

West meets East: At the Borders of the *Oikoumenē* and Beyond

**Lecture 3 – Alexander the Great and
the Conquest of India**

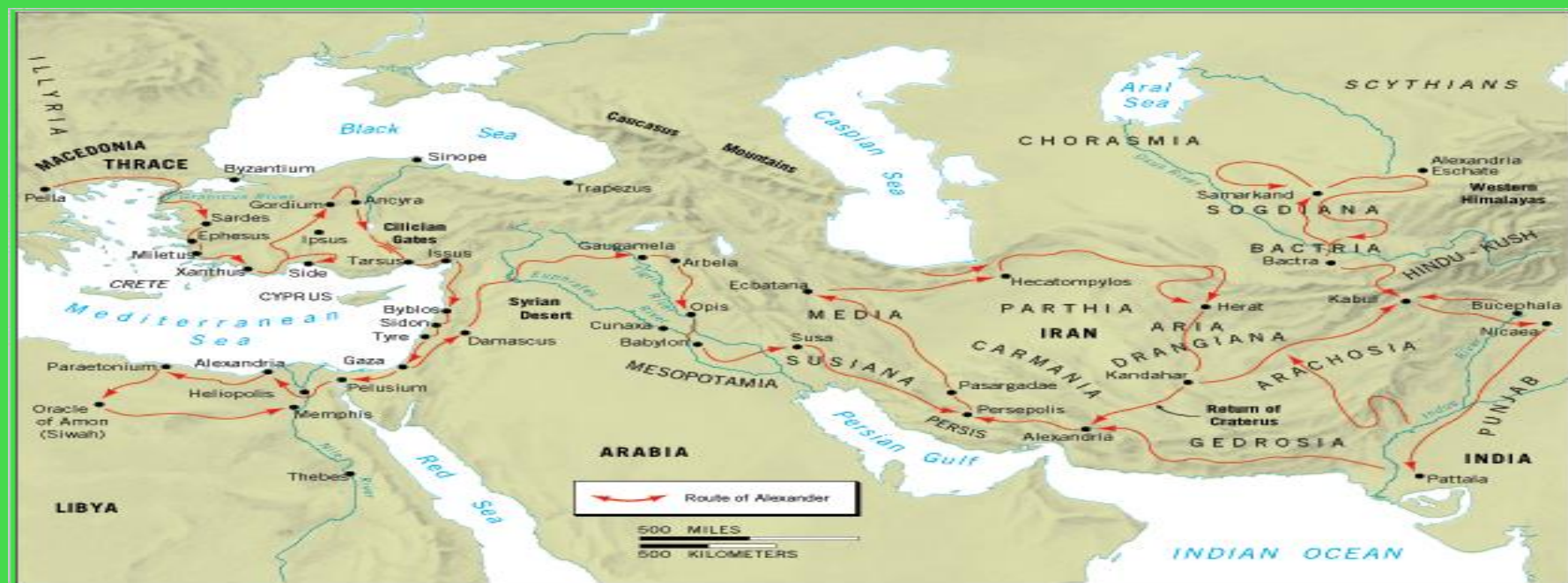
CLAH6007

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- Alexander receives no mention in early Indian literature.
- The campaigns of Alexander bring about a profusion of new information about India.
- However, most of the accounts of the contemporary writers – Callisthenes, Onesicritus, Aristobulus and Nearchus – only survive in later sources – Strabo, Arrian, Curtius Rufus, Plutarch etc.
- Difficulties of distinguishing retrojected information.
- Is the influx of new information one of quality or quantity?

Alexander's Invasion of Asia

- In 334 BC Alexander crosses over in Asia Minor with his forces.
- As a result of many victorious battles and sieges Alexander is able to progress his way through Asia Minor, Syria and the Levant, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia.
- Darius after fleeing through Media and Parthia before being capture and subsequently killed by the Bactrian satrap Bessus.



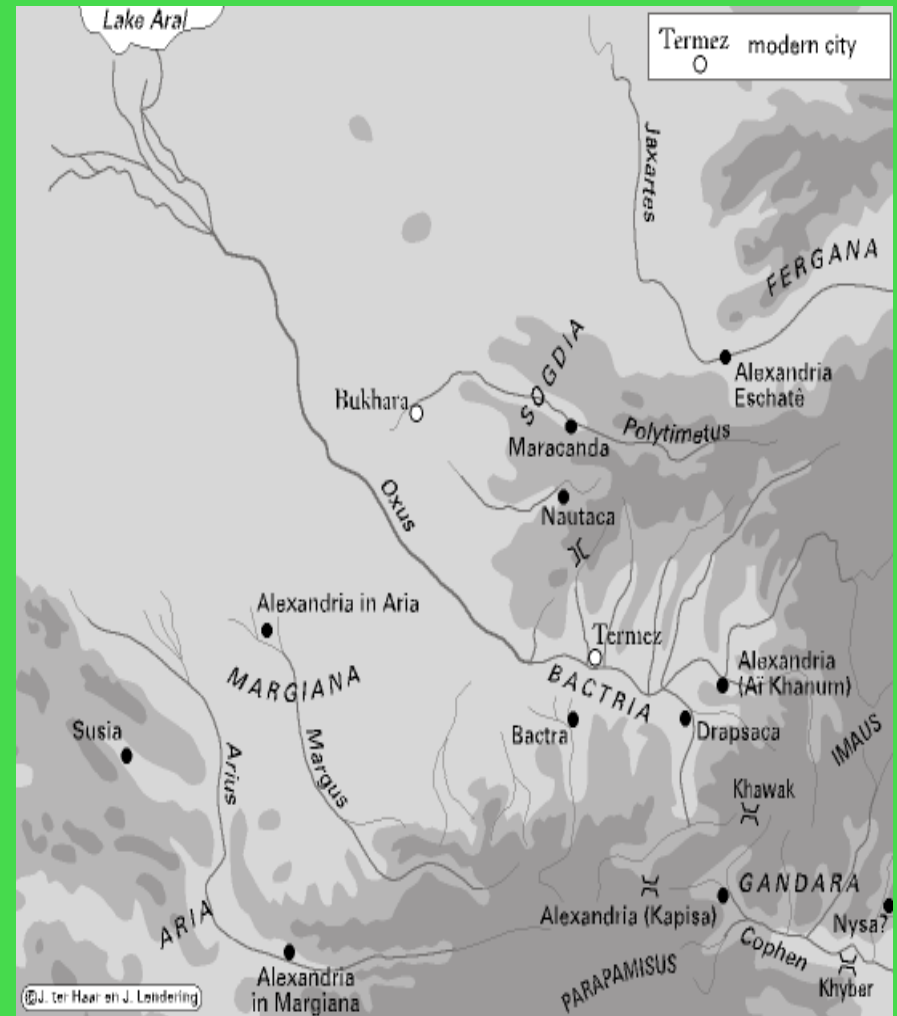
Campaigns in Bactria

“Bessus dared not make excuses for his crime. He claimed that he adopted the title of king so that he could surrender his country to Alexander, and failure to do so would have resulted in another seizing the throne... Bessus was hung up on a cross, his ears and nose cut off, and the barbarians were to shoot arrows into him and also protect his body from the carrion birds.” – **Curtius Rufus 7.5.39-40.**

Campaigns in Bactria and Sogdiana

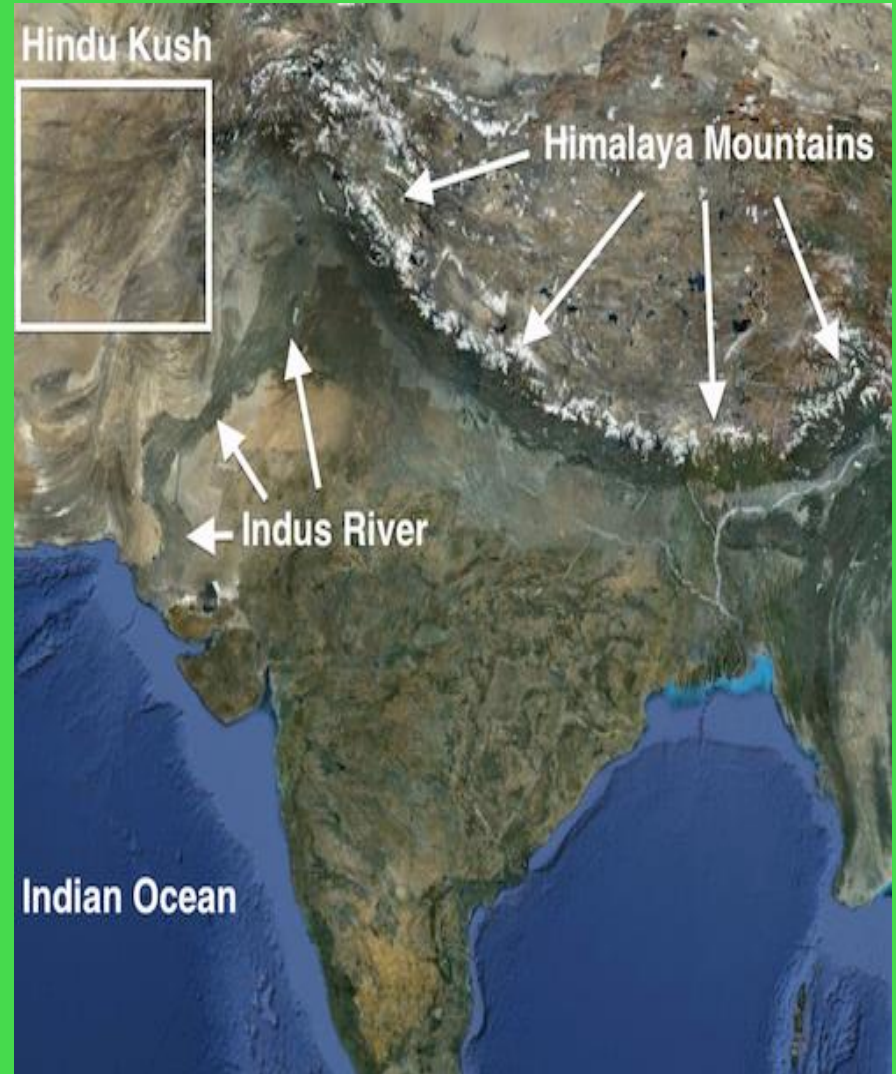
- Alexander spends two years of fierce fighting in Bactria (Afghanistan) and Sogdiana (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).
- The Jaxartes (Syr Darya) gets established as the frontier of his territory.

“Towards the end of spring Alexander began his march for India, leaving Amyntas in Bactria with a force of 3,500 mounted troops and 10,000 infantry.” – **Arrian *Anabasis* 4.22.**



Alexander Invades India

- In 327 BC Alexander crossed over from the Bactra through the Hindu Kush into the plains of the Indus – his forces split into two: one part under Hephaestion and Perdiccas, the other under his own command.
- On his way Alexander took the strong holds of the Aspasiens, Gaurians and Assakenians (**Arrian *Anabasis* 4.23.1**).
- 7,000 mercenaries massacred at Massaga.



- Alexander reaches Nysa, and the Nysaeans beg to be left to their ancestral freedom claiming that their city had been founded by Dionysus.

“The report is, that its foundation was the work of Dionysus, who built it after he had subjugated the Indians... Acuphis, accompanied by thirty of their most distinguished men as envoys, [beseeched] Alexander to leave their city free for the sake of the god...He also thought that the Macedonians would not decline still to share his labours if he advanced further, from a desire to surpass the achievements of Dionysus. He therefore granted the inhabitants of Nysa the privilege of remaining free and independent...” – **Arrian**
***Anabasis* 5.1-2.**

- The two parts of the army met at the Indus in 326 BC, and after bridging the river the forces moved to Taxila.

Battle with Porus

- The local king in the region, Porus, refuses to bow to Alexander and their forces engage in battle at the Hydaspes River.
- Alexander able to effect a successful river crossing and defeats Porus' forces – he founds Nicaea and Bucephala to commemorate his victory.
- Porus retains his kingdom but is confirmed as a vassal of Alexander.

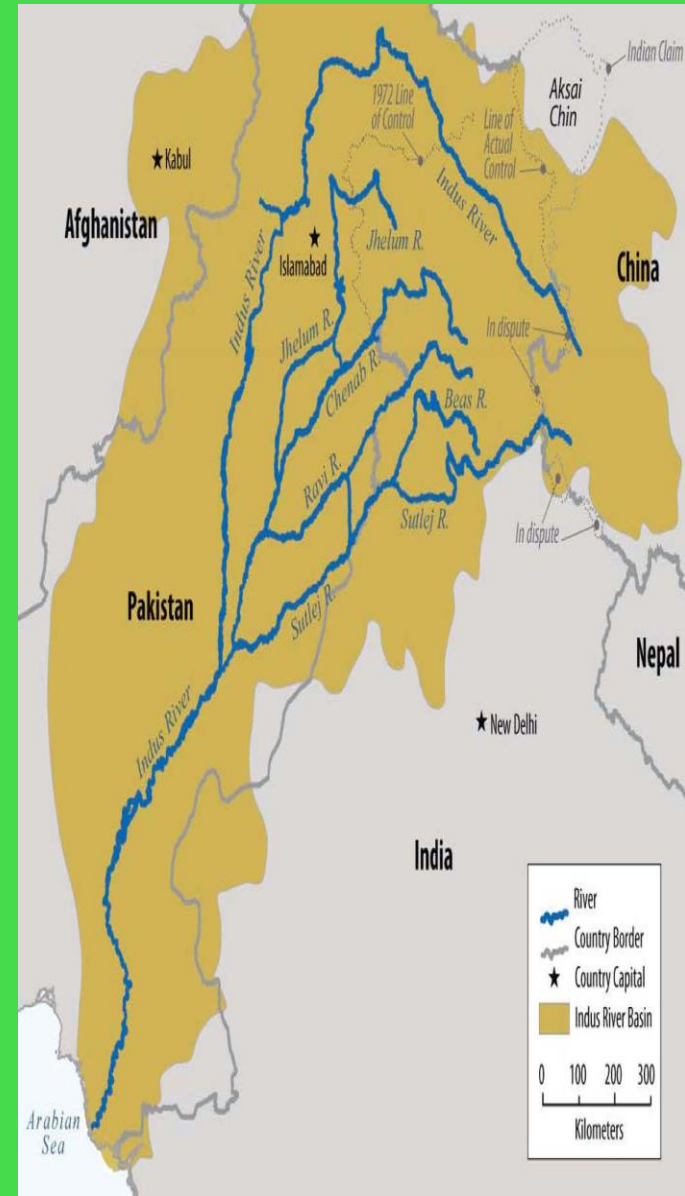


Macedonian cavalry attacking an Indian elephant – British Museum coin

Alexander Faces Mutiny

- After battle of Hydaspes (Jhelum River) Alexander continue to drive his men onwards despite it being the monsoon season.
- By the time they reach the Hyphasis (Beas) river, 390 miles from the Hydaspes, his men mutiny.
- By late September 326 BC he was back at the Hydaspes River – the land he had conquered on route was added to Porus' domain.

“[Alexander retires to his tent for three days] ...waiting to see if any change in the minds of the Macedonian and Greek allies... But on the contrary there was profound silence in the camp, and the soldiers were evidently annoyed at his wrath... he made it know to the army that he resolved to march back again.” – **Arrian *Anabasis* 5.28.3-5.**



Alexander and the Eastern Sea

“...he should know that there is no great expanse of land before us up to the Ganges River and the eastern sea. This sea, I tell you, will prove to be joined to the Hyrcanian sea for the Great Sea encircles all the whole earth... the Arabian Sea forms a continuous stretch of water with the Persian Gulf, and the Hyrcanian Sea with the Arabian Sea. From the Persian Gulf our fleet shall sail around to Libya, as far as the Pillars of Hercules; from the Pillars all the interior of Libya will become ours, just as all of Asia is in fact becoming ours...” **Arrian *Anabasis* 5.26.1-2.**

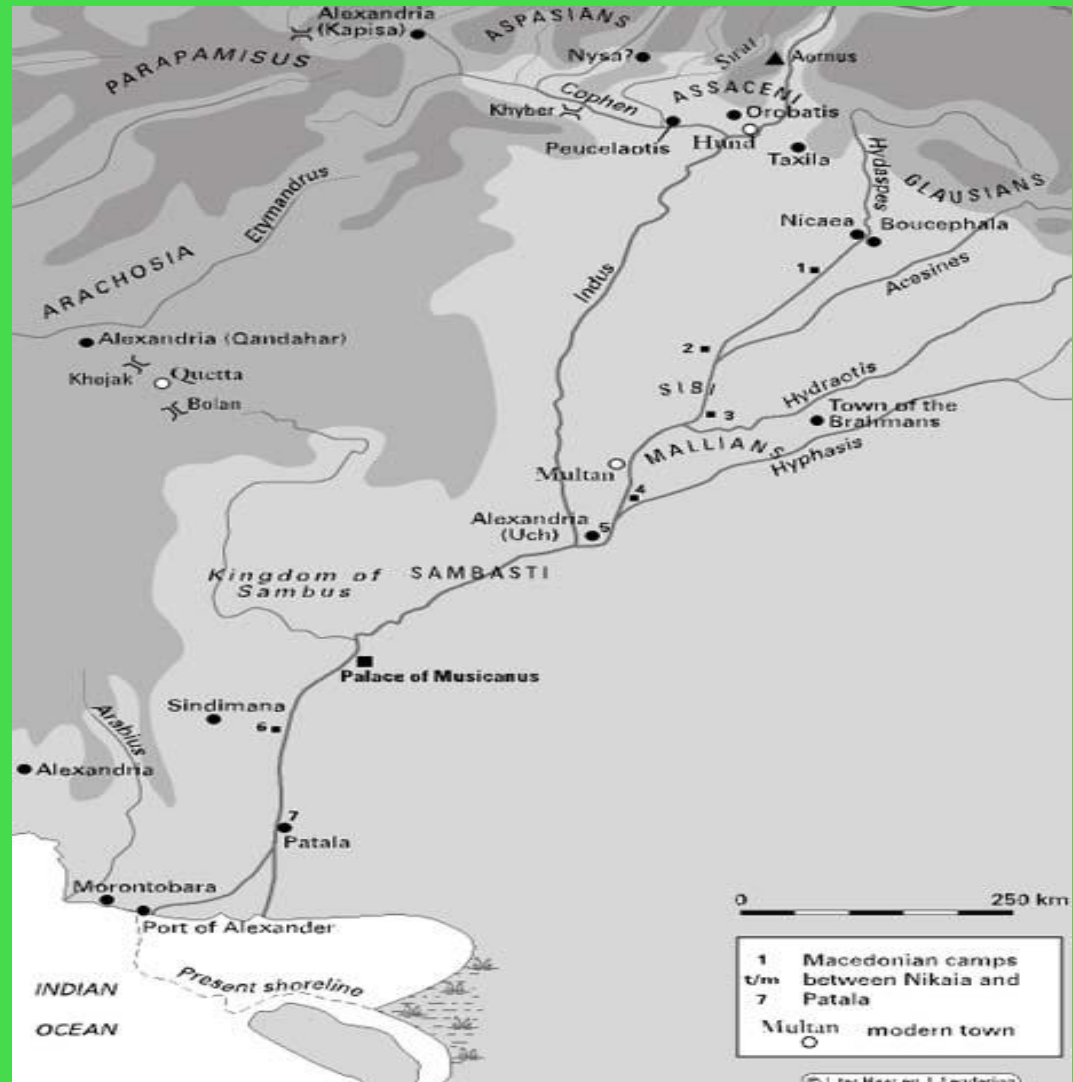
“There were mountains not far away where grew thriving firs in quantity, together with no little cedar and pine and an ample supply of other woods suitable for shipbuilding, and Alexander constructed a large number of ships. He intended to reach the borders of India and to subdue all of its inhabitants, and then to sail downstream to the Ocean.” – **Diodorus Siculus 17.89.4.**

Alexander is Injured

“The men with the ladders were not quick enough to satisfy Alexander; in his impatience he snatched one from the fellow who carried it and with his own hands reared it against the fortress all... No Indian ventured to approach Alexander why he was on the fortress wall; but he was the target of every marksman in the neighbouring towers... he leapt down into the fortress... After that none ventured again to attack him hand to hand; keeping their distance, they formed a half-circle round where he stood and hurled at him whatever missiles they had or could find... Alexander himself was hit, the arrow penetrating his corselet and entering his body above the breast. Ptolemy tells us that the blood from the wound was mixed with air breathed out from the pierced lung.” – **Arrian**
***Anabasis* 6.9-10.**

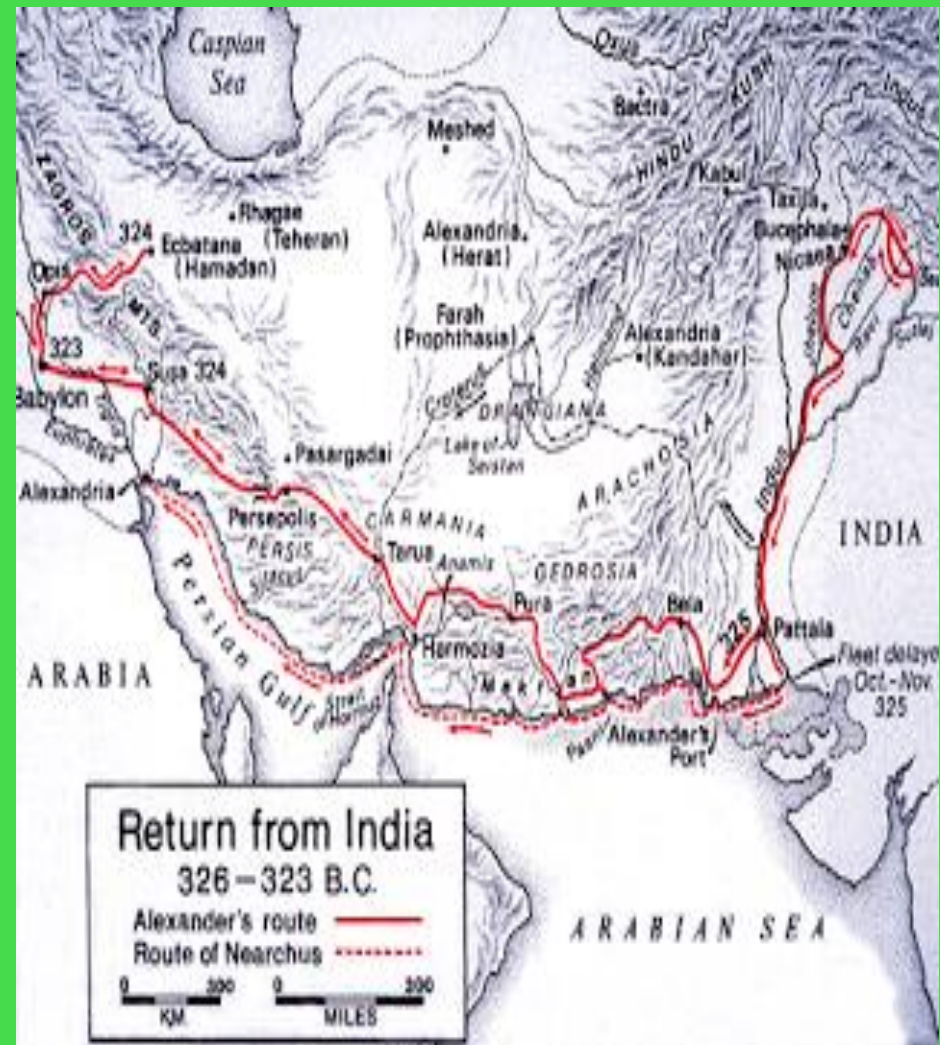
Alexander's Fleet

- On reaching Patala Alexander gave orders for construction of a harbour and dockyards.
- Set out to explore the western arm of Indus River – beset by storms but reaches the sea and makes sacrifices to Poseidon.
- When Alexander returned to Patala he set out to explore the eastern arm of the Indus.



Voyage of Nearchus

- Instead of returning to Babylon by the same route, Alexander chooses to march his forces across the Gedrosian desert resulting in the death of thousands of his camp followers.
- In tandem with this Nearchus is given the task of leading a naval fleet from Patala on the Indus down to the Sea and then along the coast up to the north of the Persian Gulf.



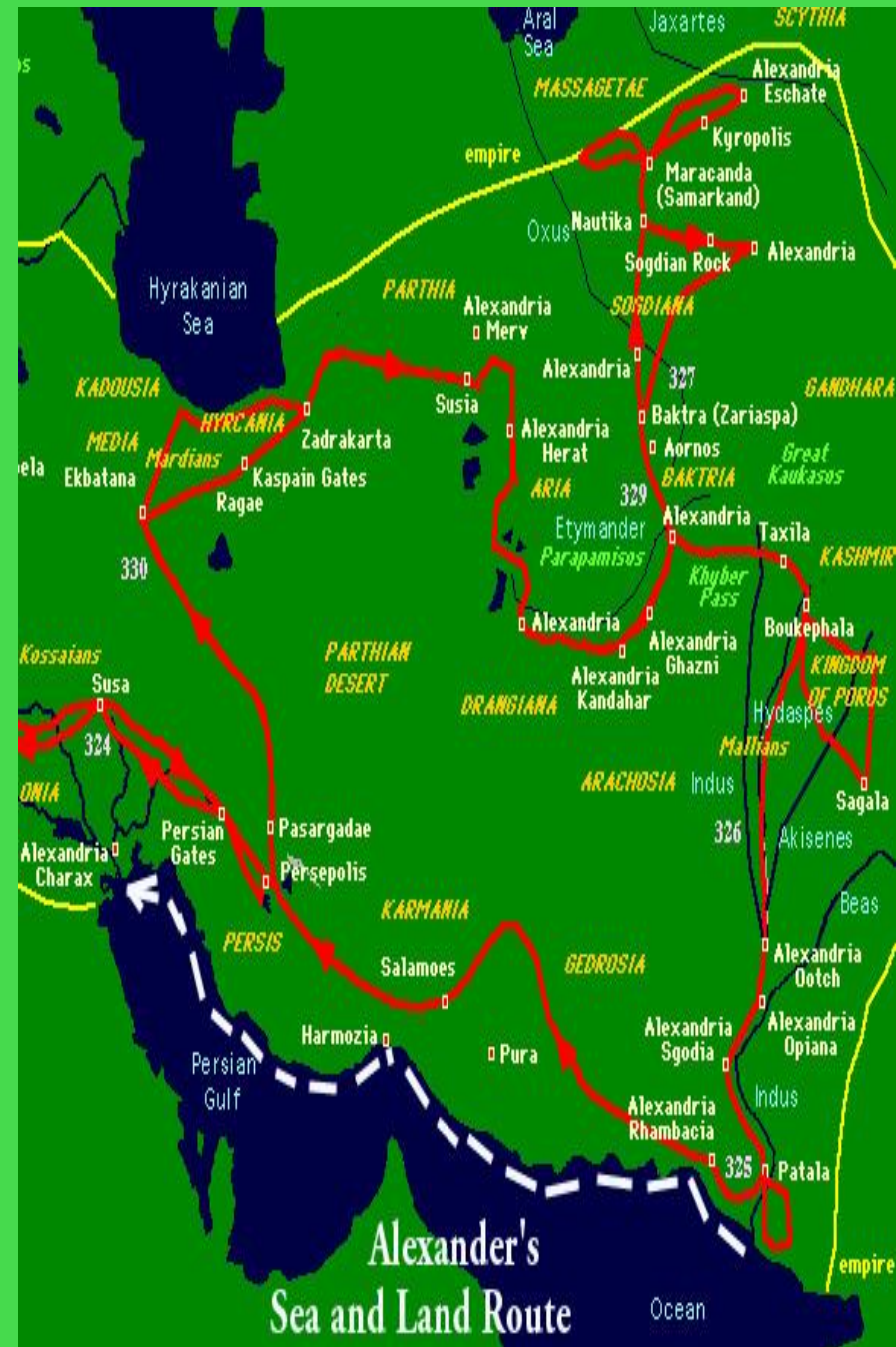
- Arrian states (*Indica* 21.1) that that Nearchus' fleet had to wait until the summer trade winds had subsided, although he states that they set out in the 20th day of the Athenian month of Boedromion (during October).
- However in the *Anabasis* 6.21.1-3, Arrian claims that Nearchus waited at Patala till winter (the setting of the Pleiads - November) before setting out, more in accord with what is known of monsoon weather patterns in the Arabian Sea, this is also what is reported in Strabo (15.1.17).



- Nearchus fleet often needed to fight with the locals to beach their ships and gain supplies – cf. Fish-Eaters (**Arrian *Indica* 27.7-28.9**).
- Very short of supplies while sailing along the coast of the Fish-Eaters – ***Indica* 29.7-8**.

“Monstrously large animals feed in the outer ocean, much larger than our inland sea... when they were sailing along the coast of Cyiza, about day break they saw water being blow upwards by the force of a waterspout. They were astonished and asked the pilots what they might be... they replied that it was these great animals spouting up the water as they moved about the sea. The sailors were so startled the oars fell from their hands... whenever he sailed past them he [Nearchus] singled them to turn the ships in line towards the animals as if to give them battle...” - ***Indica* 30**.

- Nearchus' fleet and Alexander's forces meet in the territory of Carmania – **Arrian *Indica* 32-36.**
- Nearchus fleet reaches the mouth of the Euphrates near a village called Diridotis – ***Indica* 41.**
- Sail up the Pasitigris (Karun) River in order to meet Alexander at Susa.



Alexander and the Indian Philosophers

- The discipline and self-sacrificing manner of the Indian philosophers impressed Alexander and his entourage.
- Onesicritus is sent by Alexander to meet with the Gymnosophists.
- Onesicritus drew analogies between the Gymnosophists' lifestyles and those of Greek Cynic philosophers.

“[Onesicritus] he found fifteen men at a distance of twenty stadia from the city, who were in different postures, standing or sitting or lying naked and motionless till evening, and that they then returned to the city; and that it was very hard to endure the sun, which was so hot that at midday no one else could easily endure walking on the ground with bare feet... [Mandanis] commended the king because, although busied with the government of so great an empire, he was desirous of wisdom; for the king was the only philosopher in arms that he ever saw...” – **Strabo *Geog.* 15.1.63-64** (see also **15.1.43**).

“Onesicritus goes on to say that they inquire into numerous natural phenomena, including prognostics, rains, droughts, and diseases... they regard disease of the body as a most disgraceful thing; and that he who suspects disease in his own body commits suicide through means of fire, piling a funeral pyre; and that he anoints himself, sits down on the pyre, orders it to be lit, and burns without movement.” – **Strabo *Geog.* 15.1.65.**

“Nearchus speaks of the sophists as follows: That the Brachmanes engaged in affairs of state and attend the kings as counsellors; but that the other sophists investigate natural phenomena; and that Calanus is one of these; and that their wives join them in the study of philosophy; and that the modes of life of all are severe.” (15.1.66).

“Calanus, nevertheless, was persuaded by Taxiles to pay a visit to Alexander... In Persia, too, Calanus, who had suffered for a little while from intestinal disorder, asked that a funeral pyre might be prepared for him...and so sacrificed himself acceptably, as the wise men of his country had done from of old.” – **Plutarch *Alexander* 65.5, 69.8.**

“The philosophers, too, no less than the mercenaries, gave him trouble, by abusing those of the native princes who attached themselves to his cause, and by inciting the free peoples to revolt. He therefore took many of these also and hanged them.” – **Plutarch Alexander 59.8.**

“He captured ten of the Gymnosophists who had done most to get Sabbas to revolt... Alexander therefore put difficult questions to them, declaring that he would put to death him who first made an incorrect answer, and then the rest... and he commanded one of them, the oldest, to be the judge in the contest...” – **(64.1).**

1 – whose more numerous, living or the dead? – said living as dead no longer exist.

2 – earth or sea produce larger animals? – earth as sea is part of it.

3 – which animal is most cunning? – the one man has not discovered.

4 – why he induced Sabbas to revolt? – ‘Because I wished him either to live nobly or to die nobly.’

5 – which is older, day or night? – Day, by one day.

6 – how can a man be most loved? – ‘If, said the philosopher, "he is most powerful, and yet does not inspire fear.’

7 – how might one become a god instead of a man? – ‘by doing something which a man cannot do.’

8 – which is stronger life or death? – ‘life, since it supports so many ills.’

9 – how long should a man live? – ‘Until he does not regard death as better than life.’

Colonisation in the East

Alexander's Colonies in Asia

- Most of the settlements founded by Alexander were well east of the Tigris River.
- Importance of providing a safeguard against the nomadic populations of the steps to the north.
- Also regions where Alexander encountered fierce and prolonged local opposition.

“Be this as it may, they say that Alexander founded eight cities in Bactria and Sogdiana...” – **Strabo *Geog.* 11.11.4.** – cf. Justin (**12.5.3**) who mentions twelve (and in another manuscript seven) in these places.

Possible Colonies?

TCHERIKOVER

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|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Alexandropolis in Thrace | 7. Boukephala |
| 2. Gaza | 8. Arigaion |
| 3. Alexandreia near Egypt | 9. Alexandreia on the Akesines |
| 4. Alexandreia on the Caucasus | 10. Alexandreia on the Indus and Akesines |
| 5. Alexandreia on the Tanais | 11. Alexandreia Sogdiana |
| 6. Nikaia in India | |
| 12. Xylenopolis | 15. Alexandreia Rhambakia |
| 13. Barke | 16. Alexandreia on the Pallakottas |
| 14. Arbis-Alexander's Harbor | 17. Alexandreia Charax |

TARN

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Alexandreia near Egypt | 8. Alexandreia Prophthasia |
| 2. Alexander in Aria | 9. Alexandreia-Bactra |
| 3. Alexandreia in Arachosia | 10. Alexandreia of the Caucasus |
| 4. Alexandreia in Margiana | 11. Alexandreia Boukephala |
| 5. Alexandreia on the Oxus | 12. Alexandreia Iomousa |
| 6. Alexandreia Eschate | 13. Alexandreia in Makrene |
| 7. Alexandreia in Susiana | |

"ZWEIFELHAFTE"

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|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Alexandreia on the Latmos | 8. Prophthasia |
| 2. Samareia | 9. Another city in the Caucasus (Kadrusi) |
| 3. Alexandreia in Assyria | 10. Alexandreia in Bactria |
| 4. Alexandreia in Parthia | 11. Alexandreia on the Oxus |
| 5. Alexandreia in Aria | 12. Alexandreia Soriana |
| 6. Alexandreia in Arachosia | 13. Alexandreia in Carmania |
| 7. Alexandreia in Sakastane | |

FRASER

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|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Alexandreia near Egypt | 6. Alexandreia among the Oreitai (Rhambakia) |
| 2. Alexandreia in Aria | 7. Alexandreia in Arachosia |
| 3. Alexandreia Eschate | 8. Alexandreia in Parapamisadai |
| 4. Alexandreia in Susiana | |
| 5. Alexandreia Boukephala | |

“...but Alexander established more than seventy cities among savage tribes, and sowed all Asia with Grecian magistracies, and thus overcame its uncivilized and brutish manner of living. Although few of us read Plato's Laws, yet hundreds of thousands have made use of Alexander's laws, and continue to use them. Those who were vanquished by Alexander are happier than those who escaped his hand; for these had no one to put an end to the wretchedness of their existence, while the victor compelled those others to lead a happy life... Thus Alexander's new subjects would not have been civilized, had they not been vanquished... for by the founding of cities in these places savagery was extinguished and the worse element, gaining familiarity with the better, changed under its influence. If, then, philosophers take the greatest pride in civilizing and rendering adaptable the intractable and untutored elements in human character, and if Alexander has been shown to have changed the savage natures of countless tribes, it is with good reason that he should be regarded as a very great philosopher.” – **Plutarch** *On the Fortune of Alexander* 1.5.

- Alexander was not the first to introduce settlements of Greeks in Bactria – it was a common policy for Persian kings, particularly Darius the Great and Xerxes to transplant populations as a punitive measure.
- One particularly notable group – Branchidae, who had apparently robbed the temple of Apollo. They were then settled by Xerxes in Bactria to escaped Milesian retribution.

“...the guilt of their ancestors was being atoned for by the descendants who had not even seen Miletus and accordingly could not have possibly have betrayed it to Xerxes.” – **Curtius Rufus 7.5.35.**

- Carians also settled in Bactria by Cyrus – **Strabo *Geog.* 11.11.4.**
- Barcaeans of Cyrenaica were settled in Bactria, in a settlement called Barca – **Herodotus 4.159-205.**

Cultural Continuity

“There he [Alexander] remained seven days and, proceeding with the army, came on the third day to the Celones, as they are called. There dwells here down to our time [i.e. in Diodorus’ time – first century BC] a settlement of Boeotians who were moved in the time of Xerxes's campaign, but still have not forgotten their ancestral customs. They are bilingual and speak like the natives in the one language, while in the other they preserve most of the Greek vocabulary, and they maintain some Greek practices.” – **Diodorus Siculus 17.110.4-5.**

Rebellions (1)

“For many days the king lay helpless under his treatment, and the Greeks who had been settled in Bactria and Sogdiana, who had long unhappily tolerated their stay among peoples of another race and now received word that the king had died of his wounds, revolted against the Macedonians. They formed a band of three thousand men and underwent great hardship on their homeward route. Later they were massacred by the Macedonians after Alexander's death...” – **Diodorus Siculus 17.99.5.** (contra Curtius Rufus 9.7.11).

Rebellions (2)

“The Greeks who had been settled by Alexander in the upper satrapies [Bactria, Sogdiana, Aria, Arachosia, Margiana, Parapamisadae and India], as they were called, although they longed for the Greek customs and manner of life and were cast away in the most distant part of the kingdom, yet submitted while the king was alive through fear; but when he was dead they rose in revolt... elected Philon the Aenianian as general... They had more than twenty thousand foot soldiers and three thousand horse... When Perdiccas heard of the revolt of the Greeks, he drew by lot from the Macedonians three thousand infantry and eight hundred horsemen.... it was written that they should furnish Pithon ten thousand footmen and eight thousand horsemen, he sent him against the rebels... Pithon, who was a man of great ambition, gladly accepted the expedition, intending to win the Greeks over through kindness, and, after making his army great through an alliance with them, to work in his own interests and become the ruler of the upper satrapies. But Perdiccas, suspecting his design, gave him definite orders to kill all the rebels when he had subdued them, and to distribute the spoils to the soldiers... Through the agency of a certain Aenianian he corrupted Letodorus, who had been made a commander of three thousand among the rebels, and won a complete victory... the traitor left his allies without warning and withdrew to a certain hill, taking his three thousand men... Pithon, being victorious in the battle, sent a herald to the conquered, ordering them to lay down their arms and to return to their several colonies after receiving pledges... but the Macedonians, remembering the orders of Perdiccas and having no regard for the oaths that had been sworn, broke faith with the Greeks. Setting upon them unexpectedly and catching them off their guard, they shot them all down with javelins and seized their possessions as plunder.”
– **Diodorus Siculus 18.7.**

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