

◀ A damaged Roman mosaic re-creates a battle featuring Alexander the Great (at left).

# Alexander the Great and His Empire

## 30.1 Introduction

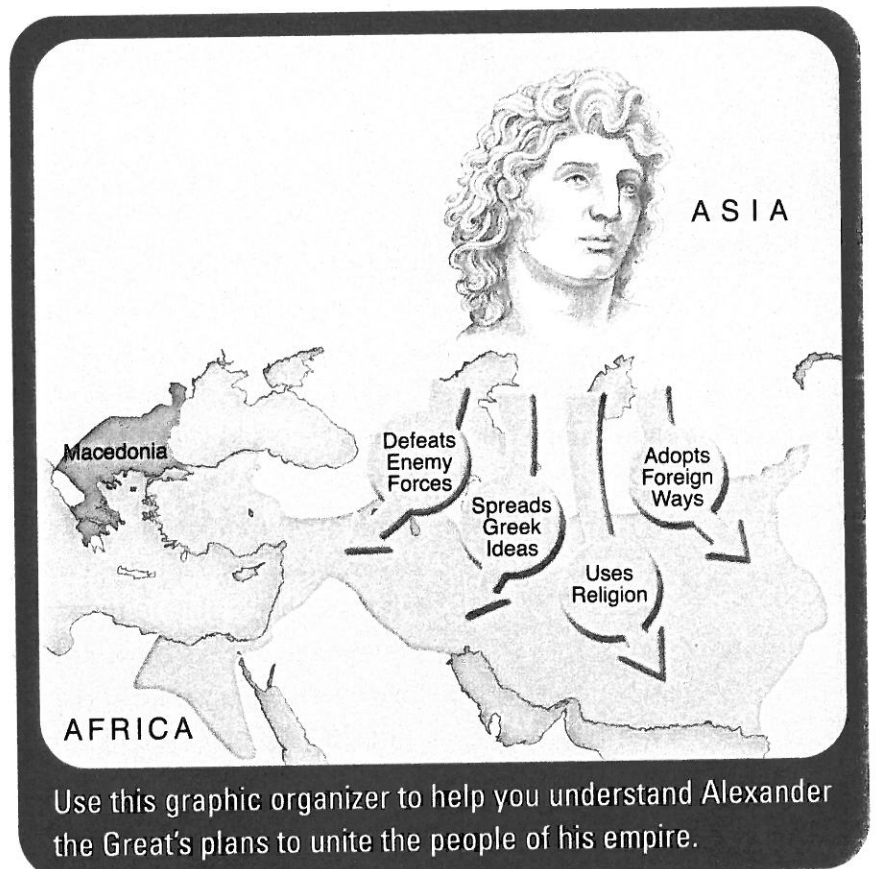
In Chapter 29, you read about Athens during its golden age. As the power of Athens grew, other city-states, especially Sparta, became jealous and fearful. Athens and Sparta had mistrusted each other for a long time. After coming together to defeat the Persians, they soon began to quarrel.

In 431 B.C.E., Sparta declared war on Athens. Many of the smaller city-states were dragged into the fight. This conflict is called the **Peloponnesian War**. It lasted for 27 years. Even after Sparta won the war, the Greeks continued to fight one another.

Meanwhile, a new danger was growing to the north, in **Macedonia**. A Macedonian king, Philip II, saw that constant wars had left the Greeks divided and weak. He seized the chance and brought Greece under his control.

Philip's son, Alexander, was even more ambitious. Today he is known as **Alexander the Great**. Alexander extended Macedonian rule over a vast area. In time, his power reached from Macedonia and Greece through central Asia all the way to parts of India.

In this chapter, you will learn how Alexander tried to rule this vast **empire**. How did he plan to unite so many different peoples under his rule? Did his plan succeed? Let's find out.



**ally** a country or group that joins with another for a common purpose

## 30.2 The Peloponnesian War and the Rise of Macedonia

In 431 B.C.E., the quarrel between Athens and Sparta boiled over into war. This conflict is called the Peloponnesian War, after the area of Greece where Sparta was located (the Peloponnesus). Other city-states were drawn into the war as **allies** of either Athens or Sparta.

The war lasted for 27 years, from 431 B.C.E. to 404 B.C.E. In the end, Sparta won. For a time it was the most powerful city-state in Greece. Then Sparta, in turn, was defeated by Thebes.

While the Greek city-states fought one another, Macedonia was growing stronger. For a long while, the Macedonians had been a collection of scattered tribes. Then a bold leader, King Philip II, took the throne. In a short time, he unified the warlike tribes of the north and created a well-trained army.

Philip then looked south. Years of war had left the Greeks divided and weak. Philip thought he could take advantage of their weakness.

## 30.3 Philip Unites Greece

By 338 B.C.E., King Philip had conquered most of mainland Greece. He allowed the Greek city-states to keep many of their freedoms. But they were now under his control. Never again would a Greek city-state become a great power.

Philip wanted to attack Persia next, but in 336 B.C.E. he was murdered. His son, Alexander, became the new Macedonian king.

## 30.4 Alexander Creates an Empire

Alexander was only 20 when he became king. But the young man was well prepared for his new duties. As a youth, he had studied under Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher. Aristotle taught him public speaking, science, and philosophy. He also taught Alexander to appreciate Greek culture.

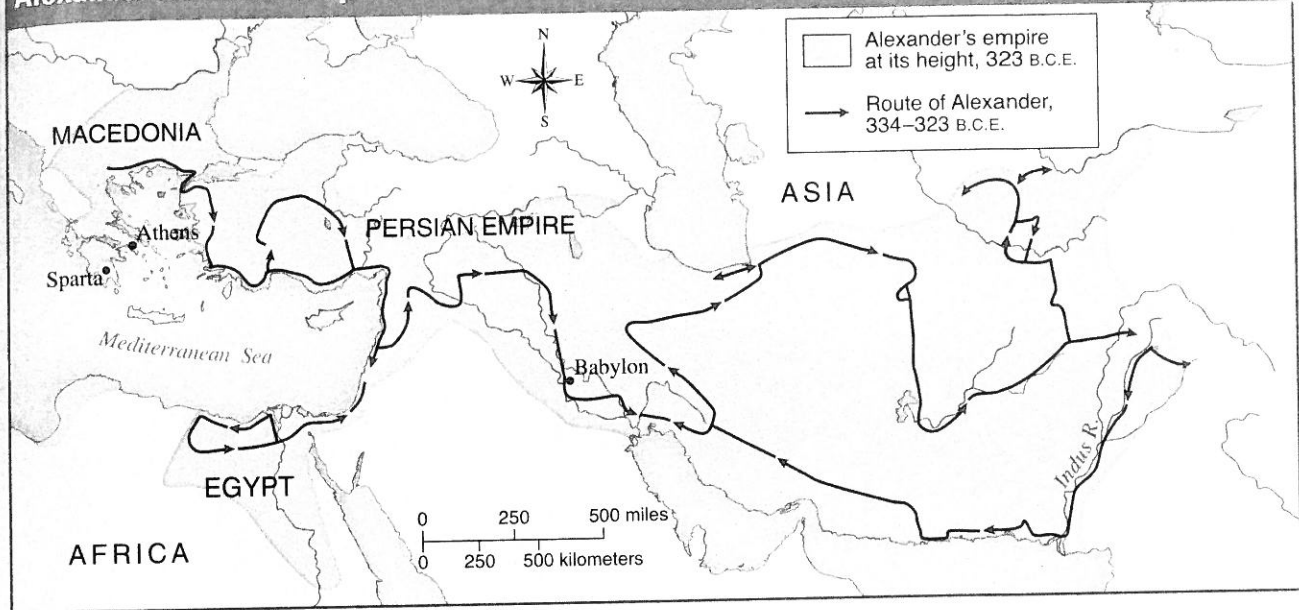
As king, Alexander put down a rebellion by some of the Greek city-states. Then he turned to the east. Alexander wanted to carry out his father's plan to invade Persia. Fighting Persia would help to unite the Greeks by giving them a common enemy. And a victory over Persia would add greatly to Alexander's wealth.

In 334 B.C.E., Alexander invaded Asia Minor with a united Greek and Macedonian army. Alexander planned to use terror and kindness to conquer an empire. The towns and cities that resisted him would be burned to the ground and their people sold into



Coins in ancient Greece often had portraits of important leaders on them. This coin shows King Philip on horseback.

## Alexander the Great's Empire, 323 B.C.E.



slavery. The towns and cities that surrendered would keep their government officials, and Alexander would help them rebuild damaged property.

### 30.5 Alexander's Plan to Unite His Empire

In a short time, Alexander extended his rule over Asia Minor, Egypt, and central Asia. Still he pushed on. He marched to the farthest limit of the Persian Empire. His armies even reached western India.

Many leaders in history have dreamed of ruling the world. Alexander the Great came as close as anyone to fulfilling that dream. He brought most of the world that was known to him under his rule.

Alexander was a bold and brilliant general, but his conquests created new challenges. How could he control such a large territory? And how could he unite so many different peoples and cultures?

Alexander wanted all the people he conquered to accept him as their ruler. He also wanted to spread Greek culture. At the same time, he did not want to destroy every local custom in his empire. His goal was to bring people of very different cultures together under a single government.

Alexander created a plan to achieve his goals. The plan had three key parts. First, he would spread Greek culture and ideas. Second, he would use religion to inspire loyalty. Third, he would show respect for the cultures he conquered and even adopt some of their customs. Let's look at each part of his plan.

This mosaic, or tile art, from a church floor is of the city of Alexandria in Egypt.



### 30.6 How Alexander Spread Greek Ideas

Alexander deeply admired Greek culture. He wanted to spread Greek ideas to the far corners of his empire. He hoped Greek culture would blend with the cultures of the people he conquered.

One way Alexander tried to accomplish his goal was by building Greek-style cities. He established many cities in different parts of the empire. Like Greek cities, they had marketplaces, temples, and theaters.

Settlers from Greece flocked to Alexander's cities. They brought with them Greek laws, art, and literature. Alexander wanted local soldiers and government officials to speak only Greek.

The most famous of the new cities was called Alexandria. It was located in Egypt near the sea. Alexander may have marked out the city boundaries himself.

Alexandria was designed with wide major streets crossed by narrower streets. It had many Greek features. It had a marketplace, a university, a gymnasium, and a theater. The city also boasted law courts and a library. There was even a temple dedicated to Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea.

In time, Alexandria became one of the ancient world's most important centers of trade and learning. Its library contained more than half a million books. It was one of the largest libraries in the world.

Because of Alexander, Greek ideas spread to Egypt, the Near East, and beyond.

### 30.7 How Alexander Used Religion

The second part of Alexander's plan involved religion. Alexander used religion in two ways to inspire loyalty among his followers and the people he conquered.

First, he honored the Egyptian and Persian gods. He treated them as equal to Greek gods. He visited oracle sites, made sacrifices, and had temples built in their honor. On one occasion, he visited the oracle site of the Egyptian god Ammon. When he arrived, a priest welcomed him as "God's son." The priest's words helped Alexander gain the loyalty of the Egyptians.

Second, Alexander encouraged the idea that he himself was a god. After his visit to the Egyptian oracle, he began wearing a crown of two rams' horns. This crown was the sacred headdress of Ammon. Seeing Alexander wearing the crown encouraged the Egyptians to accept him as a god.

Alexander also made sure to spread the story of the priest's greeting throughout the empire. Later, he required all Greeks to accept him as the son of Zeus.

Was Alexander sincere in his religious beliefs? It is hard to say for sure.

Alexander the Great (kneeling) and a Jewish high priest meet to show their mutual respect for each other.



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## 30.8 How Alexander Adopted the Ways of Conquered Cultures

The third part of Alexander's plan was to show respect for the cultural practices of the people he conquered. He did this by adopting some of these practices himself.

For example, in Persia he adopted the Persian system of government. He allowed Persian governors to run the day-to-day business of their lands. Still, he was careful to **appoint** Macedonians to head the army. He also made sure his own people controlled the taxes that were collected.

Alexander also borrowed Persian customs. He began wearing decorative Persian-style clothes. He received official visitors as a Persian king would, in a luxurious tent. The tent was supported by 30-foot columns. The columns were covered in gold and silver and decorated with precious stones.

Alexander demanded that his visitors greet him in the Persian style. A visitor had to kneel in front of the throne and bend over until his head touched the ground. Alexander then raised his visitor to his feet, kissed him, and called him "Kinsman."

Finally, Alexander encouraged marriage between Macedonians and Persians. He himself married the eldest daughter of Darius, the Persian king he had defeated.

As with religion, historians aren't sure why Alexander acted this way. Some think he was simply trying to be a more acceptable ruler to his former enemies by adopting their customs. Others think that he truly considered the people he conquered to be equal to Greeks and Macedonians.



Alexander's marriage to the daughter of King Darius of Persia was a symbol of the blending of cultures in his empire.

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### 30.9 The Empire Crumbles

By 324 B.C.E., Alexander's armies were in northern India. After 10 years of fighting, the exhausted soldiers refused to go on. Reluctantly, Alexander returned to Babylon, in Persia.

The next year, Alexander caught a swamp fever, perhaps malaria. He died in his soldiers' tent at the age of 33.

After his death, Alexander's empire crumbled. Settlers left the cities he had constructed, and they fell into ruin. His generals fought each other for control of the empire. In the end, Alexander's vast realm was divided into three separate kingdoms. Egypt became one kingdom. There was a second kingdom in Asia. Macedonia and Greece made a third kingdom.

Alexander's plan failed when his empire died, but a part of his dream lived on. He had spread Greek ideas throughout a vast area. In the centuries to come, Greek power would slowly fade away. But Greek culture would continue to influence the lands that Alexander had once ruled.

Alexander the Great died at the age of 33, leaving behind an empire that soon crumbled.

### 30.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about Alexander the Great. Alexander became king of Macedonia after his father's murder. By that time, Macedonia already controlled most of Greece.

A skilled general, Alexander conquered a vast empire. To unify this huge territory, he spread Greek ideas, used religion, and showed respect for the cultures of the people he conquered.

Alexander's empire soon died, but Greek ideas lived on. In the next chapter, you'll explore how these ideas continue to influence us today.