

# ALEXANDER THE GREAT



**A MAN OF CONVICTION,  
CONQUEST, AND CURIOSITY.**

Alexander III of Macedon, commonly known as Alexander the Great, was a king (basileus) of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon[a] and a member of the Argead dynasty. He was born in Pella in 356 BC and succeeded his father Philip II to the throne at the age of 20. He spent most of his ruling years on an unprecedented military campaign through Asia and northeast Africa, and by the age of thirty, he had created one of the largest empires of the ancient world, stretching from Greece to northwestern India. He was undefeated in battle and is widely considered one of history's most successful military commanders.





# CHARACTER

Alexander was born in Pella, the capital of the Kingdom of Macedon,[8] on the sixth day of the ancient Greek month of Hekatombaion, which probably corresponds to 20 July 356 BC, although the exact date is uncertain.[9] He was the son of the king of Macedon, Philip II, and his fourth wife, Olympias, the daughter of Neoptolemus I, king of Epirus.[10] Although Philip had seven or eight wives, Olympias was his principal wife for some time, likely because she gave birth to Alexander.[11]

Several legends surround Alexander's birth and childhood.[12] 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. Sometime after the wedding, Philip is said to have seen himself, in a dream, securing his wife's womb with a seal engraved with a lion's image.[13] Plutarch offered a variety of interpretations of these dreams: that Olympias was pregnant before her marriage, indicated by the sealing of her womb; or that Alexander's father was Zeus. Ancient commentators were divided about whether the ambitious Olympias promulgated the story of Alexander's divine parentage, variously claiming that she had told Alexander, or that she dismissed the suggestion as impious.[13]

On the day Alexander was born, Philip was preparing a siege on the city of Potidea on the peninsula of Chalcidice. That same day, Philip received news that his general Parmenion had defeated the combined Illyrian and Paeonian armies and that his horses had won at the Olympic Games. It was also said that on this day, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, burnt down. This led Hegesias of Magnesia to say that it had burnt down because Artemis was away, attending the birth of Alexander.[14] 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.[12]

In his early years, Alexander was raised by a nurse, Lanike, sister of Alexander's future general Cleitus the Black. Later in his childhood, Alexander was tutored by the strict Leonidas, a relative of his mother, and by Lysimachus of Acarnania.[15] Alexander was raised in the manner of noble Macedonian youths, learning to read, play the lyre, ride, fight, and hunt.[16]





## DOMESTIC POLICY

Alexander began his reign by eliminating potential rivals to the throne. He had his cousin, the former Amyntas IV, executed.[48] He also had two Macedonian princes from the region of Lyncestis killed, but spared a third, Alexander Lyncestes. Olympias had Cleopatra Eurydice and Europa, her daughter by Philip, burned alive. When Alexander learned about this, he was furious. Alexander also ordered the murder of Attalus,[48] who was in command of the advance guard of the army in Asia Minor and Cleopatra's uncle.[49]

Attalus was at that time corresponding with Demosthenes, regarding the possibility of defecting to Athens. Attalus also had severely insulted Alexander, and following Cleopatra's murder, Alexander may have considered him too dangerous to leave alive.[49] Alexander spared Arrhidaeus, who was by all accounts mentally disabled, possibly as a result of poisoning by Olympias.[45][47][50]

News of Philip's death roused many states into revolt, including Thebes, Athens, Thessaly, and the Thracian tribes north of Macedon. When news of the revolts reached Alexander, he responded quickly. Though advised to use diplomacy, Alexander mustered 3,000 Macedonian cavalry and rode south towards Thessaly. He found the Thessalian army occupying the pass between Mount Olympus and Mount Ossa, and ordered his men to ride over Mount Ossa. When the Thessalians awoke the next day, they found Alexander in their rear and promptly surrendered, adding their cavalry to Alexander's force. He then continued south towards the Peloponnese.[51]

Alexander stopped at Thermopylae, where he was recognized as the leader of the Amphictyonic League before heading south to Corinth. Athens sued for peace and Alexander pardoned the rebels. The famous encounter between Alexander and Diogenes the Cynic occurred during Alexander's stay in Corinth. When Alexander asked Diogenes what he could do for him, the philosopher disdainfully asked Alexander to stand a little to the side, as he was blocking the sunlight.[52] This reply apparently delighted Alexander, who is reported to have said "But verily, if I were not Alexander, I would like to be Diogenes." [53] At Corinth, Alexander took the title of Hegemon ("leader") and, like Philip, was appointed commander for the coming war against Persia. He also received news of a Thracian uprising.[54]





# PERSIAN CONQUEST

From Babylon, Alexander went to Susa, one of the Achaemenid capitals, and captured its treasury.[85] He sent the bulk of his army to the Persian ceremonial capital of Persepolis via the Persian Royal Road. Alexander himself took selected troops on the direct route to the city. He then stormed the pass of the Persian Gates (in the modern Zagros Mountains) which had been blocked by a Persian army under Ariobarzanes and then hurried to Persepolis before its garrison could loot the treasury.[86]

On entering Persepolis, Alexander allowed his troops to loot the city for several days.[87] Alexander stayed in Persepolis for five months.[88] During his stay a fire broke out in the eastern palace of Xerxes I and spread to the rest of the city. Possible causes include a drunken accident or deliberate revenge for the burning of the Acropolis of Athens during the Second Persian War by Xerxes;[89] Plutarch and Diodorus allege that Alexander's companion, the hetaera Thaïs, instigated and started the fire. Even as he watched the city burn, Alexander immediately began to regret his decision.[90][91][92] Plutarch claims that he ordered his men to put out the fires,[90] but that the flames had already spread to most of the city.[90] Curtius claims that Alexander did not regret his decision until the next morning.[90]

Alexander then chased Darius, first into Media, and then Parthia.[95] The Persian king no longer controlled his own destiny, and was taken prisoner by Bessus, his Bactrian satrap and kinsman.[96] As Alexander approached, Bessus had his men fatally stab the Great King and then declared himself Darius' successor as Artaxerxes V, before retreating into Central Asia to launch a guerrilla campaign against Alexander.[97] Alexander buried Darius' remains next to his Achaemenid predecessors in a regal funeral.[98] He claimed that, while dying, Darius had named him as his successor to the Achaemenid throne.[99] The Achaemenid Empire is normally considered to have fallen with Darius.[100]

Alexander viewed Bessus as a usurper and set out to defeat him. This campaign, initially against Bessus, turned into a grand tour of central Asia. Alexander founded a series of new cities, all called Alexandria, including modern Kandahar in Afghanistan, and Alexandria Eschate ("The Furthest") in modern Tajikistan. The campaign took Alexander through Media, Parthia, Aria (West Afghanistan), Drangiana, Arachosia (South and Central Afghanistan), Bactria (North and Central Afghanistan), and Scythia.[101]





## INDIAN CAMPAIGN

After the death of Spitamenes and his marriage to Roxana (Raoxshna in Old Iranian) to cement relations with his new satrapies, Alexander turned to the Indian subcontinent. He invited the chieftains of the former satrapy of Gandhara (a region presently straddling eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan), to come to him and submit to his authority. Omphis (Indian name Ambhi), the ruler of Taxila, whose kingdom extended from the Indus to the Hydaspes (Jhelum), complied, but the chieftains of some hill clans, including the Aspasioi and Assakenoi sections of the Kambojas (known in Indian texts also as Ashvayanas and Ashvakayanas), refused to submit.[113] Ambhi hastened to relieve Alexander of his apprehension and met him with valuable presents, placing himself and all his forces at his disposal. Alexander not only returned Ambhi his title and the gifts but he also presented him with a wardrobe of "Persian robes, gold and silver ornaments, 30 horses and 1,000 talents in gold". Alexander was emboldened to divide his forces, and Ambhi assisted Hephæstion and Perdiccas in constructing a bridge over the Indus where it bends at Hund,[114] supplied their troops with provisions, and received Alexander himself, and his whole army, in his capital city of Taxila, with every demonstration of friendship and the most liberal hospitality.

On the subsequent advance of the Macedonian king, Taxiles accompanied him with a force of 5,000 men and took part in the battle of the Hydaspes River. 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. Subsequently, however, the two rivals were reconciled by the personal mediation of Alexander; and Taxiles, after having contributed zealously to the equipment of the fleet on the Hydaspes, was entrusted by the king with the government of the whole territory between that river and the Indus. A considerable accession of power was granted him after the death of Philip, son of Machatas; and he was allowed to retain his authority at the death of Alexander himself (323 BC), as well as in the subsequent partition of the provinces at Triparadisus, 321 BC.





# DEATH AND LEGACY

On either 10 or 11 June 323 BC, Alexander died in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II, in Babylon, at age 32.[139] There are two different versions of Alexander's death and details of the death differ slightly in each. Plutarch's account is that roughly 14 days before his death, Alexander entertained admiral Nearchus, and spent the night and next day drinking with Medius of Larissa.[140] He developed a fever, which worsened until he was unable to speak. The common soldiers, anxious about his health, were granted the right to file past him as he silently waved at them.[141] In the second account, Diodorus recounts that Alexander was struck with pain after downing a large bowl of unmixed wine in honour of Heracles, followed by 11 days of weakness; he did not develop a fever and died after some agony.[142] Arrian also mentioned this as an alternative, but Plutarch specifically denied this claim.[140]

Given the propensity of the Macedonian aristocracy to assassination,[143] foul play featured in multiple accounts of his death. Diodorus, Plutarch, Arrian and Justin all mentioned the theory that Alexander was poisoned. Justin stated that Alexander was the victim of a poisoning conspiracy, Plutarch dismissed it as a fabrication,[144] while both Diodorus and Arrian noted that they mentioned it only for the sake of completeness.[142][145] The accounts were nevertheless fairly consistent in designating Antipater, recently removed as Macedonian viceroy, and at odds with Olympias, as the head of the alleged plot. Perhaps taking his summons to Babylon as a death sentence,[146] and having seen the fate of Parmenion and Philotas,[147] Antipater purportedly arranged for Alexander to be poisoned by his son Iollas, who was Alexander's wine-pourer.[145][147] There was even a suggestion that Aristotle may have participated.[145]