**The Early Years**

Alexander was born in July 356 B.C., the sixth day of the Macedonian month Loïos, to King Philip II and his wife Myrtale (better known to us now by her adopted name, Olympias). Under Philip, Macedonia flourished and grew, while Olympias proved to be the most powerful of his wives. Before Philip's reign, other Greek nations looked down upon Macedonia as barbarian, with obsolete political institutions, coarse speech and manners, and little to offer in battle. Philip therefore began reforms and expansion that Alexander would bring to a peak for Macedonia.

Two marriages brought Philip no suitable male heir. His third wife would be the niece of King Arrybas of Epirus (and daughter of the deceased King Neoptolemus). Plutarch asserts that the two met and fell in love years before their union became politically convenient. In any case, Epirus's allegiance would be useful to Philip, and Arrybas gladly approved of their marriage. Just fifteen years later, Philip would drive Arrybas from the throne and replace him with a brother of Olympias.

Philip and Olympias were far from a happy couple. Philip went on to marry three more women, and he is said to have fathered several children by still other partners, while also enjoying the company of young boys–none of which was particularly unusual in his time. These exploits may have wounded Olympias's vanity, but they did not hold back her ambition. From the beginning she showed a forceful personality, though not even eighteen at the time of their marriage. Olympias was devoted to the orgiastic rites of Dionysus, and her eccentricity did not make her easier to get along with.

This disruptive family environment would have significant consequences for Alexander's development, though the extent of the troubles between mother and father is disputed. The mutual dislike of his parents was complicated by his father's absence–away on campaigns–during most of his earliest years.

Alexander's mother, therefore, was responsible for guiding his formative years. Her first priority was to instill in him a sense of destiny and the greatness to which he would ascend. She may also have tried to turn him against his father, especially criticizing Philip's moral shortcomings. This indoctrination likely contributed to the dislike that developed between father and son, while Alexander always held his mother in the deepest respect, despite knowledge of her less scrupulous actions. Moreover, the dynamics of these relationships likely contributed to the sexual reluctance or restraint apparent in Alexander's later years. On the other hand, however, Alexander did feel genuine admiration for his father, and in many ways he followed Philip's path as a military leader and king.

The details of Alexander's early life are difficult to confirm with direct evidence amid the many legends that surround his life. Most accounts do paint him as a precocious child, accustomed to association with great politicians, artists, and generals, from whom he quickly learned through imitation. Among other talents, such as archery and javelin, Alexander showed a particular aptitude for horsemanship.

One famous anecdote recalls the acquisition of Bucephalas, the prize horse of a certain breeder who came to sell the horse to Philip for a great sum. When the king's servants found the horse unmanageable, Philip sent the breeder away, only to be interrupted by his eight-year-old son, who complained that a great horse should not be lost simply because no one had the skill or courage to master him. Alexander then rose to the challenge and tamed the horse proudly in front of a speechless audience, leaving Philip likely filled with pride and perhaps a little resentment. The horse was bought for Alexander; Bucephalas went on to serve him in almost every significant battle until his death at the age of thirty, after his master's last major victory in India.

Another anecdote paints a more troubling picture of Alexander. Once, in offering a sacrifice, Alexander scooped up two whole handfuls of incense and tossed them into the altar-fire. His tutor, Leonidas, rebuked him, reportedly saying, "When you've conquered the spice-bearing regions, you can throw away all the incense you like. Till then, don't waste it." Years later, Alexander would capture Gaza, a major spice producer. Along with the usual gifts for his mother and sister, he included a consignment of eighteen tons of frankincense and myrrh for the old tutor Leonidas–the resale of which would have made him exorbitantly rich. This was delivered "in remembrance of the hope with which that teacher had inspired his boyhood," along with a warning to cease being stingy to the gods. On the one hand, Alexander's actions demonstrate considerable generosity, if in a mocking manner. However, this anecdote also reveals Alexander's capacity for holding grudges; he is known for never forgetting an injury. Though he waited with patience, he rarely failed in the end to carry out his vengeance.

**Aristotle**

When Alexander was thirteen, Philip, to this point not much involved in his son's upbringing, decided to choose a tutor for him. The result would become one of the most famous mentors-student relationships in history. Philip's reasons for choosing Aristotle were not purely academic. First, there was Aristotle's family connection: his father had served as court physician to an earlier Macedonian king. Moreover, Aristotle had previously served in the court of Hermeias in Atarneus, and an alliance there would be useful for Philip's plans to invade Persia.

The position suited Aristotle as well. Not only did it offer a high honor and the chance to pursue his research under the most powerful of the Greek states, but it also gave him the opportunity to influence the development of that state's future leader. As the ultimate payment, Philip also restored Aristotle's native city of Stagira, which he had himself conquered years before.

Alexander's education took place in a setting removed from the capital city of Pella, in the more isolated village of Mieza, within the so-called Precinct of the Nymphs. In this rural seclusion, Alexander was joined by several of his most notable peers, some of them future kings themselves. At Alexander's departure, Philip urged his son to work hard and to learn to avoid repeating his father's mistakes. In response, Alexander rebuked his father for having had children by other women. In this regard, Alexander seems to have been troubled not so much by any moral compunction, but rather concerned for future conflicts over succession to his father's throne. Alexander's ambition was therefore evident even at this stage, if not earlier.

Alexander's education was for the most part formal, not the kind of life training that we might envision in a mentor relationship. Rather, the curriculum consisted mainly of standard subjects such as poetry, rhetoric, geometry, astronomy, and eristics–the practice of arguing a point from either side. Alexander developed a particular interest in medicine–and not merely a theoretical interest, for he actually prescribed treatments for sick friends throughout his life. When Alexander set off on his Asiatic invasion, he brought along with him a large group of zoologists and botanists, who returned with collected materials and information that would form the basis for several groundbreaking scientific works. Another of Alexander's favorite subjects was Greek poetry. He held an especially strong reverence for Homer, and he even saw the mythical Achilles as a model to follow in his own life.

Though perhaps best known for his scientific treatises, Aristotle also published his Ethics and Politics, and his influence in these areas also reached Alexander. Aristotle asserted this influence particularly with regard to the so-called barbarians–a term that was used to characterize essentially all non-Greeks. Alexander himself was already passionately anti-Persian; and Aristotle provided him with the intellectual justifications for his fated and inherited mission. Aristotle believed that slavery was a natural institution, and that barbarians were by nature meant to be slaves. He therefore encouraged Alexander to be a leader to Greeks and a despot to barbarians, treating the former as friends and the latter as beasts.

Aristotle saw barbarians as living only through and for their senses, incapable of rising above hedonism. Alexander, in his desire to follow a heroic paradigm, naturally placed great value on honor, and with it the virtues of self-control and self-denial. Therefore, in his own life he ate sparingly, gave generously while keeping little for himself, and had a cautious attitude toward sex. In these respects, Aristotle's influence was likely essential, for he pushed Alexander along a path that diverged greatly from the more precarious model set by his father.

Alexander spent three years studying with the great philosopher. In the meantime, his father was mobilizing troops to pay a visit to noncompliant allies in Perinthus and Byzantium. In 340 B.C., Philip he summoned the sixteen-year-old Alexander to return and serve as Regent of Macedonia and Master of the Royal Seal in Philip's absence. Thus Alexander would retire from the Academy and begin the lessons of real-life responsibilities.

**Victories as Prince**

Upon Alexander's return, both Olympias and Philip began to express concern about the boy's lack of heterosexual interest. Reared by his mother, Alexander did indeed show effeminate qualities. His parents even went so far as to find a potential partner with whom they encouraged Alexander to have intercourse.

While his sexual masculinity may have been slow in developing, Alexander immediately showed his prowess on the battlefield. Philip had not been long departed when a rebellion arose among the Maedi, the fierce and powerful tribe that dwelled in Thrace. Alexander went himself to subdue the rebels, and he turned their city into a military outpost for Macedonia, which was renamed Alexandropolis–in imitation of Philippopolis, founded by the king two years before. Although Philip continued to treat Alexander as a protégé, it became evident before long that the latter was competing with–if not challenging–the former's authority.

Meanwhile, Philip's campaign was going poorly, and the position of Macedonia becoming more vulnerable. His worst fears were realized when Athens and Thebes, longtime rivals, formed a coalition against Macedonia. Philip handled the ensuing conflicts expertly. In the decisive battle at Chaeronea, Alexander took command of the left wing, facing the Thebans, while Philip maintained the traditional post of the king at the right of the army, facing the Athenians. Alexander's responsibility was great, for it was on the Thebans–better trained and with more to lose than the Athenians, for they technically had been Macedonian allies–that victory or defeat depended. Alexander also had to face the famed Sacred Band, which in 371 B.C. had led the victory over the previously invincible Spartan army.

Alexander's own victory was secured, ironically, because of the superior discipline of the Sacred Band. When they held their position and the other troops did not, Alexander was able to swoop into the gap and soon had the Theban army surrounded. The rest of the troops were handled effectively, and all that remained were the 300 Thebans of the Sacred Band who fought valiantly to their deaths. Only forty-six were taken alive, while the remaining 254 were buried on site, where they lie to this day in a famous common grave.

Philip recognized that his victory over Athens did not give him license to rule tyrannically, as the situation remained precarious. He therefore offered terms so generous that Athens accepted without argument or much time to reconsider. On the other hand, the powers of Thebes had to be dismantled systematically. Its leaders had already betrayed Macedonia once, so they could no longer be trusted. Moreover, as Thebes did not have the fleet that made Athens more intimidating, Philip chose to act severely while he could.

With these powers defeated, Macedonia became the undisputed leader of the Greek city-states. Philip used this influence to form the Hellenic League, which he designed not only to maintain peace among the Greek states but to join him in the invasion of the Persian empire. Only Sparta refused to participate. Not itself a league member, Macedonia formed a separate alliance with S[arta, and Philip served as its leader, or Hegemon. Still, leaders of the other states harbored resentment toward Macedonia, which they still viewed as no more than a semi-barbaric nation that had won its right to rule through force. This unstable loyalty was a problem that neither Philip nor Alexander would ever fully overcome.

During this time of political conflict, Philip also had to face domestic problems. Although Alexander's war heroics had won him the favor of many Macedonians, some members of the nobility expressed disapproval. In particular, they disliked Olympias and feared the devotion Alexander displayed toward her. Moreover, they was noted that Alexander had shown traces of arrogance, whereas his father had been more liable to treat his subjects as peers. With all of this trouble already brewing, Philip further complicated matters by making the controversial move of marrying Cleopatra, the niece of Attalus, a strong enemy of Alexander. Moreover, Philip divorced Olympias on the grounds of suspected adultery, and he encouraged rumors that Alexander himself may have been illegitimate. The implications were clear: Philip was paving the way for a new successor.

At the wedding feast, at which all parties were heavily intoxicated, Attalus rose to propose a toast, and in doing so he expressed the hope that a legitimate successor to the kingdom might be born to Philip and Cleopatra. This public provocation infuriated Alexander, who flung his goblet in Attalus's face and challenged, "Are you calling me a bastard?" Philip jumped to his feet, drew his sword, and started toward Alexander, only to fall flat on his face.

Alexander is said to have mocked, "That, gentlemen, is the man who's been preparing to cross from Europe into Asia–and he can't even make it from one couch to the next!" Alexander then exited quickly, and the next morning he was escorting his mother to her native home in Epirus.

**Patricide**

After leaving his mother with her brother, King Alexander of Epirus (to whom Philip had given the throne after ousting Arrybas), Alexander went north to reside among the wild tribes of Illyria. There he began stirring up agitation against his father, while his mother tried to incite her brother to take revenge against Philip.

While they were away, however, Philip's new wife, Cleopatra, became pregnant, which made Alexander's hopes appear increasingly grim. When the child turned out to be a girl, however, Philip had to reconsider his plans and brought Alexander back. Though Olympias was not invited to return, Alexander did go back to Macedonia. The relationship between father and son, however, remained full of suspicion.

When Philip heard that Olympias had succeeded in convincing her brother to declare war on Macedonia, he chose not to allow himself to get sidetracked with minor battles. Instead, he used diplomacy and offered the King of Epirus the hand of Cleopatra, the daughter of Philip and Olympias and therefore the King's niece. Perhaps reluctant to follow through with an attack, the King of Epirus accepted the offer, leaving Olympias was thwarted for the time being.

The tense domestic situation in Macedonia gave rise to another conflict between father and son. Pixodarus, ruler of Caria, hoped to secure his position in Asia in the event that Macedonia did succeed against Persia; Philip saw this as a welcome addition to his Asian forces. Therefore, arrangements were begun for the marriage of Philip's daughter and Philip Arrhidaeus, Alexander's mentally disabled half-brother. Alexander somehow interpreted this arrangement as a threat to his succession–unlikely, as Philip would not have entrusted the throne to his incapable son–and in response he sent his friend Thessalus to offer to switch the engagement to Alexander himself. When Philip found out, he was furious, outraged that Alexander had thought to become the son-in-law of a barbarian king.

Thessalus, who had fled to Corinth, was extradited and brought to Macedonia in chains. Several of Alexander's friends, including Ptolemy, Harpalus, Nearchus, Erigyius, and Laeomedon, were exiled. Although Alexander would later release Thessalus and recall his friends, who would all serve him faithfully, Philip's actions had clear implications. He hoped to isolate Alexander to prevent the possibility of any conspiracies developing. Cleopatra was due to give birth to a second child, and Alexander's anxieties returned.

Philip, of course, could not have been happier. The prospects for a Persian invasion were looking better than ever before, and he had begun preparations for a lavish wedding celebration for his daughter and the King of Epirus. He hoped to use this opportunity to impress the Greek leaders in attendance, in an attempt to win their genuine support. When Philip's wife Cleopatra gave birth to a son, Philip named him Caranus, after the mythical founder of the Argead dynasty to which Philip belonged. Alexander had great reason for concern, but with his mother's return to Macedonia for the wedding, he now had a strong ally.

The wedding was indeed a grand affair, though Philip may have irked more than a few attendees by placing a statue of himself among the figures of the twelve Olympian gods. On the second day, Philip prepared his ceremonial entrance, walking between Alexander his son and Alexander his new son-in-law. Philip instructed his bodyguards to follow at a distance, as he wanted to show that he was protected by the goodwill of the Greeks. However, as he paused at the entrance of the arena, a man–who was himself a member of Philip's bodyguard–drew his sword and stabbed Philip through his ribs, killing him instantly. Though the assassin had a good head start on his pursuers, he tripped and was killed, reportedly on the spot.

The assassin's name was Pausanias; speculations about his motive remain uncertain. The generally accepted story is that he was a former lover of Philip's, and that through various plot twists he ended up offending Attalus, who avenged himself through a public rape of Pausanias with his friends joining in. When Pausanias recovered and appealed to Philip, the latter took no action, for fear of alienating Attalus and his powerful faction. This alone, however, seems insufficient to explain Pausanias's action–why he chose Philip rather than Attalus, and why he chose this particular day when he had plenty of opportunities as a bodyguard to carry out the revenge.

Suspicion therefore turns to Olympias. Indeed, her subsequent behavior–including an annual visit to offer sacrifices over Pausanias's grave on the anniversary of his deed–do implicate her. Most agree that, at the very least, she incited Pausanias's anger and encouraged the assassination; she also may have offered Pausanias protection and helped to arrange his escape. Although no direct evidence links Alexander to this conspiracy, it is unlikely that Olympias would have proceeded without consulting him.

Afterward, Alexander circulated the theory that Pausanias was a paid agent of Persia, who hoped to prevent or at least postpone a Macedonian invasion. Both Alexander's contemporaries and modern writers have dismissed this theory as propaganda. Some have even called into question whether the Attalus story is true, as Attalus, who had always been one of Alexander's bitter enemies, was murdered shortly thereafter in Asia, on Alexander's orders. Furthermore, the three men who killed Pausanias were close allies of Alexander, and they may have acted abruptly in order to silence him, when it would have made more sense to arrest and question him first. Thus, although the degree of culpability cannot be determined precisely, most scholars seem comfortable in the belief that Alexander became king through patricide.

**Succession**

Shortly after Philip's murder, Alexander's longtime ally Antipater presented him to the Macedonian army, which immediately acclaimed Alexander king. The first matter Alexander attended to was the inevitable purging of enemies. This included potential claimants Amyntas and two sons of Aëropus (the third was spared because he was among the first to pay homage to Alexander, and also because he was the son-in-law of Antipater) who were known supporters of Amyntas. Many more murders would follow as necessity arose. Olympias showed her vengeful side in a gruesome murder of Caranus. However, while this killing was an order of Alexander, Olympias also murdered Caranus's sister and drove their mother, Cleopatra, to suicide. As Caranus's sister and mother posed no threat to the throne, Alexander was naturally furious at his mother, fearing the public scandal the murders might cause.

With the purging underway, Alexander still had to win the support of the Macedonian people and then attempt to maintain his hold over the foreign states. To assure his subjects, he publicly announced that he would run the state on the same principles as his father's administration; he even removed direct taxation on Macedonian citizens to win their appreciation.

The situation abroad, however, would be more complicated. Athens was thrilled to learn of Philip's death, seeing it as an opportunity to revolt. The famous Athenian orator Demosthenes immediately wrote to Attalus and Parmenion, one of Philip's most loyal lieutenants, to offer Athens's support and to urge them to declare war on Alexander. Although Attalus had to take this opportunity to save his own life, Alexander knew that Parmenion could be won over, and that success in doing so would greatly strengthen his power. While negotiations continued, Alexander took action against states that threatened to defect. Despite warnings against brashness, Alexander knew that he could not show any signs of weakness at this crucial moment. Therefore, he soon brought Thessaly and others into line, convincing them that cooperation would be the wisest decision.

Thebes presented a greater obstacle, as it was naturally averse to Macedonian rule. Alexander, however, offered such appealing terms as could not be refused–he simply asked to be recognized as Hegemon of the Hellenic League. Athens could not, at this point, hold out alone; soon its leaders were apologizing for the delay in acknowledging Alexander as king. Attalus himself gave in and tried to switch allegiances, but his efforts were futile, as Alexander's hatred was personal as well as political. When Attalus's life was the one point of dispute between Alexander and Parmenion–Attalus was Parmenion's son-in-law–Alexander remained firm, and he eventually got his way. With Parmenion's support, Alexander was able to reclaim–all without a battle, and in a short time–the status that his father had worked so hard to achieve.

His housecleaning and consolidation of power taken care of, Alexander soon turned his attention to reaffirming his rule over the barbarians. In these encounters, Alexander showed brilliant foresight and succeeded in near annihilations while losing very few men.

Meanwhile, trouble arose again in Thebes, as rebel leaders began stirring up anti-Macedonian feeling, particularly because of a rumor that Alexander had died. Though Alexander offered Thebes the chance to surrender when he arrived with 30,000 troops, the city, though shocked to see Alexander alive, was nevertheless determined to fight. For a while, the Thebans put up a valiant struggle outside the city walls. However, when Alexander found one gate left open and sent troops to rush in, the Thebans lost heart as their city was stormed.

What resulted was one of Alexander's most destructive massacres–6,000 Thebans killed, 30,000 taken prisoner; only 500 Macedonians lost. Furthermore, the victors did not hold back when the pillaging began. At the ensuing League meeting, the council voted to raze Thebes and sell the captured citizens as slaves. Though many representatives in the League had their own reason to hate Thebes, the destruction of the city still came as a shock to Greece, for Thebes had been one of the most historic and distinguished Greek city-states. Though Alexander successfully made an example of Thebes, he would never be forgiven for his lack of mercy on the city.

**Beginnings of the Persian Expedition**

Alexander wasted no time in beginning plans for a Persian invasion. The expedition was his legacy, Philip's lifelong dream. Circumstances left the great Persian empire vulnerable at this opportune moment. Alexander also had more practical reasons for hurrying the mission along: he had inherited a considerable debt from Philip, and his army was expensive to maintain. While Alexander did manage to get by through further loans and gifts, the wealth of the Persian empire offered the best long-term solution to his financial problems.

The army that Alexander assembled was itself a marvelous achievement, described by modern military experts as technically and theoretically near-perfect. The land forces totaled almost 50,000, broken up into 43,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry. Four main components made up the army: native Macedonian soldiers, troops delegated by cities of the League of Corinth, Greek mercenaries, and divisions from Balkan countries in alliance with or subject to Macedonia.

The Macedonian army itself was divided into four main units, each designed to complement the others. First was the phalanx, the main body of the army, organized in about fourteen battalions of 1,500 each, which would engage the enemy and attempt to create a break in its line. At this point the Companion Cavalry, heavily armed men on horses, would swoop in where breaks had been successfully created. The most elite group was known as the Hypaspists, who formed the King's personal corps and bodyguard. Totaling 3,000, they formed the link between the Companions and the phalanx by protecting one side of each while attempting to further exploit any gaps created. The less heavily armed Prodromi served as scouts, and they also protected outside flanks to prevent any attempts to encircle the Companions.

The number of troops Alexander demanded from the League was relatively small–the mission was clearly his and not some kind of Greek crusade. It is likely that he may have demanded these troops only as an attempt to ensure good behavior from the individual city-states while he was away. Many states, especially Athens, were reluctant to contribute. The largest component of the army consisted of mercenaries, who had good reason to expect a lucrative invasion, the Macedonian debt notwithstanding. Rounding out Alexander's troops were groups of archers and javelin throwers, representing Crete and Thrace.

The opposition they would face was a Persian army that drew on an imposing population of approximately fifty million people. In reality, however, the Persian forces were largely makeshift, poorly trained, and poorly equipped. Philip's death had made them even more complacent and lax. Ironically, the most reliable infantry in Persian employment were Greek mercenaries, who were estimated at about 30,000 at the start of the Macedonian expedition.

Alexander set out with his army in the spring of 334 B.C., with Parmenion serving second in command and Antipater left behind as a regent. The underlying purpose of the mission was to free the Greeks under Asia Minor and to avenge wrongs committed against Greece 150 years earlier. Furthermore, Alexander may have been the first commander in antiquity to organize a team officially dedicated to propaganda and publicity. Just as Homer had immortalized Achilles, Alexander appointed Callisthenes, a nephew of Aristotle, as the official historian of the Persian expedition. Alexander even made a stop in Ilium to make a sacrifice to Priam, the legendary King of Troy.

The first engagement took place at the Granicus River, where Alexander was very nearly killed from behind; his attacker was cut down at the last moment. The Macedonian discipline soon proved superior to the Persian, and the Greek mercenaries retreated to make offers of surrender. Alexander refused, however, and slaughtered the Greek mercenaries until only 2,000 remained alive. His severity was again meant to set an example, to discourage Greeks from serving as mercenaries for Persia. But this tactic may have had an opposite effect: by showing the mercenaries that they could expect no mercy, they felt that they had no choice but to fight to the finish. Moreover, Greeks at home likely felt more sympathy for their own kinsmen than the man who slaughtered them.

The overwhelming victory gave Alexander a considerable psychological edge, and soon several Persian satraps soon turned over their power without a fight. Many Greek cities that had been under Persian rule had their democracies restored, though their freedom had limitations; as they owed their restoration to Alexander, they were expected to pay a considerable tribute. One city in particular, Miletus, was significant because it served as a Persian naval base. Although Persia sent a considerable fleet, Alexander managed to reach Miletus first and take control of the harbor. He then succeeded in breaking the city walls, but this time he offered the Greek mercenaries a chance to surrender and join his forces; all gladly accepted the opportunity. Moreover, Alexander chose not to debase his greater mission by plundering the city.

**Facing Darius at Issus**

While Alexander continued to defeat Persian forces on land, the Persian fleet attempted to provoke the League fleet to battle. Despite Parmenion's urging, Alexander had several reasons to avoid combat. First, he feared that a defeat would expose a weakness and encourage rebellion in Greece. More important, he recognized that he had little to gain from engagement, as he could more gradually dissolve the Persian fleet by cutting off its access to the ports he controlled. Alexander therefore made the momentous, if risky, decision to disband the League fleet and maintain only twenty Athenian ships.

After Miletus, Alexander's next objective was Caria, which had been ruled by Pixodarus, the satrap who tried to marry his daughter to Alexander's half-brother. Pixodarus himself had forced his sister, Ada, out of power, so Ada now sought to ally her faction with Alexander, Pixodarus having died shortly before. Before invading the city, Alexander therefore stopped in Alinda, where Ada was living in exile. She adopted him as her son, and he gained the loyalty of her significant faction. Alexander's first aim was to dismantle Halicarnassus, the capital city of Caria.

Leading the defense of Halicarnassus was Memnon, the mercenary general whom Alexander faced at Granicus. Despite the implicit insult to the Persian nobility, Darius, the Persian king, had appointed Memnon as governor of the coastal regions of Asia Minor, as well as the admiral of the fleet. The Persians had some early successes, but the Macedonians gradually wore them down. The turning point came when the Persians launched a surprise offensive, which came close to overpowering the Macedonians until the veteran soldiers of the phalanx joined the battle. Again, superior discipline won out, as the Macedonians gradually pushed the Persians back to their city. During the rush to their gates, the Persians were forced to shut out some of their own men in order to keep the Macedonians out of the city–some 1,000 fell in this manner. Though the Persian attack was valiant, Memnon's failure made the city's fall inevitable, and he was forced to sneak his fleet and the remaining mercenaries away.

The difficult siege tested the Macedonians considerably–and it cost them many men–but their success meant the securing of another major naval base. Alexander returned the state to Ada, though he would install his own ruler in Caria after her death. Winter was approaching, a time when battles traditionally ceased. Alexander even sent all newly married men home on leave, a move that greatly bolstered his popularity.

The winter would not be a complete vacation, however. Alexander still had hopes of reducing the remaining Persian bases along the coastline, so that an assault on its center could be started in the spring. One particular challenge involved the crossing of the Climax gorge along the shorter but more challenging seashore route, rendered impassable when strong southerly winds raised the water level. The winds changed direction just before the party reached the Climax, and they were able to pass with little difficulty. This fortunate turn was seen as divine intervention, as if the sea had withdrawn in deference to Alexander. Soon the first year of the campaign was nearing its end. All of the Greek cities had been liberated from Persian rule, but the Macedonians had yet to face a full-scale imperial army.

Alexander met up with Parmenion's army in Phrygia. The Macedonians continued to overcome city after city. The Persians would often clear out before Alexander arrived, but only after burning everything that would have been useful to him. Concerned about the failure of his satraps and generals to hinder Alexander's troops, Darius prepared to meet them with his own army.

Alexander made the mistake of assuming that Darius would meet him in Sochi, whereas Darius instead pursued him from behind. Darius then set up a defensive position on the Pinarus River, thus cutting off the Macedonian line of retreat and pinning them in on a narrow coastal plain. The situation looked disastrous for Alexander, for Darius's position at Issus was the dream of all generals before twentieth-century warfare.

The Macedonian forces, combining Alexander's and Parmenion's, totaled about 50,000; the Persians numbered about the same. The fighting was fierce, brimming with the hatred between the Greek mercenaries and the Macedonians. In many ways the battle was a repeat of Chaeronea, where Philip had led the victory of Thebes and Athens. The battle lasted about two hours, but it was largely decided in the first few minutes, when Alexander led a quick attack that broke down the Persian left wing. Darius fled and escaped, despite Alexander's pursuit into the night. The victory celebration was elaborate nevertheless, as the Macedonians tasted the exotic luxuries of Persia for the first time.

Again, the precarious nature of Alexander's rule revealed itself back in Greece each time Persia seemed to gain an advance. In Athens, Demosthenes got news of Darius's strategic placement and openly gloated at the apparently imminent Persian victory. In the Peloponnese, the Spartan king prepared a rebellion against the Macedonians and began communications with Persia for aid. Of course, news of Alexander's victory quickly crushed these hopes, and plans were once again put off for the meantime.

**Conquering Persia**

After the victory, Alexander did not make a rush into the heart of the Persian empire, as might have been expected, but rather persisted in his gradual approach of securing coastal areas. Though Alexander continued to break down the Persian fleet, his strategy also gave Darius time to raise a larger army.

Darius also made a first attempt to achieve a peaceful settlement. Although the tone of his letter was arrogant, he offered to cede a significant portion of Asia Minor to Alexander. The concession was difficult to refuse, as the offered area had probably been the objective of Philip's campaign. When Alexander read the letter to his officers, therefore he omitted the section that included the offer. The offers, who heard only Darius's arrogant tone, urged Alexander to continue with the campaign. Alexander sent back a harsh reply justifying the Macedonian mission. It became evident to all that the war would have to come down to a final showdown for the kingdom.

In the meantime, Alexander began his march into the Phoenician territory, where every city-state was under the rule of Persia, but almost all reluctantly. Many cities forced their Persian puppet rulers to surrender to the Macedonians. Alexander replaced the rulers with popular successors, thereby winning himself significant local support.

The one city that chose to oppose Alexander was Tyre, which had long been faithful to Persia and had been the only Phoenician city not to participate in the revolt of the 340s B.C. The Tyrians put up such a strong fight that Alexander succeeded only after seven months, after recruiting ships from Sidon to fend off the Tyrian fleet. The main difficulty, however, was the strength of Tyre's heavily guarded city wall.

Alexander caught a break only when the Tyrians, exhausted and low in morale, took a gamble and launched a surprise sea attack. By luck, Alexander had not been in the location of the attack as the Tyrians had assumed he would be. He was able to round up his ships and catch the Tyrians from the rear. At this point it was only a matter of time before the wall of Tyre was breached. Once again, the slaughter was ruthless. Almost no males were spared; the women and children, numbering 30,000, were sold into slavery. The siege, which finally came to its end in July 332 B.C., is considered, from a purely military standpoint, to be Alexander's greatest achievement.

The victory at Tyre, combined with successful resistance to Persian counterattacks, led to Darius's second offer of peace. He offered 10,000 talents for the release of his family and even more territory. He also invited Alexander to marry his daughter and become the friend of the Persian royal house. More confident after the siege of Tyre, Alexander read the letter to his officers. Despite Parmenion's advice, Alexander refused to negotiate, and instead replied with another harsh letter.

After Alexander's forces took Gaza, the path to Egypt opened up. In ancient times, Egypt was the goal of many foreign empires, as its wealth was considerable. The land also presented a challenge, however, as it was surrounded by desert on three sides. The Egyptians, who deeply resented Persian rule, surrendered to Alexander without a fight. Alexander was crowned Pharaoh and underwent all the traditional rituals; he won over popular support by a careful display of religious piety. When Alexander died and his empire was distributed, Egypt would be claimed by Ptolemy, who set up a private estate and created a dynasty that benefited from Alexander's popular reception. In 331 B.C., the new Pharaoh began to explore the lower part of his territory. In the western part of the Nile Delta he found a coastal region that appeared suitable for a city; soon Alexandria–named such even to this day–was founded.

By the spring of 331 B.C., the Macedonian army was on its way back to Phoenicia, where it would begin the final preparations for the Persian invasion. Alexander had to tend to several administrative matters among the various governments and rulers he had installed. In the meantime, Darius organized and stationed his Grand Army on the Euphrates at Babylon, the capital of Mesopotamia. Darius, who expected Alexander's route to follow the Euphrates, hoped to gain an advantage by choosing his own optimal battleground. Moreover, Darius sent a scout to disrupt the expected route, in order to make Alexander's journey as difficult as possible.

Alexander, however, saw through this plan completely, so he took a longer route that ran by the Tigris River. He recognized that the Persians would either lose spirit and energy in their extended wait, or else be forced to meet him at the Tigris. Darius decided to try to ambush the Macedonians as they were crossing the river–a tactic that required the Macedonians not only reach the area before Alexander, but also correctly predict where he would try to cross.

Alexander had the fortune of capturing some Persian scouts and learning Darius's plans. He was able to change routes and cross the river undisturbed, though the crossing was difficult and a Persian ambush would have been devastating. Darius's plans had, then, been foiled a second time, and his only recourse was to find the most suitable ground for battle at this point. He chose a field near the village of Gaugamela.

The battle took place on October 1, 331 B.C. Darius's army stood on the strength of its 34,000 cavalry, who were well trained and equipped. His infantry, which may have amounted to nearly 100,000, was of little value beyond the core group of 2,000 Greek mercenaries and the 2,000 Persians who constituted the royal bodyguard. Though Alexander's army was considerably smaller, he employed his troops efficiently. Timing the attack perfectly, he began by fighting on the defensive until he saw the gap that his Companions could exploit. Soon, Darius was in danger of being encircled, and he was again forced to flee. Alexander stayed to carry out the battle, which again ended in a rout. The decisive battle proved to be one of the influential in world history. Alexander had essentially crippled Darius, and all that remained was a formal handover of power.

**Taking Over the Empire**

Despite Alexander's expectations of an ambush, Babylon readily surrendered to him. He rested his army there for over a month, indulging in the city's luxury. Before leaving, Alexander surprised many by reinstating Mazaeus as the satrap–a surprise since the general had battled against Alexander just a month before. There were practical reasons for Alexander's decision, as he wanted to win the support of Iranians in neighboring states. The decision also reflects Alexander's vision for the empire, which included cooperation and the peaceful incorporation of the Persians.

Again, the Macedonians proceeded to win over city by city, including the very prosperous Susa, usually without a fight. Alexander then set his sights on Persis, and in particular its capital Persepolis, one of the most venerated Persian cities, whose loss would be devastating to Darius. At the entrance to Persis, Alexander faced an impenetrable wall held by Ariobarzanes, the province's satrap. The wall had been constructed so that only a frontal attack was possible, yet efforts to this end proved futile.

However, Alexander once again had the good fortune to find a Persian prisoner who offered to show a path that would allow Alexander's forces to come out behind the Persian wall. The difficult twelve-mile path took almost two days, but the ambush left the surrounded Persians helpless. Despite his recent restraint, Alexander allowed the plundering of the city, and even participated in the burning of the city palaces himself. Though Alexander received condemnation for this indulgence, his behavior here did have one ironic side effect. Persepolis, which was never rebuilt, became a ghost town, and today it serves as a rich source for archaeologists and one of the few non-Greek sources for Persian history.

Between Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis, Alexander had accumulated about 180,000 talents–estimated at approximately forty-four million pounds sterling by the 1913 standard. In comparison, Athens, the wealthiest Greek city-state at the time, had a total revenue of only 400 talents annually.

Alexander's hunt for Darius continued, but was halted with the shocking news broke that Darius had been deposed. Darius had always had rivals in the nobility, and the weakness revealed by Alexander's invasion had increased Darius's unpopularity considerably. The revolt against him was led by Nabarzanes and Bessus, who assumed the title of Great King. They placed Darius in chains and headed for Bactria, where Alexander now planned to meet them. Darius allegedly refused to mount a horse, and his awkward wagon slowed down the escape, so the conspirators ran him through with javelins and left him to die. When Alexander came upon the dead king, he sent the body to be buried with full honors at Persepolis, where the other Persian kings were buried. Although Alexander is said to have been moved by the site of Darius's dead body, the murder was convenient for Alexander; taking the king alive would have given the opposition reason to remain hopeful, while executing him would have alienated all of Persia. With Darius dead, Alexander became the undisputed ruler of Persia.

Alexander soon turned his attention again to domestic difficulties, one of which was the powerful influence wielded by Parmenion. Though the general himself was old, Alexander continued to resent his influence over the army, and he had reason to fear the ambitions of Parmenion's family. By a series of coincidences, Alexander was able to implicate Parmenion's son Philotas in a conspiracy, though the only real offense was that Philotas did not immediately report a conspiratorial incident he uncovered and dismissed as ludicrous. The trial of Philotas, which traditionally took place before the army, was a farce, and Philotas's solid defense was soundly rejected. Philotas was then tortured until he implicated his father. The son was stoned to death the next day, the father assassinated shortly afterward. These murders, along with the murders of several other potential rivals, though unjust, gave Alexander an even tighter grip on the kingdom.

**The Far East**

With the death of Darius, the Macedonians thought the war was over. The remote territories had little to offer economically. As the Iranians had been reluctant to acknowledge a ruler of their own race, they could be expected to be even more resistant to Alexander's conquest, so that large garrisons would be required to maintain power. Alexander, however, wanted to continue pressing east, using Bessus as an excuse. Bessus was still out stirring trouble, as he attempted to raise an army to defend the old empire. However, discord arose among his own faction, and soon Bessus was ousted by Spitamenes, who gladly surrendered him to Alexander. Bessus was forced to wear a wooden collar, the mark of a slave, while Spitamenes was praised by Alexander. Bessus would later be mutilated, having his nose and ears cut off before being executed.

The capture of Bessus, however, did not mean the end of the revolt as Alexander had thought. Instead, the leaders of Sogdiana had hoped that turning Bessus over would gain them immunity; when it became evident that Alexander still intended to subjugate their territory, they rose once again. When Alexander continued on, Spitamenes raised troops who slaughtered the Macedonian garrisons. Alexander was therefore forced to return to the city of Cyropolis, the center of the revolt. As he usually dealt with cities that refused to submit, he razed and massacred Cyropolis.

In the meantime, Spitamenes continued to stir trouble in other areas, so Alexander sent a small troop, led by Pharnuches, to take care of the situation. Pharnuches underestimated Spitamenes considerably. Spitamenes successfully lured Pharnuches to another territory where Spitamenes obtained further support, leaving the Macedonians surrounded. It is reported that not a single Macedonian escaped death in what was perhaps the first–and only–major defeat of Alexander's career. Though the blame falls largely on Pharnuches and his ineptitude, Alexander himself failed to appreciate the strength of Spitamenes' force, and his error in calculation was the ultimate cause of this defeat.

Spitamenes fled with his troops when Alexander's army made for their direction, but the fact remained that Spitamenes controlled most of Sogdiana. Alexander appointed Coenus, one of his generals, to supervise the rebel's activity while the Macedonians rested for the winter of 328 B.C. As Alexander and Coenus were secured more cities, Spitamenes was left without bases and means of provisioning. He therefore decided to round his troops up to make one great assault. Unfortunately for Spitamenes, Coenus was well prepared and defeated the rebels soundly. The Sogdianians deserted Spitamenes, and he was beheaded. Nevertheless, he is often remembered as Alexander's most formidable opponent, having won a major victory over the Macedonians and having harassed them for over two years–though in a full battle he never could have defeated them.

With the Sogdianian region taken care of, Alexander moved south to Paraetacene, which was still under the control of four powerful barons. The first of these, Oxyartes, had established a stronghold at the top of a steep mountain, and he was fully confident of its impenetrability. Alexander chose 300 of his best rock-climbers to undertake the mission, with the promise of generous reward. Although about thirty fell to their deaths, the remaining 270 startled Oxyartes' followers and forced surrender without a struggle.

The daughter of Oxyartes, Roxane, was widely considered the most beautiful woman in Asia, and Alexander took her as his wife. Most historians agree that he likely did not care for Roxane much more than he did for any other woman who was not his mother, but he hoped his gesture would generate goodwill among the barons of the Far East and cause the campaign to be concluded more smoothly. Indeed, one baron submitted on Oxyartes' recommendation, and the other two were defeated soon after.

Alexander's experience in the Far East was a significant period in his career. He founded a number of cities in the area in order to maintain his authority. But while the purpose of these cities was military, they also contributed to the spread of Greek culture to new lands. Alexander's experience of Asia also changed him personally. Whether because he gained a respect for Persian abilities or simply because he had indulged in the region's luxury, Alexander no longer maintained an absolute belief in Persian inferiority. He had married a Persian woman and he had supported the authority of many Persian satraps cooperatively, despite formally conquering them.

Alexander's new attitude toward Persia alienated many of the conservative Macedonian nobles, who, like Aristotle and Philip, still viewed Persians as barbaric. Two men in particular suffered for their opposition. Cleitus, one of Alexander's old friends, made the mistake of speaking his mind during a banquet where most attendants were intoxicated. Although Alexander had suspected Cleitus of treasonous thoughts, he did not intend to lose his temper and murder the man in full view of the public, as he did. Afterward, Alexander was filled with great remorse–would not eat or drink for three days–cursing himself as a murderer.

Callisthenes, the official historian of the Persian expedition, was also under suspicion. Like his uncle, Aristotle, Callisthenes viewed all Persians with contempt and disliked Alexander's change of attitude. Alexander had recently instituted a new policy requiring subjects to prostrate themselves before his feet. Though such a practice was standard for Iranians, it seemed blasphemous to Greeks, who showed such respect only to the gods. Nevertheless, Alexander's goal was to emphasize that he was king both of Macedonia and Asia. Callisthenes failed to comply and refused to prostrate himself, whether purposely or not. Alexander, noting the light applause that accompanied Callisthenes' insubordination, realized that an example would have to be made. Before long, Alexander had an opportunity to indict Callisthenes in a conspiracy in which one of Callisthenes' students had been involved–though, as in Philotas's case, the link was extremely dubious. Callisthenes was executed and immediately achieved martyr status, particularly among Aristotle's school at Lyceum. It remains unclear whether Alexander was justly protecting himself from potential conspirators or unnecessarily removing harmless opponents. In any case, his severity did contribute to the preservation of his rule.

**India**

India, in Alexander's time, meant the land of the Indus–not necessarily the area where the modern country of India stands. The Greeks, who had limited knowledge of the geography of central Asia, knew almost nothing of the Indian subcontinent or China. India, to the Greeks, meant the area in western Pakistan, particularly the Punjab and Sind territories.

There are several possible reasons why Alexander chose to pursue India. Part may be simply that Persia had once possessed parts of India, and therefore Alexander, as the new Great King, wanted to reclaim it. As little was known about India, curiosity was likely also a factor. Perhaps most important, India was the end of Asia as far as Alexander knew; its acquisition was necessary if he was to rule the entire continent.

The invasion of India began in the summer of 327 B.C. Alexander proceeded as he had in his Persian conquest, vanquishing city by city. Many cities surrendered without a fight; those that did not were usually massacred without mercy. Alexander soon gained the support of Ambhi, the ruler of Attock. Alexander and his troops rested for a couple of months in the capital city of Taxiles as they prepared to meet Ambhi's enemy, Porus.

In response to Alexander's request that he submit, Porus assembled his army and prepared to meet Alexander on the bank of the Hydaspes River. When Alexander arrived, he found that Porus had the fords guarded with elephants, which made a crossing impossible. Moreover, whenever Alexander moved along the river, Porus mirrored him on the opposite side. To confuse his foe, Alexander divided his army into several units and spread them along the bank. This splitting up also gave Alexander a chance to search for other possible fords farther down; indeed, a suitable one was found seventeen miles upstream. The question was whether Alexander could keep Porus from following him all the way to that crossing point.

Once again Alexander devised a plan to confuse his enemy. For several nights, he sent the cavalry to various spots along the bank and instructed them to make noise and raise war cries. Porus, of course, followed them the first few times, but eventually stopped responding to Alexander's bluffs. On the night planned for the attack, Alexander divided the troops into three groups. One would remain in the original spot to keep Porus off guard, while a second group prepared for a crossing that would take place only if Alexander succeeded in clearing the fords. Alexander himself led the third group, consisting of about 15,000 infantry and 5,500 cavalry. Porus sent an initial group of about 2,000 cavalry, led by his son, to attack the Macedonians while they were crossing and to drive them back into the river.

However, the Indians did not make it in time to have the early advantage, and Alexander easily defeated the troops.

Porus was therefore forced to march against Alexander with full force, leaving only a small detachment to face the second crossing group. The fact that Porus's front line consisted entirely of elephants prevented Alexander from using his cavalry, as the horses would not charge in face of the elephants. Once again, Alexander succeeded with a brilliant strategy. He kept a segment of his cavalry hidden, allowing Porus to think that he was winning. When Porus advanced to exploit Alexander's apparent weakness, the hidden cavalry emerged and caused confusion among the already exposed Indians. The battle culminated in the surrounding of the Indians, and Porus was finally prevailed upon to surrender. The victory had not been easy, however. The Macedonians were particularly troubled about the elephants, which had brutally trampled and mangled their soldiers. Nevertheless, it was Alexander's last major battle and one of his greatest.

Alexander allowed Porus to continue his rule–a decision likely motivated by Alexander's recognition that he was running out of resources to maintain a strong presence at every corner of his territory. Nevertheless, Alexander's thirst was not quenched, and he wanted to press farther, though his next opponent, the Nanda empire, would have been very formidable. Alexander's troops had other plans, however, and talks of mutiny abounded. The troops had been away for eight years and marched over 17,000 miles. The elephants had been especially demoralizing, especially since it was reported that Nanda possessed about 4,000 of them. Alexander offered every possible incentive and bribe, but even his chief officers sympathized with the men. One senior officer, Coenus, finally rose to speak on behalf of the men, and Alexander finally recognized that a rebellion led by a popular man like Coenus was an alarming possibility.

Alexander, therefore, he was finally prevailed upon to turn around and head home, though he never forgave his men and officers. He was convinced that he could have conquered the entire world if his men had not turned their backs on him. Furthermore, he showed no apparent gratitude for their service and dedication. He purposely took a difficult journey home that required constant skirmishes with unconquered Indian provinces. Alexander's armies finally left India by sea in September 325 B.C.

Some sources have exaggerated Alexander's success, particularly in his domain over India. In reality, Alexander's influence in the area was limited. Porus was essentially an independent ruler, though formally he derived power from Alexander. Moreover, Alexander did not have the resources to hold India in line, and by 317 B.C. all traces of Macedonian power had essentially disappeared. Nevertheless, Alexander had led a great expedition to unfamiliar territory, and he had conquered it as effectively as he had conquered the rest of Asia.

**Return**

Alexander's return was not a direct one. While the fleet sailed, Alexander also led part of the army on the coast to explore and collect supplies. In the course of the journey he made some poor decisions, including a difficult march through the desert, which resulted in the deaths of almost a quarter of those who began the journey. Though the blame clearly fell on Alexander's overconfidence, he found suitable scapegoats as usual.

Stopping in Persia, Alexander had quite a bit of housekeeping to do. He removed several satraps, executing those whose crimes–usually conspiracy–had been flagrant. His continued desire to unite Persia and Macedonia resulted in a mass marriage, as he paired up eighty of his leading officers with noble Iranian brides.

Alexander made two important decrees before he left Susa in 324 B.C. First, there was the problem of social distress arising from the many Greek mercenaries wandering Asia, who had been exiled from their native lands, often because of Alexander's policies. Alexander made the risky move of restoring all exiles to their native Greek cities, which would likely alienate the leaders of those cities. Alexander's second great decree was that he was now a god. That this decree was due in part to irrationality is possible; Alexander had achieved a great deal in his conquest, and he apparently decided that human honors did not measure up to his greatness. From a young age he had felt destined for divinity, and his experience in Asia and Egypt likely confirmed his belief that he was above the race of men.

After the death of a close friend, Hephaestion, Alexander entered several days of mourning and then decided to undertake a new campaign–which would be his last. His target was a tribe called the Cossaei, who controlled a mountain area and charged a toll on those who needed to pass to reach Babylon or Susa. The Persian leaders had never been able to clear the Cossaei out, and had simply paid the fee. Alexander decided to subdue the tribe, and, after a forty-day campaign, he had virtually annihilated them.

Alexander continued on to Babylon, where he began preparations for his next campaign. In the city he experienced a number of bad omens, though writers may have exaggerated some of these portents to heighten the drama surrounding Alexander's death. On June 3, 323 B.C., Alexander attended two parties that went early into the morning. Afterward he fell feverishly ill, and was incapacitated until his death on June 13. No heir was named; Alexander had indicated that he expected a funeral contest to take place to determine the strongest successor.

Though Alexander's illness was officially attributed to a fever aggravated by heavy drinking, the possibility that he was poisoned has been raised. The suspects are Aristotle and Antipater, both of whom had reason to fear Alexander's retribution for various disloyalties, and both of whom also disliked his favorable treatment of the Persians. Aristotle possessed the knowledge to make the poison and Antipater the means to administer it. Though the poisoning theory will likely never be proven with certainty, most scholars regard it as a strong possibility.

With Alexander's death came the gradual dismantling of the empire, which had no chance of enduring without his leadership. In his thirty-two years he had assembled one of the greatest military records in history. His brilliance as a tactician demonstrated itself time after time, as he systematically conquered a significant portion of Asia one piece at a time. Alexander was particularly effective in adapting to enemy tactics, and he always knew how to exploit a weakness. Moreover, his leadership ability is not to be underestimated. He knew how to choose the right governors and how to keep them in line; he knew when to compromise and when to be obstinate. Alexander may not have enjoyed the love of his subjects–particularly in Greece–but he successfully ruled them by invoking the appropriate balance of fear and respect. Though he was ruthless with potential conspirators, he also had good reason to believe that his life was constantly in danger, as countless previous rulers had lost their lives due to carelessness.

The ultimate extent of Alexander's success remains disputable. Although he has been portrayed as a visionary, he seems to have had little underlying motivation for his expeditions beyond a desire for conquest. Moreover, although he has been praised for uniting the Persians and Greeks, his success may have been overestimated. After his death, the two peoples did not live in the kind of harmony Alexander had envisioned.

Despite these shortcomings, Alexander's influence on the development of the world is not to be doubted. He founded an estimated seventy cities and made room for the spread of Greek culture in the East. More importantly, he opened up increasing possibilities for trade and social communication between East and West. Ultimately, the building of the Roman Empire can be traced to seeds that Alexander planted. While he may have viewed himself as above the human race, there is no doubt that few men have changed the course of human history to a comparable extent.