ALEXANDER IN EGYPT AND SOME CONSEQUENCES[1]

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Alexander the Great, as all the world knows, led his victorious army into Egypt in the autumn of the year 332 and back again into Asia in the following spring. He stayed in the Nile valley just about the time that an ordinary tourist spends on a single visit, and he never returned to it except as an embalmed corpse. Nevertheless, he changed the course of history in Egypt and constituted there the most durable of all the Macedonian kingdoms—one destined to last three centuries and be succeeded by European domination for some six centuries more. In addition, he founded a city which would become in fifty years the greatest port in the world, and is still the greatest in the Eastern Mediterranean; he diverted the trade of his age and created, for future ages, a new commerce between continents; and he increased the dominion of Egypt by the addition of all north Africa as far west as the Syrtis. He found time, too, to do consciously at least one other thing of no small importance, of which I shall speak presently; and, all unconsciously, he started a Romance which went over the world, inspiring early literary efforts in some scores of languages European, Asiatic, and even African. Not a bad record for a winter in Egypt!

I think we may take it that he came down to Egypt from Syria expressly to do some of these things, so far as human prescience can foresee the consequences of human actions. It is impossible, of course, to say now whether before he left Macedonia he had laid down an original plan which included a conquest of Egypt and particular undertakings there, and that to this he subsequently adhered with the inexorable obstinacy of a German General Staff. He had entered Asia across the Dardanelles rather less than two years before, having won already in the Balkans the reputation of being the first Captain of his time, though he was not quite twenty-three. His expeditionary force of about forty thousand trained men, trivial as it would seem now-a-days, was equal in numbers to any which could be brought up against him in Asia Minor, and much superior in fighting value, in equipment and in auxiliary services. It easily routed the enemy army of Asia Minor at one corner of the peninsula, and, on getting through after a year to the opposite corner, smashed a much larger first army of all Asia with almost equal ease. It would take twelve months, as Alexander's staff knew, to collect the full levy of the continent, and even then more months to move this army down to the coast. The conqueror had therefore free choice either to march straight up and forestall that general levy, or to turn off into Syria and Egypt. He chose the latter course.

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Why? Without guessing that he either did or did not plan so far ahead and adhere so pertinaciously to an original programme as a German General Staff, we may detect in the record of his advance signs of a purpose, and causes of his subsequent action. What then had happened which would have disposed him to invade Egypt and do what eventually was done there? What also which can explain Alexander's adherence to such a purpose and the action he would take? Had anything, in short, happened which accounts for Alexander in Egypt?

He had opened his great venture, as we have seen, with an army of forty thousand men; but with no sufficient war-fleet ready to take the sea. He was strong enough, he well knew, to deal with the Persian army of Asia Minor; but there is no reason to suppose he knew himself to be strong enough to meet a general levy of the Persian Empire. At Issus he enjoyed the proverbial fortune of the brave; but his situation there would have been very serious if Darius had adopted any other strategy than he did—if, for example, he had let his enemy get well into Syria and then had crossed Amanus and closed the defiles. For the sea, held by the Greeks, was hostile to the Captain-General of the Greeks. The treasonable correspondence, which fell into the latter's hands at Issus, sufficiently proves it, even if we had no other evidence; and, in fact, there is plenty. At the moment when, taken in the rear, Alexander turned at bay, he was doubly cut off from his base, and without hope, in case of defeat, of repairing his losses in men and material.

Evidently something of what was certainly his original plan had miscarried. Alexander had relied on the Greek cities of Europe supporting him, following his march with obedient fleets, and sending him reinforcements before he should leave Asia Minor. He started prematurely, without being assured by earnests of ships or men, that the agreement of Corinth would be loyally kept. There were, indeed, abundant signs that it would not. But he was very young, impetuous, and impatient, and not a little histrionic, as he was to show on landing near Ilion, on reaching Ephesus, and often enough later, till a narrow escape from the consequences of a supreme piece of dare-devil folly at Mooltan in India would teach him a little self-restraint.

The Greek fleets did not come to his aid in western Asia Minor, and if they appeared, it was as enemy ships. By the time he got down to Caria, worse happened. Miletus and Halicarnassus, the two most powerful of the Greek cities, which he had come to liberate, shut him out and only succumbed after regular sieges and desperate fighting. His own Macedonian ships, which had now taken the sea, were overawed by larger hostile fleets. He went up to Gordion to await the reinforcements to come by the Hellespontine road, but only Macedonian levies appeared in the spring. It was clear he was playing a "lone hand"—*Macedonia contra mundum!* How was he to go on into inner Asia with his rear thus insecure? He must first obtain command of the Eastern Mediterranean. But, inferior on the sea itself, he could only hope to achieve that end by land, i.e. by closing to the Greeks all ports round the Levant, where they could refit and provision, or whence they might draw allies. He had done this already on the coasts from the Dardanelles to the Gulf of Adalia. He must do it now from the latter right round to Cyrene, the last Greek stronghold before barbarism and Carthage began. To this task therefore he devoted his second year, beginning with Cilicia, and continuing, after the crowning mercy of Issus, with the Phoenician ports.

These last had long been the Persian's stand-by for ships and sailors, and only a few years before, had reconquered Cyprus for the Great King. Now Tyre was to give Alexander more trouble than any single city theretofore, or thereafter. He took it after the greatest and longest of all his sieges, crushed it, and went on convinced that some measure must be devised to prevent its revival. Such a measure he took a few months later. It was the foundation of Alexandria in Egypt. Subsequently Fortune—as it happened—once more intervened to relieve him of a further most perilous necessity, if he was to close the Levant to hostile Greeks—the march right through barren Marmarica to attack Cyrene. Envoys from the latter met him more than half way and made submission in form.

This policy of mastering the east Mediterranean coasts, I think, sufficiently explains on the one hand his marching to Egypt, although the direct road to the accomplishment of his primary object had forked off three hundred miles back, and he was giving Darius a good year to prepare to frustrate that object: in consequence, as you know, Alexander's army was to come within very little of disaster next year at Arbela, which, of all his great battles, brought him his worst moments, thanks to the enormous weight of the force which the Persian had had time to collect. On the other it explains his new foundation in Egypt, the care with which its site was chosen, and the scale, immense for the age, on which it was laid out by Alexander himself. That he meant it to be a Macedonian Tyre, I feel no doubt. How completely it was to supersede Tyre by educating another Semitic people to take commerce out of Phoenician hands, he could not, of course, foresee.

As for the site of the city, it has often been pointed out why wretched little Egyptian Rhacotis was selected to be transformed into a world-capital. The Canopic mouth of the Nile had long served for the comparatively little sea-borne commerce with the alien Levant, which Egypt had hitherto had. Of the other mouths, the Pelusiac alone remained open to anything much larger than a fishing boat. Even the Canopic had a dangerous bar. If merchant ships might enter, it offered nevertheless no good port to the Macedonian war-fleets, which must henceforth keep the Levant. Entry, exit, conditions ashore, which made for neither health nor security, were all against it. But at Rhacotis, a few miles west, Alexander found a dry limestone site, raised above the Delta level, within easy reach of drinkable and navigable inland water by a canal to be taken off the Nile, not seriously affected by the Canopic silt which the point of Abukir directs seaward, and covered by an island which, if joined to the mainland by a mole, would give alternative harbours against the sea-winds, blow they whence they might. It was the one possible situation in Egypt for a healthy open port to be used by Macedonian sea-going fleets, and particularly by war-ships, already tending, at that epoch, to increase their tonnage and their draught.

I could enlarge further on matters concerning the beginnings of Alexandria, on features which belong to the original lay-out, and therefore are to be ascribed not to any Ptolemy who enriched or beautified the city, but to Alexander's own town-planner, and, more or less, to Alexander himself. For instance, the gridiron scheme on which the streets were projected—a scheme destined to determine the lay-out of typical Hellenistic foundations all over the Near East, such as Priene and Pergamum, to mention two whose plans have been recovered by excavation. Or again the elaborate system of supply- and drainage-conduits, laid down under the axis of each street when

the roadways were first made—a system which marked an advance in the organization of urban amenities, for the civilized world to imitate. But I must pass on to less parochial matters.

It may seem extraordinary that Alexander's invasion of Egypt should have met (as seems to be the fact) with no opposition whatever. He found himself as free as in his own Emathia to busy himself with founding a city; and he could pass out with large part of his army into the eastern desert, bound for distant Cyrene, without the slightest apprehension about his base. Further, after he had left Egypt for good in the spring of the following year, the country remained perfectly quiet under his extortionate governor, Cleomenes, during all the Far Eastern campaigns; and after Alexander's death, it accepted his successor as a matter of course. But all this would have surprised no contemporary student of Near Eastern politics, and was, doubtless, confidently expected by Alexander himself. Remember what had been happening for nearly a century. Egypt had expelled its Persian rulers about eighty years before, and had successfully resisted all Persian attempts to recover the province till less than ten years before the coming of the Macedonians. This it had effected with the aid, first and foremost, of Greeks; in return for which service Egyptian kings had been sending help to any Greek, who, like Evagoras of Salamis, might be embroiled with Susa. Indeed, much longer ago the nationalist party had begun to call in these aliens and rely on them. Even the liberation of Egypt from Assyria more than two centuries back had been carried through by Psammetichus I with the help of Anatolians whom Gyges of Lydia had sent to his ally; and if those Carians and Pisidians were not, strictly speaking, Greeks, they brought Ionian civilization with them, as Petrie's discoveries at Daphnae and Memphis have demonstrated, and probably were not distinguished from Hellenes too nicely, if at all, by the Egyptians of the time. The first abortive efforts to throw off the Persian yoke in its turn before the middle of the fifth century had, again, been made with Athenian auxiliaries.

Not to mention any influence which Naukratis may have exercised upon him, the Egyptian (especially the sturdiest element, the Delta man) had long been used not only to the presence of Greeks but to absolute reliance on them as protectors. In his eyes the Greeks were the foremost fighting race in the world, and this belief was only confirmed by the predominance of Greeks in the composition of successive Persian armies sent against Egypt, for example, the force which Artaxerxes Mnemon, tardily taking advice given to him after Cunaxa by his captive Clearchus, Captain of the Ten Thousand, detached in vain against Egypt early in the fourth century.

In the year 332 therefore no Egyptian was in the least likely to raise a finger against forty thousand trained Macedonians, even had these no fresh prestige of brilliant victories to their credit. Moreover, were they not regarded as come to deliver Egypt once more from the Persian yoke recently reimposed and no more welcome than of old? It is clear from the genesis of that famous Alexander-Romance, already alluded to, that nationalist Egyptian feeling survived the reconquest by Darius Ochus, and continued to identify itself with the Greek against the Persian. Originally composed in or near Alexandria, as its author's local knowledge of the city shows, the Romance starts as what the Germans call a *Tendenzschrift*, designed to affiliate the actual Macedonian régime to the succession of former native kings. Nectanebo II, who had been driven out by the victorious Persians, appears as the real father of Alexander, having

gained access in his exile to Olympias, Philip's queen, and by magical arts secured her compliance. Later on he is got rid of by the unwitting act of his own son. This story, which, as I have said, went out with the rest of the Romance over the world and made Nectanebo, with Plato and four others, an arch-magician of mediaeval tradition throughout Europe, is interesting for many reasons. For example, it brings Nectanebo into one category with Saxon Harold and German Barbarossa, national heroes believed popularly to have survived defeat and death to secure the ultimate victory of the lost cause. Again, it illustrates the effects of stories put about in Alexander's own life-time, perhaps even by himself, which threw doubt on Philip's fatherhood and Olympias' virtue (the last, if other stories are true, not in any case appropriate to Caesar's wife!) and suggested that a god had, in fact, begotten the conqueror of the world. For it was in the serpent shape of Zeus Ammon that the Nectanebo of the Romance obtained the favours of the Macedonian queen. But the chief interest of the story, for our present purpose, lies in its nationalist tendency. It proves the survival of the old spirit of Egypt and its desire to accept Greek rule.

Having touched on the famous story which ascribed Alexander's paternity to Zeus, I cannot be silent about the most notorious of all the conqueror's proceedings in Egypt, his transaction with the Oracle of Ammon in the Oasis of Siwah. I approach the subject shyly, because I have suffered many things by reason of it. Long ago, hardly older than Alexander when he went to the Ammonium, I wrote my first article on a historical subject, in order to explode the belief that Alexander called himself, or indeed was called in his lifetime, son of Ammon. I knew something less about Egypt than I know now, and I had not learned how easy and fatal it is to judge ancient men and affairs by modern codes. Full of enthusiasm for my hero, Alexander, I revolted from the idea that he could have disowned his father, or smirched his mother, and have started and encouraged a ridiculous fable about himself. Finding the contemporary evidence indifferent and sprinkled with obvious fables, such as that of the birds which guided the Macedonians to the Oasis, I tore it to pieces to my own entire satisfaction.

That evidence is, in fact, indifferent, but it is no worse than a great deal which I cheerfully accepted in support of other incidents more creditable to my hero; and I know very well it was not the evidence but a prepossession which determined my conclusions. I was rash enough, some ten years later, to repeat them in a published essay on Alexander. Shortly afterwards Maspero published a treatise entitled *Comment Alexandre le Grand devint dieu en Égypte.* Since then no one has believed me, not even I myself, and every one has taken it from Maspero, with a sideways kick at me, that it was perfectly natural and indeed unavoidable that Alexander, once he had got Egypt, should call himself and be called, Son of Ammon. He was simply following traditional usage in the ordinary way and, in Egypt at least, incurred no imputation whatever of presumption, impiety, or absurdity.

The only unusual thing he did in the matter was to go for acknowledgment to that lone and distant temple of Amen in the palm-groves of Siwah; but this course was, I fancy, determined more by accident than anything else. He was on the march along the coast to Cyrene. Envoys met him at Paraetonium and made further progress westward unnecessary. Paraetonium is the modern Marsa Matruh, the point from which the easy road to Siwah, leaving the coast, takes you across the desert in seven camel-days to the oasis. A visit to the Ammonium, long and widely celebrated outside Egypt

(Croesus had consulted its oracle before he attacked Cyrus two centuries earlier) would make the already completed days of marching worth their fatigues. So to the Ammonium Alexander went, just as Abbas Hilmi went, but in a carriage and eight, a few years ago. Possibly Alexander's action was influenced by the prospect of not having time afterwards to visit Amen-Ra in Thebes. Possibly not. With that, let me leave this painful part of the matter. But, seriously, I am not sorry after all to have had an opportunity of recanting publicly a view which I have abandoned privately for nearly twenty years.

For what is left to be said on the matter we must follow Alexander up into Asia. The most important and significant fact about it all is this:—not that he was son of Ammon in the Nile valley, but that he continued to be so in lands with which Amen had nothing to do. It is possible that he proceeded to identify himself, or to be identified, with other gods of other lands, as he conquered them; that he was son of Baal in Tyre, of Bel-Marduk in Babylon, and in succession of whatever supreme deities the Bactrians, Afghans, Punjabis and other peoples of the Middle East may have been worshipping at that epoch. But there is no actual evidence for such further affiliations, and it is not clear that the usage of Middle Asiatic religions offered either means or precedents of nearly so literal and satisfactory a sort as did the usage of Egypt for affiliating the mortal sovereign to a supreme deity. But what is certain is this—that so far as his own followers imputed divinity in honour to him while he was on the march, and so far as his Greek and other critics imputed it in ridicule, it continued to be expressed as son-ship of Ammon.

After his death, as you probably know, the apotheosis of him which his successors promoted for their own ends, whether in Asia Minor or in Syria, or in Babylon, was from first to last as a divinity in the Egyptian, not any Asiatic, pantheon. For the benefit of Greeks or phil-hellenic princes he might appear on coins with attributes of a hero, such as Herakles; but, if he was to be a full god, the ram-horns of Ammon must protrude from his beautiful hair. In the event, the universal vogue of the Romance, which described his generation by Zeus Ammon, soon made any other affiliation impossible; and it is as "Dhulkarnein," the Two-horned, that he has passed from pre-Islamic folklore into the Koran and out of it again into the pseudo-history of half Asia, and much Africa.

These facts, more than any other evidence, dispose me to think that Alexander himself insisted on his son-ship of Ammon after he left Egypt, and imposed it as a cult with greater or less effect wherever he went. Otherwise, there is little reason why successors in Asia, who had nothing to do with Egypt except to covet it, should have adopted in common an Egyptianizing aspect of his divinity. True, it was his original apotheosis: true, too, that, when his mortal body had gone to rest in Egypt, there was a certain logic in his spirit being deified in no other guise than that of an Egyptian god. But I suspect Alexander himself took a hand in the matter.

Why, a mortal, he should have been concerned to put on immortality in life, and to create and foster a cult of himself, is to be explained not merely by vanity nor even by the immediate utility of self-magnification,—though both these considerations counted, no doubt, for something,—but by a less personal motive which shows through Alexander's actions more and more as his conquests went forward. He may have intended from the first to go up into Asia as son of Ammon; but it is much more probable that it was only when he had automatically become so in Egypt that he

bethought himself of using his novel and very un-Hellenic character to supply a vital necessity of which he must already have become conscious as he was moving through inner Anatolia and Syria, and would become still more conscious in inner Asia. This necessity was a Macedonian god who, standing for Macedonian Empire, would meet and satisfy the instinctive religiosity of the Asiatic mind. Without such a god Macedonian Empire in Asia could but be a superficial transient thing. I have tried, in a little book, *The Ancient East*, just issued in the "Home University Library" series, to explain this necessity, under which the Macedonians found themselves in Asia, and the reason why neither their ancestral deities, nor the Olympian and local gods of the Greeks, were qualified to satisfy it; how, too, history illustrates the growth of a consciousness among the Hellenes not only of their failure to satisfy the Asiatic need, but of a need of vital religion for themselves. Finally, how in the end Asia profited by this weakness of the West and took its philosophic captors captive with religions sufficiently seasoned with Greek philosophies to supply the needs of Europe. To that attempt of mine I must refer you now, all too brief as is the exposition there offered, limits having been prescribed to my book as to my lecture to-day.

For I have still to take a wider view of the consequences of Alexander's action in Egypt than it was possible for Alexander himself to take. *Impar congressus*, I yet have an advantage over Achilles—I am living two thousand years after his death! Shortly and broadly stated, what has Alexander's conquest of Egypt done for the world? I shall limit myself to a few reasonably direct and immediate results, those whose connection with actions of Alexander in Egypt is not too remote. I pass by as remote any effect the Greek occupation had on the Roman Empire, and, for another reason, even those most important effects which it had immediately and directly enough on Greece. The fact is, that the most noteworthy of these effects, the change which the Alexandrian School wrought in the direction and scope of Greek thought, was an effect of a larger cause, of the Macedonian conquest as a whole, whose influence was polarized in Alexandria and transmitted thence to Greece. Nor need I say more about effects already adumbrated in the earlier part of this lecture, such as that diversion of the main sea-route of Levantine commerce from Tyre to Alexandria; those changes in town-planning for which Alexandria served as the model; the introduction of Egyptian gods among the Greeks (inscriptions of the Greek mainland, e.g. those of the love-feasts and benefit-clubs, soon give us evidence of this); or that still more serious blow to Hellenic political and social ideas which was dealt by Alexander's insistence on the validity of his Egyptian deification throughout his Empire. One soon sees its effects on the most democratic of Greek cities when divine honours are paid in Athens itself successively to Demetrius of Phalerum and to Demetrius the Besieger.

Three other consequences, however, of grave and general import have not been set forth yet. The first and most momentous was the effect which Alexandria had on the fortunes and future of the Hebrew race. It was undoubtedly the attraction of this city which drew down from their isolated hills the Jews, already prepared by the great experience of the Babylonian captivity to expand, to associate with foreigners, to live abroad, and to take with avidity to trade. No sooner had the decline of Tyre given them a chance to usurp the position of indispensable middleman between Greek and Semitic peoples, than Alexandria brought them to the sea, which hitherto they

had left to their Phoenician cousins. And Alexandria it was which was chief agent in their hellenization. On this point I must refer you once more to that recent little book of mine, to its last chapter, wherein I have tried to show that Judaea was under the influence of Alexandria in Hellenistic times far longer and more completely than under that of Antioch; and that the place where the Septuagint committee made its translation of the Scriptures, had the most to do with the evolution of the Hellenistic Semitic type and of the Semite-Hellenic philosophic religiosity, which ultimately begat the Christian apostolate. Alexandria, it should be remembered, was in Ptolemaic times the home of the largest urban Hebrew population in the world. One of its four chief quarters was inhabited entirely by Jews and there they got most of their primary education as bankers and middlemen of the civilized world.

Secondly, I call attention to the fact that it was the Macedonian occupation of Egypt which opened the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to European commerce. I am not forgetting Alexander's subsequent overland incursion into the Punjab. This had less effect on communications between the West and India; for the East soon re-occupied and virtually re-closed the roads. But the Red Sea route remained in constant use by Greeks of Egypt from the opening of the third century B.C., and by it travelled much of that Hellenic influence which has left a deep mark on Indian art, and one only less profound on Indian thought.

Lastly, a very few words more on that famous Romance which was written and sent out over the world as a result of Alexander's appearance in Egypt. Not only did it carry some knowledge, however greatly mixed with fable, of Alexander's personality and achievements to the ends of the earth—into Abyssinia, Scandinavia, and Britain, which, else, might not have heard of him till comparatively modern times; but probably it carried also to countless thousands their first knowledge that there had been a Greek people and a world in which it had played a foremost part. Its only possible rival for that credit is the Tale of Troy, which, spread as it was through Roman channels, is probably younger folk-lore in the remoter lands where both Romances appeared in written form at the earliest articulate moment of the Middle Age. If Plutarch and Quintus Curtius instructed the cultivated societies of the Renaissance about Alexander, the Egyptian Romance had already revealed him to their rude forefathers, and was in many lands—among them our own—an earlier fountain-head of literature.