



Alexander the Great

Jacob Abbott

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Alexander the Great is part of Makers of History, a 19th century biography series by two brothers--Jacob and John S.C. Abbott. Reprinted by Canon Press, these biographies have been edited and brought up-to-date for readers twelve and up. Not only are these editions given vintage style paperback covers, but they also include introductions that explain where these men and women fit into the timeline of history. "Abbott's account of Alexander's life reads like a Greek tragedy. We are reminded of Jesus' admonition, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26a). Alexander gained the world, but at what cost? Abbott's book is an easy but fascinating read, providing insights and details into the life of one of history's most prominent, yet puzzling, figures. For those who enjoy history and have a love of reading, this book is a delightful treasure." --Patch Blakey, executive director, Association of Classical & Christian Schools

Alexander the Great Details

Date : Published (first published 1849)

ISBN :

Author : Jacob Abbott

Format : Kindle Edition

Genre : History, Biography, Historical, Nonfiction, Ancient History

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From Reader Review Alexander the Great for online ebook

Eric says

Moral of the story: don't get drunk and kill your friends. Aside from the unusual grammar lessons, it was a good general review of Alexander the Great's conquests and demise.

Carol Bakker says

While this isn't a page-turner, it wasn't a grind. There was a see-saw of "I knew this" and "Didn't know that" facts. I knew that Aristotle was Alexander's tutor. I didn't know that Demosthenes was a vociferous enemy of Philip of Macedon and of Alexander.

Rank and file is a familiar phrase, but it wasn't until I read *"The men were arranged in lines, one behind the other, and all facing the enemy — sixteen lines and a thousand in each line, or, as it is expressed in military phrase, a thousand in rank and sixteen in file."* that I attached a picture of rows and columns to those words. I had assumed rank had to do with hierarchy.

Occasionally Abbott takes an excursion which delights me:

The desert has, in some degree, the sublimity of the ocean. There is the same boundless expanse, the same vast, unbroken curve of the horizon, the same tracklessness, the same solitude. There is, in addition, a certain profound and awful stillness and repose, which imparts to it a new element of impressiveness and grandeur. Its dread and solemn silence is far more imposing and sublime than the loudest thunders of the sea.

Regarding Alexander? He was unable to survive his success due to the excesses of his lifestyle.

Tom says

Originally published in 1876, Jacob Abbott's biography tracks the rise and moral fall of Alexander the Great. Suitable for middle school.

Andrea Hickman Walker says

This was very interesting. I had no idea that Alexander was such an unpleasant person on top of being the conqueror of just about the whole known world. The only decent people, as far as I could tell, were the old general he had murdered on what appears to be an utterly ridiculous pretext, and Darius-king-of-Persia's mother.

As I listened to the LibriVox version, I have no way of knowing if the book contained much in the way of references or notes, but I very much doubt the accuracy of some of the material. What is the likelihood that the dialogue mentioned was actually recorded (accurately or otherwise) and safely transmitted? I also found the tone a little patronising. There were, however, many interesting asides (such as the fact that the word 'meander' was originally the name of a river that did precisely that).

Fred says

As far as a history of what he accomplished and a retelling of the battle tactics, strategies and all that stuff, this is not the book that you're looking for. This is a straight up biography dealing with Alexander's character and his person alone for the most part.

It's interesting that the writer, publishing this book well over a hundred years ago, believed that Alexander let power go to his head and basically makes the claim that he was enamored with himself and his own power, believing in the end that he was a deity and better than everyone else wholeheartedly. The prevailing belief today among historians is that he began to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder after a decade or more of constantly fighting battle after battle.

Either way, it's clear that whatever his accomplishments, Alexander was pretty much a dick. Even being his friend and having saved his life in battle with your own hand wasn't necessarily protection against him picking up a javelin in a drunken rage and impaling you on it at a banquet. Can't say that really embodies the characteristics that come to mind when I think of a leader.

Lauren Schumacher says

The last biography I read was about another Great (Catherine). It took me months to read--months and months. The minutia of information was disabling; it was like reading the minutes of Parliament, but, like, Russian Parliament. The tedium was so excruciating for a novel-lover like me that it took me five years to attempt another biography. This book, by contrast, was too short, too light--it barely wet my whistle.

Now, the fault lies partially in my research. I didn't know when I started this that it was as old as it was, nor did I realize that it was intended primarily as part of a shallow introduction for young adults. My bad--I was bound to be disappointed. I was looking for something nuanced (Alexander the Gay-Mo was sadly ignored), but that's a shame-on-me for failing to research my options.

The most storied anecdotes from Alexander's life were visited, forming a rough biography of his person rather than his military strategies or campaigns. I appreciated the focus on the man behind the sword, but his life's story was colored rather crudely by the broad brushstrokes of an overtly moralizing author. Abbott's intent was clearly to simplify Alexander's life and contextualize it in modernity for young children. It was not unlike a Biblical allegory, where all the drinking and sex and slaughter and ritual weirdness has been omitted to enhance a central moral, with the consequence that the actions seem totally strange and disconnected. In essence, the complexity of Alexander the Man was wrung out by hands eager to edify.

The two biggest questions I had before I began reading were "how did a young man conquer a third of the planet?" and "how did he raise such an army at such an age?" I found the answer to the first question not in

this book, but in *A Song of Ice and Fire*: Alexander Theon-ed Eurasia's Winterfell. It takes centuries of diligence to build an empire, but an unprepared city can be knocked over as easily as a domino. The second question remains unanswered because the author gives no insights into life before Christ whatsoever. Abbott was too busy judging Alexander through his own modern lens to answer the question of how Alexander's contemporaries judged him, which (for me) is an essential question a biographer must answer. A historical biography is useless without contextualizing the subject's life and actions within their own time...sooo this biography was useless.

Inihebe says

I enjoyed it thoroughly

Dayla says

It would appear that Alexander the Great was only "great" the first few years as a leader after his father died. When he went into Thebes for example, he let all of the people with any skill or talent (such as poets or artists) go free, in addition to letting all the priests go free as well. He spared Darius' wife and children. Darius was Alexander's nemesis.

But in the end, too fat, too dissipated, and too desperate, he lost all of his judgement about people and countries. After 25 years straight without a break of war, one of his captains asked if going in to yet another country, India, might not be the best thing; and couldn't the men that were following him go home and see their wives and kids before they died. "No way!" said Alexander.

New name: Alexander: Great for only 2 years

Misanthropist says

Wow, creo que es la primera vez que termino un libro de este largo en un día (en 24 horas, digamos). xD ¡Eso demuestra lo mucho que estoy jugando al Maple, jajaja! Escuché las 6 horas de este libro en apenas dos días. o.o Recordemos que escuché esto gracias a que lo encontré gratis en Librivox, grabado por una niña de voz bien agradable y acento británico bastante entendible. :) Esta fue la primera vez que logré escuchar un audiolibro de principio a fin. :o

El libro me estaba pareciendo entretenido e interesante, pero terminó disgustándome por dos cosas:

1. Que las aventuras de Alejandro se acaban cuando muere el rey persa que tanto persiguió y todo lo demás que hizo el autor optó por dejarlo en el aire y resumirlo.
2. El tono condescendiente y casi ofensivo con que el autor termina tratando a Alejandro, llegando incluso a llamarlo un simple "robber" al final. ¬_¬ No soy experta en biografías ni muchísimo menos - de hecho, esta debe ser como la segunda en la vida que "leo" (escucho... @_@), si es que no la primera -, tampoco soy experta en Alejandro Magno y quizás este caballero tenía razón al hablar pestes de él y de su carácter, pero encuentro ridículo que un autor juzgue al personaje sobre el que está escribiendo, critique prácticamente todo

lo que hace y lo trate mal. :P ¡Si no lo admiras, al menos, sé objetivo! :S

Pero, bueno. Fue una buena compañía para las largas horas de entrenamiento y Maple Galaxy y whatnot. ^^

Wow, I think it's the first time I finish a book of this length in one day (24 hours, let's say). xD That goes to show how much I'm playing Maple, hahaha! I listened to the 6 hours of this book in barely two days. o.o Let's all remember that I could listen to this thanks to Librivox, and it was recorded by a girl with a very nice voice and a beautiful British accent that was quite understandable. :) This was the first time I could listen to an audiobook from start to finish. :o

The book was quite entertaining and interesting, but two things ended up annoying me:

1. That Alexander's adventures end when the Persian king that he chased so much died and everything else that Alexander did was left out and summarized because the author thought it was OK to do that.
2. The condescending and almost offensive tone with which the author ends up treating Alexander, going as far as to call him a mere "robber" in the end. ¬_¬ I'm not an expert when it comes to biographies or anything (in fact, this must be the second one I've "read" (listened... @_@) in my life, if not the first), I'm also no expert when it comes to Alexander the Great and maybe this gentleman was right when he talks about him and his character like he was trash, but I find it ludicrous that an author should judge the character about whom he's writing, criticizing almost everything he does and treating him badly. :P If you don't admire him, at least, be objective! :S

But, oh well. It was a good company for the long hours of grinding and Maple Galaxy and whatnot. ^^

Tim Hatfield says

Listened to this on librivox. General and story like treatment of the history. Learned some things about Romans and Greeks.

In the end Alexander became what he sought to conquer (Persian way of life).

A good skim of the highlights of his life and times. I enjoyed it

Kay says

Alexander was a great man in everything but his character which deteriorated in the later part of his years. He even died a common death. The book exposes the reader to the historical facts of Alexander's life in an interesting way and the ones that were more of a legend were inconspicuously stated

Kiran Kumili says

I would say that this is the best book that I have read up to date in this year. The author was quite successful in bringing about the chronological events of Alexander, right from his birth to his death, in very simple English, that could be understood by people who yearn to learn about history, across the world.

Alexander (B.C., 356-336), son of King Philip of Macedonia, the northern province of the then Grecian territory, has been a prodigal son right from his childhood. He was under the able tutorship of Aristotle until the age of sixteen, but soon took keen interest in accompanying his father, in wars. His inborn traits of leadership, camaraderie, nobleness, organizing skills, ferociousness, and great thirst to conquer the world has made him one of the greatest warriors of ancient history, which is narrated in every history book of the world with great awe.

He was highly successful in conquering each and every nation in his voyage towards the East of Macedonia, with an army as small as just 50,000. His empire consisted of almost all kingdoms of Thebes, Thessaly, Athens, Sparta, entire Persia, Egypt, Gaza, Tyre, Afghanistan and some parts of northern India. All this, just within the age of 32 years. In his great voyage of ruthless conquests, he plundered each and every kingdom which opposed him but treated all those who surrendered with great nobility and kindness. His main target of capturing his great rival King Darius of Persia could be achieved but he repents later for being responsible for the fall of such a great kingdom. He, over a period of time, when he reached the age of around 28 years, yielded to worldly pleasures like wealth, wine and women which led to his downfall in character and great qualities, for which he was adored, worldwide. At one stage, after conquering Egypt, he even went to the extent of declaring himself as the descendant of God Jupiter and wished to be called as Son of God.

He ultimately loses all his friends and those who accompanied/assisted/protected him throughout his great voyage due to his vices. At one point even his great army refused to go with him further, as they lost confidence in his leadership and nobleness. This morally degraded Alexander to a great extent and he one night, put himself to intense alcohol consumption, after which he falls terribly ill, and dies due to multiple organ failure, and mostly confidence to live further. His vast kingdom broke into pieces of independent kingdoms after his death, only to remember him as the greatest and cruelest thief of the world.

Positives: A great book of knowledge of Alexander's history, beautifully written, describing each and every phase of his life in minutest of detail. The reader would not like to put off the book until he finishes it at one go. The adventures of young Alexander and his speeches are very enticing to know. One gets to know about many ancient places, towns, cities and terms of history, which are regarded as the marks of great civilizations, wars and kings in those days. A great learning experience to young and old as to how the fire in one's belly to achieve something can get him to the target with careful and able planning, organizing, directing and controlling one's emotions, skills, environment and resources available to him or her. At the same time, Alexander's deplorable end teaches one, as to how arrogance and power, can bring him down in no time, however great he could be! A must read by every young person and get inspired by the magnificent traits of Alexander the Great.

Negatives: The author suddenly ended Alexander's voyage with the death of King Darius. His further adventures beyond Persia into India were not described. There seemed to be equal interesting and fascinating facts to be revealed in the Indian subcontinent. That would have justified his complete voyage in a single stretch.

My rating is 4.75 out of 5

Srinadh says

nothing to say I read it to learn about Alexander 3

Gaurav Singh says

Alexander earned well the name and reputation of the Great.

One cannot help applauding the extraordinary energy of his genius, though at times it feels like one shall condemn the selfish and cruel ends to which his life was devoted.

For me, i would consider him a robber. Robber on so vast a scale, that mankind, in contemplating his career, have generally lost sight of the wickedness of his crimes in their admiration of the enormous magnitude of the scale on which they were perpetrated.

I was mainly focussing on the plans he put forward along with his generals to rule the world. Gradually, my thoughts provoked me to change my intention with which i started. In the last few chapters, i was more into finding the reasons behind his diminish.

Glad, that i was able to find the reason. It was the change in Alexander's character which let to the destruction of his vast empire.

Upon the death of Darius, his character changed. He lost his simplicity, temperance, moderation, and the sense of justice which characterised his early years.

He adopted the luxurious manners of persians.

This caused mortification and chagrin to the officers of his army. Many of the generals were older to himself and better able to resist these temptations to luxury, effeminacy and vice.

On the other hand, many of the younger officer followed Alexander's example, and became as vain, as irregular, and as fond of vicious indulgence as he.

Many of his general where dealt with iron fist and were executed by Alexander because of the fear that they were planning to depose him.

It was the Indus river post which Alexander's army resisted moving any further and proposed a plan to return back to Macedon.

Alexander had to agree. On his way back, Alexander married Statira, the oldest daughter of persian king Darius and encouraged similar marriages between Macedonian officers and persian maidens.

While returning to Babylon, his friend Hephaestion dies by disease produced by dissipation and vice.

In Babylon, Alexander drank until his faculties and his strength failed and he sank down to floor.

A violent fever intervened and he dies.

When he was about to die, he did not announced his successor. Probably, he never wished to have a well-settled government in the countries he conquered, to encourage order and peace, and industry among them and introduce system and regularity in human affairs, so as to leave the world in a better condition than he found it.

Alexander's last wish was that his body should be taken to the temple of Jupiter Ammon, in the Egyptian oasis where he had been pronounced the son of god.

A very large and elaborately constructed carriage was built to convey the boy. Carriage was covered in gold. From Babylon to the eastern frontiers of Egypt, a distance of thousand miles was perhaps as grand a plan of

interment as was ever formed. It was something like a parallel in the removal of Napoleon's body from St. Helena to Paris.

The body, never reached its intended destination. Ptolemy, forced for some reason that the body should be interred in the city of Alexandria.

A great monument was erected over the spot where Alexander's body was deposited. The monument remained standing for fifteen hundred years, but all vestiges of it have now disappeared.

Floris Wolswijk says

Greatness comes at a price. This is what we can learn from the biography of Alexander the Great by Jacob Abbott, if we only had one short sentence to review the book. There are many biographies written about Alexander the Great and each has a different focus. Jacob Abbott decided to keep it relatively simple, short and with a focus on the character of Alexander. His histories of warfare are mentioned, as well his rise to power, but both in shorter detail. If you want to learn about the personality traits of the greatest conquer in history, this is the book for you.

As a young boy Alexander was raised in relative luxury. On the one hand he was the son of Philip III of Macedon, born into incredible wealth. On the other hand he was trained to physical excellence, did not bother with exclusive food or other displays of wealth. He was trained in warfare and from early on learned how to be a leader. One of the examples is how he tamed his horse Bucephalus. At only 10 years old he read the body language of the horse, figured out that it was distressed by all the attention, his own shadow and the nervous people around him, and then took the necessary actions to calm him down. In this he achieved to tame the horse, a feat that none of the horsemen (all double or more his age) had been able to achieve.

After the tragic death of his father, Alexander became the leader of his people. He did not try and change the way the country was being run. He did not replace the men that had advised his father, but embraced the knowledge they possessed and respected their authority. By being humble he quickly gained the trust of his advisors and was embraced as the true leader of his people.

Even with his enemies he had the same understanding. He was very successful in warfare and conquered many countries. In conquering a city he would always offer the opportunity for the people to join him before he would crash down upon them. Even when a military confrontation had preceded, people who openly supported him were spared from slavery, as were religious ministers and poets. When capturing the family of one of his greatest enemies (Darius), he left them to live on in their wealth. Overlooking the sheer brutality of his force (Alexander very probably is responsible for the most murders in the history of mankind) there was a sense of justice to his actions.

Justice was complemented by the sheer focus and determination he possessed. His goal was to rule the known world (to which he succeeded with grace). In effecting this goal he stuck to one distinct military configuration, the phalanx. In the phalanx the men walked side to side, carrying a shield on the left, and a long spear on the right. In that time this mass of people became impenetrable as the shields could be used to become one massive unit. Both his focus in battle and in strategy can be compared to the hedgehog concept as proposed by Jim Collins in Good to Great. The hedgehog concept states that a company (or person) is best not to have many different goals, tactics and strategies, but to focus on one thing only. By laying a focus on one thing only, a person is able to excel and become the best, as did Alexander in conquering the world by using the phalanx.

Things start going downhill after the first invasion of Asia Minor. He rejects the offer made by Darius to receive a significant amount of land, stating that he (as the King of Asia) is the only one to redistribute land. Then he undertook the siege to capture Tyra, but in the end of the prolonged battle ended up killing all men and selling women and children into slavery. After concurring Egypt he had himself declared 'Master of the Universe', there was nothing left of the prior humility.

Humility was also gone in his own appearance. First despising the luxurious displays of the Persian wealthy, he himself became more and more acquainted with wearing this kind of clothing. Moderation was taken over by excessive drinking and might have even been the cause of the burning of Xerxes palace. This in the end also was the cause of his own death, dying roughly two weeks after two nights of heavy drinking and a subsequent fever.

Alexander the Great did not built his empire on the notion to last for ever. Much of the affairs of the empire were dependent on him. This does not mean that he personally oversaw the many details of his ruling, but that his character was what build it all. With him gone the empire soon broke up into many pieces and there was no one to follow in his footsteps. Although Alexander the Great started with a perfect character, the power he attained got to him and eventually meant the downfall of him and his empire.

Remember upon the conduct of each depends the fate of all – Alexander III of Macedon

In the end of his biography of Alexander the Great, Job Abbott ponders one very significant question: What if only Alexander only had used his awesome powers for good? In his lifetime many people prospered, but an even greater number suffered and died in consequence of his ever expanding empire. Reading about the life of Alexander the Great is very interesting and leaves you wondering how to maintain a good character when it matters. It may not be the best book to consider when thinking about leadership or character, but is definitively one that you should read when convenient.
