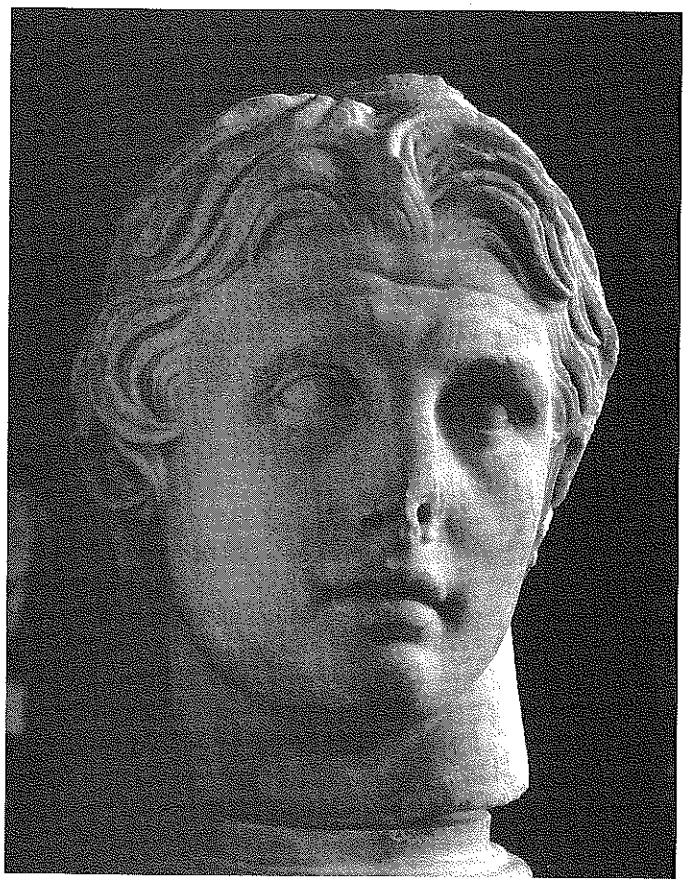

6

Alexander the Great: Disseminator of Greek Culture

Alexander the Great created the largest empire in history up to his time. His conquests led to the transmission of Greek culture to other peoples of the Mediterranean and the Near East, even as submission to Macedon transformed that culture.

FOURTH-CENTURY GREECE

Spartan Domination

Having won the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans installed puppet oligarchies throughout the former Athenian empire and in Thebes and interfered in the internal affairs of other Greek states. These oligarchies were so ferocious that the Spartan king Pausanias allowed the restoration of democracy in their poleis after only a year or two, rather than face a massive rebellion.

Even so, the Spartan social system was ill-suited to the imperial policy the Spartans now pursued. The wealth that resulted from the control of Greece corrupted luxury-starved Spartan leaders, who began secretly violating the city's prohibition on private wealth. One war hero, Gylippus, hid gold under the tiles of his roof. After a servant informed on him, saying there were "owls" roosting under those tiles (Athena's sacred owl graced Athenian coins), Gylippus was forced to leave Sparta in disgrace.

Worse yet, constant warfare had dramatically reduced the number of Spartan citizens, and Greece remained restive. Indeed, even Corinth, Sparta's erstwhile ally, joined Athens, Thebes, and Argos in rebellion against Sparta, with some financial help from Persia. This so-called Corinthian War (395–386 B.C.), in which Lysander, Sparta's greatest general, was killed, was followed by continuous skirmishes that lasted another decade. The numerous wars of the fifth and early fourth centuries B.C. took such a toll on the Spartan army that only 1,200 citizens remained by 371 B.C.

The Battle of Leuctra

Their numbers diminished and their discipline weakened, the Spartans suffered an astonishing defeat at the hands of the Thebans at the Battle of Leuctra that year. Although the Spartan force at Leuctra outnumbered the Thebans and their allies 11,000 to 6,000, only 700 of the Spartan number were citizens; the rest were allies and perioikoi. When Epaminondas, one of Thebes's elected leaders, attempted to outflank the Spartan right wing, the Spartans were forced to shift their formation. Pelopidas, another Theban leader, struck the right wing quickly and with great force at that precise moment, crushed it and created confusion and panic throughout the Spartan army. As a result, the Thebans were able to rout the Spartans, killing 400 of their citizens, including King Cleombrotus. Even more humiliating for Sparta, the survivors ran ignominiously from the field. In fact, so many Spartans retreated that the Spartan people had to suspend the law depriving them of citizenship for cowardice.

The Thebans and their allies then invaded the Peloponnesus with 70,000 men, the first time in Spartan history a foreign army had entered Laconia. The army burned and plundered the territory, freed some helots, and restored Messenia to its former inhabitants, thereby undermining Spartan power and traditional Spartan culture.

But Thebes was not to lead Greece for long. Epaminondas, the leader on whom it depended, was speared to death, on the verge of victory, while fighting the odd new alliance of Athens and Sparta at Mantinea in 362 B.C. Pelopidas was killed in a different battle soon after.

Philip II of Macedon

Meanwhile, virtually unnoticed, the power of Macedon was growing. The Macedonians were a relatively primitive, tribal people who were closely related to the Greeks, but who possessed a distinct culture of their own. Macedon was not divided into democratic and oligarchic poleis like the rest of Greece but was governed by a single, centralized monarchy. By the fourth century B.C., Macedon had become wealthy enough to possess cities and a Hellenized aristocracy.

In 359 B.C., at the age of twenty-two, the brilliant Philip II seized the throne while serving as regent for his infant nephew after his brother had been killed in battle. Taken hostage by Thebes at the age of fifteen in 367 B.C. in order to guarantee the Theban-Macedonian alliance, Philip had learned the art of warfare from Epaminondas himself. Immediately after assuming power in Macedon, Philip decreed that his infantry be trained in complex tactical maneuvers and close-order drills and sent them on thirty-five mile marches. He also hired distinguished mercenary officers from various parts of Greece. Philip improved Epaminondas's phalanx by lengthening the standard eight-foot spear to eighteen feet and by fitting this *sarissa* with a heavier iron point and a stouter bronze butt spike. Held six feet from the butt, the fifteen-pound sarissa now extended twelve feet, thus allowing the soldiers' shields to be shortened by two-thirds and their bronze breastplates and helmets to be replaced with lighter leather. The greater length of the spear also meant that the first four or five rows of soldiers could thrust instead of the usual three. (The chief problem of Philip's phalanx was to keep the spears free of the enemy's ruined equipment and mutilated corpses.) To the phalanx Philip added cavalry (great numbers of horses, largely unavailable in southern Greece, grazed in the northern pasture land), armed with lances and broad, slashing swords. Having learned from the success of Thebes's "Sacred Band" the importance of esprit de corps within elite units, Philip created an elite cavalry unit known as "the Companions." (Indeed, the very name "Philip" means "horse-lover.") Philip learned to use his cavalry to drive the enemy onto the long spears of his phalanx, a hammer-and-anvil tactic that proved highly effective.

Having ended the threat posed by the primitive Illyrians of what is now Yugoslavia, Philip seized the Athenian colony of Amphipolis and other points in gold-rich Thrace in 357 B.C. Thracian gold and silver mines, which produced 1,000 talents per year, provided Philip with the means to expand his army. The following year the Thebans called on Philip for aid in their holy war against the Athenian ally Phocis for control of sacred Delphi. Philip was only too glad to help, thereby extending his influence into central Greece. In 355 B.C., Philip gained control of Thessaly by allying himself with some of its partisans in a civil war.

Unfortunately, even the extraordinarily eloquent and passionate orations of Demosthenes (the *Philippics*, 351–341 B.C.) could not persuade the Athenians to oppose Philip. The son of a sword manufacturer, Demosthenes had overcome a speech impediment to become one of the

greatest orators in Western history, even helping to inspire Winston Churchill to oppose Adolf Hitler in the 1930s, at a time when few would. Demosthenes had begun studying rhetoric in order to prosecute the trustees whose mismanagement had cost him his father's estate. Able to recover only a portion of his inheritance, he had turned to speech writing for litigants to secure his livelihood. He had spent months at a time in an underground study, writing and practicing speeches before a full-length mirror, even shaving one cheek so that he would not be tempted to go out of the house and neglect his rhetorical training. Demosthenes now contrasted the apathy and corruption of contemporary Athens with the glorious Athens of the previous century, the Athens that had scorned the bribes and resisted the incursions of another set of barbarians, the Persians. Demosthenes warned of "the restless activity which is a part of Philip's very being and which will not allow him to content himself with his achievements and remain at peace." Demosthenes concluded:

> This peace that he speaks of is a peace which you are to observe towards Philip, while he does not observe it towards you. . . . If we will not fight him now in his own country we shall perhaps be obliged to do so in ours. . . . It is by deeds and actions, not by words, that a policy of encroachment must be arrested. . . . The Greeks see these things and endure them, gazing as they would at a hailstorm, each praying that it may not come their way, but no one trying to prevent it. . . . Heaven grant that the time may not come when the truth of my words will be tested with all severity.

But despite the warnings of Demosthenes, the Athenians adopted a policy of appeasement toward Philip, who bribed some Athenian leaders and convinced others that he was a friend who had no further territorial ambitions. Some Athenians even welcomed Philip's leadership in a joint invasion of Persia. They considered Greek unity more important than resistance to tyranny. Others were simply tired of war and the high taxes required to pay for it.

In 349–348 B.C., Philip conquered many cities of the Chalcidician League in northern Greece, several of which were Athenian allies. Having taken Olynthus, the league's capital, with the help of traitors, Philip then sold its entire population into slavery. In 348 B.C., with the help of traitors he had bribed, Philip used an army to set up puppet dictators in Euboea. The same year he seized the rest of Thrace. In 346 B.C., the Athenian Philocrates, who was also on Philip's payroll, negotiated a disastrous peace treaty with Macedon, in which Athens accepted the loss of Amphipolis, the historical equivalent of the Munich Agreement of 1938 between Neville Chamberlain and Hitler. With Athens's guard down, Philip conquered Phocis the same year. He now acquired the

prestige of acting as the guardian of sacred Delphi. When Philip attacked Byzantium, thereby threatening Athens's grain supplies from the Black Sea region, Athens, Thebes, Corinth, and a few other poleis finally joined together to stop him.

The Battle of Chaeronea

It was too late, however. In 338 B.C., Philip destroyed the coalition's reserve force of 10,000 mercenaries in a surprise attack. He then engaged the coalition's main army at the decisive Battle of Chaeronea in Boeotia. Both sides possessed about 30,000 troops. Philip led the right wing of his army ahead of the rest of his force. He engaged the Athenians, who had not put an army in the field in twenty years, then withdrew up a hill in an orderly fashion. The inexperienced Athenians, thinking they had a rout, advanced incautiously, opening a gap between themselves and the Thebans. Philip's cavalry, stationed on the left and commanded by his eighteen-year-old son, Alexander, then struck the Thebans on their now exposed flank. Meanwhile, Philip turned and launched a counterattack against the Athenians, charging downhill. The Macedonians killed 1,000 soldiers and took another 2,000 captive. The rest of the coalition forces fled. The Macedonian infantry then rushed to help the cavalry slaughter the courageous Thebans, who refused to flee. Nearly all 300 of the Sacred Band, a unit that had never before been defeated, were killed at Chaeronea. Philip wept over their slain bodies, piled up where they had died defending one another in a futile effort. He buried them there in seven soldierly rows.

Philip was magnanimous toward Athens because he did not relish expending further resources on a siege of Athens and because he admired Athenian culture. He organized the Greek poleis into the "Corinthian League," which he dominated. Each polis was obligated to contribute men and supplies for a full-scale invasion of the Persian Empire.

But Philip would not live to see the invasion of Persia. In 336 B.C., he was stabbed to death by a Macedonian nobleman while walking in a procession at his daughter's wedding. The javelins of three pursuers killed the assassin before he could be questioned. While some contemporaries believed that the Persians, who feared Philip's planned invasion of their empire, had hired the assassin, others believed the assassin had been employed by one of Philip's wives, Queen Olympias of Epirus, who feared that the son produced by his latest marriage to young Cleopatra—not to be confused with the more famous Cleopatra who lived three centuries later—would threaten her son Alexander's ascension to the throne. Indeed, the three pursuers who killed the assassin all happened to be close friends of Alexander. More revealingly, Olympias placed a crown on the

assassin's corpse, buried it, and dedicated the murder weapon (a short sword) to Apollo. Soon after, Alexander had Cleopatra's powerful uncle quietly liquidated and encouraged his mother to kill Cleopatra's infant son, his rival for the throne. Requiring little encouragement, Olympias exceeded her instructions, roasting both the infant and a daughter of Cleopatra over a charcoal brazier, then forcing Cleopatra to hang herself. A maenad in the cult of Dionysus, Olympias enjoyed sleeping in a bed filled with large snakes, an unintentional form of birth control that had driven Philip from her bed long before. She was also suspected of having administered drugs that caused brain damage to the child of another of Philip's wives.

THE VICTORIES OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Greek Rebellions Crushed

Alexander III was not yet twenty when he ascended the throne of Macedon. His features included blond hair that resembled a lion's mane, one gray-blue eye, one dark brown eye, and pointed teeth. He had a high-pitched voice, and he walked at a brisk pace, with his head bent slightly upward and to the left.

Within fifteen months, Alexander the Great, one of the greatest generals in history, had crushed Persian-financed rebellions in Thessaly, Thrace, Illyria, and Thebes. In Thebes, he slaughtered 6,000 inhabitants and sold the remaining 30,000 into slavery. He destroyed every building in the city except the temples and the house where the poet Pindar had lived.

At that point, Alexander's generals wanted him to marry and produce an heir, but he feared that those aristocratic families whose daughters were not chosen would lead a rebellion while he was away in Persia. His decision to delay the production of an heir would have unfortunate consequences for his empire.

The Invasion of the Persian Empire

In 334 B.C., Alexander crossed into Asia Minor with about 37,000 infantrymen and 6,000 cavalry. An additional 60,000 soldiers were held in reserve to await his call. The Persians rejected a Greek mercenary's wise suggestion that they engage in a scorched-earth policy, a tactic that might have forced Alexander back across the Hellespont due to a lack of supplies.

The Battle of Granicus

Alexander soon scored a victory at the Granicus River in northwest Asia Minor. Thirty thousand Persian infantry and 15,000 cavalry had positioned themselves across the deep and fast-running stream on a steep bank with thick alluvial deposits beneath. On the suggestion of Parmenio, his best general, Alexander marched downstream under cover of darkness, forded the river, and had most of his infantry across before the Persians detected his army. Recognizable by his magnificent armor and the tall white plumes on his helmet, Alexander was nearly killed in fierce cavalry combat. A javelin pierced his breastplate, and an ax severed his helmet, laying his scalp open to the bone. But the Persian infantry, far inferior to their cavalry, broke and fled. During the battle, the Persians suffered 2,500 casualties, and the Macedonians only 150. After the battle, Alexander slaughtered 15,000 to 18,000 Greek mercenaries who had dared to fight with the Persians and sent another 2,000 back to Macedon as slaves.

The victory at Granicus opened up all of Asia Minor to Macedonian conquest. But, lacking money to pay his rowers since Philip had died 500 talents in debt and Alexander had borrowed another 800 talents, Alexander was forced to send his fleet home.

The Battle of Issus

In 333 B.C., Alexander won a crucial victory at Issus, located at the crossroads between Asia Minor and Syria. Having covered his flanks with hills and the sea, so that the Persians could not use their superior cavalry and greater numbers to advantage, Alexander outflanked the Persian left, routing it and putting the whole army to flight. Darius III, who had just taken the Persian throne following the murder of Artaxerxes III, fled, leaving behind his mother, his wife, his children, and much wealth. The Persians lost 50,000 to 100,000 men.

The Siege of Tyre

Syria and most of the Phoenician ports fell soon after. The siege of Tyre lasted seven months due to the city's location on an island encircled by 150-foot walls. The capture of Tyre in 332 B.C. gave Alexander control of most of the Persian navy, thereby preventing an attack on Greece while he was in Persia. Alexander then killed about 9,000 Tyrians, crucifying 2,000 of them (it was Alexander who introduced crucifixion into the Western world), and sold another 30,000 into slavery.

The Sack of Gaza

Having then received a serious wound at the siege of Gaza in Palestine, Alexander proceeded to slaughter 10,000 of the town's males, selling the women and children into slavery. Alexander had the governor of Gaza dragged around the city until he died.

Egypt

Alexander spared Egypt since the province surrendered without resistance. The Egyptians proclaimed him Horus and the son of Osiris—in other words, a pharaoh. This proclamation, rather commonplace in Egypt, fascinated Alexander, since it seemed to corroborate the story his mother had told him just before his departure from Macedon. Olympias had implied that his real father was not Philip but a god. Eager to learn more about his divine origin, Alexander marched his army 300 miles through the Libyan desert to consult the oracle of Zeus-Amen at the Siwah Oasis. Although Alexander saw the oracle alone and claimed that he could reveal what the oracle said only to his mother, he thenceforth acted as though the oracle had declared him the son of Zeus-Amen, a scandalous claim to the Greeks, who did not worship living humans as gods. Indeed, the Macedonians refused to give their generals titles; even the lowliest soldier called the king "Alexander." To such a people, Alexander's behavior was shocking.

The Battle of Gaugamela

In 331 B.C., Alexander marched over 1,000 miles northeastward into the heart of the Persian Empire to face Darius III's main army at Gaugamela on the Tigris River. Darius then offered Alexander all of his empire west of the Euphrates River, 30,000 talents, his daughter's hand in marriage, and his son as a hostage. But when Parmenio advised, "If I were Alexander, I would accept this offer," Alexander replied, "So would I, if I were Parmenio." Though outnumbered by the Persian force of 100,000 infantry and nearly 50,000 armored cavalry (Alexander's army now consisted of about 47,000 men, only 7,250 of whom were cavalrymen), Alexander refused to launch a surprise attack at night, as Parmenio suggested, declaring his determination to demoralize the Persians by defeating them in broad daylight in an open plain. Nevertheless, he leaked Parmenio's plan to the Persians, so that they stayed awake all night and were exhausted by the time the battle was fought the following day.

In the brief but murderous Battle of Gaugamela, Darius showed his disgust with his infantry by holding them in reserve. Alexander's brilliant tactic—later imitated by John Churchill, the first duke of Marlborough, at Blenheim, and Napoléon Bonaparte at Austerlitz—was to draw as much of the Persian cavalry as he could into combat against his left wing, Parmenio's phalanx, which he made to look weaker than it actually was, and then to crush the weakened Persian center. His timing had to be perfect: If he attacked the center too soon, it would not be depleted enough, and the attack would be blunted; on the other hand, if he waited too long, his left wing might cave in from the Persian onslaught. Indeed, the Macedonian left might well have been surrounded if the Persian right had put as much energy into that objective as it put into plundering the Macedonian camp. Alexander waited patiently, and when a gap opened in the Persian line, he charged at the head of the Companions. In two or three minutes the battle was transformed. The Companions smashed through the Persian center. Fearing it would be surrounded, the Persian left then retreated. Darius fled again, as did the infantry. Alexander then turned back to slaughter the Persian right, the Scythian and Bactrian cavalry that was now penned between Alexander's cavalry and Parmenio's phalanx—yet another application of the hammer-and-anvil tactic. While Alexander lost only about 500 men, the Persians lost about 50,000 men, including much of their cavalry. Nevertheless, Alexander now had to give his soldiers huge bonuses to get them to continue eastward. They did not like the idea of marching farther and farther from home.

The Conquest of the Eastern Part of the Persian Empire

In 330 B.C., Alexander defeated 25,000 Persians at the Susian Gates, the mountain pass leading to Persepolis in what is now western Iran. The Persians initially forced the Macedonians into retreat by rolling boulders down on them. But by finding a pass that led behind the Persians, the Macedonians were able to attack them from two sides. Only 700 of the Persian cavalrymen escaped.

Alexander then seized and burned Persepolis, one of the chief cities of the Persian Empire. At that point, Darius's own satrap of Bactria (part of what are now Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) took the emperor hostage and ran him through with javelins when he refused to ride off with the satrap. Alexander ordered that the assassin's nose and ears be severed, followed by a public execution, the Persian penalty for regicide, and allowed Darius's body to be buried in the tombs of the Persian kings.

Alexander then admitted some Persians into the Companions and began dressing as a Persian king, wearing a blue and white diadem and a

white robe with a sash. Unfortunately, in the process of attempting to reconcile Persians to his rule, he was beginning to antagonize his own Macedonian soldiers. Nevertheless, from 330 to 327 B.C. Alexander conquered Parthia in what is now eastern Iran, as well as Bactria, in fierce, mountain guerilla fighting.

Paranoia

Increasingly paranoid, Alexander then ordered the murder of Parmenio and of Parmenio's son Philotas, the head of the Companions, for treason. Parmenio was stabbed to death and decapitated, while Philotas was tortured and then stoned to death before the troops. The hot-tempered and often intoxicated Alexander even impaled Cleitus, who had tended Alexander when he was a child and had saved Alexander's life at Granicus, with a spear, when Cleitus (who was also drunk) had rebuked Alexander for putting on airs.

The Indian Campaign

In 327 B.C., despite thunderstorms and his first real encounter with elephant cavalry (Darius had not used the fifteen elephants he had brought to Gaugamela), Alexander defeated Porus, king of the Punjab in western India, at the Jhelum River. The Macedonian horses refused to go near the elephants, which hurled, impaled, and stamped on many Macedonians, until the Macedonians surrounded the elephants, shot their drivers full of arrows, and pierced the elephants' feet with javelins and axes. In this battle, Alexander's army killed 20,000 of Porus's soldiers.

The following year, Alexander wanted to proceed farther into India and again offered huge bonuses, but his exhausted soldiers, who had marched over 17,000 miles and had fought in many battles, refused to go farther. An old soldier received thunderous applause at an officers' meeting when he told Alexander, "Sir, if there is one thing above all others a successful man should know, it is when to stop." Though Alexander was able to use "bad omens" as a face-saving excuse for turning back, he was furious at his men.

Alexander's frustration and rage at having to turn back, compounded by the opposition of fierce tribes, manifested itself on his voyage down the Jhelum, Chenab, and Indus Rivers. At one point, he slaughtered Indian mercenaries with whom he had negotiated a truce. He also hanged many Brahmans who encouraged the Indians to resist him. In fact, Alexander may have killed as many as 80,000 people in the cities of the southern Punjab.

The Return to Susa

Alexander and his army then sailed from the Arabian Sea into the Persian Gulf and marched northward. On the march back to Susa (325 B.C.), pounded by sandstorms, most of Alexander's army died from poisonous plants and snakes, from thirst, and from a sudden desert flood.

Dissension

Meanwhile, Alexander continued his attempt to meld together the Macedonian and Persian elites. By 330 B.C., Alexander had begun to suggest that Macedonian officers prostrate themselves before him in the Persian fashion. In fact, Alexander slammed the head of a newly arrived Macedonian against a wall for laughing at the Persians who prostrated themselves before the king. Now, in 324 B.C., acting like a Macedonian Reverend Moon, Alexander organized a mass wedding of ninety-two of his top officers to Persian women in a Persian-style ceremony. He himself took Stateira, daughter of Darius, as a wife. (Most of Alexander's forced weddings were repudiated following his death.)

Despite the fanciful claims of historians like Plutarch that Alexander sought to actualize "the brotherhood of man," his real purpose was practical—he wanted to assimilate Persian officers into his command structure and to create a Perso-Macedonian administrative class. For this reason, he gave 30,000 Persian youths Macedonian-style military training.

But Alexander's plan to allow the Persians to form part of his army prompted a mutiny among the Macedonians at Opis on the Tigris River in 324 B.C. When Alexander announced that he was letting some Macedonian soldiers return home and replacing them with Persians, the troops jeered: "No! Let us all go, and stay and fight your battles with your Persians and your father Amen!" Infuriated, Alexander had the leaders of the mutiny executed. In an emotional speech, he reminded his men of the hardships he had endured beside them: "Every part of my body—except my back—has been scarred, and there is no weapon, whether held in the hand or thrown, that has not left its mark on my flesh." He also reminded them of the fact that he had kept little wealth for himself, lavishing most of it on his men. Were they prepared to return to Macedon and tell its citizens that they had abandoned the king who had brought them honor and glory? Overcome with remorse, the soldiers wept and begged to remain. Alexander gladly forgave them and increased their pay.

The Death of Alexander

By then Alexander's empire was the largest in the world, stretching from the Adriatic Sea in the west to the Indus River in the east and from the Caspian Sea in the north to the Upper Nile in the south. The only battle Alexander ever lost was to a mysterious fever, aggravated by a wound suffered in India and by excessive drinking, a Macedonian habit. Some historians believe that the fever was induced by strychnine poisoning instigated by Antipater, the governor of Macedon in Alexander's absence. Antipater had just been ordered to Babylon by Alexander, obviously for execution. Not yet thirty-three, Alexander died at Babylon in 323 B.C. At the time, he was supervising the construction of a temple and the exploration of the Caspian Sea. He planned to extend his empire into the Arabian Peninsula. Olympias had many men killed on suspicion of poisoning her son.

THE DIFFUSION OF GREEK CULTURE

Alexander's conquests began the process through which Greek culture was transmitted throughout his vast empire. Alexander himself had imbibed Greek culture from the time he was thirteen, when Alexander's parents had employed Aristotle, the greatest living philosopher in Greece, to act as his tutor. Alexander brought Aristotle's annotated copy of the *Iliad* with him to Persia, keeping it under his pillow next to his dagger. Alexander wept because he had no Homer to recount his own exploits. During his march through Asia Minor, Alexander, who fancied himself another Achilles, stopped at what was believed to be Achilles' tomb in Troy and laid a wreath on it. Under Aristotle's influence, Alexander became interested in science as well. He included geographers, biologists, and zoologists in the Persian expedition.

Alexander established about thirty-five Greek colonies throughout the Near East. Simple garrisons, most of these settlements were composed of soldiers, located at strategic sites, and designed to offer protection against the empire's foreign and domestic foes. But some of the cities later developed into cultural centers. The greatest of the Greek centers, Alexandria (a name shared by many of these colonies), was located at the northwestern tip of the Nile delta on the site of a small fishing village. Possessing two fine harbors, Alexandria became the capital of Egypt, the largest city in the Greek world, and a center for learning, banking, and commerce. Alexandria became the port of transit from Africa and the Red Sea region and a manufacturing center for linen, jewels, cosmetics, papyrus, and glass. Planned by the Macedonian Deinocrates, the city was filled with gardens, parks, and fountains. Alexandria's streets were uncommonly wide (100 feet) and lined with shops. By 200 B.C., the city possessed a

population of 500,000, including a Jewish population large enough to require three synagogues. Many of these Jews were landowners who also served as tax collectors or generals. Considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, Alexandria's 440-foot lighthouse, located on the island of Pharos in the city's harbor, projected a beam that was visible at a distance of twenty miles. (An earthquake destroyed the lighthouse in the fourteenth century A.D.) Antioch and Pergamum, both located in what is now Turkey, were the other great commercial centers of the Hellenistic period that followed the death of Alexander. Commerce flourished throughout the empire, as Alexander unleashed hoards of Persian gold into the economy and standardized the coinage.

Koine (common Greek), a simplified version of the Attic dialect of classical Greek, became the standard written language of the Near Eastern aristocracy. In fact, the New Testament was later written in a vernacular form of koine with Semitic admixtures.

But Greek culture did not completely displace Near Eastern cultures. For instance, the Ptolemies, the Macedonian rulers of Egypt, depicted themselves wearing Egyptian garb, financed Egyptian-style temples, participated in Egyptian religious rites, and even married their own sisters as the pharaohs had. Meanwhile, officials of the Seleucid Empire used Near Eastern languages like Aramaic and cuneiform Akkadian in drafting some documents.

DIVISION AND DESTRUCTION

When Alexander died, his only heir was an embryo, a child later murdered at age thirteen. When asked on his deathbed to whom he bequeathed his empire, he whispered, "To the strongest." After forty years of bloody struggle between his former generals for control of the empire, it was divided into three parts, each controlled by a general. Ptolemy, who had been Alexander's personal staff officer and his governor of Egypt, ruled that province. Antigonus the One-Eyed, who had once saved Alexander's supply line in an important battle, ruled Macedon and much of Greece. The brilliant Seleucus, who had commanded Alexander's infantry, ruled the rest of Alexander's empire.

The easternmost portion of the Seleucid Empire was soon captured by an Indian ruler. The rest of the eastern Seleucid Empire fragmented into independent states, which were absorbed by the Parthians in the second century B.C. The western part of the empire also fragmented and fell to Rome. Egypt was conquered by Rome in the first century B.C. Greece revolted against the Antigonids, fragmented into a number of states, and was also conquered by the Romans.