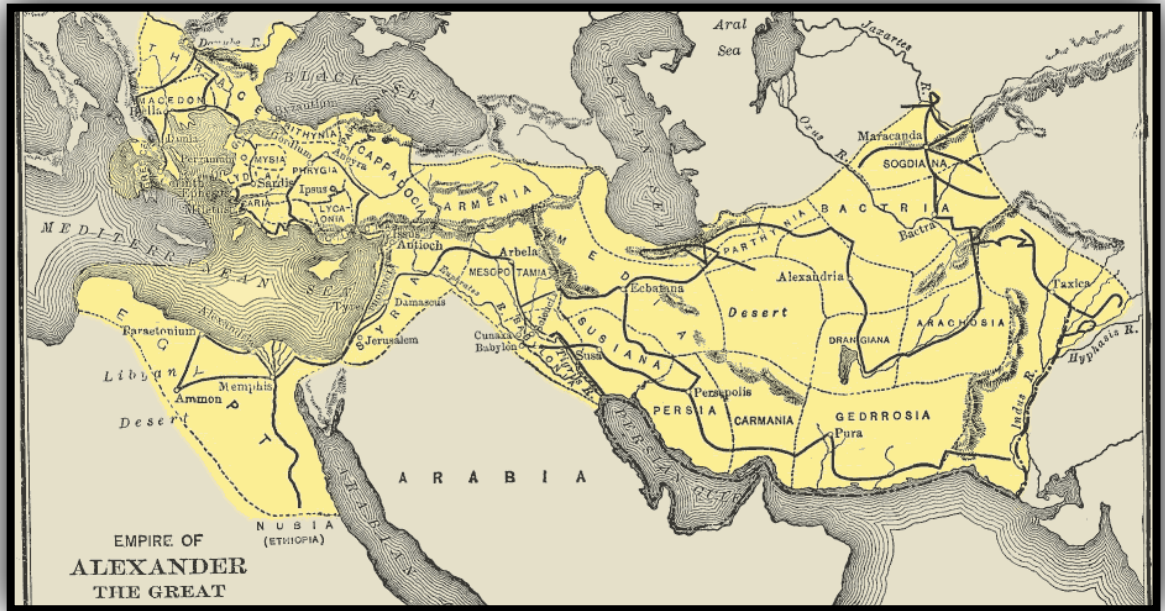


ALEXANDER'S EMPIRE



Alexander's Empire 330-323 BCE

Background

Macedonia was a small woodland kingdom north of Greece. It was peopled by Greek-speaking warrior-aristocrats who ruled over farmers and herders. Athens and the other culturally sophisticated city-states to the south tended to regard Macedonians as uncivilized and their land as a source of timber, gold, and horses. In 358 BCE, Philip II became the Macedonian king. He had become familiar with Greek life, culture, and military tactics during the three years he spent as a hostage in Thebes. While he had no use for democracy, he admired Hellenic (Greek) ceremony and cultural refinement.

When he returned to Macedonia, Philip created a new kind of army, one with soldiers who served year-round. He trained his forces in Greek military tactics and armed them with thirteen foot spear-tipped

pikes. Then he advanced on the Greek city-states, including Athens. He destroyed Thebes and Sparta, spared Athens, and declared himself supreme leader of a unified Greco-Macedonian (that is Greek and Macedonian) federation of states.

Founding

Philip intended to attack Persian-ruled Anatolia next, but he was assassinated before he could take action. He was succeeded by his son, Alexander, barely twenty years old. Alexander had been educated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle and trained in politics and war by his father. He was tireless in battle, a stickler for details, and conscious of his image. He was adored by his soldiers and almost everyone else who met him.

In 334 BCE, Alexander attacked Persia at the head of an army of 35,000 Macedonians and Greek allies. In the course of the next

eleven years, he moved through Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and Babylonia, conquering as he went. He faced the Persians in three major battles and won each against huge odds. He forced Emperor Darius III (336-300 BCE) to flee for his life. He then occupied the great Persian capitals, and moved into the empire's northeastern provinces, taking possession of stretches of the trans-Eurasian silk routes. In 326 BCE, he turned southeast and pushed his exhausted troops across the Hindu Kush Mountains into the Indus valley. There, he subdued one local ruler after another. When he asked his troops to go on beyond the Indus, they refused. He saw that they could be pushed no further and agreed to head home. In 330 BCE, Alexander was in possession of a gigantic Indo-Mediterranean empire.

Administration

Alexander was undoubtedly a conqueror and destroyer. For example, he demolished the Greek city of Thebes, and he allowed his soldiers to reduce the Persian capital of Persepolis to ruins, killing the men, enslaving the women, and carrying off the city's treasure. Alexander, however, was also a builder. He admired Greek culture and the Persian's skill at administering an empire. At the practical level, he kept Persian bureaucratic organization, sometimes substituting Macedonians in key positions. He extended the Persian system of satraps (provinces) to the lands he conquered in non-Persian areas south of the Hindu Kush. Everywhere, he established new cities in the Greek style and filled them with ex-soldiers mostly Greek and Macedonian, who settled down and formed an elite class. Most of these Greeks married local women and reared half-Greek, half-Persian children who grew up speaking Greek. Alexander himself wed Roxana, the daughter of a prince of Sogdiana, an ancient territory that generally corresponds to the modern nation of Uzbekistan. Alexander also held a gigantic marriage ceremony, wedding thousands of his soldiers to Persian women.

Trade

Alexander traveled with a court that included scientists, doctors, architects, artisans, merchants, and surveyors. In the region between the Hindu Kush and the Indus, his surveyors laid out a road that facilitated trade in the area long after Alexander had left. Later, the Mauryan Emperors of

India extended the route to the Ganges and beyond. The route is still used today.

Religion

Alexander's mother once told him that his real father was not Phillip but Apollo. At the time, the pronouncement did not appear to give Alexander divine ambitions. When he got to Egypt, in 331 BCE, however, he went to consult the oracle of Amon, the Creator God, in the Lybian Desert. There the priest told the king that he was the son of Amon-Zeus, a name combining the chief Egyptian and Greek gods. Shortly after, Alexander had himself recognized as the Pharaoh, whom Egyptians considered to be divine.

As his victories mounted and his legend grew, Alexander seemed to become more convinced of his divine roots. At one point, he required that his subjects lie face down before him. His Greek court and soldiers refused to do this, so he dropped the issue. He did, however, promote his relationship to the gods by putting his picture on the front of coins and the image of Zeus wielding a thunderbolt on the back. During his lifetime, several religious cults devoted to his worship appear to have arisen, though they disappeared shortly after he died.

Decline/Fall

After Alexander took the Indus valley in 325 BCE, he looked southeastward toward the Ganges River. By this time, his army had been away from home for almost ten years. Even his toughest Macedonian warriors were exhausted. They refused to go further, and Alexander decided to

turn for home. He got as far as Babylon, where in June 323 BCE he died. He appears to have died of a fever complicated by a number of factors: wounds he had suffered in the course of battles, overwork, a hunting trip in mosquito-ridden swamps, and a heavy night of drinking. He lingered for four days, and when his generals desperately urged him to name an heir, he is said to have replied that it would go to the strongest. In fact, after his death, his generals almost immediately set to warring against one another, resulting in the division of the empire into three major military states. Alexander asked to be buried in Egypt, and reportedly his body was taken there in a golden sarcophagus (coffin). But no one knows where the conqueror's remains were laid.



Alexander the Great portrait coin. British Museum.

EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **ALEXANDER'S** EMPIRE

Characteristic	Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:
Background/ location	
Founding	
Organization	
Religion	
Trade	
Decline/Fall	
Summary description / categorization of this empire	

ALEXANDER'S EMPIRE

330-323 BCE

