Alexander the Great

Alexander became King of Macedonia in 336BC after the murder of his father, Philip. He was only 20. He immediately embarked on a career of military conquests, which gained him the largest empire the ancient world had known, and earned him the title of Alexander the Great. He was a military genius, who inspired great loyalty in his followers and who had extraordinary courage.

In 334BC, Alexander led 35,000 troops into Asia Minor to attack the Persians. This began an 11-year campaign, during which he captured vast territories in Asia Minor, Egypt, Afghanistan, Iran and India.

This reconstruction shows the Battle of Issus (333BC), where Alexander defeated the Persians. It is based on a Roman mosaic in Pompeii.

Picture of Alexander taken from a Roman mosaic

Alexander founded many new cities, most of which he named 'Alexandria', after himself. The most famous of these was the port of Alexandria in Egypt, which became the country's new capital.

Alexander did little to change the administration of the lands he seized, although he usually replaced the local governors with his own men. He left Greeks behind in all the areas he conquered, which helped to spread Greek language and culture across an enormous area. This Greek influence lasted long after Alexander's empire had collapsed.

Alexander realized that his empire was too big to be administered from Greece. In Persia, he tried to include Persians in the government to help unify the empire. He planned to give them equal rights and to let them serve in the army. The whole empire was to have one currency, and use Greek as the official language. Alexander himself adopted Persian dress and married a Persian noblewoman named Roxane.

In 323BC, Alexander died suddenly of a fever. He does not seem to have made plans for the government of the empire after his death. Roxane was pregnant with Alexander's heir, but his generals divided the empire up between themselves.

Alexander was often shown on coins of the time.

Map of Alexander's empire

This map shows Alexander's route and the extent of the empire he conquered. The dates show when Alexander gained control of each region.

Alexander's route

Extent of the empire

BLACK SEA

CASPIAN SEA

Jaxartes river 327BC

Battle of the Granicus river 334BC

ASIA MINOR

Battle of Issus 333BC

Battle of Gaugamela 331BC

Hecatompylos 330BC

Hydaspes river 326BC

SYRIA

Tigris river

Ecbatana 330BC

AFGHANISTAN

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Tyre 332BC

Babylon Alexander died here 323BC

PERSIA

Indus river

Alexandria founded 332BC

Persepolis 331BC

Pattala 325BC

INDIA

EGYPT 332BC

Euphrates river

Bust of Alexander

INDIAN OCEAN