



GRANICUS

GRANICUS, river (mod. Kocabaş Çay) flowing into the Sea of Marmara. The Granicus was the site of the first battle between Alexander the Great and a Persian army. In late May 334 B.C.E. Alexander was moving east towards the river from the Troad, when he heard that the Persian commanders in Anatolia had concentrated their forces at Zelea (Sari Köy) and were intending to defend the river crossing. He reached the river late in the afternoon and found the Persian cavalry arrayed on the low heights (3-4 m) east of the river, with the infantry behind them. Alexander had a relatively small invasion force with him (Diodorus 17.17); the size of the Persian army, routinely exaggerated by Greek sources, cannot be recovered, but was probably about equal to his. Parmenio is said to have advised waiting until morning before attacking (this may be hostile invention), but Alexander decided to attack at once, since the enemy would have to face the sinking sun. The sources variously exaggerate the difficulty of the crossing. The river was probably only up to a meter deep and on both sides steep banks alternated with flat patches of gravel up to 200 meters wide. We cannot reconstruct the battle in detail, but Alexander seems to have sent an advance force across to entice the Persians to the river bank; it was roughly handled, but gave him the opportunity of crossing with the main force and finding the Persians immobilized. The main battle raged around Alexander; the Persian commanders seem to have aimed at killing him and he was barely saved by his bodyguard. Most of the Persian nobles lost their own lives and Arsites, satrap of Dascylion (qq.v.), who was responsible for fighting at this point and no doubt for the battle plan, committed suicide. The Greek mercenaries (the only useful Persian infantry in Asia Minor) were mostly



captured and sent as slaves to the Macedonian mines. Except for one or two fortified cities, there could be no further Persian resistance in Anatolia. Alexander sent suitably inscribed spoils to Pella and Athens.

See also [darius iii](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.13-16. Diodorus Siculus 17.18-21 (confused and useless). Plutarch "Alexander," in idem, *Lives* (rhetorical). The ultimate source is probably Callisthenes, whose aim was to glorify Alexander. See also: A. B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander I*, Oxford, 1980. C. Foss and E. Badian, "The Battle of the Granicus: A New Look," in *Ancient Macedonia II*, Thessaloniki, 1977, pp. 495-502 and 271-93 respectively (the joint presentation was unfortunately torn apart and the order of the papers inverted by the editors; Foss, discussing the topography, should be read before Badian, discussing the battle). J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch: Alexandre, A Commentary*, Oxford, 1969. The basic modern study is by two German officers, Oberst A. Janke, *Auf Alexanders des Grossen Pfaden*, Berlin, 1904, pp. 128-149, with photographs 19-20 by Oberlutenant W. von Marées, who visited the area precisely in late May; PLATE 19 shows a horse in mid-river, with the water below its knees and no trace of mud.