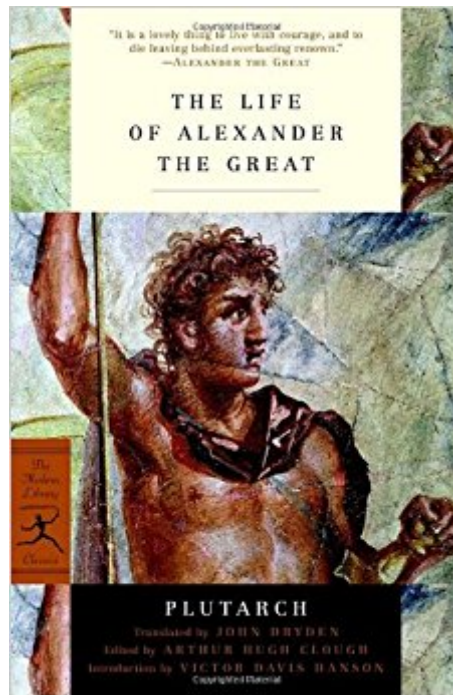


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The Life Of Alexander The Great (Modern Library Classics)



Synopsis

In 336 b.c. Philip of Macedonia was assassinated and his twenty-year-old son, Alexander, inherited his kingdom. Immediately quelling rebellion, Alexander extended his father's empire through-out the Middle East and into parts of Asia, fulfilling the soothsayer Aristander's prediction that the new king should perform acts so important and glorious as would make the poets and musicians of future ages labour and sweat to describe and celebrate him. • The Life of Alexander the Great is one of the first surviving attempts to memorialize the achievements of this legendary king, remembered today as the greatest military genius of all time. This exclusive Modern Library edition, excerpted from Plutarch's Lives, is a riveting tale of honor, power, scandal, and bravery written by the most eminent biographer of the ancient world.

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Customer Reviews

"It is a lovely thing to live with courage, and to die leaving behind everlasting renown."

In 336 b.c. Philip of Macedonia was assassinated and his twenty-year-old son, Alexander, inherited his kingdom. Immediately quelling rebellion, Alexander extended his father's empire through-out the Middle East and into parts of Asia, fulfilling the soothsayer Aristander's prediction that the new king "should perform acts so important and glorious as would make the poets and musicians of future ages labour and sweat to describe and celebrate him." The Life of Alexander the Great is one

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Obviously if you're looking at this book you are researching Alexander the Great. Without a doubt Plutarch, Arrian and Curtius Rufus are very important sources on this topic. Don't waste your time reading modern historians' versions of Alexander's life - go straight to these authors. I haven't read any other translations of Plutarch's 'Life of Alexander' but this one is quite easy to read and obviously full of great information. Plutarch is not as critical of Alexander as Curtius Rufus yet doesn't seem to be as much of a flatterer as Arrian. He's a bit in between. Overall, a very fun read although if you didn't want to read all three (Arrian, Curtius Rufus & Plutarch) I'd say that you could skip this one - although it's a fun read and a credible source.

I was impressed with this translation of Plutarch's Life of Alexander the Great. The prose was very clear and readable, and I finished the book very quickly. You shouldn't expect a detailed treatment of military or historical topics; the book is less than 100 pages in length, and such was not Plutarch's object anyway. Plutarch's Lives are really discussions of morality and character as evidenced in the lives of great men, and the history surrounding these men is really only a backdrop against which these things are portrayed. Use this book to begin to get a picture of Alexander the man; use other books to flesh out your understanding of Alexander the soldier, the king, and the politician.

So much has been written and studied and analyzed. This was a good take and synopsis and greatly enjoyed it.

I (an epileptic) have a feeling that I will love this book. I only hope that this one (among many others) have the guts to say that he was an epileptic. I just wonder what degree he was; that is, did he only have petit mals or worse (grand mals, etc.)? The media always speak of his army capabilities. I wonder what his psyche was. Napoleon & Julius Caesar (other war heroes) had epilepsy also.

The biographer/philosopher Plutarch (45 AD - 120 AD) begins his life of Alexander by stating, "It must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives. And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a

matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever." I likewise share Plutarch's interest in character rather than straight history. Here are my brief comments following passages from the text:"For being more bent upon action and glory than either upon pleasure or riches, he esteemed all that he should receive from his father as a diminution and prevention of his own future achievements; and would have chosen rather to succeed to a kingdom involved in troubles and wars, which would have afforded him frequent exercise of his courage, and a large field of honor, than to one already flourishing and settled, where his inheritance would be an inactive life, and the mere enjoyment of wealth and luxury." ----- Alexander seeks action to prove his courage and gain his honor - necessary quality of a conqueror. The last thing he wants is an idle life eating and drinking in his palace. Perhaps if Alexander had Plato rather than Aristotle for a teacher, he would have considered a 3rd choice: remaining in his country and taking on the role of the ideal philosopher-king. Plutarch relates how in Athens, the great Alexander came upon Diogenes the famous Cynic philosopher. Such followers of the Cynic way of life lived outside on the street with no possessions. Anyway, Alexander asked Diogenes if he wanted anything. "Yes," he replied, "please move as you are standing between me and the sun." Alexander was so struck by Diogenes's answer that as he told his followers who were laughing at the moroseness of the philosopher, that if he were not Alexander, he would choose to be Diogenes."Then he went to Delphi, to consult Apollo concerning the success of the war he had undertaken, and happening to come on one of the forbidden days, when it was esteemed improper to give any answers from the oracle, he sent messengers to desire the priestess to do her office; and when she refused, on the plea of a law to the contrary, he went up himself, and began to draw her by force into the temple, until tired and overcome with his importunity, "My son," said she, "thou art invincible." Alexander taking hold of what she spoke, declared he had received such an answer as he wished for, and that it was needless to consult the god any further." ----- Now here is a man keen on getting what he wants, both in the sphere of humans and the gods."But Alexander, esteeming it more kingly to govern himself than to conquer his enemies, sought no intimacy with any one of the women before marriage, except Barsine, Memnon's widow, who was taken prisoner at Damascus." ----- The key here for Plutarch and other Greco-Roman philosophers is Alexander's prime value of controlling himself more than controlling others. All the schools of ancient philosophy, including two main schools, Stoic and Epicurean, esteemed self-control as the prime quality in living a good life. For such a king to possess such self-control - no wonder Alexander was held in such high regard."He would fall into a temper of ostentation and soldierly boasting, which gave his flatterers a

great advantage to ride him, and made his better friends very uneasy. For though they thought it too base to strive who should flatter him most, yet they found it hazardous not to do it." ----- Ah, even a virtuous, heroic king has his weakness. For Plutarch, Alexander fell into the trap of bragging and boasting about how great he was and insisted others around him agree wholeheartedly. Matter of fact, Plutarch wrote a lengthy essay on the dangers of flatterers and flattery."Alexander was naturally most munificent, and grew more so as his fortune increased, accompanying what he gave with that courtesy and freedom, which, to speak truth, is necessary to make a benefit really obliging." ----- A reader can sense Plutarch swelling the joy as he relates how young Alexander's greatness of character increased as his conquests increased. All the more impressive since Alexander was doing his conquering in his 20s. What a golden boy!"In this voyage, he took ten of the Indian philosophers prisoners. These men were reputed to be extremely ready and succinct in their answers, which he made trial of, by putting difficult questions to them, letting them know that those whose answers were not pertinent, should be put to death." ----- Alexander values philosophy and has high expectations from philosophers. All ten answers to Alexander's ten questions are jewels. Here is my favorite: Which is the most cunning of beasts? "That," said the philosopher, "which men have not yet found out.""When once Alexander had given way to fears of supernatural influence, his mind grew so disturbed and so easily alarmed, that if the least unusual or extraordinary thing happened, he thought it a prodigy or a presage, and his court was thronged with diviners and priests whose business was to sacrifice and purify and foretell the future. So miserable a thing is incredulity and contempt of divine power on the one hand, and so miserable, also, superstition on the other, which like water, where the level has been lowered, flowing inland never stopping, fills the mind with slavish fears and follies, as now in Alexander's case." ----- Fear of the supernatural was an ever present reality in the ancient world. Even the conqueror of the world was caught in the belly of fear. No wonder Epicurus was considered a savior by his followers when he stated in his Principal Doctrines that the gods are living in complete bliss, thus unconcerned with human affairs.

if you intend to use this book for study purposes I strongly suggest you reconsider. It makes no reference to the original section numbers, rendering it virtually useless for academic purposes. And while one may believe one could avoid wasting money on such an edition by sampling it, the free sample does not go beyond the editorial introduction, providing one with no warning of it having abandoned the original section numbers. A waste of money for those who wish to academically reference it.

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