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FIRE FROM HEAVEN: ALEXANDER AT PERSEPOLIS*

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He set the Persian palace on fire, even though Parmenio urged him to save it, arguing that it was not right to destroy his own property, and that the Asians would not thus devote themselves to him, if he seemed determined not to rule Asia, but only to pass through as a conqueror. But Alexander replied that he intended to punish the Persians for their invasion of Greece, the destruction of Athens, the burning of the temples, and all manner of terrible things done to the Greeks; because of these things, he was exacting revenge. But Alexander does not seem to me to have acted prudently, nor can it be regarded as any kind of punishment upon Persians of long ago

[Arrian *Anab.* 3. 18. 11–12].

THUS Arrian gives us Alexander's justification for the destruction of the palace complex at Persepolis in the spring of 330 B.C. Despite Parmenio's disapproval, Alexander's own later regrets,¹ and Arrian's censure,² the drama of this conflagration has excited the imagination of scholars and poets alike, representing as it does not only an act of drama but a historical problem as well. For neither ancient nor modern writers have been entirely satisfied with the reasons our sources

give for the destruction of these monuments. It is my purpose to re-examine this event in the context of Alexander's most pressing demands in the years 331–30 B.C.

Three possible causes for the holocaust have been suggested: it was an act of perversity; it was an incident at a drunken feast; or it was an act of policy. To hold the first view, that the destruction of the palace was an act of sheer perversity, requires an assessment of Alexander's character that is highly interpretative and based on no evidence. It means that Alexander committed an act which cannot be justified on political, military, or moral grounds within the context of the values of his own age. Methodologically, this is a dangerous procedure when specific evidence is lacking. To recall the examples of Tarn and others, with their highly personal versions of Alexander's character,³ is to be well warned.

The second alternative proposes that the destruction had its origin in a bacchanal at Persepolis. The story related by Plutarch,

* A somewhat different version of this paper was read at the Pacific Coast Branch meetings of the American Historical Association at Portland, Oregon, 4 September 1970. The author has benefited from the commentary offered at that time by Ernst Badian and Pierre MacKay, and subsequently by Peter Green, some of whose suggestions have been incorporated into this draft. The author also wishes to acknowledge that he has borrowed a part of his title from Mary Renault's fine novel of the young Alexander, *Fire From Heaven*. It seemed well suited for this paper. Miss Renault's book is quite the best work of its kind, and the sober historian of Alexander looks with envy upon the novelist's skill

with words and freedom to express fully ideas he only dares hint at.

1. Arr. *Anab.* 6. 30. 1; Curt. 5. 7. 11; Plut. *Alex.* 38. 8 (all references to Plutarch are to the *Vita Alexandri* in the revised Teubner text of Ziegler, in which the numbering differs somewhat from the commonly used Loeb text of B. Perrin).

2. Arr. *Anab.* 3. 18. 12; 6. 30. 1.

3. For a brief assessment of the conditions which produced many personalized characterizations of the king, see my introduction to the reprint of U. Wilcken, *Alexander the Great* (New York, 1967), pp. xii–xviii.

Diodorus, and Curtius tells of a drunken banquet during which Thaïs, an Athenian courtesan, urged upon the king that the palaces be destroyed.⁴ She further admonished the revelers that it would be fitting if she, a single Athenian girl, could act as the instrument of revenge. Alexander concurring, the group formed a Dionysiac procession which hurled firebrands everywhere. The palace was soon consumed by flames.

The Thaïs story has always been hard to treat because of its bizarre nature. Our earliest information about Thaïs comes from a fragment of Cleitarchus of Alexandria.⁵ There is no reason to doubt that she was in Alexander's train, probably as Ptolemy's mistress, and that she was later married to the future Egyptian dynast.⁶ There is also no reason to doubt that she was an Athenian, and, despite Tarn's objections,⁷ that she (and others like her) attended banquets and feasts.

We may now turn to an examination of several interpretations concerning her behavior. First, is it possible that our sources attempted to blacken Alexander's reputation by representing the king as having permitted the destruction of an important monument by an Athenian courtesan at a bacchanal? The king appears to have lost control; no credit to him. If this is an attempt to discredit Alexander, then we must ask who would wish to do such a thing. The readiest answer heretofore has been Cleitarchus, since information about Thaïs first appears in a fragment attributed to him. The standard interpretation of

Cleitarchus has suggested that he was hostile to Alexander;⁸ thus we explain the Thaïs story as Cleitarchus' attempt to degrade the king. But there is no certainty that the story as it appears in Plutarch, Diodorus, and Curtius really depends on Cleitarchus (the later writers may have read it independently in the same tradition that Cleitarchus himself followed). Moreover, not enough is known about Cleitarchus' attitudes to suggest that he was indeed hostile to Alexander.⁹ We must conclude, therefore, that one cannot dismiss the Thaïs story as an attempt to discredit the king.

It has often been suggested that the conflagration was not incidental to a drunken feast, but was a sober and deliberate act of policy. Hardly anyone disagrees with this view, but does holding it exclude the possibility that Thaïs was a party to the destruction? If the burning of Persepolis was in fact a sign of revenge, then how dramatic to use the Athenian girl symbolically to represent vengeance for what Xerxes (this was, after all, Xerxes' palace) had done to Athens a century and a half earlier! That is, the affair was carefully staged to act out the punishment and add insult to injury by making an Athenian courtesan the agent of ruin.¹⁰

Another alternative proposes that Thaïs was initially not a party to the destruction plan. Once the bacchanal was under way, however, she fell into the spirit of things with unusual enthusiasm, and in the certain confusion of events, eyewitnesses saw or heard her mock the Great Palace. The

4. Diod. 17. 72. 1-6; Curt. 5. 7. 2-7; Plut. 38. 1-8. There are some minor variances among the sources, but nothing important enough to warrant further comment here.

5. Found in Athenaeus 13. 576D-E: "And did not Alexander the Great have with him Thaïs, the Athenian *hetaira*? Cleitarchus speaks of her as having been the cause of the burning of the palace at Persepolis; after Alexander's death this same Thaïs was married to Ptolemy, the first king of Egypt . . ." See F. Jacoby, *FGH*, IIB (Berlin, 1929), Nr. 137, Frag. 11.

6. On Thaïs' marriage, see E. N. Borza, "Cleitarchus and

Diodorus' Account of Alexander," *PACA*, XI (1968), 35, n. 47.

7. W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, II (Cambridge, 1950). 48-49. As was his wont when characters appear who, by their association with the king, degrade Alexander in any way, Tarn attempted to argue Thaïs out of existence.

8. Thus *inter alia*, Tarn, pp. 54, 76-77, 82, and *passim*.

9. I have argued this at length in my article on the fragments of Cleitarchus, *op. cit.* (n. 6).

10. G. Radet, *Alexandre le Grand*⁶ (Paris, 1950), pp. 188-99, called the incident a restaging of Euripides' *Bacchae*.

story then evolved framing her as the instigator or major participant.

Yet another possibility suggests that the story as related by Plutarch, Diodorus, and Curtius is perfectly true.

Finally, there is the difficulty that Arrian fails to mention Thaïs. There is no reason why Arrian should deliberately bury the incident if it appeared in his main source, beyond the usual comment that he is not so prone to tell such tales as some of our other major sources.¹¹ It is more likely that the Thaïs story did not appear in his source, some account which treated the Persepolis incident as the deliberate act of policy that it was. The activities of an Athenian girl at this time would be of insignificant value beside the greater importance of the fire itself. That Arrian does not mention Thaïs is no reason to assume that she was either not present or not an active participant. It only means that Arrian's source was concerned about the larger context of the act, while the other traditions stem from eyewitness accounts which were interested in human byplay.¹²

Thus we cannot say much with certainty about Thaïs, except that there appears to be no reason to deny that she was at Persepolis, and perhaps played a role in the palace's destruction. Precisely what that role was may never be known. The

archeological evidence from the site shows that the palace must have been systematically looted before the fire occurred, and when the blaze broke out it destroyed the complex in a "violent conflagration."¹³ The destruction of the palace was an important act; but despite Alexander's later regrets, we are concerned with the moment. It would be unlike the king to act out of accord with policy.¹⁴ It makes most sense to regard this incident as an act, if not of policy itself, then at least consistent with policy.

But what was that policy? Or, like Parmenio, are we to say, "It makes no sense, Alexander, to burn your own property"? At least since the crossing of the Hellespont in 334, two concerns must have loomed large for the king. One was the enemy before him. Yet this was Alexander's kind of game, the rules of which he had mastered, and the playing of which was a joy to him. The second problem was the friends behind him. Macedonian rule lay uneasily on Greece, resting in part on the diplomatic arrangements that Philip II had made with the Greek cities both separately and within the Hellenic League, and in part on the military force under the command of Alexander's able general, Antipater. The whole campaign along the Asia Minor coast reflects Alexander's uncertainty about the

11. Yet even Arrian would tell stories on occasion just to demonstrate that he was aware of them; see, e.g., his account of Alexander's death, especially *Anab.* 7. 27. 1–3.

12. I have considered the possibility that, if Ptolemy were Arrian's source for the Persepolis incident, he might have covered up Thaïs' role because of her relationship to him at that time and afterward. Such an argument, however, rests on certain assumptions about Ptolemy's feelings about Persepolis (and Thaïs). When he wrote his history did he feel shame? Pride? Embarrassment? No one knows, and I cannot argue something which is so completely conjectural.

13. The excavator's own words; see Erich Schmidt, *Persepolis*, I (Chicago, 1953), 78. S. K. Eddy, *The King is Dead* (Lincoln, Neb., 1961), p. 3, puts some emphasis on the destruction by fire as a holy manifestation of the Persian fire-god, Atar, i.e., the ultimate act of purification—and insult. There is a recent succinct description of the palaces and their destruction (with excellent photographs) in

the early chapters of Mortimer Wheeler, *Flames over Persepolis* (London, 1968). A short history of the town may be found in George Woodcock, "Persia and Persepolis," *History Today*, XVII (1967), esp. 301–7. Also see notes 52 and 55 below.

14. This is made clear by E. Badian, "Agis III," *Hermes*, XCV (1967), 187 (hereafter cited as Badian, "Agis"). Tarn (*Alex.* I, 54) regarded the Persepolis incident as policy, arguing that the destruction was intended as a sign to Asia that E-sagila, the great Babylonian temple which Xerxes had destroyed, was avenged. Badian ("Agis," p. 187) rightly demolishes this view as being unsupported by evidence. Dr. Peter Green suggests to me that the whole sequence of events at Persepolis—the rape of the town by the army, the looting of the palace complex without destroying it, and the wait—suggests policy. Why else sit on this prize inviolate for so long, as opposed to just waiting in Persepolis?

Greeks,¹⁵ and eventually his worst fears were realized when rebellion against Macedonian authority erupted in the spring of 331. Led by King Agis III of Sparta, supported by Persian money and several thousand mercenaries, the rebels represented the most serious threat yet to Macedonian hegemony.¹⁶ Now Alexander was caught between his Asian commitment and the Greek uprising. How the king would maintain a balance between these problems forms one of the more interesting stories of his career.

The victory over Darius at Issus in 333 forced Darius to regroup and enabled Alexander to concentrate on Levantine and Egyptian matters while still maintaining contact with Greece. When the trouble in Greece was reported in 331, Alexander showed his concern by sending what assistance he could.¹⁷ But events were building toward some kind of climax in Asia, and the king could ill afford to disengage from contact with Darius now, or he would risk forfeiting all that had been gained to this point. Alexander had rejected peace outright on a number of occasions.¹⁸ Now his troops were rested, his rear secure (or so he hoped), and he

marched into Assyria seeking the confrontation which he must have known was imminent. Greece and its revolt were not forgotten, but Asian events clearly took precedence in the summer and early autumn of 331.

The battle at Gaugamela was decisive. Darius was routed, and Alexander, quick as always to exploit victory, turned south toward Babylon, arriving there about 20 October.¹⁹ Alexander spent thirty-four days at Babylon, and twenty more in transit to Susa, putting him there about mid-December.²⁰ By now he was thinking again of Greece. At Susa Alexander recaptured much of what Xerxes had taken from Greece and returned to Athens the statues of the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton.²¹ It was also at Susa that Alexander is said to have sent Menes seaward with three thousand talents and orders to send as much silver as necessary to assist Antipater in the war with Agis (although see pp. 237–40 below). We must assume that the king had not yet received word of Agis' defeat, which had occurred some time before Alexander's victory at Gaugamela (late September).²² Amyntas, son of Andromenes, arrived at Susa with

15. On this see E. Badian, "Alexander the Great and the Greeks of Asia," *Ancient Society and Institutions: Studies Presented to Victor Ehrenberg* (New York, 1967), p. 48.

16. For a complete account of Agis' revolt see Badian, "Agis," pp. 170–84 and 190–92 (sources cited), whose chronology on the Greek side I follow.

17. Curt. 4. 8. 12–15; Arr. *Anab.* 3. 6. 3. Pace G. L. Cawkwell, "The Crowning of Demosthenes," *CQ*, N.S. XIX (1969), 170–73, who argues that Alexander's dispatch of a naval force under Amphoterus was of little use. On the contrary, this fleet strengthened Macedonian forces exactly where they were weakest, at sea, and thereby protected the flank of Antipater's forces in Greece.

18. Some of the diplomatic exchanges between Alexander and Darius are discussed by E. W. Marsden, *The Campaign of Gaugamela* (Liverpool, 1964), pp. 6–10 (with sources cited), and now more recently by G. T. Griffith, "The Letter of Darius at Arrian 2. 14," *PCPhS*, N.S. XIV (1968), 33–48.

19. Gaugamela was fought in late September. I am inclined to follow A. R. Burn, "Notes on Alexander's Campaign," *JHS*, LXXII (1952), 80–81, who puts the battle on 27 September. One should note, however, the tempting arguments of Marsden, *Campaign of Gaugamela*, p. 75, who would move the date up to the 30th.

We have no precise information about Alexander's march to Babylon. D. G. Hogarth, *Philip and Alexander of Macedon* (New York, 1897), p. 289, and C. A. Robinson, Jr., *The Ephemerides of Alexander's Expedition* (Providence, 1932), p. 78, suggest a forty-day march (too long), while Badian, "Agis," p. 185, n. 3, offers fourteen days (too short). The distance is about 360 miles (after Marsden, *Campaign of Gaugamela*, p. 22 and Diagram I). Seventy years earlier the Ten Thousand had marched from Sittace to the junction of the Tigris and Zapatas (Greater Zab) Rivers in fourteen days (Xen. *Anab.* 2. 4. 25–3. 4. 12), a distance of about 250 miles. Sittace is about sixty-five miles north of Babylon, and the Tigris-Zapatas forty miles from Arbela. Numerous leadership difficulties and minor skirmishes had plagued Xenophon's Greeks, while Alexander's army, though larger, moved with comparative ease over good roads (Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 2). Three weeks would be about right for Alexander's march to Babylon.

20. Curt. 5. 1. 39; Diod. 17. 64. 4 ("more than thirty days" at Babylon); Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 7.

21. Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 7–8.

22. Curt. 6. 1. 21; Cawkwell's attempt ("Crowning of Demosthenes," pp. 170–73) to date Agis' defeat to 330 B.C. seems unconvincing to me. See E. N. Borza, "The End of Agis' Revolt," *CP*, LXVI (1971), 230–35.

new recruits brought from Macedonia.²³ Badian has deduced that these reinforcements brought news of Agis' revolt, and he has argued in his important account of Agis' career that Alexander now made his concern manifest at Susa by sending aid to Antipater.²⁴ But the king did not need Amyntas' arrival to inform him of the rebellion; he already knew this and had expressed his concern several months earlier by sending naval contingents to Crete and the Peloponnesus.

Alexander remained only a short time in Susa, and then began the march toward Persepolis, arriving there in mid-January 330.²⁵ He spent four months at Persepolis; according to Plutarch (37. 6), it was winter and the king wished to refresh his troops.²⁶ It was not, however, a time of inactivity. Alexander arranged to have the huge

treasury of the Persian kings transported to Susa, in itself an enormous feat of logistics.²⁷ Thousands of pack animals were rounded up in Susa and Babylon to transport most of the 120,000 talents of gold and silver. Then, leaving the main body of the army with three thousand Macedonians to guard the citadel (where the treasury transfer may have still been under way), Alexander took a thousand horse and a troop of light infantry to reconnoiter the surrounding countryside.²⁸ This thirty-day campaign may have been waged in late March and April.²⁹ One suspects that it served mainly to relieve boredom, much in the style of Alexander's campaign against some hostile tribes in southern Phoenicia during the siege of Tyre.

Why did Alexander wait for four months at Persepolis? Badian,³⁰ among

23. Amyntas had been dispatched to Macedon in the winter of 332/31 (Diod. 17. 49. 1; Curt. 4. 6. 30–31). Curt. 5. 1. 40–42 has Amyntas delivering the reinforcements at Babylon, and Diod. 17. 65. 1 places the incident shortly after Alexander left Babylon en route to Susa, although, as Badian ("Agis," p. 187, n. 4) points out, this is a slight difference.

24. "Agis," pp. 187–88. Badian is perfectly correct in suggesting that these troops had been sent from Macedon while the uprising was in full swing, having set out by July 331, allowing for a four-month march to Susa.

25. None of the sources suggests a prolonged stay at Susa. A week would have been sufficient time to make administrative arrangements. For a description of Alexander's route and campaign into the Persis, see Aurel Stein, "An Archaeological Journey in Western Iran," *GJ*, XCII (1938), 314 ff. Badian ("Agis," p. 186), basing his estimate on explicit statements and deductions from several sources, gives two weeks for the Susa-Persepolis trek, a figure which is far too low. The air distance alone between Susa and Persepolis is about 320 miles, which, by Badian's figures, would mean an average daily march of twenty-three miles as the crow flies. But tracks across rough terrain do not follow crows' routes. J. F. C. Fuller's estimate (*The Generalship of Alexander the Great* [New Brunswick, N.J., 1960], p. 227) of 370 miles for the route is probably more nearly correct, although Strabo (15. 3. 1–2) gives 4200 stadia (about 525 miles) as the distance. Despite the quickness of Alexander's moves during parts of the campaign, he was nevertheless traversing roads and paths among the highest mountains he had yet crossed (and in winter), he was fighting, and he was making detailed arrangements with both the indigenous people of the area and the mutilated Greeks he chanced upon. These activities must have slowed the expedition. Three weeks or a month is about right for this stage.

26. For a full discussion of the chronological problems associated with Alexander's stay at Persepolis, see J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch: "Alexander": A Commentary* (Oxford,

1969), pp. 98–99 (with sources cited), with whose conclusions I am in general agreement.

27. Diod. 17. 71. 2; Curt. 5. 6. 9–10; Plut. 37. 4.

28. We can understand Alexander's curiosity about the neighborhood, and restlessness is a well-known feature of his personality. But judging by Curtius' narrative, it was a poor excuse for a campaign. The area, perhaps to the north or northeast of Persepolis (thus Curt. 5. 6. 12: *interiorem Persidis regionem*), was mountainous (snow and ice late in the season; Curt. 5. 6. 12–16) and lightly inhabited, mainly by shepherds. Even the Mardi, the only natives mentioned by name, appear to be a semibarbaric mountain people, more of a curiosity than a threat.

29. Thus Curt. 5. 6. 11–20, and Plut. 37–38, rather than Diod. 17. 73. 1, who gives one cryptic sentence to the campaign, putting it after the destruction of the palace and just before Alexander set out for Media. Curt. 5. 6. 12 dates the beginning of the campaign to just before the setting of the Pleiades. I am indebted to Dr. Louis Winkler of the Astronomy Department of the Pennsylvania State University, who has made some calculations and estimates about the heliacal setting of the Pleiades at lat. 30° N. in 330 B.C. The actual setting of the Pleiades in that year occurred on 13 April, but Dr. Winkler assures me that, because of extinction, glare, dust, water vapor, the horizon profile, and other factors, no one would actually see the setting on that date. He estimates (taking into account an unknown set of variables) that the phenomenon might be observable during the interval 28–30 March. I might add that it is impossible for us to determine whether the beginning of this campaign was dated from an actual astral observation or from a calendar (perhaps Babylonian-Persian) whose days were characterized by astronomical phenomena observed elsewhere over a long period of time. It is difficult to be more precise, and we can only make a reasonable guess that Alexander's Persis campaign began sometime in the fourth week of March.

30. "Agis," pp. 188–89.

others, has argued that he was unable to advance until he knew what had happened in Greece. The wait was in vain; no message could get through that winter, and, finally, in his frustration, Alexander fired the palace, as a sign to the Greeks that he was still fighting for their cause, and then struck out for Media and Darius. On the way to Ecbatana, the king met reinforcements from Cilicia.³¹ Badian has suggested that it was these men—"and almost demonstrably these men were the first who could do so"—who brought news of Agis' defeat.³² A few days later at Ecbatana, Alexander dismissed his Greek allies, and the charade with Greece was over.

I should like to offer a somewhat different reconstruction of these last events, one which varies from Badian's not in its emphasis on Alexander's concern for the Greeks—for I fully share Badian's views on the seriousness of that—but on the reasons for the prolonged stay at Persepolis. Two problems make an analysis of these events highly speculative. First, we have no information to indicate precisely when Alexander received word that the Greek revolt was over. That no information exists about the receipt of such a message need not surprise us, since our sources hardly touch on the Agis rebellion

in the context of Alexander's expedition. Second, any reasonable guess about when the king learned of Agis' defeat must be based in part on an estimate of the conditions of travel and communications at that time.

Badian has given us a very gloomy picture of Alexander's communications, characterizing the king's army as a "moving island in a hostile sea."³³ He has gone further to argue that messages were carried only by armed contingents. The evidence, however, suggests that it is not possible to make such broad generalizations about Alexander's communications. Certainly travel by land was precarious, especially through rugged territory in bad seasons. But to admit the difficulties of travel is not to deny the possibility that a message got through to Persepolis. Indeed there is abundant information in the sources to show that the king's army was a constant (though often moving) focal point for all manner of messages and troops sent and received. To suggest that Alexander was cut off from either the west or his own lesser units in the field is to deny a quite large body of evidence.³⁴ None of this proves that the news of Agis' defeat was received at Persepolis. But it does show that such communications were possible and that, given the extraordinary circum-

31. Curt. 5. 7. 12. These had been requested the previous autumn at Babylon; Curt. 5. 1. 43–44.

32. "Agis," p. 190.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 188–89.

34. From Arrian alone: *Anab.* 3. 2. 3; 3. 6. 1–2; 3. 16. 6; 3. 19. 1–2; 3. 23. 1–2; 3. 29. 6; 4. 3. 6–7; 6. 17. 5; 7. 19. 1, etc. A number of these messages and reports reached Alexander not in a stationary camp (he rarely stayed very long except to winter), but while the army was on the move. There are some extraordinary examples. During the winter of 329/28 a number of missions of various kinds found their way to Alexander's camp at Bactra (*Arr. Anab.* 4. 7. 1–2 and Curt. 7. 10. 11–12). Not the least of these was the arrival of those officers who had been dispatched at Ecbatana to accompany the dismissed Thessalian cavalry and treasure (*Arr. Anab.* 3. 19. 6). Now Epocillus and the others returned from the west; moreover, Asander, Nearchus, Bessus, and Asclepiodorus arrived from the west with two armies. The distances between the Syrian and Aegean coasts are about

1500 and 2300 miles respectively (air distance). Thus if our sources are to be trusted here, at least two armies and some smaller groups of men had picked their way across nearly half of Asia and found Alexander in Bactra in the dead of winter. Later, toward the end of 325 B.C., after Alexander had left the Gedrosian capital of Pura to begin his trek across Carmania, news reached him that one of his Indian satraps had been slain in a mutinous uprising (*Arr. Anab.* 6. 27. 2). The king then dispatched letters to India to provide for the temporary administration of the dead satrap's district. Whether these messages were carried across the mountain ranges and deserts of southern Afghanistan or (as is more likely) they followed Alexander's own route down the Indus and across the desert of southern Baluchistan, the way was extremely difficult. The horrors of Alexander's own recent experience in the Gedrosian desert are sufficient testimony to that. Again, the point is that a message was sent to the king and found its mark in an army moving through a largely untracked and topographically hostile environment.

stances under which men and messages found their way to Alexander under the most extreme conditions, there is no reason to deny that such a message delivery from the Aegean world was possible.

Alexander himself had sent across to Mesopotamia for pack animals to transport the Persepolis hoard. The question of the disposition of that treasure, however, is vexed. Curtius (5. 6. 9) says that Alexander intended to carry it all with him. Diodorus (17. 71. 2) suggests that the king intended to keep part with him for war expenses and deposit the rest in Susa. Strabo (15. 3. 9 [731]) reports that the Persepolis treasure was taken to Susa, but later mentions that treasure from all sources was brought together at Ecbatana. Arrian (*Anab.* 3. 19. 7) says that Parmenio was put in charge of conveying the Persian hoard to Ecbatana.

One wonders if Alexander really intended to carry millions of pounds of gold and silver with him from Persepolis, as Curtius claims. This is very unlike the commander noted for his light train and swift movements. He almost certainly would have deposited and secured the reserve some place. We know that the treasure eventually came to Ecbatana, where it was put under Harpalus' charge, and that Parmenio was assigned the task of transporting it to Ecbatana. But Alexander can hardly have left Persepolis with this plan in effect, especially after he

learned that Darius was at Ecbatana and he knew that he might have to fight him. Diodorus offers the only solution (confirmed in part by Strabo, and not in conflict with Arrian), that the treasure was to be taken to Susa, except for an amount to be carried for necessary expenses.³⁵ We may conjecture that later, after Ecbatana was in Macedonian hands and Darius no longer a threat, Alexander decided to install the treasury at Ecbatana. Parmenio was left behind to transport the treasure from Susa to Ecbatana (there was a good direct road) where Harpalus would assume control.³⁶ The relevant point for our purposes, however, is not what eventually happened to the treasure, but the strong probability that the pack animals moved from the Mesopotamian plain across the Zagros range into the Persis during that winter, indicating that at least some communications with the west seem to have been open.³⁷

If (as Badian suggests) Alexander's first news of Agis' defeat reached him en route to Ecbatana, we are faced with an extraordinary, perhaps unique, lapse in communications. The time would now be late May or early June of 330 B.C. We do not know precisely the date of Agis' collapse, but even assuming the latest possible date consistent with Curtius' chronology,³⁸ are we to believe that at least eight months elapsed before news of Antipater's victory reached the king? The traditional Sardis-

35. For a discussion of the expenses of maintaining the Macedonian army, see A. R. Bellinger, *Essays on the Coinage of Alexander the Great*, Numismatic Studies, No. 11 (New York, 1963), pp. 30-37 and 71.

36. U. Wilcken, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 148, has simply assumed that Parmenio had remained at Persepolis with the treasure and was now called up to Ecbatana. I doubt this; it is unlikely that Alexander would have left behind the experienced commander of the Thessalian cavalry and other Greek allies at the Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela when he believed that he might have to fight Darius again. At Ecbatana, when those allies were dismissed, Parmenio could safely be assigned the sinecure of treasury-guardian and Median governor, posts he held until his murder later that year. Bellinger (*Coinage of Alexander*, p. 71) also has Parmenio remain at Persepolis with

the baggage and a large part of the army, but this is clearly his misreading of Curtius (5. 6. 11), who tells of Parmenio's staying at Persepolis while Alexander conducted his month-long campaign among local tribes in the Persis. In other respects, though, Bellinger's account of Alexander's finances is the best discussion available of this important and little-known subject.

37. The Uxians, traditionally troublesome in that area, had been pacified by Alexander earlier; Arr. *Anab.* 3. 17. 1-5; Diod. 17. 67. 2-5; Curt. 5. 3. 3-16. Professor Badian has suggested to me that it may have taken quite a long time to round up the animals, drive them to Persepolis, and load the treasure, and that Alexander may have left Persepolis before the task was completed.

38. Late September 331; Curt. 6. 1. 21.

Susa journey was about three months long.³⁹ We may assume that Antipater recognized the importance of Agis' defeat, and that he dispatched word of it immediately, perhaps using some small flying force.⁴⁰ A group of horsemen, riding under normal conditions in the autumn of the year, could make the journey from Europe to Susa in about thirty days.⁴¹

It would appear that, when Alexander sent money to Antipater for use against Agis, he had as yet received no word of the collapse of the Greek rebellion. Arrian (*Anab.* 3. 16. 9–10) puts the dispatch of silver to Antipater at Susa (mid-December 331). The money was to be escorted part of the way by Menes, the newly-appointed governor of Syria, Phoenicia, and Cilicia. Diodorus (17. 64. 5), however, sets this incident at Babylon (*ca.* 20 October–20 November). While less precise than Arrian, Diodorus gives an account of Menes' appointment, the grant of one thousand talents (three thousand in Arrian), and Alexander's order "to enlist as many soldiers as possible." It is difficult to choose between Arrian and Diodorus here.⁴² Arrian's precision in describing Alexander's concern over the situation in Greece is attractive, yet Diodorus' setting the event at Babylon rather than Susa may

make more sense. Babylon, the scene of a thirty-four-day rest following the military engagement that made Alexander master of western Asia, was the place where administrative arrangements for the newly acquired territories were made.⁴³ Alexander could afford to send a large sum to Antipater from either city—from Susa because of the huge treasury (a prime objective in seizing that place; Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 6–7), and from Babylon because Alexander had come into large amounts of money both at Darius' camp after Gaugamela and in Babylon itself.⁴⁴ On the basis of internal evidence, therefore, there is little to choose between Babylon and Susa.

This problem illustrates one of those thorns which have irritated Alexander scholars for nearly a century. We are faced with a conflict in sources. Internal investigation does not permit us to choose between them. Moreover, the normal principles of source criticism have little validity here. One might suggest that Arrian's version should be selected because he is the "better" source, while Diodorus is notorious among historians of Alexander for being often sloppy, inconsistent, and derivative without intelligence. In general terms, it may be possible to characterize

39. Badian ("Agis," p. 187) gives an estimate of 112 days as a plausible figure for a march from Macedon to Susa, reflecting the relatively slow pace of a large armed force.

40. Unfortunately, we know very little about communications in antiquity. I am not inclined, however, to accept Badian's image (*ibid.*, pp. 188–89) of a lone messenger struggling through hostile mountains in midwinter.

41. The journey across the Aegean was usually just under three days; e.g., Thuc. 3. 3. 5. Herodotus (5. 52–54) estimates the length of the Royal Road from Ephesus to Susa as just under 1600 miles. W. M. Calder, "The Royal Road in Herodotus," *CR*, XXXIX (1925), 11, and R. J. Forbes, *Notes on the History of Ancient Roads* (Amsterdam, 1934), p. 80, generally corroborate Herodotus' estimate by modern scholarship. We do not know whether Alexander maintained the courier system of the Royal Road which Herodotus (5. 52) described and which Xenophon (*Cyr.* 8. 6. 17–18) called the quickest form of travel in the world, but it would be surprising if Alexander, who usually made careful administrative arrangements wherever he went, neglected this vital communications link. It has been estimated that a message could pass

from Sardis to Susa in six to nine days; see G. B. Gray, *CAH*, IV, 193, and Forbes, *Ancient Roads*, p. 80. The American Pony Express maintained post stations slightly more closely spaced than those on the Royal Road and was characterized by lighter saddle weight. The Pony Express, crossing far more difficult mountain barriers than Asia Minor offers, held to a standard schedule of eight to ten days for the 1980 miles between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. Given travel by day only, and without frequent change of horses, we cannot be far wrong in suggesting that in Alexander's day messages could pass from Europe to Susa in a month's time.

42. On the arrival of Amyntas, Badian ("Agis," p. 187) chooses Diodorus.

43. Other wide-ranging administrative matters were dealt with; Curt. 5. 1. 43–45; Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 4–5; Diod. 17. 64. 5–6 (very like Curtius here).

44. For the aftermath of Gaugamela, see Arr. *Anab.* 3. 15. 5; Diod. 17. 64. 3; and Curt. 5. 1. 10. For the Babylonian treasure, Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. 3–4; Diod. 17. 64. 6; and Curt. 5. 1. 45.

our sources on Alexander in this manner, but such characterizations can only be a superficial guide, at best, to their use. In particular terms, each case must be decided on its own merits, and there is nothing here to suggest that Arrian is in any sense "better."⁴⁵ Since it is impossible to choose between Arrian and Diodorus on the basis of the internal evidence or according to any principles of source criticism, we may leave the question open, accepting a period of time extending from late October to mid-December before which Alexander was still unaware of Agis' defeat.⁴⁶ The selection of the date itself depends upon one's use of the sources, and I have attempted to indicate the inherent difficulties of that procedure.

Word of the Macedonian victory in Greece could have arrived at any moment after the period of time indicated above; we simply have no evidence to indicate when this news reached the king. But this was important information, and it seems likely that Antipater would have taken steps to insure its passage to Alexander as quickly as possible. Given the relatively favorable seasonal conditions of the

autumn in Asia Minor, and the generally easy travel arrangements of the Royal Road, especially through Assyria and Mesopotamia, it is possible that news could have reached Alexander long before the eight months (proposed by some) had elapsed. Despite Badian's forceful arguments, Alexander was not isolated. Certainly a number of people in Susa and Babylon knew where he was until he left Persepolis for Media.⁴⁷

Alexander left Persepolis sometime in mid-May and marched north, having learned that Darius was in Ecbatana,⁴⁸ but probably uncertain of either his or Darius' next move. On the way, the king learned that Darius, having acquired Scythian and Cadusian allies, was preparing for war. Alexander responded in kind, but upon reaching Media he heard that the Cadusians and Scythians had not arrived and that Darius was in fact now in flight. The report was confirmed near Ecbatana. At Ecbatana Alexander dismissed his Thessalian cavalry and other Greek allies. Badian has interpreted this as a sign that word of Agis' defeat had at long last reached the king and that he now felt free to end

45. Indeed, it is Diodorus who comes to the rescue to fill in some gaps and clear up some of the mysteries in Arrian's account of Gaugamela, as shown by Fuller (*Generalship of Alex.*, pp. 174-78). In another place Arrian (*Anab.* 4. 6. 3-4) has Alexander marching about 180 miles in *three days* (with a mixed force of cavalry, archers, and light-armed infantry), arriving at dawn on the fourth day and engaging immediately in battle. Arrian (or his source) should have known better. Also see R. D. Milns's discussion of Arrian's times and distances, "Alexander's Pursuit of Darius through Iran," *Historia*, XV (1966), 256. This is not designed to whitewash Diodorus and degrade Arrian; it only attempts to show that since even our normally most reliable source can nod, we must use all sources with caution in every instance.

46. One is tempted to select Diodorus, since it is neither impossible nor unreasonable that word from Greece had not yet reached Alexander early in his stay at Babylon when he made his administrative arrangements and sent Menes off to the west. I am also inclined to think that Alexander sent money off to Antipater as quickly as possible after Gaugamela and after he was himself financially secure: thus Babylon rather than Susa. That is, why wait nearly two more months to support his commander in his struggle against the rebels? But, as Professor Badian has pointed out to me, and has shown in his own work over the past decade, Alexander

historians are always choosing the source which supports their case.

47. Badian argues ("Agis," p. 189) that there may have been a total communications breakdown, and that even Darius was unsure of Alexander's whereabouts. The latter is to be expected. Alexander was, after all, also uncertain of Darius' moves. But it is not Darius who is germane to this argument, it is Alexander's own forces, and we have seen that at least some (in Susa and Babylon) were in contact with the king during that winter. As to the Macedonian reinforcements who met Alexander en route to Media, Badian maintains that they were marching up from Ecbatana, suggesting that even Alexander's own personnel officers were ignorant of the king's whereabouts. It is implied that these troops were sent to Ecbatana believing that the king was there; they learned otherwise, and so marched toward Persepolis, meeting Alexander on the road north. This is impossible. These Macedonian reinforcements could hardly have gone to Ecbatana because Darius was still there. (Arr. *Anab.* 3. 19. 2; perhaps also Curt. 5. 8. 1.) It is impossible to determine the route of these troops; they may well have caught up from behind, having followed the Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis route (see Badian's objection to this, "Agis," p. 189).

48. Arr. *Anab.* 3. 19. 1-2. These events and those which follow immediately are recorded in Arr. *Anab.* 3. 19. 1-6.

the farce and send the Greeks home.⁴⁹ The dismissal of the Greeks obviously could not occur until the Hellenic crusade was finished and Greece was secure; in suggesting this Badian is perfectly correct. Yet the release of the Greeks at Ecbatana rather than earlier has little to do with the situation in Greece. Arrian puts their dismissal in its proper context, that of the situation in Asia. So long as Alexander believed that he must fight Darius he will have kept the Thessalian horse and the others. It was only before Ecbatana that he learned that battle was no longer necessary. These forces (and their commander) might now be dismissed. Their dispatch homeward was also possible because Greece was now quiet, but it may be true that Alexander had known for some months that Greece was secure. He had kept the Greeks with him because he thought that he might need them. I see no reason to suggest a necessary connection between the dismissal of the allies and the news of Agis' defeat.

We are thus faced with the possibility that the news of the rebel collapse could have greeted Alexander almost any time after mid-December (perhaps even as early as late October) 331 B.C., that there is no means of showing exactly when the king received the message, and that any attempt to be more exact can only be a reflection of our estimates of Alexander's general policy and motivations.

Now it can be argued that Alexander spent a long time at Persepolis waiting for news from Greece, although I have tried to show that it was at least possible that word reached him sooner. But it may also be

true that Alexander waited at Persepolis in order to determine Darius' next move. Having committed himself to Persepolis,⁵⁰ he was better advised to wait out Darius than move prematurely. Should Darius raise an army and choose to "liberate" upper Mesopotamia and thereby threaten Alexander's rear, the Macedonian king could retrace his route from Persepolis to Susa and Babylon to meet that challenge. If, however, Alexander should move too quickly to Ecbatana without certain knowledge of Darius' whereabouts, he might risk the Persian king's having moved to the west, thereby cutting him off. The Persepolis vigil was not in vain. Alexander learned that Darius waited in Ecbatana with a force, a virtual invitation to do battle.⁵¹ The king could now move forward, assured not only that Greece was secure, but that Darius had not cut him off in the rear. In short, because of its geographical location and communications routes, Persepolis was a place which permitted Alexander to remain flexible in relation to whatever moves Darius might make.⁵²

Thus far I have attempted to widen the range of interpretations accounting for Alexander's activities in the early months of 330 B.C. It may now be possible to offer a narrative reconstruction of those events. Persepolis fell to Alexander in mid-January 330, and the town was subjected to the free pillage of the army.⁵³ The citadel containing the palace complex was not given over to the soldiers, but was kept intact by Alexander for his own purposes. He then ordered the systematic looting of

49. Badian, "Agis," p. 190.

50. Badian, "Agis," p. 189, calls the march to Persepolis a "strategic error."

51. Arr. *Anab.* 3. 19. 1-2, almost confirmed by Plut. 42. 5, although this is highly conflated.

52. Professor MacKay further suggests to me that Alexander may have been reluctant to move until he was certain of Darius' whereabouts, in order to prevent Darius from cutting him off in Persia itself. This was, after all, Darius'

home ground, and Alexander might not want to risk moving out of Persepolis only to have Darius advance over routes unknown to the Macedonian and seize Persepolis behind the king. The importance of Persepolis as a ritual center and its symbolic and real importance to Darius as a holy city are strongly emphasized by Professor MacKay.

53. Alexander's entry into Persepolis is described in Diod. 17. 70. 1-72. 6 and Curt. 5. 6. 1-7. 7.

the royal monuments, keeping some of the treasure for his own immediate needs, but probably transporting the bulk of it back to Susa. It is clear that Alexander had no intention of establishing himself at this remote place and was taking practical steps to abandon it.

The wait was prolonged into the spring season. During this period Alexander may have received news of Agis' defeat: at least that problem had been resolved. But there was still Darius. What would he do next? It may be only our own *post factum* judgments that see the battle at Gaugamela as decisive because it was in fact decisive. Alexander may not have felt so certain. It is conceivable that Darius loomed as a much more serious threat to the king than he appears to us in retrospect.

A small campaign into the countryside may have relieved the boredom of the place and satisfied the natural instincts of a curiosity that was a formidable part of the king's personality. That three thousand Macedonians were left behind expressly to guard the citadel indicates that Alexander had serious concern for it. Either the treasure was still being packed for transport, or the king had other plans and would risk nothing which might interfere with them.

It may have been upon his return to Persepolis that Alexander received a report on Darius.⁵⁴ There was no reason to remain any longer. The treasure may have been shipped by now (late April–early May), and the time had come to move on. Persepolis had served its purpose. It had provided treasure, a place of rest,

and the sense of achievement which must have come from living in the halls of Xerxes and Darius. But it was now to be abandoned while the king pursued his own dreams. Is it too much to suggest that Alexander would discard cities, like people, when they either hindered his progress or were no longer useful to him? More than any other place, Persepolis was the symbol of the *ancien régime* in Asia. Whatever seminal ideas Alexander maintained about a new world, one thing must have been clear in May of 330 B.C.: the Old Order was gone. The full impact of this needed to be driven home to Darius and the other Asian peoples under Persian control. Darius was still alive and, for all that Alexander knew, still a threat. The destruction of the place might serve to demoralize the Persian and deny him his ancestral symbol of power. Other national wars might be raised against Alexander in Asia, but he would insure that none could use the traditional Achaemenid center as a rallying point. Never again would the representatives of a score of Asian races assemble on the Persian New Year to pay homage to the King of Kings. Never again would the long processions of tribute bearers mount those magnificent stairways and pass through Xerxes' Gate of All Nations to deposit their wealth in the Hall of Audience. The annual ritual which symbolized the Great King's power over much of Asia would now be made homeless.⁵⁵

Persepolis had been useful for four months for tactical purposes. It was now to be sacrificed for strategic reasons. Alexander no longer needed the place for

54. At least one of our sources gives the impression that Alexander left Persepolis not long after hearing of Darius' whereabouts; Arr. *Anab.* 3. 19. 1.

55. On the importance of Persepolis as a ritual center, see Arthur U. Pope, "Persepolis as a Ritual City," *Archaeology*, X (1957), 123–30. The annual New Year's festival itself is described in A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 275–83. Eddy, ch. ii, examines in detail

both Persepolis and the New Year's festival in the context of the Achaemenid monarch's religious and political functions. In his review of G. Walser, *Die Wolkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis* (Berlin, 1966), O. W. Muscarella puts to rest the idea that the Persepolis reliefs show "gifts from loyal, loving subjects." Muscarella correctly argues that the procession described in sculpture on the stairways is a *Tributzug*; see *JNES*, XXVIII (1969), 281–83.

a residence; Susa and Babylon would provide that.⁵⁶ Thus, in the nature of a farewell to what had been, as well as a warning to Darius, Alexander burned the palaces as a sign to Asia. But the act would not go unnoticed by Greeks. Indeed this was one of those rare and fortuitous moments in which two marks could be struck with one blow.⁵⁷ Asia was put on notice; Greece was avenged. For the Greeks and Macedonians in the king's train, and for those who wrote about the fire in later years, the Greek context of the act was understandably dominant. And so our sources are much taken up with the revenge motive and the fascinating story of the bacchanal and Thaïs.

Only in Arrian (*Anab.* 3. 18. 11–12) is there any hint of the effect of the conflagration on the Asians,⁵⁸ and it is probably buried in Parmenio's admonition, representing the context of Asian policy. Alexander defended his action by citing the motive of Greek revenge. About this Arrian comments: "But Alexander does not seem to me to have acted prudently, nor can it be regarded as any kind of punishment upon Persians of long ago."⁵⁹ Thus even Arrian did not regard Alexander's answer as a satisfactory explanation for what he did. Perhaps neither should we.

APPENDIX: THE END OF THE AFFAIR

Although we have been mainly concerned with Alexander's motives of the moment in the spring of 330 B.C., it may

not be idle to speculate about the aftermath of Persepolis. For some, the destruction of those magnificent monuments of Achaemenid rule was a wanton act of barbarism of which even Arrian could not approve.⁶⁰ In a somewhat different view, Badian has suggested that it was a major miscalculation on Alexander's part. In choosing to fire the palace complex for immediate political expediency (as a sign to a Greek revolt already suppressed), the king nullified his own legitimacy as the Achaemenid successor and raised an Iranian national war against himself.⁶¹ S. K. Eddy has set out most fully the thesis that the destruction of Persepolis (again, for reasons of immediate policy) not only deprived Alexander of legitimacy in Asia, but also insured the development of a long-term Asian resistance to Hellenism because the Macedonians were unable to replace the functions of the kingship which they had destroyed.⁶² The failure was thus complete.

Yet one might ask in what sense Alexander failed. Early in 330 B.C. he believed that he would have to fight Darius again. We have seen that in fact Darius had already begun to mobilize a new army, which would consist in part of Persian officers and Cadusian and Scythian allies, and that Alexander, upon hearing of these preparations, moved to meet the challenge. But the Cadusians and Scythians never materialized, and Darius was eventually murdered by his own nobles.

56. Babylon would play an increasingly important role in Alexander's empire. Strabo 15. 3. 9–10 (731) describes Alexander's interest in making Babylon the favored city, although it is impossible to say whether the king had this in mind when he burned Persepolis. Persepolis had never been a formal residence for the Achaemenids, anyway; indeed, it may have never been inhabited in the ordinary sense except for a garrison protecting the treasure and the usual military hangers-on. On the roles played by the various Persian capitals—Susa, Ecbatana, Babylon, Persepolis—see R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Cleveland, 1963), pp. 95–97.

57. Rare indeed for Alexander, the rest of whose career was often marked by an inability to reconcile Greco-Macedonian with Asian values.

58. See the opening quotation (above).

59. *Anab.* 3. 18. 12.

60. E.g., most recently, R. D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London, 1968), pp. 138–39.

61. "Alexander the Great and the Creation of an Empire," *History Today*, VIII (1958), 497, and, in more detail, "Agis," pp. 187–90.

62. *The King is Dead*, *passim*, but conclusions summarized on pp. vii–viii, 37, and 58–61.

Can we speculate about the effect of Persepolis' destruction on Darius' attempt to raise an effective force against Alexander? If Persepolis itself was as important a symbol as we have made it out to be, it is at least possible that its obliteration served to thwart Darius' opportunity to revive. In this context perhaps Alexander succeeded: the end of Persepolis may have discouraged those who would, under other circumstances, have rallied to the Achæmenid's side. Legitimacy based on the ritual pledges and symbols of the Old Order was now in doubt. Legitimacy (at least for the moment) was to be a matter of force of arms. It was only later, after the dust from Alexander's train had

settled, when his lesser successors began their incessant feuding, that Asians (including Persians) could reassert their traditional values. The resistance against Hellenism thus set in. No doubt Alexander's razing of Persepolis helped motivate this resistance. But for Alexander himself the Persepolis outcome need not necessarily be regarded as a failure. Wherever he went, Alexander's legitimacy was based mainly upon his force of arms and his force of personality. Have we much reason to feel confident that it would have been different had Persepolis lived?

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