

Introduction

Alexander cried when Anaxarchus talked about the number of worlds beyond the stars. He explained his tears: 'There are so many worlds, and I have not yet conquered even one.'

Alexander became king of Macedonia 336 years before the birth of Christ, at the age of twenty. Within ten years, he was the ruler of the biggest empire that the world had ever seen. His lands stretched from Greece in the west to India in the east, covering nearly two million square kilometres.

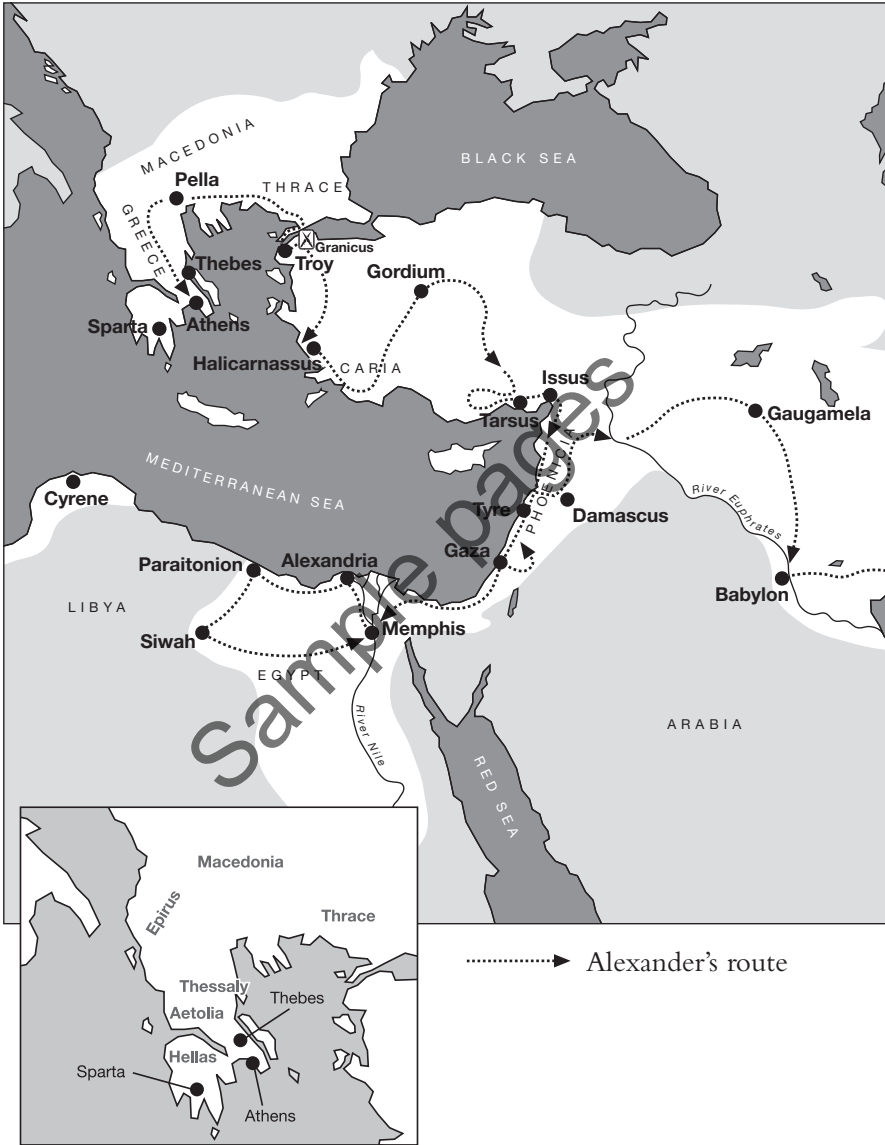
But Alexander died when he was only thirty-two. He had no chance to rule the empire that he had created so quickly.

He was very successful and very young. The great Roman general Julius Caesar lived three centuries later. He read about Alexander and cried, because at the age of thirty-two Caesar had achieved nothing and Alexander had conquered an empire.

About three-quarters of a million Asians lost their lives because of Alexander's great march east. In many lands, he is remembered as a bloodthirsty murderer, not as a conquering hero. But he made close friends as well as enemies among the people that he conquered. He married three Asian women, and filled his army and his court with Asian men. He believed that a mix of Greek and Asian traditions could create a strong empire that would continue for many years.

Alexander's empire did not, in fact, last long. But he joined East and West for the first time, and after this, ideas spread more freely between countries. Although he lived more than 2,300 years ago, Alexander the Great shaped the world that we live in today.

The Empire of Alexander the Great





Chapter 1 The Greek World

On his black warhorse Bucephalus, Alexander, king of Macedonia, rode at the head of his army. Unlike most of his soldiers, he had no beard. His skin was fair and his light-coloured, wavy hair grew long and low on his neck. He was in India, and proud of the past few years. Finally, he had proved that he was the greatest general in history. And he now ruled the greatest empire that the world had ever seen.

His soldiers had joined him from many parts of the world. There were Thracians, Macedonians and Greeks from southeastern Europe; Scythians, Bactrians and Sogdians from central Asia; and Indians, riding their enormous, armoured war elephants. It seemed that no one could stop the march of his extraordinary army. Certainly not the Persians, who had once ruled much of Asia but were now completely defeated by Alexander the Great.

Two centuries earlier, the Persians' enemy in Europe was Greece, not Macedonia. In those days, and during Alexander's lifetime, Greece was not a country. It was a collection of independent city-states which shared a language, a religion and a way of life. Athens and Sparta were two of the most famous city-states, but there were almost 1,500 others. They were not only found in the area that we call Greece today. Greek people lived in coastal areas all around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Naples in Italy, Marseille in France and Izmir in Turkey all started life as Greek city-states.

By 500 BC*, the Greek city-states in Asia had lost their independence. They were under the control of the Persian Empire and had to pay high taxes to the Persian king, Darius I. In 499 BC,

* BC: before the birth of Christ

they fought for their independence, with the help of the Athenians. Unfortunately, they suffered a serious defeat.

As punishment for this trouble-making, Darius decided to conquer the whole of present-day Greece. In 490 BC, he sent an enormous army to Athens, but the Athenians defeated it at the Battle of Marathon. After the battle, a messenger called Pheidippides ran straight home to Athens to tell everyone the good news. From Marathon to Athens was a distance of 42.195 kilometres – the same distance is called a ‘marathon’ today in memory of that great run.

When King Darius died, his son Xerxes continued the war against Greece. In 480 BC he sent another army, even larger than his father’s one. It defeated the Spartans at Thermopylae (which means ‘Gates of Fire’) and marched towards Athens. The Athenians had to leave their city to escape the Persian army. While the Athenians were away, the Persians destroyed the buildings on the Acropolis, the religious part of the city. To the Greeks, this was unforgivable.

But the Greeks soon made the Persians pay for their crimes. Athenian ships beat the Persians at sea in the Battle of Salamis, and then the armies of all Greece fought side by side to defeat the Persians at Plataea. Soon the Persian army returned to Asia. The danger had passed. But the Greeks never forgot that they had nearly become part of the Persian Empire.

Although they had fought together in the Persian Wars, the city-states continued to be independent from each other. Some were ruled by a king, or a small group of noblemen. Others, like Athens, were democracies and were ruled by the people. Unlike our democracies today, the ordinary people made all the political decisions. At least forty times a year, they came together in enormous numbers to discuss and vote on matters of government – whether to go to war, when to have public holidays, or how to reduce the number of accidents at sea. Women could

not vote, but the ordinary men of these Greek democracies had real power.

Religion was an important part of Greek life. There were many Greek gods. Zeus was the king of the gods, and he used thunder and lightning to punish the people on earth and send messages to them. He had many children, and they too were gods. His son Dionysus was god of the forces of nature; his daughter Athene was connected with learning; and there were many more.

All over the Greek world, people used to visit special places to ask the gods for advice. They asked whether they should start a new business or choose a wife; as city officials, they asked whether they should build a new temple or go to war. Communicating through religious officials, the gods gave them complicated answers that could often be understood in different ways.

In the sixth century BC, for example, the Athenians sent officials to the Greeks' most important religious centre, Delphi. They asked the god Apollo how they should protect themselves from attack by the Persians, and were told that they would be safe from the Persians behind a wall of wood. After much discussion, the Athenians decided that the 'wall of wood' meant ships. They built warships and learnt to sail them. A few years later, they defeated the Persians at sea.

The Greeks believed that the greatest heroes, like Hercules, went to live with the gods when they died. Ordinary people went to a dark place below the earth called the Underworld.

Each Greek city-state was under the protection of one or more of the gods. Each of these gods usually had a temple, built in a style that has been copied in the Western world for almost 2,500 years. To keep their gods happy, the people of the city held regular religious celebrations. They brought gifts, and performed special songs and dances.

The Greeks are remembered for their love of the theatre, which they performed in celebration of the god Dionysus. The plays of

great writers like Euripides are still performed today. Other forms of literature were popular too. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer were long poems which told stories about the heroes of the Trojan War. Other Greeks wrote beautiful love poems and the Western world's earliest works of history.

Philosophy was invented in Greece, and the work of Plato and Aristotle is still important today. The Greeks also made many discoveries in mathematics and science. Hippocrates, a doctor of the fifth century BC, is now called 'the father of medicine'. Medical students all over the world have to promise to follow his rules for looking after patients.

The Greeks thought it was important to exercise both their minds and their bodies. They were great admirers of physical beauty in men as well as women. The social centre of a typical Greek city was its gymnasium, where rich citizens took physical exercise. Every four years, the city-states sent their best sportsmen to the city of Olympia for the Olympic Games. There, competitions were held in running, jumping, fighting, horse-riding, chariot racing and spear throwing. The greatest sportsmen at the Olympic Games became heroes of the Greek world, and were celebrated in poems by writers like Pindar.

But the competition between Greek city-states was not always peaceful. There were often wars too. Except in Sparta, Greek armies did not have professional soldiers; the soldiers were usually farmers. Fighting took place in the summer months, and the soldiers went home in the autumn to look after their fields. The wars were usually about land. No city wanted other cities to control too much land or become too powerful. At the end of the fifth century BC, Athens and Sparta were at war for twenty-seven years. It was a time of great suffering all over the Greek world.

At that time, Macedonia in the north was not an important part of Greece. In fact, most Greeks did not think that Macedonia was part of Greece at all. The Macedonians spoke a strange form of

Greek that other Greek speakers had difficulty understanding. Macedonian noblemen liked horse-riding, hunting, eating meat and drinking wine. They did not share other Greeks' interest in literature, science and philosophy.

Macedonia was ruled by a royal family that believed they were relatives of the great god Zeus. The king lived in Pella, Macedonia's capital city. The palace was as beautiful as the finest buildings in Greece, and the Macedonian kings wanted their country to be more Greek. They welcomed several important Greeks there, including many who were escaping the wars. The writer Pindar and the doctor Hippocrates were guests of the Macedonian kings, and Euripides wrote one of his greatest plays in Pella.

And then, in 359 BC, Alexander's father Philip became king, and Macedonia's relationship with the rest of Greece changed for ever.

Chapter 2 A Macedonian Prince

Although Alexander's achievements were extraordinary, in many ways his father, King Philip, was responsible for his success.

When Philip became king of Macedonia, he threw all his energy into increasing his power. He conquered the lands east of Macedonia, which were rich in gold. With this gold, he was able to pay for a full-time, professional army, which gave him a great advantage over the part-time armies of the Greek city-states to his south. It was a well-trained, well-organized army, and soon it had defeated all Macedonia's neighbours. When he died, Philip's empire covered most of modern-day Macedonia, Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and European Turkey.

In Macedonia, men were allowed to have more than one wife at the same time. Philip had six wives. His first wife, his queen and the mother of Alexander, was called Olympias. Olympias was a princess from the neighbouring state of Epirus. She had a strong