



THE PERSON BEHIND THE GREATNESS: ALEXANDER'S INNER WORLD AND EXPERIENCES

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Abstract. This article examines the life and achievements of Alexander the Great, the renowned commander who lived in the 4th century BC and gained worldwide fame. It analyzes his childhood, military campaigns, political marriages, and personal qualities based on historical sources. The article explores Alexander's role in unifying the East and West, his marriage to Roxana, and the resulting political connections with Sogdiana. Additionally, it discusses various historical and conspiratorial theories regarding Alexander's death. The article presents a comprehensive view of Alexander's personality through diverse sources and perspectives.

Keywords: Alexander the Great, Roxana, Macedonian Empire, Sogdiana, Hercules, Philip II, Olympia, Arrian, Greco-Macedonian campaigns

Alexander the Great, who lived in the 4th century BCE, is considered one of the greatest military commanders in human history. In his short life of only 32 years, he embarked on a series of military campaigns that led to the formation of the largest empire the world had seen at that time. His military brilliance, strategic acumen, and extraordinary leadership skills earned him a reputation as a genius who united Eastern and Western civilizations.

From a very young age, Alexander demonstrated exceptional intelligence. By the age of six or seven, he could play melodies on the lyre and engage in complex conversations with adults on a variety of subjects. He is said to have read nearly all of Greek literature, with **Homer** being his favorite author.

It is unclear who first called him "great," or when the title was first used. Historians believe that he was not referred to as "great" during his lifetime. The first recorded use of the title "**Magnum**" (Latin for "the Great") appears in Roman comedies of the **1st century BCE**. It is speculated that the Romans were influenced by the scale of destruction and death during Alexander's conquests. For example, in Roman tradition, a victorious general had to kill at least 5,000 enemies to receive a triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. Alexander, by contrast, was responsible for the deaths of **hundreds of thousands** during his campaigns.

Alexander's father, **Philip II of Macedon**, played a significant role in shaping his son's early development. Alexander admired him deeply and strove to emulate him in his youth. However, as he began to achieve his own military victories, he sought not only to match but to surpass his father's legacy.



Alexander's mother, **Olympias**, was also a powerful influence in his life. She is believed to have fostered a rivalry between Alexander and his father, sometimes encouraging her son to distance himself from Philip.

Interestingly, Alexander showed little interest in women during his youth. Concerned by this, his parents sent a young concubine to him when he was about **16 or 17 years old**, but Alexander rejected her advances. This has intrigued historians and biographers for centuries and remains a subject of discussion regarding his personal life.

In the mountainous region of Sogdiana, many women and children were taken captive, among them the wife and children of Oxyartes, a local noble. His daughter, **Roxana**, a young woman of remarkable beauty, was among the captives. Soldiers later claimed that, aside from Darius III's wife, they had never seen a woman as beautiful – not in the entire East.

When **Alexander the Great** saw Roxana, he immediately fell in love with her. He treated her not as a captive, but with the dignity of a future queen. Upon hearing that his family had been taken captive – especially that his daughter had captivated Alexander – Oxyartes, overwhelmed by fear and concern, approached Alexander. The Macedonian king received him with honor and respect.

Following this encounter, Alexander appointed Oxyartes as the satrap (governor) of Sogdiana. This political gesture symbolized a new alliance through kinship between Macedonia-Greece and Central Asia. Alexander's marriage to Roxana set a precedent: many of his officers and soldiers followed his example, marrying local women during their campaigns – in Sogdiana, Bactria, Hyrcania, and even India.

Those young Central Asians who were taken to faraway cities like **Alexandria** often remained there permanently. Ancient historian **Arrian** comments:

“I do not blame Alexander, I rather commend him,” referring to the fact that Alexander had previously shown restraint and respect toward Darius' beautiful wife – he had treated her with dignity and compassion, demonstrating self-control uncommon in one so young.

Plutarch, however, gives a slightly different version. He writes that Alexander first saw Roxana not as a captive, but during a banquet, where her beauty struck him so deeply that he fell in love at first sight. His marriage to her, according to Plutarch, helped bridge the gap between Greeks and the so-called "barbarians" (non-Greek peoples), who began to trust and respect Alexander even more.

Curtius Rufus claims that Roxana's father Oxyartes himself offered his daughter to Alexander as a gift, a diplomatic move to secure favor and loyalty.

Thus, the King of Europe and Asia married Roxana not just out of passion, but also with the intention of producing a legitimate heir to unite both worlds. Initially, his friends and courtiers were embarrassed by this union, but they eventually accepted it.

Some historians mention that Alexander also had a mistress named **Barsine**, from whom he allegedly had a son named **Heracles**. This is noted in **Justin's Epitome of Pompeius Trogus**. It is said that Alexander often invited Barsine to his private festivities, though she was never recognized as a legitimate wife – merely a concubine in the eyes of the court.

Barsine, a woman of remarkable beauty, is thought to have been either Alexander's mistress or his unofficial consort. Some sources state that even Alexander's closest companions advised him to marry her. Barsine was slightly older than Alexander – by one or two years –



and according to other accounts, she had previously been the lover of **Ptolemy**, one of Alexander's generals.

It is said that Alexander met Barsine during a lavish banquet, where he secretly encountered her and later took her as his concubine. Ptolemy, sensing a growing intimacy between Barsine and the king, eventually stepped aside. However, Alexander declined to marry her – possibly because of her age or her past relationship with another man. As a result, **Barsine remained a concubine, and her son Heracles was never considered a legitimate heir to the throne** after Alexander's death.

According to **Arrian**, Alexander was known to enjoy flattery excessively. Disagreement or contradiction would often provoke his anger to extreme levels. One particular incident occurred in the lands of the **Paropamisadae**. While the army was marching across a scorching desert with no water in sight, Alexander continued on foot with his soldiers, suffering from thirst like everyone else. Some lightly armed scouts spread out to find water and discovered a small pool in a shallow ravine. They collected the water and brought it to Alexander in an iron helmet.

Grateful but unwilling to drink while his men were still thirsty, **Alexander poured the water onto the ground in front of everyone**. This selfless act inspired the entire army. It was as if every soldier had drunk from that water. The gesture highlighted Alexander's leadership, empathy, and deep connection with his troops.

Of course, for us – Central Asians – **Alexander the Great remains a conqueror**, an invader who once set foot in our land, as documented in numerous historical accounts. Yet understanding Alexander's personality also provides us with an opportunity to **study the broader history of Central Asia during this crucial period**. In doing so, **Greek and Roman sources** serve as essential tools for historical analysis.

Alexander was charismatic, graceful, athletic, and deeply committed to truth and valor. He loved warfare and worshipped the gods devoutly. Physically robust, he had an insatiable appetite for praise. He was gifted with foresight, tactical brilliance, and an unmatched ability to organize and equip his armies. No one could inspire soldiers the way he did, and his personal bravery could overcome fear in others. He moved with purpose and displayed unwavering determination in front of his men. No enemy could evade him or deceive him. He was honorable in treaties and promises, and no one could manipulate or trick him. **Generous to a fault**, he distributed wealth freely.

As **Aristobulus** observed, Alexander held banquets not for the sake of wine, but for the joy of companionship. He himself drank sparingly.

Throughout his life, **Alexander the Great** was the target of numerous assassination plots. One such attempt is described by **Arrian**. Alexander had a young attendant named **Hermolaus**. During a hunting expedition, a wild boar charged directly at Alexander. Hermolaus, acting swiftly, threw his spear and killed the beast before Alexander could act. Although the boar was slain, Alexander was furious that he had been deprived of the glory. In a fit of rage, he publicly punished Hermolaus before other young men and confiscated his horse.

Humiliated and embittered by this treatment, Hermolaus began plotting revenge. He enlisted several other youths and planned to **assassinate Alexander in his sleep**. According to some accounts, this plan was set into motion on a night when Alexander had been drinking heavily and had stayed awake until dawn.



Historian **Aristobulus** presents a slightly different account. He mentions a **Syrian woman** who accompanied Alexander and occasionally received **divine revelations**. At first, Alexander and his companions dismissed her, laughing at her visions. However, over time, Alexander came to believe in her prophetic abilities and began to treat her with great respect. She began **guarding him at night**, and thanks to her vigilance, the assassination attempt by Hermolaus and his conspirators was ultimately foiled.

There are many **conspiracy theories** surrounding Alexander's death, but most modern historians agree that he died of **natural causes**. During his Indian campaign, Alexander suffered a **severe chest wound**. When the arrow was extracted, **blood and air gushed out**, indicating a punctured lung. He required several days to recover, during which he grew increasingly weak. His soldiers had to carry him back to camp.

Despite his many injuries, Alexander **did not give up his habit of heavy drinking**. Throughout his campaigns, he had sustained multiple wounds, but he continued to live a lavish and intense lifestyle. Many historians believe that he suffered from **alcohol-induced pancreatitis**, a condition likely exacerbated by his wounds and overall physical strain.

According to some sources, Alexander the Great may have died from poison, allegedly sent by Antipater. The poison was supposedly administered by Iollas, the younger brother of Cassander. Iollas served as Alexander's royal cupbearer, responsible for pouring his wine. It is believed by some that Alexander had offended Iollas shortly before his death, which became the supposed motive for the poisoning.

As Alexander lay dying, his close companions asked him, *"To whom do you leave your empire?"* He is said to have replied, *"To the strongest."* He also reportedly added, *"I foresee great struggles over my tomb."* At the time, no one suspected foul play or poisoning.

However, five years later, Alexander's mother, Olympias, influenced by persistent rumors, ordered the execution of several generals, believing they had conspired against her son. She even had Iollas's tomb dug up, and according to legend, scattered his remains as punishment for poisoning Alexander.

Historian Aristobulus offers a different explanation. He claims that Alexander, suffering from a fever, became extremely thirsty and drank large amounts of wine. Soon after, he began to hallucinate and eventually passed away on the thirtieth day of the month of Daisios (corresponding to June 323 BCE).

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