

# Maracanda

Where legends once met

by Christian Höfgen © 2012

Major concern began to spread in general Ptolemy. They were already a day and a night running from their relentless pursuers, a small horde of Bactrian bandits. The bandits had chosen the small Macedonian reconnaissance detachment as prey, which tried to run them out by fleeing to the north leaving the Oxus river far behind. Ptolemy had hoped that the fear of the Scythians, who ruled these lands would be too great for the pursuers.

But it seemed they apparently didn't believe the legends about the cruel warriors, who long before king Alexander defeated the Persians did once the same, when they repulsed an invasion.

Now the Macedonians galloped across the steppe, still fleeing. Ptolemy was not a coward, but he did not want to waste his life in an obscure, pointless skirmish with some infamous bandits as long as his king and half-brother Alexander, needed him. He only fled to save his future services for his ruler.

Just before finally his anger got the upper hand, and he was about to order his faithful Macedonians to turn and fight to preserve their honor, he noticed a big dust cloud ahead of them. Very fast cavalry. The Scythians! There came the certain death. Soldiers of Alexander the Great had never been cowards and Ptolemy gave his men the signal to draw their swords.

"Today is a good day to die !!!", he cried out to them, grinning and the veterans understood only too well what was coming.

But about a hundred yards ahead of them the leader of the Scythians made some signals to his men by rising and waving his bow high in the air and the Scythian group parted before them passing them on both flanks with an surprising speed that Ptolemy had never seen before. It was like a passing hurricane. The Scythians not even bothered to look at them and aimed towards the pursuing bandits.

Only the leader continued to ride all alone straight and directly towards the Macedonians seeming to aim for Ptolemy in the middle. He was so fast that he just sped right through them, before any Macedonian cavalryman had a chance to react.

Ptolemy thought to have briefly seen the face of a young woman, which was impossible to him. He believed to hallucinate, because of the large stress. The female face he just saw had been radiant with joy, while she rode through the ranks of his men, or rather, shot like an arrow right through their midst while preparing her bow for a shot.

It was certainly a handsome young man, the general said to himself, admiring his riding and the nature of his incredible courage. They were more fearsome than any other enemy he ever fought. Such an enemy was only to be greatly admired. But were they an enemy at all?

Ptolemy signaled his troop to halt and turned back towards the Scythians. He could see now how their pursuers quickly turned their horses panicked and screamed. The Scythians encircled their prey and by rapid fire shot arrow after arrow at close range into their victims. They shot incredibly quickly and although they were fewer men than Ptolemy's own party, there were after a few minutes no more living pursuers. Their dead bodies covered the steppe and the riderless horses were left to tend for themselves.

Finally, one of the Scythians rode back to the Macedonians. It had to be their courageous commander. His courage reminded the general of his half-brother, to whom such things in his famously daring ambition were also not unknown. He gave his men a sign to withdraw their swords. This man was for whatever reason a friend.

Suddenly however Ptolemy gaped in total astonishment at the stranger, as the Scythian warrior took off his helmet and long red hair flowed down his shoulders. The young man was a woman and she was most lovely. He rode up to meet her halfway.

"This day might have been already your last one, Macedon!", she called to him, while laughing.

"Yes, indeed. Thanks! Who are you? Am I perhaps already in Hades with my men and Artemis plays a trick on me?", Ptolemy asked with a respectful and friendly voice.

The woman bowed on her horse forward from laughing even harder now. She certainly noticed in great amusement his surprise while mustering his puzzled face.

She enjoyed his confusion. She was wonderful and Ptolemy fell almost immediately deeply in love with her.

Her big green eyes sparkled with wit and grace.

"You are still alive. Among the Scythians also some women are trained warriors. In the steppe all must fight or die. That's an unwritten law, which all are following", she explained to him.

"I am princess Roxane of Maracanda, Macedon, and who are you?"

"General Ptolemy, forever in your debt, living legend."

Ptolemy bowed slightly on his horse in front of her.

"You thought Herodotus had only dreamed his reports of Amazons while drunk from too much wine?", she laughed

Ptolemy was speechless now.

"Return to your king. I've heard enough of him to know that he will soon march against Maracanda. But I'm the commander of the army, which will defend the city of my father and you just have seen that I am braver than your so called conqueror of Persia", she boasted.

Now she displayed a wide and knowing grin and raised her head proudly.

"Tell him from me that I expect him and that his death is certain. But I'm going to spare you. You will live."

What an incredible display of arrogance noticed the amazed Ptolemy, but she was perhaps better than Alexander. She was at least equal to him. What a woman! His report was certainly going to spur his half-brother to order forced marches towards Maracanda. When this two met in battle, it would be suicidal and probably not one single Macedon would ever see his home again. But they would be remembered until the end of time. Was this not what for Achilles had been reason enough to risk everything and fall.

King Alexander responded to Ptolemy's report on his adventure across the Oxus with electrified action. Broke off his encampment and lead a forced march to Maracanda. The great king had his head always full of legends, like the vaunted Iliad, which he wanted to surpass. Had not Heracles himself fought against beautiful and merciless Amazons in a terrible struggle?

So he went out to battle Roxane, who seemed like himself to despise death.

Darius had been a disappointment as an opponent. Now for the first time since he and his men had crossed the Granicus, a formidable general was opposing them.

Beyond the Oxus they didn't meet the expected vanguard of the Scythians and they marched on unopposed.

Finally, they looked upon the incredibly old, rich and beautiful Maracanda which controlled the silk road. Home of the brave Roxane.

Ptolemy felt for the first time during a campaign uncomfortable. The brave beauty had saved his life. He prayed not to have to cross his blade with hers. He was resolved not to rise his sword against her.

That day his heart became the slave to her magic green eyes. Why did no one warn them once as young soldiers that the enemy could become so beautiful, lovable, honorable and courageous. But he kept his thoughts to himself and wondered how Alexander, who adored all beauty in his private life, would react to Roxane.

For sure his ambition and heart would be fighting a fierce battle inside his half-brother, thought his loyal general.

Outside the city, the Macedonian army deployed with the great routine of veterans to face the Scythians who deployed in their response only cavalry and Ptolemy knew that their numerical inferiority would be irrelevant with regard to their perfect horse archery. But he also knew that Alexander would never ever avoid the fight, no matter what Ptolemy's advise was.

After both sides were ready to fight a single warrior detached himself from the Scythian levy and Ptolemy already suspected his identity. It could be only Roxane. She rode up halfway between both armies and Alexander also only on his own rode forward to meet her.

As she stood there on horseback facing the king, she took off her helmet and the effect was similar, as with Ptolemy previously, only with the major difference that Alexander was already forewarned

and therefore betrayed no expression of any astonishment.

They eyed each other and recognized the same wildness in the eyes of the counterpart. Both smiled at each other, because they already knew by their gazes, what the following words would only reaffirm.

"There he had finally come. The great conqueror of mighty Persia!", Roxane spoke to him with a proud voice.

"Soon to be the conqueror of Maracanda!", replied the Macedonian king, no less proud.

Roxane laughed out loudly and shook her pretty head. Her red hair fluttered like a standard in the winds of the steppe.

"Win my city in a duel! Do you dare to fight me a weak, delicate woman? ", she mocked him and this intoxicated the Macedonian infinitely.

It enchanted him. Nevertheless, his duty was war and even now he would cross his blade with this crossing between Aphrodite and Artemis. Secretly he decided however to spare her, he wanted her alive. She was very special and he felt clearly that she was his destiny.

"It shall be decided by our swords, here and now. The gods may decide", he replied gravely.

"Who knows, maybe I win all of Persia in a few minutes from now", she mocked him again accompanied by a wide grin.

She was not only with weapons lethal, saw Alexander. This was the woman he always sought, the companion, whom he almost gave up on ever finding. With her at his side he could truly conquer the whole known world. He made up his mind that the challenge had to be left undecided, as both rode apart to start the duel.

In both armies loud cheering broke out as they began to recognize the honorable intentions of their respective commanders.

Both eventually turned their horses sharply. Dust swirled up and during her turn Roxane decided that Alexander was too handsome and brave to kill him. She also made up her mind to spare the enemy, not knowing that he had the very same in mind.

Nevertheless, the attack of both parties was in every detail serious and they rushed towards each other on their horses in a gallop both leaving a swirl of loose dust behind them, their drawn swords in hand.

Shortly before they met for the first exchange of blows, Roxane was ducking quickly and struck with a cunning blow Alexanders hand which held his sword. While his blow which aimed to high missed her entirely. She intentionally led the blow with the broadside of her sword to disarm him without any scratch. Alexander's sword flew in a high arc through the air and fell on the dusty ground. Now the great king was stunned and gaped at her briefly in total amazement.

The two then raced side by side for the sword and the better rider Roxane finally won and stood

with her horse over the weapon which had already defeated so many brave generals and kings. She smiled at him in triumph.

Alexander did not attack further. He would still be able to throw his dagger at her. Instead he got off his horse, went to the winner with a grin, holding his outstretched hand to her saying: "Give me your hand in marriage Roxane. Become the queen of the vanquished. Instead of storming Maracanda, my Macedonians shall happily celebrate our wedding together with your people. Become the mistress of the world."

Roxane was now truly surprised and agreed in joy to this thrill. She loved adventure and where Alexander was the adrenaline rush was omnipresent. In addition, he was really pretty with his fiery brown eyes and wavy blond hair. A king from the crown to sole.

"I gladly accept, my husband", she replied beaming at him and he felt like a child who just took possession of a pile of sweets.

Two kindred souls had conquered each other simultaneously. Roxane got down and they embraced each other. Cheering flared up again in both armies as they guessed the reason for the embrace.