

Alexander at Issus
A Reflection of Conquest and Destiny

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Preface

As the sun rises over the Cilician Gates, I stand witness to a pale light shining upon the path that lies ahead. It feels as though the land beneath my feet is alive, holding in its breath waiting for something to release it. This stillness is broken by the clatter of boots on stone, shouted orders, and the clanging of armour as the men prepare themselves. I see my men who stand ready, with ferocity in their hearts and a wild glint in their eyes. I feel their hunger for victory and their faith in me which is as steadfast as their shields. In this moment, I know I cannot falter—not now, nor ever.

I scan the ranks, sun-darkened faces, eyes sharpened by hardship, sandals worn thin from endless marches. They stand without complaint, blades at their sides, resolve in their bearing. Only then do I reflect on how far we've come. We have marched from Pella to the frontiers of the known world. I think of my father, Philip, whose ambition was the seed of this campaign. Although my father and I had our difficulties, I can admire what he achieved for the people, and for the country. Yet, where he sought to unify Greece, I seek to transcend it. This battle is not just for Macedon, or even for Greece, it is for history. I had the *Iliad* to accompany me as a boy, but now, I live its verses. I must surpass Achilles, whose name still echoes through the ages.

While gazing upon the opposite bank of the Pinarus River, Darius III gathers his forces. His Immortals stand proud, their gilded weapons glinting even in the dim light. However, beneath this display lies a fragile core. Darius commands through fear, not loyalty, as his men are fuelled by coin, not conviction. My phalanx, by contrast, is a living thing, each man a tendon in the greater body. We fight not only for glory, but to show our enemies the might of an empire they cannot withstand.

Tension Before the Storm

As we prepare to engage, I feel the weight of more than my armour. The Persian Empire is not just an opponent, it is a legacy, a force of history that has stood for centuries. To challenge it, is to challenge the gods themselves, but I have no patience for hesitation. The gods are watching; they have shown their favour. Zeus whispers in my ear, “*Take what is yours*”.

The scouts bring word that Darius underestimates us. He believes the narrowness of the battlefield to be an advantage, that our numbers cannot outmanoeuvre the river. He forgets that it is not size but strategy that wins wars. I have ordered Parmenion to secure the left flank while

I lead the cavalry on the right. The plan is clear—strike fast, strike decisively, and drive straight into the heart of the Persian line.

Battle of Issus

It begins. The cry of war rises like a storm, and we surge forward. The phalanx advances with the purpose of holding the line, waiting for what is to come. As ash-wood sarissas and bronze spearheads grind against the Persian front, the earth begins to tremble beneath the thunder of hooves as I lead the Companion Cavalry.

Noticing the enemy's exposed left, we wheel and crash into the side of the Persian infantry with extreme precision and speed. It is here the line begins to bend. Their shields are turned toward the phalanx; they do not see us until we are already upon them. Horses scream, and lances tear through cloth and flesh. We strike like lightning at the weakened flank, and it is enough for the phalanx to break through in a slow push forward, while the cavalry carves a path.

I see the river has become a battlefield of chaos and blood. Men slip on the muddy banks, their cries drowned by the clash of steel. My heart pounds with the rhythm of war, the thrill of combat consuming all thought. I seek Darius amidst the fray, my eyes scanning until they fall upon the gilded chariot that marks his position. There, he is flanked by his Immortals, though I am not deterred. The ground trembles with Bucephalus's charge, my pulse locked to his rhythm, as we push toward the enemy's core.

As Darius senses me advancing, he turns and falters, his confidence crumbling. I witness him grab hold of the reins in his golden chariot and pivot to flee, choosing to abandon his army to its fate. The King of Kings breaks, and with him, so does Persia. His men scatter, some run, some kneel, and some die where they stand.

Victory is ours.

Wake of Victory

The war-torn field quiets, the roar of battle dimming to the heavy breaths and moans of the wounded. The bodies of men and horses lie scattered across the field, a grim testament to the cost of ambition. Still though, my heart swells with pride. We have achieved the impossible, the great Persian Empire has been humbled with its King reduced to a fugitive.

I command my men to treat the wounded of both the Greek and Persian armies. It is mercy, I believe, that can be wielded as a weapon just as powerful as the sword. I pivot to see Darius's family, now captured in the chaos, being brought before me. They kneel, trembling, expecting death—but I offer them kindness. "You are not my enemies," I tell them. "You are under my protection now." This gesture will echo through time, a reminder that I, Alexander, am not merely a conqueror, but a great unifier.

Reflecting Beyond

As night falls, I find myself alone in my tent, the toll of the day pressing heavily upon me. The victory at Issus is monumental, though it feels like only a single step on an endless road. Persia is vast, its cities glittering with untold riches. Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis—these names tempt me, calling me onward. But it is not the wealth I seek. It is legacy.

I think again of Achilles, whose deeds are immortalized in song. My own story is still being written, each battle a verse in the epic of Alexander. But I fight not just for my own renown, as Achilles once did. I fight to unite the world, to create a new order where East and West are not rivals but partners. The Hellenistic culture I envision will blend the best of both worlds, a synthesis that will endure long after I am gone.

Nevertheless, doubt gnaws at the edges of my resolve. How far can I push my men? They are loyal now, but will they follow me to the ends of the earth? Will they see the vision that drives me, or falter under the strain of endless campaigns? The gods have favoured me thus far, but even their patience is not infinite.

The road ahead is uncertain, but one thing is clear, I cannot stop. To stop now is to admit defeat, to deny my destiny. The stars above remind me of the vastness of the world, and the uncharted lands that are filled with riches and mysteries call to me. Beyond that, who knows? Perhaps the edge of the world itself.

References

Ancient Sources

Plutarch. *Life of Alexander*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Vol. 7 of *Plutarch's Lives*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919. (Original work published ca. 1st century CE.)

Modern Scholarship

Allen, Brooke. "Alexander the Great: Or the Terrible?" *The Hudson Review* 58, no. 2 (2005): 220-30.

Allen allowed me to understand Alexander's leadership skills better, as he is a crushing force who had a destructive impact on Persia, and made a handful of enemies during his conquest, which could personally cost him in the future.

Anson, Edward. *Alexander the Great: Themes and Issues*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Anson explores some of Alexander's military strategy, and his ability to exploit weakness, especially the Persians. Also, Anson describes Alexander's leadership in a calculating way, thus being able to break Darius and his army.

Austin, Michel M. *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006

Austin gave me a better insight into how Alexander is a force on the battlefield, not only at the Battle of Issus, but in other such conflicts he described. I tried to play in this fact of him being tactically flexible as well as disciplined during this battle.

Freeman, Philip. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

This novel helped me understand Alexander's psyche, as well as how he uses others' psyches to his advantage, like using Darius' cowardice to take control of the battle.

Heckel, Waldemar. *The Conquests of Alexander the Great*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 57-65.

Heckel gave an in-depth explanation of the Pinarus River, and the advantages and disadvantages it brought to this battle, thus helping me set the scene for how difficult this battle may have been.

Wasson, Donald L. "Battle of Issus." *World History Encyclopaedia*, November 24, 2011.
https://www.worldhistory.org/Battle_of_Issus/.