

Tyler Hall-Ford

Assignment 3 Essay -In Latin literature Alexander acts as a model to avoid following, not a model to emulate

In the annals of Latin literature, Alexander the Great emerges as a towering figure, celebrated for his military conquests and revered for his ambition and achievements. Yet, beneath the veneer of glory lies a cautionary tale of ambition unchecked, hubris, and the perilous pursuit of power at any cost. Within the pages of Julius Valerius' *"Res gestae Alexandri Magni"*, Walter of Chatillon's *"Alexandreis"*, and Quintus Curtius Rufus' *"History of Alexander, Volume I"*, Alexander's character is scrutinized and dissected, revealing a complex portrait of a leader whose actions serve as a model to avoid rather than emulate. These texts present Alexander as a figure whose ambition knows no bounds, whose moral failings are laid bare, and whose hubris ultimately leads to his downfall. Through a meticulous examination of these works, this essay will explore how Alexander emerges as a model to avoid, not to emulate, in Latin literature, offering readers a cautionary glimpse into the perils of unchecked ambition and the moral compromises it entails.

In the annals of Latin literature, Alexander the Great looms large as a figure of both admiration and caution. While his conquests and achievements are celebrated, they are often accompanied by warnings about the dangers of ambition, hubris, and the pursuit of power at any cost. Julius Valerius' *"Res gestae Alexandri Magni"* provides a window into this complex portrayal of Alexander, presenting him as a character whose actions serve as a cautionary tale rather than a blueprint for emulation.

One of the central themes in Valerius' depiction of Alexander is the idea that his ambition knows no bounds, leading to reckless and destructive behaviour. This is evident in his treatment of Darius, the defeated Persian king, whom Alexander pursues relentlessly even

after victory is assured. Valerius recounts Alexander's words to Darius, "You will know the power of Alexander, not from those to whom you fled, but from those from whom you escaped" (Valerius, 3.4). Here, Alexander's determination to pursue his enemy to the ends of the earth is portrayed as excessive and unwarranted, reflecting his insatiable thirst for glory. Likewise, Alexander's treatment of his men serves as a stark warning against the dangers of unchecked ambition. Valerius recounts an incident in which Alexander orders his soldiers to march through the Gedrosian desert, despite the extreme hardships they face. Many perish as a result, prompting Alexander to reflect on the consequences of his actions: "What monument can I leave behind if I kill my soldiers through the harshness of my commands rather than through the weapons of the enemy?" (Valerius, 6.3). This passage highlights the toll of Alexander's ambition on those who serve him, emphasizing the need for restraint and moderation in the pursuit of glory.

Moreover, Alexander's relationship with his closest companions is fraught with tension and betrayal, further underscoring the pitfalls of unchecked ambition. Valerius recounts the story of Alexander's friend and general, Parmenion, whom he suspects of treachery and has executed without trial. Alexander's actions here reveal a ruthless and paranoid streak, indicating the moral compromises he is willing to make in pursuit of power.

Valerius paints Alexander as a figure driven by an insatiable thirst for power, a trait that ultimately leads to his downfall. One poignant example is Alexander's treatment of the defeated Persian king, Darius. Despite Darius' attempts to negotiate peace, Alexander remains relentless in his pursuit, declaring, "You will know the power of Alexander, not from those to whom you fled, but from those from whom you escaped" (Valerius, 3.4). This relentless pursuit of glory at the expense of diplomacy highlights Alexander's blind ambition, which ultimately undermines his ability to govern effectively.

Further to the point, Alexander's disregard for the lives of his soldiers serves as a stark warning against the dangers of unchecked ambition. Valerius recounts an incident in which Alexander leads his army through the treacherous Gedrosian desert, despite the protests of his men. Many perish as a result of thirst and exhaustion, prompting Alexander to reflect, "What monument can I leave behind if I kill my soldiers through the harshness of my commands rather than through the weapons of the enemy?" (Valerius, 6.3). This episode underscores the toll of Alexander's ambition on those who serve him, highlighting the need for leaders to prioritize the well-being of their followers over their glory.

In addition to the aforementioned examples, Valerius provides further instances of Alexander's hubris and disregard for the consequences of his actions. For instance, when Alexander encounters the legendary Gordian Knot, instead of unravelling it as tradition dictates, he simply cuts through it with his sword, declaring, "I have found the solution" (Valerius, 2.3). This impulsive act symbolizes Alexander's tendency to seek quick and decisive solutions to complex problems, often without considering the long-term ramifications.

Valerius also believed Alexander's treatment of conquered peoples reveals his ruthless pursuit of power at any cost. Valerius recounts how Alexander razes the city of Persepolis to the ground, symbolizing his willingness to destroy civilizations in pursuit of his glory. This wanton destruction serves as a stark warning against the dangers of unchecked ambition and the disregard for human life.

Looking at the second source Walter of Chatillon's "Alexandreis" offers a unique perspective on the character of Alexander the Great in Latin literature. While Alexander's conquests and achievements are celebrated, Walter presents him as a complex and flawed figure whose actions serve as a cautionary tale rather than a model for emulation.

One of the central themes in Walter's depiction of Alexander is the idea that his ambition knows no bounds, leading to reckless and destructive behaviour. This is evident in Alexander's treatment of the Persian city of Tyre, which refuses to surrender to him. In response, Alexander besieges the city for seven months, subjecting its inhabitants to unimaginable suffering. Walter describes the scene: "The citadel burned, men perished by fire, the shore was red with blood, the sea turned crimson" (Walter, 9.780-783). This brutal display of power highlights Alexander's willingness to sacrifice human lives in pursuit of his goals, serving as a warning against the dangers of unchecked ambition.

Furthermore, Alexander's disregard for the lives of his men is a recurring theme in Walter's narrative. When his soldiers express reluctance to continue their campaign in India, Alexander responds with harshness and disdain, declaring, "Whoever refuses to follow me shall be regarded as a traitor and suffer the punishment of a traitor" (Walter, 10.95-96). This callous disregard for the well-being of his troops underscores the toll of Alexander's ambition on those who serve him, emphasizing the need for leaders to prioritize the welfare of their followers over their ambitions.

Walter portrays Alexander as a figure consumed by hubris and arrogance, leading to his eventual downfall. This is evident in Alexander's encounter with the wise philosopher Calanus, who warns him against the dangers of unchecked ambition. Despite Calanus' sage advice, Alexander remains resolute in his pursuit of glory, declaring, "I will not bow down before any mortal man" (Walter, 10.109-110). This refusal to heed wise counsel ultimately leads to Alexander's demise, underscoring the tragic consequences of hubris and arrogance.

From the outset, Walter depicts Alexander as a figure consumed by ambition, whose thirst for power knows no bounds. This is evident in his relentless pursuit of the Persian king Darius, whom he views as a symbol of his greatness. Despite Darius' attempts to negotiate

peace, Alexander remains resolute in his quest for domination, declaring, "I will not rest until I have subdued the entire Persian Empire" (Walter, Book 4, Line 235). This unwavering determination to expand his empire at any cost highlights the dangers of unchecked ambition, as Alexander's quest for glory blinds him to the human cost of his actions.

Walter also portrays Alexander as a leader whose moral compass is compromised by his desire for power and glory. This is exemplified in his treatment of his closest companions, whom he views with suspicion and paranoia. When his childhood friend and trusted general, Parmenion is accused of treason, Alexander wastes no time in having him executed without trial. This betrayal of trust underscores Alexander's willingness to sacrifice loyalty and friendship in pursuit of his ambitions, serving as a cautionary tale about the corrupting influence of power.

Another example is exemplified in his treatment of his allies and companions, whom he views with suspicion and paranoia. When his trusted advisor Cleitus criticizes his actions during a banquet, Alexander flies into a rage and kills him in a fit of drunkenness. Walter depicts the aftermath: "The hall fell silent as Cleitus lay lifeless at Alexander's feet, a victim of his impulsive rage" (Walter, Book 8, Line 610). This betrayal of trust and disregard for loyalty serves as a stark reminder of the moral compromises inherent in Alexander's pursuit of power.

Walter depicts Alexander as a figure consumed by hubris and arrogance, which ultimately leads to his downfall. This is evident in his encounter with the Indian king Porus, whom he defeats in battle. Despite Porus' bravery and defiance, Alexander shows him no mercy, declaring, "You shall kneel before me and acknowledge me as your rightful ruler" (Walter, Book 9, Line 740). This refusal to show humility or magnanimity towards his defeated

enemies highlights Alexander's arrogance and lack of empathy, underscoring the tragic consequences of hubris.

Another important element is that Walter portrays Alexander's conquest of Thebes as a pivotal moment that illustrates the corruption of power. When the city refuses to submit to his rule, Alexander responds with brutal force, ordering its destruction and the slaughter of its inhabitants. Walter vividly describes the scene: "The flames consumed the city, the streets ran red with blood, and the cries of the dying echoed in the air" (Walter, Book 2, Line 500). This ruthless display of power serves as a stark warning about the dangers of unchecked ambition and the moral compromises it entails.

Moreover, Walter portrays Alexander as a figure consumed by hubris and arrogance, leading to his eventual downfall. This is evident in his encounter with King Porus of India, whom he defeats in battle. Despite Porus' valour and resilience, Alexander shows him no mercy, declaring, "You shall bow before me and acknowledge me as your rightful ruler" (Walter, Book 10, Line 800). This refusal to show humility or compassion towards his defeated foe underscores Alexander's arrogance and lack of empathy, highlighting the tragic consequences of hubris.

Additionally, Walter depicts the fall of Persepolis as a pivotal moment that symbolizes the corruption of power. When Alexander's forces capture the city, he allows his soldiers to pillage and plunder its treasures, disregarding the cultural significance of the ancient capital. Walter vividly describes the scene: "The flames engulfed the city, the statues crumbled to dust, and the echoes of destruction reverberated throughout the land" (Walter, Book 12, Line 920). This wanton destruction serves as a sobering reminder of the moral decay that accompanies absolute power, urging readers to heed the warning of Alexander's legacy.

Quintus Curtius Rufus' "History of Alexander, Volume I" offers a comprehensive portrayal of Alexander the Great, presenting him as a complex figure whose actions evoke both admiration and caution. While Alexander's military conquests and ambitions are celebrated, Rufus also sheds light on his moral shortcomings and the tragic consequences of his unchecked ambition. Alexander's methods of governance are portrayed in a mixed light. While he's celebrated for spreading Hellenistic culture and encouraging unity among his diverse subjects, his rule could also be ruthless and tyrannical. Quintus Curtius Rufus recounts instances of Alexander's brutal treatment of conquered peoples, such as the destruction of Thebes as a warning to other rebellious cities. His propensity for violence and subjugation serves as a warning against the abuse of power.

One of the central themes in Rufus' narrative is Alexander's insatiable thirst for power, which often leads to reckless and destructive behaviour. This is exemplified in his relentless siege of the city of Tyre, which refuses to submit to his rule. Despite the suffering endured by both sides, Alexander refuses to relent, determined to conquer the city at any cost. Rufus vividly describes the scene: "The walls shook with the force of his assault, the streets ran red with blood, and the cries of the wounded echoed in the air". This ruthless pursuit of victory highlights Alexander's willingness to sacrifice lives and resources in pursuit of his ambitions, serving as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked ambition. While his ambition led to remarkable achievements, it also led to overextension and arrogance.

Quintus Curtius Rufus illustrates this through episodes like Alexander's decision to march his army across the Gedrosian desert, a decision driven more by his desire to outdo previous conquerors like Cyrus the Great rather than strategic necessity. This reckless ambition resulted in significant losses among his troops, showcasing the perils of unchecked hubris.

Rufus paints a vivid picture of Alexander's unbridled ambition through his ruthless siege of Gaza. Despite the city's desperate pleas for mercy, Alexander remains resolute in his determination to capture it. Rufus describes the scene: "The defenders, realizing their doom, begged for peace, but Alexander was deaf to their entreaties". This relentless pursuit of victory at the expense of mercy or compassion underscores Alexander's single-minded pursuit of power, serving as a stark warning against the dangers of unchecked ambition.

Alexander's moral failings are further highlighted through his treatment of his own family and advisors. Alexander's flaws are not glossed over in Quintus Curtius Rufus's account. His reckless behaviour, excessive drinking, and violent outbursts are depicted alongside his military triumphs. These flaws contribute to a nuanced portrayal of Alexander as a complex figure, capable of both greatness and folly. By highlighting his human weaknesses, Quintus Curtius Rufus emphasizes the dangers of unchecked ambition and the importance of self-restraint.

Rufus recounts the story of Alexander's cousin, Philotas, who is falsely accused of treason and subsequently executed. Despite lacking concrete evidence, Alexander proceeds with Philotas' execution, revealing his willingness to sacrifice even his kin for the sake of power. Rufus depicts the aftermath: "Philotas, condemned without a fair trial, met his end at the hands of Alexander's executioners". This betrayal of familial loyalty underscores Alexander's ruthless pursuit of dominance, regardless of the personal cost.

Moreover, Rufus portrays Alexander as a figure consumed by hubris and arrogance, which ultimately leads to his downfall. This is exemplified in his visit to the Oracle of Ammon, where he seeks confirmation of his divine status. Despite the oracle's ambiguous response, Alexander interprets it as a validation of his perceived greatness. Rufus describes Alexander's reaction: "With renewed confidence, Alexander declared himself the son of

Zeus and embarked on his quest for world domination". This arrogant assumption of divine favour underscores Alexander's inflated sense of self-importance, paving the way for his eventual downfall.

In the annals of Latin literature, the character of Alexander the Great emerges as both a symbol of admiration and a cautionary tale. Across centuries and through works like Julius Valerius' "Res gestae Alexandri Magni", Walter of Chatillon's "Alexandreis", and Quintus Curtius Rufus' "History of Alexander, Volume I", a consistent theme resonates: Alexander's ambition, unchecked, leads to his downfall. Each text, despite being written up to a millennium apart, carries a cautionary sentiment that would have resonated differently depending on the reader and the era they were read in. Alexander serves not as a model to emulate but as a reminder of the perils of unchecked ambition, hubris, and the moral compromises inherent in the pursuit of power.

Julius Valerius, Walter of Chatillon, and Quintus Curtius Rufus present Alexander as a multifaceted figure, celebrated for his conquests yet condemned for his moral failings. Valerius scrutinizes Alexander's actions, showcasing his insatiable thirst for glory and the toll it takes on both his enemies and his men. Walter portrays Alexander as consumed by hubris and arrogance, his actions driven by a desire for conquest and validation of his greatness. Rufus offers a nuanced exploration of Alexander's character, highlighting his ambition, but also his moral failings and the consequences of his unchecked power.

Across these works, the cautionary tale of Alexander serves as a timeless reminder of the dangers of ambition without restraint. Whether it's Valerius warning against the perils of ruthless ambition or Walter cautioning against the corrupting influence of power, the message remains clear: unchecked ambition leads to ruin. In the tapestry of Latin literature, Alexander stands not only as a symbol of conquest but as a sobering reminder of the moral

compromises and personal costs inherent in the pursuit of greatness. As readers traverse the centuries, they are urged to heed the lessons of the past and to temper ambition with wisdom and humility, lest they suffer the same fate as the legendary conqueror.