

# SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication  
Volume 140, No. 3, July 20, 1991

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SCIENCE NEWS (ISSN 0036-8423) is published weekly on Saturday, except the last week in December, for \$39.50 for 1 year or \$68.00 for 2 years (foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year) by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing office. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to SCIENCE NEWS, 231 West Center Street, Marion, OH 43305. Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required — old and new addresses, including zip codes, must be provided.

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**Editorial and Business Offices:**  
231 West Center Street, Marion, OH 43305  
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## Letters

### Too late for the Great

According to "Roman conquest clues emerge at Carthage" (SN: 4/6/91, p.214), Alexander the Great besieged Tyre in 312 B.C. That would have been an impressive feat, since he died 11 years earlier.

Alexander's epic siege of Tyre began in January of 332 B.C. and lasted until August. The causeway built by his men turned Tyre (now the Lebanese city of Sur) from an island into a peninsula, which it still remains.

The people of Carthage claimed descent from the Tyrians, so it is ironic that both cities died in a similar way.

Mike Markowitz  
Long Beach, Calif.

### Transcending disease?

Bruce Bower reports that there does not yet appear to be any consistent evidence associat-

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### 40 The Checkers Challenge

Cover: Computer scientists face an array of challenges when programming a computer to play checkers. A group at the University of Edmonton has developed a computer program, called Chinook, that now ranks among the top checker players in the world. And at the University of Rochester, researchers have programmed a robot not only to play the game but also to move the pieces. (Photo: James Montanus/University of Rochester)



### 42 Cardiac Electricians

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ing depression and attendant decrements of immune-system functioning with the incidence of specific diseases ("Questions of Mind Over Immunity," SN: 4/6/91, p.216).

However, while *increase* of stress may not yet be well correlated with increased incidence of particular diseases, there is evidence that *decrease* of stress correlates with a *reduced* incidence of at least some immune-related diseases. For example, David Orme-Johnson reported in *PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE* in 1987 that Blue Cross/Blue Shield health-utilization records of about 2,000 people practicing transcendental meditation showed that these subjects, when compared both with the general population and with other insured groups of similar size and professional membership, had significant reductions of incidence (measured by medical and surgical inpatient and outpatient care) of a wide spectrum of ailments, particularly tumors and infectious diseases.

In short, evidence that at least some "well-chosen psychological treatments" can reduce

the incidence of some immune-related diseases does exist in the published literature. The results obtained can naturally be expected to vary from procedure to procedure; the transcendental meditation technique used in the above study has been independently shown to be particularly effective in reducing trait anxiety, a major measure of ongoing psychological stress.

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All letters subject to editing.

JULY 20, 1991

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