

5. Book 12: June 325BC – June 324BC

Southern India And Its Ocean, The Kedrosian Desert And The Return to Persia

KEY
<u>Underlined bold text for attributed Fragments of Cleitarchus</u>
Bold text where there is overwhelming evidence
<i>Bold italic text where there exists direct-firm evidence</i>
Normal text where direct-weak evidence applies
<i>Italic text where the evidence is conjectural</i>
Grey text for connecting passages, if Cleitarchus' version is indeterminate

12.1 *As the twelfth year of his reign began, Alexander completed his recovery from the chest wound that had so nearly proved fatal. **When the king had been made better,** a delegation of **the Malli and Oxydracae** a hundred strong presented themselves before him. They all arrived in chariots and were powerfully built men with an air of proud dignity. Their dress was of linen, chased through with threads of gold and purple. They **conceded the subjugation of** their towns, their lands and **their persons to Alexander's authority,** thus relinquishing their accustomed liberty and placing their faith in the king's protection and good government. They asserted that it was an oracle of their gods that had motivated their submission, for their strength in arms remained undiminished. Alexander took counsel with his Friends before granting them his protection in exchange for their fealty. He further directed that a tribute, which these nations had paid to the Arachosii, should instead be delivered to him and he ordered that they should furnish 2500 cavalymen to augment his forces. These commands were faithfully performed by the Indians.*

12.2 *Alexander sacrificed to the gods for his salvation and arranged a sumptuous banquet for his Friends and the Indian envoys and magnates. A hundred golden couches were arrayed side by side, each draped about with purple tapestries glinting with strands of gold. **After much wine had been drunk at this magnificent feast, there transpired a notable incident.** There was present one of Alexander's Companions, a Macedonian called Corragus of great bodily strength and a gallant veteran of numerous battles. Spurred by the alcohol he challenged Dioxippus of Athens to a*

duel, *saying he should agree to meet him in armed combat if he were a man*. The Athenian was a renowned athlete, who had been crowned as victor in the boxing contest at the Olympic Games. Naturally the drunken guests encouraged their rivalry; therefore Dioxippus accepted the challenge, *contemptuous of the soldier's bravado*. *On the following day the king sought to dissuade them, yet their resolve had hardened, so Alexander fixed a date for the contest.*

12.3 When the appointed day came tens of thousands of men turned out to witness the spectacle. Many of the troops, especially the Greeks, backed Dioxippus, but Alexander and the Macedonians favoured Corragus, because he was their countryman. The pair progressed to the field of combat, the Macedonian arrayed in his costly panoply and bearing a shield and his usual weapons: a sarissa in his left hand, a javelin in his right and a sword slung from a strap, as if he were up against a whole team of opponents. But the Athenian came naked and gleaming with oil, garlanded and carrying a purple drape in his left hand, whilst bearing a well-proportioned club in his right. Both exhibited splendid physiques and their bodily strength was regarded with wonderment. The crowd looked forward to a battle of the gods, for the Macedonian by his bearing and his shining armaments evoked trepidation as though he were Ares, whilst Dioxippus through his surpassing strength and fitness and particularly on account of the club bore close comparison with Heracles. *The audience was thrilled with keen anticipation by the disparity, since it seemed not merely rash, but actually insane for a nude man to confront an opponent in full armour.*

12.4 As the two closed the Macedonian, believing that the Greek could be dispatched at range, hurled his javelin, but Dioxippus dodged its impact with a slight twist of his torso. Then Corragus charged, whilst swapping his sarissa into his right hand, but the Greek too leapt forward and shattered the shaft of the sarissa with a single blow of his club. Having suffered twin setbacks through the loss of both of his spears, Corragus was forced to resort to his sword. But even as he sought to draw it, Dioxippus grasped the Macedonian's right wrist with his left hand and pushed with his own right to cause his foe to lose his balance, then tripped and butted Corragus, so that he tumbled to the ground. Snatching away the sword, the Greek set his foot upon the Macedonian's neck, as he lay recumbent. Finally, he raised his club poised to crush his defeated adversary and looked to the spectators to decide Corragus' fate.

12.5 The crowd was in tumult at the paradoxical and overwhelming nature of the Greek's skill, but the king signalled that he should release Corragus, and then ordered the gathering to disperse. Alexander was clearly displeased, for the spectacle had exposed the Macedonian reputation for valour and prowess in arms to ridicule in full view of the

barbarians. Yet Dioxippus freed his fallen foe and departed the scene of his triumph bound about with ribbons by his fellow Greeks, who basked in the reflected glory from their countryman. But Fortune curtailed his opportunity to brag about his victory.

12.6 Alexander grew increasingly hostile to Dioxippus, for his ears were opened to the resentful lies of his Friends and other Macedonian courtiers. A few days later these men persuaded one of the attendants at a feast to conceal a golden cup beneath the pillow of Dioxippus' couch. During the banquet the staff reported its loss and the Macedonians pretended shock at its discovery, accusing the Greek of its theft. Thus Dioxippus was placed in a shameful and embarrassing quandary. Perceiving that the Macedonians were united against him, he could not endure the stigma of theft, so he quit the banquet.

12.7 A little later on reaching his personal quarters he composed a letter to Alexander exposing the ruse of which he had been the victim. This he placed in the hands of his servants for delivery to the king. Then he took his own life by running himself through with his sword. Though he had been indiscreet in accepting the challenge to single combat, it was downright foolish of him to commit suicide in these circumstances. For many who had despised him, now mocked his folly, joking that it was hard to live with his fate of being endowed with great bodily strength, but a tiny mind. Let us learn from this not to allow the body's strength to become the soul's weakness; let us consider wisdom to be the soul's strength.¹

12.8 Alexander read the letter and was moved to grief and anger by Dioxippus' death, *which he recognised to have been inspired by indignation and despair rather than guilt.* Afterwards, he frequently mourned the virtues of the man whom he had neglected in life, but whose death he now regretted. Only when it was futile did he appreciate the excellence of Dioxippus contrasted with the calumny of his detractors.

12.9 The Indian envoys were given leave to return home *to report the success of their mission*, but they returned a few days later bringing tributary gifts for Alexander. These comprised 300 cavalrymen, 1030 chariots each drawn by four horses abreast, a substantial amount of linen cloth, 1000 Indian shields, 100 talents of white iron, remarkably large lions and tigers, but all trained for handling, and also the skins of gargantuan lizards and the shells of tortoises. *Afterwards Alexander issued orders to Craterus to march the main army downstream, whilst maintaining contact with the river. But those who*

¹ This is Fragment 39 of Cleitarchus (Maximi, *Eclogae* II 734 B), considered doubtful by Jacoby, but it might be fitted to this context.

had been escorting him in the fleet he re-embarked and sailed with them towards the Ocean through the territory of the Malli.

12.10 The king next reached the lands of the Sambastae, a people who were the equal of any in India in numbers and breeding. Their cities were ruled in a democratic fashion and hearing of the approach of the Macedonians, they gathered an army of 60,000 infantry, 6000 cavalry and 500 armoured chariots, *which they placed under the command of three generals, distinguished in the conduct of warfare. Yet the folk in the fields on the banks of the river, inhabitants of a multiplicity of villages, watched amazed as the entire sweep of the stream within their gaze became crammed with vessels each scintillating with the arms of innumerable troops. Astounded by the novelty of the scene, they believed they saw a heavenly host led by a new Dionysus, a god whose name was hallowed among those nations. And so the bellows of the soldiers and the thrashing pulse of the oars and the sailors' chant of mutual exhortation flooded the ears of the natives filling them with terror. They fled to their own men at arms shouting that they were mad to seek battle with so many divine and invincible heroes.* The Indian troops being thus intimidated and the elders of their nation also counselling against a risky fight, the Sambastae dispatched an embassy of fifty of their chief men to Alexander to seek favourable treatment from him. The king praised them for the wisdom of their submission to his authority and concluded a peace treaty with them, being heaped with lavish presents and heroic honours in return.

12.11 *Four days travel downstream tribes living on either side of the river, who were called the Sodrae and the Massani, submitted to Alexander. At this place the king founded a city, Alexandria beside the river, and designated ten thousand persons as its populace. Afterwards he entered the lands of King Musicanus, at which juncture he held a trial for the satrap Terioltes, due to charges laid against him by the people of the Paropanisum range, of whom Alexander had made him the governor. Finding him guilty of many acts of avarice and tyranny, the king ordered his execution. Yet Oxyartes, leader of the Bactrians, was not merely absolved of guilt, but was thereby granted the rule of more extensive territories among the Parapanisadae, due to his bond of affection with Alexander.* A campaign was undertaken to complete the subjugation of the Musicani and the king left a garrison to secure their principal town. *Also at this time Alexander sent Craterus and Polyperchon back to Babylonia with a great part of the army, whilst he himself sailed on downstream towards the shore of the Ocean with select regiments.*

12.12 Alexander next launched an invasion through the forests to a wild part of India, where lay the kingdom of Porticanus. He stormed and captured two cities, allowing his troops to ransack their dwellings prior to setting them ablaze. Porticanus together with a great section of his population ensconced themselves in a fortified city, but Alexander

overwhelmed its defences after a siege lasting three days. Porticanus retreated to its citadel *and sent out envoys to seek terms of surrender from Alexander, but, before they had a chance to treat with the king, two towers collapsed with a resounding boom and the Macedonians surged across their ruins into the stronghold.* After its fall, Porticanus was slain as he made a last stand with a few loyal followers. *Having demolished the citadel, Alexander sold those captured into slavery, and then went on to capture the other cities of the kingdom, razing them all and thereby inspiring much fear of him throughout those lands.*

12.13 Afterwards Alexander ravaged the realm of King Sambus, where many towns submitted to his authority, but the strongest city of the nation was taken by digging beneath its ramparts. *The barbarians were ignorant of military engineering tactics, so it seemed to them a supernatural horror when armed men rose up out of the earth near the centre of their city, since they had not noticed any prior sign of the mining operation.* Most of the cities of this region were obliterated and the king sold their inhabitants at auction, though more than 80,000 of the Indians were cut down *in the fighting.* *The sect known as the Brahmins shared in this catastrophe, but their survivors came before Alexander as suppliants waving fronds of foliage, so he absolved them, punishing only the worst culprits. King Sambus himself abandoned the struggle and escaped with thirty elephants into the territory on the other side of India.*

12.14 At this time the Musicani launched a rebellion. Alexander entrusted Pithon with the task of suppressing their revolt, which he accomplished by capturing its leader: King Musicanus himself. Pithon arraigned his prisoner before Alexander, who had the man crucified, before rejoining his fleet, where it lay moored upon the river.

12.15 Three days later whilst travelling downstream Alexander reached a town at the far end of the kingdom of Sambus. *He had reached Harmatelia, the last city of the Brahmins, whose citizens were so confident of its invulnerability and so proud of their own valour that they forswore the submission of the realm and closed their gates against the king.* But Alexander sent a force of five hundred of his fleet-footed Agrianians to assault the ramparts, considering that their sparse numbers would be deemed contemptible. Their orders were to lure the enemy into an engagement beyond their walls, then steadily to retreat once they had been counter attacked. Around 3000 fighters spewed forth from the city, whereupon Alexander's contingent *turned their backs and* rushed away in feigned flight. The barbarians leapt after them in a hot pursuit, but were subsequently intercepted and surprised by forces led by Alexander himself. Charging furiously into the fray, the king's troops slew 600 of the barbarians and captured 1000 more, the remnants being chased back within their defences.

12.16 *Yet this was not so splendid and joyful a victory as at first appeared, as events went on to show.* Those among Alexander's forces who had suffered wounds were now exposed anew to mortal danger. The Brahmins had smeared their weapons with a deadly toxin, which indeed had been the basis of their confidence in joining battle. The potency of the poison was derived from a species of snake, which was hunted down and its carcass placed in the sun. The scorching radiance melted the flesh of the creature such that it sweated moisture and through this liquefaction the animal's venom was gleaned. By its action the bodies of the wounded at first became numbed, then little by little sharp pains developed and the victims were racked by shivering and convulsions. Their skin became clammy and grey and they began to vomit bile, whilst a dark spume seeped out of their gashes, which started to putrefy. The gangrene spread rapidly to overwhelm key parts of the body, thus inflicting a wretched death upon the sufferer. Whether the wound was great or small or even just a scratch, the outcome was the same. *The physicians were perplexed and confounded.*

12.17 *It had been the hope of the barbarians that the rash and fearless Alexander could thus have been eliminated, but though he fought in the thick of the action, the king came through unscathed.* However Ptolemy, the future king, had been injured *in the left shoulder, and, though the wound was slight, as the casualties began dying,* Alexander was greatly upset, since this man ranked high in his affections. He was a close relative and some said he was a son of Philip: indeed it was known for sure that he was the son of a woman who had been one of Philip's mistresses. *Furthermore, he was one of Alexander's elite Bodyguards and a most resolute warrior, but even more accomplished and illustrious in the arts of peace than in military crafts. Temperate and courteous in his manner, notably generous and approachable, he had adopted nothing of the arrogance of royalty. Hence it was dubious whether he was more popular with the king or the people, for his virtues were appreciated by all.*

12.18 *So great was the concern of the Macedonians for Ptolemy's well-being that it was as if they had foreseen his later enthronement.* But indeed on this occasion he received a just reward for his many kindnesses, some said through the intervention of divine Providence. For when Alexander came to visit Ptolemy, *exhausted by the battle and fatigued by worry, he commanded that a bed should be fetched for his own use and he slipped into slumber as soon as he lay down upon it.* On awakening he told of a serpent that had visited him in his dreams gripping a plant between its jaws and of how it had taught him the curative properties and the habitat of this herb. *The king gave out that he would know this plant were it brought before him. Therefore many joined the search that tracked it down.*

12.19 Alexander ground a poultice from the herb and smeared it on Ptolemy's wound. *The pain was eased straightaway and soon a scab formed over the gash.* The king also brewed a tea from the leaves and had Ptolemy drink it, thus restoring him to health. Now that the virtue of the remedy had been vindicated by Ptolemy's recovery, the therapy was extended to all the afflicted troops and they were similarly cured. Then Alexander renewed his preparations to assault and subjugate Harmatelia, notwithstanding its formidable defences. But its inhabitants, *being thwarted in their hope of inflicting a decisive blow upon the Macedonians,* emerged waving branches in supplication and surrendered.

12.20 *At this same fortified town Alexander captured ten of the Indian naked philosophers, who had done most to encourage the resistance of King Sambus.* They were reputedly adept at producing witty and concise retorts to all manner of queries. Alexander therefore challenged them: *“Since, Indian philosophers, your enmity to us is manifest, and your lives are therefore forfeit, it would be best to pay attention to what I say. I will question you one by one, and you will respond as best you can.* The first man who gives a wrong answer, I shall put to death, and then according to quality of response *the rest of you shall die.* One among you I shall appoint to judge the replies, and if his adjudication be correct, then he alone shall be granted his life.” *Then the chief of them requested whether each of them might be permitted to add explanations to their responses. This Alexander allowed.*

12.21 *Alexander proceeded to pose the question to the first of them of whether the dead or the living were greater in number. The Indian responded: “The living, of course, for those who do not exist cannot have any number.”*

12.22 *Alexander asked the second whether the beasts of the land or the sea were more numerous. The Indian responded: “Of the land, of course, for the land contains the sea.”*

12.23 *Alexander asked the third: “Which is the most cunning animal?” The Indian responded: “That, of course, which has appeared to no man up until now.”*

12.24 *Alexander asked the fourth: “For what reason did you counsel King Sambus to make war against me?” The Indian responded: “So that he might either live or die with his self-respect intact.”*

12.25 *Alexander asked the fifth: “Which of night or day was born first?” The Indian responded: “Night was born before day by one day.” Alexander was dubious about this response, but noticing this the Indian explained: “Riddling questions will usually elicit riddling answers.”*

12.26 *Alexander asked the sixth: “What must a man do in order to make everyone happy?” The Indian responded: “If, being powerful, he looks after them, without being seen to be severe with them.”*

12.27 *Alexander asked the seventh, “On what basis can a man seem to be a god?” The Indian responded: “If, whilst being mortal, he does what no man can do.”*

12.28 *Alexander inquired of the eighth whether life or death were greater in strength? The Indian responded: “Life, for this reason, that life makes things to exist out of nothing; whereas death makes nothing out of these things.”*

12.29 *Alexander asked the ninth: “How long is it beneficial for a man to live?” The Indian replied: “So long as he himself does not perceive death to be more beneficial than life.”*

12.30 *Next Alexander asked the last of them, which of those who had spoken appeared to have responded worst, at the same time conjuring him not to exhibit any favour for their cause in his judgement. And he, unwilling to voice his judgement of which of them should perish, said that each of them had answered worse than the others. Alexander retorted: “It is thus clear that all must die including you their chief, who has judged so badly.” The chief Indian responded: “But, surely, Alexander, it is not kingly to lie, for you said: ‘Whichever of you whom I command to judge, if he judge correctly, he will be set free.’ I said that each answer was worse than those already given, so I judged myself to have given the worst answer of all, which you have agreed. It was not therefore false, but true judgement. It is not in fact fair to condemn any of us through my judgement. None of us therefore according to your rules should meet with death, for indeed to avoid unjustly killing us, not so much to us, but to you is providential.” **When Alexander heard all this, he judged them to be wise, so he ordered gifts and garments to be given to them and let them go.***

12.31 *It is said that Heracles sired but one daughter and named her Pandaea. He granted her the rule of the southernmost part of India stretching as far as the Ocean and he divided up the inhabitants of her realm to dwell among 365 villages. He commanded that one village should pay a tax to the queen on each day of the year, his purpose being that those that had recently paid this tribute would support Pandaea in claiming from those whose payment was about to fall due. The people of this region are called the Mandi and the females of their race are mature enough for bearing children at just seven years of age whereas the males do not live beyond forty.*

12.32 *Alexander commanded his forces to re-embark upon the ships and ordered them regularly to observe the constellations in order to resolve whether the river Indus issued into the Atlantic and thence into the*

*Erythraean Sea.*² *When they had voyaged onwards for some days, they came to the distinguished city of Patala and its island. It was governed in a fashion resembling the constitution of Sparta: the heads of two leading dynasties inherited a joint-kingship from their fathers, which accorded them the leadership in military matters. Conversely, a council of elders was responsible for the civil administration.* One of the kings, whose name was Moeris, had lately evacuated his city to seek refuge in the hills. Therefore Alexander occupied the town *and ordered that it be fortified.* Through pillaging the fields, he amassed a great plunder of grain, flocks of sheep and herds of cows, which *he took onboard as provisions together with guides, who were familiar with the river. Then he sailed to the island, which arose in mid-stream, being formed by the branches of the Indus Delta. In that region on the right-hand branch of the river dwelt the Bigandar, whilst living upon the left were the Mamalces.*

12.33 Due to the laxity of their guards, the guides managed to escape. *The island appeared deserted, but Alexander ordered that, if anybody existed in that place with knowledge of the area, they should be rounded up. Eventually, when nobody could be found,* his burning ambition to reach the Ocean and visit the limits of the world persuaded him to consign his own fate and that of his many brave warriors to a mysterious waterway without guidance. *After praying together to god, they departed from the island,* sailing on into the unknown, in ignorance of the native tribes, the distance to the sea and the navigability of the channel for the warships. Conjecture was their blind, two-faced augur and their sole solace lay in the perpetual good fortune of their king.

12.34 *Already they had hastened on for 400 stades, when suddenly they sensed sea air, a thing of which they were not ignorant. Hope inspired the king and filled him with joy,* so that he urged the oarsmen to row with renewed vigour, declaring: “The avowed objective for which we have all striven is at hand; now nothing shall sully our glory nor stain our valour; the world shall fall to us without further bloodshed or intercession from the God of War; Nature herself cannot advance further and, shortly, things unknown to any save the immortals shall be revealed.” *And so between them they all encouraged one another, whilst rowing ever onward with the sea not far away.*

12.35 *Then, when they spied natives wandering about, Alexander ordered boats to be sent to the bank, having instructed them to seek out informants on the region. Searching all day, they finally discovered several peasants skulking in their huts. These they led before the king, who asked, how far away the sea lay? They denied any knowledge of the sea, but said that three days’ further sailing would bring them to polluted waters. It was clear that this was a reference to seawater by persons ignorant of its nature. Their spirits lifted, the army rapidly embarked, so*

² By the Erythraean (or Red) Sea is meant the Persian Gulf (and the Arabian Sea by extension).

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as to reach the sea as soon as possible. So the sailors rowed on eagerly as the consummation of their hopes drew near and each successive day the fire in their souls burnt brighter. *By the third day* they had reached salt waters and *they began to notice tidal undulations*, which were at first quite gentle.

12.36 Now they edged towards another island in the middle of the stream, their progress being retarded by a contrary flow. Mooring the fleet on its shore, they rushed off to garner provisions in blissful ignorance of the calamity that was about to befall them. At approaching the third hour, the Ocean in its habitual alternation began to swell and surge against the current. The flow of the stream was first arrested and then reversed with escalating force, generating a torrent with more impetus than a cascade in spate. The common soldiers lacked experience of the temperament of the sea, so they imagined that they were witnessing a portent of divine displeasure as *the surge of salt water streamed into the fields, rapidly flooding* a vast expanse of erstwhile well-drained land.

12.37 The ships were buoyed up *and they felt the force of the flow tugging upon them and wrenching them into violent motion*, such as to cause the entire fleet to be dispersed. Those onshore were aghast at this malign turn of events and so from every quarter they raced frantically back to their vessels. Yet in the face of panic even haste is tardy: thus some sought to punt their ships along, whilst others obstructed the deployment of the oars by squatting down in a mass. Some rushed to set sail without their full complement, thus incapacitating their vessels, which wallowed laboriously, whilst others crammed multitudes onboard. Hence both under-manning and overcrowding undermined their expedition. Here and there some yelled that they should hold back and others clamoured for departure, so that their contradictory cries confounded the ears and compounded the confusion that lay before their eyes.

12.38 Nor could the pilots rescue the situation, since their voices were drowned in the tumult and the sailors were anyway in such a state of consternation that they were uncontrollable. And so the ships began to collide, each obstructing the course of another and shearing off whole banks of oars. You might have supposed them to be two fleets engaged in battle, rather than a single army embarked upon its own vessels. Prows crashed against sterns as ships, which struck those before them, were themselves assaulted in the rear and angry words even led to fistfights.

12.39 And now the tide had inundated their entire panorama with just a few slight mounds protruding like miniature islands, whither many swam vigorously, being driven by terror to abandon the ships. One part of the divided fleet floated on a great depth of water, where before there had been depressions in the landscape; another part was stranded among shoals created where the flood had barely covered uneven stretches of higher ground. At this point a fresh source of even greater alarm was visited upon them: the sea began to ebb away with a huge dragging force as the waters returned to their former channels, draining the submerged terrain. Hence some ships were left high and dry, tilted

onto their prows or leaning upon their sides. The fields were strewn with baggage, arms and fragmentary oars and planks. The troops feared either to land or remain aboard, since they anticipated that further and worse calamities might strike at any moment. They could scarcely trust their own eyes as they witnessed ships wrecked on dry land and the sea vanishing into streams.



Figure 12.1. Disaster strikes Alexander's fleet during the journey to the Ocean.

12.40 Nor was this the end of their suffering, for, since they were ignorant of the fact that the sea would shortly return to re-float their ships, they expected hunger and dire deprivations to ensue. Vile sea-beasts deposited by the flood were roving around and night was fast approaching, so that even the king was grieved by the desperation of their plight. Yet *these troubles could not so overwhelm his invincible spirit, but that he* kept watch throughout the night and *stationed cavalymen at the river mouth* in order that, on perceiving a resurgence of the sea, they might race back ahead of it. Furthermore he issued orders that the damaged ships should be mended and that those which had been capsized by the flow should be righted, and that all should remain vigilant against a recurrence of the flood tide. When the whole night had been spent in watchfulness and exhortation, all at once the cavalry pickets came charging back, and yet the swelling flood following on their heels came close to cutting them off from the fleet.

12.41 Then as the water began to seep beneath the ships, they were each lifted afloat and when the fields were entirely inundated, the whole fleet was freed to

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sail on. The riverbanks echoed with the unrestrained cheers of the soldiers and sailors as they joyously hailed their unexpected deliverance. Whence had the sea returned and whither had it sped hence the day before? They could only wonder at this natural phenomenon, which sometimes obeyed and sometimes breached the constraints of time. However, the king conjectured from its recurrences that the surge was due after sunrise each day, so he set off down the river with a flotilla in the middle of the night to reach the estuary ahead of the tide. *Escorted by his Friends, he sailed out 400 stades into the Ocean, where he encountered two islands. Here he performed opulent sacrifices, having set up altars to Tethys and Oceanus, the gods who presided over the sea. Pouring libations from many a golden cup, he also cast these chalices into the waters, proclaiming his campaign to have achieved its end,* the objective of his prayers.

12.42 *After rejoining the main fleet, Alexander headed back upriver towards Patala.* On the second day of the return journey his ships were moored near a briny lake, the innocent appearance of which deceived those who rashly bathed in its waters. They contracted an itchy mange, which proved communicable to others, but oil was found to cure it. Since the route by which Alexander intended to lead the army passed through an arid region, Leonnatus was sent in advance to dig wells along the line of march. The king held back with his main contingents *waiting for the monsoons to abate*, whilst taking the opportunity to found several cities.

12.43 As the stormy season drew to a close, *the king burnt such of his ships as were damaged or unserviceable and placed the most seaworthy vessels from his fleet in the hands of Nearchus and Onesicritus, who were master navigators.* He ordered them to voyage out into the Ocean *as far as safety permitted*, taking careful note of everything they saw. They were to seek to meet him at the mouth of the Euphrates, or alternatively, *if that were impossible*, to sail back to the Indus and rejoin him from there. *Alexander himself got the army underway on a march across vast tracts of land, befriending friendly natives, but vanquishing any who opposed him.*

12.44 *After marching for nine days* the army entered the land of the Arabitae and after *nine more* they came to the territory of the Kedrosii. These independent nations decided *in council* to accept Alexander as their overlord, *but the king, whilst welcoming their allegiance, asked nothing of them but the provisioning of his forces.* *On the fifth day thereafter, he crossed a river known locally as the Arabus.* *Beyond its further bank* he entered a wide stretch of virtual desert, which having traversed, he arrived at the frontier of the Oreitae. At this point, the king divided the lightly armed contingents between Ptolemy, Leonnatus and himself. *Leaving the bulk of the army in the care of Hephaestion,* he ordered Ptolemy to raid the coastal areas and Leonnatus to plunder the central region, whilst his own party pillaged the upland districts and the

hills. Hence the entire country was simultaneously laid waste and every settlement was lit with flame and carpeted with corpses, for the death toll climbed to tens of thousands. But the troops garnered vast spoils and the devastation intimidated the neighbouring tribes, so that they proffered prompt submission. In the same region Alexander conceived a desire to found a seaport. Discovering a sheltered harbour in the vicinity, *called Rhambarce*, he constructed an Alexandria and populated it with citizens from Arachosia.

12.45 *Alexander advanced further into the land of the Oreitae via the passes and speedily subdued the whole territory. For the most part these people share the customs of the other Indians, save in one peculiar and incredible respect. Relatives of their deceased disrobe, then, when completely naked and brandishing spears, they bear away the body and deposit it in one of the corses scattered around their countryside. They similarly divest the corpse of its clothing, exposing it to the depredations of wild beasts. After sharing out these robes of the dead, they offer sacrifices to their Heroes in the Underworld and celebrate by holding a feast for their friends.*

12.46 Thence the king moved into Kedrosia, marching with the sea on his flank and encountering a primitive Indian race, *who dwelt along a vast and desolate stretch of the coast*, where only a few palms and a kind of thorn bush and tamarisk grew. *Complete isolation from their neighbours had made this people hostile and aggressive towards visitors. But indeed they are savage and brutish in their very nature, for their nails become talons, through never being trimmed from birth to senescence and they allow their hair to grow shaggy and to become matted like felt. Their complexion is seared black by the radiant sun, though they drape themselves in the hides of beasts. Their sole fodder is fish and the flesh of beached whales, which they are wont to shred with their talons and to dry in the sun, then to grind it in whale vertebrae and mix in a little flour, so as to make a sort of bread. They *fabricate and* decorate the walls of their dwellings using oysters and other shells and anything suitable that may drift ashore. The roof beams of these huts can span up to eighteen cubits, being formed from the ribcages and tiled with the scales of gargantuan whales, whose jaws serve as portals.*

12.47 A scarcity of provisions *among the fish-eaters* began to place the supply of the army in jeopardy, but Alexander led them on into a region of sterile desert, where shortage became famine and hunger turned to starvation. *Though they had sweet water from the wells Alexander had ordered dug by advance parties, the lack of food meant that the Macedonians were soon reduced to grubbing up the roots of palms, the only tree that continued to flourish in their path. When eventually even this meagre sustenance failed, they were compelled to slaughter their beasts of burden, not even sparing the cavalry mounts. Bereft of any*

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means to transport their baggage further, they simply burnt the gorgeous plunder stripped from their opponents, so that all the rich rewards for their campaigns in the uttermost east were merely fuel for the conflagration. And illness stalked their famished condition, for the noxious succulence of their revolting nourishment together with the exhaustion from the march and the mental stress of their plight combined to spread sickness among their ranks. Their deadly dilemma was that lingering meant starving, whereas progress risked debilitation and a surer death.

12.48 Therefore their tracks across this landscape became strewn with their incapacitated comrades more so than their stoical dead, since even mild infirmity sufficed to cause men to fall behind in the forced marches. For the army advanced at the fastest pace that the healthy could maintain, as they felt impelled to pursue their hope for safety with all their vigour. But those whose energy had failed appealed desperately for aid to their friends in the column and to strangers also, yet neither to any avail. There were no more beasts to bear the infirm and the marchers were challenged even to manage to carry their arms. Indeed, the pathetic sight of their fallen fellows was a constant reminder of their own peril. Hence, despite frequent entreaties, they looked away from the dropouts as fear conquered their compassion. Those abandoned called upon the gods to be their witnesses and invoked the sacred bonds of fraternity and the duty of care owed to them by the king. But in the end, realising that their breath was wasted on deaf ears, despair made them utter irrational curses that those who had refused them succour should suffer as cruel a fate as theirs and with equally faithless friends.

12.49 Thus starvation claimed many victims and the army was greatly dispirited. Alexander himself experienced a mixture of dolour and anguish, *also tinged with shame, since his personal leadership had brought about the disaster.* It seemed a detestable irony that men who had surpassed all in the art and practice of warfare should perish ignominiously for want of basic rations in an empty land. Therefore the king took action by dispatching fleet emissaries to *Phrataphernes, Satrap of Parthyaea* and to *Drangianê* and *Aria* and to all his provinces bordering on the desert. The governors were commanded with the utmost urgency to send racing camels and other trained beasts of burden to him via the passes of *Carmania*, each to be loaded with cooked food and other essentials for the relief of his forces. These messengers were swift to reach their objectives and the response of the satraps was equally expeditious, such that large quantities of supplies soon arrived at the specified rendezvous. Therefore the army was rescued from hunger, though not without losses, *and came through to a more fertile region of Kedrosia. Alexander encamped for some time at that place in order that his traumatised troops might gently recuperate.*

12.50 *There he received a letter from Leonnatus, describing a victory won against the Oreitae. They had attacked Leonnatus' brigade in a strength of 8000 infantry and 400 cavalry, but the Bodyguard had forced them to flee back to their own country, though he had suffered significant casualties in the battle.* News also reached him from Craterus, that he had subdued Ozines and Zariaspes, Persian aristocrats who had fomented a rebellion, and clapped them in irons. Menon, the satrap of Kedrosia having lately died, Alexander appointed Sibyrtilus to the office in his stead, before advancing into Carmania, where the satrap was Astaspes. There were suspicions that this man had sought to revolt whilst Alexander had been in India, but the king suppressed his anger in greeting his governor pleasantly and retaining him in his office, pending an opportunity to investigate the accusations properly.

12.51 Following further orders from Alexander, the provincial governors now requisitioned huge stocks of cavalry steeds and beasts of burden from throughout their domains, so that Alexander was able to replace the chattels of those who had lost them *in the desert*. This included armaments as magnificent as those that had been discarded, for the entire wealth of conquered Persia was now at the king's disposal. He therefore conceived an ostentatious extension of his rivalry with Dionysus. In a spirit of ascending above and beyond the mere imitation of the god's triumph over the subject nations, **Alexander decided also to emulate the festal procession and carousal for which Dionysus is especially renowned.** To this purpose he arranged that his path through the villages of *Carmania* should be carpeted with blossom and hung with garlands. Cauldrons and even vats of wine were set upon the threshold of every dwelling on his route *to fuel the festivities* and he had carriages extended to accommodate large parties of soldiers, enclosed beneath canopies formed from dazzling white sheets or precious *purple* fabrics, *richly embroidered, or else shaded by fresh green fronds.*

12.52 Alexander himself led the pageant in the company of his close friends and the rest of the royal party, each of them crowned with a wreath woven from a diversity of flowers. To one side the flautists trilled; on the other strummers plucked melodies from their lyres, *so that the air was filled with music and song.* Trundling in their tracks came the rest of the army conveyed by *innumerable* wagons garnished with displays of their most impressive weaponry. The king's own chariot was *drawn by eight horses, being* particularly heavily laden, for it bore basins and beakers of solid gold as well as his personal guests *and a lofty dais, on which he banqueted day and night.* **In this state of revelry, feasting and intoxication the entire army progressed for seven days,** virtually defenceless against any among the local inhabitants who might have summoned the courage to attack. Yet none dared, for Fortune, whose gift is fame, turned even this militarily imprudent behaviour to glory. And now it is considered a wonder that Alexander paraded a drunken army through lands not yet purged of enemies and that the barbarians mistook his rashness for invulnerability.

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12.53 But the executioner stalked at the tail of this Dionysiac comus, for shortly afterwards it was ordered that Astaspes, the governor of Carmania, should be put to death. Indeed **at this time Alexander discovered that many of his officials had abused their powers and committed serious crimes in his absence, and so he inflicted punishment upon a number of his satraps and generals.** For example, around this time Cleander and Sitalces, and Heracon accompanied by Agathon joined the king. These were the officers who had assassinated Parmenion at Alexander's behest. They brought with them a force of 5000 infantry and 1000 cavalry, but complainants from the provinces that they governed also followed on their heels. Although the king was greatly appreciative of the service, which they had rendered by eliminating Parmenion, this could not compensate for the numerous offences that they had since perpetrated. Having despoiled everything in the temporal sphere, they failed to exclude even sacred things from their depredations. Virgins and noblewomen, whom they had raped, came *before Alexander* to bewail the defilement of their bodies. The grasping and libidinous misbehaviour of these men had blighted the reputation of the Macedonians among the native peoples. Yet Cleander excelled the rest in lechery, for after having forcibly deflowered a virgin of noble family, he consigned her to become the harlot of his slave.

12.54 It was not so much these accusations of atrocities as remembrance of their slaughter of Parmenion that influenced a large number of Alexander's Friends against these men, though this might privately have favoured their cause with the king himself. The courtiers were glad that the king's wrath had recoiled upon the instruments of his wrath, so that no power acquired through acts of infamy should prove lasting. After considering the case, Alexander pronounced his judgement: "The prosecution has overlooked the greatest treason, and that was the abandonment of hope for my safe return. For it is inconceivable that the accused should have lapsed into such misconduct, if they had either believed or desired that I should come back unscathed from India." Accordingly, he had them fettered and ordered that 600 of their soldiers, who had been the agents of their ferocity, should be put to death. On that same day the captured leaders of the Persian rebellion, Ozines and Zariaspes, who had been brought in by Craterus, paid the price with their lives. ***As the news spread that Alexander was righteously disciplining his delinquent commanders, many of his generals were disturbed by recollections of their own extravagant or criminal behaviour. Some instigated insurrections with the backing of mercenary armies, whilst others absconded with substantial hoards of treasure. When Alexander ascertained these reactions, he dispatched letters to each of his generals and satraps in Asia, commanding them instantly to disband their private armies.***

12.55 At this time Alexander was resting in a city called Salmous, not far *upriver* from the sea. He was presiding over stage contests in the theatre, when the fleet was brought into the *nearby* harbour by its officers, ***Nearchus and Onesicritus.*** They immediately came *into town* to greet

Alexander in the theatre and to report upon the progress of their mission, for the king had ordered them to explore the sea-lanes and the coastal waters on the Ocean route from India back to Persia. The Macedonians were overjoyed by their deliverance from the perils of their voyage and welcomed them with a rousing ovation, so that the whole arena resounded with unrestrained jubilation.

12.56 *The mariners told of wonders they had themselves witnessed and of others that were merely rumoured.* They had observed astounding ebbs and surges of the Ocean waters, so that many great islands were unexpectedly revealed along the coast by the former, only to be submerged by the latter with a vigorous landward flow, its surface white with roiling foam. They described an island opposite the mouth of the river that was rich in gold but wanting in steeds, for which its inhabitants would pay a talent apiece to anyone who ventured to ship them from the mainland. Another island had a sacred mountain, which was shaded by a grove of trees that exuded a marvellously dulcet perfume.

12.57 They said that their most extraordinary experience was an encounter with a multitudinous school of unbelievably huge whales, *each of them the size of the largest of ships.* They drifted with the flow of the current, converging upon the course of the fleet. The crews were terrified and fearful for their lives, believing that the beasts were about to dash their vessels to smithereens. But when they all yelled in unison, striking their shields to generate a great cacophony and when this was further augmented with the trumpeting of their bugles, then the beasts were discomfited by the strange din and promptly dived into the depths of the Ocean with a great crashing of the waves as they closed over them, just like the roar of a foundering ship.

12.58 *They also recited a legend of the natives that the Red (or Erythraean) Sea did not take its name from the hue of its waters, as was commonly supposed, but was called after a King Erythrus. The grave of this king was to be found on an island not far offshore in the centre of a dense palm forest at a site marked by a lofty column with an inscription in the native alphabet. It was added that merchant-venturers, pursuing their pilots' reports of a golden treasure, had sailed to the island, but had never been heard of again.*

12.59 *All these stories enthused the king to complete the exploration of the sea-route.* He therefore requested that his fleet should continue its voyage by navigating a coastal course to the mouth of the Euphrates and thence upriver to Babylon.

12.60 *At these same contests in Carmania, after wine had warmed the mood, it is recorded that Alexander's lover, Bagoas the Eunuch, won the prize for singing and dancing, whilst the king presided. Decked in his festal adornments, the champion quit the stage and went across the theatre to sit down right next to Alexander. On seeing this, the Macedonians clapped their*

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hands and shouted for the king to kiss the victor, until their persistence was rewarded by the spectacle of Alexander embracing the eunuch and kissing him passionately.

12.61 Having brought all the eastern coastal regions beneath his sway, the king conceived plans that were unbounded in their ambition. He intended to cross from Syria into Africa in pursuit of his animosity towards the Carthaginians for their aid to Tyre *during his siege*. Thence he would trek through the wastes of Numidia, directing his course towards Gades, for it was widely reported that the Pillars of Heracles lay thereabouts. Next he aimed to cross to Iberia, named after its eponymous river. Afterwards he would march up to the Alps, but detour around them along the coast of Italy, whence it is but a short voyage to Epirus *and his homeland*. To these ends he issued commands to the governors of Mesopotamia to fell timber on Mount Lebanon and to convey it to the Syrian city of Thapsacus; there to lay the keels of 700 ships, all septiremes³, for delivery to Babylon *via the Euphrates*. The kings of Cyprus were ordered to supply the requisite bronze, hemp and sails. Whilst Alexander concerned himself with these matters, letters from the Indian kings, Porus and Taxiles, were brought to him, advising that Abisares had ailed and died and Alexander's viceroy, Philip, had perished from a wound, though the culprits had been punished. Accordingly, the king appointed Eudaemon, a commander of the Thracian troops, in Philip's stead and endorsed the inheritance of Abisares' kingdom by his son.

12.62 Afterwards the king arrived at Parsagada, where the people are Persians. Their satrap was Orsines, pre-eminent among all the inhabitants due to a combination of noble ancestry and wealth. His family were descended from that Cyrus who had once reigned over the Persians. He had inherited the family fortune, which he had considerably augmented in the course of a lengthy tenure of the Satrapy. He showered gifts upon Alexander and purposefully directed his largesse upon the king's Friends as well. Herds of ready-broken horses trotted in his train, together with gilded chariots, magnificent furniture, flawless gems, massive golden vases, rich purple robes and three thousand talents of silver coin. Yet this immense profligacy of the barbarian was to lead to his death. For having bestowed presents exceeding all expectations upon the rest of Alexander's Friends, he conspicuously neglected similarly to honour Bagoas, the eunuch who had won Alexander's affection by making himself sexually available to the king. Orsines was actually cautioned by certain individuals that Bagoas was very dear to Alexander, but he quipped: "I wished to show my respect for the king's noblemen, rather than for his whores, for it is not the Persian custom to treat as men those who adopt the female sexual role."

12.63 On hearing of this, the eunuch *directed all his power and energy towards the downfall of the satrap*. *By making surreptitious enquiries he discovered Persians who were willing to bear witness to the misdeeds of Orsines, but he counselled them to refrain from*

³ Probably two tiers of oars with three and four men per oar respectively.

making their accusations public until he should order it. Meanwhile in private he began to undermine Orsines' reputation with the king, so that although the satrap had not yet been charged, he was already less highly regarded. Bagoas even began to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by his sexual liaisons with Alexander, so that whenever he had aroused the king's passion for him he made accusations of acquisitiveness or even of sedition against the satrap.

12.64 Then it happened that Alexander ordered that the tomb of Cyrus should be opened, since he wished to reverence the corpse of the former monarch, which had been laid to rest within. He had supposed it to be a treasury crammed with gold and silver, for such was its widespread repute among the Persians. Yet in fact Alexander found nothing, save the king's decaying shield, two Scythian bows and a sabre. He set a golden crown upon the sarcophagus containing the body and draped it with his own cloak, musing that it was surprising that a monarch of such power and fame had been entombed with no more splendour than many an ordinary man. The eunuch, who was close beside him, gazed intently at Alexander: "What's so surprising about the tombs of kings being bare, when the mansions of satraps cannot hold all the gold gleaned from them? As for myself, I have never seen inside this vault before, but I heard from Darius that three thousand talents were buried with Cyrus. So the generous donations that Orsines has made to you were designed to purchase your favour using funds that he knew he could not anyway retain with impunity."

12.65 Thus Alexander already harboured some antipathy towards Orsines, when the witnesses to the satrap's criminality procured by Bagoas came before him. On the one hand Bagoas and on the other the testimonies of Orsines' own subjects filled the king's ears with capital charges. Before he even suspected that allegations had been made against him, the satrap found himself arraigned in fetters. Bagoas himself manhandled Orsines to his execution. At the same time Phradates was put to death, since he was suspected of having sought the throne *and Baryaxes too was executed, since he had worn the tiara upright, which is the prerogative of the Persian king.*

12.66 *The king had progressed with the army as far as the borders of Susianê, when the Indian Calanus, who was an adept philosopher and greatly respected by Alexander, decided to terminate his own life in an amazing ceremony. He had achieved the age of seventy-three without ever having suffered from sickness and considered that he had reached the limits of happiness in terms of both health and good fortune. Recently he had been ailing from a bowel complaint and was growing weaker day by day. He therefore petitioned the king to construct a vast pyre and to order the royal attendants to set it alight once he had clambered atop it.*

12.67 *Although Alexander sought to dissuade Calanus from this end, the philosopher proved resolute, so the king eventually agreed to arrange the*

matter. When word of the event had spread and the pyre had been erected, crowds gathered to witness the astonishing spectacle. The naked philosopher rode to his death on a fine steed, but dismounted at the base of the pyre to offer prayers. After also sprinkling himself with holy oil and casting a lock of his hair upon the edifice, Calanus contentedly climbed to its apex and turned to salute the Macedonian spectators, exhorting them to celebrate the day in revelry with their king. Yet he declined to bid farewell to Alexander himself, saying only that he would see him again soon in Babylon. Then he lay down and covered his head and did not stir at all as he was swallowed by the flames and perished. Thus he sacrificed himself in accordance with the ancient custom of the wise men of his country, for they consider it a sacred duty when their bodies become polluted by disease to purify themselves in fire. Some of those who attended considered him insane; others again considered it an arrogant exhibition of pride in his indifference to pain; others still simply marvelled at his strength of spirit and his contempt for death. Alexander duly proceeded to celebrate the funeral of Calanus with splendid festivities.



Figure 12.2. The weddings at Susa (late 19th century, after Andreas Muller).

12.68 *The king continued onwards to Susa, where he held magnificent wedding ceremonies. He himself took Stateira, the elder daughter of Darius, as his wife, whilst marrying her younger sister Drypetis to Hephastion. He also persuaded the most influential of his Friends and noblemen to take Persian brides selected from the most aristocratic*

families. Thus he forestalled criticism of his union with the former enemy by making all the senior men complicit in his policy.

12.69 *At this juncture a band of thirty thousand Persian youths arrived at Susa, the cream of their generation, chosen for their comeliness and strength. They had been recruited as boys three years beforehand at Alexander's behest and had since completed a course of military training under expert tuition. All were elaborately outfitted with Macedonian panoplies and weaponry and they set up their camp in front of the city, where the king came to review them. They performed their military exercises and utilised their weapons with such skill, vigour, agility and discipline that Alexander was greatly pleased and issued them a commendation. However, the Macedonian troops were downcast, fearing that their king would be freed from his reliance upon them, now that he had these young war-dancers with whom he could go on to conquer all mankind. Indeed it was recalled that the Macedonians had not merely refused to march on to the Ganges in India, but were regularly insubordinate at assemblies and lampooned Alexander's adoption of Ammon as his heavenly father. Indeed it was as a counter-weight to the power of the Macedonian phalanx that Alexander had conceived and formed the new cadre from a single age-stream of Persian youths.*

12.70 These were the concerns of Alexander *in the twelfth year of his reign.*