

The Legacy of Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great. The name alone inspires images of a man with a massive army at his back, his face laden with both the burden and the right to sweep the world and bring it under his rule. During his time, and for centuries afterwards, Alexander the Great, son of the infamous Phillip of Macedon, was hailed as one of the great, if not the greatest military commanders of all time. One particular side effect that Alexander's sweeping conquests inspired admiration in the military leaders that followed after him, though he may have also made them feel a bit of status anxiety. Scipio Africanus, and his Carthaginian counterpart Hannibal Barca were both recorded to have felt a slight sense of inadequacy at being unable to achieve the same level of military prowess as Alexander. Hannibal, in particular, can be seen as having felt status anxiety when he compared himself to Alexander. According to classical accounts, he felt that Alexander would not have been defeated in the Battle of Zama, despite the superior tactics and numbers of Scipio's Roman legions. It was said that he believed that, if he could have beaten Scipio during that critical battle, he could claim the same level of military genius as Alexander. Julius Caesar, often heralded as the greatest man to have come from ancient Rome, also felt pressured by the myth of Alexander. Roman society, the military in particular, often felt status anxiety whenever the topic of Alexander the Great was brought up. Due to his status, Caesar often felt a great deal of pressure to at least appear to have the same status of greatness as the fabled Macedonian ruler. Julius Caesar often said that he felt as if the citizens of Rome wanted him to lead the city, along with their Italian allies, to totally dominate the world. Caesar had managed to expand the empire beyond the average Roman's wildest dreams at the time. However, according to popular legend, it was said that Julius Caesar wept when he realized he would never achieve the same greatness as that of Alexander. Caesar Augustus, the first emperor of Rome, is sometimes said to have felt even worse than his famous uncle. Whereas Caesar experienced status anxiety from contending with the myth and legend of Alexander, Augustus had to achieve victories and glories equivalent to both the Macedonian conqueror and his late uncle. The pressure, however, did wonders for his career as dictator of Rome, followed by his later career as the emperor. Some analysts and historians believe that Augustus focused more on becoming worthy of the name Caesar since most of his actions were concentrated on making improvements or changes to Rome's political and social structure. His military achievements, while seen by the public as worthy of Julius Caesar, would not have been viewed as being on the same level as Alexander's. Napoleon Bonaparte, perhaps one of the few generals that can be considered in the same league as Alexander, often compared himself unfavorably with the Macedonian. By most accounts, Napoleon was a man who was supremely confident about his talents and skills. He possessed great faith in his ability to command the French army from victory to victory. However, he was once said to have uncharacteristically humbled himself when some of the people around him compared him to Alexander. Some stories claim that he was disappointed, for he could not even begin to conquer the world, whereas the Macedonian came so close to total world domination. Modern history also records some leaders who aspired for the same glory enjoyed by the ancient warrior-leaders. Some accounts claim that Adolf Hitler often dreamt of leading Nazi Germany to conquer the world, much like Alexander led the Macedonians. By this time, one of the prevalent myths about Alexander was that he was intent on conquering the world, purifying it by the sword. In some ways, Hitler saw a reflection of his own mission of reclaiming Aryan supremacy. By patterning himself after history's greatest general, he was, of course exercising nothing more than self-aggrandizement because Hitler can hardly be considered a military man. In the end, it is difficult to ascertain just how much influence the facts and the myths around Alexander the Great affect modern military commanders. Perhaps, in some ways, they still feel status anxiety when their work is compared to the Macedonians, but there is no certainty in that. The only concrete influence, really, is that any military commander that goes into an expansive campaign is going to be compared to Alexander, as a testament to the great general's legacy.

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