

Flipping the Coin: Alexander the Great's Bactrian-Sogdian Expedition from a Local Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines written sources pertinent to Alexander the Great's expedition in Bactria and Sogdiana. It focuses on the impact of the military campaigns on the local inhabitants in four interconnected fields of human activity (military, political, urban, and administrative) and addresses their responses to the invading army. It argues that Alexander's military activities took place not in Bactria-Sogdiana as a whole, but rather in specific Sogdian territories, inflicting heavy casualties in the process. It proposes that Alexander's decision to appoint Artabazus as satrap disrupted the political *status quo*, forcing a Sogdian faction to rebel and that his alliance with another local faction was crucial for pacifying the region. Comparing the available textual and archaeological evidence regarding the settlements of Bactria-Sogdiana in the 320s BC it assesses that Alexander's city building activity was limited. Lastly, the majority of the local population seems to have accepted the regime change.

KEYWORDS

Alexander the Great; Oxyartes; history of Central Asia; Bactria; Sogdiana; Achaemenid period; Hellenistic period.

INTRODUCTION

Alexander the Great needs no introduction. He belongs to that very small group of individuals, whose personality, deeds, and impact transcend time and space and take on legendary proportions. Alexander as we know him is a product of later times. Starting with the so-called 'Alexander historians',¹ who were active during the Roman Period (from approximately the mid-first century BC to the beginning of the third century AD), Alexander became a favourite topic of scholarly discourse for ancient, medieval, and modern scholars. Equally impressive is the spectrum of Alexander's reception through the passage of time, which ranges from extreme hostility to doting adoration.²

Alexander's sojourn in Western Central Asia (329–327 BC) is well documented in written sources and thoroughly researched by ancient and modern scholars. Equally investigated, if not more, due to the complexity and diversity of the available testimonies, is the Hellenistic period of this region (329–ca. 130 BC) and its cultural legacy to the successor states. Less examined, however, are the Achaemenid era of Bactria-Sogdiana (ca. 546–329 BC) and the impact of

1 These are Arrian, Diodorus Siculus, Justin, Plutarch, and Quintus Curtius Rufus.

2 The bibliography on Alexander is enormous, but I find that Tarn's 1933 article, 'Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind', is still a prime example of extreme favouritism towards Alexander, portraying him as the first person to envisage a unified humanity. On the other hand, Grainger (GRAINGER 2007) perceives Alexander as a 'Great Failure' causing the collapse of the Macedonian Empire through his shortcomings. For the reception of Alexander in the Hellenistic and Roman times see WALLACE 2018.

Alexander's conquest on the region's economic and socio-political *status quo*. This paper aims, first, to assess the immediate repercussions of the said campaign on the indigenous population (sedentary and nomadic, ordinary and elite) of Bactria-Sogdiana in the four generic and interconnected fields of human activity that are highlighted in our textual sources: military, political, urban, and administrative. Second, it aims to examine how the local elite reacted initially to Greek presence and how, eventually, they adapted to the new reality.

MILITARY ACTIVITIES

The first category is pretty much self-explanatory, if one considers that war is the predominant theme in Alexander's history. Presently, the focus will be on the impact of his direct military actions on the inhabitants of Bactria and Sogdiana.³ In the spring of 329 BC Alexander invaded Bactria to subdue Bessus, the last satrap of Bactria under the Achaemenid Empire. In the aftermath of the Persian defeat at Gaugamela (October 331 BC), Bessus had deposed Darius III and proclaimed himself Great King (Arrian *Anab.* III, 25.39; Curtius VI, 6.13; Diodorus XVII, 83.3). He retreated to his satrapy and attempted to rally the local nobility under his banner. However, Bessus failed to assess Alexander's military plans and determination. When Alexander reached Bactria, Bessus decided not to confront him there and retreated instead to Sogdiana (Arrian *Anab.* III, 28.8–10; Curtius VII, 4.20–21). His decision proved fatal: the Bactrians abandoned him (Arrian *Anab.* III, 28.10) and eventually his Sogdian allies surrendered him to Alexander in chains (Arrian *Anab.* III, 29.6–30.5; Curtius VII, 5.19–26; 5.36–38). Therefore, Alexander's army marched unchallenged from the Arachosian – Bactrian border to Sogdiana, north of the Oxus.

According to the 'Alexander Historians', the first local casualties of Alexander's expedition in the region were the Branchidae. Allegedly, they were the descendants of a priestly clan in charge of Apollo's Oracle at Didyma, who were relocated to Central Asia by Xerxes (Curtius VII, 5.28–35; Diodorus XVII, index *k*; Plutarch *Mor.* 557b; Strabo XI, 11.4; cf. Ammianus XXIX, 13.1; Herodotus VI, 19). This incident is very problematic and some scholars challenge its authenticity (BOSWORTH 1988, 108–109; HAMMOND 1998; HECKEL 2008, 95–96; HOLT 2005, 40–41; KUBICA 2016; RAPIN 2018, 280–281; PARKE 1985). It is highly probable that the Branchidae massacre is a fictional event derived from an amalgamation of different actual events that occurred in the region (RAPIN 2018, 280–281). For the purposes of this paper it is important that in the classical literary sources survives an account on the complete destruction of (an alleged 'Greek') settlement in Sogdiana and the slaughter of all its inhabitants. The Branchidae episode is only the first of a series of grisly events, which will be briefly presented in the following paragraphs: A skirmish between Alexander's foragers and Sogdians near the Iaxartes River led to the siege and capture of a mountainous Sogdian stronghold. Only 8,000 out of the 30,000 Sogdians, who took refuge in the stronghold, survived (Arrian *Anab.* III, 30.10–11; Curtius

3 Alexander and his forces were not the only ones to wreak havoc to Bactria-Sogdiana. Bessus laid waste to the Bactrian territory north of the Hindu Kush in a futile attempt to impede Alexander's advance (Arrian *Anab.* III, 28.8). Similarly, in the spring of 328 Spitamenes ravaged the surroundings of Zariaspa (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 16.5). Considering that the inhabitants of this area were loyal to Spitamenes, this course of action seems uncalled for. It could be interpreted as scorched earth policy presented in a different light by the Alexander historians. Different scenarios are equally plausible: the looting could be seen as extraction of payment promised to his Scythian allies; or as a sign that Spitamenes could not fully control all of the troops at his disposal. We should also not discard the possibility that Spitamenes was getting rid of dissidents and potential troublemakers. Lastly, a combination of all the above scenarios is possible.

VII, 6.1–5). Alexander's reaction upon being informed about Spitamenes' revolt is similar: his army sacked and pillaged several Sogdian cities and villages near the Iaxartes (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 1.4, 2.1–6, 3.1–5, Curtius VII, 6.16–23).⁴ The male population was slaughtered, the women and children were enslaved. And again, after the defeat at the Polytimetos (Zerafshan) River, the Greek and Macedonian army laid waste to the Zerafshan Valley, seizing and demolishing all villages and fortresses, killing the inhabitants and burning the crops (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 6.5; Curtius VII, 9.20–22).

In the spring of 328 BC Alexander set out from Bactra in order to pacify the rebellious territories. In order to match the mobility of his opponents and to cover more ground effectively, Alexander divided his army in five columns according to Arrian (IV, 16.2–3; each led by Hephaestion, Ptolemy, Perdikkas, Coenus-Artabazus, and Alexander himself) or three according to Curtius (Curtius VIII, 1.1; under Hephaestion, Coenus, and Alexander). Our sources do not offer much information about the activities of each division, focusing instead on Alexander's actions. It is safe to assume that each commander had more or less the same directive: to put to the sword all the insurgents and to destroy and plunder their settlements. Alexander himself besieged the Rock of Chorienes⁵ for several days; its defender eventually surrendered through the mediation of Oxyartes (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 21.1–9). The next step was the capture of the Rock of Ariamazes and the execution of the hapless hyparch, his family and all the prominent nobles (Curtius VII, 11.1–29). After a few setbacks, Craterus defeated Spitamenes and his Scythian allies, who had previously raided the area surrounding Zariaspa (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 16.3–17.2). A few months later Coenus delivered the final blow. He defeated Spitamenes near Gabae, who managed to escape. However, Spitamenes' Massagetan allies killed him and sent his head to Alexander (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 17.4–7; Strabo XI, 11.6; cf. Curtius VIII, 3.1–15). Finally, in the spring of 327 BC Alexander managed to capture another mountainous stronghold, the Rock of Sisimithres, without much bloodshed, again thanks to Oxyartes' diplomacy (Curtius VIII, 2.19–33; *ME* 19; Plutarch *Alex.* 58.3; Strabo XI, 11.4).

Therefore, from the military perspective two factors stand out: the locality and the brutality. These events demonstrate that Alexander campaigned mainly in Sogdiana, treating very harshly the inhabitants of the Zerafshan Valley and those residing along the southern bank of the Iaxartes River. To these we should add the people located in Oxiana – Ariamazes' domain – and the Scythians who confronted him on the battlefield. Even though no major battles were fought, the death toll, the property losses, and the devastation inflicted on the land and the settlements were tremendous.⁶ Of course such complete or near complete de-

4 Strabo includes Cariatae, which he places in Bactria proper, in the list of cities destroyed by Alexander in this region (Strabo XI, 11.4). The context of this passage is problematic and it is possible that Cariatae could have been a transcription (or alternate name) of Zariaspa (BOSWORTH 1995, 141; RAPIN 2018, 268). Considering that Zariaspa could be Maracanda (see *infra* note 11) then there is no textual evidence for Alexander campaigning in Bactria.

5 The so-called 'Sogdian Rocks' were mountainous refuges to be used in dire times, named after the district's ruler. Their number, location, and identification is a topic of scholarly discourse associated with Alexander's route from Bactra to Maracanda in the spring of 328 BC. For the eastern route approach see RAPIN 2018; cf. BOSWORTH 1995; RAPIN 2013. For the western route approach see LERNER 2016. STANČO 2021 reported that the Czech-Uzbek archaeological expedition did not discover any Achaemenid material in the three sites that Rapin (2018, 276, 287–290, 292) proposed as the location of the three Rocks mentioned in the Alexander Historians. The present paper favours the eastern route school of thought.

6 Holt (2016, 62) estimates that the death toll reached 'well beyond 100,000 men, women and children'. This sum is considerably lower than the 125,000 casualties he mentions in HOLT 2005, 58. He draws

structions are attested elsewhere during Alexander's reign.⁷ Therefore, Alexander's military operations had severe negative impact on the aforementioned Sogdian territories. On the other hand, the majority of the Bactrians and some of the Sogdians went through this ordeal relatively unscathed, if one excludes the demands of an invading army in supplies. These campaigns disrupted greatly and in numerous cases extinguished daily life in Sogdiana, and their outcome affected the region's political *status quo* and settlement landscape (see below).

POLITICAL STATUS QUO

As we saw in the previous section, resistance to Alexander's rule came from a group of Sogdian strongmen and their Scythian allies. In the following paragraphs I will argue that Alexander's administrative appointments disrupted Sogdiana's political balance, a political decision that led to Spitamenes' insurrection. Excluding the late Bessus, three Iranians figure prominently in our literary corpus: Artabazus, Spitamenes, and Oxyartes.

Alexander appointed Artabazus as satrap of Bactria (Arrian *Anab.* III, 29.1, IV, 15.5; Curtius VII, 5.1). He was formerly the satrap of Phrygia and most likely unaware of the inner power structures and alliances of the Upper Satrapies. Why then did Alexander appointed him to this office?⁸ Artabazus was a prominent member of the Achaemenid family (grandson of Artaxerxes II), the patriarch of the Pharnacids (who governed Phrygia since ca. 479 BC), and a steadfast supporter of Darius III. After the Persian defeat at Gaugamela Artabazus tried unsuccessfully to mediate the animosity between Darius and Bessus with Nabarzanes (Curtius V, 9.12–13, 9.17, 10.10–11). Similarly, he was unable to prevent the conspirators from apprehending his liege (Curtius V, 12.7–8) and fled to the Elburz mountain range (situated in modern northern Iran) with his retinue, the Greek mercenaries, and (even if it is not explicitly mentioned) the Persians who were loyal and/or related to Darius (Arrian *Anab.* III, 21.4; Curtius V, 12.18; cf. Arrian *Anab.* III, 23.7; Curtius VI, 5.2–6). Moreover, Artabazus was one of the scant few Persian magnates⁹ who had guest rights with the Macedonian king, having spent about a decade at Philip's court (from 352 until the mid-340s; cf. Diodorus XVI, 52.3–4; Curtius V, 9.1; VI, 5.2). He had sought refuge in Macedon after a failed revolt against Artaxerxes III Ochus (Diodorus XVI, 22.1–2, 34.1–2, 52.3).¹⁰ Consequently, Artabazus knew personally the Macedonian Old Guard

this estimation from Worthington's *Alexander the Great: Man and God* (2004, New York; Pearson Longman), which was unavailable to me. The starting point of these calculations is Diodorus index κγ': 'Ὡς Ἀλέξανδρος ἀποστάντας τοὺς Σογδιανούς κατεπολέμησε καὶ κατέσφαξεν αὐτῶν πλείους τῶν δώδεκα μυριάδων'.

- 7 After the fall of Tyre Alexander's army conducted a systematic slaughter of the city's inhabitants (Arrian *Anab.* II, 24.2–5; Curtius IV, 4.14–17). The case of Thebes is particularly well documented: 6,000 Thebans were killed during the battle and 30,000 were captured (Diodorus XVII, 14.1; cf. Aelianus XIII, 7). The city itself was razed to the ground and plundered (Arrian *Anab.* I, 7.7–8; Plutarch *Alex.* 11.5–6; Polybius V, 10.6–8, XXXVIII, 2.13). The survivors were sold into slavery, except the priests, the descendants of Pindar and those who had a *ξενία* bond with his father Philip (Aelianus XIII, 7; Arrian *Anab.* I, 9.10; Justin XI, 4.5–8; Pliny VII, 109; Plutarch *Alex.* 11.6). Diodorus (XVII, 14.4) states that sale yielded a profit of 440 silver talents.
- 8 My thanks go to Laurianne Martinez-Sève for phrasing this question during the conference.
- 9 Curtius (VI, 4.25) informs us that the Parthian Amminaspes was also an exile at Phillip II's court during Ochus' reign. For more on this person see HECKEL 2006, 22.
- 10 Diodorus, our only source for these events, is silent about the reasons that made Artabazus revolt. Perhaps another high ranking Persian accused him convincingly to the Great King for grave misconduct and/or treachery (BRIANT 2002, 682).

and (a very young) Alexander, was familiar with Macedonian institutions, politics, intrigues and customs, was bilingual and had experience in commanding Greek troops. Furthermore, his daughter, Barsine, was at that time Alexander's mistress (Justin XI, 10.2; Plutarch *Alex.* 21.7–9). Soon Alexander gave Artabazus his first assignment. He was sent with the Companions Erigyus and Caranus and the mercenary commander, Andronicus (he was in charge of the 1,500 Greek mercenaries who had served in Darius' army and surrendered in Hyrcania with Artabazus), to suppress Satibarzanes' revolt in Aria. The mission was successful, though the written sources highlight Erigyus' military prowess and not Artabazus' skills as mediator (Arrian *Anab.* III, 28.2; Curtius VII, 3.2).

After Gaugamela, Alexander, for political and practical reasons, frequently chose members of the Persian nobility as satraps, though the loyalty of these nobles was questionable (BOSWORTH 1988, 235–237). He could not reinstate the previous satrap in Bactria and the Bactrian and Sogdian nobility is conspicuously absent in the classical texts. Artabazus possessed the lineage, experience, skills, personal connection, and loyalty to Alexander in order to be appointed as satrap of Bactria. The region's distance from the Mediterranean surely made this post undesirable for high ranking Macedonians, if one can surmise from Cleitus the Black's anguish upon succeeding Artabazus to the office (Curtius VII, 1.35). Artabazus was also an outsider in this region, but not as much of an outsider as a Greek or a Macedonian would be. His outsider status might have been useful in a province that Alexander was concerned with keeping loyal, as a native satrap might act against him. An outsider helped maintain a balance of power, a tension within the administrative hierarchy. Of course, the appointment of Darius' greater supporter to the office previously held by the man who was responsible for the execution of the Great King is a clear political statement for all parties concerned. Artabazus was, therefore, the best candidate available to Alexander for governing a seemingly pacified Iranian region.

Our textual sources are silent regarding Spitamenes' office and background. He appears to be Bessus' second in command, suggesting that he held a prominent position in Sogdiana. Spitamenes' motives for arresting Bessus and surrendering him to Alexander are more than clear: he and his fellow conspirators were expecting amnesty for their actions, reinstatement to their offices and perhaps some kind of reward. Nothing of the sort is mentioned in our sources, nor are Alexander's plans regarding the local nobility, if any. Alexander reached Maracanda and the Iaxartes in 329 BC without any major challenge to his authority. His decisions to begin building Alexandria Eschate (Appian 57; Arrian *Anab.* IV 1.3–4; Curtius VII, 6.13, 6.25–27) and to announce a hyparchs' conference at Zariaspa (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 1.5) were the breaking point for the suspicious and weary Sogdian magnates. A newcomer from the West controlled the satrapy of Bactria, their ties to central authority had not been renewed and now their lands and subjects were to be redistributed. Arrian (IV, 15.7) also mentions that Alexander had appointed a new (though unnamed) satrap of Sogdiana, who was not accepted by the Sogdians. It is plausible that the appointment of this official occurred prior to or immediately after the announcement of the hyparchs' conference. In the circumstances, their only available option was to take arms and resist Alexander. This new political reality was even harsher for Spitamenes, especially if he was the satrap or subsatrap of Sogdiana and, following Rapin's hypothesis, Zariaspa is Maracanda and not Bactra (RAPIN 2018, 263–271).¹¹

11 The French scholar in a series of seminal articles reconstructs the events of Alexander's sojourn in Bactria-Sogdiana and the respective political geography of the region. He points out the etymological link between the name Zariaspa and the name of the Zerafshan Valley, stresses that the identification of Maracanda with Zariaspa provides a better understanding for several of the events

Spitamenes' military skills, intimate knowledge of the landscape, and access to networks for recruiting men from various Scythian tribes on the one hand, and the initial failures of the Greco-Macedonian army to contain the situation on the other, posed a serious threat for Alexander.

The solution to this problem was partially provided by Oxyartes. Just as enigmatic as Spitamenes in terms of origins (Bactrian or Sogdian noble; cf. Curtius VIII, 4.21–24) and political domain,¹² Oxyartes distanced himself from Spitamenes at some point after Bessus' crossing of the Oxus to Sogdiana (Arrian *Anab.* III, 28.10) and perhaps even before his arrest. Oxyartes somehow managed to join Alexander and soon realized that the new king was not properly informed about the political realities of the region. He used his diplomatic skills and personal connections to convince some members of the local nobility to abandon Spitamenes' cause and join Alexander with promises of immunity, reinstatement and rewards. Chorienes' surrender is the best example of Oxyartes' diplomatic efforts. Furthermore, noticing Alexander's interest in his daughter Rhoxane, Oxyartes brokered a marriage pact between the two (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 19.5; Plutarch *Alex.* 47.4; Curtius VIII, 4.30), thus creating a concrete political relationship between local nobility and Alexander. If Alexander's 'interest' towards Rhoxane was purely romantic, he could also have achieved his 'goal' by simply making her one of his official concubines. Similarly, if Alexander had to marry in order to legitimize his rule and/or ensure the succession, there were numerous candidates from the (former) royal Achaemenid family and Macedonian nobility, who were more eligible than a provincial governor's daughter. The wedding itself would have taken place somewhere more central in order to maximize the propaganda effects. Indeed, this is precisely the case with the mass weddings at Susa in February 324 BC, where Alexander married Barsine (the eldest of Darius' daughters), and perhaps Parysatis (the youngest of Artaxerxes III's daughters), in a grandiose ceremony (Arrian *Anab.* VII, 4.4–5.6; cf. Diodorus XVII, 107.6). Alexander's and Rhoxane's wedding provided a key in solving a pressing and local problem, the Sogdian/Scythian revolt. Alexander was aware of the political ramifications of this wedding and the Argead House followed the practice of cementing political alliances through official weddings. Considering that Alexander and his advisors did not have intimate knowledge of the Bactrian and Sogdian nobility's power structure, the suggestion of marrying Rhoxane originated from Oxyartes, the only local noble in the Greco-Macedonian camp. Therefore, regardless of whether or not the insurgency was contained at that stage, Alexander changed his policy towards the Sogdian magnates, who were affiliated in one way or another with Oxyartes.

that Arrian situates in Zariaspa during the winter of 329/328 (IV, 7.1, IV, 8.1–9.8, 10.1–14.4, 15.1–6), as well as for the context of the events surrounding Spitamenes' ultimate offensive (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 16.3–17.2). Lastly, he dismisses as useless the identification of Bactra with Zariaspa found in Strabo (Ptolemy XI, 11), Polybius (Polybius X, 49.15), and Pliny (Pliny VI, 15, VI, 48) since they draw their information from a source with erroneous Central Asian geography. Cf. GORSHENINA – RAPIN 2015. See RAPIN 2017, note 15 for the etymology of Zariaspa.

- 12 Rapin (2018, 276–277) accepts the 'Achaemenid three-tiered administrative and political system' suggested by JACOBS 2011. Bessus was the satrap of Bactria-Sogdiana consisting of the 'main satrapy' of Bactria, perhaps under Oxyartes and the 'main satrapy' of Sogdiana, apparently under Spitamenes, replaced by Artabazus and an anonymous person respectively. If indeed this is the case, then Oxyartes practices exemplary 'realpolitik', accepting the new political realities and focusing on creating a new niche for himself. As a reward for his assistance, Oxyartes is appointed satrap of the Paropamisadae, an office he managed to retain during the Succession Wars (Arrian *Anab.* VI, 15.3; Diodorus XVIII, 3.3, XVIII, 39.6, XIX, 48.2).

URBANISM

One of the great tasks that classical authors (and quite a few modern scholars) attribute to Alexander is an extensive colonisation of Asia. This impression stems from Plutarch (*Mor.* 328 e–f), who praises Alexander as builder of cities and bringer of Greek institutions and civilisation in Asia. The *Epitome* of the *Ethnika* of Stephanus of Byzantium contains a list of eighteen Alexandrias (70.8–71.21), of which three are situated in Bactria-Sogdiana: Alexandria near Bactra, Alexandria in Sogdiana near Paropamisadae, and Alexandria on the Tanais River. Claudius Ptolemy (VI, 12) mentions an Alexandria Oxiana and an Alexandria Ultima. Justin says that Alexander founded an Alexandria on the Tanais River (Ptolemy XII, 5.12) and twelve cities in Bactria-Sogdiana (Ptolemy XII, 5.13). Curtius (VII, 10.15) records the foundation of six unnamed fortified settlements (*oppida*) around the city of ‘Margania/Marginia’ north of the Oxus¹³ and notes that large numbers of Ariamazes’ followers were given to the settlers of the new cities (Curtius VII, 11.29). Strabo (XI, 11.4) and Diodorus (XVII, 83.2) state that Alexander founded cities in the region, though they do not name these cities, nor do they offer any information about their location. Hephaestion’s mission to ‘synoecize the Sogdian cities’ during the summer/early autumn of 328 BC (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 16.3) indicates that the inhabitants of the satellite sites surrounding Sogdian district centres (HENKELMAN 2017, 96–97; WU 2018, 208–210) were relocated to (new?) urban settlements to boost their population and to centralize control over the locals. However, Fraser limits Alexander’s foundations throughout his empire to 12 (FRASER 1996, 99–100).

The best documented case of city foundation in Bactria-Sogdiana is that of Alexandria Eschate, which Alexander established in the lower reaches of the Iaxartes (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 1.3–4; Curtius VII, 6.13, 6.25–27; cf. Appian 57; Pliny VI, 49; Ptolemy VI, 12.6).¹⁴ This Alexandria is identical with the Alexandria on the Tanais mentioned by Stephanus (71.21) and Justin (XII, 5.12). Alexander spent twenty days building the city walls and populating the new settlement with retired Macedonians, Greek mercenaries, and local ‘volunteers’ (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 4.1).¹⁵ Curtius (VII, 6.26) reduces to 17 days the time required for the construction of the walls, which measured 60 stadia (so Justin XII, 5.12). The new settlement’s purpose was twofold: to act as a bulwark against Scythian incursions from the north and to serve as a staging area for an eventual invasion in the Scythian territories (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 1.3). As for the other Alexandrias it is very difficult to prove they actually existed, let alone determine their exact location. Alexandria Oxiana is placed in Sogdiana, somewhere between the rivers Oxus and Iaxartes. Several identifications with archaeological sites have been proposed, but none has prevailed among scholars.¹⁶ Equally problematic is Alexandria near Bactra, which may have been Sasa-

13 For the location of this city see RAPIN 2013, 47–49; cf. RAPIN 2018, 287.

14 Alexandria Eschate is typically identified with Khojent, situated at the western edge of the Farghāna oasis at the southernmost point of the Syr Darya river course (COHEN 2013, 252–255; FRASER 1996, 151–153). However, Rapin (2018, 272) mentions the possibility that the city could have been located in the Zaamin area, pointing out that Claudius Ptolemy situates Alexandria Eschate at some distance from the river.

15 At least four new settlements in Western Central Asia were populated with this method: a) Alexandria ad Caucasum (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 22.5; Curtius VII, 3.23; Diodorus XVII, 83.2); b) a fortified settlement in the location where the city of Arigaion once stood (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 24.7; cf. Appian 57); c) a city near the Acesines River (Chenab) (Arrian *Anab.* V, 29.3); and d) a city in the lower reaches of the Pallacopas River (Arrian *Anab.* VII, 21.7). For more on the populations of these settlements see ILIAKIS 2013, 184–187.

16 Fraser (1996, 153–156) considers the possibility that that Alexandria Oxiana and Alexandria near Bactra are identical; Bernard initially (BERNARD 1982, 217–242) believed that Alexandria Oxiana

nian Andkhui (COHEN 2013, 262–263; RAPIN 2005, 147–148). Lastly, Stephanus' Alexandria in Sogdiana near Paropamisadae is most likely Alexandria in the Caucasus (Diodorus XVII, 83.1–2; cf. Arrian *Anab.* III, 28.4, IV, 22.4; Curtius VII, 3.19–23; Pliny VI, 62; Strabo XV, 2.10), usually identified with Begram (BOSWORTH 1989, 369–370; COHEN 2013, 263–269; FRASER 1996, 141–151).

According to the archaeological record, (as far as I am aware) the only Hellenistic settlement whose foundation on virgin soil can be attributed to Alexander's era is Kurganzol.¹⁷ However, Kurganzol is a fortress and not a *polis*. There is a consensus among scholars that the early Seleucids founded the Hellenistic sites of Bactria-Sogdiana and this activity took place especially during the co-regency of Antiochus I (292–281 BC). This is the case for Ai Khanoum (MARTINEZ-SÈVE 2014), Kampyr Tepa (RTVELADZE 1996), and Termez (LERICHE 2013, 144), three of the better documented Hellenistic settlements of the region. On the other hand, there is considerable evidence of damage caused to Achaemenid sites. The last occupation phase of Kyzyl Tepa, situated in the Upper Surkhan Darya Valley in southern Uzbekistan, ended violently: the room walls of the citadel were reduced to a 60–120 cm height, signs of fire damage were discovered everywhere and arrowheads were found outside the eastern façade of the Citadel (WU 2018, 200–201; WU 2016, 277–278). There is tentative information about destruction layers and abandonment phases in other sites¹⁸ and some of them were reoccupied (STANČO 2019, 362–365).¹⁹ Jakub Havlík (2021) notes that the settlements of the Surkhan Darya province decreased in number in the Hellenistic period. Nonetheless, this decrease should not be seen only as a consequence of Alexander's campaign. A new pattern in the irrigation system or a change in the administrative scheme could explain this phenomenon or further archaeological research could reveal more Achaemenid layers and sites.

ADMINISTRATIVE DOMAIN

One of the major sources for reconstructing the Achaemenid Empire is its administrative apparatus. From this perspective, our understanding of Bactria-Sogdiana is rapidly improving (HENKELMAN 2018; ILIAKIS forthcoming). The full impact of Alexander's expedition on the administrative sector eludes us. Yet, the financial cost of conducting military campaigns, the violent affairs in Sogdiana, the resettlement of local population executed by Hephaestion

was the original name of Ai Khanoum, but his suggestion was refuted in GRENET – RAPIN 1998; Leriche (2007, 133) suggested that it could be Kampyr Tepa. Rapin (2018, 282–283) places Alexandria Oxiana in the Sherabad Darya valley in south Sogdiana, in the centre of the oasis or near one of the Achaemenid sites destroyed by Alexander.

- 17 Drawing from the ceramic material found in Kurganzol, Sverchkov (2008, 127–134, 185) suggested that the fortress was built in 328 BC. Lerner (2010, 73–75), argued that this conclusion is arbitrary and requires further evidence. However, the dendrochronological analysis of a wood sample discovered at the site resulted in a 328 felling date (HEUßNER – BOROFFKA 2013).
- 18 The archaeological record offers limited information on this topic. Contrary to Leriche's (2007, 132) brief remarks, the excavators of Jandavlat Tepa have yet to unearth any evidence confirming the existence of a destruction layer dated at the end of the Achaemenid/Yaz III period. Šajdullaev (2002) does not mention an abandonment phase for Talashkan Tepe, nor a destruction layer in Khaytabad Tepa. Equally not forthcoming is the evidence for other sites in the Surkhan Darya province. I am indebted to Jakub Havlík for sharing his research on this topic.
- 19 STANČO 2019, 362–365. Stančo (2019, 364) also notes that Jandavlat Tepa is situated in a strategic location of the route from Bactra to Maracanda via Nautaca, 'where the Sherabad Darya leaves the mountain ranges and its upper valley provides the only easily penetrable road to the north', suggesting that Alexander's army passed through this locality at least once on its way to the north.

and the foundation of Alexandria Eschate surely affected the administrative system and its effectiveness.

This strain is evident in the tally sticks (D1 – D18) of the *Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria* (henceforth *ADAB*). Henkelman (HENKELMAN – FOLMER 2016, 138, 159–160) argued that they were valid for a short period and were replaced on a regular basis. They are all dated to the third year of a Darius, probably Darius III (333 BC) and they were not renewed/redeemed because of the disruption in the administrative system caused by the Macedonian invasion. The preservation of the tallies does not indicate that the system collapsed, only that it experienced setbacks because of Alexander's campaign. Furthermore, Arrian (*Anab.* III, 30.6) mentions that Alexander replaced the lost cavalry mounts by procuring horses from the territory (Nautaca) surrounding the village where Bessus was captured. Holt (2016, 61) perceives this action as one of the reasons that led to the local insurgency. However, the verb ἀναπληρώσας has a neutral meaning and does not necessarily imply that the horses were collected by force. Some of these horses were acquired from herds belonging to the royal/satrapal administration.²⁰

Administrative continuity is also attested in document C4 of the *ADAB*. It records the distribution of cereals at Araivant and Varaina; a third location, Zartani, is mentioned, but no actual transaction takes place. All three toponyms are unidentified, but are believed to be in Bactria-Sogdiana. The document is dated to the seventh year of Alexander's reign, i.e. June 324 or June 330 BC, depending on which calendar one decides to follow.²¹ The formulae and practices of the said document are Achaemenid (FOLMER 2017; NAVEH – SHAKED 2012, 202–212; TUPLIN 2017, especially 662–669) indicating the continuation of the Achaemenid administrative system with perhaps minor modifications. But the choice of date makes a difference to one's understanding of the situation: 324 BC establishes that the administrative system survived the hiccups of the Sogdian troubles and continued to work three years after Alexander's departure; 330 BC is more tricky as it entails that administrators in Bactria had rejected Bessus and accepted Alexander as the legitimate successor of Darius III prior to his arrival to the region.

LOCAL RESPONSES

Unfortunately, the Bactrians and Sogdians (and Scythians) are voiceless and we have to rely on the classical literary tradition and a small number of Achaemenid documents as a basis from which to extrapolate their experience of Alexander's expedition. This situation is even more problematic as far as the lower classes are concerned, since ancient authors are completely uninterested in them. Furthermore, as we have seen above, the Bactrians and Sogdians responded differently to Alexander's presence.

20 Perhaps we could find a parallel in an episode from Plutarch (*Eum.* 8.3): Eumenes requisitioned horses from a royal stud in the Troad; cf. BRIANT 2002, 452. Also, Polybius (X, 27.2) refers to a royal system of horse-breeding. It is possible that a similar structure existed in Bactria-Sogdiana, especially if one considers the proximity and access to the superb horses bred by the Scythian nomads. On the other hand, there is ample evidence in the *ADAB* (A1; cf. B8 and C3.22) for an organized system of camel breeding and herding. This system was the source of the 2000 camels (other pack animals, flocks and herds) that Sisimithres delivered to Alexander in Sogdiana (Curtius VIII, 4.19–20). See HENKELMAN 2017, 55–63 (esp. 56 and note 13) for the Achaemenid administrative structure for camels.

21 See the discussion in HENKELMAN – FOLMER 2016, note 3.

For the most part our sources are not interested in what transpired in Bactria during 329–327 BC and focus mainly on Sogdiana. It is, therefore, plausible to argue that the vast majority of the Bactrian elite and non-elite accepted the regime change without objections. In document C4 of the ADAB several low-ranking officials are mentioned. All of these individuals bear Iranian names (Vaxsudata, Nafabarzana, Atarvaza, Danga, Amainakana, Varcavarzana etc.) and served Alexander in more or less the same position they had under Darius. But, of course, we have no way of telling for how long they maintained their office.

On the other hand, the Sogdian nobility was initially suspicious of the new ‘ethno-classe dominante’. Spitamenes’ faction resisted Alexander fiercely, enjoying some initial success. Their rebellion was detrimental for them and their followers. However, according to our sources, even they did not present a unified front. Coenus had Bactrians and Sogdians under his command when he fought Spitamenes (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 17.6; Curtius VIII, 2.16–18). Perhaps these should be associated with the Sogdian nobles who were to be executed, but were pardoned by Alexander and entered his service (Curtius VII, 10.4–9). There is also Oxyartes (and his allies) who sided with Alexander against his fellow Sogdians and profited greatly as a result. After the end of the hostilities, Alexander, or rather his Iranian subordinates under Macedonian supervision, used Achaemenid practices and networks to recruit Bactrian, Sogdian, and Scythian cavalry (Arrian *Anab.* V, 12.2) and perhaps infantrymen for the Epigonoï experiment (Curtius VIII, 5.1; cf. Arrian *Anab.* VII, 6.1; Diodorus XVII, 108.1–3; Plutarch *Alex.* 47.3, 71.1).²² The region could spare manpower to be used for warfare and these people were willing to fight for the new regime. Surprisingly, the next recorded upheaval in Bactria-Sogdiana is not instigated by the local inhabitants, but rather by the Greek mercenaries-turned-colonists who rebelled twice, once while Alexander was still alive (326/325 BC) and for a second time shortly after his death (323 BC) (ILIAKIS 2013).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if one addresses the impact of Alexander’s expedition in Bactria-Sogdiana from the local perspective the following points stand out. No combat activity is recorded in Bactria and the ancient authors seem to be uninterested in its affairs. A series of brutal and destructive military campaigns took place in Sogdiana with a special focus on the Zerafshan Valley, extracting a tremendous toll on the local inhabitants. These campaigns were strongly interconnected with Sogdiana’s political situation at a local level. Dismayed by Alexander’s decisions, a Sogdian faction felt that its political *status quo* was threatened and reacted violently in order to preserve it. Key figures in this upheaval were Spitamenes, the leader of the Sogdian rebels, and Oxyartes, Alexander’s local advisor. The outcome of this uprising had a severe effect upon the Sogdian political landscape: prominent individuals were killed (Spitamenes) or executed (Ariamazes), but quite a few maintained their office (Chorienes) and at least one (Oxyartes) moved up the hierarchical ladder. Regarding Alexander’s building activities in Bactria-Sogdiana, the written sources offer mostly tentative information: Alexandria Eschate is the only polis foundation that can be attributed to him, even though the actual site is neither located with certainty, nor excavated. The majority of these settlements were built in haste, over the course of a few days. In fact they were temporary forts at best and not proper *poleis*. We do not know how many of these settlements were still inhabited by Alexander’s settlers, when Seleucus added Bactria and Sogdiana to his empire. If one takes into account the two

22 For more on the Epigonoï see OLBRYCHT 2015; cf. OLBRYCHT 2011.

Greek mercenaries-turned-settlers revolts, then Alexander's hastily arranged settlement foundations in the region was ineffective in the long term. Archaeological evidence is, by contrast, far more informative on this topic. On the one hand, only one new site foundation can so far be dated to Alexander's reign: it was the Seleucids who actually founded the majority of the Hellenistic settlements. On the other hand, ancient authors state that Alexander destroyed numerous settlements in Sogdiana, and this information is supported by archaeological finds, especially as far as the Surkhan Darya province is concerned. In either case a significant percentage of the inhabitants of Sogdiana either had to reconstruct their settlements or relocate to a new area. Alexander's invasion also caused a brief administrative/economic disruption but the administrative system survived and (somewhat modified) continued to be in use during the Hellenistic period. Lastly, the Bactrians and the Sogdians responded differently. The Bactrians, except perhaps those too closely affiliated with Bessus, accepted the new reality from the beginning. The Sogdian majority revolted and paid the ultimate price, factional division. One Sogdian faction, however, sided with Alexander and benefited in the aftermath of his campaigns.

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