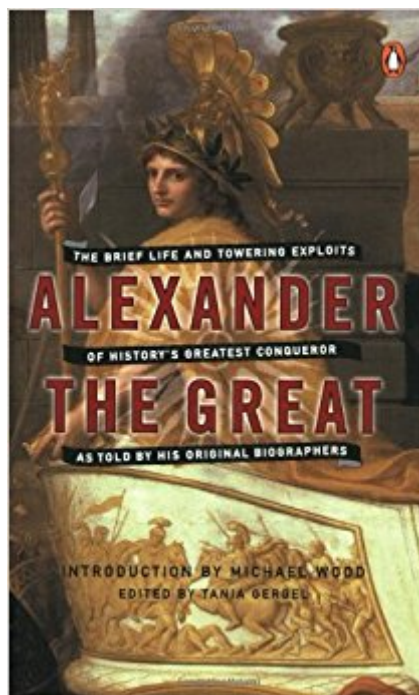




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# Alexander The Great: The Brief Life And Towering Exploits Of History's Greatest Conqueror--As Told By His Original Biographers



## Synopsis

Inspired in his leadership, fearless in battle, and boundless in his ambition, Alexander the Great was worshiped as a god during his lifetime, and his legend has only grown since. Inheriting his father's empire at the age of twenty, Alexander resolved to expand it, and by the time of his death at thirty-two, his empire stretched from Greece to India, spanning three continents and encompassing two million square miles. Comprising selections from the writings of Arrian, Plutarch, and Quintus Curtius Rufus, this definitive biography of the greatest conqueror in history features an introduction on Alexander's enduring legacy by acclaimed British television personality and Princeton University Professor Michael Wood.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tania Gergel is a lecturer in Ancient Greek Philosophy at Kings College London where her research spans Ancient Philosophy, Philosophy of Medicine, and Psychology. She co-translated *The Greek Sophists* for Penguin Classics. Michael Wood is a highly respected author and TV presenter with over eighty documentary films to his name, most recently the acclaimed *In Search of Myths and Heroes*.

*Alexander the Great*, by Arrian, is the modern English translation of "The Anabasis of Alexander" by Lucius Flavius Arrianus (Arrian), written in the second century A.D. There are no surviving "first hand" accounts of Alexander; however, Arrian informs us that his work is an abridgement of many other writers, some of whom accompanied Alexander on his conquest of the Persian Empire. In

particular, Arrian relies most heavily on Ptolemy (an outstanding General in Alexander's army who later founded the Ptolemeic dynasty, in Egypt, ending with Cleopatra) and Aristobulus (probably a military engineer or civilian who accompanied Alexander on his campaign). Arrian is a Roman historian who lived 85 AD to 146 AD, and had multiple reasons for writing about the career of Alexander the Great. Arrian, himself, was a military leader over an entire Roman legion. No doubt, he had reason to admire Alexander for his brilliance as a leader and tactician. Also, although Arrian was a Roman citizen he was also ethnically Greek, born in the Greek town of Nicomedia. I can't help but feel that a sense of nationalism and pride may have played a role in Arrian's selection of 'Alexander of Macedon' as the subject for his books. This is the third audio book about Alexander the Great, in a row, that I have listened to. It is, as far as I am concerned, the gold standard by which to compare any other audio book on this subject. I discovered, while listening to the other two books that both authors quoted Arrian, either directly or indirectly, frequently. I decided, therefore, to go right to the source, itself, and listen to what Arrian had to say about Alexander; and I am glad that I did. I had some initial apprehension about listening to an audio book that was written (probably in 'Attic') in the second century AD; though my fears were unfounded. The translation is completely modern. I am not qualified to comment on the accuracy of the translation, either in word translation or in style; however, I can say that there are no anachronisms as a result of the translation. In addition to the main body of the translated work, comprising a total of 7 books (with only one of the original pages missing, and the narrator tells you where this occurs), there is: a brief introduction by Edwin Robert Bevin, an epilogue by William W. Tarn and a "copa to the epilogue" by Mary Renault. There are 26 mp3 tracts lasting 12 hours, in total. The Anabasis is narrated by the extremely talented Charlton Griffin. Unlike today's authors, Arrian does not spend a great deal of time discussing Alexander's family history, birth or formative years. This book focuses its content primarily on Alexander's twelve years of conquest in Asia and India. Arrian gives a remarkably detailed account of Alexander's travels, with great attention to detail paid to both major and minor battles. For instance, Arrian will tell you how many foot soldiers, cavalry, archers and elephants each side possessed: how they arranged their troops and what the terrain and weather conditions were like at the time of battle. We learn the juicy details about who initiated the battle (usually Alexander), how the battle progresses and the ultimate outcome for each battle, with (often probably exaggerated) numbers given for the dead and wounded, on each side. We learn, not only the strategy and tactics that Alexander employed and how quickly he was capable of modifying them but also, according to General Ptolemy, the reasons why Alexander chose his specific strategies and tactics, and the reasons why he occasionally abandoned his usual methods. Arrian does treat

us to some the personal stories, outside of battle, which illuminate Alexander's character. I was amazed to learn how deeply religious Alexander was, making sure to offer sacrifices to the appropriate God's even when he was ill and it was all that he could do to perform the ceremonies. Religion was not a frivolous thing to these soldiers; they took it very seriously. I caution the listener NOT to judge Alexander by modern day standards. Alexander's time, cultural values, religious beliefs and mores were completely different from our own. Selling the wives and children of a defeated people into slavery was NOT considered wrong or immoral in Alexander's time; it was the norm. Arrian, fortunately, points out copious instances where Alexander defied tradition and raised himself and his troops to a higher moral standard than any other king of the same time period. He also points out that Alexander was human (even though Alexander considered himself a living God) and subject to the same temptations of the flesh that all men are subject to. Yet, in spite of this, Alexander proved himself capable of remarkable compassion, forgiveness and restraint for a king with unlimited power. Arrian's style of writing is rather straightforward, with the occasional editorializing. Today's historians place great emphasis on accuracy of details, but the ancient historians (the Greeks, especially) focused more on the moral and meaning of the story. I find Arrian a pleasant balance between the two (though, admittedly, I prefer greater historical accuracy). I loved this book and look forward to future listenings. I give credit to Arrian for the labor he put into these seven books, before the advent of the printing press, computers or even the pen. I am also grateful that these seven books have survived the ages, that we may know Alexander of Macedon, better. The introduction and epilogues are short, but good (especially Mary Renault's). However, my greatest praise goes to the Narrater, Charlton Griffin. All I can say is...Wow. He made me feel like Arrian was speaking directly to me. Griffin brought Lucius Flavius Arrianus to life and Arrian helped make Alexander "real," to me. Other books, which give more detail of Alexander's early life, and tutelage under Aristotle, may complement this book but I doubt any other book will replace it.

With an introduction by Michael Wood, who in the 1990s produced the BBC series *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great*, this book was assembled by Tania Gergel who took the work of three famous Alexander the Great biographers--Lucius Flavius Arrianus (Arrian), Plutarch, and Quintus Curtius Rufus--and edited them into a single narrative. All the authors are citizens of the Roman Empire writing centuries after Alexander had died, but they are closer to his time than we are to theirs. Gergel does an excellent job of taking the best of the three works and making them into one single narrative. The story goes from Alexander's princely boyhood to the death of the King who was ruler of the all the world that was known to him. For years the Persian Empire had been the

greatest threat to the freedom of Greece, the invasions of Darius I and Xerxes the Great had ended the polis or city-state of Greece and led various leagues and counter leagues transforming the culture of Greece from a free collections of city-states into the foundation for an empire. Alexander's father, Phillip, had brought Greece under the thumb of Macedon. Alexander takes the long-standing Greek conflicts, and brings a new war to Persia itself, invading and conquering the greatest power in the ancient world. The Alexander portrayed in this text is a young man of brilliance and inexhaustible ambition. He is viewed as good person who kind and charitable but becomes corrupted with power and does cruel things even to his closest friends. Although he would later regret some of his actions his remorse comes only after the evil deed is done. Yet his flaws are from the same source as his strengths so it is hard to tell if he could be any other way."Meanwhile some of the older of his companions, and Parmenion in particular, looked out over the plain between the river Niphates and the Gordyaeen mountains and saw the entire plain agleam with the watch-fires of the barbarians, while from their camp there arose the confused and indistinguishable murmur of myriads of voices, like the distant roar of a vast ocean. They were filled with amazement at the sight and remarked to one another that it would be an overwhelmingly difficult task to defeat an enemy of such strength by engaging him by day. They therefore went to the king as soon as he had performed his sacrifice and tried to persuade him to attack by night, so as to conceal from his men the most terrifying element in the coming struggle, that is, the odds against them. It was then that Alexander gave them his celebrated answer, 'I will not steal my victory.' Some of his companions thought this an immature and empty boast on the part of a young man who was merely joking at the presence of danger. But others interpreted it as meaning that he had confidence in his present situation and that he had correctly judged the future. In other words, he was determined that if Darius were defeated, he should have no cause to summon the courage for another attempt: he was not to be allowed to blame darkness and night for his failure on this occasion, as at Issus he had blamed the narrow mountain passes and the sea. Certainly Darius would never abandon the war for lack of arms or of troops, when he could draw upon such a vast territory and such immense reserves of manpower. He would only do so when he had lost courage and become convinced of his inferiority in consequence of an unmistakable defeat suffered in broad daylight." p.70-1 This is a great little book. I would highly recommend to anyone wanting to know more about the life of the man who conquered the world before he was thirty--literally!

This is a nice, convenient collection of sources on the life of Alexander - including excerpts from Arrian, Plutarch and Quintus Curtius Rufus (the "big three"). Woven into a (relatively) seamless

narrative this little book does a nice job of exposing one to the variety and flavor of the major sources available. Given the relative brevity of the work, there are gaps/omissions and slightly awkward transitions, but in terms of a "one stop shopping" primer on Alexander, anchored in the primary sources, this is a great place to begin. Enthusiastically recommended!

Felt deceived, i thought it was a collection of the 4 completed works not an edited version of the parts the author thought best.

Book in great condition, exactly as described. Thank you!

Another good biography. A quick read.

She got all the facts in but this book looks like something written by a 6th grader. Very little details - The map was poorly done.

This is an adequate historical record (considering what we have available today) of the Great Alexander and his travels and doings.

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