

# ALEXANDER THE GREAT

## The Battle of Issus

5 November 333 BCE, Tur

The Persian Empire crumbles under the hammer of Ancient Greece

Before Alexander the Great, the last independent city states of Greece had been encircled holdouts against the might of the Persian Empire. After the great military leader they became the centre of an empire that stretched from the mountains of his Macedonian homeland to the sweltering jungles of northern India.

Before this though, Persian control over Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) had to be broken. It all hinged on the coast, where the powerful Persian fleet could still turn the tide against the Greeks. Persia's Emperor Darius III led the army himself with the intention of linking up with the navy around the Gulf of Issus. Alexander's force of 40,000 gathered on the banks on the Issus with the Mediterranean on their left and the jagged mountains of the

Amanus on their right. Over 100,000 Persians spread out before them, the number and make-up of the rank and file troops purposefully obscured by a line of cavalry.

Greek archers advanced through the foothills on the right to pepper the Persian lines. Unable to simply sit idly under a needling rain of arrows, the Persian cavalry withdraw, exposing the ranks behind them. Now Alexander knew exactly what they planned - to focus their attack on the Greek left and prise them off the shoreline - and he reinforced the line in readiness for Darius's eventual assault.

The Persians may have had strength of numbers, but the

tightly drilled Macedonian phalanx, a tank-like wall of spears and shields, kept them safely pinned down while Alexander led his shock troops on the right, scything into the weaker Persian left flank. The lightly armoured soldiers on the left crumble under the hooves of the Greek cavalry's advance and Alexander swung his charge down the Persian lines, spooking Darius who fled on his gold chariot. With the emperor on the run, panic quickly spread through the army - fleeing infantry were even

trampled by their own cavalry as the Greeks gave chase. The Persian Empire had lost Anatolia, soon it would lose its Babylonian heartland. Eventually it would lose everything - Alexander the Great made sure of that.

### 1 PULLING DOWN THE CURTAIN

Greek skirmishers sneaking through the foothills goad the thin line of Persian cavalry with arrows. With their numbers whittling away under the scattered fire, they're forced to withdraw revealing the full Persian line-up to Alexander.

### 2 THE PERSIAN HAMMER STRIKES

Aping Alexander's tactics for hammering the sides, the Persian heavy cavalry attacks the Greek flank to try and prise them from the coast. Reinforced by Alexander, the tightly drilled spear men of the Macedon phalanx hold the attackers off.

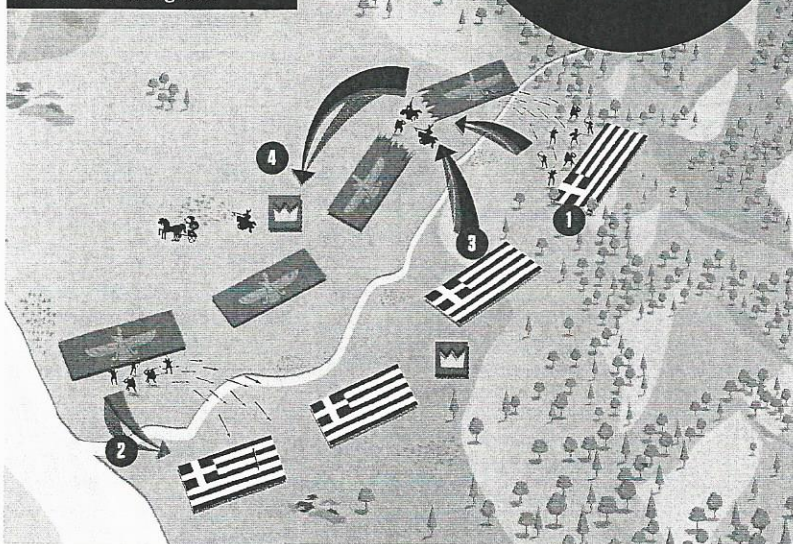
### 3 ALEXANDER ATTACKS

Leading his fast-moving Hypaspists on foot, Alexander's versatile skirmishers charge across the riverbed and hit the Persian left flank, punching a hole through the enemy lines.

### 4 RIGHT IN THE HEART

Alexander saddles up and rides through the gap opened up by his elite Companion cavalry. They charge directly at the Persian emperor and Darius panics, fleeing the battlefield in his chariot and abandoning his troops.

As Alexander's flag is a subject of debate, we have included the modern Greek flag here



If Alexander had a signature move it would be holding down the enemy with his spear-tipped phalanx and then hitting their flanks, but at Issus its success hinged on him being able to work out exactly what his opponent planned and then acting accordingly.



GREEK ARMY	PERSIAN ARMY
35,000	50-100,000
5,850	11,000

Innovation:	★★★★★
Boldness:	★★★★★
Prudence:	★★★★
Planning:	★★★★

## Adrian Goldsworthy



**Who would be your pick for the greatest military strategist?**

The Duke of Wellington, as he was always closely aware of the political context of every war and shaped policy and strategy accordingly. He made mistakes, but he never lost a war, even though he fought with limited resources. Having said that, similar things can be said about many others. The Romans used the ultimate criterion for success. The best general was the man who won the most battles - Julius Caesar in their case.

**What do you think the key qualities are in a great tactician?**

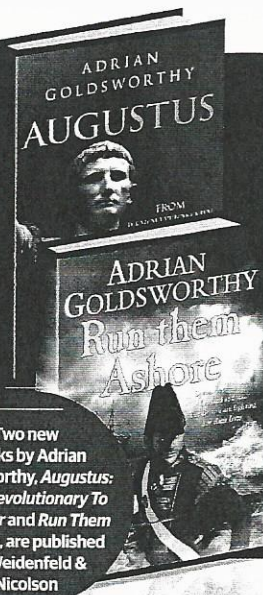
The ability to understand his own and the enemy's strengths and weaknesses and ensure that he can either negate the former - or exploit them to his own advantage as Hannibal did at Cannae - and make the most of the latter. The principle is very simple; putting it into practice is the hard part, especially when the enemy is trying to do the same thing. The tactics is one thing [to consider], but we should remember the organisation, training and preparation, leadership and sheer good luck needed.

**Who do you think is underrated?**

These days, even many people with an interest in military history often know little about the ancient world, so I cannot help naming a Roman, but I will plump for Scipio Africanus, who won Spain for the Romans, invaded Africa and ended the long, drawn-out carnage of the Second Punic War by beating Hannibal at Cannae. Scipio Africanus had never commanded an army before he arrived in Spain, and yet within a year he had captured New Carthage in a carefully executed, well-timed and very bold operation.

**Who is overrated?**

In some ways you could say Alexander the Great, who tends to be given the benefit of the doubt by modern historians, even though the fullest ancient sources for his campaigns date to four centuries after his death. He was certainly an incredible motivator of men, a skilled tactician and able strategist - and of course he kept on winning. Yet he failed to consolidate his conquests and his empire fragmented as soon as he died - which could easily have happened earlier given his recklessness in action.



Two new books by Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus: From Revolutionary To Emperor* and *Run Them Ashore*, are published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson