

Herald 681

Chapter 681 Public School (Part-1)

While it was true that Alexander did not take many major policies regarding the development of Zanzan, it was not as if he did not take any.

Because to be specific he did take one, mainly making use of the few hundred learned people that Pasha Farzah had sent.

Theocles was put in charge of overseeing their day to day activity, where he would arrange for them to be taught the beliefs of Gaia, most of which he had made up with the help of Ophenia, with some sprinkling of inspiration from Alexander.

Twice a week, these priests would learn these theological texts, as well as earn experience in how to run a temple- such as giving sermons, tending to the devotees, collecting donations, looking after some of the poor, providing some rudimentary healing advice and all sorts of other odd jobs.

But all these could have been said to be their secondary task.

Because their main task, something they did four days a week seemed to have been teaching.

Alexander had already informed Pasha Farzah of his intention to use the men as such and even promised them a large wage of three hundred (300) ropals a month.

When the aged Pasha first learned of Alexander's intention, he was a bit confused.

He initially thought Alexander wanted to teach himself and his fellow mercenary leader and their children about the cultures of this new country.

Similar to how nobles taught their progenies.

But when Alexander clarified that he wanted these people to teach the general populace, and give them a real proper education, not that wishy- washy being able to only write their name and read some numbers, at first the ruler of Matrak was shocked and then taking a moment to fully comprehending what Alexander was wishing to do, simply burst out laughing.

"Haha, you brat, you sure do all sorts of weird things," He had cried.

And he used that particular word- weird.

Because from the traditional perspective, it was indeed weird for any lord to teach the general populace en masse.

A major reason was that the ruling class saw it as a way of maintaining their grip on power, with education being strictly restricted to the nobles and the priests.

After all, it was much easier to hoodwink stupid people than clever ones.

And even the few generous lords who would sometimes take in orphans and take care of their education did it ultimately for their own gain.

The numbers they took would be very small, and usually only took the brightest and cleverest of the bunch, where they would be groomed to become useful members of the household, like bookkeepers, small-scale administrators looking after the land on behalf of their lord, stewards, accountants, and other professionals which required some formal education.

But those types of small-scale charities could never equal Alexander's grand ambition in size or scale, whose numbers were in the thousands, not in the tens.

Besides the ruling class's obvious dislike for the general populace becoming smarter, there were also other more practical difficulties.

The biggest one was simply that most people did not need a formal education, and was able to go by fine all their life without ever needing to be able to read or write.

And this applied to almost all professions except the nobility and priests, be they farmers, artisans, or even traders.

Yes, even for traders, it was not an absolute necessity to know how to read or write.

It certainly helped, but he could do without it and be even very successful at his trade.

This type of example existed in Alexander's past life as well, with perhaps the most famous trader there being Muhammad, who by most authentic records was illiterate.

So in most people's eyes, education was seen as something redundant, something only for the rich fancy folk to pursue who had more time and money in their hands than they knew what to do with.

'For us poor, ordinary folks, we do not need to worry about that hard, complicated stuff,' They generally thought.

This type of mindset regarding education might seem weird to some in the modern era, but a somewhat similar comparison of the modern day would be how many people view billionaires using private jets for work.

Most who see those do not dream of one day buying a jet of their own but feel that kind of luxury is reserved for the uber rich.

'For us normal folks, much more reasonable alternatives of cars, trains, and buses exist,' They think.

And similar to how expensive it is own own and operate a jet, mass education also faced that same obstacle as its second practical problem.

The amount of spending needed to be done to make public education free would be bloody expensive for anyone.

Books and teaching materials, the land and building itself, the furniture inside such as tables, chairs, and benches, stationery such as chalk, blackboards, and dusters, and the salaries of teachers, the cost of everything quickly added up when done in those large scales.

Most nobles would never be able to institute these on a mass scale even if they had the best wishes at heart.

After all, there was no noble like Alexander who earned in a year what even most Pasha's got in a decade, as evidenced by how he was able to transform a comatose city like Zanzan into a rich vibrant center in just three years, by simply throwing massive piles of money at it, starting from setting such huge industries, to all those infrastructure projects, to even giving out those generous bereavement payments, the likes of which were almost unheard of. I think you should take a look at

But other nobles were not so lucky, so they would not have been able to provide those services for free even if they wanted to.

And mass education had to be free if it was to be effective.

Nobles could not charge them anything.

Because as stated earlier most of the population did not see any need to be educated and would see no reason to spend that money on something so redundant.

They would rather spend that on something useful, like helping their sons get an apprenticeship at their local artisan's shop, or putting them in a temple to become priests and work in service of the gods.

And all this was assuming they had the money to spend in the first place.

Because remember, most people lived very poor lives, barely getting by.

So if Alexander wanted to educate the poor peasants, he would have to do it out of his own pocket.

In fact, it would not be enough just to pay their tuition, he figured he also would need to pay the parents to send their kids to school.

Yes!

As absurd as it sounded, Alexander reasoned that to get the kids to study, not only the parents would not need to spend a dime, they would even be getting a few dimes in return, just for sending their kids to school.

Ah! If only modern education was so profitable!

But the obvious question then rose here was why?

Why did Alexander think it was reasonable to assume so?

And the answer lay in the structure of the society of this time.

It had to be remembered that the society Alexander currently lived in an agrarian society, not an urban society like modern times.

And one of the major differences between the two societies was how children were viewed in both of them.

For a city-dwelling, urban society, children were seen as an economic burden, who were unable to contribute to the family in any way, which was why typically parents tended to limit themselves to two to three children.

Any more and it tended to get too expensive.

While for an agrarian society, where children lived in farms, they were not seen as only another mouth to feed, but also as an extra pair of hands.

And there were always work to be done on a farm, even for relatively young children.

Planting seeds with their father, picking weeds, scaring away birds, taking care of the animals, looking after them, cleaning their droppings, and even doing something as mundane as separating the stones from the harvested grains.

All these were tasks that someone needed to do and even small children could contribute.

Whereas for children in cities, all the work available to them would require too much skill for them to even attempt it.

Good luck having your child file your tax returns.

But though children in an agrarian society could contribute to their family and earn their keep so to speak from an early age, making it sound very good, but for Alexander this presented a dilemma.

And that was that given these children were economically important to their families, the parents would be much less inclined to send them away for hours on end to something that produced nothing of immediate economic value.

In fact many viewed it as something that would never produce anything of value.

So to get them to send their kids to school, Alexander knew he would need to tempt them with monetary compensation, which they then could use to hire other helpers to take their children's place.

And when all these reasons were presented before one, Pasha Farzah breaking into his outburst of incredulous laughter really started to make sense.

The old man was not stupid.

In fact he was extremely smart.

This was why he thought Alexander must have more money than sense to do something so stupid.

Chapter 682 Public School (Part-2)

If a modern person were to judge Pasha Farzah's reaction regarding the idea of general free education, he would almost certainly judge the old man quite harshly, branding him as stupid and short sighted.

But in reality, the old man was anything but those.

In fact, he was undoubtedly one of the smartest people Alexander had met, both in this and his other life.

And perhaps the biggest example of his brilliance would be when he had laughed out so loudly upon Alexander's plans.

This might sound a bit strange, but remember, the fact that he had laughed out so loud meant that he was instantly able to foresee all the problems with implementing it.

That was also why he thought Alexander had more money than sense.

But if Alexander was in his shoes, with the same experiences as the pasha, he most likely would have had the same reaction.

Because even for brilliant people it was very hard to see ten or even twenty years into the future.

Especially when there was no precedent to base one's assumptions upon.

Just try and find how many people could recognize companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, and Amazon as giant tech companies during their initial years.

And it would indeed take at least that long for the effects of mass education to show themselves.

Alexander was only able to confidently go ahead with this mind- numbingly huge expense without any worry because he knew his investment would definitely pay off, and pay off in dividends, for unlike Pasha Farzah, he stood on the shoulder of giants.

And being a modern he really could see the difference between a society widely educated and one not.

In fact here are some of the examples of conversations he had with random people during some of his city tours that went to illustrate his point.

"Zanzan is in Adhania. And Adhania is in Zanzan. But I don't know.... which is which." Said by a confused farmer.

"Don't know much about God Ramuh. He's no customer of mine." Carelessly said by a working girl while glancing at her nails.

"The first human must have beena hundred years ago."- Claimed by a traveling merchant, proud of his answer.

"The Grand Temple of Ramuh? That must be in.....Wari? Kuleef? Harim?"

Pronounced by an embarrassed farmer who did not even know the name of the capital of the country he lived in.

In fact, most people though knew they lived in a country called Adhania, really had no idea what that actually meant.

To them, the only man of authority that mattered was their local lord.

Alexander hearing those answers even felt ashamed of them.

And these were some of the good ones.

Alexander did not even want to remember the things people said about the sun, moon, the weather.

Hearing those answers Alexander felt he could empathize with the nobles who held a general disdain for the regular populace, looking down on them pretty openly.

Alexander would also look down on them given these stupid answers.

It had to be noted that, it was not only the people of Zanzan that were stupid.

When Alexander was in Thesos, he noticed the general IQ there to be similar.

All of this went to show in bright contrast the difference between a society that underwent one to two centuries of compulsory education and one that did not.

And the reason why the people Alexander hung with were not like that was because being mercenaries, they had come across a lot of various types of people and seen and dealt with a lot of unique challenges, which helped them grow out of that type of thinking.

But not completely, as even Cambyses gave Alexander strange looks at the time he revealed his plans about the compulsory education, as she asked herself why her husband was wasting his time in such expensive but pointless endeavors.

"Will it be like a military training thing? Are these our new officers?" She asked, thinking that made the most sense.

The nobles also had a very rough equivalent of that, designed to teach their butlers' and stewards' children as well as some well off children of the general populace with the intention of training them to be low level officers

But Alexander would be a gross idiot if he spent so much to do that.

One did not need how to read and write to swing a sword after all. I think you should take a look at

And this was not the modern times where soldiers needed to handle complex machinery.

So if Alexander were to turn these people soldiers, he would be needlessly putting the people he invested so much in unnecessarily at risk.

But Alexander felt he lacked the capacity to properly explain to Cambyses how compulsory education could benefit them in the long run, except for only saying, 'Trust me, bro!'

And Cambyses for her part, after seeing Alexander was adamant did not bother him anymore, letting him do his thing.

She knew Alexander rarely ever did things out of reason and so patiently waited for the results to show themselves.

And thus the first free public school fully funded by a lord was established, a feat that was possibly the very first one in the whole world.

The L shaped one story wooden building was situated in the western residential district, and Alexander started initially with only a thousand (1,000) students aged between eight to ten.

The 1,000 number might seem like a lot, but remember, this was a city of above 200,000, with tens of thousands of children, whereas Alexander was only offering free education to just the lucky 1,000.

This was mostly because Alexander did not think he had the teachers or the infrastructural capacity to handle any more at the moment.

He would expand later.

So for now, he chose most of the boys from the families who worked at Alexander's various workshops, while a few others came from backgrounds such as traders and farmers.

And yes there were only boys for now as having girls attend a schoolroom and get an education was too scandalous of a thought, at least for now, though Alexander had plans to slowly try and change that.

But for now, these 1,000 boys were divided into two groups, morning and day shift, and made to attend school four days a week.

One group would start at 6 am and end at 10, while the other would start at noon and end at 4.

Both of them would have the same routine which was starting the class with half an hour of intense physical exercise, followed by a sumptuous meal, and then be taught for three hours, the time equally divided between three subjects: maths, language, and history.

Additionally, there would be one hour per week of the study of the Gaia faith, for obvious reasons, conducted by a priest from the Temple.

And yes, that meal, be it breakfast or lunch depending on the shift they were attending, would of course be provided by Alexander.

Meaning on top of everything, the young lord even had to bribe the children with food to attract them to come to school.

He even made the items on the menu appetizing, making sure there was some type of meat, egg, or fish every day, accompanied by seasonal fruits, and lastly followed by a glass of sweet juice, which was especially popular with the kids.

The five hundred students in each shift were divided into twenty groups of twenty-five each and the school employed a total of thirty teachers along with ten staff as guards, assistants, and maintainers, to teach them,

Each of these teachers taught only one subject, which was much different from the usual practice of one person teaching everything, but Alexander was a true believer in division of labor and wanted a master to teach the students, not a jack of all trades.

He did not think a person who teaches everything could effectively teach a student anything.

Thus each teacher was allotted four hours a day of teaching time, with two classes in the morning and two in the afternoon.

The layout of the classrooms was kind of the standard kind, with large windows on all four sides to illuminate the insides, and the teacher's bench at the front, but without the rows of benches for the students to sit.

Alexander at first had contemplated using benches and even making them tiered to make it easier for those sitting at the back to see in front.

But then he found a better way.

Instead of benches, the students sat on carpets laid across the ground, with a strip of sand in front of them separating them from their classmates.

This sand was there to be used as their scrapbook, something to practice their works in.

Alexander thought of this when he was trying to find a cheap alternative to giving each of the thousand kids expensive notebooks just for them to practice their work on.

Paper was still quite expensive, as were quills and inks, and Alexander would be truly a great wastrel if he gave out such free goods when such a cheap, free substitute existed.

But though Alexander saved a lot of money using these alternatives, he did not skimp when it came to facilities for the teachers.

He could have made the teachers also use the sand to teach the students, something that was the norm at the time, even among noble tutors.

Because remember, parchment and papyrus were expensive things.

So just for his school, Alexander invented the blackboard, which was just a large wooden board simply painted matt black, where they could write with chalk.

Chapter 683 Printing Press

Alexander knew that even tutors of nobles used the ground as a cheap and easy blackboard because using things like papyrus, valium, or parchment for little children to doddle and practice on was too wasteful.

And though this type of teaching was very similar to a blackboard, where the writing was also periodically rubbed off, the most easily identifiable problem with that was that writing on the ground limited the number of people who could see it.

Basically, only the very first rows could clearly see it.

This might have worked when there were only two or three kids, but would not work for a class of twenty five.

Hence Alexander decided to splurge on the blackboard and consumable chalk.

Though it was not really splurging given the blackboards were just a cheap, slab of wood and the chalks were made from gypsum which was already being mined in huge quantities to be used in cement products.

So compared to their use there, its use in writing was not even a rounding error.

And these things were quite convenient to use, being able to be easily removed by simply wiping over it, or at worst using a wet cloth.

Speaking of expense, Alexander did do the maths regarding the cost of running his school and found them to be truly eye watering.

The thirty teachers (30) with a monthly wage of three hundred (300) ropals and the ten (10) staff with 200 ropals netted a bill of 132,000 ropals annually.

The yearly cost of the food provided to the students every 4 days of the week came to 350,000 ropals a year.

And then came the absurd cost where Alexander had to pay the kids' parents 8 ropals a week per child just to convince them to send their children to school.

That was also around 350,000 ropals annually.

Then there was the setup cost, i.e.- the cost of building the school, furnishings such as the carpets, blackboards, etc., as well as the value of the land the school was on.

And lastly, there were the running costs, such as maintenance, the provision of stationery such as chalk, registers, etc., and free books for the children.

Alexander combined all the costs to find it cost him approximately 850,000 to 900,000 ropals a year, or an average spending of about 900 per student annually.

To give one example of just how expensive this was, well. a Talukder (Viscount) earned about a million ropals per year.

And with that money, you could only get a thousand educated people.

Also, it had to be remembered that this was only the first batch of students, meaning Alexander's expenses would double the next year, and then triple the year following that.

It was also because of that that instead of the standard 16 years learning course of modern times,

Alexander planned to have a much more manageable four-year term, like a university's, or at best extend it to five years if circumstance then allowed.

Alexander neither had the money nor, frankly, the time to do anything more.

And this was considering that what should have been Alexander's biggest expense, the textbooks, were cheap, comparatively cheap as water in fact.

Because compared to what it would have cost to produce them by hand, by inventing the printing press and churning them out mechanically, the cost fell by a few hundred times.

This was a fairly simple device to make, with the clue being in its name, 'printing' and 'press'.

And its invention was made quite a bit easier for Alexander as he could take inspiration from the already existing stamps, which when inked and pressed against paper, would leave a particular pattern on it.

So the basic trick to making a printing press was to make a 'stamp' of an entire page, and then if one could be made for all the pages of a book, voila, you got a mechanical way of writing that entire book.

Well, that was the basic idea, though in reality there were many small details that needed ironing out before you could get a working product.

As they say, the devil is in the details.

And it was because of those details that a lot of time was needed in ironing out the details, which was why Alexander needed almost three years before he could get a good, working press.

To make it work, Alexander first made metal molds of all the letters, numbers, and signs one would use.

And then invented a kind of metal bed where he could insert and arrange these molds in the proper order to spell out what he wanted to say.

In this way, Alexander could 'manufacture' a page, or the template for a page.

This method also avoided the problem of needing to cast separate molds for each and every page Alexander ever wanted to print.

He could simply use the basic letters to make one as he wanted and then disassemble it when done.

And since he would be just placing the letters instead of writing them, it was much faster to reproduce a page.

It was also because of that the new blacksmiths from Galiosos were put to work making many many molds of those same few individual symbols because just to 'write' one page, one needed a lot of repeating letters. I think you should take a look at

After the template is made, then it was inked, a page was placed on top of it, and then using a wooden press, such as the one used to press grapes to make wine, the page would be pressed against the template, making the ink transfer over to the page, and that's it, a page would be printed.

And it was because this pressing mechanism was used to produce the page that the contraption was called a printing press, i.e.- the printing was literally done by a press.

Now, this was a very simple overview of the mechanism, whereas in reality there were a lot of tiny small problems.

The first problem was the metal molds.

When cast, they had to be made of the kind of metal that did not shrink too much when solidifying.

This was to ensure all the molds were of equal size and more critically height, which was important to make sure the ink stuck evenly to all the letters.

If they were to be uneven, the ink would be too much on the taller ones, but minuscule or even missing on the shorter ones when the operator coated them using a specialized leather tool.

That was why Alexander could not use iron because liquid iron shrunk by different volumes depending on its cast shape,

So a mold representing the letter A would shrink differently to a similarly sized mold of the letter B.

Thus Alexander could not simply assume that all the molds will shrink equally and that the net result would still be the same.

Hence instead Alexander decided to use an alloy of mainly lead and tin with tiny bits of iron.

This caused very little shrinkage, being within tolerable limits.

And this was also one of the reasons why it took the world in his previous life 500 years to go from stamps to the Guttenburge printing press.

One of the German inventor's greatest innovations was inventing an alloy of tin, lead, and antimony to solve that shrinkage problem.

Alexander could not find any antimony, so substituted it with iron.

He thought this was reasonable because the main purpose of the antimony was to give the mold strength.

Both lead and tin were soft metals, so if only those two were to be used to make the molds, those risked breaking under repeated presses.

Thus Alexander hoped the iron, though not perfect, as it shrunk unlike antimony, could do a similar job.

And to his great relief, Alexander did find the result to be acceptable.

Though not as flawless as he would have liked, Alexander could work with a few missing letters here and there.

Besides, it was not like he would never be able to find antimony.

He could easily switch them.

Or if his luck was truly bad, and the problem became too large in the future, well then he could switch to wooden molds.

He did not use those initially because compared to carving out a mold by hand on a small piece of wood, it was much faster and cheaper to cast them using metal.

Furthermore, wood was relatively soft, so if he did that. molds would need to be more frequently replaced.

But those future concerns, for now, Alexander had indeed solved one of his biggest problems.

Then came another problem- the paper.

It was found that the currently produced ones were too oily and did not particularly stick well to the ink through this pressing method, causing it to not imprint properly and smear.

So Alexander at first tried parchment and papyrus, but those smeared even more.

Finally. it took Alexander quite a few tries to find that the problem could be solved by simply very slightly wetting the paper with tiny sprinkles of water.

And the last surprising twist to his problems came in the form of the arrangement of the letters.

Alexander found that when the letters were arranged normally, the letter on the paper would come as being reversed.

This was of course natural, because, remember, the way it was designed, the paper was getting a reverse imprint of the template.

So Alexander had to flip the molds to get the correct orientation on the printed paper.

But with all those problems solved, Alexander could finally print his books.

Chapter 684 Public School (Part-3)

It took Alexander almost three years, with one year of that being when Alexander really paid his attention to solving all those teething problems, that the printing press could finally come to life this summer.

Alexander was at last able to manufacture the machine and hire enough people to make the whole thing finally operational, thus finally being able to print books.

Alexander at the moment ran ten such presses, with plans to make it into twenty in the future.

Most of the workers there were involved in manufacturing the template for each of the book pages, meaning they spent most of the day looking at a book page, and meticulously copying it onto the special metal bed using the metal molds.

Once one page was made, they would run a test run to check for any spelling mistakes and then adjust according.

And once they finished the template of that page, they would either start printing it immediately or properly label it using the book's name and page number before storing it in the archives for printing in the future.

Now, Alexander was not limited to printing only letters.

He could even print pictures, though it was more expensive as a custom made wooden, or metal mold of the picture had to be first made.

All this work was as one could guess needed learned men, and since Alexander needed only 30 teachers, the rest of the few hundred men Pasha Farzah sent were made to work in the printing press, four days a week for 250 ropals a month each.

And with their help, if all ten of the printing presses was running at full capacity, Alexander would be able to churn out 30,000 to 35,000 pages every single day!

Something that might have needed ten thousand scribes to accomplish by hand.

And it was such immense increases in productivity that allowed Alexander to decrease the price of books by hundreds of times for the school children.

And since the human brain cannot easily visualize such huge differences, well it was the equivalent of something like a house costing as much as a few hundred bucks.

Though the fact that even with such huge price reductions Alexander still needed to spend so much on education went on to show the inherent costly nature of the endeavor.

However, it should also be noted that Alexander expected these expenses to drop drastically once the fruits of education became apparent to the public.

He expected that once the rumor about the free food went out, many people would come flocking, possibly allowing Alexander to no longer pay the 8 ropals a week to parents, and perhaps, even start charging some money.

Though he doubted it would ever be enough to fully pay for itself.

But still, Alexander looked forward to the change in mindset, though for now, Alexander knew he had to keep dumping money.

And after spending so much, what did Alexander wish the students to be able to do after finishing their graduation?

Well, for the first year, regarding the subject of maths, it was basically primary level stuff.

They were just starting out after all.

So for the first six months, the book given to them would teach basic number recognition, enable them to write them in words, understand the concept of even and odd numbers, arrange numbers in ascending and descending order, and other easy stuff.

While for the next half of the year, the focus would be on learning about addition, subtraction, and multiplication.

Alexander did not add division to the course plan because he thought that might be too advanced for the first year.

After all, remembering how to do long division was hard for even adults.

Hence Alexander opted to leave that one out till the second year, when the students would become a bit more mature.

As it could be gathered from the context Alexander had personally written the math course textbook as he could not find any suitable ones among the ones Pasha Farzah and Lady Inayah had sent over, and even doubted such suitable ones for kids even existed.

So he made his own one, one which did not have only lifeless numbers filling them but also had numerous practice exercises to test their knowledge on, such as writing numbers from words and vice

versa, figuring the number out from its description, like finding the largest 4 digits even number, circling the odd one out, and various other problems.

While learning about the three operations involved practicing many, many example problems about them, all of which Alexander had handmade.

The math textbook that Alexander had written was 50 pages long, and currently with 1,000 copies in circulation, it was the second most popular book in Adhania, right after the Holy Scripture of Ramuh-Taqua..

Now teaching all these to kids who were just learning the numbers for the first time might seem a bit daunting.

But it had to be remembered that they were around ten years old, so were the equivalent of fourth or fifth graders, which was plenty mature.

In fact, they were even more so when the context of the time was taken into account where people tended to mature much more quickly.

There were kids just a few years older who started families! I think you should take a look at

So Alexander figured he could teach all of this in the first year.

As for the second year, he wanted to complete mastery of the four basic functions, including things like least common factor (LCF), highest common factor (HCF), and BODMAS (the equivalent of PEMDAS for the US).

Then in the third year, he wanted to teach geometry of various shapes, such as their angles, area, and volumes, as well as some basic trigonometry, which would be useful for things like construction.

And lastly,, in their last year, Alexander wanted to introduce algebra, which was a branch yet to be invented.

As to whether he would have a fifth year to teach another brand new topic- calculus, well Alexander had not decided yet.

This was because Alexander was not even sure if he could cover all this in four years, so decided to wait to determine whether to extend the curriculum by a year after looking at future results.

Now, if it was not obvious enough, Alexander really put his emphasis on maths, leaving the other two subjects mostly to the wayside.

An action that was really self-explanatory.

Alexander wanted inventors, scientists, administrators, and lawyers.

He did not care much about his students knowing about the language, just as long as they could read and write the words well enough.

He expected some of them to become scientists like Newton or Gallileo, not famous playwrights Homer or Shakespeare.

Because frankly, Alexander had little love for the arts, much preferring the sciences.

Thus the textbook for the Azhak language to be taught at school, only had the letters and a small collection of everyday used words, along with some popular rhymes, poems, and famous stories that Alexander had haphazardly put together into a weird, incoherent amalgamation, to be taught over two years.

As for the history textbook, well that would be better called a general knowledge book.

Because it did not cover any one topic but a hodgepodge of everything.

For Adhania, it listed the name of its capital, its provinces, some of the specialties of those provinces, famous rivers and mountains of the country, its local flora and fauna, and many other tidbits.

Then there was a brief history of how the current Adhania came to be, from its very inception to its current state.

It described the rise and fall of various dynasties, about how the current royal family came to be, and why there was currently a civil war.

And of course, it painted Amenheraft in a very unflattering light while painting Ptolomy as a righteous ruler and Alexander his greatest sword and friend.

Alexander was pretty proud of his propaganda piece if he said so himself,

The book also clearly showed the social structure of the nobles.

This was because though it might seem like common knowledge, to most peasants, they only knew that their local lord was their master and the king was bigger than him.

That's it.

After all, whether to a shordar or a king, a peasant was the same, a bug.

Thus most had no idea what the peerage of their lord meant, or that their 'boss' might actually have many other bosses.

So the book very briefly made them aware of the significance of the words shordar (baron), talukder (viscount), etc. and how the country's political system worked.

And in a way, Alexander also did this to show his status, as the people up until now really did not understand what being a Pasha actually meant.

He also listed the names of the large noble houses, particularly the Matbars (Marquiss) and Pashas, as well as their coat of arms, and a brief summary of their past.

In here too, Alexander embellished the achievements of his allies, while vilifying Amenheraft's staunchest allies like Pahsa Vivizan and Djose.

This was everything to be taught regarding Adhania.

But the history book did not just stop there.

Because Alexander also made sure to include a bit of history about Adhania's neighbors, painting all of them in various colors as it suited him, with the intention of burying a seed of revenge or lust for conquest against some of the foreign lands he wanted to have.

It was not any grand ambition, but Alexander thought, 'Hey, it can't hurt to try right?'

Chapter 685 Public School (End)

As Alexander wrote his first history book, he somehow felt a surge of power running through him.

Because he knew he was changing history as he did.

What he wrote would be read by a thousand, then another thousand and another thousand, and then spread from mouth to mouth countless more times.

This book would likely be spread throughout the Adhan and Matrak provinces, meaning it would be his version of the story that would be the 'truth'.

After all repeat enough times a lie and it will become the truth.

And as Alexander realized what he was doing, he experienced an exhilarating surge of power, that honeyed power to warp reality to whatever he wanted.

And he found the taste utterly addictive.

No wonder absolute monarchs tended to go crazy with power.

It was too potent a poison.

Even someone well aware of what was happening like Alexander found it very hard to resist.

So how could the other unaware, defenseless mortals even stand a chance?

Now, after experiencing this momentary high, Alexander did work to rein himself in a bit.

Amenheraft and his close allies were still made to look like the bad guys, but those in the periphery were shown to be neutral, while Alexander's own allies were shown to be good, but not saints, their actions neither criticized nor glorified, only dryly mention in a deliberate, monotone fashion.

After all, today's allies might be tomorrow's enemies, especially someone like Ptolomy, and so it would be best if the future bureaucrats of Alexander's regime did not grow to particularly love any side too much.

For now, Alexander was content with these young children siding with him and seeing others as mostly neutral who could swing either way.

This was currently Alexander's domestic policy.

As for the international one, well the vast majority of the general populace outside of Adhania was mostly shown to be misguided, lost sheep, hoodwinked by the corrupt nobility.

They were portrayed as people not to be hated, but to be liberated from the cruel yoke of their masters.

This narrative was taken of course to make sure if he did conquer and annex any of those lands, the common people there would not be too much discriminated against by the native Zanzan populace.

And as Alexander was writing the school curriculum, he really for the first time understood just how much power the government of his previous life had, being able to shape a growing child's mind through the textbook in whatever way they wished for twelve to sixteen years.

To Alexander it seemed that every single person in the general populace, all around the world was more or less brainwashed by their respective countries in some way or form.

American children are made to swear to the flag at the start of every school day to foster patriotism, North Koreans are made to think they live in a utopia, and Cubans are taught that communism is the best economic and political ideology there is.

All these various tactics are employed to promote the ruling authority's goals.

This was not to say it was a bad thing per se.

But the realization did make Alexander wonder how much the thoughts people had were really their own, free thoughts, and how much were they influenced by other external interventions, even in the most liberal countries.

As Alexander understood this, he found it to be actually good news, because remember, he now belonged to the ruling class.

Meaning these tools could be used to shape people to his liking.

Hence this was the current curriculum Alexander set up for the schools for the time being.

Now, some might have noticed, a few key subjects missing there.

And that was because Alexander intended to add them in the following years.

For example, the language and history lessons would stop after two years, and from the third year be replaced with other subjects.

One subject that Alexander intended to add was the natural sciences, which was an amalgamation of all the STEM subjects (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Astronomy, Maths, Geology, etc.), all bunched together.

Alexander wanted to wait two years to introduce this because he wanted the students to become a bit more mature, and then he planned to teach the subject two hours a day.

While in the meantime, he had to decide what to teach them there, or more specifically decide how much of his own knowledge should he transfer.

Because from whatever books Alexander could find about the subject, he found most of them to be utter rubbish.

Physics was the most passable for the time, with a heavy emphasis on the phrase 'for the time' as more than half of it was still garbage, such as believing the world to be flat.

But still, it did describe things like the motion of levers and pulleys well enough, as well as things like how a groma (an instrument for building straight roads) worked, all possible probably because there were real life examples of those principles being used in applications.

Compared to that, biology was ninety percent crap, with all sorts of absurd and illogical descriptions of how a body worked, like how blood flowed through the body like ebbs and tides of seas.

It also tried to mesh everything together, such as trying to relate a healthy living standard with a healthy mind to a healthy diet and getting nowhere.

Then was the attempt to classify birds and animals in absurd ways, like their number of feet or eyes, or body features like tails, hooves, feathers, etc.

The only thing Alexander could find that made sense was the classification of animals by their diet, i.e.- herbivore, carnivore, and omnivore.

In the realms of botany, there was little talk about plants, because of course plants were not seen as living beings.

Though there were a few books describing in very accurate detail the effects of various herbs, which were probably gathered from journals of medical practitioners.

Then there was geology, which tried to classify rocks and metals into various groups, with no real result, just a weird, intangible mix.

Then Alexander found bits and pieces regarding meteorology in one of the books, trying to predict the weather or explain the formation of the rain or snow.

But they failed here miserably as they could not figure out the water cycle, instead hypothesizing that rain was created by huge water sprouts formed in the sea that threw up massive amounts of water into the sky, which was then pushed towards the land by strong winds.

In the case of astrology, well other than naming a few stars, there was almost nothing.

In fact it was even forbidden to study the study as it was seen as trying to peer into the realm of the gods.

And lastly, about chemistry, well the knowledge about that was totally nonexistent.

It was known as alchemy and it had no clue about chemical reactions or why anything happened.

The subject was mostly practiced by quacks or amateurs as a pastime hobby, where the ultimate goal was the delusional idea of turning lead into gold.

Something that would be only possible if lead could be somehow made to fission and decay into gold.

Reading all these bad fiction novels, Alexander had a strong urge to burn them all but ultimately restrained himself.

Instead, he focused on what to teach them.

Should he spoon-feed them everything?

Alexander basically knew the classical physics front to back after all.

Or should he teach them to fish so that they could become a fisherman?

This was a question that made Alexander ponder for some while with both having its merits and demerits.

The former could accelerate his growth but leave a hollow foundation as many derivations might be missing, leading to mistakes further down the line.

While the latter would give his educated class a solid foundation, but progress would be much slower.

The trade offs were worth considering very closely.

But after thinking for a while, since Alexander had two years to think about it, he dumped it to the back of his mind for the time being.

Instead, he ruminated on what else to teach the students once they reached the third year, when he intended to increase the school hours by an hour.

Philosophy was a very popular option, as it was a kind of the yardstick used by the educated nobility to judge one's literacy.

Something, as a side note that Alexander sucked that.

Because Alexander, being from the sciences had an inherent distaste for the arts.

And in that same vein, Alexander did not want to teach his students arts or painting, thinking it was a waste of time.

Something that was consequently very popular with the nobles too.

Alexander also ruled out music or poetry for that same reason.

Instead, he wondered whether he should teach the students economics, which was not a subject yet, to help them become better economic policymakers.

Or teach them accounting to help them keep track of taxes in their jobs.

Or humanities subjects like sociology, political science, or even psychology, all of which had their benefits.

Sociology helped people understand their society and resolve conflicts such as racial tensions, and class inequality peacefully.

The usefulness of a bureaucrat learning political science and how to play the grand game need not be said.

While knowledge about human psychology for a person leading a group of people was an invaluable asset.

There were lots of very good options for Alexander to choose and he struggled to pick only one.

Chapter 686 Preparations For The Campaign (Part-1)

Alexander would decide to postpone making the choice of his subjects until later on.

Instead he for now concentrated on finally getting his school started.

Because it had taken him an entire year to finally get everything in place.

The school had to be built, the students selected, the printing press set up, the books printed, and lastly, the teachers and administrators chosen.

For the last one, Alexander even held a few interviews, choosing the thirty men among the few hundred who would be getting the position.

After that, Alexander even trained these men for three months on what he wanted them to teach and how to teach them.

Because a lot of the things, especially regarding some concepts in math were new to these people.

And it was only after this, being satisfied with their level of teaching that Alexander allowed them to join the school's roster.

So with everything set, the school only started on the start week of August, being currently only a month old.

And with everything being so new, it still needed Alexander's input from time to time on big and small matters.

But the thing that really needed Alexander's attention was the start of his campaign against Tibias, which was scheduled to start right after the fall harvest but seemed on track to be derailed.

And the reasons for this delay were myriad.

First was the formation of a good army, which Alexander needed to start the invasion in the first place.

And to achieve that over the past year, Alexander's military officers were indeed hard at work drilling new recruits into shape, putting them through the wringer.

And though they had made great progress, the reality was expanding the army from a permanent force of 5,000 to a fighting force of 10,000 presented itself with a lot of new challenges- in recruiting, training, and accommodating.

Over the last twelve months the officers and commanders did their best to overcome these, but it seemed the army still needed more time to transform itself.

It seemed the brand new legionary formation was proving to be not so easy to master from scratch within so little time.

This was the first problem.

And this very organically tied together to the second problem, which was organizational.

With many of the nobles joining the army ranks as officers, many hours were spent in the parliament discussing their position in the military, as the number of officer positions was limited and many of the bluebloods felt entitled to a lot more than they deserved.

Even after Alexander had made his position clear, many petitioned to be moved from regular infantry to officers or have their ranks elevated.

So Alexander had to again haggle a lot with them to come to a somewhat more reasonable arrangement.

He first dispersed the new recruits among various units under loyal commanders.

And then as to not to be seen as too harsh, Alexander also transferred some of the more obedient ones to form new cavalry units, which was seen as a much more prestigious position, increasing the total to 3,000 riders.

And lastly he made Jamider (Earl) Tikba and Talukder (Viscount) Prantik named the commander and vice commander of the new legion as the permanent army was increased to 10,000, or two legions, thus matching their authority with Menes and Menicus.

And speaking of Menes, after his promotion, the man seemed to have entered into a work frenzy, taking it upon himself to specifically teach the new noble officers all the minute details of the legionary formation.

He was so strict in fact that it even resulted in a few small altercations, though it was nothing serious.

With the shuffling within the army accomplished, Alexander faced the problem of training enough of the levies.

A total of 30,000 levies were supposed to be trained by now, but due to the aforementioned problems, only 10,000 had received their basic 4 months training, all of whom came from Alexander.

The 20,000 that was supposed to be given by the nobles, due to various infighting, mismanagement, and unforeseen problems had yet to come.

And this was one of the heated topics in the parliament building for almost the entire past month, with Alexander repeatedly asking his nobles what was the hold up.

"My lord, we will send them right after the harvest is done." While the noble faction could only reply as such.

This frankly was a little bit too late, but hey, better late than never, and Alexander could only purse his lips and accept.

He also knew behind all the feet dragging, there was also the fact that many nobles felt attacking Tibias through Thesalie was just a waste of time and good men.

Forget the 40,000 regular men and 5,000 local mercenaries Alexander was planning to use to assault the walls, numbers close to triple that had tried and failed to take the walls when attacked head-on.

So many of the nobles had very openly urged Alexander not to do this.

And when Alexander posed the attack as revenge against Tibias breaking the treaty and burning his house down, they instead suggested he do the smart thing like Amenheraft and use a naval route to bypass the fortification.

After all, only a fool tried to smash a rock by repeatedly bashing his head against it.

Hence to the nobles, this seemed like a no brainer

And after Alexander had seen the walls of Thesalie for himself,? he had to certainly give some very heavy weight to those suggestions.

He had gone there to scout the defense for himself, disguised as a merchant accompanying Camius up to the outskirts of the city.

And when Alexander saw the fortifications, he understood the man had not really exaggerated.

The terrain and the wall were truly daunting, with steep cliffs, dense woods, and a large moat filled with wooden spikes protecting the walled city.

And it was not even single walled.

That would have been too easy.

It was a double walled city so that even if one wall was breached, the defenders could still fall back to the second line.

Seeing it Alexander felt like he was Mehmed I, gazing upon the formidable walls of Constantinople.

Except Mehmed I had one of the largest cannons in the world with him to smash through the walls whereas Alexander's military engineers were struggling to get even the catapult going.

Looking at the thickness of the city's walls, Alexander doubted whether even trebuchets would be able to breach it, especially given it was double walled.

Alexander would have to give it to them.

The Tibians had really outdone themselves here, making one of the most impregnable defenses in all of antiquity.

And seeing the daunting challenges, Alexander was half tempted to take the nobles' advice and call off the attack.

Because breaking through it by force seemed impossible for him.

But that thought was only a fleeting feeling.

Just because smashing through it was impossible, did not mean Alexander would not be able to conquer it.

Alexander decided he would simply have to go over it, by getting his siege towers right up to the walls and clearing the walls of the defenders.

As for how he would convince the enemy to let him do that when everyone else tried the same method but failed, well, for that, the very first thing he did was call Diaogosis to build a good road from Zanzan right up to Thesalie.

There was already a road nearby that connected Jamider (Earl) Tikba's land to Zanzan, so Diaogosis only needed to build a diversion, going left toward Thesalie, an endeavor he was currently pursuing.

And until the road could be finished, Alexander was reluctant to start his campaign.

Then there was the preparation regarding the type of siege Alexander was planning.

For that he was glad he had asked for those 10 million crossbow bolts from Lady Miranda because he felt he might need all of them.

And along with that he also ordered massive amounts of stone, bricks, and most importantly cement to be stockpiled, for he would need them during the siege.

And going by the latest report, the stocks were yet to reach the desired levels, meaning it would be too hasty to launch the attack.

And lastly, there was the ever present question of money, or more specifically, who was going to finance this war.

It had to be remembered that Zanzan did not produce even a tenth of the money it spent from the taxes it collected.

So more than ninety percent of it had to come from Alexander's personal coffers.

And though Alexander was glad to spend it previously to help Zanzan get up on its feet, well there had to be a limit on it.

Zanzan was already three years old and Alexander felt it was time the others started to pull their weight too.

Especially given the large bill the campaign was sure to generate.

But that was easier said than done.

It was very easy for people to get used to being given money and once they became accustomed to it, it was very hard to make them pay.

And this was the problem Alexander was trying to solve, because he reasoned that if the nobles did not pay, well then they should not get any share of the booty.

Chapter 687 Preparations For The Campaign (Part-2)

Alexander's estimate for the cost of the campaign was nothing to scoff at.

For the entire duration of the offensive, he promised to give the 10,000 professional soldiers 150 ropals per month on top of their free food and equipment, which was 50 ropals more than they received in peace times.

And the levies were promised the same supplies, but 50 not 150 ropals a month.

After all, they were neither as skilled nor disciplined as their counterpart.

And although only 50 ropals might sound very low, this was actually much more than the standard rate.

Typically levies were paid mostly in loot and booty, with just enough food and supplies given to them so that they could keep fighting.

So Alexander giving them this much money of which the men were saving every penny was really generous.

As for context, a farmer with a family typically needed 6 months to save that much.

Now Alexander did not do it only out of altruistic reasons,

He also partly did it because of the harsh conditions these levies would be made to face during the assault, especially the backbreaking work Alexander had in mind for them in order to make his siege work.

It was also because of that they were scheduled to get warm winter clothing too, as Alexander did not want to end up like Napoleon, caught naked smack down in winter.

That was why Gelene got that request from Alexander, which was one part of a much larger total order.

And as a side note, the 40,000 thick coats that Alexander wanted were still to be delivered in full, as the acquisition seemed too large to complete in just a year.

In fact, some of the shops asked him for lead times of as much as another year.

It seemed Zanzan lacked a large enough tailor industry to meet Alexander's voracious demand.

And that was also another reason for Alexander to skip this winter campaign.

But perhaps not the critical one, as winter here was really not like the ones in Russia, and judging from the weather, it even promised to be a mild one this year.

No, the much larger problem still remained as the cost, which for the soldiers and supplies came at about 40 million ropals for the six months of fighting Alexander was planning to have.

Alexander had also asked about 5,000 mercenaries to join him, at the cost of 1 million ropals a month in food, rent, wages, and other equipment such as the consumable pilla and the better chainmail.

These veteran men were not from Zanzan, but specifically sent by Pasha Farzah all the way from Matrak, when Alexander asked for some more muscle.

And these men had been here since the start of summer, receiving training on the new legionary formation.

Which also meant Alexander was spending 1 million ropals a month on a force that was doing nothing useful until now, which was for four months.

And given the campaign was going to be pushed by perhaps up to a year, he had the choice of either paying them to stay and burn through his treasury, or asking them to go back, even paying for their ship fare, only to have them back here again in another nine to twelve months.

Both were a great hassle.

And depending on his choice, Alexander would burn anywhere between 10 to 20 million ropals after them at the end of the campaign.

And lastly, there was the cost of training the 30,000 levies for 4 months, where they were paid 100 ropals in food and wages.

So all in total Alexander estimated to run a tab of around 70 to 75 million on this war, which was something quite significant.

And it went to show why a few lost wars could destroy a country and its ruling dynasty.

That was also why he wanted the nobles to chip in a bit, and spread the risk a bit.

Specifically, he asked them to cover half of the cost as a whole, while he covered the rest.

And he knew these rich lords had that amount of capital.

After all, they were able to fatten their coffers by a lot through the preferential trade agreements they had with Alexander, buying Alexander's unique products for cheap and selling to outside clients for massive profits.

Their treasuries were certainly stacked.

And even if it wasn't, even if a lot was spent recovering from the drought resulting in not having the gold to contribute in cash, they could still easily contribute through grain and other food produce.

After all, feeding the massive army was Alexander's greatest expense in this expedition.

But of course this demand did not at all sit well with that faction.

'We are already giving you 20,000 men. Why are you asking for more?' Seemed to be the general undertone of their various excuses.

And a large reason for it was not any dislike for Alexander, but they simply thought it was a waste of money to attack Thesalie, for deep down they were quite pessimistic about the results.

And after hankering for a while on this but still ending up with nothing, Alexander got the message and decided to bear the costs for himself.

He would make them pay another way. I think you should take a look at

Thus with all the following challenges still needing to be overcome, from the men to the material, to the strategy, Alexander gave the following speech to the parliament in late September in front of all his retainers.

"Due to unforeseen challenges and immense external challenges, the offensive that was planned against Tibias this winter will be delayed by six months." As Alexander made this decision he felt it was a great shame, as this year's winter seemed to promise to be a very mild one, just like last year's.

He thought it was a missed opportunity.

But in life many times things panned out in ways you had no control over.

So given they had already gotten here, Alexander chose to do the next best thing.

Alexander decided to push the date back to the very next available slot, continuing,

"Instead we will do it right after the spring planting. Specifically, we will start our the first of April."

"That will give us ample time to put the 20,000 levies through the 4 months training as well as gather the necessary supplies."

Saying this Alexander's tone then turned hard, as he coldly looked around the room, specifically targeting the nobles, addressing them,

"And this will be the final date. I will not hear of any delays or problems. So whatever obstacles you have solve them by then."

"Or I will find someone who can!" Alexander very clearly threatened.

Following this Alexander tone turned once again soft and official, as he began,

"Now, regarding the issue of money."

"It seems one of you wishes to contribute in any meaningful way to his campaign."

"And that is okay." Alexander sounded very understanding, before quickly adding,

"But be aware that it also means you will not have any claims to the land we capture."

"After all that is only fair right!" Alexander then posed, clarifying,

"As per the tradition, since you are giving the men, you will be entitled to a share of the loot, don't worry."

"But I want to make it clear right here, right now so there is no confusion later on - if you do not contribute to the cost of the campaign, you will not get any claims to the land."

"All the land will belong to me personally, Alexander."

"So do not come to me later asking otherwise."

"Do you have any objections?"

Alexander repeated many of his sentences to make the point again and again to make it as unequivocal as possible because he knew just how slippery nobles could be, as he then turned his head around, looking around to spot any dissenters.

And unsurprisingly everyone was silent, which served as a tacit nod of approval.

They thought Alexander was simply young and brash, having no idea of the challenges conquering Thesalie posed.

After all, over the past few centuries, the amount of new and novel ways that were tried to breach the city was not insignificant.

The Adhanians might be technologically backward, but they were not stupid.

So over such a long time, the number of creative and out of the box thinking commanders was numerous and plenty.

And if all these people were able to do it over a few centuries, the nobles had little reason to be optimistic that Alexander could.

It was not as if he was their one and only savior, their true lord.

Thus none of the nobles had any real optimism towards this attack and were only going through it because their oath obliged them to.

They simply thought Alexander was going through a phase, and once he suffered the inevitable defeat here, his zeal would clash against reality and wake him up from his delusions.

Many of the older nobles even saw this as a coming of age ceremony for the young man, one where he would transform from a boy to a mature, prudent adult after the rose tinted glasses were smashed against the walls of Thesalie.

Only time would tell who was right.

Chapter 688 Preparations For The Campaign (Part-3)

The Zanzan nobles were not the only ones to be pessimistic about Alexander's chances.

Even his allies Pasha Farzah and Ptolomy were skeptical of it, feeling Alexander was needlessly wasting his fighting potential on such fruitless endeavors.

That was also why Pasha Farzah had sent those 5,000 mercenaries,

Not to help Alexander per se.

But their real reason for being was that Pasha Farzah hoped Alexander would use those sellswords to soak up the majority of the damage from the upcoming defeat, and thus preferably manage to preserve his own forces relatively well.

It was also because such widespread negativity was the general consensus that the noble faction under Alexander had no problem signing his contract.

The legal document clearly stated everyone's claim during this campaign and it in great detail divided the percentage of loot that each of the participants would be allocated in case of a successful campaign, while also very clearly laying out the fact that the nobles were to give up any and all land claims if they did not contribute monetarily.

'We are already going to lose so many men. There is no need to lose our money on top of that,' And the nobles signed without any scruples for they had this reasoning.

They thought nothing would come of the campaign and so refused to contribute.

Now, to be fair, not every single noble was like that.

For instance, some of Alexander's close council members did try to contribute.

But people like Menes, Melodias, and others were too poor to give anything of substance to Alexander.

Unlike the generational nobles, they had just gotten their lands, and given the fief was only one and a half years old, these new nobles still regularly borrowed money from Alexander just to keep their day to day operations running.

So even when they expressed their interest in contributing, Alexander simply asked them to first pay back their debts.

Because if he accepted their money, Alexander would be just accepting his own money and then giving them land for free.

It made no sense, just like it made no sense to fill a leaking jar.

Hence under Alexander's advice, all the council members also signed a similar contract to the nobles, with the additional clause that they would use a part of their loot to also pay back Alexander.

All these legal preparations took Alexander into the new year, and under Alexander's hawkish supervision, the war machine seemed on track this time, ready to be deployed by the first week of April as planned.

The nobles this time no longer dragged their feet and sent the 20,000 levies as soon as the fall harvest ended, so these peasants were already two months into their training, and seemed like they would be all graduating in time.

Alexander also kept the 5,000 mercenaries with him after all, and as he was burning money after them anyway, he had them also take part in teaching some of the green recruits the way of the war.

And this in fact helped keep the levies training on track.

Regarding the road, Diaogosis swore to Alexander that it would certainly be completed by February and that the wide, pristine road would be just 10 kilometers from the doors of Thesalie.

Hearing this of course pleased the young lord, and so even before the road was completed, Alexander by the start of February started to transfer massive quantities of cement, brick, and stone to a huge depot built just inside the border of Jamider (Earl) Tikba, who closely neighbored Tibias, acting as one of the main lookouts.

The idea behind this move was that once the siege started, these materials could be quickly moved to the frontlines within half a day, whereas it would take three to four days if ordered all the way from Zanzan.

Now, many of the nobles as well as all of Alexander's military leaders had asked him about these transfers and their purpose, but Alexander had only mysteriously smiled and simply posed if any of them was smart enough to figure out.

And though many tried, Alexander gave neither a yes nor no answer, leaving them hanging.

It seemed they would know once the time came.

With these building material stocks secured and transferred to the front lines, Alexander then made sure the weapons and equipment for his army were adequate.

And here, there was of course no problem.

Swords, pilla, crossbows, and chainmail were all available in the armory by the droves.

The military engineers had also built 30 of the torsion catapults up until now, but with ranges far exceeding those that Tibias used, going up to 250 meters as opposed to Tibias's 150 meters for the same 20 kilo stone.

And the secret sauce to this success was the rope.

Because the one used to load Alexander's catapult was not made of pure linen like Tibias's.

But it was a composite, possibly the first in the world, made of thin, elastic rubber band threads messed together with linen fibers, thus giving the rope a much stronger 'twist', and letting it shoot farther.

It was one of Alexander's inventions and given this was something truly his and not something he copied or brought from memory, he was very proud of the result.

Though to be clear, this new, better catapult was still not going to be of any use in breaking down Thesalie's walls.

Those were too thick.

But Alexander did not plan to use them for that.

They had a much more nefarious purpose.

And it was because of that Alexander ordered his engineers to continue making as many as they could before the war started.

In that same vein of helping to win the siege, Alexander also ordered the manufacture of the Roman 'Scorpion', which proved to be a simple weapon to make given it was just a much bigger bow that shot rally huge darts.

It stood on three legs and was about a meter in height, and worked by having a bolt loaded manually between the string, and then having a cranking mechanism to pull it back.

This string or rope to be more precise would be of course very thick, much too thick to be pulled by any human.

So once the rope was properly wound with the help of a manual crank, it would then be at last let go, thus instantly shooting the giant wooden arrow with a thick iron head out and skewering anyone standing in the way.

Very useful for taking out those pesky wall defenders from a good distance away.

By now Alexander had made about of a few hundred of those, all for attacking Thesalie, and every day their numbers increased.

And speaking of shooting arrows, Lady Miranda had also very punctually delivered her 10 million bolts.

That delivery was also quite a sight to behold, as an entire ship was required just to deliver the ammunition, which weighed a total of 5 tons.

When trying to fit the entire order into one ship, its cargo hold, and even its deck, got stacked with one thing and one thing only, bundles and bundles of the sharp, pointy sticks all placed on top of each other as far as physics allowed without them toppling over, like the leaning tower of Pisa.

And as the ship made port, unloading it was actually somewhat dangerous, as no one wanted to be punctured by thousands of cross bolts falling on them.

Along with that ship, the newly remarried lady also delivered a large part of the sword and halberts Alexander had ordered, thus letting him equip his army with the latest and greatest.

And as a side note, she or more specifically Harold who was sent on behalf of her also bought similar quantities of goods from Alexander this year too, but unlike last time, they paid a large amount of it in gold, showing the Margrave's business was going very well.

Harold also left with the promise to complete the rest of the transfer of the 50,000 people before the end of next year, while also informing Alexander that a dozen or so of the newly built navy ship would be available to him by that point too.

It appeared the ship construction was going well.

And this news also meant that even if Alexander failed in this endeavor this time, he would get new types of weapons to try a different route, the route preferred by the nobles.

This fallback plan pleased Alexander to a large extent, as though he was confident, Alexander of course could not say with absolute certainty that he would be able to take Thesalie with his current plan.

So it was always to have a backup.

That was almost all there was to it his preparations.

Now Alexander only needed to wait till April.

With the last major thing he would need to do was when came March.

Because it would be then when everyone would be frantically employed to get the spring planting in for the fall harvest.

And as soon as the farmers were finished seeding the field, they would be made to report to their respective military units as the army would start to gather.

So until then, Alexander could only wait.

And fortunately, Alexander did not need to wait long.

Chapter 689 Prelude to the First Tibian War

Before Alexander set off for his campaign, in the following six months Alexander mostly spent a leisurely life, spending a lot of the time playing with his daughter.

As for his son, well he mostly ate and slept.

And if you asked how Alexandraia felt about having a little brother, well seeing her mother's attention be occupied by another baby, made the one year old very hostile towards the newcomer.

And there were multiple times when the little girl was caught swatting at her brother.

But if she was going to be angry over having one younger sibling, well her mood was about to turn a whole worse.

Because just like he had promised them he would after Cambyses conceived twice, currently both Ophenia and Mean were pregnant.

He did this by sleeping with them during their 'dangerous days' and by February, both of them were around four months old, their bellies just beginning to show.

And as they transformed, though Ophenia still looked okay, not for Mean who was much more, Alexander wondered otherwise.

Even her slightly swollen belly did not at all match her face and body.

As for Gelene... well, at least she could not blame Alexander that he did not try.

Because Alexander tried very hard,

Especially when he saw the other two were pregnant, he took her almost every day regardless of the time, day or night, and even tried various exotic positions.

But it seemed the contraceptives Gelene had taken in her previous life had left too deep marks.

Up until now, she was showing signs of being barren.

And Alexander could go little more than comfort her saying they still had time to try for some time.

Outside his family, Alexander had also at last gotten his iron workshop going, and finally letting the blacksmith's Lady Miranda do something truly useful.

Alexander initiated the shop in the first week of January, and it started with only making various types of pots and pans.

But over the following months, more and more of the new furnaces were scheduled to be installed and come into operation, as supply chain issues were fixed, and the plant would start to make all kinds of other items, such as knives, farming tools, nails, decorative pieces like small statues, jewelry, and many other miscellany.

Alexander would leave all this as well as the overseeing of the day to day operations to an experienced blacksmith while he was away campaigning.

Alexander also wanted to set up a few more things before he was away at war, such as a mint and a bank.

But his hands ran out of time before he could start those.

As for why he did not start those sooner, well it was because they were not critical to his operations right at the moment.

Originally Alexander had wanted the mint because he thought that he would be getting a lot of gold from the surplus trade he would be conducting.

But most of his customers traded with him in goods rather than in cash.

Meaning there was no little new gold to be converted to ropals

And this problem also nicely explained why he had yet to set up his bank.

Which was that due to a shortage of cash reserves, he could not lend out to people.

That and the fact that there was already a shortage of labor in Zanzna, so it made no sense for him to finance the setup of even more businesses.

Thus facing all these challenges, with the date for the campaign imminent, Alexander decided those institutes could wait.

Hence as March rolled ever closer to April, Alexander quickly found his army was starting to gather, until the entire force conjoined at Zanzan, the total consisting of 40,000 Zanzan infantry, 5,000 mercenaries, and 3,000 cavalry.

And soon the day of the departure was here.

It was around 8 o'clock in the morning on a clear spring day, the temperature cool and refreshing, when standing on his porch Alexander turned to CM to say his short farewell,

"Okay, I'm off. If anything happens, send a rider. I will be close."

Alexander was very casual with his tone as if he was not going to war, but just going to his nine to five job.

"Mmmm," While CM lightly hummed with a nod.

Over the past two and a half years, the girl had gotten much more mature, shedding over her girlish features to appear much more womanly with softer, voluminous features.

And knowing Thesalie was only 90 kilometers from Zanzan, she was quite calm regarding the expedition, feeling not too worried.

Turning away from CM, Alexander said similar goodbyes to Opehenia and Mean, both of whom were just beginning to enter their third trimester.

"*Sigh*, I really do regret I will not be able to see the birth of my children," And seeing the expectant bellies, Alexander regretfully sighed as he bid them farewell, knowing the siege would be unlikely to be over in just three months.

And seeing his bitter face, the girls did try to cheer him up.

"Master, please do not worry about us. By the grace of the Goddess, there will be no problem." Ophenia smiled comfortingly.

While Mean was much less diplomatic, showing her desire for Alexander to be there when her child was born, as she said, "Also, you will be close. So maybe you can take a week off to come see us then."

This was not a bad idea and hearing so Alexander felt it was certainly doable.

If he used an endurance horse, he would be able to cover that 90 kilometers in a day.

And Alexander doubted he would have much to do anyway once he started the siege.

After all, a siege was a pretty boring affair, and Alexander even considered leaving the day to day operations to Menicus after the initial days.

"Okay, I will try." Hence Alexander replied comfortingly.

Next he turned to Gelene to promise they could try again once he returned, and with his women done, Alexander then turned lastly to say goodbye to his two children.

His son Philip was on the lap of one of his wet nurses, and too young to understand what Alexander was talking about.

But as Alexander pinched his soft cheeks and caressed his head, the young boy gave a wide smile in happiness, showing his soft gums where teeth were yet to grow.

As for his eldest daughter, she was standing on her two legs next to her brother, and dressed in a beautiful flowery one-piece with an elaborate silk hat on top, she looked like a pristine doll.

Alexander picked the little princess up on her arms, and kissing her cheek he said similar loving words, while the girl giggled and spoke with broken words.

"Da...da...soon...come backDada.."

It was apparent she was able to understand Alexander was leaving, though she might have only thought he was just leaving for work for the day.

With these farewells done, Alexander finally got on his carriage, and with his entourage in tow, it took only a short journey to find himself outside the city, where his army was beginning to form up

since the crack of dawn.

And by the time he arrived, the entire force seemed to have already gathered- all 48,000 of it, all arranged neatly into nine separate legions, flanked on either side by the cavalry.

The arranged frontlines stretched close to two kilometers, which was why Alexander had to arrange the meeting outside the city, and gazing upon it from his warhorse, the vastness of the sight made anyone think they would be able to conquer the world with so many men at his command.

Though in reality, Alexander really hoped the nearly 50,000 number was enough.

Because it was not going to be an easy fight.

Though interestingly there were not only 48,000 men gathered around here.

No, in fact, there was literally twice that, at around 90,000.

All these extra people were scattered to the back of the army, and these were the noncombatants, also called camp followers.

The origins of these people were diverse, ranging from respectable people such as traders, merchants, and farmers, to morally gray people like slavers and working girls, to good for nothing like vagabonds and homeless, to even crooks such as thieves and bandits.

And they all had their various reasons for gathering here

Though the basic was the same.

To sell their wares to the marching army as well as take part in the loot and plunder that was likely to occur as the army moved through the enemy lands.

And as Alexander saw the huge crowd of civilians lined a few kilometers behind the army, he was actually glad.

Because it meant a lot of people were optimistic about their chance of winning.

And what Alexander meant by that was, if people did not think the land they were going to attack was particularly rich, then they would have bothered showing up as there would be little to plunder.

So the huge presence at least worked to put pressure on the nobles who were in general quite pessimistic about their prospects.

And as Alexander gave the order to march, it remained to be seen which side was right.

Chapter 690 The March Forward

At Alexander common, the army slowly turned around to face the road, and filing themselves into a three columned line, with each soldier standing one to two meters apart, slowly started their march, their steps sure and heavy, as they made their way to wrought doom to the country of Tibias.

The entire procession stretched a few kilometers, and from the above, it looked like a giant ant trail.

At the very front of this procession, leading the pack so to speak was one part of the cavalry, which acted both a scout and a rapid reaction force if any unforeseen event were to occur.

Now, granted they were squarely in their own territory and there was no singular fool who would attack an army of 50,000 on his own.

But this was the military doctrine of the time and officers had to follow it, hence the specific order.

Following the 1,000 cavalymen were the real meat of the army, the infantry, and given how long they stretched, their massive numbers were apparent for any to see.

The heavily armored men moved in a loss formation, their wooden shields swinging with their arms, while their strong bodies and faces covered by their Corinthian helmets made them look very menacing.

Behind them, guarding the flanks were the remaining cavalry, while lastly, the slow moving supply wagons made up the tail.

As for officers like Alexander and the other nobles, they were all placed dead center of the army as was the custom.

It was done so to enable them to give direction to either end if the need arose, while also being easily defensible from both sides if attacked.

And this was the make up of the military convoy.

But it was not the end of the procession.

Because as if following the pied piper, the tens of thousands of camp followers also closely tailed the marching army, which was in fact a fairly common sight in any campaign of conquest.

Marching soldiers needed a lot of things to keep them going, and knowing death might come at any time, they tended to be loose with their purses, which were always the ideal candidate for a host of different people.

Peddlers could easily sell their wares to these people, providing them with the choice of all kinds of everyday essentials such as shoes, cloth, pots and pans, and even jewelry, as well as various personal tools such as razors, grinding stones to sharpen weapons, sewing needles, and yarn to name only a few.

Aside from simply selling goods, this group also provided everyday services such as shaving beards, cutting hair, mending shoes, patching up armor, sharpening weapons, selling medicine, and many more.

Aside from the peddlers, there was another group that sold their product and those were the farmers and hawkers.

Seasonal fruits and vegetables, various spices, salt, homemade wine, freshly cooked snacks, and even wholesale grain, all and many more delicious things could be found in and around an army camp.

And trade would be usually very good for these small businesses.

Because most soldiers would soon get tired of the monotone foods provided at the camp and look to add a bit of spice to their palates.

Thus going out to get a small snack of meat skewers, fried fish, or even buttered vegetables were common.

And if the men wanted something more substantial, well since each squad was responsible for their own cooking, it was easy for each of the guys to chip in a bit to add some more flavor to their overall meal, adding new ingredients to the ones already provided to them.

As for the selling of wine, well although Alexander did strictly forbade drinking, the wine being sold did not violate that.

Because wine here was not like the one of modern times.

Here. it was heavily diluted with water, and sometimes even had seawater mixed to add flavor to it, and was generally preferred over water as it was safer to drink.

And lastly, there were the grain sellers, who carried large stocks of not only human food but animal feed too, oats and barley particularly, in the hopes of selling to individual customers such as the soldiers or even other camp followers.

Or if they were really lucky, even to the army itself if it ever ran out of food.

And as a side note, there were many times where officials in charge of the army's food would sell grain meant for the soldiers to these merchants for a profit.

And this led to various consequences, ranging from an army losing a battle due to lack of supplies to the culprits getting caught and being hanged or something worse, or simply the regular soldiers being forced to buy from these merchants out of their own pocket at exorbitant prices just to survive.

But whatever the morality of these grain merchants were, they looked like straight lace goody two shoes compared to the next group that usually accompanied an army- Working girls.

These girls of course had one very similar desire, earn coin by pleasuring men weary from the long march and deadly battles.

And it would come as no surprise to anyone that such a practice was strictly forbidden in the army.

The chaos in discipline such truancy would cause was obvious.

Though that did not stop men from engaging in these acts anyway.

After all, knowing these might be your last few days on earth, tended to make men wild and jumpy.

And they all wanted an outlet.

It was also because of that that many officers turned a blind eye to these practices, just very nominally punishing the caught men, such as with few more chores or extra guard duty, but nothing too serious.

While the working girls earned money by showing their love, the next group was the opposite.

Because they were the slavers who chose to tag along.

They were of course there to capture any vulnerable prey if the opportunity provided itself.

Particularly they wished to aid their side in rounding up fleeing soldiers after a win, for a fee of course.

And to do that, they carried with their carts of rope, to bind their slaves with.

And then there was the group with the fewest numbers.

These followed the army just because they had nothing better to do, being beggars, vagabonds, and other neglected parts of the society.

Going by experience, Alexander knew these drifters were almost always a major cause of trouble, doing nothing useful; but always there at the wrong place at the right time.

Most of these kinds of people only came along just because they saw others going along, and seemingly they wanted to go on an adventure and see the world for themselves.

After all, the means of entertainment in this world were too limited.

And if they could also loot and plunder the lands while doing so, it was just the icing on the cake.

Though this favorable event would be particularly applicable if their side was especially cruel, where it destroyed the lands they passed through, looting, plundering, and burning it.

But though irksome to Alexander, the group was still not as troublesome as the last group, for those were the real bad eggs- criminals and thugs who slipped through the net to fish for opportunities, looking to get their hands on any gold or silver, no matter the unscrupulous ways they would have to employ to get it,

After all, with so many people gathered here, there was bound to be one or two careless ones who were susceptible to getting their pockets picked.

Or maybe have a few stuff stolen here and there.

With so many people around and everyone on the march constantly moving about, it was quite natural to forget and lose track of one or two things right?

Or better yet, perhaps a soldier would be distracted enough to enable them to even steal his weapon!

Ah! Stealing something like a steel sword!

Now that would be a wet dream come true for any thief.

Now, there would always be such bad eggs when any group became large enough, so their presence was not completely unexpected.

But still, it had always impressed Alexander that there were people daring enough to try and steal from no other than the army.

I mean, come on, there had to be other easier fish in the sea.

Because getting caught stealing from the army was no light matter.

If it is an outsider, he would be hanged then with little other consideration.

While if you were found to have been stealing from your fellow soldiers, well then a much crueler fate awaited,

The gully soldier would be beaten to death with a stick by their own squad mate.

But despite all the obvious risks and the brutal punishments that lay in store if caught, there seemed to never be a shortage of volunteers willing to take that risk.

They particularly loved targeting the time window an army would be engaged in a battle to try and sneak into the camp and attempt to steal stuff, which was another reason why it was another important reason to leave some guards behind to look after the camp's belongings when most was away fighting.

But whatever the reasons for these thieves' persistence, be it they were that stupid or that desperate, they existed.

And so in this way, for better or worse, all these people attached themselves to Alexander as he made his way to the gates of Thesalie.

