

8.10 Erigyus could not tolerate the taunting of the barbarians' boss. Though virtually of venerable age, he would not be believed less robust in body and spirit than any of the youths. Doffing his helm to bare his greying hair, he declared: "The day has dawned for me to demonstrate either by predominating or else most dauntlessly dying just what sort of soldiers and friends Alexander possesses!" Then without additional eloquence, he steered his steed towards his opponent's, so a courageous contest could commence. *The impression given was that both battle-lines had been bidden to sheathe their weapons, for they fell back at once, forming a free space. They were fixated upon a fight that would not only allot their leaders' fates, but their own as well, since they too must fall who followed whichever of them fell. The barbarian began by launching his lance, which Erigyus dodged by a slight nod of his head, and then spurring his steed he sped his sarissa straight through the throat of his foe, so that it poked out of the nape of his neck. Though he hurtled from his horse, still the barbarian battled on. But having levered his lance out of the wound, Erigyus aimed it again into the face of his foe. Then Satibarzanes seized it in his grasp so as to speed his last gasp by guiding his enemy's blow.*

8.11 The woebegone barbarians, being bereft of their boss, whom they had backed more out of kinship than for his own sake, and even then not unmindful of the rewards from Alexander, ceded themselves to Erigyus to seek their safety in surrender. Whilst rejoicing in this success, the king, though not at all flippant concerning the Spartans, yet tolerated their revolt with magnanimity, saying that they did not dare to lay bare their designs until they knew him to have reached the rim of India.⁶ Then he mobilized his men in pursuit of Bessus and was met on the way by Erigyus exhibiting the head of the barbarian as his spectacular spoil from the fray.

8.12 Accordingly, having entrusted the Bactrian tracts to Artabazus, Alexander left the luggage and the baggage there with a garrison. He himself entered the desert spaces of Sogdiana with a disencumbered contingent and he led this force forward by night marches. The aforementioned want of water fires a thirst, firstly through despair of its relief, even ere men are actually driven to drink. For four hundred stades not the merest modicum of moisture emerges. The searing summer sun incinerates the sands and when they are simmering, it

⁶ This is not the outrageous anachronism that it might seem, because in Cleitarchan geography India began in southern Afghanistan in the region of the Helmand River, where Alexander had been during the previous year (cf. Curtius 8.9.10, who mentions the River Ethymantus, which seems to mean the Helmand, as being part of India). Some modern translations have interpreted this passage as Alexander being "not free of anxiety" about the Spartan revolt, but he must at this point have known that it had ended, so it is more apt that Curtius/Cleitarchus was defending him against a charge of flippancy. That such flippancy was an issue is shown by Plutarch, *Agésilas* 15, where Alexander says of the Battle of Megalopolis: "It seems, my friends, that while we have been conquering Darius here, there has been a battle of mice in Arcadia."

Alexander the Great in Afghanistan by Andrew Chugg

is as though everything is cooked by a continuous conflagration. Thereupon, a haze evoked by the vicious heat of the terrain distorts the daylight, so that in vision the plain has a vast and boundless sheen like an ocean main.⁷

8.13 They noticed that nocturnal travel was tolerable; due to the dew and dawn chill recharging their bodies. But with the radiance itself the roasting resumed and their very saliva was sapped as they marched, so that their mouths and innards grew greatly parched. Consequently, firstly their verve and then their vigour began to flag: it perturbed them either to push on or to lag. A few, forewarned by those familiar with this land, had furnished themselves with water beforehand, which for a while withheld their thirst, but then their wish for wetness was rekindled when the heat reached its worst. Therefore, whatever wine and oil there was about was for each and all poured out and they were so besotted by this booze that their fear of thirst they were later to lose. After wine enough to be well the worse for wear, their arms were more than they could bear nor could they press on anywhere. Thus it was they came to think that they were happier who had had no drink, when those who had drunk without refraining were forced to spew forth all they were retaining.

8.14 Beset by such blights an anxious Alexander was encircled by his Friends, who begged him to bear in mind that his inspirational spirit was the sole succour for the failings of his forces. Thereupon, he was met by two scouts, who had gone ahead to select a site for the camp. They were lugging skins of water to support their sons, who were serving in the same sections and were understood to be suffering severe hardship from the shortage. When they came across Alexander, one of them unbound one of the bladders, filled a cup he was carrying and proffered it to the king. In accepting it, his sovereign asked for whom he had brought the water and discovered that he was carrying it for his sons. Then returning the brimming beaker, just as it had been handed to him, Alexander declared: "*Lest I pain my companions, I cannot bear to drink alone and neither can I share such a trickle among all. So chivy along to your children and hand over to them what you have hefted for their sakes.*"⁸

⁷ Anyone who feels that the Cleitarchan descriptions of the terrain are vague or exaggerated would do well to examine the route between Bactra (modern Balkh at Google coordinates 36.768352,66.901674) and the River Oxus (modern Amu-Darya at Google coordinates 37.359242,66.869316) on Google Maps in the Satellite images view. The overall distance is about 70km corresponding closely to the 400 stades mentioned by Cleitarchus. The last 30km just south of the river is a band of enormous dunes, some of them 100's of metres long and therefore tens of metres tall. On their leeward edge they would have been too steep to be negotiated by men in armour or carrying heavy packs, which would have compelled them to wend a winding course. Progress would have been terribly slow and the place a great trial for men on foot.

⁸ A similar story is told by Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.26.1-3, in the context of the Kedrosian march, though he concedes that some accounts had placed it earlier in the general vicinity of the Paropamisus. However, Cleitarchus seems to have attributed the Kedrosian disaster to a shortage of food rather than lack of water, stressing that wells had been dug in advance along the army's route. It may be that Alexander regularly made a point of refusing water, if his men had to go



Figure 8.1. Alexander refuses a drink, whilst his army suffers from lack of water (from a 1696 edition of Curtius)

8.15 Eventually, the king reached the River Oxus at around dusk, but the greater part of the army had not managed to keep up with him. Hence he bade that beacon fires be lit upon a crag, so that those struggling to follow should know that they were not far from his camp. Those in the foremost formations being rapidly restored by food and drink, he had some of them fill skins and others any vessels to hand that could hold water in order to carry aid to their comrades. **But those troops that drank too drastically choked and gave up the ghost in numbers that far exceeded the king's casualties in any conflict.**⁹ As for Alexander himself, he stood, still encased in his cuirass and having tasted neither food nor drink, waiting beside the way by which his soldiers straggled in. Nor did he stand himself down to pander to his own

without: Plutarch, *Alexander* 42.3-6, has him do so during the pursuit of Darius, although his otherwise resembles the Cleitarchan version in Curtius 7.5.9-12. Frontinus, *Stratagemata* 1.7.7, even places such an incident in Africa, but perhaps he was following Trogus and mistook the location.

⁹ The circumstances were a classic case history for death through hyponatremia (loss of body salt) and “water intoxication”. It is seriously dangerous to drink too much fresh water after severe, sweaty exercise, because the consequential sudden dilution of body salts can cause cells to swell, leading to death through seizures and coma. Such overindulgence is common, since there is a lag between the physical act of drinking and the psychological alleviation of thirst.