

Alexander's Eastern Campaigns for Religious Change in the Mediterranean Region

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Abstract: Alexander's Eastern Expedition was one of the most brilliant expeditions in the world's military history. Although Alexander's Eastern Expedition brought profound disasters to the people of Eurasia and Africa, the process of accompanying the Eastern invasion objectively made the spread of Greek culture to the East and the process of infiltration of Oriental culture into Greek culture. At that time, religion and culture were inseparable under the system of the unity of church and state. As a result of the dispersal and fusion of primitive religions during this period, the mainstream religions that determined the values of the majority of the world's people in later times were formed, thus influencing the course of human civilization.

Keywords: Alexander, Greeks, Romans, Religions

1. Introduction

The life of Alexander the Great is a legend. His story has been passed down so widely from Iceland to China. Over the centuries of ancient Greece, two of the city-states known as Athens and Sparta grew to become the two great powers of the Greek world. Athens was known for its democracy, philosophy, culture, and maritime hegemony, while Sparta was known for its land-based solid military force and strict military regime. In the 5th century BC, the two city-states had successfully joined forces to defend themselves against invasions from the Persian Empire. However, after the Greek-Persian War was brought to an end, the relationship between the two began to deteriorate gradually [1,2].

As Athens grew in power, it began to weaken the autonomy of the other city-states. This caused many city-states to become dissatisfied with Athens and seek support from Sparta. At the same time, the conflict between the two city-states grew, culminating in the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC.

It was a rather brutal war, and the state's internal affairs were closely tied to its diplomacy. Even though Athens lost its position as a powerful nation, the war's end brought much desire for peace and freedom. At this time, the inspiring Philip II stepped forward to strengthen the centralized control over the people through alliances, divisions, and emigration while simultaneously achieving the goal of expanding the territory [3,4]. Through the careful cultivation of his father, Alexander the Great grew into an ambitious and gifted military man.

At the young age of twenty, he inherited the materially strong Macedonian kingdom established by Philip II. At the same time, he inherited his father's unfinished business of opposing Persian rule

and gradually developed the Macedonian kingdom into a huge empire spanning three continents. In addition to expanding his territory, he had to open up new trade routes. The young emperor was determined to follow the example of Achilles, and through his efforts, he demonstrated his extraordinary ability to rule and create brilliant political achievements [5].

Speaking of Achilles, it is necessary to mention the ancient Greek mythology that profoundly influenced the later generations of Europe. It originated from the ancient Aegean civilization, which is slightly similar to the Shang and Zhou civilizations in China. They were the originators of Western civilization, with a remarkable nature and reflecting the extraordinary imagination of the people. This mythological system belonged to polytheism and was formed in its many forms by nature worship, hero worship, ancestor worship, and the idea of animism that had developed in primitive societies.

His personal ambition and love for Greek culture and philosophy drove him to explore unknown lands and spread Greek culture to the Far East [6].

And the close connection between the Greek and Italian peninsulas exists in real history. During the large-scale Greek colonization abroad in the 8th-6th centuries B.C., a large number of Greeks came to southern Italy across the sea. It established a number of Greek colonial city-states, which led to the Hellenization of the Italian peninsula.

The Greek world around the Aegean Sea experienced the prosperity of the Minoan civilization in Crete, the Mycenaean civilization in the Peloponnese, and the so-called "Dark Ages" for about 400 years, and then rejuvenated itself again from the middle of the 8th century BC. As the Greek world entered the Iron Age, productivity increased, the city-state state gradually replaced the clan state, and the centralized rule of the aristocracy was steadily transformed into the democratic politics of the city-state [7-9]. With the development of society and economy, the Greek city-states began to carry out large-scale overseas colonization activities, sending immigrants overseas in an organized manner to open up new territories. The new city-states established by the Greeks spread all over the north coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the coast of Asia Minor, and the Black Sea area, forming a Greek cultural circle spanning half of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and contributing to the eventual formation of the classical Greek civilization.

The migration of the ancient Greeks was well able to expand the speed of the spread and influence of their beliefs. With their organizational skills, navigational techniques, and weapons, they colonized the areas around the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Over a period of about 200 years, they established a large number of city-states over a vast area stretching from the eastern shores of the Black Sea in the East to Spain in the West.

As the road to the East progressed, his armies benefited from the changing geopolitical landscape of the time, as well as advances in military technology and transportation conditions, and became increasingly invincible.

Alexander's Eastern Expedition was one of the most brilliant expeditions in the world's military history. Although Alexander's Eastern Expedition brought profound disasters to the people of Eurasia and Africa, along with the process of the Eastern Invasion, it objectively spread the Greek culture to the East, and the Eastern culture seeped into the process of the Greek culture. At that time, under the system of the unity of church and state, the religion and the culture were inextricably intertwined. As a result of the dispersal and fusion of primitive religions during this period, the mainstream religions that determined the values of most people in the world in later times were formed, thus influencing the course of human civilization.

Due to different geographical and historical environments, the ancient civilizations of North Africa, South Asia, West Asia, and East Asia showed a pattern of diversified development. The further development of agricultural civilization led to the rise of major empires, one after another. The civilizations of different regions continued to strengthen their exchanges and influence each other with the development of history.

2. Religion

In terms of religion, Alexander, as a conqueror, fully believed that his team would spread out his culture, which objectively caused the spread of Greek culture and its religious beliefs around the Mediterranean. When he remembered to accept and utilize the Eastern ideas of religious worship and the deification of kingship, he respected the religious beliefs of the locals. He adopted a religious policy of tolerance and utilization, which embodied the spirit of national integration and laid the emotional foundation for friendly relations between the Eastern and Western peoples. Whenever this great emperor visited a place, he would hold sacrifices in the local temples, engage in some activities, and organize festivals to offer sacrifices to the gods [10].

Greek religion is often seen as a system of worship with internal consistency. This paper proposes that the religious worship of the Greeks actually provided the basis for the city-state. Religious cults played an essential character in shaping the sense of political community in the city-state, and religious cults at different levels of social organization within the city-state weaved together the social and political structure of the city-state [11]. In turn, religious cults were also based on the city-state. The city-state meticulously regulated all religious cults and expressed its ideology through religious cults. Thus, Greek religion was essentially a city-state religion where politics and religion were integrated.

This also reflects the fact that the embedded religion of the time was very close to the daily life of the people. People expressed their holiness and obedience by actively participating in religious ceremonies, hoping to take this opportunity to gain the approval of the gods to reach the goal of living a rich life in this life and the next. At the same time, however, the phenomenon of blind worship arising from excessive faith on the part of some people could not be ruled out.

During and even after the Eastern Campaign, Alexander's existence began to be deified. Not only did he fulfill his wishes, but he also caused the East and West to merge [12].

Alexander wanted the Persians to be equal partners with the Greeks and Macedonians. To realize this plan, he incorporated a large number of Persian soldiers into his army and held a great "East-West Union" banquet for this purpose. At the feast, thousands of Macedonian soldiers were married to women from Western Asia, and he took Persian noblemen's daughters as wives [13].

As an almost invincible conqueror, the emperor apparently considered his civilization to be quite advanced. As he occupied more and more land, only dictatorship and mythology could satisfy his ego-inflated mind.

Thus, in religious beliefs, he intended to blend different cults together. For example, he merged the Egyptian God Amun with the Greek Zeus while he was the son of Zeus and the son of Amun. The significance of merging the sons of God lies more in the fact that he merged the religions of Greece with those of ancient Egypt and ancient Persia on the secular side[14]. Although the original intention was the mythological self, objectively, the different religions began to learn from each other, absorb each other, and complement each other, and from the later development of the above religions, it seems that it did form a different and similar structure of the doctrines of the past. In his time, religious beliefs were not as exclusive as in later times, when religious conflicts caused national disputes.

Despite the fact that in the post-Alexandrian era, his ministers divided his empire, they basically still practiced Alexander's set of rules, not only to spread the Greek civilization to the world but also to further the ideals of the integration of different peoples in these kingdoms. The so-called Hellenistic era started by Alexander was not interrupted by the empire's collapse but instead continued to move forward, and what the various religions of later times showed was the result of this.

In the Seleucid Empire, for example, the king established his kingdom in these regions and introduced the Hellenistic political system. In the process, he also combined Persian administrative and bureaucratic systems with Hellenistic culture to create a new empire.

3. Hellenization

Hellenization was likewise reflected in the art, architecture, philosophical thought, and literature of the empire.

In Ptolemy's temple stood a statue of one such god: short and obese, with a hilarious facial expression. He was the god Bes, who was very popular, widely worshipped, and believed in ancient Egyptian society. Incorporating ancient Egyptian architectural techniques and innovative thinking, this temple and its culture have survived [15,16].

Antiochus was the third slaveholding dynasty of Macedonia. Under the slogan of "Greek salvation," he took advantage of the victories of the states and managed to repel the Celts and establish himself as king [17].

But with prosperity comes decline. Under the premise of slavery, there existed contradictions and conflicts of different degrees between various social classes. For example, there were class differences between the nobles and the commoners. This made the nobles tend to defend their privileged position, while the commoners often complained about the exploitation and injustice of the nobles. Within the empire, cultural differences between regions, differences in religious beliefs, and language barriers often led to internal political conflicts and social unrest [18,19]. At the same time, external pressures and wars also dealt a great blow to the empires. The empires gradually declined and fell under various internal and external problems.

4. Conclusion

Of course, Alexander's achievements did not only stop at the spread of religion around the Mediterranean Sea, but his influence also extended to later generations' political, cultural, and military fields, such as the close connection between the historical origins of Rome and Greece.

First, the Macedonian Empire was the meeting point of Western and Eastern civilizations, facilitating the exchange and integration of different cultures. His conquests also accelerated the period of Hellenization, a period when Greek culture spread widely in the Mediterranean and influenced the culture and institutions of the Roman Empire.

Secondly, his conquests and explorations allowed many of the features of Greek and Oriental cultures to borrow from and merge, forming a unique cultural landscape. It became a rather significant milestone in later times.

Finally, his war strategies and military tactics profoundly impacted the military theory and practice of later generations. Many military scholars and historians have drawn upon and studied his military achievements.

Back in the fourth century BC, after the successful destruction of Persia, Macedonia became a strong power straddling three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Regarding the political system, Alexander followed the divine right of kings in the Persian Kingdom and took the military and political power under his control. A provincial system was adopted at the local level, utilizing Macedonians and Greeks to hold critical positions and promote Greek culture.

In the development of human civilization, there has always existed a certain degree of contact and influence between different regions, and the general trend of interaction between civilizations has been increasing, and the mutual influence has been expanding. The economic and trade exchanges between different regions of the world in ancient times, as well as the spread of ideas, culture, and technology, were essential manifestations of civilization exchanges, which promoted the linear development of civilization.

After Alexander's death, as Rome changed politically from a republic to an empire, its religion also changed, from the original worship of many gods to the mutual struggle between divine and royal power, which at its worst even caused Europe to enter the Dark Ages for a time. Of course,

although the glory of Alexander the Great and his empire was short-lived, his three eastern campaigns brought Macedonian hooves across three continents, willing to put their lives on the line for glory. The Greek culture and religious beliefs he spread profoundly affected the Mediterranean region.

Alexander the Great was a true Homeric hero, worthy of all admiration.

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