



# Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 B.C.: A Historical Biography

*By Peter Green*

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**Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 B.C.: A Historical Biography** By Peter Green

Until recently, popular biographers and most scholars viewed Alexander the Great as a genius with a plan, a romantic figure pursuing his vision of a united world. His dream was at times characterized as a benevolent interest in the brotherhood of man, sometimes as a brute interest in the exercise of power. Green, a Cambridge-trained classicist who is also a novelist, portrays Alexander as both a complex personality and a single-minded general, a man capable of such diverse expedencies as patricide or the massacre of civilians. Green describes his Alexander as "not only the most brilliant (and ambitious) field commander in history, but also supremely indifferent to all those administrative excellences and idealistic yearnings foisted upon him by later generations, especially those who found the conqueror, tout court, a little hard upon their liberal sensibilities."

This biography begins not with one of the universally known incidents of Alexander's life, but with an account of his father, Philip of Macedonia, whose many-territoried empire was the first on the continent of Europe to have an effectively centralized government and military. What Philip and Macedonia had to offer, Alexander made his own, but Philip and Macedonia also made Alexander form an important context for understanding Alexander himself. Yet his origins and training do not fully explain the man. After he was named hegemon of the Hellenic League, many philosophers came to congratulate Alexander, but one was conspicuous by his absence: Diogenes the Cynic, an ascetic who lived in a clay tub. Piqued and curious, Alexander himself visited the philosopher, who, when asked if there was anything Alexander could do for him, made the famous reply, "Don't stand between me and the sun." Alexander's courtiers jeered, but Alexander silenced them: "If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes." This remark was as unexpected in Alexander as it would be in a modern leader.

For the general reader, the book, redolent with gritty details and fully aware of Alexander's darker side, offers a gripping tale of Alexander's career. Full backnotes, fourteen maps, and chronological and genealogical tables serve

readers with more specialized interests.

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#### From the Inside Flap

"As one reads through Peter Green's enthralling life of Alexander . . . one feels every strand of the mythical story coming apart. . . . Green takes a very bold revisionist stand against the imperial vainglory of antiquity."—Christopher Hitchens, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"In every age, cultures both East and West have cast and recast [Alexander] in a variety of heroic molds, although, as demonstrated in Peter Green's impressive biography (a 1974 study published in England and published here for the first time), the myths may well be more admirable than the man."—Erich Segal, *Washington Post Book World*

"Green's portrait will discomfit those who seek consistency in behavior (and those who have already made up their minds about Alexander): it is a complex, multi-dimensioned figure which should appeal to this troubled age."—Eugene Borza, *The Classical World*

#### About the Author

Peter Green is Dougherty Centennial Professor Emeritus of Classics at the University of Texas at Austin and Adjunct Professor of Classics at the University of Iowa. He is the author of many books and translations, including *Alexander to Actium*, the poems of Catullus, and Apollonios Rhodios's *The Argonautika*, all published by University of California Press.

Eugene N. Borza is Professor Emeritus of Ancient History at the Pennsylvania State University.

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