Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age

Conquest and Cultural Blending in a Changing World
Who was Alexander the Great?

- Son of King Philip II of Macedonia
  - Skilled horseman at a very young age
  - Tutored by the Greek Philosopher Aristotle as a teenager (13-16)
  - Became regent of Macedonia at age 16 (while Philip was at war)

- Successfully put down a Thracian revolt at age 16
- Accomplished military commander during his father’s campaign’s to unite the Greek City-States (17-19)
- King of Macedonia at age 20 (after his father was assassinated)
Alexander the Great (the Conqueror)

He vowed to exact his revenge on the Persian Empire for their crimes against Greece

- He Defeated the forces of the Persian Satraps in Asia Minor during the Battle of the Gracianus River (May 334 BCE)

- He Defeated the forces under the personal command of King Darius III at the Battle of Issus (Nov 333 BCE)

- He Defeated the forces under Persian King Darius III a second time at the Battle of Gaugamela (Oct 331 BCE)
Alexander the Great (the Conqueror)

- He defeated the last Persian forces at the Battle of the Persian Gate (Jan 330 BCE)
- He defeated the Scythian forces at the Battle of the River Jaxartes (329 BCE)
- He defeated the Hindu King Porus on the banks of the Hydaspes River (326 BCE)
Was it Alexander’s intention to spread Greek Culture during his conquests?

**Tenets of Alexander’s Policies**

- He established key cities along his path of conquest that were settled by veterans of the army and served as administrative headquarters in each region.
- He attempted to create a unified ruling class of Persians and Greeks by promoting inter-marriages between his leaders and the daughters of local nobles (as well as Greek soldiers marrying local women).
- He continued the Persian tradition of using Satraps (local governors) to rule over conquered territories within his growing empire.
- He adopted local political practices of Persian royalty (such as royal ceremonial events, robes, attendants, etc.) to better rule over his subjects.
- He unified his army by placing Persian, Indian, and Egyptian soldiers trained in the Greek phalanx and fighting skills in Macedonian ranks.
Alexander the Great (the Conqueror)

He established at least fourteen cities named in his honor

The most famous was the Egyptian port city of Alexandria
Alexander the Great (the Conqueror)

Other cities named in Alexander’s honor

The Castle of Alexandria

Alexandria on the Indus

Alexandria on the Oxus River
Alexander the Great (the Conqueror)

How much impact did Alexander’s policies have after he had died?

• Alexander died in palace of Nebuchadnezzar II (in Babylon) in June 323 (at the age of 32) due to some type of a fever (malaria, typhoid, or poison?)

• The empire split into satraps (later known as Hellenic Dynasties) under the rule of Alexander’s key military leaders

• Most of Alexander’s cultural changes were rejected after his death (including the cross-cultural marriages his officers entered into)

• As his successors founded new cities, more and more Greek colonists migrated into the new Hellenic Dynasties

• Despite their initial reluctance, his successors naturalized themselves to their local surroundings and customs to maintain control over their realms

• However, these changes did not have a great impact on the common people, the status of women, or the practice of slavery within the Mediterranean world
Alexander’s Successors created New Dynasties

General Antigonus I created the Antigonid Dynasty (in Asia Minor)
General Ptomeny I created the Ptolemeic Dynasty (in Egypt)
General Seleucus I created the Seleucid Dynasty (in Persia)
Alexander’s Successors created New Empires

Were these new Empires dominantly Greek or Hellenistic?

- The Antigonid Dynasty was short lived due to Antigonus’ attempt to take over the rest of Alexander’s former empire and his death at the Battle of Ipsus (301 BC)

- The Seleucid Dynasty or Empire maintained a preeminence of Greek culture and political power in the urban areas where the Macedonian elites dominated
  - Local customs and practices across the empire maintained dominant Persian traditions with various Greek influences visual in most aspects of life
  - Seleucid efforts to expand the empire were halted by invasions by the Parthians (Iranian tribes) from the northern steppes in 247 BCE and the Roman Empire in 63 BCE
Alexander’s Successors created New Empires

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- The Ptolemaic Dynasty or Empire was a Greek royal family who ruled Egypt from 305 BCE to 30 BCE
  - Ptolemy I secured Alexander’s body and had it entombed in Alexandria
  - He accepted the traditional title of Pharaoh given to his predecessor
  - He defended Egypt and continued to expand Alexandria’s influence as a powerful economic and cultural center on the Mediterranean

- The last and most famous of the Pharaoh’s of the Ptolemaic Dynasty was Queen Cleopatra VII
  - She became Queen and mistress to Julius Caesar
  - She gave birth to Caesar’s only son Ptolemy Caesar
  - Egypt was taken over by Caesar’s nephew Augustus
Alexandria Rivals Athens as a Cultural Center

- The port of Alexandria became one of the largest trade centers in the known world during the Hellenistic Era.

- Both land and sea routes linked Alexandria to the three major continents.

- The Lighthouse of Alexandria was built between 280-247 BCE on the island of Pharos to guide ships into the harbor.

- Estimated between 393 – 450 feet high, the Lighthouse was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
Alexandria Rivals Athens as a Cultural Center

• Alexandria became the main rival of Athens as a center for learning in the Hellenistic World

• The Great Library of Alexandria was established between the reign of Ptolemy I and II (323-246 BCE)

• It was the largest Library in the Hellenistic world and contained works on philosophy, literature, history, math, and science
Alexandria Rivals Athens as a Cultural Center

- The observatory at the Library of Alexandria focused on Astronomy.

  - Aristarchus used astronomy to prove that the sun was at least 300 times larger than the earth.
  - He was also the first to propose the Heliocentric theory of the universe based on his observations.
  - Eratosthenes used geometry to calculate the circumference of the earth at 28,000 miles.
Alexandria Rivals Athens as a Cultural Center

- Mathematicians like Eucid and Archimedes came to Alexandria to study and develop theories of geometry.

- Eucid published his work called *Elements*, which is the basis for courses in geometry.

- Eucid’s *Elements* would also contain the mathematical equations of the Pythagorean Theory developed by the Greek mathematician Pythagoras.

- Archimedes accurately estimated the value of pi ($\pi$), and explained the ideas of using a lever and compound pulleys to move large objects.
Architectural Influences of the Hellenistic Age

Colossus of Rhodes was one of the Seven Wonders

Greek style Amphitheater in Priene, Turkey

Ancient City of Petra in Jordan
Hellenistic Influences in other parts of the Known World

What impact did the Hellenistic Era have on Hebrew Judaic traditions?

- During the Hellenistic era, the Greek Torah or *Septuagint* was created
- The Hebrew “Song of Songs” was written using the Hellenistic style of poetry
- The Jewish King Aristobulus substituted the Hebrew name for God (Yaweh) in place of Zeus in the Greek “Hymn to Zeus”
- The Jewish scribe Ben Sira wrote the “Sirach” or “Wisdom of Jesus” between 180-175 BCE, while living in Alexandria. The original Greek writing was never accepted into the Hebrew Torah, but is used & referenced by Catholic & Orthodox clergy
Hellenistic Influences in other parts of the Known World

What impact did the Hellenistic Era have on the Indian Sub-Continent?

• Between 269 – 231 BCE, King Ashoka of the Mauryan Dynasty issued a collection of 33 edicts on the pillars of Ashoka. The edicts were written bilingual using both the Greek and Aramaic languages.

• Hellenistic influences can be seen in the architecture of Buddhist Stupas (shrines) carved with people wearing Greek clothes and carrying Greek instruments & amphora.