

THE MASSACRE OF THE BRANCHIDAE

THE reputation of Alexander and the judgement on his character have oscillated between two extremes down the ages. At times he was taken by ancient moralists as the prime example of one corrupted by power and ambition. At other times, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he has been seen as the ideal leader of men in war and peace. These extremes of interpretation are possible because his brief and incomplete career contained a number of highly dramatic episodes of different kinds, which can be enhanced or explained away to produce either effect. The most extreme instance leading to an adverse judgment is the massacre of the Branchidae, and it is not surprising that Tarn, whose work on Alexander represented a peak of eulogy, argued strongly for the view that the event was entirely fictitious. He has been followed by most writers since then, who usually do not try to account for this episode; in fact they simply omit it. This is strange, for the evidence that it occurred goes back to Callisthenes, the earliest to write on Alexander's campaigns, and an eye-witness of the happening, if it occurred.¹

I. THE BRANCHIDAE

Before discussing the historicity of the massacre, it may be best to explain the original position and characteristics of the Branchidae—an aspect which has not been deeply considered by those who write on Alexander. The sanctuary and oracle-centre of the Didymaeon Apollo lies some ten miles south of Miletus. Pausanias stated that it was 'older than the settlement of the Ionians', and various considerations suggest that this tradition was true.² First of all, the arrangement whereby in the archaic period the sanctuary was administered by a family is not exactly paralleled elsewhere in the Hellenic world. The Iamids and the Clytiads had secured the monopoly of the divination at Olympia in Classical times, but even they did not control the sanctuary as a whole.³ The Branchidae were in a much more conspicuous position. Not only were they the hereditary operators of a most important oracle, but their power was so dominant that they gave their name to the place: unlike any other Greek sanctuary, the site was designated by their patronymic. Though Didyma was the actual name of the locality, Herodotus when using his own words always referred to it as Branchidae.⁴ This suggests that it was in origin one of those communities centred on the sanctuary of a local deity, such as were typical in other parts of Asia Minor before it was hellenized, and which survived in places throughout classical times.

The name Branchos is almost unique in Greek mythology and was not given to individuals in the classical period—which is not surprising as its literal meaning was 'sore throat' or 'hoarseness'.⁵ There was of course a legend to explain this curious nomenclature: his mother, while pregnant, had a vision that the sun had entered her mouth and emerged from her womb;

An earlier version of some of this, forming part of a history of Branchidae, was read by Prof. R. M. Errington, and the present article by Prof. P. J. Rhodes and Dr P. S. Derow. To them I am indebted, but they are not responsible for the views expressed.

¹ W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* ii (Cambridge 1948) 272–5, Appendix 13, the alleged massacre of the Branchidae; *id.*, *CR* xxxvi (1922) 63–65. For books from which the massacre is omitted, e.g., P. Cloché, *Alexandre le Grand* (Neuchâtel 1953); R. Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London 1973)—see 534 nn.; P. Green, *Alexander of Macedon* (London 1970); J. R. Hamilton, *Alexander the Great* (London 1973); N. G. L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great* (London 1981)—see 316, n. 86; C. A. Robinson, *Alexander the Great* (New

York 1947): U. Wilcken, *Alexander the Great*, trans. G. C. Richards (New York 1967).

² Paus. vii 2.6.

³ H. W. Parke, *Oracles of Zeus* (Oxford 1967) 173–5. The Selloi of Dodona were a tribe not a family. For the Kragalidai who may have been a ruling family at Delphi see W. G. Forrest, *BCH* lxxx (1956) 45 ff.; Parke and J. Boardman, *JHS* lxxvii (1957) 277 ff.

⁴ Hdt. i 46.2, 92.2, 157.3, 159.1, ii 159.3, v 36.3: *αἱ Βραγχίδααι*. i 158: *οἱ Βραγχίδααι*. vi 19.2 (a quotation from a Delphic response, cf. *infra*) and 3 (a reference to this) *Διδύμια*.

⁵ I can only trace Branchos as a mythological name elsewhere in Apollodorus, *Epit.* 1.3—the father of Cercyon. Weizsäcker (Roscher, s.v. 'Branchus'), fol-

hence the child born to her was called Branchos, because the sun had passed through his mother's throat. This crudely exaggerated and obvious symbolism is of a type which recurs in the oriental tales of Herodotus.⁶ It is clearly primitive and eastern in origin, but one may doubt whether it was invented to explain the name Branchos, which, as we have pointed out, did not literally mean 'throat' but 'sore throat'. The vision was essentially a prophecy that Branchos was the son of the Sun God, but the Greeks re-adapted it by emphasizing the throat to provide, however inadequately, an explanation of his name. Actually the most likely hypothesis is that Branchos is derived from some non-Hellenic language of Asia Minor, and that the worship of a Sun God at Didyma antedated the arrival of the Ionians. In the third century BC and later a legend developed which made Branchos a descendant of a Delphian priest; and instead of being regarded as a child of the Sun God he became a youth beloved of Apollo. But these tales belong with the restoration of the temple and the oracle in the late fourth century BC, when after the interruption of the primitive tradition of the Branchidae a new procedure had to be developed which borrowed much from Delphi.⁷

The picture of the Branchidae in the archaic period managing a traditional establishment in territory dominated by the Ionian colony of Miletus has to rest largely on hypothesis. But there is some evidence to suggest that communities in the sphere of Milesian influence could function under local governors, such as Chares, the *archos* of Teichioussa who dedicated his seated statue to Apollo at Didyma, or the unnamed *archōn* of Assessos who occurs in a traditional story.⁸ As for the oracle itself the only reasonably historical account of a consultation is Herodotus' tale of Aristodicus of Cyme, when the response was favourable to the Persian conquerors. At the time this was also the policy of Miletus. Ever since their reconciliation with Alyattes the Milesians, unlike the other Ionians, had cultivated good relations with the rulers of Lydia. So Croesus had bestowed immense treasures on Didyma. Herodotus compares them in kind and in weight to those which Croesus dedicated at Delphi. He mentions them three times (a fact to which he draws attention), and evidently was satisfied that though they had been plundered by the Persians before his time, his enquiries had established their existence.⁹ Croesus had contributed considerable funds toward the building of the temple of Artemis of Ephesus. So it has been suggested that the great archaic temple at Didyma, which was erected soon after, might have been helped from the same source. But as archaeologists date the carved elements to the thirties of the sixth century, it is difficult to suppose that Croesus could have done much to help. Alternatively, it has been suggested by Fehr that the funds might have been provided by Cyrus, and though the arguments which he proposed, based on the hypothetical plan of the archaic temple, do not seem to the present writer convincing, it is possible that the Persian king chose to

lowed by Escher (*RE* s.v. 'Branchos'), refers to Quint. xi 3.55 where a defect of speech producing a tremolo is so called, and suggests that βράγχος was a form of utterance used by prophets and therefore a title for prophets themselves. But there is no reference to prophets in Quintilian, and the reading is now discredited. M. E. Butler (Loeb) prefers βρασμόν, and is followed by M. Winterbottom (*OCT*).

⁶ Conon *FGrH* 26 F 1.33; Varro *ap. schol. Stat. Theb.* viii 198; *Script. Rer. Myth.*, ed. G. H. Bode (1834) 28 (*Myth* 1.81). For the type of myth, cf. H. Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher*, *Tübinger Beiträge* xliii (1966) 54.

⁷ Callim. *fr.* 229 Pfeiffer = *POxy* 2172.1-22, where though the name Branchos cannot be restored, he is clearly described as descended on his father's side from Daitas and on his mother's from the Lapiths. Strabo ix 3.9 for Branchos as a descendant of Machaireus; Asclepiades of Tragilos, *FGrH* 12 F 15 for Machaireus as

a son of Daitas. The legend of Smicros, the father of Branchos, deriving him from Delphi, occurs in two versions with minor differences, Conon and Varro *loc. cit.* (n. 6). For Branchos as the beloved of Apollo, *Stat. Theb.* iii 478 with schol. and Lucian *Domo* (10) 24 and *D. Deor.* (79) 2; Longus iv 17.6; Philostr. *Ep.* 5, 8 and 57 and elsewhere in late romantic literature. For Delphic imitations in procedure, the *προφήτης* as medium and the use of hexameters, see Parke, *Hermathena* cxxx/cxxxi (1981) 109.

⁸ G. L. Huxley, *The Early Ionians* (London 1966) 50 n. 26, citing Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 52 (Assesos), and L. H. Jeffery, *Local scripts of archaic Greece* (Oxford 1961) 334 (Teichioussa).

⁹ Alyattes' reconciliation: *Hdt.* i 22.4. Croesus' treasures at Didyma: *Hdt.* i 92.2, v 36.3, vi 19.3. This is curiously inconsistent with the story which Herodotus derived from Delphi that Croesus had tested and rejected the oracle of the Branchidae, i 46.2.

show his favour in this way to the chief sanctuary in Milesian territory. Undoubtedly Apollo was accepted by Darius as a god whose rights should be protected.¹⁰

The relations of the Branchidae with the Persians before the Ionian Revolt may have been good. However it is perhaps significant of their attitude to Miletus that the stories about the oracle which were current in the fourth century, though of very dubious authenticity, do represent it as curiously independent in regard to the neighbouring city. When the Carians wish to make an alliance, they are told 'Once of old the Milesians were warlike'; and when the city is polluted with atrocities committed in civil strife, the oracle actually refuses to answer enquiries.¹¹ These are not the kind of stories which one expects of a native shrine integrated into the establishment, but they are quite appropriate to a priest-state functioning independently within local territory.

It was quite in accordance with this position that when in 494 BC at the end of the Ionian Revolt the temple of Branchidae was burnt at the time of the sack of Miletus, the Apolline oracle-centre remained in ruins. As Herodotus records, 'those of the Milesians who were taken alive' were removed by the Persians and settled at Ampe near the mouth of the Tigris. However, besides those killed and captured, enough Milesians survived to re-establish the city after the victory of Mycale. But the Branchidae were transported even further into Persian territory, and there is no sign that any remained behind. Hence when Miletus was rebuilt, the temple at Didyma was not restored, though there was some erecting of small edifices in the sanctuary—which is exactly what one might expect if the Branchidae had been a quasi-independent organization destroyed by the Persians. But the worship of Apollo on the site was not allowed to lapse completely. A Milesian inscription gives detailed regulations for an annual festival, at which a procession went to Didyma to offer sacrifice to Apollo. Mention of the date 479/8 BC shows that in some form this act of worship had begun as soon as the Milesians could undertake it, and it was appropriately managed by the Molpai, the sacred guild of Apollo Delphinios in the city. But though the ruins at Didyma must have been cleared sufficiently to allow safe and practical access to the site of the sanctuary, the temple was not rebuilt and the oracle remained silent. Herodotus, writing some fifty years after its fall, describes the oracle-centre as burnt in 494 BC, and quite consistently elsewhere refers to it in the past tense with an explanatory statement that it had been an important place in the sixth century.¹²

¹⁰ For the dating of the archaic temple see W. Hahland, *JDAI* lxxix (1964) 168, who would date the capitals c. 535 BC and the figures on the columns c. 530 or a little later. But he regards these as a late stage in building and is prepared to allow Croesus a part in the beginning. N. Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Ist.Mitt.* xv (1965) 38 would date the figures 550–540 BC, which would even allow them to have been paid for by Croesus. But K. Tuchelt, *Ist. Forsch.* xxvii (1971) 132 would fix a dating 540–530 BC. It turns on the relation to the carved figures on the Ephesian columns in so far as they are attributable to Croesus. B. Fehr, *Marburger Winckelmann-programm* 1971/2, 51 ff. assigns the funding of the temple of Branchidae to Cyrus, but his attempt to relate its plan to Persian fire-temples seems much too speculative. I would not accept his principle that there must have been a close continuity of traditional design between the archaic and the Hellenistic temples (p. 16). For Darius and Apollo see the letter to Gadatas, *ML* no. 12, and Hdt. vi 97.2 (Datis' offering on Delos, 490 BC). If we accept that Darius may have felt a special relationship with Apollo of Didyma, this might explain why he treated the Branchidae differently from the Milesians—the one anomaly which Callisthenes explains, though no doubt wrongly. Did Darius regard the Branchidae as specially treacherous to

himself because they may have backed Miletus in the Ionian Revolt? In any case, was the settlement in distant Bactria specially penal? Note how the cult statue of Apollo is removed respectfully to Ecbatana: see n. 19.

¹¹ See Demon *FGrH* 329 F 16, but an alternative version of the legend in the scholiast (*Ar. Pl.* 1002) assigns the line to Anacreon (*PMG* 426); Heraclid. *Pont. fr.* 50 Wehrli = *Ath.* xii 524a, on which see Parke, *Hermathena* cxx (1976) 50–4.

¹² Hdt. vi 19.3 ff. (the destruction); i 157.3 (the oracle-centre in the sixth century). The procession to Didyma; Dittenberger, *Syll.*³ 57. The positive statement about the cessation and revival of the oracle is in Callisthenes, *FGrH* 124 F 14 (*Str.* xvii 1.43), discussed below. The German excavators found fragmentary remains of architecture attributable to the fifth century: see H. Knackfuss, *Didyma* i 127, 142 ff. for a roofed building conjectured from some of the material, and Hahland (n. 10) 146 for altars restored. The latest reconstruction is by W. Voigtländer, *Ist. Forsch.* xxii (1972) 93 ff., who produced from the evidence a design of both a well-house and a 'cult-room'; he also argues with much special pleading for the probability of a fifth-century revival of the oracle. Apart from the clear implications of Herodotus and the silence of other sources, this theory takes no account of the point to

II. THE EVIDENCE FOR THE MASSACRE

If we return to the period of Alexander, it has to be inferred that Callisthenes mentioned the massacre of the Branchidae; but it is an inference which even Tarn did not question. Strabo cites Callisthenes in connection with Alexander's expedition to consult the oracle of Ammon. After explaining his motives, narrating the marvels of the journey, and describing the ceremony, the paraphrase continues . . . 'that the oracular responses were not as at Delphi and Branchidae given in words, but mostly by nods and tokens . . . the prophet having assumed the role of Zeus; that, however, the fellow expressly told the king that he, Alexander, was the son of Zeus. And to this statement Callisthenes dramatically adds that, although the oracle of Apollo at Branchidae had ceased to speak from the time when the temple had been robbed by the Branchidae who sided with the Persians in the time of Xerxes, and although the sacred fountain also had ceased to flow, yet at Alexander's arrival the spring began to flow again, and that many oracles were carried by the Milesian ambassadors to Memphis concerning Alexander's descent from Zeus, his future victory in the neighbourhood of Arbela, the death of Darius and the revolutionary attempts in Lacedaemon.'¹³

This passage was written up by Callisthenes for a purpose, but there is nothing in these contemporary events which need be rejected as unhistoric. Alexander did undertake the journey to the oasis of Siwa early in 331 BC, and this is not disproved because Callisthenes made the most of such details as fortunate showers of rain and auspiciously guiding birds. Again the oracle of Didyma, which had been silent since the sack of the temple in the early fifth century, was revived some time shortly after Alexander had rescued the city of Miletus from the Persians in 334. A miraculous bursting-out of the sacred spring as a spontaneous manifestation of divine approval is no doubt somewhat exaggerated.¹⁴ The re-established democracy in Miletus evidently set out to restore at last the great sanctuary of Apollo in its territory, and for this purpose the first step was to ensure the functioning once more of the source of Apolline divination. Nor need we take too seriously the alleged prophecies which reach Alexander at Memphis in the spring of 331. It would not be surprising if those who produced them for transmission to Alexander were already prepared to acclaim him as a son of a god, a notion which had just received a full meaning from his visit to the oracle of Ammon. The victory over the Persian king and that king's death were probably forecast in vaguely grandiloquent prophecies which need not have borne any precise reference to the events. Similarly, it would even have been plausible for the Milesian responses to have contained some veiled warning of troubles in Greece in Alexander's absence, though one may conjecture that they indicated tactfully that the king's enemies would be defeated. All we

which I would attach much importance, that up to 494 BC the oracle-centre had been managed by the Branchidae and that their removal created a gap. The restoration of Miletus from 479 did not automatically involve a restoration of a priesthood for Didyma. It is possible, though the archaeological evidence is not decisive, that some small building was set up in the fifth century, but even if it was a well-house, it need not have been used for oracular purposes.

¹³ Callisth. *FGrH* 124 F 14 (Str. xvii 1.43): . . . οὐχ ὡςπερ ἐν Δελφοῖς καὶ Βραγχίδαῖς τὰς ἀποθεσίσεις διὰ λόγων, ἀλλὰ νεύμασι καὶ συμβόλοις τὸ πλεόν, . . . τοῦ προφήτου τὸν Δία ὑποκριναμένου, τοῦτο μέντοι ῥητῶς εἰπεῖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ὅτι εἴη Διὸς υἱός. προστραγωδεῖ δὲ τούτοις ὁ Καλλισθένης, ὅτι τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος τὸ ἐν Βραγχίδαῖς μαντεῖον ἐκλελοιπὸτος ἐξ ὅτου τὸ ἱερόν ὑπὸ τῶν Βραγχιδῶν σεσύλητο ἐπὶ Ξέρξου περσισάντων, ἐκλελοιπυίας δὲ καὶ τῆς κρήνης, τότε ἢ τε κρήνη ἀνάσχοι καὶ μαντεῖα πολλὰ οἱ Μιλησίων πρέσβεις

κομίσαιεν εἰς Μέμφιν περὶ τῆς ἐκ Διὸς γενέσεως τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τῆς ἐσομένης περὶ Ἀρβηλα νίκης καὶ τοῦ Δαρείου θανάτου καὶ τῶν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι νεωτερισμῶν. Tarn (n. 1) ii 274, asserts that Callisthenes made up 'the story of the Branchidae' and the prophecy of Darius' death at the same time.

¹⁴ See n. 12 for the conjecture of Voigtländer that a well-house had already been erected. Six centuries later there was to be another miraculous outburst of a spring on the site to provide drinking water during the siege by the Goths (A. Rehm, *Didyma* ii 159). E. Badian in H. J. Dell, ed., *Ancient Macedonian studies in honor of Charles F. Edson* (Thessaloniki 1981) 46 goes too far in stating that Didyma 'was stimulated to prophecy for Alexander's benefit'. This must only have been one of the motives for Miletus' revival of the oracle. And though he is possibly right in arguing that the prophet at Didyma had already heard of the response from Ammon before issuing his oracle, I do not think it necessary.

need suppose is that Callisthenes is telling the truth when he records a revival of the oracle-centre at this time and the arrival in Egypt of prophecies which with the eye of the court historian he could interpret later as fulfilled by Alexander's successes. Evidently Callisthenes was writing after these alleged fulfilments: that is, not earlier than the death of Darius, which occurred in the summer of 330. But also Callisthenes did not write later than the spring of 327, when he was arrested and accused of complicity in the Pages' Conspiracy, and died in captivity.¹⁵

Callisthenes must have written when still at liberty and acting as the favoured panegyrist of Alexander. He was the son of Aristotle's first cousin, Hero, and had been brought up in Aristotle's house. They had collaborated in publishing the records of the victors in the Pythian Games. Also Callisthenes had produced a History of Greece (*Hellenica*) in ten books from the King's Peace (386 BC) to the end of the Third Sacred War (346 BC). So by the start of Alexander's expedition he was already an historian of established reputation. But he probably had shown a tendency in his writing to further the policy of his patron. His *Hellenica* appears to have traced the revival of Greek resistance to the Persian King up to the point where Philip of Macedon emerged as the dominant leader. Hence it was highly appropriate that he should join Alexander's expedition with the purpose of producing a record of events as they happened. The title, *The deeds of Alexander*, shows its deliberate aim at a narrative of personal achievement, and a quotation describing the King at Gaugamela confirms that he was treated less as a Macedonian than as leader of a Panhellenic crusade.¹⁶

It is unfortunate that none of the extant references to the work indicate whether it was divided into books. Perhaps it was only one book in length, but this would not, I suppose, exclude the likelihood that it had been written originally in smaller instalments and sent back to Greece in the form of dispatches with a view to later assembly. The collection in book form might have been the work of some member of the Peripatetic school. The latest event which can be proved by quotations to have formed part of the narrative is the battle of Gaugamela (October 331), and, as Jacoby has pointed out, the aspersions cast on Parmenion's conduct in the action could only have been written after his assassination late in 330 with a view to preparing the reader for that grim event. It is consistent with this pattern of composition that the reference to the revival of the oracle at Didyma, occurring in the context of the spring of 331, shows foreknowledge of Gaugamela (October 331), the battle of Megalopolis (winter 331) and the death of Darius (summer 330). But it is also clear, as we have seen, that Callisthenes did not write later than the spring of 327.¹⁷

In this connection his reference to the Branchidae as the original holders of Apollo's oracle-centre at Didyma shows a peculiar and significant feature. Strabo quotes him as describing their robbery of the temple after they had joined the Persian side in the time of Xerxes. This strange account reappears in greater detail in two other places in Strabo. In describing Didyma itself he records: 'It was set on fire by Xerxes as were also the other temples except that at Ephesus. The Branchidae gave over the treasures of the god to the Persian king and accompanied him in his flight in order to escape punishment for the robbing and betrayal of the temple.' Earlier, when discussing the great rock-fortresses in Bactria and Sogdiana Strabo continues: 'and near these places they say Alexander destroyed also the city of the Branchidae, whom Xerxes had settled there—people who voluntarily accompanied him from their homeland, because of the fact that they had betrayed to him the riches and treasures of the god at

¹⁵ For the most recent discussion of these rather uncertain dates see A. B. Bosworth, *JHS* ci (1981) 17–40.

¹⁶ On Callisthenes' career see Jacoby's comm. on *FGrH* 124, and L. Pearson, *The lost histories of Alexander* (New York etc. 1960) 25 ff. Alexander's Panhellenic pose at Gaugamela: *FGrH* 124 F 36.

¹⁷ *FGrH* 124 F 37. The reference to the Araxes (F 38) might indicate a narrative going down to 329 BC if it did not occur in anticipation, but Callisthenes also wrote a

rarely quoted geographical work (*Periplus*). There is a strong indication that he did not continue his narrative into the summer of 330. Plutarch's extraordinary list, perhaps derived from Ister, records both the historians who included the episode of the Amazon queen and those who omitted it (*Alex.* 46 with Hamilton's comm.). Callisthenes appears in neither list, which can best be explained by supposing his narrative had stopped before that point.

Didyma. Alexander destroyed the city, they add, because he abominated the sacrilege and the betrayal.¹⁸

The three passages, though they exhibit small verbal differences, are evidently derived from the same single source—Callisthenes, who is indeed named in the first passage. Strabo cites him elsewhere no less than ten times. So it is reasonable to suppose that he used him directly as one of his many authorities. The narrative of Callisthenes covers two quite separate events—the original treason and sacrilege of the Branchidae leading to their settlement in Bactria, and the massacre of their descendants a century and a half later by Alexander. The first of these two is universally agreed to be completely unhistoric. The destruction of the temple of Apollo at Didyma by the Persians is clearly and simply described by Herodotus at the end of his account of the Ionian Revolt. The material facts have been illustrated and to some extent confirmed by archaeology. The German excavators found beneath the Hellenistic temple a large burnt layer above the foundations of the archaic temple. The French at Susa discovered a colossal model in bronze of a knucklebone inscribed with a dedication to Apollo. This is recognised as part of the spoils of Branchidae. Another great example appears in our literary records. Seleucus after establishing himself as king sent back from Ecbatana to Miletus the cult-statue of Apollo by Canachus, which was installed again at Didyma in the restored temple.¹⁹ These confirmatory details do not actually disprove Callisthenes' version. It would be possible that the burning of the archaic temple and the removal of the knucklebone dedication had occurred in the reign of Xerxes, not of Darius, and Pausanias, our literary source for the restoration of Canachus' Apollo actually alleges that it was removed by Xerxes. But the version of Herodotus must be historically correct.

Since the description of the Branchidae as guilty of sacrilege and treason in the reign of Xerxes is disproved by the evidence of Herodotus, we may well ask why Callisthenes, a historian of repute, should venture to put out a story which was such a travesty of the facts. The reason is clear enough if the situation at the time when it was produced is examined. As we saw, it follows from Callisthenes' references to the fulfilment of prophecies that he was writing on the subject in the summer of 330 BC or later, and not after 327. This is the very period when Alexander in his march into Central Asia reached in Bactria the place to which the Branchidae had been removed by Darius. And at this time, according to some of our ancient authorities, there took place this episode, which, if historic, should be regarded as among the blackest in the record of Alexander's deeds.²⁰ One must suppose that Callisthenes' motive in recording his fantastic version of the Branchidae's relations with the Persians was to provide an explanation for why Alexander, when he encountered the descendants of the Branchidae in their Bactrian home, proceeded to massacre the whole population, man, woman and child, and even to destroy the buildings of their town. The justification which Callisthenes produced was that Alexander felt horror and revulsion at the sacrilege and treason of the Branchidae. Callisthenes dragged the subject into the passage which he was writing at the time—the events of the spring of 331 BC—by mentioning the favourable oracles which Alexander received at that time from Didyma and by drawing a

¹⁸ Str. xiv 1.5, ἐνεπρήσθη δ' ὑπὸ Ξέρξου, καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἱερὰ πλὴν τοῦ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ· οἱ δὲ Βραγχίδαι τοὺς θησαυροὺς τοῦ θεοῦ παραδόντες τῷ Πέρσῃ φεύγοντι συναπήραν, τοῦ μὴ τίσαι δίκας τῆς ἱεροσυλίας καὶ τῆς προδοσίας. Str. xi 11.4, περὶ τούτους δὲ τοὺς τόπους καὶ τὸ τῶν Βραγχιδῶν ἄστει ἀνελεῖν οὓς Ξέρξην μὲν ἰδρύσαι αὐτόθι, συναπάραντας αὐτῷ ἔκοντας ἐκ τῆς οἰκειίας διὰ τὸ παραδοῦναι τὰ χρήματα τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ ἐν Διδύμοις καὶ τοὺς θησαυροὺς· ἐκείνον δ' ἀνελεῖν μυσαστόμενον τὴν ἱεροσυλίαν καὶ τὴν προδοσίαν. Strabo's geographical vagueness in the second passage is because his only source is Callisthenes' anticipatory statement. A referee has kindly directed me to one of the few attempts to

locate the site, A. von Schwartz, *Feldzüge in Turkestan* 37 ff. If correct, the place was infertile and depended on caravan trade.

¹⁹ Hdt. cf. *supra*. The burnt layer: Hahland (n. 10) 144. The knucklebone dedication: Jeffery (n. 8) no. 30. Seleucus' restoration of Canachus' Apollo: Paus. i 16.3 and viii 46.3, where the removal of the statue is explained as Xerxes' vengeance on the Milesians for deliberate cowardice in naval battles against the Athenians (at Mycale?).

²⁰ Of the two ancient authors who record it in a historical sequence Curtius places it shortly before the capture of Bessus, Diodorus immediately after it. The capture of Bessus is usually dated to the summer of 329.

comparison with the oracle of Ammon's message and a contrast with its procedure. The purpose of this digression was to give the reader an anticipatory indication of the episode which he would have described in more detail when he came to the events of 329—though actually that was never to be written by him.²¹

Callisthenes clearly treated the massacre in this digression as a justifiable act of vengeance and meant to develop this in his narrative. But later authors evidently did not always regard it in that light. The two great contemporary sources whom Arrian followed, Aristobulus and Ptolemy, seem to have omitted the event entirely, and therefore it has no place in Arrian's history. Aristobulus' reasons in this as in other aspects of his treatment of his subject remain obscure. Ptolemy was deliberately producing a factual account of Alexander which would cut out the mythological element, but also would not reflect adversely on the king who was responsible for founding Alexandria and whose tomb there gave the Ptolemies such ground to pose as his true successors. If the omission of an event of this magnitude seems extraordinary, one may note again that Plutarch left it out of his life of Alexander, but by a reference elsewhere indicated that he both knew the story and accepted its historicity when he wished to illustrate the belated occurrence of divine vengeance.²²

Of extant writers who recorded it, the table of contents of Diodorus Siculus Book xvii lists the event, but by an unfortunate accident that part of the work is lost through a lacuna in all surviving manuscripts. Curtius Rufus tells the story in detail. His immediate source is obviously not Callisthenes, but, as elsewhere, some later writer who enjoyed producing a sensational picture of Alexander as a ruthless tyrant. He adds a curious detail which does not appear in Strabo's brief paraphrase of Callisthenes (and so we do not know whether it went back to a contemporary narrative). Alexander commanded the Milesians in his army to be called together. They had a long-standing hatred of the Branchidae. The king invited them to decide freely the fate of these people, whether they attached more importance to their Greek origin or to their subsequent outrage. When the Milesians disagreed with each other, the king reserved the decision to himself and finally resolved on their destruction. Curtius comments that it might have been just retribution on the original traitors but not on descendants who had never even seen Miletus.²³

Modern scholars, such as Tarn, have mostly been unwilling to accept the truth of the massacre of Branchidae. They are not interested in it as a moral tale and cannot see it in Callisthenes' light as redounding to Alexander's credit. Hence Tarn was prepared to believe that the whole story was an invention of Callisthenes. But this is a very unjustifiable judgement. The extant fragments of Callisthenes' history show clearly that in other instances he was prepared to write up an episode introducing an element of fantasy, but not that he invented happenings which had never occurred at all. For example, when Alexander on the coast of Lycia succeeded in leading his troops along the shore, the sea was described by Callisthenes as receding in homage to the king. The picture is imaginary, but it does not discount the fact that Alexander did follow successfully this rather venturesome route in conditions which proved favourable.²⁴ Similarly it is reasonable to suppose that Alexander actually ordered the execution of the Branchidae and that Callisthenes was preparing the way to write it up as an act of Panhellenic retribution.

²¹ For Callisthenes' technique in preparing the reader for later events compare his treatment of Parmenion's assassination, noted above.

²² It should be stated to Plutarch's credit that in the preface to his *Lives* of Alexander and Caesar he warned the reader that he would have to omit some of their many deeds as he was writing 'lives not histories'. For the moral use of the story, cf. Plut. *de Sera Numinis Vindicta* 12 (*Mor.* 557c) where Alexander is criticized on the same lines as in Curtius Rufus. See C. P. Jones, *JRS* lvi (1966) 68 and 71, arguing that the *Life of Alexander* comes late in the series, while the *de Sera Num. Vind.* was

written after 81 AD but before 107. So Plutarch knew of the massacre when he wrote the *Life*. The moral aspect is written up most elaborately in Aelian *fr.* 54 (*Suda* Βραγχίδαί).

²³ D.S. list of contents xvii 20. Curt. Ruf. vii 5.28 ff. N. G. L. Hammond, *Three historians of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge 1983), 41 in the most recent discussion argues for Cleitarchus as the source.

²⁴ *FGrH* 124 F 31. Recent critics, such as Pearson (*n.* 16) 37 and E. Badian, *Studies in Greek and Roman history* (Oxford 1964) 251 tend to discount this fragment, ill-advisedly.

III. THE MOTIVES FOR THE MASSACRE

If one accepts the deed as historical, the question remains: what was Alexander's motive? To some extent it may have been what Callisthenes suggests—horror at the sacrilege and treason of the Branchidae. But perhaps we may phrase this differently by saying that Alexander or his advisers saw in the Branchidae a convenient opportunity to stress again the object of Alexander's campaign as retaliation for the Persian war on Greece. This aspect had already been emphasized by the deliberate burning of Persepolis, two years before. But after the occupation of Ecbatana Alexander discharged with full pay the Thessalian cavalry and the contingents of the Corinthian league, while re-enlisting the not inconsiderable numbers who chose to remain in service.²⁵ This implied the formal end of the Hellenic crusade, but there may well have been those in Alexander's councils who were not satisfied with the situation. The new campaign had taken on rather the colour of the successor of the last Darius avenging himself on his enemies: some of his followers would have preferred a new demonstration that the king had not abandoned the old Macedonian and Hellenic cause of vengeance against Persia.²⁶ It was evidently from this aspect in particular that Callisthenes wrote up the story, and the unhistoric distortions which he introduced into the account of the sack of Didyma exactly suited this purpose. It was obviously not satisfactory for the event to have occurred as part of the fall of Miletus. It would have been hard to explain and distinguish the conduct of the Branchidae from that of the others in that general event. Also, and more significantly, Alexander never made any claim to avenge the Ionian Revolt. The object of his retaliation was not Darius, whom even the Athenians traditionally treated with respect, but Xerxes and the attempt to conquer mainland Greece. So Callisthenes not merely said that the Branchidae had been sacrilegious traitors, but also gave their treason a different historical context and one more appropriate to Alexander's propaganda. It did not matter that Callisthenes could not substantiate the statement that Xerxes had burned all the temples, except that of Artemis at Ephesus. To the Greeks, particularly those of the mainland, Xerxes was a man who burned Greek temples. The Artemisium was too improbable to be included in a list of sanctuaries destroyed, because of its well-known history. But no doubt the Greeks would readily accept the story as true for the rest.

But apart from the motive of demonstrating a Panhellenic crusade, there may also have been other influences at work. It is curious that Curtius Rufus brings in a consultation of the Milesians in Alexander's army. As he tells the story, this is not the decisive factor, because after mentioning their bitter hatred of the Branchidae, he rather strangely makes their vote uncertain and leaves the final decision to Alexander personally. This may be a modification introduced by Curtius' immediate source, who wished to end by condemning Alexander for his tyrannical cruelty. May one conjecture that an earlier version represented the Milesians as consulted and voting decisively for execution?

It may seem strange that the army could be represented as containing any appreciable contingent from that one city, and perhaps our sources here engage in picturesque exaggeration. But actually there is no sound evidence to show how Alexander treated the Greek cities of Asia Minor which he had liberated from Persia.²⁷ One would expect that they would be required to support the war effort. A maritime city such as Miletus may have been called on to supply ships, but when the war became a land campaign it would be surprising if the Milesians were not required to furnish troops. Also the dismissal of the League's contingents at Ecbatana, which is clearly described by Arrian, need not have applied to the Greeks of Asia Minor. The subject is

²⁵ Arr. *An.* iii 19.5.

²⁶ For the statement of this as both Macedonian and Hellenic, see Alexander's letter to Darius (Arr. *An.* ii 14.4 ff.)

²⁷ The best discussion is by E. Badian in *Ancient society and institutions: studies . . . V. Ehrenberg* (Oxford

1966) 53, where he argues that the cities of Aeolis and Ionia were joined to the League and required to pay a *syntaxis* in lieu of naval and military service. But this hypothesis is quite consistent with some (especially larger) cities alternatively supplying troops.

controversial, but there is no decisive evidence that a city such as Miletus was admitted to the Hellenic League, and therefore its contribution of troops, however organized, may still have followed Alexander in 328 BC.

Our evidence would also suggest that the new government of Miletus was enthusiastic in its support of Alexander. He had seized the city in 334 by a quick coup by land and sea, just before the arrival of a much larger Persian fleet. The government of Miletus and the mercenary garrison had attempted to negotiate neutrality and then to resist, but Alexander took the place by storm. Probably the populace already favoured the Hellenic cause, but like other cities in Asia Minor it was ruled by a pro-Persian oligarchy. The capture of the city produced a volte-face in favour of Alexander and democracy. The king was elected nominally as chief magistrate (*stephanēphoros*) for the year 334/33. One of the new policies of the democracy was to restore the oracle-centre at Didyma which was put under the management of a *prophētēs* appointed by lot and holding the office for one year; and the Milesians were quick to use this renewed institution to support Alexander and solicit his favour by issuing appropriate prophecies.²⁸

Hence it would not be surprising that if there were Milesians in Alexander's army in 329 BC, they may have had some standing with the king. It is tempting in this connection to notice a possibility suggested by the later history of Didyma. The Milesians by their flattering embassy to Memphis in 331 may have hoped to win financial help from Alexander to rebuild the temple of Apollo, but if so there is no sign that they succeeded, and the project did not even appear among the *hypomnēmata* alleged to have been disclosed after his death. Miletus had to wait till after the battle of Ipsus, when from 300 BC Seleucus, his heir apparent Antiochus, and his queen Apame combined in a series of benefactions which for the first time gave momentum to the colossal undertaking. From the documents recording these gifts it is clear that the leading figure in the negotiations at the Seleucid court was a Milesian, Demodamas, the son of Aristides, who is known elsewhere as the general who led the army of Seleucus northward across the Jaxartes to the furthest point in Central Asia ever reached by Greeks. If, as is usually supposed, this expedition took place before 306 BC, it would be quite possible that Demodamas in 329 was one of the body of brilliant young officers who surrounded Alexander, and that he was already working for the cause of Apollo of Didyma.²⁹

Anyway, if we try to picture the situation of the Milesians in 329, it must have been something like this. The pro-Alexander party in Miletus had taken a new initiative. They had revived the oracle, silent for more than a century and a half, and had used it to back strongly the Hellenic cause. One can imagine then their consternation if they had been told that Alexander had at last rescued from the wilds of Bactria the original family of the Branchidae, who would shortly be returning to take up their ancestral rights in Apollo's sanctuary. Curtius' description of the contemporary Branchidae may be due to the imagination of himself or his source. 'Their ancestral habits had not yet died out, but they were now bilingual and were gradually deteriorating from their native speech.'³⁰ But it might not be so much the incongruous nature of the restored Branchidae which would offend the Milesians. The real problem was evidently that for four or five years there had been a new vested interest in the oracle of Didyma. If the

²⁸ Arr. *An.* i 18.3 ff. Alexander Stephanephoros, A. Rehm, *Milet* i.3 132. For the *prophētai* see the lists in Rehm, *Didyma* ii.

²⁹ The *hypomnēmata*: D.S. xviii 4.3. Antiochus and Didyma: Dittenberger, *OGIS* 213; Rehm, *Didyma* ii 479. Apame and Didyma: *Didyma* ii 480. These are discussed most recently by W. Günther, *Ist.Mitt.* Beiheft iv (1971), with a criticism by J. Seibert, *GGA* ccxxvi (1974) 184 ff. The plan for the temple had probably been prepared immediately after 334 BC as the architect was Paeonius, responsible for the last stages of the Artemisium. Some work had begun in 311–306: *Didyma* ii 434–7, with L. Robert's redating, *Gnomon*

xxxii (1959) 669 and *REG* lxxiv (1961) 232 no. 637, and Günther 37 n. 70. For Demodamas, see Pliny *NH* vi 49 and M. Cary and E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers* (London 1929) 135. But W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge 1951) 83, would date the expedition later. [Since writing this I have read L. Robert's excellent discussion of Demodamas, dating his expedition before 306 BC (*BCH* cviii (1984) 168–71).] A referee calls my attention to the disparaging apothegm about Milesian prowess in the Ionian revolt attributed to Alexander, Plut. *Mor.* 180a.

³⁰ Curtius vii 5.29.

Branchidae were restored, the democratic control of the sanctuary at Didyma would presumably be challenged and perhaps alienated from its new holders. This is an imaginative reconstruction of the situation, but one may venture the hypothesis that a group of Milesians in the army decided to forestall any such eventuality by quick and dastardly action. They brought to the ear of Alexander and his staff a new version of what really happened at Didyma—that which Callisthenes was later to publicize. They accused the Branchidae of being descendants of sacrilegious traitors to the Hellenic cause. Perhaps they were literally believed; perhaps it was cynically recognized that the massacre of this offspring of alleged traitors would make a good demonstration of Alexander's avenging justice. Perhaps Alexander may even have felt that it provided a good opportunity to display that absolute power over his Asiatic subjects which was inherent in his new assertion of his position as the successor of Darius.³¹ Also it was a guarantee that the oracle of Didyma, whose propaganda value was already recognized, would not fall into the hands of dubious semi-orientals. The deed was done; and Callisthenes took his first steps to write it up to the credit of Alexander and the glory of the newly revived oracle-centre of Apollo Didymaeus.³²

If the historicity of the massacre of the Branchidae is accepted, it might appropriately involve some reconsideration of Alexander's character and policy. But this is scarcely the place for such an assessment. At most we may note that it fits into the pattern of tragic episodes which ran from the execution of Philotas and the assassination of Parmenion through the murder of Cleitus to the Pages' Conspiracy. These are symptomatic of the breakdown of the moral purpose behind the expedition, which resulted from its overwhelming success in achieving its highest original objective, the capture of the Persian capitals of Susa, Persepolis and Ecbatana. Nothing like these grim events had disfigured the earlier campaigns. Tarn found a physical explanation—that the high altitudes and dry air drove the Macedonian commanders to excessive drinking. This had from his viewpoint the advantage that it could explain, if not justify, lapses from the lofty standard which he expected of Alexander. We need not reject the climate as a factor, but much more serious were the passionate undercurrents which developed in the king, his staff and his attendants. The respected practices of the Macedonian court were challenged by the venerable traditions of the Persian monarchy. The defeat of Darius and the retribution for Greece's past discomfitures were replaced by the need to subdue and organize an oriental empire. The safeguarding of Hellenic civilization was exalted into a vision of world conquest. It was only to be expected that in this maelstrom of aims and ambitions selfish and murderous motives at times came into play with consequences that could not be justified and could scarcely be explained.

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³¹ On this aspect see especially F. Schachermeyr, in *Fond. Hardt* xxii (1976) 67–8.

³² One should avoid over-estimating the number of the Branchidae. Neither our literary nor archaeological evidence gives any indication for 494 BC. But the law of Cadys (*Delph.* 1.94–5) shows that in the early fourth century the town of Delphi cannot have contained a

thousand citizens of full age, actually probably many fewer. So a prosperous oracle-centre might have had only a few hundred male inhabitants. There is no indication how their numbers fared over a century and a half in Bactria, but they are not likely to have increased greatly.