

4. Barsine, Daughter of Artabazus

Barsine was by birth a minor princess of the Achaemenid Empire of the Persians, for her father, Artabazus, was the son of a Great King's daughter.¹⁹⁷ It is known that his father was Pharnabazus, who had married Apame, the daughter of Artaxerxes II, some time between 392 - 387BC.¹⁹⁸ Artabazus was a senior Persian Satrap and courtier and was latterly renowned for his loyalty first to Darius, then to Alexander. Perhaps this was the outcome of a bad experience of the consequences of disloyalty earlier in his long career. In 358BC Artaxerxes III Ochus had upon his accession ordered the western Satraps to disband their mercenary armies, but this edict had eventually edged Artabazus into an unsuccessful revolt. He spent some years in exile at Philip's court during Alexander's childhood, starting in about 352BC and extending until around 349BC,¹⁹⁹ at which time he became reconciled with the Great King. It is likely that his daughter Barsine and the rest of his immediate family accompanied him in his exile, so it is feasible that Barsine knew Alexander when they were both still children. Plutarch relates that she had received a "Greek upbringing", though in point of fact this education could just as well have been delivered in Artabazus' Satrapy of Hellespontine Phrygia, where the population was predominantly ethnically Greek.

As a young girl, Barsine appears to have married Mentor,²⁰⁰ a Greek mercenary general from Rhodes. Artabazus had previously married the sister of this Rhodian, so Barsine *may* have been Mentor's niece. The marriage cemented a grand alliance between the two families. They were also allied in a political sense, since it seems that Memnon, the brother of Mentor, commanded Artabazus' mercenary troops during his abortive rebellion and accompanied Artabazus in his exile. Following Mentor's premature death, probably in 338BC, Memnon took over Barsine as his wife, perhaps partly to perpetuate the alliance, but surely also in tribute to Barsine's reputed loveliness. The princess's familiarity with the language and culture of the Greeks probably also contributed to the conviviality of these liaisons with men who had by then become leaders of the Great King's Greek mercenary contingents.

In the first half of 333BC Memnon was at the forefront of the Persian Empire's doomed resistance to the precocious onslaught of Alexander the Great. The Rhodian condottiere was appointed to the command of a fleet of 300 warships and an army of 60,000 men. He enjoyed some success in reducing the islands

¹⁹⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander* 21.4.

¹⁹⁸ P A Brunt, *Alexander, Barsine and Heracles* in *Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica* 103 (1975) 22-34; rejecting Curtius 6.5.1-6, which makes the unlikely claim that Artabazus was 94 in 330BC.

¹⁹⁹ Diodorus 16.52.3; Curtius 5.9.1.

²⁰⁰ Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.4.6.

and the Ionian coastline. However, soon after he sat down to besiege Mytilene in April or May, he fell seriously ill and perished some time around June. Thus Barsine found herself widowed for a second time, whilst still probably in her early twenties. Diodorus says (17.23.5) she had already been sent to her father for safety and as a guarantee of Memnon's loyalty. Her father accompanied Darius as he mustered a massive army to meet the Macedonian invasion with what he doubtless hoped might prove an overwhelming force. However, when the Macedonian and Persian forces clashed at Issus in November of 333BC, Darius was utterly vanquished and fled the field in disarray.

Artabazus and most of the Persian aristocracy escaped back to the heartlands of their empire together with their king, but their women and much of the Persian baggage train were overtaken by the Macedonian pursuit. Curtius²⁰¹ observes that the "wife and son of the renowned general Memnon were taken" at Damascus together with numerous other Persian ladies, whilst Justin²⁰² records that it was through admiring the magnificence of the captured baggage train of Darius, that Alexander "first began to indulge in luxurious and splendid banquets, and fell in love with his captive Barsine for her beauty, by whom he had afterwards a son that he called Hercules [i.e. Heracles]."

As we shall see, the name of Heracles is cited for the son of Alexander and Barsine in numerous passages from the ancient sources. Alexander's family traced its descent from the Heracles and the hero is featured wearing the skin of the Nemean lion on the obverses of Alexander's silver drachm and tetradrachm coins, so his name is a highly credible and apt choice for a son of the king.

The fullest account of Barsine's capture is given by Plutarch:-

But Alexander, as it would seem, considering the mastery of himself a more kingly thing than the conquest of his enemies, never came near the [captured Persian] women, nor did he associate with any other before marriage, with the sole exception of Barsine. This woman, the widow of Memnon, the Greek mercenary commander, was captured at Damascus. She had received a Greek upbringing/education, was of a gentle disposition, and could claim royal descent, since her father was Artabazus, who had married one of the Persian king's daughters. These qualities made Alexander the more willing – at the instigation of Parmenion, so Aristobulus tells us – to form an attachment to a woman of such beauty and noble lineage.

Plutarch, Life of Alexander, 21.4

The most interesting details here are the attribution of the story of Alexander's liaison with Barsine to Aristobulus and the matchmaking role played by Parmenion. Aristobulus is generally considered to be amongst the most reliable of the first-hand, eyewitness accounts of Alexander's expedition. Consequently, Arrian chose him as one of his two principal sources for his austerely correct

²⁰¹ Curtius 3.13.14; Arrian, Anabasis 2.11.9-10 confirms that Persian noblewomen were found at Damascus.

²⁰² Justin 11.10.

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history of Alexander's campaigns. His word therefore imputes some authenticity to this affair.

Parmenion's involvement is equally intriguing at this juncture. A theme is developed elsewhere in the ancient sources, wherein Alexander continually ignores or overrides the advice of Parmenion, who plays the role of an overcautious elder statesman as a kind of foil to Alexander's passion for the pursuit of glory. However, here we have an instance of avuncular encouragement, which seems to have proved congenial to the young king. It is perhaps reassuring to find the history for once reflecting the influence that Parmenion must indeed have wielded at this stage of events, uncontaminated by the shadow of Parmenion's subsequent assassination, which still lay several years into the future.

Nothing specific is heard of Barsine again until the final year of Alexander's reign. However, Hieronymus (cited by Diodorus) makes Heracles about 17 years of age in 310BC,²⁰³ which would date his conception to 328BC or 327BC, around five years after Issus. At Alexander's death, Heracles and Barsine are said to be living in Pergamon by Justin. Diodorus provides partial corroboration of this by stating that the boy was reared in Pergamon. This city lay in Artabazus' old Satrapy, where the family probably still held estates, so this detail is likely to be authentic.

If Barsine was with Alexander until 328BC, but was living in Pergamon in 323BC, the question arises of the date of her departure from court. We cannot say for certain, but two other events, which might well be connected with the termination of Barsine's relationship with Alexander, also occur in Bactria around 327BC. Firstly, this was the time of Alexander's first marriage to Roxane and secondly "Alexander relieved Artabazus of the satrapy of Bactria at his own request on account of old age."²⁰⁴ Especially if Heracles had just been conceived, there would have been a potentiality for conflict between the influential families of Roxane and Barsine. The "retirement" of Artabazus might thus have provided an excellent pretext for defusing the situation by having Barsine accompany her father when he returned to his estates at the opposite end of the empire.

In the summer of 324BC Alexander organised spectacular nuptials for himself and his senior officers and courtiers at Susa. In a majestic gesture of reconciliation and integration, their partners were chosen from among the daughters of former Persian kings and aristocrats. Daughters of Artabazus and Barsine were prominent among these brides according to Plutarch and Arrian:-

...besides his other honours, Eumenes had been deemed worthy by [Alexander] of relationship in marriage. For Barsine the daughter of Artabazus (Alexander's first mistress in Asia, and

²⁰³ Justin 15.2 makes Heracles "nearly 14" in 310/309BC, but this is about the correct age for Alexander IV, so there may be some confusion on the part of Justin (or Trogus).

²⁰⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis* 4.17.3.

See also www.alexanderslovers.com

by whom he had a son, Heracles) had two sisters; of these Alexander gave one, Apame, to Ptolemy, and the other, also called Barsine, to Eumenes. This was at the time when he distributed the other Persian women as consorts among his Companions.

Plutarch, *Life of Eumenes*, 1.3

[Alexander] also held weddings at Susa for himself and for the Companions... to Ptolemy the Bodyguard and Eumenes the royal secretary, the daughters of Artabazus, Artacama and Artonis respectively; to Nearchus the daughter of Barsine and Mentor.

Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.4.4&6

Ostensibly, these two accounts seem to be at odds with one another in the matter of the names of the women. Certainly, it is probable on this ground alone that they derive from different sources. Plutarch introduces this passage from the *Life of Eumenes* by citing Duris as his source. The account of Arrian is likely to have been abstracted from Ptolemy's history (possibly augmented by Aristobulus), so it may be argued that it really ought to be accurate, since Ptolemy was himself one of the bridegrooms. However, Plutarch's version also presents some hints of authenticity. Elsewhere, it is indicated that Artabazus' mother's name was Apame, so it is fitting that one of his daughters should have borne the same appellation, considering the almost universal tendency for names to persist in families. Furthermore, Plutarch's specific points that Eumenes became connected to Alexander through his marriage to a daughter of Artabazus and that Ptolemy married another are repeated in Arrian's account. Although the names of these brides differ between the two accounts, this need not be significant, since Arrian refers to the daughter of Darius, whom Alexander married, as another Barsine, whereas she is called Stateira elsewhere. It appears that aristocratic and royal Persian ladies may have borne more than one name or else (as Tarn suggests²⁰⁵) they may have changed their name upon marriage. It is even possible that some of these supposed names are actually Persian titles. There are also cases of duplicate names among royal Greek women in this period, the best-known case being Cleopatra/Eurydice, the wife of Philip II, who seems to have taken the name (or title?) of Philip's mother upon entering wedlock. Some of the kings are also known to have assumed new names on their accession: for example, Ochus became the third Artaxerxes.²⁰⁶

Excepting the equivocal discrepancies in the names, the accounts of the Susa weddings are consistent with one another, but derive from different primary sources. It follows that they are very likely to be authentic. Arrian's source was Ptolemy or Aristobulus, whereas Plutarch was using Duris of Samos, who was a contemporary observer whose lifespan roughly covered the period 340-260BC.²⁰⁷ It is therefore clear that Barsine, her father Artabazus and their entire

²⁰⁵ W W Tarn, *Heracles Son of Barsine*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1921, p.21 note 9.

²⁰⁶ Diodorus 15.93.1.

²⁰⁷ Robert B Kebric, *In the Shadow of Macedon: Duris of Samos*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1977.

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clan remained high in Alexander's favour in 324BC, for Ptolemy, Eumenes and Nearchus were among his closest lieutenants, deserving of high status brides.

A year later on the evening of 10th June 323BC Alexander died in the Palace of Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon. Appian summarises the situation:-

[Alexander] died leaving one very young son [i.e. Heracles] and another yet unborn [i.e. Alexander IV], and the Macedonians, who were loyal to the family of Philip, chose Arrhidaeus, the brother of Alexander, as king during the minority of Alexander's sons (for they even guarded the pregnant wife [i.e. Roxane]), although he was considered to be hardly of sound mind, and they changed his name from Arrhidaeus to Philip.

Appian, The Syrian Wars 52²⁰⁸

Curtius provides a dramatic account of the debate on the succession, which occurred the day after Alexander was declared dead. In particular, he records a misjudged attempt by Nearchus to advocate the selection of Heracles as the new king:-

Nearchus then said that, while nobody could express surprise that only Alexander's blood-line was truly appropriate for the dignity of the throne, to await a king yet unborn and pass over one already living suited neither the inclinations of the Macedonians nor their critical situation. The King already had a son by Barsine, he said, and he should be given the crown. Nobody liked Nearchus' suggestion. They repeatedly signalled their opposition in traditional fashion by beating their shields with their spears and, as Nearchus pressed his idea with greater insistence, they came close to rioting.

Curtius 10.6.10-12

According to Arrian's account of the Susa marriages, Nearchus had become Heracles' brother-in-law, so it must have been clear to the assembly that Nearchus had a vested interest in supporting Heracles' succession to the throne. There seems also to have been considerable antipathy among the army to the idea of handing the Empire over to a boy who was both half-Persian and illegitimate. Being so young, Heracles could probably have been controlled by his Persian relatives. The Macedonians would hardly have tolerated any arrangement, which appeared to hand their hard won empire back to their vanquished foes.

Illegitimacy among the Macedonians probably lacked the stigma that it later acquired in Christian societies. However, on a purely practical level, illegitimate sons had normally been excluded from the succession. Hence Alexander's indignation when Attalus volubly prayed for a *legitimate* heir at the party celebrating Philip's marriage to Cleopatra, implying that Alexander was a bastard. The preference for legitimate heirs was probably motivated by a desire to maintain the stability of the regime. Rumour made Philip II the father of

²⁰⁸ See also Appian, The Syrian Wars 54, where he states that "the two sons of Alexander" were dead before Antigonus and Demetrius proclaimed themselves kings (306BC); Justin 12.15 also mentions Heracles' existence at the point of Alexander's death.

numerous illegitimate sons, including, for example, Ptolemy. If they had all competed for the throne, mayhem would have resulted. Upon Alexander's death, there was a severe shortage of legitimate heirs, but the troops still remained reluctant to consider a bastard. Old habits die hard.

Nearchus' remarks imply that it was common knowledge, at least among the officers, that Alexander was survived by a son by Barsine at the point of his death. If Heracles was an impostor, as Tarn has sought to argue, then Nearchus' interjection has to have been a fiction. In the first place, we can exclude the possibility that it was Curtius' fiction by observing that Justin (and therefore his source Trogus) also recorded that Heracles' case was pressed at this Assembly:-

Meleager argued that their proceedings should not be suspended for the result of an uncertain birth; nor ought they to wait till kings were born when they might choose from such as were already born; for if they wished for a boy, there was at Pergamon a son of Alexander by Barsine, named Hercules; or, if they would rather have a man, there was then in the camp Arrhidaeus, a brother of Alexander...

Justin 13.2

If it were possible to show that the sources used by Curtius and Trogus were independent of one another, then it would be virtually certain that Heracles really was Alexander's son. Their versions are indeed dissimilar in that Nearchus mentions Heracles in Curtius and Meleager in Justin. However, the possibility cannot be completely excluded that Curtius and Trogus used a common source or at least that their versions originated in a common source. Nevertheless, general considerations make it difficult to see how or why such an original source could have lied about this very public event. The murder of Heracles in 310/309BC would have removed the motive to lie about him later on, whereas before that date there would have been many soldiers and officers still living who had attended the Assembly after Alexander's death and could easily have denounced any attempt to lie about what was said there. In fact no surviving ancient source disputes the fact that Alexander was Heracles' father, despite the fact that Cassander and others would have had strong motives to do so had it been feasible. It should be clear therefore, that it would be a tortuous trail to pursue the argument that Heracles was not genuinely presented as a candidate for the throne immediately after Alexander's death, and that it would therefore be equally difficult to argue that he was an impostor.

Having been rejected decisively by the Assembly at Babylon, Heracles presumably remained in obscurity at Pergamon with his mother for the time being. However, Strabo²⁰⁹ speaks of the "children of Alexander" accompanying Perdiccas in his fateful invasion of Egypt in 321BC. This can only mean both Alexander IV, the son of Roxane, *and* Heracles, the son of Barsine, for no other child is recorded. If this is true, then Perdiccas had presumably summoned Heracles from Pergamon during his Anatolian campaigns in 322BC. This would

²⁰⁹ Strabo, Geography 17.1.8; Nepos, Eumenes 6, Olympias mentions Alexander's *children*.

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indicate that the Regent felt that the boy was potentially a significant pawn in the manoeuvring that was to prove the prelude to outright civil war. His purpose must have been to ensure that Heracles did not fall into the hands of his enemies.

Subsequently, perhaps after the second distribution of the satrapies at Triparadeisos late in 321BC, Heracles must have returned to Pergamon, for that is where he was still living a decade later, when dramatic events conspired to bring him once more to centre stage in the drama of the succession.

Most probably in the summer of 310BC Cassander commanded that the young king, Alexander IV, and his mother Roxane should be poisoned. Judging by their reactions, news of this atrocity would seem to have reached Cassander's enemies, Antigonus in Asia Minor and Polyperchon in the Peloponnese, within months. As Alexander's sole surviving son, it was now possible that Heracles might be prevailed upon to make a viable bid for the throne. Presumably with Antigonus' backing, for Pergamon lay within his sphere of influence, Polyperchon acted swiftly to play Heracles as his new political pawn. The most complete account comes from Diodorus, who in turn had probably sourced his material from the contemporaneous history of Hieronymus of Cardia, a protégé of Eumenes²¹⁰:-

Meanwhile Polyperchon, who was biding his time in the Peloponnese, and who was nursing grievances against Cassander and had long craved the leadership of the Macedonians, summoned from Pergamon Barsine's son Heracles, who was the son of Alexander but was being reared in Pergamon, being about seventeen years of age. Moreover, Polyperchon, sending to his own friends in many places and to those who were at odds with Cassander, kept urging them to restore the youth to his ancestral throne. He also wrote to the governing body of the Aetolians, begging them to grant a safe conduct and to join forces with him and promising to repay the favour many times over if they would aid in placing the youth on his ancestral throne. Since the affair proceeded as he wished, the Aetolians being in hearty agreement and many others hurrying to aid in the restoration of the king, in all there were assembled more than 20,000 infantry and at least one thousand horsemen. Meanwhile Polyperchon, intent on the preparations for the war, was gathering money; and sending to those of the Macedonians who were friendly, he kept urging them to join in the undertaking.

Diodorus 20.20

Aetolia lies adjacent to the Peloponnese on the northern side of the Corinthian Gulf, so it controlled Polyperchon's land route to Epirus, yet a little further to the north. The Aetolians were allies of Antigonus in this period and had been friendly to Polyperchon in the past. Olympias, Alexander's mother, was a princess of Epirus and in 318BC Polyperchon had awarded her the guardianship of Roxane and Alexander IV. She had marched on Macedonia and killed Philip-Arrhidaeus and his young queen Adea-Eurydice, who had declared

²¹⁰ Arrian, Indica 18.7 makes Eumenes the son of an Hieronymus, so the historian might well have been a son or nephew of the Secretary.

for Cassander. In Epirus, therefore, Polyperchon, acting as the sponsor of Heracles, could be relatively confident of finding enthusiastic support and a strong base from which to launch a new assault upon Macedonia, which lay immediately to its northeast. Diodorus' account shows that the plan to place Heracles upon his father's throne was proving highly popular in Greece, such that Heracles' bandwagon had begun to roll in a seemingly inexorable fashion. Cassander must have been seriously alarmed, especially recalling the setback, which had been inflicted on him by Olympias in similar circumstances eight years beforehand. Diodorus takes up the story again a few pages later:-

Meanwhile Polyperchon, who had collected a strong army, brought back to his father's kingdom Heracles, the son of Alexander and Barsine; but when he was encamped at the place called Stymphaea, Cassander arrived with his army. As the camps were not far distant from each other and the Macedonians regarded the restoration of the king without disfavour, Cassander, since he feared lest the Macedonians, being by nature prone to change sides easily, should sometime desert to Heracles, sent an embassy to Polyperchon. As for the king, Cassander tried to show Polyperchon that if the restoration should take place he would do what was ordered by others; but, he said, if Polyperchon joined with him and slew the stripling, he would at once recover what had formerly been granted him throughout Macedonia, and then, after receiving an army, he would be appointed general in the Peloponnesus and would be partner in everything in Cassander's realm, being honoured above all. Finally he won Polyperchon over by many great promises, made a secret compact with him, and induced him to murder the king. When Polyperchon had slain the youth and was openly co-operating with Cassander, he recovered the grants in Macedonia and also, according to the agreement, received four thousand Macedonian foot-soldiers and five hundred Thessalian horse.

Diodorus 20.28.1-3

It may seem that Cassander turned Polyperchon against Heracles with curious ease. However, it should be remembered that Heracles was an unacknowledged bastard son, so his claim to the throne was relatively weak in Macedonian law. Polyperchon and his faction must have been concerned at the legal weakness of his candidacy, so it is not so surprising that they betrayed Heracles as soon as Cassander tabled a reasonably attractive alternative offer. Yet the cynicism and brutality that imbued their dealings is nonetheless shocking and repugnant.

Stymphaea is a region on the border between Epirus and Macedonia, which is also known as Tymphaea. Polyperchon had commanded the battalion from Stymphaea at the battle of Gaugamela,²¹¹ so this must have been especially friendly territory for him. Indeed it was probably his ancestral homeland. Specifically, the poet Lycophron mentions in his *Alexandra* that the betrayal and murder of Heracles took place at the Tymphaean town of Trampya (see Figure 4.1):-

*When dead, as seer the Eurytanean folk
Shall honour him, and those who have as home*

²¹¹ Diodorus 17.57.2.

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*High Trampya, where the Tymphaean snake,
The Aethic leader, shall while feasting slay
One Heracles, the seed of Aeacus
And Perseus, close kin to Temenus.*

Lycophron, Alexandra 799-804

In this passage Cassandra is foretelling the fate of Odysseus, but as an aside Lycophron makes her prophesy the murder of Heracles. Lycophron probably wrote the Alexandra in Alexandria under Philadelphus, not too long after 283BC, but the feasible range of dates stretches over a half-century range commencing at the close of the 4th century BC.²¹² The “snake” is Polyperchon, whilst Aethicia is a small region just south of Tymphaea, which may have been Polyperchon’s own birthplace. Aeacus was the grandfather of Achilles, from whom Alexander the Great claimed descent on his mother’s side. On his father’s side, Alexander was a Temenid; that is a descendant of Temenus, a great-grandson of the Heracles of the twelve labours, who was in turn a great-grandson of Perseus. Lycophron’s allusion to an event of his own lifetime is therefore quite unambiguous. In the matter of the feasting he corroborates Plutarch’s moving account of Heracles’ last supper, at which Polyperchon deceived and betrayed his youthful lord with Judas-like wickedness:-

Polyperchon agreed with Cassander for a hundred talents to do away with Heracles, Alexander’s son by Barsine, and proceeded to invite him to dinner. When the youth, suspecting and dreading the invitation, alleged an indisposition, Polyperchon called on him and said: “Young man, the first quality of your father you should imitate is his readiness to oblige and attachment to his friends, unless indeed you fear me as a plotter.” The youth was shamed into attending; and they gave him his dinner and strangled him.

Plutarch, Moralia, On Compliancy 530D

Justin augments our information with the detail that Barsine was killed at the same time as her son. In a typical gloss on the truth, he attributes the murders to secret orders of Cassander, which also specified a clandestine funeral:-

Afterwards, lest Heracles, the son of Alexander, who had nearly completed his fourteenth year, should be recalled to the throne of Macedonia through the influence of his father’s name, he sent secret orders that he should be put to death, together with his mother Barsine, and that their bodies should be privately buried in the earth lest the murder should be betrayed by a regular funeral [with a pyre].

Justin 15.2

Polyperchon very probably murdered Heracles in 309BC. Apart from the fact that this is broadly consistent with the chronology of Diodorus, we have the completely independent testimony of the Parian Marble on this point:-

From the time when Alexander [Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great] died and also another son Heracles from the daughter of Artabazus, and Agathocles crossed over to

²¹² See George W Mooney, The Alexandra of Lycophron, London, 1921, pp. xi-xii.

Carthage... , 46 years [before the inscription of the chronology in 264/3BC, i.e. 310/9BC] and Hieromnemon was archon at Athens.

Parian Marble FGrH 239B

These words were sculpted within living memory of the events and other entries on the Parian Marble are known to be accurate. It follows that Justin is probably in error concerning Heracles' age, for it would make him virtually an exact contemporary of Alexander IV, dating his birth to 323BC, yet Nearchus already knew that Heracles was living in Pergamon on the 11th June 323BC. Furthermore, Justin contradicts Diodorus, who was probably citing the highly authoritative history of Hieronymus on this point. The most reasonable conclusion is that this is another of Justin's numerous inaccuracies, perhaps arising from confusion of Alexander IV with Heracles, since both were murdered at Cassander's instigation within a year or so of one another. This is probably why Justin mentions their murders in the wrong order. In fact, Justin seems to have perpetrated an identical confusion previously at 14.6.2, where he states that Olympias retreated into Pydna with Roxane *and her grandson Heracles*.

Plutarch reveals in his Life of Alexander that he obtained much of his information about Barsine and Heracles from Aristobulus, but he cites Duris as his source, when he mentions them in his Life of Eumenes. Diodorus is believed mainly to have relied upon the account of Hieronymus of Cardia in his 19th and 20th books, whereas Aristobulus probably did not cover this period after Alexander's death. Lycophron was probably relying on contemporary news reports of Heracles' fate, whereas Trogus (Justin) "kept clear of the Macedonian writers such as Ptolemy, Aristobulus and Marsyas" and mainly relied upon Cleitarchus for Alexander's reign according to N. G. L. Hammond.²¹³ The Parian Marble is likely to have been based on official records. It would therefore seem that the ancient accounts of Barsine and Heracles derive from at least five or six primary sources, at least several of which were independent of all of the others. None of these sources seems to have expressed any doubt as to the validity of Heracles' claim to be Alexander's son. As Brunt has amply demonstrated, Tarn's objections to Heracles' authenticity range from the flimsy to the vacuous. It would be correct rather to assert that the evidence overwhelmingly favours the view that Alexander was indeed Heracles' father.

Regarding Tarn's theory²¹⁴ that the Heracles of 309BC was an impostor, his only significant observation is to point out a number of references in Diodorus, which appear to ignore Heracles' existence. In particular, he states that Alexander was "childless" at his death,²¹⁵ that "he left no sons as successors to the kingdom"²¹⁶ and that Cassander believed there would be no successor to the

²¹³ NGL Hammond, *Three Historians of Alexander the Great*, CUP 1983, p. 114.

²¹⁴ W W Tarn, *Heracles Son of Barsine*, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1921.

²¹⁵ Diodorus 18.2.1.

²¹⁶ Diodorus 18.9.1.

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kingdom if he killed Alexander IV.²¹⁷ However, it is also Diodorus who tells the story of Heracles' bid for the throne in the ensuing book of his history. Evidently, this author did not recognise his earlier statements as denials of Heracles' existence. It is obvious why not: it is implicit in his previous terminology that there had been no *legitimate* child or successor, which was quite true. Diodorus (or his source - Hieronymus?) probably let the matter of legitimacy remain implicit, so as dramatically to unveil the unpleasant surprise for Cassander, when a bastard son of Alexander suddenly claimed his father's kingdom following Cassander's murder of his legitimate younger half-brother.

Tarn also seems to have overlooked the allusion to Heracles' existence in Strabo in the context of 321BC, where he says that more than one child of Alexander accompanied the Grand Army in Egypt. Even diehard Tarn enthusiasts may find this a little difficult to accommodate within the hypothesis that Heracles was invented a decade later. Dio Chrysostom (Discourse 64.23) also mentions that "Heracles was Alexander's son, yet did not become a king".

Pausanias has provided an epilogue on the murders of Alexander's relatives, which shows that Cassander, the orchestrator of these horrors, was himself doomed to suffer an agonising end:-

My own view is that in rebuilding Thebes Cassander was mainly influenced by hatred of Alexander. He destroyed the whole house of Alexander to the bitter end. Olympias he threw to the exasperated Macedonians to be stoned to death; and the sons of Alexander, Heracles by Barsine, and Alexander by Roxane, whom he killed by poison. But he himself was not to come to a good end. He was filled with dropsy, and from the dropsy came worms while he yet lived.

Pausanias 9.7.2

Poetic justice perhaps, but a little delayed, since Cassander survived until 297BC.

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The tragic history of Barsine and her son Heracles poses some intriguing questions, which merit some further deliberation.

Why did Alexander fail to marry Barsine, when he subsequently insisted upon marrying Roxane? In the first place, Barsine had already been married twice to Alexander's enemies and had children from those previous marriages. An heir would have been the younger half-brother of those children, which would have been a potentially uncomfortable situation, especially vis-à-vis the succession. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, what indications we have (excepting the unreliable Justin) suggest that the relationship with Barsine was more a matter of convenience for Alexander than an affair of the heart. The king will have been under some political pressure to beget an heir, especially in view of a conspicuous lack of any sexual liaisons with women prior to the battle of Issus.

²¹⁷ Diodorus 19.52.4 & 19.105.3.

This was not at all a question of morality, but a matter of political stability and state security. If a king should die without an heir, there was a very real threat of a chaotic and bloody power struggle over the succession, which would have been in the interests of few. Furthermore, a king with no apparent heir was arguably more exposed to assassination attempts, since the rebels might believe that their objectives were more easily achievable with a lesser risk of retribution. In fact, we have the direct testimony of Aristobulus, a reputable primary source, that Alexander took Barsine as his first mistress at Parmenion's instigation, which confirms both the existence of the pressure and the dispassionate nature of the decision. This is underlined by indications that Alexander packed Barsine off to Pergamon without compunction, when he found a princess whom he actually wished to make his bride. In fact, the particular choice of Barsine was probably due to her knowledge of Greek and of Greek culture and sensibilities, her reputed beauty and possibly also because Alexander had known her in childhood. Amorous feelings were subordinate to pragmatic considerations.

Why did Alexander's affair with Barsine seemingly result in only one child, when it extended over a period of at least 6 years? We cannot be certain that there were no other miscarried pregnancies or that another child did not become a victim of the high rate of infant mortality. We are told that Philip II fathered many sons, but most of them seem to have been killed in infancy by disease or in warfare whilst they were still youths.²¹⁸ However, there is no mention of another child in any source, so the more straightforward explanation would be that Alexander did not sleep with his mistress very frequently. This observation tends to reinforce the view that the relationship was more a business partnership than a love-match.

Why did Polyperchon betray Heracles when the enterprise of his bid for the throne seemed to be going so well?²¹⁹ The true answer to this question remains something of a mystery. Ostensibly, Polyperchon gave up a chance to dominate all Greece in order to become merely Cassander's henchman in the Peloponnese. But he was old, probably over 70, and he may have had little appetite for a risky fight. He undoubtedly had nearly as much reason to be suspicious of Antigonos, the probable ultimate backer of the enterprise, as of Cassander, for he had been the friend and the enemy of both in the recent past.²²⁰ He may also have been nervous of Heracles' family, since they were mainly Persians. However, these factors do not in themselves provide a convincing justification for an act of perfidy that would forever damn his name. There was probably something going on, of which we know nothing. Did Cassander have some hold over Polyperchon? Perhaps he held hostage some of the latter's family or friends or threatened the destruction of Polyperchon's home region. Alternatively, it could be that Cassander presented some

²¹⁸ Justin 9.8.

²¹⁹ See also NGL Hammond, *History of Macedonia*, III, 100 & 165.

²²⁰ See Waldemar Heckel, *The Marshals of Alexander's Empire*, London 1992, pp.188-204.

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intelligence of a plot by Antigonos and/or Heracles to betray Polyperchon once the struggle was won. Whether true or invented, this would have played naggingly on the fears of a suspicious old man, especially if Heracles was proving a less pliable puppet than had been hoped.

Whatever the ulterior reason, Heracles certainly perished for it, and any realistic hope for a restitution of the Temenid dynasty as kings of the entire empire died with him.

See also www.alexanderslovers.com and www.alexanderstomb.com



Figure 4.1. Locations of Tymphaea, Aethicia and Trampya