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Philip of Macedon

THE story of Alexander the Great is inexorably bound up with that of his father, King Philip II, and with his country, Macedonia. Philip was a most remarkable and dominating figure in his own right; while Macedonia, as has recently been observed,¹ 'was the first large territorial state with an effectively centralized political, military and administrative structure to come into being on the continent of Europe'. Unless we understand this, and them, Alexander's career must remain for us no more than the progress of a comet, flaring in unparalleled majesty across the sky: a marvel, but incomprehensible. Genius Alexander had, and in full measure; yet even genius remains to a surprising extent the product of its environment. What Alexander was, Philip and Macedonia in great part made him, and it is with them that we must begin.

On an early September day in the year 356 B.C.² a courier rode out of Pella, Macedonia's new royal capital, bearing dispatches for the king. He headed south-east, across the plain, past Lake Yanitza (known then as Borboros, or Mud, a godsend for superior Greek punsters: *borboros-barbaros*, uncouth primitivism in a nutshell), with Ossa and Olympus gleaming white on the far horizon, as Xerxes had seen them when he camped by Homer's 'wide-flowing Axius' at the head of his invading host. The courier's destination was Potidaea, a city of the Chalcidic peninsula, where the Macedonian army now lay; and he did not waste any time on his journey. Philip, son of Amyntas, since 359 B.C. ruler over a dubiously united Macedonia,³ was not a man who took kindly to delay or inefficiency in his servants. At present, however, having recently forced the surrender of Potidaea –

for over a century a bone of contention between various Greek powers, Athens included, and a most valuable addition to his steadily expanding domains – he was liable to be in a benevolent mood, and very probably drunk as well.

If the courier had not known Philip by sight, he might have been hard put to it to pick him out from among his fellow-nobles and staff officers. The king wore the same purple cloak and broad-brimmed hat that formed the regular attire of a Macedonian aristocrat. He affected no royal insignia of any sort, was addressed by his name, without honorifics, and indeed never described himself as ‘king’ on any official document.⁴ Here, as so often in Macedonia, Mycenaean parallels apply:⁵ Philip was an overlord among equals, the *wanax* maintaining a precarious authority over his turbulent barons. Perhaps he felt, too, that his position, especially in the faction-torn feudal court of Pella, was better not too closely defined. Rivals for the throne had spread a rumour that he and his two brothers – both kings before him, both violently killed – were impostors;⁶ accusations of bastardy formed a stock weapon in the Macedonian power-game.

Philip was now twenty-seven years old: a strong, sensual, heavily bearded man much addicted to drink, women, and (when the fancy took him) boys. Normally of a jovial disposition, he had even more reason for cheerfulness after studying the dispatches which the courier brought him. His most reliable general, Parmenio, had won a decisive victory over a combined force of Illyrians and Paeonians – powerful tribes on the Macedonian marches, occupying districts roughly equivalent to modern Albania and Serbia. In the Olympic Games, which had just ended, his entry for the horse-race had carried off first prize. Best of all, on about 20 July⁷ his wife Myrtale – better known to us by her adopted name of Olympias – had given birth to a son: his name (two previous Argead monarchs had already borne it) was Alexander.

After he had finished reading, Philip is said to have

begged Fortune to do him some small disservice, to offset such overwhelming favours.⁸ Perhaps he recalled the cautionary tale of Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, who received a letter from the Egyptian Pharaoh Amasis expressing anxiety at his excessive good fortune. ‘I have never yet heard of a man,’ Amasis declared, ‘who after an unbroken run of luck was not finally brought to complete ruin.’ He advised Polycrates to throw away the object he valued most; Polycrates tossed an emerald ring into the sea, but got it back a week later in the belly of a fish.⁹ Amasis promptly broke off their alliance, and Polycrates ended up impaled by a Persian satrap. It is, therefore, curious – though by no means out of character – that of the three events listed in that memorable dispatch, the only one we know Philip to have publicly commemorated is his victory at Olympia. The Macedonian royal mint put out a new issue of silver coins: their obverse displayed the head of Zeus, their reverse a large and spirited horse, whose diminutive naked jockey was shown crowned with the wreath of victory and waving a palm-branch.¹⁰

What was it that gave these three particular events such extreme, almost symbolic significance for him? To understand the king’s reaction it is necessary to look back for a moment, at the chequered history and archaic customs of Macedonia before his accession.

First – and perhaps most important of all – the country was divided, both geographically and ethnically, into two quite distinct regions: lowlands and highlands.¹¹ The case of Scotland provides close and illuminating parallels. Lower Macedonia comprised the flat, fertile plain round the Thermaic Gulf. This plain is watered by two great rivers, the Axios (Vardár) and the Haliacmon (Vistritza), and ringed by hills on all sides except towards the east, where the first natural frontier is provided by a third river, the Strymon (Struma). Lower Macedonia was the old central kingdom, founded by semi-legendary cattle barons who

knew good pasturage when they saw it, and ruled over by the royal dynasty of the Argeads, to which Philip himself belonged. About 700 B.C. this noble clan had migrated eastward from Orestis in the Pindus mountains, looking for arable land. They first occupied Pieria, the coastal plain running northward from Mt Olympus, and afterwards extended their conquests to include the alluvial plain of Bottiaea – Homer's Emathia – lying west of the Thermaic Gulf. During this process of expansion they also captured the picturesque fortress town of Edessa, on the north-west frontier. The district was so rich in orchards and vineyards that people called it the 'Gardens of Midas'. Edessa also had considerable strategic value, lying as it did above the pass which carried the trans-Balkan trunk road – later the Roman Via Egnatia – through to Illyria and the West.¹² Near Edessa the Argeads established their first capital, Aegae. Even after the seat of government was transferred to Pella, down in the plain, Aegae remained the sacred burial-ground of the Macedonian kings, and all important royal ceremonies were conducted there.¹³

Upper Macedonia and Paeonia formed a single geographical unit: a high horseshoe of upland plateaux and grazing-land, encircling the plain from south to north-east, and itself backed – except, again, towards the Strymon – by mountain ranges. Passes across these mountains are few, the best-known being the Vale of Tempe by Mt Olympus, and that followed by the Via Egnatia. Thus Macedonia as a whole tended to remain in isolation from the rest of the Balkan peninsula; like Sparta, it preserved institutions (such as kingship and baronial feudalism) which had lapsed elsewhere. The highlands lay mostly to the west and south-west of the central plain, and were divided into three originally autonomous kingdoms: Elimiotis in the south, Orestis and Lyncestis to the west and north-west, the latter by Lake Lychnitis. The northern frontier of Lyncestis marched with Paeonia, and all three cantons shared frontiers with Illyria and Epirus. Indeed, in many ways their inhabitants were

more akin to Illyrians or Paeonians or Thracians than they were to their own lowland cousins. The men of Lower Macedonia worshipped Greek gods; the royal family claimed descent from Heracles. But the highlanders were much addicted to Thracian deities, Sabazius, the Clodones and Mimallones, whose wild orgiastic cult-practices closely resembled those portrayed by Euripides in the *Bacchae*. They were, indeed, partly of Illyrian stock, and they intermarried with Thracians or Epirots rather more often than they did with Macedonians of the plain.

Originally, too, the three cantons had been independent kingdoms, each with its own ambitious and well-connected royal house. Efforts to preserve that independence – or to reassert it – naturally drove them into alliances with the Epirots, Paeonians or Illyrians. The sovereigns of Lower Macedonia were equally determined to annex these ‘out-kingdoms’, whether by conquest, political persuasion, or dynastic inter-marriage.¹⁴ Lyncestis was ruled by descendants of the Bacchiad dynasty, who had moved on to Macedonia after their expulsion from Corinth in 657 B.C.¹⁵ Excavations at Trebenishte have revealed a wealth of gold masks and tomb furniture of the period between 650 and 600;¹⁶ these were powerful princes in the true Homeric tradition, like the kings of Cyprus. The Molossian dynasty of Epirus, on the marches of Orestis and Elimiotis, claimed descent from Achilles, through his grandson Pyrrhus – a fact destined to have immeasurable influence on the young Alexander, whose mother Olympias was of Molossian stock.

The Argeads themselves, as we have seen, headed their pedigree with Heracles, and could thus (since Heracles was the son of Zeus) style themselves ‘Zeus-born’ like any Mycenaean dynast: both Zeus and Heracles appear regularly on Philip’s coinage. It is clear, however, that there were other clans whose claim to the throne of a united Macedonia could at least be urged with some plausibility. From the Argead viewpoint no real advance was possible

until Upper Macedonia had been brought under some sort of central control. Paradoxically (but for obvious enough reasons) the nearer this aim came to fulfilment, the greater the danger of a palace *coup d'état* by some desperate out-kingdom prince determined to keep his crown at all costs.

At least as early as the fifth century B.C. the Argeads were claiming 'traditional' suzerainty over Upper Macedonia – again, on quasi-Homeric lines. The overlordship much resembled that of Agamemnon over his fellow-kings: each canton gave just as much allegiance to the Argead throne as any individual monarch could exact. The out-kingdoms were quite liable to connive at Illyrian or Paenonian invasions, if not to give them active backing. Add to this the endless intrigue – often ending in bloody murder and usurpation – which took place at the Argead court, and we begin to see why Macedonia, before Philip's time, played so insignificant a part in Greek history. The country was frankly primitive, preserving customs and institutions which might have made even a Spartan raise his eyebrows. To achieve formal purification of the army, a dog was cut in two by a priest, and the troops then marched between the severed halves. Various ritual war-dances, mimetic in nature, have an unmistakably Zulu air about them for the modern reader.

The attitude of city-state Greeks to this sub-Homeric enclave was one of genial and sophisticated contempt. They regarded Macedonians in general as semi-savages, uncouth of speech and dialect, retrograde in their political institutions, negligible as fighters, and habitual oath-breakers, who dressed in bear-pelts and were much given to deep and swinish potations, tempered with regular bouts of assassination and incest. In a more benevolent mood, Athenians would watch the attempts of the Argead court to Hellenize itself with the patronizing indulgence of some blue-blooded duke called upon to entertain a colonial sugar-baron. No one had forgotten that Alexander I, known ironically as 'the Philhellene', had been debarred from the Olympic

Games until he manufactured a pedigree connecting the Argeads with the ancient Argive kings.¹⁷

Nor was Macedonia's record in the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars liable to improve her standing with patriotic city-state Greeks. Alexander I had collaborated wholeheartedly with the Persians, marrying his sister to a Persian satrap, and accompanying Xerxes' army as a kind of liaison officer – though he was not above hedging his bets discreetly when a Greek victory seemed possible.¹⁸ After Plataea, he turned on the retreating Persians and carved up a large body of them at Nine Ways (Ennea Hodoi) on the lower Strymon. From the spoils he then set up a gold statue of himself at Delphi, to emphasize his having (even at the eleventh hour) fought on the right side, against the Barbarian.¹⁹ As though to add insult to injury, he profited by the Persian retreat to subjugate the tribes of the Pindus in the west and the Thracian Bistonae and Crestonians in the east, thus almost quadrupling his royal territory. From silver mines on the Lower Strymon he now drew revenues amounting to one silver talent daily. He began to strike coins in his own name, the first Macedonian monarch to do so. These were sizeable achievements, but not of the sort to win him popularity among the Greek states. His successors presented an even shadier picture. His son Perdiccas II switched his allegiance so many times during the Peloponnesian War that one modern scholar thoughtfully provides a tabulated chart to show which side he was on at any given point.²⁰ What, Athenian democrats must have said, could you do with a man like *that*? Not to mention the unspeakable Archelaus, Perdiccas' illegitimate son, who reached the throne by murdering his uncle, cousin and half-brother, proceeded to marry his father's widow, and was finally murdered himself as a result of his lurid homosexual intrigues.²¹

Yet it is, precisely, the careers of Perdiccas and Archelaus which hint at Macedonia's true potential. Perdiccas' remarkable tergiversations were mostly due to his possessing,

in abundance, a basic raw material which both sides needed desperately: good Macedonian fir for shipbuilding and oars. Upper Macedonia has a continental rather than a Mediterranean climate, and its mountains still show traces of the thick primeval forests which covered them in antiquity. Perdiccas was at pains to establish a treaty of alliance and friendship with Athens (Thuc. 1.57.2), though this was an agreement which both sides honoured in the breach rather than the observance. If the Macedonian king showed himself a slippery customer, it was not for lack of harassment on Athens' part. The foundation of Amphipolis in 437 and the acquisition of Methone three years later enabled the Athenians to put direct pressure on Macedonia; by 413 they were prohibiting Perdiccas from exporting timber without specific permission from Athens (who held the monopoly).²² However, it was Perdiccas who got the best of the exchange in the long run, playing Sparta and Athens off against each other with cool cynicism, selling timber to both sides, making and tearing up monopoly treaties like so much confetti. He also contrived to keep Macedonia from any serious involvement during the Peloponnesian War, thus preventing that ruinous drainage of manpower which so weakened both main combatants. It was surely Perdiccas' example that Philip had in mind when he said: 'Cheat boys with knucklebones, but men with oaths.'²³

It is hard to see what else Perdiccas could have done; Macedonia during his reign was still so weak and disunited that effective resistance, let alone any kind of expansion, was out of the question. At least he managed to safeguard the country's natural resources – in the circumstances no mean achievement. But it was Archelaus who, with realistic insight, first formulated the basic problems which had to be dealt with before Macedonia could become any kind of force in Greek affairs, and who seriously applied himself to solving them. Alexander I had, of course, pointed the way, and not merely in the field of territorial expansion. He worked hard to get Macedonia accepted as a member of

the Hellenic family (mainly by establishing a fictitious link between the Argead dynasty and Argos), and encouraged Greeks to domicile themselves on Macedonian soil, a policy which both Perdiccas and Archelaus followed. In particular, he offered attractive patronage to such distinguished artists as Pindar and Bacchylides.²⁴ His general policy was clear enough: extend the frontiers while polishing up Macedonia's cultural image abroad.

When Archelaus came to the throne, in 413/12, Athens was no longer an immediate danger: the failure of the Sicilian Expedition had seen to that. When her rulers now approached the Macedonian king it was as petitioners, desperate for ship-timber: a decree honouring Archelaus as 'proxenos and benefactor', together with evidence supplied by that shifty Athenian politician Andocides, suggests that (in 407/6) they attained their desired end.²⁵ But it was still vital to safeguard the country against constant incursions by ambitious neighbours. This meant both strengthening the army, and achieving some kind of permanent unification between Upper and Lower Macedonia. Alexander I had already systematized the old institution of the 'Companions' (*hetairoi*), landed gentry who served the king, into formal cavalry units, the famous Companion Cavalry. It also seems probable that it was he who first created an equivalent infantry body, the Foot Companions or *peze-tairoi*, making large grants of land in the freshly conquered territories to Companions of every degree, and thus ensuring stability for his new frontiers. Also, as Edson points out,²⁶ 'by means of these grants he would increase the prestige of the kingship and the loyalty of the Macedonians to himself and to the Argead house'. Archelaus seems to have improved the supply of arms, horses, and other military equipment; he also built a network of roads and fortified posts, which served the double purpose of improving communications and letting him keep a firmer hand on his unruly vassals.²⁷ Whether by force or diplomacy, he established so secure an entente with the out-kingdoms that

by the end of his reign (400/399) he was ready to acquire a little *Lebensraum* at the expense of Thessaly and the Chalcidic League.

He also saw, very clearly, that a great deal more Hellenization – a programme, in fact, of conscious cultural propaganda – was essential before more advanced Greek states would begin to treat Macedonia on equal terms. He established a special Macedonian festival at Dium in Pieria, dedicated to the Nine Muses, and boldly entitled ‘Olympian’. Like its namesake, it offered both athletic and musical contests. Like so many tyrants in antiquity, he set himself up as an enlightened patron of literature, science, and the arts. The famous painter Zeuxis was commissioned to decorate his palace. Amongst various other distinguished figures who took up residence in Macedonia were the tragic poet Agathon and the now octogenarian Euripides: seldom can patronage have been more memorably rewarded than by that terrifying final explosion of genius, the *Bacchae*. The luxury and dissipation of Archelaus’ court were notorious; but few men had the strength of mind to refuse an invitation there. (Agathon, indeed, if Aristophanes’ picture of his effeminate habits is remotely near the truth, must have felt more than at home in Archelaus’ company.) One of the few exceptions, characteristically enough, was Socrates, who remarked that he would rather not accept favours he could never repay.²⁸

But after Archelaus was murdered, the whole edifice he had laboured to build up collapsed overnight, to be followed by forty years of the worst anarchy and intrigue Macedonia had ever experienced. His claim to the throne, dynastically, was weak at best, and his heir was a child. The out-kingdom princes saw their chance, and took it. For this they can hardly be blamed. The glimpse of the future which Archelaus had given them was far from enticing. They had no intention of being reduced to the status of provincial vassal barons if they could help it; and most of them viewed the late king’s Hellenization policy with fierce distaste. Warriors

who wore cords round their waists until they had killed a man in battle, who could not even sit at meat with their fellows until they had speared a wild boar single-handed, who drank from cattle-horns like Vikings – such men were not the stuff of which a cultural renaissance is made.²⁹

We may doubt, then, whether Archelaus' support for the arts made any impression beyond his immediate entourage. Most Macedonian nobles preferred the more manly pleasures of hunting, carousing, and casual fornication. Sodomy – with young boys or, at a pinch, with each other – they also much enjoyed; but they had no intention of letting it be contaminated with decadent Platonic notions of spiritual uplift.³⁰ The simultaneous presence in Alexander's headquarters of tough Macedonian officers and Greek civilian intellectuals was to produce untold tension and hostility (see below, pp. 163, 372 ff.). All the same, Archelaus' failure to establish a lasting settlement was not entirely due to baronial intransigence. National income – or the lack of it – must also be taken into account. Timber-export and mining rights brought in a fair return, but hardly enough to subsidize military stockpiling, lavish hand-outs to visiting celebrities, and road-construction on a nation-wide scale. It seems at least possible that Archelaus had begun to alienate crown land in return for immediate cash subsidies – a practice which Alexander later revived before the launching of his expedition (see below, pp. 155–6). The out-kingdom barons in particular would jump at such an opportunity: whatever Archelaus demanded was cheap in return for a 'gift-fief' in Lower Macedonia.

Granted these circumstances, it may not be without significance that the 'guardian' of Archelaus' young son Orestes was a prince of Lyncestis, Aeropus. Until 396 they ruled conjointly. Then Aeropus, having secured his own position, did away with Orestes and ruled alone. Two years later he died: since his grandson was of age, it may even have been from natural causes. His son Pausanias succeeded

him, but was promptly assassinated by the legitimate Argead claimant, Alexander I's grandson Amyntas.

In 394 Amyntas was nearer sixty than fifty; he had already made one unsuccessful bid for power, some three decades earlier, against his wily old uncle Perdiccas. Even now he found it a hard business claiming his inheritance. The House of Lyncestis, having once got its hands on the Macedonian crown, did not mean to relinquish it without a struggle. The Lyncestian barons, led by Pausanias' son, called in an Illyrian army to help them and drove Amyntas out of Macedonia again. But in 392, with Thessalian support, he made his comeback – this time for good.³¹ His reign lasted until 370: precariously enough, but the main wonder is that he survived so long. In his old age he sired three legitimate sons – a very necessary precaution, since he already had three bastards with designs on the throne. The youngest of these late-born heirs was Philip, Alexander's father, born in 383/2, when Amyntas was well over sixty-five. It is not hard to see how the rumour arose that all three of them were illegitimate.

For the old king the price of survival was constant and open humiliation. At first he managed to stave off the Illyrians by paying them heavy annual tribute. This did not stop them intriguing with the rebellious out-kingdom barons, who wanted nothing better than a *coup d'état* that would put the House of Lyncestis back into power. From 384 onwards, indeed, Illyria exercised *de facto* sovereignty over the western marches of Lyncestis itself – a strategically vital region between Lake Lychnidus (Okhrida) and the Tcherma River. Amyntas could still count on the support of Elymiotis, the remaining out-kingdom: its chieftain, Dardas, was his personal friend. But he dared not risk a full-scale civil war. Nor had he any firmer a hold over Macedonia's ill-defined eastern frontier. Before his forcible expulsion in 394/3, he had ceded a valuable strip of border territory to Olynthus, the most powerful maritime city in the Chalcidic peninsula – presumably as a *quid pro quo* for

promised military aid, which in the event came too late, if at all. When he finally established himself on the throne he claimed this land back, on the grounds that he had merely left it in trust with the Olynthians till his restoration. They blandly ignored his protests, and made still further encroachments.

Nothing more clearly reveals Macedonia's weakness during this period than the off-hand treatment which Amyntas received from powers such as Athens or Sparta: unwisely, since the raids of wild tribesmen from the north, Triballi and others, was as prejudicial to Greek as to Macedonian interests. To Athens Macedonia was simply a useful buffer-state in her complex dealings with Chalcidice and Thrace, a pawn in the end-game which aimed, ultimately, at secure control of the Black Sea grain-route through the Bosphorus. When Sparta was persuaded to send an expedition against Olynthus, it was not out of regard for Amyntas, but because the Chalcidic League (of which Olynthus was the head) represented a growing threat in the Thraceward regions. Olynthus surrendered in 379; the Chalcidic League was – temporarily – broken up; and the Spartans doubtless went home congratulating themselves on having done a statesmanlike job of work. In fact their action constituted one of the most disastrous errors of judgement imaginable. Forty years later they – along with every other city-state, not least Athens and Thebes – realized the truth: that they had fatally weakened the one power-group which might conceivably have checkmated Macedonia's meteoric rise to power before it was well begun. Knowledge, as so often, came too late.

Yet it would have taken more than Delphic prescience to have foreseen, in 379, just what the future held. Amyntas, everyone agreed, was a joke, like most of his predecessors. Trimmers, traitors, drunks, murderers, vacillating money-grubbers, cowardly and inefficient despots – the Argead dynasty had not won much respect from Greek public opinion, and Amyntas in this respect did little to improve

matters. He touted indiscriminately for alliances, approaching, at various times, everyone from the Thebans to that remarkable *condottiere* Jason of Pherae. In his efforts to please Athens (and to protect his own crumbling authority) he had even gone so far as to adopt an Athenian general, Iphicrates, as his son. He, and Macedonia, could clearly be discounted.

On top of all this, the usual palace intrigues continued to flourish. The king's wife, Eurydice, had taken a lover, a Macedonian nobleman named Ptolemy, from Alorus. With enviable *sang-froid* she married off Ptolemy to her own daughter – in order, presumably, to have an unchallengeable reason for keeping him around the house. After a while she got careless, and Amyntas actually caught her in bed with his son-in-law. Unwisely, he did nothing – as usual. He was much attached to his daughter, and anxious to avoid any scandal that might cause her distress.³² Ptolemy, however, showed little gratitude for this forbearance. Like most Macedonian aristocrats, his ambition was only equalled by his unscrupulousness. To enjoy the queen's person was, for him, simply a foretaste of the headier delights conferred by royal authority. Compared to him, Rizzio and Darnley were sentimental amateurs; but then Eurydice, one suspects, could have taught Mary a thing or two as well.

This fascinating pair now decided to murder Amyntas, and set up Ptolemy as King of Macedonia in his stead: an act of pure usurpation rather than a bid on behalf of one of the out-kingdoms, since Alorus lay in Bottiaea, and thus formed part of Lower Macedonia. (The tradition that Ptolemy was in fact Amyntas' son³³ clearly represents dynastic propaganda on his behalf.) Here, however, they reckoned without Eurydice's daughter, whose Grizelda-like submissiveness clearly drew the line at parricide, and who lost no time in warning her father what was afoot. However, any social embarrassment the situation might have caused at court was obviated by Amyntas promptly dying, perhaps of shock. After all, he was close on eighty.

If Ptolemy had hoped to occupy this conveniently vacant throne without trouble, he was disappointed. The king's eldest legitimate son, Alexander II, at once established his claim to the succession. However, he was unwise enough to get himself involved in a war between the rival dynasts of Thessaly, and during his absence Ptolemy made a spirited bid at usurping his crown. He met with enough opposition for the case to be decided by arbitration. The eminent Theban statesman Pelopidas gave his verdict in favour of Alexander, and Ptolemy retired gracefully – at least until Pelopidas was safely out of the country. Then, resourceful as ever, he had the young king assassinated during a Macedonian folk-dancing exhibition, married Eurydice (what became of her daughter history does not relate), and assumed the office of regent on behalf of Perdiccas, Alexander's brother, who was next in line for the throne, but still a minor. Realizing that such a move was open to misconstruction by political cynics abroad, he proceeded to negotiate an alliance with the Thebans, who had just smashed the myth of Spartan military supremacy in a pitched battle at Leuctra (371), and were rapidly emerging as the most powerful state in Greece.

As a proof of his sincerity, he also dispatched to Thebes a highly distinguished group of hostages: perhaps he was glad to have some of them safely out of the way – especially Amyntas' only other legitimate son, the young Philip, at this time fifteen years old.³⁴ Ptolemy can hardly have foreseen the consequences of his action. For Philip, while in Thebes, stayed with Pammenes, who was not only a skilled general himself, but a close friend of Epaminondas, the victor of Leuctra, and perhaps the finest strategist Greece produced before Alexander. Philip's whole military career (and that of Alexander after him) was incalculably influenced by the lessons the great Theban commander taught him. He learnt the importance of professional training in drill and tactics, of close cooperation between cavalry and infantry, of meticulous staff planning combined with speed

in attack. By watching the manoeuvres of the Sacred Band, Thebes' crack infantry regiment, he came to appreciate the potential of a permanent *corps d'élite* – so much so that thirty years later he and his formidable son were at pains to wipe out this famous military unit almost to the last man. Above all, he learnt one cardinal principle: that 'the quickest and most economical way of winning a military decision is to defeat an enemy not at his weakest but at his strongest point'.³⁵

Philip's training for power was proceeding along useful if unorthodox lines. His experience as a member of the Macedonian royal household had given him an understandably cynical view of human nature: in this world murder, adultery and usurpation were commonplace, as liable to be practised by one's own mother as by anyone else. In later life Philip took it as axiomatic that all diplomacy was based on self-interest, and every man had his price: events seldom proved him wrong. In Thebes he saw, too, the besetting weaknesses of a democratic city-state – constant party intrigue, lack of a strong executive power, the inability to force quick decisions, the unpredictable vagaries of the assembly at voting-time, the system of annual elections which made any serious long-term planning almost impossible, the amateur *ad hoc* military levies (though here Thebes was better off than, say, Athens). For the first time he began to understand how Macedonia's outdated institutions, so despised by the rest of Greece, might prove a source of strength when dealing with such opponents. Throughout his life he gained his greatest advances by exploiting human cupidity and democratic incompetence – most often at the same time.

The King of Macedonia was, with certain caveats, the supreme authority over his people: in a very literal sense he could make that famous Bourbon boast '*L'état c'est moi.*' Much has been made of the tradition that the king could not execute a free citizen on a charge of high treason (i.e. attempted murder or usurpation directed against himself), but must appear before the Macedonian assembly in the