

4. How Alexander Spread Greek Ideas

Alexander deeply admired Greek culture and aimed to distribute Greek ideas throughout his empire. He hoped that Greek ideas, customs, and traditions would blend with the diverse cultures of the people he had conquered.

Alexander thought that the building of Greek-style cities would be one way to accomplish his goal, so he established many cities in various parts of the empire. Similar to the cities in Greece, they had marketplaces, temples, and theaters.

People from Greece flocked to settle in Alexander's cities, bringing with them their Greek laws, art, and literature. Alexander insisted that local soldiers and government officials communicate solely in Greek.

The most famous of the new cities was **Alexandria**. Founded by Alexander in 332 B.C.E., Alexandria was located in Egypt, near the sea. Alexandria was designed in a grid of intersecting wide and narrow streets. It housed many Greek features, including a marketplace, a university, a gymnasium, and a theater. Additionally, the city boasted law courts, a library, and even a temple dedicated to Poseidon (puh-SY-din), the Greek god of the sea.

Eventually, the city of Alexandria became one of the ancient world's most important centers of trade and learning. It contained one of the largest libraries in the world at the time, which had more than half a million books.

5. How Alexander Used Religion

The second part of Alexander's plan—to inspire loyalty among his followers and the people he had conquered—**involved** religion. Alexander used religion in two ways.

First, he honored Egyptian and Persian gods, with the same respect he paid to those of Greek heritage. To show his respect, he visited oracle sites, made sacrifices, and ordered temples constructed to praise these gods. On one occasion, he visited the oracle site of the Egyptian god Ammon. Upon his arrival, an Egyptian priest welcomed him as “God's son,” which helped Alexander gain the loyalty of the Egyptian people.

Second, Alexander promoted the idea that he himself was a god. After his visit to the Egyptian oracle, he began wearing a crown with two ram's horns that resembled the sacred headdress of Ammon. Seeing Alexander in the crown encouraged the Egyptians to accept him as a god.

Alexander spread the story of the Egyptian priest's greeting throughout the empire. Eventually, he required all Greeks to accept him as the son of Zeus.

6. How Alexander Adopted the Ways of Conquered Cultures

The third part of Alexander's plan was to demonstrate respect for the cultural practices of the people he had conquered. One of the ways he achieved this goal was by adopting some of these practices.

For example, in Persia, he adopted their original system of government. Although he allowed Persian governors to coordinate the day-to-day business of their lands, Alexander was careful to appoint Macedonians to head the army and to control the taxes that were collected.

Alexander also borrowed Persian customs. He began wearing decorative Persian-style clothing. He received official visitors in a luxurious tent, similar to how a Persian king would have. Tall columns, which were covered in gold and silver and decorated with precious stones, supported the tent.

Alexander demanded that each of his visitors greet him according to Persian custom. A visitor had to kneel in front of the throne and bend over until his head touched the ground. Alexander would then raise the visitor to his feet, kiss him, and address him as “kinsman.”

Finally, Alexander encouraged marriage between the people of Macedonia and Persia. He himself married the eldest daughter of Darius III, a Persian king he had defeated.

Historians are unsure why Alexander behaved in these ways. Some believe that by adopting the customs of his former enemies, Alexander was simply attempting to be a more acceptable and popular leader. Other historians think that he truly considered all of the peoples he conquered to be equal to the Greeks and the Macedonians.