of thirst or exhaustion. As every man was involved, and the general distress was so great, there was no one to bring actual evidence of this crime, though Alexander himself was not unaware of what was going on; he realized, however, that the only way to deal with the situation was to feign ignorance, which would be better than to let the men feel that he connived at their breach of discipline. It was, moreover, no easy task, when men were sick or fell exhausted in their tracks, to get them along with the rest; for there were no transport animals left and even the wagons were being continually broken up as it became more and more impossible to drag them through the deep sand. In the early stages of the march they had often been prevented for this reason from taking the shortest route and compelled to seek a longer one which was more practicable for the teams. So there was nothing for it but to leave the sick by the way, and any man rendered incapable by exhaustion or thirst or sunstroke. No one could give them a helping hand; no one could stay behind to ease their sufferings, for the essential thing was to get on with all possible speed, and the effort to save the army as a whole inevitably took precedence over the suffering of individual men. Most of the marching was at night, and many men would fall asleep in their tracks; the few who had strength left to do so followed the army when they woke up again, and got safe through; but the greater number perished—poor castaways in the ocean of sand," (p. 337).

"Alexander was furious. He had grown by that time quicker to take offence, and the Oriental subservience to which he had become accustomed had greatly changed his old open-hearted manner towards his own countrymen. He leapt from the platform with the officers who attended him, and pointing with his finger to the ringleaders of the mutiny, ordered the guards to arrest them. There were thirteen of them, and they were all marched off to execution. A horrified silence ensued," (p. 360).

"It is my [Arrian's] belief that there was in those days no nation, no city, no single individual beyond the reach of Alexander's name; never in all the world was there

another like him, and therefore I cannot but feel that some power more than human was concerned in his birth; indications of this were, moreover, said to be provided at the time of his death by oracles; many people saw visions and had prophetic dreams; and there is the further evidence of the extraordinary way in which he is said, as no mere man could be, in honour and remembrance. Even today, when so many years have passed, there have been oracles, all tending to his glory, delivered to the people of Macedon. "In the course of this book I have, admittedly, found fault with some of the things which Alexander did, but of the man himself I am not ashamed to express ungrudging admiration. Where I have criticized unfavourably, I have done so because I wish to tell the truth as I saw it, and to enable my readers to profit thereby. Such was the motive which led me to embark upon this History: and I, too, have had God's help in my work" (p. 398).

## Topics for Discussion

Why is Alexander referred to as Alexander the Great?

List and describe three of Alexander's war tactics.

How does Alexander persuade his troops through his speeches and actions?

What does Alexander do to conquered leaders whom he admires?

What does Alexander do to conquered leaders whom he despises?

Choose a side and debate the question, "Was Alexander the Great a megalomaniac?"

Characterize war in the time of Alexander in physical terms.

Characterize war in the time of Alexander in psychological terms.

How does the historian Arrian present Alexander the Great's character?

Pick a role to play during Alexander's time and expound on the reasons for your choice. Possible roles include officer, soldier, seer, guide, governor, sailor, sea captain, admiral, family member of Alexander, or any role in the book other than Alexander himself.