

Premium TimeMaps Unit Slideshow

Greece and Persia

Student's Slideshow Commentary

Contents

Introduction	p. 2
Slideshow commentary	p. 3
Questions	p. 21
Further References	p. 22

Introduction

For each slide, the commentary mostly follows the same formula:

1. **Slide number and date**

2. **Introductory paragraph (in bold)**

This seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in bold.

3. **Bullet points**

One or more bullet points, giving very brief points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

4. **Additional note(s)**

For most slides there are additional notes. These give more in-depth support to the bullet points. Much of the information these contain may be superfluous to your needs, especially if you are covering the topic quickly. However, we have included it so that it is there for you if you want it.

Commentary

When using the Sideshow in class it might be helpful to print these notes out.

Slide 1: 600 BCE

The Middle East has been the location for great civilizations for more than two and a half thousand years. In the lands of the Mediterranean, on the other hand, civilization is much more recent.

- In the Middle East, the Assyrian Empire, which had dominated the region for centuries, has been replaced by three large states. These are the Babylonian Empire, the Empire of the Medes, and Egypt (note 1).
- In the Mediterranean lands, several peoples have recently begun to develop their own urban civilizations (2).
- The most significant of these are the Greeks (note 3).

Additional notes:

1. The Middle East

The Assyrian Empire has recently collapsed. Three new states now dominate the Middle East.

The Babylonian Empire

The Babylonian Empire covers most of the territories ruled by the Assyrians. It is ruled by king Nebuchadnezzar. He is famous for destroying the kingdom of Judah, and its capital Jerusalem.

Many Jewish people are taken into captivity in Babylon. There they will make good progress in writing down the teachings of their monotheistic faith. The Jewish scriptures (the Old Testament of the Christian Bible) will begin to take shape.

The Medes

In Iran, the Medes have recently become powerful.

The Medes are an Iranian tribe, who in the past centuries have moved down from central Asia and settled in Iran.

By this time, the religion of Zoroastrianism has probably appeared in Iran. Zoroastrianism teaches that there is a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil.

Egypt

Egypt is powerful again after centuries of weakness. Its pharaohs are working to revive the glories of this ancient civilization.

2. The Mediterranean

The Phoenicians

The Phoenicians are a people who have become wealthy by pioneering trade routes across the Mediterranean, and beyond. They have set up trading posts on the coasts of the Mediterranean. Some of these have grown into large cities. The outstanding example of these is Carthage, on the North African coast.

Phoenician traders have spread literacy, based on their alphabet, to western peoples such as the Lydians and the Greeks.

The Phoenician city-states are now part of the Babylonian Empire. However, they are allowed a good deal of self-rule, and they remain wealthy. They have maintained their maritime trading links to the west.

The Lydians

Lydia is a wealthy kingdom in Asia Minor. The Lydian kings are the first to mint metal coins, a practice which the Greeks, and later other peoples, will adopt.

The Greeks

The Greeks are one of the peoples with whom the Phoenicians developed strong trading links with. It is from the Phoenicians that the Greeks have picked up their alphabetic script, and also other elements of civilization. By this time, however, the Greeks have taken the place of the Phoenicians as the dominant sailors and merchants within the eastern Mediterranean Sea (see below for more on the Greeks).

3. The Greeks

In this period, the homeland of the Greeks is in what is today Greece, plus the western shores of Turkey (in ancient times called Asia Minor) and all the islands in between (i.e. in the Aegean Sea).

This is a region of narrow coastlines, small islands, rugged mountains, steep valleys, and of course water. Land suitable for growing crops is limited to narrow valleys between the high ground, plus a few small coastal plains.

This landscape means that the Greeks are divided into hundreds of small-scale societies, each based on a valley or coastal area. These societies are separated from one another by mountains and water. This gives each of them a strong sense of its own identity.

Greek city-states

Up to around 800 BCE the Greeks lived in rural villages, gathered together in small tribal groups. Around that time they began to concentrate in small cities. Each of these was clustered around a defensible hill top with a fortress on top (acropolis) and surrounded by defensive walls. Within the city walls was a public space (agora) for markets, religious ceremonies, and political meetings. Outside the walls, cultivated land stretched away from the walls for a few miles.

The city and its surrounding land formed a city-state (polis).

Republics

By this time (600 BCE) most Greek city-states have long since got rid of their kings. They are governed as republics - the earliest republics in history, in fact (with the possible exception of some Indian states - see the unit on *Ancient India*).

Most power is still in the hands of a few leading families. These are the aristocrats - the wealthiest landowners. Only they are appointed to important offices such as generals, judges and priests. They also sit on the state's council (boule), where decisions affecting the state are made.

A political system such as this, in which most power is held by just a small section of the community, is called an oligarchy.

In most states, however, there is a citizens' assembly where the ordinary citizens have a voice. They can vote on major issues, such as whether or not the state should go to war. This is important, for the ordinary citizens (all free adult males) are the ones who will do most of the fighting.

Greek warfare

The armies of the Greek city-states are made up of the ordinary farmers, who fight as foot soldiers (hoplites).

They fight in closely-packed formations, called phalanxes. Each soldier has a spear, which is aimed outwards to fend off enemy attacks. When a soldier in the front row is killed or wounded, one from the row behind steps forward to take his place.

This was the theory, anyhow. Greek battles often started with a shoving match, in which the stronger formation would push the other back, and then cause it to break and run.

A maritime people

The Greeks early looked towards the sea. They saw it as a way of escaping the limitations of their rugged homeland and finding more and better farmland on distant shores.

By this date they have founded many colonies, right around the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. From the beginning these colonies were independent city-states in their own right. However, they have maintained trading links with their mother cities. They send back grain and metals in exchange for olive oil and luxury goods. The Greeks are now replacing the Phoenicians as the dominant traders and seafarers in the eastern Mediterranean.

Athens and Sparta

There are hundreds of city-states in the Greek homeland. Of these, the leading ones are Athens and Sparta.

Athens

Athens is located on a coastal plain in eastern Greece. It is the greatest trading center, with the largest population, of all the Greek city-states.

Like many other Greek city-states its political system is an oligarchy - it is ruled by a small number of aristocratic families.

About 20 years before this date, social tensions had led the Athenians to ask a man called Draco to write a code of laws. Draco's laws, however, were so harsh (it's from these that we get the word *Draconian*) that around now the Athenians ask another statesman, Solon, to write a new law code.

By the standards of the time, these are revolutionary. They give ordinary Athenians much more protection against injustice from the rich. For example, they could no longer be enslaved for being in debt.

Sparta

Sparta, in southern Greece, is a very different kind of place.

At some point in its history Sparta conquered its neighbors and turned their inhabitants into serfs (*helots*). Not surprisingly, these people repeatedly rebelled. As they far outnumbered their masters, they posed a constant threat to the Spartans' security.

A Spartan leader called Lycurgus (who lived probably at some time between 700 BCE and 600 BCE) therefore turned Sparta into a military society. He decreed that all male citizens between ages 20 and 30 must live together in barracks and spend their time training for war. Their needs would be provided for by the helots, who would grow the crops and make the things the Spartans needed.

Since then the Spartans have gained a reputation as the best fighters in Greece.

Sparta is theoretically ruled by two kings, reigning together. They command the Spartans in war. For everyday issues, though, a small council of elected officials, the Ephors, has the real power.

Slide 2: 500 BCE

The huge Persian empire has now appeared in the Middle East.

- In the Middle East, the Persians have conquered by far the largest empire that the Ancient World has seen up to this point (note 1).
- In Greece, the first democracy in world history has appeared, in Athens (note 2).

Additional notes:

1. The Persian Empire

Like the Medes, the Persians are an Iranian people. They were ruled by the Medes until the Persian king, Cyrus, rebelled against (his uncle) the Mede king and defeated him (about 560 BCE).

Cyrus is known to history as Cyrus the Great. He is one of the great conquerors in world history. He belonged to the royal clan of the Persians, the Achaemenids, and modern scholars often refer to the empire which he founded as the Achaemenid Empire (to distinguish it from later Persian empires).

Cyrus took over the Medes' empire and then expanded its territory much further. His first major conquest was the kingdom of Lydia. This kingdom had recently conquered the Greek city-states on the western coast of Asia Minor, so these now came under Persian rule as well.

Cyrus then conquered the Babylonian Empire. He won the support of the conquered people by showing them respect and letting them keep their own customs.

Most famously, Cyrus allowed those Jewish exiles whose families had been taken to Babylon by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, to return home. There they set about rebuilding their capital, Jerusalem, along with the temple to their God, Yahweh.

Finally, Cyrus invaded far into central Asia. Here he was killed fighting the nomadic tribes there.

His son, Cambyses, succeeded him. He added Egypt to the Persian Empire. While he was there, however, a rebellion broke out in the Persian homeland. Cambyses died before he could defeat it, but a young prince, Darius, was able to do so. He killed the rebellious nobles and was able to take the Persian throne.

Darius the Great

Darius the Great (as he is known to history) has restored stability to the Persian Empire, and improved the way it is organized. He has divided its huge territory into twenty provinces, and appointed governors (called satraps) to rule them. These are very powerful officials, but they are kept in check by other royal officials known as the "King's Eyes". These travel around the empire, keeping an eye on the satraps. They report any sign of disloyalty to the king.

Darius has had a road network constructed which covers the whole empire. At the heart of this is the Royal Road, which goes from Asia Minor to Persia, more than 1,700 miles long. He has had a postal service set up, by which royal couriers carry messages swiftly from the capital to all parts of the empire.

The Persian army is made up of troops drawn from all parts of the empire. At its core, however, are the elite troops known as the Ten Thousand Immortals. These are recruited only from among the Persians, not the conquered peoples of the empire.

Darius has had a magnificent royal capital built, at Persepolis. Artists and crafts workers from all over the empire are brought here to adorn the public buildings with beautiful statues and paintings.

Under Darius, the Persian Empire has been expanded still more. To the east, he has conquered the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, up to the Indus River. To the west, Darius plans on marching into Europe.

2. Greece: the first democracy

As we have seen, most early Greek city-states were ruled by oligarchies - small groups of aristocratic families who held most of the power in the state.

Many city-states then fell under the control of tyrants. These were individuals who seized power for themselves. Many did a great deal of good for their citizens, but as time went by more and more of them became known for their cruelty and abuse of power.

Athens was one of the city-states that came to be ruled by tyrants. In 546 BCE, an aristocrat called Peisistratos forced his way to power. His rule brought political stability to Athens, which had been going through a time of great unrest. He did much to help the poor, for example by paying them to work on beautiful new buildings for the city. He also encouraged Athenian trade, and the city grew more prosperous.

Peisistratos died in 527, and his sons took his place in power. They were widely seen as ruling only for themselves; one was assassinated and the other driven from power (510 BCE).

The aristocrats returned to power, but not for long. One of them, Cleisthenes, called on the people to overthrow the oligarchy. Having achieved this, he has set about establishing the world's first democracy.

Athenian democracy

Athenian democracy was quite unlike any modern democracy. In the latter, government is carried out by elected representatives of the people meeting in assemblies such as the US Congress or the British Parliament (hence its names, representative or parliamentary democracy).

In Athenian democracy, the people themselves passed the laws (direct democracy).

An assembly of all citizens made laws and selected the public officials. Most officials were also ordinary citizens, either elected by the assembly or chosen by lot.

Every citizen (only male citizens here - women had no place in this system) had the right, not only to vote on the assembly's decisions, but to speak in the assembly as well. A smaller council, also selected by the assembly, decided which laws the assembly should discuss.

Citizens also served on juries in the law courts - much larger than modern ones, commonly with 500 jurors present.

The Peloponnesian League

Meanwhile, Sparta has made itself the dominant power in the Peloponnese. This is the peninsula which makes up southern Greece. The group of city-states which Sparta leads is therefore called the Peloponnesian League.

Slide 3: 450 BCE

A series of wars between the Persian Empire and the Greek states have seen the Greeks triumphant.

- Wars between the mighty Persian empire, on the one hand, and the many small Greek states, on the other, have ended in defeat for the Persians (note 1).
- Athens and Sparta have emerged from the Persian Wars as the undisputed leaders of the Greeks (note 2).

Additional notes:

1. The Persian Wars

In 499 BCE Darius the Great, "King of Kings" of the Persians, marched into Europe. Before he had gone very far news came of a revolt in western Asia Minor - the Greek cities there had risen against Persian rule. Frustrated and angry, Darius called off his western campaign and returned to deal with the trouble.

It took several years for the Persians to put down the revolt. The Greek rebels were helped by some city-states in mainland Greece, especially Athens. This made Darius realise that the western frontier of his empire would never be truly secure until he had conquered Greece as well.

The Battle of Marathon

In 490 BCE, therefore, he sent an expedition across the Aegean Sea to attack Athens. This invasion began the wars between the Persians and the Greeks which Western historians traditionally call the "Persian Wars".

The Persian force of 20,000 soldiers landed on the plain of Marathon, near Athens. The Athenian army marched out to meet them with about 11,000 soldiers. However, these were better armed and better led than the Persian force. The Persians were defeated, the survivors fled to their ships, and the ships sailed back to Persian territory.

Legend has it that a messenger took the news of the victory back to Athens. This man ran the 26 miles (the distance of the modern Marathon race) to the city, delivered his message and then sank to the ground, dead.

Xerxes' invasion

Darius' son, Xerxes, set himself the task of completing what his father had started.

Xerxes's expedition to conquer the Greeks set off in 480 BCE. It was much larger than the first, and led by the king in person. A joint military and naval force crossed from Asia Minor into Europe and marched on down into Greece.

Seeing the danger, the Greek city-states, who were always quarrelling among themselves, put their differences aside. Uniting against the invader, they placed themselves under the joint leadership of Athens and Sparta. Athens had the strongest navy, while Sparta had the best army.

The Battle of Thermopylae

The huge Persian army had probably 100,000 men. In order to reach most of Greece, it had to travel through the narrow pass of Thermopylae. A Greek army of about 7,000 men defended this pass for three days.

Then a Greek traitor offered to show the Persians a secret path over the mountains, known only to locals. This allowed a large force of Persians to get round behind the Greek force. On realising the danger, the Spartan commander sent the bulk of his Greek army away. He and 300 Spartans, plus 400 other Greek soldiers, remained to guard their retreat. Utterly outnumbered, they sacrificed their lives, almost to a man; but the bulk of the Greek army got away.

The Battle of Salamis

The Persians could now advance to Athens. The Athenians evacuated the city to a nearby island, and the Persians marched in and burnt it.

Xerxes swiftly led his fleet to near Athens to destroy the Athenian navy. The Athenian admiral, however, lured the Persian ships into the narrow straits of Salamis. Here, they were unable to move properly - there were just too many ships. They began to get out of control. The Athenian fleet then attacked, and sank many of the Persian ships. The rest fled the battle and soon returned to Persian territory. This ended what the Greeks came to regard as the decisive battle of the wars.

The Battle of Plataea

A little later Xerxes himself returned to home, along with much of his army. The rest remained in Greece until the following year. Then a Spartan-led Greek army attacked and defeated them at the Battle of Plataea. The surviving Persians withdrew as best they could to Asia Minor.

The Greeks had saved their homeland.

2. The Delian League

Athens and Sparta emerged from the Persian invasion as the undoubted leaders of the Greeks. After the withdrawal of the remaining Persian forces from Europe, however, the Spartans felt the danger had passed and they and their allies returned to southern Greece.

The Athenians did not agree. They knew that the Persians remained a major threat. In particular, the Greeks of Asia Minor, who had thrown off Persian rule during the war, feared that the Persians would return in force. A great power like the Persian Empire could easily raise more huge armies and fleets to attack the Greeks again.

In 478, therefore, Athens formed an alliance of the Greek city-states which were located on the coasts and islands of the Aegean Sea. For thirty years this has continued to protect Greece from the Persian navy, ensured that Greek trade carries on safely, and attacked Persian territory in the Mediterranean when it gets the opportunity.

Athens dominant

Athens is by far the strongest city-state in the alliance. Its navy does most of the fighting. To pay for it, the members of the alliance contribute into a joint treasury. Until recently this has been located on the island of Delos, in the middle of the Aegean Sea. This is where the council of representatives of the various states also met. Historians therefore call this alliance the Delian League.

By 450 BCE, fighting against the Persians has virtually ceased. The Delian League continues in being, however. In fact, the Athenians have by now converted it almost into their own empire. They treat their allies like subjects rather than equals. They strong-arm other Greek cities into joining the League. Those city-states that want to leave the League are forced back in. Most humiliatingly for the other members, the Athenians transfer the Leagues' treasury from Delos to Athens. There it is used to help pay for the beautiful buildings that are sprouting up there.

Slide 4: 400 BCE

Athens and Sparta at war

- The period between 478 BCE and 430 BCE is a Golden Age for Athens (note 1)
- Growing tensions between Athens and Sparta lead to the bitter Peloponnesian Wars between 431 and 404. This ended in Spartan victory over Athens (note 2).
- Despite this, Greek philosophy is coming to its height (note 3).

Additional Notes:

1. The Athenian Golden Age

By the mid-5th century BCE, Athens had become the wealthiest of all the Greek cities, probably of the entire Mediterranean. The Athenians used this wealth (plus contributions from the other members of the Delian League) to beautify their city. Artists, sculptors and architects from all over the Greek world came to Athens to work. These years saw the construction of the Parthenon, the best known of all Greek buildings. Many other magnificent buildings appeared as well.

Greek art was undergoing a transformation at this time. Statues of human figures were becoming less formal and rigid, and more natural and elastic. In architecture, the elegance of buildings reached new heights. In literature, this was the period of the great Athenian dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides.

One statesman in particular is associated with this glorious period. His name was Pericles. The assembly elected him to high office most years between 460 BCE and 429 BCE, when he died. He championed the construction of beautiful buildings. He was also an active supporter of democracy: for example he made sure that Athenians were paid for taking part in the assembly, and when holding public office. This meant that poorer citizens could play a fuller part in government.

2. Athens against Sparta

As we have seen, Athens and Sparta ended the Persian Wars as the leading city-states in Greece. Athens remained most powerful at sea, Sparta on land. Each stood at the head of a league of city states, which between them included most of Greece.

Over time, tensions arose between them. The wealth and power of Athens aroused resentments amongst the other Greek city-states. The very different political and social systems in Athens and Sparta bred distrust between them. Sparta began to feel its position of leadership in southern Greece under threat. Athenian over-confidence led it to interfere in the affairs of other states, fuelling the worst fears of the Spartans and their allies.

The Peloponnesian War - round one

The Peloponnesian Wars between Athens and Sparta began in 431, and ended in 404 BCE. This dreadful conflict involved most of the city-states of Greece. Several of these were totally destroyed, their people massacred or sold into slavery.

The Athenians started the war in a very strong position. They were no match for the Spartans and their allies on land, but they controlled the seas with their powerful navy. The city and its port were protected by well-built walls. As long as they could bring in food (provided by their subjects in the Delian League) they could survive.

Year after year Spartan forces occupied the area around Athens. They used the traditional tactic of burning crops to lure the Athenians out for battle. The Athenians, however, stayed within their walls. The Athenian navy escorted convoys of cargo ships carrying plenty of food into Athens. Athenian fleets also attacked Sparta's coastal allies, forcing the Spartans to send troops to their aid. Even the outbreak of plague - made much worse in a population confined within its walls - did not change the situation.

Neither side was able to gain an advantage, and the stalemate ended in a truce in 421 BCE (the Peace of Nicias).

The Peloponnesian War - round two

The tensions had not disappeared, however. In 418 BCE Athenian troops supported an attempt by some of Sparta's allies to break free of her control. This failed after a decisive Spartan victory.

Then in 415, when an Athenian ally in Sicily was attacked by a Spartan ally, the Athenians sent a large expedition to support it. This expedition ended in total disaster - both the land and sea forces were destroyed.

In 413, Sparta again attacked Athens directly, starting the second Peloponnesian War (413-404 BCE). Athens recovered its strength after the Sicilian disaster, and was able to hold Sparta and its allies off.

As time went by, however, the tide of war turned against her. The Persians (who always regarded Athens as their main enemy) started paying Sparta huge sums of money, and along with her allies, Sparta was able to build up a powerful fleet. This succeeded in destroying the Athenian navy in 405 BCE. The Athenians found their key strategic advantage gone, and their food supply cut off. After a long siege the Athenians sued for peace in 404 BCE.

Sparta is now the leading power in Greece.

3. Greek philosophy at its height

This period sees Socrates teaching and debating in Athens, whilst the Peloponnesian war drags on. He challenges the thinking of his contemporaries by posing penetrating questions, aimed at stripping away the sloppiness and prejudices we tend to bring to our thinking. He develops the "Socratic method", a way of searching for knowledge based on questions and discussion rather than simply teaching facts.

In doing this, Socrates starts a period in which Greek philosophy will reach the peak of its achievement, under his successors Plato and Aristotle.

Slide 5: 338 BCE

A new power rising

- The Spartans dominated Greece for about 30 years, but they lost this position to the city-states of Thebes and a revived Athens (note 1).
- Finally, however, the northern kingdom of Macedonia has gained sole dominance (note 2).
- These years see Greek culture - especially Greek philosophy - reach its peak (note 3).

Additional notes:

1. Greece and Persia

For about thirty years, Sparta was the leading power in Greece. Gradually, however, other city-states - including, once again, Athens - gained in strength. In the late 370s, therefore, Spartan dominance came to an end, and other states competed for leadership.

The giant Persian Empire, meanwhile, has remained a powerful state. As we have seen, it used its great wealth to boost Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. It then sent funds to Sparta's rivals to weaken its power. The city-states of the Greek mainland have been so pre-occupied with their struggles with each other, that they have allowed the Persians to resume their control over the Greek city-states of western Asia Minor.

2. Macedonia

The people of the northern kingdom of Macedonia regard themselves as Greek. They speak a form of the Greek language. The Greeks further south, however, view them as semi-barbarians.

Since the formation of the kingdom of Macedonia, in the 6th century BCE, its people have had to often deal with attacks from their northern neighbours. These are Thracian and Illyrian tribes - who are definitely not Greeks.

King Philip II of Macedonia

In 359 King **Philip II** came to the throne. Macedonia has become a formidable state. He had to spend his first years fighting off attacks from northern tribes. Since soundly defeating them, however, he has been able to focus on his main ambition - the domination of the whole of Greece.

Philip is an excellent military leader. The Macedonians have long been familiar with the phalanx - the close-packed formation of infantry which is the backbone of Greek warfare (see above, notes for 600 BCE). Philip now improves on this. He makes it larger, and gives the soldiers longer spears. He also makes the cavalry play a more important role in battle. He devises new tactics for infantry and cavalry to fight together more effectively.

Macedonia dominates Greece

In these ways Philip developed the finest army in Greece. He was able to gradually bring northern Greek city-states under his control, alarming those further south. The Athenians in particular tried to rally the other Greek states into an alliance against Philip. In this they were only partly successful, and they and their allies were completely defeated in 338 BCE.

Philip followed this battle up by forming the League of Corinth, under his leadership. This consisted of all the Greek city-states - only Sparta stood aloof.

3. Greek philosophy

The 4th century BCE has seen Greek philosophy reach its peak. The philosopher Socrates was executed (for questioning belief in the gods) in 399. His student, Plato, and then later *his* student, Aristotle, built on his work. All these great thinkers have lived and worked in Athens (though Aristotle was for a time tutor to the young Macedonian prince, Alexander). They have brought Greek philosophy to its peak, and laid the foundations for much of later Western thought.

Slide 6: 321 BCE

Alexander the Great

- Alexander inherited the Macedonian throne from his father in 336 BCE (note 1).
- He then proceeded on one of the most remarkable series of conquests in all world history, taking in the whole of the Persian empire and territories in western India (note 2).

Additional notes:

1. Alexander succeeds his father as king

King Philip of Macedon was planning to attack the Persian Empire when he was assassinated (336). He was succeeded by his son, who would go down in history as Alexander the Great. He was just 20 years old when he came to the throne.

Many Greek city-states saw Philip's death as an opportunity to throw off Macedonian dominance, and declared their independence. The northern barbarians also saw their chance to weaken Macedonia, and invaded.

Alexander attacks

Alexander marched south and the Greek city-states quickly submitted to him. He then marched north to deal with the northern barbarians. While he was doing this, the city-state of Thebes rebelled again.

Furious, Alexander turned his army around and swiftly marched south. He crushed Thebes' army, destroyed the city and sold its people into slavery.

With Thebes as an example of what would happen to those who challenged his rule, Alexander had no more trouble from the Greek cities. He then quickly drove the northern barbarians back, so that he could now turn his attention to his great project. This was to carry out his father's ambitions against the huge Persian Empire.

2. Alexander's conquests

Over the next 15 years, Alexander would prove himself to be one of the greatest military commanders in all history.

The Battle of the River Granicus

In 334 BCE he launched his invasion of the Persian Empire by crossing into Asia Minor. He then met a Persian army at the River Granicus. This was smaller than his own army (which numbered about 40,000 men), but it was in a strong, easily-defendable position.

Alexander lured it out and, once it was on open ground, attacked. The Persian army was completely destroyed.

The Battle of Issus

Alexander then led his army through Asia Minor, receiving the submission of cities and tribes as he went. Meanwhile the Persian king, Darius III, collected a huge army (perhaps 100,000 men) and marched to meet him. The two forces met at the Battle of Issus, near Syria. It was only by brilliant generalship that Alexander was able to triumph. For the Persians, defeat turned to rout, and Darius fled from the battlefield back to Babylon.

Tyre and Egypt

Alexander headed south for Egypt. On the way he was delayed by stout resistance from the people of Tyre. It was only after a seven month siege that he was able to breach the walls. Just as with Thebes, Alexander's fury caused him to destroy the city and sell its people into slavery.

On he went to Egypt. Here, he was welcomed as a liberator from Persian rule and crowned as pharaoh.

The Battle of Gaugamela

Meanwhile, Darius was collecting another army, gathered from all over the empire. It was probably about the same size as the one at Issus. Alexander set out from Egypt to deal with this, and the two armies met in northern Mesopotamia. At the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE) Alexander's brilliant leadership again led his much smaller but battle-hardened army to victory. Darius again fled, first to Babylon, and then eastward. Alexander pursued him. Babylon opened its gates to him along with many other cities; and Alexander headed on into the homeland of the Persians.

Here he heard news that Darius, whom Alexander had come to respect, had been murdered by one of his own lieutenants. Already by this time Darius' satraps had been deserting him, and now they all eagerly submitted to Alexander. He was now the undisputed ruler of what had been the Persian Empire.

Iran and Persia

He was not finished with his conquests, however. Alexander headed off, first into central Asia, and then on into India. Here, in 327 BCE, he crossed the Indus River. He intended to push much deeper into India. His exhausted soldiers refused to go any further, however. Alexander reluctantly agreed to lead his army home.

Throughout his marches, Alexander had been founding colonies in which his older soldiers could retire to. Settlers from Greece were also encouraged to live in them. Many did so, because of the poor and limited farmland available in their homeland.

These cities were organized along exactly the same lines as cities back in Greece. He named many of them Alexandria, after himself.

On the return journey to Mesopotamia, more than half his troops died in the barren wastes of Iran, from hunger, thirst and heat-stroke.

Alexander's last years

Alexander had come to greatly admire the Persians. During the next few years he adopted more and more of their ways. He began to surround himself, not just with Macedonians and Greeks, but with Persians as well. Alexander seems to have been aiming to create a new ruling class made up of all three groups. He went so far as to organize a mass marriage of his Macedonian and Greek commanders with the daughters of Persian nobles.

In 323, however, Alexander fell sick and died in Babylon. He was only 33 years old.

Slide 7: 240 BCE

Alexander's conquests have become divided between several kingdoms.

- After Alexander the Great's death, his vast empire soon began to break up into different kingdoms (note 1).
- Despite these political divisions, a unified culture appeared across all the areas of Alexander's conquests, mix of Greek and other elements which modern scholars call the Hellenistic civilization (note 2).

Additional notes:

1. After Alexander's death

Alexander died very unexpectedly. As a result, he did not have an heir whom his generals could rally round. His generals therefore agreed to share out Alexander's conquests between themselves. But out of greed for more territory and fear of each other's motives, they soon fell to fighting.

A long series of wars began, but by 300 BCE three successor kingdoms had emerged.

The Seleucid kingdom

One of the generals, called Seleucus, founded the Seleucid kingdom. This consisted of much of Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia and most of Iran.

It was by far the largest of these kingdoms. The kings were never really able to bring their outlying provinces under tight control, however. These soon started to break away. As a result, several smaller kingdoms emerged in Asia Minor, northern Iran and north-west India (off the map).

The Seleucids ruled like Persian kings. They had a magnificent Persian-style royal court, unlike anything the Greeks had ever seen.

Egypt

Another of Alexander's general, Ptolemy, established himself and his family as rulers of Egypt.

Their capital is the city of Alexandria. This was founded by Alexander the Great, and has since come to be one of the largest cities the ancient world would know. The Ptolemaic rulers have made it a great center of learning. Most famously, they have built a huge library there, which is also a museum, zoo, research institute and center of learning.

Macedonia

Alexander's death marked the end of the old royal line of Macedonia (apart from a young boy who was soon murdered). The kingdom was repeatedly fought over by generals until finally one of them gained control.

The kings of Macedonia usually dominate the city-states of Greece. These, however, are repeatedly rebelling, and as time goes by the authority of the Macedonian kings declines.

The city-states of Greece

These at first attempted to keep what independence they can by playing one powerful king off against another. They have had only limited success. Athens, for example, had to completely give up her democracy, as it proved too difficult for the various generals and kings to control.

More recently, many of the Greek city-states have started banding together into leagues for self-protection. This will prove a more enduring strategy.

2. The Hellenistic world

Alexander had great respect for Persian civilization. The generals who fought over his empire did not show the same feeling. Their aim was to establish Macedonians and Greeks as the ruling classes in their kingdoms, and Greek civilization as the dominant culture. Greek was the official language of government. The Greek-style cities which they founded (following the example of Alexander) were designed to be centers of Greek art and learning.

Over time, however, the inhabitants of these cities have been influenced by the ancient cultures which surround them. As a result, a mixed civilization has emerged. Greek art, architecture, ideas and knowledge have spread throughout the Middle East. At the same time, ancient Middle Eastern science, engineering and religion have influenced the newcomers. Modern scholars call this new version of Greek civilization, Hellenistic (= "Greek-like").

Slide 8: 130 BCE

New powers are encroaching on the Hellenistic world.

- In the second century BCE, two new powers began to encroach on the Hellenistic world. From the west came the Romans (note 1),....
-and to the east the Parthians dramatically expanded their territory (note 2).

Additional notes:

1. The Romans and the end of independence for the Greek city-states

The Greek and Hellenistic rulers of the second century BCE competed amongst themselves for dominance. In doing so, they failed to unite against the growing threats from outside the Hellenistic world, from both east and west.

The Romans had taken over Italy by the early third century BCE. By the mid-second century BCE, they had won control of all of the lands of the western Mediterranean. They then looked towards

the lands of the eastern Mediterranean - the territories of the Greek city-states and Hellenistic kingdoms.

In 146 BCE they conquered the kingdom of Macedonia and the city-states of Greece. In 133 BCE the king of Pergamum - perhaps the richest of all the Hellenistic states - gifted his kingdom to the Romans in his will. This gave them a foothold in the wealthy region of Asia Minor.

2. The Parthians

The main focus of the Seleucid kings was on their rivalry with the other Hellenistic powers to the west. Controlling their distant eastern provinces was not a major priority for them. As a result, they failed to recognise a new threat from the east.

The Parthians were an Iranian people closely related to the Persians. As they grew in power, the Seleucid kings tried only half-heartedly to deal with them. By the late 2nd century BCE the Parthians had taken over the rich provinces of Iran from them.

Slide 9: 100 BCE

Large portions of the Greek and Hellenistic worlds have fallen under the rule of Parthia, to the east, and Rome, to the west.

- In the second century BCE, the rising powers of the Parthians in the east and the Romans in the west increasingly squeezed the Greek city-states and Hellenistic kingdoms in a kind of pincer movement (note 1).
- The Jewish people have won their independence and formed a kingdom of their own (note 2).

Additional notes:

1. Parthian and Roman conquests

In the east, the expansion of Parthian power has left the Seleucids with only Syria. In the west, Rome has made more modest advances into Asia Minor.

2. The Jewish people

In Babylonian and Persian times (6th to 4th centuries BCE), many Jews came to live in other lands. Even many of those who had been exiled from their homeland by Nebuchadnezzar in 585 BCE, or their children, did not return to Judea.

This was the beginning of what is called the Jewish Diaspora. This has been going on to the present day.

After Alexander's time, the Diaspora continued. For example, the new city of Alexandria (see above) became home to a large and wealthy Jewish community. It was here that the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek (the Septuagint).

A new Jewish kingdom

In the middle of the second century BCE, a Seleucid king tried to force the Jewish people to adopt Greek culture, including Greek religion. He set up images of Greek gods in the temple of Yahweh, in Jerusalem.

This led to a popular revolt breaking out against the Seleucids. This was led by a group of brothers of the Maccabees family. It eventually led to the establishment of a new independent Jewish kingdom (103 BCE).

Slide 10: 100 CE

The Greek and Hellenistic worlds falling under the rule of foreign powers.

- By the mid-first centuries BCE, the Parthian empire in the east and Roman empire in the west had overwhelmed all the Greek city-states and Hellenistic kingdoms (note 1).
- Despite the disappearance of the Hellenistic states, Greek and Hellenistic civilization continues to flourish under both the Parthians and Romans (note 2).
- Caught up in these momentous events, the Jewish people are being ejected from their homeland once again (note 3).

Additional notes:

1. The end of independence

Despite the rising threats from east and west, the Greek and Hellenistic states continued to focus on their own rivalries rather than the threats from outside.

Syria

In the 60s BCE, the general Pompey the Great completed the Roman conquest of Asia Minor, and then conquered Syria and Palestine.

In the early years of the Romans' domination of these provinces, they left large areas under the rule of their own kings. These "client kings" were able to exert their authority over internal matters within their kingdoms, but foreign policy was now entirely in the hands of the Romans.

In more recent years, the Romans have taken the territories of all these kingdoms under their direct rule, turning them into Roman provinces.

Egypt

The Hellenistic rulers of Egypt, the Ptolemies, continued to rule until 30 BCE. The last of them was the famous queen, Cleopatra. She is often portrayed as an Egyptian queen in films and novels. In fact she was entirely Macedonian and Greek by ancestry.

She became the lover of two Roman leaders in turn. The first was Julius Caesar. After his murder, Mark Antony fell under her spell.

After the defeat of Mark Antony in 31 BCE by another Roman leader, Octavian, Cleopatra poisoned herself. Octavian (who later took the title Augustus and became the first Roman emperor), placed Egypt under direct Roman rule.

2. Hellenistic civilization under foreign rule

Greek-style cities continue to exist under both the Romans and the Parthians. Greek is still the language of everyday life for their inhabitants, and they share an international Hellenistic culture. Indeed, leading Romans and Parthians are educated along Greek lines.

The end of Hellenistic civilization

Only gradually would Hellenistic culture fade. In the Parthian Empire, Persian culture would begin to revive in the 2nd century CE. It would mingle with Greek culture, and later with Islamic culture, to produce the great civilization of medieval Persia.

In the Late Roman Empire, the rise of Christianity would transform civilization. The classical world of Greek and Hellenistic civilization would gradually give way to the medieval civilization of the Byzantine Empire.

3. The Jewish people

The Jewish kingdom established by the revolt against the Seleucids at the end of the second century BCE flourished for a while. It even expanded its borders, taking in the region of Galilee.

When the Seleucid kingdom fell to Rome, however, Judea also came under Roman rule. The Romans controlled the country through local rulers, Herod the Great and his family.

In 66 CE a revolt against Roman rule broke out, and years of horrific fighting followed. By the time it ended, in 74 CE, Jerusalem had been more or less raised to the ground, and the rest of Judaea had been badly devastated.

After the revolt had been put down, the Jewish people were allowed to remain in their homeland. However, this will not last. In 132 CE another Jewish revolt will break out, and by the time of its defeat the area of Judaea would be largely depopulated of Jews (though whether the Romans officially banished the Jews from their homeland is unclear). This situation will remain largely unchanged until the late 19th century.

Questions

1. Merchants of which people brought the alphabet to the Greeks?
2. Which kingdom was the first to use metal coinage?
3. Which were the two outstanding city-states of Classical Greece?
4. From which Indo-European people did the Medes and the Persians come?
5. Who founded the Persian empire?
6. Why is the Persian empire also called the Achaemenid empire?
7. Which state led the Delian League?
8. Name one of the three best-known philosophers in ancient Greece.
9. Which state won the Peloponnesian War?
10. Of which kingdom did Alexander succeed his father as king?
11. Many cities founded by Alexander were named Alexandria. Where was the most famous of these located?
12. Name one the three main kingdoms into which Alexander's conquests were divided.
13. Name one of two states which conquered the Hellenistic kingdoms.

APPENDIX

TimeMaps articles for further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles for Period 2 can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful.

[The Phoenicians](#)

[The Babylonian empire](#)

[Ancient Persia](#)

[The Civilization of Ancient Greece](#)

[The History of Ancient Greece](#)

[Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World](#)

[Hellenistic civilization](#)

[The Parthian Empire](#)