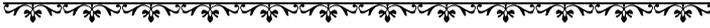


Introduction



Alexander before the Expedition to Asia Minor (356–334)

Alexander was born in July 356 at Pella, capital of the Macedonian kingdom.¹ His parents were Olympias, daughter of the king of the Molossians, and Philip II, king of Macedon since the death of King Perdiccas in 359. Much has been written about Alexander's psychological heritage, but it is impossible to determine with any certainty which aspects of his character he inherited from his parents, still less which came from one parent rather than the other. His first teacher was Leonidas, a kinsman of Olympias, who had a team of tutors under his direction. When Leonidas's brutal methods did not meet with the expected success, Philip also called in Aristotle, who had opened a school at Mytilene on Lesbos, following his stay with Hermias, tyrant of Atarneus, in Asia Minor. Aristotle instructed Alexander and his friends of the same age for three years (343–340) at Mieza. The extent of Aristotle's influence on Alexander is difficult to assess, but it

¹On this early period of Alexander's life, see, e.g., B12 (1995): 25–70; B15 (2003): 69–132; B16 (2003): 29–86; B17 (2003): 17–105; B18 (2007): 1–74, 109–124; for a synthesis, see Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire* (1988): 5–23. On all this, apart from the Athenian sources, Arrian represents a relatively reliable narrative (I.1–10), on which see the detailed commentary of Bosworth, *Commentary*, I (1980): 45–96; see also Diodorus XVII.2–3; 5.1–2; 8–15; Plutarch, *Alex.* 1–14 (Hamilton, *Commentary* [1969]): 2–36; Justin XI.1–4 (Yardley-Heckel, *Justin, Books 11–12* [1997]: 72–104).

INTRODUCTION

is safe to say that several modern authors tend to overestimate it. Wilcken, writing in 1931, stressed that Aristotle brought Alexander into close contact with Greek culture. We should remember, however, that the Macedonian court had already been welcoming Greek artists for several generations, and that Alexander himself displayed a strong passion for the great works of Greek literature, especially the *Iliad*. Greek culture was an integral part of his schooling, and this may reflect Macedonian royal tastes as much as the specific influence of Aristotle. It is generally assumed that Alexander remained in contact with Aristotle, at least down to 327, when he had the philosopher's nephew Callisthenes condemned to death. But even on this point, the documentation, where it exists, is vague.²

Early on Philip associated his son with him in the exercise of power and its related responsibilities. When he left on campaign against Byzantium in 340, he entrusted the conduct of the kingdom to the sixteen-year-old Alexander, taking care to surround him with experienced advisors. The young prince was also given the opportunity to mount an expedition against the formidable Thracians and to found a military colony (Alexandropolis). At the famous Battle of Chaeronea (338) between Macedonians and Greeks, he commanded the left (offensive) wing of the cavalry. After the battle he, together with Antipater, was sent on an embassy to Athens bearing the ashes of the Athenians killed on the battlefield.

This good relationship between father and son, however, suffered a setback in 337, when Philip repudiated Olym-

²See for example the critical reservations of J. S. Romm ("Aristotle's Elephant and the Myth of Alexander's Scientific Patronage," *AJPh* 110/4 [1989]: 566–75), which I find more persuasive than the position taken by L. Bodson, "Alexander the Great and the Scientific Exploration of the Oriental Part of His Empire," *Ancient Society* 22 (1991): 127–38.

ALEXANDER BEFORE THE EXPEDITION

pias and married Cleopatra, a Macedonian princess, and Alexander along with his mother went into exile to Epirus. Thanks to the intervention of Demaratus of Corinth a reconciliation was effected fairly rapidly. A less serious quarrel between father and son erupted when Philip proposed Arrhidaeus, Alexander's half-brother, as groom to the daughter of Pixodaros the dynast of Caria, causing an anxious Alexander to intrigue secretly with the dynast. The affair ended with the banishment of a number of Alexander's best friends, who were thought to have misled him (Nearchus, Harpalus, and Ptolemy, among others).

In October of the year 336, there took place at Aigai a marriage between Cleopatra, daughter of Philip and Olympias (now reconciled), and a Molossian prince named Alexander. On the occasion of this royal wedding, Pausanias, a young Macedonian nobleman, murdered Philip, stabbing him in broad daylight in the middle of the theater where the celebration was taking place. This, at least, is one possible story, but it is a version beset with many uncertainties respecting both the chronology of the events and the background of the various episodes. There has been much debate—both in the past and continuing to the present day: Did Pausanias act on his own, or was he egged on by Olympias, by the Achaemenid court, or even by Alexander? Did Alexander perhaps feel his position to be insecure in the aftermath of the Pixodaros affair, so that he was drawn to join in a plot against his father, or at least not to oppose it? Again the documentation is very scanty, as it depends on Plutarch's story (*Alex.* 10.1–8), on the basis of which it is possible to assume, or not, that Alexander had reason to fear that he might not succeed Philip. It is important to stress once more: there is no text nor any argument that can furnish convincing proofs. We are reduced to either believing Plutarch or not, and/or to deciding

INTRODUCTION

whether he was motivated by a concern for historical truth or by his wish to make a splash in literary circles.³

As soon as Alexander became king, he proclaimed to the Assembly of the Macedonian people (the representatives of the *ethnos*)⁴ his desire to continue his father's work. He must surely have conducted the funerary ceremonies in the royal necropolis of Aigai, as doing so would publicly and definitively confer dynastic legitimacy upon himself as the new king.⁵ He immediately made preparations to ensure calm and stability within the Greek communities. Philip's death and the new king's youth had given rise to hopes among Alexander's enemies: ambitious members of the Macedonian nobility, the barbarians on the frontiers of the kingdom, the Greeks, and, of course, at the Achaemenid court. Alexander set about methodically disabusing them. He began by ordering a bloody purge of the Macedonian nobility: Philip's murderer Pausanias was executed, as were a number of real and suspected pretenders, while some nobles chose to

³M. Hatzopoulos ("A Reconsideration of the Pixodaros Affair," in *Studies in the History of Art* 10, Symposium Series I, Washington DC [1986]: 59–66) comments: "The Pixodaros affair, if not simply invented, was completely different from what Plutarch's account would have us believe. . . ." (p. 62). Against this, V. French and P. Dixon ("The Pixodarus Affair: Another View," *AncWorld* 13 [1986]: 73–86) support Plutarch, whose "high regard for the truth, and his desire to avoid malice" they stress (p. 85).

⁴This is not the place to review at length the historiography of this issue. Since my discussion in *Antigone* (1973): 237–350 (based on Aymard's earlier studies), innumerable articles rejecting my suggestions have appeared (most recently the one by E. M. Anson in *Classical Philology* 103 [2008]: 135–49). On this "new orthodoxy," see the critical analysis and interpretations of M. Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions under the Kings I*, Athens 1996: 37–42 (historiography) and 261–322 ("The Common Assembly").

⁵Since Manolis Andronikos's first discoveries at the site in 1977, there have been endless debates about the identification of the tomb as that of the dead king. The bibliography is too enormous to be cited here: see the information collected and presented by Elizabeth Carney at <http://people.clemson.edu/~elizab/aegae.htm> and <http://people.clemson.edu/~elizab/Tombbib.htm#Tombbib>.

ALEXANDER BEFORE THE EXPEDITION

flee to Asia and offer their services to the Great King. Alexander “descended” on Greece, silenced his opponents (particularly those in Athens), and was granted the title of commander of the war against Persia, thus renewing the Corinthian pact of 338. The third stage in his consolidation of power was a campaign along the Danube and in the Balkans (spring 335) that resulted in the Thracians offering their submission. Alexander clearly wanted to be sure of the situation to his rear. He broke off his Illyrian campaign and within thirteen days had advanced upon the Greeks who, misled by news of his death, were preparing to rebel. When Thebes refused to surrender, Alexander took it by storm and left the fate of the captured city in the hands of the Greeks gathered at Corinth: Thebes was razed to the ground, a powerful warning to the other Greek cities. Alexander displayed more clemency towards Athens, which had given Thebes clandestine support. Of the orators, only Charidemus was exiled and sought refuge at the Great King’s court. Everything was now ready. Philip’s death had delayed the start of the great expedition into Asia by no more than a few months.