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NO: Alexander Wasn’t So Great After All

I don’t believe that Alexander the “Great” deserves his title, because of his neglection of his subjects as a king and statesman. Yes, there is much historical evidence of his militaristic achievements, as he had a kingdom stretching from Western Greece to Eastern India. He is certainly one of the best military generals this world has ever seen, at the very least of his time. His strategic sense and militaristic intellect was extraordinary, exceeding all other generals during his lifetime. However, the way he treated his subjects and the lands he conquered was subpar. Sure, he made some efforts to incorporate foreign subjects into his military and administrations, but he did not do it for the benefit of his kingdom. He only did those things for his own militaristic gain. He only wanted to increase the size of his military, as well as put his conquered subjects to use in laying siege to more lands. There is no doubt at all that Alexander was great in the military sense, but there is also evidence of how poor of a king he was.

Alexander abandoned Macedonia to go fight in an unnecessary war, leaving Greece and Macedonia in the care of Antipater. Alexander also made Antipater the hegemon of the League of Corinth, which was an alliance of Greek states that was created by Alexander’s father, Philip II, in 338 BC. Upon the dismissal of his home state, he spent many lives, time, and resources on unnecessary sieges. There were also times he didn’t spend enough time ensuring that he truly had been victorious. He was careless, allowing the enemy to regroup in later years, and he would have to fight another battle that he could have avoided by not declaring a false victory. For example, when he allowed the Persian king, Darius, and his commander escape, ignoring him so that he could conquer more land, but then fighting them again two years later. He could have saved so many more of his men’s lives if he had finished the battle off by hunting down Darius and killing him. Instead, he just wanted to keep on conquering land, which would later cost him. Alexander had also dismissed the needs of his home state, only caring about them if they had soldiers to send to him on his conquests. Whether or not that put a strain on Macedonia’s resources was none of his concern, so long as he had the manpower to conquer state after state. His home could have been in danger of invaders with a lack of defensive forces to protect them, because all of their defenses were with Asia with Alexander, who was only focused on fulfilling his own personal needs.

The biggest reason Alexander left home for conquering was for personal gain, because he wanted to surpass his father in every aspect that he could. Alexander had always resented his father and his achievements, and had always wanted to be a better military general than he ever was. However, this drove Alexander to do many more things than just build a massive kingdom across the globe. For example, he likely manufactured a lot of Macedonian historical records and stories about his achievements. A well-known example of these heavily exaggerated stories is the *Alexander Romance*, which had a lot of influence on future literature and cultures. A couple examples of these preposterous stories were how he encountered a tribe of headless men, and how he went on an adventure to discover the Water of Life and ended up turning into a mermaid. Because of these crazy stories, Alexander has shown up in various cultures, such as the Hebrew, Persian, and Western cultures as various figures of high status or importance.

Another way that Alexander attempted to prove himself better than his father is that he tried to enforce a Persian custom called *proskynesis*. *Proskynesis* is the process in which one would prostrate themselves before the king in an act of loyalty and submission to his rule. However, the act was considered a method of worship, so many Greeks did not approve of committing this act. While the Greeks worship many gods and dead heroes, it was another thing to worship someone who was still alive. Many didn’t follow through with Alexander’s desire to perform this social act, and Callisthenes would stop this ritual from being enforced. Alexander later punished Callisthenes for this act with death. While no one knows exactly why Alexander wanted *proskynesis* to become a part of Greek custom, people have formed theories. One theory is that he only wanted to form a similar social custom that was shared by the Macedonians, Greeks, and Persians. As if to find a way to further secure the unification of his kingdom and to ensure that his subjects would accept him as their king. Some people say that he tried to introduce it because he knew that there were religious connotations that came with the act, therefore trying to declare himself a deity to his people. This further proves that he was more concerned with his own personal or militaristic gain than the good of his own kingdom, because he should have known that it was wrong to believe that someone, especially yourself, is divine while they are alive.

To expand on how he was not as concerned with his kingdom as a great king would have been, he also did not appoint foreigners to his administration for the sake of racial equality. Sure, he appointed Mazaeus as satrap after the battle of Gaugamela, but a foreigner never handled the military or finances. The only reason he appointed foreigners to his administration was so that his administration could work efficiently, because it was the locals who knew the language, knowledge, and geography. There were also few instances where foreigners were scattered consistently among the armies. For example, there was an instance where Persians and Macedonians were in a phalanx together, but Alexander did not put them together for equality. Alexander had also created a mass-marriage ceremony between the men of his army and many Persian noble women. He did not care for the displeasure or feelings of his men, which is proven when Alexander died, and all his men divorced their Persian wives except for Seleucus. It was believed that the reasoning behind this interracial mass-wedding was to reduce the threat of rebellion by the Persians. It was certain that this mass-marriage was not because of a sort of fusion policy, because then the Macedonian and Greek women would have married Persian noble men. Also, no Persian men were given honors at the following ceremony. Another instance where equality was not the priority was at the banquet in Opis, 324 BC. Alexander prayed for harmony and blessings between the Macedonians and Persians, yet the Macedonians were all seated closest to Alexander. This shows that Alexander still had believed the Macedonians to be superior in race and power to the rest of them. The only reason he made that prayer was to ease tensions as much as he could, so that he could further his conquests with as little dissensions as possible.

Another way that Alexander has proven that his kingdom was simply a tool to him is how Antipater and Parmenion advised Alexander to have a son and heir to the throne before leaving to conquer Asia. Alexander had decided not to listen to their advice, and began to take over Asia. If he had truly cared about the outcome of his kingdom, he would have waited until he had a proper heir to the throne, so that if something were to happen to him, the kingdom would live on with a proper king. Also before Alexander marched on Asia, Darius III had offered to Alexander all territories to the west of the Euphrates river, and then become an ally to Darius. Parmenion said that it would be within the kingdom’s best interests, but Alexander refused it. There was another situation where Alexander ordered all exiles to come back to their native cities with his Exiles Decree of 324 BC. It was believed that Alexander enforced this decree because he did not want any political enemies to rally them together and move against him. However, the mercenary groups formed by these exiles had proven to be no threat to his empire, militaristic or political. Antipater also had the powers to use force to coerce unwilling cities to follow through with his decree. According to the principles of the League of Corinth, the decree was illegal because it infringed upon the autonomy of the Greek *polis*. When Alexander died, none of the Greek states but one ever actually enforced the decree.

Many historians only consider Alexander famous because, at the time of their evaluations of his achievements, it was a matter of how many people you slaughtered and homes you destroyed to decide how great of a person you really were. Alexander was a king who kept his kingdom in a state of constant warfare, focusing on how many battles he could win and how much land he could conquer, rather than on how he could secure is kingdom’s success in the long-term. None of his actions were to ensure his kingdom would survive and prosper. Instead, he mostly acted on purely military and personal desires. There is no doubt that Alexander had come to own quite a massive territory, but at what cost to his kingdom? So many people had to die for him to be “great”, especially his own soldiers in battles that he didn’t need to fight in. As a military general, Alexander deserves to be called great. But in any other sense, especially as a king, he does not deserve such a title.