

## HELLENISTIC ERA—ERA SUMMARY

ANCIENT GREECE—336 TO 146 B.C.

REIGN OF ALEXANDER TO ROME DESTROYS CORINTH

[Philip of Macedonia](#) died shortly after the *battle of Chaeronea* leaving his young son [Alexander the Great](#) to the throne. The Greeks, led by Thebes, immediately tried to throw off the Macedonian garrison, but Alexander, only twenty years old at the time, quickly put down all revolts with an iron hand. He razed Thebes to the ground, sold their citizens into slavery, and prevented a revolution in Athens by a combination of threats and diplomacy.

Immediately after pacifying Greece, he started planning for an ambitious [Invasion of Persia](#). The idea was not originally his, since his father had already laid the groundwork by building up the Macedonian army into the finest fighting force of the ancient world. Alexander also had his father's favorite generals, including [Parmenio](#), and [Antipater](#) to rely on. Nevertheless, Alexander's own military instincts were near genius, as his subsequent series of victories against enormous Persian armies showed. Macedonia was a very poor nation and Alexander crossed the Hellespont with only about 40,000 Greek and Macedonian soldiers. With this, he set about to conquer an empire of around forty million people, the largest and wealthiest in the ancient world.



ALEXANDER AND BUCEPHELUS

The story of Alexander's conquest of Persia is full of interest, but boils down to several large scale battles, in each of which the Macedonian forces prevailed over a vastly larger Persian host. The four great battles of Alexander's conquest of Persia were *Granicus*, *Issus*, *Guagamela*, and *Hydaspes*, which won for him the Near East, Syria, Media, and Hindustan respectively. The entire conquest took only seven years and was completed before Alexander's 30th birthday. It was his very youth that caused his downfall however, not to a conqueror, but to dissipation. Only a few years after returning from his farthest campaign in India he succumbed to an illness undoubtedly brought on by excessive drink.

The results of Alexander's conquests were enormous both culturally and politically, but when he died, he left neither a legitimate heir, nor an outstanding general strong enough to hold his empire together. It was therefore divided, after [twenty years of civil war](#), between four of his generals. The main divisions early in the wars were [Ptolemy I](#) in Egypt, [Seleucus](#) in the Far East, [Antigonus I](#) in the Near East, and [Antipater](#) in Macedonia and Greece, but in the final

settlement, the descendants of Antipater lost their kingdom to those of Antigonus. The kingdoms were all of the traditional despotic variety, with no pretense of self-rule or democratic government.

The cultural effects of Alexander's conquests were, therefore, much more striking than his political legacy. Alexander, who had grown up with [Aristotle](#) as a tutor, believed that Greek culture was superior to any other and did all he could to spread the Greek language and learning throughout the regions he conquered. Both Alexander and his generals founded many new cities based on the Greek model, with streets laid out in grids, market places, gymnasiums, theatres, council halls, and baths. The Greek language became the one used for education and higher learning. Libraries and schools of learning were maintained in most major cities. In the east, many of the towns founded by the Macedonians never really took root, but in the Mediterranean regions, Greek culture became dominant, and prevailed until the [Moslem Conquests](#) of the seventh century.



CORINTHIAN NOBLEMAN SOLD  
AS A SLAVE IN THE MARKETPLACE.

The first contact between Roman and Greco-Macedonian powers occurred during the [Pyrrhic Wars in Italy](#) in 291 BC when the Greek city states in southern Italy invited the [Pyrrhus](#), King of Epirus and the greatest general of his age to help them resist Rome. Although Pyrrhus was at first successful, he was eventually overcome by Rome and the Greek cities in Italy were absorbed in Rome's growing sphere of influence. It was not until 80 years later, however, that a Roman Army was sent into Macedonian territory to punish the Macedonian king for making an alliance with Hannibal. Three [Roman Macedonian Wars](#) followed, with Rome increasing its influence over Macedonia in each.

The first phase of the [Roman Macedonian Wars](#) occurred during the Second Punic War, and the last, culminating in the *Battle of Pydna*, resulted in the complete overthrow of Macedonian rule over mainland Greece. About this time, several of the city-states in the Peloponnese fought a series of [Wars of the Achaean League](#) to defend their interests. Their intrigues led to an uprising in 146 BC against Roman rule, and as a result, a Roman army

invaded Greece and destroyed the city of Corinth. After this, mainland Greece was ruled as a Province of the Roman Empire.

The influence of Greek culture on that of Rome was tremendous. Even before the Roman conquest of Greece, Greek scholars and teachers were very influential in Rome, since Greek was the language of learning throughout the Mediterranean. The Roman religion, art, philosophy, literature, and even the formalization of Latin grammar was heavily influenced by Greek culture. Educated Greek slaves were very expensive and sought after by aristocratic Roman families as teachers for their children. But just as in Classical Greece, where there was tension and distrust between stoic Sparta, and cultured Athens, the Greek influence was resisted by stoic Romans, such as [Cato \(the censor\)](#), who feared its decadent influence.

Eventually Rome conquered the eastern portion of the territory that was once part of Alexander's Hellenistic empire. By that time, however, Greek culture was so well-established that it remained the language of commerce and learning in the eastern Mediterranean long after Rome's political domination of the area. It was only the western part of the Empire, including Italy, Gaul, and Britain, where Latin became the predominant language. The Greek centers of learning in the east, including Athens, Alexandria, Rhodes, Ephesus, Tarsus, Pergamum, continued to prosper under the *Pax Romana*, and produced many of the greatest scholars of Roman times, in the fields of literature, medicine, geography, astronomy, philosophy, and many others. Among them were [Archimedes](#), one of the greatest scientists of Ancient times, [Plutarch](#), the great biographer, Eratosthenes, who correctly measured the size of the earth, Galen, who made great advances in medicine, and Hypatia, a female philosopher and teacher. In addition, Christianity thrived in the eastern empire, and produced many of the most important early saints and missionaries of the time.