


Introduction

Macedonia and Greeks

After the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, tourist shops across Greece teemed with t-shirts bearing slogans such as ‘Macedonia is Greece’ and ‘ [Greek flag] ♥ Macedonia’. A new country on Greece’s northern border had just proposed to call itself ‘The Republic of Macedonia’, and the t-shirts were part of a concerted campaign against the name. Because of Greece’s opposition, the new state joined the United Nations in 1993 under the *provisional reference* (i.e. not a formal name) ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ (FYROM).

This recent controversy testifies to the power that the name ‘Macedonia’ still holds today. It is true that Greece has expressed concerns that FYROM’s proposed name will pave the way for territorial expansion into Greece’s northern province of Macedonia. In reality, however, Greek opposition probably has as much to do with national identity and cultural heritage. A new Macedonia might suggest that ‘Macedonian’ is somehow not ‘Greek’, and could consequently seem to threaten the Greeks’ claim on Alexander the Great, the king of Macedonia (336–323 BC) who famously conquered the Persian Empire.

The Greek view of Macedonia in the fourth century BC was quite different. Greece was not a nation at all, but rather consisted of independent city-states who shared a common Greek culture and spoke regional dialects of the Greek language. These Greeks, or ‘Hellenes’, inhabited parts of modern Greece, modern Turkey and colonies around the Mediterranean. To an Athenian at the time, ‘Macedonia’ was the back of beyond, a remote and rather unsophisticated region whose Greekness was questionable at best. Macedonians did not participate in the Panhellenic (‘all-Greek’ and ‘Greek-only’) Olympic Games. They drank wine straight, without diluting it with water, a habit of ‘barbarians’ such as the Thracians, not of Greeks. Macedonia was neither a democracy nor an oligarchy like most Greek city-states, but a monarchy whose power derived from the support of the army. Finally, though evidence suggests that the Macedonian language was linguistically related to Greek, the Greeks themselves seem to have thought it a non-Greek, ‘barbaric’, tongue.

For its part, however, Macedonian royalty and prominent nobility had, since the Persian invasion of 480 BC, sought to cultivate a Greek identity. The royal court used the Greek language, distinct from the native Macedonian tongue, and invited prominent Greek poets such as Agathon, Timotheus and maybe even Euripides to the capital at Pella. Macedonian nobility were educated in Greek culture, including philosophy, literature and music. Macedonians asserted that their royal (‘Temenid’) house sprang from men of the Greek city of Argos, descendants of Temenus, who himself was a descendant of Zeus’ son Heracles. Not surprisingly, Greeks began to question Macedonia’s professed Greekness most vocally during the

reign of Philip II (Alexander the Great's father), whose growing power and influence had begun to affect the Greeks themselves. The Athenian orator Demosthenes, for example, warning against the growing threat from Macedonia, disparaged Philip as 'not only no Greek, but wholly unrelated to Greeks; not even a barbarian from a land that one might call worthy, he is a pestilence from Macedonia, a region yet to produce even a decent slave for purchase' (*Third Philippic* 31).

Macedonia under Philip II

Macedonia rose to power thanks largely to Philip's innovations in his army. He introduced the sarissa, a pike so long that an enemy was forced to face three rows of them before reaching the serried ranks who held the weapons. Philip also masterfully combined infantry and cavalry manoeuvres, so that the two contingents worked in concert like never before. A new corps of experienced and lighter-armed soldiers called Hypaspists ('Shield Bearers') facilitated this cooperation. They could protect the infantry flank when the cavalry charged ahead and, if necessary, they could charge forward to support the advancing cavalry. This cavalry, too, was a formidable force, specially trained to attack in a wedge formation that could punch through enemy lines and thereby render an entire army vulnerable. Finally, improvements in siege technology made taking rugged hilltops or city walls only a matter of time for Philip.

Through early military victories Philip gained control of the mountainous region of Upper Macedonia. He did not subjugate its people, but rather united their nobility with that of his native coastal plains of Lower Macedonia. He incorporated Upper Macedonians into his court and into an army of regionally defined infantry battalions and cavalry squadrons. These regional units took pride in their unique cultural identities and naturally rivalled one another in skill and courage. At the same time, they reaped the benefits that the whole Macedonian army won, and so quickly came to identify with Philip and his goals.

Military success brought Philip access to financial resources. Victories in Thrace won him silver and gold mines, which enabled him to enhance his army and hire Greek mercenary soldiers in great numbers. As he acquired more territory, Philip parcelled it out to chosen Macedonian nobles, at once increasing Macedonian interests in the new lands and rewarding those nobles who supported him. He also required eminent Macedonian families to send their sons to him to serve as Royal Pages. This was an opportunity for the noble youths to establish personal relationships with the king and to learn from him first-hand. But it was also a means of controlling the powerful nobles. Families whose sons resided with Philip were more likely to remain loyal.

Marriage won Philip alliances, too, both within and beyond Macedonia. He married Olympias (Alexander's mother) from Epirus to the west, Phila from Elimiotis to the south, Audata from Illyria to the north-west, Philinna and Nicesipolis from Thessaly to the south, Meda of the Thracian Getae north-east of Macedonia, and

Cleopatra, a member of a powerful native Macedonian family. Although polygamy did sometimes lead to strife within the palace, Philip was clearly willing to risk such tensions for the diplomatic advantages his several marriages offered.

Philip II and the Greeks

Philip always had his eye on the Greeks farther south, working hard to cast himself and Macedonia as Greek. He was the first Macedonian king to enter the Olympic Games, where his horse won a victory. The Athenian philosopher Aristotle famously tutored his son Alexander. And Philip also welcomed other influential Greeks to his court, where he lavished them with 'gifts'. Through these contacts, he acquired a nuanced understanding of the Greek city-states, their unique interests and the conflicts between them. As he exerted increasing influence in the Greek world, he worked to ensure that most Greeks either did not recognize Macedonia's growing power or were too preoccupied with affairs closer to home to do anything about it. This included bribing Greek officials and supporting variously the interests of different city-states at different times.

When the Greeks did unite to resist Philip, they suffered a decisive defeat at Chaeronea in 338 BC, and Philip swiftly installed Macedonian garrisons in key cities. Philip did not absorb the Greeks into a Macedonian empire. Instead, he formed a confederation of Greek city-states called the League of Corinth. The League's treaty bound members not to attack one another and obliged them to declare war on any who did. The designated leader of this new League and its 'Common Peace' was none other than Philip himself.

Philip recognized that a common war could keep this new confederation intact, and Persia made an ideal target. King Xerxes of Persia had led a destructive invasion of Greek lands in 480 BC, and a Greek war of revenge against Persia was just the common cause that Philip needed. The current weakness of the Persian Empire made the idea even more attractive. It was plagued by revolts; just before the battle at Chaeronea, in fact, the Persian Grand Vizier Bagoas had poisoned King Artaxerxes III Ochus, killed any competent successors, and was ruling the empire through Ochus' youngest son. The Greeks were well aware of Persia's plight and knew that an empire in disarray was more vulnerable to attack.

The proposed invasion won the League's enthusiastic support. The League declared war on Persia in 337 BC and named Philip commander-in-chief for the invasion. By 336, Persia seemed even worse off. There had been revolts in Egypt and Babylon. Bagoas had poisoned his puppet ruler. The successor, Darius III, eluded Bagoas' attempt on his life, but was now ruling an empire governed by unreliable satraps whose loyalties were highly questionable. This was the Persian Empire against which Philip sent his generals Parmenion and Attalus with 10,000 men to prepare the way for the larger invasion to come. And so it was that under Philip II, Macedonia, a kingdom of the Greek hinterlands and of dubious Greekness, rose to become the Greek world's champion of Panhellenism.

Alexander III as king

When Philip was assassinated in 336 BC, Alexander III was not yet 20 years of age. He swiftly acceded to the Macedonian throne, but also assumed leadership of the Corinthian League and its Panhellenic interests. As king of the leading state in the Greek cause against Persia, Alexander proved himself a master of public relations. He would regularly cast his conquest in Greek terms, taking advantage of historical and mythological parallels in the works of Homer, Herodotus and Xenophon. He would retain Greek Companions and surround himself with Greek philosophers. At intervals during the campaign, he would sponsor at great expense Greek athletic and dramatic festivals that included performances by the most famous Greek talents of the day.

Alexander also proved a good student of his father's diplomacy. He had learned the value of spending resources lavishly. He had seen Philip honour non-Macedonians and even bestow on them traditionally Macedonian offices and titles. He had watched (and even intervened) as his father used carefully negotiated marriages to forge a network of alliances. The reader who observes Alexander's use of diplomacy throughout his campaign may well wonder whether Alexander approached the peoples of the Persian Empire and beyond in a manner very like Philip's management of his Macedonian neighbours, including his 'fellow' Greeks to the south.

Plutarch and Arrian

All eyewitness accounts of Alexander's campaign are lost. Those works we do have were written centuries after Alexander's death, but we know that they used a wealth of earlier accounts, many of them first-hand. The variety of the extant sources, the contradictions within and between them, and the different 'Alexanders' they offer can dizzy a reader, but a full reading of them all affords a magnificent – if kaleidoscopic and vertiginous – view on his life and deeds. A listing of the major extant works and those sources now lost to us appears under 'Ancient sources' on pp. 177–9.

The present text includes translated selections excerpted primarily from Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* and from the *Anabasis of Alexander* by Arrian. These works complement one another well, primarily because their approaches to Alexander are so very different – one biographical, the other historical. Furthermore, because both offer statements of their authorial purposes and even something of their methodologies (Plutarch at p. 8; Arrian at pp. 28 and 31–2), one can readily track how these authors' aims and perspectives shape their accounts.

Plutarch (Mestrius Plutarchus, AD c. 46–120) was a Greek from Chaeronea, a town on the Greek mainland east of the Delphic oracle. Though he spent much of his life there, he travelled widely, visiting Athens, Egypt and Rome, where he taught and lectured. In a series of works known collectively as the *Moralia*, one finds reflected a wide array of interests, including religion, politics, literature and morality. One

jewel in this collection, *On the Virtue or Fortune of Alexander the Great*, explores the question of whether Alexander's achievements were the result of his courage or of divine luck. Plutarch is probably best known, however, for his 'parallel lives', a series of 50 biographies of famous Greek and Roman men. Forty-six of them are paired with another life (hence 'parallel'), each pair treating a famous Greek and Roman who share something with each other in career and accomplishment, in virtues and failings. Plutarch paired his *Life of Alexander*, the source for many excerpts in the present text, with a biography of Julius Caesar.

Arrian (Flavius Arrianus Xenophon, AD c. 86–post 146) was a Greek native of Nicomedia in the Roman province of Bithynia, on the south coast of the Black Sea (see map on pp. vi–vii). He was a student of Stoic philosophy who led an active administrative and military career. Under the Roman emperor Hadrian he served as senator, then consul and then governor of Cappadocia from AD 131 to 137. This last appointment included his successful leadership of Roman legions against an invasion by the Alans from across the Caucasus to the north-east. We last hear of him serving as archon at Athens (an honorary post of great distinction) in AD 145/6. Arrian published verbatim lectures by his teacher, the famous Stoic philosopher Epictetus, which he had copied in shorthand as a youth. He composed treatises on hunting and military tactics, several biographies, and a description of the entire Black Sea coast. He wrote a history of his homeland Bithynia, an account of the emperor Trajan's campaigns in Parthia, and a description of his own military tactics used to drive the Alans from Armenia. His ten-book *Affairs after Alexander* is lost, but we still have his *Indica*, a work full of Indian memorabilia that features the exotic voyage of Alexander's admiral Nearchus from the Indus River to the Persian Gulf. In his seven-book *Anabasis of Alexander*, a central resource for the present text, Arrian openly glorifies the king and mitigates his faults for posterity.

Plutarch and Arrian offer remarkably different perspectives on Alexander, but the authors also have much in common. Both were Greek intellectuals living under the Roman Empire and both sought to present their Greek heritage to their contemporary audiences. The studied prose of Arrian imitates and combines the styles of the historians Xenophon, Herodotus and Thucydides, a testament to his profound respect for those famous Greek writers of five centuries earlier. Plutarch for his part looked back wistfully to an age of greater piety. In presenting a Roman figure on the heels of an earlier Greek, his parallel lives inevitably led his readers to consider the celebrities of Roman history in terms of Greek accomplishments.

When FYROM in 2007 renamed its capital's airport 'Alexander the Great', Greece saw an aggressive attempt to appropriate part of its cultural heritage. Indeed, Alexander's Greekness is as old as our earliest literature about the king. Although the works of both Plutarch and Arrian do acknowledge a distinction between Macedonian and Greek, as their sources certainly did, the Greekness of Alexander the Great is for them never in question. Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* is the Greek life of the pair, so that Alexander was for Plutarch as fundamentally Greek as Caesar

was Roman. When Arrian likewise searches for his parallel to Alexander, he looks to the literary heart of Greek culture, the works of Homer, and he returns with Achilles, the *Iliad*'s most formidable and transcendent Greek hero.

When reading the excerpts in this text, therefore, one must beware. These are treatments by men who felt a very real connection to Alexander, a figure who did not seem so distant to them as he does to most of us today. Plutarch, remember, as a native of Chaeronea, was born just a stone's throw away from the battlefield where Philip and his son defeated the Greeks in 338 BC. Alexander never even saw Arrian's native Bithynia, but Arrian insists that his own fatherland, his people and his whole life's career are inseparable from the story of Alexander the Great. This kind of passion is contagious. I know from personal experience that it is all but impossible to resist the visceral reactions that Alexander inspires. And so I encourage my readers to make Alexander their own even as they critique the accounts of his life and the phenomenon that he became.

Important dates in the life of Alexander

Date BC	
480	Xerxes invades Greece
359	Philip II becomes king of Macedonia
356	Alexander III is born (around 20 July)
344	Alexander tames Bucephalas
343	Aristotle tutors Alexander
340–339	Philip II besieges Byzantium Alexander founds Alexandropolis
338	Battle of Chaeronea Formation of the Corinthian League, which declares war on Persia Philip II elected commander-in-chief of the proposed war King Artaxerxes III Ochus of Persia assassinated by Bagoas
336	Darius III becomes king of Persia Philip II assassinated Alexander III becomes king of Macedonia
335	Campaigns against Thrace (spring) Campaigns against the Illyrians (summer) Sack of Thebes (October)
334	Crossing to Asia (spring) Battle of the Granicus (May)

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- 334–333 — Taking of Gordium (winter)
- 333 — Battle of Issus (November)
- 332 — Siege of Tyre (January–August)
 Alexander becomes Pharaoh of Egypt (14 November)
- 331 — Foundation of Alexandria
 Siwah and the Oracle of Ammon (winter)
 Battle of Gaugamela (1 October)
- 330 — Burning of the palace at Persepolis (May)
 Dismissal of Greek allies at Ecbatana (June)
 Darius III dies (July)
 Alexander assumes the Persian title and dress of the Great King (July)
 Execution of Philotas and Parmenion (September)
- 329 — Capture and execution of Bessus (summer)
- 328 — Taking of the Rock of Sogdiana (summer)
 Alexander kills Cleitus (November)
- 327 — Marriage to Roxane (spring)
Proskynesis affair (spring)
 Pages' conspiracy (spring)
- 326 — Taking of the Rock of Aornus and crossing the Indus River (winter)
 Battle of the Hydaspes (May)
 Mutiny at the Hyphasis (June)
 River journey begins (November)
- 325 — Campaign against the Malli
 Mouth of the Indus (July)
 March through Gedrosia (September–December)
 Alexander reaches Carmania
- 324 — Purge of satraps and generals
 Alexander in Pasargadae; Cyrus' tomb restored
 Mass wedding at Susa; payment of soldiers' debts (April)
 Mutiny at Opis (June)
 Death of Hephaestion at Ecbatana (October)
 Campaign against the Cossaeans (winter)
- 323 — Return to Babylon (spring)
 Alexander dies (10 June)

1 From birth to kingship

Plutarch's purpose

Plutarch (see Introduction, pp. 4–5) composed a series of biographies commonly known as his 'parallel lives'. They are so called because Plutarch often published these biographies in pairs, in which the life of a famous Greek was followed by that of a Roman whose career or accomplishments were comparable to the Greek figure's. As Plutarch states here, his 'life' of Alexander was published together with that of Gaius Julius Caesar. The philosophical intent of these works was to illustrate virtues and vices in the well-known figures of history.

As you read the excerpts by Plutarch in this book, consider how he abides by his aims as presented here and to what extent his focus must necessarily affect how we interpret the contents of his work. A useful approach may be to note which aspects of his account are the 'face' and the 'eyes' of Alexander and which are the 'body'.

Plutarch 1 I compose in this book the lives of Alexander the king and of the Caesar who overthrew Pompey. Because of the multitude of their recorded deeds, I ask my readers not to criticize my mainly summary approach, if I fail to report all their famous acts or to relate any one of them fully. I am writing not histories, after all, but lives, and an illustration of virtue or vice does not always reside in the most conspicuous deeds. A little thing – a remark or joke – often reflects character better than battles with countless dead, better than the greatest armies readied for war, better than the sieges of cities. A painter captures his subject's likeness through the face and the expression of the eyes that reveals the character of the person; he pays very little attention to the rest of the body. In the same way, I must be allowed to focus more on the signs of the soul and use those to depict the life of each of my subjects. I leave their grand exploits to others.

- Think of a renowned individual of the present day. What famous acts would you suggest best reveal his or her soul or character?

Alexander's birth

Plutarch 2 There is complete agreement about Alexander's lineage, that he was by his father a descendant of **Heracles** through Caranus and by his mother a descendant of **Aeacus** through Neoptolemus. And it is said that **Philip**, upon initiation with **Olympias** into the mysteries of **Samothrace**, fell in love with her – he still a youth and she an orphaned child – and so engaged to marry her after prevailing upon her brother Arymbas. Then, before the night of the marriage's consummation, the bride dreamed that amid peals of thunder a lightning bolt struck her belly. A great deal of fire was kindled from the bolt, then scattered, bursting into flames and spreading everywhere. Later, after the marriage, Philip dreamed that he was placing a seal upon his wife's belly, and that the relief on the seal contained the image of a lion. While the other seers were apprehensive at the vision and said that Philip's marriage demanded more scrupulous attention, **Aristander** of Telmessus said that the woman was pregnant, for nothing empty is sealed, and that she was pregnant with a child quick-tempered and lion-like in nature. A serpent, too, was once seen stretched out beside the body of the sleeping Olympias, and it was this most of all, they say, that dampened Philip's desire and affection for her, so that he ceased his frequent visits to her, either because he feared some magic or drug from his wife, or because he was keeping himself safe from intercourse with a woman who appeared to be enjoying a union with some greater power.

Heracles Greek hero more familiar today by his Roman name Hercules. Heracles was the son of Zeus and Alcmena. The royal house of Macedonia traditionally traced its lineage back to Heracles, and therefore ultimately to Zeus himself.

Aeacus another son of Zeus, and grandfather of Achilles. Both Achilles and his son Neoptolemus participated in the Greek conquest of Troy.

Philip king of Macedonia and Alexander's father, properly Philip II.

Olympias Alexander's mother. She came from the region of Epirus to the south-west of Macedonia. She was married off to Philip to reinforce a strategic alliance between the Molossian dynasty of Epirus and the kingdom of Macedonia.

Samothrace an important centre for the worship of the chthonic (underworld) deities called Cabiri. We know almost nothing of their 'mysteries', or initiation rites.

Aristander prophet who hailed from Lycian Telmessus (in modern Turkey), a city famous in antiquity for its seers. He makes his first appearance here before Alexander's birth, and proves later to be Alexander's most important seer during his campaign, until he disappears from all records after 327 BC.



Roman medallions of Olympias and Philip, c. third century AD, a testament to the desire to identify in some way with this Macedonian royal family even six centuries after Alexander lived.

And there is another story pertaining to this situation. All the local women had been participants in the **Orphic** rites and the ritual orgies of **Dionysus** from very ancient times. They were called Klodones and Mimallones, and were often thought to behave like the Edonian and Thracian women around Mount Haemus, apparently the source for the word *thrēskeuein*, meaning to engage in intemperate and superstitious acts of worship. Olympias herself was supposed to have achieved such ecstatic bouts of divine possession more zealously and barbarically than the rest. She would also provide the revellers with giant tamed serpents, and these would often slither out of the ivy or the mystic **baskets** and coil around the women's wands and garlands, to the horror of the men.

Orphic term referring to rites held in honour of Orpheus, son of a Muse and Apollo. According to tradition, he was one of the few figures to have travelled to the Underworld and to have returned, and though he was ultimately dismembered by a band of Thracian women, his head continued to sing posthumously. For these reasons, he is associated with rebirth, and mystery cults of Dionysus frequently celebrated him.

Dionysus Greek god of wine. He was the son of Zeus and Semele, who was incinerated when Zeus revealed himself to her in the form of a lightning bolt.

thrēskeuein Plutarch derives this verb (meaning 'to worship') from the word 'Thrace'. The words bear an even greater resemblance to each other in Greek.

baskets *liknoi* in Greek, typically carried on the head during rituals in honour of Dionysus.