

and private and spoke at length about the good fortune that would come to the soldiers. He assured that they would be taken care of in the future, and should anything happen to them, their families at home. However, he failed in his attempt to persuade the troops to move into Bengal. He had simultaneously started to build about 800 boats to enable him and the army to sail, after the Bengal campaign, down the Jhelum River in the Punjab. Then through the Indus down to Sind and the Indian Ocean, he would be on his way back to Macedonia via Persia and Mesopotamia. He did not reach home but died in Babylon on June 11 in the year 323 BC.

About three hundred years after his death, Quintus Curtius Rufus, the Roman historian wrote "The History of Alexander" in Latin. It is a detailed account, mostly in the form of a dialogue between the King and his followers and enemies. It contains a vivid account of Alexander's life and adventures. This article is based on an English translation of Curtius's book by John Yardley, Guy MacLean Rogers' "Alexander", J.R. Hamilton's book, "Alexander the Great" and Paul Cartledge's book of the same name.

Determined to cross the Beas River, Alexander collected pertinent information before marching east. He was informed that beyond that river, lay a twelve-day journey through barren land. Then they would reach the Ganges, the largest river in India. On the bank of the Ganges, there lived two tribes, the Gangaridae and the Prasii. Their ruler was Aggrammes, who was waiting with a force of 20,000 cavalry and 200,000 infantry. Behind this, he had 2000 chariots and 3000 elephants. Alexander also learnt that the ruler was a common man from the lowest class. His father, who was a barber, was extremely good looking. With the help of the queen, he treacherously murdered the king and then his children to assume the throne. His treachery had earned the hatred of the people.

Alexander had only contempt for the enemy and the elephants, though the terrain and the violence of the rivers concerned him. However, convinced that he was invincible, Alexander was determined to proceed. He had said earlier that 'it is a lovely thing to live with courage, and die leaving an everlasting fame.' He called his men to an assembly and addressed them. He told them not to believe the rumours and false reports of the enemy's natural advantages and army strength. He said, 'We have withstood elephants and crossed the Jhelum River. Why if stories could have defeated us we would have fled Asia long ago!' Alexander, who was tutored by Aristotle, informed the troops that the broader the river,

the gentler its flow. He added, 'it is when the rivers are compressed between narrow banks that the waters they carry become torrents: a broad channel, conversely, slows the current.' As to the elephants, Alexander told the troops that they were a greater risk to their masters than to the enemy. In the earlier battle with Porus, it was noticed that when a few elephants received injuries by axes and scythes, they all turned to flight and charged their own men more violently than they did the enemy. 'Unless cowardice stands in our way, we shall return home in triumph, after bringing the ends of the earth into subjugation.'

The men listened in silence, hanging their heads. They did not respond to the King's exhortations. Alexander then said that if he is abandoned, he alone will press on with his journey and find a way to gain victory 'of which you despair, or else death with honour.' The soldiers started to groan, and soon tears started flowing. Coenus, one of the generals came forward to speak to the king, with men urging him to plead that owing to exhaustion from wounds and the relentless hardship of the campaign, they were unable to fulfill their responsibilities. Coenus said to the king, 'whatever mortals were capable of, we have achieved. You are preparing to enter another world and seek an India even the Indians do not know. That is a programme appropriate to your spirit, but beyond ours.' Coenus made a memorable point: it was a noble thing to exercise self-restraint when all was going well. He suggested that Alexander should proceed quickly to the sea by going south, which was not so vast, instead of striving for glory by a circuitous route. Applause greeted his speech. None rallied to Alexander's call to world conquest. Alexander was convinced that his officers, like the men, had no stomach for further campaigns. Frustrated by all this,

Alexander jumped down from the dais. He went to the royal quarters, ordering it to be closed to all but his personal attendants. He remained there in seclusion in an angry mood. Alexander emerged on the third day, giving up his plans for going to Bengal. He ordered the erection of twelve altars of stone to commemorate his expedition. He founded two cities, naming one of them Bucephala in memory of his horse, which he had lost in battle. Meanwhile, the ships he had ordered were ready for the journey. With his boyhood friend Nearchus, whom he appointed the Admiral of the fleet, he then sailed down the Indus, forgoing the Ganges and what lay beyond it. Bengal remained unconquered by Alexander.

*'We have withstood elephants and crossed the Jhelum River. Why if stories could have defeated us we would have fled Asia long ago!'*

--Alexander the Great