



# Alexander the Great: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

*Hugh Bowden*

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Alexander the Great became king of Macedon in 336 BC, when he was only 20 years old, and died at the age of 32, twelve years later. During his reign he conquered the Achaemenid Persian Empire, the largest empire that had ever existed, leading his army from Greece to Pakistan, and from the Libyan desert to the steppes of Central Asia. His meteoric career, as leader of an alliance of Greek cities, Pharaoh of Egypt, and King of Persia, had a profound effect on the world

he moved through. Even in his lifetime his achievements became legendary and in the centuries that following his story was told and retold throughout Europe and the East. Greek became the language of power in the Eastern Mediterranean and much of the Near East, as powerful Macedonian dynasts carved up Alexander's empire into kingdoms of their own, underlaying the flourishing Hellenistic civilization that emerged after his death.

But what do we really know about Alexander? In this Very Short Introduction, Hugh Bowden goes behind the usual historical accounts of Alexander's life and career. Instead, he focuses on the evidence from Alexander's own time — letters from officials in Afghanistan, Babylonian diaries, records from Egyptian temples — to try and understand how Alexander appeared to those who encountered him. In doing so he also demonstrates the profound influence the legends of his life have had on our historical understanding and the controversy they continue to generate worldwide.

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