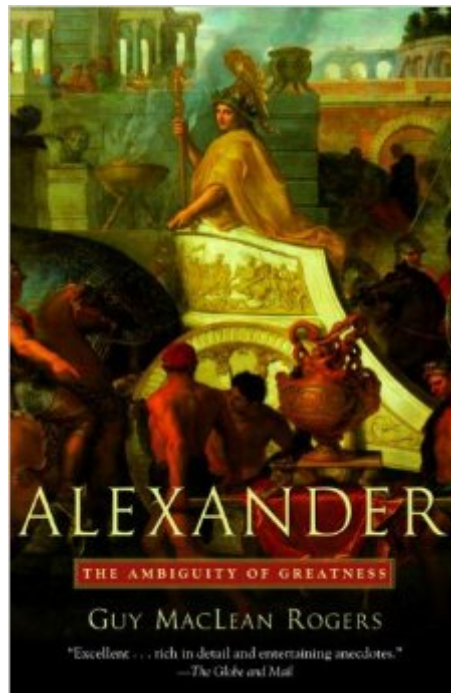


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Alexander: The Ambiguity Of Greatness



Synopsis

For nearly two and a half millennia, Alexander the Great has loomed over history as a legend “and an enigma. Wounded repeatedly but always triumphant in battle, he conquered most of the known world, only to die mysteriously at the age of thirty-two. In his day he was revered as a god; in our day he has been reviled as a mass murderer, a tyrant as brutal as Stalin or Hitler. Who was the man behind the mask of power? Why did Alexander embark on an unprecedented program of global domination? What accounted for his astonishing success on the battlefield? In this luminous new biography, the esteemed classical scholar and historian Guy MacLean Rogers sifts through thousands of years of history and myth to uncover the truth about this complex, ambiguous genius. Ascending to the throne of Macedonia after the assassination of his father, King Philip II, Alexander discovered while barely out of his teens that he had an extraordinary talent and a boundless appetite for military conquest. A virtuoso of violence, he was gifted with an uncanny ability to visualize how a battle would unfold, coupled with devastating decisiveness in the field. Granicus, Issos, Gaugamela, Hydaspes “as the victories mounted, Alexander’s passion for conquest expanded from cities to countries to continents. When Persia, the greatest empire of his day, fell before him, he marched at once on India, intending to add it to his holdings. As Rogers shows, Alexander’s military prowess only heightened his exuberant sexuality. Though his taste for multiple partners, both male and female, was tolerated, Alexander’s relatively enlightened treatment of women was nothing short of revolutionary. He outlawed rape, he placed intelligent women in positions of authority, and he chose his wives from among the peoples he conquered. Indeed, as Rogers argues, Alexander’s fascination with Persian culture, customs, and sexual practices may have led to his downfall, perhaps even to his death. Alexander emerges as a charismatic and surprisingly modern figure “neither a messiah nor a genocidal butcher but one of the most imaginative and daring military tacticians of all time. Balanced and authoritative, this brilliant portrait brings Alexander to life as a man, without diminishing the power of the legend. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Erudite, engaging and immensely readable, Guy Maclean Rogers's new biography of Alexander may not contribute much new material to an ancient fascination, but the vividness of the writing combined with the author's passion for his subject makes for a gripping read. Though the book tends to race through Alexander's life at the expense of further detail, it is still a more patient account than other recent biographies rushed to stores in time for the movie. From his mounting of Philip II's incorrigible horse as a boy to his legendary pursuit of Darius throughout Persia and subsequent endeavor to avenge his murder (only because Alexander would have liked the honor of killing Darius himself), every quirk and rumor of Alexander's personality is explored here. It is hard to say anything necessarily "new" when no new sources of information exist beyond those of contemporary historians who continue to interpret the documents of the same handful of ancient writers: Curtius, Justin, Diodorus, Plutarch and others. When a chairman of the Department of History at Wesleyan University with a Ph.D. from Princeton tosses yet another biography into the fray, it is usually an attempt to dispute the conclusions of other biographers. Rogers does plenty of that here. Downplaying accounts of Alexander's homosexuality while attempting to understand his bloody rampages across the known world within the context of his times, Rogers objects to notions of Alexander as the Hitler or Stalin of the ancient world, often pointing to the equally brutal tactics of the king's contemporaries. Admittedly, Rogers tends to apologize for Alexander's brutality where he really ought to leave it up to the reader to decide.

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