

9-1-2023

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Maxwell C., "The Hangman Followed the Feast" (2023). *Student Research and Creative Projects 2022-2023*. 14.

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The Hangman Followed the Feast

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Course: HIST 495-01 (Senior Research Seminar)

May 5, 2023

INTRODUCTION

In 330 BCE, the mighty temples and pristine artwork of Persepolis were ablaze. Soldiers streamed through alleys and looted buildings ravaged by the flames. This once beautiful city was reduced to a pile of rubble. But how, and why, had this occurred? Persepolis had been one of the most beautiful cities in the Persian empire. In fact, Persepolis was not “merely remarkable, it was in the first class”.¹ But, following the Macedonian conquest, it became a tributary state in the rapidly expanding Macedonian Empire.

The fate of Persepolis and its citizens highlights a paradox in the expansion of the Macedonian Empire. However, Persia was on the losing side of a brutal war with the Macedonian Kingdom since 334. The king of the conquering force, Alexander the Great, is commonly known for being rather lenient towards cities that had surrendered. At times, he would even reinstate the previous rulers of the city who had opposed him. Take for example the ancient Punjab King Porus who Alexander bested at the Battle of the Hydaspes River in 326.² Once he had decisively lost the battle, Alexander rewarded his bravery during battle and had him reinstated as ruler of Paurava.³ Historians often highlight benevolence like this in describing his successful expansion through the Mediterranean and east Asia. Yet, at Persepolis Alexander revealed no such mercy.

¹ Barnett, R. D, “Persepolis.” *Iraq* 19, no. 1 (1957): 55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4199617>.

² Worthington, Ian, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 248.

³ Worthington, *By the Spear*, p. 248.

This paper explores the dual nature of Alexander the Great's policies of expansion during his reign from 336 to 323. It demonstrates the Persepolis was not an anomaly. Rather Alexander's rule was more multifaceted than scholars have previously recognized. In places like Persepolis, Alexander would show his true side. As his power grew, he began to believe, he was, in fact, a god. In this logic those that resisted him would meet a punishment befitting those who disobeyed a deity. That day he would slaughter men, women, and children. That day he would burn the city to the ground, destroying any architecture or artwork that had existed there. That day was an insight to Alexander's dual sided nature: while he may show compassion, anyone who threatened his conquest or image immediately became expendable.

The time period 359 B.C. to 323 B.C. saw one of the largest kingdoms to ever rule the world expand its borders from Greece, down to Egypt, and all the way to the fractionalized kingdoms of India; This was the Macedonian Kingdom.⁴ Philip II, Alexander's father ruled at the beginning of this time period, from 359 to 336 and he revolutionized the military, economy, and social structure of Macedonia.⁵ These three actions primed Macedonia to conquer the world when his son, Alexander the Great, became king upon his father's death in 336 B.C.⁶

Alexander the Great's conquests have captured people's imaginations for centuries. Even today work done on him such as: "How Alexander the Great Conquered the World" or

⁴ Worthington, *By the Spear*, (vii).

⁵ Worthington, *By the Spear*, (31, 32).

⁶ W., Blanning T C, and Robin Osborne, *Classical Greece: 500-323 BC*. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009.), 219

“Alexander the Great” from Epic History TV have millions of views. Together they envelop the popular media’s vision of Alexander. They speak of the massive scale of his conflicts and the great abilities he possessed as a general. Yet such portrayals are full of inconsistencies. By correcting popular views of this “larger than life” character of Alexander the Great, this paper hopes to shed new light on the realities of his conquests and kingdoms and the nature of authoritarian rule more broadly.

While Alexander the Great had incredible victories and his achievements instilled Ancient Macedon’s place in history books, he made decisions that indicate he was not the “charismatic leader” many newer texts would lead us to believe. This essay uses older texts that provide detailed insights into Alexander’s decisions once the battles of conquest ended. Rather than simply describe battles, these texts give new insights into the decisions Alexander made with the population he conquered as well as his soldiers, generals, and even close friends and advisors. This essay focuses on three texts that provide insights into different aspects of Alexander’s decision-making process. In “*The Life and Death of Alexander the Great, the First founder of the Grecian Empire,*” provides insights into the actions Alexander takes to garner complete control over his kingdom. In doing so, he reveals the plethora of murders Alexander had a hand in committing. Also used to further this argument was a translation of Plutarch’s *The Lives of Epaminondas, of Philip of Macedon...* to examine the transition between Alexander and Philip II. Such work provides important historical context. A comparison of Phillip and Alexander’s expansion indicated Alexander was not a product of his time, but was rather uniquely unfazed by the suffering of his populace. Plutarch speaks very positively of Philip II but seems to change his tone a bit when speaking of Alexander. While he does respect Alexander’s accomplishments, he was all too aware of the many murders that he authorized while he was

king. Finally, “*The Life and Death of Alexander the Great, King of Macedon,*” written by Quintus Curtius Rufus, details personal interactions between Alexander on and off the battlefield. This provides evidence that Alexander’s disregard for human life was not abstract. Rather he was more than willing to enact heinous murders, likely due to his god-like view of himself. In fact, a review of older texts indicates that Alexander could be a rather authoritarian figure, very similar to other rulers of this time period. His decisions would lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, and even though he showed mercy at times, he all too often was comfortable with committing deranged acts.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

There are some aspects of Alexander’s rule that all historians can agree on: He was a cunning general and an intelligent diplomat.⁷ Some historians tend to focus on his military conquests and how these propelled the Macedonian kingdom to new heights. Others instead focus on his political agenda and his use of satrapies in order to better govern his kingdom.⁸ While these fields of study are full of pertinent information, they miss out on the full picture of Alexander’s actions. Instead of focusing on Alexander’s great military or political accomplishments, this paper will be relying on Samuel Clarke, Plutarch, and Quintus Curtius Rufus to detail Alexander’s belief of conquest above all else.

Ancient history is a highly debated field of history simply due to the uncertainty that exists when one asks “what really happened?”. There are many different forms of ancient sources and nearly every one has some form of disagreement or difference in it compared to another.

⁷ Worthington, *By the Spear*, 163.

⁸ Blanning and Osborne, *Classical Greece*, 219.

These arguments exist throughout all forms of history and were certainly prevalent when analyzing the works and accomplishments of Alexander the Great. Alexander was incredibly successful in his respective ways and the world certainly would have been different if he had not existed. However, miniscule effort has been exerted in examining Alexander's unpopular decisions while king such as his razing of several important cities.⁹ This became even more obvious when examining secondary sources as these too had very little information pertaining to such. Secondary sources, pertaining to this topic of study, are largely supportive of Alexander and tend to leave out many of his more calloused actions. In fact, it was not until far older primary sources were examined that detailed accounts of the heinous actions taken by Alexander during his conquests were discovered. These detailed many of the horrific actions of Alexander that unfortunately are not commonplace when discussing Alexander's life.

In pushing back against the heroic view of Alexander the Great, I am building on a growing line of scholarship that goes beyond the myth to understand the realities of Alexander's rule. One of the best examples of this type of work is *By the Spear*, by Ian Worthington. While Worthington does detail Alexander's wide array of accomplishments, he is also keen on pointing out these are not all due to his ability as a ruler. The author argues that -if there was no Philip, there would have been no Alexander the Great. He says, "indeed, if Philip had not laid "the basis for a worldwide empire," the son would not have been able to "bring to completion the glorious enterprise".¹⁰ "Philip's most urgent need in 359 was to neutralize the threats to his vulnerable

⁹ Clarke, Samuel, *The Life and Death of Alexander the Great, the First Founder of the Grecian Empire*. London: W. Miller, 1665, 6.

¹⁰ Worthington, *By the Spear*, 309.

kingdom, and he did so with speed and determination”.¹¹ Finally he concludes, “It was the fact that he was changing from a traditional Macedonian warrior king into more of an oriental potentate before their eyes”.¹²

These three quotes combined form the basis for Worthington’s argument in this book. The author argues that Philip laid the framework for Alexander to conquer the world and without this Alexander would not have been successful. While this may be true to an extent, Worthington underestimates the significance of Alexander’s strategic capacity. For example, the quick and decisive movements by Alexander during the Battle of Issus lead to a quick rout of the enemy.¹³ Historians often label Alexander a master strategist, attributed more to his military actions rather than his political.¹⁴ Worthington’s assessment of Alexander’s preference for negotiations rather than warfare, likewise, are undermined by close examinations of texts from the Macedonian empire. The final quotation is how Alexander’s men felt about him near the end of his life. His men could not stand the thought of Alexander fully adopting Persian customs, even though he had been a remarkable leader and a cunning general.¹⁵ Only by Alexander’s persuasive ability was the kingdom able to stay whole until his untimely death. Ultimately the work done by Ian Worthington in *By the Spear* is partially accurate as one might disagree with his analysis of the connection between Philip II and Alexander. This secondary source will largely benefit this paper

¹¹ Worthington, *By the Spear*, 29.

¹² Worthington, *By the Spear*, 214.

¹³ Antonio, Santosuosso *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War: From Classical Greece to Republican Rome, 500-167 B.C.* (S.l.: ROUTLEDGE, 2019), 125.

¹⁴ Worthington, *By the Spear*, 163.

¹⁵ Worthington, *By the Spear*, 214.

as it will further prove the point of Alexander's cruelty not having commonplace when discussing him.

Common historical analysis of Alexander will label him a cunning strategist, yet Antonio Santosuosso argues this would not have been plausible if specific policies had not been set in place by Philip II. *Soldiers, Citizens and the Symbols of War*, by Santosuosso, elaborates more on the economic and political success of Alexander. As there is little discussion of Alexander's military conquests, this source is almost completely absent from critiques of Alexander. However, the author does explain how Philip II's economic and political strategies were largely adopted by his son. Santosuosso also explains Alexander's belief system and why he believes he thinks this way. "Philip's new heavy infantry was not an overnight sensation but the result of a long reign (of 24 years) during which Macedonia was almost continuously at war."¹⁶ "Like his father, Philip, Alexander was keenly aware of the value of pageantry as a key to public recognition and political power."¹⁷ "Yet what distinguished Alexander most of all was his attempt to introduce values unknown to the west."¹⁸

These three quotes form the basis for Santosuosso's argument in the Macedonian section of the book, that Alexander understood how to leverage his political knowledge to retain power and used this knowledge to his advantage whenever possible. While Santosuosso benefits the scholarship on Alexander by highlighting largely his military prowess, he fails to acknowledge the entirety of Alexander's rule. To comment on the first quote, Philip's military was not built

¹⁶ Santosuosso. *Soldiers, Citizens, and the symbols of War*, 113.

¹⁷ Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War*, 144.

¹⁸ Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War*, 144.

overnight, but was certainly the result of over two decades of constant war with the Illyrians and other Greek peoples.¹⁹ Through these wars, along with his advancements linked with these on a political and social scale, Philip was able to create a military that could rival any. Not only did Philip pass down the military, economy, and political successes of his reign to Alexander, he also passed down his charisma. Alexander was very akin to his father when it came to negotiating with other powers. He was also aware that displaying this negotiating strength publicly was beneficial to keeping subjects in line. Often times this “keeping in line” would turn in to violent reconquering of territories by Alexander. Finally, and most importantly to the author’s argument, Alexander was heavily intrigued in eastern traditions and practices. Santosuosso explains many details of Alexander’s personality such as dividing his realm into satrapies and “deifying himself”. Thus, Alexander proved many times he was comfortable with intermingling cultures as long as they supplemented his own beliefs. At the same time, he was quick to dispose of cultures that would not appease him.

Historical analysis of Alexander largely focuses on his military and economic achievements, as is seen in *Greek and Macedonian Art of War*, written by F.E. Adcock. However, Adcock misrepresents these achievements by labeling them as Alexander’s rather than encompassing Philip II in them as well. “It was, in fact, an age in which finance often helped or hindered strategy, and Philip knew this well”.²⁰ “Rulers did not possess the Fortunatas Purse of a national debt, which enables modern states to spend today the wealth they may possess

¹⁹ Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War*, 113.

²⁰ Adcock, F. E. *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.) 67.

tomorrow”.²¹ “Alexander in his invasion of Asia minor made a shrewd strategic use of political propaganda against pro-Persian tyrants or oligarchies”.²²

The author’s main argument seems to be that Alexander understood the economic and political side of being a leader, not just the military side. By having successful tactics in all three of these fields, Alexander was able to create a powerful kingdom. The first quote explains how Philip is largely aware of the importance of financial backing. Too many times prior to his rule, and certainly after, a ruler would have a campaign season cut short due to a lack of funds. This not only greatly impacted the kingdom that year but almost always in the years to come. Philip would not allow this to happen and made sure he had proper mining villages set up to produce the silver and gold he desperately needed to wage war.²³ Alexander, therefore, had to do very little to secure economic functionality at the beginning of his conquests. The author also makes a great comparison to modern day in the second quote. Rulers such as Philip and Alexander had to ensure there were plenty of funds, either through means back home or through conquering territories. Without assuring this, there would be incredible logistical issues for anyone involved. While Philip was able to supply funds for his kingdom through non-military gains, Alexander would use his army to ensure his treasury was full. Many times this would cause Alexander to plunder cities, slaughtering anyone inside in order to gain their wealth. While Adcock focuses primarily on economic means of running an empire, there are mentions of military victories as

²¹ Adcock, F.E. *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*. 68.

²² Adcock, F.E. *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*. 72.

²³ Worthington, *By the Spear*. 39.

well. However, Adcock's view of Alexander has clearly been misinformed as he labels those against him as "tyrants" while labeling Alexander a "conqueror".²⁴

Classical Greece, written by Robin Osborne, gives readers a concise analysis of the history of Macedonia. Throughout Osborne's analysis of Alexander's empire-running abilities, there are no mentions of his murderous intent towards Greeks, Persians, or Indians. In fact, Osborne seems to find Alexander to be quite a cunning ruler due to his involvement of local populations in governments. "Alexander took over the loose Persian structures and used them to run his empire".²⁵ Along with this the author makes several points towards Alexander's placement of Greek cities throughout much of Persia's former territory. "they were important both in themselves... and they offered a model followed by Alexander's successors".²⁶ Finally, Osborne makes the argument that Alexander's decision for states within his empire to take back exiled peoples was a "... (masterstroke) as a demonstration of power".²⁷

The author first makes the argument that Alexander's use of the Persian satrapies was a good way to govern newly conquered territories. This can be an effective strategy, yet the Persian people did not want to be ruled by a foreign entity and this led to countless revolts. As will be discussed later, these revolts often lead to copious amounts of bloodshed on behalf of Alexander and his army. Alexander's newly founded cities throughout the former Persian empire were actually very important not only in this time period, but in later periods as well. While they

²⁴ Adcock, F.E. *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*. 72.

²⁵ Blanning and Osborne. *Classical Greece: 500-323 BC*. 220.

²⁶ Blanning and Osborne. *Classical Greece: 500-323 BC*. 220.

²⁷ Blanning and Osborne. *Classical Greece: 500-323 BC*. 222.

would eventually lose much of their Greek language and customs, these cities did ensure a constant link between east and west. The author's final argument, a decision made less than a year before Alexander's death, is labeled as a "masterstroke" of political decisions. Yet, what masterstroke would lead to uprisings throughout several territories within an individual kingdom? This was not a masterstroke but rather was deliberately executed by Alexander in order to spread chaos throughout mainly the Greek city-states and would lead to not only uprisings in the near future, but to wars with massive bloodshed.

Philip II and Alexander the Great, written by Edmund M. Burke, is an article explaining the successes of Alexander while mentioning he is also ruthless and "driven by a limitless ego".²⁸ The author makes a very good point in arguing that we truly do not know how much of Alexander's life was simply made up, as the earliest accounts of Alexander were written nearly three centuries after his death. The author, in speaking on the matter, "...was so interwoven with fact that even as late as the middle of this century successful separation of the two by ancient historians was not always achieved" (67). When examining the centerpieces of an art exhibit previously thought to be from Alexander's tomb or time as king, "Indeed the centerpieces of the exhibit... are probably from Philip's tomb".²⁹ Speaking of his father Philip II's innovations... "For it was these, as Engels makes clear, that shaped much of Alexander's strategy and tactics as he moved east."³⁰

²⁸ Burke, "Philip II and Alexander the Great." (*Military Affairs* 47, no. 2 (1983): 67–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1988494>.) 67.

²⁹ Burke, "Philip II and Alexander the Great." 67.

³⁰ Burke, *Philip II and Alexander the Great*. 68.

Author Edmund Burke does a thorough job of examining Philip II and his connection to Alexander. Other than being his father, Philip II put many provisions in place in order for Alexander to be successful when he would die. These provisions, from military to economic, were crucial for Alexander to move his army quicker than previous Grecian armies had. This quickness of movement was one of Alexander's keys to military victory and it would not have been possible had his father not "reduced significantly the size of the cumbersome baggage-train..."³¹ Alexander's father therefore should be attributed for much of the logistical means of Alexander's conquering force, not Alexander.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Alexander lived during a time in which there was very little historical information recorded. Many of the accounts that had been recorded are now lost to time. Some burned in great sieges, others ripped to shreds on the ocean floor. Despite this, there are several accounts that still exist today. These accounts allow us to form the basis for what we as historians believe happened during this time period. The secondary sources pertaining to the life of Alexander the Great, detail in full his accomplishments. From his ability to persuade nations to do their bidding, to winning battles in which they were outnumbered 2:1, the list of achievements is long. However, the list of what would be considered international crimes today is also extensive, specifically for Alexander. By researching deep into the works of Samuel Clarke, Plutarch, and Quintus Curtius Rufus, one may review several different circumstances in which Alexander abused his position of power, often while drunk, in order to solidify in his mind that he was indeed a deity.

³¹ Burke, *Phillip II and Alexander the Great*. 69.

For example, towards the end of Alexander's conquests he found that many of his soldiers had not gained the bounty they had believed they would when conquering Western Asia. Instead, they had incurred a significant amount of debt on their conquest. In order to appease his men Quintus Curtius Rufus states that Alexander used his own personal treasury, consisting of 10,000 talents, in order to pay his men's debt.³² This left with him less than 200 talents and was certainly a charitable act. While this and other acts are commonly talked about and often elaborated on, these decisions are often left for those who have a direct allegiance to him. Without these soldiers Alexander's conquest would end, giving him a legitimate reason to be kind. These actions, however, sharply contrast his decisions when Alexander felt like he was under threat by these same soldiers who had supported him. These decisions were therefore often made in haste and resulted in the deaths of subjects and even close friends.

What follows is a summary of Alexander's cunning and ruthlessness in coming to the throne. Alexander's willingness to set morals aside began the instant he was presumed king. Alexander's relationship with his father's second wife had been poor while his father in rule, yet his death greatly exacerbated this issue as her kin could now have a legitimate claim to the throne as well. Aware of this, Alexander enacted a policy of exterminating her kinsmen in order to ensure his ascension to the throne was secure. While this was common at the time, Alexander went far beyond what was the regular standard of killing at the time by ensuring all of her kin, young and old, were exterminated.

³² Curtius, Quintus Rufus. *The Life and Death of Alexander the Great, King of Macedon. In Ten Books*. (London: Printed by Tho Johnson for Samuel Speed, 1670.) 453.

Alexander, having come into power following the assassination of his father Philip II, was keen on ensuring his position as King of Macedon was not to be trifled against when he left for his conquest of Asia. In order to ensure this Alexander, “put to death, without any offence given him, all his mother in laws kinsmen...”.³³ This act, while not completely uncommon, was usually confined to killing just the men or young men who had a legitimate shot at the throne. Despite knowing that most of his mother in law’s family would have no actual shot at the throne, Alexander had everyone killed. As Clarke elaborates on this point he explains that Alexander had not been too keen on his father’s second marriage and was all too ready to have her family slain.³⁴ This shows us that Alexander, while lenient at times, would do anything to ensure his dictatorial “god-like” status was kept in place. Even when this called for the death of women and children.

Alexander’s decision to eliminate his mother-in law’s kinsmen had certainly gone past the standard for killing at the time, yet his ruthless actions would extend to other Grecian’s as well. Not long after he had secured the throne, Alexander was campaigning south towards the Greek city-states. When he reached the city of Thebes he besieged it and began talks for the surrender of the city.³⁵ When Thebes refused to surrender, Alexander told his army to destroy everything. As Plutarch states the Greek inhabitants were, “slain in manner, every one of them,

³³ Clarke, Samuel. *The Life and Death of Alexander the Great, the First Founder of the Grecian Empire*. London: W. Miller, 1665. 7.

³⁴ Clarke, The Life and Death, 7.

³⁵ Clarke, The Life and Death, 6.

their city taken, destroyed and razed even to the hard ground”.³⁶ While the razing of cities was not uncommon at the time, having every citizen of a city slain, as Plutarch states, in order to “make all the rest of the peoples of Greece afraid by example”, was an action Alexander was all too comfortable with.³⁷ Upon razing Thebes Alexander was able to initially subdue most of the Greek city-states rather easily and would set his sights on the East, where his treatments of “lesser beings” would show time and time again.

Alexander’s relationship with the men under his command was more complex than his relationship with those he ruled over. Alexander was undoubtedly aware that without an army, he could not conquer new territories, leading him to be rather generous to his soldiers. However, when he felt like his rule was threatened by his soldier’s, Alexander was quick to enact deadly punishments. Alexander began to question the loyalty of some of his most trusted officers many times while on his conquests and these lead to several officers being executed by this supposedly “gracious king”.³⁸

Alexander was often informed of his generals speaking against some of his actions and, while some rulers may heed their advice, Alexander would take a much different route. Calisthenes, one of Alexander’s most trusted generals, was accused of this and was in turn, “without confession, accusation, or tryall, to be torne asunder upon the Rack”.³⁹ For most ancient

³⁶ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas, of Philip of Macedon, of Dionysivs the Elder, and of Octavivs Cæsar Avgvstvs: Collected out of Good Authors. Also the Liues of Nine Excellent Chieftaines of Warre, Taken out of Latine from Enylivs Probvvs*, (by S.G.S., 1610.) 563.

³⁷ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 563.

³⁸ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 46.

³⁹ Clarke, *The Life and Death*. 52.

civilizations, this would not contradict the norm, as sedition was punishable by death. Alexander was a king and kings often had unimpeachable rights, he could do no wrong. However, Ancient Greece was unlike most ancient civilizations as they actually had a rather advanced democratic and judicial system.⁴⁰ These judicial systems were often a democratic popular vote in order to determine the guilt of an individual. So, for Alexander in Ancient Greece, openly murdering generals without a fair trial was often frowned upon. Alexander, knowing this, would often hold these so-called “trials”. In these trials the guilt of the subject was confined to Alexander’s opinion on the matter, as Alexander would say he was guilty and his loyal lieutenants would follow suit. This kind of power dynamic supported the egotistical and “god-like” deity Alexander envisioned himself as. Yet, Calisthenes was just one of many Greek men that Alexander had senselessly killed.

Alexander’s actions in the wake of Hephaestion’s death in year 324 provides an example of his calculated ruthlessness. While on the return home from his conquests in India, Alexander’s long beloved friend Hephaestion died due to an illness. Following his death, Plutarch recounts that Alexander “committing in his grief many things that were unbecoming the majesty of a prince”.⁴¹ One of these things was much worse however, as he had Hephaestion’s physician hanged as if it had been his fault that Hephaestion had passed.⁴² This cruel act was just briefly mentioned in Plutarch’s account but showed just how volatile Alexander could be. Alexander’s

⁴⁰ Heckel Waldemar, “The Conspiracy Against Philotas.” *Phoenix* 31, no. 1 (1977): 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1087152>. 14.

⁴¹ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 588.

⁴² Rufus, *Life and Death*, 461.

treatment of his Greek subjects has been historically viewed as rather benevolent; however, actions such as this strongly refute these claims.

There is evidence from the beginning of Alexander's conquests that he does not view those he conquers as actual people. Rather, he views them as loyal subjects, happy to be expendable if he requires it. Earlier in his conquests, Alexander had taken a boat out onto a lake with one of his stewards during a week or so of rest he was granting his soldiers.⁴³ While out on the lake the king's crown fell from his head and landed in the river. Without hesitation the single steward Alexander had with him dove into the lake and retrieved the crown. Upon exiting the lake he placed the crown upon his head in order to dry it off, an action considered treason by Alexander. If Alexander's had been a forgiving king, as popular belief holds, he would have forgiven his steward. Yet, Alexander would instead "...caused his head to be cut off...".⁴⁴ This action was unnecessary and was due to Alexander's god-like vision of himself. That was his crown and no mortal man should place it upon his head, or his head should be cut off. This was the image Alexander wished to present to others from the very beginning.

Returning back to earlier in Alexander's conquest of Persia, we find possibly his most abhorrent decision. On the eastern end of Persia's empire there was a town inhabited by Greeks who had been brought there by Xerxes following his campaigns in Greece. When Alexander first arrived "these entertained him with great joy."⁴⁵ Yet Alexander found their lack of Grecian culture and language revolting. In turn Alexander would, "most cruelly put them all to the sword,

⁴³ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 30.

⁴⁴ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 30.

⁴⁵ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 48.

and destroyed their city”.⁴⁶ This action gives merit to the belief that Alexander did not believe his subjects had a right to live. These peoples, although of Greek descent, had directly betrayed him and other Grecian’s by adopting Persian culture, and their punishment would befit their actions. Altogether Alexander showed he could commit any atrocity imaginable. He would kill all Greek men, women, and children if it ensured he cemented himself as a deity in history.

While Alexander’s inhumanity towards Greeks was all too prevalent, his actions against non-Greeks are unspeakable. Despite this, Alexander is known to as allowing for most of the customs and practices to survive in areas he conquered despite not believing they should exist, “Yet in India Alexander allowed some local traditions”.⁴⁷ Rufus makes the point that Alexander did allow some local Punjab traditions to exist; however, this is only the case when these traditions directly supplemented his own beliefs. Another instance in which Alexander showed his leniency was towards Persian customs. Alexander was known to, “sacrifice to native gods, dress in Persian clothes...”.⁴⁸ This may not seem like much, but the idea of a Greek inhabitant wearing Persian clothes was blasphemous. For a Greek king to wear Persian attire was unheard of as Greeks viewed Persians as barbarians.⁴⁹

Yet these actions are not due to him believing their practices are better than the Greeks but instead he does this to again portray himself as a deity. In Persian culture the kings were regarded as gods by their citizens. This was something that directly impacted Alexander’s own

⁴⁶ Clarke, *The Life and Death*. 48.

⁴⁷ Curtius, *The Life and Death*. 463.

⁴⁸ Curtius, *The Life and Death*. 463, 464.

⁴⁹ Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War*, 145.

belief in himself as a deity. This is further supplemented by his previous conquering of Egypt, whose customs were also to view their ruler, or Pharaoh, as a “god-king”. This again illustrates that Alexander’s decisions were often made by his ego and his desire to be deified, not his benign character.

While Alexander may be portrayed as a “unifier” in secondary accounts, primary accounts would argue otherwise. After Alexander had conquered the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, he turned his eyes south towards the vast kingdom of Egypt (currently under Persian control). Upon entering Egypt many cities submitted to him without a fight; however, the great city of Gaza did not. This was likely due to the governor being a staunch supporter of the current Persian King, Darius III. The governor’s support of Darius III is stated in several primary accounts, yet popular history would seem to argue against this.

History channels documentary on Alexander says the Egyptians willingly submitted to him, “But unlike Tyre, conquering Egyptians required no bloodshed”.⁵⁰ Showing how common media has severely affected the general public’s understanding of Alexander, as a simple analysis of primary accounts would reveal this to be completely false. The fight to enter Gaza was in fact brutal and cost Alexander many men as well as Alexander himself receiving two wounds.⁵¹ Alexander, up to this point, had not been wounded in battle. He had not bled in front of his men until this decisive battle of Gaza. Following the battle, Alexander would not allow his men to

⁵⁰ *How Alexander the Great Conquered the World | Engineering an Empire. YouTube.* The History Channel, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYgbOqeEhtM>.

⁵¹ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 19.

raze the city. Yet, he would punish the governor of Gaza to the utmost extent for refusing to surrender.

This, Clarke states, is where Alexander “began to show his cruelty”.⁵² Upon capturing the city Alexander took the governor and “caused holes to be bored through his feet, and himself to be dragged through the streets whilst he was yet alive”.⁵³ This action, reminiscent of Achilles treatment of Hector, shows the underlying inhumanity of Alexander. While there were times in which leaders of the city would retain their position following his victory, Alexander had been injured. He had bleed in front of his men and shown that he was a mortal, not the god he believed he was. For this offense, the governor of Gaza had to be made an example of. This action alone would prove Alexander’s inhuman nature, yet he would not stop there.

While his treatment of the Egyptian governor was barbaric, Alexander would worsen his attacks when conquering western Asia. Once Alexander conquered an area he would sometimes leave governors in place in order to ensure Macedonian rule of law was maintained.⁵⁴ Yet, as has happened many times throughout history, the citizens within these cities often revolted.⁵⁵ This would cause Alexander to turn around and reconquer territories he had already conquered, something that highly frustrated him. Upon reconquering these territories, Alexander was unusually cruel, often slaughtering entire cities in order to “make an example”. While heading east towards India, Alexander was alerted of a Bactrian revolt in a recently conquered area of

⁵²Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 18.

⁵³ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 19.

⁵⁴ Adcock, F.E. *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*. 71.

⁵⁵ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 587.

Persia.⁵⁶ Alexander would return to quell the revolts; however, he would do much more than end the revolt. Upon reconquering the cities Alexander would “utterly deface” them as well as “... killing all therein”.⁵⁷ While there is not an exact number given of the cities Alexander reconquered the word “many” was used multiple times.⁵⁸ This would lead to the assumption that on this reconquering campaign Alexander razed at least ten cities as well as slaughtering hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children. This action is deplorable and speaks to Alexander’s less-known military beliefs- submit to me fully or face imminent death. This explains why so many cities were quick to yield and this was not the first nor the last time Alexander would needlessly slaughter civilians out of anger.

While the death of Hephaestion was previously mentioned, the resulting actions of Alexander were not fully elaborated. After having Hephaestion’s physician hanged for “allowing” his death, Alexander would march his army into the territory of the Cossaeians.⁵⁹ At every city Alexander “... slew man, woman, and child”. While himself labeling his actions “... the sacrifice of Hephaestion’s funeral”.⁶⁰ This portrays Alexander’s core beliefs in that it is okay if others suffer in order for him to be deified. After all, only a god could have worshippers that find no fault in moments like these. Alexander’s actions here are a true testament to how he

⁵⁶ Clarke, *The Life and Death*. 48.

⁵⁷ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 588.

⁵⁸ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 588.

⁵⁹ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 588.

⁶⁰ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 588.

treated his subjects. Alexander would use his position as king to do as he pleased, even if this meant the loss of countless lives.

Alexander was quick to murder Persians who resisted his authority, yet his murderous intent also extended to the farthest reaches of his empire: India. While little was written of Alexander's decisions in India that were not related to military conquest, there was one quote that can shed light on his inability to recognize his subjects as human. While conquering Western India Alexander's actions towards those who resisted him were noted, "the others he enforced, killing man, woman, and child".⁶¹ Once again, Alexander is willing to slaughter hundreds of thousands of innocents in order to achieve his goals. As mentioned before, this was not uncommon at the time. However, common literature and media refrains from labeling Alexander as a murderous dictator while freely giving that title to other kings whose actions were no worse than his. Alexander's behavior towards foreign citizens only solidifies the argument that Alexander's accomplishments were always more important to him than the lives of others.

Alexander's actions against his own as well as foreign peoples are significant, but why did he commit such atrocities? The answer is written throughout many different books but only one makes this connection between his ego and the drunkenness which caused many of his abhorrent actions. Clarke writes of what he believes is the beginning of Alexander's "change", "His chastity and moderation were turned into pride and lust".⁶² However this prideful manner of Alexander was not a change, yet something he had possessed since his youth. He was aware that he was a prince at a young age and while his temperament was better then, by the time his father

⁶¹ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 588.

⁶² Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 64.

died Alexander was clearly a very disturbed individual. Clarke continues to write that he believed this pride and lust was due to his belief of himself as a god and the Persian practices towards kingship only furthered his argument.⁶³ Previously, Alexander succeeded in asserting himself as a god (or pharaoh) over the people of Egypt as well. While traveling through Egypt Alexander had been informed of an oracle at a site known as the oracle of Ammon.⁶⁴ When he heard this he sent out messengers to the site in order to bribe the priests in to giving him the reading he desired the most: he was the son of Zeus and therefore a god.⁶⁵ Alexander's ego would cause many issues for himself as well as those he conquered. His final decision was law and those who spoke against him would face the punishment of speaking against a god.

Alexander's drunken mannerism was not usually attributed to his decision making but was mentioned this way throughout several books. While this drunkenness had not yet turned murderous, it would prove a catalyst for later actions. Alexander's upbringing seemed to drive him to his later drinking problem, "... As the heat of youth stirred him unto anger, and to the desire of drinking...".⁶⁶ While this is not necessarily a testament to his actions while drunk, it shows that his drunken nature was noticed by individuals even from his youth. This proves that his desire to be drunk and have others drunk around him was something he began at a young age. Alexander, throughout much of his free time, preferred being drunk and this would eventually lead to a "game" Alexander created while partying with his soldiers one night. After a military

⁶³ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 64.

⁶⁴ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 570.

⁶⁵ Clarke, *The Life and Death*, 22.

⁶⁶ Curtius, Quintus Rufus. *The Life and Death*. 463.

excursion Alexander “bid divers of his friends and captains to supper to him”.⁶⁷ During this dinner, Alexander proposed that he “(would) bring forth a Crown for a reward unto him that drank the most”.⁶⁸ While it may not seem like it, close analysis of this action would show Alexander’s intent was much darker than most would presume. Following this game, many of the men who participated fell sick and those “who should drink most, there died of them one and forty persons...”.⁶⁹ This “game” that Alexander proposed was not a game for the men involved, as Alexander bribed them in order to fulfill his own goal of having other men share in his drunkenness. While this simple game may seem harmless, Alexander’s drunken manner would soon give him nothing but murderous intent.

By the time Alexander had reached the heart of the Persian empire, Persepolis, his drunken decisions would cause true travesties. Upon entering the city of Persepolis Alexander would decide to have it burned to the ground.⁷⁰ Known for honoring the temples and gods of Persian culture, why had Alexander decided to burn it to the ground? The answer lies in his love of drinking as Clarke states, “... and all his other noble conditions, were drowned in drunk”.⁷¹ Even the noblest area of Alexander’s character had been completely uprooted by his need to drink. Alexander had been persuaded by his men to burn down the city for resisting his rule, following their desires as they were also secretly his own. His drunkenness even prevented him

⁶⁷ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 587.

⁶⁸ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 587.

⁶⁹ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 587.

⁷⁰ Plutarch, *The Lives of Epaminondas*, 575.

⁷¹ Clarke, *The Life and Death*. 47.

from following the advice of one of his most trusted followers Parmenio. Parmenio argued with Alexander stating, "... it was a dishonour to destroy those things by the persuasion of others, which by his proper virtue, and force, he obtained".⁷² Parmenio knows that Alexander is aware of the consequences of his actions and how this will alienate many of the Persian people from his rule, yet he refuses to care. Alexander's drunkenness had caused his ego to be his sole characteristic and he agreed with his soldiers, if they will not follow me they will die and their city will burn. This action would prove immensely consequential towards Alexander's future campaigns as it is one of the reasons so many Persians revolted against his rule in western Asia.

Alexander's drunkenness would have severe consequences on not only those he conquered but others as well. Alexander was well known for becoming drunk and making decisions that seriously impacted those who supported him. Oftentimes, this would turn to unnecessary murder as a possible "coping mechanism". While in Persia, Alexander was made aware of a conspiracy against him. Upon hearing this he ordered the conspirators to be brought before him. One in particular, known as Philotas, was brutally tortured.⁷³ Eventually he gave Alexander the names of other men supposedly involved in this plot, although there was no evidence to support they had even been aware of the plot.⁷⁴

Following the torture and murder of Philotas, Alexander "hands yet died in blood... commanded that Lycenius... should be slain".⁷⁵ Following this killing Alexander would continue

⁷² Clarke, *The Life and Death*. 47-48.

⁷³ Heckel, "The Conspiracy Against Philotas," 10.

⁷⁴ Heckel, "The Conspiracy Against Philotas," 10.

⁷⁵ Curtius, Quintus Rufus, *The Life and Death*. 46.

his blood bath. Any man that had been named as knowing of the plot was eventually found and murdered in one of many ways.⁷⁶ Alexander, simply wanting a reason to murder more men, tortured Parmenio to receive the answers he desired. He believed that there had to be more men conspiring to kill him and received that fictitious answer from Parmenio. In doing so Alexander was able to freely kill these men for treason, many of whom had faithfully served him since they had left Greece many years before. This nonchalant attitude towards his follower's lives would eventually lead to other legitimate conspiracies that wished to have Alexander killed. Even his most trusted followers would conspire against Alexander as a consequence of his many cruel actions.

Alexander committed atrocities unto other peoples that would today be considered international war crimes. He slaughtered hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of men, women, and children. These actions, often determined by his drunkenness, would cause immense internal strife within his empire. Eventually this strife would turn to hatred and would play a part in Alexander's untimely death in 323 B.C. Throughout his life Alexander would prove he had little regard for the lives of those he ruled. From the burning of the grand city of Persepolis, to the inhumane torture and murder of his own generals, Alexander certainly had little regard for human life. The best way to sum up Alexander's attitude when was found in Clarke's writings as he states, "The hangman followed the feast".⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Heckel, *The Conspiracy Against Philotas*. 14.

⁷⁷ Clarke, Samuel. *The Life and Death*. 58.



A map of Alexander's conquests for context.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ "Figure 45: Alexander the Great Route of His Military Conquests." Accessed April 24, 2023. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Alexander-the-great-route-of-his-military-conquests_fig1_339782594.