

Memnon, the Strategist

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The general impression on Memnon of Rhodes that is transmitted by our sources – and is more or less unanimously accepted in modern historiography – is that he may have been the only military commander able to bring the relentless Alexander III to a halt and disrupt his plans. This opinion seems to be based on Memnon's few successes, which could purportedly imperil the Asian expedition of Alexander: namely, Memnon's achievements against Parmenio; his sensible proposal to avoid direct altercation with the Macedonians; the gallant defence of Halicarnassus; and particularly, his dangerous naval campaign in the Aegean Sea in 333 BC. In this paper, we will consider whether Memnon's actions, as well as their results, truly validate the impression and reputation he has acquired both in antiquity and today.

1. Against Parmenio, 336/5 BC

As a vanguard of his intended conquest, Philip II sent Parmenio to Asia at the head of an expeditionary corps, tasked with establishing a bridgehead for the bulk of the military.¹ We are well aware of the general course of events; however, the detailed order of events cannot be ascertained beyond doubt.² From what we know, Parmenio managed to achieve signifi-

¹ Diod. 16.91.2., 17.2.4; Just. 9.5.8.

² The main source for this campaign is Diod. 17.7.3-10. Short overviews in HECKEL, 2005: 12-3; BOSWORTH, 1988: 34-5; GREEN, 1974: 140-1; NAWOTKA, 2010: 72-3; BRIANT, 2002: 817-8.

cant initial success, which emboldened the cities of Ephesus and Erythrae to join the Macedonian side.³ Alarmed by Parmenio's success, Darius III gave Memnon a 5000-strong mercenary force and ordered him to cut short the advance of the Macedonian.⁴

Memnon's first achievement was winning the battle of Magnesia, where he managed to defeat Parmenio and Attalus with an army inferior in number.⁵ Subsequently, he traversed Mount Ida and tried to conquer Cyzicus by sudden attack; this, however, turned out to be a failure.⁶ Then he set out to Gryneion, attempting to assist the city that had been besieged by Parmenio. Even though this venture also ended in disappointment, Memnon still managed to prevent the fall of Pitane. Once Parmenio returned to Macedonia, his successor Callas engaged in battle against the superior Persian forces⁷ but, after being defeated, withdrew to Rhoiteion.⁸ Thus, in spite of the initial accomplishments, the Macedonian forces found themselves cut off on the Hellespont, while all other advantages were lost.⁹

³ cf. ELLIS 1994, 787, 789.

⁴ Diod. 17.7.3. According to Diodorus, Darius tasked Memnon with reconquering Cyzicus. However, as the battle between Parmenio and Memnon at Magnesia predates this episode, it is obvious that the order to reconquer Cyzicus was issued after Memnon's initial successes.

⁵ Polyæn. 5.44.4. Unfortunately, one cannot tell whether this Magnesia was *ad Sipyllum* or *ad Maeandrum* (cf. ERRINGTON, 1990: 279, no.4). According to Polyænus, Memnon entered this battle with 4,000 soldiers, while Parmenio had 10,000. This figure is usually accepted in modern scholarship, although certain scholars believe that it is not quite plausible (NIESE, 1893: 59; HECKEL, 2005: 13, no.39). It is quite possible that the complete forces of Parmenio added up to about 10,000 men; however, as part of the army was certainly left in the Troas in order to defend the bridgehead and the communication with Macedonia, it is unlikely that Parmenio had at his disposal an army much more numerous than that of his enemy.

⁶ Diod. 17.7.8; Polyæn. 5.44.5.

⁷ Some scholars believe that these forces were lead by Memnon; however, the source material does not allow us to consent with this conclusion. It is equally likely that the Persian force was lead by one of the satraps.

⁸ Diod. 17.7.9-10.

⁹ Among other things in Ephesus, there was a counter-revolution supported by Memnon (Arr. 1.17.11).

This is all we know about the course of combat operations in Asia Minor in 336 and 335 BC. Although Memnon's acts are not negligible – especially defeating Parmenio, the most capable general Philip II had – one should think twice before assessing them as particularly impressive, and this is chiefly because of two things. First, as obvious as it is that the Macedonians encountered surprisingly strong resistance and suffered several setbacks, they ultimately achieved their main goal: the bridgehead to Asia Minor was defended. Second, what Diodorus writes may give the impression that Memnon was the only commanding officer who had offered fervent resistance against the Macedonians; this, however, would be very far from the truth. At the beginning of the war season in 334 BC, the Persians already had a rather large army at their disposal, so it would be reasonable to assume that the satraps had begun mobilising their forces the year before; moreover, Diodorus does not affirm that it was precisely Memnon who defeated Callas, so it is quite possible that these, more numerous Persian forces, had been led by one of the satraps. Finally, if one takes into account the theatre of these military activities, it would be reasonable to assume that the combat actions also saw the involvement of Arsites and Spithridates – the satraps of Hellespontine Phrygia and Lydia.¹⁰ Therefore, it seems erroneous to attribute exclusively to Memnon the suppression of the Macedonians to Abydos.¹¹

2. The defence of Halicarnassus, 334 BC

No matter how (un)remarkable Memnon's previous actions had been, his persistent and skilful defence of Halicarnassus during the second half of 334 BC looks nothing short of outstanding. Let us, then, delve into how things went. After the defeat at Granicus, Darius III bestowed upon Memnon the authority over southern Asia Minor, as well as the command of the entire Persian fleet.¹² The first task of the Rhodian was to organise and conduct the defence of Halicarnassus. This siege would prove to be one of the most difficult that Alexander had ever undertaken, an operation that cost the king plenty of time and resources; even though the city finally fell, the Macedonian victory was anything but complete, as the two citadels, Salma-

¹⁰ BOSWORTH, 1988: 35.

¹¹ *cf.* BRIANT, 2002: 818; MCCOY, 1989: 425, no.40.

¹² Arr. 1.20.3; Diod., 17.23.6.

cis and Zephyrion, remained in Persian hands. In fact, Halicarnassus would remain a stronghold of Persian power until the beginning of 332 BC.¹³

Given the ensuing successes of Alexander in conquering cities, Memnon's accomplishment is certainly worthy of note; there is, however, reason to believe that our sources have yet again exaggerated his merit. First off, the sources state that Memnon managed to provide the city with everything necessary to withstand a siege;¹⁴ however, one must take account of the fact that the defensive walls of the city had been in excellent condition for several decades already, as they had been reinforced by the Hecatomnids.¹⁵ Second, the sources give the impression that the acclaim for this reasonably successful defence operation belongs exclusively to Memnon; however, it is rather obvious that other commanders were also active – primarily Orontobates, the satrap of Caria, as well as the mercenary commanders Ephialtes and Thrasibulus.¹⁶ It is not by mere chance that Diodorus mentions the most capable commanders being gathered in Halicarnassus.¹⁷ Of course, this does not imply that Memnon did not have the final say in matters; however, one should not underestimate the role of the other commanders, especially of Orontobates.¹⁸

To complicate things even further, if Memnon had been notified of his promotion and new command just before Alexander arrived at Halicarnassus,¹⁹ one could assume that the more likely reason for the city to be able to sustain a siege would be the measures taken by Orontobates; ultimately, it is probably not a mere accident of fortune that Strabo cites Orontobates as the man who endured the siege of Alexander.²⁰ As for Ephialtes, Diodorus

¹³ On the siege of Halicarnassus, *v.* Diod., 17. 24-27.6; Arr. 1.20-23. *cf.* BOSWORTH, 1988: 47-49; BEAN & COOK, 1955: 89-91; GREEN, 1974: 195-200; NAWOTKA, 2010: 138-43.

¹⁴ Diod., 17.23.6; Arr. 1.20.3.

¹⁵ BOSWORTH, 1988: 47.

¹⁶ Arr. 1.23.1; Diod., 17.25.6.

¹⁷ Diod., 17.23.4.

¹⁸ *Contra* BOSWORTH 1988, 47, who reckons that Memnon cooperated with Orontobates merely out of *courtoisie*. However, Arrian states in quite an explicit manner that the decision to evacuate Halicarnassus was made jointly by Memnon and Orontobates.

¹⁹ BOSWORTH, 1988: 47; CAWKWELL, 2005: 207.

²⁰ Strab., 14.2.17. *cf.* BRIANT, 2002: 707.

clearly states that he made headway during the defence of the city; it is said that Memnon and Orontobates finally decided to evacuate Halicarnassus after an unsuccessful excursion from the city, an episode during which he lost his life.

It is beyond doubt that one of the key factors in the conquest of Halicarnassus was the Macedonian siege machinery. A rather interesting detail is that the entire siege machinery, as well as some of the grain supply, was transported to Halicarnassus by sea, with a fair amount of risk.²¹ If one takes into account the vast superiority of the Persian fleet, the failure to intercept this small transport fleet must be considered a serious oversight by Memnon, who stationed his fleet in the vicinity of Halicarnassus. However, our sources do not seem to take any notice of this oversight.

Of course, this does not imply that Memnon was an incompetent or languid commander; nor was our intention to demonstrate such a thing. What we have tried to point out is that, when it comes to Memnon's ventures, historiographical information must be taken with an exceptional dose of caution. As seen in these two examples, historiographers have a certain tendency to overstate the achievements of Memnon. And this happens to be especially important because of what followed next.

Regardless of his successes against the Macedonian vanguard and during the defence of Halicarnassus, one thing that begot Memnon fame and special appreciation both in antiquity and today is his overall plan of action against Alexander and the Macedonian army. Diodorus gives us a description of his general idea:

Meanwhile, the Persian satraps and generals had not acted in time to prevent the crossing of the Macedonians, but they mustered their forces and took counsel how to oppose Alexander. Memnon, the Rhodian, famed for his military competence, advocated a policy of not fighting a pitched battle, but of stripping the countryside and through the shortage of supplies preventing the Macedonians from advancing further, while at the same time they sent naval and land forces across to Macedonia and transferred the impact of war to Eu-

²¹ Diod., 17.24.1. *cf.* NAWOTKA, 2010: 140.

rope. This was the best counsel, as after-events made clear, but, for all that, Memnon failed to win over the other commanders, since his advice seemed beneath the dignity of the Persians. So they decided to fight it out, and summoning forces from every quarter and heavily outnumbering the Macedonians, they advanced in the direction of Hellespontine Phrygia. They pitched camp by the river Granicus, using the bed of the river as a line of defence.²²

So, this plan of Memnon's consisted of two essential parts: avoiding massive pitched battle, while employing scorched earth tactics, and taking a naval counter-offensive in the Aegean Sea and Macedonia. However, what we need to dwell upon first are the circumstances in which Memnon put forward his plan.

3. The Council at Zeleia, 334 BC

Both Arrian and Diodorus concur that Memnon presented his plan in front of several Persian satraps and commanders at the military council at Zeleia.²³ According to Diodorus and (with more moderation) Arrian, Arsites and the other satraps rejected this proposal for the simple reason that an action of this sort had been deemed unworthy of a Persian satrap. But Briant notes that this argument is not only unconvincing, but also too reminiscent of other, similar dialogues between Greeks and Persians in Diodorus and other authors,²⁴ and this would, of course, imply that the episode is invented.

Nonetheless, Memnon's proposal to avoid frontal battle against Alexander and apply scorched earth tactics is collectively accepted by modern

²² Diod., 17.18.2-4; translated by C. B. WELLES (Loeb Edition, vol. 8). Arrian conveys the same general plan, but mentions that Memnon was willing to also sacrifice the cities (1.12.8-9).

²³ Diod., 17.18.2; Arr. 1.12.8. Quite expectedly, Arrian lists the names of all the satraps, while Diodorus mentions only Memnon by name. Contrary to common opinion that Memnon participated as a commander of a squad of mercenaries (e.g. GREEN, 1974: 170; HECKEL, 2006: 12; ID., 2008: 56), Memnon in fact led a cavalry detachment enlisted at his estate in the Troas (NAWOTKA, 2010: 119; MCCOY, 1989: 414-419; BRIANT, 2002: 796, 821).

²⁴ BRIANT, 2002: 821-822. For more details on why the Persians refused Memnon's proposal, *v.* further.

scholars. For example, Wilcken opines that, had the Persians accepted Memnon's plan, Alexander would have found himself in a situation similar to Napoleon's in Russia.²⁵ Though with conclusions far less dramatic, other scholars reckon that the plan of the Rhodian would have seriously hindered the advance of Alexander, especially as the Macedonian had only ten days worth of supplies, while the local crops were not yet ripe.²⁶ Yet, as we have seen above, the Persian satraps repudiated the plan, and one can only speculate about their motivation.

As mentioned earlier, Briant's detailed analysis demonstrates that the argument of the satraps – that Memnon's proposal is contrary to the sheer nature of their service – is hardly valid. Indeed, during the later stages of the war, not just some satraps, but also the Great King himself, would resort to the scorched earth tactic.²⁷ It would rather be that the key to this disposition of the satraps is an additional argument given to us by Arrian – that the satraps, quite simply, did not trust Memnon.²⁸ It is not by chance that precisely this argument is usually accepted in modern scholarship;²⁹ and, given the role of Memnon at the Battle of Granicus, we can deduce that the satraps indeed looked at Memnon with a certain degree of suspicion.³⁰ And, of course, another reason would be that the majority of these satraps had held personal estates in western Asia Minor; hence, Memnon's plan affected their personal interests.³¹

But all of this does not even touch upon the heart of the matter. One has to admit that the interpretation of the events seems to be satisfactory only under one condition – that Memnon's exposition of a plan to the

²⁵ ВИАКЕН, 1988: 116. No matter how seductive, all comparison with Napoleon's campaign is outright inappropriate, as the circumstances differ substantially in both historical and geographical terms. The difficulties experienced by Napoleon amid the frozen Russian expanses should never be applied to the possible difficulties Alexander would have experienced in the densely populated Asia Minor in spring.

²⁶ e.g. НАВОТКА, 2010: 119-20; BOSWORTH, 1988: 39-40; STRAUSS, 2003: 149-150.

²⁷ BRIANT, 2002: 821-822, with examples of the Persians employing this tactic.

²⁸ Arr. 1.12.10.

²⁹ e.g. HECKEL, 2008: 45; BOSWORTH, 1988: 40; НАВОТКА, 2010: 120.

³⁰ On Memnon's role in the battle of Granicus, *v.* MCCOY, 1989.

³¹ STRAUSS, 2003: 149. *cf.* BOSWORTH, 1988: 39.

military council at Zeleia is an actual fact. However, as we have seen, it is precisely the narrative on this military council that is very suspicious. Briant logically assumes that the issue put forward at this council of satraps, who arrived with troops already fully gathered and mobilised, was hardly about what strategy to use against Alexander. Quite on the contrary, Arsites³² – the satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia – had already been given orders by Darius III to clash with Alexander. As things stood, the purpose of the council was to reach a decision on the most suitable place and manner to intercept Alexander.³³ If so, then Memnon’s speech would be fairly inappropriate for the occasion. If the satraps were acting under the instructions of Darius III, who had ordered them to clash with Alexander, whatever relationship they had with Memnon played no role in the preparation of the general plan of action.

It is fairly obvious that the entire episode must be reviewed with special caution, if it is not to be dismissed as historical fiction. However, one is not allowed to hastily dismiss the possibility that Memnon had indeed devised a general plan to fight Alexander. Whether the historiographers found out about this plan from an imprisoned associate of Memnon’s, or the thesis was made *post factum* as a result of the subsequent actions of Memnon, is not of great importance.

This brings us to the practical side of this plan, which has been met with great approval by modern scholars.

4. The “scorched earth” policy

For what reason was Darius III reluctant to accept Memnon’s proposal, provided that the Greek had ever had the occasion to present it to the Great King? The mindset of Darius III in the wake of the Battle of Issus – that a battle should not be delayed, that if he withdrew, he would certainly be giving up the land to his enemies, that the custom of his ancestors

³² Scholars often assume that the Persians had no commander-in-chief, but a joint team of satraps; however, our sources make it quite obvious that the final word belonged to Arsites, whose satrapy was to serve as the place where Alexander was to be intercepted (*v.* BADIEN, 1977: 283-284; although, BADIEN, 2000: 255 implies that he later changed his mind).

³³ BRIANT, 2002: 822-823.

was to face danger³⁴ – does indeed resemble a classic historiographical construction; however, it might also partly answer the question about his overall plan. There was certainly no room for any tactics of scorched earth in this line of thinking. Indeed, as we shall later see, it appears that his plan was more aggressive than commonly assumed. And this should be quite a sufficient explanation as to why Memnon’s proposal was not met with approval – his plan was simply not consistent with the plan of Darius III.

Yet, it seems worthwhile to examine whether this plan was at all feasible, and whether it would really be as perilous to the plans of Alexander. This may lead us to speculation that may seem unnecessary; however, we believe that the question must be answered. Indeed, how does one treat a plan that never came into being, but still largely serves as a basis for Memnon’s reputation?

There is no doubt that the Macedonian army required constant supply.³⁵ What is more, after landing in Asia Minor, Alexander had relatively small reserves at his disposal.³⁶ Hence, at first glance, Memnon’s proposal appears reasonable enough. However, it is interesting to note that modern scholars never entertain the question of how Memnon intended to supply the cities in Asia Minor. Namely, as we have mentioned earlier, when Alexander crossed into Asia Minor, the crops were not yet ripe. According to Engels, this presented an advantage in Memnon’s plan, since even if he had managed to conquer a city, Alexander could not have been able to fill his reserves.³⁷ All of this looks fine on paper; but in the first days after crossing to

³⁴ Curt. Ruf., 3.8.7-10.

³⁵ For a detailed analysis of the logistics and the requirements of the Macedonian army during the Asian campaign, *v.* ENGELS, 1978.

³⁶ It is generally believed that at the beginning of his Asian expedition, Alexander had at his disposal supplies for another ten days. This conclusion is based on the calculations of ENGELS (1978: 28-29) on the expenditure of the Macedonian army *en route* from Macedonia to the Hellespont. This conclusion, however, is not without its problems. Namely, these calculations are based on Plut. *Moral.* 342e, ἐκ τούτου διέβαινεν, ὡς μὲν Φύλαρχος φησιν, ἡμερῶν τριάκοντ' ἔχων ἐφόδιον κτλ. Engels apparently believes that Plutarch describes Alexander’s reserves before his departure from Macedonia; but although διαβαίνω usually translates as “to pass”, it can also quite often mean “to cross”, especially in absolute use, when θάλασσαν or ποταμόν are omitted (*v.* LSJ⁹, s.v. διαβαίνω).

³⁷ ENGELS, 1978: 30.

Asia Minor, Alexander was still positioned relatively close to his bases in Europe, so his fleet could at least temporarily supply the army gathered in the Troas. Engels argues that this venture would be all but impossible, as the Persians had at their disposal a much more numerous and powerful fleet, which could sever Alexander's ties with Europe.³⁸ However, it seems that early in the battle season, the Persian fleet was insufficiently prepared for such active operations; and this hardly comes as a surprise, given that the Persian fleet always took time to gather and organise.³⁹ In fact, the siege of Miletus is the first occasion where we meet the Persian fleet; and even then it came belatedly, failed to prevent the blocking of the city from the seaside, and came short of achieving anything against the far inferior fleet of Alexander.⁴⁰ As stated earlier, Alexander managed to transport the provisions and the siege equipment by sea even during the siege of Halicarnassus. Given the limitations of the naval vessels of the day, it was no easy feat to achieve a complete naval blockade of the coast of Asia Minor. Indeed, for Memnon's plan to achieve any kind of success, it was necessary that Persian vessels control the Straits. However, the Persian attack on the Hellespont does not take place before the end of the battle season of 333 BC. Moreover, it appears that, at least in 334 BC, the figure of 400 Persian ships is clearly exaggerated.⁴¹

Furthermore, Polyænus states that, when Alexander landed in Asia and began to pillage the land, he spared the estate of Memnon.⁴² We cannot tell with certainty whether the pillaging preceded or followed the Battle of Granicus; in any case, whenever it may have occurred, this episode does not quite leave an impression of a general who lacks supplies.

Of course, this does not mean that the movement of Alexander would not have been seriously impeded by Memnon's actions. Even if his fleet could have provided supplies through the Hellespont, Alexander would not have been able to greatly depart from his positions in the Troas, and

³⁸ ENGELS, 1978: 30.

³⁹ CAWKWELL, 2005: 207-208.

⁴⁰ On the siege of Miletus, *v. Arr.* 1.18-19.

⁴¹ *v. CAWKWELL*, 2005: 208, 218, no.34. As he concludes, the otherwise cautious Parmenio must have been "temporarily out of his senses" when advising Alexander to clash with the Persian fleet, although the Persian fleet outnumbered the Macedonian on the scale of 400 to 160 vessels.

⁴² Polyænen. 4.3.15.

from a purely strategic point of view, this would have been highly beneficial to the Persians. But it seems that modern scholars are too often impressed by the disaster of the Grande Armée, failing to take into account the political consequences. It is one thing to expect a Russian *krestyanin* to sacrifice his land in the interest of country and emperor; the question is, could we expect a similar sentiment among the peoples of Asia Minor, especially the Greek cities along the coast? One should not forget that their reserves were likely to end, so in the absence of a new harvest, most of them would have been threatened by famine. However numerous and powerful it was, the Persian fleet could simply not supply the entire Asia Minor with provisions.

We have noted earlier that, at the very moment Parmenio came into sight with the Macedonian vanguard, Ephesus and Erythrae succumbed to the pro-Macedonian party. Even Pericles, in his time, briefly lost the affection of his people because of a similar policy at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. A century after Alexander, Rome had descended into serious political turmoil after Fabius Maximus applied similar tactics against Hannibal. Should anyone be allowed to speculate that the cities in Asia Minor would have accepted Memnon's decision with no objection at all? Not to mention his proposal that the cities should be destroyed as well, if need be.⁴³ Hence, no matter how reasonable its military side appeared, Memnon's plan, as presented to us, appears not to take into account the attitude of the local population. At that moment, Alexander might have indeed been isolated in the Troas, but it could very easily have happened that the Persians lost control of a large part of Asia Minor even without his interference. And, lacking full control of the Aegean coast, especially the Hellespont, the political risk of Memnon's plan surpassed any military advantages.

And thus, Memnon's plan, if faithfully transmitted by our sources, does not appear as judicious as it may seem at first glance. However, we should once again recall that the whole episode looks very suspicious, so the big question in this case is whether to accept the presentation of Diodorus and Arrian by the letter; from what we can actually extract, another impression of Memnon and his actions is obtained. After the defeat at Granicus, Memnon gradually and skilfully pulls out the remaining troops and eventually offers fierce resistance in the defence of Halicarnassus. Everything points to the conclusion that his main objective is to slow down Alexander's

⁴³ Arr. 1.12.9.

advancement as much as possible. In the version of his plan conveyed by Arrian, Memnon points out that the main weaknesses of the Persians are the superiority of the Macedonian infantry and the absence of Darius III, as opposed to Alexander, who stood at the helm of his army.⁴⁴ If one attempts to extract from the text more than is possible, it would appear that the main objective of Memnon is to protract the hostilities until Darius III appears at the head of the Persian army:⁴⁵ an assumption barely feasible, for the Persian rulers were usually reluctant to leave the heart of their kingdom, and a possible expedition to Asia Minor could trigger insurrection in the upper satrapies.⁴⁶ So perhaps it may be best to assume that Memnon's plan is reminiscent of that of Fabius Maximus – i.e., a controlled withdrawal and manoeuvring, until Alexander has worn out his resources. It is possible that Memnon suggested some areas of devastation as part of such a plan – but certainly not in the scale our sources transmit.⁴⁷

5. The Aegean Campaign, 333 BC

At first glance, the second part of Memnon's plan does not appear to be problematic; precisely as he suggested at Zeleia, in 333 BC he began his campaign in the Aegean. As we have seen above, the sources claim that Memnon intended to enter the Aegean Sea with the fleet and then to invade Europe; his premature death in 333 BC prevented the realisation of this plan that, according to several scholars, would have seriously endangered Alexander's Asian expedition.⁴⁸ But as we shall see, it appears that our sources have once again overestimated the role of Memnon and the scale of his plans.

⁴⁴ Arr. 1.12.9.

⁴⁵ This is how the text of Arrian is understood by TARN, 1933: 361.

⁴⁶ *cf.* BRUNT, 1962: 143. Briant (2002: 826) points out that the King's army had not appeared in Asia Minor since the time of Xerxes.

⁴⁷ This interpretation may be corroborated by the fact that it is only Arsites who says that "he would not suffer one house belonging to his subjects to be burned". Arsites probably had the final word in this, as it was decided to engage Alexander in his satrapy. Arrian tells us that the other satraps supported him as they were suspicious of Memnon, without saying, however, whether they accepted his view. *cf.* MCCOY, 1989: 421-422.

⁴⁸ e.g. STRAUSS, 2003: 149; BIAKEH, 1988: 128-129; O'BRIEN, 2005: 68; GREEN, 1947: 216; BADIAN, 2000: 255-256; NAWOTKA, 2010: 152.

First and foremost, the instigation of a naval campaign in the Aegean Sea in response to Alexander's invasion was hardly Memnon's brainchild. We have seen earlier that the council at Zeleia was not an occasion to expose general plans; even more, Memnon attended this council as a commander of a cavalry detachment mobilised from his estate, so at that point, he had little to do with either the Persian fleet, or any plan linked to it.⁴⁹ Then again, the Persian fleet is first mentioned during the siege of Miletus, before Memnon was appointed as its commander. If one takes account of the almost leisurely gathering of the Persian fleet, it becomes quite clear that Darius III had geared up his fleet long beforehand. This conclusion is confirmed by Diodorus:

Darius became king before the death of Philip and thought to turn the coming war back upon Macedonia, but when Philip died, Darius was relieved of his anxiety and despised the youth of Alexander. Soon, however, when Alexander's vigour and rapidity of action had secured for him the leadership of all Greece and made evident the ability of the young man, then Darius took warning and began to pay serious attention to his forces. He fitted out a large number of ships of war and assembled numerous strong armies, choosing at the same time his best commanders, among whom was Memnon of Rhodes, outstanding in courage and in strategic grasp.⁵⁰

So, Darius had begun preparing his military, including the fleet, at least a year before Alexander marched into Asia. Of course, this does not have to imply that Memnon was unable to implement his plan – regardless of when it was devised – after he finally took command of the fleet. Rather, the questions we need to ask are: what was Memnon's final objective; to what extent did his actions represent a real threat for Macedonia; and, did his achievements dramatically influence the subsequent plans of Alexander. Unlike the issue with the scorched earth tactics, where we had to reconstruct and assume the possible benefits and hazards of a plan that never came into being, it seems that, in this case, Memnon's intentions can be un-

⁴⁹ CAWKWELL, 2005: 207.

⁵⁰ Diod. 17.7.1-2; translated by C. B. WELLES (Loeb edition, vol. 8).

derstood with much less effort. All we need to do is to follow his actions during 333 BC⁵¹

In March 333 BC, Memnon finally embarked on his naval counter-offensive, at the head of a fleet of 300 ships. After conquering the island of Chios, he proceeded by taking nearby Lesbos, with the exception of the town of Mytilene. Reinforced by mercenaries sent by Alexander, Mytilene offered strong resistance; Memnon was forced to besiege the city from late April until his death,⁵² the city being finally captured by his successor Pharnabazus.⁵³ While the siege persisted, most of the Cyclades crossed to the Persian side. There was even talk of Memnon preparing to come ashore on the island of Euboea.⁵⁴

That Alexander was vexed by this development becomes quite clear from the measures he took. After requesting that the allies start preparing their fleets, he assigned the military command of the Hellespont to Hegelochus, while the fleet was given to Amphoterus. They were given 500 talents and ordered to free Lesbos, Chios and Cos; meanwhile, Antipater was given 600 talents to prepare a new fleet.⁵⁵ Apparently, Alexander had underestimated the threat of the Persian fleet before, and at this time he was far from “defeating the Persian fleet on land”.⁵⁶ However, the extent to which Memnon’s actions could truly endanger Macedonia, is quite another matter.

Notwithstanding the fact that historiographers chose to depict Memnon’s actions as a serious threat to Macedonia, and regardless of the kind of rumours that had spread on his future plans, the security of Macedonia had probably never been in doubt.⁵⁷ First off, one can resoundingly

⁵¹ On the naval campaigns in 333 and 332 BC, *v.* HAMMOND *in* HAMMOND & WALBANK, 1988: 69-72; *id.*, 1997: 73-75, 83-85; NAWOTKA, 2010: 151-155.

⁵² There is no agreement on Memnon’s time of death. According to HAMMOND (1997: 85), Memnon died in June (*cf.* BADIAN, 2000a: 80), while BRUNT (1962: 143) argues for April or May.

⁵³ Arr. 2.1.

⁵⁴ Diod., 17.29.3-4.

⁵⁵ Curt. Ruf., 3.1.19-20; Arr. 2.2. *cf.* HECKEL, 2006, *s.v.* Amphoterus; Hegelochus.

⁵⁶ The best indication that Alexander had indeed had held such concerns is his speech before Tyre, when he argued that it would be dangerous to proceed toward the interior of Persia while the Persian fleet was operating in the Aegean Sea (Arr. 2.17).

⁵⁷ For a short analysis of this question, *v.* CAWKWELL, 2005: 209-210.

exclude a possible disembarking on Macedonian soil. Supplying these armed forces by sea would present a huge logistical endeavour, even for the powerful Persian fleet; moreover, the experienced Antipater had a reasonably numerous army at his disposal, which could resist whatever Memnon came up with. A threat to Greece would appear more probable, but only in case Memnon managed to win over almost every Greek polis on the mainland – a venture that has always shown to be practically impossible. The Spartans would have certainly joined the fight, but they would most likely have been the only significant force that would fully take the Persian side. It is a matter of fact that there was an anti-Macedonian party in Athens as well; yet, old Phocion still exerted enough influence to rein in the passion of his heady fellow citizens.⁵⁸ Several poleis and regions would most certainly have taken the Macedonian side. To begin with, Thessaly still maintained excellent relations with Alexander, having dispatched to his army a reinforcement of 250 horsemen not long before.⁵⁹ The events during the Lamian War show that the Boeotians, pleased by the destruction of Thebes, would remain loyal to Macedonia out of fear that the city might be restored. Ultimately, the traditional rivals and enemies of Sparta in the Peloponnese – Corinth, Argos and Megalopolis – would always fight on the side opposed to the Spartans.⁶⁰

No real threat, then, to Macedonia. But hindsight is the perfect general; Alexander, for that matter, did not have the luxury of dwelling upon an academic reconstruction that came into being more than two millennia after his time. Another thing he most certainly could not afford, was speculating about the future and leaving Macedonia to meet its fate in the hope that everything would turn out as it should.⁶¹ For this reason, we must ob-

⁵⁸ Plut. *Phoc.*, 21.1-2.

⁵⁹ The fact that Thessaly joined the Allied forces during the Lamian War cannot serve as an argument for their possible disloyalty in 333 BC. Their allegiance to the Athenian side during the Lamian War was due to the loss of their privileged position during the last years of Alexander's reign, and not to some sense of common purpose with the other Greeks (*v.* ERRINGTON, 1990: 68-70).

⁶⁰ During the war with Agis III, these cities would immediately take the side of Antipater.

⁶¹ *Contra* GREEN (1974: 211-216), who describes the fears and dilemmas of Alexander in a remarkably dramatic style. However, his conclusion that Alexander eventually decided to sacrifice Macedonia "for a pursuit of the greater

serve to what extent Memnon's actions practically affected the subsequent plans of Alexander.

It is fairly evident that Alexander's decision to build a new fleet and mobilise the allied fleet at the same time was a deviation from his intent to "defeat the Persian fleet on land". But it seems that is all there was, given that Alexander never considered returning to Macedonia.⁶² In fact, the only thing Memnon managed to incite was Alexander's reinforced intention to quickly capture the crucial ports of Egypt and Phoenicia, an exploit which might lead to the disintegration of the Persian fleet.⁶³ Ultimately, Memnon's actions could have hardly been surprising. What he did was, in essence, a repetition of the actions taken by Artaxerxes II and Conon in response to the attack of Agesilaus in 396 BC, and one would be naive to think that either Philip or Alexander would be caught unawares of such a prospect.⁶⁴ The fact that Memnon consistently squandered time besieging Mytilene, while the Peace of Corinth remained in power despite certain fissures, seems to have been a sufficient guarantee to Alexander that his measures were sufficient within the given moment, at least until he had managed to conquer the Levant.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, if one considers the intentions of the Rhodian and compares what the sources claim to Memnon's on-field actions, one is soon to be faced with yet another historiographical inconsistency. Namely, if he really had the intention of "conveying the war to Europe", i.e. Greece, then his endeavours become hardly comprehensible. Setting out from Cos and Halicarnassus, with an undeniably superior fleet at that, the simplest and most effective approach to Greece would lead through the Cyclades. Given the absence of a noteworthy allied navy, this breakthrough would have been accomplished with reasonable ease. Given the presumed course of events, a

goal" is hardly acceptable. The obvious counter-argument is precisely Alexander's speech before Tyre (*v.* note 54).

⁶² BOSWORTH, 1988: 52-3. *Contra* MURISON (1972: 405), who assumes that Alexander may have spent more time in Gordium because he wanted to see how things would develop in the Aegean. However, Alexander probably left Gordium even before Memnon's death (*v.* BELOCH, 1923: 314; BRUNT, 1962: 143).

⁶³ *cf.* MILTNER, 1933: 70.

⁶⁴ HAMMOND, 1997: 73-74.

⁶⁵ *cf.* HAMMOND, 1997: 85.

particularly important exploit would be the conquest of Andros.⁶⁶ From Andros, Memnon could exert military pressure on Euboea, political pressure on Athens and, if need be, he could relatively quickly connect with Agis III.

Quite unexpectedly – for us, at least – Memnon did nothing of the sort. In fact, he first sailed to Chios, then to Lesbos. On its own, this does not necessarily imply that he had no intention of disembarking in Greece; it is possible that he may have had a different plan from the one which we consider most viable. However, the siege of Mytilene is the indisputable sign that he had devised a completely different objective. However embellished our source material may be, there is absolutely no dispute that Memnon was a capable commander. He must have known clearly that the persistent besieging of Mytilene would present serious hazards. Firstly, it would give the Macedonian fleet more time to (re)organise and strengthen its defensive positions; simultaneously, the fact that the fleet was tied up at Lesbos could cause loss of initiative at sea;⁶⁷ and most importantly, Memnon would lose a significant portion of the already short time convenient for naval operations, while Alexander was still positioned in the interior of Asia Minor. But Memnon apparently estimated that the risk would pay off in order to achieve the ultimate objective. The question is what this objective was.

If Memnon had intended to cross into Greece, then the persistent siege of Mytilene must be understood as a serious strategic error.⁶⁸ But let us for a moment disregard what the sources tell us about Memnon's plans, and recall the counter-offensive of Artaxerxes II. Namely, what forced Agesilaus out of Greece was not the fleet and its actions, as he was already in Boeotia at the time of the battle of Cnidus.⁶⁹ In fact, the fleet had a task to break the already fragile Spartan control of the sea and then participate in the re-conquest of the coast of Asia Minor. The return of Agesilaus was motivated by the unrest in Greece, which had started as a result of the

⁶⁶ On the strategic importance of the Cyclades, *v.* REGER, 1994: 20-26.

⁶⁷ *cf.* HAMMOND, 1997: 85.

⁶⁸ *Contra* BADIAN (2000a: 80), who opines that conquering Mytilene was necessary for a disembarkment in Greece. A quick glance at the map of the Aegean islands would make it clear that this interpretation is implausible.

⁶⁹ Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.10-12.

emergence of the Persian fleet, Persian funding and, primarily, the hatred towards the Spartan way of managing things in Greece.⁷⁰

This parallel does not necessarily imply that Memnon had the same idea; however, his persistent besieging of Mytilene indisputably shows that his main goal was not Greece, but most probably the Straits. With the eventual conquest of the Straits, Memnon would give Alexander a double blow – on one hand, he would disrupt his link with Macedonia, and on the other hand he would gain control of the grain transport, which would then permit him to exert additional pressure, primarily on Athens. Several things indicate that this was indeed Memnon's primary objective. First of all, it is not a coincidence that Alexander gave special instructions to strengthen the fleet around the Hellespont; the fact that Alexander decided to set up a reinforced garrison of mercenaries just in Mytilene leads to the same conclusion. As we have seen, Lesbos was of secondary importance for an attack on Greece; the island offered certain advantages for an attack on Macedonia, but only in case the attack came through the Thraco-Macedonian coast – an option that appears fairly incredible. On the other hand, the strategic importance of Mytilene is striking if the place serves as an outpost for the entrance to the Hellespont. And, of course, the strongest argument in favour of the Hellespont is the fact that, after the fall of Mytilene, Pharnabazus proceeded directly to Tenedus⁷¹ – the gate to the Straits. Samothrace fell at the same time with Tenedus; as did Callipolis on the European coast. But just then, under the command of Aristomenes, the Persians suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the Allied fleet.⁷²

Hence it becomes clear that Memnon's main objective was precisely the Hellespont. For his general plan to work, it was necessary for the Persian fleet to reconquer the coast of Asia Minor and the Hellespont, and then hope that this course of events, aided by additional means, would cause a rebellion in Greece. As already mentioned, this had been the traditional approach to things ever since the time of Artaxerxes II. Since it had worked very well in the case of Agesilaus, Darius III may have attempted to take a similar course of action in order to coerce Alexander to turn back. But Ale-

⁷⁰ For an overview of the events in the Corinthian War, *v.* HORNBLLOWER, 2011: 225-232.

⁷¹ Arr. 2.2.3.

⁷² Curt. Ruf. 4.1.36.

xander was no Agesilaus. Of course, this did not bring an end to the fighting, which continued during 322 BC. However, after the defeat at Issus, all the possible prospects of Darius' Aegean counter-offensive began to disappear;⁷³ even more, after the definitive conquest of the Levantine coast, the successes of Asander⁷⁴ and Ptolemy – the brother of Antigonus Monophthalmus – against Orontobates in Caria, and especially after the fall of Tyre, the outcome had already become more than obvious. The main objective of the fleet was to create conditions for diversion: even before the death of Memnon,⁷⁵ Darius III ordered a significant portion of the Greek mercenaries to leave the fleet and join the King's army. One may argue that this decision is hardly comprehensible in case the objective was a disembarkment in Greece, especially as, at the time, things were going very well for Memnon. However, once it became clear that Alexander had no intention of turning back, Darius III realised that a pitched battle was inevitable. Or, as Grainger nicely dissected the whole situation: Alexander had called Dareios' Aegean bluff, and moved on eastwards rather than turning west to deal with Memnon: Dareios was outbluffed.⁷⁶

Thus, regardless of how dangerous it appeared at first sight, Memnon's counter-offensive failed to trigger a substantial change in Alexander's plans. Incidentally, Memnon's actions and those of his successors clearly show that the brilliant and grandiose plan of the Rhodian is the fruit of historiographical imagination, based on unsubstantiated rumours that Memnon would attack Euboea; the actual plan had relatively limited objectives, quite in the spirit of the Persian policy from the beginning of IV century BC. In all, Briant seems quite correct to assume that Memnon did not even conduct a plan of his own; in fact, he simply met the orders of Darius III, who had followed the policy of Artaxerxes II.⁷⁷

Now it becomes perfectly apparent that the source behind Arrian, Diodorus and other historiographers was particularly keen on Memnon, to

⁷³ *cf.* BADIAN, 1967: 176.

⁷⁴ *v.* HECKEL, 2006, *s.v.* Asander (1).

⁷⁵ *v.* BOSWORTH, 1988: 53.

⁷⁶ GRAINGER, 2007: 76.

⁷⁷ BRIANT, 2002: 826-827.

the point of overstressing his accomplishments and embellishing his plans.⁷⁸ But this hardly comes as a surprise, if one recalls that Mentor, Memnon's brother, had the benefit of a perfectly analogous treatment. Diodorus stated that Mentor's abilities were such that Artaxerxes Ochus appointed him "satrap of the coast of Asia Minor and commander-in-chief in the war against the insurgents";⁷⁹ a position that strikes us as almost absurd, for he was most probably appointed commander only in the war against Hermias.⁸⁰

Thus, the factual image of Memnon shows itself to be very different from the one our sources wish to convey. It is beyond any doubt that the Rhodian was a very capable field commander; however, that is all he actually was. Whatever influence he had with Darius III, he most certainly did not play a major role in designing the general plan to run a war against Alexander. And it would be even more unjust to state that his death was the end of all hopes for Darius III and Persia.

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⁷⁸ Culminating with the display of Memnon's death, which, as the sources claim, meant an end to all hopes of Darius III. Amazingly, many modern scholars accept this conclusion without a single remark. BRIANT (2002: 790-791, 825-827) gives an excellent analysis of this problem.

⁷⁹ Diod. 16.52.1-2.

⁸⁰ *v.* CAWKWELL, 2005: 204-205; *cf.* BRIANT, 2002: 1002. On Mentor in general, *v.* U. KAHRSTEDT, *RE* XV.1., coll. 964-965, *s.v.* Mentor (6).

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