

ALEXANDER AND HIS SUCCESSORS IN CENTRAL ASIA*

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Part One

ALEXANDER'S CAMPAIGN IN CENTRAL ASIA

(A. H. Dani)

Alexander advanced into Central Asia in the follow-up operations against the Achaemenid monarch, Darius III Codomannus, whom he had defeated in three successive battles at Granicus (334 B.C.), Issus (333 B.C.) and Gaugamela (331 B.C.). This had fired his imagination to pursue the retreating monarch and to put an end to Achaemenid power by crushing the remaining source of its strength in Central Asia. The eastern forces of the Achaemenids are described in Arrian's *Anabasis* (III.8.3–7):

The Indians who were coterminous with the Bactrians, as also the Bactrians themselves and the Sogdians, had come to the aid of Darius, all being under the command of Bessus, the satrap of the land of Bactria. They were followed by the Sakas, a Scythian tribe belonging to the Scythians who dwell in Asia. These were not subject to Bessus but were in alliance with Darius. . . . Barsaentes, the satrap of Arachosia, led the Arachosians and the men who were called Mountaineer Indians. . . . There were a few elephants, about fifteen in number, belonging to the Indians who live this side of the Indus. With these forces Darius had encamped at Gaugamela near the River Bumelus, about 600 stades from the city of Arbela.

The elephants probably belonged to Porus, the ruler of Jhelum region, and among the 'Mountaineer Indians' was possibly the local chief Sisicottus who is known to have helped Bessus.¹

The whole of Central Asia opposed Alexander and resisted his march at every stage. The Achaemenids had built a strong empire and much of Central Asia shared their cultural

¹ Dani, 1980, pp. 117–30.

heritage for some two centuries. It was in defence of this heritage that they rallied against the invaders with courage and strength. Alexander's father Philip had advanced from his native Macedonia, to establish his supremacy over Greece, and had then brought the Greeks of Asia Minor under his control. It fell to the good fortune of his son Alexander to win his first great battle at Granicus, which enabled him to possess the Mediterranean coastal region of Asia. But it was only after his subsequent success at Issus that he could properly measure his growing strength against that of the Achaemenid monarch.

Alexander's motivation

In reply to a letter from Darius, Alexander had declared his political manifesto:

Your ancestors invaded Macedonia and the rest of Greece, and without provocation inflicted wrongs upon us. I was appointed leader of the Greeks, and crossed over into Asia to avenge these wrongs; for you were the first aggressors.

This motivation of revenge has been construed by some historians² as being a 'crusade' against the Persians, but Ghirshman³ has modified this view. Alexander's failure to capture Darius stirred him to pursue the Achaemenid king and crush his power completely. Military victory was not enough. The change in policy adopted by Alexander to pacify Persia has been explained by Frye⁴ and Tarn⁵ as the 'fusion of Greeks and Persians, or better, it should be said, Hellenes and Iranians'. This is far from the 'pan-Hellenic ideal' which modern historians had attributed to Alexander. It was this double approach, political and military, that dragged the war into the heart of Asia. If Alexander was to become King of Greece and Persia, he must destroy, root and branch, all the sources of Achaemenid power, and establish a series of strong garrisons right up to the Oxus and Jaxartes. It was in the pursuit of this aim that he won over to his side Sisicottus and welcomed Ophis, ruler of Taxila, who held out the prospect of conquering the Indus region. Alexander was thus lured to the farthest reaches of Achaemenid territory. While he succeeded in destroying Persian power, his death in 323 B.C. put an end to the dream of a Hellenic empire. The struggle in Central Asia roused the dormant spirit of its people. While they were willing to benefit from cultural contacts, they soon threw off the political yoke and absorbed the Greek population that Alexander had left behind in the garrison cities of his new empire.

² Olmstead, 1948, pp. 495 et seq.

³ Ghirshman, 1954, p. 208.

⁴ Frye, 1963, p. 127.

⁵ Tarn, 1951, p. 137.

Alexander's main task and its result

Alexander's campaigns can be divided into several phases. His first object was to pursue the retreating Achaemenid monarch. The second phase was to meet the challenge of the Arians, Arachosians, Bactrians and Sogdians who formed a united opposition and continued to fight even when Bessus was captured and killed. The third phase was the new game of diplomacy and war against the local chiefs of the Indus region, and finally his retreat through the desert of Baluchistan to Susa and Babylon involving the reappraisal of his long, arduous campaigns. The Greek historians (Arrian VI.1 et seq.) have created a myth about his return march from the River Beas and have not given a proper assessment of the situation when Alexander's Greek appointees were either killed or illegally usurped power, while Alexander was busy with his Indus campaigns or on his retreat. It was no surprise that when Alexander unexpectedly died, his faithful commanders fished for power in troubled waters. The Indus region fell to the rise of the Mauryans and later when Seleucus Nicator tried to recover this lost territory, he had further to cede to Candragupta Maurya the provinces of Aria, Arachosia, Gedrosia and the Paropamisadae. Before sixty years had passed, Parthia, Hyrcania and Bactria became independent and rejected the Seleucid hegemony. A fresh power struggle began in Central Asia; a new era of adjustment and cultural assimilation was inaugurated.

The murder of Darius

In the first phase, Darius tried to remuster his forces at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan) and was joined there by Bessus of Bactria, Barsaentes of Arachosia, Satibarzanes of Aria, Nabazarnes, Artabazus and many others including his Greek mercenaries. But Alexander's advance was too swift for Darius to reorganize the support of his eastern provinces. He chose to retreat and paused to fight at the Caspian gates. Here history took a new turn. Alexander usurped the title of the Great King and called himself 'Lord of Asia', disregarding the fact that the Achaemenid monarch was still alive – a signal of great historic change. Although the Greek historians give no details except for the final disowning and, later, the murder of Darius by his eastern commanders (the crime being attributed to Barsaentes and Satibarzanes), the split between the Greek mercenaries of the Achaemenid monarch and the eastern commanders can be seen clearly – a division that may have been brought about by Alexander's own diplomatic moves. The result was the return of the Greek mercenaries and a switch in their loyalty. The eastern commanders, on the other hand, defended their national home, which lay entirely in Central Asia. Bessus emerged as the great leader and retreated to his home province of Bactria to meet Alexander's

challenge. Satibarzanes and Barsaentes returned to their provinces of Aria and Arachosia, respectively, to make defence preparations. Meanwhile Alexander consolidated his gains in the Caspian region. Hyrcania lay at his feet and the Greek deserters submitted to him with the men and material they commanded. He made Zadracarta (modern Astrabad) the headquarters of Hyrcania, the strong centre and spearhead for his conquest of the East.

The fall of Aria and Arachosia

The defence of the East seems to have been well planned. Alexander⁶ began to pursue Bessus who, with the support of his people, had assumed the upright tiara and made himself known as 'Great King'. Satibarzanes feigned submission to Alexander and accepted his general Anaxippus and a Macedonian military garrison in Aria. But when the latter arrived, Satibarzanes, with the full support of his people, killed the Greek general along with his whole force. The war of liberation had now begun. Both Aria and Arachosia were up in arms in alliance with Bactria and probably with Sogdiana. Alexander had to forgo his plan of advance on Bactria and turned back to deal with the new situation. We only read about his victorious march to Artacoana, through Aria and further south to Drangiana. But he could not capture the local chieftains. Satibarzanes is said to have gone to Bessus, while Barsaentes left Drangiana and escaped to the 'Indians' in eastern Arachosia, bringing in the new support of the 'Mountaineer Indians'. Here Alexander further changed his policy. He appointed Arsames, a Persian, as satrap of Aria; but while he advanced into Arachosia, this newly appointed satrap proved to be in league with Satibarzanes, and led Aria in a further revolt. Alexander was able to defeat and kill them, putting a new satrap, Stasanor, in charge of Aria. Alexander's advance into Arachosia cannot be explained unless his immediate objective was to capture Barsaentes, who was ultimately caught and put to death. No details are available about the name of the local chief or the resistance that Alexander met; but we do know that he was forced to march round the central massif of Afghanistan, through the Helmand and Arghandab valleys and over the high range of the Hindu Kush simply to reach Bactria – a circuitous journey which was hardly necessary unless dictated by some political or strategic reasons that remain unknown to us. We do however know the measures he adopted to control these provinces. He founded or refounded cities, peopled with a Macedonian and Greek population and strong garrisons, all named after himself – Alexandria in Aria (Herat), Alexandria Prophthasia in Drangiana (Phrada), Alexandropolis (Kandahar), Alexandria in Arachosia (Ghazni) and Alexandria ad Caucasum (now identified with ancient Kāpiśa, modern Begram, near Charikar). This chain of posts, garrisoned

⁶ Tarn, 1951, pp. 61 et seq.

by Alexander's own troops, were meant to safeguard the route and cover the rear of his advancing army.

The capture of Bessus

Bessus enjoyed quite a strong position in Bactria, as he had been able to gain the support of Oxyartes and Spitamenes (the two great chiefs of Sogdiana) and of Satibarzanes who had fomented the revolts in Aria. Alexander decided to make a strategic move and take Bessus by surprise. But Bessus was not prepared to give open battle, and withdrew to the other side of the Oxus. Alexander appointed the veteran Artabazus as satrap of Bactria and marched to the Oxus with the intention of crossing the river, but he found that Bessus had destroyed all the boats, followed a scorched-earth policy and joined up with Spitamenes. As Alexander advanced, Spitamenes retreated towards Bukhara, but Bessus stood his ground and was eventually captured.

Resistance in Bactria and its suppression

In a the local chiefs decided to follow a wait-and-strike tactic, and to employ desert manoeuvres. They gained the support of nomads beyond the Jaxartes, and Spitamenes 'found allies in the nomads of the Kyrgyz steppe, west of the Polytimetus river – part of the great Saka confederacy known as the Massagetae'.⁷ Initially Alexander occupied Maracanda (Samarkand), the royal summer residence of Sogdiana. Then, worried about the Saka hordes beyond the Jaxartes, he advanced northward past the fortress of Cyropolis occupying seven fortresses on the way to the Jaxartes, the boundary of Achaemenid territory. It was in these engagements that he was wounded in the tibia and lost part of the bone. This fitted in well with the tactics of the local chiefs, which only became known to Alexander when the whole country behind him had risen in revolt. His garrisons in Cyropolis and the seven fortresses were all massacred, and he had to turn back to reconquer this territory. Meanwhile Spitamenes, who had retired into the desert, besieged the citadel of Maracanda, and the Saka nomads, who were allies of Spitamenes, swarmed round the Jaxartes. This was the first time that Alexander was faced with a new encircling tactic by the Sakas. He established a strong garrison on the Jaxartes by founding Alexandria Eschate (Alexandria the Farthest), now identified with Khojand. He then crossed the river and broke through the encircling Sakas with the help of his archers and cavalry. Alexander had sent his commander Pharnuches, a Lycian, to relieve Maracanda. Spitamenes withdrew

⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

down-river and lured the Macedonian force after him to the edge of the desert. This gave Spitamenes his opportunity to make a frontal attack and driving the whole Macedonian force back to the river he annihilated it and again besieged Maracanda. Alexander had to rush personally to relieve the town and although he was able to destroy the harvest of the countryside, Spitamenes' desert tactics proved more than a match for him. Alexander was obliged to retreat to Bactria while Spitamenes celebrated his victory at Bukhara, the royal winter residence of Sogdiana. Alexander consolidated his position in Bactria and received large reinforcements from his home country and from the satraps he had appointed in the western provinces. He was joined by Pharasmanes, the ruler of Chorasmia south of the Aral Sea, who was probably won over because of his opposition to Spitamenes, and by Sisicottus, an older friend of Bessus. It was here also that Ophis, the ruler of Taxila, jealous of his powerful neighbour, Porus, came to offer his alliance, opening up before Alexander the rosy picture of the conquest of the Indus valley. Alexander 'assumed the state of Great King, surrounded himself with eastern forms and pomp, exacted self-abasement in his presence from oriental subjects, and adopted the maxim that the king's person was divine. He was the successor of Darius.'⁸

The conquest of Transoxania

The territory north of the Oxus had yet to be conquered. Spitamenes was a strong force in Sogdiana, and four other chiefs – Oxyartes, Choriene, Catanes and Austanes – were in arms in the Paraetacene (modern Hissar) hills. Alexander himself advanced, dividing the army into five columns, which swept across the plains and reunited at Maracanda. While Alexander was building fortified garrisons at various points, Spitamenes, in league with the Sakas, overwhelmed a Bactrian border post and appeared before Bactra itself. In the winter of 328 B.C., Alexander put Coenus in charge of western Sogdiana with two battalions of the phalanx, two squadrons of the Companions (his personal bodyguard), and the newly raised Bactrian and Sogdian horse. Spitamenes, helped by the Massagetae, attacked him but by now Coenus had mastered his tactics and was able to overpower and defeat Spitamenes. We do not know what diplomatic moves followed, but we read of the estrangement of the Sogdians from Spitamenes and their surrender to Alexander. Later the Massagetae lost heart, cut off Spitamenes' head and sent it to Alexander. Thus was the end of the great defender of Sogdiana. Alexander arranged for Spitamenes' daughter Apama to be married to Seleucus Nikator, and she became the mother of Antiochus I. Alexander was not yet master of the whole of Sogdiana. While he held the plains, the great chiefs were strong in the hills.

⁸ Tarn, 1951, p. 77.

Late in 328 Alexander advanced to Oxyartes' stronghold, 'the Sogdian rock' near Derbend, which was very strongly defended. Oxyartes was not present. While we read of Alexander's assault on the rock and its surrender, we have no details of Oxyartes' reconciliation except that his captured daughter Roxane was married to Alexander. The way in which Oxyartes was made to accompany Alexander to the siege of other strongholds suggests that some historical facts have not been recorded and a deliberate tradition was established that Alexander had fallen in love with Roxane. Later when we find Oxyartes securing the surrender of Chorienes, who had a strong fort on the Vakhsh river south of Faizabad, his political role should be clearly understood. As we note later that the same Oxyartes was made satrap of the Paropamisadae, the political trend becomes clear. Alexander did not himself advance to subdue the two remaining chiefs of the hills but entrusted the task to Craterus who was successful in his mission.

Alexander's allies from the Indus region

It was in Bactria that Alexander planned to conquer the Indus provinces of the Achaemenid Empire.⁹ Three local chiefs had their own reasons for supporting him. One of these, Sisicottus, came from Swat, and was later rewarded by an appointment in this locality. Sangaeus from Gandhāra had a grudge against his brother Astis, and to improve his own chances of royalty, sided with Alexander. The ruler of Taxila wanted to satisfy his own grudge against Porus. In this way Alexander's new push towards the Indus was preceded by considerable diplomatic activity, of which very little is known. Whether his original intention was to explore the southern sea is difficult to say, but his advance in that direction and the information he received from local chiefs must have increased his curiosity. However, to say that mere curiosity brought him to this part of the world would be wide of the mark. Certainly such curiosity cost him dear, and the assistance of the local chieftains was of no great consequence from a military point of view.

Alexander's route to the Indus

In the early summer of 327 B.C. Alexander started from Bactra and found to his surprise his city of Alexandria ad Caucasum in some disorder. Arrian (IV.22.6–8) gives details of his route from Alexandria to the Indus, the strategy he followed and the help he received from local chieftains. Taxiles and the others came to meet him, bringing gifts reckoned of value among the Indians. They presented him with the twenty-five elephants they had

⁹ Dani, 1980, pp. 117–30.

with them. Alexander divided his army, sending Hephaestion and Perdikkas into the land of Peucelaotis, towards the River Indus with the brigades of Gorgias, Clitus and Meleager, half of the Companion cavalry, and the entire cavalry of Greek mercenaries. He gave them instructions to capture by force places en route, or to compel them to capitulate; and when they reached the Indus, they were to make all necessary preparations for the passage of the army. Taxiles and the other chiefs marched with them. When they reached the Indus they carried out all Alexander's orders but Astis, the ruler of Peucelaotis, revolted, bringing ruin on himself and on the city to which he had fled for refuge, when Hephaestion captured it after a siege of thirty days. As far as the route is concerned, P. H. L. Eggermont,¹⁰ relying on the *Geography* of Strabo, makes Alexander cross the Cophen (Kabul) river but this is not borne out by other historians. If Alexander crossed the Kabul river, the only route open for him was thorough the Khyber pass – a route that he definitely avoided because that it lacked water and was less inhabited. It is therefore reasonable to believe that Alexander marched north of the Kabul river across the Ningrahar valley into Bajaur. It is also clear that Hephaestion and Perdikkas, who were sent ahead, did not follow the Khyber route. As their target was Peucelaotis (modern Charsadda, north of the Kabul river), they must have come down through Mohmand territory. Both routes lay north of the Kabul river and clearly indicate the strategy followed by Alexander. Peucelaotis was occupied with the help of Sangaeus and Taxiles, but not without a great fight against Astis. Alexander himself went north. We are not informed who was his guide, but as we hear later that Sisicottus, a chief of this great region, was appointed to administer the area, it is reasonable to believe that Alexander must have followed his advice. Arrian (IV.23) calls this 'the land of the Aspasiens, Guraeans and Assaceniens'. In modern geographical terminology, it embraces Nawagai, Bajaur, Dir and Swat.

The battle with the Aspasiens

The way was now blocked by the Aspasiens, who followed a scorched-earth policy and gave Alexander a tough fight, finally retreating into their mountain fastness. Arrian (IV.24.6–25, 4) describes it thus:

Then crossing the mountains Alexander descended to a city called Arigaeum [identified with Nawagai], and found that this had been set on fire by the inhabitants, who had afterwards fled. There Craterus with his army reached him, after accomplishing all the king's orders; and because this city seemed to be built in a convenient place, he directed that general to fortify it well, and settle in it as many of the neighbouring people as were willing to live there, together with any of the soldiers who were unfit for service. He then advanced to the place

¹⁰ Eggermont, 1970, pp. 63 et seq.

where he heard that most of the barbarians of the district had fled for refuge. . . . When the enemy who were occupying the commanding heights saw the Macedonians approaching they descended into the plain, being emboldened by their superiority in number and despising the Macedonians, because they were seen to be few. A sharp contest ensued; but Alexander won the victory with ease. . . . Ptolemy indeed says that all the men were captured, to a number exceeding 40,000 and that over 2,300,000 oxen were also taken, of which Alexander picked out the finest, because they seemed to him to excel both in beauty and size, wishing to send them to Macedonia to till the soil.

That such a great booty in cattle was collected shows the great prosperity of the region and the reason why the local tribe put up such a stiff resistance.

Fight with the Assaceniens

Alexander then crossed the River Guræus (the Panchkora, in Dir District). Beyond the Karmani pass lies the Talash valley. The Assaceniens, identified with the Aśvakas of Sanskrit literature, tried to defend themselves. According to Arrian (IV.25.7–26,1):

When the barbarians perceived Alexander approaching, they durst not take their stand for a battle in close array, but dispersed one by one to their various cities with the determination of preserving these by fighting from the ramparts. The most important of them was Massaga.

The ponderous ruins of Massaga occupy a conspicuous height near Ziarat about 16 km north of Chakdara fort. Here on a bare hill the walls of later-period ramparts have stood through the centuries to speak of the brave defence that the people put up against Alexander, as described by Quintus Curtius (VIII.10.23–9):

An army of 38,000 infantry defended the city which was strongly fortified both by nature and art. For on the east, an impetuous mountain stream with steep banks on both sides barred approach to the city, while to south and west nature, as if designing to form a rampart, had piled up gigantic rocks, at the base of which lay sloughs and yawning chasms hollowed in the course of ages to vast depths, while a ditch of mighty labour drawn from their extremity continued the line of defence. The city was besides surrounded with a wall thirty-five stadia in circumference which had a basis of stonework supporting a superstructure of unburnt, sun-dried bricks. The brickwork was bound into a solid fabric by means of stones so interposed that the more brittle material rested upon the harder, while moist clay had been used for mortar. Lest, however, the structure should sink, strong beams had been laid on top, supporting wooden floors which covered the walls and afforded a passage along them.

Alexander while reconnoitring the fortifications, and unable to fix on a plan of attack, since nothing less than a vast mole, necessary for bringing up his engines to the walls, would suffice to fill up the chasms, was wounded from the ramparts by an arrow which chanced to hit him in the calf of the leg. When the barb was extracted, he called for his horse, and without having his wound so much as bandaged, continued with unabated energy to prosecute the work on

hand. But when the injured limb was hanging without support and the gradual cooling, as the blood dried, aggravated the pain, he is reported to have said that though he was called, as all know, the son of Jupiter, he felt notwithstanding all the defects of the weak body. He did not, however, return to the camp till he had viewed everything and ordered what he wanted to be done.

It was at Massaga that we learn of Alexander's ploy. After the besieged had agreed to surrender, Diodorus (XVII.84.1) informs us:

When the capitulation on those terms had been ratified by oaths, the Queen [of Massaga], to show her admiration of Alexander's magnanimity, sent out to him most valuable presents, with an intimation that she would fulfil all the stipulations. Then the mercenaries at once, in accordance with the terms of the agreement, evacuated the city, and after retiring to a distance of eighty stadia, pitched their camp unmolested, without thought of what was to happen. But Alexander, who was actuated by an implacable enmity against the mercenaries, and had kept his troops under arms ready for action, pursued the barbarians, and falling suddenly upon them made a great slaughter of their ranks. The barbarians at first loudly protested that they were attacked in violation of sworn obligation, and invoked the gods whom he had desecrated by taking false oaths in their name. Alexander, with a loud voice, retorted that his covenant merely bound him to let them depart from the city, and was by no means a league of perpetual amity between them and the Macedonians. The mercenaries, undismayed by the greatness of their danger, drew their ranks together in a ring, within which they placed the women and children to guard them on all sides against their assailants. As they were now desperate, and by their audacity and feats of valour made the conflict in which they closed hot work for the enemy, while the Macedonians held it a point of honour not to be outdone in courage by a horde of barbarians, great was the astonishment and alarm which the peril of this crisis created. For as the combatants were locked together fighting hand to hand, death and wounds were dealt out in every variety and form. Thus the Macedonians, when once their long spikes had shattered the shield of the barbarians, pierced their vital organs with the steel points of these weapons, and on the other hand the mercenaries never hurled their javelins without deadly effect against the near target presented by the dense ranks of the enemy. When many were thus wounded and not a few killed, the women, taking the arms of the fallen, fought side by side with the men for the imminence of the danger and the great interests at stake forced them to do violence to their nature, and to take an active part in the defence. Accordingly some who had supplied themselves with arms did their best to cover their husbands with their shields, while others who were without arms did much to impede the enemy by flinging themselves upon them and catching hold of their shields. The defenders, however, after fighting desperately, along with their wives, were at last overpowered by superior numbers, and met a glorious death which they would have disdained to exchange for a life with dishonour.

Massaga was only one of the fortress cities of the Assaceniens. Two more places of great importance were then the target of attack. Arrian continues (IV.27.5–28,1):

Thence he dispatched Coenus to Bazira, entertaining an opinion that the inhabitants would surrender when they heard of the capture of Massaga. He also dispatched Attalus, Alcetas, and Demetrius, the cavalry officer, to another city, named Ora, with instructions to blockade it until he himself arrived. The men of this city made a sortie against the forces of Alcetas; but the Macedonians easily routed them, and drove them into the city within the wall. But affairs at Bazira were not favourable to Coenus, for the inhabitants showed no sign of capitulating, trusting to the strength of the place, because not only was it situated on a lofty eminence, but it was also thoroughly fortified all round. When Alexander learnt this, he started off to Bazira, but ascertaining that some of the neighbouring barbarians were about to get into the city of Ora by stealth, being dispatched thither by Abisares for that very purpose, he first marched to Ora. He ordered Coenus to fortify a certain strong position to serve as a basis of operations against the city of Bazira, and then to come to him with the rest of his army, after leaving in that place a sufficient garrison to restrain the men in the city from enjoying the free use of their land. But when the men of Bazira saw Coenus departing with the larger part of his army, they despised the Macedonians, as not being able to contend with them, and sallied forth into the plain. A sharply contested battle ensued, in which 500 of the barbarians fell and over seventy were taken prisoner. But the rest, fleeing for refuge into the city, were now more securely shut off from the country by the men in the fort. The siege of Ora proved an easy matter to Alexander, for he no sooner attacked the walls than at the first assault he got possession of the city, and captured the elephants which had been left there. When the men in Bazira heard the news, despairing of their own affairs, they abandoned the city about the middle of the night, and fled to the rock which is in their land, and is called Aornos.

Both these forts lie on the left bank of the River Swat and to attack them Alexander's forces had to cross the river. Stein¹¹ identified Ora with Udegram and Bazira with Barikot. From Udegram retreat upstream along the Swat river was possible, but if Udegram had already fallen to Alexander, the only escape from Bazira to Buner was across the Karakar pass. Abisares' forces could reach either place through this pass as Alexander was coming from across the river. As a stand was not possible, the forces must have planned to retreat to Buner where they could again get help from Abisares, who must have been planning to stop Alexander on that side of the River Indus. Although the Greek historians relate that the Assaceniens were defeated, they were not conquered, but took up new positions at Aornos.

The very fact that Alexander did not advance directly to Aornos suggests that by then he was well aware of the geography of the terrain where the local chiefs had taken refuge and was well guided by other local chiefs. Who were these local chiefs and what was their affiliation? We know the names of two of them – Cophaeus (probably a ruler of the lower Kabul valley) and Assagates (probably Aśvagupta) – but they are not heard of again, except in connection with Alexander's march towards Aornos.

¹¹ Stein, 1929.

Arrian informs us that Alexander fortified Ora and Massaga to keep the land in subjection and also the city of Bazira. He appointed Nicanor as ‘viceroys of the land on this side of the River Indus’, fortifying yet another city, Orobatis, generally identified with Varuša (modern Shahbazgarhi, in Mardan District) where the Aśokan rock edicts are to be found. As it lies in a strategic position that could be used as a base for operations against enemy forces in Buner, its fortification can be well understood. It was probably here that Alexander planned his future campaign to dislodge his enemies from Aornos and to prevent Abisares from interfering in the region.

The capture of Aornos

Stein¹² takes ‘Aornos’ to be linguistically identical with (Mount) Una on the Indus in the Indus Kohistan, near Thakot on the modern Karakorum highway; but ‘Buner’ could be a corrupted form of ‘Aornos’. In that case, any high peak in Buner (and there are several) could be identified with this last siege. Alexander was bent on taking possession of Aornos, towards which he now moved. The first city he reached is called Embolima, which is identified with ancient Ambulima. Stein takes it for Amb because it is situated on the route to Mount Una following closely the River Indus. On the other hand Eggermont¹³ identifies it with Ambela, an important pass that can be reached from Shahbazgarhi. Both are strategically located. As a good strategist Alexander left the experienced Craterus with part of the army and himself advanced towards Aornos. If Aornos was situated on the right bank of the Indus, as the narratives of Diodorus and Curtius state, one alternative would be to accept its identification with Pirsar on Mount Una, which can be reached from Amb along the river, or from Ambela through the Kaghlum and Chakesar passes. But it is difficult to understand how he could get to Pirsar by the latter route when Erices (Assacenus’ brother) was holding the district of the Assaceni, which was Buner itself. Classical historians would have us believe that Alexander tackled Erices after capturing Aornos. Eggermont would have Erices take refuge on Mount Elam, if he could be identified with the leader of the forces fleeing from Barikot, because Elam lies to the north-west by the side of the Karakar pass. In either case the capture of Aornos was part of Alexander’s Buner campaign, and it was after this victory that he fortified the place, ‘committing the superintendence of the garrison to Sisicottus’ (Arrian IV.30.4). After such an arduous campaign Alexander was finally able to subjugate the Assaceni and the whole area west of the Indus. When Nicanor

¹² Stein, 1929.

¹³ Eggermont, 1970, pp. 63 et seq.

was appointed viceroy we read of two local chiefs, Sangaeus in Peucelaotis and Sisicottus (Sasigupta) in the farthest corner of Buner.

Alexander and Taxila

After his arduous Buner campaign Alexander returned to cross the Indus at the point where a bridge had been built. Arrian (V.3.5) describes his activities:

When Alexander arrived at the River Indus, he found a bridge made over it by Hephaestion, and two thirty-oared galleys, besides many smaller craft. He moreover found that 200 talents of silver, 3,000 oxen, above 10,000 sheep for sacrificial victims, and thirty elephants had arrived as gifts from the Indian Taxiles; 700 Indian horsemen also arrived from Taxiles as a reinforcement, and that prince sent word that he would surrender to him the city of Taxila, the largest town between the Rivers Indus and Hydaspes.

Arrian (V.8.2 et seq.) continues the story:

Then starting from the Indus, he arrived at Taxila, a large and prosperous city, in fact the largest of those situated between the Rivers Indus and Hydaspes. He was received in a friendly manner by Taxiles, the governor of the city, and by the Indians of that place; and he added to that territory as much of the adjacent country as they asked for. Thither also came to him envoys from Abisares, King of the Mountaineer Indians, the embassy including the brother of Abisares as well as the other most notable men. Other envoys came from Doxares, the chief of the province, bringing gifts with them. Here again at Taxila Alexander offered the sacrifices which were customary for him to offer, and celebrated a gymnastic and equestrian contest. Having appointed Philippus, son of Machetas, viceroy of the Indians of that district, he left a garrison in Taxila, as well as the soldiers who were invalidated by sickness, and then marched towards the River Hydaspes.

It is very significant that Arrian calls Abisares 'King of the Mountaineer Indians'. If this information is correct, should we not suppose that the forces of the Mountaineer Indians who fought at Gaugamela were sent by him – an inference supported by the fact that Abisares had opposed Alexander all along, while his enemy, Omphis, had been on Alexander's side? Abisares, who had sent his troops to support the Assaceniens in Ora and Buner against Alexander, now sent only his embassy of goodwill to Taxila and never went in person to attend on Alexander, who nevertheless tacitly accepted the pretence of submission. Quintus Curtius (VIII.12.12–16) gives more information:

When Alexander asked him [Omphis] whether he had more husbandmen or soldiers, he replied that as he was at war with two kings he required more soldiers than field labourers. These kings were Abisares and Porus, but Porus was superior in power and influence. Both of them held sway beyond the River Hydaspes, and had resolved to try the fortune of war whatever invader had come. Omphis, with Alexander's permission, and according to the

usage of the realm, assumed the ensigns of royalty along with the name which his father had borne. His people called him Taxiles, for such was the name which accompanied the sovereignty on whomsoever it devolved. When, therefore, he had entertained Alexander for three days with lavish hospitality, he showed him on the fourth day what quality of corn he had supplied to Hephaestion's troops, and then presented him and all his friends with golden crowns, and eighty talents besides of coined silver. Alexander was so exceedingly gratified with his profuse generosity that he not only sent back to Omphis the presents he had given, but added a thousand talents from the spoils which he carried, along with many banqueting vessels of gold and silver, a vast quantity of Persian drapery, and thirty chargers from his own stalls, caparisoned as when ridden by himself.

Quintus Curtius (VIII.13.3) informs us:

Alexander had now resolved to cross the Hydaspes, when Barsaentes, who had instigated the Arachosians to revolt, was brought to him in chains, along with thirty captured elephants. . . . Samaxus was also brought in chains, the king of a small Indian state, who had espoused the cause of Barsaentes. Alexander, having put the traitor and his accomplice under custody, and consigned the elephants to the care of Taxiles, advanced to the River Hydaspes.

This information brings a new perspective of the battle at Gaugamela *vis-à-vis* the princes from the Indus region. It is not clear where Barsaentes was caught, but if the identification of Samaxus with Sambus in Sind (as suggested by Eggermont) is accepted we can understand the purpose of the entire campaign of Alexander in the Indus region; and the capture of Barsaentes at this stage does focus on the part that was played by the princes from the Indus region in the great battle at Gaugamela.

To these events Plutarch adds:

Alexander, therefore, after having received many presents from Taxiles, and given him more in return, at last drank to his health, and accompanied the toast with the present of a thousand talents of coined money.

At this time in Taxila there was a certain Kauṭilya, the author of the well-known book on Indian policy, the *Arthaśāstra* who was to become famous as the teacher of Candragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire. Plutarch records:,

Sandrocottos [Candragupta] himself, who was then but a youth, saw Alexander and afterwards used to declare that Alexander could easily have taken possession of the whole country, since the king [i.e. one of the Nanda kings of the Gangetic valley] was hated and despised by his subjects for the wickedness of his disposition and the meanness of his origin.

Justin (XV.4.15) adds:

This man was of humble origin, but was stimulated to aspire to regal power by supernatural encouragement; for having offended Alexander by his boldness of speech and orders being given to kill him, he saved himself by swiftness of foot.

Unfortunately we do not know when and where Candragupta met Alexander, but as he was in Taxila, that is the most likely place of their meeting.

Alexander and Porus

From Taxila to the Hydaspes Alexander had the choice of two main roads. Either would be practicable provided the passes were in the hands of allies. The principal chain of the Salt range commences in the lofty hills of Chel formed by the convergence of three spurs, two of which extended as far as the Himalayan out-liers. The first is traversed by the Grand Trunk Road at Bakrala and, 32 km lower down, by the Dhudial-to-Jalalpur road at the gap through which the Bunhar Nullah flows. The spur on which the fort of Rohtas stands is terminated at one end by the Bunhar and at the other by the Nuhan Nullah, which flows through the Pubbi range near the apex of the triangle. The lower road, which emerges near Jalalpur, is narrow and was perhaps under the control of Sopeithes, while the northern route – the Grand Trunk Road – was under Abisares' control. The route followed by Alexander depended upon the relationship of these two chiefs to Porus. In spite of his feigned submission to Alexander, Abisares was ready to support Porus with whom he was in league, and therefore the northern route appears to have been less preferred. On the other hand, Sopeithes, the ruler of the Salt range, was too weak to stand against Alexander and more likely to yield. On this ground the southern route was preferable, as Stein has argued on other, geographical, grounds. On the other side of the Hydaspes (Jhelum) lay the Kingdom of Porus (Fig. 1). The name appears to have been derived from the ancient Puru tribe, which at this time must have spread from Jhelum eastward beyond Chenab, probably up to the River Ravi, because the younger Porus, nephew of the former, ruled here. He was antagonistic to his uncle and is reported to have offered Alexander help against him, hoping to be installed as ruler over the whole area. The territory of the elder Porus between the



Fig. 1. Silver coin with the figure of Porus (BMC 191, 61). Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Jhelum and Chenab was well defended. Strabo tells us that it was an extensive and fertile district containing nearly 300 cities. Diodorus mentions that Porus had an army of more than 50,000 foot soldiers, about 300 horses, over 1,000 chariots and 130 elephants. The story of the battle against Porus is related in detail by the Greek historians.

The special strategic moves made by Alexander for the battle, the severity with which the battle was fought, the daredevil courage shown by Porus, and his final treatment by Alexander indicate the importance of the war. It appears that all along Porus was the main target of attack on this side of the Indus, just as the Assaceniens had been on the other. As Sisicottus was Alexander's supporter on the west, so Omphis was on the east, while Abisares played a political game on both fronts. As we shall see later, he not only saved his life but preserved his territory and never submitted personally to Alexander.

After his victory over Porus, Alexander (Fig. 2) founded the city of Nicaca, as well as another city, Bucephala, in memory of his horse Bucephalus, who died there. Alexander not only restored his territory to Porus but also added the neighbouring region beyond the Chenab that belonged to the 'Glausians' and as far as the Ravi, where the younger Porus had risen in revolt as his uncle had been honoured by Alexander. At a campsite in this area Alexander effected a reconciliation between Taxiles and Porus. And there arrived a second ambassador from Abisares, who, seeing the failure of his political manoeuvres, again feigned submission by sending his brother with a gift of forty elephants. It is strange that even then he did not come in person. We are told:

At this time Phrataphernes, viceroy of Parthia and Hyrcania, came to Alexander at the head of the Thracians who had been left with him. Messengers also came from Sisicottus, the viceroy of the Assaceniens, to inform him that these people had slain their governor [Nicanor] and revolted from Alexander. Against these he dispatched Philippus [the viceroy of Taxila region] and Tyriespis, with an army, to arrange and set in order the affairs of their land.

This was the first revolt by local people in the territory of the Assaceniens.

It was on the banks of the Ravi that Alexander met the Cathaeans (with their stronghold at Sangala). There were many other independent tribes between the Ravi and the Beas. In these campaigns Porus accompanied Alexander and helped him with the elephants. After a great siege Sangala was captured and razed to the ground. Alexander advanced up to the Beas which was probably the limit of the Achaemenid Empire. Beyond lay the Gangetic kingdom of the Great Nandas.

Alexander's retreat

We are informed that here the Greek soldiers revolted and would not proceed further to conquer the Gangetic region. Although Alexander unwillingly acceded to their demands,



FIG. 2. Head of Alexander the Great. Sculpture. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

it is strange that they did not insist on returning by the route they had come. Was this story of revolt concocted by the Greek historians to put all the blame on the soldiers and prove that Alexander wished to be a world conqueror but stopped at the limit of the Achaemenid

Empire? The army certainly stood by him so long as he was only subjugating the lands that had belonged to the Achaemenids. If the army only wanted an easy return home, it is difficult to understand why Alexander tackled new hazards by going south.

It is said that Alexander made Abisares viceroy over his own country and the region belonging to Arsaces. Thus to the east of the Indus, Porus and Abisares, who were enemies of Taxiles, were made stronger. On the other hand Philippos, who was appointed 'viceroy of the district' at Taxila, became 'viceroy of the country beyond the Indus extending to Bactria' after the murder of Nicanor. Later his authority was extended up to the territory of the Malli, that is, to the confluence of the Indus and the Chenab. Beyond this point as far as the sea, and extending over the Makran coast, Pithon was appointed viceroy; but that area remained to be conquered. Meanwhile Alexander went back to the River Hydaspes.

Alexander fights his way to the South

Arrian (II.1.1–2,2) continues the story:

Alexander now resolved to sail down the Hydaspes to the Great Sea, after he had prepared on the bank of that river many thirty-oared galleys and others with one and a half banks of oars, as well as a number of vessels for conveying horses, and all the other things requisite for the easy conveyance of an army on a river. . . . With himself he placed on board all the shield-bearing guards, the archers, the Agrianians and the bodyguard of the cavalry. Craterus led a part of the infantry along the right bank of the Hydaspes, while along the other bank Hephaestion advanced at the head of the most numerous and efficient part of the army, including the elephants, which now numbered about 200. These generals were ordered to march as quickly as possible to the place where the palace of Sopeithes was situated.

They reached this on the second day.

Alexander then proceeded down the Jhelum to its confluence with the Chenab. In the southern Panjab he had to fight against four tribes – the Sibi, Agalassi (Diodorus XVII.98), Sudracae and Malli. The Sibi occupied the Shorkot region in Jhang District, and the Agalassi (or the Agrasura) must have been close neighbours. The other two tribes, the Malli (or Mālavas) and the Sudracac (*Śudraka* or *Kṣudraka*), made a joint defence against Alexander. It was in the fortress city of the Malli, which was heavily defended, that Alexander was badly wounded. The city seems to have been Mālavasthāna (probably modern Multan) and the Sudracae must have lived in the Bahawalpur region northward along the Ravi.

The onward journey to the sea was interrupted by two more geographical features – the great Indus gorge at Sakkhar and the head of the delta below the hillock of Thatta. In the first area Alexander met two important tribes, that of Musicanus, probably with their

headquarters at Al-Ror, near Sakkhar, and the second of Sambus, with their city called Sindimana. In the name 'Musicanus' it is not difficult to see the ancient tribe of Mūṣikas, or Mauṣikas, and in the name 'Sambus' the later Sindhi tribe, Sammas. It is said that the Brahmans instigated their fight against Alexander, who defeated them and destroyed their cities.

The next important place was Patala, where 'the water of the Indus is divided into two large rivers, both of which retain the name of Indus as far as the sea. Here Alexander constructed a harbour and a dockyard.' Quintus Curtius (IX.8.28) further writes:

From there they came to the next nation, that of the Patalii. Their king was Moeris, who had abandoned his city and taken refuge in the mountains. Alexander took the town and pillaged the fields. From there great booty was driven off, in the form of flocks and herds, and a great store of grain was found. Then taking guides acquainted with the river he sailed down to an island which arose in the middle of the channel.

There has been a vain attempt to identify the city of Patala. If 'Patala' is not taken as a proper name but only refers to a city, it can be corrected to 'Pattana', that is, city or port city *par excellence*, a term applied in a later period to Thatta, which is ideally situated in the way the Greek historians describe. King Moeris has been taken by Eggermont to be Mauryas – but without any reasonable foundation, and he is better regarded as the head of the local tribe Med or Mehr, which is well known in the Sind coastal area.

Alexander marches back across Baluchistan

When the exploration of the Indus was complete, Alexander prepared for the return journey. He had already, according to Arrian (VI.17.3),

sent Craterus into Carmania with brigades of Attalus, Meleager and Antigenes, some of the archers and as many of the Companions and other Macedonians as, being now unfit for military service, he was dispatching to Macedonia by the route through the lands of Arachosians and Zarangians.

Eggermont rightly points out the line of march along the ancient caravan trail from Al-Ror through the Bolan pass to Kandahar and from there to Sistan. According to Strabo (613.3 et seq.), Alexander

himself set out with one division through Gedrosia. He kept away from the sea, no more than 500 stadia at most, in order that he might at the same time equip the seaboard for the reception of his fleet; and he often closely approached the sea, although its shores were hard to traverse and rugged.

The fleet he gave over to Nearchus and Onesicritus, the latter his master pilot, giving them orders to take an appropriate position, and to follow, and sail alongside, his line of march.

Alexander's retreat from the Indus delta has been reconstructed by Eggermont who has evaluated the two possible routes – the northern one, suggested by Stein, and the southern one given by Holditch. He has opted for the latter to identify the port town of Alexandria in the Oreitae country near the mouth of the Hingol river – the most important river in Baluchistan, separating the eastern part held by the Oreitae tribe from the western part – Gedrosia proper. Alexander entered via the River Arabis (the Hab river flowing between the Kirthar and Pab ranges that run in a north-south direction). The focal point here is the central Kalat area, the southern part of which is drained by the Porali river. The Oreitae tribe appears to have occupied this entire zone. They put up a stout resistance and rose in revolt after the departure of Alexander, but were brought to book by Leonnatus. Even later, Diodorus (XVII.105.8) informs us, when Alexander 'was on the march, some of the Oreitae, having attacked the troops commanded by Leonnatus and slain a good many men, escaped unscathed into their own country'.

Arrian (VI.27.1–2) tells the story of Alexander's last appointments:

When he arrived at the capital of the Gedrosians he gave his army a rest. Apollophanes he deposed from his satrapy because he found out that he had utterly disregarded his instructions. He appointed Thoas to be satrap over the people of this district, but as he was taken ill and later died, Sibyrus occupied the vacant post. The same man had also recently been appointed by Alexander satrap of Carmania, but now the government of the Arachosians and Gedrosians was committed to him, and Tlepolemus, the son of Pythophanes, got Carmania. The king was already advancing into Carmania when tidings reached him that Philippus, satrap of the Indian Country, had been treacherously murdered by the mercenaries; but that his Macedonian bodyguards had put to death his murderers whom they had caught in the very act, and others whom they had afterwards seized. On learning what had occurred he sent a letter to India addressed to Eudemus and Taxiles directing them to assume the administration of the province previously governed by Philippus until he could send a satrap to govern it.

That opportunity never came. The finale of Alexander's march is given in the words of Justin (XV.1.10–15):

Seleucus Nicator waged many wars in the east after the partition of Alexander's empire among his generals. He first took Babylon and then with his forces augmented by victory subjugated the Bactrians. He then passed over into India, which after Alexander's death, as if the yoke of servitude had been shaken off from its neck, had put its prefects to death. Sandrocottus was the leader who achieved their freedom, but after his victory he forfeited by his tyranny all title to the name of the liberator, for he oppressed with servitude the very people whom he had emancipated from foreign thralldom.

Alexander's last days

Alexander returned to Susa only to find that the satraps appointed by him had enrolled mercenaries and acted as independent rulers while some of the Persian satraps had ill-used and murdered their subjects. 'One trouble, a revolt of Greek mercenaries in Bactria, was not really overcome; Amyntas was replaced by another Philippos, but the discontent simmered till Alexander died.'¹⁴ Alexander was struck down by fever and died in Babylon on 13 June 323 B.C.

How far Alexander succeeded in uniting his empire is difficult to say because the men that he posted as satraps in the different provinces could not remain in power after his death. He certainly succeeded in bridging the rift between the Greek and Persian worlds, and, by bringing the two into one imperial system, he fulfilled the aim that once inspired the Achaemenids; the voyage of his admiral Nearchus must have added information to that already gained by Skylax in the time of Darius I, and the new silver currency issued by Alexander must have accelerated trade and commerce. The new cities he founded in Asia, and the Greek population he settled in them, planted the seeds of Hellenistic culture and inaugurated a new spirit of cultural exchange.

However, the empire that he founded did not survive him. Its unity was destroyed, and for forty years after his death his own companions and comrades indulged in mutual strife. The one who emerged successful in Asia was Seleucus Nicator. The major claim to independence from the Seleucids came from the Indus region where Candragupta Maurya, with the support of the Parvataka (probably the Paurava tribe), overthrew the Greeks and gained the provinces of Aria, Arachosia, Gedrosia and the Paropamisadae, almost all the eastern areas where troubles had been brewing in Alexander's lifetime. Within half a century the Seleucids lost Parthia and Hyrcania, provinces situated to the south-east and east of the Caspian Sea, and probably at about the same time Bactria threw off their suzerainty. The Seleucids continued to control Iran until the Roman menace roused the national consciousness of the Iranians. The Parthians gave the final signal, recovering Iran from the Greeks and stabilizing their western frontier on the Euphrates.

¹⁴ Tarn, 1951, p. 110.

Part Two

THE SELEUCIDS IN CENTRAL ASIA

(*Paul Bernard*)

Rare as they are for this period, historical sources and coins help to pierce the darkness surrounding the fate of the Greek colonies in Central Asia during the twenty years between the death of Alexander (323 B.C.) and the conquest of Central Asia by Seleucus I (c. 305–304 B.C.). The survival of this Greek presence in regions far away from the Mediterranean and apparently isolated is primarily explained by the fact that it had put down roots. Even if we reject the theory of a genuine Greek colonization prior to Alexander of political exiles settled in these provinces by the Achaemenid kings,¹⁵ it is nevertheless evident that the number of colonists left behind by Alexander was far from negligible. Classical texts mention 13,500 soldiers in the Oxus valley (Arrian IV.22) and 4,600 in Arachosia alone (Curtius VII.3–4), the centre of troop disposition south of the Hindu Kush. To this number must be added the pensioned soldiers, who were settled in the newly founded towns, as the conquest progressed.

Alexander's death and its aftermath

The announcement of Alexander's death caused 23,000 Greek mercenaries settled, no doubt against their will, in the upper satrapies of the Iranian plateau and in Central Asia to rebel and attempt to return to their distant homeland (Diodorus XVIII.7).¹⁶ But the dead king's lieutenants, who had sided with the regent Perdiccas, immediately instructed the general responsible for suppressing the rebellion to put the rebels to death, convinced that they could count on other troops remaining at their posts. Far from feeling imprisoned in a hostile environment behind their ramparts, the colonists who had not abandoned their posts were sufficiently sure of themselves to join in the power struggles then taking

¹⁵ Narain, 1957 pp. 1–6.

¹⁶ On this revolt, see Koshelenko, 1979 pp. 181–221.

place in Western Asia. The consideration shown to their satraps on the occasion of three successive reorganizations of the empire (at Babylon in 323 B.C., at Triparadisus in 321 and at Persepolis in 316), and which amounted, for the eastern provinces, to little more than a few staff changes indicated their considerable political importance in the balance of power. In 317 B.C., the satraps of Central Asia, Bactria, Aria-Drangiana, Arachosia, the Paropamisadae and Gandhāra joined forces to check Pithon, their powerful colleague in Media, whose ambitions threatened their own position. Their 6,500-strong army (further proof that the rebellion of 323 B.C. had not drained the country of colonists) was victorious. It was with this army that they sided with Eumenes in his struggle against Antigonos, and, in spite of the defeat suffered by the coalition in Iran (316 B.C.), Antigonos was careful not to undermine their power. These élite soldiers were also political creatures who knew how to attend to the effective running of their provinces, where they had no doubt rallied the local nobles to their cause to ensure local support. In this context, a highly significant comment is made by the Greek historian, Hieronymus of Cardia, who was personally involved. He notes that the reason behind Antigonos' decision to confirm the satraps of Carmania and Bactria in their offices was 'because they would not allow themselves to be dismissed by a mere letter, given the many partisans at their service among the local populations, whose allegiance they had won through their fine administration' (Diodorus XIX.48). The silver coins struck in the Greek manner which appeared at this time in the Oxus valley (either imitating Athenian coins or with an eagle design or bearing the name of Sophytes),¹⁷ minted for local use, indicate that these satraps were also concerned with the economic development of their provinces. The ground had been well prepared for the fresh wave of Greek colonization, which was to be initiated by the Seleucid kings.

After a gap of some ten years, the satrapies of Central Asia reappear in the history of the Hellenistic kingdoms, through their inclusion in the empire of Seleucus I. Seleucus, a Macedonian noble, had pursued an uneventful military career among the companions of Alexander, gradually rising through the officer ranks. At the division of Triparadisus (321 B.C.) he was allotted the important satrapy of Babylonia. After many turns of fortune, in which he demonstrated his tenacity, political acumen and administrative talents, Seleucus eventually consolidated his power over the entire region of Mesopotamia and northern Syria. Before engaging in the final struggle with his rival Antigonos, who had withdrawn to Anatolia, Seleucus had to be certain of his eastern borders. In 307 B.C. he therefore decided to ensure acknowledgement of his authority in the satrapies of the Iranian plateau and Central Asia, and his expedition does not appear to have encountered any serious resistance from the Greeks living north of the Hindu Kush.

¹⁷ Mitchiner, 1976, pp. 21–4.

Mauryas and Central Asia

South of the Hindu Kush, however, Seleucus came up against a new, non-Greek, power – the Indian Empire of the Mauryas. Its founder, Candragupta, had recently extended his power beyond the Indus, up to the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau. In spite of the vagueness of the historical texts, the treaty concluded between Candragupta and Seleucus seems to acknowledge the *fait accompli* of Indian control of a large part of the territories west of the Indus, comprising Gedrosia, the Paropamisadae (the region of Kabul and Begram) and Arachosia (the Kandahar region). The Greek colonies in these regions, particularly Alexandria ad Caucasum (Begram) and Alexandria in Arachosia and Alexandropolis (Kandahar), thus became subject to a foreign power, but this dependence did not prevent them from flourishing while remaining true to their ancestral traditions. To safeguard the interests of the Greeks and Macedonians who had come under foreign rule, Seleucus concluded a convention with the Indian rulers which guaranteed full rights to children born of intermarriages with local Iranian women. Having secured his eastern frontier by incorporating into his kingdom the provinces north of the Hindu Kush, and by stabilizing through an alliance his relations with the Mauryas, Seleucus returned west with the 500 elephants he had obtained from Candragupta. There he eliminated his rival Antigonus at the battle of Ipsus (301 B.C.) and extended his empire over a large part of Anatolia.

Political Uphavals

Slightly before 290 B.C. the provinces of Central Asia were rocked by upheavals that destroyed several cities, particularly in Margiana and Aria.¹⁸ These were caused not by local revolts against the Greek colonists, but by a wave of nomadic invaders. This may be supposed from the military expedition led by an important servant of the Seleucid state, Demodamas of Miletus, who advanced to the Jaxartes (modern Syr Darya). On the banks of this river, beyond which lay the territory of the nomads, Demodamas erected altars honouring Apollo of Didyma, protector of the Seleucid dynasty, as a symbolic affirmation of Greek presence. Seleucus made his son Antiochus viceroy, and put him in charge of the upper satrapies. The royal coins bearing the combined names of the two sovereigns, which were struck by the mint at Bactra,¹⁹ bear witness to a special relationship between Antiochus and the Bactrian satrapy. Antiochus probably lived in Bactria for a time, using it as a base for supervising the reconstruction of the devastated provinces. Seleucid concern for

¹⁸ Wolski, 1947, pp. 13–70.

¹⁹ Newell, 1978, pp. 231–6.

these provinces continued until the death of Seleucus I (281 B.C.). During his own reign (281–261 B.C.), Antiochus I was no doubt too occupied with the difficulties he faced in Anatolia and his rivalry with Ptolemaic Egypt to give them the same attention. There was ample reason for the interest shown by the Seleucids in these Central Asian satrapies. Their strategic importance lay in their role as the bulwark of the empire against the continuing threat from Asiatic nomads. Their wealth came from their oases, especially those in the valleys of the Oxus and Polytimetus (modern Amu Darya and Zerafshan), which enjoyed an agricultural surplus from the expansion of irrigated land, and prosperity from the metals and precious gems found in the mountains of the region. This interest was strengthened by family ties. Seleucus had married the Bactrian princess, Apama, whose father, Spitamenes, had organized the resistance against Alexander; Seleucus named several of the towns that he founded after her; and Antiochus was Apama's son.

Urbanization and city life

The founding or refounding of cities bearing Antiochus' name testifies to his determination to consolidate and develop the urban fabric of these satrapies. In the oasis of Merv (ancient Margiana) the Achaemenid settlement at Erk-kala, transformed by Alexander into Alexandria in Margiana, was incorporated by a new city (the Gyaur-kala site) whose massive unbaked-brick ramparts enclosed a vast square 1,500 m across, fortified at each corner by a bastion. Inside the ramparts, whose irregular contours reflect those of the site, two main streets linking the four gates crossed at the centre of the city.²⁰ According to Strabo, the king was so impressed by the fertility of the oasis and anxious to protect it from nomadic incursions like the one that had recently devastated it, that he ordered the city to be surrounded by a rampart 1,500 stadia (250 km) long. Lengthy sections of this defence work, consisting of a light rammed-earth wall punctuated with towers, have been discovered on the northern boundaries of the oasis.²¹ At Maracanda (Samarkand), the main site of the Zerafshan oasis, a rampart with a corridor inside, following the irregular contours of the Achaemenid city and dated by pottery of the first half of the third century B.C. can be attributed to the period of Antiochus I, in spite of the differences in architectural technique.²² The presence of a Greek colony whose origins go back to the period of Seleucid rule is confirmed by the discovery there of a Greek name (Nikias) engraved on a vase.²³ The city of Antioch in Scythia, mentioned by a Byzantine author, may be the former

²⁰ Filanovich, 1974, pp. 1 et seq.

²¹ Viazigin, 1949, pp. 260–75; Merezhin, 1978, pp. 11–15.

²² Shishkina, 1969, pp. 62–75, 1975, pp. 60–78.

²³ Shishkina, 1975, p. 69, Fig. 9.1.

Alexandria Eschate (modern Khojand-Leninabad) on the Jaxartes, refounded in the name of Antiochus I by Demodamas during his expedition against the nomads. Further south, in the Hari-rud valley, Antiochus restored the ramparts of Artacoana, headquarters of the satrapy of Aria (possibly Alexandria in Aria). The present-day town of Herat represents – in the quadrilateral form of its medieval ramparts, and in its four gates and two main streets intersecting at right angles near the town centre – the topography and grid pattern typical of Hellenistic cities.²⁴ Two other towns, also in the satrapy of Aria, owe their existence to Antiochus I: Soteira, from his surname Soter (meaning ‘saviour’) and Achaea, founded by Alexander and refounded by the Seleucid king. At Bactra (the capital of Bactria) the most ancient rampart of the acropolis, a solid mass equipped with projecting towers, perched on a high base of adobe, probably dates from the Greek period, though it is not possible to determine whether it was built under Seleucid rule.²⁵ In contrast, the remains of a lesser rampart surrounding the oasis, also constructed of adobe but flanked with rectangular towers, recalls the rampart built by Antiochus I to defend the Merv oasis, and may well have been erected on his orders.²⁶ The Greek city about which we are best informed, as a result of extensive French excavations, is the town located on the site of Ay Khanum, on the eastern borders of Afghan Bactria, at the confluence of the Oxus and its southern tributary, the Kokcha. It is not known whether the city was founded by Alexander or Seleucus, but we do know that its rise began under Seleucid rule. During this period the natural defences of the vast site (1,800 × 1,500 m), formed by the two rivers and a natural hill which acted as its acropolis, were completed by the construction of massive ramparts built of unbaked brick, reinforced with full rectangular towers, and by a citadel erected in the south-east corner of the acropolis. The basic layout of the town (Fig. 3) was designed so that the main street, at the foot of the acropolis, left room for the broad expanse of the lower town with its vast palace (Fig. 4). The residential area, with patrician mansions, was laid out in the triangle formed by the junction of the two rivers, while the most important sanctuary of the city was located on the side of the main street.²⁷

During the first half of the third century B.C., under the reigns of Seleucus I (311–281), Antiochus I (281–261) and Antiochus II (261–246), the Greek provinces of Central Asia were part of an empire centred around the ancient Greek lands of Anatolia and Hellenized Western Asia. It was a crucial period for these colonies as their Hellenism was then nourished by frequent contact with Mediterranean influences which were able to

²⁴ Lezine, 1963/64, pp. 127–45.

²⁵ Dagens et al., 1964, pp. 61–104.

²⁶ Pugachenkova, 1976, pp. 137–43.

²⁷ Bernard et al., 1973, Annual reports in *CRAI*, 1965–80; for a general overview, see Bernard, 1981, pp. 108–20.

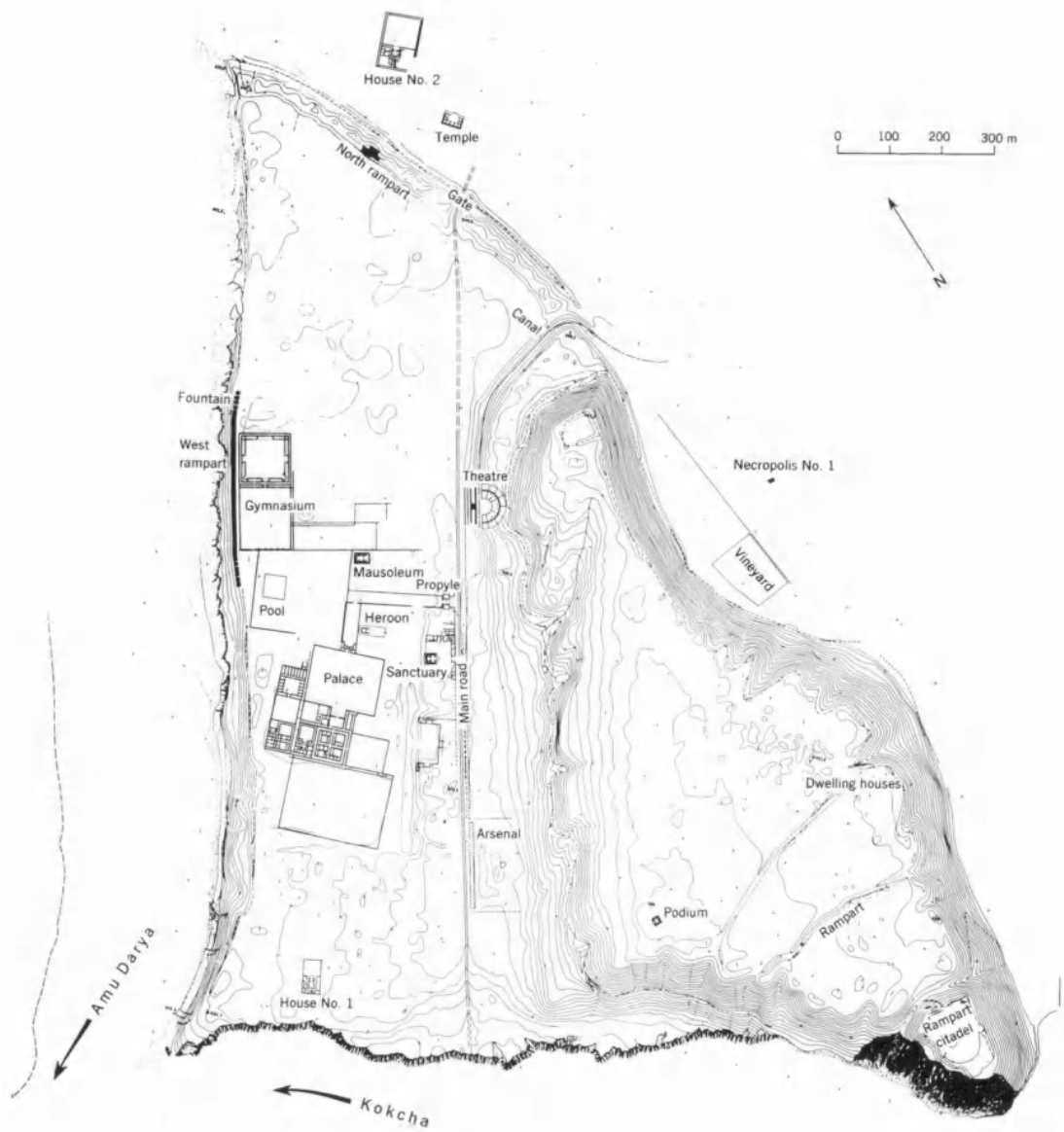


FIG. 3. Plan of Ay Khanum.

penetrate freely, propagated by officials, soldiers, merchants, artists and intellectuals, such as the Aristotelian philosopher Clearchus who, on his way from Greece to India to investigate Iranian and Indian religions, left behind at Ay Khanum a copy of the aphorisms embodying the most venerable Greek wisdom engraved in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi.²⁸

New colonists, many of whom probably came from the Seleucid possessions of Asia Minor, strengthened the Greek presence in the Central Asian satrapies. Under Seleucid

²⁸ Robert, 1973, pp. 211–37.

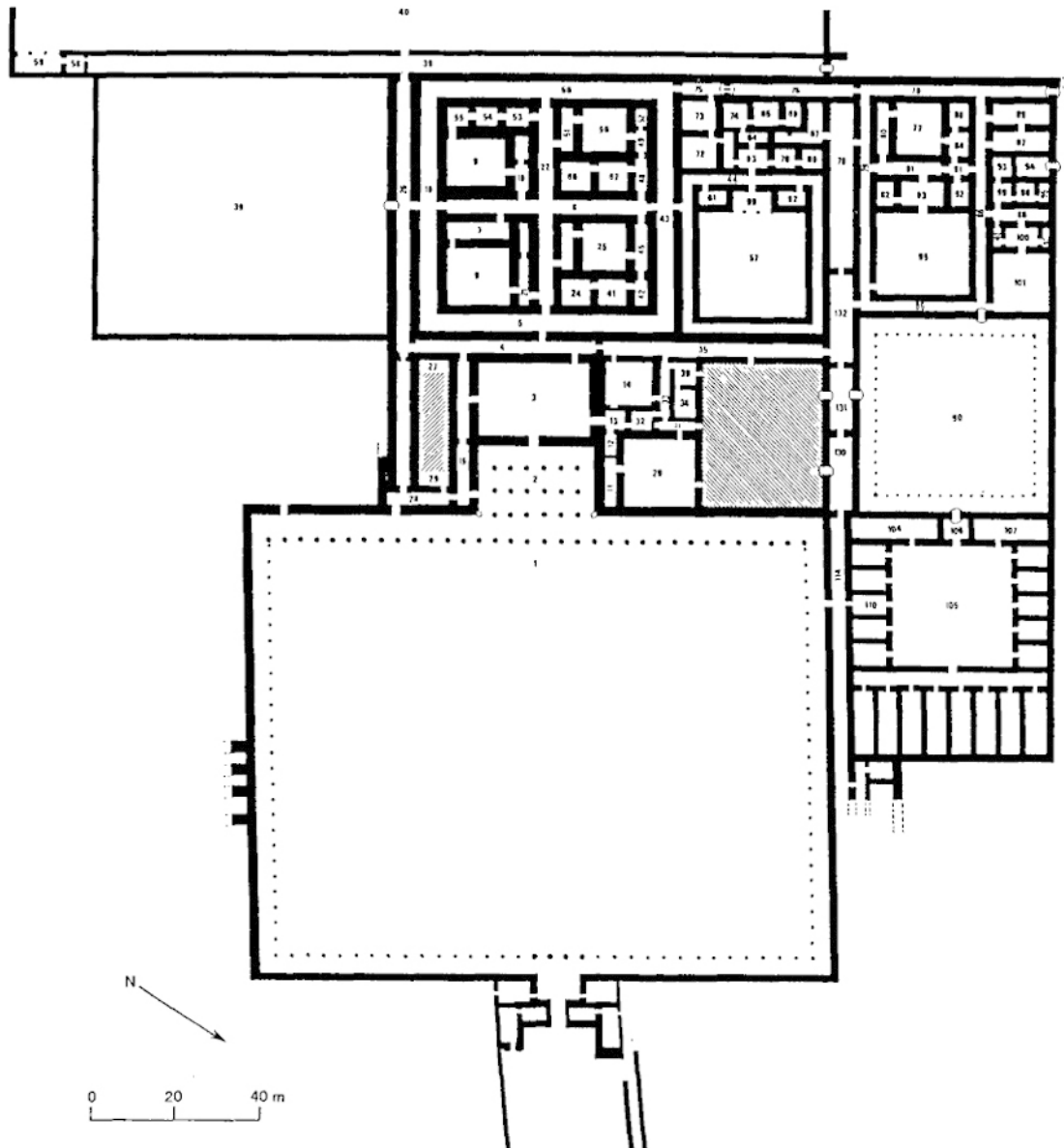


FIG. 4. Plan of the palace of Ay Khanum (reconstruction).

administration, the towns of these satrapies learnt how to conciliate the respect due to the monarchical power and the practice of municipal institutions such as they were found in any Greek city, within the limits of autonomy allowed by the royal authorities. The activity of the mints of Bactra and Ay Khanum²⁹ indicates the economic prosperity of the whole region. Almost 40 per cent of all bronze coins discovered at Ay Khanum were struck by the first three Seleucid kings. The West, in return, exhibited a curiosity about this new world. During their joint reigns, Seleucus and Antiochus ordered Patroclus, one

²⁹ Mitchiner, 1975, pp. 28–32; Bernard, 1985, pp. 6 et seq.

of their generals, to explore the Caspian, and Demodamas wrote a treatise devoted to the geographical observations he made during his time in Central Asia.

The end of seleucid power in Central Asia

Seleucid power in Central Asia fell victim to the very success of the colonies that it had so strongly fostered. Having increased the Greek elements of their population, enjoying the resources of a booming economy and benefiting from the support of local nobles and the mass of peasants under their rule, these colonies must have grown increasingly impatient with the monarchy, whose concerns were predominantly directed towards Western affairs, and eventually felt strong enough to take their destiny into their own hands. The break, which occurred gradually without provoking a reaction from the central authorities, was instigated by Diodotus, the satrap of Bactria-Sogdiana. Diodotus struck coins still bearing the name of his sovereign, Antiochus II, but he substituted his own emblem (Zeus wielding a thunderbolt) and portrait in the place of his master's. The complete break came with the king's death in 246 B.C. (or according to some sources, slightly later, in 238 under Seleucus II), when Diodotus took the final step of striking coins in his own name with the title 'king'.³⁰ From that time onwards, the Greek territories north of the Hindu Kush formed an independent kingdom, to which modern historians have lent the name Graeco-Bactria.

From the late third century B.C., the Greek colonists south of the Hindu Kush in Arachosia, the Paropamisadac and Gandhāra had been subjects of the Mauryan Empire and were to remain so for over a century, until around 200 B.C., when the conquests of the Graeco-Bactrians brought them back into a Greek state. In 205 B.C., Antiochus III even renewed with the Indian sovereign, Sophagasenus, the treaty concluded in 303 B.C. by his ancestor, Seleucus I, confirming Indian sovereignty over these territories. Far from being a source of hostility or conflict between the Mauryan and Seleucid empires, the presence of the Greek colonies on the western borders of India fostered neighbourly relations between the two.³¹ The Seleucid kings regularly sent ambassadors to the court of Pāṭaliputra – first Megasthenes and then Daimachus. The name of a representative of Ptolemaic Egypt, Dionysius, has also come down. Emissaries sent by Aśoka to spread Buddhist doctrine in the West visited the states ruled by Antiochus II and other western kingdoms.

Even though it formed a minority among the indigenous population, whose language and culture were Iranian, the Greek element, concentrated in the towns and administrative centres, probably continued under Mauryan rule to play the leading role it had enjoyed during the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. in the early days of colonization. The

³⁰ Newell, 1978, pp. 245–9.

³¹ Schwarz, 1970, pp. 267–316.

vigour with which the traditions of Hellenism were maintained in these regions is a cultural phenomenon with its roots deeply embedded in politics. When Emperor Aśoka ordered his edicts to be engraved in a Greek translation at Kandahar, he gave clear evidence of the importance of the Greek colonists whom he addressed in their own language. The discoveries made over the last twenty years on the site of the old town at Kandahar provide striking examples of the firmly rooted Greek culture in this Indo-Iranian setting. In contrast to the new cities that were built on virgin ground, the Greek settlement at Kandahar is interwoven with the remains of the Achaemenid town.³²

The texts discovered there are just as eloquent as those found at Ay Khanum. A votive inscription offered by the son of Aristonax³³ provides evidence that people still knew how to write Greek verse there during the early third century B.C. Two other Greek inscriptions (one accompanied by a version in Aramaic, the language of the Achaemenid administration) paraphrase some of the fourteen rock edicts written in the Indian language and engraved on rock at different Indian sites, in which the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (268–237 B.C.) directed his subjects to observe the law of the *Dharma* and to practise the virtues it sought to inspire – non-violence, compassion, tolerance and the service of others. The intimate knowledge of the current language of Greek philosophy shown by the Greeks – for good translations can only be made into one’s mother tongue – in their search for the closest equivalents to Indian concepts is a clear indication that the Hellenism of this Greek colony was nourished by the loftiest and liveliest Western thought. It was through these Greek colonies under Mauryan rule that the Indian and Mediterranean worlds entered into contact, and that a mutual curiosity arose between them. The story of Emperor Bindusāra’s request to his colleague Antiochus I for a philosopher, some wine and some figs is well known, as is the Greek’s mocking reply (Atheneus XIV.652–3). A Greek romance of the Hellenistic period also tells the story of a ‘Philhellenic’ Mauryan emperor who rescues a shipwrecked Greek on the coast of Bengal and has him escorted through his territories as far as the Persian border (Diodorus II.55–60). Megasthenes, Seleucus I’s ambassador to the court of Pāṭaliputra, collected material for his book, which became the indispensable work of reference on India for the entire ancient world. Modern scholarship has reaffirmed the reliability of many of his observations on the geography, ethnography and society of the subcontinent.³⁴ Thus the century-long annexation of the territories south of the Hindu Kush by the Mauryan Empire created no obstacles to the implantation of Hellenism in these regions.

³² Reports on excavations in *Afghan Studies* 1978, 1979, 1982.

³³ Fraser, 1979, pp. 9–21.

³⁴ Bongard-Levin, 1971, pp. 109–22; Derrett, 1979.