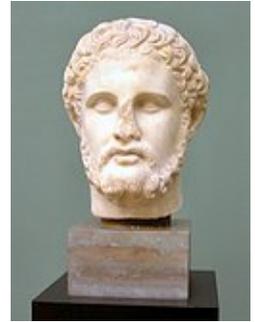




Philip II, King of Macedon (382-336 B. C. E.)

by Louis Crompton

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An ancient sculpture of the head of Philip II of Macedon.
Photograph by Gunnar Bach Pedersen.

Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, was a Macedonian prince who spent three of his formative teenage years in Thebes as a military hostage. There he received his own military education and observed the training of the famous Sacred Band of lovers under the command of Epaminondas and Pelopidas, then at the height of its prestige for its defeat of the Spartans.

Returning to Macedon in 364, he seized the throne five years later from his infant nephew and began his successful career as a soldier and diplomat. With a well-organized and highly disciplined army under capable generals, he subdued the Thracians and the Illyrian hill tribes who had been Macedon's unruly vassals. He also made himself master of some northern gold mines, whose riches allowed him to finance his conquests. Then, by force and guile, he set about achieving the hegemony of all of Greece.

The Macedonians, like other Greeks, had long possessed a reputation for bisexuality. Archelaus, who had ruled Macedon half a century earlier, was a patron of the arts who had brought the painter Zeuxis to his court and the Athenian playwrights Euripides and Agathon. Aristotle tells us that he was assassinated by two disgruntled former lovers acting in concert in 399. The historian Theopompus, Philip's contemporary, even claimed that the Macedonian army marched with a complement of men "with shaven bodies" who served as male concubines.

The Roman writer Justin (*ca* 100 C. E.) recounts that Philip had an affair with Alexander of Epirus, the handsome younger brother of his wife Olympias, whom he seduced with the promise of a throne.

With the famed Macedonian phalanxes Philip entered the so-called Sacred War (356-346) and defeated the Athenians and the Spartans. Then, at Chaeronea in 338, in a battle that was decisive in Greek history, he overcame the combined forces of Athens and Thebes.

It was in this engagement that the three hundred members of the Sacred Band perished to a man. Philip, Plutarch tells us, burst into tears when the dead were identified. Now master of Greece, Philip formed a confederation of Hellenic states to invade Persia, a project to which his son Alexander fell heir.

Before he could carry out this plan, Philip was slain at the celebrations held for the marriage of his former lover, Alexander of Epirus, to his daughter Cleopatra in 336 B. C. E.

Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century B. C. E., gives an account of the event with enough sensational details to satisfy any tabloid editor. A young man named Pausanias, beloved of the king "for his beauty," had been superseded in favor by another boy who bore the same name. The elder Pausanias accused his rival of submitting to the king, not for love, but for the personal advantages his role as catamite would bring. When the latter, to disprove the slur, deliberately sacrificed himself in battle fighting beside the king, one of Philip's generals, outraged at the tragedy, invited Pausanias to a feast, made him drunk, and had him raped by the other guests. When Philip ignored his demand that he punish the general, Pausanias stabbed the king when he was hurrying to witness the games at his daughter's wedding.

Some historians have suggested that Pausanias was encouraged by Olympias (whom Philip had divorced in favor of a new wife) and by his estranged son, Alexander. It was the army Philip had equipped and organized that made Alexander's conquests possible.

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About the Author

Louis Crompton was Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Nebraska. Co-founder of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the Modern Language Association, he authored the highly acclaimed *Byron and Greek Love*, and *Homosexuality and Civilization*, among numerous other works. He died on July 11, 2009.