our. Philip was more staid in his words, Alexander in his actions. The son felt readier and nobler impulses to spare the conquered; the father showed no mercy even to his allies. The father was more inclined to frugality, the son to luxury. By the same course by which the father laid the foundations of the empire of the world, the son consummated the glory of conquering the whole world."

CHAPTER 2

Long Live the King

The new king of Macedonia, reigning as Alexander III, inherited a troubled empire. "At the age of twenty years Alexander received the kingdom, which was exposed to great jealousies, dire hatreds, and dangers on every hand," wrote Plutarch. "The neighboring tribes of Barbarians would not tolerate their servitude, and longed for their hereditary kingdoms; and as for Greece, although Philip had conquered her in the field, he had not had time enough to make her tame under his yoke, but had merely disturbed and changed the condition of affairs there, and then left them in a great surge and commotion."

Alexander's first military campaigns as king in early 335 BC were aimed at preserving the empire that he had inherited from Philip. He marched north to the Danube and into what is now Serbia to subdue the Triballi, a Thracian people who had earlier been a painful thorn in Philip's side.

Meanwhile, the Thebans and Athenians interpreted Philip's death as the end of Macedonian primacy. They were encouraged by rumors that Alexander had been killed by the Triballi during operations in the north, and that the Macedonian command structure was in disarray. One can imagine their surprise when Alexander himself arrived at Thebes leading an intact and disciplined army.

Rather than simply engaging and defeating the Theban army—as he and Philip had done at Chaeronea in August 338—Alexander also destroyed the city, obliterating what had been one of the most powerful of all the Greek cities. He spared only the temples and the former home of the poet Pindar. The Theban death toll was in the thousands, and the survivors were sold as slaves.

This devastation, with its take-no-prisoners doctrine, both shocked and awed the Athenians, who sensed that their city was next. Athens capitulated immediately, groveling for mercy, congratulating Alexander on his victories since becoming king, and promising to silence and reprimand those Athenians who had spoken against him. Just a fortnight earlier, Athenians had rejoiced at the unfounded rumor that Alexander was dead. Now, all they could do was murmur "long live the king." Alexander chose to leave Athens intact, letting Thebes be his lesson to the city-states that Chaeronea had indeed irrevocably changed the balance of power within Greece.

His empire under control, Alexander now prepared to continue what Philip had barely started: to take the long-simmering cold war decisively to the Achaemenid Persian Empire, now ruled by Darius III, the 45-year-old great-grandson of Darius II, who had come to the throne the year before.

To rule Greece as regent in his absence, Alexander chose Antipater, or Antipatros, a 62-year-old Macedonian general and diplomat, whose loyalty to both Philip and Alexander was well established. He had served as Philip's ambassador to Athens after Chaeronea, and had served previously as Alexander's regent in the Macedonian capital of Pella during the 336–335 campaigns against the Triballi and the Thebans.

As Justinus writes, Alexander "divided all his private property, which he had in Macedonia and the rest of Europe, among his friends, saying, 'that for himself Asia was sufficient.'"

He also killed all of the relatives of his stepmother Cleopatra, including Attalus, so that there would be no pretenders to his throne to cause trouble in his absence. He made sacrifices to the gods in accordance with custom, and he went to Delphi. Here, as interpreted by the Pythian priestess, the oracle told him that he was invincible. That was all he needed to hear.

Alexander headed for the Hellespont, where Parmenio had already seized a bridgehead between Sestus on the European side and the old Thracian city of Abydos in Asia Minor. It was here that Xerxes had crossed in the opposite direction when he invaded Greece in 480 BC.

As Justinus writes, there was a "general assembly of the Greeks" held at Sestus, where "a vote was passed to make an expedition against Persia with Alexander, and he was proclaimed their leader. Thereupon many statesmen and philosophers came to him with their congratulations."

Justinus says that the people had given Alexander the mandate as the chosen "avenger of Greece so often assailed by the Persians."

Alexander's field commanders, Parmenio, Craterus, Coenus and Cleitus the Black were Macedonian, but his army consisted of troops drawn from throughout Greece. They included troops, especially Thessalians, who would fight under Macedonian command because Alexander was seen as the avenger of all Greece who would lead them to exact the long-desired vengeance against the hated Persians—who nearly everyone agreed were the enemy.

Notable among the international troops serving in Alexander's army—because of their reputation as warriors and because Alexander's biographers would refer to them repeatedly in accounts of his military exploits in Asia—was a large contingent of Agrianian javelin throwers. The Agrianians were a Thracian people from the area that is now southern Serbia. Alexander would use them consistently in his upcoming operations in Asia, frequently attaching them to units that he led into battle personally.

Estimates of the exact size of Alexander's Greco-Macedonian army vary, though not widely. Justinus reports 32,000 infantry, and 4,500 cavalry. Citing various ancient sources, Plutarch gives a range of between 30,000 and 43,000 infantry, and between 4,000 and 5,000 cavalry. These figures apparently do not account for logistical and support personnel, camp followers and auxiliaries, which would have included Alexander's engineers, who would play a vital role in future operations.

Meanwhile, Alexander's offensive naval strength was proportionally smaller than his land strength. His navy consisted of just 160–180 triremes, which would explain why he would pursue a land, rather

than naval, strategy. The trireme, so named for its having three rows of oars on each side, was the standard Mediterranean warship of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Though triremes were the most common warship of the day, larger vessels called quadriremes and quinqueremes were also used by various navies during this period. While Alexander emphasized land power over naval power in his military doctrine, he occasionally deployed a fleet comprised mainly of allied naval forces, and all three types of vessels were included.

Though the numbers in Alexander's army were relatively small, roughly the size of a modern corps, their training, discipline and experience—dating back to their battles under Philip—made them perhaps the best field army the world had yet seen. As Justinus wrote, "when [Alexander] selected his troops for so hazardous a warfare, he did not choose robust young men, or men in the flower of their age, but veterans, most of whom had even passed their term of service, and who had fought under his father and his uncles; so that he might be thought to have chosen, not soldiers, but masters in war. No one was made an officer who was not 60 years of age; so that he who saw the captains assembled at headquarters, would have declared that he saw the senate of some ancient republic. None, on the field of battle, thought of flight, but every one of victory; none trusted in his feet, but every one in his arms."

Strategically, Alexander's first "victory" in his Persian campaign was getting his army across the Hellespont intact in the spring of 334 BC. For Darius, this was a major missed opportunity. As the Allies discovered at nearby Gallipoli in 1915–1916, troops engaged in such operations are extremely vulnerable. Troops crossing a waterway are nearly always dangerously exposed. In the case of amphibious operations on a river or a sea, they are at the mercy of currents, crashing waves and underwater obstacles. In the case of crossing a pontoon bridge, such as Alexander's men were able to do, they are exposed in single file with no cover and no ability to disperse or take evasive action. In short, in ether case, they are sitting ducks for a well-entrenched defender. Darius, who reportedly had a 20,000-man cavalry force in Asia Minor, forfeited the easiest opportunity that he would ever have to defeat Alexander.

Justinus tells us that Darius, "from confidence in his strength, abstained from all artifice in his operations; observing that 'clandestine measures were fit only for a stolen victory;' he did not attempt to repel the enemy from his frontiers, but admitted them into the heart of his kingdom, thinking it more honorable to drive war out of his kingdom than not to give it entrance."

Reportedly, Alexander stepped ashore on the Asian continent in full armor, ready to do battle, and threw his spear into the sand on the beach at Abydos. He offered sacrifices to the gods, asking that the lands he encountered would willingly accept him as their king.

Traveling eastward from Abydos, into what is now Çanakkale Province of northwestern Turkey, Alexander's army marched toward Dascylium, a city near present-day Ergili, which had been the site of important battles in earlier Greek forays into Asia Minor. Agesilaus of Sparta had captured the city in 395, but less than a decade later it had been recaptured by the Persians. Alexander probably saw it as the essential first objective in any Asia Minor campaign. In 334, it was the capital of the Persian province of Phrygia.

As his army marched into Asia Minor, Alexander approached the river now known in Turkish as Biga Çayi or Kocabas Çayi, but then known as the Granicus. Slow moving except when choked with the spring run-off from Mount Ida, the Biga Çayi meanders in a northeasterly direction toward the Sea of Marmara. Like that small stream in Virginia known as Bull Run, the Granicus appears inconsequential if one bothers to notice it at all.

However, like Bull Run, the Granicus would give its name to a momentous battle that was the opening salvo in several years of warfare that would alter the course of history.

CHAPTER 3

From Granicus to Gordium

Though he was far away in his palace in Susa, now the southwestern Iranian city of Shush, Darius III, monarch of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, knew that Alexander was coming, and he knew what he was planning. One does not cross the Hellespont with an army of nearly 50,000 without its being noticed, and the news had reached Darius quickly. The Persian emperor assumed that decimating the upstart Macedonian and his army would be a routine matter for his Persian legions. As Justinus observes, Darius had "confidence in his strength."

The exact number of Persian combat troops is not known, and modern estimates vary widely from about 20,000 to nearly 50,000. Two of the principal Persian field commanders were Spithridates, the Persian satrap of Lydia and Ionia, and Mithridates, the son-in-law of Darius. The Persian force also included a substantial number of Greek mercenaries. At the Granicus, they were led by Memnon of Rhodes, reportedly a favorite of Darius.

The battle lines were drawn on opposite sides of the river, with Alexander to the north and west, and the Persians to the south and

east. This being early May, 334 BC, the river was running high, and the Persians probably saw it as a decisive natural barrier. They could wait on their side and pick off Alexander's troops as they struggled ashore.

Alexander's plan of attack against the Persian defenses is described by Arrian of Nicomedia (Lucius Flavius Arrianus) in his *Anabasis Alexandri,* or *The Campaigns of Alexander.* A military leader himself, he had a good understanding of the tactical situation. According to Arrian, Parmenio proposed a flanking maneuver early the next day, but Alexander countered that they should not wait, but attack immediately. His rationale was that this would take the Persians off guard and give the Greco-Macedonian troops the instant gratification of getting into the fight straight away.

Alexander's confidence was also buoyed that day by a good interpretation of omens by Aristander of Telmessos, once his father's favorite soothsayer, who was now part of Alexander's entourage. The old fortune teller, who had once told Philip II that his son would be bold as a lion, now predicted a victory for that son.

The opening gambit was a fake attack by Parmenio on the left, against the Persian right. As the Persians moved their forces to cover this possible attempt to ford the Granicus, Alexander struck the true opening blow.

Alexander, like his father and like so many of history's greatest generals, led from the front. He went wide to his right, taking the Companion Cavalry across the Granicus and circling behind the Persian left flank. Here he engaged the cavalry led by Mithridates and Spithridates, who were apparently stunned to find Macedonians outflanking them from their rear so early in the battle.

It hadn't exactly been easy for Alexander, though. As Plutarch writes in his *Life of Alexander the Great,* Alexander "gained the opposite banks with difficulty and much ado, though they were moist and slippery with mud, and was at once compelled to fight pell-mell and engage his assailants man by man, before his troops who were crossing could form into any order. For the enemy pressed upon them with loud shouts, and matching horse with horse, plied their lances, and their swords when their lances were shattered. Many rushed upon Alexander, for he was conspicuous by his buckler and by his helmet's crest, on either side of which was fixed a plume of wonderful size and

whiteness. But although a javelin pierced the joint of his breastplate, he was not wounded."

Indeed, in the hand-to-hand combat, Alexander is said to have broken two spears fighting the Persians at close range. He also lost the horse that he was riding that day—he had chosen for some reason not to use Bucephalas—to a Persian spear.

Meanwhile, as the Persian left and right were dashing to meet attacks both real and perceived, Alexander's phalanx forced its way across the Granicus to strike the Persian center, which now had no support from its flanking cavalry.

The fight in the center began with the difficult struggle by Alexander's men to get across the river. Once joined on the other side, the battle must have been vicious, but the Persians with their shorter spears would have been no match for the men with the 18-foot sarissa, the fearsome Macedonian spear.

As the Greco-Macedonian spearmen sliced through the Persian phalanx, they threatened the rear of the Persian cavalry that had turned 180 degrees to face Alexander and the Companion Cavalry. By this time, Parmenio, having faked the earlier attack on the Persian right, actually did cross the Granicus.

As for Alexander himself, he soon found himself facing the Persian cavalry commanders man to man. Mithridates, also leading from the front, was well ahead of his troops, presenting Alexander with an opportunity. This he took, ramming his spear straight into the Persian general's head, and knocking his lifeless body from his horse.

At this point, Spithridates and his brother Rhoesaces turned to attack Alexander. As Plutarch describes it, Alexander avoided Spithridates, but "smote Rhoesaces, who wore a breastplate, with his spear; and when this weapon snapped in two with the blow, he took to his sword. While he was thus engaged with Rhoesaces, Spithridates rode up from one side, raised himself up on his horse, and with all his might came down with a barbarian battle-axe upon Alexander's head. The helmet's crest was broken off, together with one of its plumes, and barely resisted the blow, so that the edge of the battle-axe touched the topmost hair of his head. But while Spithridates was raising his arm again for another stroke, Cleitus, 'Black Cleitus,' got the start of him and ran him through the body with his spear. At the same time Rhoesaces also fell, smitten by Alexander's sword."

Writing in his *Bibliotheca Historica,* or *Historical Library,* Diodorus Siculus tells a slightly different story, explaining that Alexander killed Spithridates first, and was then attacked by Rhoesaces, who "galloped up and brought his sword down on Alexander's head so hard that he split his helmet and wounded his scalp. As Rhoesaces aimed another blow at the same break in the helmet, Cleitus, known as 'the Black,' dashed up and cut off the Persian's arm."

With the entire Greco-Macedonian force across the river, the Persians were outflanked on all sides. As the tactical situation deteriorated, many of the Persians fled, although Memnon's Greek mercenaries, being veteran professional soldiers, stayed in the fight and were the last of the Persian force still fighting. They too, were finally defeated, although Memnon himself got away. Those mercenaries captured were considered Greek traitors and were sent back to Greece in chains. Perhaps their anticipation of such a fate was what kept them in the fight until the bitter end.

The Battle of Granicus was a triumph both for Alexander personally and for his army. The actual casualty figures are unknown, but were probably lopsided in favor of Alexander—although it is likely that the historians exaggerated them. Plutarch repeats the story he was told that the Persians lost 20,000 infantry and 2,500 cavalry.

He then quotes Aristobulus of Cassandreia, who tells that Alexander's total losses numbered just 34. Aristobulus was an architect and military engineer who accompanied Alexander on the campaign and wrote an account that served as one of Arrian's primary sources. Continuing to reference Aristobulus, Arrian adds that Alexander ordered bronze equestrian statues to be cast by the sculptor Lysippus, who did a great deal of work for Alexander though the years, including statues of the young king himself. Justinus reports that Alexander lost nine infantrymen and 120 cavalry, while Arrian is somewhat more realistic, estimating losses at around 400 for the Greco-Macedonian army and ten times that number for the Persians.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers who retold Alexander's story and repeated these figures usually did so adding the grain of salt that they are probably exaggerations. Equally probable is that they are based on numbers that were deliberately concocted at the