

Let me ask you a question. What would we say about a manager who took charge of Macclesfield Town - currently near the bottom of the bottom division in the Football League - and in four years, got Macclesfield promoted all the way up to the Premier League, and then in the next eight years, won five Premier League titles (coming runner-up the other three years), four FA Cups, and three Champions League titles? We'd have to say that that manager was the greatest manager of all time, wouldn't we? Well, today we are going to talk about someone who in 12 years did roughly the equivalent in terms of conquering other countries as our imaginary manager did in terms of winning trophies, and as a result has good claims to be the greatest war leader that ever existed. We are talking about ALEXANDER THE GREAT.



Alexander the Great was born in 356 BC, which you'll remember means 356 years before Jesus was born. Alexander's father, PHILIP II OF MACEDON (pronounced 'Mass - a - don'), was the king of the northern Greek kingdom of MACEDON. Here is a map of Greece at the time Philip II died to help you understand where Macedon was located:



Philip II died when Alexander was 20 years old. Alexander himself died when he was only 32 years old. So Alexander was king of Macedon for 12 years, and in those 12 years he turned the world upside down, earning the title 'the Great'. He led the Macedonian army to military victory after military victory. First he brought the rest of Greece under control. Then he headed south to Egypt, conquering that. He founded the city of ALEXANDRIA (which is still there - it's not that nice a place (I've been there) because it is just so huge and busy) and

installed his close friend PTOLEMY (pronounced 'Toll - uh - mee') as ruler of Egypt. Ptolemy and his successors would rule Egypt until the death of QUEEN CLEOPATRA in 30 BC - so about 300 years, which is an amazingly long period of time for one family to rule over a foreign country. Then Alexander turned his attentions to the country on the left of the above map - PERSIA, ruled by KING DARIUS III.

Alexander invaded and conquered Persia (which covered modern day Turkey, Iraq and Iran) and then kept pressing further East, even invading India. It seemed that Alexander wanted to conquer the entire world - it's said that when a friend of his said that there were likely to be other worlds in the universe, other than the Earth, Alexander wept because he had not even conquered one world and now he was being told there were even more worlds still to conquer (so Alexander wanted to go into space as well!). But by the time Alexander got to India, his army was tired and scared and refused to go on. So Alexander gave up on the idea of conquering the whole of India and moved back West and closer home with his troops. But then he was faced with an even more serious revolt when he told his army that he would allow the old and the injured in his army to go back to Macedon to tell everyone just how amazingly well Alexander and his army had done, the soldiers thought he was telling them that he was sending them all back home. So the soldiers said, 'Why are you sending us away? What - you don't want to be around us anymore? Fine - sod you, then: we'll go home and leave you all alone here.' Alexander gave a stirring speech to his soldiers to get them to be friends with him again. The speech is in this clip, which says it might be the greatest speech in history:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIKJDwViNKs>

Now that Alexander and his soldiers had made up, Alexander started planning new campaigns of conquest - but then, all of a sudden, while he was resting up in the city of BABYLON (pronounced 'Bab - ee - lon'), he died. No one knows exactly how. It seems to have involved drinking some wine and then falling into a fever and then dying. But he was dead, at the age of 32. This was the size of Alexander's empire when he died:

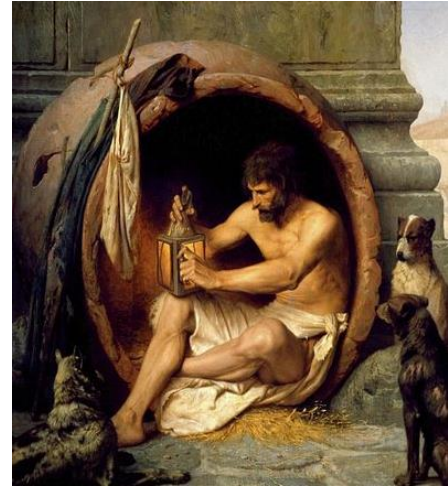


Needless to say, the empire fell apart soon after Alexander's death, as Alexander's generals fought over who would be in charge. And from 200 BC onwards, a new empire would rise up, taking over most of Europe, North Africa, and Turkey. This was THE ROMAN EMPIRE,



and we will talk about it another day. But Alexander's name would be remembered forever - and films are still made about him (one, made in 1956, starred a young RICHARD BURTON playing Alexander - it's not very good though; nor is a more recent one, as the actor playing Alexander in that film was drunk most of the time and didn't know what he was doing). Here are a couple of funny stories about Alexander, which also helped to make him famous.

First, Alexander visited a very clever Greek man called DIOGENES (pronounced 'Die - oj - e - knees'), who lived a very odd life - he often ran around town naked, lived in a big jar rather than a house, and would do things like go around with a lamp in the middle of the day saying that he was looking for an honest man. Alexander took a liking to him and wanted to do something nice for him. So Alexander asked him, 'Is there anything I can do for you?' Diogenes, faced with this chance to ask for whatever he wanted - loads of gold, a big house, honours - simply said, 'Get out of my light!'. But Alexander was very pleased with this answer, and said if he were not Alexander, he would like to be Diogenes instead.



Second, when Alexander was conquering the land that is now occupied by Turkey, he visited a town called 'Gordium'. This was the capital city of a country called Phrygia (pronounced 'Frig - ee - ah'). Long ago, an oracle (something that tells the future) had said that the first man who drove an ox-cart into the Phrygian capital city would become the king of Phrygia. And a man called GORDIAS then drove an ox-cart into the city, and was made king. (I imagine the capital city was then named after him - and that's why it was called 'Gordium' when Alexander visited it.) Gordias' ox-cart was as a result regarded as something quite special and ended up being tied up to a post in the city with a set of knots that were really entangled, so it was impossible to see how to undo them. This set of knots came to be known as the GORDIAN KNOT. A later oracle said that whoever untied the Gordian Knot would conquer the whole of Asia. So you'll understand that when Alexander got to Gordium he was very keen on trying his hand at untying the Gordian Knot and putting himself in line to conquer the whole of Asia. He had a look, and thought there was no way he was going to be able to untie such a knotty series of knots. But then he had an idea, and drew his sword, and cut the knot in two! Ever since then, a real simple solution to a really difficult problem is known as 'cutting the Gordian Knot'.

