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ALEXANDER THE GREAT IN PERSEPOLIS¹

Summary: While in Fars (January/February–May/June 330 B.C.) Alexander tried to gain acceptance of the Persians as the lawful successor to the Achaemenid kings. Failure of this endeavour and the perceived danger of Darius' III lead to a Macedonian campaign of terror aiming at breaking the Persian will to resist. It culminated in burning three palatial buildings in Persepolis in May 330 B.C. Alexander's decision to do so, rational at the moment of its execution, proved a mistake after the resistance organized by Darius III collapsed.

Key words: Alexander the Great, Persepolis.

This paper is another attempt to reconstruct and analyse arguably the most often discussed episode in Alexander's career: the burning of the palaces of the Persian kings in Persepolis in 330 (all dates in this paper are B.C.). In recent years several new theories have been raised, concerning both the date of this event and its explanation. I will argue here that the palaces were burned near the end of Alexander's sojourn in Fars and that it happened because of his failure to gain approval of the Persians as the lawful successor to the Achaemenid kings.

Persepolis, founded by Darius I before 509, was one of several capitals of the Persian Empire, alongside Susa, Ecbatana and Babylon. Every year the itinerant royal court travelled between these capitals, spending a few months in each city.² In all probability, the Great King spent the autumn in Persepolis.³ Persepolis consisted of a magnificent palatial complex, spread on a terrace occupying 12.5 hectares, and of a city, inhabited by Persian aristocracy and court officials, among others.

The palaces, the majestic ruins of which still grace the foothill of Mt. Rahmat, have been thoroughly studied by archaeologists, while the city has not been excavated so far and is known only from literary evidence. Even today, so much more

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² About the 'itinerant' nature of the Persian Empire see P. BRIANT: *Histoire de l'Empire perse. De Cyrus à Alexandre*, Paris 1996, p. 200–201.

³ Aristoboulos and Chares apud Ath., 12.8; cf. BRIANT: *Histoire*, p. 180–181, 197–198.

remains to be seen in Persepolis than in other ancient Persian capitals that there should be little doubt that, in contrast with other palaces built of mud bricks, those in Persepolis were constructed to a large extent of stone, both local and imported, often from far corners of the empire. A large expense involved, the high artistic quality of architecture and reliefs, as well as their original iconographic program testify to the exceptional role of Persepolis in the Persian Empire. In no other place such manifest reflection of the Achaemenid ideology and their position within the cosmic order created by Ahuramazda can be found.⁴ Moreover, Persepolis was the capital of the Achaemenids in their native land of Fars, the privileged province of the Persian Empire.

Alexander reached Persepolis in January 330 by way of the Persian Gates, marching from Susa, captured in the late autumn of 331. The taking of Persian capitals was the outcome of the decisive victory in the war with Darius III at Gaugamela on 1 October 331. Some four months spent by Alexander in Persepolis was his longest stay in one place throughout all of his career; it was interrupted only by short forays to various places in Fars. Upon his arrival, Alexander allowed his soldiers to loot the city of Persepolis and to massacre its inhabitants.⁵

At one point (some) palatial buildings were put to torch. Recently N. G. L. Hammond tried to assail the generally accepted date of the burning of palaces near the end of Alexander's first visit in Fars.⁶ He rejects the story of the sack of the city of Persepolis as a rhetorical fabrication and believes that in fact the palaces were burnt immediately after Alexander's arrival, i.e., in January 330. There is, however, nothing in our sources which makes the story of the sack of the city of Persepolis unbelievable.⁷ To that, there is also logistics to reckon with. Before the palaces were destroyed, the enormous amount of 120,000 talents of gold and silver taken in Persepolis were transported on orders of Alexander to Susa (ca. 600 km) on some 10,000 mules and 3000 pack camels. Most of these animals had to be brought from Babylonia and Elam, together with stacks of fodder not available in winter-time Fars. Then, some time was necessary for loading at least 3000 tons of gold and silver on animals and for arranging heavily guarded convoys. This operation had to take more than two months, which of course disproves Hammond's hypothesis of the early date of the burning of the palaces.⁸ The current state of evidence suggests that the traditionally accepted late date of the Persepolis fire in May 330 holds.⁹

The fate of the palaces is related by all principal literary sources to Alexander.⁹ As it happens very often, Alexander-historians differ in their rendering of the details of events they describe. The Vulgate authors (Diodorus, Curtius Rufius, Plutarch)

⁴ T. CUYLER YOUNG, in: *CAH IV²*, Cambridge 1988, p. 108–110; J. WIESEHÖFER: *Ancient Persia. From 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.*, London and New York 1996, p. 24–26; BRIANT: *Histoire*, p. 183–228.

⁵ Diod. 17.71.3; Curt., 5.6. On the historicity of this episode see E. BADIAN, in: *Cambridge History of Iran* (ed. I. Gershevitch), vol. II, Cambridge 1985, p. 440; E. F. BLOEDOW, H. M. LOUBE: “Alexander the Great ‘under fire’ at Persepolis”, *Klio* 79 (1997), p. 349.

⁶ N. G. L. HAMMOND: “The Archaeological and Literary Evidence for the Burning of the Persepolis Palace”, *CQ* 42 (1992), p. 358–364.

⁷ See note 5.

⁸ See BLOEDOW, LOUBE, p. 347–352.

⁹ Arr., *An.*, 3.18.10–12; Diod., 17.70–72; Str., 15.3.6; Curt., 5.7.2–11; Plu., *Alex.*, 38; *It. Alex.*, 67.

show the decision to burn the palaces taken by Alexander during a banquet, at a moment of intoxication. Allegedly, he was prompted to do so by the Athenian hetaira Thais who delivered a speech urging Alexander to exact vengeance on Persians for their misdeeds towards Greek (i.e., Athenian) temples. In Arrian's account, Alexander makes the decision to burn the palaces having rejected (as always) Parmenio's advice to the contrary. His rationale is again retribution. Strabo and the anonymous *Itinerarium Alexandri*, based on Arrian¹⁰, present the same motive behind Alexander's deliberate choice. For all differences between the two traditions and notwithstanding the romantic details in the Vulgate authors, the sheer fact of the Persepolis fire cannot be put in doubt: in the Apadana, in the Treasury and in the Hall of 100 Columns archaeologists have uncovered an appropriately dated 0.3–1 m thick layer of ash.¹¹ In it they found charred fragments of cedar wood which, on evidence of Curtius Rufus (5.7.5), was among principal building materials in Persepolis.

The most important differences in our sources amount to the opposition between the rational Alexander in Arrian and Strabo versus the irrational Alexander in the Vulgate, as well as the absence of Thais versus her active participation in the event. Such disparity in Alexander-historians is not uncommon because of different sources in the Vulgate and in Arrian. This time it is practically certain that the Vulgate version is derived from Cleitarchus, since Athenaeus quotes him blaming Thais for burning Persepolis.¹² Sober and seemingly free of rhetoric, Arrian, who based his account on Aristoboulos and Ptolemy, is usually more reliable than the Vulgate. The case of Thais is an exception to this rule. It is not enough to deny with Tarn and Hammond¹³ her participation in the torching of the palaces just because Arrian does not mention her. Arrian or his source may have skipped her involvement in the incident as a minor detail in comparison with the great political act of burning the palaces of Xerxes.¹⁴ It is worth mentioning, too, that Thais was a long-time companion (perhaps a wife) of Ptolemy I.¹⁵ The destruction of splendid works of art at Persepolis was a less than glorious affair, soon deplored by Alexander himself.¹⁶ Therefore one can easily imagine that reminding the reader of Thais' involvement in this episode may have been somewhat embarrassing to Ptolemy¹⁷, which perhaps explains why Arrian does not mention it.

¹⁰ H.-J. HAUSMANN: *Itinerarium Alexandri*. (Kritische Edition), Köln 1970, s. IV–V.

¹¹ E. SCHMIDT: *The Treasury of Persepolis and Other Discoveries in the Homeland of Achaemenians*, vol. I, Chicago 1953, p. 78.

¹² Ath., 13.37: Θοίδα ... περὶ ἣς φησι Κλείταρχος ὡς αἰτίας γενομένης τοῦ ἐμπρησθῆναι τὰ ἐν Περσεπόλει βασίλεια.

¹³ W. W. TARN: *Alexander the Great*, II, Cambridge 1948, p. 48–50; HAMMOND: loc. cit; also U. WILCKEN: *Alexander the Great*, New York 1967, p. 145; L. PEARSON: *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great*, New York 1960, p. 218–219; E. FREDRICKSMEYER: “Alexander the Great and the Kingdom of Asia” in: A. B. BOSWORTH, E. J. BAYNHAM (eds.): *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, Oxford 2000, p. 149.

¹⁴ E. N. BORZA: “Fire from heaven: Alexander at Persepolis”, *Cl. Ph.* 67 (1972), p. 234.

¹⁵ Ath., 13.37.

¹⁶ Plu., *Alex.*, 38.8; Curt., 5.7.10.

¹⁷ W. M. ELLIS: *Ptolemy of Egypt*, London and New York 1994, p. 9.

For a long time the burning of Persepolis was perceived in modern historiography as a deliberate, political act. The vengeance motive, although present in all our sources, has been mostly perceived as unconvincing. Beside or instead of it modern scholars used to view the burning of the palaces as Alexander's act of enthronement and a sign for Asia that the Persian empire ended in flames¹⁸. Wilcken supplemented Arrian by stressing Alexander's role as a *hegemon* of the League of Corinth, responsible for waging war to avenge Greek losses suffered during the fifth-century Persian wars.¹⁹ Tarn saw the Persepolis fire as a sign for Asia marking the fall of the Achaemenids and avenging the atrocities of the Persian occupation, in the first place avenging the destruction of the Esagila in Babylon by Xerxes.²⁰ Some scholars suggest that Alexander wanted to deprive Darius III of a focal point of nationalistic feelings in the ceremonial capital, to which all nations of the Persian Empire flocked in homage during the equinox celebration of the Persian new year (No Rüz).²¹ In recent years the influence of panhellenic thinking on Alexander has been stressed once again and with it came attempts to understand his setting the palaces ablaze as the fulfilment of Alexander's responsibilities as the commander-in-chief of the Greek war of vengeance.²²

Some try to approach the problem of the burning of the palaces in Persepolis in the context of the war between Agis III of Sparta and Antipater.²³ Alexander was to burn Persepolis hoping to convince the Greeks that the panhellenic crusade was not yet over and thus to dissuade them from joining forces with Agis. Hence Alexander was willing to risk estranging his Iranian subjects in order to save Antipater from a military debacle, which would have surely forced the king himself to abort the expedition and to return to Macedonia. Unfortunately, chronology undermines this attractive theory. On the testimony of Curtius Rufus (6.1.21), Agis lost the decisive battle and his life at Megalopolis before Gaugamela and notwithstanding the speed of communication in the 4th century, Alexander must have learned about it within a month

¹⁸ J. G. DROYSSEN: *Gesch. Alex.*, s. 291; (cf. E. F. BLOEDOW: “That great puzzle in the history of Alexander”: back into ‘the primal pit of historical murk’”, in: *Rom und der griechische Osten: Festschrift für Hatto H. Schmitt zum 65. Geburtstag*, hrsg. Ch. SCHUBERT, Stuttgart 1995, p. 30). See also H. E. STIER: *Welteroberung und Weltfriede im Wirken Alexanders d. g.*, Opladen 1973, p. 25–31. These nineteenth-century ideas were recently revived with some modification in Fredricksmeier, loc. cit.

¹⁹ WILCKEN: *Alexander*, p. 144–145; also: E. KORNEMANN: *Weltgeschichte des Mittelmeer-Raumes*, I, Munich 1948, s. 94; H. BENGTON: *Griechische Geschichte von Anfängen bis in die römische Kaiserzeit*, Munich 1977, p. 366–367; with some reservation: M. WHEELER: *Flames over Persepolis*, London 1968, p. 24.

²⁰ TARN, p. 54; also G. WIRTH: “Dareios und Alexander”, *Chiron* 1 (1971), p. 150, n. 70; idem: *Brand*, p. 231–234.

²¹ P. GOUKOWSKY: “Alexandre et la conquête de l’Orient (336–323)”, in: E. WILL (ed.): *Le monde grec et l’Orient, II Le IV^e siècle et l’époque hellénistique*, Paris 1975, p. 274; BORZA: “Fire”, p. 242–243.

²² Wirth: *Brand*, p. 224–225; M. B. HATZOPoulos: “Alexandre en Perse: la revanche et l’empire”, *ZPE* 116 (1997), p. 51; M. FLOWER: “Alexander the Great and Panhellenism”, in: A. B. BOSWORTH, E. J. BAYNHAM (eds.): *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction*, Oxford 2000, p. 114.

²³ E. BADIAN: “Alexander the Great and the Creation of an Empire”, *History Today* 8 (1958), p. 376; idem, *CHI* II, p. 445–447; in greatest detail idem, “Agis III: Revisions and Reflections”, in: I. WORTHINGTON (ed.): *Ventures into Greek History*, Oxford 1994, p. 258–292.

or two, at any rate well before arriving at Persepolis.²⁴ At this point, an attempt to impress the Greeks even with the finest example of a panhellenic act of vengeance would have been superfluous. Moreover, selecting Persepolis as a symbol in a Graeco-Persian war would not be a very good choice. Persepolis tablets show that Persian authorities tightly controlled and restricted movements of foreigners east of the Zagros mountains; in fact we do not know of any visit in Persepolis of a Greek traveller or diplomat.²⁵ The Vulgate tradition indicates that Greeks, probably working involuntarily in Fars, were mutilated to such an extent that they did not want to return to their native land,²⁶ as the Greek cultural taboos concerning the integrity and beauty of the human body would have made their lives in Greece unbearable. In spite of the well attested Greek presence in Achaemenid-era Fars, as far as we know, Persepolis was virtually unknown to Greek public opinion before Alexander. For the Greeks the capital city of the Achaemenid Empire was Susa, where the Great King granted audience to foreign ambassadors.²⁷ In Greek literature before Alexander Susa is mentioned at least 36 times, while Persepolis no more than twice.²⁸ If Alexander was aiming at a symbolic gesture demonstrating to the Greeks that his real war aim was avenging the sacrilegious acts of Xerxes,²⁹ he would have burnt the palace in Susa and not in the obscure Persepolis. Hence, it is not surprising that our sources do not show either Alexander spreading in Greece the news of the alleged panhellenic act of retribution or any immediate impact of this news in Greece. Contrary to what Flower³⁰ says, epigram *AP* 6.344 is not a positive proof of favour won by Alexander in Greece thanks to his burning of Persepolis. This epigram is a dedication of a tripod to Zeus, offered by the Thespian hoplites who fought for Alexander and destroyed Persian *cities*. This last expression (*Περσῶν ἄστη*) is so vague, that it surely refers to unspecified victories over the ancestral enemy and not specifically to Persepolis. The precise date of commissioning this epigram is unknown; most likely it was inscribed when the Thespian veterans returned safely home. It attests to their joy of safe homecoming and pride of having taken part in a great war but not to the political impact of the Persepolis fire in Greece in 330. Our sources do not give any clue as to the symbolic importance of Persepolis in the eyes of non-Iranian (e.g., Babylonian) subjects of the Great King either. Therefore no hypothesis should be advanced as to the possible impact of the Persepolis fire in Mesopotamia or elsewhere in Western Asia.

The protracted search for Alexander's rationale at Persepolis has failed to produce convincing results. Some of the theories referred to above are based on inade-

²⁴ E. BORZA, a note to English translation of Wilcken, *Alexander the Great*, p. 337; idem, "Fire", p. 238–242; Wirth, *Brand*, p. 211–223.

²⁵ J. M. COOK, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, II, Cambridge 1985, p. 241.

²⁶ Ps.-Callisth., 2.18; Curt., 5.5; Diod. 17.69.3–4; Just. 11.14; cf. R. KULESZA: "Persian deportations: Greeks in Persia", *Eos* 82 (1994), p. 241–244; BRIANT: *Historie*, p. 755–756.

²⁷ Chr. TUPLIN: *Achaemenid Studies*, Stuttgart 1996 (Historia. Einzelschriften 99), p. 137–140; FREDRICKSMEYER: "Alexander", p. 148.

²⁸ As Parsa/Persai: Arist., *Mir.* 838a; Ctes., *FGrH* 688F36; although Ctesias may be referring to Fars rather than to Persepolis, cf. K. GŁOBIOWSKI: *Ktezjasz z Knidos. Grecki historyk perskiej monarchii Achemenidów*, Gdańsk 1981, p. 192.

²⁹ So recently: HATZOPoulos: "Alexandre", p. 45–52; FLOWER, "Alexander", p. 114.

³⁰ "Alexander", p. 115.

quate sources, or even on legends enshrined in scholarly literature. Among them is the belief in Persian atrocities in Babylon, in the destruction of the Esagila by Xerxes, or in the role of Persepolis as the ritual city in which the No Rüz festival was allegedly celebrated already in the Achaemenid period.³¹ Moreover, nobody has been able to identify any positive outcome of the Persepolis fire to Alexander's identifiable political aims. All of this has weakened the original belief in the burning of the palaces in Persepolis as a premeditated act of policy. This corresponds with the tendency prevailing in Alexander studies to relinquish looking for motives and aims. In the case of the Persepolis fire the bacchic elements present in the Vulgate³² or the role of Thais in this incident have come to the fore. Some scholars doubt any political designs of Alexander in this case and explain the torching of the Persian palaces as an accident during a rowdy banquet,³³ or a result of boredom and exhaustion of the soldiers after four years of marching and battles.³⁴ Already A.T. Olmstead in his classic *History of the Persian Empire* perceived the burning of Persepolis as an act of useless barbaric vandalism.³⁵ For Atkinson vandalism can be understood as a manifestation of repressed creativity (of Macedonian soldiers).³⁶ Radet regarded the fateful events in Persepolis as a recreation of bacchic rituals.³⁷ In recent times some scholars have been pointing at the irrational elements in Alexander's behaviour and at his demonic nature.³⁸ To a degree, this inadvertently reflects the Persian Zoroastrian tradition of the Macedonians as demons from the land of wrath who came to destroy Iran and overturn the true religion.³⁹

Explaining the torching of the palaces in Persepolis by alcohol abuse and relegating the act to the realm of the irrational seems a sign of despair among Alexander-scholars, unable to find any rationale in his action. One should not, however, forget that no (other) examples of important political decisions taken under the influence of alcohol can be found in Alexander's life with any certainty.⁴⁰ Both archaeology and the careful analysis of the Vulgate tradition speak against regarding the burning of Persepolis as an accident at a drinking party. Already Plutarch, commenting upon Thais' encouraging Alexander to avenge the crimes of Xerxes, noticed that "she ... was moved to utter a speech which befitting the character of her native country, but

³¹ See BRIANT: *Histoire*, s. 197–198.

³² Diod., 17.72; FREDRICKSMEYER: "Alexander", p. 149–150.

³³ So already H. BERVE: "Die Verschmelzungspolitik Alexanders des Grossen", *Klio* 31 (1938), p. 146–147; G. T. GRIFFITH: "Alexander the Great and an experiment in government", *PCPhS* 10 (1964), p. 37, n. 3.

³⁴ J. ATKINSON: "Troubled spirits in Persepolis", in: U. VOGEL-WEIDEMANN (ed.): *Charisterion C.P.T. Naudé*, Pretoria 1993, p. 9–10.

³⁵ P. 480–482 (page numbers after Polish edition of 1974).

³⁶ ATKINSON: "Troubled", p. 9–10.

³⁷ G. RADET: *Alexandre le Grand*, Paris 1950, p. 188–9.

³⁸ E.g. BLOEDOW, "Great Puzzle", passim; BLOEDOW, LOUBE, p. 352.

³⁹ Tradition contained in the Prophecy of Hystaspes, or in the Bahman Yasht. See S. K. EDDY, *The King is Dead. Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334–31 B.C.*, Lincoln 1961, p. 3–80, 324–349.

⁴⁰ Nor on passing impulse either, see, BADIAN, *CHI* II, p. 445.

was too lofty for one of her kind.”⁴¹ In other words, her speech, befitting Athens, was in fact a Greek literary *topos* and quite an unlikely elucubration for a prostitute⁴² entertaining Macedonian soldiers at a drinking party. The whole scene preceding the fire in the Vulgate is an unintended parody of a war council during which the commander-in-chief listens to the opinions of his generals and consents to the majority view: “*Ebrio scorto de tanta re ferente sententiam unus, alter, et ipsi mero onerati, adsentientur. Rex quoque avidior fuit quam patientior: “Quin igitur ulciscimur Graeciam et urbi faces subdimus?”*”⁴³

Alexander’s consent to the advice of this grotesque war council is even more peculiar in the light of what we know from the same sources about his decision-making process. As a rule, Alexander made decisions by himself, often disregarding the advice of his most senior generals, including Parmenio. As I have indicated earlier, it is not advisable to deny Thais’ participation in the whole incident just because Arrian does not mention her, but her real role was certainly less prominent than what Cleitarchus and the Vulgate attribute to her. It is extremely unlikely that her advice was the ultimate cause of the burning of the Persian palaces. On the other hand, she may have been used as a convenient tool by Alexander, the noted master of manipulating people to his ends.⁴⁴

Apart from the literary sources, archaeology provides us with some additional information on the burning of Persepolis. First of all, we know that fire consumed in Persepolis not one but three buildings: the Apadana, the Hall of 100 Columns, and the Treasury. A comparatively large distance between them and their construction (the outer shell of stone and mud bricks, clay-covered roofs) practically precluded the spontaneous spreading of fire from one building to another.⁴⁵ In all probability each of them was set on fire deliberately which points to a premeditated decision to burn them. The 21 coins and the minute number of mostly cheap jewellery items, found by archaeologists in Persepolis, stay in sharp contrast to the enormous riches once stored there. Quite obviously there was enough time to clear the palatial complex, the Treasury in particular, of all valuables well in advance of the fire. This corresponds with Diodorus’ account that the wealth of Persepolis was transferred to Susa on Alexander’s orders.⁴⁶ Archaeological evidence suggests a deliberate decision to torch the palaces rather than a fire started on impulse by drunken guests at a banquet.⁴⁷

It has not been possible to explain this decision in reference to either Greece or non-Iranian countries of the Achaemenid Empire. What remains is to look for a solution in the Iranian context of the winter and spring of 330, having in mind Alexan-

⁴¹ Plu., *Alex.*, 38.1, transl. by B. PERRIN (Loeb).

⁴² Vulgate authors, Curtius in particular, contrast unfavourably the low social position of Thais with the state matters upon which she pronounces her view, see E. BAYNHAM: *Alexander the Great. The Unique History of Quintus Curtius*, Ann Arbor 1999, p. 96–97.

⁴³ Curt., 5.7.4; similar Diod., 17.72; Plu., *Alex.*, 38.2.

⁴⁴ GOUKOWSKY, in: *Diodore de Sicile*, XVII, Paris 1976, p. 222; BADIAN: “Agis III”, p. 284; FLOWER: “Alexander”, p. 114.

⁴⁵ ATKINSON: “Troubled”, p. 5.

⁴⁶ SCHMIDT: *Persepolis* I, p. 16–78; Borza “Fire”, p. 235; BLOEDOW, LOUBE, p. 344–346.

⁴⁷ H. SANCISI-WEERDENBURG: “Alexander and Persepolis”, in: J. CARLSEN (ed.): *Alexander the Great: Reality and Myth*, Rome 1993, p. 181–182.

der's *modus operandi* during the war with Darius III. Alexander did not seek to win the war exclusively on military grounds, by defeating enemy in a string of pitched battles (Granicus, Issus, Gaugamela). Simultaneously he tried to win over the elites of the conquered countries in search of political gains and legitimacy of power. This policy succeeded in the coastal areas of Asia Minor,⁴⁸ in Egypt, in Babylonia. The same was to happen in Iran. Immediately after Gaugamela, Alexander let his army proclaim him the king of Persia,⁴⁹ publicly accepting the title to which he had laid claim in 332 in a diplomatic exchange with Darius III. The second proclamation could have taken place in April 330, during Alexander's stay in Fars.⁵⁰ As a lawful heir to the Achaemenids, Alexander sat on the throne of Darius III, adopted key elements of the Persian royal attire, Persian court ceremony, royal habits, and promoted eminent Iranian aristocrats to satrapal posts.⁵¹ The Persians, however, were not impressed. Even before reaching Fars, Alexander campaigned against the Uxii tribesmen who had close ties to the family of Darius III. On the way from Elam to Persis the Macedonian army had to face a remarkably tough resistance of the satrap Ario-barzanes, who inflicted on Alexander the only military defeat in the latter's career.⁵² While in Fars, Alexander tried to win over the Persians through symbolic gestures, the high point of which was the visit to Cyrus' tomb at Pasargadae.⁵³ The aim of the whole long sojourn in Fars was, as it seems, gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the inhabitants of the privileged province and the native country of the Achaemenids.⁵⁴ The effort was not successful. The authors write about the enmity between Alexander and the population of Fars and about his taking the fortified settlements by force.⁵⁵ The most serious clash was with the tribe of Mardi, faithful to the Achaemenids.⁵⁶ The implacable hostility of the Persians to Alexander explains why they alone were

⁴⁸ In greater detail: K. NAWOTKA: "Freedom of Greek cities in Asia Minor in the age of Alexander the Great", *Klio* 85 (2003), p. 15–41.

⁴⁹ Plu., *Alex.*, 34.1: Τοῦτο τῆς μάχης ἐκείνης λαβούστης τὸ πέρας, ἡ μὲν ὄρχη παντάπασιν ἡ Περσῶν ἐδόκει καταλελόσθαι, βασιλεὺς δὲ τῆς Ἀσίας Ἀλέξανδρος ἀνηγορευμένος. Cf. HAMILTON: *Commentary*, ad. loc.; F. SCHACHERMEYR: *Alexander der Große. Ingenium und Macht*, Wien 1973, p. 277–279; A. B. BOSWORTH: *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge 1988, p. 85.

⁵⁰ Ael., VH 2.25; the date after: E. GRZYBEK: *Du calendrier macédonien au calendrier ptolémaïque. Problèmes de chronologie hellénistique*, Basel 1990, p. 43–44.

⁵¹ BADIAN, *CHI* II, p. 450–452; WIESEHÖFER: *Ancient Persia*, p. 105–107; WIRTH: *Brand*, p. 223; BRIANT: *Histoire*, p. 90–94. About dress see my comment on Plu., *mor.*, 329f in Plutarch, *O szczęściu czy dzielności Aleksandra*, Wrocław 2003, p. 100–101. On Alexander as the successor to Darius III see GOUKOWSKY: "Alexandre", chapter 2.

⁵² About these campaigns see: BADIAN, *CHI* II, p. 440–443; BOSWORTH: *Conquest*, p. 88–91; W. HECKEL: "Resistance to Alexander the Great", in: L. A. TRITTLE (ed.): *The Greek World in the Fourth Century: From the Fall of the Athenian Empire to the Successors of Alexander*, London and New York 1997, p. 169–172.

⁵³ P. BRIANT: "Conquête territoriale et stratégie idéologique. Alexandre le Grand et l'idéologie monarchique achéménide", in: *Actes du Colloque international sur l'idéologie monarchique dans l'antiquité. Cracovie-Mogilany, du 23 au 26 Octobre 1977*, ZNUJ 536, Pr. Hist. 63, p. 65–72.

⁵⁴ WIESEHÖFER: *Ancient Persia*, p. 105.

⁵⁵ Curt. 5.6.17; Diod. 17.73.

⁵⁶ BRIANT: "Conquête", p. 79.

singled out in Aristotle's letter to Alexander (chapter 9)⁵⁷ for forced resettlement in Europe and Africa. It is doubtful if Alexander could at all legitimise his rule in Fars while Darius III was still alive.⁵⁸ The Persians saw themselves as the chosen people and believed that they could be ruled only by a Persian, Aryan, and Achaemenid, capable of following all taboos of the Persian sacral and heroic monarchy.⁵⁹

At that time Darius III in Eckbatana, some 600 km away, was trying to muster a new army for yet another battle. Since the formidable East Iranian cavalry managed to leave the battlefield at Gaugamela in good shape and Darius was awaiting his Scythian allies, it would have been foolish to disregard his forces.⁶⁰ By the same token, leaving behind not fully pacified Persis, with its pro-Achaemenid population, could incur unnecessary risk during the planned campaign against Darius III. Therefore the burning of the palaces in Persepolis should be perceived as the high point in Alexander's campaign of terror, waged in Fars when conciliatory gestures had failed. Persepolis, as no other place, embodied the might and glory of the Achaemenid monarchy. Destroying it with fire, the sacred element of Mazdaism, was to break the Persian will to resist the Macedonian invaders. These events are reflected in the Iranian Zoroastrian tradition, unique in its decidedly negative image of Alexander: blamed for killing Darius, attempting to destroy the true religion, extinguishing the sacred fires, burning one copy of the Avesta, stealing and having translated the other one, destroying cities, killing aristocrats and magi, and dividing the land of Ērānšahr.⁶¹ Not all of these accusations are equally trustworthy,⁶² but archaeological evidence suggests the ideology-laden nature of warfare conducted by the Macedonians in Fars. The treasury in Persepolis yielded fragments of ca. 300 stone mortars used in the production of *haoma* – a drink consumed in Zoroastrian religious ceremonies.⁶³ These heavy stone mortars were broken on purpose, probably by the Macedonian soldiers carrying out operation against the magi, guardians of religious and nationalistic traditions among the inhabitants of Fars.

Shortly after the palaces in Persepolis had been reduced to ashes, it turned out that the Scythian allies did not arrive and Darius III was unable to muster another army. The organised war effort lead by the last of the Achaemenids collapsed and by

⁵⁷ The letter (ed. by: M. PLEZIA, J. BIELAWSKI: *Lettre d'Aristote à Alexandre sur la Politique envers les cités*, Wrocław 1970) known from Arabic manuscript is probably an authentic document written in the summer of 330.

⁵⁸ Darius III was killed in June-July 330; GRZYBEK: *Calendrier*, p. 44, cf. H. HAUBER: "La chronologie macédonienne et ptolémaïque mise à l'épreuve: à propos d'un livre d'Ehrhardt Grzybek", *CdÉ* 67 (1992), p. 149.

⁵⁹ EDDY: *King is Dead*, p. 58–62; J. M. BALCER: "Alexander's Burning of Persepolis", *Iranica Antiqua* 13 (1978), p. 126–127.

⁶⁰ WIRTH: *Brand*, p. 174–175.

⁶¹ J. WIESEHÖFFER: "Zum Nachleben von Achemeniden und Alexander in Iran", *Achaemenid History* 8 (1994), p. 363–364, 395–397.

⁶² E.g. Darius III was murdered by Bessos and the written form of Avesta cannot be dated earlier than to the Sassanian times, hence Alexander could not have burned it; cf. WIESEHÖFFER: "Nachleben", p. 395–396.

⁶³ SCHMIDT: *Persepolis* II, p. 53–55; BALCER: "Burning", p. 31. About haoma in Zoroastrian cult see SCHWARTZ, *CHI* II, p. 676–677.

June/July 330 Darius III was dead. From this perspective the campaign of terror in Fars proved useless and Alexander soon came to regret his burning of the palaces in Persepolis.⁶⁴ Although no political benefits of this deed can be identified, there is no sufficient reason to deny that Alexander may have planned a positive outcome of the Persepolis fire. His planning was rational and based on the best knowledge he had in the spring of 330. He erred, but in Greece even gods were not infallible.

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⁶⁴ Plu., *Alex.*, 38.8; Curt., 5.7.10.