

**4.11** But, whilst the scouts were retracing their tracks, a huge host was glimpsed in the distance. Thereafter all over the flats fires began to flare and a blaze appeared to be burning everywhere without intermittence, since the sprawling horde of men had dispersed especially spaciouly on account of their beasts of burden. Therefore, rejoicing that the contest would take place there, in that most ideally narrow of courses, as he had begged in his every prayer, Alexander commanded his forces to lay out their camp just where they were. However, as commonly occurs when the occasion of a decisive battle nears, ***the king's confidence gave way to fears.*** *The numerical superiority of the enemy was cause for anxiety and he was afraid of Fortune herself, whose favour had furthered his affairs so prosperously and, not unreasonably considering what she had done for him, he was concerned about her inconstancy. Just a single night now lay between him and the outcome of such a critical fight. Conversely, he reckoned the rewards outweighed the jeopardy and, although it was dubious whether he would win a victory, it was at any rate certain that, should he die, it would be heroically and with great glory. Certainly, to delay the confrontation would be to increase their insecurity, for it would foster despondency among his military.*

**4.12** Therefore he told his soldiers to refresh themselves and thereafter at the third watch to be armed and ready. Alexander himself ascended to the crest of a lofty ridge and, lit by the enveloping light of multiple torches, he sacrificed to the guardian gods of the vicinity in accordance with the custom of his country. The third blast of the trumpet was heard by the troops as had been ordered and they were now well prepared for both marching and for battle. They were told to advance at the double, such that by dawn they had reached the narrow strip of land where they had determined that they should make their stand. Those **scouts sent forward on a foray reported that Darius lay thirty stades away, his forces as drawn up for battle making for a menacing spectacle.** Thereupon Alexander halted his formations, donned his armour and **decreed his dispositions.**

**4.13** Panicked peasants brought the news to Darius of the arrival of his foes. He could hardly believe that those fugitives that he had been pursuing were actually advancing upon him. Therefore no little stress obsessed the minds of all, for they were fitted out for marching rather than for combat, so they rushed to snatch up their arms for the spat. But the very haste of those that scurried about and their invocation of their colleagues to take up their arms instilled still greater trepidation. Others went up onto the mountain ridge in order to get a good view of the formation of the enemy forces, whilst many more bridled their horses. No single chain of command controlled this disorderly army, amongst which diverse disruptions had stirred everyone into a frenzy. Originally, Darius had ordained that the mountain ridge should be occupied by a detachment in order to envelop his enemy's rear as well as his front. Also along the shoreline that afforded his right flank protection he planned to throw forward further troops so as to harry his foe from every direction. Additionally, twenty thousand soldiers he had sent forward with a battalion of archers were ordered to ford the

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Pinarus River, which coursed between the rival arrays of soldiery, and told to block the advance of the Macedonian military. If they could not hold their ground, they were to withdraw into the mountains and covertly to go right around the endmost of the enemy. But Fortune upset these worthy intentions, proving more influential than all calculations. For out of fear some did not dare to execute their mission, whereas others vainly pursued its execution, since when some parts show indecision, the whole is thrown into confusion.

**4.14** Darius deployed his forces in the following fashion. Nabarzanes covered the right wing with his cavalry bolstered by about twenty thousand slingers and archers. On the same wing, Themistocles led the Greek mercenary infantry, comprising thirty thousand soldiers, unquestionably the backbone of Darius's army and the equal of the Macedonian phalangite fighters. On the left wing twenty thousand barbarian infantry were commanded by the Thessalian Aristomedes and the king disposed his most pugnacious peoples in support of these. Darius himself meant to fight on that side of his army accompanied by three thousand elite cavalry, his usual bodyguards, and forty thousand infantry. Then the Hyrcanian and Median cavalry came after these and adjoining them, extending both to their right and their left, were the cavalry of other nationalities. Six thousand slingers and javelin-throwers preceded these formations whilst they were stood at their specified stations. He had filled up with his forces every accessible spot in that corridor, and the wings reached to the ridges on one side and on the other plastered the shore. The wife and mother of the king and the rest of the retinue of women were received into the core of the corps.

**4.15** *Alexander conceived this to be a heaven-sent opportunity to dispel the power of the Persians by a single victory, so he arrayed his infantry and cavalry appropriately.* He placed his phalanx to the fore, for no others amongst the Macedonians were mightier in war. Nicanor, the son of Parmenion, had custody of the right wing with Coenus, Perdikkas, Meleager, Ptolemaeus<sup>36</sup> and Amyntas standing by him, each leading his own battalion. Craterus and Parmenion were on the left wing, which stretched to the sea, but Craterus was bidden to obey Parmenion. *Cavalry were stationed on either wing: the right flank was covered by the Macedonians in combination on their left with the Thessalians* and the left wing was held by the Peloponnesians. Ahead of this battlefield Alexander deployed a company of slingers intermingled with archers. Thracians and Cretans also sallied forward, since they too were only lightly armoured. But against those sent forth by Darius to make the mountain ridge their base he flung the Agrianians, just lately arrived from Thrace. Furthermore, he instructed Parmenion to expand his lines as much as possible towards the sea in order to form his fighting front further away from the mountains, which were occupied by the foreign forces of his enemy. But, having dared neither to make a stand against the oncoming

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<sup>36</sup> Ptolemaeus the son of Seleucus: he died in the ensuing battle.

Macedonians nor to get in behind them as they passed them by, these particular barbarians, being especially intimidated by the sight of the slingers, had opted to fly. This eventuality secured the flank of Alexander's formation, which he had feared might be assailed from a greater elevation. The Macedonian phalanx advanced in a depth of thirty-two ranks, for the narrow corridor did not permit a more extensive cordon. But then the mountain gorges gradually began to broaden and afford more space, so that, not only could the infantry assume their normal number of ranks, but *the cavalry*, who had *occupied the whole front*, could also wheel into place around the flanks.<sup>37</sup>

4.16 At this point the two armies came in sight of one another, though still beyond the range of spears, whereupon *the foremost Persians raised up rough and ragged cheers, which spread through all their half a million warriors. These were reciprocated by the Macedonians with more force than the strength of their numbers by virtue of the reverberations from the peaks and desolate mountain pastures.* For crags and highlands situated roundabout always echo and amplify any audible shout. *Alexander forged ahead of his foremost standards and held up his hand frequently to halt his array, so that they should not through impetuosity be winded when they entered the fray and to accustom their vision to toleration of the sight of their seething opposition. And as he rode along his ranks he addressed his soldiers in various terms as suited their respective characters. The Macedonians, winners of so many wars in Europe, who not so much at his but rather their own instigation had engaged upon the subjection of Asia and the uttermost Orient, he reminded of the traditional bravery of their nation. They were the deliverers of all the world's territories, who would someday surpass the boundaries reached by Dionysus and Heracles. They would not only impose their yoke upon the Persians, but also upon all nations. Bactria and India would be provinces of the Macedonians. What they regarded with wonder currently was the least of what there was to see, but everything would be revealed to them by victory. Profitless endeavours amidst the pinnacles of Illyria or the crags of Thrace were not their destiny, but rather the riches of the entire East prospectively. And there would scarcely be any work for their swords, for a shove of their shields would shift those panic-stricken wavering hordes. In addition to this, Alexander hailed his father Philip, who had defeated the Athenians, and he put his men in mind of the subjugation of the Boeotians and the tearing down of their most renowned town. He recalled their battlefront at the Granicus at one juncture and the many cities they had either stormed or received in surrender at another, reflecting that everything*

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<sup>37</sup> The account of the Battle of Issus by Alexander's court historian, Callisthenes of Olynthus, survives via Polybius 12.17-22; he explained that Alexander drew up his phalanx initially 32-deep as he came northwards back through the pass, but that he was able to reduce this to 16-deep then 8-deep as the coastal plain widened and he was able to broaden his front; it seems likely that Cleitarchus drew upon this account.

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behind their backs had been overthrown and trampled in their tracks. *He also told them that the impending battle would be both the termination of their toil and the culmination of their glory.*



Figure 4.1. Alexander addresses his officers before Issus (André Castaigne, 1898)