

GRECO-MACEDONIAN RULE IN TURAN: AN ANALYSIS OF ARAB  
HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ulugbek Olimov

researcher, Institute of History  
Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan

**Abstract:** the late 4th to the mid-3rd centuries BCE, the region of Turan underwent significant political and cultural transformations following its incorporation into the dominion of Alexander the Great and, subsequently, the Seleucid Empire. Alexander's eastern campaigns, initially launched to dismantle the Achaemenid state, had a profound impact on Central Asia. This historical period and the figure of Alexander have garnered considerable attention in Arab historiography. While Arab scholars often discuss the theological debate surrounding the identification of Alexander with Dhul-Qarnayn in the Qur'an, this article focuses on the historical narrative. Based on primary Arab historiographical sources, this study examines the impact of Alexander's conquests on Turan, specifically analyzing the participation of Turanian warriors in the Battle of Gaugamela, administrative governance in the conquered territories, and the political implications of Alexander's marriage to Roxana. The article provides a scholarly interpretation of the military, political, and cultural shifts that defined Turan during the Macedonian period, highlighting the unique perspective offered by Arab historians.

**Keywords:** Macedonia, Iskandar, Alexander the Great, Turan, Hellenistic period, Issus, Granicus, Gaugamela, Roxana.

### Introduction

From the late 4th century to the mid-3rd century BCE, the territory of Turan underwent profound political and cultural transformations. This era of change was initiated by the Greco-Macedonian conquests under Alexander the Great and was further consolidated under the rule of the Seleucid Empire. Alexander's eastern campaigns, originally launched with the strategic objective of dismantling the Achaemenid state, extended deep into Central Asia, directly impacting the lands of Turan. These events left an indelible mark on world history and fundamentally reshaped the political landscape of the region.

In Arab historiography, the figure of Alexander and the period of Greco-Macedonian domination occupy a significant place, mirroring the attention given to them in global scholarship. Arab researchers have critically examined not only Alexander's military acumen but also his personality, administrative governance, and his role in driving socio-economic and cultural developments in the conquered territories. Given this thematic depth, it is methodologically essential to analyze the Arab historiographical perspective through specific dimensions. Consequently, this article focuses on three key areas: the military dynamics of Alexander's campaigns in Turan, his administrative practices, and the broader socio-political processes that defined this epoch.

**Historiographical Perspectives on Alexander's Identity.** In Arab scholarship, the nomenclature regarding Alexander of Macedon varies, reflecting distinct historical and cultural interpretations. In academic literature, he is variously referred to as Al-Iskandar al-Akbar (الإسكندر الأكبر – Alexander the Great), Iskandar al-Maqduni (الإسكندر المقدوني – Alexander of Macedon), and Iskandar III al-Maqduni (الإسكندر الثالث المقدوني – Alexander III of Macedon). The

primary source base for Arab research on this period comprises both original Islamic chronicles and Arabic translations of ancient Greco-Roman texts.

The personality of Alexander (Iskandar) remains one of the most multifaceted subjects in Arab historiography. Central to this scholarly discourse is the long-standing debate regarding his potential connection to Dhul-Qarnayn, a figure mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. However, the prevailing consensus among modern Arab researchers is to clearly distinguish between these two figures, positing that equating them lacks historical validity.

This distinction is grounded in source criticism. Scholars emphasize that knowledge about Alexander is derived principally from Greco-Roman historical accounts, which characterize him as a formidable secular conqueror. In contrast, Dhul-Qarnayn appears exclusively in religious texts — the Qur'an and its exegeses (tafsir) — where he is depicted not merely as a ruler, but as a symbol of divine justice and monotheistic guidance. Consequently, conflating a historical monarch with a figure of religious symbolism is methodologically problematic.

Nevertheless, research in the Arab world is not limited to this issue. For example, Mansur Abdulhakim, while noting that Alexander and Dhul-Qarnayn are two different individuals, puts forward the interesting hypothesis that Alexander may have been inspired by the legends of Dhul-Qarnayn and consciously imitated him to leverage his reputation [(Abd al-Hakīm, 1980, p. 305)]. On the other hand, some scholars, like the Tunisian researcher Tahir Fiqa, focus on Alexander's personal virtues, portraying him positively as a pious, resolute, and just commander. The Iraqi scholar Kazim Abbas Amir examines the literary aspect of the subject, analyzing the character of Iskandar in Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh" and proving that he is not an exact replica of the historical Alexander but rather an independent, deified literary hero created within the Persian literary tradition [Abbās, 2017, pp. 298–321].

In summary, modern Arab historiography adopts a multidimensional approach to Alexander the Great. He is simultaneously studied as a verified historical figure, a subject of theological debate regarding Dhul-Qarnayn, and a legendary archetype in Eastern literature. This nuanced research serves to disentangle his historical reality from mythologized interpretations, thereby enriching the global scholarly understanding of the Hellenistic era.

#### **Military Dynamics: The Role of Turanian Contingents at Gaugamela**

The Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE) represents a decisive watershed in military history, marking the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire and the beginning of Alexander's expansion into Central Asia. In Arab historiography, this confrontation is analyzed not merely as a clash of empires but as a complex theater of diverse ethnic warfare. The Egyptian historian Ra'uf Musa, in his monograph *Alexander the Great*, provides a detailed examination of the ethnic composition of the Persian army, with a specific focus on the participation of warriors from Turan.

Musa emphasizes the polyethnic character of the Achaemenid forces, highlighting the critical role played by levies recruited from the northeastern satrapies — specifically Sogdiana, Bactria, and the Saka regions. According to his analysis, these Turanian contingents constituted a vital component of the empire's military potential, serving primarily as elite cavalry units deployed to counter the Macedonian flexibility [Mūsā, n.d., pp. 75–82].

The researcher R. Musa pays special attention to the military prowess of the Turanian cavalymen within the Persian army. Citing sources, he notes that the Saka and Sogdian mounted archers were the swiftest and most mobile part of the Persian army. At the Battle of Gaugamela, they were tasked with striking the flanks of the Macedonian army and weakening the enemy's lines. It should be noted that the initial attacks of the Turanian cavalry offered serious resistance to the Macedonian phalanx. However, their efforts did not yield sufficient results against the well-organized defensive system and combat tactics of the Macedonian infantry.

Furthermore, Musa analyzes the correlation between the morale of the Turanian troops and the battle's outcome. He argues that while the Turanian cavalry fought tenaciously during the initial engagement, the collapse of the Persian center—triggered by the flight of Darius III – forced a general retreat. The soldiers, having lost their commander-in-chief, saw no rationale to continue the defense of a falling dynasty [Mūsā, n.d., p. 82].

An important aspect of Ra'uf Musa's research is that he highly appraises the military skill of the Turanian soldiers at the Battle of Gaugamela. He primarily attributes their defeat to the strategic and tactical errors of the Persian ruler, Darius III. The researcher emphasizes that Darius III's indecisiveness, his shortcomings in commanding the army, and his flawed tactical decisions had a decisive impact on the final outcome of the battle. The personal bravery and military skill of the Turanian warriors did not yield sufficient effect against the backdrop of overall strategic mistakes.

Ra'uf Musa's work, “Alexander the Great”, is considered an important source for studying the history of the Battle of Gaugamela, particularly in assessing the role of the Turanian warriors. The researcher provides a deep analysis of the ethnic diversity of the Persian army, the military prowess of the Turanian cavalry, and the reasons for the defeat in battle. The findings of this research provide valuable information not only for the military-political history of the Battle of Gaugamela but also for studying the history of military art and ethnic relations in the ancient world.

Another author, Jabir Khalil, also provides information about the Battle of Gaugamela and the participation of Turanian soldiers in his study titled “Alexander of Macedon and the Road to Gaugamela” [Khalil, 2022, p. 25]. In contrast to Ra'uf Musa, Jabir Khalil does not give as much significance to the role of the Turanian soldiers at Gaugamela in his research. He does not cover in detail such matters as the exact number of Turanians, their position in the battle, or the courage they displayed. The main focus of Khalil's research is on the general course of the military-political confrontation between the Achaemenids and the Greco-Macedonians. The researcher focuses on analyzing the course of the battle, the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing sides, as well as the tactics employed by both. Thus, in Khalil's work, the Battle of Gaugamela is examined in a broader context, as an important stage in Alexander's process of conquering the Persian Empire.

A comparative analysis of the research by Ra'uf Musa and Jabir Khalil reveals both commonalities and significant differences in their approaches to studying the Battle of Gaugamela. As a commonality, both authors acknowledge the polyethnic composition of the Persian army and the presence of soldiers from the territories of Turan within its ranks. Both researchers, based on historical sources, confirm that Sakas, Sogdians, and Bactrians participated on the Persian side. However, the differences in methodological approach are evident. Ra'uf Musa, as noted above, focuses on the role and importance of the Turanian soldiers, giving high praise to their art of war and fortitude, even though they were defeated in the end. He seeks to define the contribution of the Turanian soldiers to the course of the battle and to emphasize their importance despite the tactical errors of the Persian command.

Jabir Khalil, in contrast, offers a broader picture of the battle, viewing it as the result of a combination of military-political, strategic, and tactical factors. His work places emphasis on the generalship of Alexander of Macedon, the organizational structure and command of the Macedonian army, as well as the strategic errors and tactical dynamics of the Persian command, including the mistakes of Darius III. Issues related to the ethnic composition of the Persian army, including the participation of Turanian soldiers, occupy a secondary position in Khalil's research. Their participation is noted more as a fact and does not become a subject for deep analysis.

In Jabir Khalil's research, matters such as the specific numbers of Turanian soldiers at the Battle of Gaugamela, their role in the battle, and their displayed courage are not covered in detail. The author's main attention is directed at the course of the military conflict between the Achaemenids and the Greco-Macedonians, the strengths and weaknesses of the sides, and the tactics they employed. Additionally, the study analyzes issues like Alexander's military skill and the organization and command of his army.

The dissertation by the Iraqi historian Hasan Hamza Jawad, a specialist in the history of the Greco-Macedonian and Seleucid periods, titled "The Emergence and Establishment of the Seleucid State" [Jawād, 2008, p. 390], is an important scholarly work aimed at a deep analysis of the political and military history of the Seleucid Empire, one of the key states of that era. In this dissertation, the author provides a detailed account of the military campaigns of Alexander of Macedon and the expansionist policies of his successors—the rulers of the Seleucid dynasty—from a military-historical perspective. A central place in the research is occupied by the analysis of the military campaigns of Alexander and the Seleucid rulers, the battle tactics they employed, army types, and weaponry. Relying on ancient sources and modern historiography, the dissertation scientifically demonstrates the unique characteristics of these military strategies and tactics, as well as their impact on the political and military power of the Seleucid state. Special attention in the research is given to the history of the Turan region.

In the dissertation, the strategic importance of the Turan region, its place within the Seleucid Empire, and the participation of the local population in military conflicts are evaluated from a high scholarly perspective. The author comprehensively analyzes how important Turan's geographical location, natural resources, and the military potential of its population were for the Seleucids. Furthermore, issues such as the major battles that occurred in this territory, the methods of the local population's resistance against the conquerors, and the place of this struggle in the history of the Seleucid Empire are also addressed in the dissertation. The dissertation of Hasan Hamza Jawad is considered an important source for studying the military history of the Seleucid state, including the history of the Turan region.

In this work, in addition to the aforementioned Battle of Gaugamela, information is also provided about the battles of Granicus and Issus. The author, discussing the Battle of Gaugamela, specifically notes that even when Darius III accepted his defeat and retreated, a group of soldiers gathered from the eastern part of the empire continued their resistance, and their high military skill is particularly emphasized [Jawād, 2008, p. 23]. The fighting spirit, determination, cavalry expertise, archery skills, and steppe warfare experience of the Turanian soldiers were a key factor in the might of the Achaemenid army. Research confirms that the people of the Turan region held a distinct and solid position within the Achaemenid army. Soldiers from the eastern satrapies constituted a large portion of the imperial forces, and their military power was of great importance to the empire. Thus, although the Battle of Gaugamela led to the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, the fact that soldiers from the eastern part of the empire, particularly from the Turan region, attempted to continue their resistance even after the defeat demonstrates their military potential and their significant role in the Achaemenid army. This confirms that the region of Turan and its population played an important role in the history of the Achaemenid Empire, not only geographically but also in military-political terms.

In the section of Jabir Khalil's work on Alexander's eastward campaign, he expresses his views on the military operations conducted directly in the territory of Turan – in Bactria and Samarkand—and on the Spitamenes rebellion. The work describes Alexander's founding of a fortress in Bactria near Khujand and his brutal suppression of the people of Samarkand who revolted against him, as well as the Spitamenes rebellion. Alexander was wounded in the leg

while suppressing the rebellion led by Spitamenes, and enraged by this, he executed men, women, and even children. The rest were enslaved. His atrocities committed in the territory of Turan are strongly condemned by the author [Khalil, 2022, p. 25].

**Administration.** Samir Imam Abu Sharif's work, "Alexander the Great of Macedon" [Abū Sharaf, 2016, p. 228], not only illuminates the life and activities of Alexander of Macedon but also reveals the historical situation of the Turan region during his campaigns. The section of the work related to Turan can be analyzed holistically by focusing on the following aspects:

- Turan's Geopolitical Position and Significance – He emphasizes that Alexander's war against the Persian Empire was of decisive importance for the Turan region. As a result of this campaign, the territories of Turan were incorporated into Alexander's empire, and the influence of Hellenistic culture in the region intensified. The author also reveals Turan's geopolitical position at that time, showing that its wealth and strategic importance attracted Alexander to this region.

- The Resistance of the Peoples of Turan – It is noted that the populations of Sogdiana and Bactria showed great resistance against Alexander, which indicates the high level of the region's social structure and military power. This fact demonstrates that the peoples of Turan fought for their freedom and reveals the significance of their resistance movement against Alexander's empire in the region's history.

- Alexander's Policy and its Consequences – In the author's opinion, after conquering Turan, Alexander attempted to establish a Greek-style political system. This caused resistance from the local peoples and later led to various political struggles and uprisings in the region. This situation shows the negative consequences of Alexander's policy of conquest in the Turan region. The work also mentions the city of Samarkand, highlighting its importance at the time and events related to Alexander's activities in the city, particularly the conflict with and murder of Cleitus. This event is shown as an important factor that led to the escalation of the political situation in the region. The work states that the influence of Greek culture in the region intensified as a result of Turan's territories being incorporated into Alexander's empire. This serves as an important source for studying the mutual influence of Turanian and Greek cultures, as well as how this situation affected the region's subsequent historical development.

The administration in the conquered territories of Turan was also changed, and a system of viceroyalty was established. Macedonians or Persian nobles loyal to Alexander were appointed to these positions. Border regions were established in conquered cities, and the satraps of the territory were also subordinate to their heads. Information about this is also provided in national sources. For instance, the following system of governance was established in Bactria and Sogdiana: large territories were subordinate to satraps who held administrative and civil power, as well as command over a military contingent partially formed from the local population. At the same time, in the event of a great danger, all military formations were placed under the command of commanders who were Alexander's closest companions [Rtveladze & Alimova, 2021, p. 144]. According to the research of Hasan Hamza Jawad, after conquering the territories of the Achaemenid Empire, including the Turan region, Alexander of Macedon pursued a pragmatic and balanced policy in organizing governance. Typically, the person who had been the governor in a conquered city during the Achaemenid period was left in his position. However, Alexander of Macedon took control of two strategic areas – military command and financial control—by appointing Macedonian representatives [Jawād, 2008, p. 26]. This method of governance reflects the complex process of establishing and strengthening Macedonian rule in the conquered territory of Turan.

Based on the information presented in the work, the following conclusions can be drawn from this governance method employed by Alexander. By leaving the existing authorities, particularly the governors appointed by the Achaemenids, in their posts, Alexander sought to ensure the continuity of governance. This was a pragmatic approach aimed at maintaining socio-political stability in the newly conquered territories, reducing the discontent of the local population, and minimizing administrative costs. Retaining local governors provided the opportunity to use existing administrative structures, legislation, and tax systems.

Despite leaving local governors in their positions, Alexander took control of two strategically important spheres – military and financial administration. The appointment of Macedonian representatives to military command positions created the opportunity to station Macedonian troops, ensure defense and security, and suppress potential future uprisings. The establishment of financial control, in turn, guaranteed tax collection, replenishing the state treasury, and covering military expenses.

Alexander of Macedon's subjugation of the Turan territories is characterized not only by military victories but also by strategic political decisions. One of these decisions was his marriage to Roxana, the daughter of a Bactrian ruler, in 327 BCE. Although detailed research on this marriage is rare in Arab historiography, existing Greco-Roman sources emphasize that this union was connected to political objectives. In particular, the prominent Arab scholar Hasan Hamza Jawad emphasizes in his research that Alexander of Macedon's marriage to Roxana was for a political purpose [Jawād, 2008, p. 28]. In this context, 3 main reasons for this marriage can be cited:

1. Securing Bactria: As Bactria was an important and resistant eastern satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire, it was crucial for Alexander to maintain peace and prevent rebellions there. To this end, Alexander married Roxana, the daughter of a Bactrian nobleman, attempting to strengthen relations with the local population and ensure Bactria's loyalty. This marriage served to increase legitimacy for the Bactrian people and nobility by linking Macedonian rule with the local power structure.
2. Strengthening the Political Alliance and Improving Inter-dynastic Relations: Roxana's father was one of the Bactrian nobles who had most fiercely resisted Achaemenid rule. By marrying Roxana, whose father was a Bactrian ruler, Alexander sought to secure not only the loyalty of the Bactrian elite but also the acceptance of Macedonian rule by local governors throughout the Turan region in general. This marriage was intended to establish and strengthen inter-dynastic relations with local ruling dynasties and to enhance integration within the empire in the future.
3. Preparation for the Indian Campaign and Securing the Rear Front: While Alexander was preparing for his Indian campaign, creating a reliable and stable political situation in the Turan region was of critical importance. It was necessary to protect the rear front, guarantee logistical supply, and eliminate potential threats before a long-lasting military campaign. The marriage to Roxana reduced the need for Alexander to return to Bactria and Turan, allowing him to establish reliable governance in the region and save time. This political strategy was vital for directing resources toward the Indian campaign and successfully carrying out military operations.

At the same time, this marriage also served to enhance cultural exchange and integration between the Greco-Macedonians and the local population. This policy of Alexander's created a foundation for the long-term stability and development of the empire. Although this marriage was short-lived, its political and strategic importance was immense.

**Conclusion.** Arab historiography provides a multifaceted view of Alexander's impact on Turan, covering not only his military achievements but also his complex persona, administrative policies, and their profound consequences for the region's political and cultural landscape.



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