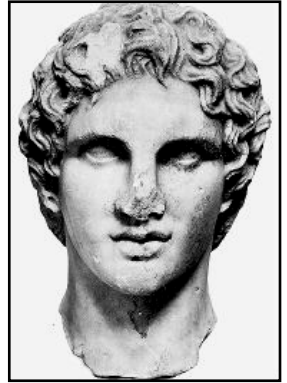


Alexander the Great (356 – 323 B.C.E.)

The decisive battle of Philip's conquest of Greece occurred in 338 BCE at Chaeronea in Boeotia, when Philip beat the Athenians and their allies. The military victory that won the day was a cavalry charge by Philip's eighteen year old son, Alexander. Alexander seems to have inherited much from his brilliant father: physical courage, arrogance, extreme intelligence, and, most importantly, un-restrained ambition. For when his father died in 336 BCE at an assassin's hand, Alexander quickly consolidated his power and set out to conquer the world--at the age of twenty-one!



He had been a youth of infinite promise. Physically handsome, strong, brave, and nothing short of brilliant, he had been schooled by no less a person than Aristotle. With all these qualities, he took up his father's ambition and prosecuted it with a swiftness that is almost frightening.

In 334 BCE, Alexander crossed over into Asia Minor to begin his conquest of Persia. To conquer Persia was to conquer the world, for the Persian Empire sprawled over most of the known world: Asia Minor, the Middle East, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran. He didn't have much to go on: his army numbered thirty thousand infantry and only five thousand cavalry. He had no navy. He had no money.

His strategy was simple. He would move quickly and begin with a few sure victories, so he could gain money and supplies. He would focus on the coastal cities so that he could gain control of the ports; in that way, the Persian navy would have no place to make landfall. Finally, he took the battle right to the center of the opposing forces, and he threw himself into the very worst of the battle. His enemies were stunned and his troops grew intensely loyal to this man who threw both them *and* himself right into the teeth of the wolf.

He quickly overran Asian Minor after defeating the Persian forces that controlled the territory, and after seizing all the coastal cities, he turned inland towards Syria in 333 BCE. There he engaged the main Persian army under the leadership of the Persian king, Darius, at a city called Issus. As he had done at Chaeronea, he led an astounding cavalry charge against a superior opponent and forced them to break ranks. Darius, and much of his army, ran inland towards Mesopotamia, leaving Alexander free to continue south. He seized the coastal towns along the Phoenician and Palestinian coasts. When he entered Jerusalem, he was hailed as their great liberator. He continued south and conquered Egypt with almost no resistance whatsoever; the Egyptians called him king and son of Re.

By this point, Darius understood that the situation was out of his control. As Alexander moved down the Phoenician coast, he managed to conquer the city of Tyre, which was absolutely central to Persian naval operations. Darius knew that he could never recover Asia Minor, Phoenicia, or Palestine, so he sent an offer to halt hostilities. If Alexander would cease, Darius would cede to him all of the Persian Empire west of the Euphrates River; Mesopotamia, Persia (modern day Iran), and the northern territories would remain Persian.

Alexander would have none of this. In 331 BCE, he crossed the Euphrates river into Mesopotamia. Darius met him near the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh, the city that had been destroyed by the Chaldeans only three centuries earlier. This was the last battle between Darius and Alexander; the

Macedonian king again put the numerically superior Persian army to flight, and Darius ran also. In January of 330 BCE, Alexander entered Babylon: he had conquered Mesopotamia and now controlled its greatest and wealthiest city. The Persians had amassed vast wealth from the tribute paid by the various states under them. Alexander, who had started with no money at all, was now in control of the fattest treasury that had ever existed.

Darius, meanwhile, met his death at the hands of a conspiracy. The Persian nobles no longer felt that he could effectively lead them and, under the leadership of his brother Bessus, the nobles killed Darius and left his body for Alexander to find. Alexander, however, pushed on, found Bessus, and killed him and as many Persian nobles as he could. The Persian Empire had officially come to a close.

Having conquered what was then the known world, Alexander had pushed his army to the very limits of civilization as he knew it. But he wanted more; he saw that the world extended further and partly out of curiosity, and partly out of a desire to conquer the entire world within the boundaries of the river Ocean (the Greeks believed that a great river, called Ocean, encircled all the land of the world), Alexander and his army pushed east, through Scythia (northern Iran), and all the way to Pakistan and India. He had conquered Bactria at the foot of the western Himalayas, gained a huge Bactrian army, and married a Bactrian princess, Roxane. But when he tried to push on past Pakistan, his army grew tired, and he abandoned the eastward conquest in 327 BCE.

In 324 BCE, Alexander returned to Babylon. He was now, literally, king of the world, and began to lay down his strategies for consolidating his empire. He began to plan cities and building works, new conquests, and even considered deifying himself. But like so many human gods, his own death caught up with him. In 323 BCE, at the age of thirty-three, he fell into a fever and died.

It's rare in history that human events become so focused on a single individual; rarely is that focus justified. Alexander, however, is one of the notable exceptions. The age of Alexander was the age created by Alexander, and he would permanently stamp world culture with a Greek character. He was in many ways a brilliant and selfless person, quite possibly the most brilliant military leader in human history. With a small army, little or no supplies, and no money, he conquered the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire in the world. He never lost a battle, not once, and he flung himself into battle with intense physical bravery. He was also a tyrant and a bully, given to fits of uncompromising violence. He was certainly a drunkard and at times unstable. We will never know if he could have ruled or unified this huge empire, for it may have crumbled into nothing within a few years. His death, however, guaranteed that the empire he had built would never last.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S LEGACY:

While there is much controversy among historians about the significance of Alexander in Greek history and culture, there is no question that the Alexandrian empire was built because of his military genius and his unbridled ambition. Whether or not Alexander could have kept this unimaginably large empire together is an unanswerable and ultimately useless question. It is clear, however, that his death, only a year after completing his Herculean conquest of the world, spelled the end of the empire he had acquired so quickly.

Alexander, who was only thirty-three years old when he died, had made no preparations for his succession. He had married a Bactrian princess, Roxane, when he had conquered Bactria; their son, however, was unborn when Alexander died. Alexander also had a brother, but he was both weak and unintelligent. So the generals which had aided him divided the empire among themselves in order to preserve the empire for the future, as yet unborn, king; this would guarantee that Alexander's empire would remain in the royal line of Macedonian kings. Like all powerful and

ambitious men, they soon fell into conflict with one another. In two decades of conflict, several of the original generals were killed, along with Alexander's son and brother. By 300 BC, all that was left of Alexander's empire were four smaller empires, each controlled by military generals who declared themselves kings. Greece and Macedonia fell to Antigonius, who founded the Antigonid dynasty of Greek kings; this dynasty would eventually control Asia Minor. Asia Minor originally came under the control of the Attalid dynasty, but was eventually subsumed under the Antigonids. Mesopotamia and the Middle East came under the control of Seleucus, who crowned himself Seleucus I and began the Seleucus dynasty (every king in this dynasty would be named Seleucus). Egypt came under the control of Ptolemy, who crowned himself Ptolemy I and began the Ptolemaic dynasty. The Ptolemies maintained Greek learning and culture, but adopted several Egyptian customs surrounding the kingship, such as inheritance through the maternal line.

These empires periodically fought with one another, for none of these kings ever fully accepted the fact that the empire had fractured into three parts. Each believed that they were the rightful heirs to the entire empire that Alexander had built. Countries, such as Judah, periodically shifted from one empire to another as the fortunes of war went now to the Ptolemies and now to the Seleucids.

Despite the constant conflict, the Hellenistic world was an incredibly prosperous one. Alexander and his successors had liberated an immense amount of wealth from the Persian empire, and with this new wealth in circulation the standard of living rose dramatically. Each of the empires embarked on building projects, on scholarship, on patronage of the arts, and on literature and philosophy. The Ptolemies built an enormous library in their capital city of Alexandria, and sponsored the translation of a host of religious and literary works into Greek.

This period really marked the first international culture in Western, Middle Eastern, and North African history. The Greeks imported their culture: political theory, philosophy, art, and literature all over the known civilized world. This culture would greatly alter the culture and religion of the Mediterranean. But the flow of culture worked in the opposite direction as well; non-Greek ideas and non-Greeks flowed into Greece (and Italy). They took with them their religions, their philosophies, science, and culture; in this environment, eastern religions in particular began to take hold in the Greek city-states both in the east and in Greece. Among these religions was Zoroastrianism and Mithraism; in later years, this international environment would provide the means for the spread of another eastern religion, Christianity.

This process of the "hellenization" ("making Greek") of the world took place largely in the urban centers the Greeks began to zealously build. While the Greeks had for a long time believed that monarchy was a sign of barbarity, they had to come to terms with the reality of their new form of government. So they compromised. While they accepted the monarchy, they set about building somewhat independent *poleis* that had the structure of the polis without its political independence. The growth of these cities provoked massive migrations from the Greek mainland, as Greeks settled in these new, far-flung *poleis* to assume lucrative positions in the military and administration.

Spread from Italy to India, from Macedonia to Egypt, Greek culture was the most significant of its times. The mighty empires of the Greeks hung onto this vast amount of territory for almost three centuries. Slowly, however, a new power was rising in the west, steadily building its own, accidental empire. By the time of Christ, the great Greek empires of the Hellenistic world had been replaced and unified once more into a single empire under the control of an Italian people, the Romans.