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A Babylonian Astronomical Diary, written in cuneiform script, is the only contemporary account which discusses the death of Alexander the Great. This image, by Shaunnol, depicts that tablet which is now maintained at the British Museum. It is from the year 323-322 BC, and the reference to Alexander simply refers to him as "The King." Alexander had been warned, by a Babylonian astronomer, not to enter Babylon.

In 323, Alexander wanted to take his army to Babylon. There were so many omens against it, however, that Alexander wondered whether he had fallen out of favor with his gods.

Despite the warnings and concerns, he followed his own desire and arrived in Babylon during the late spring. Not long after, Alexander developed a fever which lasted ten days. While some scholars think he had been poisoned, that seems unlikely given the length of his illness.

On the 7th of June, many of his men filed past his bedside although he was no longer coherent. With Alexander as their leader, these Macedonians had:

- Marched more than 22,000 miles
- Overthrown the Persian empire
- Conquered approximately 2 million miles of territory
- Established new towns throughout the journey
- Never lost a battle except with the desert

On June 11th, he was gone. Squabbling over his replacement, and who should control his remains, erupted immediately.

Ptolemy, Alexander's great friend and general who ultimately became Pharaoh of Egypt, had the prince of Macedonia embalmed in the Egyptian manner and his men brought him to Alexandria. There he was enshrined in a sarcophagus.

Hundreds of years later, Caesar Augustus wanted to gaze upon Alexander's body. The historian Suetonius, in

his *Life of Augustus*, tells the story:

When Alexander's sarcophagus was brought from its shrine, Augustus gazed at the body, then laid a crown of gold on its glass case and scattered some flowers to pay his respects. When they asked if he would like to see Ptolemy too, "I wished to see a king," he replied, "I did not wish to see corpses." (The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, "Life of Augustus," 18.1.)

No conqueror, before or since, has ever achieved as much. Because he failed to name a successor, however, his empire soon fell apart.

Alexander believed the honor should go to the man most worthy. No one, apparently, fit that description. No one came close:

*As a conqueror he came less to change than to inherit and restore; but as a man he inspired and demanded what few leaders since have dared to consider possible. (Robin Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great*, page 59.)*

Alexander proved what has been known ever since: The magnetic force and sheer drive of one's personality is sometimes enough to change the world.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ALEXANDER-S-DEATH-Alexander-the-Great>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ALEXANDER-S-DEATH-Alexander-the-Great>

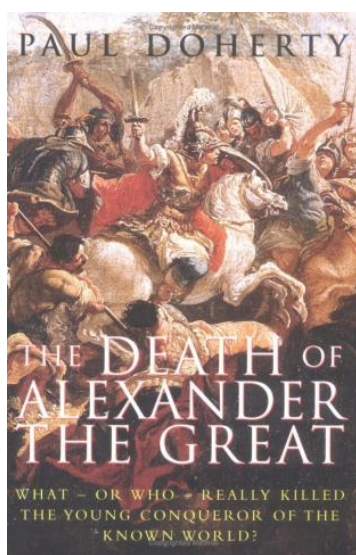
Media Stream



Alexander's Empire - Map

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

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The Death of Alexander the Great - by Paul Doherty

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

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Ptolemy I

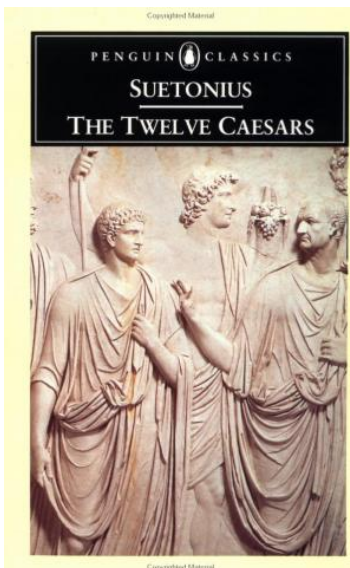
Image, described above, depicting a bust of Ptolemy I. It is part of the De Tott Collection, at the Louvre, gifted to the museum sometime before 1805. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen. PD
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Caesar Augustus

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Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars

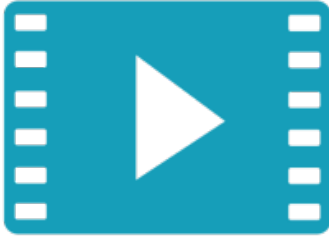
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ALEXANDER'S DEATH

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Death of Alexander the Great

Clip from "[In the Footsteps of Alexander](#)" (1998), presented by Michael Wood - a Maya Vision Production for the BBC. Online, courtesy BBC Worldwide Channel at YouTube.

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