



## Chapter 30

# Alexander the Great and His Empire

### *How did Alexander build his empire?*

#### 30.1 Introduction

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 joining 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 drawn into the fight. This conflict is called the Peloponnesian (pel-uh-puh-NEE-zuhn) War. The war continued for 27 years.

While the city-states were at war, a new threat was growing to the north, in a kingdom called Macedonia (mas-ih-DOH-nee-uh). A Macedonian king, Philip II, realized 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 built and tried to rule this vast empire. How did he plan to unite so many different peoples under his rule?



This sculpture honors the powerful leader Alexander the Great.

◀ A detail of a Roman mosaic shows Alexander the Great in battle.



**Peloponnesian War** (431 to 404 B.C.E.) the war fought between Athens and Sparta that involved other city-states

**Macedonia** an ancient kingdom located north of Greece

**Aristotle** a great Greek philosopher; a tutor of Alexander the Great; and the author of works on logic, science, and politics

## 30.2 The Peloponnesian War and the Rise of Macedonia

In 431 B.C.E., the quarrel between Athens and Sparta grew into a conflict called the **Peloponnesian War**. The name comes from the Peloponnesus, the peninsula that extends south from mainland Greece. Sparta was located here. Other city-states were drawn into the war as **allies** of either Athens or Sparta.

The war lasted for 27 years, from 431 to 404 B.C.E. Sparta won. It became the most powerful Greek city-state, until it was defeated by Thebes.

While the Greek city-states fought one another, **Macedonia** grew stronger. For a long while, the Macedonians had lived in scattered tribes. Then King Philip II took the throne. He unified the warlike tribes of the north and created a well-trained army.

Philip then looked south to mainland Greece. Years of war had left the Greeks divided and weak. Philip used this weakness.

By 338 B.C.E., King Philip had conquered most of mainland Greece. He let the Greek city-states keep many freedoms. But Philip now ruled them. 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, was the new Macedonian king.

## 30.3 Alexander Creates an Empire

Alexander was only 20 years old when he became king. But he was well prepared for his new duties. He had been tutored by **Aristotle** (ar-uh-STOT-uhl), the famous Greek philosopher. Aristotle had taught him public speaking, science, and philosophy. He had also taught Alexander to **appreciate** Greek culture.

As king, Alexander put down a rebellion by some of the Greek city-states. Then he focused on 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 to Alexander's wealth.

In 334 B.C.E., Alexander, with a united Macedonian and Greek army, invaded Asia Minor. His plan was to create an empire by using a strategy of both terror and kindness. The towns and cities that resisted him would be burned to the ground, and their people sold into slavery. The towns and cities that surrendered to him would keep their government officials, and Alexander would help them rebuild damaged property.



Coins in ancient Greece were often decorated with portraits of important leaders. This coin shows King Philip on horseback.

## 30.4 Alexander's Plan to Unite His Empire

In a short time, Alexander extended his rule over Asia Minor, Egypt, and Central Asia. Still not satisfied, 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 came as close as anyone to fulfilling that dream. He brought much of the known world at that time under his rule. His achievements gave him the name **Alexander the Great**.

Alexander was a bold and brilliant general, but his many 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 intended to spread Greek culture. But he did not want to destroy the local **customs** and traditions of the various cultures across his empire. His goal was to bring the different peoples of these many cultures together under a single government.

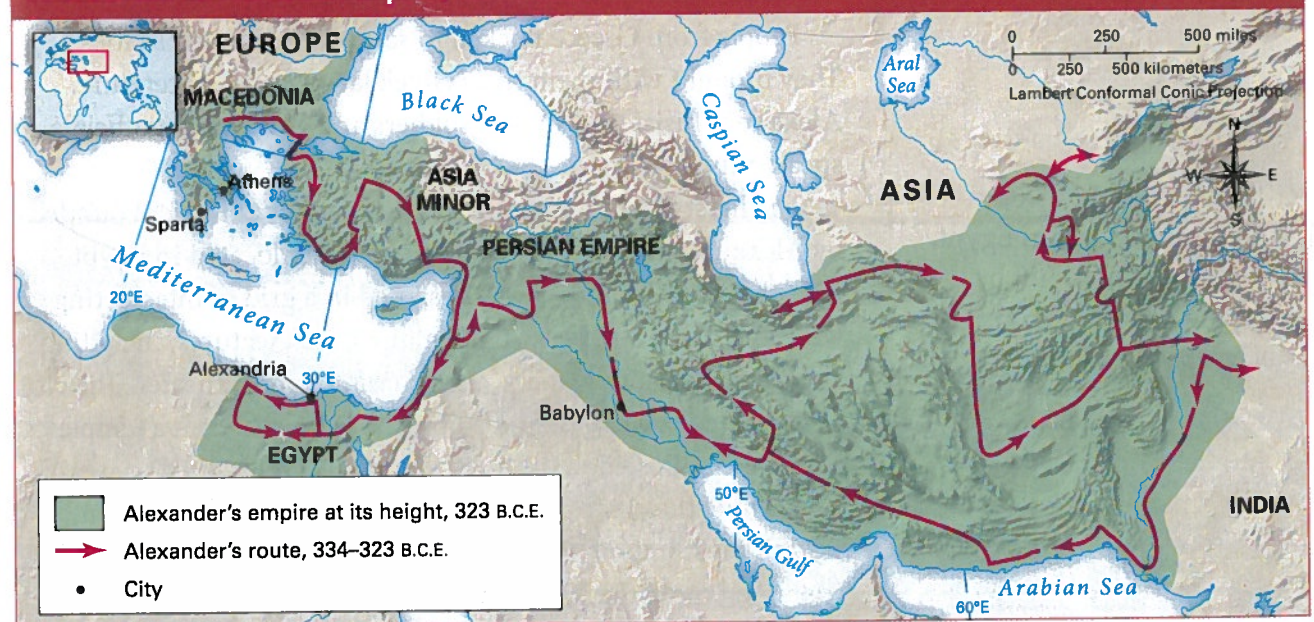
Alexander created a plan to achieve his goals. The plan had three key parts. First, he would spread Greek culture and ideas. Second, he would use religion to inspire loyalty. Third, he would show respect for the cultures he had conquered, and even adopt some of their customs. Let's look at each part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

**Alexander the Great** the ruler of a vast empire that extended from Macedonia to India in the 300s B.C.E.

**custom** a practice that is common to people of a particular group or region

Alexander the Great ruled a vast empire. It extended from his home in Macedonia to western India.

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







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

### 30.5 How Alexander Spread Greek Ideas

Alexander deeply admired Greek culture and wanted to spread Greek ideas throughout his empire. He hoped that Greek ideas, customs, and traditions would blend with the diverse cultures of the people he had conquered.

Alexander thought that the building of Greek-style cities would be one way to accomplish his goal. He established many cities in different parts of the empire. Like the cities in Greece, they had marketplaces, temples, and theaters.

People from Greece flocked to settle in Alexander's cities. They brought with them their Greek laws, art, and literature. Alexander insisted that local soldiers and government officials speak only Greek.

The most famous of the new cities was **Alexandria**. Founded by Alexander in 332 B.C.E., Alexandria was located in Egypt, near the sea. Alexandria was designed in a grid of intersecting wide and narrow streets. It had many Greek features, including 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 (puh-SY-din), the Greek god of the sea.

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

**Alexandria** a city in Egypt, founded in 332 B.C.E. by Alexander the Great; also, an ancient center of learning

### 30.6 How Alexander Used Religion

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

First, he honored Egyptian and Persian gods, with the same respect he paid to Greek gods. To show his respect, he visited oracle sites, made sacrifices, and had temples built to honor these gods. On one occasion, he visited the oracle site of the Egyptian god Ammon. When he arrived, an Egyptian priest welcomed him as "God's son." The priest's words helped Alexander gain the loyalty of the Egyptian people.

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

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



On the silver coin above is one of the earliest-known images of Alexander the Great. The ram's horn is a sign that he is a god. The engraving below depicts a meeting between Alexander, kneeling in respect, and a Jewish high priest.





His marriage to the daughter of King Darius III of Persia was a symbol of Alexander's efforts to blend cultures in his empire.



### 30.7 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 had 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. However, 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 clothing. He received official visitors in a luxurious tent, much as a Persian king would have done. The tent was supported by tall columns. The columns were covered in gold and silver and decorated with precious stones.

Alexander demanded that each of his visitors greet him according to Persian custom. A visitor had to kneel in front of the throne and bend over until his head touched the ground. Alexander would then raise the visitor to his feet, kiss him, and address him as "kinsman."

Finally, Alexander encouraged marriage between the people of Macedonia and Persia. He himself married the eldest daughter of Darius III, a Persian king he had defeated.

Historians are not sure why Alexander behaved in these ways. Some think that by adopting the customs of his former enemies, Alexander was simply trying to be a more acceptable ruler. Other historians think that he truly considered all of the peoples he conquered to be equal to the Greeks and the Macedonians.

### 30.8 Alexander's Empire Crumbles

By 324 B.C.E., Alexander's armies were in northern India. After ten years of fighting, the exhausted soldiers refused to go on. **Reluctantly**, Alexander returned to Babylon, in Persia. In 323 B.C.E, he died at the age of 33.

After his death, Alexander's empire fell apart. Settlers left the cities he had built, and the cities fell into ruin. His generals fought to control the empire. Eventually, his land was divided into three kingdoms. Egypt became one kingdom. Syria in the Middle East was the second kingdom. Macedonia and Greece made a third kingdom.

Alexander 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.

### Chapter Summary

**In this chapter, you learned how Alexander the Great built and ruled his empire.**

**The Peloponnesian War and the Rise of Macedonia** Athens and Sparta and their allies fought one another in the Peloponnesian War, lasting from 431 to 404 B.C.E. Then, King Philip II of Macedonia took advantage of the Greeks' weakness after years of warfare and conquered most of Greece.

**Alexander Creates and Unites an Empire** Alexander, son of Philip, became king. Educated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, Alexander enlarged his empire by invading Asia Minor. He conquered Persia, Egypt, Central Asia, and western India. He planned to unite his vast empire by spreading Greek culture, by inspiring loyalty through religion, and by adopting some of the customs of conquered peoples.

**Spreading Greek Ideas, Using Religion, and Adopting the Ways of Conquered Cultures** Alexander built Greek-style cities, such as Alexandria, in Egypt. Greeks settled in these cities and brought their laws and arts. Alexander made Egyptian and Persian gods equal to Greek gods. He also encouraged the idea that he himself was a god. He adopted customs from the cultures of the people he had conquered, such as the Persian system of government.

**Alexander's Empire Crumbles** After Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E., his generals fought among themselves for control of the empire. Settlers left the cities Alexander had built. The empire divided into three kingdoms. But the Greek culture that he had spread would continue to influence the lands Alexander had ruled.