The paradox of allegiances: Alexander I of Macedon and Persian power

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ABSTRACT
This article considers the impact of the European campaigns of successive Persian kings on the development of early Macedon. The focus is on the challenges that the Argeads faced from the end of the sixth century BCE, as they sought to establish a dynasty and advance their own interests, even while balancing competing obligations to rival powers. That paradox of allegiances is well noted by Herodotus. The *Histories* documents how Argead ties to the Achaemenids remained crucial for both Amyntas and Alexander I, allowing the latter to place his kingdom at the centre of international affairs for the first time during Xerxes' campaign. Indeed, that the great 'Philhellene' of later reputation could remain both 'friend of' and 'subject to' rival powers concurrently was key to the first Alexander's success as king.

KEYWORDS
Macedon – Persian Wars – Alexander I Philhellene – Herodotus – international relations

Introduction

In a brief review of the early Argead kings, taken from the *Epitome* of the lost *Philippic History* of Pompeius Trogus, Justin offers these closing comments on the reign of Alexander I (r. c.498-454 BCE):

> Post discessum a Macedonia Bubaris, Amyntas rex decedit, cuius filio et successori Alexandro cognatio Bubaris non Darii tantum temporibus pacem praestitit, verum etiam Xerxen adeo conciliavit, ut, cum Graeciam, veluti tempestas quaedam, occupasset, inter Olympum Haemumque montes totius regionis eum imperio donaverit. Sed nec virtute minus, quam Persarum liberalitate, regnum ampliavit.
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> After Bubares' departure from Macedonia, King Amyntas died. But the family ties that Alexander, his son and successor, enjoyed with Bubares not only ensured peace for him during the reign of Darius,

> they also put him on such good terms with Xerxes, so that when the Persian swept through Greece like a tempest he granted Alexander sovereignty over all the territory between the Olympus and Haemus mountains. But Alexander extended his authority as much by his own courage as through Persian munificence.
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> (7.4.1-2).[1]

Although this short excerpt condenses much and presents a final observation at odds with the first great Argead king's enduring reputation as a Philhellene,[2] there is much in Justin's review to consider.[3] Certainly, the *Epitome* overstates the individual importance of Alexander to Xerxes' Greek campaign, but it also offers a clear acknowledgement of the impact that the imperial ambition of successive Persian kings had on Macedon. Justin's note on Persian 'munificence' is a significant – though almost solitary – source statement on the part the Achaemenids played in the early development of the Argead dynasty.

While Alexander I was far from the only Greek to gain from service to the Great Kings on their European campaigns,[4] that the Macedonians were 'willing and useful Persian allies' right through the opening decades of the fifth century BCE was a truth obscured, primarily, by the Argeads themselves as that century progressed.[5] In the power vacuum created by the defeat of Xerxes' army, and faced with the subsequent encroachment of the newly-emboldened southern states on his kingdom, Alexander I sought both to reassert his dynasty's Hellenic pedigree and to recast his own part in recent events. While Noel Robertson is a little too plain in noting that 'Alexander hellenised

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[1] Translation based on that by John Yardley in Heckel and Yardley 2004, 5.

[2] 'Alexander, nicknamed the Philhellene' in Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2.23. See Borza 1990, 112-3, and Sprawski 2013, 45-58, for contrasting opinions on the use of the epithet.

[3] I take this position despite recent criticisms of the author. Vasilev 2015, 126-7 labels Justin an 'unreliable source' (126) and sees little merit in this section of his review (198); however, Hammond and Griffith 1979, 58-60 tend to favour Justin's account of the reign of Amyntas and Alexander.

[4] See Vlassopoulos 2013, 55-6 on what motivated those Greeks who fought valiantly both for and against the Persians – as well as those who decided to 'wait to see how things would turn out before taking sides'.

[5] Borza 1990, 115, for whom Alexander I 'seems to have operated rather freely, if not flamboyantly, as a Persian subject'.

as briskly as he had medised before',[6] it is the case that the Macedonian king did orchestrate a notable volte-face in the years after Plataea; with grand gestures such as his participation in the Olympic Games and the ostentatious dedication of a gold statue of himself at Delphi, not to mention the sure articulation of ancient ties to Argos.[7] All of this coincided with the heady surge of Panhellenic feeling that followed victory over the 'barbarian' and allowed the Macedonians more room to manoeuvre in post-war Greek politics. These later claims of strident opposition to Persia certainly endured, and by the middle of the fourth-century BCE we find the likes of Speusippus speak of 'the good services' (εὐεργεσίας) Alexander carried out on behalf of all Greece.[8]

Sources of ambiguity

Certainly, enemies such as Alexander's Olympic rivals (Hdt. 5.22) would continue to dispute that re-presentation. In 331 BCE Lycurgus, speaking of the patriots of old in *Against Leocrates*, recalls the Athenian reaction to the Macedonian treachery of serving as the Great King's representative after Salamis:

> οὕτω γοῦν ἐφίλουν τὴν πατρίδα πάντες ὥστε τὸν παρὰ Ξέρξου πρεσβευτὴν Ἀλέξανδρον, φίλον ὄντα αὐτοῖς πρότερον, ὅτι γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ ᾔτησε, μικροῦ δεῖν κατέλευσαν.
>
> All those men loved their country so much that when Alexander came as an ambassador for Xerxes, they almost stoned him to death

[6] Robertson 1976, 120.

[7] On Alexander and the Olympics, note the arguments by Mikalson 2003, 112 and Adams 2008, 58 that the Macedonian competed in the game of 476 BCE. However, the issue is far from certain and earlier dates are preferred by many: see Hammond and Griffith 1979, 60; Borza 1990, 111-12; and Mari 2002, 33-6. For the Delphic dedication, set up beside the 'first fruits' from the victory at Salamis, see Hdt. 8.121. Sprawski 2010, 141-3 gives a general review of early Argead cultural activities. Herodotus may have been among visitors to Macedonia (to the court of Alexander or Perdiccas II); certainly his *Histories* present the first detailed accounts of the Hellenic ancestry. That the Macedonian king was the likely source of the information found in Hdt. 5.22 and 8.137-9 is argued by Hammond and Griffith 1979, 98-9, and Borza 1982, 8.

[8] *Letter to Philip* 3. Discussed in Natoli 2004, 77-8, arguing that this particular passage is key, given the importance of Macedonian *euergesia* as an important theme in Speusippus' address to Philip II. Squillace 2017, 241-8 offers further notes on the memory of Alexander I in the Greek sources.

> because he demanded earth and water although he had been their friend before this.
>
> (1.71).[9]

All here is not quite as Herodotus presents it in Books 8 and 9 of the *Histories*: Alexander made no demand of 'earth and water' there. Lycurgus seems to conflate accounts of the embassy and the extreme example the Athenians made of Lycidas later; when the latter sought to have the city accept Mardonius' second offer of terms, it was he who was stoned to death.[10] But across the scattered references to this Macedonian king we can see how fourth-century BCE Athenians both 'attacked and defended Philip II by recalling the Persian Wars through the persona of Alexander I'.[11] This we find even in the work of Demosthenes. For example, in the anti-Macedonian *Second Philippic* the orator was also sure to remind his audience that it was Alexander I who conveyed that shameful proposal that Athens should submit to the Great King (Hdt. 6.11).[12] And yet the great μισοφίλιππος (Aeschin. 2.14) previously praised the patriotism of the Argeads when such rhetoric was required (and before the threat of Philip II loomed so large); remarkably, in *Against Aristocrates* the Macedonians are the Greeks who complete and confirm the defeat of the Great King having, supposedly, 'destroyed the Persians on their retreat from Plataea'.[13]

Of course, this varying presentation of the Argeads also reflects the retrospective revisions of the Athenian tradition;

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[9] Translation by Edward Harris in Worthington, Cooper, and Harris 2001, 179.

[10] Herodotus says that another representative was sent to the Athenians on Salamis to repeat the offer Alexander made previously, and the brutal death of Lycidas, his wife, and children followed after Lycidas sought to put that proposal to the *demos* (Hdt. 9.4-5). The remarkable punishment of the Athenian is noted explicitly by Lycurgus later in 1.122 (and also in Dem. *On the Crown* 18.204).

[11] Squillace 2010, 78.

[12] The *Second Philippic* dates to 344/3 BCE, so in *Against Leocrates* Lycurgus follows Demosthenes' example of noting Alexander's role as Xerxes' messenger against the backdrop of a broader acclamation of Athenian patriotism.

[13] Dem. *Against Aristocrates* 23.200, although mistaking Perdiccas for Alexander. The information in *Against Aristocrates* is repeated – historical error and all – in *On Organization*, 13.23-4. Both speeches date to the late 350s BCE. However, as has been noted so often, there is no contemporary evidence that the Macedonians attacked the remnants of the 'barbarian' army in retreat. See Hammond and Griffith 1979, 101, and Sprawski 2010, 139-40.

ultimately, the toing and froing on Alexander I in the later literary accounts tends to tell us more about that *polis*' shifting attitudes to Macedon than it does about historic events in the kingdom itself.[14] In a fourth-century BCE Athenian context, amid the charged discourse on Hellenic identity and attempts to fix sharp divisions between Greek and barbarian, such contrary notes were common, even if they were not always appropriate.[15] In Lycurgus, the lines are clear: where previously Alexander had been a friend to Athens (φίλον ὄντα αὐτοῖς πρότερον), now he was Persia's messenger. However, it is crucial to note that during the opening decades of the fifth century BCE Alexander remained, concurrently, both 'friend of' and 'subject to' rival powers, as the king sought to advance his own interests even while balancing competing obligations. Crucially, that is how the Macedonian is presented in Herodotus' *Histories*.[16] In that text, Alexander is essentially a ruler with divided loyalties. And yet scholars have consistently tended to overwork that tension: in Herodotus, this Argead is not simply a 'collaborator … made good', a king who 'sold out to the Persians'; nor do Macedonian actions 'betray the Greek cause'.[17] For what common cause, what master narrative, was there? Prior to the Persian invasion, Macedonian motives could have had little to do with such aims, as this was a political ideal that had yet to emerge. Certainly, when a nascent panhellenism is defined in the *Histories*, we do find that it is Alexander's embassy to Athens that prompts the famous

[14] Extrapolating from Morgan 2016, 260 here.

[15] See Whitmarsh 2002, 175 on the development of the 'schematic polarity of Greek-barbarian' after the Persian Wars and how Macedon fits within those categories.

[16] This paper tends to agree with those scholars who argue, like Mari 2011, 85-6, that 'Herodotus was openly favourable to Alexander': see Hammond and Griffith 1979, 98-9; Borza 1990, 112; and Sprawski 2010, 140. However, for Scaife 1989, 129-30 'there is no evidence to suggest that Alexander charmed away Herodotos' critical faculties', an interpretation Badian 1994, 108 n. 1 endorses. For Fearn 2007, 125 'Herodotus' treatment of Alexander offers implicit criticism of duplicity in the realms of international politics and military strategy'.

[17] Quotations from Scaife 1989, 136-7, and Errington 1981, 143. Reviewing Herodotus' presentation of the king, Scaife's language is particularly charged: Alexander is the embodiment of 'medism resulting from capricious opportunism' (137).

statement of a patriotic programme in Book 8.144.[18] However, even here, the key contrast is not between Alexander's supposed Medism and Athenian heroism.[19] Indeed, the latter's declaration on τὸ Ἑλληνικόν is directed at, and picks up points made by, the Spartans: Sparta is urged to stand firm with her allies, the Athenians having already rejected Alexander with a blunt warning that his advice was not worthy of their friendship.[20] The Macedonians are not privy to the subsequent conversation between allies.

But moving beyond binary tropes and the habitual focus on Athenian narratives, and taking Herodotus as keenly interested in the broader 'opposition of conquerors and peoples who resist', can we consider the outline of Alexander's situation in the *Histories* as the presentation of another serious and cogent reaction to power?[21] Rather than the trenchant reviews of his actions and motives as duplicitous and ambivalent (such as in Badian and Fearn), we could read Herodotus' presentation of the king as a nuanced and non-judgemental representation of the reality of the Macedonian situation.[22] Emily Baragwanath's *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* is crucial here, arguing against 'exclusive' readings of the *Histories*. She notes that Herodotus prioritises understanding, not blame, and tends to remain

[18] A passage which, as Harrison 2011, 68 notes, 'has provided the starting point for countless modern discussions of "Hellenicity"'. But see Skinner 2012, 249-50 for a note of caution on the use of such 'enunciations of identity'.

[19] For Scaife 1989, 137: 'The weak, medizing Hellenism of Alexander … acts as a foil to this stirring Athenian expression of patriotism.' However, neither position is ever steadfast in the *Histories*; indeed, even by Hdt. 9.11 the 'national cohesion' Scaife notes is threatened when the Athenians *are* ready to 'be Xerxes' friends'.

[20] Hdt. 8.143. The Athenians respond to Alexander's proposal with a stern warning: 'we would not want you, as our *proxenos* and *philos*, to suffer anything unpleasant at the hands of the Athenians' (Hdt. 8.143). Certainly, it is not the case that the Macedonian's 'Athenian friends angrily threw him out of their country', as Badian 1994, 120 would have it.

[21] Quotation from Vlassopoulos 2007, 232. See Skinner 2019, 129-37 on the limits of overly schematic, narrow readings of the *Histories*.

[22] Although both scholars offer perceptive readings of the *Histories*, I disagree with their interpretations of Herodotus' final opinion of Alexander. For Badian 1994, 121, Herodotus 'uses his literary art to guide the reader to what seemed to him a just verdict on Alexander's duplicity'; although any and all such criticism is indirect, apparently, as 'Herodotus did not approve of Alexander's medism' (123).

'sensitive to people's occasional powerlessness'.[23] Following Baragwanath's push to consider different *logoi* – different motivations, from different perspectives – also brings us closer to the approach of many interested in the broader history of resistance, who see both opposition and collaboration as multi-dimensional phenomena and *do* accept the historical co-existence of both 'support' and 'struggle' as responses to foreign occupation.[24] In particular, when considering relationships between occupiers and the occupied, we might note recent work that sees 'collaborators as historical actors rather than abstract moral subjects, moving in and out of collaboration in relation to actual circumstances'.[25] That is, arguably, a closer approximation to the experience of the Macedonian kings in that grey zone of action from c.510-479 BCE, and it is very much in keeping with the complex and nuanced presentation of their situation as we find in the *Histories*. As Johannes Heinrichs and Sabine Müller observe: 'Alexander erscheint in den Historien gemäß seiner Selbststilisierung griechenfreundlich, wird zugleich aber in seinem Bemühen um die Gunst der Perser gezeigt. Das eine dürfte so ernst gemeint gewesen sein wie das andere.'[26] Faced with the arrival of the Achaemenids in Europe, the response of Amyntas I and Alexander I was not at all 'shameful'.[27] It is perhaps more important to acknowledge the opportunities that alliance with the Great King presented to an emerging dynasty and consider how

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[23] Baragwanath 2008, 238; see also 318-22 for criticism of 'bipartite' readings of the *Histories*.

[24] Such as Lemmes 2008, 171, for whom '[c]auses, reasons and motives are multiple and generally overlap with each other'. Lemmes also notes how even contrary reactions do 'not exclude each other, but [can] succeed one another and even coincide'.

[25] Brook 2012, 107. Similarly, Burbank and Cooper 2010, 402 note: 'Conventional studies of "resistance and collaboration" in colonial regimes fail to get at the variety of ways in which people tried to carve out space for maneuver within as well as against colonial regimes. The line between a subversive and a useful producer could be a fine one.'

[26] 'Alexander appears in the *Histories* as a self-styled friend of the Greeks, while at the same time he endeavours to win the favour of the Persians. The one was meant as seriously as the other': Heinrichs and Müller 2008, 291; while the *Histories*' presentation of Macedon's Persian dealings may be understated, one can still appreciate the importance of the kingdom to successive Great Kings in this text.

[27] Hammond 1991, 497 is of the opinion that Herodotus' account of the murder of the Persian envoys (5.18-20) is an 'attempt to conceal the shame of Macedonia for having been for a generation subject to Persia'.

ties to the imperial court enabled the early Argeads to establish a dominant domestic position and steer their kingdom through troubled times.[28]

Grey zone opportunities

Although Herodotus' review of early Macedon does aim at establishing or restoring the Greek credentials of the Argead dynasty, from its beginnings, the written history of Macedon still remains bound up with Persia – deliberately so. Indeed, Herodotus' account of Darius I's European campaigns in Books 4 and 5 of the *Histories* provides the occasion for the first introduction to the kingdom. Early Persian interest in Macedonia came as a consequence of their wars against the Scythians and Thracians. Launched in 514-513 BCE, these campaigns established the Great King's presence on the Thracian coast and brought his envoys to the court of the Argeads. Although the *Histories* provides the names of previous kings, the reigning monarch when Herodotus begins his Macedonian story is the elderly Amyntas I,[29] and it was he who dealt with ambassadors from a power whose army had swept in from the east, subdued all neighbouring lands, and quickly established key strongholds at nearby Doriscus and Eion.[30]

The Argeads, in turn, had by c.510 BCE pushed beyond their original base on the Macedonian plains beneath the Pierian mountains, where they founded the old capital, Aegae, on the Haliacmon river. Thucydides gives a general outline of that expansion, noting that the Macedonians ousted local populations as they took hold of Pieria to the south, Eordaea to the west, and

[28] As Bowie 2007, 224 notes of Alexander's diplomacy: '[his] skilful handling of his relationships with the Achaemenids laid the foundations of the great Macedonian monarchy of the future'.

[29] Hdt. 8.139 lists five kings back to Perdiccas I. Amyntas I became king at some point in the second half of the sixth century BCE and ruled until 498 or 495 BCE. See Hammond and Griffith 1979, 60, and Borza 1990, 98.

[30] The extent of Persian control of the region at the very end of the sixth century BCE is not clear: in Hdt. 6.44 we are told that all lands 'up to Macedonia' had been 'won over' even before the 490s BCE; in 5.10 the Persians have secured control of the coast of eastern Thrace. For a review, see Sprawski 2010, 134-7. Did the Persians establish a satrapy in Europe at this point? Briant 2002, 145 thinks it unlikely. See Xydopoulos 2012, 27-8 for a discussion.

then pushed north to the Loudias river.[31] Consequently, after his defeat of the Paeonians, Macedonia was next in line for Darius' commander, Megabazus, on a campaign to 'subdue Thrace'.[32] Indeed, the news that the Persians had just deported the captured Paeonian population immediately precedes Herodotus' account of the arrival of 'seven most distinguished Persians' to the court of Amyntas (Hdt. 5.17-18). It seems that the Macedonian had already sought to gain from the Persian presence in the area, immediately taking advantage of Paeonian losses by seizing Amphaxitis, territory beyond the Axios river.[33] But what would Megabazus make of this bold move and how would Amyntas' ambition fit with the Persian's demand 'for earth and water'?

The account of Amyntas' meeting with the Achaemenid envoys at a magnificent royal reception is one of the most colourful stories in Herodotus' *Histories*: a tale of drunkenness, cross-dressing, and bloody murder, where the 'most distinguished' Persians meet a most unseemly end (5.17-22). Unfortunately, although remarkable, this infamous anecdote is likely a later invention aimed at a Hellenic audience, presenting the Macedonians as reluctant and rebellious subjects.[34] Indeed, the only verifiable outcome from this first Argead and Achaemenid summit was the marriage alliance between elite families that was arranged later. Herodotus tells us that, having instigated the violence, Alexander also put an end to the subsequent investigation into events by giving 'a lot of money and his own sister, whose name was Gygaea, to a Persian called Bubares, the general in charge of those searching for the lost men' (5.21). History confirms the union, and given that Bubares was the son of Megabazus, the marriage was a notable triumph for the local king as it set the seal on a new alliance with an international

[31] Thuc. 2.99. See Hammond and Griffith 1979, 66-7 for an outline of an expansion that began mid-century.

[32] Hdt. 5.2. See Briant 2002, 141-6 for a summary of Darius' Scythian campaign and Megabazus' follow-up mission.

[33] Hammond and Griffith 1979, 57-9 offer this reconstruction, arguing that the Macedonians were in possession of Amphaxitis even before the arrival at court of the Persian delegation. As Heinrichs and Müller 2008, 289 note, the defeat of the Paeonians was significant as it saw a constant threat to the Macedonians removed.

[34] See Fearn 2007, 115 and Hornblower 2013, 109, for whom the account 'is a later fiction, designed to palliate Macedonian submission'.

power. It is not quite clear whether Amyntas conceded formally and in full to the Great King, and perhaps initial relations were, crucially, relatively casual.[35] With the Persians not yet fully committed to the area, the Macedonian kings seem to have retained a degree of local autonomy. Even so, the Argeads did reap real benefits from the new association: not only did the Persians confirm Amyntas in his position and accept those recent territorial gains, they appear also to have granted part of Mygdonia to the Macedonian afterwards.[36] Overall, this Persian endorsement was significant and helped bring Amyntas' rule to a new level; indeed, backed by the Achaemenids, the Argeads were established as the main power around the Thermaic Gulf at the end of the sixth century BCE.[37]

What the fathers established, their sons would continue: as they moved into the new century and into the reigns of two new kings, friendly relations between the Argeads and the Achaemenid elite developed further.[38] In Book 6 of the *Histories* we hear of Darius' determination, in 492 BCE, to punish the Ionian rebels and campaign again in the far west. Led this time by the Great King's son-in-law, Mardonius, the Persians supposedly aimed 'to subdue as many Greek cities as they could'. Herodotus

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35 While γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ ('earth and water') was demanded in Hdt. 5.18, Kuhrt 1988, 98 notes that the conditions of submission could vary greatly, 'though the underlying relationship was a binding one'. Consequently, there has been much debate on the form of the Macedonian subjection here. Did the Macedonians formally submit to Megabazus, and then again to Mardonius later, having freed themselves after the Ionian Revolt, as Olbrycht 2010, 343-4 outlines? According to Mari 2011, 85 the Macedonians remained a 'vassal state' from 512 through to 479 BCE. For Borza 1990, 103-5 alliance became vassalage only with Alexander in 492 BCE; similarly, Briant 2002, 156 sees Macedon move from Persian 'protectorate' to 'conquered country' with the campaign of Mardonius.

36 Suggested by Hammond and Griffith 1979, 59. However, the idea that Amyntas became Darius' satrap (based on the use of ὕπαρχος in Hdt. 5.20) perhaps overstates his importance: see Badian 1994, 114. For other arguments on Amyntas as 'provincial ruler', rather than satrap, see Balcer 1995, 4-6; Tripodi 2007, 83; and Hornblower 2013, 115.

37 Heinrichs and Müller 2008, 289 note that Persian support boosted Macedon's standing, with rivals wary of challenging the Argeads, given that any such move might also be counter to Persian interests in the region. For Olbrycht 2010, 343: 'blood ties between Persian and Macedonian elites enhanced the mutual cooperation'.

38 It is not clear when Alexander I became king: 498 BCE for Borza 1990, 103 n. 16; 495 BCE for Hammond and Griffith 1979, 60.

notes how Thasos was quickly captured, and then Persia 'added the Macedonians to the slaves they had taken previously' (Hdt. 6.44.1). Some would suggest that Mardonius was forced to retake the kingdom on this campaign because relations with the Argeads lapsed around the time of the death of Amyntas.[39] However, given the benefits that Macedonian king had previously enjoyed, and the fact that Alexander remained secure in power even after Mardonius' stay – and proved himself to be an eager 'subject king' – it seems more likely that Persian ties to the Argeads remained intact throughout the 490s BCE.[40] Indeed, Mardonius had more trouble at this time with the Thracian Brygi, who attacked while he and his army were based in Macedonia.[41] But with Thrace and Macedonia secure, and with the Great King's foothold in Europe firmly re-established, Mardonius returned to Asia.

The narrative of Book 6 of the *Histories* also relates the events that led to the Persian attack on Eretria and the battle of Marathon; when Herodotus next considers Alexander in Book 7, Xerxes is the Great King and his campaign against the Greek states is already well underway. Even before 480 BCE Herodotus notes the extent of Persian activity in and around Macedonia as extensive preparations are made for the attack: Xerxes' canal was cut through Mount Athos (under the direction of Bubares), bridges built across the Strymon River, and supply deposits were established for the invading force along the route to Greece (one in Macedonia itself: Hdt. 7.20-2). This was the vast army that famously drank the local rivers dry when assembled; so the cost of hosting the Persians in the region for an extended period was considerable – not to mention the Great King himself, who 'delayed many days at Pieria'.[42] But that investment would pay dividends: for the next great phase of Argead expansion also

[39] Briant 2002, 157.

[40] See Heinrichs and Müller 2008, 291. Müller 2015, 464 argues that Argead fortunes remained essentially linked to the east across this decade.

[41] Hdt. 6.45. Fol and Hammond 1988, 246 suggest that Macedon benefitted from Mardonius' defeat of the Brygi; again, the power of another local rival was significantly reduced.

[42] Herodotus' famous note in 7.127 relates to the Echeidoros River, just beyond the Macedonian kingdom at this point. We hear of the huge expense of hosting this army in 7.118-19, the Thasians alone spend 400 talents doing so. In 7.131 Xerxes waits for his army at Pieria, before moving on the Thessaly.

occurred in these busy years, as Alexander managed to add Upper Macedonia to his territories in the late 480s BCE. Given the overall importance of his kingdom to Persian operations, and with their route to Greece cutting through Lower Macedonia, this seems to have been an opportune time for Alexander to call on Persian support and annex those inland cantons.[43]

'this is worth a great deal to you …' (Hdt. 8.140β.4)

Having served in a supporting role during the build-up to Xerxes' grand invasion, when that attack on mainland Greece got underway in the autumn of 480 BCE, the Macedonians were committed to more active service in the war. Alexander's men are listed among the ranks of the 'army of many nations' in Herodotus (Hdt. 7.185), who also notes, more specifically, that the Macedonians (and Thessalians) lined up against the Athenians at the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 9.31). The *Histories* also highlight how, after Thermopylae, Alexander sent his men to save the medising cities of Boeotia and ensure that it was clear to Xerxes that these Greeks were now on his side (Hdt. 8.34).[44] This is an action that typifies the Macedonian king in Herodotus, whose 'unmodified' Alexander serves the Persians as a key intermediary between east and west throughout the entire campaign. Indeed, the Persians were quick 'to entrust to the king the role of go-between':[45] even before Xerxes crossed into Thessaly, the Argead sent messengers to urge the Hellenic coalition to withdraw from the vale of Tempe rather than wait there to be 'trampled underfoot' by the enemy (Hdt. 7.173). Here we have another significant intervention by the Macedonian, one that later sources

[43] Justin 7.4.1 is the key source here. Hammond and Griffith 1979, 64: 'It was probably with Persian aid and as a Persian vassal that Alexander established his suzerainty over those peoples and named the region for the first time "Upper Macedonia".' For further notes on Alexander and his 'highland kinsmen', see Borza 1990, 124.

[44] Bowie 2007, 126 says of these services: they 'enabled Alexander both to demonstrate his own loyalty for the Persians and to curry favour with the Boeotians as their saviour.' Although, as Hammond and Griffith 1979, 98 note, such appointments 'must have been made in the first place by Xerxes or a Persian officer'.

[45] Borza 1990, 115.

attempt to colour as a patriotic act.[46] But Herodotus' account is much more circumspect and seems to present Alexander acting in both his own and Xerxes' interests, as he attempts to move the Greek forces away from the borders of Macedon. As Herodotus was sure to note subsequently, that withdrawal by the Greeks left the Thessalians with little choice but to side with Persia.[47] Having previously warned their allies that they would switch sides if support from the south was not forthcoming, all of Thessaly now turned to Xerxes eagerly and absolutely (προθύμως οὐδ' ἔτι ἐνδοιαστῶς: Hdt. 7.174).

In Herodotus the Greek retreat at Tempe is not just down to Alexander, but the Macedonian's place at the centre of events there is significant and worth noting. For, in the *Histories*, the message that Alexander sends over from the enemy's side is received and believed by the Greeks; led by Euaenetus and Themistocles, the allies can accept – and perhaps welcome – that the Argead king still remains 'well disposed' (εὔνοος) to them, even while serving Xerxes. So to present the Macedonian's advice to the allies as disingenuous, as some have, is to recolour the account that we find in the *Histories*: even if his involvement was self-serving, Alexander can still offer 'useful advice' (χρηστός) to the Greeks, inside information that is noted as key to their fateful decision to move back to Thermopylae and defend that pass.[48] Again, the role that Herodotus has Alexander play in helping to bring all of Thessaly over to Xerxes is just as significant: at Tempe, as in Boeotia, we see the 'marginal man' in the centre of

[46] Speusippus' *Letter to Philip* 3, drawing on Damastes, presents the king informing the Greeks of the treachery of the Thessalians himself, so the coalition forces were 'saved because of Alexander'. In Herodotus, the Greeks only withdraw from Tempe when they realise their position is vulnerable. See Natoli 2004, 78-9.

[47] See Scaife 1989, 131. For Gillis 1979, 63-4 Alexander's message aimed to have the Greeks pull back and leave the Thessalians 'to work out their own future'. For a consideration of Alexander's motives, see Robertson 1976, 117-18.

[48] The attempt by Fearn 2007, 119 (following Badian 1994, 117) to contrast the notes on Alexander's influence in *Histories* 7.173 and 7.175 with Herodotus' interjection that the Greeks withdrew from Thessaly because of 'fear' is not convincing. Herodotus does moderate the decisive influence of Alexander's advice, but that statement does not 'implicitly' undercut the Macedonian – 'suggesting disingenuousness' – as Fearn would have it. Borza 1990, 108 offers a more balanced consideration of the situation and Robertson 1976, 118 does better again to note the typically 'nimble' nature of the Macedonian kings in this period.

things, making the most of his network of local relations to benefit the Persian king.[49] Amidst the chaos of war, Alexander serves as a key intermediary between the two sides; in tumultuous and threatening times, as Michael Whitby has noted, 'Such middle-men served useful purposes for both Greeks and Persians by removing potential difficulties in the relationship'.[50] It is as the polyvalent and pragmatic broker of another prospective settlement with Persia that Alexander is sent to, and allowed to enter, the city of Athens at the end of Book 8 of the *Histories*.

That debate at Athens (Hdt. 8.14-144) represents 'the climax of Herodotus' treatment of Alexander'.[51] Selected for this mission precisely because of his family ties to Persia and his standing as *proxenos* and *euergetes* to Athens,[52] the *Histories* carefully notes that sending Alexander represents the best way for the Persians to try and 'win over the Athenians' (τοὺς γὰρ Ἀθηναίους οὕτω ἐδόκεε μάλιστα προσκτήσεσθαι: Hdt. 8.136). Indeed, as Sulochana Asirvatham highlights, 'Mardonius' very strategy depends here on Alexander's duality'.[53] The paradox of allegiances stands, and it is interesting to note how apprehensive the Spartans are about the influence this particular ambassador might have on their allies' resolve. Hearing of the embassy, at once they send their own delegation to Athens, to counter the 'smooth' presentation of Mardonius' offer by Alexander, who they try to dismiss as a petty

[49] Although dismissing him as such, Scaife 1989, 136 is right to describe Alexander as 'a marginal man, a person with interests and commitments in two directions'.

[50] Whitby 1998, 208. In the same collection, Harrison 1998, 69 also notes the 'variety of informal relationships' between east and west, observing: 'that such contacts took place despite what one might describe as the official posture of hostility to all things Persian makes that official posture no less true'. Similarly, Miller 1997, 132 notes the importance of key 'go-betweens' in the 'contact zone' between the Greek and Persian worlds.

[51] As Fearn 2007, 120 notes, although the character 'trajectory' he presents (119-27) is different from that outlined here.

[52] Alexander is the earliest recorded Athenian *proxenos*, but when and why he received these awards is not clear. Cole 1978, 42-3 suggests that the award dates to the late 480s BCE, when Alexander perhaps supplied Athens with the timber and pitch needed to maintain and expand her fleet. For Sprawski 2010, 141 the Argead friendship with Athens dates to the Peisistratid tyranny. That Macedon was a vassal state across many of these decades need not have been an issue, given the loose nature of the Persian control of the region down to the preparations for Xerxes' campaign, as discussed above at n. 37 and in Borza 1990, 109-10.

[53] Asirvatham 2008, 242.

tyrant (Hdt. 8.142).[54] In Herodotus, crucially, the Spartans are right to be hostile to, and anxious about, Alexander and his mission: these are uncertain times and much still hangs in the balance. The Athenians are set to make a critical choice: they previously threatened to abandon the fight with Xerxes entirely if they were not supported (Hdt. 8.62) and, having contrived to stage this debate with a key Persian ally, the Spartans fear that Athens will now agree to terms. So, with the allegiance of another key state wavering, Herodotus gives the floor to Alexander to present his 'rhetorical fireworks'.[55]

A skilled speaker, now in a position of considerable influence, Alexander gives more than the Great King's message and the warning from Mardonius (Hdt. 8.140α): he also adds his own urgent appeal. Opposed by the Spartan delegation (οἱ ἀπὸ Σπάρτης ἄγγελοι) as he addresses the Athenians (ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι), Alexander emphasises his personal relationship with the city, beginning his plea by noting his longstanding 'goodwill' towards his hosts (Hdt. 8.140β). The specifics of their previous history are not detailed (perhaps there is a nod here to the supply of Macedonian timber, or to prior dealings between Athens and Persia),[56] but what matters are the ties of friendship and the relationship that has been established between both parties. Building on that now, Alexander offers the Athenians his advice and a review of their options that is very much a summation of the situation from the Macedonian point of view. Primarily, Alexander notes the extent of the danger facing Athens: the city lies directly in the 'path of destruction' and cannot possibly hold

[54] See Bowie 2007, 234-5 for a consideration of the Spartan speech, who notes that the use of λεαίνω (to smooth, to polish) 'in connection with words regularly implies deceit'. That the Spartan ambassadors characterise the Persian offer as deceitful, and Alexander pejoratively as a τύραννος, is as we might expect of their challenging response.

[55] Bowie 2007, 232, with further thoughts on the tension between the allies through Book 8, which 'shows again how fragile was the notion that because one belonged to the Greek race one's allegiance naturally lay with the Greeks'. Harrison 2011, 68-70 is also excellent on the motives of the key agents in this scene.

[56] Badian 1994, 124-7 sees Macedonian involvement in the Athenian appeal to the Great King in 508/7 BCE (see Hdt. 5.73). Bowie 2007, 231 is receptive to Badian's suggestion, but Hornblower 2013, 218-19 rejects it (although the idea is cited with approval in Hornblower 2002, 382-3).

out indefinitely against a 'power greater than human' (δύναμις ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον): nothing seems beyond the long reach of the Persian king.[57] It is a situation comparable to that which the Macedonians themselves faced when Amyntas and Alexander both chose to come to terms with the Great King, and the choices facing Athens do seem as limited. Should the city accept the favourable terms that Xerxes now offers, Alexander promises that the Athenians will not just survive, they will surely prosper,[58] for the Great King wishes to forgive all (τὰς ἁμαρτάδας ἀπιεὶς ἐθέλει). Herodotus takes care to end the Macedonian's appeal by highlighting the benefits of securing Xerxes' goodwill. As Bowie notes, the emphasis is on the 'value' of an alliance with Persia, so it is worth a great deal (πολλοῦ γὰρ ὑμῖν ἄξια ταῦτα) that, alone of all the Greeks, the Great King now wants to befriend Athens.[59] Significantly, the example of the individual Macedonian king – who was also granted both land (his own and more) and relative autonomy by Xerxes – serves to emphasise just how advantageous Persian support can be. As much as the words of the message delivered, the recent achievements of the emissary – secure in his own realm and at the centre of international events – also point to future opportunities for Athens. Alexander's deeds as client king, in addition to his polished words, are key to the Persian attempts to win over this crucial city.

Conclusion

That the intermediaries' attempts at persuasion did not succeed is, for Emily Baragwanath, something of a 'Herodotean *thōma*': momentum in the *Histories* seems to lead the reader in one direction, only for Athens to dismiss Mardonius' offer and reject Alexander's appeal in order to stand alongside her allies.[60] The Athenians insist that they will never come to terms with Xerxes; a desire for vengeance and new considerations of patriotism

[57] Bowie 2007, 232. See Hdt. 8140β.3, where, for rhetorical effect, Alexander puts Athens directly in the path of Mardonius' advance.

[58] Baragwanath 2008, 229 notes that readers of the *Histories* 'are familiar with the Persian practice of treating well those they respect for their bravery and martial prowess.'

[59] Bowie 2007, 230.

[60] Baragwanath 2008, 230.

trump any suggestion of personal obligation and reciprocal exchange. At the end of this key encounter, Alexander is dismissed with fighting words to carry back to the Great King and the Macedonian leaves Athens having failed to turn the city for his master (Hdt. 8.143). Crucially, however, Alexander still remains both a *philos* and a *proxenos* of Athens – as the Athenians themselves acknowledge – even as he returns to the service of Mardonius. Indeed, the Macedonians see out the rest of the war in the ranks of the Persian army.[61] Herodotus' tale of Alexander's night-time mission to the Greek camp on the eve of the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 9.44-6) is perhaps an invention of the post-war age,[62] for the Macedonian king probably retained close ties to Persia even beyond the final defeat of Xerxes' campaign. Certainly, as noted above, fourth-century BCE claims that Alexander completed the Greek rout of the Persians, with his own attack on the retreating army, seem fanciful. In the final mention of Macedonia in Herodotus' *Histories*, we see what was left of the Persian army withdraw, without harassment, through Thessaly and Macedon. Alexander may have been quick to take advantage of Persian difficulties by claiming further territory east of the Axios – perhaps extending his kingdom to the Strymon and taking hold of the mines at Dysoron[63] – but the one note of an attack on the retreating troops led by Artabazus tells us that it was carried out by Thracians, not Macedonians (Hdt. 9.89). Given that the Persians continued to maintain a presence in the region and a base on Alexander's eastern border, at Eion, until 476/5 BCE, it seems much more likely that the Macedonian king

[61] See Mari 2011, 85. Again, it is worth highlighting that in the narrative of Hdt. *Hist.* Alexander remains, primarily, a loyal ally of the Persians even as he retains ties to the southern Greek states.

[62] For Borza 1990, 110 the tale of Alexander's nocturnal daring derives from a Macedonian source, perhaps the king himself, and suggests that the story is 'suspect on several grounds'. Sprawski 2010, 139 agrees and maintains that the king was in no position to play such a 'risky double game' at this point of Mardonius' campaign.

[63] Hdt. 5.17. Kremydi 2011, 160-1 links the note in Hdt. 5.17 to the issue of coinage by Alexander after 479 BCE. See Hammond and Griffith 1979, 104-5 and Borza 1990, 128 for thoughts on the dates of early Macedonian coins.

remained careful in his dealings with the Achaemenids, even after their defeat in Greece.[64]

Such cautious opportunism was typical of Alexander I, an astute king who transformed Macedon even as he adjusted and adapted to the 'fluid geopolitical circumstances of his times'.[65] Indeed, an appreciation of Argead agency and the conditionality of this turbulent period is key to the proper understanding of not only the complex motivations and concerns of the Macedonian kings, but also the importance of their submission to the Achaemenids. Although subject and often incidental to the Great King,[66] the maintenance of close links to the Persian elite was still the bedrock for both Amyntas and Alexander's rule, and those unequal but reciprocal ties were retained even through uncertain times. For with Persian protection and support the Argeads were able to consolidate their position domestically, add new territories to the kingdom, and even participate meaningfully in 'foreign affairs' for the first time. Subsequently, Herodotus would try to recast that interaction, yet even in the *Histories* the 'bargain of collaboration' still shows through: Alexander I could not have established his 'great kingdom' without the support of the Great King.[67] However, the extent of that debt was further occluded by fourth century BCE authors, who continued to revise the medising past of the Macedonians as later Argeads set out to turn the tables on former superiors. That those kings managed to do

[64] Lest the Persians return once more, like in 492 BCE, as Sprawski 2010, 140 suggests. Indeed, Alexander was perhaps already wary of growing Athenian interest in the northern Aegean, indicated by their capture of this key site at the mouth of the Strymon: see Hdt. 7.107, Thuc. 1.98, and Plut. *Cim*. 7.1-2.

[65] Paspalas 2004, 17. In concluding thoughts on the success of Alexander's reign, Borza 1990, 123-4 notes: 'What had been a backward feudal kingdom in the time of Amyntas had become under his son the most powerful monarchy in the Balkans.'

[66] See Tripodi 2007, 84-5 on Alexander as an 'elemento funzionale' in Xerxes' campaign.

[67] Robinson 1972, 120-4, considering modern imperialism, outlines the 'bargain of collaboration' that some among the social elites in Africa and Asia sought to strike with colonial rule, exploiting a new political situation to re-establish authority. For a more recent review, see Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts 2006, 3-7. The note on Alexander paraphrases Sprawski 2010, 141, for whom 'undoubtedly Alexander was the creator of Great Macedonia'.

so, and that another Alexander emerged this time to destroy the Achaemenid dynasty, was one of the great *metabolai* of the age.

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