

Plut. Alex. 26

Text Übersetzung:

(Übersetzung Bernadotte Perrin)

[26] When a small coffer was brought to him, which those in charge of the baggage and wealth of Dareius thought the most precious thing there, he asked his friends what valuable object they thought would most fittingly be deposited in it. And when many answered and there were many opinions, Alexander himself said he was going to deposit the Iliad there for safe keeping. [2] This is attested by many trustworthy authorities. And if what the Alexandrians tell us on the authority of Heracleides is true, then it would seem that Homer was no idle or unprofitable companion for him in his expedition. They say, namely, that after his conquest of Egypt he wished to found a large and populous Greek city which should bear his name, and by the advice of his architects was on the point of measuring off and enclosing a certain site for it. [3] Then, in the night, as he lay asleep, he saw a wonderful vision. A man with very hoary locks and of a venerable aspect appeared to stand by his side and recite these verses:—

Now, there is an island in the much-dashing sea, In front of Egypt; Pharos is what men call it.

Accordingly, he rose up at once and went to Pharos, which at that time was still an island, a little above the Canobic mouth of the Nile, but now it has been joined to the mainland by a causeway. [4] And when he saw a site of surpassing natural advantages (for it is a strip of land like enough to a broad isthmus extending between a great lagoon and a stretch of sea which terminates in a large harbour), he said he saw now that Homer was not only admirable in other ways, but also a very wise architect, and ordered the plan of the city to be drawn in conformity with this site. [5] There was no chalk at hand, so they took barley-meal and marked out with it on the dark soil a rounded area, to whose inner arc straight lines extended so as to produce the figure of a chlamys, or military cloak, the lines beginning from the skirts (as one may say), and narrowing the breadth of the area uniformly. The king was delighted with the design; but suddenly birds from the river and the lagoon, infinite in number and of every sort and size, settled down upon the place like clouds and devoured every particle of the barley-meal, so that even Alexander was greatly disturbed at the omen. [6] However, the seers exhorted him to be of good cheer, since the city here founded by him would have most abundant and helpful resources and be a nursing mother for men of every nation, and so he ordered those in charge of the work to proceed with it, while he himself set out for the temple of Ammon. The journey thither was long, full of toils and hardships, and had two perils. One is the dearth of water, which leaves the traveller destitute of it for many days; the other arises when a fierce south wind smites men travelling in sand of boundless depth, as is said to have been the case with the army of Cambyses, long ago; the wind raised great billows of sand all over the plain and buried up fifty thousand men, to their utter destruction. [7] Almost all of Alexander's followers took all these things into consideration, but it was difficult to turn him aside from any course so ever when he had once set out upon it. For Fortune, by yielding to his onsets, was making his purpose obstinate, and the high spirit which he carried into his undertakings rendered his ambition finally invincible, so that it subdued not only enemies, but even times and places.