



# Alexander the Great

**Alexander III of Macedon** (Ancient Greek: Ἀλέξανδρος, romanized: *Aléxandros*; 20/21 July 356 BC – 10/11 June 323 BC), most commonly known as **Alexander the Great**,<sup>[c]</sup> was a king of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon.<sup>[d]</sup> He succeeded his father Philip II to the throne in 336 BC at the age of 20 and spent most of his ruling years conducting a lengthy military campaign throughout Western Asia, Central Asia, parts of South Asia, and Egypt. By the age of 30, he had created one of the largest empires in history, stretching from Greece to northwestern India.<sup>[1]</sup> He was undefeated in battle and is widely considered to be one of history's greatest and most successful military commanders.<sup>[2][3][4]</sup>

Until the age of 16, Alexander was tutored by Aristotle. In 335 BC, shortly after his assumption of kingship over Macedon, he campaigned in the Balkans and reasserted control over Thrace and parts of Illyria before marching on the city of Thebes, which was subsequently destroyed in battle. Alexander then led the League of Corinth, and used his authority to launch the pan-Hellenic project envisaged by his father, assuming leadership over all Greeks in their conquest of Persia.<sup>[5][6]</sup>

In 334 BC, he invaded the Achaemenid Persian Empire and began a series of campaigns that lasted for 10 years. Following his conquest of Asia Minor, Alexander broke the power of Achaemenid Persia in a series of decisive battles, including those at Issus and Gaugamela; he subsequently overthrew Darius III and conquered the Achaemenid Empire in its entirety.<sup>[e]</sup> After the fall of Persia, the Macedonian Empire held a vast swath of territory between the Adriatic Sea and the Indus River. Alexander endeavored to reach the "ends of the world and the Great Outer Sea" and invaded India in 326 BC, achieving an important victory over Porus, an ancient Indian king of present-day Punjab, at the Battle of the Hydaspes. Due to the mutiny of his homesick troops, he eventually turned back at the Beas River and later died in 323 BC in Babylon, the city of Mesopotamia that he had planned to establish as his empire's capital. Alexander's death left unexecuted an additional series of planned military and mercantile campaigns that would have begun with a Greek invasion of Arabia. In the years following his death, a series of civil wars broke out across the Macedonian Empire, eventually leading to its disintegration at the hands of the Diadochi.

## Alexander the Great

*Basileus*



Alexander in the *Alexander Mosaic*

### King of Macedon

<b>Reign</b>	October 336 – June 323 BC
<b>Predecessor</b>	Philip II
<b>Successor</b>	Alexander IV Philip III

### Hegemon of the Hellenic League

<b>Reign</b>	336–323 BC
<b>Predecessor</b>	Philip II
<b>Successor</b>	Demetrius I of Macedon

### Pharaoh of Egypt

<b>Reign</b>	332–323 BC
<b>Predecessor</b>	Darius III
<b>Successor</b>	Alexander IV Philip III

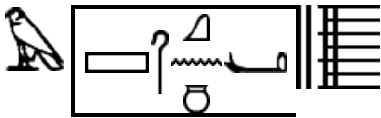
### Royal titulary

#### Horus name

*mk-kmt*

*Mekemet*

Protector of Egypt



Second Horus name:

*ḥꜥꜥ-ḳꜣnj tꜣn-ḥꜣswt*

*Heqaqeni tekenkhasut*

The brave ruler who has attacked foreign lands

Alexander became legendary as a classical hero in the mould of Achilles, featuring prominently in the historical and mythical traditions of both Greek and non-Greek cultures. His military achievements and unprecedented enduring successes in battle made him the measure against which many later military leaders would compare themselves,<sup>[6]</sup> and his tactics remain a significant subject of study in military academies worldwide.<sup>[7]</sup> Legends of Alexander's exploits coalesced into the third-century *Alexander Romance* which, in the premodern period, went through over one hundred recensions, translations, and derivations and was translated into almost every European vernacular and every language of the Islamic world.<sup>[8]</sup> After the Bible, it was the most popular form of European literature.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Lineage and childhood

Several legends surround Alexander's birth and childhood.<sup>[15]</sup> According to the ancient Greek biographer Plutarch, on the eve of the consummation of her marriage to Philip, Olympias dreamed that her womb was struck by a thunderbolt that caused a flame to spread "far and wide" before dying away. Sometime after the wedding, Philip is said to have seen himself, in a dream, securing his wife's womb with a seal engraved



with a lion's image.<sup>[16]</sup> Plutarch offered a variety of interpretations for these dreams: that Olympias was pregnant before her marriage, indicated by the sealing of her womb; or that Alexander's father was Zeus. Ancient commentators were divided about whether the ambitious Olympias promulgated the story of Alexander's divine parentage, variously claiming that she had told Alexander, or that she dismissed the suggestion as impious.<sup>[16]</sup>

On the day Alexander was born, Philip was preparing a siege on the city of Potidea on the peninsula of Chalcidice. That same day, Philip received news that his general Parmenion had defeated the combined Illyrian and Paenionian armies and that his horses had won at the Olympic Games. It was also said that on this day, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, burnt down. This led Hegesias of Magnesia to say that it had burnt down because Artemis was away, attending the birth of Alexander.<sup>[17]</sup> Such legends may have emerged when Alexander was king, and possibly at his instigation, to show that he was superhuman and destined for greatness from conception.<sup>[15]</sup>

In his early years, Alexander was raised by a nurse, Lanike, sister of Alexander's future general Cleitus the Black. Later in his childhood, Alexander was tutored by the strict Leonidas, a relative of his mother, and by Lysimachus of Acarnania.<sup>[18]</sup> Alexander was raised in the manner of noble Macedonian youths, learning to read, play the lyre, ride, fight, and hunt.<sup>[19]</sup> When Alexander was ten years old, a trader from Thessaly brought Philip a horse, which he offered to sell for thirteen talents. The horse refused to be mounted, and Philip ordered it away. Alexander, however, detecting



Roman medallion depicting Olympias, Alexander's mother

the horse's fear of its own shadow, asked to tame the horse, which he eventually managed.<sup>[15]</sup> Plutarch stated that Philip, overjoyed at this display of courage and ambition, kissed his son tearfully, declaring: "My boy, you must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedon is too small for you", and bought the horse for him.<sup>[20]</sup> Alexander named it Bucephalas, meaning "ox-head". Bucephalas carried Alexander as far as India. When the animal died (because of old age, according to Plutarch, at age 30), Alexander named a city after him, Bucephala.<sup>[21]</sup>

Education

When Alexander was 13, Philip began to search for a tutor, and considered such academics as Isocrates and Speusippus, the latter offering to resign from his stewardship of the Academy to take up the post. In the end, Philip chose Aristotle and provided the Temple of the Nymphs at Mieza as a classroom. In return for teaching Alexander, Philip agreed to rebuild Aristotle's hometown of Stageira, which Philip had razed, and to repopulate it by buying and freeing the ex-citizens who were slaves, or pardoning those who were in exile.<sup>[22]</sup>



Nomen

ἄλκυσινδρς  
Aluksindres  
Alexandros



King of Persia

Reign	330–323 BC
Predecessor	Darius III
Successor	Alexander IV Philip III
Born	20 or 21 July 356 BC <u>Pella</u> , <u>Macedon</u>
Died	10 or 11 June 323 BC (aged 32) <u>Babylon</u> , <u>Macedon</u>
Spouse	<u>Roxana</u> · <u>Stateira</u> · <u>Parysatis</u>
Issue	3, including <u>Alexander IV</u> <u>Heracles</u> <sup>[a]</sup>
Greek	Ἀλέξανδρος <sup>[b]</sup>
Dynasty	<u>Argead</u>
Father	<u>Philip II of Macedon</u>
Mother	<u>Olympias of Epirus</u>
Religion	<u>Ancient Greek religion</u>



Archaeological site of Pella, Greece, Alexander's birthplace

Mieza was like a boarding school for Alexander and the children of Macedonian nobles, such as Ptolemy, Hephaestion, and Cassander. Many of these students would become his friends and future generals, and are often known as the "Companions". Aristotle taught Alexander and his companions about medicine, philosophy, morals, religion, logic, and art. Under Aristotle's tutelage, Alexander developed a passion for the works of Homer, and in particular the *Iliad*; Aristotle gave him an annotated copy, which Alexander later carried on his campaigns.<sup>[23]</sup> Alexander was able to quote Euripides from memory.<sup>[24]</sup>

In his youth, Alexander was also acquainted with Persian exiles at the Macedonian court, who received the protection of Philip II for several years as they opposed Artaxerxes III.<sup>[25][26][27]</sup> Among them were Artabazos II and his daughter Barsine, possible future mistress of Alexander, who resided at the Macedonian court from 352 to 342 BC, as well as Amminapes, future satrap of Alexander, and a Persian nobleman named Sisines.<sup>[25][28][29][30]</sup> This gave the Macedonian court a good knowledge of Persian issues, and may even have influenced some of the innovations in the management of the Macedonian state.<sup>[28]</sup>

Suda writes that Anaximenes of Lampsacus was one of Alexander's teachers, and that Anaximenes also accompanied Alexander on his campaigns.<sup>[31]</sup>

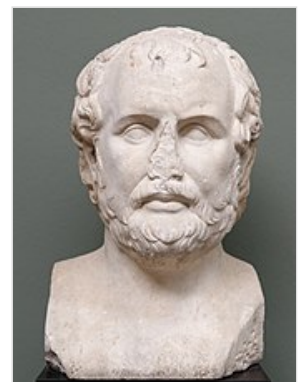
## Heir of Philip II

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### Regency and ascent of Macedon

At the age of 16, Alexander's education under Aristotle ended. Philip II had waged war against the Thracians to the north, which left Alexander in charge as regent and heir apparent.<sup>[15]</sup> During Philip's absence, the Thracian tribe of Maedi revolted against Macedonia. Alexander responded quickly and drove them from their territory. The territory was colonized, and a city, named Alexandropolis, was founded.<sup>[32]</sup>

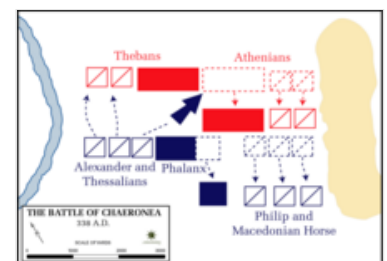
Upon Philip's return, Alexander was dispatched with a small force to subdue the revolts in southern Thrace. Campaigning against the Greek city of Perinthus, Alexander reportedly saved his father's life. Meanwhile, the city of Amphissa began to work lands that were sacred to Apollo near Delphi, a sacrilege that gave Philip the opportunity to further intervene in Greek affairs. While Philip was occupied in Thrace, Alexander was ordered to muster an army for a campaign in southern Greece. Concerned that other Greek states might intervene, Alexander made it look as though he was preparing to attack Illyria instead. During this turmoil, the Illyrians invaded Macedonia, only to be repelled by Alexander.<sup>[33]</sup>



Philip II of Macedon,  
Alexander's father

Philip and his army joined his son in 338 BC, and they marched south through Thermopylae, taking it after stubborn resistance from its Theban garrison. They went on to occupy the city of Elatea, only a few days' march from both Athens and Thebes. The Athenians, led by Demosthenes, voted to seek alliance with Thebes against Macedonia. Both Athens and Philip sent embassies to win Thebes's favour, but Athens won the contest.<sup>[34]</sup> Philip marched on Amphissa (ostensibly acting on the request of the Amphictyonic League), capturing the mercenaries sent there by Demosthenes and accepting the city's surrender. Philip then returned to Elatea, sending a final offer of peace to Athens and Thebes, who both rejected it.<sup>[35]</sup>

As Philip marched south, his opponents blocked him near Chaeronea, Boeotia. During the ensuing Battle of Chaeronea, Philip commanded the right wing and Alexander the left, accompanied by a group of Philip's trusted generals. According to the ancient sources, the two sides fought bitterly for some time. Philip deliberately commanded his troops to retreat, counting on the untested Athenian hoplites to follow, thus breaking their line. Alexander was the first to break the Theban lines, followed by Philip's generals. Having damaged the enemy's cohesion, Philip ordered his troops to press forward and quickly routed them. With the Athenians lost, the Thebans were surrounded. Left to fight alone, they were defeated.<sup>[36]</sup>



Battle plan from the Battle of Chaeronea

After the victory at Chaeronea, Philip and Alexander marched unopposed into the Peloponnese, devastating much of Laconia and ejecting the Spartans from various parts of it.<sup>[37]</sup> At Corinth, Philip established a "Hellenic Alliance" (modelled on the old anti-Persian alliance of the Greco-Persian



Wars), which included most Greek city-states except Sparta. Philip was then named *Hegemon* (often translated as "Supreme Commander") of this league (known by modern scholars as the League of Corinth), and announced his plans to attack the Persian Empire.<sup>[38][39]</sup>

## Exile and return

When Philip returned to Pella, he fell in love with and married Cleopatra Eurydice in 338 BC,<sup>[40]</sup> the niece of his general Attalus.<sup>[41]</sup> The marriage made Alexander's position as heir less secure, since any son of Cleopatra Eurydice would be a fully Macedonian heir, while Alexander was only half-Macedonian.<sup>[42]</sup> During the wedding banquet, a drunken Attalus publicly prayed to the gods that the union would produce a legitimate heir.<sup>[41]</sup>

At the wedding of Cleopatra, whom Philip fell in love with and married, she being much too young for him, her uncle Attalus in his drink desired the Macedonians would implore the gods to give them a lawful successor to the kingdom by his niece. This so irritated Alexander that throwing one of the cups at his head, "You villain," said he, "what, am I then a bastard?" Then Philip, taking Attalus's part, rose up and would have run his son through; but by good fortune for them both, either his over-hasty rage, or the wine he had drunk, made his foot slip, so that he fell down on the floor, at which Alexander reproachfully insulted him: "See there," said he, "the man who makes preparations to pass out of Europe into Asia, overturned in passing from one seat to another."

—Plutarch, describing the feud at Philip's wedding.<sup>[43]</sup>

In 337 BC, Alexander fled Macedon with his mother, dropping her off with her brother, King Alexander I of Epirus in Dodona, capital of the Molossians.<sup>[44]</sup> He continued to Illyria<sup>[44]</sup> where he sought refuge with one or more Illyrian kings, perhaps with Glaucias, and was treated as a guest, despite having defeated them in battle a few years before.<sup>[45]</sup> However, it appears Philip never intended to disown his politically and militarily trained son.<sup>[44]</sup> Accordingly, Alexander returned to Macedon after six months due to the efforts of a family friend, Demaratus, who mediated between the two parties.<sup>[46]</sup>

In the following year, the Persian satrap (governor) of Caria, Pixodarus, offered his eldest daughter to Alexander's half-brother, Philip Arrhidaeus.<sup>[44]</sup> Olympias and several of Alexander's friends suggested this showed Philip intended to make Arrhidaeus his heir.<sup>[44]</sup> Alexander reacted by sending an actor, Thessalus of Corinth, to tell Pixodarus that he should not offer his daughter's hand to an illegitimate son, but instead to Alexander. When Philip heard of this, he stopped the negotiations and scolded Alexander for wishing to marry the daughter of a Carian, explaining that he wanted a better bride for him.<sup>[44]</sup> Philip exiled four of Alexander's friends, Harpalus, Nearchus, Ptolemy and Erigyius, and had the Corinthians bring Thessalus to him in chains.<sup>[47]</sup>

## King of Macedon

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### Accession

In the 24th day of the Macedonian month Dios, which probably corresponds to 25 October 336 BC,<sup>[48][49]</sup> while at Aegae attending the wedding of his daughter Cleopatra to Olympias's brother, Alexander I of Epirus, Philip was assassinated by the captain of his bodyguards, Pausanias.<sup>[h]</sup> As Pausanias tried to escape, he tripped over a vine and was killed by his pursuers, including two of Alexander's companions, Perdiccas and Leonnatus. Alexander was proclaimed king on the spot by the nobles and army at the age of 20.<sup>[50][51][52]</sup>

### Consolidation of power

Alexander began his reign by eliminating potential rivals to the throne. He had his cousin, the former Amyntas IV, executed.<sup>[53]</sup> He also had two Macedonian princes from the region of Lyncestis killed for having been involved in his father's assassination, but spared a third, Alexander Lyncestes. Olympias had Cleopatra Eurydice, and Europa, her daughter by Philip, burned alive. When Alexander learned about this, he was furious. Alexander also ordered the murder of Attalus,<sup>[53]</sup> who was in command of the advance guard of the army in Asia Minor and Cleopatra's uncle.<sup>[54]</sup>

Attalus was at that time corresponding with Demosthenes, regarding the possibility of defecting to Athens. Attalus also had severely insulted Alexander, and following Cleopatra's murder, Alexander may have considered him too dangerous to be left alive.<sup>[54]</sup> Alexander spared Arrhidaeus, who was by all accounts mentally disabled, possibly as a result of poisoning by

Olympias.<sup>[50][52][55]</sup>

News of Philip's death roused many states into revolt, including Thebes, Athens, Thessaly, and the Thracian tribes north of Macedon. When news of the revolts reached Alexander, he responded quickly. Though advised to use diplomacy, Alexander mustered 3,000 Macedonian cavalry and rode south towards Thessaly. He found the Thessalian army occupying the pass between Mount Olympus and Mount Ossa, and ordered his men to ride over Mount Ossa. When the Thessalians awoke the next day, they found Alexander in their rear and promptly surrendered, adding their cavalry to Alexander's force. He then continued south towards the Peloponnese.<sup>[56]</sup>

Alexander stopped at Thermopylae where he was recognized as the leader of the Amphictyonic League before heading south to Corinth. Athens sued for peace and Alexander pardoned the rebels. The famous encounter between Alexander and Diogenes the Cynic occurred during Alexander's stay in Corinth. When Alexander asked Diogenes what he could do for him, the philosopher disdainfully asked Alexander to stand a little to the side, as he was blocking the sunlight.<sup>[57]</sup> This reply apparently delighted Alexander who is reported to have said, "But verily, if I were not Alexander, I would like to be Diogenes."<sup>[58]</sup> At Corinth, Alexander took the title of *Hegemon* ("leader") and, like Philip, was appointed commander for the coming war against Persia. He also received news of a Thracian uprising.<sup>[59]</sup>

## Balkan campaign

Before crossing to Asia, Alexander wanted to safeguard his northern borders. In the spring of 335 BC, he advanced to suppress several revolts. Starting from Amphipolis, he travelled east into the country of the "Independent Thracians", and at Mount Haemus, the Macedonian army attacked and defeated the Thracian forces manning the heights.<sup>[60]</sup> The Macedonians marched into the country of the Triballi and defeated their army near the Lyginus river<sup>[61]</sup> (a tributary of the Danube). Alexander then marched for three days to the Danube, encountering the Getae tribe on the opposite shore. Crossing the river at night, he surprised them and forced their army to retreat after the first cavalry skirmish.<sup>[62]</sup>

News then reached Alexander that the Illyrian chieftain Cleitus and King Glaukias of the Taulantii were in open revolt against his authority. Marching west into Illyria, Alexander defeated each in turn, forcing the two rulers to flee with their troops. With these victories, he secured his northern frontier.<sup>[63]</sup>

## Destruction of Thebes

While Alexander campaigned north, the Thebans and Athenians rebelled once again. Alexander immediately headed south.<sup>[64]</sup> While the other cities again hesitated, Thebes decided to fight. The Theban resistance was ineffective and Alexander razed the city and divided its territory between the other Boeotian cities. The end of Thebes cowed Athens, leaving all of Greece temporarily at peace.<sup>[64]</sup> Alexander then set out on his Asian campaign, leaving Antipater as regent.<sup>[65]</sup>

# Conquest of the Achaemenid Persian Empire

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## Strategy

Alexander's invasion of Persia as a whole has been denoted as a supreme example of a "strategic line" of conducting war, a line formed by "the chain of logic that connects operations into a single whole." In his book *Strategy*, Soviet military officer and theorist Alexander Svechin delineates Alexander's strategic steps. After securing his Greek base and the Balkans by subjugating



Pausanias assassinates Philip II, Alexander's father, during his procession into the theatre



The Macedonian phalanx at the "Battle of the Carts" against the Thracians in 335 BC