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The Supreme Figure of Empire

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Alexander the Great: The Supreme Figure of Empire

Tato Bezhitashvili

Introduction

History tells us about heroes. Yet, the stories include both great and ordinary men among those heroes. Since there is a necessity for specifying one name that represents great hero and, at the same time, the great image of his empire, it is, unquestionably, Alexander the Great. If one should name one of the greatest empires throughout the history of mankind, it is obviously the Empire of Alexander the Great. This paper, with the primary focus on the personal image of Alexander, his achievements and merit in building and extension of empire, provides a detailed portrait of Alexander the Great. Along with the analysis of imperialist attitudes of King, the work reveals the motivations behind the actions of ruler as well.

A Brief Biography

Alexander, born in Pella, Macedonia, in 356 BC, was the heir son of King Phillip II from Argead dynasty and Queen Olympias (Walbank, 2020)¹. He is known as one of the greatest military strategists of the ancient time. Considering his accomplishment in establishing the ancient world's most extensive state formation, Alexander is recognized as the top world ruler enlarging his supremacy from Balkan to Indochina. Tutored by the well-known philosopher Aristotle for around seven years, Alexander could quickly gain a vast knowledge in science, philosophy, medicine, and literature (Tierney, 1942)². As a result of the assassination of his father, 20-year old Alexander claimed his legitimate place on throne: *"In 336 B.C.E., a proud, intelligent, and supremely ambitious young man rose to become king of Macedon, which is a kingdom on the northern border of modern-day Greece"* (Skelton & Dell, 2009)³. His candidacy was strongly supported by the commons in a congregation and members of palace nobility (Errington, 1978)⁴.

The period of 336-323 BCE is famously branded as the era of Alexander the Great. Despite being short in its duration, the following decade represent the most noteworthy epoch in

¹ Walbank, F. W. (2020); Alexander the Great.

² Tierney, Michael (1942); Aristotle and Alexander the Great.

³ Skelton & Dell (2009); Empire of Alexander the Great.

⁴ Errington, R. M. (1978); The Nature of the Macedonian State Under the Monarchy.

Macedonian history. Alexander the Great managed to profoundly influence Greek and Asian cultures, and inspire Hellenistic Period.

Alexander's Expansionist policies

Alexander started his rule with a clear expansionist stance. In fact, he led the waves of foreign invasions, both near and far expeditions, from the very beginning of his reign. Battles of Issus and Tyre, invasions in Egypt, Persia, and India, all underline the irreversible prominence of Alexander's Empire at his period of governance.



Battle of Issus

The battle of Issus (333 BCE) represents one of the initial litmus tests for measuring the strength of Alexander the Great as long as he encountered a strong and experienced King Darius III's massive force near Issus, Turkey. Although the army of Alexander was outnumbered by its competitor force, a high motivation for claiming Persian resources played a decisive role in the former's victory. Since the confrontation appeared to be devastating for Darius, he left not only the battlefield, but his family as well (Bosworth, 1993)⁵. Consequently, the Macedonian ruler Alexander gained an incredible reputation within and outside his nation, and continued the construction of empire based on his motto: "There is nothing impossible to him who will try".

⁵ Bosworth, A. B. (1993); The Gaining of Empire.

Battle of Tyre

Alexander vigorously continued fulfilling his imperialistic desires by attacking the settlements of Byblos and Sidon. Yet another remarkable victory was gained after the protracted siege around the Tyre Island, which took place from January to July 332 BCE. The reason of prolongation was that there was an absence of Macedon navy for reaching the shores of the island. After the several inadequate attempts of building a causeway, Alexander accumulated a sizeable fleet against Tyrians, and occupied an island in July of that year (Worthington, 2014)⁶. Thus, the Battle of Tyre represents an important evidence that Alexander was a great war-strategist.

Alexander in Egypt

The next destination of Alexander's foreign invasions was Egypt. Alexander the Great crossed the borders of Egypt by 332 BC, and was regarded as the liberator of nation. That is why, there was no need for waging war or engagement in direct combat against Egypt. The whole nation of Egypt was already fed up with Persian domination, and therefore, they easily accepted the rule of Alexander as their savior from Darius III's regime (Ladynin, 2014)⁷. There are several facts and myths claiming that Alexander the Great had a hobby of founding the cities after his name. According to Skelton & Dell (2009)⁸, he could establish about 57 cities mostly after his successful invasions. Egyptian Alexandria is believed to be the first among all cities founded at the crossroad of the Nile River and the Mediterranean Sea by Macedonian Emperor. Though intended to be the hub of commerce in the region, the city of Alexandria became not only the commercial center but the multicultural and multilingual city as well.

Alexander in Persia

Alexander the Great appeared to be so ambitious and courageous that he did not only went into the competition against Persia, but also went directly to Persian land for conquering it. Macedonian army faced the massive Persian military forces at Gaugamela in 331 BCE. Although the battle appeared to be devastating for both side, Darius was no longer capable of enduring the

⁶ Worthington, Ian (2014); *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire*.

⁷ Ladynin, Ivan A. (2014); *The Argeadai Building Program in Egypt in the Framework of Dynasties' XXIX–XXX Temple Building*.

⁸ Skelton & Dell (2009); *Empire of Alexander the Great*.

adequate confrontation with Alexander, and was forced to escape from battlefield. However, he was soon found assassinated by his warriors. After the victory at Gaugamela and execution of Bessus, Alexander gained the full authority over Persia and became the new King of it (History.com Editors, 2009)⁹.

Alexander in India

In 327 BCE, at the ninth anniversary of Alexander the Great's reign, he could reach the borders of Punjab, India. Alexander's army was resisted to varying degrees by different tribes and regions of India, albeit, eventually, all of them were defeated by Macedonian forces. Remarkably, the innovation of using Indian elephants as military force appeared challenging for European King, but he could still manage to cope with them (Stoneman, 2019)¹⁰. Notably, Alexander desperately wanted to conquer the whole country, however he was refused by his entire army. Consequently, he was forced to return to recently-occupied Persia.

Conclusion

Alexander the Great represents one of the most prominent leaders in the world history. Ultimately, he constructed a domain, which was covering around 2 million square miles from west to east, including three continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Macedonian king died at the age of 32, in summer 323 BCE. The real cause of his death is still unknown for us. Though, what is obvious and unquestionable is his influence over the almost entire world's culture, traditions, and lifestyle. His first attempt to encourage globalization found its way in the subsequent centuries, and is still prominent nowadays. By spreading of Greek influence, Alexander promoted the Hellenistic culture everywhere he went, and consequently, made the world more developed and interconnected than ever before.

⁹ History.com Editors (2009); Alexander the Great.

¹⁰ Stoneman, Richard (2019); The Greek Experience of India: From Alexander to the Indo-Greeks.

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