

## Why was Alexander's Indian Campaign so Bloody?

Ancient writers note that Alexander's invasion of India (327-325) was exceptionally savage, and they single out the siege of Malli to illustrate the carnage: "The city was taken by storm. In a fury at the injury to their king, the Macedonians killed all whom they met and filled the city with corpses," states Diodorus (17.99.4), while Curtius (9.5.20) and Arrian (6.11.1) emphasize the totality of the massacre by specifying that all women and children were cut down when the citadel fell. The sources describe this siege in detail because of Alexander's near-fatal wound there, however the brutality was not unique to the Malli region or a response to the king's injury. In fact, the campaigns in Bactria and Sogdiana were more ferocious than those in Persia, and in India levels of slaughter reached a zenith. Ancient authors do not make this distinction or try to define the causes of violence. Nor do most modern scholars, who take the savagery of the campaign as a given without explaining it. Those who do explain the increased violence do so by viewing India as an extension of the wearying Bactrian and Sogdian campaigns (Holt: 1988, Worthington: 2014), emphasizing the duration of the entire Asian invasion, or highlighting strong local resistance but glossing Macedonian reaction by supposing that "the act of killing meant little" (Bosworth: 1996).

This paper advances a different explanation from what modern authors say for the brutality in India, arguing that it stemmed from a multiplicity of factors, none of which should be pigeonholed, as is commonly the case. Curtius' claim that "by the slaughter of the enemy [the Macedonians at Malli] appeased their just anger" (9.5.20) oversimplifies the reality of the army's brutal behavior, which cannot be tied exclusively to Alexander's injury. Rather, the backdrop of the Bactrian and Sogdian campaigns, the Indian perception of autonomy, contending with non-traditional warfare, and the cultural isolation and alien environment of India all combined and

contributed to war-weariness and a mutinous atmosphere. This proverbial perfect storm of conditions accelerated the army's rate of violence and expanded it in scope from the occasional use of *andrapodismos* to total slaughter.

The Bactrian and Sogdian campaigns played a critical role in preparing the Macedonian response to similar autonomous resistance in India, where troops were less inclined to show mercy after facing numerous revolts. Resistance was met with merciless conquest that was only further intensified by the execution of the Brahmans in the territory of the Malli, King Sambus, and King Musicanus. Alexander's policy of treating those in flight as resisters to prevent their regrouping elsewhere led to instances like the killing of Indian mercenaries after their surrender at Massaga (Arr. 4.27.2-4) and later Perdikkas' pursuit and slaughter of "everyone except for those who escaped into the marshes" of the Malli plain (Arr. 6.6.6).

Instances of viciousness focusing primarily on the actions of the Macedonians, and above all, Alexander are not a complete picture of the trials of the Indian campaign. The guerilla combat of the Indians involved chariots, distanced fighting, and fatally toxic arrows (Mayor: 2003). The Macedonians, "scorning such a disorderly device" (Curt. 9.1.16) as a chariot, were nonetheless unable to make use of their superior phalanx formation and battle tactics in the manner to which they were accustomed. The high rate of injury (e.g. Arr. 5.24.5) put the opportunity of returning home at risk, and the loss of cultural identifiers like clothing (cf. Curt. 9.3.10) and armor (cf. Diod. 93.4.2, Curt. 9.3.10-12) took a heavy toll on morale (Worthington: 2014). Moreover, the very environment of India was an alien land, which ultimately provoked mutiny and hastened the Macedonians' retreat at the expense of tribes and kingdoms whose submission was secured through great carnage.

The exhaustive slaughter in India must also take into account the forces which acted upon the Macedonians. My paper presents a holistic view of the campaign in order to warn against focusing too heavily on one aspect of the march and to show why the killing in India continued even after Alexander's decision to march homeward.

### Bibliography

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