

Impact of Alexander the Great's Upbringing on His Conquest and Treatment Towards Women

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Abstract: Throughout his journey, Alexander The Great had displayed traits that were unusual of his time, such as the respect of women and his tolerant towards the Persian people. The article focuses on the descriptions of Plutarch and Curtius Rufus on the upbringing of Alexander The Great to examine how his childhood in Macedonia and his education had impacted his character and decisions he made during his conquest. The excessive love and expectation from his mother Olympia had resulted in his respect and reluctance to engage in intimate relationship early on in his life. His path towards conquest was due to his desire to surpass his parents. On the other hand his lack of paternal care and love likely resulted in his homosexual desires. Growing up, Alexander amounted the desire to gain more glory and become greater than his parents, which he did through conquest.

Keywords: Olympias, Phillip II, Homosexual, Childhood, Conquest

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction of Alexander The Great

Son of Phillip II and Olympias, Descendant of Heracles and Achilles, Conquer of Persia, King of the Macedonian empire. Alexander the great was considered to be one of the greatest military genius the history has ever seen. For decades, scholars aim to understand his thinking process, but there are certain people that you can't understand what they think as historians say. However, studies can examine the upbringings of Alexander the great to gain an understanding of how he became who he is, and the reasons behind his actions.

1.2. Other studies

This article aims to focus on the early childhood life of Alexander the great and his parentage to find out its impact on his personality and later course of action. The study in this area is scarce due to the lack of sources on the early life of Alexander the Great. The only source that can be relied on is Plutarch's account on the early life of Alexander the great. This article is influenced by the perspective of Kenneth R Thomas, who focused on assessing Alexander the Great through the lens of psychoanalysis, theory based on Sigmund Freud, heavily stressed on the influence of sexual desire, In his article it is pointed out that Alexander may have been in an Oedipus complex [1]. This article will not be stressing on sexual desires but the impact of Alexander's parentage and his early

upbringings to his character. There are also works which suggest a major transition in Alexander The Great's personality, which will also be addressed to in this article.

2. Alexander The Great's character

In order to examine how Alexander the Great's upbringing had influenced his character, it is necessary to find out about his personality. According to sources of Plutarch and Arrian, there had been a transition of his personality in his early years and his later years after he conquered most of Asia. Alexander had been demonstrating a strong ambition and desire for fame at an early age. According to Plutarch, when the Persian ambassadors came to Macedon when Phillip II was absent, Alexander had been "entertaining the guests through asking the size of the Persian army and Persian empire and the character of the Persian King" [2]. Similarly Plutarch writes that every time Phillip II achieves a victory or conquers a city, Alexander will note to his friends that "his father forestalled him in everything" [2]. One notable characteristic Alexander demonstrated as he grew up, he demonstrated immense bravery, most notably in the battle of Chaeronea as he led the cavalry charge which won the battle and saved the life of his father Phillip II as he later claims on the banquet which he killed Clitus [3]. At early adulthood he was ambitious but reckless and hasty at times, particularly evident in him interrupting his father's plan to form a family union with the strap of Caria Pixodarus by writing to Pixodarus recommending himself to be the bride [2]. In Alexander's later life, he grew more narcissistic, arrogant and showed symptoms of megalomania but his ambition and military genius remains. One of the most important changes is that in Alexander the great's early years, he showed no interest in women, which worried his parents who went at length to find two courtesans to help Alexander to develop an interest in women as described by Plutarch. However, later on in his life, Alexander was known for having affairs and relationships with both men and women.

3. Olympias' impact on Alexander

To understand how Alexander developed these traits, Olympia would be the first person to start examining as she is one of the most important and closest people to Alexander the great. Olympias is a Molossian princess, whose family is of descendant of Achilles. She was described as a "jealous and beautiful woman who has a vindictive temper" [2]. Alexander inherited those traits from both Olympias and his father. Plutarch's described "she engaged in orphic religion and of the orgiastic rites of Dionysus" [2]. She married Phillip II in 357 B.C. Though the marriage began passionately at the beginning, Phillip II lost his interest in Olympias as he saw Olympias sleeping with serpent who Phillip II was later told to be god in the form of the serpent. As Alexander was born, his parents were distant as Phillip II is often away at war. Alexander spent his early years with Olympias and his nurse, for which he got the undivided attention of Olympias, as Plutarch described that "Olympias would hide things that are delicate and superfluous for him in his wardrobe and furniture of his bedchamber" [2]. It is likely that with such devotion of Olympias contributed to Alexander's later optimism, ambition and narcissistic personality. Olympias held high expectation towards Alexander as she dreamt of a lightning striking her womb when she bore Alexander [2]. She first made one of her Molossian relative Leonidas to supervise all Alexander's studies, who was then later replaced by Lysimachus and eventually Aristotle. Later on in Alexander's life he showed tendencies of having homosexual relationship, most known was his relationship with Hephaestion. This tendency is likely to have originated from his early childhood interactions with his tutors combined with the absence of a father figure as the article will mention later on. Olympias was cruel to her political opponents and was known for many murders, most notably her assassinations after the death of Phillip II to clear a path for her son Alexander to ascend to the throne. According to Plutarch, she murdered Cleopatra, who Phillip II married and was seen as a political opponent by Olympias, and her sons, which had

infuriated Alexander. Olympias and Alexander had a close relationship throughout Alexander's life, although he never saw Olympias again after he left for the conquering of the Persian empire in 334 B.C, he consistently wrote to her and sought her advice. It is described by W.Tarn that "Alexander never cared for any women except his terrible mother" [4]. It is often considered that Alexander compassion and is deeply bonded with his mother, however I theorize that Alexander has a complex love and hate relationship toward his mother. Alexander's ambition and narcissism doesn't allow for anyone to be better than him. The control and high expectation of his mother evoked Alexander to be better than his mother to escape the control and the restrains of her, which is similar for his father as well, as will be mentioned later on. The lack of self-esteem towards his mother is illustrated through his unwillingness to engage in intimate relationship. This had also invoked Alexander's desire to prove himself had led to him on the path of conquering. His later shift in the attitude towards erotic relationship is a result of his gaining confidence after conquering the Persian lands. His first known mistress is said to be Barsine in 334 after Alexander conquered what is modern day Damascus, noted by Curtius Rufus in his book 11. Similarly he also engaged in intimate relationship with the queen of Amazons Thalestris at early stage of his campaign, but later refused to stay with her but wanted to continue his campaign [3]. With the boast of his victories and the increasing territories he is able to escape from the shadow of his mother and seek for women and men on his own free will. He fell in love with Roxanne, daughter of Oxyartes, at first sight and married her [3]. Alexander engaged in erotic and intimate relationship more and more frequently throughout his campaign. But he only married after the conquering of Persia. Such supported the idea that he was only able to become himself after he exceed the image of Olympias in his mind through victories. His later narcissistic behaviours such as introducing proskynesis, a custom in which his subjects kneel in front of him, and the dressing of colorful and fancy garments described by Arian, could also be supported by his desire to exceed Olympias. [5] Apart from his relationships, Alexander also exhibited admiration and mercy for women, one of the only in his time. Plutarch described that when Alexander massacred the city of Thebes, he spared a noblewoman with the name Timocleia for her murdering the Thracian soldier to protect for her city [2]. Similarly after the battle of Gaugamela he captured the Darius' family, not only did he not commit disrespectful behavior of any sort, but instead he ensured "they never, hear, suspect, or fear of any behavior that could disgrace them" [2]. Alexander's fondness and passion towards Olympias may have also contributed to his action of respecting women and not engage in raping with female captives which was the norm at his time. Apart from her personality, Olympias' relationship with Phillip II also has a profound impact on the character building of Alexander the great.

4. Phillip II's impact on Alexander

It is often thought that Alexander and Olympias were involved in the assassination of Phillip II, and Alexander was jealous of Phillip II and felt threatened by him. Phillip II, compared to Alexander also possessed great ambition and military prowess. Nevertheless, Phillip II held high regards of Alexander the Great. It is most evident in the well-known Bucephalus story noted by Plutarch in which Phillip II said to Alexander that "he must find a kingdom big enough for his ambitions" after Alexander successfully tamed a horse that none can tame [2]. As mentioned earlier that Alexander also expressed his dissatisfaction with his father conquering cities and winning battles. The sources describing Alexander's relationship with his father in his early years was scarce, but it can be reasonably deduced that Alexander had both admired his father, as Alexander throughout his life had showed admiration towards figures that demonstrated resilience and intellectual capabilities, and seen him as a competitor for taking glory that belonged to him. In addition, as Phillip II spent most of his time expanding his kingdom, Alexander lacked a father figure in his early childhood, as a result he turned to his mentors to seek for care and attention such as Aristotle. Plutarch writes that Alexander

became more attached to him than to his father [2]. Alexander's affection and relationship with his mentors persisted years after his time with them. Additionally, His mentor Aristotle, in many of the sources, showed more interest in men rather than women. As mentioned above, Alexander likely developed his desire for homosexual relationship from this point. According to Plutarch "Olympias had at many times incited Alexander to oppose his father" [2]. Which not only shows Alexander's opinion of his father as a competitor, but also illustrate the hostile and competitive relationship between Phillip II and Olympias, especially after Philip II had fallen in love with a native Macedonian women Cleopatra, who Olympias believes had threatened her and Alexander's position as heir. As a result, Alexander experienced parental conflict throughout his early years. Although there are sources describing Alexander's psychological activities regarding his opinion on his parental discord, however it might be possible that Alexander was affected by it and a part of him longed for a harmonious family. Which perhaps may potentially be one of the reasons that he didn't kill any of Darius' family members and was described by Plutarch "to be more affected by the women's grief than by his own triumph" [2]. It is potentially possible that his subconscious desire for an united family might have contributed to him making a unified empire in which the Persians and Greeks intermarry to create a new identity. Just like the marriage between Olympias, the Molossian princess; and Phillip II, the Macedonian king, which produced Alexander the Great himself.

5. Conclusion

Never the less, Alexander possessed conflicted feelings towards both of his parents, which he both admired but viewed as competitors in the same time. This might serve as the underlying reason for the polar opposite characteristics he has demonstrated throughout his life. The rational, compassionate military genius who respects women and the ambitious, narcissistic, megalomaniac king who have committed numerous amounts of massacres. With his growing victories and the expanding empire, Alexander was able to surpass the biggest competitors in his life, his parents, and became Alexander the Great.

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