# *Shadows of Conquest*

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*DOI: https://doi.org/10.15353/et.v1i1.6798*

# Chapter 13

## ~ The Conspiracy of Pages ~

Daylight spilled through the open folds of Alexander's tent, casting a warm glow on the finely woven rugs that softened the ground beneath their boots. The air was thick with the scent of figs and sun-warmed leather, mingling with the faint aroma of oil from the gilded armour resting on a polished wooden stand near the back. Embroidered tapestries hung along the walls, bearing the symbols of Macedon and Persia—the sun and the lion intertwined—a visual declaration of Alexander's expanding empire.[1] A bronze basin glimmered in the corner, reflecting the light, while untouched goblets sat abandoned among a scattering of scrolls and maps on the low table.

Hephaestion[2] stood dutifully at Alexander's right, as he often did, hands clasped behind his back. His eyes rested on the king, who leaned forward over the table, a finger tracing the eastern edge of the map with a wistful precision. There was a fire in Alexander's gaze—a gleam Hephaestion knew well. It was the spark that could rally armies or raze cities, a force that inspired both awe and fear.

"I can practically taste the salt of the seas to the east in the air," Alexander murmured, his voice low but reverent, as though he spoke not to his generals but to the map itself. "We are close—so close—to the ends of the earth."[3]

The words lingered, heavy with conviction. Hephaestion glanced at the others in the room—Craterus[4] and Perdiccas[5] stood to Alexander's left, their faces carefully composed. But Hephaestion caught a flicker of unease on Craterus' face before the general masked it. He then

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[1]Jovan Jonovski, The Sun and the Lion as Symbols of the Republic of Macedonia: A Heraldic and Vexillological Analysis, ed. Edward B. Kaye (Danvers, MA: Flag Heritage Foundation, 2020), 9–11.

[2]Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, trans. E. J. Chinnock (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1884), 245 (Book 4, chap. 22). In this section, Hephaestion is tasked with overseeing critical logistical operations, a responsibility reflective of his elevated status and foreshadowing his later role as Chiliarch.

[3] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 306–11 (Book 5, chaps. 25–26).

[4] Commander of the heavy infantry (pezhetairoi) and a senior field general. See, Arrian, *Anabasis*, 183 (Book 3, chap. 11). Craterus is described leading the Macedonian phalanx and supporting Alexander during operations in the Persian Gates.

[5] Commander of battalion of the pezhetairoi and trusted field leader. See, Arrian, *Anabasis,* 203 (Book 3, chap. 18). Perdiccas is noted as commanding a battalion of the pezhetairoi during the capture of Persepolis.

returned his gaze to Alexander, the only man in the room who could speak with such confidence, leaving no room for doubt.

The moment was shattered when the tent flap flew open with a rush of wind. Ptolemy, son of Lagus[6], strode inside, his face flushed with urgency. Behind him stumbled a boy—young Eurylochus, his fine tunic dishevelled, his head bowed so low that his shoulders trembled under the weight of his fear. The boy dropped to his knees before Alexander, pressing his forehead to the rug[7].

"My King," Ptolemy began, his voice taut with urgency. "I have uncovered a conspiracy."

Hephaestion's stomach twisted, though his face betrayed nothing. He watched Alexander stiffen, his gaze sharp as he turned toward Ptolemy. "Speak," he commanded, his tone cutting through the air like a knife.

Ptolemy gestured to the boy, who raised his head slowly. His pale face was slick with sweat, and his eyes darted nervously between Alexander and Hephaestion. Yet, despite his trembling, there was a flicker of resolve in his voice as he began. "Great King," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I tell you this not only to save myself but because I believe in your greatness—your divine wisdom and heritage."

The faintest of sneers curled Alexander's lips downwards, but he said nothing. His piercing gaze bore into the boy, and Hephaestion could feel the heat of it even from where he stood.

Eurylochus swallowed hard, his voice faltering as he continued. "I learned of the plot from Charicles, son of Menander. He confided in me after hearing it from my brother, Epimenes, son of Arseas—who had taken part in the conspiracy himself." His hands fidgeted in his lap, and his voice grew steadier as he went on. "What I have learned is the plan was to strike while you slept, during the watch of Antipater, son of Asclepiodorus, viceroy of Syria. But fate intervened. That night, you did not rest—you were drawn to a drinking party, where you stayed until dawn. It was this, my king, that kept you from their treachery."[8]

Alexander stepped around the table with deliberate calm, his boots sinking softly into the thick carpet. Without a word, he reached for a sheet of papyrus on the desk. He held it out to Eurylochus along with a reed pen and a small ink pot, the motion slow, deliberate.

"I need the names of everyone involved," Alexander said, his voice dangerously quiet.

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[6] Arrian, *Anabasis*, (Book 4, chap. 6). Describing Ptolemy's role during the crossing of the Oxus and the subsequent campaign in Sogdiana.

[7] Sarah B. Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 454–455. Discussing proskynesis and prostration.

[8] Arrian, *Anabasis*, 229–33, (Book 4, chaps. 13-14).

Eurylochus hesitated only a moment before dipping the reed pen into the ink. His hand trembled violently as he traced each name onto the sheet, the faint scratching of the tip the only sound in the room. Hephaestion watched as the boy's face grew paler with each letter as if the act of writing itself drained him of life. When he finally finished, he held the sheet out with trembling fingers, unable to meet the king's gaze.

Alexander snatched the papyrus from his hands and scanned the names. His lips curled faintly as he read aloud, his tone sharp and clipped: "Hermolaus, son of Sopolis... Sostratus, son of Amyntas... Anticles, son of Theocritus... Philotas, son of Carsis the Thracian."[9] His voice faded as he read through the rest of the list, but each of the mentioned names struck the room like a blow.

He turned and handed the list to Seleucus[10]. "Take your most trusted men," Alexander commanded, his tone carrying deafening authority. "Arrest every name on this list. Put them to the rack until we know all who are involved and every last detail of this treachery[11]. By sunset, I want all of them assembled in the valley to the east."

Seleucus nodded and departed swiftly, leaving the tent in tense silence once more. Alexander stood at the centre of the room, motionless, his eyes fixed on nothing. Then, like a storm breaking, he erupted.

"Traitors!" he roared, his voice reverberating through the tent. "How dare they even think to raise their hands against me—me!" His fists clenched, trembling with rage. "I am Alexander, King of Macedon! Hegemon of the Hellenic League! Pharaoh of the Two Lands! Son of Ammon! King of Persia! Lord of All Asia!"[12]

His voice rose with each title, shaking the air as his fury filled the room. With a sudden, violent motion, he gripped the edge of the table, his knuckles white with tension, and flung it onto its side. The table toppled with a resounding crash, sending maps, goblets, and scrolls scattering across the floor in a heap. He stood there, his chest heaving, his eyes blazing with an intensity that made even Hephaestion flinch inwardly.

"I have led them to glory!" Alexander bellowed. "To riches beyond their dreams! To immortality! And this—this is how they repay me?"

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[9] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 230 (Book 4, chap. 13).

[10] Commander of the Royal Hypaspists, closely connected to Alexander's personal safety. See, Arrian, *Anabasis*, 310 (Book 5, chap. 13). Seleucus is mentioned as the commander of the Royal Hypaspists, an elite corps within Alexander's army.

[11] Arrian, *Anabasis*, 231 (Book 4, chap. 13).

[12] Krzysztof Nawotka, Alexander the Great (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), chap. 5, "King of Asia," 213–94.

The room fell silent, his words pressing down on everyone present. After a long pause, Alexander exhaled, his breath ragged, and his tone dropped to a low, venomous growl. "Get out. Gather every soul from this camp and ensure they are present for the executions as the sun sets. I don't want to see a single one of you until then."

The generals filed out quickly, leaving only Hephaestion. For a moment, he lingered, his heart heavy with concern for his friend. Alexander turned to him, his gaze cold but steady. "Bring me the ringleader," he said, his voice soft but unyielding. "Bring me Hermolaus."[13]



The camp was still as Hephaestion approached Alexander's tent, situated at the heart of the encampment. Unlike the more austere tents of the rank and file, Alexander's headquarters loomed as a grand structure of thick, unadorned fabric. Its size alone distinguished it, visible from nearly every corner of the camp, flanked by the smaller, orderly tents of his generals and officers. Standards bearing the Vergina Sun of Macedon and the Lion of Persia fluttered in the breeze, unmistakable markers of his dual authority.[14]

Hephaestion marched steadily, gripping Hermolaus by the arm. The young page, his face still smooth and unmarked by a first beard, stumbled as they neared the tent, his bound hands forcing him to keep his balance with awkward steps. Guards stationed at the entrance stood rigid, their *kopis* blades gleaming in the setting sun. They stepped aside with synchronized precision, their heads bowing in deference as Hephaestion passed.

Inside the tent, the air was heavy with the mingling scents of leather, oil, and incense. Alexander stood near the back, the light filtering through the open folds of the tent, catching the gold of his cuirass, which gleamed as if freshly polished. Though Macedonian in design, the armour bore intricate Persian engravings—lions, griffins, and the winged figure of Ahura Mazda—testaments to the king's claim over the East. His *chlamys*, deep crimson and edged with gold embroidery in royal Persian patterns, fell over one shoulder, contrasting sharply against the darkened metal of his greaves.[15]

Hephaestion hesitated briefly, as he often did when entering Alexander's presence. Even after years of friendship, the sight of the king in full regalia, commanding without a word, never failed to stir awe. Here was no mortal general but a man who could walk with the gods.

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[13] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 232 (Book 4, chap. 14).

[14] Jonovski, *Sun and the Lion*, 9–11.

[15] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, trans. P.A. Brunt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), (Book 4, chap. 9).

Hephaestion shoved Hermolaus forward, causing him to stumble and fall to the ground. Alexander turned, his expression calm but unreadable. His gaze dropped briefly to Hermolaus, who was struggling to get back to his knees, then rose to meet Hephaestion's.

"Why?" Alexander asked the page, his voice low, almost conversational.

Hermolaus took a shaky breath, lifting his head to meet Alexander's gaze. Though his body trembled, his voice rose with bitter defiance. "Why?" he repeated, spitting the word back. "Because no free man can bear your tyranny."

Hephaestion stiffened, his hand instinctively resting on the hilt of his xiphos, but Alexander raised a hand, halting him. Hermolaus continued, his voice growing louder, sharper with every word.

"You speak of glory, but it is soaked in the blood and humiliation of your own men! Philotas—betrayed and slaughtered without trial! Parmenio—your most loyal general, executed on a whisper of suspicion! Clitus—who saved your life—struck down in a drunken fury by your own hand! And what of your cruelty to those closest to you? When I struck down the boar that threatened your life, you flew into a rage, punishing me not for failure, but for daring to act too swiftly. You had me scourged in front of my peers, stripped of my horse, and humiliated for your own pride! You call yourself a king, yet you drape yourself in Persian silk and strut like a god. You force free Macedonians—men like me—to bow as slaves. You abandon the simplicity of Macedon for wine-soaked feasts and foreign decadence, leaving yourself unfit to rule while demanding blind loyalty from those you have wronged!"[16]

The page leaned forward, his face twisting with anger. "You betray everything we are. You are no king of Macedon. You are a tyrant. A god in your own eyes—and nothing more."

The tent was silent, the air thick with the weight of Hermolaus's words. Alexander's face remained impassive, but his eyes never left the page. After a long moment, he spoke, his voice measured and cold. "Get up."

Hephaestion stepped forward, seizing Hermolaus by the elbow and hauling him roughly to his feet. Alexander turned sharply and strode out of the tent, his crimson *chlamys* trailing behind him like a river of dark blood. Hephaestion followed, dragging Hermolaus as they exited into the waning sunlight.

The camp around them lay in perfect order, its pathways lined with neatly arranged tents. Those of the *pezhetairoi*[17] formed the central block, flanked by the quarters of the *hetairoi*[18], and, farther out, the tents of allied Persian and Thracian auxiliaries. Every part of the camp reflected

[16] Arrian, *Anabasis* (Chinnock), 229–33 (Book 4, chaps. 13-14).

[17] 'Foot Companions'. See Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 418.

[18] 'Elite Companion Cavalry'. See Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 74.

Alexander's meticulous discipline, its design ensuring not only efficiency but a visual hierarchy of power.[19]

As they walked, the silence was broken only by the faint rustle of canvas in the wind and the crunch of stones under their feet. The camp was deserted, its usual hum of activity replaced by an unnatural stillness. Every man and woman had been summoned to the outskirts, where justice would be served.

Soon, they approached the outermost defences of the camp, a trench that encircled the perimeter. The shallow ditch had been dug quickly but with precision, its earth piled on the inner side to create a low embankment fortified with sharpened wooden stakes. Guards stood at regular intervals along the line, their spears resting at their sides, their gazes sharp and alert. At the narrow entrance to the camp, two sentries stepped aside with disciplined movements, their heads lowering as Alexander passed.[20]

Beyond the defences, they entered the large clearing where the army had gathered. A vast sea of soldiers, camp followers, and officers stood in tense clusters, their faces grim and expectant. Murmurs rippled through the ranks as Alexander approached, his presence silencing even the faintest whispers. One by one, the men bowed their heads, stepping aside to clear his path. The air felt charged, each movement laced with fear and reverence.

Hephaestion, walking a pace behind, tightened his grip on Hermolaus, whose pale face glistened with sweat. The young page stumbled once more, but the *Chiliarch's*[21] strong arm kept him upright, propelling him forward toward his inevitable fate.

On the far side of the crowd, a dais had been hastily constructed, its platform elevated to ensure Alexander could be seen by all. Before it stood the conspirators, their hands bound, their faces battered and bruised. Behind each of them stood an armed guard, their expressions grim.

Closest to the dais stood Callisthenes[22], his defiant glare fixed on the approaching king. Alexander's gaze lingered on him briefly, his expression frigid. He paused, his voice low yet cutting as he addressed the man. "I wish I were surprised," Alexander murmured. "There is a special torture reserved for traitors like you." Without another word, he turned sharply and ascended the platform.

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[19] Robert Lock, *The Army of Alexander the Great* (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1974), 157–99.

[20] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 454–55. Discussing *proskynesis* and prostration.

[21] Jeanne Reames, "The Cult of Hephaestion," in *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies,* ed. Paul Cartledge and Fiona Greenland (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 188.

[22] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 436.

As he turned, silence fell, his presence enough to command absolute attention. He stood tall, his image regal as he looked across the assembly. "These men," Alexander began, his voice commanding and resolute, "have conspired against me. Against you. Against everything we have built together."

His eyes swept over the crowd, his tone growing in intensity. "Think of where we began. In Macedon—a small kingdom, overshadowed by the mighty empire of Persia. Yet we dared to dream of something greater. And so, we marched. We crossed the Hellespont into Ionia and the Persian satrapies, stepping into lands that once seemed untouchable.[23] At the Granicus, we faced Darius's forces for the first time and crushed them, proving that Macedon would not be underestimated. From there, we pressed onward, freeing cities from Persian rule and standing as liberators to those who had only known oppression.[24]

"At Issus, we confronted Darius again and shattered his pride, forcing him to flee into the heart of his empire. We turned southward, laying siege to Tyre, a city that no one believed could fall. Yet after months of relentless effort, we broke its walls and claimed it, securing control of the seas and opening the way to the satrapy of Egypt. There, the people did not resist us—they welcomed us once again as liberators, not conquerors. In Memphis, we stood together before the great Nile, where the decision to found Alexandria was made, destined to shine as a beacon for all eternity—a city of knowledge and culture that will outlast all time. Further, at the Oasis of Siwa, the oracle of Zeus-Ammon confirmed what I have always known about our divine path."[25]

His tone hardened, his voice rising with conviction. "But we did not stop. We pressed eastward, confronting Darius for the last time at Gaugamela, where we didn't just defeat his army—we broke his empire. The treasures of Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis became ours, and Persia itself fell to Macedon. Still, we marched. Over the Zagros Mountains, through Bactria and Sogdiana, into lands no Hellene had ever seen. Along the way, we built cities and brought order to chaos. We carried the light of Hellas to places that had known only darkness."[26]

His gaze swept over the crowd, his voice steady yet sharp. "Many of you have lost brothers, friends, and comrades who stood beside you on these battlefields. They gave their lives for this vision, for this empire, for the immortality that we now stand on the brink of achieving. Their sacrifices demand not only respect but action—to honour their memory by completing the task we set out to do."

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[23] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 439–42.

[24] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 442–45.

[25] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 445–52.

[26] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 452–56.

Alexander paused, letting his words settle. The entire army stood still, hanging on his every word as he turned his piercing gaze toward the conspirators.

"But these once noble pages—these selfish boys—sought to undo it all. Their treachery is not only against me. It is against every one of you. Against the memory of our fallen. Against the future we are building. And for that, they will die."

The crowd thundered, the sound crashing like a wave through the tense air. Alexander stood motionless, his gaze steady, waiting until the roar faded into uneasy silence. The stillness was absolute, every breath held as he turned to the guards. His voice was sharp, unyielding. "Stone them."[27]

No one moved. The guards remained fixed in place, gripping the conspirators tightly, their eyes trained on Alexander, awaiting the final word. The crowd remained frozen, suspense crackling like fire through the gathered ranks.

Alexander's gaze shifted to Callisthenes, his tone cutting through the air like a blade. "Stretch him upon the rack," he said, his voice venomous, "and then let him hang until the wind scatters what the carrion birds could not swallow."[28]

The silence lingered as Alexander began his descent, his steps deliberate and measured, his expression calm. The soft glow of dusk framed him, casting long shadows across his face. Hephaestion followed closely, the soldiers parting and bowing once more as the two passed.

When they reached the back of the crowd and began their walk uphill toward the camp, the chaos erupted behind them. Soldiers surged forward with roars of vengeance, their cries and shouts overpowering the pleas of the condemned.



Hephaestion lingered outside Alexander's tent for a moment, his hand resting on the entrance flap. He expected destruction—a scene of utter devastation left in the wake of Alexander. The massive table, already upturned earlier in the day, would surely be smashed by now, the tapestries torn from the walls, and perhaps even chairs or goblets flung across the space in a fit of rage. It would not be the first time Alexander had followed in his father Philip's footsteps, venting his fury on inanimate objects.

But when Hephaestion stepped inside, the scene before him was entirely different.

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[27] Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, in *Parallel Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 267 (55.4).

[28] Plutarch, *Alexander,* 267 (55.5).

Alexander was bent over, straining to right the massive table that had been overturned hours earlier. The creaking of wood followed by a heavy thud echoed in the quiet space. Hephaestion paused, his steps faltering, as Alexander calmly began gathering the remaining scattered items—maps, ink pots, and rolled scrolls—placing them back on the table with meticulous care.

Once everything had been set in order, Alexander moved to pour himself a glass of wine, then walked around the desk and took his seat, leaning back as if nothing of consequence had happened that day. The golden light of the now-lit lamps flickered over his armour, which he had not yet removed, casting his face in a warm, shifting glow.

Looking up, Alexander noticed Hephaestion's expression—concerned, bewildered. "What?" Alexander asked, his tone almost amused.

Hephaestion swallowed, his brows furrowing. "Are you… alright? How can you move on so quickly?"

Alexander took a measured sip of his wine and then smiled, but it was not one of reassurance. It was cryptic, a tilt of the lips which carried the weight of secrets Hephaestion did not yet understand. "Why would I be upset?" Alexander's voice was calm, almost playful, as if he relished Hephaestion's confusion. "Everything has gone exactly as I've intended."[29]

The words slammed Hephaestion like a wave. He stood frozen, searching Alexander's face for any trace of jest, but found none. Alexander rose then, setting the wine glass down with deliberate care, and began lighting the remaining oil lamps scattered throughout the tent.

"I knew this would happen eventually," Alexander said, his voice calm, almost peaceful. "The men are weary, their spirits frayed from years of marching, fighting, conquering. We have not stopped since we left Macedon—not truly. Fatigue eats away at loyalty, no matter how strong the oaths once sworn." He turned, the light catching his eyes before he continued. "I found out about the whispers weeks ago. I let them grow and fester because I needed to see who among us would falter. Weakness is a contagion, Hephaestion. If left unchecked, it will spread until it has nothing left to devour."

He paused, lighting another lamp, his voice steady. "And treachery, even in noble blood, cannot be tolerated. These boys—Hermolaus, and Callisthenes—thought their lineage would shield them. They believed their birth elevated them above consequence. Today, the army saw otherwise. They saw that cowardice, no matter its source, will be punished."

Hephaestion shifted uncomfortably, his mind reeling at the cool precision of Alexander's words. "You waited for this to happen?" he asked, his voice quieter than he intended.

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[29] Kenneth R. Thomas, "A Psychoanalytic Study of Alexander the Great," *Psychoanalytic Review* 82, no. 6 (1996): 880–91.

"I encouraged it," Alexander replied without hesitation, turning to face his closest friend. "Do you think I would allow such dissent to build without control? No, I allowed it to evolve—to draw out those who harboured treachery in their hearts. The executions today served their purpose. The men needed a reminder of what happens to those who challenge me, especially now, when we are so far from home." He paused, his gaze unyielding. "Fear and love, Hephaestion. Measured and controlled, these two emotions are the levers that move men's hearts. Together, they bind loyalty tighter than any amount of gold or glory."[30]

Hephaestion was silent for a moment, his thoughts racing. Finally, he asked, "Why, then, did you act so enraged earlier? The outburst, the fury?"

Alexander smiled again, this time with the faintest hint of pride. "It was all a performance," he said, his tone measured. "My generals, my officers, even my closest allies—they had grown too comfortable. Too sure of their standing. They had to see me as dangerous, unpredictable, and unyielding. They needed to remember that I am not simply their leader—I am their king. Hephaestion, I respect their opinions and advice but if they think me soft, they will test their limits and cross lines they should not dare cross. Now… now they will think twice."

Hephaestion's breath caught in his chest. Before him stood not only the friend he had grown up with, the boy who once dreamed of becoming a second Achilles and recited Homer beneath Macedon's summer skies, but someone changed.[31] The brightness once lit by Aristotle's teachings had hardened into calculation; the innocence he remembered now burned with Olympias's ruthless cunning.

A chill ran through him as the truth struck: Alexander was no longer merely a king or a conqueror. He had become something more dangerous—a man who carried both his father's military genius and his mother's seething cruelty. Hephaestion thought of the comrades they had lost, the cities consumed by fire, the sacrifices that paved their ascent. The empire they had forged together loomed like a storm cloud, vast and unyielding—and at its heart stood Alexander, his friend and his king, wielding a power that seemed without limit.

Alexander's voice broke the quiet. "You look troubled, Hephaestion. What is it?"

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[30] Plutarch discusses the balance of fear and love in Alexander's leadership, with the destruction of Thebes as an example of instilling fear (ch. 11), his generosity and shared hardships with soldiers (ch. 16), the siege of Tyre showcasing his use of fear to intimidate enemies (ch. 24), his execution of Philotas and the purge of the Companion Cavalry to assert authority (ch. 28), his personal connection with troops (ch. 39), his refusal to drink water to inspire loyalty (ch. 42), his respect for conquered peoples fostering goodwill (ch. 47), and his disciplinary actions after the Cleitus incident highlighting his authority (ch. 50). See Plutarch, *Alexander,* chs. 11, 16, 24, 28, 39, 42, 47, 50.

[31] Arrian, *Anabasis* (Chinnock), 1.11, 36-38.

Hephaestion forced a faint smile. "Nothing, my king. Nothing at all."

Alexander studied him a moment, then smiled—a genuine smile this time, one that softened the hard edges of his expression. "You've always stood with me, from the very beginning."

Hephaestion nodded, his voice steady despite the turmoil within. "And I will stand with you until the end, my friend."[32]

Alexander's smile deepened, the boyish warmth returning to his features. "Until the end."

Hephaestion turned to leave, his steps measured as he moved toward the entrance of the tent. Before stepping outside, he glanced back one final time. The man who sat at the desk, now bathed in triumph, was both familiar and foreign. The friend he had known and the ruler he now served were one and the same, yet he could not shake the quiet fear that this empire they had built together might one day consume them both.[33]

[32] Reames, "Cult of Hephaestion," 187, describing Alexander's vision of a shared future with Hephaestion and its Platonic philosophical underpinnings.

33 Reames, "Cult of Hephaestion," 191, discussing Hephaestion's multifaceted roles and responsibilities, categorized into diplomatic/advisory, building cities, troop supply, troop movement, and combat

# Artist's Statement

*Shadows of Conquest* is a work of historical fiction deeply inspired by Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*. Its aim is to remain faithful to the ancient text while capturing the grandeur and complexity of Alexander the Great's character and his monumental campaigns. At the same time, creative liberties have been taken to explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of the individuals involved, particularly Alexander and his closest companion, Hephaestion.

This reimagining centres on the infamous Conspiracy of the Pages, as recounted by Arrian, while examining the personal dynamics and political machinations that surrounded this critical moment. It seeks to illuminate the pressures, ambitions, and fears that shaped Alexander's leadership and tested the loyalty of his army. The aftermath of the executions—especially Alexander's private reflections and his exchanges with Hephaestion—has been elaborated to provide readers with a more nuanced understanding of their bond and its role in Alexander's vision of conquest.

The dialogue and internal monologues are works of creative interpretation, grounded in historical source, that bring these figures to life in ways the surviving texts only suggest. While this narrative adheres closely to the events outlined in Arrian's account, it also endeavours to explore the human elements behind the grand strategy, offering a perspective on how ambition, loyalty, and betrayal intersect in the pursuit of empire.

It is my hope that *Shadows of Conquest* serves not only as an engaging story but also as a tribute to the enduring legacy of one of history's most enigmatic figures and his closest confidant. This work reflects both admiration for the ancient sources and an awareness of the creative license necessary to reimagine them for modern audiences.

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