

Chapter 8: The Greek Adventure: 8-8a A Mixed Culture

Book Title: World Civilizations

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8-8a A Mixed Culture

Alexander the Great (as he was soon called) had founded the largest empire yet seen in history, but it began to disintegrate almost on the day of his death. He left an infant son by his last and favorite wife, Roxana, but the child became a mere pawn as Alexander's generals struggled to succeed him as sole ruler. (The son eventually was killed at age sixteen by one of the contestants.) Finally, the exhausted combatants tired of the civil war and split up the vast territories conquered by Alexander into a series of kingdoms, each originally ruled by one of Alexander's generals. Collectively, these successor states in southwestern Asia and the eastern Mediterranean are called the [Hellenistic kingdoms](#) (Kingdoms carved out of the empire conquered by Alexander the Great. Blended Greek and Asiatic cultures; extant in the Mediterranean basin and Middle East between 300 B.C.E. and c. 200 C.E.).

Everywhere Alexander led his armies, he founded new cities or towns, several of which bore his name. He then recruited Greeks from the homeland to come and establish themselves as a ruling group in the new cities. He encouraged them to follow his own example and intermarry with the locals. Tens of thousands of Greeks took up the invitation, leaving overcrowded, resource-poor Greece to make their names and fortunes in the countries now under Greco-Macedonian control. Inevitably, they brought with them the values they had cherished in their native land. As the conquerors, the Greeks could and did impose their ideas on the Asiatics and Egyptians with whom they had contact or had intermarried.

The result was a mixed culture that blended Greek and Asiatic attitudes and tastes. A major example of this is the fate of the Greek civic community. The conquering Greeks first tried to reconstruct the polis mode of shared government and interdependent community in their new homes, but they quickly found that this was impossible. The Easterners had no experience of the polis form of government and did not understand it. They had never governed themselves but had always had an all-powerful king who ruled through his appointed or hereditary officials and generals. The ruling Greeks themselves soon adopted the monarchical form of government. Thus, instead of the small, tight-knit community of equal citizens that was typical of the polis of the Classical Age, a Hellenistic state was typically a large kingdom in which a bureaucracy governed at a king's command.

The plastic arts also underwent similar changes. Examples of Iranian, Central Asian, and northwest Indian art from the Hellenistic era and later that archaeologists have unearthed show an obvious imprint from Greek prototypes, particularly in the greater stress they placed on realism. Zoroastrian and Buddhist art of the period resembles the Greeks' Olympian gods.

Although Alexander never conquered India's heartland, the Greek invasion of the Indus plains also had lasting effects. It introduced the Central Asian and Indian worlds to the Western world, and from this time onward, there were direct trade contacts between Bactria and India with the eastern Mediterranean. The invasion also disrupted the existing political balance in northern India, opening a vacuum that paved the way for the conquering Mauryan Dynasty, including the great Ashoka (see [Chapter 4](#)) and the later Kushan Empire ([Chapter 12](#)).

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