

**Extended Project**

**Qualification**

[www.aqa.org.uk/over/  
extendedproject](http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/extendedproject)

# Sample **22**

**An analysis of the personality of Alexander the Great**

**Prepared for:** Standardising of the Extended Project Qualification, May 2009 Cohort

*To be completed by the supervisor*

Marks must be awarded in accordance with the instructions and criteria in section 2.4.2 of the specification.

Summary information to show how the marks have been awarded should be given in the spaces below in addition to comments in other pages of this document and any supporting information in the form of annotations on the candidate's work.

Skill area		Maximum mark	Mark awarded	Supervisor's supporting statement
<b>A01</b>	Manage	10		
<b>A02</b>	Use resources	10		
<b>A03</b>	Develop and realise	20		
<b>A04</b>	Review	10		
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>		

**Concluding comments**

Candidate Name:

Extended Project Working Title: *An Analysis of the personality  
of Alexander the Great*Planned Form of Project: Either Written report ☒Or.....and accompanying written report ☐

This production log and assessment record consists of the pages listed below.  
Additional journal material, planning evidence, research evidence, presentation evidence  
and review material may be added.

		Date completed
1	Candidate declaration	14/10/08
2	Record of marks	
3	Contents	14/10/08
4	Record of initial planning	03/10/07
5-7	Project Proposal (Parts A, B and C)	05/11/07
8	Plan at start of project	20/11/07
9	Mid-project review	09/02/08
10	End-of-project review	26/06/08
11	Summary	11/09/08
12-13	Presentation record (Parts A and B)	23/09/08
14	Reflection	08/10/08

Is this extended project part of a group project?

No ☒Yes ☐

If 'Yes', give brief details:

Extended Project Final Title: *An Analysis of the personality of  
Alexander the Great*

**Record of initial  
planning**

This page records initial meeting(s) with your supervisor to agree your project proposal.

Your first idea for topic/title:

*The life and achievements of Alexander the Great*

Your first ideas for research and development of your project:

- Examination of primary and secondary sources documenting Alexander's personality and actions.
- Investigation of his character, and how this shaped the events of his life.
- Modern historical interpretations of his achievements.
- The nature of the man behind the mythology surrounding his life.
- The rise to greatness of himself and his empire.

Your supervisor's main comments and advice:

- Ensure a specific analysis of a particular facade to Alexander's life.
- Question the reliability of sources.
- Research: use of the library and the internet are essential, but in particular make use of a number of libraries or search for respected authors on the subject.

Changes, clarifications or additions you have made as a result of your discussion with your supervisor:

*Having considered the outcome of my meeting with my supervisor, I have decided to focus in more on Alexander's personality as seen in historical sources. I have arranged to visit a number of libraries to look for sources on Alexander and am researching the most respected authors. I have clarified my idea to assess different sources, but also to develop my own opinions on Alexander.*

Supervisor's initials:

Date: 03/10/2007

## Project proposal Part A

Candidate Name:

Title of the

Extended

Project:

Project title to be researched in the form of a short statement/question/hypothesis with clear focus.

*An Analysis of the Personality of Alexander the Great  
and the events that shaped it*

Please give a brief outline, based upon page 4 of this Production Log &amp; Assessment Record, of:

- the researched or activity/task to be carried out and sources to be consulted

*I wish to analyse the complex character of Alexander the great through discussion and evaluation of historical sources, investigating the key events of his life. I will make reference to any academic opinion obtained through research in libraries. I wish to discover whether there is any truth to the many hyperbolic portrayals.*

- the area(s) of courses of study or area(s) of personal interest to which the topic relates
- This topic relates to my study of AS and A2 Ancient Greek, combined with my deep fascination with the Classical world and the key figures of interest within it.*

- your proposed action

*Having carried out thorough research into sources relating to the topic, I intend to write an essay of four to five thousand words as the main result of this project.*

Please give details of the courses that you are currently studying:

Qualification Type (e.g. GCE AS/A, Applied GCE AS/A, Diploma L3, VRQ, Modern Apprenticeship, BTEC, etc)	Subject (e.g. Mathematics, English, Health, Spanish, ICT, etc)
GCE AS/A	Latin
GCE AS/A	Ancient Greek
GCE AS/A	English literature
GCE AS/A	History

Declaration by the candidate

I certify that I have read and understood the AQA's Regulations relating to unfair practice as set out in the Notice to Candidates below.

Candidate's signature: ..

Date: *05/11/07*

## Notice to Candidates

You must not take part in any unfair practice in the preparation of project work required for assessment and you must understand that to present material copied directly from books or other sources without acknowledgement will be regarded as deliberate deception. If you use or attempt to use any unfair practice you will be reported to AQA. If AQA is satisfied that you have committed an offence you may be disqualified from all subjects.

**Project proposal Part B**

Candidate Name: .

Please comment below on the validity and feasibility of the proposal (Project proposal Part A) as an Extended Project:

	Supervisor's comments
Comment on the clarity and focus of the title chosen	A clear and focused title on a topic of great personal interest to the candidate.
Indicate the relation to, and development/extension outside of, the main course(s) of study or interest (Specification 1.2)	Though Alexander the Great is touched upon tangentially as part of the candidate's Ancient Greek A-level, the topic of this Project is not directly covered within that course.
Comment on the suitability of the proposed initial sources and research base	There is sufficient academic material on this topic available within and outside the Centre to enable the candidate to succeed.
Confirm that the project is feasible in the proposed timescale and/or indicate any potential difficulties	Very manageable within the timescale.
Outline the scope to produce a project that meets the assessment objectives (Specification 2.4.3)	The project as outlined would appear to meet all Assessment objectives, including Ao2 (Using Resources) and Ao3 (Develop and Realise).
Indicate proposed form and date of the presentation	Presentation to mixed group of teachers and peers involving exploration of Project findings and reflection on the Project and the research process.

Indicate the expected format of the project product that will be submitted for assessment:

- Long written report ..... ☒
- Live performance (e.g. in music, drama & theatre studies) plus written report ..... ☐
- Electronic format (e.g. CD, video, presentation, program) plus written report ..... ☐
- Artefact (e.g. prototype, model, artwork) plus written report ..... ☐

Is the project a contribution to a group exercise? If so, confirm that there is a defined individual contribution by the candidate (Specification 2.4.1 **Group Work**), YES NO and list other group members below.

Candidate No.:	Candidate Name:
Candidate No.:	Candidate Name:
Candidate No.:	Candidate Name:

Supervisor's name (please print): .

Supervisor's signature: .....

....

Date: 05/11/2007

**Project proposal Part C**

Candidate Name: .

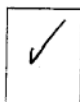
Supervisor Name: .

Please comment below on the feasibility and acceptability of the proposal (Project proposal Parts A &amp; B) as an Extended Project (Specification 1.4):

Centre Coordinator's comments:

This is an eminently interesting and suitable topic for independent study at level 3 which will provide the candidate with valuable experience of planning, researching, managing and reviewing independent extended writing. I am confident that proposed title meets the checklist 1-7 contained in 1.4 of the Extended Project Specification.

Approved

Approved subject to the implementation  
of the centre coordinator's  
recommendations

Resubmission required



Coordinator's name (please print):..

Coordinator's signature: .....

Date: 06/11/2007

\* As both Supervisor and Centre Coordinator are the same for this candidate, the Head of Sixth form has been asked to countersign below:

NAME (please print) :

POSITION :

SIGNATURE :

DATE :

06/11/07

# Plan at start of project

This page records your outline plan at the start of your work.

Outline the next steps in your planned research/initial development:

- Introduction to the topic, outlining the main sources, the significance of Alexander's achievements and the ways in which his character contributed to his behaviour and conquests.
- Investigation of major sources by ancient authors (Arrian, Plutarch, Quintus Curtius and Diodorus of Sicily) that still survive and an evaluation of their reliability, whilst also investigating their interpretations of Alexander.
- Comparison of these texts with modern historians, taking into account their conclusions on Alexander's character.
- Judgement as to whether Alexander was a brutal conqueror or noble hero, taking into consideration all available evidence.

Your supervisor's main comments and advice:

- Ensure the evidence is compared and contrasted to judge reliability.
- Make a balanced argument, showing knowledge of the many different views.
- It might be better to focus in further on Alexander's personality, taking into account descriptions of his experiences, but not diverting attention from the key theme.

Changes, clarifications or additions you have made as a result of your discussion with your supervisor and/or the comments from your centre coordinator:

- I have decided to alter my title slightly to 'An Analysis of the Personality of Alexander the Great', allowing for a greater, single focus for the project.
- I have clarified my decision to balance different historical interpretations in the project through my investigation. I have confirmed the means by which I will gather information and chosen the works of respected authors on the topic for research.

Supervisor's initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 20/11/2007

## Mid-project review

This page records your outline plan about half-way through your work.

Outline the successes, failures, additions and/or changes you made as you followed your Plan at start of project:

- The decision to change the title to one with a clear, single focus, was excellent, and has allowed me to go into a more detailed analysis of Alexander's personality, without other distractions.
- The sheer number of secondary sources has made it difficult to compare all those I am dealing with, and I have decided to compare the themes of people's interpretations.
- I have decided to add a section on the 'Iliad' due to the numerous comparisons of Alexander and Achilles, and I am researching this further.
- I am planning to add sections, such as that on the 'Iliad', which have become significant to the analysis through my research.
- I will complete another draft of the project
- Try to find further themes and interpretations of Alexander's personality to investigate.
- Refer to recent research into the subject.

Your supervisor's main comments and advice at this stage:

- Excellent start to the project and the essay
- Ensure there is continued focus on Alexander's personality when comparing sources or using evidence.
- Explain the background of the four authors of the primary sources and any key places or names mentioned.

Changes, clarifications or additions you have made as a result of your discussion with your supervisor at this stage:

- Taking into account the advice of my supervisor I have chosen to add more explanation of the key characters and places mentioned.
- I am clear that my decision to focus on themes of different interpretations to form a judgement has been a good one.

Supervisor's initials:

Date: 09/02/2008

## End-of-project review

This page records the (near) completion of your project product.

Outline the successes, failures, additions and/or changes you made as you followed the plan in your Mid-project review:

The investigation into the links between Alexander and the character of Achilles have been particularly fascinating and I have added them to the project. I have also more thoroughly investigated the themes of Alexander's personality taking into account the events of his life as evidence. The project has been particularly successful in allowing for a thorough analysis of Alexander's personality through the judgement of historical sources. This has allowed for some telling conclusions to be drawn, developing my own opinions on the subject through this research. There is now much more explanation of key characters and places, making the project more accessible for the reader.

Outline any additional advice or comment that you received from your supervisor during this final stage:

- Superb draft, with excellent analysis and staying close to the original aims of the project.
- Perhaps more detail is needed on Alexander's significance as a world leader or the impact of his personality upon his legacy.
- Excellent and thorough bibliography.
- It might be better to use footnotes to reference authors when quoting.
- More discussion of the inherent unreliability of any account of Alexander due to the lack of primary sources written by his contemporaries.

Changes, clarifications or additions you made as a result of discussion with your supervisor in this final stage:

- I have clarified that I have fulfilled the original aims of my project at this point through my investigation of Alexander's personality.
- I have decided to add an opening paragraph outlining the sheer lack of evidence and the potential variety of interpretations. I will also add a section on the importance of this topic to a modern reader.
- I have decided to change the way I reference my sources to make use of footnotes to make the essay easier to read.

Supervisor's initials:

Date: 26/06/2008

This page records the nature of your project product (abstract).

Outline (50 – 150 words) the nature of your final product, its main content and your conclusion:

The central aim of my project was to provide an in depth analysis of the personality of Alexander the Great. I have fulfilled this aim through a close discussion of the many interpretations of historians on this topic. I have outlined that surrounding Alexander is an enigmatic shroud due to a lack of real evidence. However, it is still possible to glean aspects of his character from such sources despite his own deification. It is clear that to lead such conquests, he had a powerful aura that inspired leadership, popularity and a certain gregarious magnanimity. Along with this is his spirited and wrathful nature, from which stern comparisons with Achilles. I concluded by judging that despite the commonly held view of modern historians that Alexander was characterised by the moral decline of his later life, it is clear that his ambition, bravery and vision associate him more with a hero of the Homeric world, seeking honour and eternal remembrance above all else, inherent in his personality.

**Presentation record  
Part A**

This page records your presentation and its preparation.

Planned nature of your presentation (e.g. timing, audience, use of visual aids, slides, use of notes, etc.):

I plan to produce a PowerPoint presentation with accompanying handouts for my presentation. The audience will be made up of two classies teachers and a number of my peers. I do not intend to use notes to refer to and the talk will last for around fifteen to twenty minutes, including time for questions from the audience.

Briefly list the main content of your presentation:

I begin by outlining the aims of my project in analysing the personality of Alexander the Great and discussing different historical interpretations of him. Having outlined the key sources on Alexander, I move on to discuss the key interpretations of his personality, assessing the merits and validity of each. I then draw some of my own conclusions on Alexander, having judged the different views on him, before moving on to what knowledge I feel I have gained from my project. When I have summarised and explained clearly my own conclusions on my project, I allow questions to be asked by the audience for explanation or to answer particular points of interest around my topic.

Changes, clarifications or additions you made as a result of rehearsal and/or discussion with your supervisor

- After discussion and rehearsal with my supervisor, I decided to add more detail to the facts and explanation of Alexander's life to allow the audience to more easily understand the presentation.
- It also clarified my decision to speak about aspects of preparation and research for the project itself along with my findings and conclusions on Alexander.

# Presentation record

## Part B

Candidate Name: .....

Please record and comment below on the delivery of the presentation (Specification 2.4.1 Presentation):

	Supervisor's record / comment
The nature of the audience (include numbers of staff, students and others present)	A mixture of teachers and students in Years 7-13 with an interest in Greek and Latin topics: 3 teachers and 9 students.
The nature of the presentation (include use of notes, use of display items, and use of presentation software)	A talk delivered with minimal use of cue cards and supported by relevant Powerpoint slides displaying key visual aids and important findings from the project.
Comment on the content and delivery of the presentation	See attached comments written immediately after the presentation.
Comment on the response of the candidate to questions that demonstrated understanding and grasp of the project and/or its production (give examples where appropriate).	See attached comments written immediately after the presentation.
Outline the nature of any additional presentation evidence that the candidate might add to this Project Production Log & Assessment Record (e.g. speaker notes, handouts, presentation slides, recording).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Powerpoint slides used during the presentation</li> <li>Cue cards from talk?</li> </ul>

Supervisor's name (please print): .....

Supervisor's signature: .....

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Date: 23/09/2008

## Supervisor Notes on Extended Project Presentation

23/09/2008

### 'An Analysis of the Personality of Alexander the Great'

The presentation lasted 15 minutes and consisted of the candidate exploring their key findings about Alexander the Great's personality based on an in-depth analysis of the available primary and secondary sources. This was followed by some detailed reflection on the process of producing the Extended Project, including points at which the focus and scope of the Project required some alteration to the initial plan. The presentation ended with a question and answer session involving members (both staff and students) of the audience.

█'s introduction was very clear and effective, focusing in detail on what the candidate has learned about Alexander the Great during the course of the Project. He is knowledgeable and erudite about the problems encountered by historians with sources and their interpretation over the centuries. Powerpoint slides are very well used to support the talk and help structure the candidate's ideas to maximise understanding by the audience. The content of the presentation is convincing and highly effective.

The aims of the Project are made very clear through sophisticated and mature expression. Technical terminology is used and explained extremely well for a (largely) non-specialist audience. █ shows a very acute awareness of interrogating sources and considering issues of bias and unreliability.

The candidate provides some very precise and specific details about events in Alexander the Great's life which define how future historians perceive his character and personality. He uses an assured, sophisticated vocabulary throughout and his delivery is superb: excellent intonation and gestures which really convey his understanding and passion for the subject.

He is able to give some very specific and accurate examples of ways in which the scope or focus of the Project has had to be adapted, for example the sheer number of sources which led to the candidate being more selective and looking at overall themes within a range of sources. The candidate showed insight into the strengths and weaknesses of his own research methodology and some very sound judgements about how he would do things differently if he was to repeat the Project in the future.

█ answered a range of questions from the audience with skill and dexterity. Ideas were conceptualised and he is clear that history *is* determined by personalities and their actions. He provided some very useful advice to the audience on how to go about planning and researching a Project of this nature and some of the pitfalls and difficulties to avoid. In doing so he is demonstrating fulfilment of the 7-10 mark criteria in AO4 (Review). In answer to a question about the methodology required to study an ancient historical figure, █ spoke confidently about the need for independent thinking, evaluation of a range of sources, careful planning and sequencing of ideas in extended writing and the need to develop excellent critical evaluation and reflection skills.

23/09/2008

## An Analysis of the Personality of Alexander the Great

Presentation for the Extended Project

[Redacted]

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### Aims of the Project

- The key aim was to investigate the personality of Alexander the Great through researching the key historical sources.
- It is clear that interpretations of him can be vastly different due to a lack of evidence from contemporaries.
- A judgement of these different views is necessary to develop a portrait of his character.

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### Conclusions drawn on Alexander's personality

- It is clear that his experiences were central to the development of his personality.
- Leadership strengths (ambition and determination).
- Wrathful and spirited.
- Moral decline in the latter part of his reign.
- Hubris through self-deification.
- Visionary, though at times brutal, conqueror.
- Shares the traits of a Homeric hero.

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## Results of the Project

- It is apparent from my research that his character was particularly complex, partly due to the unreliability of the sources.
- His personality played an important role in his conquests and the rise of the Hellenistic Age.
- I have realised the importance of the comparison of historical interpretations.

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This page records your own evaluation when you have completed your project product and given your presentation.

Briefly summarise your main learning from completing this project. You might include new knowledge or expertise that you enjoy or find valuable, a consideration of your planning and organisation, changes you would make if you undertook such work again, advice you would give to others undertaking such a project.

Through my research into this project, I have gained extensive knowledge of Alexander the Great, his personality and the varying historical viewpoints on this topic. I have found the entire experience fascinating and stimulating. I have gained essential study skills, with extra expertise in using learning resources such as libraries and condensing vast amounts of information for effective evaluation. The project gives me valuable experience in essay writing, whilst also further stimulating my interest in the Classical World. I have also gained a certain amount of self-knowledge, by developing my own opinions on the topic and discovering how it is best to carry out research on a large scale. I have certainly fulfilled the aims of my project set out in my planning, and I believe that I have learnt how to organise an extended essay of this kind more effectively. My planning was effective, yet if I undertook such work again, I would be less prescriptive and allow more space for new areas of interest discovered during the research process. I would also try to arrange a meeting with an expert on Alexander the Great to have an in depth discussion of interpretation of him. I would advise any others undertaking such a project to plan thoroughly and engage in regular discussion with the supervisor to express their thoughts in an open debate and to have confidence in expressing their own views on the topic from their research.

Through the project, I have also realised the value of continuous review, making important changes to improve its quality. For instance, I gained valuable experience through correcting my existing essay title. Due to problems in the finding of sources, I decided to alter the title slightly for a greater focus. In such a way, I have learnt the importance of overcoming such difficulties in order to improve the project. By planning and repeatedly reviewing my project I have gained valuable experience in essay writing, evaluation and research gathering. I feel that in the future, I will be able to more effectively carry out such a project due to this useful experience. Hence, this stimulating project has allowed me not only to improve my essay and research technique, but also to gain essential self-knowledge for use when faced with similar challenges.

# **An Analysis of the Personality of Alexander the Great**

**By**

## **Abstract**

The personality of Alexander the Great has often proved elusive due to the many discrepancies of historical sources, and the numerous hyperbolic accounts of his life. However, the aim of this project was to decipher the character of Alexander through the study and comparison of the many historical sources and cultural evidence. From such analysis I was able to reach an informed judgement on the nature of Alexander's personality. Throughout the ages, Alexander has been revered as an almost godlike figure, which although proving to be a hindrance in any investigation into the actual man beneath the legend, provided evidence of his character. There was most certainly a desire for eternal remembrance, achieving immortality, paradoxically from within the shackles of mortality. Alongside this is a sense of vision and influential leadership, running parallel to perhaps a sense of arrogance.

There appear to be two major, yet contrasting views on Alexander. The first is a more cynical one, adopted by a number of modern historians, who, often discrediting the ancient sources believe that Alexander was a brutal megalomaniac, seeking continuous conquest above all else, while sinking into a spiral of self-indulgence and profligacy. The second is more supportive of the myth, claiming that he was a remarkable and heroic statesman, heralding a new epoch in history, permanently imprinting Greek culture upon much of the known world. It is clear that not only his parentage, but his early life, prior to his rule, deeply affected his personality, instilling in him a love of Homer and a desire for greatness. Other influences were those of Greek culture through Aristotle and his campaigns themselves. In fact he often appears to be both gregarious and magnanimous, eminently transcending his peers. However, towards the end of his life the sources agree that there was, to an extent, a moral decline, in which he proved himself to be prone to excess and supercilious, almost believing his own exaggerated propaganda.

I concluded that despite the irregularities of the source material and the very negative modern approach to Alexander, there is substance to the eminently heroic vision of Alexander. It appears that he sought to emulate Homeric ideals such as those of his idol, Achilles. However, to an extent he went beyond this, attaining eternal glory and a lasting influence upon the world, his longing for fame driving him to succeed. His paradoxical personality, heroic, yet pragmatic, brutal, yet merciful has ensured his rightful position as a hero of his own age.

Alexander the Great has been the subject of story telling and documentation on a truly colossal scale, yet amid the hyperbole of his deification, it appears that an enigmatic shroud has developed, concealing the personality of the conqueror. Hence, any portrait of Alexander is hindered by the endlessly paradoxical views of him. For instance, to ancient historians such as Arrian, he was a symbol of triumphant Hellenism, a detached, seemingly god-like figure for whom 'there was no doubt that when Alexander had departed from among them they would honour him as a god' (Arrian, *Anabasis* 4.10.7). Such glowing praise and the apparent creation of a cult around him, has served to distort our knowledge of him, making it exceedingly difficult to form a judgement on his true personality. However, despite such evident exultation and the rise of such tales of heroism as the Middle Age 'Alexander Romance,' a portrait of Alexander 'beset by paranoia, megalomania, alcoholism and violence'<sup>1</sup> has emerged amongst certain modern historians. In the quest to unearth any reliable evidence of Alexander's personality, it seems, it is necessary to evaluate the nature of this shroud and attempt to analyse the often deceptive sources. Further, though the distorted character descriptions of ancient historians offer clues, their documenting of the events that shaped his life must be investigated in an attempt to unearth implicit suggestions of his actual personality. Thus, with in depth comparison of historical opinion throughout the ages, along with cultural responses to his influence, and the many sources on Alexander, it may be possible to reach a reasoned conclusion as to his distinguished character traits.

With such ambiguities it seems difficult, at first sight, to brand Alexander as either the magnanimous Homeric hero or the brutally pragmatic conqueror and thereby try to develop a portrait of his personality. The significance of his character cannot be underestimated, being key to his success in conquering the mighty Persian Empire in just under a decade. The greatness of his achievement required magnificently potent presence and personality. His ability to inspire an army, conquer a massive empire and set up his own cult, while living for only thirty three years is emblematic of an irrepressibly magnanimous and gregarious character. For instance, Alexander's ineffable ambition, typified by his march across the desert of Gedrosia (borders of Pakistan and Iran), as documented by Arrian, his returning from India and persuasive powers, created a stoic loyalty in his troops. Alexander's presence in itself sustained his army and empire it seems. This is seen in the almost immediate fragmentation of his empire as his successors competed for power. In such a way, the character of Alexander was key to his conquests, sharing in his soldier's hardships while driving them to excel against innumerable odds.

This image of Alexander being successful as a result of a gregarious magnanimity is not unfounded. However, it is necessary to outline the key ancient sources commenting on Alexander that have produced such an image. It appears that Alexander himself left no written material, and the numerous works of his contemporaries, ranging from descriptions of heroic conquests to scathing comment on a moral decline towards the end of his life. The main authorities referred to by the later historical sources are Callisthenes of Olynthus, a nephew of Aristotle, who tends to praise Alexander's exploits with the exception of his later adoption of eastern customs. This was often thought of by ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Holt 'Alexander the Great Today: in the interests of historical accuracy?' 'Ancient History Bulletin' 13.3 (1999) 111-17

historians as the reason for the later suggestions of his madness, having descended into a pit of stereotypical eastern profligacy. Onesicritus of Astypalaea (a Cynic philosopher) Aristobulus, Nearchus (a general) Cleitarchus (a key source, very much deifying Alexander in recounting wondrous, fantastical events) and Ptolemy (one of his most prominent generals and a later King of Egypt) are the most important contemporary historians of Alexander to be referred to by the ancient historians. However, all these sources no longer exist, very much adding to the endless complications of developing a portrait of Alexander's character, with so little contemporary evidence remaining. In such a way, a wealth of knowledge upon the conqueror has been lost to the ravages of time, leaving but five ancient sources, written several hundred years after Alexander's death. 'The History of Alexander' by Quintus Curtius Rufus (first century AD), the universal histories of Diodorus of Sicily (first century BC) and Pompeius Trogus' work (first century BC), in an abridged version by Justin (second century AD) are among the less reliable of the ancient sources, but are useful nonetheless. Arrian's 'Anabasis of Alexander', considered the most reliable source on his career, outlining the essential cause of the king's success, in a tone of admirable esteem and mild criticism, as his 'ποθος' (desire). Finally, Plutarch's 'Life of Alexander' (first century AD) focused more on the development of a moral portrait of him through chosen anecdotes as opposed to a narrative account. Much of the questionable nature of these sources arises from the known problems with ancient historians. They seldom refer directly to their source material and the accounts are rife with personal opinions. Such conventions among ancient historians has led modern commentators to occasionally condemn their works as contrived and having a tendency towards fantasy. However, since such historians are the key to much of our knowledge of the ancient world and Alexander himself, their views cannot simply be discarded. In fact their informed judgements are of particular note, as they often grant deeper insight into Alexander's personality. As a result, there is much speculation amongst modern historians as to the true personality of Alexander on account of the prevalence of heroic exaggeration and the catastrophic loss of contemporary evidence. Alongside this historic evidence is a wealth of cultural heritage, ranging from coinage to art. It is immediately obvious that Alexander's Hellenising of the Eastern Mediterranean was overwhelmingly significant, seen in the long lasting nature of his cultural legacy. However, such evidence is particularly warped, displaying solely Alexander's propaganda image; formidable and deified. Hence, although useful, this evidence gives very little indication of his true character, despite there being, implicit within such hyperbolic representations, the desire for eternal remembrance and perhaps narcissistic tendencies. There is most evidently a dense shroud over the true character of Alexander, simply through problematic source material.

Hence, in the search for the personality of a hero, who conquered a large portion of the known world, revered for centuries as a figure akin to a living Homeric hero, or later, a chivalrous knight in the 'Alexander Romance', or feared as 'The Two Horned One'<sup>2</sup> in the Tales of his Eastern Enemies. Alexander has been the subject of awed reverence and speculation yet he has often appeared distant despite the vast scale of documentation. For instance, Chaucer commented that 'the storie of Alisaundre is so commune/that every

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Wood – 'In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great: A Journey from Greece to India,' BBC Books

wight that hath discrecioun/hath herd somewhat or al of his fortune,'<sup>3</sup> emphasising his eternal fame. Just as Plutarch claimed that 'it is my task to dwell upon those actions which illuminate the workings of the soul, and by this means to create a portrait,'<sup>4</sup> I shall attempt to piece together the shards of Alexander's character described, and combined with historical material from both ancient and modern sources, judge whether he should be considered as the justifiably deified hero or the brutal pragmatist, eventually corrupted to a supercilious state by his own propaganda.

The early life of Alexander the Great was of particular significance, both in providing telling examples of his character and in shaping him as the future king of Macedonia. Even his birth was considered portentous in the sources, with prophesies that he was to be a heroic leader and the belief that one of the seven wonder of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis at Ephesus was burnt down on the day of his birth. However, it seems likely that such legends were contrived during his rise to greatness to form a cult around his godlike reputation. In fact, one of the great difficulties of analysing the youth of Alexander is the sheer lack of detail, having become suffused in myth and legend. His greatness as a conqueror has led to a great distortion of his younger years, which are renowned for shaping someone's future. Only Plutarch appears to be interested in Alexander's youth in terms of ancient historians' coverage of the man. As a result, much of the evidence or famous anecdotes are difficult to prove, with so much historical interpretation based upon one source. It is interesting, though, that even Plutarch claims 'that day had brought forth a great scourge and calamity for Asia.'<sup>5</sup>

Alexander's parentage is particularly significant, giving further clues as to his traits, despite the endless rumours denoting a descent from Zeus Ammon (a combination of the King of the Greek and Egyptian gods). Firstly, his father Philip (despite disputed rumours denying Philip's status as the biological father) had been chiefly responsible for the development of Macedonia as a military power. He engineered an effective war machine made up of highly organised and heavily armoured infantry, trained to form an impenetrable wall of spears in a phalanx formation and the deadly companion cavalry. With the decisive battle of Chaeronea (338 BC) against a Southern Greek coalition, Philip founded the League of Corinth, rendering Greece dependent upon Macedonia, adding to the conquests of Thessaly and Thrace. In fact, it was Philip who first proposed a Panhellenic invasion of Asia. Perhaps it is not overly outlandish to suggest that Alexander inherited his military efficiency, propensity for leadership and ambition from his father. It was his father who had planned and begun the invasion of Asia, and in many ways Alexander capitalised on an already effective and trained war machine. However, most sources purport that he was far more akin to his mother's spirited nature. For instance, Plutarch claims that Alexander had a 'vehement and impulsive nature' while Olympias was 'a woman of jealous and vindictive temper.'<sup>6</sup> The similarities are obvious,

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<sup>3</sup> Chaucer – 'The Monk's Tale,' lines 641-643

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch, 1973, 'The Age of Alexander' translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, first edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, 1973, 'The Age of Alexander' translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, first edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch, 1973, 'The Age of Alexander' translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, first edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

both seeming domineering and wrathful, with for example, Olympias supposedly roasting Philip's last wife and child over a brazier and Alexander ruthlessly annihilating threats to his leadership after the assassination of Philip.

Despite the lack of documentation of Alexander's early life in the surviving ancient sources these years seem very much to define his future personality. For instance, the famous incident of Alexander's taming of Bucephalus is a prime example of his self-willed impetuosity coupled with limitless desires for greatness. His father is supposed to have said after the event, 'my boy, you must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedonia is too small for you.'<sup>7</sup> Clearly, it is impossible to know whether such a comment was made or not, yet it is clear that, despite the aid of hindsight for an ancient historian, the episode is delightfully symbolic of Alexander's future. Plutarch saw him as destined to tame the untameable; to conquer an empire. The anecdote is also emblematic of an impulsive, daring quality to all of his actions. He was never one to be awed at limits, ever dreaming the impossible in the manner of the Homeric heroes he became devoted to. Alexander's ruthless efficiency used to solidify his position as king after the assassination of Philip typifies his eventual prowess as a military leader, the early years shaping the character of a conqueror.

There is also a case for the influence of Greek culture shaping his personality through his education under the austere Leonidas and later under Aristotle. Alexander developed a keen interest in philosophy, which perhaps affected his tendency to grant mercy to his enemies' women and children, highly unusual in the ancient world. However, most significant of all in this case is the influence of the 'Iliad' upon his life. During his conquests, he became committed to the Hellenising of Persia. By founding new cities and spreading the Greek language, he rendered much of the Mediterranean and the known world to Greek customs and values. However, his vision was such that he sought to amalgamate Greek and eastern values within his newly founded empire. This exemplifies his brazen ambition, imposing his own values upon the world, whilst also showing his foresight with the need for a unity of cultures. He greatly revered the text, admiring the titanic clashes of heroes in war; Achilles in particular. He grew up with a devotion to Homer and the Homeric world which his own kingship so much resembled, and slept 'every night with the 'Iliad' under his pillow.'<sup>8</sup> Alexander's obsession with the 'Iliad,' its heroic values and Achilles, appears to have affected his character to a degree. For instance, his relationship with Hephaestion is strikingly similar to that between Achilles and Patroclus, and Alexander's mourning for his friend emulates the epic proportions of Achilles' grief. In such a way, it seems that Alexander was very much affected by Greek culture, inadvertently or purposefully spreading the influence of Hellenism in the east.

The effectiveness of Alexander's leadership was undoubtedly very great, in terms of the scale of his achievement through conquest, as 'his passionate desire for fame implanted

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<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, 1973, 'The Age of Alexander' translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, first edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>8</sup> Richard Stoneman – 'Alexander the Great', Lancaster Pamphlets

in him a pride and a grandeur of vision which went far beyond his years.’<sup>9</sup> During his campaigns he truly adopted a multifaceted nature, simultaneously the divine hero and ruthless conqueror, utterly consumed by ambition. His exploits in the major pitched battles against Persia denote his devotion towards heroic conflict, always leading his men from the front. For example, his efforts at the front line in the battle of Granicus proved decisive, despite almost being slain by the Persians. He was also magnanimous in his treatment of women, ‘having shown a restraint towards Persian women which even surpassed the valour he had shown against their husbands.’<sup>10</sup> The fact that he spared the life of Darius’ wife upon her capture is particularly evident of a certain transcendent nobility. Arrian, for instance, remarks that, ‘I cannot but admire Alexander both for treating these women with such compassion and for showing such respect and confidence.’<sup>11</sup> However, he also had the capacity to be savagely barbarous. His utter annihilation of Thebes and a large proportion of its inhabitants, upon the defeat of its rebellion against Macedonian rule, was particularly brutal (only the house and relatives of the Greek poet Pindar were spared, along with a painting that was to Alexander’s liking). Alexander’s nobility and mercy had obvious limits and was often superseded by his ambition. His response to Darius’ plea for his wife, mother and children to be released after the battle of Issus, as documented by Arrian, typifies this ruthlessness:

*‘In the future let any communications you wish to make with me be addressed to the King of all Asia. Do not write to me as to an equal. Everything you possess is now mine, so, if you should want anything, let me know in the proper terms, or I shall take steps to deal with you as a criminal. If, on the other hand, you wish to dispute your throne, stand and fight for it, and do not run away. Wherever you may hide yourself, be sure I shall seek you out.’*<sup>12</sup>

Despite the imperious tone of this letter, however, by the standards of his age, he was unusual in terms of his capacity for mercy, even allowing Persians, his enemies, to oversee his vast empire. Obviously, this must be treated with scepticism, as it is unlikely that Arrian could provide substantial evidence as to its genuine nature. It is also possible that elements of the letter are fabricated. However, simply the tone of the letter, with its suggestions of a heroic desire to fight a war until its bitter end, give a telling impression of how Arrian saw Alexander through the information he had available to him, often referring to contemporaries of the man. There is potential to state that Arrian is a biased source, rife with discrepancies and loyal to the heroic memory of Alexander. Yet such a view would be at fault because, firstly, it is undeniable that to attain such a great empire so quickly, the king must have possessed formidable skills of leadership. Secondly, perhaps it is overtly cynical of modern historians such as Ian Worthington to condemn

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, 1973, ‘The Age of Alexander’ translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, first edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch, 1973, ‘The Age of Alexander’ translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, first edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>11</sup> Arrian, 1971, ‘The Campaigns of Alexander’ translated by Aubrey De Sélincourt, revised edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>12</sup> Arrian, 1971, ‘The Campaigns of Alexander’ translated by Aubrey De Sélincourt, revised edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

the ancient sources of fabrication, simply because they agree on the fact that Alexander was a noble and influential Macedonian king. Hence, it is clear that the sources, in general, claim that Alexander possessed an unusual, yet compelling potency to his leadership. He is at once gregarious, sharing in his men's hardships on campaigns, whilst simultaneously aloof, seen in his elevated state as king of, eventually, a vast, expansive kingdom.

Upon the defeat of Darius and the Persian Empire with the symbolic destruction of one of its capitals, Persepolis, Alexander had conquered almost the entirety of the known world. His glowing achievements, despite thousands of deaths in wars, would usher in a new age of Hellenistic prosperity. However, even the staunchest admirers of Alexander consider him to have declined morally in the latter part of his reign, becoming extravagant and paranoid almost to the point of insanity. In fact some modern historians, such as Ian Worthington, purport that the entirety of his life was a selfish crusade for glory, slaughtering thousands due to his own megalomania and blinding ambition. This view also claims that there was a certain corruption to Alexander's personality; a callous pitilessness that drove him to endlessly seek war. However, he should not be judged by today's moral standards, being part of a different age. Such a view disregards many key ancient historical sources, ignoring the underlying greatness of his achievement. Ernst Badian states that 'After fighting, scheming and murdering in pursuit of the secure tenure of absolute power, Alexander found himself at least on a lonely pinnacle over an abyss, with no use for his power and security unattainable.'<sup>13</sup> The saying of Lord Acton that 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely' is particularly apt in this case. For instance, it appears that, not only does Alexander alienate his Macedonian fellows by adopting Persian customs and dress, but he begins to believe his own propaganda. The silver coins depicting Alexander with two horns (the symbol of the Egyptian god Ammon) form part of this publicity of his own legend. When he conquered Egypt he was addressed, upon his visit to the oracle of Ammon at the Siwah oasis, as 'the son of Ammon', from which he developed the legend of his own divine birth, emulating his idols, Achilles and Heracles. His murder of Cleitus, who was angered at Alexander's claim to be the son of Ammon (Zeus) is evident of this madness in killing his own soldiers, and perhaps delusion as he is overcome by his own greatness and ambition.

This potent paranoia regarding his apparent religious status was coupled with ostentatious excesses in terms of alcoholism and mourning for his companion Hephaistion, causing the repulsion both of his fellows and later historians at 'the orientalising megalomania of their now uncomfortably remote king.'<sup>14</sup> This lack of restraint is particularly evident in the selfish extravagance of his mourning for his companion (and according to many his lover) Hephaistion. Alexander was so aggrieved that he refused sustenance, and was only satisfied by the promise of his friend being worshipped as a hero, and for a large monument to be built in his memory. Hence, just as he mourned in the manner of Achilles, so did he display his wrath to ensure absolute loyalty. The irony of his extreme mourning was that it greatly weakened him, making his imminent death more likely. At

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<sup>13</sup> Ernst Badian, 'Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind', *Historia* 7 (1958a) 425-44 (Griffith, editor – 1966: 287-306)

<sup>14</sup> Cartledge, P, 2005, 'Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past,' second edition, Pan Books, London

times he appears to be maddened by his own power in the ancient sources. Though often aloof, even the praising Arrian disapproves of this alienation of his Macedonian comrades in favour of eastern allies. Perhaps some of this ill feeling was due to stereotypical Greek uneasiness concerning eastern customs. However, the noted change in Alexander's personality must be related to the position of ruler he was unaccustomed to. In fact, it is possible that he was maddened and confused due to his lack of experience in administrative affairs, being so used to campaigning. His brutal treatments of those suspected of being involved in the supposed mutiny planned by Philotas, and his treatment of the Indians after the mutiny of 326 BC denote a severe loss of control. Growing paranoia appeared to characterise much of his later life as he was turned against former Macedonian friends, who were alienated by the adoption of eastern customs. He appears very much to have been corrupted by his position and propaganda.

Such hubris and lack of restraint in the latter part of his reign were not considered to be the only negative character traits. The favour shown towards the Persians was particularly derided by the Macedonians. His marriages to Roxane and one of Darius' daughters were particularly unpopular amongst his troops. Such disregard for his troops' feelings at this stage coupled with their frustration at the long years of campaigning highlights his lack of foresight in terms of the maintenance of his empire. However, simultaneously the strength of his ambition or megalomania in comparison to others is shown. Just prior to his death, he was planning further campaigns. He was merely relying on the Persian form of government to sustain his holdings while he planned further conquests. The isolation of his men, away from the adoption of Persian customs exemplifies Alexander's self-motivation, with the exception of Hephaistion. His friends and allies seem merely to be exploited into supporting him within the brutal factional politics of the Macedonians. In which case, he was simultaneously close and distant from the men he led so inspirationally to conquer an empire, through the force of his personality, gradually alienated into legend through his own deification.

Despite the tainted negativity defining the latter years of his life, it appears that Alexander is very much a man of extreme paradoxes, perhaps arising from distortion in the ancient sources but more likely a true reflection of the complexity of the man himself. The positive traits of Alexander appear far more compelling, however. His Hellenisation of his eastern territories was particularly significant, spreading Greek ideals and culture. However, unusually in the ancient world he appears to have favoured both Persians and Greeks equally. For instance, Arrian comments tellingly that 'Alexander prayed for various blessings and especially that the Macedonians and Persians should enjoy harmony as partners in government.'<sup>15</sup> Hence, it appears Cartledge's comment that he symbolised 'peaceful, multi-ethnic coexistence,'<sup>16</sup> is not without evidence, with the conqueror keen to encourage equality in his newly won empire, perhaps a visionary existing before his time.

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<sup>15</sup> Arrian, 1971, 'The Campaigns of Alexander' translated by Aubrey De Selincourt, revised edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>16</sup> Cartledge, P, 2005, 'Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past,' second edition, Pan Books, London

However, he had a tendency for mercy in equality, attempting to form an unprecedented union between east and west. This is seen in the mass weddings of his officers to Persian brides at Susa. Yet it is overshadowed by an enthusiastic romanticism, as he is thoroughly driven to excel. Robin Lane Fox's comment that, 'he did not believe in impossibility,'<sup>17</sup> is apt in this case, as he always strived to heighten his reputation. The longing for fame described by Plutarch, his appreciation of eastern customs and his kindness towards women emphasise this in particular. Perhaps then, he was a visionary, seeking to carve out a new world. The last plans of Alexander, made before he died, comment on an ambitious extension of his conquests. However, Arrian's statement that 'he would have continued to seek beyond them for unknown lands, as it was ever his nature, if he had no rival, to strive to better the best'<sup>18</sup> echoes the Homeric ideology to which he was devoted, in which heroes always sought to be the best and win everlasting remembrance.

It is this devotion to Homeric heroism, which seems to be the most persuasive interpretation of Alexander's personality, circumventing much of his life. It is clear that from an early age he was dedicated to the 'Iliad,' and such an obsession with the epic became a key facet to many of his actions. An example of this is seen in the fact that upon his invasion of Asia, the first place he visited was the grave of Achilles, beside the ancient site of Troy (the setting for the 'Iliad'). Of course, the stories of triumphant Greek heroism appealed to many of his peers. However, Alexander's state of mind had a propensity for devotion to this tale of heroism, perhaps to the point of obsession. A Homeric hero was devoted to a selfish quest for 'τιμή' ('honour') and 'κλέος' ('glory') bound to an endless cycle of tragic and brutal wars in order to achieve eternal remembrance. Their egocentric devotion is coupled with their inevitable doom, by continuously endangering their lives. Battles in the epic poem are played out as a series of honourable duels, glorifying the efforts of the chief heroes. Such ideals are in many ways paramount to an understanding of Alexander's personality; a statesman and a perfectionist. He was famed to have led the daring cavalry charge at the battle of Gaugamela, headlong towards Darius and is also renowned to have fought regularly at the forefront of battle. Such boldness and wistful risking of his life highlights his desire to be a hero himself. His actions in such battles exemplify his goal of 'striving to realize an age which he had been too late to share.'<sup>19</sup> In fact, his unerring devotion to Achilles, the ultimate hero of the 'Iliad,' powerful, yet subversive, is particularly telling. Achilles appears to be barbarously savage at times, at one point taking human sacrifices. However, his pitilessness seems at times to embody greatness beyond that of the other heroes. Alexander's swift execution of suspected traitors emulates, perhaps, Achilles' extreme temperament. However, Alexander appears to be far more pragmatic and politically driven than the Homeric hero, who is often irrational and embodying a separate moral vision. Both individuals transcend those around them, yet, though similar, as seen in Alexander's devotion to the character of Achilles, display their greatness in different ways. Alexander's sparing of women, his dislike of looting and his embracing of eastern customs are examples of his unusual, but inspired characteristics of leadership. However,

<sup>17</sup> Fox, RL, 2004 'Alexander the Great,' fourth edition, Penguin, St Ives

<sup>18</sup> Arrian, 1971, 'The Campaigns of Alexander' translated by Aubrey De Sélincourt, revised edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

<sup>19</sup> Fox, RL, 2004 'Alexander the Great,' fourth edition, Penguin, St Ives

both men inexorably die in their youth from their own excesses; both were devoted to a glorious, yet doomed ideal.

In conclusion, despite the shroud looming over much of Alexander's true personality, it is possible to discern the inner potency of it, with the ability to lead armies so effectively and conquer an empire within a decade. Although the many discrepancies of the ancient sources are damaging in creating a truthful picture of Alexander, by comparing the different historical opinions, I have reached my own judgement. It seems that he had a self-indulgent lack of restraint at times, in his latter years falling into an abyss of grief and purposelessness in his exalted position, with the sheer amount of evidence in favour of this. Yet beyond this, there is a key part of his character that very much transcends this, that 'he lived above all for the ideal of a distant past, striving to realise an age which he had been too late to share.'<sup>20</sup> Alexander's daring exploits, sharing in his men's hardships denotes this search for the heroism of Homer's 'Iliad', as his longing for fame to realise his ambitions drove him to succeed. Hence, there can be no more fitting conclusion than Sarpedon's words in the 'Iliad' that 'countless dooms of death surround us and no mortal man can escape or avoid them;'<sup>21</sup> and so has Alexander achieved his eternal glory.

Word count 5009

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<sup>20</sup> Fox, RL, 2004 'Alexander the Great,' fourth edition, Penguin, St Ives

<sup>21</sup> Homer, 2003 'The Iliad,' translated by EV Rieu, second edition, Penguin Classics, St Ives

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