

ALEXANDER THE GREAT



Alexander III of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great, single-handedly changed the nature of the ancient world in little more than a decade. Alexander was educated by the philosopher Aristotle. Philip the father of Alexander was assassinated in 336 BC and Alexander inherited a powerful yet volatile kingdom. He quickly dealt with his enemies at home and reasserted Macedonian power within Greece. He then set out to conquer the massive Persian Empire. Against overwhelming odds, he led his army to victories across the Persian territories of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt without suffering a single defeat. His greatest victory was at the Battle of Gaugamela, in what is now northern Iraq, in 331 BC. The young king of Macedonia, leader of the Greeks, overlord of Asia Minor and pharaoh of Egypt became 'The Great King' of Persia at the age of 25. Over the next eight years, in his capacity as a king, commander, politician, scholar and explorer, Alexander led his army a further 11,000 miles, founding over 70 cities and creating an empire that stretched across three continents and covered around two million square miles. The entire area from Greece in the west, north to the Danube, south into Egypt and as far to the east as the Indian Punjab, was linked together in a vast international network of trade and commerce. This was united by a common Greek language and culture, while the king himself adopted foreign customs in order to rule his millions of ethnically diverse subjects. Alexander was acknowledged as a military genius who always led by example, although his belief in his own indestructibility meant he was often reckless with his own life and those of his soldiers. The fact that his army only refused to follow him once in 13 years of a reign during which there was constant fighting, indicates the loyalty he inspired. A Cavalry commander at the age of eighteen, the King at twenty, the Conqueror of the Persian Empire at twenty-six, the Explorer of the Indian frontier at thirty, Alexander the Great died of a fever in Babylon in June 323 BC.

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Where & when born

Alexander was born in Pella, the ancient capital of Macedonia in July 356 BC. His parents were Philip II of Macedon and his wife Olympias.

Brief history of the person

Alexander spent his childhood watching his father transforming Macedonia into a great military power, winning victory after victory on the battlefields throughout the Balkans. At age 12 he showed his equestrian skill to his father and all who were watching when he tamed Bucephalus, an unruly stallion horse, unable to be ridden and devouring the flesh of all who had tried.

In 340 BC, Alexander at his 16 years old left to rule Macedonia in his father's absence as regent, which shows that even at such young age Alexander was recognized as quite capable. At that time the Thracian tribe of Maedi bordering north-eastern Macedonia rebelled and posed a danger to the country. Alexander led an army against the rebels, and with swift action defeated the Maedi, captured their stronghold, and renamed it after himself to Alexandropolis. Two years later in 338 BC, Philip gave his son a commanding post among the senior generals as the Macedonian army invaded Greece. At the Battle of Chaeronea the Greeks were defeated and Alexander displayed his bravery by destroying the elite Greek force, the Theban Secret Band.

The royal family split apart when Philip married Cleopatra, a Macedonian girl of high nobility and subsequently Phillip was assassinated during the wedding ceremony. Phillip's dream of conquering the Persian Empire now laid on his successor, his son king Alexander III.

Once he ascended on the Macedonian throne, Alexander quickly disposed of all of his domestic enemies by ordering their execution and he restored Macedonian rule in northern & southern Greece. His speed surprised the Greeks and by the end of the summer 336 BC they had no other choice but to acknowledge his authority. Later Greece also remained under Macedonian rule.

With the conquered territories firmly in Macedonian control, Alexander completed the final preparations for the invasion of Asia, the 22 year-old king appointed Philip's experienced General Antipater as Regent in his absence to preside over the affairs of Macedonia and Greece and set out for the Hellespont (modern Dardanelles) in the spring of 334 BC. From that moment onwards, Alexander won many battles from Persia



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to West of India and expanded his empire unlike anything before his time in the history within a decade.

There were occasions to prove that he was a legendary king of that time in the history with a mystical aspect coupled to it. In the city of Gordium which was a home of the famous so-called Gordian Knot the legend that said that the man who could untie the ancient knot was destined to rule the entire world. To that date nobody had succeeded in unraveling the knot. But the young Macedonian king simply slashed it with his sword and unraveling its ends. Similarly when Alexander conquered the city of Tyre, he entered the temple of Melcart, where he had his sacrifice. On another occasion when he conquered Egypt, the earlier Egyptian pharaohs were believed to be sons of Amon-Ra and Alexander as new ruler of Egypt wanted the god to acknowledge him as his son. So he decided to make the dangerous trip across the desert to visit the Oracle at the temple of the god. According to the legend, on the way he was blessed with abundant rain, and guided across the desert by ravens. At the temple, he was welcomed by the priests and spoke to the oracle. The priest told him that he was a son of Zeus Ammon, destined to rule the world, and this must have confirmed in him his belief of divine origin.

But Alexander the Great died of a fever in Babylon at the age of 32 and that Hellenistic era continued till the rise of Romans 31 BC.

In the Quest of conquering the world

The battle at ancient city of Troy, witnessed that the Persians with King Darius III along with rebellion Greeks. In the fierce battle the Macedonians put the Persians flight from the battle and the Greeks lost it to Macedonians. The Macedonian army defeated the enemy along the Greek coastal cities and conquered the coast of Asia Minor.

In the autumn of 333 BC, the Macedonian army's encountered the Persian forces under the command of King Darius III himself again at a mountain pass at Issus in northwestern Syria Darius's army greatly outnumbered the Macedonians, but the Battle of Issus ended in a big victory for Alexander.

In early 332 BC, Alexander sent general Parmenio to occupy the Syrian cities and himself marched down the Phoenician coast where he received the surrender of all major cities except the island city of Tyre. In an enormous effort, Alexander continued the siege for seven months, surrounding the island with ships and blasting the city walls with catapults. Finally the Macedonians conquered the city and Alexander had his sacrifice at the temple of Melcart.

He continued marching south toward Egypt but resisted by Gaza. The Macedonians put the city under a siege which lasted for two months, after which the scenario of Tyre was repeated. With the fall of Gaza, the whole Eastern Mediterranean coast was then secured and firmly in the hands of the Macedonians. Alexander entered Egypt in the beginning of 331 BC. The Persian satrap surrendered and the Macedonians were welcomed by the Egyptians as liberators for they had despised living under Persian rule for almost two centuries. There Alexander ordered that a city be designed and founded in his name at the mouth of river Nile. He never lived to see it built, but Alexandria became a major economic and cultural center in the



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Mediterranean world not only during the Macedonian rule in Egypt but centuries after.

Alexander conquered the lands between rivers Tigris and Euphrates and found the Persian army at the plains of Gaugamela, near modern Irbil in Iraq with King Darius again. But Alexander's Cavalry rode straight after Darius and forced again his flight like he did at Issus. Darius fled to Ecbatana in Media, and Alexander occupied Babylon, the imperial capital Susa, and the Persian capital Persepolis, and was henceforth proclaimed king of Asia. Alexander continued his pursuit of Darius for hundreds of miles from Persepolis. When he finally caught up to him, he found the Persian king dead in his coach. Alexander gave Darius a royal funeral and set out for Bactria after his murderer.

In the spring of 327 BC, Alexander and his army marched into India invading Punjab. The greatest of Alexander's battles in India was at the river Hydaspes, against king Porus, one of the most powerful Indian rulers. In the summer of 326 BC, Alexander's army crossed the heavily defended river during a violent thunderstorm to meet Porus forces. The Indians were defeated in a fierce battle, even though they fought with elephants, which the Macedonians had never seen before. Porus was captured and praised the bravery of king Porus and allowed him to continue to govern his territory.

Fearing the prospect of facing other large armies at east of Porus kingdom, (the Nanda Empire of Magadha near the Ganges River and further east the Gangaridai Empire of modern day Bangladesh) and exhausted by 13 years of campaigning, Alexander's army mutinied at the Hyphasis River (Beas), refusing to march farther east. This river thus marked the eastern most extent of Alexander's conquests.

After Alexander traveled to Ecbatana to retrieve the bulk of the Persian treasure, his closest friend Hephaestion, died of illness or poisoning. Devastated Alexander back in Babylon, planned a series of new campaigns, beginning with an invasion of Arabia, but he would not have a chance to realize them, as he died shortly thereafter.

Leadership qualities, Principles & Practices

A visionary, team builder, mentor, he shows us some timeless leadership lessons but also some glaring failures.

1. Have a compelling vision

Alexander's actions demonstrate what can be accomplished when a person is totally focused—when he or she has clarity coupled with a 'magnificent obsession'. Through dramatic gestures and great rhetorical skills, Alexander spoke to the collective imagination of his people and won the commitment of his followers.

2. Be unsurpassed in execution

Alexander not only had a compelling vision, he also knew how to make that vision become reality. By maintaining an excellent information system, he was able to interpret his opponent's motives and was a master at coordinating all parts of his military machine. No other military leader before him ever used speed and surprise with such dexterity. He knew the true value of the statement "One is either quick or one is



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dead!"

3. Create a well-rounded executive team

Alexander also knew how to build a committed team around him and operated in a way that allowed his commanders to build on each other's strengths.

4. Walk the talk

Alexander set the example of excellence with his leadership style; he led his troops quite literally from the front. When his troops went hungry or thirsty, he went hungry and thirsty; when their horses died beneath them and they had to walk, he did the same. This accessibility only changed when he succumbed to the luxury of Persian court life.

5. Encourage innovation

Alexander realised the competitive advantage of strategic innovation. Because of his deft deployment of troops, his support for and reliance on the creativity of his corps of engineers, and his own logistical acumen, his war machine was the most advanced of its time.

6. Foster group identification

Alexander created a very astute propaganda machine to keep his people engaged. His oratory skills, based on the simple language of his soldiers, had a hypnotic influence on all who heard him. He made extensive use of powerful cultural symbols which elicited strong emotions. These 'meaning-management' actions, combined with his talent for leading by example, fostered strong group identification among his troops, and motivated his men to make exceptional efforts.

7. Encourage and support followers

Alexander knew how to encourage his people for their excellence in battle in ways that brought out greater excellence. He routinely singled people out for special attention and recalled acts of bravery performed by former and fallen heroes, making it clear that individual contributions would be recognised. He also had the ability to be a 'container' of the emotions of his people through empathetic listening.

To win the support of the Persian aristocracy Alexander appointed many Persians as provincial governors in his new empire. He adopted the Persian dress for ceremonies, gave orders for Persians to be enlisted in the army, and encouraged the Macedonians to marry Persian women.

8. Invest in talent management

Extremely visionary for his time, Alexander spent an extraordinary amount of resources on training and development. He not only trained his present troops but also looked to the future by developing the next generation.

9. Consolidate gains

Paradoxically, three of Alexander's most valuable lessons were taught not through his strengths but through his weaknesses. The first of these is the need to consolidate gains. Alexander failed to put the right control systems in place to integrate his empire and thus never really savoured the fruit of his accomplishments. Conquest may be richly rewarding, but a leader who advances without ensuring the stability of his or her gains stands to lose everything.

10. Succession planning

Another lesson Alexander taught by omission is the need for a viable succession plan. He was so focused on



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his own role as king and aspiring deity that he could not bring himself to think of the future when he was gone. As a result, political vultures tore his vast empire apart after his death.

11. Create mechanisms of organizational governance

The final lesson that the case of Alexander illustrates (again by omission) is the paramount importance of countervailing powers. Leaders have the responsibility to put proper mechanisms of organisational governance into place, using checks and balances to prevent faulty decision-making and the abuse of power.

Critical Conspiracies against the King.

In 330 BC a series of allegations were brought up against some of Alexander's officers concerning a plot to murder him. Alexander tortured and executed the accused leader of the conspiracy, Parmenio's son Philotas, the commander of the cavalry. After Philotas was executed, Alexander ordered next the execution of Philotas' father, general Parmenio fearing of vengeance. Alexander next killed Cleitus, another Macedonian noble, in a drunken brawl. Callisthenes was also later executed on a charge of conspiracy.

When Alexander died at Babylon of a fever, many theories surfaced as he was the victim of a poisoning conspiracy in the end. Antipater purportedly arranged for Alexander to be poisoned by his son Iollas, who was Alexander's wine-pourer. There was even a suggestion that Aristotle might have participated. Several natural causes (diseases) have been suggested, including malaria and typhoid fever.

Alexander began his reign as an enlightened ruler, encouraging participation by his 'companions'—loyal soldiers drawn from the noble families in Macedonia. But like many rulers before him, he became addicted to power. As time passed, Alexander's behaviour became increasingly domineering and grandiose. He tolerated nothing but applause from his audience, so his immediate circle kept their reservations to themselves. As a result he lost touch with reality, another factor leading to his failure to consolidate his empire.

Historiography

Apart from a few inscriptions and fragments, texts written by people who actually knew Alexander or who gathered information from men who served with Alexander were all lost. Contemporaries of Alexander who wrote accounts of his life were all lost, but later works based on these original sources had survived. The earliest of these is Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), followed by Quintus Curtius Rufus (mid-to-late 1st century AD), Arrian (1st to 2nd century AD), the biographer Plutarch (1st to 2nd century AD), and finally Justin, whose work dated as late as the 4th century. Of these, Arrian is generally considered the most reliable, given that he used Ptolemy and Aristobulus as his sources, closely followed by Diodorus.

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