

Alexander the great and the battle of gaugamela



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King Alexander at only 25 years old, his reputation already one of greatness had led his men into Asia. To his soldiers, their invasion of Persia was to fight back after half a century of devastation brought onto Greece during the Persian wars between 499 and 448 BC. Alexander's private desire, however, was to cast a shadow on the large Persian empire by winning all its lands and bringing it under his rule.

Gaugamela, named after the village it was fought by, was the decisive battle in the struggle between Alexander III and Darius II for the Persian Empire.

The battle occurred in 331 BC, this battle was one of importance as it shows a significant amount of Alexander's tactical and military genius while including examples of his great leadership skills with his men. Mesopotamia was an abundant region between the rivers, Euphrates and Tigris, dominated by Darius more than a century earlier. The major city in this region was Babylon and was located south where Darius anticipated Alexander would lead his troops. Instead Alexander headed north in the direction of the Tigris River basically there was more food for the horses, the heat was less intense and it would also tempt Darius away from the widespread plains surrounding Babylon. Darius needed vast, flat, obstacle free areas for his chariots and cavalry to be allowed to fight effectively.

Alexander knew this, hence the reason he wanted to force Darius northward where the ground would be less favourable to him. This was just one instance that shows a factor that contributed to Alexander's triumph in the battle. Therefore Darius moved north and encamped near the village of Gaugamela while Alexander camped a few kilometers away. Alexander managed to capture some Persian soldiers and discovered where Darius'

location was so he could observe the activities of his rival. Unlike previous battles, Darius had found a suitable battlefield and was unwilling to give this one up.

The ground here was flat, perfect for chariots. Darius made it even flatter by ordering the terrain plowed, leveled, removed stones, shrubs and filled in potholes so the area would be ideal for chariots and cavalry. Alexander in turn had also prepared himself for the battle. From his captured and interrogated Persian soldiers he had gathered information that helped him reconstruct the Persian army allowing him to work his movements against Darius'. After seeing that Alexander's Army was outnumbered five Persians to every one Macedonian Parmenio advised against an instant attack.

Alexander approved this suggestion as he was anxious about the superior Persian cavalry and wanted more time to think of how to outmaneuver Darius and the Persians. Alexander permitted his men a decent meal and sleep, while only a few kilometers away Darius kept his men on standby all night long. This, Arrian believed to be a major mistake, ultimately causing Darius' defeat since the next day Alexander's men were well rested whereas Darius' were exhausted. Giving his men rest and food also shows how Alexander was a responsible leader and furthermore he would have respect from his men for doing so. Not rushing into a battle unprepared also shows this excellent leadership and by planning carefully would have allowed more men be spared from death.

Alexander knew that the only way to triumph over the gigantic Persian army was through clever strategies so he thought about the difficult conditions

over night while his men rested, he came up with a series of orders for his men. He ordered the Agrianians near his cavalry and specifically told them to bring the chariots and elephants to a halt, the chariots may be made of tough material but the drivers were only human just like the elephants were only animals, they could still be injured and stopped. In the centre were the phalanx and the Greek cavalry. A second line of infantry was following them, Alexander ordered them all to turn around and fight the enemy if they became surrounded as there was a high chance of this considering the size of the Persian army. The infantry were all told to break ranks and create corridors for the chariots and elephants to pass directly through hoping that no infantry would be injured, this meant that then the infantry could then quickly press forward before the elephants and chariots would have a chance to turn around and come back.

The arrangements ended up being parallel to that of the battle of Issus. However, realizing that the Persian cavalry was moderately powerful, Alexander reinforced his wings and ordered them to lengthen if there was any risk of being out-flanked. These well designed decisions would have made a huge impact on the final outcome of the battle, this shows Alexander's ability to adapt his tactics to suit different situations and develop ways to overcome problems that may occur. The battle turned out better than it possibly could have for Alexander, as we can see his well thought out plan coincided with the actual events of the battle and all went as he had pre-determined.

Alexander initially ordered his right wing cavalry to advance on an angle, as always, to the right. Consequently forcing the Persian cavalry further left to <https://assignbuster.com/alexander-the-great-and-the-battle-of-gaugamela/>

pursue them, thus moving away from the specially cleared area Darius had so carefully arranged for them. To counteract these actions Darius ordered his men to stop moving to the left and head directly forward to attack Alexander's right wing as intended. This arrangement worked well for Alexander as he postponed a rather dominant attack to his right wing and would have confused Darius' cavalry who needed to aim to break through Alexander's right wing and get behind his troops as to fight them from the back. Darius then launched the elephants and chariots against the phalanx but Alexander had foreseen this problem and all his men followed their detailed instructions. The Agrinians stopped the majority of the chariots and elephants before they even reached the phalanx.

The rest caused many of the infantry to panic but because of their training and discipline they followed Alexander's orders and broke ranks at precisely the right moment allowing the elephants and chariots to pass through corridors made for them so the attack failed miserably as it caused very minimal damage. If Alexander had not thought of this intelligent tactic then the elephants and chariots would certainly have caused great destruction to the phalanx. But his simple yet ingenious plan worked brilliantly, saving them from possible defeat. Darius, after seeing this failure, saw that he was not on the winning side and desperately ordered a general offence where his whole line advanced.

Darius also quickly ordered his very strong right wing cavalry, led by Mazaeus, to attack Alexander's left wing cavalry, under the command of Parmenio. The Persian cavalry was significantly superior to that of Alexander's; hence Parmenio was under a great deal of pressure. Alexander

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put a lot of trust in to Parmenio and he obviously believed he could deal with the pressure or he would not have placed him in the situation. Darius was still intent on using his cavalry on his left wing to attempt to get through Alexander's right wing to encircle him, so he sent his Indian cavalry to help attack the right wing. However, this created a gap in the Persian line, to the left of the centre. This was the moment Alexander had been waiting for, he and his companions advanced for Darius.

They were held up by the Persian horse guard and the Greek mercenaries, preventing them from reaching Darius who was standing in his chariot. Darius decided the battle was lost and fled with his entire left wing following close behind. Darius' left wing and center were still intact, and both parties would have had most likely equal chances if he could secure the gap in the left of the center, and pull together his right wing again. The result of the battle might have been entirely different if the Persians had a more firm, determined and brave king. But Alexander knew that a gap would eventually appear and in his brave charge he managed to frighten Darius into backing down, although Alexander would have wanted to catch his rival instead of allowing him to escape. Parmenio on the left wing was being brutally beaten by Mazaeus and the Persians, who at this point had no idea that Darius had gone.

Some of the Persian right wing had even gotten through the Macedonian line and reached the baggage animals and Macedonian camp where Arrian states there was fierce fighting ' for the Persians boldly attacked men who were mainly unarmed and had not expected that anyone would cut their way through the double phalanx and force their way up to them'. Yet, as

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instructed the second line of infantry turned around and caught them in the camp, attacking from the rear they forced the Persians to retreat back the way they came. Alexander anticipated the problem of the Persians getting in behind, unusually as it is he provided a solution not to prevent the problem but solve it if it occurred. He knew it would be difficult to stop them getting in behind but coming up with such a plan was really very resourceful and tactful, thus insuring his victory in the battle.

In the meantime, although Alexander wanted to pursue his rival Darius, Parmenio was in great peril and sent a message to Alexander requesting help. As Arrian states ' When the king received this information, he refrained from further pursuit' and Alexander alongside his companions quickly headed to help his left wing. But, on the way, they bumped into the Persian right wing, who in turn were trying to escape from the Macedonian camp. Here there was a terrible fight and many companions' lives were lost but nevertheless Alexander prevailed and rushed to the aid of Parmenio. Though, by this time, Parmenio and the left wing did not need his help any more. Mazaeus, after hearing of Darius' flight, hastily led his men away from the battle and was pursued by the Thessalians.

Alexander showed remarkable leadership skills in this stage of the battle as he put aside his own wants for the needs of his men. Alexander considered the victory at Gaugamela to be one of significance in the fight over the Persian Empire, as Darius' army was crushed, Alexander now had control of the heart of Asia and so he proclaimed himself ' king of Asia'. This statement, before the whole Macedonian army, would have had huge propaganda worth to Alexander making him appear very impressive to his

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people. Throughout the battle Alexander proved himself to be worthy of his title; Alexander the Great.

This particular battle illuminated Alexander's tactical brilliance, strength and genius because he won purely through intellectual strategies. Considering the size of Darius' army and the outcome of the battle Alexander shows that there is some truth to the saying that brains beat brawn.