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Alexander the Great

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[By Timothy D. Naegele\[1\]](#)

In the pantheon of the greatest human beings who ever lived, in terms of influencing the history of the world, Jesus Christ “ranks” number one and Alexander the Great ranks number two, for similar albeit different reasons. Both influenced history more than others, and died at essentially the same age, 33. Jesus changed Man’s perception of his relationship to God and thereby “conquered” much of the world, while Alexander’s territorial conquests spread democracy and the assimilation of disparate cultures. Both were remarkable leaders who possessed super-human qualities, including wisdom and fearlessness.

In a sense their lives were intertwined, for without the common language of Greek, Christianity might not have spread beyond Judea to become a world religion. The Roman Empire and the long centuries of Byzantium are all said to be the fruits of Alexander’s achievements too. In his short life, this young king and student of Aristotle conquered the known world as far as India to the east—”at the farthest end of Earth”—and changed the course of history. Among the ages, he is a giant; a man who became a mythic god.

As a general, Alexander (or Alexander III of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.) is considered to be among the greatest the world has ever known. His conquests dwarf those of other conquerors, such as Julius Caesar, Napoleon and Hitler. He was recognized as pharaoh (or god incarnate) of Egypt; and his

general Ptolemy founded the fabled Egyptian dynasty that ended with the death of Cleopatra (who was named for Alexander's full sister^[2]), the last of the Ptolemies. Alexander's wife, Roxane, is a story of love and alliances—and of their son, born posthumously, who succeeded him.

Even the taming of his great black stallion, Bucephalas—which his father Philip had proclaimed unmanageable to the youth of 12, and which became Alexander's loyal companion during his campaigns on three continents, as far as India—has been immortalized in history and legend, and in movies such as Francis Ford Coppola's "The Black Stallion." According to tradition, Alexander also solved the riddle of the "Gordian knot"—a rope knotted so intricately that whoever could undo it was to rule Asia—by cutting it with his sword.

Alexander's numerous acts of both savagery and gallantry in war have been chronicled throughout recorded history, such that 2,300 years after his death he often appears more like a mythic figure than a man of flesh and blood. His conquests ushered in what has been called the Hellenistic Age—or the "Golden Age"—dating from his death in 323 B.C. to 31 B.C. when Ptolemaic Egypt fell to Rome, a period in which the Greek culture and language spread through northern Africa and southwestern Asia, creating an era that has been described as the first giant step toward the establishment of an international culture.

At the time of his death, his empire stretched from Albania, the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, the Danube and the Black Sea in the north, through Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and what was the Persian Empire, to Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Punjab of India in the east, and encompassing strategic parts of present-day Libya, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Born around July 20, 356, at Pella in Macedonia^[3], west of what is now Thessaloniki in the rugged northern reaches of Greece—in the shadow of Mount Olympus, the home of the gods—he was the son of Philip II, king of Macedonia, and Olympias, daughter of the king of Epirus. Philip was considered one of the most brilliant generals of his day^[4], whose family had ruled Macedonia for more than 300 years. Alexander is said to have owed much of his tactical genius to his father, although emotionally he is considered to have been closer to his strong-willed, proud and ruthless mother. Philip was married at least seven times; and after his death, it is said that Olympias roasted his last and youngest wife alive.

From his mother, Alexander acquired a belief that he was a descendant of Achilles, the legendary hero of his beloved *Iliad* by Homer, whose code was upheld by warriors: Glory in war was life's highest honor. Plutarch, who wrote a biography of Alexander in the first century A.D., noted that "[h]e regarded the *Iliad* as a handbook of the art of war and took with him on his campaigns a text annotated by Aristotle which he always kept under his pillow together with a dagger." Alexander was groomed by Philip to inherit his kingdom; and Philip acquired Aristotle, a former student of Plato, who became Alexander's tutor and taught him philosophy, medicine, and scientific investigation from age 13 to 16. Also, Alexander was reared among his father's hard-drinking professional soldiers, and hunters.

In 340, during his father's attack on Byzantium, he was left in charge of Macedonia. He defeated the Maedi, a Thracian people; and two years later, at the age of 18, he commanded the Companion Cavalry, Macedonia's elite mounted unit, at the Battle of Chaeronea in which Philip decisively defeated an alliance of Athenian, Theban and other Greek forces. Taking advantage of a break in the enemy line, Alexander is said to have displayed personal courage in leading the attack against Thebes'

legendary crack unit, the Sacred Band.[\[5\]](#)

A year later Philip divorced Olympias; and after a quarrel at a feast held to celebrate his father's new marriage, Alexander and his mother fled to Epirus, and he subsequently went to Illyria. Shortly afterward, father and son were reconciled and Alexander returned to Macedonia, where he spent all but 11 years of his short life. In 336, however, on Philip's assassination by a bodyguard[\[6\]](#), Alexander at 20—supported by the army—installed himself on his father's throne.

He at once executed those who were alleged to be behind Philip's murder, along with all possible rivals and the faction that was opposed to him. He then marched south, recovered a wavering Thessaly, and at an assembly of the Greek League at Corinth was appointed generalissimo for the forthcoming invasion of Asia, already planned and initiated by Philip whose ultimate goal was to attack Persia, Greece's old enemy across the Aegean Sea.

Before turning to Persia, whose wealth was needed if he was to maintain the army that Philip had built and pay off 500 talents that he owed—and following a rumor of his death that precipitated a revolt of Theban democrats—Alexander marched 240 miles in 14 days from Pelion (near modern Korçë, Albania) in Illyria to Thebes. When the Thebans refused to surrender, he entered and razed their city to the ground; 6,000 were killed, and all survivors were sold into slavery; and the other Greek states were cowed by this savagery.

The Persian expedition and the Battle of Issus

In 334 B.C., Alexander crossed the Hellespont—the strait known today as the Dardanelles—to Asia Minor and set out for Troy, leaving Antipater, who had faithfully served his father, as his deputy in Europe with more than 13,000 men. Alexander himself commanded more than 5,000 cavalry and 30,000 infantry, as he began his campaign against Persia whose empire extended from modern Turkey to Pakistan.

At the fall of Troy, Alexander and his closest companion, Hephaestion, paid tribute to the great Homeric warrior Achilles, by anointing altars at his alleged tomb with oil and offering sacrifices. Indeed, it has been said that blood was the characteristic of Alexander's whole campaign, and that there is nothing comparable in ancient history except Julius Caesar in Gaul.

He confronted the Persians first at the Granicus River (now the Kocabas), northeast of Troy, in May of 334. The Persians were arrayed on high ground with approximately 15,000 cavalry and 16,000 infantry, a third of them Greek mercenaries. The Persian plan to tempt Alexander across the river and kill him almost succeeded. Alexander, ignoring the advice of his father's general Parmenion to delay the attack, forged into the river and up the steep opposing bank to where the Persians waited. However, in hand-to-hand combat, he and his men were able to break the enemy lines and surround the mercenaries of the Persian king, Darius III, and Alexander's victory was complete. The mercenaries were largely massacred, except for 2,000 survivors who were sent back to Macedonia in chains.

In addition to having his father's Companion Cavalry, Alexander had the Macedonian phalanx that had been refined by Philip into a highly mobile unit of foot soldiers armed with wooden thrusting pikes up to 16 feet long. It was the length of these pikes—as much as nine feet longer than the average spear—that protected Alexander's men as they climbed the river bank from their vulnerable

position below the Persians, according to one account. This victory at Granicus exposed western Asia Minor to the Macedonians; most cities opened their gates; and in contrast to Macedonian policy in Greece, democracies were installed—on the condition that they were obedient to Alexander.

While the Persian forces fled inland, Alexander and his army marched triumphantly along the coast, liberating the region's Greek cities from their Persian rulers. By the winter of 334-333, Alexander conquered western Asia Minor. Darius and his Persian army advanced northward, and intelligence on both sides was faulty. Alexander was already encamped near modern Iskenderun, Turkey, when he learned in the fall of 333 that Darius was at Issus, north of Alexander's position, near the present-day Turkish-Syrian border. Turning, Alexander found Darius drawn up along the Pinarus River; and in the battle that followed, Alexander won a decisive victory.

Exhausted from a two-day march, Alexander's men were outnumbered: a Macedonian force of about 50,000, to as many as 70,000 Persians. Nonetheless, Alexander rallied his troops and led the charge into the Persian lines. It is said that amidst the dust and savagery of battle, Alexander spotted Darius in his war chariot and made straight for him, followed by his cavalry. Darius fled; the struggle turned into a Persian rout, leaving Darius' family in Alexander's hands; and on Alexander's orders, the Persian king's wife and daughters were not harmed. Yet, at 23, Alexander had met the great King of Persia and defeated him.

Conquest of the Mediterranean coast and Egypt

From Issus, Alexander marched south along the Mediterranean coast, into Syria and Phoenicia, his object being to isolate the Persian fleet from its bases and destroy it as an effective fighting force. City after city allied to Persia surrendered to him; and Alexander's second in command, Parmenion, who had secured a foothold in Asia Minor during Philip's lifetime, was sent ahead to secure Damascus and its rich booty including Darius' war chest. In response to a letter from Darius offering peace, Alexander replied arrogantly, recapitulating the historic wrongs of Greece by Persia and demanding unconditional surrender to himself as lord of Asia.

He met his first resistance at Tyre, an island city located a mile offshore, which was a strategic site because of its fabled sea power. Alexander's forces included a special engineering unit similar to the modern American Seabees, and they began constructing a causeway to the island. While his siege of Tyre was in progress, Darius sent a new offer: he would pay a huge ransom of 10,000 talents for his family and cede all his lands west of the Euphrates. "I would accept," Parmenion is reported to have said, "were I Alexander"—"I too," was the famous retort, "were I Parmenion."

The storming of Tyre in July of 332 is considered to be Alexander's greatest military achievement; however, it was attended with great carnage and the sale of the women and children into slavery. It took Alexander seven months to conquer the city; and when his Macedonians triumphed, it is said of Tyre that 7,000 were slain outright, 2,000 young men were crucified, and 30,000 sold into slavery. Leaving Parmenion in Syria, Alexander advanced south without opposition until he reached Gaza. There, bitter resistance halted him for two months, and he sustained a serious shoulder wound during a sortie.^[7]

In November of 332, after neutralizing Persian allies along the way, Alexander reached Egypt where the people welcomed him as their deliverer, and the Persian satrap wisely surrendered. At Memphis, Alexander was crowned with the traditional double crown of the pharaohs; the native priests were

placated, and their religion was encouraged. He spent the winter organizing Egypt, where he employed Egyptian governors, keeping the army under a separate Macedonian command. He founded Alexandria, one of the greatest cities of its time, near the western arm of the Nile on a site between the sea and Lake Mareotis, protected by the island of Pharos, and had it laid out by a Rhodian architect. He is also said to have sent an expedition to discover the causes of the flooding of the Nile.

From Alexandria, he trekked inland to visit the famed Oracle of the god Ammon, in its lush oasis at Siwah. Hoping to confirm his divine status and secure favorable omens for his invasion of Asia, the priest gave him the traditional salutation of a pharaoh, as the son of Ammon, a title that fueled his growing sense of invincibility. It is said that throughout his campaigns, he made daily sacrifices to sway the gods.

His conquest of Egypt had completed his control of the whole eastern Mediterranean coast; and in July of 331, Alexander was on the Euphrates. Instead of taking the direct route down the river to Babylon, he traveled across northern Mesopotamia toward the Tigris; and Darius, learning of this move from an advance force, marched up the Tigris to oppose him. The decisive battle of the war was fought on the plain of Gaugamela, between Nineveh and Arbela. Alexander pursued the defeated Persian forces for 35 miles to Arbela, but Darius escaped with his cavalry and Greek mercenaries into Media.

Alexander now occupied Babylon, city and province. Susa, the capital, also surrendered, releasing huge treasures amounting to 50,000 gold talents. Here, Alexander established Darius' family in comfort; and he pressed on into Persia proper. At Persepolis, he ceremonially burned down the palace of Xerxes, as a symbol that the Panhellenic war of revenge was at an end. In the spring of 330, Alexander marched north into Media and occupied its capital. The Thessalians and Greek allies were sent home; and henceforth, it is said that he was waging a purely personal war.

Alexander's views on the empire were changing. He had come to envisage a joint ruling class consisting of Macedonians and Persians, and this served to augment the misunderstanding that now arose between his Macedonians and him. Before continuing his pursuit of Darius, who had retreated into Bactria, he assembled all the Persian treasure and entrusted it to Harpalus; and Parmenion was also left behind in Media to control communications. In midsummer 330, Alexander set out for the eastern provinces "at a high speed" via modern Rayy (near Tehran) and the Caspian Gates, where he learned that Bessus, the satrap of Bactria, had Darius stabbed and left him to die. Alexander sent his body for burial with honors in the royal tombs at Persepolis.

Campaign eastward, to Central Asia

Darius' death left no obstacle to Alexander's claim to be "lord of Asia"—of the Persian Empire. He also accepted the surrender of Darius' Greek mercenaries. His advance eastward was now rapid, and he founded Alexandria of the Arians (modern Herat). At Phrada, he took steps to destroy Parmenion and his family as well. Parmenion's son, commander of the elite Companion Cavalry that Alexander had once commanded, was implicated in an alleged plot against Alexander's life; he was condemned by the army, and executed; and a secret message was sent to Parmenion's second in command, who obediently assassinated him. This ruthless action excited widespread horror but strengthened Alexander's position relative to his critics and those whom he regarded as his father's men. All of Parmenion's adherents were now eliminated, and men close to Alexander were promoted.

From Phrada, Alexander pressed on during the winter of 330-329, over the mountains past the site of modern Kabul, Afghanistan, into the country of the Paropamisadae, where he founded Alexandria by the Caucasus. Bessus was now in Bactria raising a national revolt with the usurped title of Great King. Crossing the Hindu Kush northward over the Khawak Pass (11,650 feet), Alexander brought his army, despite food shortages, to Drapsaca. Outflanked, Bessus fled and Alexander sent his general Ptolemy in pursuit; Bessus was captured, flogged, and sent to Balkh^[8], where he was mutilated after the Persian manner (losing his nose and ears); and in due course he was publicly executed.

From modern Samarkand, Alexander advanced to the Jaxartes, the boundary of the Persian Empire. There he broke the opposition of Scythian nomads by his use of catapults and, after defeating them in a battle on the north bank of the river, pursued them into the interior. On the site of modern Leninabad (Khojent) on the Jaxartes, he founded a city, Alexandria Eschate, "the farthest." It took Alexander until the autumn of 328 to crush the most determined opponent he encountered in his campaigns.

Later in the same year, he attacked Oxyartes and the remaining barons who held out in the hills of modern Tadzhikistan. Volunteers seized the crag on which Oxyartes had his stronghold, and among the captives was his daughter, Roxane. In reconciliation Alexander married her, and the rest of his opponents were either won over or crushed.

At Maracanda (or modern Samarkand), an incident occurred that widened the breach between Alexander and many of his Macedonians. He murdered Cleitus, one of his most trusted commanders, in a drunken quarrel, but his excessive display of remorse led the army to pass a decree convicting Cleitus posthumously of treason. The event marked a step in Alexander's progress toward Eastern absolutism, and this growing attitude found its outward expression in his use of Persian royal dress.

Shortly afterward, at Balkh, he attempted to impose the Persian court ceremonial—involving prostration (or what has been described as a "courtly kiss")—on the Greeks and Macedonians too; however, to them this custom, habitual for Persians entering the king's presence, implied an act of worship toward a god and was intolerable before a man. Even Callisthenes, historian and nephew of Aristotle, whose ostentatious flattery had perhaps encouraged Alexander to see himself in the role of a god, refused to abase himself. Macedonian laughter caused the experiment to founder, and Alexander abandoned it. Shortly afterward, however, Callisthenes was held to be privy to a conspiracy among the royal pages and was executed (or died in prison).

Invasion of India

In early summer of 327, Alexander left Bactria with a reinforced army under a reorganized command. If Plutarch's figure of 120,000 men has any reality, however, it must have included all kinds of auxiliary services, together with muleteers, camel drivers, medical corps, peddlers, entertainers, women, and children—the fighting strength perhaps stood at about 35,000. Recrossing the Hindu Kush, Alexander divided his forces. Half the army with the baggage, under Hephaestion and another Cavalry commander, was sent through the Khyber Pass, while Alexander himself led the rest through the hills to the north. His advance was marked by the storming of the almost impregnable pinnacle of the modern Pir-Sar, a few miles west of the Indus and north of the Buner River, an impressive feat of siegecraft.

In the spring of 326, crossing the Indus, Alexander entered Taxila, whose ruler, Taxiles, furnished

elephants and troops in return for aid against his rival Porus, who ruled the lands between the Hydaspes (modern Jhelum) and the modern Chenab. In June, Alexander fought his last great battle on the left bank of the Hydaspes. He founded two cities there, one of which was named Alexandria Nicaea, to celebrate his victory; and Porus became his ally.

Although Alexander gained a rajah and a new troop of elephants, he also lost a life-long friend. It is said that Bucephalas was a man-eater and a unicorn, and that he was born of the same seed as his master, and that he whinnied and fawned with his front legs at the sight of the only man he ever trusted. What we do know for certain is that not far from the defeat of Porus and the site of Bucephalas' last river crossing, Alexander founded a second city and named it Bucephala, in memory of his beloved horse that died there about the age of 30. The great black stallion had carried his master to the "eastern edge of the world," and a funeral procession was organized, which Alexander led in person.

How much Alexander knew of India beyond the Hyphasis (probably the modern Beas) is uncertain; there is no conclusive proof that he had heard of the Ganges. While he was anxious to press on, he had advanced to the Hyphasis when his army mutinied, refusing to go farther in the tropical rain; they were weary in body and spirit, and Coenus, one of Alexander's four chief marshals, acted as their spokesman. On finding the army adamant, Alexander agreed to turn back.

On the Hyphasis, Alexander built a fleet of 800 to 1,000 ships. Leaving Porus, he then proceeded down the river and into the Indus, with half his forces on shipboard and half marching in three columns down the two banks. Nearchus commanded the fleet; and the march was attended with much fighting and heavy, pitiless slaughter. At the storming of one town near what is now called the Ravi River, Alexander received a severe wound that left him weakened.

On reaching the head of the Indus delta, he built a harbor and docks and explored both arms of the Indus. He planned to lead part of his forces back by land, while the rest in perhaps 100 to 150 ships under the command of Nearchus made a voyage of exploration along the Persian Gulf. Local opposition led the ships to set sail in September of 325, and they were held up for three weeks until they could pick up the northeast monsoon in late October. In September, Alexander too set out along the coast through Gedrosia (modern Baluchistan), but he was soon compelled by mountainous country to turn inland, thus failing in his project to establish food depots for the fleet.

Craterus, a high-ranking officer, already had been sent off with the baggage and siege train, to rejoin the main army on the Amanis (modern Minab) River in Carmania. Alexander's march through Gedrosia proved disastrous; waterless desert and shortage of food and fuel caused great suffering; and many, especially women and children, perished in a sudden monsoon flood while encamped. At the Amanis, Alexander was rejoined by the fleet, which also had suffered losses.

Consolidation of the empire

Alexander now proceeded farther with the policy of replacing senior officials and executing defaulting governors, upon which he had already embarked before leaving India. Between 326 and 324, more than a third of his satraps were superseded and six were put to death; three generals in Media were accused of extortion, arrested, tried, and executed. Whether the conduct that Alexander displayed against his governors represented exemplary punishment for gross maladministration during his absence, or merely the elimination of men he had come to distrust (as in the case of Parmenion), is

debatable; however, ancient sources generally favorable to Alexander comment adversely on his savagery.

In the spring of 324, he was back in Susa, administrative center of the Persian Empire. He found that his treasurer, Harpalus, had absconded with 6,000 mercenaries and 5,000 talents to Greece. Arrested in Athens, he escaped and later was murdered in Crete. At Susa, Alexander held a feast to celebrate his conquest of the Persian Empire, at which, in furtherance of his policy of fusing Macedonians and Persians into one master race, he and 80 of his officers took Persian wives. He and Hephaestion married Darius' daughters Barsine (also called Stateira) and Drypetis, respectively; and 10,000 of his soldiers with native wives were given generous dowries.

This policy of racial fusion brought increasing friction to Alexander's relations with his Macedonians, who had no sympathy for his changed concept of the empire. His determination to incorporate Persians on equal terms in the army and the administration of the provinces was bitterly resented. This discontent was now fanned by the arrival of 30,000 native youths who had received Macedonian military training, and by the introduction of Orientals from various parts of the empire into the Companion Cavalry. The issue came to a head when Alexander's decision to send home Macedonian veterans under Craterus was interpreted as a move toward transferring the seat of power to Asia.

There was an open mutiny involving all but the royal bodyguard; however, when Alexander dismissed his whole army and enrolled Persians instead, the opposition broke down. An emotional scene of reconciliation was followed by a vast banquet with 9,000 guests to celebrate the ending of the misunderstanding and the partnership in government of Macedonians and Persians—but not, as has been argued by some, the incorporation of all the subject peoples as partners in the commonwealth. Ten thousand veterans were now sent back to Macedonia with gifts, and the crisis was ended.

In the autumn of 324, Hephaestion died and Alexander indulged in extravagant mourning for his closest friend. He was given a royal funeral in Babylon with a pyre costing 10,000 talents. It was probably in connection with a general order sent out to the Greeks, to honor Hephaestion as a hero, that Alexander linked the demand that he himself should be accorded divine honors. Legend offered more than one example of men who, by their achievements, acquired divine status.

Alexander had on several occasions encouraged favorable comparison of his own accomplishments with those of Dionysus or Heracles. He seemed to have become convinced of the reality of his own divinity and to have required its acceptance by others. There is no reason to assume that his demand had any political background (divine status gave its possessor no particular rights in a Greek city); rather it has been said to be a symptom of his growing megalomania and emotional instability. The cities complied, but often ironically—the Spartan decree read, "Since Alexander wishes to be a god, let him be a god."

In the spring of 323, at Babylon, he received complimentary embassies from the Libyans and from the Bruttians, Etruscans, and Lucanians of Italy. Representatives of the cities of Greece also came, garlanded as befitted Alexander's divine status. Following up Nearchus' voyage, he now founded an Alexandria at the mouth of the Tigris and made plans to develop sea communications with India, for which an expedition along the Arabian coast was to be a preliminary. He also dispatched an officer to explore the Caspian Sea.

Suddenly, in Babylon, while busy with plans to improve the irrigation of the Euphrates and to settle

the coast of the Persian Gulf, Alexander was taken ill after a prolonged banquet and drinking bout. Ten days later, on June 10 or 13, 323, he died before reaching the age of 33. He had reigned for 12 years and eight months. His body, diverted to Egypt by Ptolemy, its later king, was eventually placed in a golden coffin in Alexandria. Both in Egypt and elsewhere in the Greek cities, he received divine honors.

No heir had been appointed to the throne, and his generals adopted his father's half-witted illegitimate son, Philip Arrhidaeus, *and* Alexander's posthumous son by Roxane, Alexander IV, as kings, sharing out the satrapies among themselves, after much bargaining. Both kings were murdered, Arrhidaeus in 317 and Alexander IV in 310/309. The provinces became independent kingdoms; and the generals, following Antigonus' lead in 306, took the title of king.

Who was Alexander?

Like Napoleon, in physical terms, Alexander is said to have been short, perhaps not more than five feet tall; stockily built; and apparently unable to grow a full beard, thus setting a fashion of being clean-shaven. He was said to be famously good-looking, with long curling hair and fair skin that, according to Plutarch, had "a ruddy tinge . . . especially upon his face and chest."[\[9\]](#)

In his later years, Alexander's aims seem to have been directed toward exploration, in particular of Arabia and the Caspian. In the organization of his empire, he had been content in many spheres to improvise and adapt what he found. His financial policy is an exception; it is clear that he set up a central organization with collectors perhaps independent of the local satraps. That this proved a failure was partly due to weaknesses in the character of Harpalus, his chief treasurer. But the establishment of a new coinage with a silver standard based on that of Athens in place of the old bimetallic system current both in Macedonia and in Persia helped trade everywhere and, combined with the release of vast amounts of bullion from the Persian treasuries, gave much-needed stimulation to the economy of the whole Mediterranean area.

Alexander's founding of new cities—Plutarch writes of more than seventy—initiated a new chapter in Greek expansion. No doubt many of the colonists, by no means volunteers, deserted these cities, and marriages with native women led to some dilution of Greek ways; however, the Greek (rather than Macedonian) influence remained strong in most of them. Since the process was carried further by Alexander's successors, the spread of Hellenic thought and customs over much of Asia as far as Bactria and India was one of the more striking effects of Alexander's conquests.

His plans for racial fusion, on the other hand, were considered a failure. The Macedonians, leaders and men alike, rejected the idea; and in the later Seleucid Empire, the Greek and Macedonian element was clearly dominant. How far Alexander would have succeeded in the difficult task of coordinating his vast dominions, had he lived, is hard to determine. The only link between the many units that went to make up an empire more disparate than that of the Habsburgs, and far larger, was his own person; and his death came before he could tackle this problem.

What had held it all together was his own dynamic personality. He combined an iron will, and ability to drive himself and his men to the utmost, with a supple and flexible mind. He knew when to draw back and change his policy, though it is said that he did this reluctantly. He was imaginative and not without romantic impulses—figures like Achilles, Heracles, and Dionysus were often on his mind. He was swift in anger; and under the strain of his long campaigns, this side of his character grew more

pronounced.

Ruthless, he had increasing recourse to terror, showing no hesitation in eliminating men whom he had ceased to trust, either with or without the pretense of a fair trial. Years after his death, it is said that Cassander, son of Antipater, a regent of the Macedonian Empire under Alexander, could not pass his statue at Delphi without shuddering. Yet he maintained the loyalty of his men, who followed him to the Hyphasis without complaining and continued to believe in him throughout all hardships. Only when his whim would have taken them still farther into unknown India did he fail to get his way.

His military genius is undisputed, and he was blessed with the gift of leadership. When he gave the command to attack, it is said that he knew his men would confidently do so. Alexander himself led the cavalry charge at the Granicus, in a white-plumed helmet; and empathy for his men was part of the Macedonian warrior code. Arrian, a Greek historian of the second-century A.D. whose account of Alexander's campaigns is considered one of the best of ancient sources, wrote: "For the wounded he showed deep concern. He visited them all and examined their wounds, asking each man how and in what circumstances his wound was received, and allowing him to tell his story and exaggerate as much as he pleased."

In addition, Alexander showed unusual versatility both in the combination of different arms and in adapting his tactics to the challenge of enemies who commanded novel forms of warfare—the nomads, the Indian hill tribes, or Porus with his elephants. His strategy was skillful and imaginative, and he knew how to exploit the chances that arose in every battle and that might be decisive for victory or defeat. He also drew the last advantage from victory by relentless pursuit. His use of cavalry was so effective that it is said he rarely had to fall back upon his infantry to deliver a crushing blow.

Alexander's short reign marks a decisive moment in the history of Europe and Asia. His campaigns and his own personal interest in scientific investigation brought many advances in the knowledge of geography and natural history. His career led to the moving of the great centers of civilization eastward, and initiated the new age of the Greek territorial monarchies. It spread Hellenism in a vast colonizing wave throughout the Middle East and created, if not politically at least economically and culturally, a single world stretching from Gibraltar to the Punjab, open to trade and social intercourse and with a considerable overlay of common civilization.

...

Two thousand three hundred years ago, Alexander and his army began a 22,000-mile expedition from Greece to India, and conquered most of the known world before he was 30. It was a turning point in history. It is said that there was never a king before or since with exploits as vast as those of Alexander. He was the world's first authentic hero—a worldly genius who succeeded, whereas others before and after him failed.

He is one of a handful of men who, in striding across the pages of history, left the world marked forever by their presence.

This was the Age of Alexander . . . Alexander the Great!

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Timeline/Chronology

356 B.C. Birth of Alexander the Great (Alexander III) in Macedonia to Philip II, king of Macedonia, and his wife, Olympias

344 B.C. Alexander tames the giant horse Bucephalas (age 12)

343-340 B.C. Alexander is taught by Aristotle (ages 13-16)

340 B.C. Philip attacks Byzantium; Alexander is left in charge of Macedonia, and defeats the Maedi (age 16)

338 B.C. Philip II defeats combined Greek armies (consisting of Athenian, Theban and other Greek forces) at Chaironeia (or Chaeronea); Alexander commands the Companion Cavalry, Macedonia's elite mounted unit, and displays personal courage in leading the attack against Thebes' legendary crack unit, the Sacred Band (age 18)

336 B.C. First invasion of Asia; King Philip assassinated at Aigai; accession of Alexander to the Macedonian throne (age 20)

335 B.C. Alexander's campaigns in Thrace and Illyria; the destruction of Thebes (age 21)

334 B.C. Alexander begins his invasion of the Persian Empire; the Battle of the Granicus River; the sieges of Miletus and Halicarnassus (age 22)

334-333 B.C. Conquest of southern Asia Minor; visit to Gordion near Ankara

333 B.C. The Battle of Issus (age 23)

332 B.C. The siege and capture of Tyre and Gaza (age 24)

332-1 B.C. Alexander conquers Egypt, founds Alexandria, and visits the Oracle of Ammon at the Siwah Oasis

331 B.C. The Battle of Gaugamela (age 25)

330 B.C. The burning of Persepolis; death of the Persian Great King Darius III; murders of Philotas and Parmenion (or Parmenio); the Hindu Kush and the "eastern edge of the world," according to Aristotle; the pursuit of Bessus (age 26)

329-8 B.C. Campaigns in Bactria and Sogdia (or Sogdiana); the capture of Bessus; the murder of Cleitus; the Royal Pages' Conspiracy, and the arrest and death of Callisthenes; the revolt and death of Spitamenes

327 B.C. Alexander marries Roxane (or Rhoxane); the invasion of India (age 29)

326-5 B.C. The Battle of the Hydaspes against Porus, during which Bucephalas is gravely wounded and dies (at about 30 years); the mutiny on the Hyphasis river; the

voyage down the Indus; the campaign against the Malli (or Malloi), and the fortress of Multan

325 B.C. The march across the Gedrosian desert (age 31)

324 B.C. The mass marriage at Susa; the mutiny at Opis; the death of Hephaestion (or Hephaistion) (age 32)

June 10 or 13, 323 B.C. The death of Alexander the Great at Babylon (before the age of 33)

31 B.C. Rome overcomes the last of Alexander's successor kingdoms with the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra

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[1] Timothy D. Naegele was counsel to the U.S. Senate Banking Committee, and chief of staff to Presidential Medal of Freedom and Congressional Gold Medal recipient and former U.S. Senator Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass), the first black senator since Reconstruction after the U.S. Civil War. He practices law in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles with his firm, Timothy D. Naegele & Associates (www.naegele.com). He has an undergraduate degree in economics from UCLA, as well as two law degrees from the School of Law (Boalt Hall), University of California, Berkeley, and from Georgetown University. He is a member of the District of Columbia and California bars. He served as a Captain in the U.S. Army, assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency at the Pentagon, where he received the Joint Service Commendation Medal. Mr. Naegele is an Independent politically; and he is listed in Who's Who in America, Who's Who in American Law, and Who's Who in Finance and Business. He has written extensively over the years. See, e.g., www.naegele.com/whats_new.html#articles

[2] Also, the last wife of Alexander's father, King Philip II, was named Cleopatra.

[3] Macedonia was a large region of northern Greece, not to be confused with the former Yugoslavia, or the province of that name in present-day Greece. In the Fourth Century B.C., it stretched to the north and covered much of the former Yugoslavia and parts of Bulgaria, to the east as far as Thrace and the Black Sea, in the south as far as Thessaly, and to the west across the Pindus mountains into modern Albania.

[4] He was considered to be an insightful leader, unrivaled by any except his famous son, Alexander. In 359 B.C., at about the age of 23, Philip became king of Macedonia, which consisted of many clans. He consolidated the kingdom, increased its wealth and status, and built a mighty army. With shrewd diplomacy, alliances and brute force, he conquered much of Greece and headed the Greek League that was formed to invade Asia Minor; however, in 336, an assassin's sword ended his life, leaving the invasion to his ambitious son, Alexander.

[5] As promising as his performance was, few would have guessed that he would conquer the known world to the east and change the course of history in the next 14 or so years.

[6] It has been written that the bodyguard might have been a former lover of Philip since—like most

Greek upper-class men—Philip was considered to be bisexual.

[7] It is said that there is no basis for the tradition that he turned aside to visit Jerusalem.

[8] Also, this appears to be referred to as Bactra.

[9] It is also said that he held his head slightly to the left and had a “melting look” in his eyes, traits that have led some modern doctors to suggest that he suffered from a rare eye condition known as Brown’s syndrome. If this diagnosis is accurate, the characteristic tilt of his head may have enabled him to see straight.

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