

# The Coins Of Alexander The Great

By Dom Crannis.



# Background On Alexander The Great

Alexander the Third of Macedon, better known as Alexander the Great, was a famous king of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon. Alexander, who became king at the age of only 20 due to the assassination of his father, Philip II, used his Macedonian army to create a huge empire that eventually spanned from Greece to the Himalayas.



Alexander the Great is probably best known for never losing a battle. The empire he created, which was the largest in the ancient world, would've kept on growing if it was not for his soldiers refusing to go any further. By conquering so many different lands, Alexander became not only the King of Macedon, but the Pharaoh of Egypt, the King of Persia and the “Lord of Asia” as well. Here is a map of Alexander's Macedonian empire:





By 323 BC, Alexander was living in Babylon (a Persian city he had conquered). He was making plans to once again expand his empire, starting with an invasion of Arabia, but he unfortunately died in Babylon at the age of 32, before he could start any of his plans. After his death, Alexander's generals and friends squabbled over his empire and ended up tearing it into separate countries (as seen in this map).



# Alexander The Great's Legacy And His Coins

As well as being a great general, Alexander the Great had a lasting impact on the world. He spread Greek culture throughout his empire, established many cities such as Alexandria in Egypt, and became a legendary figure that many later generals and leaders got inspiration from.



Alexander the Great was also a creator of currency- Alexander-style coins spread from Macedon to the rest of his empire, and then (due to all the leaders who were inspired by Alexander the Great) to other parts of the world. This coin, created by King Lysimachus (a successor of Alexander the Great), is an Alexander-style coin. It depicts Alexander on one side and on the other it shows Athena, a Greek goddess, seated. The picture of Athena is still used on coins today as “Britannia” (see the British 50 pence piece at the bottom). This shows how Alexander the Great and his coins are still influencing modern currency.



How Alexander's coins have evolved into modern-day coins.



This is another example of a coin made in the time of Alexander the Great. It is made out of gold, so it was worth quite a lot. This type of coin was designed to be given to one of Alexander's soldiers as the soldier's monthly salary. The soldier could then exchange the coin for some change (in the form of copper and silver coins). Alexander has used some clever propaganda on this type of coin- on one side it shows the Greek goddess Athena, and on the other it shows Nike (the Greek goddess who symbolised victory). So, this coin was not only used as monthly salary, but as a way of inspiring and encouraging Alexander's soldiers with symbols of victory for Greece.



I thought of how Macedonian gold coins of this sort could be used in modern day. As they look rather nice and are very small I thought they could be used as extravagant shirt buttons.





Macedon wasn't the only Greek country to create currency. Here is an example of a coin from the Greek island of Aegina. You can tell that it was made on Aegina as it has depictions of a tortoise and a dolphin (which were symbols associated with Aegina that appeared on Aegean coins).



However, the tortoise was not always associated with Aegina. Sea turtles used to appear on its coins instead (after all, sea turtles are sea creatures and Aegina is a small island surrounded by the Aegean Sea). This was back when Aegina was a powerful Greek nation and manufacturer of currency. Other Greek countries became concerned with Aegina's growing power, so Aegina was eventually invaded. To represent the fact that Aegina was no longer an independent sea power but instead a colony of a Greek land power the Aegean sea turtle was replaced with a land tortoise.

Location of  
Aegina:



I thought of how this sort of Aegean coin could be used in modern day. They could be turned into badges and sold to tourists visiting modern Aegina. As they are made of silver so I think they would fit the role of being jewellery perfectly.



Someone wearing an Aegean coin badge.



Although the coins featured in this presentation have writing on them, this writing is not to do with the values of the coins. This is because most people in Alexander the Great's empire, and indeed across most of the ancient world, were illiterate. How were they supposed to know the value of coins if they could not read? Alexander solved this problem in two ways- the first was to use pictures on his coins. People would be able to identify certain pictures with certain values. Secondly, Alexander's silver coins followed the Attic weight standard, meaning a coin would be worth more or less depending on its weight, so the bearer of a coin would just have to feel its weight to get an idea of its value. Finally, people could use their common sense to work out the value of a coin- for example, one would immediately know that a gold coin is worth more than a copper one, as gold was a rarer metal in Alexander's empire.





*The End*

