



PARMENIO

PARMENIO, son of Philotas, of high nobility, probably from mountainous Upper Macedonia (b. ca. 400 BCE, d. 330 BCE). He became Philip II's most successful general (Philip jocularly called him his "only" general: Plutarch, *Moralia* 177c) as well as his most trusted adviser. A friend of Attalus, also of high nobility, who married his daughter, he was probably involved in Philip's marriage to Attalus's young niece and ward, Cleopatra, in 338/7, which led to a split between Philip and his wife Olympias and son Alexander, and ultimately to Philip's assassination late in 336 and Alexander's succession. In the spring of that year, Philip had sent Parmenio and Attalus to Asia Minor to gain a foothold for the major invasion and attack on Persian lands that he was planning for 335. Parmenio conquered most of the Greek cities on the coast, but after Philip's death, [Memnon](#) led a considerable Persian recovery. With his brother and two sons, a son-in-law, and other adherents no doubt appointed by him, in the military hierarchy, Parmenio was too firmly entrenched for Alexander to remove him, in spite of their enmity under Philip. Parmenio decided to throw his support behind Alexander, trusting in his ability to retain his power. At Alexander's behest, he saw to the murder of his son-in-law, Attalus, and served Alexander loyally and successfully in the great battles of the [Granicus](#), Issus, and [Gaugamela](#), commanding the left half of the battle line, with the elite Thessalian cavalry directly under him. At Issus, he decisively contributed to the completion of the victory (Curtius, 3.11.13-16); at Gaugamela, he had to withstand enemy while Alexander advanced on the right wing until he lost touch and a message from Parmenio asked him to turn back, as Parmenio successfully warded off a major attack by Persian cavalry



under Mazaeus, commander of the Persian right wing. This event was later turned into a tale of his weakness or disloyalty, and was blamed for Alexander's failure to capture Darius (Curtius, 4.16; Plutarch, *Alexander* 32-33)—a tale disproved by the fact that, after entering Susa, Alexander rewarded his services by giving him the palace of the minister [Bagoas](#) (Plut. *Alex.* 39.10).

During the march, he was put in charge of important operations; he played a major part in the conquest of Asia Minor, and after Issus he was sent to take over and guard the royal treasure left at Damascus, and the royal household and noble women and children, including the widow and daughters of Artaxerxes Ochus (see [ARTAXERXES III](#)) and the families of [Mentor](#) and Memnon, captured there. (See esp. Curt., 3.13, rhetorically embellished.) Athenaeus (13.607f-608a) claims to quote part of an inventory of royal luxury slaves that Parmenio sent to Alexander. He pacified Coele Syria and organized its administration, then joined Alexander at the sieges of Tyre and Gaza and, according to Josephus's account, heavily embroidered and perhaps totally fictitious, before Jerusalem (*Antiquities* 11.332).

Parmenio presumably stayed with Alexander until he was instructed to take the major part of the army to Persepolis along the traditional carriage-way, while Alexander made a dash for the city through the mountains and the Persian Gates (Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.18.1; Curt., 5.3.16). With Craterus, he was left at Persepolis while Alexander completed the conquest of Persis with a small contingent (Curt., 5.6.11).

When Alexander left Persepolis (early 330), Parmenio was entrusted with the daunting task of seeing to the transport of the treasure captured at Persepolis (Arr., 3.19.7, not naming him), reportedly valued at 120,000 talents of silver (Diodorus, 17.71.1; Curt., 56.9-10, adding 6,000 talents from Pasargadae) over the mountain road to Ecbatana, on a vast number of pack animals and camels (ibid.; Diodorus lists 3,000 camels), no doubt with an appropriate security detail. This major logistical feat was accomplished by him so smoothly that no further details are noted about it in the sources. The treasures were handed over to Harpalus, who was assigned 6,000 Macedonians (temporarily, according to Arrian) to guard them, while Parmenio was ordered to take a small light force to Hyrcania (Arr., 3.19.7), no doubt in support of Alexander's invasion of that area (Arr., 3.23). He soon returned to Ecbatana, where he apparently still had 6,000 Macedonians and some other forces under him as well as four senior officers (cf. Arr., 6.27.3 and Curt., 10.1.2 for 325 BCE). This



suggests a considerable army and responsibilities well beyond the protection of the treasure. In fact, he seems to have had some authority over Susa and Persis, where he is found intervening (Berve, p. 304, omitting Agathon, attested among his officers), as well as Media.

This major post was, however, not a front-line assignment. Alexander had, usefully, rid himself of the (by now) irksome presence of the senior commander inherited from his father; a final reckoning soon followed. In 330, Parmenio's younger surviving son died in an accident and his elder brother Philotas, commander of the elite *hetairoi* (the Companion Cavalry), stayed behind for the funeral. On his return to camp, he was at once charged with involvement in an attempt to assassinate Alexander, was arrested in a coup d'état (Curt., 6.8.15-22), presented to the army for trial, and condemned to death at Alexander's insistence (Arr., 3.26; Curt., 6.8.23-6.11.40, turning it into a showpiece of rhetorical historiography). Various other sources also report this major upheaval, expressing various opinions on Philotas's guilt, from Arrian (following Ptolemy), who asserts manifest guilt (3.26.2), to Plutarch, who reports total innocence (*Alex.* 49: "a plot against Philotas").

Having rid himself of Philotas, Alexander decided to deal with Parmenio. An officer was sent to Ecbatana with a small escort, all on racing camels, carrying an order to the senior among Parmenio's subordinates, Cleander (who was a brother of his son-in-law), to kill him. The order was obeyed without question—just as, after Philip's death, Parmenio himself had obeyed a similar order.

After Parmenio's assassination, stories hostile to him began to circulate. (We have noted one, above, about the battle of Gaugamela.) It was said that he had on various occasions given Alexander bad, often timid, advice, which the king had ignored (e.g., Arr., 1.13.3 ff., before Granicus; 2.25.2, reaction to an offer from Darius; 3.10.1, before Gaugamela). We even find an allegation that he had engaged in a conspiracy against Alexander (Curt., 6.11.21-29: a confession by Philotas under torture, cf. 6.9.14 ff.). These stories, at least some of them apparently spread by Callisthenes, the 'official' historian of the campaign (see Plut. *Alex.* 33.10, with Hamilton's note), do not deserve any more credit than the demonstrable distortion of his action at Gaugamela. The story of Parmenio offers a striking illustration of Alexander's political methods.

Sources. The main sources are Arrian's *Anabasis*; Diodorus's *Library of History*, Books 16 and 17; what survives of Curtius's account of Alexander's campaign;



and Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*. Diodorus can be used in C.B Welles' annotated Loeb edition, Arrian in the Loeb edition by P. A. Brunt, outstanding for historical commentary. For the relevant part of Curtius, see J. E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4*, Amsterdam, 1980, and the general discussion of Curtius by E. Baynham, *Alexander the Great. The Unique History of Quintus Curtius*, Ann Arbor, 1998. For Plutarch see the commentary by J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch, Alexander*, 2nd ed. by P. A. Stadter, Oxford, 1999.

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See, above all, the entries on Parmenio in H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage*, Munich, 1926, II, pp. 298-306, and W. Heckel, *The Marshals of Alexander's Empire*, London and New York, 1992, pp. 13-23.

See also E. Badian, "The Death of Parmenio," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 91, 1960, pp. 324-38, as supplemented in idem, "Plutarch's Unconfessed Skill," in *Laurea Internationalis: Festschrift für Jochen Bleicken zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Theodora Hantos, Stuttgart, 2003, pp. 41-44.