LECTURE 6: Alexander the Great and Hellenistic Expansion

HISTORY 1130:
Themes in Global History:
Trade, Economy, and Empires

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Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Expansion
Decline of Greece and Rise of Alexander
Who was Alexander the Great?
Alexander’s Conquests
Warfare and Weaponry
Alexander’s Legacy: Hellenistic Influence
DECLINE OF GREECE AND THE RISE OF ALEXANDER:

Throughout the 5th and 4th centuries, the Greek world degenerated into oligarchy. Athenian direct democracy became a weak as Athens lost its leadership in the Greek world after its defeat at the hands of the Spartans. But Spartan domination did not last very long. Full of arrogance and pride, Sparta found itself engaged in war after war. The three leading city-states of Athens, Sparta and Thebes traded positions of influence and power, sometimes two states joining against the other for protection.

http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture9b.html

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Philip of Macedon

In 359 B.C., PHILIP II of Macedon (383-336 B.C.) came to the throne by a rather typical procedure – a round of family assassinations. Philip was an energetic and ambitious man – if anything motivated him besides greed, it was his awareness of just how divided and disordered the Greek world had become. This disorder was a direct result of a century of warfare and in particular, the Peloponnesian Wars. With this in mind, Philip set out to conquer the Hellenic world. He accomplished this task by treachery, secrecy, speed and dishonesty. He quieted his rivals, crushed rebellions and made secret treaties which were broken almost as quickly as they were made. He was eventually assassinated by his lover, Pausanias, who most likely acted in concert with others (including Olympias, Philip's power-hungry wife).
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WHO WAS ALEXANDER THE GREAT?

Philip's son, Alexander III (356-323 B.C.) or, as he is better known, ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

The son of Philip of Macedon and Olympias, daughter of Neoptolemus of Epiras, Alexander the Great was born at Pella, and was tutored by Aristotle. He was only sixteen when his father marched against Byzantium and left him regent in his absence. Philip was preparing to attack the Persian Empire when he was assassinated by Pausanias in 336. The twenty-year-old Alexander assumed the throne.

He went on to become one of the most famous military leaders and conquerors in world history.

Overall, Alexander seems to have inherited much from his brilliant father: physical courage, arrogance, intelligence, and, most importantly, unbridled ambition. He was also periodically depressed, unstable, drank excessively etc.

http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/lecture9b.html

ALEXANDER'S CONQUESTS:

In 334 BC, Alexander crossed over into Asia Minor to begin his conquest of Persia. To conquer Persia was to conquer the world, for the Persian Empire sprawled over most of the known world: Asia Minor, the Middle East, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran. He didn't have much to go on: his army numbered thirty thousand infantry and only five thousand cavalry. He had no navy. He had no money.

He quickly overran Asian Minor after defeating the Persian forces that controlled the territory, and after seizing all the coastal cities, he turned inland towards Syria in 333 BC. There he engaged the main Persian army under the leadership of the Persian king, Darius, at a city called Issus. As he had done at Chaeronea, he led an astounding cavalry charge against a superior opponent and forced them to break ranks. Darius, and much of his army, ran inland towards Mesopotamia, leaving Alexander free to continue south. He seized the coastal towns along the Phoenician and Palestinian coasts. When he entered Jerusalem, he was hailed as their great liberator. He continued south and conquered Egypt with almost no resistance whatsoever; the Egyptians called him king and son of Re.

http://www.wsu.edu:8001/~dee/GREECE/ALEX.HTM
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As Alexander moved down the Phoenician coast, he managed to conquer the city of Tyre, which was absolutely central to Persian naval operations. Darius knew that he could never recover Asia Minor, Phoenicia, or Palestine, so he sent an offer to halt hostilities. If Alexander would cease, Darius would cede to him all of the Persian Empire west of the Euphrates River, Mesopotamia, Persia (modern day Iran), and the northern territories would remain Persian.

Alexander refused Darius' offer. In 331 BC, he crossed the Euphrates river into Mesopotamia. Darius met him near the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh, the city that had been destroyed by the Chaldeans only three centuries earlier. This was the last battle between Darius and Alexander; the Macedonian king again put the numerically superior Persian army to flight, and Darius ran also. In January of 330 BC, Alexander entered Babylon: he had conquered Mesopotamia and now controlled its greatest and wealthiest city.

Having conquered what was then the known world, Alexander had pushed his army to the very limits of civilization as he knew it. But he wanted more; he saw that the world extended further and partly out of curiosity, and partly out of a desire to conquer the entire world within the boundaries of the river Ocean (the Greeks believed that a great river, called Ocean, encircled all the land of the world), Alexander and his army pushed east, through Scythia (northern Iran), and all the way to Pakistan and India. He had conquered Bactria at the foot of the western Himalayas, gained a huge Bactrian army, and married a Bactrian princess, Roxane. But when he tried to push on past Pakistan, his army grew tired, and he abandoned the eastward conquest in 327 BC.

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Why was Alexander such an efficient general? The first clue is Alexander’s leadership. Military experts still consider him one of the most outstanding commanders ever. Arguably, there is no one else in history who could inspire and motivate his men quite like Alexander did. Many explanations have been suggested: he suffered the same wounds as his soldiers, he payed attention to every single man in the army and he always led the attack in person.

So the generals which had aided him divided the empire among themselves in order to preserve the empire for the future, as yet unborn, king; this would guarantee that Alexander’s empire would remain in the royal line of Macedonian kings. Like all powerful and ambitious men, they soon fell into conflict with one another. In two decades of conflict, several of the original generals were killed, along with Alexander’s son and brother. By 300 BC, all that was left of Alexander’s empire were four smaller empires, each controlled by military generals who declared themselves kings.
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WARFARE AND WEAPONRY:

Phalanx: ancient Greek expression to signify an organized, dense line of battle; the heavily armed infantry soldiers were known as hoplites.

The first Greek author to use the expression phalanx is Homer, and in his poems it means something like an organized battle line. This is remarkable because in Homer's poems, warriors fight individual combats whereas the soldiers in a phalanx (the hoplites) fight as a group. However, it is reasonably clear that Homer's duels were in his age already becoming anachronistic. The Greeks had started to fight as organized lines of battle, and if we can trust the evidence of the Chigi Vase, which was produced in circa 650 B.C.E., the soldiers already had standard equipment in the seventh century.

By then, tactics must have been very simple. The heavily-armed soldiers, recruited from the upper class of a town (because only they could afford arms and panoply), were standing in long, parallel lines, close to each other. Every hoplite carried a large round shield (the aspis or hoplon) which covered his own left side and the right side of the man to his left. A phalanx was, therefore, very densely packed and could not easily turn to the left or right. If its allowed to compare war with sport: a hoplite battle was something like a "scrum" in a rugby match: both sides, armed with spears, tried to push over the enemy, and once a phalanx was victorious, the losses at the other side were extremely heavy, because the victors would use their swords to kill the defeated men.
The hoplites were protected by a breastplate, greaves, their hoplon, and a tunic of stiffened linen. Their offensive weapons were, as already noted, a spear and a sword - the latter only to be used in the second phase of the battle. The soldiers must have been strong men, because the full panoply could weigh as much as 15 kg, and it comes as no surprise that foreigners often noted that the Greek soldiers were "men of bronze" (Herodotus) or "men clad in iron" (Ptolemy).

For more, see especially:
http://www.livius.org/pha-phd/phalanx/phalanx.html

King Philip II of Macedonia, who had spent his youth as a hostage in Thebes and knew Epaminondas personally, further improved the phalanx. Until then, it had been eight to sixteen lines deep, but now, twenty lines were more common. The spear, which had been two to three meters long, was now replaced by a lance (sarissa) with a length of about six meters. Because a hoplite now needed both hands to carry his weapon, his shield was made smaller.

At Issus (333), the phalanx was a straight line and the main cavalry unit, commanded by Philip's son Alexander the Great, was on the right wing. Alexander's conquest of the Punjab and the valley of the Indus meant the introduction of the war elephant, which was used against enemy cavalry, which could never keep its line of battle when faced by these monsters. (The soldiers in the phalanxes usually had special sarissas that were used to attack the trunks, whereas archers could attack their eyes.) At the same time, units became more varied: heavy cavalry was used to force a break into the enemy's lines, light troops were used to protect or disturb the phalanx, and sometimes, even catapults could be employed.
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Battle of Gaugamela:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzzpbkNr_MQ

See also:
ALEXANDER'S LEGACY: HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE

In the Hellenistic period, although the cities were no longer independent, as they had been in the Hellenic era, they were the centers of trade and craft industry. It was in the cities that the descendants of the Greco-Macedonian conquerors became a professional class of rulers and soldiers and merchants, which provided a cultural and economic bond throughout the area, even though political unity did not survive the death of Alexander. Among the Greek ruling class, the old loyalties to the Polis had given way to a dedication to the profession. As the administrators and the merchants of their world, in spite of being in the minority, they had an influence out of proportion to their numbers. The city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander, located on the Mediterranean at the mouth of the Nile, became the most prominent center of commerce and learning. The library in Alexandria became the depository for recording many of the literary and scientific achievements of the time.

Slavery, which had been a commonly accepted practice throughout the history of ancient civilization, remained a prominent part of Hellenistic culture. Most labor was hand labor, and slavery had the effect of degrading the value of labor and discouraging the search for alternative methods of production. Thus, in spite of the fact that the Hellenistic era is noted for its scientific achievements, the increase in theoretical knowledge did not lead to practical applications. Industry remained essentially hand-craft industry, and agriculture remained the primary occupation. Trade and commerce, though enhanced by the mercantile and shipping expertise of a professional class of merchants, was limited, almost entirely to agricultural products such as the grains of the river valleys, and wine and olives of the Mediterranean.
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The **systematic search for natural laws** can be said to start with Hellenic civilization, which reached its zenith in the 4th century BC, and served as the intellectual background for western civilization up to the time of the Scientific Revolution. The philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle being preeminent during this period, while Hippocrates laid the foundations of medicine as a branch of science. The important legacy of this early period of Greek science included substantial advances in factual knowledge, especially in anatomy, zoology, and astronomy; an awareness of the importance of certain scientific problems, especially those related to the problem of change and its causes; and a recognition of the methodological importance of applying mathematics to natural phenomena and of undertaking empirical research.

The military campaigns of Alexander the Great spread Greek thought through Egypt, Asia Minor, Persia, and to the Indus River. The resulting Hellenistic civilization produced seats of learning in **Alexandria** and **Antioch** along with Greek speaking populations across several monarchies.

**Hellenistic science**, as a list of its leading names shows, had some impressive achievements to its credit: indeed, the Italian scholar Lucio Russo, has claimed that scientific method was actually born in the 3rd century B.C., to be forgotten during the Roman period and only revived in the Renaissance.

In **medicine**, Herophilus was the first to base his conclusions on dissection of the human body and to describe the nervous system.

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Five questions. Getting three right = attendance. Getting five right = automatic half a point of extra credit.

1. Which of the following is not among the policies used by Alexander the Great to control his vast empire? [A] He established Greek-style cities. [B] He adopted Persian customs. [C] He encouraged intermarriage to foreign women. [D] He promoted local militias. [E] He maintained the framework of Persian administration.

2. When Alexander the Great died, his vast empire: [A] continued to be administered as a unified entity by his successors. [B] was broken up into three Macedonian dynasties. [C] fragmented into many separate states. [D] was conquered by Indians from the Indus River.


4.

5.
ANY QUESTIONS ON TODAY’S LECTURE?
ANYTHING ELSE?