

ALEXANDER

QX Magazine: Chris Barber

www.chrisbarber.eu**ALEXANDER the GREAT - History's Queer'est' Soldier**

It's hardly surprising the British Army vigilantly opposes gay recruitment, it conceals much: male bonding, initiation-rites, uniformed-drag, fetishised-discipline; the army is queer'er' than queer! Military homophobia is relatively recent, but the entire history of British/European military organisation is founded upon queer soldiery. Europe's first empire builder, tyrant and liberator, military genius, and History's Great-est queer, was Alexander.

In a previous life, I was Alexander the Great. Sounds absurd, but it's true; until now, only my closest friends knew. Now I want you to know my story (from a third person perspective, because I still feel guilty about the killing).

Mythology has it, that a comet emblazoned the sky the night Alexander was born, in Pela, Macedon (Macedonia) July 365 BC, even the ancients were suckers for sensational stories! His mother, Olympias, descended from the royal Molossian House of Epirus; she was a devotee of the orgiastic rites of Dionysus. His bisexual Father Philip II of Macedon, was a formidable warrior-chief and military strategist, who developed ingenious tactical logistics; trail-blazed across disparate Macedonian territories, uniting high and lowlands for the first time. This marriage was arranged for convenience; by marrying into the family of his former enemy, Philip could secure his southern flank and spawn an heir.

During childhood, Alexander slept with a pet snake. Olympias worshiped snakes and dominated Alexander's infancy. Philip insisted on the finest education for Alexander, hiring the Philosopher Aristotle, as the boy's personal tutor. In Greek education, Mythology assumed great importance, simultaneously recording a nation's history and dictating prevalent morality. Homer's *Illiad* captivated Alexander; its hero: Achilles, is a butt-slammer who leads the sacking of Troy to avenge the killing of his butt-buddy - Patroklos. Achilles was Alexander's life-long role model.

Alexander was schooled on an island, with sons of Macedonia's ruling elite. Hephaiston was one:

Hephaiston was the man whom Alexander loved, and for the rest of their lives their relationship remained as intimate as it is now irrecoverable: Alexander was only defeated once, the Cynic philosophers said long after his death, and that was by Hephaiston's thighs ... Hephaiston's age is not known and its discovery could put their relationship in an unexpected light; he may even have been the older of the two ... At the age of thirty Alexander was still Hephaiston's lover although most young Greeks have grown out of the fashion by then.... Their affair was a strong one: Hephaiston grew to lead Alexander's cavalry most ably and to become Vizier before dying a divine hero, worthy of posthumous worship.

Alexander the Great by Robin Lane Fox [Penguin, 1986]

Alexander became a champion athlete and was drilled in warfare from youth; while still a teenager, Philip sent him to wage war. The King was trying to coerce Greek states into a federation - a pre-requisite to attacking Persia (the biggest and strongest Empire of the day, stretching from Libya to Western India). When diplomacy failed, Alexander was despatched leading an army; to kick-ass and ensure that petulant Greek states capitulated under Philip's Overlordship. It was no mean task, but Alexander nurtured ruthless efficiency in combat. He returned, victorious, having forced a precarious alliance supporting Philip's conquest of Persia.

By Alexander's nineteenth birthday, his parents were feuding. Olympias believed her husband planned to ditch her, and Alexander's rite of accession; Philip considered her neurotic and crazy. When Philip announced he was marrying again, Alexander fell-back under his mother's dominant influence. Macedonian kings customarily possessed

harems and this was Philip's seventh wife; but she belonged to a rival aristocratic family and bore Philip another son. Because the eldest prince wasn't automatically first in line, Olympias and Alexander feared their divine rites were threatened. Macedon was a feudal society and if power struggle erupted everyone was in the firing line.

Olympias scampered back to her family with Alexander. Philip was furious, but assured Alexander it was stuff 'n'nonsense. So Alexander returned as Philip's Heir apparent (Philip's real long-term intentions are unknown). However, when Philip announced his daughter's marriage into another rival family, suspicion deepened.

Prior to invading Persia, Macedon scheduled massive festive celebrations. Before joining this party, an incident should be recalled concerning a cute aristocrat called Pausanias:

Philip, attracted by his remarkable youthful beauty, had taken him as a lover. Later, however, the king transferred his homosexual attentions elsewhere, upon which Pausanias made a great jealous scene with the new favourite, calling him, among other things, a hermaphrodite and a promiscuous little tart. However, the other boy ... was also a friend of Attalus, whose niece Philip had married. The incident caused a great scandal in court circles, and Attalus decided to revenge himself ... He invited Pausanias to dinner, and got him dead drunk. Then he invited himself, and all his guests, took turns to rape the wretched youth, while the rest of the company looked on, laughing and jeering. Finally, Pausanias was turned over to Attalus' grooms and muleteers, who subjected him to the same treatment, and then beat him up for good measure. When Pausanias recovered, he went straight to Philip and laid charges against Attalus. This placed the king in a very awkward position ... He could not possibly afford to alienate Attalus, who was not only his father-in-law, but had also just been appointed joint-commander of the advance expedition into Asia Minor (spring 336 B.C.).

Alexander of Macedon by Peter Green [California Press, 1992]

Philip assured Pausanias, that Attalus would be punished; but he stalled the judgement day, hoping Pausanias would eventually forget the affair. Unfortunately for Philip, Pausanias didn't forget...

Macedonian party-time, summer 336 BC, was a lush and extravagant occasion. Nobles, statesmen and scholars arrived from all over Europe; a New World order was evolving, pertaining to Philip's consolidated Macedon. Philip's hospitality was worthy of a world power; at the show's climax, came a procession of towering, wood-carved statues, depicting Philip and the Olympian gods. The guest-multitudes (pissed on excessive free wine) roared at this amazing spectacle. King Philip disarmed for his customary ascent to the temple. Suddenly:

Alexander ... jumped from his throne and went swiftly downstage ... shouting began outside. ... Hephaestion ... began to race along. ... In the still centre of the chaos ... wooden gods in their circle turned all their eyes on the wooden King. Unmoving as they, straight-backed on her carved chair of honour ... Queen Olympias sat staring out. Philip lay on his back, the hilt of a dagger standing out between his ribs. ... Alexander was bent over him, feeling for his heart. The King's blind eye was half-closed, the other turned up at the living eyes above him. His face was set in a stare of shock, and astonished bitterness. Alexander drew back... "The King is dead."

Fire From Heaven by Mary Renault [Penguin, 1970]

The hand which struck down Philip of Macedonia, was that of his homosexual affair – Pausanias (one of the few allowed close enough to the King's person). Pausanias finally got his revenge, and was himself, cut-down, a few steps from his victim. Pausanias certainly wasn't acting alone; but by failing to serve his ex-concubine with justice, the King handed his enemies a tool. Behind the assassination, was a more complex and intriguing, political

conspiracy (which bored historians continue to argue about); was Olympias the primary instigator? Almost certainly. Did Alexander actively participate in his Father's murder? Current opinion is about fifty-fifty, but the truth will never be known.

Alexander consolidated his power quickly and brutally. Even before his father's funeral, Alexander's potential rivals lay dead (including his half-brother and the baby's mother). Philip's top general, Parmenion, declared allegiance to Alexander. Attempted rebellions in Macedonian occupied territories, were mercilessly crushed; obstreperous Balkans were given a hiding. Thebes (where Sophocles wrote Oedipus) rallied against Alexander; it was completely destroyed, its inhabitants killed or enslaved. Athens took the hint and promptly pledged continued unity with the Hellenic League. This ensured all other states supported Alexander (except Sparta).

Meanwhile, in Babylon, Satrap Darius decided the Greek offensive wasn't worth taking seriously. When Alexander and Hephiastion, stepped onto Asian soil (ahead the unified Greek army) the Persians virtually ignored them (334 BC). Only after loosing the Battle of Granicus, and a significant chunk of territory (including enough major ports along Turkey's coast to disrupt the Empire's infrastructure), would Darius acknowledge the threat. By this time the invaders approached Egypt, the Empire's jewel. Stopping at Gordium, Alexander got into a knot, which he famously sliced apart with his sword.

The opposing armies met at the Battle of Issus (333,Nov). Persia's army outnumbered the Greeks by six-to-one, everything bespoke easy Persian victory. However, within minutes of the first clash, Alexander located a weakness in the Persian line. Darius had ordered his newest recruits, to hold the centre-left flank. He assumed Alexander wouldn't risk a precarious frontal attack, leaving Darius's finest troops to strengthen the wings. Darius cunningly concealed this ploy by stationing his own entourage, behind the tyros. Alexander hit this position hardest, with elite Macedonian cavalry. The Persian line broke immediately, as troops fled - none faster than Darius himself; Alexander gave hot pursuit. The battle was over. Half Persia's Empire had fallen to Alexander. He then stubbornly delayed his campaign to hold Siege of Tyre.

Reaching Egypt, Alexander was rapturously welcomed as their liberator; High Priests declared him Son of the God Amon. Alexander's world tour was frequently welcomed, because Persian tyranny enforced Persian values. By contrast, Alexander respected local tradition. He already entertained the notion that he was Son of Zeus, now, his willingness to adopt Ra as Pa, went to his head! (Three centuries later, Jesus Christ 'resurrected' this idea for selfish purposes.)

In 331, October, against the odds, Alexander won another resounding victory at Gaugamela. His enemies routed, Alexander was now Top-Dog and nothing stood in his way. He won this position through a combination of brilliant strategy and sheer brute-force; he fought and smashed all opposition.

Now Alexander relaxed his vigilance, to the point of decadence:

One early symptom of this was the arrival of Nabarzanes with numerous costly gifts, not least a beautiful eunuch named Bagoas. ... Same-sex relationships were always of equal importance to Greek and Macedonian aristocrats. His friendship with Hephaestion was and remained close and intense; but the sensual indulgence represented by Bagoas marked a new development in his personality ... Ancients spoke of the 'corruption' of his character by an excess of 'good fortune'.

Alexander the Great by Richard Stoneman [Routledge, 1997]

After dealing with marauding bands of Persian bandits, and some rowdy peasants, order was established throughout Alexander's empire. Yet he was hot-to-trot; in boredom he'd taken to dressing-up as a Persian whore and

roaming the streets of Babylon! He must have had a good Tour Operator, because he got it into his head that he wanted a holiday in India. His army was still shagged-out and not amused by the idea; but after a bit of cajoling, Alexander assembled a force. India was considered a dodgy place; not even Persians ventured there.

As Alexander fought his way across Northern India, his soldiers grew reluctant and rambunctious. Finally, during the siege of Malli in 325 BC, the army buggered-off under relentless hail from Indian artillery. Alone, Alexander leapt over the battlements, into the midst of the enemy fortress. He was assaulted from all sides and seriously wounded. Upon seeing this, his soldiers furiously stormed the fortress, protecting Alexander's body and saving his life.

Return from India was gruelling, but worse tragedy waited. In 324 BC, Hephaiston died at Ecbatana (probably food poisoning). Alexander was distraught and never fully recovered. While arranging outrageously ostentatious tributes to his lover's memory, Alexander drunk wine continuously. His health, and empire, declined. On June 10th 323 BC, amidst his closest living compatriots, Alexander the Great, died. Moments before, they asked to whom he bequeathed his Empire. His reply, "To the strongest."

Chris Barber