

# Alexander's shadow in the *Mahābhārata*

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## Summary:

Alexander's expedition has given rise in the Graeco-Roman world (and then in the European medieval one also) to many comments and stories. Has it gone unnoticed in the Indian world ? But the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* mention a odd figure named Kālayavana, who besieges a Kṛṣṇa's city. If its identification with Alexander is valid, a handling of the same historical data in two different cultures, the Greek and the Indian, would thus appear. The question arises: what brings us a culture to remember from the past ?

I am the Empire at the end of the decadence  
Which looks at the big white barbarians passing by  
Writing in the mean time indolent acrostics  
In a golden style where the sun languorously dances

Over there they say there are long bloody fightings.  
P. Verlaine, *Recently and Formerly*

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In Europa, since the Antiquity, Alexander's name is associated with a military expedition, whose most glorious side is the conqueror's incursion in India. Following that, a complete myth has built itself, due as much to the distance of these far-off countries than to the desire to maintain at the known world's end — the oikoumenê of the Greeks — countries rich in wonders. Indeed the reading of ancient geographers (Herodotus, Strabon, Arrien, Pausanias, Curtius) shows that, if the center of the inhabited world lies somewhere between Athens and Alexandria, the populating of the other parts of the world follows the principle of perspective: the farther away they move from the center, the more do the people become barbarians and farther, more odd and more monstrous (dogheaded men, men who shade themselves with their only foot, and so on). Also, if Alexander, having travelled as far as the ends of the inhabited world, benefited in Europe from an abundant literature to praise him, is it possible he has left in India some memories of his visit ? Indeed, the historical conditions are not identical: seen from our side, Alexander has opened up the Indian sub-continent to the Mediterranean, the effect of his venture being to facilitate numerous and various exchanges, so that, in spite of his expedition's brevity, we were grateful to him for his action's effects.. From the

Indian side, in addition to the fact he was an invader and that an invasion does not necessarily leave good memories, the expedition's very brevity became an additional factor contributing to oblivion: too few garrisons were left here and there by Alexander to set up, on a permanent basis, the Greek world in the East.

1.2 However, the amazement of the Greek soldiers, travellers and historians in front of Indian culture, may well be answered by an equal amazement of the Indians faced by these intruders from so far away, armed in a so different way, or driven by intentions as frightening as incomprehensible. The amazement of the Greeks can be gauged by the comments on the fauna, the flora, the customs which enhance the expedition's accounts: there are the elephants, the huge snakes, the gold-digger ants, the gymnosophists or naked sages, the castes, the invoked gods. But the Indians as well could have been surprised by the Macedonian soldiers' appearance, habits and organization. And yet, it is difficult to find traces of that, not only as a result of temporal destructions, but because India is not obliged to record its amazements on the Western manner. Such is our perspective of study.

## **2. From the Greek side**

**2.1 Let us begin with Alexander's adventures** according to the Latin historian Curtius and the Greek historian Arrien. Curtius lived in the first half of the 1st century AD. His book, *Historia Alexandri Magni* was inspired by a lost work of Clitarcos, an Athenian philosopher who wrote in Alexandria a monumental *Story of Alexander*. A biographical and moralizing feature dominates Curtius' work. At the same time, there is the Arrien's *Story of Alexander*. Arrien was a Greek historian, living in the 2nd century AD. He relies on the account, also lost, of an Alexander's companion, Ptolemy Soter. The dominant feature of his book is more historical. Nonetheless, these two stories tally well enough concerning the following episode: the siege laid by Alexander to the town of Porus. Both Curtius and Arrien make use of a version of the events common to Clitarcos and Ptolemy, the two initial informants, although Clitarcos' version is more detailed, as we will see.

**2.2 The crossing of the Indus.** The military operations stand at the point where, after Alexander has been welcomed by the town of Nysa founded by Dionysos, he crosses the river Indus by a bridge (a pontoon bridge as it seems, but Arrien admits he does not know how it was constructed: "Was it built with boats or was it continuous and permanent ?" (Arrien, V, 2). Alexander has

obtained the aid of Taxila, an Indian prince who supplies him with horses, elephants and weapons. Taxila is also the name of the “populous and rich” town located between the Indus and the Hydaspes (Vitastā or Jhelum) where the king Taxila reigns. Alexander then marches toward the river Hydaspes which he has to cross to face Porus. For Curtius, Alexander takes hold of Nysa, Dionysos’ town (an immense drunken orgy follows), then marches toward the Indus. He receives the surrender of Omphis (Āmbhi), an Indian king, who gives him elephants and gold. He pardons Omphis, and hears that Omphis is at war with two kings, Abisares and Porus, whose territories are located beyond the Hydaspes. Alexander, grateful for the aid brought to him, gives him back the kingdom. Omphis then let himself be called Taxila by his subjects (Curtius, VIII, 12, 5-14). Curtius adds: “Alexander goes to war against Porus at Omphis’ instigation” (Curtius, VIII, 13, 1). The town of Porus lies on the other side of the Hydaspes.

**2.3 The battle on the Hydaspes’ banks** begins. Porus with his large army defends the crossing of the torrential river, keeping a close watch on its fords. Arrien relates Alexander’s ruse, which deceives the enemy: “By night, he let run his cavalry along the bank, shouting loudly ... Porus rushes to the spot, sees that the movements are limited to screams, refrains from moving when they are repeated, and contents himself with dispatching scouts” (Arrien, V, 3). Alexander decides then to get to an island in the middle of the river and makes part of his soldiers cross it. He takes advantage of a storm for his preparations “The noise of the thunder covering the noise of preparations and weapons” (Arrien, V, 3). The island is wider as expected, and only a canal is left to reach the opposite bank. Alexander easily completes the crossing. With sixty chariots, the Porus’ son, either does not take the opportunity to attack or he attacks the landing Greek army and kills Alexander’s horse Bucephalus, or he arrives too late to counter Alexander. In all the scenarios, Alexander chases the Porus’ son whose chariots get stuck in a rain-soaked ground. Porus’ son is killed. Curtius has the following version of the crossing: an elite corps succeeds in reaching an island in the river. But they are insufficient in number to hold it; Alexander then catches sight of an island bigger than the others; what’s more, a ravine would allow him to conceal his troops. So he sends Ptolemy with soldiers far downstream to pretend that he is getting ready to cross in this place. Porus follows him on the other side. Alexander takes advantage of that to give the order to cross, when a violent storm breaks which slows down the movement but the noise of the thunder covers also their noises and favours their undertaking. The rain stops, the clouds “hide entirely the light and hardly allow to recognize each other by speech” (Curtius VIII, 13, 24). Alexander considers this darkness to be “a favour of his good fortune”. He gives the order to carry

on and reaches the opposite bank which is “devoid of enemies”. There would be no Porus’ son to wait for him.. It is practically the only difference with the Arrien’s version. The darkness plays a greater role by Curtius.

**2.4 Porus and Alexander are face to face.** “Memorable and bloody fighting”, comments Curtius. For Arrien, Porus lines up his army: In the center the elephants are placed at the front, the cavalry behind and between the elephants; the wings are made of chariots in the first line, horsemen and foot soldiers in the second. The number of foot soldiers is 30000, of horses 4000, of chariots 300, of elephants 300. Alexander avoids attacking the center, and moves toward Porus’ left wing; two of his commanders will attack the right wing and attempt by a turning movement to take Porus’ army in the rear. He puts the Macedonian phalanx at the center. If the wings are easily broken, the phalanx facing the elephants is resisting with difficulty when the cavalry, knocked about by Alexander, takes refuge between the elephant’s legs which causes such a mess that the elephants trample underfoot the Indian horsemen more than the Greeks: “They trample underfoot everything they meet with” (Arrien, V, 4). “The Macedonians opened their ranks as the elephants approached, then pierced them with spears. Then these enormous animals were seen dragging themselves languorously like a smashed galley, moaning at length” (Arrien, *ibid*). 20000 Indian foot soldiers, two sons of Porus, 3000 horses, many elephants perished; and 300 Greek soldiers.

Curtius has the following version of the battle: with 100 chariots and 3000 horses, Porus confronts the Macedonian phalanx: his chariots get stuck in a sliding ground. Then Porus sends his elephants, placing foot soldiers and archers behind them. The historian adds: “Herakles’ image was carried at the head of the infantry” (Curtius, VIII, 14, 12). Finally Porus, who is taller than the average, places himself at the center, on his elephant taller than the others. Alexander attacks the wings, leaving the phalanx in the center. The fighting is not easy for the Greek soldiers whom the elephants give a hard time until they attack their legs and trunks with blows of axes. Wounded, these animals turn against their own camp. Porus, nine time wounded, flees on his elephant. Alexander chases him, but his horse Bucephalus collapses. Arrien and Curtius agree clearly on the strategy used. Arrien is, military speaking, more accurate; Curtius places greater emphasis on the soldiers’ courage

**2.5 Porus’ surrender.** Arrien emphasises the courage of Porus; Taxila is dispatched by Alexander to hasten his surrender. Porus “seing his old enemy, seizes a spear to pierce him”. Taxila only just escapes. Alexander dispatches another emissary, the Indian Meroe, who persuades Porus to surrender.

Alexander, impressed by Porus' height and bearing, gives him back his power and his kingdom, and makes an ally of him.

Curtius writes: "The king, overwhelmed with wounds, slides from the back of his elephant; the driver thinks that he wants to alight and makes the animal kneel. Porus falls down. Alexander think he is dead and orders to strip him, but the elephant, in order to defend its master seizes him with its trunk and puts him again on its back. The elephant is wounded to death: Porus is carried on a chariot. Porus is well treated by Alexander who compassionately gives him back his kingdom."

Both versions are similar enough.

**2.6 Further battles.** Alexander will continue his conquest toward the East, crossing three other rivers, the Acesines, the Hydratoes and the Hyphase (with the Indus and the Hydaspes, they are the five rivers of the well-named Penjab). He hands all these territories over to Porus. But let us note these other facts. Arrien says he builds two towns, one at the spot where he has crossed the Hydaspes and where his horse died, the other on the battle-field. He besieges a town named Sambala surrounded with swamps: its inhabitants decide to flee during the night. He slaughters them and razes their town to the ground. This warlike people had given trouble to Porus who had not succeeded in defeating them. To go beyond the Hyphase provokes in Alexander's soldiers a great despondency. Alexander retraces his steps toward the Indus (Arrien, V, 5). Curtius, in book IX, tells that Alexander builds two towns on the banks of the Hydaspes, that he orders to built ships which "he will use to discover the sea after he has travelled all over Asia". and that he encourages his soldiers "to go deep within the interior of India". He arrives before a town surrounded with swamps. Its inhabitants fight on chariots and jump from a chariot to the other. Besieged, they run away through the swamps and take refuge nearby, announcing that "an invincible army, a real army of gods, has come to invade them" (Curtius, IX, 1, 18). Alexander ravages the country and obtains their submission. From there he goes to the kingdom of the sage Sophites; this one surrenders without fighting; the town seems uninhabited, closed, when "all of a sudden, a door flies open and the Indian monarch, who was much taller than the other barbarians, was seen moving forward with his two already grown-up sons. He wore a robe richly adorned with gold and purple brocade which came down to feet; his golden sandales were inlaid with gems; a set of pearls was also placed around his arms and wrists; from his ears diamonds of extraordinary size and sparkle were hanging; his golden sceptre was adorned with beryls" (Curtius, IX, 1, 28-30). Sophites shows to Alexander a breed of dogs capable of facing a lion who tears them apart. Finally, Alexander sees his soldiers refusing to go farther, and has to retrace his steps .

Curtius and Arrien are still alike. Yet, the visual and anecdotal aspect dominates by the Latin historian.

**2.7 The decisive elements in both these narratives.** Curtius and Arrien differ in the way in which they process information: the former is more interested in Alexander's personality, the latter in material circumstances of the military exploits. Let us note this feature which makes them different from each other: Arrien does not hesitate to name the generals who help Alexander, he lists their decisive role; Curtius avoids this and turns his attention to Alexander only. And yet, a Greek general, Coenus, plays as Alexander's second a great role: it's he who will dare to tell Alexander on behalf of all soldiers that it's time to return; That provokes the wrath of Alexander (who, like Achilles, withdraws without a word to his tent).

But if we do not take into account these differences, we note that the reported facts in both the narratives are rather similar. In everything that relates to the big battle against the monarch Porus, we notice:

- 1) Alexander is aided by Taxila, a king on the Indus, an old enemy of Porus.
- 2) The crossing of the river Hydaspes succeeds through a ruse of Alexander who diverts the attention of the Indians and captures an island.
- 3) Porus' army includes elephants, it is large, it has for standard an image of Herakles (Curtius); the fighting takes place on the river's banks, Porus is taller than the average, he is brave.
- 4) Porus loses at least one son, but by surrendering to Alexander, he finds favour with the conqueror who restores him to the throne and in fact increases his possessions.
- 5) Alexander builds two towns on the places of the battle.
- 6) Alexander besieges a town surrounded with swamps.
- 7) Alexander receives the submission of a very sage king, Sophites, whose physical aspect is amazing: he is covered with gems and taller than the average and let his dogs being torn apart by a lion (only Curtius reports this version).
- 8) Alexander is forced to return by his soldiers.

Let us note also the amazement of the Greeks faced by the elephants, a formidable war machine which they will import into the Mediterranean (cf Pyrrhus, Hannibal). Let us note also the hellenizing of some Indian names: Porus is Pūru, name of an ancestor of the king Bharata who gave his name to India.

Both these historians build a chronology and show the same desire for conveying the exceptional nature of these events, either ascribed to Alexander's strength of character or related to his good fortune, to his luck or to his military organization's superiority. We know that our western conception of history lies in this principle: bring out the unique nature of a fact, a tendency, a structure.

## From the Indian side

3.1 We know that the contacts with the Graeco-Roman world have left traces in the Indian one. So, in the *Mahābhārata*, the towns of Antioch and Rom are named (*Mahābhārata*, II, 28, 49): in this passage, the five Pāṇḍava conquer the world: Sahadeva takes hold of the south of India, and of Antioch and Rom, placed thus at the south of the world. Greek terms are borrowed (for example *suruṅgā* (tunnel, secret passage), will come from the Greek *syrinx*, flute. To refer to the Greeks, there is the word “*yavana*” (Ionian), even if we know this term is generic and may apply to Scythians, Persians, barbarian peoples. But, in most people’s opinion, the Greek influence is at best seen in astronomy and theater (*yavanikā* refers to a theater’s curtain). Could we imagine that some memory of Alexander was also left in India.

**3.2 An assailant named Kālayavana.** The *Mahābhārata* alludes oddly to a Kālayavana (i. e. a “black Ionian”, or a “Ionian linked with death or time”, *kāla* has both these meanings). We are in book XII, 326. This book was probably written later than the other ones, and includes numerous additions. In this passage, Viṣṇu lists his incarnations (or *avātara*) to save from tremendous dangers earth, gods or men. Viṣṇu announces that he will be Kṛṣṇa at the junction of the Bronze and the Iron Age (*dvāpara* and *kali yuga*), the crucial period of the war told by the *Mahābhārata*. He will be born in Mathurā, he will kill many demons, he will live in Dvārakā and kill the demons besieging this town.

The text reads (XII, 326, 88-91):

88. *yaḥ kālayavanaḥ khyāto gargatejobhisamvṛtaḥ*  
*baviṣyati vadhas tasya matta eva dvijottama*

89. *jarāsaṃdhaśca balavān sarvarājavirodhakaḥ*  
*bhaviṣyaty asuraḥ sphīto bhūmipālo girivraje*  
*mama buddhiparispandhād vadhas tasya bhaviṣyati*

90. *samāgateṣu baliṣu pṛthivyāṃ sarvarājasu*  
*vāsaviḥ susahāyo vai mama hy eko bhaviṣyati*

91. *evaṃ lokā vadiṣyanti naranārāyaṇāv ṛṣī*  
*udyuktau dahataḥ kṣatraṃ lokakāryārtham īśvarau*

88. He who is named Kālayavana, who is wrapped in Garga’s energy,  
I will kill him, o excellent brahmin.

89. There will be a powerful demon, Jarāsaṃdha,  
Prosperous king of Girivraja, enemy of all the kings.  
After careful consideration, I will kill him.

90. In front of all the kings of the earth assembled,  
With Vāsavi (Arjuna) as only companion.
91. So it will be said that Nara and Nārāyaṇa have destroyed  
With zeal the warrior's caste for the benefit of the world

Let us add:

This king, Kālayavana is “wrapped in Garga’s energy”. Garga is a sage, famous for his astrological knowledge; Jarāsaṃdha is a king who is born in a mythical way: a king devoid of children prays Śiva’s to obtain descendants. Śiva gives him a mango for his spouse to eat, but the king has two wives equally dear to him, so he gives half of the mango to each one of them, and each of them gives birth to half a child which are discarded on a garbage dump. An ogress, Jarā, pick them up, ties them together to carry them more easily, and Jarāsaṃdha, “assembled by Jarā” comes to life. He aspires to the universal power and is capturing all the kings when Kṛṣṇa intervenes and gets him killed; Girivraja is the name of the capital of Magadha (located in the south of the Ganges’ plain); Mathurā the town on the banks of the Yamunā where Kṛṣṇa is born.

The *Mahābhārata* will say no more. Kālayavana is associated with these demonic beings Viṣṇu gets rid of. He is also a member of the kṣatriya warrior caste who often in the Indian mythology lacks respect for brahmins and disregards the sacred or duty (dharma).

**3,3 We meet again Kālayavana** in greater detail in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (X, 50-51). This text, in Kṛṣṇa’s honour like every Purāṇa, relates many stories. It was written after the *Mahābhārata* in the X-XIth century AD. Here is what is said about Kālayavana:

- a) In Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa is talking with his brother Balarāma when their two battle chariots appear suddenly in the sky; it means, says Kṛṣṇa, that a blight is falling on the Yadu and that it is necessary to take up arms to save them.
- b) The enemy is Jarāsaṃdha, the king of Magadha, who refuses to fight the child Kṛṣṇa, but faces Balarāma.
- c) Balarāma is in trouble, but Kṛṣṇa rescues him and defeats Jarāsaṃdha. Kṛṣṇa spares his life and gives him back his surviving soldiers.
- d) Jarāsaṃdha takes advantage of that to come back to attack seventeen times.
- e) At the eighteenth time, an other enemy appears: Kālayavana, with “30 millions barbarians”. He has been sent by the sage Nārada.
- f) Kṛṣṇa is so worried that he gets a fortress built in the sea, Dvārakā, where he transfers the population of Mathurā.
- g) Kālayavana recognizes Kṛṣṇa by his beauty and decides to fight against him “on foot and without weapons”.



- h) The fighting does not take place: Kṛṣṇa flees, or rather lets himself be chased by him, drawing him into a cave.
- i) In the cave sleeps a king named Mucukunda; He is woken by the arrival of Kālayavana, and in a fit of anger, he reduces him to ashes by merely looking at him.
- j) His story is told: he has helped the gods against the demons, and after his fierce battles, has obtained to take a well earned rest, sleeping in a cave and with the boon to reduce to ashes all those who will wake him.
- k) Jarāsaṃdha reappears for an eighteen attack. Taking advantage of the fact that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are weighted down by the booty taken from Kālayavana’s soldiers he attacks. They take refuge in a mountain drenched in rain. Jarāsaṃdha succeeds in setting it on fire, but they escape. Jarāsaṃdha, persuaded of his victory, returns home.

#### 4. Comparison with Alexander’s expedition.

**4.1 A first series of comparisons.** Several elements of these two series — Greek and Indian — can be compared. Our aim is to see if Alexander and Kālayavana could be one and the same.

<b>Greek version</b>	<b>Indian version</b>	<b>Measured Similarities</b>	<b>Irreconciliable Differences</b>
Alexander has just left the town of Nysa, founded by Dionysos at the feet of Mount Meros (the Indian Meru); There, he is saluted like a god; his enterprise finds thus a justification.	Kālayavana is sent by Nārada, a ṛṣi. Nārada shows him how to recognize Kṛṣṇa.	by deduction of what follows.	Alexander is a proper noun (the protector of men) Kālayavana is a generic name (the black Ionian, the Ionian linked with time or death).
He receives a direct help from Omphis-Taxila	He receives an indirect help from Jarāsaṃdha who has already affronted Kṛṣṇa and his brother seventeen times	Taxila like Jarāsaṃdha are both at war with their neighbours since many years.	Taxila’s kingdom lies on the Indus’ bank; Jarāsaṃdha’s kingdom is Magadha (south of the Ganges),
Hydaspes’ crossing, diversionary move, access to an island.			No element looking like this river crossing.

<b>Greek version</b>	<b>Indian version</b>	<b>Measured Similarities</b>	<b>Irreconciliable Differences</b>
Fighting against Porus' son who is killed (Porus' son plays a minor role) and against Porus who makes use of his elephants. Alexander alone in front of two opponents	Jarāsaṃdha faces first Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa brother, then Kṛṣṇa also who has come to help his brother in trouble. Enormous elephant fighting.	The two passages look alike. Two combatants follow one another against only one. Porus (Pūru) is an ancestor of Bharata. Kṛṣṇa is descended from Yadu, a brother of Pūru.	
Alexander succeeds in getting hold of Porus fallen from his elephant. Alexander sends peace messengers to him.	Without violence, Kṛṣṇa gets away from Kālayavana and attracts him in a cave.	The roles are inverted. The Greek winner is in India the loser, but the idea of a personal pursuit which isolates the protagonists remains.	
Surrender of the King. Alexander pardons him.	Kṛṣṇa gets Kālayavana killed. Before that, Kṛṣṇa has pardoned seventeen times to Jarāsaṃdha, giving him back each time his soldiers	Same inversion of the roles. Jarāsaṃdha and Kālayavana overlap, the former, pardoned, takes the place of the second, killed.	
Alexander builds two towns as a souvenir of his victory and the death of his horse. He stores wealth.	Kṛṣṇa stores the booty taken from the barbarians.	Wealth taken from the enemy.	The two towns built by Alexander do not meet with a response in the Indian version.
Alexander besieges a town surrounded by swamps. Its inhabitants attempt to escape by night; they are slaughtered.	Kṛṣṇa, before he fights against Kālayavana, builds a town in the sea, Dvārakā. He transfers there the population of Mathurā to protect it.	New inversion. What is slaughter on a side is protection on the other.	
Alexander arrives in the town of the sage Sophites. He believes it is empty but it is closed. Sophites, covered with gems, appears. He shows to Alexander dogs torn into pieces by a lion.	Kālayavana, attracted by Kṛṣṇa in a cave, finds an old king asleep, Mucukunda, who reduces him to ashes.	Sophites means "the sage". His gems make him bright, there is something "sacred" in him. Mucukunda is a king whose asceticism produces brightness.	"Reduce to ashes" does not correspond to the courage of the dogs' breed. They are torn to pieces by a lion. Kālayavana is burned alive.

<b>Greek version</b>	<b>Indian version</b>	<b>Measured Similarities</b>	<b>Irreconciliable Differences</b>
Alexander is forced to retrace his steps by his soldiers' defection. His conquest has to stop.	Jarāsaṃdha chases Kṛṣṇa as far as Dvārakā and then, believing him dead in an fire, he returns home.	The situation is the same: return to the starting point. The danger is removed from the Greek as well as the Indian side.	Kṛṣṇa spares again his enemy's life. Alexander is forced to do so by the revolt of his troops

#### 4.2 An other series of minor correspondences.

Alexander, Aristotle's pupil, took Callisthenes, Aristotle's nephew and man of science in his expedition. Other scientists accompany him.	Kālayavana is said to be "wrapped in Garga's energy". And yet Garga is the presumed author of one of the first treatises of astronomy in India, therefore a man of science. In Mahābhārata (IX, 36, 14-17), it is said: " At the great holy place named Gargasrotas, the noble and venerable Garga, purified by ascetism, has made out the knowlege of time and its flow, of the rotation of stars, of the good and bad omens.
Alexander finds the mythical tracks of two Greek expeditions in India, the expeditions of Herakles and of Dionysos. That justifies his conquest: he comes back on his ancestors' trail and has to pull himself up to their level. It is as if he was entrusted to recover an inheritance (N.B. Achilles withdrawing under his tent). At the gates of India, he stays in a town named Nysa grounded by Dionysos. There are strong ressemblance between Dionysos and Śiva: they are both gods reigning over the creatures and the vital forces.	Kālayavana is "sent by Nārada" (Bhāgavata Purāṇa); Nārada is a ṛṣi, these immortals beings; he is the inventor of the vīṇā, a musical instrument. He encourages Vyāsa to write the <i>Mahābhārata</i> . Nārada expects from Kālayavana that he confronts Kṛṣṇa (still a child) whose worth he wants to check. Nārada tries in other occasions to test Kṛṣṇa's merit (when he visits his harem to verify if all his wives are happy with him). A certain opposition turns out between Nārada and Kṛṣṇa, identical to this between Śiva and Viṣṇu, whose Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation.
Omphis (Āmbhi: descendant of the celestial water, i.e. Varuṇa's son) is the first Indian king to surrender to Alexander. In Greek, his name means "prophetic voice" and such is the nickname given to Osiris, the dismembered Egyptian god whose wife Isis seeks out the pieces. He takes the nickname of Taxila, which means "the big elephant", because he has offered to Alexander his first elephant.s. He will forever remain faithful to him. Lasting tie of alliance.	Jarāsaṃdha, who takes the place of Kālayavana, is the king who, by his repeated but unsuccessful assaults, weakens Kṛṣṇa. So he helps Kālayavana indirectly. Oddly he is born in two pieces (see Osiris) which have to be assembled (see Isis). Jarā is the ogress who has assembled both halves. Her name means "old age", i.e. according to the magic rule of inversion, "youth". Young forever, he will fight Kṛṣṇa also young forever. Lasting tie of anomisity.

Porus is a man taller than the average, as well as his elephant. He is exceptional. On the standard of his troops, appears Herakles' image. His bravery in the face of death, as well as his soldiers' one is exemplary. Alexander, whose expedition follows the trail of Herakles, welcomes him for this very reason	Under Porus, the name Pūru can easily be read. This latter is a well known figure of the Indian mythology. He was the only one to accept the exchange of his his youth for his father's old age. His four eldest brothers have been cursed. It is not Herakles who is to be seen on his standards, but Indra, the warriors' god.
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## 5. Conclusion

**5.1 What conclusion from these connexions ?** The hypothesis that India has kept the memory of Alexander's expedition in both these passages, can also be supported by the existence of these Graeco-Roman kingdoms which maintained themselves for a while on the marches of the Greek world. Alexander should have been remembered there. Is Kālayavana a vague response to the glorious Alexander ? We would like to think it is the case, but, in view of the fact that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* dates back from the tenth century AD, it would presuppose a very effective mode of transmission. Then, unable to decide at this very moment, we will preserve at least the expected characteristic of every hypothesis: its creative potential. We will not look for proofs in its favour, but ask ourselves if there is any advantage to be get out of this hypothesis. Two such advantages could be considered:

- a) The first one compels us to look at the reality of Alexander's campaign. The view of the Indians adds itself to the Greeks' one. Read from a column to the other, the story complements itself.
- b) The second one consists in considering these two series as two ways to portraying the facts and in wondering about the way in which the Greek and the Indian history deals with the same facts. Each column conveys an "algorithm", offering a different result, but aiming at the same purpose: to remember an intrusion.

**5.2 The real Alexander's campaign.** Our comparative analysis mentions two historians: the Greek Arrien and the Latin Curtius. Their points of view differ, but, by and large, the same chronology appears: Taxila's help, the crossing of the Indus, the battle against Porus, the march toward the East, the revolt of the soldiers. The encountered difficulties serve by the Latin to highlight the conqueror's feat (hero's picture) and by the Greek to show how they have been solved technically or with military efficiency (building of a bridge, set of alliances, help of the generals). The Indian version, by visible inversions, enables us to add the point of view of the invaded, their resistance, their trust in war chariots, archers, elephants. We see that the Indian kings at that time were

involved in wars (Mathurā's king against Magadha's). Has Alexander taken advantage of their mutual weakening? On the other hand, the crossing of the Punjab's rivers does not play an important part: did not the Indian kings know how to take advantage of their own ground? And yet it seems that Kṛṣṇa's tactics to let himself be chased by Kālayavana is but a way to attract the enemy into an unfavourable place: the mountains (where resistance is easier). Has that been done, or has it become a myth about what should have been done? Finally, we notice population shifts: Indian kings have sheltered part of their subjects (building of Dvārakā); the fact that the Greeks were using besieging machines and sappers to take towns must have provoked a questioning of the defences' specifications (build a town in the sea, as the Indians say). In a sense, the Indian sources complement the Western versions: Alexander has found before him reactive and well organized people.

More strange for us is the location of Mathurā and Dvārakā. If Kālayavana is really Alexander, the fighting should have taken place in Punjab, and not in the plain of the Yamunā and the Ganges, even less at the Indus' mouth (near to Dvārakā). Consequently, we must reconsider the origin of Kṛṣṇa and his worship: originally, he was the king of a state between the Indus and the Hydaspes; many centuries later only, he was moved toward south and west. these are may be the traces of a forgotten start point the Greek world would makes possible to rediscover;

**5.3 The two series of the history.** The reconstruction of an event goes not the same way in Greece and in India. For the Greeks, two principles are in action: to show the uniqueness of a fact (this event is unique, for x reasons) and to assign it to a decision-making choice which changes reality (a decision, human, structural or another emerges). We believe in history because it tells events which have happened but once, and which have led to decisions for which many reasons can be rediscovered. Both Arrien's and Curtius' works try to celebrate a man's feats, to specify his choices and his projects and to say how, in such and such situation, he has found the right way to behave. The chosen framework is the time and the space into which the needed facts can be fitted. The same does not go for the Indian version which seems to us a tissue of legends and improbabilities (a king reducing a man to ashes, Kṛṣṇa defeating alone a whole army). And yet, the Greek historians as well have forged Alexander's legend with their way of favouring the unique and the choice. In both these cases, history leads to legend. As a matter of fact, the logic which underlies the Indian handling of the facts to transform them in events is of an other nature: firstly, a look is cast to see if the fact can have a sense on an other similar level, if it repeats itself elsewhere in the feats of gods, heroes or animals, if it retains a meaning after having been surimposed on other facts at these

levels; then a further look is cast to see if the fact can be reduced to some feature which denotes the transcendent. It is not the result which is taken into account, but the essence of the fact, its “quiddity”.

Here Kālayavana is an assailant, but Jarāsaṃdha, who is like him, has preceded him seventeen times in unlucky attacks; they come to parallel each other; in the same way their assaults remind of the increasing battle the gods conduct against the demons, or Kṛṣṇa against his enemies (Porus has been transformed into Kṛṣṇa; one level replaces another one). A difference appears: Kṛṣṇa accepts that Jarāsaṃdha will come back to attack, the old ascetic king reduces Kālayavana into ashes. And yet the latter has recognized Kṛṣṇa and decided to face him in a single combat, not using his many soldiers. So the meaning is that there is in Kālayavana’s attack a sacrilegious aspect, a punishable pride, an excess in believing to be able alone to face the god. Jarāsaṃdha does not make this error, he uses every possible means, even if he is each time sent back to his starting point. Kālayavana’s pride makes really think of the hubris of the Greek tragedians. Such is the **essence of the fact** observed in the event.

Moreover, the Indian historian looks if **traces of the transcendent** are present in the fact, if it is able to give some conceptual confusion. Here, it is the double escape of Kṛṣṇa that deserves attention: the first time, he pretends to escape in the face of Kālayavana; the second time, he flees from Jarāsaṃdha. Kālayavana as Jarāsaṃdha really believe they have done a good deal: neither one nor the other sees they are ordered about, manipulated and dependent. Hell is this: an unending blindness. Kālayavana dies not knowing why. Jarāsaṃdha thinks he has won. Their illusions are without end. The point is not to give a lecture on morality but to show how error manifests itself. It is a headlong rush which calls on power for nothing..

The way of memorizing is not the same. By the Greek historian, the exceptional nature (worthy of the human being), worked out by a more or less clear-sighted human will power, will be remembered from Alexander’s expedition; by the Indian one, it is the sacrilegious nature of the human faculty to delude oneself until the end which will be recorded from this invasion. In themselves these two points of view are not so far removed. They are reversed in the first member (toward men/toward gods) and opposed in the second one (changeable lucidity/unending blindness).

We will conclude utterly convinced that we are faced with two ways of handling the history. The two logics are so different that it is not easy to notice the existence of the same fact in both handlings. Could this be sufficient to explain that our hypothesis of an identification of Kālayavana with Alexander is inadmissible ? Let us then hope it could be arguable<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Pradip Bhattacharya writes the following:

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“The much older Harivaṃśa (written soon after the Mahābhārata as its appendix) in the 35th chapter of Book I, shlokas 12-22 states this about Kālayavana:

Śaiśirāyana of Garga’s ”gotra” (clan) was the husband of the princess of Trigarta kingdom. People were suspicious about his masculinity because for 12 years he had no progeny. Furious on hearing the scandal, his complexion turned the colour of iron with anger. To prove himself he had intercourse with a cowmaid Gopālī who was actually an apsaras (courtesan ?). She, by Śiva’s command, accepted the semen and gave birth to mighty king Kāla-Yavana. The forequarters of his war horses looked like oxen. This child grew up in some childless Yavana’s king’s harem and was later famed as Kālayavana. Eager for proving his mettle in battle, he enquired of brahmins who was a warrior equal to him. All knowing Nārada told him of the Vṛṣṇi and Andhaka clans. With an army of over a million he attacked Mathura and the Vṛṣṇi and Andhaka took counsel with Kṛṣṇa and decided to flee and reside in Dvāravatī in Kuśasthalī (peninsula of Kuch).

Note that Kālayavana had, according to Śiva, a boon that he could not be killed by any Yādava. That is why Kṛṣṇa tricked him into the king Mucukunda’s presence, being aware of the boon Indra had given this king to consume anyone disturbing his sleep.

Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa get treasure earlier by killing Śṛgāla Vasudeva of Karaviṃā where Paraśurama has sent them when they approach him for advice because the Yādava have been ruined by Jarāsaṃdha’s 17 attacks. Because Śṛgāla was his ally, this provokes Jarāsaṃdha to attack the 18th time, and then Kṛṣṇa shifts to Dvārakā.

The Indian Heracles is Hari-Kṛṣṇa. Dionysos is possibly Śiva.”

This opens a further and promising discussion.