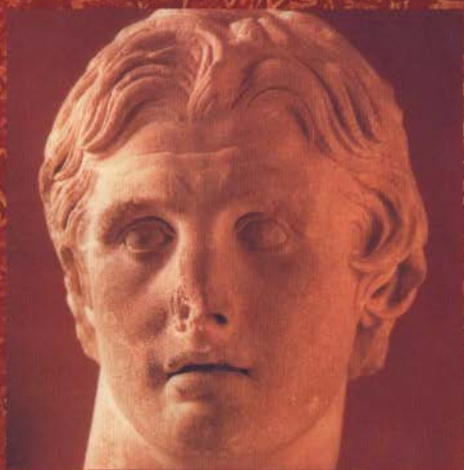


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# Alexander the Great



General Editor  
**KIREET JOSHI**

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*Illumination, Heroism and Harmony*

# Alexander the Great

General Editor: KIREET JOSHI





# Illumination, Heroism and Harmony

## *Preface* ·

The task of preparing teaching-learning material for value-oriented education is enormous.

There is, first, the idea that value-oriented education should be exploratory rather than prescriptive, and that the teaching-learning material should provide to the learners a growing experience of exploration.

Secondly, it is rightly contended that the proper inspiration to turn to value-orientation is provided by biographies, autobiographical accounts, personal anecdotes, epistles, short poems, stories of humour, stories of human interest, brief passages filled with pregnant meanings, reflective short essays written in well-chiselled language, plays, powerful accounts of historical events, statements of personal experiences of values in actual situations of life, and similar other statements of scientific, philosophical, artistic and literary expression.

Thirdly, we may take into account the contemporary fact that the entire world is moving rapidly towards the synthesis of the East and the West, and in that context, it seems obvious that our teaching-learning material should foster the gradual familiarisation of students with global themes of universal significance as also those that underline the importance of diversity in unity. This implies that the material should bring the students nearer to their cultural heritage, but also to the highest that is available in the cultural experiences of the world at large.



Fourthly, an attempt should be made to select from Indian and world history such examples that could illustrate the theme of the upward progress of humankind. The selected research material could be multi-sided, and it should be presented in such a way that teachers can make use of it in the manner and in the context that they need in specific situations that might obtain or that can be created in respect of the students.

The research team at the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) has attempted the creation of the relevant teaching-learning material, and they have decided to present the same in the form of monographs. The total number of these monographs will be around eighty to eighty-five.

It appears that there are three major powers that uplift life to higher and higher normative levels, and the value of these powers, if well illustrated, could be effectively conveyed to the learners for their upliftment. These powers are those of illumination, heroism and harmony.

It may be useful to explore the meanings of these terms – illumination, heroism and harmony – since the aim of these monographs is to provide material for a study of what is sought to be conveyed through these three terms. We offer here exploratory statements in regard to these three terms.

Illumination is that ignition of inner light in which meaning and value of substance and life-movement are seized, understood, comprehended, held, and possessed, stimulating and inspiring guided action and application and creativity culminating in joy, delight, even ecstasy. The width, depth and height of the light and vision determine the degrees of illumination, and when they reach the splendour and glory of synthesis and harmony, illumination ripens into wisdom. Wisdom, too, has varying degrees that can uncover powers of knowledge and action, which reveal unsuspected secrets and unimagined skills of art and craft of creativity and effectiveness.

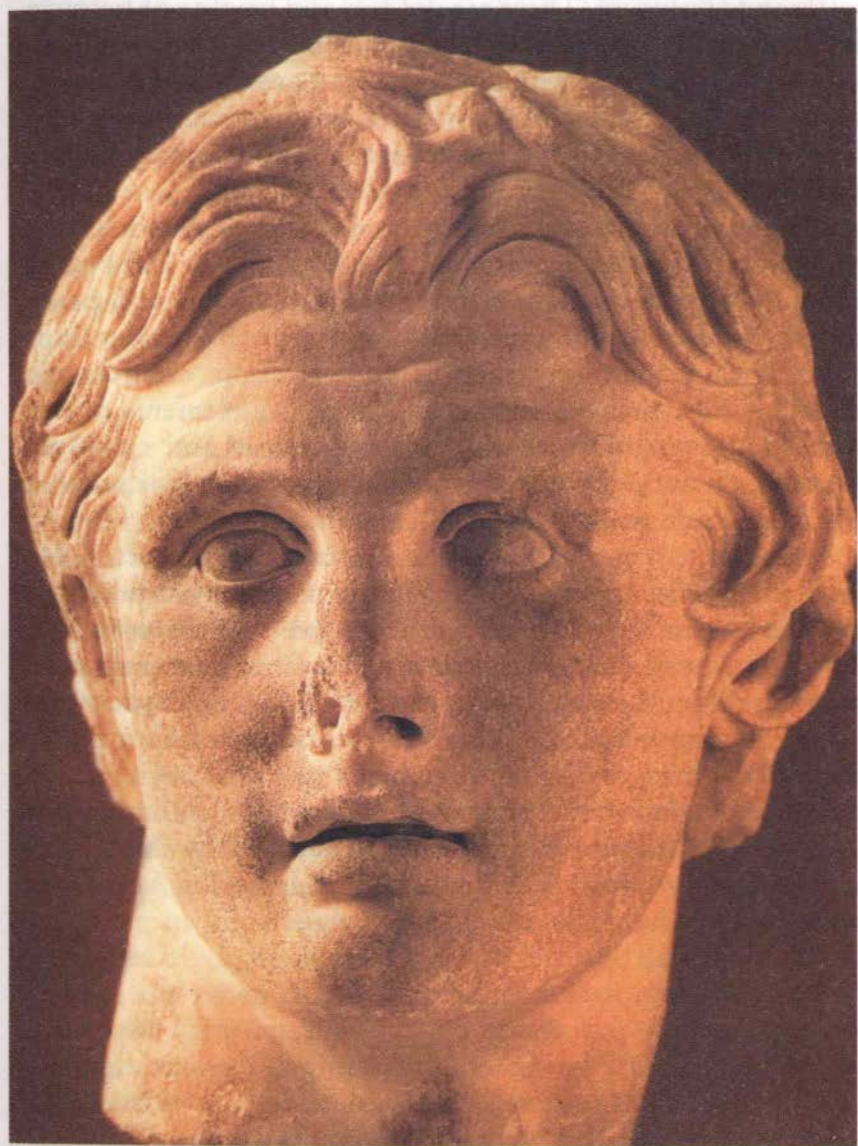
Heroism is, essentially, inspired force and self-giving and sacrifice in the operations of will that is applied to the quest,



realisation and triumph of meaning and value against the resistance of limitations and obstacles by means of courage, battle and adventure. There are degrees and heights of heroism determined by the intensity, persistence and vastness of sacrifice. Heroism attains the highest states of greatness and refinement when it is guided by the highest wisdom and inspired by the sense of service to the ends of justice and harmony, as well as when tasks are executed with consummate skill.

Harmony is a progressive state and action of synthesis and equilibrium generated by the creative force of joy and beauty and delight that combines and unites knowledge and peace and stability with will and action and growth and development. Without harmony, there is no perfection, even though there could be maximisation of one or more elements of our nature. When illumination and heroism join and engender relations of mutuality and unity, each is perfected by the other and creativity is endless.

Heroism can easily be seen in Alexander's character. No deed, no ambition seem too high for him. Equally, if he would have had more time—he died at 33!—, we may think that he might have been able to develop a high level of illumination, as in many difficult situations he has shown a great capacity for intuition. One can also perceive a potentiality for harmony in the fact that he was able to show many fine qualities as general, king and administrator of a vast empire. But he disappeared too fast from the world's scene, like a comet in the sky, leaving a trail of glory unparalled to this day, truly, as Sri Aurobindo said, a poet on a throne.



Alexander

# Alexander the Great

## Introduction

*But Alexander of Macedon and Napoleon Buona-  
parte were poets on a throne, and the part they played  
in history was not that of incompetents and weakling.  
There are times when Nature gifts the poetic tem-  
perament with a peculiar grasp of the conditions of  
action and irresistible tendency to create their poems  
not in ink and on paper, but in living characters and  
on the great canvas of the world. Such men become  
portents and wonders whom posterity admires or hates  
but can only imperfectly understand. Like Joan of Arc  
or Mazzini and Garibaldi, they save a dying nation  
or like Napoleon and Alexander they dominate the  
world. They are only possible because they only get  
full scope in races which unite with an ardent and  
heroic temperament, a keen susceptibility to poetry in  
life, idealism and hero worship.*

Sri Aurobindo, *Centenary Edition*, Vol III — pp. 198-99

**A**lexander was born in 356 B.C. His father, King Philip of Macedonia, had united Greece and had intended to free the Asiatic Greeks from Persian control. He also coveted the riches of the Persian Empire to pay for his professional army. At Philip's death, Alexander first quelled rebellions in Greece and then crossed the Dardenelles to start, at the age of twenty years, his 2800 mile journey into Asia.

During his Asian campaigns, Alexander founded or refounded

many cities to administer the conquered territories. The greatest of these was Alexandria in Egypt. From these cities, in territories later ruled by Alexander's successors, Greek culture spread and for the next three centuries was dominant throughout much of the Middle East. This hellenisation process lasted until the spread of Roman power towards the end of the first century B.C. It all stemmed from the brief career of one man, who died at the age of 33.

Who really was the man known as Alexander the Great? In only thirteen years, between 336 and 323 B.C., he earned enough fame to fuel legends down through the ages. Thirteen years of unrelenting drive, of amazing deeds. Here was a young man able to inspire large troops of men to follow him in a whirlwind of conquests that looks like a race against time. Perhaps he knew that fate would not grant him years enough to conquer the whole world, as he could well have attempted. In fact, it has been said that the greatest blessing in Alexander's life was his early death, and his greatest good fortune was that the practical common sense of his followers prevented him from crossing the Ganges. Had Napoleon been similarly forced to recognise his limits, his end might have been as great as his beginning.

In Alexander's case, it is remarkable that one of the greatest thinkers in world history, Aristotle<sup>1</sup>, was his teacher. It can safely be assumed that Aristotle gave his pupil an enormous wealth of information and some degree of intimacy with the teachings of Socrates<sup>2</sup> and Plato. Alexander surely must have known that man could attain his highest well-being only by acquiring a knowledge

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1. Aristotle: 384-322 B.C., Greek philosopher; pupil of Plato, tutor of Alexander the Great, and founder of the Peripatetic school at Athens; author of works on logic, ethics, politics, poetics, rhetoric, biology, zoology, and metaphysics. His works influenced Muslim philosophy and science and medieval scholastic philosophy.

2. Socrates: 470-399 B.C., Athenian philosopher, whose beliefs are known only through the writings of his pupils Plato and Xenophon. He taught that virtue was based on knowledge, which was attained by a dialectical process that took into account many aspects of a stated hypothesis. He was indicted for impiety and corruption of youth (399) and was condemned to death. He refused to flee and died by drinking hemlock.

that would lead him to do the right action voluntarily. This was the very teaching of Socrates: "Virtue is knowledge." Alexander also must have learned the ethical doctrine of Aristotle himself, according to whom virtue meant a mean between extremes. Aristotle was the first logician of the Western world and he must have taught his pupil the art and science of reasoning as applied to metaphysics, science and mathematics. The vast encyclopedic knowledge that Aristotle could have put at Alexander's disposal would have made Alexander, if he so chose, a great master of knowledge. Why, we may ask, did this not happen? What exactly was the determining factor that made Alexander a conqueror of lands and men instead of an expert scholar or an illumined sage? Did Alexander ever ask himself, consciously and reflectively, what his aim of life should be? We do not know with any certainty. Considering, however, that he had access to wide fields of knowledge, such a question could hardly have escaped him. But even if he asked this question, did he set about to find an answer?

Physically, he was an ideal youth, good in every sport. He possessed a wild energy that would make him shoot arrows at any passing object, or alight from and remount his chariot at full speed. During campaigns, if the going was slow, he would go hunting alone and on foot and do combat with wild animals, however dangerous. He liked hard work and hazardous deeds. He was usually sober and, apparently, in very good health, since his body was credited with a pleasant fragrance. Beyond the exaggerations of fame and legend, Alexander was certainly quite handsome, with expressive features, soft blue eyes and luxuriant auburn hair.

Alexander is a striking example of what life-force can do in a man. More often than not, human beings are led to their career or their life's work by temperament, by likes and dislikes, and by their inner drives. The life-force in man seeks acquisition, possession, enjoyment, relationship, battle and conquest. It is often instinctive and therefore irresistible. Accordingly, it is not easy for a human being driven by an extraordinary executive power and force of accomplishment to become intellectualised. This does not mean that the intellectualisation of life energy is impossible, but it

is evident that the tasks involved in such a process are enormous and extremely difficult.

Alexander was primarily interested in adventure. He was verily a Prince of Air, ready to fly on the wings of time just to discover novelties and unexpected experiences. His ambitions were deep-seated and illimitable. In fact, it seems that his aim of life was determined by the pressure of his ambitions rather than by any rational system of thought or any ethical discipline. He was probably so prodigious that he found it difficult to contain his energy. He brings to mind quicksilver: pursue as you may, he is always one step ahead. He did not like the idea of rest and said that sleep only served to remind him of his mortal condition. So many things to do, so much to learn, so many possibilities.... He brings to mind too the echo of a perpetual galloping on the quickest of horses.... The bursting life-force inside him was quite evidently overwhelming, as was the call of the sirens of adventure and ambition.

Mentally, he was very active and had a passion for study. His intellectual abilities could never be used fully due to the early responsibilities that fell upon him — hence, a lack of maturity of mind. As often is the case with great men of action, he would always regret not having become a great thinker as well. Even after an exhausting day of marching or fighting, he would delight in spending half the night conversing with scholars or scientists. King at twenty, absorbed in warfare and administration, he had no chance to complete his education. He was brilliant, but prone to errors in politics and warfare. He tended to be excessively superstitious, despite his broadmindedness. Capable of leading armies, of conquering millions of people, he was often unable to control his temper. Generally blind to his own faults or limitations, he too frequently allowed his judgement to be obscured by praise. Similar contradictions can be seen in his moral character. Naturally sentimental and emotional, he could be moved to tears by poetry and music. He was exceptional in friendship, very trusting and warm. He cared for his soldiers and avoided risking their lives needlessly. Besieged cities would often open their gates to him, confident in his reputation for generosity. Yet he could

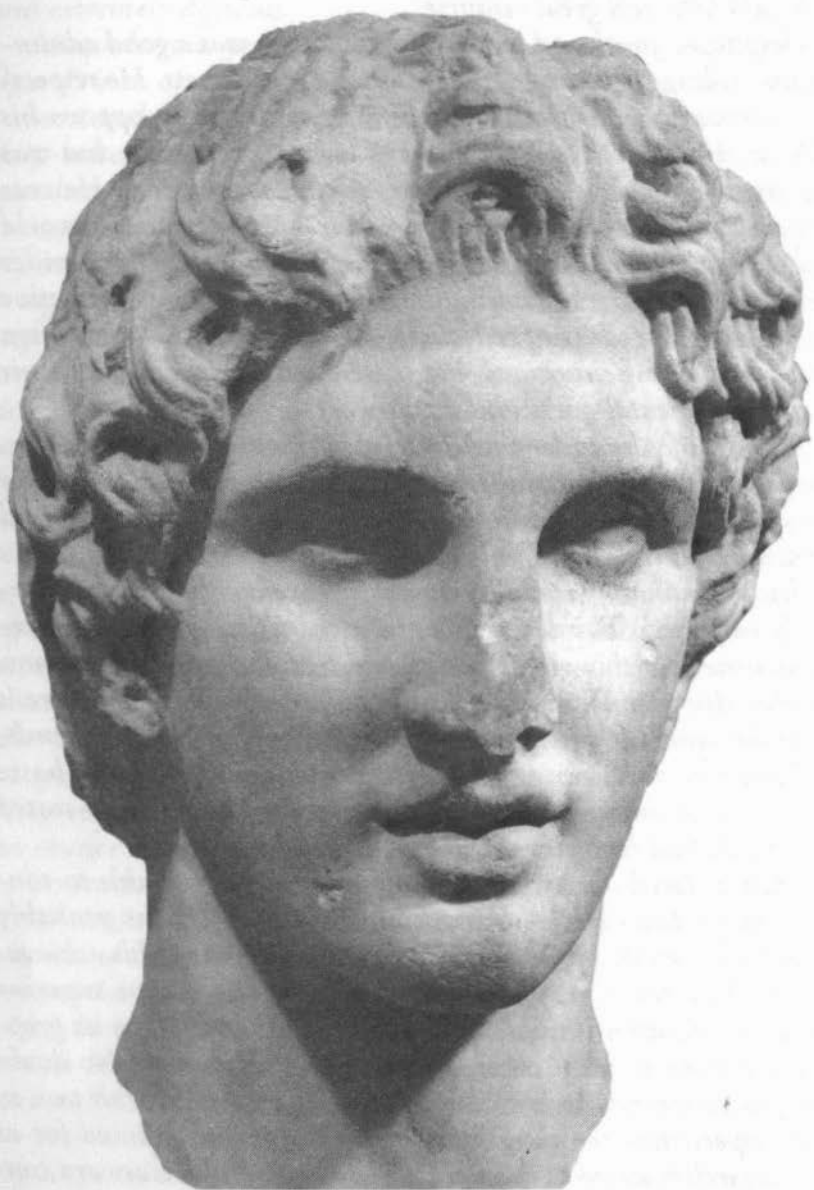
suddenly turn ferocious and resort to excessive cruelty for which he would later feel great remorse.

Despite his youth and lack of experience, he was a good administrator, ruling his empire with kindness and firmness. He respected agreements, and did not allow his appointees to oppress his subjects. He had all the potential of a great statesman, but was not given enough time to mature in that dimension. He was driven by the vision of a united eastern Mediterranean world and, above all, of a fertile cross-breeding of many cultures under the umbrella of Greek civilisation. This was more an instinctive feeling than a product of reflection. Men like Alexander are often seized by blazing intuitions, but these often get mixed with their more fundamental ambitious drive.

A study of Alexander the Great is instructive in several ways. Firstly, it shows us what the life-force in man can achieve under circumstances and conditions as favourable as Alexander's, and yet what failures attend unbridled adventure. Secondly, it shows us that the human personality has far richer potentials than is normally suspected. Thirdly, it gives us a chance to understand ourselves better, for though we have a hundred and more limitations, we may discover, if we look closely within ourselves, that there is in us the same life-force as we find in Alexander. In other words, we discover that somewhere within our being we have basic instincts and impulses, a universe of pressing desires, deep-seated attractions and repulsions, and longings and ambitions.

Had he lived longer, would Alexander have been able to control his wild nature? A better control of his passions probably would have given him a deeper sense of fulfilment in his achievements. Life-force may be exhilarating, but to attain superior human realisation it needs to be transformed and put in its proper place along with the other energies that meet in man. No doubt this prodigious young king was faced with a very difficult task in that respect. But the extraordinary profile of him painted for us by Plutarch may be very instructive when we ourselves are confronted with the quest of our aim of life.





Alexander young

## Alexander the Great

Alexander was born on the sixth day of the month Hecatombaeon,<sup>1</sup> which the Macedonians call Loûs, the same day on which the temple of Artemis at Ephesus was burned down. It was this coincidence which inspired Hegesias of Magnesia to utter a joke which was flat enough to have put the fire out: he said it was no wonder the temple of Artemis was destroyed, since the goddess was busy attending to the birth of Alexander. But those of the Magi who were then at Ephesus interpreted the destruction of the temple as the portent of a far greater disaster, and they ran through the city beating their faces and crying out that day had brought forth a great scourge and calamity for Asia.

At that moment Philip had just captured the city of Poridaea, and he received three messages on the same day. The first, that his general Parmenio had overcome the Illyrians in a great battle, the second that his race-horse had won a victory in the Olympic games, and the third that Alexander had been born. Naturally he was overjoyed at the news, and the soothsayers raised his spirits still higher by assuring him that the son whose birth coincided with three victories would himself prove invincible.

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<sup>1</sup> In 356 B.C.

The best likeness of Alexander which has been preserved for us is to be found in the statues sculpted by Lysippus, the only artist whom Alexander considered worthy to represent him. Alexander possessed a number of individual features which many of Lysippus's followers later tried to reproduce, for example the poise of the neck which was tilted slightly to the left, or a certain melting look in his eyes.... We are told that he was fair-skinned, with a ruddy tinge that showed itself especially upon his face and chest. Aristoxenus also tells us in his memoirs that Alexander's skin was fresh and sweet-smelling, and that his breath and the whole of his body gave off a peculiar fragrance which permeated the clothes he wore.<sup>1</sup> (...)

Even while he was still a boy, he gave plenty of evidence of his power of self-control. In spite of his vehement and impulsive nature, he showed little interest in the pleasures of the senses and indulged in them only with great moderation, but his passionate desire for fame implanted in him a pride and a grandeur of vision which went far beyond his years. And yet it was by no means every kind of glory that he sought, and, unlike his father, he did not seek it in every form of action. Philip, for example, was as proud of his power of eloquence as any sophist,<sup>2</sup> and took care to have the victories won by his chariots at Olympia stamped upon his coins. But Alexander's attitude is made clear by his reply to some of his friends, when they asked him whether he would be willing to compete at Olympia, since he was a fine runner. "Yes," he answered, "if I have kings to run against me." He seems in fact to have disapproved of the whole race of trained athletes. At any rate although he founded a great many contests of other kinds, including not only the tragic drama and performances on the flute and the lyre, but also the reciting of poetry, fighting with the quarter-staff and various forms of hunting, yet he never

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1 This fragrance was also regarded as a sign of his superhuman nature.

2 Sophist: one of the pre-Socratic philosophers who were itinerant professional teachers of oratory and argument and who were prepared to enter into debate on any matter however specious.

offered prizes either for boxing or for the pancration.<sup>1</sup>

On one occasion some ambassadors from the king of Persia arrived in Macedon<sup>2</sup> and since Philip was absent, Alexander received them in his place. He talked freely with them and quite won them over, not only by the friendliness of his manner, but also because he did not trouble them with any childish or trivial enquiries, but questioned them about the distances they had travelled by road, the nature of the journey into the interior of Persia, the character of the king, his experience in war, and the military strength and prowess of the Persians. The ambassadors were filled with admiration. They came away convinced that Philip's celebrated astuteness was as nothing compared to the adventurous spirit and lofty ambitions of his son. At any rate, whenever he heard that Philip had captured some famous city or won an overwhelming victory, Alexander would show no pleasure at the news, but would declare to his friends, "Boys, my father will forestall me in everything. There will be nothing great or spectacular for you and me to show the world." He cared nothing for pleasure or wealth but only for deeds of valour and glory, and this was why he believed that the more he received from his father, the less would be left for him to conquer. And so every success that was gained by Macedonia inspired in Alexander the dread that another opportunity for action had been squandered on his father. He had no desire to inherit a kingdom which offered him riches, luxuries and the pleasures of the senses; his choice was a life of struggle, of wars, and of unrelenting ambition.

It was natural, of course, that a great number of nurses, pedagogues<sup>3</sup> and teachers were appointed to take part in his upbringing, but the man who supervised them all was Leonidas, a severe disciplinarian, who was also a relative of Olympias<sup>4</sup>....

There came a day when Piloneicus the Thessalian brought

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1 A contest which combines wrestling and boxing.

2 In 340 BC. Alexander was only 16 years old.

3 Pedagogue: a teacher or educator.

4 Olympias was the mother of Alexander.



King Philip

Philip a horse named Bucephalus,<sup>1</sup> which he offered to sell for thirteen talents<sup>2</sup>. The king and his friends went down to the plain to watch the horse's trials, and came to the conclusion that he was wild and quite unmanageable, for he would allow no one to mount him, nor would he endure the shouts of Philip's grooms, but reared up against anyone who approached him. The king became angry at being offered such a vicious animal unbroken, and ordered it to be led away. But Alexander, who was standing close by, remarked, "What a horse they are losing, and all because they don't know how to handle him, or dare not try!" Philip kept quiet at first, but when he heard Alexander repeat these words several times and saw that he was upset, he asked him, "Are you finding fault with your elders because you think you know more than they do, or can manage a horse better?" "At least I could manage this one better," retorted Alexander. "And if you cannot," said his father, "what penalty will you pay for being so impertinent?"<sup>3</sup> "I will pay the price of the horse," answered the boy. At this the whole company burst out laughing, and then as soon as the father and son had settled the terms of the bet, Alexander went quickly up to Bucephalus, took hold of his bridle, and turned him towards the sun, for he had noticed that the horse was shying at the sight of his own shadow, as it fell in front of him and constantly moved whenever he did. He ran alongside the animal for a little

1 The name of a famous breed of Thesalian horses which were branded on the shoulder with the sign of an ox's head.

2 Talent: sum of money, from Greek *talanton*, unit of money or weight.

3 Impertinent: rude; insolent; impudent.

way, calming him down by stroking him, and then, when he saw he was full of spirit and courage, he quietly threw aside his cloak and with a light spring vaulted safely on to his back. For a little while he kept feeling the bit with the reins, without jarring or tearing his mouth, and got him collected. Finally, when he saw that the horse was free of his fears and impatient to show his speed, he gave him his head and urged him forward, using a commanding voice and a touch of the foot.

At first Philip and his friends held their breath and looked on in an agony of suspense, until they saw Alexander reach the end of his gallop, turn in full control, and ride back triumphant and exulting<sup>1</sup> in his success. Thereupon the rest of the company broke into loud applause, while his father, we are told, actually wept for joy, and when Alexander had dismounted he kissed him and said, "My boy, you must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedonia is too small for you."

Philip had noticed that his son was self-willed, and that while it was very difficult to influence him by force, he could easily be guided towards his duty by an appeal to reason, and he therefore made a point of trying to persuade the boy rather than giving him orders. Besides this he considered that the task of training and educating his son was too important to be entrusted to the ordinary run of teachers of poetry, music and general education: it required, as Sophocles<sup>2</sup> puts it: The rudder's<sup>3</sup> guidance and the curb's<sup>4</sup> restraint. And so he sent for Aristotle,<sup>5</sup> the most famous and learned of the philosophers of

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1 To exult: to be joyful or jubilant, esp. because of triumph or success; rejoice.

2 Sophocles was born in Athens in 496 B.C. He was one of the most famous writers of dramatic tragedy. Until his death, at the age of ninety, he was one of the authors most loved, respected and awarded. He wrote more than 200 plays.

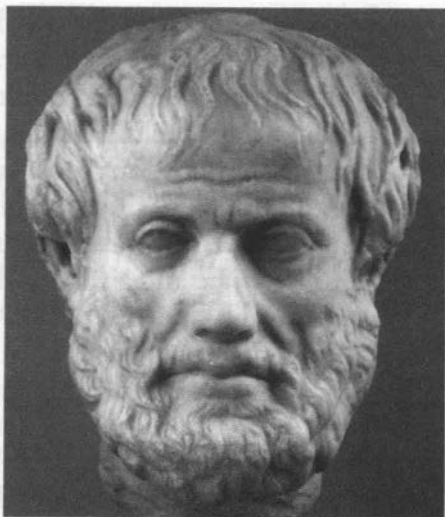
3 Rudder: anything that guides or directs.

4 Curb: something that restrains or holds back.

5 Aristotle was a famous philosopher who spent 20 years in Plato's academy in Athens. His works had a tremendous influence on Western thought.

his time, and rewarded him with the generosity that his reputation deserved. Aristotle was a native of the city of Stageira, which Philip had himself destroyed. He now repopulated it and brought back all the citizens who had been enslaved or driven into exile.

He gave Aristotle and his pupil the temple of the Nymphs near Mieza as a place where they could study and converse, and to this day they show you the stone seats and shady walks which Aristotle used. It seems clear too that Alexander was instructed by his teacher not only in the principles of ethics and politics, but also in those secret and more esoteric<sup>1</sup> studies which philosophers do not impart to the general students, but only by word of mouth to a select circle of the initiated. Some years later, after Alexander had crossed into Asia, he learned that Aristotle had published some treatises dealing with these esoteric matters, and he wrote to him in blunt language and took him to task for the sake of the prestige of philosophy. This was the text of his letter: "Alexander to Aristotle, greetings. You have not done well to write down and publish those doctrines you taught me by word of mouth. What advantage shall I have over other men if these theories in which I have been trained are to be made common property? I would rather excel the rest of mankind in my knowledge of what is best than in the extent of my power. Farewell."



Aristotle

1 Esoteric: restricted to or intended for an enlightened or initiated minority, esp. because of abstruseness or obscurity; difficult to understand; abstruse: an esoteric statement.



Aristotle wished to encourage this ambition of his pupil's and so when he replied to justify his action, he pointed out that these so-called oral doctrines were in a sense both published and not published. For example it is true that his treatise on metaphysics<sup>1</sup> is written in a style which makes it useless for those who wish to study or teach the subject from the beginning: the book serves simply as a memorandum for those who have already been taught its general principles.

It was Aristotle, I believe, who did more than anyone to implant in Alexander his interest in the art of healing as well as that of philosophy. He was not merely attracted to the theory of medicine, but was in the habit of tending his friends when they were sick and prescribing for them various courses of treatment or diet, as we learn from his letters. He was also devoted by nature to all kinds of learning and was a lover of books. He regarded the *Iliad*<sup>2</sup> as a handbook of the art of war and took with him on his campaigns a text annotated<sup>3</sup> by Aristotle, which became known as "the casket copy", and which he always kept under his pillow together with his dagger. When his campaigns had taken him far into the interior of Asia and he could find no other books, he ordered his treasurer Harpalus to send him some....

While Philip was making an expedition against Byzantium, Alexander, although he was only sixteen years old, was left behind as regent of Macedonia and keeper of the royal seal. During this period he defeated the maedi who had risen in revolt, captured their city, drove out its barbarous inhabitants, established a colony of Greeks assembled from various regions,

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1 Metaphysics: 1. the branch of philosophy that deals with first principles, esp. of being and knowing. 2. the philosophical study of the nature of reality, concerned with such questions as the existence of God, the external world, etc.

2 The *Iliad* is an epic poem on the Trojan War traditionally attributed to the ancient Greek poet Homer.

3 To annotate: to supply (a written work, such as an ancient text) with critical or explanatory notes.



Olympias

and named it Alexandroupolis. He also took part in the battle against the combined armies of Greece at Chaeronea, and is said to have been the first to break the line of the Theban Sacred Band. Because of these achievements Philip, as was natural, became extravagantly fond of his son, so much that he took pleasure in hearing the Macedonians speak of Alexander as their king and Philip as their general.

But before long the domestic strife that resulted from Philip's various marriages and love-affairs caused the quarrels which took place in the women's apartments to infect the whole kingdom, and led to bitter clashes and accusations between father and son. This breach was widened by Olympias, a woman of a jealous and vindictive temper, who incited Alexander to oppose his father. Their quarrel was brought to a head on the occasion of the wedding of Cleopatra, a girl with whom Philip had fallen in love and whom he had decided to marry, although she was far too young for him. Cleopatra's uncle Attalus, who had drunk too much at the banquet, called upon the Macedonians to pray to the gods that the union of Philip and Cleopatra might bring forth a legitimate heir to the throne. Alexander flew into rage at these words, shouted at him, "Villain, do you take me for a bastard, then?" and hurled a drinking-cup at his head. At this Philip lurched to his feet, and drew his sword against his son, but fortunately for them both he was so overcome with drink and with rage that he tripped and fell headlong. Alexander jeered at him and cried out: "Here is the man who was making ready to cross from Europe to Asia, and who

cannot even cross from one table to another without losing his balance." After this drunken brawl Alexander took Olympias away and settled her in Epirus, while he himself went to live in Illyria. (...)

Not long afterwards a Macedonian named Pausanias<sup>1</sup> assassinated the king.... Alexander was only twenty years old when he inherited his kingdom, which at that moment was beset by formidable jealousies and feuds, and external dangers on every side. The neighbouring barbarian tribes were eager to throw off the Macedonian yoke and longed for the rule of their native kings; as for the Greek states, although Philip had defeated them in battle, he had not had time to subdue them or accustom them to his authority. He had swept away the existing governments, and then, having prepared their peoples for drastic changes, had left them in turmoil and confusion, because he had created a situation which was completely unfamiliar to them. Alexander's Macedonian advisers feared that a crisis was at hand and urged the young king to leave the Greek states to their own devices and refrain from using any force against them. As for the barbarian tribes, they considered that he should try to win them back to their allegiance<sup>2</sup> by using milder methods, and forestall the first signs of revolt by offering them concessions. Alexander, however, chose precisely the opposite course, and decided that the only way to make his kingdom safe was to act with audacity and a lofty spirit, for he was certain that if he were seen to yield even a fraction of his authority, all his enemies would attack him at once. He swiftly crushed the uprising among the barbarians by advancing with

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1 In 346 B.C. Pausanias was a young Macedonian noble. The tragic end of Philip is indirectly connected to his alliance with the niece of Attalus, an alliance which had already brought much misfortune to his house; for Pausanias had previously been insulted by Attalus, and, being unable to get satisfaction from him, had turned his anger against Philip who, in spite of repeated applications, had left the insult unpunished.

2 Allegiance: loyalty, as of a subject to his sovereign or of a citizen to his country.

his army as far as the Danube, where he overcame Syrmus, the king of the Triballi, in a great battle. Then when the news reached him that the Thebans<sup>1</sup> had revolted and were being supported by the Athenians,<sup>2</sup> he immediately marched south through the pass of Thermopylae. "Demosthenes", he said "called me a boy while I was in Illyria and among the Triballi, and a youth when I was marching through Thessaly; I will show him I am a man by the time I reach the walls of Athens."

When he arrived before thebes, he wished to give the citizens the opportunity to repent of their actions, and so he merely demanded the surrender of their leaders Phoenix and Prothytes, and offered an amnesty<sup>3</sup> to all the rest if they would come over to his side. The Thebans countered by demanding the surrender of Philotas and Antipater and appealing to all who wished to liberate Greece to range themselves on their side, and at this Alexander ordered his troops to prepare for battle. The Thebans, although greatly outnumbered, fought with a superhuman courage and spirit, but when the Macedonian garrison which had been posted in the citadel<sup>4</sup> of the Cadmeia made a sortie<sup>5</sup> and fell upon them from the rear, the greater part of their army was encircled, they were slaughtered where they stood, and the city was stormed, plundered and razed to the ground. Alexander's principal object in permitting the sack<sup>6</sup> of Thebes was to frighten the rest of the Greeks into submission by making a terrible example. (...)

1 Thebes was one of the chief cities and powers of ancient Greece.

2 Athens is considered the birthplace of Western civilization to which it bequeaths the foundations of democracy; Athens has exerted a tremendous fascination on the world of antiquity. Many of the intellectual and artistic ideas of classical civilization originated there.

3 Amnesty: a general pardon, esp. for offences against a government.

4 Citadel: 1. a stronghold within or close to a city. 2. Any strongly fortified building or place of safety; refuge.

5 Sortie: (of troops, etc.) the act of emerging from a contained or besieged position.

6 Sack: the plundering of a place by an army or mob, usually involving destruction, slaughter, etc.

In the previous year a congress of the Greek states had been held at the Isthmus of Corinth: here a vote had been passed that the states should join forces with Alexander in invading Persia and that he should be commander-in-chief of the expedition. Many of the Greek statesmen and philosophers visited him to offer their congratulations, and he hoped that Diogenes of Sinope,<sup>1</sup> who was at that time living in Corinth, would do the same. However since he paid no attention whatever to Alexander, but continued to live at leisure in the suburb of Corinth which was known as Craneion, Alexander went in person to see him and found him basking at full length in the sun. When he saw so many people approaching him, Diogenes raised himself a little on his elbow and fixed his gaze upon Alexander. The king greeted him and inquired whether he could do anything for him. "Yes" replied the philosopher, "you can stand a little to one side out of my sun." Alexander is said to have been greatly impressed by this answer and full of admiration for the hauteur and independence of mind of a man who could look down on him with such condescension.<sup>2</sup> So much so that he remarked to his followers who were laughing and mocking the philosopher as they went away, "You may say what you like, but if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes." (...)

As for the size of his army, the lowest estimate puts its strength at 30,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry<sup>3</sup> and the highest

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1 Diogenes of Synope was a Greek philosopher. He belonged to the Cynic philosophical school that stressed stoic self-sufficiency and the rejection of luxury. It was by personal example rather than any coherent system of thought that Diogenes demonstrated the Cynic philosophy.

2 Condescension: the act or an instance of behaving in a superior manner.

3 Modern estimates give totals of about 43,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry; about one quarter of these were the advance guard, which had already crossed to Asia. The cavalry included as many Thessalians as Macedonians, while the other Greek city-states contributed about 7,000 infantry and 600 cavalry. Beside the operational troops, the expedition included reconnaissance staff and many other specialists — geographers, historians, astronomers, zoologists, etc.

43,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. According to Aristobulus the money available for the army's supplies amounted to no more than seventy talents, Douris says that there were supplies for only thirty days, and Onesicritus that Alexander was already two hundred talents in debt. Yet although he set out with such slender resources, he would not go aboard his ship until he had discovered the circumstances of all his companions and had assigned an estate to one, a village to another, or the revenues of some port or community to a third. When he had shared out or signed away almost all the property of the crown, Perdicas asked him, "But your majesty, what are you leaving for yourself?" "My hopes!" replied Alexander. "Very well, then," answered Perdicas, "those who serve with you will share those too." With this, he declined to accept the prize which had been allotted to him, and several of Alexander's other friends did the same. However those who accepted or requested rewards were lavishly provided for, so that in the end Alexander distributed among them most of what he possessed in Macedonia. These were his preparations and this was the adventurous spirit in which he crossed the Hellespont.<sup>1</sup>

Once arrived in Asia, he went up to Troy,<sup>2</sup> sacrificed to Athena<sup>3</sup> and poured libations<sup>4</sup> to the heroes of the Greek army.... Meanwhile Darius' generals<sup>5</sup> had gathered a large army and posted it at the crossing of the river Granicus, so that Alexander was obliged to fight at the very gates of Asia, if he was to enter and conquer it. Most of the Macedonian officers

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1 The Dardanelles strait between the Aegean and the Sea of Marmara, separating European from Asian Turkey. Ancient name: Hellespont.

2 Troy was an ancient city in northwestern Anatolia that holds an enduring place in both literature and archaeology. The legend of the Trojan War is the most notable theme from ancient Greek literature and forms the basis of Homer's *Iliad*. Ancient Troy commanded a strategic point at the southern entrance to the Dardanelles (Hellespont).

3 For the Greeks, Athena is the goddess of war, handicrafts and practical reason. She is also the protector of Athens.

4 Libation: the pouring out of a wine, etc., in honour of a deity.

5 Darius III was the Great King of Persia.

were alarmed at the depth of the river and of the rough and uneven slopes of the banks on the opposite side, up which they would have to scramble in the face of the enemy. There were others too who thought that Alexander ought to observe the Macedonian tradition concerning the time of year, according to which the king of Macedonia never made war during the month of Daesius. Alexander swept aside these scruples<sup>1</sup> by giving orders that the month should be called a second Artemisius. And when Parmenio advised him against risking the crossing at such a late hour of the day, Alexander declared that the Hellespont would blush for shame if, once he had crossed it, he should shrink back from the Granicus; then he immediately plunged into the stream with thirteen squadrons of cavalry. It seemed the act of a desperate madman rather than of a prudent commander to charge into a swiftly flowing river, which swept men off their feet and surged about them, and then to advance through a hail of missiles towards a steep bank which was strongly defended by infantry and cavalry. But in spite of this he pressed forward and with a tremendous effort gained the opposite bank, which was a wet treacherous slope covered with mud. There he was immediately forced to engage the enemy in a confused hand-to-hand struggle, before the troops who were crossing behind him could be organised into any formation. The moment his men set foot on land, the enemy attacked them with loud shouts, matching horse against horse, thrusting with their lances and fighting with the sword when their lances broke. Many of them charged against Alexander himself, for he was easily recognisable by his shield and by the tall white plume<sup>2</sup> which was fixed upon either side of his helmet. The joint of his breastplate was pierced by a javelin, but the blade did not penetrate the flesh. Rhoesaces and Spithridates, two of the Persian commanders, then rode at him; he evaded the charge of the one and struck Rhoesaces, who wore a breastplate, with

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1 Scruple: a doubt or hesitation as to what is morally right in a certain situation.

2 Plume: a feather, esp. one that is large or ornamental.



his spear, but the shaft of the weapon snapped, whereupon he fought with his sword. While he was engaged with Rhoesaces, Spithridates rode up on the other side, and rising in his stirrups<sup>1</sup> brought down a barbarian battle-axe with all his strength upon Alexander's head. The stroke split the crest of his helmet, sheared away one of his plumes, and all but cleft the head-piece. In fact the edge of the axe penetrated it and grazed the hair on the top of Alexander's head. But just as Spithridates raised his arm for another blow, "Black" Cleitus as he was called, struck first and ran him through with a spear, and at the same moment Rhoesaces was cut down by Alexander's sword.

While Alexander's cavalry was engaged in this furious and dangerous action, the Macedonian phalanx<sup>2</sup> crossed the river and the infantry of both sides joined the battle. The Persians offered little resistance, but quickly broke and fled, and it was only the Greek mercenaries<sup>3</sup> who held their ground. They rallied together, made a stand on the crest of a hill and sent a message to Alexander asking for quarter.<sup>4</sup> In this instance he allowed himself to be guided by passion rather than by reason, led a charge against them and lost his horse (not Bucephalus on this occasion), which was pierced through the ribs by a sword-thrust. It was in this part of the field that the Macedonians suffered greater losses in killed and wounded than in all the rest of the battle, since they were fighting at close quarters with men who were expert soldiers and had been rendered desperate. (...)

This battle brought about a great and immediate change in Alexander's situation. Even the city of Sardis, which was the

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1 Stirrup: Also called stirrup iron. Either of two metal loops on a riding saddle, with a flat foot piece through which a rider puts his foot for support. They are attached to the saddle by stirrup leathers.

2 Phalanx: an ancient Greek and Macedonian battle formation of hoplites presenting long spears from behind a wall of overlapping shields.

3 Mercenary: a man hired to fight for a foreign army.

4 Quarter: mercy or pity, as shown to a defeated opponent (esp. in the phrases ask for or give quarter).



**Darius III the Great**

the coastal region and its resources and training his army, and only then strike inland against the king.

Next he marched into Pisidia where he subdued any resistance which he encountered, and then made himself master of Phrigia.... After this Alexander marched northward and won over the people of Capadocia and Paphlagonia. He also learned of the death of Memnon, the general to whom Darius had entrusted the defence of the coast of Asia Minor, and who, if he had lived, was likely to have offered the most stubborn resistance to Alexander's advance and caused him the greatest trouble. (...)

Darius was encouraged by the many months of apparent inactivity which Alexander had spent in Cilicia, for he imagined

principal seat of Persian power on the Asiatic seaboard, at once surrendered to him and the rest of the region likewise made its submission. Only Halicarnassus and Miletus held out, and these cities were stormed and the surrounding territory subdued. At this point Alexander hesitated as to what his next step should be. Time and again he was impelled to seek out Darius and risk everything upon the issue of a single battle, and then as often he would decide that he must build up his strength by securing

that this was due to cowardice. In fact the delay had been caused by sickness. At any rate none of his physicians dared to treat him, for they all believed that his condition was so dangerous that medicine was powerless to help him, and dreaded the accusations that would be brought against them by the Macedonians in the event of their failure. The only exception was Philip, an Acanian, who saw that the king was desperately ill, but trusted to their mutual friendship. He thought it shameful not to share his friend's danger by exhausting all the resources of his art even at the risk of his own life, and so he prepared a medicine and persuaded him to drink it without fear since he was so eager to regain his strength for the campaign. Meanwhile Parmenio had sent Alexander a letter from the camp warning him to beware of Philip, since Darius, he said, had promised him large sums of money and even the hand of his daughter if he would kill Alexander. Alexander read the letter and put it under his pillow without showing it to any of his friends. Then at the appointed hour, when Philip entered the room with the king's companions carrying the medicine in a cup, Alexander handed him the letter and took the draught<sup>1</sup> from him cheerfully and without the least sign of misgiving.<sup>2</sup> It was an astonishing scene, and one well worthy of the stage — the one man reading the letter and the other drinking the physic,<sup>3</sup> and then each gazing into the face of the other, although not with the same expression. The king's serene and open smile clearly displayed his friendly feeling towards Philip and his trust in him, while Philip was filled with surprise and alarm at the accusation, at one moment lifting his hands to heaven and protesting his innocence before the gods, and the next falling upon his knees by the bed and imploring Alexander to take courage and follow his advice. (...)

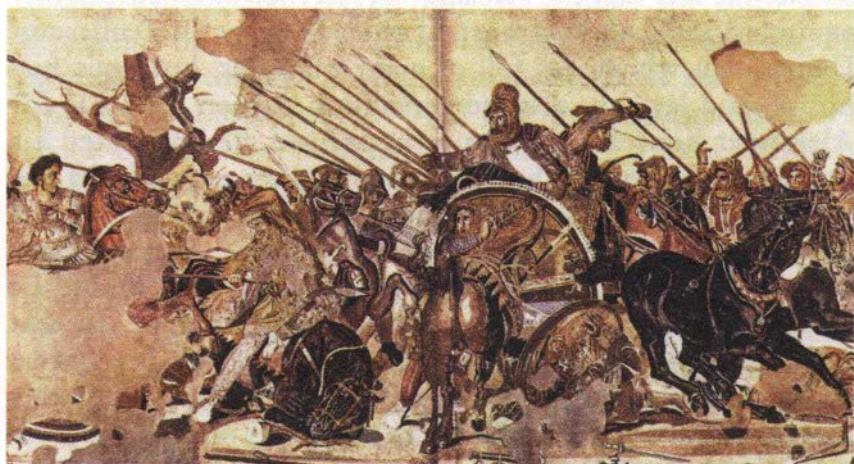
There was at this time in Darius's army, a man named Amyntas a refugee from Macedonia, who was acquainted with

1 Draught: a portion of liquid to be drunk, esp. a dose of medicine.

2 Misgiving: a feeling of uncertainty, apprehension, or doubt.

3 Physic: medicine, drug.

Alexander's character. When he learned that Darius was eager to advance and attack Alexander as he marched through the mountain passes, he begged the Persian king to remain where he was in the flat open plains, where his immense numbers would have the advantage in fighting the small Macedonian army. Darius said that he was afraid the enemy might run away before he could come to grips with them, and that Alexander might thus escape him, to which Amyntas retorted: "Your majesty need have no fears on that score: Alexander will march against you, in fact he is probably on his way now." Darius refused to listen to Amyntas's advice, but broke camp and advanced into Cilicia, while at the same time Alexander marched against him into Syria. During the night they missed one another and both turned back. Alexander, delighted at his good fortune, hastened to catch his enemy in the narrow defile<sup>1</sup> which leads into Cilicia, while Darius was no less eager to extricate his forces from the mountain passes and regain his former camping-ground in the plains. He already saw the mistake he had made by advancing into country which was hemmed in by the sea on



**Battle of Issus: Alexander facing Darius (Mosaic)**

<sup>1</sup> Defile: a narrow pass or gorge, esp. one between two mountains.

one side and the mountains on the other, and divided by the river Pinarus which ran between them. Here the ground prevented him from using his cavalry, forced him to split up his army into small groups, and favoured his opponent's inferior numbers. Fortune certainly presented Alexander with the ideal terrain for the battle, but it was his own generalship which did most to win the victory. For although he was so heavily outnumbered, he not only gave the enemy no opportunity to encircle him, but leading his own right wing in person, he managed to extend it round the enemy's left, outflanked it, and fighting in the foremost ranks, put the barbarians to flight. In this action he received a sword wound in the thigh. (...)

The result of this battle<sup>1</sup> was a brilliant victory for Alexander. His men killed one hundred and ten thousand of the enemy, but he could not catch Darius, who had got a start of half a mile or more, although he captured the king's chariot and his bow before he returned from the pursuit. He found the Macedonians busy carrying off the spoils from the enemy's camp, for this contained an immense wealth of possessions, despite the fact that the Persians had marched into battle lightly equipped and had left most of their baggage in Damascus. Darius' tent which was full of many treasures, luxurious furniture, and lavishly dressed servants had been set aside for Alexander himself. As soon as he arrived, he unbuckled his armour and went to the bath, saying, "Let us wash off the sweat of battle in Darius' bath." "No, in Alexander's bath, now," remarked one of his companions. "The conqueror takes over the possessions of the conquered and they should be called his." When Alexander entered the bathroom he saw that the basins, the pitchers, the baths themselves and the caskets containing unguents<sup>2</sup> were all made of gold and elaborately carved, and noticed that the whole room was marvellously fra-

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1 The battle of Issus in November 333 B.C. .

2 Unguent: a less common name for an ointment. A fatty or oily medicated preparation applied to the skin to heal or protect. A similar substance used as a cosmetic.

grant with spices and perfumes, and then passing from this into a spacious and lofty tent, he observed the magnificence of the dining-couches, the tables and the banquet which had been set out for him. He turned to his companions and remarked, "So this, it seems, is what it is to be a king."<sup>1</sup>

As he was about to sit down to supper, word was brought to him that the mother, the wife and the two unmarried daughters of Darius were among the prisoners, and that at the sight of the Persian king's bow and chariot they had beaten their breasts and cried out, since they supposed that he must be dead. When he heard this Alexander was silent for some time, for he was evidently more affected by the women's grief than by his own triumph. Then he sent Leonnatus to tell them that Darius was not dead and that they need have no fear of Alexander: he was fighting Darius for the empire of Asia, but they should be provided with everything they had been accustomed to regard as their due when Darius was king. This kindly and reassuring message for Darius' womenfolk was followed by still more generous actions. Alexander gave them leave to bury as many of Persians as they wished, and to take from the plunder any clothes and ornaments they thought fit and use them for this purpose. He also allowed them to keep the same attendants and privileges that they had previously enjoyed and even increased their revenues. But the most honourable and truly regal service which he rendered to these chaste<sup>2</sup> and noble women was to ensure that they should never hear, suspect nor have cause to fear anything which could disgrace them: they lived out of sight and earshot of the soldiers, as though they were guarded in some inviolable<sup>3</sup> retreat set aside for virgin priestesses rather than in an enemy's camp. This was the more remarkable because the wife of Darius was said to have been the most beautiful princess of her time,

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1 A remark intended to express not admiration but pity for Darius, for thinking that royalty consisted of mere wealth and luxury.

2 Chaste: (of conduct, speech, etc.) pure; decent; modest.

3 Inviolable: that must not or cannot be transgressed, dishonoured, or broken; to be kept sacred.

just as Darius himself was the tallest and handsomest man in Asia, and their daughters resembled their parents.

At any rate Alexander, so it seems, thought it more worthy of a king to subdue his own passions than to conquer his enemies, and so he never came near these women, nor did he associate with any other before his marriage. (...) When he was at leisure, his first act after rising was to sacrifice to the gods, after which he took his breakfast sitting down. The rest of the day would be spent in hunting, administering justice, planning military affairs or reading. If he were on a march which required no great haste, he would practise archery as he rode, or mounting and dismounting from a moving chariot, and he often hunted foxes or birds, as he mentions in his journals. When he had chosen his quarters for the night and while he was being refreshed with a bath or rubbed down, he would ask his cooks and bakers whether the arrangements for supper had been suitably made.

His custom was not to begin supper until late, as it was growing dark. He took it reclining on a couch, and he was wonderfully attentive and observant in ensuring that his table was well provided, his guests equally served, and none of them neglected. He sat long over his wine because of his fondness for conversation. And although at other times his society was delightful and his manner full of charm beyond that of any prince of his age, yet when he was drinking he would sometimes become offensively arrogant and descend to the level of a common soldier, and on these occasions he would allow himself not only to give way to boasting but also to be led on by his flatterers.<sup>1</sup> (...) When the drinking was over it was his custom to take a bath and sleep, often until midday, and sometimes for the whole following day.

As for delicacies, Alexander was so restrained in his appetite that often when the rarest fruits or fish were brought him from the seacoast, he would distribute them so generously among his companions that there would be nothing left for himself.

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<sup>1</sup> To flatter: to praise insincerely, esp. in order to win favour or reward.



His evening meal, however, was always a magnificent affair, and as his successes multiplied, so did his expenditure on hospitality. (...)

After the battle of Issus he sent a force to Damascus and there captured the whole of the Persian army's treasure and baggage, together with their wives and children. On this occasion it was the Thessalian cavalry who obtained the richest share of the plunder. They had particularly distinguished themselves at Issus, and Alexander had deliberately sent them on this expedition to reward them for their courage, but the booty<sup>1</sup> proved so inexhaustible that there was enough to make the whole army rich. It was here that the Macedonians received their first taste of gold and silver and women and of the luxury of the barbarian way of life, and henceforth, like hounds<sup>2</sup> which have picked up a scent,<sup>3</sup> they pressed on to track down the wealth of the Persians.

However this did not divert Alexander from his strategy of securing the whole of the Asiatic seaboard before striking inland. The kings of Cyprus promptly visited him to hand over the island and the whole of Phoenicia surrendered to him except for the city of Tyre. He besieged Tyre for seven months, constructing moles and siege artillery on the landward side, and blockading it with two hundred triremes by sea. (...) In the autumn of the same year he laid siege to Gaza, the most important city in Syria.

After Alexander had conquered Egypt, he was anxious to found a great and populous Greek city there to be called after him. He had chosen a certain site on the advice of his architect.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Booty: any valuable article or articles, esp. when obtained as plunder.

2 Hound: any of several breeds of dog used for hunting.

3 Scent: a distinctive smell, esp. a pleasant one.

4 The second largest city and the main port of Egypt, Alexandria was built by the Greek architect Dinocrates (332-331 B.C.) on the site of an old village, Rhakotis, at the orders of Alexander the Great. The city, immortalizing Alexander's name, quickly flourished into a prominent cultural, intellectual, political, and economic metropolis, the remains of which are still evident to this day.

Then after subduing the whole region which lay on the line of march between the Tigris and the Euphrates, he resumed his advance against Darius, who was on his way to meet him with a million men. (...)

The great battle that was fought against Darius did not take place at Arbela, as the majority of writers say, but at Gaugamela. The word signifies "the house of the camel". It happened in the month of Boedromion. On the eleventh night after this, by which time the two armies were in sight of one another, Darius kept his troops under arms and held a review of them by torch-light. Alexander allowed his Macedonians to sleep, but himself spent the night in front of his tent in the company of his diviner Aristender, with whom he performed certain mysterious and sacred ceremonies and offered sacrifice to the god Fear. Meanwhile some of the older of his companions and Parmenio in particular looked out over the plain between the river Niphates and the Gordyaeon Mountains and saw the entire plain agleam<sup>1</sup> with the watch-fires of the barbarians, while from their camp there arose the confused and indistinguishable murmur of myriads<sup>2</sup> of voices, like the distant roar of a vast ocean. They were filled with amazement at the sight and remarked to one another that it would be an overwhelmingly difficult task to defeat an enemy of such strength by engaging him by day. They therefore went to the king as soon as he had performed his sacrifice and tried to persuade him to attack by night, so as to conceal from his men the most terrifying element in the coming struggle, that is the odds against them. It was then that Alexander gave them his celebrated answer: "I will not steal my victory." Some of his companions thought this an immature and empty boast on the part of a young man who was merely joking in the presence of danger. But others interpreted it as meaning that he had confidence in his present situation and that he had correctly judged the future. In other words he was determined

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1 Agleam: glowing, gleaming.

2 Myriad: innumerable.

that if Darius were defeated, he should have no cause to summon up courage for another attempt: he was not to be allowed to blame darkness and night for his failure on this occasion, as at Issus he had blamed the narrow mountain passes and the sea. Certainly Darius would never abandon the war for lack of arms or of troops, when he could draw upon such a vast territory and such immense reserves of manpower. He would only do so when he had lost courage and become convinced of his inferiority in consequence of an unmistakable defeat suffered in broad daylight.

When his friends had gone, Alexander lay down in his tent and is said to have passed the rest of the night in a deeper sleep than usual. At any rate when his officers came to him in the early morning, they were astonished to find him not yet awake, and on their own responsibility gave out orders for the soldiers to take breakfast before anything else was done. Then, as time was pressing, Parmenio entered Alexander's tent he stood by his couch and called him two or three times by name: when he had roused him, he asked how he could possibly sleep as if he were already victorious, instead of being about to fight the greatest battle of his life. Alexander smiled and said, "Why not? Do you not see that we have already won the battle, now that we are delivered from roving around these endless devastated plains, and chasing Darius, who will never stand and fight?" And indeed not only beforehand, but at the very height of the battle Alexander displayed the supremacy and steadfastness of a man who is confident of the soundness of his judgement. (...)

After the battle the authority of the Persian Empire was regarded as having been completely overthrown. Alexander was proclaimed king of Asia and after offering splendid sacrifices to the gods, he proceeded to reward his friends with riches, estates and governorships. As he wished to increase his prestige in the Greek world, he wrote to the states saying that all tyrannies were now abolished and that henceforth they might live under their own laws. (...)

After the battle of Gaugamela Alexander advanced through the province of Babylonia, Susa and Persepolis, conquering one after the other all the most important cities and provinces of the Persian Empire.

Alexander was by nature exceptionally generous and became even more so as his wealth increased. His gifts were always bestowed with grace and courtesy, and it is this alone, to tell the truth, which makes the giver's generosity welcome....

Alexander now noticed that his companions had acquired thoroughly luxurious habits and had become vulgar in their extravagance of their way of living. There was Hagnon of Teos, who wore silver nails in his boots; Leonnatus, who had the dust with which he sprinkled his body for wrestling brought by camel-train from Egypt; and Philotas who hunted with nets that could enclose a space of twelve miles. When his friends bathed, they often anointed<sup>1</sup> themselves with myrrh,<sup>2</sup> rather than with plain oil, and were attended by masseurs and body-servants. Alexander reasoned with them and gently reproved them for these excesses. He told them he was amazed to see that men who had fought and conquered in such great battles could have forgotten that those who labour sleep more sweetly than those who are laboured for. Could they not understand, when they compared their style of living with that of the Persians, that there is nothing more slavish than the love of pleasure and nothing more princely than the life of toil?<sup>3</sup> How can a man attend to his horse, he asked them, or keep his spear and his helmet clean and bright, if he has lost the habit of using his hands to look after his own precious body? Did they not know that the end and perfection of conquest is to

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1 Anoint: to apply oil to as a sign of consecration or sanctification in a sacred rite.

2 Myrrh: any of several burseraceous trees and shrubs of the African and South Asian genus *Commiphora*, esp. *C. myrrha*, that exude an aromatic resin; the resin obtained from such a plant, used in perfume, incense, and medicine.

3 Toil: hard or exhausting work.

avoid doing the same things as the conquered have done? And so, to set an example, he exerted himself more strenuously than ever in campaigns and hunting expeditions, exposing himself to hardship and danger, so that an envoy from Sparta,<sup>1</sup> who was by his side when he speared a great lion, remarked "Alexander, you fought nobly with this lion to decide which of you should be king!" (...)

Alexander made a point of risking his life in this way both to exercise himself and to inspire others to acts of courage, but his friends, because of the wealth and pomp with which they were surrounded, desired only to lead a life of luxury and idleness. They found his expeditions and campaigns an intolerable burden, and little by little went so far as to abuse and find fault with the king. Alexander bore this treatment with great tolerance at first, and remarked that it is the part of a king to do good to his subjects and be maligned for it. And indeed even in the most trivial services which he rendered to his friends, he revealed the affection and regard which he had for them. (...)

He now set out again in pursuit of Darius, fully expecting that he would have to fight another battle. However when he learned that the king had been arrested by Bessus, the satrap<sup>2</sup> of Bactria, he sent his Thessalian cavalry back to Greece. The pursuit of Darius turned out to be long and exhausting. Alexander covered more than four hundred miles in eleven days, and by this time most of his horsemen were on the verge of collapse for lack of water. At this point he met some Macedonians, who were carrying water from a river in skins on the back of their

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1 Sparta was founded in 900 BC with a rigid oligarchic constitution (oligarchy means a government by a small group of people). The ruling class of Sparta devoted itself to war and diplomacy, deliberately neglecting the arts, philosophy and literature, and forged the most powerful standing army in Greece. This warrior city devoted itself to austerity, frugality and discipline; it created an ideal of an absolute surrender of the individual to the state.

2 Satrap: (in ancient Persia) a provincial governor.

mules, and when they saw Alexander almost fainting with thirst in the midday heat, they quickly filled a helmet and brought it to him. He asked them for whom they were carrying the water. "For our sons," they told him, "but so long as your life is safe, we can have other children, even if we lose them." At this Alexander took the helmet in his hands. But then he looked up and saw the rest of his troop craning<sup>1</sup> their heads and casting longing glances at the water, and he handed it back without drinking a drop. He thanked the men who had brought it, but said to them "If I am the only one to drink, the rest will lose heart." However no sooner had his companions witnessed this act of self-control and magnanimity<sup>2</sup> then they cried out and shouted for him to lead them on boldly. They spurred<sup>3</sup> on their horses and declared that they could not feel tired or thirsty or even like mortal men, so long as they had such a king.

All his horsemen were fired with the same enthusiasm, but only sixty of his men, so the story goes, had kept up with Alexander when he burst into the enemy's camp. They rode over great heaps of gold and silver vessels which had been scattered on the ground, passed wagons full of women and children that were moving aimlessly about without their drivers, and at length caught up with the Persian vanguard<sup>4</sup>, imagining that Darius must be among them. At last they found him lying in a wagon, riddled with javelins and at his last gasp. He asked for a drink, and when he had swallowed some cold water which a Macedonian brought to him, he said "This is the final stroke of misfortune, that I should accept a service from you, and not be able to return it, but Alexander will reward you for your kindness, and the gods will repay him for his courtesy towards my mother and my wife and my children. And so through you, I give him my hand." As he said this he

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1 To crane: to stretch out (esp. the neck) as to see over other people's head.

2 Magnanimity: generosity.

3 To spur: to go or ride quickly; to press on.

4 Vanguard: the leading division or units of a military force.

took the Macedonian by the hand, and died. When Alexander came up, he showed his grief and distress at the king's death, and unfastening his own cloak, he threw it over the body and covered it. Later, after he had captured Bessus, who had murdered the king, he had him torn limb from limb. As for Darius' body, he sent it to his mother to be laid out in royal state, and he enrolled his brother Exathres into the number of his companions.

Meanwhile he advanced into Parthiā, and it was here during a pause in the campaign that he first began to wear barbarian dress. He may have done this from a desire to adapt himself to local habits, because he understood that the sharing of race and of customs is a great step towards softening men's hearts. Alternatively, this may have been an experiment which was aimed at introducing the obeisance<sup>1</sup> among the Macedonians, the first stage being to accustom them to accepting changes in his own dress and way of life. However he did not go so far as to adopt the Median costume, which was altogether barbaric and outlandish<sup>2</sup> and he wore neither trousers, nor a sleeved vest, nor a tiara.<sup>3</sup> Instead he adopted a style which was a compromise between Persian and Median costume, more modest than the first, and more stately than the second. At first he wore this only when he was in the company of the barbarians or with his intimate friends indoors, but later he put it on when he was riding or giving audience in public. The sight greatly displeased the Macedonians, but they admired his other virtues so much that they considered they ought to make concessions to him in some matters which either gave him pleasure or increased his prestige. (...)

Alexander was by now becoming anxious that the Macedonians might refuse to follow him any further in his campaigns. He therefore quartered the main body on the country and allowed them to rest, but pressed on with his best troops,

1 Obeisance: a gesture expressing obeisance.

2 Outlandish: grotesquely unconventional in appearance, habits, etc.

3 Tiara: a high headdress worn by Persian kings in ancient times.

consisting of twenty thousand infantry and three thousand cavalry, and marched into Hycarnia. He then addressed this picked force and told them that up to now the barbarians had watched them as if they were in a dream, but that if they merely threw the whole country into disorder and then retired, the Persians would fall upon them as if they were so many women. He went on to say that he would allow any of them who desired it to go back, but he called on them to witness that at the very moment when he was seeking to conquer the whole inhabited world for the Macedonians, he found himself deserted and left only with his friends and those who were willing to continue the expedition. These are almost the exact words which he used in his letter to Antipater, and he says that after he had spoken in this way, the whole of his audience shouted aloud and begged him to lead them to whatever part of the world he chose. Once he had tested the loyalty of these troops, he found no difficulty in winning over the main body, indeed they followed him with a will.

From this point he began to adapt his own style of living more closely to that of the country and tried to reconcile Asiatic and Macedonian customs: he believed that if the two traditions could be blended and assimilated in this way his authority would be more securely established when he was far away, since it would rest on goodwill rather than on force. For this reason he selected thirty thousand boys and gave orders that they should be taught to speak the Greek language and to use Macedonians weapons, and he appointed a large number of instructors to train them. His marriage to Roxane<sup>1</sup> was a love match, which began when he first saw her at the height of her youthful beauty taking part in a dance at a banquet, but it also played a great part in furthering his policy of reconciliation. The barbarians were encouraged by the feeling of partnership which their alliance created, and they were completely won

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<sup>1</sup> Roxane was the daughter of the Bactrian prince Oxyartes, once a companion of Bessus.



over by Alexander's moderation and courtesy and by the fact that without the sanction of marriage he would not approach the only woman who had ever conquered his heart.

Alexander noticed that among his closest friends it was Hephaestion who approved of these plans and joined him in changing his habits, while Craterus clung to Macedonian customs, and he therefore made use of the first in his dealings with the barbarians and of the second with the Greeks and Macedonians. In general he showed most affection for Hephaestion and most respect for Craterus, for he had formed the opinion and often said that Hephaestion was a friend of Alexander's while Craterus was a friend of the king's. For this reason a feeling of hostility grew and festered<sup>1</sup> between the two and they often came into open conflicts. Once on the expedition to India they actually drew their swords and came to blows, and as their friends appeared and began to join in the quarrel, Alexander rode up and publicly reprimanded Hephaestion: he told him that he must be a fool and a madman if he did not understand that without Alexander's favour he was nothing. Then later in private he sharply rebuked<sup>2</sup> Craterus. Finally he called both men together and made them be friends again. He swore by Zeus, Ammon and the rest of the gods that these were the two men he loved best in the world, but that if he ever heard them quarrelling again, he would kill them both, or at least the one who began the quarrel. After this, it is said, neither of them ever did or said anything to offend the other even in jest.<sup>3</sup> (...)

Alexander was now about to launch his expedition to India. He had already taken note that his army was over-encumbered<sup>4</sup> with booty and had lost its mobility, and so early one morning after the baggage wagons had been loaded, he

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1 To fester: become bitter, irritated, over time.

2 To rebuke: to scold.

3 Jest: something done or said for amusement; joke.

4 To encumber: 1. to hinder or impede; make difficult; hamper: (encumbered with parcels). 2. to fill with superfluous or useless matter.

began by burning those which belonged to himself and the Companions, and then gave orders to set fire to those of the Macedonians. In the event his decision proved to have been more difficult to envisage than it was to execute. Only a few of the soldiers resented it: the great majority cheered with delight and raised their battle cry: they gladly shared out the necessities for the campaign with those who needed them and then they helped to burn and destroy any superfluous possessions with their own hands. (...)

The events of the campaign against Porus<sup>1</sup> are described in Alexander's letters. He tells us that the river Hydaspes flowed between the two camps, and that Porus stationed his elephants on the opposite bank and kept the crossing continually watched. Alexander caused a great deal of noise and commotion to be made day after day in his camp and in this way accustomed the barbarians not to be alarmed by his movements. Then at last on a stormy and moonless night he took a part of his infantry and the best of his cavalry, marched some distance along the river past the enemy's position, and then crossed over to a small island. Here he was overtaken by a violent storm of rain accompanied by tremendous bursts of thunder and lightning. Although he saw that a number of his men were struck dead by the lightning, he continued the advance and made for the opposite bank. After the storm the Hydaspes, which was roaring down in high flood, had scooped out a deep channel, so that much of the stream was diverted in this direction and the ground between the two currents had become broken and slippery and made it impossible for his men to gain a firm footing. It was on this occasion that Alexander is said to have exclaimed: "O you Athenians, will you ever believe what risks I am running just to earn your praise?"

This is the version which Onesicritus gives of the battle. But according to Alexander's own account, the Macedonians

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<sup>1</sup> Porus was the king of the Pauravas. He was a giant of manly beauty, and during the battle of the Hydaspes he fought to the last with the greatest bravery, till wounded and exhausted he had to surrender to the victor.

left their rafts<sup>1</sup> and waded across the breach in full armour, up to their chests in water. After making the crossing, Alexander rode on for more than two miles ahead of the infantry; he calculated that if the enemy attacked with their cavalry he could overcome them easily, and that if they moved their infantry, there would still be time for his own to join him. His judgement proved quite correct. He was attacked by a thousand of the enemy's cavalry and sixty of their chariots, and killed four hundred of their horsemen. Then Porus, understanding that Alexander had crossed, advanced against him with his whole army, but left behind a force sufficient to prevent the remainder of the Macedonians from crossing. Alexander, remembering the threat of the enemy's elephants and their superior numbers, attacked their left wing and ordered Coenus to charge against the right. Both flanks of the Indian army were routed,<sup>2</sup> and the defeated troops fell back upon the elephants and crowded into the centre. Here they rallied and a stubborn hand-to-hand struggle ensued, so that it was not until the eighth hour that the enemy was overcome. This is the account we have from the conqueror himself in one of his letters.

Most historians agree that Porus was about six feet three inches tall, and that his size and huge physique made him appear as suitably mounted upon an elephant as an ordinary man looks on a horse. His elephant too was very large and showed an extraordinary intelligence and concern for the king's person. So long as Porus was fighting strongly, it would valiantly defend him and beat off his attackers, but as soon as it recognised that its master was growing weak from the thrusts and missiles that had wounded him, it knelt quietly on the ground for fear that he might fall off, and with its trunk took hold of each spear and drew it out of his body. When Porus was taken prisoner, Alexander asked him how he wished to be treated. "As a king," Porus answered, and when Alexander went

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1 Raft: a flat floating platform of logs, planks.

2 To rout: to defeat.



One of Alexander's coin

on to ask whether he had anything more to say, the reply came, "Those words, 'as a king' include everything." At any rate Alexander not only allowed him to govern his former kingdom, but he also added to it a province, which included the territory of the independent peoples he had subdued. These are said to have numbered fifteen nations, five thousand towns of considerable size,

and innumerable villages. His other conquests embraced an area three times the size of this, and he appointed Philip, one of the Companions, to rule it as a satrap.

After this battle with Porus Bucephalas also died, not immediately, but some while later. (...) Alexander was plunged into grief at his death, and felt that he had lost nothing less than a friend and a comrade. He founded a city in his memory on the banks of the Hydraspe and called it Bucephalia (...)

Another consequence of this battle with Porus was that it blunted the edge of the Macedonian's courage and made them determined not to advance any further into India. It was only with great difficulty that they had defeated an enemy who had put into the field no more than twenty thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry, and so, when Alexander insisted on crossing the Ganges,<sup>1</sup> they opposed him outright. The river, they were told, was four miles across and one hundred fathoms<sup>2</sup> deep, and the opposite bank swarmed with a gigantic host of infantry, horsemen and elephants. It was said that the kings of the Gandaridae and the Praesii were waiting for Alexander's

1 It was not the Ganges but the Hyphasis, the last great river of the Punjab.

2 Fathom: a unit of length equal to six feet used to measure depths of water.

attack with an army of eighty thousand cavalry, two hundred thousand infantry, eight thousand chariots and six thousand fighting elephants, and this report was no exaggeration, for Sandrocottus,<sup>1</sup> the king of this territory who reigned there not long afterwards, presented five hundred elephants to Seleucus, and overran and conquered the whole of India with an army of six hundred thousand men.

At first Alexander was so overcome with disappointment and anger that he shut himself up and lay prostrate<sup>2</sup> in his tent. He felt that unless he could cross the Ganges, he owed no thanks to his troops for what they had already achieved; instead he regarded their having turned back as an admission of defeat. However his friends set themselves to reason with him and console him and the soldiers crowded round the entrance to his tent, and pleaded with him, uttering loud cries and lamentations, until finally he relented and gave orders to break camp.(...)

Alexander was now eager to see the outer Ocean. He had a large number of oar-propelled<sup>3</sup> ferries and rafts constructed, and was rowed down the rivers on these at a leisurely speed. But his voyage was by no means a peaceful and certainly not a passive affair. As he travelled downstream he would land, assault the cities near the banks, and subdue them all. However when he attacked the tribe known as the Malli, who are said to be the most warlike of all the Indian people, he nearly lost his life. (...)

Alexander's voyage to the mouth of the Indus occupied seven months. When he reached the open sea with his ships, he sailed out to an island which he himself named Scillustis, while others called it Psilukis. Here he landed and sacrificed to the gods, and made what observations he could on the nature of the sea and of the coast, as far as it was accessible. Then he

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1 The Hellenized form of Chandragupta, whose accession took place about 326 BC. He later wiped out the Macedonian garrisons in India.

2 Prostrate: exhausted physically or emotionally.

3 Oar: long pole of wood for propelling a boat by rowing.

offered up a prayer that no man after him might ever pass beyond the bounds of his expedition.

He appointed Nearchus to the supreme command of the fleet with Onesicritus as its chief pilot, and ordered them to follow the line of the sea coast, keeping India on their right.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile he set out by land and marched through the territory of the Oreites. Here he endured terrible privations and lost great numbers of men, with the result that he did not bring back from India so much as a quarter of his fighting force. And yet his strength had once amounted to a hundred and twenty thousand infantry and fifteen thousand cavalry.<sup>2</sup> Some of his men died from disease, some of the wretched food, some of the scorching heat, but most from sheer hunger, for they had to march through an uncultivated region whose inhabitants only eked out<sup>3</sup> a wretched<sup>4</sup> existence. It was only with great difficulty that Alexander succeeded in crossing this region in sixty days, but once he reached Gedrosia, he was immediately in a land of plenty, and the satraps and local rulers provided him with all his needs. (...)

But the difficulties he had encountered during the whole eastern campaign, the wound he had received in the battle with the Malli, and the heavy losses which his army was reported to have suffered had raised doubts as to his safe return: this combination of events had encouraged the subject peoples to revolt and his various viceroys and satraps to act in an unjust, rapacious<sup>5</sup> and arrogant manner. In short the whole empire was

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1 The plan was that the fleet should sail up the Persian Gulf and rejoin Alexander at the mouth of the Euphrates.

2 Alexander is said to have chosen this desert route both to support the fleet by digging wells and establishing depots and to restore his own reputation for superhuman achievement. The strength of Alexander's operational force was 35,000 fighting men. Plutarch seems to be referring to a total which includes all camp-followers. The non-combatants were the principal sufferers on this march.

3 To eke out: to live from hand to mouth; to struggle along.

4 Wretched: poor; miserable.

5 Rapacious: 1. practising pillage or rapine. 2. greedy or grasping.



**Alexander in battle**  
**A detail of the famous mosaic of the battle of Issus.**  
**Pompeii**

in turmoil and an atmosphere of instability prevailed everywhere. Even at home his mother Olympias and his sister Cleopatra had been intriguing against the regent, Antipater, and had divided the kingdom between them, Olympias taking Epirus and Cleopatra Macedonia. When Alexander heard of this, he remarked that his mother had made the wiser choice, since the Macedonians would never tolerate being governed by a woman. For these reasons he now sent Nearchus back to sea: his plan was to carry the war into the provinces which bordered the coast, while he himself would march down from Upper Asia and punish those of his officers who had abused their powers. (...)

One of his first acts when he reached Persis was to distribute money to the women: in this he was following the



custom of the Persian kings, who, whenever they arrived in this province, presented each matron<sup>1</sup> with a gold coin. Not long afterwards Alexander discovered that the tomb of Cyrus<sup>2</sup> had been plundered and had the offender put to death, even though he was a prominent Macedonian from Pella. When he had read the inscription on the tomb, he ordered it to be repeated below in Greek characters. The text was as follows: "O man, whoever you are and wherever you come from, for I know you will come, I am Cyrus who won the Persians their empire. Do not therefore grudge me this little earth that covers my body." These words made a deep impression on Alexander, since they reminded him of the uncertainty and mutability<sup>3</sup> of mortal life. (...)

Alexander now celebrated the marriages of a number of Companions at Susa. He himself married Stateira, the daughter of Darius, and he matched the noblest of the Persian women with the bravest of his men. On this occasion he gave a banquet to which he invited all the Macedonians who had already married Persian wives. We are told that nine thousand guests attended this feast and each of them was given a golden cup for libations. The whole entertainment was carried out on a grand scale and Alexander went so far as to discharge all the debts owed by any of his guests. (...)

The thirty thousand boys whom he had left behind to be given a Greek education and military training had now grown into active and handsome men and had developed a wonderful skill and agility in their military exercises. Alexander was delighted with their progress, but the Macedonians were disheartened and deeply disturbed for their own future, because

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1 Matron: a married woman, esp. a middle-aged woman with children.

2 Cyrus the Great was a conqueror who founded the Achaemenian Empire. The figure of Cyrus has survived throughout history more than as a man who founded an empire. He became the embodiment of the great qualities expected for a ruler in antiquity, and he assumed heroic features as a conqueror who was tolerant and magnanimous as well as brave and daring.

3 Mutability: able to or tending to change.



they assumed that the king would henceforth have less regard for them. So when he arranged to send the sick and disabled among them to the sea-coast, they protested that he was not only doing them an injustice but deliberately humiliating them.

In the spring (324) he left Susa for Ecbatana in Media and there, after he had dealt with the most pressing of his concerns, he once more turned his attention to plays and spectacles, since three thousand players had arrived from Greece. At this time it happened that Hephaestion had caught a fever, and being a young man who was accustomed to a soldier's life, he could not bear to remain on a strict diet. No sooner had his physician Glaucus gone off to the theatre, than he sat down to breakfast, devoured a boiled fowl and washed it down with a great cooler-full of wine. His fever quickly mounted and soon afterwards he died. Alexander's grief was uncontrollable. As a sign of mourning he gave orders that the manes and tails of all horses should be shorn, demolished the battlements of all the neighbouring cities, crucified the unlucky physician and forbade the playing of flutes or any other kind of music for a long time until finally an oracle was announced from the temple of Ammon, commanding him to honour Hephaestion and sacrifice to him as a hero. He determined to spend ten thousand talents on the funeral and on the tomb of his friend, and as he wished the ingenuity and originality of the design to surpass the expense he was especially anxious to employ Stasticrates, as this artist was famous for his innovations, which combined an exceptional degree of magnificence, audacity and ostentation.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the year Alexander travelled to Babylon. Before he arrived he was joined by Nearchus, who had sailed through the ocean and up the Euphrates: Nearchus told him that he met some Chaldaens who had advised the king to stay away from Babylon. Alexander paid no attention to this warning and continued his journey, but when he arrived before the walls of the city, he saw a large number of ravens flying about

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<sup>1</sup> Ostentation: pretentious, showy, or vulgar display.

and pecking one another, and some of them fell dead in front of him. (...) He began to regret he had not taken Nearchus' advice, and so he spent most of his time outside the walls of Babylon, either in his tent or in boats on the Euphrates. Many more omens now occurred to trouble him. A tame<sup>1</sup> ass attacked the finest lion in his menagerie and kicked it to death. On another occasion Alexander took off his clothes for exercise and played a game of ball. When it was time to dress again, the young men who had joined him in the game suddenly noticed that there was a man sitting silently on the throne and wearing Alexander's diadem and royal robes. When he was questioned, he could say nothing for a long while, but later he came to his senses and explained that he was a citizen of Messenia named Dionysius. He had been accused of some crime, brought to Babylon from the coast, and kept for a long time in chains. Then the god Serapis had appeared to him, cast off his chains and brought him to this place, where he had commanded him to put on the king's robe and diadem, take his seat on the throne and hold his peace.

When he had heard the man's story, Alexander had him put to death, as the diviners recommended. But his confidence now deserted him, he began to believe that he had lost the favour of the gods, and he became increasingly suspicious of his friends. (...) Alexander had become so much obsessed by his fears of the supernatural and so overwrought and apprehensive in his own mind, that he interpreted every strange or unusual occurrence, no matter how trivial, as a prodigy or a portent,<sup>2</sup> with the result that the palace was filled with soothsayers,<sup>3</sup> sacrificers, purifiers and prognosticators.<sup>4</sup> Certainly it is dangerous

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1 Tame: changed by man from naturally wild state into a domesticated condition.

2 Portent: a sign or indication of future event, especially a momentous or calamitous one; omen.

3 Soothsayer: a seer or prophet.

4 To prognosticate: to foretell (future events) according to present signs or indications.

to disbelieve or show contempt for the power of the gods, but it is equally dangerous to harbour superstition, and in this case just as water constantly gravitates to a lower level, so unreasoning dread filled Alexander's mind with foolish misgivings, once he had become a slave to his fears. However, when the verdict of the oracle concerning Hephaestion was brought to him, he laid aside his grief and allowed himself to indulge in a number of sacrifices and drinking-bouts.<sup>1</sup> He gave a splendid banquet in honour of Nearchus, after which he took a bath as his custom was, with the intention of going to bed soon afterwards. But when Medius invited him, he went to his house to join a party, and there after drinking all through the next day, he began to feel feverish.<sup>2</sup> Aristobus tells us that he was seized with a raging fever, that when he became very thirsty he drank wine which made him delirious,<sup>3</sup> and that he died on the thirtieth day of the month Daesius.

According to his journals, the course of his sickness was as follows. On the eighteenth day of the month Daesius he slept in the bathroom because he was feverish. On the next day, after taking a bath, he moved into the bedchamber and spent the day playing dice with Medius. He took a bath late in the evening, offered sacrifice to the gods, dined and remained feverish throughout the night. On the twentieth he again bathed and sacrificed as usual, and while he was lying down in the bathroom he was entertained by listening to Nearchus' account of his voyage, and his exploration of the great sea. On the twenty-first he passed the time in the same way, but the fever grew more intense: he had a bad night and all through the following day his fever was very high. He had his bed moved and lay in it by the side of a great plunge-bath, and there he discussed with his commanders the vacant posts in the army and how to fill them with experienced officers. On the twenty-fourth his fever was still worse and he was carried outside to offer a

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1 Bout: a period of time spent in doing something, such as drinking.

2 Probably malaria.

3 Delirious: affected with delirium.

sacrifice. He gave orders to the senior commanders to remain on call in the courtyard of the palace and to the commanders of companies and regiments to spend the night outside. On the twenty-fifth day he was moved to the palace on the other side of the river, and there he slept a little, but his fever did not abate.<sup>1</sup> When his commanders entered the room he was speechless and remained so on the twenty-sixth day. The Macedonians now believed that he was dead: they thronged the doors of the palace and began to shout and threaten the Companions, who were at last obliged to let them in. When the doors had been thrown open they all filed slowly past his bedside one by one, wearing neither cloak nor armour. On the twenty-eighth towards evening he died.<sup>2</sup>

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Translated and annotated by Ian Scott-Kilvert

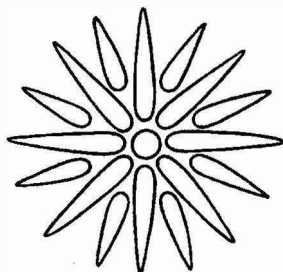
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1 Abate: to make or become less in amount or intensity.

2 On the 13 June of 323 BC. He was not yet 33 years.

## Alexander as a general, leader of men and king of Asia

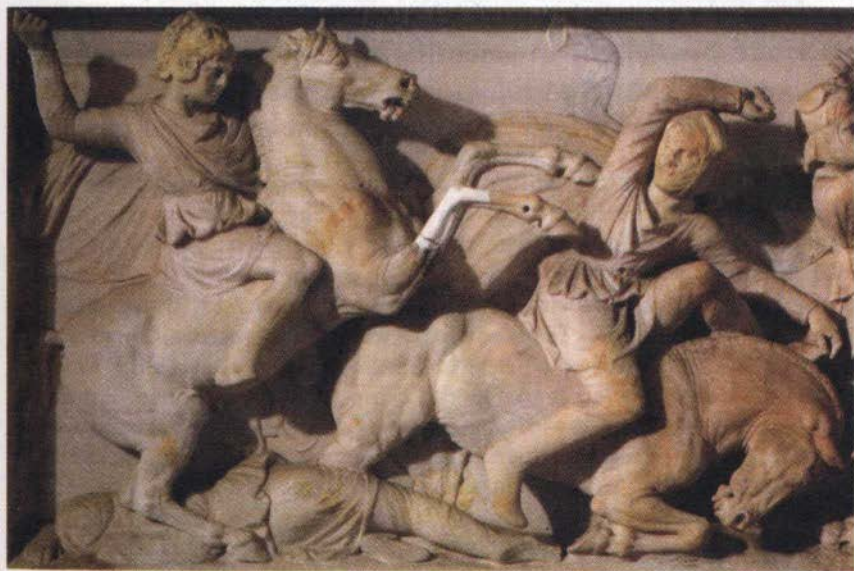
When Alexander died, he was not yet thirty-three. He was carried off at the very height of his youthful vigour, like his ancestor and model Achilles.<sup>1</sup> He had not completed the thirteenth year of his reign. A retrospect of his gigantic life work brings before us a personality of quite unique genius, a marvellous mixture of demonic passion and sober clearness of judgement. In this iron-willed man of action, who was a realist in policy if anyone ever was, beneath the surface lay a non-rational element: for example, his 'longing' for the undiscovered and the mysterious, which, coupled with his will to conquer and his delight in scientific discovery, sent him to the limits of the known world. (...) He was firmly persuaded that he was under the special protection of the gods, and therefore

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1 Achilles in Greek mythology, son of the mortal Peleus, king of the Myrmidons, and the Nereid, or sea nymph, Thetis. He was the bravest, handsomest, and greatest warrior of the army of Agamemnon in the Trojan War. During the first nine years of the war, Achilles ravaged the country around Troy and took 12 cities. In the 10th year a quarrel with Agamemnon occurred when Achilles insisted that Agamemnon restore Chryseis, his prize of war, to her father, a priest of Apollo, so as to appease the wrath of Apollo, who had killed many in the camp with a pestilence. An angry Agamemnon recouped his loss by depriving Achilles of his favourite slave, Briseis. Achilles refused further service, and consequently the Greeks floundered so badly that at last Achilles allowed Patroclus to impersonate him, lending him his chariot and armour. Hector (the eldest son of King Priam of Troy) slew Patroclus, and Achilles, having finally reconciled with Agamemnon, obtained new armour from the god Hephaestus and slew Hector. After dragging Hector's body behind his chariot, Achilles gave it to his father Priam at his earnest entreaty.

believed in his mission. It was said that: "This sense of divine possession is characteristic of the conduct of the great men of antiquity;" that is true of no one more than Alexander. (...) This firm belief in his mission gave him an absolute confidence in victory, without which his will and actions would be unintelligible. The supernatural in his temperament gave him also control over men.

The general and the statesman are indissolubly bound up in Alexander; as a general he was the executor of his political will. The general is easier to comprehend, since we have finished performances to survey, whereas the tasks of the statesman were still in process of evolution when he died. Alexander is the type of the royal general, who has unlimited control over the military material and apparatus of his country and is responsible to himself alone. He had no trials for conduct in the field to fear, such as the Athenian democracy loved, and no need to whitewash himself. (...) He had further the good



Alexander in battle (detail of sarcophagus sculpture)

fortune to inherit the best army in the world at the time, together with a tried body of officers, and to have been initiated into the art of war by his father, who was himself a great general. These fortunate conditions made it easier for him fully to develop his military genius, but the important point was that this genius was born in him. (...) Military experts in ancient as in modern times agree that Alexander as a general was as great a genius as any in history.

As a tactician we saw him fight and win the three great battles, the Granicus, Issus and Gaugamela, by the tactics developed by his father. But only the tactical idea was common to them. Its execution in detail Alexander varied according to the peculiarities of the ground and of the enemy. (...) Completely different was the set of problems he had to solve in the terribly difficult guerrilla war in Eastern Iran. Here we have a still more brilliant exhibition of his independence of his father's tradition in his operations with flying corps and his adaptation to the different mode of warfare of the new enemy. The severe fighting in the mountainous region north of Kabul, and especially the capture of Aornos, display Alexander in all his greatness. Perhaps the most signal stroke of genius is to be seen in his last great field of battle on the Hydaspes, when he had to deal with the totally new problem presented by the huge elephant host of Porus.

His strategic genius we saw from the beginning in his plan for the Asiatic campaign, according to which, on account of the difficult situation in Greece, he resolved first to win the Mediterranean coasts of the Persian empire with his land army in order to eliminate the superior Persian fleet. We saw with what tenacity and how in spite of all temptations he pursued this plan, up to the conquest of Egypt, and how thus he actually became master of the sea. When he led his army into the interior of Asia he faced new problems. Up to the Euphrates the march of the Ten Thousand had made all clear. What lay beyond the Euphrates was completely unknown country. So it was into mysterious distances that Alexander led his army, overcoming

all natural obstacles, over the snowy Hindu-Kush and over broad rivers, and finally through the Punjab to the Hyphasis, where the morale of his troops gave out and he turned round.

Yet there is nothing adventurous in his march. On the one hand, always and from the beginning he tried to get advance information about the foreign country which he wished to conquer, took care, as far as was possible, to be enlightened by his spies about political, military and local conditions, and as a result entered into alliances with individual rulers by clever diplomacy, as before his Indian campaign, or sent out voyages of exploration, as before the Arabian expedition. On the other hand he never advanced without having covered his rear. (...) When he made his first conquests in Asia, he began at once to secure the conquered territories from the military point of view, and to ensure peace and order by administrative arrangements. Later when he penetrated into the heart of Asia, and went ever to more remote countries, he followed the same principle, and thus in spite of the tremendous distances, which finally he put between himself and home, he succeeded in never losing connection with it. Only once, at Issus, was he, by an unusual chain of events, cut off from his base of operations, yet in a few hours he carved his way out of the dangerous situation. What proves his systematic method is that even in the Far East the drafts<sup>1</sup> for his army from Macedonia and Greece always reached him according to his directions. This was only possible because he deliberately and most carefully built up a system of rest stages. Without such measures his successes and his triumph over distances, which our military experts often admire more than his battles, would not be conceivable. (...)

Among Alexander's great qualities as a general is the tenacity with which, when he once regarded anything as essential, he carried it out to the bitter end. He lay seven months before Tyre, till he had got hold of it. (...)

He showed himself, too, a great leader of men, by partici-

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<sup>1</sup> Draft: detachment of military personnel from one unit to another.



pating in all the dangers and fatigues of his troops; in this way he carried them along with him. In battle he set them an example of supreme personal bravery; on the march there were no toils<sup>1</sup> he did not share. If in sieges causeways or anything of the kind had to be constructed, he himself took a hand in the task, praised those who succeeded, and punished those who failed. When outstanding successes had been gained, he liked to reward his troops, by holding games and all sorts of festivities for them. His extensive money gifts to his army were a compensation for the prohibition of plundering the conquered districts, which for political reasons he thought necessary. This presupposes strict discipline. By the humanity with which after battles he cared for the wounded, he won the hearts of his soldiers. To his Macedonian officers he preserved to the end the attitude of a comrade. Though not imposing in figure, for he scarcely reached middle height, he dominated everybody by his wonderfully bright eyes. The towering nature of his personality is most clearly exhibited in the fact that the men nearest to him, who after his death in many cases showed themselves to be strong rulers, blindly obeyed him during his lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Nearchus says once, with reference to the beginning of his ocean voyage, that the army believed in Alexander's wonderful luck, and was of the opinion that there was nothing he could not dare and do. It was that mystical faith of an army in its leader, which Caesar also and later Napoleon were able to evoke.

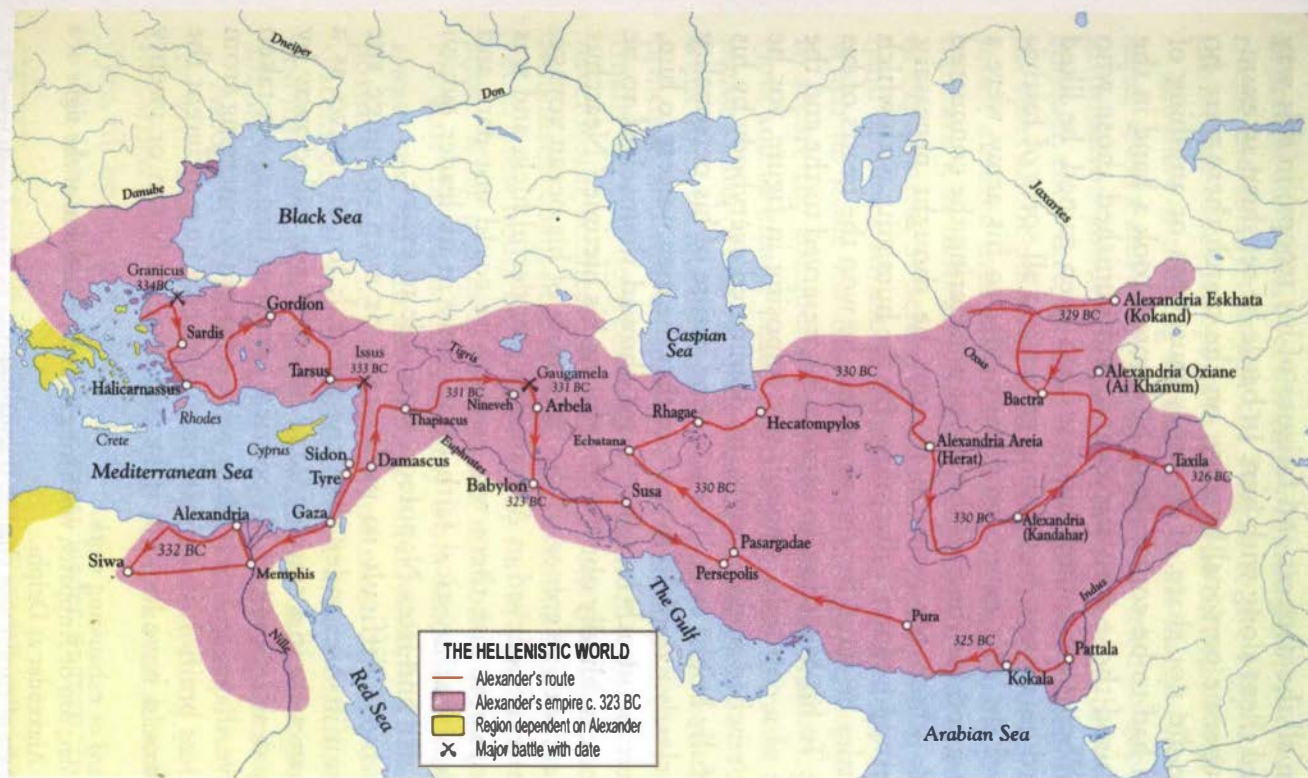
It is more difficult to understand or even to judge the statesman in Alexander than the general; for his views as a statesman were in a state of flux,<sup>3</sup> when he was called away by an early death. None of his political creations had as yet taken definitive shape, and new plans were constantly emerging from his restless brain. It is impossible to conceive how different the world would have looked, if he had lived only ten or twenty

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1 Toil: hard or exhausting work.

2 Cassander, son of Antipater, when king himself, shuddered at the sight of a statue of Alexander at Delphi.

3 Flux: state of continuous change, fluctuation.



Alexander's empire

years longer. How differently then should we be able to judge the youthful work which he did up to 323. We must never forget that we have only beginnings before us.

Let us now examine his behaviour as King of Asia. The use of Darius' seal confirms the view that after the death of Darius Alexander felt himself to be his legitimate successor; henceforth on principle he regarded the Asiatics no longer as his enemies but as his subjects. Starting from this, he reached the thoroughly statesmanlike conviction that he must enlist the vigour contained in these nations for the great problems that Asia presented to him. This course commended itself the more as it was to be hoped that it would have a reconciling and calming influence on the subjected peoples. (...) A still more urgent necessity was the recruiting of his army with the elite troops of Asia, for his European troops were insufficient for the colossal plans he was revolving in his brain. The filling up of gaps with Asiatic forces was absolutely imperative from the military point of view. Here, as in the administrative posts, he chose Iranians especially Persians, and after the conquest of Eastern Iran its inhabitants too. (...)

He did not, however, stop at the use of Iranians in the administration and the army, a use which will be recognised as politically right and required by circumstances, but went beyond it to the idea of a race-fusion of his Macedonians with these Iranians, an idea which dominated him more and more, as we saw, in his last years. He himself set the example by his marriage with Roxane (327), and later by the mass-marriage of Susa (324) he expressed most plainly his political intentions. Obviously he regarded this fusion as a means to an end; his aim was to build a bridge between the Macedonians, who were increasingly dissatisfied with the military employment of the Persians, and these same Persians, and to restore concord and agreement between the two peoples, so that hand in hand they might afford a sufficient guarantee against possible hostile reactions on the part of other nations of the empire. Thus conceived, the policy of fusion may be regarded as a statesmanlike

idea, however surprising the thought of race-breeding promoted by government may appear, and however doubtful it is whether such a fusion as Alexander desired was at all feasible, and finally, whether it would have had the effect for which he hoped. (...)

In the "Prayer of Opis"<sup>1</sup> Alexander expressed very clearly the conception he held of his monarchy over Asia and his policy of reconciliation, when at the great feast of union he prayed to the gods that concord and partnership of rule might be granted to the Macedonians and Persians. As the Macedonians alone were insufficient for the ruling of Asia, the previously dominant Persians, who already under the Achaemenids<sup>2</sup> had taken up a privileged position before the other nations of the world empire, were to be called to the leadership along with them. Alexander's Asiatic empire — for only to this can his words refer — was thus to become a Macedonian-Persian empire. In this ideal, only to be brought about by concord, he seems to have seen the best guarantee for the security and permanence of his Asiatic empire, and his civilising policy. (...)

We see Alexander too as an economist who knew what he was aiming at. He founded numerous cities, which were able and were intended to be the props<sup>3</sup> of distant traffic. His most magnificent foundation, Alexandria in Egypt, was from the

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1 In 324 Alexander's decision to send home Macedonian veterans under Craterus was interpreted as a move toward transferring the seat of power to Asia. There was an open mutiny involving all but the royal bodyguard; but when Alexander dismissed his whole army and enrolled Persians instead, the opposition broke down. An emotional scene of reconciliation was followed by a vast banquet with 9,000 guests to celebrate the ending of the misunderstanding and the partnership in government of Macedonians and Persians but not, as has been argued, the incorporation of all the subject peoples as partners in the commonwealth. Ten thousand veterans were now sent back to Macedonia with gifts, and the crisis was surmounted.

2 Also called Achaemenid, Persian Hakmanishiya (559-330 B.C.), ancient Iranian dynasty whose kings founded and ruled the Achaemenian Empire. The dynasty became extinct with the death of Darius III, following his defeat (330 BC) by Alexander the Great.

3. Prop: support.

first designed to be an emporium. Even among the new cities in the Far East were many whose position on the old trade routes shows that they were designed to serve trading purposes; and so some of them are prosperous at the present day, like Herat,<sup>1</sup> Kandahar<sup>2</sup> and Khojend.<sup>3</sup> He opened new sea routes for trade: the voyage of Nearchus connected his new colonial territory in India with Babylon; he himself intended shortly before his death to connect Babylon with Egypt by an expedition by sea around Arabia; he rendered the Tigris navigable, and a "new Phoenicia" was designed on the coast of the Persian gulf; great harbour works were begun in Pattala and Babylon for the promotion of navigation and trade. All these are achievements and designs of colossal dimensions, which display a genius at work, who intended to divert into the paths he regarded as right the world commerce of his world-empire. (...)

Finally we come to his civilising policy. Alexander marched out as the enthusiastic admirer of Greek culture who was to open up the East to its influence. Did he remain faithful to this object after he had become acquainted with the old cultures of the East, which could not fail to impress his susceptible<sup>4</sup> nature? Was he still faithful after the idea of a fusion of the nations had laid hold upon him in his last years with ever-increasing force? One thing is undeniable: in spite of all Iranian policy he was personally to the last an enthusiastic admirer of Greek culture. The pupil of Aristotle never abandoned the idea of making his triumphal march also a journey of discovery, and of causing it to serve Greek science through the examination of lands hitherto unknown by the staff of experts who accompanied him. Out of the later years we need only call to mind the zealous work of investigation in India, Nearchus' voyage of exploration, and finally the mission of Heraclides to the Caspian Sea. (...)

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1 In western Afghanistan.

2 In south-central Afghanistan.

3 Modern Leninabad.

4 Sensitive, impressionable.

His love of Greek literature remained unchanged to the end. He started out with Homer, and later he sent from the Far East for other works of literature, classical and modern. He had special veneration for the three great tragedians, above all for Euripides, whom he knew so well that at times he could recite entire scenes from memory. Besides the poets who accompanied his travelling court there were also in his camp philosophers and philosophically educated men of the most different schools. (...) The intellectual life at the court of Alexander, which we picture as very animated, was thoroughly Greek. So far as we know, he had no acquaintance with the literatures of the Oriental peoples. (...)

Greek art too remained for him the art. We never hear that he caused Oriental artists to work for him; on the contrary he exclusively employed Greeks. His architects also were Greeks.(...)

But nothing actually had so strong an effect on the Hellenisation of the East (so far as one can speak of anything of the kind) as Alexander's foundation of cities. (...) The colonists settled in these cities were chiefly Greek mercenaries, many thousands of whom were left behind in these spots, along with a lesser number of Macedonians, probably veterans for the most part. As these mercenaries to a great extent came from an uprooted proletariat<sup>1</sup> (...) one may regard Alexander's city-foundations as a solution on a grand scale to a social and economic problem. (...) These cities received from him a Greek constitution: a council, popular assembly and city magistrates. In spite of this they seem not to have possessed complete autonomy, and in all likelihood were directly under the king. (...)

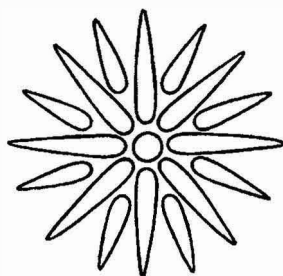
At the time of the foundation of the cities in Eastern Iran Alexander had already conceived the idea of bringing the Iranians into closer relation with the Macedonians and Greeks, and soon afterwards he was busy with the fusion of these

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<sup>1</sup> Proletariat: the lowest social class in any community.

peoples. The prospect therefore of a gradual mixture of cultures in the settlements cannot have run counter to the views which he then held. Was he thus unfaithful to his original object of spreading Greek culture in the East? Personally, in spite of all the political concessions which he made to the Iranians, he remained to the last, as we saw, a thorough admirer of Greek culture, and it must accordingly still have been his ambition to make Greek culture prevail as far as possible. But just as he had learned as a politician that he could not rule his Asiatic Empire with Macedonians alone, so in active contact with Oriental cultures it must have become clear to him that neither could he make Greek culture exclusively dominant. The chief requisite was that centres should at first be created from which the spread of Greek culture could take its start — and that is what he accomplished by the cities which he founded. Though mixtures of culture might be expected later, yet in his attitude to Greek culture he must have had the desire and confident expectation that it would be the leading factor. The great question of the future in fact was, which of the two cultures would prove itself the stronger. For many centuries this was the chief problem of the history of civilisation. (...)

Taken from:  
*Alexander the Great* by Ulrich Wilcken  
Translated by G.C. Richards  
W.W. Norton and Company



## After Alexander's death

We see the greatness of Alexander as a whole, only when we contemplate the effects of his life work on successive periods of history. In the few years of his reign he actually put the ancient world on a new basis. The whole subsequent course of history, the political, the economic and cultural life of after times, cannot be understood apart from the career of Alexander. John Gustav Droysen wrote: "The name of Alexander betokens<sup>1</sup> the end of one world epoch, and the beginning of another." (...)

Through the unexpected early death of Alexander the leaders of the army present at Babylon were suddenly faced by extremely difficult problems. The conduct of the deliberations fell to Perdiccas to whom the dying king had handed his signet ring.<sup>2</sup> As the unity of the empire had to be maintained and therefore a new king elected, the assembly of the Macedonian army came once more to the front. But the wishes of the infantry, in whom the old Macedonian spirit was strongly entrenched, and of the cavalry, who had become more accessible to Alexander's modern ideas, could not be reconciled. After a vehement conflict, which well nigh led to fighting and bloodshed, an unlucky compromise was effected: Arrhidaeus, the candidate of the infantry, an epileptic but a son of Philip, and the still unborn son of the Bactrian Roxane — he was born a few weeks later — favoured by the cavalry, were to rule conjointly. Thus two minors, neither capable of ruling, were to take the place of the irreplaceable. The weaker this phantom monarchy was, the stronger burned the ambition of the generals who aimed at power. At

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1 To betoken: to indicate; signify.

2 Signet ring: a finger ring bearing a signet.





Posthumous portrait of Alexander

first they went off to their satrapies according to the new distribution decided upon at Babylon.

Before they left Babylon, the question was decided, on what principles the government was to be carried on. To remove the responsibility from himself, Perdicas laid before the assembly of the army the memoranda (*Hypomnemata*)<sup>1</sup> on the

latest plans of Alexander, and it was unanimously resolved to cancel them — which was natural enough, as these plans served precisely the ideas of Alexander to which the Macedonians had for years presented a fruitless opposition. This decision affected alike the policy of fusion and the policy of world empire, which was to lead to the conquest of the West. The two favourite ideas of Alexander, which stirred him in his later years with more and more passionate intensity, were

1 These official memoranda probably contained the working out and calculations of the technical accomplishments of his last plans, and the military and financial resources required for them. We possess only a brief table of contents, from which it appears that 1000 warships of a larger type than triremes were to be built in Phoenicia, Syria, Cilicia and Cyprus for a campaign against the Carthaginians and the other coast peoples who lived in Africa, Spain, and the coasts adjoining up to Sicily. It is mentioned also that a road was to be made along the African coast to the Pillars of Heracles, and that in correspondence with the requirements of so great a naval enterprise, harbours and docks were to be constructed at suitable places.

These accounts of the *Hypomnemata* indicate nothing less than that Alexander, after becoming lord of Asia, actually thought of a conquest of the whole world. He is probably the only man in history who conceived this gigantic plan of becoming "world ruler" in the proper sense of the word.

thus rendered inoperative by the resolution of the army. (...)

The news of the sudden death of the king, which startled the whole world, did not produce disturbances anywhere among the Oriental peoples. It is a powerful testimony to Alexander's organising genius that they made no attempt to recover their independence. He had known how to reconcile them to their new conditions. (...)

Soon afterwards began the conflict of the ambitious satraps, who in constantly shifting coalitions strove with each other for mastery. Such a wealth of forceful personalities as were found in the circle of the Diadochi (successors) was never repeated till the epoch of the condottieri and tyrants of the Italian Renaissance. (...) The most powerful of the Diadochi was Antigonus, who gradually acquired a great part of Asia and aimed at sole sovereignty over Alexander's empire. Against him and his son Demetrius in long years of fighting was arrayed a coalition of Ptolemy of Egypt, Seleucus of Babylon, Lysimachus of Thrace, and Cassander, son of Antipater of Macedonia. The monarchy, by which the unity of the empire could still be formally maintained, soon disappeared; King Philip Arrhidaeus was murdered and the little Alexander with his unhappy mother Roxane too. The house of Alexander ended in massacre. No longer was there a king, but only satraps fighting, and fighting each other for power. In this way the unity of Alexander's empire was lost. (...)

As the result of over forty years of fighting out of the empire of Alexander three great monarchies came into being: Egypt under the Ptolemies, Asia under the Seleucids, and Macedonia under the Antigonids...

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## Three anecdotes of Alexander's life and conquests

### The Battle with Porus

Before leaving Nikaia, Alexander had sent messengers to all the Indian princes residing in the lower valley of Cophen to invite them to recognize him as their suzerain and to come to pay him homage. A few of them had answered favourably, notably Taxiles, with whom Alexander already had friendly relations. But many others had refused. Because of this, Alexander was obliged to open a way by force to the Indus.

Alexander drove his troops to the border of the Pauravas. Before crossing, he sent a messenger to Porus inviting him to submit himself to his tutelage.<sup>1</sup> But Porus was not a man to bow without a fight. He proudly answered:

— I will indeed come to the limits of my land. But it will not be to bow to Alexander. It will be to receive him, as he deserves, arms in hand!

This answer equaled a declaration of war. Alexander penetrated the Pauravas territory and reached the Hydaspes after two days of marching.

It was the beginning of the rainy season. The river, immediately swollen by the growth of its innumerable tributaries, was four hundred metres wide. One could see the immense camp of Porus on the other side. Aligned facing west, his army was deployed in battle order. In front, three hundred war elephants were displayed. The Macedonians shuddered on seeing them, for they had never confronted such creatures. The monstrous aspect of these beasts, the cry of which resembled the sound

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<sup>1</sup> Tutelage: the state of being a tutor, of being the master.

of no other animal, confirmed their belief that they were approaching the ends of the world.

At first glance, Alexander realised that it was out of the question to cross the river at this spot. Not only did its width make it impossible, but also he would be pushed back into the waters by the army of Porus. He arrayed a thin curtain of troops in front of the enemy camp to lead Porus into fearing an attack from that side. Then he went down the river with the largest part of his army, in search of a ford.<sup>1</sup> Having found one half a mile downstream, he ordered his troops to quickly cross it. When Porus' watchmen came to warn him that a mass of foreign soldiers was marching to meet him, coming up from the south, it was too late: under cover of night all the Macedonians had crossed to the left bank of the river.

Porus then understood whom he was dealing with. His last chance of salvation was to rush on Alexander, before his phalanges had time to regroup. He set off with his whole army, consisting of four thousand horsemen, three hundred war chariots, thirty thousand foot soldiers and three hundred elephants: the latter, standing with a gap of twenty metres between each, moved forward as a four-kilometer front. It resembled a moving rampart with each elephant as a tower. The surface occupied by the small Macedonian army was hardly one quarter of the enemy front. It should have been smashed. But once more, intelligence and mobility would gain the upper hand.

Soon the scramble was general. Porus directed the movements of his army from the top of his elephant, a superb animal even taller than the others. But his troops did not have the same mobility. Driven to one point, they were unable to regroup fast enough to face a new attack.

After a few hours, Porus realised that the battle might end in a disaster. By dusk twenty thousand Indians had been killed, among them the king's two sons. All the squadron leaders of both the infantry and the cavalry, all the chariot

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<sup>1</sup> Ford: a shallow area in a river that can be crossed by car, horseback, etc.

drivers had perished. Three thousand horses and more than a hundred elephants lay lifeless on the battlefield.

Seeing his sons dead, his elephants massacred and his army in flight, king Porus understood that all resistance was useless. He suffered from a wound in his right shoulder, which had been pierced by an arrow. He gestured to his elephant keeper to have his elephant kneel. The beast obeyed. After which it delicately gathered the king with its trunk and put him on the ground. Mastering his pain, Porus stayed a moment immobile, and then he ordered one of his aides-de-camp to lead him to Alexander.

When the king of Macedon saw him approach, he stepped out to meet him. The beauty of this man, who was over seventy years old, and the nobility of his attitude filled Alexander with admiration. He had never seen a man show such greatness of being in adversity.<sup>1</sup> After the usual greetings, Alexander asked him how he wanted to be dealt with.

— Royally, said Porus.

— That was my intention, answered Alexander. Please let me know what are your wishes.

— This single word contains them all, answered the old king laconically.<sup>2</sup>

Alexander heartily wished to make a friend of him. He showed him great generosity. Not only did he leave him his kingdom, but also he increased his powers by obliging several of the neighboring princes to accept his suzerainty.

## **Crossing the Gedrosia Desert**

After a short stay in Pattala, Alexander decided to return to the centre of the Empire. Already Craterus had preceded him by going inland. Nearchus, casting off with the entire fleet,

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1 Adversity: distress; affliction; hardship.

2 Laconically: (of a person's speech) using very few words.

would explore the sea route from the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf. As for Alexander, he had decided to reach Pasargadae and Persepolis by passing through Ramballa, Poura and Hormuz, that is to say following the Southern road, the closest to the coastline.

This road was by far the most difficult of the three. Why had Alexander chosen it? Would it not have been better to follow the same itinerary as Craterus, which would have permitted him to reach the Arachosia and the Drangiana more quickly? Did he not know that a desert, almost impassable to isolated travellers — and all the more to a multitude in arms — spread from the mouth of the Indus to the Hormuz Gulf? It did not seem so. If he had chosen this route instead of another it is because he wanted to see all the frontiers of his empire, and in particular this one, which stood between him and the unknown.

Alexander's plan was well studied: while Nearchus would clarify the problem of maritime relations at the head of a fleet of one hundred ships, Alexander would force his way through the coastal provinces, and secure the safety of scheduled stops by accumulating the necessary quantity of water and other provisions, in advance at certain agreed points.

The operation was logical. But its execution proved to be delicate. The slightest delay, leading to a lack of synchronization in the progression of either group, could compromise everything. If the army suffered a delay, the fleet was lost; if the fleet was kept waiting, the army was condemned. That Alexander embarked on such an adventure despite all the risks proves the confidence he had in his lucky star.

Nearchus weighed anchor on a beautiful morning in August 325.

Alexander followed him.

The Gedrosia Desert, which covers the whole of southern Beluchistan, is one of the most arid and disinherited regions of the world. It was inhabited, at that time, by some primitive population, to which the Greeks had given the name "Ichthyophages" because they ate only dry fish. But what else could they

eat? This region produced nothing. It was a blinding furnace, where the ground burned even more than the sky.

Fresh water could be found only at the foot of the mountains, that is to say quite far inland. But Alexander was obliged not to wander far from the seashore if he wanted to fit out the necessary stations for supplying the fleet. The sparse vegetation did not offer any protection against the sun. "A few date palms", tell us the historians Arrian and Strabo, "raised their dried fronds in the torrid air. On the other hand, myrrh and Indian nard grew in abundance."

Already overwhelmed by the heat, the phalanxes were soon weakened by lack of food. Their supplies decreased rapidly. When some dry wheat was discovered in the back of an abandoned shack, Alexander gave the order to requisition it. He had it put in bags sealed with his stamp and carried to the coastline, to where Nearchus would be able to collect them.

The beasts of burden perished first. They were eaten on the spot. The soldiers were unable to carry the luggage abandoned to the desert. Overcome by sleep, stragglers fell by the side of the track, some to awaken only when the column had passed. A few managed to catch up by following the footprints that had been left behind. Others became lost in the sands and died of exhaustion.

It was not a march, it was an agony. With throats burning, lips wrinkled and cracked, feet gashed by sharp stones, the soldiers dawdled<sup>1</sup> rather than moving forward. They longed for the freshness of the Indian forests.

One evening the army put up its tents in the bed of a dried up ravine. Suddenly, the expanse filled up. A mass of water rushed in with the violence of a downpour. Arms, beasts, tents, men, everything was carried away in a moment. The king escaped by miracle. When the soldiers regained enough presence of mind to try to take advantage of the flood to quench their thirst, the water had already disappeared, soaked up by

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<sup>1</sup> To dawdle: to be slow or lag behind.

the stones. Thus, horror piled upon horror. When, two days later a violent wind rose, stirring the dunes and covering the path with a layer of sand so thick that the natives themselves were unable to find their way, the bravest lost courage and the entire army felt abandoned.

Then Alexander gathered his last able-bodied horsemen — there were only a handful — and told them that they must go in search of the ocean, that it was the only means of finding a point of reference which would help them find their way. In a state of utter exhaustion, they left for the south, through dunes in which the horses sank up to the knees. After several miles the beasts lay down forever. The horsemen declared that they could go no further. Alexander selected five men and continued on foot. They wandered the whole night. Since the storm of the previous day, the sky had been overcast with a sort of mist, which obscured the moon and stars. At dawn, they at last saw the silvery line of the sea. They crawled to it, and dug holes in the sand with their sword hilts hoping to find some fresh water — which finally gushed forth to quench their thirst. As soon as Alexander regained some strength, he returned to the rest of his horsemen to lead them to the beach. Once there, the native guides who had accompanied them, found their way.

But for six more days, the Macedonian army had to clear a way through the dunes. On the seventh day, the track reoriented inland. One could distinguish traces of vegetation. The outline of a valley showed. The slopes became covered with gardens and orchards. The soldiers finally reached Poura, the capital of Gedrosia.

At the cost of inexpressible suffering, the army had finally reached the aim of its journey but in what a pitiful condition. The march through the desert had lasted sixty days. The soldiers, who had left India so proud of their victories and overloaded with booty, now possessed nothing at all. They were gaunt and emaciated, dressed in rags, almost without weapons.

It was under the appearance of an army of spectres that the conquerors of the world entered Poura.



## Uprising at Opis

Alexander left Susa in the spring 324. With his light troops he boarded the fleet of Nearchus and went down towards the sea, with the intention of exploring the Persian Gulf. In the meantime, Hephestion was to lead the main body of the troops to Opis, where Alexander planned to meet him at the beginning of the summer.

Opis owed its importance to its geographical situation, which is why Alexander had chosen it to be the centre of his military administration. He had built a gigantic camp which served as a depot, arsenal and war machine storage. Here the young recruits coming from Greece were enrolled; and from here they set off to join their garrison located on the borders of the Empire.

When Alexander reached there in July 324, he found the army in turmoil. The officers were unhappy, the soldiers exasperated. Their anger, for a long time repressed, burst out suddenly and rapidly into a general uprising.

Alexander had barely arrived at Opis before he had measured the gravity of the situation. A storm was coming. To bow down and let it pass was impossible.

Alexander convened all the soldiers in a general assembly. When they had gathered, he mounted a platform that stood in front of the troops and spoke thus:

— Macedonian officers and soldiers! I have good news for you! A large number of you are exhausted by long years of service, by wounds and ordeals. Some aspire to exchange arms, which they have carried so gloriously, against a well-deserved rest. I do not want to let them settle in the newly founded cities, as I have done for so many others. I know with what joy they will see their motherland again. I have then decided to send home all men who have become unfit for active service. Those who prefer to stay with me can let it be known. The fact that Asia is now subjected and pacified means that a large

number of soldiers can be dismissed. Ten thousand men may then return home.

At that moment, a wave of protestations cut off his speech. The shouts burst forth from every side:

— Alexander is trying to get rid of veterans!

— That is why he has recruited thirty thousand Epigones and introduced Asiatic horsemen to the hipparchy....

— This decision is a shame! It insults our honour....

Remonstrations<sup>1</sup> and imprecations<sup>2</sup> became more and more vehement. A soldier exclaimed:

— After having poured out the last drops of our blood, you fire us with contempt! You expel us old, exhausted; you send us back to our parents in very different conditions than those in which you took us.

The veterans, who had moved up to the platform, started to draw their swords. Feeling his life in danger Alexander climbed down the steps and advanced unarmed toward the unleashed crowd. His glance was terrifying. With a vigorous sweep he grabbed the nearest ringleaders and threw them to his guards. Then he pointed at the others and gave the order to arrest them. Thirteen were apprehended after a quick man-to-man fight.

— To death! yelled Alexander.

A dreadful silence followed these words. The veterans did not expect such a reaction from him. But Alexander was racked by a fury which sometimes swept over him with the violence of a hurricane.

The king had already climbed back onto the platform, surrounded by his guards, a few generals and a handful of hypaspists<sup>3</sup> who ran to his aid. Beside himself, he looked at the army with daggers in his eyes and cried:

— It is not to prevent you from leaving that I am addressing

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1 Remonstrations: to argue in protest or objection; to remonstrate with the government.

2 Imprecation: curse, or blasphemy.

3 Hypaspist: a macedonian shield bearer.

you for the last time! You can go wherever you like, I do not care! But I want to remind you what you have become thanks to me! You complain of having been exploited, pressurized? Well! Listen to me:

“My father Philip made you accomplish great things. Formerly you were miserable and possessed only your flocks. You wandered through the mountains without a roof, without homes, exposed to the attacks of the Thracians and the Hylirians. My father settled you in villages and cities. He replaced your animal pelts with warriors’ uniforms. He made you the masters of the neighbouring Barbarians. He opened to your industry the silver mines and allowed your ships to plough the seas. He put at your feet Thessalia, Thebes, Athens and the Peloponnese. He claimed and obtained supreme hegemony<sup>1</sup> over all Hellenes to march against the Persians. All that Philip did. Great things indeed! Nothing, when compared to what has been accomplished since then. My father left me only a little silver and gold. I found only sixty talents in the royal treasury and five hundred talents of debts. I was obliged to borrow eight hundred talents to pay for the preparations for war. Although the Persians held the hegemony of the seas I opened the Hellespont for you. I vanquished the Great King’s satraps at Granicus. I subjugated the rich satrapies of Asia Minor and let you enjoy the fruits of victory. I distributed to you the riches of Egypt and Cyrene; I gave you Syria, Babylon and Bactria; I gave you Persia’s treasures, the precious objects of India! My satraps, my governors, my generals, I chose them from among you. What advantages did I get from all these battles besides the purple cloak and the diadem? I kept nothing for myself and no one could point out my treasures unless to show what belongs to you all. Why should I hoard wealth, since I eat and sleep like you? More than one of you leads a life more pleasant than mine, for after having fought the whole day, I

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<sup>1</sup> Hegemony: ascendancy or domination of one power or state within a league, confederation, etc., or of one social class over others.

still have to stay awake at night so that you may sleep peacefully. Those who bear wounds, show them! And I will show mine. There is no part of my body which has not been wounded and no type of weapon from which I do not bear the scar. I have received blows from swords and knives, from stones and clubs, from arrows, from javelins and catapults, while I fought to shower you with glory and wealth, and led you from victory to victory, through mountains and deserts, forests and rivers, continents and seas! I have contracted the same marriage as you and I have promised that your children will be the parents of mine. I have settled your debts without asking how you had incurred<sup>1</sup> such heavy ones, with such high pay and such enormous booty. Most of you have received golden crowns as reward for bravery and, by admiration for them, I have immortalized their names. As for those who have perished during the battles, their death was glorious and their sepulchre<sup>2</sup> honourable. Their bronze statues stand in the fatherland's temples to commemorate their memory. Their parents are venerated and exempted from income tax. And last, as long as I commanded you, none of you died turning his back to the enemy. Now I had the intention to send back home those among you who are weary of fighting, that they may be the pride of their fathers and the admiration of their children. But you all want to leave? Never mind. Leave! And when you arrive home, say that your king Alexander, who defeated the Uxians, the Archosians and the Dragians; who rallied the Parthians, the Chorasmians and the Hyrcanians who live in the areas bordering the Caspian sea; who climbed the Caucasus; who crossed the Oxus, the Liaxarte and the Indus — that only Dionysus had reached before him; who crossed the Hydaspes and the Acesines, and who crossed the Gedrosia desert which no one had crossed before him at the head of an army, and whose fleet has opened the shipping

1 To incur: to make oneself subject to (something undesirable); bring upon oneself.

2 Sepulchre: a burial vault, tomb, or grave.

route which leads from the Indus to Persia, say that this king, you abandoned him and left him alone under the protection of Barbarians. These things, when you tell them, will no doubt make you glorious in human eyes and make the Gods love you! Go!

Having pronounced this terrible word "Go!" Alexander went back to the city. The king's speech had rooted his audience to the spot. Appalled, the Macedonians did not know what to do. Should they leave or stay? To whom should they ask advice?

Two days passed, Alexander had still not reappeared. On the third day, the tension had reached an absolutely unbearable level. The king called the Persians. He informed them of his decision; he bestowed some of them with the honorific title of "King's parent". Then he distributed the Asian troops in squadrons and phalanxes. He created a Persian escort, an infantry phalanx of loyal Persians, a hypaspist Persian cohort with silver shields, hipparchy of loyal Persians from the cavalry, and a royal escort of Persian riders. He removed the Macedonian sentries from the castle entrances and replaced them with Persian sentries. He assigned the Persian ephebes to his personal service. Then he sent the Macedonians the order to leave the camp and to go wherever they wished.

At last on the third day he came out, and when he saw them reduced to such a forlorn<sup>1</sup> and pitiful state, he himself wept for a while. He reproached them gently for their behaviour and finally spoke to them kindly: afterwards he dismissed those who were no longer fit for service and gave them generous gratuities.<sup>2</sup> Besides this he sent instructions to Antipater that at all public contests and in the theatres these men should occupy the best seats and wear garlands on their heads. He also gave orders that the orphaned children of those who had died in his service should continue to receive their fathers' pay.

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<sup>1</sup> Forlorn: miserable and sad.

<sup>2</sup> Gratuity: a gift or reward, usually of money, for services rendered.



Alexander

## The Soul of a Conqueror

*(A portrait of Alexander by Will Durant)*

The intellectual career of Aristotle, after he left his royal pupil, paralleled the military career of Alexander; both lives were expressions of conquest and synthesis. Perhaps it was the philosopher who instilled into the mind of the youth that ardor for unity which gave some grandeur to Alexander's victories; more probably that resolve descended to him from his father's ambitions, and was fused into a passion by his maternal blood. If we would understand Alexander we must always remember that he bore in his veins the drunken vigor of Philip and the barbaric intensity of Olympias. Furthermore, Olympias claimed descent from Achilles. Therefore the Iliad had a special fascination for Alexander; when he crossed the Hellespont he was, in his interpretation, retracing the steps of Achilles; when he conquered Hither Asia he was completing the work that his ancestor had begun at Troy. Through all his campaigns he carried with him a copy of the Iliad annotated by Aristotle; often he placed it under his pillow at night beside his dagger, as if to symbolize the instrument and the goal.

Leonidas, an austere Molossian, trained the boy's body, Ly-simachus taught him letters, Aristotle tried to form his mind. Philip was anxious that Alexander should study philosophy, "so that," he said, "you may not do a great many things of the sort that I am sorry to have done." To some extent Aristotle made a Hellene of him; through all his life Alexander admired Greek literature, and envied Greek civilization. To two Greeks sitting with him at the wild banquet at which he slew Cleitus he said, "Do you not feel like demigods among savages when

you are sitting in company with these Macedonians?"

Physically, Alexander was an ideal youth. He was good in every sport: a swift runner, a dashing horseman, a brilliant fencer, a practiced bowman, a fearless hunter. His friends wished him to enter the foot races at Olympia; he answered that he would be willing, if his opponents were kings. When all others had failed to tame the giant horse Bucephalus, Alexander succeeded; seeing which, says Plutarch, Philip acclaimed him with prophetic words: "My son, Macedonia is too small for you; seek out a larger empire worthier of you." Even on the march his wild energy found vent in shooting arrows at passing objects, or in alighting from, and remounting, his chariot at full speed. When a campaign lagged he would go hunting and, unaided and on foot, face any animal in combat; once, after an encounter with a lion, he was pleased to hear it said that he had fought as though it had been a duel to decide which of the two should be king. He liked hard work and dangerous enterprises, and could not bear to rest. He laughed at some of his generals, who had so many servants that they themselves could find nothing to do. "I wonder," he told them, "that you with your experience do not know that those who work sleep more soundly than those for whom other people work. Have you yet to learn that the greatest need after our victories is to avoid the vices and the weaknesses of those whom we have conquered?" He grudged the time given to sleep, and said that "sleep and the act of generation chiefly made him sensible that he was mortal." He was abstemious in eating, and, until his last years, in drinking, though he loved to linger with his friends over a goblet of wine. He despised rich foods, and refused the famous chefs who were offered him, saying that a night march gave him a good appetite for breakfast, and a light breakfast gave him an appetite for dinner. Perhaps in consequence of these habits his complexion was remarkably clear, and his body and breath, says Plutarch, "were so fragrant as to perfume the clothes that he wore." Discounting the flattery of those who painted or



carved or engraved his likeness, we know from his contemporaries that he was handsome beyond all precedents for a king, with expressive features, soft blue eyes, and luxuriant auburn hair. He helped to introduce into Europe the custom of shaving the beard, on the ground that whiskers offered too ready a handle for an enemy to grasp. In this little item, perhaps, lay his greatest influence upon history.

Mentally he was an ardent student, who was too soon consumed with responsibilities to reach maturity of mind. Like so many men of action, he mourned that he could not be also a thinker. "He had," says Plutarch, "a violent thirst and passion for learning, which increased as time went on. He was a lover of all kinds of reading and knowledge," and it was his delight, after a day of marching or fighting, to sit up half the night conversing with scholars and scientists. "For my part," he wrote to Aristotle, "I had rather surpass others in the knowledge of what is excellent, than in the extent of my power and dominion." Possibly at Aristotle's suggestion he sent a commission to explore the sources of the Nile, and he gave funds generously for a variety of scientific inquiries. Whether a longer life would have brought him to Caesar's clear intelligence, or the subtle understanding of Napoleon, is to be doubted. Royalty found him at twenty, after which warfare and administration absorbed him; in consequence he remained uneducated to the end. He could talk brilliantly, but fell into a hundred errors when he wandered from politics and war. With all his campaigns he seems never to have gained such acquaintance with geography as the science of his time could have given him. He rose at times above the narrowness of dogma, but remained to the last a slave to superstition. He put great confidence in the soothsayers and astrologers that crowded his court; before the battle of Arbela he spent the night performing magic ceremonies with the magician Aristander, and offered sacrifices to the god Fear; he who faced all men and beasts with a very ecstasy of courage was "easily alarmed by portents and prodigies," even to changing important plans. He could lead many

thousands of men, could conquer and rule millions, but he could not control his own temper. He never learned to recognize his own faults or limitations, but allowed his judgment to be soaked and drowned in praise. He lived in a frenzy of excitement and glory, and so loved war that his mind never knew an hour of peace.

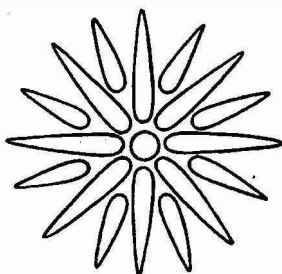
His moral character hovered between similar contradictions. He was at bottom sentimental and emotional, and had, we are told, "melting eyes"; he was moved sometimes beside himself by poetry and music; he played the harp with great feeling in his early youth. Teased about this by Philip, he abandoned the instrument, and thereafter, as if to overcome himself, he refused to listen to any but martial airs. Sexually he was almost virtuous, not so much on principle as by preoccupation. His incessant activity, his long marches and frequent battles, his complex plans and administrative burdens, used up his resources, and left him little appetite for love. He took many wives, but as a sacrifice to statesmanship; he was gallant to ladies, but preferred the company of his generals. When his aides brought a beautiful woman to his tent late at night he asked her, "Why at this time?" "I had to wait," she replied, "to get my husband to bed." Alexander dismissed her, and rebuked his servants, saying that because of them he had narrowly escaped becoming an adulterer. He had many of the qualities of a homosexual, and loved Hephaestion to madness; but when Theodorus of Taras offered to sell him two boys of great beauty he sent the Tarentine packing, and begged his friends to tell him what baseness of soul he had shown that anyone should make such a proposal to him. He gave to friendship the tenderness and solicitude that most men give to love. No statesman known to us, much less any general, ever surpassed him in simple trustfulness and warmheartedness, in open sincerity of affection and purpose, or in generosity even to acquaintances and enemies. Plutarch remarks "upon what slight occasions he would write letters to serve friends." He endeared himself to his soldiers by his kindness; he risked

their lives, but not heedlessly; and he seemed to feel all their wounds. As Caesar forgave Brutus and Cicero, and Napoleon Fouché and Talleyrand, so Alexander forgave Harpalus, the treasurer who had absconded with his funds and had returned to beg forgiveness; the young conqueror reappointed him treasurer to all men's astonishment, and apparently with good results. At Tarsus, in 333, Alexander being ill, his physician Philip offered him a purgative drink. At that moment a letter was brought to the King from Parmenio, warning him that Philip had been bribed by Darius to poison him. Alexander handed the letter to Philip, and as the latter read it, Alexander drank the draught—with no ill effect. His reputation for generosity helped him in his wars; many of the enemy allowed themselves to be taken prisoner, and cities, not fearing to be sacked, opened their gates at his coming. — Nevertheless, the Molossian tigress was in him, and it was his bitter fate to be ruined by his occasional paroxysms of cruelty. Having taken Gaza by siege and assault, and infuriated by its long resistance, Alexander caused the feet of Batis, its heroic commandant, to be bored, and brazen rings passed through them; then, intoxicated with memories of Achilles, he dragged the now dead Persian, tied by cords to the royal chariot, at full speed around the city. His increasing resort to drink as a means of quieting his nerves led him more and more frequently, in his last years, to outbreaks of blind ferocity, followed by brooding fits of violent remorse.

One quality in him dominated all the rest — ambition. As a youth he had fretted over Philip's victories: "Father," he complained to his friends, "will get everything done before we are ready, and will leave me and you no chance of doing anything great and important." In his passion for achievement he assumed every task, and faced every risk. At Chaeronea he was the first man to charge the Theban Sacred Band; at the Granicus he indulged to the full what he called his "eagerness for encountering danger." This, too, became an uncontrollable passion; the sound and sight of battle intoxicated him; he forgot

then his duties as a general, and plunged ahead into the thickest of the fight; time and again his soldiers, fearful of losing him, had to plead with him to go to the rear. He was not a great general; he was a brave soldier whose obstinate perseverance marched on, with boyish heedlessness of impossibilities, to unprecedented victories. He supplied the inspiration; probably his generals, who were able men, contributed organisation, training, tactics, and strategy. He led his troops by the brilliance of his imagination, the fire of his unstudied oratory, the readiness and sincerity with which he shared their hardships and griefs. Without question he was a good administrator: he ruled with kindness and firmness the wide domain which his arms had won; he was loyal to the agreements which he signed with commanders and cities; and he tolerated no oppression of his subjects by his appointees. Amid all the excitement and chaos of his campaigns he kept clearly at the center of his thoughts the great purpose that even his death would not defeat: the unification of all the eastern Mediterranean world into one cultural whole, dominated and elevated by the expanding civilization of Greece.

Taken from:  
*The Life of Greece* by Will Durant  
(Chapt. XXII, *Alexander*, pp. 538-542)  
in Part II of *The Story of Civilization*  
Simon and Schuster, New York





## Notes

### Plutarch

Plutarch was one of the last classical Greek historians. He was born around AD 46 at Chaeronea in Boetia, and died sometime after AD 120. He was a student in the School of Athens, became a philosopher, and wrote a large number of essays and dialogues on philosophical, scientific and literary subjects (the *Moralia*). We know that he traveled widely in Egypt and went to Rome. Plutarch wrote his historical works relatively late in life, and his *Parallel Lives* of eminent Greeks and Romans is probably his best known and most influential work. As he states, his intention in the *Lives* was to write biography, not history as such, and this is reflected in the choice of his sources. He drew upon a very wide range of authorities, of quite unequal value. He felt his task was more to create an inspiring portrait than to evaluate facts. At any rate, in the case of Alexander the Great, his achievements, his influence on the world, and his personal character were certainly awe-inspiring. That much was clearly perceived by Plutarch, and he did manage to communicate it in the chapter on Alexander.

## Ancient Greece and Alexander: A brief outline

A civilisation appears to have emerged on mainland Greece about 1600 B.C. This came to be known as the Mycenaean civilisation. Feudal<sup>1</sup> warrior leaders ruled their districts from hilltop fortresses, the principal fort being Mycenae itself. Minoan Crete exercised a strong influence in these early times; but, as Mycenaean Greece gradually acquired knowledge of the sea, power shifted in its favor. Feared as warriors, large mercenary detachments fought for Crete and Egypt, among other states.

The height of Mycenaean expansion and power was reached between 1500 and 1300 B.C. Eventually Crete, the Cyclades, Rhodes, and Cyprus were annexed, and vigorous trade was established throughout the Mediterranean, even with the tribes of north and west Europe. Weakened by internal strife and wars in Asia Minor, Mycenae was overrun by invaders from central Asia toward the end of the 12th century B.C.

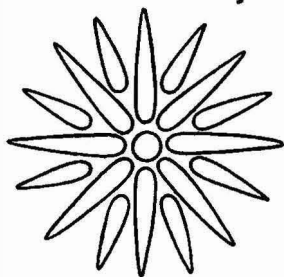
After the Mycenaean period, Greece was invaded by Indo-European tribes from the north. The distribution of peoples in Greece before the city states made for little unity, but they all took part in the Olympic Games.<sup>2</sup> Greek colonies were established along much of the perimeter of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and Athens became the leading state after the Persian advance was halted in the 5th century B.C.

Fifth-century Greece was dominated by the Athenians. The Acropolis was the ancient hilltop citadel of Athens, and its ruins still dominates the city today. Its buildings were constructed in the second half of the 5th century B.C. The greatest was the Parthenon, the temple dedicated to the goddess Athena. Sparta, one of the city-states, had military ambitions and a well-trained professional army. Athens and Sparta fought together against Persian attacks, but afterwards became rivals. In the long Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) between Athens and Sparta, Athens was defeated by Sparta, and lost its empire.

<sup>1</sup> Feudal: characteristic of or relating to a fief.

<sup>2</sup> Olympic Games: the greatest Panhellenic festival, held every fourth year in honour of Zeus at ancient Olympia. From 472 B.C., it consisted of five days of games, sacrifices, and festivities.

The city-states of Greece continued to fight between themselves and particularly against Sparta whose rule was very harsh. All the city states were much weakened by these constant battles and, despite a last effort to unite against the invader from Macedonia, Philip, they lost and thus Greece became at last unified under Macedonian rule, just before the birth of Alexander the Great in 356 B.C.



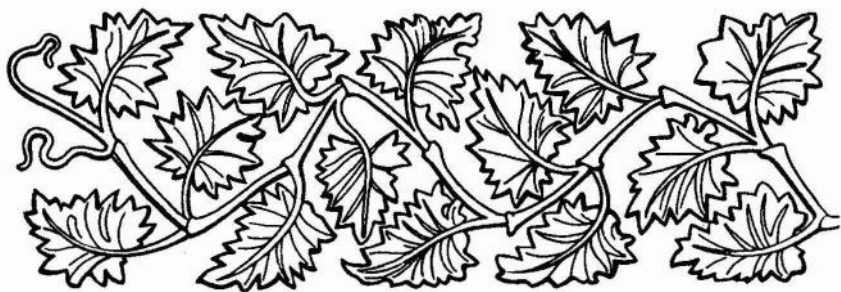
## **State of the civilised world in Alexander's time (around 330 B.C.)**

For the Greeks of that time, civilisation was concentrated in the Mediterranean world. Besides Greece and its city states, there was the immense Persian Empire which embraced nearly all of the Middle East: Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, the Phoenician cities and finally Egypt were successively conquered by the Persians.

In the days of Alexander and Darius, no one would have thought that two centuries later Rome would be able to unify the Ancient World. It was then a small city without a good harbour and not much given to commerce. Nevertheless, two centuries after Alexander the Romans, having dominated all of Italy, had already conquered Greece and were on their way to take over and unify the Mediterranean world.

In India in 350 B.C. Buddhism was flourishing. At the time of

Alexander's death, the Mauryan dynasty was established (322 B.C.) and the first King of that dynasty, Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 B.C.), came closer to uniting India than had any earlier ruler. Only the extreme South escaped his domination.



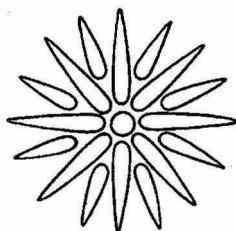
## What happened after Alexander

Alexander's sudden death meant that he had no time to consolidate his empire or to arrange for an orderly succession. His Macedonian generals fought among themselves. Political disunity, however, did not interfere with Alexander's vision of a commonwealth of peoples united by Greek culture. All the successor states were dominated by Greeks and by natives who imitated the Greek way of life. And although the peasants and much of the urban population of the Middle East held fast to their native cultures and native languages, scholars, administrators, and businessmen all used Greek and were guided, to some degree, by Greek ideas and customs. This era in which the Middle East was permeated by Greek influence is known as the Hellenistic period (The Greeks called themselves Hellenes; Hellenistic means "Greek-like"). It ended politically in 30 B.C., when Rome annexed Egypt, the last nominally independent Hellenistic state. But the cultural unity of the Middle East lasted far longer; it was broken only when the Moslems conquered Syria and Egypt in the seventh century A.D.



## Suggestions for further reading

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## A few dates

- 356 B.C. — Birth of Alexander
- 336 B.C. — Alexander (aged 20) becomes king of Macedon following  
the assassination of his father Philip
- 334 B.C. — Alexander crosses the Hellespont into Asia
- 332 B.C. — Invasion of Egypt. Foundation of Alexandria
- 331-328 — Campaigns in Asia
- 327 B.C. — Invasion of India
- 324 B.C. — Return to Persia
- 323 B.C. — Death of Alexander



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**I**llumination, heroism and harmony are three major powers that can uplift life to higher and higher levels. It may be useful to explore and illustrate the meanings of these three terms by giving examples of those qualities through appropriate stories. This monograph offers a few glimpses of the life of Alexander the Great. In Alexander we find an extraordinary personality whose life was so brief that his great qualities did not have the time to mature the way they should have. But a study of Alexander the Great is instructive in several ways. Firstly, it shows us what the life-force in man can achieve under circumstances and conditions as favourable as Alexander's, and yet what failures attend unbridled adventure. Secondly, it shows us that the human personality has far richer potentials than is normally suspected. Thirdly, it gives us a chance to understand ourselves better, for though we have a hundred and more limitations, we may discover, deep within ourselves, the same life-force as we find in Alexander. Alexander's character is also marked by great heroism. No deed, no ambition seemed too high for him. Equally, if he had had more time—he died at 33!—, he might have been able to develop a high level of illumination, for in many tricky situations he showed a great capacity for intuition. One can even perceive a potentiality for harmony in the fact that he was able to show many fine qualities as general, king and administrator of a vast empire. He disappeared too fast from the world's scene, like a comet in the sky, leaving a trail of glory unparalleled to this day. He truly was, as Sri Aurobindo said, a poet on a throne.

