

Alexander III

According to Plutarch, Alexander was born on the sixth of Hecatombaeon (July) in the year 356 B.C. He was the son of Philip, king of Macedon, and Olympias. Supposedly on the day he was born the temple of Artemis burnt down, signifying his future glory. Not much is known of the youth of Alexander. It is known that he was taught by Aristotle and had a love of the Greek epic poems. One famous story from his youth is told in Plutarch's life of Alexander. Philonius the Thessalian brought the horse Bucephalus to Philip offering to sell him for thirteen talents. Philip and his attendants brought the horse to a field to try him. When they got there none of Philip's attendants could even mount him. They were leading the horse away when young Alexander asked for a chance to ride him. A wager was made that if Alexander could not ride the horse he would pay the price for the horse. After the wager was made Alexander took the horse and pointed him in the direction of the sun. He had noticed that the horse was afraid of his own shadow. He then mounted the horse and began to ride, to the amazement of all who watched. When he got off the horse Philip kissed his son.

Plutarch also tells of Alexander entertaining Persian ambassadors while his father was not present. When Alexander was 16 Philip left him in charge of Macedon when Philip went to fight the Byzantines.

When Alexander was 20 his father was murdered at the theatre. Some say that Alexander had a part in the plot to assassinate his father but almost all agree that his mother Olympias was a key figure in the death of Philip. Whatever the case may be Alexander took the throne in 336 B.C.

Alexander is known for his conquest into Persia. When there, he performed hellenization. Hellenization is the attempt to become "Greek." Alexander helped this process along in the lands that he conquered.

Another of the things that Alexander did was he set up cities where ever he went. Garrisons were left in these cities. These colonists would become the ruling class. They would then impose laws or rules to promote hellenization. Also in these cities gymnasiums were set up. Gymnasiums were the center of most Greek cities. What better way to make Persian cities similar to Greek cities than by setting up institutions such as these.

Another deliberate way that Alexander tried to hellenize had to do with setting up a school. Alexander recruited 30,000 Persian boys to enroll in this school to learn Greek and Greek ways of life.

I think the most effective way that Alexander hellenized had to do with his

army.

First he let Persians into his army. These new members of his army would have to learn how to speak Greek to understand orders. The Persians would also pick up Greek customs from being in the camps with Alexander's army. Secondly, Alexander encourages his soldiers to marry Persian women. Alexander himself had Persian wives. There was even a mass marriage in Susa, where Alexander married 80 of his top officials to Persian women.

Why would a Persian want to become Greek? Well, there are six main reasons. It would help to know what's going on. To achieve unity. If you wanted to join army, it would be necessary. You would need it for trade. Necessary to abide by the Greek laws. Maybe they weren't nationalistic at all, and had no problems with changing.

Although Alexander tried to Hellenize Persia what actually happened was a Persianization of Alexander. Alexander began to take on Persian ways. He may have been doing this for political reasons. Maybe he hoped that the Persians would respond better to a Persian king than a Greek one.

One of the things that Alexander things was take the title of "Great King" and all the things that go along with it. Alexander wanted to be worshipped as a God and even claimed to be descended from divinity. He wanted everybody to engage in proskynesis, that is the act of bowing before the king. The Persians were more than happy to do this but it caused problems between Alexander and the Macedonians in his court. That is another thing that Alexander did. He established a Royal Court, which included both Persians and Macedonians. Alexander also started to dress like a Persian. He wore silk and long pants. He also took on multiple wives.

Alexander became more Persian than the Persians became Greek. This Persianization may be the cause of his death. The Macedonians might have gotten a little upset at this and bumped him off.

After the attempted mutinies, Alexander and his troop began the long journey back. One thing that doesn't make sense is why Alexander would travel through Gedrosia instead of staying with his ships and sailing the Persian Gulf. Gedrosia is a desert region.

Why walk you're army through the desert? Some say it was to imitate ancient heroes who had been said to have made the journey. One thing that occurred on the journey through the desert was what I consider to be the greatest party ever, due to its originality. Alexander's army had just filled up on rations upon entering Gedrosia. When he refreshed his army he continued the march, feasting all the way for seven days. He and his most

intimate friends banqueted and revelled night and day upon a platform erected on a lofty, conspicuous scaffold, which was slowly drawn by eight horses. This was followed by a great many chariots, some covered with purple canopies, and some with green boughs, which were continually supplied afresh, and in them the rest of his commanders drinking. There was no target or spear in sight. Instead the soldiers handled nothing but goblets of wine, drinking to each other's health. All places resounded with music of pipes and flutes, with harping and singing. Don't forget the women dancing in the rites of Bacchus (naked). This rolling party lasted until they reached the royal palace of Gedrosia. There the party didn't stop, but lasted for several more days.

Alexander the Great also had a party in Ecbatana. Alexander was in Ecbatana twice. The first time was in pursuit of Darius after the battle at Gaugamela. While there he captured all the gold that was there. There he stayed until marching east, leaving Parmenion there as a garrison.

The second time in Ecbatana is the one that is more important to me. In the autumn of 324, Alexander went to Ecbatana for the sole purpose of a three month drinking binge. Plutarch tells us this story. When he came to Ecbatana in Media, and had despatched his most urgent affairs, he began to divert himself again with spectacles and public entertainments, to carry on which he had a supply of 3000 actors and artists, newly arrived out of Greece.

Alexander's plan of three months of pleasure was quickly interrupted. Alexander's closest companion and suspected lover, Hephaestion fell sick of a fever. Being a young man and a soldier he had to continue to party and drink heavily. While his doctor, Glaucus was at the theatre, Hephaestion ate a fowl for dinner, and drank a large draught of wine. He quickly fell ill and shortly thereafter, died. Alexander was so completely upset that he ordered the tails and manes of all the horses be cut to show respect. He then crucified the doctor, Glaucus.

Alexander III had another party in Susa. Susa was the administrative capital of the Persian empire. Alexander first went to Susa shortly after the Battle of Gaugamela. There he took control of the money, totalling 50,000 talents (\$60 million) as well as the rest of the royal property.

Alexander was again in Susa in 324 B.C. There he performed a mass marriage. Between eighty and a hundred Macedonian officials took one Persian woman each, including Hephaestion and Ptolemy. Alexander himself took two new brides. The wedding was done in traditional Persian style. The bridegroom would sit down in chairs, after a toss the brides came in, took them by the hand, and kissed them. Every guest that

sat

down for the banquet (roughly 30,000) had a gold cup before them. The celebration went

on for no less than 5 days. There was also a big parade in the park.