

Alexander the Great and the “Defeat” of the Sogdianian Revolt*

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“A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers”
(W. Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act I, Scene I)

(i)

At the beginning of 329,¹ the flight of the satrap Bessus towards the northeastern borders of the former Persian Empire gave Alexander the Great the timely opportunity for the invasion of Sogdiana.² This ancient region was located between the Oxus (present Amu-Darya) and Iaxartes (Syr-Darya) Rivers, where we now find the modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, bordering on the South with ancient Bactria (present Afghanistan). According to literary sources, the Macedonians rapidly occupied this large area with its “capital” Maracanda³ and also built, along the Iaxartes, the famous Alexandria Eschate, “the Farthermost.”⁴ However, during the same year, the Sogdianian nobles Spitamenes and Catanes⁵ were able to create a coalition of Sogdianians, Bactrians and Scythians, who created serious problems for Macedonian power in the region, forcing Alexander to return for the winter of 329/8 to the largest city of Bactria, Zariaspa-Bactra.⁶ The chiefs of the revolt were those who had

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1 Except where differently indicated, all the dates are BCE.

2 Arr. 3.28.10-29.6.

3 Arr. 3.30.6; Curt. 7.6.10: modern Samarkand. According to Curtius, the city was surrounded by long walls (70 stades, i.e. about 12.5 km), whereas the rock had a different (and higher) line of fortifications. On the city and the Hellenistic remains see Bernard 1996, 331-365; Mairs 2011, 33-34.

4 Arr. 4.1.3-4; 4.1; Curt. 7.6.13; 25-27; Iust. 12.5.12: the modern Khujand in Tajikistan (Mairs 2011, 34). Other sources: Ptol. 6.12.6; 8.23.14 (who calls it “Eschate”); App. Syr. 57. Fraser (Fraser 2003², 151-153) suggests that the foundation “marked, or coincided with, a turning-point in the campaign.” But the Marmor Parium (*FGrH* 239 B7) strangely dates the foundation to the following year, that is in 328/7 (archonship of Euthycritus in Athens). Bosworth notes that the marble reports incorrect dates for other contemporary events, as for example the execution of Bessus (Bosworth 1992, 74; Boiy 2007, 19). However, if we accept the idea that Alexander was faced with insurmountable problems in controlling the territory, omissions of historical data could be ascribed to Macedonian propaganda. The underlying source of the marble—inscribed in 264/3—is unknown (according to Fraser [Fraser 2003², 153 n. 94] “it must be an almost contemporary historical source, or other documentation”). There is no way to ascertain the hostility of this source to the Macedonians. In any case, the different date given in the inscription for the foundation of Alexandria Eschate is possibly due to a sudden interruption of city building works in the winter of 329/8. A completion was perhaps possible only in 328/7, when Alexander returned to full control of the north-eastern borders of the Empire.

5 Arr. 4.1.5; Curt. 7.6.13-15; Heckel 2009, 254, s.v. *Spitamenes*, 81-82, s.v. *Catanes*.

6 Arr. 4.7.1; cf. Curt. 7.10.10 (on the chronology see Bosworth 1995, 37-38; on the city and its remains see Mairs 2011, 29-30 with bibliography). Curtius says that Alexander’s official, Peucolaus, was left in Sogdiana with 3,000 men—maybe as *phrourarchos* of unknown fortress (so Heckel 2009, 205 s.v. *Peucolaus* [1]). He adds that

previously taken part in the arrest of Bessus. One can only wonder what the real reason was behind their subsequent opposition to the Macedonians. According to Arrian, Alexander proclaimed a congress (*syllagos*) among local *hyparchoi* in Zariaspa-Bactra, which caused the revolt of many Sogdianians and some Bactrians, worried that the event would be harmful to their interests.⁷ However, it is uncertain if there were further and more specific reasons other than generic “fears” behind the insurgence, as for example the imposition of the unwelcome satrap Artabazus.⁸ As far as we can see, Arrian’s information that he was later removed at his own request on the grounds of “old age” sounds extremely doubtful.⁹ In any case, in the spring of 328 the king again crossed the Oxus.¹⁰ He divided his army into five parts and rapidly moved to Maracanda. At the same time, Alexander founded several cities in the surrounding region—with the aim of protecting his conquests.¹¹ Arrian states that towards the end of 328 Spitamenes was isolated in the desert and eventually killed by his own allies, the Massagetae.¹² However, the rebellion continued. It appears that the rebels focused their actions on the mountainous areas of Sogdiana, using as their headquarters two impregnable fortresses: the so-called Sogdianian Rock (or Rock of Ariamazes) and the Rock of Chorienes (or Rock of Sisimithres).¹³ Despite the general uncertainty of events, detailed

Alexander considered Peucolaus’ force sufficient to control the region: *neque enim maiore praesidio indigebat*. However, despite the building of a long, solid wall in Alexandria Eschate (mentioned by Curtius and Iustinus) and the presence of a well-defended fortress in Maracanda, Alexander preferred to lead a large part of his forces back to winter in Bactria. This means that he could neither effectively garrison Sogdiana nor adequately supply his troops. Coloru (Coloru 2009, 58) reports on the recent discovery in Maracanda of a large barn-warehouse (8 rooms, containing millet and barley) built in the first Greek stages. This would suggest that food shortages were feared. Could we even hypothesize that lack of provisions induced the great Macedonian withdrawal towards Bactria?

7 4.1.5.

8 Arr. 3.29.1; Curt. 7.5.1.

9 4.17.3. See Bosworth, suggesting that a fictitious version was given by Arrian, instead emphasizing the decisive role played by the hostility of the local nobility against Artabazus (Bosworth 1995, 18; see *infra*).

10 Arr. 4.15.7; Sisti-Zambrini 2004, 421. On the river as a traditional boundary between Bactriana and Sogdiana cf. Sisti 2004², 548; Tarn 2010³, 102 (reporting the most diffused opinion among the Greek geographers) *contra* Harmatta 1999, 133-134 (noting that, according to the eastern sources, the border was instead marked by the Barsun-tau Mountains; so Sogdiana should be solely identified with the smaller area of Polytimetus Valley, modern Zarafshan). It seems that Alexander crossed the Oxus a total of four times in his campaign, between the spring of 329 and that of 327 (Rtveladze 2007, 158).

11 Arr. 4.16.1-3.

12 Arr. 4.17.7; by his wife according to Curt. 8.3.1-16. However, Strabo (11.8.8) states that they were Chorasmii. Tarn stresses the reliability of Strabo’s notice, concluding that these people were without a doubt included in the Massagetae confederacy (Tarn 2010³, 479 n. 1).

13 Ancient authors simply refer to both as *petrai* (Arrian, Polyaeus) or *petrae* (Curtius). However, Strabo’s passage clearly highlights the existence of strong fortifications in their surroundings (cf. the adjective *erymnai*, “fortified”: 11.11.4). As we shall see, some evidence would confirm this. However, given the problematic nature of the matter, I suggest maintaining, for the time being, the indistinct traditional designation “Rocks.” The present article is based on the most widespread historical interpretation, for which Ariamazes would have

accounts come from two of the most important historians of Macedon—Arrian of Nicomedia and Curtius Rufus, who report hard and meticulous *sieges* of the Rocks by the Macedonians. According to their accounts, these events represented turning points in the war. When telling of the capture of the Sogdianian Rock, both Arrian and Curtius ambiguously refer to a situation of alleged pacification. The former alleges that Alexander ταύτης γὰρ ἐξαιρεθείσης οὐκέτι οὐδὲν ὑπολειφθήσεσθαι ἐδόκει τῶν Σογδιανῶν τοῖς νεωτερίζειν ἐθέλουσιν,¹⁴ the latter bluntly claims that *cetera quidem pacaverat rex. Una erat petra, quam Arimazes Sogdianus...obtinebat*.¹⁵ These expressions are extremely meaningful and lead us to think that the conquest of the aforementioned Rock could have taken place only after the complete submission of the surrounding territories. However, the circumstances are somewhat puzzling and elements argue in favour of a serious reconsideration of the traditional historical perspective. The suspicion is that Curtius and Arrian (or their original sources) deliberately *exaggerated* the Macedonian success. The issue is also complicated by a number of factors. For example, we must highlight that in past years some debate has arisen among the historians on the role and the efficacy of Alexander's war strategy. It has been assumed that Alexander was forced to adapt his previous tactics to Sogdiana, and that some changes in military approach were sufficient to allow for the Macedonian victory over the rebels.¹⁶ The roles played by harsh treatment of the population and territorial devastation have also been greatly emphasized.¹⁷ In recent times, Rtveldze has rightfully highlighted important discordances in modern interpretations,¹⁸ and many inconsistencies arise, with the clearest evidence being the negative opinions on Alexander's conquest by Soviet scholars of the last century.¹⁹ On the contrary, Tarn stressed the positive turning point in the administrative history of the region under the Macedonians.²⁰ We must admit that

controlled the so-called Sogdianian Rock, while Arrian's Rock of Chorienees would be identifiable with that of Sisimithres (so e.g. Tarn 1948, I, 72-76; Hamilton 1969, 129; Brunt 1976, 407 n. 1; P'jankov 1982, 43-46; Sisti – Zambrini 2004, 426-435; Heckel 2009, 250 s.v. *Sisimithres contra* Holt 1988, 66 with n. 64; Rapin 2007, 30). In any case, the primary aim of this contribution is not a further discussion of prosopographical interpretations, but an overall analysis of historical incoherence of the Sogdianian campaign that emerge from Arrian, Curtius and other sources (especially Polyaeus, Strabo and the *Metz Epitome*).

14 Arr. 4.18.4: "Once this rock had been taken, Alexander thought that the Sogdianians who were ready to revolt would have no further recourse left" (transl. by Brunt 1976).

15 Curt. 7.11.1.

16 Lonsdale 2007, 94, 152; Balasevicius 2012, 40-41.

17 For example Holt 2005, 105; Lonsdale 2007, 93. More specifically, Holt's statement that Alexander declared the beginning of a "total war" against the Sogdianians after the defeat at the Polytimetus River, where a detachment of Macedonians was ambushed and massacred by the insurgents led by Spitamenes (Arr. 4.5.2-6; Curt. 7.7.30-39; Holt 2005, 56-58, 107) requires further investigation; and the same can be said for Lonsdale's opinion that Alexander's military supremacy was sufficient to obtain political control on Sogdiana.

18 Rtveldze 2007, 194-195.

19 See for example Košelenko 1979.

20 Tarn 2010³. As far as we can see, Tarn's theories are still alive in modern historiography: see for example Bosworth 1995, 18 ("Alexander's impact upon Bactria and Sogdiana was much greater than it had been upon

both interpretations may depend both on misleading interpretations of historical sources and, to some extent, the political influences of contemporary events (namely, Russian and British expansionism in Central Asia).²¹ Despite the enthusiastic passages by Arrian and Curtius, it is more likely that Alexander had enormous difficulties in winning his campaign. This can be inferred from some evidence that merits serious consideration. For example, in a dark passage of his *Geographika*, Strabo claims that the king conquered the Rocks *by treachery*.²² This statement goes against most literary traditions. Nevertheless, the passage has inexplicably been underestimated by historians. This is quite odd, because the so-called *Metz Epitome* (or *Incerti auctoris epitome rerum gestarum Alexandri Magni*) indirectly confirms Strabo’s allegation, i.e. *the killing* (!) of Ariamazes by his own men, who surrendered to the Macedonians and in exchange were spared.²³ Moreover, there are doubts concerning the meaning of the strange testimony of Curtius that, after these sieges, the Macedonian army was *saved* by the former enemy Sisimithres.²⁴ In general, several contradictions can be found in the extended narratives of Arrian and Curtius. The suspicion is that Alexander faced considerable military opposition by the insurgents, far stronger than generally claimed both by ancient and modern historians. The winters in Bactria-Sogdiana were, as they are today, ineluctable obstacles for invading armies. In those extreme conditions, food supply was certainly one of the most pressing problems for Alexander’s troops.²⁵ Furthermore, one wonders to what extent the conquest of the Sogdianian Rocks *really* marked a turning point in the course of the war. Should we suspect intentional exaggerations in Arrian’s account and/or omissions of negative details of the campaign?²⁶

central Iran”) and Hammond 1997, 159 (positive results of Alexander’s conquest in Bactriana-Sogdiana). As for the developing of local arts, the impact of Alexander’s conquest is generally considered as determinant (Palagia 2012, 377-380).

21 A detailed discussion on these points has recently appeared in Coloru 2009, 25-63. Coloru focuses his attention on Tarn’s “colonial” opinions: “un’impostazione troppo ellenocentrica nella quale mi sembra di cogliere un riflesso dell’espansione coloniale inglese” (Coloru 2009, 53). Similarly, he criticizes the (apparently) contrary work of Narain reconsidering the history of Hellenistic Bactria from the Indian point of view (Narain 1957, 11). As highlighted by Coloru, both works were without a doubt deeply influenced by political-historical visions of the middle of the 20th century (see, however, Narain’s note against the *communis opinio* of modern scholars [especially Holt] considering his work be the exact cultural counterpart to that of Tarn [Narain 1989, 419 n. 185]).

22 11.11.4: ἐκ προδοσίας.

23 ME 18.

24 8.4.1-19.

25 This is not so strange, since intense winter snowing and very low temperatures effectively stopped well-equipped, organized and strong armies in the past (cf. e.g. the famous destruction of Napoleon’s *Grande Armée* and the defeat of Third Reich’s *Wehrmacht* in Russia).

26 Some doubts concern the overall reliability of his main source, Ptolemy. For example, Pédech thinks—perhaps correctly—that the companion of Alexander and future *basileus* of Egypt omitted important details shedding negative light on the military campaign (Pédech 1984, 329 *contra* Meister 2000³, 135-136, who instead

As a matter of fact, the meticulous and successful sieges of the two Rocks appear quite amazing, especially when one considers the geographical setting and physical limitations of soldiers. What is more important, the narratives of the ancient historians are in such strong contrast to that of Strabo. How can we explain this discrepancy? To understand, I believe we must relocate the events in the wider context of the Macedonian campaign of 328/7. A brief re-examination of literary evidence on the supposed "decisive" sieges is a fundamental beginning.

(ii)

The Sogdianian Rock (as named by Arrian; however, the same place was occupied by Ariamazes according to Curtius)²⁷ was captured at an uncertain date between the summer of 328²⁸ and the early spring of 327.²⁹ The precise date is disputed. Tarn suggests that the siege of both Rocks (the Sogdianian and that of Chorienes/Sisimithres) may have occurred in the middle of the winter 328/7.³⁰ Nevertheless, Bosworth and Rhodes observe that Arrian placed too many events in the spring of 327, while the summer of 328 is strangely empty. This would make a date in late winter or spring highly unlikely. On the other hand, it is difficult to believe that abundant snowfalls such as those implied by Arrian's narrative could have occurred in middle of the summer.³¹ Further observations on this point should be made, as we shall see. A general impression of the development of military actions can be taken from Arrian, as well as from details in Curtius. The latter claims that, at that time, Alexander had under his control the entire region, except for the Rock garrisoned by the Sogdianian Ariamazes, who was in command of some 30,000 armed men: *et cetera quidem pacaverat rex. Una erat petra, quam Arimazes Sogdianus cum XXX milibus armatorum obtinebat alimentis ante congestis, quae tantae multitudini vel per biennium suppeterent.*³² Curtius' account—and especially the number of men that he adduces—may appear literary exaggerations.

has more positive opinions on Ptolemy's accounts). Further negative opinions on Ptolemy's reliability are for example in Welles 1963, 105-113; Errington 1969, 233-241; Seibert 1969, 4-26.

27 Contrary to this interpretation see Holt 1988, 66 and esp. n. 64 (who maintains the Sogdianian Rock and the Rock of Ariamazes were different places). In any case, Strabo reports that the Sogdianian Rock was alternatively said "Rock of the Oxus" (11.11.4). This designation, possibly referring to its location on the boundary-river, could be indicative of its strategic role as a key fortress of Sogdiana. As I suggest, the crucial location of the Rock certainly represented the main reason behind the attack by the Macedonians.

28 Date according to the "vulgate" tradition (Curt. 7.11.1-29; Diod. 17 arg. κε'; *ME* 15-18); Bosworth 1981, 32-36; Bosworth 1995, 125 ("summer of 328"); O'Brien 1994, 127; Rhodes 2010², 257; Heckel 2012³, 100 ("at the beginning of the campaigning season of 328").

29 Arr. 4.18.4-9; Brunt 1976, 399; Green 1991, 368; Hammond 1999, 195; Ashley 2004², 301; Stoneman 2004², 76; Gehrke 2005⁴, 45; Wiemer 2005, 132 ("Frühjahr 327"); Briant 2010, 116.

30 Tarn 1948, I, 72-76.

31 Tarn 1948, I, 72 n. 1, 75-76; Sisti-Zambrini 2004, 426.

32 Curt. 7.11.1. On Ariamazes (Ariamazes: Strabo 11.11.4; Arimazes: Curt. 7.11.1; Ariomazes: Polyæn. 4.3.29; Ariomazes: *ME* 18) see Heckel 2009, 44, s.v. *Ariamazes*.

However, Arrian states that many Sogdianians took refuge in the Rock, as they believed it was unassailable; there we find also the wife and daughters of the rebel Oxyartes the Bactrian.³³ This fact can clearly explain why Alexander quickly regarded the capture of the Rock as essential for his military campaign. According to Arrian, the conquest represented a turning point in the war, but the truth of this statement is questionable. As we see, Curtius claims that the rebels had stored a quantity of provisions sufficient for a long-standing siege in the heart of the mountain, which was believed unassailable because of its steepness.³⁴ Arrian claims the king attacked the rock because of an offensive remark made by the barbarians. As they were invited to make terms,³⁵ the besieged invited Alexander “to look for soldiers with wings to capture the mountain for him.”³⁶ The king ordered all who had done rock-climbing in the previous sieges—about three hundred soldiers in all—to take part in the military action.³⁷ Alexander’s acceptance of such a challenge turns, for some aspects, into unreality. Both Arrian and Curtius agree that the climb was actually performed and in the end the top was effectively reached. But their incredible accounts present serious differences. Arrian claims that the climbers had gathered “small iron pegs” usually used to peg down their tents, to fix them into the ice and the rocks, and bound them to strong linen ropes so as to hoist themselves; they had begun to climb on the side of the rock described as the *most* precipitous (*to apotomōtaton*) and therefore the least guarded at night.³⁸ In contrast, Curtius says that they began in the late evening (*secunda vigilia*) by approaching

33 Heckel 2009, 187-188, s.v. *Oxyartes*. In collaboration with Spitamenes, he had previously supported Bessus in his flight beyond the Oxus (Arr. 3.28.10).

34 7.11.1. Arrian (4.18.5) adds that the ground was impractical on account of heavy snowfall, and that snow furnished a great quantity of water for the besieged. The height of the Rock would also have represented an enormous problem for troops. Curtius states that it measured 30 stades (5,400 m) in height and 150 stades (27 km) in circumference (Curt. 7.11.2). The same height is given by Strabo (11.11.4); but the *Metz Epitome* reports 3,600 m (ME 15). Curtius mentions the existence of a huge cavern midway up the height of the Rock, having a narrow entrance progressively developing into a system of deep galleries. The heart of the cavern was crossed by numerous internal fonts, which gave rise to a river flowing out of the mountain (7.11.3).

35 Curt. 7.11.5. By Cophes, son of the noble Persian Artabazus (Heckel 2009, 94, s.v. *Cophen*, observing that in ME 17 he is instead called Dares).

36 Arr. 4.18.6: πτηνοὺς ἐκέλευον ζητεῖν στρατιώτας Ἀλέξανδρον, οἵτινες αὐτῷ ἐξαιρήσουσι τὸ ὄρος (transl. by Brunt 1976); cf. Curt. 7.11.5. In Arrian’s text, this seems to be the real reason behind Alexander’s following proclamation to his troops that a sum of twelve talents would have been awarded to the first who had scaled the rock, and that the next would receive “a second prize, the third another prize and so on, the last to reach the top to have three hundred darics” (4.18.7; transl. by Brunt 1976). However, one wonders whether Alexander’s proclamation was an invention. Traditional assaults may have been attempted, but likely turned into a disaster. If so, the Macedonians would have had very good reason to make up the incredible story of the “flying” (or “winged”) men.

37 Arr. 4.19.1. According to Curtius, the skill was given to the most agile youths in Alexander’s army (7.11.7: *pernicissimos iuvenes*); cf. ME 16; Polyæn. 4.3.29.

38 According to Arrian, it seems that the soldiers climbed the rock in open order (4.19.2). He refers to a technique quite similar to that used in modern climbing. The author states that only 30 of them (that is, 10% of the total) perished in the ascent.

the *least* precipitous part *armed only with spears and swords* (*gladiis modo atque hastis armati*) and having provisions for two days. Some of the climbers fixed pegs (*ferrei cunei*) in the rock horizontally, and used them as steps.³⁹ Apparently a third version is in Polyaeus, who claims that the climbing occurred on the side covered by a *dense* wood: Ἀλέξανδρος ἐνέβαλεν εἰς τὴν Σογδιανῶν χώραν. ἡ δὲ ἐστὶ πᾶσα τραχεῖα καὶ δύσβατος· πέτρα δὲ κατὰ μέσσην ἀνατείνει (ὀρνίθων) τοῖς πτηνοῖς [μόνοις] βάσιμος· ἐν κύκλῳ δὲ ὕλη δασεῖα καὶ πυκνὴ τοὺς ἀβάτους κρημνοὺς ἀβατωτέρους εἰργάζετο. τὴν πέτραν Ἀριομάζης μετὰ πολλῆς χειρὸς καὶ καρτερᾶς Σογδιανῶν κατελάβετο πηγὰς ὕδατος ἔχων ἔνδον καὶ παρασκευὴν σιτίων ἄφθονον. Ἀλέξανδρος περιππασάμενος καὶ καταμαθὼν τὰς φύσεις τῆς πέτρας ἐκέλευσε τριακοσίους λογάδας νεανίας, οἷς ἦν ἄσκησις καὶ τέχνη κρημνοβατεῖν, ἀόπλους κατόπιν τῆς πέτρας διὰ πυκνῆς ὕλης ἀνέρπειν καὶ λεπτοῖς κάλοις ἀνιμᾶν ἀλλήλους· ἐπειδὴν δὲ τῶν κορυφῶν κρατήσωσιν, ζώνας λευκάς, ἃς εἶχον, λυσαμένους κοντοῖς εὐμήκεσι περιάψαι καὶ τούτους ὑπὲρ τὴν ὕλην ἀνατείνειν, ὥστε ἀθρόας καὶ λαμπράς τὰς ζώνας ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τινασσομένας καὶ τοῖς ἄνω βαρβάροις καὶ τοῖς κάτω Μακεδόσιν ὀρᾶσθαι. οἱ μὲν δὴ κρημνοβάται σὺν πολλῷ πόνῳ κατὰ κορυφὴν [γενόμενοι] ἀνίσχοντος ἡλίου τὰς ζώνας ἀνέσεισαν· οἱ δὲ Μακεδόνες μέγα καὶ λαμπρὸν κάτωθεν ἠλάλαξαν· ὁ δὲ Ἀριομάζης ἐκπλαγεὶς, ὡς πάσης τῆς στρατιᾶς ἀναβαινούσης καὶ ὡς ἤδη κατὰ κορυφῆς ἐαλωκῶς, αὐτόν τε καὶ τὴν πέτραν παρέδωκεν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ θειοτέραν αὐτοῦ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν τύχην ἡγούμενος (Polyaen. 4.3.29).⁴⁰

Since neither Arrian nor Curtius narrates such lush vegetation (*hylē daseia kai pyknē*), either on the slope or the top (*koryphē*) of the Rock, Polyaeus' account is problematic. It is hard to say whether his topographical description is reliable. Without a doubt some important details can be noted: first of all the complete lack of snow. As observed by Hammond, Polyaeus is so close to Curtius to lead us to suspect that both drew on the same original source(s).⁴¹ However, this is questionable. Firstly, the mention of a thick and dense *hylē* is not strictly indicative of spring/summer. If the forest was evergreen—that is, of conifers, a very likely case in consideration of the altitude—then there would have been

39 7.11.14-15. Cf. also *ME* 16 (*clavi ferrei*).

40 "Alexander invaded the territory of the Sogdiani. It is all rough and impassable. In the middle a rock rises up, accessible only to the birds, and a thick, dense wood encircling it makes the inaccessible cliffs still more inaccessible. Ariomazes held the rock with a large, strong force of Sogdiani, and he had springs of water and abundant stores of food. After riding around and discovering the nature of the rock, Alexander ordered 300 picked young men, trained experts in climbing cliffs, to creep up unarmed through the dense wood behind the rock and to pull one another up with thin ropes. When they reached the top, they were to take off their white belts, fasten them to long poles, and raise them above the wood, so the numerous shining belts, being shaken as far as possible, would be seen both by the barbarians above and the Macedonians below. After a great effort the cliff-climbers, reaching the peak at dawn, shook their belts and the Macedonians shouted loudly and clearly from below. An astounded Ariomazes, thinking that the whole army was ascending and that the peak was already captured, surrendered himself and the rock to Alexander, believing his power and fortune more divine than human" (transl. by Krentz-Wheeler 1994).

41 Hammond 1996, 41: "(Polyaeus) chose to follow Curtius, or alternatively to go back to Curtius' source or other sources."

leaves on the trees even in autumn/winter. Furthermore, it appears that Arrian’s reference to climbing *to apotomōtaton te tēs petras kai tautē aphylaktotaton* does not necessarily conflict with Polyaeus. Arrian omits references to the dense wood, but the overall sense of his narrative is that the climb was made on the *least visible* part. The method of climbing is also seemingly the same as that described by Polyaeus. Arrian speaks of “small strong cords of linen” (*kalōdiois ek linou ischyrois*) bound to “small iron pegs” (*passalous mikrousidērous*) to be fixed in the rock and the ice. Similarly, Polyaeus mentions “thin ropes” (*leptois kalois*) used by the soldiers “to pull one another up” (*animan allēlous*). As it seems, the first climbers opened the way for those following. In contrast with Arrian and Curtius, Polyaeus does not mention casualties. But one wonders if he abbreviated the original source. Secondly, Curtius’ finale substantially agrees with the *Strategika*—that is, the climbers continued their ascent and successfully reached the top.⁴² However, he reports that the soldiers signalled their success by waving white cloths (*candidis velis*, which Arrian calls *sindones*, i.e. “fine linen cloths” or “flags”) towards the headquarters, whereas Polyaeus says that they shook “white” (or, perhaps, “bright”) belts’ (*zōnas leukas*) fastened to long poles. Despite the apparent similarity between the two signalling systems, I suspect that Polyaeus’ belts must not be confused with Curtius’ *vela* (nor with Arrian’s *sindones*). In fact, the belts are described as shining (*lampras*) and were shaken at the light of the sun (*anischontos heliou tas zōnas aneseisan*). The adjective *lampros -a -on* can qualify both white cloths⁴³ and metallic objects such as helmets with “horns” (*phaloi*) and other similar items.⁴⁴ The latter possibility is interesting, since military *zōnai* were often decorated with metallic elements. One wonders if Polyaeus meant large metallic belts like those usually worn by the peltasts.⁴⁵ Shining metallic objects would have been perfect for signalling positions high in the mountains. On the contrary, flags would have been ineffective in the event of fog. One of the most important differences in Curtius is also the description of the climbers as *unarmed* (*aoplous*). This was likely due to the fact that Polyaneus’ account aimed to celebrate the ingenious Macedonian trick of shaking a few little metallic objects to simulate many *full sets of armor*. This is perhaps a proof of that the otherwise inexplicable statement of Arrian that the Sogdianians believed the climbers on the top to be “exactly fully-armed” (ἀκριβῶς ὠπλισμένους).⁴⁶ I believe that Curtius was misled by his source(s), which differed from that (or those) of Polyaeus. In turn, the latter author appears at some points suspiciously close

42 According to Curtius, the climbers occupied the top at night, but only at daybreak could they see a column of smoke rising from a underlying cavern, where the enemies had taken refuge (7.11.17-19).

43 Liddell-Scott 1953⁹ (s.v.), see Od. 19.234; Hdt. 4.64; Polyb. 10.5.1.

44 Liddell-Scott 1953⁹ (s.v.), see Il. 13.132 (*phaloi* of helmet: according to Janko [Janko 1992, 61-62] they were large plates of shining polished metals) and 17.269 (*korythes*).

45 Ashley 2004², 45: “the peltasts wore a broad metal belt that served to protect the abdomen.” The peltasts were recruited from poor people living in the Greek and Balkan mountainous areas (Ashley). They were lightly armed: apart from the typical shields covered with skins of sheep or goat, they only had two or three javelins and a sword. As far as I can see, these elements fit very well with the descriptions of the 300 “flying men.”

46 Arr. 4.19.4.

to Arrian. At any rate, the level of literary "contamination" among the various sources for the event appears to be a difficult (and perhaps insoluble) question.⁴⁷ The end of the story is well known. A herald sent by the king (the above-mentioned Cophes) called upon the enemy to surrender. He said that "men with wings" had climbed the rock, and that the peak of the fortress was now controlled by the Macedonians.⁴⁸ According to Arrian, a small group of soldiers had been able to surprise the barbarians, who believed that they more numerous, and surrendered.⁴⁹ Curtius says that Ariamazes and many Sogdian nobles were crucified, while the rest of the prisoners were given as a gift (*dono*) to the inhabitants of the new six fortresses founded by the Macedonians in the region.⁵⁰ Given Alexander's supposed brutal strategy of counter-insurgency in Sogdiana, the version of Curtius has been considered unrealistic.⁵¹ However, it cannot be verified on the sole basis of literary evidence, and one can only wonder what the real situation was. Arrian adds that Alexander captured many wives and children of the rebels; this was clearly the case with the famous daughter of Oxyartes, Roxane, sought in marriage on that occasion by the Macedonian.⁵² Nevertheless,

47 Polyaeus undoubtedly presents details agreeing with both Arrian and Curtius. Hammond (Hammond 1996, 41-42) supports the view that Polyaeus and Curtius drew the episode of the capture of the Sogdian Rock from the same sources ("Aristobulus for the actual ascent of the Rock and Cleitarchus for the background and the finale, the scourging and crucifying of the Sogdian leaders"). These were essentially different from those of Arrian, based instead on "Ptolemy and/or Aristobulus." He also emphasizes Strabo's closeness to Curtius and Polyaeus (and not to Ptolemy). Nevertheless, one cannot exclude "contaminations" among literary traditions. These were perhaps due to the writers' own methods of collecting sources. My guess is that this was the case of Strabo, whose extremely concise account of the *prodosia* has specific historical reasons (see *infra*). As for Polyaeus, his *Strategika* were clearly based on the reading of different sources. Hence, despite the lapidary opinion of Hammond ("it is evident that Polyaeus disregarded Arrian's account"), it is hard to believe in Polyaeus' *total* dependence and adherence to Curtius (or his sources).

48 Curt. 7.11.22-24.

49 4.19.3-4.

50 7.11.28-29: *Arimazes desperatis magis quam perditis rebus cum propinquis nobilissimisque gentis suae descendit in castra; quos omnis verberibus adfectos sub ipsis radicibus petrae crucibus iussit adfigi. Multitudo deditorum incolis novarum urbium cum pecunia capta dono data est, Artabazus in petrae regionisque, quae adposita esset ei, tutela relictus.* On the new fortresses see Curt. 7.10.15.

51 Berve 1926, II, 59; Sisti-Zambrini 2004, 430. Surprisingly, the episode of the 300 "winged men" is considered credible in some updated studies on ancient warfare. See for example Kern 1999, 221 ("this shows how highly specialized the Macedonians had become in siege warfare"); Lonsdale 2004, 165 ("like the Romans at Masada, Alexander wanted to make it clear to those who opposed him that they could never escape his relentless pursuit ... The Sogdians assumed a considerable force had breached their defences and surrendered"); Campbell 2006, 69 (who uncritically puts the event among other famous Macedonian sieges). Nevertheless, there is enough to reconsider the historicity of the event, as we shall see.

52 The author is tempted to give us the impression that Alexander fell in love with Roxane at first sight, and that the ensuing marriage was only a consequence of real love, since she was the most beautiful (!) woman of Asia after the wife of Darius (Arr. 4.19.4-6; see Heckel 2009, 241-242, s.v. *Rhoxane*). In Arrian's version, when Oxyartes *discovered* the intentions of the king, "ventured to come to Alexander and was honourably treated by him, as was appropriate on so happy an event" (4.20.4; transl. by Brunt 1976). However, we should only go so far as to assume that Alexander did so with the intention of neutralizing the increasing power of the rebel

the aforementioned passages are obscure. Professor Bosworth rightfully notes aspects of discontinuity in Arrian’s narration, in comparison with the complexity of Curtius’ account, which is more coherent and detailed.⁵³ We also find in Arrian contradictory reasons for Alexander’s attack. Initially, Arrian emphasizes the *need* (18.4: ταύτης γὰρ ἑξαιρεθείσης οὐκέτι οὐδὲν ὑπολειφθήσεσθαι ἑδόκει τῶν Σογδιανῶν τοῖς νεωτερίζειν ἐθέλουσιν) and the serious difficulties of the action (18.5); but then he highlights the *derision* of the barbarians towards Alexander that stimulated his ego and anger (18.6: φιλοτιμίαν ξὺν ὀργῇ). Arrian’s *exaggeration* of Macedonian military power is evident. Should we believe that the attack was *actually* ordered to vindicate the king’s honor? We must emphasize the unreality of the episode of the “300 winged men.” As already stated by Grilli, the climbing of the summit of a snowy rock wall of 3,600 or 5,400 m (according to different sources) in just a day or two (!), with rudimentary instruments as ropes and iron pegs, is questionable.⁵⁴ On the contrary, Strabo notes the more realistic *prodosia* and marriage of Alexander to Roxane on the Rock of Sisimithres (and not in that of Ariamazes).⁵⁵ How to explain this deep contrast among the sources? Should we perhaps believe that Alexander suffered a military failure and fell back on a conspiracy with a Sogdianian faction? A better understanding of the issue can possibly come from a close comparison with the description of the second siege.

According to Arrian, Alexander had then moved to the bordering territory of Pareitacae, where he found many rebels and local hyparchs gathered on the so-called Rock of Chorienes.⁵⁶ The same place is said to have been controlled by a certain Sisimithres (and not

Oxyartes in Bactriana. Not surprisingly, according to some scholars, the marriage was a *ploy* in order to obtain political control of the eastern regions (Tarn 1948, II, 326; Hamilton 1969, 129).

⁵³ Bosworth 2004, 160 with n. 268. A close comparison of the accounts of Curtius, Arrian, Polyaeus and the *Metz Epitome* is found in Baynham 1998, 92-95 (suggesting that Arrian probably followed Ptolemy and Aristobulus, while Curtius either assembled different sources on Alexander or provided the integral version of “vulgate” tradition).

⁵⁴ Grilli 1985, 64. Aside from the general doubts of Grilli, it is my guess that Arrian’s account is especially unlikely from a physiological point of view. Firstly, we must reject the story that climbers used bare hands, because they would have suffered frostbite on their fingers (!) in the snow (Jurkovich 2007, 247-55; Golant-Nord-Paksima-Posner 2008, 704-10). Secondly, heavy clothing and blankets, although useful against the cold, would have burdened them and impeded the climbing. The same can be said for the heavy *cunei* and other instruments (ropes; hammers and hooks?). It is unlikely that the supposed climbers could lift heavy weights under such terrible conditions. Besides, unacclimated soldiers would have certainly suffered from hypoxia (acute mountain sickness, usually occurring in untrained individuals under great physical efforts above 2,500 m). Low pressure and lack of oxygen would also have caused fatigue, dizziness and perhaps potentially lethal pulmonary (or cerebral) edema (Roach-Stepanek-Hackett 2002, 779). As a result, not only the story of the 300 “winged men” itself, but also any other narration of military operations on a large scale (e.g. hard sieges) at similar altitudes in Bactria-Sogdiana is suspect. If I am in right, many of these events should be historically reconsidered and likely treated as inventions of Macedonian propaganda.

⁵⁵ 11.11.4.

⁵⁶ Arr. 4.21.1. The real dimensions of the Rock are unknown. Arrian gives it a height of about 20 stades (3,600 m) and a circumference about 60 stades (10.8 km), whereas Strabo (11.11.4) gives 15 stades (2,700 m) and 80 stades (14.4 km) respectively.

Chorienes) in Curtius, who also dates the event to the late autumn of 328—and not the spring of 327 as in Arrian and other sources.⁵⁷ The confusion among literary sources is noteworthy, so no certainty exists regarding prosopography or possible dates. However, as suggested by Professor Heckel, it is possible that Sisimithres and Chorienes were the same individual.⁵⁸ The name Cohortandus appearing in Curtius manuscripts has been usually emended by editors to Oxyartes (and not Chorienes, although this restoration would be more logical by the palaeographical point of view), this being the most reasonable correction in consideration of the following mention of Roxane as *filia ipsius*.⁵⁹ As for Strabo, he claims that the capture of Roxane and the marriage with Alexander happened on the Rock of Sisimithres,⁶⁰ and not on that of Ariamazes, as in Arrian. As we see, a possible solution to this puzzle must take different elements into consideration. To address the question, it has been suggested by Heckel (following the majority of the modern authors) that Chorienes effectively *was* Sisimithres—and more precisely, following Brunt, that Chorienes was the official title of Sisimithres when he ruled the region as hyparch.⁶¹ Given the state of present research this interpretation is without a doubt the most acceptable. As a consequence, we must conclude that, in addition to the Sogdianian Rock (or Rock of Ariamazes), there was only one other Rock besieged by the Macedonians between the autumn and the spring of 328/7 in Bactria-Sogdiana, which was that controlled by Sisimithres/Chorienes. As for the place, Arrian says that it was sheer on all sides, with very narrow access, and with a deep ravine surrounding it;⁶² Curtius leads us to believe that the ravine was crossed by a large river flowing from a waterfall on the top of the mountain.⁶³ High conifers (*elatai*) growing around the mountain were cut and used to build stairs (*klimakes*) to go down into the rift.⁶⁴

57 Curt. 8.2.19-33 (late autumn 328). Strabo 11.11.4; Plut. *Alex.* 58.3-4; *ME* 19 (spring 327; on a similar hypothesis see Hammond 1999, 195).

58 Heckel 1986, 224-225. In fact, the name Chorienes is only attested in Arrian (4.21); on the contrary, the manuscripts of the *Metz Epitome* (*ME* 28) attest *Corianus* (the term is emended in Chorienes e.g. by O. Wagner [Wagner 1899]) and those of Curtius (8.4.21) *Cohortandus*.

59 8.4.21-23. Cohortandus has been emended in Oxyartes, for example by Müller (Müller – Schönfeld 1954), Rolfe (Rolfe 1976⁴, 271) and more recently Lucarini (Lucarini 2009, 255). Other solutions: Bosworth 1981, 31 n. 95 (Chorienes); Porta 2005 (Chorienes). Otherwise, we should conclude that Roxane was actually daughter of Chorienes (!), in contrast to Arrian, who clearly distinguishes him from Oxyartes (4.21.6). On this point see Sisti – Zambrini 2004, 434 (who considers this Oxyartes as the father of Roxane and not an unknown individual) *contra* Brunt 1976, 411 n. 4.

60 11.11.4.

61 Heckel 2009, 250, s.v. *Sisimithres*. On other proposals of identification of Chorienes with Sisimithres see von Schwarz 1906², 83-84; Berve 1926, II, 354; Tarn 1948, II, 96; Brunt 1976, 407 n. 1 (hypothesis that Chorienes was the title of the local hyparch); Holt 1988, 66 *contra* Bosworth 1981, 32, nn. 110-111; Bosworth 1995, 135 (suggesting that, based on Curt. 8.4.21 and *ME* 28, Chorienes and Sisimithres were likely different individuals).

62 4.21.2.

63 8.2.23.

64 Arr. 4.21.3. The word *elatai* can mean either firs or pines. However, as rightfully outlined by Rtveladze, no mountain in South Uzbekistan is today covered with firs. He therefore suggests the tree in question was

According to Arrian, stakes (*passaloi*) were fixed into the ground at a point defined as *to oxytaton*; they were covered with wicker-nets, and earth was thrown from above, in order to create an artificial level for the soldiers.⁶⁵ From this point, the Macedonians, protected by solid screens, began firing arrows in the direction of the Rock.⁶⁶ The barbarians, although in a higher position, soon realized they were unable to answer such a massive attack. Given the situation, Chorienes chose to surrender.⁶⁷ Also in this case, we must highlight Arrian's enthusiastic magnification of the Macedonian military bravery. A difficult siege is brilliantly performed and Alexander reaches his goal with relative ease and minimal casualties. Arrian and Curtius emphasize the complete *confidence* of the soldiers in their king.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Plutarch makes clear reference to the great *demoralization* of the troops (ἄθυμούντων τῶν στρατιωτῶν) during the siege.⁶⁹ In my opinion, Plutarch's reference causes us to question the course of the events. He stresses the inaccessibility of the Rock of Sisimithres and the

Juniperus excelsa, a conifer widely diffused from Greece to Central Asia from 1,000 to 3,700 m above sea level (Rtveladze 2007, 178; cf. Adams 2011³, 186). As it seems, the operation involved the whole army. Half of them worked by day under Alexander's personal supervision, and the other half by night divided into three sections, under the officials Perdikkas, Leonnatus, and Ptolemy. Given the difficult ground, the soldiers could only complete 20 cubits (about 9 m) by day, a little less by night (Arr. 4.21.4).

65 4.21.5; Bosworth 1995, 137. Nevertheless, Curtius reports the use of siege *turres* (8.2.26); Holt suggests that of torsion catapults (Holt 2005, 83). *To oxytaton* may mean not "the narrowest" (e.g. Brunt 1976), but "the keenest" (Liddell-Scott 1953⁹) point standing out from the bottom of the ravine. Colossal trunks were piled and embedded there—just below the edge on the side of the Macedonians—so as to provide a convenient platform for *turres* and other siege machines (Curtius also reports the use of stones, a more consistent building material). It is unlikely that the ravine was entirely filled. In addition, Arrian says that the Macedonians were not able to reach the level of the Sogdianians (4.21.6). This considered, it is uncertain to what extent Alexander's siege technique was actually sufficient to "terrify" the besieged and compel them to surrender.

66 One may wonder if the screens (*prokalymmata*) were of leather, as those used in the siege of Tyre (Arr. 2.18.6).

67 Arr. 4.21.6-9: he would later become an important ally of Alexander. Subsequently, the Macedonian appointed some officials to defeat the rest of the rebels in Pareitacene and moved to Bactra (Arr. 4.22.1-3), where, at the beginning of summer 327, he left his general Amyntas (Heckel 2009, 26, s.v. *Amyntas* [9]) and moved across the Caucasus (Hindu-Kush) towards India (Arr. 4.22.3-4).

68 The versions of Arrian and Curtius are considered probable by some modern scholars, for example Kern 1999, 221-222. However, the event recalls the similarly unbelievable siege of the Rock of Aornus (possibly Pir-Sar on the Indus River, a different place from Arrian's Aornus near Bactra [3.29.1], see Stein 1929, 113-154; Bosworth 1995, 178-180), where earth (how much?) was used to build, in *only* 3 days (Arrian), a high rampart, so as to attack the fortress from a higher position (Arr. 4.29.7-30.1; Curt. 8.11.8-9; Diod. 17.85.6-7; *ME* 46-47; Campbell-Hook 2005, 41, who consider the account of Aornus realistic). Modern scholars do not take the extreme climatic conditions of Bactria-Sogdiana into due consideration. It is hardly conceivable that *the entire* army moved earth and boulders in extreme lack of oxygen, food and water, at the altitudes of the *petrai* (between c. 2,500 [Aornus: Bosworth 2004, 173] and 3,600 m [Rock of Sisimithres/Chorienes: Arrian]), even if we know that, in the case of Aornus, large quantity of supplies were previously stored at the lower base camp of Embolima (Arr. 4.28.7). This means that Alexander learned from strategic errors in Sogdiana and eventually set up supply points for the sieges.

69 *Alex.* 58.3.

“moral” solution given by the king. According to this writer, Alexander instilled fear in Sisimithres—a notoriously timorous man—and at the same time gave courage (!) to the Macedonians. Ultimately, Alexander’s fortitude would have represented the reason for the taking of the Rock.⁷⁰ Of course, this is possibly literary exaggeration. The question of courage (*tolmē*) and virtue (*aretē*) as elements respectively allowing the overcoming of luck (*tychē*) and brutal force (*dynamis*) returns shortly after, in the siege of another Rock (Plutarch does not specify it, but it could be that of Ariamazes or the “Sogdianian”).⁷¹

Were these anecdotes created by later tradition, perhaps in order to hide sensational military failures of Alexander? Let us finally consider the controversial passage of Strabo: ἐλεῖν δὲ καὶ πέτρας ἐρυμνὰς σφόδρα ἐκ προδοσίας τήν τε ἐν τῇ Βακτριανῇ, τὴν Σισιμίθρου, ἐν ᾗ εἶχεν Ὀξυάρτης τὴν θυγατέρα Ῥωξάνην, καὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ Σογδιανῇ τὴν τοῦ Ὠξοῦ, οἱ δ’ Ἀριαμάζου φασί. τὴν μὲν οὖν Σισιμίθρου πεντεκαίδεκα σταδίων ἱστοροῦσι τὸ ὕψος, ὀγδοήκοντα δὲ τὸν κύκλον· ἄνω δ’ ἐπίπεδον καὶ εὐγεων, ὅσον πεντακοσίους ἄνδρας τρέφειν δυναμένην, ἐν ᾗ καὶ ξενίας τυχεῖν πολυτελοῦς καὶ γάμους ἀγαγεῖν Ῥωξάνης τῆς Ὀξυάρτου θυγατρὸς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον· τὴν δὲ τῆς Σογδιανῆς διπλασίαν τὸ ὕψος φασί (11.11.4).⁷² Aside from the mention of Roxane, it is interesting to find the description of the fertility of the summit of the Rock of Sisimithres and its capacity of maintenance (*trephein*) for a fairly small number of men—only 500, but we cannot exclude that more men and supplies were located in other places of the mountain. As we have said, we find the astonishing mention of the taking of the Rocks *ek prodosias*, which apparently contradicts the detailed account of Arrian and Curtius on the sieges. Given the contradiction, and the difficult problems posed by eventual acceptance of Strabo’s version, Hammond translated *prodosia* as “abandonment” rather than “betrayal.”⁷³ But it is doubtful whether this is the best option.⁷⁴ As we have seen, no “abandonment” or “escape” by the occupants of the Rocks is described (we only hear of “surrenders”), and this makes the question even more interesting. Other than our passage, the word *prodosia* occurs only four other times in Strabo, in three different episodes:⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Alex.* 58.3-5.

⁷¹ Plut. *Alex.* 58.5.

⁷² “And (they say) that through a betrayal he took also two strongly fortified rocks, one in Bactriana, that of Sisimithres, where Oxyartes kept his daughter Rhoxana, and the other in Sogdiana, that of Oxus, though some call it the rock of Ariamazes. Now writers report that that of Sisimithres is fifteen stadia in height and eighty in circuit, and that on top it is level and has a fertile soil which can support five hundred men, and that here Alexander met with sumptuous hospitality and married Rhoxana, the daughter of Oxyartes; but the rock in Sogdiana, they say, is twice as high as that in Bactriana” (transl. after Jones 1954³).

⁷³ Hammond 1983, 146.

⁷⁴ In fact, this is not the common sense of the word. Many scholars prefer less problematic translations, cf. for example Kärcher 1832 (“Verrat”); Hamilton–Falconer 1903 (“treachery”); Jones 1954³ (“betrayal”); Lasserre 1975 (“traîtrise”); Radt 2004 (“Verrat”).

⁷⁵ 11.11.4; 12.3.11; 14.1.5; 16.4.24. Results according to the Greek Word Study Tool of Perseus Tufts search engine (www.perseus.tufts.edu), searched word: *prodosia*.

1) The author refers to Alexander’s destruction of the city of the Branchidae in Sogdiana, who were guilty of having gone over to Xerxes, giving him the treasure of the god of Didymae. Strabo justifies the king’s act as rightful punishment for their *prodosia* and sacrilege.⁷⁶ As far as we can see, there is no certainty on the real meaning of the term here. It can be both “abandonment” (of the sanctuary, maybe?) and “betrayal.” However, the reason the Branchidae chose to follow the Persian king to the East is explained as φεύγοντι συναπήραν τοῦ μὴ τίσαι δίκας τῆς ἱεροσυλίας καὶ τῆς προδοσίας.⁷⁷ Therefore, although in a general sense the Branchidae were guilty of having “abandoned” the sanctuary, it is quite evident that—more specifically—they *betrayed* the Greeks.

2) The term also appears in the account on Lucullus’ siege of Sinope. There, Bacchides, the foreign *phrourarchos* appointed by Mithridates, massacred those inhabitants suspected of plotting (ὑπονοῶν ἀεὶ τινα προδοσίαν ἐκ τῶν ἔνδοθεν).⁷⁸ It is unlikely that the meaning of the term is here “abandonment.” In fact, the foreign mercenaries would never have allowed the Sinopeans to leave the city and join the Romans. On the contrary, treason by the citizens would have represented a more dangerous event for the foreign *phrourarchos*.

3) According to Strabo, the Arabian expedition of the second *praefectus Aegypti* Aelius Gallus (the intimate friend of Strabo and successor of Cornelius Gallus in 27) was hindered by the Nabataean Syllaeus, the *epitropos* of the king Obodas, who misleadingly suggested to him (ἡ δὲ τοῦ Συλλαίου προδοσία . . .) that he march with the army on the wrong roads across the desert. This caused the death of the most of the men from thirst, hunger and various diseases: Syllaeus was later *punished* (ἔτισε δίκας) for his *prodosia* in Rome.⁷⁹

As we have seen, in most cases, the word *prodosia* is better translated as “treason,” “treachery,” “betrayal” (and not, despite the doubts of Hammond, “abandonment”). Moreover, what kind of sources does Strabo use? The question is crucial, especially when considering the geographer’s well-known negative opinion of the Alexander’s historians.⁸⁰

76 11.11.4: ἐκείνον δ’ ἀνελεῖν μυσσάτμενον τὴν ἱεροσυλίαν καὶ τὴν προδοσίαν. On the massacre cf. Curt. 7.5.28-35; Plut. *Mor.* 557 b. Tarn translates *prodosia* as “treachery” and considers Callisthenes the source of Strabo for Alexander’s massacre of Branchidae (Tarn 1948, II, 274). The same translation is found in Prandi 1985, 86 (“tradimento”).

77 14.1.5.

78 Strabo 12.3.11. His name was not Bacchides, but Cleochares, according to Orosius (6.3.2), who offers a different version: Cleochares and the pirate king Seleucus sacked, burnt and eventually abandoned the city to Lucullus. On the events cf. Tibiletti 1953, 76.

79 Strabo 16.4.24; see Dueck 2000, 87; cf. also Richardson 1999², 230. On the Arabian expedition see Török 2009, 441.

80 Strabo 11.6.4: οὐδὲ τοῖς περὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου δὲ συγγράψασιν οὐ ῥάδιον πιστεύειν τοῖς πολλοῖς· καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι ῥάδιουργοῦσι διὰ τε τὴν δόξαν τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ διὰ τὸ τὴν στρατείαν πρὸς τὰς ἐσχατίας γεγονέναι τῆς Ἀσίας πόρρω ἄφ’ ἡμῶν· τὸ δὲ πόρρω δυσέλεγκτον. ἡ δὲ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐπικράτεια καὶ ἡ τῶν Παρθυαίων πλεῖόν τι προσεκκαλύπτει τῶν παραδεδομένων πρότερον· οἱ γὰρ περὶ ἐκείνων συγγράφοντες καὶ τὰ χωρία καὶ τὰ ἔθνη, ἐν οἷς αἱ πράξεις, πιστότερον λέγουσιν ἢ οἱ πρὸ αὐτῶν· μᾶλλον γὰρ κατωπτέυκασιν, “neither is it easy to believe most of those who have written the history of Alexander; for these toy with facts, both because of the glory of Alexander and because his expedition reached the ends of Asia, far away from us; and statements about things

Strabo may have read about the famous *prodosia* in his independent research, either in Alexandria or elsewhere (Rome). It is unlikely that his first source was Ptolemy, for this author virtually lacks geographical and ethnographic *excursus*. Liebmann-Frankfort suggests that Strabo's 11th Book was drawn from Posidonius.⁸¹ However, even if Posidonius transmitted some interesting news to Strabo (e.g. from Duris of Samos, cf. *infra*), he is not the only possible source. For example, Strabo certainly knew the geographical descriptions of Aristobulus⁸² and the *Parthika* of Apollodorus of Artemita.⁸³ He may also have used unattested sources on Hellenistic Bactria-Sogdiana.⁸⁴ Sometime before 27/6, the geographer went to Egypt with his *philos kai hetairos* Gallus.⁸⁵ He accompanied the new *praefectus* in his inspection of the assigned territory from the Mediterranean Sea to Ethiopia,⁸⁶ possibly also spending some time carrying out research in the famous library of Alexandria.⁸⁷ Now, it is unlikely that Strabo collected materials on *prodosia* before Gallus' defeat. On the contrary, the *praefectus* had experience with writing and could have played some role in this research. Not surprisingly, he is commonly regarded as Strabo's primary source on the Arabian expedition. We could suggest that Gallus drew up a small military *dossier* in order to be acquitted by Augustus, likely listing famous episodes of historical betrayals. Among these, there was perhaps the case of Alexander and Sogdiana. A copy of the *dossier* was later transmitted to Strabo, who included short extracts in his *Geographika*.⁸⁸ I see no reason to

that are far away are hard to refute. But the supremacy of the Romans and that of the Parthians has disclosed considerably more knowledge than that which had previously come down to us by tradition; for those who write about those distant regions tell a more trustworthy story than their predecessors, both of the places and of the tribes among which the activities took place, for they have looked into the matter more closely" (transl. by Jones 1954³). Cf. also 11.5.5; 11.7.4; Meister 2000³, 126; Dueck 2000, 112; Dueck 2005, 105.

⁸¹ Liebmann-Frankfort 1969, 909.

⁸² On the reliability of Aristobulus' geographical information see Meister 2000³, 137.

⁸³ The work is unfortunately lost. According to the recent hypothesis of Nikonorov (Nikonorov 1998, 109, 119, proposing an early date for Apollodorus' work to c. 50) the geographer possibly drew upon Apollodorus' "young pupils" (if this is the sense of the obscure statement in which Strabo claims himself indebted for the information on Bactria and Ircania with οἱ περὶ Ἀπολλόδωρον τὸν Ἀρτεμιτηνόν: 2.5.12). According to Nikonorov, this is the best option because Arrian's *Parthika* focused instead on wars between Rome and Parthians and not on geography. On Apollodorus as Strabo's source: Tarn 2010³, 44-45 (dating Apollodorus' life between c. 130 and 87: the *terminus ante quem* is the death of Mithridates II of Parthia); Holt 1999, 55.

⁸⁴ The perspective is that further—unfortunately unknown—variegated materials converged in the 11th Book of the *Geographika* (Muccioli 2007, 94). For example, Strabo likely knew—and drew from?—the *Stathmoi Parthikoi* of Isidore of Charax, a possible *itinerarium* for ancient traders to Further East (Kramer 2003, 129; cf. Tarn 2010³, 53, arguing that the *Stathmoi* reproduced under Augustus an older document of the reign of Mithridates II ["his writings must fall in the last quarter of the first century B.C."]).

⁸⁵ Stickler 2002, 88-92 *contra* Jameson 1968, 72-76, 78-79.

⁸⁶ Strabo 2.5.12.

⁸⁷ Strabo 2.3.5; see Dueck 2000, 21, suggesting he wrote there "one of his historiographical works before turning to the *Geography*".

⁸⁸ Unfortunately, we have no reliable date for the 11th Book. It has been recently suggested that Strabo made a long-lasting and continuous composite work over several years (Clarke 1997, 103) until his death

consider Strabo's information on the Sogdianian Rocks as mystifying. On the contrary, I guess that he just reported statements from a reliable (but unfortunately unknown) source on the sieges. We should here recall the hypothesis of Tarn, who postulated the existence of an unknown source for Parthia and the Further East ("Trogon's source") even more important than Apollodorus himself.⁸⁹ The fact that Trogon was a contemporary of Strabo makes this theory particularly interesting. Yardley, Wheatley and Heckel suggest that the source of Strabo was no other than Duris of Samos, maybe transmitted to Trogon through Timagenes of Alexandria.⁹⁰ The positive opinions of Strabo (and Trogon) on Parthia possibly came from the hellenocentric and philobarbaric Timagenes, whose hostility to Augustus and Rome is well attested.⁹¹ This does not automatically mark out Timagenes as *the source* of Strabo. In any case, the lack of solid grounding in Strabo's passage cannot be proved. This leads us to some crucial considerations. Firstly, one cannot exclude the historicity of the treason. The Macedonian may have given relevant awards to local *elites*, in exchange for rapid peace. Secondly, we should consider the Bactrian-Sogdianian region to be the scene of one of Alexander's worst military failures. This is not surprising, especially when considering the evidence on the debacle of the army in the "vulgate" tradition. Unfortunately, the information given by the geographer has until now been neglected. At any rate, it is quite evident that we must reconsider the question from entirely new perspectives.

(iii)

Recently, David J. Lonsdale has investigated the methods and aims of Alexander's campaign in Sogdiana and Bactria.⁹² According to Lonsdale, Alexander's methods demonstrate that modern Western doctrine of counterinsurgency (or COIN), largely based on Robert Thompson's work,⁹³ should be revised in its main and root principles. Lonsdale claims that the success of the Macedonians was strictly based on the defeat of the "guerrillas" and on the military supremacy, and not—to the chagrin of Thompson—on political, economic, or

(happened sometime after the latest events mentioned, that is those concerning the death of king Juba II of Mauretania in 23/4 CE; Strabo 17.3.7; Engels 1999, 25; Dueck 2000, 2). Potheary definitely dates the *Geographika* between Augustus and the first years of Tiberius (Potheary 1997, 235).

89 Tarn 2010³, 45-50. He suggested that Pompeius Trogon – whose work is unfortunately known to us only thanks to the Epitome of Justin – and other authors based their accounts on an unknown source – dated by Tarn to 110-80 – reporting on events in the East down to the death of Mithridates II).

90 Yardley–Wheatley–Heckel 2011, 5; Yardley–Heckel 2003², 30-34 *contra* Richter 1987, 26-30 (who denies the use of Trogon by Timagenes). On Timagenes in general see McInerney–Roller 2012 (88); on the hypothesis that he was also the intermediary source between Cleitarchus and Curtius see Prandi 1996, 142.

91 Dueck 2000, 114-115; on Timagenes' ideological hostility to Rome see Sordi 1982, 777-778, 796-797 (supporting the statement with parallels) *contra* Bruno Sunseri 1976, 98-101 (highlighting instead the ambiguity of the ancient sources).

92 Lonsdale 2007, 95-97.

93 Thompson 1966.

social prestige. The author states that the use of brutal force was fundamental in Alexander's approach against insurgents, this representing the real clue to answering the question at hand. However, the statement seems to be seriously flawed, especially when compared to currently available historical sources, which as we shall see contain many interesting elements against this idea. I should like to highlight the important and exceptional role—especially at the end of the campaign—played by political strategy, an aspect greatly emphasized by other authors (see, e.g., the criticisms of Tarn and Hamilton). Sogdiana and Bactria were geographically marginal. Nevertheless, given Alexander's intentions to march towards India, no corners of possible resistance could be left untouched, although a complete military submission of these regions in a short time was out of the question. By contrast, it is also possible that, in spite of the indulgent literary sources, the campaign of Alexander in Bactria and Sogdiana was a complete failure.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, because of the inexplicable vagueness of Arrian and Curtius (or their sources?), we know little about the reasons for the revolt of Spitamenes and Catanes—or the effective potential of the rebels.⁹⁵ It is likely, however, that a more radical approach was necessary to counter the insurgents and establish dominion in the region. This aspect has been much emphasized by Holt, who believes the great defeat at the Polytimetus created the idea that a "total war" was strictly necessary to win the campaign. But how does this fit with the historical evidence? Holt

94 Smith 2009-10, esp. 70. The statement is not made by chance. In fact, the traditional military strategy of the Macedonians was not fully adaptable to guerrilla attacks, as demonstrated by the defeat at the Polytimetus River. Moreover, as rightly suggested by Smith, many problems arose from misunderstanding local traditions and socio-economic institutions. Taking this into consideration, another set of problems must be highlighted here. When compared with the maximum number of losses due to cold, thirst and hunger during the entire campaign, the defeat at the Polytimetus appears not so "great." As for the casualties, Arrian offers two different versions, the first perhaps from Ptolemy and the second from Aristobulus. The first reports a total of 2,360 men killed in the ambush (4.5.2-9: calculation according to Holt 2005, 57; Heckel 2012³, 160: "60 Companions, 800 mercenary cavalry, and 1,500 infantry. A few were captured alive but later killed"), while Curtius gives the figures of 2,000 infantry and 300 cavalry lost (7.7.29), on a total initial force of 3,000 infantry and 800 cavalry (7.6.24). However, the version of Aristobulus is different, remarking that a good number of soldiers (40 cavalry and 300 infantry) managed to escape the massacre (Arr. 4.6.1-2). Given the different figures, one wonders to what extent the aforementioned historical accounts of the battle are realistic. Unfortunately, there is no solid evidence against the story of a *total massacre*, whereas Aristobulus' reference to survivors is suspect. It seems rather that Macedonian propaganda excessively emphasized the defeat, so as to justify Alexander's subsequent bloody actions in the region. Hammond stresses the substantial reliability of Arrian's description (Hammond 1991, 41-45). It would be quite understandable if, after such a terrible event, Alexander was distressed by political isolation, as well as logistical and supply problems. The expedition organized immediately after the Polytimetus had no other result than exterminating *not* the troops of Spitamenes, *but* the local barbarians living around Maracanda who were (perhaps wrongly) believed guilty of supporting rebels (Arr. 4.6.3-5). This massacre was most likely counterproductive. Alexander's rapid return to Zariaspa for wintering (Arr. 4.7.1) shows that he could not re-establish his power in the region. Since every traditional military approach was ineffective against the rebels, the overall strategy must have changed rapidly.

⁹⁵ Bloedow 1991a, 57; Bloedow 1991b, 26-30 (hypothesis of insurgence at Alexander's exaggerated requests of local livestock); Bosworth 1995, 17-18 (theory of general intolerance towards the Macedonians, worsened after Artabazus' satrapal appointment).

rightly highlights the great difficulties and the substantial failure that accompanied the expedition of Alexander in Bactria and Sogdiana, offering some parallels with the unsuccessful methods of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁹⁶ However, the efficacy and utility of a similar political and military approach must be seriously questioned. In fact, we must remark that, in spite of the wide military resources, neither the Soviets nor Alexander were able to obtain deep and long-standing control of the occupied territories. In addition, there is no direct evidence that Alexander's plans of occupation included "total" devastations and even "genocide" (?)—in the proper sense of the word—with regard to the Sogdianians. The king did not want to be considered as a violent and bloody conqueror. On the contrary, indiscriminate raids would have seriously harmed Alexander's troops in the winter, when they would have been engaged in hard battles on snowy mountains, far from their headquarters in the Bactrian plains.⁹⁷ A total annihilation of the Sogdianian culture would have not established a good basis for subsequent Macedonian colonization. Therefore, the precise aims (and limits) of the Macedonian counter-offensive against the insurgents are uncertain. More specifically, the real intentions of Alexander when he launched assaults on the two Rocks are unknown. A direct relationship between the sieges and the subsequent success of the campaign seems to be undeniable, although some aspects of the topic are still obscure. Based on the available information, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

A) In the absence of incontrovertible historical evidence, a possible answer to the question might arise—if possible—from the correct localization of the Rocks and an understanding of their effective regional strategic role. However, we find considerable confusion among literary sources and, above all, the matter is extremely complicated by the uncertain identifications of Chorienes and Sisimithres. Based on Curtius' description, von Schwarz located the Sogdianian Rock (or Rock of Ariamazes) at Baisun-tau, about 20 km east of Derbent.⁹⁸ He also identified the Rock of Chorienes/Sisimithres with Koh-i-Nor, about 80 km South-East of Stalinabad, where the road between Dushambe (Stalinabad) and Boldzhuan crosses the river Vachsh, the ancient Oxus.⁹⁹ However, the solution lacks archaeological support. Some interesting results have been produced by the Franco-Uzbek missions. Rapin distinguishes not two, but three possible fortresses under Alexander, with different localizations: (1) the Rock of Chorienes (Kyrk-kyz, north-east of Derbent), (2) the Rock of Ariamazes (Derbent), (3) the Rock of Sisimithres (Akabad, west of Derbent).¹⁰⁰ Given the

⁹⁶ Holt 2005, 45-65, 106. According to Holt, who follows Bodansky (Bodansky 1987, 234; cf. Rubin 1987, 343) the Soviets would have adopted the same tactics of Alexander consisting in (1) isolating the region, (2) eliminating the local leadership, and (3) damaging local social and economic infrastructures (e.g. destroying food, agriculture, and pastoralism).

⁹⁷ I fundamentally agree with the opinion of S. Tanner (Tanner 2002, 35): "as ever, Alexander considered his most dangerous opponents not enemy armies, but hunger, thirst, and the elements, especially when heading into strange territory."

⁹⁸ Von Schwarz 1906², 75-77; Brunt 1976, 506.

⁹⁹ Von Schwarz 1906², 85-86; Hammond 1999, 195.

¹⁰⁰ Rapin 2007, 30.

identification of Chorienes with Sisimithres here proposed, such a tripartite scheme is unlikely. Holt regards these two as the same individual, but distinguishes—with weak arguments in my opinion—the Sogdianian Rock from that of Ariamazes (for the latter had “racing streams from the spring run-off” and no snow).¹⁰¹ In any case, the general identification with the present Hissar Range has a good chance of being correct. More precisely, the sites of Akrabad and Derbent delimit the area known in antiquity as the Iron Gates, where Alexander found natural barriers to his invasion of Sogdiana. It is highly probable that the Rocks (or fortresses) mentioned by the ancient writers were there.¹⁰² Unfortunately, the relationship between archaeological remains and literary sources is only hypothetical. Holt and Rtveladze identify the Rock of Chorienes/Sisimithres with Susiztag on the Shurob River, west of Derbent, where in 2002 a stone catapult ball dating to the age of Alexander was found.¹⁰³ The massive walls forming the defensive system of the Iron Gates have different phases of construction—the first possibly dating, on the basis of the ceramics, only to the time of Antiochus I and not Alexander the Great.¹⁰⁴ At first glance, this would make the connection with the Macedonian campaign unlikely. Nevertheless, we know that Alexander had to overcome strong fortifications of the enemy. In fact, Curtius says that the narrow entrance to the region of Sisimithres was fortified with walls (*fauces regionis, qua in artissimum cogitur, valido munimento saepserat*),¹⁰⁵ which must have been demolished by the Macedonians with battering-rams (*arietibus admotis, munimenta, quae manu adiuncta erant, concussit*).¹⁰⁶ Only after this preliminary operation would the army have been able to approach the *petra* for the siege (*ruinas munimentorum supergressus ad petram admovit exercitum*).¹⁰⁷ Strangely, Arrian is silent on these manoeuvres.¹⁰⁸ However, the geographical

¹⁰¹ Holt 1988, 66 n. 64. Holt considers the attacks to the Sogdianian Rock and the Rock of Ariamazes as “two separate incidents at different times of year and with different outcomes.” However, there is no evidence that the streams described by Curtius (7.11.3) were directly caused by thawing snow. They rather seem to be perennial springs, gushing out from the heart of the mountain. This can be inferred from the present tenses of Curtius’ description (*fontes per totum fere specum manant, e quibus conlatae aquae per prona montis flumen emittunt*), which likely points out the usual aspect of the *petra* in the course of the year. Holt’s hypothesis would lead us to admit that Alexander used the same stratagem on two different occasions. However, Bosworth suspects that Arrian superimposed different sources, perhaps Ptolemy and Aristobulus (Bosworth 1995, 128).

¹⁰² See for example P’jankov 1982, 43–46 (believing the place as the most likely localization for the Rock of Sisimithres/Chorienes); Bosworth 2004, 160.

¹⁰³ Holt 2005, 82–83 (citing Grenet 2003, 31–32); Rtveladze 2007, 177–184 (esp. 180, 184).

¹⁰⁴ Lyonnet 1998, 153–154; Mairs 2011, 33.

¹⁰⁵ 8.2.20.

¹⁰⁶ 8.2.22.

¹⁰⁷ Curt. 8.2.22–23.

¹⁰⁸ However, in the case of Chorienes, Arrian seems to distinguish the *petra* from the *chorion* (or fortress: 4.21.8; cf. 21.1 and 7). The same distinction is made for the Sogdianian Rock (4.18.5). The Rocks were possibly included in systems of larger fortifications, since Strabo explicitly calls them *petrai erymnai sphodra* (“strong fortified rocks”: 11.11.4). This leads us to reconsider the propagandistic image of the sieges given by Arrian and Curtius. Despite the *communis opinio*, the Sogdianians were not so drastically inferior from a military point of

position of the Iron Gates makes it possible that they were included in a wider defensive system by the Sogdianians. Not surprisingly, the insurgents had their headquarters there. If our supposition is true, the distance from the Macedonian capital (Zariaspa-Bactra) would have been minimal (about 150 km). Depending on the season, the Oxus River was fordable in a number of places, allowing the insurgents to make unforeseeable attacks. It is unknown whether or not Alexander built special strongholds along the river as a military solution, but this would have been a complex operation. Alexander's hasty withdrawal from Sogdiana in the winter of 329/8 casts doubt on the creation of a well-fortified *limes*. Should we assume that for months the Macedonians were forced to remain in their positions in an enervating state of military alert?

B) The losses on both sides were certainly relevant. Modern estimates suggest that no fewer than 120,000 indigenous (most of whom were civilians and not soldiers) and 7,000 Macedonians were killed in the two-year operation conducted across the region.¹⁰⁹ Are these numbers realistic? Or should we radically reconsider them? Based on literary sources, the impression is that casualties resulted not only from battles but also from food shortages and harsh climatic conditions. This calls into question Engels' statement that "it is a testimony to the productivity of Sogdiana in the fourth century B.C. that at no time in the entire campaign did a supply shortage occur."¹¹⁰ What is certain is that Alexander's strategy assured the control of the major cities and roads, with the probable aim of supplying troops and ensuring lines of communication. Polyaeus effectively summarizes the great difficulties suffered by Alexander in crossing the region—described as *tracheia* ("rough") and *dysbatos* ("hard to traverse")—just before the encounter with the Sogdianian Rock. This place is instead said to be a *petra* full of springs and provisions.¹¹¹ Alexander was most likely compelled to resort to severe rationing for troops. In fact, how else can we explain Alexander's strange request for two months' provisions from the besieged after the surrender of the Rock of Chorienes/Sisimithres?¹¹² Significantly, in the case of the Sogdianian Rock (or Rock of Ariamazes), Curtius outlines that the besieged had stored in the heart of the mountain an impressive *two-year supply*.¹¹³ Even if the number of the occupants

view. On the contrary, they certainly relied on very clear defensive strategies. Lines of walls and strongholds likely protected the areas around the *petrai*. This peculiar situation created serious problems for the invaders, who were forced to adapt the traditional techniques of sieges to such contexts. Eventually, it is likely that the capture of the otherwise impregnable Rocks was effected thanks to sincere agreements and consistent offers to the Sogdianian nobility.

¹⁰⁹ On Alexander's massacres of civilians see Arr. 4.2.4; Curt. 7.6.16-18; Olbrycht 2010, 359. On the number of deaths cf. Worthington 2004, 134 (who derives the very high number of 120,000 from Diodorus' contents of Book 17, arg. κγ'); Holt 2005, 58, 107; Smith 2009-10, 67 with n. 31, 68.

¹¹⁰ Engels 1978, 104.

¹¹¹ 4.3.29.

¹¹² Arr. 4.21.10.

¹¹³ 7.11.1: *alimentis ante congestis, quae tantae multitudini vel per biennium suppeterent*.

he gives (30,000) is unrealistic,¹¹⁴ the reference to provisions may mean that the strategy based on the destruction of agriculture and pastoral activities damaged mainly the Macedonians and not the insurgents: plans based on destruction of local resources would have turned into damages for the invaders themselves.¹¹⁵ The insurgents were likely helped by popular support. Without a doubt, the Sogdianians were more efficient in controlling the remaining local resources than the Macedonians, who in turn did not receive sufficient supplies from their bases. We must also emphasize the harsh climatic conditions in which the capture of the two Rocks occurred. These facts may have played a key role in Alexander's military choices. In fact, although in both cases a surrender was reported, Arrian says the occupants of the Sogdianian Rock were crucified or enslaved,¹¹⁶ whereas those found in the Rock of Chorienes/Sisimithres became allies of Alexander. However, the *Metz Epitome* reports that Ariamazes was killed by his own citizens, who in exchange were spared by the king.¹¹⁷ Is this account groundless? Curtius stresses that Alexander's conquest of the Rock of Ariamazes happened *maiore fama quam gloria*.¹¹⁸ He seemingly refers to the crucifixion of the vanquished. However, we find similar expressions elsewhere. Especially interesting for our purposes is *magis ad famam temeritatis quam gloriae insignem*, referring to Alexander's solitary confrontation with the Sudracae (9.5.1-2), when Alexander jumped alone into their city to fight heroically, and, taking great risks against them, was seriously injured. Curtius reports that the inhabitants were later punished for such a terrible offense with a bloody

¹¹⁴ Holt 1988, 61 n. 46. The *Metz Epitome* makes clear reference to the local population's fear (*timor*) of Alexander, this being the reason for their taking refuge on the Sogdianian Rock (*ME 15: ex eis regionibus quaedam hominum multitudo timore impulsus in quendam montem praeruptum atque excelsum confugerant*). As for the Rock of Sisimithres, Curtius instead says that armed subjects were mobilized by Sisimithres (8.2.20: *armatis popularibus*). To what extent these statements point out a real and total popular adhesion to the cause of the insurgents is uncertain. The high numbers mentioned by the ancient authors possibly deal with the eventuality that both *petrai* were included in wider defensive systems on the Hissar Range.

¹¹⁵ It is difficult to make estimates concerning the productivity of Bactria-Sogdiana under Alexander. We know that in the third century deserts and arid zones did not cover the most part of the region as today. The statement of Apollodorus of Artemita on the extraordinary fertility of the country (reported by Strabo, 11.11.1) is enlightening on this regard. According to Tarn (Tarn 2010³, 102), the regimentation of the Oxus and the Polytimetus River made possible the miracle of a second Babylonia under the Graeco-Bactrian dynasties. Unfortunately, we have very little evidence on the situation at the end of the fourth century. The long war against the rebels likely caused a shortage of resources, although traditional activities apparently survived. We can perhaps deduce this from the accounts on the ambush against Attinas, depicting a landscape of woods, "cultivated fields" (transl. by Porta 2005, 799: "campi coltivati"), flocks: *namque hostis in silvis – et forte campo erant iunctae – armatum militem condidit paucis propellentibus pecora, ut improvidum ad insidias praeda perduceret* (Curt. 8.1.4-5); cf. Front. 2.5.6: *in eis campis, quibus iunctae paludes erant ... in insidias hostes evocaverunt*.

¹¹⁶ 4.18.6.

¹¹⁷ *ME 18: cum de ea re timidus consultaret, quid ageret, multitudo hominum, quae ibi erat, Ariomazen interfecerunt. Deinde ipsi <se> dediderunt. Alexander autem eo interfecto reliquis ignovit.*

¹¹⁸ 8.1.1.

massacre.¹¹⁹ But the explanation given for Alexander's cruelty is completely imaginative and leaves us suspecting that such anecdotes were in some cases intended to justify dishonorable acts (e.g. retreats, massacres, unmotivated executions, betrayals?) after unsuccessful military actions.¹²⁰ If so, one may wonder whether Curtius invented the story of the continuing offenses against Alexander by Ariamazes so as to justify his execution.¹²¹ He says that the besieged sent thirty of their *principes* to Alexander in order to offer surrender in exchange for the promise of freedom. After that, was it the Sogdianian noblemen who decided to betray Ariamazes? Curtius says only that Alexander, though fearing that the enemies might notice the small number of attackers and retract, took a *risk* (*tamen et fortunae suae confisus*) and replied that he did not accept any surrender.¹²² Ariamazes was so frightened that he came down from the Rock with his family and the noblest of his people (*cum propinquis nobilissimisque gentis suae*) to meet Alexander. Nevertheless, this did not prevent their later flogging and crucifixion. As we have already stated, the remaining occupants of the Rock (*multitudo deditorum*) were instead spared and assigned to the Macedonian's newly-founded cities.¹²³ However, how many of the *XXX principes*, who initially came to deal with Alexander (11.26) may be identified with the *nobilissimi* who were later executed (11.28)? The question is interesting, because it is possible that Alexander spared the life to some *principes*, whose merit was having treacherously convinced Ariamazes to abandon the defence of the Rock. Even if Alexander's indiscriminate and total cruelty at the Sogdianian Rock were true (however, based on *ME* 18, I believe it was not), it is unclear what might have caused a different treatment for the occupants of the Rock of Sisimithres. One can also wonder if seasonal elements played a role. In fact, given Alexander's pragmatism, a determining factor was likely the need to take control of the insurgents' food resources before the beginning of winter. As we have observed, the date for the sieges is disputed. In any case, the snowy context leads us to consider only a few choices. Arrian puts the siege of the Sogdianian Rock in early spring of 327;¹²⁴ but, according to Tarn,

¹¹⁹ Curt. 9.5.2-20 (cf. Plut. *Mor.* 343 d; Strabo 15.1.33). Curtius' identification of this population with Sudracae is contrasted by Arrian, who instead says that they were really the Indian Malli (6.11.3).

¹²⁰ Curtius repeats a similar *formula* as 9.5.1-2 in 3.6.18 (*temeritas in gloria cesserat*), a passage dealing with Alexander's long illness and recovery after bathing in the frigid Cydnus River nearby Tarsus. In this case, the delay for illness was providentially (!) balanced by Darius' difficulties in crossing the Euphrates (3.7.1). Is this a form of propaganda, providing a reasonable and honorable justification for Alexander's procrastination in dealing with Darius at Issus? As for Sogdiana, we know that Alexander was responsible for massacres and the destruction of several cities (Arr. 4.2.4-3.4; Curt. 7.6.16-23). Now, it has been rightly suggested by Smith that destructions "only contributed to the locals' animosity towards Alexander" (Smith 2009-10, 67, based on Strauss 2003, 141-142). Therefore, one wonders whether Curtius' account of the offenses against the king was intended to justify Alexander's failures or unwarranted atrocities against the Sudracae (Malli).

¹²¹ 7.11.5; 7.11.23.

¹²² 7.11.26-27.

¹²³ 7.11.28-29.

¹²⁴ 4.18.4: ἅμα δὲ τῷ ἡρὶ ὑποφαίνοντι προὐχώρει ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ Σογδιανῇ πέτραν. This date is followed, for example, by Hammond (1999, 195).

the surrender of both Rocks had already occurred sometime before, perhaps in the middle of winter 328/7.¹²⁵ To save the "vulgate" date (summer 328), Bosworth believes that Ptolemy had not witnessed the siege, because he was sent on a mission elsewhere.¹²⁶ According to Bosworth, Arrian had replaced his main source with Aristobulus for the narration of events between the summer and the winter of 328/7, and then returned to Ptolemy for 327. He also suggests that Ptolemy gathered "eye-witness" accounts from soldiers who took part to the siege and provided a dramatic background to his entire narrative.¹²⁷ However, neither Arrian's temporary use of Aristobulus nor of soldiers' versions can be demonstrated (it also seems incredible that Ptolemy accepted the version of the summer snow, as reported to him by common soldiers).

As for the siege of the Rock of Chorienes, Arrian vaguely says that it happened sometime in winter.¹²⁸ From Curtius we infer that, after the conquest of the Rock of Sisimithres, Alexander spent the winter of 328/7 in the surrounding region of Nautaca.¹²⁹ Arrian dates this wintering just before the siege of the Sogdianian Rock.¹³⁰ Later, the king ordered the soldiers to move from their winter quarters early (after only two months) in order to reach the region of Gazaba.¹³¹ It was during this march that the Macedonians were decimated by a terrible blizzard (cf. *infra*); and one wonders if the vagueness of Arrian's chronology aimed to exculpate Alexander from the responsibility of having moved his army from winter quarters prematurely.¹³² This considered, a more likely dating of the siege of the Sogdianian Rock is early autumn, while the Rock of Chorienes/Sisimithres could be placed in the late autumn or the early winter. In both cases, we find snow on the peaks of the Hissar Range between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and the rivers are not completely frozen. The conquest of the Rocks would have assured the Macedonians a greater chance of surviving the cold and food shortages, the most feared adversities in Bactria-Sogdiana, as clearly outlined by Plutarch.¹³³ In fact, most of the Macedonians were probably killed by snowstorms and low temperatures rather than by hostile enemies. Not surprisingly, Alexander decided to take

¹²⁵ Tarn 1948, I, 72-76. This proposal is plausible, although the date can be considered simply as a (questionable) *terminus ante quem*. In fact, the scenes described by ancient authors refer to running water and waterfalls: a situation more suitable to periods such as October/November or March/April (rather than December/February).

¹²⁶ Arr. 4.16.2.

¹²⁷ Bosworth 1981, 34-36; Bosworth 1995, 125-135. As an extreme consequence of his proposed dates, Bosworth's opinion is that the climbing was "conducted in harsh and unforgiving terrain where the summer temperatures regularly exceed 40°C" (Bosworth 1996, 99).

¹²⁸ 4.21.10: ξυνέβη δὲ χειμῶνι.

¹²⁹ 8.2.19.

¹³⁰ 4.18.2.

¹³¹ Curt. 8.4.1.

¹³² Sisti-Zambrini 2004, 435.

¹³³ *Alex.* 58.1: τὴν δὲ πλείστην φθορὰν ἀπορίαι τῶν ἀναγκαίων καὶ δυσκρασίαι τοῦ περιέχοντος ἀπειργάσαντο τῆς στρατιᾶς.

definitive possession of all local resources, including those of the Iron Gates. As far as the Rock of Sisimithres is concerned, its occupation surely played a strategic role for the positive development of war. This can be supported by the later episode in Curtius, who narrates how the troops of Alexander had survived a terrible blizzard only thanks to large supplies and provisions sent by Sisimithres (*damno et fame liberaverunt*), who was later rewarded with thousands of heads of cattle plundered from the Sacae.¹³⁴ As noted above, the passage highlights the difficulties due to a terrible storm that surprised the Macedonians during their march towards the city of Gazaba.¹³⁵ According to Curtius, the soldiers set fire to the bush and improvised a camp as best they could, but only some of them survived. The rest suffered from the storm of snow and ice that hit the area and dispersed them. The author stresses that the storm killed about 2,000 soldiers, sutlers and servants. However, the number of casualties recorded in the *Metz Epitome* is much greater, i.e. 30,000 men (!) and 4,000 animals.¹³⁶ Which of the two versions is more truthful? Arrian seems to be totally unaware of the terrible event. He relates only that, during the siege of the Rock of Chorienes, Alexander's army suffered (κακοπαθῆσαι) on account of the snowfall. He points out that the troops lacked supplies (ἀπορία τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἐπέσθησαν) but makes no mention of the blizzard that decimated the army, or of the thousands (!) of deaths reported by the *Metz Epitome* and Curtius. According to Arrian, Chorienes *voluntarily* promised σιτία for two months. He promptly furnished the soldiers with food and wine from the Rock, and gave them salted meat for their tents. By doing this, the good (!) Chorienes is said to have given

¹³⁴ 8.4.19-20: *nam Sisimithres multa iumenta et camelorum II milia adduxit pecoraque et armenta; quae distributa pariter militem et damno et fame liberaverunt. Rex gratiam sibi relatam a Sisimithre perlaetus, sex dierum cocta cibaria ferre milites iussit, Sacas petens. Totam hanc regionem depopulatus, XXX milia pecorum ex praeda Sisimithri dono dat*, "for Sisimithres had brought in many pack-animals and 2,000 camels besides flocks and herds; these were distributed equally and saved the soldiers both from loss and from hunger. The king, greatly pleased by the requital made him by Sisimithres, on his way to the Sacae ordered the soldiers to carry with them cooked food enough for six days. Having devastated all that region, he gave Sisimithres a gift of 30,000 cattle from the booty" (transl. by Rolfe 1976⁴, suggesting that, based on Curtius' account, the Sacae apparently lived in the eastern part of Hissar). The extraordinary indulgence of Alexander towards his men was greatly emphasized by the ancient authors. According to the sources, the king saved a cold soldier by giving him his own throne as a refuge against the storm: *ex sella sua exiit torpentemque militem et vix compotem mentis demptis armis in sua sede iussit considerare* (Curt. 8.4.15); *cumque (Alexander) conspexisset quendam prope exanimatum frigore, considerare loco suo iussit* (Front. 4.6.3). Cf. Val. Max. 5.1 ext. 1a. However, the episode of the extreme goodness of the Macedonian is suspicious, being a possible invention of Macedonian propaganda to cover terrible mistakes of the king. In fact, other sources describe the event as a catastrophe: *ME 24-27*; Diod. 17 arg. κθ' ("the campaign of the king against the people called Nautaces and *destruction* [φθορά] of the army in heavy snow"). Cf. Strasburger 1982, I, 465. One wonders if the "goodness of Alexander" was a circulating anecdote possibly intended to hide the ineptitude of the officials who dealt with such emergencies.

¹³⁵ The city of Gazaba was probably in the western Hissar Range between Derbent and the Iron Gates (P'jankov 1982, 43-46; Rtveladze 2007, 183-187).

¹³⁶ *ME 27: huius vi tempestatis miserrima morte ad hominum XXX milia, iumentorum IIII milia perierunt consumpti; praeterea multi, qui aut corporis dolore aut aliqua parte membrorum debilitati essent, in castra revertebantur.*

less than a tenth of the provisions previously stored for the siege.¹³⁷ To what extent is this credible? Did Arrian simply follow different literary traditions (Ptolemy and not Cleitarchus)? Or, conversely, did he prefer to keep quiet about a clear failure of Alexander? We can only say that, as the aforementioned passages of Curtius and the *Metz Epitome* clearly demonstrate, the intervention of Alexander's new ally, Sisimithes (Chorienes), was absolutely providential, preventing tragic decimation by cold and hunger.

C) Another set of problems concerns the defence of Macedonian headquarters in Bactria. Difficulties in defending military installations could justify the capture of the two fortresses in spite of the adverse climatic conditions. As far as we know, the only fortifications existing in Bactria—the seven fortresses on the Iaxartes—dated back to the Achaemenid period.¹³⁸ As for Bactra, it was very likely not provided with walls. Not surprisingly, the city was occupied by the cavalry of Spitamenes and eventually saved by the rapid arrival of Craterus.¹³⁹ It is uncertain if stronger fortifications were built in Bactria immediately after Spitamenes' death.¹⁴⁰ In any case, at the end of 328, such a massive number of insurgents in the surroundings of the Iron Gates was completely intolerable to Alexander. The mountain pass was the conventional border between Sogdiana and Bactria. From there, the rebels could

¹³⁷ 4.21.10.

¹³⁸ Arrian reports that with the exception of the great Cyropolis, with a higher wall that compelled Alexander to carry out the siege (4.3.1: *hypsēloterō teichei*), the remaining six strongholds were protected by low mud ramparts, which were easily taken by the Macedonians (4.2.3: Gaza, having a low wall made of earth—*gēinō*—that was overcome thanks to *klimakes*). The rest of the territory was spotted with villages without protective walls (Tarn 2010³, 475-476).

¹³⁹ Arr. 4.16.6. Spitamenes also managed to occupy one of the six fortresses on the Iaxartes River (4.16.4-5) at that time defended only by low ramparts. As correctly suggested by Tarn, only this allowed the Sogdianian cavalry to take easy possession of the stronghold (Tarn 2010³, 476).

¹⁴⁰ As for Zariaspa-Bactra, when the Greek colonists revolted in 325, the defence of the city still focused on the pre-existent Rock, for Curtius does not mention the extensive fortifications (Curt. 9.7.2: *Bactriana arce*). These walls were certainly built at a later date, but we do not know at what point. It is likely that a first important circuit was created under Antiochus I when he was viceroy in 295-281 (Holt 1999, 24-46; Holt 2005, 125). Alternatively, we can imagine that strong fortifications were built by Euthydemus, because Antiochus III besieged Bactra in 208-206 (Polyb. 11.34.1-11; 29.12.8; Holt 2005, 127). The siege of Bactra was one of the most famous in antiquity. Strangely, Polybius offers no details. It seems that Antiochus was unable to overcome the city defences (according to Tarn, possibly because great ditches [like those found by Antiochus in the siege of Sirynx in Hyrcania, Polyb. 10.31.8; Tarn 2010³, 16] impeded the approach of the siege machines to the walls; Tarn [Tarn 2010³, 82] outlines that, if so, "Euthydemus had turned Bactra into one of the greatest fortified places known"). The Seleucid king was perhaps also in serious difficulty on account of a lack of supplies (Sidky 2000, 173) and severe climatic conditions (Coloru 2009, 182). In the end, Antiochus abandoned the siege and negotiated. He promised one of his daughters in marriage to Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus (Polyb. 10.49; 11.34.7-11). Can we find similarities with Alexander's "diplomatic" solution to the anti-insurgents campaign of 328/7? The most remarkable aspect is that in both cases a marriage was provided to seal the concluded peace. Nevertheless, Antiochus likely paid for his political isolation with a bitter defeat, as indirectly attested by the silence of Polybius on the phases of the siege (omitted by the Seleucid propaganda). Alexander's impending failure was, on the other hand, avoided by a plan that was successfully carried out together with local chiefs (Strabo's version).

interfere with the movements of Macedonians towards the plain of Maracanda and also launch unpredictable attacks against Bactria. This situation must have been particularly dangerous in winter, when abundant snowfalls severely limited the mobility of the Macedonian cavalry. In all likelihood, Alexander's troops were compelled to make difficult manoeuvres in order to outflank the Rocks and avoid ambushes. A possible alternative route to Maracanda was today's Turkestan Deserts (Sundukli and Karakum), west of the Iron Gates. However, Alexander's previous march in that region in pursuit of Bessus had turned into a complete disaster. According to Curtius, the human losses exceeded the highest amount that Alexander had ever suffered in a single battle.¹⁴¹ Alexander carefully avoided repeating such a terrible experience during his stay in Bactria-Sogdiana.¹⁴² On the contrary, given the planned war against India, the matter of human losses required serious attention. There were several fords along the Oxus, but the only ones allowing rapid contacts between northern Bactria and Sogdiana were those at the Iron Gates, between Kelife and Termez (respectively northwest and northeast of Bactra).¹⁴³ The Macedonians likely built small permanent strongholds along the main roads, but Arrian and Curtius discuss temporary camps and periods spent in tents.¹⁴⁴ The building of a standing camp (*stativa*) is recorded only after the conquest of the Rock of Ariamazes, when Alexander reached Maracanda.¹⁴⁵ Curtius' statement *et cetera quidem pacaverat rex* is therefore contradictory. In fact, after the conquest of the Rock of Ariamazes, Alexander had to continue his war against elusive enemies.¹⁴⁶ The events are listed in a questionable order, quite different from that given by

¹⁴¹ 7.5.1-15. According to Curtius, the disaster was caused by scarcity of water during the march through the desert. When the soldiers arrived at the Oxus and drank, they began dying in mass *intercluso spiritu*, that is, of congestion (7.5.15: *sed qui intemperantius hauserant, intercluso spiritu extincti sunt, multoque maior horum numerus fuit, quam ullo amiserat proelio*). Again, the catastrophe was probably due to unpreparedness of the officials. Plutarch tries to exonerate Alexander, by saying that he refused to drink the water offered by his own soldiers (Plut. *Alex.* 42.5-10), but such rhetorical account is likely a product of propaganda (Baynham 1998, 184-185).

¹⁴² The terrible march through the Gedrosian desert (present Beluchistan, south-western Pakistan) on his return from India can say a great deal about the reasons behind this event. In fact, according to Arrian, a great part of his army died on that occasion (Arr. 6.24.4-25.6; cf. Curt. 9.10.11-16). See Hammond 1993, 274-276, esp. 275 (suggesting that the source for similar tragic episodes was Cleitarchus); Baynham 1998, 81-82 (making close comparisons between the two events and concluding that Arrian's source for the Gedrosian disaster was not Cleitarchus—as for Curtius and the residual “vulgate” tradition—, but Nearchus).

¹⁴³ Rtveladze 2007, 157-158.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Arr. 4.21.10: *skēnē*.

¹⁴⁵ Curt. 8.1.10.

¹⁴⁶ According to Curtius, *vagi hostes* (“mobile troops”) repeatedly attacked the Macedonians soon after the capture of the Rock (8.1.1). In addition, a number of attacks were launched by Bactrian exiles and 800 Massagetae (8.1.3-6). Even Attinas, *eius regionis praefectus*, was ambushed and killed with 300 of his horsemen (8.1.5; Heckel 2009, 64, s.v. *Attinas*). Afterwards, Craterus rushed to the area, massacring 1,000 Dahae (8.1.6). This event would have marked the end of the revolt in the whole region and Alexander safely reached Maracanda (8.1.6-7: *quorum clade totius regionis finita defectio est. Alexander quoque Sogdianis rursus subactis Maracanda repetit*). However, Curtius contradicts himself, when reporting subsequent revolts in the

Arrian. For example, a very important difference concerns the killing of Spitamenes, which Arrian places immediately *before* the capture of the Rocks. As a result, Curtius does not present total pacification of Sogdiana before the taking of the Rocks or even after that. A similar comment can be made on Arrian's statement that the conquest of the Sogdianian Rock would have removed everything that was left to the rebels. In fact, after the capture of the Rock, Alexander had to launch an attack on the Rock of Chorienes and sent Craterus to fight against the undaunted Catanes and Haustanes in Paraetacene.¹⁴⁷ This state of affairs is well summed up by Plutarch's famous statement comparing the revolts in Bactria and Sogdiana to the "heads of hydra, which ever grew again in renewed wars among these faithless and conspiring people."¹⁴⁸ The most obvious conclusion is that, despite embellishment of the literary sources, a complete and rapid conquest of Sogdiana was impossible. The rebels immediately reorganized their resistance when Alexander turned his back. These forces were mainly composed by mobile elements, which were extremely difficult to counteract. Given the situation, the numerical superiority of the Macedonians in the territory was of only minimal importance, whereas the strategic control of the Iron Gates was fundamental. The threat had to be eliminated, hence Alexander's conceivable decision to launch assaults on the two Rocks.

D) Eventually, the importance of the diplomatic option must be emphasized. Following the substantial failure of Alexander's repressive measures, it has been rightly argued that his marriage to Roxane represented an easy means of bringing a rapid end to the conflict, by creating a close tie with local nobility.¹⁴⁹ Human losses and economic costs of such an exhausting campaign surely exceeded initial estimates. Alexander chose to adopt the most pragmatic option and launched assaults on the Rocks. Was he helped by pro-Macedonian factions? In my opinion, the major doubts concern the eventuality of secret agreements among the Persian noble Artabazus (the grandson of Artaxerxes II and former satrap of

region of Xenippa (8.2.14-18: perhaps west of the Hissar Range on the road between Bactra and Maracanda, modern region of Kashkhadaria [Rtveladze 2007, 176-177]) and then the siege of the Rock of Sisimithres (8.2.19). He also records new fights against the rebels (8.2.33-38) and the proposed expedition against the Dahae, who were guilty of giving hospitality to Spitamenes—avoided only by the fact that the rebel was killed by treachery at the hands of his wife (8.3.1-16). After these events, Curtius collocates the famous episode of the blizzard and the aid given by Sisimithres (8.4.1-17), the visit to the region of *Chorienes, satrapes nobilis* (8.4.21: that is, perhaps the same Sisimithres) where he married Roxane during the famous banquet (8.4.22-30).

¹⁴⁷ 4.22.1-2; cf. Curt. 8.5.2. The mission of Craterus can be dated to the spring of 327 (Heckel 2009, 82). According to Arrian, the losses among the rebels amounted to 120 horsemen and 1,500 infantry. Catanes died in battle, while Haustanes was led to Alexander. As for Paraetacene, it can maybe be identified with present Surkhandarya region, in the south-eastern Hissar Range, where many strongholds dating the middle of the century (e.g. Kizyl-tepe) were progressively abandoned under Alexander and his successors (Rtveladze 2007, 188).

¹⁴⁸ Plut. *Mor.* 341 f (transl. by Cole Babbitt 1936).

¹⁴⁹ Tarn 1948, II, 326; Hamilton 1969, 129; Bosworth 1980, 10; Carney 2003, 245-246; Holt 2005, 90-91; Smith 2009-10, 69.

Hellespontine Phrygia),¹⁵⁰ Oxyartes, Sisimithres and other Sogdianian nobles, against Ariamazes. The aforementioned accounts of the *Metz Epitome* and Strabo lead us to presume that Alexander failed in his military campaign and was compelled to adopt “diplomatic” options. Curtius mentions the *amicitia* with Sisimithres,¹⁵¹ whereas the *Metz Epitome* makes a distinction between the *amicitia* with Choriene¹⁵² and the *foedus* with Sisimithres.¹⁵³ Despite the initial appearance, the evidence is not contradictory. It is likely that Alexander made a first agreement (*amicitia*) with Sisimithres/Choriene, which was later reinforced by a stronger *foedus*. Alexander’s inclination to seek local alliances is revealed by the *Metz Epitome*. This states that Ariamazes was killed by his own men when they saw him terrified by the 300 “flying men.”¹⁵⁴ As far as we can see, the *Metz Epitome* confirms—albeit indirectly—Strabo’s reference to *prodosia*. The story of the timorous Ariamazes may well be propaganda, aiming to justify an unnecessary and apparently unmotivated surrender and the execution of the defenders. Ariamazes was likely convinced by his own nobles to abandon the Rock in exchange for freedom or other promises from Alexander. However, the Macedonian sentenced him to death. Although metaphorically, Ariamazes was therefore “killed” by his own men. And who better than Oxyartes, the father of Roxane, to put together the actors of such a plot? According to Arrian, Oxyartes surrendered to Alexander upon the news that Roxane had been captured at the Sogdianian Rock, yet there is much evidence that leads us to believe that he had already gone over to the Macedonians.¹⁵⁵ The real role of Oxyartes is generally underestimated by Arrian as well as Curtius. Only the latter adequately

¹⁵⁰ Heckel 2009, 55, s.v. *Artabazus*.

¹⁵¹ 8.2.32: *imperium Sisimithri restituit spe maioris etiam provinciae facta, si cum fide amicitiam ipsius coluisset*. According to Curtius, Sisimithres offered his *deditio* to Alexander (2.28) who in turn restored him with his previous power (*imperium*). Moreover, Alexander invited two young sons of Sisimithres to join his army (2.33: *duos illi iuvenes patre tradente secum militaturos sequi iussit*). Were they offered as hostages? Or, on the contrary, should we instead think that Alexander requested military counseling (and even troops) in order to continue his campaign?

¹⁵² *ME* 28: *cum eo amicitiam fecit*.

¹⁵³ *ME* 19: *ibi cum Sisimithre ... foedus fecit*.

¹⁵⁴ *ME* 18. We find the “fear” be the real reason behind surrendering also in the case of Sisimithres (Curt. 8.2.25: *ad deditionem metu*; 26: *ad augendam formidinem*; 27: *trepidum diffidentemque rebus suis*).

¹⁵⁵ 4.20.4. The intermediary in the surrender of the Rock of Ariamazes was Cophes, the son of Artabazus (Curt. 7.11.5; 11.22-26) later awarded—possibly as satrap—command of the *petra* and the surrounding region (7.11.29: *Artabazus in petrae regionisque, quae adposita esset ei, tutela relictus*; see Heckel 2009, 55 n. 135, cf. Arr. 3.29.1). It is only after this event that Oxyartes properly appears as an intermediary between the Macedonians and Sisimithres (Arr. 4.21.6-8). In this case, Curtius says that Oxyartes was sent by Alexander to persuade the besieged to surrender (8.2.25: *Oxarten misit*). Here, “Oxartes” is possibly just a corruption of the name Oxyartes, and not another individual. In fact, the father of Roxane is mentioned on the same occasion by Plutarch with his uncorrupted name (*Alex.* 58.3: Oxyartes; Sisti-Zambrini 2004, 434; Heckel 2012³, 42). The version of Arrian is different. He claims that Choriene requested a meeting with Oxyartes, who exhorted him to surrender. The immediate consequence of Oxyartes’ intervention was that Choriene made a *philia* with Alexander, who in turn granted (*edōken*) him confirmation as *hyparchos* (4.21.6-9).

highlights his effective importance, defining him *internuntius pacis*.¹⁵⁶ This definition, however, appears reductive when compared to Oxyartes' later political role. One must note that he would later become father-in-law of Alexander and even grandfather (!) of the heir to the throne, Alexander IV. The marriage of Alexander and Roxane was celebrated between the second half of 328 and the early spring of 327, and significantly had the impressive result of stopping the actions of the insurgents.¹⁵⁷ We do not know if this was a consequence of previous agreements with local nobility. In any case, it was without a doubt a *temporary* solution, as the events that followed demonstrate. A total pacification was contradicted by the fact that the Macedonian, in Bactria-Sogdiana during the spring/summer of 327, left a large detachment of 10,000 infantry and 3,500 cavalry under the satrap Amyntas, son of Nicolaus.¹⁵⁸ Such a force was scattered over an immense territory. The negative consequence was the diminution of its overall military efficacy. On the other hand, Kuhrt and Sherwin-White outline the lack of strong administrative (and military) hellenized centers in Bactria-Sogdiana under Alexander.¹⁵⁹ In 326/5 Greek colonists headed by Athenodorus revolted in conjunction with local tribes.¹⁶⁰ According to Curtius, the rebellion was due to internal dissent and not to hostility against Alexander.¹⁶¹ In any case, Athenodorus' self-proclamation as the new king suggests intolerance towards Alexander's administrative settlement. In addition, in 325 Alexander ordered the execution of Tyriespis, the rebellious satrap of Parapamisus who was replaced by Oxyartes.¹⁶² There are some contrasting elements in the sources, since Curtius defines Oxyartes *praetor Bactrianorum*, arguing that he was acquitted of the charge of treason and even awarded a larger territory.¹⁶³ However, this is highly

¹⁵⁶ Curt. 8.2.29; cf. the use of the same terminology in Tac. *Hist.* 3.70.25.

¹⁵⁷ Atkinson - Yardley 2009, 136 (328/7); Heckel 2009, 242 (second half of 328: "the marriage had not yet occurred in mid-328"); Bosworth 2004, 166 (early spring of 327). It is not the case to dwell on the vast literature on the marriage. Nevertheless, we must emphasize how this event marked a turning point in Macedonian policy towards Eastern populations. By now, they were incorporated in the "ecumenical" vision of Alexander. According to Carney, the marriage to Roxane scandalized both Greeks and Persians (Carney 2003, 245-246). Effectively, despite Arrian's attempt to exculpate Alexander (4.19.5-6), we find very negative opinions in other ancient historians, as for example Curtius (10.6.13; cf. 8.4.30). Plutarch states that the marriage was initially made for love, but in following it turned into a political advantage for Alexander, because the barbarians became devoted to his figure (*Alex.* 47.7). As for Strabo, he does not criticize the Macedonian (Engels 1998, 160-161). In any case, there is enough to see political opportunism behind this act (see e.g. Martin 2006, 216). One can reasonably suspect a state of serious military crisis, compelling the king to "dishonorable" alliances with Sogdianians. Given the situation, Strabo's reference to *treason* is therefore suggestive and, as I believe, much more than simple historical invention.

¹⁵⁸ Arr. 4.22.3; Holt 1988, 81.

¹⁵⁹ Kuhrt - Sherwin-White 1993, 9. This idea is also followed by Smith 2009-10, 70.

¹⁶⁰ Curt. 9.7.1-6; Diod. 17.99.5-6.

¹⁶¹ 9.7.1: *orta inter ipsos seditione defecerant*.

¹⁶² Arr. 6.15.3.

¹⁶³ 9.8.10: *Oxyartes, praetor Bactrianorum, non absolutus modo sed etiam iure amoris amplioris imperii donatus est finibus*.

unlikely, seeing that there is no concrete evidence for his appointment as satrap of Bactria-Sogdiana. In fact, after the death of Bessus, the satrapy was ruled in 329/8 by Artabazus,¹⁶⁴ in the summer of 328 by Cleitus,¹⁶⁵ from the autumn of 328 by Amyntas son of Nicolaus.¹⁶⁶ According to Heckel, Amyntas was likely killed during the revolt of the Greek colonists in 325, since in 323 we hear of a new satrap, Philip.¹⁶⁷ The death of Alexander in June 323 gave the colonists the opportunity for a new revolt. This was defeated by Perdikkas' official Pithon, the satrap of Media.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, the father of Roxane managed to maintain the control of bordering Parapamisus. He sent forces to Eumenes in 317¹⁶⁹ and was confirmed satrap by Antigonus the One-Eyed.¹⁷⁰ His career can tell a great deal about our discussion. Evidently, in spite of the failure of the general military strategy of Alexander in Bactria-Sogdiana, Oxyartes exercised good regional politics and proved to be good ally of the Macedonians. Therefore, the common idea of a harsh treatment of local *élites* by Alexander is quite likely an exaggeration of the moderns. On the contrary, in most cases the Sogdianian dynasts were treated with respect and held in the highest regard by the Macedonians. A good example is the survival of Spitamenes' daughter, Apame, who married Seleucus I and became

¹⁶⁴ Arr. 3.29.1; cf. 4.17.3; Curt. 8.1.19; Heckel 2009, 55, s.v. *Artabazus*. The satrap was apparently replaced because of his old age. No episodes related to negative policies towards local populations are known. Even if Bosworth suggests that Artabazus' appointment by Alexander in 329/8 caused the revolt of Spitamenes and Catanes (Bosworth 1995, 17-18), it seems unlikely that after the departure of the king he acted against his orders. In any case, according to Diodorus (20.20.1), in 327/6 Artabazus' daughter Barsine gave birth to Alexander's son Heracles (Heckel 2009, 70, s.v. *Barsine*). One wonders if some hostility had previously arisen between Oxyartes and Artabazus (the grandson of Artaxerxes II) on the legitimacy of Alexander's possible heirs. If so, Artabazus' removal could be best seen as a consequence of Alexander's strategic interest in maintaining good relationships with the Sogdianian nobility.

¹⁶⁵ Curt. 8.1.19; Heckel 2009, 86-86, s.v. *Cleitus* [2]. According to Curtius, Cleitus was appointed to such important satrapy for his longstanding loyalty to Alexander and his family (8.1.21: *ob has causas validissimam imperii partem fidei eius tutelaeque commisit*); however, the official was killed by the same king after a serious dispute on the matter of orientalizing during the famous banquet in Maracanda (Arr. 4.8.4-6; Curt. 8.1.22-52; cf. Iust. 12.6.1; Plut. *Alex.* 50.5; 51.1-2; see Carney 1981, 149-160), and rapidly replaced by Amyntas.

¹⁶⁶ Arr. 4.17.3; Curt. 8.2.14.

¹⁶⁷ Diod. 18.3.3; Dexippus *FGrH* 100 F8; Heckel 2009, 26, s.v. *Amyntas* [9]. We can say very little about the obscure years of the rule of Amyntas. Specifically, we do not know a great deal about his policy towards local dynasties. He may have been killed (Holt 1988, 84; Schober 1981, 30-32) or replaced because of his "incompetence" (so Yardley-Wheatley-Heckel 2011, 114).

¹⁶⁸ Diod. 18.7.1-6; cf. 18.4.8; soldiers were sent to Bactria possibly six months after the king's death, according to the *Astronomical Diaries* I, no. 322 D Obv. 22. Soon after Alexander's death in Babylon, the Greeks who had settled in Bactria-Sogdiana revolted, asking to return home. Diodorus says that Perdikkas sent his officer Pithon to confront an enormous force of 20,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry commanded by Philon of Aeniania (18.7.2; see Holt 1988, 88; Zeimal 2003⁴, 236). On the revolt see Landucci Gattinoni 2008, 48-52; Walsh 2009, 75-87.

¹⁶⁹ Diod. 19.14.6; 27.5.

¹⁷⁰ Diod. 19.48.2; Heckel 2009, 187-188.

the mother of Antiochus I.¹⁷¹ We lack sufficient evidence to assume that the family of Spitamenes was involved in Oxyartes' supposed philo-Macedonian faction. However, given the later role of Apame, it seems to be a plausible option. The marriage between Seleucus and Apame, to whom several Seleucid foundations were even dedicated¹⁷² is a good example of longstanding relationships occurring between the Macedonian and Sogdianian nobility after Alexander. It also reveals that political marriages were essential in maintaining control over Upper Satrapies.¹⁷³ Arrian states that Catanes, the rebellious companion of Spitamenes, was killed in battle, while Haustanes was sent as a prisoner to Alexander.¹⁷⁴ Could Haustanes have betrayed Catanes, being then rewarded by the Macedonian for that? Unfortunately, we do not know anything on his fate, nor if he was later included in the *elite* of the new satrapy.¹⁷⁵ We do not know if the real reason behind the revolt of Spitamenes was, as Arrian says, the announced *sylogos* in Zariaspa. According to Briant, the *sylogos* was an institution from the Achaemenid age, a sort of periodical military review of the *hyparchoi* along with

¹⁷¹ Heckel 2009, 39 s.v. *Apame* [1]. Apame was the first wife of Seleucus. Their union was celebrated in 324 at Susa, along with other marriages among Macedonian *hetairoi* and local noblewomen ordered by Alexander (Arr. 7.4.6; cf. App. *Syr.* 57; Plut. *Demetr.* 31.5). In Strabo we find the strange news that the inhabitants of Apamea in Phrygia considered Artabazus—and not Spitamenes—the father of Apame (12.8.15). This could well be a later local version, aiming to reconnect the origins of the city to Phrygian (rather than Sogdianian) names. On the city see Cohen 1995, 281-285 (Apameia Kelainai). On Apame and Seleucus see Macurdy 1985², 77-78; Grainger 1997, 38, s.v. *Apama* (3); Heckel 2005², 235, s.v. *Seleukos son of Antiochos*.

¹⁷² Apart from Apamea Celaenae founded by Antiochus I, especially remarkable is the great Apamea (Strabo 16.2.4; App. *Syr.* 57) on the Axios or "Orontes" in Syria, presumably founded by Seleucus after Ipsus in 301-299 (Cohen 2006, 95).

¹⁷³ It was perhaps under Seleucus (c. 300) and not under Alexander that, according to archaeological evidence (Leriche 1986, 67-70, 79-84, dating the first well-constructed walls to 300-250), the important settlement of Aï Khanoum was founded. This leads Smith to suggest that military and administrative difficulties persisted for many years after Alexander' death (Smith 2009-10, 70). The palace of Aï Khanoum likely had fundamental administrative importance both under the Seleucids as well as the Bactrian kings (Nielsen 1994, 124-129). The general absence of large Hellenized settlements in Bactria-Sogdiana immediately after 323 can reasonably explain why the Macedonians took local alliances into great consideration. More specifically, this could justify Seleucus' long and opportunistic marriage to Apame (ended in 300/299, when the king likely married Stratonice, daughter of Demetrius Poliorcetes: Grainger 1997, 67-68, s.v. *Stratonike* [3]; Cohen 2006, 95).

¹⁷⁴ Arr. 4.22.2; Curt. 8.5.2.

¹⁷⁵ The episode concerning the Macedonian expedition to Paraetacene is quite dark. Arrian speaks of a hard battle that caused numerous casualties among the barbarians and especially the death of Catanes. Nevertheless, as remarked by Heckel (Heckel 2009, 82), we read in the *Metz Epitome* that Catanes was *not killed* but simply *arrested* by the Dahae, who handed him over to Alexander in order to prevent possible reprisals (*ME* 23: *Catanen et Dataphernen conprehensos ad Alexandrum adduxerunt*). The existence of contrasting versions on these events is relevant and leads us to presume – to the chagrin of the ancient writers – that the Macedon encountered serious trouble in defeating the Paraetacenian insurgents. In this case, should we suppose that there was the conclusion of resolving agreements between Alexander and the local tribes?

their troops subjected to the satrap by the Great King.¹⁷⁶ We must suppose that the *hyparchoi* were expected to submit to Alexander since he was the legitimate successor of Darius. The most logical consequence would have been the full disposal of troops and horses to the Macedonians. Spitamenes and the other nobles refused to take part in such a capital event and were therefore considered rebels. It is possible that Alexander later tried to repair this split with local nobility by marrying Roxane, but this was not an easy operation. This list of satraps, marriages, revolts and other remarkable events reveals the real reasons why military strategy was not sufficient to rule over the Sogdianians. As demonstrated by the politics of integration with local *elites*, Alexander and his Successors undoubtedly considered the diplomatic option as an indispensable cornerstone for declared purposes of regional control.

(iv)

Could these arguments shed further light on Alexander's policy towards the Sogdianian insurgency? Although Arrian and Curtius enhance the exploits of Alexander and his army, it is quite probable that in 328 the Macedonians met fierce resistance from locals. It is also possible that Arrian drew upon a tradition that was unduly favorable to Alexander, an aspect that is less present in Curtius and the *Metz Epitome*. Strabo requires separate treatment. In any case, the contrast between the previously highlighted statements and what has been recently assumed by modern studies (e.g. Lonsdale) could not be more obvious. As noted, the strategy of the Macedonians revealed its vulnerability on many occasions. Alexander was forced to find new solutions, by changing military tactics in order to counter territorial losses and avoid further deceases among the soldiers. Just as the case of the capture of the two Rocks and the subsequent marriage with the princess Roxane show, Alexander's "definitive" victory over the Sogdianians was possible only thanks to careful use of diplomacy.

Summary of Findings

Firstly, we must debunk the myth of the invincibility of the Macedonian army. This mainly applies to the statements of Arrian (4.18.4) and Curtius (7.11.1), which appear as completely unjustified. Alexander certainly dealt with adverse climatic and topographical conditions. However, the assumption that these difficulties were easily overcome either by military bravery (Arrian) or *tolmē* and *aretē* (Plutarch) is frankly anti-historical. On the contrary, it is quite evident that during the Sogdianian campaign the Macedonians had a desperate need of supplies and logistical bases. These requirements could not be provided by distant headquarters in Bactria or temporary encampments of tents in deserts and high mountains.

¹⁷⁶ Briant 2002, 748-749. On periodical *syllogoi* in the Achaemenid Empire see Xen. *Oec.* 4.6; cf. *Cyr.* 8.6.15. According to Briant, Alexander was simply trying to reinforce his army in order "to launch a trans-Oxus campaign."

Secondly, although accurate estimates are impossible, casualties were likely more considerable than commonly imagined. Curtius emphasizes the very large number of soldiers who died in crossing the Turkestan desert and the *Metz Epitome* records the staggering number of 30,000 deaths in a snowstorm. Similar episodes were underestimated by modern historians, in comparison to the emphasis of the “heroic” capture of the Rocks. The figures for casualties are discordant, but one can imagine that without the necessary aid from local allies (Oxyartes, Sisimithres), Alexander would have found himself in serious trouble. This leads us to consider Alexander’s strategy in Sogdiana in a new light. A “total” war would have been not only impractical, but also unproductive. It would have harmed the invaders themselves by further worsening difficult situations of provisioning, while also exacerbating the political isolation. All this would have caused rapid disruption in Alexander’s army; not surprisingly, the Macedonian finally came to terms with the enemies.

Thirdly, the possible identification of the Rocks with the Iron Gates, in a strategically important area, justifies the actions narrated by Arrian and Curtius. However, it is unlikely that such conquests were carried out entirely by siege. In addition to topographical incongruences, we must highlight the lack of agreement in the literary tradition. Specifically, the climbing of the Sogdianian Rock sounds extremely dubious. It was certainly impracticable with the rudimentary means mentioned by Arrian and Curtius. Moreover, it is possible that both authors omitted many details—especially the presence of some fortifications and the “shameful” behavior of Alexander. We may suppose that the king made agreements with local philo-Macedonians plotting betrayal against Ariamazes.

In conclusion, during the Sogdianian campaign, the Macedonian king likely realized that there were clear impediments to obtaining long-term control over the invaded regions. As a consequence, he contracted firm political alliances. In this sense, the support given by local nobility was a vitally important matter. Strabo, the *Metz Epitome* and Polyaeus, in addition to parts of Curtius, undoubtedly give us a less rhetorical image than Arrian. The Nicomedian author followed a tradition overly favorable to the Macedonians (Ptolemy) and deliberately ignored negative items from the “vulgate” tradition (Callisthenes and Cleitarchus).¹⁷⁷ As a matter of fact, the clash with guerrilla fighters required excessive efforts in comparison to the conclusion of agreements with local tribes. Alexander’s planned march towards India required the previous establishment of good political relations and the installation of well-furnished forts in Bactria-Sogdiana and Parapamisis. Not surprisingly, after his departure,

¹⁷⁷ Obviously, this is not the most general character of the *Anabasis*. In fact, Arrian did not always follow Ptolemy’s version. He possibly drew details from the parallel “Vulgate” (maybe through Diodorus and Curtius, if we accept dating the latter’s *Historiae* to the first century CE, between Tiberius and Nero [Porta 2005, 16–68, esp. 16–22]). This is not a new perspective. A recent and updated discussion on various historical traditions regarding Alexander’s deeds in Greek and Roman contexts can be found in Dreyer 2009, esp. 69–71 (with “table of relevant Alexander’s historians,” showing decisive convergences between the two traditions under Trajan). Dreyer retains urgent a wider re-examination of Roman receptions of Alexander’s historians - especially as far as Curtius, Trogus (Justin) and Plutarch are concerned. As for Strabo, we should focus attention on Augustus’ or Tiberius’ possible influences on the long composition of *Geographika*.

Bactria-Sogdiana was ruled by Macedonian officials, who continued basing their military strategy on an openness towards local nobility. As stated in ancient sources, the necessary premise for all of this was Alexander's "conquest" of the Rocks. These had strategic importance not only with regard to their geographical position (Iron Gates), but also because they stored a quantity of provisions and sheltered some of the major chiefs of the insurgence. Therefore, it is quite possible that Alexander's texturing of *prodosia* had historically foundations. The episode perhaps became famous in the circles of intellectuals in Rome, after Gallus' Arabian misadventure. The *praefectus* likely presented a *memorandum* to clarify things with Augustus. The document possibly contained various *exempla*, perhaps drawn either on Aristobulus or later *Parthika*. One of these examples focused on Alexander's capture of the Rocks by treason. It is unlikely that such a story was *tout court* made up by Strabo. The betrayal of a local faction and the presence of faithful local guides helped prevent that Sogdianian campaign turned into a complete disaster. On the contrary, Gallus could not count on such favorable elements. As we see, geography and the presence (or absence) of local allies played a decisive role. If we accept the idea that the so-called "Trogus' source" was effectively Duris, we could also presume that Strabo drew from Timagenes. In this regard, we must emphasize that a positive reassessment of the historical reliability of Duris has been recently carried out by Pownall.¹⁷⁸ This perhaps allows us to find in Strabo a

¹⁷⁸ Pownall 2012 (76); Yardley-Wheatley-Heckel 2011, 7 and n. 16 *contra* Meister 2000³, 115. Pownall argues that the common view of Duris as an unreliable historian devoted to "sensationalism" is a *myth* invented by modern scholars. In any case, a very positive opinion on the reliability of Duris was also found in Beloch 1925, 479-480. Was the "reliable" Duris one of the sources of Strabo? Duris is only once mentioned by the geographer (1.3.19) as his source for the false Greek etymology of the city of Rhagae (Rhagai) in Media, that is "Rents" or "Rifts," with reference to local seismicity (cf. Strabo 11.9.1 [Rhagai]; 13.6 [Rhaga]). However, this is unlikely. The Old Persian name for the locality—attested under Darius I in 521—was *Ragā* (Wiesehöfer 2012 [Rhagae] www.encquran.brill.nl/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/rhagae-e1021730). The Greeks may simply have imagined the similarity between the Greek and the Persian term. Ambraseys and Melville contrast Duris' version and suggest that "the attempt by the Greeks to explain the name as that of a place rent by earthquakes should be regarded simply as popular etymologising" (Ambraseys – Melville 2005², 35-36, n. 1). This is not the case: the transmitter of Duris' fragment to Strabo was Posidonius of Apamea, whose interest on earthquakes is well known (Landucci Gattinoni 1997, 46, 120-121, 201; Kidd 2004³, F 233, 823-824). However, one may wonder whether Duris' explanation on the origin of the name was intended to discredit Monophthalmus (cf. Landucci Gattinoni 1997, 120, considering the etymology of Duris as false). In fact, in 316/5 after his victory against Eumenes, Antigonus wintered in the area of Rhagae, where he founded military settlements (Diod. 19.44.4-5; see Griffith 1935, 150). Unfortunately, we do not know whether Duris actually was a supporter of Eumenes. The fragments of the Samian historian offer no evidence of hostility towards Antigonus (so Kebric 1977, 4-9, who suggests that Duris' relationship with this dynasty was excellent). Besides, Billows (1990, 336) definitely places Duris' activity not under Monophthalmus, but rather Gonatas in 280-260. In addition, Billows—perhaps rightly—suggests that Duris drew from two reliable main sources: Hieronymus of Cardia, the author of the *Royal Ephemerides* (Hornblower 1981, *passim* [considering him a very accurate historian] *contra* Roisman 2010, 145-148, [remarking instead on Hieronymus' elitism and absence of reliability]), and Diyllus (according to Hammond 1983, 160-161, the reliable favorite source used by Diodorus and Curtius instead of Clitarchus for many episodes of Alexander's expedition to Asia). As a result, no intentional error from Duris can be proved.

special historical *realism* that lacks in Arrian, who is instead affected by Ptolemy’s instrumental omission of less honorable behavior on the part of the Macedonian. It is, however, quite certain that we must abandon the meanderings of Macedonian propaganda and gain a new grasp of the question in order to lay more solid historical foundations. When Alexander “captured” the Rocks and married Roxane, the “invincible” Sogdianian guerrilla slowly grew weak. Only after these events did the Macedonians emerge from the Sogdianian quagmire and begin their march toward India. Thanks to this strategy, Alexander spared troops and obtained alliances with the local nobility. Despite possible doubts, we must admit these are the real reasons why the “conquest” of the Rocks by treason, along with the alliances with Chorienes/Sisimithres and the father of Roxane, quite likely represented, as far as we know, the ideal—although temporary—solution for Alexander’s difficult campaigns of 329-327.

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As far as Strabo’s reliability is concerned, if any error occurred, this should be solely imputed to Duris’ later transmitters.

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