
Death on the Nile: The murder of Perdiccas and the river crossing in Ancient Macedonia*

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ABSTRACT The death of Perdiccas, son of Orontes, during his invasion of Egypt is a fact hardly understandable, so that we can find different explanations for this event. The main goal of this paper is to establish a connection between Perdiccas' death and the importance, meaning of rivers and its crossing for the ancient Macedonians. Indeed, rivers were related to kingship. This fact is reflected in its relationship with kings of the Balkan geographical area (Polyaen. 4.12.3). Thus, we can find passages in which some of most important mythical characters were begotten by a god-river (Asteropaios, Rhesus, Orpheus, etc). Besides, sometimes even the majesty comes from the river, because the kings were crowned into the river or near one (App. *Syr.* 56; Justin 15. 4.2-7). In fact, the founder of the Argead royal house, Perdiccas I, became king after being saved by a river (Hdt. 8. 138). The strong connection between kings and rivers can be perceived during the crossing, because the Macedonian monarchs, especially Alexander the Great, were responsible of this act. In other words, a true king was able to protect his soldiers during the crossing, given his close link with the water. Perdiccas son of Orontes wanted to become king, therefore the disaster of Nile could be understood like ordeal which showed the will of the river. Perdiccas was not considered a true king, while Ptolemy should become one.

KEYWORDS Perdiccas; Nile; Alexander the Great; Diadochoi; Ancient Macedonian myths; Ancient religion; Orpheus.

“Mirar el río hecho de tiempo y agua
y recordar que el tiempo es otro río,
saber que nos perdemos como el río
y que los rostros pasan como el agua”.
J. L. Borges, *Arte poética*.

Recently, the successors of Alexander the Great have received a great amount of interest from scholars¹. We should be delighted, because this means progress in our subject of study, since this topic has traditionally been forgotten. One of the books that contributed to fill this gap in modern historiography is Bosworth's *The Legacy of Alexander*. However, we still need to ponder many questions about the Diadochi. One

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¹ BOSWORTH: 2002; WATERFIELD 2011; ROMM 2011; ROISMAN 2012; ANSON – ALONSO TRONCOSO 2013.

of these is the murder of Perdiccas during his invasion of Egypt. Although he was never a king, he was the most powerful and important Macedonian immediately after Alexander's death. Indeed, after his victory against Ariarathes², Perdiccas had a larger Empire than his prior sovereign. It is remarkable that he was murdered so easily after his defeat on the Nile (Str. 17.1.8). Ptolemaic's propaganda explained that this fact was due to Perdiccas' brutal authoritarianism:

“Perdiccas, indeed, was a man of blood (φονικὸς), one who usurped the authority of the other commanders and in general, wished to rule all by force (βιαιῶς); but Ptolemy, on the contrary, was generous (εὐεργετικὸς) and fair (ἐπιεικῆς) and granted to all the commanders the right to speak frankly (παρρησία)”.
(Diod. 18. 33.3; translated by GEER 1947).

Suda (*sv.* “Perdiccas”) also mentioned that he appeared to be despised because he was exceptionally haughty (ὑπερφρονεῖν) and boasted excessively (μεγαλήγορον). Extreme pride or excess (*hybris*) seem to have been the words that best describe Perdiccas's personality, terms very much associated with the Greek tyrants, and this was exactly the image that our sources wanted us to believe about him. The use of propaganda was a *leitmotif* of the Diadochi relations between them, and in both texts we can distinguish the remains of Ptolemy's manipulation, who presented himself as the opposite to his hated rival. However, Perdiccas could not have been in power long enough to build a lasting image to leave to posterity. This means that what remains about him was written by the acolytes of his enemies. Although this fact is evident, the savage character of Perdiccas is still present among many scholars³.

Beyond any shadow of doubt the hijack of Alexander's hearse by Ptolemy was an important reason to understand the final fate of Perdiccas⁴, but his soldier only abandoned him after his failure in Egypt⁵. If victory was a source of legitimacy, defeat meant the opposite. Even so it does not seem sufficient motive to explain the whole course of events. In fact, Perdiccas's army was greater than Ptolemy's and the invaders still had the advantage in spite of all the misfortunes that had happened. Ptolemy had mercenaries, “many friends,” garrisons, but a much smaller number of Macedonians in his army, therefore fearing a civil war among Macedonians was a remote possibility (Diod. 18.14.1; 21.7; 28.5; 33.3–4). It is not surprising that another explanation has been sought, such as the existence of Ptolemy's collaborators in Perdiccas's camp⁶. It

² Diod 18.16.1-3; Plut. *Eum.*3.12-14; App. *Mith.*8; Arr. *Fr.* 1.11; Lucian. *Macr.*13; Just. 13.6.1.

³ Cf. BOSWORTH 2002, 14: “Alienated by his autocratic savagery... It is a stereotype, contrasting with Ptolemy's magnanimity and moderation, but there is likely to be some truth behind the contrast of characters”; ROMM 2011, 182: “Many others likewise had an interest in blackening Perdiccas' name—those who colluded in his murder, inherited his power, or joined in the hunt for his partisans. Any or all of these may have helped color the portrait of Perdiccas preserved in the ancient sources. We find in those sources condemnations of Perdiccas' arrogance, high-handedness, and brutality, a portrait that at times verges on slander. Diodorus uses the word *phonikos*, or “man of slaughter,” to describe him, an odd barb to throw at a soldier whose stock-in-trade was killing enemies. But when a leader has failed, the very qualities that made him a leader suddenly appear as flaws. Perdiccas' arrogance and bloody-mindedness were no more pronounced than Alexander's, indeed much less so. But Alexander, unlike the hapless Perdiccas, knew little of failure”.

⁴ ROISMAN 2012, 92.

⁵ Although Diodorus (18.33.1) states that at the beginning of the invasion many soldiers were reluctant to fight against Ptolemy, this statement should be related to Ptolemaic propaganda since it was a way of proving that the invasion was unfair. Cf. Anson 2002, 383: “Desertions began almost immediately upon Perdiccas' entrance into Egypt (Diod. 18.33.1)”.

⁶ WATERFIELD 2011, 64: “Ptolemy undoubtedly had a very active fifth column within Perdiccas's camp”.

should also be noted that Perdiccas learned of Eumenes' victory over Neoptolemus shortly after his arrival in Egypt (Diod. 18.33.1). Consequently, he had a clear lead over his enemy. In our opinion the disaster on the Nile was the true reason for Perdiccas's demise, but this fact must be understood in the context of the crossing of the river and its importance for the ancient Macedonians and not only for the number of casualties which seems to have been exaggerated⁷. The main goal of this study is to establish a connection between Perdiccas' death and the importance of the river crossing for the ancient Macedonians.

RIVERS AND ROYALTY IN ANCIENT MACEDONIA

Water was a vital element for the ancient Greeks, given that it was the origin of the world according to their cosmogonies. Even the god Oceanus was said to have the shape of a river, which encircled the world (*Il.* 14.245). There were also rivers such as the Acheron that represented the passage from the world of the living to the dead (Verg. *A.* 6.295-6). These rivers were deities and took part in the assemblies of the gods in the Mount Olympus according to the Homeric world (*Il.* 20.4-9).

However, before starting our study about the rivers of this area, we should be aware of changes that have taken place over time, namely, that the water network is not the same as in antiquity. Water carries life in every possible way conceivable, but sometimes this is not possible without the action of human being. In ancient times the first works to drain swamps were ordered by the Macedonian kings and in the last century a large number of marshes and swamps have been drained which has radically changed the landscape⁸. Therefore, we must remember that the Macedonian rivers do not have the same shape or size as in antiquity. We know that in the time of Herodotus, (7.127) Lydias and Haliacmon must have been connected, but now not.

In Macedonia, their importance was bigger because they were the largest rivers in the Balkan Peninsula, but also because they were related to kingship. This fact is reflected in their relationship with kings of this geographical area. Therefore, we can find texts in which some of the most important mythical characters were begotten by a god-river. The Axios seems to have had a prominent role since it has the earliest mention of a hydronym in this region, although it is not linked to the Macedonians, but to the Paeonian people, one of the first settlers of the region. The *Iliad* (2.848-50) states that Axios is the river with the clearest water in the entire world. Axios was the father of Pelagon and the grandfather of Asteropaios, the opponent of Achilles and leader of the Paeonians in the poem.

The special meaning of rivers for the Paeonian royal house can be understood by reading a passage from Polyaeus (4.12.3), in which Lysimachus conducted Ariston to his father's kingdom of Paeonia; but after the royal bath in the river Astibus, Bregalnica river, that converted Ariston to king, according to the custom of his country, Lysimachus ordered his guards to take up arms. Ariston instantly mounted his horse and escaped to the land of the Dardani; and Lysimachus was left in possession of Paeonia.

⁷ Diod. 18.36.1: "Since more than two thousand men were lost" (translated by Russel M. Geer 1947). This number goes beyond whatever figure comes from Alexander's battles cf. ADAMS 2010, 211: "More than 2,000 men were drowned, more men (we are told) than Alexander had lost in all of his pitched battles combined".

⁸ Cf. BORZA 1979, 97-121.

Water is not only the origin of Paeonian kingship; it is also an essential element in the ritual of investment: the royal bath. Apparently, there is nothing similar in the Macedonian kingdom, given that the kingship does not come from a river in the Macedonian state, but it should be brought to mind that in the folktale about Perdicas and his brothers, one river, possibly the Haliacmon, protected and supported his claim to the throne (Cf. Hdt. 8.138).

Another interesting story relating to the Paeonian kings is the funeral of Xermodigestus:

“This Xermodigestus, as Diodorus writes, ranking as the most trusted friend, I think, of Audoleon, king of the Paeonians, reveals the treasures to Lysimachus, or to some other king of Thrace (‘tis difficult for me, without books as I am, to relate all, like a god; you to whom I speak know). He revealed to the crowned head of Thrace the treasures hidden beneath the river Sargentius, which he himself, aided only by captives, had buried, turning aside the river bed, and burying the treasure beneath, then letting in the stream, and slaying the captives”.
(Diod. 21.13; translated by GEER 1947).

The slaughter of the captives was a way to conceal the whereabouts of the treasure, but was also a type of atonement for having altered the course of the river. At any rate, if the kingship came from the water, it would be logical that it returned there after the death of every king. This way we can see a cyclical process, which is a symbolic perpetuation of the relationship between Paeonians and their rivers. This passage does not present similarities with the Macedonian customs, since kings were not buried in the rivers, but in the Royal Graves of Vergina. However, we can see that the river was used like a safe to protect the king’s treasure in this story, and the Macedonians, similarly to the Greeks, thought that the river was a synonym of wealth. In this way, throwing something into the river or collecting objects which were expelled by the river was something normal in their myths⁹. Since Alexander a bronze tablet engraved with ancient letters spawned up by a sacred spring found in Xanthus (Plut. *Alex.* 17. 4), he thought the prediction of his victory was true. Finding as well as throwing something into the river had great importance for the Macedonians.

In Macedonia the rivers were also linked to wealth. At least two of the Macedonian rivers Axios and Gallikos were auriferous. The latter was called Echedorus, bearing gifts, because of the gold in its stream¹⁰. The wealth seems to have been a feature of the god river, inasmuch as one of the stories, which explains the origin of the cornucopia, tell us that it came from the river Achelous and was ripped off by Heracles during his fight against this river god¹¹. If wealth was a gift of the rivers is not unthinkable that great treasures were buried in their riverbed, given that it was a way to give them back to its rightful owner.

In addition, Rhesus who was a king of the Edonians (Thracian people) and son of the Strymon river, was called by some sources king of Thrace (Hes. *Th.* 339; Conon. *Narr.* 4; Anton. Lib. 21). There was also a river named Rhesus in Bithynia.

Concerning the Macedonian myths we can find some examples of links between kings and rivers in different stories. Haliacmon was regarded as one of the many sons of

⁹ The most beautiful story is the aquatic ordeal between Minos and Theseus. Minos throws his signet ring to the sea and asks Theseus to bring it back, if he is a true son of Poseidon. The Athenian emerged from the sea with the ring and a golden crown (cf. Paus. 1.17.3; Hyg. *Astr.* 2.5; Bacchyl. 17).

¹⁰ Scyl. *Periplus* 66.7; Str. 7.F 21.

¹¹ Ov. *Met.* 9.1-88.

Oceanus and Tethys, whose children were of no special significance for Macedonians, but his strong connection to the realm is reflected in the legend about the origins of Aigai, in which the oracle states that the city must be founded near the Haliacmon (Diod. 7.16).

We can also find the opposite case: the Macedonian hydronym was not the father but apparently just the descendant of the eponymous hero, and this might be the case of Olganos. This river is usually identified with the Arapitsa, near the actual Naoussa, and is regarded as the grandson of Macedon, eponymous hero of the Macedonians, and son of Beris (Theagenes, *FGrH* 774 F 7). An amazing bust of Olganos as a young man can be found in the Veria Museum (Greece).

Pseudo-Plutarch¹², talking about the Strymon establishes again connections between the leaders of the region and the said river:

“Strymon is a river of Thrace near a city Edonis. Formerly it was named Palaestinus from Palaestinus, son of Poseidon. For when he was at war with the neighboring cities and had fallen ill, he dispatched his son Haliacmon as commander. Fighting too recklessly, he was slain. Informed about what had transpired, Palaestinus, too, unseen by his bodyguards, through an excess of grief flung himself into the river Conozus, which from him was named Palaestinus. Strymon, son of Ares and Helice, when he had heard about Rhesus’ death and had been overcome with despair, flung himself into the river Palaestinus, which from him was renamed Strymon”.

(Ps-Plut. *Fluv.* 1156 E. Translated by BANCHICH 2010).

In all these cases the death of a man in the river entails a new name for that watercourse. So, in this way, we encounter many names for the same current of water: Conozus/Palaestinus/Strymon. The renaming of a river due to someone falling into the current is a leitmotif in the work *De Fluviis* of Pseudo-Plutarch and here the Strymon is mentioned as a Thracian river¹³, so *prima facie*, it is not possible to infer specific information in the text about Macedonia, however its deep relation to Haliacmon, a Macedonian river, allows us to identify a probable Macedonian myth. Indeed, the presence of two nearby rivers, Haliacmon and Strymon, draws our attention. The first one was, without a doubt a Macedonian river, and it is therefore appropriate to use this passage for our study. At any rate, both Palaestinus and Strymon were members of the royalty who finished their days in the same river bed.

Another text of *De Fluviis* tells a similar story, but this time with the Haliacmon and Inachus as protagonists:

“Inachus is a river of the Argive territory. Formerly it was called Carmanor. Haliacmon, by race a Tiryntian, tending sheep on Mount Coccygium and having unwittingly beheld Zeus having intercourse with Rhea, went mad and, borne away with an impulse, flung himself into the river Carmanor, which, from him, was renamed Haliacmon. It was named Inachus for a reason of this sort. Inachus, a child of Ocean, when his daughter Io had been ravished by Zeus, began rebuking the god with blasphemous insults, trailing behind him. Indignant, he sent to him Tisiphone, one of the Erinyes, tormented by whom, he flung himself into the Haliacmon River, which, from him, was renamed Inachus”.

(Ps-Plut. *Fluv.* 1160 E. Translated by BANCHICH 2010).

¹² We are following in part the analysis of MALLIOS 2011, 73-5 about these passages of Plutarch in his thesis, which we highly recommend to all readers.

¹³ Strabo considered the Strymon a natural border between Macedonia and Thrace (Str. 7.4).

We have again three different names for the same river: Carmanor–Haliacmon–Inachus¹⁴. In this occasion the myth establishes a relationship between one Macedonian river (Haliacmon) and one Argive river (Inachus), given that it was a perpetual demand of the Royal Macedonian house throughout its history to descend from Argos. Therefore, we can see in this myth substantial evidence of the existence of a deep union between monarchy and rivers. On the other hand, this myth reminds us of others like Aegeus's death and the persecution of Idas by Evenus¹⁵, so this story is a possible topos in Greek-Macedonian literature. In any case, although it is not an isolated incident of ancient Macedonia, we have to stress that it is a reverse phenomenon compared to the canonical story: it was usual for mortals to receive the name of a river and not otherwise. Indeed, in the Greek *poleis* it was not uncommon for many young people to be called after their natal rivers¹⁶, but we cannot find such a parallel in Macedonia. The adoption of a name through the death of someone is the anomaly.

At some places in Greece where there were large waterways, for example the Achelous, rivers were also the first kings or lords of the region¹⁷, although there were also exceptions, such as the *autochthonoi* in Athens¹⁸. By contrast, when the seed proceeded from a river god, a patrilineal conception of identity was established, because it came from a masculine element, and not from the earth, a feminine element, according to the Greek thought. The god-river was masculine, so this could be the reason why it was always renamed with the sacrifice of men. Not so with the sources and springs, which were often associated with maidens who died giving their name to the sacred waters¹⁹.

A similar case can be found in the legend about Pindus²⁰, son of the king Lycaon. It is said that when Pindus died, he gave his name to the river (Ael. NA10.48), although in later versions, the place that received a new name was given to a mountain and not a river (Tz. *Chilia*. 4. 329-338).

There has been some dispute about the origins of Orpheus²¹, but in any case, he was related to rivers, especially after his death:

“There is also a river called Helikon [in Pieria]. After a course of seventy-five stades the stream hereupon disappears under the earth. After a gap of about twenty-two stades the water rises again, and under the name of Baphyras instead of Helikon flows into the sea as a navigable river. The people of Dion (Dium) say that at first this River flowed on land throughout its course. But, they go on to say, the women who killed Orpheus wished to wash off in it the blood-stains, and there

¹⁴ There are not evidences about the term Conozus, but there are for Carmanor. It was a semi Cretan god of harvest that was one of Demeter's flings, and its etymology may derive from *keiro*, i.e., cutting / shearing, action proper of shepherds as the Haliacmon of this story.

¹⁵ Apollod.1.7.8-9 (Evenus); *Epit.*1.10 (Aegeus' death).

¹⁶ LARSON 2007a, 152.

¹⁷ LARSON 2007b, 66: “In myth, the rivers figured as ancestors and primordial figures, the first kings in the land. Examples include Peneus in Thessaly, Inachus in Argos, Asopus in Phlius, and Scamander in the Troad”.

¹⁸ LORAUX 1996.

¹⁹ DOWDEN 2000, 43.

²⁰ OGDEN 2011, 51ff.

²¹ Plut. *Alex.* 2; Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.15 (Thracian); Conon, *FGrH* 26 F1, 45; Paus. 9.30.4 (Macedonian). Cf. GUTHRIE 1993, 45; HERRERO DE JAUREGUI 2010, 84.

at the River sank underground, so as not to lend its waters to cleanse manslaughter²².

(Paus. 9.30.8. Translated by JONES 1918).

The rivers' sorrow for the death of Orpheus is logical, because his father was another river, Eager (Apollod. 1.3.2). Indeed, as Orpheus played music he was able to stop the course of a river (Sen. *Her.F.* 569-79). The existence of underground rivers was a recurrent theme in Greek ethnography²³, although the reason for the underground escape of the Helikon is more difficult to explain. There is an explanation in the myth itself i.e. the desire of the river not to be contaminated by the blood of Orpheus, is what led it to take refuge in the depths of the earth. In all the above cases the introduction of a foreign substance into the aquatic element meant a change in the onomastic, this time the river was almost polluted by the poet's blood. After all, contamination is also a process of change in which a natural state is temporary or permanently abandoned, however this was not the case since it was not consumed. Helikon fled not only at the possibility of coming into contact with Orpheus's blood that women carried on their hands, but rather for the crime that it represented, because the river did not act like a mere purifier of dirt, the blood was "an offering", which was given by them, on the condition that they were absolved from their criminal act²⁴. Possibly, this would be the reason why crossing a river was not allowed for those who had committed violent crimes²⁵. The only way Helikon could prevent this unwanted exchange was by running underground. An intrinsic quality of the river was its movement: therefore a significant change in its channel meant a change of name. This time the variation was a result of the action, but the indirect cause of it had once again been an object about to be introduced into its waters.

The murder was discovered because another river, Meles, was the place where the head of Orpheus was found (*Orphicorum Fragmenta* no. 115, ed. Kern). And finally, the river Sys was the reason for Orpheus's transfer from Libethra to Dium, which resulted in him becoming a symbol of Macedonian religion (Paus.9. 30.11).

Again, Orpheus was related to a river in a contextual way. But beyond any doubt, all these passages show us that the river was a symbol of kingship in the whole geographical area of the Ancient Macedonia. Only in this way, can we understand why Seleucus had to create stories to ensure his rights to the throne, placing all of them in the course of one river²⁶. We refer to his coronation in the Euphrates²⁷ as well as the loss, near or in the same place, of the ring given to him by his mother, who had augured his royal destiny²⁸: he would become king over the land where he lost the ring, the lands bathed by the river Euphrates.

²² Cf. Ov. *Met.* 11.47, states that the rivers increased their flows because of the tears shed for the death of Orpheus.

²³ Hdt. 2.33; Arist. *Mete.* 351a 9-11; Plb. 12.4d; Sen. *QN* 3; Plin. *NH* 5.51; Str. 6.2.9; Paus. 5.7.3; Procop. *Aed.* 2. 2. Cf. Peretti 1994.

²⁴ The river Anigrus acquired its bad smell when Heracles washed the venom of himself in it after his battle with the Hydra (Paus. 5.5.10). Cf. OGDEN 2013: 59.

²⁵ Asch. *Sept.* 602-604; Eur. *HF* 1295-1297; Apollod. 2.8.3.

²⁶ We would like to thank to Daniel Ogden for show us the relevance of these passages.

²⁷ App. *Syr.* 56.

²⁸ Appian, *Syr.* 56: "Also that his mother saw in a dream that whatever ring she found she should give him to wear, and that he should be king at the place where he should lose the ring. She did find an iron ring with an anchor engraved on it, and he lost it near the Euphrates" (Translated by H. White 1972); Just. 15.4.2-7.

THE MACEDONIAN KING AND THE CROSSING OF RIVER

There is another context in which the Macedonian king had a strong relationship with the rivers: the crossing. In fact, the fight against the greatest rivers of Asia was a leitmotiv of Alexander's conquest. Almost all these passages are part of Arrian's *Anabasis* and have as a main character Alexander the Great. Alexander's interest in geography has been a question commonly accepted²⁹, although sometimes with not enough criticism, and the rivers were one of the aspects he was most curious about: He was one of the first kings on record to have crossed the Danube (Arr. *An.* 1.4.5); he crossed the river Granicus to defeat the Persians in his first battle, despite the objections of Parmenion (Arr. *An.* 1.13.3); he bathed in the cold waters of Cydnus being close to death because of fevers contracted (Arr. *An.* 2.4.7); it is said that he even organized an expedition to the sources of the Nile³⁰; he defeated the strong streams of the Tigris (Arr. *An.* 3.7.4); he worried about the identity of the Tanais and the Jaxartes (Str. 11.7.4); he defeated Poros at Hydaspes after crossing the river that gave name to this battle; he stopped at the Hyphasis when his troops mutinied because they did not want to cross it (Arr. *An.* 4.26); the king and his court were also interested in the hydrography of India, especially the possibility that the Indus and the Nile were the same river (Str. 15.1.25); one possibility defended by Alexander at first, but which he ultimately rejected (Arr. *An.* 6.1.2-3; Str. 15.1.25); perhaps for this reason he showed interest in navigating the Indus Delta (Arr. *An.* 6.1.5), being on the verge of drowning like his ancestor Achilles (Diod. 17.97.3); he made sacrifices to allow his fleet to have a safe journey (Arr. *Ind.* 18.11); Palacopas and Euphrates courses were also explored by the Macedonian (Arr. *An.* 7.21).

Crossing a river seems to have been a feat comparable to a military victory, and therefore it must have played a prominent role in the exaltation of Macedonian leadership³¹.

Some recent studies have appeared about Alexander's logistics in order to cross³². However, the ideological implications of crossing and its ritual have been ignored, as well as the key role of the king in this process. Beyond the use of bridges, tent skins or water skins, it is clear that a type of ceremony must have existed which we need to study. We refer to the sacrifices that were made before and after crossing a river. Indeed allusions to such acts in the sources are numerous: regarding the Danube³³; the Indus³⁴; Hydaspes³⁵ and Acesines³⁶. In all these cases, Alexander himself performed the sacrifice.

²⁹ BODSON 1991, 127-138; ALVAR 2000, 83-98.

³⁰ Curt. 4.8.3; Luc. *Phar.* 10.272-75; John Lydus *De mens.* 4.68; Phot. *Bibli.Cod.* 249, 441 B. The veracity of this travel is denied by many scholars: PÉDECH 1984, 403; PEARSON 1960, 31: "It is hardly necessary to believe on such evidence that Callisthenes had actually been to Ethiopia"; THOMSON 1965, 136: "Unreliable seem two late statements that, inspired by his old tutor, he did in fact send explorers, who already saw the mountain rains that swell the river"; BOSWORTH 1993, 418: "Callisthenes' expedition is a near absurdity, and indeed it is impossible to countenance any new discoveries in Alexander's reign". In pro of its historical veracity cf. BURSTEIN 1976, 144: "He was aware of the potential problems that might arise on Egypt's southern frontier".

³¹ Cf. Curt. 7.18.3: "Then, if you defeat the whole human race, you will be ready to make war on woods, on snow, on rivers, on wild animals", translated by ROLFE 1962.

³² BLOEDOW 2002, 57-75; ROLLINGER 2013, 74ff.

³³ Arr. *An.* 1.4.5.

³⁴ Arr. *Ind.* 18.11.

³⁵ Arr. *An.* 5.28.4.

³⁶ Arr. *An.* 5.29.5.

The first example, the crossing of the Hellespont, relates to this issue:

“According to the prevalent story Alexander made from Elaeus for the Achaean harbour, and steered the admiral’s ship himself when he crossed, sacrificing a bull to Posidon and the Nereids in the midst of the Hellespont strait, and pouring into the sea a drink offering from a golden bowl”.
(Arr. *An.* 1.11.6, translated by BRUNT 1976).

This passage is usually compared to Xerxes’ crossing of the Hellespont³⁷ (Hdt. 7.54), but in our opinion Alexander was not emulating the Achaemenid king, but was making a Macedonian sacrifice similar to others he had made every time his army crossed a river³⁸. Although this time it involved a sea, the ritual was exactly the same, given that rivers and seas were Oceanus’s children (Hes. *The.* 337-70)³⁹. Furthermore, Xerxes himself renamed the Hellespont as a salt river (Hdt 7.35 ἀλμυρῶ ποταμῶ). An example of the same ritual is offered by Euripides (*Hel.* 1578-1589). Therefore, the sacrifices of transit were the same for both rivers and seas, because as mentioned earlier in the Greek mentality, all waters were part of the Ocean, and Hellespont was still seen as a river god. Moreover, Arrian clearly says that it was Alexander who sacrificed and steered the ship. The act of personally directing the ship shows that the result was in his hands. The king of Macedonia was the ferryman who communicated both sides of the river.

However, the data are scarce regarding both the process and its meaning, given that the sources are content simply to mention the sacrifices most of the time, although we do not have a complete description of the ritual in all its phases. Thus, we discover how Alexander offered his gifts to the rivers before or after he crossed. It is logical to assume that the sacrifices would have occurred twice: during the crossing (Arr. *An.* 6.3.1) and after leaving the river bed (Arr. *An.* 1. 4.5). One explanation is that they were a type of agreement, according to which there would be a second sacrifice in gratitude for a quiet crossing without great difficulty⁴⁰. A process that conformed to the mentality of *do ut des*, which prevailing in ancient Greek religion. The first sacrifice would be carried out to change the will of the deity who lived in the river, and established a second offering that would be fulfilled if the crossing had been made safely. Therefore, the sources point out that the sacrifice was performed after landing on the other shore, showing gratitude for a transit without complications. The scarcity of references in our sources about the second sacrifice is explained by a possible confusion with the former; it could have been suppressed because it was deemed repetitive or simply it was cancelled because the crossing of the Macedonian troops was not easy.

Another issue is to determine how was the ceremonial by which the Macedonian king established contact with the river god. Initially, we can assume, without too much risk in presupposing, a libation with water from the river itself or with the introduction of a part of the offeror’s body, the hands, in the stream⁴¹. Therefore, the person who

³⁷ INSTINSKY 1949, 46-53; ZHRNT 1996, 134ff; BRIANT 2002, 548-9; SQUILLACE 2010, 78; 264; Cf. BRIQUEL – DESNIER 1983, 22-30.

³⁸ HOLTZ 2005, 129, states that this way Alexander symbolized the beginning of the conquest of the Persian Empire, and with the same rituals he established the limits of his great empire.

³⁹ Cf. Arr. *An.* 1.13.6, Alexander considers the Granicus as a little stream (σ μικρὸν ῥέδμα) as he compares it to the Hellespont.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hom. *Od.* 11.30-50, during the Nekyia, Odysseus offers Tiresias a first sacrifice when he arrived to the Hades, but perhaps he has to offer a second sacrifice, when he returned home to give him and the other ghosts an incentive to release him from the underworld.

⁴¹ Hes. *Op.* 737-42: “Never cross the sweet-flowing water of ever-rolling rivers afoot until you have prayed, gazing into the soft flood, and washed your hands in the clear, lovely water. Whoever crosses a

made the sacrifice and the entity that received it, were temporarily bonded by contact of their bodies. By becoming familiar with the divine nature of the river, a safe crossing was guaranteed, because briefly through contact, they were one being.

Thereafter, the king proceeded with the offering. The sacrifice to the river god could be direct, i.e. the victim was thrown directly into the water to drown; he could offer the blood of an animal, or of course make some modest sacrifice on an altar and throw objects into the river.

Throwing a victim into the river current to drown recalls myths that we have previously seen, in which the drowned person changed the name of the river that they fell into. Now we can understand that the drowning played the role of a symbolic sacrifice to the river. The intensity and strength of it, since human sacrifices were the most powerful of all⁴², made the offering and receptor perpetually intertwined, which resulted in the name being altered. Change was not just a memorial tribute to the dead, because the body of the deceased was absorbed by the river, therefore merging into one being only. We cannot find examples of human sacrifices to the river outside the mythical world. However, as Daniel Ogden has shown⁴³, authors such as Julian (*Ep.* 82) associated the deaths of Hector, son of Parmenio, and Antinous. This was possible because both were lovers of their master, drowned in the same river, the Nile, but unlike Antinous, Hector's death seemed to have been an accident (*Curt.* 4.8.7ff; 6.9.27).

The second type is characterized by sacrificial bloodshed in honor of the river. One of the rites performed could also have included *Sphagia*⁴⁴, that is to say, bloody sacrifices. The name comes from σφάζω (to cut throat) which shows clearly how the animal was killed⁴⁵. In this case, either an animal or its blood were thrown into the water, therefore water replaced the ground as a vessel for the blood. Again it sought to interact with the receptor of the offering by similarity, namely, it was thought that the combination of two liquid elements would be more easily assimilated. The way in which the blood and water mixed, determined whether or not the crossing was feasible⁴⁶. One of the favorite victims for rivers appeared to have been the bull (βοῦς). This animal shape was curiously a favorite for rivers when taking on a physical body. Another common sacrifice was the horse⁴⁷, also very related to springs and currents of water in the Greek myths⁴⁸.

The third type of offering could have been to throw an object of great value such as a cup of precious metal⁴⁹, probably the same one with which the initial libation was made. Recently, S. Torallas Tovar and K. A. Worp have stated that among the Greek papyri

river with hands unwashed of wickedness, the gods are angry with him and bring trouble upon him afterwards" (translated by EVELYN-WHITE 1967).

⁴² An example of human sacrifices can be seen in *Hdt.* 7.114, Persians sacrificed nine women and nine men in Ennea Odi. Cf. HENRICH 1981, 195-235; HUGHES 1991; BONNECHERE 1994.

⁴³ OGDEN 2011, 171-73.

⁴⁴ ZIEHEN 1929, cols.1169-79; EKROTH 2002, 242-7.

⁴⁵ JAMESON 2002, 203: "On the island of Mykonos, in an annual sacrifice for the river Acheloius, the throats of eight lambs were pierced (s[phat]tet[ai]) so that the blood would flow into the river while three other victims, a full-grown sheep and two lambs, were killed for him at an altar (DITTENBERGER SIG3 1024, lines 36-7)".

⁴⁶ *Hdt.* 6.76; 7.113; *X. An.* 4.3.18-19.

⁴⁷ WASER 1909, col. 2777.

⁴⁸ *Il.* 21.124-132. Cf. LARSON 2007a, 152-153.

⁴⁹ We are almost certain that the hair of those who reached maturity was also offered (*A. Ch.* 6; Paus. 8.41.3), as well as honey, animals, but never wine (*Theoc.* v.12, 53, 139, 149; Servius, On 4.380 Virgil's *Georgics, Eclogues* V.74) although this was the system used by Midas to capture Silenus, namely, he added wine to its waters to intoxicate him (*Theopomp.* *FGH* 115 F 75; Paus.1.4.5).

from Montserrat, a fragment was found, in which Alexander made the same libation with a golden cup mentioned by Arrian⁵⁰. Given that this type of ritual seems to have been very common during the ceremony of crossing, it could be another Macedonian king and not Alexander, but the fragment reveals to us that throwing objects into the stream was an essential part of the ritual.

Moreover, nothing prevented these options happening together at the same time, as in the crossing of the Hellespont. It was the risk of the crossing and the importance of the river that determined the type and value of offering, therefore the greater the difficulty the bigger the object sacrificed had to be.

All cases examined bear a strong resemblance to the sacrifices called *diabateria* (διαβατήρια) that were intended not only for the rivers, but also for the land borders, and they seem to have been frequent during military campaigns, when the army was out of its homeland⁵¹. The Spartan *diabateria* have similarities with the sacrifices made by the Macedonian kings, but there is significant difference among them: if the Spartan king could not impose his will over the waters, he had to come back. Besides this Spartan ritual was celebrated in other places such as crossroads, and if the sacrifice was bad it always meant the end of the military expedition (Hdt. 6.76; Th. 5.54.2; 55.3; 116.1; X. *HG.* 3.1.17; 4.15; 4.4.5; 7.7). The most famous example was the struggle of king Cleomenes against the river Erasinus:

“As Cleomenes was seeking divination at Delphi, the oracle responded that he would take Argos. When he came with Spartans to the river Erasinus, which is said to flow from the Stymphalian lake (this lake issues into a cleft out of sight and reappears at Argos, and from that place onwards the stream is called by the Argives Erasinus) —when Cleomenes came to this river he offered sacrifices (ἔσφαγιάζετο) to it. The omens were in no way favorable for his crossing, so he said that he honored the Erasinus for not betraying its countrymen, but even so the Argives would not go unscathed. Then he withdrew and led his army seaward to Thyrea, where he sacrificed a bull to the sea and carried his men on shipboard to the region of Tiryns and to Nauplia”.
(Hdt. 6.76, translated by GODLEY 1971).

However, in cases in which Alexander faced this problem, he chose to continue with the sacrifices until they were propitious. An example of this occurred near Ciropolis when Alexander was preparing to attack the Scythians:

“But when he sacrificed with a view to crossing, the omens were not favourable. Though much annoyed by this, still he restrained himself and stayed where he was. But as the Scythians did not give up, he sacrificed again with a view to crossing, and Aristander the prophet again said that danger to him was portended. Alexander replied that it was better to go to any extremity of danger than, after subduing almost the whole of Asia, to be a laughing-stock to Scythians, as Darius the father of Xerxes had been long ago. Yet Aristander refused to interpret the sacrifices in any way contrary to the signs from heaven because Alexander desired to hear something different”.
(Arr. *An.* 4.4.3, translated by BRUNT 1976).

Although in this sacrifice Alexander was aided by Aristander the final decision belonged to him and for this reason the Macedonian army crossed the river.

⁵⁰ TORALLAS TOVAR – WORP 2014, 64ff.

⁵¹ PRITCHETT 1974, 68; MONTERO 2012, 168.

There is no doubt that the mutiny of Hyphasis was an important reason to put an end to Alexander's conquests, but according to Arrian (*An.* 5.28.4-5), the bad omens were another cause. This time, due to the lack of support, the king changed his mind and decided to abandon his plans. Crossing a river without its authorization was very dangerous⁵², but it was even worse without the presence of the king (*Arr. An.* 6.12.2. Cf. *Curt.* 7.7.24). Without their king, crossing the same rivers seemed like an impossible challenge. In a word, the soldiers didn't just think the Macedonian king had to take an active role in the sacrifices, they believed that he made the passage possible.

The Romance of Alexander offers us an example in which we can see that his duty was to choose the way the river would be crossed:

“Next day reached a very large river, so broad that it took three days to cross it. When they came to it and looked at this immense divided, Alexander was at a loss. Alexander sat down on the bank and ordered the men to build a rampart across it. When this had been done according to Alexander's plan for crossing the river the water suddenly dried up and became sand instead. Then Alexander saw how to cross the river. He ordered square containers to be constructed of wooden planks. These were then placed on the river-bed, and when the first one was in place, it was filled with stones so that it would not move. Next, he ordered his men to bring very long planks, 24 to 36 feet long and to place them on the first box, stretching over the second. So they put them on top of the wood, and nailed them down. Then he put down in the stream of sand a second box 24 feet from the first, and filled this with stones; and that likewise remained immobile. And so with the third and subsequent ones, until they had bridged the river. It took the army sixty-six days to cross the river. When they had crossed it, Alexander named it the River the Sand; it flowed three days with water and three days with sand”⁵³.

This text is part of Alexander's legend, but even so it is very useful to us, because it shows that Alexander, that is to say the Macedonian king, was the responsible one in this sort of action, namely, he was the ferryman of his army. The relationship between rivers and the Macedonian dynasty was not limited to a symbolical origin of monarchy, but was also the role of every king to defeat their streams.

Interestingly, these ceremonies coexisted with different methods and techniques of crossing: from swollen skins of the Assyrians to the bridges of boats. Technological progress did not seem to mean the abandonment of this way of thinking. In fact, possessing the means to cross the physical barrier that was the river did not imply that mental barriers had vanished.

On the other hand, the aforementioned interest of Alexander for the rivers has been seen as evidence of his activity as an explorer. Nevertheless, these sacrifices allows us to infer that knowing the name of the river was a necessary element of the ritual, so that the Macedonians could discuss whether a stream of water was a river or its tributary was because, they needed to know to whom river-god they were making sacrifices⁵⁴, as in the same way, someone who prays to one god needs to know the name of this divinity before invoking him. The name is an essential element of every ritual and, of course, of ancient magic⁵⁵.

⁵² The most famous crossing against the will of a river was made by Xerxes. Cf. *Hdt.* 7.35.

⁵³ STONEMAN 1991, 29-30, translated by himself.

⁵⁴ *Arr. An.* 5.6; 6.1; 7.7.

⁵⁵ LUCK 2006, XV.

INTERPRETATIONS ON THE RITUAL

At this point we need to ask ourselves what the goal of the Macedonian king was when he made these rituals:

— 1) It is unquestionable that the sacrifices had a clear purpose, and this was to ensure the crossing from one river bank to another. The crossing was a moment of maximum risk for the soldiers, and the possibility of drowning would worry them, because if the waters of the stream swallowed their bodies, they would become the ghosts of the unburied. The danger was greater when the crossing occurred without the authorization of the river, given that even the mere fact of crossing by bridges or similar forms was seen as an act of *hybris*, arrogance, which could cause the river god's anger⁵⁶. But this danger can only be weathered by paying a price. Offerings for Charon⁵⁷ or the sandal that Jason lost to help cross Hera are some examples of this custom⁵⁸.

— 2) Coming in contact with water means to face the purest form of change. There were many stories of transformation or metamorphosis, by drinking from sources or by bathing in rivers⁵⁹. It is possible, although it is only a hypothesis, that among the demands to the river god was not to change the nature of the men who crossed.

— 3) There is one last possibility and this is to appease the river. The river gods were protecting elements of the people living around them. Peleus sacrificed to Spercheios with the intention of seeking the return of his son Achilles⁶⁰, because it was thought that this river veiled and protected those born near the water. The force of the river was something that Achilles felt when Scamander – Xanthos tried to drown him for filling its riverbed with the bodies of the Trojans (*Il.* 21.235-9). Identifying natural divinities with the culture that develops in its geographical area seems to have been a constant in the ancient world. The army that entered a foreign land had in mind that not only must it fight against their inhabitants, but also against the geographical space. After all, an invading army not only wanted to subject men, but the space they occupied too. Indeed, in a speech by Agricola himself, the adverse nature (rain, mountains, rivers or seas) was presented as another enemy, which he had fight to win, because the geography of Britain benefited the Roman's enemies and not the invaders⁶¹. Cleomenes of Sparta also felt the Erasinios protected Argos from his army when he did not obtain good omens to cross the river (*Hdt.* 6.76). Nature protected its

⁵⁶ *Hdt.* 1.205, Cyrus' crossing of the Araxes; 4.122, Darius' crossing of the Tanais; 7.24, Xerxes makes a canal in the Athos; 7.35; *Plut. Syll.* 27.8-28.1. Luculus cross the bridge on the Euphrates like a *hybris* act. Cf. *Verg. A.* 8. 728; *S. Italicus* 3.355ff; 12.695-7; *Plin. NH* 5.85. Probably Alexander's order to destroy the *katarraktai* of the river Tigris, was not motivated to improve the navigability, but because he considered an unnatural act to control the stream of the river (*Arr. An.* 7.7.7). About this topic are interesting the works of BRIANT 2008, 155-218.

⁵⁷ *Lucian, Charon* 11; *Prop.* 4.11.7-8; *AP.* 7.67.1-6.

⁵⁸ *A.R.* 1.10; *Hyg. fab.* 12;

⁵⁹ Cf. *Arist. HA* 519a; *Plin. NH* 31.13-14; *Hdt.* 3.23. The major change for a human being because of the water was the immortality, which was obtained after drinking of Fountain of Youth.

⁶⁰ *Il.* 23.140-51.

⁶¹ *Tac. Ag.* 33. 2; 3; 5. Cf. BORCA 1996, 337-340.

inhabitants, who not only had a better knowledge of the terrain, but also its protection. Therefore, to conquer a people meant to also conquer their space and geography, that they were subjected too. Thus, when the river facilitated movement, it could be seen as a sign of support to the conquerors. If it did not, as in the case of the crossing of the Tigris and Gureus (Arr. *An.* 4.25), it was seen as a resistance to the conquest as well as to the crossing. This is a possible interpretation of Cyrus the Younger crossing the river Thapsacus:

“The people of Thapsacus said that this river had never been passable (διαβατός) on foot except at this time, but only by boats; and these Abrocomas had now burned, as he marched on ahead of Cyrus, in order to prevent him from crossing. It seemed, accordingly, that here was a divine intervention, and that the river had plainly retired before Cyrus because he was destined to be king (Κύρω ὡς βασιλεύσοντι)”.
(X. *An.* 1.4.18, translated by BROWNSON 1968).

Nature also submitted to Alexander’s will, the story about mount Climax is evidence of submission to the foreign conqueror:

“Encouraged by this prophecy, Alexander hastened to clear up the seacoast as far as Cilicia and Phoenicia. His rapid passage along the coasts of Pamphylia has afforded many historians material for bombastic and terrifying description. They imply that by some great and heaven-sent good fortune (θεία τινὶ τύχῃ) the sea retired to make way for Alexander, although at other times it always came rolling in with violence from the main, and scarcely ever revealed to sight the small rocks which lie close up under the precipitous and riven sides of the mountain. And Menander, in one of his comedies, evidently refers jestingly to this marvel:
— How Alexander-like, indeed, this is; and if I seek someone, Spontaneous he'll present himself; and if I clearly must Pass through some place by sea, this will lie open to my steps. Alexander himself; however, made no such prodigy out of it in his letters, but says that he marched by way of the so-called Ladder, and passed through it, setting out from Phaselis”.
(Plut. *Alex.* 17.3-4, translated by PERRIN 1971).

Strabo (14.3.9) and Arrian (*An.* 1.26.1-2) describe the episode in a more rational way, but there is no doubt that the version which circulated in Alexander's time was that of Plutarch tells us, otherwise Menander would not have parodied it. The sea retreated from Alexander as if it was making a bow, just like the Thapsacus had done to Cyrus. The two texts have an unquestionable resemblance between them, and were definitely inspired by a passage from the *Iliad* (13. 27-31) in which the sea bowed to Poseidon recognizing his sovereignty over itself. The river that allowed transit was a river that gave to the Macedonian king its approval to conquer the lands, which were irrigated by its waters⁶².

In a word, the crossing of rivers was not a trivial matter for the Macedonians. During this crucial moment, the person in charge, the king, showed his charisma, legitimacy and the favor of gods. So what if he failed in his goal?

PERDICCAS CROSSING THE NILE

⁶² Cf. DESNIER 1995, 31: “Alexandre est donc bien vainqueur de l’eau et reconnu comme prétendant légitime”.

It is logical to assume that as the Macedonian army was separated, the general in chief was the person in charge to organize the crossing and to make the sacrifices. His authority was tested in every transit, but to a lesser degree, because he was a subject of his king. However, in Perdikkas's case he was an aspirant to the throne. He wore Alexander's ring (Curt. 10.5.4; cf. 10.6.4–5; Just. 12.15.12; Diod. 17.117.3; 18.2.4; Nepos. *Eum.* 2.1) and was married to his sister, Cleopatra (cf. Arr. *Succ.* 1.26). Besides, he was the lord protector of his son and wife (*LM* 112,118; Diod. 18.23.2). He was a king without a crown⁶³, and if Perdikkas had buried the body of Alexander in Vergina, he would have become a true king⁶⁴.

Although this ideological paraphernalia we have studied was exclusively associated to the Argeads, we should not underestimate the implications of his wedding to Cleopatra. The Argead dynasty worked like a royal clan throughout its history, so only its members possessed the sacral power and the charismatic authority⁶⁵. Perdikkas was, as regent, the person in charge of protecting the rights of the clan and through his wedding to Cleopatra, almost a full member of the royal family. It should be recalled, that this wedding was the detonator of the first war of the Diadochi (Just. 13.6.6; Diod. 18.23.3; Arr. *Succ.* 1.21).

From that point of view, Perdikkas was almost a king who was testing his legitimacy in every attempt at crossing the Nile. Although a puppet king existed, Philip III, all the Macedonian soldiers knew who was in charge of that expedition and who would be responsible for failing.

Some years ago Desnier drew our attention to a number of cases in which several kings or aspirants to the throne were destroyed after crossing a river⁶⁶. The river always acted like a judge, and only gave its favor to the most deserving of them. It was a river ordeal⁶⁷, in which one of them received the approval of the river and the other his rightful punishment⁶⁸. According to Greenwalt, in ancient Macedonia there was also a fire oracle⁶⁹, and as is well known, water and fire in antiquity were the main ordeal elements. Therefore, it is not impossible that the Macedonians considered the water in this way, because they also had ordeal by fire.

One of the cases studied by Desnier was the first king of Macedonia, Perdikkas I. Herodotus tells the story of Perdikkas, the youngest of three siblings who was blessed by the favor of the gods and persecuted by men of the king of Upper Macedonia. During the persecution a river overflowed, allowing Perdikkas and his brothers to arrive at safe territory where they would find their kingdom. Somehow the river supported the rights of Perdikkas over the region. In gratitude, Perdikkas and his descendants sacrificed annually to the river as their savior (σωτήρ):

⁶³ Curt. 10.7.8: “*Stirpe regia genitus*”.

⁶⁴ HECKEL 1992, 144: “With the Kings securely in his possession and the army favourably disposed towards him on account of his recent successes in Kappadokia and Pisidia, Perdikkas was prepared to take two final steps to the kingship: union with Kleopatra and the ceremonious return of Alexander's body to Makedonia. What army would oppose the man returning to Makedonia with the son of Philip II, the wife, son and sister—indeed, the very body—of Alexander himself?”.

⁶⁵ ANSON 2009, 278.

⁶⁶ DESNIER 1995.

⁶⁷ GLOTZ 1906; DETIENNE 1967, 35-58.

⁶⁸ Desnier identifies this support with the Xvarenah or “light of glory” a concept from the Zoroastrian religion.

⁶⁹ GREENWALT 1994, 7. Cf. Hdt. 7.111; Arist. *Mir.* 842a.

“When the king heard this, he was angered, and sent riders after them to slay them. There is, however, in that land a river, to which the descendants from Argos of these men offer sacrifice as their deliverer (σωτήρι). This river, when the sons of Temenus had crossed it, rose in such flood that the riders could not cross”. (Hdt. 8.138; translated by GODLEY 1969).

It is reasonable to ask: were these sacrifices related to the ritual of crossing? The name of the river that saved Perdiccas is unknown, although it is generally identified as the Haliacmon⁷⁰. We are inclined to think that the sacrifice involved the throwing of a horse into the river. This makes sense, given that Perdiccas escaped from his persecutors on horse-back. This animal was very much related to springs and it is well-known that Pegasus was the creator of the fountain Hippocrene (Anton. Lib. 9; Ov. *Met.* 5.256). Indeed its name recalls a spring (*pegai*).

If the mythology teaches that the sacred horses came from the sacred waters, to offer one of these animals to the current of Haliacmon could have been a good way of showing that the king was grateful to the river. Thus, one of the sacred white horses of Cyrus was drowned in the river Gyndus (Hdt. 1.189) and Xerxes sacrificed white horses to the river Strymon when he was in the region⁷¹. Arrian never mentioned the sacrifice of a horse by Alexander, but it can be found in a fragment of a papyrus:

“The Persians 60 myriads... Alexander, seeing the crisis at hand, was in agony and turned to prayers, invoking Thetis and Nereids and Nereus and Poseidon and ordered a four-horse chariot to be brought up and thrown into the sea. And he sacrificed too at night”. (POxy. 1798 = *FGrH* 148 F 44 Col II)⁷².

In addition, according to *Alexander's Romance* (2.15 recension alpha), Alexander escaped from Darius on horseback, crossing a frozen river, Stranga. Darius sent riders in order to catch him, but they could not follow him because the ice had melted due to sunlight, after Alexander had passed by. Again, the river protected in some way a horse rider, so we might wonder if the presence of a horse in these stories (Perdiccas I; Alexander) could be a *topos* related to the ritual, which does not reproduce a real event, namely, a flight by horse. In other words, the myth is based on the ritual.

The overflowing of the river in the Herodotus' story is the opposite phenomenon to those seen so far, that is to say, the decrease in strength of current or the lowering of the water level, but again emphasizes the deep connection between the water and the Macedonian kings and demonstrates that their offerings to the rivers could have demanded much more than *diabateria* from the Spartans kings. The tale of the three brothers may have had a propagandistic goal intended for the Greek *poleis*, and also unquestionably within Macedonia itself. The power came to Argeads from the same place that their mythical ancestors had received it before them⁷³.

Returning to the crossing of Perdiccas, son of Orontes, we can see the facts presented in different ways by the sources (Paus. 1.6.3; Arr. *Succ.* 1.28; Plut. *Eum.* 8.2–3; Just. 13.8.1–2), but Diodorus gives us the most detailed version:

⁷⁰ MALLIOS 2011, 73 (Haliacmon); HAMMOND 1972, 433–6; II 1979: 6–8, Beres (Tripotamos); ZAHRT 1984, 325–68 (Haliacmon). Cf. HATZOPOULOS 2003, 206–7.

⁷¹ Hdt. 7.113.

⁷² Cf. HAMMOND 1994, 20–21.

⁷³ Despite that fact, DESNIER 1995, 40 thinks all these ordeals comes from the Iranian tradition, he has to admit that “Auquel cas il faudrait estimer que, bien qu'en foui plus profondément que dans le monde indo-iranien, le mythe du descendant des eaux était également actif en Grèce du Nord”.

“But Perdiccas, seeing the difficulty caused by the current, in an effort to break the downward rush of the river, placed the elephants in line on the left, thus mitigating the strength of the current, and placed on the right side the horsemen, through whose agency he kept catching the men who were being carried away by the river and bringing them safe to the other side. A peculiar and surprising thing took place during the crossing of this army, namely, that after the first men had crossed in safety, those who tried to cross afterwards fell into great danger. For although there was no visible cause, the river became much deeper, and, their bodies being totally submerged, they would one and all become completely helpless. When they sought the cause of this rise, the truth could not be found by reasoning. Some said that somewhere upstream a canal that had been closed had been opened and, joining with the river, had made the ford deeper; others said that rain falling in the regions above had increased the volume of the Nile. It was, however, neither of these things, but what happened was that the first crossing of the ford had been free from danger because the sand at the crossing had been undisturbed, but in the course of the other crossings by the horses and elephants which had gone over before and then by the infantry, the sand, trodden by their feet and set in motion by the current, was carried down stream, and the place of crossing being hollowed out in this way, the ford became deeper in the middle of the river. Since the rest of his army was unable to cross the river for this reason, Perdiccas was in great difficulty; and, as those who had crossed were not strong enough to fight the enemy and those on the nearer bank were not able to go to the aid of their fellows, he ordered all to come back again. When all were thus forced to cross the stream, those who knew how to swim well and were strongest of body succeeded in swimming across the Nile with great distress, after throwing away a good deal of their equipment; but of the rest, because of their lack of skill some were swallowed by the river, and others were cast up on the shore toward the enemy, but most of them, carried along for some time, were devoured by the animals in the river”.

(Diod.18.35. Translated by GEER 1947).

Even though there is no mention of ritual, Perdiccas chose the method which should be used to ensure a safe crossing. Therefore, he was assuming his duties as regent and was responsible for the result. He tried to replicate Alexander’s strategy but using elephants instead of horses, in order to defeat the stream, however, as we know now, he failed and was blamed for every casualty. We could say that he did not live up to his own expectations.

Some conclusions can be drawn by comparing the passages of both Perdiccas:

— 1) In both, two men with the same name tried to cross a river. The successful one became king, the failed one died. The defeat of Perdiccas meant the victory of his rival Ptolemy, who became the true owner of Egypt and even was tempted to regency by the Macedonian army (Diod. 18.36.6), but he preferred to grant this honor to Peithon and Arrhidaeus. The river Nile had dethroned a king, but put another in his place.

— 2) The rivers overflowed in both cases to protect the man who was fated to become king. Diodorus gives different explanations and theories about the Nile floods (rains, sand, canals, etc.) but in any case, the consequence is the same: nature was protecting Ptolemy and withdrawing its favor of Perdiccas.

— 3) Curiously the river which saved Perdikkas was adored as the Saviour (*Soter*) and Ptolemy had this epiclesis in his royal name⁷⁴.

The story of Perdikkas and his brothers was well-known in Macedonia, so it was almost impossible for a common soldier to think about it and not conclude that his leader was not blessed by the gods and was the cause of death of countless Macedonians. To make matters worse, Alexander's story about the Mount Climax was equally celebrated by every Macedonian veteran. As in Kipling's *The man who would be king*, Perdikkas must have been to his soldiers just another Daniel Dravot, an imposter hiding behind Alexander's fame.

In short, all that has been said so far does not mean that the disaster was not an important reason to explain the fall of the heir of Alexander the Great. We think that the beliefs and the myths of ancient Macedonians were also significant to understand a fact that in our modern minds could be incomprehensible. Power and wealth were important elements to set the basis of legitimacy of new Hellenistic kings, but this basis was built on the pillars of Macedonian myths.

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⁷⁴ According to Pausanias (1.8.6) the name Soter was given to Ptolemy by the Rhodians. However, in other versions the epiclesis Soter is related to saving Alexander in India (Curt. 9.5.21; Arr. *An.* 6.11.3; Paus. 1.6.2); cf. HAZZARD 1992, 52-6, notes that "inscriptions from the island of Rhodes did not employ the epiklesis" (55).

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