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Alexander the Great

Early life

Lineage and childhood

[13] According to the ancient Greek biographer Plutarch, on the eve of the consummation of her marriage to Philip, Olympias dreamed that her womb was struck by a thunderbolt that caused a flame to spread "far and wide" before dying away.

[15] Such legends may have emerged when Alexander was king, and possibly at his instigation, to show that he was superhuman and destined for greatness from conception.

Education

Roman medallion depicting Olympias, Alexander's mother When Alexander was 13, Philip began to search for a tutor, and considered such academics as Isocrates and Speusippus, the latter offering to resign from his stewardship of the Academy to take up the post.

[23][24][25] Among them were Artabazos II and his daughter Barsine, possible future mistress of Alexander, who resided at the Macedonian court from 352 to 342 BC, as well as Amminapes, future satrap of Alexander, or a Persian nobleman named Sisines.

Heir of Philip II

Regency and ascent of Macedon

The territory was colonized, and a city, named Alexandropolis, was founded.

The Athenians, led by Demosthenes, voted to seek alliance with Thebes against Macedonia.

Exile and return

This so irritated Alexander, that throwing one of the cups at his head, "You villain," said he, "what, am I then a bastard?"

[42] Olympias and several of Alexander's friends suggested this showed Philip intended to make Arrhidaeus his heir.

King of Macedon

Accession

Further information: Government of Macedonia (ancient kingdom) Pausanias assassinates Philip II, Alexander's father, during his procession into the theatre The emblem of the Stag Hunt Mosaic, c. 300 BC, from Pella; the figure on the right is possibly Alexander the Great due to the date of the mosaic along with the depicted upsweep of his centrally-parted hair (anastole); the figure on the left wielding a double-edged axe (associated with Hephaistos) is perhaps Hephaestion, one of Alexander's loyal companions.

[46] In summer 336 BC, while at Aegae attending the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra to Olympias's brother, Alexander I of Epirus, Philip was assassinated by the captain of his bodyguards, Pausanias.

Consolidation of power

Alexander also ordered the murder of Attalus,[50] who was in command of the advance guard of the army in Asia Minor and Cleopatra's uncle.

Alexander stopped at Thermopylae, where he was recognized as the leader of the Amphictyonic League before heading south to Corinth.

Balkan campaign

Main article: Alexander's Balkan campaign The Macedonian phalanx at the "Battle of the Carts" against the Thracians in 335 BC Before crossing to Asia, Alexander wanted to safeguard his northern borders.

Starting from Amphipolis, he travelled east into the country of the "Independent Thracians"; and at Mount Haemus, the Macedonian army attacked and defeated the Thracian forces manning the heights.

Destruction of Thebes

While Alexander campaigned north, the Thebans and Athenians rebelled once again. Alexander immediately headed south.

Conquest of the Achaemenid Persian Empire

Main articles: Wars of Alexander the Great and Chronology of the expedition of Alexander the Great into Asia

Asia Minor

Alexander Cuts the Gordian Knot (1767) by Jean-Simon Berthélemy After his victory at the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BC), Philip II began the work of establishing himself as hēgemōn (Greek: ἡγεμῶν) of a league which according to Diodorus was to wage a campaign against the Persians for the sundry grievances Greece suffered in 480 and free the Greek cities of the western coast and islands from Achaemenid rule.

After an initial victory against Persian forces at the Battle of the Granicus, Alexander accepted the surrender of the Persian provincial capital and treasury of Sardis; he then proceeded along the Ionian coast, granting autonomy and democracy to the cities.

The Levant and Syria

Further information: Battle of Issus and Siege of Tyre (332 BC) In spring 333 BC, Alexander crossed the Taurus into Cilicia.

[67] In the following year, 332 BC, he was forced to attack Tyre, which he captured after a long and difficult siege.

Egypt

After his trip to Siwa, Alexander was crowned in the temple of Ptah at Memphis. During his brief months in Egypt, he reformed the taxation system on the Greek models and organized the

military occupation of the country, but, early in 331 BC, he left for Asia in pursuit of the Persians.

Assyria and Babylonia

Further information: Battle of Gaugamela Leaving Egypt in 331 BC, Alexander marched eastward into Achaemenid Assyria in Upper Mesopotamia (now northern Iraq) and defeated Darius again at the Battle of Gaugamela.

[83] Darius once more fled the field, and Alexander chased him as far as Arbela.

Persia

On entering Persepolis, Alexander allowed his troops to loot the city for several days.

[89] During his stay a fire broke out in the eastern palace of Xerxes I and spread to the rest of the city.

Fall of the Persian Empire and the East

[99] He claimed that, while dying, Darius had named him as his successor to the Achaemenid throne.

In 329 BC, Spitamenes, who held an undefined position in the satrapy of Sogdiana, betrayed Bessus to Ptolemy, one of Alexander's trusted companions, and Bessus was executed.

Problems and plots

During the long rule of the Achaemenids, the elite positions in many segments of the empire including the central government, the army, and the many satrapies were specifically reserved for Iranians and to a major degree Persian noblemen.

[102] Alexander wrote a letter in 332 BC to Darius III, wherein he argued that he was worthier than Darius "to succeed to the Achaemenid throne".

Macedon in Alexander's absence

[62] The one exception was a call to arms by Spartan king Agis III in 331 BC, whom Antipater defeated and killed in the battle of Megalopolis.

In general, Greece enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity during Alexander's campaign in Asia.

Coinage

Alexander appears to have introduced a new coinage in Cilicia in Tarsus, after the Battle of Issus in 333 BC, which went on to become the main coinage of the empire.

[116] The reverse design of Alexander's tetradrachms is closely modelled on the depiction of the god Baaltars (Baal of Tarsus), on the silver staters minted at Tarsus by the Persian satrap Mazaeus before Alexander's conquest.

Indian campaign

Main article: Indian campaign of Alexander the Great

Forays into the Indian subcontinent

After that victory, he was sent by Alexander in pursuit of Porus, to whom he was charged to offer favourable terms, but narrowly escaped losing his life at the hands of his old enemy. Porus surrenders to Alexander After Aornos, Alexander crossed the Indus and fought and won an epic battle against King Porus, who ruled a region lying between the Hydaspes and the Acesines (Chenab), in what is now the Punjab, in the Battle of the Hydaspes in 326 BC.

Revolt of the Hellenic army

Asia in 323 BC, the Nanda Empire and the Gangaridai of the Indian subcontinent, in relation to Alexander's Empire and neighbours East of Porus's kingdom, near the Ganges River, was the Nanda Empire of Magadha, and further east, the Gangaridai Empire of Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent.

[133] Alexander tried to persuade his soldiers to march farther, but his general Coenus pleaded with him to change his opinion and return; the men, he said, "longed to again see their parents, their wives and children, their homeland".

Last years in Persia

Alexander at the Tomb of Cyrus the Great, by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes (1796) Meanwhile, upon his return to Persia, Alexander learned that guards of the tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae had desecrated it, and swiftly executed them.

[145] Back in Babylon, Alexander planned a series of new campaigns, beginning with an invasion of Arabia, but he would not have a chance to realize them, as he died shortly after Hephaestion.

Death and succession

Diodorus, Plutarch, Arrian and Justin all mentioned the theory that Alexander was poisoned.

[161][162][163] In a 2014 manuscript in the journal Clinical Toxicology, Schep suggested Alexander's wine was spiked with Veratrum album, and that this would produce poisoning symptoms that match the course of events described in the Alexander Romance.

Post-death events

See also: Tomb of Alexander the Great Alexander's body was laid in a gold anthropoid sarcophagus that was filled with honey, which was in turn placed in a gold casket.

It was originally thought to have been the sarcophagus of Abdalonymus (died 311 BC), the king of Sidon appointed by Alexander immediately following the battle of Issus in 331.

Division of the Macedonian Empire

Main articles: Partition of Babylon and Diadochi Kingdoms of the Diadochi in 301 BC: the Ptolemaic Kingdom (dark blue), the Seleucid Empire (yellow), Kingdom of Lysimachus (orange), and Kingdom of Macedon (green).

In the process, both Alexander IV and Philip III were murdered.

Last plans

[193] Furthermore, Perdikkas had read the notebooks containing Alexander's last plans to the Macedonian troops in Babylon, who voted not to carry them out.

Construction of 1,000 ships larger than triremes, along with harbours and a road running along the African coast all the way to the Pillars of Hercules, to be used for an invasion of Carthage

and the western Mediterranean;[194] Erection of great temples in Delos, Delphi, Dodona, Dium, Amphipolis, all costing 1,500 talents, and a monumental temple to Athena at Troy[62][194] Amalgamation of small settlements into larger cities ("synoecisms") and the "transplant of populations from Asia to Europe and in the opposite direction from Europe to Asia, in order to bring the largest continent to common unity and to friendship by means of intermarriage and family ties"[195][194] Construction of a monumental tomb for his father Philip, "to match the greatest of the pyramids of Egypt"[62][194] Conquest of Arabia[62] Circumnavigation of Africa[62] The enormous scale of these plans has led many scholars to doubt their historicity.

Character

Generalship

In his first battle in Asia, at Granicus, Alexander used only a small part of his forces, perhaps 13,000 infantry with 5,000 cavalry, against a much larger Persian force of 40,000.

At Issus in 333 BC, his first confrontation with Darius, he used the same deployment, and again the central phalanx pushed through.

Physical appearance

[205][204] Nevertheless, Andrew Stewart highlights the fact that artistic portraits, not least because of who they are commissioned by, are always partisan, and that artistic portrayals of Alexander "seek to legitimize him (or, by extension, his Successors), to interpret him to their audiences, to answer their critiques, and to persuade them of his greatness", and thus should be considered within a framework of "praise and blame", in the same way sources such as praise poetry are.

The outward appearance of Alexander is best represented by the statues of him which Lysippus made, and it was by this artist alone that Alexander himself thought it fit that he should be modelled.

Personality

[218] While Alexander worried that his father would leave him "no great or brilliant achievement to be displayed to the world",[219] he also downplayed his father's achievements to his companions.

[233] He began to identify himself as the son of Zeus-Ammon.

Personal relationships

[247] The Roman era writer Athenaeus says, based on the scholar Dicaearchus, who was Alexander's contemporary, that the king "was quite excessively keen on boys", and that Alexander kissed the eunuch Bagoas in public.

Aelian writes of Alexander's visit to Troy where "Alexander garlanded the tomb of Achilles, and Hephaestion that of Patroclus, the latter hinting that he was a beloved of Alexander, in just the same way as Patroclus was of Achilles.

Battle record

Persian Gate Battle of the Persian Gate
Afghanistan and Pakistan

Legacy

The Hellenistic world view: world map of Eratosthenes (276–194 BC), using information from the campaigns of Alexander and his successors[257] Alexander's legacy extended beyond his military conquests, and his reign marked a turning point in European and Asian history. [258] His campaigns greatly increased contacts and trade between East and West, and vast areas to the east were significantly exposed to Greek civilization and influence.

Hellenistic kingdoms

Main article: Hellenistic period Plan of Alexandria c. 30 BC Alexander's most immediate legacy was the introduction of Macedonian rule to huge new swathes of Asia.

Taking advantage of this power vacuum, Chandragupta Maurya (referred to in Greek sources as "Sandrokottos"), of relatively humble origin, took control of the Punjab, and with that power base proceeded to conquer the Nanda Empire.

Founding of cities

The Smyrnaeans sent ambassadors to the oracle at Clarus to ask about this, and after the response from the oracle they decided to move to the "new" city.

The city of Pella, in modern Jordan, was founded by veterans of Alexander's army, and named it after the city of Pella, in Greece, which was the birthplace of Alexander.

Funding of temples

Dedication of Alexander the Great to Athena Polias at Priene, now housed in the British Museum[265] In 334 BC, Alexander the Great donated funds for the completion of the new temple of Athena Polias in Priene, in modern-day western Turkey.

Libanius wrote that Alexander founded the temple of Zeus Bottiaios (Ancient Greek: Βοττιαίου Δῖός), in the place where later the city of Antioch was built.

Hellenization

Main article: Hellenization Alexander's empire was the largest state of its time, covering approximately 5.2 million square km.

Hellenization was coined by the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen to denote the spread of Greek language, culture, and population into the former Persian empire after Alexander's conquest.

Hellenization in South and Central Asia

Main articles: Indo-Greek Kingdom, Indo-Greek art, and Greco-Buddhism The Buddha, in Greco-Buddhist style, 1st to 2nd century AD, Gandhara, northern Pakistan.

Several examples of capitals displaying Ionic influences can be seen as far as Patna, especially with the Pataliputra capital, dated to the 3rd century BC.

Influence on Rome

While there, he encountered a statue of Alexander the Great, and realised with dissatisfaction that he was now at an age when Alexander had the world at his feet, while he had achieved comparatively little.

But this mania for Alexander, strange as it was, was overshadowed by subsequent events in Alexandria.

Letters

Main article: Letters of Alexander the Great
Alexander wrote and received numerous letters, but no originals survive.

A few official letters addressed to the Greek cities survive in copies inscribed in stone and the content of others is sometimes reported in historical sources.

In legend

Main article: Alexander the Great in legend
Many of the legends about Alexander derive from his own lifetime, probably encouraged by Alexander himself.

In the first centuries after Alexander's death, probably in Alexandria, a quantity of the legendary material coalesced into a text known as the Alexander Romance, later falsely ascribed to Callisthenes and therefore known as Pseudo-Callisthenes.

In ancient and modern culture

[311] Alexander was depicted as performing a Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) many times in subsequent Islamic art and literature.

[316] In medieval India, Turkic and Afghan sovereigns from the Iranian-cultured region of Central Asia brought positive cultural connotations of Alexander to the Indian subcontinent, resulting in the efflorescence of Sikandarnamah (Alexander Romances) written by Indo-Persian poets such as Amir Khusrow and the prominence of Alexander the Great as a popular subject in Mughal-era Persian miniatures.

Historiography

Main article: Historiography of Alexander the Great
Apart from a few inscriptions and fragments, texts written by people who actually knew Alexander or who gathered information from men who served with Alexander were all lost.

[17] Contemporaries who wrote accounts of his life included Alexander's campaign historian Callisthenes; Alexander's generals Ptolemy and Nearchus; Aristobulus, a junior officer on the campaigns; and Onesicritus, Alexander's chief helmsman.

See also

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References

Notes

^ Macedon was an Ancient Greek polity; the Macedonians were a Greek tribe.
Napoleon also placed Alexander in the first rank.

Citations

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Further reading

"Quintus Curtius Rufus, History of Alexander the Great" (in Latin).
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External links

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Meryhathor Neferkare VIII Wahkare Khety Merykare Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period (2040–1550 BC)PeriodDynasty Pharaohs male female♀ uncertain Middle Kingdom(2040–1802 BC)XI Mentuhotep I Intef I Intef II Intef III Mentuhotep II Mentuhotep III Mentuhotep IV Nubia Segerseni Qakare Ini Iyibkhentre