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Global Studies

Study Guide #16 The Rise of Macedonia and Alexander the Great

The Rise of Macedonia. Macedonia was strategically located on a trade route between Greece and Asia. The Macedonians suffered near constant raids from their neighbors and became skilled in horseback riding and cavalry fighting. Although the Greeks considered the Macedonians to be semibarbaric because they lived in villages instead of cities, Greek culture had a strong influence in Macedonia, particularly after a new Macedonian king, Philip II, took the throne in 359 B.C.

As a child, Philip II had been a hostage in the Greek city of Thebes. While there, he studied Greek military strategies and learned the uses of the Greek infantry formation, the phalanx. After he left Thebes and became king of Macedonia, Philip used his knowledge to set up a professional army consisting of cavalry, the phalanx, and archers, making the Macedonian army one of the strongest in the world at that time. Philip's ambitions led him to conquer Thrace, to the east of Macedonia. Then he moved to the trade routes between the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. Soon Philip turned his attention to the Greek city-states.

Although some Greek leaders tried to get the city-states to unite, they were unable to forge a common defense, which made them vulnerable to the Macedonian threat. Eventually, Philip conquered all the city-states, including Athens and Thebes, which he defeated at the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. This battle finally ended the independence of the Greek city-states.

Philip forced all the city-states except Sparta into the new League of Corinth, with himself in charge, and began to plan a war against Persia. Before he could proceed with his plans, however, a disgruntled Macedonian noble murdered him.

Alexander the Great. Philip's 20-year-old son, Alexander, succeeded him as king. Once Philip died, the Greeks began to rebel against the new king. Though young, Alexander was well-versed in the arts of war. He campaigned through Thrace, Illyria, and the Greek city-states, restoring his control. After forcing the Greeks to submit, he turned his attentions back to Persia.

In 334 B.C., Alexander crossed the Hellespont and invaded the Persian empire with an army of 35,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. His force was small compared with that of the Persians, but his men were well disciplined and highly loyal to Alexander. The Persian army, on the other hand, was enormous but disorganized. Alexander was victorious, winning battles in Asia Minor, Syria, Phoenicia, and Egypt. He then moved into the heart of the Persian Empire. In 331 B.C., he defeated the Persian army at Gaugamela in Assyria, taking the title “king of kings.” Still not satisfied, he pushed his men farther, into Central Asia, and finally to the Indus River. There, his men rebelled, and Alexander was forced to end his campaign. In the 10 years of fighting, he had conquered the largest empire the world had seen.

Alexander’s Legacy. In 323 B.C. in Babylon, Alexander the Great died of a fever. Although scholars know little about Alexander’s policies as a ruler, they do know that he respected Greek culture and spread it wherever he went. He also established many new cities, naming several “Alexandria” after himself. In addition, he integrated the conquered Persians into his armies and encouraged his Greek and Macedonian subjects to intermarry with the Persians in order to stabilize the empire. In 324 B.C. Alexander supervised a mass marriage, wedding over 10,000 of his troops to Persian women. He himself married the daughter of the Persian king.

Following Alexander’s conquests, ideas, culture, and peoples flowed freely from the Mediterranean to Central Asia and all the way to India. This melding of Greek culture with that of the Persian Empire resulted in a new culture among the ruling elite that later came to be known as **Hellenistic**, or “Greeklike.”

1. What factors allowed Philip II of Macedonia to conquer the Greek city-states?

2. Where did Philip learn the use of the phalanx?

3. At what battle did Philip defeat Athens and Thebes, the remaining Greek city-states?

4. What kind of problems did Alexander face after his father, Philip, died?

5. How did Alexander the Great unite the different peoples in his empire?

6. What did the blending of cultures under Alexander's rule come to be called?
