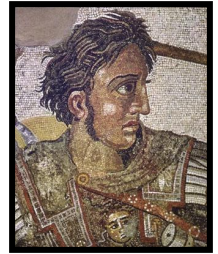


Does Alexander the Great Deserve His Reputation?



Alexander the Great was one of the most famous people from the ancient world. Primarily known as a military general, he succeeded in creating the largest empire the world had ever seen, at least for his time. So how great was he? The question is more important than just comparing him to other famous people. It also asks us to think about the standards we use to judge our “heroes.” If someone is famous for winning a particular battle, does that mean we also accept the rest of his/her actions as important? And what do we consider important? In other words, choosing “heroes” sometimes says more about us today – and the values we hold – than it does about those individuals from the past.

The following statements are excerpts from historians’ different interpretations on this matter. As you read through them, identify whether the statement supports or rejects the question.

<i>Check one of the boxes for each statement. →</i>	Yes	No
1. Alexander believed the best way to spread Greek culture and civilization was by founding cities throughout Asia. At the outset the leaders in these cities were the Macedonians and the Greek soldiers, who conducted the democratic form of self-government. At the same time the future leaders were being educated ‘in Greek letters and in Macedonian weaponry.’		
2. Alexander grew up in a kingdom which was continually at war, and he said it was his duty to lead the Macedonians in war not from a distance but in the forefront of the fighting.		
3. Alexander himself was not above embellishing his own life and achievements.		
4. Alexander’s [mission] was his father’s plan of punishing the Persians for their sacrilegious acts of 150 years ago... the king would soon disregard the [mission] for personal reasons, causing discontent amongst the army with him and also his countrymen back home.		
5. As King of Macedonia his rations were the same as theirs and he shared all their dangers and hardships; and he enjoyed the same festivals and drinking parties as they did. He led them not by order but by persuasion, and a crucial element in that persuasion was that he should always tell the truth, and they should know that he was telling them the truth.		
6. Deeds were attributed to Alexander which were unhistorical, such as his encounters with the tribe of headless men, his flying exploits in a basket borne by eagles, and the search for the Water of Life, which ended with his transformation into a mermaid.		
7. Does a man deserve to be called ‘The Great’ who was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of his own men and for the unnecessary slaughter of native peoples?		
8. Had Alexander only been a general, his [title] may well have been deserved. But he was a king, too, and hence military exploits form only a percentage of what Alexander did, or did not do.		
9. He admired Aristotle as the leading exponent of Greek intellectual inquiry, and he had a natural yearning for philosophical discussion and understanding.		
10. He knew on his landing in Asia that he must set up his own Kingdom of Asia and obtain the willing cooperation of his subjects.		
11. He made the same demands on his Commanders and his men (as himself). They had committed themselves to following him when they had sworn the oath of allegiance, to be loyal and have the same friend and enemy of their king. If a man should be killed in his service, Alexander assured them that his death would bring him glory for ever and his place of burial would be famous.		
12. He spoke of the victorious career of Philip [king of Macedonia (359-336 B.C.) and father of Alexander] as conferring “glory” both on him and on “the community of Macedonians.”		

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13. He was the inspirer and often the judge of competition in others. He alone promoted soldiers and officers, awarded gifts for acts of courage, bestowed gold crowns on successful commanders.		
14. His belief in the superiority of Greek civilization was absolute. His most treasured possession was <i>The Iliad</i> of Homer, and he had plays sent to him in Asia, together with poems and history.		
15. His decision to have the different races working together was to make the local government function as efficiently as possible, and had nothing to do with promoting racial equality.		
16. His emotions were very strong. His love for his mother was such that he sent her letter and gifts to her constantly. His loyalty to his friends of his own generation was sometimes carried to a fault.		
17. How 'great' is a king who often endangered his own life and the lives of his men? Or who towards the end of his life was an alcoholic, megalomaniac, and believed in his own divinity?		
18. How 'great' is a king who prefers constant warfare... or whose temper on occasion led him to murder his friends?		
19. It was plain stupidity on his part if he thought his men would embrace the custom [genuflection] with relish, and his action clearly shows that he had lost touch with his army and the religious beliefs on which he had been raised.		
20. No Macedonian festival was complete without contests in such arts as dramatic performance, recitation of poetry, proclamation as a herald, and musicianship, and in athletic events which on occasion included armed combat.		
21. Of the personal qualities of Alexander, the brilliance, the range and the quickness of his intellect are remarkable, especially in his conduct of warfare. In generalship no one has surpassed him.		
22. On the basis of his military conquests... historians who measured success by the number of body-bags used, deemed him great.		
23. Significant also was Alexander's attempt to adopt the Persian custom of genuflection at his court... a social act which involved prostrating oneself before the person of the king in an act of subservience, and thereby accepting his lordship.		
24. The answer seems relatively straightforward: from an early age he was an achiever, he conquered territories on a superhuman scale, he established an empire until his times unrivalled, and he died young, at the height of his power.		
25. The historical Alexander has faded into the invincible general, the great leader, explorer and king... even if this meant distortion of the truth, and history [changed] to legend.		
26. The originality of his intellect was apparent in his development of the Indus, Tigris, and the Euphrates as waterways of commerce and his reorganization of the irrigation of Mesopotamia.		
27. There is a difference between the mythical Alexander, which for the most part we have today, and the historical.		
28. There is no question that Alexander was the most powerful individual of his time, and we must recognize that. In just a decade he conquered the vast Persian Empire that had been around for two centuries, and he amassed a fortune so vast that it is virtually impossible to comprehend.		
29. Was the waste of human lives, the incalculable damage to foreign peoples, institutions, livelihoods, and lands, not to mention the future of the empire, and the loyalty of the army, worth it?		
30. We have also seen the various [military campaigns] which Alexander undertook and which were often length, costly, and questionable. Ultimately no real gain came from this except... his damaged ego had been repaired; the cost in time, manpower, and reputation mattered little.		