



ELEPHANTS AND EMPIRE: THE ASIAN ELEPHANT, FROM ALEXANDER TO AKBAR

Nicholas K. Redmond (Winthrop L. Adams)
Department of History

This thesis studies the prominence of the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus maximus*) in the historical record. The purpose is to show the impact of *elephas* on human affairs, most notably in the formation and destruction of empires. Of these empires, two are of primary importance: the conquests of Alexander the Great of Macedon, and the Mughal Empire of Jalal Muhammad Akbar the Great in India. Additionally, the dynasty of Seleucus I Nicator, Alexander's successor in Asia, is analyzed. Brief accounts of Pyrrhus of Epirus, Hannibal Barca, Chandragupta Maurya, and the Roman Empire are also discussed. These accounts have been gleaned through an examination of ancient primary sources, including Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Arrian's *Campaigns of Alexander*, and Abu al-Fazl's *Akbarnama*, among others.

Upon examination of these accounts, it is clear that the Asian elephant has played a crucial role in the development of human empire. Further, the times of Alexander the Great and Seleucus I Nicator can be seen as a "golden age" of Asian elephant warfare, and its important use sparked one of the world's first large-scale arms races. The era of Akbar and the Mughal Empire can be seen as the reverse; the advent of gunpowder and its increasing prevalence began the steady decline of war elephants in battle. Finally, through viewing the importance of elephants in military history, this thesis suggests that protecting *elephas* for use in warfare may have been one of the world's first conservation efforts, and could very well have aided in protecting the species from extinction.

