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# Meander

Jeremy Seal

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## About the Book

The course of the Meander is so famously indirect that the river's name has come to signify digression - an invitation Jeremy Seal is duty-bound to accept while travelling the length of it in a one-man canoe. At every twist and turn of his journey, from the Meander's source in the uplands of Central Turkey to its mouth on the Aegean Sea, Seal illuminates his account with a wealth of cultural, historical and personal asides.

It is a journey that takes him from Turkey's steppe interior - the stamping ground of such illustrious adventurers as Xerxes, Alexander the Great and the Crusader Kings - to the great port city of Miletus, home of the earliest Western philosophers. Along the way Seal unpicks the history of this remarkable region, but he also encounters a rich assortment of contemporary characters who reveal a rural Turkey on the cusp of change. Above all, this is the story of a river that first brought the cultures of East and West into contact - and conflict - with one another, its banks littered with the spoil of empires, the marks of war, and the detritus of recent industrialisation.

At once epic, intimate and insightful, *Meander* is a brilliant evocation of a land between two worlds.

## About the Author

Jeremy Seal is a travel writer, teacher and broadcaster with a life-long fascination for Turkey. His first book, *A Fez of the Heart*, was shortlisted for the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. He is also the author of *The Snakebite Survivors' Club*, *The Wreck at Sharpnose Point*, and *Santa: A Life*, which was Radio 4's Book of the Week. He has written for *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, *The Weekend Australian* and *The New York Times*, among others. He lives in Bath.

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# THE MEANDER VALLEY



## CHRONOLOGY AND CAST

A regional timeline, with explanatory notes on historical and mythical participants.

6000 BC: The Neolithic cave paintings found on Beşparmak (Mount Latmus) have been dated roughly to this period.

2700 BC: Rise of the Minoan Civilisation in Crete.  
Emergence of ancient Anatolian fertility deity, **Cybele**, the forerunner of **Artemis of the Ephesians** and characterised by pendulous and multiple dugs.

2000 BC: Rise of a civilisation, tentatively identified as Arzawa, in western Anatolia.

1800 BC: Emergence of the Hittites in Central Anatolia.

1700 BC: Sack of the Arzawan palace at Beycesultan.

1300 BC: Wars between Trojans and Greeks. Emergence of Olympian/Anatolian deities including **Apollo**, god of music and prophecy; **Marsyas**, satyr and virtuoso pipe player; and **Endymion**, a beautiful shepherd of Mount Latmus seduced by the moon goddess.

1000 BC: Gradual colonisation of Anatolia's shores, especially the mid-Aegean - Ionia - by mainland Greeks.

800 BC: Rise of Phrygian Empire in central Anatolia under the legendary **Midas**, who was given asses' ears by Apollo as a punishment for championing the pipe playing of Marsyas, and further chastised for his foolish greed when the gods granted him the golden touch. Midas is

supposedly related to the mythical **Lityerses**, a Meander Valley deity notorious for killing his harvesters.

600 BC: Miletus celebrated as commercial and cultural centre of the Aegean world, and home to residents such as the scientist, philosopher and proto-rationalist **Thales**.

580 BC: Apogee of the Lydian Empire under **King Croesus**, byword for inordinate wealth.

546 BC: Defeat of Croesus by the Persians after the Lydian King misinterprets the advice of the Delphic Oracle. The beginning of Persian rule in Anatolia.

(?)545 BC: Attempt by **Pactyas**, a Lydian, to lead a revolt against Persian rule. On his flight to Cyme the citizens of that Aegean port ask the oracle at Didyma whether to honour the Lydian's request for protection.

499 BC: The Ionian Revolt against Persian rule.

494 BC: End of Ionian Revolt and the sack of Miletus.

c.490 BC: Birth in Halicarnassus of **Herodotus**, so-called Father of History.

481 BC: Persian invasion force under **King Xerxes** at Celaenae, and his meeting there with **Pythius**, a Lydian, who thinks to curry favour with the King by offering him his entire fortune.

480 BC: Xerxes crosses the Hellespont into Greece. Heroic Spartan defence at Thermopylae. Defeat of Persian fleet at Salamis.

479 BC: Further Persian defeats at Plataea and Mycale.

460 BC: Persian defeat at the Battle of Eurymedon.

401 BC: The anabasis, or expedition, of a Persian prince, **Cyrus the Younger**, and his 'Ten Thousand' Greek mercenaries passes through Celaenae en route for the East. After the prince's death near Baghdad it is

**Xenophon**, an Athenian, who takes the lead – at least according to the *Anabasis*, his own eyewitness account of their heroic retreat to the Black Sea.

334 BC: **Alexander the Great**, King of Macedonia, passes through Celaenae en route for Gordium and an encounter with a legendary knot. He conquers all Asia, bringing to an end Persian rule in Anatolia.

312–188 BC: A Hellenistic dynasty, the Seleucids, rule the region. At the Peace of Apamea (188 BC) all western Anatolia is ceded to Pergamum, a client state of Rome, which progressively extends its administrative influence across the Hellenised region.

47: **St Paul** makes his first missionary journey, visiting Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

60: Earthquake flattens Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae.

c.100: Progressive silting of Meander Delta cities including Miletus, Priene and Myus.

c.200: Christian conversion at its height in Phrygia.

312: Legalisation of Christianity across the Roman world.

324: Adoption of the city on the Bosphorus – the newly named Constantinople – as the Eastern Roman Emperor's new capital announces the Byzantine Empire.

542: **Bishop John of Ephesus** persecutes pagan communities in the Meander Valley.

650–750: Raids by Muslim Saracens into Anatolia. Pergamum besieged in 717. At around the same time Turkish tribes begin their long migration west from the lands surrounding the Gobi Desert.

1045: Raids by Selçuk Turks and Turcomans reach the Lycus Valley.

- 1071: Defeat of the Byzantines by the Turks at Manzikert, eastern Anatolia.
- 1097: Knights of the First Crusade defeat the Turks at Dorylaeum. Establishment of Selçuk Turkish Sultanate with capital at Konya (Iconium).
- 1145: Turks raid west as far as the Aegean.
- 1146: Byzantine Emperor **Manuel Comnenus** skirmishes with Turcomans at the head of the Meander.
- 1148: Knights of the Second Crusade under **Louis VII** defeat the Turks by the Meander. They then suffer a major reverse in the mountains above Laodicea en route to the Mediterranean port of Adalia.
- 1176: Defeat of Byzantines by the Turks at Myrioccephalon.
- c.1200: Increased fear among settled Turks and Byzantines alike of unruly Turcoman raiders.
- 1282: Sack of Nysa and Tralles by Turkish clan chief **Menteşe**.
- c.1300: Eclipse of Selçuk Turks and gradual rise from the competing Turkish clans of the Ottomans.
- 1453: Fall of Constantinople to the Turks. End of Byzantine Empire.
- 1529: Siege of Vienna. The pinnacle of Ottoman imperial power.
- 1683: Second siege of Vienna, marking the beginning of the Ottomans' decline.
- 1682: **George Wheler's** *Journey Into Greece*, among the first of many Western accounts of travels in Anatolia, is published.
- c.1740: **Richard Pococke's** exploration of the Meander Valley and the surrounding region's ancient sites

coincides with the rise of European neoclassicism.  
Another antiquary, **Richard Chandler**, follows in 1765.

1821: The Greek War of Independence focuses European prejudices against Turks. Over the next century the loss of further Ottoman territories in the Balkans, the Crimea and the Caucasus triggers a flood of Muslim refugees into Anatolia.

1826: **Reverend Francis Arundell** identifies the site of Celaenae-Apamea. Other scholars and antiquaries, among them **William Hamilton** and **Charles Fellows**, subsequently publish accounts of their travels in and around the Meander Valley.

c.1830: Outlaw zeybeks, popular rebels against Ottoman authority, rife in the Meander Valley. **Bald Mehmet** heads a local insurrection near Kuyucak.

1856: A British company begins to build Turkey's first railway line up the Meander Valley, connecting Smyrna with Aydın.

1911-12: Ottoman-Italian War in Libya.

1912-13: Balkan Wars between Ottomans and a coalition of Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbians.

1915-17: Caucasus Campaign against the Russians. Among the deserters is **Yörük Ali**, a peasant of the Meander Valley.

1915: Defence of the Gallipoli Peninsula against Allied invasion forces where **Colonel Mustafa Kemal** distinguishes himself.

1918: Surrender of the Ottomans to the Allies.

1919: Treaty negotiations at Sèvres, Paris, where the dismemberment of Anatolia among the victorious powers is proposed.

15 May 1919: 13,000 Greek forces land at Smyrna.

19 May 1919: Mustafa Kemal leaves Constantinople to lead the nationalist resistance in Anatolia.

27 May 1919: Greek forces occupy Aydın.

27 June–4 July 1919: Battle for Aydın where the Turkish zeybek bands are under the command of Yörük Ali.

1919–21: Greek forces advance east to threaten the Turkish nationalists' capital at Ankara. In August 1921 their advance is finally halted.

August 1922: The Turkish counter-offensive routs the Greeks, who fall back on Smyrna, which the Turks take in September.

1923: Turkey is reborn as a republic under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, who will take the surname **Atatürk**. For the next fifteen years the country is radically Westernised.

1923–4: Anatolia's Greek Christians, more than a million, are forcibly exchanged with Greece's Muslims.

1938: Death of Atatürk.

1950: Election of **Adnan Menderes**' Democratic Party.

1960: Overthrow of Menderes, who is executed by command of a military tribunal in 1961. Further military interventions follow every decade or so.

2007: The Islamic party, *Ak*, wins a commanding majority in Turkey's national elections. In 2008 it is fined for attempting to undermine Atatürk's secular constitution but remains in power.

2008–9: Record rains cause floods along the Meander Valley.

To Nick Morris



# Meander

East to West along a Turkish River

Jeremy Seal

Chatto & Windus  
LONDON

## PROLOGUE

I WOULD HAVE gone down the Meander years ago if I'd known it existed.

All through my travels in the country I described for a living, however, I had never dared to imagine that this alluring proposition might lie within conventional reach; the original winding river appeared so entwined in the remote past of Anatolia, or Asiatic Turkey, as to have forfeited any geographical place in the present. The Meander was no more accessible than the mythical Styx or the mislaid Rubicon, or so I supposed until the day I came across it.



A few years ago I was travelling in a *dolmuş*, one of the public minibuses that serve Turkey's thousands of villages, when a series of slowing jolts roused me from my back-seat reverie. Glancing beyond the window to the iron parapet of a reed-fringed bridge, I happened to spy a blue sign bearing the name of the river - *Menderes* - that we were crossing. In that instant, and no doubt thanks to some random connection triggered by my wandering thoughts, I saw at last through the Turkish rendering, and wondered that a disguise so thin could have held for so long; the Meander still ran, as it had always done, and now ran directly beneath me. It was then I realised how much more there was to know about Turkey, and what I would do about it; by the time the *dolmuş* cleared the bridge I had resolved to follow this singular river's every last winding to the sea.

Windings being, of course, what I was to expect from the Meander. The river's course from Anatolia's plateau interior to the Aegean - it showed on the map as a longitudinal squiggle, which roughly bisected the westernmost reaches of this vast and roughly rectangular land - was so sinuous that the Meander had established its byword reputation even before the first historians went to work; the earliest of them all, Herodotus, chose as his default simile the river that reached the sea just forty miles north of his home city, now Turkey's foremost tourist mecca of Bodrum, to describe a particularly mazy stretch of the Nile.<sup>1</sup>

The river compelled me, of course, not only because it ran through the land whose holiday attractions had long been my subject, but because its very name embodied such resonant associations. Those associations had been actively evolving since the time of Christ when the great geographer Strabo, another Anatolian writer, was to describe the Meander as 'running in a direction excessively tortuous,<sup>2</sup> so that from the course of this river all windings are called meanders'. The river's name had already

embarked, in other words, on its etymological odyssey towards all manner of often conflicting meanings and resonances. It was even then acquiring a figurative currency in both Greek and Latin, one which would duly flourish among their offspring European tongues. By the seventeenth century English writers had come to use the word in a prodigious range of contexts,<sup>3</sup> variously deploying that distant river's name to describe everything from the intricacies of legal process to those of the serpentine gut, from delirium or the mental effects of strong drink to the devious nature of 'oily eloquence'. By the nineteenth century its innate lack of direction especially commended the word to writers of, for example, reports on shiftless Victorian schoolboys.

In all the word's current associations it was this pejorative sense that predominated. To judge by *meanderthal*, a modern colloquialism that busy individuals favoured to describe dozy types given to wandering around, getting in the way in shops, or to dithering behind the wheel in streams of traffic, there was something contemptible about meandering. The dismissive coinage spoke of a sensibility, of nineteenth-century schoolmasters and metropolitan yuppies alike, which despised deviation, believing that progress was properly measured in straight lines.

Others had sensed something far more appealing, however, in the river's name. It was evidence of the word's innate elasticity that Ovid, a near contemporary of Strabo, should instead have been so patently in thrall to what he described as the loose straying of 'soft Meander's wanton current'.<sup>4</sup> On this one I was firmly with the Roman lyric poet; to me, the word encapsulated the freewheeling, romantic spirit that was the essence of true travelling.

The fitting thing, then, would have been to go to the river and go aimless when I got there - aimlessness being a productive virtue I had mislaid and thought to rediscover

on the Meander. Except that I knew enough about rivers, and Turkey, to know that simply turning up, directionless as the river I meant to follow, was not wise; I had a family, after all, and was not about to cast myself adrift and unaccompanied upon a river before learning all I could about the hazards and challenges I might be letting myself in for. At the computer and in the library I therefore set about familiarising myself with the Meander.

The basic geography was relatively simple. The regional maps, though they were poor, at least revealed that the river rose somewhere near a hinterland town called Dinar and drained into the Aegean between the resort towns of Kuşadası and Didim. Along the way it looped and strayed for some 500 kilometres, in the process losing 1,000 metres, or a single kilometre, of elevation, which is to say that the river's average gradient at least appeared reassuringly gentle.

Not that my researches threw up much else, however, in the way of bringing me to expeditionary readiness. They instead confirmed such colourful details as that the Meander Valley was famously fertile from the substantial silts carried down by the river, and quite as rich in historical figures as it was in fruit and vegetables; an epic cast of gods and mythical heroes, conquerors, kings, traders and travellers had trodden the ancient road that ran along much of its broad valley to connect the Aegean with the vast Asian hinterland. This was all of interest, of course, though at this stage I was more concerned by failures to progress along the more practical avenues of my research - like not turning up anybody, ever, who had attempted an actual descent of the Meander.

For what I urgently needed was the advice of boatmen with hands-on experience of the river: its up-close character, that is, from the height of the banks to the caprice of its currents. It soon became apparent, however, that such men had never thought to steer cargoes down the

Meander, no doubt because those in the freight trade, counting themselves with the schoolmasters and the thrusting yuppies, were deterred by the river's famously errant course. The only certainty about the one possible exception, the marble consignments rumoured to have been shipped from the Roman-era quarries at the river's midway point around Hierapolis, was that no marble man's rafting memoir had survived to throw light on the ways of the river.

My other hope was to track down modern accounts of experiences on the Meander. I soon learned, however, that expeditionary adventurers had shown no more interest in the river than the cargo men of the centuries long before them, and for reasons I readily guessed; they thought they knew enough about names, that is, to assume that the adrenaline they craved was unlikely to course through their veins on a river called the Meander.

So the Meander Valley, though it might have served as historic thoroughfare between worlds, bore a river that nobody for various reasons had ever thought to travel; a river known, then, almost entirely by the associations conjured by its name. I could therefore suppose no more than that my descent, apparently a first, was sure to be indirect, and likely to entail a feeble seaward incline; sufficiently feeble, at any rate, to have passed beneath the notice of other expeditionary parties. I hoped, being a party of one, that these intrepid types were right about the river; I was banking on the fact that the Meander might live down to its name. What I wanted was not white-water thrills but the freedom to drift gently downstream, freely attentive to the rich past of this valley on the historic borders of Asia and Europe, East and West, as well as to its present at a time when Turks especially questioned their place between these two worlds.

Against all this uncertainty I could at least claim to know my way around Turkey and speak the language reasonably

well. I had also come to have a deep regard for the locals, if not for their formidable dogs, and was sufficiently confident in the sincerity of Turkish hospitality to reckon I had a good chance of finding lodgings in the many valley villages along the way; all I could otherwise do was pack as properly as possible. Before leaving home, I had therefore drawn up a priority list of every last item of gear that I might struggle to find in the Turkish hinterland. This list included maps, iodine tablets, a first aid kit and a lightweight sleeping bag. It also featured walking boots, various creams and tablets, and dry bags. It ran to a reducible walking pole sufficiently stout to fend off the dogs, and even a collapsible boat.

What it did not include was a trowel.

## CHAPTER ONE

TROWEL WAS A Turkish word I didn't know, so I improvised. Hardly had I requested a pocket-sized spade, however, before the ironmonger's eyes were narrowing to wary slits.

It had not crossed my mind that laying my hands on a trowel might present a problem in a place like Dinar. How but with trowels had the chillies, peppers and aubergines that ran amok in the scruffy little town's kitchen gardens been planted? What of the geraniums that bloomed in rusty cooking oil tins at the foot of whitewashed walls? The potted pine saplings that stood in long rows at the state railway's nursery opposite the station? And the apple and cherry orchards that blossomed across the springtime plains west of the town? Dinar was where Turkey's fertile western lowlands, liberally watered by the Meander's springs, ran up against the plateau interior to breed a last-ditch growing fervour among the locals - but one that their ironmonger did not appear to share.

He stocked, that said, every other item that the practical man might need; his shop was a monument to all the manual work that even now was done in rural Anatolia. Every corner, half-lit and dusty, brimmed with those brunt-bearing objects - axe handles, mattock heads, scythe blades - that interminable usage was apt to blunt or break. There were also whetstones, washers, lengths of plastic piping, buckets of nails, screws and bolts, reels of rope and chain, jubilee clips, bridles and heavy-duty sheepdog

collars, their blades ferociously skewed to keep the wolves off. Wolves being something, it now struck me, that I hadn't planned for.

The closest things to trowels, however, were the spade heads. They were royal green, with tapered blades, and so like the shape of medieval shields as to put me in mind of heraldic devices. For a moment I expected to spot adjacent piles of escutcheons, chevrons and bends sinister, as if some alternative history had turned out an altogether more prosperous land; one in which Dinar's ironmonger instead ran a profitable sideline in knocking up kitsch coats of arms to order, no doubt to adorn the entrance gates that fronted the extensive spreads of the town's proliferating nouveau class, along with the same fake-grained plastic plaques bearing the carved swirls of manorial addresses standard in the affluent West. It was a fragile fancy, however, which lasted no longer than the time it took to glance through the shop door to the make-do concrete structures that in fact lined Dinar's gridded streets, the bare block walls with their hanging tongues of hardened cement, and the plots strewn with spoil. I thought of the wider town, with its shattered pavements and the tile-strewn roofscapes of rusting air-conditioning units beneath skeins of sooty cables and wires, and the scruffy villages that lay beyond Dinar, all crumbling walls of baked mud, and I had no more thoughts of entrance gates, heraldry or of prosperity in the Anatolian backcountry.

'Like them.' I pointed at the spade heads. 'Only smaller. With a handle.' The ironmonger folded his arms. He threw his head back and batted languid eyelids, which eventually reopened to reveal an elsewhere gaze, all interest drained, almost to the point of insult. It was the graphic Turkish negative, but sufficiently aggravated to express something more spirited than a shortage of stock; that the ironmonger was not minded, in fact, to sell me a trowel. On principle. He took me for a treasure hunter.

I had not anticipated such an obstruction quite so early in my journey. I nevertheless supposed it could do the lone traveller no harm to be reminded that Turks resent some things about foreigners. Not least when it comes to digging. I might have pleaded my case (that it was not, after all, a bulldozer, or even a spade, that I was attempting to buy) but for the fact that foreigners in Turkey have the sort of digging form as to discredit even the most plausible excuse. Anatolia has haemorrhaged treasures throughout its history, to conquering occupiers from both East and West. By the nineteenth century, however, such artefacts were not the spoils of victory but articles of purchase, albeit of questionable process, as the European powers set about filling the Grecian-style halls of their newly endowed museums.

From the 1700s collectors descended upon Turkey to haggle with ruin-weary Ottoman beys and provincial governors for all manner of dirt-caked antiquities. Crated marbles were carted to the decks of waiting brigs all along the ruin-strewn littorals of south-west Anatolia; the spades, crowbars and squealing pulley blocks sounded especially loud, however, across the ancient city sites thickly clustered around the delta of the Meander River. At Miletus, the great port that had once commanded the river's mouth, the excavators found beneath the accumulated depth of silt such treasures as the monumental entrance gate that had once served the city's south agora; the gate was removed to Berlin, along with columns, capitals, pedestals and inscriptions from the Temple to Athena at nearby Priene. The temple friezes from Magnesia on the Meander, a city a few miles inland, were dispatched to Paris; and the statues that lined the Sacred Way between Miletus and the oracular temple at Didyma, the seated figures worn to an oddly modern amorphousness, went to London.

It is a national grievance that the museums of the West, to say nothing of its clandestine art collections, are often rich in finds purchased, purloined or plundered from Turkey. The soil of Anatolia even today conceals perhaps as many carved sarcophaguses, statues and inscriptions, coins, pottery and jewellery as anywhere else on earth. The Turkish state assumes that among the Western arrivals are those intent on persisting, only more covertly, in the ways of their filching forebears. The airports provide stern reminders that the unlicensed removal of antiquities from the country is punishable by a lengthy stay in prison. It's a message that clearly bears repetition, though it can often manifest more gently, as an appeal to the visitor's moral and aesthetic conscience by reminding him, typically, how 'Every flower is beautiful in its own garden. Every antique is beautiful in its own country.'

Which was not the approach they favoured at Dinar. The locals' view was that their inland region had in turn become victim to the same process of plunder that had befallen the Meander Delta in earlier centuries; that grasping foreigners, having exhausted all such coastal opportunities, had now worked their way upstream to eye the unexcavated and unguarded archaeological sites located at the top of the same river. The locals judged that the only legitimate business these same foreigners could have with the Meander was back at the river's mouth, at the beach resorts that had sprung up at nearby Kuşadası and Didim; those who found their way as far inland as Dinar must have come not as tourists but as clandestine trowellers. That same morning a man in a brimless woollen cap, the favoured headgear among senior males in the Turkish interior, had expressed precisely these common suspicions by meeting my request for directions to the Roman theatre with a vigorous query of his own; was I, he asked, an 'accredited archaeologist'? It was only once I had strenuously argued my innocence that he pointed me up a

hillside track, but with the parting discouragement that a dog - 'large, often unchained' - lived there. I had barely checked in, besides, before Turgay, the Dinar hotelier, was mentioning the old coins I might wish to view, as if my apparent interest in the local river masked my real intent, which was the illicit acquisition of local antiquities.

The locals were right in one respect: Dinar had certainly enjoyed a past worth guarding. Celaenae, as the city was first known, not only stood by the source of the storied river but occupied what was once the most strategically significant site in all Anatolia; it commanded the pass through the Samsun Dağı range, a modest set of mountains by regional standards, but one that finally saw off the Aegean littoral as the contours stepped up to the plateau. The climb from the coastlands<sup>1</sup> to the high interior, a prime communications consideration, was more easily managed at Celaenae, in the ancient region of Phrygia, than at anywhere else in Anatolia.

All through its early history, from perhaps two millennia before the birth of Christ until some four hundred years after his crucifixion, Celaenae remained a place of exceptional geographical consequence; the great longitudinal land routes across the ancient world's Mediterranean heartlands - anywhere, that is, between the sandy shores of North Africa and the black steppe of Ukraine - necessarily funnelled through Anatolia before converging on the pass at Celaenae. The route had first connected the foremost Aegean port of Miletus, the silt-sunk city that awaited me at the end of my journey, with the early Mesopotamian civilisations of the Assyrians and Hittites. This great highway to the East - 'the public frequented road<sup>2</sup> by which all travellers pass' - set out from the shores of the Aegean along the lower Meander Valley before returning to the river's headwaters at Celaenae and continuing via the pass, 'on, in a straight line, as far as

India'. Vast caravans of wool, wheat and spices, marble and ivory, trundled through the pass, establishing Celaenae as the commercial and administrative hub of the western Anatolian hinterland. It was no surprise that the keepers of Celaenae's pass made immense fortunes. In the year 481 BC, for example, a resident of the city called Pythius<sup>3</sup> had occasion to calculate his personal worth. His two thousand talents of silver, 3,393,000 gold pieces, plus unspecified slaves and estates, made him the world's second richest man.

For all this, however, inland Celaenae could be dismissed as a glorified toll house in comparison with Miletus, the city at the seaward end of the Meander. For in the course of the sixth and fifth centuries BC Miletus had spawned a unique crop of what Strabo called 'illustrious persons'.<sup>4</sup> The great port city, which Greeks from their homelands across the Aegean had settled some centuries earlier, was home to musicians, poets and sculptors. Miletus also boasted planners, engineers and the earliest map makers, and philosophers such as Anaximander and Anaximenes, to say nothing of the great Thales, who would duly be credited with nothing less than the founding of the Western rational tradition. The neighbouring cities of Ionia, as the settler Greeks called the coastal region that encompassed the Meander Delta, were barely less impressive; Priene was a haunt of artists and home to Bias, one of the Seven Sages of Antiquity, while Magnesia on the Meander a short distance upstream swarmed with orators and singers.

This atmosphere of inquisitive and civilised enlightenment appeared coastal by instinct; in the fifth century BC it certainly did not appear to extend to Celaenae. The hinterland city, populated by its Persian ruling class and by Anatolian locals such as Phrygians, Lydians and Pisidians, failed to measure up to Miletus when it came to the production of famous sons. Easy

affluence bred little, it seemed, by way of local accomplishment. The residents of Celaenae apparently felt no need to distinguish themselves beyond the breadth of their wallets. The city appeared mired in a provincialism from which even its extraordinary wealth could not drag it. If the coastal Ionians knew anything of 'the pasture lands of Celaenae',<sup>5</sup> it was merely that these uncultured wastes were home to the long-haired and uncouth Anatolian barbarians who were to serve as fodder at the Roman-era gladiatorial shows.

Yet Celaenae was to rise above this dearth of home-grown talent by achieving a reputation of its own, even if it was a borrowed one. The city found it in the one resource it could count upon: passing traffic. Celaenae was to make its name largely by association with the epic deeds - however far-flung their actual execution - of those who passed through the place. In this respect Celaenae recalled a small-town restaurant, the walls pinned with promotional photos, complete with scribbled wishes, of the generously disposed stars that happened to halt there. Back in an age, that is, when the stand-out stars were marchers. If Miletus was renowned for its revered philosophers, then Celaenae came to be known for the marching columns, or at least for the men in command of those columns, who took their rest there; as it was for the achievements of the head that the city at the river's foot was known, so it was for the exertions of the foot that the one at its head was to be remembered.

For in the course of the fifth and fourth centuries BC it happened that the three most celebrated ancient marches of all passed through Celaenae. These had much in common, not least in terms of the infinite ambition of their leaders, but given how quickly the dust obscures the facts of ancient history it may not be facile to suggest that the most glaring similarity, however superficial, was the incidence of the letter X in their names. The first one to

enter the city, exceptionally enough, had two; the arrival in 481 BC of Xerxes, King of Persia, was the very event that prompted the same Pythius to reckon his fortune, the local tycoon thinking to commend himself by offering up his wealth to serve the war chest of the new arrival, the only man in existence richer than himself. Xerxes was scion of the Persian imperial line that had ruled Anatolia - even unto its Hellenised western littoral - since 546 BC. After leading his army hordes out of Persia and along the great Anatolian road, Xerxes had arrived at the eastern gates of Celaenae. At this centre of provincial Persian rule, the King ordered his armies to rest while he took himself off to the palace that he kept by the banks of the Meander. In the company of advisers he fine-tuned his plans for the invasion of Europe. Greece, for too long defiant of Persian dominion, was now to be brought to heel.

Or so Xerxes thought. To this end the so-called Great King had assembled a force that matched the scale of his ambition; his armies, stuffed with the levies of countless subject people, were so vast that it was feared their combined thirst<sup>6</sup> must drain Anatolia's rivers, if the dust the columns put up did not first turn the waters to slurry. In time, of course, the rested armies were to continue out of Celaenae, and on towards the epic events for which posterity was to remember them: the gigantic pontoon bridge, an engineering marvel, which bore the invaders across the Hellespont into Europe; the Persians' frustration before the heroic stand of Leonidas' 300 Spartans at Thermopylae; and the subsequent destruction by Greek forces of Xerxes' huge trireme fleet in the shallows around the island of Salamis.

Back to the comparative backwaters of Celaenae, however, to await the arrival eighty years later of another oft-remembered army at the city gates. Among this lot of mercenary marchers the man that history was destined to single out was one Xenophon, who would not only gain an