

**Murder in Macedon:
413-336 BC**

by R.L. Porter

The Macedonian monarchy determined the succession to the throne in a somewhat informal fashion: the eldest son did not always smoothly follow the father. Macedon required an adult, vigorous king at all times since one of the monarch's chief functions was to lead the national army, often in person. In the final analysis, after make-shift meetings of the chief lowland barons and allied princes of the highland peoples, a candidate from the Argead Royal House would be selected for presentation to and approval of the Army Assembly. Sometimes a regent was selected for a king who was still a minor if this seemed the most appropriate policy at any given time. Sometimes the regent ousted the king-to-be and became king himself. Sometimes the king-to-be was murdered. Murder, in fact, flourished in royal circles and was considered a traditional, if not perfectly legitimate, way to select a proper king. Macedonian history abounds in such dynastic killings.

Beginning with the greatest king before Philip II (Alexander's father) we find that Archelaus (413-399 BC), who was responsible for starting Macedon on the road out of barbarism, came to power in just such a fashion. He was the illegitimate son of the former monarch and a slave woman and won the throne by "knocking off" his half-brother, uncle and numerous other royals of the Argead family. This might appear barbaric to us but it worked and Macedon enjoyed a whole decade and a half of peace, stability and increasing power. After all, such murders might be construed as a sort of civil war in which a few people got killed. To the southern Greeks, such as the Athenians, however, it just showed what lawless, uncivilized, drunken, murderous barbarians the half-Greek Macedonians were. Yet it worked for a time.

In the end Archelaus was murdered by his boyfriend. Then Archelaus' son was murdered by the son's guardian, Aeropus, whose reign began a 10-year period of abysmal chaos, civil war and more murders. Finally an Argead

prince named Amyntas III (393-370 BC) murdered his way to power and brought back a measure of stability to the northern kingdom. In the course of his reign Amyntas performed two miracles: one, he gave to the world the impressive Philip II; two, he died in bed of natural causes.

Amyntas had three sons who were destined not to enjoy the same blissful longevity as their father. The first son, Alexander II, was "rubbed out" by his own mother's lover, Ptolemy of Alorus, who then seized the throne for himself. Thereafter Alexander's younger brother Perdikkas III "bumped off" Ptolemy - a fatal mistake for Ptolemy to let the lad live after killing off an older brother (was it the influence of the mother which made the usurper spare the two younger children of Amyntas?). Poor Perdikkas was slain on the battlefield by invading Illyrians along with most of the royal army. Finally in 359 the youngest and most talented son of Amyntas, Philip II, came to power.

At this point something strange took place. Philip did not murder his young nephew, Amyntas IV, son of his brother Perdikkas III. Philip either became king in 359, hailed by the Army Assembly as such, or was made regent for the youthful nephew until 3 years later when Philip was confirmed as king and the boy Amyntas was set aside - still living (Philip's son, Alexander the Great, tied up this loose end by having his cousin "hit" after Alexander became king). Philip, however, did have Argead cousins to despatch in civil wars which afflicted him in his first year in power and was not deprived of his share of killing family members.

As for Philip, like Archelaus, he was murdered by an ex-boyfriend in 336 when at the height of his power. Philip had turned Macedon into the dominant power in all of Hellas and was contemplating an attack on Persia when he was knifed in the back. Alexander succeeded his father with relative ease - but only after killing off his own share of relatives. Macedon would now go on to even greater glories, but there would always be that nasty bit of Macedonian tradition haunting the future - the use of murder as an instrument in forging stability is a flawed tool. For one thing the Argead family was now close to extinction.