

**Review: Carol Wilkinson, Alexander the Great: *Reckless Conqueror*, Black Dog Books, Fitzroy, VIC, 2004**

Pages: 183

**Great Summary of the “Notable Horn”**

Alexander’s history is an amazing testimony to the supernatural origin of the Book of Daniel, and the Bible.

Though written from a secular viewpoint, a Christian reader will see clear parallels between Alexander’s exploits and Daniel’s foresight. He prophesied the rise of the Grecian Empire (Daniel 8.21), its swift overthrow of the Medes and Persians (Daniel 8.5), and sudden end in four pieces (Daniel 8.8), all over 250 years before events occurred.

The speed of the Persian conquest was leopard-like (Daniel 7.6) taking only three years and three major battles to conquer Babylon, beginning at Macedonia. The bronze armouring of the Hoplite soldiers (Daniel 2.32), and Alexander himself as the great horn or first king are evident.

Alexander’s coins minted in Tarsus bear a ram-horn headdress of Heracles, and both his face and the army (united Macedonians and Greeks) were lopsided (Daniel 8.3).

The history is light but informative, covering Alexander’s progress from Regent of Macedonia aged sixteen, to a debauched death in Babylon aged thirty-two, after covering 40,000km.

Each of his four major battle’s armies, strengths, and weaknesses are well-detailed by the author. His callous actions and personal relationships are secondary, yet important for understanding the type of person he was.

Like any antichrist figure, he was incredibly egotistical; he had thirty cities named after him, of which only Alexandria in Egypt remains.

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### **Prelude (pp. 1-3)**

The Book of Arda Viraf, “the accursed Alexander...came to the country of Iran with severe cruelty and war and devastation; he slew the ruler of Iran...destroyed the metropolis and empire, and made them desolate”.

Alexander gained control of all Greeks and tribes up to the Danube. The Egyptians called him pharaoh, and a city of his namesake was being built in Sogdiana.

After eight years of campaigning and 27,000km from Macedonia he reached the River Beas in India. He had suffered twenty-two wounds.

Alexander was always clean-shaven, thought as protection against beard-snatching by his soldiers.

### **I) Crown Prince (pp. 4-16)**

Alexander’s father King Philip bought him a horse for thirteen talents he named Bucephalus (Greek for “Ox head”), which was with him till it died of exhaustion aged thirty.<sup>1</sup>

A stade was an ancient Greek measure of distance equivalent to 160m.

Alexander was born 356BC to King Philip II of Macedonia, and Olympias, a princess from neighbouring Epirus. She worshipped Dionysius, the Greek god of wine and vegetation. Ceremonies involved killing animals with bare hands and eating the flesh.

Philip’s other son was intellectually disabled so Alexander was heir.

Greece, a collection of city-states, was the most powerful and cultured place in Europe at the time. Sparta, Athens, and Thebes

vacillated between alliances and wars. Philip had forced them to ally with Macedonia, called the League of Corinth.

Alexander's head had a permanent tilt [Daniel 8.3g], possibly caused by "ocular torticollis" which causes partial paralysis of the optic nerve.

Age thirteen, Aristotle was made his tutor; he believed non-Greeks were inferior. In Greece only men of good birth could vote; slaves, women, and foreigners were forbidden.

Alexander was made Regent of Macedonia age sixteen.

Philip wanted to revenge Greece on King Xerxes' defeat of Macedonia, and Athen's burning 150 years earlier in 480BC. They were driven back by the Greek navy.

## **II) Two Weddings and a Funeral (pp. 17-27)**

Philip took a second wife which displeased Alexander. He was murdered at his daughter Cleopatra's wedding and Alex and Olympias rumoured to have been the plotters.

In 1977, an ancient tomb in Macedonia was found with bones and a gold crown; the skull was damaged in the right eye, and Philip had been blinded in his right eye by an arrow wound.

## **III) Leaving Home (pp. 28-47)**

Alex would not kill his half-brother, but Olympias would and did, horrifying him.

A chiton was a loose two-sectioned rectangular tunic worn by all, fastened at the shoulders and tied at the waist.

Alex killed his cousin Amyntas and all Cleopatra's male relatives. He marched from Pella with the Macedonian army and conquered Thessaly [just south], having to cut out part of a mountain to breach defences. Thebes and Athens soon surrendered, though the entire male population of Thebes was killed for rebellion, and the city razed to the ground.

At twenty-one he was a king, that same year 2,000 kilometres away Darius III became Great King of Persia.

Alex first had to march 500km to Europe's edge and cross the 2km-wide Hellespont [Dardanelles]. He had 45,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. Macedonian soldiers wore a leather tunic [a cuirass] and metal greaves on lower legs.

Infantry was organised into phalanxes of 9,000 men and six battalions (1,500 each), the most important being the Macedonian Phalanx. They would form blocks of sixteen rows and march with overlapped shields, holding six metre long lances. Five rows of these *sarissas* would reach past the frontline when advancing.

The Hypaspists were fast-moving soldiers wielding shorter spears.

The Greek Hoplites had bronze armour and heavy shields.

Alexander crossed into Phrygia, part of the Persian empire for 150 years. He was 50 km from the first Persian army.

The Battle of Granicus was 334BC, where Darius' son-in-law, Memnon had a similar sized army including Greek mercenaries. Alexander won, killing 18,000 of the 20,000 Greek mercenaries, the remainder were sent to Macedonia as forced labourers.

In the battle Alexander was wounded in the head by a scimitar (Cf. Rv 13.3).

#### **IV) Soothsayers and Ancestors (pp. 48-59)**

Knowledge of the Trojan Wars comes from Homer's *Iliad*, written c800BC.

Many of Alex's tactics were based on omens, and he had a seer Aristander of Telmissus. Seers usually studied animal entrails of a sacrificed sheep or goat. The shape of the liver was said to be of particular interest. Most of Aristander's omens were good.

Alex had been told he was the ancestor of Heracles (Hercules) and that he was fathered by Zeus in the form of a serpent. Olympias was said to be a descendent of Achilles.

He cut the infamous Gordian Knot; a yoke tied with a concealed Turk's head knot to the central shaft.

After being made Pharaoh, Alex sought after an oracle at the Siwah Oasis, 500km into the desert. There was a temple to Ammon, who the Greeks believed was also Zeus. The oracle turned out to be a cone-shaped, emerald-studded rock on a boat-shaped bed of gold. It confirmed he was Zeus' son.

His tactic was to replace each Persian governor (satrap) and demand the same tribute.

The Greek city-states were proving unreliable allies.

Alex had to cross the Cilician Gates to reach Tarsus; there he minted coins with him wearing the ram-horn headdress of Heracles.

King Darius was thought to have had 10,000 Immortals troops; they wore purple, blue, and yellow trousers, also shemaghs. He marched to Issus and found only sick Macedonians, so cut off their hands and sent them to report to Alexander.

Darius' army had a chariot for Ahura Mazda, his own chariot had a golden eagle with outstretched wings.

#### **V) King Versus King (pp. 60-75)**

The Battle of Issus (Cilicia) was in 333 BC. Darius had a larger army but the battlefield was a narrow plain neutralising this advantage. Darius lost and fled on horseback.

#### **VI) Rags to Riches (pp. 76-93)**

Alex captured Darius' family, and found 3,000 talents of gold, however the main treasury was in Damascus. While the Persian

army was defeated, its navy was still a threat, so Alex decided to take their Mediterranean supply ports of Syria, Phoenicia, and Egypt.

The city of Tyre refused to surrender, and was located on an island outside of Alex's siege engines. Its thick walls were 45m high and they had a navy. The gap was 800m and the sea 6m deep, so Alexander built a causeway, which took months. This remains today as a permanent peninsula.

During this time most of the Persian-Phoenician navy rebelled and joined Alexander, increasing his fleet to 200 vessels. He attacked Tyre, killing 8,000 (2,000 by crucifixion) and sold the 30,000 women and children into slavery. He then sacrificed to their god Melqart.

In Egypt the governor of the capital Memphis simply handed over the country and proclaimed Alex pharaoh. They had been under Persian rule for 200 years.

He decided to build a new port to take over from Tyre, calling it Alexandria, giving it the shape of a Macedonian cloak.

Darius had since offered a bribe of 30,000 talents, all land west of the Euphrates, and his daughter's hand in marriage for surrender, yet Alexander refused.

The Battle of Gaugamela in Armenia was 331BC. Darius had amassed a 35,000 strong cavalry force, added elephants to his infantry, and had 200 scythed chariots. He had flattened the plain for logistical advantage.

Alex's infantry made gaps to allow the charging scythes to pass through, then stabbed them in the rear. As the Persians attacked on the flanks, he was able to form a cavalry wedge and charged the middle straight for Darius, who again fled (to the Persian summer capital of Ecbatana).

Alex marched into Babylon, through the Ishtar Gate. The Hanging Gardens were actually planted on high terraces, so trees could be seen growing above the walls. He honoured the

Babylonian gods and gave his troops a month's holiday. Before leaving he appointed the Persian Mazaeus as governor of his new capital.

He soon took Susa, which yielded 50,000 talents of gold and silver, and 9,000 in coins, also some Greek statues that had been stolen by Xerxes.

### **VII) Royal Purple (pp. 94-106)**

Purple dye was so valuable in ancient times as the only source was a rare sea snail, thus purple became the colour of royalty.

Persepolis was Persia's ceremonial capital. It had a Great Terrace; 12m high, 300m wide, and 400m long, and at the top the gigantic Gate of All Nations, also Xerxes's Palace. Darius' audience room could hold 10,000, and 72, 20m-high stone columns each topped with two griffin heads supported a carved cedar-wood roof.

The city offered no resistance and Alex took the treasury contents of 120,000 talents, so gold began to lose value.

Before leaving the palace was burned down in a fire; this preserved some Persian clay tablet records that got baked hard in the fire.

The Persian Royal Road reached from Lydia to Persepolis, 2,500km long. Alexander's army was marching on it at 30km per day.

### **VIII) Plots and Paranoia (pp. 107-123)**

Darius ended up betrayed by his generals who murdered him, and made Bessus king.

Alex had started to wear Persian dress, including a purple and white headband (called a diadem), the symbol of Persian royalty.

Like an antichrist, he was incredibly egotistical, naming thirty cities after him; of which only Alexandria in Egypt remains today.

Based on a rumour, Alexander had his faithful old general Parmenio killed.

He had to cross the Hindu Kush range at 6,000m to find Bessus in Bactria. He found Bessus' generals had likewise betrayed him, and cut off his ears then sending him to Ecbatana for execution.

He had since recruited 30,000 natives into his army.

He executed his official historian Callisthenes for failing to bow to him in worship.

He took two years to completely subdue Bactria and Sogdia, finally reaching the north-east corner of the known world "Alexandria-Eschate" (Alexandria-the-Furthest").

### **IX) What Made Alexander so Great? (pp. 124-137)**

No cavalry had stirrups in Alexander's time; invented in China, they reached Europe 1,000 years later.

When pursuing Darius at the last his cavalry could cover 145km a day.

His driving force was said to be *ποθος*, or the longing to discover the unknown.

### **X) World's End (pp. 138-149)**

Alexander's tactic of circling the enemy and sneaking up on them was subsequently used by both Napoleon, and the U.S. [in Operation Desert Storm].

The Battle of Jhelum was 326BC in India. Under Poros they had 200 war elephants, whom the Macedonians speared in the eyes



and cut off trunks while archers attacked the drivers. Bucephala died after the battle from exhaustion.

### **XI) Homeward Bound (pp. 150-165)**

Alexander arranged for a navy to be built so as to sail down the river Jhelum, into the Indus, and reach the Southern Ocean. It took 800 ships; thousands of women and children had accumulated from soldiers taking wives along the way.

In Malli he encountered resistance and is said to have attacked the fortress alone. He was pierced in the lung by a barbed arrow yet survived after his men cut it out.

They reached the coast and found the Makran desert, which the legendary Queen Semiramis, builder of Babylon 500 years earlier, had crossed after conquering India. Only twenty men were said to have survived.

Persian satraps and Indian governors soon rebelled, also Bactria and Sogdiana were causing trouble. Arriving in Susa, he took two more Persian wives and had around 90 of his officers married in a group ceremony.

When he approached Babylon Persian seers delivered a bad omen from Marduk.

He still had designs to conquer Africa and Arabia, but after a long party one night slipped into a coma and died, age 32.

Over 11 years he had travelled 40,000km.

His body was taken to Alexandria and laid in a gold tomb on public display for many years, later visited by Julius Caesar. After the gold was melted down a glass tomb was made, though all trace of it was gone by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup>C BC.

### **Aftermath (pp. 166-180)**

General Cassander became king of Macedonia and most of Greece, killing Alexander's wife and son. Ptolemy (Alexander's undertaker) became king of Egypt.