

The Dead Guy Interview

Alexander the Great
(356-323 BCE)

WITH
MICHAEL A. STUSSER



BELATED OBITUARY: *Alexander Philip III was born in Pella, the capital of Macedonia (now northern Greece), to King Philip II and Olympias, a princess from Epirus. As a child, he studied under Aristotle, learning the values of ethics and philosophy (and being forced to memorize Homer's The Iliad). As king of Macedonia, Alexander conquered most of what was then the civilized world, amassing an empire that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to India. He is widely considered one of the greatest military geniuses in history. When not slaying enemies, Alexander enjoyed spending quality time with his life-long lover, a eunuch named Bagoas. He died at the age of 32, but the cause is not exactly known. He either contracted malaria, was poisoned by an enemy, or drank himself to death (he was a work-hard-play-hard kinda guy).*

MENTAL FLOSS: At the age of 16, most kids are learning how to kiss girls and drive the station wagon. You had some bigger things on the brain, eh?

ALEXANDER THE GREAT: Yeah, my dad [King Philip of Macedonia] would sometimes leave me in charge of the colonies when he was out of town. One time a colony revolted and we had to go in there and bang heads. It was cool though. I renamed the place Alexandroupolis.

MF: June of 336 B.C.E., you're 20 years old and your dad gets killed at the theatre. Who dunnit?

ATG: Not sure, but I think my mom was probably involved somehow. She was a wild one. My father remarried and things got nasty between her and the new gal. Can't really complain, though; it made me King of Macedonia.

MF: You took the name Alexander the Great. Kind of cocky, isn't it?

ATG: You're lucky I'm a dead guy right now.

MF: O.K., moving on. During your reign, you somehow managed to conquer Persia, Syria, Egypt, India and central Asia, even though your army was often outnumbered. How'd you kick so much butt?

ATG: Good training. I was quite the drill sergeant. I taught the guys to respond to flags and trumpets—that was new. Plus we had a

killer cavalry. Gotta have a good horse. The catapults and javelin throwers didn't hurt either.

MF: Ever get hurt in battle?

ATG: Oh, all the time. I always rode up front to inspire the troops—probably not such a good idea. I took an arrow in the lung in India and got stabbed in the neck in Granicus.

MF: Let's move on. You were way ahead of your time when it came to the idea of the melting pot, but the whole idea of ethnic fusion among the varying regions of your kingdom didn't work out. Why?

ATG: Has it worked in your country?

MF: Good point.

ATG: It got to where I had so many nations under my belt that I needed to smooth things out with some intermarriages, you know?

MF: And you led by example.

ATG: Yeah, my second wife, Stateira, was Persian. I also put foreign soldiers in my army so they'd mix cultures. The Macedonians hated the idea, and after I died, they annulled almost all the marriages. Then the whole empire went to hell in a handbasket.

MF: Let's get back to the "great" thing for a second. Isn't it true that you started to see yourself as a god?

ATG: I got a little carried away with this "proskynesis" idea—basically making people bow down to me all the time. *I was trying to unite all my territories with a common religion—my own—but it didn't quite work out. Take too much, they'll suck the life outta ya. Just ask Nixon.*

MF: Did you know they're making a movie of your life starring Leonardo DiCaprio? [*"Alexander the Great" directed by Baz Luhrmann opens in 2005.*]

ATG: Yeah? Hope it's better than the 1956 version with Richard Burton. Who plays my mom?

MF: Oh you'll like this: Nicole Kidman stars as Olympia, one of the most extraordinary female figures in all history.

ATG: She's hot.

MF: Yes, Alex. Yes, she is. 🙄