

Alexander “the Great”: A Fitting Title

Being the first person to conquer the Egyptian, Greek, and Persian empires in just over a decade was no walk in the park, and neither was integrating a culture into all of those empires nor attempting to unite them all. Alexander of Macedon was this man: he conquered the greatest empires, spread the Greek influence, and lead in a unique way with his inspiring character that he is famous for. Although he was not the ideal leader such as Plato’s idea of a philosopher-king, he was an ethical man who wanted his people content. His well-known title, “Alexander *the Great*,” was very appropriate for him: his fine character and social goals, his unique political leadership and strategic conquering, and his economic advances all are examples of his greatness.

Best known for his military genius, courage, and devotion to his followers (Document 2), Alexander had the personality to be a great leader. The famous “The Legend of the Helmet” is a story praising his morals: when his thirsty army was marching in the hot desert, he did not allow himself - he even rejected - the special treatment of a ride and precious water. Therefore, his soldiers were very inspired by his act that showed them that he is equal to them: “this action ... was as good as a drink of water for every man in the army” (Document 5), a *great* act that only shows impressive moral character. He was often sculpted or painted on anything from his companions’ sarcophaguses to even the clothes of Roman emperor Marcus 540 years later (Documents 4, 8), because all his people admired him for his character. Although some people beg to differ, and that he was very vain, because he was mostly shown as “a beautiful youth, with wonderful locks flowing backward from a broad forehead” (Document 6), it’s still likely that the people thought of him this way, having the energy and youth to have fought in so many battles and ruling from when he was a young adult, only 20 years old (Document 2). Another of the great parts of his character was that, while some critics believe that his conquest was only for his personal legend and as achievements (Documents 6, 7), Alexander made it “clear that part of his goal in conquering foreign lands was to spread the influence Greek culture” (Document 2), and therefore he did not only fight and conquer for his personal benefit and fame. As a result of his goal, Greek literature and theater remained a prominent influence in the Middle East for nine centuries, and Greek was the official language of Jordan for a full millennium (Document 8); this

should be recognized as an impressive achievement, because he had impacted those millions of people in the Middle East for so many years (Document 3). Because Macedonia was a part of Greece, Alexander decided not to create a whole new empire, but to expand on an already great one; to spread the greatness of *Greece*, not himself. He is similar to Plato's ideal philosopher-king in this way- he wants good to the people, and does not use his power selfishly, just as he did not accept the water that he could have taken because of his authority in "The Story of the Helmet." It is from Alexander's excellent leadership traits and his cultural goal that much of his greatness and fame rises.

Alexander's military conquests and political campaigns allowed him to rule such a large area of so many people. His homeland Macedonia is very small; however, with the strong military foundations of new weapons and disciplined soldiers laid by his father Philip II, Alexander was able to conquer an area almost as large as the Roman empire in only eleven years, from his homeland of Greece to the far east of India (Documents 1, 8). He was unstoppable in his conquests, and defeated the powerful empires of Greece, Persia, and Egypt without any major setbacks. The main reason Alexander was able to create and sustain such a large empire was because of not only his military might but also his method of rule: "Alexander adapted existing administrative structures rather than imposing new ones" (Document 2). Instead of wiping out existing cultures and government systems, he assimilated Greek methods into a conquered territory, without excessive control. As a result, "Greek cities throughout the realm of Alexander often had some degree of self-control" (Document 2), and this extra freedom was a revolutionary idea that Alexander created. Freedom is an ideal that everyone wants, and usually a dictator would rob its subjects of freedom by being tyrannical and imposing strict laws; Alexander did the opposite, leaving the territories to self-rule if they were still under his power and he still had some control over them - this way, the people would be much more content. This differed from Plato's philosopher-king as well- instead of giving the common, uneducated people no power at all, he instead gave them local power in their governments, but he still controlled the overall power over the conquered lands. This can be considered an even better idea than Plato's, because local governments may need to be adapted to their own people and culture, something that the philosopher-king may not take into account; therefore, this idea of rule also contributed to

Alexander's greatness. Lastly, he tried to create equality in his kingdom, even amongst the Persians, their original enemies. "In 324 B.C., he and approximately 80 of his officers married Persian wives, and 10,000 of his soldiers with native wives were granted gifts. Alexander also planned to bring Persians into the army and into the administration of his empire" (Document 2). Although his idea was mostly unsuccessful, it showed the reasonable ideals of equality that we fought for and enjoy today, and it was a demonstration of his brilliant character and ideas to make a much larger percentage of his people (the Persians) content in his empire. In his lifetime, Alexander created over 70 cities, some of which had an enormous effect on history, especially Alexandria of Egypt. These political influences, which had influenced the lives of all the inhabitants of the Middle East and the rest of his empire, again qualifies as "great," especially because he did not use force to prevent the territories from fighting, but instead kept them content by allowing some self-rule (Document 5). Alexander's unusual method of assimilation and accommodation in the areas that he ruled was no simple idea; it played a huge part to his greatness as a political ruler.

Although he was not known for making dramatic economic changes to his empire, some of his actions improved the economy through easier trade. Because a huge area of two million square miles (Document 8) was now under one rule and one language, trade became much easier because international trade between different empires and nations were not necessary; instead, trading was more local and simpler because there were no borders to cross. Alexander simplified trade further by establishing a new currency, "a new coinage system" (Document 2), which would standardize prices and clear up confusions of transactions with currency conversions. This would also open up easier trade routes from Europe and Africa to China and India, without crossing over other empires. Also, having conquered Persia, an "enormously rich prize" (Document 7) and many other territories, Macedonia was not poor, which also contributed to the overall wealth of the empire. His political system of some self-rule probably also allowed cities control over their own trade, without as many restrictions as a dictatorship. The other great part of Alexander's economic system was that the rulers were not known for being overly wealthy, and therefore corrupted by money. Alexander was not well-known for being very rich; nor was he known for spending huge amounts of money for useless items for his personal benefit or

enjoyment. The common people could still control their lives and the economy by themselves. This was one major aspect of Plato's ideal government, and it worked very well, in practice, in Alexander's government. Not only did Alexander create a politically-sound system, he also developed an empire with better trade, and therefore more overall wealth.

Alexander of Macedon was a very unique man who achieved many exceptional accomplishments with his empire. He lead with a skillful nature, to conquer and to spread Greek culture; he had excellent ideas to rule his people in a new way; and he improved trade throughout his whole empire by unifying and standardizing currency. Few people in history can claim these accomplishments. According to D. Cruson's description of the quality of greatness, Alexander is great for having "altered history to a substantial degree" (Document 3): creating such a tremendous impact on thousands of people for so long- even if his empire did fall after only a decade, its impact on all the people was enormous and lasted for several centuries; and, he was not a ruthless dictator that caused mass death and destruction. Based on his remarkable social, political, and economic ideas and methods, Alexander undoubtedly deserves the status of greatness and his title of "Alexander the Great."