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## Did Alexander Use one or two Seals?

In an article entitled 'Die Siegel Alexanders des Großen', *Chiron* 17, 1987, 395–449, the theory was advanced by H. R. BALDUS that from the summer of 330 B. C. onwards Alexander possessed two seals, namely his 'personal' one and that of Darius; and that he used the former in his dealings with Europeans, whether in Europe or in Asia, and the latter in his dealings with his new, formerly Persian subjects. BALDUS wrote also of Alexander's 'personal' seal going out of use after his death, and of Philip Arrhidaeus using his own 'personal' seal. It seems to me that the literary evidence points to a different view. I therefore set out the testimonia, some of which were interpreted otherwise by BALDUS.<sup>1</sup>

### A. *The Testimonia*

1. Curtius 3.6.7. When Alexander lay ill in 333 B. C., he received a letter from Parmenio to the effect that Darius had bribed the doctor, Philip. The thoughts of Alexander are reported in direct speech. Then, after lengthy pondering and without revealing to anyone the contents of the letter, Alexander 'stamped the letter with the bezel of his own seal and put it under his pillow' (*epistolamque sigillo anuli sui impresso pulvino cui incubabat subicit*).

In the other versions of this affair (Diod. 17.31.4–6; Justin [Trogus] 11.8.3–9; Arr. 2.4.7–11; Valerius Maximus, *de constantia* 3. 8 ext. 6) there is no mention of the sealing of the letter. At that date, of course, there was no question of Darius's seal. In the version of Curtius 'his own seal' implies perhaps that the letter had originally been marked by the unbroken seal of Parmenio.<sup>2</sup>

2. Plutarch in *Alex.* 39.8 and *Mor.* 333 A tells the story of Alexander reading a letter from Olympias and of Hephaestion reading it with him, whereupon Alexander 'took off his own ring and placed its seal on the lips of Hephaestion' (τὸν δακ-

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<sup>1</sup> BALDUS and his predecessor G. HAFNER, *Das Siegel Alexanders des Großen*, *Festschrift F. BROMMER*, 1977, which I have not seen but is quoted by BALDUS, were mainly concerned with the question, what emblem or emblems figured on Alexander's seal or seals. Their speculations seem to me not to rest on any secure evidence. In my *Testimonia* I am not including *Plut. Alex.* 2.4, because the seal which in Philip's dream was placed on the womb of Olympias was an imaginary seal, and not Alexander's seal, *pace* BALDUS 404.

<sup>2</sup> That letters were generally bound and sealed is clear from the account of Parmenio receiving letters from Philotas and from Alexander in *Curt.* 7.2.16 and 25.

τύλιον ἀφελόμενος τὸν αὐτοῦ προσέθηκε τῷ ἐκείνου στόματι τὴν σφραγίδα). Here τὸν αὐτοῦ seems to be added simply for clarity. There is no clue to the date.

3. Curt. 3.7.11. A story is told of a Persian, called Sisines, who had served Philip and was with Alexander just before the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C. A letter from a general of Darius was delivered by a Cretan soldier to Sisines with the request that he should act in the interest of Darius. 'The letter was sealed with a ring of which the device was not known to Sisines' (*obsignatam anulo cuius signum haud sane notum erat*). In fact this letter had been seen and read by Alexander, and it was Alexander who had sealed it with the ring which was not known to Sisines (*ignoti anuli sigillo impresso*). Alexander's aim was to test the loyalty of Sisines. The unfortunate Persian tried several times to give the letter to Alexander, but as the king was busy he waited for a better opportunity. This delay brought about his death on the march at the hands of the Cretans 'no doubt on the order of the king'.<sup>3</sup>

4. Curt. 6.6.6. In a passage which depicted Alexander as striving to surpass the Persian kings in hauteur and extravagance it is stated that 'Alexander sealed letters to be sent to Europe with the bezel of his ancient ring (*veteris anuli gemma obsignabat*), but on those he was to write to Asia the ring of Darius was impressed (*Darei anulus imprimebatur*), so that it became clear that one mind was not coping with the fortune of two' (*ut appareret unum animum duorum non capere fortunam*).<sup>4</sup>

The point of this statement is that Alexander was ceasing to be just the king of Macedonia using his ancient ring for all purposes, and that he was now behaving as the successor of Darius towards Asiatics.

5. Arr. 6.23.4, in 325 B.C. when Alexander sent supplies to the coast of Gedrosia, he sealed the consignment 'with his own seal' (σημηγάμενος τῇ ἑαυτοῦ σφραγίδι). The seal was added in order to discourage the escorting troops from tampering with the supplies, but it was ineffective.

6. Arr. 6.29.10, in 324 B.C. when Alexander ordered Aristobulus to repair the tomb of Cyrus, the final order was to put clay on the doorway 'and to set the royal seal on the clay' (ἐπιβαλεῖν τῷ πηλῷ τὸ σημεῖον τὸ βασιλικόν). The seal of the king was intended to discourage anyone from opening the doorway. There is no reason to suppose that the seal was any other than that which Alexander had used in Gedrosia with the same purpose.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As J. E. ATKINSON remarked, 'the story is patently a mixture of borrowed ingredients' (A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, Books 3 and 4, Amsterdam 1980, 186).

<sup>4</sup> BALDUS translated this as 'Aus der Verwendung der beiden Siegel wurde also für Curtius offenbar, daß eine Person nicht das für zwei Bestimmte fassen könne'. For this sense of *fortuna* see Curt. 10.6.20.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the view of BALDUS 399 f.

7. Nepos, Eum. 2.1; Diod. 17.117.3 and 18.2.4; Justin 12.15.12; Curt. 10.5.4 and 10.6.4 and 16. In all these passages the dying Alexander draws his ring from his finger and gives it to Perdiccas.

8. Curt. 10.6.4. When the crowd assembled after the death of Alexander, Perdiccas placed before them the throne of the king, on which were the diadem and the robe of Alexander together with his arms, and he «set upon the same throne the ring which had been given to him the previous day by the king» (*anulum sibi pridie traditum a rege*). It is to be noted that in the structure of his sentence Curtius separated the throne, diadem, robe and arms from the ring.

9. Curt. 10.6.5. The speech of Perdiccas, which is reported in oratio recta, began thus: «I return to you the ring which he himself handed to me, the ring with which he was wont to seal the affairs of his kingdom and of his empire» (*anulum quo ille regni atque imperii res [MS vires] obsignare erat solitus*).

J. MÜTZEL in his edition (Berlin 1843) kept the reading of the Group A codices, and ROLFE in the Loeb edition (Harvard 1946) followed SCHEFFER in reading *res*. The choice of reading does not affect the point of there being one ring which served for the Macedonian kingdom and for the Macedonian empire alike. A similar contrast between the «kingdom» (*regnum*) and the «empire» (*imperium*) occurred at Curt. 10.7.14–15, where the succession to the kingdom (*regnum*) and the right to rule the empire (*imperium*) would be based on the hereditary principle in the person of Philip Arrhidaeus.<sup>6</sup> There was only the one ring at 10.6.18 (*regis anulum*), that which had been laid on the throne.

### B. Deductions from the testimonia

In all the testimonia except A 4 the king is represented as having only one ring. It was this ring which was to pass to Alexander's successor as the sign of his legitimacy as king and ruler (Curt. 10.6.20 *summa imperii*). It was in a different category from the diadem, robe and arms of Alexander in A 8. The diadem was placed on the corpse of Alexander as part of what we may call his personal *insignia* and would accompany him to the grave (10.10.13). We know now from the excavation of the royal tombs at Vergina that the *insignia* which accompanied a dead king comprised a diadem, royal wreath, royal robe, and his arms, but not the royal ring. It evidently passed from king to king. That is why it was called *vetus anululus*, the ancient ring, in A 4. Curtius was particularly interested in early precedents and traditional practices, for instance in Macedonian trials for treason. Cases were tried *vetusto Macedonum more* (Curt. 6.8.25). So too the *vetus anululus* had been transmitted by king to king from the distant past of the Macedonian kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Curtius 10.7.15 is mistranslated by ROLFE in the Loeb edition; for the accusative with *vindicaturam* is not the neuter word *imperium* but *stirpem regiam*, i.e. Philip Arrhidaeus.

<sup>7</sup> Curtius reported the customs not only of the Macedonians but also of the Persians, Indians and Egyptians (e. g. 3.3.8; 8.8.3; 8.9.30; 10.10.13).

When Philip and Alexander brought other lands under the rule of the Macedonians, this same ring was the symbol of their authority in kingdom and empire alike. That was stated specifically in A 7, when Perdikkas laid down the ring <with which he (Alexander) was wont to seal the affairs of his kingdom and of his empire> (*anulo ... regni atque imperii*).

In contrast A 4 alone states that Alexander used two rings. Which are we to choose? BALDUS opted for A 4 but without either drawing the attention of his reader to the epithet *vetus* in A 4 and the phrase *regni atque imperii* in A 9, or discussing the context of A 4, or analysing the sources from which the passages mentioning the ring or rings were drawn.

I conclude therefore with a consideration of the context of A 4 and of the sources. The context of A 4 (Curt. 6.6.6) is the deterioration of Alexander's character, which was alleged to have changed from self-control and temperance to arrogance and wantonness – demanding that the victors prostrate themselves before him, adopting full Persian dress and Darius' type of diadem, compelling the friends, cavalry and commanders to wear Persian dress, and filling his palace with 365 concubines and hordes of eunuchs serving as male prostitutes. All these points, sandwiched between Alexander's spell of fornication with the Amazon queen and Alexander's attempt to overcome Macedonian disgust by gifts, are found also in the narratives of Diodorus 17.77 and Justin 12.3 and 4.<sup>8</sup> Thus Curtius was drawing on the same source as his predecessors, Diodorus and Trogus, had done. That this source was Cleitarchus has been commonly maintained, and it has been argued by me elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> There is no regard for historical truth in the episode of the Amazon queen, in the wearing of full Persian dress by Alexander and his staff and cavalry, and in the hordes of prostitutes of both sexes at the court. In such a context one should not accept as historically accurate the statement that Alexander used two rings. In fact the last thing Alexander wished to do was to set his Macedonian subjects and his Asiatic subjects apart in this way; for his policy was one of assimilation and partnership (Arr. 7.11.9). It seems probable that Curtius – or rather his source Cleitarchus – introduced the idea of the two rings in order to conclude that even Alexander's mind was incapable of coping with the combination of his own kingdom and that of Darius. The conclusion based on using two rings was certainly puerile. It justifies Cicero's remark that the work of Cleitarchus was *puerile quiddam* (see FGrH 137 T 13).

The best evidence for Alexander's use of his seal is in Arrian's account (A 5 and A 6), because it was drawn from Ptolemy and Aristobulus,<sup>10</sup> both contemporaries and participants. BALDUS argued that in A 5 and 6 the phrase *σημηνάμενος τῆ ἑαυτοῦ σφραγίδι* meant that Alexander used his <personal seal> (persönliches Siegel),

<sup>8</sup> See my *Three Historians of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge 1983, 136.

<sup>9</sup> *Op.cit.* 59, 102 and 136.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Sources for Alexander the Great*, Cambridge 1993, 274.

and the phrase τὸ σημεῖον τὸ βασιλικόν meant the use of the Asiatic seal, formerly the possession of the Great King (p. 399). But that is not acceptable. For in the second passage Alexander was not the subject of the sentence, and so the phrase τῇ ἑαυτοῦ σφραγίδι could not have been applied. In any case the distinction between a personal seal and an official seal in the case of a king is unreal; for the person is and cannot be other than the king himself.<sup>11</sup>

The passages in A 1 and A 2 show that Alexander was expected to be wearing his seal-ring constantly, whether he was desperately ill or perfectly well. I say <expected>, because the account, being derived probably from Cleitarchus,<sup>12</sup> may be historically inaccurate. The passages in A 7, in which the dying Alexander took his ring from his finger and gave it to Perdikkas, were historically untrue,<sup>13</sup> because the correct version was in the Royal Journal and in the accounts of Ptolemy and Aristobulus. But they support the other evidence that the king's ring was not to die with him but would be taken over by his successor. The passage in A 9, where the speech of Perdikkas is reported, is based either on a full contemporary account or on the work of the dependable contemporary historian, Hieronymus of Cardia.<sup>14</sup> There is thus good reason to accept its phrase *regni atque imperii* as authentic.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the coinage inscribed <of Alexander> was the coinage of the king.

<sup>12</sup> Three Historians of Alexander the Great 97f. and 121.

<sup>13</sup> See op.cit. 77f. and 108.

<sup>14</sup> See N. G. L. HAMMOND and F. W. WALBANK, A History of Macedonia 3, Oxford 1988, 96ff.

