

# Alexander the Great: Conqueror with an Indomitable Spirit

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## Abstract

This essay explores the remarkable life and indomitable spirit of Alexander the Great, one of history's most renowned military leaders. Through a comprehensive examination of his conquests, strategic brilliance, and unyielding determination, this paper aims to shed light on how the faith of Alexander the Great contributed to making him a true conqueror. Beginning with an overview of Alexander's upbringing under the tutelage of the great philosopher Aristotle, this essay delves into the formation of his ambitious character and insatiable thirst for knowledge, specifically his visit to the Oracles of Delphi and Amun. From an early age, Alexander demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and an unshakable belief in his divine destiny to conquer the known world. Moreover, this paper explores Alexander's challenges during his conquests, including the arduous journeys, devastating battles, and managing diverse cultures under his rule. Despite these obstacles, his religion-fueled, indomitable spirit enabled him to overcome adversity and emerge victorious time and again. The essay then examines the idea of religious syncretism in the ruling philosophy of Alexander the Great as he expanded his empire to encompass a diverse population and culture. Ultimately, this essay seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Alexander the Great, delving beyond his military exploits to reveal a man whose ambition and character were shaped by his religious experiences.

**Keywords:** Alexander the Great, Hellenistic civilization, Persian Empire, Battle of Gaugamela, Macedonian army, religious syncretism.

## 1. Introduction

Alexander the Great, the renowned military strategist and king of Macedonia left an indelible mark on history with his unwavering faith in his abilities and destiny. While his military prowess and conquests are often cited as his most significant achievements, his faith played a vital role in shaping his character and driving his ambitions. This research paper delves into the life and reign of Alexander the Great, specifically focusing on his faith and the religious influence it exerted on his decisions and actions. Alexander, known for his remarkable military conquests and empire-building, was also a complex individual shaped by his beliefs. By examining primary and secondary sources, including historical accounts, biographical texts, and archaeological findings, this paper aims to shed light on Alexander's religious inclinations and how they influenced his strategic decisions, relationships with his subjects and conquered territories, and overall vision of a united empire. The research not only explores the religious beliefs practiced during Alexander's time but also identifies the significant impact of his faith on his leadership and decision-making process.

## 2. Review

Alexander III was born in Pella, Macedonia, in 356 B.C. to King Philip II and Queen Olympias—although legend had it, his father was none other than Zeus, the ruler of

the Greek gods. Philip II was an impressive military man in his own right. He turned Macedonia (a region on the northern part of the Greek peninsula) into a force to be reckoned with, and he fantasized about conquering the massive Persian Empire [1]. Indeed, he did plot to conquer Persia or simply advance his frontier eastward. Before his suspicious assassination attempt, he was still trying to find potential allies in Asia Minor [2].

Throughout his life, Alexander displayed an unyielding belief in his divine purpose. When Alexander was 13, Philip called on the great philosopher Aristotle to tutor his son. Aristotle fostered Alexander's interest in literature, science, medicine, and philosophy [3]. Raised under the tutelage of the philosopher Aristotle, he developed an appreciation for Greek culture and mythology [4], which influenced his understanding of the divine. He identified himself as a descendant of the mythical hero Achilles and sought to emulate his extraordinary deeds [5]. This conviction propelled him to greatness and fortified his faith that he was destined for extraordinary feats.

Alexander's faith manifested in various ways throughout his life. Before his grand campaign to conquer the Persian Empire, he famously visited the Oracle of Delphi. Seeking the guidance of the gods, he received a favorable response, which served as a confirmation of his divine mission. This encounter not only solidified his faith but also gave him confidence and invincibility [6]. After that, Alexander appointed the general Antipater as regent

and headed for Persia with his army. They crossed the Hellespont, a narrow strait between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara, and faced Persian and Greek forces at the Granicus River. Without a doubt, Victory went to Alexander and the Macedonians [7].

To name but a few, Alexander's own religious experiences, such as visiting the Oracle of Amun at Siwa, contributed to his perception of divine favor and his role as a ruler. The Oracle at Siwa was renowned for its connection to the Greek god Zeus-Ammon, who was equated with the Egyptian deity Amun [8]. Alexander sought confirmation of his divine ancestry as the son of Zeus, and the Oracle's affirmation reinforced his belief in his divine heritage.

The visit to the Oracle of Amun at Siwa profoundly impacted Alexander. According to historical accounts, After destroying Tyre and rejecting another peace offer from Darius, Alexander set out for Egypt. He was sidelined in Gaza, however, and forced to endure another lengthy siege. After several weeks, he took the town and entered Egypt, where he established the city that still bears his name: Alexandria. Alexander traveled to the desert to consult the oracle of Ammon, a god of supposed good counsel. Legends abound about what transpired at the oracle, but Alexander kept mum about the experience. Still, the visit furthered speculation Alexander was a deity. Alexander received a favorable response from the Oracle, declaring him to be the true son of Zeus [9,10]. This endorsement boosted his confidence and legitimacy as a ruler, leading to a charismatic aura that appealed to his followers. Alexander used this perception to present himself as a divine figure, intertwining politics, and religion to solidify his authority. It also helped him unite his forces and maintain their loyalty despite challenging campaigns and hardships. Alexander's religious experiences, particularly his visit to the Oracle of Amun at Siwa, deepened his perception of divine favor, validated his role as a ruler, and fueled his ambitions for conquest [11].

Furthermore, Alexander's faith fueled his perseverance in the face of adversity. Throughout his military campaigns, he faced numerous challenges and setbacks. From battles against formidable foes to navigating treacherous terrains, he confronted immense trials. However, his unwavering belief in his divine mission propelled him forward, inspiring his soldiers and instilling in them the confidence needed to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds [12]. Additionally, Alexander's religious faith was demonstrated through his adoption of Eastern customs and rituals in the areas he conquered. This played a role in shaping his conquests and his interactions with conquered regions. As he expanded his empire, he recognized the importance of reconciling the diverse cultures and religions under

his rule. He adopted a policy of syncretism, blending elements of different religions, which allowed him to foster unity among his diverse subjects. Rather than imposing his Hellenistic beliefs, he allowed the conquered people to maintain their religious practices, promoting a sense of inclusivity and tolerance. This approach not only facilitated cultural assimilation but also ensured the loyalty of the newly incorporated regions [13].

Some might contrast the ideas of Alexander the Great and Akbar the Great with their ideas of religious syncretism. Undoubtedly, religious syncretism played a significant role in the realms of Alexander the Great and Akbar the Great, aiming to cultivate religious tolerance, unity, and interfaith dialogue. While both leaders shared a common vision of accommodating diverse religious beliefs, they diverged in their temporal contexts, personal beliefs, and approaches to governance. With his creation of the syncretic faith Din-i Ilahi and his active pursuit of religious reforms, Akbar pursued a more collaborative and inclusive approach. In contrast, Alexander, a product of his era, showcased tolerance and assimilation without the same level of intentional religious syncretism.

On the other hand, while Alexander respected local traditions and incorporated them into his empire, he primarily identified as a pagan. He sought to synthesize various religious elements without creating a new belief system. As a result, the plan based on good expectations did not end well but instead fostered antagonism and division, weakening Alexander's rule [14].

Nevertheless, while Alexander's faith was integral to his character, it also had its pitfalls. As his successes mounted, he grew increasingly convinced of his status as a god among men. This hubris led to a decline in his moral judgment, and he increasingly succumbed to excesses and cruelty. The faith that had once guided him was his downfall, as it clouded his vision and disconnected him from the realities of governing an empire. Some argue that Alexander's ambitions were less for the glory of Macedon than they were for himself. Alexander's self-esteem was so strong that, in 328 B.C., Cleitus the black, another general and close friend of Alexander, also met a violent end. Fed up with Alexander's new Persian-like persona, a drunk Cleitus continually insulted Alexander by ruling in the "Asian way" and kept pushing eastward while minimizing his achievements. Pushed too far, Alexander killed Cleitus with a spear, a spontaneous act of violence that anguished him. Some historians believe Alexander killed his general in a fit of drunkenness—a persistent problem that plagued him through much of his life.

After conquering Egypt, Alexander faced Darius and his massive troops at Gaugamela in October 331 B.C. Following fierce fighting and heavy losses on both sides,

Darius fled and was assassinated by his troops. Finally rid of Darius, Alexander proclaimed himself King of Persia. Wiping out another pretender, Bessus, Alexander had full control of Persia. But Alexander's rule in Persia remained precarious. Even up to Alexander's return from his journey from the Indus Valley, he was met with many revolts. Alexander had no intention of accepting the Persian way of rule in its entirety, preferring instead to believe that all people should worship him as if he were the Greek gods since he considered himself the son of Zeus and the descendant of Achilles. But Alexander succumbed to gain credibility with the Persians and took on many Persian customs. He began dressing like a Persian and adopted the practice of proskynesis, a Persian court custom that involved bowing down and kissing the hands of others, depending on their rank.

However, the Macedonians were less than thrilled with the changes in Alexander and his attempt to be viewed as a deity. They refused to practice proskynesis, and some plotted his death. Increasingly paranoid, this practice led to a massive revolt. Alexander ordered the death of one of his most esteemed generals, Parmenio, in 330 B.C., after Parmenio's son Philotas was convicted of plotting an assassination attempt against Alexander. Alexander became a rebel after killing the dissenting minister Parmenion and his son Philotas, as well as Aristotle's nephew and historian Callisthenes, and his behavior undoubtedly caused him to lose the confidence and support of his comrades-in-arms and, at the same time, cast doubt on his exaggerated vision and the ongoing warfare [15,16].

It is also debatable that Alexander's belief is a prominent driving force behind his persistent military operations, thus finally blinding himself with a mania of expansion. Many historians doubted it because Alexander was not a fanatic and did everything he could to reconcile religious contradictions, such as Plutarch's "The Life of Alexander the Great" emphasizes his military ambitions and desire for personal glory rather than religious conviction [17]. It is reasonable because it is hard to define Alexander's religion, but he believes in his divinity, which distinguishes him from everyone else. What Alexander paid attention to was not related to religious doctrine but the God-related identity, which he thought made him capable of conquering and legitimizing his actions. Alongside admitting the god the local people worshiped, Alexander tried to put himself in the same row, claiming himself to have the divinity and legitimacy to rule them all [18]. Eventually, he is determined that his divinity is the source of uniting his men and gaining the support of the vanquished. The way to maintain his divinity is to win. Under this belief, after taking over Persia, Alexander

left for Middle Asia without a break, then Hindu, and eventually, "To the end of the world." [19].

Some also argue that the claim of Alexander being the son of Zeus and his father's weakened role and influence badly deteriorated the relationship between Alexander and the most potent generals. When King Philip was assassinated in 336 BCE, Alexander succeeded him at 20 [20]. He also quashed rebellions for independence in northern Greece. Once he'd cleaned house, Alexander left to follow in his father's footsteps and continue Macedonia's world domination. The suddenness of his father's death and the power struggles that followed might have put additional pressure on Alexander, as he had to assert his authority and legitimacy to secure the kingdom and maintain a delicate relationship with his father's generals and ministers at the same time [21]. Alexander faced numerous threats from rivals and rebellions within and outside his empire during his reign. His strained relationship with his father might have affected his ability to handle these challenges. Some argue that Alexander's aggressive military campaigns and desire to surpass his father's achievements were driven by a need to prove himself. Alexander's relationship with his father influenced the loyalty and support he received from his subjects and key figures within his empire. Some officials and commanders loyal to King Philip may have been less inclined to pledge their allegiance to Alexander, considering their loyalties and possible doubts about his leadership capability [22].

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Alexander the Great's faith was a guiding force that defined his life and shaped his destiny. It fueled his ambitions, influenced his decision-making, and gave him a sense of purpose. While his faith empowered him to achieve remarkable military conquests, it also has a cautionary tale about the perils of unchecked belief. Alexander's story serves as a reminder that faith, although a powerful motivator, must be tempered with humility and a sense of responsibility for the greater good.

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