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WHAT IF?

THE WORLD'S FOREMOST
MILITARY HISTORIANS IMAGINE
WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

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The historian Arnold Toynbee once put forward a counterfactual speculation that has gained a certain fame. What would have happened if, instead of dying at thirty-two, Alexander the Great had made it to old age? Toynbee saw Alexander conquering China and dispatching naval expeditions that would circumnavigate Africa. Aramaic or Greek would become our lingua franca and Buddhism our universal religion. An extra quarter century of life would have given Alexander the chance to achieve his dream of One World, becoming in the process a kind of benevolent advance man for a United Nations, ancient style.

Josiah Ober, the chairman of the Department of Classics at Princeton, has come up with an alternative scenario for Alexander the Great, and one darker than Toynbee’s: What if Alexander had died at the beginning of his career, before he had the opportunity of adding “the Great” to his name? That nearly happened at the Battle of the Granicus River in 334 B.C., and Alexander’s literal brush with death reminds us how often the interval of a millisecond or a heartbeat can alter the course of history. The conquests of the young Macedonian king would never have been realized, the Per-
sian Empire would have survived unchallenged, and the brilliant Hellenistic period, that cultural seedbed of the West, would have been stillborn. Suppose, however, that Alexander had outlasted his bout with an unnamed fever in 323 B.C.? Given his appetite for conquest and for terror as a political weapon, Ober feels, he might only have filled another two decades of life with fresh occasions for "opportunistic predation." The culture of the known world, and Hellenism in particular, might have been the worse for Alexander's reprieve.

Ober is the author of THE ANATOMY OF ERROR: ANCIENT MILITARY DISASTERS AND THEIR LESSONS FOR MODERN STRATEGISTS (with Barry S. Strauss) and, most recently, THE ATHENIAN REVOLUTION AND POLITICAL DISSENT IN DEMOCRATIC ATHENS.

At the Battle of the Granicus River in northwestern Anatolia, during the first major military engagement of Alexander the Great's invasion of the Persian Empire, young King Alexander came very close to death. At the Granicus, the Macedonians and their Greek allies encountered local Anatolian cavalry and Greek mercenary infantry under the joint command of Persian regional governors (satraps). The enemy was massed in a defensive formation on the opposite bank of the river. The river was fordable, but the banks were steep and Alexander's senior lieutenants counseled caution. After all, the king was barely twenty-two years old and presumably still had much to learn. A serious setback early in the campaign could end the invasion before it had properly begun. Ignoring their sensible advice, Alexander mounted his great charger, Bucephalus ("Oxhead"). Highly conspicuous in a white-plumed helmet, the king led his Macedonian shock cavalry in an audacious charge across the river and up the opposite bank. The Persian-led forces fell back before the Macedonian's charge, and he penetrated deep into their ranks. This was probably exactly what the Persian tacticians had planned for from the beginning. Due to the startling success of his charge, Alexander, accompanied only by a small advance force, was momentarily cut off from the main body of the Macedonian army.

At this critical moment in the battle, young Alexander was surrounded by enemies, including one Spithridates, an ax-wielding Persian noble who managed to deal the Macedonian king a heavy blow to the head. Alexander's helmet was severely damaged. The king was disoriented, unable to defend himself. A second strike would certainly kill him. And with the young king would die the hopes of the entire expedition and Macedonian imperial aspirations. In the next few seconds the future
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ALEXANDER THE GREAT

A helmetless Alexander the Great, riding Bucephalus, ancient history's most famous horse, leads a charge on fleeing Persians. How different would our world be if he had died in battle—as he nearly did? This mosaic, uncovered in Pompeii, was based on a Greek painting, probably completed in Alexander's lifetime.

(Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

of the Persian empire and the entire course of Western history would be decided. Did Alexander's life flash before him as he awaited imminent extinction? How had he come to arrive at this place, at this untoward fate? How could so much have come to depend on a single blow?

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Alexander was born in Macedon (the northeastern region of modern Greece) in 356 B.C., the first and only son of King Philip II of Macedon and Olympias of Epirus (modern Albania). Philip had seized control of

CONQUEST DENIED

Macedon just three years prior to his son's birth, following the death in battle of his royal brother, Amyntas III. Prior to Philip's accession, Macedon had been a relative backwater—a semi-Hellenized border zone pressured on the north and west by aggressive Danubian tribes and to the east by imperial Persia. When not confronting system-level tribal or imperial threats, Macedon's rulers were consistently outmaneuvered diplomatically by the highly civilized Greek city-states to the south. Internally, Macedon was dominated by semi-independent warlords who followed the lead of the weak central government only when it pleased them. Yet by instituting a dramatic reorganization of the Macedonian armed forces, technological innovations (for example, the extra-long thrusting spear known as the sarissa and hair-spring powered catapult artillery), economic restructuring, and astute diplomacy, Philip had changed all that—seemingly overnight. By the time Alexander was ten years old, Macedon was the most powerful state on the Greek peninsula. The Danubian tribes had been first bought off, then humbled militarily. Some of the Greek city-states bordering Macedon had been destroyed: The sack of Olynthus in 348 had shocked the rest of the Greek world. Many other Greek cities were forced into unequal alliances. Even proud and powerful Athens had eventually seen the wisdom of making a peace treaty, after suffering a series of humiliating military and diplomatic setbacks at Philip's hands.

Meanwhile, Alexander was being groomed to help govern the kingdom and, eventually, assume the throne. He was well trained: His tutor in intellectual and cultural matters was the philosopher Aristotle; his mentor in military and diplomatic affairs was his own father, probably the best military mind of his generation. And in the corridors of the royal palace at Pella, Alexander learned the murkier arts of intrigue. The Macedonian court was beset by rumor and factions. The counterpoint was the hard-drinking parties favored by the Macedonian elite, all-night events that featured blunt speech and, sometimes, sudden violence. Alexander and his father had come close to blows on at least one of these drunken occasions.
In Alexander's twentieth year, Philip II was cut down by an assassin. The killer, a Macedonian named Pausanias, was in turn butchered by Philip's bodyguards as he ran for his horse. Although Pausanias may well have held a personal grudge against his king, there was suspicion that he had not acted alone. One obvious candidate for the mastermind behind the killing was Darius III, the Great King of Persia—in the mid-fourth century a mighty empire that stretched from the Aegean coast of Turkey, to Egypt in the south, and east as far as modern Pakistan. In the years before the assassination, Philip had been making open preparations for a Persian expedition; a few months prior to his death his lieutenants had established a beachhead on Persian-held territory in northwestern Anatolia. "Cutting the head from the dangerous snake" was a well-known Persian modus operandi and (at least according to later historians) Alexander himself publicly blamed Darius for Philip's death. But Darius was not the only suspect; other fingers pointed at a jealous wife—Olympias—and even at the ambitious young prince himself.

In any event, Alexander's first order of business after his father's death was the establishment of himself as undisputed king: The Macedonian rules for succession were vague and untidy, in fact any member of the royal family who could command a strong following had a chance at gaining the throne; Alexander proceeded to establish his claim with characteristic dispatch and equally characteristic ruthlessness. Potential internal rivals were eliminated, the restive Danubians crushed in a massive raid deep into their home territory. Immediately thereafter a hastily pulled together anti-Macedonian coalition of Greek city-states was smashed by Alexander's lightning march south. In the aftermath of Alexander's victory, the great and ancient Greek city of Thebes was destroyed as an example to others who might doubt the new king's resolve.

Alexander had proved himself his father's son and worthy of the throne, but his treasury was seriously depleted. He had no choice but to follow through with the planned invasion of the western provinces of the Persian empire. The prospect of war booty fired the imagination of his Macedonian troops. The restive southern Greeks were brought on board by the prospect of revenge for long-past, but never-forgotten, Persian atrocities during the Greco-Persian wars of the early fifth century B.C. Crossing at the Hellespont, Alexander had sacrificed at Troy to the shades of Homeric Greek heroes, and then proceeded south, toward the Granicus, where he met his first significant opposition. Now, with Spithridates's ax arcing down toward Alexander's shattered helmet for the second time, it appeared as if the glorious expedition would end before it had begun.

Yet the deadly blow never landed. Just as Spithridates prepared to finish off his opponent, one of Alexander's personal bodyguard "companions," Cleitus (nicknamed "the Black"), appeared at his king's side and speared the Persian axman dead. Alexander quickly rallied, and the wild charge that might have ended in disaster spurred on his troops. Most of the Persian forces crumbled; a stubborn body of Greek mercenaries was eventually cut down. Alexander was spectacularly victorious at the Granicus—losing only 34 men and reportedly killing over 20,000 of the enemy. Spoils from the battle were sent back to Greece to be displayed in places of honor. Alexander was now on his way, and it seemed nothing could stop him. In the course of the next decade, Alexander and his Macedonians repeatedly demonstrated their capacity to overcome tremendous obstacles. They went on to conquer the entire Persian empire, and more. Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire is among the most remarkable—and most terrifyingly sanguinary and efficient—military campaigns of all time. By 324 B.C. Alexander had laid the foundations for a successor empire that might have included both the entirety of the old Persian holdings, peninsula Greece, and various outlying areas as well. He established an imperial capital at Mesopotamian Babylon and began to lay plans for internal administration—and further military expeditions. Yet Alexander did not long outlive his great campaign of conquest. He died of disease (perhaps malaria) complicated by the effects of hard living (multiple serious wounds, heavy drinking) in June of 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-two, ten years after the Granicus.
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The would-be unified empire never came about; in the course of two generations of savage warfare Alexander's generals and their lieutenants and sons divided amongst themselves the vast territories they had helped to conquer. Some distant northern and eastern provinces fell away from Macedonian rule—control of northwestern India was formally ceded to the aspiring native dynast Chandragupta Maurya (founder of the great Mauryan empire) in exchange for 300 war elephants. But vast regions remained: Within a generation of Alexander's death, Egypt, most of Anatolia, Syria-Palestine, and much of western Asia (as well as the Macedonian homeland and contiguous regions in Europe) were being ruled by relatively stable Macedonian dynasties. And because the Macedonian elite eagerly adopted Greek culture, this extensive region was incorporated into a Greek sphere of political and cultural influence. Dozens of major and minor Greek cities were established by Alexander and his successors: Egyptian Alexandria, Macedonian Thessalonika, Anatolian Pergamum, and Syrian Antioch are only a few of the most famous. The Greek language quickly became the common vernacular for a large part of the civilized world—and the dominant language of trade, diplomacy, and literary culture.

The brilliant Hellenistic civilization that arose in the generations following the death of Alexander not only enlarged exponentially the geographic range of Greek culture, it provided a historical bridge between the classical Greek culture of the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. and the coming age of imperial Rome. Hellenistic scholars at the famous library in Egyptian Alexandria preserved and codified the best of earlier Greek literature, while Hellenistic historians did the same for the memory of Greek accomplishments in the political and military spheres. Philosophical speculation—especially the relatively individual-centered Stoicism and Epicureanism flourished among the educated elites. Local experiments in religious practice and thought were granted the possibility of a vast audience, due to the prevalence of a common language and a general attitude of religious tolerance among the ruling elites.

There were remarkable demographic shifts as people gravitated toward new opportunities: Greeks and Macedonians—in high demand as soldiers and administrators—to be sure, but also Jews, Phoenicians, and other peoples of the Near East who established enclaves in the new and burgeoning Greek cities; meanwhile older cities (including Jerusalem) were made over in a new cosmopolitan and increasingly Hellenic image. This Hellenistic (or "Greek-oriented") world was similar to the classical era in its political focus on semi-independent city-states and its highly developed urban culture. It was different from the classical era in that "Greekness" was now defined as much by cultural affinity as by ethnic heritage—individual Syrians, Egyptians, Bactrians in central Asia, along with people from many other ethnic backgrounds living in regions controlled by descendants of Alexander's generals became increasingly Greek in their language, education, literary, and athletic tastes—even while remaining quite un-Greek in their religious practices. The Hellenistic world was the milieu in which Judaism came to the attention of the Greeks and achieved some of its distinctive "modern" forms. It was the context in which Jesus of Nazareth preached his new message and in which Christianity grew up as a religion. It was, in short, Hellenistic Greek culture that was inherited by the Romans, and subsequently preserved for rediscovery in the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. And so, it is not too much to say that to the extent that modern Western culture is defined by a "Greco-Roman-Judaic-Christian" inheritance, it is a product of the world that grew up in the wake of Alexander's conquests.

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Alexander's seemingly premature death at the age of thirty-two stimulated one of the best known historians of the twentieth century, Arnold Toynbee, to develop an elaborate and romantic "counterfactual history," which has become a classic of the genre. Postulating a sudden recovery from his debilitating fever, Toynbee imagined a long productive life for Alexander in which conquest and exploration were nicely balanced by thoughtful administrative arrangements and a generous social policy that
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saw all residents of the great empire as worthy of basic human dignity. In Toynbee’s optimistic counterfactual scenario, Alexander and his unbroken line of successors promoted both culture and technology, leading to the early discovery of (for example) steam power. Consequently, the great empire was invincible; Rome never became a serious threat. With the discovery of the Western Hemisphere by Alexandrian explorers, the empire eventually becomes a genuine world-state. It is ruled by a benevolent monarchy; in Toynbee’s counterfactual present, Alexander’s direct lineal descendent still sits secure on his throne, his subjects enjoy peace and prosperity, and all really is right with the world.

Toynbee’s counterfactual was heavily influenced by the cheerful portrait painted by his contemporary, W. W. Tarn, an eloquent and domineering historian who had depicted the historical Alexander as a cosmopolitan, thoughtful, and far-sighted proto-Stoic. Tarn’s Alexander engaged in warfare only as a means to a higher end—Tarn envisioned that end as a broad-based “brotherhood of man” (centered on a policy of intermarriage between Greek- and Persian-speaking groups) that would flourish beneath the benevolent imperial aegis. Yet more recent commentators (notably E. Badian and A. B. Bosworth) have emphasized a much darker side of Alexander’s character. They focus on the brutality of the means by which Alexander’s tenure of power and the Macedonian conquest of Persia were effected, and they assert that there was no grand vision of a higher or humanitarian end. Under this revisionist theory, Alexander cared much for slaughter and little for imperial management. Under his direct leadership the Macedonians proved to be remarkably good at wholesale butchery of less militarily competent peoples—but they contributed little in the way of culture. This alternative view of Alexander allows the development of a grim alternative to Toynbee’s “Alexander survives” counterfactual. We might posit that if Alexander really had lived for another thirty years, there would have been much more widespread destruction of existing Asian cultures and disastrous impoverishment in the process of the sapping of local resources to finance a never-ending cycle of opportunistic predation that offered little but misery in its wake. And so we might posit that the Hellenistic world (and its modern legacy) might never have come about if its progenitor had lived much longer.

Yet, realistically speaking, Alexander did not die young. People in antiquity could not expect to live nearly as long as do modern people in developed countries: Disease and risks of battle tended to end their lives much earlier than we would regard as “normal life expectancy.” So it is hardly remarkable that Alexander expired before turning gray—a man who repeatedly exposed himself to extraordinary physical risks on the battlefield and suffered several appalling wounds, who had many personal enemies, who indulged in frequent bouts of binge drinking, and who spent most of his life outdoors, traveling thousands of miles in an era before the development of modern sanitation or medicine in areas with diverse and unfamiliar disease pools. Rather the wonder is that Alexander lived to the “ripe old age” of thirty-two. The explanation for his relative longevity in the face of the many risks he took and the stresses he inflicted on his body can be put down to some combination of remarkable personal vigor and equally remarkable luck. And so, in terms of really plausible counterfactual history, it seems more sensible to ask ourselves, not, “What if Alexander had lived to be sixty-five?” but, “What if Alexander had died in his early twenties?” To make it more specific: What if Alexander had been just a bit less lucky at the Battle of the Granicus? What if Cleitus had been a heartbeat too late with his spear? There is good reason to suppose that, although Alexander was very lucky indeed to ride away from the Granicus with his head intact, it was not just luck that placed Spithridates just an ax-length from the Macedonian commander early in the battle. The Persians certainly knew just where Alexander was riding among the Macedonian cavalry. The king’s white-plumed helmet was a clear marker, as indeed it was intended to be, for the Macedonians. And the Persian commanders had ample reason to suppose that Alexander would lead the charge personally. The place of an ancient Greek general was typically at the front of the line, rather than in the rear echelons. Moreover, young Alexander, at the outset of an auda-
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 Persian plan of “isolate and eliminate the commander” had worked at the Granicus—as it so nearly did? If Alexander had died at age twenty-two, instead of ten years later after having conquered the Persian empire, human history would have been very different indeed.

With the second blow of the ax, Alexander’s skull was cleaved; he died instantly. Cleitus arrived in time to dispatch his foe, and a fierce battle over the body of the fallen king ensued. The Macedonians eventually prevailed and drove back the enemy forces, but they took many casualties and the main body of the Persian forces withdrew largely intact. Moreover, King Darius III, the young, energetic, and battle-proven Persian monarch, was even now raising a huge force: Macedonian victories against Darius’s local governors would be meaningless as soon as the royal army arrived in western Anatolia. Meanwhile, Darius’s admirals were preparing to carry the conflict back into Greece. With no great success to report, and with the news of Alexander’s death impossible to contain for long, the Macedonian expeditionary force was faced with the prospect of a major Greek uprising. With the Macedonian throne vacant; the Greeks would play the familiar game of supporting this pretender or that—and the future of every member of the Macedonian elite was bound up in the outcome of the ensuing struggle. The Macedonian war council following Granicus was brief and to the point: There was no sense in continuing the campaign, every reason to beat a quick retreat, taking whatever plunder could be grabbed up quickly on the way home. As Macedon devolved into civil war, the brief Macedonian golden age sparked by Philip’s organizational genius came to an end: The next several generations closely recapitulated earlier Macedonian history, a series of weak kings in thrall variously to Greeks, Danubians, Persians, and their own strong-willed nobles.

Persia, on the other hand, entered a long period of relative peace and prosperity. Darius proved diplomatically adept and allowed the semi-Hellenized western satraps to deal with the Greeks on their own terms.
The general modus vivendi that had pertained earlier in the fourth century was expanded: Trade between Greece, Anatolia, the Near East, and even the further reaches of the empire expanded; there was less and less reason for anyone in Greece to imagine that the Greek cities of the western Anatolian littoral would welcome "liberation" from the Persian master, and the Persians had long ago lost interest in military adventurism among the bronze-clad warriors to their west. Although the Persian kings stuck by the old and successful Persian policy of religious toleration (which helped to avoid costly uprisings among the pockets of the Empire's population that were especially touchy about matters of religious purity), the worship of the God of Light and the Truth, Ahuru-Mazda, and a cosmology based on his eternal struggle with darkness and the forces of the Lie continued to spread among the multiethnic elites of the Empire, providing some level of cultural continuity that helped to undergird Persia's conservative military policy and efficient system of taxation.

Meanwhile, in mainland Greece, the big winner was the city-state of Athens. Athens's two traditional rivals, Sparta and Thebes, were both out of the picture: Thebes had been eliminated by Alexander and Sparta never recovered from a crushing defeat at the hands of the Thebans in 371 B.C. and the subsequent liberation of Sparta's serf population in nearby Messenia. With Macedon in a state of near collapse, Athens was once again the dominant military power on mainland Greece: The Athenian navy was now larger than it had been at the height of the Periclean "golden age" in the mid-fifth century. But the Athenians saw little advantage to imperialistic adventurism on the mainland or toward the east. The democratic city had proved capable of flourishing economically without an empire, focusing on its role as an international port and trading center. With Athenian warships patrolling the Aegean, piracy was kept to a minimum. Given the generally good relations Athens was able to maintain with the western satraps of Persia, the conditions were ideal for an expansion of peaceful trade in both luxury items and bulk commodities. As Athenian trading interests expanded, so too did the ten-
dency for the expansive tendency of Athenian democracy to include non-natives and it became increasingly common for successful resident foreigners in Athens to be granted citizenship. Always a cultural mecca, Athens now became the unquestioned center of Greek intellectual and cultural life—there were relatively few Greek philosophers, poets, scientists, or artists who willingly lived elsewhere. As the citizen body and state revenues from harbor taxes grew in tandem, so too did the capacity for Athens to extend its influence into new zones.

The western Mediterranean beckoned: Italy, Sicily, southern Gaul, Spain, and North Africa were all quite well known to the mainland Greeks, and the Athenians had attempted the conquest of Sicily back in the late fifth century. But there was a real problem: The imperial Phoenician city-state of Carthage (located on the North African coast near modern Tunis) had long regarded overseas trade in the western Mediterranean as an exclusive Carthaginian monopoly, and the Carthaginians had backed up this policy with a strong naval presence. Tension between Carthaginian and Athenian traders eventually flared into open conflict between the two great sea powers. In the long and debilitating war that followed, neither side managed to gain a clear advantage. Both sides had large citizen populations from which to recruit rowers and marines; both had large war chests and so each side was able to augment its citizen levies with mercenary forces. Tens of thousands of men were lost in massive sea battles, and even more drowned when sudden Mediterranean storms caught fleets of oared warships too far from protective harbors.

The theater of war expanded: Other mainland Greek states, and especially the Greek cities of Sicily and southern Italy, were inevitably drawn into the fray, on one side or the other. As Athens and Carthage poured more and more of their resources into the bitter and futile war, other non-Greek states moved in to pick up the trade: Phoenicians in the east, and eventually Latin speakers from central Italy in the west. As the conflict droned on, new traders took over the routes and new trade goods from inner Asia, Egypt, and Europe came available; the popularity of Hellenic cultural icons, for example, in architecture, decorated vases, and literature, tended to fade in the western provinces of the Persian empire. And Greek culture had never really caught on in most of the West.

With Carthage and the western Greek cities weakened by warfare, the big winner in the western Mediterranean was Rome. Only a mid-range regional power at the time of Alexander's death on the Granicus, Rome grew in strength by creating a coherent central-Italian defensive league; the influence of the league spread rapidly and Rome eventually entered the Atheno-Carthage conflict, ostensibly on the Carthaginian side. The result was the rapid absorption of all of Italy, then Sicily, and eventually a much-reduced Carthage into a rapidly growing Roman confederation that had by now become a genuine empire. A temporary truce with Athens and the mainland Greeks proved ephemeral: The Romans soon found an excuse to launch an invasion of Greece. With Athens weakened by two generations of unceasing conflict, the Roman victory was assured. But Athenian stubbornness in refusing to surrender after a lengthy siege tried Roman patience. When the walls of the city were finally breached, the Roman soldiers ran amok. The massacre was general and the city burned. Along with the extermination of Athens was lost the bulk of Greece’s intellectual and cultural treasures: Only tattered remnants of Greek tragedy, comedy, philosophy, and science survived the sack. The Greek world never regained its cultural or economic vibrance; the surviving city-states were strictly controlled by the vigilant Romans. Most Romans had developed no taste for Greek culture and despised what little they knew. "Greek studies” eventually became a very minor area of the larger world of Roman antiquarian research, of interest to a few scholars with especially arcane and esoteric tastes.

The conquest of Greece brought the Romans into direct confrontation with the Persians. Yet a generation of skirmishes between the two great empires proved indecisive: Although Rome took over Egypt and so completed its conquest of North Africa, the Romans found that they did not have the manpower simultaneously to pacify their vast holdings in the west and at the same time to engage in a really effective large-scale
war with Persia. For their part, the Persians had long ago given up thoughts of westward expansion; holding onto central Asia was enough of a challenge. Moreover, in the course of protracted diplomatic exchanges, the ruling elites of two great powers found that Persian and Roman aristocrats had much in common. Both cultures had immense respect for tradition and authority. Both were highly patriarchal, oriented toward duty and ancestors. The Romans found Ahuru-Mazda worship much to their liking—the starkly dualistic vision of a cosmos divided between forces of good and evil fit their worldview and they found it quite easy to integrate Ahuru-Mazda into the religious mishmash they had inherited from the Etruscans. The Persians, for their part, found that adopting some aspects of Roman military organization helped them consolidate their hold on their eastern provinces. There was a fair amount of intermarriage between Roman and Persian noble families; and in time the two cultures became harder and harder to tell apart.

This is the world as we might have known it, divided into the relatively stable bipolar structure that has, from time to time, seemed self-evidently the appropriate and indeed inevitable fate of mankind. Under this international regime, the peoples of the world, almost infinitely diverse in their cultures and their beliefs, simply remained so—there was (for better or for worse) no hegemonic "master culture" or "central canon" to unite them. This means that there would have been no Renaissance, no Enlightenment, no "modernity." The very concept of "the Western World" as exemplifying a set of more or less clearly articulated (if always contested and imperfectly realized) cultural, political, and ethical ideals would never have arisen.

There would perhaps have been occasional outbreaks of religious enthusiasm, but these would have remained local matters, never to transcend the provincial level. For indeed by what means could they become generalized? While Latin in the West and Aramaic in the East would prove workable administrative languages, they were not hospitable linguistic environments for transcultural exchanges. Traders inevitably would have learned a few languages, but most people would continue to speak their own local language and nothing but, live by local laws, worship their local deities, tell their local stories, and think their local ideas. Their contact with whichever of the great empires they happened to inhabit would be limited to paying taxes and occasional military service. The peculiarities of diverse cultures might be of interest to the state-supported scholars who would make it their business to collect and categorize knowledge about the world; but these would remain few and would be supported by the governments of the two empires only because abstruse knowledge sometimes comes in handy in dealing with problems of tax collection or keeping order.

And so, if Cleitus had stumbled as he hastened to save his king, we would inhabit a world very different from our own in terms of geopolitics, religion, and culture. I have suggested that it would be a world in which the values characteristic of the Greek city-states were lost in favor of a fusion of Roman and Persian ideals. The stark dualism of Ahuru-Mazda worship became the dominant religious tradition. A profound reverence for ritual, tradition, ancestors, and social hierarchy—rather than Greek reverence for freedom, political equality, and the dignity of the person—defined the ethical values of a small "cosmopolitan" elite that would rule over a diverse mosaic of cultures. And this could take place because there was no long and brilliant "Hellenistic Period"—and so no integration of a wider world into a Greek cultural/linguistic sphere.

Without the challenge of strong Greek cultural influence and subsequent Roman mismanagement in Judea, Judaism would have remained a localized phenomenon. The Persians were quite sensitive to local religious concerns; under continued Persian rule there would have been no great Maccabean uprising, no Greek Septuagint, no violent Roman destruction of the Second Temple, no great Jewish diaspora. Likewise, Jesus of Nazareth (had he not chosen to stick to carpentry) would remain a local religious figure. The New Testament (whatever form it took) would never have been composed in "universal" Greek and so would not have
found a broad audience. Without the wide diffusion of Jewish and Christian texts, the cultural domain in which Mohammed grew up would have been radically altered; if a new religion emerged within the Arabian peninsula it would take a form quite different from that of classical Islam and it seems highly unlikely that it would have generated the remarkable cultural and military energies we associate with the great Jihad. Indeed, the very concept of "culture" would have a very different meaning; culture would remain overwhelmingly local rather than developing viable aspirations to universality.

Ironically, the values of our own world, which I have suggested is a result of Alexander's good luck at the Granicus, would not have pleased Cleitus the Black. As a staunch Macedonian conservative who despised innovation, Cleitus would be more likely to approve of the counterfactual Romano-Persian regime described above. But Cleitus did not live to see the world his spear thrust made: Seven years after saving his king at Granicus, he was speared to death by Alexander in a drunken quarrel over the cultural future of the nascent empire. Their quarrel, even more ironically, was (as it turned out) over contrasting counterfactual scenarios: Cleitus believed that Macedonians should stick by their traditions and should have nothing to do with the customs of the people they conquered; he dreamed of a world in which the victorious Macedonians would be culturally unaffected by their military success. Alexander, seeking to unify his empire and to gain the manpower needed for future conquests, was eager to adopt Persian court ritual and to train Persian soldiers to fight side by side with his Macedonian veterans. But neither Cleitus's Macedonia-first conservatism nor Alexander's hope for a unitary empire and unending imperial expansionism had much to do with the real new world that came into being upon Alexander's very timely death in Babylon, at age thirty-two, in June of 323 B.C.