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## Philip II and the Macedonian Army

At no time in Macedonian history did things look more dismal than in 360 BCE, when Balkan tribes killed the king and overran much of Macedon. But the king's younger brother Philip immediately took control of the kingdom and initiated the reforms that would turn the Macedonian army into a well-organized war machine. The first step was raising the effectiveness of the peasant foot soldiers. Drawing on funds from silver mines, Philip introduced standardized weapons and the discipline of the phalanx formation. Within two years, he increased the size of the Macedonian army to over 10,000 and drove out the invaders. Not only did his victory strengthen the power of the monarchy, but the newly effective infantry balanced the political influence of the nobility.

Using his new strength, Philip introduced over the next twenty years further reforms in both organization and weaponry. He forged the Macedonian nobles into a drilled and disciplined heavy cavalry force organized by territorial squadrons. He gave them the title Companions (*hetairoi*) to emphasize their social and political relationship to the king, winning their loyalty to a more centralized military system and reducing their independent influence in the kingdom. They wore armor and carried a shorter version of the infantry *sarissa*, or pike, more suited to fighting on horseback. The Companions formed a mobile offensive strike force the equal in quality if not numbers to the best Persian cavalry and unmatched in any Greek army.

Philip also expanded the heavy infantry further, recruiting men from parts of Macedon that traditionally had been outside the direct control of the king, such as the rugged cantons of western Macedon, and tying them to the king with grants of land. Philip's intention was to create an army of citizen-soldiers who derived their status from military service to the king, in effect fusing two sources of infantry cohesion: communal ties as developed in the Greek poleis, and centrally imposed drill and discipline. The result was the creation of a large Macedonian infantry force

organized into territorial battalions. These units formed a phalanx of some 18,000 men, much larger than any Greek state could raise. Philip armed these troops with a *sarissa* roughly 15–18 feet long. The *sarissa* allowed Philip to lighten the armor of his infantry, providing them with a small shield strapped to the left arm and only light body armor. The *sarissa* and lighter armor increased both the mobility and the offensive striking power of the Macedonian phalanx, as multiple spear points now preceded the front line of soldiers into combat. To emphasize the royal nature of the infantry in the political structure of the realm, Philip called them his Foot Companions (*pezhetairoi*). Though their privileges did not match those of the noble Companion cavalry, the infantry received regular pay, which allowed them to maintain their farms by buying slaves or hiring labor, giving the Macedonian kings the best qualities of citizen militia and professional soldiers in one force.

The tactical combination of phalanx and heavy cavalry could be formidable, with the infantry acting as an anvil, holding the enemy for the hammer blow of the Companions. But these two heavy elements alone lacked flexibility and maintained connection with each other only with difficulty. The crucial third unit of the Macedonian army was, therefore, an infantry force of 3000 men who formed the Royal Guard—the hypaspists, or shield bearers. These men differed from the regular infantry in that they were not organized territorially, but were recruited from throughout the kingdom. Their equipment is a matter of much debate but seems to have included a larger shield than the men of the phalanx carried, a short sword, and a shorter, lighter spear. They were thus more lightly armed than the heavy infantry; their equipment, even more intensive drill, and their smaller units of organization made them more mobile than the phalanx. Thus, one role of the hypaspists was to act as a link or hinge between the phalanx and the heavy cavalry in set-piece battles. But their skill and tactical flexibility made the hypaspists useful for a variety of tasks, and under Philip's son Alexander, they became the “special forces” unit of the army.

Philip also included light infantry and skirmishers in the regular army organization, and he added specialized troops from allies or mercenaries, including Thessalian heavy cavalry, Cretan archers, and Agri-anian mountaineers. Such troops added both firepower and skirmishing and scouting capabilities to the army, giving Philip and later Alexander a set of tactical and operational tools that could meet almost any

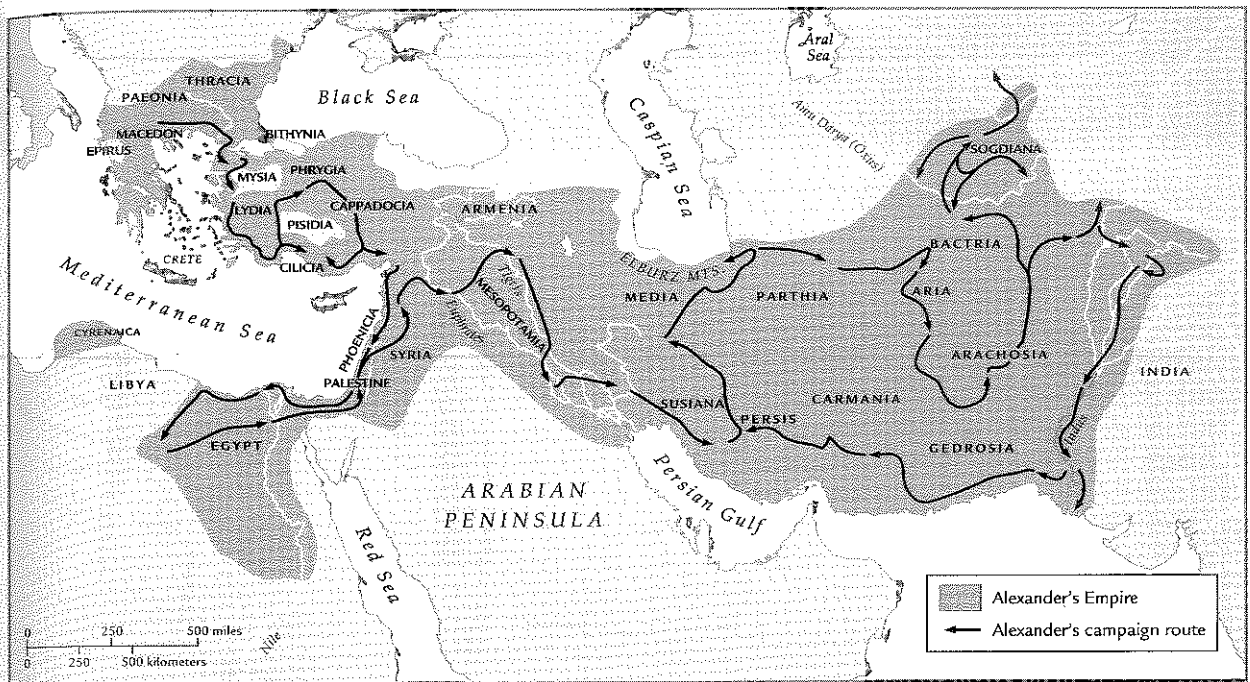


Figure 3.2 Alexander's Campaigns

challenge. And, in fact, one important hallmark of Philip's use of his new army was his ability to coordinate the various types of infantry and cavalry in a coherent battle plan.

Operationally and strategically, Philip emphasized mobility. He had his troops carry their own supplies and limited the number of pack animals. Unlike the forces of the Greeks, his army could campaign all year long. Philip also understood the importance of siege warfare and organized a mobile siege train that included engineers and war engines, some of which were light enough to be used as field artillery in battle. Philip had created a complete war machine.

Philip was now ready to take up the challenge of the pan-Hellenists and lead a great war against the barbarian Persians. Unfortunately, the Greeks considered him a barbarian, too. Therefore, he brought his army into Greece, and in 338 BCE at Chaeronea, he defeated an army of Athenians and Thebans, destroying the Sacred Band. During the battle, his son Alexander won distinction at the head of the Companion cavalry. By 336, Philip, now *hegemon* of the Greek League as well as king of Macedon and leader of Thessaly, was ready to invade Persia. He sent an advance guard to Asia Minor, but before he could join them, he was assassinated.

## Alexander the Great

While he rebuilt the army and royal power, Philip also used the Macedonian tradition of polygamy as a diplomatic tool. One of his wives, Olympias of Epirus, gave birth to his second son, Alexander, in 356 BCE. Philip and Alexander had a tumultuous relationship, in part due to Olympias's claim that Zeus rather than Philip was Alexander's father. But Alexander was groomed for the throne because his elder brother was clearly less capable. At age 16, he was left in charge of the kingdom and put down a rebellion, perhaps overstepping his charge by renaming the capital of the rebels as Alexandropolis. He received the best Greek education (Aristotle was his tutor for a time), participated in Greek-style athletic festivals, and soaked in Greek culture (the playwright Euripides had been resident at the Macedonian court before Alexander's birth). His favorite book seems to have been Homer's *Iliad*. When Philip was assassinated, Alexander assumed the throne and immediately proved his effectiveness as a leader, ruthlessly suppressing rebellions in the Balkans and at Thebes, where he razed the city, sparing only the house of the poet Pindar. King of Macedon and hegemon of the Greek world, he then turned his attention eastward (Figure 3.2).

## HIGHLIGHTS

*The Battle of Gaugamela*

At the end of September 331 BCE, Alexander entered the open plains near ancient Nineveh with an army of about 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry. He stopped to rest his army overnight, refusing in the meantime a peace offering from Darius that would have given him half of Darius's kingdom. Arrayed against him was a Persian army whose numbers are impossible to determine with any accuracy—some sources claim up to 200,000, but such a figure is at the outer limits of logistical believability and is probably an exaggeration. In addition, Persian losses at the Granicus and at Issus had reduced the numbers of elite Persian infantry and Greek mercenaries available to the Great King, who probably had to rely more on provincial levies and the still effective and numerous Persian cavalry, as well as a corps of chariots and a small group of war elephants. In other words, it is certain that the Persians outnumbered Alexander's army significantly, but by how much and with what quality is open to

question. Darius drew up his army to maximize his advantages, with the chariots and elephants backed by the Royal Guard cavalry and his remaining Greek mercenaries anchoring the center, and masses of cavalry on the wings whose job was to envelop the smaller Macedonian force (Figure 3.3).

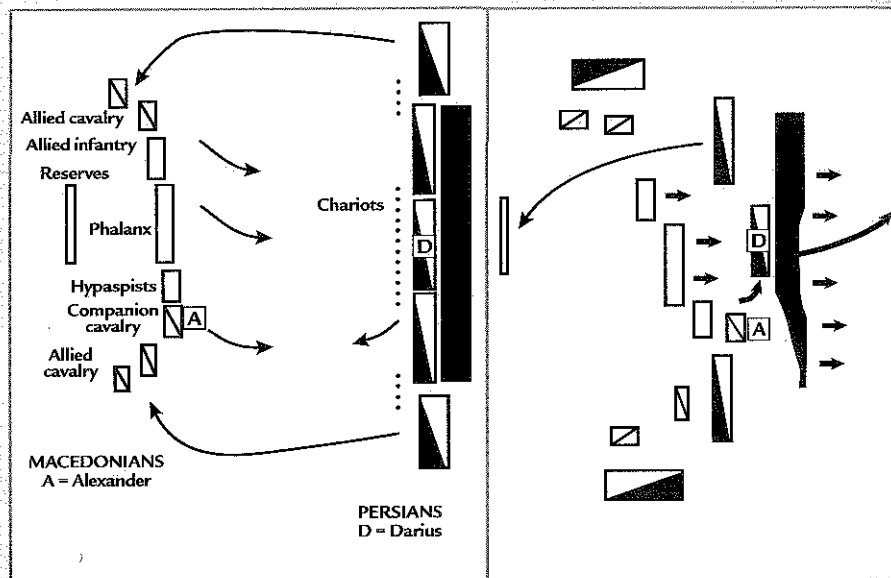


Figure 3.3 The Battle of Gaugamela

**Alexander's Campaigns** In 334 BCE, Alexander launched his great war against the Persians—a new Trojan War, as he may have seen it, with himself in the role of a new and greater Achilles—crossing the Hellespont with an army of about 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. His first major action was at the Granicus River, which was defended by 20,000 Persian cavalry and an equal number of infantry including a large number of Greek mercenaries. Alexander used his infantry to pin down part of the Persian forces while concentrating his cavalry for the decisive

blow. The Persian horse fled, leaving their infantry, including the Greeks, to be slaughtered.

Alexander recognized that, although he had won a significant victory over a Persian army, the Persian fleet could still threaten his communications with Macedon and cause trouble in Greece. He therefore captured Persian naval bases at Miletus and Halicarnassus, the first steps in a larger strategy of neutralizing the Persian fleet by capturing the entire eastern Mediterranean coast before turning inland to finish off the heart of the empire. He secured western Asia



refused his left wing, leading on the right with his Companion cavalry and the hypaspists, with the phalanx in the center. Thessalian cavalry covered the left flank. In addition, he posted mixed units of light infantry and cavalry behind each wing, ready to wheel outward and counter Persian attempts at envelopment, and posted a unit of Thessalian infantry in the rear to guard the Macedonian camp. The formation provided capacity both for all-around defense and for a tactical reserve.

The Persian army had been up all night expecting a night attack by Alexander's inferior force, but Alexander did not move until the next morning, October 1. As his army approached the Persian line, it drifted to the right, perhaps intentionally. Persian attempts to shift their own more cumbersome line resulted in a gap opening in the left-center. Alexander seized the opportunity this presented him, leading the Companions and hypaspists in wedge formation in a charge into the gap and straight for Darius and his personal bodyguard. Darius panicked and fled, and the entire left and center of the Persian host began rapidly to give way.

Alexander could not pursue Darius immediately, however, because both Persian wings had charged when Alexander attacked the Persian center, and the cavalry on the Persian right wing had driven back the Thessalians and was pressing the Macedonian reserves, threatening to get behind the phalanx and envelope the whole Macedonian army. In what was perhaps the most remarkable

feat of the day, Alexander managed to comprehend, from the midst of combat in the middle of a vast battlefield, the danger to his left and center (a testimony to the messenger system that connected Alexander to his subordinates) and then to wheel the Companions and hypaspists around from the fighting they were already engaged in and charge into the flank and rear of the Persian horsemen. The Persians broke, and the entire engagement now became a massive pursuit, breaking the Persian army decisively. About 500 Macedonians died; perhaps another 5000 were wounded. Persian losses are even harder to determine than their total army size but may well have exceeded 50,000.

It is too easy in retrospect to see the outcome at Gaugamela as a foregone conclusion, based on the superior fighting qualities of the Macedonian army. But the Persians had plenty of elite troops, a significant superiority in cavalry, and ideal geography in which to deploy their advantages. The same Macedonian army under less decisive leadership could easily have been surrounded, worn down, and slaughtered. But not only did Alexander unhesitatingly seize the right moment and place to attack, in the rush of a triumphant charge, he also never lost sight of the larger dynamics of the battle. His tactics in the battle at the Hydaspes (see Chapter 2) may, in fact, have been even better, but Gaugamela was a masterpiece of Alexander's generalship—one that won him an empire.

Minor, dividing his forces on the overland marches to ease his supply problems—close attention to logistics, including advance scouting and arrangement of markets, would characterize Alexander's entire career.

Next, Alexander moved into Cilicia, preparing to proceed down the coast of Syria. But the Great King, Darius III, and his army managed to get behind him and cut the Macedonian lines of communication. Alexander turned back and attacked Darius on a narrow plain between the sea and hills at the Battle of Issus. Significantly outnumbered by an army com-

posed of some of the best Persian troops including the Applebearers (descendants of the Immortals), Greek mercenaries, and a large cavalry force, Alexander advanced obliquely, refusing his left flank while leading the Companions and hypaspists against the Persian left, which he drove off. He then turned and rolled up the Persian center, hotly engaged with the phalanx; Darius fled, and the Persian army broke.

After this victory, Alexander returned to securing the coast. He besieged and captured the Phoenician island city of Tyre using a combination of land

assaults over an artificially constructed causeway and attacks by ship; the causeway eventually silted up and turned the island into an isthmus, making Alexander one of the few generals to permanently alter geography. By 331, having secured Syria and Egypt and captured most of the Persian fleet and all their bases, Alexander controlled the sea. He was now ready to move east. He advanced unmolested to the Euphrates, crossed over, and marched south along the Tigris, where fodder was plentiful for his animals and grain was easily obtainable in undefended villages. Seeking out the gathering Persian army, Alexander defeated the forces of Darius on the plains of Gaugamela in the final battle for control of the Persian Empire (see the Highlights box “The Battle of Gaugamela”).

With the defeat of Darius at Gaugamela, the heartland of the Persian Empire was open to Alexander. Alexander captured Persepolis, the ceremonial capital and treasury, which was then burnt, allegedly by accident. Alexander pursued Darius, who was hoping to fall back and rally the forces from the eastern provinces; but, along the way, Darius was slain by some of his own nobles. Alexander eventually killed the regicides; he had defeated the Achaemenids and conquered the heart of their empire.

Alexander would continue to move east through Afghanistan and into the Indus River valley. These later campaigns are characterized by flexibility, both tactically and logistically. Alexander successfully altered his tactics to suit his enemies, dividing his army to ease logistical problems and concentrating it for battles or sieges, whether against fortified mountain strongholds, Scythian nomads, or Indian armies with chariots and elephants—his battle at the Hydaspes River against King Porus was perhaps the hardest of his career (see Chapter 2). Alexander continued east, intent on bringing the entire world under his command, until his homesick, weary army mutinied at the Hyphasis River and demanded to return home. After a week-long Achilles-like sulk in his tent, Alexander turned south along the Indus River for the trip home.

**Alexander’s Impact** Alexander returned to Babylon and began organizing the resources of his empire. He initiated some interesting army reforms, including the integration of Persians and other Asians, especially horse archers, into the Companion cavalry and foot archers and Persian spearmen into the Macedonian infantry. In doing so, he may have taken advantage of extant Persian institutions for military training (see Chapter 2). Historians debate Alexander’s

motives—was he trying to integrate Macedonians and Persians in the rule of his empire, or did manpower shortages in Macedon force his hand? The question is in one sense irresolvable, because Alexander’s premature death in 323 BCE prevented his plans from being fully implemented. But, in a larger sense, Alexander had already set in motion a fusion of Greek and Persian civilizations that would shape the military, political, and cultural history of southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean for centuries.

Alexander founded new cities wherever he went, many named Alexandria (including the most famous in Egypt) and one named after his horse Bucephalus. Modeled on Greek poleis and often populated in part by retired Macedonian soldiers, these cities carried the Greek culture Alexander loved to all corners of his empire. They became the model for military colonies founded by Alexander’s leading generals, who became the Diadochi, the successor kings of a divided empire; these colonies supported the scarce Macedonian manpower that was the key component of successor kingdom armies. This style of army went unchallenged until the Roman legions entered eastern Mediterranean politics a century later (see Chapter 4).

The colonists often married Persian or other non-Greek women, a policy encouraged and practiced by Alexander himself, furthering the cultural syncretism these urban foundations inspired. Perhaps even more important, Alexander fused these cities into a larger conception of imperial rule, using them as the administrative connection between localities and his kingship. For that kingship, he drew on Persian (as well as Egyptian) notions of divinely supported rule and a sense of his own divinity, inherited from his mother, to create a political structure neither fully Macedonian and Greek nor fully Persian, but successful enough—and enhanced by the tremendous prestige of his seemingly superhuman conquests—to inspire imitation and flattery by later Roman emperors, whose empire also featured divine kingship laid over an urban network of local rule. His model certainly formed the ideal of the Hellenistic world he created and reflected at the grandest political level the fusion of polis communalism with the resources of centralized kingship.

If Alexander had a weakness, it was his reckless courage. He led from the front and was wounded several times, most seriously in a siege of an Indian city when he took an arrow in the lung, a wound that probably contributed to his death from fever a year