

# ATHENIAN EMPIRE



## The Athenian Empire 454-404 BCE

**Background** Greece was a collection of city-states sprinkled across the tip of the Balkan Peninsula, on islands of the Aegean Sea, along the western edge of the Anatolian Peninsula (Ionia), and on the rim of the Black Sea. In the sixth century BCE, the Ionian city-states belonged to Persia, which conquered them along with the rest of the Anatolian Peninsula. In 494 BCE, however, these city-states revolted, spurred on by Athens. Darius, the Persian emperor quickly squashed the uprising, and two years later, sent an army to get even with Athens. In spite of having a force several times larger as the Athenian army, the Persians suffered defeat on the plains of Marathon in 490 BCE. Darius died before he could have another go at the Athenians. But in 480 BCE his son Xerxes launched a second attack. The Athenian navy, however, outfoxed and outmaneuvered the Persian fleet at

the Battle of Salamis. Xerxes watched the defeat of his navy from his throne high up on the coastal plain overlooking the battle site. He quickly marched home in humiliation. The following year, the Greeks defeated the remnants of the Persian army at Platea.

**Founding** Although the Persians had been defeated, they remained a threat to the Greeks. In 478, 104 Greek city-states created an alliance, the Delian League, under Athenian leadership, agreeing to contribute ships or cash to Athens in exchange for building and maintaining a navy. Although the League was run by a council of representatives from member states, the Athenians, as the leading city-state, determined how much each state would be taxed—how many ships it would contribute or how much money it would pay. Members could not leave the League without unanimous consent of the members, which meant that

Athens could prevent any city-state from dropping out. Xerxes died in 456 BCE and with him the threat from Persia. Nevertheless, Pericles (495-429), the powerful, charismatic leader of Athens, refused to allow any state to leave the League. In fact, he forced more city-states to join. States that did not cooperate were subject to occupation by Athenian troops. In 454 BCE, the League's treasury was moved to Athens. The Delian League had become the Athenian empire. At its imperial height in the 440s BCE, Athens controlled 172 tribute-paying city-states.

**Administration** Athens, the champion of individualism and the independent city-state, had become the oppressor. While probably no Athenian would have admitted to owning subject states, Athens certainly treated the states as though they were private property. Uncooperative states had their land taken and handed out to Athenian colonists.

Governments in uncooperative states were overthrown and replaced. Taxes were collected regularly and often raised. With no external enemy threatening the empire, the funds piled up in the Athenian treasury. Therefore, it was not long before these taxes from member states, whose citizens were mostly farmers, traders, and herders, were being used support projects in Athens. This money financed the art, architecture, and literature of what historians call the Golden Age of Athens. In 447 BCE, funds from the League's treasury paid for the construction of the Parthenon. Completed in 432, it was built on the Acropolis, where the Persians had destroyed temples in 480 BCE. Phidias (490-430), one of Greece's greatest sculptors, created the Parthenon's monumental statue of Athena. It was about thirty-nine feet high and made of gold and ivory. The figure of Athena held a spear in her left hand and a six-foot high statue of Nike, the goddess of Victory, in her right hand. The arts, including drama, also flourished under the Athenian empire. Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Sophocles, four of Greece's most important playwrights, wrote during this period. So did the historians Herodotus (c. 490-c.425 BCE) and

Thucydides (c. 460/455-c. 300 BCE).

Needless to say, subject city-states were not happy about underwriting the glory of Athens. They did, however, benefit to some extent from the arrangement, enjoying a period of relative peace and prosperity.

### Religion

All of the city-states of the Athenian empire shared generally the same culture, so religion was never an issue. By 500 BCE, however, the old polytheistic religion of Zeus, Hera, and Athena, had ceased to be used for much more than public ceremony. Into this spiritual void came mystery religions such as the Egyptian cult of the goddess Isis. These cults had elaborate rites and restricted memberships. At the same time, thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle used reason to develop systems of rational thought, philosophies that spread widely in later centuries.

### Trade

The Athenian navy cleared the Aegean of pirates. This was a benefit to all of the merchants of the empire because it allowed for an increase in trade. The downside was that Athens closely controlled trade so as to benefit itself.

**Decline/Fall** In the wars against Persia, Athens and Sparta had been allies. Now they turned against one another. The increase in Athenian wealth and power, both political and commercial, alarmed the Spartans and their allies. In 460 BCE, the First Peloponnesian War broke out. In 445 BCE a 30-year peace treaty was signed, but the peace didn't last. In 431, the fighting resumed. In 404, The Spartans won and imposed humiliating terms on Athens. All but a few of its ships had to be surrendered. Athenian democracy was replaced by a Council of Thirty, an oligarchy, loyal to Sparta. In addition, Athenian property was plundered and many citizens were exiled. The Athenian Empire had come to an end.



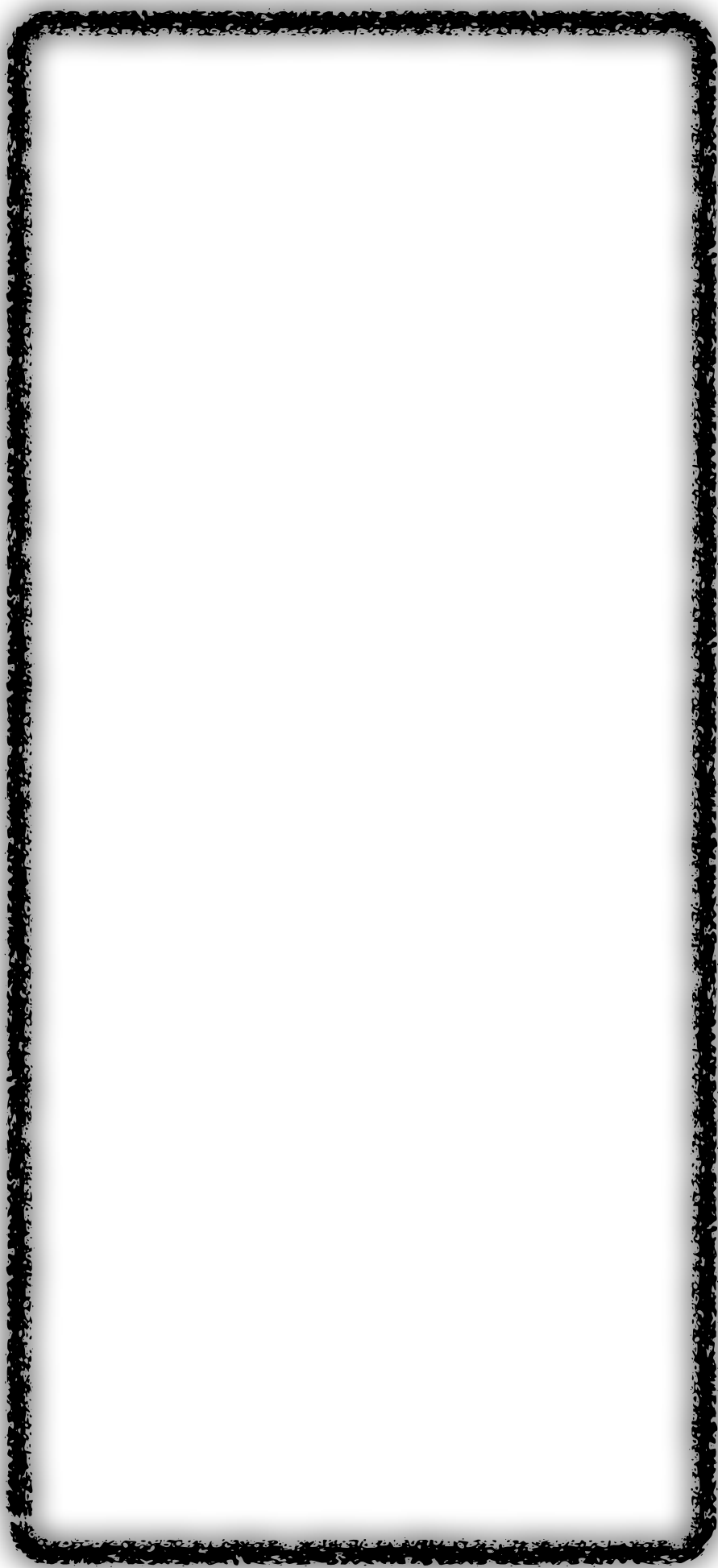
Bronze statuette of a soldier. Spartan work, around 500 BCE

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **ATHENIAN** EMPIRE

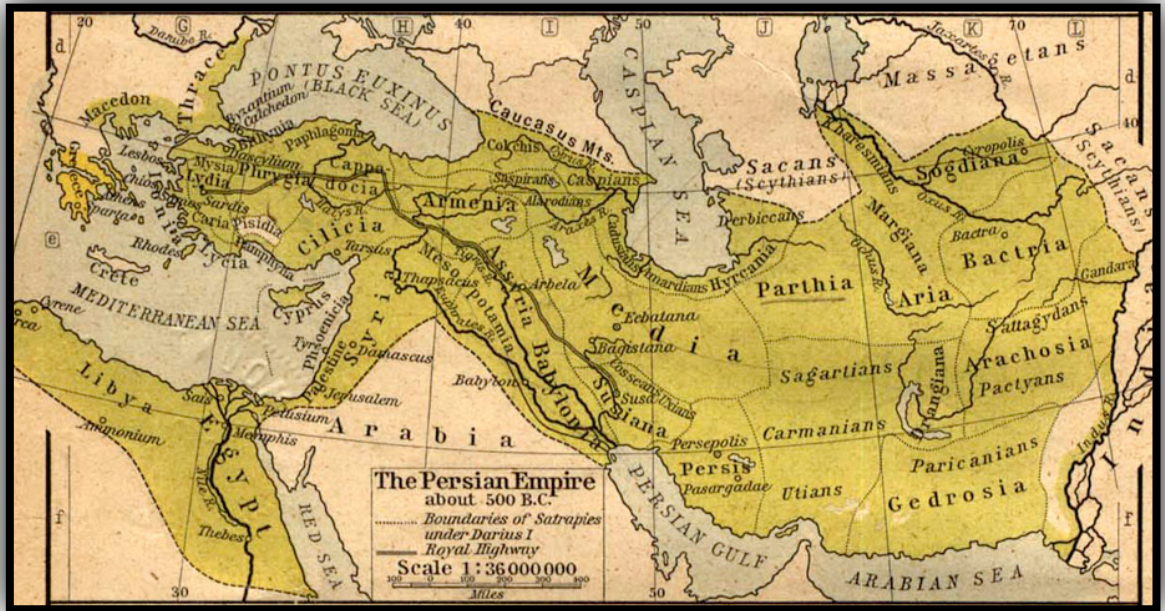
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:</b>
Background/ location	
Founding	
Organization	
Religion	
Trade	
Decline/Fall	
Summary description / categorization of this empire	

# ATHENIAN EMPIRE

454-404 BCE



# PERSIAN EMPIRE



## The Persian (Achaemenid) Empire 550-330 BCE

### Background

The Persians were a group of people from Inner Eurasia who arrived in the area of Mesopotamia that is now known as Iran sometime between 1500 and 1000 BCE. In about 550 BCE, a leader known as Cyrus II, led a successful revolt against a group of people called the Medes, who ruled over the Persians at that time. Cyrus was part of a clan (family based group) called the Achaemenids, so the empire he eventually formed is sometimes called the Achaemenid Empire.

**Formation** Cyrus conquered the Medes in less than 10 years. He then moved on to take control of the Anatolian Peninsula (near modern day Turkey) and nearby Greek city-states. His forces conquered Syria next and in 539 BCE his army took over Babylon. When conquering Babylon, Cyrus had promised to treat it fairly and not to destroy either its institutions or its culture. At the same time, he returned to various groups the goods which the Babylonians had taken from them as a sign of conquest. Cyrus also freed the Hebrews, who had been enslaved in Babylon. He allowed them to return home. Later he helped them rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. This policy of local cultural independence won for him a reputation as a fair ruler. In other words, even though Cyrus conquered many peoples, he did not force them to adopt his culture. Meanwhile, other Persian forces

moved northeast where they captured most of the trade centers on the Silk Routes that led to Inner Eurasia. After Cyrus' death, his son, Cambyses, conquered Egypt. When Cambyses died, Darius (522-486 BCE), a strong military leader, took control of the Persian Empire. He soon pushed the Persian borders to the Indus River valley in the east. At that point, the Persians controlled the largest empire the world had ever seen.

### Administration

The vast Persian Empire was the most culturally diverse empire that had ever existed. Persian rulers developed new tools to help them control this large area with so many different people. Darius I organized the empire and established twenty provinces (called satrapies), each with its governor, military commander, and treasurer, who reported separately to the king.

In addition, there was a separate system of inspectors known as the King's Eyes or the Kings Ears. These inspectors had their own armies and could move against even a military commander if necessary. The system was so effective in preventing rebellion, corruption, and harsh rule that it was copied again and again, even in modern times. Darius also introduced the Babylonian calendar, known for its accuracy, and set up granaries (a storehouse for grain) to assure a constant supply of food for his troops. He built elaborate underground irrigation systems as well. In the far reaches of what is now Iran, these irrigation systems turned deserts into gardens.

**Religion** The Persian ruling class followed the religion of Zoroastrianism. This religion taught that there were two deities, Ahura Mazda, the god of light and truth and Ahriman, the god of darkness and evil. These two gods were in constant struggle, a struggle that Ahura Mazda would eventually win. Zoroastrians believed that after the final battle, there would be a Judgment Day and everyone who had ever lived would be judged and sent either to heaven or hell. These ideas are believed to have influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Today, there are Zoroastrian communities in Iran and India, where they are called *Parsis* or *Parsees*. Communities also exist in other parts of the world including the United States. The Achaemeinds did not force Zoroastrianism on their subjects. As rulers of an empire that embraced more cultural communities than had any other before them, they wisely allowed

their subjects much cultural freedom. Persian kings saw themselves as ruling by the will of the god Ahura Mazda who cared for the well-being of all. In an inscription on a rock in Behistun, written in 519 BCE, Darius proclaims that “by the favor of Ahura Mazda I am King; Ahura Mazda bestowed the kingdom upon me.”

### Trade

Darius encouraged trade and economic development in a number of ways. He standardized weights and measures and established a coinage system based on gold and silver. He also built banking houses. (The word “check” is derived from a Persian word.)

When Darius came to power, a network of roads connecting the urban centers in Southwest Asia already existed. Darius added a royal road from Susa in the Persian homeland to Sardis in the western part of Anatolia, a distance of some 1500 miles. A system of relay stations made it possible for a rider carrying mail to ride the distance in six to nine days rather than the usual three months. Officials and merchants traveling on the imperial roads to do the emperor's business carried passports entitling them to free food and lodging along the way. Perhaps Darius' most ambitious undertaking was the building of a canal, 87 miles long and 164 feet wide, from the Nile to the Red Sea. Completed in 500 BCE, it connected Memphis, then the capital of Egypt, to Babylon by sea.

### Decline/Fall

During Darius' reign, the Greek city-states at the western edge of the Anatolian Peninsula rebelled. They were encouraged by Athens. Darius successfully squashed the rebellion, and two years later he sent an expedition to discipline Athens and the other unruly Greek city states. The Persian army was defeated at the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Darius died before he could launch another attack; but his son Xerxes advanced on Greece with a huge expeditionary force. Xerxes managed to burn Athens. He was defeated, however, when the Athenian general, Themistocles lured the Persian fleet into a trap at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE. After this humiliation, the Persians chose to deal with the Greeks through diplomacy, siding with one, then another of Athens' enemies.

The next 150 years of Persian history saw slow decline under a series of ineffective rulers. Rebellions multiplied. By 359 BCE, Phillip II of Macedonia had seen the empire's weakness and planned an invasion. He was murdered before he could launch the plan, but his son Alexander carried it forward. In 330 BCE, Alexander earned his title “the Great” with the defeat of Darius III the last emperor of the Achaemenid dynasty.



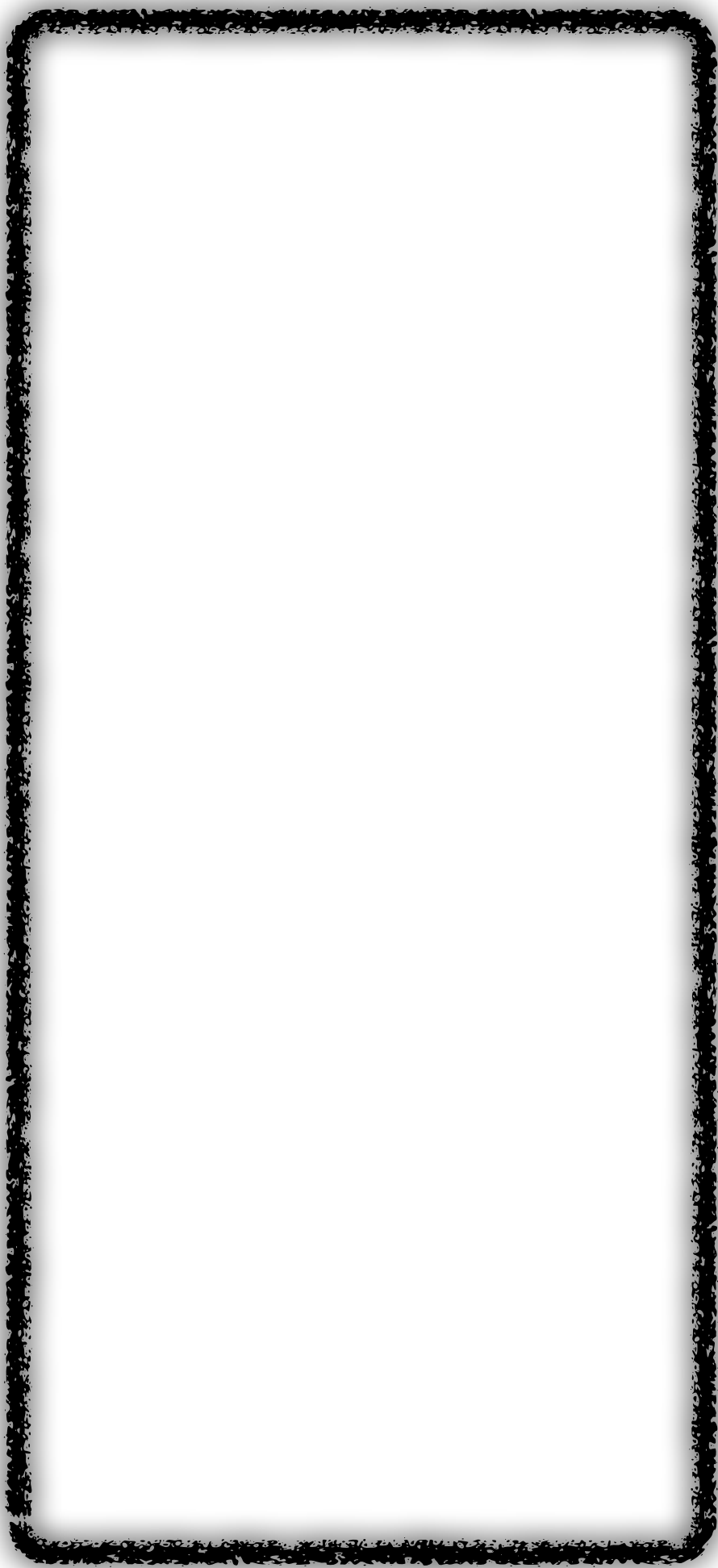
Stone carving of Darius I. Behind him is his son, Xerxes. Found in the *Apadana building in Persepolis*

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **PERSIAN** EMPIRE

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:</b>
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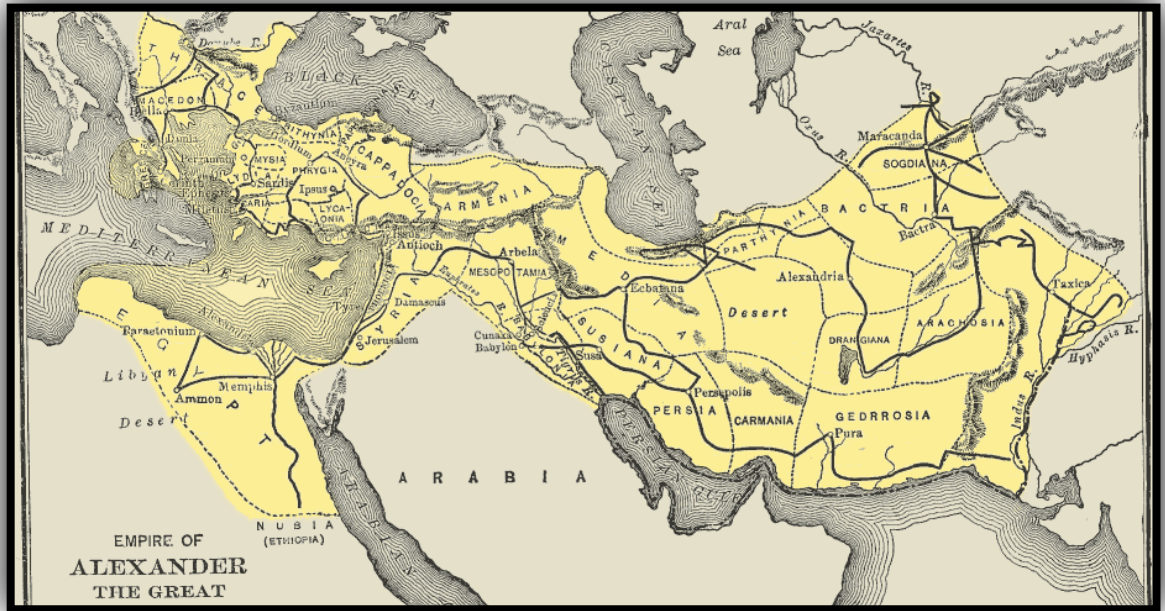
# PERSIAN EMPIRE

550-330 BCE





# ALEXANDER'S EMPIRE



## Alexander's Empire 330-323 BCE

### Background

Macedonia was a small woodland kingdom north of Greece. It was peopled by Greek-speaking warrior-aristocrats who ruled over farmers and herders. Athens and the other culturally sophisticated city-states to the south tended to regard Macedonians as uncivilized and their land as a source of timber, gold, and horses. In 358 BCE, Philip II became the Macedonian king. He had become familiar with Greek life, culture, and military tactics during the three years he spent as a hostage in Thebes. While he had no use for democracy, he admired Hellenic (Greek) ceremony and cultural refinement.

When he returned to Macedonia, Philip created a new kind of army, one with soldiers who served year-round. He trained his forces in Greek military tactics and armed them with thirteen foot spear-tipped

pikes. Then he advanced on the Greek city-states, including Athens. He destroyed Thebes and Sparta, spared Athens, and declared himself supreme leader of a unified Greco-Macedonian (that is Greek and Macedonian) federation of states.

### Founding

Philip intended to attack Persian-ruled Anatolia next, but he was assassinated before he could take action. He was succeeded by his son, Alexander, barely twenty years old. Alexander had been educated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle and trained in politics and war by his father. He was tireless in battle, a stickler for details, and conscious of his image. He was adored by his soldiers and almost everyone else who met him.

In 334 BCE, Alexander attacked Persia at the head of an army of 35,000 Macedonians and Greek allies. In the course of the next

eleven years, he moved through Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and Babylonia, conquering as he went. He faced the Persians in three major battles and won each against huge odds. He forced Emperor Darius III (336-300 BCE) to flee for his life. He then occupied the great Persian capitals, and moved into the empire's northeastern provinces, taking possession of stretches of the trans-Eurasian silk routes. In 326 BCE, he turned southeast and pushed his exhausted troops across the Hindu Kush Mountains into the Indus valley. There, he subdued one local ruler after another. When he asked his troops to go on beyond the Indus, they refused. He saw that they could be pushed no further and agreed to head home. In 330 BCE, Alexander was in possession of a gigantic Indo-Mediterranean empire.

## Administration

Alexander was undoubtedly a conqueror and destroyer. For example, he demolished the Greek city of Thebes, and he allowed his soldiers to reduce the Persian capital of Persepolis to ruins, killing the men, enslaving the women, and carrying off the city's treasure. Alexander, however, was also a builder. He admired Greek culture and the Persian's skill at administering an empire. At the practical level, he kept Persian bureaucratic organization, sometimes substituting Macedonians in key positions. He extended the Persian system of satraps (provinces) to the lands he conquered in non-Persian areas south of the Hindu Kush. Everywhere, he established new cities in the Greek style and filled them with ex-soldiers mostly Greek and Macedonian, who settled down and formed an elite class. Most of these Greeks married local women and reared half-Greek, half-Persian children who grew up speaking Greek. Alexander himself wed Roxana, the daughter of a prince of Sogdiana, an ancient territory that generally corresponds to the modern nation of Uzbekistan. Alexander also held a gigantic marriage ceremony, wedding thousands of his soldiers to Persian women.

## Trade

Alexander traveled with a court that included scientists, doctors, architects, artisans, merchants, and surveyors. In the region between the Hindu Kush and the Indus, his surveyors laid out a road that facilitated trade in the area long after Alexander had left. Later, the Mauryan Emperors of

India extended the route to the Ganges and beyond. The route is still used today.

## Religion

Alexander's mother once told him that his real father was not Phillip but Apollo. At the time, the pronouncement did not appear to give Alexander divine ambitions. When he got to Egypt, in 331 BCE, however, he went to consult the oracle of Amon, the Creator God, in the Lybian Desert. There the priest told the king that he was the son of Amon-Zeus, a name combining the chief Egyptian and Greek gods. Shortly after, Alexander had himself recognized as the Pharaoh, whom Egyptians considered to be divine.

As his victories mounted and his legend grew, Alexander seemed to become more convinced of his divine roots. At one point, he required that his subjects lie face down before him. His Greek court and soldiers refused to do this, so he dropped the issue. He did, however, promote his relationship to the gods by putting his picture on the front of coins and the image of Zeus wielding a thunderbolt on the back. During his lifetime, several religious cults devoted to his worship appear to have arisen, though they disappeared shortly after he died.

## Decline/Fall

After Alexander took the Indus valley in 325 BCE, he looked southeastward toward the Ganges River. By this time, his army had been away from home for almost ten years. Even his toughest Macedonian warriors were exhausted. They refused to go further, and Alexander decided to

turn for home. He got as far as Babylon, where in June 323 BCE he died. He appears to have died of a fever complicated by a number of factors: wounds he had suffered in the course of battles, overwork, a hunting trip in mosquito-ridden swamps, and a heavy night of drinking. He lingered for four days, and when his generals desperately urged him to name an heir, he is said to have replied that it would go to the strongest. In fact, after his death, his generals almost immediately set to warring against one another, resulting in the division of the empire into three major military states. Alexander asked to be buried in Egypt, and reportedly his body was taken there in a golden sarcophagus (coffin). But no one knows where the conqueror's remains were laid.



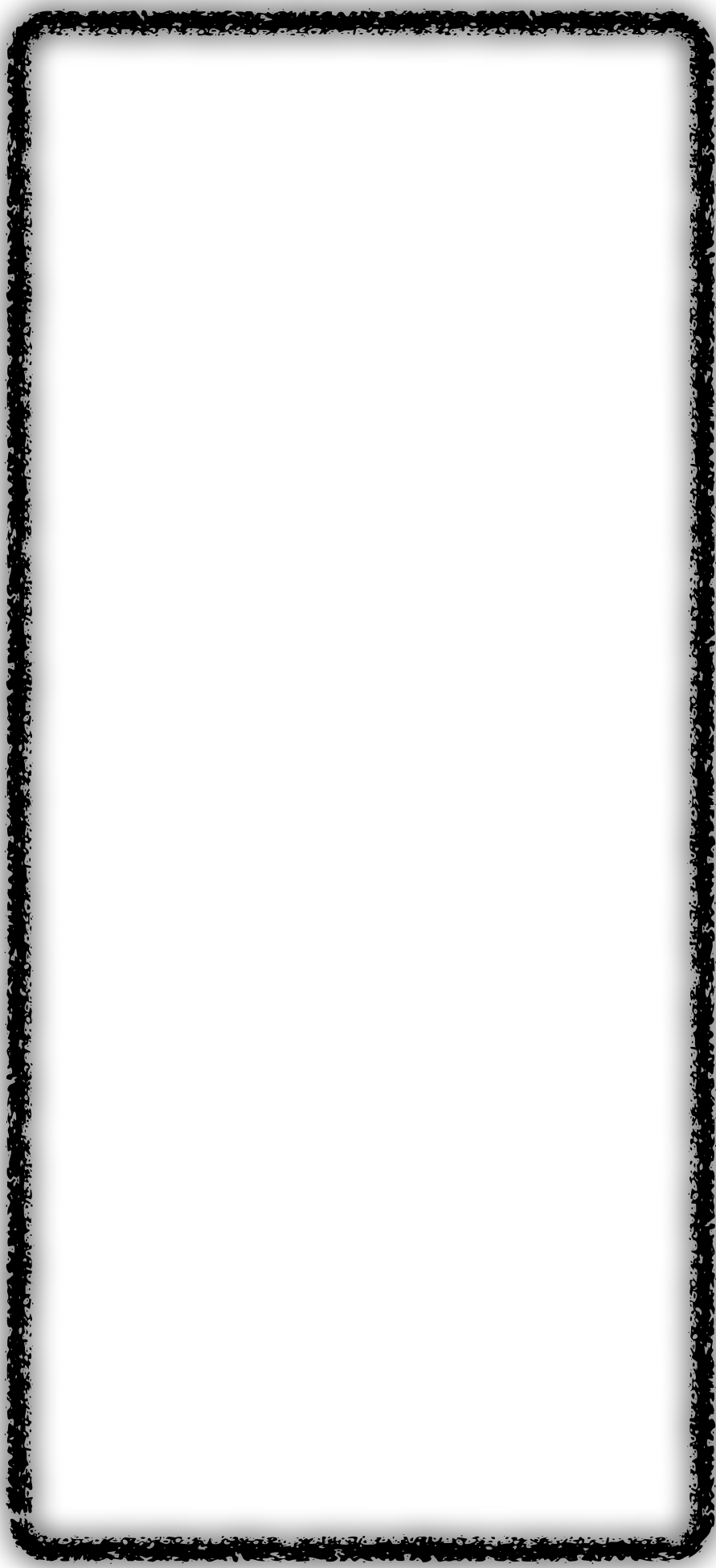
Alexander the Great portrait coin. British Museum.

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **ALEXANDER'S** EMPIRE

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Background/ location	
Founding	
Organization	
Religion	
Trade	
Decline/Fall	
Summary description / categorization of this empire	

# ALEXANDER'S EMPIRE

330-323 BCE



# PTOLEMAIC EMPIRE



## Ptolemaic Empire (tall-ah-may-ick) 323-30 BCE

**Background** After conquering as far east as the Indus River valley, Alexander the Great returned to Babylon in today's Iraq, where he died in June 323 BCE. After his death, his generals fought among themselves for power, and his empire was split into three smaller empires: the Seleucid empire centered in what is now Iran and Iraq, the Antigonid monarchy centered in today's Macedonia and Greece, and the Ptolemaic empire centered in Egypt.

**Founding** Ptolemy, a former general of Alexander, led a force that got control of Egypt, perhaps the richest prize in Alexander's former empire. Ptolemy, and leaders who followed him, also gained control of the island of Cyprus and coastal lands of Anatolia and the Levant (today Syria, Lebanon, and Israel). During the 300 years of their reign, none of the Ptolemies spoke Egyptian except for

Cleopatra VII, the last one, who died in 30 BCE.

**Administration** The Ptolemies ran Egypt as though it were a private estate. Non-Egyptian soldiers (Greek, Macedonian, and Anatolian) were hired to fight their wars and keep the Egyptian subjects in line. Greeks had been in Egypt as traders for several centuries. Now they became part of a Greek ruling class, which excluded even upper-class Egyptians. The Ptolemy's divided their kingdom into provinces, each of which was subdivided into areas and villages. Because the Ptolemies' wanted to get as much wealth as they could from the kingdom, the financial administrator (the guy in charge of money, taxes, tribute, etc.) became very powerful. Pretty much anything you could tax was taxed—houses, goods people bought, goods they sold, farmlands, vineyards, orchards, and gardens.

Furthermore, licenses were required for fishing and trading as well as for keeping bees and pigs. In addition, the government controlled trade, mines, quarries, salt production, and any commodity which produced oil—linseed, safflower, and castor. They also increased the amount of land being farmed and improved irrigation to get more crops. Alexandria, on the Mediterranean, was the major Egyptian city and port. Founded by Alexander, it was the heart of the Ptolemaic administration. Its population was a mix of Greeks, Macedonians, Jews, and native Egyptians. It was one of the intellectual centers of the Hellenistic, that is, Greek-like cultural world. It was here that Ptolemy I, who collected scrolls, founded a great museum and library. Eventually, the library had some 500,000 scrolls. The Ptolemies recruited the best minds of the day, creating the first "think tank". It was

here where early discoveries were developed, like the idea that the sun was the center of the universe and the first accurate calculation of the earth's circumference. It was at Alexandria that Ptolemy I began construction of the gigantic Pharos lighthouse, which became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

### Trade

Trade expanded under the Ptolemies. They brought in timber, metals, pitch, and wine from the lands they controlled along the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, they built roads from the Nile to new ports on the Red Sea. The new ports were designed to facilitate the importation of elephants, major military weapon in that era. These ports also brought in spices from the Arabian Peninsula and India.

### Religion

Although the Greeks brought their gods with them to Egypt, the Ptolemies carefully respected the traditional Egyptian gods. Ptolemy I became the Pharaoh, the god-king. He called himself Ptolemy I, Sotor, or Savior. After his death, his son Ptolemy II established a joint religious cult for his father and mother as savior gods. Cults were established for subsequent Ptolemaic rulers as well, sometimes even while they were alive. At death, the bodies of these Hellenistic pharaohs were mummified and buried in sarcophagi (coffins) covered with Egyptian hieroglyphs.

At the same time, those following other religions were not harassed. While the Ptolemies controlled Palestine, the Jews, for example, enjoyed a period of peace. Only under the vicious Ptolemy IV (221-203) were they persecuted.

### Decline/Fall

By 200 BCE, the glory days of the Ptolemaic Dynasty were fading. When facing a struggle in 217 with the Seleucid king, Antiochus III, the Ptolemies found themselves in financial trouble. They did not have enough money to hire soldiers from outside, so they had to arm some 200,000 Egyptian troops. The cost of the war led to increasing money problems and peasant unrest. Between 207 and 186 BCE, Upper Egypt broke away and was governed by separate Pharaohs of Nubian origin. The Ptolemies' lack of concern for the population, widespread corruption, civil unrest, a disastrous foreign policy, and near economic collapse contributed to the decline of the empire. It had no resources to ward off the growing power of Rome to the west. It is not surprising that the Roman Emperor, Octavian, seized Egypt from Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemies, in 30 BCE.



Bust of Ptolemy I  
Louvre, Paris, France.



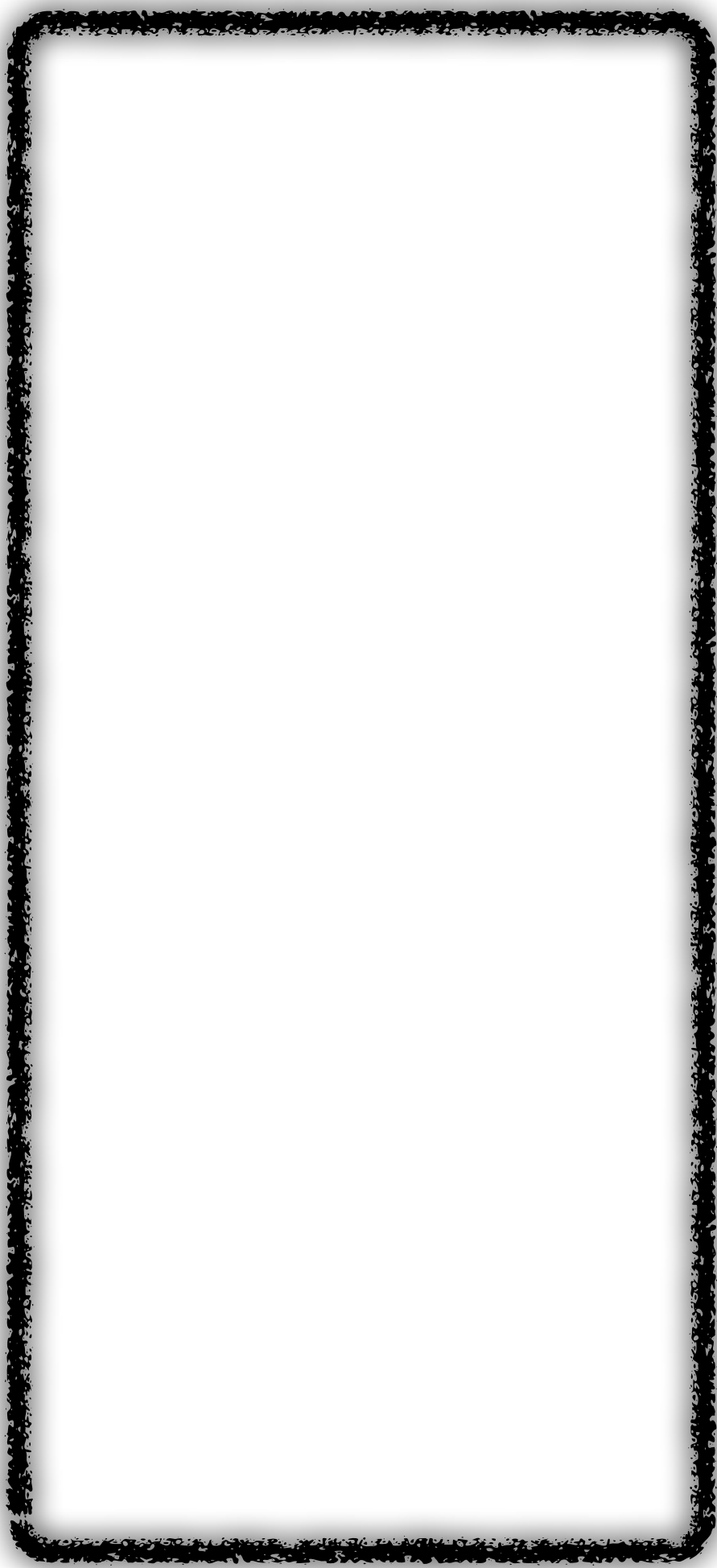
Ptolemy I on a silver coin.  
British Museum.

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **PTOLEMAIC** EMPIRE

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:</b>
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Founding	
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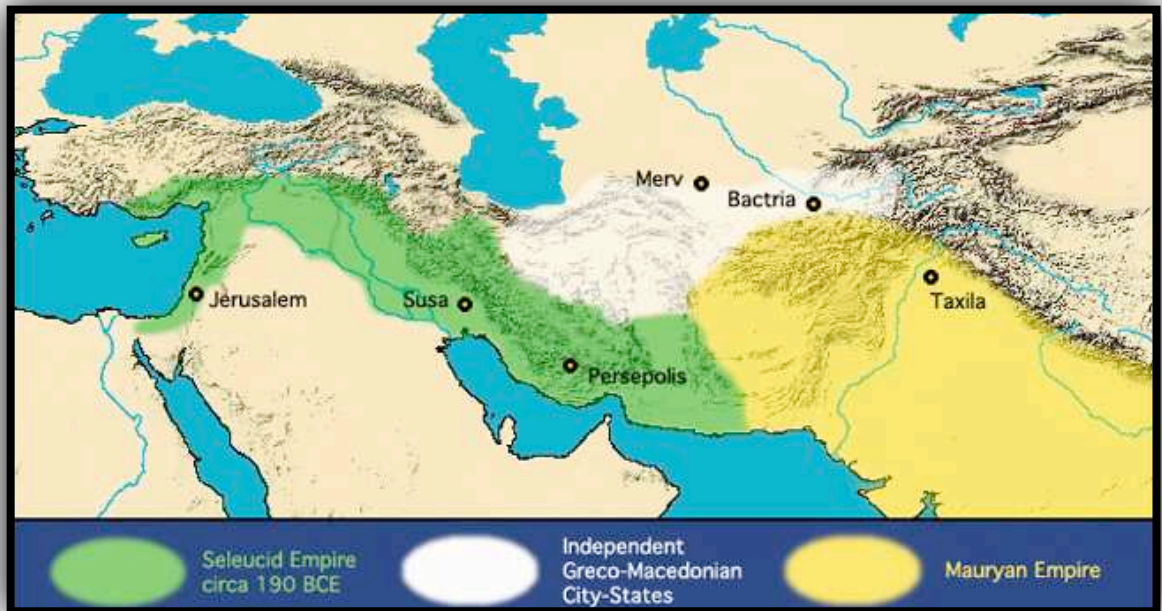
PTOLEMAIC EMPIRE

323-30 BCE





# SELEUCID EMPIRE



## Seleucid Empire 312-64 CE

**Background** After conquering as far east as the Indus River valley, Alexander the Great returned to Babylon in today's Iraq, where he died in June 323 BCE. After his death, his generals fought among themselves for power, and his empire was split into three smaller empires: the Seleucid empire centered in what is now Iran and Iraq, the Antigonid monarchy centered in today's Macedonia and Greece, and the Ptolemaic empire centered in Egypt.

**Founding** Seleucus I Nicator (Victor), another former general of Alexander, eventually got control of most of Alexander's empire except for Egypt, the region that is now part of Pakistan, and the Aegean Sea basin, including Greece and Macedonia. The Seleucid empire, the name given to the area he controlled, included modern Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, as well as parts of modern Turkey,

Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Seleucus thought that the part of the Indus region that Alexander had conquered should be his as well. He moved his army into the area in 305 BCE, however, he found himself confronting Chandragupta, the ruler of the rising Maurya empire, and his 9,000 war elephants. Seleucus wisely called it quits, signed a treaty, gave Chandragupta his daughter in marriage, and went home with a consolation prize of 500 elephants.

**Administration** The Seleucid empire had two capitals, one at Antioch in Syria and a second at Suleucia on the Tigris River. It contained a huge variety of peoples and languages. Both bureaucracy (government systems and rules) and the army were needed to keep order. Unlike Alexander, Seleucus was not interested in combining Greek and Persian ways. Rather, he based his

governance on the Greek culture that he knew. The old Persian political divisions (satrapies), were reduced in size and administered by a Greek elite. To increase Greek influence, he established a string of new cities and encouraged Greek immigrants to settle in them. The establishment of these cities was perhaps the most striking achievement of the Seleucids. The new cities were usually laid out on a grid pattern, and they were overseen by magistrates responsible for seeing to the condition of the water supply, public bathrooms, and streets. These cities were not distributed evenly throughout the empire. Most of them were in the Anatolian Peninsula and northern Syria. There were also several in Bactria, an ancient region that today corresponds to parts of Iran and Afghanistan. Lots of settlers from the Greek city-states came to the area to get free land, and many of

these new settlers became the local elites, usually married local women, and raised Greek-speaking off-spring. Even after the collapse of the Seleucid Empire in the middle of the third century, Greeks, their language, and their culture remained important in the region.

### Trade

Seleucus' treaty with Chandragupta in the Mauryan Empire led to expanded trade that , connected India with the Mediterranean. Merchants, as well as ambassadors, monks, artisans, and adventurers traveled from northern India to Seleucid territory. One result was that Greek became a common language in this large area, particularly used in trade.

### Religion

Seleucus, like Alexander and many other conquerors, created a story that gave himself a divine origin. While Alexander traced his roots to Zeus, Seleucus presented himself as Apollo's son. Reputedly, he had a birthmark in the shape of an anchor, Apollo's symbol. He established a religious cult with himself as its god. The Seleucids did not try to impose any particular religion on their subjects, most of whom belonged to **polytheistic** religions that simply added the emperor to its pantheon of gods. Only after 198 BCE, when the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III grabbed Palestine from the Ptolemies, did the monotheistic Jews find living with the polytheistic Seleucids a problem.

### Decline/Fall

During its existence, the Seleucid Empire had thirty rulers, though the territories they ruled varied widely. The empire was at its height in 312 BCE when it conquered Babylon. Its decline began about 190 BCE when Antiochus III crossed the Bosphorus Strait and invaded Thrace (northeastern Greece). The Romans, who by this time were expanding into Greece, did not appreciate this provocation, and they quickly defeated Antiochus III, pushing him back into the Anatolian Peninsula. In the eastern part of the Seleucid domain, the Parthians, originally a nomadic group, revolted and pushed the Seleucid borders westward. Little by little, other bits of the empire broke off or were gobbled up by neighbors until by 129 BCE the Seleucids were reduced to only a small area in northern Syria. In 64 BCE, The Romans conquered that region and made it a province of their own empire.



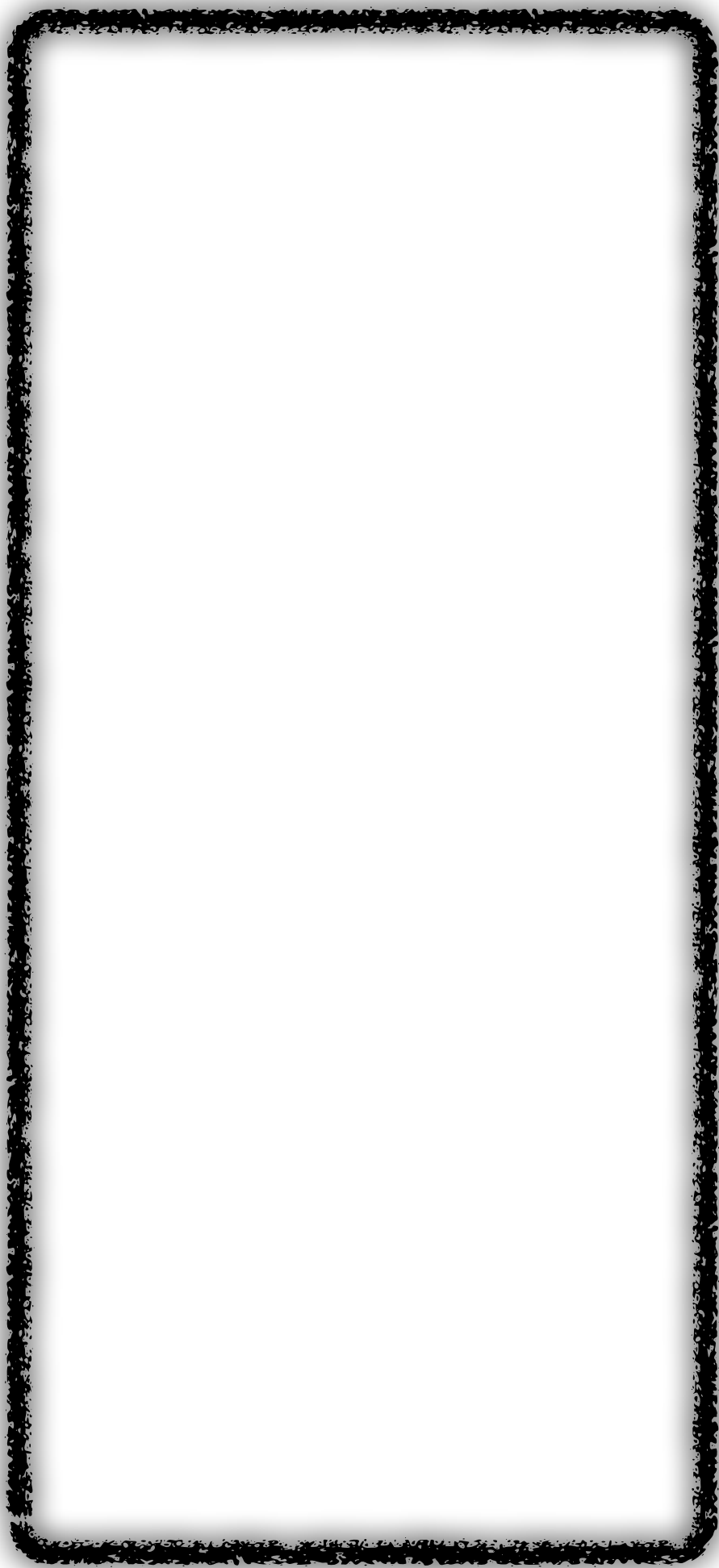
Bust of Seleucus I  
Museo archeologico nazionale, Napoli

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: **SELEUCID** EMPIRE

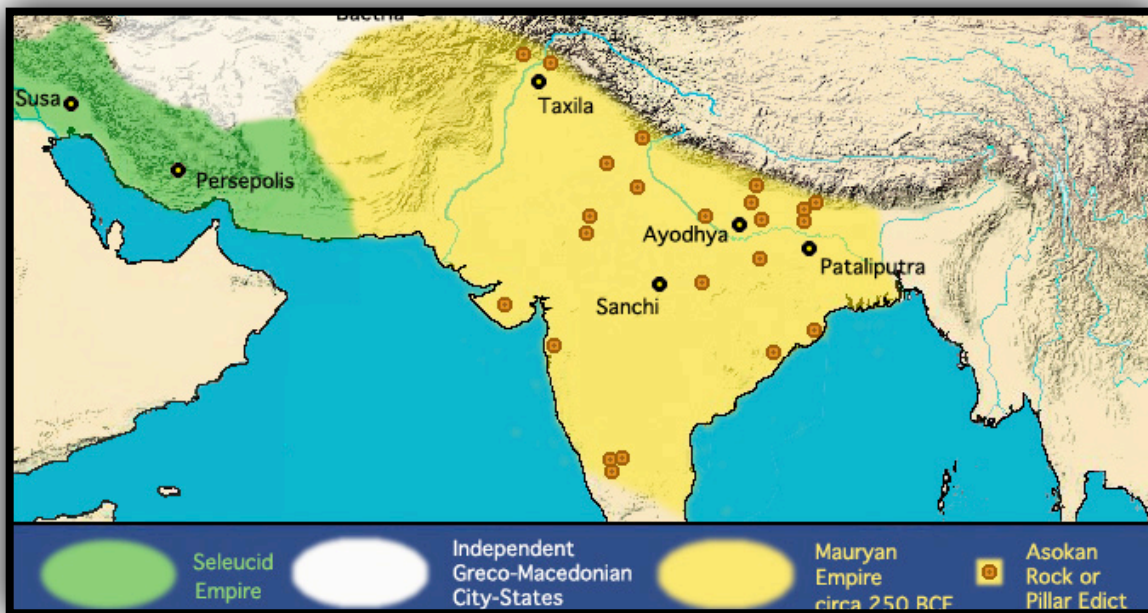
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# SELEUCID EMPIRE

323-30 BCE



# MAURYAN EMPIRE



## Mauryan Empire 322-188 BCE

### Background

By 500 BCE, the Persian Empire controlled the area between the Hindu Kush mountains and the Indus River. When Alexander the Great invaded Persia, he pushed beyond the Indus, setting up governors and provinces as he went. After his death, however, his generals fought to control the pieces of the great empire. Seleucus, one of his generals, gained control of the eastern part of what had been the Persian empire and considered the Indus region to be part of that empire.

**Founding** However, farther southeast, along the Ganges River, the Mauryan empire began to take shape under Chandragupta Maurya, the ruler of the kingdom of Magadha. While Alexander's generals were squabbling among themselves over the remnants of his empire, Chandragupta moved north and gained more control over the territories between the Indus and Hindu Kush. In 305, Seleucus moved his army into the region, however, he faced the huge Mauryan army with its 700,000 soldiers, 10,000 chariots, and 9,000 war elephants. Seleucus wisely called it quits, signed a treaty with Chandragupta, gave him a daughter in marriage, and went home with a consolation prize of 500 war elephants. Chandragupta's son then pushed the Maurya state southward into India, and his grandson, Ashoka (Asoka, 272-232 BCE) completed the conquests by taking

control of much of this area.

### Administration

The Mauryans appear to have used and improved upon bureaucratic methods developed earlier by the Persians. They divided the state into provinces, districts, and villages. Royal officials, including superintendents, judges, clerks, and inspectors, fanned out across the cities and countryside, keeping order and collecting taxes from villages. Well-maintained roads and swift postal riders helped the emperor to rule over this vast area. An elaborate system of spies kept him informed. The government regulated everything from copper, lead, tin, bronze, and iron works to gum, dye, perfume, drug, and pottery industries.

Pataliputra, the capital, was at the center of bustling commerce and trade. Inside the walls were palaces, temples, a library, parks, and gardens. Under Ashoka, Pataliputra became perhaps the world's largest city, with between 200,000 and 300,000 people.

## Religion

The Mauryan Empire reached its peak under Ashoka (271-232 BCE), Chandragupta's grandson. Apparently, Ashoka began his rule as a cruel leader with total control. Legend says that he killed 99 of his brothers in order to secure the throne for himself. Eventually, he seems to have had a change of heart. According to a stone pillar erected and inscribed by Ashoka himself, he spoke out against war and bloodshed after seeing an especially bloody battle. He then turned to Buddhism, a religion that had been developing in northern India since the time of its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha, the Enlightened One, c. 563 - c.483 ).

Buddha agreed with Hinduism that people's destiny depended on how they lived their lives. He did not, however, see a need for Hindu gods, priests, temples, or the sacrificing of animals. Buddha stressed a code of ethics based on unselfishness and on rules of behavior that he called the Eightfold Path. A person simply had to live a moral, unselfish life in order to attain *nirvana*, the perfect peace which frees the soul from reincarnation (repeated rebirth of the soul until it attains perfection).

Ashoka considered himself responsible for the well-being of his subjects, and he tried to create a system of government based on *dharma*, Buddhist moral and ethical principles. He defined these principles as non-violence, obedience to parents, tolerance of and respect for all opinions and sects, humane treatment of servants, kindness to all living beings, and generosity to all. He considered these principles so broad that no one, no matter his or her religious beliefs, could reasonably object to them. He broadcast these principles by carving them on rocks and stone pillars throughout his empire.

## Trade

The Mauryan Empire was an important link in the chain of interconnected kingdoms that stretched more than 4,000 miles across Indo-Mediterranea. Trade flourished along trade routes that ran from Pataliputra, across the Hindu Kush, Persia, and Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Aegean. Ashoka improved the stretch between the city of Taxila in the upper Indus valley and Pataliputra on the Ganges. He added shade trees, wells, and rest houses to accommodate travelers. It was along this route, among others, that Buddhism spread from India after about 300 BCE.

## Decline/Fall

After Ashoka's death in 232 BCE, the Mauryan Empire slowly disintegrated under a series of weak monarchs. It came to an end around 184 BCE with the assassination of the last emperor.



Ringstone with four goddesses and four date palms. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



One of the Ashoka pillars. Vaishali, India

## EXPERT GROUP NOTE TRACKER: MAURYAN EMPIRE

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Significant information about this empire related to this characteristic:</b>
Background/ location	
Founding	
Organization	
Religion	
Trade	
Decline/Fall	
Summary description / categorization of this empire	

# **MAURYAN**EMPIRE

**322-188 BCE**

