NO PREP

Alexander's Empire

Archaeology Across Three Continents

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Alexander's Empire: Archaeology Across Three Continents

The World's Greatest Conqueror

In 334 BCE, a twenty-two-year-old Macedonian king crossed the Hellespont from Europe into Asia with an army of approximately 40,000 soldiers, and began one of the most audacious military campaigns in human history. Over the next eleven years, Alexander III of Macedon — known to history as Alexander the Great — conquered the Persian Empire (the largest empire the world had ever seen), Egypt, Central Asia, and the northwestern reaches of the Indian subcontinent. When he died in Babylon in 323 BCE at the age of thirty-two, probably from typhoid fever complicated by heavy drinking, he controlled an empire stretching from Greece to modern Pakistan — roughly two million square miles of territory. Alexander's military genius is not

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Ai-Khanoum: A Greek City at the Edge of the World

One of the most remarkable sites in all of Greek archaeology is Ai-Khanoum, located in northern Afghanistan near the border with Tajikistan. Founded probably by Seleucus I (one of Alexander's generals who inherited part of the empire) around 300 BCE, Ai-Khanoum was a thoroughly Greek city, or rather a city that looked thoroughly Greek, in one of the most remote corners of the ancient world. French archaeologists excavating the site between 1964 and 1978 (before the Soviet

invasion ended the work) uncovered a gymnasium, a theater, a large palace, Greek temples, and inscriptions in Greek, including a copy of philosophical maxims from Delphi. A city built on Greek principles, 5,000 kilometers from Athens. Ai-Khanoum also reveals the complexity of Hellenization. While the city's public architecture was Greek in style, the material culture of its inhabitants shows extensive mixing: Bactrian, Persian, Indian, and Greek elements combined in art, religion, and daily life. Local pottery forms appeared alongside Greek shapes. Coins struck at Ai-Khanoum show Greek inscriptions on one side and Aramaic or Bactrian scripts on the other. A bronze statuette found at the site combines Greek artistic style with Central Asian iconography. This cultural blending, neither purely Greek nor purely local, is the archaeological signature of the Hellenistic world everywhere archaeologists look.

Alexandria: The City Alexander Built

Of the many cities Alexander founded (he reportedly founded over twenty, many of them called Alexandria), the most important was the one in Egypt: Alexandria at the mouth of the Nile Delta, established in 331 BCE. Under the rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty (the Greek-Macedonian successors who ruled Egypt after Alexander's death), Alexandria became the intellectual capital of the ancient world: home to the famous Library of Alexandria, the Museum (an ancient university), and the Pharos Lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The city attracted scholars, poets, scientists, and philosophers from across the Greek and Near Eastern worlds. Archaeological investigation of ancient Alexandria is complicated by the fact that the modern city of Alexandria sits directly on top of the ancient one. However, underwater archaeology in the harbor has uncovered dramatic evidence of the ancient city: the foundations of the royal palace quarter, colossal statues of pharaohs and sphinxes, and what appears to be the location of the Pharos Lighthouse, all submerged when an ancient earthquake lowered the coastline into the sea. The ancient city that the diver Franck Goddio and his team have been systematically mapping since the 1990s is yielding a picture of an extraordinarily cosmopolitan metropolis.

The Spread of Greek Culture

The Hellenistic world that Alexander's conquests created was not simply Greek culture imposed on unwilling populations. It was a dynamic synthesis in which local cultures engaged selectively with Greek influences, adopting what was useful or

prestigious while maintaining their own traditions. In Egypt, the Ptolemaic rulers presented themselves as pharaohs in the traditional Egyptian mode while simultaneously ruling a Greek court — their portraits appear in both Egyptian and Greek styles depending on the audience. In Judea, some Jewish communities enthusiastically embraced Greek culture (a process the Book of Maccabees condemns as apostasy) while others resisted fiercely, leading to the Maccabean revolt. The Greek language itself became the great unifier. Koine Greek — a simplified, standardized form of the language — spread as the common tongue of trade, diplomacy, and culture across Alexander's former empire. The Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek (the Septuagint) to serve Greek-speaking Jewish communities in Alexandria and elsewhere. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek. The philosophy of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Neoplatonism developed in the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world and shaped Roman and early Christian thought. Alexander's conquests did not just spread Greek art and architecture — they created the cultural environment in which the major religious and philosophical traditions of the Western world would develop.

Key Information: Alexander's Empire and Hellenism

Detail	Information
Alexander's Dates	356-323 BCE; conquered Persian Empire, Egypt, Central Asia, and northwest India
Empire Size	Approximately 2 million square miles at its greatest extent
Hellenization	Spread of Greek language, culture, urban planning, and art across the conquered world
Ai-Khanoum	Greek city in Afghanistan; excavated 1964-1978; shows cultural blending of Greek and local traditions
Alexandria, Egypt	Founded 331 BCE; became the intellectual capital of the ancient world
Library of Alexandria	Ancient world's greatest intellectual center; housed the Museum (university) and vast scroll collection

Detail	Information
Koine Greek	Simplified standardized Greek that became the common language of the Hellenistic world
Cultural Legacy	Shaped Roman culture, early Christianity, and Western philosophical traditions

Case Study: Demetria in Ai-Khanoum

Demetria had been born in Ai-Khanoum and had never seen Greece. Her grandfather had come from Pella in Macedonia with the first settlers, had helped build the gymnasium and the theater, and had died speaking of olive trees and the smell of the sea. Her father spoke Greek at home and Bactrian in the market. Her mother's family had lived in this valley for ten generations before the Greeks arrived. At the gymnasium, she watched her brother train in the Greek fashion, oiling himself before wrestling with boys whose names were half-Greek and half-Bactrian. At the temple on the hill, the priests conducted rites that looked Greek from the outside but used offerings her grandmother would have recognized from the old religion. The coins her father kept in a box bore the king's face with a Greek inscription on one side and a script she could not read on the other. A philosopher visiting from Antioch had told her that they lived at the edge of the Greek world. She had not corrected him. But she knew that this was not the edge of any world. This was the center of her world — the market, the river, the mountains behind the city, her grandmother's house, and the gymnasium where her brother trained in a sport nobody around here had ever heard of before her grandfather's people came. All of it together. All of it hers. She did not know what to call it, this thing she was. Neither did anyone else.

1. Demetria says she does not know what to call 'this thing she was.' Based on the reading's description of Hellenization, why is Demetria's identity so difficult to categorize, and what does her experience reveal about how cultural contact actually works?

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2. The philosopher tells Demetria she lives 'at the edge of the Greek world.' Why does she privately disagree, and what does this tension reveal about the difference between how dominant cultures see their margins and how people actually experience those places?

Multiple Choice

1. What was Hellenization, and what does the archaeological evidence from Ai-Khanoum reveal about how this process actually worked?

a) The spread of Greek culture across Alexander's empire; Ai-Khanoum shows Greek and local elements blending rather than one replacing the other

b) A diplomatic process by which conquered kings agreed to adopt Greek customs in exchange for political autonomy

c) The replacement of local languages with Greek; Ai-Khanoum shows that Greek was the only language used in the city

d) The forced conversion of conquered peoples to Greek religion with temple closure; Ai-Khanoum shows that local religions were entirely eliminated

2. Why is archaeological investigation of ancient Alexandria particularly challenging?

a) The Library of Alexandria's destruction caused all written records of the city's layout to be lost

b) The Egyptian government has refused to grant excavation permits to foreign archaeologists

c) The modern city of Alexandria sits directly on top of the ancient one, and much of the ancient city is now underwater

d) Alexander's original city was completely demolished by the Romans and rebuilt from the ground up in a different location

3. The reading argues that Alexander's conquests created the environment for major religious and philosophical traditions to develop. Which of the following best supports this claim?

a) Alexander personally commissioned the translation of Persian philosophical texts into Greek

b) The destruction of the Library of Alexandria preserved only Greek texts, which later became the essential basis of Western philosophical thought

c) Alexander converted to all the religions of the territories he conquered to unify his empire

d) Koine Greek spread as a common language, allowing the Jewish scriptures to be translated into Greek and the New Testament to be written in Greek

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Hellenization	A) A Greek city founded in Afghanistan around 300 BCE, excavated by French archaeologists, showing cultural blending
2. ___ Ai-Khanoum	B) The Egyptian city founded by Alexander in 331 BCE that became the intellectual capital of the ancient world
3. ___ Koine Greek	C) The Greek-Macedonian rulers who governed Egypt after Alexander's death, presenting themselves as both pharaohs and Greek kings
4. ___ Ptolemaic dynasty	D) The spread of Greek language, culture, urban planning, and art across the territories conquered by Alexander
5. ___ Alexandria	E) A simplified standardized form of the Greek language that served as the common tongue of the Hellenistic world

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Alexander the Great died in _____ in 323 BCE at the age of thirty-two, probably from typhoid fever, after conquering an empire stretching from Greece to modern Pakistan.

2. _____ Greek — a simplified, standardized form of the language — spread across Alexander's former empire as the common tongue of trade, diplomacy, and culture.

3. French archaeologists excavated Ai-Khanoum in northern _____ between 1964 and 1978, before the Soviet invasion ended the work and the site was later looted.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. The reading argues that Hellenization was 'not simply Greek culture imposed on unwilling populations' but rather 'a dynamic synthesis.' What evidence from the reading supports this interpretation?

2. What does the discovery and excavation of Ai-Khanoum reveal about Alexander's historical impact that written sources alone might not adequately convey?

3. The reading says Alexander's legacy shaped 'Roman culture, early Christianity, and Western philosophical traditions.' How is it possible that a military conqueror who died at thirty-two could have such long-lasting intellectual and cultural influence?